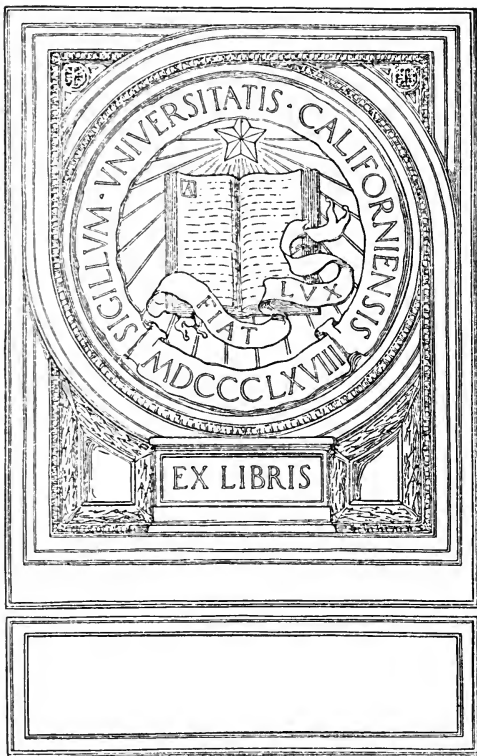
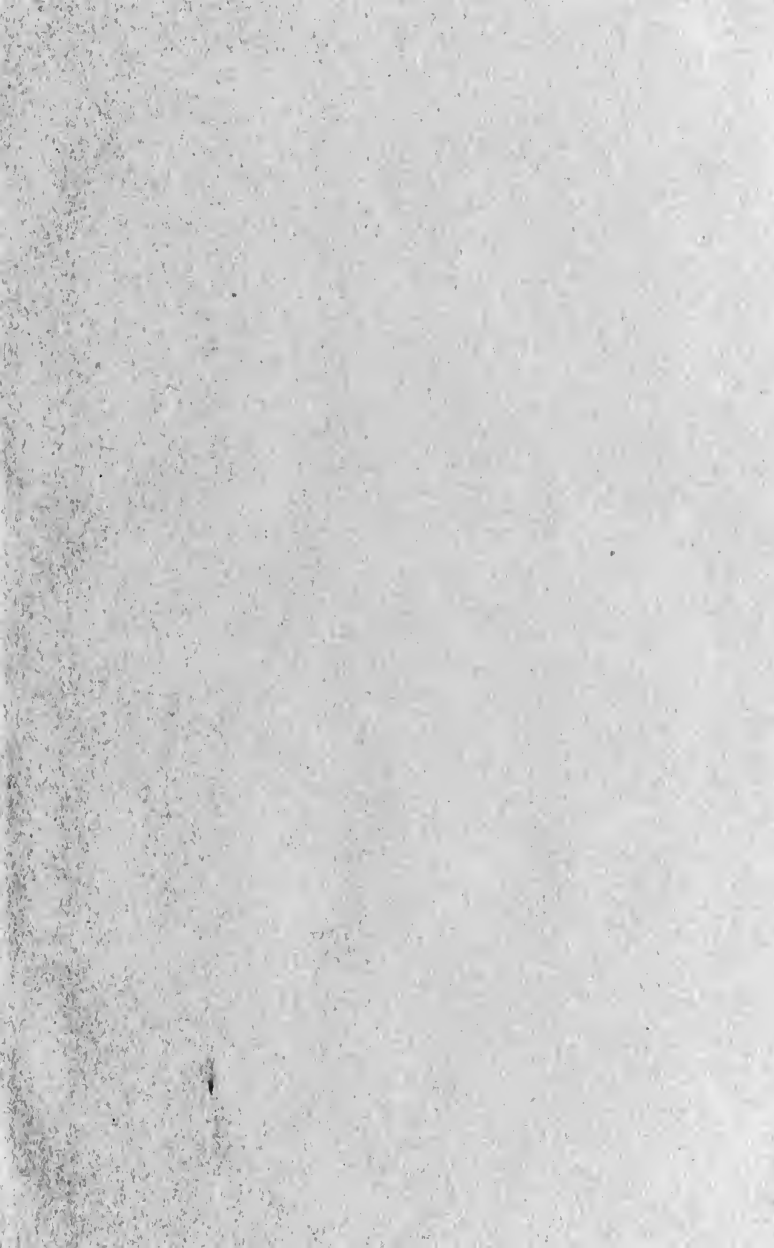


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**A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS**

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**BY ARTZIBASHEF**

Translated by PERCY PINKERTON

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BY  
**MICHAEL ARTZIBASHEF**

TRANSLATED BY  
**PERCY PINKERTON & IVAN OHZOL**



LONDON  
**GRANT RICHARDS LTD.**  
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MAIN

## PREFATORY NOTE

*The main facts of Michael Artzibashef's life are to be found in a letter addressed by him to a friend. He was born, in the year 1878, in a small town in Southern Russia. By name and extraction he is Tartar, but, as he says, "not of pure descent, as there is Russian, French, Georgian and Polish blood in my veins." One of his ancestors was the notorious Polish rebel, Kosciusko, his great-grandfather on the maternal side. His father was a small landowner, and had seen service as an officer in the Russian army. From an early age the boy showed the keenest interest in painting, and when he was sixteen he left the grammar school in order to become an artist. For a while he attended a school of art, but poverty proved too powerful a barrier to success. To earn any money at all he was forced to do caricatures, or write short stories of a humorous sort for some of the cheap papers. It was in 1901 that his first tale, Pasha Tumanov, caused considerable sensation in official circles. Based on an actual occurrence, it denounced the evils of the Russian educational system. It had been accepted for publication by one of the leading Russian reviews, but the censorship would not allow it to appear. However, as its author says: "The story was not without favourable results for me. It attracted the attention of editors; it stimulated me to further work. I renounced my dream of becoming an artist, and transferred my allegiance to literature. This was*

*very hard. Even to-day I cannot look at paintings without emotion. I love colours more than words.*<sup>11</sup>

*Just at this time a small review was being published in Russia to which distinguished writers such as Andreyef, Kuprin and Maxim Gorki contributed. It was edited by Miroljubov, to whom Artzibashef owed his first success as a writer. Miroljubov appointed him sub-editor of his paper, and by the publication of several of his stories brought him to the notice of literary Russia. In 1903 Artzibashef wrote Sanine, though it was not published till five years later. This book, which the author describes as "the apology for individualism," proved to be a veritable œuvre à sensation. Translations of it have appeared in Germany, France, Italy, Bohemia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Denmark, Japan, and even in England.*

*Referring to himself, Artzibashef says : "I am an inveterate realist ; a disciple of the school of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky."<sup>12</sup> And again : "My development was very strongly influenced by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, and to a certain extent Chekhov played almost as great a part, while Victor Hugo and Goethe were constantly before my eyes. These five names are those of my teachers and literary masters."*

*As "an inveterate realist" he appears once more in this play, written though it is with singular simplicity and restraint. The unutterable pity and horror of war are here depicted for us in hues that burn.*

P. E. P.



## PERSONS IN THE PLAY

PETER IVANOVITCH	<i>A Retired Colonel</i>
OLGA PETROVNA	<i>His Wife</i>
VOLODIA	<i>Their Son, a Student</i>
NINA	<i>Their Daughter</i>
VLADIMIR ALEXANDROVITCH	<i>Nina's Husband, an Officer in the Army</i>
ASSIA	<i>Volodia's Fiancée</i>
DOWE	<i>A Subaltern</i>
PRINCE VORONETZKY	
SEMENOFF	<i>A Student</i>
SONIA and COLIA	<i>Two Children</i>
SIDORENKO	<i>A Gardener</i>
KATIA	<i>A Servant</i>

*Member of the Army Medical Corps, Red Cross  
Sister, Soldiers*

# WAR:

## A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

### ACT I

SCENE: *A clear, sunny day in spring, with leaf and blossom everywhere. The scene shows a stately mansion, with pillared portico. There is a broad terrace in front, with steps leading down to the garden. On the terrace, a large wicker chair, and, under a tree in the garden, a bench. In front, a round flower-bed. Trees at back, and a fence with small gate leading to street.*

OLGA PETROVNA *is busy gardening, while PETER IVANOVITCH stands near her, smoking and looking on. He is bare-headed, and wears a white linen coat.*

OLGA

You ought to put on your cap, Peter Ivanovitch. You'll catch cold.

PETER

I am quite warm.

OLGA

Warm indeed! One can never trust weather like this. It's just the sort of weather in which to catch cold. I'll tell Katia to fetch your cap.

PETER

There's not the slightest need to do so.

OLGA (*not heeding this remark*)

Katia! Katia!

[KATIA *appears on terrace.*

KATIA

Yes, ma'am?

OLGA

Bring your master his cap, and tell Aksina to light the fire.

KATIA

Yes, ma'am.

[*Exit.*

PETER (*looking at his watch*)

It's about time for coffee, I think. Shall you be long?

OLGA

What time is it?

PETER

Half-past twelve. It is high time.

OLGA

I'm coming. I mustn't forget to tell Sidorenko to see that the flowers are watered every night. The fellow only dangles about after Katia, and does no work at all.

KATIA (*coming down the steps*)

Your cap, sir.

[PETER *takes cap.*



OLGA

Is Vladimir Petrovitch up yet ?

KATIA

Yes, ma'am ; he is having his bath. Shall I get the coffee ready, ma'am ?

OLGA

Yes. You'll find a clean tablecloth on the sideboard, and be careful not to soil it, please ! One can never be sure what you'll do next.

KATIA

Very well, ma'am.

PETER (*slowly putting on cap*)

It's a long while since we had such a lovely spring. Last year, about this time, it was still quite cold.

OLGA

Now, now, don't exaggerate, as usual ! Last year it was just as warm. Thank God, it's the month of May !

PETER

I distinctly remember that on the 10th of May last year I had to wear my overcoat when I went out.

OLGA

Rubbish ! You didn't go out at all. It's all pure imagination !

PETER (*excitedly*)

Yes, yes. I can quite well remember the date !  
(*After a pause.*) But, talking of spring, I shall never forget the spring of '77, when we crossed the frontier . . .

OLGA (*not heeding him*)

I haven't sown any mignonette this year.

PETER (*loudly*)

. . . When we came up the Danube . . .

OLGA

Oh, there's Nina ! (NINA *appears at back.*) In a thin summer frock, too ! Why have you put that on ? I shall tell Vladimir Alexandrovitch, I shall !  
[NINA, *in cool summer attire, crosses the terrace and sits down on the topmost step.*

NINA

Tell him, by all means, mother, if you like. What's that you're talking about, father ?

PETER

I was just saying that in '77, when we crossed the frontier . . .

OLGA (*pettishly*)

Oh ! we've heard that old tale.

PETER (*angrily*)

Well, I never ! Nina asks me a question, and I am giving her an answer . . .

NINA (*smiling*)

What you want is your coffee, don't you, father ?

PETER (*in a calmer tone*)

Why, of course ! It's high time we had our coffee. But you can never drag her away from her flower-bed.

OLGA

I'm coming directly.

PETER

Aha ! I know what "directly" means ! (*To NINA.*)  
Has Vladimir Alexandrovitch not come yet ?

NINA

He'll be here very soon.

PETER

Now then, Olga Petrovna !

OLGA (*crossly*)

All right ! You go on ! I'm coming.

PETER (*with a gesture intended for NINA, as he moves towards the house*)

Make her hurry up, Nina, or else she'll be gardening there till midnight !

[*Exit into house.*

[*A pause.* OLGA continues her gardening. NINA remains seated on the terrace.

NINA

When I woke this morning I suddenly remembered that it is just three years since I was married. Strange, isn't it ?

OLGA

Why strange ?

NINA

You know that when I first met Vladimir Alexandrovitch I didn't like him at all ; and if anybody had told me at the time that I was going to marry him I should have simply laughed at the idea of such a thing.

OLGA

That's always the way.

NINA (*after a pause*)

Of course, at that time I had only just left school, and I was always fancying that something extraordinary was going to happen. Then Prince Voronetzky came along and made love to me. I very nearly fell in love with him myself. In fact, I think I did love him just a little bit. Now Vladimir struck me at first as being such a simple, commonplace sort of man. Then the strange thing happened. I began to dislike the Prince, and I thought Vladimir the best, most lovable of men ! What a silly girl I was ! How frightened I was that you would find out that I had kissed Vladimir ! That anybody should know

this seemed too awful for words ! But when the whole thing came out, it wasn't awful at all ! Everybody was delighted ! (*A pause.*) Ah well ! Those were fine times. There will never be anything like that again while I live !

OLGA

Nice, was it ? Who knows ? The future may have better things in store.

NINA

Impossible ! That could never be. It was all like a fairy tale, a dream ! There will never be such lovely moonlight nights as those ! Never again ! Not that I am unhappy, but it's sad to think that the most beautiful part of one's life is gone for ever, and that all that can never, never happen again.

OLGA

You can't tell, Nina.

NINA

Oh ! but I could never be Vladimir's bride again, could I ?

OLGA (*pointedly*)

Why must it be Vladimir's ?

NINA (*in amazement*)

Mother ! How absurd you are ! You just say that to tease me.

OLGA (*amused*)

I'm not absurd at all. Stranger things than that have happened, let me tell you. Suppose war were declared, and Vladimir got killed? You would marry again; marry somebody else.

