

# Summer Folk

(1904)

by Maxim Gorky



*Liberated from  
capitalist control  
to educate the masses  
by  
Socialist Stories*

## CHARACTERS

- Basov, Sergei Vasilyevich, 40 years old, a lawyer  
Varvara Mikhailovna, 27 years old, his wife  
Kaleria, 29 years old, Basov's sister  
Vlas, 25 years old, Varvara's brother  
Suslov, Pyotr Ivanovich, 42 years old, an engineer  
Yulia Filippovna, 30 years old, his wife  
Dudakov, Kirill Akimovich, 40 years old, a doctor  
Olga Alexeyevna, 35 years old, his wife  
Shalimov, Yakov Petrovich, 40 years old, a writer  
Ryumin, Pavel Sergeevich, 32 years old  
Maria Lvovna, 37 years old, a doctor  
Sonya, 18 years old, her daughter  
Dvoyetochiye, Semyon Semyonovich, 55 years old,  
Suslov's uncle  
Zamyslov, Nikolai Petrovich, 28 years old, Basov's assistant  
Zimin, 23 years old, a student  
Pustobaika, 50 years old, a night watchman  
Kropilkin, another night watchman  
Sasha, the Basovs' serving-girl  
Woman with a Tied-up Face  
Semyonov  
Woman in Yellow  
Young Man in a Checked Suit  
Young Lady in Blue  
Young Lady in Pink  
A Cadet  
Man in a Top Hat

} Amateur actors

## ACT I

*A house in the country which has been taken for the summer by the Basovs. A large room, serving as dining and sitting room. There are three doors in the back wall. The one on the left is open and gives a glimpse into Basov's study. The one on the right is to Varvara Mikhailovna's room. The centre door leads into the hall, and is hung with dark portieres. In the right wall, one window and a wide door leading out on to a verandah; in the left wall, two windows. There is a big table in the centre of the room and a grand piano opposite the door of the study. The rest of the furniture (except for a large sofa with a grey cover on it, which stands near the hall door) is made of wicker. It is evening. Basov is in his study, sitting at the writing-desk, which is lighted by a lamp with a green shade. We see him in profile. He hums to himself from time to time as he writes, and keeps glancing into the darkness of the big room. Varvara Mikhailovna comes noiselessly out of her room and strikes a match, which she holds up in front of her face as she looks about. The match goes out. She walks softly over to the window in the darkness and stumbles over a chair.*

Basov: Who's that?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Me.

Basov: Uh.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Did you take the candle?

Basov: No.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Ring for Sasha.

Basov: Has Vlas come?

Varvara Mikhailovna (*at the door of the verandah*):  
I don't know.

Basov: A crazy house. Electric bells all over the place, but the walls are full of chinks and the floor creaks. (*Hums something cheerful.*) Still there, Varya?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Yes.

Basov (*putting his papers away*): Are there draughts in your room too?

Varvara Mikhailovna: There are.

Basov: I thought so.

(Enter Sasha.)

Varvara Mikhailovna: Bring a light, Sasha.

Basov: Sasha, has Vlas Mikhailovich come?

Sasha: Not yet.

(Sasha goes out, comes back with a lamp which she puts on a table next to an armchair. She empties an ash-tray and straightens the cloth on the big table. Varvara Mikhailovna pulls the curtains, takes a book off a shelf and sits down in the armchair.)

Basov (good-naturedly): Vlas has become very careless of late. And lazy. I can't make him out, that's a fact.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Will you have tea?

Basov: No, I'm going to the Suslovs.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Sasha, run over to Olga Alexeyevna's and ask her to come and have tea with me.

(Sasha goes out.)

Basov (locking away his papers): So that's that. (Comes out of his study stretching himself.) I wish you'd tell him that for me, Varya—tactfully, of course.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Tell him what?

Basov: That he ought to . . . er . . . be more conscientious about his work.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I will. But I don't think you ought to speak about him in that tone in front of Sasha.

Basov (examining the room): Oh, it doesn't matter. There's no hiding anything from the servants. It's sort of—sort of bare in here, Varya. You might hang something on those walls—some frames. And pictures. Make it cosier. Well, I'm off. Your hand, ducky. You're very chilly and untalkative. Why is that? And what makes you look so glum?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Are you in a great hurry to get to the Suslovs?

Basov: Yes, I must run along. Haven't had a game of chess with him for ages—or kissed your hand, either. Strange. I wonder why.

Varvara Mikhailovna (hiding a smile): And so we'll put off discussing me until you're not so busy. It's not of any particular importance, I suppose.

Basov (placatingly): I'm sure it isn't. Couldn't be serious—

I don't know why I mentioned it. You're the perfect wife—clever, sincere, and all the rest. Fact. If you had a grudge against me you'd tell me, wouldn't you? What makes your eyes so glittery? Aren't you feeling well?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Oh, I'm all right.

Basov: You want to find something to keep you busy, dear. You read too much—always reading, and any overindulgence is harmful, don't forget.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Don't you forget when you and Suslov are tipping.

Basov (*laughing*): A nasty dig! But to tell you the truth, these spicy modern books are more harmful than wine. Like taking narcotics. And the gentlemen who write them are a set of neurotics. (*Yawning*.) Very soon we are to be visited by what the children would call an "honest-to-goodness" writer. I wonder what he's like now. Probably conceited. All these chaps who get into the limelight are painfully conceited. Not normal. Take Kaleria—she's not normal either, although you could hardly call her a writer. She'll be glad to see Shalimov. Wouldn't it be nice if she married him? But she's too old and she whines all the time, as if she had chronic toothache. And she's not exactly a beauty.

Varvara Mikhailovna: You always let your tongue run away with you, Sergei.

Basov: Do I? It doesn't matter this time. We're alone. I suppose I do like to talk. (*Someone is heard to cough on the other side of the portiere*.) Who's there?

Suslov (*unseen*): Me.

Basov (*going to meet him*): I was just coming over to your place.

Suslov (*bowing to Varvara Mikhailovna*): Come along. That's what I'm here for—to get you. Were you in town today?

Basov: No. Why?

Suslov (*with a wry smile*): They say that assistant of yours won 2,000 rubles at the club last night.

Basov: Oho!

Suslov: From a merchant who was soaked to the gills.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Why do you always say that?

Suslov: What?

Varvara Mikhailovna: You always make a point of saying the person who lost was drunk.

Suslov (*with a little laugh*): I wasn't aware of it.

Basov: And what if he does? It isn't as if he had said Zamyslov dosed his victim first and then took his money away from him. That, of course, would be in bad taste. Come along. Pyotr, Varya, when Vlas comes—ah, here he is!

Vlas (*comes in carrying a worn brief-case*): Have you been missing me, my noble patron? Glad to hear it. (*To Suslov, in an exaggerated tone of warning.*) You are being searched for by a gentleman who seems to have just arrived. He goes from house to house asking in a loud voice where you live. (*Going over to his sister.*) Hullo, Varya.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Hullo.

Suslov: Botheration! It's probably my uncle.

Basov: Perhaps you'd rather I didn't come then?

Suslov: Oh, I say! Do you think I'd enjoy being left alone with an uncle I hardly know? I haven't seen him for ten years.

Basov (*to Vlas*): Just a minute, Vlas. (*Takes Vlas into his study.*)

Suslov (*lighting up*): Will you come with us, Varvara Mikhailovna?

Varvara Mikhailovna: No, thank you. Is your uncle poor?

Suslov: No, he's rich. Very. Do you think it's only poor relations I dislike?

Varvara Mikhailovna: I don't know.

Suslov (*clearing his throat testily*): That Zamyslov is going to get Sergei into trouble one beastly day. He's a scoundrel if there ever was one, don't you think so?

Varvara Mikhailovna (*calmly*): I don't care to discuss him with you.

Suslov: Very well, we'll leave it at that. (*Pause.*) It seems to me that this candour of yours is ... er ... something of a pose. Watch out. It's hard to play the role of one who always says what he thinks. It takes a lot of courage, and a lot of brain. I hope you don't mind my saying so?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Not at all.

Suslov: Wouldn't you like to argue the point? Or perhaps in your heart of hearts you agree with me?

Varvara Mikhailovna (*very simply*): I don't know how to argue, or even to express myself properly.

Suslov (*glumly*): Don't be angry. I find it very hard to believe that there really are people with the courage to be themselves at all times.

Sasha (*entering*): Olga Alexeyevna said she would be over soon. Shall I put on the tea?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Do, please.

Sasha: Here comes Nikolai Petrovich. (*Goes out.*)

Suslov (*going to the door of the study*): Hurry up there, Sergei. I'm going.

Basov: So am I. This very minute.

Zamyslov (*entering*): Good evening, Varvara Mikhailovna. Hello, Pyotr Ivanovich.

Suslov (*coughing*): Good evening. Aren't you the gay young man, just!

Zamyslov: Oh, yes. Light-hearted, light-minded, light-pocketed!

Suslov: Quite right as to the heart and the mind, but as to the pocket—they say you stripped somebody at the club last night.

Zamyslov (*mildly*): "Stripped" is said of thieves. I won some money.

Varvara Mikhailovna: The news of you is always sensational. That, they say, is true only of exceptional people.

Zamyslov: When I hear the gossip spread about me, I can't help thinking I must be exceptional. As to the money—unfortunately it was only forty-two rubles.

(*Suslov, coughing quietly, goes over to the window at left and stands looking out.*)

Basov (*entering*): Is that all? And I was entertaining dreams of champagne! Well, have you anything to tell me? I'm in a hurry.

Zamyslov: Leaving, Chief? Then I'll save my news till you come back. Nothing urgent. What a pity you weren't at the play, Varvara Mikhailovna! Yulia Filippovna's acting was marvellous! Superb!

Varvara Mikhailovna: I always enjoy seeing her.

Zamyslov: Off with my head if she isn't a born actress!

Suslov (*with a little laugh*): Too bad if you lose the wager. It would hardly be decent to go about with no head at all. Come along, Sergei. Good-bye, Varvara Mikhailovna. Good-bye. (*Bowing stiffly to Zamyslov.*)

Basov (*glancing into his study, where Vlas is sorting papers*): So I can hope you'll have it all copied by nine o'clock in the morning, Vlas?

Vlas: You can—and may you be plagued by insomnia, my noble patron.

*(Suslov and Basov go out.)*

Zamyslov: I, too, must go. Your hand, Varvara Mikhailovna.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Stay and have tea with us.

Zamyslov: With your permission I'll come back later, I've got to go now. *(Goes out quickly.)*

Vlas *(coming out of the study)*: Is there any hope of getting tea in this house, Varya?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Ring for Sasha. *(Putting a hand on his shoulder.)* What makes you look so pale?

Vlas *(rubbing his cheek against her hand)*: Tired. From ten to three I was in court, from three to seven I ran about town on various errands. Sasha! I didn't even have time for dinner.

Varvara Mikhailovna: A clerk. Surely you could do something better than that, Vlas.

Vlas *(with mock pathos)*: Oh, I know, one ought to seek the heights, and all that. But, Varya, being fond of examples, I turn to the lowly chimney-sweep—he climbs higher than all others, but can he climb higher than his own self?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Do be serious. Why don't you want to look for some other situation—something more useful, more important?

Vlas *(in a shocked voice)*: My dear girl! Here am I, a vital, albeit a humble, link in the mechanism of guarding and protecting the sacred institution of private property! And you call it useless labour! What perverted ideas you have!

Varvara Mikhailovna: You just won't be serious.

*(Sasha comes in.)*

Vlas *(to Sasha)*: Take pity on me, fair lady. Bring me some tea and something to eat.

Sasha: Directly. Would you care to have a meat cake?

Vlas: A meat cake and a fish cake and anything else you can find. Only hurry up.

*(Sasha goes out. Vlas puts his arm about his sister's waist and they walk up and down.)*

Vlas: Well, how are you?

Varvara Mikhailovna: In the dumps, Vlas. Some-



times without any particular reason I suddenly feel as if I were in prison. Everything looks strange, hostile, unwanted—by me or anybody else. Nobody is serious. Take you, for instance—you're always facetious, mocking at everybody and everything.

V l a s (*striking a pose*):

Reproach me not, beloved friend.

For my frivolity.

A weight of woe is hid behind

This seeming jollity.

Lines of my own inventing, and ever so much better than Kaleria's if you ask me. I won't read them all to you—they're miles long. So you want me to be serious, darling? I suppose all who are one-eyed would like others to be the same.

(*Enter Sasha with the tea-things, which she deftly places about the table. The rattle of the night watchman is heard.*)

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a : Don't, Vlas. You oughtn't to let yourself prattle on like this.

V l a s : "Very well," said he, "and hung his head." But you're unkind, sister. All day long I'm so busy making copies of their slanderous claptrap that I have no time to talk. Naturally I want to indulge myself when evening comes.

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a : And I want to go away. I want to find a place where there are plain wholesome people who have a different way of talking and are doing something big and important. Do you understand what I mean?

V l a s (*thoughtfully*): I suppose so. But you'll not go anywhere, Varya.

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a : Perhaps I will. (*Pause. Sasha brings in the samovar.*) We're expecting Shalimov tomorrow.

V l a s (*yawning*): I don't like what he's been writing of late. Dull, empty, lifeless stuff.

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a : I saw him once at a party we had at school when I was a girl. I remember how firmly and resolutely he walked out on the stage; I can still see his thick unruly hair, and the look of his face, so bold and candid—the look of a person who knows what he loves and what he hates, and who is aware of his own strength. It was thrilling. I remember how he kept tossing back his hair like a dark mane, and the inspired look in his eyes. That was six or seven—no, eight years ago.

V l a s : You're as anxious to see him again as a schoolgirl is

to see the new teacher. Watch out, sister! Writers, they say, are great hands at seducing women!

Varvara Mikhailovna: That's a horrid thing to say, Vlas. So commonplace.

Vlas (*simply, sincerely*): Don't be angry.

Varvara Mikhailovna: You don't understand. I look forward to his coming as to the spring. I can't go on living like this.

Vlas: I do understand. I can't either. I'm ashamed to, somehow. Ashamed and uneasy. And there doesn't seem to be anything better ahead.

Varvara Mikhailovna: That's the whole trouble. But then why do you always—

Vlas: Make a fool of myself? I can't bear to have people see my real feelings.

(*Kaleria enters.*)

Kaleria: A glorious night! And you two sitting indoors! It smells of smoke in here.

Vlas (*shaking off his mood*): Good evening, Dreamer of Dreams.

Kaleria: The woods are rapt and still, with a gentle moon smiling down, and warm thick shadows everywhere. Night is always more lovely than day.

Vlas (*imitating her tone*): Ah, yes! As old ladies are gayer than girls, and crabs swifter than swallows.

Kaleria (*sitting down at the table*): As though you could appreciate anything! Pour me out a cup of tea, Varya. No one has been here, I suppose?

Vlas (*facetiously*): "No one" could not have been here, for "no one" does not exist.

Kaleria: Don't you ever get sick of that?

(*Vlas bows and goes into the study, where he leafs through the papers on the writing-desk. In the distance can be heard the watchman's rattle and a soft whistle.*)

Varvara Mikhailovna: Yulia Filippovna was here and asked for you.

Kaleria: For me? She wanted to find out about the play, I guess.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Were you in the woods?

Kaleria: Yes. I met Ryumin. He spoke to me about you.

Varvara Mikhailovna: What did he say?

Kalera: Can't you guess?

*(Pause. Vlas sings softly through his nose.)*

Varvara Mikhailovna *(sighing)*: I'm very sorry.

Kalera: For him?

Varvara Mikhailovna: He once said that falling in love with a woman was a man's tragic obligation.

Kalera: You used to treat him differently.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Are you blaming me for that?

Kalera: Oh, no, Varya! Not at all!

Varvara Mikhailovna: At first I tried to cheer him up. It's true I gave him a lot of my time, but then I saw what it was leading to, and—he went away.

Kalera: Did you have it out with him?

Varvara Mikhailovna: No. Neither he nor I said a word.

*(Pause.)*

Kalera: His must be a lukewarm sort of love—all expressed in pretty words, without any joy in it. A woman resents love that brings no joy. Has it ever struck you that he's hunchbacked?

Varvara Mikhailovna *(surprised)*: Oh, no! Is he? Surely you're mistaken.

Kalera: There's something mis-shapen about him—about his soul. And whenever I notice that in a person, it seems to me he is mis-shapen in body as well.

Vlas *(slapping some documents against his hand as he comes out of the study, looking very doleful)*: Considering the amount of this claptrap, and basing my conclusion on said consideration, I have the honour of announcing to you, wife of my patron, that however much I so desire, I am physically unable to fulfil this unpleasant task within the time limits imposed.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I'll help you later. Come and have tea.

Vlas: Sister! Dear, true sister! Kalera Vasilyevna, take lessons in love from my sister and me while we are yet with you.

Kalera: You, it seems, are definitely hunchbacked!

Vlas: In what respect, may I ask?

Kalera: You have a hunchbacked soul.

Vlas: That, I hope, does not spoil my figure?

Kaléria: Rudeness is as much a deformity as a hump. Stupid people are like the lame—

Vlas (*imitating her tone*): —and the lame are like your aphorisms.

Kaléria: Vulgar people always look pock-marked to me, and they are almost always blonds.

Vlas: All brunettes get married early, and all metaphysicians are blind and deaf. What a pity they have the power of speech!

Kaléria: Very flat. I don't suppose you even know what metaphysics is.

Vlas: I do. Tobacco and metaphysics were invented for the sole purpose of giving pleasure to those who indulge. I do not smoke, and know nothing about the ill effects of tobacco, but I have tried metaphysics and know that it brings on giddiness and nausea.

Kaléria: Some people are made giddy even by the scent of flowers.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Haven't you had enough of this?

Vlas: I have. I'm going to eat—much more sensible, I find it.

Kaléria: And I'm going to play the piano—much more interesting. How stuffy it is in here, Varya!

Varvara Mikhailovna: I'll open the door of the verandah. Here comes Olga.

*(Pause. Vlas has tea. Kaléria sits down at the piano. The whistle of the night watchman can be heard faintly and it is answered by an even fainter whistle. Kaléria runs her hands lightly over the keys of the middle register. Olga Alexeyevna thrusts back the portieres and rushes into the room like a great frightened bird.)*

Olga Alexeyevna (*snatching the shawl off her head*): Here I am! I thought I'd never get away. (*Kisses Varvara Mikhailovna.*) Good evening, Kaléria Vasilyevna. Go on playing, do. We don't have to shake hands, do we? Hullo, Vlas.

Vlas: Good evening, Olga Alexeyevna.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Sit down. Shall I pour you out some tea? What kept you so long?

Olga Alexeyevna (*nervously*): Wait a bit. It's fearfully dark out. I had the feeling that someone was hiding in the woods. The watchmen kept blowing their whistles. They make your blood run cold. What do they do it for?

Vlas: Hm, very suspicious. Maybe they're blowing them at us?

Olga Alexeyevna: I wanted to come earlier, but Nadya was peevish—she's probably coming down with something, too. Did I tell you that Volka was laid up? Yes, he has a fever. And I had to give Sonya a bath. Misha ran off into the woods directly after dinner and just came back—torn and dirty and starved, of course. And my husband came down from town in a bad mood—scowls and doesn't open his mouth. My head's in a perfect whirl. That new maid of mine is worse than nobody at all. She poured boiling water over the baby's bottles and they all cracked.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*smiling*): You poor dear! You must be worn out.

Vlas: Oh, Marpha! Marpha! Too many art thy cares! And so everything is either over-cared-for or under-cared-for. What wisdom lies in those words!

Kalera: Very ugly words. "Over-cared-for"—ugh! how clumsy!

Vlas: Begging your pardon. It wasn't I who invented the language.

Olga Alexeyevna (*slightly piqued*): I suppose you find me absurd—or tiresome. I understand. But what's to be done about it? Everyone talks about the things on his mind. Children! The very thought of them makes a bell ring inside of me. Ding, dong! Children, children! They're a great trial, Varya. If you only knew what a trial they were!

Varvara Mikhailovna: Forgive me, but I think you exaggerate.

Olga Alexeyevna (*roused*): No, I don't. You're no judge. You've never been weighed down by that horrible sense of responsibility a mother feels. Some day my children will come and ask me what the proper way of life is, and what shall I tell them?

Vlas: Why worry in advance? Maybe they won't. Maybe they'll have their own views on the subject.

Olga Alexeyevna: Oh, but you don't know! They're asking already. They're asking all the time. All sorts of impossible questions that neither you nor I nor anyone else can answer. It's a torture to be a woman.

Vlas (*softly and gravely*): A human being—that's what you want to be.

*(Goes into the study, sits down at the desk and begins to write.)*

Varvara Mikhailovna: Stop it, Vlas.

*(Gets up and walks slowly over to the door of the verandah.)*

Kaléria (*pensively*): The smile of the dawn put out the stars, one by one. . . .

*(She too gets up and goes over to stand beside Varvara Mikhailovna.)*

Olga Alexeyevna: Oh, dear! I seem to have put a damp on everybody—like the hooting of an owl in the night. Very well, I won't say another word about my troubles. Why have you gone away, Varya? Come here, or I'll think you're trying to avoid me.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*coming back quickly*): How can you say such a thing, Olga! I feel dreadfully sorry for you.

Olga Alexeyevna: Don't. Sometimes I hate myself—and pity myself. I seem to have the disposition of an old lap-dog. They're vicious, those lap-dogs—they hate everybody and are always looking for a chance to take a nip out of somebody's calf on the sly.

Kaléria: The sun rises and the sun sets, but it's always twilight in men's souls.

Olga Alexeyevna: What's that?

Kaléria: Nothing in particular. I was just talking to myself.

Vlas (*sings in a nasal voice as he copies documents, putting the words to the tune of a dirge*): Family joys . . . family joys. . .

Varvara Mikhailovna: Do stop, Vlas.

Vlas: I've stopped.

Olga Alexeyevna: I'm the one who has spoilt his mood.

Kaléria: Some people have just come out of the woods. A pretty picture they make. Pavel Sergeyevich is waving his arms comically.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Who else is there?

Kaléria: Maria Lvovna, Yulia Filippovna, Sonya, Zimin, and Zamyslov.

Olga Alexeyevna (*putting on her shawl*): I'm such a dowdy! That chic Yulia Filippovna is always making fun of me. I can't bear her.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Ring for Sasha, Vlas.

Vlas: Don't forget that all these little interruptions are keeping me from fulfilling my duty!

