ANTON PAVLOVICH CHEKHOV

IVANOFF: A PLAY

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Содержание

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CHARACTERS

NICHOLAS IVANOFF, perpetual member of the Council of Peasant Affairs

ANNA, his wife. Nee Sarah Abramson

MATTHEW SHABELSKI, a count, uncle of Ivanoff

PAUL LEBEDIEFF, President of the Board of the Zemstvo

ZINAIDA, his wife

SASHA, their daughter, twenty years old

LVOFF, a young government doctor

MARTHA BABAKINA, a young widow, owner of an estate and daughter of a rich merchant

KOSICH, an exciseman

MICHAEL BORKIN, a distant relative of Ivanoff, and manager of his estate

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA, an old woman

GEORGE, lives with the Lebedieffs

FIRST GUEST SECOND GUEST THIRD GUEST FOURTH GUEST

PETER, a servant of Ivanoff

GABRIEL, a servant of Lebedieff

GUESTS OF BOTH SEXES

The play takes place in one of the provinces of central Russia

ACT I

The garden of IVANOFF'S country place. On the left is a terrace and the facade of the house. One window is open. Below the terrace is a broad semicircular lawn, from which paths lead to right and left into a garden. On the right are several garden benches and tables. A lamp is burning on one of the tables. It is evening. As the curtain rises sounds of the piano and violoncello are heard.

IVANOFF is sitting at a table reading.

BORKIN, in top-boots and carrying a gun, comes in from the rear of the garden. He is a little tipsy. As he sees IVANOFF he comes toward him on tiptoe, and when he comes opposite him he stops and points the gun at his face.

IVANOFF. [Catches sight of BORKIN. Shudders and jumps to his feet] Misha! What are you doing? You frightened me! I can't stand your stupid jokes when I am so nervous as this. And having frightened me, you laugh! [He sits down.]

BORKIN. [Laughing loudly] There, I am sorry, really. I won't do it again. Indeed I won't. [Take off his cap] How hot it is! Just think, my dear boy, I have covered twelve miles in the last three hours. I am worn out. Just feel how my heart is beating.

IVANOFF. [Goes on reading] Oh, very well. I shall feel it later!

BORKIN. No, feel it now. [He takes IVANOFF'S hand and

presses it against his breast] Can you feel it thumping? That means that it is weak and that I may die suddenly at any moment. Would you be sorry if I died?

IVANOFF. I am reading now. I shall attend to you later.

BORKIN. No, seriously, would you be sorry if I died? Nicholas, would you be sorry if I died?

IVANOFF. Leave me alone!

BORKIN. Come, tell me if you would be sorry or not.

IVANOFF. I am sorry that you smell so of vodka, Misha, it is disgusting.

BORKIN. Do I smell of vodka? How strange! And yet, it is not so strange after all. I met the magistrate on the road, and I must admit that we did drink about eight glasses together. Strictly speaking, of course, drinking is very harmful. Listen, it is harmful, isn't it? Is it? Is it?

IVANOFF. This is unendurable! Let me warn you, Misha, that you are going too far.

BORKIN. Well, well, excuse me. Sit here by yourself then, for heaven's sake, if it amuses you. [Gets up and goes away] What extraordinary people one meets in the world. They won't even allow themselves to be spoken to. [He comes back] Oh, yes, I nearly forgot. Please let me have eighty-two roubles.

IVANOFF. Why do you want eighty-two roubles?

BORKIN. To pay the workmen to-morrow.

IVANOFF. I haven't the money.

BORKIN. Many thanks. [Angrily] So you haven't the money!

And yet the workmen must be paid, mustn't they?

IVANOFF. I don't know. Wait till my salary comes in on the first of the month.

BORKIN. How is it possible to discuss anything with a man like you? Can't you understand that the workmen are coming to-morrow morning and not on the first of the month?

