

# **A Month in the Country**

**A Comedy in Five Acts**

by

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**Translated from the Russian by Constance Garnett**



# A Month in the Country

## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

**Arkady Sergeyitch Islayev**, a wealthy landowner, aged 36.

**Natalya Petrovna**, his wife, aged 29.

**Kolya**, their son, aged 10.

**Vera**, their ward, aged 17.

**Anna Semyonovna Islayeva**, mother of Islayev, aged 58.

**Lizaveta Bogdanovna**, a companion, aged 37.

**Schaaf**, a German tutor, aged 45.

**Mikhail Alexandrovitch Rakitin**, a friend of the family, aged 30.

**Alexey Nikolayevitch Beliayev**, a student, Kolya's tutor, aged 21.

**Afanasy Ivanovitch Bolshintsov**, a neighbor, aged 48.

**Ignaty Ilyitch Shpigelsky**, a doctor, aged 40.

**Matvey**, a manservant, aged 40.

**Katya**, a maidservant, aged 20.

*The action takes place on Islayev's estate.*

*There is an interval of one day between ACTS I and II, ACTS II and III, and ACTS IV and V.*

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## ACT I

*A drawing-room. On Right a card-table and a door into the study; in Center a door into an outer room; on Left two windows and a round table. Sofas in the corners. At the card-table ANNA SEMYONOVNA, LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA and SCHAAF are playing preference; NATALYA PETROVNA and RAKITIN are sitting at the round table; she is embroidering on canvas; he has a book in his hand. A clock on the wall points to three o'clock.*

SCHAAF . Hearts.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . Again? Why, if you go on like that, my good man, you will beat us every time.

SCHAAF [*phlegmatically*]. Eight hearts.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA [*to LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA*]. What a man! There's no playing with him.

[*LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA smiles.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*to RAKITIN*]. Why have you left off? Go on.

RAKITIN [*raising his head slowly*], 'Monte Cristo se redressa haletant. . . .' Does it interest you, Natalya Petrovna?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Not at all.

RAKITIN . Why are we reading it then?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Well, it's like this. The other day a woman said to me: 'You haven't read Monte Cristo? Oh, you must read it--it's charming.' I made her no answer at the time, but now I can say that I've been reading it and found nothing at all charming in it.

RAKITIN . Oh, well, since you have already made up your mind about it. ...

NATALYA PETROVNA . You lazy creature!

RAKITIN . Oh, I don't mind. . . . [*Looking for the place at which he stopped.*] 'Se redressa haletant et. . . .'

NATALYA PETROVNA [*interrupting him*]. Have you seen Arkady to-day?

RAKITIN . I met him on the dam.... It is being repaired. He was explaining something to the workmen and to make things clearer waded up to his knees in the sand.

NATALYA PETROVNA . He gets too hot over things, he tries to do too much. It's a failing. Don't you think so?

RAKITIN . Yes, I agree with you.

NATALYA PETROVNA . How dull that is!... You always agree with me. Go on reading.

RAKITIN . Oh, so you want me to quarrel with you. . . . By all means.

NATALYA PETROVNA . I want ... I want ... I want *you* to want. ... Go on reading, I tell you.

RAKITIN . I obey, madam. [*Takes up the book again.*]

SCHAAF . Hearts.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . What? Again? It's insufferable! [*To NATALYA PETROVNA.*] Natasha . . .  
Natasha! . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . What is it?

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . Only fancy! Schaaf wins every point. He keeps on--if it's not seven, it's eight.

SCHAAF . And now it's seven.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . Do you hear? Its awful.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes ... it is.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . Back me up then! [*To NATALYA PETROVNA.*] Where's Kolya?

NATALYA PETROVNA . He's gone out for a walk with the new tutor.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . Oh! Lizaveta Bogdanovna, I call on you.

RAKITIN [*to NATALYA PETROVNA.*] What tutor?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Ah! I forgot to tell you, while you've been away, we've engaged a new teacher.

RAKITIN . Instead of Dufour?

NATALYA PETROVNA . No ... a Russian teacher. The princess is going to send us a Frenchman from Moscow.

RAKITIN . What sort of man is he, the Russian? An old man?

NATALYA PETROVNA . No, he's young.... But we only have him for the summer.

RAKITIN . Oh, a holiday engagement.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes, that's what they call it, I believe. And I tell you what, Rakitin, you're fond of studying people, analyzing them, burrowing into them. . . .

RAKITIN . Oh, come, what makes you . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes, yes.... You study him. I like him. Thin, well made, merry eyes, something spirited in his face. . . . You'll see. It's true he is rather awkward . . . and you think that dreadful.

RAKITIN . You are terribly hard on me to-day, Natalya Petrovna.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Joking apart, do study him. I fancy he may make a very fine man. But there, you never can tell!

RAKITIN . That sounds interesting.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Really? [*Dreamily.*] Go on reading.

RAKITIN . 'Se redressa haletant et...'

NATALYA PETROVNA [*suddenly looking round*]. Where's Vera? I haven't seen her all day. [*With a smile, to RAKITIN.*] Put away that book. ... I see we shan't get any reading done to-day. . . . Better tell me something.

RAKITIN . By all means. . . . What am I to tell you? You know I stayed a few days at the Krinitsyns'. . . . Imagine, the happy pair are bored already.

NATALYA PETROVNA . How could you tell?

RAKITIN . Well, boredom can't be concealed.... Anything else may be, but not boredom. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*looking at him*]. Anything else can then?

RAKITIN [*after a brief pause*]. I think so.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*dropping her eyes*]. Well, what did you do at the Krinitsyns'?

RAKITIN . Nothing. Being bored with friends is an awful thing; you are at ease, you are not constrained, you like them, there's nothing to irritate you, and yet you are bored, and there's a silly ache, like hunger, in your heart.

NATALYA PETROVNA . You must often have been bored with friends.

RAKITIN . As though you don't know what it is to be with a person whom one loves and who bores one!

NATALYA PETROVNA [*slowly*]. Whom one loves, that's saying a great deal. . . . You are too subtle to-day. . . .

RAKITIN . Subtle. . . . Why subtle?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes, that's a weakness of yours. Do you know, Rakitin, you are very clever, of course, but . . . [*Pausing*] sometimes we talk as though we were making lace. . . . Have you seen people making lace? In stuffy rooms, never moving from their seats. . . . Lace is a fine thing, but a drink of fresh water on a hot day is much better.

RAKITIN . Natalya Petrovna, you are . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . What?

RAKITIN . You are cross with me about something.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh, you clever people, how blind you are, though you are so subtle! No, I'm not cross with you.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . Ah! at last, he has lost the trick! [*To NATALYA PETROVNA.*] Natasha, our enemy has lost the trick!

SCHAAF [*sourly*]. It's Lizaveta Bogdanovna's fault.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA [*angrily*]. I beg your pardon--how could I tell Anna Semyonovna had no hearts?

SCHAAF . In future I call not on Lizaveta Bogdanovna.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA [*to SCHAAF*]. Why, how is she, Lizaveta Bogdanovna, to blame?

SCHAAF [*repeats in exactly the same tone of voice*]. In future I call not on Lizaveta Bogdanovna.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . As though I care! What next! . . .

RAKITIN . You look somehow different, I see that more and more.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with a shade of curiosity*]. Do you mean it?

RAKITIN . Yes, really. I find a change in you.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes?... If that's so, please. . . . You know me so well--guess what the change is, what has happened to me . . . will you?

RAKITIN . Well. . . . Give me time. . . . [*Suddenly KOL YA runs in noisily from the outer room and straight up to ANNA SEMYONOVNA.*]

KOLYA . Granny, Granny! Do look what I've got! [*Shows her a bow and arrows.*] Look!

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . Show me, darling. . . . Oh what a splendid bow! Who made it for you?

KOLYA . He did ... he. . . . [*Points to BELIAYEV, who has remained at the door.*]

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . Oh! but how well it's made. . . .

KOLYA . I shot at a tree with it, Granny, and hit it twice. . . . [*Skips about.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA . Show me, Kolya.

KOLYA [*runs to her and while NATALYA PETROVNA is examining the bow*]. Oh, maman, you should see how Alexey Nikolaitch climbs trees! He wants to teach me and he's going to teach me to swim too. He's going to teach me all sorts of things. [*Skips about.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA . It is very good of you to do so much for Kolya.

KOLYA [*interrupting her, warmly*]. I do like him, maman, I love him.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*stroking KOLYA'S head*]. He has been too softly brought up. . . . Make him a sturdy, active boy.

[*BELIAYEV bows.*]

KOLYA . Alexey Nikolaitch, let's go to the stable and take Favourite some bread.

BELIAYEV . Very well.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA [*to KOLYA*]. Come here and give me a kiss first. . . .

KOLYA [*running off*]. Afterwards, Granny, afterwards! [*Runs into the outer room; BELIAYEV goes out after him.*]

ANNA SEMYONOVNA [*looking after KOLYA*]. What a darling boy! [*To SCHAAF and LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA.*] Isn't he?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . To be sure he is.

SCHAAF [*after a brief pause*]. Pass.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with some eagerness to RAKITIN*]. Well, how does he strike you?

RAKITIN . Who?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*pausing*]. That. . . . Russian tutor.

RAKITIN . Oh, I beg your pardon--I'd forgotten him. . . . I was so absorbed by the question you asked me. . . . [*NATALYA PETROVNA looks at him with a faintly perceptible smile of irony.*] But his face . . . certainly. . . . Yes, he has a good face. I like him. Only he seems very shy.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes.

RAKITIN [*looking at her*]. But anyway I can't quite make out . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . How if we were to look after him a bit, Rakitin? Will you? Let us finish his education. Here is a splendid opportunity for discreet sensible people like you and me! We are very sensible, aren't we?

RAKITIN . This young man interests you. If he knew it... he'd be flattered.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh, not a bit, believe me! You can't judge him by what. . . anyone like us would feel in his place. You see he's not at all like us, Rakitin. That's where we go wrong, my dear, we study ourselves very carefully and then imagine we understand human nature.

RAKITIN . The heart of another is a dark forest. But what are you hinting at? . . . Why do you keep on sticking pins into me?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Whom is one to stick pins into if not one's friends? . . . And you are my friend. . . . You know that. [*Presses his hand.* RAKITIN *smiles and beams.*] You are my old friend.

RAKITIN . I'm only afraid . . . you may get sick of the old friend.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*laughing*]. It's only very nice things one takes enough of for that.

RAKITIN . Perhaps. But that doesn't make it any better for them.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Nonsense. . . . [*Dropping her voice.*] As though you don't know ce que vous etes pour moi.

RAKITIN . Natalya Petrovna, you play with me like a cat with a mouse. . . . But the mouse does not complain.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh! poor little mouse!

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . That's twenty from you, Adam Ivanitch. . . . Aha!

SCHAAF . In future I call not on Lizaveta Bogdanovna.

MATVEY [*enters and announces*]. Ignaty Ilyitch.

SHPIGELSKY [*following him in*]. Doctors don't need showing in. [*Exit MATVEY.*] My humblest respects to all the family. [*Kisses ANNA SEMYONOVNA'S hand.*] How do you do, gracious lady. Winning, I expect?

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . Winning indeed! I've hardly got my own back and I'm thankful for that. It's all this villain. [*Indicates SCHAAF.*]

SHPIGELSKY [*to SCHAAF*]. Adam Ivanitch, when you're playing with ladies, it's too bad. . . . I should never have thought it of you.

SCHAAF [*muttering through his teeth*]. Blaying wif ladies. . . .

SHPIGELSKY [*going up to the round table on the left*]. Good afternoon, Natalya Petrovna! Good afternoon, Mikhail Alexandritch!

NATALYA PETROVNA . Good afternoon, Doctor. How are you?

SHPIGELSKY . I like that inquiry. . . . It shows that you are quite well. What can ail me? A respectable doctor is never ill; at the most he just goes and dies. . . . Ha! ha!

NATALYA PETROVNA . Sit down. I'm quite well, certainly. . . . But I'm in a bad humor . . . and that's a sort of illness too, you know.

SHPIGELSKY [*sitting down beside NATALYA PETROVNA*]. Let me feel your pulse. [*Feels her pulse.*] Oh, nerves, nerves. . . . You don't walk enough, Natalya Petrovna, you don't laugh enough . . . that's what it is.... Why don't you see to it, Mikhail Alexandritch? But of course I can prescribe some drops.

NATALYA PETROVNA . I'm ready enough to laugh. . . . [*Eagerly.*] Now, Doctor, . . . you have a spiteful tongue, I like it so much in you, I respect you for it, really ... do tell me something amusing. Mikhail Alexandritch is so solemn to-day.

SHPIGELSKY [*with a sly glance at RAKITIN*]. Ah, it seems, it's not only the nerves that are upset, there's just a touch of spleen too. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . There you are, at it, too! Be as critical as you like, Doctor, but not aloud. We all know how sharp-sighted you are. You are both so sharp-sighted.

SHPIGELSKY . I obey, madam.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Tell us something funny.

SHPIGELSKY . I obey, madam. Tell us a story straight away, it's a bit sudden. . . . Allow me a pinch of snuff. [*Takes snuff.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA . What preparations!

SHPIGELSKY . Well, you see, my dear lady, you must graciously consider there are all sorts of funny stories. One for one person, and one for another. . . . Your neighbour, Mr. Hlopushkin, for instance, roars and laughs till he cries, if I simply hold up my finger . . . while you. . . . But, there, here goes, you know Verenitsyn?

NATALYA PETROVNA . I fancy I've met him. I've heard of him anyway.

SHPIGELSKY . He has a sister who's mad. To my thinking, they are either both mad, or both sane; for really there's nothing to choose between them, but that's neither here nor there. It's the finger of destiny, dear lady, everywhere, and in everything. Verenitsyn has a daughter, a greenish little thing, you know, with little pale eyes, and a little red nose, and little yellow teeth, a charming girl in fact; plays the piano, and talks with a lisp, so everything's as it should be. She has two hundred serfs of her own besides her aunt's hundred and fifty. The aunt's still alive to be sure, and will go on living for years; mad people always live to be old, but one need never despair. She has made a will in her niece's favor anyway, and, the day before she did it, with my own hand I poured cold water on her head--it was a complete waste of time for there's no chance of curing her. Well, so Verenitsyn's daughter is a bit of a catch, you see. He has begun bringing her out, suitors are turning up, and among others Perekuzov, an anemic young man, timid but of excellent principles. Well, the father liked our Perekuzov; and the daughter liked him, too. . . . There seemed to be no hitch, simply bless them and haste to the wedding! And, as a matter of fact, all was going swimmingly; Mr. Verenitsyn was already beginning to poke the young man in the ribs and slap him on the back, when all of a sudden, a bolt from the blue, an officer, Ardalion Protobekasov! He saw Verenitsyn's daughter at the Marshal's ball, danced three polkas with her, said to her, I suppose, rolling his eyes like this, 'Oh, how unhappy I am!' and our young lady was bowled over at once. Tears, sighs, moans. . . . Not a look, not a word for Perekuzov, hysterics at the mere mention of the wedding.... Oh, Lord, there was the deuce of a fuss. Oh well, thinks Verenitsyn, if Protobekasov it is to be, Protobekasov let it be! Luckily he was a man of property too. Protobekasov is invited to give them the honor of his company. He does them the honor, arrives, flirts, falls in love, and finally offers his hand and heart. Verenitsyn's daughter accepts him joyfully on the spot, you'd suppose. Not a bit of it! Mercy on us, no! Tears again, sighs, hysterics! Her father is at his wits' end. What's the meaning of it? What does she want? And what do you suppose she answers? 'I don't know,' she says, 'which of them I love.'

'What!?' 'I really don't know which I love, and so I'd better not marry either, but I am in love!' Verenitsyn, of course, had an attack of cholera at once; the suitors can't make head or tail of it either. But she sticks to it. So you see what queer things happen in these parts.

NATALYA PETROVNA . I don't see anything wonderful in that. . . . Surely it's possible to love two people at once?

RAKITIN . Ah! you think so....

NATALYA PETROVNA [*slowly*], I think so. ... I don't know, though . . . perhaps it only shows one doesn't love either.

SHPIGELSKY [*taking snuff and looking now at NATALYA PETROVNA, now at RAKITIN*]. So that's how it is.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*eagerly to SHPIGELSKY*] Your story is very good, but you haven't made me laugh.

SHPIGELSKY . Oh, my dear lady, who'll make you laugh just now? That's not what you want at the moment.

NATALYA PETROVNA . What is it I want then?

SHPIGELSKY [*with an affectedly meek air*]. The Lord only knows!

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh, how tiresome you are, as bad as Rakitin.

SHPIGELSKY . You do me too much honor upon my word.. ..

[*NATALYA PETROVNA makes an impatient gesture*]

ANNA SEMYONOVNA [*getting up*]. Well, well, at last. . . . [*Sighs.*] My legs are quite stiff from sitting so long. [*LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA and SCHAAF stand up also*] O-ooh!

NATALYA PETROVNA [*stands up and goes to them*]. Why do you sit still so long? [*RAKITIN and SHPIGELSKY stand up.*]

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . You owe me seventy kopecks, my good sir. [*SCHAAF bows frigidly*] You can't punish us all the time. [*To NATALYA PETROVNA.*] You look pale, Natasha? Are you quite well? Shpigelsky, is she quite well?

SHPIGELSKY [*who has been whispering something to RAKITIN*]. Oh, perfectly!

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . That's right. . . . I'll go and have a little rest before dinner. . . . I'm dreadfully tired! Liza, come along. . . . Oh, my legs, my legs. . . .

[*Goes into the outer room with LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA. NATALYA PETROVNA walks with her to the door. SHPIGELSKY, RAKITIN and SCHAAF are left in the front of the stage*]

SHPIGELSKY [*offering SCHAAF his snuff-box*]. Well, Adam Ivanitch, wie befinden Sie sich?

SCHAAF [*taking a pinch with dignity*]. Quite vell. And you?

SHPIGELSKY : Thank you kindly, pretty middling. [*Aside to RAKITIN.*] So you don't know what's the matter with Natalya Petrovna to-day?

RAKITIN . I don't, really.

SHPIGELSKY . Well, if you don't. .. [*Turns round and goes to meet NATALYA PETROVNA who is coming back from the door.*] I have a little matter to talk to you about, Natalya Petrovna.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*going to the window*]. Really! What is it?

SHPIGELSKY . I must speak to you alone. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA. Oh dear!... You alarm me.... [RAKITIN *meanwhile has taken SCHAAF'S arm and walks to and fro with him, murmuring something to him in German. SCHAAF laughs and says in an undertone, 'Ja, ja, ja! ja wohl, ja wohl, sehr gut!'*]

SHPIGELSKY [*dropping his voice*]. This business, strictly speaking, does not concern you only. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*looking out into the garden*]. What do you mean?

SHPIGELSKY . Well, it's like this. A good friend of mine has asked me to find out . . . that is ... your intentions in regard to your ward . . . Vera Alexandrovna.

NATALYA PETROVNA. My intentions?

SHPIGELSKY. That is ... to speak plainly . . my friend. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . You don't mean to say he wants to marry her?

SHPIGELSKY . Just so.

NATALYA PETROVNA. Are you joking?

SHPIGELSKY. Certainly not.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*laughing*]. Good gracious! She's a child; what a strange commission!

SHPIGELSKY . Strange, Natalya Petrovna? How so? My friend . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . You're a great schemer, Shpigel-sky. And who is your friend?

SHPIGELSKY [*smiling*]. One minute. You haven't said anything definite yet in reply. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Nonsense, Doctor. Vera is a child. You know that yourself, Monsieur le diplomate. [*Turning round.*] Why, here she is. [VERA and KOLYA run in from the outer room.]

KOLYA [*runs up to RAKITIN*]. Rakitin, some glue, tell them to give us some glue. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*to VERA*]. Where have you been? [*Strokes her cheek.*] How flushed you are!

VERA . In the garden. . . . [SHPIGELSKY bows to her]. Good afternoon, Ignaty Ilyitch.

RAKITIN [*to KOLYA*]. What do you want with glue?

KOLYA . We must have it. ... Alexey Nikolaitch is making us a kite. . . . Ask for it. ... .

RAKITIN [*is about to ring*]. Very well. In a minute.

SCHAAF . Erlauben Sie. . . . Master Kolya has not learned his lesson to-day. . . . [*Takes KOLYA'S hand.*] Kommen Sie.

KOLYA [*gloomily*]. Morgen, Herr Schaaf, morgen. . . .

SCHAAF [*sharply*]. Morgen, morgen, nur nicht heute, sagen alle faule Leute.... Kommen Sie. [KOLYA resists.]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*to VERA*]. Whom have you been out with all this time? I've seen nothing of you all day.

VERA . With Alexey Nikolaitch . . . with Kolya. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Ah! [*Turning round.*] Kolya, what's the meaning of this?

KOLYA [*dropping his voice*]. Mr. Schaaf. . . Maman. . .

RAKITIN *[to NATALYA PETROVNA]*. They are making a kite, and you see, it's time for a lesson.

SCHAAF *[with a sense of dignity]*. Gnädige Frau. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA *[severely, to KOLYA]*. You have been playing about enough to-day, do you hear. Go along with Mr. Schaaf.

SCHAAF *[leading KOLYA towards the outer room]*. Es ist unerhört!

KOLYA *[to RAKITIN in a whisper as he goes out]*. Ask for the glue, all the same. . . . [RAKITIN nods.]

SCHAAF *[pulling KOLYA]*. Kommen sie, mein Herr. . . . *[Goes out with him. RAKITIN follows them out.]*

NATALYA PETROVNA *[to VERA]*. Sit down . . . you must be tired. . . . *[Sits down herself.]*

VERA *[sitting down]*. Not at all, Natalya Petrovna. r

NATALYA PETROVNA *[to SHPIGELSKY, with a smile]*. Shpigelsky, look at her, she is tired, isn't she?

SHPIGELSKY . But that's good for Vera Alexandrovna, you know.

NATALYA PETROVNA . I don't say it's not. . . . *[To VERA.]* Well, what have you been doing in the garden?

VERA . Playing, running about. First we looked at the men digging the dam, then Alexey Nikolaitch climbed up a tree after a squirrel, ever so high, and began shaking the tree-top. ... It really frightened us. ... The squirrel dropped at last, and Tresor nearly caught it. ... But it got away.

NATALYA PETROVNA *[glancing with a smile at SHPIGELSKY]*. And then?

VERA . Then Alexey Nikolaitch made Kolya a bow . . and so quickly . . . and then he stole up to our cow in the meadow and all at once leapt on her back . . and the cow was scared and set off running and kicking . . . and he laughed *[Laughs herself]* and then Alexey Nikolaitch wanted to make us a kite and so we came in.

NATALYA PETROVNA *[pats her cheek]*. Child, child, you are a perfect child.... What do you think, Shpigelsky?

SHPIGELSKY *[slowly, looking at NATALYA PETROVNA]*. I agree with you.

NATALYA PETROVNA . I should think so.

SHPIGELSKY . But that's no hindrance. . . . On the contrary . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . You think so? *[To VERA.]* And you've been enjoying yourself?

VERA . Yes. . . . Alexey Nikolaitch is so amusing.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh, he is, is he? *[After a brief pause.]* And, Vera, how old are you? *[VERA looks at her with some surprise.]* You're a child ... a child.

*[RAKITIN comes in from the outer room.]*

SHPIGELSKY *[fussily]*. Ah, I was forgetting . . . your coachman is ill ... and I haven't had a look at him yet. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . What's the matter with him?

SHPIGELSKY . He's feverish, but it's nothing serious.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*calling after him*]. You are dining with us, Doctor?

SHPIGELSKY . With your kind permission. [*Goes out by center door.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA . Mon enfant, vous feriez bien de mettre une autre robe pour le diner. . . .  
[*VERA gets up.*] Come to me. . . . [*Kisses her on the forehead.*] Child. . . . Child. [*VERA kisses her hand and goes towards door on right.*]

RAKITIN [*aside to VERA with a wink*]. I've sent Alexey Nikolaitch all you need.

VERA [*aside*]. Thank you, Mikhail Alexandritch. [*Goes out.*]

RAKITIN [*goes up to NATALYA PETROVNA, she holds out her hand to him. He at once presses it*]. At last, we are alone. Natalya Petrovna, tell me, what's the matter?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Nothing, Michel, nothing. And if there were, it's all over now. Sit down.  
[*RAKITIN sits down beside her.*] That happens to everybody. Clouds pass over the sky. Why do you look at me like that?

RAKITIN . I'm looking at you. . . . I am happy.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*smiles in answer to him*]. Open the window, Michel. How lovely it is in the garden! [*RAKITIN gets up and opens the window.*] How I welcome the wind! [*Laughs.*] It seems to have been waiting for a chance to burst in. . . . [*Looks round.*] How completely it's taken possession of the room. . . . There's no turning it out now. . . .