NINA

Oh! impossible! Even if Vladimir were killed I should never marry again.

OLGA

That's what they all say, my dear Nina, but it doesn't prevent them from marrying again, and from having children.

NINA

To me such an idea is revolting. How could one ever forget the past, more especially if the man you loved had been killed? It is too terrible!

OLGA

Terrible, yes; but do you expect widows to go into a convent? For a while they weep and are disconsolate; and then they forget. Somehow or other they manage to live on.

NINA

I don't see that it's really necessary to marry again. Besides, if I did, I should simply loathe it.

OLGA

That's only what you imagine.

NINA

No, no, it's not imagination. How can anybody possibly live the same life twice? However fond I might be of my second husband, I should always be remembering, comparing. No; the idea's impossible, horrible.

OLGA

There's nothing horrible about it at all.

NINA

Yes, there is. After having known what love is, I think it would be far better to die. Life otherwise would seem utterly humdrum and tedious.

OLGA

If we all thought that, life wouldn't be worth living.

NINA

Perhaps it isn't.

OLGA

Look at us two: at Peter and myself. We've lived together all these years, and now we're growing old, but I certainly don't want to die.

NINA

*You* don't, no! That's a very different thing.

OLGA

Pure imagination, my dear Nina!

NINA

Imagination ?

OLGA

Yes, it's only what you imagine at present. That's because you have no children ; but when once you do, you'll be calmer and more contented.

NINA (*blushing*)

I shall never have any children.

OLGA

Why not ?

NINA

Oh ! I don't like children.

OLGA

You don't like them because you haven't got any. When I was young, I thought, like you, that I didn't care for children. But when my dear Sashenka died I nearly went mad.

NINA (*after a pause*)

Well, well, it's all very sad.

OLGA

So it is ; very sad. But I do wish that you would put on something warmer, or else you'll catch cold.



NINA

Mother, how can I catch cold in such weather as this ?

OLGA (*insisting*)

This is just the sort of weather when colds are easily caught.

KATIA (*from the terrace*)

Please, ma'am, the master is calling you.

OLGA

I'm coming! I'm coming! (*As she goes into house, to NINA.*) You really ought to put on something else, my dear Nina! Shall I tell Katia to bring you your coat ?

NINA

Oh, mother, I wish you wouldn't worry me !

OLGA

Worry you, indeed ! You might easily catch cold, and begin to cough like Senia Semenoff !

[*Exit with KATIA.*]

NINA (*seated on the terrace in the radiant sunlight*)

Oh, how beautiful it is ! (*Puts her hands behind her head, stretches herself languidly, rises, and, glancing once more at the garden, goes slowly into the house.*)

[*Silence. Sunlight. Birds are singing in the trees.*]

[*Enter from garden-gate at back ASSIA KATCHALOVA and SEMENOFF. ASSIA wears a light dress and carries a white parasol. Though the weather is warm SEMENOFF wears a student's overcoat closely buttoned up, having hooked his stick on to one of the buttons. He is carrying ASSIA'S books.*

SEMENOFF

Volodia's evidently asleep still.

ASSIA

But it's one o'clock !

SEMENOFF

That's all the same to him. Just go and see, will you ? I'll wait here, and Peter Ivanovitch shall entertain me once more with some of his tales about the campaign of '77.

ASSIA (*laughing*)

All right, sit down ! I shall not be long.

[*Exit up steps to house.*

[SEMENOFF *sits down on bench and coughs violently.*

SEMENOFF (*soliloquising*)

Yes, my boy, it's really nothing but rubbish.  
(*Whistles, and taps his boot with his stick.*)

[*Enter VLADIMIR ALEXANDROVITCH from the street.*

VLADIMIR

Hullo, Semen Nicolaivitch ! What are you doing here ?

SEMENOFF

Nothing. Good-day to you.

VLADIMIR

Good-day. Well, where are our people ?

SEMENOFF

I don't know. We have only just got here.

VLADIMIR

Won't you come in ? They're probably having their coffee.

SEMENOFF

No, thank you. I had rather stay here. I am sick to death of the story of the war of '77.

VLADIMIR

Ha ! Ha ! Just as you like. So Peter Ivanovitch has been boring you, too ?

SEMENOFF (*with a comic gesture of horror*)

I should rather say he had ! It's absolutely the limit !

VLADIMIR

Peter's a funny chap, isn't he ? All right. You stop here, and I'll tell Volodia. (*Calling.*) Sidorenko !

[*Exit indoors.*]

[SEMENOFF goes on whistling and tapping his boot.

[*Enter ASSIA, merrily.*]

ASSIA

I say ! Volodia has only just got up, lazy fellow !

SEMENOFF (*bitterly*)

Delightful !

ASSIA (*surprised*)

You seem to be angry ?

SEMENOFF

Oh ! no, I'm not. But it irritates me to see how hopelessly in love you are.

ASSIA (*sharply*)

What do *you* know about it ?

SEMENOFF

Well, when a girl actually goes into raptures because a fellow has overslept himself, things look a bit strange. I call it nothing but a bad habit to sleep till noon.

ASSIA (*pouting*)

Ah ! you're only jealous because he's so strong and healthy.

SEMENOFF (*bitterly*)

I call that cruel of you, Alexandra Ivanovna !

---

ASSIA

Forgive me, Senia! I didn't mean to offend you. Don't be angry with me.

SEMENOFF

I am not angry. You are quite right. It's jealousy, and nothing else. After all, who wouldn't be jealous? Everything in blossom; laughter, gaiety everywhere; and I . . . have got to die!

ASSIA

Senia, you mustn't talk like that!

SEMENOFF

Why not? It's the truth. I am dying, that's all.  
[ASSIA gazes at him in mute sympathy.]

SEMENOFF (*continuing*)

Yes, such is Nature's law. You cannot escape it. Indeed it is a wonderfully wise law, and it has its purpose. The worst of it is that this purpose, damn it, is so dead against one! Yet, after all, somebody has to die. If it is not I, then it's another, and I shouldn't gain very much even if I lived for another twenty years.

ASSIA

Why are you so angry with life, Senia?

SEMENOFF

What good has life given to me, Assia? If I were healthy like your Volodia, and if a girl such as you were in love with me, well, perhaps then I might become jubilant. But . . . as it is! (*With a forced smile.*) So you've got to fall in love with me, do you see?

ASSIA

Don't talk nonsense! (*In her confusion she begins to draw circles on the ground with her sunshade.*)

SEMENOFF (*hoarsely*)

Yes; nonsense for you . . . but for me . . .

ASSIA

Yes; and for you it's nonsense, too.

SEMENOFF

Not altogether. In your relation to Volodia, I . . .

ASSIA (*interrupting*)

First of all, what does it matter to you?

SEMENOFF (*bitterly*)

Ha! Ha! Matter indeed! It matters nothing, really. Yet somehow it is all quite wrong.

ASSIA

What is?

SEMENOFF

All of it. Why should something be given to one person and denied to another? Look at me, and then at Volodia. He's got splendid health; and love and all life's pleasures and prospects lie before him. Like all healthy people, he enjoys life because he is so tremendously alive, whilst I, besides consumption and an early painful death, have nothing in prospect.

ASSIA

Always harping on that, Senia!

SEMENOFF

You cannot get away from facts, Assia. As I look at it, the right thing would be for you to love me instead of Volodia.

ASSIA

There you go again! Aren't you sick of it, Senia?

SEMENOFF

I've been sick of it for ever so long. But all the same it would really be far more romantic if you were to beautify the last days of my life with your love instead of giving it all to Volodia. And what will be the result? Marriage, babies!

ASSIA (*irritably*)

Now you're talking nonsense, and, what is more, you are impertinent, Semen Nicolaievitch.

## SEMENOFF

Yes, yes, I know that I am! Forgive me, Assia. It's very hard on me!

ASSIA (*recovering herself*)

I am not angry, but you mustn't talk like that.

[*Silence. ASSIA stoops to smell the flowers, but does not pick any. SEMENOFF watches her, evidently annoyed.*]

SEMENOFF (*with a sneer*)

Are you very much in love, Assia?

ASSIA (*drawing herself up*)

Really, this is unbearable!

SEMENOFF (*bitterly*)

What a fool I am! Why apologise to you at all? What's the use? You are alive, you are in love, you are happy. But why should I be pleased at your happiness? (*Flourishing his stick.*) I don't care a damn about your happiness or your love! Not only have I the right to laugh at your happiness, but I have also every reason to be jealous of it, to hate it, to disdain it. In fact, I can do just as I like. You happy people ought to be very grateful to us, the unhappy, for allowing you to be so! However . . . live, love, enjoy, imagining that the whole world was created solely for your pleasure.



Be fruitful and multiply ; and my curses on the lot of you ! Good-bye !

*[He turns round and is going out.]*

VOLODIA (*from the terrace*)

Semenoff, where are you going ? (*Running down the steps and seizing ASSIA'S hand.*) Good-day, Assia ! Semenoff !

SEMENOFF (*glancing round*)

Go to hell !

*[Exit.]*

VOLODIA (*after a pause*)

What's the matter ? What has happened ?

ASSIA (*in confusion*)

I don't know. He's so strange at times.

VOLODIA

Yes ; one feels sorry for him. His illness has made him so bitter. Never mind ! He'll come round. He sometimes has these fits of temper, but he is really an excellent fellow. (*Taking ASSIA'S hand.*) How pretty you look to-day, Assia.

ASSIA (*laughing*)

That's what you tell me every day.

VOLODIA (*taking her hand*)

Do you mind ? Don't you like me to say so ? Don't you like it, Assia ? (*Bends down to look in*

*her eyes. At that moment KATIA appears on the terrace and shakes out the tablecloth. VOLODIA releases ASSIA'S hand, and, looking round at KATIA, says stiffly :)* Did you go to the library to-day ?

ASSIA (*confused*)

Yes, I brought you . . . Oh ! he took my books with him !

VOLODIA

Who did ?

ASSIA

Senia. I had got you a copy of *Blanco Ibanez*, but he's taken it with him.

[*Exit KATIA.*

VOLODIA

Never mind. He'll bring it back. Let us go into the garden, Assia.

ASSIA (*demurely*)

Why ?

VOLODIA

Why ? (*ASSIA shuts her eyes and shakes her head.*)  
Why don't you want to come ?

ASSIA (*looking down*)

You'll only begin talking about . . .

VOLODIA

About what, Assia ?

ASSIA (*half withdrawing her hand*)

Well, you know . . . about . . .

VOLODIA

About what ? Don't you know that I love you, Assia ?

ASSIA

Is that love ?

VOLODIA

Love ? Why, of course it is ! You are a woman, Assia, so why shouldn't we talk about it ? Sooner or later it will have to be !

ASSIA (*looking down*)

It will never be !

VOLODIA (*clasping her hands and drawing her close to him*)

Yes, it will ; it will !

ASSIA

Volodia ! Volodia ! You're mad !

[SIDORENKO, *carrying a watering-pot, comes out of the garden. VOLODIA quickly moves away from ASSIA.*

VOLODIA

What do you want ?

SIDORENKO

Nothing, sir. I was going to water the flowers.

VOLODIA

You can do that later. Vladimir Alexandrovitch has been calling you.

SIDORENKO

Yes, sir. (*Puts down the watering-pot and goes into house.*)

ASSIA (*in a low voice*)

Let's go away somewhere, Volodia.

VOLODIA

Where shall we go ?

ASSIA (*smiling*)

Oh ! into the garden—anywhere !

VOLODIA

My own darling !

ASSIA

Only you're not to . . . you mustn't . . . like yesterday . . .

VOLODIA

Why not ?

ASSIA

Because you mustn't! It isn't nice.

[VOLODIA suddenly takes her in his arms and kisses her.]

ASSIA (*striving to free herself*)

Volodia! Volodia! You're mad! Let me go!

[*She lets him kiss her and then, breaking away from him, she runs off into the garden and he pursues her. SIDORENKO returns, picks up the watering-pot, yawns and goes out in the opposite direction. NINA and VLADIMIR ALEXANDROVITCH appear on the terrace.*]

NINA

Where are the others?

VLADIMIR

I don't know. They were here just now. In the garden probably.

NINA (*sitting on first step*)

Oh! I feel so awfully happy to-day. I suppose that's because it is such a beautiful day—so bright and sunny!

VLADIMIR (*sitting on balustrade*)

Perhaps it's because I love you? (*Takes her hand, kisses it and puts it on his knee.*) My dearest, sweetest Nina!

NINA (*laughing*)

We're all sweet, aren't we ?

VLADIMIR (*stroking her hand*)

Anyway, it's good to be alive.

NINA (*musings*)

Yes ; at times it's too good. . . .

VLADIMIR

Too good ?

NINA

And it's awful, too !

VLADIMIR

Awful ?

NINA

Yes, awful ! Because we know that nothing endures, and that the present state of things cannot always last.

VLADIMIR

Ah ! that's true enough.

NINA

Well, when you know that your happiness is not eternal, but that immediately after happiness sorrow will come, it's then that you feel how awful it all is !

VLADIMIR

Why think about it, Nina ?

NINA

I can't help it. And yet I am happy, oh, so happy !  
Vladimir !