IVANOFF. How can I help it? I'll be hanged if I can do anything about it now. And what do you mean by this irritating way you have of pestering me whenever I am trying to read or write or —

BORKIN. Must the workmen be paid or not, I ask you? But, good gracious! What is the use of talking to you! [Waves his hand] Do you think because you own an estate you can command the whole world? With your two thousand acres and your empty pockets you are like a man who has a cellar full of wine and no corkscrew. I have sold the oats as they stand in the field. Yes, sir! And to-morrow I shall sell the rye and the carriage horses. [He stamps up and down] Do you think I am going to stand upon ceremony with you? Certainly not! I am not that kind of a man!

ANNA appears at the open window.

ANNA. Whose voice did I hear just now? Was it yours, Misha? Why are you stamping up and down?

BORKIN. Anybody who had anything to do with your Nicholas would stamp up and down.

ANNA. Listen, Misha! Please have some hay carried onto the croquet lawn.

BORKIN. [Waves his hand] Leave me alone, please!

ANNA. Oh, what manners! They are not becoming to you at all. If you want to be liked by women you must never let them see you when you are angry or obstinate. [To her husband] Nicholas, let us go and play on the lawn in the hay!

IVANOFF. Don't you know it is bad for you to stand at the open window, Annie? [Calls] Shut the window, Uncle!

[The window is shut from the inside.]

BORKIN. Don't forget that the interest on the money you owe Lebedieff must be paid in two days.

IVANOFF. I haven't forgotten it. I am going over to see Lebedieff today and shall ask him to wait.

[He looks at his watch.]

BORKIN. When are you going?

IVANOFF. At once.

BORKIN. Wait! Wait! Isn't this Sasha's birthday? So it is! The idea of my forgetting it. What a memory I have. [Jumps about] I shall go with you! [Sings] I shall go, I shall go! Nicholas, old man, you are the joy of my life. If you were not always so nervous and cross and gloomy, you and I could do great things together. I would do anything for you. Shall I marry Martha Babakina and give you half her fortune? That is, not half, either, but all – take it all!

IVANOFF. Enough of this nonsense!

BORKIN. No, seriously, shan't I marry Martha and halve the money with you? But no, why should I propose it? How can you

understand? [Angrily] You say to me: "Stop talking nonsense!" You are a good man and a clever one, but you haven't any red blood in your veins or any – well, enthusiasm. Why, if you wanted to, you and I could cut a dash together that would shame the devil himself. If you were a normal man instead of a morbid hypochondriac we would have a million in a year. For instance, if I had twenty-three hundred roubles now I could make twenty thousand in two weeks. You don't believe me? You think it is all nonsense? No, it isn't nonsense. Give me twenty-three hundred roubles and let me try. Ofsianoff is selling a strip of land across the river for that price. If we buy this, both banks will be ours, and we shall have the right to build a dam across the river. Isn't that so? We can say that we intend to build a mill, and when the people on the river below us hear that we mean to dam the river they will, of course, object violently and we shall say: If you don't want a dam here you will have to pay to get us away. Do you see the result? The factory would give us five thousand roubles, Korolkoff three thousand, the monastery five thousand more —

IVANOFF. All that is simply idiotic, Misha. If you don't want me to lose my temper you must keep your schemes to yourself.

BORKIN. [Sits down at the table] Of course! I knew how it would be! You never will act for yourself, and you tie my hands so that I am helpless.

Enter SHABELSKI and LVOFF.

SHABELSKI. The only difference between lawyers and doctors is that lawyers simply rob you, whereas doctors both rob

you and kill you. I am not referring to any one present. [Sits down on the bench] They are all frauds and swindlers. Perhaps in Arcadia you might find an exception to the general rule and yet – I have treated thousands of sick people myself in my life, and I have never met a doctor who did not seem to me to be an unmistakable scoundrel.

BORKIN. [To IVANOFF] Yes, you tie my hands and never do anything for yourself, and that is why you have no money.

SHABELSKI. As I said before, I am not referring to any one here at present; there may be exceptions though, after all – [He yawns.]

IVANOFF. [Shuts his book] What have you to tell me, doctor?

LVOFF. [Looks toward the window] Exactly what I said this morning: she must go to the Crimea at once. [Walks up and down.]

