

THREE SISTERS
A drama in four acts.
LIST OF CHARACTERS

ANDREY, Andrey Sergeyevich Prozorov

NATALYA Ivanovna, (Natasha), his fiancée, afterwards his wife.

OLGA }

MASHA } his sisters.

IRINA }

KULYGIN, Fyodor Ilyich, a school teacher, husband of Masha.

VERSHININ, Alexander Ignatyevich, a lieutenant colonel, commander of the
local regiment.

TUZENBACH, Nikolay Lyvovich, a baron and a lieutenant.

SOLYONY, Vasiliy Vasilyevich, a staff captain.

CHEBUTYKIN, Ivan Romanovich, a regimental doctor.

FYEDOTIK, Alexey Petrovich, a sub-lieutenant.

RODEY, Vladimir Karlovich, a sub- lieutenant.

FERAPONT, a watchman for the local council.

ANFISA, Nanny to the Prozorov family, an old lady of 80.

The action takes place in a provincial town.

ACT ONE

Inside the Prozorov house. A sitting room with pillars, behind which is seen another large dining or reception room. It is midday; outside it is bright and sunny. In the dining room beyond the table is being laid for lunch. Olga in a blue dress, the official school dress for a teacher of the Girls' High School, is continually correcting exercise books as she stands or while she walks around. Masha in a black dress sits on a chair with her hat on her knees and reads a book. Irina in a white dress is standing deep in thought.

OLGA. Father died exactly a year ago, on this very same day, on the fifth of May, on your name day, Irina. It was very cold, and snow was falling. It seemed to me as if I would not live through it, you were lying in a faint, as if you were dead. But look, a year has gone by and we can remember it lightly, you are already wearing white, and your face is full of brightness...

(The clock strikes twelve.)

And then also the clock struck in just the same way.

(Pause.)

I remember, when they carried father out, the band was playing, at the cemetery they fired shots in his honour. He was a general, and commanding officer of a brigade, but even so, not many came to the funeral. But of course, it was raining then. Very heavy rain, and snow.

IRINA. Why do you insist on remembering it!

(Behind the pillars, in the dining room, Baron Tuzenbach, Chebutykin and Solyony appear near the table.)

OLGA. Today it's warm, we can even have the windows open - but the birch trees are still not in leaf. Father was given command of a brigade and left Moscow with us eleven years ago. And I remember it all distinctly, at the beginning of May, just at this time, in Moscow already everything is in flower, it's warm, everything is flooded with sunlight. Eleven years have gone by, but I remember everything there, as if we left Moscow yesterday. Good God! This morning I woke up and I saw a blaze of colour, I saw the spring, and gladness bubbled up inside my heart, and I desperately wanted to be where I came from, in my native land.

CHEBUTYKIN. Its absolutely not true.

TUZENBACH. Of course, it's nonsense.

(Masha, deep in thought over her book, starts to whistle a tune.)

OLGA. Don't whistle Masha. How could you!

(Pause.)

Because I go to the school every day and then give lessons until the evening, that is why I continually have headaches, and the thoughts I have are those of an ageing old woman. And really and truly, while I have been working in the school, I feel as if every day my youth and my strength have been oozing away drop by drop. The only thing that grows and strengthens is one single dream

IRINA. To go back to Moscow. To sell the house, to finish everything here, and then, to Moscow...

OLGA. Yes. To Moscow, as fast as possible.

(Chebutykin and Tuzenbach laugh.)

IRINA. Our brother, probably, will become a professor, at any rate he won't want to live here. The only difficulty is with poor Masha.

OLGA. Masha will come to Moscow for the whole summer, every year.

(Masha softly whistles a tune.)

IRINA. With God's help it will all work out. *(Looking out of the window.)* What wonderful weather today. I don't know why everything is so bright inside me today. This morning I remembered that it was my name day, and suddenly I felt happy, and I

remembered my childhood, when Mama was still alive. And what wonderful thoughts stirred inside me, wonderful thoughts.

OLGA. Today you are all radiant, you are looking unusually beautiful. And Masha is also beautiful. Andrey would be handsome, only he has grown rather stout, and that doesn't suit him. But I've grown old, and I've grown very thin, it must be because I get angry with the girls at school. But now, today, I am free, I'm at home, and my head doesn't ache at all, and I feel myself to be younger than I was yesterday. I'm twenty eight years old, only twenty eight... Everything is fine, everything as God wishes, but it seems to me, that if I were to marry and if I were at home every day, then it would be much better.

Pause.

I would love my husband.

TUZENBACH. *(To Solyony.)* You talk such rubbish, it's annoying to listen to you. *(Coming into the sitting room.)* I forgot to tell you. Today our new battalion commander, Vershinin, is going to visit you. *(He sits at the piano.)*

OLGA. Well, of course, we'll be delighted.

IRINA. Is he old?

TUZENBACH. No, not especially. At the most, forty, or forty five. *(He plays quietly.)* Evidently, he's a fine sort of fellow. He's not stupid, that's for sure. Only he talks a lot.

IRINA. Is he an interesting man?

TUZENBACH. Yes, not bad, only he has a wife, a mother in law, and two daughters. And then, this is his second marriage. He visits people and everywhere he announces that he has a wife and two daughters. He'll say the same here. His wife is a sort of half-wit, with long girlish plaits, she speaks all manner of high-blown phrases, she philosophises and often attempts suicide, evidently to stir up her old man. I would have left someone like that long ago, but he endures it and only complains about her.

SOLYONY. *(Coming from the dining room into the sitting room towards Chebutykin.)* With one hand I can lift up fifty pounds, but with two I can lift one hundred and fifty, perhaps even two hundred. From that I can conclude that two men are stronger than one not by twice as much, but three times, even more ...

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Reading the newspaper as he walks in.*) For loss of hair... two scruples of naphthalene in half a bottle of surgical spirit... dissolve it and use the mixture every day... (*Writes in a notebook.*) Yes my dear fellow, we'll make a note of it. (*To Solyony.*) So, let me explain to you, you get the cork pushed into the bottle, or whatever, have a glass tube running through the cork... Then you take a small pinch of completely ordinary kvass ...

IRINA. [*To Chebutykin*]. Ivan Romanich, dearest Ivan Romanich.

CHEBUTYKIN. What is it, my dearest girl, my enchantment?

IRINA. Tell me, why is it I am so happy today? It's as if my sails are all spread, above me is the wide blue heaven and large white birds are flying in it.

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Kissing both her hands, tenderly.*) My darling white bird ...

IRINA. When I woke up today, I got up and washed, and suddenly it seemed that everything on this earth was clear to me, and I now know how I must live. Dearest Ivan Romanich, I know everything. Man must toil, he must work in the sweat of his brow, whoever he is, and in this alone is encompassed the sense and the aim of his life, his happiness, his raptures. How wonderful to be a workman, one who rises when it is scarcely daylight and breaks stones on the roadway, or a shepherd, or a teacher who teaches children, or an engine driver on the railway... Good God, let alone being a man, it would be better to be an ox, better to be a simple horse, as long as one works, rather than be a young woman who stirs at eleven o'clock in the morning, then drinks coffee in bed, then takes two hours to get dressed... Oh, that is appalling! Just as in hot weather you are sometimes dying for a drink, that is how much I want to work. And if I am not going to get up early and devote myself to work, then deny me your friendship Ivan Romanich.

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Tenderly.*) I will deny it, I will ...

OLGA. Father taught us to get up at seven o'clock. But now Irina wakes up at seven and then lies in bed till at least nine o'clock and thinks about something. And she has such a serious face. (*She laughs.*)

IRINA. You are in the habit of seeing me as a young girl, and it's strange to you when I have a serious face. But I'm twenty years old.

TUZENBACH. A longing for work, Gods above, how I understand it! I haven't worked once in my life. I was born in St. Petersburg, where it is cold and detached, into a family which never new work and had no cares. I remember when I used to

come home from the cadet corps, a servant would pull my boots off for me, and I would be bad tempered while he was doing it, and my mother used to look upon me with a sort of reverence and was amazed when other people had a different view of me. They carefully preserved me from work. Only they barely managed to protect me, only barely. A time will come, storm clouds are building up all around us, a heavy, mighty tempest is preparing, which will overtake us, it is already near, and it will blow away from our society idleness, indifference, prejudice against work, and putrefying boredom. I will work, and within some twenty five or thirty years every single individual will be working. Every single one.

CHEBUTYKIN. I won't work.

TUZENBACH. You don't count.

SOLYONY. In twenty five years time you won't be on the earth any longer, thank God. In two or three years you'll either die of a fit, or I will fly into a rage and slam a bullet into your head, my dear angel. *(Takes from his pocket a scent bottle and sprinkles the scent on his chest and hands.)*

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Laughs.)* But it's true, I never did anything. When I left university I didn't lift a finger, I didn't even read a book, I only read newspapers... *(Takes another newspaper from his pocket.)* Look... I know from the newspapers that there was, for example, someone, Dobrolyubov shall we say, and that he wrote here that - I don't know... God knows what he wrote...

(A knocking is heard under the floor from the room beneath.)

Now look... I'm being summoned from below, somebody's here to see me. I'll be back right away ... wait for me ... *(He hurries away, stroking his beard.)*

IRINA. This is some scheme of his.

OLGA. Yes, it's awful. He's always doing idiotic things.

MASHA. A green oak grows by the curving shore,

A gilded chain on the oak tree hangs...

A gilded chain on the oak tree hangs ... *(She stands up and quietly hums.)*

OLGA. You're not happy today Masha.

(Masha continues humming and puts on her hat.)

Where are you going?

MASHA. Home.

IRINA. That's very strange.

TUZENBACH. To leave the Saint's day party!

MASHA. It doesn't matter... I will be back this evening. Goodbye, dearest. *(She kisses Irina.)* Once again I wish you all health, and all happiness... In earlier years, when father was alive, every time we would have thirty or forty officers at our parties, it was bustling and noisy, but today, there's just one and a half men and it's quiet, like the desert... I'm leaving now... Today I have a fit of the blues, I'm not happy, so don't listen to me. *(Laughing through her tears.)* We'll talk afterwards, so goodbye for the time being, my dearest, I'm just going off somewhere.

IRINA. *(Annoyed.)* Well, I don't know ...

OLGA. *(Tearfully.)* I understand you Masha.

SOLYONY. If a man philosophises, then it will be philosophy, or at least sophistry; but if a woman philosophises, or two women, then you will have - pull the other leg please.

MASHA. What exactly do you mean by that, you terrible uncouth man?

SOLYONY. Nothing. Before he had uttered a note, the bear was upon his throat.

(Pause.)

MASHA. *(Angrily, to Olga.)* Do stop moaning!

(Anfisa and Ferapont enter with a cake.)

ANFISA. This way, old fellow. Come in, your boots are clean. *(To Irina.)* The local council, from Protopopov, Mikhail Ivanich, a cake ...

IRINA. Thank you. Give him my thanks. *(Accepts the cake.)*

FERAPONT. What's that?

IRINA. (*Louder.*) Give him my thanks.

OLGA. Nanny, give him some cake. Ferapont, if you go out through there they will give you some cake.

FERAPONT. What's that?

ANFISA. Come on, old man. Come this way Ferapont. Let's go... (*She goes out with Ferapont.*)

MASHA. I don't like that Protopopov, that Mikhail Potapich or Ivanich. He ought not to be invited.

IRINA. I didn't invite him.

MASHA. That's excellent.

(*Chebutykin enters, followed by a soldier carrying a silver samovar; a gasp of amazement and displeasure.*)

OLGA. (*Covers her face with her hands.*) A samovar! This is dreadful! (*Goes into the dining room to the table.*)

IRINA. [*To Chebutykin*]. My dearest, dearest Ivan Romanich, what are you doing?

TUZENBACH. (*Laughs.*) I told you so.

MASHA. Ivan Romanich, you simply have no shame.

CHEBUTYKIN. My dearest children, most sweet, most beautiful girls, you are my sole delight, you are the dearest things that exist here on this earth. I will soon be sixty, I am an old man, alone, a worthless old man... There is nothing of any worth in me, except the love I have for you three, and if you were not here, then I would long ago have ceased to live on the earth... (*To Irina.*) My sweet one, my little child, I have known you since the day you were born... I carried you in my arms... I loved your late mother ...

IRINA. But why such expensive presents.

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Tearfully and angrily.*) Expensive presents...What utter nonsense! (*To the orderly.*) Put the samovar over there... (*In a mocking voice.*) Expensive presents...

(The orderly carries the samovar through to the dining room.)

ANFISA. *(Walking across the sitting room.)* My dears, there is an unknown colonel. He's already taken off his overcoat, children, and he's coming this way. Irina, dearest, be kind to him, treat him well... *(Going out.)* It's already time for lunch... Lord, oh Lord...

TUZENBACH. Vershinin, for sure.

(Vershinin enters.)

Lieutenant Colonel Vershinin!

VERSHININ. *(To Masha and Irina.)* I have the honour to introduce myself - Vershinin. I am very, very pleased that at last I have managed to visit you. How you have changed! What a place! What a place!

IRINA. Please sit down. We are delighted.

VERSHININ. *(Joyfully.)* I am so happy, so happy to be here. But you were three sisters. I remember - three little girls. Your faces I can't say I remember, but that your father, colonel Prozorov, had three little girls, I particularly remember, and I saw it with my own eyes. How time flies! Ah, yes, how time flies!

TUZENBACH. Alexander Ignatyevich is from Moscow.

IRINA. From Moscow? Are you from Moscow?

VERSHININ. Yes, I'm from there. Your father was a garrison commander there, and I was an officer in the same brigade. *(To Masha.)* I think I seem to remember your face just a little.

MASHA. But yours I don't, no, not at all!

IRINA. Olga! Olga! *(Shouts through to the dining room.)* Olga, come in here.

(Olga comes into the sitting room.)

Lieutenant Colonel Vershinin, it turns out, is from Moscow.

VERSHININ. You, surely, must be Olga Sergeyevna, the eldest... And you are Masha... And you, Irina - the youngest.

OLGA. And you're from Moscow?

VERSHININ. Yes. I studied in Moscow and began my military service in Moscow. I served there a long time, but finally I was given a posting here - and so I transferred here, as you see. I don't remember you exactly, I only remember that you were three sisters. Your father is still fresh in my memory, and if I close my eyes I can see him, as if he were alive. I used to visit you in Moscow.

OLGA. I thought I remembered everyone, and suddenly...

VERSHININ. My name is Alexander Ignatyevich...

IRINA. Alexander Ignatyevich, and you're from Moscow... Such a surprise!

OLGA. You know, we intend to move there.

IRINA. We think that by the autumn we will be gone. Our home town, we were born there... On Old Basmanny Street...

(They both laugh with pleasure.)

MASHA. How unexpected to see a fellow countryman. *(Vivaciously.)* Now I remember, Olga, at home there was talk about 'the love-sick major. You were then a lieutenant and in love with someone, and everyone teased you for some reason as the major...

VERSHININ. *(He laughs.)* That's it, that's it... The love-sick major, it was just that...

MASHA. Then you had only a moustache. How much you have aged! *(Tearfully.)* How much you have aged!

VERSHININ. Yes, when they called me the love-sick major I was still a young man, and I was in love. Not so now.

OLGA. But you still haven't got a single grey hair. You might have aged, but you're still not old.

VERSHININ. But I am already forty three. Is it long since you left Moscow?

IRINA. Eleven years. Now why Masha, why are you crying, you silly... *(Tearfully.)* Look, it's making me cry...

MASHA. It's nothing. What street did you live on?

VERSHININ. On Old Basmanny Street.

OLGA. We were there also...

VERSHININ. At one time I lived on German Street. From German Street I frequently crossed to The Red Barracks. On the way there, there was a gloomy bridge, and the water gurgled under the bridge. Alone on that bridge your heart became heavy.

