

AN ANONYMOUS STORY

by

ANTON CHEKHOV

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and developed in collaboration with
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

VLADIMIR: a revolutionary, ill with Tuberculosis.
"Stepan" is his assumed name.

ORLOV: A well-to-do government official of no consequence whatsoever. About 35.

ORLOV'S FATHER: the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs.

ZINAIDA: Orlov's lover, married to another man.

POLYA: a maid.

GRUZIN: Orlov's friend.

Note: Orlov and Orlov's Father are played by the same actor.

SETTING

The action takes place in Orlov's home, various locations around St. Petersburg, and later briefly in Venice, and Nice. The story begins in 1887, not long after the execution of Alexander Ulyanov and several others for their part in an assassination attempt on the life of Czar Alexander III.

A NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

I first encountered the treasure trove of Chekhov's short, and not so short, stories as a graduate student, when a good friend of mine allowed me to direct his adaptation of *Ward Six*. I immediately fell in love with the story, and found in it a whole new dimension in Chekhov's work, apart from the great plays of his so familiar on stage. The stories, in particular the longer ones, or "novellas," often rove across distant, unfamiliar landscapes, the far-flung Russian provinces, the great cities, and even to other parts of Europe. Then in 2004, I returned to the multitudinous short stories—some say there are as many as 300 of them!—when we decided to adapt one for a project at Central Works. But we didn't know which one. Choosing from so many rich options proved a considerable challenge. In the end, we narrowed it down to two, and finally chose

The Duel, one of Chekhov's masterpieces. That project was so exciting, and so artistically rewarding, that I've long wanted to return to the same well once again. This year we decided to turn to the other story, the one not chosen in 2004, *An Anonymous Story*. Completed in 1893, this curious tale is a much lesser known work of Chekhov's. Though both stories have many of the same themes in common, *Anonymous* stands out among the rest of Chekhov's work for its peculiar veneer of political intrigue. The "Anonymous Man" at the heart of this story is a revolutionary of some sort, though Chekhov tells us virtually nothing about the character's actual politics. We have set the play in 1887, the year Chekhov began writing it. That year Alexander Ulyanov and several others were executed for attempting to assassinate Czar Alexander III. Ulyanov's younger brother was Vladimir Lenin. It would be nearly twenty-five years after the publication of *An Anonymous Story* before the Russian Revolution finally erupted in full. Chekhov, however, was no *proto-Bolshevik*. The hero in this story is driven by something other than his political principles, something more familiarly Chekhovian perhaps.

ACT ONE

1 SCENE ONE

1

(Lights up in the drawing room of Orlov's flat in St. Petersburg. Eleven o'clock in the morning.

VLADIMIR enters dressed as a footman, wearing a "swallowtail" servant's coat.

He looks around, listens at a door in the room, then turns to Orlov's writing desk.

He opens a few drawers, rifling through letters and papers, notices one in particular, and notes something about it on a small pad he keeps in his jacket.

Then he turns to the audience.)

VLADIMIR

For reasons I would rather not go into at the moment, I am masquerading as a footman in the service of Georgy Ivanitch Orlov. I took the assignment because of his father. A prominent politician. Marked for execution. By the Faction. I am not a footman.

(ORLOV enters. He wears slippers and a morning robe or house coat over his clothes. He is "exhausted by sleep." He sits, groggy and dissatisfied with everything.

VLADIMIR waits in attendance, at a distance, watching, waiting.

ORLOV lets out a long, sad sigh.

VLADIMIR coughs.

POLYA enters. She brings coffee and the morning paper. She pours the coffee. VLADIMIR serves it. Orlov slurps the coffee, then downs it.

VLADIMIR takes the empty coffee cup, and hands Orlov the paper. ORLOV sits and reads the morning paper.

VLADIMIR and POLYA wait in attendance.

Again, ORLOV sighs.)

ORLOV

(thinking out loud)

Of what consequence is a man's appearance? Of what consequence...is anything?

(VLADIMIR coughs again.

POLYA winces at the sound of the bad cough.

ORLOV regards the footman.)

ORLOV (cont'd)

I'll need my portfolio. I'm going into the office today.

VLADIMIR

Very well.

POLYA

Will you be dining in tonight, sir?

ORLOV

I don't know.

(beat)

There's a bad smell in here.

(looks at Vladimir)

VLADIMIR

I opened the windows this morning.

ORLOV

Do you smell that?

VLADIMIR

Smell what?

ORLOV

That. You don't smell that?

VLADIMIR

No, I don't smell anything, I open the windows every morning and I--

ORLOV

Don't argue with me, you idiot!

(Beat.

VLADIMIR glares at ORLOV.)

POLYA

Yes, I smell it. I wonder what that is? Stepan, open the windows--again.

(VLADIMIR moves to open the windows.)

ORLOV

Never mind that. Where's the letter?

POLYA

The letter, sir?

ORLOV

The letter!

POLYA

Oh, yes, the letter.

(POLYA retrieves a letter and gives it to Orlov.)

ORLOV

(gives the letter to Vladimir)

Go to Znamensky Street. Deliver this letter to Madam Krasnovsky. In person. But first ask the porter if Mr. Krasnovsky is at home. If he is, don't deliver the letter. Just come back. Is that clear?

(VLADIMIR nods, and starts out.)

ORLOV (cont'd)

Wait.

(beat)

If he's not home, and you give her the letter, she might ask questions. If she asks where I am, tell her I'm visiting with a friend. And we're busy at work.

(ORLOV exits.)

VLADIMIR puts on his coat and hat. He coughs.

POLYA

Bad cough.

(POLYA exits.)

Lights change to Krasnovsky's House.

VLADIMIR waits to deliver the letter.

ZINAIDA hurries in, dressed in black, a sparkling diamond ring on her wedding finger. She is surprised to discover Vladimir in the room.)

Oh.
ZINAIDA

Madam Krasnovsky?
VLADIMIR

Yes.
ZINAIDA

A letter from Mr. Orlov.
VLADIMIR

(She tears open the letter, and reads it. He watches her as she reads.)

ZINAIDA
(after reading the letter)
Give him my thanks. And my greetings.

Yes, Madam.
VLADIMIR

Wait. Where is he?
ZINAIDA

He's visiting with a friend. And they're very busy.
VLADIMIR

Ah. Well, give him my greetings.
ZINAIDA

(He nods.)

She tilts her head, and re-reads the letter as she exits the room.

He watches her go, tilting his head, as well. He smiles. And exits.

Lights change.)

2 SCENE TWO

2

(Back in Orlov's drawing room. Another morning. POLYA enters. She buttons up her blouse. Powders her face, colors her lips and eyebrows, laces herself up, wearing a bustle, and a bangle made of coins.

She steals something.

VLADIMIR enters. They prepare the room for the master in some way. They eye one another. Is there attraction? They move close. Will they kiss?)

VLADIMIR

That scent you're wearing...

POLYA

(seductively)

Yes?

VLADIMIR

Is that the master's?

(She glares at him.)

VLADIMIR (cont'd)

Did you steal it from him?

POLYA

I hate you. What are you doing here? You've not been properly trained. You don't know what you're doing. You're not right for this job. What are you? Who are your references? You have none. Why not? Look at you. You don't look right.

(He coughs.)

And you're sick. What's wrong with you? That's a bad cough. You keep me awake at night with that cough. Do you know that? I can hear you right through the wall. All night long. You should be in the hospital. Not here.

VLADIMIR

Do you believe in God?

POLYA

What?

VLADIMIR

I said, do you believe in--

POLYA

I heard you. Yes, of course, I believe in God. What--you don't?

(beat)

I see. No God, no laws--what--you want to set fire to the house--is that it? Commit murder? Anarchy? Are you one of them?

VLADIMIR

Do you believe in a final Day of Judgement?

(beat)

I don't like telling lies.

(ORLOV pops in.)

ORLOV

Ah. There you are.

POLYA

Sir?

ORLOV

(extends a letter)

Here.

(POLYA moves to take the letter.)

ORLOV (cont'd)

(withdrawing the letter)

No.

(ORLOV extends the letter to VLADIMIR.)

POLYA exits, angrily.

VLADIMIR takes the letter.)

ORLOV (cont'd)

Tell her I'm sorry. Actually, I completely forgot I told her I would be there. Don't tell her that, of course. Just tell her... Tell her I'm sorry. It's all in the letter. You know what to say.

VLADIMIR

Your father...

ORLOV

Hm?

VLADIMIR

Is he...were you...where is he?

ORLOV

Where is my father? How should I know? I couldn't care less. Why?

(beat)

The letter. Immediately.

(ORLOV exits.)

VLADIMIR

(alone)

Orlov is of no use to us. He has no interest whatsoever in his father's political work. No knowledge of it at all. I am wasting my time here.

(Lights change to Krasnovsky's House again.)

ZINAIDA enters.

VLADIMIR gives her the letter.

They are close.

She exits.)

3 SCENE THREE

3

(Back in Orlov's drawing room. Night.)

ORLOV and his good friend, GRUZIN, enter, with a bottle of vodka, singing the old folk song, "Korobeiniki"--loudly, badly.)

GRUZIN

"Only the deep night knows, what she agreed to.
Straighten up now, my tall shaft of rye,

(ORLOV joins in)

And keep our secret between us!"

(They laugh, drunkenly. Sit.)

ORLOV

(to Vladimir)

Give us some vodka.

(VLADIMIR serves them tea.)

ORLOV (cont'd)

What do you think, Gruzin--is there a God?

GRUZIN

God? No. Only in fairy tales.

ORLOV

What about the soul? Is there such a thing as a human soul?

GRUZIN

A quaint notion. But if there is such a thing, it ceases to exist at death. Everything ends at death. Unless you're French.

ORLOV

(laughs)

Apres moi, le deluge! [After me, the flood!]

GRUZIN

(laughs)

Are you married, Stepan?

VLADIMIR

No, sir.

GRUZIN

How fortunate for you.

(ORLOV and GRUZIN both laugh.)

ORLOV

You're a good man, Gruzin.

GRUZIN

A good man? Agh. True goodness is predicated upon an ideal of human perfectibility, which is a logical absurdity.

ORLOV

Is it? Not in my case.

(More laughter.)

GRUZIN

Is there anything to eat?

VLADIMIR

Food is on the way.

GRUZIN

Good. I'm starving.

ORLOV

Ah, Russia.

GRUZIN

Russia. Russia is a country as poor and backward as Persia. Our intellectuals are hopeless.

ORLOV

That's you that's hopeless, Gruzin. Don't confuse yourself with an intellectual.

GRUZIN

No chance of that. Intellectuals are idiots. Completely and utterly useless. Every one of them.

ORLOV

Not like you and me, eh?

(Laughter.)

POLYA enters with food.)

GRUZIN

Ah. Splendid. Food.

ORLOV

Yes, let's eat.

(POLYA serves the food.)

GRUZIN

I'll tell you something, Georgy: it's human nature. Human nature's the culprit.

ORLOV

Really--what's the crime?

GRUZIN

By nature, people are drunken, lazy, dishonest, thieves. They're degenerates.

ORLOV

By nature?

GRUZIN

They don't understand anything. Their minds are ruled by superstition, not science.

ORLOV

Well, they don't read.

GRUZIN

Why should they? Russian writers are all idiots. The whole country. Everyone's out for themselves. Nothing else. They're all just trying to sell you something--if its not one thing its another. And while they're at it, they're trying to screw you out of every ruble they can. No, I'll tell you, not until you work for the Government do you ever really know the truth.

ORLOV

Well, there you said a mouthful.

(They eat.)

GRUZIN

Wives. Women.

ORLOV

Trouble at home, Gruzin?

GRUZIN

No, no. Poor thing.

ORLOV

Her or you?

GRUZIN

There's not a wife in the world that's faithful.

ORLOV

Ha!

