

THE PROPOSAL

*The parlor of Chubukov's estate house.
Chubukov is counting money when Lomov
enters and knocks meekly on the door frame.
He is dressed formally, complete with gloves,
hat, and cape, and is dizzy from the heat.
When Lomov gets no response from knocking,
he clears his throat. Chubukov looks up
annoyed, but quickly changes his attitude
upon seeing who it is. He runs to Lomov with
an outstretched hand.*

CHUBUKOV: Well, well, well! Good gracious, of all people, Ivan Vasilevich! What a surprise, et cetera, and so good to see you. How are you doing?

LOMOV: Ah, hah. Yes. I mean, how are you doing?

CHUBUKOV: Getting along, as they say, getting along. Come in, sit down, please. Anywhere. Good gracious, what a surprise, what a surprise.

LOMOV: A surprise?

CHUBUKOV: Well, yes, it's been so long, I nearly forgot we're neighbors!

LOMOV: You, uh... you forgot?

CHUBUKOV: So, what's the occasion, where are you off to?

LOMOV: Off to?

CHUBUKOV: Why the fancy clothes?

LOMOV: No, no, no, I'm here to see you.

CHUBUKOV: Well, my gracious, it must be New Year's. (a joke not understood) If you're here to see me. New Years. Heh, heh. Yes, well. To see me, are you?

LOMOV: Well yes, you and... yes, to see you, Stepan Stepanovich. I..

*He pauses long enough to be stricken by
terror. He takes a tremulous breath and tries
to continue.*

LOMOV: I have something to ask of you. A request, you might call it. Or maybe a... a... well, a request, for now we'll call it a request. (a speech) Dear friend and neighbor that you have always been, you have always been a dear friend and neighbor. I mean... you have always been... you have always been anxious. I might even say... (searches for another word, but can't find it) anxious... to help me out, even to... assist me, yes, assist me from time to time. So, in light of our families having known each other for so long, I... Well, you see, you have always

been... you have always been... anxious... excuse me, but could I have some water? My mouth has gone dry.

CHUBUKOV: Water? Certainly.

*He moves to his cash box, closes and locks it,
then pours Lomov a glass of water...*

CHUBUKOV: Well, my boy, as you know I have the deepest respect, et cetera, for your fine family, so I'll help you in whatever way I can, as they say.

LOMOV: (he takes the water) Thank you. (he drinks) Ah. Yes. Better. Well!

CHUBUKOV: No reason to be shy, et cetera.

LOMOV: No, not at all. Yes. My dear friend and neighbor, Stribend Stupantovich... uh, Stepan Strefrinovich. My neighbor and my friend, Stopenkovich... Stopan... Steeeee... eee... eee... Strumanko... Stepepepepep... Strupiduptoh... toh... toh... toh... toh... (one final attempt) Snifno Stankakrovich! (defeated) Can I have some more water?

CHUBUKOV: Are you alright?

LOMOV: Oh, yes, I just... (indicating his mouth) Thank you. (he drinks) Excuse me, I'm sorry, when I get nervous I... names, you see. And in addition to being nervous, I'm also... well... nervous. Yes, but to get to my request, I've come to ask for your... how should I put it...? Assistance. Oh, no, not that I deserve any, or expect any even, but nevertheless, here I am. (having completely forgotten his train of thought) Here I am! Here I am. (he finishes the water) Yes. I...? Oh yes! My request! Yes, you have always been... anxious... a dear friend and neighbor, Strinfo Shastatrafkovich. Stree... Stroh... Strah... Str... Str... Str...

CHUBUKOV: (saying it for him) Stepan Stepanovich! Please get a hold on yourself!

