



**Sample Pages from
Commedia Chekhov**

Welcome! This is copyrighted material for promotional purposes. It's intended to give you a taste of the script to see whether or not you want to use it in your classroom or perform it. You can't print this document or use this document for production purposes.

Royalty fees apply to all performances **whether or not admission is charged**. Any performance in front of an audience (e.g. an invited dress rehearsal) is considered a performance for royalty purposes.

Visit <https://folk.me/p486> to order a printable copy or for rights/royalty information and pricing.

**DO NOT POST THIS SAMPLE ONLINE.
IT MAY BE DOWNLOADED ANY TIME FROM THE LINK ABOVE.**

COMMEDIA CHEKHOV

THE ANNIVERSARY
THE PROPOSAL
THE BEAR

THREE SHORT COMEDIES ADAPTED BY
Lindsay Price
FROM THE ORIGINALS BY
Anton Chekhov



Commedia Chekhov

Copyright © 2024 Lindsay Price

CAUTION: This play is fully protected under the copyright laws of Canada and all other countries of the Universal Copyright Convention and is subject to royalty. Changes to the script are expressly forbidden without written consent of the author. Rights to produce, film, or record, in whole or in part, in any medium or in any language, by any group amateur or professional, are fully reserved.

Interested persons are requested to apply for amateur rights to:

Theatrefolk

www.theatrefolk.com/licensing

help@theatrefolk.com

Those interested in professional rights may contact the author c/o the above address.

No part of this script covered by the copyrights hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means - graphic, electronic or mechanical - without the prior written permission of the author. Any request for photocopying, recording, or taping shall be directed in writing to the author at the address above.

Printed in the USA

Characters

The Anniversary

Andrey Andreyevitch Shipuchin: Chairman of the Norvik Joint Stock Bank.

Tatiana Alexeyevna: His wife.

Yelena Nicolaevna Khirin: The bank's bookkeeper.

Nastasya Fyodorovna Merchutkina: A persistent woman.

Deputation of Shareholders of the Bank: Extremely satisfied with the bank.

The Proposal

Svetlana Milailovna Chubukov: A landowning widow.

Natalya Stepanovna: Her daughter.

Ivan Vassilevitch Lomov: A nervous neighbour of Chubukov.

The Bear

Elena Ivanovna Popova: A landowning widow.

Grigory Stepanovitch Smirnov: A landowner.

Ludmilla: Popova's housekeeper.

Casting

It is the expectation of the author that this group of characters can and should be played by a diverse group of actors. Do not assume the characters are white or cisgendered. Cast the actor who connects to the character's intention. Period. Don't get bogged down in gender as presented in the source material. A wide variety of actors played all the roles in the original workshop and it worked just fine.

Sets

See the set description at the beginning of each play.

Costumes

It is the intention of the author that these plays are not necessarily set in the 19th century nor should they match the original source material. Costumes should be chosen to best reflect the characters and their personalities. The characters are physical and exaggerated, so use this as a foundation.

There are characters who mention specific costume pieces – Elena Ivanovna in *The Bear* is in mourning and wearing all-black, Natalya in *The Proposal* talks about wearing an apron and Ivan Vassilevitch is dressed as if going to a New Year’s Eve party. A list of mentioned costume pieces is in the Appendix.

Name Pronunciations

See the Pronunciation guide in the Appendix.

Accents

It is neither required nor suggested that anyone speak with a Russian accent.

Timing

If doing all three plays, put your intermission after *The Proposal*.

Introduction

Why is this play called *Commedia Chekhov*?

This collection adapts three one-act plays by Anton Chekhov, a late 19th-century Russian playwright known for his realistic comedies and dramas, and blends them with the highly physical acting style of *Commedia dell'Arte*. These two styles might seem at odds with each other. Chekhov often explored themes of failed ideas, the breakdown of aristocratic society, class structure, and loss. In contrast, *Commedia dell'Arte* features exaggerated physical comedy, such as a Zanni character comically eating their shoe out of hunger.

As a writing challenge, I wanted to explore both worlds and discover how they fit together. Surprisingly, there is a lot of overlap. Where do they align? Can Chekhov be played through the lens of *Commedia*? It has been a great experience, and I hope you feel the same!

Do you need to have an extended knowledge of *Commedia* to stage these plays? No. Does it help? Sure!

Commedia dell'Arte is an improvised comedic theatre form that flourished in Italy in the 1500s. The exact origins of *Commedia dell'Arte* are hard to pin down, with little documentation prior to the 16th century. The term “*Commedia dell'Arte*” itself wasn’t commonly used until the 18th century. It is generally acknowledged that the form solidified in Italy in the 1550s and reached its peak in the 1650s. Despite its opaque history, the elements that define *Commedia* are clear: improvised performances based on scenarios, where actors work from a basic outline and make up their lines.

- **Stock Characters** – Character types in *Commedia dell'Arte* are divided into masters (*vecchi*), servants (*zanni*), and lovers. The characters remain consistent, with only the situations changing. They have the same attitude, appearance, drive, and physical actions throughout. Although the stories are improvised, the characters behave the same way in any situation.
- **Limited Themes** – Love, money, and food form the basis of almost every scenario in *Commedia dell'Arte*. These themes are closely tied to the characters’ needs and drives.
- **Use of Mask** – The mask defines the characters in *Commedia dell'Arte*. Each character is associated with a specific mask.
- **Use of Lazzi** – Lazzi are short comedic physical bits within the story, serving as moments that connect the character to the theme. Every *Commedia* actor had well-rehearsed lazzi for their character. For example, *Arclecchino*, a servant character, is always hungry. Lazzi for this character often revolved around food, or eating something not normally seen as food, such as a fly.
- **Use of Mime, Acrobatics, and Music** – All of these elements were used to enhance story and character.

The interaction between characters in Commedia dell'Arte often centers on battles for status and control. The character types—masters, servants, and lovers—provide ample opportunity for such conflicts. Some characters have status, some don't, and some will do whatever it takes to get it.

Characters in Commedia work in extremes: they are not just hungry, they are so hungry they'll eat anything; they don't just like money, they are obsessed with it. Their decisions can swing from an energy level of 1 to 100 and back again in a moment.

Commedia is an improvised form. Does that mean we can improvise dialogue in these plays?

These plays are not Commedia scripts in that they are not improvised scenarios. They are adaptations. The purpose of an adaptation is to take a work and make it suitable for a new purpose. In this case, the new purpose is a hybrid of two distinct forms. For me, the Commedia aspect of these plays lies in the characters and their portrayal: the characters are fixed, each has a specific need, there are status battles, and there are numerous opportunities for physical action!

Use these scripts as an opportunity to explore the character aspects of Commedia and character physicalization with your students.

The Stage Directions

I encourage and strongly suggest that you and your students read the stage directions. Normally, I'm a strong advocate for writers ensuring that everything they want presented on stage is in the text. If it's in the text, then it's integral to the character and the story. However, rules are meant to be broken, and in this case, the stage directions will provide your students with inspiration on how to physicalize the characters within a Commedia context.

For example, there are a number of lazzi in the script, entirely written in the stage directions. The physicality of the characters is an important element and might not always be apparent in the text alone. Can and should your students find their own interpretations? Absolutely! But the stage directions will give you a good starting point.

THE ANNIVERSARY

Characters

Andrey Andreyevitch Shipuchin: Chairman of the Norvik Joint Stock Bank.

Tatiana Alexeyevna: His wife.

Yelena Nicolaevna Khirin*: The bank's bookkeeper.

Nastasya Fyodorovna Merchutkina: A persistent woman.

Deputation of Shareholders of the Bank: Extremely satisfied with the bank.

*In the original, Yelena Nicolaevna Khirin is named Kusma Nicolaievitch Khirin and is male.

Setting

The private office of the Chairman of the Bank. There is an exit leading to the public outer office. In the main room there are two desks: one for Khirin, the bookkeeper, and one for Shipuchin, the Chairman of the Bank. The decoration on the desks should reflect their character and jobs. Everything looks lush and is deliberately luxurious. There is velvet, flowers, statues, carpet, pictures.

Note

This play is all about money and status, both of which are extremely prevalent in Commedia scenarios. Money, a central theme in Commedia, is vividly explored here. Merchutkina wants it, Shipuchin uses it to show status, and Khirin uses it as a bribe to get what she wants. It all culminates in a moment of great physical character action!

Think about how each character embodies high, middle, or low status. Status is all about who has power and who controls the scene. This play presents an interesting dynamic: a character who doesn't have wealth but has all the status, and a character who typically would be high status but is not.

Merchutkina is not a typical Commedia master (vecchi) character, who holds power. However, she maintains high status from beginning to end. She never gives up and never lets someone who "seems" higher status gain the upper hand. She holds power.

Khirin is an example of a servant character (zanni) who lacks status and power but is extremely driven to get what she wants. This drive impacts her status, making her more dynamic.

Shipuchin should be high status, but he isn't. He occupies a middle status, needing to appease Tatiana, a master character who is high status all the way, while trying to assert power over Khirin and Merchutkina. His character constantly shifts in status, making it great to physicalize. Shipuchin never truly

wins: he doesn't get his way with his wife, and he definitely doesn't win against Merchutkina.

Tatiana, as a master character, consistently maintains high status, asserting her power and influence over Shipuchin, who finds himself navigating between these powerful personalities.

Physicalizing these status shifts and dynamics can add depth and humor to the performance, reflecting the essence of Commedia dell'Arte.

SHIPUCHIN's private office. KHIRIN is at the far side of the stage, yelling at someone in the outer office.

KHIRIN: (*calling out, nasty tone*) Someone get me some water! This is the hundredth time I've asked! The two-hundredth time! The millionth trillionth time! (*turns into the room*) Huh! (*yawns with a huge mouth*) I am so tired. (*yawns again with a huge mouth and arms*) This report has exhausted me beyond repair. (*yawns with a big mouth, arms, and shaking legs*) Drained! Depleted! Done!

She yawns and lets the yawn carry her to put her head on a nearby rolling chair. There is a loud snore. She is asleep. As she snores, she rolls herself over to her own desk, keeping her head on the seat of the rolling chair. She then uses a hand to pick up her head off the chair and moves herself to her own chair. Her head drops to her desk with a bang (safely, please). She sits right back up and groans as if her whole body aches.

Oh my legs. Ah my back. Oh my shoulders. (*grabbing different body parts*) Ahhhh I have a stitch! Ohhhh a spasm! Ahhhh sciatica! Arthritis! Bursitis! Gout! Charley Horse!

Her head lands heavily on the desk again. There is noise and applause offstage.

SHIPUCHIN: (*voice*) Thank you! Thank you! I'm so grateful for this. You've done too much!

SHIPUCHIN enters backing up, bowing, addressing the outer office. He's holding a plaque.

SHIPUCHIN: I will treasure this expression of gratitude until the day I die. On my deathbed, the last thing I will say with my last breath is "thank you." I will treasure this beyond death! They will have to pry this plaque from my cold dead hands. (*beat*) Ha, ha, ha, ha! (*bowing*) Thank you! (*bowing lower*) Thank you so much. (*he's now kneeling on the ground*) This is the happiest day of my life! (*He now crawls backwards into the office. He turns and sees KHIRIN looking*

at him.) Oh! (*tries to leap up, shoulders back, the presentation of high status*) Hello, dear Yelena Nicolaevna!

KHIRIN: (*standing, not happy but not sarcastic*) It is an honour to congratulate you, Andrey Andreyevitch, on the fiftieth anniversary of our Bank.

SHIPUCHIN: (*all pomp*) Thank you! If I've had any success as Chairman of this bank, I must give credit where credit is due – to me! (*puts plaque on desk – it should stand like a picture frame would*) Where's the report?

KHIRIN: I've five pages left.

SHIPUCHIN: (*shoulders slump*) What? Not done! Whyyyyyy?

KHIRIN: It's a lot of work for one person.

SHIPUCHIN: What?

KHIRIN: I didn't get enough sleep last night.

SHIPUCHIN: What?

KHIRIN: My brain is swelling and I can't see straight.

SHIPUCHIN: What?

KHIRIN: The world is on the brink of economic collapse. And you want me to finish a report? The nerve!

SHIPUCHIN: (*power!*) It has to be ready by three! If it's not, (*thinking, but not succeeding*) you'll... you'll... You'll be sorry.

KHIRIN: Really?

SHIPUCHIN: Yes! You will be... incredibly sorry.

KHIRIN: How so?

SHIPUCHIN: (*standing up straight, trying but really no good at this*) I will... I will... I will...

KHIRIN: (*to audience*) This should be good.

SHIPUCHIN: I will... I will... I will...

KHIRIN: Yes?

SHIPUCHIN: I will... dock your pay.

KHIRIN: You wouldn't dare!

SHIPUCHIN: (*slumping shoulders*) No I wouldn't. If you finish on time... I'll give you a bonus.

KHIRIN: (*now that is interesting*) A financial bonus? Money? Not like last time – pickled beets are not a bonus.

SHIPUCHIN: Beets are good for you. They can slow dementia.

KHIRIN: (*slamming the table*) Is it money or isn't it?