GRUZIN

It's true. Not a one will hold out in the end--what's more, she'll give in with her husband sitting right there in the next room--not a one!

ORLOV

You dog.

GRUZIN

And girls in their teens these days...

ORLOV

Yes?

GRUZIN

They're perverted. And they know everything.

ORLOV

Not a bad combination, if you ask me.

GRUZIN

Where's the vodka?

(ORLOV snaps his fingers at VLADIMIR.

He pours vodka.)

GRUZIN (cont'd)

How ridiculous it all is. There is no such thing as moral purity. No such thing. There never has been.

ORLOV

Who needs moral purity?

GRUZIN

Well, that's true; mankind has survived without it long enough.

ORLOV

In my opinion, the harm done by the so-called "vices" is vastly overstated. Did the vices prevent Diogenes from becoming a great philosopher?

GRUZIN

Diogenes--which one was he?

ORLOV

He went looking for an honest man.

GRUZIN

Well, he won't find one in Russia.
(They laugh.)

ORLOV

Come on. Eat up.

GRUZIN

What's the rush?

ORLOV

Varvara Ossipovna is expecting us.

GRUZIN

Oh, ho, ho, ho, ho!

ORLOV

Come on. We'll play some cards. Have a few drinks.

GRUZIN

What--you want to lose more money to me?

ORLOV

Tonight I'll have the shirt off your back.

GRUZIN

You have no talent for cards, Georgy.

ORLOV

I don't go to Varvara's for the cards. Now, come on.

(They down shots and head off.)

GRUZIN

(singing as they go)

Varvara, I hear you calling...Varvara, I think I love you...

POLYA

(after they're gone)

Pigs. I'll take care of the study. You clean up in here.

(POLYA exits.)

Alone, VLADIMIR coughs. He clears the dishes, etc.)

VLADIMIR

(alone)

There is a certain species of man in Petersburg whose special talent it is to ridicule every aspect of life. He cannot even pass by a starving man or a woman committing suicide without saying something vulgar and cynical. Or else he speaks...ironically. This is Orlov and his friends. Their irony knows no bounds. They spare no one and nothing. If they speak of religion, it is with irony.

(MORE)

VLADIMIR(cont'd)

If they speak of philosophy, about the significance and meaning of life--again, irony. If anyone brings up the poor--more irony. They disgust me.

(He coughs.

Black out.)

4 SCENE FOUR

4

(A bell rings at the front door. Lights up in Orlov's drawing room. Sunday morning. Just before eleven. ZINAIDA enters wearing her coat, etc. The wedding ring is gone. VLADIMIR follows her in. She stops.)

ZINAIDA

Is he up yet?

(POLYA enters with coffee and the newspaper.

Beat.)

ZINAIDA (cont'd)

Well, no matter.

(She exits to Orlov's room.)

POLYA

What's this all about?

VLADIMIR

(shakes his head, no)

There are two trunks, and a dress basket at the door. With a porter.

POLYA

Her's?

(beat)

Really.

(ORLOV enters in his robe, followed by ZINAIDA.)

ORLOV

Coffee. Quickly.

POLYA

I'll get another coffee.

(VLADIMIR serves coffee. POLYA returns with another, for Zinaida. Once the coffee is served, they move to their familiar waiting positions in the room--attending.)

ZINAIDA

(laughs)

I can't believe it.

(MORE)

ZINAIDA(cont'd)

It feels as if I've been traveling for days. Finally, I've arrived, but I can't believe the journey's over, can't believe I'm really here, that I don't have to keep going, on and on. It's so nice just to sit and take a breath.

(she takes a breath, another laugh)

ORLOV

Excuse me.

(picks up the paper)

The morning paper with my coffee is a habit I can't break. But don't worry, I can read and listen at the same time.

ZINAIDA

Oh, yes, read away. By all means. You should keep all of your old habits. Please. Go on.

(beat)

What's wrong? Are you always like this in the morning? Or is it me? Aren't you happy to see me?

ORLOV

Yes, of course, I am. Of course, I am. It's just a bit...well...overwhelming. That's all.

ZINAIDA

Overwhelming--why? We've been discussing it for weeks.

ORLOV

Yes, but I didn't expect you to...to...

ZINAIDA

I know. I didn't expect it myself. But all the better, hm? All the better. Best to have the aching tooth out and be done with it.

ORLOV

Yes. Of course.

ZINAIDA

Oh, darling...

(closes her eyes)

All's well that ends well. But how awful it's been. I'm laughing, but I don't know why. I'm happy, but I feel like crying. Yesterday was unbearable. *Seulement Dieu sait je misérable étais.* Only God knows how wretched I was. I'm sitting here, drinking coffee with you, but it isn't real. It's all a dream.

(ORLOV turns the page.)

ZINAIDA (cont'd)

I told him. I just broke it off. He's been suspecting something for a while. But he didn't want to discuss it. We've been fighting constantly.

(MORE)

ZINAIDA(cont'd)

Whenever he gets angry, he goes silent--retreats into his study. He's afraid to discuss anything--won't bring anything out in the open--his suspicions, my feelings. But I felt so guilty, worthless. I was paralysed. And that makes me hate myself. Makes me hate him, more and more and more. *J'ai souffert les supplices de l'enfer.* I have suffered the torments of hell.

(ORLOV turns a page.)

ZINAIDA (cont'd)

But the day before yesterday, when we fought, he cried out, in tears, "My God, my God, when will this end?" And he ran for the study, but I ran ahead of him. I had him, and I wouldn't let him pass. I shouted. "I hate you! I hate you with my entire soul!" That did it. I told him everything. I'm in love with another man. Another man...is my true husband. I have to go to him. Immediately. It's my duty. Whatever happens. Even if you shoot me for it.

ORLOV

Hm.

(ZINAIDA laughs, then looks at Polya--Vladimir.)

ZINAIDA

(back to Orlov)

He threatened me. Said horrible things. Then he cried. Cried as if I were whipping him.

(a little laugh)

You don't believe in God, but I do. A little anyway. I'm afraid. What if He punishes me?

ORLOV

Your husband?

ZINAIDA

No, God. He came to me, at two o'clock in the morning.

ORLOV

God?

ZINAIDA

No, my husband. He burst into my room, and he said, "Don't you dare leave me. I'll send the police after you. I'll tell everyone!" And then later, on his knees, he begged me, "Please, don't do this to me. Think of the scandal. I could lose my position in the service!" His Career. How disgusting. He's punishing me.

(Orlov starts to ask)

God. It begins. The tears. The fear. As though the ceiling will come crashing down upon me. Any minute the police will drag me away. You'll grow cold.

(MORE)

ZINAIDA(cont'd)

Anything can happen. "Get thee to a nunnery." Become a nurse. Abandon all hope of happiness. No. You. Georgy. You love me.

(he smiles)

Yes, you do, I mustn't forget that. I'm so confused. Despair. But look. The sun has come out. I'm happy. I've brought all my things. There, at the door. With the porter. *Ah, ce que j'ai supporté, mon cher.* What I have endured. I haven't slept in days.

(beat)

You have a cosy flat. Might be a bit small for the two of us, though. Which room will be mine? I like the one next to your study.

(she hugs him)

I will love you forever.

(she laughs)

There's no blessing greater than freedom. Isn't it absurd? I was so afraid of what other people would think, but as soon as I made up my mind, and did what I chose to do, my eyes opened up. I overcame my silly fears. And now I'm happy. I wish everyone could be as happy as I am.

ORLOV

(finishing with the paper)

Well. Good.

ZINAIDA

I'd like to change.

ORLOV

Hm?

ZINAIDA

Stepan, move my things into the room next to the study.

(to Orlov)

If that's all right.

ORLOV

Of course.

(nods to Vladimir)

ZINAIDA

Shall we go to lunch? Then some shopping perhaps. Just a few things...for my room.

ORLOV

Yes. Lunch. Let's go out. Why not? I'll dress.

(ORLOV exits, back to his room.)

ZINAIDA regards POLYA and VLADIMIR.

POLYA exits.)

ZINAIDA

(alone with Vladimir)

He'll need to pay the porter.

VLADIMIR

Yes. Madam.

(ZINAIDA exits. VLADIMIR watches her go.)

5 SCENE FIVE

5

(Lights change to night.)

VLADIMIR

(alone)

I don't know what exactly is happening to me. My thinking...
Something's got hold of me. More and more every day.
Nagging at me, in the back of my mind. A strange longing
for...an ordinary everyday life.

(GRUZIN enters, followed by ORLOV.)

GRUZIN

No, no, my dear fellow, I congratulate you. May the two of
you increase together like the Cedars of Lebanon.

(laughs)

ORLOV

Very amusing.

GRUZIN

I noticed her slippers in the hallway there. Very dainty.
Very domestic. Where is she, anyway?

ORLOV

She's gone to visit with her old governess for the evening.

GRUZIN

Hm.

ORLOV

Sit.

GRUZIN

I'm hungry.

ORLOV

You're always hungry, Gruzin.

GRUZIN

Isn't there anything to eat?

ORLOV

It's coming, it's coming.

(VLADIMIR pours vodka.)

GRUZIN

You've been snared, Georgy. Plain and simple.

ORLOV

Oh, shut up.

GRUZIN

I don't understand, how could you allow this to happen?

(POLYA enters with food.)

GRUZIN (cont'd)

He who once pointed the finger in scorn, now bows his knee in homage. All you need now is a pipe in your mouth, and the picture of your domestic happiness will be complete.

ORLOV

Eat.

GRUZIN

What about the husband?

ORLOV

What about him?

GRUZIN

I don't understand, it's one thing to fall in love--break the Seventh Commandment to your heart's content, that I understand, that makes perfect sense to me--but why bring the whole thing out into the open? What's the point of that?

(beat)

If ever you take it in to your head to seduce my wife, please, don't tell me about it, don't throw it in my face, all right? It's one thing to deceive a man, it's quite another to make a public spectacle of it. Oh, I see, you think that living together openly makes you somehow "enlightened" in your thinking, is that it?

(beat)

It's not as if you're some student and she's a dressmaker, for God's sake. You both have means. Why don't you get her a flat of her own?

ORLOV

She's been reading Turgenev.

GRUZIN

What?

ORLOV

Turgenev. Be true to your heart. Follow the man you love to ends of the earth.

(smiles)

Unfortunately, the "ends of the earth" are--in this case--my home. Thank you, Turgenev.

GRUZIN

But you invited her to move in here.

ORLOV

I did no such thing.

GRUZIN

That's not what you told me--

ORLOV

Nonsense. I never imagined this. I thought it was all a joke.

GRUZIN

A joke?

ORLOV

A whimsical "what if?" I never imagined she would actually... I'm not some hero out of Turgenev; I don't want to liberate Bulgaria. Love is nothing more than a physical necessity, if you ask me. It's a drain on the spirit. Either you satisfy it with discretion, or else you renounce it altogether. If you want to enjoy love, and not be corrupted by it, you have to cloak it in a fabric of illusions. I want to look my best when I'm with a lover. And I want her to look the same. How else would we ever be in the mood? How else can we deceive ourselves? How else can we ever really believe we're in love--that we're even happy? Do I want to see dirty dishes, soiled laundry, messy hair? Do I want a woman to see me before I've washed in the morning? Or when I'm in a foul mood? Zinaida wants me to fall in love with the very thing I've been resisting all my life. Cooking smells, cleaning fluids. She wants to count the linen, and look after my health. She wants to know about every single aspect of my personal life at every single moment of the day, while at the same time she assures me that she doesn't want to change anything about me. I have habits. I like to come and go as I please. She wants to travel together. She wants a honeymoon. She wants to be with me, constantly, in trains and hotels. I can't stand trains, and I hate hotels.

GRUZIN

Have you told her this?

ORLOV

You're not serious. Do you really think she would understand any of this? We don't think the same way. If I tried to explain all of this to her, she would go to pieces, another breakdown, then the tears, then I've ruined her, she has nothing left to live for, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera--no.

