

The Three Sisters

Anton Chekhov

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The Three Sisters

The Three Sisters
Anton Chekhov

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English translation by Constance Garnett, 1916,

edited and annotated by James Rusk and A. S. Man, 1998

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Characters

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List of Characters

- ANDREY SERGEEVICH PROZOROV
- NATALYA IVANOVNA, *also called NATASHA (his fiancée, afterwards his wife)*
- PROZOROV'S SISTERS:
 - ◆ OLGA
 - ◆ MASHA
 - ◆ IRINA
- FYODOR ILICH KULYGIN (*high-school teacher, husband of MASHA*)
- LIEUTENANT-COLONEL ALEXANDR IGNATEVICH VERSHININ (*battery commander*)
- BARON NIKOLAY LVOVITCH TUZENBAKH (*Lieutenant*)
- VASSILY VASILEVICH SOLYONY (*Captain*)
- IVAN ROMANOVICH CHEBUTYKIN (*Army Doctor*)
- ALEXEY PETROVITCH FEDOTIK (*Second Lieutenant*)
- VLADIMIR KARLOVITCH RODE (*Second Lieutenant*)
- FERAPONT (*an old Porter from the Rural Board*)
- ANFISA (*the nurse, an old woman of eighty*)

The action takes place in a provincial town.

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Act I

In the house of the PROZOROVs. A drawing-room with columns beyond which a large room is visible. Mid-day; it is bright and sunny. The table in the farther room is being laid for lunch.

OLGA, *in the dark blue uniform of a high-school teacher, is correcting exercise books, at times standing still and then walking up and down*; MASHA, *in a black dress, with her hat on her knee, is reading a book*; IRINA, *in a white dress, is standing plunged in thought.*

OLGA. Father died just a year ago, on this very day — the fifth of May, your name-day, Irina. It was very cold, snow was falling. I felt as though I should not live through it; you lay fainting as though you were dead. But now a year has passed and we can think of it calmly; you are already in a white dress, your face is radiant. [*The clock strikes twelve.*] The clock was striking then too [*a pause*]. I remember the band playing and the firing at the cemetery as they carried the coffin. Though he was a general in command of a brigade, yet there weren't many people there. It was raining, though. Heavy rain and snow.

IRINA. Why recall it!

[BARON TUZENBAKH, CHEBUTYKIN and SOLYONY appear near the table in the dining-room, beyond the columns.]

OLGA. It is warm today, we can have the windows open, but the birches are not in leaf yet. Father was given his brigade and came here with us from Moscow eleven years ago and I remember distinctly that in Moscow at this time, at the beginning of May, everything was already in flower; it was warm, and everything was bathed in sunshine. It's eleven years ago, and yet I remember it all as though we had left it yesterday. Oh, dear! I woke up this morning, I saw a blaze of sunshine. I saw the spring, and joy stirred in my heart. I had a passionate longing to be back at home again!

CHEBUTYKIN. The devil it is!

TUZENBAKH. Of course, it's nonsense.

[MASHA, brooding over a book, softly whistles a song.]

OLGA. Don't whistle, Masha. How can you! [*a pause*] Being all day in school and then at my lessons till the evening gives me a perpetual headache and thoughts as gloomy as though I were old. And really these four years that I have been at the high-school I have felt my strength and my youth oozing away from me every day. And only one yearning grows stronger and stronger. . . .

IRINA. To go back to Moscow. To sell the house, to make an end of everything here, and off to Moscow. . . .

OLGA. Yes! To Moscow, and quickly.

[CHEBUTYKIN and TUZENBAKH laugh.]

IRINA. Andrey will probably be a professor, he will not live here anyhow. The only difficulty is poor Masha.

OLGA. Masha will come and spend the whole summer in Moscow every year.

[MASHA softly whistles a tune.]

IRINA. Please God it will all be managed. [*Looking out of window*] How fine it is today. I don't know why I feel so light-hearted! I remembered this morning that it was my name-day and at once I felt joyful and thought of my childhood when mother was living. And I was thrilled by such wonderful thoughts, such thoughts!

OLGA. You are radiant today and looking lovelier than usual. And Masha is lovely too. Andrey would be nice-looking, but he has grown too fat and that does not suit him. And I've grown older and ever so much thinner. I suppose it's because I get so cross with the girls at school. Today now I am free, I'm at home, and my head doesn't ache, and I feel younger than yesterday. I'm only twenty-eight. . . . It's all quite right, it's all from God, but it seems to me that if I were married and sitting at home all day, it would be better [*a pause*]. I would love my

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husband.

TUZENBAKH [*to SOLYONY*]. You talk such nonsense, I'm tired of listening to you. [*Coming into the drawing-room*] I forgot to tell you, you will receive a visit today from Vershinin, the new commander of our battery [*sits down to the piano*].

OLGA. Well, I'll be delighted.

IRINA. Is he old?

TUZENBAKH. No, not particularly. . . . Forty or forty-five at the most [*softly plays the piano*]. He seems to be a nice fellow. He's not stupid, that's certain. Only he talks a lot.

IRINA. Is he interesting?

TUZENBAKH. Yes, he's all right, only he has a wife, a mother-in-law and two little girls. And it's his second wife too. He is paying calls and telling everyone that he has a wife and two little girls. He'll tell you so too. His wife seems a bit crazy, with her hair in a long braid like a girl's, always talks in a high-flown style, makes philosophical reflections and frequently attempts to commit suicide, evidently to annoy her husband. I should have left a woman like that years ago, but he puts up with her and merely complains.

SOLYONY [*coming into the drawing-room with CHEBUTYKIN*]. With one hand I can only lift up half a hundredweight, but with both hands I can lift up two or even two-and-a-half hundredweight. From that I conclude that two men are not only twice but three times as strong as one man, or even more. . . .

CHEBUTYKIN [*reading the newspaper as he comes in*]. For hair falling out. . . two ounces of naphthaline in half a bottle of alcohol. . . to be dissolved and used daily. . . [*puts it down in his note-book*]. Let's make a note of it! No, I don't want it. . . [*scratches it out*]. It doesn't matter.

IRINA. Ivan Romanitch, dear Ivan Romanitch!

CHEBUTYKIN. What is it, my child, my joy?

IRINA. Tell me, why is it I am so happy today? As though I were sailing with the great blue sky above me and big white birds flying over it. Why is it? Why?

CHEBUTYKIN [*kissing both her hands, tenderly*]. My white bird. . . .

IRINA. When I woke up this morning, got up and washed, it suddenly seemed to me as though everything in the world was clear to me and that I knew how one ought to live. Dear Ivan Romanitch, I know all about it. A man ought to work, to toil in the sweat of his brow, whoever he may be, and all the purpose and meaning of his life, his happiness, his ecstasies lie in that alone. How delightful to be a workman who gets up before dawn and breaks stones on the road, or a shepherd, or a schoolmaster teaching children, or an engine-driver. . . . Oh, dear! to say nothing of human beings, it would be better to be an ox, better to be a humble horse as long as you can work, than a young woman who wakes at twelve o'clock, then has coffee in bed, then spends two hours dressing. . . . Oh, how awful that is! Just as one has a craving for water in hot weather I have a craving for work. And if I don't get up early and work, give me up as a friend, Ivan Romanitch.

CHEBUTYKIN [*tenderly*]. I'll give you up, I'll give you up. . . .

OLGA. Father trained us to get up at seven o'clock. Now Irina wakes at seven and lies in bed at least till nine thinking about things. And she looks so serious! [*Laughs*]

IRINA. You are used to thinking of me as a child and are surprised when I look serious. I'm twenty!

TUZENBAKH. The yearning for work, oh dear, how well I understand it! I've never worked in my life. I was born in cold, idle Petersburg, in a family that had known nothing of work or cares of any kind. I remember, when I came home from the military school, a valet used to pull off my boots. I used to be troublesome, but my mother looked at me with reverential awe, and was surprised when other people didn't do the same. I was shielded from work. But I doubt if they have succeeded in shielding me completely, I doubt it! The time is at hand, an avalanche is moving down upon us, a mighty clearing storm which is coming, is already near and will soon blow the laziness, the indifference, the distaste for work, the rotten boredom out of our society. I'll work, and in another twenty-five or thirty years every one will have to work. Every one!

CHEBUTYKIN. I'm not going to work.

TUZENBAKH. You don't count.

SOLYONY. In another twenty-five years you won't be here, thank God. In two or three years you will kick the bucket, or I shall lose my temper and put a bullet through your head, my angel. [*Pulls a scent-bottle out of his pocket and sprinkles his chest and hands.*]

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CHEBUTYKIN [*laughs*]. And I really have never done anything at all. I haven't done a stroke of work since I left the University, I have never read a book, I read nothing but newspapers . . . [*takes another newspaper out of his pocket*]. Here. . . I know, for instance, from the newspapers that there was such a person as Dobrolyubov, but what he wrote, I can't say. . . . Goodness only knows. . . . [*A knock is heard on the floor from the floor below.*] There. . . they are calling me downstairs, someone has come for me. I'll be back directly. . . . Wait a minute. . . [*goes out hurriedly, combing his beard*].

IRINA. He's got something up his sleeve.

TUZENBAKH. Yes, he went out with a solemn face, evidently he's just going to bring you a present.

IRINA. What a nuisance!

OLGA. Yes, it's awful. He's always doing something silly.

MASHA. By the sea—strand an oak—tree green. . . upon that oak a chain of gold. . . upon that oak a chain of gold. . . [*gets up, humming softly*].

OLGA. You are not very cheerful today, Masha.

[*MASHA, humming, puts on her hat.*]

OLGA. Where are you going?

MASHA. Home.

IRINA. That's odd! . . .

TUZENBAKH. To walk out on a name—day party!

MASHA. Never mind. . . . I'll come in the evening. Good—bye, my darling. . . [*kisses IRINA*]. Once again I wish you, be well and happy. In old days, when Father was alive, we always had thirty or forty officers here on name—days; it was noisy, but today there's only a man and a half, and it's as still as the desert. . . . I'll go. . . . I've got the blues today, I'm feeling glum, so don't you mind what I say [*laughing through her tears*]. We'll talk some other time, and so for now good—bye, darling, I'm going. . . .

IRINA [*discontentedly*]. Oh, how tiresome you are. . . .

OLGA [*with tears*]. I understand you, Masha.

SOLYONY. If a man philosophises, there will be philosophy or sophistry, anyway, but if a woman philosophises, or two do it, then it will be so much twiddle—twaddle!

MASHA. What do you mean to say by that, you terrible person?

SOLYONY. Nothing. He had not time to say "alack, before the bear was on his back [*a pause*].

MASHA [*to OLGA, angrily*]. Don't blubber!

[*Enter ANFISA and FERAPONT carrying a cake.*]

ANFISA. This way, my good man. Come in, your boots are clean. [*To IRINA*] From the District Council, from Mihail Ivanitch Protopopov. . . . A cake.

IRINA. Thanks. Thank him [*takes the cake*].

FERAPONT. What?

IRINA [*more loudly*]. Thank him from me!

OLGA. Nanny dear, give him something to eat. Ferapont, go along, they will give you something to eat.

FERAPONT. Eh?

ANFISA. Come along, Ferapont Spiridonitch, my good soul, come along. . . [*goes out with FERAPONT*].

MASHA. I don't like that Protopopov, that Mihail Potapitch or Ivanitch. He ought not to be invited.

IRINA. I didn't invite him.

MASHA. That's a good thing.

[*Enter CHEBUTYKIN, followed by an orderly with a silver samovar; a hum of surprise and displeasure.*]

OLGA [*putting her hands over her face*]. A samovar! How awful! [*Goes out to the table in the dining—room.*]

IRINA. My dear Ivan Romanitch, what are you thinking about!

TUZENBAKH [*laughs*]. I warned you!

MASHA. Ivan Romanitch, you really have no conscience!

CHEBUTYKIN. My dear girls, my darlings, you are all that I have, you are the most precious treasures I have on earth. I shall soon be sixty, I am an old man, alone in the world, a useless old man. . . . There is nothing good in me, except my love for you, and if it were not for you, I should have been dead long ago. . . . [*To IRINA*] My dear, my little girl, I've known you from a baby. . . . I've carried you in my arms. . . . I loved your dear mother. . . .

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IRINA. But why such expensive presents?

CHEBUTYKIN [*angry and tearful*]. Expensive presents. . . . Get along with you! [*To the orderly*] Take the samovar in there. . . [*Mimicking*] Expensive presents . . . [*The orderly carries the samovar into the dining-room.*]

ANFISA [*crossing the room*]. My dears, a colonel is here, a stranger. . . . He has taken off his overcoat, children, he is coming in here. Irinushka, you must be nice and polite, dear. . . [*As she goes out*] And it's time for lunch already. . . mercy on us. .

TUZENBAKH. Vershinin, I suppose.

[*Enter VERSHININ.*]

TUZENBAKH. Lieutenant Colonel Vershinin.

VERSHININ [*to MASHA and IRINA*]. I've the honour to introduce myself, my name is Vershinin. I'm very, very glad to be in your house at last. How you've grown up! Oh! Oh!

IRINA. Please sit down. We are delighted to see you.

VERSHININ [*with animation*]. How glad I am, how glad I am! But there are three of you sisters. I remember three little girls. I don't remember your faces, but that your father, Colonel Prozorov, had three little girls I remember perfectly, and saw them with my own eyes. How time passes! Hey—ho, how it passes!

TUZENBAKH. Alexandr Ignatyevitch has come from Moscow.

IRINA. From Moscow? You have come from Moscow?

VERSHININ. Yes. Your father was in command of a battery there, and I was an officer in the same brigade. [*To MASHA*] Your face, now, I seem to remember.

MASHA. I don't remember you.

IRINA. Olya! Olya! [*Calls into the dining-room*] Olya, come!

[*OLGA comes out of the dining-room into the drawing-room.*]

IRINA. Lieutenant Colonel Vershinin is from Moscow, it appears.

VERSHININ. So you are Olga Sergejevna, the eldest. . . . And you are Marya. . . . And you are Irina, the youngest. . . .

OLGA. You come from Moscow?

VERSHININ. Yes. I studied in Moscow. I began my service there, I served there for years, and at last I've been given a battery here — I have moved here as you see. I don't remember you exactly, I only remember you were three sisters. I remember your father. If I shut my eyes, I can see him as though he were living. I used to visit you in Moscow. . . .

OLGA. I thought I remembered everyone, and now all at once. . . .

VERSHININ. My name is Alexandr Ignatyevitch.

IRINA. Alexandr Ignatyevitch, you've come from Moscow. . . . What a surprise!

OLGA. We're going to move there, you know.

IRINA. We're hoping to be there by the autumn. It's our native town, we were born there. . . . In Old Basmannaya Street . . . [*both laugh with delight*].

MASHA. To see some one from our own town unexpectedly! [*Eagerly*] Now I remember! Do you remember, Olya, they used to talk of the "love-sick major"? You were a lieutenant at that time and were in love, and for some reason everyone called you major to tease you. . . .

VERSHININ [*laughs*]. Yes, yes. . . . The love-sick major, that was it.

MASHA. You only had a moustache then. . . . Oh, how much older you look! [*through tears*] how much older!

VERSHININ. Yes, when I was called the love-sick major I was young, I was in love. Now it's very different.

OLGA. But you haven't a single grey hair. You've grown older but you're not old.

VERSHININ. I'm in my forty-third year, though. Is it long since you left Moscow?

IRINA. Eleven years. But why are you crying, Masha, you foolish girl? . . . [*through her tears*] I shall cry too. . . .

MASHA. I'm all right. And in which street did you live?

VERSHININ. In Old Basmannaya.

OLGA. And that's where we lived too. . . .

VERSHININ. At one time I lived in Nyemetsky Street. I used to go from there to the Red Barracks. There is a gloomy-looking bridge on the way, where the water makes a noise. It makes a lonely man feel melancholy [*a*

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pause]. And here what a broad, splendid river! A marvellous river!

OLGA. Yes, but it is cold. It's cold here and there are mosquitoes. . . .

VERSHININ. How can you! You've such a splendid healthy Russian climate here. Forest, river. . . and birches here too. Charming, modest birches, I love them better than any other trees. It's nice to live here. The only strange thing is that the railway station is fifteen miles away. . . . And no one knows why it's so.

