

Marriage: an absolutely impossible event in two acts.

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Translated and adapted by: Nicholas Leno and Yana Meerzon

Marriage: An Absolutely Impossible event in two acts, translated and adapted by Yana Meerzon and Nicholas Leno, was first produced by the University of Ottawa on March 28th 2017 with the following cast and crew:

Podkolyosin	Matt Hertendy
Stepan/Dunyashka	Montana Adams
Kochkaryov	Cullen Elijah McGrail
Fyokla	Katie Macneill
Arina	Monica Bradford-Lea
Agafya	Robin Stars Breiche
Omelette	Sam Randazzo
Zhevakin	Even Gilchrist
Anuchkin	Luke Brown

Director	Nicholas Leno
Set Designer	Roger Schultz
Costume Designer	Vanessa Imeson
Lighting Designer	Chantal Labonté
Production Manager	Katie Rochford
Stage Manager	Taylor Stewart
Assistant Stage Manager	Annie Martin

*Starikov was cut from the original production, but has been reinserted into this translation.

Characters

AGAFYA TIKHONOVNA: The merchant's daughter. The bride.

ARINA PANTELEIMONOVNA: The aunt to AGAFYA.

FYOKLA IVANOVNA: The matchmaker.

PODKOLYOSIN: The deputy minister. The groom.

KOCHKARYOV: The friend of PODKOLYOSIN.

OMELETTE: The chief superintendent manager.

ANUCHKIN: The retired infantry officer.

ZHEVAKIN: The sailor.

DUNYASHKA: The servant to ARINA.

STARIKOV: a merchant.

STEPAN: the servant to PODKOLYOSIN.

SCENE I
PODKOLYOSIN alone.

PODKOLYOSIN, alone with a pipe lying on the sofa.

PODKOLYOSIN

Marriage! Marriage is the only way. What else is there? You live and you live, you go and you go, and in the end you just can't take it any longer. Now I've gone and missed the marrying season again. The matchmaker has been calling for the last three months. I should be ashamed of myself! Hey, Stepan!

SCENE II
PODKOLYOSIN, STEPAN.

PODKOLYOSIN

Has the matchmaker come?

STEPAN

Not yet.

PODKOLYOSIN

And did you go to the tailor?

STEPAN

I did.

PODKOLYOSIN

Is he working on my tailcoat?

STEPAN.

He is.

PODKOLYOSIN.

How far has he got?

STEPAN.

He's already doing the buttonholes.

PODKOLYOSIN.

What?

STEPAN

I said: he's already doing the buttonholes.

PODKOLYOSIN

And didn't he ask: "What does your master need a tailcoat for?"

STEPAN

No, he didn't.

PODKOLYOSIN

Perhaps he said something about your master getting married?

STEPAN

No, he didn't.

PODKOLYOSIN

Did you see, perhaps, other tailcoats in his workshop? He makes tailcoats for other people too?

STEPAN

Yes, he has lots of tailcoats.

PODKOLYOSIN

Still, their cloth wouldn't be quite as good as mine would it?

STEPAN

It's true.

PODKOLYOSIN

What?

STEPAN

I said your cloth is better than theirs.

PODKOLYOSIN

Good.

Pause.

So, didn't he ask why your master was having a tailcoat made from such fine cloth?

STEPAN

No.

PODKOLYOSIN

Didn't he say anything like... err... "Is your master getting married?"

STEPAN
No.

PODKOLYOSIN
But I presume you told him what my rank is and which department I'm in?

STEPAN
Yes, I did.

PODKOLYOSIN
And what did he say to that?

STEPAN
He said: "I'll see what I can do."

PODKOLYOSIN
Good. Off you go, now.

STEPAN exits.

SCENE III
PODKOLYOSIN alone.

PODKOLYOSIN
A tailcoat. The way I see it, a black tailcoat is somehow more imposing. Coloured ones are more for assistant ministers, assistant to the assistant ministers, and other small fry. Those of us with a rather higher rank must look a little more, how do you say... err... damn, I've forgotten the word! Such a good word, too, and I've lost it. Hey, Stepan!

SCENE IV
PODKOLYOSIN, STEPAN.

PODKOLYOSIN
Did you buy the shoe polish?

STEPAN
I did.

PODKOLYOSIN
Where did you buy it? Did you buy it from the shop I told you about?

STEPAN
I did.

PODKOLYOSIN

So, it's the good polish?

STEPAN

Yes, it's the good polish.

PODKOLYOSIN

Have you tried cleaning my shoes with it?

STEPAN

I have.

PODKOLYOSIN

Are they shiny?

STEPAN

Yes, they're shiny.

PODKOLYOSIN

Good.

Pause.

And when you bought the polish, did the clerk ask anything? Did he say something like:
"What does your master need this polish for?"

STEPAN

No.

PODKOLYOSIN

Maybe he said something like: "Perhaps your master's getting married?"

STEPAN

No, he didn't ask anything.

PODKOLYOSIN

Good, off you go.

SCENE V
PODKOLYOSIN alone.

PODKOLYOSIN

Shoes! You would think that shoes are nothing really, but if they're badly made and the polish is on the orange side, you won't get any respect. It's even worse if they give you blisters. I can put up with anything, but not blisters. Hey, Stepan!

SCENE VI
PODKOLYOSIN, STEPAN.

STEPAN

Yes?

PODKOLYOSIN

Did you tell the shoemaker that I don't want any blisters?

STEPAN

I did.

PODKOLYOSIN

And what did he say?

STEPAN

He said: "okay".

STEPAN exits.

SCENE VII
PODKOLYOSIN, then STEPAN.

PODKOLYOSIN

Marriage. This marriage business! First this, then that. Then the other thing. And another thing. God damn it, it's not an easy thing! Hey, Stepan!

Enter STEPAN.

I wanted to tell you--

STEPAN

The old woman's here.

PODKOLYOSIN

Ah, she is! Ask her to come in.

STEPAN exits.

Yes, it's such a business... it's not at all... err... it's a tough business. Yes, that's a thing. Kind of a thing. A difficult thing.

SCENE VIII
PODKOLYOSIN and FYOKLA.