(Pause.)

But here there is such a wide and splendid river. A wonderful river.

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

VERSHININ. What do you mean! Here it's such a healthy, such a fine, such a truly Slavonic climate. The woods, the river... and here besides there are birch trees. Those beautiful, modest birches, I love them more than any other tree. It's fine to live here. But it is strange, the rail station is fifteen miles away... And nobody knows why that is.

SOLYONY. I know why it is.

(They all look at him.)

Because, if the station were nearer, it would not be far away, but if it is far away then, evidently, it cannot be nearby.

(An awkward silence.)

TUZENBACH. You're a buffoon, Vasily Vasilich.

OLGA. Now I remember you. I do remember.

VERSHININ. I knew your mother.

CHEBUTYKIN. She was beautiful, God rest her soul.

IRINA. Mamma is buried in Moscow.

OLGA. In the Novo-Devichy cemetery...

MASHA. Just think, I am already beginning to forget her face. People will not remember us either. They will forget.

VERSHININ. Yes. They will forget. That is our fate, you can't do anything about it. The things which to us seem serious, significant, very important, - the time will come - they will be forgotten or they will seem of no consequence.

(Pause.)

And it's interesting, at the moment we have no means of knowing what especially will be considered elevated or important, or what will be pitiful and ridiculous. Is it possible that the discoveries of Copernicus, or, shall we say, Columbus, appeared in the first instance unnecessary and laughable, while some empty waffle written by a freak seemed to be true. And it could happen that our present day life, which we accept so unquestioningly, will in time appear strange, awkward, stupid, somewhat unclean, perhaps even warped and sinful...

TUZENBACH. Who knows? Perhaps our life now will be called sublime and people will mention it with reverence. For nowadays there is no torture, no capital punishment, no violent invasions, but at the same time, how much suffering there is.

SOLYONY. *(In a shrill voice.)* Cheep, cheep, cheep... Don't feed the baron with buckwheat, just give him a chance to philosophise.

TUZENBACH. Vasily Vasilich, I must ask you to leave me in peace. *(Sits in a different place.)* Its quite boring, when all's said and done.

SOLYONY. *(In a shrill voice.)* Cheep, cheep, cheep...

TUZENBACH. *(To Vershinin.)* The sufferings which may be observed nowadays - they are so widespread and so vast - but people speak nevertheless about a certain moral improvement which society has achieved...

VERSHININ. Of course, of course.

CHEBUTYKIN. You said just now, Baron, that they will call our life sublime; but people despite that are debased. *(He stands up.)* Look how debased I am. Such things have to be said to console me, that my life is sublime, that's understood.

(Behind the scene someone plays the violin.)

MASHA. That's Andrey playing, our brother.

IRINA. He's very scholarly. He's bound to be a professor. Father was a military man, but his son chose for himself an academic career.

MASHA. According to Father's wishes.

OLGA. We were teasing him today. It seems that he's a little bit in love.

IRINA. With a local damozel. She will be here today, in all probability.

MASHA. But heavens above how she dresses! It's not that it's ugly, or unfashionable, it's just pitiful. Some sort of strange, glaring, yellowish skirt with a vulgar sort of fringe and a crimson blouse. And her cheeks are so scrubbed, absolutely scrubbed. Andrey is not in love - I won't agree to that, for at least he has some taste, but he's simply like that, he teases us, he plays the fool. I heard yesterday that she's going to marry Protopopov, the chairman of the local council. That's excellent... *(Through the side door.)* Andrey, come in here. Dear Andrey, just for a minute.

(Enter Andrey.)

OLGA. This is my brother, Andrey Sergeyevich.

VERSHININ. Vershinin.

ANDREY. Prozorov. *(Wipes the sweat from his face.)* You are our new military commander?

OLGA. Just imagine, Alexander Ignatich is from Moscow.

ANDREY. Really? Then I congratulate you, for now my sisters will give you no rest.

VERSHININ. I think I have already succeeded in boring your sisters.

IRINA. Look at this. This is the portrait frame that Andrey gave me today as a present. *(She shows him a frame.)* He made it himself.

VERSHININ. *(Looking at the frame and not knowing what to say.)* Yes... of course...

IRINA. And that frame over there, on the piano, he made that as well.

(Andrey gesticulates and walks away.)

OLGA. He's the cleverest of the four of us, he plays the violin, and he does fretwork - to put it in a few words, he's good at everything. Andrey, don't go away. That's just what he's like. He always walks away.

(Masha and Irina, laughing, take him by the arms and lead him back.)

MASHA. This way! This way!

ANDREY. Leave me alone, please.

MASHA. You're so quirky. They used to call Alexander Ignatyevich the love-sick major, but he didn't take the slightest offence.

VERSHININ. Not the slightest.

MASHA. But I want to call you 'The love-sick violinist'!

IRINA. Or 'The love-sick professor'!...

OLGA. He's in love! Our little Andrey is in love!

IRINA. (*Clapping.*) Bravo, bravo! Encore! Our little Andrey is in love!

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Goes up behind Andrey and clasps him round the waist with both his arms.*) For love alone upon this planet, Our guardian Nature us did place! (*He laughs; all the time he holds a newspaper.*)

ANDREY. That's it, enough, enough... (*Wipes his face.*) I didn't sleep all night and now I'm not quite myself, as they say. I read until four, then I went to bed, but it was no good. I thought of this and that, but here the dawn is early, and the sun comes right into my bedroom. I intend, during the summer, while I am here, to translate a book from English.

VERSHININ. Do you read English?

ANDREY. Yes. Our late Father, may God rest his soul, oppressed us with education. It's funny and somewhat stupid, but all the same I have to admit it, after his death I started to put on weight, and I've grown fat inside a year, as if my body had freed itself from being watched. Thanks to Father I and my sisters know French, German and English, and Irina knows Italian as well. But at what a price!

MASHA. In this town to know three languages is an unnecessary luxury. It's not even a luxury, but a sort of unnecessary addition, like a sixth finger. We have a great deal of superfluous knowledge.

VERSHININ. Well fancy that! (*He laughs.*) To have superfluous knowledge! It seems to me that there is not and there could not be such a dull and gloomy town which would not have need of clever and educated people. Let us suppose that among the hundred thousand inhabitants of that town, which we accept is backward and

uncultured, there would only be three such as you. It stands to reason that you would be unable to overcome the surrounding mass of dark ignorance. In the course of your life, little by little, you would have to yield and become absorbed by the crowds in their thousands, life would smother you, but all the same you would not disappear, you would not be without influence. Of people like yourselves perhaps another six would appear when you were gone, then twelve, and so on and so on, until, finally, those such as you would be in the majority. After two or three hundred years life on this earth will be unimaginably beautiful and extraordinary. Mankind needs such a life, and if for the time being it is not at hand, then he must have an apprehension of it, wait for it, dream about it, prepare himself for it, and for this purpose he must perceive and know more than his father and grandfather perceived and knew. *(He laughs.)* And you complain that you know much that is superfluous.

MASHA. *(Takes off her hat.)* I will stay for lunch.

IRINA. *(With a sigh.)* Really, all this ought to be written down...

(Andrey has disappeared, having left without being noticed.)

TUZENBACH. After many years, you say, life on the earth will be beautiful and extraordinary. That's true. But to be able to participate in it now, even remotely, one must prepare oneself for it, one must work...

VERSHININ. *(He stands up.)* Yes. What a marvellous lot of flowers you have here. *(Looking around.)* A wonderful room. I'm envious. All my life I have been hanging around rooms with just two chairs, with one settee, and with stoves that always smoke. It is precisely flowers like this which have been missing all of my life. *(He rubs his hands.)* Ah, well, what does it matter?

TUZENBACH. Yes, one must work. You no doubt think 'He's a German, he's slightly touched'. But I give you my word of honour, I'm a Russian, I do not even speak German. My father was Russian orthodox...

(Pause.)

VERSHININ. *(Paces the room.)* I often think, what if one were to start one's life again, with full consciousness? If one life, which had already been lived, were, so to speak, a rough sketch, and the other - a full drawing! Then each one of us would, I think, first of all strive not to repeat himself, at least he would create for himself other surroundings and circumstances, he would arrange to have such a room with flowers, with this mass of bloom... I have a wife, and two daughters, and in addition my wife

is not very well, and so on and so forth, but then, if I were to start my life afresh, then I would not marry... Definitely not!

(Kulygin enters wearing official school clothing.)

KULYGIN. *(Goes up to Irina.)* My dearest sister, permit me to congratulate you on the day of your Saint and to wish you, sincerely, from the bottom of my heart, good health and all those things which a young girl of your age might wish herself. And then I would like to offer you, as a present, this little book. *(Gives her a small book.)* It is the story of our school, over the last fifty years, written by me. A trifling little book, written in my spare time, but do, nevertheless, read it my dear. Good day to you all, Gentlemen! *(To Vershinin.)* Kulygin, teacher of the local boy's school. His majesty's official servant of the seventh grade. *(To Irina.)* In that little book you will find a list of all those who completed their courses in our school over the last fifty years. 'Feci, quod potui, faciant meliora potentes.' *(He kisses Masha.)*

IRINA. But you already gave me exactly the same book at Easter.

KULYGIN. *(He laughs.)* That cannot be! Well in that case give it back, or better still give it to the colonel. Please take it, colonel. At some time you will read it out of boredom.

VERSHININ. Thank you. *(He gets ready to leave.)* I am so pleased that I have been able to meet you...

OLGA. Are you leaving? No, you must not!

IRINA. You must stay to lunch with us. Please do so.

OLGA. I insist that you stay!

VERSHININ. *(He bows.)* It seems that I have stumbled on a Saint's day celebration. Pardon me, I did not know, I did not congratulate you... *(He goes out with Olga into the dining room.)*

KULYGIN. Today, gentlemen, it is Sunday, a day of rest, and we will rest, we will enjoy our leisure, everyone according to his age and position. Carpets should be taken up and put away until the winter... with Persian powder or with naphthalene... the Romans were healthy because they knew how to work, they maintained 'mens sana in corpore sano' - a healthy mind in a healthy body. Their life was regulated according to strict patterns and forms. Our director and head teacher says this: 'The important part of every life is its formal structure... Whatever loses its form is ruined - and it is the

same with our day to day life.' *(He puts his arms around Masha's waist and laughs.)* Masha loves me. My wife loves me. One should take the curtains down also, and put them away with the carpets... Today I am happy, I am in an excellent frame of mind. Masha, today at four o'clock we are going to the head's apartments. A walk with all the teachers and their families has been arranged.

MASHA. I am not going.

KULYGIN. *(Offended.)* Dear Masha, why not?

MASHA. We'll talk about it later... *(Angrily.)* Alright, I'll go, only leave me alone, please... *(She walks away.)*

KULYGIN. And then we'll spend the evening at the with the head as well. Despite all his physical frailties, this is a man who strives above all to be sociable. He's a most excellent, enlightened personality. A most splendid example of a man. Yesterday, after our meeting, he said to me: 'I'm worn out, Fyodor Ilyich, I'm worn out.' *(He looks at the clock on the wall, then at his own watch.)* Your clock is seven minutes fast. Yes, he said, I'm worn out.

(Behind the scene someone plays the violin.)

OLGA. Gentlemen, we request the pleasure of your company, lunch is served. And there are desserts.

KULYGIN. Ah, my dearest, dearest Olga! Yesterday I worked from morning until eleven in the evening, I was exhausted, and now I feel myself to be so happy. *(Goes into the dining room towards the table.)* Dearest Olga...

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Puts the newspaper in his pocket and strokes his beard.)* Desserts? Splendid!

MASHA. *(Sternly to Chebutykin.)* But listen to me: Don't drink anything today. Do you hear? It's bad for you.

CHEBUTYKIN. Drop it, drop it! That's all past. Two years since I last had a binge. *(Impatiently.)* Heavens above, does it matter!

MASHA. All the same, don't you dare to drink. Don't you dare. *(Angrily, but so that her husband does not hear.)* Again, blast it, to spend another entire boring evening at the head's apartments.

TUZENBACH. I wouldn't go if I were in your place... It's quite simple.

CHEBUTYKIN. Don't go, my little darling.

MASHA. Yes, don't go... Oh what a cursed, wretched, unbearable life... (*Goes to the dining room.*)

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Following her.*) Stea-eady!

SOLYONY. (*Passing through into the dining room.*) Cheep, cheep, cheep...

TUZENBACH. That's enough, Vasily Vasilich! Stop it!

SOLYONY. Cheep, cheep, cheep...

KULYGIN. (*Happily.*) Good health, Colonel! I'm a school master, but here I'm at home, as it were, for I'm Masha's husband... She's so good, such a good woman...

VERSHININ. I'll have a drink of this black vodka... (*He drinks.*) Good health! (*To Olga.*) I feel so relaxed here.

(Irina and Tuzenbach remain alone in the sitting room.)

IRINA. Masha is out of sorts today. She married when she was eighteen, when her husband seemed to her to be the cleverest of men. But now it's different. He's certainly a good man, but not exactly the cleverest.

OLGA. (*Impatiently.*) Andrey, are you going to join us or not!

ANDREY. (*From behind the scene.*) I'm just coming. (*Enters and goes to the table.*)

TUZENBACH. What are you thinking of?

IRINA. Nothing much. I don't like that Solyony of yours, he frightens me. He always talks nonsense...

TUZENBACH. He's a strange man. I feel sorry for him, but also angry, but more sorrow than anger. It seems that he's rather shy. When I'm with him alone, then he's very intelligent and kind, but in society he's generally coarse, a bit of a bruiser. Don't go yet, wait until they've all sat at the table. Let me just be with you, near you. What are you thinking of?

(Pause.)

You're twenty years old, and I'm not yet thirty. How many years remain ahead of us, a long, long series of days, all full of my love for you...

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

TUZENBACH. (*Not hearing her.*) I have a desperate thirst for life, for the struggle, for toil, and this thirst in my soul is merged with my love for you Irina, and it's as if on purpose that you are beautiful, and my life seems to be beautiful in the same way! What are you thinking of?

IRINA. You talk about a beautiful life. Yes, but suppose that it only appears to be so. For us three sisters life has not been so beautiful, it has smothered us, like choking weeds... I can't help crying. This is really unnecessary. (*She quickly wipes her face and smiles.*) We must work, work and work. The reason we are unhappy and look on life so gloomily is that we don't know how to work...

(*Enter Natalya Ivanovna. She is dressed in pink, with a green belt.*)

NATASHA. They're already sitting for lunch... I'm late... (*Briefly looks in the mirror, straightens herself.*) Well, my hair is alright, I think... (*Seeing Irina.*) Dearest Irina, many happy returns! (*Kisses her firmly and persistently.*) What a lot of guests you have, to tell you the truth, I'm feeling rather awkward... Baron, good morning.

OLGA. (*Coming into the sitting room.*) Ah, here is Natasha. Welcome, my dearest.

(*They kiss.*)

NATASHA. Birthday greetings. You have so many people here, I'm terribly shy...

OLGA. It's nothing, they're all people we know. (*In a low voice, somewhat shocked.*) The green belt you're wearing! My dear, it's just not right!

NATASHA. Is it bad luck?

OLGA. No, it simply doesn't suit the dress... it's rather strange...

NATASHA. (*In a tearful voice.*) Really? But it's not quite green, it's rather a matt colour. (*Follows Olga into the dining room.*)

(*In the dining room they are seated for lunch; the sitting room is empty.*)

KULYGIN. Irina, I wish you a fine, handsome fiancé. It's time that you were married.

CHEBUTYKIN. [*To Natasha*]. Natalya Ivanaovna, I wish you a fiancé as well.

KULYGIN. Natalya Ivanovna already has a fiancé.

MASHA. (*Raps with a fork against a plate.*) Why not down a glass or two! Friends, life is rosy, let us celebrate all we can

KULYGIN. You would lose marks for that, Masha.