VLADIMIR

It's so dull for you, so lonely, my dear one. Sometimes I feel as if I were committing a crime in making you live with me.

NINA

Don't be absurd !

VLADIMIR

No, really, I mean it. I'm too simple, too commonplace for you. You ought to have another sort of husband.

NINA (*her hand on his lips*)

Now don't talk nonsense.

VLADIMIR (*kissing the palm of her hand*)

I am not joking. What am I? Just an ordinary provincial officer. But you, with all your beauty and charm, you should have married a rich, clever man, and you ought to be living in a big town where you could have your place in society. Why didn't you marry the Prince, dear ?

NINA

Because I married you. That's why.

VLADIMIR

He's far more suited to you than I am.

NINA

I shall get cross with you directly, Vladimir!

VLADIMIR

All right; then, I'll stop. (*A pause.*) Never mind. In the autumn I shall pass my exam. at the Military Academy, and then we'll go and live in Petrograd. We shall still have our whole life before us, Ninotschka!

NINA

Of course, darling.

VLADIMIR (*kissing her hands*)

Yes; and we shall yet be able to have a good time. All we have to do now is to hope on and work hard. When I look at you, the sun seems only to be shining because you are there! (*Looking round.*) Somebody is coming! (*VORONETZKY and DOWE enter through the gate.*) (*Irritably.*) That Prince again!

NINA

Never mind! I'll pretend that I am not feeling well.

VLADIMIR

No, no! Why should you? (*He rises to meet the visitors.*) Good-day, Prince! Good-day, Dowe. Have you come to see me on business?



## DOWE

I have come straight from the office. Maximitch asked me to give you this. (*Handing him official envelope.*) Good-day, Nina Petrovna. (*Kissing her hand.*) I have found such a charming piece of music for you. We must try it over, and you'll see!

[*The PRINCE kisses NINA'S hand, and shakes hands with VLADIMIR.*]

VLADIMIR (*glancing at the letter*)

Just come with me, Dowe, will you? We must have a talk about this. I think that Maximitch is right. You won't mind, Prince, if we leave you for a moment?

## PRINCE

Not at all!

## VLADIMIR

We shall be back directly, Nina. Come along, Dowe! [*They go indoors.*]

PRINCE (*with an awkward laugh*)

You seem to be annoyed with me, Nina Petrovna.

NINA (*coldly*)

I am not annoyed, I am merely surprised. I thought that all was now at an end.

## PRINCE

Do you suppose that I could forget?

NINA (*shrugging her shoulders*)

That I don't know. That is your affair. But, if you really love me, as you say you do, you ought to respect my peace of mind.

PRINCE (*quickly*)

Then my presence upsets you ?

NINA

Not for the reason that you imagine. It is simply distasteful to me.

PRINCE

To you or to your husband ?

NINA (*haughtily*)

I must ask you to leave my husband out of this. What has he to do with it ? It is distasteful to me personally.

PRINCE

But, after all, why should it be ?

NINA (*convulsively tearing her handkerchief*)

You ought to know, Prince ! As a man I like and esteem you, but can't you yet see how boring it all is—these declarations of love, these persecutions ? To me it is all most annoying.

PRINCE (*scowling*)

It is your own fault, Nina Petrovna.

NINA

My fault ?

PRINCE

Yes, yours. Whose fault is it that you are the only woman in the world for me ? That you are always in my thoughts ? Who was it that caused this ? Your voice, your presence, the very perfume of you, even the rustling of your dress—these things are enough to drive me mad.

NINA

If that be so, it is certainly through no wish of mine.

PRINCE (*cuttingly*)

That is not true.

NINA (*angrily*)

Prince !

PRINCE

No, it's not true. Do you mean to tell me that you are as simple as you try to appear ? You are a commonplace woman that has learnt how to look remarkable. The way your hair is done, the way you move, or wear your clothes—it's all a trick ! Tell the truth. After all the hours that you spend in front of your glass, beautifying yourself, trying this pose or that, smirking, smiling—do you mean to say that you do all that unconsciously, naturally, without some object in view ?

NINA

What a strange question! You must be mad, Prince.

PRINCE

Very likely. Sometimes I really think that I am.  
[A pause.]

NINA (*in confusion*)

Well, perhaps you are right in blaming me.

PRINCE

Ha, ha!

NINA

Very well. Let us leave it at that. It is partly my fault. I ought not to have allowed things to go so far. I am sensible enough not to be offended when somebody tells me the truth, and I have courage enough to admit that I was in the wrong. Once I tried . . .

PRINCE

Once?

NINA (*excitedly*)

Yes, I have not always behaved as I ought to have done. But, you see, I am a commonplace woman, as you said, and I did wrong. But now all is at an end.

PRINCE

It cannot end like this, Nina Petrovna.

NINA

Now, do be reasonable! I don't want to . . .  
You are persecuting me! I love my husband. . . .

PRINCE

What's that to me?

NINA

But, I beg you . . . This is a threat! Surely I  
have the right to ask you to leave me alone?

PRINCE

As to that I could say much; but here they come.  
. . . Some other time!

[VLADIMIR ALEXANDROVITCH and DOWE come down  
*the steps from the terrace.*

VLADIMIR

So you've finally decided to do that?

DOWE

Yes; in August I shall leave the regiment and go  
to the Academy of Music in the autumn.

VLADIMIR

Then we shall meet in Petrograd?

DOWE

You'll be at the Military Academy?

VLADIMIR

I hope so. (*To NINA.*) Here we are!

DOWE

Shall we try that piece now, Nina Petrovna?

NINA (*absently*)

What piece? Oh! yes, yes, certainly!

DOWE

I've got the music with me. I want so much to play this piece specially for you. It's so bright, so full of sunshine.

PRINCE

Apparently Dowe has fallen in love with Nina Petrovna!

DOWE (*unmoved*)

Oh no! If there is anything that I love it is music.

PRINCE

Really?

DOWE

Yes, that's a fact. I often wonder how people can fall in love with women, for whom they make themselves utterly wretched, when there is such a thing as music in the world. For me the loveliest woman is not worth a single sonata by Beethoven.

---

VLADIMIR

You appear to value a sonata more than anything else on earth. Tell me, Dowe, why did you ever go in for soldiering ?

DOWE

That has often puzzled me too. You see, I never dared to think of being a real musician. You have to be quite specially gifted for that. I had to choose a profession of some sort, and, as my father had been in the army, the best thing to do, I thought, was to follow his lead. But now I've decided to send in my papers and take up music seriously. I daresay that I shall get on all right. (*Smiling confusedly.*)

VLADIMIR

No doubt you will.

DOWE (*obviously impatient*)

Nina Petrovna, shall we try over that piece ?

NINA

Yes, let us go. (*To the others.*) You sit here and listen.

VLADIMIR

An excellent idea ! Will you have a cigarette, Prince ? (*Hands a cigarette.* NINA and DOWE go indoors.) Dowe's a funny chap. Nothing but music interests him.

PRINCE (*absently*)

Yes, yes, he's a very clever fellow.

VLADIMIR

Last year, when war was talked about so much, Dowe got into such a state that it was positively painful to see him. Not that he's a coward, but to be parted from his fiddle is for him as bad as death itself. (*Pensively.*) After all, each one of us has got something of his own. (*Sound of the violin being tuned.*) Yes, something that is nearest and dearest to him. And yet, you know, if something suddenly happens somewhere we fling everything aside, and rush off to kill and be killed. Funny, isn't it? One of the first to go would be Dowe. He'd throw down his fiddle and march away with the rest.

PRINCE (*mechanically*)

Yes, it's very strange.

[OLGA PETROVNA *and* PETER IVANOVITCH *appear on the terrace.*

OLGA

Here's the Prince! Good-day. Nina and Dowe are going to play directly. We've come to listen.

PETER (*gleefully*)

I love to hear them play. Dowe's quite an accomplished musician. We had an officer in our regiment who . . .



OLGA (*sitting on step*)

Oh! do be quiet, Peter Ivanovitch! Listen to the music.

[*Music within.* OLGA PETROVNA moves her head to and fro in time to the music. VLADIMIR ALEXANDROVITCH looks pleased, but the PRINCE'S face wears a painful expression. VOLODIA and ASSIA, coming back from the garden, stand still to listen.

PETER

Charming! What is that piece?

OLGA

Oh, do be quiet, Peter Ivanovitch! Don't interrupt.  
[*The music ends on a high note.*]

ALL

Bravo! Bravo, Dowe! Encore!

[ASSIA and VOLODIA join the others.

ASSIA

How charming that is! What's the name of it? It's beautiful. Encore, encore! Nina dear, do play it again! (*Running indoors.*)

OLGA

You're without your cap again, Peter Ivanovitch!

PETER

Will you leave me alone, please? I shall be so much obliged!

OLGA

Yes, yes, I daresay! And, if you catch cold, who will have to look after you?

[PETER'S gesture of despair makes all the others laugh.]

VLADIMIR

I didn't know that Assia was here. What a nice girl she is! Nina likes her so much.

OLGA

Everybody likes her.

VLADIMIR (*with a wink*)

But Volodia likes her more than anybody else.

OLGA

That's a good thing. They'll get married, and then we shall all live together, and be happier than ever. We shall have to make the Prince get married, too. You ought to find some nice girl, Prince, and marry her. Then you could come to tea here with your wife. It would be charming!

PRINCE (*ironically*)

A trifle too charming, perhaps!

[DOWE and NINA begin to play: all are silent.]

CURTAIN

## ACT II

SCENE : *The dining-room. Table laid for a farewell luncheon. At back a door leading to lobby, where SIDORENKO is busily strapping up luggage. Bell rings. SIDORENKO admits ASSIA and SEMENOFF. She removes her hat, and he hangs up his coat on a peg. They go into dining-room.*

ASSIA

Nobody here! Do you know, Senia, we had better wait here. They won't much want us at present.

SEMENOFF

All right, then; let us wait. (*Sits near window and lights a cigarette.*)

ASSIA

You're smoking again, Senia! You know that it's not good for you.

SEMENOFF

What does it matter? If I smoke, or if I don't, I've got to die all the same. There's not much time left.

[ASSIA walks up and down the room, straightens an upturned corner of the tablecloth, and looks out of the window.]

SEMENOFF

Why are you so restless, Assia ?

ASSIA

I can't help it. It is all so unexpected.

SEMENOFF

Do you think so ? For a long while this might have been foreseen. You don't suppose the Germans have been preparing for this war for the last forty years just for their own amusement, do you ?

ASSIA

No, I wasn't thinking about that. You're more able to judge of that than I am. But to me it's all so utterly unexpected. How people can ever decide to do such an awful thing is what I can't understand ! What tears, what grief in every home ! There's not a single person in the town who hasn't got somebody to see off ! The soldiers march away, laughing and singing ; and the officers, too, look quite pleased. But oh ! it breaks my heart to think how many of them are doomed to be killed or to suffer horribly. And, do you know, those who go alone I pity less than those who have friends to see them off. How many of them will ever come back ? Each has got a mother, or a wife and children. Think what they must feel, and how they will fret ! Oh ! it's too horrible ! It were better to die than to see all this !

---

SEMENOFF

It depends, Assia.

ASSIA

Poor Nina Petrovna! And Vladimir Alexandrovitch! How he was looking forward to going to the Military Academy and to his life in Petrograd! Nina Petrovna cries from morning till night.

SEMENOFF

Yes, it's a sad sort of a joke. But look out! You may have to cry, too!

ASSIA (*in alarm*)

Cry? Why should I have to cry?

SEMENOFF

Your Volodia might have to go to the front and leave you as a grass widow.

ASSIA

Volodia's not a soldier.

SEMENOFF

He would go as a volunteer. A healthy fellow like that, why shouldn't he? All the others have to go.

ASSIA

You don't go, though.

SEMENOFF

Well, I'd go, right enough, but the worst of it is that I shouldn't get farther than the first hospital, and that wouldn't be of much use. But why are you so restless ?

ASSIA (*excitedly*)

Oh, it's impossible ! You're only saying this to frighten me.

SEMENOFF

No, I'm not. He spoke to me about it last night. And I think he's doing the right thing. Even Dowe, you see, is ready to go.

ASSIA

What do I care about what Dowe does ?

SEMENOFF

There you are ! You're all alike ; all full of heroic ideas till it affects you personally. It's only Dowe that I do pity, for he's worth more than all your Volodias put together. If Dowe were killed it would be a great pity.

ASSIA

And you mean to say that you don't care about the others ?

SEMENOFF

That depends. Volodia, for instance, I certainly don't pity.

ASSIA (*indignantly*)

You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Senia !

SEMENOFF

Why should I be ashamed of myself ? You're the only person to whom he is invaluable. For the rest of humanity it would be no great loss if there were one Volodia less in the world.

ASSIA

But he is your friend ?

SEMENOFF

I have no friends.

ASSIA

So much the worse for you.

SEMENOFF

Very likely. But do look at things calmly. Suppose your Volodia stays at home, passes his exams., becomes a teacher of mathematics, marries you, and you have children. That in itself is a worry. Where's the use of being born to become that ?

ASSIA

But is it worth while being born just to be killed or maimed through the war ?

SEMENOFF

Oh! well, you might fall under a tram. But at the front anyway, there's life, there's fighting. Yes; I should advise him to go with all my heart.