PODKOLYOSIN

Ah, good day, good day, Fyokla! Well? How are things? Take a chair. Sit down, please. How's business? Tell me everything. Go on. And, what's her name? What did you say she was called? Melanya?

FYOKLA

Agafya.

PODKOLYOSIN

Agafya. I suppose this is one of your 40-year-old maids, isn't it?

FYOKLA

No, no, no! Just you wait: when you're married you'll never stop singing my praises.

PODKOLYOSIN

Fyokla, you're lying.

FYOKLA

Lying? I'm too old to lie, my good sir; only dogs lie--

PODKOLYOSIN

Her property. What about her property? Tell me again.

FYOKLA

A grand estate, a house, a two story stone house. It's a pleasure to see. There's a shop on the ground floor, pays seven hundred. There's a beer cellar in the basement that also brings a lot of people. There are two additions -- a stone one and a wooden one -- rented to very nice tenants, each brings 400 apiece. There's a little garden elsewhere, three years ago an older gentleman rented it for cabbage. Such a nice, sober man he was too. He never took a drink and had three sons: two of them were married. "As for number three," he'd say, "he's a youngster, let him sit around and take some of the load off me" --

PODKOLYOSIN

So? Agafya? What does she look like?

FYOKLA

Sugar, pure sugar. And hot, like a loaf of bread fresh out of the oven. She's too lovely to describe. You'll be satisfied. Satisfied up to here. So satisfied that you'll say to your friends and enemies alike: "It's all Fyokla's work, I'm so grateful to her!"

PODKOLYOSIN

Are you sure she's not from the military stock--

FYOKLA

She's the daughter of a merchant. And such a daughter, that she would do credit to a general! Now, she doesn't want to hear about any merchants. "I don't care", she says, "what a man looks like, he can be nothing to write home about, just so long as he has a title." Such refinement! And on Sunday in her silk dress, just a picture. Simply a princess!

PODKOLYOSIN

Oh ah. The reason I ask is because I'm a deputy minister--

FYOKLA

I understand. How can I not understand? There was one, a minister. A few years ago, but she wouldn't take him: not to her liking. He had such a funny manner, he couldn't open his mouth without telling a lie, and such whoppers too. He didn't like it either. But what can he do: that's how he is. That's the way God made him.

PODKOLYOSIN

Right. Apart from this one, are there any others?

FYOKLA

Any others? She's the best you'll find.

PODKOLYOSIN

Really she's the best you've got?

FYOKLA

She's the best you've got.

PODKOLYOSIN

Okay. I'll think about. Why don't you come back the day after tomorrow, and then we'll do the same thing: I'll have little lie-down and you'll tell your story.

FYOKLA

God forbid! I've been calling on you for nearly three months. All you can do is sit there sucking away on your pipe.

PODKOLYOSIN

You think getting married is as easy as shouting: "Hey, Stepan, give me my shoes!" I pull the shoes on and off I go! No: one must think, give it thought, have a look round.

FYOKLA

Have a look around? You want to look around, then look around. Tell your man to fetch your coat and we'll get going, while it's still good and early.

PODK OLYOSIN

Now? But it's cloudy. It might rain at any moment.

FYOKLA

You wait: you'll be sorry! You're already starting to get grey hairs, soon you won't be any good for the marriage business. Putting on such a fuss just because he's a deputy minister!

PODKOLYOSIN

What rubbish you talk! What gave you the idea that I've got grey hairs? Show me a grey hair!

FYOKLA

Of course you've got grey hairs! There's no pleasing him: he doesn't like this one, he doesn't like that one. Let me tell you: there's a retired sea captain I have my eye on, and when he talks, his voice is like a trumpet--

PODKOLYOSIN

You're lying! I'm going to look in the mirror. Hey, Stepan, bring the mirror! No, don't, I'll go and look for myself. Grey hairs! God only preserve. It's worse than shingles.

PODKOLYOSIN exits.

SCENE IX

FYOKLA and KOCHKARYOV.

KOCHKARYOV

Where's Podkolyosin?

KOCHKARYOV sees FYOKLA.

You! What are you doing here? Why the devil did you go and get me married?

FYOKLA

What's so bad about that? You did your duty as a man.

KOCHKARYOV

My duty as a man! And what reward do I get? A wife! I could have managed perfectly well without one!

FYOKLA

But you were always going on and on: Please, Fyokla, please find me a wife! Please!

KOCHKARYOV

Listen you old hag! What business do you have here? Don't tell me Podkolyosin's thinking of--

FYOKLA

And what if he is?

KOCHKARYOV

Never! And not a word to me, the scoundrel! The old fox: thought you'd do it on the sly, eh?

SCENE X

The same and PODKOLYOSIN.

PODKOLYOSIN enters looking at himself in the mirror.

KOCHKARYOV *(sneaking up behind.)*

Boo!

PODKOLYOSIN *(screams and drops the mirror.)*

You crazy fool! Why did you do that!

KOCHKARYOV

Calm down, it was only a joke--

PODKOLYOSIN

You call that a joke? Look: the mirror's smashed. It wasn't cheap, you know!

KOCHKARYOV

Alright, alright: I'll find you another mirror.

PODKOLYOSIN

Yes, you'll find me one alright. I know those mirrors: they make you look ten years older, and your face is all twisted and crooked.

KOCHKARYOV

I'm the one who should be angry. Here you are, keeping me completely in the dark, and I'm supposed to be your friend. You've decided to get married?

PODKOLYOSIN

Nonsense! I haven't even thought about it.

KOCHKARYOV

Here's the proof! We all know our friend here. We know what she does. Oh that's nothing, it's nothing, nothing to worry about. Nothing special. Marriage is a good thing, a noble thing, a Christian thing, a patriotic thing, the right thing. I will take care of it. So, tell us. Who is she? What's her family? Noble origin? Civil service? A merchant's daughter? What's her name?

FYOKLA

Agafya. Agafya Tikhonovna.

KOCHKARYOV

Agafya? Not Agafya Tikhonovna Brandakhlystova?

FYOKLA

No -- Agafya Tikhonovna Kuperdyagina.