VERSHININ. The liqueur is wonderful. What's it made of?

SOLYONY. It's made from beetles.

IRINA. (*In a tearful voice.*) No! No! That's just disgusting!..

OLGA. For dinner there will be roast turkey followed by apple tart. Thank God, today I have all day at home. I'm at home in the evening... Gentlemen, do come this evening...

VERSHININ. May I come this evening?

IRINA. Please do.

NATASHA. They don't stand on ceremony.

CHEBUTYKIN. For love alone upon this planet, Our guardian Nature us did place! (*He laughs.*)

ANDREY. (*Angrily.*) Stop it. All of you!. Aren't you tired of it yet?

(*Fyedotik and Rodey enter with a large basket of flowers.*)

FYEDOTIK. It seems they're already eating.

RODEY. (*Loudly and gutturally.*) Eating? Yes, they're already eating.

FYEDOTIK. Hold still for a minute! (*He takes a photograph.*) That's one! Just wait a moment longer. (*Takes another photograph.*) Two! That's all done! (*They take the basket and go into the dining room., where they are noisily welcomed.*)

RODEY. Happy name day, and I wish you absolutely everything, everything! Today the weather is enchanting, it's simply magnificent. Today I was out strolling all morning with the students. I teach P. E. in the High School...

FYEDOTIK. You can move now, Irina, you can move! *(He takes a photograph.)* You look so charming today. *(Takes a humming top from his pocket.)* Here, while I think of it, a spinning top... Makes a wonderful sound...

IRINA. What a lovely thing!

MASHA. A green oak grows by the curving shore,

A gilded chain on the oak tree hangs...

A gilded chain on the oak tree hangs ...

(Tearfully.) But why do I keep repeating it? That phrase has stuck in my mind from early this morning...

KULYGIN. There are thirteen at the table!

RODEY. Ladies and gentlemen, surely you don't believe in these superstitions? *(Laughter.)*

KULYGIN. If there are thirteen at the table, then, evidently, somebody here is in love. *[To Chebutykin.]* Would it be you, by any chance, Ivan Romanich... *(Laughter.)*

CHEBUTYKIN. I know I am an old sinner, but, joking aside, I really can't understand why Natasha here is so embarrassed.

(Loud laughter; Natasha runs from the dining room into the sitting room. Andrey follows her.)

ANDREY. It's alright, don't pay any attention to them. Wait, stay a minute... Please...

NATASHA. I'm so ashamed... I don't know what is happening to me, but I know they're making fun of me. I just left the table, I know it's impolite, but I can't help it... I can't help it... *(Covers her face with her hands.)*

ANDREY. My dearest one, please, please, I implore you, don't be upset. I'm absolutely certain, they are joking, they do it from the goodness of their hearts. My darling one, my beautiful, they are all good people, honest and well-meaning, and they love both you and me. Come to the window, over here they can't see us. *(He looks around.)*

NATASHA. I'm so unused to being in the big world.

ANDREY. Innocent youth, most wonderful, most beautiful youth. My darling, my beautiful one, don't be so upset... Believe me, believe me... I feel so absolutely inspired, my heart is full of love and delight... Ah, now they can't see us, they can't see us! For what reason, for what reason I fell in love with you, when I fell in love - I just don't understand at all. My darling girl, my beautiful, my pure one, be my wife! I love you, I love you... as I have never loved anyone before... *(They kiss.)*

(Two officers come into the room and seeing the kissing couple they stand and gaze in astonishment.)

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

The scene is the same as in the first act.

It is eight in the evening. Outside in the street, barely audibly, someone is playing an accordion. There is no fire in the grate. Natasha enters wearing a dressing gown and carrying a candle. She walks to the door which leads to Andrey's room and then stops.

NATASHA. Is that you Andrey? What are you doing? Are you reading? It's not important. I was just thinking... *(She walks away, opens another door, looks inside and then closes it.)* Has anyone lit a fire?...

ANDREY. *(Enters reading a book.)* What is it Natasha?

NATASHA. I was looking to see if anyone had lit the fire. It's Shrovetide, the servant doesn't know what she's doing, so I keep my eyes open, I must keep my eyes open to make sure nothing goes wrong. Last night, at midnight, I went through the dining room, and there was a candle burning. But who lit it, that's the point, I can't find out. *(She puts down the candlestick.)* What time is it?

ANDREY. *(Looks at his watch.)* Quarter past eight.

NATASHA. And still Olga and Irina are not back. They're not home yet. They work all the time, the poor things; Olga at the governors' meeting, Irina at the Telegraph office... *(She sighs.)* This morning I spoke to your sister. "Irina", I said, "you must take more care of yourself, you poor thing." But would she listen? A quarter past eight did you say. I'm very worried about Bobik. He's not well. Why is he so cold? Yesterday he was feverish, and now today he's all cold... I'm terribly worried.

ANDREY. It's nothing, Natasha. He's a healthy lad.

NATASHA. All the same, he'd better go on a diet. I worry about him. And this evening, apparently, after nine, the mummers are coming to play here. Andrey darling, perhaps it would be better if they didn't come.

ANDREY. Really, I can't say. They were after all invited.

NATASHA. Today, when little Bobik woke up, he looked at me and suddenly he smiled at me - it must be, he knew who it was. "Bobik", I said, "Hello Bobik, hello my little darling". And he laughed. Children understand, you see, they understand everything. So, it's decided, Andrey, I will give orders that the mummers are not to be let in.

ANDREY. *(Hesitantly.)* But my sisters should perhaps decide. It is after all their house.

NATASHA. Of course, I'll tell them as well. They are so good. *(She walks about.)* I've ordered yoghurt for supper. The doctor said 'You must have only yoghurt to eat, otherwise you won't lose weight'. *(She stops.)* Bobik is cold. I'm worried that he might be cold in his room, perhaps. We must put him in another room, at least until the weather gets warmer. Take Irina's room, for example, it's just right for a baby: it's dry and it gets the sun all day. We must tell her, and for the time being she could move in with Olga in the same room... After all, it doesn't matter, she's not at home in the day, she only sleeps here...

(Pause.)

Darling little Andrey, why are you keeping so quiet?

ANDREY. It's nothing. I was just thinking... Besides there's nothing to say...

NATASHA. Yes... There's something I meant to tell you. Ah, yes, from the council, Ferapont is here, he was asking for you.

ANDREY. *(Yawns.)* Tell them to call him.

(Natasha goes out. Andrey, leaning over the candle Natasha has forgotten to take, reads his book. Ferapont enters. He is wearing an old, worn overcoat with the collar turned up, and with muffs over his ears.)

Greetings, old fellow. What news do you have?

FERAPONT. The chairman sent a book and some papers. Here they are... *(He hands over a book and a package.)*

ANDREY. Thank you. That's fine. But why didn't you come early on? Look, it's past eight.

FERAPONT. What's that?

ANDREY. *(Louder.)* I said, it's late for you to come, it's past eight o'clock.

FERAPONT. Yes, I know. I did come when it was still light, but they would not let me see you. The master, they said, is busy. Well then, if he's busy he's busy, I've no place to rush off to. *(Thinking that Andrey has asked him something.)* What's that?

ANDREY. Nothing. *(Studying the book.)* Tomorrow it's Friday, we don't have a sitting tomorrow, but still, I think I'll go...I'll do something. It's boring at home...

(Pause.)

Dear old fellow, how strangely everything changes, how life deceives us! Today out of boredom, having nothing at all to do, I picked up this book here - old University lectures, and it seemed so amusing... Good God, I'm the secretary of the local council, the same council which has Protopopov as chairman, yes, I'm the secretary, and the very most that I can hope for is to be a member of the local district council! Yes, to be a member of the local district council, me, who dream every night that I am a professor at Moscow University, famous, learned, someone that our Russian homeland is proud of!

FERAPONT. I can't really say... My hearing's not good...

ANDREY. If your hearing were all that good, then, I suppose, I probably wouldn't talk to you. I need to talk to somebody, but my wife doesn't understand me, I'm afraid of my sisters for some reason, afraid that they might be laughing at me, or are ashamed of me... I don't drink, I don't like the local inns, but how much I would love to be sitting now in Moscow at Tyestov's, or at the Great Moscow restaurant. What do you think, old man?

FERAPONT. In Moscow, a contractor told us only yesterday at the council, some merchants had pancakes to eat. One of them ate forty pancakes, and they say he died. It was either forty or fifty, I can't remember which.

ANDREY. In Moscow you sit in a huge restaurant, you don't know anyone, and nobody knows you, but all the same you don't feel yourself to be a stranger. But here you know everyone and everyone knows you, but you're a stranger, a stranger. You're a stranger and you're alone.

FERAPONT. What's that?

(Pause.)

The same contractor, he said, perhaps he was fibbing, he said that they wanted to stretch a cable right across Moscow.

ANDREY. What for?

FERAPONT. How should I know? That's what the contractor said.

ANDREY. It's utter nonsense. *(He reads his book.)* Did you ever visit Moscow?

FERAPONT. *(After a pause.)* No, I never did. It was not God's will.

(Pause.)

Will that be all Sir?

ANDREY. Yes, you may go. Keep well.

(Ferapont leaves.)

Keep well. *(He goes on reading.)* You may come tomorrow morning and pick up these papers. You may go now...

(Pause.)

He's gone.

(The bell rings.)

Yes, I must get on... *(He stretches and then unhurriedly goes to his room.)*

(Off scene a nanny sings as she rocks a child to sleep. Masha and Vershinin enter. While they chat a maidservant lights candles and the oil lamp.)

MASHA. I don't know.

(Pause.)

I don't know. Of course habit counts for a lot. After father's death, for example, for a long time we could not accustom ourselves to the idea that there were no orderlies. But apart from habit, it seems to me at least to be a true statement. It may be different elsewhere, but in our town the decent, honourable and the most educated people - it is the military.

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

MASHA. *(Looks at her watch.)* They'll soon be bringing it. My marriage was agreed to when I was eighteen, and I was afraid of my husband, because he was a teacher, and I had barely finished my studies. He seemed then to me to be extraordinarily learned, clever and solemn. But now it's not the same, unfortunately.

VERSHININ. Yes... That's how it is.

MASHA. I say nothing about my husband, I've got used to him, but among civilians generally, such a high proportion of them are coarse people, with no finesse, and no education. Coarseness and vulgarity upsets and offends me, it causes me pain when I meet a man who is insufficiently sensitive, insufficiently pliable or considerate. When I have to spend time with the other teachers, my husband's colleagues, it's simply agonising.

VERSHININ. Yes, I suppose so... But it seems to me that it doesn't matter whether it's civilian or military personnel, they are all much the same and equally interesting, at least in this town. What does it matter! If you listen to the local intelligentsia, it doesn't matter whether it's civilian or military, they all say that they're fed up with their wives, they're fed up with home life, they're fed up with their estates, they're fed

up with their horses... Russians have a wonderful aptitude for loftiness of thought, but why is it that in reality they always sink so low? Why is it so?

MASHA. Why should it be?

VERSHININ. Why is he fed up with his children, fed up with his wife? And why are his wife and children fed up with him?

MASHA. I think you are a bit depressed today.

VERSHININ. Perhaps. I didn't eat today, I have had nothing since this morning. My daughter was rather ill, and when my daughters become ill a great anxiety takes hold of me, and my conscience tortures me that their mother is like the person she is. If only you had seen her today. It was so shameful. We started to quarrel from seven in the morning, and at nine o'clock I slammed the door and left.

(Pause.)

I never talk about this, it's strange, I seem to complain only to you. Don't be angry with me. I have only you, there is no one else, no one...

(Pause.)

MASHA. What a noise in the stove. Not long before father's death the chimney used to roar. Just as it is doing now.

VERSHININ. Are you superstitious?

MASHA. Yes.

VERSHININ. It's strange. *(Kisses her hand.)* You're a wonderful, a marvellous woman. Wonderful, marvellous! It's dark here, but I can see the glint of your eyes.

MASHA. *(Sits on another chair.)* It's brighter here...

VERSHININ. I adore, I adore, I adore... I adore your eyes, your movements, which I dream of... You're a wonderful, a marvellous woman!

MASHA. *(Laughing softly.)* When you say such things to me, I have to laugh, although it's rather frightening... Don't talk like that, please... *(Quietly.)* Alright, go on talking, I don't mind... *(Covers her face with her hands.)* I don't mind. Somebody's coming, talk about something else...

(Irina and Tuzenbach walk through the dining room.)

TUZENBACH. I have a treble-barrelled surname. It is Tuzenbach-Krone-Altschauer, but I am Russian, and orthodox, just like you. There is only a little German left in me, only my endurance, for example, and my stubbornness, which I know is wearisome to you. I walk home with you every evening.

IRINA. I'm so tired!

TUZENBACH. Every day I intend to go to the Telegraph Office and walk home with you. I will do it for ten, for twenty years, as long as you don't drive me away... *(Seeing Masha and Vershinin, happily.)* It's you? Greetings, greetings.

IRINA. At last I'm home. *(To Masha.)* Just now a woman came to the Office, she was sending a telegram to her brother in Saratov, because her son had just died, and she could not remember the address at all. So she sent it without the address, simply to Saratov. She was crying. And I was rude to her for absolutely no reason. "I haven't time for this" I said. It was so stupid. Do the mummers come tonight?

MASHA. Yes.

IRINA. *(Sits in an armchair.)* I must rest. I'm so tired.

TUZENBACH. *(With a smile.)* When you come home from work, you seem so tiny, so vulnerable...

(Pause.)

IRINA. I'm worn out. No, I'm not in love with the Telegraph office, I don't love it.

MASHA. You've grown thinner... *(She whistles.)* And you look younger, and your face is looking rather boyish...

TUZENBACH. That's her hair style.

IRINA. I must look for another job, this one doesn't suit me. The thing which I looked for in it, about which I dreamed, is simply not there at all. It's a labour without poetry, without any thought attached...

(A knock on the floor from below.)

That's the doctor knocking. *(To Tuzenbach.)* Dear friend, knock in reply... I can't... I'm so tired...

(Tuzenbach knocks on the floor.)

He'll come straight away. We'll have to do something about what's happening. Yesterday the doctor and Andrey went to the club and they lost money again. People are saying that Andrey lost two hundred roubles.

MASHA. *(Unconcerned.)* So what should we do!

IRINA. Two weeks ago he lost, in December he lost. The sooner he loses everything, I suppose, the sooner we could get away from this town. Lord above, I dream of Moscow every night, I'm almost entirely mad. *(She laughs.)* We are going to move there in June, but until June there is still... February, March, April, May... almost half the year!

MASHA. All that matters is that Natasha does not find out somehow or other about Andrey's losses.

IRINA. I don't think she cares in the slightest about it.

(Chebutykin, who has only just risen from an after-dinner nap, enters the dining room and strokes his beard. He sits at the table and takes a newspaper from his pocket.)

MASHA. Here he is... Has he paid for his room?

IRINA. *(She laughs.)* No. Not a single kopeck for the last eight months. Evidently he's forgotten.

MASHA. *(She laughs.)* Look how importantly he sits.

(They all laugh; pause.)

IRINA. *[To Vershinin.]* Why are you silent, Alexander Ignatyevich?

VERSHININ. I don't know. I need a cup of tea. Half my life for a cup of tea! I've had nothing since this morning...

CHEBUTYKIN. Irina. Irina Sergeyevna!

IRINA. What do you want?

CHEBUTYKIN. Please come here. Venez ici.

(Irina goes to him and sits at the table.)

I can't do this without you.

(Irina sets out a game of Patience.)

VERSHININ. Well then. If they are not going to bring the tea, let's at least try to philosophise.

TUZENBACH. Of course. But about what?

VERSHININ. About what? Well, let's dream... let's dream for example about life in the future, what it will be like after us, in two or three hundred years time.