SHIPUCHIN: (*cowering a little*) Yes, ok, ok. Fine! A financial bonus.

KHIRIN: Fine. I'll keep at it. (*returns to work*)

SHIPUCHIN: (*turning to survey the office*) The general meeting is at four. This report, it's everything; it's my own personal firework! (*makes fireworks noises, uses his hands to gesture firework shapes*) I'll be promoted to the moon! (*takes a stapler off his desk and blasts it like a rocket ship*) All these excitements, gifts, standing ovations in my honour, it's such a whirlwind!

KHIRIN: (*trying to concentrate*) Two, carry the three, nine, seven...

SHIPUCHIN: (*looking at the plaque*) Isn't this nice? They're going to give me a big speech and a silver cup, too, at the general meeting.

KHIRIN: Carry the four, carry the eight, divide by two...

SHIPUCHIN: Of course, I wrote the speech and bought the cup. And told them to get the plaque. They never would have thought of it themselves.

KHIRIN: X minus Y plus thirty-two equals minus I . If x equals x minus I , when is Cheryl's birthday?

SHIPUCHIN: A certain pomp and circumstance is essential to a bank's reputation.

KHIRIN: If two trains are on the same track two hours apart and a fly is on the eastbound train traveling at 300 ft per minute, what is the colour of the westbound train?

SHIPUCHIN: Everything must look perfect. (*wipes the desk*) Flawless. Exquisite. (*polishes a knickknack*) Impeccable. Whatever it takes. (*looks around the office, sees the plaque in relation to a picture frame on the file cabinet*) Oh no. Oh no. This will not do.

The picture frame on the file cabinet and the plaque on the desk have to be far enough apart that SHIPUCHIN has to reach to the extreme to get to each.

Music plays. SHIPUCHIN sees that the picture frame on the file cabinet is crooked. He fixes it. He turns and now sees that the plaque on the desk is crooked. He fixes that. Now the frame on the file cabinet is crooked. He fixes that. He realizes he has to move both the plaque and the frame at the same time. He reaches out as far as he can with his hand to touch the picture frame. He tries to reach out with the other hand to get the plaque but it's too far. So, he reaches out with his hand to get the picture frame, and tries to reach out with his foot to get the plaque. Just when it looks like he might get it, he loses his balance and falls with a yelp. During all this, KHIRIN completely ignores him. Music fades.

SHIPUCHIN: (*staggering to his feet*) Really, Yelena Nicolaevna, don't you have a better jacket?

KHIRIN: Finishing this job is more important than my appearance, wouldn't you agree?

SHIPUCHIN: You look untidy.

KHIRIN: If the mayor shows up I'll hide in the closet.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA SHIPUCHIN enters with great swish and gesture. She poses. She is high status all the way.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Darling!

SHIPUCHIN: My treasure!

He goes to kiss her and she reacts vividly.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Not the face! Not the face!

SHIPUCHIN scrambles back and they air kiss. TATIANA poses again.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Did you miss me? Yes, you did, I know it. I haven't been home, I came straight from the station. There's so much to tell you, I couldn't wait! I'll only stay a minute. Good morning, Yelena Nicolaevna.

KHIRIN: (*ignoring her*) Seven, one, seven, two, seven, four...

SHIPUCHIN: Did you have a good time?

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Splendid. Oh what a time! Mamma and Katya send their regards. Vassili Andreitch sends you a kiss. *(blows a kiss)* Oh, if you knew what happened. If you only knew! *(sitting)* Let me tell you.

SHIPUCHIN: *(scooping TATIANA back to her feet)* Darling, I do want to hear everything, but –

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Not the sleeves! Not the sleeves!

SHIPUCHIN: *(backing away)* It's the bank's anniversary, remember?

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Oh, yes, the anniversary! Happy anniversary, bank! *(she laughs and sits again)*

SHIPUCHIN: *(tries to air-scoop TATIANA to her feet)* We may get a deputation of the shareholders at any moment, there's the meeting, the dinner, and you're not appropriately dressed.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: *(this is shocking)* Whaaaaaaat?

SHIPUCHIN: Don't get me wrong, you always look lovely!

KHIRIN: *(counting loudly)* Eight, four, three, one...

TATIANA tries to sit again and SHIPUCHIN furiously air-scoops her to her feet.

SHIPUCHIN: But I know you want to look your absolute best. For the bank. You must go home and get ready.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: *(moving away from SHIPUCHIN)* In a minute. There's so much to share, I'll talk quickly. We start on the train, I was sitting next to the most unpleasant –

KHIRIN: *(counting loudly)* Seven, one, seven, two...

SHIPUCHIN: *(trying to air-steer TATIANA to the door)* Tania, dear, you're disturbing Yelena Nicolaevna.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: *(deftly gets away from SHIPUCHIN)* She can listen and work at the same time, can't she?

SHIPUCHIN: I need this report before the general meeting.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: It's such an interesting story and it won't take a minute. So! Serezha came to meet me, and some young man turned up, a tax inspector I think...

Offstage voices start yelling "You can't! What are you doing? Get back here!"

MERCHUTKINA: (*offstage*) Don't you touch me! I'm going in!

MERCHUTKINA enters, waving her arms about, holding a piece of paper, and goes right up to SHIPUCHIN.

MERCHUTKINA: Your Excellency!

SHIPUCHIN: (*stumbling back, perhaps into a chair*) Oh!

MERCHUTKINA: (*towering over SHIPUCHIN*) I am the wife of a civil servant, Nastasya Fyodorovna Merchutkina.

SHIPUCHIN: (*unsettled by her forward nature*) What do you want?

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*looking at her sleeve*) Is that a crease? (*she focuses 100% on smoothing her sleeve*)

MERCHUTKINA: Your Excellency, my husband was ill for five months. FIVE! And while he was at home, getting better, as one should, he was suddenly dismissed. For no reason! (*She gives a very dramatic wail, perhaps collapsing onto SHIPUCHIN, who has no idea what to do. She suddenly draws back and continues on.*) And when I went to get his remaining salary, they said there was no money. NONE! Why? They said my husband already withdrew it! From his employee's account! And I said, how could he do that without my permission?

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*she's finished smoothing*) There! Now, where was I?

MERCHUTKINA: I'm at my wit's end! It's all here.

MERCHUTKINA shoves a piece of paper, her petition, at SHIPUCHIN who has no choice but to take it.

SHIPUCHIN: Oh!

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Oh! (*standing, moving to SHIPUCHIN*) Grendilevsky proposed to my sister. Can you believe it?

MERCHUTKINA: (*tugging on SHIPUCHIN's jacket*) Your Excellency! I'm a poor woman. I haven't two coins to rub together.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*pulling on the other side of SHIPUCHIN*) A nice, modest young man, but with no means of his own.

MERCHUTKINA: I haven't a purse to hold the coins I don't have.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: And wouldn't you know it, Katya is absolutely in love with him.

MERCHUTKINA: I haven't the strength to hold the purse to hold the coins I don't have! That's how poor I am!

KHIRIN: This is insufferable! I will scream!

She does so. It's long and extended. She takes a breath and continues screaming. Everyone reacts.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Yelena Nicolaevna. I am in the middle of a story.

MERCHUTKINA: (*grabbing SHIPUCHIN*) Your Excellency! I am weak and defenseless!

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*grabbing SHIPUCHIN*) Andrey! Do something!

SHIPUCHIN: (*gestures and moves away*) Enough! How can I read with all this noise?

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*taking the petition away from him*) Why are you reading anyway? You should be listening to me. You must hear this!

SHIPUCHIN: Tania, I want to hear it. Truly I do. (*thinking*) But my dear, I'm... I'm... I'm... (*pause*) I'm... I'm... I'm...

KHIRIN: (*to audience*) This should be good.

SHIPUCHIN: (*fast and quick*) I'm feeling a little dehydrated! (*now slow, it's the right idea*) I'm feeling a little dehydrated...

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*genuine*) Oh! Don't you know how dangerous dehydration is? It's the primary cause of wrinkles. (*SHIPUCHIN gently takes back the petition*) You need water immediately! (*calling off*) I need water!

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA sweeps out and SHIPUCHIN gives a little fist pump of success.

SHIPUCHIN: (*to MERCHUTKINA*) Madam, you've come to the wrong place. This is a bank. (*referring to the petition*) It says here your husband worked at the Army Medical Department. We can't help you.

SHIPUCHIN tries to return the petition to MERCHUTKINA, who refuses to take it.

MERCHUTKINA: (*moving away*) I've been there many times over the past five months. They won't talk to me, they won't look at my

petition. Last time, they threw me out into the street! Like this!
(*she throws herself to the ground*) Help me, your Excellency!

SHIPUCHIN: As I said, this is a bank. There's nothing we can do. Let me see you out.

SHIPUCHIN reaches down to try and help MERCHUTKINA up, who refuses to get up. No matter how hard SHIPUCHIN pulls, she stays on the ground. She plays as heavy as possible. Over the following, SHIPUCHIN ends up dragging her ungracefully along the floor toward the exit. With every step forward, MERCHUTKINA does everything she can to not be moved forward.

MERCHUTKINA: (*as she's being dragged*) I have a doctor's note.

SHIPUCHIN: Come now, Madam...

MERCHUTKINA: (*as she's being dragged*) It's five pages outlining my husband's every ache and pain.

KHIRIN: I can't concentrate.

MERCHUTKINA: (*as she's being dragged*) Eight pages with footnotes and bookmarks.

KHIRIN: I'll never finish at this rate.

MERCHUTKINA: (*as she's being dragged*) Twelve pages with seven appendices, a verified analysis and a very readable font.

KHIRIN: Enough! (*stands up and gathers her papers*)

SHIPUCHIN: What?

In surprise, SHIPUCHIN lets go of MERCHUTKINA who rolls away, also in surprise. When she comes to a stop, she starts looking through her purse, or pulling things out of her costume.

SHIPUCHIN: Where are you going?

KHIRIN: (*starts to exit*) I need quiet or my head will explode!

SHIPUCHIN: (*stopping KHIRIN*) No, no, you must stay at your desk. The office can't know there's an issue with the report!

MERCHUTKINA: (*finally pulling out her note*) Ah ha! Here it is!

KHIRIN: Give me an advance on my bonus.

SHIPUCHIN: What? Whyyyyyyyyyy?

KHIRIN: If you want me to finish on time...

MERCHUTKINA: (*moving to SHIPUCHIN*) Your Excellency, look!

SHIPUCHIN: I can't!

MERCHUTKINA: (*shoving the note at SHIPUCHIN*) Your Excellency!

KHIRIN: (*starts to exit again*) Then out I go!

SHIPUCHIN: (*pulling KHIRIN back into the room*) Sit down and I'll take care of it.

MERCHUTKINA: Your Excell –

SHIPUCHIN: (*interrupting*) Yes, yes, yes! Your husband is sick! I believe you. One hundred percent!

MERCHUTKINA: (*with quiet dignity*) You can't yell at me like that. I'm the wife of a civil servant.

SHIPUCHIN: Oh, I didn't mean, I really didn't mean to –

MERCHUTKINA: I can hardly stand. (*Pause. Then she collapses into a chair.*)

SHIPUCHIN: – it's just that so much is happening and –

KHIRIN: I'm leaving...

SHIPUCHIN: No, no, no, no, no, no don't leave.

MERCHUTKINA: (*feebly*) The only thing that will repair this damage to my heart and soul is that money...

*Offstage, we hear TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA's laugh.
SHIPUCHIN looks offstage.*

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*offstage voice*) Can you believe it? He proposed!

SHIPUCHIN: (*referring to TATIANA*) Oh! What if the shareholders come in and see that! (*back to the matter at hand*) Madam. I'm terribly sorry but I can't be more clear. This is a bank. We don't just give money to every person that asks for it.

MERCHUTKINA: (*zeroing in, no sign of feebleness*) In that case, your Excellency, you should order the Army Medical Department to pay me the money.

SHIPUCHIN: What?

KHIRIN: (*holding out a hand*) Andrey Andreyevitch...

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*offstage voice*) She's absolutely in love with him!

MERCHUTKINA: Your Excellency!

SHIPUCHIN: (*completely out of sorts*) Madam... report... anniversary... divorce papers to a flower shop! (*TATIANA laughs offstage*) You must excuse me.

KHIRIN: Where are you going?

MERCHUTKINA: (*getting in his way and grabbing on to SHIPUCHIN's arm*) Your Excellency, have pity on me, I'm an orphan! I'm defenseless! I lost my appetite! My parents never loved me!

SHIPUCHIN: I thought you were an orphan.

MERCHUTKINA: I'm an emotional orphan. This is triggering.

SHIPUCHIN: I'll be right back. Yelena Nicolaevna, please explain our situation.

SHIPUCHIN exits on the run and KHIRIN runs after.

KHIRIN: No! You're trying to get out of giving me my advance! This is the pickled beets all over again! I won't have it! (*turns back into the room*) Who are you? Huh?

MERCHUTKINA: (*scurrying away*) Ack!

KHIRIN: (*pursuing MERCHUTKINA*) What are you really doing here?

MERCHUTKINA: Oh! Help! I can hardly stand!