RAKITIN . You are as soft and sweet yourself now as an evening after a storm.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*dreamily repeating the last words*]. After a storm?... But has there been a storm?

RAKITIN [*shaking his head*]. It was gathering.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Really? [*Gazing at him, after a short silence.*] Do you know, Michel, I can't imagine a kinder man than you? [*RAKITIN tries to stop her.*] No, don't prevent my speaking out. You are sympathetic, affectionate, constant. You never change. I owe you so much.

RAKITIN . Natalya Petrovna, why are you telling me this just now?

NATALYA PETROVNA . I don't know; I feel light-hearted, I'm at rest; don't stop me from chattering, . . .

RAKITIN [*pressing her hand*]. You are kind as an angel. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*laughing*]. You wouldn't have said so this morning. But listen, Michel, you know me, you must make allowances for me. Our relations are so pure, so genuine, . . . and at the same time, not quite natural. . . . You and I have the right to look everybody in the face, not only Arkady. . . . Yes, but . . . [*Sinking into thought.*] That's what makes me sometimes depressed and ill at ease. I feel spiteful like a child, I'm ready to vent my spite on others, especially on you. . . . You don't resent that privilege?

RAKITIN [*earnestly*]. Quite the contrary.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes, at times it gives one pleasure to torture the man whom one loves . . . whom one loves. . . . Like Tatyana, I too can say, why not be frank?

RAKITIN . Natalya Petrovna, you . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*interrupting him*]. Yes, I love you; but do you know, Rakitin? Do you know what sometimes seems strange to me? I love you . . . and the feeling is so clear, so peaceful. . . . It does not agitate me. . . . I am warmed by it. . . . [*Earnestly.*] You have never made me cry . . . and it seems as though I ought to have. . . . [*Breaking off.*] What does that show?

RAKITIN [*rather mournfully*]. That's a question that needs no answer.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*dreamily*]. And we have known each other a long while.

RAKITIN . Four years. Yes, we are old friends.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Friends. . . . No, you are more to me than a friend.

RAKITIN . Natalya Petrovna, don't touch on that. . . . I'm afraid for my happiness, I'm afraid it may vanish at your touch.

NATALYA PETROVNA . No . . . no . . . no. The whole point is that you are too good. . . . You give way to me too much. . . . You have spoilt me. . . . You are too good, do you hear?

RAKITIN [*with a smile*]. I hear, madam.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*looking at him*]. I don't know what you feel but I desire no other happiness. Many women might envy me. [*Holds out both hands to him.*] Mightn't they?

RAKITIN . I'm in your hands.... Do with me what you will. . . . [*The voice of ISLAYEV from the outer room: 'So you've sent for him, have you?'*]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*getting up quickly*]. Arkady! I can't see him just now. . . . Good-bye! [*Goes out by door on right.*]

RAKITIN [*looking after her*]. What does it mean? The beginning of the end, or the end? [*d brief pause.*] Or the beginning?

[*Enter ISLAYEV looking worried.*]

ISLAYEV [*taking off his hat*]. Good afternoon, Michel.

RAKITIN. We've seen each other already to-day.

ISLAYEV. Oh! I beg your pardon. . . . I've had so much to see to. . . . [*Walks up and down the room.*] It's a queer thing! The Russian peasant is very intelligent, very quick of understanding, I've a respect for the Russian peasant . . . and yet sometimes, you may talk to him, and explain away. . . . It's clear enough you'd think, but it's all no use at all. The Russian peasant hasn't that. . . that . . .

RAKITIN . You're still busy with the dam, are you?

ISLAYEV . That . . . so to speak . . . love for work . . . that's just it, he has no love for it. He won't let you tell him what you think properly. 'Yes, Sir.' . . . Yes, indeed, when he hasn't taken in a word. Look at a German now, it's quite a different thing! The Russian has no patience. For all that, I have a respect for him.... Where's Natasha? Do you know?

RAKITIN . She was here just now.

ISLAYEV . What time is it? Surely, dinner-time. I've been on my feet all day--such a lot to do. . . . And I haven't been to the building yet. . . . The time goes so fast. It's dreadful! One's simply behindhand with everything----- [*RAKITIN smiles.*] You're laughing at me, I see. . . . But I can't help it, old man. People are different. I'm a practical man, born to look after my land--and nothing else. There was a time when I dreamed of other things; but I burnt my fingers--I can tell you--came to grief, you know. Why

isn't Beliaev here?

RAKITIN . Who's Beliaev?

ISLAYEV . Our new teacher. He's a shy bird, but he'll get used to us. He has a head on his shoulders. I asked him to see how the building was going on to-day.... [*Enter BELIAYEV.*] Oh, here he is! Well, how are they getting on? Doing nothing, I expect?

BELIAYEV . No, Sir, they are working.

ISLAYEV . Have they finished the framing of the second barn?

BELIAYEV . They have begun the third.

ISLAYEV . And did you speak to them about the beams?

BELIAYEV . Yes.

ISLAYEV . Well, what did they say?

BELIAYEV . They say that's how they always do it.

ISLAYEV . Hm. ... Is Yermil the carpenter there?

BELIAYEV . Yes.

ISLAYEV . Ah! well, thanks! [*Enter NATALYA.*] Ah! Natasha! Good afternoon.

RAKITIN . Why twenty greetings to each of us to-day?

ISLAYEV . I tell you, I'm tired out with all I've had to see to. Oh! by the way. I haven't shown you my new winnowing machine, have I? Do come along, it's worth seeing. It's marvelous, a whirlwind, a regular whirlwind. We've time before dinner. . . . What do you say?

RAKITIN . Oh, by all means.

ISLAYEV . Won't you come with us, Natasha?

NATALYA PETROVNA . As though I know anything about your machines! You go by yourselves--and mind you're not late.

ISLAYEV [*going out with RAKITIN.*] We'll be back immediately.

[*BELIAYEV is about to follow them.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*to BELIAYEV.*] Where are you going, Alexey Nikolaitch?

BELIAYEV . I ... I ...

NATALYA PETROVNA . Of course go, if you want a walk. . . .

BELIAYEV . Why no, I've been out of doors all the morning.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Well, then, sit down. ... Sit here. [*Motions him to a chair.*] We have not had a proper talk, Alexey Nikolaitch. We have not made friends yet.

[*BELIAYEV bows and sits down.*] I want to get to know you.

BELIAYEV . I'm . . . it's very kind of you.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with a smile.*] You are afraid of me, I see ... but wait a little, you won't be afraid of me, when you know me. Tell me . . . tell me now how old are you?

BELIAYEV . Twenty-one.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Are your parents living?

BELIAYEV . My mother is dead, my father is living.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Has your mother been dead long?

BELIAYEV . Yes, a long time.

NATALYA PETROVNA . But you remember her?

BELIAYEV . Oh yes ... I remember her.

NATALYA PETROVNA . And does your father live in Moscow?

BELIAYEV . Oh no, in the country.

NATALYA PETROVNA . And have you any brothers and sisters?

BELIAYEV . One sister.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Are you fond of her?

BELIAYEV . Yes. She's much younger than I am.

NATALYA PETROVNA . And what's her name?

BELIAYEV . Natalya.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*eagerly*]. Natalya! How odd! I'm Natalya too! . . . [*Pauses.*] And you are very fond of her?

BELIAYEV . Yes.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Tell me what do you think of my Kolya?

BELIAYEV . He is a dear boy.

NATALYA PETROVNA . He is, isn't he? And so affectionate. He's devoted to you already.

BELIAYEV . I'll do my best. . . . I'm glad.

NATALYA PETROVNA . You see, Alexey Nikolaitch, of of course I should like to make him a thoroughly able man--I don't know whether I shall succeed in that, but anyway I want him to look back on his childhood with pleasure. Let him grow up in freedom, that's the great thing. I was brought up very differently, Alexey Nikolaitch; my father was not an unkind man, but he was stern and irritable; everyone in the house, including my mother, was afraid of him. My brother and I used to cross ourselves in terror whenever we were summoned to his room. Sometimes my father would pet me, but even in his arms I was in a panic. My brother grew up, and you may perhaps have heard of his rupture with my father. ... I shall never forget that awful day. ... I remained an obedient daughter up to my father's death. . . . He used to call me his consolation, his Antigone (he was blind for some years before his death) ... but however tender he was he could never make me forget those early impressions. ... I was afraid of him, a blind old man, and never felt at ease in his presence. The traces of timidity, of those years of repression, haven't perhaps quite disappeared even now.... I know that at first sight I seem ... how shall I say? . . . frigid, perhaps. . . . But I notice I'm talking to you about myself, instead of talking about Kolya. I only meant to say that I know from my own experience how good it is for a child to grow up in freedom. You now, I imagine, have never been repressed as a child, have you?

BELIAYEV . I don't know really. . . . Of course nobody repressed me, nobody bothered about me.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*shyly*]. Why, didn't your father...

BELIAYEV . He'd no time to spare. He was always going round among the neighbors ... on business ... or if not business exactly. . . . He got his living through them, in a way. . . . By his services. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh! So then nobody troubled about bringing you up?

BELIAYEV . As a matter of fact, nobody did. I dare say that's evident though, I'm only too aware of my defects.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Perhaps ... but on the other hand. . . . [*Checks herself and adds in some embarrassment.*] Oh, by the way, Alexey Nikolaitch, was that you singing in the garden yesterday?

BELIAYEV . When?

NATALYA PETROVNA . In the evening ... by the pond . . . was it you?

BELIAYEV . Yes. [*Hurriedly.*] I didn't think . . . the pond is such a long way off. ... I didn't think it could be heard from here.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Are you apologizing? You have a very pleasant musical voice and you sing so well. You have studied music?

BELIAYEV . No, not at all. I only sing by ear ... only simple songs.

NATALYA PETROVNA . You sing them capitally. ... I'll ask you some time . . . not just now, but when we know each other better, when we are friends. . . . We are going to be friends, Alexey Nikolaitch, aren't we? I feel confidence in you; the way I've been chattering is a proof of it. . . . [*She holds out her hand for him to shake hands. BELIAYEV takes it irresolutely and after some hesitation, not knowing what to do with the hand, kisses it. NATALYA PETROVNA flushes and draws away her hand. At that moment SHPIGELSKY comes in from the outer room, stops short, then takes a step forward, NATALYA PETROVNA gets up quickly, BELIAYEV does the same.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*embarrassed*]. Oh, it's you, Doctor . . . here Alexey Nikolaitch and I have been having. . . [*Stops.*]

SHPIGELSKY [*in a loud, free and easy voice*]. Really, Natalya Petrovna, the goings on in your house! I walk into the servants' hall and ask for the sick coachman, and my patient is sitting at the table gobbling up pancake and onion. Much good it is being a doctor and relying on illness for getting a living.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with a constrained smile*]. Really. [*BELIAYEV is about to go away.*] Alexey Nikolaitch, I forgot to tell you . . .

VERA [*running in from the outer room*]. Alexey Nikolaitch! Alexey Nikolaitch! [*She stops abruptly at the sight of NATALYA PETROVNA.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with some surprise*]. What is it?

What do you want?

VERA [*blushing and dropping her eyes, indicates BELIAYEV*].

He is wanted.

NATALYA PETROVNA . By whom?

VERA . Kolya . . . that is Kolya asked me . . . about the kite. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh! [*Aside to VERA.*] On n'entre pas comme cela dans une chambre. . . . Cela ne convient pas. [*Turning to SHPIGELSKY.*] What time is it, Doctor? Your watch is always right. . . . It's time for dinner.

SHPIGELSKY . Allow me. [*Takes out his watch.*] It is just... I beg to inform you . . . just exactly twenty minutes past four.

NATALYA PETROVNA . There, you see, it's dinner-time. [*Goes to the looking-glass and tidies her hair. Meanwhile VERA whispers something to BELIAYEV. Both laugh. NATALYA PETROVNA sees them reflected in the looking-glass. SHPIGELSKY gives her a sidelong look.*]

BELIAYEV [*laughing, in a low voice*]. Really?

VERA [*nodding and speaking in a low voice too*]. Yes, yes, she just went flop.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*turning with assumed indifference to VERA*]. What? Who went flop?

VERA [*in confusion*]. Oh no ... Alexey Nikolaitch made us a swing, and so nurse took it into her head . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*without waiting for her to finish, turns to SHPIGELSKY*]. Oh, by the way, Shpigelsky, come here. . . . [*She draws him aside and speaks again to VERA.*] She wasn't hurt, I hope?

VERA . Oh, no!

NATALYA PETROVNA . But ... all the same, Alexey Nikolaitch, you shouldn't have done it.

MATVEY [*enters from the outer room and announces*]. Dinner is served.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Ah! But where is Arkady Sergey-itch? They'll be late again, he and Mikhail Alexandritch.

MATVEY . The gentlemen are in the dining-room.

NATALYA PETROVNA . And mother?

MATVEY . Madam is in the dining-room too.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Well, then, come along. [*Motioning to BELIAYEV.*] Vera, allez en avant avec monsieur.

[*MATVEY goes out, followed by VERA and BELIAYEV. SHPIGELSKY [to NATALYA PETROVNA]*

You had something to say to me.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh yes! To be sure. ... You see ... we'll have another talk about. ... your proposal.

SHPIGELSKY. Concerning . . . Vera Alexandrovna?

NATALYA PETROVNA. Yes . . . I will think about it.

I'll think about it. [*Both go out.*]

## ACT II

*The garden. Seats to Right and to Left under trees; in the foreground raspberry bushes. KATYA and MATVEY come in on Right. KATYA has a basket in her hand.*

MATVEY . So how is it to be, Katerina Vassilyevna? Kindly explain yourself, I beg you earnestly.

KATYA . Matvey Yegoritch, I really can't.

MATVEY . You are very well aware, Katerina Vassilyevna, what my feelings, I may say, are for you. To be sure, I'm older than you in years, there's no denying that, certainly; but I can still hold my own, I'm still in my prime. I'm of mild disposition, as you are aware; I should like to know what more you want?

KATYA . Matvey Yegoritch, believe me, I feel it very much, I'm very grateful, Matvey Yegoritch. . . . But you see ... Better wait a bit, I think.

MATVEY . But, dear me, what is there to wait for, Katerina Vassilyevna? You used not to say that, allow me to tell you. And as for consideration, I can answer for that, I believe I may say----- You couldn't ask for more consideration than you will get from me, Katerina Vassilyevna. And I'm not given to drink, and I never hear a word of blame from the master and mistress either.

KATYA . Really, Matvey Yegoritch, I don't know what to say. . . .

MATVEY . Ah, Katerina Vassilyevna, something's come over you lately. . . .

KATYA [*blushing a little*]. Lately? Why lately?

MATVEY . I don't know . . . but there was a time when you didn't treat me like this.

KATYA [*glancing hurriedly behind the scene*]. Mind.... The German's coming.

MATVEY [*with annoyance*]. Bother him, the long-nosed crane! ... I must talk to you again. [*He goes out to Right. KATYA is moving towards the raspberries. Enter SCHAAF from the Left with a fishing-rod on his shoulder.*]

SCHAAF [*calling after KATYA*]. Vere you go, vere you go, Katerin?

KATYA [*stopping*]. We've been told to pick raspberries, Adam Ivanitch.

SCHAAF . Raspberries? . . . The raspberry is a pleasant fruit. You love raspberries?

KATYA . Yes, I like them.

SCHAAF . He ... he! And I do too! I love all that you love. [*Seeing that she is going.*] Oh, Katerin, wait a leetle.

KATYA . I've no time to spare. The housekeeper will scold me.

SCHAAF . Oh! That's nothing. You see I'm going . . . [*Points to the rod*] how do you say ... to feesh, you understand, to feesh, that is, to catch feesh. You love feesh?

KATYA . Yes.

SCHAAF . He, he, I do too, I do too. Do you know what I will tell you, Katerin. There's a song in German: [*Sings*] Katrinchen, Katrinchen, wie lieb ich dich so sehr! that is, in Russian, O Katrinushka, Katrinushka, you are so pretty I love you! [*Tries to put one arm round her.*]

KATYA . Give over, give over, for shame. . . . Here's the mistress coming! [*Escapes into the raspberry patch.*]

SCHAAF [*assuming a glum expression, aside*]. Das ist dumm. . . .

[*Enter on Right NATALYA PETROVNA, arm in arm with RAKITIN.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*to SCHAAF*]. Ah! Adam Ivanitch! Are you going fishing?

SCHAAF. Yes, madam.

NATALYA PETROVNA. Where's Kolya?

SCHAAF . With Lizaveta Bogdanovna . . . the music lesson.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Ah! [*Looking round.*] You are alone here?

SCHAAF . Yes.

NATALYA PETROVNA . You haven't seen Alexey Nikolaitch then?

SCHAAF . No, madam.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*after a pause*]. We'll go with you, Adam Ivanitch, shall we? We'll look on while you fish.

SCHAAF . I am very glad.

RAKITIN [*aside to NATALYA PETROVNA*]. What possesses you?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Come along, come along, beau ténébreux.

[*All three go out on Right.*]

KATYA [*cautiously raising her head above the raspberries*]. They've gone. . . . [*Comes out, stops for a little and ponders.*] That German! . . . [*Sighs and begins picking raspberries again, singing in a low voice.*]

'No fire is burning, no ember is glowing, But the wild heart is glowing, is burning.'

Yes, Matvey Yegoritch is right! [*Goes on singing.*]

'But the wild heart is glowing, is burning, Not for father dear, not for mother dear. . . .'

What big raspberries! . . . [*Goes on singing.*]

'Not for father dear, not for mother dear.' How hot it is! Stifling. . . . [*Goes on singing.*]

'Not for father dear, not for mother dear, It glows and it burns for. . . .'

[*Suddenly turns round; is quiet and half hides behind the bushes. From Left BELIAYEV and VERA come in; BELIAYEV has a kite in his hand.*]

BELIAYEV [*as he passes the raspberries, to KATYA*]. Why have you stopped, Katya? [*Sings.*]

'It glows and it burns for a maiden so fair.'

KATYA [*blushing*]. That's not how we sing it.

BELIAYEV . How then? [*KATYA laughs and does not answer.*] What are you doing? Picking raspberries? Let us taste them.

KATYA [*giving him the basket*]. Take them all.

BELIAYEV . Why all? . . . Vera Alexandrovna, won't you have some? [VERA *takes some from the basket, and he does so too.*] Well, that's enough. [*Is giving back the basket to KATYA.*]

KATYA [*putting back his hand*]. Take them, take them all.

BELIAYEV . No, thanks, Katya. [*Gives her the basket.*] Thank you. [*To VERA.*] Vera Alexandrovna, let's sit down on this seat. You see [*Showing the kite*] we must fasten the tail on. You'll help me. [*They go and sit down on the seat. BELIAYEV puts the kite in her hands.*] That's it. Mind now, hold it straight. [*Begins to tie on the tail.*] What's the matter?

VERA . I can't see you.

BELIAYEV. Why must you see me?

VERA. I mean I want to see how you fix the tail on.

BELIAYEV. Oh--wait a minute. [*Arranges the kite so that she can see him.*] Katya, why aren't you singing? Sing. [*After a brief interval KATYA begins singing in a low voice.*]

VERA. Tell me, Alexey Nikolaitch, do you sometimes fly kites in Moscow too?

BELIAYEV . I've no time for kites in Moscow! Hold the string, that's right. Do you suppose we've nothing else to do in Moscow?

VERA . What do you do in Moscow?

BELIAYEV . What do we do? We study, listen to the professors.

VERA . What do they teach you?

BELIAYEV . Everything.

VERA . I expect you're a very good student. Better than all the rest.

BELIAYEV . No, I'm not very good. Better than all the rest, indeed! I'm lazy.

VERA . Why are you lazy?

BELIAYEV . Goodness knows! I was born so, apparently.

VERA [*after a pause*]. Have you any friends in Moscow?

BELIAYEV . Of course. . . I say, this string isn't strong enough.

VERA . And are you fond of them?

BELIAYEV . I should think so. Aren't you fond of your friends?

VERA . I haven't any.

BELIAYEV . I meant the girls you know.

VERA [*slowly*]. Yes.

BELIAYEV . I suppose you have some girl-friends?

VERA . Yes . . . only I don't know why . . . for some time past I've not thought much about them. . . I haven't even answered Lisa Moshnin, though she begged me to in her letter.

BELIAYEV . How can you say you have no friends . . . what am I?

VERA [*with a smile*]. Oh, you ... that's a different thing. [*After a pause*], Alexey Nikolaitch.

BELIAYEV . Well?

VERA . Do you write poetry?

BELIAYEV . No. . . . Why?

VERA . Oh, nothing. [*After a pause*] A girl in our school used to write poetry.

BELIAYEV [*pulling the knot with his teeth*]. Did she? Was it good?

VERA . I don't know. She used to read it to us, and we cried.

BELIAYEV . What did you cry for?

VERA . Pity. We were all so sorry for her.

BELIAYEV . Were you educated in Moscow?

VERA . Yes, at Madame Beauluce's school in Moscow. Natalya Petrovna took me away last year.

BELIAYEV . Are you fond of Natalya Petrovna?

VERA . Yes, she's so kind. I'm very fond of her.

BELIAYEV [*with a smile*]. And you're afraid of her, I bet.

VERA [*also with a smile*]. A little.

BELIAYEV [*after a pause*]. And who sent you to school?

VERA . Natalya Petrovna's mother. I grew up in her house. I'm an orphan.

BELIAYEV [*letting his hands fall*]. You're an orphan? And you don't remember your father or your mother?

VERA . No.

BELIAYEV , My mother is dead too. We are both motherless. Well we must put up with it! We mustn't be down-hearted for all that.

VERA . They say orphans quickly make friends with one another.

BELIAYEV [*looking into her eyes*]. Do they? And do you think so?

VERA [*looks into his eyes with a smile*]. I think they do.

BELIAYEV [*laughs and sets to work on the kite again*]. I should like to know how long I've been in these parts.

VERA . This is the twenty-eighth day.

BELIAYEV . What a memory you have! Well, here's the kite finished. Look what a tail! We must go and fetch Kolya.

KATYA [*Coming up to him with the basket*]. Won't you have some more raspberries?

BELIAYEV . No, thanks, Katya. [*KATYA goes off without speaking.*]

VERA . Kolya's with Lizaveta Bogdanovna.

BELIAYEV . How absurd to keep a child indoors in this weather!

VERA . Lizaveta Bogdanovna would only be in our way. . .

BELIAYEV . But I'm not talking about her. . . .

VERA [*hurriedly*]. Kolya couldn't come with us without her. . . . She was praising you ever so yesterday, though.

BELIAYEV . Really?

VERA . Don't you like her?

BELIAYEV . Oh, I don't mind her. Let her enjoy her snuff, bless the woman. Why do you sigh?

VERA [*after a pause*]. I don't know. How clear the sky is!

BELIAYEV . Does that make you sigh? [*A silence.*] Perhaps you are depressed?

VERA . Depressed? No! I never know myself why I sigh. . . . I'm not depressed at all. On the contrary . . . [*A pause.*] I don't know.... I think I can't be quite well. Yesterday I went upstairs to fetch a book--and all at once, fancy, on the staircase, I sat down and began to cry. Goodness knows why, and my tears kept on coming into my eyes for a long while afterwards. . . . What's the meaning of it? And yet I am quite happy.

BELIAYEV . It's because you're growing. It's growing up. It does happen so. ... Of course, I noticed your eyes looked swollen yesterday evening.

VERA . You noticed it?

BELIAYEV . Yes.

VERA . You notice everything.

BELIAYEV . Oh no, not everything.

VERA [*dreamily*]. Alexey Nikolaitch . . .

BELIAYEV . What is it?

VERA [*after a pause*]. What was it I was going to ask you? I've forgotten what I was going to say.

BELIAYEV . You are absent-minded!

VERA . No . . . but ... oh yes! This is what I meant to ask. I think you told me--you have a sister?

BELIAYEV . Yes.

VERA . Tell me, am I like her?

BELIAYEV . Oh no. You're much better looking.

VERA . How can that be? Your sister ... I should like to be in her place.

BELIAYEV . What? You'd like to be in our poor little house at this moment?

VERA . I didn't mean that. ... Is your home so small?

BELIAYEV . Tiny. Very different from this house.

VERA . Well, what's the use of so many rooms?

BELIAYEV . What's the use? You'll find out one day how useful rooms are.

VERA . One day. . . . When?

BELIAYEV . When you're the mistress of a house yourself. . . .

VERA [*dreamily*]. Do you think so?

BELIAYEV . Yes, you will see. [*A pause.*] Hadn't we better go and fetch Kolya, Vera Alexandrovna?

VERA . Why don't you call me Verotchka?

BEHAYEV . You can't call me Alexey, can you?

VERA . Why not?... [*Suddenly starting.*] Oh!

BELIAYEV . What's the matter?

VERA [*in a low voice*]. There's Natalya Petrovna coming this way.

