

ANTON PAVLOVICH CHEKHOV

PLAYS BY ANTON
CHEKHOV, SECOND
SERIES

АНТОН ЧЕХОВ

**Plays by Anton
Chekhov, Second Series**

«Public Domain»

Чехов А. П.

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INTRODUCTION

The last few years have seen a large and generally unsystematic mass of translations from the Russian flung at the heads and hearts of English readers. The ready acceptance of Chekhov has been one of the few successful features of this irresponsible output. He has been welcomed by British critics with something like affection. Bernard Shaw has several times remarked: "Every time I see a play by Chekhov, I want to chuck all my own stuff into the fire." Others, having no such valuable property to sacrifice on the altar of Chekhov, have not hesitated to place him side by side with Ibsen, and the other established institutions of the new theatre. For these reasons it is pleasant to be able to chronicle the fact that, by way of contrast with the casual treatment normally handed out to Russian authors, the publishers are issuing the complete dramatic works of this author. In 1912 they brought out a volume containing four Chekhov plays, translated by Marian Fell. All the dramatic works not included in her volume are to be found in the present one. With the exception of Chekhov's masterpiece, "The Cherry Orchard" (translated by the late Mr. George Calderon in 1912), none of these plays have been previously published in book form in England or America.

It is not the business of a translator to attempt to outdo all others in singing the praises of his raw material. This is a dangerous process and may well lead, as it led Mr. Calderon, to drawing the reader's attention to points of beauty not to be found in the original. A few bibliographical details are equally necessary, and permissible, and the elementary principles of Chekhov criticism will also be found useful.

The very existence of "The High Road" (1884); probably the earliest of its author's plays, will be unsuspected by English readers. During Chekhov's lifetime it a sort of family legend, after his death it became a family mystery. A copy was finally discovered only last year in the Censor's office, yielded up, and published. It had been sent in 1885 under the nom-de-plume "A. Chekhonte," and it had failed to pass. The Censor, of the time being had scrawled his opinion on the manuscript, "a depressing and dirty piece, – cannot be licensed." The name of the gentleman who held this view – Kaiser von Kugelgen – gives another reason for the educated Russian's low opinion of German-sounding institutions. Baron von Tuzenbach, the satisfactory person in "The Three Sisters," it will be noted, finds it as well, while he is trying to secure the favours of Irina, to declare that his German ancestry is fairly remote. This is by way of parenthesis. "The High Road," found after thirty years, is a most interesting document to the lover of Chekhov. Every play he wrote in later years was either a one-act farce or a four-act drama. [Note: "The Swan Song" may occur as an exception. This, however, is more of a Shakespeare recitation than anything else, and so neither here nor there.]

In "The High Road" we see, in an embryonic form, the whole later method of the plays – the deliberate contrast between two strong characters (Bortsov and Merik in this case), the careful individualization of each person in a fairly large group by way of an introduction to the main theme, the concealment of the catastrophe, germ-wise, in the actual character of the characters, and the of a distinctive group-atmosphere. It need scarcely be stated that "The High Road" is not a "dirty" piece according to Russian or to German standards; Chekhov was incapable of writing a dirty play or story. For the rest, this piece differs from the others in its presentation, not of Chekhov's favourite middle-classes, but of the moujik, nourishing, in a particularly stuffy atmosphere, an intense mysticism and an equally intense thirst for vodka.

"The Proposal" (1889) and "The Bear" (1890) may be taken as good examples of the sort of humour admired by the average Russian. The latter play, in another translation, was put on as

a curtain-raiser to a cinematograph entertainment at a London theatre in 1914; and had quite a pleasant reception from a thoroughly Philistine audience. The humour is very nearly of the variety most popular over here, the psychology is a shade subtler. The Russian novelist or dramatist takes to psychology as some of his fellow-countrymen take to drink; in doing this he achieves fame by showing us what we already know, and at the same time he kills his own creative power. Chekhov just escaped the tragedy of suicide by introspection, and was only enabled to do this by the possession of a sense of humour. That is why we should not regard “The Bear,” “The Wedding,” or “The Anniversary” as the work of a merely humorous young man, but as the saving graces which made perfect “The Cherry Orchard.”

“The Three Sisters” (1901) is said to act better than any other of Chekhov’s plays, and should surprise an English audience exceedingly. It and “The Cherry Orchard” are the tragedies of doing nothing. The three sisters have only one desire in the world, to go to Moscow and live there. There is no reason on earth, economic, sentimental, or other, why they should not pack their bags and take the next train to Moscow. But they will not do it. They cannot do it. And we know perfectly well that if they were transplanted thither miraculously, they would be extremely unhappy as soon as ever the excitement of the miracle had worn off. In the other play Mme. Ranevsky can be saved from ruin if she will only consent to a perfectly simple step – the sale of an estate. She cannot do this, is ruined, and thrown out into the unsympathetic world. Chekhov is the dramatist, not of action, but of inaction. The tragedy of inaction is as overwhelming, when we understand it, as the tragedy of an Othello, or a Lear, crushed by the wickedness of others. The former is being enacted daily, but we do not stage it, we do not know how. But who shall deny that the base of almost all human unhappiness is just this inaction, manifesting itself in slovenliness of thought and execution, education, and ideal?

The Russian, painfully conscious of his own weakness, has accepted this point of view, and regards “The Cherry Orchard” as its master-study in dramatic form. They speak of the palpitating hush which fell upon the audience of the Moscow Art Theatre after the first fall of the curtain at the first performance – a hush so intense as to make Chekhov’s friends undergo the initial emotions of assisting at a vast theatrical failure. But the silence ryes almost a sob, to be followed, when overcome, by an epic applause. And, a few months later, Chekhov died.

This volume and that of Marian Fell – with which it is uniform – contain all the dramatic works of Chekhov. It considered not worth while to translate a few fragments published posthumously, or a monologue “On the Evils of Tobacco” – a half humorous lecture by “the husband of his wife;” which begins “Ladies, and in some respects, gentlemen,” as this is hardly dramatic work. There is also a very short skit on the efficiency of provincial fire brigades, which was obviously not intended for the stage and has therefore been omitted.

Lastly, the scheme of transliteration employed has been that, generally speaking, recommended by the Liverpool School of Russian Studies. This is distinctly the best of those in the field, but as it would compel one, e.g., to write a popular female name, “Marya,” I have not treated it absolute respect. For the sake of uniformity with Fell’s volume, the author’s name is spelt Tchekoff on the title-page and cover.

J. W.

RUSSIAN WEIGHTS AND MEASURES AND MONEY EMPLOYED IN THE PLAYS, WITH ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS

1 verst = 3600 feet = 2/3 mile (almost)

1 arshin = 28 inches

1 dessiatin = 2.7 acres

1 copeck = 1/4 d

1 rouble = 100 copecks = 2s. 1d.

ON THE HIGH ROAD

A DRAMATIC STUDY

CHARACTERS

TIHON EVSTIGNEYEV, the proprietor of a inn on the main road

SEMYON SERGEYEVITCH BORTSOV, a ruined landowner

MARIA EGOROVNA, his wife

SAVVA, an aged pilgrim

NAZAROVNA and EFIMOVNA, women pilgrims

FEDYA, a labourer

EGOR MERIK, a tramp

KUSMA, a driver

POSTMAN

BORTSOV'S WIFE'S COACHMAN

PILGRIMS, CATTLE-DEALERS, ETC.

The action takes place in one of the provinces of Southern Russia

[The scene is laid in TIHON'S bar. On the right is the bar-counter and shelves with bottles. At the back is a door leading out of the house. Over it, on the outside, hangs a dirty red lantern. The floor and the forms, which stand against the wall, are closely occupied by pilgrims and passers-by. Many of them, for lack of space, are sleeping as they sit. It is late at night. As the curtain rises thunder is heard, and lightning is seen through the door.]

[TIHON is behind the counter. FEDYA is half-lying in a heap on one of the forms, and is quietly playing on a concertina. Next to him is BORTSOV, wearing a shabby summer overcoat. SAVVA, NAZAROVNA, and EFIMOVNA are stretched out on the floor by the benches.]

EFIMOVNA. [To NAZAROVNA] Give the old man a nudge dear! Can't get any answer out of him.

NAZAROVNA. [Lifting the corner of a cloth covering of SAVVA'S face] Are you alive or are you dead, you holy man?

SAVVA. Why should I be dead? I'm alive, mother! [Raises himself on his elbow] Cover up my feet, there's a saint! That's it. A bit more on the right one. That's it, mother. God be good to us.

NAZAROVNA. [Wrapping up SAVVA'S feet] Sleep, little father.

SAVVA. What sleep can I have? If only I had the patience to endure this pain, mother; sleep's quite another matter. A sinner doesn't deserve to be given rest. What's that noise, pilgrim-woman?

NAZAROVNA. God is sending a storm. The wind is wailing, and the rain is pouring down, pouring down. All down the roof and into the windows like dried peas. Do you hear? The windows of heaven are opened... [Thunder] Holy, holy, holy...

FEDYA. And it roars and thunders, and rages, sad there's no end to it! Hoooo... it's like the noise of a forest... Hoooo... The wind is wailing like a dog... [Shrinking back] It's cold! My clothes are wet, it's all coming in through the open door... you might put me through a wringer... [Plays softly] My concertina's damp, and so there's no music for you, my Orthodox brethren, or else I'd give you such a concert, my word! – Something marvellous! You can have a quadrille, or a polka, if you like, or some Russian dance for two... I can do them all. In the town, where I was an attendant at the Grand Hotel, I couldn't make any money, but I did wonders on my concertina. And, I can play the guitar.

A VOICE FROM THE CORNER. A silly speech from a silly fool.

FEDYA. I can hear another of them. [Pause.]

NAZAROVNA. [To SAVVA] If you'd only lie where it was warm now, old man, and warm your feet. [Pause.] Old man! Man of God! [Shakes SAVVA] Are you going to die?

FEDYA. You ought to drink a little vodka, grandfather. Drink, and it'll burn, burn in your stomach, and warm up your heart. Drink, do!

NAZAROVNA. Don't swank, young man! Perhaps the old man is giving back his soul to God, or repenting for his sins, and you talk like that, and play your concertina... Put it down! You've no shame!

FEDYA. And what are you sticking to him for? He can't do anything and you... with your old women's talk... He can't say a word in reply, and you're glad, and happy because he's listening to your nonsense... You go on sleeping, grandfather; never mind her! Let her talk, don't you take any notice of her. A woman's tongue is the devil's broom – it will sweep the good man and the clever man both out of the house. Don't you mind... [Waves his hands] But it's thin you are, brother of mine! Terrible! Like a dead skeleton! No life in you! Are you really dying?

SAVVA. Why should I die? Save me, O Lord, from dying in vain... I'll suffer a little, and then get up with God's help... The Mother of God won't let me die in a strange land... I'll die at home.

FEDYA. Are you from far off?

SAVVA. From Vologda. The town itself... I live there.