GRUZIN

All right, then don't talk to her. Just get her a flat of her own.

ORLOV

An easy thing for you to say.

(ORLOV gestures for the vodka.
VLADIMIR replenishes their glasses.)

GRUZIN

She is charming. She's exquisite. Women like her imagine they'll be in love forever. Complete abandon. Tragic devotion, that sort of thing.

ORLOV

Just have to keep a level head on my shoulders. Have to be logical about this. Everybody knows--how many books have been written on the subject--this sort of thing never lasts. No more than two or three years. No matter how intense the romance is at the beginning. Doesn't she know that? All of this--it's nothing more than a desperate attempt to delude herself--and me. Yes, she's charming and exquisite, I can't deny that. But she's turned my life upside down.

GRUZIN

Like me to take her off your hands for you?

(ORLOV smiles.)

GRUZIN (cont'd)

Careful. I mean it.

(They laugh.)

ORLOV

The devil will roast you in hell, Gruzin.

GRUZIN

(a finger to his lips)

Shhh.

ORLOV

(checks his watch)

Ut-oh.

GRUZIN

Hm?

ORLOV

Uh, the time.

GRUZIN

Oh. I see.

ORLOV

Yes, it's just that--

GRUZIN

You don't have to explain, it's written all over your face.

ORLOV

No, no, it's just that--

GRUZIN

(downing a shot)

Georgy, my friend, let's go out for a drink.

ORLOV

Oh. No. I can't.

GRUZIN

Why not?

ORLOV

(with a smile)

I'm a married man now.

GRUZIN

She won't mind. Come on. It's fantastic out there tonight. The snow, the frost. Believe me, you need it. It would be good for you.

ORLOV

Would it?

GRUZIN

Come on.

ORLOV

You're right. She won't mind.

GRUZIN

That's my Georgy.

ORLOV

Wait.

(checks watch again)

GRUZIN

Hm?

ORLOV

(to Vladimir)

Fetch our coats.

(back to Gruzin)

We'll go out through the garden.

(VLADIMIR gets their coats and hats.)

GRUZIN

The garden--why?

ORLOV

I don't want to run into her at the door.

GRUZIN

Ah. How about one to keep the chill off?
(pours himself a drink)

ORLOV

You know, Gruzin, if I didn't know any better, I'd think you only come to visit me for the food and drink I provide you with.

GRUZIN

Don't be ridiculous, Georgy, you provide me with so much more than that.

(A door closes off stage.)

ZINAIDA

(off)

Georgy?

ORLOV

That's her. Quickly. Come on.

GRUZIN

I'm coming.

ORLOV

Hurry!

(ORLOV and GRUZIN exit through the garden.)

ZINAIDA enters, opposite.)

POLYA

Good evening, Madam.

ZINAIDA

(to Vladimir)

Where is he?

VLADIMIR

He went out. Madam.

ZINAIDA

Out? Where?

POLYA

They didn't say exactly.

ZINAIDA

They--who?

POLYA

The master and his friend, Mr. Gruzin.

ZINAIDA

Gruzin. Hm.

POLYA

Went out for a drink together, I think they said. Didn't they?

(POLYA exits to the kitchen.)

ZINAIDA

Hm. Well. I suppose he's entitled to that. Once in a while.

VLADIMIR

If I'm not needed...

(starting out)

ZINAIDA

Just a moment, if you please. I have a gold broach. A present from my father.

VLADIMIR

Yes?

ZINAIDA

Have you seen it?

(beat)

VLADIMIR

No, I don't think so.

(POLYA enters, tidies up. ZINAIDA watches her, suspiciously.)

POLYA

Can I get you anything?

ZINAIDA

No, thank you.

(POLYA smiles, and exits.)

ZINAIDA looks VLADIMIR in the eye.

She exits, leaving her purse in the
room.

Lights change.)

6 SCENE SIX

6

(The middle of the night. VLADIMIR stands alone, in the shadows.)

VLADIMIR

(looking out the window)

Peace, tranquility, good health, a small piece of land in the country, the breeze blowing through the trees, across the fields. I just want to live an ordinary life.

(POLYA enters. VLADIMIR steps back into the shadows. POLYA doesn't realize he's there. She grabs Zinaida's purse, and exits.

VLADIMIR emerges from the shadows.

Lights change to morning.

ORLOV enters in his robe, ignores Vladimir, looks out the window, and sighs.

POLYA enters with coffee and the paper.

VLADIMIR serves coffee.

ORLOV downs his coffee, reads his paper.

ZINAIDA enters.)

ZINAIDA

Good morning, darling.

ORLOV

Good morning.

ZINAIDA

Stepan.

VLADIMIR

Yes, Madam.

ZINAIDA

Have you seen my purse?

(beat.)

VLADIMIR

No, Madam. I haven't. Polya? Have you seen Madam's purse?

POLYA

The little one?

ZINAIDA

Yes. My purse.

POLYA

Nope. Haven't seen it.

ZINAIDA

Strange. I distinctly remember taking it out of my pocket in here last night. I set it down here. And then I went to bed. Right here. But now I can't find it anywhere.

POLYA

Hm.

(Exits with tray, etc.)

ZINAIDA

(to Orlov)

It seems we have spirits in the flat.

ORLOV

Hm?

ZINAIDA

Someone--or something--has taken my purse.

ORLOV

Are you sure you haven't misplaced it?

ZINAIDA

Yes, I'm certain. I left it right here last night. And this morning it was gone. I've looked everywhere for it.

ORLOV

You do lose things.

ZINAIDA

I didn't lose it. It was taken.

ORLOV

Hm.

ZINAIDA

I've been doing a little thinking about this. It's quite clear to me. She took my broach. That was a gift from my father.

ORLOV

Oh, God.

ZINAIDA

And she took my purse. I'm certain of it. That explains about the handkerchiefs. And the gloves.

ORLOV

Does it.

ZINAIDA

I'm letting her go. Tomorrow. I shall send Stepan for my Sofya. At least she's not a thief.

ORLOV

Look, you can't go dismissing people simply because you suspect them of something.

ZINAIDA

I don't suspect her, I know she's done it.

ORLOV

You're upset.

ZINAIDA

You have to believe me, Georgy.

ORLOV

I don't have to believe anything. Even if you're right, there's no need to get upset about it.

ZINAIDA

Dismiss her.

(beat)

You don't understand...I'm afraid of her.

ORLOV

Afraid? Of her? Don't be absurd. Just ignore her. Pretend she isn't there. It's really quite simple. There's no need to get so upset about it. Nothing is worth the bother of all that. You've got to realize that. Really. You must. I'll buy you a new broach. Whatever was in the purse, I'll give you a hundred times the amount. How much did you lose?

(POLYA enters, walks slowly past ZINAIDA, and exits.)

ORLOV sips coffee, reads his paper.)

ZINAIDA

Are you going out today?

ORLOV

Yes.

ZINAIDA

Good.

ORLOV

No, on second thought, think I'll stay in today.

ZINAIDA

Really?

(beat)

Don't you want to go out?

ORLOV

Do you want me to go out?

ZINAIDA

No. Not unless that's what you want. I think it would be wonderful to stay in together today.

(He groans.)

ZINAIDA (cont'd)

What's the matter?

ORLOV

Nothing. Nothing at all.

(He picks up a book, and starts reading.)

ZINAIDA

What are you reading?

ORLOV

(sighs)

What does it matter?

ZINAIDA

(sits at his feet)

You read so much. You know what the secret of your success is, Georgy? You're smart and you're well-read.

(beat)

There's something I want to ask you.

(she laughs)

Shall I?

(beat)

Are you staying in today because you want to be with me? Or because you're afraid you'll hurt my feelings if you go out?

ORLOV

Truly happy is he who thinks not only of what is, but what is not.

ZINAIDA

I'm not sure what you mean by that.

ORLOV

It means whatever you like.

ZINAIDA

Ah.

(beat)

I love sitting here with you, and letting my thoughts just carry me away. Far, far away. It's pleasant to dream...sometimes. Let's dream together, Georgy.

ORLOV

I'm not a school-girl, Zinya.

ZINAIDA

You're grouchy.

(taking his hand)

Why? When you get like this, it frightens me. Is it me? Are you angry with me?

(beat)

Why have you changed? Why aren't you ever tender and sweet, and happy, like you always used to be?

ORLOV

At your husband's house?

ZINAIDA

It's been almost a month, but I don't feel at all comfortable here. We don't ever talk.

ORLOV

What--we don't talk?

ZINAIDA

Not about anything we really need to talk about.

ORLOV

More talk?

ZINAIDA

You answer with jokes, or you lecture me--

ORLOV

I mean what I say--

ZINAIDA

There's something cold in your jokes. Why don't you talk to me?

ORLOV

All right, fine. You want to talk, let's talk. What do you want to talk about?

ZINAIDA

About our life together, our future. I want to make plans. Don't you want to plan for the future?

ORLOV

What sort of plans?

ZINAIDA

Well, to begin with, when are you going to give up your post?

ORLOV

Give up my post? Why on earth would I want to do that?

ZINAIDA

The way you think? You can't stay there. You're out of place there. You shouldn't be working for the government.

ORLOV

No, I fit in perfectly there. What do you mean, the way I think? What are you talking about?

ZINAIDA

Joking again.

ORLOV

I'm not joking. I'm quite serious. You've got the wrong idea about me. It may not be my idea of the best position in the entire world, but it's just fine for me. / I'm quite used to it. I have friends there.

ZINAIDA

You hate the government. You told me it makes you sick.

ORLOV

When did I ever say that?

ZINAIDA

Many times.

ORLOV

Suppose I resigned my position--just quit, just like that--do you really think I'd hate the world one bit less than I do now?

ZINAIDA

Anything I say, you contradict me.

ORLOV

That's not true.

ZINAIDA

Why are you so angry? Is it because you spend your life writing down things you don't believe for the government? Doing as your superiors say? Congratulating them on a job well done, when you know they've failed miserably? You work for a system you detest. Why do you always joke about it? It's awful. You're a brilliant man, you ought to be working at something you believe in--and nothing less!

ORLOV

That's enough, my dear! I have good grounds for living my life as I choose. That's the first thing. The second thing is, you have, as far as I know, never worked for the government. I don't know where you get your ideas about it, but you don't get them from personal experience. So let's agree, once and for all, not to talk about things we don't know anything about!

ZINAIDA

Why do you speak to me like that? Why? For God's sake, think what you're saying!

(she sobs)

Georgy, I'm dying. I'm so miserable. I'm exhausted. *Je ne peux pas le supporter.* I can't bear it. When I was little-- my stepmother. Then my husband. Now you. I love you, but you're so cold to me. Nothing but sarcasm and anger.

(referring to Polya)

And that horrible, horrible woman.

(beat)

All right, I see. I'm not your wife. I'm not your friend. I'm just a woman you don't respect. Your mistress. Nothing more. I'll kill myself.

ORLOV

Darling, you don't understand. Forgive me. Please. I was unfair to you. I hate myself.

ZINAIDA

I've said terrible things to you. You're a good man. You're generous. You're true. And I've been so unhappy lately.

(embraces him, kisses him on the cheek)

ORLOV

Please. Don't cry.

ZINAIDA

No, no. I'm better now.

ORLOV

I'll dismiss her tomorrow.

ZINAIDA

No, no. Keep her. Please. You're right. I'm fine now.
I'm not afraid of her anymore. Silly of me, to begin with.

(beat)

You know, when I was little, I used to walk along the seaside
with my mother. We would walk and walk.

(she kisses him)

ORLOV

Why don't we have tea together. In the bedroom. Stepan?

ZINAIDA

I got a letter today. May I read it to you?

ORLOV

In the bedroom. With tea.

ZINAIDA

I do love you, Georgy.