BELIAYEV [*also in a low voice*]. Where?

VERA [*nodding towards the Right*]. Over there . . . along the path, with Mikhail Alexandritch.

BELIAYEV [*getting up*]. Let's go to Kolya.... He must have finished his lesson by now.

VERA . Let's go ... or I'm afraid she'll scold me. . . . [*They get up and walk away quickly to the Left.*  
KATYA *hides again in the raspberry bushes.* NATALYA PETROVNA *and* RAKITIN *come in on Right.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*standing still*]. I believe that's Mr. Beliayev with Vera.

RAKITIN . Yes, it is. ...

NATALYA PETROVNA . It looks as though they were running away from us.

RAKITIN . Perhaps they are.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*after a pause*]. But I don't think Verotchka ought... to be alone like this with a young man in the garden. . . . Of course, she's only a child, still, it's not the proper thing. . . . I'll tell her.

RAKITIN . How old is she?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Seventeen! She's actually seventeen. ... It is hot to-day. I'm tired. Let's sit down. [*They sit down on the seat on which VERA and BELIAYEV have been sitting.*] Has Shpigelsky gone home?

RAKITIN . Yes, he's gone.

NATALYA PETROVNA . It's a pity you didn't keep him. I can't imagine what induced that man to become a district doctor. . . . He's very amusing. He makes me laugh.

RAKITIN . Well, I thought you were not in a very laughing humor to-day.

NATALYA PETROVNA . What made you think that?

RAKITIN . Oh, I don't know.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Because nothing sentimental appeals to me to-day? Oh, certainly, I must warn you there's absolutely nothing that could touch me to-day. . . . But that doesn't prevent me from laughing; on the contrary. Besides, there's something I had to discuss with Shpigelsky to-day.

RAKITIN . May I ask what?

NATALYA PETROVNA . No, you mayn't. As it is, you know everything I think, everything I do. That's boring.

RAKITIN . I beg your pardon. ... I had no idea. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . I want to have some secrets from you.

RAKITIN . What next! From what you say, one might suppose I know everything. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*interrupting*]. And don't you?

RAKITIN . You are pleased to make fun of me.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Why don't you know everything that goes on in me? If you don't I can't congratulate you on your insight. When a man watches me from morning to night. . . .

RAKITIN . What do you mean? Is that a reproach. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . A reproach? [*A pause.*] No, I see; you certainly have not much insight.

RAKITIN . Perhaps not . . . but since I watch you from morning to night, allow me to tell you one thing I have noticed. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . About me? Please do.

RAKITIN . You won't be angry with me?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh no! I should like to be, but I shan't.

RAKITIN . For some time past, Natalya Petrovna, you have been in a state of permanent irritability, and that irritability is something unconscious, involuntary: you seem to be in a state of inward conflict, as though you were perplexed. I had never observed anything of the sort in you before my visit to the Krinitzyns'; it has only come on lately. [NATALYA PETROVNA *draws lines in the sand before her with her parasol.*] At times you sigh--such deep, deep sighs --like a man who's very tired, so tired that he can't find rest.

NATALYA PETROVNA . And what do you deduce from that, you observant person?

RAKITIN . I deduce? Nothing. . . . But it worries me.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Humbly grateful for your sympathy.

RAKITIN . And besides . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with some impatience*]. Please, change the subject.

[*A pause.*]

RAKITIN . You have no plans for going out anywhere to-day?

NATALYA PETROVNA . No.

RAKITIN . Why not? It's so fine.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Too lazy. [*A pause.*] Tell me . . . you know Bolshintsov, of course?

RAKITIN . Our neighbour, Afanasy Ivanitch?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes.

RAKITIN . What a question! Only the day before yesterday we were playing preference with him in your house.

NATALYA PETROVNA . I want to know what sort of man he is.

RAKITIN . Bolshintsov?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes, yes, Bolshintsov.

RAKITIN . Well, I must say, that I never expected that!

NATALYA PETROVNA [*impatiently*]. What didn't you expect?

RAKITIN . That you would ever be making inquiries about Bolshintsov! A foolish, fat, tedious man-- though of course there's no harm in the man.

NATALYA PETROVNA . He's by no means so foolish or tedious as you think.

RAKITIN . Perhaps not. I must own, I haven't studied the gentleman very carefully.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*ironically*]. You haven't been watching him.

RAKITIN [*with a constrained smile*]. And what has induced you? . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh, nothing! [*Again a pause.*]

RAKITIN . Look, Natalya Petrovna, how lovely that dark green oak is against the dark blue sky. It's all bathed in the sunlight and what rich colors . . . What inexhaustible life and strength in it especially when you compare it with that young birch tree. . . . She looks as though she might pass away in radiance, her tiny leaves gleam with a liquid brilliance, as though melting, yet she is lovely too. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Do you know, Rakitin, I noticed it ages ago. You have a very delicate feeling for the so-called beauties of nature, and talk very elegantly and cleverly about them ... so elegantly and cleverly that I imagine nature ought to be unutterably grateful for your choice and happy phrases; you dance attendance on her like a perfumed marquis on high red heels dallying with a pretty peasant girl. . . . Only I'll tell you what's wrong, it sometimes seems to me that she could never understand or appreciate your subtle observations, just as the peasant girl wouldn't understand the courtly compliments of the marquis; nature is far simpler, even coarser, than you suppose, because, thank God, she's healthy. . . . Birch trees don't melt or fall into swoons like nervous ladies.

RAKITIN . Quelle tirade! Nature is healthy . . . that is, in other words, I'm a sickly creature.

NATALYA PETROVNA . You're not the only sickly creature, we are neither of us too healthy.

RAKITIN . Oh, I know that way of telling a person the most unpleasant things in the most inoffensive way. . . . Instead of telling him to his face, for instance, you're a fool, my friend, you need only tell him with a good-natured smile, we are both fools, you know.

NATALYA PETROVNA . You're offended? What nonsense! I only meant to say that we are both . . . since you don't like the word sickly .. we are both old, very old.

RAKITIN . In what way are we old? I don't think so of myself.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Well, listen; here we are sitting ... on this very seat a quarter of an hour ago two really young creatures have been sitting, perhaps.

RAKITIN . Beliayev and Verotchka? Of course they are younger than we are . . . there's a few years' difference between us, that's all. . . . But that doesn't make us old yet.

NATALYA PETROVNA . The difference between us is not only in years.

RAKITIN . Ah! I understand. . . . You envy them . . . their naïveté; their freshness and innocence . . . their foolishness, in fact.

NATALYA PETROVNA . You think so? Oh, you think that they are foolish? You think everybody foolish to-day, I see. No, you don't understand me. And besides . . . foolish? What does that matter? What's the good of being clever, if you're not amusing. Nothing is *more* depressing than that sort of gloomy cleverness.

RAKITIN . Hm. . . . Why don't you say it straight out, without these hints? I don't amuse you . . . that's what you mean. Why find fault with cleverness in general on account of one miserable sinner like me?

NATALYA PETROVNA . No, that's not what I mean. . . . [KATYA comes out from among the bushes.] Have you been picking raspberries, Katya?

KATYA . Yes, madam.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Show me. [KATYA goes up to her.] What splendid raspberries! What a color . . . though your cheeks are redder still. [KATYA smiles and looks down.] Well, run along---

[KATYA goes out]

RAKITIN . There's a young creature after your taste.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Of course. [Gets up]

RAKITIN . Where are you going?

NATALYA PETROVNA . First, I want to see what Verotchka's doing . . . it's time she was indoors . . . and secondly I must own I don't like our conversation. We had better drop our discussions of nature and youth for a time.

RAKITIN . Perhaps you would rather walk alone?

NATALYA PETROVNA . To tell the truth, I should. We shall see each other again soon. . . . But we are parting friends? [Holds out her hand to him]

RAKITIN [getting up]. Yes indeed! [Presses her hand]

NATALYA PETROVNA . Good-bye for the present. [She opens her parasol and goes off at Left]

RAKITIN [walks up and down for some time]. What is the matter with her? [A pause.] Simply caprice. But is it? I have never seen that in her before. On the contrary, I know no woman less moody. What is the reason? [Walks to and fro again and suddenly stands still.] Ah, how absurd a man is who has only one idea in his head, one object, one interest in life. . . . Like me, for instance. It was true what she said: one keeps watching trifling things from morning to night, and one grows trivial oneself. . . . That's so; but without her I can't live, in her presence I am more than happy; the feeling can't be called happiness, I belong to her entirely, parting from her would . . . without exaggeration ... be exactly like parting with life. What is wrong with her? What's the meaning of her agitation, the involuntary bitterness of her words? Is she beginning to be weary of me? Hm? [Sits down.] I have never deceived myself, I know very well how she loves me; but I hoped that with time that quiet feeling ... I hoped? Have I the right to hope, dare I hope? I confess my position is pretty absurd . . . almost contemptible. . . . [A pause.] What's the use of talking like that? She's an honest woman, and I'm not a Lovelace. [With a bitter smile.] More's the pity! [Getting up quickly.] Well, that's enough! I must put this nonsense out of my head! [Walking up and down.] What a glorious day! [A pause.] How skilfully she stung me! ... My choice and happy expressions. . . . She's very clever, especially when she's in a bad humor And what's this sudden adoration of youth and innocence? . . . This tutor. . . . She often talks about him. I must say I see nothing very striking in him. He's simply a student, like all students. Can she . . . impossible! She's out of humor . . . she doesn't know what she wants and so she snaps at me, as children beat their nurse. ... A flattering comparison! But she must go her own way. When this fit of depression and uneasiness is over, she will be the first to laugh at that lanky boy, that raw youth. . . . Your explanation is not bad, Mikhail Alex-andritch, but is it true? God knows! Well, we shall see. It's not the first time, my dear fellow, that after endless fretting and pondering you have had suddenly to give up all your subtle conjectures, fold you hands and wait meekly for what is to come. And meanwhile you must recognize it's pretty awkward and bitter for you. . . . But that's what I'm for, it seems. . . . [Looking round.] Ah, here he is, our unsophisticated young man! . . . Just when he's wanted. ... I haven't once had a real talk with him. Let's see what he's like. [BELIAYEV comes in on Left.] Ah! Alexey Nikolaitch! So

you have come out for a turn in the fresh air too?

BELIAYEV . Yes.

RAKITIN . Though I must say the air is not so very fresh to-day: the heat's terrific, but in the shade here under these lime trees it's endurable. *[A pause.]* Did you see Natalya Petrovna?

BELIAYEV . I met her just now. ... She's gone indoors with Vera Alexandrovna.

RAKITIN . Wasn't it you I saw here half an hour ago with Vera Alexandrovna?

BELIAYEV . Yes. ... We were having a walk.

RAKITIN . Ah! *[Takes his arm.]* Well, how do you like living in the country?

BELIAYEV . I like the country. The only thing is, the shooting is not good here.

RAKITIN . You're fond of shooting then?

BELIAYEV . Yes. . . . Aren't you?

RAKITIN . I? No; I'm a poor shot. I'm too lazy.

BELIAYEV . I'm lazy too . . . but not in that way.

RAKITIN . Oh! Are you lazy about reading then?

BELIAYEV . No, I love reading. But I'm too lazy to work long at a time, especially too lazy to go on doing the same thing.

RAKITIN *[Smiling.]* Talking to ladies, for instance?

BELIAYEV . Ah, you're laughing at me. . . . I'm frightened of ladies.

RAKITIN *[Slightly embarrassed].* What an idea! Why should I laugh at you?

BELIAYEV . Oh, that's all right. ... I don't mind! *[A pause.]* Tell me where can I get gunpowder about here?

RAKITIN . You can get it no doubt in the town; it is sold there. But do you want good powder?

BELIAYEV . No, it's not for shooting, it's for making fireworks.

RAKITIN . Oh, can you make them?

BELIAYEV . Yes; I've picked out the right place already, the other side of the pond. I heard it's Natalya Petrovna's name-day next week, so they will come in for that.

RAKITIN . Natalya Petrovna will be pleased at such an attention from you. She likes you, Alexey Nikolaitch, I may tell you.

BELIAYEV . I'm very much flattered. . . . Ah, by the way, Mikhail Alexandritch, I believe you take a magazine. Could you let me have it to read?

RAKITIN . Certainly, with pleasure. . . . There's good poetry in it.

BELIAYEV . I'm not fond of poetry.

RAKITIN . How's that?

BELIAYEV . I don't know. Comic verses strike me as far-fetched, besides there aren't many; and sentimental ones. ... I don't know. There's something unreal in them somehow.

RAKITIN . You prefer novels?

BELIAYEV . Yes. I like good novels; but critical articles--they appeal to me-----

RAKITIN . Oh, why?

BELIAYEV . It's a fine man that writes them.

RAKITIN . And you don't go in for authorship yourself?

BELIAYEV . Oh no! It's silly to write if you've no talent. It only makes people laugh at you. Besides, it's a queer thing, I wish you would explain it to me, sometimes a man seems sensible enough, but when he takes up a pen he's perfectly hopeless. No, writing's not for us, we must thank God if we understand what's written.

RAKITIN . Do you know, Alexey Nikolaitch, not many young men have as much common sense as you have.

BELIAYEV . Thank you for the compliment. [*A pause.*] I'm going to let off the fireworks the other side of the pond, because I can make Roman candles, and they will be reflected in the water...

RAKITIN . That will be beautiful. . . . Excuse me, Alexey Nikolaitch, by the way, do you know French?

BELIAYEV . No, I translated a novel of Paul de Kock's, 'La Laitiere de Montfermeil,' perhaps you've heard of it, for fifty rubles; but I didn't know a word of French. For instance: quatre-vingt-dix I translated four-twenty-ten. . . . Being hard-up drove me to it, you know. But it's a pity. I should like to know French. It's my cursed laziness. I should like to read Georges Sand in French. But the accent . . . how is one to get over the accent? An, on, en, in, isn't it awful?

RAKITIN . Well, that's a difficulty that can be got over. . . .

BELIAYEV . Please tell me, what's the time?

RAKITIN [*looking at his watch*]. Half-past one.

BELIAYEV . Lizaveta Bogdanovna is keeping Kolya a long time at the piano. ... I bet he's dying to be running about.

RAKITIN [*cordially*]. But one has to study too, you know, Alexey Nikolaitch. . . .

BELIAYEV [*with a sigh*]. You oughtn't to have to say that, Mikhail Alexandritch, and I oughtn't to have to hear it. . . . Of course, it would never do for everyone to be a loafer like me.

RAKITIN . Oh, nonsense. . . .

BELIAYEV . But I know that only too well.

RAKITIN . Well, I know too, on the contrary, that just what you regard as a defect, your impulsiveness, your freedom from constraint is what's attractive.

BELIAYEV . To whom, for instance?

RAKITIN . Well, to Natalya Petrovna, for example.

BELIAYEV . Natalya Petrovna? With her I don't feel that I am free, as you call it.

RAKITIN . Ah! Is that really so?

BELIAYEV . And after all, Mikhail Alexandritch, isn't education the thing that matters most in a man? It's easy for you to talk.... I can't make you out, really. [*Suddenly looking round.*] What's that? I thought I heard a corncrake calling in the garden. [*Is about to go*]

RAKITIN . Perhaps. . . . But where are you off to?

BELIAYEV . To fetch my gun. . . . [*Goes to Left; NATALYA PETROVNA comes in, meeting him.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*seeing him, suddenly smiles*]. Where are you going, Alexey Nikolaitch?

BELIAYEV. I was . . .

RAKITIN. To fetch his gun. . . . He heard a cornrake in the garden. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . No, please don't shoot in the garden. . . . Let the poor bird live. . . . Besides, you may startle Granny.

BELIAYEV . I obey, madam.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*laughing*]. Oh, Alexey Nikolaitch, aren't you ashamed? 'I obey, madam,' what a way to speak! How can you . . . talk like that? But wait, you see Mikhail Alexandritch and I will see to your education. . . . Yes, yes ... we have talked together about you more than once already. . . . There's a plot against you, I warn you. . . . You will let me have a hand in your education, won't you?

BELIAYEV . Why, of course. ... I shall be only too . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . To begin with, don't be shy, it doesn't suit you at all. Yes, we will look after you. [*Indicating RAKITIN.*] We are old people, you know, he and I, while you are young. You are, aren't you? You will see how good it will be. You will look after Kolya and I .. . we . . . , will look after you.

BELIAYEV . I shall be *very* grateful.

NATALYA PETROVNA . That's right. What have Mikhail Alexandritch and you been talking about?

RAKITIN [*smiling*]. He has been telling me how he translated a French book without knowing a word of French.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Ah! Now there, we will teach you French. What have you done with your kite, by the way?

BELIAYEV . I've taken it indoors. I thought you didn't like it.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with some embarrassment*]. What made you think that? Was it because of Vera . . . because I took Vera indoors? No, that . . . No, you were mistaken. [*Eagerly.*] I tell you what . . . Kolya must have finished his lesson by now. Let us take him and Vera and the kite, shall we? . . . and all of us together fly it in the meadow? Yes?

BELIAYEV . With pleasure, Natalya Petrovna.

NATALYA PETROVNA . That's right then. Come, let us go, let us go. [*Ho/ding out her arm to him.*] But take my arm, how awkward you are! Come along . . . make haste. [*They go off quickly to Left.*]

RAKITIN [*looking after them*]. What eagerness . . . what gaiety. ... I have never seen a look like that on her face. And what a sudden transformation! [*A pause.*] Souvent femme varie. . . . But ... I am certainly not in her good books to-day. That's clear. [*A pause.*] Well, we shall see what will come later. [*Slowly*] Is it possible? . . . [*With a gesture of dismissal*] It can't be! ... But that smile, that warm, soft, bright look in her eyes. ... O God spare me from knowing the tortures of jealousy, especially a senseless jealousy! [*Suddenly looking round.*] Hullo, what do I see? [*SHPIGELSKY and BOLSHINTSOV enter from Left. RAKITIN goes to meet them*] Good day, gentlemen. ... I confess I didn't expect to see you to-day, Shpigelsky.... [*Shakes hands.*]

SHPIGELSKY . Well, I didn't expect it myself. ... I never imagined. . . . But you see I called in on him [*Indicating BOLSHINTSOV*] and he was already sitting in his carriage, coming here. So I turned round and came back with him.

RAKITIN . Well, you are very welcome.

BOLSHINTSOV . I certainly was intending ...

SHPIGELSKY [*cutting him short*]. The servants told us you were all in the garden. . . . Anyway there was nobody in the drawing-room. . .

RAKITIN . But didn't you meet Natalya Petrovna?

SHPIGELSKY . When?

RAKITIN . Why, just now.

SHPIGELSKY . No. We didn't come here straight from the house. Afanasy Ivanovitch wanted to see whether there were any mushrooms in the copse.

BOLSHINTSOV [*surprised*]. I really . . .

SHPIGELSKY . Oh, there, we know how fond you are of mushrooms. So Natalya Petrovna has gone in? Well then, we can go back again.

BOLSHINTSOV . Of course.

RAKITIN . Yes, she has gone in to fetch them all out for a walk.... They are going to fly a kite, I believe.

SHPIGELSKY . Ah! That's capital. It's just the weather for a walk.

RAKITIN . You can stay here. . . I'll go in and tell her you have come.

SHPIGELSKY . Why should you trouble. . . Really, Mikhail Alexandritch . . .

RAKITIN . No trouble. . . I'm going in anyway. . . .

SHPIGELSKY . Oh, well, in that case we won't keep you. . . No ceremony, you know. . . .

RAKITIN . Good-bye for the present. . . . [*Goes out to Left.*]

SHPIGELSKY . Good-bye. [*To BOLSHINTSOV.*] Well, Afanasy Ivanovitch. . . .

BOLSHINTSOV [*interrupting him*]. What did you mean about mushrooms, Ignaty Ilyitch? . . . I'm amazed, what mushrooms?

SHPIGELSKY . Upon my soul, would you have had me say my Afanasy Ivanovitch was overcome with shyness; he wouldn't go straight in, and insisted on taking another turn?

BOLSHINTSOV . That's so ... but all the same, mushrooms. ... I don't know, may be I'm mistaken....

SHPIGELSKY . You certainly are, my dear fellow. I'll tell you what you'd better be thinking about. You see we've come here . . . done as you wished. Look out now and don't make a mess of it.

BOLSHINTSOV . But, Ignaty Ilyitch, you know you. . . . You told me, I mean ... I should like to know for certain what answer . . .

SHPIGELSKY . My honored friend! It's reckoned over fifteen miles from your place here; at least three times every mile you put that very question to me. . . . Isn't that enough for you? Now listen; but this is the last time I give way to you. This is what Natalya Petrovna said to me: 'I . . .'

BOLSHINTSOV [*nodding*]. Yes.

SHPIGELSKY [*with annoyance*]. Yes! Why, what do you mean by 'yes'? I've told you nothing yet. ... 'I don't know,' says she, 'Mr. Bolshintsov very well, but he seems to me a good man; on the other hand, I don't intend to force Vera's inclinations; and so, let him visit us, and if he wins . . .'

BOLSHINTSOV . Wins? She said 'wins'?

SHPIGELSKY . 'If he wins her affections, Anna Semyon-ovna and I will not oppose . . .'

BOLSHINTSOV . Will not oppose? Is that what she said? Will not oppose?

SHPIGELSKY . Yes, yes, yes. What a queer fellow you are! 'We will not oppose their happiness.'

BOLSHINTSOV . Hm.

SHPIGELSKY . 'Their happiness.' . . . Yes, but observe, Afanasy Ivanitch, what your task is now. . . . You have now to persuade Vera Alexandrovna herself that marrying you really will be happiness for her; you have to win her affection.

BOLSHINTSOV [*blinking*]. Yes, yes, win . . . exactly so. I agree with you.

SHPIGELSKY . You insisted on my bringing you here. . . . Well, let's see how you will act.

BOLSHINTSOV . Act? Yes, yes, we must act, we must win . . . exactly so. Only you see, Ignaty Ilyitch . . . May I confess, admit to you, as to my best friend, one of my weaknesses: I did, as you truly say, wish you to bring me here to-day. . . .

SHPIGELSKY . You didn't wish it, you insisted, absolutely insisted on it...

BOLSHINTSOV . Oh, well, we'll grant that. . . . I agree with you. But you see . . . at home . . . I certainly . . . at home I felt I was ready for anything; but now you know I feel overcome with fears.

SHPIGELSKY . But what are you afraid of?

BOLSHINTSOV [*glancing at him from under his brows*]. The risk, sir.

SHPIGELSKY . Wha-at?

BOLSHINTSOV . The risk. There's a great risk. I must, Ignaty Ilyitch, I must confess to you that. . .

SHPIGELSKY [*interrupting him*]. As to 'your best friend.' We know all about it. . . . Get on. . . .

BOLSHINTSOV . Exactly so. . . . I agree with you. I must confess to you, Ignaty Ilyitch, that I have had very little to do with ladies, with the female sex, in general, if I may say so; I will confess frankly, Ignaty Ilyitch, that I simply can't imagine what one can talk about to a person of the female sex--and alone with her too . . . and especially a young lady.

SHPIGELSKY . You surprise me. I really don't know what one can't talk about to a person of the female sex, especially a young lady, and particularly alone with her.

BOLSHINTSOV . Oh . . . you . . . Good gracious, but I'm not you. So you see it's just in this case I want to appeal to you, Ignaty Ilyitch. They say that in these affairs it's the first step that counts, so couldn't you just . . . to give me a start in the conversation . . . tell me of something to say, something agreeable in the way, for instance, of an observation . . . and then I can get along. After that I could manage somehow by myself.

SHPIGELSKY . I won't tell you anything to say, Afanasy Ivanovitch, because nothing I could tell you would be of any use to you . . . but I will give you some advice if you like.

BOLSHINTSOV . My dear sir, pray do. . . . And as to my gratitude . . . you know . . .

SHPIGELSKY . Oh, come, come, I'm not bargaining with you, am I?

BOLSHINTSOV [*dropping his voice*]. You can reckon on the three horses.

SHPIGELSKY . Oh, that will do. . . . You see, Afanasy Ivanovitch . . . You are unquestionably a capital fellow in every respect . . . [*BOLSHINTSOV makes a slight bow*] a man of excellent qualities. . . .

BOLSHINTSOV . Oh dear!

SHPIGELSKY . You are, besides, the owner, I believe, of three hundred serfs.

BOLSHINTSOV . Three hundred and twenty, sir.

SHPIGELSKY . Not mortgaged?

BOLSHINTSOV . I owe nobody a farthing.

SHPIGELSKY . There you are. I've been telling you, you're an excellent man and the most eligible of suitors. But you say yourself you've had very little to do with ladies. ...

BOLSHINTSOV [*with a sigh*]. That's just so. I may say, Ignaty Ilyitch, I've avoided the female sex from a child.