TUZENBACH. Very well. When we are no more, people will fly around in balloons, they'll change the style of jackets, perhaps they'll discover a sixth sense and develop it, but life will remain more or less the same, a difficult life, full of mysteries, and sometimes it will be a happy life. And after a thousand years men will still sigh and say 'Ah, what a wearisome life,' - and at the same time, just as now, they will fear death and not wish to accept it.

VERSHININ. *(Thoughtfully.)* How can I express this? It seems to me that everything on this earth must gradually change, and it is changing already in front of our eyes. After two or three hundred years, perhaps after a thousand - the exact figure is not important - a new and happy life will emerge. We ourselves will not be a part of it, of course, but that is what we are living for now, we are working for it, even suffering, but we are in fact creating it. And that is the sole purpose of our existence now, or, if you wish, our only happiness.

(Masha quietly laughs.)

TUZENBACH. What is it?

MASHA. I don't know. I've been laughing all day, since this morning.

VERSHININ. I finished my training at the same point as you did. I did not go to University. I read a lot, but I am not skilled at choosing books and I probably read things that are inappropriate. But all the same, the longer I live, the greater is my desire to know. My hair is turning grey, I'm almost an old man, but I know hardly anything, hardly anything at all! But despite that it seems to me that the most important and the most real things I do know, I know them for certain. Somehow I would like to prove to you that there is no happiness, there must not and there cannot be happiness for us... We must simply work and work, while happiness - that will be the destiny of our distant descendants.

(Pause.)

Not for me, but for the descendants of my descendants.

(Fyedotik and Rodey enter the dining room; they sit down and start singing softly, strumming on the guitar.)

TUZENBACH. According to you, one cannot even dream about happiness. But suppose I tell you that I am happy!

VERSHININ. Absolutely not.

TUZENBACH. *(Clapping his hands and laughing.)* It's obvious that we don't understand one another. So, how can I convince you?

(Masha quietly laughs. Tuzenbach shakes his finger at her.)

Yes, you may laugh! *(To Vershinin.)* It is not a question of two hundred or three hundred years, for even after a million years life will still be exactly the same as it was before. Life does not change, it remains constant, following its own particular laws, laws which are outside your scope or, at the very least, laws which you will never know. Migratory birds, cranes for example, keep on flying and flying, and no matter what thoughts wander into their heads, whether they are sublime or petty it is no matter, they will still keep on flying and not know why they are flying or where they are flying to. They fly and will keep on flying whatever philosophers might be born amongst them; and let them philosophise, as much as they wish, as long as they keep on flying...

MASHA. But what is the meaning of it?

TUZENBACH. The meaning... Look, it is snowing. What is the meaning of that?

(Pause.)

MASHA. Surely mankind must believe in something, or at least seek for the truth, otherwise life is just emptiness, emptiness... To live and not to know why the cranes are flying, why children are born, why there are stars in the sky... Either you must know why it is you live, or everything is trivial - mere pointless nonsense.

(Pause.)

VERSHININ. But it's still a pity that youth has so quickly vanished.

MASHA. There is a line in Gogol: Gentlemen, how dull it is to live on this planet.

TUZENBACH. Well I would say: Gentlemen, how difficult it is to argue with you. You leave me speechless.

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Reading from a newspaper.*) Balzac got married in Berdichev.

(*Irina sings quietly.*)

I must write that in my notebook. (*He makes a note.*) Balzac got married in Berdichev. (*He reads the newspaper.*)

IRINA. (*Thoughtfully, as she sets out the Patience.*) Balzac got married in Berdichev.

TUZENBACH. The die is cast. You know, Marya Sergeyevna, I am going to retire from the service.

MASHA. Yes, I heard. And I don't see anything good about it. I don't like civilians.

TUZENBACH. It doesn't matter... (*He stands.*) I'm far from handsome, what sort of military man am I? Well, it doesn't matter, however... I intend to work. Just for one day of my life to work so wholeheartedly that I can come home in the evening, tumble exhausted into bed and fall asleep there and then. (*Going into the dining room.*) Workers, surely, must sleep soundly!

FYEDOTIK. (*To Irina.*) Just now, in Moscow street, from Pizhikov, I bought these coloured pencils for you. And here's a little penknife...

IRINA. You're so used to treating me as if I was a little girl, but I am after all grown up now... (*She takes the pencils and the penknife and exclaims in delight.*) Aren't they lovely!

FYEDOTIK. And look, I bought a knife for myself, you see... one blade, and here's another blade, and a third blade, this is for poking your ears, these are scissors, this is for cleaning your nails...

RODEY. (*Loudly.*) Doctor, how old are you?

CHEBUTYKIN. How old am I? Thirty two.

(*Laughter.*)

FYEDOTIK. Let me show you a different game of Patience. (*He sets out the cards.*)

(The tea is brought in; Anfisa serves from the samovar; a short time afterwards Natasha enters and fusses around the table; Solyony enters and greets everyone, then sits at the table.)

VERSHININ. What a gale is blowing out there!

MASHA. Yes. The winter is tedious. I have totally forgotten what summer is like.

IRINA. It's going to come out, your game, I can see. We will go to Moscow.

FYEDOTIK. No, it won't come out. Look, the eight was covering the two of spades. *(He laughs.)* That means you won't go to Moscow.

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Reading the newspaper.)* Tsitsikar. Small pox is raging there.

ANFISA. Masha, have some tea, little one. *(To Vershinin.)* Please, have some, your excellency... Excuse me Sir, I have forgotten your name

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

IRINA. Nanny!

ANFISA. I'm comi-i-ing!

NATASHA. *(To Solyony.)* Little babies have a wonderful understanding. 'Hello little Bobik', I said, 'hello my little darling'. And he looked at me in that special way. You'll think that it's just the mother in me that is speaking, but no, it's not, I assure you. He's a most remarkable child.

SOLYONY. If that child were mine, then I'd fry him up in the frying pan and gobble the lot. *(Takes his tea and walks into the dining room, where he sits in a corner.)*

NATASHA. *(Covers her face with her hands.)* What a shocking, ill-bred man!

MASHA. The happy person is one who does not notice if it is winter or summer. I think that if I were in Moscow, then I would be indifferent to the weather.

VERSHININ. Recently I read the diary of a French minister, written while he was in prison. He had been imprisoned because of the Panama affair. With total rapture and delight he talks about the birds which he can see from his prison window, and which he had never noticed before, when he was a minister. Now of course, after he's been released, he doesn't notice the birds anymore, just as beforehand. In the same way you

won't notice Moscow, when you actually live there. Happiness is not for us, nor will it be, we can only wish for it.

TUZENBACH. (*Takes a box from the table.*) Where are the chocolates?

IRINA. Solyony has eaten them.

TUZENBACH. All of them?

ANFISA. (*To Tuzenbach, serving him tea.*) Sir, there's a letter for you.

VERSHININ. For me? (*Takes the letter.*) It's from my daughter. (*He reads it.*) Yes, of course... I must, excuse me, Marya Sergeyevna, I must leave quietly. I won't have the tea. (*He stands up in an agitated manner.*) It's always the same old story...

MASHA. What is it? Is it a secret?

VERSHININ. (*Quietly.*) My wife has poisoned herself again. I must go. I'll get away unnoticed. It's all so terribly unpleasant. (*Kisses Masha's hand.*) My dearest, most wonderful, most beautiful woman... I'll go out this way, very quietly... (*He leaves.*)

ANFISA. Where's he gone? I'd just given him tea... Strange man.

MASHA. (*Flaring up.*) Leave him be! You pester so, nobody has any rest... (*Walks to the table with her tea.*) You're so exasperating, you silly old woman!

ANFISA. Why are you so offended? My dearest girl!

(*The voice of Andrey calling: 'Anfisa!'*)

ANFISA. (*Mockingly.*) Anfisa! He just sits out there... (*She leaves.*)

MASHA. (*In the dining room, at the table, in an angry tone.*) Let me have somewhere to sit. (*Messes up the cards on the table.*) You've spread all over here with your cards. Just drink your tea.

IRINA. You're in a bad mood, Masha.

MASHA. Well if I am in a bad mood, don't talk to me. Don't touch me!

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Laughing.*) Don't touch her, don't touch her.

MASHA. You're sixty years old, but you behave like a little boy, you're always talking utter crap.

NATASHA. (*Sighs.*) Dear Masha, how can you use such dreadful expressions? You have such a wonderful appearance and presence, in decent society, I can absolutely assure you of this, you would be simply enchanting, if only you didn't use such language. Je vous prie, pardonnez moi, Marie, mais vous avez des manières un peu grossières.

TUZENBACH. (*Trying not to laugh.*) Let me have... Let me just... I think I see some cognac...

NATASHA. Il parait que mon Bobik déjà ne dort pas, he's woken up. He hasn't been well today. I must go to him, excuse me... (*She leaves.*)

IRINA. Where has Alexander Ignatyevich gone?

MASHA. Home. Some disaster with his wife again.

TUZENBACH. (*Goes to Solyony, a decanter of cognac in his hand.*) You are always sitting alone and brooding about something - goodness knows what it can be. Come on, let's make peace. Let's have a brandy. (*They drink.*) Today I will have to play the piano, all night, probably, all manner of rubbish... What must be must be.

SOLYONY. Why should we make peace? I haven't quarrelled with you.

TUZENBACH. You always seem to create the impression that something has occurred between us. You have a somewhat strange character, you must admit.

SOLYONY. (*In a declamatory style.*) I am strange, yet who is not strange! Do not be angry, Aleko!

TUZENBACH. What has Aleko got to do with it?

(*Pause.*)

SOLYONY. When I'm alone with another person, then I'm normal, like everyone else. But in social gatherings I'm gloomy and shy and I talk all sorts of rubbish. But all the same I'm more honourable and better bred than very, very many others. And I can prove it.

TUZENBACH. I am often angry with you, you frequently irritate me when we are in company, but all the same I like you for some reason. Well, whatever happens, today I shall get drunk. Let's drink to that!

SOLYONY. Let's drink to it.

(Pause.)

I have nothing against you, Baron, I have never had anything against you. But I am blessed with the character of Lermontov. *(Quietly.)* I even resemble Lermontov a little... so they say... *(Takes a flask of perfume from his pocket and sprinkles his hands.)*

TUZENBACH. I'm retiring from the service. Enough is enough. For five years I thought about it, and finally I took the decision. I intend to work.

SOLYONY. *(In a declamatory style.)* Aleko, curb your rage... Forget, forget those dreams you cherish so...

(While they are talking Andrey enters quietly, with a book, and sits by the candle.)

TUZENBACH. I intend to work...

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Going into the drawing room with Irina.)* And the meal was also a typical Caucasian one - onion soup, and for the roast, chexkhartma, a lamb casserole.

SOLYONY. Cheremsha is certainly not a lamb casserole. It's a plant, rather like our garlic.

CHEBUTYKIN. That is not so, my dear boy. Chexkhartma is not garlic, but a casserole made from lamb.

SOLYONY. I can assure you - cheremsha is garlic.

CHEBUTYKIN. And I can assure you - chexkhartma is lamb casserole.

SOLYONY. And I can assure you - cheremsha is garlic.

CHEBUTYKIN. Why should I bother to quarrel with you? You were never in the Caucasus, and you never ate chexkhartma.

SOLYONY. I didn't eat it because I loathed it. Cheremsha smells just like garlic.

ANDREY. (*In a pleading voice.*) Gentleman, surely that's enough! Please, please!

TUZENBACH. When are the mummers due here?

IRINA. They promised for about nine o'clock. That means any minute now.

TUZENBACH. (*Embraces Andrey.*) Ah, my summer house, my new built house...

ANDREY. (*Dances and sings.*) My new built house, of maple wood...

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Dances.*) Of maple wood and lattice work all round...

(*Laughter.*)

TUZENBACH. (*Kisses Andrey.*) Goddammit, let's have a drink Andrey, let's drink to close friendship. And I will go with you, dear Andrey, to Moscow, to the University there.

SOLYONY. To which one? There are two universities in Moscow.

ANDREY. There is only one university in Moscow.

SOLYONY. I assure you, there are two.

ANDREY. Let there be three. All the better.

SOLYONY. There are two universities in Moscow.

(*Booing and hissing.*)

There are two universities in Moscow - the old and the new. But if it is unpleasant for you to listen me, if my speech offends you, then I can hold my tongue. I can even go into another room... (*He exits through one of the doors.*)

TUZENBACH. Bravo, bravo! (*He laughs.*) Ladies and gentlemen, it is time, I am about to play! What an odd fellow he is, that Solyony... (*He sits at the piano and plays a waltz.*)

MASHA. (*Dances alone to the waltz.*) The baron is drunk, the baron is drunk, the baron is drunk!

(*Natasha enters.*)

NATASHA. *(To Chebutykin.)* Ivan Romanich! *(Whispers something in Chebutykin's ear, then departs.)*

(Chebutykin touches Tuzenbach on the shoulder and whispers something to him.)

IRINA. What's the matter?

CHEBUTYKIN. It's time for us to leave. Good health to you all.

TUZENBACH. Good night. Time to leave.

IRINA. But please... What about the mummers?..

ANDREY. *(Embarrassed.)* There won't be any mummers. You see, my dear sisters, Natasha says that Bobik is not very well, and so, therefore... To put it bluntly, I don't know, and I don't care either way.

IRINA. *(Shrugs her shoulders.)* Bobik is not well.

MASHA. So this is what we have come to. Well, if they're driving us away, there's no alternative, we have to go. *(To Irina.)* It's not Bobik who is unwell, but she is, that woman... Here! *(Taps with her finger on her forehead.)* Ignoramus!

(Andrey leaves through the right hand door to his study. Chebutykin follows him. In the dining room people take their leave.)

FYEDOTIK. What a pity! I had counted on having a fine evening, but if the little one is unwell, then of course... I'm bring him a toy tomorrow.

RODEY. *(Loudly.)* I deliberately slept today after lunch, I thought that I would be dancing all night. And now its only just nine o'clock!

(Voices heard saying 'Goodbye! Keep well! Tuzenbach's happy laughter is heard. Everyone leaves. Anfisa and a maid clear the table and put out the lights. The nanny is heard singing. Andrey, wearing an overcoat, leaves quietly with Chebutykin.)

CHEBUTYKIN. I didn't manage to marry, life went by in a flash, like lightning, and then I was in love with your mother, madly in love, and she was married already...

ANDREY. Marriage is quite unnecessary. It's unnecessary because it's a bore.

CHEBUTYKIN. That may be so. But then there's loneliness. However you might philosophise about it, loneliness is a terrible thing, my dear fellow... Although in reality, of course, it's absolutely of no importance!

ANDREY. Let's leave quickly.

CHEBUTYKIN. What's the hurry. We'll get there in time.

ANDREY. I'm worried that my wife might stop me.

CHEBUTYKIN. Ah!

ANDREY. I don't intend to play today, I shall just watch. I'm not all that well... What should one do for asthma, Ivan Romanich?

CHEBUTYKIN. Why ask? I don't remember, my dear fellow. I simply don't know.

ANDREY. Let's go through the kitchen.

(The doorbell rings, then again. Voices are heard, and laughter. They leave.)

IRINA. *(Enters.)* What is it?

ANFISA. *(In a whisper.)* It's the mummers.

(The doorbell rings.)

IRINA. Tell them, nanny, that no one is at home. Give them our apologies.

(Anfisa goes out. Irina paces the room deep in thought; she is perturbed. Solyony enters.)

SOLYONY. *(Embarrassed.)* No one here?... Where is everyone?

IRINA. They've gone home.

SOLYONY. How strange. Are you alone here?

IRINA. I'm alone.

(Pause.)

Goodnight.

