

Tolstoy Leo

Fruits of Culture



Лев Толстой

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CHARACTERS

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH ZVEZDÍNTSEF. *A retired Lieutenant of the Horse Guards. Owner of more than 60,000 acres of land in various provinces. A fresh-looking, bland, agreeable gentleman of 60. Believes in Spiritualism, and likes to astonish people with his wonderful stories.*

ANNA PÁVLOVNA ZVEZDÍNTSEVA. *Wife of Leoníd. Stout; pretends to be young; quite taken up with the conventionalities of life; despises her husband, and blindly believes in her doctor. Very irritable.*

BETSY. *Their daughter. A young woman of 20, fast, tries to be mannish, wears a pince-nez, flirts and giggles. Speaks very quickly and distinctly.*

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH ZVEZDÍNTSEF. *Their son, aged 25; has studied law, but has no definite occupation. Member of the Cycling Club, Jockey Club, and of the Society for Promoting the Breeding of Hounds. Enjoys perfect health, and has imperturbable self-assurance. Speaks loud and abruptly. Is either perfectly serious – almost morose, or is noisily gay and laughs loud. Is nicknamed Vovo.*

ALEXÉY VLADÍMIRITCH KROUGOSVÉTLOF. *A professor and scientist of about 50, with quiet and pleasantly self-possessed manners, and quiet, deliberate, harmonious speech. Likes to talk. Is mildly disdainful of those who do not agree with him. Smokes much. Is lean and active.*

THE DOCTOR. *About 40. Healthy, fat, red-faced, loud-voiced, and rough; with a self-satisfied smile constantly on his lips.*

MÁRYA KONSTANTÍNOVNA. *A girl of 20, from the Conservatoire, teacher of music. Wears a fringe, and is super-fashionably dressed. Obsequious, and gets easily confused.*

PETRÍSTCHEF. *About 28; has taken his degree in philology, and is looking out for a position. Member of the same clubs as Vasíly Leoníditch, and also of the Society for the Organisation of Calico Balls.¹ Is bald-headed, quick in movement and speech, and very polite.*

THE BARONESS. *A pompous lady of about 50, slow in her movements, speaks with monotonous intonation.*

THE PRINCESS. *A society woman, a visitor.*

HER DAUGHTER. *An affected young society woman, a visitor.*

THE COUNTESS. *An ancient dame, with false hair and teeth. Moves with great difficulty.*

GROSSMAN. *A dark, nervous, lively man of Jewish type. Speaks very loud.*

THE FAT LADY: MÁRYA VASÍLEVNA TOLBOÚHINA. *A very distinguished, rich, and kindly woman, acquainted with all the notable people of the last and present generations. Very stout. Speaks hurriedly, trying to be heard above every one else. Smokes.*

BARON KLÍNGEN (nicknamed KOKO). *A graduate of Petersburg University. Gentleman of the Bedchamber, Attaché to an Embassy. Is perfectly correct in his deportment, and therefore enjoys peace of mind and is quietly gay.*

TWO SILENT LADIES.

SERGÉY IVÁNITCH SAHÁTOF. *About 50, an ex-Assistant Minister of State. An elegant gentleman, of wide European culture, engaged in nothing and interested in everything. His carriage is dignified and at times even severe.*

¹ Economical balls at which the ladies are bound to appear in dresses made of cotton materials.

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. *Personal attendant on Zvezdintsef, aged about 60. A man of some education and fond of information. Uses his pince-nez and pocket-handkerchief too much, unfolding the latter very slowly. Takes an interest in politics. Is kindly and sensible.*

GREGORY. *A footman, about 28, handsome, profligate, envious, and insolent.*

JACOB. *Butler, about 40, a bustling, kindly man, to whom the interests of his family in the village are all-important.*

SIMON. *The butler's assistant, about 20, a healthy, fresh, peasant lad, fair, beardless as yet; calm and smiling.*

THE COACHMAN. *A man of about 35, a dandy. Has moustaches but no beard. Rude and decided.*

A DISCHARGED MAN-COOK. *About 45, dishevelled, unshaved, bloated, yellow and trembling. Dressed in a ragged, light summer-overcoat and dirty trousers. Speaks hoarsely, ejecting the words abruptly.*

THE SERVANTS' COOK. *A talkative, dissatisfied woman of 30.*

THE DOORKEEPER. *A retired soldier.*

TÁNYA (TATYÁNA MÁRKOVNA). *Lady's-maid, 19, energetic, strong, merry, with quickly-changing moods. At moments, when strongly excited, she shrieks with joy.*

FIRST PEASANT. *About 60. Has served as village Elder. Imagines that he knows how to treat gentlefolk, and likes to hear himself talk.*

SECOND PEASANT. *About 45, head of a family. A man of few words. Rough and truthful. The father of Simon.*

THIRD PEASANT. *About 70. Wears shoes of plaited bast. Is nervous, restless, hurried, and tries to cover his confusion by much talking.*

FIRST FOOTMAN (in attendance on the Countess). *An old man, with old-fashioned manners, and proud of his place.*

SECOND FOOTMAN. *Of enormous size, strong, and rude.*

A PORTER FROM A FASHIONABLE DRESSMAKER'S SHOP. *A fresh-faced man in dark-blue long coat. Speaks firmly, emphatically, and clearly.*

The action takes place in Moscow, in Zvezdintsef's house.