SHPIGELSKY [*with a sigh*]. Quite so. That's not a vice in a husband; quite the contrary; but still in certain circumstances, at the first declaration of love, for instance, it is essential to be able to say *something*. . . isn't it?

BOLSHINTSOV . I quite agree with you.

SHPIGELSKY . Or else, you know, Vera Alexandrovna may simply suppose that you feel unwell--and nothing more. Besides, though your exterior figure is also perfectly presentable in all respects, it does not offer any feature very striking at first sight... not at first sight, you know, and that's what's wanted in this case.

BOLSHINTSOV [*with a sigh*]. That's what's wanted in this case.

SHPIGELSKY . Young ladies are attracted by it, anyway. And then, your age too ... in fact, it's not for you and me to try to please. And so it's no good for you to think of agreeable remarks. That's a poor thing to depend on. But you have something else to count upon, far firmer and more reliable, and that's virtues, my dear Afanasy Ivanovitch, and your three hundred and twenty serfs. In your place I should simply say to Vera Alexandrovna . . .

BOLSHINTSOV . Alone with her?

SHPIGELSKY . Oh, of course, alone with her! 'Vera Alexandrovna!' [*From the movement of BOLSHINTSOV'S lips it is evident that he is repeating in a whisper every word after SHPIGELSKY.*] 'I love you and ask your hand in marriage. I'm a kind-hearted, good-natured, harmless man and I'm not poor. You will be perfectly free with me; I will do my best to please you in every way. And I beg you to find out about me, to take a little more notice of me than you have done hitherto, and to give me an answer as you please and when you please. I am ready to wait and shall consider it a pleasure to do so.'

BOLSHINTSOV [*uttering the last words aloud*]. To do so! Yes, yes, yes. ... I quite agree with you. Only I tell you what, Ignaty Ilyitch; I believe you used the word 'harmless.' . . . You said a harmless man. . . .

SHPIGELSKY . Well, aren't you a harmless man?

BOLSHINTSOV . Ye-e-es . . . but still I fancy. . . . Will it be the right thing, Ignaty Ilyitch? Wouldn't it be better to say, for instance? . . .

SHPIGELSKY . For instance?

BOLSHINTSOV . For instance ... for instance. ... [*A pause.*] But maybe 'harmless' will do.

SHPIGELSKY . Now, Afanasy Ivanovitch, you listen to me; the more simply you express yourself, the plainer your words, the better it will go, trust me. And above all, don't be too pressing, Afanasy

Ivanovitch. Vera Alexandrovna is very young; you may scare her. . . . Give her time to think over your offer. Avoid fine words and I guarantee your success. [*Looking round*] Why, here they are all coming too----- [*BOLSHINTSOV wants to make off*] Where are you going? To pick mushrooms again? [*BOLSHINTSOV smiles, turns red and remains*] The great thing is not to be scared!

BOLSHINTSOV [*hurriedly*], Vera Alexandrovna knows nothing about it yet, does she?

SHPIGELSKY . I should think not!

BOLSHINTSOV . Well, I rely on you. . . . [*Blows his nose. Enter from Left NATALYA PETROVNA, VERA, BELIAYEV with the kite, and KOLYA, followed by RAKITIN and LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA. NATALYA PETROVNA is in a very good humor*]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*to BOLSHINTSOV and SHPIGELSKY*]. How do you do; how are you, Shpigelsky; I didn't expect you to-day, but I am very glad to see you. How are you, Afanasy Ivanitch. [*He bows with some embarrassment*]

SHPIGELSKY [*to NATALYA PETROVNA, indicating BOLSHINTSOV*]. This gentleman here insisted on bringing me. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*laughing*] I'm very much obliged to him. . . . But do you need forcing to come to see us?

SHPIGELSKY . Oh, good heavens! but ... I was only here . . . this morning . . . dear me. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Ah! our diplomat's caught!

SHPIGELSKY . I'm delighted, Natalya Petrovna, to see that you are in a very good humor

NATALYA PETROVNA . You think it necessary to remark it--is it so rare then with me?

SHPIGELSKY . Oh, good gracious--no . . . but . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Monsieur le Diplomate, you're getting more and more in a tangle.

KOLYA [*who has been all this time impatiently fidgeting about VERA and BELIAYEV*]. But, Maman, when are we going to fly the kite?

NATALYA PETROVNA . When you like. . . . Alexey Nikolaitch, and you Vera, let us go to the meadow. [*Turning to the others.*] You won't care about it, I expect. Lizaveta Bogdanovna, and you, Rakitin, I leave our good friend Afanasy Ivanovitch with you.

RAKITIN . But what makes you think we shan't care about it, Natalya Petrovna?

NATALYA PETROVNA . You are sensible people ... it must seem childish to you. . . . But as you like. We don't want to prevent your following us. [*To BELIAYEV and VERA.*] Come along. [*NATALYA PETROVNA, VERA, BELIAYEV and KOLYA go off to Right.*']

SHPIGELSKY [*glancing with some surprise at RAKITIN, says to BOLSHINTSOV*]. Our good friend Afanasy Ivanovitch, give your arm to Lizaveta Bogdanovna.

BOLSHINTSOV [*nervously*]. With the greatest pleasure.

[*Gives LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA his arm.*]

SHPIGELSKY . And we'll go along together, if you'll allow me, Mikhail Alexandritch. [*Takes his arm.*] My word! How they're racing along the avenue. Let's go and see them fly the kite, though we are sensible people.

Afanasy Ivanovitch, will you lead the way?

BOLSHINTSOV [*as they walk, to LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA*]. The weather is certainly very agreeable to-day, one may say.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA [*mincing*]. Yes, indeed, very agreeable!

SHPIGELSKY [*to RAKITIN*]. I've something I want to talk to you about, Mikhail Alexandritch. . . .  
[*RAKITIN suddenly laughs.*] What is it?

RAKITIN . Oh . . . nothing. ... I was amused at our following in the rear like this.

SHPIGELSKY . The front rank easily turns into the rearguard, you know. ... It all depends which way you are going.

[*All go out to Right.*]

## ACT III

*The scene is the same as in Act I. RAKITIN and SHPIGELSKY come in from the outer room.*

SHPIGELSKY . Well, how about it, Mikhail Alexandritch? For goodness sake do help me.

RAKITIN . In what way can I help you, Ignaty Ilyitch?

SHPIGELSKY . In what way? Why, put yourself in my place, Mikhail Alexandritch. This is no concern of mine, really. Indeed, I've been acting chiefly from a wish to serve others. . . . My kind heart will be my ruin!

RAKITIN [*laughing*]. Well, ruin's a good way off still.

SHPIGELSKY [*laughing too*]. About that there's no knowing, but my position is certainly awkward. I brought Bolshintsov here at Natalya Petrovna's wish, and have given him her answer with her permission, and now on one side I get sulky looks as though I'd done something foolish, and on the other, Bolshintsov gives me no peace. They avoid him and won't say a word to me. . . .

RAKITIN . What possessed you to take up this business, Ignaty Ilyitch? Why, Bolshintsov, between ourselves . . . he's simply a fool.

SHPIGELSKY . Well, I declare! Between ourselves! That's a piece of news! And since when have sensible men been the only ones to marry? We must leave the fools free to get married, if nothing else. You say I've taken up this business. . . . Not at all, I'll tell you how it came about: a friend asks me to put in a word for him. Well, was I to refuse? I'm a good-natured man, I don't know how to refuse. I carry out my friend's commission: the answer I get is: 'Very much obliged; pray, don't trouble yourself further.' I understand and don't trouble myself further. Then they take it up themselves and encourage me, so to speak. I obey; and now they're indignant with me. And in what way am I to blame?

RAKITIN . Why, who says you are to blame? . . . The only thing that puzzles me is what induces you to take so much trouble.

SHPIGELSKY . What induces ... what induces.... The man gives me no peace.

RAKITIN . Come, nonsense. . . .

SHPIGELSKY . Besides, he's an old friend.

RAKITIN [*with an incredulous smile*]. Is he? Oh, well, that's another matter.

SHPIGELSKY [*smiling too*]. I'll be open with you, though. . . . There's no deceiving you. ... Oh well--he has promised me ... one of my horses has gone lame, so you see he has promised me . . .

RAKITIN . A horse to replace it?

SHPIGELSKY . Well, since I must own up, three new ones.

RAKITIN . You should have said that before!

SHPIGELSKY [*eagerly*]. But please don't you imagine . . . I would never have consented to be a go-between in this affair, it would have been utterly unlike me [RAKITIN *smiles*], if I had not known Bolshintsov to be a thoroughly honest man. ... Besides, all I want even now is a definite answer--yes or

no.

RAKITIN . Surely, things haven't reached that stage yet?

SHPIGELSKY . But what are you imagining? . . . It's not a question of marriage, but of permission to come, to visit. . . .

RAKITIN . But whoever forbids it?

SHPIGELSKY . Forbids . . . what a thing to say! Of course, if it were anybody else ... but Bolshintsov's a shy man, a blessed innocent, straight out of the Golden Age, scarcely weaned from the feeding bottle. ... He has so little self-confidence, he needs some encouragement. While his intentions are most honorable

RAKITIN . Yes, and his horses good.

SHPIGELSKY . And his horses are good. [*Takes a pinch of snuff and offers the box to RAKITIN.*] Won't you have some?

RAKITIN . No, thanks.

SHPIGELSKY . So that's how it is, Mikhail Alexandritch. As you see, I don't want to deceive you. Indeed, why should I? The thing's perfectly clear and straightforward. A man of excellent principles, with property, quite harmless. ... If he suits--good. If he doesn't--well, they should say so.

RAKITIN . That's all very well, no doubt, but how do I come in? I really don't see what I can do about it.

SHPIGELSKY . Oh, Mikhail Alexandritch! As though we don't know that Natalya Petrovna has a very great respect for you and even sometimes follows your advice. . . . Now do, Mikhail Alexandritch [*Puts his arm round him*], be a friend, put in a word. . . .

RAKITIN . And you think this is a good husband for little Vera?

SHPIGELSKY [*assuming a serious air*], I'm convinced of it. You don't believe it. ... Well, you'll see. As you know, the great thing in marriage is solid character. And Bolshintsov is solidity itself. [*Looking round.*] And here I do believe is Natalya Petrovna herself coming in. ... My dear good friend, my benefactor! The two chestnuts as trace-horses, and the bay in the shafts! You will do your best?

RAKITIN [*smiling*]. Oh, very well, very well. . . .

SHPIGELSKY . Mind now, I rely on you. . . . [*Escapes into the outer room.*]

RAKITIN [*looking after him*]. What a sly rogue that doctor is! Vera . . . and Bolshintsov! But there you are! There are marriages worse than that. I'll do as he asks me, and then--it's not my business! [*Turns round. NATALYA PETROVNA, coming out of the study and seeing him, stops.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*irresolutely*]. It's . . . you.... I thought you were in the garden.

RAKITIN . You seem sorry I'm not. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*interrupting*]. Oh! nonsense. [*Advancing to front of stage.*] Are you alone here?

RAKITIN . Shpigelsky has just gone.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with a slight frown*]. Oh, that local Talleyrand. . . . What has he been saying to you? Is he still hanging about?

RAKITIN . The local Talleyrand, as you call him, is evidently in disfavor to-day . . . but yesterday, I fancy . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . He's funny; he's amusing, certainly, but... he meddles in what's not his business. . . . It's disagreeable. . . . Besides, for all his obsequiousness, he is very impudent and persistent. . . . He's a great cynic.

RAKITIN [*going up to her*]. You didn't speak of him like that yesterday. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Perhaps not. [*Eagerly.*] So what was he talking about?

RAKITIN . He talked to me . . . about Bolshintsov.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh? About that stupid creature?

RAKITIN . Of him, too, you spoke very differently yesterday.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with a constrained smile*]. Yesterday is not to-day.

RAKITIN . True, for others . . . but it seems not for me.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*dropping her eyes*]. How's that?

RAKITIN . For me to-day is the same as yesterday.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*holding out her hand to him*]. I understand your reproach, but you are mistaken. Yesterday I wouldn't admit that I was behaving badly to you. . . . [RAKITIN *attempts to stop her.*] Don't contradict me. . . . I know and you know what I mean . . . but to-day I admit it. I have been thinking things over to-day. . . . But believe me, Michel, whatever silly thoughts take hold of me, whatever I say, whatever I do, there is no one I depend upon as I do on you. [*Dropping her voice.*] There is no one ... I love as I do you.... [*A brief silence.*] You don't believe me?

RAKITIN. I believe you . . . but you seem depressed to-day, what's the matter?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*goes on speaking without hearing him*]. But I am convinced of one thing, Rakitin; one can never answer for oneself, one can never be sure of oneself. We often don't understand our past, how can we expect to answer for the future! There's no putting the future in fetters!

RAKITIN . That's true.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*after a long silence*]. Do you know, I want to tell you the truth. Perhaps I shall wound you a little, but I know you will be more hurt by my keeping things from you. I confess, Michel, this young student . . . this Beliaev, has made rather an impression on me. . . .

RAKITIN [*in a low voice*]. I know that.

NATALYA PETROVNA. Oh? You have noticed it? For some time?

RAKITIN . Only yesterday.

NATALYA PETROVNA. Ah!

RAKITIN . The day before yesterday, you remember, I spoke of the change in you. ... I did not know then what to put it down to. But yesterday after our talk . . . and in the meadow , . . if you could have seen yourself! I didn't know you; you were like another woman. You laughed, you skipped and played about like a little girl; your eyes were shining, your cheeks were flushed, and with what confiding interest, with what joyful attention you gazed at him, how you smiled. [*Glancing at her.*] Why, even now your face glows at the memory of it! [*Turns away.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA . No, Rakitin, for God's sake, don't turn away from me. . . . Listen, why exaggerate? This man has infected me with his youth--that's all. I have never been young myself,

Michel, from childhood up to now. You know what my life has been.... The novelty of it has gone to my head like wine, but I know it will pass as quickly as it has come. . . . It's not worth talking about... . [A pause.,] Only don't turn away from me, don't take your hand away. . . . Help me. . . .

RAKITIN [*in a low voice*]. Help you--a cruel saying! [*Aloud.*] You don't know what is happening to you, Natalya Petrovna. You are sure it's not worth talking about, and you ask for help. . . . Evidently you feel you are in need of it!

NATALYA PETROVNA . That is ... yes. ... I appeal to you as a friend.

RAKITIN [*bitterly*]. Quite so. ... I hope to justify your confidence . . . but let me have a moment to try and face it.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Face it? Why, are you dreading ... anything unpleasant? Is anything changed?

RAKITIN [*bitterly*]. Oh no! everything's the same.

NATALYA PETROVNA . What are you imagining, Michel? Surely you can't suppose. . . .

RAKITIN . I suppose nothing.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Surely you can't have such a contempt for me as ...

RAKITIN . For God's sake, stop. We'd better talk about Bolshintsov. The doctor's expecting an answer from you about Vera, you know.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*sadly*]. You're angry with me.

RAKITIN . Me? Oh no! But I'm sorry for you.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Really, it's positively annoying, Michel, aren't you ashamed? . . . [RAKITIN is silent. She shrugs her shoulders, and goes on in a tone of vexation.] You say the doctor is expecting an answer? But who asked him to interfere? . . .

RAKITIN . He assured me that you yourself. . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*interrupting*]. Perhaps, perhaps. . . . Though I believe I said nothing definite. ... Besides, I may have changed my mind. And, good gracious, what does it matter? Shpigelsky has a hand in all sorts of affairs; he can't expect to have everything his own way.

RAKITIN . He only wants to know what answer . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . What answer. . . . [A pause.] Michel, don't! Give me your hand. . . . Why this indifferent expression, this cold politeness? . . . What have I done? Think a little, is it my fault? I came to you hoping for good advice, I didn't hesitate for one instant, I never thought of concealing things from you, and you . . . I see I was wrong to be open with you. ... It would never have entered your head. You suspected nothing, you deceived me. And now, goodness knows what you're imagining.

RAKITIN I imagining? Not at all.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Give me your hand. . . . [*He does not move; she goes on, somewhat offended.*] You turn away from me? So much the worse for you, then. But I don't blame you.... [*Bitterly.*] You are jealous!

RAKITIN . I have no right to be jealous, Natalya Petrovna. ... How could I be?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*after a pause*]. As you please. About Bolshintsov, I haven't yet spoken to Verotchka.

RAKITIN . I can send her to you at once.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Why at once? . . . But as you please.

RAKITIN [*moving towards the study-door*]. So you want me to fetch her?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Michel, for the last time. . . . You said just now that you were sorry for me. ... Is this how you show it? Can you really . . .

RAKITIN [*coldly*]. Am I to send her?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with annoyance*]. Yes. [RAKITIN *goes into the study*. NATALYA PETROVNA *stands for some time motionless, sits down, takes a book from the table, opens it, lets it fall on her lap.*] He too! It's awful. He ... he too! And I relied upon him. And Arkady? Good heavens! I have never even thought of him! [*Drawing herself up.*] I see it's high time to put a stop to all this. . . . [VERA *comes in from the study.*] Yes . . . high time.

VERA [*timidly*]. You sent for me, Natalya Petrovna?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*looking round quickly*]. Ah! Verotchka! Yes, I wanted you.

VERA [*going up to her*]. Are you unwell?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Me? Oh no, why?

VERA . I fancied . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . No, it's nothing. I'm feeling the heat a little. . . . That's all. Sit down. [VERA *sits down*] Tell me, Vera, are you doing anything particular just now?

VERA . No.

NATALYA PETROVNA . I ask you because I want to have a talk with you ... a serious talk. You see, my dear, I've always looked on you as a child; but you are seventeen; you are a sensible girl. . . . It's time for you to think about your future. You know I love you as a daughter; my house will always be your home . . . but all the same, in other people's eyes, you are an orphan; you have no fortune. You may in time grow tired of always living with strangers; tell me would you like to be mistress in your own house, absolute mistress in it?

VERA [*slowly*]. I don't understand you, Natalya Petrovna.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*after a pause*]. I have received an offer of marriage for you. [VERA *stares at her in amazement*] You didn't expect that; I must own it seems strange to me too. You are so young. ... I need not tell you that I do not mean to put pressure on you. ... In my opinion you're too young to be married; but I thought it my duty to tell you. . . . [VERA *suddenly hides her face in her hands*] Vera . . . what is it? You're crying? [*Takes her hand*] You're trembling all over? . . . Surely you're not afraid of me, Vera?

VERA [*in a toneless voice*], I'm in your power, Natalya Petrovna.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*taking VERA'S hands from her face*]. Vera, aren't you ashamed to cry? Aren't you ashamed to say that you're in my power? What do you take me for? I am speaking to you as I would to a daughter, and you . . . [VERA *kisses her hands.*] What? You are in my power? Then please laugh at once! ... I tell you to. ... [VERA *smiles through her tears.*] That's right. [NATALYA PETROVNA *puts one arm round her and draws her closer.*] Vera, my child, treat me as though I were your mother, or no, imagine that I'm an elder sister and let us have a little talk together about all these wonderful things.... Will you?

VERA. Oh, yes.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Well, listen then. . . . Come a little nearer. That's right. To begin with, as you're my sister, we suppose there's no need for me to assure you that this is your home; a girl with eyes like yours is at home everywhere. So it ought never to enter your head that you are a burden to anybody in the world or that anybody wants to get rid of you. . . . You hear? But now one fine day your sister comes to you and says: Just think, Vera, you have a suitor. . . . Well? What answer would you make? That you are too young, that you are not thinking of marriage?

VERA. Yes, Natalya Petrovna.

NATALYA PETROVNA . But you wouldn't speak like that to your sister.

VERA [*smiling*]. Oh . . . yes, then.

NATALYA PETROVNA. Your sister agrees with you, the suitor is refused and there's the end of it. But suppose the suitor is a good man, and well-to-do, and if he is willing to wait, if he only asks permission to see you occasionally in the hope of gaining your affections in time? VERA. Who is this suitor?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Ah! you would like to know! You don't guess?

VERA . No.

NATALYA PETROVNA . You have seen him to-day. [VERA *flushes crimson*.] It is true he is not very handsome, and not very young. . . . Bolshintsov.

VERA . Afanasy Ivanitch?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes. . . . Afanasy Ivanitch.

VERA [*gazes for some time at NATALYA PETROVNA, suddenly begins laughing, then stops*]. You're not joking?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*smiling*]. No . . . but I see there's no hope for Bolshintsov. If you had cried at his name, he might have hoped, but you laugh; there's nothing for him but to go his way, bless him!

VERA . I'm sorry... but really I didn't expect... Surely people don't get married at his age?

NATALYA PETROVNA . What an idea! How old is he? He's not fifty. The very age to marry.

VERA . Perhaps . . . but he has such a queer face. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Well, don't let us say any more about him. He's dead and buried . . . bless him! But it's only natural a child of your age cannot care for a man like Bolshintsov. . . . You all want to marry for love, not from prudence, don't you?

VERA . Yes, Natalya Petrovna, and you . . . didn't you marry Arkady Sergeyitch for love too?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*after a pause*]. Of course. [*Another pause, squeezing VERA'S hands*.] Yes, Vera. . I called you a child just now . . . but children are right. [VERA *drops her eyes*.] And so that business is settled. Bolshintsov is dismissed. I must own it wouldn't have been quite pleasant to me to see his puffy old countenance beside your fresh young face, though he is a very good man. Do you see now how little reason you had to be afraid of me? How quickly it's all settled! . . . [*Reproachfully*.] Really, you behaved to me as though I were your patroness! You know how I hate that word. . . .

VERA [*embracing her*]. Forgive me, Natalya Petrovna.

NATALYA PETROVNA . I should hope so. Really? You're not afraid of me?

VERA . No, I love you. I'm not afraid of you.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Thank you. So now we are great friends, and will have no secrets from each other. Well, suppose I were to ask you, Verotchka, whisper in my ear; is it only because Bolshintsov is

much older than you, and not a beauty, that you don't want to marry him?

VERA . Surely that's reason enough, Natalya Petrovna?

NATALYA PETROVNA . I don't deny it... but is there no other reason?

VERA . I don't know him at all.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Quite so; but you don't answer my question.

VERA . There's no other reason.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Really? In that case, I should advise you to think it over. It wouldn't be easy to be in love with Bolshintsov, I know . . . but I say again, he's a good man. Of course, if you cared for anyone else . . . that would be a different matter. But your heart has told you nothing so far, has it?

VERA [*timidly*]. What do you mean?

NATALYA PETROVNA . You love no one else?

VERA . I love you . . . Kolya; I love Anna Semyonovna too.

NATALYA PETROVNA . I'm not speaking of that sort of love; you don't understand me. . . . Among the young men you may have seen here, for instance, or at parties, is there no one who attracts you?

VERA . No. ... I like some of them, but . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . I noticed, for instance, that at the Krinitseys' you danced three times with that tall officer, what's his name?

VERA . An officer?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes, that man with a big mustache

VERA . Oh! that man!. . . No; I don't like him.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Well, and Shalansky?

VERA . Shalansky is a nice man, but he ... I don't think he cares about me.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh! why?

VERA . He ... I fancy he thinks more of Liza Velsky.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*glancing at her*]. Ah! . . . you noticed that? [*A pause.*] Well . . . Rakitin?

VERA . I love Mikhail Alexandritch very much indeed.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes, like a brother. And, by the way, there's Beliayev?

VERA [*flushing*], Alexey Nikolaitch? I like Alexey Nikolaitch.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*watching her*]. Yes, he's a nice fellow. But he's so shy with everybody. . . .

VERA [*innocently*]. No. . . . He's not shy with me.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Ah!

VERA . He talks to me. Perhaps you fancy that because he ... he's afraid of you. He has not got to know you yet.

NATALYA PETROVNA . How do you know he's afraid of me?

VERA . He told me so.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh! he has told you.... So he is more unreserved with you than with other

people?

VERA . I don't know how he is with other people, but with me . . . perhaps it's because we are both orphans. Besides ... he looks on me ... as a child.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Do you think so? But I like him very much too. He must have a very kind heart.

VERA . Oh! the kindest! If only you knew . . . everyone in the house likes him. He's so friendly. He talks to everybody, he's ready to help anyone. The day before yesterday he carried a poor old beggar-woman in his arms from the high road to the hospital. He gathered a flower for me one day from such a high crag that I shut my eyes in terror, I kept thinking he would fall and be hurt, but he's so clever! You saw yesterday in the meadow how clever he is at that sort of thing.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes, that's true.

VERA . Do you remember the great ditch he jumped over when he was running after the kite? It was nothing to him.

NATALYA PETROVNA . And did he really pick a flower for you from a dangerous place? He must be fond of you.

VERA [*after a pause*]. And he's always good-humored . . . always in good spirits. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . It's strange, though. Why isn't he like that with me? . . .

VERA [*interrupting her*]. But I tell you he doesn't know you. Wait a little, I'll tell him. . . . I'll tell him there's no need to be afraid of you, shall I? That you're so kind. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with a constrained laugh*]. Thanks so much.