SOLYONY. I know why it is. [*They all look at him.*] Because if the station had been near it would not have been so far, and if it is far, it's because it's not near.

[*An awkward silence.*]

TUZENBAKH. He's fond of his joke, Vassily Vassilyevitch.

OLGA. Now I recall you, too. I remember.

VERSHININ. I knew your mother.

CHEBUTYKIN. She was a fine woman, the Kingdom of Heaven be hers.

IRINA. Mother is buried in Moscow.

OLGA. In the Novo-Dyevitchy. . . .

MASHA. Would you believe it, I'm already beginning to forget her face. So people won't remember us either; they'll forget us.

VERSHININ. Yes. They'll forget us. Such is our fate, there is no help for it. What seems to us serious, significant, very important, will one day be forgotten or will seem unimportant [*a pause*]. And it's curious that we can't possibly tell what exactly will be considered great and important, and what will seem petty and ridiculous. Didn't the discoveries of Copernicus or Columbus, let's say, seem useless and ridiculous at first, while the nonsensical writings of some fool seemed true? And it may be that our present life, which we accept so readily, will in time seem strange, inconvenient, stupid, not clean enough, perhaps even sinful. . . .

TUZENBAKH. Who knows? Perhaps our age will be called a great one and remembered with respect. Now we have no torture-chamber, no executions, no invasions, but at the same time how much suffering there is!

SOLYONY [*in a high-pitched voice*]. Chook, chook, chook. . . . It's bread and meat to the baron to talk about ideas.

TUZENBAKH. Vassily Vassilyevitch, I ask you to let me alone . . . [*moves to another seat*]. It gets boring, at last.

SOLYONY [*in a high-pitched voice*]. Chook, chook, chook.

TUZENBAKH [*to VERSHININ*]. The suffering which one observes now — there is so much of it — does indicate, however, that society has reached a certain moral level. . . .

VERSHININ. Yes, yes, of course.

CHEBUTYKIN. You said just now, Baron, that our age will be called great; but people are small all the same. . . [*gets up*]. Look how small I am. [*A violin is played behind the scenes.*]

MASHA. That's Andrey playing, our brother.

IRINA. He's the scholar of the family. We expect him to become a professor. Father was a military man, but his son has gone in for a scholarly career.

MASHA. It was father's wish.

OLGA. We've been teasing him today. We think he's a little in love.

IRINA. With a young lady living here. She'll come in today most likely.

MASHA. Oh, how she dresses! It's not that her clothes are merely ugly or out of fashion, they're simply pitiful. A weird gaudy yellowish skirt with some sort of vulgar fringe and a red blouse. And her cheeks scrubbed till they shine! Andrey is not in love with her — I won't admit that, he has some taste after all — it's simply for fun, he is teasing us, playing the fool. I heard yesterday that she is going to be married to Protopopov, the chairman of our District Council. And a very good thing too. . . . [*At the side door*] Andrey, come here, dear, for a minute!

[*Enter ANDREY.*]

OLGA. This is my brother, Andrey Sergeyevitch.

VERSHININ. My name is Vershinin.

ANDREY. And mine is Prozorov [*mops his perspiring face*]. You're our new battery commander?

OLGA. Can you believe, Alexandr Ignatyevitch comes from Moscow.

ANDREY. Really? Well, then, I congratulate you. My sisters will let you have no peace.

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VERSHININ. I've had time to bore your sisters already.

IRINA. See what a pretty picture—frame Andrey has given me today! [*Shows the frame*] He made it himself.

VERSHININ [*looking at the frame and not knowing what to say*]. Yes. . . , it is a thing. . . .

IRINA. And that frame above the piano, he made that too!

[*ANDREY waves his hand in despair and moves away.*]

OLGA. He's a scholar, and he plays the violin, and he makes all sorts of things with the fretsaw. In fact he's good all round. Andrey, don't go! That's a way he has — he always tries to make off! Come here!

[*MASHA and IRINA take him by the arms and, laughing, lead him back.*]

MASHA. Come, come!

ANDREY. Leave me alone, please!

MASHA. How funny he is! Alexandr Ignatyevitch used to be called the love—sick major at one time, and he wasn't a bit offended.

VERSHININ. Not in the least!

MASHA. And I'd like to call you the love—sick violinist!

IRINA. Or the love—sick professor!

OLGA. He's in love! Andryusha is in love!

IRINA [*claps her hands*]. Bravo, bravo! Encore! Andryusha is in love!

CHEBUTYKIN [*comes up behind ANDREY and puts both arms round his waist*]. Nature our hearts for love created! [*Laughs, then sits down and reads the newspaper which he takes out of his pocket.*]

ANDREY. Come, that's enough, that's enough. . . [*mops his face*]. I haven't slept all night and this morning I don't feel quite myself, as they say. I read till four o'clock and then went to bed, but it was no use. I thought of one thing and another, and then it gets light so early; the sun simply pours into my bedroom. I want while I'm here during the summer to translate a book from the English. . . .

VERSHININ. You read English then?

ANDREY. Yes. Our father, the Kingdom of Heaven be his, oppressed us with education. It's funny and silly, but it must be confessed I began to get fatter after his death, and I've grown too fat in one year, as though a weight had been taken off my body. Thanks to our father we all know English, French and German, and Irina knows Italian too. But what it cost us!

MASHA. In this town to know three languages is an unnecessary luxury! Not even a luxury, but an unnecessary encumbrance, like a sixth finger. We know a great deal that's unnecessary.

VERSHININ. What next! [*laughs*] You know a great deal that's unnecessary! I don't think there can be a town so dull and dismal that intelligent and educated people are unnecessary in it. Let's suppose that of the hundred thousand people living in this town, which is, of course, uncultured and behind the times, there are only three of your sort. It goes without saying that you cannot conquer the mass of darkness round you; little by little, as you go on living, you'll be lost in the crowd. You'll have to give in to it. Life will get the better of you, but still you'll not disappear without a trace. After you there may appear perhaps six like you, then twelve and so on until such as you form a majority. In two or three hundred years, life on earth will be unimaginably beautiful, marvellous. Man needs such a life and, though he hasn't got it yet, he must have a presentiment of it, expect it, dream of it, prepare for it; for that he must see and know more than his father and grandfather [*laughs*]. And you complain of knowing a great deal that's unnecessary.

MASHA [*takes off her hat*]. I'll stay to lunch.

IRINA [*with a sigh*]. All that really ought to be written down. . . .

[*ANDREY has slipped away unobserved.*]

TUZENBAKH. You say that after many years life on earth will be beautiful and marvellous. That's true. But in order to have any share, however far off, in it now we must be preparing for it, we must be working. . . .

VERSHININ [*gets up*]. Yes. What a lot of flowers you have! [*Looking round*] And delightful rooms. I envy you! I've been knocking about all my life from one wretched lodging to another, always with two chairs and a sofa and stoves which smoke. What I've been lacking all my life is just such flowers . . . [*rubs his hands*]. But there, it's no use thinking about it!

TUZENBAKH. Yes, we must work. No doubt you think the German is getting sentimental. But on my honour I am Russian and I can't even speak German. My father belonged to the Orthodox Church. . . [*a pause*].

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VERSHININ [*walks about the stage*]. I often think, what if you were to begin life over again, knowing what you're doing! If one life, which has been already lived, were only a rough sketch so to speak, and the second were the final copy! Then, I think, every one of us would try before anything else not to repeat himself, anyway he would create a different setting for his life; would have a house like this with plenty of light and masses of flowers. . . . I have a wife and two little girls, my wife is in delicate health and so on and so on, but if I were to begin life over again I would not marry. . . . No, no!

[*Enter KULYGIN in the uniform of a teacher.*]

KULYGIN [*goes up to IRINA*]. Dear sister, allow me to congratulate you on your name-day and with all my heart to wish you good health and everything else that one can desire for a girl of your age. And to offer you as a gift this little book [*gives her a book*]. The history of our high-school for fifty years, written by myself. An insignificant little book, written because I had nothing better to do, but still you can read it. Good day, friends. [*To VERSHININ*] My name is Kuligin, teacher in the high-school here, court councilor. [*To IRINA*] In that book you'll find a list of all who have finished their studies in our high-school during the last fifty years. *Feci, quod potui, faciant meliora potentes* [*kisses MASHA*]. IRINA. Why, but you gave me a copy of this book at Easter.

KULYGIN [*laughs*]. Impossible! If that's so, give it me back, or better still, give it to the Colonel. Please accept it, Colonel. Some day when you're bored you can read it.

VERSHININ. Thank you [*is about to take leave*]. I'm extremely glad to have made your acquaintance. . . .

OLGA. You are going? No, no!

IRINA. You must stay for lunch with us. Please do.

OLGA. Pray do!

VERSHININ [*bows*]. I believe I have intruded on a name-day party. Forgive me, I didn't know and haven't congratulated you. . . [*Walks away with OLGA into the dining-room.*]

KULYGIN. Today, ladies and gentlemen, is Sunday, a day of rest. Let's all rest and enjoy ourselves each in accordance with our age and our position. The carpets should be taken up for the summer and put away till the winter. . . . Persian powder or naphthaline. . . . The Romans were healthy because they knew how to work and they knew how to rest, they had *mens sana in corpore sano*. Their life was moulded into a certain framework. Our headmaster says that the most important thing in every life is its framework. . . . What loses its framework, comes to an end — and it's the same in our everyday life. [*Puts his arm round MASHA'S waist, laughing.*] Masha loves me. My wife loves me. And the window curtains, too, ought to be put away together with the carpets. . . . Today I feel cheerful and in the best of spirits. Masha, at four o'clock this afternoon we have to be at the headmaster's house. An excursion has been arranged for the teachers and their families.

MASHA. I'm not going.

KULYGIN [*grieved*]. Dear Masha, why not?

MASHA. We'll talk about it afterwards. . . [*Angrily*] Very well, I'll go, only let me alone, please. . . [*walks away*].

KULYGIN. And then we shall spend the evening at the head-master's house. In spite of the delicate state of his health that man tries before all things to be sociable. He's an excellent, noble personality. A splendid man. Yesterday, after the meeting, he said to me, "I'm tired, Fyodor Ilyitch, I'm tired." [*Looks at the clock, then at his watch*] Your clock is seven minutes fast. "Yes," he said, "I'm tired."

[*Sounds of a violin behind the scenes.*]

OLGA. Come to lunch, please. There's a pie!

KULYGIN. Ah, Olga, my dear Olga! Yesterday I was working from early morning till eleven o'clock at night and was tired out, and today I feel happy [*goes up to the table in the dining-room*]. My dear. . . .

CHEBUTYKIN [*puts the newspaper in his pocket and combs his beard*]. Pie? Splendid!

MASHA [*to CHEBUTYKIN, sternly*]. Only mind you don't drink today! Do you hear? It's bad for you to drink.

CHEBUTYKIN. Oh, come, that's a thing of the past. It's two years since I got drunk. [*Impatiently*] But there, my good girl, what does it matter!

MASHA. Anyway, don't you dare to drink. Don't dare. [*Angrily, but so as not to be heard by her husband*] Oh, to hell with it, I'm going to be bored a whole evening at the headmaster's!

TUZENBAKH. I wouldn't go if I were you. . . . It's very simple.

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CHEBUTYKIN. Don't go, my love.

MASHA. Oh, yes, don't go! . . . It's a damnable life, insufferable. . . [*goes to the dining-room*].

CHEBUTYKIN [*following her*]. Come, come. . . .

SOLYONY [*going to the dining-room*]. Chook, chook,

TUZENBAKH. Enough, Vassily Vassilyevitch! Stop it!

SOLYONY. Chook, chook,

KULYGIN [*gaily*]. Your health, Colonel! I am a teacher and one of the family here, Masha's husband. . . .
She's very kind, really, very kind. . . .

VERSHININ. I'll have some of this dark-coloured vodka. . . [*drinks*]. To your health! [*To OLGA*] I feel so happy with all of you!

[*No one is left in the drawing-room but IRINA and TUZENBAKH.*]

IRINA. Masha is in low spirits today. She was married at eighteen, when she thought him the cleverest of men. But now it's not the same now. He's the kindest of men, but he's not the cleverest.

OLGA [*impatiently*]. Andrey, come on!

ANDREY [*behind the scenes*]. I'm coming [*comes in and goes to the table*].

TUZENBAKH. What are you thinking about?

IRINA. Nothing. I don't like that Solyony of yours, I'm afraid of him. He keeps on saying such stupid things. . . .

TUZENBAKH. He's a strange man. I'm sorry for him and annoyed by him, but more sorry. I think he's shy. . . .
When there's just the two of us he is very intelligent and friendly, but in company he's rude, a bully. Don't go yet, let them sit down to the table. Let me be by you. What are you thinking of? [*a pause*] You're twenty, I'm not yet thirty. How many years have we got before us, a long, long chain of days full of my love for you. . . .

IRINA. Nikolay Lvovitch, don't talk to me about love.

TUZENBAKH [*not listening*]. I have a passionate craving for life, for struggle, for work, and that craving is mingled in my soul with my love for you, Irina, and just because you're beautiful it seems to me that life too is beautiful! What are you thinking of?

IRINA. You say life is beautiful. . . . Yes, but what if it only seems so! Life for us three sisters hasn't been beautiful yet, we've been stifled by it as plants are choked by weeds. . . . I'm starting to cry. . . . I mustn't do that [*hurriedly wipes her eyes and smiles*]. I must work, I must work. The reason we are depressed and take such a gloomy view of life is that we know nothing of work. We come of people who despised work. . . .

[*Enter NATALYA IVANOVNA; she is wearing a pink dress with a green sash.*]

NATASHA. They're sitting down to lunch already. . . . I'm late. . . [*Steals a glance at herself in the mirror and puts herself straight*] I think my hair is all right. [*Seeing IRINA*] Dear Irina Sergejevna, I congratulate you! [*Gives her a vigorous and prolonged kiss.*] You have a lot of visitors, I really feel embarrassed. . . . Good day, Baron!

OLGA [*coming into the drawing-room*]. Well, here's Natalya Ivanovna! How are you, my dear? [*Kisses her.*]

NATASHA. Congratulations on the name-day. You have such a big party and I feel awfully embarrassed. . . .

OLGA. Nonsense, we have only our own people. [*In an undertone, in alarm*] You've got on a green sash! My dear, that's not done!

NATASHA. Why, is that a bad omen?

OLGA. No, it's only that it doesn't go with your dress. . . and it looks odd. . . .

NATASHA [*in a tearful voice*]. Really? But you know it's not green exactly, it's more a dull colour [*follows OLGA into the dining-room*].

[*In the dining-room they are all sitting down to lunch; there is no one in the drawing-room.*]

KULYGIN. I wish you a good fiancé, Irina. It's time for you to think of getting married.

CHEBUTYKIN. Natalya Ivanovna, I hope we may hear of your engagement, too.

KULYGIN. Natalya Ivanovna has got a suitor already.

MASHA. I'll have another little glass of wine! You only live once — what the hell.

KULYGIN. You deserve three bad marks for conduct.

VERSHININ. How nice this cordial is! What is it made of?

SOLYONY. Cockroaches.

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IRINA [*in a tearful voice*]. Ugh, ugh! How disgusting.

OLGA. We're going to have roast turkey and apple pie for supper. Thank God I'm at home all day and will be at home in the evening. . . . Friends, won't you come again this evening?

VERSHININ. Allow me to come too.

IRINA. Please do.

NATASHA. They don't stand on ceremony here.

CHEBUTYKIN. Nature our hearts for love created! [*Laughs*]

ANDREY [*angrily*]. Stop it, gentlemen! Aren't you tired of it yet?

[*FEDOTIK and RODE come in with a big basket of flowers.*]

FEDOTIK. Why, they're at lunch already.

RODE [*speaking loudly, with a lisp*]. At lunch? Yes, they are at lunch already. . . .

FEDOTIK. Wait a minute [*takes a snapshot*]. One! Wait another minute. . . [*takes another snapshot*]. Two! Now it's ready. [*They take the basket and walk into the dining-room, where they are greeted noisily.*]

RODE [*loudly*]. My congratulations! I wish you everything, everything! The weather is delightful, perfectly magnificent. I've been out all the morning for a walk with the high-school boys. I teach them gymnastics.