FEDYA. And where is this Vologda?

TIHON. The other side of Moscow...

FEDYA. Well, well, well... You have come a long way, old man! On foot?

SAVVA. On foot, young man. I've been to Tihon of the Don, and I'm going to the Holy Hills. [Note: On the Donetz, south-east of Kharkov; a monastery containing a miraculous ikon.]... From there, if God wills it, to Odessa... They say you can get to Jerusalem cheap from there, for twenty-ones roubles, they say...

FEDYA. And have you been to Moscow?

SAVVA. Rather! Five times...

FEDYA. Is it a good town? [Smokes] Well-standing?

Sews. There are many holy places there, young man... Where there are many holy places it's always a good town...

BORTSOV. [Goes up to the counter, to TIHON] Once more, please! For the sake of Christ, give it to me!

FEDYA. The chief thing about a town is that it should be clean. If it's dusty, it must be watered; if it's dirty, it must be cleaned. There ought to be big houses... a theatre... police... cabs, which... I've lived in a town myself, I understand.

BORTSOV. Just a little glass. I'll pay you for it later.

TIHON. That's enough now.

BORTSOV. I ask you! Do be kind to me!

TIHON. Get away!

BORTSOV. You don't understand me... Understand me, you fool, if there's a drop of brain in your peasant's wooden head, that it isn't I who am asking you, but my inside, using the words you understand, that's what's asking! My illness is what's asking! Understand!

TIHON. We don't understand anything... Get back!

BORTSOV. Because if I don't have a drink at once, just you understand this, if I don't satisfy my needs, I may commit some crime. God only knows what I might do! In the time you've kept this place, you rascal, haven't you seen a lot of drunkards, and haven't you yet got to understand what they're like? They're diseased! You can do anything you like to them, but you must give them vodka! Well, now, I implore you! Please! I humbly ask you! God only knows how humbly!

TIHON. You can have the vodka if you pay for it.

BORTSOV. Where am I to get the money? I've drunk it all! Down to the ground! What can I give you? I've only got this coat, but I can't give you that. I've nothing on underneath... Would you like my cap? [Takes it off and gives it to TIHON]

TIHON. [Looks it over] Hm... There are all sorts of caps... It might be a sieve from the holes in it...

FEDYA. [Laughs] A gentleman's cap! You've got to take it off in front of the mam'selles. How do you do, good-bye! How are you?

TIHON. [Returns the cap to BORTSOV] I wouldn't give anything for it. It's muck.

BORTSOV. If you don't like it, then let me owe you for the drink! I'll bring in your five copecks on my way back from town. You can take it and choke yourself with it then! Choke yourself! I hope it sticks in your throat! [Coughs] I hate you!

TIHON. [Banging the bar-counter with his fist] Why do you keep on like that? What a man! What are you here for, you swindler?

BORTSOV. I want a drink! It's not I, it's my disease! Understand that!

TIHON. Don't you make me lose my temper, or you'll soon find yourself outside!

BORTSOV. What am I to do? [Retires from the bar-counter] What am I to do? [Is thoughtful.]

EFIMOVNA. It's the devil tormenting you. Don't you mind him, sir. The damned one keeps whispering, "Drink! Drink!" And you answer him, "I shan't drink! I shan't drink!" He'll go then.

FEDYA. It's drumming in his head... His stomach's leading him on! [Laughs] Your honour's a happy man. Lie down and go to sleep! What's the use of standing like a scarecrow in the middle of the inn! This isn't an orchard!

BORTSOV. [Angrily] Shut up! Nobody spoke to you, you donkey.

FEDYA. Go on, go on! We've seen the like of you before! There's a lot like you tramping the high road! As to being a donkey, you wait till I've given you a clout on the ear and you'll howl worse than the wind. Donkey yourself! Fool! [Pause] Scum!

NAZAROVNA. The old man may be saying a prayer, or giving up his soul to God, and here are these unclean ones wrangling with one another and saying all sorts of... Have shame on yourselves!

FEDYA. Here, you cabbage-stalk, you keep quiet, even if you are in a public-house. Just you behave like everybody else.

BORTSOV. What am I to do? What will become of me? How can I make him understand? What else can I say to him? [To TIHON] The blood's boiling in my chest! Uncle Tihon! [Weeps] Uncle Tihon!

SAWA. [Groans] I've got shooting-pains in my leg, like bullets of fire... Little mother, pilgrim.

EFIMOVNA. What is it, little father?

SAVVA. Who's that crying?

EFIMOVNA. The gentleman.

SAVVA. Ask him to shed a tear for me, that I might die in Vologda. Tearful prayers are heard.

BORTSOV. I'm not praying, grandfather! These aren't tears! Just juice! My soul is crushed; and the juice is running. [Sits by SAVVA] Juice! But you wouldn't understand! You, with your darkened brain, wouldn't understand. You people are all in the dark!

SAVVA. Where will you find those who live in the light?

BORTSOV. They do exist, grandfather... They would understand!

SAVVA. Yes, yes, dear friend... The saints lived in the light... They understood all our griefs... You needn't even tell them... and they'll understand... Just by looking at your eyes... And then you'll have such peace, as if you were never in grief at all – it will all go!

FEDYA. And have you ever seen any saints?

SAVVA. It has happened, young man... There are many of all sorts on this earth. Sinners, and servants of God.

BORTSOV. I don't understand all this... [Gets up quickly] What's the use of talking when you don't understand, and what sort of a brain have I now? I've only an instinct, a thirst! [Goes quickly to the counter] Tihon, take my coat! Understand? [Tries to take it off] My coat...

TIHON. And what is there under your coat? [Looks under it] Your naked body? Don't take it off, I shan't have it... I'm not going to burden my soul with a sin.

[Enter MERIK.]

BORTSOV. Very well, I'll take the sin on myself! Do you agree?

MERIK. [In silence takes off his outer cloak and remains in a sleeveless jacket. He carries an axe in his belt] A vagrant may sweat where a bear will freeze. I am hot. [Puts his axe on the floor and takes off his jacket] You get rid of a pailful of sweat while you drag one leg out of the mud. And while you are dragging it out, the other one goes farther in.

EFIMOVNA. Yes, that's true... is the rain stopping, dear?

MERIK. [Glancing at EFIMOVNA] I don't talk to old women. [A pause.]

BORTSOV. [To TIHON] I'll take the sin on myself. Do you hear me or don't you?

TIHON. I don't want to hear you, get away!

MERIK. It's as dark as if the sky was painted with pitch. You can't see your own nose. And the rain beats into your face like a snowstorm! [Picks up his clothes and axe.]

FEDYA. It's a good thing for the likes of us thieves. When the cat's away the mice will play.

MERIK. Who says that?

FEDYA. Look and see... before you forget.

MERIK. We'll make a note of it... [Goes up to TIHON] How do you do, you with the large face! Don't you remember me.

TIHON. If I'm to remember every one of you drunkards that walks the high road, I reckon I'd need ten holes in my forehead.

MERIK. Just look at me... [A pause.]

TIHON. Oh, yes; I remember. I knew you by your eyes! [Gives him his hand] Andrey Polikarpov?

MERIK. I used to be Andrey Polikarpov, but now I am Egor Merik.

TIHON. Why's that?

MERIK. I call myself after whatever passport God gives me. I've been Merik for two months. [Thunder] Rrrr... Go on thundering, I'm not afraid! [Looks round] Any police here?

TIHON. What are you talking about, making mountains out of mole-hills?.. The people here are all right... The police are fast asleep in their feather beds now... [Loudly] Orthodox brothers, mind your pockets and your clothes, or you'll have to regret it. The man's a rascal! He'll rob you!

MERIK. They can look out for their money, but as to their clothes – I shan't touch them. I've nowhere to take them.

TIHON. Where's the devil taking you to?

MERIK. To Kuban.

TIHON. My word!

FEDYA. To Kuban? Really? [Sitting up] It's a fine place. You wouldn't see such a country, brother, if you were to fall asleep and dream for three years. They say the birds there, and the beasts are – my God! The grass grows all the year round, the people are good, and they've so much land they don't know what to do with it! The authorities, they say... a soldier was telling me the other day... give a hundred dessiatins ahead. There's happiness, God strike me!

MERIK. Happiness... Happiness goes behind you... You don't see it. It's as near as your elbow is, but you can't bite it. It's all silly... [Looking round at the benches and the people] Like a lot of prisoners... A poor lot.

EFIMOVNA. [To MERIK] What great, angry, eyes! There's an enemy in you, young man... Don't you look at us!

MERIK. Yes, you're a poor lot here.

EFIMOVNA. Turn away! [Nudges SAVVA] Savva, darling, a wicked man is looking at us. He'll do us harm, dear. [To MERIK] Turn away, I tell you, you snake!

SAVVA. He won't touch us, mother, he won't touch us... God won't let him.

MERIK. All right, Orthodox brothers! [Shrugs his shoulders] Be quiet! You aren't asleep, you bandy-legged fools! Why don't you say something?

EFIMOVNA. Take your great eyes away! Take away that devil's own pride!

MERIK. Be quiet, you crooked old woman! I didn't come with the devil's pride, but with kind words, wishing to honour your bitter lot! You're huddled together like flies because of the cold – I'd be sorry for you, speak kindly to you, pity your poverty, and here you go grumbling away! [Goes up to FEDYA] Where are you from?

FEDYA. I live in these parts. I work at the Khamonyevsky brickworks.

MERIK. Get up.

FEDYA. [Raising himself] Well?

MERIK. Get up, right up. I'm going to lie down here.

FEDYA. What's that... It isn't your place, is it?

MERIK. Yes, mine. Go and lie on the ground!

FEDYA. You get out of this, you tramp. I'm not afraid of you.

MERIK. You're very quick with your tongue... Get up, and don't talk about it! You'll be sorry for it, you silly.

TIHON. [To FEDYA] Don't contradict him, young man. Never mind.

FEDYA. What right have you? You stick out your fishy eyes and think I'm afraid! [Picks up his belongings and stretches himself out on the ground] You devil! [Lies down and covers himself all over.]

MERIK. [Stretching himself out on the bench] I don't expect you've ever seen a devil or you wouldn't call me one. Devils aren't like that. [Lies down, putting his axe next to him.] Lie down, little brother axe... let me cover you.

TIHON. Where did you get the axe from?

MERIK. Stole it... Stole it, and now I've got to fuss over it like a child with a new toy; I don't like to throw it away, and I've nowhere to put it. Like a beastly wife... Yes... [Covering himself over] Devils aren't like that, brother.

FEDYA. [Uncovering his head] What are they like?

MERIK. Like steam, like air... Just blow into the air. [Blows] They're like that, you can't see them.

A VOICE FROM THE CORNER. You can see them if you sit under a harrow.

