Three Sisters

by Anton Chekhov

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Act I

In Prosorov’s house. A sitting-room with pillars; behind is seen a large dining-room. It is midday, the sun is shining brightly outside. In the dining-room the table is being laid for lunch.

Olga, in the regulation blue dress of a teacher at a girl’s high school, is walking about correcting exercise books; Masha, in a black dress, with a hat on her knees, sits and reads a book; Irina, in white, stands about, with a thoughtful expression. Olga It’s just a year since father died last May the fifth, on your name day, Irina. It was very cold then, and snowing. I thought I would never survive it, and you were in a dead faint. And now a year has gone by and we are already thinking about it without pain, and you are wearing a white dress and your face is happy. Clock strikes twelve. And the clock struck just the same way then. Pause. I remember that there was music at the funeral, and they fired a volley in the cemetery. He was a general in command of a brigade but there were few people present. Of course, it was raining then, raining hard, and snowing. Irina Why think about it! Baron Tuzenbach, Chebutikin and Soleni appear by the table in the dining-room, behind the pillars. Olga It’s so warm today that we can keep the windows open, though the birches are not yet in flower. Father was put in command of a brigade, and he rode out of Moscow with us eleven years ago. I remember perfectly that it was early in May and that everything in Moscow was flowering then. It was warm too, everything was bathed in sunshine. Eleven years have gone, and I remember everything as if we rode out only yesterday. Oh, God! When I awoke this morning and saw all the light and the spring, joy entered my heart, and I longed passionately

to go home. Chebutikin Will you take a bet on it? Tuzenbach Oh, nonsense. Masha, lost in a reverie over her book, whistles softly. Olga Don't whistle, Masha. How can you! Pause. I'm always having headaches from having to go to the high school every day and then teach till evening. Strange thoughts come to me, as if I were already an old woman. And really, during these four years that I have been working here, I have been feeling as if every day my strength and youth have been squeezed out of me, drop by drop. And only one desire grows and gains in strength …
Irina To go away to Moscow. To sell the house, drop everything here, and go to Moscow … Olga Yes! To Moscow, and as soon as possible. Chebutikin and Tuzenbach laugh. Irina I expect Andrey will become a professor, but still, he won't want to live here. Only poor Masha must go on living here. Olga Masha can come to Moscow every year, for the whole summer. Masha is whistling gently. Irina Everything will be arranged, please God. Looks out of the window. It's nice out today. I don't know why I'm so happy: I remembered this morning that it was my name day, and I suddenly felt glad and remembered my childhood, when mother was still with us. What beautiful thoughts I had, what thoughts! Olga You're all radiance today, I've never seen you look so lovely. And Masha is pretty, too. Andrey wouldn't be bad-looking, if he wasn't so stout; it does spoil his appearance. But I've grown old and very thin, I suppose it's because I get angry with the girls at school. Today I'm free. I'm at home. I haven't got a headache, and I feel younger than I was yesterday. I'm only twenty-eight. … All's well, God is everywhere,
but it seems to me that if only I were married and could stay at home all day, it would be even better. Pause. I should love my husband. Tuzenbach To Soleni. I'm tired of listening to the rot you talk. Entering the sitting-room. I forgot to say that Vershinin, our new lieutenant-colonel of artillery, is coming to see us today. Sits down to the piano. Olga That's good. I'm glad. Irina Is he old? Tuzenbach Oh, no. Forty or forty-five, at the very outside. Plays softly. He seems rather a good sort. He's certainly no fool, only he likes to hear himself speak. Irina Is he interesting?

Tuzenbach Oh, he's all right, but there's his wife, his mother-in-law, and two daughters. This is his second wife. He pays calls and tells everybody that he's got a wife and two daughters. He'll tell you so here. The wife isn't all there, she does her hair like a flapper and gushes extremely. She talks philosophy and tries to commit suicide every now and again, apparently in order to annoy her husband. I should have left her long ago, but he bears up patiently, and just grumbles. Soleni Enters with Chebutikin from the dining-room. With one hand I can only lift fifty-four pounds, but with both hands I can lift 180, or even 200 pounds. From this I conclude that two men are not twice as strong as one, but three times, perhaps even more. … Chebutikin Reads a newspaper as he walks. If your hair is coming out … take an ounce of naphthaline and hail a bottle of spirit … dissolve and use daily. … Makes a note in his pocket diary. When found make a note of! Not that I want it though. … Crosses it out. It doesn't matter. Irina Ivan Romanovitch, dear Ivan Romanovitch! Chebutikin What does my own little girl want? Irina Ivan Romanovitch, dear Ivan Romanovitch! I feel as if I were sailing under the broad blue sky with great white birds around me. Why is that? Why? Chebutikin Kisses her hands, tenderly. My white bird. … Irina When I woke up today and got up and dressed myself, I suddenly began to feel as if everything in this life was open to me, and that I knew how I must live. Dear Ivan Romanovitch, I know everything. A man must work, toil in the sweat of his brow, whoever he may be, for that is the meaning and object of his life, his happiness, his enthusiasm. How fine it is to be a workman who gets up at daybreak and breaks stones in the street, or a shepherd, or a schoolmaster, who teaches children, or an engine-driver on the railway. … My God, let alone a man, it's better to be an ox, or just a horse, so long as it can work, than a young woman who wakes up at twelve o'clock, has her coffee in bed, and then spends two hours dressing. … Oh it's awful! Sometimes when it's hot, your thirst can be just as tiresome as my need for work. And if I don't get up early in future and work, Ivan Romanovitch, then you may refuse me your friendship.

Chebutikin Tenderly. I'll refuse, I'll refuse. … Olga Father used to make us get up at seven. Now Irina wakes at seven and lies and meditates about something till nine at least. And she looks so serious! Laughs. Irina You're so used to seeing me as a little girl that it seems queer to you when my face is serious. I'm twenty! Tuzenbach How well I can understand that craving for work, oh God! I've never worked once in my life. I was born in Petersburg, a chilly, lazy place, in a family which never knew what work or worry meant. I remember that when I used to come home from my regiment, a footman used to have to pull off my boots while I fidgeted and my mother looked on in adoration and wondered why other people didn't see me in the same light. They shielded me from work; but only just in time! A new age is dawning, the people are marching on us all, a powerful, health-giving storm is gathering, it is drawing near, soon it will be upon us and it will drive away laziness, indifference, the prejudice against labour, and rotten dullness from our society. I shall work, and in twenty-five or thirty years, every man will have to work. Everyone! Chebutikin I shan't work. Tuzenbach You don't matter. Soleni In twenty-five years' time, we shall all be dead, thank the Lord. In two or three years' time apoplexy will carry you off, or else I'll blow your brains out, my pet. Takes a scent-bottle out of his pocket and sprinkles his chest and hands. Chebutikin Laughs. It's quite true, I never have worked. After I came down from the university I never stirred a finger or opened a book, I just read the papers. … Takes another newspaper out of his pocket. Here we are. … I've learnt from the papers that there used to be one, Dobrolubov,1 for instance, but what he wrote—I don't know … God only knows. … Somebody is heard tapping on the floor from below. There. … They're calling me downstairs, somebody's come to see me. I'll be back in a minute … won't be long. … Exit hurriedly, scratching his beard. Irina He's up to something. Tuzenbach Yes, he looked so pleased as he went out that I'm pretty certain he'll bring you a present in a moment. Irina How unpleasant! Olga Yes, it's awful. He's always doing silly things. Masha

“There stands a green oak by the sea. And a chain of bright gold is around it … And a chain of bright gold is around it. …”

Gets up and sings softly.

Olga You’re not very bright today, Masha. Masha sings, putting on her hat. Where are you off to? Masha Home. Irina That’s odd. … Tuzenbach On a name day, too! Masha It doesn’t matter. I’ll come in the evening. Goodbye, dear. Kisses Irina. Many happy returns, though I’ve said it before. In the old days when father was alive, every time we had a name day, thirty or forty officers used to come, and there was lots of noise and fun, and today there’s only a man and a half, and it’s as quiet as a desert … I’m off … I’ve got the hump today, and am not at all cheerful, so don’t you mind me. Laughs through her tears. We’ll have a talk later on, but goodbye for the present, my dear; I’ll go somewhere. Irina Displeased. You are queer. … Olga Crying. I understand you, Masha. Soleni When a man talks philosophy, well, it is philosophy or at any rate sophistry; but when a woman, or two women, talk philosophy—it’s all my eye. Masha What do you mean by that, you very awful man? Soleni Oh, nothing. You came down on me before I could say … help! Pause. Masha Angrily, to Olga. Don’t cry! Enter Anfisa and Ferapont with a cake. Anfisa This way, my dear. Come in, your feet are clean. To Irina. From the District Council, from Mihail Ivanitch Protopopov … a cake. Irina Thank you. Please thank him. Takes the cake. Ferapont What? Irina Louder. Please thank him. Olga Give him a pie, nurse. Ferapont, go, she’ll give you a pie. Ferapont What? Anfisa Come on, gran’fer, Ferapont Spiridonitch. Come on. Exeunt. Masha I don’t like this Mihail Potapitch or Ivanitch, Protopopov. We oughtn’t to invite him here. Irina I never asked him. Masha That’s all right. Enter Chebutikin followed by a soldier with a silver samovar; there is a rumble of dissatisfied surprise. Olga Covers her face with her hands. A samovar! That’s awful! Exit into the dining-room, to the table. Irina My dear Ivan Romanovitch, what are you doing! Tuzenbach Laughs. I told you so! Masha Ivan Romanovitch, you are simply shameless! Chebutikin My