LOMOV: That's it! What? No, no, no, you're Streftan Sporgvedavich! I mean... never mind. Oh, I see! I'm sorry, excuse me, of course, you're suggesting that... and you said... for me. Thank you. Yes, you're right, why so nervous! Dear friend and neighbor that you are, I'll just blurt it right out. No need to be shy. Here we go. (he begins to get down on his knees, but checks himself) Okay. (takes a deep breath and all at once) I am requesting the honor of your daughter's hand in marriage, Natalona Stinkanovna... uh...Nutenya Strudenkovna... Nah... Nah... Noo... Nee...

CHUBUKOV: Natalia Stepanovna!

LOMOV: That's it!

CHUBUKOV: What has happened to you? Have you gone mad like your loony grandfa...? (dawns on him) You what? Natalia?! You want to marry... You want to marry... Natalia?

LOMOV: (leaving) I knew you wouldn't...

CHUBUKOV: My boy, my boy! (he embraces him) You are the answer to my prayers! Why that daughter of mine, I thought she'd never... well, we can forget that now, as they say. My dear boy! My dear son, now! (embraces him again and pounds him on the back) God bless you! Thank you, thank you! If this is a dream, please don't wake me up, that's all I ask! Good gracious, look at me! Going on like a fool when you can hardly wait to see the lucky girl, et cetera. You devil!

LOMOV: No, I don't really need to...

CHUBUKOV: (yelling) Natalia! She must be in the back.

LOMOV: Don't go to any trouble...

CHUBUKOV: (louder) Natalia! You wait right here, I'll go get her...

LOMOV: My dear friend and neighbor, (carefully) Stepan Stepanovich, I am deeply moved. Deeply. Moved. By your proposal. What did I say? Approval, I mean approval. Haha. Yes. Deeply. Moved. Now, can you tell me honestly... what about her?

CHUBUKOV: What do you mean?

LOMOV: Will she...?

CHUBUKOV: What have you heard?

LOMOV: Heard? Should I have heard something?

CHUBUKOV: Of course not.

LOMOV: Oh. Good.

CHUBUKOV: I'll go get her.

LOMOV: No, I mean, will she... will she approve. Do you think?

CHUBUKOV: Do I think...? Of course she will, of course! A handsome fellow like you! Of course, she's wild about you, as they say, madly in love, et cetera. I'll go get her...

LOMOV: Alright. Yes. Thank you.

Chubukov rushes out. Lomov reaches for the water, but his hands are so sweaty that he can't lift the pitcher. He frantically wipes them on his coat, and finally succeeds, but

then is trembling so badly that he misses the glass. Now he needs to wipe up the spill, but has no scarf or handkerchief, so he resorts to using a pillow from the loveseat. After mopping up the water, he carefully hides the wet spot by turning the pillow around. During this...

LOMOV: This is worse than a final exam. No wonder it's taken me thirty-six years, this is awful. How do other people do it? Never mind, I've done it. The worst is over. I hope she's nice. I seem to remember that she's... well, maybe she's grown up. You just can't keep expecting that the ideal wife is going to come looking for you. At some point you have simply got to plow the field in front of you, stones and all. She sure keeps a chilly house. I must make a mental note, make sure she learns to keep the house warm. But everything is neat and tidy, that's a point in her favor. And while I don't remember that she's any beauty, no one could really call her ugly, either, so... Besides, you reach a certain age when a tidy house means more than... My it's cold in here. She's written her name in this book, well then, that's something. I think a woman should read, it opens up conversation. That's good. Very good. I am absolutely certain I've made the best possible choice, given the circumstances. I feel completely calm about... (he stops suddenly and shakes his head) Damn! Ringing in my ears. Too much stress. A wife will be good, yes, good relief from stress. I have to settle down, at my age you have to consider your health. Keep this up, I could go any minute, what with my heart the way it is, not to mention my twitches. Always twitching. If it's not my nose, it's my foot. Or my eyes. Weak nerves. I've got to get some sleep. Last night the twitching woke me up, which gave me stabbing pains in my head which hurt my bad shoulder, so I had to get up and pace until I was so exhausted I'd fall asleep in spite of it all, but after a few minutes I woke up with sore legs from all the walking, and that started the twitching again, so I had to get up and pace some more...