ACT I

The entrance hall of a wealthy house in Moscow. There are three doors: the front door, the door of Leoníd Fyódoritch's study, and the door of Vasíly Leoníditch's room. A staircase leads up to the other rooms; behind it is another door leading to the servants' quarters.

Scene 1

GREGORY [*looks at himself in the glass and arranges his hair, &c.*] I am sorry about those moustaches of mine! "Moustaches are not becoming to a footman," she says! And why? Why, so that any one might see you're a footman, – else my looks might put her darling son to shame. He's a likely one! There's not much fear of his coming anywhere near me, moustaches or no moustaches! [*Smiling into the glass*] And what a lot of 'em swarm round me. And yet I don't care for any of them as much as for that Tánya. And she only a lady's-maid! Ah well, she's nicer than any young lady. [*Smiles*] She is a duck! [*Listening*] Ah, here she comes. [*Smiles*] Yes, that's her, clattering with her little heels. Oh!

Enter Tánya, carrying a cloak and boots.

GREGORY. My respects to you, Tatyána Márkovna.

TÁNYA. What are you always looking in the glass for? Do you think yourself so good-looking?

GREGORY. Well, and are my looks not agreeable?

TÁNYA. So, so; neither agreeable nor disagreeable, but just betwixt and between! Why are all those cloaks hanging there?

GREGORY. I am just going to put them away, your ladyship! [*Takes down a fur cloak and, wrapping it round her, embraces her*] I say, Tánya, I'll tell you something ...

TÁNYA. Oh, get away, do! What do you mean by it? [*Pulls herself angrily away*] Leave me alone, I tell you!

GREGORY [*looks cautiously around*] Then give me a kiss!

TÁNYA. Now, really, what are you bothering for? I'll give you such a kiss! [*Raises her hand to strike*].

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH [*off the scene, rings and then shouts*] Gregory!

TÁNYA. There now, go! Vasíly Leoníditch is calling you.

GREGORY. He'll wait! He's only just opened his eyes! I say, why don't you love me?

TÁNYA. What sort of loving have you imagined now? I don't love anybody.

GREGORY. That's a fib. You love Simon! You have found a nice one to love – a common, dirty-pawed peasant, a butler's assistant!

TÁNYA. Never mind; such as he is, you are jealous of him!

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH [*off the scene*] Gregory!

GREGORY. All in good time... Jealous indeed! Of what? Why, you have only just begun to get licked into shape, and who are you tying yourself up with? Now, wouldn't it be altogether a different matter if you loved me?.. I say, Tánya ...

TÁNYA [*angrily and severely*] You'll get nothing from me, I tell you!

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH [*off the scene*] Gregory!!

GREGORY. You're mighty particular, ain't you?

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH [*off the scene, shouts persistently, monotonously, and with all his might*] Gregory! Gregory! Gregory! [*Tánya and Gregory laugh*].

GREGORY. You should have seen the girls that have been sweet on me. [*Bell rings*].

TÁNYA. Well then, go to them, and leave me alone!

GREGORY. You are a silly, now I think of it. I'm not Simon!

TÁNYA. Simon means marriage, and not tomfoolery!

Enter Porter, carrying a large cardboard box.

PORTER. Good morning!

GREGORY. Good morning! Where are you from?

PORTER. From Bourdey's. I've brought a dress, and here's a note for the lady.

TÁNYA [*taking the note*] Sit down, and I'll take it in. [*Exit*].

Vasíly Leoníditch looks out of the door in shirt-sleeves and slippers.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. Gregory!

GREGORY. Yes, sir.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. Gregory! Don't you hear me call?

GREGORY. I've only just come, sir.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. Hot water, and a cup of tea.

GREGORY. Yes, sir; Simon will bring them directly.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. And who is this? Ah, from Bourdier?

PORTER. Yes, sir.

Exeunt Vasíly Leoníditch and Gregory. Bell rings. Tánya runs in at the sound of the bell and opens the front door.

TÁNYA [*to Porter*] Please wait a little.

PORTER. I am waiting.

Sahátov enters at front door.

TÁNYA. I beg your pardon, but the footman has just gone away. This way, sir. Allow me, please. [*Takes his fur cloak*].

SAHÁTOF [*adjusting his clothes*] Is Leoníd Fyódoritch at home? Is he up? [*Bell rings*].

TÁNYA. Oh yes, sir. He's been up a long time.

Doctor enters and looks round for the footman. Sees Sahátov and addresses him in an offhand manner.

DOCTOR. Ah, my respects to you!

SAHÁTOF [*looks fixedly at him*] The Doctor, I believe?

DOCTOR. And I thought you were abroad! Dropped in to see Leoníd Fyódoritch?

SAHÁTOF. Yes. And you? Is any one ill?