dear good girl, you are the only thing, and the dearest thing I have in the world. I'll soon be sixty. I'm an old man, a lonely worthless old man. The only good thing in me is my love for you, and if it hadn't been for that, I would have been dead long ago. … To Irina. My dear little girl, I've known you since the day of your birth, I've carried you in my arms … I loved your dead mother. … Masha But your presents are so expensive! Chebutikin Angrily, through his tears. Expensive presents. … You really, are! … To the orderly. Take the samovar in there. … Teasing. Expensive presents! The orderly goes into the dining-room with the samovar. Anfisa Enters and crosses stage. My dear, there's a strange Colonel come! He's taken off his coat already. Children, he's coming here. Irina darling, you'll be a nice and polite little girl, won't you. … Should have lunched a long time ago. … Oh, Lord. … Exit. Tuzenbach It must be Vershinin. Enter Vershinin. Lieutenant-Colonel Vershinin! Vershinin To Masha and Irina. I have the honour to introduce myself, my name is Vershinin. I am very glad indeed to be able to come at last. How you've grown! Oh! oh! Irina Please sit down. We're very glad you've come. Vershinin Gaily. I am glad, very glad! But there are three sisters, surely. I remember—three little girls. I forget your faces, but your father, Colonel Prosorov, used to have three little girls, I remember that perfectly, I saw them with my own eyes. How time does fly! Oh, dear, how it flies! Tuzenbach Alexander Ignateyevitch comes from Moscow. Irina From Moscow? Are you from Moscow? Vershinin Yes, that's so. Your father used to be in charge of a battery there, and I was an officer in the same brigade. To Masha. I seem to remember your face a little. Masha I don't remember you. Irina Olga! Olga! Shouts into the dining-room. Olga! Come along! Olga enters from the dining-room. Lieutenant Colonel Vershinin comes from Moscow, as it happens. Vershinin I take it that you are Olga Sergeyevna, the eldest, and that you are Maria … and you are Irina, the youngest. … Olga So you come from Moscow? Vershinin Yes. I went to school in Moscow and began my service there; I was there for a long time until at last I got

my battery and moved over here, as you see. I don't really remember you, I only remember that there used to be three sisters. I remember your father well; I have only to shut my eyes to see him as he was. I used to come to your house in Moscow. … Olga I used to think I remembered everybody, but … Vershinin My name is Alexander Ignateyevitch. Irina Alexander Ignateyevitch, you've come from Moscow. That is really quite a surprise! Olga We are going to live there, you see. Irina We think we may be there this autumn. It's our native town, we were born there. In Old Basmanni Road. … They both laugh for joy. Masha We've unexpectedly met a fellow countryman. Briskly. I remember: Do you remember, Olga, they used to speak at home of a "lovelorn Major." You were only a Lieutenant then, and in love with somebody, but for some reason they always called you a Major for fun. Vershinin Laughs. That's it … the lovelorn Major, that's got it! Masha You only wore moustaches then. You have grown older! Through her tears. You have grown older! Vershinin Yes, when they used to call me the lovelorn Major, I was young and in love. I've grown out of both now. Olga But you haven't a single white hair yet. You're older, but you're not yet old. Vershinin I'm forty-two, anyway. Have you been away from Moscow long? Irina Eleven years. What are you crying for, Masha, you little fool. … Crying. And I'm crying too. Masha It's all right. And where did you live? Vershinin Old Basmanni Road. Olga Same as we. Vershinin Once I used to live in German Street. That was when the Red Barracks were my headquarters. There's an ugly bridge in between, where the water rushes underneath. One gets melancholy when one is alone there. Pause. Here the river is so wide and fine! It's a splendid river! Olga Yes, but it's so cold. It's very cold here, and the midges. … Vershinin What are you saying! Here you've got such a fine healthy Russian climate. You've a forest, a river … and birches. Dear, modest birches, I like them more than any other tree. It's good to live here. Only it's odd that the railway station should be thirteen miles away. … Nobody knows why. Soleni I know why. All look at him. Because if it was near it wouldn't be far off,

and if it's far off, it can't be near. An awkward pause. Tuzenbach Funny man. Olga Now I know who you are. I remember. Vershinin I used to know your mother. Chebutikin She was a good woman, rest her soul. Irina Mother is buried in Moscow. Olga At the Novo-Devichi Cemetery. Masha Do you know, I'm beginning to forget her face. We'll be forgotten in just the same way. Vershinin Yes, they'll forget us. It's our fate, it can't be helped. A time will come when everything that seems serious, significant, or very important to us will be forgotten, or considered trivial. Pause. And the curious thing is that we can't possibly find out what will come to be regarded as great and important, and what will be feeble, or silly. Didn't the discoveries of Copernicus, or Columbus, say, seem unnecessary and ludicrous at first, while wasn't it thought that some rubbish written by a fool, held all the truth? And it may so happen that our present existence, with which we are so satisfied, will in time appear strange, inconvenient, stupid, unclean, perhaps even sinful. … Tuzenbach Who knows? But on the other hand, they may call our life noble and honour its memory. We've abolished torture and capital punishment, we live in security, but how much suffering there is still! Soleni In a feeble voice. There, there. … The Baron will go without his dinner if you only let him talk philosophy. Tuzenbach Vassili Vassilevitch, kindly leave me alone. Changes his chair. You're very dull, you know. Soleni Feebly. There, there, there. Tuzenbach To Vershinin. The sufferings we see today—there are so many of them!—still indicate a certain moral improvement in society. Vershinin Yes, yes, of course. Chebutikin You said just now, Baron, that they may call our life noble; but we are very petty. … Stands up. See how little I am. Violin played behind. Masha That's Andrey playing—our brother. Irina He's the learned member of the family. I expect he will be a professor some day. Father was a soldier, but his son chose an academic career for himself. Masha That was father's wish. Olga We ragged him today. We think he's a little in love. Irina To a local lady. She will probably come here today. Masha You should see the way she dresses! Quite prettily, quite

fashionably too, but so badly! Some queer bright yellow skirt with a wretched little fringe and a red bodice. And such a complexion! Andrey isn't in love. After all he has taste, he's simply making fun of us. I heard yesterday that she was going to marry Protopopov, the chairman of the Local Council. That would do her nicely. … At the side door. Andrey, come here! Just for a minute, dear! Enter Andrey. Olga My brother, Andrey Sergeyevitch. Vershinin My name is Vershinin. Andrey Mine is Prosorov. Wipes his perspiring hands. You've come to take charge of the battery? Olga Just think, Alexander Ignateyevitch comes from Moscow. Andrey That's all right. Now my little sisters won't give you any rest. Vershinin I've already managed to bore your sisters. Irina Just look what a nice little photograph frame Andrey gave me today. Shows it. He made it himself. Vershinin Looks at the frame and does not know what to say. Yes. … It's a thing that … Irina And he made that frame there, on the piano as well. Andrey waves his hand and walks away. Olga He's got a degree, and plays the violin, and cuts all sorts of things out of wood, and is really a domestic Admirable Crichton. Don't go away, Andrey! He's got into a habit of always going away. Come here! Masha and Irina take his arms and laughingly lead him back. Masha Come on, come on! Andrey Please leave me alone. Masha You are funny. Alexander Ignateyevitch used to be called the lovelorn Major, but he never minded. Vershinin Not the least. Masha I'd like to call you the lovelorn fiddler! Irina Or the lovelorn professor! Olga He's in love! little Andrey is in love! Irina Applauds. Bravo, Bravo! Encore! Little Andrey is in love. Chebutikin Goes up behind Andrey and takes him round the waist with both arms. Nature only brought us into the world that we should love! Roars with laughter, then sits down and reads a newspaper which he takes out of his pocket. Andrey That's enough, quite enough. … Wipes his face. I couldn't sleep all night and now I can't quite find my feet, so to speak. I read until four o'clock, then tried to sleep, but nothing happened. I thought about one thing and another, and then it dawned and the sun crawled into my bedroom. This summer, while I'm here, I want to translate a book

from the English. … Vershinin Do you read English? Andrey Yes father, rest his soul, educated us almost violently. It may seem funny and silly, but it's nevertheless true, that after his death I began to fill out and get rounder, as if my body had had some great pressure taken off it. Thanks to father, my sisters and I know French, German, and English, and Irina knows Italian as well. But we paid dearly for it all! Masha A knowledge of three languages is an unnecessary luxury in this town. It isn't even a luxury but a sort of useless extra, like a sixth finger. We know a lot too much. Vershinin Well, I say! Laughs. You know a lot too much! I don't think there can really be a town so dull and stupid as to have no place for a clever, cultured person. Let us suppose even that among the hundred thousand inhabitants of this backward and uneducated town, there are only three persons like yourself. It stands to reason that you won't be able to conquer that dark mob around you; little by little as you grow older you will be bound to give way and lose yourselves in this crowd of a hundred thousand human beings; their life will suck you up in itself, but still, you won't disappear having influenced nobody; later on, others like you will come, perhaps six of them, then twelve, and so on, until at last your sort will be in the majority. In two or three hundred years' time life on this earth will be unimaginably beautiful and wonderful. Mankind needs such a life, and if it is not ours today then we must look ahead for it, wait, think, prepare for it. We must see and know more than our fathers and grandfathers saw and knew. Laughs. And you complain that you know too much. Masha Takes off her hat. I'll stay to lunch. Irina Sighs. Yes, all that ought to be written down. Andrey has gone out quietly. Tuzenbach You say that many years later on, life on this earth will be beautiful and wonderful. That's true. But to share in it now, even though at a distance, we must prepare by work. … Vershinin Gets up. Yes. What a lot of flowers you have. Looks round. It's a beautiful flat. I envy you! I've spent my whole life in rooms with two chairs, one sofa, and fires which always smoke. I've never had flowers like these in my life. … Rubs his hands. Well, well! Tuzenbach Yes, we must work. You are probably

thinking to yourself: the German lets himself go. But I assure you I'm a Russian, I can't even speak German. My father belonged to the Orthodox Church. … Pause. Vershinin Walks about the stage. I often wonder: suppose we could begin life over again, knowing what we were doing? Suppose we could use one life, already ended, as a sort of rough draft for another? I think that every one of us would try, more than anything else, not to repeat himself, at the very least he would rearrange his manner of life, he would make sure of rooms like these, with flowers and light … I have a wife and two daughters, my wife's health is delicate and so on and so on, and if I had to begin life all over again I would not marry. … No, no! Enter Kuligin in a regulation jacket. Kuligin Going up to Irina. Dear sister, allow me to congratulate you on the day sacred to your good angel and to wish you, sincerely and from the bottom of my heart, good health and all that one can wish for a girl of your years. And then let me offer you this book as a present. Gives it to her. It is the history of our high school during the last fifty years, written by myself. The book is worthless, and written because I had nothing to do, but read it all the same. Good day, gentlemen! To Vershinin. My name is Kuligin, I am a master of the local high school.2 To Irina. In this book you will find a list of all those who have taken the full course at our high school during these fifty years. Feci quod potui, faciant meliora potentes. Kisses Masha. Irina But you gave me one of these at Easter. Kuligin Laughs. I couldn't have, surely! You'd better give it back to me in that case, or else give it to the Colonel. Take it, Colonel. You'll read it some day when you're bored. Vershinin Thank you. Prepares to go. I am extremely happy to have made the acquaintance of … Olga Must you go? No, not yet? Irina You'll stop and have lunch with us. Please do. Olga Yes, please! Vershinin Bows. I seem to have dropped in on your name day. Forgive me, I didn't know, and I didn't offer you my congratulations. Goes with Olga into the dining-room. Kuligin Today is Sunday, the day of rest, so let us rest and rejoice, each in a manner compatible with his age and disposition. The carpets will have to be taken up for the summer and put away till