MERCHUTKINA groans loudly as she sways back and forth, looking around for a place to land. She topples into the rolling chair. She moves herself around the room, wailing on the chair, until KHIRIN finally grabs the chair.

KHIRIN: (*leaning over her*) Stop that wailing!

MERCHUTKINA stops on a dime.

KHIRIN: What do you want? Out with it!

MERCHUTKINA: (*sitting straight up*) 15 rubles now and the rest next month.

KHIRIN: (*pushing away the chair*) You think you're getting money from him? Ha!

MERCHUTKINA: (*holding out paper*) I have a doctor's note. In a readable font.

KHIRIN: I'm getting my advance. (*calling out*) Security! Come quickly!

MERCHUTKINA: (*calling out*) Security!

KHIRIN: You don't get to call for security. I'm the one who works here.

MERCHUTKINA: (*calling out*) This is tyranny! I'm being bullied! She's shaming my haircut! Security!

KHIRIN: (*calling out*) Security!

MERCHUTKINA: (*calling out*) Security!

KHIRIN: (*calling out*) Security!

SHIPUCHIN runs in.

SHIPUCHIN: What are you yelling for? What would happen if the shareholders came in and saw you behaving this way, Yelena Nicolaevna. Stop making a scene.

MERCHUTKINA: Ha!

KHIRIN: Unbelievable. (*returns to her desk and sits there, doing nothing*)

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA enters. SHIPUCHIN tries to get away from her but TATIANA is persistent. She follows SHIPUCHIN wherever he goes. MERCHUTKINA watches.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Darling, you ran off in the middle of my sentence. We spent the evening at the Berezhnitskys. Katya was wearing a sky-blue dress; silk, of course. She looked lovely, I did her hair myself.

SHIPUCHIN: (*on the move*) Yes, yes, darling...

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Everyone was so taken with her, just as they used to be taken with me, which I truly understand. But still, I felt more than a little disrespected, let me tell you... (*looks at her nail*) Oh! Is that a chip? This won't do. (*sits, pulls out an emery board and fully focuses on her nail*)

SHIPUCHIN collapses into a chair and MERCHUTKINA pounces.

MERCHUTKINA: Your Excellency!

SHIPUCHIN: Ah! (*alarmed, leaping to feet*) Why are you still here?
(*crossing to KHIRIN's desk*) Yelena Nicolaevna...

KHIRIN: (*arms crossed*) Not my problem.

MERCHUTKINA: (*grabbing SHIPUCHIN and spinning him around*) You must listen to me!

SHIPUCHIN: (*turning back around to KHIRIN*) Why aren't you working?

KHIRIN: Where's my advance?

MERCHUTKINA: (*grabbing SHIPUCHIN and spinning him around*) Your Excellency!

SHIPUCHIN: Now is not a good time. (*back to KHIRIN*) If you would just –

MERCHUTKINA: (*spinning SHIPUCHIN around*) If she gets money, I should get money.

SHIPUCHIN: Please leave! (*to KHIRIN*) Please get back to work.

MERCHUTKINA: As soon as I get my money.

KHIRIN: As soon as I get my advance.

SHIPUCHIN: (*shouting*) Enough!

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*still focused on her nail*) Darling... shouting causes wrinkles...

SHIPUCHIN: I can't take it – I'm going to... I'm going to...

KHIRIN: (*to audience*) This should be good.

SHIPUCHIN groans and grabs his stomach and sinks to the floor.

KHIRIN: (*to audience*) Or not so good.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*satisfied*) Much better. Now, where was I?

SHIPUCHIN groans from the floor.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: (*standing*) Andrey, what are you doing on the floor? Is this any way for the chairman of a bank to act? Really, what if your shareholders saw you? (*to MERCHUTKINA*) What is happening here?

SHIPUCHIN groans from the floor.

MERCHUTKINA: (*grabbing TATIANA by the hands*) Beautiful lady, nobody will help me.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: The nails! The nails!

MERCHUTKINA actually backs off. She knows power when she sees it.

MERCHUTKINA: (*swanning back*) Beautiful lady, what can I do? My coffee tastes like dirt.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Oh that is awful. Darling, her coffee tastes like dirt. Such a disappointing start to the day. (*she pats MERCHUTKINA*) I'll get you a good coffee.

SHIPUCHIN groans from the floor. KHIRIN sees a moment and pushes MERCHUTKINA away to get in front of TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA.

KHIRIN: Madam! He made promises to me. He always makes promises and never follows through. Never, never, never!

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Darling, you can't back out on your promises.

KHIRIN: He gave me pickled beets.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Beets are good for you. They're a proven anti-inflammatory, not that I am puffy in any way and needing any anti-inflaming, but some mornings, you look in the mirror and maybe you slept on your face wrong and the blood has pooled in an unattractive way – all you need is a demitasse of beet juice, which tastes dreadful but it's so worth it when the puff melts away. Not that it happens often but every woman knows the power of a good puff melt even though my sister has never –

Not being able to listen to this any longer, KHIRIN and MERCHUTKINA drag SHIPUCHIN to standing.

KHIRIN: (*at the same time as MERCHUTKINA below*) Andrey Andreyevitch!

MERCHUTKINA: (*at the same time as KHIRIN above*) Your Excellency!

KHIRIN and MERCHUTKINA verbally badger SHIPUCHIN about getting paid until he speaks.

SHIPUCHIN: Fine, fine, fine, fine, fine, fine!! (*to MERCHUTKINA*) How much do you want?

MERCHUTKINA: 24 rubles 36 copecks.

SHIPUCHIN: *(takes out money)* Here's 25.

MERCHUTKINA: I thank you humbly, your Excellency.

KHIRIN: What about me?

SHIPUCHIN: Fine, fine, fine! Here. *(pays KHIRIN some money)* Now you *(referring to MERCHUTKINA)* go, and you, *(referring to KHIRIN)* get back to work!

SHIPUCHIN collapses into his desk chair. His head heavily hits the desk (safely). KHIRIN goes back to work. MERCHUTKINA puts the money away, but does not leave. TATIANA starts talking.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: Well, that was easy. I'll just finish my story. What a time we had. So much fun, but nothing out of the ordinary. *(lifting SHIPUCHIN's head)* Darling are you listening? *(lets go of SHIPUCHIN, who slumps back onto the desk)* Katya's man was there of course, and as requested by Mama, I was to persuade Katya not to marry Grendilevsky. Which I completely agree with. Why should Katya be happy and in love? It isn't right. No one else in the world is happy, why should she get to be?

MERCHUTKINA: *(lifting SHIPUCHIN's head)* Your Excellency...

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: She cried and I cried, but I convinced her that I was right and she was wrong.

MERCHUTKINA: *(holding SHIPUCHIN's face)* Your Excellency, if I could make another request?

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: *(grabbing SHIPUCHIN's arm to wrench him to focus on her)* And then! Katya and I were walking along the avenue just before dinner when suddenly –

MERCHUTKINA: *(grabs the other arm to wrench SHIPUCHIN to focus on her)* Your Excellency!

Now both TATIANA and MERCHUTKINA are pulling SHIPUCHIN back and forth like a tug-of-war.

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: *(pulls SHIPUCHIN)* A gunshot!

MERCHUTKINA: *(pulls SHIPUCHIN)* Can't my husband go back to his job?

TATIANA ALEXEYEVNA: *(pulling)* Grendilevsky! I can't even!

MERCHUTKINA: *(pulling)* Your Excellency!

THE PROPOSAL

Characters

Svetlana Milailovna Chubukov*: A landowning widow.

Natalya Stepanovna: Her daughter.

Ivan Vassilevitch Lomov: A nervous neighbour of Chubukov.

* In the original, Svetlana Milailovna is named Stepan Stepanovitch Chubukov and is male.

Setting

A formal living room in Chubukov's house. There is a couch and a pair of chairs. One of the chairs should clearly be "the good chair." Off to the side there is a small table with water and glasses. The furniture should be sturdy enough so that characters can leap on and off of it.

Note

While none of these characters are specific stock Commedia characters, they all explore a key factor in Commedia scenarios: status. There is a clear demarcation of status in this play, even though it doesn't follow the typical master/servant relationship. All characters in Commedia are either high status, middle status, or low status. In this play, Chubukov is high status, Natalya is middle status between her mother and Lomov, and Lomov, despite being a rich man, is low status.

Another aspect of status is control. All Commedia characters are either controlling the situation or lack control. Each of the characters in this play wants to control the situation—they want to be high status and they want to be right.

There are three main themes in Commedia: money, love, and hunger. In this play, we explore the idea of love within the context of getting married. Lomov wants to marry Natalya; Natalya, once she realizes Lomov wanted to propose, wants to marry Lomov; and Chubukov wants Natalya and Lomov to be married. But nothing about this marriage is about love; it's all about status and control.

When you create the physicalizations for these characters, think about how they visualize status. When do they feel in control of the situation, and how does that impact their body language? When are they out of control? And what is each character's physical status relationship with "the good chair"? Also, focus on ramping up and down the energies of the characters. They are calm one moment and jumping on the furniture the next.

Music plays.

CHUBUKOV sits in “the good chair” reading. She looks very comfortable and at ease in the good chair. At no time during the following does she look up or hear LOMOV. She is always focused on her book.

LOMOV enters, dressed formally. He faces downstage with confidence and smooths his hair with flair. He turns, sees CHUBUKOV, freezes in terror, and runs off. LOMOV enters again, his hair now a little disheveled and faces downstage. With much less confidence, he smooths his hair with a little less grace and brushes imaginary dirt off his shoulders. He turns toward CHUBUKOV, freezes in terror, and runs off. Once again, LOMOV enters and faces downstage. He is now a little more disheveled. He vigorously tries to smooth his hair, vigorously brushes imaginary dirt off his shoulders, his arms, and his legs, then takes a huge breath in and out. He does that again. He sticks his hand out powerfully as if greeting CHUBUKOV. He pretends to greet her, smiling, acting the master of small talk, miming a joke and giving a confident laugh. It’s all going well.

CHUBUKOV gives a small cough, which causes LOMOV to panic and run out. He now sneaks into the room. He sneakily smooths his hair and brushes dirt off his shoulders. This time though, before he can turn toward CHUBUKOV, his shoulder twitches slightly. He clamps a hand on his shoulder. He breathes in and out. Everything is fine. Then his other shoulder twitches, more than slightly. He clamps a hand on the other shoulder. He takes a breath in and out. Just when everything seems fine, both of his shoulders twitch uncontrollably no matter how hard a grip he has. The twitching sends him violently to the floor.

CHUBUKOV, who has paid no attention at all to what has been happening, stands. Still reading. She moves to the side to get a drink of water. Her back is to LOMOV. LOMOV moves to standing as quietly as possible, which is quite the struggle.

CHUBUKOV finishes her water. LOMOV sees her start to turn and dives behind a piece of furniture. CHUBUKOV returns to sit in the good chair, all the while she hasn’t looked up from her book.

LOMOV leaps up from behind the piece of furniture. Music cuts off.

LOMOV: *(as loud and bold as possible with gesture)* Greetings, Svetlana Milailova!

This causes CHUBUKOV to jump up and throw her book in the air.

CHUBUKOV: Ack!

LOMOV: Oh no! *(much quieter and smaller gesture)* Greetings, Svetlana Milailova.

CHUBUKOV: Why, Ivan Vassilevitch. I didn't see you there. What a surprise. How are you, my dear?

LOMOV: How am I? *(aside)* How am I, how am I? *(turns back)* Greetings, Svetlana Milailova.

CHUBUKOV: Yes, we've established that. Please come in. Will you sit down?

LOMOV: Sit down? *(aside)* Will I sit down? Will I sit down?

CHUBUKOV: Yes, you will. *(gesturing)* Take the good chair.

LOMOV: What?

CHUBUKOV: Take the good chair.

LOMOV: I can't.

CHUBUKOV: I insist.

LOMOV: But, it's the good chair.

CHUBUKOV: Yes. It's the best chair in the whole room. In the whole house, even.

LOMOV: I can't, I can't, I can't sit in the best chair. It's impossible.

CHUBUKOV: Impossible? To sit on a chair? *(gives a tinkling laugh)* I'm going to sit on the couch. Sit where you like. *(she does so)*

LOMOV freezes. He is conflicted. He doesn't think he's good enough to sit in the good chair but he doesn't want to insult his host. He looks off, as if thinking about running. He looks at the chair. He smooths his hair. He side steps awkwardly to approach the chair. He bows to the chair, which causes CHUBUKOV to roll her eyes. He brushes off his backside so nothing dirty

touches the chair. He turns around and slowly sits. But he doesn't sit comfortably and only sits on the very edge of the chair.

CHUBUKOV: Now! (*this causes LOMOV to spasm as he sits*) Why are you here? And I must know: why are you dressed so formally? Is there a party I don't know about?

LOMOV: (*standing up formally*) I've only come to see you, honoured Svetlana Milailovna.

CHUBUKOV: My goodness! How special am I? Sit down, sit down.

LOMOV: (*sitting on the very edge of the chair*) I've come to see you because I have a request. It's a small request. Well, perhaps not small at all, it depends on your point of view. In the past, I've had the privilege of asking for your help and you have always been so (*he stops talking and gives a little squeak as if his mouth has gone dry*) You have always been so... (*he squeaks again and pats the sweat off his forehead*) May I have a glass of water?