SOLYONY. Just now I behaved rather recklessly, I was tactless. But you are not like that, like all the others, you are sublime and you are so pure, you know about principles... Only you alone can understand me. I love you, deeply, endlessly, I love you...

IRINA. Goodnight! Please leave.

SOLYONY. I cannot live without you. *(Following her.)* My paradise! *(Tearfully.)* What happiness! Those luxuriant, wonderful, fantastic eyes, such as I have never seen in any other woman...

IRINA. *(Coldly.)* Please stop, Vasily Vasilich!

SOLYONY. This is the first time that I have spoken to you about love, and it's as if I am not on this earth at all, I am on another planet. *(Rubs his forehead.)* Well, it doesn't matter. Love can't be forced, naturally... But there must not be any rivals against me... it will not be... I swear to you, by all that is holy, any rival in my place I will kill... Oh, you are so wonderful!

(Natasha walks through holding a candle.)

NATASHA. *(Peers through one doorway, then another, and then walks past the door to her husband's room.)* Andrey's there. Let him go on reading. Forgive me, Vasily Vasilich, I did not know that you were here, I'm casually dressed.

SOLYONY. It doesn't matter to me. Goodnight! *(He leaves.)*

NATASHA. How tired you are, my poor poor girl! *(Kisses Irina.)* You should go to bed earlier.

IRINA. Is Bobik asleep?

NATASHA. He's asleep. It's an uneasy sleep. That reminds me, dear Irina, I kept meaning to tell you, but either you were not here, or I didn't have the time. It seems so cold and damp for Bobik in the present nursery. But your room is such a perfect one for a child. Dear Irina, dear sister, please move in, for the time being, to Olga's room!

IRINA. *(Not understanding.)* Where?

(A sledge with bells is heard driving up to the house.)

NATASHA. You and Olga can share the same room for the time being, and Bobik will have your room. He's such a lovely baby. Today I said to him 'Bobik, you're mine, all mine!', and he looked at me with his darling little eyes.

(The doorbell rings.)

It must be Olga. How late she is!

(A maidservant walks up to Natasha and whispers something in her ear.)

Protopopov? What a strange man. Protopopov has called, he's invited me to go for a sleigh ride with him in the troika. *(She laughs.)* Men are such strange creatures...

(The doorbell rings.)

Somebody else is here. Perhaps just a ride for a quarter of an hour... *(To the maidservant.)* Tell him, in a few minutes.

(The doorbell rings.)

Somebody is at the door. It must be Olga *(Exit.)*

(The maidservant runs out. Irina sits down, deep in thought. Kulygin and Olga enter, followed by Vershinin.)

KULYGIN. Well here's a thing. They said they were having an evening party.

VERSHININ. It's strange, I left not long ago, half an hour, and they were expecting the mummers...

IRINA. Everyone has gone.

KULYGIN. Has Masha gone? Where has she gone? And why is Protopopov waiting downstairs with a sledge? Who is he waiting for?

IRINA. No interrogation please. I'm worn out.

KULYGIN. A very capricious madam.

OLGA. The meeting has only just finished. I'm exhausted. Our headmistress is ill, and now I'm taking her place. My head is aching, it's aching... *(She sits.)* Yesterday Andrey lost two hundred roubles at cards... The whole town is talking about it.

KULYGIN. Yes, and I'm tired out by our meeting. (*He sits.*)

VERSHININ. My wife took it into her head just now to scare the wits out of me, she nearly poisoned herself. Everything worked out in the end, and I'm glad, I can rest now... So, it seems, we have to leave? May I wish you the best of everything. [*To Kulygin.*] Fyodor Ilyich, come out with me somewhere! I can't stay at home. I absolutely cannot... Let's go out!

KULYGIN. I'm tired. I'm not going out. (*He stands up.*) I'm tired. Did my wife go home?

IRINA. She must have done.

KULYGIN. (*Kisses Irina's hand.*) Goodnight. Tomorrow and the day after tomorrow there is the whole day to rest. All the best! (*He starts to go.*) I really would like some tea. I counted on spending an evening in pleasant company and instead - o fallacem hominum spem! All exclamations take the accusative case...

VERSHININ. So, it seems, I must go out alone. (*He goes out with Kulygin, whistling.*)

OLGA. My head is aching, it's aching... Andrey lost money... the whole town is talking... I must go and lie down. (*She starts to go.*) Tomorrow I am free... Good God, how pleasant that will be. Free tomorrow, free the day after tomorrow... My head is aching, it's aching. (*Exit.*)

IRINA. (*Alone.*) Everyone has gone. There is no one here.

(*An accordion plays in the street, the nanny sings a lullaby.*)

NATASHA. (*Dressed in a fur coat and a hat she walks across the dining room. The maidservant follows her.*) I'll be back in half an hour. I'm just going for a short ride. (*She goes out.*)

IRINA. (*Left on her own, with deep longing.*) Moscow! Moscow! Moscow!

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

Olga's and Irina's room. Beds on the right and the left, partitioned by screens. It is between two and three in the morning. Behind the scene a siren is sounding owing to a fire in the town which started some time ago. It is evident that no one has been to

bed so far tonight. Masha is lying on a divan, wearing, as usual, a black dress. Olga and Anfisa enter.

ANFISA. They are sitting downstairs now, under the staircase... I said to them - 'Please, come upstairs. It's impossible,' - I said, - 'for you to stay like this' - and they were crying. 'Daddy', they said, 'we don't know where he is. Please God, please God, don't say he's died in the fire'. What a thing to think of! And then in the yard there are others... they are also only half dressed.

OLGA. *(Takes some dresses from the wardrobe.)* Take this grey one... and this one... And this jacket also... And take this skirt nanny... My God, can you imagine it. The whole of the Kirsanovsky suburb has burnt down, it seems... Take this... And take this as well... *(Heaps up dresses into her arms.)* The Vershinin's are terrified, poor things... their house almost burnt down. They must spend the night with us... it's impossible to let them go home... Poor Fyedotik has lost everything, nothing is left...

ANFISA. You'd better call Ferapont, Olya darling, I can't carry all this.

OLGA. *(Rings the bell.)* No one will answer this... *(Through the door.)* Is anyone there, please come here!

(Through the open doorway a window can be seen which is red with the glow of the fire; fire engines are heard passing the house.)

It's simply dreadful! It's totally exhausting!

(Enter Ferapont.)

Here, take these downstairs. The Kolotilin girls are standing there under the stairs... give these to them. And these as well...

FERAPONT. Yes Madam. In eighteen hundred and twelve Moscow was burning. Good Lord above! The French were struck with horror.

OLGA. Go on. Take them away.

FERAPONT. Yes Madam. *(He goes.)*

OLGA. Nanny, my dear, give them everything. We don't need anything, so give them the lot nanny... I'm tired out, I can hardly stand... We cannot let the Vershinin's go home... The girls can sleep in the drawing room, and Vershinin himself can go down with the baron... Fyedotik also had better go with the baron, or perhaps with us in the

dining room... The doctor is drunk, absolutely drunk, as if on purpose, and no one can be put with him. Vershinin's wife also must go in the drawing room.

ANFISA. (*Exhausted.*) Dear Olya, my dearest one, don't get rid of me, please don't get rid of me!

OLGA. What nonsense you are talking, nanny. Nobody is going to get rid of you.

ANFISA. (*Puts her head on Olga's breast.*) My dear child, my darling one, I toil away, I keep working... But I'm getting weak, and everyone is saying 'She should go!' But where would I go to? Where? I'm eighty years old. I'm in my eighty second year.

OLGA. Sit down nanny. You're tired, you poor thing. (*Makes her sit down.*) Rest awhile, nanny dear. How pale you are!

(*Natasha enters.*)

NATASHA. Outside they're saying that we should set up a committee to help those whose homes have been burnt. What do you say? It's an excellent idea. We ought generally to help the poor, that is the duty of the rich. Bobik and little Sophie are fast asleep, sleeping as if nothing had happened. There's such a huge number of people in our house, everywhere, wherever you go the house is full. There is influenza in the town. I'm worried that the children might catch it.

OLGA. (*Not hearing her.*) The fire is not visible from this room. It's quiet here.

NATASHA. Yes... I think I must be rather dishevelled. (*In front of the mirror.*) I'm told that I'm getting fatter. It's not true! Not in the slightest! Masha's asleep, she's worn out, poor girl... (*Coldly, addressing Anfisa.*) How dare you sit down when I am here! Stand up! Leave this room!

(*Anfisa leaves. A pause.*)

I don't know why you keep that old bag. I just don't understand.

OLGA. (*Horried.*) Pardon me, but I also do not understand...

NATASHA. She's absolutely no use here. She's a peasant and she ought to go and live back in the country... Why all this cossetting? I like to see order in the house. (*Strokes Olga's cheek.*) You, my poor dear, you are so tired. Our headmistress is tired! When my little Sophie grows up and goes to school, then I will be afraid of you.

OLGA. I am not going to be headmistress.

NATASHA. They will choose you, darling Olga. It's decided.

OLGA. Then I will refuse. I can't do it. It's more than I can manage. *(She drinks some water.)* You behaved so rudely just now with nanny... Excuse me, I can't cope with it just now... my eyes are swimming...

NATASHA. *(Worried.)* Forgive me, dear Olga, forgive me... I didn't want to offend you.

(Masha gets up, takes a cushion and goes out angrily.)

OLGA. Please understand me my dear... We're educated people, perhaps we've been brought up in a strange way, but I cannot put up with that sort of thing. That sort of conduct oppresses me, it makes me feel ill... I am absolutely shattered by it!..

NATASHA. Forgive me, forgive me...*(Kisses her.)*

OLGA. Every time there is rudeness, even the slightest, or an indelicately spoken word, I become agitated...

NATASHA. I know I often say what is unnecessary, but do agree, my dearest, she could easily live at home in the country.

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

NATASHA. But look, now she's incapable of work! Either I do not understand you, or you deliberately choose not to understand me. She's not fit to do any work, she only sleeps and sits around the place.

OLGA. Then let her sit

NATASHA. *(In astonishment.)* What do you mean 'Let her sit'? She is after all a servant. *(Tearfully.)* I do not understand you, dear Olga. I already have a nanny, there is a wet nurse, we have maidservants, we have a cook... Why should we need this old woman? Why? Why?

(Outside the fire alarm is heard.)

OLGA. I have aged by ten years tonight.

NATASHA. Dear Olga, we need to talk this thing over. You are in the schoolroom, and I am here, at home; you have your teaching, and I have the running of this house. So if I say something about the servants, then I know what I am saying; I know what I

am say-ing... I want that old thief out of the house by tomorrow, that old witch... *(She stamps her foot.)* that old broomstick!... How dare you cross me! How dare you! *(Pulls herself up.)* Really now, if you don't move downstairs, then we'll always be quarrelling. This is terrible.

(Enter Kulygin.)

KULYGIN. Where's Masha? It's time for us to be going home. The fire, so they say, has died down. *(He stretches.)* Only one district burned, but really, if there had been a wind, it seemed at first as if the whole town would be alight. *(He sits down.)* I'm worn out. Dearest, dearest Olga... I often think, if I had not married Masha, then I would have married you, dear Olga. You are very beautiful... I'm exhausted. *(He starts listening to something.)*

OLGA. What is it?

KULYGIN. The doctor, as if on purpose, he went on a binge, he's dreadfully drunk. *(He stands up.)* He's coming this way, it seems... Can you hear? Yes, he's coming this way... I'm going to hide...

OLGA. For two years he's had nothing, now suddenly he's gone well over the top...*(She and Natasha retreat to the back of the room.)*

(Chebutykin enters. He walks across the room, apparently sober, not reeling at all, stops, looks around, then walks to the wash basin and starts to wash his hands.)

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Mournfully.)* God damn the whole lot of them. God damn them. They thought, because I am a doctor, I can therefore treat all ailments, but I know absolutely nothing, I have forgotten everything which I knew, and I don't remember a thing, not a single thing.

(Olga and Natasha leave, unnoticed by Chebutykin.)

God damn them. Last Wednesday I was treating a woman in Zasip - she went and died, and I was responsible that she had died. Yes... I knew something or other twenty five years ago, but now I don't remember anything. Nothing. It may be that I do not exist as a man, that I just give the appearance of having arms and legs and a head; it may be that I do not exist at all, but it only appears to me that I walk, eat and sleep. *(Sobs.)* Oh if only I could not exist! *(Stops sobbing. Gloomily.)* God knows... The other day they were talking in the club; they mentioned Shakespeare and Voltaire... I haven't read them, haven't read them at all, but I put on an expression as if to show I had read them. And the others did the same as me. What crudity! What

nastiness! And then I remembered that woman who had died on Wednesday... I remembered everything, and in my heart all was deformed, and loathsome, and disgusting... so I went off and got myself drunk...

(Irina, Vershinin and Tuzenbach enter; Tuzenbach is dressed in a new and fashionable civilian outfit.)

IRINA. Let's sit here. Nobody will come in here.

VERSHININ. If it had not been for the soldiers the whole town would have burned. Fine young men. *(Rubs his hands with pleasure.)* A wonderful team! Such a fine bunch of men!

KULYGIN. *(Approaching them.)* What time is it, good folks?

TUZENBACH. It's already four. It's getting light.

IRINA. Everyone is in the drawing room, no one is leaving. That Solyony of yours is there as well... *(To Chebutykin.)* Doctor, you should go and have a sleep.

CHEBUTYKIN. It's nothing Madam. My grateful thanks, Madam. *(He strokes his beard.)*

KULYGIN. *(Laughs.)* You've had a good drop, Ivan Romanich! *(Pats him on the shoulder.)* A fine fellow. In vino veritas, - as the Romans used to say.

TUZENBACH. Everyone says that I should arrange a concert to help the victims of the fire.

IRINA. Well, if anyone can...

TUZENBACH. It could be arranged, if it is worthwhile. Marya Sergeyevna, in my view, is a superb pianist...

KULYGIN. A superb pianist, Masha!

IRINA. She's already forgotten how to play. She hasn't played for three years... or four.

TUZENBACH. In this town absolutely nobody understands music, not a single soul, except me, I understand it, and I give you my word of honour that Marya Sergeyevna plays superbly, I would even say with inspiration.

KULYGIN. You are correct baron. I love Masha very, very much. She is wonderful.

TUZENBACH. To be able to play with such abundant richness and at the same time to realise that no one, no one understands!

KULYGIN. *(Sighs.)* Yes... But would it be appropriate for her to take part in a concert?

(Pause.)

I, of course, good people, do not know anything. It is possible that it would be alright. One must recognise that our head of school is a worthy man, even very worthy, very clever, but he does have certain fixed opinions. Of course it is not his business, but if you wish, I suppose I could have a talk with him.

(Chebutykin picks up a china clock and examines it.)

VERSHININ. I got totally covered in grime in the fire. I look like nothing on earth.

(Pause.)

Yesterday I heard in passing that they are thinking of transferring our brigade to somewhere far off. Some say it would be to Poland, others to Chita.

TUZENBACH. I heard it also. What then? The town will be completely deserted.

IRINA. And we will go to!

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Drops the clock, which smashes.)* Smashed to smithereens!

(Pause. All are shocked and embarrassed.)

KULYGIN. *(Picking up the pieces.)* To break such an expensive object. Ah, Ivan Romanich, Ivan Romanich. Minus ten for conduct, minus ten!

IRINA. That was a clock belonging to our late mother.

CHEBUTYKIN. It may be so... Mothers and others. It may be that I didn't in fact break it, but it only seems as if I broke it. It may be that we only appear to ourselves to exist, but in reality we are not here. I don't know anything, nobody knows anything. *(Standing at the door.)* Why are you looking at me? Natasha is having a little affair with Protopopov, and you can't see it. You are sitting here and you see

nothing, and yet Natasha is having a little affair with Protopopov... *(He sings.)* Do me the honour of accepting this date... *(He leaves.)*

VERSHININ. Yes... *(He laughs.)* Indeed how strange it all is.