SHABELSKI. [Bursts out laughing] To the Crimea! Why don't you and I set up as doctors, Misha? Then, if some Madame Angot or Ophelia finds the world tiresome and begins to cough and be consumptive, all we shall have to do will be to write out a prescription according to the laws of medicine: that is, first, we shall order her a young doctor, and then a journey to the Crimea. There some fascinating young Tartar —

IVANOFF. [Interrupting] Oh, don't be coarse! [To LVOFF] It takes money to go to the Crimea, and even if I could afford it, you know she has refused to go.

LVOFF. Yes, she has. [A pause.]

BORKIN. Look here, doctor, is Anna really so ill that she absolutely must go to the Crimea?

LVOFF. [Looking toward the window] Yes, she has consumption.

BORKIN. Whew! How sad! I have seen in her face for some time that she could not last much longer.

LVOFF. Can't you speak quietly? She can hear everything you say. [A pause.]

BORKIN. [Sighing] The life of man is like a flower, blooming so gaily in a field. Then, along comes a goat, he eats it, and the flower is gone!

SHABELSKI. Oh, nonsense, nonsense. [Yawning] Everything is a fraud and a swindle. [A pause.]

BORKIN. Gentlemen, I have been trying to tell Nicholas how he can make some money, and have submitted a brilliant plan to him, but my seed, as usual, has fallen on barren soil. Look what a sight he is now: dull, cross, bored, peevish —

SHABELSKI. [Gets up and stretches himself] You are always inventing schemes for everybody, you clever fellow, and telling them how to live; can't you tell me something? Give me some good advice, you ingenious young man. Show me a good move to make.

BORKIN. [Getting up] I am going to have a swim. Goodbye, gentlemen. [To Shabelski] There are at least twenty good moves you could make. If I were you I should have twenty thousand

roubles in a week.

[He goes out; SHABELSKI follows him.]

SHABELSKI. How would you do it? Come, explain.

BORKIN. There is nothing to explain, it is so simple. [Coming back] Nicholas, give me a rouble.

IVANOFF silently hands him the money

BORKIN. Thanks. Shabelski, you still hold some trump cards.

SHABELSKI follows him out.

SHABELSKI. Well, what are they?

BORKIN. If I were you I should have thirty thousand roubles and more in a week. [They go out together.]

IVANOFF. [After a pause] Useless people, useless talk, and the necessity of answering stupid questions, have wearied me so, doctor, that I am ill. I have become so irritable and bitter that I don't know myself. My head aches for days at a time. I hear a ringing in my ears, I can't sleep, and yet there is no escape from it all, absolutely none.

LVOFF. Ivanoff, I have something serious to speak to you about.

IVANOFF. What is it?

LVOFF. It is about your wife. She refuses to go to the Crimea alone, but she would go with you.

IVANOFF. [Thoughtfully] It would cost a great deal for us both to go, and besides, I could not get leave to be away for so long. I have had one holiday already this year.

LVOFF. Very well, let us admit that. Now to proceed. The best cure for consumption is absolute peace of mind, and your wife has none whatever. She is forever excited by your behaviour to her. Forgive me, I am excited and am going to speak frankly. Your treatment of her is killing her. [A pause] Ivanoff, let me believe better things of you.

IVANOFF. What you say is true, true. I must be terribly guilty, but my mind is confused. My will seems to be paralysed by a kind of stupor; I can't understand myself or any one else. [Looks toward the window] Come, let us take a walk, we might be overheard here. [They get up] My dear friend, you should hear the whole story from the beginning if it were not so long and complicated that to tell it would take all night. [They walk up and down] Anna is a splendid, an exceptional woman. She has left her faith, her parents and her fortune for my sake. If I should demand a hundred other sacrifices, she would consent to every one without the quiver of an eyelid. Well, I am not a remarkable man in any way, and have sacrificed nothing. However, the story is a long one. In short, the whole point is, my dear doctor – [Confused] that I married her for love and promised to love her forever, and now after five years she loves me still and I – [He waves his hand] Now, when you tell me she is dying, I feel neither love nor pity, only a sort of loneliness and weariness. To all appearances this must seem horrible, and I cannot understand myself what is happening to me. [They go out.]