the winter … Persian powder or naphthaline. … The Romans were healthy because they knew both how to work and how to rest, they had mens sana in corpore sano. Their life ran along certain recognized patterns. Our director says: “The chief thing about each life is its pattern. Whoever loses his pattern is lost himself”—and it’s just the same in our daily life. Takes Masha by the waist, laughing. Masha loves me. My wife loves me. And you ought to put the window curtains away with the carpets. … I’m feeling awfully pleased with life today. Masha, we’ve got to be at the director’s at four. They’re getting up a walk for the pedagogues and their families. Masha I shan’t go. Kuligin Hurt. My dear Masha, why not? Masha I’ll tell you later. … Angrily. All right, I’ll go, only please stand back. … Steps away. Kuligin And then we’re to spend the evening at the director’s. In spite of his ill-health that man tries, above everything else, to be sociable. A splendid, illuminating personality. A wonderful man. After yesterday’s committee he said to me: “I’m tired, Feodor Ilitch, I’m tired!” Looks at the clock, then at his watch. Your clock is seven minutes fast. “Yes,” he said, “I’m tired.” Violin played off. Olga Let’s go and have lunch! There’s to be a masterpiece of baking! Kuligin Oh my dear Olga, my dear. Yesterday I was working till eleven o’clock at night, and got awfully tired. Today I’m quite happy. Goes into dining-room. My dear … Chebutikin Puts his paper into his pocket, and combs his beard. A pie? Splendid! Masha Severely to Chebutikin. Only mind; you’re not to drink anything today. Do you hear? It’s bad for you. Chebutikin Oh, that’s all right. I haven’t been drunk for two years. And it’s all the same, anyway! Masha You’re not to dare to drink, all the same. Angrily, but so that her husband should not hear. Another dull evening at the Director’s, confound it! Tuzenbach I shouldn’t go if I were you. … It’s quite simple. Chebutikin Don’t go. Masha Yes, “don’t go. …” It’s a cursed, unbearable life. … Goes into dining-room. Chebutikin Follows her. It’s not so bad. Soleni Going into the dining-room. There, there, there. … Tuzenbach Vassili Vassilevitch, that’s enough. Be quiet! Soleni There, there, there. …

Kuligin Gaily. Your health, Colonel! I'm a pedagogue and not quite at home here. I'm Masha's husband. … She's a good sort, a very good sort. Vershinin I'll have some of this black vodka. … Drinks. Your health! To Olga. I'm very comfortable here! Only Irina and Tuzenbach are now left in the sitting-room. Irina Masha's out of sorts today. She married when she was eighteen, when he seemed to her the wisest of men. And now it's different. He's the kindest man, but not the wisest. Olga Impatiently. Andrey, when are you coming? Andrey Off. One minute. Enters and goes to the table. Tuzenbach What are you thinking about? Irina I don't like this Soleni of yours and I'm afraid of him. He only says silly things. Tuzenbach He's a queer man. I'm sorry for him, though he vexes me. I think he's shy. When there are just the two of us he's quite all right and very good company; when other people are about he's rough and hectoring. Don't let's go in, let them have their meal without us. Let me stay with you. What are you thinking of? Pause. You're twenty. I'm not yet thirty. How many years are there left to us, with their long, long lines of days, filled with my love for you. … Irina Nicolai Lvovitch, don't speak to me of love. Tuzenbach Does not hear. I've a great thirst for life, struggle, and work, and this thirst has united with my love for you, Irina, and you're so beautiful, and life seems so beautiful to me! What are you thinking about? Irina You say that life is beautiful. Yes, if only it seems so! The life of us three hasn't been beautiful yet; it has been stifling us as if it was weeds … I'm crying. I oughtn't. … Dries her tears, smiles. We must work, work. That is why we are unhappy and look at the world so sadly; we don't know what work is. Our parents despised work. … Enter Natalia Ivanova; she wears a pink dress and a green sash. Natasha They're already at lunch … I'm late … Carefully examines herself in a mirror, and puts herself straight. I think my hair's done all right. … Sees Irina. Dear Irina Sergeyevna, I congratulate you! Kisses her firmly and at length. You've so many visitors, I'm really ashamed. … How do you do, Baron! Olga Enters from dining-room. Here's Natalia Ivanovna. How are you, dear! They kiss. Natasha

Happy returns. I'm awfully shy, you've so many people here. Olga All our friends. Frightened, in an undertone. You're wearing a green sash! My dear, you shouldn't! Natasha Is it a sign of anything? Olga No, it simply doesn't go well … and it looks so queer. Natasha In a tearful voice. Yes? But it isn't really green, it's too dull for that. Goes into dining-room with Olga. They have all sat down to lunch in the dining-room, the sitting-room is empty. Kuligin I wish you a nice fiancée, Irina. It's quite time you married. Chebutikin Natalia Ivanovna, I wish you the same. Kuligin Natalia Ivanovna has a fiancé already. Masha Raps with her fork on a plate. Let's all get drunk and make life purple for once! Kuligin You've lost three good conduct marks. Vershinin This is a nice drink. What's it made of? Soleni Blackbeetles. Irina Tearfully. Phoo! How disgusting! Olga There is to be a roast turkey and a sweet apple pie for dinner. Thank goodness I can spend all day and the evening at home. You'll come in the evening, ladies and gentlemen. … Vershinin And please may I come in the evening! Irina Please do. Natasha They don't stand on ceremony here. Chebutikin Nature only brought us into the world that we should love! Laughs. Andrey Angrily. Please don't! Aren't you tired of it? Enter Fedotik and Rode with a large basket of flowers. Fedotik They're lunching already. Rode Loudly and thickly. Lunching? Yes, so they are. … Fedotik Wait a minute! Takes a photograph. That's one. No, just a moment. … Takes another. That's two. Now we're ready! They take the basket and go into the dining-room, where they have a noisy reception. Rode Loudly. Congratulations and best wishes! Lovely weather today, simply perfect. Was out walking with the high school students all the morning. I take their drills. Fedotik You may move, Irina Sergeyevna! Takes a photograph. You look well today. Takes a humming-top out of his pocket. Here's a humming-top, by the way. It's got a lovely note! Irina How awfully nice! Masha

"There stands a green oak by the sea, And a chain of bright gold is around it … And a chain of bright gold is around it …"

Tearfully. What am I saying that for? I've had those words running in my head all

day. …

Act II

Scene as before. It is 8 p.m. Somebody is heard playing a concertina outside in the street. There is no fire.

Natalia Ivanovna enters in indoor dress carrying a candle; she stops by the door which leads into Andrey's room. Natasha What are you doing, Andrey? Are you reading? It's nothing, only I. … She opens another door, and looks in, then closes it. Isn't there any fire. … Andrey Enters with book in hand. What are you doing, Natasha? Natasha I was looking to see if there wasn't a fire. It's Shrovetide, and the servant is simply beside herself; I must look out that something doesn't happen. When I came through the dining-room yesterday midnight, there was a candle burning. I couldn't get her to tell me who had lighted it. Puts down her candle. What's the time? Andrey Looks at his watch. A quarter past eight. Natasha And Olga and Irina aren't in yet. The poor things are still at work. Olga at the teacher's council, Irina at the telegraph office. … Sighs. I said to your sister this morning, "Irina, darling, you must take care of yourself." But she pays no attention. Did you say it was a quarter past eight? I am afraid little Bobby is quite ill. Why is he so cold? He was feverish yesterday, but today he is quite cold … I am so frightened! Andrey It's all right, Natasha. The boy is well. Natasha Still, I think we ought to put him on a diet. I am so afraid. And the entertainers were to be here after nine; they had better not come, Audrey. Andrey I don't know. After all, they were asked. Natasha This morning, when the little boy woke up and saw me he suddenly smiled; that means he knew me. "Good morning, Bobby!" I said, "good morning, darling." And he laughed. Children understand, they understand very well. So I'll tell them, Andrey dear, not to receive the entertainers. Andrey Hesitatingly. But what about my sisters. This is their flat. Natasha They'll do as I want them. They are

so kind. … Going. I ordered sour milk for supper. The doctor says you must eat sour milk and nothing else, or you won't get thin. Stops. Bobby is so cold. I'm afraid his room is too cold for him. It would be nice to put him into another room till the warm weather comes. Irina's room, for instance, is just right for a child: it's dry and has the sun all day. I must tell her, she can share Olga's room. It isn't as if she was at home in the daytime, she only sleeps here. … A pause. Andrey, darling, why are you so silent? Andrey I was just thinking. … There is really nothing to say. … Natasha Yes … there was something I wanted to tell you. … Oh, yes. Ferapont has come from the Council offices, he wants to see you. Andrey Yawns. Call him here. Natasha goes out; Andrey reads his book, stooping over the candle she has left behind. Ferapont enters; he wears a tattered old coat with the collar up. His ears are muffled. Andrey Good morning, grandfather. What have you to say? Ferapont The Chairman sends a book and some documents or other. Here. … Hands him a book and a packet. Andrey Thank you. It's all right. Why couldn't you come earlier? It's past eight now. Ferapont What? Andrey Louder. I say you've come late, it's past eight. Ferapont Yes, yes. I came when it was still light, but they wouldn't let me in. They said you were busy. Well, what was I to do. If you're busy, you're busy, and I'm in no hurry. He thinks that Andrey is asking him something. What? Andrey Nothing. Looks through the book. Tomorrow's Friday. I'm not supposed to go to work, but I'll come—all the same … and do some work. It's dull at home. Pause. Oh, my dear old man, how strangely life changes, and how it deceives! Today, out of sheer boredom, I took up this book—old university lectures, and I couldn't help laughing. My God, I'm secretary of the local district council, the council which has Protopopov for its chairman, yes, I'm the secretary, and the summit of my ambitions is—to become a member of the council! I to be a member of the local district council, I, who dream every night that I'm a professor of Moscow University, a famous scholar of whom all Russia is proud! Ferapont I can't tell … I'm hard of hearing. … Andrey If you weren't, I don't suppose I