MERIK. I've tried, but I didn't see any... Old women's tales, and silly old men's, too... You won't see a devil or a ghost or a corpse... Our eyes weren't made so that we could see everything... When I was a boy, I used to walk in the woods at night on purpose to see the demon of the woods... I'd shout and shout, and there might be some spirit, I'd call for the demon of the woods and not blink my eyes: I'd see all sorts of little things moving about, but no demon. I used to go and walk about the churchyards at night, I wanted to see the ghosts – but the women lie. I saw all sorts of animals, but anything awful – not a sign. Our eyes weren't...

THE VOICE FROM THE CORNER. Never mind, it does happen that you do see... In our village a man was gutting a wild boar... he was separating the tripe when... something jumped out at him!

SAVVA. [Raising himself] Little children, don't talk about these unclean things! It's a sin, dears!

MERIK. Aaa... greybeard! You skeleton! [Laughs] You needn't go to the churchyard to see ghosts, when they get up from under the floor to give advice to their relations... A sin!.. Don't you

teach people your silly notions! You're an ignorant lot of people living in darkness... [Lights his pipe] My father was peasant and used to be fond of teaching people. One night he stole a sack of apples from the village priest, and he brings them along and tells us, "Look, children, mind you don't eat any apples before Easter, it's a sin." You're like that... You don't know what a devil is, but you go calling people devils... Take this crooked old woman, for instance. [Points to EFIMOVNA] She sees an enemy in me, but is her time, for some woman's nonsense or other, she's given her soul to the devil five times.

EFIMOVNA. Hoo, hoo, hoo... Gracious heavens! [Covers her face] Little Savva!

TIHON. What are you frightening them for? A great pleasure! [The door slams in the wind] Lord Jesus... The wind, the wind!

MERIK. [Stretching himself] Eh, to show my strength! [The door slams again] If I could only measure myself against the wind! Shall I tear the door down, or suppose I tear up the inn by the roots! [Gets up and lies down again] How dull!

NAZAROVNA. You'd better pray, you heathen! Why are you so restless?

EFIMOVNA. Don't speak to him, leave him alone! He's looking at us again. [To MERIK] Don't look at us, evil man! Your eyes are like the eyes of a devil before cockcrow!

SAVVA. Let him look, pilgrims! You pray, and his eyes won't do you any harm.

BORTSOV. No, I can't. It's too much for my strength! [Goes up to the counter] Listen, Tihon, I ask you for the last time... Just half a glass!

TIHON. [Shakes his head] The money!

BORTSOV. My God, haven't I told you! I've drunk it all! Where am I to get it? And you won't go broke even if you do let me have a drop of vodka on tick. A glass of it only costs you two copecks, and it will save me from suffering! I am suffering! Understand! I'm in misery, I'm suffering!

TIHON. Go and tell that to someone else, not to me... Go and ask the Orthodox, perhaps they'll give you some for Christ's sake, if they feel like it, but I'll only give bread for Christ's sake.

BORTSOV. You can rob those wretches yourself, I shan't... I won't do it! I won't! Understand? [Hits the bar-counter with his fist] I won't. [A pause.] Hm... just wait... [Turns to the pilgrim women] It's an idea, all the same, Orthodox ones! Spare five copecks! My inside asks for it. I'm ill!

FEDYA. Oh, you swindler, with your "spare five copecks." Won't you have some water?

BORTSOV. How I am degrading myself! I don't want it! I don't want anything! I was joking!

MERIK. You won't get it out of him, sir... He's a famous skinflint... Wait, I've got a five-copeck piece somewhere... We'll have a glass between us – half each [Searches in his pockets] The devil... it's lost somewhere... Thought I heard it tinkling just now in my pocket... No; no, it isn't there, brother, it's your luck! [A pause.]

BORTSOV. But if I can't drink, I'll commit a crime or I'll kill myself... What shall I do, my God! [Looks through the door] Shall I go out, then? Out into this darkness, wherever my feet take me...

MERIK. Why don't you give him a sermon, you pilgrims? And you, Tihon, why don't you drive him out? He hasn't paid you for his night's accommodation. Chuck him out! Eh, the people are cruel nowadays. There's no gentleness or kindness in them... A savage people! A man is drowning and they shout to him: "Hurry up and drown, we've got no time to look at you; we've got to go to work." As to throwing him a rope – there's no worry about that... A rope would cost money.

SAVVA. Don't talk, kind man!

MERIK. Quiet, old wolf! You're a savage race! Herods! Sellers of your souls! [To TIHON] Come here, take off my boots! Look sharp now!

TIHON. Eh, he's let himself go I [Laughs] Awful, isn't it.

MERIK. Go on, do as you're told! Quick now! [Pause] Do you hear me, or don't you? Am I talking to you or the wall? [Stands up]

TIHON. Well... give over.

MERIK. I want you, you fleecer, to take the boots off me, a poor tramp.

TIHON. Well, well... don't get excited. Here have a glass... Have a drink, now!

MERIK. People, what do I want? Do I want him to stand me vodka, or to take off my boots? Didn't I say it properly? [To TIHON] Didn't you hear me rightly? I'll wait a moment, perhaps you'll hear me then.

[There is excitement among the pilgrims and tramps, who half-raise themselves in order to look at TIHON and MERIK. They wait in silence.]

TIHON. The devil brought you here! [Comes out from behind the bar] What a gentleman! Come on now. [Takes off MERIK'S boots] You child of Cain...

MERIK. That's right. Put them side by side... Like that... you can go now!

TIHON. [Returns to the bar-counter] You're too fond of being clever. You do it again and I'll turn you out of the inn! Yes! [To BORTSOV, who is approaching] You, again?

BORTSOV. Look here, suppose I give you something made of gold... I will give it to you.

TIHON. What are you shaking for? Talk sense!

BORTSOV. It may be mean and wicked on my part, but what am I to do? I'm doing this wicked thing, not reckoning on what's to come... If I was tried for it, they'd let me off. Take it, only on condition that you return it later, when I come back from town. I give it to you in front of these witnesses. You will be my witnesses! [Takes a gold medallion out from the breast of his coat] Here it is... I ought to take the portrait out, but I've nowhere to put it; I'm wet all over... Well, take the portrait, too! Only mind this... don't let your fingers touch that face... Please... I was rude to you, my dear fellow, I was a fool, but forgive me and... don't touch it with your fingers... Don't look at that face with your eyes. [Gives TIHON the medallion.]

TIHON. [Examining it] Stolen property... All right, then, drink... [Pours out vodka] Confound you.

BORTSOV. Only don't you touch it... with your fingers. [Drinks slowly, with feverish pauses.]

TIHON. [Opens the medallion] Hm... a lady!.. Where did you get hold of this?

MERIK. Let's have a look. [Goes to the bar] Let's see.

TIHON. [Pushes his hand away] Where are you going to? You look somewhere else!

FEDYA. [Gets up and comes to TIHON] I want to look too!

[Several of the tramps, etc., approach the bar and form a group. MERIK grips TIHON's hand firmly with both his, looks at the portrait, in the medallion in silence. A pause.]

MERIK. A pretty she-devil. A real lady...

FEDYA. A real lady... Look at her cheeks, her eyes... Open your hand, I can't see. Hair coming down to her waist... It is lifelike! She might be going to say something... [Pause.]

MERIK. It's destruction for a weak man. A woman like that gets a hold on one and... [Waves his hand] you're done for!

[KUSMA'S voice is heard. "Trrr... Stop, you brutes!" Enter KUSMA.]

KUSMA. There stands an inn upon my way. Shall I drive or walk past it, say? You can pass your own father and not notice him, but you can see an inn in the dark a hundred versts away. Make way, if you believe in God! Hullo, there! [Planks a five-copeck piece down on the counter] A glass of real Madeira! Quick!

FEDYA. Oh, you devil!

TIHON. Don't wave your arms about, or you'll hit somebody.

KUSMA. God gave us arms to wave about. Poor sugary things, you're half-melted. You're frightened of the rain, poor delicate things. [Drinks.]

EFIMOVNA. You may well get frightened, good man, if you're caught on your way in a night like this. Now, thank God, it's all right, there are many villages and houses where you can shelter from the weather, but before that there weren't any. Oh, Lord, it was bad! You walk a hundred versts,

and not only isn't there a village; or a house, but you don't even see a dry stick. So you sleep on the ground...

KUSMA. Have you been long on this earth, old woman?

EFIMOVNA. Over seventy years, little father.

KUSMA. Over seventy years! You'll soon come to crow's years. [Looks at BORTSOV] And what sort of a raisin is this? [Staring at BORTSOV] Sir! [BORTSOV recognizes KUSMA and retires in confusion to a corner of the room, where he sits on a bench] Semyon Sergeyevitch! Is that you, or isn't it? Eh? What are you doing in this place? It's not the sort of place for you, is it?

BORTSOV. Be quiet!

MERIK. [To KUSMA] Who is it?

KUSMA. A miserable sufferer. [Paces irritably by the counter] Eh? In an inn, my goodness! Tattered! Drunk! I'm upset, brothers... upset... [To MERIK, in an undertone] It's my master... our landlord. Semyon Sergeyevitch and Mr. Bortsov... Have you ever seen such a state? What does he look like? Just... it's the drink that brought him to this... Give me some more! [Drinks] I come from his village, Bortsovka; you may have heard of it, it's 200 versts from here, in the Ergovsky district. We used to be his father's serfs... What a shame!

MERIK. Was he rich?

KUSMA. Very.

MERIK. Did he drink it all?

KUSMA. No, my friend, it was something else... He used to be great and rich and sober... [To TIHON] Why you yourself used to see him riding, as he used to, past this inn, on his way to the town. Such bold and noble horses! A carriage on springs, of the best quality! He used to own five troikas, brother... Five years ago, I remember, he came here driving two horses from Mikishinsky, and he paid with a five-rouble piece... I haven't the time, he says, to wait for the change... There!

MERIK. His brain's gone, I suppose.

KUSMA. His brain's all right... It all happened because of his cowardice! From too much fat. First of all, children, because of a woman... He fell in love with a woman of the town, and it seemed to him that there wasn't any more beautiful thing in the wide world. A fool may love as much as a wise man. The girl's people were all right... But she wasn't exactly loose, but just... giddy... always changing her mind! Always winking at one! Always laughing and laughing... No sense at all. The gentry like that, they think that's nice, but we moujiks would soon chuck her out... Well, he fell in love, and his luck ran out. He began to keep company with her, one thing led to another... they used to go out in a boat all night, and play pianos...

BORTSOV. Don't tell them, Kusma! Why should you? What has my life got to do with them?

KUSMA. Forgive me, your honour, I'm only telling them a little... what does it matter, anyway... I'm shaking all over. Pour out some more. [Drinks.]

MERIK. [In a semitone] And did she love him?