Natalia Stepanovna enters. She is a plain, sensible woman in her late twenties. She is puzzled to find Lomov in the room, pacing frantically.

NATALIA: Oh. Ivan Vasilevich. How odd. Papa ran in yelling something about a customer begging for the goods... I didn't know what to make of it, but... Well, what a surprise. There's no one else here? I mean, it's been so long! Well! So, what have you come to buy?

LOMOV: Buy? No, no, I... Well, as I was saying to Strufnick Sbro... bree... broo... fee... fee... fee... Hah.

He paces furiously. This drives Natalia wild but she tries to be polite.

NATALIA: Yes. Pardon my apron, I was in the back shelling peas. But, it's been ages. Please, sit down. Would you like to join us for lunch?

LOMOV: I've already.

NATALIA: Sit, please. I won't mind at all if you sit down and smoke. Take some matches.

He takes the box of matches and in trying to open it, spills them everywhere.

LOMOV: Oh no. I'm sorry, I...

He gets down to scoop them up.

NATALIA: That's so easy to do...

LOMOV: I'm terribly sorry, I'll just...

NATALIA: Don't worry, just let me...

LOMOV: No, no, I can...

NATALIA: You just sit down and relax...

LOMOV: No, I couldn't...

NATALIA: SIT DOWN!

He does. She picks up the matches and tries to make conversation.

NATALIA: Lovely weather today. Not like yesterday with all that rain! The men couldn't work at all yesterday. (pause) Did you get your hay in? (pause) I was so worried that it would rain again, I had the whole field done, but then if it does rain, the hay will rot, so I don't know if I did the right thing. What do you think? (pause) You're right, I should have waited. (about the matches) Well, that's most of them. (pause) You look so... dressed up. What's the occasion? A dance? (he's perplexed) Your clothes.

LOMOV: Oh these! I just... I'll come right to the point, Nutoonia Storpinozna... Nortania Smrontinovna... Noo... Naaa... Nubububub... Can I help myself to some more water, please?

NATALIA: Are you well?

LOMOV: (as he drinks) Very well. Thank you! Very well. Well... so to speak. I do have this... (he chokes on the water)

NATALIA: (hitting his back) You shouldn't drink and talk at the same time.

- LOMOV: You're right... (cough) Absolutely right. (cough) So, here we go! I find it's best if I just blurt it out. Just blurt it out. (cough) Is it cold in here? I mean, if you like it this way, well I can understand that, you're still young and you probably don't even notice, but I on the other hand, find it a little too... fresh, for my taste, you see? I like to keep my house just a bit warmer, comfy, you know? I hope you don't mind my speaking to you like this, but after all, it's these kinds of things that matter most, don't you agree?
- NATALIA: What are you talking about?
- LOMOV: Wha...? Oh. Yes, I forgot, I haven't... Well, it's now or never. Do you mind if I don't call you by name? Not always, just right now, until later.
- NATALIA: I don't mind, no...
- LOMOV: Good, that will speed things up considerably. Alright. What I'm saying is that I've known you ever since you were just a little girl, a baby in fact, and I've also had the honor, the very great honor, of having been acquainted with your entire family for my whole life. And I'm not just speaking for myself, but for my aunt and her husband, my uncle, too. As you probably know they left me my estate -- my late aunt I should say -- and they always spoke of your father and mother in such glowing terms. Of your late mother. Why, the Lomov's and the Chubukov's have always been like one big family even before... I, uh... And besides that, of course, there is the fact that we're neighbors, not just so-called neighbors but actual neighbors because our estates share a common boundary at several points, so many in fact that it's not hard to imagine them being one big estate ...someday. For example my Ox Meadow and your Birch Forest, all you'd have to do there is bridge that little creek and...
- NATALIA: Excuse me. Excuse me, dear Ivan Vasilevich, pardon me for interrupting, but I believe you referred to the Ox Meadow as "my", meaning "your", Ox Meadow?
- LOMOV: Correct. Now, as I was...
- NATALIA: I'm afraid that's not correct. The Ox Meadow is on our estate.
- LOMOV: No, no, no, it's on my estate. Now, as I was...
- NATALIA: What makes you think it's on yours?
- LOMOV: Because it is! The Ox Meadow, it's wedged right in between your Birch Forest and my Black Swamp.
- NATALIA: That's the one I mean, only it's our Ox Meadow, not yours.
- LOMOV: No, no, no, Natalia Stepanovna, I have to correct you, it's mine.