DOCTOR [*laughing*] Not exactly ill, but, you know ... It's awful with these ladies! Sits up at cards till three every morning, and pulls her waist into the shape of a wine-glass. And the lady is flabby and fat, and carries the weight of a good many years on her back.

SAHÁTOF. Is this the way you state your diagnosis to Anna Pávlovna? I should hardly think it quite pleases her!

DOCTOR [*laughing*] Well, it's the truth. They do all these tricks – and then come derangements of the digestive organs, pressure on the liver, nerves, and all sorts of things, and one has to come and patch them up. It's just awful! [*Laughs*] And you? You are also a spiritualist it seems?

SAHÁTOF. I? No, I am not also a spiritualist... Good morning! [*Is about to go, but is stopped by the Doctor*].

DOCTOR. No! But I can't myself, you know, positively deny the possibility of it, when a man like Krougosvétlof is connected with it all. How can one? Is he not a professor, – a European celebrity? There must be something in it. I should like to see for myself, but I never have the time. I have other things to do.

SAHÁTOF. Yes, yes! Good morning. [*Exit, bowing slightly*].

DOCTOR [*to Tánya*] Is Anna Pávlovna up?

TÁNYA. She's in her bedroom, but please come up.

Doctor goes upstairs.

Theodore Ivánitch enters with a newspaper in his hand.

THEODORE IVÁNITCH [*to Porter*] What is it you want?

PORTER. I'm from Bourdey's. I brought a dress and a note, and was told to wait.

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. Ah, from Bourdey's! [*To Tánya*] Who came in just now?

TÁNYA. It was Sergéy Ivánitch Sahátov and the Doctor. They stood talking here a bit. It was all about spiritualism.

THEODORE IVÁNITCH [*correcting her*] Spiritualism.

TÁNYA. Yes, that's just what I said – spiritualism. Have you heard how well it went off last time, Theodore Ivánitch? [*Laughs*] There was knocks, and things flew about!

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. And how do *you* know?

TÁNYA. Miss Elizabeth told me.

Jacob runs in with a tumbler of tea on a tray.

JACOB [*to the Porter*] Good morning!

PORTER [*disconsolately*] Good morning!

Jacob knocks at Vasíly Leoníditch's door.

Gregory enters.

GREGORY. Give it here.

JACOB. You didn't bring back all yesterday's tumblers, nor the tray Vasíly Leoníditch had. And it's me that have to answer for them!

GREGORY. The tray is full of cigars.

JACOB. Well, put them somewhere else. It's me who's answerable for it.

GREGORY. I'll bring it back! I'll bring it back!

JACOB. Yes, so you say, but it is not where it ought to be. The other day, just as the tea had to be served, it was not to be found.

GREGORY. I'll bring it back, I tell you. What a fuss!

JACOB. It's easy for you to talk. Here am I serving tea for the third time, and now there's the lunch to get ready. One does nothing but rush about the livelong day. Is there any one in the house who has more to do than me? Yet they are never satisfied with me.

GREGORY. Dear me? Who could wish for any one more satisfactory? You're such a fine fellow!

TÁNYA. Nobody is good enough for you! You alone ...

GREGORY [*to Tánya*] No one asked your opinion! [*Exit*].

JACOB. Ah well, I don't mind. Tatyána Márkovna, did the mistress say anything about yesterday?

TÁNYA. About the lamp, you mean?

JACOB. And how it managed to drop out of my hands, the Lord only knows! Just as I began rubbing it, and was going to take hold of it in another place, out it slips and goes all to pieces. It's just my luck! It's easy for that Gregory Mihályitch to talk – a single man like him! But when one has a family, one has to consider things: they have to be fed. I don't mind work... So she didn't say anything? The Lord be thanked!... Oh, Theodore Ivánitch, have you one spoon or two?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. One. Only one! [*Reads newspaper*].

Exit Jacob.

Bell rings. Enter Gregory (carrying a tray) and the Doorkeeper.

DOORKEEPER [*to Gregory*] Tell the master some peasants have come from the village.

GREGORY [*pointing to Theodore Ivánitch*] Tell the major-domo here, it's his business. I have no time. [*Exit*].

TÁNYA. Where are these peasants from?

DOORKEEPER. From Kursk, I think.

TÁNYA [*shrieks with delight*] It's them... It's Simon's father come about the land! I'll go and meet them! [*Runs off*].

DOORKEEPER. Well, then, what shall I say to them? Shall they come in here? They say they've come about the land – the master knows, they say.

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. Yes, they want to purchase some land. All right! But he has a visitor now, so you had better tell them to wait.

DOORKEEPER. Where shall they wait?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. Let them wait outside. I'll send for them when the time comes. [*Exit Doorkeeper*]

Enter Tánya, followed by three Peasants.

TÁNYA. To the right. In here! In here!

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. I did not want them brought in here!

GREGORY. Forward minx!

TÁNYA. Oh, Theodore Ivánitch, it won't matter, they'll stand in this corner.

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. They'll dirty the floor.

TÁNYA. They've scraped their shoes, and I'll wipe the floor up afterwards. [*To Peasants*] Here, stand just here.