FEDOTIK. You may move, Irina Sergeevna, you may move [*taking a photograph*]. You look charming today [*taking a top out of his pocket*]. Here is a top, by the way. . . . It has a wonderful sound. . . .

IRINA. How lovely!

MASHA. By the sea-shore an oak-tree green. . . . Upon that oak a chain of gold. . . [*Tearfully*] Why do I keep saying that? That phrase has been haunting me all day. . . .

KULYGIN. Thirteen at table!

RODE [*loudly*]. Surely you don't attach importance to such superstitions? [*Laughter*]

KULYGIN. If there are thirteen at table, it means that someone present is in love. It's not you, Ivan Romanovitch, by any chance? [*Laughter*]

CHEBUTYKIN. I'm an old sinner, but why Natalya Ivanovna is blushing, I can't imagine. . .

[*Loud laughter; NATASHA runs out from the dining-room into the drawing-room followed by ANDREY.*]

ANDREY. Come, don't take any notice! Wait a minute. . . stop, please. . . .

NATASHA. I feel ashamed. . . . I don't know what's the matter with me and they make fun of me. I know it's improper for me to leave the table like this, but I can't help it. . . . I can't. . . [*covers her face with her hands*].

ANDREY. My dear girl, please, I implore you, don't be upset. I assure you they're only joking, they do it in all kindness. My dear, my sweet, they're all kind, warm-hearted people and they're fond of me and of you. Come here to the window, here they can't see us. . . [*looks round*].

NATASHA. I'm so unaccustomed to society! . . .

ANDREY. Oh youth, lovely, marvellous youth! My dear, my sweet, don't be so distressed! Believe me, believe me. . I feel so happy, my soul is full of love and ecstasy. . . . Oh, they can't see us, they can't see us! Why, why, I love you, when I first loved you — oh, I don't know. My dear, my sweet, pure one, be my wife! I love you, I love you. . . as I have never loved anyone. . . [*a kiss*].

[*Two officers come in and, seeing the pair kissing, stop in amazement.*]

CURTAIN.

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Act II

The same scene as in the First Act. Eight o'clock in the evening. Behind the scenes in the street there is the faintly audible sound of an accordion. There is no light. NATALYA IVANOYNA enters in a dressing-gown, carrying a candle; she comes in and stops at the door leading to ANDREY'S room.

NATASHA. What are you doing, Andryusha? Reading? Never mind, I only just asked . . . [*goes and opens another door and peeping into it, shuts it again*]. Is there a light?

ANDREY [*enters with a book in his hand*]. What is it, Natasha?

NATASHA. I was looking to see whether there was a light, . . . It's Carnival, the servants aren't acting normally; you've always got to be on the lookout in case something goes wrong. Last night at twelve o'clock I passed through the dining-room, and there was a candle left burning. I couldn't find out who had lighted it [*puts down the candle*]. What's the time?

ANDREY [*looking at his watch*]. A quarter past eight.

NATASHA. And Olga and Irina aren't in yet. They haven't come in. Still at work, poor dears! Olga is at the faculty meeting and Irina at the telegraph office . . . [*sighs*]. I was saying to your sister this morning, "Take care of yourself, Irina darling," said I. But she won't listen. A quarter past eight, you say? I am afraid our Bobik is not at all well. Why is he so cold? Yesterday he was feverish and today he is cold all over, . . . I am so anxious!

ANDREY. It's all right, Natasha. The boy is quite well.

NATASHA. We'd better be careful about his food, anyway. I'm anxious. And I'm told that the munners are going to be here for the Carnival at nine o'clock this evening. It would be better for them not to come, Andryusha.

ANDREY. I really don't know. They've been invited, you know.

NATASHA. Baby woke up this morning, looked at me, and all at once he gave a smile; so he knew me. "Good morning, Bobik!" said I. "Good morning, darling!" And he laughed. Children understand; they understand very well. So I'll tell them, Andryusha, not to let the Carnival party come in.

ANDREY [*irresolutely*]. That's for my sisters to say. It's for them to give orders, since it's their house.

NATASHA. Yes, for them too; I'll speak to them. They are so kind . . . [*going*]. I've ordered yogurt for supper. The doctor says you must eat nothing but yogurt, or you will never get thinner [*stops*]. Bobik is cold. I'm afraid his room is chilly, perhaps. We ought to put him in a different room till the warm weather comes, anyway. Irina's room, for instance, is just right for a nursery: it's dry and the sun shines there all day. I must tell her; she might share Olga's room for the time. . . . She's never at home, anyway, except for the night . . . [*a pause*].

Andryushantchik, why don't you speak?

ANDREY. Nothing. I was Besides, I have nothing to say.

NATASHA. Yes . . . what was it I meant to tell you? . . . Oh, yes; Ferapont has come from the District Council, and is asking for you.

ANDREY [*yawns*]. Send him in.

[NATASHA goes out; ANDREY, bending down to the candle which she has left behind, reads. Enter FERAPONT; he wears an old shabby overcoat, with the collar turned up, and has a scarf over his ears.]

ANDREY. Good evening, my good man. What is it?

FERAPONT. The Chairman has sent a book and a paper of some sort here . . . [*gives the book and an packet*].

ANDREY. Thanks. Very good. But why have you come so late? It's past eight.

FERAPONT. Eh?

ANDREY [*louder*]. I say, you have come late. It's past eight o'clock.

FERAPONT. Just so. I came before it was dark, but they wouldn't let me see you. The master is busy, they told

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me. Well, of course, if you are busy, I'm in no hurry [*thinking that ANDREY has asked him a question*]. Eh?

ANDREY. Nothing [*examines the book*]. Tomorrow is Friday. We don't have a meeting, but I'll come all the same . . . and do my work. It's boring at home . . . [*a pause*]. Dear old man, how strangely life changes and deceives you! Today I was so bored and had nothing to do, so I picked up this book — old university lectures — and I laughed. . . . Good heavens! I'm the secretary of the District Council of which Protopopov is the chairman. I am the secretary, and the most I can hope for is to become a member of the Board! Me, a member of the local District Council, while I dream every night I'm professor at the University of Moscow — a distinguished man, of whom all Russia is proud!

FERAPONT. I can't say, sir. . . . I don't hear well. . . .

ANDREY. If you did hear well, perhaps I shouldn't talk to you. I must talk to somebody, and my wife doesn't understand me. My sisters I'm somehow afraid of — I'm afraid they will laugh at me and make me ashamed. . . . I don't drink, I'm not fond of restaurants, but how I'd enjoy sitting at Tyestov's or the Bolshoy Moskovsky at this moment, dear old man!

FERAPONT. A contractor was saying at the Board the other day that there were some merchants in Moscow eating pancakes; one who ate forty, it seems, died. It was either forty or fifty, I don't remember.

ANDREY. In Moscow you sit in a huge room at a restaurant; you know no one and no one knows you, and at the same time you don't feel a stranger. . . . But here you know everyone and everyone knows you, and yet you are a stranger — a stranger. . . . A stranger, and lonely, . . .

FERAPONT. Eh? [*a pause*] And the same contractor says — maybe it's not true — that there's a rope stretched right across Moscow.

ANDREY. What for?

FERAPONT. I can't say, sir. The contractor said so.

ANDREY. Nonsense [*reads*]. Have you ever been to Moscow?

FERAPONT [*after a pause*]. No, never. It wasn't God's will I should [*a pause*]. Mind if I go?

ANDREY. You can go. Take care of yourself. [FERAPONT *goes out*.] Take care [*reading*]. Come tomorrow morning and pick up some papers here. . . . Go. . . . [*a pause*]. He's gone [*a ring*]. Yes, it's work . . . [*stretches and goes slowly into his own room*].

[*Behind the scenes a nanny is singing, rocking a baby to sleep. Enter MASHA and VERSHININ. While they are talking a maidservant is lighting a lamp and candles in the dining-room.*]

MASHA. I don't know [*a pause*]. I don't know. Of course habit means a great deal. After father's death, for instance, it was a long time before we could get used to having no orderlies in the house. But apart from habit, I think it's a feeling of justice makes me say so. Perhaps it's not so in other places, but in our town the most decent, honourable, and well-bred people are all in the army.

VERSHININ. I'm thirsty. I'd like some tea.

MASHA [*glancing at the clock*]. They'll soon be bringing it. I was married when I was eighteen, and I was afraid of my husband because he was a teacher, and I had only just left school. In those days I thought him an awfully scholarly, clever, and important person. And now it's not the same, unfortunately. . . .

VERSHININ. Yes. . . . I see. . . .

MASHA. I'm not speaking of my husband — I'm used to him; but among civilians generally there are so many rude, ill-mannered, badly-brought-up people. Rudeness upsets and distresses me: I'm unhappy when I see that a man is not refined, not gentle, not polite enough. When I have to be among the teachers, my husband's colleagues, it makes me quite miserable.

VERSHININ. Yes. . . . But, to my mind, it makes no difference whether they are civilians or military men — they are equally uninteresting, in this town anyway. It's all the same! If one listens to a man of the educated class here, civilian or military, he's worried to death by his wife, worried to death by his house, worried to death by his estate, worried to death by his horses. . . . A Russian is peculiarly given to exalted ideas, but why is it he always falls so short in life? Why?

MASHA. Why?

VERSHININ. Why is he worried to death by his children and by his wife? And why are his wife and children worried to death by him?

MASHA. You are rather depressed this evening.

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VERSHININ. Perhaps. . . . I've had no dinner today, and had nothing to eat since the morning. My daughter is not quite well, and when my little girls are ill I am consumed by anxiety; my conscience reproaches me for having given them such a mother. Oh, if you had seen her today! What a fool she is! We began quarrelling at seven o'clock in the morning, and at nine I slammed the door and went away [*a pause*]. I never talk about it. Strange, it's only to you I complain [*kisses her hand*]. Don't be angry with me. . . . Except for you I have no one — no one . . . [*a pause*].

MASHA. What a noise in the stove! Before father died there was howling in the chimney. There, just like that.

VERSHININ. Are you superstitious?

MASHA. Yes.

VERSHININ. That's strange [*kisses her hand*]. You're a splendid, wonderful woman. Splendid! Wonderful! It's dark, but I see the light in your eyes.

MASHA [*moves to another chair*]. It's lighter here.

VERSHININ. I love you — love you, love you, . . . I love your eyes, your movements, I see them in my dreams. . . . Splendid, wonderful woman!

MASHA [*laughing softly*]. When you talk to me like that, for some reason I laugh, though I am frightened. . . . Please don't do it again . . . [*In an undertone*] You may say it, though; I don't mind . . . [*covers her face with her hands*]. I don't mind, . . . Someone is coming. Talk of something else.

[IRINA and TUZENBAKH come in through the dining-room.]

TUZENBAKH. I've got a three-barrelled name. My name is Baron Tusenbach-Krone-Altschauer, but I belong to the Orthodox Church and am just as Russian as you. There is very little of the German left in me — nothing, perhaps, but the patience and obstinacy with which I bore you. I walk you home every evening.

IRINA. How tired I am!

TUZENBAKH. And every day I'll come to the telegraph office and walk you home. I'll do it for ten years, for twenty years, till you drive me away . . . [*Seeing MASHA and VERSHININ, delightedly*] Oh, it's you! How are you?

IRINA. Well, I'm home at last. [*To MASHA*] A lady came just now to telegraph to her brother in Saratov that her son died today, and she couldn't think of the address. So she sent it without an address — simply to Saratov. She was crying. And I was rude to her for no reason. Told her I had no time to waste. It was so stupid. Are the Carnival people coming to-night?

MASHA. Yes.

IRINA [*sits down in an arm-chair*]. I must rest. I'm tired.

TUZENBAKH [*with a smile*]. When you come from the office you seem so young, so forlorn . . . [*a pause*].

IRINA. I'm tired. No, I don't like telegraph work, I don't like it.

MASHA. You've grown thinner . . . [*whistles*]. And you look younger, rather like a boy in the face.

TUZENBAKH. That's the way she does her hair.

IRINA. I must find some other job, this does not suit me. What I so longed for, what I dreamed of is the very thing that it's lacking in, . . . It is work without poetry, without meaning. . . . [*a knock on the floor*]. There's the doctor knocking. . . . [*To TUZENBAKH*] Knock back, dear. . . . I can't. . . . I am tired.

[TUZENBAKH *knocks on the floor*.]

IRINA. He will come directly. We ought to do something about it. The doctor and our Andrey were at the Club yesterday and they lost again. I am told Andrey lost two hundred roubles.

MASHA. [*indifferently*]. Well, it can't be helped now.

IRINA. Two weeks ago he lost money, in December he lost money. I wish he'd hurry up and lose everything, then perhaps we'd go away from this town. My God, every night I dream of Moscow, it's perfect madness [*laughs*]. We'll move there in June and there's still left February, March, April, May . . . almost half a year.

MASHA. The only thing is Natasha must not hear of his losses.

IRINA. I don't suppose she cares.

[CHEBUTYKIN, who has only just got off his bed — he has been resting after dinner — comes into the dining-room combing his beard, then sits down to the table and takes a newspaper out of his pocket.]

MASHA. Here he is . . . has he paid his rent?

IRINA [*laughs*]. No. Not a kopek for eight months. Evidently he's forgotten.

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MASHA [*laughs*]. How gravely he sits. [*They all laugh; a pause.*]

IRINA. Why are you so quiet, Alexandr Ignatyevitch?

VERSHININ. I don't know. I'm longing for tea. I'd give half my life for a glass of tea. I've had nothing to eat since the morning.

CHEBUTYKIN. Irina Sergeyevna!

IRINA. What is it?

CHEBUTYKIN. Come here. Venez ici. [*IRINA goes and sits down at the table.*] I can't do without you. [*IRINA lays out the cards for patience.*]

VERSHININ. Well, if they won't bring tea, let's discuss something.

TUZENBAKH. By all means. What?

VERSHININ. What? Let us dream . . . for instance of the life that will come after us, in two or three hundred years.

TUZENBAKH. Well? When we are dead, men will fly in balloons, change the fashion of their coats, will discover a sixth sense, perhaps, and develop it, but life will remain just the same, difficult, full of mysteries and happiness. In a thousand years man will sigh just the same, "Ah, how hard life is," and yet just as now he will be afraid of death and not want it.

VERSHININ [*after a moment's thought*]. Well, I don't know. . . . It seems to me that everything on earth is bound to change by degrees and is already changing before our eyes. In two or three hundred, perhaps in a thousand years — the time does not matter — a new, happy life will come. We shall have no share in that life, of course, but we're living for it, we're working, well, yes, and suffering for it, we're creating it — and that alone is the purpose of our existence, and is our happiness, if you like.

[*MASHA laughs softly.*]

TUZENBAKH. What is it?

MASHA. I don't know. I've been laughing all day.

VERSHININ. I was at the same school as you were, I didn't go to the Military Academy; I read a great deal, but I don't know how to choose my books, and very likely I read quite the wrong things, and yet the longer I live the more I want to know. My hair is turning grey, I'm almost an old man, but I know so little, oh so little! But all the same I think that I do know and thoroughly grasp what is essential and matters most. And how I should like to make you see that there is no happiness for us, that there ought not to be and will not be. . . . We must work and work, and happiness is the portion of our remote descendants [*a pause*]. If it's not for me, but at least it's for the descendants of my descendants. . . .

[*FEDOTIK and RODE appear in the dining-room; they sit down and sing softly, playing the guitar.*]

TUZENBAKH. You think it's no use even dreaming of happiness! But what if I'm happy?

VERSHININ. No, you're not.

TUSENBAGH [*flinging up his hands and laughing*]. It's clear we don't understand each other. Well, how am I to convince you?

[*MASHA laughs softly.*]

TUSENEACH [*holds up a finger to her*]. Laugh! [*To VERSHININ*] Not only in two or three hundred years but in a million years life will be just the same; it doesn't change, it remains stationary, following its own laws which we have nothing to do with or which, anyway, we'll never find out. Migratory birds, cranes for instance, fly backwards and forwards, and whatever ideas, great or small, stray through their minds, they'll still go on flying just the same without knowing where or why. They fly and will continue to fly, however philosophic they may become; and it doesn't matter how philosophical they are so long as they go on flying. . . .