should talk to you. I've got to talk to somebody, and my wife doesn't understand me, and I'm a bit afraid of my sisters—I don't know why unless it is that they may make fun of me and make me feel ashamed … I don't drink, I don't like public-houses, but how I should like to be sitting just now in Tyestov's place in Moscow, or at the Great Moscow, old fellow! Ferapont Moscow? That's where a contractor was once telling that some merchants or other were eating pancakes; one ate forty pancakes and he went and died, he was saying. Either forty or fifty, I forget which. Andrey In Moscow you can sit in an enormous restaurant where you don't know anybody and where nobody knows you, and you don't feel all the same that you're a stranger. And here you know everybody and everybody knows you, and you're a stranger … and a lonely stranger. Ferapont What? And the same contractor was telling—perhaps he was lying—that there was a cable stretching right across Moscow. Andrey What for? Ferapont I can't tell. The contractor said so. Andrey Rubbish. He reads. Were you ever in Moscow? Ferapont After a pause. No. God did not lead me there. Pause. Shall I go? Andrey You may go. Goodbye. Ferapont goes. Goodbye. Reads. You can come tomorrow and fetch these documents. … Go along. … Pause. He's gone. A ring. Yes, yes. …

Stretches himself and slowly goes into his own room. Behind the scene the nurse is singing a lullaby to the child. Masha and Vershinin come in. While they talk, a maidservant lights candles and a lamp. Masha I don't know. Pause. I don't know. Of course, habit counts for a great deal. After father's death, for instance, it took us a long time to get used to the absence of orderlies. But, apart from habit, it seems to me in all fairness that, however it may be in other towns, the best and most-educated people are army men. Vershinin I'm thirsty. I should like some tea. Masha Glancing at her watch. They'll bring some soon. I was given in marriage when I was eighteen, and I was afraid of my husband because he was a teacher and I'd only just left school. He then seemed to me frightfully wise and learned and important. And now, unfortunately, that has changed. Vershinin Yes … yes. Masha I don't speak of

my husband, I've grown used to him, but civilians in general are so often coarse, impolite, uneducated. Their rudeness offends me, it angers me. I suffer when I see that a man isn't quite sufficiently refined, or delicate, or polite. I simply suffer agonies when I happen to be among schoolmasters, my husband's colleagues. Vershinin Yes. … It seems to me that civilians and army men are equally interesting, in this town, at any rate. It's all the same! If you listen to a member of the local intelligentsia, whether to civilian or military, he will tell you that he's sick of his wife, sick of his house, sick of his estate, sick of his horses. … We Russians are extremely gifted in the direction of thinking on an exalted plane, but, tell me, why do we aim so low in real life? Why? Masha Why? Vershinin Why is a Russian sick of his children, sick of his wife? And why are his wife and children sick of him? Masha You're a little downhearted today. Vershinin Perhaps I am. I haven't had any dinner, I've had nothing since the morning. My daughter is a little unwell, and when my girls are ill, I get very anxious and my conscience tortures me because they have such a mother. Oh, if you had seen her today! What a trivial personality! We began quarrelling at seven in the morning and at nine I slammed the door and went out. Pause. I never speak of her, it's strange that I bear my complaints to you alone. Kisses her hand. Don't be angry with me. I haven't anybody but you, nobody at all. … Pause. Masha What a noise in the oven. Just before father's death there was a noise in the pipe, just like that. Vershinin Are you superstitious? Masha Yes. Vershinin That's strange. Kisses her hand. You are a splendid, wonderful woman. Splendid, wonderful! It is dark here, but I see your sparkling eyes. Masha Sits on another chair. There is more light here. Vershinin I love you, love you, love you … I love your eyes, your movements, I dream of them. … Splendid, wonderful woman! Masha Laughing. When you talk to me like that, I laugh; I don't know why, for I'm afraid. Don't repeat it, please. … In an undertone. No, go on, it's all the same to me. … Covers her face with her hands. Somebody's coming, let's talk about something else. Irina and Tuzenbach come in

through the dining-room. Tuzenbach My surname is really triple. I am called Baron Tuzenbach-Krone-Altschauer, but I am Russian and Orthodox, the same as you. There is very little German left in me, unless perhaps it is the patience and the obstinacy with which I bore you. I see you home every night. Irina How tired I am! Tuzenbach And I'll come to the telegraph office to see you home every day for ten or twenty years, until you drive me away. He sees Masha and Vershinin; joyfully. Is that you? How do you do. Irina Well, I am home at last. To Masha. A lady came today to telegraph to her brother in Saratov that her son died today, and she couldn't remember the address anyhow. So she sent the telegram without an address, just to Saratov. She was crying. And for some reason or other I was rude to her. "I've no time," I said. It was so stupid. Are the entertainers coming tonight? Masha Yes. Irina Sitting down in an armchair. I want a rest. I am tired. Tuzenbach Smiling. When you come home from your work you seem so young, and so unfortunate. … Pause. Irina I am tired. No, I don't like the telegraph office, I don't like it. Masha You've grown thinner. … Whistles a little. And you look younger, and your face has become like a boy's. Tuzenbach That's the way she does her hair. Irina I must find another job, this one won't do for me. What I wanted, what I hoped to get, just that is lacking here. Labour without poetry, without ideas. … A knock on the floor. The doctor is knocking. To Tuzenbach. Will you knock, dear. I can't … I'm tired. … Tuzenbach knocks. He'll come in a minute. Something ought to be done. Yesterday the doctor and Andrey played cards at the club and lost money. Andrey seems to have lost 200 roubles. Masha With indifference. What can we do now? Irina He lost money a fortnight ago, he lost money in December. Perhaps if he lost everything we should go away from this town. Oh, my God, I dream of Moscow every night. I'm just like a lunatic. Laughs. We go there in June, and before June there's still … February, March, April, May … nearly half a year! Masha Only Natasha mustn't get to know of these losses. Irina I expect it will be all the same to her. Chebutikin, who has only just got out of bed—he was resting after

dinner—comes into the dining-room and combs his beard. He then sits by the table and takes a newspaper from his pocket. Masha Here he is. … Has he paid his rent? Irina Laughs. No. He's been here eight months and hasn't paid a copeck. Seems to have forgotten. Masha Laughs. What dignity in his pose! They all laugh. A pause. Irina Why are you so silent, Alexander Ignateyevitch? Vershinin I don't know. I want some tea. Half my life for a tumbler of tea: I haven't had anything since morning. Chebutikin Irina Sergeyevna! Irina What is it? Chebutikin Please come here, Venez ici. Irina goes and sits by the table. I can't do without you. Irina begins to play patience. Vershinin Well, if we can't have any tea, let's philosophize, at any rate. Tuzenbach Yes, let's. About what? Vershinin About what? Let us meditate … about life as it will be after our time; for example, in two or three hundred years. Tuzenbach Well? After our time people will fly about in balloons, the cut of one's coat will change, perhaps they'll discover a sixth sense and develop it, but life will remain the same, laborious, mysterious, and happy. And in a thousand years' time, people will still be sighing: "Life is hard!"—and at the same time they'll be just as afraid of death, and unwilling to meet it, as we are. Vershinin Thoughtfully. How can I put it? It seems to me that everything on earth must change, little by little, and is already changing under our very eyes. After two or three hundred years, after a thousand—the actual time doesn't matter—a new and happy age will begin. We, of course, shall not take part in it, but we live and work and even suffer today that it should come. We create it—and in that one object is our destiny and, if you like, our happiness. Masha laughs softly. Tuzenbach What is it? Masha I don't know. I've been laughing all day, ever since morning. Vershinin I finished my education at the same point as you, I have not studied at universities; I read a lot, but I cannot choose my books and perhaps what I read is not at all what I should, but the longer I love, the more I want to know. My hair is turning white, I am nearly an old man now, but I know so little, oh, so little! But I think I know the things that matter most, and that are most real. I know them well.

And I wish I could make you understand that there is no happiness for us, that there should not and cannot be. … We must only work and work, and happiness is only for our distant posterity. Pause. If not for me, then for the descendants of my descendants. Fedotik and Rode come into the dining-room; they sit and sing softly, strumming on a guitar. Tuzenbach According to you, one should not even think about happiness! But suppose I am happy! Vershinin No. Tuzenbach Moves his hands and laughs. We do not seem to understand each other. How can I convince you? Masha laughs quietly, Tuzenbach continues, pointing at her. Yes, laugh! To Vershinin. Not only after two or three centuries, but in a million years, life will still be as it was; life does not change, it remains forever, following its own laws which do not concern us, or which, at any rate, you will never find out. Migrant birds, cranes for example, fly and fly, and whatever thoughts, high or low, enter their heads, they will still fly and not know why or where. They fly and will continue to fly, whatever philosophers come to life among them; they may philosophize as much as they like, only they will fly. … Masha Still, is there a meaning? Tuzenbach A meaning. … Now the snow is falling. What meaning? Pause. Masha It seems to me that a man must have faith, or must search for a faith, or his life will be empty, empty. … To live and not to know why the cranes fly, why babies are born, why there are stars in the sky. … Either you must know why you live, or everything is trivial, not worth a straw. A pause. Vershinin Still, I am sorry that my youth has gone. Masha Gogol says: life in this world is a dull matter, my masters! Tuzenbach And I say it’s difficult to argue with you, my masters! Hang it all. Chebutikin Reading. Balzac was married at Berdichev. Irina is singing softly. That’s worth making a note of. He makes a note. Balzac was married at Berdichev. Goes on reading. Irina Laying out cards, thoughtfully. Balzac was married at Berdichev. Tuzenbach The die is cast. I’ve handed in my resignation, Maria Sergeyevna. Masha So I heard. I don’t see what good it is; I don’t like civilians. Tuzenbach Never mind. … Gets up. I’m not handsome; what use am I as a