Olga Alexeyevna: A remarkable woman. She pays hardly any attention to her children, but they never seem to be ill.

Maria Lvovna (*entering from the verandah*): Your husband said you weren't feeling well. What's the matter?

Varvara Mikhailovna: I'm glad to see you, but I don't need your services. I'm quite all right.

(*Noise and laughter out on the verandah.*)

Maria Lvovna: Your face looks a little strained. (*To Olga Alexeyevna.*) You here? I haven't seen you for a long time.

Olga Alexeyevna: As if there were any pleasure in seeing my sour face!

Maria Lvovna: For all you know I may be fond of sour things. How are the children?

Yulia Filippovna (*entering from the verandah*): Just see all the company I've brought you! But don't get frightened—we've only come for a minute. Hullo, Olga Alexeyevna! Why don't the men come in? Pavel Sergeyeovich and Zamyslov are out there, Varvara Mikhailovna. May I invite them in?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Certainly.

Yulia Filippovna: Come along, Kaleria Vasilyevna.

Maria Lvovna (*to Vlas*): You've got thinner. Why is that?

All together } Vlas: I don't know.

Sasha (*entering*): Shall I heat the samovar again?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Yes. And as quickly as possible.

Maria Lvovna (*to Vlas*): Who are you making faces at?

Olga Alexeyevna: He just—

Vlas: That's my profession.

Maria Lvovna: Always trying to be funny and never quite being it. (*To Varvara Mikhailovna.*) That Pavel Sergeyeovich of yours is sure to have nervous prostration one of these days.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Why do you call him mine?

(*Enter Ryumin, followed by Yulia Filippovna and Kaleria. Vlas, frowning, goes back into the study and closes the door.*)

*Olga Alexeyevna draws Maria Lvovna aside left and whispers something to her, pointing to her chest.)*

Ryumin: Forgive us for invading at such a late hour—

Varvara Mikhailovna: I'm always glad to have visitors.

Yulia Filippovna: The nicest thing about living in the country is that you can dispense with ceremony. You ought to have heard them quarrelling!—him and Maria Lvovna.

Ryumin: I can't speak calmly about things that are so important and demand being made clear—

*(Sasha brings in the samovar. Varvara Mikhailovna, who is standing at the table, quietly gives her orders as she herself arranges the tea-things. Ryumin is standing at the piano staring hard and thoughtfully at her.)*

Yulia Filippovna: You get too excited to be convincing. *(To Varvara Mikhailovna.)* Your husband and mine are having a go at the cognac, and I suspect they're going to get good and tight. An uncle of my husband's has suddenly turned up. He sells meat or makes vegetable oil or something else in the manufacturing line. He's got a lot of curly grey hair and is always laughing and joking—quite an amusing chap. But where's my worthy knight. Nikolai Petrovich?

Zamyslov *(from out on the verandah)*: Here, 'neath your window, lovely Inesillia!

Yulia Filippovna: Come in here. What are you talking about out there?

Zamyslov *(entering)*: I'm corrupting youth. Sonya and Zimin have been trying to tell me that man's purpose in life is to commit himself daily to the solving of problems—social, moral, and the like. But I maintain that life is an art—the art of seeing with your own eyes, hearing with your own ears—

Yulia Filippovna: Twaddle!

Zamyslov: I made the theory up on the spur of the moment, but accept it as my firm conviction. Life is the art of finding joy and beauty in everything, even in eating and drinking. They quarrel like savages.

Yulia Filippovna: Make them stop, Kaleria Vasilyevna.

Zamyslov: Kaleria Vasilyevna! I know you are a lover



of beauty, and yet you have no love for me. How is such an inconsistency to be explained?

K a l e r i a (*laughing*): You're so noisy and—and dazzling.

Z a m y s l o v: Ahem! But that's not what we were saying. We were saying that this charming young lady and I—

Y u l i a F i l i p p o v n a: Enough of that! We've come—

Z a m y s l o v (*bowing to Kaleria*):—to you—

Y u l i a F i l i p p o v n a: We've come to ask—

Z a m y s l o v (*bowing even deeper*):—you—

Y u l i a F i l i p p o v n a: He won't let me ask. Let's go into that pretty little room of yours. I just adore it.

Z a m y s l o v: Do let's. At least nobody will interrupt us there.

K a l e r i a (*laughing*): Come along.

(*They make for the middle door.*)

Y u l i a F i l i p p o v n a: Just wait till you see that uncle! He's too sweet for words!

Z a m y s l o v: Sweet, did you say?

(*Laughing, they disappear behind the portieres.*)

O l g a A l e x e y e v n a: She's always so cheery, and yet I know her life isn't a bed of roses. She and her husband—

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a (*dryly*): I really don't think that's any of our business, Olga.

O l g a A l e x e y e v n a: Why, have I said anything I oughtn't to?

R y u m i n: How many unhappy marriages there are these days!

S o n y a (*putting her head in through the door*): I'm going for a walk, mummy.

M a r i a L v o v n a: But you've just come from a walk.

S o n y a: I know. But this house is full of women, and they're always such a bore!

M a r i a L v o v n a (*banteringly*): Careful what you say, young lady! Your mother's a woman too.

S o n y a (*running in*): You? Really? Since when?

O l g a A l e x e y e v n a: What does she mean by that?

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a: At least you might say how d'ye-do.

M a r i a L v o v n a: You're disgracing me, Sonya.

S o n y a (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*): Haven't I said it? Excuse

mé. I'll even kiss you, and with pleasure. I'm always kind and generous when it gives me pleasure—or doesn't cost anything.

Maria Lvovna: Stop your nonsense and get out of here.

Sonya: What do you think of my mother? Calling herself a woman all of a sudden! I've known her for eighteen years, but this is the first time I've ever heard that. Extraordinary!

Zimin (*peeping through the portieres*): Are you coming or not?

Sonya: Meet my slave.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Why don't you come in?

Sonya: He's not fit to be seen in polite society.

Zimin: Because she's torn the sleeve of my jacket—that's the only reason.

Sonya: The only reason! It's not enough, it seems—the lad wants more! Well, he'll get it! I'll call for you later, mummy, shall I? Now I can't wait to hear what Max has to say about undying love.

Zimin: You'll have a long wait!

Sonya: We'll see, youngster! Good-bye. Is the moon still up?

Zimin: I'm no youngster! In Sparta—I like that! Pushing a man who—

Sonya: You're not a man yet. Forward, Sparta!

*(For some time their voices and laughter are to be heard outside.)*

Ryumin: A fine daughter you have, Maria Lvovna.

Olga Alexeyevna: I used to be like that.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I like your relationship. Come and have tea, everybody.

Maria Lvovna: Yes, we're good friends—

Olga Alexeyevna: Friends. How is that achieved?

Maria Lvovna: What?

Olga Alexeyevna: Friendship with your children.

Maria Lvovna: Very simply. Be honest with them—never hide the truth from them, never deceive them.

Ryumin (*with a little laugh*): Rather a risky business, that. The truth is harsh and cold and contains the subtle poison of scepticism. A child can be ruined at the very outset by showing him the fearful face of truth.

Maria Lvovna: And you prefer poisoning him by degrees? To spare yourself the shock of seeing how you injure his mind?

Ryumin (*heatedly, nervously*): But that's not what I said. It's just that I'm against all efforts—foolish, uncalled-for efforts, it seems to me—to strip life of the veils of poetry that soften its harsh and ugly lines. Life must be adorned. And we mustn't strip it of its old garments until we have new ones ready.

Maria Lvovna: Sorry, but I don't understand what you're talking about.

Ryumin: About a person's right to be deceived. You're always talking about life. What is life? The word calls up before me the image of a huge, formless monster that's always demanding a sacrifice—a human sacrifice. Day after day it gobbles up human brain and brawn and swills human blood. (*Varvara Mikhailovna listens to him attentively, and gradually a look of consternation comes over her face. She makes a little movement, as if to stop him.*) Why, I don't know. I see no meaning in it, but I know that the longer a man lives, the more filth and vulgarity—crude, loathsome vulgarity—he sees, and therefore the more intense grows his longing for the Beautiful and the Pure. He is unable to overcome life's contradictions or to purge life of its filth and evil. Well, then, at least let him close his eyes to all that crushes his spirit! Let him turn his face away from whatever offends him. He wants to rest, to forget. He wants to live in peace and tranquillity. (*Catching Varvara Mikhailovna's eyes upon him, he gives a start and breaks off.*)

Maria Lvovna (*calmly*): Is the person you have in mind so lacking in spirit? What a pity! Is that why you think he has a right to peace and tranquillity? Not very flattering.

Ryumin (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*): Excuse my ... er ... vehemence. I see you are displeased.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Not with your vehemence.

Ryumin: With what?

Varvara Mikhailovna (*calmly and slowly*): I remember your saying something quite different two years ago—just as vehemently, just as convincingly.

Ryumin (*agitatedly*): But a man changes, and so do his ideas.

Maria Lvovna: They dart hither and thither like a terrified mouse, those little dark thoughts of his.

Ryumin (*still agitated*): They advance in a spiral, but they advance all the same. You seem to doubt my sincerity, Maria Lvovna.

Maria Lvovna: Oh, not at all. I see that you are ...

er ... shouting sincerely, and while hysterics don't have much weight with me, I'm sure that something has given you a great fright. That's why you want to hide. And you aren't the only one. There are lots of frightened people in this world.

R y u m i n : There are, because people are coming to have a more keen and sensitive appreciation of the horrors of a life in which all things are strictly predetermined. The only chance thing is human existence, and that is without aim or meaning.

M a r i a L v o v n a (*calmly*): Try to elevate the chance fact of your existence to the level of social necessity, and then life will take on meaning for you.

O l g a A l e x e y e v n a : Oh, dear, I simply cringe when people become harsh and accusing. It's as if it was me they were talking to, me they were accusing. There's so little kindness in the world! But it's time for me to be going. I like to come here, Varya—I always hear something interesting, something that ... what shall I say? ... something that makes the finer strings vibrate. But it's late, I must be going.

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a : Don't go yet, darling. Why do you want to, all of a sudden like this? They'll send for you if you're needed.

O l g a A l e x e y e v n a : I suppose they will. Very well, I'll stay a little longer.

*(Goes over and sits on the sofa, tucking her feet up under her. Ryumin stands at the door of the verandah, tapping nervously on the glass with his fingers.)*

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a (*pensively*): How strange our lives are! We just talk and talk without doing anything. We form countless opinions that we're much too hasty in accepting and rejecting. But we have no real desires—clear, strong desires.

R y u m i n : Are you referring to me?

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a : To everybody. Our lives are dull, sham, ugly.

Y u l i a F i l i p p o v n a (*running in followed by Kaleria*): Help me, everybody!

K a l e r i a : But really, this is not the time—

Y u l i a F i l i p p o v n a : She's written a new poem and promised to read it at our recital for the benefit of the Children's Home. But I want her to read it now. Do beg her to!

R y u m i n : Why not, Kaleria Vasilyevna? I'm very fond of your poetry. I find it soothing.

Maria Lvovna: I'd like to hear it, too. All this arguing makes us rude and rough. Read it, dear.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Something new, Kaleria?

Kaleria: Yes. Prose. Very tiresome.

Yulia Filippovna: Read it, that's a love! Why shouldn't you? Let's go and collect the others.

*(Goes out, drawing Kaleria with her.)*

Maria Lvovna: Where's Vlas Mikhailovich?

Varvara Mikhailovna: In the study. He has a lot of work to do.

Maria Lvovna: I'm afraid I was a little brusque with him this evening. It's a pity to see him playing the fool all the time.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Isn't it? I wish you would be nice to him. He deserves it. Lots of people have preached to him, but no one has ever shown him any affection.

Maria Lvovna *(smiling)*: We've all had the same experience, haven't we? That makes us so rude and unfeeling towards one another.

Varvara Mikhailovna: He lived with father who was always drunk and beat him.

Maria Lvovna: I'll go in and speak to him.

*(Walks to the door of the study, knocks, and goes in.)*

Ryumin *(to Varvara Mikhailovna)*: Your friendship with Maria Lvovna seems to be growing.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Yes, I like her.

Olga Alexeyevna *(softly)*: How decided she is in her opinions! Simply downright!

Ryumin: She has the ruthlessness of a true believer. A cold blind ruthlessness. How anyone can like that is more than I can see.

Dudakov *(coming in from the hall)*: Good evening. Sorry if I've interrupted. So here's where you are, Olga! Coming home soon?

Olga Alexeyevna: I can come straightaway if I'm needed. Have you been out for a walk?

Varvara Mikhailovna: What about a glass of tea, Kirill Akimovich?

Dudakov: No, thanks. I don't take tea so late. Pavel Sergeevich, I'd like to speak to you. May I call tomorrow?

R y u m i n : Oh, yes.

D u d a k o v : It's about the Home for Juvenile Delinquents. They're always up to something out there, damn it all! Now it seems they beat the brats! You and I got hauled over the coals for it in yesterday's paper.

R y u m i n : The fact is, I haven't been out there lately. I have no time.

D u d a k o v : Hm ... none of us have any time. We're always rushing from one place to another without getting anywhere. How do you account for it? As for me, I'm completely worn out. I just took a little turn in the woods to quiet my nerves. They're all on edge.

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a : You are looking a bit drawn.

D u d a k o v : Not strange. I had another little unpleasantness today. That fool of a chief of ours complained that we weren't economical—that the patients eat too much food and we prescribe too much quinine. First of all, it's none of his blasted business. Secondly, if they'd drain the lower part of the town I wouldn't need to use any quinine at all. Does he think I eat it? I loathe quinine—and impertinence.

O l g a A l e x e y e v n a : Is it worth letting such trifles upset you, Kirill? I should think you'd be used to them by this time.

D u d a k o v : My whole life is made up of such trifles. And what do you mean by being "used to them"? To what? To having any fool who comes along poke his nose into your business and keep you from doing what you want to do? I certainly am getting used to that! Once the chief says I must be more economical, you can be sure I will be—even to the detriment of my work. I don't have a private practice, so I can't throw over this job.

O l g a A l e x e y e v n a (*reproachfully*): Because you have such a large family—that's why, isn't it, Kirill? I've heard you say that before, but I hardly think this is the place to repeat it. How tactless! How unfeeling! (*She throws her shawl over her head and goes quickly towards Varvara Mikhailovna's room.*)

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a (*running after her*): Olga! What are you saying?

O l g a A l e x e y e v n a (*almost sobbing*): Let me go! I've heard all that—

(*The two women go into Varvara Mikhailovna's room.*)

Dudakov: A pretty kettle of fish! I had nothing of the sort in mind. I apologize, Pavel Sergeyevich—I couldn't have foreseen such a thing. I'm . . . I'm quite upset.

*(Goes out quickly, meeting Kaleria, Yulia Filippovna and Zamyslov in the doorway.)*

Yulia Filippovna: The doctor nearly knocked us off our feet. What's wrong with him?

Ryumin: Nerves. *(Varvara Mikhailovna comes in.)* Has Olga Alexeyevna gone home?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Yes.

Yulia Filippovna: I have no confidence in that doctor. There's something unhealthy about him. He stammers and is so absent-minded—puts his tea-spoon into his spectacle-case and stirs his tea with his lancet. He could just as easily make a mistake in a prescription and give you poison.

Ryumin: I have an idea he'll end up by putting a bullet through his head.

Varvara Mikhailovna: You say that in such an off-hand way!

Ryumin: Doctors are given to suicide.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Words touch you more than people, don't they?

Ryumin *(starting)*: Varvara Mikhailovna!

*(Kaleria sits down at the piano, Zamyslov stands beside her.)*

Zamyslov: Enough light?

Kaleria: Quite.

Zamyslov: Attention, everybody!

*(Maria Lvovna and Vlas come in in lively spirits.)*

Vlas: So we're to have poetry, are we?

Kaleria *(annoyed)*: If you want to hear it, you'll have to stop making so much noise.

Vlas: Begone, ye wanton spirits!

Maria Lvovna: We won't say a word.

Kaleria: Good. This is poetry in prose. It's to be set to music.

Yulia Filippovna: A recitation to music! How nice! I love anything original. I'm like a baby—get pleasure out of such things as picture postcards, automobiles—

Vlas (*imitating her*):—earthquakes, gramophones, influenza—  
Kaleria (*loudly and witheringly*): May I begin? (*Everyone sits down hastily. Kaleria fingers the keys softly for a minute or two.*) It's called "Edelweiss."

The summits of the Alps are eternally wrapped in a shroud of snow and of ice, and above and about them reigns a cold silence, the silence of wisdom, breathed down from proud heights.

Boundless the heavenly wastes o'er the peaks of the mountains, and countless the stars winking sad o'er the snows.

At the foot of the mountains, on the crowded plains of earth, Life, all atremble with fear, is growing apace, while Man, weary Lord of the Plain, is bowed down by a burden of suffering.

From the caverns of earth issue laughter and groans, outcries of fury, whisperings of love—the grim and the many-voiced music of life. But silent are the mountain peaks, unimpassioned the stars, deaf to the moanings of men.

The summits of the Alps are eternally wrapped in a shroud of snow and of ice, and above and about them reigns a cold silence, the silence of wisdom, breathed down from proud heights.

But as if to recount, as if to confide the sufferings of earth and the travail of men, a lone flower springs up at the foot of the peaks, in the kingdom of silence. And the name of this flower is—the edelweiss.

High in the boundless wastes of the sky sails a proud and silent sun, while at night a speechless moon shines coldly down on the earth, and the stars look down in mute trepidation.

And day in and day out cold blankets of silence descend from the heights to gently embrace the lone little flower—the edelweiss.

*(Pause. All are lost in thought. The rattle and whistle of the night watchman can be heard in the distance. Kaleria sits staring into space with wide-open eyes.)*

Yulia Filippovna (*softly*): How lovely! So sad ... so pure....

Zamyslov: You want to recite that in costume, in a fluffy white frock suggesting the edelweiss. Picture it? Deuced effective.

Vlas (*going over to the piano*): I like it too, really I do. (*Laughing self-consciously.*) Splendid! Marvellous! Like a drink of cold syrup on a hot day!



K a l e r i a : Go away!

V l a s : But I mean it. Don't be angry.

S a s h a (*entering*): Mr. Shalimov has come.

*(A stir in the room. Varvara Mikhailovna goes towards the door but stops on catching sight of Shalimov. He is bald.)*

S h a l i m o v : Have I the pleasure of—?

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a (*softly, and after a pause*):  
Come in . . . do. Sergei will be here in a little while. . . .

C U R T A I N

## ACT II

*A sweep of lawn in front of the Basovs' house. It is encircled by pines, firs, and birches. The verandah is hung with linen curtains. Downstage left are two pine-trees with a round table and three chairs under them. A wide bench with a back to it stands in a clump of trees downstage right. Behind the trees is a road leading into the woods. An outdoor stage with a few benches in front of it can be seen upstage right; a path connects it with the Suslov's house. It is evening, the sun is setting. Kaleria can be heard playing the piano. Slowly and laboriously Pustobaika is arranging the benches in front of the stage. Kropilkin, a gun slung over his back, stands watching him.*

Kropilkin: Who's taken the house over there this year?

Pustobaika (*in a surly tone*): An engineer named Suslov.

Kropilkin: So they're new, eh?

Pustobaika: What's that?

Kropilkin: New, I say? Not the same as lived here last year?

Pustobaika (*taking out his pipe*): The same. They're all the same.

Kropilkin (*sighing*): Oh, I know that. All swells.

Pustobaika: All summer folk are the same. In the last five years I've seen more'n you can count. Like bubbles in a puddle on a rainy day—pop up and burst, pop up and burst.

*(Some noisy young people with guitars and mandolins and balalaikas come out from behind the house and go down the path into the woods.)*

Kropilkin: Hear that? Music. Are they going to play-act too?

Pustobaika: Why not? They're not hungry.

Kropilkin: I've never seen their play-acting. Must be funny. Have you seen it?

Pustobaika: I've seen everything, brother.

*(From off stage right comes the hearty laugh of Dvoyetochiye.)*

**Kropilkin:** What's it like?

**Pustobaika:** Nothing much. They just dress themselves up and make speeches—whatever comes into their heads. Then they shout and rush about like they was doing something—like they'd gone off their chumps over something. One chap gives himself out to be honest and upright, another to be brainy, a third to be down and out. Anything you like—take your choice.

*(Someone off stage left whistles to a dog and calls: "Here Spot, here Spot!" Pustobaika hammers a nail into a bench with the blunt end of a hatchet.)*

**Kropilkin:** Think of that now! Hm! And do they sing?

**Pustobaika:** Not much. Sometimes the engineer's wife has a go at it, but it's a measly little voice she's got.

**Kropilkin:** Here they come.

**Pustobaika:** Let them.

*(Dvoyetochiye enters right, near the outdoor stage. Behind him comes Suslov.)*

**Dvoyetochiye** *(in genial tones)*: Who are you to laugh at me? You're bald before you're forty, while I've got a headful of hair at sixty, even if it is grey. Guess that'll hold you! Ha, ha!

*(Pustobaika goes on fussing with the benches in a lazy, clumsy way. Kropilkin slips behind the outdoor stage.)*

**Suslov:** All the better for you. Well, go on with what you were saying.

**Dvoyetochiye:** Let's sit down. So just about this time the Germans put in an appearance. Mine is an out-of-date little factory with a lot of worthless machinery in it, while theirs is the very latest. Naturally the goods they put out were better and cheaper than mine. I could see I was going up the flue—no competing with those Germans. So I decided to sell out. *(Falls to thinking.)*

**Suslov:** Did you sell everything?

**Dvoyetochiye:** Everything but my house in town—a great big old place. And now there's nothing left for me to do but sit and count my money. Ho-hum! No fool like an old fool, as the saying goes. The bottom seemed to drop out of everything as soon as I sold out. I'm bored to death—don't know what to do with myself. These hands of mine—funny, but I

never noticed them before. Now they keep dangling at the ends of my arms and getting in the way. (*Laughs. Pause. Varvara Mikhailovna comes out on the verandah and walks up and down lost in thought, her hands clasped behind her.*) Look, Basov's wife. A gem of a woman! If only I was ten years younger!

Suslov: But you're married, aren't you?

Dvoyetochiye: I was. More than once. Some of my wives died, some of them left me. And I had children—two girls. Both of them died. And a boy. He drowned. I had good luck with the women—found all my wives here in Russia. It's easy to take wives away from you Russians. You're not much as husbands. Whenever I came here on a business trip I'd look for a pretty woman with a nonentity for a husband, and—well, it never took me long to bring her round, ha, ha! (*Vlas comes out on the verandah and stands watching his sister.*) But that's all a thing of the past. Nothing and nobody left.