SHABELSKI comes in.

SHABELSKI. [Laughing] Upon my word, that man is no scoundrel, but a great thinker, a master-mind. He deserves a memorial. He is the essence of modern ingenuity, and combines in himself alone the genius of the lawyer, the doctor, and the financier. [He sits down on the lowest step of the terrace] And yet he has never finished a course of studies in any college; that is so surprising. What an ideal scoundrel he would have made if he had acquired a little culture and mastered the sciences! "You could make twenty thousand roubles in a week," he said. "You still hold the ace of trumps: it is your title." [Laughing] He said I might get a rich girl to marry me for it! [ANNA opens the window and looks down] "Let me make a match between you and Martha," says he. Who is this Martha? It must be that Balabalkina – Babakalkina woman, the one that looks like a laundress.

ANNA. Is that you, Count?

SHABELSKI. What do you want?

ANNA laughs.

SHABELSKI. [With a Jewish accent] Vy do you laugh?

ANNA. I was thinking of something you said at dinner, do you remember? How was it – a forgiven thief, a doctored horse.

SHABELSKI. A forgiven thief, a doctored horse, and a Christianised Jew are all worth the same price.

ANNA. [Laughing] You can't even repeat the simplest saying without ill-nature. You are a most malicious old man. [Seriously] Seriously, Count you are extremely disagreeable, and very

tiresome and painful to live with. You are always grumbling and growling, and everybody to you is a blackguard and a scoundrel. Tell me honestly, Count, have you ever spoken well of any one?

SHABELSKI. Is this an inquisition?

ANNA. We have lived under this same roof now for five years, and I have never heard you speak kindly of people, or without bitterness and derision. What harm has the world done to you? Is it possible that you consider yourself better than any one else?

SHABELSKI. Not at all. I think we are all of us scoundrels and hypocrites. I myself am a degraded old man, and as useless as a cast-off shoe. I abuse myself as much as any one else. I was rich once, and free, and happy at times, but now I am a dependent, an object of charity, a joke to the world. When I am at last exasperated and defy them, they answer me with a laugh. When I laugh, they shake their heads sadly and say, "The old man has gone mad." But oftenest of all I am unheard and unnoticed by every one.

ANNA. [Quietly] Screaming again.

SHABELSKI. Who is screaming?

ANNA. The owl. It screams every evening.

SHABELSKI. Let it scream. Things are as bad as they can be already. [Stretches himself] Alas, my dear Sarah! If I could only win a thousand or two roubles, I should soon show you what I could do. I wish you could see me! I should get away out of this hole, and leave the bread of charity, and should not show my

nose here again until the last judgment day.

ANNA. What would you do if you were to win so much money?

SHABELSKI. [Thoughtfully] First I would go to Moscow to hear the Gipsies play, and then – then I should fly to Paris and take an apartment and go to the Russian Church.

ANNA. And what else?

SHABELSKI. I would go and sit on my wife's grave for days and days and think. I would sit there until I died. My wife is buried in Paris. [A pause.]

ANNA. How terribly dull this is! Shall we play a duet?

SHABELSKI. As you like. Go and get the music ready. [ANNA goes out.]

IVANOFF and LVOFF appear in one of the paths.

IVANOFF. My dear friend, you left college last year, and you are still young and brave. Being thirty-five years old I have the right to advise you. Don't marry a Jewess or a bluestocking or a woman who is queer in any way. Choose some nice, common-place girl without any strange and startling points in her character. Plan your life for quiet; the greyer and more monotonous you can make the background, the better. My dear boy, do not try to fight alone against thousands; do not tilt with windmills; do not dash yourself against the rocks. And, above all, may you be spared the so-called rational life, all wild theories and impassioned talk. Everything is in the hands of God, so shut yourself up in your shell and do your best. That is the pleasant,

honest, healthy way to live. But the life I have chosen has been so tiring, oh, so tiring! So full of mistakes, of injustice and stupidity! [Catches sight of SHABELSKI, and speaks angrily] There you are again, Uncle, always under foot, never letting one have a moment's quiet talk!