ASSIA (*trembling with indignation*)

Yes, I know! You'd suggest it to him. But it is most wicked of you!

SEMENOFF

Why is it wicked? To advise somebody to go and fight for his country?

ASSIA

That's not what I meant . . . but you . . . (*Covering her face with her hands, she goes out of the dining-room.*)

SEMENOFF

Stop, Assia, stop! Well, as you please! (*Shrugs his shoulders and crushes the stump of his cigarette in the ash-tray.*) Yes, that's what it is. (*To SIDORENKO.*) Are you going, too, Sidorenko?

SIDORENKO

Yes, sir.

SEMENOFF

And you're not afraid, are you?



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SIDORENKO

Well, of course, it's a terrible business. But I'm more worried about the home, sir.

SEMENOFF

What home ?

SIDORENKO

My own home, sir. I've got a wife in the village, and the silly woman does nothing but cry all day long. Of course it's sad ; but it can't be helped. God willing, we shall come back again all right. Things look worse at a distance than they really are, perhaps. When we get there we shall see.

*[Bell rings. SIDORENKO admits DOWE, in uniform, who carries his violin-case and comes straight into the dining-room.]*

DOWE

Ah ! Good-day, Semen Nicolaievitch ! So you've come, too, to see us off ? *(They shake hands.)* Good ! I was afraid that I should not have a chance of saying good-bye to you.

SEMENOFF

Then, you *are* going ?

DOWE *(putting violin-case on chair in corner)*

There's nothing else to be done. I must !

SEMENOFF

But you wanted to leave the Service ?

DOWE

Ah ! yes ; but it's too late now. It's just fate ! Besides, when everybody else joins up, it would be a disgrace if I sat at home scraping on my fiddle. No ; if we've got to die, let's die together.

SEMENOFF

And what about your music ?

DOWE (*sighing*)

Ah ! I shall have to give that up. I've brought my violin, and I want to ask Nina Petrovna to take care of it till . . . It's a very good one ; cost a lot. Perhaps I sha'n't get killed.

SEMENOFF

You won't get killed.

DOWE

Well, that we shall see if we live long enough. And if I am killed, what does it matter ? There'll only be one bad violinist the less. One can but die once. I must take good care of my violin. It would be a great pity if it got lost or damaged.

SEMENOFF

Don't worry about your violin. We'll look after it.

DOWE

Many thanks. I know it will be quite safe with Nina Petrovna. She loves music herself, and has always been so kind to me.

[VLADIMIR ALEXANDROVITCH *enters. He is in uniform and looks worried and sad. Forgetting that he had not seen SEMENOFF yet, he shakes hands with DOWE only.*

VLADIMIR

How are you, Dowe? I sent for you but you were out.

DOWE

Yes; I have been running about the town putting my affairs in order. Thank goodness, everything's now settled. Khokanovsky has bought my piano, and I've only got my violin left.

VLADIMIR (*absently*)

Yes, yes, the violin. (*Goes towards the violin-case.*)  
What a lot of people were in church to-day!

SEMENOFF

Good-morning, Vladimir Alexandrovitch.

VLADIMIR

Oh! I'm sorry; I didn't see that you were here, I am so glad you've come. It is most kind of you. But why are we all in here? Let's go into the

drawing-room. All our people are there, and the Prince, too.

DOWE

Oh ! the Prince, too ?

VLADIMIR (*quickly*)

Yes, yes ; he has come to see us off. Let us go, gentlemen. (*With a faint smile.*) Still with your violin, Dowe ?

DOWE

Yes, I want to ask Nina Petrovna to take care of it for me. It's a very good one, you know—cost a lot. It would be a pity . . .

VLADIMIR (*absently*)

Yes, yes, a great pity. Now, let us go.

[*He hurries out. The others follow. After a time, KATIA brings in wine and beer, which she places on the table. ASSIA and VOLODIA enter quickly. Seeing KATIA, they stop short.*]

VOLODIA

Just go away for a moment, Katia, will you ?

KATIA

Yes, sir. (*In going out she whispers to SIDORENKO, who follows her.*)

VOLODIA (*watching her go*)

You see, Assia, I was awfully anxious to have a talk with you. As a woman, of course, you don't understand how one feels about all this. You can't see how shameful it would be to stop at home when everybody else is going.

ASSIA (*keeping back her tears*)

But they're not all going. Senia isn't, nor the Prince. . . .

VOLODIA

Senia! Senia is ill; and the Prince . . . well, he's just a well-fed animal who thinks more about his love-affairs than anything else. You don't want to keep me back, Assia, do you?

ASSIA (*tearfully*)

As if I could possibly do that!

VOLODIA

There you are! Crying again? What an extraordinary girl you are, Assia! Nothing's settled yet. Perhaps I sha'n't go, after all. It's only an idea of mine.

ASSIA (*incredulously*)

Ah! you just say that to comfort me, but I feel . . .  
(*Sobbing.*)

VOLODIA

For shame, Assia! I give you my word that I haven't yet made up my mind about it,

ASSIA (*half hopefully*)

Is that really true ?

VOLODIA

Of course it's true! For heaven's sake don't cry! It's bad enough as it is.

ASSIA

No, I won't do so any more. (*Smiling through her tears.*) It's Senia's fault. He frightened me. I know it's silly of me, but please don't be cross!

VOLODIA

As if I could ever be cross with you!

ASSIA

I shall be all right again directly. (*Laughing.*) How silly I am, to be sure!

VOLODIA

Not silly; charming. (*Placing her hands on his shoulders.*) Assia, suppose I went to the front, would you marry me then?

[ASSIA looks affectionately at him, suddenly kisses him, and runs away.]

VOLODIA

Assia!

[Running out of the room, ASSIA encounters OLGA PETROVNA.]

OLGA

Where are you going, Assia? We shall have lunch directly. Don't go. Our people are off to the war. It's sad, isn't it?

ASSIA (*in confusion*)

Yes, I'm coming back.

[*Exit.*

[VOLODIA *sits near window and lights cigarette.*

OLGA PETROVNA *goes up to him and lovingly fondles his hand.*

OLGA

O Volodia, Volodia! Tell me why this war's been declared! We were all living so happily, so peacefully, and now, all at once . . . I'm dreadfully sorry for Nina, poor thing. (VOLODIA *kisses her hand.*) But perhaps nothing will happen . . .

VOLODIA

What do you mean, mother? The war has already begun.

OLGA

Yes, I know, but perhaps they'll come to some sort of an arrangement. They might look at each other and say: "What fools we are!" and then each go his own way.

VOLODIA (*laughing*)

They couldn't do that, mother.

OLGA

In my opinion what they should do would be just to snap their fingers at each other and then go home.

VOLODIA

They can't settle matters quite as simply as that, mother.

OLGA

The simpler, the better, say I!

VOLODIA

But that wouldn't help us. Tell me, would you let me go, mother?

OLGA

Go? Where?

VOLODIA

To the front.

OLGA

What do you mean? Do you suppose we should ever let you go there?

VOLODIA

Then I shall go of my own accord.

OLGA (*angrily*)

Don't talk such nonsense! I'm sad enough as it is. You've always got some absurd idea or other. I'll tell Assia, and she shall give you a good scolding.

[VOLODIA *laughs outright.*]



## OLGA

He laughs! Talks rubbish like that, and thinks it is funny! Peter Ivanovitch is just the same. If he were younger he says that he would go, too. You're all of you mad! Go and tell them that lunch is ready. Vladimir Alexandrovitch will be starting directly, and if he doesn't mind, he'll have to go hungry.

[VOLODIA goes out and returns with PETER IVANOVITCH, the PRINCE, DOWE and SEMENOFF.

## OLGA

Do sit down, gentlemen! Sit down! Dowe, my boy, I've got some of your favourite cutlets for you, so just eat and enjoy them. Out there you won't get anyone to cook cutlets for you, and then you'll think of me.

## DOWE

I should never forget you, even without the cutlets to remind me.

## PETER

But where are Nina and Vladimir Alexandrovitch?

## SEMENOFF

They'll be here directly.

## OLGA

Do, please, sit down and have your lunch. Prince, would you like some vodka? Peter Ivanovitch!

*(Suggesting that he should get some.)* Sit down, darling!  
*(To NINA as she comes in with VLADIMIR.)*

PETER *(offering vodka)*

Will you have some vodka, Vladimir Ivanovitch?  
Dowe, will you have any?

DOWE

If you please.

*[ASSIA comes in quietly and takes a seat at some distance from VOLODIA, avoiding his glance.]*

OLGA

Drink, gentlemen! You must all drink before you start, or you might catch cold. You've got a long way to go, too.

PRINCE *(to DOWE)*

Are you going to ride?

DOWE

Yes, to the station.

PRINCE

What train shall you catch?

DOWE

They say it leaves at six o'clock, but we cannot be certain.

PRINCE (*trying to keep up the conversation*)

Strange, isn't it? A big town like this, always full of soldiers, and yet we've no railway! Such a thing is only possible in our country.

SEMENOFF

I know of a provincial town with a population of a hundred thousand, and the nearest railway station is eighty versts off. So, such things do exist.

PETER

Next year they're going to begin building our railway. The engineers are already at work getting out plans. But in '77, when we were moving to the frontier . . .

OLGA

Oh, we've heard all about that!

PETER

How extraordinary it is that I am not allowed to . . .

[NINA *begins to cry, much to VLADIMIR'S distress.*]

OLGA

My darling, don't give way like that! You'll only upset Vladimir Alexandrovitch.

NINA (*hurriedly*)

It's nothing! Just my nerves! (*Laughing hysterically.*) Do you know, it's really all most awfully comic, if you come to think of it!

[*They all affect not to notice her, and VLADIMIR ALEXANDROVITCH looks more depressed than ever.*]

OLGA (*anxiously, to NINA*)

Shall I get you some of those drops, Nina?

NINA (*starting back*)

Why? Do you think I'm getting hysterical? Oh no; it's only that I suddenly thought how absurd it all seems. (*To DOWE.*) Where's your violin, Dowe?

DOWE

I was just going to ask you . . .

NINA (*not listening*)

Don't you see what a terrible comedy it all is? Somewhere there's a Wilhelm, a Germany. You've never seen Germany, have you, Dowe? I haven't, either. Yet here we are, all crying, all saying good-bye, all breaking up our lives. Here's Dowe going to the war! Isn't it too absurd? Do you want to go, Dowe?

DOWE

It's not a question of whether I want to go, Nina Petrovna. Everybody is going.

NINA

Everybody! What's everybody got to do with you?

OLGA

You really ought to have some of those drops, Nina. Shall I get them?

NINA (*excitedly*)

Oh! do, for goodness' sake, leave me alone, mother! I was going to say . . .

OLGA (*in tears*)

Nina, darling!

NINA (*pushing her aside*)

I have my life to live! I'm not interfering with anyone else. My life may be unimportant, but I won't have it spoilt. Do you hear? I won't have it spoilt!

OLGA (*patting her on the head*)

It can't be helped, Nina. You're not the only one. All must suffer alike.

NINA

But that's not my fault. That's their look-out. I won't have my life sacrificed for somebody else.

PETER (*with unexpected emphasis*)

Only those who have no mother-country of their own talk like that, Nina.

OLGA

Do be quiet, Peter Ivanovitch ! Leave her alone !  
Can't you see . . .

PETER (*without heeding*)

It's only the enemies of Russia who talk like that !  
(*Striking the table with his fist.*) In times like these  
we've no right to talk about our own lives nor to  
argue.

OLGA

Peter Ivanovitch !

PETER (*continuing*)

Our duty is to go to our death without giving it  
a thought. I am an old man, but, if need be, I shall  
go without a word, because my life is needed to help  
Russia. What are you compared with the fate of  
Russia ? I won't have this sort of talk in my house !

OLGA (*shouting*)

Peter Ivanovitch !

NINA (*sobbing*)

I know, I know, father dear !

OLGA

Oh ! Peter Ivanovitch ! Can't you see . . .

PETER

There, there ! All I said was that, in times like  
these, when Russia is going through . . .

OLGA

Oh ! do be quiet, will you ? Nina darling, don't cry like that ! Vladimir Alexandrovitch !

NINA

I shall be all right directly. Don't take any notice of me. It will pass. (*A long, depressing silence ensues.*)

SEMENOFF (*to DOWE*)

Will you have some beer, Dowe ?

DOWE

Yes, please.

OLGA

Perhaps someone would like tea. The samovar is all ready. Would you like some, Prince ?

PRINCE

No, thank you.

[*Silence again. NINA hurriedly leaves the room. They all watch her go out.*]

OLGA

You ought to go to her, Vladimir Alexandrovitch ! Do go, there's a dear.

VLADIMIR

Yes, I will. Excuse me, gentlemen.

SEMENOFF

Certainly.

[VLADIMIR *goes out.*]

PRINCE

Yes, it's very hard on those who have near relatives. . . .

DOWE

I am all right. Besides my violin I have nobody. If I am killed it can't play of itself! (*Laughing.*)

SEMENOFF (*sardonically*)

That's true!

SIDORENKO (*in the doorway*)

If you please, sir, the lance-corporal's here to say that the Commanding Officer has arrived.

DOWE

Already? (*Rises and looks at his watch.*) Yes, time's up! We are late. . . . I must be off. (*They all rise from the table in confusion.*) Yes, we must start. (*With affected nonchalance.*) Yes . . . well, good-bye, Olga Petrovna. Thank you so much for all that you have done.