Suslov: What do you think of doing?

Dvoyetochiye: I don't know. Maybe you can give me some advice? I don't think much of that fish soup of yours. Nor the pork either. Who eats pork in summer?

Vlas: What's on your mind, Varya?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Oh, nothing. I'm a pathetic creature, aren't I?

Vlas (*slipping his arm round her waist*): I'd like to say something comforting, but I don't know what.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Leave me alone, dear.

Dvoyetochiye: Vlas is coming our way.

Suslov: That clown?

Dvoyetochiye: A lively chap, but not very ambitious.

Vlas (*coming up*): Who isn't?

Dvoyetochiye: A ... er ... my nephew here, ha, ha! But you don't seem to have much taste for business either.

Vlas: If I can judge on so slight an acquaintance, the word "business" means for you squeezing the juice out of your fellow-men, am I right? In that sense, alas! you are right: I have no taste for it.

Dvoyetochiye: Ha, ha! Don't let that trouble you. Plenty of time ahead. It's hard to be business-like when you're young—your conscience hasn't hardened yet and your head is stuffed full of pink pudding instead of brains. But as soon as you grow up you'll find it very convenient to live on your neighbour's juices. Ha, ha! That's the quickest way to get fat.

Vlas: You seem to have had extensive experience in this line. I must take your word for it.

*(Bows and goes out.)*

Dvoyetochiye: Ha, ha! Very pleased with himself for putting me in my place! Charming lad. Thinks himself a hero. That's all right, let him, if it amuses him. *(Drops his head and sits on in silence.)*

Kaleria *(coming out on the verandah)*: Still so shocked by the change you found in him?

Varvara Mikhailovna *(softly)*: Yes.

Kaleria: What have you to look forward to now?

Varvara Mikhailovna *(pensively)*: I don't know.

*(Kaleria shrugs her shoulders and comes down off the verandah, walks to left, disappearing behind the house.)*

Dvoyetochiye: Hm. Well, so what's your advice, Pyotr? What am I to do?

Suslov: That can't be decided in a hurry. We must think it over.

Dvoyetochiye: Think it over? Pshaw!... What did you say?

Suslov: Nothing.

Dvoyetochiye: And you never will, I guess. Here come the writer and the lawyer. *(Shalimov and Basov emerge from the woods on the right. They nod to Suslov and Dvoyetochiye and go over to the pines on the left, where they sit down at the table. Basov has a towel round his neck.)* Out for a walk?

Basov: We had a bath.

Dvoyetochiye: Water cold?

Basov: Not very.

Dvoyetochiye: Think I'll follow suit. Come along, Pyotr. Maybe I'll drown and you'll get my money sooner.

Suslov: I can't go yet. I want to speak to them.

Dvoyetochiye: Well, I'm off.

*(Gets up and goes into the woods right. Suslov watches him, then, with a little laugh, goes over to Basov.)*

Basov: Varya, ask them to bring us a bottle of beer—or rather, three. Well, how do you find your uncle?

*(Varvara Mikhailovna goes inside.)*

Suslov: A bit stuffy.

Basov: Old men aren't very amusing.

Suslov: He's angling for an invitation to live with me.

Basov: That so? And how do you feel about it?

Suslov: I can't say exactly. I suppose he'll have his way.

*(Sasha brings in the beer.)*

Basov: What are you so silent about, Yakov?

Shalimov: I'm a little out of sorts. What did you say was the name of that belligerent lady?

Basov: Maria Lvovna. You ought to have heard the battle we had at dinner today, Pyotr!

Suslov: Maria Lvovna again?

Shalimov: She's a ferocious fighter, I will say that for her.

*(Varvara Mikhailovna comes out on the verandah again.)*

Suslov: She's not the woman for me.

Shalimov: I'm very mild by nature, but I confess I could hardly keep myself from being insulting.

Basov *(laughing)*: Which was more than she could.

Shalimov *(to Suslov)*: Put yourself in my place: here am I, a writer, a man who goes through all sorts of emotional experiences, and who, in the end, gets worn out by them. I come here to have a rest, to live in complete relaxation and collect my thoughts, and all of a sudden a lady swoops down on me and begins searching my soul: What do you believe in? What do you live for? Why don't you write about this? Why do you write about that? Your ideas on this are hazy, on that are wrong, on the other are ugly. Good God! Do your own writing, madam, if you know so well how to make everything clear and right and beautiful! Write the finest book that ever was written, but for God's sake leave me in peace!

Basov: A writer's fate! When people travel down the Volga, they make a point of eating sturgeon, and when they meet a writer, they show off their brains. Grin and bear it, old man.

Shalimov: She shows neither brains nor tact. Does she often come to your house?

Basov: No. That is, pretty often. I don't encourage it. She's too opinionated for me. And too straight-laced. It's my wife that makes friends with her. She has a bad influence over

my wife. (*Glances up on the verandah and sees Varvara Mikhailovna.*) Oh, you here, Varya?

Varvara Mikhailovna: As you see.

(*Zamyslov and Yulia Filippovna come quickly down the path from Suslov's house. They are laughing. Shalimov notices Basov's discomfiture and laughs to himself.*)

Zamyslov: Varvara Mikhailovna! We're getting up a picnic! We're going in boats!

Yulia Filippovna: Hullo, darling!

Varvara Mikhailovna: Come inside.

(*They go in. Suslov gets up and follows them slowly.*)

Zamyslov: Is Kaleria Vasilyevna at home?

Shalimov (*laughing*): You're a bit afraid of your wife, aren't you, Sergei?

Basov (*sighing*): Nonsense. She's an awfully good sort.

Shalimov (*with a little laugh*): Why do you say that so ruefully?

Basov (*under his breath, with a nod in the direction of Suslov*): He's jealous. Of my assistant. His wife—have you noticed her?—she is quite a beauty.

(*Sonya and Zimin pass in the background.*)

Shalimov: Really? I must be more observant. Although, to tell you the truth, that Maria Lvovna has put a damp on my desire to meet women.

Basov: Oh, but she's different. She's—but you'll see. (*Pause.*) You haven't come out with anything new in a long time, Yakov. Writing something big?

Shalimov (*grumpily*): If you must know, I'm not writing at all. Who can write in times like these? There's no making head or tail of what's going on. People are all so hazy and mixed up—you can't put your finger on them.

Basov: Write just that—that you can't make head or tail of it all. Sincerity is the main thing in a writer.

Shalimov: Thanks. Sincerity, indeed. It's not a matter of sincerity. If I were really sincere, there would be just one thing for me to do: drop everything and sow cabbages, like the venerable Diocletian. (*From behind the house comes the doleful chant of some beggars: "A crust, good people, in the name of Christ and in memory of the dear departed; in the name of*

Christ and in memory of the dear departed." *Pustobaika comes on and chases them away.*) But one must eat, and so one must write. For whom? I don't know. A writer ought to see his reader very clearly in his mind's eye. Who is he? What is he like? Five years ago I was sure I knew who he was and what he wanted of me. But all of a sudden I lost sight of him. That's it—lost sight of him. Are you aware of the drama in those words? They say a new sort of reader has been born. Perhaps, but I don't know him. Who is he?

**B a s o v**: I don't quite follow you. What do you mean—lost sight of your reader? What about me? And all the intellectuals in the country? We're your readers, aren't we? How can you lose sight of us?

**S h a l i m o v** (*reflectively*): Oh, yes—the intellectuals. I'm not speaking of them. I'm speaking of that other—that new type of reader.

**B a s o v** (*shaking his head*): I don't understand.

**S h a l i m o v**: Neither do I, but I have a feeling. Whenever I walk down the street I see people of a new type. There's something special in their faces—and in their eyes. I look at them and think to myself: they won't read me, they're not interested in what I have to say. This winter I read my work at some sort of a gathering. I saw them there, too. They kept looking at me—looking at me with all their eyes—attentively, searchingly, but I could see they weren't my sort. They don't like me. They have about as much need of me as of Latin. They find me outworn—and my ideas too. Who could they be? Who do they like? What is it they want?

**B a s o v**: Hm, very curious. But isn't it just nerves with you? After you've been here awhile and had a good rest, you'll calm down and find your reader. The important thing is to take things calmly. That's how I see it. Let's go inside. But there's one thing I'd like to ask of you, Yakov: show off a bit . . . er . . . act the peacock, so to speak.

**S h a l i m o v** (*taken aback*): What do you mean, act the peacock?

**B a s o v** (*mysteriously*): . . . er . . . spread your tail and show off your feathers. For Varya's sake—my wife. Catch her eye . . . make her sit up and take notice. That's a good friend.

**S h a l i m o v** (*after a pause*): In other words, I'm to act as a lightning rod, is that it? Funny fellow you are. Very well, if that's what you want.



**Basov**: Oh, don't go thinking things. She's a good wife and all that, but she seems to be brooding over something. Everybody's brooding these days. Moods are the vogue—serious talks on strange themes, et cetera. In a word, something's wrong somewhere. By the way, are you married? That is, I heard you had left your wife.

**Shalimov**: I married again, and left again. It's hard to find a woman who is a good companion.

**Basov**: Oh yes, that's true enough. Very true indeed.

*(They go into the house. The Woman in Yellow and the Young Man in a Checked Suit come out of the woods.)*

**Woman**: What? Nobody here yet? And we were told to come at six. How do you like that?

**Young Man**: To be frank with you, I'm used to being the leading man—

**Woman**: Simply the limit! But I expected as much.

**Young Man**:—the leading man, and he gives me a comedy part. I consider that an affront.

**Woman**: They keep all the best ones for themselves.

*(They go off into the woods right. From the opposite side come Sonya and Zimin. In the back, Suslov is seen returning slowly to his own house.)*

**Zimin** (*under his breath*): I won't come in, Sonya. And so it's settled: tomorrow I'm leaving.

**Sonya** (*in the same tone*): Settled. But do be careful, Max, I beg you to.

**Zimin** (*taking her hand*): And you too.

**Sonya**: Good-bye. I suppose it'll be three weeks before we see each other again, won't it?

**Zimin**: Yes, darling. Good-bye. When I'm gone, don't—  
*(Breaks off, embarrassed.)*

**Sonya**: Don't what?

**Zimin**: Oh, nothing. Foolishness. Good-bye, Sonya.

**Sonya** (*holding on to his hand*): No, finish what you began to say. When you're gone, don't what?

**Zimin** (*softly, dropping his head*): Don't marry somebody else.

**Sonya**: How dare you say such a thing, Max! Or think such a thing! It's stupid, and ... horrid! Can't you see it?

**Zimin**: Yes, but ... well, don't be angry. Forgive me.

Such thoughts pop into your head without being invited. They say a person can't control his feelings.

Sony a (*vehemently*): That's not true! It's not, and you ought to know it. People say such things just to excuse their weakness of character, but I don't believe them. Remember, Max: I don't believe them. Now run along.

Zimin (*squeezing her hand*): I'm glad, and I will remember, Sonya—I will. Good-bye, sweetheart.

*(He goes quickly behind the house. Sonya watches him, then climbs the verandah slowly and goes inside. Dudakov, Vlas and Maria Lvovna come out of the woods right; just behind them comes Dvoyetochiye. Maria Lvovna sits down on the bench, Dvoyetochiye sits beside her and yawns.)*

Dudakov: How can people take things so easy when life's so hard?

Vlas: Can't say, doctor. To continue: my father was a cook, and a person with a vivid imagination. He loved me cruelly and dragged me with him wherever he went, like his pipe. Several times I escaped and ran back to my mother, but each time he turned up at the laundry, knocked down anyone who got in his way, and took me in tow again. Once when he was working for the bishop he got the fatal idea of giving me an education. That's how I found myself in a seminary, but a few months later he went to work for an engineer, and I was sent to a technical school. In a year's time I was studying in an agricultural college because father went to work for the Chairman of the Rural Land Administration. An art school and a commercial college are among the other educational institutions that had the honour of finding me within their walls. In a word, by the time I was seventeen I had developed such an aversion to study that I couldn't make myself learn anything, not even to smoke or play cards. . . . Why are you looking at me like that, Maria Lvovna?

Maria Lvovna (*pensively*): A very depressing story.

Vlas: Depressing? But it's all a thing of the past.

Woman with a Tied-up Face: Has anyone seen our Zhenya? Has he come this way? A little boy in a straw hat, Fair-haired—

Maria Lvovna: We haven't seen him.

Woman: The little scamp! He's the Rozovs' boy. Are you sure you haven't seen him—a lively little fellow with—

Vlas: Quite sure, nanny.

*(The woman goes out mumbling.)*

Dvoyetochiye: Do you know, Vlas, I rather . . . er . . .

Vlas: What?

Dvoyetochiye: Like you.

Vlas: Not really!

Dvoyetochiye: Yes, really!

Vlas: That does you credit.

*(Dvoyetochiye laughs.)*

Dudakov: You're going to have a hard time, Vlas.

Vlas: When?

Dudakov: Always.

Dvoyetochiye: Of course he is, because he's straight, and people will amuse themselves by trying to put crooks in him.

Vlas: That remains to be seen. But let's go in and have tea, shall we? It must be ready by this time.

Dudakov: An excellent idea.

Dvoyetochiye: I wouldn't mind, but—the hostess?

Vlas: The hostess will be glad to have you. Come along.

*(Vlas runs into the house, the others following him leisurely.)*

Dvoyetochiye: A fine chap.

Maria Lvovna: Yes, but he's never himself.

Dvoyetochiye: That's all right. That'll pass. He's honest to the very core. Most people wear their honesty on the outside, like a necktie, and they go about shouting: "I'm honest, I'm honest, I'm honest!" But when a girl keeps saying over and over: "I'm still a maid, I'm still a maid," you can be sure she's been plucked. Ha, ha! Begging your pardon, Maria Lvovna.

Maria Lvovna *(smiling)*: What's to be expected of the likes of you?

*(They go up on the verandah and into the house. Suslov meets them as he comes out.)*

Dvoyetochiye: Where are you going, Pyotr?

Suslov: Oh, I just came out for a smoke.

*(He saunters off in the direction of his own house. The Woman with a Tied-up Face comes running up the path in his direction. The Man in a Top Hat comes out of the woods, stops, shrugs his shoulders.)*

W o m a n : I'm looking for a little boy. You haven't seen him, have you? Zhenya's his name. In a jacket.

S u s l o v *(under his breath)*: No, I haven't. Go away.  
*(The Woman runs off.)*

M a n i n a T o p H a t *(bowing graciously)*: I beg your pardon, sir, but is it me you're looking for?

S u s l o v *(in surprise)*: I'm not looking for anybody. That woman was looking for a child.

M a n i n a T o p H a t : I was invited, you see, to come and play the leading part in a play—

S u s l o v *(walking away)*: That doesn't concern me.

M a n i n a T o p H a t *(offended)*: But who *does* it concern? Where's the stage manager? For two hours I've been wandering about waiting. *(Noticing that Suslov has gone.)* Walked off, the boor!

*(Goes over to the summer stage and disappears behind it. Olga Alexeyevna comes down the path from the Suslovs.)*

O l g a A l e x e y e v n a : Good evening, Pyotr Ivanovich.

S u s l o v : Good evening. Very warm, I find it.

O l g a A l e x e y e v n a : Do you? I don't.

S u s l o v *(lighting up)*: Suffocating. A pack of lunatics seem to have been set loose on the premises. They go about looking for little boys and stage managers.

O l g a A l e x e y e v n a : I know. You must have had a hard day. Your hands are shaking.

S u s l o v *(walking back with her to the Basovs' house)*: That's because I drank too much and slept too little last night.

O l g a A l e x e y e v n a : What makes you drink?

S u s l o v : A man's got to get some joy out of life.

O l g a A l e x e y e v n a : Have you seen my husband?

S u s l o v : He's having tea at the Basovs'.

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a *(coming out on the verandah)*: Coming in, Olga?

O l g a A l e x e y e v n a : I was just taking a little walk.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Why did you leave us, Pyotr Ivanovich?

Suslov (*with a little laugh*): I wanted to get down to earth. I'm sick of listening to the highfalutin speeches of Maria Lvovna and that man of letters.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Are you? I don't mind listening.

Suslov (*with a shrug of his shoulders*): Very glad. Good-bye for the present. (*Goes off to his house.*)

Olga Alexeyevna (*under her breath*): What do you suppose makes him like that?

Varvara Mikhailovna: I don't know and don't care. Shall we go inside?

Olga Alexeyevna: No, let's sit here awhile. They can get on without you.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Very nicely. You're upset about something again, aren't you?

Olga Alexeyevna: How can I help being, Varya? He didn't stay home five minutes after coming down from town this evening. How would you like it?

Varvara Mikhailovna: He's here.

*(They walk slowly over to a clump of firs.)*

Olga Alexeyevna (*irritably*): He avoids me and the children. Oh, I know he works hard and needs a rest, but so do I. If you ever knew how tired I am! I can't work properly—I do everything wrong, and that upsets me more than ever. He ought to realize I've sacrificed my youth and my strength for him.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*gently*): Poor Olga! You love to complain, don't you?

*(A murmur of voices raised in argument comes from the house. The sound increases.)*

Olga Alexeyevna: I don't know, perhaps I do. I want to tell him that I think I ought to go away—take the children and go away.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Quite right. A brief separation would do both of you good. I'll lend you the money.

Olga Alexeyevna: I owe you so much as it is!

Varvara Mikhailovna: Oh, it's nothing. Don't let it trouble you. Let's sit down.

Olga Alexeyevna: I hate myself for not being able

to get on without you. Hate myself! Do you think it's easy for me to accept your money—your husband's money? A person loses all his self-respect when he finds he can't live independently—always has to be helped and supported. Sometimes I even hate you for it—for being so tranquil; inwardly disapproving, but never coming out with it, never really living and feeling.

Varvara Mikhailovna: But, darling, I don't know how to do anything but keep quiet. I won't allow myself to complain.

Olga Alexeyevna: In the bottom of their hearts those who give must despise those who take. I wish I were the one who did the giving.

*(Ryumin walks briskly up to the house.)*

Varvara Mikhailovna: So that you could despise those who took?

Olga Alexeyevna: Yes. I don't like people. I don't like Maria Lvovna. Why is she always criticizing others? And I don't like Ryumin. He spends all his time philosophizing and hasn't the courage to do anything at all. And I don't like your husband. He's soft as dough, and he's afraid of you. Do you approve of that? And your brother. He's in love with that woman preacher, that termagant of a Maria Lvovna.

Varvara Mikhailovna *(surprised and reproachful)*: Olga! What are you saying? That really isn't nice.

Olga Alexeyevna: Maybe it isn't, but it's the truth. And that conceited Kaleria. She keeps raving on about beauty, but what she really wants is a husband.

Varvara Mikhailovna *(coldly and severely)*: You oughtn't to let such feelings run away with you, Olga. They'll lead you into a bog.

Olga Alexeyevna *(softly, but vengefully)*: I don't care. I don't care where they lead me so long as it's out of this insufferable boredom! I want to get a taste of life! I have as much right as anybody else. I'm not so stupid as not to see what's going on. I can see that you, too—oh, I understand. Yours is an easy life. Your husband is rich—he's none too scrupulous in business matters. Everybody says that about him, and you ought to know it. And you, too—you've done something so as not to have children—

Varvara Mikhailovna *(gets up slowly and stands looking at Olga Alexeyevna in astonishment)*: What are you implying?

Olga Alexeyevna (*uneasily*): Nothing. I just meant to say that ... my husband says lots of women don't want to have children.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I don't know what you mean, but you seem to be accusing me of something loathsome, I don't want to know what it is.

Olga Alexeyevna: Don't speak like that, Varya; don't look at me like that. After all, it's the truth. They do say nasty things about your husband.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*shudders and speaks pensively*): You and I have been like sisters, Olga. If I didn't know how unhappy you were, if I didn't remember that once you and I dreamed of quite a different way of life. . . .

Olga Alexeyevna (*sincerely*): Forgive me. Please forgive me. I'm hateful.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Our lives were to be full and beautiful. And together we wept over our lost dreams. You've hurt me, Olga. Was that what you wanted to do? Hurt me awfully.

Olga Alexeyevna: Don't say that, Varya!

Varvara Mikhailovna: I'm going away. (*Olga Alexeyevna gets up.*) No, don't come with me. I don't want you to.

Olga Alexeyevna: For good, Varya? For good?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Stay here. I can't understand why you said such things.

*(Dvoyetochiye runs down the steps of the verandah and takes Varvara Mikhailovna's arm.)*

Dvoyetochiye (*laughing*): I've run away, young lady! That handsome philosopher of yours, Mr. Ryumin, has got me in a dither. I don't know all the learned words, and so I can't answer back. He drowned me in the flood of his eloquence like a cockroach in treacle. And so I took to my heels. To hell with him! I much prefer talking to you. This old codger's quite gone on you, my dear. But why that abstracted look? (*Catches sight of Olga Alexeyevna and gives a dissatisfied grunt.*)

Olga Alexeyevna (*meekly*): Shall I go away, Varya?

Varvara Mikhailovna (*firmly*): Yes. (*Olga Alexeyevna goes off quickly. Varvara Mikhailovna watches her go, then turns to Dvoyetochiye.*) What were you saying? Forgive me, I—

Dvoyetochiye (*amiably*): You feel like a fish out of water here, don't you? This is no place for you, my dear. (*Laughs.*)

Varvara Mikhailovna (*with a withering look*): Who has given you a right to use that tone with me, Semyon Semyonovich?

Dvoyetochiye: Now, now, none of that! It's my age and my experience that's given me the right.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I beg your pardon, but it seems to me they don't give anyone the right to intrude in—

Dvoyetochiye (*good-naturedly*): I'm not really intruding. It's just that I can see you're not their sort, and I'm not their sort either, and I had a longing to speak to you. But I guess I made a blunder, in which case I beg your pardon.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*laughing*): And I beg yours. I was rather rude, I'm afraid, but I'm not used to being spoken to like that.

Dvoyetochiye: I can see you're not used to it. How are you to get used to it in a place like this? Let's go for a walk, shall we? Do an old man the favour.

*(Semyonov rides swiftly up on a cycle and nearly falls at  
Dvoyetochiye's feet.)*

Dvoyetochiye (*startled*): Where are you going, young man? What's this?

Semyonov (*breathing hard*): I beg your pardon. Is everything over?

Dvoyetochiye: Is what over? Are you mad?