SHABELSKI. [In a tearful voice] Is there no refuge anywhere for a poor old devil like me? [He jumps up and runs into the house.]

IVANOFF. Now I have offended him! Yes, my nerves have certainly gone to pieces. I must do something about it, I must —

LVOFF. [Excitedly] Ivanoff, I have heard all you have to say and – and – I am going to speak frankly. You have shown me in your voice and manner, as well as in your words, the most heartless egotism and pitiless cruelty. Your nearest friend is dying simply because she is near you, her days are numbered, and you can feel such indifference that you go about giving advice and analysing your feelings. I cannot say all I should like to; I have not the gift of words, but – but I can at least say that you are deeply antipathetic to me.

IVANOFF. I suppose I am. As an onlooker, of course you see me more clearly than I see myself, and your judgment of me is probably right. No doubt I am terribly guilty. [Listens] I think I hear the carriage coming. I must get ready to go. [He goes toward the house and then stops] You dislike me, doctor, and you don't conceal it. Your sincerity does you credit. [He goes into the house.]

LVOFF. [Alone] What a confoundedly disagreeable character! I have let another opportunity slip without speaking to him as I meant to, but I simply cannot talk calmly to that man. The moment I open my mouth to speak I feel such a commotion and suffocation here [He puts his hand on his breast] that my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. Oh, I loathe that Tartuffe, that unmitigated rascal, with all my heart! There he is, preparing to go driving in spite of the entreaties of his unfortunate wife, who adores him and whose only happiness is his presence. She implores him to spend at least one evening with her, and he cannot even do that. Why, he might shoot himself in despair if he had to stay at home! Poor fellow, what he wants are new fields for his villainous schemes. Oh, I know why you go to Lebedieff's every evening, Ivanoff! I know.

Enter IVANOFF, in hat and coat, ANNA and SHABELSKI

SHABELSKI. Look here, Nicholas, this is simply barbarous You go away every evening and leave us here alone, and we get so bored that we have to go to bed at eight o'clock. It is a scandal, and no decent way of living. Why can you go driving if we can't? Why?

ANNA. Leave him alone, Count. Let him go if he wants to.

IVANOFF. How can a sick woman like you go anywhere? You know you have a cough and must not go out after sunset. Ask the doctor here. You are no child, Annie, you must be reasonable. And as for you, what would you do with yourself over there?

SHABELSKI. I am ready to go anywhere: into the jaws of a

crocodile, or even into the jaws of hell, so long as I don't have to stay here. I am horribly bored. I am stupefied by this dullness. Every one here is tired of me. You leave me at home to entertain Anna, but I feel more like scratching and biting her.

ANNA. Leave him alone, Count. Leave him alone. Let him go if he enjoys himself there.

IVANOFF. What does this mean, Annie? You know I am not going for pleasure. I must see Lebedieff about the money I owe him.

ANNA. I don't see why you need justify yourself to me. Go ahead! Who is keeping you?

IVANOFF. Heavens! Don't let us bite one another's heads off. Is that really unavoidable?

SHABELSKI. [Tearfully] Nicholas, my dear boy, do please take me with you. I might possibly be amused a little by the sight of all the fools and scoundrels I should see there. You know I haven't been off this place since Easter.

IVANOFF. [Exasperated] Oh, very well! Come along then! How tiresome you all are!

SHABELSKI. I may go? Oh, thank you! [Takes him gaily by the arm and leads him aside] May I wear your straw hat?

IVANOFF. You may, only hurry, please.

SHABELSKI runs into the house.

IVANOFF. How tired I am of you all! But no, what am I saying? Annie, my manner to you is insufferable, and it never used to be. Well, good-bye, Annie. I shall be back by one.

ANNA. Nicholas! My dear husband, stay at home to-night!