KOCHKARYOV

The one who lives in Shestilavochnaya?

FYOKLA

No she lives on Peski --

KOCHKARYOV

Oh yes I know it.

FYOKLA

On the soap lane.

KOCHKARYOV

Yes, yes; on the soap lane, just behind the shop -- in a wooden house.

FYOKLA

No, not behind the shop -- behind the beer cellar.

KOCHKARYOV

The beer cellar? Then I don't know it.

FYOKLA

When you turn onto Peski, there's a booth right before you. Just after you pass the booth, look to your left and you can't miss it -- right in front of you there's a wooden house where the dressmaker lives, the one who use to live with the senate chief secretary. So, don't go into the dressmaker's house, but right behind it there's another house, a stone house, this is the house you need, it's her house, I mean, that's the house she lives in, Agafya, the bride, I mean.

KOCHKARYOV

Ah yes, I know! I shall take charge of everything, you can run along we have no further need of your services.

FYOKLA

What? You're going fix the marriage yourself?

KOCHKARYOV

Yes I am, I most certainly am; and we don't want you interfering.

FYOKLA

Shame on you. This is no business for a man! Please dear God, please don't do this.

KOCHKARYOV

Go on, off you go! You make no sense. To each cricket their nest.

FYOKLA

Look at that! Taking the bread out of an old woman's mouth, you devil! Fancy getting mixed up with this one. If only I'd known, I'd never have opened my mouth.

FYOKLA exits.

SCENE XI

PODKOLYOSIN and KOCHKARYOV.

KOCHKARYOV

Well, my friend, this business can't wait. Let's go.

PODKOLYOSIN

Well. I haven't. It was only a thought, really--

KOCHKARYOV

Rubbish, rubbish! I'll get you married so quickly you won't feel a thing. We'll go to the bride right away and you'll see.

PODKOLYOSIN

Right now? No...

KOCHKARYOV

Why not? What's stopping you? Just look for yourself: what's so good about this single life of yours? Have a good look at your room! What do you see?

PODKOLYOSIN

A shoe, some tobacco, a broken mirror --

KOCHKARYOV

Garbage, it's all garbage! And all you can do is lie around the whole day like a stuffed beaver.

PODKOLYOSIN

It's true. I'm a mess.

KOCHKARYOV

Imagine: once you get yourself a wife you'll be a changed man. You won't recognize yourself, or anything else for that matter: over here there'll be a love seat, a little doggy, some sort of a chickadee tweeting away in a cage, a piece of artwork. Just imagine, there you are sitting on your sofa, and suddenly this tasty morsel – this pretty little thing -- is placed next to you and with her little hand she—

PODKOLYOSIN

Oh man. Those hands. Those pretty little hands.

KOCHKARYOV

My friend, it's not only hands that they have!

PODKOLYOSIN

Oh, I like it when a pretty young lady sits next to me.

KOCHKARYOV

You see: I told you.

Let's get things going. You don't need to worry about anything. The wedding dinner and the other things, I'll take care of all that. The champagne, you need a dozen bottles, at least. Half a dozen bottles of white wine, definitely. The young lady will likely have lots of aunties and little cousins – and they'll all like to drink. As for the meal itself I'll stuff you so full that you won't be able to get up from your seat.

PODKOLYOSIN

Well. I don't know. You'd think the wedding was tomorrow.

KOCHKARYOV

Why not! Why put it off? Why take your time? You've agreed, haven't you?

PODKOLYOSIN

Have I? No. I haven't agreed to anything. Not yet.

KOCHKARYOV

Now what? You said you were ready.

PODKOLYOSIN

I only said it wouldn't be a bad idea--

KOCHKARYOV

God. Why? You don't like the idea of married life? .

PODKOLY OSIN

No... I like it.

KOCHKARYOV

What's the problem?

PODKOLYOSIN

It just feels a little strange--

KOCHKARYOV

What's strange?

PODKOLYOSIN

It's strange! You've never been married, and then suddenly you're married.

KOCHKARYOV

I know what you need: I'll speak firmly to you, heart-to-heart, like a father to a son. Look: take a good look at yourself, look at the expression on your face. What do you see? A chump, a log, a man with no purpose or meaning. What are you living for? Look in the mirror. What do you see? Such a stupid face, and nothing else.

Now, imagine: there are little children running round you, and not just two or three, but six or seven, and they all look like you. As things are, you're on your own, a deputy minister, a bureaucrat, a director of God knows what. But imagine when you're married, you'll have all your baby bureaucrats around you, such little scoundrels, and one naughty one will stick out his little paws and tug on your beard. And like a little doggy, you'll go "arf, arf, arf". What could be better than that?

PODKOLYOSIN

Children are little scoundrels: they'll mess with my paper.

K OCHKAR YOY

Let them play; they'll look just like you.

PODKOLYOSIN

It could be nice: just imagine there's this little dumpling running around -- a rascally little suit -- the spitting image of me.

KOCHKARYOV

Of course it is nice. Now let's get going.

PODKOLYOSIN

I suppose we might.

KOCHKARYOV

Hey, Stepan! Come and get your master into his clothes.

PODKOLYOSIN

Listen, I know what we should do. You go on your own.

KOCHKARYOV

Are you crazy? Me, go on my own? Tell me: which of us is getting married, you or me?

PODK OLYOSIN

To be honest, I don't really feel like it; we should just leave it until tomorrow.

KOCHKARYOV

Is there any sense in that head of yours? Or are you a complete moron? First he was rearing to go, and now, suddenly, he "doesn't feel like it!" Tell me something: are you not a total slob, a complete pig--

PODKOLYOSIN

Why are you getting angry at me? What did I do?

KOCHKARYOV

You're a fool, a complete and utter fool, anyone will tell you that. Stupid, plain stupid, deputy minister or no deputy minister. Why do I bother? Look at him, lying there, the cursed bachelor! May I tell you what you look like? Like a heap of garbage, a useless idiot, a jackass—

PODKOLYOSIN

What's wrong with you? Are you out of your mind? Stepan is in the room--

KOCHKARYOV

How can I not curse you? Tell me, please? Who could stand it, not to curse you? Would anyone have the patience not to curse you? Like a decent person he decides to marry. He followed reason. And then suddenly, just out of the blue, he takes complete leave of his senses, you piece of wood, you rotting log--

PODKOLY OSIN

That'll do, that'll do! I'll go!! There's no need to shout!