CHUBUKOV gestures to the side and LOMOV runs over to grab a glass and pours himself a glass of water. He drinks a second glass.

CHUBUKOV: (*aside*) He's come to borrow money. That's what this is about. Why should the richest man in the county get a single penny from me? Ludicrous! Not going to happen. Never! He can beg on his knees. He can hold his breath till he turns blue. He can say pretty, pretty, please with sugar on top. Never! Not a chance! Not on your life! (*Beat. Graciously, to LOMOV.*) Why, what is it, my beauty? What have you come to ask? I'm on pins and needles waiting to hear! Sit down, sit down.

LOMOV: (*moving back and sitting, just on the edge*) You see, Honour Milailovna, I beg your pardon, honoured Svetlana Honourovna, I mean, in short, you alone can help me, though I don't deserve it, of course...

CHUBUKOV: Spit it out!

LOMOV: (*standing and speaking quickly*) I've come to ask the hand of your daughter, Natalya Stepanovna, in marriage.

CHUBUKOV: Marriage? That's what you want? (*joyfully laughing, standing with a little dance*) How wonderful! (*grabbing LOMOV's hands with her hands*) I'm delighted! What joyous news! (*aside*) Finally, I can get her out of the house, and to one so rich. (*to*

LOMOV) I've always loved you as if you were my own son. Happy days! I'll go and get Natalya. *(she starts to dance off)* Happy days!

LOMOV: Honoured Svetlana Milailovna, do you think she will say yes?

CHUBUKOV: Of course, my darling. I'll make sure of it. Sit tight. *(exits with joy)*

LOMOV flings himself onto the good chair, realizes what he's done, and bounces back off, with a squeal, to stand stiffly.

LOMOV: I did it! Whoop! What a relief! *(fanning himself)* So hot... *(shivering)* So cold... All the time I've thought about this moment, worried myself sick... It's going to happen! Natalya Stepanovna and I are to be married! *(shivers)* Why is it so cold in here? Do they never pay their bills? *(twitches an eyebrow)* Oh no. *(twitches a shoulder)* Oh no, oh no. *(twitches both shoulders)* Not now. *(Twitches an arm and a leg. Talking to his body.)* Stop it! Stop it this instant! *(exaggeratedly twitches all over)* Stoooooooooooooppppppp!

LOMOV flings himself on the good chair and holds himself tight to try and stop the twitching. NATALYA enters. She has no idea what's to come.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Hello!... *(seeing LOMOV twitching)* Are you all right?

LOMOV: *(leaping to his feet, standing stiffly)* Ack! *(takes a breath and bows)* I am well, Natalya Stepanovna.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: How do you do, Ivan Vassilevitch?

LOMOV: How do you do, Natalya Stepanovna?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: I am well, thank you. *(beat)* It's been ages since I've seen you.

LOMOV: Yes. It's been forever.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Yes. Forever.

LOMOV: Yes.

They stand there and stare at each other. NATALYA finally can't stand it.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Should we sit down?

LOMOV: Yes. Let us sit down.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Please, take the good chair.

LOMOV: No. I can't.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: I insist.

LOMOV: You take it. It's your chair. It's the best chair in the whole room. The whole house.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: You're the guest.

LOMOV: You take it.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: You.

LOMOV: You.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: I'm going to sit on the couch.

LOMOV: If you wish.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: I do.

LOMOV and NATALYA stand and stare at each other.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Are you going to sit?

LOMOV: You should sit first.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Why?

LOMOV: Because?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Because why?

LOMOV: Because you should.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: You should.

LOMOV: You.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: You.

LOMOV: You.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Why does it matter who sits first?

LOMOV: It doesn't.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: So sit down.

LOMOV: You sit down.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: We'll sit at the same time. All right?

LOMOV: If you wish.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: I do.

There is a bit of a staredown as NATALYA slowly sits. LOMOV matches her speed. Suddenly NATALYA stands straight up. LOMOV matches her. NATALYA goes to sit and then doesn't. LOMOV falls over. NATALYA finally sits and LOMOV crawls into the good chair. There is a pause.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Will you stay for lunch?

LOMOV: No, thank you. Oh! Thank you for the invitation. It is very kind of you. It's just that I am not hungry. I appreciate the offer. If you really want me to eat. I will eat. I wouldn't want to upset you – oh, I have, haven't I. I have insulted your kind invitation! How could I be so stupid! Stupid, stupid –

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: It's fine! It's fine. You don't have to eat. Forget I even asked. Ok?

LOMOV: Oh. Ok.

There is a pause.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: The weather is lovely, isn't it? Sun today. Better than yesterday. Rain, yesterday. *(beat)* Can I ask you something?

LOMOV: Of course, Natalya Stepanovna.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Why are you dressed like that? In the afternoon? Is there a party I don't know about?

LOMOV: *(Leaps to his feet, twitches his shoulder, and stands stiffly. Speaks loudly.)* Natalya Stepanovna! *(talks quietly)* Natalya Stepanovna, I've made up my mind. Please hear me out. *(twitches an eyebrow, clamps a hand over one eye)* Of course you'll be surprised and perhaps even angry, but, but, but, *(does an all-over twitch)* Ack!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: What's the matter? Are you ok? Sit down, sit down!

LOMOV: *(gets under control, sits on the edge of the chair, formally)* I will be brief. As you know, Natalya Stepanovna, we have known each other since we were children. My late aunt and her husband, from whom, as you know, I inherited my land, always had the greatest respect for your late father and your mother. The Lomovs and the Chubukovs have always been friendly with the greatest regard

for each other. And, as you know, my land is beside yours. My Oxen Meadows touch your birchwoods. And as you know-

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: (*standing up*) What did you say?

LOMOV: (*a little derailed*) What?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: What did you say? That last thing.

LOMOV: Uh, let me think... you kind of derailed my – Oh! This was it. (*formally*) My Oxen Meadows touch your birchwoods. And as you know –

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: (*moving away*) When you say “my Oxen Meadows...” are they really yours?

LOMOV: Yes.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: No.

LOMOV: What?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: No, they’re not.

LOMOV: What what?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: The Oxen Meadows are ours, not yours.

LOMOV: No.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Yes.

LOMOV: They’re mine.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: How do you figure that?

LOMOV: (*sitting back, in the good chair*) How? We’re talking about the Oxen Meadows which are wedged in between your birchwoods and the Burnt Marsh.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Exactly! They’re ours.

LOMOV: That’s wrong.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: And how long do you think they’ve been yours?

LOMOV: As long as I can remember.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: No.

LOMOV: Yes! (*standing*) Everyone knows they are mine.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Oh no they don't!

LOMOV: Oh yes they do!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Our land extends to Burnt Marsh, which includes the Oxen Meadows! (*taking a breath*) Why are we arguing about this? It's silly. Oh, I see what you're doing. You're having me on. Playing a joke.

She laughs out loud and LOMOV joins in, not at all sure what the joke is. They both sit.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: As if to say that land we've had for nearly three hundred years suddenly isn't ours. Surprise! (*laughing long and then stopping with seriousness*) But seriously, don't joke. If there's one thing I can't stand, it's unfunny jokes about land that has always been ours.

LOMOV: This is ridiculous.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: What's ridiculous is suggesting that the Meadows are yours.

LOMOV: They are mine.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: They're ours! You can talk all you want and wear all the fancy clothes you want but they're ours, ours, ours! (*standing*) What do you think you're doing, sitting in our good chair?

LOMOV: You told me to sit here.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Get up!

LOMOV: What?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: (*pulling him out of the chair*) Get up, get up, get up!

There is a bit of a tug-of-war here as NATALYA is not strong enough to pull LOMOV out the chair and LOMOV doesn't understand what's going on. Finally, she launches him out of the chair and across the room.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Ah ha!

LOMOV stumbles across the room and tries to regain his composure.

LOMOV: Sit down! Get up! Sit down! Get up! Make up your mind!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: (*sitting in the good chair*) I can't believe you! Here we thought you were a good neighbour and now we find out you're nothing but a scoundrel.

LOMOV: Are you trying to tell me that I am a land grabber? Madam, never in my life have I grabbed anyone else's land or anything else, and I will not, I will not be accused of doing so now. The Oxen Meadows are mine!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: (*leaping up*) They're ours!

LOMOV: Mine!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: (*standing on the chair*) Ours, ours, ours!

LOMOV: Mine, mine, mine!

They two keep shouting at each other as CHUBUKOV runs in.

CHUBUKOV: What's the matter? What's all this shouting? Aren't we happy? Celebrating? Happy days...? Did things not... Natalya, why are you standing on the chair? My darling, please get down.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: But, Mama!

CHUBUKOV: Shall we sit? Yes. Clearly we need a little direction, hmmm? Ivan Vassilevitch, please take the good chair.

LOMOV: (*same time as below*) I will not!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: (*same time as above*) Mama, you can't!

The two start talking at CHUBUKOV at the same time about how LOMOV can't sit in the good chair.

CHUBUKOV: (*clapping her hands and making a verbal sound to shut them both up*) Buh, buh, buh! That's enough! Children! (*this shuts them up*) Take a breath. In and out. (*they do so*) Again. In and out. (*they do so*) Excellent. Shall we breathe and sit? Yes, we shall. (*They all breathe in together. They all slowly sit at exactly the same time. CHUBUKOV talks as they slowly sit.*) We're sitting and we're breathing. Sitting and breathing. And we're sitting. Well done. Now. What on earth is going on?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: (*calmly*) Mama, please tell this gentleman who owns Oxen Meadows.

CHUBUKOV: (*calmly*) Why darling, the Meadows are ours.

LOMOV: (*calmly*) But, please, Svetlana Milailovna, how can they be yours?

CHUBUKOV: (*calmly*) Because they are.

LOMOV: Be reasonable. My aunt's grandmother gave the Meadows for the temporary and free use of your grandfather's peasants and –

CHUBUKOV: (*on edge*) Everyone knows they're ours.

LOMOV: They do not. The fact is...

CHUBUKOV: The fact? Oh ho! The fact?

LOMOV: Everyone knows they belong to me and I can prove it!

CHUBUKOV: (*ramping up to 100*) Prove it? You think you can prove it?

LOMOV: (*ramping up to 100*) You bet I can! I'll prove it and rub your noses in it!

CHUBUKOV: (*all the way past 100, leaping up*) Young man, you will not speak to me in that tone of voice! Get out of our good chair!

LOMOV: I will not! Ha! The Meadows are mine and so is this chair! How about that!

CHUBUKOV: Get out!

LOMOV: Make me!

CHUBUKOV: How dare you!

She lunges to grab LOMOV. Another tug-of-war. This time LOMOV resists. NATALYA helps CHUBUKOV pull. Finally they launch LOMOV out of the chair and everyone goes flying.

CHUBUKOV: You are not a nice man!

LOMOV: I'll take this matter to court, that's what I'm going to do!

CHUBUKOV: Go ahead! Court away! You always want to go to court! All your family, court, court, court, court, court, court, court!

LOMOV: At least no one in my family has ever been tried for embezzlement, like your grandfather! (*eye starts twitching, he clamps a hand over the eye*)

CHUBUKOV: At least my aunt didn't run away with an architect!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: (*leaps on the furniture*) Take that!

CHUBUKOV: (*leaps on the furniture*) At least my family isn't crazy!

LOMOV: Your mother was a hump-back! (*shoulder starts twitching, clamps a hand on the shoulder*)

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: How dare you!

CHUBUKOV: Your father was a gambler!

LOMOV: Enough! Ah! This twitching! Look at what you've done to me!
(*exits as he tries to stop a twitch over his entire body*)

CHUBUKOV: (*following*) And don't set foot in my house again!

LOMOV: (*from offstage*) Ack!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Take it to court! Go ahead!

There is a pause. The two sit. There is a further pause.

CHUBUKOV: I can't believe he sat in our good chair. Like he owned it.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Like the Meadows.

CHUBUKOV: What an unpleasant man.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Dishonest.

CHUBUKOV: A villain.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: A monster.

CHUBUKOV: Ugh. And he had the audacity to tell me he wanted to propose. The nerve.

NATALYA goes white and turns slowly to CHUBUKOV.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: (*completely still*) Propose?

CHUBUKOV: That's why he was here. To propose to you.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: (*tightly*) A marriage... proposal?

CHUBUKOV: Granted, he's extremely wealthy and I'll be sad to see that walk out the door. Oh, and of course, I'm sad for you; it would have been a good match, but it looks like this is for the –

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Propose? To me?

CHUBUKOV: And the way he dressed up to impress you. Ridiculous moron.

LOMOV appears at the edge of the space, clearing his throat. There is silence. No one knows where to start. Pause as long as you can stand it before finally...

CHUBUKOV: (*clearing throat*) Welcome... Ivan Vassilevitch... It appears that my daughter would like... to talk to you. And... yeah. Good luck. (*exits*)

LOMOV: (*muttering in a daze*) My foot's gone to sleep... (*eye twitch*) My eye...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: (*smiling and gesturing*) Forgive us, Ivan Vassilevitch, we were all a little... um... heated...