OLGA (*in tears as she kisses his forehead.*)

Good-bye, my boy; good-bye! I hope you'll come back safe and sound.

DOWE (*cheerily*)

Why not? Everybody doesn't get killed. Good-bye, Peter Ivanovitch. Allow me to embrace you. We may not see each other any more, you know!

[*Embraces him.*]



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PETER

Don't talk like that! Don't say good-bye, but *Au revoir!*

DOWE

All right, then, *Au revoir!* Everything is possible. Well, Volodia, are you coming to see us off? Good! Good-bye, Prince! Take care of yourself! And now . . . where's Nina Petrovna? Ah! she has got other things to think about. Please give her my compliments and thanks for all her kindness. Perhaps she will sometimes think how we used to play over pieces together. I wanted so much to ask her to look after my violin. It's a very good one, you know—cost quite a lot.

OLGA

Don't worry about your violin, my boy! We'll take good care of it. And you'll come back all right, too! And then what a fine lot of music you and Nina will be giving us!

DOWE (*smiling faintly*)

I don't know about that. My music's over and done with. Oh! well, no matter. . . . I didn't say good-bye to you, Alexandra Ivanovna. . . . God bless you! (*ASSIA weeps and does not reply.*) Now what else was there that I wanted to say? Well, never mind! Good-bye once more, and think of me sometimes.

ALL

Good-bye. Au revoir! Good luck!

DOWE (*stopping suddenly in the doorway and smiling awkwardly*)

I . . . you won't laugh, gentlemen, but . . . I should just like to have one more look at . . . (*Opens the violin-case, but shuts it immediately with a bang.*) No, after all, it's rather silly of me. . . . Good-bye once more, and many thanks.

[*He hurries out and the others follow. The room is empty. Voices without are heard saying good-bye. A door is banged; and there is silence. SIDORENKO is alone in the lobby. After a while VLADIMIR ALEXANDROVITCH enters, and SIDORENKO quickly hands him his accoutrements. He moves towards the door, then stops and goes back to the dining-room. NINA runs towards him and, without weeping, falls on his neck silently.*

VLADIMIR

Nina! Nina, my darling! My little Nina! (*He strokes her head and kisses her hair. ASSIA enters quietly.*) Assia, please help! Look to my little Nina!

[*ASSIA supports NINA as VLADIMIR rushes out.*

*NINA utters a piercing shriek, attempts to follow him, and falls back into the arms of ASSIA and SIDORENKO.*

CURTAIN

### ACT III

SCENE : *Two months later. The same dining-room at evening. The lamp is lit, and the samovar on the table. OLGA PETROVNA is seated behind it. PETER IVANOVITCH sits at the other end of the table with a newspaper and his special large cup beside him. ASSIA is giving tea to a little boy and girl, the children of an officer who has been killed in action. SEMENOFF sits at a small side-table. He is smoking a cigarette. On the wall is a war-map stuck with flags of different colours.*

ASSIA

Would you like some more tea, Sonia ?

SONIA

Yes, please.

ASSIA

Colia, you mustn't drink with your spoon. Drink properly. Do you want me to pour it into your saucer for you ? Say so, if you do.

OLGA

And how is mamma, Sonia ?

SONIA

Oh, she's quite well, thank you.

COLIA (*merrily*)

Mamma's always cwyng ! Her eyes are so wed,  
like the eyes of a cwayfish.

ASSIA (*smiling*)

Are the eyes of a crayfish red ?

COLIA

Well, what colour are they ?

ASSIA

Black.

COLIA

Black ? Why are they black ?

ASSIA

Because God gave it black eyes.

COLIA

Why did God give it black eyes ?

ASSIA

Because He wished.

COLIA

Wished ?

ASSIA

Yes.

COLIA

But our Souska's got yellow eyes like pussy's !

ASSIA

There, that will do! Drink your tea. Sonia, dear, would you like some jam?

SONIA

Yes, please.

[*A pause.*]

OLGA

It's just a month since our Volodia went away. Poor boy, I wonder where he is now? [*Silence.*]

[*A bell rings. SEMENOFF goes to the front door and lets the PRINCE in. He takes off his overcoat in the lobby, and enters the dining-room.*]

PETER

Ah! it's you, Prince!

[*The PRINCE shakes hands with them all. SONIA curtsies to him.*]

PRINCE

I am so bored that I hardly know what to do with myself. I hope you're not getting tired of me, Olga Petrovna.

OLGA

Why should we get tired of you? We're always pleased to see you, and when you're here it cheers Nina up. She frets so, poor girl!

PRINCE

How is Nina Petrovna?

OLGA

Oh! she won't eat, and does nothing but worry. May I give you some tea, Prince?

PRINCE

If you please. Thank you. (*Taking his cup.*) It is cold and foggy out-of-doors. The town seems utterly dead. Well, have you had any news?

OLGA

We had a letter from Vladimir Alexandrovitch two days ago, but it's a week since we heard from Volodia. He used to write every day, and now we've no news of him at all. Assia's quite upset. I am so terribly afraid that something's happened to him. It is so easy to catch cold, you know. Peter Ivanovitch reads the paper every day, but I am too frightened to look at it. Those dreadful lists of killed, wounded and missing! They are too appalling!

PRINCE

If anything had happened to him I think that you would have heard. One can't be surprised at not getting letters, considering . . .

PETER

He's got nothing to tell us. That's why he doesn't write. It can't be helped. They've no time for nonsense. They have to attend to business.

OLGA

Yes, yes, I know, but . . . all the same . . . poor Assienka feels it terribly. I am not talking about myself. I am so sorry for them. And, as for Peter Ivanovitch, who tries to look so brave, he doesn't sleep, let me tell you, but he walks up and down all night long.

PETER (*angrily*)

I'm suffering from insomnia ; that's why I can't sleep. I always do, at this time of year. You know that very well.

OLGA

Don't talk nonsense ! Insomnia, indeed !

[*Silence ensues.*]

PRINCE (*to ASSIA*)

And you're still looking after the children, Alexandra Ivanovna ?

ASSIA

Yes.

OLGA

Yes ; and she ought to be thinking about her own children ! What a mad idea, to be sure ! Get married, and then separate ! You're neither wife nor widow. Could anything be more absurd ?

ASSIA

It was I who wished it, Olga Petrovna.

[*Silence.*]

COLIA (*loudly*)

They killed my daddy in the war, they did! The Germans did!

PRINCE (*startled*)

What?

ASSIA

Drink your tea, Colia. It's getting cold.

COLIA

I am drinking.

ASSIA

Go on, then, Colia.

[*Silence.* NINA *enters quietly.*

NINA

I didn't know you were here, Prince. Why didn't you tell me, mother?

PRINCE

I've only just come.

NINA (*sitting opposite to him*)

What a long, dreary day this is!

OLGA

Don't think so much about it, and then it won't seem so long.

NINA (*with a feeble smile*)

I should be glad not to think. But thoughts come of their own accord.

[*Silence.*



## PRINCE

I am sorry to be the bearer of sad news. Poor Dowe's body reached the railway-station to-day.

[*They all look up. OLGA wipes her eyes.*

PETER IVANOVITCH *stares grimly at his newspaper. Silence.*

## NINA

Poor Dowe! It's all over now with his music. Do you remember how he talked of leaving the Service, and of going to Petrograd to study?

## PRINCE

Fate was against that, it seems.

SEMENOFF (*angrily*)

What has Fate got to do with it? It's not Fate, but an infamous wrong.

## PRINCE

Yes, of course . . .

[*Silence.*

## OLGA

Do you remember, Assia, how he wanted to have a last look at his fiddle? "If I am killed," he said, "it can't play of itself." (*Sobbing.*) Oh, my God, what awful things are happening in this world!

## SEMENOFF

All of them foolish and wicked!

[*Silence.*

NINA

We heard last week about Dowe's death. "Killed" is a word one doesn't seem able to understand till the news actually comes that he's lying there at the railway-station, sleeping in his coffin. He doesn't know—he never will know that we are all here, thinking about him! What a terrible thing war is!

PRINCE

Terrible, yes; but there's also a certain tragic beauty about it. Do you know, I feel somehow half envious of the war.

SEMENOFF (*in a low voice*)

A nice thing to be envious of!

ASSIA (*checking him*)

Senia!

PRINCE (*who did not hear*)

What did you say?

SEMENOFF

Oh! nothing in particular . . .

PRINCE (*continuing*)

What sort of life is this of ours? It's not life at all, but perpetual torture, mere existence. What are our petty interests and worries, our everyday commonplace doings? But out there, facing death, all such trivial things disappear. Man becomes what

he ought always to be, the tragic exponent of an heroic idea.

SEMENOFF (*under his breath*)

Splendid, isn't it ?

[ASSIA *shakes her head at him.*

PRINCE

It may sound strange, but I positively envy the men at the front, where there's all that fighting, that excitement, that life !

NINA

You say that you envy them, but my heart aches for them. Hungry, cold and mud-stained, facing death, and suffering continually ! What a life is theirs ! Not life, but sordid torture. Then, think of all the killed and wounded, of all the widows and orphans ! And all their misery caused by the caprice of one man ! What a hideous, revolting thing ! Such butchery utterly horrifies me. (*After a pause.*) O God, how hard it is to bear ! I don't know, perhaps it's because I'm so stupid, but first of all I took up war work and made things for the wounded. I worked ever so hard, and then one day I suddenly felt that it did not fill up my time, nor make me forget my own troubles. I shall now go in for nursing, as a hospital is soon to be opened here. I shall try that, but I don't know if my nerves will stand it. So I go on, chopping and changing ; first

this, then that. I'm no good to anybody: useless for anything. The worst of it is that letters come so seldom, and are such a long time on the way. When they do get here they're hardly of any value. You glance at the familiar signature, and find that the letter was written weeks ago! Perhaps . . . (*Her voice quivers.*)

PETER

All this sort of talk is cowardly. I won't listen to it. The wife of a Russian officer ought not to have such ideas.

NINA (*with a forced smile*)

Father dear, I'm not an officer's wife. I'm just a wife, a commonplace sort of woman for whom the man she loves is—everything.

PETER

Yes, yes, but I think . . .

OLGA

Peter Ivanovitch!

PETER

I really cannot stand any more of this perpetual talk! There's the man fighting for his country, performing a sacred duty, and all that his wife thinks about is how she can persuade him to lose his courage and his honour! She wants him back in the nursery, in the bedroom!

OLGA

Peter Ivanovitch!

NINA

Oh! as if that were what I wanted, father!

PETER (*rising, and shaking his newspaper irritably*)

I can quite imagine the sort of letters that this lady writes to her husband. But, let me tell you, if I had a wife like that, I'd get rid of her! Yes, I'd get rid of her! Yes, that I would! (*To OLGA PETROVNA.*) Be quiet, and leave me alone! I speak as I feel! It is revolting! [*Exit.*]

[*Silence ensues. NINA weeps quietly. The children look scared. The PRINCE appears downcast, while SEMENOFF smokes hard.*]

OLGA (*to NINA*)

Don't cry, dear! It's only his way! You know what father is. He worries more than any of us, really, and only talks like that just to cheer himself up.

NINA

Yes, I know he does, mother.

ASSIA

Now, children, have you finished tea?

SONIA

Yes, thank you.

ASSIA

Very well, then, I'll take you home. It's your bed-time, and your mother will be getting anxious. You'll come with us, won't you, Senia ?

SEMENOFF

Certainly.

ASSIA

Now, children, say good-bye, and we'll go.  
[*The children say good-bye. OLGA kisses them and they go out with ASSIA and SEMENOFF.*]

OLGA

Poor little things! They've lost their father, and their mother is without means. All they had was what he earned. Of course they'll get a pension, but it won't be the same thing as when their father was alive.

PRINCE

Why is Alexandra Petrovna so much interested in them ?

OLGA

Oh! she's so sorry for them, dear, kind-hearted girl, and that's why she looks after them. Their poor mother's not got over the shock yet, and does nothing but cry. The children often go hungry. If Assia didn't fetch them they'd have to go to bed without their supper. My God! Save me from war! I daresay I don't understand much about it, but it's

certainly not beautiful! (*As she goes out she strokes NINA'S head.*) Don't be angry with father, Nina. He is old, and he's worrying dreadfully about you and Volodia. That's why he gets into such tempers, and hardly knows what he's saying. Just stop here and have a chat while I go and see to the supper. [*She goes out. There is a long silence. A clock strikes nine.*]

NINA

What a dark, terrible night! When I'm alone in my room all I hear is the howling of the wind. I've felt so wretched to-day that I can scarcely breathe. Why is everything so utterly dreadful to-day, Prince?

PRINCE

I don't know. Your nerves are overwrought, Nina Petrovna.

NINA

Very likely. But you've no idea how awful it is. Do you know, I'm so grateful to you, Prince, for coming here. I am alone the whole day long. Father, well, you know what he is; and mother and Assia have their own troubles. So that I wander up and down by myself just like some madwoman, longing to speak about all that is on my mind. To whom can I speak? To no one. Nobody knows! Nobody understands! (*Placing her hands on the table, she bends forward in an attitude of dejection. The PRINCE gently touches her hands.*)

PRINCE

You know that you have no more devoted friend than myself.