ORLOV

Come, my dear.

(ORLOV and ZINAIDA exit.)

VLADIMIR

(alone)

I don't want to appear ridiculously sentimental--my whole
life, I've never been--when it comes to intimacy, or
tenderness--I'm afraid I'm rather hopeless. It's the fear
of...it's something I've no experience with. I'm not able to
express myself clearly about these things--about what's
happening to me. Am I falling in love with her?

(He coughs.

Blackout.)

7 SCENE SEVEN

7

(Lights up in the morning. ZINAIDA enters in her coat with a dress box in hand.)

ZINAIDA
(calling out)

Stepan?

(VLADIMIR enters.)

VLADIMIR
Good morning, Madam.

ZINAIDA
Is he up yet?

VLADIMIR
Not yet.

ZINAIDA
Good. Help me, will you.

(He helps her out of her coat.)

VLADIMIR
Out early today.

ZINAIDA
Yes, I've been shopping. I'm so excited. Wait till he sees this. What a glorious morning it is outside.

(She exits, hurrying off to her room with the box.)

VLADIMIR
(alone)
I want to be in love. I want a wife and a child of my own. And I want my wife to be just like her. The same face. The same voice. I dream of her. At dinner, in the street on errands, as I lie awake at night. He doesn't want any children. He hates the smell of food cooking in the kitchen, all the little knickknacks a woman places about the house. All the things I dream about, tenderly gathering them up in my arms, cherishing them, loving them. Come to me, please. I can see it all now, my wife, a nursery, a little house with a garden path... But she would never love me. I could never dare hope for that. Not unless some miracle... But never mind about that. For a wretch like me, happiness is something only to be dreamt of.

(POLYA enters with coffee and the paper.)

POLYA

He's up.

(ORLOV enters in his robe. Gets his coffee. Gets his paper. Sighs.)

ZINAIDA enters, in her new dress.)

ZINAIDA

Good morning, darling.

(ORLOV smiles.)

ZINAIDA (cont'd)

Do you like it?

ORLOV

Hm?

ZINAIDA

My dress. It's new.

ORLOV

Ah. Yes. Lovely.

(returns to his paper and his coffee)

ZINAIDA

You don't like it.

ORLOV

I like it very much.

ZINAIDA

Really?

ORLOV

How much did it cost?

ZINAIDA

Four hundred.

ORLOV

Four hundred?

ZINAIDA

Expensive, I know.

(ORLOV returns to his paper.)

ZINAIDA (cont'd)

You don't like it.

VLADIMIR

Four hundred roubles for a dress, when so many make only twenty kopecks a day. At work in the factories, or the mills, sewing lace till they go blind, or digging coal till they suffocate. Don't you realize that?

(No one seems to hear him.)

VLADIMIR (cont'd)

Why do I love her? God knows. But I do. I can't help it.

(ZINAIDA looks at VLADIMIR, almost as if she has heard this last remark.)

POLYA

Coffee, Madam?

(ZINAIDA glares at POLYA.)

ORLOV

(still reading the paper)

I'm being sent to assist Senator Niminsky on a revising commission in Rostov. I don't want to go, but I can't get out of it. Have to go. That's all there is to it.

ZINAIDA

For how long?

ORLOV

Five days. Or so.

(beat)

ZINAIDA

Good. I'm happy for you. Really. The change will do you good. You'll fall in love with someone along the way, and tell me all about it when you get back.

(She laughs.

They all look at her.)

ZINAIDA (cont'd)

When?

ORLOV

I'm leaving tonight.

ZINAIDA

Tonight?

ORLOV

My train's at eight-thirty.

ZINAIDA

I'll see you off at the station.

ORLOV

There's no need for that.

ZINAIDA

But I want to.

ORLOV

I'm not going off to America. It's five days.

(He moves to her, puts his arms around her, kisses her on the lips, and on the forehead.)

ORLOV (cont'd)

Don't let it trouble you. I'll be back before you know it.

ZINAIDA

Forgive me. Lovers quarrel. It can't be helped. *C'est la vie*. Such is life. I love you terribly. You won't forget me, will you?

ORLOV

You're not serious.

ZINAIDA

Wire me often, at luxurious length. Promise me.

(He kisses her again.)

ORLOV

I should pack.

(He heads for the bedroom, but stops and turns back, as if he has something to say.)

ZINAIDA

Yes, darling?

(ORLOV cannot say the words--he exits.)

POLYA clears the glasses, etc., and exchanges hateful glances with ZINAIDA.

POLYA exits.

ZINAIDA exits.

Lights change to night.)

VLADIMIR

(alone)

We leave sometime between seven and eight at night. Two sledges wait at the door. Orlov gets into one. I get into the other, with his portmanteau. There's a hard frost. Torches burn at all the crossroads. The cold wind bites at my face--takes my breath away as we drive along. What a splendid woman she is. How she loves him. They collect rubbish these days, and reuse it for all sorts of things. Even old, broken glass bottles have a certain value out there, somewhere. But something so precious, so rare, so unique as the love of a woman--a beautiful, young, intelligent woman--is casually discarded, just thrown away, wasted, utterly.

(beat)

We stop in Sergievsky Street. In front of Gruzin's house. Orlov gets out of the other sledge and goes inside. I wait. I don't know how long. "Are you deaf?" someone shouts. It's Gruzin's footman. "Pay the cabman, and go upstairs," he says, "He's calling for you!" I'm utterly confused. I go in, and climb the stairs, up to the drawing-room.

(Lights change to Gruzin's.)

After the cold, gloomy night outside, I'm struck by all the glitter of the place, its gilt picture frames, bronze statuettes, and finely polished furniture.

(GRUZIN enters, followed by ORLOV, getting ready to go out.)

GRUZIN

Here he is.

ORLOV

Stepan, didn't you hear me?

VLADIMIR

My apologies, sir.

ORLOV

Listen to me, I shall be staying here till Friday or Saturday. If any letters or telegrams arrive, I want you to bring them to me here. Every day, is that clear?

VLADIMIR

Yes, sir, every day.

ORLOV

Back home, of course, you'll say nothing of this. Just say I caught my train, and...send her my love. Is that clear?

(VLADIMIR nods.)

ORLOV (cont'd)
Are you sure?

(VLADIMIR smiles.

ORLOV smiles.)

ORLOV (cont'd)
Good. Go on then.
(to Gruzin)
Where shall we go tonight?

GRUZIN
Why don't we get something to eat?

ORLOV
Why don't we get something to drink?

GRUZIN
Why not both--are you buying?

ORLOV
Tonight is on me, my friend, lay on!

(GRUZIN and ORLOV exit.

Lights change back to Orlov's.

ZINAIDA enters and lights a candle in
the dark flat.)

ZINAIDA
Did Georgy catch his train?

VLADIMIR
Yes, Madam. He sends you his love.

(She sits and thinks, then finds a
pencil and paper and writes something.)

VLADIMIR (cont'd)
Why? Why this deception? How could a man of such seeming
intelligence be so cowardly? What possible rationalization
could there be for such childish behavior? To deceive your
own mistress this way. I don't understand it.

(She gives him a note.)

ZINAIDA
Take this to the telegraph office as quick as you can and
have it sent after him. Go. Now.

(She looks anxiously out the window.

Lights change.)

VLADIMIR

I walk to the telegraph office. It's snowing heavily.
Silently.

(he opens the note and reads
it)

ZINAIDA

May the new day bring you happiness, my love. Hurry and wire
me. I miss you terribly. It seems an eternity since you
left. I only wish I could send you a thousand kisses--my
heart itself. I remain...your Zinya.

VLADIMIR

I sent it and bring her the receipt.

(They look at each other.

Blackout.)

8 SCENE EIGHT

8

(Morning. POLYA enters with a black shawl, a bottle of perfume, a brooch, a lace handkerchief, and a pair of gloves. She sets the loot down, and regards each piece with delight.

VLADIMIR enters.

Beat.)

POLYA

What are you looking at?

VLADIMIR

Where did you get those things?

POLYA

That's none of your business. You know where I was this morning? I was over on Sergievsky Street. Mm-hm. The Master wanted me to bring him his shirts. That's right. I know all about what's going on here. All about it. She's overstayed her welcome. Time for her to be on her way. She ought to know that by now. Don't you think?

(POLYA gathers up all the items, and exits.

ZINAIDA enters.)

ZINAIDA

Stepan, I have a shawl, a black shawl. I've looked everywhere for it.

(beat)

This is too much. Too much. The nerve. It's beyond all...

(POLYA enters.)

POLYA

Dinner, Madam. Soup's on the table. Soup and meat pies. The little ones Master likes so much. Everything all right, Madam? You're trembling. Your hands. Your lips there. Not feeling well? Some fresh air perhaps? A walk might do you good. Hm? Or were you already planning to go out? Shall I get your coat? It's not so cold tonight. A light frost. It'll do you good. Go on.

ZINAIDA

You may go. Stepan will do by himself.

POLYA

Are you giving me the night off?

ZINAIDA

I'm dismissing you. Get out. Immediately.

POLYA

You can't dismiss me. Only the Master can do that. He hired me. It's up to him.

ZINAIDA

It's up to me. I am the Mistress here.

POLYA

Indeed you are. But only the Master can dismiss me.

ZINAIDA

Don't you dare stay another minute. You're a thief. You're a thief!

(ZINAIDA exits.)

POLYA

She's a fine one to talk. I could have been a lady like her. A lady. But I have my self-respect.

(POLYA exits.)

VLADIMIR

Meat pies.

(Lights change, three days later, at night. The room is dark.)

Off stage, ZINAIDA cries.

VLADIMIR waits in the room, alone, listening to her cry.

ZINAIDA looks in, with a candle in hand.)

ZINAIDA

Stepan?

VLADIMIR

Yes, Madam?

ZINAIDA

Have any telegrams arrived?

VLADIMIR

No, Madam. None.

ZINAIDA

Are you sure?

VLADIMIR

Yes, Madam.

ZINAIDA

How long has he been gone?

VLADIMIR

Three days, Madam.

ZINAIDA

Three days. Go ask the porter. Perhaps something has just come. Some word from him.

VLADIMIR

If you wish.

(he starts out)

ZINAIDA

But don't leave the house. I don't want to be alone with her.

VLADIMIR

Very well.

ZINAIDA

From now on, every day, I want you to check with the porter every hour on the hour. I want to know the minute anything arrives. I'll be in my room. Here.

(she gives him a handful of folded notes)

Send these first thing in the morning. But check with me before you go. There may be others. I don't know if I can write anymore tonight.

VLADIMIR

Madam...

ZINAIDA

Yes? What is it?

VLADIMIR

I'll check with you in the morning.

(ZINAIDA exits.)

VLADIMIR looks out the window.)

VLADIMIR (cont'd)

Why can't I bring myself to tell her?

(Lights change to morning.)

POLYA enters, straightens up the room, humming--loudly. She looks at Vladimir and smiles, triumphantly.

He coughs.)

POLYA
You're getting worse. Any blood coming up?

(Off stage, ZINAIDA rings for Vladimir.)

POLYA (cont'd)
Oh. "Your mistress" is calling.
(he starts out)
I know what you're up to with her.
(he stops)
I know what goes on in her room. The two of you. Like dogs in heat.
(the bell rings again)
Go on. She wants you. What are you waiting for?

(He exits.)

POLYA (cont'd)
(mimicking her)
"Come, Stepan, I need you. Come to me..."

(She puts her ear to the door, and listens.)

ORLOV enters.)

POLYA (cont'd)
Oh. Master. You're back.

(She helps him out of his coat, hat, etc.)

ORLOV
I'm exhausted.

POLYA
Are you? Yes, you must be. Let's get you right to bed.

ORLOV
Where is she?

POLYA
The Mistress? Well, I'm not exactly certain. Why don't you give her room a try.

(ZINAIDA looks in.)