LOMOV: I see spots.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Let's start over. Wipe the slate clean. (*makes a wiping motion*) There. What's past is past. (*takes a breath*) Please. I beg of you. Sit in the good chair.

LOMOV: (*with horror*) No!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Please!

LOMOV: No!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: I insist.

LOMOV: Never!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Don't be stupid!

LOMOV: I will never sit in that chair again!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: If I say you're going to sit in that chair, you will sit in it!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA runs over and drags LOMOV to the good chair and pushes him into it. LOMOV resists the whole way. It is quite the battle. Finally she gets him in the chair.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: There! (*sits*) So! Let's start again. Clean slate. (*she makes a "wipe the slate clean" gesture*) I remember now: Oxen Meadows are yours.

LOMOV: The Meadows?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Yes, the Oxen Meadows. That's what we are talking about. The Meadows are yours. Of course they are. We were wrong. We admit it. Ok?

LOMOV: My aunt's grandmother gave the land to your father's grandfather's peasants...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Yes, yes of course. *(makes a ready-for-the-proposal pose)* Now, what else could we talk about?

LOMOV: Thank you, Natalya Stepanovna. I only came on so strong on principle. It's the principle of the thing when someone accuses you of something and –

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: *(getting annoyed)* Yes, yes. I got it. You were right and we were wrong. It's water under the bridge. We wiped the slate clean, remember? *(makes the wiping motion again)* Now. *(leaning in a little too hard)* What else could we talk about? *(LOMOV shrieks a little and cowers in the chair. NATALYA STEPANOVNA reigns it back.)* What else could we talk about? Hmmmmmm? *(She floats her left hand toward him and hums a little of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March." He does not respond. She slumps and changes the subject.)* Are you going to start hunting soon?

LOMOV: *(taking a breath and everything is back to normal)* Why yes, although have you heard? My dog, Guess, has gone lame.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Oh how sad! What happened?

LOMOV: I don't know... must have got twisted, or bitten by some other dog... *(sighing)* Guess is my very best dog.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: So sad.

LOMOV: A first-rate dog.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: *(not sincerely)* Yes...

LOMOV: The best dog in the county.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Oh.....

There is a pause. They sit. LOMOV twitches slightly a couple of times. NATALYA is trying to contain something. She tries and tries and tries. Finally she can't.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Well, he's not as good as our Squeezer.

LOMOV: What?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Squeezer is a much better dog than Guess.

LOMOV: Squeezer better than Guess? You're kidding.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: You can't deny it.

LOMOV: I can and I do. (*laughing*) Squeezer better than Guess.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Of course he's better. Squeezer is a young dog.

LOMOV: He's overshot. That means he's a bad hunter.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Overshot?

LOMOV: His lower jaw is shorter than the upper.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: I know what overshot means. I don't recall you ever being close enough to Squeezer to have measured his jaw.

LOMOV: He'll be all right at following, but not if you want him to get hold of anything.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: (*Standing. All the way to 100.*) Our Squeezer is a thoroughbred. He has an impeccable pedigree. Guess is old and ugly and completely worn-out!

LOMOV: He may be old but I wouldn't take five Squeezers for him. Squeezers are ordinary. And cheap. Everyone has a Squeezer!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Stop saying Squeezer!

LOMOV: (*leaning forward*) I'll bet you can find a Squeezer under every bush!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Get out of that chair!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA goes to yank LOMOV, who leaps up before she can grab him.

LOMOV: Ha! I wouldn't sit in that chair if you paid me! Ha ha! (*he blows a raspberry at her*)

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Squeezer is a hundred times better than your silly Guess.

LOMOV: You must think I'm blind.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: (*leaping on the furniture*) Squeezer is better!

LOMOV: (*leaping on the furniture*) Guess!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Squeezer!

LOMOV: Shut up!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: You shut up!

LOMOV: You!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: You!

They continue to argue. CHUBUKOV wanders in, sees the fighting, and gives a big sigh. Finally, she steps in.

CHUBUKOV: HEY! *(the two stop fighting)* Are you getting married or not?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: *(leaping off the chair and running over)* Mama, you have to set him straight!

CHUBUKOV: *(trying to get away)* Ack!

LOMOV: *(leaping off the chair and running over)* Svetlana Milailovna, you cannot deny it! You can't!

CHUBUKOV: *(trying to get away)* Get away from me!

They both chase CHUBUKOV around the room.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: *(speaking at the same time as LOMOV)* Who is the better dog, our Squeezer or his Guess?

LOMOV: *(speaking at the same time as NATALYA)* Svetlana Milailovna, you can't deny it! You can't deny Guess is better than Squeezer!

CHUBUKOV: ENOUGH! *(the two freeze)* Sit! *(the two sit)* Breathe! *(They both breathe. This time she speaks with much more annoyance.)* In and out. In and out. Sitting and breathing. Ok? Now. What are we yelling about?

LOMOV: *(leaping up)* Your Squeezer is overshot.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Ha!

CHUBUKOV: Overshot? And what if he is? He's the best dog in the district.

LOMOV: *(trying to advance on CHUBUKOV)* My Guess is the better dog.

CHUBUKOV: *(meets him face-to-face)* That dog is old and short in the muzzle.

LOMOV: *(scurrying away and now keeping as much distance as possible between him and CHUBUKOV)* You know on the Marusinsky hunt my Guess ran neck-and-neck with the Count's dog, while your Squeezer was left behind.

CHUBUKOV: (*pursuing LOMOV*) He got left behind because the Count hit him with his whip.

LOMOV: With good reason! The dogs were supposed to be chasing the fox and Squeezer went after a sheep!

CHUBUKOV: That's not true and you know it!

LOMOV: (*starts twitching*) My eye! Oh no! (*clamps a hand on his eye*) I can't! (*shoulders and arms twitch*) Stop it, stop it, Stoooooooooop it!

LOMOV starts stumbling around the room. Both NATALYA and CHUBUKOV chase him around the space.

CHUBUKOV: What are you doing?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: What sort of a hunter are you with all that twitching?

LOMOV: (*twitching*) Oh shut up!

CHUBUKOV: How dare you speak to my daughter that way!

LOMOV: (*twitching*) You shut up too!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: How dare you speak to my mother that way! What's wrong with you?

LOMOV: You! You're what's wrong with me! The two of you will be the death of – (*twitching all over*) There, there, there! My shoulder's come off! Where's my shoulder? Where is it? What have you done with it?! (*collapses into the good chair*) Doctor! (*faints*)

There is silence. NATALYA STEPANOVNA and CHUBUKOV stare at LOMOV, at each other, and back at LOMOV.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: What was that?

CHUBUKOV: Unbelievable. (*shaking LOMOV*) Ivan Vassilevitch. You can't sleep in our good chair!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA picks up one of LOMOV's arms and lets go. It flops down.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: Oh no. Mama!

CHUBUKOV: What?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA: He's dead!

THE BEAR

Characters

Elena Ivanovna Popova: A landowning widow.

Grigory Stepanovitch Smirnov: A landowner.

Ludmilla*: Popova's housekeeper.

* In the original, Ludmilla is Luka and is a male footman.

Setting

A formal living room in Popova's house. There is a couch for Popova to dramatically pose on. A couple of chairs. A small table where Ludmilla polishes silverware. Several small tables for Ludmilla to put water glasses on. The furniture should be solid enough that Smirnov can leap on and off.

Note

In this play, each character embodies a classic Commedia want: food, money, or love. While not following traditional lines exactly, the characters still resonate with these desires. Popova loves her dead husband and wants him to feel guilty about it. As a master character, she wields power and status. She controls Ludmilla and has power over Smirnov when she says she can't pay him. She is not stupid, but her extreme narrow focus hampers her intelligence, and her need clouds everything else in her life.

Smirnov is a classic Commedia stock character. He's an Il Capitano, alternating between presenting as brave and powerful and being scared by something as small as a teeny tiny spider. He feels powerful but loses status constantly throughout the play.

Ludmilla is a servant type, doing whatever she can to satisfy her urgent hunger. She does not represent a single specific character type but has characteristics of several: the common sense of Columbina and the mischievousness of Arlecchino.

Each character should have a specific and vivid physicalization connected to their need. There is nothing internal about these characters; everything is external. They know what they want, they say what they want, but many obstacles prevent them from getting what they want.

Music plays.

POPOVA is dressed in black. She is flung across on a sofa in an exaggerated inauthentic pose of mourning. She has one arm flung across her forehead and the other arm wrapped around an oversized framed photograph of her dead husband. LUDMILLA is standing at a table with a cloth, polishing cutlery with vigor.

LUDMILLA's nose goes in the air. She wiggles her nose. She gives a sniff. She sniffs herself. It's not her. She sniffs the cutlery. It's not the cutlery. She takes a deep, deep, sniff into the air. It's FOOD. She does a little dance at the glory of what she's sniffing. Suddenly she hears something. She listens left. She listens right. She listens up. She listens down and realizes what it is. It's her stomach growling. She grabs her stomach. She is HUNGRY.

She looks at POPOVA. She looks at the door. Can she get out the door without POPOVA noticing? Can she feed her stomach? She takes in another deep, deep sniff which carries her around the space in a wide circle. She is led all the way by her nose. She pauses at the door. Looks at POPOVA, looks off. Does a quick sniff and dances at the glory of what she is sniffing. In the middle of her dance, she trips and stumbles into a chair. POPOVA groans without moving. Music dims.

POPOVA: Where are you going?

LUDMILLA: (*whirling around*) Nowhere! Upstairs! Downstairs! The parlour! The pantry! The kitchen! We're out of spoons! Forks! Knives! Everything! We're out of everything!

POPOVA: Just polish what's here.

LUDMILLA: (*looking desperately off*) If I could go to the kitchen for one second...

POPOVA: Stay with me!

LUDMILLA: (*sighing*) Of course.

Music rises in volume. LUDMILLA makes a face and goes back to polishing. POPOVA goes silent. LUDMILLA's nose goes up in the air again and she is drawn by the smell of food. She is so HUNGRY. All

she wants is some food. Her hands are facing toward her polishing but her head and nose is twisted toward the exit. She looks to POPOVA then to the exit. She looks to POPOVA then to the exit. She slowly puts down the cloth and the spoon. She sneaks slowly and exaggeratedly toward the exit. She measures each step, not wanting anything to go wrong this time.

Suddenly, her stomach growls. It is so loud! She grabs her stomach. She puts a finger to her lips in a “Shhh!” gesture. Her stomach growls again. She grabs a pillow from a chair. She grabs another pillow. And a third. She now is juggling three pillows, jamming them into her stomach to muffle the sound of her stomach growling. But it’s too much and LUDMILLA speaks out loud. Music fades.

LUDMILLA: (to stomach) Shhhhh! Quiet will you?

POPOVA: (sitting up) What are you doing?

LUDMILLA: Nothing! Polishing! Plumping the pillows! They’re sooooo flat. They really need it. (she thumps one of the pillows she’s holding)

POPOVA: (lying back down) Oh. All right. It is nice to have fluffy pillows. (sighing) If only I could enjoy them.

LUDMILLA: Madam. I was wondering. My stomach is telling me it’s lunch time. Very reliable, my stomach. It’s good at lunch time and anticipating tornados. Perhaps I could go down to the kitchen and get you something?

POPOVA: No.

LUDMILLA: A bite of bread? A chunk of cheese? A portion of potatoes? A basting of beets? A parcel of pasta? A soupçon of soup? A smattering of salad? A ration of rice? A wedge of watermelon? A quota of quiche? A fragment of frittata? A whole chicken? A side of beef? A duck wrapped in back bacon and stuffed into a turkey? I’ll get you anything you want!

POPOVA: I’m not hungry.

LUDMILLA: But maybe I could bring some food, and the smell might change your mind?

POPOVA: I’ll never be hungry again!

POPOVA flings her arm over her face in exaggerated despair. LUDMILLA gives a full-body move of

frustration; silent jumping, for example. She smashes two of the pillows against each other and then flings them away. She holds the last pillow over her face for a silent scream. She sniffs the air again. This time, she is determined.

She looks at POPOVA, and then exaggeratedly takes a step toward the door. She coughs and freezes. She looks at POPOVA, who doesn't move. She takes a step and then sneezes. She looks at POPOVA, who doesn't move. She takes two more steps. She freezes. She knows she's going to cough and sneeze at the same time. She tries to do it silently, but she can't. It is an explosive moment and she throws herself all over the stage. POPOVA sits up and stares at her. Finally LUDMILLA stops. There is a pause and then...

LUDMILLA: Allergies.

POPOVA throws herself back down. LUDMILLA, resigned, goes back to polishing, which she does furiously. She turns to the audience.

LUDMILLA: *(to the audience)* Look at her. Look! It isn't right. She does this all day, every day. Every day I polish. Every day she lies on the couch hugging that picture. *(groaning)* I am so hungry. I'm so hungry I could eat plain brown bread without butter and call it a feast. I'm so hungry I could eat my shoes. *(looking under the couch)* I'm so hungry I could eat that spider. Oh look how fat it is. I wonder what a spider tastes like. That is one fat, meaty, juicy arachnid. *(as if sneaking up on the spider)* How hard could it be to catch? I could grab it easily and shove it in my mouth and crunch down on those eight legs in one fell – *(gives a shake)* What am I saying? *(She looks at POPOVA and makes a decision. To POPOVA.)* This isn't right, madam.