- NATALIA: Oh really, and how long has that been the case?
- LOMOV: As far back as I can remember.
- NATALIA: Then your memory's playing tricks on you, Ivan Vasilevich, because...
- LOMOV: I have the papers and I'd be happy to show them to you. It's true there was a disagreement once, but that was all worked out, and now as everyone knows, the Meadow belongs to me and that's that. To refresh your memory, Na... Na... Natalia Step... Strep... , my aunt's grandmother allowed your great grandfather's peasants to use that land rent free in return for firing some bricks, and as might be expected, after forty years or so they began to treat the land as their own, but in reality...
- NATALIA: In reality, Ivan Vasilevich, according to my grandfather and my great-grandfather, our land extends all the way to the Swamp, which means that the Ox Meadow is ours, so what are you arguing about?
- LOMOV: Well that's funny because according to the legal, notarized documents I have at home, the deed, Natrillia Streptavinka...
- NATALIA: You must be joking! You are, aren't you?
- LOMOV: No, no, no, I...
- NATALIA: That land has been ours for three centuries, and now out of the blue it's yours? It's ridiculous!
- LOMOV: Just hear me out!
- NATALIA: Anyway, who in their right mind would keep a straight face and argue over fifteen acres of meadow worth a measly hundred rubles! The whole thing is ridiculous, and it's beginning to get me mad, especially when I think of the principles involved...
- LOMOV: It's like this, your grandfather's peasants were obliged to fire my aunt's grandmother's bricks, and my aunt's grandmother...
- NATALIA: (speaking over him, in fact, most of the time, they overlap) Ancient history and dead relations. There's nothing to argue about, the Meadow is ours, period.
- LOMOV: No it's not!
- NATALIA: You can whine about this until Friday if you like, and you can wear fifteen cutaways and twelve top hats, but it doesn't change who owns the Ox Meadow!
- LOMOV: No, no, no, you don't understand, the Meadow means nothing to me, nothing at all, it's only a matter of principle. For all I care you can have

the Meadow. In fact, I'll give it to you. There, now the Meadow is yours. It's all settled!

NATALIA: Wrong. I give you the Meadow! It is our Meadow, not your Meadow! You can't give it to us, we already own it! What a odd duck you turned out to be! You used to seem decent enough. I mean, we did lend you our threshing machine last year, even though we couldn't get to our own threshing until November because of it. And this is your idea of gratitude! You give us our own land like we were a bunch of gypsies? Really, this is humiliating! This is...

LOMOV: I'll have you know that I have never, never, ever, so much as even thought of taking anyone's land, anywhere, ever! And in this case there is no question to begin with, because the Ox Meadow is already mine! You distort everything!

NATALIA: Land grabber!

LOMOV: What!?

NATALIA: You are and I'll prove it by having my men go out there today and mow that meadow into dust!

LOMOV: What?!

NATALIA: Right down to the ground!

LOMOV: I'll evict them!

NATALIA: Just you try!

LOMOV: I can and will evict anyone I want from my land!

NATALIA: Keep your temper! You can behave like an idiot at home, Ivan Vasilevich, but here you're my guest, so shut up!

LOMOV: I'm not the one behaving like an idiot! What's more, I have nothing to argue about because... (screaming) that Meadow is mine!