KUSMA. [In a semitone which gradually becomes his ordinary voice] How shouldn't she? He was a man of means... Of course you'll fall in love when the man has a thousand dessiatins and money to burn... He was a solid, dignified, sober gentleman... always the same, like this... give me your hand [Takes MERIK'S hand] "How do you do and good-bye, do me the favour." Well, I was going one evening past his garden – and what a garden, brother, versts of it – I was going along quietly, and I look and see the two of them sitting on a seat and kissing each other. [Imitates the sound] He kisses her once, and the snake gives him back two... He was holding her white, little hand, and she was all fiery and kept on getting closer and closer, too... "I love you," she says. And he, like one of the damned, walks about from one place to another and brags, the coward, about his happiness... Gives one man a rouble, and two to another... Gives me money for a horse. Let off everybody's debts...

BORTSOV. Oh, why tell them all about it? These people haven't any sympathy... It hurts!

KUSMA. It's nothing, sir! They asked me! Why shouldn't I tell them? But if you are angry I won't... I won't... What do I care for them... [Post-bells are heard.]

FEDYA. Don't shout; tell us quietly...

KUSMA. I'll tell you quietly... He doesn't want me to, but it can't be helped... But there's nothing more to tell. They got married, that's all. There was nothing else. Pour out another drop for Kusma the stony! [Drinks] I don't like people getting drunk! Why the time the wedding took place, when the gentlefolk sat down to supper afterwards, she went off in a carriage... [Whispers] To the town, to her lover, a lawyer... Eh? What do you think of her now? Just at the very moment! She would be let off lightly if she were killed for it!

MERIK. [Thoughtfully] Well... what happened then?

KUSMA. He went mad... As you see, he started with a fly, as they say, and now it's grown to a bumble-bee. It was a fly then, and now – it's a bumble-bee... And he still loves her. Look at him, he loves her! I expect he's walking now to the town to get a glimpse of her with one eye... He'll get a glimpse of her, and go back...

[The post has driven up to the in.. The POSTMAN enters and has a drink.]

TIHON. The post's late to-day!

[The POSTMAN pays in silence and goes out. The post drives off, the bells ringing.]

A VOICE FROM THE CORNER. One could rob the post in weather like this – easy as spitting.

MERIK. I've been alive thirty-five years and I haven't robbed the post once... [Pause] It's gone now... too late, too late...

KUSMA. Do you want to smell the inside of a prison?

MERIK. People rob and don't go to prison. And if I do go! [Suddenly] What else?

KUSMA. Do you mean that unfortunate?

MERIK. Who else?

KUSMA. The second reason, brothers, why he was ruined was because of his brother-in-law, his sister's husband... He took it into his head to stand surety at the bank for 30,000 roubles for his brother-in-law. The brother-in-law's a thief... The swindler knows which side his bread's buttered and won't budge an inch... So he doesn't pay up... So our man had to pay up the whole thirty thousand. [Sighs] The fool is suffering for his folly. His wife's got children now by the lawyer and the brother-in-law has bought an estate near Poltava, and our man goes round inns like a fool, and complains to the likes of us: "I've lost all faith, brothers! I can't believe in anybody now!" It's cowardly! Every man has his grief, a snake that sucks at his heart, and does that mean that he must drink? Take our village elder, for example. His wife plays about with the schoolmaster in broad daylight, and spends his money on drink, but the elder walks about smiling to himself. He's just a little thinner...

TIHON. [Sighs] When God gives a man strength...

KUSMA. There's all sorts of strength, that's true... Well? How much does it come to? [Pays] Take your pound of flesh! Good-bye, children! Good-night and pleasant dreams! It's time I hurried off. I'm bringing my lady a midwife from the hospital... She must be getting wet with waiting, poor thing... [Runs out. A pause.]

TIHON. Oh, you! Unhappy man, come and drink this! [Pours out.]

BORTSOV. [Comes up to the bar hesitatingly and drinks] That means I now owe you for two glasses.

TIHON. You don't owe me anything? Just drink and drown your sorrows!

FEDYA. Drink mine, too, sir! Oh! [Throws down a five-copeck piece] If you drink, you die; if you don't drink, you die. It's good not to drink vodka, but by God you're easier when you've got some! Vodka takes grief away... It is hot!

BORTSOV. Boo! The heat!

MERIK. Dive it here! [Takes the medallion from TIHON and examines her portrait] Hm. Ran off after the wedding. What a woman!

A VOICE FROM THE CORNER. Pour him out another glass, Tihon. Let him drink mine, too.

MERIK. [Dashes the medallion to the ground] Curse her! [Goes quickly to his place and lies down, face to the wall. General excitement.]

BORTSOV. Here, what's that? [Picks up the medallion] How dare you, you beast? What right have you? [Tearfully] Do you want me to kill you? You moujik! You boor!

TIHON. Don't be angry, sir... It isn't glass, it isn't broken... Have another drink and go to sleep. [Pours out] Here I've been listening to you all, and when I ought to have locked up long ago. [Goes and looks door leading out.]

BORTSOV. [Drinks] How dare he? The fool! [to MERIK] Do you understand? You're a fool, a donkey!

SAVVA. Children! If you please! Stop that talking! What's the good of making a noise? Let people go to sleep.

TIHON. Lie down, lie down... be quiet! [Goes behind the counter and locks the till] It's time to sleep.

FEDYA. It's time! [Lies down] Pleasant dreams, brothers!

MERIK. [Gets up and spreads his short fur and coat the bench] Come on, lie down, sir.

TIHON. And where will you sleep.

MERIK. Oh, anywhere... The floor will do... [Spreads a coat on the floor] It's all one to me [Puts the axe by him] It would be torture for him to sleep on the floor. He's used to silk and down...

TIHON. [To BORTSOV] Lie down, your honour! You've looked at that portrait long enough. [Puts out a candle] Throw it away!

BORTSOV. [Swaying about] Where can I lie down?

TIHON. In the tramp's place! Didn't you hear him giving it up to you?

BORTSOV. [Going up to the vacant place] I'm a bit... drunk... after all that... Is this it?.. Do I lie down here? Eh?

TIHON. Yes, yes, lie down, don't be afraid. [Stretches himself out on the counter.]

BORTSOV. [Lying down] I'm... drunk... Everything's going round... [Opens the medallion] Haven't you a little candle? [Pause] You're a queer little woman Masha... Looking at me out of the frame and laughing... [Laughs] I'm drunk! And should you laugh at a man because he's drunk? You look out, as Schastlivtsev says, and... love the drunkard.

FEDYA. How the wind howls. It's dreary!

BORTSOV. [Laughs] What a woman... Why do you keep on going round? I can't catch you!

MERIK. He's wandering. Looked too long at the portrait. [Laughs] What a business! Educated people go and invent all sorts of machines and medicines, but there hasn't yet been a man wise enough to invent a medicine against the female sex... They try to cure every sort of disease, and it never occurs to them that more people die of women than of disease... Sly, stingy, cruel, brainless... The mother-in-law torments the bride and the bride makes things square by swindling the husband... and there's no end to it...

TIHON. The women have ruffled his hair for him, and so he's bristly.

MERIK. It isn't only I... From the beginning of the ages, since the world has been in existence, people have complained... It's not for nothing that in the songs and stories, the devil and the woman are put side by side... Not for nothing! It's half true, at any rate... [Pause] Here's the gentleman playing the fool, but I had more sense, didn't I, when I left my father and mother, and became a tramp?

FEDYA. Because of women?

MERIK. Just like the gentleman... I walked about like one of the damned, bewitched, blessing my stars... on fire day and night, until at last my eyes were opened... It wasn't love, but just a fraud...

FEDYA. What did you do to her?

MERIK. Never you mind... [Pause] Do you think I killed her?.. I wouldn't do it... If you kill, you are sorry for it... She can live and be happy! If only I'd never set eyes on you, or if I could only forget you, you viper's brood! [A knocking at the door.]

TIHON. Whom have the devils brought... Who's there? [Knocking] Who knocks? [Gets up and goes to the door] Who knocks? Go away, we've locked up!

A VOICE. Please let me in, Tihon. The carriage-spring's broken! Be a father to me and help me! If I only had a little string to tie it round with, we'd get there somehow or other.

TIHON. Who are you?

THE VOICE. My lady is going to Varsonofyev from the town... It's only five versts farther on... Do be a good man and help!

TIHON. Go and tell the lady that if she pays ten roubles she can have her string and we'll mend the spring.

THE VOICE. Have you gone mad, or what? Ten roubles! You mad dog! Profiting by our misfortunes!

TIHON. Just as you like... You needn't if you don't want to.

THE VOICE. Very well, wait a bit. [Pause] She says, all right.

TIHON. Pleased to hear it!

[Opens door. The COACHMAN enters.]

COACHMAN. Good evening, Orthodox people! Well, give me the string! Quick! Who'll go and help us, children? There'll be something left over for your trouble!

TIHON. There won't be anything left over... Let them sleep, the two of us can manage.

COACHMAN. Foo, I am tired! It's cold, and there's not a dry spot in all the mud... Another thing, dear... Have you got a little room in here for the lady to warm herself in? The carriage is all on one side, she can't stay in it...

TIHON. What does she want a room for? She can warm herself in here, if she's cold... We'll find a place [Clears a space next to BORTSOV] Get up, get up! Just lie on the floor for an hour, and let the lady get warm. [To BORTSOV] Get up, your honour! Sit up! [BORTSOV sits up] Here's a place for you. [Exit COACHMAN.]

FEDYA. Here's a visitor for you, the devil's brought her! Now there'll be no sleep before daylight.

TIHON. I'm sorry I didn't ask for fifteen... She'd have given them... [Stands expectantly before the door] You're a delicate sort of people, I must say. [Enter MARIA EGOROVNA, followed by the COACHMAN. TIHON bows.] Please, your highness! Our room is very humble, full of blackbeetles! But don't disdain it!

MARIA EGOROVNA. I can't see anything... Which way do I go?

TIHON. This way, your highness! [Leads her to the place next to BORTSOV] This way, please. [Blows on the place] I haven't any separate rooms, excuse me, but don't you be afraid, madam, the people here are good and quiet...

MARIA EGOROVNA. [Sits next to BORTSOV] How awfully stuffy! Open the door, at any rate!

TIHON. Yes, madam. [Runs and opens the door wide.]

MARIA. We're freezing, and you open the door! [Gets up and slams it] Who are you to be giving orders? [Lies down]

TIHON. Excuse me, your highness, but we've a little fool here... a bit cracked... But don't you be frightened, he won't do you any harm... Only you must excuse me, madam, I can't do this for ten roubles... Make it fifteen.

MARIA EGOROVNA. Very well, only be quick.

TIHON. This minute... this very instant. [Drags some string out from under the counter] This minute. [A pause.]

BORTSOV. [Looking at MARIA EGOROVNA] Marie... Masha...

MARIA EGOROVNA. [Looks at BORTSOV] What's this?

BORTSOV. Marie... is it you? Where do you come from? [MARIA EGOROVNA recognizes BORTSOV, screams and runs off into the centre of the floor. BORTSOV follows] Marie, it is I... I [Laughs loudly] My wife! Marie! Where am I? People, a light!

MARIA EGOROVNA. Get away from me! You lie, it isn't you! It can't be! [Covers her face with her hands] It's a lie, it's all nonsense!