(Pause.)

When the fire started I ran home as fast as I could; I got there and looked around - our house was still standing and unharmed and out of danger, but my two girls were standing in the doorway in their night clothes, their mother was not in sight, people were in panic, horses rushed by, and dogs, and on the girls' faces there was fear and terror, prayers, and I don't know what. My heart was devastated when I saw those faces. Good God, I thought, what will those girls have to endure through the course of a long life. I picked them up, ran off, and still thought only about that one thing - what will they have to endure while they are on this earth!

(The siren sounds. Pause.)

I came here, their mother was here, shouting, and in a rage.

(Masha enters, holding a cushion, and sits on the divan.)

And when my daughters stood in the doorway dressed only in their night clothes and the street was red from the flames, with a terrible noise, then I thought that something very similar must have happened many years ago when an enemy unexpectedly descended on a town, and looted it, and set it alight... But at the same time, in reality, what a difference there is between the world today, and what it used to be! And with the passage of more time, some two or three hundred years, say, people will look back at our own times with horror, or with sneering laughter, because all of our present day life will appear so clumsy, and burdensome, extraordinarily inept and strange. Yes, certainly, what a life it will be then, what a life! *(He laughs.)* Pardon me, I seem to have started philosophising again. Let me continue then. I really do want to philosophise, for that is the mood I am in at present.

(Pause.)

It's as if everyone were asleep. So, I was saying: what a life it will be in the future! You can only begin to imagine it... Such people as yourselves, there are only three in the town, but in future generations there will be more, and then more and more, and the time will come when everything will change to harmonise with your way of life, people will live like you, and then you will become outmoded, and people will be

born who are better than you... *(He laughs.)* I am in a very special mood today. I want to live life to the full and to the brim... *(He sings.)*

For love all ages shall be dancing,

Her flights of fancy are entrancing... *(He laughs.)*

MASHA. Lah, la-la-la,

VERSHININ. Lah, la-la-la...

MASHA. La-la-la-la?

VERSHININ. La-la-la-la. *(He laughs.)*

(Enter Fyedotik.)

FYEDOTIK. *(He dances.)* It's all burned, it's all burned! All to the last tiny piece.

(Laughter.)

IRINA. What's so funny in that? Is it all burnt?

FYEDOTIK. *(He laughs.)* All to the last tiny piece. There's nothing left. My guitar has burned, my photographs are burned, and all my letters... I wanted to give you a little letter knife - but that's burned too.

(Enter Solyony.)

IRINA. No, please go away, Vasily Vasilich. You can't come in here.

SOLYONY. Why is the baron allowed in here, and I am not?

VERSHININ. We must go, really and truly. How is the fire?

SOLYONY. They say that it's abated. No. To me it's decidedly strange. Why is the baron allowed here, and I am not. *(He takes out a flask of perfume and sprinkles his hands.)*

VERSHININ. Lah la-la-la?

MASHA. Lah la-la-la.

VERSHININ. (*He laughs. To Solyony.*) Let's go into the dining room.

SOLYONY. Yes indeed sir. We will make a note of it. The meaning though is all too clear, but the geese might be annoyed, I fear. (*Looking at Tuzenbach.*) Cheep, cheep, cheep... (*Leaves with Vershinin and Fyedotik.*)

IRINA. That Solyony has smoked the place out... (*Taken aback.*) The baron's asleep! Baron! Baron!

TUZENBACH. (*Comes to.*) Well I must say, I'm tired... The brick works... Please don't think I'm rambling, for indeed, in actual fact I'm soon going to the brick factory, I'm going to work... I've discussed it. (*Tenderly to Irina.*) You're so pale, so beautiful, so entrancing... It seems to me as if your paleness brightens the dark air, like a glowing light... You're sad, you're dissatisfied with life... Why not come with me, we will go together and work together!..

MASHA. Nikolay Lyvovich, please leave.

TUZENBACH. (*He laughs.*) Are you here Masha? I can't see. (*Kisses Irina's hand.*) Goodnight, I'm going... I look at you now and I remember how, some time ago, at your name day party, you were bright and cheerful and spoke about the joy of working... And what a happy vision of life flashed in front of my eyes! Where is it now? (*Kisses her hand.*) there are tears in your eyes. Go to bed, it's already getting light... the morning is here... If only it were possible for me to give my life for you!

MASHA. Nikolay Lyvovich, please leave! Really, that's enough...

TUZENBACH. I'm going... (*He leaves.*)

MASHA. (*Lying down.*) Are you asleep, Fyodor?

KULYGIN. What's that?

MASHA. You ought to go home.

KULYGIN. Darling Masha, my dearest, dearest Masha...

IRINA. She's tired. You should let her rest, Fedya.

KULYGIN. I'm going right away... My wife is lovely, wonderful. I love you, my dear incomparable Masha.

MASHA. (*Angrily.*) Amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant.

KULYGIN. (*He laughs.*) No, it's true, she is absolutely amazing. I married you seven years ago and it seems as if we only went to the altar yesterday. My word of honour. No, it's true, you are an amazing woman. I am happy, I am happy, I am happy.

MASHA. You are boring, you are boring, you are boring... (*She rises and speaks from a sitting position.*) But this is what will not go out of my head... It's simply excruciating. It's like a nail driven into my head, and I can't keep silent. It's about Andrey... He's mortgaged this house with the bank and his wife has taken all the money, but the house doesn't belong only to him, but to all four of us! He must know that, if he's at all a decent sort of man.

KULYGIN. There's no point, Masha. What use can it be? Andrey owes money all round, so, God help him, that's all we can say.

MASHA. It's still, whatever you say, unforgivable. (*She lies down again.*)

KULYGIN. You and I are not poor. I work, I teach at the grammar school, and then I give lessons... I'm a respectable man. Straightforward... *Omnia mea mecum porto*, as they say.

MASHA. I don't need anything, but injustice torments me.

(*Pause.*)

Go home, Fyodor.

KULYGIN. (*Kisses her.*) You're tired, just rest for half an hour, and I'll sit here, I'll wait. Sleep awhile... (*Sings.*) I'm happy, I'm happy, I'm happy. (*Exit.*)

IRINA. It's true, how small minded our Andrey has become. How he's wasted himself and grown old, living with that woman! There was a time when he was aiming to be a professor, but now, only yesterday he was boasting that he's at last managed to be elected as a member of the local district council. He's a member of the council, and Protopopov is chairman... the whole town is talking about it and laughing at him, but he is the only one who knows nothing and sees nothing... Just now everyone ran to help to fight the fire, but he sat alone in his study and did not give it a thought. He just plays on the violin. (*Distraught.*) It's terrible, terrible, terrible! (*She cries.*) It's too much for me, I can't bear it any longer!... I can't, I can't!... (*Sobs bitterly.*) Don't have anything more to do with me, don't, don't, I can't bear it any longer!...

(*Olga enters and starts to tidy things on her side table.*)

OLGA. (*Alarmed.*) What is it? What is it? My darling!

IRINA. (*Sobbing.*) Where? Where has it all gone? Where is it? Oh my God, my God! I have forgotten everything, forgotten everything... Everything is confused in my head... I can't remember what is the word for window in Italian, or for ceiling... I am forgetting everything, I forget more every day, and life flies past and never returns, never, and we will never go to Moscow... I see now that we will never go...

OLGA. Darling, my darling...

IRINA. (*Controlling herself.*) Oh, I'm so unhappy... I can't work, I won't work. That's enough! That's enough! I worked in the Telegraph Office, now I am employed by the Town Council, and I hate and despise everything that they give me to do... I'm already twenty four, I have been working already for ages, my brain is drying up, I'm growing ugly and old, and nothing I do, nothing at all gives me any joy, and time goes flying by and all the time it seems as if you are abandoning real life, life that is beautiful, you are going farther and farther away from it, over some sort of precipice. I am in total despair, and how I am alive, why I have not killed myself before now I do not understand...

OLGA. Don't cry, my little girl, don't cry... I'm suffering too.

IRINA. I won't cry, I won't cry... That's enough!... Look, I've already stopped crying. That's enough... that's enough!

OLGA. My darling girl, I will talk to you like a sister, like a friend; take my advice, if you like, marry the baron!

(*Irina cries quietly.*)

After all you do respect him, you value him... It's true, he's far from handsome, but he's such a decent, honourable man... After all, people marry, not for love, but only so that they can fulfil their duty. At least I think that that is true, and I would have married without love. Whoever had proposed to me, I would have married him whatever, as long as he was a decent man. I would even have married an old man...

IRINA. I kept on waiting, thinking we would settle in Moscow, and there my ideal man would meet me, I dreamed about him, I love him... But it turns out it was all nonsense, all nonsense...

OLGA. (*Embraces her.*) My darling, my beautiful sister, I understand everything. When the baron retired from the military and first came to us dressed in a suit, he

seemed to me to be so ugly that I almost burst out crying... He asked me 'Why are you crying?' As if I could tell him! But if it were God's will that you were to marry him, then I would be so happy.

(Natasha, holding a candle, walks silently across the stage from the right door into the left hand one.)

MASHA. *(Sits up.)* She walks as if she had set fire to the town.

OLGA. Masha, you are utterly stupid. The most stupid one in our family, it is you. Pardon me for saying so, if you don't mind.

(Pause.)

MASHA. I would like to confess, my dearest sisters. My heart is breaking. I will confess to you, and then to nobody else, never, never... I will tell you this minute. *(Quietly.)* this is my secret, but you all know it already... I can't keep quiet any longer...

(Pause.)

I love him, I love him... I love that man... You have only just seen him... But why dissemble. In one word only, I love Vershinin...

OLGA. *(Goes behind her screen.)* Don't say any more. In any case I am not listening.

MASHA. There is nothing to be done. *(Takes her head in her hands.)* At first he seemed to me to be so odd, and then I pitied him... and then I fell in love with him... I fell in love with his voice, with what he said, with his two unhappy daughters...

OLGA. *(Behind the screen.)* I am not listening, whatever you say. Whatever nonsense you talk, I have no intention of listening.

MASHA. You're just mad, Olga. I'm in love, that means, it's my fate. It is my destiny to love him... And he loves me... This is all terrible. Isn't it? Or is it wonderful? *(Grasps Irina's hand and pulls her towards herself.)* My darling Irina... How will we go on living our lives? What will become of us?... When you read a novel, any novel, then it seems that everything is so old hat and everything is easily understood, but when you fall in love yourself then it becomes obvious to you that nobody knows anything and each person must make their own decisions... My dearest sisters, my own dearest ones... I have made my confession, now I will be silent... I will now be silent, like the madman in Gogol's story... silence, silence...

(Andrey enters, followed by Ferapont.)

ANDREY. *(Angrily.)* What do you want? I do not understand.

FERAPONT. *(Impatiently, standing in the doorway.)* Andrey Sergeyevich, I have already told you ten times.

ANDREY. In the first place I will not be spoken to as Andrey Sergeyevich. I am your excellency.

FERAPONT. The firemen, your excellency, request permission to cross the garden to reach the river. As it is, they are going round, going round all the time - it's a nightmare for them.

ANDREY. Alright. Tell them it's alright.

(Ferapont leaves.)

It's exhausting. Where's Olga?

(Olga comes out from behind the screen.)

I've been looking for you. Let me have the key to the cupboard. I've lost my own. You have a tiny key for it.

(Olga gives him a key. Irina goes behind her screen. Pause.)

What an enormous fire. It's died down now. The devil only knows how that Ferapont annoys me, I spoke some nonsense to him... Your excellency...

(Pause.)

Why are you so quiet, Olga?

(Pause.)

It's time to end this nonsense and not to be so stand-offish, for no rhyme or reason. You, Masha, are here, Irina is here, that's just perfect, we can have everything out, a clean slate, once and for all. Now what exactly do you have against me? What is it?

OLGA. Andrey dear, just say no more. Tomorrow we will talk it over. *(Getting alarmed.)* What an excruciating night!

ANDREY. *(He is very embarrassed.)* Don't agitate yourself.. I am asking you in an entirely disinterested way: What is it that you have against me? Just tell me straight.

(The voice of Vershinin is heard: 'Lah la-la-la.')

MASHA. *(She rises. Loudly.)* Lah la-la-la! *(To Olga.)* Goodnight, Olga dear. All blessings on you. *(Goes behind the screen and kisses Irina.)* Sweet dreams... Goodnight Andrey. Leave them, they're tired... Tomorrow you can sort things out...*(She leaves.)*

OLGA. She's absolutely right, Andrey dear, put it off till tomorrow... *(Goes behind her own screen.)* It's time for bed.

ANDREY. I'll just say this and then leave you. It won't take a minute... In the first place, you have something against Natasha, my wife, and I noticed that from the very first day of my marriage. Natasha is an excellent and honourable woman, straightforward and decent - that is my opinion. I love and respect my wife, you must understand that, I respect her, and I demand that others should respect her in the same way. I repeat, she's an honourable, decent woman, and all your complaints, pardon me for saying so, are just capricious nonsense.

(Pause.)

In the second place, you seem to be angry for some reason that I am not a professor, and that I have not taken up a scientific career. However, I do serve on the council, I'm a member of the local district council, and the service I give to it I count just as important and sacred as service to science. I'm a member of the local district council, and I'm proud of it, since you ask me to mention it...

(Pause.)

In the third place... There is another thing I have to talk about... I mortgaged the house, without having asked your permission... In that I admit I was guilty, yes, and I ask you to forgive me... I was driven to it because of my debts... thirty five thousand... I have given up cards, I stopped that a long time ago, but the most important thing, which I can say in my justification, is that you girls, you receive a pension, whereas I didn't have one... a salary, so to speak...

KULYGIN. *(Through the doorway.)* Is Masha here? *(Alarmed.)* Where can she be? This is very strange... *(Exit.)*

ANDREY. They're not listening. Natasha is a fine, excellent, honourable woman. (*Paces the stage silently, then stops.*) When I married, I thought we would be happy... I thought we would all be happy... But God above... (*He sobs.*) My dearest sisters, my sweetest sisters, please don't believe me, don't believe me... (*He leaves.*)

KULYGIN. (*Anxiously, in the doorway.*) Where's Masha? Is Masha not here? This is most extraordinary. (*He leaves.*)

(*The siren sounds. The scene is empty.*)

IRINA. (*Behind the screen.*) Olga dear! Who's that knocking on the floor?

OLGA. That's the doctor, Ivan Romanich. He's drunk.

IRINA. What a terrible night!

(*Pause.*)

Olga dear! (*She looks out from behind the screen.*) Did you hear. The brigade is being posted elsewhere, it's transferring somewhere far off.

OLGA. That's only a rumour.

IRINA. We'll be left completely alone then... Olga dear!

OLGA. What now?

IRINA. Dear Olga, my dear sister, I do respect and value the baron, he's a very fine man, I will marry him, I agree, I will, only let's move to Moscow! Please, please let's go. There is nothing more wonderful on this earth than Moscow. Let's go there, dear Olga! Please! Please!

CURTAIN

ACT FOUR

The old garden in front of the Prozorovik house. A long avenue of pine trees, at the end of which the river is visible. On the far side of the river, a wood. On the right, the verandah of the house. On it there is a table with bottles and glasses: it is evident that champagne has been drunk there recently. It is eleven in the morning. Occasionally strollers pass through the garden, going from the street to the river; five soldiers walk rapidly across. Chebutykin, in a benign and well-disposed frame of mind, which does not desert him throughout the whole act, sits in an armchair in the garden and waits to be called. He is wearing a forage cap and carries a stick. Irina, Kulygin wearing a medal on a ribbon and with his moustache shaved off, and Tuzenbach, all standing on the terrace, are saying their farewells to Fyedotik and Rodey, who are going down into the garden. Both officers are dressed in the uniform appropriate for travel.