MASHA. But still, isn't there a meaning?

TUZENBAKH. Meaning. . . . Here it's snowing. What meaning is there in that? [*A pause.*]

MASHA. I think man ought to have faith or ought to seek a faith, or else his life is empty, empty. . . . To live and not to understand why cranes fly; why children are born; why there are stars in the sky. . . . You've got to know what you're living for or else it's all nonsense and waste [*a pause*].

VERSHININ. And yet you're sorry when your youth is over, . . .

MASHA. Gogol says: it's dull living in this world, friends!

TUZENBAKH. And I say: it is difficult to argue with you, friends, Oh, well, I give up. . . .

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CHEBUTYKIN [*reading the newspaper*]. Balzac was married at Berditchev.

[*IRINA hums softly.*]

CHEBUTYKIN. I really must put that down in my book [*writes*]. Balzac was married at Berditchev [*reads the paper*].

IRINA [*lays out the cards for patience, dreamily*]. Balzac was married at Berditchev.

TUZENBAKH. The die is cast. You know, Marya Sergeyevna, I've resigned my commission.

MASHA. So I hear. And I see nothing good in that. I don't like civilians.

TUZENBAKH. Never mind . . . [*gets up*]. I'm not good-looking enough for a soldier. But that doesn't matter, though . . . I'm going to work. If only for one day in my life, to work so that I come home at night tired out and fall asleep as soon as I get into bed . . . [*going into the dining-room*]. Workmen must sleep soundly!

FEDOTIK [*to IRINA*]. I bought these coloured pencils for you just now as I passed Pyzhikov's on Moscow Street. . . . And this penknife. . . .

IRINA. You've got used to treating me as though I were little, but I'm grown up, you know . . . [*takes the coloured pencils and the penknife, joyfully*]. How lovely!

FEDOTIK. And I bought a knife for myself . . . look . . . one blade, and another blade, a third, and this is for your ears, and here are scissors, and that's for cleaning your nails

RODE [*loudly*]. Doctor, how old are you?

CHEBUTYKIN. Me? Thirty-two [*laughter*].

FEDOTIK. I'll show you another kind of patience . . . [*lays out the cards*] .

[*The samovar is brought in; ANFISA is at the samovar; a little later NATASHA comes in and is also busy at the table; SOLYONY comes in, and after greeting the others sits down at the table.*]

VERSHININ. What a wind there is!

MASHA. Yes. I'm sick of the winter. I've already forgotten what summer is like.

IRINA. The game is working out right, I see. We shall go to Moscow.

FEDOTIK. No, it's not working out. You see, the eight is over the two of spades [*laughs*]. So that means you won't go to Moscow.

CHEBUTYKIN [*reads from the newspaper*]. Tsitsikar. Smallpox is raging here.

ANFISA [*going up to MASHA*]. Masha, come to tea, my dear. [*To VERSHININ*] Come, your honour . . . excuse me, sir, I've forgotten your name. . . .

MASHA. Bring it here, nanny, I'm not going there.

IRINA. Nanny!

ANFISA. I'm coming!

NATASHA [*to SOLYONY*] Little babies understand very well. "Good morning, Bobik, good morning, darling," I said. He looked at me in quite a special way. You think I say that because I'm a mother, but no, I assure you! He's an extraordinary child.

SOLYONY. If that child were mine, I'd fry him in a frying pan and eat him. [*Takes his glass, comes into the drawing-room and sits down in a corner.*]

NATASHA [*covers her face with her hands*]. Rude, ill-bred man!

MASHA. Happy people don't notice whether it is winter or summer. I think if I lived in Moscow I wouldn't mind what the weather was like, . . .

VERSHININ. The other day I was reading the diary of a French minister written in prison. The minister was condemned for the Panama affair. With what enthusiasm and delight he describes the birds he sees from the prison window, which he never noticed before when he was a minister. Now that he's released, of course he notices birds no more than he did before. In the same way, you won't notice Moscow when you live in it. We have no happiness and never do have, we only long for it.

TUZENBAKH [*takes a box from the table*]. What has become of the sweets?

IRINA. Solyony has eaten them.

TUZENBAKH. All?

ANFISA [*servicing tea*]. There's a letter for you, sir.

VERSHININ. For me? [*Takes the letter.*] From my daughter [*reads*]. Yes, of course, . . . Excuse me, Marya Sergeyevna, I'll slip away. I won't have tea [*gets up in agitation*]. Always these upsets. . . .

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MASHA. What is it? Not a secret?

VERSHININ [*in a low voice*]. My wife has taken poison again. I must go. I'll slip off unnoticed. Horribly unpleasant it all is. [*Kisses MASHA'S hand*] My fine, dear, splendid woman. . . . I'll go this way without being seen . . . [*goes out*].

ANFISA. Where is he off to? I've just given him his tea. . . . What a man.

MASHA [*getting angry*]. Leave me alone! Don't pester, you give me no peace . . . [*goes with her cup to the table*]. You bother me, old lady.

ANFISA. Why are you so huffy? Darling!

[*Andrey's voice: "Anfisa!"*]

ANFISA [*mimicking*]. Anfisa! He sits there. . . . [*goes out*].

MASHA [*by the table in the dining-room, angrily*]. Let me sit down! [*Mixes the cards on the table.*] You take up all the table with your cards. Drink your tea!

IRINA. How mean you are, Masha!

MASHA. If I'm mean, don't talk to me. Don't interfere with me.

CHEBUTYKIN [*laughing*]. Don't interfere, don't interfere!

MASHA. You're sixty years old, but you talk rot like a schoolboy, just to raise hell.

NATASHA [*sighs*]. Dear Masha, why make use of such expressions in conversation? With your attractive appearance I tell you straight out, you would be simply fascinating in a well-bred social circle if it were not for the things you say. *Je vous prie, pardonnez-moi, Marie, mais vous avez des manières un peu grossières.*

TUZENBAKH [*suppressing a laugh*]. Give me . . . give me . . . I think there is some brandy there.

NATASHA. *Il paraît que mon Bobik déjà ne dort pas.* he's awake. He isn't well today. I must go to him, excuse me. . . . [*goes out*].

IRINA. Where has Alexandr Ignatyevitch gone?

MASHA. Home. Something going on with his wife again.

TUZENBAKH [*goes up to SOLYONY with a decanter of brandy in his hand*]. You always sit alone, thinking, and there's no making out what you think about. Come, let's make peace. Let's have a drink of brandy. [*They drink.*] I'll have to play the piano all night, I suppose, play all sorts of trash. . . . Here goes!

SOLYONY. Why do you want to make peace? I haven't quarrelled with you.

TUZENBAKH. You always make me feel as though something had gone wrong between us. You are a strange character, there's no denying that.

SOLYONY. [*declaims*]. *I am strange, who is not strange! Be not wrath,* Aleko!

TUZENBAKH. I don't see what Aleko has got to do with it, . . . [*a pause*]

SOLYONY. When I'm tête-à-tête with somebody, I'm all right, just like anyone else, but in company I'm depressed, ill at ease and . . . say all sorts of idiotic things, but at the same time I'm more conscientious and straightforward than many. And I can prove it, . . .

TUZENBAKH. I often feel angry with you, you're always attacking me when we're in company, and yet I somehow like you. What the hell, I'm going to drink a lot today. Let's drink!

SOLYONY. Let's [*drinks*]. I've never had anything against you, Baron. But I have the temperament of Lermontov. [*In a low voice*] In fact I'm rather like Lermontov to look at . . . so I'm told [*takes out scent-bottle and sprinkles scent on his hands*].

TUZENBAKH. I have sent in my resignation. I've had enough of it! I have been thinking of it for five years and at last I have come to a decision. I'm going to work.

SOLYONY [*declaims*]. Be not wrath, Aleko, . . . Forget, forget thy dreams. . . .

[*While they are talking ANDREY comes in quietly with a book and sits down by a candle.*]

TUZENBAKH. I'm going to work.

CHEBUTYKIN [*coming into the drawing-room with IRINA*]. And the food too was real Caucasian stuff: onion soup and for the meat course tchchartma, . . .

SOLYONY. Tcheremsha is not meat at all, it's a plant rather like our onion.

CHEBUTYKIN. No, my dear soul. It's not onion, but mutton roasted in a special way.

SOLYONY. But I tell you that tcheremsha is an onion.

CHEBUTYKIN. And I tell you that tchchartma is mutton.

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SOLYONY. And I tell you that tcheremsha is an onion.

CHEBUTYKIN. What's the use of my arguing with you? You have never been to the Caucasus or eaten tchehartma.

SOLYONY. I haven't eaten it because I can't stand it. Tcheremsha smells like garlic.

ANDREY [*imploringly*]. That's enough! Please!

TUZENBAKH. When are the Carnival party coming?

IRINA. They promised to come at nine, so they will be here directly.

TUZENBAKH [*embraces ANDREY and sings*] . "Oh my porch, oh my new porch . . .

ANDREY [*dances and sings*]. "With posts of maple wood. . .

CHEBUTYKIN [*dances*]. "And lattice work complete . . . [*laughter*].

TUZENBAKH [*kisses ANDREY*]. Hang it all, let's have a drink. Andryusha, let's drink to our everlasting friendship. I'll go to the University in Moscow when you do, Andryusha.

SOLYONY. Which? There are two universities in Moscow.

ANDREY. There is only one university in Moscow.

SOLYONY. I tell you there are two.

ANDREY. There may be three for anything I care. So much the better.

SOLYONY. There are two universities in Moscow! [*A murmur and hisses.*] There are two universities in Moscow: the old one and the new one. And if you don't care to hear, if what I say irritates you, I can keep quiet. I can even go into another room [*goes out at one of the doors*].

TUZENBAKH. Bravo, bravo! [*laughs*] Ladies and gentlemen, let's begin, I'll sit down and play! Funny fellow that Solyony. . . . [*Sits down to the piano and plays a waltz.*]

MASHA [*dances a waltz alone*]. The baron is drunk, the baron is drunk, the baron is drunk.

[*Enter NATASHA.*]

NATASHA [*to CHEBUTYKIN*]. Ivan Romanitch! [*Says something to CHEBUTYKIN, then goes out softly.*]
CHEBUTYKIN [*touches TUZENBAKH on the shoulder and whispers something to him.*]

IRINA. What is it?

CHEBUTYKIN. It's time we were going. Good night.

TUZENBAKH. Good night. It's time to be going.

IRINA. Excuse me. . . what about the Carnival party?

ANDREY [*with embarrassment*]. They won't be coming. You see, dear, Natasha says Bobik is not well, and so . . . In fact I know nothing about it, and don't care either.

IRINA [*shrugs her shoulders*]. Bobik isn't well!

MASHA. Well, it's not the first time we've had to lump it! If we're kicked out, we must go. [*To IRINA*] It's not Bobik that's ill, but she's a bit. . . [*taps her forehead with her finger*]. Petty, vulgar creature!

[*ANDREY goes by door on right to his own room, CHEBUTYKIN following him; they are saying good-bye in the dining-room.*]

FEDOTIK. What a pity! I was meaning to spend the evening, but of course if the child is ill . . . I'll bring him a toy tomorrow.

RODE [*loudly*]. I had a nap today after dinner on purpose, I thought I'd be dancing all night. . . . Why, it's only nine o'clock.

MASHA. Let's go outside; there we can talk. We'll decide what to do.

[*Sounds of "Good-bye! Good night!" The good-humoured laugh of TUZENBAKH is heard. All go out. ANFISA and the maidservant clear the table and put out the light. There is the sound of the nanny singing.*

ANDREY [*in his hat and coat, and CHEBUTYKIN come in quietly.*]

CHEBUTYKIN. I never had time to get married, because life has flashed by like lightning and because I was passionately in love with your mother, who was married.

ANDREY. A person shouldn't get married. You shouldn't, because it's boring.

CHEBUTYKIN. That's all very well, but what about loneliness? Say what you like, it's a dreadful thing to be lonely, my dear boy. . . . But no matter, though!

ANDREY. Come on, let's go.

CHEBUTYKIN. What's the hurry? We have plenty of time.

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ANDREY. I am afraid my wife may stop me.

CHEBUTYKIN. Oh!

ANDREY. I'm not going to play today, I'll just sit and look on. I don't feel well. . . . What can you do, Ivan Romanitch, for shortness of breath?

CHEBUTYKIN. It's no use asking me! I don't remember, dear boy. . . . I don't know. . . .

ANDREY. Let's go through the kitchen. [*They go out.*]

[*A ring, then another ring; there is a sound of voices and laughter.*]

IRINA [*enters*]. What is it?

ANFISA [*in a whisper*]. The mummers, all dressed up [*a ring*].

IRINA. Nanny, dear, tell them there's no one at home. They must excuse us.

[*ANFISA goes out. IRINA walks about the room in hesitation; she is excited. Enter SOLYONY.*]

SOLYONY [*in perplexity*]. No one here. . . . Where are they all?

IRINA. They've gone home.

SOLYONY. How strange. Are you alone here?

IRINA. Yes [*a pause*]. Good night.

SOLYONY. I behaved tactlessly, without sufficient restraint just now. But you're not like other people, you're pure and noble, you see the truth. You alone can understand me. I love you, I love you deeply, infinitely.

IRINA. Good night! You must go.

SOLYONY. I can't live without you [*following her*]. Oh, my joy! [*Through his tears*] Oh, happiness! Those glorious, exquisite, marvellous eyes such as I have never seen in any other woman.

IRINA [*coldly*]. Don't, Vassily Vassilyitch!

SOLYONY. For the first time I am speaking of love to you, and I feel as though I were not on earth but on another planet [*rubs his forehead*]. Well, it doesn't matter. There is no forcing kindness, of course. . . . But there must be no successful rivals. . . . There must not. . . . I swear by all that is sacred I will kill any rival. . . . O exquisite being!

[*NATASHA crosses the room with a candle.*]

NATASHA [*peeps in at one door, then at another and passes by the door that leads to her husband's room*]. Andrey is there. Let him read. Excuse me, Vassily Vassilyitch, I didn't know you were here, and I'm in my dressing-gown. . . .

SOLYONY. I don't care. Good-bye! [*Goes out.*]

NATASHA. You are tired, my poor, dear little girl! [*kisses IRINA*]. You ought to go to bed earlier, . . .

IRINA. Is Bobik asleep?

NATASHA. He's asleep, but not sleeping quietly. By the way, dear, I keep meaning to speak to you, but either you are out or else I haven't the time. . . . I think Bobik's nursery is cold and damp. And your room is so nice for a baby. My sweet, my dear, you might move for a time into Olya's room!

IRINA [*not understanding*]. . . . Where?

[*The sound of a three-horse sleigh with bells driving up to the door.*]

NATASHA. You would be in the same room with Olga, and Bobik in your room. He is such a darling. I said to him today, "Bobik, you are mine, you are mine!" and he looked at me with his funny little eyes. [*A ring*] That must be Olga. How late she is!

[*The maid comes up to NATASHA and whispers in her ear.*]

NATASHA. Protopopov? What a crazy fellow he is! Protopopov has come, and asks me to go out with him in his sleigh [*laughs*]. How strange men are! . . . [*A ring*] Somebody has come. I might go for a quarter of an hour. . . . [*To the maid*] Tell him I'll be right there. [*A ring*] You hear . . . it must be Olga [*goes out*].

[*The maid runs out; IRINA sits lost in thought; KULYGIN, OLGA and VERSHININ come in.*]

KULYGIN. Well, this is a surprise! They said they were going to have an evening party.

VERSHININ. Strange! And when I went away half an hour ago they were expecting the Carnival people. . . .

IRINA. They've all gone.

KULYGIN. Has Masha gone too? Where has she gone? And why is Protopopov waiting below with his sleigh? Whom is he waiting for?

IRINA. Don't ask questions. . . . I am tired.

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KULYGIN. Oh, isn't she a bad little girl. . . .

OLGA. The meeting is only just over. I'm tired out. Our headmistress is ill and I have to take her place. Oh, my head, my head does ache; oh, my head! [*Sits down.*] Andrey lost two hundred roubles yesterday at cards. . . . The whole town is talking about it, . . .