ZINAIDA

Georgy!

(She runs in, embraces him, kisses him, whispers something inaudible in his ear.)

POLYA

Well, isn't this a happy occasion.

(VLADIMIR enters from a different door than Zinaida.)

POLYA (cont'd)

Stepan, there you are. Where have you been? The Master's come home.

(VLADIMIR nods. ORLOV hands him his gloves.)

ZINAIDA

Why didn't you wire me?

ORLOV

Hm?

ZINAIDA

Didn't you get my telegrams?

ORLOV

Did you wire me?

ZINAIDA

My God, I sent dozens of them. You mean to say you didn't get any of them?

ORLOV

Oh. No. So sorry about that. There's a simple explanation. Ugh, I'm exhausted.

ZINAIDA

What explanation?

ORLOV

I... we--the Senator and I--went straight on to Moscow.

ZINAIDA

Moscow?

ORLOV

You must have been wiring me in Rostov.

ZINAIDA

You didn't receive a single word?

ORLOV

I'm so sorry about that.

ZINAIDA

Stepan, send for something to eat from the restaurant. I want to hear all about your trip, Georgy. Every detail.

ORLOV

Later, my dear. Later we'll have dinner, and then I'll tell you all about it. Sleep first. I'm exhausted.

ZINAIDA

Of course, of course, my dear. Come along. I'll put you to bed.

(to Polya, before she exits)

Not a sound in here. Do you understand?

(POLYA smiles.)

ZINAIDA exits to the bedroom after
ORLOV.)

POLYA

That was a close one, eh? Almost got caught in the act. You and your mistress in there.

VLADIMIR

Shut up. And get out.

POLYA

Are you threatening me?

(he turns away)

I didn't think so.

(POLYA exits.)

Lights change.)

9 SCENE NINE

9

(The following day.)

ORLOV

(off)

Stepan? Stepan!

(VLADIMIR waits.

ORLOV enters in his black dress coat.
With a medal in hand. He sees VLADIMIR
standing there.

Beat.)

VLADIMIR

Sir?

ORLOV

Do you know what time it is?

VLADIMIR

Half past one?

ORLOV

Yes, half past one! And what day is it?

VLADIMIR

The seventh of January, I believe.

ORLOV

Yes, the seventh of January.

(beat)

You really don't know?

VLADIMIR

Know what?

ORLOV

The seventh of January is my father's birthday, you idiot.
The ceremony is at two o'clock. Everyone in Petersburg knows
that. Here.

(hands him the medal)

Pin this on me.

(VLADIMIR pins the medal on
Orlov's breast)

I have to congratulate him. In front of everyone. Every
year. It's always the same. Congratulations, Father...
Congratulations, Father... "Great leader with the
outstretched hand. The one whose will founded the city along
the Neva..."

VLADIMIR

Pushkin?

ORLOV

That's right. *The Bronze Horseman*. Every year on my father's birthday, I recite it at the ceremony.

VLADIMIR

The entire poem?

ORLOV

The entire poem. The first time I was only seven years old. I was terrified. And now, every year... Congratulations, Father.

(ZINAIDA enters.)

ZINAIDA

Georgy, I have to speak with you?

ORLOV

Hm?

ZINAIDA

(whispering)

She's at it again. That woman is stealing from me. She's taken my black shawl, a bottle of perfume, /she's taken money from my purse--

ORLOV

Oh, no, not this again.

ZINAIDA

She's stealing from me.

ORLOV

I wonder why she doesn't steal from me?

ZINAIDA

She insults me. Openly.

ORLOV

She doesn't insult me. Why is it I never notice all these things you're forever pointing out? I'm beginning to worry about you. There's something wrong with you. You've got some kind of condition. I offered to let her go. You insisted she remain. Now you want me to let her go again. She stays. And that's that. / That's the only way I can cure you of this. It's your nerves.

ZINAIDA

All right, all right, all right! Let's not say anymore about it. Today. We'll discuss it...tomorrow. Tomorrow.

(MORE)

ZINAIDA(cont'd)

(beat)

What kind of world do you think this would be if we were all equals?

ORLOV

What did you say?

ZINAIDA

Just wondering about it.

ORLOV

Oh, for God's sake. Please. Is that what you've been reading lately? How tiresome. I beg you, please, no more "serious questions." Can't you read something just a little more interesting than that?

ZINAIDA

I'm not allowed to have my own thoughts.

ORLOV

You can think whatever you want. Be as radical as you like. But, please, don't tell me about all the problems with our class system, and don't talk about the evils of marriage. Do you have any idea what I'm talking about? It's always the fault of the upper classes. It's the rich who are corrupt, not the tradesmen, not the priests, not the workers, not the peasants. The poor are all as honest as saints. I hate them all. But I'll tell you one thing: if I had to choose between being rich and being poor, I'd choose to be rich. Any day of the week. The world is a trivial, insignificant place. It's an empty place. But at least some of us can speak French to each other. Some of us can read. At least some of us don't strangle each other too often. But the poor, the "good" people, they act like pigs in a pen, and they believe the most ridiculous things. / Ignorant, superstitious brutes.

ZINAIDA

Those people put food on your table.

ORLOV

So what if they do? Is that my fault? Look, I don't blame anybody. I don't favor anybody. The rich are as bad as the poor. I'm against them all!.

(checks his watch)

As for the evils of marriage, it's about time you realized there is nothing inherently evil in the institution of marriage. The problem is you don't know what you really want from it. What do you want? You see, you've been reading. Now you don't know what you want. You're starting to wonder about everything. You run from one man to another, and to make sense of it all, you talk about the evils of marriage.

(MORE)

ORLOV(cont'd)

So long as you refuse to admit what's underneath it all, your darkest enemy, your devil incarnate--so long as you serve him like a slave... Oh, what's the point of talking about it? Seriously. Everything you say to me is false. / It's all just affectation. I don't believe a word you say.

ZINAIDA

You're trying to shock me. Your cynicism revolts me. I am pure before God. And man. I have done nothing wrong. I left my husband and came to you, because I loved you. I'm proud of that. / I swear to you, on my honor, I'm proud of it.

ORLOV

Fine. Fine. All right.

ZINAIDA

If you were a decent, honest man, you'd be proud of it, too. It raises us up above thousands of people who would like to do what we've done, but don't dare, because they're cowards, or hypocrites. They're pathetic. But you're not a decent man. You're afraid of real freedom. You make fun of genuine feelings. Because you're terrified that some idiot will think you have sincere feelings about anything. You're afraid to introduce me to your friends. Nothing embarrasses you more than walking down the street together with me. Admit it. Why haven't you introduced me to your father yet? Why? / No never mind, I'm sick of this.

ORLOV

Go present yourself to him, if you want to meet him so badly. He receives visitors every morning at ten.

ZINAIDA

You're so cruel.

ORLOV

Around and around we go. We never get anywhere. The truth is--this was a mistake. But you won't admit it to yourself. You thought I was some kind of hero. That I stood for something. Some ideal of something. But I'm just an ordinary government official. I play cards. I don't really care about anything. I'm the ideal of a thoroughly rotten world, a world you've run away from, because you despise its meaninglessness. It's emptiness. Admit it. Be honest with yourself. Don't be angry with me, be angry with yourself. This was your mistake. / Not mine.

ZINAIDA

Yes, I admit it. I was mistaken.

ORLOV

Good. That's it then. I can't rise up to your level. And you can't come down to mine. I'm too corrupt. And you're too pure. There's only one thing to do.

ZINAIDA

What?

ORLOV

We have to be logical about this.

ZINAIDA

Why are you torturing me?

(she begins to cry)

Why? I'm so miserable.

(ORLOV starts to go.)

ZINAIDA (cont'd)

I hate you. I despise you. Its over between us. Everything is over.

(He exits.

She cries.

Gently, VLADIMIR approaches Zinaida.)

VLADIMIR

Madam. Should I get a doctor?

ZINAIDA

No. There's no need for that. I'm fine. I have a bit of a headache. That's all. Thank you.

(ZINAIDA exits.

Lights change to night.

ORLOV and GRUZIN enter with vodka.)

ORLOV

My life is hell, Gruzin. It's no life at all. It's the rack. It's tears, and shouting--we fight, we make up, we fight again--it never stops--on and on and on. I have no home anymore. I am a wretched human being. And I make her wretched. It can't go on like this.

GRUZIN

You talk too much. Where's the food?

(POLYA enters with food.)

GRUZIN (cont'd)

Ah. Splendid. Just in the nick of time.

ORLOV

What can I do, Gruzin? There's no reasoning with her. She's completely illogical. I can't stand her crying. It makes me...I don't know. When she cries...I do anything. I give in. We reconcile. It happens every time.

GRUZIN

(eating)

I don't understand. Why don't you get her a flat of her own? It's so simple.

(ORLOV shakes his head, no)

Why not?

ORLOV

I'm not a mushroom...but I'm in the basket. I never wanted to be a hero. I can't stand Turgenev's novels. I'm not a hero. Why won't she believe that? Do I look like a hero?

GRUZIN

Time for another trip to the provinces?

ORLOV

(lifting his glass)

To the provinces.

(They drink shots.)

POLYA watches.

VLADIMIR looks out the window.

Blackout.)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

ACT TWO

10 SCENE TEN

10

(Lights up in Orlov's flat. Night.)

ORLOV'S FATHER enters. He wears a full-length fur coat and beaver cap. He sits, and sighs.

VLADIMIR enters, and is shocked to discover the old man sitting in the room.)

VLADIMIR

Your Excellency?

FATHER

Where is Georgy?

VLADIMIR

A tour of the provinces, I believe.

FATHER

The provinces? Why? Doesn't make any sense. When did he leave?

VLADIMIR

Just this evening, your Excellency.

FATHER

Oh, for God's sake. Get me a pen and paper. I'll leave a note.

VLADIMIR

Yes, your Excellency.

(VLADIMIR provides the old man with a pen and paper.)

FATHER

(looking at the flat)

Who can live like this?

(FATHER writes a note. VLADIMIR moves around behind him.)

VLADIMIR

It's him. Right there. In front of me. Just an instant from my grasp. I can see him breathing. His skull. Brittle as an eggshell. His throat, no more substantial than a straw. Just...grip it...tighten...and close it off.

(MORE)

VLADIMIR(cont'd)

Over in a minute. And done. Then snatch his watch, and make it look like a robbery. Out the back way. And good bye. Good bye to all of this. Who could dream of such an opportunity? Just me and him. Do it.

FATHER

All right. There we are. Give him this.
(hands him the letter, gets up to go)

VLADIMIR

Your Excellency...

FATHER

(stops, turns back)

Yes?

(beat--a last chance for murder)

What is it?

(still nothing)

How long have you been in my son's service?

VLADIMIR

How long? Uh, three months, your Excellency.

FATHER

Hm. Yes, you're new. I thought so.

(FATHER heads for the door.

VLADIMIR starts after him.

FATHER turns back.

VLADIMIR stops.)

FATHER (cont'd)

Good night, son.

(FATHER exits.)

VLADIMIR

(alone)

I had him in my grasp. But I did nothing. I let him go. Everything's changed. I have to leave this place.

(ZINAIDA enters.

She crosses to the window, and looks out.)

ZINAIDA

So be it.

(She sees VLADIMIR.

Beat.

GRUZIN peaks his head in.)

GRUZIN

Hello, there.

VLADIMIR

Mr. Gruzin.

GRUZIN

Bonjour, Madam.

ZINAIDA

(correcting him)

Bon soir.

GRUZIN

Yes, excuse me, *bon soir*. The maid let me in. I'm to get something for Georgy. I mean, something he left for me.

(grabs a book)

Ah, yes, here we are. Well. I'll just be on my...

(starts to go, but stops)

You...is there anything...you want to ask me?

ZINAIDA

No, I don't think so.

GRUZIN

So...Georgy's gone away, hm? He's a rascal, he is.