IVANOFF. [Excitedly] Darling, sweetheart, my dear, unhappy one, I implore you to let me leave home in the evenings. I know it is cruel and unjust to ask this, but let me do you this injustice. It is such torture for me to stay. As soon as the sun goes down my soul is overwhelmed by the most horrible despair. Don't ask me why; I don't know; I swear I don't. This dreadful melancholy torments me here, it drives me to the Lebedieff's and there it grows worse than ever. I rush home; it still pursues me; and so I am tortured all through the night. It is breaking my heart.

ANNA. Nicholas, won't you stay? We will talk together as we used to. We will have supper together and read afterward. The old grumbler and I have learned so many duets to play to you. [She kisses him. Then, after a pause] I can't understand you any more. This has been going on for a year now. What has changed you so?

IVANOFF. I don't know.

ANNA. And why don't you want me to go driving with you in the evening?

IVANOFF. As you insist on knowing, I shall have to tell you. It is a little cruel, but you had best understand. When this melancholy fit is on me I begin to dislike you, Annie, and at such times I must escape from you. In short, I simply have to leave this house.

ANNA. Oh, you are sad, are you? I can understand that! Nicholas, let me tell you something: won't you try to sing and

laugh and scold as you used to? Stay here, and we will drink some liqueur together, and laugh, and chase away this sadness of yours in no time. Shall I sing to you? Or shall we sit in your study in the twilight as we used to, while you tell me about your sadness? I can read such suffering in your eyes! Let me look into them and weep, and our hearts will both be lighter. [She laughs and cries at once] Or is it really true that the flowers return with every spring, but lost happiness never returns? Oh, is it? Well, go then, go!

IVANOFF. Pray for me, Annie! [He goes; then stops and thinks for a moment] No, I can't do it. [IVANOFF goes out.]

ANNA. Yes, go, go – [Sits down at the table.]

LVOFF. [Walking up and down] Make this a rule, Madam: as soon as the sun goes down you must go indoors and not come out again until morning. The damp evening air is bad for you.

ANNA. Yes, sir!

LVOFF. What do you mean by "Yes, sir"? I am speaking seriously.

ANNA. But I don't want to be serious. [She coughs.]

LVOFF. There now, you see, you are coughing already.

SHABELSKI comes out of the house in his hat and coat.

SHABELSKI. Where is Nicholas? Is the carriage here yet? [Goes quickly to ANNA and kisses her hand] Good-night, my darling! [Makes a face and speaks with a Jewish accent] I beg your bardon! [He goes quickly out.]

LVOFF. Idiot!

A pause; the sounds of a concertina are heard in the distance.

ANNA. Oh, how lonely it is! The coachman and the cook are having a little ball in there by themselves, and I – I am, as it were, abandoned. Why are you walking about, Doctor? Come and sit down here.

LVOFF. I can't sit down.

[A pause.]

ANNA. They are playing "The Sparrow" in the kitchen. [She sings]

"Sparrow, Sparrow, where are you?
On the mountain drinking dew."

[A pause] Are your father and mother living, Doctor?

LVOFF. My mother is living; my father is dead.

ANNA. Do you miss your mother very much?

LVOFF. I am too busy to miss any one.

ANNA. [Laughing] The flowers return with every spring, but lost happiness never returns. I wonder who taught me that? I think it was Nicholas himself. [Listens] The owl is hooting again.

LVOFF. Well, let it hoot.

ANNA. I have begun to think, Doctor, that fate has cheated me. Other people who, perhaps, are no better than I am are happy and have not had to pay for their happiness. But I have paid for it all, every moment of it, and such a price! Why should I have to pay so terribly? Dear friend, you are all too considerate and gentle with me to tell me the truth; but do you think I don't know

what is the matter with me? I know perfectly well. However, this isn't a pleasant subject – [With a Jewish accent] "I beg your bardon!" Can you tell funny stories?

LVOFF. No, I can't.

ANNA. Nicholas can. I am beginning to be surprised, too, at the injustice of people. Why do they return hatred for love, and answer truth with lies? Can you tell me how much longer I shall be hated by my mother and father? They live fifty miles away, and yet I can feel their hatred day and night, even in my sleep. And how do you account for the sadness of Nicholas? He says that he only dislikes me in the evening, when the fit is on him. I understand that, and can tolerate it, but what if he should come to dislike me altogether? Of course that is impossible, and yet – no, no, I mustn't even imagine such a thing. [Sings]

"Sparrow, Sparrow, where are you?"