KULYGIN. Yes, I'm tired out by the meeting too [*sits down*].

VERSHININ. My wife took it into her head to give me a fright, she nearly poisoned herself. It's all right now, and I'm glad, it's a relief, . . . So we are to go away? Very well, then, I'll say good night. Fyodor Ilyitch, let's go somewhere together! I can't stay at home, I absolutely can't. . . . Come along!

KULYGIN. I am tired. I'm not coming [*gets up*]. I'm tired. Has my wife gone home?

IRINA. I expect so.

KULYGIN [*kisses IRINA'S hand*]. Good-bye! I have all day tomorrow and next day to rest. Good night! [*Going*] I do want some tea. I was counting on spending the evening in pleasant company. . . . *O fallacem hominum spem!* . . . Accusative of exclamation.

VERSHININ. Well, then, I must go alone [*goes out with KULYGIN, whistling*].

OLGA. My head aches, oh, how my head aches. . . . Andrey has lost at cards. . . . The whole town is talking about it. . . . I'll go and lie down [*is going*]. Tomorrow I'll be free. . . . Oh, God, how nice that is! Tomorrow I'm free, and the day after I'm free. . . . My head does ache, oh, my head . . . [*goes out*].

IRINA [*alone*]. They've all gone away. There's no one left.

[*An accordion plays in the street, the nanny sings.*]

NATASHA [*in a fur cap and coat crosses the dining-room, followed by the maid*]. I'll be back in half an hour. I'll only go a little way [*goes out*].

IRINA [*left alone, in dejection*]. Oh, to go to Moscow, to Moscow!

CURTAIN.

Act III

The bedroom of OLGA and IRINA. On the left and right beds with screens round them. Past two o'clock in the night. Behind the scenes a bell is ringing on account of a fire in the town, which has been going on for some time. It can be seen that no one in the house has gone to bed yet. On the sofa MASHA is lying, dressed as usual in black. Enter OLGA and ANFISA.

ANFISA. They are sitting below, under the stairs. . . . I said to them, "Come upstairs; why, you mustn't stay there" — they only cried. "We don't know where father is." they said. "What if he is burnt!" What an idea! And the poor souls in the yard . . . they are all undressed too.

OLGA [*taking clothes out of the closet*]. Take this grey dress . . . and this one . . . and the blouse too . . . and that skirt, nanny. . . . Oh, dear, what a dreadful thing! Kirsanov Street is burnt to the ground, it seems. . . . Take this . . . take this . . . [*throws clothes into her arms*]. The Vershinins have had a fright, poor things. . . . Their house was very nearly burnt. Let them stay the night here . . . we can't let them go home. . . . Poor Fedotik has had everything burnt, he doesn't have a thing left. . . .

ANFISA. You'd better call Ferapont, Olyushka darling, I can't carry it all.

OLGA [*rings*]. No one will answer the bell [*at the door*]. Come here, whoever is there! [*Through the open door can be seen a window red with fire; the fire brigade is heard passing the house.*] How awful it is! And I'm sick of it!

[*Enter FERAPONT.*]

OLGA. Here take these, carry them downstairs. . . . The Kolotilin young ladies are downstairs . . . give it to them . . . and give this too.

FERAPONT. Yes, miss. In 1812 Moscow was burnt too. . . . Mercy on us! The French were surprised.

OLGA. You can go now.

FERAPONT. Yes, miss [*goes out*].

OLGA. Nanny darling, give them everything. We don't want anything, give it all to them. . . . I'm tired, I can hardly stand on my feet. . . . We mustn't let the Vershinins go home. . . . The little girls can sleep in the drawing-room, and Alexandr Ignatyevitch down below at the baron's. . . . Fedotik can go to the baron's, too, or sleep in our dining-room. . . . As ill-luck will have it, the doctor is drunk, frightfully drunk, and no one can be put in his room. And Vershinin's wife can be in the drawing-room too.

ANFISA [*wearily*]. Olyushka darling, don't send me away; don't send me away!

OLGA. That's nonsense, nanny. No one is sending you away.

ANFISA [*lays her head on OLGA'S shoulder*]. My own, my treasure, I work, I do my best. . . . I'm getting weak, everyone will say "Send her away!" And where am I to go? Where? I'm eighty. Eighty-one.

OLGA. Sit down, nanny darling. . . . You are tired, poor thing . . . [*makes her sit down*]. Rest, dear good nanny. . . . How pale you are!

[*Enter NATASHA.*]

NATASHA. They're saying we must form a committee at once for the assistance of those whose houses have been burnt. Well, that's a good idea. Indeed, we ought always to be ready to help the poor, it's the duty of the rich. Bobik and baby Sophie are both asleep, sleeping as though nothing were happening. There are such a lot of people everywhere, wherever you go, the house is full. There is influenza in the town now; I'm so afraid the children may get it.

OLGA [*not listening*]. In this room you can't see the fire, it's quiet here.

NATASHA. Yes . . . my hair must be untidy [*in front of the mirror*]. They say I have grown fatter . . . but it's

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not true! Not a bit! Masha is asleep, she is tired out, poor dear. . . . [*To ANFISA coldly*] Don't dare to sit down in my presence! Get up! Go out of the room! [*ANFISA goes out; a pause*]. Why you keep that old woman, I can't understand!

OLGA [*taken aback*]. Excuse me, I don't understand either. . . .

NATASHA. She is no use here. She's a peasant; she ought to be in the country. . . . You spoil people! I like order in the house! There ought to be no useless servants in the house. [*Strokes her cheek.*] You are tired, poor darling. Our headmistress is tired! When baby Sophie is a big girl and goes to the high-school, I shall be afraid of you.

OLGA. I won't be headmistress.

NATASHA. You'll be elected, Olechka. That's a settled thing.

OLGA. I'll refuse. I can't, . . . It's too much for me . . . [*drinks water*]. You were so rude to nanny just now. . . . Excuse me, I can't endure it, . . . It makes me feel faint.

NATASHA [*perturbed*]. Forgive me, Olya; forgive me. . . . I didn't mean to hurt your feelings.

[*MASHA gets up, takes her pillow, and goes out in a rage.*]

OLGA. You must understand, my dear, it may be that we have been strangely brought up, but I can't endure it, . . . Such an attitude oppresses me, it makes me ill. . . . I feel simply unnerved by it, . . .

NATASHA. Forgive me; forgive me . . . [*kisses her*].

OLGA. The very slightest rudeness, a tactless word, upsets me. . . .

NATASHA. I often say too much, that's true, but you must admit, dear, that she might just as well be in the country.

OLGA. She's been with us for thirty years.

NATASHA. But now she can't work! Either I don't understand, or you won't understand me. She's not fit for work. She does nothing but sleep or sit still.

OLGA. Well, let her sit still.

NATASHA [*surprised*]. How, sit still? Why, she's a servant. [*Through tears*] I don't understand you, Olya. I've a nanny to look after the children as well as a wet nurse for baby, and we have a housemaid and a cook, what do we want that old woman for? What's the use of her?

[*The alarm bell rings behind the scenes.*]

OLGA. This night has made me ten years older.

NATASHA. We must come to an understanding, Olya. You are at the high-school, I'm at home; you're teaching while I look after the house, and if I say anything about the servants, I know what I'm talking about; I do know-what-I-am-talk-ing-a-bout. . . . And that old thief, that old hag . . . [*stamps her foot*], that old witch shall clear out of the house tomorrow! . . . I won't have people annoy me! I won't have it! [*Feeling that she has gone too far*] Really, if you don't move downstairs, we'll always be quarrelling. It's awful.

[*Enter KULYGIN.*]

KULYGIN. Where is Masha? It's time to be going home. The fire is dying down, so they say [*stretches*]. Only one part of the town has been burnt, and yet there was a wind; it seemed at first as though the whole town would be destroyed [*sits down*]. I'm exhausted. Olechka, my dear . . . I often think if it had not been for Masha I should have married you. You're so good. . . . I'm tired out [*listens*].

OLGA. What is it?

KULYGIN. It is unfortunate the doctor should have a drinking bout just now; he is helplessly drunk. Most unfortunate [*gets up*]. Here he comes, I do believe. . . . Do you hear? Yes, he's coming this way . . . [*laughs*]. What a man he is, really. . . . I'll hide [*goes to the wardrobe and stands in the corner*]. Isn't he a ruffian!

OLGA. He hasn't drunk for two years and now he's gone and done it . . . [*walks away with NATASHA to the back of the room*].

[*CHEBUTYKIN comes in; walking as though sober without staggering, he walks across the room, stops, looks round; then goes up to the washing-stand and begins to wash his hands.*]

CHEBUTYKIN [*morosely*]. The devil take them all . . . damn them all. They think I'm a doctor, that I can treat all sorts of complaints, and I really know nothing about it, I've forgotten all I did know, I remember nothing, absolutely nothing. [*OLGA and NATASHA go out unnoticed by him.*] The devil take them. Last Wednesday I treated a woman at Zasyp — she died, and it's my fault that she died. Yes . . . I did know something twenty-five

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years ago, but now I remember nothing, nothing. Perhaps I'm not a man at all but only pretend to have arms and legs and head; perhaps I don't exist at all and only imagine that I walk around, eat and sleep [*weeps*]. Oh, if only I didn't exist! [*Stops weeping, morosely*] I don't care! I don't care a scrap! [*a pause*] Who the hell knows. . . . The day before yesterday there was a conversation at the club: they talked about Shakespeare, Voltaire. . . . I've read nothing, nothing at all, but I looked as though I'd read them. And the others did the same as I did. The vulgarity! The meanness! And that woman I killed on Wednesday came back to my mind . . . and it all came back to my mind and everything seemed nasty, disgusting and all twisted in my soul. . . . I went and got drunk, . . .

[*Enter IRINA, VERSHININ and TUZENBAKH; TUZENBAKH is wearing a fashionable new civilian suit.*]

IRINA. Let's sit here. No one will come here.

VERSHININ. If it hadn't been for the soldiers, the whole town would've been burnt down. Splendid fellows! [*Rubs his hands with pleasure.*] They are first-rate men! Splendid fellows!

KULYGIN [*going up to them*]. What time is it?

TUZENBAKH. It's past three. It's getting light already.

IRINA. They're all sitting in the dining-room. No one seems to think of going. And that Solyony of yours is sitting there too, . . . [*To CHEBUTYKIN*] You had better go to bed, doctor.

CHEBUTYKIN. It's all right, . . . Thank you! [*Combs his beard.*]

KULYGIN [*laughs*]. You've been hitting the bottle, Ivan Romanitch! [*Slaps him on the shoulder.*] Bravo! In vino veritas, the ancients used to say.

TUZENBAKH. Everyone is asking me to get up a concert for the benefit of the families whose houses have been burnt down.

IRINA. Why, who is there? . . .

TUZENBAKH. We could do it, if we wanted to. Marya Sergeyevna plays the piano splendidly, to my thinking.

KULYGIN. Yes, she plays splendidly.

IRINA. She's forgotten. She hasn't played for three . . . or four years.

TUZENBAKH. There is absolutely no one who understands music in this town, not one soul, but I do understand and on my honour I assure you that Marya Sergeyevna plays magnificently, almost with genius.

KULYGIN. You are right, Baron. I'm very fond of her; Masha, I mean. She is a good sort.

TUZENBAKH. To be able to play so gloriously and to know that no one understands you!

KULYGIN [*sighs*]. Yes. . . . But would it be suitable for her to take part in a concert? [*a pause*] I know nothing about it, my friends. Perhaps it would be all right. There's no denying that our director is a fine man, indeed a very fine man, very intelligent, but he has such views, . . . Of course it's not his business, still if you like I'll speak to him about it.

[*CHEBUTYKIN takes up a china clock and examines it.*]

VERSHININ. I got dirty all over at the fire. I'm a sight [*a pause*]. I heard a word dropped yesterday about our brigade being transferred ever so far away. Some say to Poland, and others to Tchita.

TUZENBAKH. I've heard something about it too. Well! The town will be a wilderness then.

IRINA. We'll go away too.

CHEBUTYKIN [*drops the clock, which smashes*]. To smithereens! [*Pause; everyone is upset and confused*]

KULYGIN [*picking up the pieces*]. To smash such a valuable thing — oh, Ivan Romanitch, Ivan Romanitch! I'd give you minus zero for conduct!

IRINA. That was mother's clock.

CHEBUTYKIN. Perhaps. . . . Well, if it was hers, it was. Perhaps I didn't smash it, but it only seems as though I had. Perhaps it only seems to us that we exist, but really we aren't here at all. I don't know anything — nobody knows anything. [*By the door*] What are you staring at? Natasha has got a little affair going with Protopopov, and you don't see it, . . . You sit here and see nothing, while Natasha has a little affair on with Protopopov . . . [*sings*]. May I offer you this fig? . . . [*Goes out.*]

VERSHININ. Yes . . . [*laughs*]. How very strange it all is, really! [*a pause*] When the fire began I ran home as fast as I could. I went up and saw our house was safe and sound and out of danger, but my little girls were standing in the doorway in their night-gowns; their mother was nowhere to be seen, people were bustling about, horses and dogs were running about, and my children's faces were full of alarm, horror, pleas for help, and I don't

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know what; it wrung my heart to see their faces. My God, I thought, what more have these children to go through in the long years to come! I took their hands and ran along with them, and could think of nothing else but what more they would have to go through in this world! [*a pause*] When I came to your house I found their mother here, screaming, angry.

[MASHA comes in with the pillow and sits down on the sofa.]

VERSHININ. And while my little girls were standing in the doorway in their nightgowns and the street was red with the fire, and there was a fearful noise, I thought that something like it used to happen years ago when the enemy would suddenly make a raid and begin plundering and burning, . . . And yet, in reality, what a difference there is between what is now and has been in the past! And when a little more time has passed — another two or three hundred years — people will look at our present manner of life with horror and derision, and everything of today will seem awkward and heavy, and very strange and uncomfortable. Oh, what a wonderful life that will be — what a wonderful life! [*Laughs*] Forgive me, here I am airing my theories again! Allow me to go on. I have such a desire to talk about the future. I'm in the mood [*a pause*]. It's as though everyone were asleep. And so, I say, what a wonderful life it will be! Can you only imagine? . . . Here there are only three of your sort in the town now, but in generations to come there will be more and more and more; and the time will come when everything will be changed and be as you would have it; they will live in your way, and later on you too will be out of date — people will be born who will be better than you. . . . [*laughs*]. I am in such a strange state of mind today. I have a fiendish longing for life . . . [*sings*]. Young and old are bound by love, and precious are its pangs . . . [*laughs*].

MASHA. Tram-tam-tam!

VERSHININ. Tam-tam!

MASHA. Tra-ra-ra?

VERSHININ. Tra-ta-ta! [*Laughs*]

[Enter FEDOTIK.]

FEDOTIK [*dances*]. Burnt to ashes! Burnt to ashes! Everything I had in the world [*laughter*].

IRINA. That's not something to joke about. Is everything burnt?

FEDOTIK [*laughs*]. Everything I had in the world. Nothing is left. My guitar is burnt, and the camera and all my letters. . . . And the note-book I meant to give you — that's burnt too.

[Enter SOLYONY.]

IRINA. No; please go, Vassily Vassilyitch. You can't stay here.

SOLYONY. How is it the baron can be here and I can't?

VERSHININ. We must be going, really. How's the fire?

SOLYONY. They say it's dying down. No, I really can't understand why the baron may be here and not me [*takes out a bottle of scent and sprinkles himself*].

VERSHININ. Tram-tam-tam!

MASHA. Tram-tam!

VERSHININ [*laughs, to SOLYONY*]. Let's go into the dining-room.

SOLYONY. Very well; we'll make a note of it. I might explain my meaning further, but fear I may provoke the geese . . . [*looking at TUZENBAKH*]. Chook, chook, chook! . . . [*Goes out with VERSHININ and FEDOTIK.*]

IRINA. How that horrid Solyony has made the room smell of tobacco! . . . [*Bewildered*] The baron is asleep! Baron, Baron!