NATALIA Ours!

LOMOV: Mine!

NATALIA: Ours!

LOMOV: Mine!

CHUBUKOV: (rushes in) Good gracious, what's happening here, what's all the commotion about?

NATALIA: Papa, please tell him who owns the Ox Meadow.

CHUBUKOV: The Ox Meadow? It belongs to us.

NATALIA: See.

LOMOV: But my best friend, Steptran Sheptanov... nov... nov..., just... just... hear me out, will you, please? My aunt's grandmother lent the land to your grandfather's peasants in exchange for firing some bricks, and after forty years they probably forgot that the land was still ours, but that doesn't...

CHUBUKOV: Ah, ah, little pal, you forget that the title to the land was in dispute even then, when your aunt's grandmother had her bricks, et cetera, but that was all worked out long ago, as they say, and it's a matter of public record that the Meadow is ours.

LOMOV: I'll prove it's mine.

CHUBUKOV: How can you if it's not?

LOMOV: I can, and I will!

CHUBUKOV: Now, now, my old chum, Ivan Vasilevich, let's be rational. I don't want what's yours, and I don't want to give up what's mine, but if you keep this up, I'll settle the issue by deeding the land to my peasants, and see how you like that!

LOMOV: You're going to give away my property to your peasants!?! What right have you to...

CHUBUKOV: (they start talking over one another, too) I know my rights, young man! And I won't be lectured on my rights by some freshman farmer!

LOMOV: Freshman farmer! Freshman...! My family have been the respected owners of a productive and prestigious estate since....

CHUBUKOV: Since you stole it from my family five hundred years ago!

LOMOV: That's a lie! But even if it were true, that gives you no right to deed my meadow to your peasants! You're a bandit!

CHUBUKOV: I'm a what? What did you call me?

NATALIA: Papa, have the men mow the Meadow, tell them right now, have them...

CHUBUKOV: Say it again, I dare you, say it again...!

NATALIA: The Ox Meadow is ours, now and forever, and we'll never, never, never let it go!

LOMOV: I'll go to the law!

CHUBUKOV: So! He thinks he'll go to the law.

LOMOV: I've proof on my side!

CHUBUKOV: That's what all this is about, is it? Casting about for a lawsuit! You'll have your lawsuit alright, you'll have your lawsuit! It won't be the first time your money-grubbing family concocted some hare-brained reason to sue! No, no! Not the first time!

LOMOV: Leave my family out of this! What have I said about your family? Did I say anything about your grandfather? And I could have! Why, that old crook skimmed and embezzled every...

CHUBUKOV: You want to talk family? Alright, let's talk family! How about that bizarre collection of retarded nitwits you call your ancestors? What about them, huh?

NATALIA: Bonkers!

CHUBUKOV: And grandfathers! What about your grandfather? The soggiest lush and drunken sot in the whole county! And how about that other aunt of yours, Natashia Mihailovna? They don't come any crazier than her! She ran off with an architect!

NATALIA: An architect!

LOMOV: You... you... that... that... that witch you called your mother was a hunchback and a cripple! Ouch! (grabs at his heart)

CHUBUKOV: Your idiot father was a half-crooked, muddle-headed, pie-eyed, low-life scum and a gambler!

LOMOV: My head... (he staggers over to the water)

NATALIA: And that aunt with the bricks was a razor-tongued, mean-hearted, scandalmonger, and a gossip!

LOMOV: Oh, my foot! (he begins to drag it) And you! You ooze corruption! Excuse me, I'm getting dizzy... (he sits) The whole county knows about how you grease the ballot box with bribes.

CHUBUKOV: You'll pay for that remark!

LOMOV: ...where'd I put my hat?

CHUBUKOV: I've got friends in high places!

LOMOV: Every election!

CHUBUKOV: The Secret Service owes me a couple of favors, and I...

LOMOV: Where'd I put my hat?