VERA . You'll see. . . . He does what I tell him though I am younger than he is.

NATALYA PETROVNA . I didn't know you were such friends. . . . But mind, Vera, be careful. Of course, he's an excellent young man . . . but you know, at your age. . . . It's not suitable, people may imagine things. ... I mentioned that, you remember? ... in the garden yesterday. [VERA *looks down*.] On the other hand, I don't want to check your inclinations either. I have too much confidence in you and in him . . . but still. . . you mustn't be angry with me for my scruples, my dear ... it's the duty of us old folks to worry young people with our lectures. Though I really need not say all this, you simply like him, don't you--and nothing more?

VERA [*timidly raising her eyes*]. He. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Now there you are looking at me like that again! Is that the way to look at a sister? Vera, listen, and lean down to me. . . . [*Caressing her*.] What if a sister, a real sister whispered now in your ear: 'Verotchka, is it true, you don't love anyone, do you?' What would you answer? [VERA *looks uncertainly at NATALYA PETROVNA*.] Those eyes want to tell me something. . . . [VERA *suddenly presses her face to NATALYA PETROVNA'S bosom*. NATALYA PETROVNA *turns pale--and after a pause goes on*.] You do love him? Tell me, do you?

VERA [*not raising her head*]. Oh! I don't know what I feel. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Poor child! You're in love. . . . [VERA *huddles still more closely to NATALYA PETROVNA*.] You're in love . . . , and he? Vera, he?

VERA [*still not raising her head*]. Why do you ask me questions? ... I don't know. . . . Perhaps ... I don't know, I don't know. . . . [NATALYA PETROVNA *shudders and sits motionless*. VERA *lifts her head and at once notices the change in her face*.] Natalya Petrovna, what's the matter?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*recovering herself*]. The matter . . . nothing. Why? Nothing.

VERA . You're so pale, Natalya Petrovna. . . . What's wrong? Let me ring. . . . [*Gets up.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA . No, no ... don't ring. It's nothing. ... It will pass. There, it's over now.

VERA . Let me fetch somebody, anyway.

NATALYA PETROVNA . No, don't, I ... I want to be alone. Leave me alone, do you hear? We will finish our talk later. Run along.

VERA . You are not angry with me, Natalya Petrovna?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Angry? What for? Not at all. No, I'm grateful to you for your confidence. . . . Only leave me, please, just now.

[*VERA is about to take her hand, but NATALYA PETROVNA turns away as though not noticing her movement.*]

VERA [*with tears in her eyes*]. Natalya Petrovna. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . I ask you to leave me alone. [*VERA slowly goes out of the study.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*alone, remains for some time motionless*]. Now it's all clear to me. . . . These children love each other. . . . [*Stops and passes her hand over her face.*] Well? So much the better. . . . God give them happiness! [*Laughing.*] And I ... I could imagine. . . . [*Stops again.*] She was not long blurting it out. ... I must own I did not suspect it, I must own the news has startled me. . . . But wait a bit, it's not all settled yet. My God . . . what am I saying? What's wrong with me? I don't know myself. What am I coming to? [*A pause.*] What am I about? Trying to marry the poor girl to an old man! . . . I used the doctor as a go-between ... he suspects, he drops hints . . . Arkady, Rakitin . . . while I... [*Shudders and suddenly raises her head.*] But what does this mean? Me jealous of Vera! Me in love with him! [*A pause.*] And you still doubt it, do you? You're in love to your misery! How it has come about ... I don't know. It's as though I'd been poisoned. . . . All at once everything's destroyed, scattered, swept away. . . . He's afraid of me. They're all afraid of me! What could he see in me? . . . What use is a creature like me to him? He is young and she is young. While I! [*Bitterly.*] How could he think much of me? They are both foolish, as Rakitin says. ... Oh! I hate that clever friend! And Arkady, my good trusting Arkady! My God! my God! It's killing me! [*Gets up.*] But I believe I'm going out of my mind! Why exaggerate? Yes . . . of course . . . I'm overwhelmed. . . . It's so strange to me . . . it's the first time ... I ... yes, the first time! I'm in love for the first time now! [*She sits down again.*] He must go away. Yes. And Rakitin too. It's time to come to my senses. I've allowed myself to take one step . . . and see! See what I've come to! And what is it in him attracts me? [*Ponders.*] So this is it, this dreadful feeling. . . . Arkady! Yes, I will fall into his arms, I will beg him to forgive me, to protect me, to save me. . . . He . . . and no one else! All the others are strangers to me and must remain strangers. . . . But can there be ... can there be no other way out? That girl--she's a child. She may be mistaken. That's all childishness really. . . . Why should I. ... I will talk to him myself, I will ask him. . . . [*Reproachfully.*] What? What? You are hoping? You still want to hope? And what am I hoping for? My God! don't make me despise myself! [*Drops her head on her arms. RAKITIN comes in from the study, pale and agitated.*]

RAKITIN [*going up to NATALYA PETROVNA*]. Natalya Petrovna.... [*She does not stir.*] [*To himself.*] What can have happened with Vera? [*Aloud.*] Natalya Petrovna....

NATALYA PETROVNA [*raising her head*]. Who is it? Ah! you.

RAKITAN . Vera Alexandrovna told me you were unwell. ...I...

NATALYA PETROVNA [*turning away*], I am quite well. ... What made her?. ..

RAKITIN . No! Natalya Petrovna, you are not well, you should see yourself.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Well, perhaps not. . . but what's that to you? What do you want? What have you come for?

RAKITIN [*in a voice of deep feeling*]. I'll tell you what I have come for. I have come to ask your forgiveness. Half an hour ago I was unspeakably stupid and rude. . . . Forgive me. . . . You see, Natalya Petrovna, however modest a man's desires and . . . and hopes, it is hard, for a moment anyway, for him to keep his head, when they are suddenly snatched away from him; but I have come to my senses. I understand my position and my fault, and I want only one thing . . . your forgiveness. [*He gently sits down beside her.*] Look at me . . . don't you too turn away from me. Beside you is your old Rakitin, your friend, a man who asks nothing but to be allowed to serve you, as you said . . . to help you. Don't deprive me of your confidence, rely on me and forget that I ever. . . . Forget everything that may have wounded you. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*who has been all the while staring fixedly at the floor*]. Yes, yes.... [*Stopping.*] Oh! I'm, sorry Rakitin, I haven't heard a word of what you've been saying.

RAKITIN [*mournfully*]. I said . . . I begged you to forgive me, Natalya Petrovna, I asked you whether you would let me be your friend still.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*slowly turning to him and laying her hands on his shoulders*]. Rakitin, tell me, what's the matter with me?

RAKITIN [*After a pause*]. You're in love.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*slowly repeating it after him*]. I'm in love. . . . But it's madness, Rakitin, it's impossible. Can such things happen all of a sudden. . . . You say I'm in love. . . . [*Breaks off.*]

RAKITIN . Yes, you're in love, poor dear woman. . . . Don't deceive yourself.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*not looking at him.*] What am I to do?

RAKITIN . I can tell you, Natalya Petrovna, if you promise . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*interrupting, still without looking at him*]. You know that girl, Vera, loves him. . . . They are in love with each other....

RAKITIN . If so, a reason the more...

NATALYA PETROVNA [*interrupting again*]. I've long suspected it, but she acknowledged it herself. . . . just now.

RAKITIN [*in a low voice, as though to himself*]. Poor woman!

NATALYA PETROVNA [*passing her hand over her face*]. Come. . . . I must pull myself together. I believe you were going to say something. . . . For God's sake, Rakitin, advise me what to do. . . .

RAKITIN . I'm willing to advise you, Natalya Petrovna, only on one condition.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Tell me.

RAKITIN . Promise that you won't suspect my motives. Tell me that you believe in my disinterested desire to help you; do you help me too. Let your confidence give me strength, or else let me keep silence.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Speak, speak.

RAKITIN . You have no doubt of me?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Speak!

RAKITIN . Well then, listen, he must go away. [NATALYA PETROVNA *looks at him in silence.*] Yes, he must go. I'm not going to speak to you of... your husband, your duty. On my lips, such words are . . . out of place. . . . But those children love each other. You told me so yourself just now, imagine yourself now between them. . . . Why, your position will be awful!

NATALYA PETROVNA . He must go. ... [A pause.] And you? You remain?

RAKITIN [*confused*]. I?... I?... [A pause.] I must go too. For the sake of your peace, your happiness, Verotchka's happiness, both he ... and I ... we must both go away for ever.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Rakitin ... I have sunk so low that I ... was almost ready to sacrifice that poor girl, an orphan entrusted to me by my mother, to marry her to a stupid, absurd old man! I couldn't bring myself to it, Rakitin, the words died away on my lips when she burst out laughing at the suggestion . . . but I have been plotting with the doctor; I have put up with his meaning smiles, I have borne with his grins, his compliments, his hints. . . . Oh, I feel I am on the brink of a precipice; save me!

RAKITIN . Natalya Petrovna, you see that I am right. . . . [She is silent; he goes on hurriedly.] He ought to go ... we ought both to go. ... There is no other way to save you.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*dejectedly*]. But what to live for afterwards?

RAKITIN Good God, is it as bad as that? . . . Natalya Petrovna, you will get over it, believe me. . . . This will pass. What, nothing to live for!

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes, yes, what have I to live for when all abandon me?

RAKITIN . But . . . your family. . . . [NATALYA PETROVNA *looks down.*] If you like, after he is gone, I might stay a few days just to . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*gloomily*]. Ah! I understand. You are reckoning on habit, on our old friendship. . . . You hope I shall come to myself, and turn to you again, don't you? I understand you.

RAKITIN [*flushing*]. Natalya Petrovna! Why do you insult me?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*bitterly*]. I understand you . . . but you are mistaken.

RAKITIN . What? After your promise, when simply for your sake, your sake only, for your happiness, for your position in society, in fact. . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh! how long have you been concerned about that? Why is it you have never spoken of it before?

RAKITIN [*getting up*]. Natalya Petrovna, I will leave this place to-day, at once, and you shall never see me again. . . . [Is going.]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*stretching out her hands to him*]. Michel, forgive me; I don't know what I'm saying. . . . You see the state I'm in. Forgive me.

RAKITIN [*turning rapidly to her and taking her by the hands*]. Natalya Petrovna . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh, Michel, I'm unutterably miserable. . . . [*Leans on his shoulder and presses her handkerchief to her eyes.*] Help me, I am lost without you. [*At that instant the door of the outer room is flung open, and ISLAYEV and ANNA SEMYONOVNA walk in.*]

ISLAYEV [*loudly*]. I was always of that opinion. [*Stops in amazement at the sight of RAKITIN and NATALYA PETROVNA. NATALYA PETROVNA looks round and goes out quickly. RAKITIN remains where he is, overwhelmed with confusion.*]

ISLAYEV [*to RAKITIN*]. What's the meaning of this? What's this scene?

RAKITIN . Oh . . . nothing . . . it's . . .

ISLAYEV . Is Natalya Petrovna unwell?

RAKITIN . No . . . but . . .

ISLAYEV . And why has she run away so suddenly? What were you talking about? She seemed to be crying.... You were consoling her... . What's the matter?

RAKITIN . Nothing really.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . How can there be nothing the matter, Mikhail Alexandritch? [*After a pause.*] I'll go and see. ... [*Is about to go into the study.,*]

RAKITIN [*stopping her*]. No, you had better leave her in peace, please.

ISLAYEV . But what does it all mean? Tell us.

RAKITIN . Nothing, I assure you. ... I promise to explain it to you both to-day. I give you my word. But now, please, if you have any trust in me, don't ask me . . . and don't worry Natalya Petrovna.

ISLAYEV . Very well. . . but it is strange. This sort of thing has never happened with Natasha before. It's something quite out of the way.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . What I want to know is what could make Natasha cry? And why has she gone away? . . . Are we strangers?

RAKITIN . Of course not. What an idea! But as a matter of fact, we had not finished our conversation. . . , I must ask you . . . both--to leave us alone for a little while.

ISLAYEV . Indeed? There's some secret between you, then?

RAKITIN . Yes . . . but you shall know it.

ISLAYEV [*after a moment's thought*]. Come along, Mamma. . . . Let us leave them. Let them finish their mysterious conversation.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . But . . .

ISLAYEV . Come, let us go. You hear he promises to explain.

RAKITIN . You needn't worry. . . . ISLAYEV [*coldly*]. I'm not worrying. [*To ANNA SEMYONOVNA.*] Let us go. [*They go out.*]

RAKITIN [*looks after them and goes quickly to the study door*]. Natalya Petrovna, Natalya Petrovna, please come back.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*comes out of the study. She is very pale*]. What did they say?

RAKITIN . Nothing, don't worry yourself. . . . They were rather surprised, certainly. Arkady thought you were ill.... He noticed how upset you were. ... Sit down, you can hardly stand. . . . [NATALYA PETROVNA *sits down*] I said ... I begged him not to worry you ... to leave us alone.

NATALYA PETROVNA. And he agreed?

RAKITIN. Yes. I had, I must say, to promise I'd explain it all to-morrow. Why did you go away?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*bitterly*]. Why indeed! What are you going to say?

RAKITIN . I'll . . . I'll think of something to say. But that's no matter just now. We must take advantage of this reprieve. You see that this can't go on. ... These violent emotions are too much for you. . . . They are unworthy of you. ... I myself. . . But that's not the point. Only be firm and I'll manage. You agreed

with me, you know.

NATALYA PETROVNA. About what?

RAKITIN. The necessity of ... our going. You do agree? If that's so, it's no good to delay. If you'll let me, I'll talk to Beliayev at once. . . . He's a decent fellow, he'll understand.

NATALYA PETROVNA . You want to talk to him? You? But what can you say to him?

RAKITIN [*in embarrassment*], I'll . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*after a brief pause*]. Rakitin, listen, don't you think that we're both behaving like lunatics? . . . I was in a panic, I frightened you, and perhaps it's all about nothing that matters.

RAKITIN . What?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Really? What's the matter with us? It seems only a little while ago everything was so quiet and peaceful in this house . . . and all at once . . . goodness knows how! Really we've all gone out of our minds. Come, it's time to stop, we've been silly enough. . . . Let us go on as before. . . . And there'll be no need to explain anything to Arkady; I'll tell him about our antics myself and we'll laugh over them together. I need no one to intercede between my husband and me!

RAKITIN . Natalya Petrovna, you are frightening me now. You are smiling and you're as pale as death. ... Do remember what you said to me only a quarter of an hour ago. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . I dare say! But I see what it is. . . . You're raising this storm . . . that you may not sink alone.

RAKITIN . Again, again suspicion, again reproaches, Natalya Petrovna. . . . God forgive you . . . but you torture me. Or do you regret having spoken so freely?

NATALYA PETROVNA . I regret nothing.

RAKITIN . Then how am I to understand you?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*eagerly*]. Rakitin, if you say a single word from me or about me to Beliayev, I will never forgive you.

RAKITIN . Oh! so that's it! ... Don't worry, Natalya Petrovna. So far from telling Mr. Beliayev anything, I won't even say good-bye to him, when I take my departure. I don't mean to pester you with my services.

NATAYLA PETROVNA [*with some embarrassment*]. You imagine perhaps that I have changed my mind about... his going?

RAKITIN . I imagine nothing.

NATALYA PETROVNA . That's not so. I'm so convinced of the necessity, as you say, of his leaving that I mean to dismiss him myself. [*A pause.*] Yes, I will dismiss him myself.

RAKITIN . You?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes. And at once. I beg you to send him to me.

RAKITIN . What? This minute?

NATALYA PETROVNA . This very minute. I ask you to do so, Rakitin. You see I am composed now. Besides, I shan't be interrupted just now. I must seize the opportunity. ... I shall be very much obliged to you. I'll question him.

RAKITIN . But he won't tell you anything. I can assure you. He admitted to me that he felt awkward

with you.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*suspiciously*]. Ah! You've been talking to him about me. [RAKITIN *shrugs his shoulders.*] Oh, forgive me, forgive me, Michel, and send him to me. You'll see, I will dismiss him and all will be over. It will all pass and be forgotten, like a bad dream. Please fetch him. I absolutely must have a final conversation with him. You will be pleased with me. Pray do.

RAKITIN [*who has not taken his eyes off her all this time, coldly and mournfully*]. Certainly. Your wishes shall be obeyed. [*Goes towards door of outer room.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*after him*]. Thank you, Michel.

RAKITIN [*turning*]. Oh, spare me your thanks, at least. . . . [*Goes out quickly.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*alone, after a pause*]. He's a good man. . . . But is it possible I ever loved him? [*Stands up.*] He is right. *He* must go. But how can I dismiss him? I only want to know whether he really cares for that girl. Perhaps it's all nonsense. . . . How could I be worked up into such a state? What was the object of all that outburst? Well, it can't be helped now. I want to know what he is going to say. But he must go. . . . He must... he must. . . . He may not be willing to answer. . . . He's afraid of me, of course. . . . Well? So much the better. There's no need for me to say much to him. . . . [*Lays her hand on her forehead.*] My head aches. Shall I put it off till to-morrow? Yes. I keep fancying they are all watching me to-day. . . . What am I coming to! No, better make an end of it at once. . . . Just one last effort and I am free. . . . Oh yes! I yearn for freedom and peace.

[*BELIAYEV comes in from the outer room.*] Here he is. . .

BELIAYEV [*Going up to her*]. Natalya Petrovna, Mikhail Alexandritch tells me you want to see me.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with some effort*]. Yes, certainly . . . I have to . . . speak to you. . . .

BELIAYEV . Speak to me?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*without looking at him*]. Yes . . . speak to you. [*A pause.*] I must tell you, Alexey Nikolaitch, I'm . . . I'm displeased with you.

BELIAYEV . May I ask on what ground?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Listen. . . . I . . . I really don't know how to begin. However, I must tell you first that my dissatisfaction is not due to any remissness in your work. On the contrary, I am pleased with your methods with Kolya.

BELIAYEV . Then what can it be?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*glancing at him*]. You need not be alarmed. . . . Your fault is not so serious. You are young, you have probably never before stayed with strangers, you could not foresee . . .

BELIAYEV . But, Natalya Petrovna. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . You want to know what is wrong? I understand your impatience. So I must tell you that Verotchka . . . [*Glancing at him*] Verotchka has confessed everything.

BELIAYEV [*in amazement*], Vera Alexandrovna? What can Vera Alexandrovna have confessed? And what have I to do with it?

NATALYA PETROVNA . So you really don't know what she can have confessed? You can't guess?

BELIAYEV . I? No, I can't.

NATALYA PETROVNA . If so, I beg your pardon. If you really can't guess, I must apologize. I supposed . . . I was mistaken. But allow me to say, I don't believe you. I understand what makes you say

so. ... I respect your discretion.

BELIAYEV I haven't the least idea what you mean, Natalya Petrovna.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Really? Do you expect to persuade me that you haven't noticed that child's feeling for you?

BELIAYEV . Vera Alexandrovna's feeling for me? I really don't know what to say to that. . . . Good gracious! I believe I have always behaved with Vera Alexandrovna as

NATALYA PETROVNA . As with everybody else, haven't you? [*After a brief silence.*] However that may be, whether you are really unaware of it, or are pretending to be, the fact is the girl loves you. She admitted it to me herself. Well, now I am asking you, what do you mean to do?

BELIAYEV [*with embarrassment*]. What do I mean to do?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*folding her arms*]. Yes.

BELIAYEV . All this is so unexpected, Natalya Petrovna. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*after a pause*]. Alexey Nikolaitch, I see ... I have not put the matter properly. You don't understand me. You think I'm angry with you . . . but I'm . . . only ... a little upset. And that's very natural. Calm yourself. Let us sit down. [*They sit down.*] I will be frank with you, Alexey Nikolaitch, and you too be a little less reserved with me. You have really no need to be on your guard with me. Vera loves you. . . . Of course, that's not your fault, I am willing to assume that you are in no way responsible for it. ... But you see, Alexey Nikolaitch, she is an orphan, she is my ward. I am responsible for her, for her future, for her happiness. She is very young, and I feel sure that the feeling you have inspired in her may soon pass off. ... At her age, love does not last long. But you understand, it was my duty to warn you. It's always dangerous to play with fire . . . and I do not doubt that, knowing her feeling for you, you will adopt a different behavior with her, will avoid seeing her alone, walking in the garden. . . . Won't you? I can rely on you. With another man I should be afraid to speak so plainly.

BELIAYEV . Natalya Petrovna, I assure you I appreciate. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . I tell you that I do not distrust. . . . Besides, all this will remain a secret between us.

BELIAYEV . I must own, Natalya Petrovna, all you have told me seems to me so strange . . . of course, I can't venture to disbelieve you, but. . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Listen, Alexey Nikolaitch. All I said to you just now ... I said it on the supposition that on your side there is nothing . . . [*Breaks off*] because if that's not so ... of course I don't know you well, but I do know you well enough to see no reason to make serious objections. You have no fortune . . . but you are young, you have your future before you, and when two people love each other . . . I tell you again, I thought it my duty to warn you, as a man of honor, of the consequences of your friendship with Vera, but if you . . .

BELIAYEV [*in perplexity*], I really don't know what you mean, Natalya Petrovna.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*hurriedly*]. Oh! believe me, I'm not trying to wring out a confession, there's no need. ... I shall see from your manner how it is. ... [*Glancing at him.*] But I ought to tell you that Vera fancied that you were not quite indifferent to her.

BELIAYEV [*after a brief silence, stands up*]. Natalya Petrovna, I see that I can't go on living in your house.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*firing up*]. You might have waited for me to decide that. . . . [*Stands up.*]

BELIAYEV . You have been frank with me. Let me be frank with you. I don't love Vera Alexandrovna, at least, I don't love her in the way you suppose.

NATALYA PETROVNA . But I didn't. . . [*Stops short*].

BELIAYEV . And if Vera Alexandrovna cares for me, if she fancied, as you say, that I care for her, I don't want to deceive her; I will tell her the whole truth myself. But after such plain speaking, you must see, Natalya Petrovna, that it would be difficult for me to stay here, my position would be too awkward. I can't tell you how sorry I shall be to leave . . . but there's nothing else for me to do. I shall always think of you with gratitude. . . . May I go now? ... I shall come to say good-bye properly later on.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with affected indifference*]. As you please . . . but I own I did not expect this. That was not my object in wishing to speak to you. ... I only wanted to warn you . . . Vera is still a child ... I have perhaps taken it all too seriously. I don't see the necessity of your leaving us. However, as you please.

BELIAYEV . Natalya Petrovna . . . it's really impossible for me to go on staying here.

NATALYA PETROVNA . I see you are very ready to leave us!

BELIAYEV . No, Natalya Petrovna, I'm not.

NATALYA PETROVNA . I'm not in the habit of keeping people against their will, but I must own I don't like it at all.

BELIAYEV [*after some indecision*]. Natalya Petrovna, I shouldn't like to cause you the slightest annoyance. . . . I'll stay.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*suspiciously*]. Ah! [*after a pause*.] I didn't expect you would change your mind so quickly! . . . I am grateful, but . . . Let me think it over. Perhaps you are right, perhaps you ought to go. I'll think it over. I'll let you know. . . . May I leave you in uncertainty till this evening?

BELIAYEV . I am willing to wait as long as you like. [*Bows and is about to go*.]

NATALYA PETROVNA . You promise me....

BELIAYEV [*stopping*]. What?

NATALYA PETROVNA . I believe you meant to speak to Vera. . . . I'm not sure that it's the right thing. But I'll let you know what I decide. I begin to think that you really ought to go away. Good-bye for now. [BELIAYEV bows again and goes off into the outer room. NATALYA PETROVNA looks after him.] My mind's at rest! He does not love her. . . . [*Walks up and down the room*.] And so instead of sending him away, I've myself prevented his going. . . . He'll stay. . . . But what shall I say to Rakitin? What have I done? [*A pause*.] And what right had I to publish abroad the poor girl's love? I trapped her into confessing it ... a half-confession, and then I go ... so ruthlessly, so brutally. . . . [*Hides her face in her hands*.] Perhaps he was beginning to care for her. . . . What right had I to trample on that flower in the bud? . . . But have I trampled on it? He may have deceived me. ... I tried to deceive him! Oh! no! He's too good for that. ... He's not like me! And why was I in such haste? Blurting it all out at once? [*Sighing*.] I needn't have done it! If I could have foreseen. . . . How sly I was, how I lied to him! And he! How boldly and independently he spoke! ... I felt humbled by him. ... He is a man! I didn't know him before. . . . He must go away. If he stays ... I feel that I shall end by losing all self-respect. . . . He must go, or I am lost! I will write to him before he has had time to see Vera .... He must go! [*Goes quickly into the study*.]