NINA (*looking up and withdrawing her hands*)

Yes, I know that. But I can't talk about it to you.

PRINCE

Why not ?

NINA (*smiling sadly*)

Well, you see, I know that you don't care to listen when I talk about . . . him. Though you don't say anything, I can see that every word of mine is painful to you.

PRINCE

That cannot be helped. Nina Petrovna, I won't attempt to disguise the fact ; I love you ; and now, when you're so lonely, so unhappy, I love you all the more. Of course it requires an effort, a great effort on my part to sympathise with you about Vladimir Alexandrovitch. But I love you so much that I share your sorrow, and I try to forget, indeed, I do sometimes forget, that you are grieving for a man who is in my way. I see all that you suffer, and I call God to witness that, if I could, I would go and take his place out there !

NINA (*giving him her hand*)

Thank you, Prince !

[*He kisses her hand and releases it immediately.*

*Silence ensues.*



NINA (*thinking aloud*)

Who knows? Perhaps it might, if . . .

[*Stops suddenly.*]

PRINCE (*eagerly*)

What? What do you mean? If what?

NINA (*without looking at him*)

Nothing. (*She rises, and going to the window, gazes into the darkness.*) How dark it is! Only one light to be seen! One would never think that it was evening-time. It is more like midnight.

PRINCE (*approaching her*)

Nina Petrovna, what were you going to say?

NINA (*starting, but without looking round*)

Nothing.

PRINCE (*hoarsely*)

I implore you to speak! It seemed to me . . . Oh, you don't know what it means to me! Nina Petrovna, speak!

[NINA *slowly turns round, but is silent.*]

PRINCE (*with outstretched hands*)

I implore you, Nina, for God's sake!

[*Smiling strangely, NINA places her hands on his shoulders, draws him slightly closer, gazes into his eyes, and then thrusts him back, as, covering her face with both hands, she turns away.*]

NINA

I am a wicked, vile woman.

PRINCE

Nina Petrovna !

NINA (*imploringly*)

Leave me, I beg you, leave me ! For heaven's sake, go away ! I don't know what I'm doing, nor what I'm saying !

[*After a pause, the PRINCE stares at NINA and all at once draws her vehemently towards him.*]

PRINCE

Then you do . . . you do love me, Nina ? (NINA, *without resisting, shuts her eyes, and feebly shakes her head.*) No ? You don't love me ? Then, what is the meaning of all this ?

NINA (*faltering*)

I said that . . .

PRINCE

What ? I don't understand . . .

NINA

I . . .

PRINCE (*almost shaking her*)

What ? What is it ? You're torturing me ! Don't you love me ?

NINA (*breaking away from him, with a wild look in her eyes*)

No! I don't love anybody! I said that I was wicked, vile! And now I tell you that I love my husband with all my heart; I am always thinking of him. I don't care for you; you are repulsive to me, but . . . if you wanted, I . . .

PRINCE (*advancing*)

Nina!

[*She retreats in terror to the door.*]

NINA

For heaven's sake, Prince!

PRINCE (*rushing towards her*)

Why do you torture me as well as yourself?

NINA

It is not my fault. I don't want to do so.

PRINCE (*seizing her wrists and dragging her towards him*)

Nina!

NINA (*angrily*)

How dare you! Let me go! (*She rushes out.*)

[*The PRINCE stands motionless for a time, as if stunned. Turning round, he notices SEMENOFF, who had entered noiselessly.*]

PRINCE

Ah!

SEMENOFF

Not bad for a beginning, was it?

PRINCE

What did you say?

SEMENOFF

Oh, nothing! (*Sits down and takes out a cigarette-case.*) Candidly, the whole thing's revolting; but, after all, it's only nature . . .

PRINCE (*controlling himself*)

What do you mean?

SEMENOFF

What I say.

PRINCE

And, pray, what is that?

SEMENOFF

Does it interest you? Well, since you want to know . . . In the first place, the lady's young, charming, desirable. Her husband's away at the front. It's all as plain, as clear as can be. But, if you ask me, your share in the whole thing does not please me at all!

PRINCE (*with a sneer*)

Oh, indeed !

SEMENOFF

Yes, and I would even go further, and say that the part you play is by no means a beautiful one. The expression on your face at this moment leaves no doubt as to your real feelings. If you like, I will be more explicit.

PRINCE

Explain yourself ! I insist upon it !

SEMENOFF

You can insist as much as you like, but, if I wished, I could simply tell you to go to hell !

PRINCE (*advancing angrily*)

How dare you !

SEMENOFF

Gently, gently !

PRINCE

I insist upon an explanation !

SEMENOFF

Oh ! you insist, do you ? Well, you know very well that she doesn't love you, but that she is devoted to her husband. It is only as a male that you are

in the least interesting to her. Even if, after this rebuff, you succeed in seizing the right moment, I can't say that I envy you. Your position will be even more degrading than it is at present.

PRINCE (*sarcastically*)

This is all most edifying. I hope to have an opportunity of discussing the matter with you at another time and in another place.

SEMENOFF

Aha! A challenge? Jokes of that sort are best left alone. Although it's war-time, I for one should prefer to risk my life for something more interesting.

PRINCE

So you refuse?

SEMENOFF

Yes, I refuse. I have not the slightest wish to fight a duel with you, and let me warn you that, if I have any of your nonsense, I always carry about with me the usual weapon for self-defence. War-time again, you see!

PRINCE (*ironically*)

A revolver?

SEMENOFF

Yes, a revolver, and a very good one, too. Dowe gave it to me. (*Changing his tone.*) So, if you worry

me at all, I shall put a bullet through your head just as quietly as I am now speaking.

PRINCE

That we shall see.

SEMENOFF

Yes, so we shall.

PRINCE

At any rate, I should like to tell you, Mr Semenoff . . .

*[A bell rings. SEMENOFF goes out, and returns with a telegram in his hand. He appears grieved.]*

PRINCE (*continuing*)

I only wish to say . . .

SEMENOFF

Look here, Prince, we'll talk about this some other time. Here's a telegram! (*Goes to the door and calls out.*) Peter Ivanovitch! Peter Ivanovitch! What's the matter? Are you all asleep? (*To the PRINCE.*) I'll tell you what, Prince . . .

PRINCE (*haughtily*)

Pray, what do you mean?

SEMENOFF (*not noticing the other's manner*)

Well, it's this. I don't like the look of this telegram.

PRINCE (*getting up quickly*)

A telegram ?

SEMENOFF

It's from out there . . . addressed to Peter Ivanovitch. I think we ought to read it first.

PRINCE

Yes . . . but . . .

SEMENOFF

Oh! there's no "but" about it! I don't want to open it out of curiosity, yet suppose something has happened? In that case we can at any rate break the news to them. (*He opens the telegram, looks extremely grave, and hands it to the PRINCE.*) It's what I expected. (*Turns round hurriedly.*)

PRINCE (*reads telegram and appears horrified*)

Good God! What shall we do? What does it mean?

SEMENOFF (*still with his back to the PRINCE*)

Mean? Why, that he is killed. Killed, that's all! (*Turning round suddenly, he grabs the telegram and pockets it.*) How absurd all this is! What's the good of standing there like that? Go and tell Nina Petrovna! She'll be able to manage it better than we can. I'll break the news to Assia. Why don't you go?

[*The PRINCE goes out.*]



SEMENOFF

Poor Volodia ! To hell with it all !

*[Stands centre, absorbed in his thoughts. A piercing shriek is heard from without. The PRINCE enters hurriedly.]*

PRINCE

She overheard me !

SEMENOFF

Who did ? Olga Petrovna ?

PRINCE

Yes. She overheard me when I was telling Nina ! We had better send for a doctor.

SEMENOFF

What the deuce can a doctor do ? Assia will be here directly.

*[Shrieks without. OLGA PETROVNA rushes in, her grey hair all dishevelled, followed by NINA, who endeavours to console her.]*

NINA

Mother, dearest ! For heaven's sake ! . . .

OLGA (*wildly*)

Where . . . where is it ? It's not true ! Killed ? Volodia killed ? It's not true ! (*Collapses. NINA and the PRINCE place her in a chair. NINA, weeping, caresses her mother.*)

NINA

Mother, dearest! Don't, don't! Be calm! Don't give way!

[PETER IVANOVITCH *enters quickly and with firm step approaches* OLGA PETROVNA. *His face wears a stony expression.*

PETER

Olga Petrovna!

OLGA (*clutching his hands convulsively*)

Peter Ivanovitch! It's not true! It can't be true! Volodia killed? Peter Ivanovitch! (*Falls on his neck, but immediately thrusts him back, and shakes herself free from NINA.*) It's not true! It can't be true! Leave me alone! (*Rushes to a corner, kneels, and hurriedly crosses herself, beating the floor with her forehead.*) My God! My God!

[PETER IVANOVITCH *sinks down into a chair at the table, hiding his face in his hands.* ASSIA *appears in the doorway, wearing her coat and hat. Seeing OLGA on her knees in prayer, she remains rooted to the spot. Her hands fall helplessly to her side.*

OLGA (*praying*)

They have killed my dear little Volodia! My Volodia! Oh, God, help me! Help me, Lord! (*Perceiving ASSIA.*) Assia! my Assenka! Our little Volodia's dead! They've killed Volodia! (*Crawls*

*to ASSIA, takes her hands and kisses them repeatedly.)*  
They've killed him! Assia! Assenka! Our little Volodia's dead! My God! My God!

*[ASSIA stands there, lifeless, with wide-opened eyes. NINA falls forward on the table, sobbing. SEMENOFF and the PRINCE stand aside, looking downwards. PETER IVANOVITCH, at the table, covers his face with his hands.]*

CURTAIN

## ACT IV

SCENE: *Golden autumn. The same scene as in Act I. Leaves are slowly falling from the trees. Through branches that are bare the house-roofs and church of the little town can be seen. PETER IVANOVITCH is seated on the terrace, wearing an old uniform and a cap which he has pulled down over his ears. A newspaper and a cigar-case are near him, yet he does not read nor smoke, but sits there, brooding, dazed, forlorn. The PRINCE and NINA enter from the house. NINA is not in mourning, but wears smart clothes, as if about to make some pleasant excursion. She looks radiantly happy; yet on seeing PETER IVANOVITCH her face becomes grave.*

### NINA

All by yourself, as usual, father dear! (*Embracing him.*) Come cheer up! You'll make yourself ill. It can't be helped. We shall never bring him back to life.

### PETER (*roused somewhat*)

It's all right. I only wanted to sit here quietly for a bit. Wonderful weather, isn't it? I've been reading the paper. They say that Lvoff has been captured. Did you see that?

PRINCE (*stammering*)

Er . . . yes . . . er . . . so I did . . . I . . .  
er . . . read about it . . . er . . . of course . . .

NINA (*tenderly*)

But, my dear father, Lvoff was captured ever so long ago! Don't you recollect?

PETER (*eagerly*)

What? Have they taken it? When? I didn't know that.

NINA (*glancing at the PRINCE*)

Oh! you must have forgotten, father!

PETER

Perhaps I did.

NINA (*sighing*)

Of course you forgot about it. You ought not to be always by yourself, like this. You really oughtn't.

PETER

Oh! That doesn't matter! Do you remember, Nina, that Volodia wrote from Yaroslaf?

NINA

Yes, yes, father, I remember. But we mustn't think about that.

PETER (*in a low voice*)

No, no ; of course we mustn't.

NINA

It only upsets you. What can we do, father ? Our Volodia's not the only one. Many, many have perished.

PETER (*with a vacant expression*)

Yes, many, many ! It can't be helped.

PRINCE (*consolingly*)

All the same, Vladimir Petrovitch's death was one to be envied. (PETER IVANOVITCH *looks scared*.) He died like a hero. This, I think, should be some consolation to you, even though it is a slight one. An officer who was wounded in the same engagement told me that, if it had not been for Vladimir Petrovitch, the whole regiment would have been annihilated.

PETER (*knitting his brows*)

Aha ! Yes . . . yes . . . I know . . .

PRINCE (*continuing*)

He said that, in spite of the terrible firing that was going on, Vladimir Petrovitch never once took cover, but went on calmly giving orders to his men.

PETER (*rising*)

Yes, yes, I know ! He died like a hero. I ought to be proud of him. Volodia died like a hero. My

dear sir, I know ! A hero, a hero ! There's nothing else to be said but that. Nothing else ! Excuse me !

[*Exit hastily and nervously to house. NINA and PRINCE watch him go. Silence.*]

NINA (*in a low voice*)

You mustn't mind father. He's got quite childish since Volodia's death. It has utterly broken him.

PRINCE (*sadly*)

Yes, I quite understand, Nina Petrovna.

NINA (*sitting down*)

Father cannot bear to hear Volodia mentioned. Do you know, he has never once shed a tear since that dreadful time. He never speaks ; and this silence of his is far more awful than the most heartrending cries would be. I can't tell you how painful it is to see him like this. O God ! when will this hideous war end ? I wonder if, for all this grief and suffering, those who caused it will be punished ?

PRINCE

Yes, I think they will.

NINA

After all these horrors can there ever be another war ? Will people again be slaughtered, and again have to die ? Will they ever understand, ever realise, what they are doing ?