KOCHKARYOV

"I'll go" he says! Of course he'll go, what else could he do but go!

(To STEPAN)

Give him his coat and hat.

PODKOLYOSIN

You have no idea of good manners.

KOCHKARYOV

All right, all right; I've stopped cursing.

PODKOLYOSIN and KOCHKARYOV exit.

SCENE XII

AGAFYA and ARINA.

A room in AGAFYA's house. AGAFYA lays out cards. ARINA is watching over her shoulder.

AGAFYA

Look, Auntie, look at the cards! Again, auntie, it's a road! There seems to be a king of diamonds here, showing some interest, tears, and a love letter; on the left the king of clubs is quite interested, but there's some evil woman getting in the way.

ARINA

Who do you think the king of clubs could be?

AGAFYA

I don't know.

ARINA

Well I do.

AGAFYA

Who?

ARINA

It's that handsome merchant, the one who sells cloth, Starikov Aleksei Dmitrievitch.

AGAFYA

Oh no, not him! I guarantee it's not him.

ARINA

Don't argue, Agafya. He has a fair head of hair. No one else can be the king of clubs.

AGAFYA

Auntie it's the king of clubs. The King! A merchant's is a far cry from a king.

ARINA

Agafya Tikhonovna, you would never talk like that if your late father was still alive. I remember how he used to pound the table with his fist and shout: "I spit in the face of any man who's ashamed to be a merchant; and I won't give my daughter's hand to any colonel. And" he would say, "no son of mine will be a suit wearing pencil pusher! A merchant" he would say, "a merchant serves his country just as well as any other man." And he would hit the table like this with all his might. His fist was the size of a bucket! To tell you the truth, if it wasn't for him your mother would've lived longer.

AGAFYA

So you want me to have a vicious husband like that?!

ARINA

Starikov isn't like that--

AGAFYA

I don't want him – I don't want him -- No, no, no! Food trickles down his beard when he eats! No, no, I don't want him!

ARINA

Where do you hope to find a nice noble husband? They don't grow on trees, you know.

AGAFYA

Fyokla will find me one. She promised to bring me the best there is.

ARINA

Fyokla is a liar, my dear.

SCENE XIII
The same, and FYOKLA.

FYOKLA

Shame on you Arina, spreading lies like that.

ARINA

Fyokla! What a surprise! So tell us. What's the news? Have you brought a man for us?

FYOKLA

Yes, yes! First let me catch my breath. I've been so busy! I went through every office in town! I marched into the ministries, the cabinets, stuck my nose in every door or window I could find... And let me tell you, pumpkin, I almost got attacked! A rival of mine -- the one who married off the Aferovs -- came up to me and said: "You! You're trying to steal the bread from my mouth, find your own territory." "You can say what you like," I told her, "but I'm prepared to do anything for my Agafya and I don't care what you think!" You should see the fine gentlemen I've rounded up for you! In all my life I've never seen such fine matches! Some will be calling today, so I've come to warn you.

AGAFYA

What do you mean: today? Fyokla, Fyokla, I'm so frightened!

FYOKLA

No need to be frightened! It's all part of life. They'll drive over and take a look, nothing more than that. And you can take a look at them; if you don't like them they'll just drive off again.

ARINA

I hope you've found some decent ones this time!

AGAFYA

How many did you find?

FYOK LA

There's six. At least.

AGAFYA

Ooh!

FYOKLA

Settle down, my dear! It's always better to have a choice, you know: if one doesn't work, another will, or another one, or another one, or—

AGAFYA

Are they noble people?

FYOKLA

All as one! So noble, noble like you've never seen before!

AGAFYA

And? Who are they? What are they like?

FYOKLA

They're the very best, top of their class. The first is Mr. Zhevakin, such a fine man, a retired sea captain, he'd be perfect for you. He says he wants his bride to be on the full-bodied side, he doesn't go for the scrawny types. Then there's Ivan he's a chief superintendent manager; he's so full of himself -- impossible to get near him. And he's so good looking, so fat! MMM! You should hear how he shouts at me: "don't waste my time with all that beauty crap," he says. "Just give me a straight answer: how much is she worth in property and furniture?" "This much in property and that much in furniture," I say. "You're lying, you" — and he throws in another word, pumpkin, but decency forbids me to repeat it. I could see it straight away: this gentleman is someone of real importance.

AGAFYA.

Is there anyone else?

FYOKLA

There's Mr. Anuchkin. Such a handsome man! His lips are like plums, plump little plums! Such a fine man. "I want my bride to be well brought-up, and she must be able to speak French," he says. He's very polite, somewhat on the German side. But he is very subtle: such fine and slender legs.

AGAFYA.

Oh no, skinny men ... I mean, for me they... I don't see anything in them.

FYOKLA

If you want someone with a bit more body, take Ivan. There's nobody better than him: he could hardly fit through this door.

AGAFYA

And how old is he?

FYOKLA

A youngster: about 50.

AGAFYA.

And what's his last name?

FYOKLA

His last name? Omelette.

AGAFYA

Omelette? That's his last name?

FYOKLA

That's his last name.

AGAFYA

Gosh, what a last name! Fyokla what is this?! If I married him I would be called Agafya Tikhonovna Omelette!

FYOKLA

My dear, it's a name. There are lots of names! If you don't like that name, then why not take Zhevakin? He'd make a splendid husband.

AGAFYA

What sort of hair does he have?

FYOKLA

A fine head of hair.

AGAFYA

And nose?

FYOKLA

His nose is good too. Everything's in the right place. He's very attractive. But there's one thing you should know: all he has in his house is his tobacco pipe; there's nothing else. No furniture.

AGAFYA

Oh. Who else is there?

FYOKLA

Well there is one more, but he's such a-- No, to hell with him!

AGAFYA

But who is he, this other one?