TUZENBAKH [*waking up*]. I'm tired, though. . . . The brick-yard. I'm not talking in my sleep. I really am going to the brick factory directly, to begin work. . . . It's nearly settled. [*To IRINA, tenderly*] You're so pale and lovely and fascinating. . . . It seems to me as though your paleness sheds a light through the dark air. . . . You're melancholy; you're dissatisfied with life. . . . Ah, come with me; let's go and work together!

MASHA. Nikolay Lvovitch, go away!

TUZENBAKH [*laughing*]. Are you here? I didn't see you . . . [*kisses IRINA'S hand*]. Good-bye, I'm going. . . . I look at you now, and I remember as though it were long ago how on your name-day you talked of the joy of work, and were so cheerful and confident. . . . And what a happy life I was dreaming of then! What has become of it? [*Kisses her hand.*] There're tears in your eyes. Go to bed, it's getting light . . . it's nearly morning. . . . If only I could give my life for you!

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MASHA. Nikolay Lvovitch, do go! Really, this is too much. . . .

TUZENBAKH. I'm going [*goes out*].

MASHA [*lying down*]. Are you asleep, Fyodor?

KULYGIN. Eh?

MASHA. You'd better go home.

KULYGIN. My darling Masha, my precious girl! . . .

IRINA. She's tired out. Let her rest, Fedya.

KULYGIN. I'll go at once, . . . My dear, charming wife! . . . I love you, my only one! . . .

MASHA [*angrily*]. *Amo, amas, amat; amamus, amatis, amant.*

KULYGIN [*laughs*]. Yes, really she's wonderful. You've been my wife for seven years, and it seems to me as though we were only married yesterday. Honour bright! Yes, really you are a wonderful woman! I'm content, I'm content, I'm content!

MASHA. I'm bored, I'm bored, I'm bored! . . . [*Gets up and speaks, sitting down*] And there's something I can't get out of my head. . . . It's simply revolting. It sticks in my head like a nail; I must speak of it. I mean about Andrey, . . . He has mortgaged this house to the bank and his wife has grabbed all the money, and you know the house doesn't belong to him alone, but to us four! He ought to know that, if he's a decent man.

KULYGIN. Why do you want to bother about it, Masha? What's got into you? Andryusha is in debt all round, so there it is.

MASHA. It's revolting, anyway [*lies down*].

KULYGIN. We're not poor. I work — I go to the high-school, and then I give private lessons, . . . I do my duty. . . . There's no nonsense about me. *Omnia mea mecum porto*, as the saying is.

MASHA. I want nothing, but it's the injustice that revolts me [*a pause*]. Go, Fyodor.

KULYGIN [*kisses her*]. You're tired, rest for half an hour, and I'll sit and wait for you. . . . Sleep . . . [*goes*]. I'm content, I'm content, I'm content [*goes out*].

IRINA. Yes, how petty our Andrey has grown, how dull and old he has become beside that woman! At one time he was working to get a professorship and yesterday he was boasting of having succeeded at last in becoming a member of the District Council. He's a member, and Protopopov is chairman. . . . The whole town is laughing and talking of it and he's the only one who sees and knows nothing. . . . And here everyone has been running to the fire while he sits still in his room and takes no notice. He does nothing but play his violin . . . [*nervously*]. Oh, it's awful, awful, awful! [*Weeps*] I can't bear it any more, I can't! I can't, I can't!

[*OLGA comes in and begins tidying up her table.*]

IRINA [*sobs loudly*]. Throw me out, throw me out, I can't bear it any more!

OLGA [*alarmed*]. What is it? What is it, darling?

IRINA [*sobbing*]. Where? Where has it all gone? Where is it? Oh, my God, my God! I've forgotten everything, everything . . . everything is in a tangle in my mind. . . . I don't remember the Italian for window or ceiling . . . I'm forgetting everything; every day I forget something more and life is slipping away and will never come back, we'll never, never go to Moscow. . . . I see that we won't go. . . .

OLGA. Darling, darling, . . .

IRINA [*restraining herself*]. Oh, I'm miserable. . . . I can't work, I'm not going to work. I've had enough of it, enough of it! I've been a telegraph clerk and now I have a job in the town council and I hate and despise every bit of the work they give me. . . . I'm already twenty-three, I've been working for years, my brains are drying up, I'm getting thin and old and ugly and there's nothing, nothing, not the slightest satisfaction, and time is passing and you feel that you are moving away from a real, a beautiful life, moving farther and farther away and being drawn into the depths. I'm in despair and I don't know how it is I'm alive and haven't killed myself yet. . . .

OLGA. Don't cry, my child, don't cry. It makes me miserable.

IRINA. I'm not crying, I'm not crying. . . . It's over, . . . There, I'm not crying now. I won't . . . I won't.

OLGA. Darling, I'm speaking to you as a sister, as a friend, if you care for my advice, marry the baron!

[*IRINA weeps quietly.*]

OLGA. You know you respect him, you think highly of him. . . . It's true he isn't good-looking, but he is such a thoroughly nice man, so good. . . . A person doesn't marry for love, but to do her duty. . . . That's what I think, anyway, and I would marry without love. Whoever proposed to me I'd marry him, if only he were a good man. . . .

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I'd even marry an old man. . . .

IRINA. I kept expecting we should move to Moscow and there I should meet my true love. I've been dreaming of him, loving him. . . . But it seems that was all nonsense, nonsense. . . .

OLGA [*puts her arms round her sister*]. My darling, lovely sister, I understand it all; when the baron left the army and came to us in a plain coat, I thought he looked so ugly that it positively made me cry. . . . He asked me, "Why are you crying?" How could I tell him! But if God brought you together I should be happy. That's a different thing, you know, quite different.

[NATASHA *with a candle in her hand walks across the stage from door on right to door on left without speaking*.]

MASHA [*sits up*]. She walks about as though it were she who set fire to the town.

OLGA. Masha, you're silly. The very silliest of the family, that's you. Please forgive me [*a pause*].

MASHA. I want to confess my sins, dear sisters. My soul is yearning. I'm going to confess to you and never again to anyone. . . . I'll tell you this minute [*softly*]. It's my secret, but you must know everything. . . . I can't be silent . . . [*a pause*]. I'm in love, I'm in love, . . . I love that man. . . . You have just seen him. . . . Well, I may as well say it straight out. I love Vershinin.

OLGA [*going behind her screen*]. Stop it. I'm not listening anyway.

MASHA. But what am I to do? [*Clutches her head*]. At first I thought him strange . . . then I was sorry for him . . . then I came to love him . . . to love him with his voice, his words, his misfortunes, his two little girls. . . .

OLGA [*behind the screen*]. I'm not listening anyway. Whatever silly things you say I won't hear them.

MASHA. Oh, Olya. you are silly. I love him — so that's my fate. It means that that's my lot, . . . And he loves me. . . . It's all terrifying. Yes? Is it wrong? [*Takes IRINA by the hand and draws her to herself*] Oh, my darling, . . . How are we going to live our lives, what will become of us? . . . When you read a novel it all seems trite and obvious, but when you're in love yourself you see that no one knows anything and we all have to settle things for ourselves, . . . My darlings, my sisters. . . . I've confessed it to you, now I'll hold my tongue. . . . I'll be like Gogol's madman . . . silence . . . silence. . . .

[*Enter ANDREY and after him FERAPONT*].

ANDREY [*angrily*]. What do you want? I can't make it out.

FERAPONT [*in the doorway, impatiently*]. I've told you ten times already, Andrey Sergeyeitch.

ANDREY. In the first place I'm not Andrey Sergeyeitch, but your honour, to you!

FERAPONT. The firemen ask permission, your honour, to go through the garden on their way to the river. Or else they have to go round and round, an awful nuisance for them.

ANDREY. All right. Tell them, all right. [FERAPONT *goes out*.] I'm sick of them. Where's Olga? [OLGA *comes from behind the screen*]. I've come to ask you for the key of the cupboard, I have lost mine. You've got one, it's a little key.

[OLGA *gives him the key in silence; IRINA goes behind her screen; a pause*.]

ANDREY. What a tremendous fire! Now it's begun to die down. Damn it all, that Ferapont made me so cross I said something silly to him. Your honour . . . [*a pause*]. Why don't you speak, Olya? [*a pause*] It's time to drop this foolishness and sulking all about You're here, Masha, and you too, Irina — very well, then, let us have things out thoroughly, once and for all. What have you got against me? What is it?

OLGA. Stop it, Andryusha. Let's talk tomorrow [*nervously*]. What an agonising night!

ANDREY [*greatly confused*]. Don't excite yourself. I ask you quite calmly, what have you against me? Tell me straight out.

[VERSHININ'S *voice*: "Tram-tam-tam!"]

MASHA [*standing up, loudly*]. Tra-ta-ta! [To OLGA] Good night, Olga, God bless you . . . [Goes behind the screen and kisses IRINA.] Sleep well. . . . Good night, Andrey. You'd better leave them now, they're tired out . . . you can go into things tomorrow [*goes out*].

OLGA. Yes, really, Andryusha, let's put it off till tomorrow . . . [*goes behind her screen*]. It's time we were in bed.

ANDREY. I'll say what I have to say and then go. Directly. . . . First, you have something against Natasha, my wife, and I've noticed that from the very day of my marriage. Natasha is a splendid woman, conscientious, straightforward and honourable — that's my opinion! I love and respect my wife, do you understand? I respect

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her, and I insist on other people respecting her too. I repeat, she is a conscientious, honourable woman, and all your disagreements are simply caprice. . . [a pause]. Secondly, you seem to be cross with me for not being a professor, not working at something scholarly. But I'm in the service of the Zemstvo, I'm a member of the District Council, and I consider this service just as sacred and elevated as the service of learning. I'm a member of the District Council and I'm proud of it, if you care to know . . . [a pause]. Thirdly . . . there's something else I have to say. . . . I've mortgaged the house without asking your permission. . . . For that I am to blame, yes, and I ask your pardon for it. I was driven to it by my debts . . . thirty-five thousand. . . . I'm not gambling now — I gave up cards long ago; but the chief thing I can say in self-defence is that you girls — you get a pension . . . while I don't get . . . my wages, so to speak . . . [a pause].

KULYGIN [*at the door*] . Isn't Masha here? [*Perturbed*] Where is she? It's strange . . . [*goes out*].

ANDREY. They won't listen. Natasha is an excellent, conscientious woman [*paces up and down the stage in silence, then stops*]. When I married her, I thought we should be happy . . . happy, all of us. . . . But, my God! [*Weeps*] Dear sisters, darling sisters, you must not believe what I say, you mustn't believe it . . . [*goes out*].

KULYGIN [*at the door, uneasily*]. Where is Masha? Isn't Masha here? How strange! [*Goes out.*]

[*The firebell rings in the street. The stage is empty.*]

IRINA [*behind the screen*]. Olya! Who is that knocking on the floor?

OLGA. It's the doctor, Ivan Romanitch. He's drunk.

IRINA. What a troubled night! [a pause] Olya! [*Peeps out from behind the screen.*] Have you heard? The brigade is going to be taken away; they are being transferred to some place very far off.

OLGA. That's only a rumour.

IRINA. Then we shall be alone, . . . Olya!

OLGA. Well?

IRINA. My dear, my darling, I respect the baron, I think highly of him, he's a fine man — I'll marry him, I consent, only let's go to Moscow! I implore you, please let's go! There's nothing in the world better than Moscow! Let's go, Olya! Let's go!

CURTAIN.

Act IV

Old garden of the PROZOROV'S house. A long avenue of fir trees, at the end of which is a view of the river. On the farther side of the river there is a wood. On the right the verandah of the house; on the table in it are bottles and glasses; evidently they have just been drinking champagne. It is twelve o'clock noon. People pass occasionally from the street across the garden to the river; five soldiers pass rapidly.

CHEBUTYKIN, in an affable mood, which persists throughout the act, is sitting in an easy chair in the garden, waiting to be summoned; he is wearing a military cap and has a stick. IRINA, KULYGIN with a decoration on his breast and with no moustache, and TUZENBAKH, standing on the verandah, are saying good-bye to FEDOTIK and RODE, who are going down the steps; both officers are in marching uniform.

TUZENBAKH [*kissing* FEDOTIK] . You're a good fellow; we've got on so happily together. [*Kisses* RODE.] Once more. . . . Good-bye, my dear boy. . . .

IRINA. Till we meet again!

FEDOTIK. No, it's good-bye for good; we'll never meet again.

KULYGIN. Who knows! [*Wipes his eyes, smiles.*] Here I am crying too.

IRINA. We'll meet some day.

FEDOTIK. In ten years, or fifteen perhaps? But then we shall scarcely recognise each other — we'll greet each other coldly . . . [*Takes a snapshot*] Stand still. . . . Once more, for the last time.

RODE [*embraces* TUZENBAKH]. We'll never see each other again, . . . [*Kisses* IRINA'S *hand.*] Thank you for everything, everything. . . .

FEDOTIK [*with vexation*]. Oh, can't you stand still for a minute?

TUZENBAKH. Please God we shall meet again. Write to us. Be sure to write to us.

RODE [*taking a long look at the garden*] . Good-bye, trees! [*Shouts*] Halloo! [*a pause*] Good-bye, echo!

KULYGIN. I shouldn't wonder if you get married in Poland. . . . Your Polish wife will clasp you in her arms and call you *kochany!* [*Laughs*]

FEDOTIK [*looking at his watch*]. We have less than an hour. Of our battery only Solyony is going on the barge; we're going with the rank and file. Three divisions of the battery are going today and three more tomorrow — and peace and quiet will descend upon the town.

TUZENBAKH. And dreadful boredom too.

RODE. And where is Marya Sergejevna?

KULYGIN. Masha is in the garden.

FEDOTIK. We must say good-bye to her.

RODE. Good-bye. We better go, or I'll begin to cry . . . [*Hurriedly embraces* TUZENBAKH *and* KULYGIN *and kisses* IRINA'S *hand.*] We've had a splendid time here.

FEDOTIK [*to* KULYGIN]. This is a little souvenir for you . . . a note-book with a pencil. . . . We'll go down this way to the river . . . [*As they go away both look back.*]

RODE [*shouts*]. Halloo-oo!

KULYGIN [*shouts*]. Good-bye!

[RODE *and* FEDOTIK *meet* MASHA *in the background and say good-bye to her; she walks away with them.*]

IRINA. They've gone . . . [*Sits down on the bottom step of the verandah.*]

CHEBUTYKIN. They have forgotten to say good-bye to me.

IRINA. Well, what about you?

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CHEBUTYKIN. Why, I somehow forget, too. But I'll see them again soon, I'm setting off tomorrow. Yes . . . I have one day more. In a year I shall be on the retired list. Then I'll come here again and I'll spend the rest of my life near you. . . . There's only one year now before I get my pension. [*Puts a newspaper into his pocket and takes out another.*] I'll come here to you and arrange my life quite differently. . . . I'll become such a quiet . . . hon. . . honorable . . . well-behaved person.

IRINA. Well, you do need to arrange your life differently, dear Ivan Romanitch. You certainly ought to somehow.

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes, that's the way I feel. [*Softly hums*] "Tarara-boom-dee-ay — Tarara-boom-dee-ay."

KULYGIN. Ivan Romanitch is incorrigible! Incorrigible!

CHEBUTYKIN. You ought to take me in hand. Then I would reform.

IRINA. Fyodor has shaved off his moustache. I can't bear to look at him!

KULYGIN. Why, what's wrong?

CHEBUTYKIN. I might tell you what your face looks like now, but I better not.

KULYGIN. Well! It's the thing now, *modus vivendi*. Our headmaster is clean-shaven and now I'm second to him I've taken to shaving too. Nobody likes it, but I don't care. I'm content. With moustache or without moustache I'm equally content [*sits down*].

[*In the background ANDREY is wheeling a baby asleep in a baby carriage.*]

IRINA. Ivan Romanitch, darling, I'm dreadfully uneasy. You were on the boulevard yesterday, tell me what was it that happened?

CHEBUTYKIN. What happened? Nothing. Nothing much [*reads the newspaper*]. It doesn't matter!

KULYGIN. The story is that Solyony and the baron met yesterday on the boulevard near the theatre. . . .

TUZENBAKH. Oh, stop it! Really . . . [*with a wave of his hand walks away into the house*].