Semyonov: Such a pity! A tyre blew. I had two rehearsals today.

Dvoyetochiye: What do I care?

Semyonov: Why, aren't you taking part? I beg your pardon. I thought you were in a wig and make-up.

Dvoyetochiye (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*): What's he talking about?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Have you come for the rehearsal?

Semyonov: Yes, and on the way—

Varvara Mikhailovna: It hasn't begun yet.

Semyonov (*joyfully*): Oh, thank you. I was so put out! I'm always very punctual.

Dvoyetochiye: What were you put out about?



Semyonov (*graciously*): That is, I would have been put out if I had been late. I beg your pardon. (*Goes to the summer stage, bowing.*)

Dvoyetochiye: Queer sort of insect. Nearly ran us down—how do you like that! Let's get away from here, Varvara Mikhailovna, before some other conundrum bumps into us.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*disconcerted*): Very well. I'll get a scarf. Just a minute.

(*Goes into the house. Semyonov comes up to Dvoyetochiye.*)

Semyonov: Some others are riding up—two girls and a cadet.

Dvoyetochiye: Think of that, now! Very glad to hear it.

Semyonov: They'll be here in a minute. That cadet—do you know who he is? He's the brother of the girl who shot herself.

Dvoyetochiye: Think of that now!

Semyonov: Very sensational, wasn't it? A kid like that to go and shoot herself!

Dvoyetochiye: Very sensational indeed.

Semyonov: I really did think you were in make-up. All that hair. And your face, too.

Dvoyetochiye: Thanks. Very flattering.

Semyonov: Oh, I didn't mean to be flattering, really I didn't!

Dvoyetochiye: I'm sure you didn't. Only I don't see where the flattery comes in.

Semyonov: You don't? Why, a person's always better-looking when he's made up. You don't happen to be the settings artist, do you?

(*Suslov comes out of the woods. In the background can be seen the Woman in Yellow and the Young Man in a Checked Suit.*)

Dvoyetochiye: No, I happen to be the uncle of that gentleman.

Woman in Yellow: Mr. Sazanov!

Semyonov: It's me she's calling. Strange: I've got a very ordinary name, but nobody ever remembers it. Good-bye.

(*Goes towards the woman, bowing quickly.*)

Suslov (*coming up*): Have you seen my wife? (*Dvoyetochiye shakes his head and gives a sigh of relief.*) The actors seem to be collecting.

Dvoyetochiye: That young bur fastened himself on me. Called me a settings artist or something of the sort, the bandy-legged amoeba! There they are, quarrelling again!

*(Out of the house come Kaleria, Shalimov, Ryumin, and Varvara Mikhailovna. Dvoyetochiye goes over to them and listens attentively. Suslov sits down on a bench and watches them with a sullen look on his face.)*

Shalimov (*exhausted*): I'd like to flee to the North Pole to escape her hot temper.

Ryumin: What gets me is that she's so despotic! It's criminal to be so intolerant. Why do people like her assume that everybody ought to think as they do?

Varvara Mikhailovna (*giving all of them a searching look*): Prove to them that there is something greater and more beautiful than the things they believe in.

Kaleria: What do you see great or beautiful in dreams of full bellies for all?

Varvara Mikhailovna (*moved*): I don't know. But I don't find anything more appealing. (*Shalimov is interested.*) I can't express myself, but I feel in my heart that we ought to instill in people a sense of their human worth—in all people, without exception. Then we would stop insulting each other. We don't respect one another's feelings, and that's so hurtful, so regrettable.

Kaleria: But good God! It isn't Maria Lvovna who is to teach us that!

Varvara Mikhailovna: Why are you all so dead set against her?

Ryumin: It's her own fault. She gets on people's nerves. Whenever someone tries to explain the meaning of life to me I feel as if I were caught in a vice and being squeezed out of shape.

Kaleria: It's impossible to live with such people!

Varvara Mikhailovna: And is it possible to live with people who do nothing but complain, Kaleria? Let's be honest: is it possible to live with people who do nothing but talk about themselves and fill the air with their complaints and yet do nothing to improve life? What do we do, you and I?

R y u m i n : And she? Maria Lvovna? All she does is stir up bad feelings.

K a l e r i a : And dig up old mottoes that are better forgotten. The living cannot be guided by dead precepts.

*(The amateur players gather about the summer stage. Pustobaika is up on the stage arranging chairs.)*

D v o y e t o c h i y e : Don't take it so to heart, Varvara Mikhailovna. Let's drop the subject and go for a walk. You promised to.

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a : Yes, and I will. It's so awful not to be able to put one's thoughts and feelings into words! I'm a sort of intellectual mute.

S h a l i m o v : But you're not, Varvara Mikhailovna. May I join you?

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a : If you wish.

D v o y e t o c h i y e : Let's go to the summer-house down by the river. What are you so wrought up about, my dear?

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a : I feel that there's been some sad misunderstanding—

*(They go off into the woods. Suslov watches them go, then gives a little laugh.)*

R y u m i n *(watching them)*: She certainly has perked up since that Shalimov arrived. The way she talks! And what is he, after all? She can't help seeing that he's written himself out. When he expresses his opinions so confidently he's just lying to himself and deceiving others.

K a l e r i a : She knows this, I saw her crying like a disappointed child after she had talked with him last night. Before he came she was sure he was strong and brave, and she expected him to bring novelty and interest into her barren life.

*(Zamyslov and Yulia Filippovna come out from behind the house. He whispers something that makes her laugh. Suslov sees them.)*

R y u m i n : Let's go in. Perhaps you'll play something for us? I'm in the mood for music.

K a l e r i a : Just as you like. Yes, it's very sad when everything about you is so—

Y u l i a F i l i p p o v n a : Look! The players have come! The rehearsal was called for six, and now it's—?

Zamyslov: Half past seven. You used to be the only one who came late. Now everybody does. That's your influence.

Yulia Filippovna: Are you being impudent?

Zamyslov: I'm being flattering. But I've got to run in and see the chief a moment. Will you excuse me?

Yulia Filippovna: Don't be long!

*(Zamyslov goes into the house. Yulia Filippovna hums to herself as she strolls over to the clump of trees. She catches sight of her husband.)*

Suslov: Where have you been?

Yulia Filippovna: Down there. And out there.

*(The Woman in Yellow, the Young Man, Semyonov, the cadet and the two girls are standing near the stage. Pustobaika is putting a table in place with a great deal of noise. Laughter, exclamations of: "Listen, everybody!" "Where's the regisseur?" "Mr. Stepanov!" "He's here somewhere, I saw him." "We'll miss the train back to town!" "I beg your pardon, but my name's not Stepanov. It's Semyonov.")*

Suslov: With him all the time? With that . . . that . . . And so openly. Think what you're doing, Yulia! Everybody's laughing at me.

Yulia Filippovna: They are? How horrid.

Suslov: We've got to have it out, you and I. I can't allow you to—

Yulia Filippovna: I certainly don't want to be the wife of a man everybody laughs at.

Suslov: Be careful, Yulia! I'm capable of—

Yulia Filippovna:—being a boor. I know that.

Suslov: How dare you say such a thing, you slut!

Yulia Filippovna *(calmly, and in lowered tones)*: We'll finish this little scene at home. People are coming. Go away. If you could see your face!

*(Gives a little shudder of disgust. Suslov takes a step towards her, then backs away quickly and hurries off down the path into the woods, muttering through his teeth as he goes.)*

Suslov: Some day I'll shoot you!

Yulia Filippovna *(calling after him)*: Why not today? *(Singing.)* "The weary day draws to a close. . . ." *(Her voice quivers.)* ". . . recedes in crimson waves. . . ."

(She stares into space with wide-open eyes for a moment, then slowly drops her head. Maria Lvovna comes out of the house in a state of excitement. Behind her come Dudakov and Basov with fishing-rods in their hands.)

B a s o v (*untangling his line*): You want to be gentler, Maria Lvovna. More amiable. We're all human beings like yourself. Damn it all! Who could have got this in such a tangle?

M a r i a L v o v n a : But you don't understand!

D u d a k o v : Can't you see he's tired?

B a s o v : You aren't right. According to you, once a man's a writer, he ought to be one of the minor deities. Not every writer has such aspirations.

M a r i a L v o v n a : We've got to demand more and more of life and people.

B a s o v : I understand that. But within the limits of the possible. Everything develops gradually. Evolution! That's a thing we must never forget.

M a r i a L v o v n a : I don't ask for the impossible. But we live in a country where the only person who can voice the truth, the only one who can judge impartially of the vices and virtues of our people and carry on a struggle to improve their condition, is the writer. He alone can do this, and this alone is what he ought to do.

B a s o v : True enough, but—

M a r i a L v o v n a (*coming down the steps*): I can't see that your friend is doing this. What are his aims? What are his ideals? What does he hate? What does he love? What does he call right and wrong? Is he friend or foe? I don't know.

(*Goes off quickly, disappearing behind the house.*)

B a s o v (*still untangling his line*): I respect you for your . . . er . . . ebullition, Maria Lvovna, but—gone? Why in the world do you suppose she gets all that steam up? Every schoolboy knows that a writer's supposed to be honest and . . . well . . . work for the good of the people and all that; and a soldier's supposed to be brave; and a lawyer's supposed to be clever. But this incorrigible woman insists on hammering you over the head with her platitudes. Well, Doc, let's go and see how the perch are biting. Who the hell could have got my line in such a state?

D u d a k o v : Hm. She says a lot of things that set you to

thinking. But then she has an easy life. She has her own practice and doesn't need many patients.

B a s o v : That Yakov's a rascal. Did you see how adroitly he slipped out of the corner she pushed him into? (*Laughs.*) He talks very prettily when he's in good form. Yes, he talks prettily, but after the death of his first wife, with whom, by the way, he only lived six months before he threw her over—

D u d a k o v : One doesn't say that in polite society. One says that he and his wife parted.

B a s o v : Let's say they parted. But now that she's dead he's put in a claim to her little estate. Not bad, eh?

D u d a k o v : Tck, tck, tck! Very bad indeed. Going a little too far, I should say.

B a s o v : He doesn't seem to think so. Well, let's go down to the river.

D u d a k o v : Know what I've been thinking?

B a s o v : No. What?

D u d a k o v (*slowly and thoughtfully*): Aren't you surprised—that is, don't you find it strange that we haven't come to hate each other?

B a s o v (*stopping*): Wha-at? Are you joking?

D u d a k o v : Not at all. After all, we're a worthless lot, don't you think so?

B a s o v (*walking up and down*): No, I don't. I take a healthy view of life. I'm a normal person on the whole, if you don't mind my saying so.

D u d a k o v : Don't try to laugh it off.

B a s o v : Me? Listen, Doc, I'm afraid you're a little. . . . ahem! In a word, you're in need of your own professional services. Are you sure you won't push me into the river when we get there?

D u d a k o v (*gravely, with a shrug of his shoulders*): Why should I?

B a s o v (*walking away*): How do I know? You're in a very odd mood.

D u d a k o v (*glumly*): It's hard to talk seriously with you.

B a s o v : Don't try. Your idea of serious talk is a very queer one. Let's avoid it.

(*Basov and Dudakov go out. Sonya and Vlas come in right. Zamyslov comes out of the house and runs over to the stage, where he is greeted noisily. The players crowd round him as he tries to explain something to them.*)

Sonya: I don't believe you're really a poet—

Vlas: Too bad. I've written some very good things, as, for instance:

Cognac and caviar, alas!  
Are dainties of the upper class.  
And so poor Vlas must let them pass—  
Cognac and caviar. Alas!

Sonya (*laughing*): Why do you waste your time on such nonsense? Why don't you take yourself more seriously?

Vlas (*softly and mysteriously*): Ah, my dear Sonya, I've tried that, too. I even have poetry to prove it. (*Sings through his nose*):

Too great to stoop to little things,  
Too little to attempt the great—

Sonya (*earnestly*): What makes you like that? You don't want to be ridiculous, I'm sure. What *do* you want?

Vlas (*brightly*): To be happy!

Sonya: And what are you doing about it?

Vlas (*crumpling*): Nothing. Not the least little thing.

Maria Lvovna (*from the woods*): Sonya!

Sonya: Here I am! What is it?

Maria Lvovna: Some friends have come to see you.

Sonya: I'll be along! (*Maria Lvovna appears on the path leading out of the woods*): Here, take over this clown. He talks nothing but nonsense and needs a good spanking for it. (*Runs off*).

Vlas (*meekly*): Well, begin. Your daughter spanked me all the way from the station, but I'm still alive.

Maria Lvovna (*gently*): Don't talk like that. You only lower yourself in your own and everyone else's estimation. You oughtn't to.

Vlas (*avoiding her eyes*): You say I oughtn't to, but everybody's so damned serious. Why don't they ever laugh? (*Suddenly speaking simply, sincerely, vehemently.*) I'm fed up with it all, Maria Lvovna. I have no love or respect for any of these people. They're as small and insignificant as mosquitoes. I can't talk seriously to them. They make me want to assume a pose, and do it more openly than they do. My head is stuffed full of all sorts of trash. I want to shout and brawl and complain. Damn it all, I'll start drinking soon if something doesn't happen! I

can't help doing as they do when I'm with them, and that's why I've become such a monstrosity. I'm poisoned by their vulgarity. There they are—hear them? They're coming this way. Sometimes I can't bear the sight of them. Come away. I want terribly to talk to you.

Maria Lvovna (*taking his arm*): If you only knew how glad I am to see you like this!

Vlas: Sometimes it is all I can do to keep myself from insulting them to their faces.

(*They go into the woods, Shalimov, Yulia Filippovna, and Varvara Mikhailovna come on right.*)

Shalimov: Serious talk again? Spare me! I've had all the philosophy I can stand. Let me vegetate awhile, at least until my nerves are in order. All I want is to take walks and flirt with the ladies.

Yulia Filippovna: Doesn't flirting with the ladies upset your nerves? Very strange. Why don't you flirt with me?

Shalimov: I shall be only too glad to take advantage of your gracious consent.

Yulia Filippovna: I haven't given my consent. I've only asked you a question.

Shalimov: Allow me to accept the question as a sort of consent.

Yulia Filippovna: Enough of this. Answer my question, and answer it truly.

Shalimov: I admit the possibility of being friends with a woman, but not for long. Nature will have her way.

Yulia Filippovna: In other words, you consider friendship as merely a preface to love?

Shalimov: I take love very seriously. When I love a woman, I wish to elevate her, to shower upon her the flowering of my thoughts and feelings.

Zamyslov (*from the stage*): Yulia Filippovna! Come here!

Yulia Filippovna: Coming! Good-bye for the present, Monsieur horticulturist! See that your orchids are put in order! (*Goes over to the stage.*)

Shalimov: Oh, that I shall, and as soon as possible! What a gay and attractive little piece she is! Why that strange look, Varvara Mikhailovna?

Varvara Mikhailovna: That moustache suits you perfectly.



Shalimov (*smiling*): Does it? Thank you. You seem to be shocked by my tone. You're very strict. But you'll admit it would be difficult to adopt any other tone with her.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I'm afraid nothing will shock me any more.

Shalimov: I see. You didn't expect to find me like this, did you? But one can't go around shouting out his ideas like that hysterical Ryumin. Oh, I beg your pardon—it seems he's your friend.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*shaking her head*): I have no friends.

Shalimov: I set too high a value on my inner world to expose it to the first person who comes along. The followers of Pythagoras revealed their secrets only to the chosen.

Varvara Mikhailovna: And now your moustache seems superfluous.

Shalimov: Drat this moustache! You know the saying: When among wolves, howl like a wolf. A very wise saying, especially for one who has drunk the cup of loneliness to the dregs. You, it seems, have not yet had your fill, and so it is hard for you to understand one who—but I'm afraid I'm keeping you.

*(Bows and goes over to the benches where a few onlookers are watching Zamyslov who, with a book in his hand, is stealing silently across the stage, showing Semyonov how a certain scene should be acted. Basov comes towards the house with his fishing-rod.)*

Basov: Varya! What fishing! Even the doctor, bungler that he is, got a bite straight off! How is this for a perch, eh? The uncle caught three. (*Glances about.*) Listen, as I was coming up the path I saw Vlas down on his knees to Maria Lvovna! Near the summer-house. Think of that! Kissing her hand! You'll have to speak to him, dear. After all, he's scarcely more than a boy. She's old enough to be his mother.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*softly*): Sergei, promise not to mention this—not to a soul! You don't understand. You see it in the wrong way. I'm afraid you'll tell everybody and that will be dreadful.

Basov: What are you so upset about? If I'm not to mention it, I won't, that's all. But isn't it ridiculous? That Maria Lvovna—

Varvara Mikhailovna: Promise me on your word of honour to forget all about it. Promise!

Basov: I promise. To hell with them. But explain it if you can.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I can't. But I know it isn't what you think it is. It's not a flirtation.

Basov: Humph! Not a flirtation? Tck, tck! Then what is it, Varya? Very well, I'll not say a word, have no fear. I'm off to catch more perch—I hear nothing, see nothing, know nothing. Oh, yes, by the way—Yakov turns out to be rather a beast.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*alarmed*): Why, what's happened, Sergei? Something new?

Basov: You're terribly nervous, Varya. This is quite a different story.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*softly, recoiling*): I don't want to hear it. Really I don't, Sergei.

Basov (*quickly, in surprise*): But it's nothing in particular, you silly puss! What's the matter with you? It's just that he's trying to get his late wife's estate—take it away from her sister.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*with pain and repulsion*): Don't! Please don't! Can't you understand? I don't want to hear such things, Sergei!

Basov (*offended*): You ought to do something about those nerves of yours, Varya. You behave very strangely—almost insultingly, if you don't mind my saying it.

*(He walks away quickly. Varvara Mikhailovna goes slowly over to the verandah. Noise and laughter from the summer stage.)*

Zamyslov: Watchman! Where's the lantern?

Yulia Filippovna: Mr. Somov! Have you got my part?

Semyonov: Semyonov, if you don't mind.

Yulia Filippovna: I don't.

Zamyslov: Attention, everybody! We're about to begin!

## ACT III

*A clearing in the woods. Under the trees in the background a carpet has been spread and bottles and food placed on it. Around the carpet Basov, Dvoyetochiye, Shalimov, Suslov and Zamyslov are sitting. To the right of them and at some distance stands a big samovar, near which Sasha is washing dishes and Pustobaika is stretched out, smoking his pipe. On the ground beside him are a pair of oars, a basket, and a tin pail. Downstage left is a haystack and a stump. Kaleria, Varvara Mikhailovna and Yulia Filippovna are sitting in the hay. Basov is recounting something in a low voice and the men are listening attentively. From time to time can be heard the voice of Sonya, the strumming of a balalaika and guitar coming from offstage right. The day is drawing to a close.*

Yulia Filippovna: A very dull picnic.

Kaleria: As dull as our lives.

Varvara Mikhailovna: The men seem to be enjoying themselves.

Yulia Filippovna: Probably telling dirty stories after getting nice and mellow.

*(Pause. Sonya: "Not like that—slower." The guitar strums. Dvoyetochiye laughs.)*

Yulia Filippovna: I drank quite a lot myself, but it hasn't cheered me any. On the contrary, a glass of strong wine always sobers me and makes me unhappy. Makes me feel like doing something wildly reckless.

Kaleria *(pensively)*: Everything's a blur and a tangle, and I'm afraid.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Of what?

Kaleria: People. They're not to be depended upon—not to be trusted.

Varvara Mikhailovna: That's true. They're not. I understand you.

*(Basov, with an Armenian accent: "But why, pet? Couldn't be better!" A burst of laughter from the men.)*

Kaléria: No, you don't understand me and I don't understand you, and nobody understands anybody else, or cares to. People just drift about aimlessly, like ice floes in a cold northern sea, bumping into each other—

*(Dvoyetochiye gets up and goes off right.)*

Yulia Filippovna *(singing softly)*:

Into the glowing water,  
Sinks the weary day....

*(When Varvara Mikhailovna begins to speak, Yulia Filippovna stops singing and looks at her intently.)*

Varvara Mikhailovna: Life is a market-place where everyone is cheating, trying to get as much and give as little as possible.

Yulia Filippovna:

The vault of heaven darkens,  
Soft the shadows steal....

Kaléria: What ought people to do to make themselves less tiresome?

Varvara Mikhailovna: They ought to be more honest and to have more courage.

Kaléria: They ought to be more definite, Varya. At least their relationships ought to be more definite.

Yulia Filippovna: Oh, stop philosophizing! It's not the least bit amusing. Let's sing.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I liked that duet you sang the other day, Yulia Filippovna.

Yulia Filippovna: It was nice, wasn't it? Very sweet and pure. I love all that is sweet and pure. Don't you believe me? I really do: sweet pure sights, sweet pure sounds....  
*(Laughs.)*

Kaléria: Indignation is gathering inside me like a big grey cloud in autumn. It's choking me to death, Varya. I don't love anybody, and don't want to. And I'll die an absurd old maid.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Don't say such things, dear. It's so dreary—

Yulia Filippovna: Marriage is also a doubtful blessing. If I were you I'd marry Ryumin. He's got a dour disposi-

tion, but—(*Sonya*: “Wait! Now you can begin. No, the mandolin first.” *The mandolin and the guitar play a duet.*)

*K a l e r i a*: He’s made of rubber.

*V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a*: The words of a sad song I used to know keep coming into my head for some reason. The laundresses who worked with my mother used to sing it. I was just a little girl then—studied at the gymnasium. I remember coming home and finding the laundry full of suffocating steam and seeing the half-naked women bobbing up and down indistinctly and singing in soft, tired voices:

Pity me, oh mother dear,  
Weep to see my misery.  
Never a glimpse of loving face,  
Nothing but endless drudgery....

It used to make me cry. (*Basov*: “Sasha, let’s have some more beer—and port.”) But they were happy days. The women loved me. In the evenings, when work was over, they’d gather for tea round a big well-scrubbed table. They used to let me sit with them.

*K a l e r i a*: What dull things you say, Varya. You and Maria Lvovna.

*Y u l i a F i l i p p o v n a*: It really is awful the way we live now.

