

MOSCOW!

Lucy Cashion, ERA
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adapted from *The Three Sisters*
By Anton Chekhov
1901

Characters

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*)
- FERAPONT (*an old Porter from the Rural Board*)
- ANFISA (*the nurse, an old woman of eighty*)

The action takes place in a provincial town.

ACT 1.

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.

A pause.

I remember the band playing and the firing at the cemetery as they carried the coffin. 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

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, 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.

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 husband.

TUZENBAKH

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 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. 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.

CHEBUTYKIN

Reading the newspaper as he comes in with SOLYONY.

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.

No, I don't want it. . .

Scratches it out.

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?

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.

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 everyone 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.

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...

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.

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...

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.

ALL

Olya! Olya! 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 Sergeyevna, 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 someone 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 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**.

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.

SOLYONY

In a high-pitched voice.

Chook, chook, chook.

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.

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

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.

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.

VERSHININ

I've had time to bore your sisters already.

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. 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

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. 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.

MASHA

Takes off her hat.

I'll stay to lunch.

ANDREY has slipped away unobserved.

VERSHININ

Gets up.

What a lot of flowers you have!

Looking round.

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...

*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. 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!

KULYGIN

Puts his arm round MASHA'S waist, laughing.

Masha loves me. My wife loves me. 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

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. 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.

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.

MASHA

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.

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!

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... I feel so happy with all of you! To your health!

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.

TUZENBAKH

What are you thinking about? Let me be by you.

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

NATASHA

They're sitting down to lunch already... I'm late... I think my hair is all right.

Steals a glance at herself in the mirror and puts herself straight.

IRINA

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...

NATASHA

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 color.

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.

OLGA

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.

CHEBUTYKIN

Nature our hearts for love created!

Laughs.

ANDREY

Angrily.

Stop it, gentlemen! Aren't you tired of it yet?

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

If there are thirteen at table, it means that someone present is in love.

CHEBUTYKIN

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.

IRINA

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

Curtain.

ACT 2.

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 now wearing a red sash, 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.*

ANDREY

*Enters with a book in his
hand.*

What is it, Natasha?

NATASHA

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?

ALL

Looking at their watches.

A quarter past eight.

NATASHA

And Olga and Irina aren't in yet.

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 mummers 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

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... 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...

ANDREY

Dear old man, how strangely life changes and deceives you! 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 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

And the same contractor says - maybe it's not true - that there's a rope stretched right across **Moscow**.

ANDREY

Nonsense.

Reads.

Have you ever been to **Moscow**?

FERAPONT

No, never. It wasn't God's will I should. In 1812 **Moscow** was burnt. Mercy on us! The French were surprised.

FERAPONT goes out.

ANDREY

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. 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

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?

ALL

Why?

MASHA

You are rather depressed this evening.

VERSHININ

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... Someone is coming. Talk of something else.

IRINA and TUZENBAKH come in through the dining-room.

TUZENBAKH

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

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 . . .

IRINA

No, I don't like telegraph work, I don't like it. I must find some other job, this does not suit me. It is work without poetry, without meaning... 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.

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, 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.

CHEBUTYKIN

Irina Sergeyevna!

They all laugh; a pause.

VERSHININ

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

TUZENBAKH

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

VERSHININ

No, you're not.

MASHA laughs softly.

TUZENBAKH

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.

MASHA

But still, isn't there a meaning?

ALL

Here it's snowing. What meaning is there in that?

MASHA

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

IRINA hums softly.

CHEBUTYKIN.

I really must put that down in my book.

Reads the paper.

TUZENBAKH

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

MASHA

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

TUZENBAKH

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!

*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.*

SOLYONY

To IRINA.

I bought these colored pencils for you just now as I passed Pyzhikov's on **Moscow** Street.

VERSHININ

What a wind there is!

IRINA

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

CHEBUTYKIN

No, it's not working out.

Laughs.

So that means you won't go to **Moscow**.

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.

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.

ANFISA

Serving tea.

There's a letter for you, sir.

VERSHININ

For me?

Takes the letter. Reads.

Yes, of course... Excuse me, Marya Sergeyevna, I'll slip away. I won't have tea.

Gets up in agitation.

Always these upsets...

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.

ANFISA

Why are you so huffy? Darling!

MASHA

*By the table in the
dining-room, angrily.*

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.

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.

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 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.

*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.*

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

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

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.

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...

MASHA

It's not Bobik that's ill, but she's a bit...

*Taps her forehead with her
finger.*

Petty, vulgar creature!

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. I'm not going to play today, I'll just sit and look on. 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...

They go out. A ring.

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, 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

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

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

Protopopov has come, and asks me to go out with him in his sleigh.

Laughs.

IRINA

Where has it all gone? I've forgotten everything, everything...everything is in a tangle in my mind... I don't remember the Italian for window or ceiling...every day I forget something more and life is slipping away and will never come back, we'll never, never go to **Moscow**.

NATASHA

How strange men are! I might go for a quarter of an hour...

Goes out. IRINA sits lost in thought.

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.

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 4.

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, standing on the verandah.

IRINA

Well, what about you?

CHEBUTYKIN

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

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

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.

KULYGIN

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

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.

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...

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. 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 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.

ALL.

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

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 . . .

CHEBUTYKIN

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

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

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? We're not real, nothing in the

world is real, we don't exist, but only seem to exist... Nothing matters!

MASHA

I'm not going indoors, I can't go in there... When Vershinin comes, tell me...

Goes down the avenue.

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?

ANDREY

A wife is a wife.

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.

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.

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

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.

TUZENBAKH

Let's don't talk about it! I'm happy. Good-bye, my darling...

Kisses her hands.

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. 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.

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

Shouts.

Mashenka, aa-oo!

VERSHININ

Everything comes to an end. Here we are parting.

Looks at his watch.

OLGA

Shall we ever see each other again?

VERSHININ

Most likely not.

OLGA

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. 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. MASHA sobs violently.

VERSHININ

Write to me... Don't forget me! Let me go! Time is up! Olga Sergeevna, take her, I must...go...I'm late...

Much moved, kisses OLGA'S hands; then again embraces MASHA and quickly goes off.

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. . .

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. Enter NATASHA.

NATASHA

Irina, you're going away tomorrow, what a pity. 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! My dear, that sash does not suit you at all... It's in bad taste. You need to wear something brighter.

CHEBUTYKIN

Olga Sergeevna!

OLGA

What is it?

CHEBUTYKIN

Nothing. . . . I don't know how to tell you.

Whispers in her ear.

OLGA

In alarm.

It can't be!

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...

CHEBUTYKIN

The baron has just been killed in a duel.

IRINA

Weeping quietly.

I knew, I knew. . . .

The three sisters stand with their arms round one another.

MASHA

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...

OLGA

Father was given his brigade and came here with us from Moscow fourteen years ago and I remember distinctly that in Moscow at this time, everything was bathed in sunshine. It's fourteen years ago, and yet I remember it all as though we had left it yesterday.

IRINA

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

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.

ALL

It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter.

Curtain.