BORTSOV. Her voice, her movements... Marie, it is I! I'll stop in a moment... I was drunk... My head's going round... My God! Stop, stop... I can't understand anything. [Yells] My wife! [Falls at her feet and sobs. A group collects around the husband and wife.]

MARIA EGOROVNA. Stand back! [To the COACHMAN] Denis, let's go! I can't stop here any longer!

MERIK. [Jumps up and looks her steadily in the face] The portrait! [Grasps her hand] It is she! Eh, people, she's the gentleman's wife!

MARIA EGOROVNA. Get away, fellow! [Tries to tear her hand away from him] Denis, why do you stand there staring? [DENIS and TIHON run up to her and get hold of MERIK'S arms] This thieves' kitchen! Let go my hand! I'm not afraid!... Get away from me!

MERIK. [Note: Throughout this speech, in the original, Merik uses the familiar second person singular.] Wait a bit, and I'll let go... Just let me say one word to you... One word, so that you may understand... Just wait... [Turns to TIHON and DENIS] Get away, you rogues, let go! I shan't let you go till I've had my say! Stop... one moment. [Strikes his forehead with his fist] No, God hasn't given me the wisdom! I can't think of the word for you!

MARIA EGOROVNA. [Tears away her hand] Get away! Drunkards... let's go, Denis!

[She tries to go out, but MERIK blocks the door.]

MERIK. Just throw a glance at him, with only one eye if you like! Or say only just one kind little word to him! God's own sake!

MARIA EGOROVNA. Take away this... fool.

MERIK. Then the devil take you, you accursed woman!

[He swings his axe. General confusion. Everybody jumps up noisily and with cries of horror. SAVVA stands between MERIK and MARIA EGOROVNA... DENIS forces MERIK to one side and carries out his mistress. After this all stand as if turned to stone. A prolonged pause. BORTSOV suddenly waves his hands in the air.]

BORTSOV. Marie... where are you, Marie!

NAZAROVNA. My God, my God! You've torn up my your murderers! What an accursed night!

MERIK. [Lowering his hand; he still holds the axe] Did I kill her or no?

HIGH ROAD

TIHON. Thank God, your head is safe...

MERIK. Then I didn't kill her... [Totters to his bed] Fate hasn't sent me to my death because of a stolen axe... [Falls down and sobs] Woe! Woe is me! Have pity on me, Orthodox people!

Curtain

THE PROPOSAL

CHARACTERS

STEPAN STEPANOVITCH CHUBUKOV, a landowner

NATALYA STEPANOVNA, his daughter, twenty-five years old

IVAN VASSILEVITCH LOMOV, a neighbour of Chubukov, a large and hearty, but very suspicious landowner

The scene is laid at CHUBUKOV's country-house

A drawing-room in CHUBUKOV'S house.

[LOMOV enters, wearing a dress-jacket and white gloves. CHUBUKOV rises to meet him.]

CHUBUKOV. My dear fellow, whom do I see! Ivan Vassilevitch! I am extremely glad! [Squeezes his hand] Now this is a surprise, my darling... How are you?

LOMOV. Thank you. And how may you be getting on?

CHUBUKOV. We just get along somehow, my angel, to your prayers, and so on. Sit down, please do... Now, you know, you shouldn't forget all about your neighbours, my darling. My dear fellow, why are you so formal in your get-up? Evening dress, gloves, and so on. Can you be going anywhere, my treasure?

LOMOV. No, I've come only to see you, honoured Stepan Stepanovitch.

CHUBUKOV. Then why are you in evening dress, my precious? As if you're paying a New Year's Eve visit!

LOMOV. Well, you see, it's like this. [Takes his arm] I've come to you, honoured Stepan Stepanovitch, to trouble you with a request. Not once or twice have I already had the privilege of applying to you for help, and you have always, so to speak... I must ask your pardon, I am getting excited. I shall drink some water, honoured Stepan Stepanovitch. [Drinks.]

CHUBUKOV. [Aside] He's come to borrow money! Shan't give him any! [Aloud] What is it, my beauty?

LOMOV. You see, Honour Stepanitch... I beg pardon, Stepan Honouritch... I mean, I'm awfully excited, as you will please notice... In short, you alone can help me, though I don't deserve it, of course... and haven't any right to count on your assistance...

CHUBUKOV. Oh, don't go round and round it, darling! Spit it out! Well?

LOMOV. One moment... this very minute. The fact is, I've come to ask the hand of your daughter, Natalya Stepanovna, in marriage.

CHUBUKOV. [Joyfully] By Jove! Ivan Vassilevitch! Say it again – I didn't hear it all!

LOMOV. I have the honour to ask...

CHUBUKOV. [Interrupting] My dear fellow... I'm so glad, and so on... Yes, indeed, and all that sort of thing. [Embraces and kisses LOMOV] I've been hoping for it for a long time. It's been my continual desire. [Sheds a tear] And I've always loved you, my angel, as if you were my own son. May God give you both His help and His love and so on, and I did so much hope... What am I behaving in this idiotic way for? I'm off my balance with joy, absolutely off my balance! Oh, with all my soul... I'll go and call Natasha, and all that.

LOMOV. [Greatly moved] Honoured Stepan Stepanovitch, do you think I may count on her consent?

CHUBUKOV. Why, of course, my darling, and... as if she won't consent! She's in love; egad, she's like a love-sick cat, and so on... Shan't be long! [Exit.]

LOMOV. It's cold... I'm trembling all over, just as if I'd got an examination before me. The great thing is, I must have my mind made up. If I give myself time to think, to hesitate, to talk a lot, to look for an ideal, or for real love, then I'll never get married... Brr!.. It's cold! Natalya Stepanovna

is an excellent housekeeper, not bad-looking, well-educated... What more do I want? But I'm getting a noise in my ears from excitement. [Drinks] And it's impossible for me not to marry... In the first place, I'm already 35 – a critical age, so to speak. In the second place, I ought to lead a quiet and regular life... I suffer from palpitations, I'm excitable and always getting awfully upset... At this very moment my lips are trembling, and there's a twitch in my right eyebrow... But the very worst of all is the way I sleep. I no sooner get into bed and begin to go off when suddenly something in my left side – gives a pull, and I can feel it in my shoulder and head... I jump up like a lunatic, walk about a bit, and lie down again, but as soon as I begin to get off to sleep there's another pull! And this may happen twenty times...

[NATALYA STEPANOVNA comes in.]

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Well, there! It's you, and papa said, "Go; there's a merchant come for his goods." How do you do, Ivan Vassilevitch!

LOMOV. How do you do, honoured Natalya Stepanovna?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. You must excuse my apron and *négligé*... we're shelling peas for drying. Why haven't you been here for such a long time? Sit down. [They seat themselves] Won't you have some lunch?

LOMOV. No, thank you, I've had some already.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Then smoke... Here are the matches... The weather is splendid now, but yesterday it was so wet that the workmen didn't do anything all day. How much hay have you stacked? Just think, I felt greedy and had a whole field cut, and now I'm not at all pleased about it because I'm afraid my hay may rot. I ought to have waited a bit. But what's this? Why, you're in evening dress! Well, I never! Are you going to a ball, or what? – though I must say you look better. Tell me, why are you got up like that?

LOMOV. [Excited] You see, honoured Natalya Stepanovna... the fact is, I've made up my mind to ask you to hear me out... Of course you'll be surprised and perhaps even angry, but a... [Aside] It's awfully cold!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. What's the matter? [Pause] Well?

LOMOV. I shall try to be brief. You must know, honoured Natalya Stepanovna, that I have long, since my childhood, in fact, had the privilege of knowing your family. My late aunt and her husband, from whom, as you know, I inherited my land, always had the greatest respect for your father and your late mother. The Lomovs and the Chubukovs have always had the most friendly, and I might almost say the most affectionate, regard for each other. And, as you know, my land is a near neighbour of yours. You will remember that my Oxen Meadows touch your birchwoods.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Excuse my interrupting you. You say, "my Oxen Meadows..." But are they yours?

LOMOV. Yes, mine.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. What are you talking about? Oxen Meadows are ours, not yours!

LOMOV. No, mine, honoured Natalya Stepanovna.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Well, I never knew that before. How do you make that out?

LOMOV. How? I'm speaking of those Oxen Meadows which are wedged in between your birchwoods and the Burnt Marsh.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Yes, yes... They're ours.

LOMOV. No, you're mistaken, honoured Natalya Stepanovna, they're mine.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Just think, Ivan Vassilevitch! How long have they been yours?

LOMOV. How long? As long as I can remember.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Really, you won't get me to believe that!

LOMOV. But you can see from the documents, honoured Natalya Stepanovna. Oxen Meadows, it's true, were once the subject of dispute, but now everybody knows that they are mine. There's nothing to argue about. You see, my aunt's grandmother gave the free use of these Meadows in

perpetuity to the peasants of your father's grandfather, in return for which they were to make bricks for her. The peasants belonging to your father's grandfather had the free use of the Meadows for forty years, and had got into the habit of regarding them as their own, when it happened that...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. No, it isn't at all like that! Both my grandfather and great-grandfather reckoned that their land extended to Burnt Marsh – which means that Oxen Meadows were ours. I don't see what there is to argue about. It's simply silly!

LOMOV. I'll show you the documents, Natalya Stepanovna!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. No, you're simply joking, or making fun of me... What a surprise! We've had the land for nearly three hundred years, and then we're suddenly told that it isn't ours! Ivan Vassilevitch, I can hardly believe my own ears... These Meadows aren't worth much to me. They only come to five dessiatins [Note: 13.5 acres], and are worth perhaps 300 roubles [Note: £30.], but I can't stand unfairness. Say what you will, but I can't stand unfairness.

LOMOV. Hear me out, I implore you! The peasants of your father's grandfather, as I have already had the honour of explaining to you, used to bake bricks for my aunt's grandmother. Now my aunt's grandmother, wishing to make them a pleasant...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. I can't make head or tail of all this about aunts and grandfathers and grandmothers! The Meadows are ours, and that's all.

LOMOV. Mine.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Ours! You can go on proving it for two days on end, you can go and put on fifteen dress-jackets, but I tell you they're ours, ours, ours! I don't want anything of yours and I don't want to give up anything of mine. So there!

LOMOV. Natalya Ivanovna, I don't want the Meadows, but I am acting on principle. If you like, I'll make you a present of them.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. I can make you a present of them myself, because they're mine! Your behaviour, Ivan Vassilevitch, is strange, to say the least! Up to this we have always thought of you as a good neighbour, a friend: last year we lent you our threshing-machine, although on that account we had to put off our own threshing till November, but you behave to us as if we were gipsies. Giving me my own land, indeed! No, really, that's not at all neighbourly! In my opinion, it's even impudent, if you want to know...

LOMOV. Then you make out that I'm a land-grabber? Madam, never in my life have I grabbed anybody else's land, and I shan't allow anybody to accuse me of having done so... [Quickly steps to the carafe and drinks more water] Oxen Meadows are mine!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. It's not true, they're ours!

