

Barbarian

The drawing room of a country estate. Elyena Ivanovna Popova is dressed in deep mourning, the shades are drawn, an atmosphere of gloom pervades. She gazes at a small photograph with intense concentration. She and Luka, her aged manservant, have been engaged in heated discussion.

LUKA

What I'm trying to say, is that you shouldn't kill your spirit like this! Yes, kill your spirit! It's a beautiful summer day. Nature's out everywhere. Servants are picking berries, cats are chasing birds, and you sulk around in a house that's as dark and solemn as a convent! *He* died, not you! Life is as sweet as ever and you're wasting it! Don't ignore me. You've been at this for a year. You're frightening the neighbors.

POPOVA

Death only frightens the living. For those of us dead in spirit, it is merely...

She gestures dramatically, then sadly watches the gesture fade.

The sun went down on my life when Nicolai...

She takes a moment to keep from crying, then stalwartly...

A life unshared is a death indeed. This room is my tomb. I sit. I wait. Someday, I will pass imperceptibly into the shadows.

LUKA

Listen. Nicolai Mihailovich is food for worms, God's will. But it's nobody's will that you should die mourning him! When my wife died, I cried for a month. A month is plenty of time. More than a month is strange... disturbing. Alright, I'll tell you. The neighbors are saying you've lost your mind.

Popova is outraged.

Well look at us, a couple of spiders creeping around in the dark, why shouldn't they? My uniform needs to be *worn*. I don't wear it, it falls apart. A life is that way, too, you know. You have to get out! Do something!! The regiment at Riblovo has a dance every Friday. A bunch of handsome officers waltzing around, how's that, huh? You're still a looker, you're not too old for young men like those, but give yourself another five or six years and...

POPOVA

The subject is closed, Luka! And it won't come up again, do you understand? Nicolai Mihailovich has passed on. Now my life passes on. He is gone, I am gone. Symmetry. Ghosts don't dance and eat berries.

Luka throws up his arms in frustration.

POPOVA

I'm serious! Alright, he wasn't perfect, we had our difficulties. He wandered, somewhat. Yes, Luka, fine. More than somewhat. That was my fault as much as his, you know. I wasn't dedicated enough. I should have taught him. Taught him the meaning of real love. I failed in that. But its not too late. He hadn't a notion of what real love is, (*a huge change of tone*) so let him watch from the grave!

LUKA

I've heard it and I can't believe I'm hearing this again. You talk like a madwoman. The garden? How about we hitch up Toby and take a spin in the...

POPOVA

(*in tears*) Oh, Luka...!

LUKA

Alright, no [Toby...]

POPOVA

Toby! Toby was his favorite horse! He *loved* Toby! We'd visit the Korchatkins or the Vaslovs and he'd drive Toby. He *loved* that horse. They were like one being. How beautiful they were together. (*she sighs*) Toby gets an extra portion of oats today, be sure and tell them.

LUKA

Whatever you say, madam.

A bell rings.

POPOVA

I'm indisposed, Luka.

He starts to go.

No, wait! I'm not at home.

LUKA

Yes, madam.

He goes.

POPOVA

(*to his portrait*) Nicolai, the world passes away, the body withers, but love is forever. You shall see. I will be a martyr to love. (*she sighs*) Of course, I've had plenty of practice. At least now I don't have to wonder where you are or who your with. That's some consolation.

LUKA

Entering, all excited.

There's a... gentleman... he wants to... speak with you, madam, he says...

POPOVA

Luka, what did I just tell you?

LUKA

I know, I remember, and I told him, I *told* him, but he doesn't believe me. He says he wants to see you *right now!*

SMIRNOV

(offstage, yelling) And tell her I haven't got all day!

LUKA

You see?

POPOVA

Did you tell him I'm not at home?

LUKA

He doesn't believe me.

POPOVA

Make him believe you.

LUKA

He spoke to the neighbors. He says he's not leaving until you see him.

POPOVA

Well! It seems, then, I am left with no choice. *(she sighs)*

LUKA

So it seems, madam.

He rushes off.

POPOVA

She straightens up as listlessly as she can manage.

The neighbors. Think I've lost my mind, have they? Won't leave until I see him. A convent? What has this house ever been to me but a convent? I should take vows? Why not? Nothing to miss and at least people would leave me alone. That's actually a fine idea. Become a nun. Then let them talk! How I've lost my mind.

Grigory Stepanovich Smirnov enters, pushing his way past Luka who endeavors to announce him. He in a state of extreme agitation.

LUKA

Madam, Mister.. uh...

SMIRNOV

Dispense with the formalities and let me in, you old...!

He sees Elyena and struggles for some control.

Madam, I am honored to make your acquaintance. I am Grigory Stepanovich Smirnov, landowner and lieutenant of artillery, retired. It distresses me to disturb you in your mourning, but I'm afraid the situation urgently requires your attention.

POPOVA

I would be most appreciative if you would kindly, and quickly, come to the point, sir.

SMIRNOV

Most happy to. Your late husband... and he was a good man, I am honored to have known him and to have had him as a customer... but your late husband died, you see, in my debt to the order of some twelve hundred rubles. I have two documents of credit here as proof, if you wish.

She declines.

Tomorrow I have an large interest payment due on an agricultural loan, and since I was expecting to be repaid several months ago, I'm afraid I must ask you for the full amount immediately.

POPOVA

Twelve hundred rubles!

SMIRNOV

(offering the documents again) As you see.

POPOVA

(taking the documents) What was the debt for?

SMIRNOV

Oats.

POPOVA

Oats!?

SMIRNOV

I supplied his oats.

POPOVA

Twelve hundred rubles for...? Luka. Luka, oats, for Toby? Now, please.

Luka goes.

Yes. Oats. Well, Mister... I'm sorry, your name is...?

SMIRNOV

Smirnov. Grigory Stepanovich.

POPOVA

(reading it also) Yes, of course! Mister Smirnov. If my late husband died in debt to you, then there is no question of payment, is there?

SMIRNOV

Excellent!

POPOVA

You shall have the full amount when my manager returns from town.

SMIRNOV

Thank you.

POPOVA

Tomorrow.

SMIRNOV

Tomorrow?

POPOVA

You have my word.

SMIRNOV

Tomorrow?

POPOVA

Tomorrow. I promise you. Well, perhaps the day after, but you will have it all back, every ruble.

SMIRNOV

The day after?

POPOVA

For today, you must please forgive me. It is seven months exactly since my dear late husband passed away leaving me alone forever, and I am in no frame of mind to deal with matters of business. I'm sure you understand.

SMIRNOV

Understand? Madame Popova, no, wait, *you* must understand. Unless I get that money today by tomorrow I'll be shaking *hands* with your dear late husband. If I miss tomorrow's payment, they'll have my estate up for auction the day after, and then what? I need that money now!

POPOVA

I will pay you, sir, tomor... rather, the day after tomorrow.

SMIRNOV

(exploding) No! Not the day after tomorrow, today!