Peasants come forward carrying presents tied in cotton handkerchiefs: cake, eggs, and embroidered towels. They look around for an icon before which to cross themselves; not finding one, they cross themselves looking at the staircase.

GREGORY [*to Theodore Ivánitch*]. There now, Theodore Ivánitch, they say Pironnet's boots are an elegant shape. But those there are ever so much better. [*Pointing to the third Peasant's bast shoes*].

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. Why will you always be ridiculing people? [*Exit Gregory*].

THEODORE IVÁNITCH [*rises and goes up to the Peasants*] So you are from Kursk? And have come to arrange about buying some land?

FIRST PEASANT. Just so. We might say, it is for the completion of the purchase of the land we have come. How could we announce ourselves to the master?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. Yes, yes, I know. You wait a bit and I'll go and inform him. [*Exit*].
The Peasants look around; they are embarrassed where to put their presents.

FIRST PEASANT. There now, couldn't we have what d'you call it? Something to present these here things on? To do it in a genteel way, like, – a little dish or something.

TÁNYA. All right, directly; put them down here for the present. [*Puts bundles on settle*].

FIRST PEASANT. There now, – that respectable gentleman that was here just now, – what might be his station?

TÁNYA. He's the master's valet.

FIRST PEASANT. I see. So he's also in service. And you, now, are you a servant too?

TÁNYA. I am lady's-maid. Do you know, I also come from Démen! I know you, and you, but I don't know him. [*Pointing to third Peasant*].

THIRD PEASANT. Them two you know, but me you don't know?

TÁNYA. You are Efim Antónitch.

FIRST PEASANT. That's just it!

TÁNYA. And you are Simon's father, Zachary Trifánitch.

SECOND PEASANT. Right!

THIRD PEASANT. And let me tell you, I'm Mítry Vlásitch Tchilíkin. Now do you know?

TÁNYA. Now I shall know you too!

SECOND PEASANT. And who may you be?

TÁNYA. I am Aksínya's, the soldier's wife's, orphan.

FIRST AND THIRD PEASANTS [*with surprise*] Never!

SECOND PEASANT. The proverb says true:

“Buy a penny pig, put it in the rye,
And you'll have a wonderful fat porker by-and-by.”

FIRST PEASANT. That's just it! She's got the resemblance of a duchess!

THIRD PEASANT. That be so truly. Oh Lord!

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. [*off the scene, rings, and then shouts*] Gregory! Gregory!

FIRST PEASANT. Now who's that, for example, disturbing himself in such a way, if I may say so?

TÁNYA. That's the young master.

THIRD PEASANT. Oh Lord! Didn't I say we'd better wait outside until the time comes?
[*Silence*].

SECOND PEASANT. Is it *you*, Simon wants to marry?

TÁNYA. Why, has he been writing? [*Hides her face in her apron*].

SECOND PEASANT. It's evident he's written! But it's a bad business he's imagined here. I see the lad's got spoilt!

TÁNYA [*quickly*] No, he's not at all spoilt! Shall I send him to you?

SECOND PEASANT. Why send him? All in good time. Where's the hurry?

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH [*desperately, behind scene*] Gregory! Where the devil are you?..
[*Enters from his room in shirt-sleeves, adjusting his pince-nez*].

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. Is every one dead?

TÁNYA. He's not here, sir... I'll send him to you at once. [*Moves towards the back door*].

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. I could hear you talking, you know. How have these scarecrows sprung up here? Eh? What?

TÁNYA. They're peasants from the Kursk village, sir. [*Peasants bow*].

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. And who is this? Oh yes, from Bourdier.

Vasíly Leoníditch pays no attention to the Peasants' bow. Tánya meets Gregory at the doorway and remains on the scene.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH [*to Gregory*] I told you the other boots... I can't wear these!

GREGORY. Well, the others are also there.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. But where is *there*?

GREGORY. Just in the same place!

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. They're not!

GREGORY. Well, come and see. [*Exeunt Gregory and Vasíly Leoníditch*].

THIRD PEASANT. Say now, might we not in the meantime just go and wait, say, in some lodging-house or somewhere?

TÁNYA. No, no, wait a little. I'll go and bring you some plates to put the presents on. [*Exit*].

Enter Sahátóf and Leoníd Fyódoritch, followed by Theodore Ivánitch.

The Peasants take up the presents, and pose themselves.

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH [*to Peasants*] Presently, presently! Wait a bit! [*Points to Porter*] Who is this?

PORTER. From Bourdey's.

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. Ah, from Bourdier.

SAHÁTOF [*smiling*] Well, I don't deny it: still you understand that, never having seen it, we, the uninitiated, have some difficulty in believing.

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. You say you find it difficult to believe! We do not ask for faith; all we demand of you is to investigate! How can I help believing in this ring? Yet this ring came from there!

SAHÁTOF. From *there*? What do you mean? From where?

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. From the other world. Yes!

SAHÁTOF [*smiling*] That's very interesting – very interesting!