POPOVA groans.

LUDMILLA: You're destroying yourself. *(looking at the cutlery)* Perfect. *(to POPOVA)* Not that you're eating anything of substance. I really think a nice meal would do you good. Some steamed salmon? Stroganoff? A tomato and onion sandwich? What's the point in polishing the silverware if you don't eat? *(holds her stomach)* Ohhhhh, just talking about food makes me weak at the knees. Light in the head. Giddy in the gallbladder. You know what? You know what? *(trying to psych herself up to defy her boss)* You know what? You know what? You know what? You know what? You know what! Madam. I. Am. Hungry. It's lunch time. My stomach

knows it. We haven't had a tornado here in years. It's time to eat. Some of us are not in a state of grief. Some of us are human beings with needs. Stomach needs. I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm, I'm (*and out with it!*) going to run to the kitchen. That's what I'm going to do. (*fast*) I won't be long; less than five minutes. Super fast, super fast. I'll grab and go. I'll dine and dash. I'll be there and back in the wink of an eye. You won't even know I'm gone!

POPOVA gives a long pitiful groan and moves to another exaggerated pose, facing away from LUDMILLA.

POPOVA: Ludmilla, how could you leave me in my moment of grief?

LUDMILLA gives another overall movement of frustration. She stomps over to the couch and stands over POPOVA, hands on hips.

LUDMILLA: Everyone else is living their best lives. Everyone! The maid and the cook are having a fabulous day off. And you know what they're doing on their day off? Picking fruit. That's what they want to do on their day off: pick fruit. They're ecstatic about it. If they can enjoy themselves doing something as stupid as that, surely you, as well off as you are, can find something, anything, to bring a smile to your face.

POPOVA groans, hugging the photograph tighter.

LUDMILLA: Enough of this.

LUDMILLA tries to grab the photograph away from her. This results in a tug-of-war.

POPOVA: (*while trying to keep the photograph, same time as LUDMILLA below*) No, no, no, no, no, no, no!

LUDMILLA: (*while trying to get the photograph, same time as POPOVA, above*) Let. Go! Let. Go! Let. Go!

On the last word, LUDMILLA wins the tug-of-war and gets the photo. The momentum causes LUDMILLA to stumble backward. POPOVA, on losing the photo, throws herself face down on the sofa.

LUDMILLA, once she gains her ground, runs around the room holding the photo over her head in victory.

LUDMILLA: Ah ha! Ah ha! Ah... ha... (*frowning and looking at POPOVA*)
Oh bother.

POPOVA: (*mumbling still face down on the couch*) I will never go out.

LUDMILLA: (*didn't understand POPOVA*) What?

POPOVA: (*still face down on the couch*) I will never go out.

LUDMILLA: You know I can't hear you when you're face down on the couch.

POPOVA: Ugh! (*Dramatically sits up with much resistance and reluctance. Poses with great drama.*) I will never go out!

LUDMILLA: Why?

POPOVA: Why? Why? You ask why? You ask why I will never go out? You ask that? Why?

LUDMILLA: Yes.

POPOVA: Why should I? (*changes the pose*) My life is at an end. (*pointing at the photograph*) My husband is gone. He is no more. My love is in his grave and I (*dramatically flinging her arms to the walls*) I have buried myself between four walls. We are both dead. (*falls back on the couch as if in a coffin*)

LUDMILLA: (*exasperated to self*) For the love of – I'm never going to eat again. (*putting the photo off to the side*) Madam. Nicolai Mihailovitch is dead. Certainly. May his soul rest in peace. You have mourned, as you should. You have been the epitome of mourning. You stopped the clocks. Covered the mirrors. Made a broach from his hair. Which, if I may say, is a little creepy, but I support your choices. You have kept the windows open. In the dead of winter. (*realizing what she just said*) The middle of winter. It's snowing in the dining room. But it's been seven months...

POPOVA: Queen Victoria mourned for 40 years.

LUDMILLA: Which is overkill. Uhhh. Overdone. Excessive? It's been a long time.

POPOVA: I haven't even done the amount of time required for deep mourning, which is a year and a day, and then there's full mourning after that, half mourning, half-half mourning, almost out of mourning, and finally non-mourning.

LUDMILLA: Well, if you're going to go down that road, shouldn't you be wearing crepe?

POPOVA: (*this is a sore point*) I'm emotionally wearing crepe. Emotionally. I'm wearing crepe on the inside. Crepe is so stiff and

if you get it wet it molds which gives me hives and you know they dye the fabric using tar, which is toxic, and I'm not interested in have a rash and lung cancer, and if you wear it as a veil it actually triggers asthma, so now I have a rash and lung cancer and I can't breathe! Is that what you want? You want me to have a rash and lung cancer and asthma in my time of grief?

LUDMILLA: I want to know if you really expect me to polish the silverware when you never eat with it.

POPOVA: Yes!

LUDMILLA: Fine. (*moves back to polishing the cutlery*) I'll do it. But I won't like it. (*there is a moment of silence*) You could go out. That's all I'm saying. You could leave the house. There's that regiment staying at Riblov. The officers... (*makes an approving noise but there's no response from POPOVA*) Every Friday there's a ball with music and dancing and (*music begins to play and LUDMILLA dances, pretending to be at a ball*) Why, yes. I would like this dance! Thank you so much for asking. I am a wealthy widow who hasn't seen the light of day for seven months. Can you do the Watusi? How fresh! I've always been attracted to men who can participate in at least seven to ten different dances, depending on the social situation. Oh, you Billy Bounce as well! I am particularly good at the Jazz square. (*Music fades. LUDMILLA is overcome with an overpowering smell from the kitchen. She takes a huge sniff.*) Roast chicken... I am particularly good at eating roast chicken... (*LUDMILLA throws down the cloth and the cutlery and stomps over to POPOVA*) You're not going to stay young forever, you know. Beauty doesn't last. Especially if you're going to go through deep mourning, full mourning, half mourning, almost out of mourning, before you get to non-mourning.

POPOVA: You forgot half-half mourning.

LUDMILLA: By the time you're over this, you'll be too old and not a single officer will look at you. There! I said it!

POPOVA sits up and (safely) grabs LUDMILLA.

POPOVA: Never talk to me about men again! (*pushes LUDMILLA away*)

LUDMILLA: (*stumbling away*) Ok, ok, fine.

POPOVA: (*standing and moving dramatically about the room*) When Nicolai Mihailovitch died, life lost all meaning. I vowed to wear mourning, emotional crepe, emotional crepe, to the end of my days. Let his ghost see how much I love him. (*calling out*) Hey you!

You see? You see what I'm doing? You see how much I'm taking this seriously? Huh? Huh?

LUDMILLA: He's dead. I don't think he sees anything.

POPOVA: (*dramatic pose, to LUDMILLA*) I know, that you know, that I know, that he was cruel to me. Unfair. Even unfaithful.

LUDMILLA: So we're mourning him because...?

POPOVA: (*change pose*) I will be true until death. I will show him what it means to love. I will really, really, really, really, really, really, really. Really. REA-LLY show him. (*calling out*) You hear me? You hear what I'm doing?

LUDMILLA: Couldn't you demonstrate your love and faithfulness by walking in the garden? Or visiting the neighbours? OR eating a plate of salted herring? Maybe I could eat a plate of salted herring in support?

POPOVA does an exaggerated wail and run around the room landing back at the couch for a final dramatic fling.

LUDMILLA: Got it. No herring.

A bell rings offstage. LUDMILLA and POPOVA react.

POPOVA: What is that?

LUDMILLA: The doorbell. And that only means one thing –

POPOVA: No!

LUDMILLA: Yes! (*with glee*) Visitors!

POPOVA: No!

LUDMILLA: Yes! This is exactly what you need!

LUDMILLA goes to exit, and POPOVA grabs LUDMILLA, dragging her back into the room.

POPOVA: No! No! No! Don't go out there!

LUDMILLA: I have to!

The bell rings again.

POPOVA: No!

LUDMILLA: I have to answer the door. Otherwise they'll keep ringing.

POPOVA: If we don't answer, maybe they'll go away.

The bell rings and rings and rings.

LUDMILLA: I have to go.

POPOVA: No you don't!

LUDMILLA: It's part of my job.

POPOVA: I forbid you to answer the door. If you answer the door, I'll officially reprimand you. I'll officially fire you. I'll fire you twice! I'll write a nasty mean letter to all the houses in the district so you'll never work in this town again!

The bell rings again.

POPOVA: Who is it? Who's there? Who's bothering me? Who?

LUDMILLA: I don't know, I'm in here.

POPOVA: Go find out.

LUDMILLA: And risk a nasty mean letter? No, thank you.

POPOVA: Please!

LUDMILLA: No, thank you.

The bell rings again.

POPOVA: I beg you.

LUDMILLA: No, thank you.

POPOVA: Find out who won't leave me alone and tell them to go away.

LUDMILLA: No, thank you.

POPOVA: What do you want? I'll give you anything.

LUDMILLA: Chicken. A whole roast chicken for myself. And borscht. And salted herring. And bread. Multiple loaves of bread. And –

POPOVA: Are you eating for seven? Go!

LUDMILLA: Fine.

POPOVA: (*pulling LUDMILLA*) Tell them that due to the death of my husband I will not see anyone. No one! (*pushing LUDMILLA and pulling her right back*) Wait! Emphatically tell them I am in mourning and I will unequivocally not see anyone. (*pushing LUDMILLA and pulling her right back*) Stress the seriousness of this.

I am not and I will not see them. I am not, without a shadow of a doubt, accepting visitors. *(beat)* What are you waiting for? Go! *(pushing LUDMILLA)*

LUDMILLA: Right away. *(aside to the audience)* This is perfect. She'll be distracted by whoever is at the door, who I will welcome with open arms, whoops, and I'll get to eat all that chicken! *(exits)*

POPOVA: *(grabbing the photograph)* You will see, Nicolas. I will show you how I can love and forgive. Doesn't that make you ashamed? Huh? I'm a good and virtuous one, you cretin. I'm the good person. I will be true to the grave and doesn't that fill you with a boat load of remorse? Huh? You bad deceitful child!

*POPOVA throws the photograph on the couch.
LUDMILLA enters, pouring it on a little thick.*

LUDMILLA: Madam, I'm soooooo sorry but I couldn't stop him! He would not listen!

POPOVA: But you told him I am not, without a shadow of a doubt, accepting visitors.

LUDMILLA: I did, oh I did. *(posing, a little thick)* But oh! *(new pose)* He pushed past me, citing some pressing affair. I'm soooooo sorry.

POPOVA: Nothing as pressing as death! I will not see him.

LUDMILLA: And I tried to close the door in his face. He pushed right past me! *(aside to audience)* Maybe I opened the door really wide and told him to come on in. Maybe I didn't. You weren't there. There's no proof. *(now to POPOVA)* He's in the dining room now. Ohhhhhhhhhhhhh.

POPOVA reacts poorly to that news with exaggerated and dramatic movement.

POPOVA: The dining room? He's in the dining room? Now? He's there now?

LUDMILLA: *(posing)* He won't leave! Whatever shall I do! He won't leave until you see him. *(with exaggerated and dramatic movement)* Ohhhhhhhhhhh.

POPOVA: Quiet! *(pauses before speaking)* Very well. Ask him in.

LUDMILLA turns, giving a little fist bump in the air as she exits. POPOVA paces.

POPOVA: How people annoy me. All I want is to do my deep mourning, full mourning, half mourning, half-half mourning, almost out of mourning, and non-mourning in peace!

SMIRNOV strides in with LUDMILLA following.

LUDMILLA: (*overdoing it*) Ohhhhhhhhhh. She doesn't want to see anyone!

SMIRNOV: (*at the same time, to LUDMILLA on entering*) Shut up, shut up! Stop talking!

SMIRNOV sees POPOVA and stops walking, causing LUDMILLA to bump into them.

LUDMILLA: Ow!

SMIRNOV: (*to LUDMILLA*) Get away from me!

LUDMILLA: Don't have to tell me twice. (*aside to the audience*) There's a chicken leg with my name on it. (*exits*)

SMIRNOV poses. Boldly. Proudly. With a sense of power. He is reminiscent of Commedia's Il Capitano.

SMIRNOV: Madam. May I please have the honour to present myself. (*pose*) I am Grigory Stepanovitch Smirnov of the Ufa Smirnovs. I am a spectacular landowner. Meadows and forests as well as plots of farmland. (*new pose*) Farmland bulging with sugar beets and potatoes. I am a decorated former lieutenant of artillery – (*beat*) guns, madam. (*pose*) Big guns. I was placed in charge of multiple platoons and many men. Sometimes this meant building a bridge. I was fine with that. You do what has to be done. (*pose*) But sometimes being second or third in command, I would lead into combat. I would lead into battle. I would lead with strength and determination. I rode a horse. I am a man.