PRINCE

Perhaps. Who knows ?

NINA

Semenoff said last night that wars would never cease to occur, because they are not revolting to human nature, but belong to it. Can this be so ?

PRINCE

That is a matter for argument.

NINA

I cannot see what there is to argue about. If such is the case, then humanity ought to be exterminated altogether. It has no right to exist.

*[The PRINCE shrugs his shoulders. Silence ensues.]*

NINA

How beautiful it all is, round here ! The falling leaves, the mellow sunlight ; such peace, such charm ! Oh ! I'm ever so happy, Prince ! Mother tells me that I've forgotten poor Volodia, and scolds me for not being in mourning. But would black clothes ever bring him back ? I never think of the dear boy but the tears come into my eyes. And yet I'm happy all the same. Perhaps I'm very selfish, or silly, but happy I certainly am. When the telegram came from Vladimir I nearly went mad ! I wanted to dance and sing . . .



PRINCE (*gloomily*)

I daresay you did. But don't you think it's rather cruel to come and tell *me* all this ?

NINA

Yes, yes ! Forgive me, Prince ! I was so happy that I quite forgot. Do forgive me ! (*Offers him her hand.*)

PRINCE (*without taking it*)

I have no right to be offended, and I have nothing to forgive. It was I who thrust myself into your life, and I cannot expect to be anything to you.

NINA (*smiling sadly*)

Why do you say that, Prince ? You know quite well that I like you very much.

PRINCE (*bitterly*)

Thank you. Most interesting, I am sure . . . but that's not what I want.

NINA (*sadly*)

But what am I to do ?

PRINCE

Nothing. We cannot go into that. All that I want to say to you now is this. While all was still so uncertain, I felt that I ought not to leave you. I had an idea that I might be of some service to you ;

that it might comfort you to know that in your distress you had somebody at hand who was ready to do anything for you . . .

NINA (*in a subdued voice*)

For that I am most grateful to you, Prince !

PRINCE (*continuing*)

But now, things have altered. Vladimir Alexandrovitch is coming home. His wound must evidently be slight, as he does not mention it. I feel, therefore, that my presence would be useless now ; indeed, only burdensome to him and to you.

NINA (*sadly*)

Then you are going away ?

PRINCE

Yes ; I am leaving for Moscow to-night . . . probably I shall never see you again.

NINA (*after a pause*)

Yes . . . well, you may be right. Perhaps it is better that you should go.

PRINCE (*bitterly*)

And is that all that you have to say to me as good-bye ?

NINA (*with a helpless gesture*)

What else can I say ?

PRINCE

Listen ! Tell me, Nina ! Allow me to call you Nina for the first and last time, though I have always called you that in my heart . . .

[NINA looks down, as she clasps and unclasps her hands.]

PRINCE (*continuing*).

Tell me, now . . . tell me, have you ever felt otherwise towards me ? Don't let my question surprise you. I only just want to ask this ; and it would be easier for me to say good-bye if I could take with me the impression that it was merely a trick of Fate that spoilt *my* life and that the part which I played in yours was not a wholly ridiculous one. Don't be too crushing ! (*Laughs nervously.*)

NINA

I do not know ! I can hardly tell . . .

PRINCE

You mean . . . that . . .

NINA (*resolutely*)

Listen to me, Prince ! You've done so much for me, and I'm so grateful to you, that I'll . . . (*Hesitates.*) Yes, I'll tell you the truth. There have been moments when I loved you !

PRINCE

Nina ! (*He seizes her hand.*)

NINA (*withdrawing it*)

But they were moments of weakness when I felt lonely, and depressed, thinking that I should never see Vladimir again. I am only a woman, Prince, "a commonplace woman," as you once said I was, if you remember! I cannot live without love . . . and . . . when I thought that Vladimir might be killed . . . I know it's wrong, it's bad; but I . . .

PRINCE

You mean that . . . if . . .

NINA (*glancing at him in alarm*)

Prince . . . you mustn't talk like that! It was simply something stronger than I was . . . I'm bad, I know . . . immoral; I deserve to be despised . . .

PRINCE

That may be. But I love you just as you are; and now, more than ever!

NINA (*rising suddenly*)

Good-bye, Prince! We must never speak of this again!

PRINCE

One word, Nina! One word! You mean that, if your husband had been killed, you . . .

NINA (*after a pause, hurriedly*)

Well . . . yes!

[*She turns away, trembling.*]

PRINCE

Aha ! What a muddle life is ! Everything so clumsily arranged, so completely a matter of chance ! While thousands of others are being killed in this war . . .

NINA (*in alarm*)

Prince !

PRINCE

Why be afraid of words ? Especially if they reveal the truth ? Why should I tell a lie or make believe when that which to-day means radiant happiness for you, means for me the grave of all my hopes of love and joy ? If you can thus light-heartedly discard me for someone else, why should I pretend ? Listen. All the while you were anxiously scanning the lists of killed, dreading to find your husband's name there, I was looking for it, too !

NINA (*horrified*)

You mean to say that you did that, Prince ? How could you be so wicked ?

PRINCE

Is it wicked to love ?

NINA

Never dare to call it love ! Who are you to talk to me of love ?

PRINCE (*perplexed*)

Nina !

NINA

I am not Nina to you! How dare you call me by that name? You loved me! Ha! ha! ha! All you wanted was a pretty woman! Do you suppose that people like you are capable of loving anyone? Listen. I never, never for one moment loved you! Now go! Do you hear me? Go!

*[Exits quickly to house.]*

PRINCE

Nina!

*[Stands motionless for a while in utter amazement, and then walks resolutely towards gate, as ASSIA and SEMENOFF meet him. ASSIA is in deep mourning. SEMENOFF wears the Red Cross badge.]*

SEMENOFF

Ah! It's you, Prince! Are you going?

PRINCE

Yes. Good-bye, Alexandra Ivanovna!

ASSIA (*mechanically*)

Good-bye.

SEMENOFF

Why good-bye? Are you going away?

PRINCE

Yes; I am leaving for Moscow to-night.

SEMENOFF

Oh! Are you? H'm! Well, perhaps it's best!

PRINCE

I must.

SEMENOFF

Then, good-bye! Think of us sometimes. We probably sha'n't meet again.

PRINCE

No.

SEMENOFF

Well, good-bye!

*[They shake hands and walk on. As the PRINCE is going, SEMENOFF stops him.]*

SEMENOFF

One moment, Prince! I was too hard on you. I am glad that you have such strength of will and self-respect. Up to now I thought you were a scoundrel, but I can see that you have really suffered much. Forgive me for what I said, and accept my best wishes.

PRINCE (*ironically*)

Extremely obliged to you. Many thanks. Good-bye!

*[They shake hands. The PRINCE goes out.]*

SEMENOFF (*to ASSIA, who is on the terrace*)

Assia! Wait a moment!

ASSIA

What is it ?

SEMENOFF

Oh ! You know ! Let's sit down here for a while. It's so awfully depressing indoors. One can hardly breathe. Peter Ivanovitch never speaks ; Olga Petrovna is in tears ; and Nina seems almost crazy with delight. She won't want us ; so let's sit here.

ASSIA

Very well. (*She comes down the steps and sits on the bench under the trees.*) I only wanted to see how mother . . .

SEMENOFF

Olga Petrovna ?

ASSIA

Yes, mother. She ought not to be left alone for long.

SEMENOFF

You call her mother, do you ?

ASSIA

Yes.

SEMENOFF

H'm ! . . . well . . . (*After a pause.*) So the Prince is going ! A good thing, too ! It would all be really most absurd, if it weren't so sad. What a strange sort of jumble is life ! Tragedy and comedy



side by side. Even the funny man has a part in the whole show.

ASSIA

Where does the funny man come in ?

SEMENOFF (*jeeringly*)

Yes, and what about us ? That's rather a farce, isn't it ?

ASSIA

Don't begin about that, please, Semen Nicolaievitch.

SEMENOFF

I don't want to do so, but I can't help it.

ASSIA

It is so boring.

SEMENOFF

Boring for you, but very sad for me. What am I to do ? You see, the Prince is going. Well, that means that there have been mutual explanations. But we shall never be able to understand each other.

ASSIA (*annoyed*)

Really, Senia, I don't know what more there is to say ! We've discussed the matter over and over again, but all to no purpose.

SEMENOFF

So you imagine, but I think that there's something still to be said ; perhaps the most important thing of all.

ASSIA

Very well, then, say it!

SEMENOFF

It's not so easy as you think.

ASSIA

Then don't say it.

SEMENOFF

Damn it all! You needn't choke me off like that!  
I call it cruel, Alexandra Ivanovna.

ASSIA

Say it, then.

[*Silence.* SEMENOFF *gnaws his moustache and looks hard at ASSIA.*

ASSIA

Come, what is it? I must be going.

SEMENOFF

One moment! Listen to me, Assia!

ASSIA

I am listening.

SEMENOFF (*resolutely*)

I know that you are very unhappy, and that I . . . well, I am nothing to you. It's just this . . . Oh! Why should I waste words? Let me tell you outright. I love you, and I have only a very short time to live.

ASSIA

Do you know, Senia, you always talk so much about your death that I have begun not to believe in it! For the last three years you've told us that you were dying.

*[She turns away.]*

SEMENOFF

Pray let me apologise for not yet being dead. It's really no fault of mine.

ASSIA

Words again! Words! Of what use are they?

SEMENOFF

They all serve the same purpose.

ASSIA (*deprecatingly*)

That will do, Semen Nicolaievitch!

SEMENOFF

But . . . if I love you!

ASSIA

Oh, dear! How wearisome all this is! (*Angrily.*) You've got one foot in the grave, Semen Nicolaievitch, and you talk about love! (*Rises.*)

SEMENOFF (*furiously*)

Have I? Well, perhaps I have; but your Volodia's been in his grave a long time now.

ASSIA (*uttering a cry*)

Oh! Senia! (*She sinks down on the bench, covering her face with her hands.* SEMENOFF, *trembling all over, watches her.*)

SEMENOFF

Assia! Assia! Forgive me! I didn't mean to . . .

ASSIA (*rising*)

It doesn't matter! (*Goes slowly towards the house.* SEMENOFF *helplessly follows.*)

SEMENOFF

Assia, I swear that I never meant to say that!

[NINA *appears on the terrace.*]

NINA

Oh! There you are! Where's the Prince? Has he gone?

SEMENOFF

Yes, he's gone.

NINA (*with a slight touch of regret in her voice*)

Oh! . . . Well, Semen Nicolaievitch, did you go to the station? (*As ASSIA passes her.*) What's the matter, Assia? You look so strange. Has anything happened?

ASSIA

No, it's nothing. I've got a headache, that's all.  
 [Exit to house.]

NINA (to SEMENOFF)

Then you've not been to the station ?

SEMENOFF

No, I telephoned to ask about the train. It gets in at three o'clock.

NINA

But you said two ?

SEMENOFF

Yes, the time-table said two o'clock, but the station-master told me that it would be an hour late. No trains for a long while past have been running regularly.

NINA

So you're not going ?

SEMENOFF

No. There will be nobody else besides Vladimir Alexandrovitch.

NINA

I ought to go myself, but (*smiling*) Heaven knows what would happen if I did ! I should behave like a madwoman ! And then, somehow I feel that he would rather meet me here, at home. There'll be nobody to stare at us then.

SEMENOFF (*dryly*)

Quite so. Besides, the Prince promised to meet him with the car and bring him home quietly.

NINA

Oh ! The Prince said . . .

SEMENOFF

Yes ; he said that he would fetch Vladimir Alexandrovitch himself.

NINA

How kind of him ! He's such a good fellow, isn't he, Semen Nicolaievitch ?

SEMENOFF

Who ? The Prince ? Oh ! well, yes . . . he's not ungrateful. So you'll stop here till they come ?

NINA

Yes, I cannot . . . (*Simpering.*) I'm afraid, you know.

SEMENOFF

Afraid of what ?

NINA

You see, I am afraid that, if I suddenly . . . his wound . . .

SEMENOFF

What is there to be afraid of ? From what Vladimir Alexandrovitch says in his letters, he is

getting on, and that means that his wound is slight. If it were anything serious he would have prepared you for it.

NINA (*smiling*)

I know it's nothing serious, but, all the same . . . I don't know why, but I'm afraid . . .

SEMENOFF

Oh, well, if you feel like that it's better to stop here.

NINA (*sitting on the balustrade*)

Sit down for a moment, Semen Nicolaievitch. For some reason or other, I simply cannot bear to be left alone. Assia is looking after mother.

SEMENOFF

Very well ; I'll sit down here. (*Sits opposite NINA.*)

NINA (*pensively*)

We seem to be coming together again, don't we ?

SEMENOFF

Not all of us.

NINA

No, not all. Poor Volodia ! Poor Dowe ! I myself am happy, but I'm almost ashamed at being so. And it grieves me to think of mother, and Assia, and father.

SEMENOFF

Yes ; you've been lucky.

NINA

But still, Vladimir's been wounded.

SEMENOFF

Wounded, yes ; but the wound will heal. In fact, that's an advantage, as otherwise he might have got killed in the long run. For it ends it, as far as he is concerned. If he wanted to go back to the front they probably wouldn't take him. By that time, too, the war will be over, and you'll be able to live quietly together. As a Knight of the Order of St George, he's got every chance of success. You'll go and live at Petrograd. I can't get used to that new name.