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. Well, supposing we admit that I'm a man carried away by an idea, as you think, and that I am deluding myself. Well, but what of Alexéy Vladímiritch Krougosvétlof – he is not just an ordinary man, but a distinguished professor, and yet he admits it to be a fact. And not he alone. What of Crookes? What of Wallace?

SAHÁTOF. But I don't deny anything. I only say it is very interesting. It would be interesting to know how Krougosvétlof explains it!

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. He has a theory of his own. Could you come to-night? – he is sure to be here. First we shall have Grossman – you know, the famous thought-reader?

SAHÁTOF. Yes, I have heard of him but have never happened to meet him.

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. Then you must come! We shall first have Grossman, then Kaptchítch, and our mediumistic séance... [*To Theodore Ivánitch*] Has the man returned from Kaptchítch?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. Not yet, sir.

SAHÁTOF. Then how am I to know?

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. Never mind, come in any case! If Kaptchítch can't come we shall find our own medium. Márya Ignátievna is a medium – not such a good one as Kaptchítch, but still ...

Tánya enters with plates for the presents, and stands listening.

SAHÁTOF [*smiling*] Oh yes, yes. But here is one puzzling point: – how is it that the mediums are always of the, so-called, educated class, such as Kaptchítch and Márya Ignátievna? If there were such a special force, would it not be met with also among the common people – the peasants?

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. Oh yes, and it is! That is very common. Even here in our own house we have a peasant whom we discovered to be a medium. A few days ago we called him in – a sofa had to be moved, during a séance – and we forgot all about him. In all probability he fell asleep. And, fancy, after our séance was over and Kaptchítch had come to again, we suddenly noticed mediumistic phenomena in another part of the room, near the peasant: the table gave a jerk and moved!

TÁNYA [*aside*] That was when I was getting out from under it!

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. It is quite evident he also is a medium. Especially as he is very like Home in appearance. You remember Home – a fair-haired naïve sort of fellow?

SAHÁTOF [*shrugging his shoulders*] Dear me, this is very interesting, you know. I think you should try him.

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. So we will! And he is not alone; there are thousands of mediums, only we do not know them. Why, only a short time ago a bedridden old woman moved a brick wall!

SAHÁTOF. Moved a brick ... a brick wall?

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. Yes, yes. She was lying in bed, and did not even know she was a medium. She just leant her arm against the wall, and the wall moved!

SAHÁTOF. And did not cave in?

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. And did not cave in.

SAHÁTOF. Very strange! Well then, I'll come this evening.

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. Pray do. We shall have a séance in any case. [*Sahátof puts on his outdoor things, Leoníd Fyódoritch sees him to the door*].

PORTER [*to Tánya*] Do tell your mistress! Am I to spend the night here?

TÁNYA. Wait a little; she's going to drive out with the young lady, so she'll soon be coming downstairs. [*Exit*].

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH [*comes up to the Peasants, who bow and offer him their presents*] That's not necessary!

FIRST PEASANT [*smiling*] Oh, but this-here is our first duty, it is! It's also the Commune's orders that we should do it!

SECOND PEASANT. That's always been the proper way.

THIRD PEASANT. Say no more about it! 'Cause as we are much satisfied... As our parents, let's say, served, let's say, your parents, so we would like the same with all our hearts ... and not just anyhow! [*Bows*].

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. But what is it about? What do you want?

FIRST PEASANT. It's to your honour we've come ...

Enter Petrístchef briskly, in fur-lined overcoat.

PETRÍSTCHEF. Is Vasíly Leoníditch awake yet? [*Seeing Leoníd Fyódoritch, bows, moving only his head*].

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. You have come to see my son?

PETRÍSTCHEF. I? Yes, just to see Vovo for a moment.

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. Step in, step in.

Petrístchef takes off his overcoat and walks in briskly. Exit.

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH [*to Peasants*] Well, what is it you want?

SECOND PEASANT. Please accept our presents!

FIRST PEASANT [*smiling*] That's to say, the peasants' offerings.

THIRD PEASANT. Say no more about it; what's the good? We wish you the same as if you were our own father! Say no more about it!

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. All right. Here, Theodore, take these.

THEODORE IVÁNITCH [*to Peasants*] Give them here. [*Takes the presents*].

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. Well, what is the business?

FIRST PEASANT. We've come to your honour ...

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. I see you have; but what do you want?

FIRST PEASANT. It's about making a move towards completing the sale of the land. It comes to this ...

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. Do you mean to buy the land?

FIRST PEASANT. That's just it. It comes to this ... I mean the buying of the property of the land. The Commune has given us, let's say, the power of attuning, to enter, let's say, as is lawful, through the Government bank, with a stamp for the lawful amount.

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. You mean that you want to buy the land through the land-bank.

FIRST PEASANT. That's just it. Just as you offered it to us last year. It comes to this, then, the whole sum in full for the buying of the property of the land is 32,864 roubles.

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. That's all right, but how about paying up?

FIRST PEASANT. As to the payment, the Commune offers just as it was said last year – to pay in 'stalments, and your receipt of the ready money by lawful regulations, 4000 roubles in full.²

SECOND PEASANT. Take 4000 now, and wait for the rest of the money.