KULYGIN. Near the theatre. . . . Solyony began pestering the baron and he couldn't keep his temper and said something offensive, . . .

CHEBUTYKIN. I don't know. It's all nonsense.

KULYGIN. A teacher at a divinity school wrote "nonsense" at the bottom of an essay and the pupil puzzled over it thinking it was a Latin word . . . [*laughs*]. It was terribly funny They say Solyony is in love with Irina and hates the baron. . . . That's natural. Irina is a very nice girl.

[*From the background behind the scenes, "Aa-oo! Halloo!"*]

IRINA [*shudders*]. Everything frightens me somehow today [*a pause*]. All my things are ready, after dinner I'll send off my luggage. The baron and I are to be married tomorrow, tomorrow we go to the brick factory and the day after that I'll be in the school. A new life is beginning. God will help me! How will it fare with me? When I passed my exam as a teacher I felt so happy, so blissful, that I cried . . . [*a pause*]. The cart will soon be coming for my things. . . .

KULYGIN. That's all very well, but it does not seem serious. It's all nothing but ideas and very little that is serious. However, I wish you success with all my heart.

CHEBUTYKIN [*moved to tenderness*]. My good, delightful darling. . . . My heart of gold. . . .

KULYGIN. Well, today the officers will be gone and everything will go on in the old way. Whatever people may say, Masha is a true, good woman. I love her dearly and am thankful for my lot! . . . People have different lots in life, . . . There is a man called Kozyrev serving in the Excise here. He was at school with me, but he was expelled from the fifth form because he could never understand ut consecutivum. Now he's frightfully poor and ill, and when I meet him I say, "How are you, ut consecutivum?" "Yes," he says, "just so — consecutivum" . . . and then he coughs. . . . Now I've always been successful, I'm fortunate, I've even got the order of the Stanislav of the second degree and I'm teaching others that ut consecutivum. Of course I'm clever, cleverer than very many people, but happiness doesn't lie in that . . . [*a pause*].

[*In the house the "Maiden's Prayer" is played on the piano.*]

IRINA. Tomorrow evening I'll not be hearing that "Maiden's Prayer," I won't be meeting Protopopov . . . [*a pause*]. Protopopov is sitting there in the drawing-room; he's come again today. . . .

KULYGIN. The headmistress hasn't come yet?

IRINA. No. They've sent for her. If only you knew how hard it is for me to live here alone, without Olya, . . . Now that she is headmistress and lives at the high-school and is busy all day long, I'm alone, I'm bored, I have

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nothing to do, and I hate the room I live in. . . . I've made up my mind, since I'm not fated to be in Moscow, that so it must be. It must be destiny. There's no help for it, . . . It's all in God's hands, that's the truth. When Nikolay Lvovitch made me an offer again . . . I thought it over and made up my mind, . . . He's a good man, it's wonderful really how good he is. . . . And I suddenly felt as though my soul had grown wings, my heart felt so light and again I longed for work, work. . . . Only something happened yesterday, there's some mystery hanging over me.

CHEBUTYKIN. Nonsense.

NATASHA [*at the window*]. Our headmistress!

KULYGIN. The headmistress has come. Let's go in [*goes into the house with IRINA*].

CHEBUTYKIN [*reads the newspaper, humming softly*]. "Tarara-boom-dee-ay."

[*MASHA approaches; in the background ANDREY is pushing the baby carriage.*]

MASHA. Here he sits, snug and settled.

CHEBUTYKIN. Well, why not?

MASHA [*sits down*]. Nothing . . . [*a pause*]. Did you love my mother?

CHEBUTYKIN. Very much.

MASHA. And did she love you?

CHEBUTYKIN [*after a pause*]. That I don't remember.

MASHA. Is my man here? It's just like our cook Marfa used to say about her policeman: is my man here?

CHEBUTYKIN. Not yet.

MASHA. When you get happiness by snatches, by little bits, and then lose it, as I'm losing it, by degrees one grows coarse and spiteful . . . [*Points to her bosom*] I'm boiling here inside . . . [*Looking at ANDREY, who is pushing the baby carriage*] Here's our Andrey, . . . All our hopes are shattered. It's like thousands of people raised a huge bell, a lot of money and of labour was spent on it, and it suddenly fell and smashed. All at once, for no reason whatever. That's just how it is with Andrey, . . .

ANDREY. When will they be quiet in the house? There's such a noise.

CHEBUTYKIN. Soon [*looks at his watch*]. My watch is an old-fashioned one with a repeater . . . [*winds his watch, it strikes*]. The first, the second, and the fifth batteries are going at one o'clock [*a pause*]. And I'm going tomorrow.

ANDREY. For good?

CHEBUTYKIN. I don't know. Perhaps I'll come back in a year. Though goodness knows. . . . It doesn't matter one way or another.

[*There is the sound of a harp and violin being played far away in the street.*]

ANDREY. The town will be empty. It's as though you put an extinguisher over it [*a pause*]. Something happened yesterday near the theatre; everyone is talking of it, and I know nothing about it.

CHEBUTYKIN. It was nothing. Foolishness. Solyony began annoying the baron and he lost his temper and insulted him, and it came in the end to Solyony's having to challenge him [*looks at his watch*]. It's time, I think. . . . It was to be at half-past twelve in the Crown forest that we can see from here beyond the river . . . Piff-paff! [*Laughs*] Solyony imagines he is a Lermontov and even writes verses. Joking apart, this is his third duel.

MASHA. Whose?

CHEBUTYKIN. Solyony's.

MASHA. And the baron's?

CHEBUTYKIN. What about the baron? [*a pause*]

MASHA. My thoughts are in a muddle. . . . Anyway, I tell you, you ought not to let them do it. He may wound the baron or even kill him.

CHEBUTYKIN. The baron is a very good fellow, but one baron more or less in the world, what does it matter? Let them! It doesn't matter. [*Beyond the garden a shout of "Aa-oo! Halloo!"*] You can wait. That's Skvortsov, the second, shouting. He's in a boat [*a pause*].

ANDREY. In my opinion to take part in a duel, or to be present at it even in the capacity of a doctor, is simply immoral.

CHEBUTYKIN. That only seems so. . . . We're not real, nothing in the world is real, we don't exist, but only seem to exist. . . . Nothing matters!

MASHA. How they keep on talking, talking all day long [*goes*]. To live in such a climate, it may snow any

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minute, and then all this talk on the top of it [stops]. I'm not going indoors, I can't go in there. . . . When Vershinin comes, tell me . . . [goes down the avenue]. And the birds are already flying south . . . [looks up]. Swans or geese. . . . Darlings, happy birds [goes out].

ANDREY. Our house will be empty. The officers are going, you are going, Irina is getting married, and I shall be left in the house alone.

CHEBUTYKIN. What about your wife?

[Enter FERAPONT with papers.]

ANDREY. A wife is a wife. She's a straightforward, upright woman, kind, perhaps, but for all that there's something in her which makes her no better than some petty, blind, hairy animal. Anyway she's not a human being. I speak to you as to a friend, the one man to whom I can open my soul. I love Natasha, that's so, but sometimes she seems to me absolutely vulgar, and then I don't know what to think, I can't account for my loving her or, anyway, having loved her.

CHEBUTYKIN [gets up]. I'm going away tomorrow, my boy, perhaps we'll never meet again, so this is my advice to you. Put on your cap, you know, take your stick and walk off . . . walk off and just go, go without looking back. And the farther you go, the better.

[SOLYONY crosses the stage in the background with two officers; seeing CHEBUTYKIN he turns towards him; the officers walk on.]

SOLYONY. Doctor, it's time! It's half-past twelve [greets ANDREY].

CHEBUTYKIN. Directly. I'm sick of you all. [To ANDREY] If anyone asks for me, Andryusha, say I'll be back directly . . . [sighs]. Oho-ho-ho!

SOLYONY. He had not time to say alack before the bear was on his back [walks away with the doctor]. Why are you croaking, old man?

CHEBUTYKIN. Come!

SOLYONY. How do you feel?

CHEBUTYKIN [angrily]. Like a pig in clover.

SOLYONY. The old man doesn't need excite himself. I won't do anything much, I'll only shoot him like a snipe [takes out scent and sprinkles his hands]. I've used a whole bottle today, and still they smell. My hands smell like a corpse [a pause]. Yes. . . . Do you remember the poem? "And, restless, seeks the stormy ocean, as though in tempest there were peace." . . .

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes. He had not time to say alack before the bear was on his back [goes out with SOLYONY. Shouts are heard: "Halloo! Oo-oo!" ANDREY and FERAPONT come in].

FERAPONT. Papers for you to sign. . . .

ANDREY [nervously]. Let me alone! Let me alone! I beg you! [Walks away with the baby carriage.]

FERAPONT. That's what the papers are for — to be signed [retires into the background].

[Enter IRINA and TUZENBAKH, wearing a straw hat; KULYGIN crosses the stage shouting "Aa-oo, Masha, aa-oo!"]

TUZENBAKH. I believe that's the only man in the town who's glad that the officers are going away.

IRINA. That's very natural [a pause]. Our town will be empty now.

TUZENBAKH. Dear, I'll be back directly.

IRINA. Where are you going?

TUZENBAKH. I must go into the town, and then . . . to see my comrades off.

IRINA. That's not true. . . . Nikolay, why are you so absent-minded today? [a pause] What happened yesterday near the theatre?

TUZENBAKH [with a gesture of impatience]. I'll be here in an hour and with you again [kisses her hands]. My beautiful one . . . [looks into her face]. For five years now I've loved you and still I can't get used to it, and you seem to me more and more lovely. What wonderful, exquisite hair! What eyes! I shall carry you off tomorrow, we'll work, we'll be rich, my dreams will come true. You'll be happy. There's only one thing, one thing: you don't love me!

IRINA. That's not in my power! I'll be your wife and be faithful and obedient, but there is no love, I can't help it [weeps]. I've never been in love in my life! Oh, I have so dreamed of love, I've been dreaming of it for years, day and night, but my soul is like a wonderful piano which is locked and the key has been lost [a pause]. You

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look worried.

TUZENBAKH. I didn't sleep all night. There has never been anything in my life so dreadful that it could frighten me, and only that lost key torments my soul and won't let me sleep. . . . Say something to me . . . [*a pause*]. Say something to me. . . .

IRINA. What? What am I to say to you? What?

TUZENBAKH. Anything.

IRINA. Stop it! Stop it! [*a pause*]

TUZENBAKH. What trifles, what little things suddenly à propos of nothing acquire importance in life! You laugh at them as before, think them nonsense, but still you go on and feel that you don't have the power to stop. Let's don't talk about it! I'm happy. I feel as though I were seeing these firs, these maples, these birch trees for the first time in my life, and they all seem to be looking at me with curiosity and waiting. What beautiful trees, and, really, how beautiful life ought to be under them! [*A shout of "Halloo! Aa-oo!"*] I must be off; it's time. . . . See, that tree is dead, but it waves in the wind with the others. And so it seems to me that if I die I'll still be part of life, one way or another. Good-bye, my darling . . . [*kisses her hands*]. Those papers of yours you gave me are lying under the calendar on my table.

IRINA. I'm coming with you.

TUZENBAKH [*in alarm*]. No, no! [*Goes off quickly, stops in the avenue.*] Irina!

IRINA. What is it?

TUZENBAKH [*not knowing what to say*]. I didn't have any coffee this morning. Ask them to make me some [*goes out quickly*].

[*IRINA stands lost in thought, then walks away into the background of the scene and sits down on the swing. Enter ANDREY with the baby carriage, and FERAPONT comes into sight.*]

FERAPONT. Andrey Sergejevitch, the papers aren't mine; they are government papers. I didn't invent them.

ANDREY. Oh, where is it all gone? What's become of my past, when I was young, happy, and clever, when my dreams and thoughts were exquisite, when my present and my past were lighted up by hope? Why on the very threshold of life do we become dull, drab, uninteresting, lazy, indifferent, useless, unhappy? . . . Our town has been in existence for two hundred years — there are a hundred thousand people living in it; and there's not one who's not like the rest, not one saint in the past, or the present, not one man of learning, not one artist, not one man in the least remarkable who could inspire envy or a passionate desire to imitate him. . . . They only eat, drink, sleep, and then die . . . others are born, and they also eat and drink and sleep, and not to be bored to stupefaction they vary their lives by nasty gossip, vodka, cards, litigation; and the wives deceive their husbands, and the husbands tell lies and pretend that they see and hear nothing, and an overwhelmingly vulgar influence crushes the children, and the divine spark is quenched in them and they become the same sort of pitiful, dead creatures, all exactly alike, as their fathers and mothers. . . . [*To FERAPONT, angrily*] What do you want?

FERAPONT. Eh? There are papers to sign.

ANDREY. You're a nuisance!

FERAPONT [*handing him the papers*]. The porter from the local court was saying just now that there was as much as two hundred degrees of frost in Petersburg last winter.

ANDREY. The present is hateful, but when I think of the future, it's so nice! I feel so light-hearted, so free. A light dawns in the distance, I see freedom. I see how I and my children will become free from sloth, from kvass, from goose and cabbage, from naps after dinner, from mean, parasitic living. . . .

FERAPONT. He says that two thousand people were frozen to death. The people were terrified. It was either in Petersburg or Moscow, I don't remember.

ANDREY [*in a rush of tender feeling*]. My dear sisters, my wonderful sisters! [*Through tears*] Masha, my sister!

NATASHA [*in the window*]. Who's talking so loud out there? Is that you, Andryusha? You'll wake baby Sophie. Il ne faut pas faire du bruit, la Sophie est dormée déjê. Vous êtes un ours. [*Getting angry*] If you want to talk, give the carriage with the baby to somebody else. Ferapont, take the baby carriage from the master!

FERAPONT. Yes, ma'am [*takes the baby carriage*].

ANDREY [*in confusion*]. I'm talking quietly.

NATASHA [*petting her child, inside the room*]. Bobik! Naughty Bobik! Little rascal!

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ANDREY [*looking through the papers*]. Very well, I'll look through them and sign what needs signing, and then you can take them back to the Board. . . . [*Goes into the house reading the papers; FERAPONT pushes the baby carriage farther into the garden.*]

NATASHA [*speaking indoors*]. Bobik, what is mamma's name? Darling, darling! And who is this? This is auntie Olya. Say to auntie, "Good morning, Olya!"

[*Two wandering musicians, a man and a girl, enter and play a violin and a harp; from the house enter VERSHININ with OLGA and ANFISA, and stand off a minute listening in silence; IRINA comes up.*]

OLGA. Our garden is like a public passage; they walk and ride through. Nanny, give those people something.

ANFISA [*gives money to the musicians*]. Go away, and God bless you, my dear souls! [*The musicians bow and go away.*] Poor things. They must be hungry. Why else would they do it? [*To IRINA*] Good morning, Irisha! [*Kisses her.*] Well, my little girl, I'm having a time of it! Living in the high-school, in a government apartment, with dear Olyushka — that's what the Lord has granted to me in my old age! I've never lived so well in my life, sinful woman that I am. . . . It's a big flat, and I have a room to myself and my own bed. All at the government expense. I wake up in the night and, O Lord, Mother of God, there's no one in the world happier than me!

VERSHININ [*looks at his watch*]. We're just going, Olga Sergeyevna. It's time to be off [*a pause*]. I wish you every, every. . . . Where is Marya Sergeyevna?

IRINA. She is somewhere in the garden. . . . I'll go and look for her.

VERSHININ. If you'll be so kind. I am in a hurry.

ANFISA. I'll go and look for her too. [*Shouts*] Mashenka, aa-oo! [*Goes with IRINA into the farther part of the garden.*] Aa-oo! Aa-oo!

VERSHININ. Everything comes to an end. Here we are parting [*looks at his watch*]. The town has given us something like a lunch; we've been drinking champagne, the mayor made a speech. I ate and listened, but my heart was here, with you all. . . [*looks round the garden*]. I've grown used to you. . . .

OLGA. Shall we ever see each other again?

VERSHININ. Most likely not [*a pause*]. My wife and two little girls will stay here for another two months; please, if anything happens, if they need anything . . .