soldier? Well, it makes no difference … I shall work. If only just once in my life I could work so that I could come home in the evening, fall exhausted on my bed, and go to sleep at once. Going into the dining-room. Workmen, I suppose, do sleep soundly! Fedotik To Irina. I bought some coloured pencils for you at Pizhikov's in the Moscow Road, just now. And here is a little knife. Irina You have got into the habit of behaving to me as if I am a little girl, but I am grown up. Takes the pencils and the knife, then, with joy. How lovely! Fedotik And I bought myself a knife … look at it … one blade, another, a third, an ear-scoop, scissors, nail-cleaners. Rode Loudly. Doctor, how old are you? Chebutikin I? Thirty-two. Laughter. Fedotik I'll show you another kind of patience. … Lays out cards. A samovar is brought in; Anfisa attends to it; a little later Natasha enters and helps by the table; Soleni arrives and, after greetings, sits by the table. Vershinin What a wind! Masha Yes. I'm tired of winter. I've already forgotten what summer's like. Irina It's coming out, I see. We're going to Moscow. Fedotik No, it won't come out. Look, the eight was on the two of spades. Laughs. That means you won't go to Moscow. Chebutikin Reading paper. Tsitsigar. Smallpox is raging here. Anfisa Coming up to Masha. Masha, have some tea, little mother. To Vershinin. Please have some, sir … excuse me, but I've forgotten your name. … Masha Bring some here, nurse. I shan't go over there. Irina Nurse! Anfisa Coming, coming! Natasha To Soleni. Children at the breast understand perfectly. I said "Good morning, Bobby; good morning, dear!" And he looked at me in quite an unusual way. You think it's only the mother in me that is speaking; I assure you that isn't so! He's a wonderful child. Soleni If he was my child I'd roast him on a frying-pan and eat him. Takes his tumbler into the drawing-room and sits in a corner. Natasha Covers her face in her hands. Vulgar, ill-bred man! Masha He's lucky who doesn't notice whether it's winter now, or summer. I think that if I were in Moscow, I shouldn't mind about the weather. Vershinin A few days ago I was reading the prison diary of a French minister. He had been sentenced on account of the Panama

scandal. With what joy, what delight, he speaks of the birds he saw through the prison windows, which he had never noticed while he was a minister. Now, of course, that he is at liberty, he notices birds no more than he did before. When you go to live in Moscow you'll not notice it, in just the same way. There can be no happiness for us, it only exists in our wishes. Tuzenbach Takes cardboard box from the table. Where are the pastries? Irina Soleni has eaten them. Tuzenbach All of them? Anfisa Serving tea. There's a letter for you. Vershinin For me? Takes the letter. From my daughter. Reads. Yes, of course … I will go quietly. Excuse me, Maria Sergeyevna. I shan't have any tea. Stands up, excited. That eternal story. … Masha What is it? Is it a secret? Vershinin Quietly. My wife has poisoned herself again. I must go. I'll go out quietly. It's all awfully unpleasant. Kisses Masha's hand. My dear, my splendid, good woman … I'll go this way, quietly. Exit. Anfisa Where has he gone? And I'd served tea. … What a man. Masha Angrily. Be quiet! You bother so one can't have a moment's peace. … Goes to the table with her cup. I'm tired of you, old woman! Anfisa My dear! Why are you offended! Andrey's voice Anfisa! Anfisa Mocking. Anfisa! He sits there and … Exit. Masha In the dining-room, by the table angrily. Let me sit down! Disturbs the cards on the table. Here you are, spreading your cards out. Have some tea! Irina You are cross, Masha. Masha If I am cross, then don't talk to me. Don't touch me! Chebutikin Don't touch her, don't touch her. … Masha You're sixty, but you're like a boy, always up to some beastly nonsense. Natasha Sighs. Dear Masha, why use such expressions? With your beautiful exterior you would be simply fascinating in good society, I tell you so directly, if it wasn't for your words. Je vous prie, pardonnez moi, Marie, mais vous avez des manières un peu grossières. Tuzenbach Restraining his laughter. Give me … give me … there's some cognac, I think. Natasha Il parait, que mon Bobick déjà ne dort pas, he has awakened. He isn't well today. I'll go to him, excuse me … Exit. Irina Where has Alexander Ignateyevitch gone? Masha Home. Something extraordinary has happened to his

wife again. Tuzenbach Goes to Soleni with a cognac-flask in his hands. You go on sitting by yourself, thinking of something—goodness knows what. Come and let's make peace. Let's have some cognac. They drink. I expect I'll have to play the piano all night, some rubbish most likely … well, so be it! Soleni Why make peace? I haven't quarrelled with you. Tuzenbach You always make me feel as if something has taken place between us. You've a strange character, you must admit. Soleni Declaims. "I am strange, but who is not? Don't be angry, Aleko!" Tuzenbach And what has Aleko to do with it? Pause. Soleni When I'm with one other man I behave just like everybody else, but in company I'm dull and shy and … talk all manner of rubbish. But I'm more honest and more honourable than very, very many people. And I can prove it. Tuzenbach I often get angry with you, you always fasten on to me in company, but I like you all the same. I'm going to drink my fill tonight, whatever happens. Drink, now! Soleni Let's drink. They drink. I never had anything against you, Baron. But my character is like Lermontov's In a low voice. I even rather resemble Lermontov, they say. … Takes a scent-bottle from his pocket, and scents his hands. Tuzenbach I've sent in my resignation. Basta! I've been thinking about it for five years, and at last made up my mind. I shall work. Soleni Declaims. "Do not be angry, Aleko … forget, forget, thy dreams of yore. …"
While he is speaking Andrey enters quietly with a book, and sits by the table. Tuzenbach I shall work. Chebutikin Going with Irina into the dining-room. And the food was also real Caucasian onion soup, and, for a roast, some chehartma. Soleni Cheremsha3 isn't meat at all, but a plant something like an onion. Chebutikin No, my angel. Chehartma isn't onion, but roast mutton. Soleni And I tell you, chehartma—is a sort of onion. Chebutikin And I tell you, chehartma—is mutton. Soleni And I tell you, cheremsha—is a sort of onion. Chebutikin What's the use of arguing! You've never been in the Caucasus, and never ate any chehartma. Soleni I never ate it, because I hate it. It smells like garlic. Andrey Imploring. Please, please! I ask you! Tuzenbach When are the entertainers coming? Irina They promised for

about nine; that is, quite soon. Tuzenbach

Embraces Andrey.

“Oh my house, my house, my new-built house.”

Andrey Dances and sings. “Newly-built of maple-wood.” Chebutikin

Dances.

“Its walls are like a sieve!”

Laughter.

Act III

The room shared by Olga and Irina. Beds, screened off, on the right and left. It is past 2 a.m. Behind the stage a fire-alarm is ringing; it has apparently been going for some time. Nobody in the house has gone to bed yet.

Masha is lying on a sofa dressed, as usual, in black. Enter Olga and Anfisa. Anfisa Now they are downstairs, sitting under the stairs. I said to them, “Won’t you come up,” I said, “you can’t go on like this,” and they simply cried, “We don’t know where father is.” They said, “He may be burnt up by now.” What an idea! And in the yard there are some people … also undressed. Olga Takes a dress out of the cupboard. Take this grey dress. … And this … and the blouse as well. …
Take the skirt, too, nurse. … My God! How awful it is! The whole of the Kirsanovsky Road seems to have burned down. Take this … and this. …
Throws clothes into her hands. The poor Vershinins are so frightened. … Their house was nearly burnt. They ought to come here for the night. … They shouldn’t be allowed to go home. … Poor Fedotik is completely burnt out, there’s nothing left. … Anfisa Couldn’t you call Ferapont, Olga dear. I can hardly manage. … Olga Rings. They’ll never answer. … At the door. Come here, whoever there is! Through the open door can be seen a window, red with

flame: afire-engine is heard passing the house. How awful this is. And how I'm sick of it! Ferapont enters. Take these things down. … The Kolotilin girls are down below … and let them have them. This, too. Ferapont Yes'm. In the year twelve Moscow was burning too. Oh, my God! The Frenchmen were surprised. Olga Go on, go on. … Ferapont Yes'm. Exit. Olga Nurse, dear, let them have everything. We don't want anything. Give it all to them, nurse. … I'm tired, I can hardly keep on my legs. … The Vershinins mustn't be allowed to go home. … The girls can sleep in the drawing-room, and Alexander Ignateyevitch can go downstairs to the Baron's flat … Fedotik can go there, too, or else into our dining-room. … The doctor is drunk, beastly drunk, as if on purpose, so nobody can go to him. Vershinin's wife, too, may go into the drawing-room. Anfisa Tired. Olga, dear girl, don't dismiss me! Don't dismiss me! Olga You're talking nonsense, nurse. Nobody is dismissing you. Anfisa Puts Olga's head against her bosom. My dear, precious girl, I'm working, I'm toiling away … I'm growing weak, and they'll all say go away! And where shall I go? Where? I'm eighty. Eighty-one years old. … Olga You sit down, nurse dear. … You're tired, poor dear. … Makes her sit down. Rest, dear. You're so pale! Natasha comes in. Natasha They are saying that a committee to assist the sufferers from the fire must be formed at once. What do you think of that? It's a beautiful idea. Of course the poor ought to be helped, it's the duty of the rich. Bobby and little Sophy are sleeping, sleeping as if nothing at all was the matter. There's such a lot of people here, the place is full of them, wherever you go. There's influenza in the town now. I'm afraid the children may catch it. Olga Not attending. In this room we can't see the fire, it's quiet here. Natasha Yes … I suppose I'm all untidy. Before the looking-glass. They say I'm growing stout … it isn't true! Certainly it isn't! Masha's asleep; the poor thing is tired out. … Coldly, to Anfisa. Don't dare to be seated in my presence! Get up! Out of this! Exit Anfisa; a pause. I don't understand what makes you keep on that old woman! Olga Confusedly. Excuse me, I don't understand either … Natasha