*V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a* (*thoughtfully*): Yes, it is. And we don’t know what to do about it. My mother worked hard all her life, yet how kind she was, and how cheerful! Everybody loved her. She saw to it that I got an education. I think the day I finished the gymnasium was the happiest in her life. By that time she couldn’t walk at all—she was crippled with rheumatism. She died very quietly. “Don’t cry, Varya,” she said to me. “It’s time for me to go. I’ve lived my life and done my work. It’s time.” There was more point to her life than there is to mine. I always feel out of place. It’s as if I were in a strange country, among strange people. I don’t understand this sort of life—the life of the intelligentsia. It’s as shaky and temporary as the stalls put up at a fair. Or like the chunks of ice that float on top of the river: they’re hard and they have a shine, but there’s a lot of filth frozen into them—a lot that is ugly and shameful. Whenever I read a bold honest book it seems to me that the truth must surely send out warm rays to melt the ice and release the filth

frozen into it, so that the waters of the river can wash it all away.

K a l e r i a (*impatiently*): Why don't you leave your husband? He's a vulgar beast, not nearly good enough for you.

(*Varvara Mikhailovna looks at Kaleria in astonishment.*)

K a l e r i a (*insistently*): You ought to leave him. Go away and study, or find a lover, or anything else you like, but leave him by all means!

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a (*getting up in disgust*): How very crude, Kaleria!

K a l e r i a : There's no reason why you shouldn't. Dirt doesn't frighten you. You like laundries and things like that. You could live anywhere.

Y u l i a F i l i p p o v n a : The things you say about your brother are simply charming!

K a l e r i a (*calmly*): If you want me to I can say things quite as charming about your husband.

Y u l i a F i l i p p o v n a (*laughing*): Do. I don't mind. I often tell him charming things myself, and he pays me back in kind. Quite recently he called me a slut.

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a : What did you say to that?

Y u l i a F i l i p p o v n a : Nothing. I'm not quite sure what a slut is, but perhaps he has grounds. I'm inquisitive—keenly, morbidly inquisitive about men. (*Varvara Mikhailovna walks away a few paces.*) My great misfortune is that I have a pretty face. When I was only in the sixth form the men teachers used to look at me in a way that made me blush and feel ashamed, and they liked it, and would smile and smack their lips, like gluttons at a feast.

K a l e r i a (*shuddering*): Ugh, how loathsome!

Y u l i a F i l i p p o v n a : Isn't it? After that my married friends instructed me. But the person I am most indebted to is my husband. He's the one who really polluted my mind. He's the one who made me inquisitive about men. (*Laughs. Shalimov gets up and comes slowly over to join the women.*) And in return, I pollute his life. There's a saying that goes: Take a handful, give an armful.

S h a l i m o v (*coming up*): And a very good saying it is! The man who invented it must have been very kind and generous. Wouldn't you like to take a stroll down to the river, Varvara Mikhailovna?

Varvara Mikhailovna: I would, rather.

Shalimov: May I offer you my arm?

Varvara Mikhailovna: No, thank you.

Shalimov: What makes you look so mournful? You're not the least like your brother. He's a jolly fellow—quite amusing.

*(They go out right.)*

Kalera: There's not a person among us who is happy. Take you, for instance—you're always very lively, but underneath—

Yulia Filippovna: Do you like that man? I feel there's something underhand about him. He's as cold and slimy as a frog. Let's go down to the river too.

Kalera *(getting up)*: Let's.

Yulia Filippovna: I think he's interested in her. She really does seem to be a stranger among us. She looks at everybody so strangely—so ... searchingly. What is it she's looking for? I like her, but I'm afraid of her. She's very upright and wholesome.

*(They go out. From the right come loud cries and laughter:*

*"A boat! Hurry! Where are the oars? Bring the oars!"*

*Pustobaika gets up very deliberately, puts the oars over his shoulder and is about to go out when Zamyslov snatches them from him. Suslov and Basov run off in the direction of the voices.)*

Zamyslov: Stir your stumps, you lazy devil! Hear those cries? Something may have happened, and you move like a snail! *(Runs off.)*

Pustobaika *(follows him out, muttering)*: That's not the way they'd shout if anything had happened. Thinks himself a hero because he raises a cloud of dust.

*(For a few seconds the stage is empty. Cries are heard:*

*"Don't throw stones! Hold it! Catch it on the oar!" Maria Lvovna and Vlas come on left. Both of them are greatly disturbed.)*

Maria Lvovna *(in lowered tones)*: Leave me alone. I don't want to listen to such a thing. Don't dare repeat it! Have I given you any reason to think you could?

Vlas: I will say it! I will!

Maria Lvovna (*holding out both arms as if to push him away*): Have you lost all respect for me?

Vlas: I love you—love you, I say! I love the way you think and feel. I love that strand of grey hair. I love your eyes, the way you talk. I love everything about you—madly, with my whole being!

Maria Lvovna: Hush! How dare you?

Vlas: I can't live without you. You're as necessary to me as the air I breathe.

Maria Lvovna: Good heavens, must you?

Vlas: You've raised me in my own eyes. You've awakened my self-respect. I was groping in the darkness, without aim or purpose. You taught me to believe in myself.

Maria Lvovna: Do go away, don't torture me like this. Don't, dear boy.

Vlas (*on his knees*): You've given me much, but not enough. Be generous, be munificent. I want to believe that I'm worthy of your love. I beg and implore you not to rebuff me.

Maria Lvovna: It's I who implore. Go away. I'll speak to you later. Not now. Get up—oh, please get up!

Vlas (*getting up*): Believe me when I say I can't live without your love. My heart has become so contaminated by contact with these paltry people that I need to cauterize it with some great pure flame.

Maria Lvovna: Have you no respect for me at all? After all, I'm an—an old woman. You can't help seeing that. Please go away, please, please!

Vlas: I will if I must. But promise to speak to me later.

Maria Lvovna: I will. Later. But now go away.

(*As Vlas goes quickly into the woods left, he runs into his sister.*)

Varvara Mikhailovna: Careful! What's the matter with you?

Vlas: Sorry.

Maria Lvovna (*holding out her arms to Varvara Mikhailovna*): Varya! Come here!

Varvara Mikhailovna: What's the matter? Has he insulted you?

Maria Lvovna: No. That is—yes. Insulted? I don't know. I can't tell.



Varvara Mikhailovna: Sit down. Tell me what has happened.

Maria Lvovna: He told me—(*Laughs and looks distractedly at Varvara Mikhailovna.*) He told me that he—that he loves me! And I've got grey hair and three false teeth! I'm an old woman! Can't he see that? My daughter is eighteen years old! It's impossible! Absurd!

Varvara Mikhailovna (*moved*): You darling! But compose yourself and tell me everything. You're such a—

Maria Lvovna: Such a nothing. Just a woman, like all the rest. Help me. I've got to refuse him, and I can't. I'll go away.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I see. You feel sorry for him. You can't stand him, poor Vlas.

Maria Lvovna: That's not so. It's not him I feel sorry for, it's myself.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*quickly*): But ... but why?

*(Sonya comes out of the woods and stands for a few seconds behind the haystack. Her arms are full of flowers which she intended to drop upon her mother and Varvara Mikhailovna. She hears what her mother says, takes a few steps towards her, then turns round and softly goes away.)*

Maria Lvovna: I love him! Does that sound ridiculous to you? Yes, I love him. My hair is turning grey, and still I want to live life to the full. I'm starved. I haven't had a real taste of life yet. My marriage was three years of torture. Never have I loved anybody before, and now ... I'm ashamed to admit it, I long to be loved—loved by someone strong and gentle. Too late! Too late! I know that. That's why I beg you to help me. Convince him that he's mistaken, that he doesn't really love me. I was unhappy once. I suffered terribly. I don't want to again.

Varvara Mikhailovna: But, darling, I don't understand why you should be so afraid. If you love him and he loves you, why not go through with it? Are you afraid of the future? Who knows how far away that future is?

Maria Lvovna: So you think it's possible? What about my daughter? My Sonya? And my years? Curse my age! And this grey hair? He's so very young! He'll leave me before a year is up. Oh, no! I couldn't bear such humiliation!

Varvara Mikhailovna: Why weigh things, why calculate? We're all so afraid to take life as it comes! Why should we be? But I scarcely know what I'm saying. Perhaps not what I ought to say at all. I don't understand. I keep beating my head against the wall like a big foolish fly against a window-pane, trying to get free. I feel sorry for you. I'd like to see you happy. And I'm sorry for my brother. You could do him so much good! He never had a mother. He's been so terribly wronged and humiliated! You would be a mother to him.

Maria Lvovna (*dropping her head*): A mother. Yes, only a mother. I understand. Thank you.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*hastily*): Oh, you didn't understand me! I didn't say—

*(Ryumin comes out of the woods from the right. On seeing the women he stops and coughs into his fist. They do not hear him. He comes closer.)*

Maria Lvovna: Without meaning to, you've told me the simple sober truth. I must be a mother to him. A mother and a friend. Oh, darling! I feel like crying. I'll go now. Look, Ryumin is standing there. My face must be a sight. The old lady's had quite a shock.

*(Goes slowly, wearily, into the woods.)*

Varvara Mikhailovna: I'm coming with you.

Ryumin (*quickly*): Just a minute, Varvara Mikhailovna! I won't keep you long.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I'll catch you up, Maria Lvovna. Walk in the direction of the watchman's lodge. What is it, Pavel Sergeevich?

Ryumin (*glancing about*): I'll tell you in just a minute. (*Drops his head and is silent.*)

Varvara Mikhailovna: What made you glance about so mysteriously? What's the matter?

*(In the background Suslov crosses the stage from right to left, humming to himself. Basov is heard to say: "You were going to read us some verse, Vlas. Where are you going?")*

Ryumin: I ... I won't mince words. You've known me for a long time—

Varvara Mikhailovna: Four years. Has anything happened?

Ryumin: I'm not quite myself. I haven't the courage to come out with it. I wish that you would . . . that you would. . . .

Varvara Mikhailovna: What in the world are you getting at?

Ryumin: Guess. Do try!

Varvara Mikhailovna: Guess what? Can't you put it simply?

Ryumin (*softly*): What I have long wanted to tell you. Do you understand now? Now can you guess?

(*Pause. Varvara Mikhailovna frowns and looks coldly at him for a moment, then walks off to one side.*)

Varvara Mikhailovna (*involuntarily*): What a queer day!

Ryumin (*softly*): I feel as if I had loved you all my life—even before I ever met you! You were the woman of my dreams, the glorious image youth always creates for itself and searches for—sometimes a lifetime in vain. But I did find you, the woman of my dreams.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*calmly*): Please don't say such things, Pavel Sergeevich. I don't love you.

Ryumin: But perhaps . . . allow me to say. . . .

Varvara Mikhailovna: What? And to what purpose?

Ryumin: What am I to do? (*Laughs softly.*) So this is the end? How simple! How long it took me to make up my mind to tell you this! With what joy and fear I looked forward to the moment when I would tell you I loved you! And now—it's all over!

Varvara Mikhailovna: I'm sure I'm very sorry, Pavel Sergeevich.

Ryumin: Oh, I understand. But all my hopes were placed in you, in your feeling for me, and now there is no hope left. Nothing left to live for.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Don't talk like that. It hurts me to hear you. Is it my fault?

Ryumin: Do you think it doesn't hurt me? I'm crushed under the weight of unfulfilled promises. In my youth I swore to myself and to others that I would dedicate my whole life to fighting for what I considered right. Now the best years of my life are over and I haven't done a thing, not a single thing!

At first I spent my time getting ready, seeing how the land lay, waiting for the right moment. Before I knew it I had grown accustomed to a tranquil life and liked it—was, in fact, afraid of having it disturbed. Are you aware of how frankly I am speaking? Allow me the pleasure of being sincere for once. I'm ashamed to say all this, and yet there is a pang of pleasure in the shame—the pleasure a believer gets out of confession.

Varvara Mikhailovna: But ... what can I do to help you?

Ryumin: It isn't love I ask, but compassion. I am frightened by the persistence with which life presses its demands upon me. I cautiously evade them, hiding behind a screen of various theories. You see that, I know you do. When I first met you a wonderful hope flared up in my heart that you would help me fulfil my promises, that you would inspire me with strength and courage, so that I could devote myself to making life better.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*vehemently, despairingly*): But I can't! Believe me, I can't! I myself am a pauper. I myself am baffled. I keep searching for the meaning of life, but I can't find it. And indeed, do you call this life at all? Is it possible to go on living as we are? My soul cries out for something vital and beautiful, but all I find is the triviality of our existence. It's horrid, disgusting, shameful to live like this! People are afraid, they clutch at each other, seeking support, they shriek and cry out—

Ryumin: I, too, seek support. At present I am weak and irresolute, but if you would—

Varvara Mikhailovna (*impulsively*): That's not true! I don't believe it! You just say that to rouse my compassion! Even if I were strong, I couldn't put my own heart in your breast! I don't believe there is any force outside of a man which is capable of transforming him. Either it exists within him, or it doesn't exist at all. But I mustn't go on. I feel myself growing hostile—

Ryumin: To me? But why?

Varvara Mikhailovna: No, not to you—to everything. We have estranged ourselves from everything. We don't know how to make ourselves needed. I have a feeling that soon—sooner than we think—a different sort of people—brave, strong people—will take things over and sweep us away like refuse. It's our lies and illusions that make me hostile.

Ryumin: And I want to live with my illusions. Now that you have scattered them, there is nothing for me to live for.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*repulsed*): Don't bare your soul to me like that. I feel sorry for a pauper if he has been robbed, but not if he has squandered his means or was born a pauper. I can't feel sorry for such a one.

Ryumin (*offended*): That is cruel. You yourself are sick, you're wounded.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*emphatically, almost proudly*): The wounded are not sick, their bodies are just broken. The sick are those who are poisoned.

Ryumin: Pity me! After all, I'm a human being.

Varvara Mikhailovna: And I? Am I not a human being too? Or am I just something you need to make your life easier? Isn't that being cruel? You are not the only one who made vows and promises in your youth—thousands upon thousands have broken their vows.

Ryumin (*distracted*): Good-bye. I see that I have spoken too late. But Shalimov, too—take a good look at him—just take a look, and you'll see—

Varvara Mikhailovna (*coldly*). Shalimov? You have no right to—

Ryumin: Good-bye. I'll say no more. Good-bye.

*(Goes quickly into the woods left. Varvara Mikhailovna takes a step as if to follow him, but with a decided shake of her head stops and sits down on the stump. Suslov enters upstage, near the carpet on which the lunch is spread, and helps himself to a drink. Varvara Mikhailovna gets up and goes off left. Ryumin quickly comes on right, glances about and with a gesture of despair sinks down on the hay. Suslov, slightly tipsy and whistling to himself, goes over to Ryumin.)*

Suslov: Did you hear that?

Ryumin: What?

Suslov (*sitting down*): The argument.

Ryumin: No. What about?

Suslov (*lighting up*): Vlas versus the writer and Zamyslov.

Ryumin: No.

Suslov: A pity.

Ryumin: Careful, you'll set fire to the hay.

Suslov: To hell with it. Yes, quite an argument. But it's all bluff. I once went in for philosophy myself. I, too, used all those fancy words, and I know what they're worth: conservatism, intelligentsia, democracy, and all the rest. Dead words. A pack of lies. Man is first and foremost a zoological phenomenon, and you know it. Whatever airs he puts on, there's no hiding the fact what he wants most is to eat, drink and have a woman. That's the truth and the whole truth! I understand Shalimov's raving on—he's a writer; playing with words is his profession. And I understand Vlas—he's still young and foolish. But when that polecat of a Zamyslov begins, I feel like jamming my fist down his throat! Have you heard? He's got Basov mixed up in a pretty affair! They'll make a cool fifty thousand out of it, Basov and that swindler, but their reputations are ruined for good. And that haughty Varvara, who can't decide who she wants as a lover—

Ryumin: That's foul! (*He walks swiftly away.*)

Suslov: The wishy-washy ass! (*Pustobaika comes on right, takes the pipe out of his mouth and stares intently at Suslov.*) What are you gaping at? Never seen a man before? Go away!

Pustobaika: I'm going. (*Walks off slowly.*)

Suslov (*stretching out on the hay*): "Behold the race of humans!" (*Coughs.*) Nothing but a set of rascals underneath. "Money is the root of all evil. . . ." Nonsense! money's nothing—when you've got it. . . . (*Drowsy.*) And to be afraid of what people think of you . . . that's . . . that's for those who are sober . . . all of you are rascals underneath, 'pon my word!

(*Sleeps. Dudakov and Olga stroll on, arm in arm. She is leaning on his shoulder and looking up into his face.*)

Dudakov: Both of us were in the wrong. We let our work and worries get the better of us. We mustn't lose respect for each other, Olga. But then I don't know why you should respect me. Who am I?

Olga Alexeyevna: My beloved Kirill, father of my children. I do respect you. I love you.

Dudakov: I get worn out and let myself go—can't control myself, and you take everything so to heart, and there you are—a row.

Olga Alexeyevna: You're the only one I've got in all the world. You and the children. I have nobody at all.

Dudakov: Think of the old days, Olga. Was it this sort of life we dreamed of, you and I? (*Yulia Filippovna and Zamylov appear among the trees left.*) Hardly.

Olga Alexeyevna: But what's to be done about it? There are the children. We've got to think of them.

Dudakov: Yes, the children. I know. But sometimes I think—

Olga Alexeyevna: You poor dear! What *are* we to do?

(*They disappear in the woods.*)

Yulia Filippovna (*coming forward, laughing*): Very solemn and touching! A lesson for me!

Zamylov: Prelude to the fifth baby—or is it the sixth? And so, Yulia darling, I'm waiting for your answer.

Yulia Filippovna (*mockingly*): I don't know what to say now. They were so sweet. Perhaps I, too, should become virtuous; what do you think, ducky?

Zamylov: Later, Yulia.

Yulia Filippovna: Yes, later. My decision is to keep to the path of vice and allow this summer's affair to run its natural course. What were you shouting about with Vlas and the writer?

Zamylov: Vlas seems to be half-crazy today. We were talking about our beliefs.

Yulia Filippovna: And what do you believe in?

Zamylov: I? Only in myself, Yulia. And my right to live as I please.

Yulia Filippovna: As for me, I don't believe in anything.

Zamylov: I was half-starved as a child, and as a youth, too. Starved and mortified. Yes, my dear Yulia, it's an unpleasant past I have to look back upon. I saw too much hardship and ugliness. I suffered too much. And now I'm the one who is to say how I shall live and what is right and wrong. Well, I must be off. Good-bye, sweetheart. But we must be careful not to be seen too much together.

Yulia Filippovna (*with exaggerated sentiment*): What matters it whether we be together or apart, my gallant knight? What have we to fear? We, the mad lovers!

Zamylov: I'm off, dear! (*Goes into the woods. Yulia*

*Filippovna watches him go, then glances about her with a care-free air. She walks over to the haystack, singing softly:*

As a mother comforts her babe,  
So comfort my tormented soul. . . .

*(Suddenly she catches sight of her husband. She stops, shudders, stands for a second gazing at him motionless. Then she makes a movement as if to withdraw, but instead smiles and sits down beside him, tickling his face with a blade of grass. Suslov grunts.)*

Yulia Filippovna: Very musical.

Suslov: Who the devil—? Oh, is it you?

Yulia Filippovna: What a breath! A whole stack of hay can't drown out that aroma! Expensive wines will be your ruin, my good man.

Suslov (*holding out his arms to her*): You? So close to me? I can't remember when that happened last!

Yulia Filippovna: And there's no point in trying to remember. Look, would you like to do me a favour?

Suslov: Just say what it is. You know I'd do anything for you.

Yulia Filippovna: The ideal husband!

Suslov (*kissing her hand*): Say what it is. What do you want me to do?

Yulia Filippovna (*taking a little revolver out of her pocket*): Let's shoot ourselves, darling. First you, then me.

Suslov: What a grim joke, Yulia! Put that ghastly thing down—do, I beg of you.

Yulia Filippovna: Wait. Take your hand off! Don't you like my suggestion? But you've already made up your mind to shoot me. I'd shoot myself first, but I'm afraid you'll fool me and remain alive, and I don't want to be fooled a second time, and I don't want to part with you. You and I must be together for ever and ever, amen. Are you glad?

Suslov (*overwhelmed*): You can't do that, Yulia—you can't!

Yulia Filippovna: Yes, I can. You'll see. Here, do you want me to shoot you?

Suslov (*covering his face*): Don't look at me like that. God knows you could do it. I'll go away. I can't stand it.



Yulia Filippovna (*gaily*): Go ahead, I'll shoot you in the back. Oh, dear, now I can't. Here comes Maria Lvovna. She's a darling. Why don't you fall in love with her, Pyotr? She has such pretty hair!

Suslov (*under his breath*): You'll drive me mad. And why? What have I done to make you hate me so?

Yulia Filippovna (*contemptuously*): One can't hate you.

Suslov (*softly, gasping*): Why do you torture me like this? Tell me why!

*(Maria Lvovna comes in slowly, lost in reverie. Suslov is standing in front of his wife, his eyes fixed on the revolver in her hand.)*

Yulia Filippovna: Maria Lvovna! Come here! Go away, Pyotr; you've made a vile woman out of me. Go away. Are we going home soon, Maria Lvovna?

Maria Lvovna: I don't know. Our party seems to be scattered all over the place. Have you seen Varvara Mikhailovna?

Yulia Filippovna: She's probably with the writer. I thought you were going down to the river, Pyotr. Go on. We can get on very nicely without you.

*(Suslov goes away without a word.)*

Maria Lvovna (*absent-mindedly*): How cutting you are!

Yulia Filippovna: It will do him good. I was told that some philosopher once said a man should take a whip with him whenever he went near a woman.

Maria Lvovna: That was Nietzsche.

Yulia Filippovna: Was it? He was mad, wasn't he? I don't know any philosophers, mad or otherwise, but if I were a philosopher I would say that a woman should take a good stout club with her whenever she went near a man. (*Olga Alexeyevna and Kaleria appear in the background left. They sit down beside the carpet on which the food is spread.*) I was also told there's a tribe of savages who have the following charming custom: before plucking the flowers of delight, they strike the woman over the head with a club. Our people are more civilized

—they do it after the wedding. Were you struck over the head with a club?

Maria Lvovna: I was.

Yulia Filippovna (*smiling*): The savages are more honest, don't you think? But why are you looking so unhappy?

Maria Lvovna: Don't ask. Are you unhappy, too?

(*Dvoyetochiye comes on right. He is hatless and carries his fishing-rod.*)

Yulia Filippovna (*laughing*): Has anyone ever heard me complain? I'm always bright and gay. Here comes the uncle. Do you like him? I do, awfully.

Maria Lvovna: Yes, he seems pleasant.