FYOKLA

I wasn't going to bring him up. He's a deputy minister, but he's such a lazy ass it's impossible to get him out of the house.

AGAFYA

Okay, okay. So who else is there?

FYOKLA

Isn't that enough? Look at you, calling for more when only a moment ago you were frightened.

ARINA

What's so good about them, these gentlemen of yours? I'd give you more for one merchant than all of your gentlemen.

FYOKLA

Oh no, Arina. A gentleman commands more respect.

ARINA

Who cares about respect? Take our Starikov, for example. With his fur hat and fine jacket—

FYOKLA

Oh yes? And when a gentleman comes strutting up and says: “Hey, you! Get out of my path!” Or: “Hey you, show me your very best fabric!” Your merchant will say: “At your service!” –

ARINA

The merchant doesn't have to show his fabric if he doesn't feel like it; then your gentleman will have to run around naked!

FYOKLA

A gentleman will beat the merchant in the street.

ARINA

Then the merchant will go to the police and complain.

FYOKLA

Then the gentleman--

ARINA

Fyokla your head's turned with these gentlemen of yours! There's many a time a gentleman also has to lower his hat, you know! Listen, someone's ringing.

FYOKLA

They're here! It's them!

ARINA

Who's "them"?

FYOKLA

Them -- one of the suitors.

AGAFYA

Oooh!

ARINA frantically runs around the room.

ARINA

Holy saints, have mercy! The room is such a mess. And look at the table cloth, the table cloth's filthy. A clean table-cloth! Quickly! Dunyashka! Dunyashka!

DUNYASHKA enters and also runs frantically around the room.

AGAFYA

Auntie, Auntie, what should I do? I'm still in my nightgown.

ARINA

Quick, quick, my dear: run and get dressed! Dunyashka tell him: 'Just a moment!'

DUNYASHKA runs by and shouts: 'Just a moment!'

AGAFYA

Auntie, my dress hasn't been ironed.

ARINA

Merciful God, please have pity on me! Put on another one.

FYOKLA

Why are you all still here? Quickly, Agafya, hurry up!

The doorbell rings.

You see: he's still waiting!

ARINA

Dunyashka show him in and ask him to sit and wait.

DUNYASHKA runs out. A voice is heard saying: 'Is anyone at home? They're at home, please step inside.' AGAFYA, ARINA and FYOKLA try and peep through the keyhole.

AGAFYA (*Shrieking*)

Awh! He's so fat!

All hurtle out of the room.

SCENE XIV

OMLETTE and DUNYASHKA.

OMELETTE

Well. Hmm. Okay. They said to wait. I suppose I can wait. Only for a moment or two, provided it's not too long. I only slipped out of the office for a minute. At any moment my boss might rush in and ask: "Where's the Chief Superintendent Manager?" – "He's gone fishing for a bride," they'll say. In the meantime, I might as well inspect the inventory.

Reads.

"An estate -- two story stone house..."

Surveys the room.

Correct!

Continues reading.

Two additions: a stone one and a wooden one. Well, the wooden one is a bit tacky. Still, the old woman insists that she has first-rate stuff, so I'll assume it's first-rate. "Two dozen silver spoons..." Of course, one must have silver spoons in the home! "Two fox-fur coats, four large beds, two small beds, six silk dresses, six cotton dresses, two night gowns..." oh and more! She can have that stuff, if she wants. I must send someone from my office to carefully verify everything here. Nowadays they promise you stone houses, additions, silver spoons, but once the noose is tied all you find is pillows and duvets.

The doorbell rings. DUNYASHKA runs through the room. A voice is heard saying: "Anyone at home?" – "hello?"

SCENE XV
OMELETTE and ANUCHKIN.

DUNYASHKA

Wait here. They will be with you shortly.

ANUCHKIN and OMELETTE shake hands.

OMELETTE

Good day to you.

ANUCHKIN

And good day to you, sir! What an honour, to address the father of the house!

OMELETTE

I am not the father. I don't even have any children yet.

ANUCHKIN

Oh, I'm so sorry! I beg your pardon!

OMELETTE (*Aside*)

I don't like the face of this guy: is he here for the same business as me?

(*Aloud*)

I presume that you have some business with the lady of the house?

ANUCHKIN

No, no... no business, I was just uh, strolling by.

OMELETTE (*Aside*)

The liar: "strolling by", ha! It's a wife he's after!

The doorbell rings. DUNYASHKA runs through the room. A voice is heard in the entrance-hall, saying: "Anyone in?"

SCENE XVI

The same, with ZHEVAKIN, accompanied by DUNYASHKA.

ZHEVAKIN (*to DUNYASHKA*)

Would you be so kind as to brush my coat... There's so much dust about outside, you know. And there, take off that piece of fluff. That's it! Thank you, thank you!

He turns.

What's that crawling on me?- It looks like a spider! Kill it, kill it. Oh thank you. Are you sure you got it? Did you check my back? Thank you, oh thank you! Wait, what's that. Oh it's just another little speck of dust.

ZHEVAKIN strokes the sleeves of his coat. He notices ANUCHKIN and OMELETTE.

This coat's made from Italian cloth, you know! I bought it in '65, when my squadron was stationed in Sicily; I had a uniform made from it. When I received a promotion in '74, the cloth was still like new. Then in '96 I went on a round-the-world expedition and it got just a little frayed along the seams; I retired and only had to change the lining: I've worn it ten years since and it's still just like new.

(To DUNYASHKA)

Thank you my dear. Mmm, such a pumpkin pie.

Waves his hand. He fixes himself in a mirror.

ANUCHKIN

Pardon me sir, Sicily? Did I hear you say Sicily? Is it a nice place, this Sicily?

ZHEVAKIN

Ah, a gorgeous place! We spent thirty-four days there; the view, I might tell you, is astonishing! Such mountains, pomegranate trees, and little Signorinas, so pretty you want to kiss them all.

ANUCHKIN

And are they well educated, these Signorinas?

ZHEVAKIN

Excellently brought up! Sometimes I'd be walking along the street -- sporting my new uniform -- and these beautiful women -- they have little balconies sticking out from every house and the roofs are completely flat, as flat as this floor here. Sometimes you'd look up and see these beautiful women... Of course, you don't want them to think you're ill-mannered, so you go...