NINA (*smiling*)

I sha'n't allow him to go back to the front. Let others go. He has done his share.

SEMENOFF

Yes, and splendidly, too.

NINA (*proudly*)

Oh ! Semen Nicolaievitch, if you knew how happy, how happy I am !

SEMENOFF (*sympathetically*)

May you always be that !

NINA (*fretfully*)

Mother's angry because I'm not in mourning. It's not that I have forgotten poor Volodia, but just



to-day, well, it's simply impossible to wear black !  
 Feeling so happy as I do, how can I suddenly put on  
 crape ?

SEMENOFF

And it wouldn't help matters, either.

[OLGA PETROVNA comes out on to the terrace.  
*Her figure is bent, her face wrinkled, and  
 her hair white. ASSIA follows.*

NINA

There's mother !

OLGA (*languidly*)

Good-day, Semen Nicolaievitch. It's good of  
 you not to forget us. (*Sits on the topmost step.*)  
 Nina, there, she's forgotten poor little Volodia !  
 Forgotten him !

NINA (*petulantly*)

Oh, mother, I've not forgotten him ! You won't  
 understand . . .

OLGA

Yes, yes, you have forgotten him ! Don't say that  
 you haven't !

NINA (*angrily*)

Very well, then, I'll go and put on my black dress.  
 What else do you want me to do ?

ASSIA

Nina !

NINA

What in Heaven's name am I to do? All day long it's the same thing! (*Turns away. OLGA watches her with wrathful eyes and shakes her head.*)

SEMENOFF (*to change the subject*)

Are you feeling better to-day, Olga Petrovna?

OLGA

Better? As if I should ever be better? What does it matter, either? My little Volodia's dead! (*Sobs.*)

ASSIA (*sitting down beside her*)

Don't cry, mother dear!

OLGA (*stroking ASSIA'S hair*)

I've still got my little Assenka! She's not forgotten little Volodia! We'll both live together, won't we? Poor little widow! (*Silence.*)

SEMENOFF

Vladimir Alexandrovitch will be here soon.

OLGA (*with an evil look in her eyes*)

Ah yes! he's coming. That's all right. But little Volodia's not coming! Our darling Volodia, he's not coming! Do you recollect how you called them the big and the little Volodia? Well, now, the big Volodia's coming home, but there's no little Volodia to come back to us ever again! (*ASSIA weeps.*)

NINA

Mother, why do you always upset her like that ?

OLGA

I don't upset her. Do I upset you, Assenka ?

ASSIA (*striving to keep back her tears*)

No, no, mother !

OLGA

Ah yes! the big Volodia's coming home.

NINA (*shrugging her shoulders*)

Mother, you say that as if you were sorry that he hadn't been killed, too !

OLGA (*after a pause*)

It's no good being cross, Nina. I cannot forget Volodia !

NINA

And we can't either, mother dear.

OLGA

No, no, it's different with you. Vladimir Alexandrovitch is coming and you'll soon be consoled. You're both young and have many years to live ; but for me and for Peter Ivanovitch there's only one thing left—to die.

NINA

Then am I no longer your daughter, mother ?

OLGA (*without heeding, in a low voice*)  
They've killed my Volodia ! They've killed him.

KATIA (*at the door*)  
Shall I lay the table, ma'am ?

NINA (*rising quickly*)  
Yes, of course. It's two o'clock. I'll see to everything, mother.

OLGA (*mechanically*)  
Yes, go, go ! (NINA goes out with KATIA.) Nina's angry with me. She doesn't want me !

ASSIA  
Oh, mother, you shouldn't talk like that !

OLGA  
Well, what else can I say ? She's young ; and I only cause her pain.

ASSIA  
Oh ! but she loves you just as much as ever.

OLGA  
Yes, I know she loves me. But nobody will ever love me as much as Volodia did.

ASSIA  
And what about me, mother ?

OLGA

You're a dear, good little thing. But still you're not one of us. You'll forget Volodia, and marry again.

ASSIA

No ; that will never happen !

OLGA (*shaking her head*)

God only knows, Assenka ! God only knows !

[*Distant sound of a motor-horn heard.*]

SEMENOFF (*rising*)

Hullo ! Are they here already ?

ASSIA

I can't say ? Do you think it is the car ?

[*They go down the steps.*]

ASSIA

Yes, here they are ! There's Sidorenko ! Nina !  
Nina !

[*Runs back towards the house, but stops. Bronzed and smiling, SIDORENKO, with luggage, appears at the gate.*]

SEMENOFF

Good-day, Sidorenko !

SIDORENKO

Good-day, sir ! (*He puts down the bags.*)

SEMENOFF

And where's Vladimir Alexandrovitch ?

SIDORENKO

He's just arrived. The car could not come up the lane.

*[The PRINCE enters hurriedly, looking pale and upset. He is accompanied by a man of the Army Medical Corps and a soldier. Seeing SEMENOFF, he seizes his hand and draws him aside.]*

PRINCE *(in an undertone)*

Break the news to Nina Petrovna. Vladimir Alexandrovitch has been very seriously wounded.

SEMENOFF *(anxiously)*

What ? Seriously wounded ? But . . .

PRINCE *(hurriedly)*

He didn't want to write . . . *(In a low voice.)*  
He has lost both legs.

SEMENOFF *(starting back)*

Impossible ! *(To ASSIA.)* Assia !

ASSIA *(who has overheard)*

Yes, yes, I'll go.

*[Exit into house.]*

PRINCE

The car cannot come up here. We must have a chair to . . .

SEMENOFF

A chair? Here you are! (*Seizes garden-chair.*)  
 [*The attendants carry out the chair. The PRINCE follows them, and then returns.*]

PRINCE (*to SEMENOFF*)

Please go and see to things. I'll stop here . . .

SEMENOFF

Yes, all right. [*Exit.*]

OLGA (*excitedly*)

What's the matter, Prince? Is Vladimir Alexandrovitch ill?

PRINCE.

Yes.

OLGA

Poor Nina! What is it? What's the matter with him?

PRINCE

He has lost both legs.

[*OLGA PETROVNA crosses herself and sinks down on her seat. PETER IVANOVITCH hurries in, followed by NINA, who rushes past him. ASSIA also returns.*]

NINA (*on terrace*)

Prince, what is it? Vladimir . . . is the wound dangerous? Tell me! Tell me what's the matter?

PRINCE

Keep calm, Nina Petrovna. It is nothing.

NINA (*running into the garden*)

Where is he ? Where can I see him ?

PRINCE

He is being carried here. Don't go !

NINA (*horrified*)

Being carried ?

[*The PRINCE looks away, and goes towards the gate. The men carry in VLADIMIR ALEXANDROVITCH on the chair. He looks weak and emaciated. His legs are covered with a rug. Seeing NINA, the men set down the chair. The rug slips off, showing the two shapeless stumps in their white bandages.*]

VLADIMIR ALEXANDROVITCH (*stretching out his hands*)

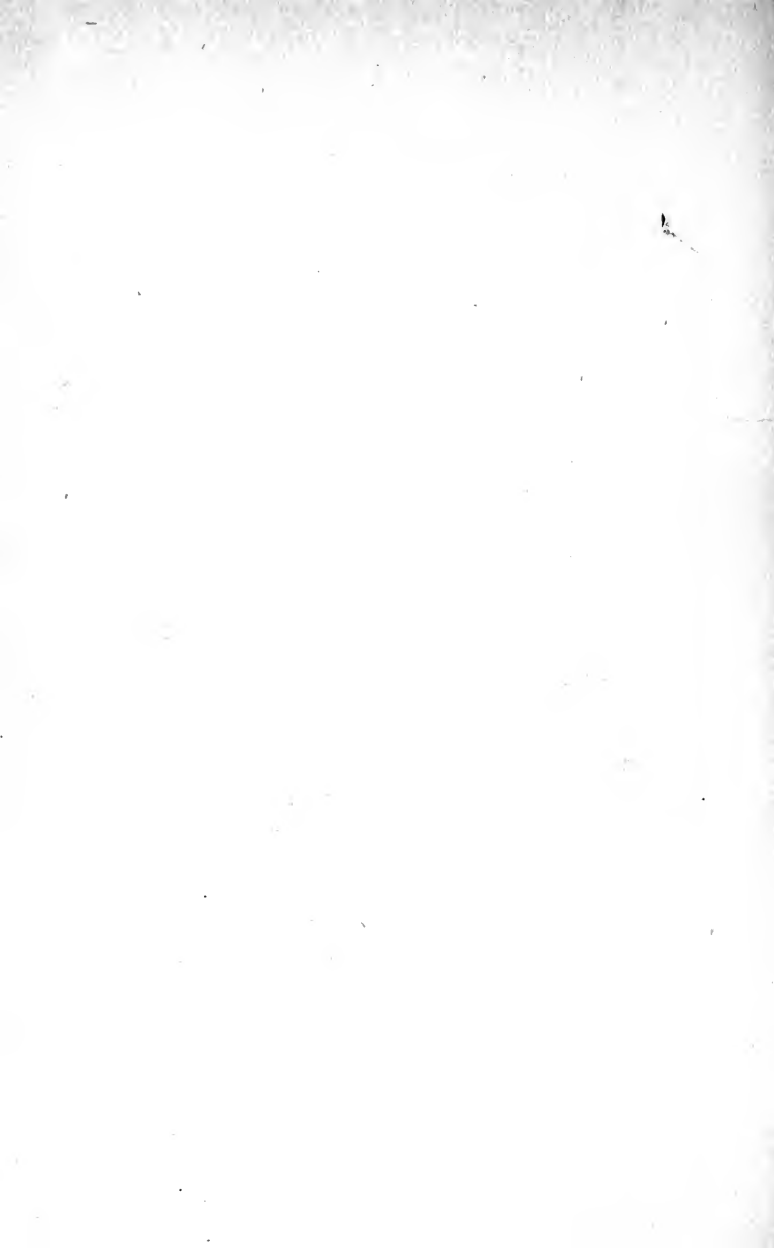
Nina, my little Nina !

[*NINA recoils from him in horror, and falls back into the arms of the PRINCE.*]

CURTAIN

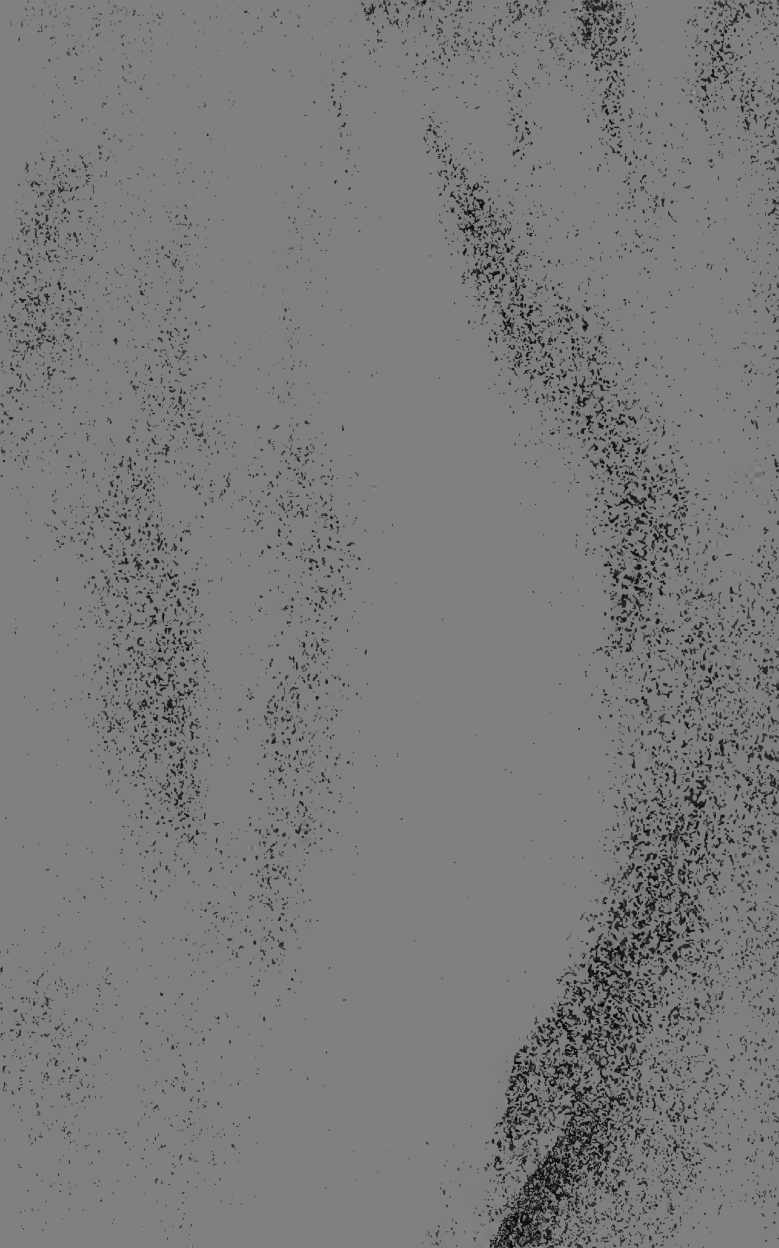












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