THIRD PEASANT [*unwrapping a parcel of money*] And about this be quite easy. We should pawn our own selves rather than do such a thing just anyhow say, but in this way, let's say, as it ought to be done.

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. But did I not write and tell you that I should not agree to it unless you brought the whole sum?

FIRST PEASANT. That's just it. It would be more agreeable, but it is not in our possibilities, I mean.

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. Well then, the thing can't be done!

FIRST PEASANT. The Commune, for example, relied its hopes on that, that you made the offer last year to sell it in easy 'stalments ...

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. That was last year. I would have agreed to it then, but now I can't.

² The present value of the rouble is rather over two shillings and one penny.

SECOND PEASANT. But how's that? We've been depending on your promise – we've got the papers ready and have collected the money!

THIRD PEASANT. Be merciful, master! We're short of land; we'll say nothing about cattle, but even a hen, let's say, we've no room to keep. [*Bows*] Don't wrong us, master! [*Bows*].

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. Of course it's quite true, that I agreed last year to let you have the land for payment by instalments, but now circumstances are such that it would be inconvenient.

SECOND PEASANT. Without this land we cannot live!

FIRST PEASANT. That's just it. Without land our lives must grow weaker and come to a decline.

THIRD PEASANT [*bowing*] Master, we have so little land, let's not talk about the cattle, but even a chicken, let's say, we've no room for. Master, be merciful, accept the money, master!

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH [*examining the document*] I quite understand, and should like to help you. Wait a little; I will give you an answer in half-an-hour... Theodore, say I am engaged and am not to be disturbed.

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. Yes, sir. [*Exit Leoníd Fyódoritch*].

The Peasants look dejected.

SECOND PEASANT. Here's a go! "Give me the whole sum," he says. And where are we to get it from?

FIRST PEASANT. If he had not given us hopes, for example. As it is we felt quite insured it would be as was said last year.

THIRD PEASANT. Oh Lord! and I had begun unwrapping the money. [*Begins wrapping up the bundle of bank-notes again*] What are we to do now?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. What is your business, then?

FIRST PEASANT. Our business, respected sir, depends in this. Last year he made us the offer of our buying the land in 'stalments. The Commune entered upon these terms and gave us the powers of attorning, and now d'you see he makes the offering that we should pay the whole in full! And as it turns out, the business is no ways convenient for us.

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. What is the whole sum?

FIRST PEASANT. The whole sum in readiness is 4000 roubles, you see.

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. Well, what of that? Make an effort and collect more.

FIRST PEASANT. Such as it is, it was collected with much effort. We have, so to say, in this sense, not got ammunition enough.

SECOND PEASANT. You can't get blood out of a stone.

THIRD PEASANT. We'd be glad with all our hearts, but we have swept even this together, as you might say, with a broom.

Vasíly Leoníditch and Petrístchef appear in the doorway both smoking cigarettes.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. I have told you already I'll do my best, so of course I will do all that is possible! Eh, what?

PETRÍSTCHEF. You must just understand that if you do not get it, the devil only knows what a mess we shall be in!

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. But I've already said I'll do my best, and so I will. Eh, what?

PETRÍSTCHEF. Nothing. I only say, get some at any cost. I will wait.

Exit into Vasíly Leoníditch's room, closing door.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH [*waving his arm*] It's a deuce of a go! [*The Peasants bow*].

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH [*looking at Porter, to Theodore Ivánitch*] Why don't you attend to this fellow from Bourdier? He hasn't come to take lodgings with us, has he? Just look, he is asleep! Eh, what?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. The note he brought has been sent in, and he has been told to wait until Anna Pávlovna comes down.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH [*looks at Peasants and notices the money*] And what is this? Money? For whom? Is it for us? [*To Theodore Ivánitch*] Who are they?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. They are peasants from Kursk. They are buying land.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. Has it been sold them?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. No, they have not yet come to any agreement. They are too stingy.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. Eh? Well, we must try and persuade them. [*To the Peasants*] Here, I say, are you buying land? Eh?

FIRST PEASANT. That's just it. We have made an offering as how we should like to acquire the possession of the land.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. Then you should not be so stingy, you know. Just let me tell you how necessary land is to peasants! Eh, what? It's very necessary, isn't it?

FIRST PEASANT. That's just it. The land appears as the very first and foremost necessity to a peasant. That's just it.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. Then why be so stingy? Just you think what land is! Why, one can sow wheat on it in rows! I tell you, you could get eighty bushels of wheat, at a rouble and a half a bushel – that would be 120 roubles. Eh, what? Or else mint! I tell you, you could collar 400 roubles off an acre by sowing mint!

FIRST PEASANT. That's just it. All sorts of products one could put into action if one had the right understanding.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. Mint! Decidedly mint! I have learnt about it, you know. It's all printed in books. I can show them you. Eh, what?