Bows, with a wide flourish.

And she goes like this.

Makes a small wave with his hand.

Naturally all dressed up, all covered in lace and earrings, such a sweet little treat...

ANUCHKIN

And, if I might be so bold, what language do they use in Sicily?

ZHEVAKIN

Why, French, of course.

ANUCHKIN

French? They all speak French?

ZHEVAKIN

They do. You may find this hard to believe, but we stayed there for thirty-four days and in all that time I never heard them utter a single word in English.

ANUCHKIN

Not a single word of English?

ZHEVAKIN

Not a single word. And I'm not even talking about the city folk, you can take a simple farmer, a country fellow, and if you ask him: "I say my man, give me some bread," he won't understand, honest to God he won't understand; but say it in French: "Dateci de! pane!" or 'Portate vino!" he'll understand right away, and he'll bring it just as you asked.

OMELETTE

This Sicily must be an interesting place. I always enjoy meeting a world traveller. If I may: with whom am I speaking to?

ZHEVAKIN

Zhevakin, retired sea captain. And with whom am I holding conference?

OMELETTE

Chief Superintendent Manager, Ivan Omelette.

ZHEVAKIN (*mishearing.*)

Yes, I had a quick bite, too.

OMELETTE

No I think you misunderstood. My last name is Omelette.

ZHEVAKIN (*bowing.*)

I beg your pardon! I'm a little hard of hearing. I thought you were saying that you had eaten an Omelette.

OMELETTE

Such a nuisance. I thought of asking the court to let me change my name to Omelettovitch, but people said it sounds too much like “son-of-a-bitch”.

ZHEVAKIN

You get funny names, it's true. Our squadron had the oddest names: Dustbin, Broomstick, and the lieutenant, Sweaty. There was a man, whose name was simply Dick. The captain used to shout at him: “Hey you, Dick, come here!” We would all shout: “You're such a Dick!”.

The doorbell rings. FYOKLA runs through the room to open the door.

OMELETTE

Ah, good day, my good woman!

ZHEVAKIN

Good day; how are you today, my dear?

ANUCHKIN

Good day Fyokla!

FYOKLA (*breathless from running.*)

Thank you, gentlemen! I'm well, thank you.

FYOKLA exits. Voices are heard saying “Hello?” “Anyone in.” We hear FYOKLA offstage.

Well look at that! Who do you think you are?!

SCENE XVII

The same, with KOCHKARYOV, PODKOLYOSIN and FYOKLA.

KOCHKARYOV (*to PODKOLYOSIN*)

Now remember: all you need is courage, nothing else.

KOCHKARYOV bows to everyone in the room.

(*Aside*)

What a crowd! What's going on? These aren't suitors, I hope?

(*to FYOKLA*)

Where did you find all these fishes?

FYOKLA

They aren't "fishes", they're honest people. Your man is nothing to write home about!

KOCHKARYOV

I suppose your men are all rolling in money, with holes in their pockets. Ah. This must be the door to the lady's bedroom.

KOCHKARYOV Steps up to the door.

FYOKLA

Shame on you! You know she's still getting dressed.

KOCHKARYOV

So what? There's no harm in looking! I'll just have a little peek, nothing more.

KOCHKARYOV peers through the keyhole.

ZHEVAKIN

If I might also be so bold as to have a little look...

OMELETTE

And with your kind permission I shall have a little look too.

KOCHKARYOV (*still looking.*)

You can't see anything, gentlemen. There's something white, but it's impossible to say if it's a woman or a pillow.

They all crowd round the door, jostling for a position by the keyhole.

KOCHKARYOV

Shh! Someone's coming!

They all jump back.

SCENE XVIII

The same, with ARINA and AGAFYA.

They all bow.

ARINA

To what do we owe the pleasure of your visit?

OMELETTE

Well, madam, I saw an advertisement that said you were seeking government contracts for the transportation of timber. So, in my capacity as manager of a government office, I thought I would pay a visit to ascertain the nature of the timber in question, the quantities available, and how soon you would be able to deliver it.

ARINA

We're not in the timber business, but we thank you for your visit just the same. What is your name?

OMELETTE

Chief Superintendent Manager Omelette.

ARINA

Please take a seat.

Turns and looks at ZHEVAKIN.

Might I ask?

ZHEVAKIN

I also saw an advertisement about... something. I thought, I'll go along and see -- it turned out be a fine day...

ARINA

Might I ask, what is your name sir?

ZHEVAKIN

Retired sea captain Zhevakin the Second. There was another Zhevakin he retired before you me; he was wounded, ma'am, just below the knee. The bullet didn't touch the knee, just the muscle. So when you stand next to him, you think he will stick his knee into your bottom.

ARINA

Oh. Please take a seat.

Turning to ANUCHKIN.

And what brings you here?

ANUCHKIN

Just a neighbourly visit, ma'am.

ARINA

You wouldn't by any chance live in Tulubova's house across the way? The merchant's wife? Would you?

ANUCHKIN

No, for the time being I'm still living in Peski, but I'd like to move somewhere closer to this part of town—

ARINA

Please take a seat.

ARINA turns to KOCHKARYOV.

And you are?

KOCHKARYOV

Surely you know who I am?

Turning to AGAFYA.

Don't you recognize me, miss?

AGAFYA

As far as I know, I've never seen you before.

KOCHKARYOV

Think back. You must have seen me somewhere.

AGAFYA

I really don't know. Was it at the Biryushkin's, perhaps?

KOCHKARYOV

You've got it: at the Biryushkin's.

AGAFYA

Oh dear, I expect you haven't heard what happened to her?

KOCHKARYOV

Why yes, she got married.

AGAFYA

Oh no: she broke her leg.

ARINA

She broke it a lot. She was coming home—

AGAFYA

The driver tipped her out into the road.

ARINA

She fell in the snow--

AGAFYA

The driver ran over her leg—

KOCHKARYOV

Ah yes, now I remember: either she got married, or she broke her leg.

ARINA

Might I ask your name?