Dvoyetochiye (*coming over*): I've lost my hat. The young folk set out in a boat to rescue it but only succeeded in sending it to the bottom. Has anyone an extra kerchief I could tie on my head to keep the mosquitoes out of my hair?

Yulia Filippovna (*getting up*): Wait, I'll bring you one.

(*Goes to the back of the stage.*)

Dvoyetochiye: That Vlas was just putting on a show for us. A nice chap.

Maria Lvovna: Do you find him amusing?

Dvoyetochiye: Oh, very. Sparkles with fun. He read his poetry to us. One of the girls asked him to write something in her album, so he writes: You looked at me, he writes, with laughter in your eyes, and the glance, he writes, went straight to my heart, and so night and day I am pining away . . . you know—that sort of thing—

Maria Lvovna (*hastily*): Yes, I know. You don't have to go on, Semyon Semyonovich, I know the poem. Tell me, do you intend to stay here long?

Dvoyetochiye: Well, here's how it is: I was thinking of settling down with my nephew for good, but he doesn't seem to be any too anxious. There's nowhere else for me to go. I haven't got a soul in the world. Plenty of money, but nothing else.

Maria Lvovna (*absent-mindedly and without looking at him*): Are you really, then, so rich?

Dvoyetochiye: I've got about a million, if you want to know it—about a million, ha, ha! It'll all go to Pyotr when I die, but that doesn't seem to mean anything to him. He takes no pains to be nice to me. In general he's sort of flabby—there's nothing he seems to want very bad. I can't understand him. Maybe it's because he knows he'll get the money anyway—why put himself out? Ha, ha!

Maria Lvovna (*with more interest*): You poor thing! Why don't you donate your money to some cause? It would be used to better purpose.

Dvoyetochiye: There was a young dandy who suggested the same thing, but he rubbed me the wrong way, he did. Gave himself out to be a liberal, but he was nothing but a mountebank, I could see that. To tell you the truth, it does seem a pity to leave all that money to Pyotr. What good'll it do him? He's too puffed up as it is. (*Maria Lvovna laughs and Dvoyetochiye darts a sharp look at her.*) What are you laughing at? Think I'm a fool? I'm not really; it's just that I'm not used to living alone. (*Sighs.*) I groan and moan and my heart's like a stone—it's a sad thing to lose your friends, Maria Lvovna. By the way, I like you. (*Laughs.*)

Maria Lvovna: Thank you.

Dvoyetochiye: For nothing. It's you who are to be thanked. For instance, you just called me "poor". Ha, ha! I never heard that before. Everybody else calls me rich. Ha, ha! And I myself thought I was rich. But it turns out I'm poor.

Yulia Filippovna (*comes up with a kerchief in her hand*): Are you making love, uncle?

Dvoyetochiye: Sorry to say I'm out of the running. All I'm capable of at my age is a little sympathy. That's it, tie it in a pretty bow. Think I'll go over and have a bite before we leave.

Yulia Filippovna: There. It's very becoming.

Dvoyetochiye: That's a fib. Mine is a manly mug. Will you come with me? By the way, I've been meaning to ask you if you love your husband.

Yulia Filippovna: Do you think it's possible to love my husband?

Dvoyetochiye: Then what did you marry him for?

Yulia Filippovna: He pretended to be interesting.

Dvoyetochiye: Ha, ha! You're the limit!

*(All three go to the carpet at the back of the stage, and the low sound of their talk and laughter accompanies the following scene. Shalimov, Dudakov, Vlas and Basov, who is tipsy, come in left. Vlas goes upstage to join the people round the carpet, the other men go over to the haystack.)*

Zamyslov *(calling from the woods)*: Time to go home, everybody!

Basov: A pretty spot, isn't it, Yakov? A very nice outing, I'd say.

Shalimov: You've done nothing all day but sit and drink. You're quite sodden.

*(Sonya, at the carpet, reties the kerchief on Dvoyetochiye's head. Laughter. Zamyslov comes out of the woods near the carpet, picks up a bottle of wine and some glasses, and comes down to Basov. He is followed by Dvoyetochiye, who waves his arms to beat off Sonya.)*

Basov *(collapsing on the hay)*: Think I'll sit down again. It's easier to admire the beauties of nature sitting down. Fact. The woods, the fields, the trees ... this hay... how I love the out-of-doors! *(Maudlin.)* And I love people. I love this big, beggarly, baffling country of ours—Russia, my native land! I love everybody and everything! My soul's as tender as a raspberry! That's a nice figure, Yakov—remember it. You can make use of it sometime—a soul as tender as a raspberry!

Shalimov: I'll be sure to make use of it.

Sonya: Semyon Semyonovich! I haven't finished tying it.

Dvoyetochiye: Enough of your nonsense. Making a fool out of an old man like me! You've hurt my feelings—ha, ha!

Basov: Ah, a bottle of wine! Pour me out a glass. This is the life, friends! Life's a joy for those who take it in a simple, friendly way. That's it, friends, you've got to be friendly and trusting if you want to get on in life. You've got to look at things with the frank, trusting eyes of a child, and then everything will be fine. *(Dvoyetochiye, who is standing next to the stump, laughs at Basov's volubility.)* All we have to do, gentlemen, is to look into each other's hearts with the frank, trusting

eyes of a child. What's the uncle laughing at? He caught a gay young perch and I went and threw it back into its native element. Because I'm—I'm a pantheist. Fact. And I love perches. And the uncle lost his hat in the river, so there!

Shalimov: You're talking through yours, Sergei.

Basov: Judge not, that ye be not judged. I'm as good a talker as you are. You're an eloquent man, and I'm an eloquent man. Hear that? That's Maria Lvovna talking. Wonderful woman. Deserves to be respected.

Shalimov: I don't like machine-guns of her type. And in general I'm not an admirer of women who deserve to be respected.

Basov (*delighted*): Quite right! Respectable women are worse than the other kind. Fact!

Dvoyetochiye: A fine thing for a man to say who's married to a . . . to a very queen.

Basov: My wife? Varya? Oh, there's a purist for you, there's a Puritan! A saint if there ever was one! But it's no fun to live with her. She reads all the books and is always quoting some sage or other. Let's drink to her health!

Shalimov: An unexpected conclusion. But that Maria Lvovna—

Basov (*interrupting*): Did you know she was having an affair with my clerk? Fact. I caught him in the act of making love to her.

Dvoyetochiye: Hm—that, it seems, would be better left unsaid. (*Walks away.*)

Basov: Oh, yes, I forgot. It's a deep secret.

Kaleria (*coming up*): Sergei, have you seen Varya?

Basov: Here's my sister. My dear little poetess. Has she read you her poetry, Yakov? Wait till you hear it! All very lofty—clouds, mountains, stars—

Kaleria: You've been drinking, haven't you?

Basov: Only one glass.

Zamyslov: From *this* bottle.

Shalimov: I should like very much to hear what you've written, Kaleria Vasilyevna.

Kaleria: What if I should take you at your word and bring you four fat notebooks?

Shalimov: Have no fear, I'm not easily intimidated.

Kaleria: We shall see.

Yulia Filippovna (*from the woods*): Time to go home! Time to go home!

*(Kaleria goes out right, meeting Sonya on the way. Zamylov goes in the direction from which Yulia's voice has come. Basov winks as he watches him go and bends over to whisper something into Shalimov's ear. Shalimov laughs.)*

Kaleria: Ready to go home?

Sonya: Yes, everybody's tired.

Kaleria: Whenever I leave the house I am accompanied by some vague hope. But I always come back disappointed. Have you had the same experience?

Sonya: No.

Kaleria: You will have.

Sonya (*laughing*): You seem to enjoy saying morbid things.

Kaleria: Do I? I should like to throw a disturbing shadow of thought over your bright eyes. I often see you in the company of coarse, dirty people and marvel at your stoicism. Don't you find such people revolting?

Sonya (*laughing*): Their dirt is just on the outside. It washes off with soap and water.

*(Their words become indistinct as they walk to the back of the stage.)*

Shalimov (*getting up*): You've got a vicious tongue, Sergei. Be careful—you're a husband yourself.

Basov: Me?

Shalimov: A beautiful spot, but why must there be mosquitoes? I left my rug somewhere.

*(He goes off right. Basov stretches himself and hums a tune. Upstage Sasha, Sonya, and Pustobaika are gathering up the food and dishes. Varvara Mikhailovna comes on left, near the haystack, carrying a bouquet of flowers.)*

Vlas (*from the woods*): Who's going in the boat?

Basov: Varya! That you? I'm all alone. Everyone's gone and left me.

Varvara Mikhailovna: You've had too much to drink again, Sergei.

Basov: Oh, not so much.

Varvara Mikhailovna: You shouldn't drink cognac. You'll be complaining of your heart again.

Basov: I drank mostly port. Don't scold me, Varya. You're always so strict with me, and I'm very sensitive. My love is as soft and tender as a baby's. Sit down beside me, dear, and let's have a heart-to-heart talk. We need to have a good talk, you and I.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Oh, stop it! Everyone's getting ready to go home. Get up and go down to the boat. Get up, Sergei!

Basov: Just as you say. Where am I to go? Down there? Very well.

*(He goes out with too deliberate a step. Varvara Mikhailovna watches him with a stern look on her face. Suddenly she catches sight of Shalimov, who goes quietly up to her with a tender smile on his lips.)*

Shalimov: Your face is drawn and there's a sad look in your eyes. Are you tired?

Varvara Mikhailovna: A little.

Shalimov: I'm very tired. Tired of being with these people. And it hurts me to see you among them. But forgive me.

Varvara Mikhailovna: For what?

Shalimov: Perhaps you object to my saying such a thing?

Varvara Mikhailovna: I would have told you if I did.

Shalimov: I watch you moving silently in the midst of this noisy throng, your eyes seeking the answer to some question. And your silence is more eloquent than words. I, too, have known the chill of loneliness.

Sonya (*shouting*): Mummy! Are you going by boat?

Maria Lvovna (*from the woods*): No, I'm walking back.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*holding out a flower to Shalimov*): Would you like to have it?

Shalimov (*with a bow and a smile*): Thank you. I jealously guard flowers presented to me with such friendly simplicity. (Vlas [*calling from the woods right*]: "Hey, watchman! Where's the other oar?") I'll put it between the pages of a book. Some

day in the future I shall find it there and think of you. Does the thought appeal to you? Or is it sentimental?

Varvara Mikhailovna (*softly, dropping her head*): No. Go on.

Shalimov (*gazing curiously into her face*): You must be unhappy among people who are so tragically at a loss.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Teach them how they ought to live.

Shalimov: I lack the self-confidence of a teacher. I'm a stranger in this world, a lonely observer of life. I don't know how to make pompous speeches, and nothing I said would have the power of inspiring these people with courage. What are you thinking of?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Me? Thoughts that show people in a repulsive light, and therefore ought to be killed as soon as born.

Shalimov: And turn your mind into a graveyard? Wouldn't it be better to simply withdraw from people? Believe me, the air is more clear and wholesome and everything takes on more definite form when one stands at a distance from them.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I see what you mean, and it makes me feel as dejected as if someone very dear to me were incurably ill.

*(Preparations for departure are being made noisily in the woods right.)*

Shalimov (*not listening to her*): If you only knew how desperately I mean what I say! You'll hardly believe it, but I must confess that being with you makes me want to be sincere, to be a better and a wiser man.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Thank you.

Shalimov (*kissing her hand in agitation*): It is as if when I am standing beside you I were on the threshold of some great happiness, as deep and unplumbed as the sea. As if you possessed some magic power that penetrates others as the power of a magnet penetrates steel. And a bold, insane idea takes possession of me. It seems to me that if you—

*(He breaks off and glances round. Varvara Mikhailovna watches him closely.)*

Varvara Mikhailovna: If I—what?



Shalimov: Varvara Mikhailovna ... you ... you won't laugh at me, will you? Shall I go on?

Varvara Mikhailovna: No, I know what you want. You're not a very subtle seducer.

Shalimov (*embarrassed*): No, you don't understand. You—

Varvara Mikhailovna (*simply, sadly, softly*): If you ever knew how I loved you when I read your books! How I looked forward to meeting you! I was sure you were great and good and that everything was clear to you. I was sure of it that evening when you read your works at our school—I was only seventeen then. And your image has been shining in my heart ever since, like a bright star.

Shalimov (*dully, dropping his head*): Please don't. I apologize.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I would think of you whenever this life got too much for me, and that made it easier to bear. At least there was some hope.

Shalimov: Be merciful. Try to understand—

Varvara Mikhailovna: And then you came here. And you were just the same as everybody else—just exactly the same. How dreadful! What has happened to you? Can't a person ever preserve his strength of spirit?

Shalimov (*excitedly*): But why should your demands on me be different from those on other people? Why use a different measuring rod? All of you can live as you please, but I, because I happen to be a writer, must live not as I please, but as *you* please, is that it?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Don't talk like that. And throw my flower away. I gave it to that other, to the one I believed to be above ordinary people. Throw it away.

(*She goes out quickly.*)

Shalimov (*watching her go*): I'll be damned! (*Crushes the flower in his hand.*) A spiteful woman!

(*Nervously wipes his face with his handkerchief, then goes off in the direction Varvara Mikhailovna took. Dudakov and Olga come quickly out of the woods left.*)

Zamyslov (*singing in the woods*): "Oh, hasten, night, to draw...."

Yulia Filippovna (*continuing the song*): "... thy dark transparent veils..."

Vlas (*in the woods*): For goodness' sake, sit down!

Dudakov: We almost got left behind.

Olga Alexeyevna: I'm so tired! Kirill, darling, you must never forget this day.

Dudakov: Nor you—your promise not to give way to your feelings.

Olga Alexeyevna: I'm so happy, love! Life is going to be different from now on.

(*They go out. Pustobaika comes on right with a basket over his arm and searches for something on the ground.*)

Pustobaika: Rubbish everywhere. That's all they leave behind them—waste and rubbish. Just clutter up the earth. (*Goes out left.*)

Yulia Filippovna (*in the woods*): Who else hasn't come?

Sonya: Mummy!

Basov: Mummy!

Maria Lvovna (*comes on left; she looks tired and distracted*): Here I am, Sonya!

Sonya (*running on*): We're going, mummy! But what's the matter with you?

Maria Lvovna: Nothing. I'm going to walk. Tell them not to wait for me. Run along.

Sonya (*running off to one side and calling, with her hand to her mouth*): Go ahead, don't wait for us! We're walking. What? Good-bye!

Dvoyetochiye (*from the woods*): You'll be worn out.

Sonya: Good-bye!

Maria Lvovna: Why didn't you go in the boat with them?

Sonya: Because I wanted to go with you.

Maria Lvovna: Well, come along.

Sonya: Let's take a little rest first. Feeling low, mummy? My precious mummy! Sit down here—like this. Let me put my arms round you—like this. Well, now tell me what the trouble is.

(*Laughter, talk, shouts come from the woods.*)

Yulia Filippovna (*from the woods*): Stop rocking the boat!

Zamyslov: No, don't sing. Let them just play.

Basov (*from the woods*): The musicians are to sit in the bow.

(*The guitar and the mandolin can be heard tuning up.*)

Vlas (*from the woods*): We're off!

Maria Lvovna: Sonya, darling! If you only knew!

Sonya (*simply*): I do know.

Maria Lvovna: No, you don't.

Sonya: Listen, mumsy—remember how, when I used to cry as a child because I couldn't do my arithmetic problems, you'd take my head on your breast, like this, and hum a lullaby:

Lulla-lulla-lullaby,  
Sleep, my mummy, sleep!

It's you who can't do your problem this time, mumsy dear. If you really love him—

(*Dvoyetochiye laughs.*)

Maria Lvovna: Hush, Sonya! How did you find out?

(*The guitar and the mandolin begin to play.*)

Sonya: Sh. Lie still.

Lulla-lulla-lullaby,  
Sleep, my mumsy, sleep. . . .

Mine is the cleverest mummy in the world. She taught me to think simply and clearly. He's a dear, mummy— don't send him away. He'll be even better once you take hold of him. You've already produced one first-class human specimen—I really am first class, don't you think? And now you'll produce another.

Maria Lvovna: But, darling, it's impossible!

Sonya: He'll be a brother to me. He's inclined to be rude; you'll teach him to be mild and gentle—there's so much gentleness in you! You'll teach him to work with zest, as you work yourself, and as you taught me to work. He'll be a good companion for me, and we'll get on famously together—at first the three of us, and then the four, because I intend to marry that crazy Maxim. I love him, mummy. And he deserves it.

M a r i a L v o v n a : You're sure to be happy, you blessed child. You can't help being.

S o n y a : Don't get up. He and I will finish studying and we'll live full, interesting, eventful lives. The four of us, mumsy—four brave, honest people!

M a r i a L v o v n a : My darling! My joy! The three of us—you and your husband and I. And he—if he wants to join us, it must be as your brother—and my son.

S o n y a : And we'll do things worth doing! Oh, we will! But rest a bit first, mumsy. Don't cry.

Lulla-lulla-lullaby,  
Sleep, my mumsy, sleep!

*(Sonya's voice trembles. In the distance can be heard the music of the guitar and the mandolin.)*

C U R T A I N

## ACT IV

*The setting is that of Act II. The sun has already set. Basov and Suslov are playing chess under the pines. Sasha is laying the table for supper on the verandah. The hoarse sounds of a gramophone come from the woods right. Inside the house Kaleria is playing a sad tune on the piano.*

**Basov:** What our country needs is well-intentioned people. Such people are evolutionaries. They don't go rushing into things.

**Suslov:** I'm taking your bishop.

**Basov:** Go ahead. Well-intentioned people change the forms of life slowly and imperceptibly, but theirs are the only changes that last.

*(Dudakov comes hurriedly out from behind the house.)*

**Dudakov:** Hullo! Is my wife here?

**Basov:** Haven't seen her. Sit down, doctor.

**Dudakov:** Can't. Have no time. I've got to get the teachers' report ready for print.

**Basov:** If I remember correctly, you've been getting it ready for the past two years.

**Dudakov** (*going out*): Can't be helped if I'm the only person who does anything. There are lots of people around, but no one to do anything. How do you account for that?

**Basov:** A foolish figure that doctor cuts.

**Suslov:** Your move.

**Basov:** Hm. What I was saying, was: you've got to be well-intentioned. Misanthropy is a luxury we cannot afford. It's been eleven years since I first arrived in these parts, and all I brought with me was a brief-case and a carpet. The brief-case was empty, the carpet worn thin. And I was thin myself.

**Suslov:** Here goes your queen.

**Basov:** Pshaw! How did I ever miss the move of your knight?

**Suslov:** A person who philosophizes always loses.

**Basov:** A fact's a fact, as the ducks say.

*(They become absorbed in their game. Out of the woods right come Vlas and Maria Lvovna. They don't see the chess players.)*

Maria Lvovna (*softly*): It will soon pass, my dear boy; it will, believe me. And then in the bottom of your heart you will thank me.

Vlas: It's hard. Unspeakably hard.

*(Basov listens, motioning Suslov to be silent.)*

Maria Lvovna: Go away. Go quickly, dear. I promise to write to you. Work hard. Make a place for yourself in the world. Be courageous, and never surrender to the trivialities of life. You are fine by nature, and I love you. Yes, I love you. *(Basov grows round-eyed. Suslov looks at him with a smile.)* But my love may injure you, and it frightens me. Yes, I'm not ashamed to admit it—it frightens me. You will soon get over your infatuation, but I—I would only love you the more as time went on, and the end would be comical, even vulgar. At least it would be very painful for me.

Vlas: I swear to you—

Maria Lvovna: Don't. I don't want you to.

Vlas: I will always admire you, even if love passes.

Maria Lvovna: Ah, that is not enough for a woman who loves. And besides, I'm ashamed to give myself up to personal happiness. That may sound silly and unnatural, but in our times it seems shameful to seek personal happiness. Go away, dear, and if ever the time comes when you need a friend, I shall be waiting for you. You will be as a son to me—a dearly beloved son. Good-bye.

Vlas: Give me your hand. I want to get down on my knees to you. How I love you; I feel like crying. Good-bye.

Maria Lvovna: Good-bye, my dear, good friend! Remember my advice: fear nothing and bow down to nothing—ever, ever, ever!

Vlas: Good-bye, my love! My first love, so good and pure. Thank you. *(Maria Lvovna goes quickly into the woods right. Vlas goes toward the house. Suddenly he sees Basov and Suslov and realizes they have overheard. He stops. Basov gets up and bows and is about to say something. Vlas goes up to him.)* Not a word! Not a single word! Don't so much as open your mouth! *(Goes into the house.)*

Basov (*taken aback*): A ferocious youngster.

Suslov (*laughing*): Give you a fright?

Basov: How do you like that? I knew about it, but I never expected such . . . er . . . lofty sentiment. The silly fools! (*Bursts out laughing. Yulia Filippovna and Zamyslov come down the path from Suslov's house. Yulia goes over to her husband, Zamyslov into the house.*)

Suslov: She said all that on purpose, just to tighten her hold on the chap.

Basov: Good Lord, what a comedy, eh?

Suslov (*frowning*): She's sly as a fox. Did me a dirty trick. On her advice my uncle gave away all his money.

Yulia Filippovna: Pyotr, a man has come—

Basov (*interrupting*): Ask him what just happened, Yulia Filippovna.

Suslov: Who is he?

Yulia Filippovna (*to Basov*): What's that? (*To her husband.*) Some contractor. He says it's urgent—something has gone wrong somewhere.

Suslov (*going off quickly*): What next?

Basov: How do you like this, my dear? We're sitting here, your husband and I, and suddenly Maria Lvovna—(*Bursts out laughing.*) It seems that she—that they are in love!

Yulia Filippovna: Who? Maria Lvovna and my husband? (*Laughs.*)

Basov: No, Vlas. That clown.

Yulia Filippovna: Oh, that. Thanks to you, everybody's known that for a long time.

Basov: But the details! That's what's interesting.

(*From behind the house come Ryumin and Dvoyetochiye, the latter with some parcels in his hands.*)

Dvoyetochiye: Is Varvara Mikhailovna home? See who I've brought.

Basov: Back from your wanderings? Glad to see you. Looking fine—a becoming coat of tan, and you've lost some weight. Where have you come from?

Ryumin: The south. I saw the sea for the first time in my life. How do you do, Yulia Filippovna.

Yulia Filippovna: Your looks really have improved, Pavel Sergeyevich. I think I'll take a trip to the seaside, too.

D v o y e t o c h i y e : I'm going inside. (*Goes.*) I've brought you a box of chocolates as a farewell gift, niece.