FIRST PEASANT. That's just it, all concerns are clearer to you through your books. That's learnedness, of course.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. Then pay up and don't be stingy. [*To Theodore Ivánitch*] Where's papa?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. He gave orders not to be disturbed just now.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. Oh, I suppose he's consulting a spirit whether to sell the land or not? Eh, what?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. I can't say. All I know is that he went away undecided about it.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. What d'you think, Theodore Ivánitch, is he flush of cash? Eh, what?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. I don't know. I hardly think so. But what does it matter to you? You drew a good sum not more than a week ago.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. But didn't I pay for those dogs? And now, you know, there's our new Society, and Petrístchef has been chosen, and I had borrowed money from Petrístchef and must pay the subscription both for him and for myself. Eh, what?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. And what is this new Society? A Cycling Club?

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. No. Just let me tell you. It is quite a new Society. It is a very serious Society, you know. And who do you think is President? Eh, what?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. What's the object of this new Society?

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. It is a "Society to Promote the Breeding of Pure-bred Russian Hounds." Eh, what? And I'll tell you, they're having the first meeting and a lunch, to-day. And I've no money. I'll go to him and have a try! [*Exit through study door*].

FIRST PEASANT [*to Theodore Ivánitch*] And who might he be, respected sir?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH [*smiles*] The young master.

THIRD PEASANT. The heir, so to say. Oh Lord! [*puts away the money*] I'd better hide it meanwhile.

FIRST PEASANT. And we were told he was in military service, in the cav'rely, for example.

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. No, as an only son he is exempt from military service.

THIRD PEASANT. Left for to keep his parents, so to say! That's right!

SECOND PEASANT [*shaking his head*] He's the right sort. He'll feed them finely!

THIRD PEASANT. Oh Lord!

Enter Vasíly Leoníditch followed by Leoníd Fyódoritch.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. That's always the way. It's really surprising! First I'm asked why I have no occupation, and now when I have found a field and am occupied, when a Society with serious and noble aims has been founded, I can't even have 300 roubles to go on with!..

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. I tell you I can't do it, and I can't! I haven't got it.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. Why, you have just sold some land.

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. In the first place I have not sold it! And above all, do leave me in peace! Weren't you told I was engaged? [*Exit, slamming door*].

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. I told you this was not the right moment.

VASÍLY LEONÍDITCH. Well, I say! Here's a position to be in! I'll go and see mamma – that's my only hope. He's going crazy over his spiritualism and forgets everything else. [*Goes upstairs*].

Theodore Ivánitch takes newspaper and is just going to sit down, when Betsy and Márya Konstantínovna, followed by Gregory, come down the stairs.

BETSY. Is the carriage ready?

GREGORY. Just coming to the door.

BETSY [*to Márya Konstantínovna*] Come along, come along, I know it is he.

MÁRYA KONSTANTÍNOVNA. Which he?

BETSY. You know very well whom I mean – Petrístchef, of course.

MÁRYA KONSTANTÍNOVNA. But where is he?

BETSY. Sitting in Vovo's room. You'll see!

MÁRYA KONSTANTÍNOVNA. And suppose it is not he? [*The Peasants and Porter bow*].

BETSY [*to Porter*] You brought a dress from Bourdier's?

PORTER. Yes, Miss. May I go?

BETSY. Well, I don't know. Ask my mother.

PORTER. I don't know whose it is, Miss; I was ordered to bring it here and receive the money.

BETSY. Well then, wait.

MÁRYA KONSTANTÍNOVNA. Is it still that costume for the charade?

BETSY. Yes, a charming costume. But mamma won't take it or pay for it.

MÁRYA KONSTANTÍNOVNA. But why not?

BETSY. You'd better ask mamma. She doesn't grudge Vovo 500 roubles for his dogs, but 100 is too much for a dress. I can't act dressed like a scarecrow. [*Pointing to Peasants*] And who are these?

GREGORY. Peasants who have come to buy some land or other.

BETSY. And I thought they were the beaters. Are you not beaters?

FIRST PEASANT. No, no, lady. We have come to see Leoníd Fyódoritch about the signing into our possession of the title-deeds to some land.

BETSY. Then how is it? Vovo was expecting some beaters who were to come to-day. Are you sure you are not the beaters? [*The Peasants are silent*] How stupid they are! [*Goes to Vasíly Leoníditch's door*] Vovo? [*Laughs*].

MÁRYA KONSTANTÍNOVNA. But we met him just now upstairs!

BETSY. Why need you remember that? Vovo, are you there?

Petrístchef enters.

PETRÍSTCHEF. Vovo is not here, but I am prepared to fulfil on his behalf anything that may be required. How do you do? How do you do, Márya Konstantínovna? [*Shakes hands long and violently with Betsy, and then with Márya Konstantínovna*].

SECOND PEASANT. See, it's as if he were pumping water!

BETSY. You can't replace him, – still you're better than nobody. [*Laughs*] What are these affairs of yours with Vovo?

PETRÍSTCHEF. What affairs? Our affairs are fie-nancial, that is, our business is fie! It's also nancial, and besides it is financial.

BETSY. What does nancial mean?

PETRÍSTCHEF. What a question! It means nothing, that's just the point.

BETSY. No, no, you have missed fire. [*Laughs*].