She’s no good here. She comes from the country, she ought to live there. … Spoiling her, I call it! I like order in the house! We don’t want any unnecessary people here. Strokes her cheek. You’re tired, poor thing! Our head mistress is tired! And when my little Sophie grows up and goes to school I shall be so afraid of you. Olga I shan’t be head mistress. Natasha They’ll appoint you, Olga. It’s settled. Olga I’ll refuse the post. I can’t … I’m not strong enough. … Drinks water. You were so rude to nurse just now … I’m sorry. I can’t stand it … everything seems dark in front of me. … Natasha Excited. Forgive me, Olga, forgive me … I didn’t want to annoy you. Masha gets up, takes a pillow and goes out angrily. Olga Remember, dear … we have been brought up, in an unusual way, perhaps, but I can’t bear this. Such behaviour has a bad effect on me, I get ill … I simply lose heart! Natasha Forgive me, forgive me. … Kisses her. Olga Even the least bit of rudeness, the slightest impoliteness, upsets me. Natasha I often say too much, it’s true, but you must agree, dear, that she could just as well live in the country. Olga She has been with us for thirty years. Natasha But she can’t do any work now. Either I don’t understand, or you don’t want to understand me. She’s no good for work, she can only sleep or sit about. Olga And let her sit about. Natasha Surprised. What do you mean? She’s only a servant. Crying. I don’t understand you, Olga. I’ve got a nurse, a wet-nurse, we’ve a cook, a housemaid … what do we want that old woman for as well? What good is she? Fire-alarm behind the stage. Olga I’ve grown ten years older tonight. Natasha We must come to an agreement, Olga. Your place is the school, mine—the home. You devote yourself to teaching, I, to the household. And if I talk about servants, then I do know what I am talking about; I do know what I am talking about … And tomorrow there’s to be no more of that old thief, that old hag … Stamping. that witch! And don’t you dare to annoy me! Don’t you dare! Stopping short. Really, if you don’t move downstairs, we shall always be quarrelling. This is awful. Enter Kuligin. Kuligin Where’s Masha? It’s time we went home. The fire seems to be going down. Stretches himself. Only one

block has burnt down, but there was such a wind that it seemed at first the whole town was going to burn. Sits. I'm tired out. My dear Olga … I often think that if it hadn't been for Masha, I should have married you. You are awfully nice. … I am absolutely tired out. Listens. Olga What is it? Kuligin The doctor, of course, has been drinking hard; he's terribly drunk. He might have done it on purpose! Gets up. He seems to be coming here. … Do you hear him? Yes, here. … Laughs. What a man … really … I'll hide myself. Goes to the cupboard and stands in the corner. What a rogue. Olga He hadn't touched a drop for two years, and now he suddenly goes and gets drunk. … Retires with Natasha to the back of the room. Chebutikin enters; apparently sober, he stops, looks round, then goes to the washstand and begins to wash his hands. Chebutikin Angrily. Devil take them all … take them all. … They think I'm a doctor and can cure everything, and I know absolutely nothing, I've forgotten all I ever knew, I remember nothing, absolutely nothing. Olga and Natasha go out, unnoticed by him. Devil take it. Last Wednesday I attended a woman in Zasip—and she died, and it's my fault that she died. Yes … I used to know a certain amount five-and-twenty years ago, but I don't remember anything now. Nothing. Perhaps I'm not really a man, and am only pretending that I've got arms and legs and a head; perhaps I don't exist at all, and only imagine that I walk, and eat, and sleep. Cries. Oh, if only I didn't exist! Stops crying; angrily. The devil only knows. … Day before yesterday they were talking in the club; they said, Shakespeare, Voltaire … I'd never read, never read at all, and I put on an expression as if I had read. And so did the others. Oh, how beastly! How petty! And then I remembered the woman I killed on Wednesday … and I couldn't get her out of my mind, and everything in my mind became crooked, nasty, wretched. … So I went and drank. … Irina, Vershinin and Tuzenbach enter; Tuzenbach is wearing new and fashionable civilian clothes. Irina Let's sit down here. Nobody will come in here. Vershinin The whole town would have been destroyed if it hadn't been for the soldiers. Good men! Rubs his hands

appreciatively. Splendid people! Oh, what a fine lot! Kuligin Coming up to him. What's the time? Tuzenbach It's past three now. It's dawning. Irina They are all sitting in the dining-room, nobody is going. And that Soleni of yours is sitting there. To Chebutikin. Hadn't you better be going to sleep, doctor? Chebutikin It's all right … thank you. … Combs his beard. Kuligin Laughs. Speaking's a bit difficult, eh, Ivan Romanovitch! Pats him on the shoulder. Good man! In vino veritas, the ancients used to say. Tuzenbach They keep on asking me to get up a concert in aid of the sufferers. Irina As if one could do anything. … Tuzenbach It might be arranged, if necessary. In my opinion Maria Sergeyevna is an excellent pianist. Kuligin Yes, excellent! Irina She's forgotten everything. She hasn't played for three years … or four. Tuzenbach In this town absolutely nobody understands music, not a soul except myself, but I do understand it, and assure you on my word of honour that Maria Sergeyevna plays excellently, almost with genius. Kuligin You are right, Baron, I'm awfully fond of Masha. She's very fine. Tuzenbach To be able to play so admirably and to realize at the same time that nobody, nobody can understand you! Kuligin Sighs. Yes. … But will it be quite all right for her to take part in a concert? Pause. You see, I don't know anything about it. Perhaps it will even be all to the good. Although I must admit that our Director is a good man, a very good man even, a very clever man, still he has such views. … Of course it isn't his business but still, if you wish it, perhaps I'd better talk to him. Chebutikin takes a porcelain clock into his hands and examines it. Vershinin I got so dirty while the fire was on, I don't look like anybody on earth. Pause. Yesterday I happened to hear, casually, that they want to transfer our brigade to some distant place. Some said to Poland, others, to Chita. Tuzenbach I heard so, too. Well, if it is so, the town will be quite empty. Irina And we'll go away, too! Chebutikin Drops the clock which breaks to pieces. To smithereens! A pause; everybody is pained and confused. Kuligin Gathering up the pieces. To smash such a valuable object—oh, Ivan Romanovitch, Ivan Romanovitch! A very bad mark

for your misbehaviour! Irina That clock used to belong to our mother. Chebutikin Perhaps. … To your mother, your mother. Perhaps I didn't break it; it only looks as if I broke it. Perhaps we only think that we exist, when really we don't. I don't know anything, nobody knows anything. At the door. What are you looking at? Natasha has a little romance with Protopopov, and you don't see it. … There you sit and see nothing, and Natasha has a little romance with Protopovov. … Sings. Won't you please accept this date. … Exit. Vershinin

Yes. Laughs. How strange everything really is! Pause. When the fire broke out, I hurried off home; when I get there I see the house is whole, uninjured, and in no danger, but my two girls are standing by the door in just their underclothes, their mother isn't there, the crowd is excited, horses and dogs are running about, and the girls' faces are so agitated, terrified, beseeching, and I don't know what else. My heart was pained when I saw those faces. My God, I thought, what these girls will have to put up with if they live long! I caught them up and ran, and still kept on thinking the one thing: what they will have to live through in this world! Fire-alarm; a pause. I come here and find their mother shouting and angry. Masha enters with a pillow and sits on the sofa. And when my girls were standing by the door in just their underclothes, and the street was red from the fire, there was a dreadful noise, and I thought that something of the sort used to happen many years ago when an enemy made a sudden attack, and looted, and burned. … And at the same time what a difference there really is between the present and the past! And when a little more time has gone by, in two or three hundred years perhaps, people will look at our present life with just the same fear, and the same contempt, and the whole past will seem clumsy and dull, and very uncomfortable, and strange. Oh, indeed, what a life there will be, what a life! Laughs. Forgive me, I've dropped into philosophy again. Please let me continue. I do awfully want to philosophize, it's just how I feel at present. Pause. As if they are all asleep. As I was saying: what a life there will be! Only just imagine. … There are only three persons like yourselves in the town

just now, but in future generations there will be more and more, and still more, and the time will come when everything will change and become as you would have it, people will live as you do, and then you too will go out of date; people will be born who are better than you. … Laughs. Yes, today I am quite exceptionally in the vein. I am devilishly keen on living. … Sings.

“The power of love all ages know, From its assaults great good does grow.”

Laughs.

Act IV

The old garden at the house of the Prosorovs. There is a long avenue of firs, at the end of which the river can be seen. There is a forest on the far side of the river. On the right is the terrace of the house: bottles and tumblers are on a table here; it is evident that champagne has just been drunk. It is midday. Every now and again passersby walk across the garden, from the road to the river; five soldiers go past rapidly.

Chebutikin, in a comfortable frame of mind which does not desert him throughout the act, sits in an armchair in the garden, waiting to be called. He wears a peaked cap and has a stick. Irina, Kuligin with a cross hanging from his neck and without his moustaches, and Tuzenbach are standing on the terrace seeing off Fedotik and Rode, who are coming down into the garden; both officers are in service uniform. Tuzenbach Exchanges kisses with Fedotik. You’re a good sort, we got on so well together. Exchanges kisses with Rode. Once again. … Goodbye, old man! Irina Au revoir! Fedotik It isn’t au revoir, it’s goodbye; we’ll never meet again! Kuligin Who knows! Wipes his eyes; smiles. Here I’ve started crying! Irina We’ll meet again sometime. Fedotik After ten years—or fifteen? We’ll hardly know one another then; we’ll say, “How do you do?” coldly. … Takes a snapshot. Keep still. … Once more, for the last time. Rode Embracing Tuzenbach. We shan’t