## ACT IV

*A large unfurnished outer room. The walls are bare, the stone floor is uneven; the ceiling is supported by six brick columns, three each side, covered with whitewash which is peeling off. On Left two open windows and a door into the garden. On Right a door into the corridor leading to the main building; in Center an iron door opening into the storeroom. Near first column on Right a green garden seat; in a corner spades, watering-cans and flower-pots. Evening. The red rays of the sun fall through the windows on the floor.*

KATYA [*comes in from door on Right, goes briskly to the window and stands for some time looking into the garden*]. No, he's not to be seen. They told me he'd gone into the conservatory. I suppose he hasn't come out yet. Well, I'll wait till he comes by. There's no other way he can go. ... [*Sighs and leans against the window.*] They say he's going away. [*Sighs again.*] However shall we get on without him. . . . Poor young lady! How she did beseech me. . . . And why shouldn't I oblige her? Let him have a last talk with her. How warm it is to-day. And I do believe it's beginning to spot with rain. . . . [*Again glances out of window and at once draws back.*] Surely they're not coming in here? They are. My gracious. . . . [*Tries to run off, but has not time to reach the door before SHPIGELSKY and LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA come in from the garden. KATYA hides behind a column.*]

SHPIGELSKY [*shaking his hat*]. We can shelter here from the rain .... it will soon be over.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . If you like.

SHPIGELSKY [*looking round*]. What is this building? A storehouse or what?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA [*pointing to the iron door*]. No, the storeroom's there. This room, I'm told, Arkady Sergeiyitch's father built when he came back from abroad.

SHPIGELSKY . Oh, I see the idea, Venice, if you please. [*Sits down on the seat.*] Let's sit down. [*LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA sits down.*] You must confess, Lizaveta Bogdanovna, the rain has come in an unlucky moment. It has interrupted our talk at the most touching point.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA [*casting down her eyes*]. Ignaty Ilyitch... .

SHPIGELSKY . But there's nobody to hinder our beginning again. . . . You say, by the way, that Anna Semyonovna is out of humor to-day?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . Yes, she's put out. She actually did not come down to dinner, but had it in her room.

SHPIGELSKY . You don't say so! What a calamity, upon my word!

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . She came upon Natalya Petrovna in tears this morning... with Mikhail Alexandritch. . . . Of course he's almost like one of the family, but still. ... However, Mikhail Alexandritch has promised to explain it.

SHPIGELSKY . Ah! well, she need not worry herself. Mikhail Alexandritch has never, to my thinking, been a dangerous person, and now he's less so than ever.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . Why?

SHPIGELSKY . Oh, he talks a bit too cleverly. Where other people would come out in a rash, they work it all off in talk. Don't be afraid of chatterers in future, Lizaveta Bogdanovna; they're not dangerous; it's these silent men, slow in the uptake, with no end of temperament and thick necks, who are dangerous.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA [*after a pause*]. Tell me, is Natalya Petrovna really ill?

SHPIGELSKY . She's no more ill than you or I.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . She ate nothing at dinner.

SHPIGELSKY . Illness isn't the only thing that spoils the appetite.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . Did you dine at Bolshintsov's?

SHPIGELSKY . Yes. ... I went to see him. And it's only on your account I came back here, upon my soul.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . Oh, nonsense. And do you know, Ignaty Ilyitch, Natalya Petrovna is cross with you. . . . She said something not very complimentary about you at dinner.

SHPIGELSKY . Really? Ladies don't like us poor fellows to have sharp eyes, it seems. You must do what they want, you must help them, and you must pretend not to know what they're up to. A pretty set! But we shall see. And Rakitin, I dare say, looked rather in the dumps, too?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . Yes, he, too, seemed, as it were, out of sorts. . . .

SHPIGELSKY . Hm. And Vera Alexandrovna? And Beliayev?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . Everyone, absolutely everyone seemed depressed. I really can't imagine what's the matter with them all to-day.

SHPIGELSKY . If you know too much, you'll grow old before your time, Lizaveta Bogdanovna. . . . But never mind them. We had better talk about our affairs. The rain hasn't left off. ... Shall we?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA [*casting down her eyes primly*]. What are you asking me, Ignaty Ilyitch?

SHPIGELSKY . Oh, Lizaveta Bogdanovna, if you'll allow me to say so, there's no need to put on airs, and to drop your eyes like that! We're not young people, you know! These performances, these sighs and soft nothings--they don't suit us. Let us talk calmly, practically, as is proper for people of our years. And so--this is the question: we like each other ... at least, I presume that you like me.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA [*a little affectedly*], Ignaty Ilyitch, really. . . .

SHPIGELSKY . Oh, all right, very well. After all, perhaps, airs and graces are . . . only proper in a lady. So then, we like each other. And in other respects too we are well matched. Of course, I am bound to say about myself that I am not a man of good family: well, you're not of illustrious birth either. I'm not a rich man; if I were, I shouldn't be where I am----- [*Laughs.*] But I've a decent practice, not all my patients die; you have, as you say, fifteen thousand rubles of your own, all that's not at all bad, you see. At the same time, you're tired, I imagine, of living for ever as a governess, and then fussing round an old lady, backing her up at preference, and falling in with her whims isn't much fun, I should say. On my side, it's not so much that I'm weary of bachelor-life, but I'm growing old, and then, my cooks rob me; so you see, it all fits in nicely. But here's the difficulty, Lizaveta Bogdanovna; we don't know each other at all, that is, to be exact, you don't know me ... I know you well enough. I understand your character. I don't say you have no faults. Being a spinster, you're little old-maidish, but that's no harm. In the hands of a good husband, a wife is soft as wax. But I should like you to know me before marriage; or else you'll, maybe, blame me afterwards. ... I don't want to deceive you.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA [*with dignity*]. But, Ignaty Ilyitch, I believe I too have had opportunities of discovering your character.

SHPIGELSKY . You? Oh! nonsense. . . . That's not a woman's job. Why, I dare say you imagine I'm a man of cheerful disposition, an amusing fellow, don't you?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . I have always thought you a very amiable man. . . .

SHPIGELSKY . There you are. You see how easily one may be mistaken. Because I play the fool before outsiders, tell them anecdotes and humor them, you imagine that I'm really a light-hearted man. If I didn't need these people, I shouldn't even look at them. ... As it is, whenever I can, without much danger, you know, I turn them into ridicule. ... I don't deceive myself, though: I'm well aware that certain gentry, who can't take a step without me and are bored when I'm not there, consider themselves entitled to look down on me; but I pay them out, you may be sure. Natalya Petrovna, for instance. . . . Do you suppose I don't see through her? [*Mimics* NATALYA PETROVNA.] 'Dear Doctor, I really like you so much . . . you have such a wicked tongue,' ha, ha, coo away, my dove, coo away. Ugh! these ladies! And they smile and make eyes at you, while disdain is written on their faces. . . . They despise us, do what you will! I quite understand why she is saying harsh things of me to-day. Upon my soul, these ladies are wonderful people! Because they sprinkle themselves with eau-de-Cologne every day and speak so carelessly--as though they were just dropping their words for you to pick them up--they fancy there's no catching them by the tail. Oh, isn't there, though! They're just mortals the same as all of us poor sinners!

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . Ignaty Ilyitch . . . you surprise me.

SHPIGELSKY . I knew I should surprise you. So you see I'm not a light-hearted man at all, and not too good-natured even.... But at the same time, I don't want to make myself out what I never have been. Though I may put it on a bit before the gentry, no one's ever seen me play the fool in a low way, no one's ever dared to take insulting liberties with me. Indeed, I think they're a bit afraid of me; in fact, they know I bite. On one occasion, three years ago, a gentleman --a regular son of the soil--by way of fun at the dinner-table, stuck a radish in my hair. What do you think I did? Why, on the spot, without any show of anger, you know, in the most courteous manner, I challenged him to a duel. The son of the soil almost had a stroke, he was so terrified; our host made him apologize--it made a great sensation. As a matter of fact, I knew beforehand that he wouldn't fight. So you see, Lizaveta Bogdanovna, my vanity's immense; but my life's not been much. My talents are not great either. . . . I got through my studies somehow. I'm not much good as a doctor, it's no use my pretending to you, and if you're ever taken ill, I shan't prescribe for you myself. If I'd had talent and a good education, I should have bolted to the capital. For the aborigines here, no better doctor is wanted, to be sure. As regards my personal character, Lizaveta Bogdanovna, I ought to warn you: at home I'm ill-humored, silent and exacting, I'm not cross as long as everything's done for me to my satisfaction; I like to be well fed and to have my habits respected; however, I'm not jealous and I'm not mean, and in my absence, you can do just as you like. Of romantic love and all that between us, you understand it's needless to speak; and yet I imagine one might live under the same roof with me ... so long as you try to please me, and don't shed tears in my presence, that I can't endure! But I'm not given to fault-finding. There you have my confession. Well, what do you say now?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . What am I to say to you, Ignaty Ilyitch? ... If you have not been blackening your character on purpose to ...

SHPIGELSKY . But how have I blackened my character? Don't forget that another man in my place would, with perfect complacency, have kept quiet about his faults, as you've not noticed them, and after the wedding, it's all up then, it's too late. But I'm too proud to do that. [*LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA glances at him.*] Yes, yes, too proud . . . you needn't look at me like that. I don't mean to pose and lie

before my future wife, not if it were for a hundred thousand instead of fifteen thousand, though to a stranger I'm ready to humble myself for a sack of flour. I'm like that. . . . I'll smirk to a stranger while inwardly I'm thinking, you're a blockhead, my friend, you'll be caught by my bait; but with you, I say what I think. That is, let me explain; I don't say everything I think, even to you; but at any rate, I'm not deceiving you. I must strike you as a very queer fish certainly, but there, wait a bit, one day I'll tell you the story of my life and you'll wonder that I've come through as well as I have. You weren't born with a silver spoon in your mouth, I expect, either, but yet, my dear, you can't conceive what real hopeless poverty is like. . . . I'll tell you all about that, though, some other time. But now you had better think over the proposition I have had the honor of laying before you. . . . Consider this little matter well, in solitude, and let me know your decision. So far as I can judge, you're a sensible woman. And by the way, how old are you?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . I ... I ... I'm thirty.

SHPIGELSKY [*calmly*]. And that's not true, you're quite forty.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA [*firing up*], I'm *not* forty, only thirty-six.

SHPIGELSKY . That's not thirty, anyway. Well, Lizaveta Bogdanovna, that's a habit you must get out of ... especially as thirty-six isn't old for a married woman. And you shouldn't take snuff either.

[*Getting up.*] I fancy the rain has stopped.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA [*getting up also*]. Yes, it has.

SHPIGELSKY . And so you'll give me an answer in a day or two?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . I will tell you my decision to-morrow.

SHPIGELSKY . Now, I like that! That's really sensible! Bravo! Lizaveta Bogdanovna! Come, give me your arm. Let us go indoors.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA [*taking his arm*]. Let us go.

SHPIGELSKY . And by the way, I haven't kissed your hand . . . and I believe it's what's done. Well, for once, here goes! [*Kisses her hand.* LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA *blushes.*] That's right. [*Moves towards door into garden.*]

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA [*stopping*]. So you think, Ignaty Ilyitch, that Mikhail Alexandritch is really not a dangerous man?

SHPIGELSKY . I think not.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . Do you know what, Ignaty Ilyitch? I fancy that for some time past Natalya Petrovna ... I fancy that Mr. Beliayev. . . . She takes a good deal of I notice of him ... doesn't she! And Verotchka too, what do you think? Isn't that why to-day? . . .

SHPIGELSKY [*interrupting her*]. There's one other thing I've forgotten to tell you, Lizaveta Bogdanovna. I'm awfully inquisitive myself, but I can't endure inquisitive women. That is, I'll explain. To my thinking, a wife ought to be inquisitive and observant only with other people (indeed it's an advantage to her husband). . . . You understand me--with others only. However, if you really want to know my opinion concerning Natalya Petrovna, Vera Alexandrovna, Mr. Beliayev, and the folks here generally, listen and I'll sing you a little song. I've a horrible voice but you mustn't mind that.

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA [*with surprise*]. A song!

SHPIGELSKY. Listen! The first verse:

'Granny had a little kid,

Granny had a little kid,

A little grey kid!

Yes, she did, yes, she did!

The second verse:

'The kid would in the forest play,

The kid would in the forest play,

Yes, I say, yes, I say,

He would in the forest play.'

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA . But I don't understand. . . .

SHPIGELSKY. Listen then! The third verse:

'The grey wolves ate that little kid [*skipping about*]

The grey wolves ate that little kid,

They ate him up, they ate him up,

Yes, I say, they ate him up.'

And now let us go. I must have a talk with Natalya Petrovna, by the way. Let us hope she won't bite me. If I'm not mistaken, she still has need of me. Come along.

*[They go out into the garden]*

KATYA [*cautiously coming out from behind the column*], They've gone at last! What a spiteful man that doctor is . . . talked and talked and what didn't he say? And what a way to sing! I'm afraid Alexey Nikolaitch may have gone back indoors meanwhile... . Why on earth need they have come in here! [*Goes to the window*] So Lizaveta Bog-danovna is to be the doctor's wife. . . . [*Laughs*] So that's it! ... Well, I don't envy her. . . . [*Keeps looking out of window*] The grass looks as though it had been washed. . . . What a nice smell . . . it's the wild cherry. . . . Oh! here he comes! [*After waiting a moment.*] Alexey Nikolaitch! . . . Alexey Nikolaitch!

BELIAYEV [*behind the scenes*]. Who's calling me? Oh! is it you, Katya? [*Comes up to window.*] What do you want?

KATYA . Come in here. . . . I've something to say to you.

BELIAYEV . Oh! very well. [*Moves away from window and a moment later comes in at door.*] Here I am.

KATYA . Aren't you wet?

BELIAYEV . No . . . I've been sitting in the greenhouse with Potap . . . he's your uncle, isn't he?

KATYA . Yes, he's my uncle.

BELIAYEV . How pretty you are to-day! [*KATYA smiles and looks down. He takes a peach out of his pocket*] Would you like it?

KATYA [*refusing*]. Thank you very much ... eat it yourself.

BELIAYEV . I didn't refuse your raspberries when you gave me some yesterday. Take it, I picked it for you . . . really.

KATYA . Oh! thank you very much. *[Takes the peach.]*

BELIAYEV . That's right. What did you want to tell me?

KATYA . My young lady . . . Vera Alexandrovna, asked me . . . she wants to see you.

BELIAYEV . Ah! well, I'll go to her at once.

KATYA . No . . . she'll come here. She wants to have a talk with you.

BELIAYEV *[with some surprise]*. She wants to come here?

KATYA . Yes. . . . Here, you see. . . . Nobody comes in here. You won't be interrupted here. . . . *[Sighs.]* She likes you very much, Alexey Nikolaitch. . . . She's so kind. I'll go and fetch her. And you'll wait, won't you?

BELIAYEV . Of course, of course.

KATYA . In a minute. . . . *[Is going and stops.]* Alexey Nikolaitch, is it true what they are saying, that you are leaving us?

BELIAYEV . I? No. . . . Who told you so?

KATYA . So you're not going away? Thank goodness! *[In confusion.]* We'll be back in a minute. *[Goes out by door leading to the house.]*

BELIAYEV *[remains for some time without moving]*. How strange it all is! Strange things are happening to me. I must say I never expected all this. . . . Vera loves me. . . . Natalya Petrovna knows it. . . . Vera has confessed it herself. . . . extraordinary! Vera . . . such a sweet, dear child; but. . . what's the meaning of this note? *[Takes a scrap of paper out of his pocket.]* From Natalya Petrovna . . . in pencil. 'Don't go away, don't decide on anything till I have had a talk with you.' What does she want to talk about? *[A pause.]* Such idiotic ideas come into my head! I must say all this is very embarrassing. If anybody had told me a month ago that I . . . I . . . I simply can't get over that conversation with Natalya Petrovna, Why is my heart throbbing like this? And now Vera wants to see me. . . . What am I going to say to her? Anyway, I shall find out what's the matter. . . . Perhaps Natalya Petrovna's angry with me. . . . But whatever for? *[Looks at the note again.]* It's all queer, very queer.

*[The door is opened softly. He quickly hides the note. VERA and KATYA appear in the doorway. He goes up to them. VERA is very pale, she does not raise her eyes, nor move from the spot.]*

KATYA . Don't be afraid, miss, go up to him; I'll be on the look-out. Don't be afraid. *[To BELIAYEV.]* Oh! Alexey Nikolaitch! *[She shuts the windows, goes out into the garden and closes the door behind her.]*

BELIAYEV . Vera Alexandrovna... you wanted to see me. Come here, sit down here. *[Takes her by the hand and leads her to the seat. VERA sits down.]* That's it. *[Looking at her with surprise.]* You've been crying?

VERA *[without looking up]*. That doesn't matter. . . . I've come to beg you to forgive me, Alexey Nikolaitch.

BELIAYEV . What for?

VERA . I heard . . . you have had an unpleasant interview with Natalya Petrovna . . . you are going . . . you're being sent away.

BELIAYEV . Who told you that?

VERA . Natalya Petrovna herself. . . . I met her just after you had been with her. . . . She told me you

yourself are unwilling to stay. But I believe you are being sent away.

BELIAYEV . Tell me, do they know this in the house?

VERA . No . . . only Katya knows. ... I had to tell her. ... I wanted to see you, to beg you to forgive me. Imagine now how wretched I must be. ... I'm the cause of it, Alexey Nikolaitch, it's all my fault,

BELIAYEV . Your fault, Vera Alexandrovna?

VERA . I never could have thought. . . Natalya Petrovna. . . . But I don't blame her. Don't you blame me either.... This morning I was a silly child, but now. ... *[Breaks off.]*

BELIAYEV . Nothing's settled yet, Vera Alexandrovna. ... I may be staying.

VERA *[sadly]*. You say nothing's settled yet, Alexey Nikolaitch. . . . No, everything's settled, everything's over. See how you are with me now, and remember only yesterday, in the garden. . . . *[A pause.]* Ah! I see Natalya Petrovna has told you everything.

BELIAYEV *[embarrassed]*. Vera Alexandrovna . . .

VERA. She has told you, I see it. ... She tried to catch me, and I, like a silly, fell into her trap. But she betrayed herself too. . . . I'm not such a child. *[Dropping her voice.]* Oh no!

BELIAYEV . What do you mean?

VERA *[glancing at him]*. Alexey Nikolaitch, did you really want to leave us yourself?

BELIAYEV. Yes.

VERA . Why? *[BELIAYEV is silent.]* You don't answer?

BELIAYEV. Vera Alexandrovna, you are not mistaken. . . . Natalya Petrovna told me everything.

VERA *[faintly]*. What, for instance?

BELIAYEV. Vera Alexandrovna ... I really can't. . . . You understand.

VERA . She told you perhaps that I love you?

BELIAYEV *[hesitating]*. Yes.

VERA *[quickly]*. But it's untrue. . . .

BELIAYEV *[in confusion]*. What! . . .

VERA *[hides her face in her hands and whispers in a toneless voice through her fingers]*. Anyway, I didn't tell her that, I don't remember. . . . *[Lifting her head.]* Oh! how cruelly she has treated me! And you . . . you meant to go away because of that?

BELIAYEV . Vera Alexandrovna, only consider. . . .

VERA *[glancing at him]*. He does not love me! *[Hides her face again.]*

BELIAYEV *[sits down beside her and takes her hands]*. Vera Alexandrovna, give me your hand. . . . Listen, there must not be misunderstandings between us. I love you as a sister; I love you because no one could help loving you. Forgive me if I ... I've never in my life been in such a position.... I can't bear to wound you. ... *[She hides her face again.]* I'm not going to pretend with you, I know that you like me, that you've grown fond of me. . . . But think, what can come of it? I'm only twenty, I haven't a farthing. Please don't be angry with me. I really don't know what to say.

VERA *[taking her hands from her face and looking at him]*. And as though I expected anything, my God! But why so cruelly, so heartlessly. . . . *[She breaks off.]*

BELIAYEV . Vera Alexandrovna, I didn't mean to hurt you.

VERA . I'm not blaming you, Alexey Nikolaitch. How are you to blame? It's all my fault. . . . And how I am punished! I don't blame her either, I know she's a kind-hearted woman but she couldn't help herself. . . . She didn't know what she was doing.

BELIAYEV [*in amazement*]. Didn't know what she was doing?

VERA [*turning to him*]. Natalya Petrovna loves you, Beliyayev.

BELIAYEV . What?

VERA . She's in love with you.

BELIAYEV . What are you saying?

VERA . I know what I'm saying. To-day has made me years older. . . . I'm not a child now, believe me. She was actually jealous ... of me! [*With a bitter smile..*] What do you think of that?

BELIAYEV . But it's impossible!

VERA . Impossible. . . . Then why has she suddenly taken it into her head to marry me to that gentleman, what's his name, Bolshintsov? Why did she send the doctor to me, why did she try to persuade me to it herself? Oh! I know what I am saying! If you could have seen, Beliyayev, how her whole face changed when I told her. . . . Oh! you can't imagine how cunningly, how treacherously she trapped me into admitting it. Yes, she's in love with you; it's only too evident. . . .

BELIAYEV . Vera Alexandrovna, you're mistaken, I assure you.

VERA . No, I'm not mistaken. I tell you I'm not mistaken. If she doesn't love you, why has she tortured me like this? What have I done to her? [*Bitterly.*] Jealousy is an excuse for anything. But what's the good of talking! And now why is she sending you away? She imagines that you . . . that we . . . Oh! she need not worry herself! You can stay! [*Hides her face in her hands.*]

BELIAYEV . She hasn't sent me away so far, Vera Alexandrovna. . . . As I've told you already, nothing is decided yet. . . .

VERA [*suddenly lifting her head and looking at him*], Really?

BELIAYEV . Yes ... but why do you look at me like that?

VERA [*as though to herself*]. Ah! I see. . . . Yes, yes. . . . She is still hoping. . . . [*The door into the corridor is quickly opened and NATALYA PETROVNA appears in the doorway. She stops short on seeing VERA and BELIAYEV.*]

BELIAYEV . What did you say?

VERA . Yes, now it's all clear to me... She has thought better of it. She sees I'm no danger to her, and indeed what am I? A silly girl, while she! . . .

BELIAYEV . Vera Alexandrovna, how can you imagine.. .

VERA . But who knows? Perhaps she's right . . . perhaps you love her. . . .

BELIAYEV . I?

VERA [*standing up*]. Yes, you. Why are you blushing?

BELIAYEV . Me blushing? . . .

VERA . You like her, you may come to love her? . . . You don't answer my question.

BELIAYEV . But, good Lord, what do you want me to say? Vera Alexandrovna, you're so excited. . . . Do be calm for goodness sake. . . .

VERA [*turning away from him*]. Oh! you treat me as a child. . . . You don't deign to give me a serious answer. . . . You simply want to get rid of me. You try to comfort me! [*Turns to go out but but stops short at sight of NATALYA PETROVNA.*] Natalya Petrovna! . . . [*BELIAYEV looks round instantly.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*taking a few steps forward*]. Yes, I'm here. [*She speaks with some effort.*] I came for you, Verotchka.

VERA [*coldly and deliberately*]. What made you come here? So you've been looking for me?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes, I've been looking for you. You're indiscreet, Verotchka. . . . I've spoken of it more than once. . . . And you, Alexey Nikolaitch, you've forgotten your promise . . . you've deceived me.

VERA . Oh! stop that, Natalya Petrovna, leave off, do! [*NATALYA PETROVNA looks at her in amazement.*] Give up speaking to me as though I were a child. . . . [*Dropping her voice.*] From to-day I'm a woman. . . . I'm as much a woman as you are.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*embarrassed*]. Vera. . . .

VERA [*almost in a whisper*]. He hasn't deceived you. . . . Our meeting here is not his doing. He doesn't care for me, you know that, you've no need to be jealous.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with rising amazement*]. Vera!

VERA . It's the truth ... don't go on pretending. These pretenses are no use now. ... I see through them now, I can assure you. To you I'm not the ward you are watching over [*Ironically*] like an elder sister... [*Moves closer to her*] I'm your rival.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Vera, you forget yourself. . . .

VERA . Perhaps . . . but who has driven me to it? I don't understand what has given me courage to speak to you like this. . . . Perhaps it's because I have nothing to hope for, because it has pleased you to trample upon me.. . . And you have succeeded . . . completely. But let me tell you, I don't mean to be as underhand with you as you have been with me. . . . I'll let you know I've told him everything. [*Indicating BELIAYEV.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA . What could you tell him?

VERA . What? [*With irony.*'] Why, everything I have noticed. You hoped to worm everything out of me without betraying yourself. You made a mistake, Natalya Petrovna, you overrated your self-control.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Vera, think what you're saying...