[She shudders] What fearful thoughts I have! You are not married, Doctor; there are many things that you cannot understand.

LVOFF. You say you are surprised, but – but it is you who surprise me. Tell me, explain to me how you, an honest and intelligent woman, almost a saint, could allow yourself to be so basely deceived and dragged into this den of bears? Why are you here? What have you in common with such a cold and heartless – but enough of your husband! What have you in common

with these wicked and vulgar surroundings? With that eternal grumbler, the crazy and decrepit Count? With that swindler, that prince of rascals, Misha, with his fool's face? Tell me, I say, how did you get here?

ANNA. [laughing] That is what he used to say, long ago, oh, exactly! Only his eyes are larger than yours, and when he was excited they used to shine like coals – go on, go on!

LVOFF. [Gets up and waves his hand] There is nothing more to say. Go into the house.

ANNA. You say that Nicholas is not what he should be, that his faults are so and so. How can you possibly understand him? How can you learn to know any one in six months? He is a wonderful man, Doctor, and I am sorry you could not have known him as he was two or three years ago. He is depressed and silent now, and broods all day without doing anything, but he was splendid then. I fell in love with him at first sight. [Laughing] I gave one look and was caught like a mouse in a trap! So when he asked me to go with him I cut every tie that bound me to my old life as one snips the withered leaves from a plant. But things are different now. Now he goes to the Lebedieff's to amuse himself with other women, and I sit here in the garden and listen to the owls. [The WATCHMAN'S rattle is heard] Tell me, Doctor, have you any brothers and sisters?

LVOFF. No.

ANNA sobs.

LVOFF. What is it? What is the matter?

ANNA. I can't stand it, Doctor, I must go.

LVOFF. Where?

ANNA. To him. I am going. Have the horses harnessed. [She runs into the house.]

LVOFF. No, I certainly cannot go on treating any one under these conditions. I not only have to do it for nothing, but I am forced to endure this agony of mind besides. No, no, I can't stand it. I have had enough of it. [He goes into the house.]

The curtain falls

ACT II

The drawing-room of LEBEDIEFFÕS house. In the centre is a door leading into a garden. Doors open out of the room to the right and left. The room is furnished with valuable old furniture, which is carefully protected by linen covers. The walls are hung with pictures. The room is lighted by candelabra. ZINAIDA is sitting on a sofa; the elderly guests are sitting in arm-chairs on either hand. The young guests are sitting about the room on small chairs. KOSICH, AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA, GEORGE, and others are playing cards in the background. GABRIEL is standing near the door on the right. The maid is passing sweetmeats about on a tray. During the entire act guests come and go from the garden, through the room, out of the door on the left, and back again. Enter MARTHA through the door on the right. She goes toward ZINAIDA.

ZINAIDA. [Gaily] My dearest Martha!

MARTHA. How do you do, Zinaida? Let me congratulate you on your daughter's birthday.

ZINAIDA. Thank you, my dear; I am delighted to see you. How are you?

MARTHA. Very well indeed, thank you. [She sits down on the sofa] Good evening, young people!

The younger guests get up and bow.

FIRST GUEST. [Laughing] Young people indeed! Do you

call yourself an old person?

MARTHA. [Sighing] How can I make any pretense to youth now?

FIRST GUEST. What nonsense! The fact that you are a widow means nothing. You could beat any pretty girl you chose at a canter.

GABRIEL brings MARTHA some tea.

ZINAIDA. Why do you bring the tea in like that? Go and fetch some jam to eat with it!

MARTHA. No thank you; none for me, don't trouble yourself. [A pause.]

FIRST GUEST. [To MARTHA] Did you come through Mushkine on your way here?

MARTHA. No, I came by way of Spassk. The road is better that way.

FIRST GUEST. Yes, so it is.

KOSICH. Two in spades.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.