meet again. … Kisses Irina's hand. Thank you for everything, for everything! Fedotik Grieved. Don't be in such a hurry! Tuzenbach We shall meet again, if God wills it. Write to us. Be sure to write. Rode Looking round the garden. Goodbye, trees! Shouts. Yo-ho! Pause. Goodbye, echo! Kuligin Best wishes. Go and get yourselves wives there in Poland. … Your Polish wife will clasp you and call you "kochanku!"6 Laughs. Fedotik Looking at the time. There's less than an hour left. Soleni is the only one of our battery who is going on the barge; the rest of us are going with the main body. Three batteries are leaving today, another three tomorrow and then the town will be quiet and peaceful. Tuzenbach And terribly dull. Rode And where is Maria Sergeyevna? Kuligin Masha is in the garden. Fedotik We'd like to say goodbye to her. Rode Goodbye, I must go, or else I'll start weeping. … Quickly embraces Kuligin and Tuzenbach, and kisses Irina's hand. We've been so happy here. … Fedotik To Kuligin. Here's a keepsake for you … a notebook with a pencil. … We'll go to the river from here. … They go aside and both look round. Rode Shouts. Yo-ho! Kuligin Shouts. Goodbye! At the back of the stage Fedotik and Rode meet Masha; they say goodbye and go out with her. Irina They've gone. … Sits on the bottom step of the terrace. Chebutikin And they forgot to say goodbye to me. Irina But why is that? Chebutikin I just forgot, somehow. Though I'll soon see them again, I'm going tomorrow. Yes … just one day left. I shall be retired in a year, then I'll come here again, and finish my life near you. I've only one year before I get my pension. … Puts one newspaper into his pocket and takes another out. I'll come here to you and change my life radically … I'll be so quiet … so agree … agreeable, respectable. … Irina Yes, you ought to change your life, dear man, somehow or other. Chebutikin Yes, I feel it. Sings softly. "Tarara-boom-deay. …" Kuligin We won't reform Ivan Romanovitch! We won't reform him! Chebutikin If only I was apprenticed to you! Then I'd reform. Irina Feodor has shaved his moustache! I can't bear to look at him. Kuligin Well, what about it? Chebutikin I could tell you what your face looks like

now, but it wouldn't be polite. Kuligin Well! It's the custom, it's modus vivendi. Our Director is clean-shaven, and so I too, when I received my inspectorship, had my moustaches removed. Nobody likes it, but it's all one to me. I'm satisfied. Whether I've got moustaches or not, I'm satisfied. … Sits. At the back of the stage Andrey is wheeling a perambulator containing a sleeping infant. Irina Ivan Romanovitch, be a darling. I'm awfully worried. You were out on the boulevard last night; tell me, what happened? Chebutikin What happened? Nothing. Quite a trifling matter. Reads paper. Of no importance! Kuligin They say that Soleni and the Baron met yesterday on the boulevard near the theatre. … Tuzenbach Stop! What right … Waves his hand and goes into the house. Kuligin Near the theatre … Soleni started behaving offensively to the Baron, who lost his temper and said something nasty. … Chebutikin I don't know. It's all bunkum. Kuligin At some seminary or other a master wrote "bunkum" on an essay, and the student couldn't make the letters out—thought it was a Latin word "luckum." Laughs. Awfully funny, that. They say that Soleni is in love with Irina and hates the Baron. … That's quite natural. Irina is a very nice girl. She's even like Masha, she's so thoughtful. … Only, Irina your character is gentler. Though Masha's character, too, is a very good one. I'm very fond of Masha. Shouts of "Yo-ho!" are heard behind the stage. Irina Shudders. Everything seems to frighten me today. Pause. I've got everything ready, and I send my things off after dinner. The Baron and I will be married tomorrow, and tomorrow we go away to the brickworks, and the next day I go to the school, and the new life begins. God will help me! When I took my examination for the teacher's post, I actually wept for joy and gratitude. … Pause. The cart will be here in a minute for my things. … Kuligin Somehow or other, all this doesn't seem at all serious. As if it was all ideas, and nothing really serious. Still, with all my soul I wish you happiness. Chebutikin With deep feeling. My splendid … my dear, precious girl. … You've gone on far ahead, I won't catch up with you. I'm left behind like a migrant bird grown old, and unable to fly.

Fly, my dear, fly, and God be with you! Pause. It's a pity you shaved your moustaches, Feodor Ilitch. Kuligin Oh, drop it! Sighs. Today the soldiers will be gone, and everything will go on as in the old days. Say what you will, Masha is a good, honest woman. I love her very much, and thank my fate for her. People have such different fates. There's a Kosirev who works in the excise department here. He was at school with me; he was expelled from the fifth class of the high school for being entirely unable to understand ut consecutivum. He's awfully hard up now and in very poor health, and when I meet him I say to him, "How do you do, ut consecutivum." "Yes," he says, "precisely consecutivum …" and coughs. But I've been successful all my life, I'm happy, and I even have a Stanislaus Cross, of the second class, and now I myself teach others that ut consecutivum. Of course, I'm a clever man, much cleverer than many, but happiness doesn't only lie in that. … "The Maiden's Prayer" is being played on the piano in the house. Irina Tomorrow night I shan't hear that "Maiden's Prayer" any more, and I shan't be meeting Protopopov. … Pause. Protopopov is sitting there in the drawing-room; and he came today … Kuligin Hasn't the headmistress come yet? Irina No. She has been sent for. If you only knew how difficult it is for me to live alone, without Olga. … She lives at the high school; she, a headmistress, busy all day with her affairs and I'm alone, bored, with nothing to do, and hate the room I live in. … I've made up my mind: if I can't live in Moscow, then it must come to this. It's fate. It can't be helped. It's all the will of God, that's the truth. Nicolai Lvovitch made me a proposal. … Well? I thought it over and made up my mind. He's a good man … it's quite remarkable how good he is. … And suddenly my soul put out wings, I became happy, and lighthearted, and once again the desire for work, work, came over me. … Only something happened yesterday, some secret dread has been hanging over me. … Chebutikin Luckum. Rubbish. Natasha At the window. The headmistress. Kuligin The headmistress has come. Let's go. Exit with Irina into the house. Chebutikin "It is my washing day. … Tara-ra …

boom-deay.” Masha approaches, Andrey is wheeling a perambulator at the back. Masha Here you are, sitting here, doing nothing. Chebutikin What then? Masha Sits. Nothing. … Pause. Did you love my mother? Chebutikin Very much. Masha And did she love you? Chebutikin After a pause. I don’t remember that. Masha Is my man here? When our cook Martha used to ask about her gendarme, she used to say my man. Is he here? Chebutikin Not yet. Masha When you take your happiness in little bits, in snatches, and then lose it, as I have done, you gradually get coarser, more bitter. Points to her bosom. I’m boiling in here. … Looks at Andrey with the perambulator. There’s our brother Andrey. … All our hopes in him have gone. There was once a great bell, a thousand persons were hoisting it, much money and labour had been spent on it, when it suddenly fell and was broken. Suddenly, for no particular reason. … Andrey is like that. … Andrey When are they going to stop making such a noise in the house? It’s awful. Chebutikin They won’t be much longer. Looks at his watch. My watch is very old-fashioned, it strikes the hours. … Winds the watch and makes it strike. The first, second, and fifth batteries are to leave at one o’clock precisely. Pause. And I go tomorrow. Andrey For good? Chebutikin I don’t know. Perhaps I’ll return in a year. The devil only knows … it’s all one. … Somewhere a harp and violin are being played. Andrey The town will grow empty. It will be as if they put a cover over it. Pause. Something happened yesterday by the theatre. The whole town knows of it, but I don’t. Chebutikin Nothing. A silly little affair. Soleni started irritating the Baron, who lost his temper and insulted him, and so at last Soleni had to challenge him. Looks at his watch. It’s about time, I think. … At half-past twelve, in the public wood, that one you can see from here across the river. … Piff-paff. Laughs. Soleni thinks he’s Lermontov, and even writes verses. That’s all very well, but this is his third duel. Masha Whose? Chebutikin Soleni’s. Masha And the Baron? Chebutikin What about the Baron? Pause. Masha Everything’s all muddled up in my head. … But I say it ought not to be allowed. He might wound the Baron or even

kill him. Chebutikin The Baron is a good man, but one Baron more or less—what difference does it make? It's all the same! Beyond the garden somebody shouts "Co-ee! Hallo!" You wait. That's Skvortsov shouting; one of the seconds. He's in a boat. Pause. Andrey In my opinion it's simply immoral to fight in a duel, or to be present, even in the quality of a doctor. Chebutikin It only seems so. … We don't exist, there's nothing on earth, we don't really live, it only seems that we live. Does it matter, anyway! Masha You talk and talk the whole day long. Going. You live in a climate like this, where it might snow any moment, and there you talk. … Stops. I won't go into the house, I can't go there. … Tell me when Vershinin comes. … Goes along the avenue. The migrant birds are already on the wing. … Looks up. Swans or geese. … My dear, happy things. … Exit. Andrey Our house will be empty. The officers will go away, you are going, my sister is getting married, and I alone will remain in the house. Chebutikin And your wife? Ferapont enters with some documents. Andrey A wife's a wife. She's honest, well-bred, yes; and kind, but with all that there is still something about her that degenerates her into a petty, blind, even in some respects misshapen animal. In any case, she isn't a man. I tell you as a friend, as the only man to whom I can lay bare my soul. I love Natasha, it's true, but sometimes she seems extraordinarily vulgar, and then I lose myself and can't understand why I love her so much, or, at any rate, used to love her. … Chebutikin Rises. I'm going away tomorrow, old chap, and perhaps we'll never meet again, so here's my advice. Put on your cap, take a stick in your hand, go … go on and on, without looking round. And the farther you go, the better. Soleni goes across the back of the stage with two officers; he catches sight of Chebutikin, and turns to him, the officers go on. Soleni Doctor, it's time. It's half-past twelve already. Shakes hands with Andrey. Chebutikin Half a minute. I'm tired of the lot of you. To Andrey. If anybody asks for me, say I'll be back soon. … Sighs. Oh, oh, oh! Soleni "He didn't have the time to sigh. The bear sat on him heavily." Goes up to him. What are you groaning about, old man? Chebutikin Stop

it! Soleni How's your health? Chebutikin Angry. Mind your own business. Soleni

The old man is unnecessarily excited. I won't go far, I'll only just bring him down like a snipe. Takes out his scent-bottle and scents his hands. I've poured out a whole bottle of scent today and they still smell … of a dead body. Pause. Yes. …
You remember the poem

"But he, the rebel seeks the storm, As if the storm will bring him rest …"?

Chebutikin

Yes.

"He didn't have the time to sigh, The bear sat on him heavily."

Exit with Soleni.