(He kisses her hand.)

GRUZIN (cont'd)

Can we talk?

ZINAIDA

Talk?

GRUZIN

I can't stand the thought of going home.

(removes his coat)

It's too early to go to the Birshovs. They're having a little party.

(POLYA enters. Sizes up the situation.)

POLYA

Shall I bring tea?

GRUZIN
Yes.

ZINAIDA
No.

GRUZIN
Is there anything to eat?

(POLYA exits.)

GRUZIN (cont'd)
Odd woman.
(beat)
Have you ever been to a party at the Birshovs?

ZINAIDA
No.

GRUZIN
Always fun. I remember once--what was it--New Year's Eve?
Oh, what a party that was. The dancing. The food.

(ZINAIDA sighs.)

GRUZIN (cont'd)
But enough of that. Stepan--vodka?
(gestures for a short one)
I feel a bit light-headed. Don't know what it is exactly.
Some strange effect you have on me. Is that it?

(VLADIMIR pours a shot of vodka in a glass, and offers it to Gruzin, who is too distracted to notice. VLADIMIR clears his throat.)

GRUZIN (cont'd)
(sees the drink)
Ah.
(to Zinaida)
To your health.
(downs the vodka)
Ahhh!

(POLYA enters with a sandwich.)

GRUZIN (cont'd)
Ah, food.

POLYA
Will this do?

GRUZIN

Fine. Splendid. I'm starving. You know, I have a little girl at home. She's too skinny, but she's a good child.

(he bites into the sandwich)

Mmmm. This is good. Whatever you can say...it's good to have children. Though Georgy wouldn't agree. Would he? No, he wouldn't. He's funny that way. Georgy and his ideas. What a funny fellow. The way his mind works. Don't you agree?

ZINAIDA

Are you the one that plays the piano?

GRUZIN

Hm? Why, yes, I play a bit.

ZINAIDA

Yes, I understand you're quite good.

GRUZIN

Well, I don't know about that. Do you play?

ZINAIDA

Yes, a bit. Now and then. Come. Play something for me, won't you. Then perhaps we can talk a little.

GRUZIN

Talk?

ZINAIDA

Mm-hm. Come.

GRUZIN

If you wish.

ZINAIDA

(as they go)

Tell me, honestly, Mr. Gruzin, what has Georgy told you about me?

GRUZIN

Not nearly enough.

(ZINAIDA and GRUZIN exit.)

Piano music plays in the other room-- perhaps Tchaikovsky or Saint-Saens' "Swan Song.")

POLYA

That's a fine thing. What do you suppose they're up to? I know how it goes, all right. First he'll kiss her hands, first one, then the other. All kissy, kissy, kissy.

(MORE)

POLYA(cont'd)

Then what? You know what. I've seen it. I know how she is. One, after another, after another--

VLADIMIR

For God's sake, he's only playing the piano.

(The piano stops.)

POLYA

Mm-hm. And now what?

VLADIMIR

It's not what you think.

POLYA

Oh, no? Then why doesn't she turn him out?

(ZINAIDA enters, followed by GRUZIN.
Have they been kissing?)

GRUZIN

Wait, please.

ZINAIDA

(a bit desperate)

Stepan.

POLYA

(to Zinaida)

Find what you were looking for in there, Madam?

(POLYA exits.)

VLADIMIR crosses to GRUZIN, and hands
him his coat.

GRUZIN takes the coat, and puts it on.)

GRUZIN

(to Vladimir)

Not married, huh. Lucky for you, all right. I suppose you
and the maid there are as thick as thieves, eh?

(a laugh)

You rascal, you.

(to Zinaida)

Are you coming, my dear?

(beat)

Get the lady's coat, Stepan.

(beat)

Stepan?

(ZINAIDA exits, back to her room.)

GRUZIN (cont'd)

She'll be back. Watch.

(VLADIMIR crosses to GRUZIN, and grabs him by the lapels, violently.)

VLADIMIR

Get out of here!

(releases him)

GRUZIN

(stunned)

What! Who the hell do you think you are? Your master will hear about this! You can count on that! You...

(GRUZIN exits.)

VLADIMIR

What have I done?

(begins pacing)

I've got to leave.

(removes his "swallowtail"
servant's coat)

Leave immediately. Pack my valise, grab the overcoat, and go. But first...

(gets pen and paper, begins
writing)

To my former master...

(looks up)

The government official. Ha! You, sir--no, forget the "sir." You...are a fake. No, a phoney. No, an imposter.

(writes)

You are an imposter.

(looks up)

And what am I? Never mind about that. What does it matter what he thinks of me, what anyone thinks? You lie, you cheat, you defile everything in the world! While I... How many dinners, how many mornings have I endured, listening to you go on and on and on? While I stayed silent, silent as a mute! Silent as a mouse. No more. Not a minute longer. Now it's my turn to speak. Me! My turn! Listen to me, you fat, lazy pig! You cowardly liar. This is what I have to say to you, and all those like you, the whole lousy lot of you.

(looks down at the paper, looks
up again)

God, what a gloomy, dismal place this is. Odd how quiet it is, though. Quiet as a tomb.

(coughs, feels his forehead)

Christ. My face is on fire. My legs. I'm fainting.

(he sits)

Sick. Weak. Alone. Cast out. Damn you. I can't think. Why can't I say what I want to say?

(MORE)

VLADIMIR(cont'd)

(imagines Orlov)

You. From the first moment I saw you...I wanted to kill you. But now...I don't know. What right have I got to take your life? We are both fallen men. And neither one of us will ever rise again. No matter what I say, no matter how eloquent, how terrifying, how certain... Nothing I can say will ever warm your blood. All the noise in the world won't awaken the dead. And you know that as well as I do. What am I doing here? What good could this possibly do either one of us? None. There's only one question to be answered, I see it, burning before me, written in fire: why have I failed? Why? I have deceived myself.

(he coughs)

I don't think I have ever known happiness. I have no home. No happy memories. I'm afraid to remember. But you--why have you failed? What kept you from becoming all that you might have been? The unseen hand of God? An evil heart within? Are you kidding me? You're a coward. You don't do anything. You are bored to death! Every day, on and on, nothing matters, nothing but your irony. God, I hate your irony. Though I understand it. It's your protection. It's your armor. You pretend to know everything. And you jeer at it all. To hide your shame, you sneer at the thought of anything noble, anything pure, anything honest, human, passionate--any true feelings. Real life! No wonder you can't stand the sight of tears.

(Someone plays the piano in the other room.)

VLADIMIR (cont'd)

It's her. Playing the piano. Zinaida. Why is it over? Why do we begin so full of life, and love, so passionate, so full of faith and nobility, only to become total wastrels by the age of thirty-five? One man puts a bullet through his brain, another seeks escape in vodka and cards, another deadens his fear and misery with irony, while I waste away. Why? Why? What if by some miracle all of this turned out to be some sort of dream, a horrible nightmare. What if we woke up from this and started all over again? Young, pure, strong again, confident. I want to live. I want life to be holy as the heavens above. Everyone. Live.

(He sits and writes the letter, as the music plays, swelling as the lights change, and the night passes. The morning sun rises, and the piano music ends.

He rises from the letter, and waits for her to enter. She does not. He goes to the letter, signs it, and leaves it for Orlov.

As he starts out, the door opens, and
ZINAIDA looks into the dark room.)

ZINAIDA

Who's there?

(sees Vladimir)

Oh.

(ZINAIDA enters the room.)

VLADIMIR

He's not coming back.

(beat)

He's not coming back. Because he hasn't even left
Petersburg. He's been staying at Gruzin's.

(She looks out the window)

VLADIMIR (cont'd)

I'm sorry.

ZINAIDA

I see.

VLADIMIR

Can I get you something?

(beat)

Madam?

ZINAIDA

This is none of your business. Get out.

VLADIMIR

I am not a servant. Not a footman. I'm as free as you are.
I've been spying on him. For political reasons.

ZINAIDA

Political reasons?

VLADIMIR

My name is not Stepan. It's Vladimir Ivanitch. I'm a member
of a special faction in the Narodnaya Volya party.

ZINAIDA

The what?

VLADIMIR

The Faction. Have you read the works of Karl Marx?

(beat)

We regard the working class as the heart of a new movement, a
Socialist movement--

ZINAIDA

Yes--

VLADIMIR

We take our direction from the revolutionary intelligentsia.
We oppose autocracy, by any means necessary.

ZINAIDA

Like those men they hanged at the fortress last year.

VLADIMIR

I was assigned to spy on Orlov in order to gather information
about his father.

ZINAIDA

His father--why?

VLADIMIR

The Deputy Minister is a very important man. But...all of
that...became...irrelevant.

ZINAIDA

What do you mean?

VLADIMIR

The son has no relationship to the father. My efforts here
were all a waste of time, as far the Faction is concerned. I
intended to leave Orlov's service some time ago, but...

ZINAIDA

But what?

VLADIMIR

You. I was aware...of what he was doing to you. His
deception. His cruelty. The senator and the tour of the
provinces, he invented all of that, in order to deceive you.
Back in January, as well, he never went away; he just stayed
at Gruzin's. I saw him every day. I took part in it. He
said he was tired of you. He hated the sight of you. He
made fun of you. If you heard what he and Gruzin said about
you, you wouldn't have stayed here another moment. You
should leave this place. Immediately. Get away from here.

ZINAIDA

Well, so be it. The Faction, eh? Hm.

(she smiles)

It's all rather comic, isn't it?

VLADIMIR

Comic?

ZINAIDA

No doubt Georgy expects I'll die of humiliation.

VLADIMIR

I don't understand.

ZINAIDA

I think it's funny. Why does he hide from me? There's no need to hide. Why didn't he just tell me? Hiding in other peoples flats. I'm not blind. I saw this coming months ago. I was only waiting for him to...to...I don't know what I was waiting for.

(She sits and cries.)

VLADIMIR

A person can't go on living like this. It's not life. It's...

ZINAIDA

It's so humiliating. To live with me, smile at me every morning, and all the while, hate me. Did they laugh at me?

VLADIMIR

(nods, yes)

They don't understand Turgenev. If we both died, here, right now, in the light of the rising sun, they would laugh at that, too. Make a funny story of it, to laugh at, with their friends. To smile at, with that ironic smile of his. We have to leave. I can't stay here a minute longer.

ZINAIDA

I can't think.

VLADIMIR

We should leave together.

ZINAIDA

Will you take me to the Petersburg Side?

(They exit.

Blackout.)

11 SCENE ELEVEN

11

(VLADIMIR and ZINIADA, wearing coats,
step into a spotlight--outside Gruzin's
house.)

ZINAIDA
(shivering)

Where?

VLADIMIR
(pointing)
Up there. Do you see him? They're having breakfast.

ZINAIDA
(she sees Orlov)
He's been staying here for the last three weeks?
(he nods)
Thank you... Thank you... Thank you...

VLADIMIR
Not at all.

ZINAIDA
I've troubled you enough.

VLADIMIR
It's no trouble.

ZINAIDA
I understand. I understand everything now. When Gruzin was
there last night. I could tell. I knew he was hiding
something from me. I'm so ashamed. Look at him. Well, so
be it.

VLADIMIR
Shall we go?

(He puts his arm around her.)

The sound of sleigh bells and horse
hooves.)

VLADIMIR (cont'd)
We drive on. Through the snow. And the wind. Blowing
across the Neva, cuts into our faces, into our bones. On and
on we go. Ages seem to pass as we glide along. I can feel
her breathing, softly. Am I asleep? I look back on my life,
my strange, ruinous life, and for some reason, I think of
that old melodrama, "The Beggars of Paris." I remember it
from when I was a child. I look out at the snow. And I
know: everything is over for Zinaida Fyodorovna Krasnovsky.
For the both of us. Or so it seems at this moment.