VERA [*in a whisper and coming still closer to her*]. Tell me that I'm wrong. . . . Tell me that you're not in love with him. . . . He has told me that he doesn't love me! [*NATALYA PETROVNA, overwhelmed with confusion, is silent. VERA remains for some time motionless, then suddenly presses her hand to her forehead.*] Natalya Petrovna . . . forgive me ... I ... don't know . . . what's come over me . . . forgive me, don't be hard on me. . . . [*Bursts into tears and goes out rapidly by door into corridor. A silenced*]

BELIAYEV [*going up to NATALYA PETROVNA*]. I can assure you, Natalya Petrovna. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*looking fixedly at the floor; holds out her hand in his direction*]. Stop, Alexey Nikolaitch. The truth is ... Vera is right. . . . It's time I ... time I laid aside deceit. I have wronged her, and you--you have a right to despise me. [*BELIAYEV makes an involuntary gesture.*] I am degraded in my own eyes. The only way left me to regain your respect is openness, complete openness, whatever

the consequences. Besides, I am seeing you for the last time, for the last time I am speaking with you. I love you. [*She does not look at him.*]

BELIAYEV . You, Natalya Petrovna! . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes, yes, I love you. Vera was not deceived and has not deceived you. I have loved you from the very day you arrived here, but I only recognized it yesterday. I don't mean to justify my conduct. It has been unworthy of me ... but anyway you can understand now, you can make allowance for me. Yes, I was jealous of Vera; yes, I was planning to marry her to Bolshintsov, so as to get her away from you and from myself; yes, I took advantage of my position, of my being older, to find out her secret and--of course I didn't reckon on that--I betrayed myself. I love you, Beliayev; but let me say, it's only pride that forces me to confess it... the farce I have been playing revolts me at last. You cannot stay here. . . . Indeed, after what I have just told you, you will no doubt feel very awkward in my company, and you will want to get away as quickly as possible. I am certain of that. It is that certainty has given me courage. I confess I shouldn't like you to think badly of me. Now you know everything. . . . Perhaps I have spoilt things for you . . . perhaps, if all this had not happened, you might have cared for Verotchka. ... I have only one plea to urge, Alexey Nikolaitch. ... It has all been beyond my control. [*She pauses. She has said all this in a rather calm and measured voice, not looking at BELIAYEV. He is silent. She goes on with some agitation, still not looking at him.*] You don't answer me? But I understand that. There's nothing for you to say to me. The position of a man receiving a declaration of love when he feels no love is too painful. I thank you for your silence. Believe me, when I told you ... I love you, I was not pretending ... as before; I was not counting on anything; on the contrary, I wanted at last to throw off the mask, which I can assure you I'm not used to wearing. . . . And indeed, what's the use of affectation and duplicity, when everything's known; why pretend when there's no one to deceive? Everything is over between us now. I will not keep you. You can go away without saying another word to me, without taking leave of me. I shall not think it discourteous, I shall be grateful to you. There are circumstances in which delicacy is out of place . . . worse than rudeness. It seems we were not destined to know each other better. Good-bye! Yes, we were not destined to know each other . . . but at least I hope that now you no longer look on me as an oppressor, a furtive and deceitful creature. ... Good-bye for ever. [BELIAYEV *in distress tries to say something, but cannot.*] You are not going?

BELIAYEV [*bows, is about to go, and after a struggle with himself turns back*]. No, I can't go. ... [NATALYA PETROVNA *for the first time looks at him*] I can't go away like this! Natalya Petrovna, you said just now . . . you didn't want me to carry away unpleasant memories of you, and I don't want you to think of me as a man who . . . Oh dear! I don't know how to say it. ... Natalya Petrovna, I'm sorry. ... I don't know how to talk to women like you. . . . Up to now I've only known . . . quite ordinary women. You said that we were not destined to be friends, but, good God, how could an ordinary almost uneducated fellow like me ever dream of being anything to you? Think what you are and what I am! Think, could I dare to dream? . . . With your bringing up. ... But why talk of that. ... Just look at me ... this old coat and your sweet-scented clothes.... My God! Oh yes, I was afraid of you and I'm afraid of you still. ... I thought of you, without any exaggeration, as a being of higher order, and now . . . you, you tell me that you love me . . . you, Natalya Petrovna! Me! ... I feel my heart beating as it never has in my life; it's not beating merely from amazement, it's not that my vanity's flattered. . . . No, indeed . . . vanity doesn't come in now.... But I... I can't go away like this, say what you like!

NATALYA PETROVNA [*after a pause, as though to herself*]. What have I done?

BELIAYEV . Natalya Petrovna, for God's sake, I assure you . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*in a changed voice*]. Alexey Nikolaitch. If I did not know you are an honest man, and incapable of deceit, God knows what I should think. I might regret having spoken. But I trust

you. I don't want to hide my feelings from you; I am grateful for what you have just said. Now I know why we have not been friends. ... So it was nothing in me myself that repelled you. . . . Only my position. . . . *[Breaks off.]* It's all for the best, of course . . . but now it will be easier for me to part from you. . . . Good-bye. *[Is about to go out.]*

BELIAYEV *[after a pause]*. Natalya Petrovna, I know that it's impossible for me to stay here . . . but I can't tell you what's going on in me. You love me. . . . I'm positively terrified to utter those words . . . it's all so new to me ... it seems as though I'm seeing you for the first time, hearing you for the first time, but I feel one thing, I must go. ... I feel I can't answer for anything. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA *[in a faint voice]*. Yes, Beliaev, you must go.... Now after what you have said, you can go. . . . And can it be really, in spite of all I have done. . . . Oh, believe me, if I had had the remotest suspicion of all you have just told me, that confession would have died in me, Beliaev. ... I only meant to put an end to all misunderstandings, I meant to expiate, to punish myself, I meant to cut the last thread. If I could have imagined. . . . *[Hides her face.]*

BELIAYEV . I do believe you, Natalya Petrovna, I do. And I, too ... a quarter of an hour ago . . . could I have imagined. . . . It's only to-day, during our interview before dinner that I felt for the first time something extraordinary, incredible, as though a hand had squeezed my heart, and such a burning ache. ... It is true that before then I had, more or less, avoided you and even not liked you particularly, but when you told me to-day that Vera Alexandrovna fancied . . . *[Breaks off.]*

NATALYA PETROVNA *[with an involuntary smile of happiness on her lips]*. Hush, hush, Beliaev; we mustn't think of that. We must not forget that we are speaking to each other for the last time . . . that you are going to-morrow. . . .

BELIAYEV . Oh yes! I'll go to-morrow! Now I can go. ... All this will pass. . . . You see I don't want to exaggerate. . . . I'm going ... to take what God gives! I shall take with me a memory, I shall never forget that you cared for me. . . . But how was it I didn't know you till now? Here you are looking at me now. . . . Can I have ever tried to avoid your eyes? . . . Can I ever have felt shy with you?

NATALYA PETROVNA *[with a smile]*. You said just now that you're afraid of me.

BELIAYEV . Did I? *[A pause.]* Really.... I wonder at myself. ... Is it I, I talking so boldly to you? I don't know myself.

NATALYA PETROVNA . And you're not deceiving yourself?

BELIAYEV . How?

NATALYA PETROVNA . In thinking that you . . . *[Shuddering.]* Oh? good God, what am I doing? . . . Beliaev. . . . Help me. . . . No woman has ever been in such a position. It's more than I can bear indeed. . . . Perhaps it's for the best, everything is ended at once; but anyway, we have come to know each other. . . . Give me your hand and good-bye for ever.

BELIAYEV *[takes her hand]*, Natalya Petrovna ... I don't know what to say at parting . . . my heart is so full. God give you. . . . *[Breaks off and presses her hand to his lips.]* Good-bye. *[Is about to go out by door into garden.]*

NATALYA PETROVNA *[looking after him]*. Beliaev.. ..

BELIAYEV *[turning]*. Natalya Petrovna. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA *[pausing for some time, then in a weak voice]*. Stay. . . .

BELIAYEV . What?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Stay, and may God be our judge! *[She hides her head in her hands.]*

BELIAYEV [*goes swiftly to her and holds out his hands to her*]. Natalya Petrovna. . . . [*At that instant the garden door opens and RAKITIN appears in the doorway. He gazes at them for some time, then goes suddenly up to them.*]

RAKITIN [*in a loud voice*']. They are looking for you everywhere, Natalya Petrovna. . . . [NATALYA PETROVNA and BELIAYEV look round.]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*taking her hands from her face and seeming to come to herself*]. Ah, it's you. . . . Who is looking for me? [BELIAYEV *in confusion bows to NATALYA PETROVNA and is going out.*] Are you going, Alexey Nikolaitch? . . . Don't forget, you know what. . . . [*He bows to her a second time and goes out into the garden.*]

RAKITIN . Arkady is looking for you. . . . I must say I didn't expect to find you here . . . but as I passed by . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with a smile*']. You heard our voices. . . . I met Alexey Nikolaitch here and have had a complete explanation with him. . . . To-day seems a day of explanations; but now we can go into the house. . . . [*Goes towards door into corridor.*]

RAKITIN [*with some emotion*]. May I ask . . . what decision?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*affecting surprise*]. Decision? . . . I don't understand you.

RAKITIN [*after a long pause, sadly*]. If that's so, I understand.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Well, there it is.... Mysterious hints again! Oh, well, I have spoken to him and now everything is set right. . . . It was all nonsense, exaggeration. . . . All you and I talked about was childish. It must be forgotten now.

RAKITIN . I am not asking you for explanations, Natalya Petrovna.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with forced ease*]. What on earth was it I wanted to say to you. . . . I don't remember. Never mind. Let us go. It's all at an end . . . it's over.

RAKITIN [*looking at her intently*]. Yes, it's all at an end. How vexed you must be with yourself now . . . for your openness this morning. [*She turns away.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA . Rakitin. . . . [*He glances at her again; she obviously does not know what to say.*] You've not spoken to Arkady yet?

RAKITIN . No . . . I haven't thought of anything yet.... You see I must make up some story. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . How insufferable it is! What do they want of me? I'm followed about at every step I take. Rakitin, I'm really conscience-stricken you should have . . .

RAKITIN . Oh, Natalya Petrovna, pray don't distress yourself. . . . Why, it's all in the natural order of things. But how obviously this is Mr. Beliayev's first experience! Why was he so embarrassed, why did he take to flight? . . . But with time . . . [*In an undertone*] you will both learn to keep up appearances. . . . [*Aloud.*] Let us go.

[NATALYA PETROVNA *is about to go up to him but stops short. At that instant ISLAYEV'S voice is heard in the garden: 'He went in here, you say?'* and then ISLAYEV and SHPIGELSKY come in.]

ISLAYEV . To be sure . . . here he is. Well, well, well! And Natalya Petrovna too! [*Going up to her.*] How's this? The continuation of this morning's talk? It's evidently an important matter.

RAKITIN . I met Natalya Petrovna here as I walked.

ISLAYEV . Met her? [*Looking round.*] A queer place for a walk!

NATALYA PETROVNA . Well, you've walked in, too. . .

ISLAYEV . I came in because . . . [*Breaks off.*]

NATALYA PETROVNA . You were looking for me?

ISLAYEV [*after a pause*]. Yes--I was looking for you. Won't you come into the house? Tea's ready. It will soon be dark.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*taking his arm*]. Come along.

ISLAYEV [*looking round*]. This place might be turned into two good rooms for the gardeners--or another servants' hall--don't you think, Shpigelsky?

SHPIGELSKY . To be sure it could.

ISLAYEV . Let us go by the garden, Natasha. [*Goes towards the garden door. Throughout the scene he has not once looked at RAKITIN. In the doorway he turns half round.*] Well, gentlemen. Let us go in to tea.

[*Goes out with NATALYA PETROVNA.*]

SHPIGELSKY [*to RAKITIN*]. Well, Mikhail Alexandritch, come along. . . . Give me your arm. . . . It's clear we are destined to follow in the rear. . . .

RAKITIN [*wrathfully*]. Oh, Doctor, I'm sick of you.

SHPIGELSKY [*with affected good-humor*]. Ah, Mikhail Alexandritch, if only you know how sick I am of myself! [RAKITIN *cannot help smiling.*] Come along, come along. [*They go out into the garden.*]

# ACT V

*[The scene is the same as in the 1st and 3rd Acts. Morning. ISLAYEV is sitting at the table looking through papers. He suddenly jumps up.]*

ISLAYEV . No! impossible. I can't work to-day. I can't get it out of my mind. *[Walks up and down.]* I confess I didn't expect this; I didn't expect I should be so upset... as I am now. How is one to act? . . . that's the problem. *[Ponders and suddenly shouts.]* Matvey!

MATVEY *[entering]*. Yes, Sir?

ISLAYEV . Send the bailiff to me. . . . And tell the men digging at the dam to wait for me. . . . Run along.

MATVEY . Yes, Sir. *[Goes out.]*

ISLAYEV *[going back to the table and turning over the papers]*. Yes . . . it's a problem!

ANNA SEMYONOVNA *[comes in and goes up to ISLAYEV]*. Arkasha. . . .

ISLAYEV . Ah! it's you, Mamma. How are you this morning?

ANNA SEMYONOVNA *[sitting down on the sofa]*. I'm quite well, thank God. *[Sighs.]* I'm quite well. *[Sighs still more audibly.]* Thank God. *[Seeing that ISLAYEV is not attending to her, she sighs very emphatically, with a faint moan.]*

ISLAYEV . You're sighing . . . what's the matter?

ANNA SEMYONOVNA *[sighs again but less emphatically]*. Oh! Arkasha, as though you don't know what makes me sigh!

ISLAYEV . What do you want to say?

ANNA SEMYONOVNA *[after a pause]*. I'm your mother, Arkasha. Of course you're a man, grown-up and sensible; but still--I'm your mother. It's a great word--mother!

ISLAYEV . Please explain.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . You know what I am hinting at, my dear. Your wife, Natasha ... of course, she's an excellent woman . . . and her conduct hitherto has been most exemplary . . . but she is still so young, Arkasha! And youth... .

ISLAYEV . I see what you want to say. . . . You fancy her relations with Rakitin. . . .

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . God forbid! I never thought of such a thing.

ISLAYEV . You didn't let me finish. . . . You fancy her relations with Rakitin are not altogether . . . clear. These mysterious conversations, these tears--all strike you as strange.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . Well, Arkasha, has he told you at last what their talks were about? . . . He has told me nothing.

ISLAYEV . I haven't asked him, Mamma, and he is apparently in no hurry to satisfy my curiosity.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . Then what do you intend to do now?

ISLAYEV . Do, Mamma? Why, nothing.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . Nothing?

ISLAYEV . Why, certainly, nothing.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA [*getting up*]. I must say, I'm surprised to hear it. Of course you are master in your own house and know better than I do what is for the best. But only think of the consequences. . . .

ISLAYEV . Really, Mamma, there's no need to worry yourself.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . My dear, I'm a mother . . . you know best. [*A pause.*] I must own I came to see whether I could do anything to help.

ISLAYEV [*earnestly*]. No, as far as that goes, I must beg you, Mamma, not to trouble yourself. . . . Pray don't!

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . As you wish, Arkasha, as you wish. I won't say another word. I have warned you, I have done my duty, and now I won't open my lips, [*A brief silence.*]

ISLAYEV . Are you going anywhere to-day?

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . Only I must warn you; you are too trustful, my dear boy; you judge everybody by yourself! Believe me, true friends are only too rare nowadays!

ISLAYEV [*with impatience*]. Mamma. . . .

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . Oh, I'll say no more, I'll say no more! And what's the use, an old woman like me! I'm in my dotage, I suppose! But I was brought up on different principles, and have tried to instil them in you . . . there, there, go on with your work, I won't interrupt you. . . . I'm going. [*Goes to door and stops.*] Well, you know best. [*Goes out.*]

ISLAYEV [*looking after her*]. Queer that people who really love you have such a passion for poking their fingers into your wounds. And of course they're convinced it's doing you good ... that's what's so funny! I don't blame Mother, though; of course she means well, and how could she help giving advice? But that's no matter. . . . [*Sitting down.*] How am I to act? [*After a moment's thought, gets up.*] Oh! the more simply, the better! Diplomatic subtleties don't suit me. ... I should be the first to make a muddle of them. [*Rings, MATVEY enters.*] Is Mikhail Alexandritch at home, do you know?

MATVEY . Yes, Sir. I saw his honor in the billiard-room just now.

ISLAYEV . Ah, well, ask him to come to me.

MATVEY . Yes, Sir. [*Goes out.*]

ISLAYEV [*walking up and down*]. I'm not used to these upheavals. ... I hope they won't happen often . . . strong as I am, I can't stand them. [*Puts his hand on his heart.*] Ough! . . . [RAKITIN, embarrassed, comes in from the outer room.]

RAKITIN . You sent for me?

ISLAYEV . Yes. . . . [*A pause,*] Michel, you know you owe me something?

RAKITIN . I owe you?

ISLAYEV . Why, yes. Have you forgotten your promise? About . . . Natasha's tears . . . and altogether . . . When my Mother and I came upon you, you remember--you told me you had a secret which you would explain.

RAKITIN . I said a secret?

ISLAYEV . You said so.

RAKITIN . But what secret could we have? We had had a talk.

ISLAYEV . What about? And why was she crying?

RAKITIN . You know, Arkady . . . there are moments in in the life of a woman . . . even the happiest. . .

ISLAYEV . Rakitin, stop, we can't go on like this. I can't bear to see you in such a position. . . . Your confusion distresses me more than it does yourself. [*Takes his hand.*] We are old friends--you've known me from a child; I don't know how to pretend and you have always been open with me. Let me put one question to you. . . . I give you my word beforehand that I shall not doubt the sincerity of your answer. You love my wife, don't you? [RAKITIN *looks at ISLAYEV.*] You understand me, you love her as . . . Well, that is you love her with the sort of love that . . . it's difficult to admit to her husband?

RAKITIN [*after a pause, in a toneless voice*]. Yes, I love your wife . . . with that sort of love.

ISLAYEV [*also after a pause*]. Michel, thank you for your frankness. You're an honorable man. But what's to be done now? Sit down, we'll think it over together. [RAKITIN *sits down.* ISLAYEV *walks about the room.*] I know Natasha; I know how to appreciate her. But I know how much I'm worth myself too. I'm not your equal. Michel. . . don't interrupt me, please--I'm not your equal. You're cleverer, better, more attractive, in fact. I'm an ordinary person. Natasha loves me--I think, but she has eyes, well, of course, she must find you attractive. And there's another thing I must tell you: I noticed your affection for each other long ago. . . . But I was always so sure of you both--and as long as nothing came to the surface . . . Ough! I don't know how to say things! [*Breaks off.*] But after the scene yesterday, after your second interview in the evening--what are we to do? And if only I had come upon you alone, but other people are mixed up in it; Mamma, and that sly fox, Shpigelsky. . . . Come, what do you say, Michel?

RAKITIN . You are perfectly right, Arkady.

ISLAYEV . That's not the point . . . what's to be done? I must tell you, Michel, that though I am a simple person--so much I do understand, that it's not the thing to spoil other people's lives--and that there are cases when it's wicked to insist on one's rights. That I've not picked out of books, Michel . . . it's my conscience tells me so. Leave others free. . . . Well, yes, let them be free. Only it wants some thinking over. It's too important.

RAKITIN [*getting up*]. But I have thought it over already.

ISLAYEV . How so?

RAKITIN . I must go. . . . I'm going away.

ISLAYEV [*after a pause*]. You think so? . . . Right away from here altogether?

RAKITIN . Yes.

ISLAYEV [*begins walking up and down again*]. That is . . . that is a hard saying! But perhaps you are right. We shall miss you dreadfully. . . . God knows, perhaps it won't mend matters either. . . . But you can see more clearly, you know best. I expect you are right. You're a danger to me, Michel.... [*With a mournful smile.*] Yes . . . you are. You know what I said just now . . . about freedom. . . . And yet perhaps I couldn't survive it! For me to be without Natasha. . . . [*Waving his hand in dismissal of the idea.*] And another tiling, Michel: for some time past, and especially these last few days, I've noticed a great change in her. She's all the time in a state of intense agitation and I'm alarmed about it. I'm not mistaken, am I?

RAKITIN [*bitterly*]. Oh no! you're not mistaken!

ISLAYEV . Well, you see! So you are going away?

RAKITIN . Yes.

ISLAYEV . H'm! And how suddenly this has burst on us! If only you had not been so confused when my Mother and I came upon you. . . .

MATVEY [*coming in*]. The bailiff is here.

ISLAYEV . Ask him to wait! [MATVEY *goes out*.] But, Michel, you won't be away for long? That's nonsense.

RAKITIN . I don't know . . . really ... a good time, I expect.

ISLAYEV . But you don't take me for an Othello, do you? Upon my word, I don't believe there has been such a conversation between two friends since the world began! I can't part from you like this. . . .

RAKITIN [*pressing his hand*]. You'll let me know when I can come back. . . .

ISLAYEV . There's nobody who can fill your place here! Not Bolshintsov, anyway!

RAKITIN . There are others. . . .

ISLAYEV . Who? Krinitsyn? That conceited fool? Beliayev, of course, is a good-natured lad ... but you can't speak of him in the same breath.

RAKITIN [*ironically*]. Do you think so? You don't know him, Arkady. . . . Look at him more attentively. ... I advise you. . . . Do you hear? He's a very . . . very remarkable fellow!

ISLAYEV . Pooh! To be sure, Natasha and you were always meaning to finish his education! [*Glancing towards the door*.] Ah! here he is, coming here, I do believe. . . . [*Hurriedly*.] And so, dear Michel, it's settled . . . you are going away ... for a short time ... some days. . . . No need to hurry . . . we must prepare Natasha, . . . I'll soothe my Mother. . . . And God give you happiness! You've lifted a load off my heart. . . . Embrace me, dear boy! [*Hastily embraces him and turns to BELIAYEV who is coming in*.] Ah! . . . it's you! Well. . . well, how are you?

BELIAYEV . Very well, thank you, Arkady Sergeyitch.

ISLAYEV . And where's Kolya?

BELIAYEV . He's with Herr Schaaf.

ISLAYEV . Ah ... that's right! [*Takes his hat*.] Well, I must be off, my friends. I've not been anywhere this morning, neither to the dam nor the building. . . . Here, I've not even looked through my papers. [*Gathers them up under his arm*.] Good-bye for now! Matvey! Matvey! Come with me! [*Goes out*. RAKITIN *remains in front of stage, plunged in thought*.]

BELIAYEV [*goes up to him*]. How are you feeling this morning, Mikhail Alexandritch?

RAKITIN . Thank you. Just as usual. And you?

BELIAYEV . I'm quite well.

RAKITIN . That's obvious!

BELIAYEV . How so?

RAKITIN . Why . . . from your face. . . . And oh! you've put on your new coat this morning. . . . And what do I see? A flower in your buttonhole! [BELIAYEV, *blushing*, *snatches it out*.] Oh! why . . . why. . . . It's charming. [*A pause*.] By the way, Alexey Nikolaitch, if there's anything you want . . . I'm going to the town tomorrow.

BELIAYEV . To-morrow?

RAKITIN . Yes . . . and from there on to Moscow, perhaps.

BELIAYEV [*with surprise*]. To Moscow? Why, only yesterday you said you meant to be here another month or so....

RAKITIN . Yes . . . but business . . . things have turned up....

BELIAYEV . And shall you be away for long?

RAKITIN . I don't know ... a long time, perhaps.

BELIAYEV . Do you mind telling me--does Natalya Petrovna know of your intention?

RAKITIN . No. Why do you ask me about her?

BELIAYEV . Why? [*A little embarrassed*]. Oh, nothing.

RAKITIN [*pausing and looking round*]. Alexey Nikolaitch, there's nobody in the room but ourselves; isn't it queer that we should keep up a farce before each other? Don't you think so?

BELIAYEV . I don't understand you, Mikhail Alexandritch.

RAKITIN . Oh, you don't? Do you really not understand why I'm going away?

BELIAYEV . No.

RAKITIN . That's strange. . . . However, I'm willing to believe you. Perhaps you really don't know the reason ... would you like me to tell you why I'm going?

BELIAYEV . Please do.

RAKITIN . Well, you see, Alexey Nikolaitch--but I rely on your discretion--you found me just now with Arkady Sergeyitch. . . . We have had a rather important conversation. In consequence of which I have decided to depart. And do you know why? I'm telling you all this because I think you are a really good fellow. . . . He imagined that I ... oh! well, that I'm in love with Natalya Petrovna. What do you think of that? It's a queer notion, isn't it? But I am grateful to him for speaking to me simply, straight out instead of being underhand, keeping watch on us and all that. Come, tell me now what would you have done in my place? Of course, there are no grounds at all for his suspicions, still he's worried by them. . . . For the peace of mind of his friends, a decent man must be ready at times to sacrifice . . . his own pleasure. So that's why I'm going away. . . . I'm sure you think I'm right, don't you? You too ... you would certainly do the same in my place, wouldn't you? You would go away too?