Shouts are heard. Andrey and Ferapont come in. Ferapont Documents to sign. … Andrey Irritated. Go away! Leave me! Please! Goes away with the perambulator. Ferapont That's what documents are for, to be signed. Retires to back of stage. Enter Irina, with Tuzenbach in a straw hat; Kuligin walks across the stage, shouting "Co-ee, Masha, co-ee!" Tuzenbach He seems to be the only man in the town who is glad that the soldiers are going. Irina One can understand that. Pause. The town will be empty. Tuzenbach My dear, I shall return soon. Irina Where are you going? Tuzenbach I must go into the town and then … see the others off. Irina It's not true … Nicolai, why are you so absentminded today? Pause. What took place by the theatre yesterday? Tuzenbach Making a movement of impatience. In an hour's time I shall return and be with you again. Kisses her hands. My darling … Looking her closely in the face. it's five years now since I fell in love with you, and still I can't get used to it, and you seem to me to grow more and more beautiful. What lovely, wonderful hair! What eyes! I'm going to take you away tomorrow. We shall work, we shall be rich, my dreams will come true. You will be happy. There's only one thing, one thing only: you don't love me! Irina It isn't in my power! I shall be your wife, I shall be true to you, and obedient to you, but I can't love you. What

can I do! Cries. I have never been in love in my life. Oh, I used to think so much of love, I have been thinking about it for so long by day and by night, but my soul is like an expensive piano which is locked and the key lost. Pause. You seem so unhappy. Tuzenbach I didn't sleep at night. There is nothing in my life so awful as to be able to frighten me, only that lost key torments my soul and does not let me sleep. Say something to me Pause. say something to me. … Irina What can I say, what? Tuzenbach Anything. Irina Don't! don't! Pause. Tuzenbach It is curious how silly trivial little things, sometimes for no apparent reason, become significant. At first you laugh at these things, you think they are of no importance, you go on and you feel that you haven't got the strength to stop yourself. Oh don't let's talk about it! I am happy. It is as if for the first time in my life I see these firs, maples, beeches, and they all look at me inquisitively and wait. What beautiful trees and how beautiful, when one comes to think of it, life must be near them! A shout of Co-ee! in the distance. It's time I went. … There's a tree which has dried up but it still sways in the breeze with the others. And so it seems to me that if I die, I shall still take part in life in one way or another. Goodbye, dear. … Kisses her hands. The papers which you gave me are on my table under the calendar. Irina I am coming with you. Tuzenbach Nervously. No, no! He goes quickly and stops in the avenue. Irina! Irina What is it? Tuzenbach Not knowing what to say. I haven't had any coffee today. Tell them to make me some. … He goes out quickly. Irina stands deep in thought. Then she goes to the back of the stage and sits on a swing. Andrey comes in with the perambulator and Ferapont also appears. Ferapont Andrey Sergeyevitch, it isn't as if the documents were mine, they are the government's. I didn't make them. Andrey Oh, what has become of my past and where is it? I used to be young, happy, clever, I used to be able to think and frame clever ideas, the present and the future seemed to me full of hope. Why do we, almost before we have begun to live, become dull, grey, uninteresting, lazy, apathetic, useless, unhappy. … This town has already been in existence for two hundred years and it has a

hundred thousand inhabitants, not one of whom is in any way different from the others. There has never been, now or at any other time, a single leader of men, a single scholar, an artist, a man of even the slightest eminence who might arouse envy or a passionate desire to be imitated. They only eat, drink, sleep, and then they die … more people are born and also eat, drink, sleep, and so as not to go silly from boredom, they try to make life many-sided with their beastly backbiting, vodka, cards, and litigation. The wives deceive their husbands, and the husbands lie, and pretend they see nothing and hear nothing, and the evil influence irresistibly oppresses the children and the divine spark in them is extinguished, and they become just as pitiful corpses and just as much like one another as their fathers and mothers. … Angrily to Ferapont. What do you want? Ferapont What? Documents want signing. Andrey I'm tired of you. Ferapont Handing him papers. The hall-porter from the law courts was saying just now that in the winter there were two hundred degrees of frost in Petersburg. Andrey The present is beastly, but when I think of the future, how good it is! I feel so light, so free; there is a light in the distance, I see freedom. I see myself and my children freeing ourselves from vanities, from kvass, from goose baked with cabbage, from after-dinner naps, from base idleness. … Ferapont He was saying that two thousand people were frozen to death. The people were frightened, he said. In Petersburg or Moscow, I don't remember which. Andrey Overcome by a tender emotion. My dear sisters, my beautiful sisters! Crying. Masha, my sister. … Natasha At the window. Who's talking so loudly out here? Is that you, Andrey? You'll wake little Sophie. Il ne faut pas faire du bruit, la Sophie est dormée deja. Vous êtes un ours. Angrily. If you want to talk, then give the perambulator and the baby to somebody else. Ferapont, take the perambulator! Ferapont Yes'm. Takes the perambulator. Andrey Confused. I'm speaking quietly. Natasha At the window, nursing her boy. Bobby! Naughty Bobby! Bad little Bobby! Andrey Looking through the papers. All right, I'll look them over and sign if necessary, and you can take them back to the offices. … Goes into

house reading papers; Ferapont takes the perambulator to the back of the garden. Natasha At the window. Bobby, what's your mother's name? Dear, dear! And who's this? That's Aunt Olga. Say to your aunt, "How do you do, Olga!" Two wandering musicians, a man and a girl, are playing on a violin and a harp. Vershinin, Olga, and Anfisa come out of the house and listen for a minute in silence; Irina comes up to them. Olga Our garden might be a public thoroughfare, from the way people walk and ride across it. Nurse, give those musicians something! Anfisa Gives money to the musicians. Go away with God's blessing on you. The musicians bow and go away. A bitter sort of people. You don't play on a full stomach. To Irina. How do you do, Arisha! Kisses her. Well, little girl, here I am, still alive! Still alive! In the high school, together with little Olga, in her official apartments … so the Lord has appointed for my old age. Sinful woman that I am, I've never lived like that in my life before. … A large flat, government property, and I've a whole room and bed to myself. All government property. I wake up at nights and, oh God, and Holy Mother, there isn't a happier person than I! Vershinin Looks at his watch. We are going soon, Olga Sergeyevna. It's time for me to go. Pause. I wish you every … every. … Where's Maria Sergeyevna? Irina She's somewhere in the garden. I'll go and look for her. Vershinin If you'll be so kind. I haven't time. Anfisa I'll go and look, too. Shouts. Little Masha, co-ee! Goes out with Irina down into the garden. Co-ee, co-ee! Vershinin Everything comes to an end. And so we, too, must part. Looks at his watch. The town gave us a sort of farewell breakfast, we had champagne to drink and the mayor made a speech, and I ate and listened, but my soul was here all the time. … Looks round the garden. I'm so used to you now. Olga Shall we ever meet again? Vershinin Probably not. Pause. My wife and both my daughters will stay here another two months. If anything happens, or if anything has to be done … Olga Yes, yes, of course. You need not worry. Pause. Tomorrow there won't be a single soldier left in the town, it will all be a memory, and, of course, for us a new life will begin. … Pause. None of our plans are

coming right. I didn't want to be a headmistress, but they made me one, all the same. It means there's no chance of Moscow. … Vershinin Well … thank you for everything. Forgive me if I've … I've said such an awful lot—forgive me for that too, don't think badly of me. Olga Wipes her eyes. Why isn't Masha coming … Vershinin What else can I say in parting? Can I philosophize about anything? Laughs. Life is heavy. To many of us it seems dull and hopeless, but still, it must be acknowledged that it is getting lighter and clearer, and it seems that the time is not far off when it will be quite clear. Looks at his watch. It's time I went! Mankind used to be absorbed in wars, and all its existence was filled with campaigns, attacks, defeats, now we've outlived all that, leaving after us a great waste place, which there is nothing to fill with at present; but mankind is looking for something, and will certainly find it. Oh, if it only happened more quickly. Pause. If only education could be added to industry, and industry to education. Looks at his watch. It's time I went. … Olga Here she comes. Enter Masha. Vershinin I came to say goodbye. … Olga steps aside a little, so as not to be in their way. Masha Looking him in the face. Goodbye. Prolonged kiss. Olga Don't, don't. Masha is crying bitterly. Vershinin Write to me. … Don't forget! Let me go. … It's time. Take her, Olga Sergeyevna … it's time … I'm late … He kisses Olga's hand in evident emotion, then embraces Masha once more and goes out quickly. Olga Don't, Masha! Stop, dear. … Kuligin enters. Kuligin Confused. Never mind, let her cry, let her. … My dear Masha, my good Masha. … You're my wife, and I'm happy, whatever happens … I'm not complaining, I don't reproach you at all. … Olga is a witness to it. Let's begin to live again as we used to, and not by a single word, or hint … Masha

Restraining her sobs.

"There stands a green oak by the sea, And a chain of bright gold is around it. … And a chain of bright gold is around it. …"

I’m going off my head … “There stands … a green oak … by the sea.”

…

Olga Don’t, Masha, don’t … give her some water. … Masha I’m not crying any more. … Kuligin She’s not crying any more … she’s a good … A shot is heard from a distance. Masha

“There stands a green oak by the sea, And a chain of bright gold is around it … An oak of green gold. …”

I’m mixing it up. … Drinks some water. Life is dull … I don’t want anything more now … I’ll be all right in a moment. … It doesn’t matter. … What do those lines mean? Why do they run in my head? My thoughts are all tangled.

Colophon

Three Sisters was published in 1900 by Anton Chekhov. It was translated from Russian in 1916 by Julius West.

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Dramatis Personae

Andrey Sergeyevitch Prosorov

Natalia Ivanova (Natasha), his fiancée, later his wife (28)

Olga (28), Masha (23), Irina (20), his sisters

Feodor Ilitch Kuligin, high school teacher, married to Masha

Alexander Ignateyevitch Vershinin, lieutenant-colonel in charge of a battery (42)

Nicolai Lvovitch Tuzenbach, baron, lieutenant in the army (30)

Vassili Vassilevitch Soleni, captain

Ivan Romanovitch Chebutikin, army doctor (60)

Alexey Petrovitch Fedotik, sublieutenant

Vladimir Carlovitch Rode, sublieutenant

Ferapont, doorkeeper at local council offices, an old man

Anfisa, nurse (80)

The action takes place in a provincial town.

(Ages are stated in parentheses.)

Endnotes

Dobroluboy (1836–81), in spite of the shortness of his career, established himself as one of the classic literary critics of Russia.

He adds that he is a Nadvorny Sovetnik (almost the same as a German Hofrat), an undistinguished civilian title with no English equivalent.

A variety of garlic.

I.e. in the correct dress for making a proposal of marriage.

Quite literally, “your high honour,” to correspond to Andrey’s rank as a civil servant.

Darling.

Three Sisters

Imprint

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