(MORE)

VLADIMIR(cont'd)

As if it were written in the sky. As plain as prophecy.
(a new thought)
I wonder if Peter the Great ever rode along this road?

ZINAIDA

Where will I go? What will I do? "Get thee to a nunnery."
If only I could. Change my clothes, change the way I look,
change my name, erase my thoughts--change everything...
everything. I want to hide away. Forever. I'm pregnant.

(beat)

VLADIMIR

We'll leave the country. Tomorrow. Together.

ZINAIDA

My husband will never give me a passport.

VLADIMIR

We'll go without one.

(beat)

ZINAIDA

You look different somehow. It's strange. I'm sorry.
Forgive me, but...you look...how extraordinary. Are you a
terrorist?

VLADIMIR

We are activists.

ZINAIDA

Those men they hanged at the fortress--they tried to kill the
Czar.

VLADIMIR

The aim is revolution. The overthrow of...all of this.

ZINAIDA

All of this. Everything is over for me here. Yes, we'll
leave the country. Together. Yes?
(He smiles.)

ZINAIDA (cont'd)

Have you ever read Balzac's "Father Goriot?" Do you remember
how it ends? The hero looks out over the rooftops of Paris,
and he says, "Now"--to the whole city, he says--"now we shall
settle our account!" And then he begins an entirely new
life.

VLADIMIR

Yes, I've read it.

ZINAIDA

(looks out)

Now we shall settle our account.

(looks at him)

I'm one of you. Friend.

(They shake hands.

Lights change.)

12 SCENE TWELVE

12

(VLADIMIR and ZINAIDA step into a spotlight.)

VLADIMIR

We travel by train to Venice. Winter is almost over. But it's still cold. We leave the train station, and row through the canals, to the Hotel Bauer.

(He coughs, severely.)

ZINAIDA

What's wrong?

VLADIMIR

I don't know.

ZINAIDA

I'll find a doctor.

(She hurries off.

A hotel room in Venice.

ZINAIDA reads from a book--the end of Turgenev's "Diary of a Superfluous Man."

VLADIMIR listens, weakly, huddled in a chair, wrapped in a blanket.)

ZINAIDA (cont'd)

"I am dying...Live on, ye living.
And may the young child play
By the side of a grave,
As Nature, the indifferent,
Beams with beauty forever!"

(closes up the book)

Something else?

VLADIMIR

Whatever you like.

ZINAIDA

Something French or something Russian?

(he shrugs)

You don't care.

VLADIMIR

I enjoy the sound of your voice no matter what the book.

(A cannon booms in the distance.)

ZINAIDA

Noon. Hm.

(goes to the window, looks out)
How beautiful it is today. The sun is warm. Finally, spring is almost here. Think I'll go out for a walk today.

VLADIMIR

When you come back, tell me what you see out there, every detail.

ZINAIDA

I will. Every detail.

VLADIMIR

So we can see Venice together.

ZINAIDA

Every detail.

VLADIMIR

You're crying.

ZINAIDA

No.

VLADIMIR

What's wrong?

ZINAIDA

Nothing.

VLADIMIR

I heard you whispering with the doctor.

ZINAIDA

You'll be fine.

VLADIMIR

You're being kind. It's consumption.

(She kisses him on the forehead, and exits.)

Lights change.

Night.

The sound of rain.)

VLADIMIR (cont'd)

(alone)
I'm happy. The nights are cold. It rains a lot. Lonely nights.

The rain stops.

The sun shines in.)

VLADIMIR (cont'd)

But I revel in the days. Our time together.

(stands in the sunlight)

When the sun is out. Warm sunlight. The view from our balcony.

(sounds from the canal outside,
a bell in the distance)

I feel the breeze from the sea caress my face.

(coughs)

The gondolas. Gliding along with feminine grace, smoothly, majestically, as if they're alive. You can feel the luxury of this unique civilization. This fascinating place. The smell of the sea.

(mandolin music plays)

The sea. The sun glistening on the water. So bright it hurts my eyes. Perfect freedom. Does wonders for the soul.

(opens the blanket, like wings)

Wings. Sprout from my back. And bear me...Gods knows where. To have another human being so close beside me. It's a joy like none other. I just want to live.

(looks out the window again)

There's a house out there. They say it was Desdama's. A mournful little house, with a sad expression about it. As delicate as lace. I'm a bit better today. Think I'll take a walk on my own.

(lights change)

I stand for an hour gazing up at the Bridge of Sighs. Can't take my eyes off the melancholy lion in St Mark's Square. And in the Palace of the Doges, I can't tear myself away from the portrait of poor Marino Faliero, painted over in black, "Beheaded for his crimes." How fine it is to be an artist, a poet, a dramatist. But that's not my lot. If only I believed...if only there were some small trace of faith in...

(ZINAIDA enters, lights change again,
and together they ride in a gondola,
more mandolin music, someone sings.)

VLADIMIR (cont'd)

We ride together in a gondola one evening, side by side, after a dinner of oysters, and wine. The stars above, the lights of the city.

(notices she is disturbed)

Your hands are tense. Zinaida?

ZINAIDA

Hm? I'm sorry. I was thinking about...

VLADIMIR

What?

ZINAIDA

So many unpleasant memories. The sleigh ride that night we went to Sergievsky Street together. The cold. The ice.

VLADIMIR

Sometimes I think we're like two characters out of one of those old novels--"The Doomed." "The Outcasts." Something like that.

ZINAIDA

Who would I be?

VLADIMIR

The heroine, of course.

ZINAIDA

The doomed? The outcast?

VLADIMIR

No.

ZINAIDA

And who would you be?

VLADIMIR

Me? The faithful, devoted friend, I suppose, hm? The dreamer. A superfluous man, if you like. A failure, capable of nothing...

(coughs)

Nothing but coughing. And dreaming. And perhaps sacrificing myself.

ZINAIDA

To whom? For what?

(Lights change, back in the hotel room, at night now.)

VLADIMIR

Life at Orlov's was torture for me. The masquerade. Serving him, dressing him every morning, while he sipped his coffee, and read his paper. There were moments when I hated you.

ZINAIDA

You hated me?

VLADIMIR

He was so uncaring with you, so condescending. He lied to you. Couldn't you see that? It was all so obvious.

(MORE)

VLADIMIR(cont'd)

But you would kneel at his feet, flatter him, kiss him again and again--

ZINAIDA

When I knelt at his feet, when I kissed him, I loved him.

VLADIMIR

Couldn't you see what he was doing to you? Was he so mysterious to you? Was he the Sphinx of Egypt? Good God. He's a scoundrel. But all that's past now. I don't blame you. What did I do? I went right on serving him. Hating myself. Not knowing what to do. How to speak to you. What to say.

ZINAIDA

No. You despise who I was. And you have every right to do so. You're not an ordinary sort of man. You can't be judged like that. Your moral standards are extraordinary. I understand there are certain things you can't forgive. I understand that about you. Believe me, I see things the same way you do. But all this is new to me. Sometimes I slip back into my old thoughts, like wearing my old clothes, out of habit, nothing more. I hate the things I did back then. I despise who I was. Orlov. My love for him. What was it? It seems completely absurd to me now.

(looks out the window)

Love clouds the mind. Confuses us. The only meaning in life is found in the fight. Getting your heel on the vile serpent's head, and crushing it. That's all that matters. That...or nothing.

VLADIMIR

Shall I light a fire?

ZINAIDA

No. I'm not cold. Do you know, I believe I've grown a bit wiser lately?

VLADIMIR

Wiser?

ZINAIDA

I have all these ideas in my head. When I think of the past, who I was back then--when I think of people in general--it all leads back to my stepmother. She was cruel and harsh, she lied, there was nothing of a soul left in her. She was addicted to morphine. My father was weak, he was feeble. He married my mother for her money. But she contracted consumption.

VLADIMIR

Your mother?

ZINAIDA

Yes. But my stepmother--Father was mad for her. The things I put up with. But what's the use of talking about it? It all leads back to her. Too bad she's dead now. They're all dead. You should rest. Get well. As soon as you're well enough, we'll get to work, hm? It's time.

VLADIMIR

Yes. Good night.

ZINAIDA

Do you think Polya is still back there?

VLADIMIR

I expect so.

ZINAIDA

Hm. Look. The clouds. Coming in from the sea, darkening the canal. Like a muslin veil.

(Lights change.)

13 SCENE THIRTEEN

13

(A hotel room in Nice.)

VLADIMIR

It's autumn. We're in Nice, on the French Riviera.

(looks out the window)

Again, by the sea. The endless, undulating sea.

(ZINAIDA sits, huddled in a chair,
sobbing.)

VLADIMIR (cont'd)

What is it? What's wrong?

(she waves him away)

Tell me, please.

(he kisses her hand)

What is it?

ZINAIDA

It's nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Leave me alone,
Vladimir. I'm not...presentable.

VLADIMIR

Is it...the child? I'll call for a doctor.

(She hurries from the room.

He knocks at the door.)

Zinaida?

ZINAIDA

(off)

Go away.

VLADIMIR

Please, come out. I can't bear the thought of your crying
all alone in there. Tell me what's troubling you. Come,
we'll go for a walk, down by the seaside. We can talk.

ZINAIDA

(off)

Leave me alone.

(Lights change. Sound of the sea.)

VLADIMIR

I take a long walk, down by the seaside. Thoughts of her
fill my head. Ache in my heart. The sound of the sea, the
monotonous lap of the waves, seems to foretell something
unwanted. There will be more tears, more troubles to come,
more losses ahead. Thoughts of Petersburg return. All my
dreams, all my hopes dry up like leaves in the heat.

(MORE)

VLADIMIR(cont'd)

The nearness is gone. I am alone again. No more to her than...than a cobweb, blown away on the wind.

(sound of music playing)

I walk about the city square. A band plays. Walk past the Casino, look in at the overdressed, over-perfumed women, who turned and glance at me, as if to say, "You're alone." Out on the terrace, look out at the sea again. Not one sail on the horizon. In the lilac-colored mist, mountains, gardens, towers, houses, all sparkle in the sunset. All alien to me. Indifferent. An incomprehensible tangle. Don't leave me, Zinaida. I'm so afraid to be alone.

(Lights change.)

14 SCENE FOURTEEN

14

(Night, back in the hotel room.
VLADIMIR knocks lightly at the door to
the other room.)

VLADIMIR

Darling?

(no answer, he knocks again)

Zinaida, shall we have some dinner together?

(ZINAIDA enters through the other door.
She has been out.)

ZINAIDA

Ah, my good sir.

VLADIMIR

Have you been out all this time?

ZINAIDA

Mm-hm.

VLADIMIR

It's nearly eleven. Where have you been?

ZINAIDA

Where? At the casino.

(withdraws a handful of gold
coins from her pocket)

Look. I won. At the roulette wheel.

VLADIMIR

No.

ZINAIDA

Why not? And I'm going back tomorrow.

VLADIMIR

You're not well.

ZINAIDA

I'm fine.

VLADIMIR

You shouldn't be going there, in your condition, standing
around the gaming tables, crowded in among the coquettes, and
the rich old bags who swarm around the place like flies
circling round--

ZINAIDA

My good sir. Don't upset yourself. Afterall, how much can I
lose?

VLADIMIR

It's not a question of how much you can lose. You'll faint again. You have to take care of yourself.

ZINAIDA

You're concerned for me.

VLADIMIR

Has it never occurred to you, that gambling for gold, rubbing elbows with all those people, all of it--it's all a vile mockery of real labor, of the workers who labor to actually do something of significance in the world--

ZINAIDA

Oh, don't be ridiculous. If we don't gamble here, what else is there to do? "The workers who labor." Really. Come now. Save that for someone else. Tell me, truthfully, what else can I do here? What?

(beat)

Answer me, honestly, Vladimir. Don't recite me the same old nonsense.

VLADIMIR

It isn't nonsense.