POPOVA: Is that it?

SMIRNOV: It is.

POPOVA: And why are you here?

SMIRNOV: I am compelled to disturb you on a most pressing affair. (*he holds out his hand*)

POPOVA: (*folds her arms across her chest, decidedly not taking his hand*) What do you want?

SMIRNOV: (*recovering from the snub, and choosing another proud pose*) Your late husband, with whom I had the honour of being

acquainted, neglected to pay the capital he owed me before he died.

POPOVA: What?

SMIRNOV: He borrowed money. One thousand, two hundred rubles, to be precise. I have to pay the interest on my own mortgage tomorrow and so I've come to ask you, madam, to make good on your husband's debt. (poses)

POPOVA: (*dramatic*) Oh! Oh! Oh! My husband!

She throws herself face down on the couch. There is a pause. SMIRNOV continues his proud pose. He begins to look around, expecting POPOVA to move. She does not. He's posing for no one. Suddenly he spies a movement under the couch. He looks a little closer and breathes in horror.

SMIRNOV: (*starts quiet and gets louder*) Spider. Spider! SPIDER!

He shrieks, once, twice, three times and leaps onto the couch, causing POPOVA to react violently and fall on the floor. LUDMILLA runs in with a tea towel around her neck and eating a chicken leg. She sees the action, turns around, and runs out. SMIRNOV gets down off the couch and resumes his strong powerful pose. He does not assist POPOVA.

SMIRNOV: (*trying to regain composure*) I've come to ask you, madam, to make good on your husband's debt.

POPOVA: (*getting up*) If Nicolai Mihailovitch owed you money, I will certainly pay it.

SMIRNOV: (*bowing*) Thank you, madam.

POPOVA: But not today.

SMIRNOV: (*whipping back up*) What's that?

POPOVA: I haven't any spare cash on hand. I can pay you the day after tomorrow. (*posing dramatically*) Also, if you can't clearly see, I'm in mourning. (*groans and sits dramatically on the couch*)

SMIRNOV: Didn't he die seven months ago?

POPOVA: (*leaping off the couch*) That's right! And I'll have you know I haven't even done the amount of time required for deep mourning.

SMIRNOV: If you're in deep mourning, shouldn't you be wearing crepe?

POPOVA: I'm emotionally wearing crepe. Emotionally. I'm wearing crepe on the inside and it means I simply can't think about money because (*hands on hips*) my mind is filled with grief!

SMIRNOV: (*hands on hips*) And my mind is filled with the knowledge that if I don't pay the interest due tomorrow they'll take my estate!

POPOVA: (*moving forward to SMIRNOV*) I told you, I'll take care of it the day after tomorrow.

SMIRNOV: (*moving forward to POPOVA*) I don't want the money the day after tomorrow. I want it today.

POPOVA: I can't pay you today.

SMIRNOV: I can't wait.

POPOVA: I can't pay you.

SMIRNOV: You have to.

POPOVA: I can't.

SMIRNOV: You must.

POPOVA: I can't.

SMIRNOV: You must.

POPOVA: I can't.

SMIRNOV: You must.

POPOVA: I can't.

SMIRNOV: You must, you must, you must! You must! You, you, you, must, must, must!

POPOVA: No.

SMIRNOV: (*turning away and posing dramatically*) Are you actually saying you can't pay me today?

POPOVA: That's what I'm saying.

SMIRNOV: Are you actually saying, with the words that are coming out of your mouth, that there will be no payment that transfers from your hands to my wallet?

POPOVA: That's exactly what I'm saying.

SMIRNOV: Is that your last word? Absolutely your last?

POPOVA: Yes. (*sitting*) How many times do I have to say it?

SMIRNOV: Huh. Thank you. I'll make a note. (*SMIRNOV paces, clenching and unclenching his fists as he talks to the audience. POPOVA watches.*) And everyone tells me to keep calm! Ha! I need that money!

POPOVA: Who are you talking to?

SMIRNOV: I called on every single one of my debtors yesterday and not one paid up! And here I am, far from home, and I'm received by (*imitating*) "my mind is full of grief."

POPOVA: I can hear you, you know.

SMIRNOV: (*not paying attention to her in the slightest*) Keep calm? Ha ha ha! (*His laugh turns into a shriek as he sees the spider. He tries to turn it into a cough, then back into a laugh, and then he poses.*) Pay me!

POPOVA: The day after tomorrow.

SMIRNOV: What the devil have I to do with the day after tomorrow. I need the money today!

POPOVA: (*leaping up, exaggerated and dramatic*) Scandalous! I will not listen to such language. I will hear no more! (*exits dramatically, hands over her ears*) La, la, la, la, la! (*the sound one makes when they don't want to hear anything*)

SMIRNOV: What does any of this have to do with me? Should I go to my creditor and say, "Sorry, her husband died and her mind is filled with grief." (*calling out*) You shall not play about with me! (*dramatically throwing himself on to a seat*) I will sit here until she pays.

SMIRNOV shrieks and leaps up because the spider is now close by. SMIRNOV leaps onto the chair. LUDMILLA looks in, a sandwich in both hands.

LUDMILLA: (*with a full mouth*) Are you calling for something?

SMIRNOV: What?

LUDMILLA: (*swallows*) Are you calling for something?

SMIRNOV: (*from on top of the chair*) Get me a drink!

LUDMILLA: (*more to self*) A "please" would be nice. (*exits*)

SMIRNOV: *(still on top of the chair)* She can't think about money. What a thing to say. I am sweating in anger. There is so much anger sweat!

LUDMILLA enters with a glass of water, in one hand, eating a sandwich with the other. She puts the water down near SMIRNOV.

LUDMILLA: Are you going to stay up there?

SMIRNOV: Get out!

LUDMILLA: If you were a little less shouty you'd probably get what you want.

SMIRNOV: Get out!

LUDMILLA: *(to audience, referring to POPOVA)* I need to get her back in here. My bowl of borscht will go brisk. Or cold. You know what I mean. *(exit)*

SMIRNOV: *(climbing down)* Huh! I'm going to sit here... *(looks around for the spider before sitting)* till I get my money! *(dramatically collapsing into the chair)* My head is aching. Huh! *(calling out)* Hey!

LUDMILLA: *(entering, full mouth)* You rang?

SMIRNOV: What?

LUDMILLA: *(swallowing first)* What do you want?

SMIRNOV: A glass of vodka! Immediately!

LUDMILLA: *(to the audience)* There goes my borscht. *(exits)*

SMIRNOV: *(inspects himself)* Look at me. Dust all over, boots dirty, unwashed, unkempt... *(sighing)* I'm a sight. No wonder she reacted the way she did. *(leaping up and posing)* No! This is not my fault. I am not here as a visitor but as someone who is collecting what is due to them. There are no rules of dress for that. *(he sits, then leaps back up to search for the spider)*

LUDMILLA: *(entering with a drink in one hand, a sandwich in the other)* What are you doing?

SMIRNOV: That is none of your concern. *(sitting)*

LUDMILLA: Afraid of spiders, huh. Don't look under the couch. *(exits hurriedly)*

SMIRNOV shrieks and jumps. He paces about the room, clenching and unclenching his fists.

SMIRNOV: Ooooooh I could grind the whole world to dust!

LUDMILLA slightly enters with POPOVA.

LUDMILLA: (*pouring it on a little thick*) He keeps jumping on the furniture! I don't know what to dooooooooooooooooooooo. You need to talk to him.

POPOVA: Fine, fine, fine!

She strides in. LUDMILLA gives a little fist bump to the air and runs off. SMIRNOV scrambles to stand in a masculine and prideful stance.

POPOVA: Sir. In my great grief, all this shouting is giving me a headache. And can you please stop jumping on my furniture?

SMIRNOV: Pay me and I'll go.

POPOVA: (*losing her grief, hands on hips*) Read my lips. Day.

SMIRNOV: Day.

POPOVA: After.

SMIRNOV: After. No! I told you: Money today!

POPOVA: You don't know how to behave, you rude, ill-bred man. (*posing*) My husband would not put up with this.

SMIRNOV: He's dead!

POPOVA: How dare you! I am in mourning!

SMIRNOV: No crepe. No mourning.

POPOVA: Emotionally! I'm wearing it emotionally! You don't know how to behave in front of a woman.

SMIRNOV: I don't know how to behave before women? (*poses, puffed up with pride*) Madam. I know women. I am aware of women. Women are in my sphere of awareness. In my time, over the vast number of my dating years, I have seen more women than you have seen sparrows! There's a woman! There's a woman! Everywhere a woman! There! There! There!

POPOVA: (*not impressed*) Is that right?

SMIRNOV: Women all over the place! I have fought duels over women! Three of them. Twenty paces and turn – ha ha! I have had twelve women throw themselves at my feet, bam! Not one. Not two. Twelve! And I have refused every one of them. Bah! Nine times I have thrown myself at the feet of women – please! And they have refused me. But never mind that! Let me tell you what I have learned about women.

POPOVA: I can't wait.

SMIRNOV: Crocodiles. The bunch of you! Snap, snap, snap! Liars to the marrow of your bones.

POPOVA: Insane! (*throws herself into a chair*)

SMIRNOV: (*posing*) Men are out there in the world, suffering, making sacrifices, and every woman on the planet plays with her hair and her scarf and her tinkling laugh (*imitates the laugh*), just to catch that man in her teeth. I have never, never, never (*takes a breath*), never, never, never, never, never, never, (*takes a breath*), never, never, never, never, never. Never. Never. I have never met a woman who is sincere, faithful and constant. Not one! (*flings himself into a chair, lifts his feet looking for the spider, sees none, and poses as he sits*)

POPOVA: I see. (*calmly*) Please allow me to clarify, so we're clear. In love, men suffer.

SMIRNOV: Terribly.

POPOVA: (*calmly*) Men make sacrifices.

SMIRNOV: Every day.

POPOVA: (*calmly*) Men are faithful and...?

SMIRNOV: Constant. And sincere.

POPOVA: Right. Thank you. Men, according to you, are sincere, faithful and constant in love. Do I have that right?

SMIRNOV: Exactly.

POPOVA: (*losing it, leaping up*) Are you completely off your rocker? Men are faithful and constant! Ha! (*reigning it in*) Let me tell you something. Let me tell you of all the men I knew and know, the best was my late husband. (*poses dramatically*) I love him with all my being. With all my heart. I gave him my youth, my happiness, my life, my fortune and what then? (*looking at SMIRNOV*) What then? Come on! Say it!

SMIRNOV: Um, what then?

POPOVA: (*turning away dramatic pose*) Deceit! Deception at every step! After he died I found a whole drawer full of letters from his girlfriends. So many girlfriends! There a girlfriend! There a girlfriend! There, there, there! He betrayed me, wasted my money, and made fun of my feelings. And after that, after all that – what then? (*looking at SMIRNOV*) What then? Come on, play along!

SMIRNOV: What then?

POPOVA: (*posing dramatically*) I loved him. I was true to him. And now that he's dead, I am true to his memory. I will mourn forever. I have shut myself in and I will wear these clothes –

SMIRNOV: (*leaping up*) But not crepe! Ha!

POPOVA: Do you want me to have a toxic asthma attack? Do you?

SMIRNOV: Ha!

POPOVA: Do you want me to get lung cancer?

SMIRNOV: I know your game. It's all pretend! All of it!

POPOVA: (*striding to the "door"*) How dare you say that to me! (*pointing off*) Get out!

SMIRNOV: Pay me my money!

POPOVA: Stop shouting at me!

SMIRNOV: You stop shouting at me!

POPOVA: I'm not going to give you any money.

SMIRNOV: You will.

POPOVA: I won't.

SMIRNOV: Will!

POPOVA: Won't!

SMIRNOV: Will, will, will, won't!

POPOVA: Won't, won't, won't... Won't, won't, won't... (*realizes what's happening, almost breaking character*) Huh! Who's playing games now?

SMIRNOV: (*with a shrug*) It was worth a shot.

POPOVA: (*back at it*) Just for that, I'm not going to pay you, out of spite.

SMIRNOV: Very well. (*sits*)

POPOVA: How dare you sit when I haven't asked you to.

SMIRNOV: (*calmly*) And yet, here I am.

POPOVA: You're just going to sit there.

SMIRNOV: (*calmly*) Yes I am.

POPOVA: You are.

SMIRNOV: Yep. Lots of sitting happening right here. I'm sitting aaaaaalllllllll over the place.

POPOVA: Very well.

POPOVA walks slowly over to a table and picks up a bell. Rings it once. Turns to stare at SMIRNOV. The two stare at each other as LUDMILLA enters slowly, holding a bag of chips.

LUDMILLA: (*to audience*) Look at this. Look! I thought this would end up in a neighbourly conversation, maybe a dinner, maybe, maybe a smidge of chaos. Just a smidgen for some small entertainment in my humdrum life. But this? Stubborn fools. Someone's going to burst a blood vessel. (*to others*) So... how are things going?

POPOVA: Ludmilla! (*pointing to the door*) Show this gentleman out!