B a s o v : I saw the sea.

With greedy eyes I took its measure,  
And tested, as I gazed,  
My fortitude of spirit.

Isn't that how it goes? Well, well, so here you are! Go into the house, my wife will be glad to see you.

R y u m i n : It's glorious down there. I suppose music is the only thing capable of expressing the majesty of the sea. It dwarfs a man as thoughts of eternity do, making him feel as tiny and insignificant as a straw.

(*Varvara Mikhailovna comes out from behind the house.*)

B a s o v : I'll gather up the chess-men. Varya, did you know Pavel Sergeevich had come back?

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a : Is he here?

B a s o v (*going over to her*): Yes. And he seems to have made some additions to his store of pretty phrases. If you only knew what has happened, Varya! Suslov and I were sitting here playing chess, and suddenly Maria Lvovna and Vlas—get what I mean? They really are having an affair! (*Laughs.*) And you were so sure it was something different. Well it isn't, it's just that. Fact!

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a : Stop it, Sergei! I don't want to hear any more of your gossip.

B a s o v : But wait, Varya. I haven't told you anything yet—

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a : I asked you not to mention what was happening between my brother and Maria Lvovna, and you told everybody about it. Can't you see how disgusting it is?

B a s o v : Confound it all! I had better not talk to you at all, I can see that!

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a : You certainly had better talk less and think more about what you're doing. You ought to hear what other people are saying about you, Sergei.

B a s o v : About me? It's beneath me to listen to their gossip. Let them say whatever they like. But it surprises me that you, Varya, my wife—



Varvara Mikhailovna: The honour of being your wife is not as great as you think, and it weighs heavily on me.

Basov (*indignant*): What are you saying, Varvara?

(*Dvoyetochiye and Vlas come out on the verandah.*)

Varvara Mikhailovna: I'm saying what I think, and what I feel.

Basov: But I must ask you to explain.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I will. Later.

(*With a snort Basov goes into the house. Vlas follows him with a hostile glance, then sits down on a lower step of the verandah.*)

Dvoyetochiye: I've brought you some chocolates, Varvara Mikhailovna.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Thank you.

Dvoyetochiye (*also sitting down on a step*): I've brought all the ladies chocolates, so that they'll remember me kindly. Don't forget you promised to give me your picture.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Oh, yes. I'll go and get it. (*Goes into the house.*)

Dvoyetochiye: Well, Uncle Vlas, so we're off, are we?

Vlas: I wish we were gone already.

Dvoyetochiye: Less than a day left. Hm. If we could only get that sister of yours to come with us! This is no place for her.

Vlas (*glumly*): This is no place for anybody.

Dvoyetochiye: I'm glad you're coming with me. Ours is a pretty little town, with a river running through it and woods all round. I've got an enormous house—ten rooms. Cough in one of them, and the sound goes echoing through them all. It's very lonely there in the winter, with the wind blowing outside. (*Sonya comes quickly on right.*) Loneliness is good for a fellow when he's young, but it's better to have somebody beside you when you're an old codger like me. Ha, ha! (*To Sonya.*) Good-bye, minx! I'm leaving tomorrow, and you'll have forgotten all about me the day after.

Sonya: No, I won't. I couldn't forget you, you have such a funny name.

Dvoyetochiye: Is that the only reason? Well, we're grateful for each small thing.

Sony a : Oh, no, that's not the only reason. You're a plain person without any airs, and I like plain people. But you haven't seen my mummy anywhere, have you?

Dvoyetochiye : Haven't had the pleasure.

Vlas : She isn't here. Let's go and look for her. Maybe she's in the summer-house, down by the river.

Kaleria : Do you mind if I go with you?

Sony a : Come along.

*(The three of them go into the woods. Dvoyetochiye sighs and hums to himself as he watches them go. Varvara Mikhailovna comes out with a snapshot in her hand. Ryumin comes behind her.)*

Varvara Mikhailovna : Here's the picture. When are you leaving?

Dvoyetochiye : Tomorrow. Thanks for the message. I've quite fallen in love with you, my dear.

Varvara Mikhailovna : Why should anyone love me?

Dvoyetochiye : There's no why or wherefore to love. True love's like the sun—you can't tell what it hangs on to.

Varvara Mikhailovna : I'm not so sure about that.

Dvoyetochiye : I can see you're not. Why don't you come away with me? Your brother's coming. You'd find something for yourself to do there.

Varvara Mikhailovna : What? I don't know how to do anything.

Dvoyetochiye : Because you haven't learned. Now you can learn. Vlas and I are going to build two schools—a girls' school and a boys' school—

Ryumin (*absent-mindedly*): If life is to have meaning, one must do something great and noble, something that will live through the ages: build great temples—

Dvoyetochiye : All that highfalutin stuff is beyond me. I didn't even think of the schools, but a kind person came along and put a flea in my ear.

Ryumin : The very highest institutions of learning offer nothing but a set of contradictory theories, mere hypotheses touching on the mystery of life.

Varvara Mikhailo'vna: How tiresome! How trite and commonplace!

Ryumin (*glancing at all of them and smiling in a queer, quiet way*): I know. Dead words, like autumn leaves. I don't know why I say them. Out of habit, I guess, or because autumn has set in. The contemplative murmur of the green waves has been sounding in my ears ever since I got my first sight of the sea. Everything man has ever spoken is drowned out by that music, like raindrops in the ocean.

Varvara Mikhailovna: How oddly you speak! What's the matter with you? (*Kaleria and Vlas come out of the woods right.*)

Ryumin (*laughing*): Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Kaleria: To stand firmly on your feet means to stand knee-deep in mud.

Vlas: And would you rather hang in the air? All you want is to keep your frock and your soul unsullied. But who has any use for cold immaculate people like you?

Kaleria: I have use for myself.

Vlas: You just think you have.

Kaleria: I don't want to talk to you. You're uncouth. (*Goes into the house.*)

Dvoyetochiye: Well, Uncle Vlas, are you pleased with yourself for telling off the young lady?

Vlas (*sits down beside his sister on the lower step of the verandah*): I'm sick of her. (*Imitating her tone.*) "Ah, me! I'm dying of boredom!" I told her a person ought to live with others, but die all by himself.

Ryumin (*quickly*): Quite right. That may sound cruel, but it's true. Very true.

(*Basov and Yulia Filippovna come out on the verandah.*)

Varvara Mikhailovna (*as if to herself*): Life passes us by without touching our hearts—merely stirring our thoughts.

Basov: Varya, I told Sasha we'd have supper out here. (*Suslov comes walking quickly down the path from his house.*) We'll give you a little send-off, Semyon Semyonovich. A good excuse to drink champagne.

Dvoyetochiye: I'm quite touched.

Suslov: Yulia, please come here a minute.

Yulia Filippovna: Why, has something happened?

(*Suslov leads his wife away, whispering something in her ear. On hearing it she starts away from him. He takes her arm and leads her to the right, where they stand talking in undertones for a few seconds, returning to the verandah after Basov has gone away.*)

**Basov**: I'll treat you to some first-rate sausage, friends. You've never tasted anything like it. A client sent it to me from the Ukraine. But where's that assistant of mine? (*Under his breath.*) He happens to be the assistant of Yulia Filippovna's husband as well.

**Varvara Mikhailovna** (*in quiet indignation*): Sergei! That's foul!

**Basov** (*defiantly*): But everybody knows it, Varya. I don't see why you should. . . . Sasha! (*Goes inside.*)

**Yulia Filippovna** (*gloatingly*): Uncle, a wall of the jail Pyotr just built fell down on two working men.

**Suslov** (*with a little laugh*): And she's tickled to death.

**Varvara Mikhailovna** (*frightened*): Not really! Where did it happen?

**Suslov**: In a little district town.

**Dvoyetochiye**: Congratulations. (*Contemptuously.*) You young folk! I don't suppose you ever went near it while it was being built, did you?

**Suslov**: Yes, I did. It's that rascal of a contractor who's to blame.

**Yulia Filippovna**: That's a lie. He didn't go near it—not once. He had no time.

**Dvoyetochiye**: What you need's a good walloping. Bah, you young folk! You never do anything right.

**Suslov** (*with a little laugh*): I'll shoot myself, that'll be doing something right.

**Ryumin** (*shaking his head*): No, you won't. You'll never shoot yourself.

**Suslov**: And what if I should? All of a sudden?

**Varvara Mikhailovna**: What about those two working men, Pyotr Ivanovich? Were they killed?

**Suslov** (*glumly*): I don't know. I'll have to go up there tomorrow.

(*Enter Olga Alexeyevna.*)

**Vlas** (*out loud*): Revolting.

Suslov (*baring his teeth*): Easy there, young man, easy!

Olga Alexeyevna (*coming up*): Good evening. You're perched about like birds in autumn. I think I've seen everybody today. Oh, Pavel Sergeevich! When did you get back?

*(Suslov takes his wife aside again and whispers something to her. His face wears an angry look. She gives him a mocking bow and comes back to the verandah. Suslov, whistling defiantly, goes off to his own house. Dvoyetochiye, after a glance at Yulia Filippovna, goes after him.)*

Ryumin: Today.

Olga Alexeyevna: And came straight out here? What a devoted friend you are! Isn't the air oppressive, somehow? Summer will soon be over. We'll all move back to town and there, fenced in by stone walls, we'll be more inaccessible to each other than ever. We'll be quite like strangers.

Vlas (*disapprovingly*): Complaining again!

Basov (*from the door on to the verandah*): Pavel Sergeevich! Come here a moment, will you?

Olga Alexeyevna (*to Vlas*): Well, isn't it the truth?

*(Ryumin goes into the house and meets Kaleria and Shalimov on the way. Without answering Olga Alexeyevna, Vlas gets up and goes over to the pines.)*

Shalimov (*with bored indifference*): People expect great things of democracy, but who can say what sort of a beast your democrat is?

Kaleria (*roused*): Yes, yes, you're right; right a thousand times! He's still a beast. A savage, whose one desire is to fill his belly.

Shalimov: And wear squeaky boots.

Kaleria: What does he believe in? What is his credo?

Vlas (*irritated*): And yours? What do you believe in? What is your credo?

Kaleria (*ignoring Vlas*): New inspiration is given to life by people who believe in something. By the aristocrats of the spirit.

Vlas: Who are those aristocrats? Where are they to be found?

Kaleria: I'm not talking to you, Vlas. Come, Yakov Petrovich, let's sit down.

*(They come down off the verandah and sit under the pines, resuming their conversation in lowered tones. Kaleria is nervous, Shalimov calm. His movements are slow and languid, as if he were very tired.)*

Varvara Mikhailovna *(going over to Vlas)*: You're terribly touchy today, Vlas.

Vlas *(dully)*: I'm miserable, Varya.

Yulia Filippovna: Come down to the river with me, Vlas Mikhailovich.

Vlas: I'd rather not, if you don't mind.

Yulia Filippovna: Please do. There's something I must tell you.

Vlas *(going reluctantly)*: What is it?

*(Yulia Filippovna takes his arm and whispers something to him as they walk away. Varvara Mikhailovna goes up on the verandah.)*

Olga Alexeyevna *(taking Varvara Mikhailovna's arm)*: Varya, are you still angry with me?

Varvara Mikhailovna *(pensively)*: Angry? No.

Vlas *(in a loud voice from the depths of the stage)*: He's a cad! If he weren't my sister's husband—

Yulia Filippovna: Sh! *(Draws him with her into the woods.)*

Varvara Mikhailovna *(frightened)*: Heavens! What has happened?

Olga Alexeyevna: Our friend Yulia is probably gossiping. But I can see you are still angry, Varya. You ought to realize that what a person says in a moment of irritation—

Varvara Mikhailovna *(pensively)*: Do let's forget that, Olga, I don't like things that are patched up—not even friendship.

Olga Alexeyevna *(getting up)*: I didn't think you were one to bear a grudge. Can't you forget? Or at least forgive?

Varvara Mikhailovna *(coldly and firmly)*: We forgive too much. That's a weakness. It destroys our respect for one another. There's a certain person whom I forgave so much that now I am as nothing in his eyes.

Olga Alexeyevna *(after a pause)*: Do you mean your husband? *(Varvara Mikhailovna gazes into space without answering.)* How quickly people change! I remember him as a

student—poor and gay and carefree. Everybody loved him. But you've hardly changed at all—still so serious and thoughtful. When we heard you were going to marry him, I remember Kirill saying Sergei couldn't go wrong with a wife like you. He said Sergei was frivolous and inclined to be vulgar, but you—

Varvara Mikhailovna (*simply*): Why do you tell me that, Olga? To prove how ineffectual I am?

Olga Alexeyevna: Varya! How can you think such a thing? It just happened to come to my mind—

Varvara Mikhailovna (*softly, but very distinctly, as if pronouncing a sentence*): Yes, I'm weak and ineffectual. Is that what you wanted to say? I know it without your saying so, Olga. I've known it for a long time.

Sasha (*on the verandah*): The master's asking for you, Varvara Mikhailovna. (*Varvara Mikhailovna goes without a word into the house.*)

Olga Alexeyevna (*following her in*): But you misunderstood me, Varya...

Kalera (*softly*): For me, a person who thinks he knows the truth is as good as dead. (*Pause. Shalimov smokes.*) Tell me, do you find life a burden?

Shalimov: A heavy one at times.

Kalera: Often?

Shalimov: It's never a joy. I've seen too much to be joyful. And the times do not tend to make one joyful.

Kalera (*quietly*): The life of every thinking person is a great drama.

Shalimov: Oh, yes. By the way...

Kalera: What?

Shalimov (*getting up*): Tell me truthfully, do you like my stories?

Kalera (*eagerly*): Oh, awfully! Especially your latest ones. They are not so realistic, there is less of the gross flesh in them. They are veiled in the tender mists of melancholy that envelop the soul as clouds envelop the sun at sunset. Few are capable of appreciating them, but those few are your ardent admirers.

Shalimov (*smiling*): Thank you. Er... you were telling me about your poems. Won't you read them to me?

Kalera: I will. Later. (*Shalimov bows his head in silent acquiescence. Pause. Vlas and Yulia Filippovna come out of the woods right and walk over to the pines. Vlas sits down at the*

table, puts his elbows on it, and whistles to himself. Yulia Filippovna goes into the house.) Or perhaps now?

Shalimov: What's that?

Kalera (with a sad smile): Have you forgotten already? How soon!

Shalimov (frowning): Come now ... let me see...

Kalera (getting up): You asked me to read you my poems. Shall I read them now?

Shalimov (quickly): Oh, yes, do. Such a beautiful evening! Very appropriate. But you're mistaken: I didn't forget, I was just lost in thought and didn't catch your question.

Kalera (going into the house): Very well, I'll bring them, although I'm sure you won't find them interesting.

Shalimov (following her with his eyes): I'm sure I will.

(Kalera runs quickly up the steps, Shalimov lifts his shoulders and makes a face. Turning round, he sees Vlas. Dvoyetochiye and Suslov come down the path leading to Suslov's house. They are silent and seem to be annoyed with each other.)

Shalimov (to Vlas): Day-dreaming?

Vlas (without being rude): Whistling.

(Out on the verandah come: Olga Alexeyevna, who sits down in a wicker chair near the railing; Ryumin, who stands beside her while she tells him something in a low voice; Basov, who goes over to the table and examines the food; Varvara Mikhailovna, who stands leaning against one of the pillars; Zamyslov, who takes up a position in front of her.)

Basov: Everybody here? Vlas? Maria Lvovna?

Vlas: I'm here.

(Yulia Filippovna comes out of the house humming to herself, and sits down on one of the steps.)

Zamyslov: We're all very complicated people, Varvara Mikhailovna.

Basov (leaning over the railing): You here, Yakov? Good.

Zamyslov: It's just because our psychical processes are complicated that we are the elect, the intelligentsia. And you—



*(Dvoyetochiye stands listening to Zamyslov. Suslov, with a glance at the orator, goes over to where Shalimov and Vlas are sitting. Sonya and Maria Lvovna come out of the woods right.)*

Varvara Mikhailovna (*nervously*): We're not the intelligentsia. We're something quite different. We're just summer folk—people who come and go. We're too busy looking for a cosy nest to settle ourselves in to really do anything—anything, that is, but talk.

Basov (*mockingly*): You give brilliant proof of your own theory.

*(Kaleria comes out with a notebook in hand, stands beside the table and listens.)*

Varvara Mikhailovna (*waxing vehement*): And our talk is full of lies. We dress ourselves up in pretty phrases, in tawdry book learning to hide the nakedness of our souls. We talk about the tragedy of life without really living, and we wallow in the pleasure of moaning and complaining.

*(Dudakov comes out on the verandah and stands where his wife cannot see him.)*

Ryumin (*nervously*): That isn't fair. There is beauty in complaint. It is cruel to doubt the sincerity of a person's lamentations, Varvara Mikhailovna.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I'm sick of hearing them. It's time we had the courage to keep quiet. We have no right to keep talking about our little griefs. We know well enough how to keep quiet when we're content with life, don't we? Each of us nibbles his happiness in secret, but he takes his pricks and pains out into the street to be displayed to everybody and bemoaned from the house-tops. We poison the air with the refuse thrown out of our kitchens. In just the same way we throw out the garbage of our souls. Oh, there's no doubt but that hundreds and thousands of healthy people perish from the poison of our moans and groans. Who ever gave us the right to make a display of our sores?

*(Pause.)*

Vlas (*quietly*): Bravo, Varya!

Dvoyetochiye: Very true. Good girl.

*(Maria Lvovna strokes Varvara Mikhailovna's hand in silence. Vlas and Sonya stand beside her. Ryumin jerks his head nervously.)*

Ryumin: A word. Allow me to speak—for the last time.

Kaleria: It's time we had the courage to keep quiet.

Olga Alexeyevna *(to Basov)*: How boldly and harshly she speaks these days!

Basov: Thus spake Balaam's—

*(He breaks off and covers his mouth with his hand. Varvara Mikhailovna is too excited to notice, but many of the others hear it. Zamyslov quickly goes down the steps and over to the pines, laughing. Shalimov smiles and shakes his head reprovingly. Vlas and Sonya look at Basov contemptuously. The others pretend not to have heard. A strained silence. Suslov coughs and smiles. Noticing that something is wrong, Varvara Mikhailovna looks anxiously about her.)*

Varvara Mikhailovna: Did I say something rude—something I shouldn't? Why does everyone act so strangely?

Vlas *(in a loud voice)*: It isn't you who was rude.

Olga Alexeyevna *(with an innocent look)*: Why, what's the matter?

Maria Lvovna *(quickly and quietly)*: Don't Vlas. *(She begins to speak in order to counteract the effect of Basov's words, but warms to her subject as she goes on. Shalimov, Suslov and Zamyslov make a point of not listening to her. Dudakov keeps nodding his head approvingly. Basov looks at her gratefully and signs to the others to listen.)* We ought to be different—all of us. We're the children of cooks and laundresses, of wholesome working people, and we ought to be different. Never before have Russians of education been connected with the masses by ties of blood. These blood ties ought to fill us with a desire to improve and brighten and expand the lives of those, our kith and kin, who sweat in darkness and dirt from morning to night. Not for pity of them, nor for charity's sake, should we seek to improve life, but for our own sakes, to escape an accursed isolation, to annihilate the yawning precipice out of which our kith and kin gaze up at us on the heights as at their enemies, who live by their labour. They sent us ahead to find a road leading

to a better life for all; we went ahead and got lost. And in this isolation of our own creating our lives are filled with alarm and torn by contradictions. That is the real drama of our lives. But we ourselves are to blame for it. We deserve the suffering we have brought on ourselves, and, as you say, Varya, we have no right to poison the air with our groans.

*(Exhausted by her effort, she sits down beside Varvara Mikhailovna. Silence.)*

Dudakov *(looking at the others)*: There you are. There's the truth for you.

Olga Alexeyevna *(quickly)*: You? Come here.

Shalimov *(lifting his hat)*: Have you finished, Maria Lvovna?

Maria Lvovna: Yes.

Olga Alexeyevna *(leading her husband over to a corner of the verandah)*: Did you hear? Did you understand? What a fool Basov is!

Dudakov *(softly)*: Why Basov?

*(Movement on the verandah. Varvara Mikhailovna looks round at everybody. No one is sure that Basov's break has been forgotten.)*

Olga Alexeyevna: Sh. Varya said a lot of nasty things, and he called her Balaam's ass.

Dudakov: He's a blockhead. Listen, Olga, when I left home—

Olga Alexeyevna: Wait, Kaleria is going to read her poetry to us. But it's a good thing, I'm glad. Varya's become very high and mighty of late.

*(Ryumin, depressed, goes down off the verandah and begins pacing up and down.)*

Shalimov: Attention, everybody! Kaleria Vasilyevna has kindly agreed to read some of her poems to us.

Basov: Very nice. Begin, dear.

Kaleria *(bashfully)*: If you like.

Shalimov: Here's a chair.

Kaleria: No, thank you. How do you explain such interest in my poetry all of a sudden, Varya? I'm quite overcome.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I don't know. Somebody

must have made an indiscreet remark and everybody's anxious to cover it up.

K a l e r i a : Well, I'm going to begin. My poems will meet the same fate as your words, Varya. Everything is sucked down into the mire of this life of ours.

Pale, immaculate snow-flakes  
Flutter like dead little flowers,  
Blown by the breath of autumn  
Out of their chilly bowers.

Softly they settle; a coverlet  
Drawn o'er the sickly earth,  
Hiding its sores 'neath a whiteness  
Pure as an infant at birth.

Lifeless the trees and the bushes;  
Soulless the days and nights,  
Soundless the pale little snow-flakes,  
Falling from frozen heights.

*(Pause. Everyone looks at Kaleria as if expecting more.)*

S h a l i m o v : Charming.

R y u m i n *(contemplatively)*:

Blown by the breath of autumn  
Out of their chilly bowers.

V l a s *(impetuously)*: I, too, write poetry; I, too, want to read it.

D v o y e t o c h i y e *(laughing)*: Let's hear!

S h a l i m o v : An interesting competition.

V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a : Must you, Vlas?

Z a m y s l o v : Indeed he must if it's to be amusing.

M a r i a L v o v n a : Don't forget, my dear boy: always be yourself. *(All eyes are on Vlas' excited face. Silence.)*

V l a s : I want to prove to you how simple it is to clutter up the minds of your fellow-men with poetry. *(Recites in a strong, clear voice that rings with challenge)*:

Little, lugubrious people,  
Shrinking from storm and strife,  
Wander the earth in search of  
A means of escaping from life.