LOMOV. Mine!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. It's not true! I'll prove it! I'll send my mowers out to the Meadows this very day!

LOMOV. What?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. My mowers will be there this very day!

LOMOV. I'll give it to them in the neck!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. You dare!

LOMOV. [Clutches at his heart] Oxen Meadows are mine! You understand? Mine!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Please don't shout! You can shout yourself hoarse in your own house, but here I must ask you to restrain yourself!

LOMOV. If it wasn't, madam, for this awful, excruciating palpitation, if my whole inside wasn't upset, I'd talk to you in a different way! [Yells] Oxen Meadows are mine!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Ours!

LOMOV. Mine!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Ours!

LOMOV. Mine!

[Enter CHUBUKOV.]

CHUBUKOV. What's the matter? What are you shouting at?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Papa, please tell to this gentleman who owns Oxen Meadows, we or he?

CHUBUKOV. [To LOMOV] Darling, the Meadows are ours!

LOMOV. But, please, Stepan Stepanitch, how can they be yours? Do be a reasonable man! My aunt's grandmother gave the Meadows for the temporary and free use of your grandfather's peasants. The peasants used the land for forty years and got as accustomed to it as if it was their own, when it happened that...

CHUBUKOV. Excuse me, my precious... You forget just this, that the peasants didn't pay your grandmother and all that, because the Meadows were in dispute, and so on. And now everybody knows that they're ours. It means that you haven't seen the plan.

LOMOV. I'll prove to you that they're mine!

CHUBUKOV. You won't prove it, my darling.

LOMOV. I shall!

CHUBUKOV. Dear one, why yell like that? You won't prove anything just by yelling. I don't want anything of yours, and don't intend to give up what I have. Why should I? And you know, my beloved, that if you propose to go on arguing about it, I'd much sooner give up the meadows to the peasants than to you. There!

LOMOV. I don't understand! How have you the right to give away somebody else's property?

CHUBUKOV. You may take it that I know whether I have the right or not. Because, young man, I'm not used to being spoken to in that tone of voice, and so on: I, young man, am twice your age, and ask you to speak to me without agitating yourself, and all that.

LOMOV. No, you just think I'm a fool and want to have me on! You call my land yours, and then you want me to talk to you calmly and politely! Good neighbours don't behave like that, Stepan Stepanitch! You're not a neighbour, you're a grabber!

CHUBUKOV. What's that? What did you say?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Papa, send the mowers out to the Meadows at once!

CHUBUKOV. What did you say, sir?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Oxen Meadows are ours, and I shan't give them up, shan't give them up, shan't give them up!

LOMOV. We'll see! I'll have the matter taken to court, and then I'll show you!

CHUBUKOV. To court? You can take it to court, and all that! You can! I know you; you're just on the look-out for a chance to go to court, and all that... You pettifogger! All your people were like that! All of them!

LOMOV. Never mind about my people! The Lomovs have all been honourable people, and not one has ever been tried for embezzlement, like your grandfather!

CHUBUKOV. You Lomovs have had lunacy in your family, all of you!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. All, all, all!

CHUBUKOV. Your grandfather was a drunkard, and your younger aunt, Nastasya Mihailovna, ran away with an architect, and so on.

LOMOV. And your mother was hump-backed. [Clutches at his heart] Something pulling in my side... My head... Help! Water!

CHUBUKOV. Your father was a guzzling gambler!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. And there haven't been many backbiters to equal your aunt!

LOMOV. My left foot has gone to sleep... You're an intriguer... Oh, my heart!.. And it's an open secret that before the last elections you bri... I can see stars... Where's my hat?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. It's low! It's dishonest! It's mean!

CHUBUKOV. And you're just a malicious, double-faced intriguer! Yes!

LOMOV. Here's my hat... My heart!.. Which way? Where's the door? Oh!.. I think I'm dying... My foot's quite numb... [Goes to the door.]

CHUBUKOV. [Following him] And don't set foot in my house again!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Take it to court! We'll see!

[LOMOV staggers out.]

CHUBUKOV. Devil take him! [Walks about in excitement.]

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. What a rascal! What trust can one have in one's neighbours after that!

CHUBUKOV. The villain! The scarecrow!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. The monster! First he takes our land and then he has the impudence to abuse us.

CHUBUKOV. And that blind hen, yes, that turnip-ghost has the confounded cheek to make a proposal, and so on! What? A proposal!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. What proposal?

CHUBUKOV. Why, he came here so as to propose to you.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. To propose? To me? Why didn't you tell me so before?

CHUBUKOV. So he dresses up in evening clothes. The stuffed sausage! The wizen-faced frump!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. To propose to me? Ah! [Falls into an easy-chair and wails] Bring him back! Back! Ah! Bring him here.

CHUBUKOV. Bring whom here?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Quick, quick! I'm ill! Fetch him! [Hysterics.]

CHUBUKOV. What's that? What's the matter with you? [Clutches at his head] Oh, unhappy man that I am! I'll shoot myself! I'll hang myself! We've done for her!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. I'm dying! Fetch him!

CHUBUKOV. Tfoo! At once. Don't yell!

[Runs out. A pause. NATALYA STEPANOVNA wails.]

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. What have they done to me! Fetch him back! Fetch him! [A pause.]

[CHUBUKOV runs in.]

CHUBUKOV. He's coming, and so on, devil take him! Ouf! Talk to him yourself; I don't want to...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. [Wails] Fetch him!

CHUBUKOV. [Yells] He's coming, I tell you. Oh, what a burden, Lord, to be the father of a grown-up daughter! I'll cut my throat! I will, indeed! We cursed him, abused him, drove him out, and it's all you... you!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. No, it was you!

CHUBUKOV. I tell you it's not my fault. [LOMOV appears at the door] Now you talk to him yourself [Exit.]

[LOMOV enters, exhausted.]

LOMOV. My heart's palpitating awfully... My foot's gone to sleep... There's something keeps pulling in my side.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Forgive us, Ivan Vassilevitch, we were all a little heated... I remember now: Oxen Meadows really are yours.

LOMOV. My heart's beating awfully... My Meadows... My eyebrows are both twitching...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. The Meadows are yours, yes, yours... Do sit down... [They sit] We were wrong...

LOMOV. I did it on principle... My land is worth little to me, but the principle...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Yes, the principle, just so... Now let's talk of something else.

LOMOV. The more so as I have evidence. My aunt's grandmother gave the land to your father's grandfather's peasants...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Yes, yes, let that pass... [Aside] I wish I knew how to get him started... [Aloud] Are you going to start shooting soon?

LOMOV. I'm thinking of having a go at the blackcock, honoured Natalya Stepanovna, after the harvest. Oh, have you heard? Just think, what a misfortune I've had! My dog Guess, whom you know, has gone lame.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. What a pity! Why?

LOMOV. I don't know... Must have got twisted, or bitten by some other dog... [Sighs] My very best dog, to say nothing of the expense. I gave Mironov 125 roubles for him.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. It was too much, Ivan Vassilevitch.

LOMOV. I think it was very cheap. He's a first-rate dog.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Papa gave 85 roubles for his Squeezer, and Squeezer is heaps better than Guess!

LOMOV. Squeezer better than. Guess? What an idea! [Laughs] Squeezer better than Guess!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Of course he's better! Of course, Squeezer is young, he may develop a bit, but on points and pedigree he's better than anything that even Volchanetsky has got.

LOMOV. Excuse me, Natalya Stepanovna, but you forget that he is overshot, and an overshot always means the dog is a bad hunter!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Overshot, is he? The first time I hear it!

LOMOV. I assure you that his lower jaw is shorter than the upper.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Have you measured?

LOMOV. Yes. He's all right at following, of course, but if you want him to get hold of anything...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. In the first place, our Squeezer is a thoroughbred animal, the son of Harness and Chisels, while there's no getting at the pedigree of your dog at all... He's old and as ugly as a worn-out cab-horse.

LOMOV. He is old, but I wouldn't take five Squeezers for him... Why, how can you?.. Guess is a dog; as for Squeezer, well, it's too funny to argue... Anybody you like has a dog as good as Squeezer... you may find them under every bush almost. Twenty-five roubles would be a handsome price to pay for him.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. There's some demon of contradiction in you to-day, Ivan Vassilevitch. First you pretend that the Meadows are yours; now, that Guess is better than Squeezer. I don't like people who don't say what they mean, because you know perfectly well that Squeezer is a hundred times better than your silly Guess. Why do you want to say it isn't?

LOMOV. I see, Natalya Stepanovna, that you consider me either blind or a fool. You must realize that Squeezer is overshot!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. It's not true.

LOMOV. He is!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. It's not true!

LOMOV. Why shout, madam?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Why talk rot? It's awful! It's time your Guess was shot, and you compare him with Squeezer!

LOMOV. Excuse me; I cannot continue this discussion: my heart is palpitating.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. I've noticed that those hunters argue most who know least.

LOMOV. Madam, please be silent... My heart is going to pieces... [Shouts] Shut up!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. I shan't shut up until you acknowledge that Squeezer is a hundred times better than your Guess!

LOMOV. A hundred times worse! Be hanged to your Squeezer! His head... eyes... shoulder...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. There's no need to hang your silly Guess; he's half-dead already!

LOMOV. [Weeps] Shut up! My heart's bursting!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. I shan't shut up.

[Enter CHUBUKOV.]

CHUBUKOV. What's the matter now?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Papa, tell us truly, which is the better dog, our Squeezer or his Guess.

LOMOV. Stepan Stepanovitch, I implore you to tell me just one thing: is your Squeezer overshot or not? Yes or no?

CHUBUKOV. And suppose he is? What does it matter? He's the best dog in the district for all that, and so on.

LOMOV. But isn't my Guess better? Really, now?

CHUBUKOV. Don't excite yourself, my precious one... Allow me... Your Guess certainly has his good points... He's pure-bred, firm on his feet, has well-sprung ribs, and all that. But, my dear man, if you want to know the truth, that dog has two defects: he's old and he's short in the muzzle.

LOMOV. Excuse me, my heart... Let's take the facts... You will remember that on the Marusinsky hunt my Guess ran neck-and-neck with the Count's dog, while your Squeezer was left a whole verst behind.

CHUBUKOV. He got left behind because the Count's whipper-in hit him with his whip.

LOMOV. And with good reason. The dogs are running after a fox, when Squeezer goes and starts worrying a sheep!

CHUBUKOV. It's not true!.. My dear fellow, I'm very liable to lose my temper, and so, just because of that, let's stop arguing. You started because everybody is always jealous of everybody else's dogs. Yes, we're all like that! You too, sir, aren't blameless! You no sooner notice that some dog is better than your Guess than you begin with this, that... and the other... and all that... I remember everything!

LOMOV. I remember too!

CHUBUKOV. [Teasing him] I remember, too... What do you remember?