BELIAYEV [*after a pause*]. Perhaps.

RAKITIN . I am very glad to hear that. . . . Of course, I can't deny that my making off has its comic side. It's as though I imagine I'm dangerous; but you see, Alexey Nikolaitch, a woman's honor is such an important thing. . . . And at the same time--of course, I don't say this of Natalya Petrovna--but I have known women pure and innocent at heart, perfect children for all their cleverness, who just through that very purity and innocence, are more apt than others to give way to sudden passion. . . . And so, who knows? One can't be too discreet in such cases, especially as ... By the way, Alexey Nikolaitch, you may perhaps still imagine that love is the greatest bliss on earth?

BELIAYEV [*coldly*]. I have had no experience, but imagine that to be loved by a woman one loves is a great happiness.

RAKITIN . God grant you long preserve such pleasant convictions! It's my belief, Alexey Nikolaitch, that love of every kind, happy as much as unhappy, is a real calamity if you give yourself up to it

completely. . . Wait a bit! You may learn yet how those soft little hands can torture you, with what sweet solicitude they can tear your heart to rags. . . . Wait a bit! You will learn what burning hatred lies hidden under the most ardent love! You will think of me when you yearn for peace, for the dullest, most commonplace peace as a sick man yearns for health, when you will envy any man who is free and light-hearted. . . . You wait! You will know what it means to be tied to a petticoat, to be enslaved and poisoned--and how shameful and agonizing that slavery is! . . . You will learn at last how little you get for all your sufferings. . . . But why am I saying all this to you, you won't believe me now. The fact is that I am very glad of your approval. . . yes, yes . . . in such cases one ought to be careful.

BELIAYEV [*who has kept his eyes fixed on RAKITIN*]. Thanks for the lesson, Mikhail Alexandritch, though I didn't need it.

RAKITIN [*takes his hand*]. Please forgive me, I had no intention . . . it's not for me to give lessons to anyone whatever . . . I was just talking. . . .

BELIAYEV [*with slight irony*]. Not apropos of anything?

RAKITIN [*a little embarrassed*]. Just so, not apropos of anything in particular. . . . I only meant. . . . You haven't hitherto had occasion, Alexey Nikolaitch, to study women. Women are peculiar creatures.

BELIAYEV . But of whom are you speaking?

RAKITIN . Oh . . . no one in particular.

BELIAYEV . Of women in general?

RAKITIN [*with a constrained smile*]. Yes, perhaps. I really don't know what business I have to adopt this lecturing tone, but do let me at parting give you this one piece of advice. [*Breaking off with a gesture of dismissal*] But there! I'm not the man to give anyone advice! Please forgive my running on like this. . . .

BELIAYEV . Oh, not at all. . . .

RAKITIN . So you don't want anything in the town?

BELIAYEV . Nothing, thank you. But I'm sorry you're going away.

RAKITIN . Thanks very much. . . . So am I, I can assure you. . . . [NATALYA PETROVNA and VERA come in from the study. VERA is very sad and pale] I am very glad to have made your acquaintance. . . . [*Presses his hand again*]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*looks at them and then goes up to them*]. Good morning.

RAKITIN [*turning quickly*]. Good morning, Natalya Petrovna . . . . Good morning Vera Alexandrovna. . . . [BELIAYEV bows to NATALYA PETROVNA and VERA without speaking. He is confused]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*to RAKITIN*]. What are you doing this morning?

RAKITIN . Oh, nothing. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Vera and I have been walking in the garden. . . . It's a lovely day. . The scent of the lime trees is so delicious. We've been walking under the lime trees. . . . It's delightful to listen to the humming of the bees in the shade overhead. . . . [*Timidly to BELIAYEV.*] We expected to meet you there. [BELIAYEV is silent]

RAKITIN [*to NATALYA PETROVNA*]. Ah! You too can admire the beauties of nature to-day. . . . [A pause] Alexey Nikolaitch couldn't go into the garden. . . . He has got his new coat on.

BELIAYEV [*reddening*]. Of course, it's the only one I have, and I dare say it might get torn in the

garden. ... I suppose that's what you mean?

RAKITIN *[blushing]*. Oh no ... I didn't mean that. . . . [VERA goes in silence to sofa on Right, sits down and takes up her work. NATALYA PETROVNA gives BELIAYEV a constrained smile. A brief, rather oppressive silence. RAKITIN goes on with malicious carelessness] Ah, I'd forgotten to tell you, Natalya Petrovna, I'm going away to-day. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA *[with some agitation]*. Going? Where?

RAKITIN . To the town. . . . On business.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Not for long, I hope.

RAKITIN . That's as my business goes.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Mind you come back as soon as you can. *[To BELIAYEV without looking at him]* Alexey Nikolaitch, was it your sketches Kolya was showing me? Did you draw them?

BELIAYEV . Yes . . . they're nothing much.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Not at all, they are very charming. You have talent.

RAKITIN . I see you are discovering new talents in Mr. Beliayev every day.

NATALYA PETROVNA *[coldly]*. Perhaps ... so much the better for him. *[To BELIAYEV.]* I expect you have some other sketches, you must show them to me. *[BELIAYEV bows]*

RAKITIN *[who stands all this time as though on thorns]*. But I remember it's time to pack. . . . Good-bye. *[Goes to door of outer room.]*

NATALYA PETROVNA . But you'll come to say good-bye to us. ...

RAKITIN . Of course.

BELIAYEV *[after some hesitation]*. Mikhail Alexandritch, wait a minute, I'm coming with you. I must have a few words with you. . . .

RAKITIN . Ah! *[They go out together. NATALYA PETROVNA is left in the middle of the stage; after a little while, she sits down on Left.]*

NATALYA PETROVNA *[after an interval of silence]*. Vera!

VERA *[not lifting her head]*. What is it?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Vera for goodness sake, don't treat me like this ... for goodness sake, Vera . . . Verotchka. *[VERA says nothing. NATALYA PETROVNA gets up, walks across the stage and slowly sinks on her knees before VERA. VERA tries to make her get up, turns away and hides her face.*

*NATALYA PETROVNA speaks on her knees.]* Vera, forgive me; don't cry, Vera. I've behaved badly to you, I'm to blame. Can't you forgive me?

VERA *[through her tears]*. Get up, get up. ...

NATALYA PETROVNA . I won't get up, Vera, till you forgive me. It's hard for you . . . but think, is it any easier for me . . . think, Vera. . . . You know everything. . . . The only difference between us is that you have done no wrong, while I ...

VERA *[bitterly]*. That's all the difference! No, Natalya Petrovna, there's another difference between us.... You're so soft, so kind, so warm this morning. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA *[interrupting her]*. Because I feel how wrong I've been. . . .

VERA . Really? Is it only that?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*gets up and sits beside her*]. What other reason can there be?

VERA . Natalya Petrovna, don't torture me any more, don't ask me questions. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with a sigh*]. Vera, I see you can't forgive me.

VERA . You're so kind and soft to-day because you feel you are loved.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*embarrassed*], Vera?

VERA [*turning to her*]. Well, isn't it the truth?

NATALYA PETROVNA [*sadly*], I assure you we are both equally unhappy.

VERA . He loves you!

NATALYA PETROVNA . Vera, why do we torture each other? It's time for both of us to think what we're doing. Remember the position I'm in, the position we are both in. Remember that our secret, though my fault, of course, is known to two men here already. . . . [*Breaks off.*] Vera, instead of tormenting each other with suspicions and reproaches, hadn't we better consider together how to get out of this dreadful position . . . how to save ourselves! Do you imagine I can stand these shocks and agitations? Have you forgotten who I am? But you're not listening.

VERA [*looking dreamily at the floor*]. He loves you. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . Vera, he's going away.

VERA [*turning away*]. Oh, leave me alone. . . . [NATALYA PETROVNA *looks at her irresolutely*. At that instant, ISLAYEV'S voice calls from the study: 'Natasha, Natasha, where are you?']

NATALYA PETROVNA [*gets up quickly and goes to study-door*]. I'm here . . . what is it?

ISLAYEV [*from the study*]. Come here, I've something to tell you. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . In a minute. [*She turns to VERA and holds out her hand. VERA does not stir. NATALYA PETROVNA sighs and goes out into the study.*]

VERA [*alone; after a silence*]. He loves her! . . . And I must stay in her house. . . . Oh! it's too much. . . . [*She hides her face in her hands and sits motionless. SHPIGELSKY puts his head in at the door leading to the outer room. He looks round cautiously and goes on tip-toe up to VERA, who does not notice him.*']

SHPIGELSKY [*standing before her, his arms crossed and a malicious grin on his face*]. Vera Alexandrovna! . . . Vera Alexandrovna!

VERA [*raising her head*]. Who is it? You, Doctor. . . .

SHPIGELSKY. What is it, my young lady, not well, or what?

VERA. Oh, nothing.

SHPIGELSKY . Let me feel your pulse. [*Feels her pulse.*] H'm! Why is it so quick? Ah, young lady, young lady. You won't listen to me. . . . And yet it's your welfare I wish for.

VERA [*looking at him resolutely*]. Ignaty Ilyitch . . .

SHPIGELSKY [*alertly*], I'm all ears, Vera Alexandrovna. . . . What a look, upon my word. . . . I'm all ears.

VERA . That gentleman . . . Bolshintsov, your friend, is he really a good man?

SHPIGELSKY . My friend Bolshintsov? The most excellent, the best of men ... a pattern and paragon

of all the virtues.

VERA . He's not ill-natured?

SHPIGELSKY . Most kind-hearted, upon my soul. He's not a man, he's made of dough, really. You've only to take him and mold him. You wouldn't find another such good-natured fellow if you searched with a candle by daylight. He's a dove, not a man.

VERA . You answer for him?

SHPIGELSKY [*lays one hand on his heart and raises the other upwards*]. As I would for myself!

VERA . Then, you can tell him . . . that I am willing to marry him.

SHPIGELSKY [*with joyful amazement*]. You don't say so!

VERA . But as soon as possible--do you hear? ... As soon as possible. . . .

SHPIGELSKY . To-morrow, if you like. ... I should rather think so! Bravo, Vera Alexandrovna! You're a young lady of spirit! I'll gallop over to him at once. Won't he be overjoyed. . . . Well, this is an unexpected turn of affairs! Why, he worships the ground you tread on, Vera Alexandrovna. . . .

VERA [*with impatience*]. I didn't ask you that, Ignaty Ilyitch.

SHPIGELSKY . As you please, Vera Alexandrovna, as you please. Only you'll be happy with him, you'll be grateful to me, you'll see. . . . [VERA *makes a gesture of impatience*.] There, I'll hold my tongue. ... So then I can tell him? . . .

VERA . You can, you can.

SHPIGELSKY . Very good. So I'll set off at once. Good-bye. [*Listens*]. And here's somebody coming, by the way. [*Goes towards study and in the doorway makes a grimace expressing surprise to himself*]. Good-bye for the present. [*Goes out*]

VERA [*looking after him*]. Anything in the world is better than staying here. [*Stands up*]. Yes, I have made up my mind. I won't stop in this house ... not for anything. I can't endure her soft looks, her smiles, I can't bear the sight of her, basking and purring in her happiness. . . . She's happy, however she pretends to be sad and sorrowful. . . . Her caresses are unbearable. . . .

[BELIAYEV *appears in the door of the outer room. He looks round and goes up to VERA*.]

BELIAYEV [*in a low voice*]. Vera Alexandrovna, you're alone?

VERA [*looks round, starts, and after a moment, brings out*]. Yes.

BELIAYEV . I'm glad to find you alone. ... I should not have come in here otherwise. Vera Alexandrovna, I've come to say good-bye to you.

VERA . Good-bye?

BELIAYEV . Yes, I'm going away.

VERA . You are going away? You too?

BELIAYEV . Yes ... I too. [*With intense suppressed feeling*]. You see, Vera Alexandrovna, I can't stay here. I've done so much harm here already. Apart from my having--I don't know how--disturbed your peace of mind and Natalya Petrovna's, I've broken up old friendships. Thanks to me, Mr. Rakitin is leaving this house, you have quarreled with your benefactress. . . . It's time to put a stop to it all. After I am gone, I hope everything will settle down and be right again. . . . Turning rich women's heads and breaking young girls' hearts is not in my line. . . . You will forget about me, and, in time perhaps, will wonder how all this could have happened. ... I wonder even now. . . . I don't want to deceive you, Vera

Alexandrovna; I'm frightened, I'm terrified of staying here. ... I can't answer for anything. . . . And you know I'm not used to all this. I feel awkward. ... I feel as though everybody's looking at me. . . . And in fact it would be impossible for me . . . now . . . with you both. . . .

VERA . Oh, don't trouble yourself on my account! I'm not staying here long.

BELIAYEV . What do you mean?

VERA . That's my secret. But I shan't be in your way, I assure you.

BELIAYEV . Well, but, you see, I must go. Think; I seem to have brought a plague into this house, everyone's running away. . . . Isn't it better for me to disappear before more harm's done? I have just had a great talk with Mr. Rakitin. . . . You can't imagine how bitterly he spoke. . . . And he might well jeer at my new coat. . . . He's right. Yes, I must go. Would you believe it, Vera Alexandrovna, I'm longing for the minute when I shall be racing along the high road in a cart. I'm stifling here, I want to get into the open air. I can't tell you how grieved and at the same time light-hearted I feel, like a man setting off on a long journey overseas; he's sad and sick at parting from his friends, yet the sound of the sea is so joyful, the wind is so fresh in his face, that it sets his blood dancing, though his heart may ache. . . . Yes, I'm certainly going. I'll go back to Moscow, to my old companions, I'll set to work. . . .

VERA . You love her, it seems, Alexey Nikolaitch; you love her, yet you are going away.

BELIAYEV . Hush, Vera Alexandrovna, why do you say that? Don't you see that it's all over? It flared up and has gone out like a spark. Let us part friends. It's time. I've come to my senses. Keep well, be happy, we shall see each other again some day. ... I shall never forget you, Vera Alexandrovna. . . . I'm very fond of you, believe me. . . . [*Presses her hand and adds hurriedly.*] Give this note to Natalya Petrovna for me. . . .

VERA [*glancing at him embarrassed*]. A note?

BELIAYEV . Yes ... I can't say good-bye to her.

VERA . But are you going at once?

BELIAYEV . This minute. ... I have not said anything to anybody . . . except Mikhail Alexandritch. He approves. I'm going to walk from here to Petrovskoe. There I shall wait for Mikhail Alexandritch and we shall drive on to the town together. I'll write from there. My things will be sent on after me. You see it's all settled. But you can read the note. There's only a couple of words in it.

VERA [*taking the note from him*]. And you are really going?

BELIAYEV . Yes, yes. . . . Give her that note and say . . . No, there's no need to say anything. . . . What's the use? [*Listening.*] Here they come. Good-bye. [*Rushes to the door, stops an instant in the doorway, then runs away.* VERA is left with the note in her hand. NATALYA PETROVNA comes in.]

NATALYA PETROVNA [*going up to VERA*]. Verotchka. . . . [*Glances at her and breaks off.*] What's the matter?

[VERA holds out the note without a word.] A note? From whom?

VERA [*in a toneless voice*]. Read it.

NATALYA PETROVNA . You frighten me. [*Reads the note in silence and suddenly presses both hands to her face and sinks into an armchair. A long silence*]

VERA [*approaching her*]. Natalya Petrovna.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*not taking her hands from her face*]. He is gone! . . . He wouldn't even say good-bye to me. . . . Oh, to you he said good-bye, anyway!

VERA [*sadly*]. He doesn't love me. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*taking her hands from her face and standing up*]. But he has no right to go off like this. . . . I will ... He can't do this. . . . Who told him he might break away so stupidly. . . . It's simply contempt. ... I . . . how does he know I should never have the courage. . . . [*Sinks into the armchair.*] My God! my God!

VERA . Natalya Petrovna, you told me yourself just now that he must go. . . . Remember.

NATALYA PETROVNA . You are glad now. . . . He is gone. . . . Now we are equal. [*Her voice breaks*]

VERA . Natalya Petrovna, you said to me just now; these were your very words; instead of tormenting each other hadn't we better think together how to get out of this position, how to save ourselves. . . . We are saved now.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*turning away from her almost with hatred*]. Ah! ...

VERA . I understand, Natalya Petrovna; don't worry yourself. ... I shan't burden you with my company long. We can't live together.

NATALYA PETROVNA [*tries to hold out her hand to VERA but lets it fall on her lap*]. Why do you say that, Verotchka? . . . Do you too want to leave me? Yes, you are right, we are saved now. All is over . . . everything is settled again. . . .

VERA [*coldly*]. Don't disturb yourself, Natalya Petrovna. [*She looks at NATALYA PETROVNA without speaking. ISLAYEV comes out of the study*]

ISLAYEV [*after looking for a moment at NATALYA PETROVNA, aside to VERA*]. Does she know that he is going?

VERA [*puzzled*]. Yes . . . she knows.

ISLAYEV [*to himself*]. But why has he been in such a hurry? . . . [*Aloud.*] Natasha. . . . [*He takes her hand. She raises her head*] It's I, Natasha. [*She tries to smile*] You're not well, my darling? I should advise you to lie down, really. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA . I'm quite well, Arkady; it's nothing.

ISLAYEV But you're pale . . . Come, do as I say. . . . Rest a little.

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh! very well. . . . [*She tries to get up, and cannot*]

ISLAYEV [*helping her*]. There you see. . . . [*She leans on his arm*] Shall I help you along?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Oh, I'm not so weak as all that! Come, Vera. [*Goes towards the study. RAKITIN comes in from the outer room. NATALYA PETROVNA stops*]

RAKITIN . I have come, Natalya Petrovna, to ...

ISLAYEV [*interrupting him*]. Ah, Michel, come here! [*Draws him aside--in an undertone with vexation.*] What made you tell her at once like this? Didn't I beg you not to! Why be in such a hurry?... I found her here in such a state.

RAKITIN [*perplexed*], I don't understand.

ISLAYEV . You've told Natasha you are going. . . .

RAKITIN . So you suppose that is what has upset her?

ISLAYEV . Sh! she is looking at us. [*Aloud.*] You're not going to lie down, Natasha?

NATALYA PETROVNA . Yes. . . . I'm going. . . .

RAKITIN . Good-bye, Natalya Petrovna! [NATALYA PETROVNA *takes hold of the door-handle and makes no reply*]

ISLAYEV [*laying his hand on RAKITIN'S shoulder*]. Natasha, do you know this is one of the best of men. . . .

NATALYA PETROVNA [*with sudden vehemence*]. Yes, I know he's a splendid man . . . you're all splendid men . . . all of you, all ... and yet. . . . [*She hides her face in her hands, pushes the door open with her knee and goes out hurriedly. VERA goes out after her. ISLAYEV in silence sits down to the table and leans on his elbows.*]

RAKITIN [*looks at him for some time and with a bitter smile shrugs his shoulder.*] Nice position mine! Glorious, it certainly is! Really it's positively refreshing. And what a farewell after four years of love! Excellent, serve the talker right. And thank God, it's all for the best. It was high time to end these sickly, morbid relations. [*Aloud to ISLAYEV.*] Well, Arkady, good-bye.

ISLAYEV [*raises his head. There are tears in his eyes*]. Good-bye, my dear, dear boy. It's . . . not quite easy to bear. I didn't expect it. It's like a storm on a clear day. Well, grind the corn and there'll be flour. But anyway, thank you, thank you. You're a true friend.

RAKITIN [*aside through his teeth*]. This is too much. [*Abruptly.*] Good-bye. [*Is about to go into outer room. SHPIGELSKY runs in, meeting him.*]

SHPIGELSKY . What is it? They tell me Natalya Petrovna is ill. . . .

ISLAYEV [*getting up*]. Who told you so?

SHPIGELSKY . The girl. . . her maid. . . .

ISLAYEV . No, it's nothing, Doctor. I think, better not disturb Natasha just now. . . .

SHPIGELSKY . Ah! well, that's all right. [*To RAKITIN.*] I hear you're going to town?

RAKITIN . Yes, on business.

SHPIGELSKY . Ah! on business!. . . [*At that instant ANNA SEMYONOVNA, LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA, KOLYA and SCHAAF burst in from the outer room, all at once.*]

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . What is it? What's the matter? What's wrong with Natasha?

KOLYA . What's the matter with Mamma? What is it?

ISLAYEV . Nothing's the matter with her. ... I saw her a minute ago. What's the matter with all of you?

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . Really, Arkasha, we were told Natasha's been taken ill. . . .

ISLAYEV . Well, you shouldn't have believed it.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . But why are you so cross, Arkasha? Our sympathy's only natural.

ISLAYEV . Of course ... of course.

RAKITIN . It's time for me to start.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . You are going away?

RAKITIN . Yes. ... I am going.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA [*to herself*]. Ah! Well, now I understand.

KOLYA [*to ISLAYEV*]. Papa . . .

ISLAYEV . What do you want?

KOLYA . Why has Alexey Nikolaitch gone out?

ISLAYEV . Where's he gone?

KOLYA . I don't know. . . He kissed me, put on his cap and went out. . . . And it's time for my Russian lesson.

ISLAYEV . I expect he'll be back soon. . . . We can send to look for him, though.

RAKITIN [*aside to ISLAYEV*]. Don't send after him, Arkady, he won't come back. [ANNA SEMYONOVNA *tries to overhear*; SHPIGELSKY *is whispering with LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA*.]

ISLAYEV . What's the meaning of that?

RAKITIN . He's going away, too.

ISLAYEV . Going away . . . where?

RAKITIN . To Moscow.

ISLAYEV . To Moscow? Why, is everybody going mad to-day, or what?

RAKITIN [*in a still lower voice*]. Well, the fact is ... Verotchka's fallen in love with him ... so being an honorable man he decided to go. [ ISLAYEV, *flinging up his hands, sinks into an arm-chair*.] You understand now, why. . . .

ISLAYEV [*leaping up*]. Understand? I understand nothing. My head's going round. What is one to make of it? All fluttering off in different directions like a lot of partridges, and all because they're honorable men. . . . And all at once on the same day. . . .

ANNA SEMYONOVNA [*coming up from one side*]. But what's this? Mr. Beliaev, you say . . .

ISLAYEV [*shouts hysterically*]. Never mind, Mamma, never mind! Herr Schaaf, kindly give Kolya his lesson now instead of Mr. Beliaev. Take him away.

SCHAAF . Yes, Sir. [*Takes KOLYA'S hand*.]

KOLYA . But, Papa . . .

ISLAYEV [*shouting*]. Go along, go along! [SCHAAF *leads KOLYA away*.] I'll come part of the way with you, Rakitin. . . . I'll have my horse saddled, and wait for you at the dam. . . . And you, Mamma, meanwhile, for God's sake, don't disturb Natasha, nor you either, Doctor. . . . Matvey! Matvey! [*Goes out hurriedly*. ANNA SEMYONOVNA *sits down with melancholy dignity*. LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA *takes her stand behind her*. ANNA SEMYONOVNA *turns her eyes upwards, as though disclaiming all connection with what is going on around her*.]

SHPIGELSKY [*slyly and stealthily to RAKITIN*]. Well, Mikhail Alexandritch, may I have the honor of driving you along the high road with my three new horses?

RAKITIN . Why? Have you got the horses already?

SHPIGELSKY [*discreetly*]. I had a little talk with Vera Alexandrovna. ... So may I?

RAKITIN . By all means! [*Bows to ANNA SEMYONOVNA*.] Anna Semyonovna, I have the honor to ...

ANNA SEMYONOVNA [*still as majestically, not getting up*]. Good-bye, Mikhail Alexandritch.... I wish you a successful journey. . . .

RAKITIN . I thank you . . . Lizaveta Bogdanovna. . . . [*Bows to her. She curtsies in reply. He goes into outer room*.]

SHPIGELSKY [*going up to kiss ANNA SEMYONOVNA'S hand*]. Good-bye, gracious lady. . . .

ANNA SEMYONOVNA [*less majestically but still severely*], Ah! you are going too, Doctor. . . .

SHPIGELSKY . Yes. My patients, you know, madam. . . . Besides, you see my presence here is not needed. [*As he bows himself out, winks slyly at LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA, who replies with a smile.*] Good-bye for the present. . . . [*Runs off after RAKITIN.*]

ANNA SEMYONOVNA [*lets him disappear, then folding her arms, turns deliberately to LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA*]. And what do you think of all this, my dear, pray?

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA [*sighing*]. I really don't know what to say, Anna Semyonovna.

ANNA SEMYONOVNA . Did you hear, Beliayev too has gone? . . .

LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA [*sighing again*]. Ah, Anna Semyonovna, perhaps I, too, may not be staying here much longer. . . . I too am going away. [*ANNA SEMYONOVNA stares at her in unutterable amazement. LIZAVETA BOGDANOVNA stands before her, without raising her eyes.*]

CURTAIN

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