OLGA. Yes, yes, of course. Set your mind at rest [*a pause*]. By tomorrow there won't be a soldier in the town — it'll all turn into a memory, and of course for us it'll be like beginning a new life . . . [*a pause*]. Nothing turns out as we would have it. I didn't want to be a headmistress, and yet I am. It seems we are not to live in Moscow. . . .

VERSHININ. Well Thank you for everything. . . . Forgive me if anything was amiss. . . . I've talked a great deal: forgive me for that too — don't think too badly of me.

OLGA [*wipes her eyes*]. Why doesn't Masha come?

VERSHININ. What else am I to say to you at parting? What am I to philosophise about? . . . [*Laughs*] Life is hard. It seems to many of us dull and hopeless; but yet we must admit that it goes on getting clearer and easier, and it looks as though the time were not far off when it'll be full of happiness [*looks at his watch*]. It's time for me to go! In old days men were absorbed in wars, filling all their existence with marches, raids, victories, but now all that is a thing of the past, leaving behind it a great void which there is so far nothing to fill: humanity is searching for it passionately, and of course will find it. Ah, if only it could be quickly! [*a pause*] If, don't you know, hard work were united with education and education with hard work. . . [*Looks at his watch*] But, really, it's time for me to go. . . .

OLGA. Here she comes.

[*MASHA comes in.*]

VERSHININ. I have come to say good-bye. . . .

[*OLGA moves a little away to leave them free to say good-bye.*]

MASHA [*looking into his face*]. Good-bye . . . [*a prolonged kiss*].

OLGA. Don't, don't. . . .

[*MASHA sobs violently.*]

VERSHININ. Write to me. . . . Don't forget me! Let me go! . . . Time is up! . . . Olga Sergeyevna, take her, I must . . . go . . . I'm late . . . [*Much moved, kisses OLGA'S hands; then again embraces MASHA and quickly goes off.*]

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OLGA. Come, Masha! Stop it, darling.

[Enter KULYGIN.]

KULYGIN [*embarrassed*]. Never mind, let her cry — let her. . . . My good Masha, my dear Masha! . . . You are my wife, and I'm happy, anyway. . . . I don't complain; I don't say a word of blame. . . . Here Olya is my witness. . . . We'll begin the old life again, and I won't say one word, not a hint. . . .

MASHA [*restraining her sobs*]. By the sea—strand an oak—tree green. . . . Upon that oak a chain of gold. . . . Upon that oak a chain of gold. . . . I am going mad. . . . By the sea—strand . . . an oak—tree green. . . .

OLGA. There, there, Masha. . . . Calm yourself. . . . Give her some water.

MASHA. I'm not crying now. . . .

KULYGIN. She's not crying now . . . she's being good. . . .

[*The faint sound of a far-away shot.*]

MASHA. By the sea—strand an oak—tree green, upon that oak a chain of gold. . . . The cat is green . . . the oak is green. . . . I am mixing it up . . . [*drinks water*]. My life's a failure, . . . I want nothing now. . . . I'll calm down in a minute. . . . It doesn't matter. . . . What does "strand" mean? Why do these words haunt me? My thoughts are in a tangle. [Enter IRINA.]

OLGA. Calm yourself, Masha. Come, that's a good girl. Let's go indoors.

MASHA [*angrily*]. I'm not going in. [*Sobs, but at once checks herself*] I don't go into that house now and I won't.

IRINA. Let's sit together, even if we don't say anything. I'm going away tomorrow, you know . . . [*a pause*].

KULYGIN. I took a false beard and moustache from a boy in the third form yesterday, just look . . . [*puts on the beard and moustache*]. I look like the German teacher . . . [*laughs*]. Don't I? Funny creatures, those boys.

MASHA. You really do look like the German teacher.

OLGA [*laughs*]. Yes.

[MASHA weeps.]

IRINA. There, Masha!

KULYGIN. Awfully like. . . .

[Enter NATASHA.]

NATASHA [*to the maid*]. What? Mr. Protopopov will sit with Sofochka, and let Andrey Sergeych push Bobik's carriage. What a lot there is to do with children . . . [*To IRINA*] Irina, you're going away tomorrow, what a pity. Why not stay just another week? [*Seeing KULYGIN utters a shriek; the latter laughs and takes off the beard and moustache.*] Well, what in the . . . you gave me such a fright! [*To IRINA*] I'm used to you and do you suppose that it will be easy for me to part with you? I'll put Andrey with his violin into your room — let him saw away there! — and we will put Sofochka in his room. Adorable, delightful baby! Isn't she a good little girl! Today she looked at me with such eyes and said "Mamma"!

KULYGIN. A fine child, that's true.

NATASHA. So tomorrow I'll be all alone here [*sighs*]. First of all I'll have this avenue of fir trees cut down, and then that maple. . . . It looks so ugly in the evening. . . . [*To IRINA*] My dear, that sash does not suit you at all. . . . It's in bad taste. You need to wear something brighter. And then I'll have flowers, flowers planted everywhere, and there'll be such a scent. . . . [*Severely*] Why is there a fork lying about on that seat? [*Going into the house, to the maid*] Why is there a fork lying about on this seat. I ask you? [*Shouts*] Hold your tongue!

KULYGIN. She's at it!

[*Behind the scenes the band plays a march; they all listen.*]

OLGA. They're going.

[Enter CHEBUTYKIN.]

MASHA. Our friends are going. Well . . . a happy journey to them! [*To her husband*] We must go home. . . . Where are my hat and cape?

KULYGIN. I took them into the house . . . I'll get them directly. . . .

OLGA. Yes, now we can all go home, it's time.

CHEBUTYKIN. Olga Sergeevna!

OLGA. What is it? [*a pause*] What?

CHEBUTYKIN. Nothing. . . . I don't know how to tell you. [*Whispers in her ear.*]

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OLGA [*in alarm*]. It can't be!

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes . . . such a business. . . . I'm so worried and worn out, I don't want to say another word. . . .
[*With vexation*] But, it doesn't matter!

MASHA. What's happened?

OLGA [*puts her arms round IRINA*]. This is a terrible day. . . . I don't know how to tell you, my precious. . . .

IRINA. What is it? Tell me quickly, what is it? For God's sake! [*Cries*]

CHEBUTYKIN. The baron has just been killed in a duel.

IRINA [*weeping quietly*]. I knew, I knew. . . .

CHEBUTYKIN [*in the background of the scene sits down on a garden seat*]. I'm worn out . . . [*takes a newspaper out of his pocket*]. Let them cry. . . . [*Sings softly*] "Tarara-boom-dee-ay" . . . It doesn't matter.
[*The three sisters stand with their arms round one another.*]

MASHA. Oh, listen to that band! They're going away from us; one has gone altogether, gone forever. We're left alone to begin our life over again, . . . We've got to live . . . we've got to live, . . .

IRINA [*lays her head on OLGA'S bosom*]. A time will come when everyone will know what all this is for, why there is this misery; there will be no mysteries and, meanwhile, we have got to live . . . we have got to work, only to work! Tomorrow I'll go alone; I'll teach in the school, and I'll give all my life to those who may need me. Now it's autumn; soon winter will come and cover us with snow, and I will work, I will work.

OLGA [*embraces both her sisters*]. The music is so happy, so confident, and you long for life! O my God! Time will pass, and we shall go away for ever, and we shall be forgotten, our faces will be forgotten, our voices, and how many there were of us; but our sufferings will pass into joy for those who will live after us, happiness and peace will be established upon earth, and they will remember kindly and bless those who have lived before. Oh, dear sisters, our life is not ended yet. We shall live! The music is so happy, so joyful, and it seems as though in a little while we shall know what we are living for, why we are suffering. . . . If we only knew — if we only knew!

[*The music grows more and more subdued; KULYGIN, cheerful and smiling, brings the hat and cape; ANDREY pushes the baby carriage in which BOBIK is sitting.*]

CHEBUTYKIN [*humming softly*]. "Tarara-boom-dee-ay!" [*Reads his paper.*] It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter.

OLGA. If we only knew, if we only knew!

CURTAIN.

The Three Sisters

Notes

List of Characters

The action takes place in a provincial town: In a letter Chekhov suggested that the town was like Perm, located in central Russia

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Act I

Act I: Noon, spring of 1897 is the time Bristow suggested in program notes to the play
a large room is visible : In a large 19th-century house, this room could be used both as a dining-room and a ballroom

the fifth of May: Russians did not switch to the Gregorian calendar until after the 1917 revolution; the Russian calendar was about 12 days behind

your name-day, Irina: Russians celebrated the feast-day of their patron saint with festivities resembling a birthday party

already in a white dress: As opposed to black, the traditional colour of mourning

at my lessons till the evening: Olga means she gives private lessons

The only difficulty is poor Masha: Masha can't go because her husband can't leave his job

half a hundredweight : 54 pounds

two or even two and a half : 180 pounds, 200 pounds

or an engine-driver: On the railroad

wakes at twelve o'clock: Noon

will kick the bucket: Lit., die of a stroke

such a person as Dobrolyubov: Probably Chekhov means N. A. Dobrolyubov (1836–1861), a literary critic read by progressive thinkers; that the doctor doesn't know who Dobrolyubov is indicates his shallowness; however, the reference may be to the poet A. M. Dobrolyubov (1876–?), who first appeared in print in 1895

By the sea-strand : Masha recites the first two lines (she repeats the second line) of A. S. Pushkin's (1799–1837) long poem *Ruslan and Lyudmila* (1820)

Nanny dear: The actual Russian word Olga uses is *Nyanechka* , a diminutive for "nanny."

A samovar! How awful!: Olga is upset because a samovar would be an appropriate gift for a wedding shower or wedding anniversary, not a name-day party.

Irinushka, you must be nice: Lit., Arinushka, a deliberate mispronunciation of "Irinuska," a diminutive for Irina

Nyemetsky Street: Lit., German Street

fifteen miles away: Lit., twenty versts

Novo-Dyevitchy: A famous Moscow cemetery; Chekhov himself is buried there

Chook, chook, chook : Solyony is imitating sounds made by domestic fowl

Look how small I am : In later editions, Chekhov added: You make me feel better when you say my life is great.

it gets light so early: Because of their high latitudes, most Russian cities have very short nights in the summer

mass of darkness: I.e., the ignorant and uneducated masses

court councilor : Rank 7 in the Table of Ranks for the Civil Service

Feci quod potui, faciant meliora potentes: I have done my best; let others do better if they can

mens sana in corpore sano: A healthy mind in a healthy body

my good girl: Lit., *Matushka*, an old-fashioned word for mother; the implication is that Masha is trying to treat him like a child

with a lisp: Lit., with exaggerated r's

That phrase has been haunting me all day: Educated Russians would immediately recall the next two lines: "And linked to the chain with a scholarly mien/ A tomcat is seen going round and round. . ." (Bristow translation)

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Act II

Act II: Bristow suggests that this act begins at 8 p.m., winter of 1899

It's Carnival: Carnival Week was celebrated just before the beginning of Lent

Bobik: The nickname of Natasha's first child

mummers: masked and costumed persons who paraded through the streets or visited houses on holidays; in Russia mummers are called *skomorokhi* and trace their origins to the 10th century

Andryushantchik : A diminutive for Andrey

Tyestov's or the Bolshoy Moskovsky: Two famous Moscow restaurants

Venez ici: Come here (French)

the Military Academy : Before 1914 almost all major Russian cities had military schools; the Moscow Military Academy was founded in 1832

Gogol says it's dull living: From the short story "How Ivan Ivanovitch Quarreled with Ivan Nikoforovitch"; N. V. Gogol (1809–1852), famous Russian novelist and dramatist

Balzac was married at Berditchev: At the time of the play, Berditchev was part of the Russian Empire

another kind of patience: patience is a type of solitaire card game

the game is working out right: Russians often used a game of patience to decide questions (as Pierre does in Book 10 of *War and Peace*)

Tsitsikar: A city in northeast China

Masha, come to tea, my dear: Lit, *Mataushka*, come to tea

minister was condemned for the Panama affair: Baihot, French minister of public works, was sent to prison in 1893 for accepting a bribe from developers who hoped to build a canal in Panama

Je vous prie... : I beg of you, excuse me, Masha, but your manners are a little unrefined (Natasha consistently uses clumsy French)

Il paraît... : It seems my Bobik is no longer asleep

I am strange, who is not strange: From the play *Woe from Wit* by A. S. Griboyedov (1795–1829)

Be not wrath, Aleko! : From Pushkin's poem "The Gypsies" (1824); Aleko is the hero, but the exact words that Solyony quotes do not occur in the poem

temperament of Lermontov: Mikhail Lermontov (1814–1841) was a poet who was sometimes called the Russian Byron; Lermontov was killed in a duel

Oh my porch, oh my new porch: A popular Russian folk song; Paul Schmidt prints the music and words in the notes to his translation of the play (*The Plays of Anton Chekhov*, HarperCollins, 1997, p. 321)

Petty, vulgar creature: Lit., *Meshchanka!*, a female member of the petty bourgeoisie; since Andrey (and his sisters) are members of the gentry, Andrey has married beneath his class

three-horse sleigh: a troika

O fallacem...: O delusive hope of man!

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Act III

Act III: Bristow suggests the act begins between 2 and 3 a.m. during the summer of 1900

Behind the scenes a bell is ringing: A jarring noise made by a provincial church bell; Chekhov was particularly concerned with the sounds in Act III; in a letter he wrote that the only noise is off in the distance, off stage, vague and muffled, and everyone on stage is tired and sleepy

know where father is: Lit., *Papasha*, an affectionate form of address to an elderly man

In 1812 Moscow was burnt too: When the French under Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812, the people of Moscow burned the city rather than let it fall into enemy hands

baby Sophie: Lit., *Sofochka*, Natasha's second child

The vulgarity!: The Russian word used here is *poshlost'*, which has no English equivalent; Nabokov has suggested that it is "not only the obviously trashy but also the falsely important, the falsely beautiful, the falsely clever, the falsely attractive."

In vino veritas: There is truth in wine

May I offer you this fig?: In a letter Chekhov wrote that the song was from an operetta he once heard, but he could not recall its name

Young and old are bound by love, and precious are its pangs: An aria sung by Prince Gremin in Act III of Tchaikovsky's opera *Eugene Onegin*

Tram-tam-tam: In a letter Chekhov wrote that Vershinin says the words "Tram-tam-tam" as a kind of question and Masha answers in kind; Masha should say "tram-tam" and start to laugh, but not loud, just a little, almost to herself

I may provoke the geese: Refers to Krylov's fable "The Geese"

Amo, amas...: Masha declines the Latin verb "love"

Omnia mea mecum porto: All I own is what I carry with me

Gogol's madman: *Memoirs of a Madman* (1835)

your honour, to you: Lit., "your worship"; Andrey wants to be addressed according to his rank, but Ferapont responds with a title of a higher rank

Zemstvo: A local council

you get a pension: A military pension because of their father's service

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Act IV

Act IV: Bristow suggests that this act begins at noon in the autumn of 1900

kochany: Polish for sweetheart

modus vivendi : mode of living

thinking it was a Latin word : The joke is that the Russian word for nonsense, *chepukha*, when written in Cyrillic cursive can be read as *renixa* in Latin

My heart of gold: In later editions Chekhov replaced this with: You've gone on far ahead, I won't catch up with you. I'm left behind like a migrant bird grown old and unable to fly. Fly, my dear, fly, and God be with you! [a pause] It's a pity you shaved your moustache, Fyodor Ilyich.

KULYGIN. Oh, drop it! [sighs]

ut consecutivum : A Latin grammar term

order of the Stanislav of the second degree: A civil service decoration

Maiden's Prayer: A parlour piano favourite written by Baranowski

with a repeater: his pocket watch strikes the hours

put an extinguisher over it: an extinguisher was a bell-shaped device that was used to put out candles

having to challenge him: to a duel

And the farther you go, the better: In the first version of the play Chekhov added: [a pause]. But do as you like! It doesn't matter. . .

And, restless, seeks the stormy ocean...: Solyony misquotes slightly from Lermontov's "The Sail"

ANDREY and FERAPONT come in: Note that there is no previous stage direction for Andrey to exit

kvass: a homemade beer

baby Sophie: Lit., *Sofochka*

Il ne faut pas faire du bruit...: Stop making noise, Sophie is asleep already. You are a bear (once again Natasha uses awkward French)