LOMOV. My heart... my foot's gone to sleep... I can't...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. [Teasing] My heart... What sort of a hunter are you? You ought to go and lie on the kitchen oven and catch blackbeetles, not go after foxes! My heart!

CHUBUKOV. Yes really, what sort of a hunter are you, anyway? You ought to sit at home with your palpitations, and not go tracking animals. You could go hunting, but you only go to argue with people and interfere with their dogs and so on. Let's change the subject in case I lose my temper. You're not a hunter at all, anyway!

LOMOV. And are you a hunter? You only go hunting to get in with the Count and to intrigue... Oh, my heart!.. You're an intriguer!

CHUBUKOV. What? I an intriguer? [Shouts] Shut up!

LOMOV. Intriguer!

CHUBUKOV. Boy! Pup!

LOMOV. Old rat! Jesuit!

CHUBUKOV. Shut up or I'll shoot you like a partridge! You fool!

LOMOV. Everybody knows that – oh my heart! – your late wife used to beat you... My feet... temples... sparks... I fall, I fall!

CHUBUKOV. And you're under the slipper of your housekeeper!

LOMOV. There, there, there... my heart's burst! My shoulder's come off... Where is my shoulder? I die. [Falls into an armchair] A doctor! [Faints.]

CHUBUKOV. Boy! Milksop! Fool! I'm sick! [Drinks water] Sick!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. What sort of a hunter are you? You can't even sit on a horse! [To her father] Papa, what's the matter with him? Papa! Look, papa! [Screams] Ivan Vassilevitch! He's dead!

CHUBUKOV. I'm sick!.. I can't breathe!.. Air!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. He's dead. [Pulls LOMOV'S sleeve] Ivan Vassilevitch! Ivan Vassilevitch! What have you done to me? He's dead. [Falls into an armchair] A doctor, a doctor! [Hysterics.]

CHUBUKOV. Oh!.. What is it? What's the matter?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. [Wails] He's dead... dead!

CHUBUKOV. Who's dead? [Looks at LOMOV] So he is! My word! Water! A doctor! [Lifts a tumbler to LOMOV'S mouth] Drink this!.. No, he doesn't drink... It means he's dead, and all that... I'm the most unhappy of men! Why don't I put a bullet into my brain? Why haven't I cut my throat yet? What am I waiting for? Give me a knife! Give me a pistol! [LOMOV moves] He seems to be coming round... Drink some water! That's right...

LOMOV. I see stars... mist... Where am I?

CHUBUKOV. Hurry up and get married and – well, to the devil with you! She's willing! [He puts LOMOV'S hand into his daughter's] She's willing and all that. I give you my blessing and so on. Only leave me in peace!

LOMOV. [Getting up] Eh? What? To whom?

CHUBUKOV. She's willing! Well? Kiss and be damned to you!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. [Wails] He's alive... Yes, yes, I'm willing...

CHUBUKOV. Kiss each other!

LOMOV. Eh? Kiss whom? [They kiss] Very nice, too. Excuse me, what's it all about? Oh, now I understand... my heart... stars... I'm happy. Natalya Stepanovna... [Kisses her hand] My foot's gone to sleep...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. I... I'm happy too...

CHUBUKOV. What a weight off my shoulders... Ouf!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. But... still you will admit now that Guess is worse than Squeezer.

LOMOV. Better!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Worse!

CHUBUKOV. Well, that's a way to start your family bliss! Have some champagne!

LOMOV. He's better!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Worse! worse! worse!

CHUBUKOV. [Trying to shout her down] Champagne! Champagne!

Curtain

THE WEDDING

CHARACTERS

EVDOKIM ZAHAROVITCH ZHIGALOV, a retired Civil Servant.

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA, his wife DASHENKA, their daughter

EPAMINOND MAXIMOVITCH APLOMBOV, Dashenka's bridegroom

FYODOR YAKOVLEVITCH REVUNOV-KARAULOV, a retired captain

ANDREY ANDREYEVITCH NUNIN, an insurance agent

ANNA MARTINOVNA ZMEYUKINA, a midwife, aged 30, in a brilliantly red dress

IVAN MIHAILOVITCH YATS, a telegraphist

HARLAMPI SPIRIDONOVITCH DIMBA, a Greek confectioner

DMITRI STEPANOVITCH MOZGOVOY, a sailor of the Imperial Navy
(Volunteer Fleet)

GROOMSMEN, GENTLEMEN, WAITERS, ETC.

The scene is laid in one of the rooms of Andronov's Restaurant

[A brilliantly illuminated room. A large table, laid for supper. Waiters in dress-jackets are fussing round the table. An orchestra behind the scene is playing the music of the last figure of a quadrille.]

[ANNA MARTINOVNA ZMEYUKINA, YATS, and a GROOMSMAN cross the stage.]

ZMEYUKINA. No, no, no!

YATS. [Following her] Have pity on us! Have pity!

ZMEYUKINA. No, no, no!

GROOMSMAN. [Chasing them] You can't go on like this! Where are you off to? What about the *grand ronde*? *Grand ronde, s'il vous plait!* [They all go off.]

[Enter NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA and APLOMBOV.]

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. You had much better be dancing than upsetting me with your speeches.

APLOMBOV. I'm not a Spinosa or anybody of that sort, to go making figures-of-eight with my legs. I am a serious man, and I have a character, and I see no amusement in empty pleasures. But it isn't just a matter of dances. You must excuse me, *maman*, but there is a good deal in your behaviour which I am unable to understand. For instance, in addition to objects of domestic importance, you promised also to give me, with your daughter, two lottery tickets. Where are they?

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. My head's aching a little... I expect it's on account of the weather... If only it thawed!

APLOMBOV. You won't get out of it like that. I only found out to-day that those tickets are in pawn. You must excuse me, *maman*, but it's only swindlers who behave like that. I'm not doing this out of egoisticism [Note: So in the original] – I don't want your tickets – but on principle; and I don't allow myself to be done by anybody. I have made your daughter happy, and if you don't give me the tickets to-day I'll make short work of her. I'm an honourable man!

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. [Looks round the table and counts up the covers] One, two, three, four, five...

A WAITER. The cook asks if you would like the ices served with rum, madeira, or by themselves?

APLOMBOV. With rum. And tell the manager that there's not enough wine. Tell him to prepare some more Haut Sauterne. [To NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA] You also promised and agreed that a general was to be here to supper. And where is he?

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. That isn't my fault, my dear.

APLOMBOV. Whose fault, then?

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. It's Andrey Andreyevitch's fault... Yesterday he came to see us and promised to bring a perfectly real general. [Sighs] I suppose he couldn't find one anywhere, or he'd have brought him... You think we don't mind? We'd begrudge our child nothing. A general, of course...

APLOMBOV. But there's more... Everybody, including yourself, *maman*, is aware of the fact that Yats, that telegraphist, was after Dashenka before I proposed to her. Why did you invite him? Surely you knew it would be unpleasant for me?

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. Oh, how can you? Epaminond Maximovitch was married himself only the other day, and you've already tired me and Dashenka out with your talk. What will you be like in a year's time? You are horrid, really horrid.

APLOMBOV. Then you don't like to hear the truth? Aha! Oh, oh! Then behave honourably. I only want you to do one thing, be honourable!

[Couples dancing the *grand ronde* come in at one door and out at the other end. The first couple are DASHENKA with one of the GROOMSMEN. The last are YATS and ZMEYUKINA. These two remain behind. ZHIGALOV and DIMBA enter and go up to the table.]

GROOMSMAN. [Shouting] Promenade! Messieurs, promenade! [Behind] Promenade!

[The dancers have all left the scene.]

YATS. [To ZMEYUKINA] Have pity! Have pity, adorable Anna Martinovna.

ZMEYUKINA. Oh, what a man!.. I've already told you that I've no voice to-day.

YATS. I implore you to sing! Just one note! Have pity! Just one note!

ZMEYUKINA. I'm tired of you... [Sits and fans herself.]

YATS. No, you're simply heartless! To be so cruel – if I may express myself – and to have such a beautiful, beautiful voice! With such a voice, if you will forgive my using the word, you shouldn't be a midwife, but sing at concerts, at public gatherings! For example, how divinely you do that *fioritura*... that... [Sings] "I loved you; love was vain then..." Exquisite!

ZMEYUKINA. [Sings] "I loved you, and may love again." Is that it?

YATS. That's it! Beautiful!

ZMEYUKINA. No, I've no voice to-day... There, wave this fan for me... it's hot! [To APLOMBOV] Epaminond Maximovitch, why are you so melancholy? A bridegroom shouldn't be! Aren't you ashamed of yourself, you wretch? Well, what are you so thoughtful about?

APLOMBOV. Marriage is a serious step! Everything must be considered from all sides, thoroughly.

ZMEYUKINA. What beastly sceptics you all are! I feel quite suffocated with you all around... Give me atmosphere! Do you hear? Give me atmosphere! [Sings a few notes.]

YATS. Beautiful! Beautiful!

ZMEYUKINA. Fan me, fan me, or I feel I shall have a heart attack in a minute. Tell me, please, why do I feel so suffocated?

YATS. It's because you're sweating...

ZMEYUKINA. Foo, how vulgar you are! Don't dare to use such words!

YATS. Beg pardon! Of course, you're used, if I may say so, to aristocratic society and...

ZMEYUKINA. Oh, leave me alone! Give me poetry, delight! Fan me, fan me!

ZHIGALOV. [To DIMBA] Let's have another, what? [Pours out] One can always drink. So long only, Harlampi Spiridonovitch, as one doesn't forget one's business. Drink and be merry... And if you can drink at somebody else's expense, then why not drink? You can drink... Your health! [They drink] And do you have tigers in Greece?

DIMBA. Yes.

ZHIGALOV. And lions?

DIMBA. And lions too. In Russia zere's nussing, and in Greece zere's everysing – my fazer and uncle and brozeres – and here zere's nussing.

ZHIGALOV. H'm... And are there whales in Greece?

DIMBA. Yes, everysing.

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. [To her husband] What are they all eating and drinking like that for? It's time for everybody to sit down to supper. Don't keep on shoving your fork into the lobsters... They're for the general. He may come yet...

ZHIGALOV. And are there lobsters in Greece?

DIMBA. Yes... zere is everysing.

ZHIGALOV. Hm... And Civil Servants.

ZMEYUKINA. I can imagine what the atmosphere is like in Greece!

ZHIGALOV. There must be a lot of swindling. The Greeks are just like the Armenians or gipsies. They sell you a sponge or a goldfish and all the time they are looking out for a chance of getting something extra out of you. Let's have another, what?

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. What do you want to go on having another for? It's time everybody sat down to supper. It's past eleven.

ZHIGALOV. If it's time, then it's time. Ladies and gentlemen, please! [Shouts] Supper! Young people!

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. Dear visitors, please be seated!

ZMEYUKINA. [Sitting down at the table] Give me poetry.

“And he, the rebel, seeks the storm,
As if the storm can give him peace.”

Give me the storm!

YATS. [Aside] Wonderful woman! I'm in love! Up to my ears!