Drab little cowards and liars,  
With nothing but moans in their breast,  
They hope to get happiness gratis—  
Comfort, satiety, rest.

Empty their high-sounding phrases,  
Stolen their trivial thoughts—  
Little, lugubrious people,  
Born of miasmal grots.

*(When he finishes he stands motionless, looking in turn at Shalimov, Ryumin, and Suslov. Pause. Everyone feels uneasy. Kaleria shrugs her shoulders. Shalimov slowly lights a cigarette. Suslov is wrought up. Maria Lvovna and Varvara Mikhailovna go over to Vlas as if to shield him.)*

Dudakov (*quietly and distinctly*): Very apt. Quite to the point, I should say.

Yulia Filippovna: Bravo! That's the sort of thing I like!

Dvoyetochiye: A nice little slap in the face, deuced if it isn't!

Kaleria: Coarse and vicious. What makes him like that?

Zamyslov: Not the least bit amusing, not the least.

Shalimov: Did you like it, Sergei?

Basov: Me? Oh, I don't know—that is, of course, the rhymes are weak, but as a bit of humorous verse—

Zamyslov: It's very serious verse.

Yulia Filippovna (*to Shalimov*): You're a past master at pretending.

Suslov (*with spleen*): Allow me, one of your "little, lugubrious people," to give my answer to that . . . that . . . I'm sorry, but I don't know what to call that particular genre. But it's not you, Vlas Mikhailovich, that I'll answer. I'll address myself to the source of your inspiration: to Maria Lvovna.

Vlas: What's that? Mind what you're saying!

Maria Lvovna (*proudly*): To me? Very odd. But go ahead.

Suslov: Not odd at all, for you, I know, are this poet's muse.

Vlas: Don't be a cad.

Yulia Filippovna (*gently*): He doesn't know how to be anything else.

Suslov: Don't interrupt. When I finish, I'll answer for all I've said. You, Maria Lvovna, are what is called a person of high principles. You've devoted yourself to some mysterious cause—maybe a great one, even a historic one—I can't say, but evidently you think your activities give you the right to look down on other people.

Maria Lvovna (*calmly*): That's not true.

Suslov: You try to exert influence over everybody, to teach others how they ought to behave. You've made this boy think he has a right to judge others—

Vlas: What piffle are you talking?

Suslov (*viciously*): Patience, youngster! I've borne your mocking long enough. What I want to say is, that if we don't live as you think we ought to, respected Maria Lvovna, there's good reason for it. We starved and suffered enough in our childhood. It's only natural that on growing up we should want to eat and drink and enjoy ourselves to our heart's content, that we should want to make up for all the hunger and hardships behind us.

Shalimov (*dryly*): And who, may I ask, do you mean by "we"?

Suslov (*growing more vehement*): We? You, and I, and he, and all of us. Yes, we're all children of the poor. We all worked and starved in childhood. And now that we're grown up we want to eat and take life easy—that's our psychology. You may not like it, Maria Lvovna, but it's only natural, and nothing else is to be expected of us. The human nature in us comes first, Maria Lvovna, and then all the tinsel and furbishing. And therefore I say, leave us alone! Do you think that by rating us day in and day out, by getting others to rate us, by calling us cowards and loafers, you can make us social-minded? Oh, no! Not a single one of us—

Dudakov: How cheap! Hadn't you better make it short?

Suslov (*more vehement than ever*): As for myself, let me say that I'm no child, Maria Lvovna, and there's no sense trying to teach me! I'm a grown man. I'm the ordinary run of Russian—that's it, the ordinary run, and nothing more! That's what I am and what I mean to be. I *like* being it, if you want to know it. I intend to live as I please in spite of all your sermons, your preachings, your lofty ideas!

*(He slaps his hat on to his head and goes off swiftly in the direction of his house. General consternation. Zamyslov, Basov and Shalimov withdraw to one side, whispering together excitedly. Varvara Mikhailovna and Maria Lvovna remain standing together. Yulia Filippovna, Dvoyetochiye, Dudakov and his wife form another group. General distress. Kaleria, depressed, sits alone under the pines. Ryumin walks quickly up and down.)*

Vlas *(going off to one side and clutching his head)*: Good God! What ever made me do it?

*(Sonya goes over and says something to him.)*

Maria Lvovna: An attack of hysterics. Only a person who is mentally unbalanced could let himself go like that.

Ryumin *(to Maria Lvovna)*: Now do you see how horrible it is to tell the truth?

Varvara Mikhailovna: How very sad!

Dvoyetochiye *(to Yulia Filippovna)*: I don't understand a thing—not a thing.

Yulia Filippovna: Has he hurt you, Maria Lvovna?

Maria Lvovna: Me? Oh, no. Only himself.

Dvoyetochiye: A fine state of affairs, ladies and gentlemen! A fine state!

Dudakov *(to his wife)*: Just a second. *(To Dvoyetochiye.)* An abscess has burst. An abscess of the heart. The same thing might happen to any of us. *(He stammers in his excitement and is unable to go on.)*

Yulia Filippovna: Nikolai Petrovich—

Zamyslov *(coming over)*: Has this upset you?

Yulia Filippovna: Not in the least. But I don't think I want to stay here. Take me home.

Zamyslov: Idiotic, isn't it? And a pity. The chief had got such a delicious surprise ready for us.

Yulia Filippovna: We've had surprise enough for one day.

*(They go out.)*

Shalimov *(going over to Kaleria)*: How did you like it?

Kaleria: Horrible! As if the muck had risen from the bottom of a bog and were choking me ... choking me!...

(*Basov goes over to Vlas and takes his arm.*)

Vlas: What do you want?

Basov (*leading him aside*): A word with you.

Ryumin (*distracted, going over to Varvara Mikhailovna*): I've been overwhelmed, swept away by this regurgitation of middle-class bile, Varvara Mikhailovna. I'm going away. Good-bye. I only came to say good-bye to you. I wanted so badly to spend a quiet evening together—my last evening! I'm going away forever. Good-bye.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*not listening to him*): Do you know what I've been thinking? Perhaps Suslov is more honest than the rest of you. I mean it. He put it crudely, but what he said was the bitter truth, and nobody else has the courage to say it.

Ryumin (*recoiling*): Is that all? Is that your farewell? My God! (*He goes into the woods upstage.*)

Basov (*to Vlas*): Well, you've distinguished yourself, my fine fellow! What's to be done about it now? You've insulted my sister, and Yakov, who's a writer, and a well-known one at that. And Suslov. And Ryumin. You'll have to apologize.

Vlas: Wha-at? Me apologize? To them?

Basov: Don't take it so hard. Just say you wanted to have some fun and put it on a bit too thick. They'll forgive you—they're used to your tricks—they all know you're eccentric.

Vlas (*shouting*): You go to hell! It's you who are eccentric! A clown, that's what you are!

Sonya: Heavens! Less noise!

Varvara Mikhailovna: Vlas, what are you saying?

Maria Lvovna: We've been caught up in a wave of madness.

Dvoyetochiye: Go away, Vlas; go away, lad.

Basov: Not so fast. It's me he's insulted this time.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Don't, Sergei. Vlas!

Basov: I'll teach him to call me a clown!

Vlas: It's only respect for my sister keeps me from telling you—

Varvara Mikhailovna: Vlas! Not another word!

(*Kaleria comes up.*)

Sasha (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*): Shall I serve supper?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Go away!



Sasha (*under her breath, to Dvoyetochiye*): It'd be better to serve it. The master would get over his anger if he saw food on the table.

Dvoyetochiye: Get out of here! Shoo!

Basov (*to Vlas*): I'll teach you! (*Suddenly shouting.*) You young upstart!

Kaleria: Sergei, are you crazy?

Basov: An upstart, that's what he is!

Shalimov (*taking Basov's arm and leading him into the house. Sasha follows them*): Drop it.

Maria Lvovna: Vlas Mikhailovich! How could you?

Vlas: Am I to blame? Am I?

Sasha: Shall I serve the supper, Sergei Vasilyevich?

Basov: Be off with you! I'm nobody here—in my own house! (*Goes inside.*)

Maria Lvovna (*to Sonya*): Take him to our place. (*To Vlas.*) Go, Vlas.

Vlas: Forgive me. And you forgive me, sister. It's all my fault. My poor sister! Leave this place. Go away somewhere.

Varvara Mikhailovna (*softly*): Where shall I go?

Dvoyetochiye: With us. That would be ripping.

(*Nobody hears what he says. With a deep sigh he turns and goes down the path to Suslov's house.*)

Maria Lvovna: You come to my place too, Varya.

Varvara Mikhailovna: I will ... later. Vlas ... I'll come.

(*Varvara Mikhailovna goes into the house. Maria Lvovna follows her. Vlas and Sonya go into the woods. Kaleria, crushed, staggers into the house.*)

Olga Alexeyevna: What a scene! And so unexpected! Do you understand how it happened, Kirill?

Dudakov: Me? Oh, yes. The time was sure to come when we'd fly at each other's throats. Vlas hit the nail straight on the head, Olga. But it's time for you to go home.

Olga Alexeyevna: Wait. It's so exciting. Maybe something else will happen.

Dudakov: For shame, Olga. And besides, it's really time to go home. The kids are wailing their heads off. Volka screamed at the nursemaid and she's in a huff. He says she pulled his ear.

In a word, pandemonium. I told you long ago you ought to go home.

Olga Alexeyevna: You did not. You didn't say a word.

Dudakov: I did so. Don't you remember, when we were standing up there and you told me something about Basov?

Olga Alexeyevna: Not a word! You didn't say a single word!

Dudakov: I don't know why you argue with me. I remember distinctly telling you to go home.

Olga Alexeyevna: You couldn't have. Only children and servants are told to go home.

Dudakov: What a scrappy wench you are, Olga!

Olga Alexeyevna: Kirill! You promised me you wouldn't let yourself go.

Dudakov (*marching away from her*): Oh, bother! It's all so stupid! So like a woman!

Olga Alexeyevna (*at his heels*): Stupid, you say? Like a woman? (*Tearfully.*) Thank you for that.

*(They disappear in the woods. For a few seconds the stage is empty. Darkness deepens. Basov and Shalimov come out on the verandah.)*

Shalimov: You ought to be a bit of a philosopher, old fellow. It's silly to fly off the handle at every little thing.

Basov: The young upstart! The whipper-snapper! But I hope you're not angry, are you?

Shalimov: Oh, we often come up against things like that—couplets written by would-be poets in the trashy papers, but nobody takes them seriously.

*(They come down off the verandah and stand under the pines. Suslov goes over to them quickly.)*

Suslov: Sergei Vasilyevich! I've come back to . . . I know I owe you an apology. . . . (*To Shalimov.*) And you, too, but I just couldn't contain myself. She raises my gorge—simply can't stand her and her kind. Can't stand her face, or her way of speaking, or anything else.

Basov: I understand you, old man; I understand you perfectly. A person ought to show tact and understanding.

Shalimov (*dryly*): You went a little too far.

**B a s o v** (*hurriedly*): What of it? I endorse everything he said. In his place I'd have told her—

**S u s l o v**: The thing is that all women are actresses—Russian women, tragediennes for the most part. They like to make heroines of themselves.

**B a s o v**: Hm, women. It's very hard to get on with them.

(*Varvara Mikhailovna and Maria Lvovna come out on the verandah.*)

**S h a l i m o v**: We ourselves make it hard. We must simply look upon them as of a lower species.

**B a s o v** (*as if voicing another's thoughts*): Quite right. Yes, old fellow, you're right. Women haven't climbed as high in the scale as we have. And if we are to subjugate them to our will, we must use a gentle despotism with them—gentle, but strong, with beauty in the strength.

(*A shot rings out in the woods right. No one pays any attention to it.*)

**S u s l o v**: No, all we have to do is keep them pregnant, then we've got them where we want them.

**V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a** (*softly, but forcefully*): How revolting!

**M a r i a L v o v n a**: Good heavens, there's an odour here like the decay of dead bodies! Come away, Varya!

(*Suslov slinks away, coughing into his hand.*)

**B a s o v** (*hastening over to his wife*): Come now, Pyotr, that's going a little too far—that's stooping pretty low.

**V a r v a r a M i k h a i l o v n a** (*to Shalimov*): You! You!

**S h a l i m o v** (*taking off his hat and shrugging his shoulders*): Me, as you see.

**M a r i a L v o v n a**: Come quickly, Varya. Come away. (*Draws her after her. Basov watches them go in dismay.*)

**B a s o v**: Damn it all, they must have heard everything.

**S h a l i m o v** (*with a little laugh*): A fine friend you turned out to be!

**B a s o v** (*vexed and disturbed*): Whatever got into him, the poisonous brute! You can't say a thing like that just anywhere!

**S h a l i m o v** (*dryly*): I'm leaving tomorrow. It's getting damp and chilly out here. Let's go inside.

**B a s o v** (*glumly*): My sister's crying in there, you can be sure.

*(They go inside. Everything is quiet. Pustobaika and Kropilkin come out from behind the house, both of them dressed warmly and carrying whistles and rattles. Someone in Suslov's house is heard to play a few chords on the piano, then Yulia Filippovna and Zamyslov sing a duet: "The weary day is dying.")*

Pustobaika: You show yourself on that path, I'll show myself on this, and then we'll go into the kitchen to have tea with Stepanida.

Kropilkin: We came out too early; nobody's asleep yet.

Pustobaika: It's just a matter of showing ourselves. Get along.

Kropilkin (*going off left*): Off I goes, O Lordy, Lordy!

Pustobaika: All the rubbish they leave, the swine! Like picnickers, these summer folk—come, clutter things up and go away, leaving you to sweep and pick up after them.

*(In exasperation he makes a lot of noise with his whistle and rattle. Kropilkin whistles in reply. Pustobaika goes out. Kaleria comes out of the house and sits down under the pines, mournful and pensive. She hums an accompaniment to the singing and nods her head in tune to it. From the woods on the right comes the voice of Pustobaika.)*

Pustobaika (*in alarm*): Who are you? What? Good Lord!

*(Kaleria listens with a startled look on her face.)*

Pustobaika (*leading in Ryumin*): Is it to the Basovs' you want to go?

Kaleria: Sergei! Sergei!

Ryumin: A doctor! Call a doctor!

Kaleria: Pavel Sergeyevich! You? What happened? What's the matter with him?

Pustobaika: I goes down the path and sees him crawling towards me on the ground. Says he's wounded.

Kaleria: Wounded? Sergei, go for Maria Lvovna! He needs a doctor, quick!

Basov (*running out of the house*): What's the matter? What has happened?

Ryumin: Forgive me.

Kaleria: Who wounded you?

Pustobaika (*muttering*): Who'd wound a person here? Nobody but himself. Here's the weapon. (*Takes a revolver out of the breast of his coat and surveys it calmly.*)

Basov: You? I thought it was Zamyslov. I thought Pyotr had—(*Runs off, calling.*) Maria Lvovna!

Shalimov (*wrapped in a rug*): What? Has something happened?

Kalera: Are you in great pain?

Ryumin: I'm ashamed. Frightfully ashamed.

Shalimov: Perhaps it isn't dangerous?

Ryumin: Take me away from here. I don't want her to see me. Take me away, please do.

Kalera (*to Shalimov*): Go and call somebody. Why do you stand there?

(*Shalimov hurries off to the Suslov's house. The noise of people running, excited outcries. Maria Lvovna, Varvara Mikhailovna, Sonya and Vlas come in.*)

Maria Lvovna: You? Sonya, help me. Take off his jacket. Quiet, quiet, don't get excited.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Pavel Sergeevich!

Ryumin: Forgive me. I intended to end it once and for all, but when a person's heart is very small and is beating very hard, it's not easy.

Varvara Mikhailovna: But why? Why?

Kalera (*to Ryumin, hysterically*): How cruel of you! (*Catching herself.*) But what am I saying? Forgive me.

Vlas (*to Kalera*): Go away, you shouldn't see things like this. Go away.

(*She goes over to the pines. Dvoyetochiye, hatless, in a vest without a jacket and with a topcoat thrown over his shoulders, comes running in with Suslov; behind them come Zamyslov, Yulia Filippovna, Dudakov, untidy and irritable, and Olga Alexeyevna, meek and dismayed.*)

Maria Lvovna: Here's the wound, I don't think it's serious.

Ryumin: People are coming. Varvara Mikhailovna, give me your hand.

Varvara Mikhailovna: But why?

Ryumin: I love you. I can't live without you.

Vlas (*between his teeth*): Damn you and your love!

Kaleria (*in a loud whisper*): How dare you say such a thing! How dare you give a final blow to one who is dying!

Maria Lvovna (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*): Go away. (*To Ryumin.*) You have nothing to fear, the wound is a trifle. Here's another doctor.

Dudakov: What is it? A gun wound? In the shoulder? Why shoot yourself in the shoulder? You want to do it in your left side, or in your temple, if you're really serious.

Maria Lvovna: Think what you're saying, Kirill Akimovich!

Dudakov: Quite. I beg your pardon. Bandaged him up? Good. Take him inside.

Basov: Into our house. Our house, Varya?

Ryumin: Don't lift me. I can walk.

Dudakov: Can you? Good.

Ryumin (*staggers away, supported by Basov and Suslov*): I made a hash out of my life and couldn't even die gracefully. A pathetic specimen.

*(They lead him into the house. Dudakov goes with them.)*

Yulia Filippovna: He's right.

Zamyslov (*drearily*): What a sorry farce!

Pustobaika (*to Dvoyetochiye*): I'm the one as found him.

Dvoyetochiye: Good for you. Very good indeed.

Pustobaika: Oughtn't I to get something for my pains?

Dvoyetochiye (*reproachfully*): You unfeeling man! (*Gives him a coin.*)

Pustobaika: Thanks.

Kaleria (*to Varvara Mikhailovna*): Is he going to die? I'm the one who should have done that, aren't I, Varya?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Hush. Don't say such things. (*Hysterically.*) What disgusting creatures we are! Why, oh why?

Shalimov (*to Maria Lvovna*): Is it a dangerous wound?

Maria Lvovna: No.

Shalimov: It's all very unpleasant. Varvara Mikhailovna, allow me—

Varvara Mikhailovna (*starting*): What?

Shalimov: Just a few minutes ago you heard me say— (*Basov, Suslov and Dudakov come on.*)

Basov: We've put him to bed.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Leave me alone! I don't believe you; I don't want to hear your explanations. I hate all of you with all my heart! You're miserable, contemptible monstrosities!

Vlas: Wait, sister, let me tell them. I know what they are—they're mummies. And I'll spend the rest of my life tearing off the costumes they wear to cover up their lies, their vulgarity, the poverty of their feelings and the obscenity of their thoughts!

*(Shalimov shrugs his shoulders and walks off to one side.)*

Maria Lvovna: Stop it. It won't do the least good.

Varvara Mikhailovna: No, let them hear. I've paid dearly for my right to tell them what I think of them! They've twisted my soul out of shape and ruined my life. Was I like this before? There's nothing I believe in any more—nothing at all. I have no strength left, and nothing to live for. Is that what I used to be? That's what they've brought me to.

Yulia Filippovna (*agonizedly*): I, too, can say that!

Olga Alexeyevna (*to her husband*): Look at Varya. Take a good look at her face. Did you ever see anything so vicious?

*(Dudakov shakes off his wife's arm.)*

Basov: Don't Varya. Must we have this? After all, nothing in particular has happened. Ryumin has done a foolish thing, but is it worth—?

Varvara Mikhailovna: Don't come near me, Sergei!

Basov: But, darling—

Varvara Mikhailovna: I never was your darling, or you mine. We have never been anything to each other but husband and wife. Now there is nothing at all between us. I am going away.

Basov: Where? For shame, Varya! In front of everybody! Out in the street, so to speak—

*(Suslov stands motionless at the back of the stage.)*

Varvara Mikhailovna: There's nobody here.

Maria Lvovna: Come away, Varya.

Yulia Filippovna: Don't interrupt her. Let her have her say.

Dvoyetochiye (*bitterly*): Ah, good folk, you've upset me bad today, indeed you have.

Kaleria (*to Maria Lvovna*): What is it? Do you understand what's happened?

Maria Lvovna: Calm yourself. Help me take her away.

Varvara Mikhailovna: Yes, I'm going away—as far away as possible from this place where everything is rotten and corrupt. Away from these people with nothing to do. I want to live! And I intend to live. To live and work—to undo the harm you've done. (*Looks at them and cries out in despair.*) May you be accursed forever!

Vlas: Come, sister. Don't. You've said enough. (*Leads her away.*)

Basov (*to Shalimov*): This is outrageous! Why don't you help me do something about it?

Shalimov (*sarcastically*): Give her a glass of cold water. What else can you do?

Yulia Filippovna (*going over to Varvara Mikhailovna*): If only I could go away too!

Basov: Varya! Where are you going? I wouldn't have expected this of you. Maria Lvovna! You're a doctor. You ought to do something to quiet her nerves.

Maria Lvovna: Don't talk to me.

Dvoyetochiye (*to Basov*): Tck! A fine one you are!

(*Follows Varvara Mikhailovna and Vlas into the woods right.*)

Kaleria (*sobbing*): And me? What is to become of me?

Sonya (*going over to her*): Come to our house. (*Leads her away.*)

Yulia Filippovna (*with grim tranquillity*): Well, Pyotr Ivanovich, let's go on living.

(*Suslov grins and follows her.*)

Basov: What's happening? Everyone suddenly gone clean off their chumps! Was there ever an idiot like that Ryumin? Just because his nerves happened to be unstrung. . . . Why don't you say something, Yakov? What are you laughing at? Do you think it'll pass over? It happened so suddenly—bang!—and everything blown to smithereens. What are we to do now?

Shalimov: Take it easy, old fellow. It's nothing but a display of oratory inspired by hysterics.



*(Takes Basov's arm and leads him to the house. Dudakov, with his hands clasped behind him, comes out of the house and goes slowly to the right where his wife is waiting for him under the trees.)*

B a s o v : Damnation!

S h a l i m o v (*mockingly*): Come, come. The Suslovs, as you see, have decided to go on living; let us calmly do the same.

O l g a A l e x e y e v n a : Kirill, is he going to die?

D u d a k o v (*testily*): No. Come along. Nobody's going to die.

*(They go into the woods.)*

S h a l i m o v : It's all so unimportant, old fellow. Everything. People as well as events. Pour me out a glass of wine. So utterly meaningless, old fellow. (*Drinks. From the woods comes the long low whistle of the watchman.*)

C U R T A I N