LUDMILLA: I'm kind of on a lunch break? There's an open container of sour cream on the kitchen counter and I was just about to add onion soup mix because everyone knows that sour cream is great but if you add onion soup mix it takes everything to a –

POPOVA: Ludmilla!

LUDMILLA: All right. (*puts down chips and walks tentatively over to SMIRNOV*) Ok... so...(getting closer) Sir, if you wouldn't mind... (*getting closer*) Would you mind...

POPOVA: Are you going to take all day?

LUDMILLA: Don't rush me! (*in front of the chair, speaking fast*) Sir, would you mind vacating the premises?

SMIRNOV: (*jumping up*) Who do you think you're talking to!

LUDMILLA stumbles back with an exaggerated response and clutches at their heart from the ferocity of the response. LUDMILLA is now going to be extremely dramatic as they fake a heart attack.

LUDMILLA: Ack! (*staggering forward*) Ock! (*staggering back*) Eek!

SMIRNOV: Oh good grief. (*sitting*)

POPOVA: Look what you've done! (*running to the exit*)

LUDMILLA: Ah... ah... I can't breathe! I can't...! (*staggering in a circle one way and then the other*)

POPOVA: (*dramatically calling out*) Dasha! (*calling out*) Dasha!

LUDMILLA: (*staggering dramatically*) She's... gone... to pick... fruit!

SMIRNOV: Don't you think you're exaggerating just a little?

LUDMILLA: Madam, is that you? I can't see! It's all spots. I can't breathe, I...can't...

LUDMILLA falls to the ground in an exaggerated and dramatic manner. Flops there a couple of times. Sits up, gasps, flails, then flops to the ground again. Repeat this as many times as you can stand. Decide if LUDMILLA will end with a big dramatic moment or a small flail, perhaps with one hand.

POPOVA: (*to SMIRNOV*) You! Get out.

SMIRNOV: I won't.

POPOVA: Don't you think you've done enough? You boor.

SMIRNOV: Is that the worst you can do?

LUDMILLA: Um... someone's on the floor here...?

POPOVA: You, you, coarse... bear!

SMIRNOV: (*jumping up, as if truly offended*) Now that's too far! What right do you have to insult me?

POPOVA: So what if I am insulting you? So what!

LUDMILLA: (*from the floor*) Water...?

SMIRNOV: I will not be insulted by anybody!

POPOVA: Do you think I am afraid of you because of your yelly yellyness? Ooooooh!

SMIRNOV: How dare you call me a bear. It's madness!

POPOVA: (*overtop of SMIRNOV above*) Bear! Bear! Bear!

LUDMILLA: (*from the floor*) Water...? Anyone?

SMIRNOV: You will pay for your insults!

POPOVA: Bear! Bear! Bear!

SMIRNOV: With pistols!

LUDMILLA: (*from the floor*) Water...what?

POPOVA: With pistols? (*Beat. Suddenly calm.*) Very well.

LUDMILLA: (*sitting up*) Did you say pistols?

SMIRNOV: (*calm*) Good.

LUDMILLA: (*getting up*) No. Not good.

POPOVA: My husband had some.

LUDMILLA: Hang on.

SMIRNOV: Fine.

POPOVA: I'll be right back. (*starts to exit*)

LUDMILLA: (*stopping her*) The school won't allow it!

SMIRNOV: What?

LUDMILLA: The school won't allow it.

POPOVA: What school?

SMIRNOV: There's no school.

LUDMILLA: I know. Technically, there is though. It's a thing... (*gesturing vaguely to the audience*) out there.

SMIRNOV and POPOVA turn to stare at the audience.

SMIRNOV & POPOVA: (*as if seeing for the first time*) Ohhhhh...

LUDMILLA: Yeah.

SMIRNOV: Surely, they won't interfere.

LUDMILLA: You'd be surprised.

SMIRNOV: That's going to make this kind of tough. We're supposed to duel.

POPOVA: I'm supposed to say "I can't wait to shoot you in the skull."

SMIRNOV: (*wincing*) Ouch. Harsh.

POPOVA: Yeah. (*shrugging*) It's going to come out in the moment.

SMIRNOV: (*to LUDMILLA*) If we can't use pistols what do we do?

LUDMILLA: I suggest rubber chickens.

POPOVA: Really? You do?

SMIRNOV: Will it have the same, (*posing*) gravitas?

LUDMILLA: Absolutely. You'll say the same lines, you'll have to replace pistol for chicken of course, but it should work.

SMIRNOV: And the school will approve?

LUDMILLA: It can't hurt. There's two rubber chickens in the pantry.

SMIRNOV: Why are there two rubber chickens in the pantry?

LUDMILLA: I am a woman of many depths. Ok?

SMIRNOV & POPOVA: Ok.

LUDMILLA: I'm going to get back on the floor. Start glaring at each other.

LUDMILLA lies on the floor. POPOVA and SMIRNOV square off.

SMIRNOV: You will pay for your insults! With chickens!

POPOVA: With chickens? (*to LUDMILLA*) Is this really going to work?

SMIRNOV: I'm not sure it's got good gravitas.

LUDMILLA: (*from the floor*) Keep going!

POPOVA: Ok. (*back in it*) With chickens? Very well.

SMIRNOV: Good.

POPOVA: My husband had some.

SMIRNOV: Fine.

POPOVA: I'll be right back. (*she starts to leave, then turns back*) What pleasure it will give me to whack a chicken across your skull!
(*exits*)

SMIRNOV: Ha! Devil take you! (*flings himself into a chair and calling out*) I am not a little boy, you know! I am not a sentimental puppy.

LUDMILLA: (*sitting up*) Just so we're clear. You come in here, yell at her, refuse to leave, and now you want to whack her with a chicken.

SMIRNOV: She wants to whack me too! It's the principle of the thing! I have to whack back!

LUDMILLA: (*getting up*) You could just leave...

SMIRNOV: Huh! She accepted my challenge! It's the first time I've ever seen that... (*gives a sigh*) She is something else.

LUDMILLA: (*realizing what is happening*) Oh no. Don't say it!

SMIRNOV: That is what I want in a partner. That is true love.

LUDMILLA: You said it.

SMIRNOV: Fire! Gunpowder! A rocket! Not a sour-faced jelly bag. I'm even sorry I have to whack her with a chicken. (*SMIRNOV gives a loving sigh, which turns into a shriek and a jump*) Why do you have so many spiders in your house!

LUDMILLA: If I kill them, will you go away?

SMIRNOV: I can't!

LUDMILLA: Then it's together town for you and the spiders!

SMIRNOV: You're so cruel!

LUDMILLA: Please go away. Please, please, please, please! I beg of you.

SMIRNOV: I can't. I love her! (*LUDMILLA groans*) Not only that, I like her! I'm almost ready to let the debt go; that's how much I like her.

POPOVA enters with the rubber chickens.

POPOVA: (*a little puzzled*) Here are the... chickens. (*shrugs*) Ok. But, before we fight you must show me how to (*holding the chicken*) use it?

LUDMILLA: This is going to end badly. I'm going to... yeah. (*exits*)

SMIRNOV: *(the expert, examining the rubber chickens)* You see, there are several sorts of chickens. There are Mortimer chickens, specially made for duels. These are Smith & Wesson chickens, triple action, with extractors. *(tries to "aim" with the rubber chicken and it flops to the side)* These are excellent. *(gets behind POPOVA and puts her hands on the chicken)* You must hold it like this. *(aside)* What an inspiration! Her eyes!

POPOVA: Like this?

SMIRNOV: Yes. Take aim... put your head back a little. The main thing is to keep your cool and aim steadily. Good. Now. All you have to do is whack me in the chest.

POPOVA: Thank you. Well. It's inconvenient to duel in a room. Let's go into the garden. *(turns to exit)*

SMIRNOV: All right. But I warn you, I'm going to wave the chicken.

POPOVA: *(wheeling back around)* What?

SMIRNOV: I'm going to wave.

POPOVA: That's the last straw! Why? Why won't you whack?

SMIRNOV: Never you mind why! *(waving the chicken)* It's my choice and I choose to wave!

POPOVA: If I whack, you have to whack back! None of this waving nonsense!

SMIRNOV: You'll get no whacking from me.

POPOVA: You don't get out of this so easily! *(starts to drag SMIRNOV toward the door, who resists with every fibre of his body, grabbing on to furniture etc.)* Come with me! I mean it! Ah! I won't have any peace until there's a welt on your forehead! I hate your forehead! Stop resisting!

SMIRNOV: I won't!

POPOVA: Are you afraid?

SMIRNOV: Yes! I am afraid!

POPOVA: Liar! Why won't you fight?

SMIRNOV: Because! Because. Because... I... like you.

POPOVA: *(Gives a short laugh. And then a longer laugh. And then a longer laugh still.)* He likes me? He likes me! After alllllllllll this he dares to

Name Pronunciation Guide

This page is just a guide when it comes to pronunciation. It is neither required nor suggested that any one speaks with a Russian accent. Use your character's voice, and say the pronunciation with confidence within that voice.

Decide if your character says names correctly, incorrectly the same way all the time, or incorrectly and differently each time. How your character respects another character should be directly connected to how you say their name.

The CAPS indicate a slight emphasis. Slide the syllables together. And speak with confidence.

The Anniversary

Andrey Andreyevitch Shipuchin: AHN-dreh an-DREY-e-vihch shee-POO-chin

Tatiana Alexeyevna: ta-ti-AH-nah a-lex-ee-EV-nuh

Yelena Nicolaevna Khirin: ye-LEN-a ni-col-a-EV-nuh KEE-rin

Nastasya Fyodorovna Merchutkina: nah-TASH-ye-a fee-or-dor-OV-nuh merchut-KEE-nah

The Proposal

Svetlana Milailovna Chubukov: suvet-LA-nuh mill-ail-OV-nuh CHEW-bu-koff

Natalya Stepanovna: nah-TAL-ya ste-pan-NEH-vah (yes that's neh rather than no)

Ivan Vassilevitch Lomov: E-van vas-SIL-e-vihch LOH-mof

The Bear

Elena Ivanovna Popova: e-LEN-a e-van-OHV-na pop-OH-va

Grigory Stepanovitch Smirnov: GREE-gor-ee ste-pan-OH-vihch SMEER-nof

Ludmilla: lud-MEE-la

The Anniversary - Technical Requirements

Mentioned Costume Pieces

Andrey Andreyevitch Shipuchin: while nothing specific is mentioned, Shipuchin does believe in being fashionable. This should be reflected in their costume.

Tatiana Alexeyevna: Tatiana is dressed in travel attire. Shipuchin mentions that she's not dressed for the Bank's anniversary dinner. Her outfit must have sleeves.

Yelena Nicolaevna Khirin: A worn jacket. Shipuchin mentions that she looks untidy.

Nastasya Fyodorovna Merchutkina: She pulls a doctor's certificate either out of her costume or from a purse.

Props

- Papers, pencil, eraser, calculator, bookkeeping ledger, a folder with a written report (Khirin)
- Achievement plaque (Shipuchin)
- A piece of paper, a written petition (Merchutkina)
- Money/Wallet (Shipuchin)
- A piece of paper, a doctor's certificate (Merchutkina)

Necessary Set Pieces

The goal is that the location looks lush and deliberately luxurious. Velvet, statues, flowers, carpet, pictures

Two desks that are each dressed to reflect the personality and job status of Khirin (the bookkeeper) and Shipuchin (Chairman of the Bank)

The Proposal - Technical Requirements

Mentioned Costume Pieces

Natalya Stepanovna: Wears an apron.

Ivan Vassilevitch Lomov: Formal dress, described as an New Year's Eve outfit, or a party outfit; handkerchief.

Props

- Book (Chubukov)
- Water jug and glasses

Necessary Set Pieces

A good chair that clearly looks better than the others in the room.

All the furniture should be solid enough so that the characters can leap up and off of it.

The Bear - Technical Requirements

Mentioned Costume Pieces

Elena Ivanovna Popova: Dressed in black to represent mourning. But not crepe.

Props

- Silverware, polishing cloth, polish (Ludmilla)
- Couch pillows (Ludmilla)
- A large framed photo of Elena's dead husband (Popova, Ludmilla)
- Tea towel (Ludmilla)
- A chicken leg (Ludmilla)
- Bowl of soup (Ludmilla)
- Sandwich (Ludmilla)
- Glass of water x2 (Ludmilla)
- Glass of "vodka" (Ludmilla)
- Small bell (Popova)
- Bag of chips (Ludmilla)
- Two rubber chickens (Smirnov, Popova)

Necessary Set Pieces

A small table with silverware and polishing accessories.

There should be side tables for Ludmilla to put glasses on.

The furniture should be solid enough so that Smirnov can leap up and off of it.



www.theatrefolk.com

help@theatrefolk.com

Follow Us

for daily updates and free stuff!

 facebook.com/theatrefolk

 twitter.com/theatrefolk

 instagram.com/theatrefolk

 theatrefolk.com/blog

 theatrefolk.com/podcast

 theatrefolk.com/signup



help@theatrefolk.com www.theatrefolk.com

Want to Read More?

Order a full script through the link above. You can get a **PDF file** (it's printable, licensed for one printout, and delivered instantly) or a **traditionally bound and printed book** (sent by mail).