TUZENBACH. (*Exchanges farewell kisses with Fyedotik.*) You're a fine fellow, life was so friendly here with you. (*Kisses Rodey.*) One more time... Goodbye, goodbye!

IRINA. Till we meet again!

FYEDOTIK. Not 'till we meet again', but goodbye. We won't see each other ever again.

KULYGIN. Who knows? (*He rubs his eyes and smiles.*) Look, I've even started to cry.

IRINA. Some time in the future we'll meet.

FYEDOTIK. In ten or fifteen years. But by then we'll hardly recognise one another and we'll greet each other coldly. (*Takes a photograph.*) Hold still... Just for the last time

RODEY. (*Embraces Tuzenbach.*) We won't see each other again... (*Kisses Irina's hand.*) Thank you for everything. For everything!

FYEDOTIK. (*With annoyance.*) Hold still!

TUZENBACH. God willing, we'll meet again. Write to us. Whatever else, at least write.

RODEY. (*Casts a glance round the garden.*) Goodbye trees! (*He shouts.*) Hall-oo-oo! Hall-oo-oo!

(*Pause.*)

Goodbye echo!

KULYGIN. With any luck you'll get married there, in Poland... Your Polish wife will kiss you and say 'Sweetcake!' (*He laughs.*)

FYEDOTIK. (*Looking at his watch.*) Less than an hour left. From our battery only Solyony is going by barge, we are all going with the infantry. Today three batteries of the division are leaving, tomorrow another three - then in the town there will be peace and quiet.

TUZENBACH. And terrible boredom.

RODEY. Where is Marya Sergeyevna?

KULYGIN. Masha is in the garden.

FYEDOTIK. We must say goodbye to her.

RODEY. Goodbye, time to go, otherwise I shall start crying... (*Swiftly embraces Tuzenbach and Kulygin; kisses Irina's hand.*) It was so enjoyable living here...

FYEDOTIK. (*To Kulygin.*) Here, just as a souvenir... a little notebook and pencil. We'll go from here to the river...

(They walk away, and both of them turn to look back.)

RODEY. *(He shouts.)* Hall-oo-oo! Hall-oo-oo!

KULYGIN. *(He shouts.)* Goodbye!

(At the back of the stage Fyedorik and Rodey meet Masha and say their farewells to her; she leaves with them.)

IRINA. They've gone... *(She sits on the lower step of the verandah.)*

CHEBUTYKIN. They forgot to say goodbye to me.

IRINA. Why do you say that?

CHEBUTYKIN. Well I forgot anyway. In any case, I shall see them again soon. I leave tomorrow. Yes... Still another short day left. In a year I'll be retired, then I'll come here again to live my life out somewhere close to you... Only one little year until I get my pension... *(Puts a newspaper in his pocket, takes out another one.)* I'll come here to be somewhere close to you, and I'll change my life, root and branch... I will become such a quiet thing, so accom... so accommodating, so perfectly polite...

IRINA. You know you need to change your life, you really do. Somehow or other.

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes. I know I do. *(Sings softly.)* Ta-ra-ra boom-de-boom,... I sat upon a stone...

KULYGIN. You are incorrigible, Ivan Romanich, incorrigible!

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes. But if I came to your lessons, then I would learn something

IRINA. Fyodor has shaved off his moustache. I think it's horrible!

KULYGIN. It's nothing.

CHEBUTYKIN. I could tell you what your face looks like now, but I'd better not.

KULYGIN. It's nothing. That's the way it has to be now, it's the modus vivendi. Our headmaster has shaved his moustache, and since I was promoted to examiner I have shaved mine too. Nobody seems to like it, but it doesn't bother me. I'm contented. With a moustache or without a moustache I'm always contented. *(He sits.)*

(At the back of the stage Andrey pushes a sleeping baby in a pram.)

IRINA. Ivan Romanich, my own dear Ivan Romanich, what happened last night, out on the street, tell me? I'm most desperately worried about it.

CHEBUTYKIN. What happened? Nothing happened. Complete nonsense. (*Reads the newspaper.*) It's of no consequence.

KULYGIN. They are saying that Solyony and the baron met in the street near the theatre yesterday evening...

TUZENBACH. Enough, enough! Really, it's hardly right... (*Waves his hand and goes into the house.*)

KULYGIN. They say that, near the theatre, Solyony started abusing him. The baron lost his temper and said something offensive...

CHEBUTYKIN. I've no idea. It's all nonsense.

KULYGIN. In some seminary or other a teacher wrote 'nonsense' when correcting an essay, but the pupil read it as 'consensus' - he thought it had been written in Latin. (*He laughs.*) It's remarkably funny, remarkably. They say that Solyony is in love with Irina and that he hates the baron... That's understandable. Irina is a very beautiful girl. She's even rather like Masha, and just as much a thinker. The only thing is, Irina, your character is softer. Although Masha, of course, has a very fine character. I love her. I love Masha.

(Behind the scene from the depths of the garden: 'Yoo-hoo! Hall-oo-oo!')

IRINA. (*Shudders.*) For some reason everything terrifies me today.

(Pause.)

I have everything packed, I'll send my things off after dinner. Tomorrow the baron and I are getting married, we'll be setting off tomorrow for the brick works, then the day after tomorrow I'll be teaching, a new life will open out. Somehow God will see us through! When I passed the teacher's training exams I almost cried with joy, with thankfulness...

(Pause.)

The wagon will be here any minute for my things

KULYGIN. I suppose it's alright, but somehow all this is not very serious. It's just ideas, but nothing serious in them. Still, I wish you all happiness.

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Deeply moved.*) My wonderful girl, my beautiful girl... My precious one... You have gone so far ahead, I can't keep up with you any more. I've been left behind, like a migrating bird that's grown old and can no longer fly. Fly away my treasure, fly away, and may God go with you!

(*Pause.*)

What a foolish thing, Fyodor, to shave your moustache.

KULYGIN. Drop it, can't you! (*He sighs.*) Today the soldiers all leave, and then everything will run on the old lines. Whatever anyone says, Masha is a fine and honourable woman, I love her dearly and I bless my fate... Fate is different for different people... In the excise office here there is a clerk called Kozirev. He was a fellow student of mine, and he was expelled from the fifth form because he could not understand the 'ut consecutivum' in Latin. Now he's dreadfully poor, he's ill, and whenever I meet him I say to him 'Good morning, ut consecutivum.' 'Yes,' he says, 'that's just it, consecutivum,' and then he coughs... But for me, I've had good fortune all my life, I'm happy, I even have the Stanislav medal of the second class, and I teach others this very same thing, the 'ut consecutivum'. Of course I'm clever, cleverer than so many others, but that doesn't make for happiness...

(*In the house someone plays on the piano 'the Maiden's Prayer'.*)

IRINA. At least tomorrow morning I will no longer have to listen to 'The Maiden's Prayer' and I won't have to meet Protopopov...

(*Pause.*)

I believe Protopopov is sitting there in the drawing room; he even came today...

KULYGIN. Has the headmistress arrived yet?

IRINA. No. They've sent for her. If only you knew how difficult it has been for me to live here alone, without Olga... She lives at the school; she's the headmistress, she's busy all day, while I'm alone here, living in boredom with nothing to do, and the room I am in is hateful... So I decided, if it's my destiny not to go to Moscow, so be it. It means that that's my fate. There is no way round it... Everything is as God wills it, that's true. Nikolay Lyvovich proposed to me... Well? I thought it over and came to a decision. He's a good man, it's astonishing, really, how good he is... And suddenly it was as if wings had grown on my soul, I brightened up, the burden was lifted from me and once more I wanted to work and work. Only it seems last night something happened, and some dark cloud is hanging over me.

CHEBUTYKIN. Nonsense. Consensus.

NATASHA. *(In the window.)* The headmistress!

KULYGIN. The headmistress has arrived. Let's go and meet her.

(He and Irina go into the house.)

CHEBUTYKIN. *(He reads a newspaper and sings quietly.)* Ta-ra-ra boom-de-boom,
I sat upon a stone...

(Masha enters; at the back of the stage Andrey wheels the pram.)

MASHA. He just sits here, and loafes around...

CHEBUTYKIN. What of it?

MASHA. *(She sits.)* Nothing.

(Pause.)

Did you love my mother?

CHEBUTYKIN. Very much.

MASHA. And did she love you?

CHEBUTYKIN. *(After a pause.)* That I no longer remember.

MASHA. Is my man here? That was how in the past our cook Martha used to talk about her policeman: my man. Is my man here?

CHEBUTYKIN. Not yet.

MASHA. When you pick up happiness in fragments, in torn pieces, and then lose it, as I do, then gradually you turn coarse, you become fierce and angry... *(Points to her heart.)* In here I am absolutely seething... *(Looks at her brother Andrey who is wheeling the pram towards them.)* There's Andrey, our brother... All his hopes have gone. A thousand people lift up a huge bell, there is an enormous expenditure of energy and money, and suddenly it falls down and smashes to pieces. Suddenly, for no reason at all. That's what happened to Andrey...

ANDREY. When is the house going to quieten down again? All that racket.

CHEBUTYKIN. Soon. *(Looks at his watch.)* I have an old watch, one which strikes... *(Winds up his watch which then strikes.)* The first, the second and the fifth battery are leaving at exactly one o'clock...

(Pause.)

I'm leaving tomorrow.

ANDREY. For good?

CHEBUTYKIN. I don't know. After a year I might return. Perhaps. Although, the devil only knows... it's not important.

(Music from a zither and violin is heard in the distance.)

ANDREY. The town is emptying. It's as if it's being covered with a hood.

(Pause.)

Something happened yesterday near the theatre. Everyone is talking about it, but I don't know what it was.

CHEBUTYKIN. It was nothing. Stupidity. Solyony started to pester the baron and he flared up and insulted him. So it turned out in the end that Solyony was duty bound to challenge him to a duel. *(Looks at his watch.)* It looks as if it's already time... At half-past twelve, in the public woodland, that one over there that you can see beyond the river... Piff-paff. *(He laughs.)* Solyony imagines that he is Lermontov, he even writes poems. But joking aside, this is his third duel.

MASHA. Who's third duel?

CHEBUTYKIN. Solyony's.

MASHA. And the baron?

CHEBUTYKIN. What about the baron?

(Pause.)

MASHA. Everything's confused in my head... All the same, I think that it ought not to be allowed. He could injure the baron, or even kill him.

CHEBUTYKIN. The baron is an excellent man, but one baron more, or one baron less, does it really matter? Forget it! It's not important.

(Beyond the garden is heard the shout 'Yoo-hoo! Hall-oo-oo!')

You can wait. That's Skvortsov shouting, one of the seconds. He's in a boat.

(Pause.)

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

CHEBUTYKIN. That's only as it seems to be... In reality we are not here, there's nothing on the earth, we don't exist, it only seems as if we exist... And it's all the same anyway!

MASHA. You talk and talk the whole day long... *(Starts to go.)* We're living in this sort of climate where without any warning it starts to snow, but still everyone talks and talks... *(She stops.)* I won't go into the house, I can't go in there... When Vershinin comes, please let me know... *(Walks along the avenue.)* The migratory birds are already flying overhead... *(She looks upwards.)* Swans, or geese... Such lovely, happy things... *(She leaves.)*

ANDREY. Our house will be empty. The officers are leaving, you are leaving, Irina is getting married, and I'll be in the house on my own.

CHEBUTYKIN. And your wife?

(Ferapont enters holding some papers.)

ANDREY. My wife is my wife. She's an honest, decent sort of woman, even good I suppose, but with all that there is something in her which reduces her to the level of a mean, blind, rough coated sort of beast. Whatever else, she is not a human being. I can tell you this as a friend, the only man whom I can talk to about what is in my heart. I love Natasha, that's true, but at times she appears to me to be so incredibly vulgar that I despair, and I do not understand why, for what reason I love her at all, or at any rate did love her...

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Stands up.)* Look, dear chap, I'm leaving tomorrow, perhaps we'll never see each other again, so here is my advice. It's just this: put on your hat, take your walking stick in your hand, and clear off... clear off and keep going, keep going without looking back. And the farther away you get the better it will be.

(Solyony walks across at the back of the stage with two officers. Seeing Chebutykin he turns towards him; the officers go on walking.)

SOLYONY. Doctor, it's time. It's already half-past twelve. *(Greets Andrey.)*

CHEBUTYKIN. Coming. You're wearing me out, all of you. *(To Andrey.)* If anyone asks for me, Andrey, tell them that I'll be back very shortly... *(He sighs.)* Ooh, ooh, ooh!

SOLYONY. Before he had uttered a note, the bear was upon his throat. *(Walks with Chebutykin.)* Why are you groaning, old man?

CHEBUTYKIN. Why do you ask!

SOLYONY. Are you well or not?

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Angrily.)* Like cheese and butter.

SOLYONY. The old man is getting angry for nothing. I'll just allow myself a little sport, I'll just wing him, like a snipe. *(Takes a flask of perfume from his pocket and sprinkles his hands.)* I've poured out a whole flask of the stuff today, and still they smell. Today they smell to me of corpses.

(Pause.)

That's just it... do you remember that verse?

But he, the rebellious one, seeks out the storm,

As if in the heart of storms there might be peace...

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes. Before he had uttered a note, the bear was upon his throat. *(Leaves with Solyony.)*

(The shout 'Yoo-hoo! Hall-oo-oo!' is heard. Andrey and Ferapont enter.)

FERAPONT. There are papers to sign.

ANDREY. *(Irritated.)* Leave me alone! Just leave me! I am asking you, please, please! *(Leaves pushing the pram.)*

FERAPONT. What else are papers for, if not for signing. *(Goes towards the back of the stage.)*

(Irina enters accompanied by Tuzenbach wearing a boater. Kulygin walks across the stage shouting 'Yoo-hoo, Masha, yoo-hoo.)

TUZENBACH. That, it seems, is the only man in the town who will be glad when the military leave.

IRINA. That's understandable.

(Pause.)

Our town will be empty now.

TUZENBACH. *(Looks at his watch.)* Dearest one, I will be back right away.

IRINA. Where are you going?

TUZENBACH. I must go in to town, in order to... to see off some friends.

IRINA. That's not true... Nikolay, why are you so distracted today?

TUZENBACH. *(Makes an impatient gesture.)* I'll be back in less than an hour and be with you again. *(Kisses her hand.)* My darling girl... *(Looks into her face.)* Five years have already gone since I first fell in love with you, but still I cannot accustom myself to it, and you seem to be more beautiful than ever. What wonderful and entrancing hair! What lovely eyes! I will take you away tomorrow, we will both work, we will be rich, and my dreams will become reality. You will be happy. But there is this one thing, just this one: that you do not love me.

IRINA. That is not something I have any power over. I will be your wife, I'll be faithful and loyal, even without love. What can one do? *(She cries.)* I didn't fall in love once in my life. I dreamed so much about love, night and day I have dreamed so long about it, but my heart is like a glorious grand piano, and the lid is closed and the key is thrown away.

(Pause.)

You are looking worried.

TUZENBACH. I didn't sleep all night. There's nothing in my life which is so terrible or has the power to frighten me so much as that lost key which breaks my heart and doesn't let me sleep... Talk to me about something.

(Pause.)

Talk to me about something...

IRINA. What? What can I say? What?

TUZENBACH. Anything.

IRINA. Really! Really!

(Pause.)

TUZENBACH. What trifling things, what idiotic little details sometimes acquire quite suddenly a significance in one's life, for no reason whatsoever. As always you laugh at them, consider them to be of little importance, yet still it turns out that you feel unable to stand up against them. But let's not talk about that! I'm happy. It's as if I am seeing for the first time in my life these fir trees, these maples and birch trees, and everything looks at me with curiosity and waits. What beautiful trees, and, in reality, what a beautiful life they must have.