KOCHKARYOV

Why of course: Ilya Fomich Kochkaryov , in fact we're relatives. My wife is always talking about-- But allow me, allow me.

KOCHKARYOV takes PODKOLYOSIN by the arm and steers him forward.

My friend, Podkolyosin Ivan Kuzmich, deputy minister; he has his whole department running like clockwork. They do have a minister, of course, but he's busy smiling and taking breaks, so Podkolyosin here runs the whole show himself.

ARINA

What's his name again?

KOCHKARYOV

Podkolyosin. Podkolyosin Ivan Kuzmich. They do have a director, of course, but it's purely for form's sake; Podkolyosin here runs the whole show himself: he can do anything he turns his hand to, that's Podkolyosin.

ARINA

Pleased to meet you. Please, take a seat.

SCENE XIX

All, and STARIKOV.

STARIKOV (*Bows. Speaking in a lively manner, as a merchant*)

Good day, Arina Panteleyevna. The fellows said you're selling wool, ma'am.

AGAFYA (*turning away dismissively, whispering, but making sure he can hear her.*)
This is not a merchant's shop.

STARIKOV
Really! Not a good time, eh? Closed the deal without us?

ARINA
Here, here, Aleksei Dmitrievitch. Although we're not selling wool, we're pleased to see you. Please take a seat.

All seated. Silence.

OMELETTE
Odd weather these days: this morning it looked like rain, but now it doesn't.

AGAFYA
Yes, the weather is particular: sometimes it's fine, and then later on it's not. It's really disagreeable.

ZHEVAKIN
Now when I was in Sicily, it was the springtime but if you think of it, it must've been our February. I would leave the house and it would be sunny. And then, it would be rainy. When it rains it pours.

OMELETTE
It's worse if you're on your own, in weather like that. It's quite different for a married man; things are never dull for a married man. When you're on your own, however, it's worse than--

ZHEVAKIN
Death, it's worse than death.

ANUCHKIN
Yes, you could say that...

KOCHKARYOV
It's horrible! Awful! You can't enjoy life; may God spare us such a fate.

OMELETTE
Alright, forgive me, miss, for being so direct, but if you had to make your choice, what is the most appropriate service for a husband?

ZHEVAKIN

Yes! Tell me, miss, don't you want a husband familiar with the tempests of the ocean?

KOCHKARYOV

No, no, no. To my mind, the best husband is a man who is like minister, but not a minister. A man who can run an entire department single-handed!

ANUCHKIN

Why this prejudice? Why disparage a man who has committed his life to education, and has regard for the etiquette of the highest society?

OMELETTE

Tell us miss, which do you like best?

AGAFYA remains silent.

FYOKLA

Give them an answer, my dear. Tell them something.

OMELETTE

Miss?

KOCHKARYOV

Penny for your thoughts, Agafya Tikonhovna?

FYOKLA (*Aside to AGAFYA*)

Just say: "I thank you most humbly, with the greatest of pleasure." It's not polite to sit there and say nothing.

AGAFYA (*Aside to FYOKLA and ARINA*)

I'm too embarrassed, really I am. I better go. Auntie, please take my place.

FYOKLA

You can't go, you'll embarrass us all! God knows what they'll think!

AGAFYA (*Aside*)

No, no, no, I must go. I must.

AGAFYA runs away. ARINA and FYOKLA run after her.

SCENE XX

The same, expect those who left.

OMELETTE

Well now, there's a thing: they've all gone! What can it all mean?

KOCHKARYOV

Something must have happened.

ZHEVAKIN

Something to do with the ladies' toilette.

Enter FYOKLA. All run towards her, with questions.

KOCHKARYOV

Is something wrong?

FYOKLA

Wrong? Why would anything be wrong? There's nothing wrong.

KOCHKARYOV

Then why did she leave the room?

FYOKLA

You embarrassed her, that's why; all of your shameful questions, she couldn't handle it. She sends her apologies, and invites you all to return this evening for tea.

FYOKLA exits.

OMELETTE (*Aside*)

Tea! All you do in this marriage business is run-around: "Not today, please come tomorrow, oh then again maybe the day after tomorrow, but wait! I'll give it a little thought." And it's all bullshit! To hell with it, I'm a busy man, I haven't the time for this nonsense!

KOCHKARYOV (*To PODK OLYOSIN*)

Agafya is a good-looking lady, no?

PODKOLYOSIN

Yes, she's good-looking.

ZHEVAKIN

Yes, the young hostess is pretty!

KOCHKARYOV (*Aside*)

Damnit! This fool's gone and fallen in love. That could get in the way.

(*Aloud*)

I take it back; she's not pretty at all.

OMELETTE

Her nose is too big.

ZHEVAKIN

I didn't notice her nose! She's... such a perfect little daffodil.

ANUCHKIN

I think I share their view. There's something not right, not right at all... Clearly she doesn't possess proper manners. I wonder whether she knows any French.

ZHEVAKIN

Why didn't you put her to the test, say something to her in French? Perhaps she does know it.

ANUCHKIN

What makes you think I can speak French? I never had a chance to enjoy such an education. My father was a scumbag, such a pig. He never thought of teaching me French. When you're a young child it's easy to pick it up, a few good beatings and you pick it up in no time.

ZHEVAKIN

If you don't know French what possible good would it be for her to--

ANUCHKIN

Oh no, no. You're mistaken. For a woman it's quite a different matter. It's vital for a woman to know it, otherwise she would be...

He gestures.

It wouldn't be right.

OMELETTE (*Aside*)

Let them worry about her French. I'm going to have a good look at the house: if everything's up to snuff I'll have this marriage in the bag by nightfall. As for this sloppy bunch, ha! They don't appeal to the ladies.

ZHEVAKIN

I feel like smoking my pipe, so I think I'll be on my way. Care to join?

ANUCHKIN

I'll walk along with you.

STARIKOV

What a haughty-snotty bunch. Agafya Tikhonovna soon you'll think about us. My respects, gentleman.

STARIKOV bows and leaves. OMELETTE, ANUCHKIN, AND ZHEVAKIN exit.