PETRÍSTCHEF. One can't always hit the mark, you know. It's something like a lottery. Blanks and blanks again, and at last you win! [*Theodore Ivánitch goes into the study*].

BETSY. Well, this was blank then; but tell me, were you at the Mergásofs' last night?

PETRÍSTCHEF. Not exactly at the *Mère* Gásof's, but rather at the *Père* Gásof's, or better still, at the *Fils* Gásof's.

BETSY. You can't do without puns. It's an illness. And were the Gypsies there?³ [*Laughs*].

PETRÍSTCHEF [*sings*] “On their aprons silken threads, little birds with golden heads!” ...

BETSY. Happy mortals! And we were yawning at Fof's.

PETRÍSTCHEF [*continues to sing*] “And she promised and she swore, She would ope' her ... her ... her ...” how does it go on, Márya Konstantínovna?

MÁRYA KONSTANTÍNOVNA. “Closet door.”

PETRÍSTCHEF. How? What? How, Márya Konstantínovna?

BETSY. *Cessez, vous devenez impossible!*⁴

PETRÍSTCHEF. *J'ai cessé, j'ai bébé, j'ai dédé...*⁵

BETSY. I see the only way to rid ourselves of your wit is to make you sing! Let us go into Vovo's room, his guitar is there. Come, Márya Konstantínovna, come! [*Exeunt Betsy, Márya Konstantínovna, and Petrístchef*].

FIRST PEASANT. Who be they?

GREGORY. One is our young lady, the other is a girl who teaches her music.

FIRST PEASANT. Administrates learning, so to say. And ain't she smart? A reg'lar picture!

SECOND PEASANT. Why don't they marry her? She is old enough, I should say.

GREGORY. Do you think it's the same as among you peasants, – marry at fifteen?

FIRST PEASANT. And that man, for example, is he also in the musitional line?

GREGORY [*mimicking him*] “Musitional” indeed! You don't understand anything!

FIRST PEASANT. That's just so. And stupidity, one might say, is our ignorance.

THIRD PEASANT. Oh Lord! [*Gipsy songs and guitar accompaniment are heard from Vasíly Leoníditch's room*].

Enter Simon, followed by Tánya, who watches the meeting between father and son.

GREGORY [*to Simon*] What do you want?

SIMON. I have been to Mr. Kaptchítch.

GREGORY. Well, and what's the answer?

SIMON. He sent word he couldn't possibly come to-night.

GREGORY. All right, I'll let them know. [*Exit*].

SIMON [*to his father*] How d'you do, father! My respects to Daddy Efím and Daddy Mítry! How are all at home?

SECOND PEASANT. Very well, Simon.

FIRST PEASANT. How d'you do, lad?

THIRD PEASANT. How d'you do, sonny?

SIMON [*smiles*] Well, come along, father, and have some tea.

SECOND PEASANT. Wait till we've finished our business. Don't you see we are not ready yet?

³ The Gypsy choirs are very popular in Moscow.

⁴ BETSY. Cease! You are becoming quite unbearable!

⁵ PETRÍSTCHEF. I have C said (*ceased*), B said, and D said.

SIMON. Well, I'll wait for you by the porch. [*Wishes to go away*].

TÁNYA [*running after him*] I say, why didn't you tell him anything?

SIMON. How could I before all those people? Give me time, I'll tell him over our tea. [*Exit*].

Theodore Ivánitch enters and sits down by the window.

FIRST PEASANT. Respected sir, how's our business proceeding?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. Wait a bit, he'll be out presently, he's just finishing.

TÁNYA [*to Theodore Ivánitch*] And how do you know, Theodore Ivánitch, he is finishing?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. I know that when he has finished questioning, he reads the question and answer aloud.

TÁNYA. Can one really talk with spirits by means of a saucer?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. It seems so.

TÁNYA. But supposing they tell him to sign, will he sign?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. Of course he will.

TÁNYA. But they do not speak with words?

THEODORE IVÁNITCH. Oh, yes. By means of the alphabet. He notices at which letter the saucer stops.

TÁNYA. Yes, but at a si-ance?..

Enter Leoníd Fyódoritch.

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. Well, friends, I can't do it! I should be very glad to, but it is quite impossible. If it were for ready money it would be a different matter.

FIRST PEASANT. That's just so. What more could any one desire? But the people are so inpennycuous – it is quite impossible!

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. Well, I can't do it, I really can't. Here is your document; I can't sign it.

THIRD PEASANT. Show some pity, master; be merciful!

SECOND PEASANT. How can you act so? It is doing us a wrong.

LEONÍD FYÓDORITCH. Nothing wrong about it, friends. I offered it you in summer, but then you did not agree; and now I can't agree to it.

THIRD PEASANT. Master, be merciful! How are we to get along? We have so little land. We'll say nothing about the cattle; a hen, let's say, there's no room to let a hen run about.

Leoníd Fyódoritch goes up to the door and stops. Enter, descending the staircase, Anna Pávlovna and doctor, followed by Vasíly Leoníditch, who is in a merry and playful mood and is putting some bank-notes into his purse.

ANNA PÁVLOVNA [*tightly laced, and wearing a bonnet*]

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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