[Enter DASHENKA, MOZGOVOY, GROOMSMEN, various ladies and gentlemen, etc. They all noisily seat themselves at the table. There is a minute's pause, while the band plays a march.]

MOZGOVOY. [Rising] Ladies and gentlemen! I must tell you this... We are going to have a great many toasts and speeches. Don't let's wait, but begin at once. Ladies and gentlemen, the newly married!

[The band plays a flourish. Cheers. Glasses are touched. APLOMBOV and DASHENKA kiss each other.]

YATS. Beautiful! Beautiful! I must say, ladies and gentlemen, giving honour where it is due, that this room and the accommodation generally are splendid! Excellent, wonderful! Only you know, there's one thing we haven't got – electric light, if I may say so! Into every country electric light has already been introduced, only Russia lags behind.

ZHIGALOV. [Meditatively] Electricity... h'm... In my opinion electric lighting is just a swindle... They put a live coal in and think you don't see them! No, if you want a light, then you don't take a coal, but something real, something special, that you can get hold of! You must have a fire, you understand, which is natural, not just an invention!

YATS. If you'd ever seen an electric battery, and how it's made up, you'd think differently.

ZHIGALOV. Don't want to see one. It's a swindle, a fraud on the public... They want to squeeze our last breath out of us... We know then, these... And, young man, instead of defending a swindle, you would be much better occupied if you had another yourself and poured out some for other people – yes!

APLOMBOV. I entirely agree with you, papa. Why start a learned discussion? I myself have no objection to talking about every possible scientific discovery, but this isn't the time for all that! [To DASHENKA] What do you think, *ma chère*?

DASHENKA. They want to show how educated they are, and so they always talk about things we can't understand.

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. Thank God, we've lived our time without being educated, and here we are marrying off our third daughter to an honest man. And if you think we're uneducated, then what do you want to come here for? Go to your educated friends!

YATS. I, Nastasya Timofeyevna, have always held your family in respect, and if I did start talking about electric lighting it doesn't mean that I'm proud. I'll drink, to show you. I have always sincerely wished Daria Evdokimovna a good husband. In these days, Nastasya Timofeyevna, it is difficult to find a good husband. Nowadays everybody is on the look-out for a marriage where there is profit, money...

APLOMBOV. That's a hint!

YATS. [His courage failing] I wasn't hinting at anything... Present company is always excepted... I was only in general... Please! Everybody knows that you're marrying for love... the dowry is quite trifling.

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. No, it isn't trifling! You be careful what you say. Besides a thousand roubles of good money, we're giving three dresses, the bed, and all the furniture. You won't find another dowry like that in a hurry!

YATS. I didn't mean... The furniture's splendid, of course, and... and the dresses, but I never hinted at what they are getting offended at.

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. Don't you go making hints. We respect you on account of your parents, and we've invited you to the wedding, and here you go talking. If you knew that Epaminond Maximovitch was marrying for profit, why didn't you say so before? [Tearfully] I brought her up, I fed her, I nursed her... I cared for her more than if she was an emerald jewel, my little girl...

APLOMBOV. And you go and believe him? Thank you so much! I'm very grateful to you! [To YATS] And as for you, Mr. Yats, although you are acquainted with me, I shan't allow you to behave like this in another's house. Please get out of this!

YATS. What do you mean?

APLOMBOV. I want you to be as straightforward as I am! In short, please get out! [Band plays a flourish]

THE GENTLEMEN. Leave him alone! Sit down! Is it worth it! Let him be! Stop it now!

YATS. I never... I... I don't understand... Please, I'll go... Only you first give me the five roubles which you borrowed from me last year on the strength of a *piqué* waistcoat, if I may say so. Then I'll just have another drink and... go, only give me the money first.

VARIOUS GENTLEMEN. Sit down! That's enough! Is it worth it, just for such trifles?

A GROOMSMAN. [Shouts] The health of the bride's parents, Evdokim Zaharitch and Nastasya Timofeyevna! [Band plays a flourish. Cheers.]

ZHIGALOV. [Bows in all directions, in great emotion] I thank you! Dear guests! I am very grateful to you for not having forgotten and for having conferred this honour upon us without being standoffish. And you must not think that I'm a rascal, or that I'm trying to swindle anybody. I'm speaking from my heart – from the purity of my soul! I wouldn't deny anything to good people! We thank you very humbly! [Kisses.]

DASHENKA. [To her mother] Mama, why are you crying? I'm so happy!

APLOMBOV. *Maman* is disturbed at your coming separation. But I should advise her rather to remember the last talk we had.

YATS. Don't cry, Nastasya Timofeyevna! Just think what are human tears, anyway? Just petty psychiatry, and nothing more!

ZMEYUKINA. And are there any red-haired men in Greece?

DIMBA. Yes, everyting is zere.

ZHIGALOV. But you don't have our kinds of mushroom.

DIMBA. Yes, we've got zem and everysing.

MOZGOVOY. Harlampi Spiridonovitch, it's your turn to speak! Ladies and gentlemen, a speech!

ALL. [To DIMBA] Speech! speech! Your turn!

DIMBA. Why? I don't understand... What is it!

ZMEYUKINA. No, no! You can't refuse! It's you turn! Get up!

DIMBA. [Gets up, confused] I can't say what... Zere's Russia and zere's Greece. Zere's people in Russia and people in Greece... And zere's people swimming the sea in karavs, which mean sips, and people on the land in railway trains. I understand. We are Greeks and you are Russians, and I want nussing... I can tell you... zere's Russia and zere's Greece...

[Enter NUNIN.]

NUNIN. Wait, ladies and gentlemen, don't eat now! Wait! Just one minute, Nastasya Timofeyevna! Just come here, if you don't mind! [Takes NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA aside, puffing] Listen... The General's coming... I found one at last... I'm simply worn out... A real General, a solid one – old, you know, aged perhaps eighty, or even ninety.

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. When is he coming?

NUNIN. This minute. You'll be grateful to me all your life. [Note: A few lines have been omitted: they refer to the "General's" rank and its civil equivalent in words for which the English language has no corresponding terms. The "General" is an ex-naval officer, a second-class captain.]

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. You're not deceiving me, Andrey darling?

NUNIN. Well, now, am I a swindler? You needn't worry!

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. [Sighs] One doesn't like to spend money for nothing, Andrey darling!

NUNIN. Don't you worry! He's not a general, he's a dream! [Raises his voice] I said to him: "You've quite forgotten us, your Excellency! It isn't kind of your Excellency to forget your old friends! Nastasya Timofeyevna," I said to him, "she's very annoyed with you about it!" [Goes and sits at the table] And he says to me: "But, my friend, how can I go when I don't know the bridegroom?" "Oh, nonsense, your excellency, why stand on ceremony? The bridegroom," I said to him, "he's a fine fellow, very free and easy. He's a valuer," I said, "at the Law courts, and don't you think, your excellency, that he's some rascal, some knave of hearts. Nowadays," I said to him, "even decent women are employed at the Law courts." He slapped me on the shoulder, we smoked a Havana cigar each, and now he's coming... Wait a little, ladies and gentlemen, don't eat...

APLOMBOV. When's he coming?

NUNIN. This minute. When I left him he was already putting on his goloshes. Wait a little, ladies and gentlemen, don't eat yet.

APLOMBOV. The band should be told to play a march.

NUNIN. [Shouts] Musicians! A march! [The band plays a march for a minute.]

A WAITER. Mr. Revunov-Karaulov!

[ZHIGALOV, NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA, and NUNIN run to meet him. Enter REVUNOV-KARAULOV.]

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. [Bowing] Please come in, your excellency! So glad you've come!

REVUNOV. Awfully!

ZHIGALOV. We, your excellency, aren't celebrities, we aren't important, but quite ordinary, but don't think on that account that there's any fraud. We put good people into the best place, we begrudge nothing. Please!

REVUNOV. Awfully glad!

NUNIN. Let me introduce to you, your excellency, the bridegroom, Epaminond Maximovitch Aplombov, with his newly born... I mean his newly married wife! Ivan Mihailovitch Yats, employed

on the telegraph! A foreigner of Greek nationality, a confectioner by trade, Harlampi Spiridonovitch Dimba! Osip Lukitch Babelmandebsky! And so on, and so on... The rest are just trash. Sit down, your excellency!

REVUNOV. Awfully! Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, I just want to say two words to Andrey. [Takes NUNIN aside] I say, old man, I'm a little put out... Why do you call me your excellency? I'm not a general! I don't rank as the equivalent of a colonel, even.

NUNIN. [Whispers] I know, only, Fyodor Yakovlevitch, be a good man and let us call you your excellency! The family here, you see, is patriarchal; it respects the aged, it likes rank.

REVUNOV. Oh, if it's like that, very well... [Goes to the table] Awfully!

NASTASYA TIMOFEYEVNA. Sit down, your excellency! Be so good as to have some of this, your excellency! Only forgive us for not being used to etiquette; we're plain people!

REVUNOV. [Not hearing] What? Hm... yes. [Pause] Yes... In the old days everybody used to live simply and was happy. In spite of my rank, I am a man who lives plainly. To-day Andrey comes to me and asks me to come here to the wedding. "How shall I go," I said, "when I don't know them? It's not good manners!" But he says: "They are good, simple, patriarchal people, glad to see anybody." Well, if that's the case... why not? Very glad to come. It's very dull for me at home by myself, and if my presence at a wedding can make anybody happy, then I'm delighted to be here...

ZHIGALOV. Then that's sincere, is it, your excellency? I respect that! I'm a plain man myself, without any deception, and I respect others who are like that. Eat, your excellency!

APLOMBOV. Is it long since you retired, your excellency?

REVUNOV. Eh? Yes, yes... Quite true... Yes. But, excuse me, what is this? The fish is sour... and the bread is sour. I can't eat this! [APLOMBOV and DASHENKA kiss each other] He, he, he... Your health! [Pause] Yes... In the old days everything was simple and everybody was glad... I love simplicity... I'm an old man. I retired in 1865. I'm 72. Yes, of course, in my younger days it was different, but – [Sees MOZGOVOY] You there... a sailor, are you?

MOZGOVOY. Yes, just so.

REVUNOV. Aha, so... yes. The navy means hard work. There's a lot to think about and get a headache over. Every insignificant word has, so to speak, its special meaning! For instance, "Hoist her top-sheets and mainsail!" What's it mean? A sailor can tell! He, he! – With almost mathematical precision!

NUNIN. The health of his excellency Fyodor Yakovlevitch Revunov-Karaulov! [Band plays a flourish. Cheers.]

YATS. You, your excellency, have just expressed yourself on the subject of the hard work involved in a naval career. But is telegraphy any easier? Nowadays, your excellency, nobody is appointed to the telegraphs if he cannot read and write French and German. But the transmission of telegrams is the most difficult thing of all. Awfully difficult! Just listen.

[Taps with his fork on the table, like a telegraphic transmitter.]

REVUNOV. What does that mean?

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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