(A shout is heard 'Yoo-hoo! Hall-oo-oo!')

I must go, it's already time... Look, there's a tree which has withered, but it still sways in the wind like the other trees. So, I think, if I should die, I shall still be a part of life, like that, or in some other way. Goodbye, my dearest... *(He kisses her hand.)* Those papers which you gave me, they are on my desk, under the calendar.

IRINA. I am going with you.

TUZENBACH. *(Alarmed.)* No, no! *(Quickly walks away, then stops in the avenue of trees.)* Irina!

IRINA. What is it?

TUZENBACH. *(Not knowing what to say.)* I didn't have any coffee this morning. Please ask to have some brewed for me... *(Leaves quickly.)*

(Irina stands pensively, then walks quickly to the back of the stage and sits on the swing. Andrey enters with the pram; Ferapont appears.)

FERAPONT. Andrey Sergeyevich, the papers are not mine, after all, they're the town council's. I didn't invent them.

ANDREY. Ah, where is it, where has it gone, my past, when I was young and happy, and clever, when I dreamed and had lofty ideals, when the present and the future were

lit up with hope and promise? Why is that, when our lives have scarcely begun, we become boring, grey, uninteresting, lazy, indifferent, useless, unhappy... Our town has been here for at least two hundred years, it has a hundred thousand inhabitants, and there is not one of them in all that number who is not like all the others, not a single saintly fanatic either in the past or in the present, not a single scholar, not a single artist, not even a remotely noteworthy man who might awaken some envy, or the desire to imitate him... All they do is eat, and drink, and sleep, and then die... others are then born and they also eat, and drink and sleep, and so as not to become completely numb from boredom, they embroider their lives with disgusting gossip, with vodka, with cards, and deceptions, and the wives deceive their husbands, while the husbands lie to themselves, they give the appearance that they see nothing and hear nothing, and the oppressing, inescapable and degenerate influence crushes their children, and the spark of divinity is extinguished in them, and they become just the same pitiful and mean corpses without life, all the same as one another, just as their parents were before them... (*To Ferapont.*) What do you want?

FERAPONT. What's that? Some papers to sign.

ANDREY. You will be the death of me.

FERAPONT. (*Gives him the papers.*) Just now the porter in the town hall told us that, he said, in St. Petersburg, in the winter, it was minus two hundred degrees of frost.

ANDREY. The present is unbearable, but if I think ahead to the future, ah! how fine it is. It becomes so free and so spacious; in the distance the dawn is breaking, I see freedom, I see how I and my children will be freed from idleness, from cabbage pickle, from roast chicken and vegetables, from dozing after dinner, from crippling inactivity...

FERAPONT. Two thousand people were frozen solid. The people, he said, were terrified. It was either in St. Petersburg, or it was in Moscow, I don't remember which.

ANDREY. (*Seized with tender emotion.*) My dearest sisters, my wonderful sisters! (*Tearfully.*) Masha, my own dearest sister...

NATASHA. (*At the window.*) Who is making that noise with all that talking? Is that you, Andrey darling? You will wake up little Sophie. Il ne faut pas faire du bruit, la Sophie est dormée déjà. Vous êtes un ours. (*Flaring up.*) If you really must chatter so, then give the pram with the baby to someone else. Ferapont, take the pram from the master.

FERAPONT. Yes Ma'am. (*Takes the pram.*)

ANDREY. (*Embarrassed.*) I was talking quietly.

NATASHA. (*Behind the window, playing with little Bobik.*) Bobik! You rascal, Bobik. You bad boy, Bobik!

ANDREY. (*Glancing through the papers.*) Alright, I'll have a look through these, and sign whatever is necessary, then you can take them to the council office... (*He goes into the house reading the papers; Ferapont wheels the pram away to the far part of the garden.*)

NATASHA. (*Behind the window.*) Bobik, what's your mummy's name? Little darling. Little darling. And who's this? This is auntie Olga, say 'Auntie Olga!', say 'Hello, auntie Olga!'

(Some travelling musicians, a man and a young girl, are playing on a violin and a zither; Vershinin, Olga and Anfisa come out of the house on stage and listen silently for a minute to the music; Irina approaches.)

OLGA. You would think our garden was a public highway, people walk and ride across it. Nanny, give something to the musicians!..

ANFISA. (*gives money to the musicians.*) Go on your way with God's blessing, good folks.

(The musicians bow and leave.)

Such ill-starred people. You don't play music if your belly's full. (*To Irina.*) Hello, my darling Irinushka. (*Kisses her.*) You know, my darling girl, what a life I have now, what a life! I'm in the school buildings, in a council flat, it's wonderful, with little Olga - God provided this for me in my old age. Since the day I was born I have never known such happiness, sinner that I am... It's a large room, a council owned flat, and a whole room for me, with my own bed. It's all state owned. I wake in the night, and - Oh Lord above, Blessed Virgin Mary, no one has ever known such happiness.

VERSHININ. (*Glancing at his watch.*) We are leaving shortly, Olga Sergeyevna, it's time for me to go.

(Pause.)

I wish you all the very best of everything... Where is Masha?

IRINA. She's somewhere in the garden... I'll go and find her.

VERSHININ. If you would be so kind. I'm rather in a hurry.

ANFISA. I will help find her too. *(She shouts.)* Masha, hal-oo-oo! *(She and Irina depart towards the far end of the garden.)* Masha, hal-oo-oo!

VERSHININ. Everything must have an end. Even we must say goodbye. *(Glances at his watch.)* The town council gave us a sort of lunch, we drank champagne, the dignitaries gave speeches; I ate something and listened, but my heart was really here, with you... *(He looks round the garden.)* I've grown used to being here.

OLGA. Will we ever see each other again?

VERSHININ. Probably never.

(Pause.)

My wife and my two daughters will be staying here for another couple of months. Please, if anything happens, or if anything is needed...

OLGA. Of course. Of course. You need not worry yourself.

(Pause.)

Tomorrow in the town there won't be a single military person, it will all be just a memory, and, of course, for us a new life will be beginning. To Moscow, it seems, we will never go...

VERSHININ. Yes, I know... thank you, for everything... Please forgive me if anything was not entirely proper... I spoke a lot, gabbled so much - forgive me for that, don't have bad memories.

OLGA. *(Wipes her eyes.)* I wonder where Masha is...

VERSHININ. What can I say as a farewell speech? What should I philosophise about now?... *(He laughs.)* Life is such a harsh thing. To many it appears as a lonely and hopeless place, but all the same, we have to admit, it is becoming much more clear and more enlightened, and the time is not far away, evidently, when it will become entirely bright and clear. *(Looks at his watch.)* I must be going, it's already time! Formerly humanity was engaged with warfare, filling all its existence with expeditions, incursions, conquests, but now all that has outlived its time, and it has left in its space a huge emptiness, which, for the time being, there is nothing left to fill...

Humanity passionately seeks for something, and, given time, it will surely find it. If only it could find it swiftly, swiftly !

(Pause.)

You know, if we could only add education to a love of hard work, and a love of hard work to education... *(Looks at his watch.)* But, it seems, I must be going...

OLGA. Look, she's coming now.

(Masha enters.)

VERSHININ. I've come to say goodbye...

(Olga moves a little to one side, so as not to embarrass them as they part.)

MASHA. *(Looking into his face.)* Goodbye...

(A prolonged kiss.)

OLGA. Please, please...

(Masha sobs uncontrollably.)

VERSHININ. Write to me... Don't forget! Please, I must go... it's time... Olga Sergeyevna, please take her, it's time, you know... I am late... *(Deeply moved he kisses Olga's hand, then embraces Masha once more and quickly departs.)*

OLGA. There, Masha, there, please stop now, my dearest...

(Kulygin enters.)

KULYGIN. *(Embarrassed.)* It doesn't matter. Let her cry, let her... She's so very good, my Masha, so very, very good... She is my wife, and I am happy, whatever might have been or not been... I make no complaint, I do not offer a single word of criticism... Look, Olga is my witness... We will start to lead our life again as it was before, and I will say nothing, not even the slightest hint...

MASHA. *(Restraining her sobs.)*

A green oak grows by the curving shore,

A gilded chain on the oak tree hangs...

A gilded chain on the oak tree hangs...

I'm going out of my mind... A green oak grows... on the curving shore...

OLGA. Calm yourself, Masha, calm yourself... Let her have some water.

MASHA. I will stop crying...

KULYGIN. She has stopped crying... she is very good

(A dull, distant shot is heard.)

MASHA. A green oak grows by the curving shore, a gilded chain on the oak tree hangs... a green cat... a green oak tree... I am all confused. *(Drinks some water.)* A life gone wrong... I don't need anything now... I will soon calm down... It doesn't matter... What does it mean 'by the curving shore'? Why are those words clinging in my head? My thoughts are all confused.

(Irina enters.)

OLGA. Calm down, Masha. Good, good, that's well done... Let's go into the house.

MASHA. *(Angrily.)* I will not go in there! *(She sobs, but quickly controls herself.)* I am not going into the house again, I will not go in there.

IRINA. Come on, let's sit down together, and we can be quiet. After all, tomorrow I am leaving...

(Pause.)

KULYGIN. Yesterday, in the third form, I confiscated this beard and whiskers from a boy... *(He puts on the beard and moustache.)* You see, I'm like the German teacher... *(He laughs.)* Don't you think so? Those boys are so amusing.

MASHA. Yes, you really are like our German teacher.

OLGA. *(Laughs.)* Yes, he is.

(Masha cries.)

IRINA. Shush, Masha!

KULYGIN. Very much like him...

(Enter Natasha.)

NATASHA. *(To the maidservant.)* What did you say? Little Sophie will stay with Protopopov, with Mikhail Ivanich, and Andrey can take Bobik for a stroll. What a lot of fuss and bother children are... *(To Irina.)* Irina, you are leaving tomorrow, it's such a pity. Stay for a few more days. *(Seeing Kulygin she screams. He laughs and removes the beard and moustache.)* Hey, that's enough! You terrified me! *(To Irina.)* I'm so accustomed to you being here, and do you think it will be easy for me to part with you? I will arrange to have Andrey moved to your room, with his violin - let him scrape away in there! Then I can move little Sophie into his room. She's a wonderful, a most marvellous child! What a girl she is! Today she looked at me with her own little eyes, and - 'Mama'!

KULYGIN. A wonderful child, there's no doubt about that.

NATASHA. That means tomorrow I will already be all alone here. *(She sighs.)* First of all I will have this avenue of pine trees cut down, and then that maple... It's so ugly in the evenings... *(To Irina.)* You know, my dear Irina, that belt does not suit your style of face... It's badly chosen... You need something brighter than that. Then here I will have bedding plants put in, and here, and there will be a lovely scent... *(Sternly.)* Why is there a garden fork lying on this bench? *(She approaches the house and addresses the maid.)* I am asking you, why is there a garden fork lying on this bench? *(She shouts.)* Shut your mouth!

KULYGIN. She's off again.

(Behind the scene a march begins to play; they all listen.)

OLGA. They're leaving.

(Enter Chebutykin.)

MASHA. Our friends are leaving. What must be must be... Happy journey to them. *(To her husband.)* We should be going... Where are my hat and shawl?

KULYGIN. I took them into the house... I'll bring them now... *(He goes into the house.)*

OLGA. Yes. Now we can go home. It's time.

CHEBUTYKIN. Olga Sergeyevna!

OLGA. What is it?

(Pause.)

What is it?

CHEBUTYKIN. Nothing... I don't know how to tell you this... *(Whispers in her ear.)*

OLGA. *(Horrified.)* it can't be!

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes... What a saga... I'm quite worn out, exhausted, I don't want to say any more... *(With annoyance.)* In any case, it makes no difference!

MASHA. What's happened?

OLGA. *(Embraces Irina.)* It's been a terrible day... I don't know how to say this to you, my dearest...

IRINA. What is it? Tell me quickly. What is it? For God's sake! *(She cries.)*

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

IRINA. *(Cries quietly.)* I knew it, I knew it...

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Sits on a bench at the rear of the stage.)* I'm exhausted... *(Takes a newspaper out of his pocket.)* Let them cry... *(Sings quietly.)* Ta-ra-ra boom-de-boom, I sat upon a stone... In any case, what does it matter!

(The three sisters stand close together supporting each other.)

MASHA. Listen, how the music is playing! They are going away from us, one of them has already gone, gone forever, and we are left here alone to start our lives again. We must go on living... We must go on living...

IRINA. *(Leans her head on Olga's breast.)* The time will come, and everyone will know the meaning of all this, why there is all this suffering, and there won't be any mysteries, but meanwhile, we must go on living... we must work, we must work! Tomorrow I will leave on my own, I will teach in a school and I'll give all my life to those perhaps who need it. It's already autumn, soon it will be winter, the snow will fall, but I will be working, I will go on working...

OLGA. *(Embraces both sisters.)* The music is playing so cheerfully, it's so full of high spirits that one wants to stay alive. Oh God, Oh God! The time will come when we

will be gone forever, we will be forgotten, our faces, our voices, and even how many of us there were. But our suffering will be transformed into happiness for those who live after us, peace and contentment will cover the earth, and they will remember and bless with kind words all those who live now. My dearest, dearest sisters, our life is still not finished. We will go on living. The music is playing so happily, so cheerfully, that it seems, in just a little time, we will know why we live, and why there is all this suffering... If only we could know! If only we could know!

(The music becomes quieter and quieter; Kulygin, smiling and happy, brings Masha's hat and shawl; Andrey wheels out the pram with Bobik sitting in it.)

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Sings quietly.)* Ta-ra-ra boom-de-boom, I sat upon a stone... *(Reads the paper.)* It doesn't matter! It doesn't matter!

OLGA. If only we could know! If only we could know!

CURTAIN

NOTES

ACT ONE.

Masha. A green oak grows on the curving shore etc.

The opening lines of Puskin's poem 'Ruslan and Ludmila'.

Kulygin. Feci, quod potui, faciant meliora potentes. (Latin.)

I have done what I could, may others more capable do better.

Kulygin. Mens sana in corpore sano. (Latin.)

A healthy mind in a healthy body.

ACT TWO

Chebutykin. Venez ici. (French.)

Come here.

Natasha. Je vous prie pardonnez moi, Marie etc. (French.)

Pardon me Masha, but I think your behaviour is somewhat coarse.

Natasha. Il parait etc. (French.)

It seems that my Bobik is already awake.

Kulygin. O fallacem spem hominum. (Latin.)

How vain are men's hopes.

(Kulygin's subsequent remark about the accusative case refers to a rule of Latin grammar.)

ACT THREE

Kulygin. In vino veritas. (Latin.)

Truth comes from drink.

Vershinin. For love all ages shall be dancing, etc.

This is a quotation from Pushkin's Eugene Onegin, which had been set to music by Tchaikovsky. Vershinin possibly takes the tune from T's opera. Chekhov discusses in a letter the interchange of tra-la-las between Vershinin and Masha.

'Tra-la-la...la-la. Vershinin pronounces tra-la-la as if it were a question, but you - as if it were a reply, and to you this appears such an original touch, that you pronounce the tra-la-la with a laugh. (Letter to Olga Knipper [who played the part of Masha in the original production] 20th. January 1901.) It is easier to put this into practice with a familiar tune.

Masha. Amo, amas, amat etc. (Latin.)

I love, you love, he loves, we love, you love, they love.

(Conjugation of the Latin verb, *amare*, to love.)

Kulygin. Omnia mea mecum porto. (Latin.)

All that I own I carry with me.

ACT FOUR.

Kulygin. Modus vivendi. (Latin.)

The accepted custom.

Kulygin. Ut consecutivum. (Latin.)

A syntactical rule for the use of *ut* in Latin.

Natasha. Il ne faut pas faire du bruit etc. (Latin.)

Stop making a noise, Sophie is already asleep. You are a bear