ZINAIDA

Tell me, what should I do? And I don't mean just here in Nice, I mean here in the world, what should I do?

(He has no answer for her. He looks out the window.)

ZINAIDA (cont'd)

Yes, great things were done in the days of old, my good sir. But now things are different. It all seemed so heroic before. But now... If you don't believe in the cause anymore, if you have no intention of returning to the Faction... Then why? Why did you bring me here? Why did you drag me away from Petersburg?

VLADIMIR

I didn't drag you away--

ZINAIDA

Why did you make promises to me? Why did you raise my hopes? What happened to your convictions? You've become a different man. I don't blame you for that--everybody changes--but, Vladimir, for God's sake, why won't you be honest with me? For months now, I've been sharing my dreams with you, I've gone on and on, like a madwoman, a raving madwoman. What about the revolution? What about the plan? Is that all a lie? Have you been lying to me?

VLADIMIR

No.

ZINAIDA

I've given up everything. My whole life, everything I ever believed, everything I've ever done. Turned the whole world upside down. For what? Why did you let me carry on like this? You made me believe. Why did you lie?

VLADIMIR

Yes, I have lost all faith. In the cause. The revolution. All of it. It's difficult to admit that. Very difficult. So I kept it to myself. I couldn't bear to see you...

ZINAIDA

(taking him by the hands)

You've been through so much. Seen so much of life. So much more than me. What should I do? Tell me!

(beat)

I cannot live a lie.

VLADIMIR

There is more light in the world than you see through that little window.

ZINAIDA

What?

VLADIMIR

There are other people in the world.

ZINAIDA

Other people--who?

VLADIMIR

Other ideas. Other possibilities.

ZINAIDA

What are you talking about?

VLADIMIR

You and me. Together.

ZINAIDA

It all comes down to that. Doesn't it? All your fine talk. All your politics. Your momentous ideas. It all comes down to one simple, inevitable conclusion: you want me to be your mistress.

VLADIMIR

No.

ZINAIDA

What else is there?

VLADIMIR

You're angry.

ZINAIDA

I mean what I say.

VLADIMIR

I know you do, but you're wrong. And it hurts me / to hear you say such things.

ZINAIDA

I'm wrong?

(she laughs)

No, my good sir.

VLADIMIR

Stop calling me that!

ZINAIDA

You think I'm cruel? I don't care. Do you love me?

(beat)

You do. When you were ill, you said things. I thought you were delirious. But since then, I've seen it in your eyes. The way you sigh. All this lofty talk about our friendship, about our spiritual connection. You haven't been honest with me. Why not? Why do you pretend? If you had been honest with me from the start; if I had known the real reason why you dragged me away from Petersburg--

VLADIMIR

I didn't drag you away Petersburg--

ZINAIDA

I would have poisoned myself.

VLADIMIR

What?

ZINAIDA

Yes. I would have poisoned myself. As I meant to. And this entire farce would have been over with.

VLADIMIR

No.

ZINAIDA

What good is there in talking anymore?

VLADIMIR

I love you.

ZINAIDA

You want me to be your mistress.

VLADIMIR

No.

ZINAIDA

You hate Georgy, but at least he was honest.

VLADIMIR

Honest? You're not serious. He's a coward, and a liar!

ZINAIDA

Honest when it came to that.

VLADIMIR

My God, he's vile!

ZINAIDA

All right, so he's a coward, and a liar. So he deceived me. And you? Excuse me for asking, but what are you? He deceived me and left me in Petersburg. You have deceived me and left me here.

VLADIMIR

I haven't left you.

ZINAIDA

He didn't confuse his deceptions with his illusions.

VLADIMIR

Why are you doing this? This is darkness. This is despair. Stop. Listen to me. I've seen too much of this world. It makes my head spin when I think of it.

(a clock chimes quietly)

There's only one thing I've learned that means anything: the only hope for us lies in love, a self-sacrificing love, for our fellows, our neighbors, our brothers and sisters in the world. That's what we must strive for. That's our true destination. The longed-for end of our journey. That's what I believe. I want to live. I want peace, and tranquility. Warmth. I want you near me. Just to hear your voice. To look into your eyes.

ZINAIDA

You love life. I hate it. We can't go on together.

VLADIMIR

No.

ZINAIDA

Enough of this. It's over.

VLADIMIR

No.

ZINAIDA

Everything is over. I don't want anything. What more can I say?

VLADIMIR

It's not over.

ZINAIDA

Enough.

(She sits and cries.)

VLADIMIR

Morning comes. I go out for a long walk. When I return, a waiter in the lobby informs me, with a smile on his face, that the lady in my room--there has been an incident. A disturbance of some sort. I run as fast as I can. There's a doctor. And a midwife. And an old woman from Harkov. The smell of ether is thick in the room.

ZINAIDA

What does it matter? Help me.

(looking up)

What's happening?

(whispers to Vladimir)

It's horrible.

VLADIMIR

Zinaida.

(she rises, looks out the window)

That night, the old woman from Harkov tells me that the child, a girl, is born, but the mother's life is in danger. Then a commotion, the wringing of hands, gasping looks of despair. The doctor suspects she has poisoned herself. At noon, the following day, she dies.

(ZINAIDA exits into the garden.)

VLADIMIR (cont'd)

As if blown in on the winds from Russia, I think of Orlov. And his irony.

(Lights change.)

15 SCENE FIFTEEN

15

(VLADIMIR, alone, in Orlov's flat.)

VLADIMIR

Two years pass. Circumstances change. I return to Petersburg. With Zinaida's child, Sonya. Whom I adore. Feeding her, bathing her, putting her to bed. Never take my eyes off her for days at a time. Sonya is everything to me. At last, I have found what I need. I love the child with all my heart. In her, my life continues. Not exactly what I expected, but I believe, that when all this is over, I will survive in those dear, little blue eyes. That silky, golden hair. Those little, tender hands that touch my face so lovingly, and grab me round the neck. But I'm dying.

(He coughs.

POLYA enters.

She serves him a cup of tea.)

VLADIMIR (cont'd)

I see there's a new footman.

POLYA

I don't know you.

(POLYA exits.

VLADIMIR pours himself a cup of tea.

Sound of a child laughing outside.

VLADIMIR watches Sonya playing in the garden. He smiles, sips his tea, coughs.

ORLOV enters.)

ORLOV

Ah, Monsieur Revolutionary! What fate has brought you back here to me? Come, sit down. Well, you look well.

VLADIMIR

Do I?

(beat)

ORLOV

Nice weather we're having, hm?

VLADIMIR

Yes, very nice. Listen--

ORLOV

I understand Zinaida has died.

VLADIMIR

Yes.

ORLOV

In childbirth, is that correct?

VLADIMIR

Yes. The doctor suspected otherwise, but...let's just say it was complications due to childbirth. That's her daughter. Playing in the garden. Sonya.

ORLOV

Ah. Hm. Lovely. And here, as you can see, nothing has changed. Not a thing. Though my father, perhaps you know, has left the service and retired. Yes. But I'm still in the same department. Do you remember Gruzin? Yes, Gruzin is the same as he always was. He often speaks of you. You made quite an impression on him.

(GRUZIN enters a spot light.)

GRUZIN

He attacked me. Would have murdered me, if he could have. But I gave him what for, I told him who he was dealing with. The socialist thug! Cutthroat. If you want my opinion, he was an assassin, plain and simple! They should have arrested him, and hanged him. Good riddance!

(GRUZIN exits.)

ORLOV

Care for some vodka?

VLADIMIR

No. Thank you. I've come to see you about a very important matter.

ORLOV

I don't care much for important matters. But I shall be glad to be of service to you, if I can.

VLADIMIR

It's...Sonya. I've raised her myself, but, the fact is...
(he coughs)

I don't expect to be here much longer.

ORLOV

Here, in Petersburg?

VLADIMIR

Here, in this world.

ORLOV

Ah. I see. Hm.

VLADIMIR

I would like to die knowing she'll be provided for.

ORLOV

Ah. Yes. I understand.

(looks out at the girl)

Sonya, did you say?

VLADIMIR

Yes, that's right. A dear child.

ORLOV

Mm-hm. Well, of course, I'm prepared to do my part. But I think we should discuss this with her husband, Krasnovsky. I'm sure he'd be willing to take the child.

VLADIMIR

Krasnovsky? I don't see what he has to do with it.

ORLOV

What is the child's last name?

VLADIMIR

Well, legally, he may be obliged to care for the child--I don't know--but I've come to you because--I'm not talking about the legal implications--

ORLOV

Yes, yes, of course. I don't know what I was thinking. Please, don't get excited.

VLADIMIR

I'm not excited.

ORLOV

I'm sure we can figure this out to everyone's satisfaction, hm? If one thing doesn't work, we'll try something else. If that doesn't work, we'll keep thinking. One way or another, we'll take care of this. I'll speak to Gruzin about it, hm? He'll arrange the whole thing.

VLADIMIR

Gruzin?

ORLOV

Yes, he's a lawyer, you know? Just leave me your address, and I'll let you know when we figure it all out. Where are you living, by the way?

VLADIMIR

I'd rather not say, if you don't mind.

ORLOV

Oh, yes. Of course not.

(looking at Sonya)

My God, what a job it is bringing up a little girl these days, eh? My God.

VLADIMIR

I'd prefer we leave Gruzin out of it.

ORLOV

Leave him out of it. Hm.

(produces a letter)

You've probably forgotten about this letter by now. The one you wrote me the night you left. Yes, I kept it. I understand you were...upset. But I'll admit to you, I admire this letter. Oh, yes...

(reading from the letter)

"You are an imposter." Very amusing. Very direct. Let's see..."imposter...fat, lazy pig...cowardly liar...I want to kill you..." Very nice, all very clever. Ah, and here, your central point, I think, "We have failed. You and I both. Why? Because I have deceived myself, and you"--that's me--"are a coward." Yes, I must admit, that seems very near the truth. Though I suppose we could argue about it all night. But what good would that do? Well, it would pass the time, which is nothing to sneeze at.

(beat)

Yes, I admit my life is perverse. I'm corrupt. I'm of no use to anyone. And the only thing that prevents me from chucking it all in is, yes, cowardice. You're quite right about that. But you take it all so seriously. You're so troubled by all of it. You reduce yourself to despair. That's irrational, my boy. You're all wrong there. A man can't avoid despair when he sees himself going to ruin, while others go to ruin all around him. Who doubts that? I'm not saying we should all be indifferent. I just think we should be objective about it. If we can be objective, we can avoid being deceived. Look at the root causes of things, see the cause of other causes. We have grown weak, feeble, degenerate. People our age are all neurotics, whiners. We do nothing but talk about how tired we are. We're exhausted. But it's not your fault. It's not my fault. We don't matter. Nothing we do will change anything. So why worry, and write long, dreary letters?

VLADIMIR

We only live once. We have to live courageously, aware. We have to appreciate beauty. We have to make a difference. We have to do some good. Lest those future generations say we squandered what opportunities we had. I believe what is happening now is inevitable, and it's happening for a reason. I just don't know how I fit in. Don't know what exactly is the meaning of my life.

ORLOV

Well, there no one can help you. Don't worry about the girl. I'll take care of it.

VLADIMIR

Give me back the letter.

ORLOV

Why should I?

(Beat.

ORLOV hands him the letter.)

ORLOV (cont'd)

I know a woman, who keeps a school, some sort of kindergarten. She takes children at a young age. She can be depended upon, entirely. Of course, we have to talk the whole thing over with Krasnovsky. That's just a matter of form. Get me her birth certificate. Trust me. I respect you, in my own particular way.

(with a smile)

Consider me your humble servant.

(VLADIMIR looks out the window.

We hear the sound of a little girl laughing, at play.

The two men watch the little girl in the garden.

ORLOV puts his hand on Vladimir's shoulder.

Blackout.)

THE END