SCENE XXI

PODKOLYOSIN and KOCHKARYOV.

PODKOLYOSIN

I suppose we should be on our way too.

KOCHKARYOV

I must say, the young lady is very charming, don't you think?

PODKOLYOSIN

Not at all! To be perfectly honest, I didn't take to her.

KOCHKARYOV

What! Why? You agreed that she's pretty.

PODKOLYOSIN

All the same, something's not right about her: her nose is too big and she doesn't know French.

KOCHKARYOV

What of it? What does she need French for?

PODKOLYOSIN

Kochkaryov, one's wife should know French.

KOCHKARYOV

What for?

PODKOLYOSIN

I can't explain: it's just not the same if she doesn't speak French!

KOCHKARYOV

Listen to that, he hears one fool say it, so he strikes up the same tune. She's a beauty, a real beauty; you won't find another like her anywhere.

PODKOLYOSIN

At first I did like the way she looks, but later, when the others started pointing out how her nose is too long, I had a closer look and I agree. Her nose is just too long.

KOCHKARYOV

You stupid fool they said all that on purpose to put you off; this is a first-rate lady! Look at her eyes: they're smashing, dammit, they talk and breathe! And her nose -- I don't know how to do it justice. Pure gold! Take a good look at it.

PODKOLYOSIN (*Smiling*)

Yes, now that you come to mention it, she is rather pretty, I must say.

KOCHKARYOV

Of course she's pretty! Listen, now that they've all gone, let's pop in and see her, we'll propose and put the lid on this whole thing.

PODKOLYOSIN

Oh no. No. I couldn't do that.

KOCHKARYOV

Why on not?!

PODKOLYOSIN

There are so many of us; let her choose for herself.

KOCHKARYOV

You're afraid of competition, is that it? If you like, I'll send the whole lot packing.

PODKOLYOSIN

How could you do that?

KOCHKARYOV

That's my business. Just give me your word, promise you will see things through.

PODKOLYOSIN

Alright. I can give you my word, I guess. As you wish. Yes. I won't try and get out of it: I want to get married.

KOCHKARYOV

Shake on it!

PODKOLYOSIN (*Shaking his hand*)

Agreed!

KOCHKARYOV

Now we're getting somewhere.

END OF ACT I

ACT II
A room in AGAFYA'S house.

SCENE I
AGAFYA alone; later KOCHKARYOV.

AGAFYA

Choices. All those choices. How do you make a choice? There's nothing harder than having to choose in a moment's notice! If there were only one or two, that wouldn't be so bad, but there are four. I must decide which one I like best. Mr. Anuchkin isn't bad-looking, although he's a bit on the thin side. Mr. Podkolyosin isn't bad-looking either. And to tell the truth, neither is Mr. Omelette, he is fat but at least he has presence. Oh dear, it's impossible; so hard to choose. Oh, and Mr. Zhevakin! He's also a man of dignity. Why do I have to choose? It's hard. So hard. Truly hard.

Now, if I could take Mr. Anuchkin's lips, and stick them on to Mr. Podkolyosin's nose, throw in some of Mr. Zhevakin's easy manner, and put all that onto Mr. Omelette's sturdy figure. I would make a decision right away. That would be something; really something.

As of now I don't know. Oh, I have a headache.

I think it's better to leave it up to chance. I will leave everything to fate – to the will of God: I'll write their names down on pieces of paper, and roll them. The one I draw will be the one I wed. What will be, will be.

AGAFYA approaches a table. She takes out scissors and paper, cuts pieces of paper, and rolls them, as she speaks.

Such an unhappy situation for a young woman – especially one in love. Men just can't understand it. They don't even want to understand it.

Here they all are! I will put them into my purse, close my eyes; then what will be, will be.

AGAFYA puts the pieces of paper into her purse, and mixes them up.

It's so scary. It's horrible. Oh God.

I'm hope I get Anuchkin. Wait, why him? Podkolyosin would be better. But, why Podkolyosin? Is he better than the others? No! No, I won't say anything else... What will be, will be.

AGAFYA puts her hand into the purse, and takes out all of the pieces of paper.

Oh no! All of them! They all came out! No wonder my heart was pounding! No: one only! One only! It must be one!

AGAFYA puts the pieces of paper back into her purse. At the same time, KOCHKARYOV creeps up behind her.

Oh, if only I could pick Zhevakin... What am I saying, I mean Anuchkin... No, no, not him either. I will leave it to chance!

KOCHKARYOV

Take Podkolyosin, he's the best.

AGAFYA (Shrieks and covers her face with both hands, scared to look behind her.)

Oooh!

KOCHKARYOV

Why are you scared? There's nothing to fear, it's only me. You should take Podkolyosin.

AGAFYA

This is so embarrassing. What are you doing here?

KOCHKARYOV

Never mind, never mind. I'm one of the family, did you forget; it's alright, you can show your face.

AGAFYA (Opens her hands, half revealing her face.)

I'd rather not.

KOCHKARYOV

You must take Podkolyosin. Really you must.

AGAFYA shrieks and hides her face again.

AGAFYA

Oooh!

KOCHKARYOV

Seriously, he's a marvel ... a remarkable man.

AGAFYA (Slowly revealing her face.)

What about the other ones? Anuchkin? He's a fine man.

KOCHKARYOV

Compared to Podkolyosin he's nothing.

AGAFYA

Why?

KOCHKARYOV

It's quite obvious. Podkolyosin is a man... he's simply a man ... a man unlike any other man.

AGAFYA

What about Omelette?

KOCHKARYOV

He's rubbish! They're all rubbish.

AGAFYA

All of them?

KOCHKARYOV

Judge for yourself, just compare them: whichever way you look at it, Podkolyosin is your man. As for the others, Omelette, Anuchkin, and all the rest – rubbish.

AGAFYA

But they're all... so modest.

KOCHKARYOV

Modest? Who's modest?! They're scoundrels, drunks! Do you want to be beaten up? The morning of your wedding?

AGAFYA

Oh God! Tragedy – such a tragedy. Nothing worse.

KOCHKARYOV

Nothing worse.

AGAFYA.

So; in your opinion, I should take Podkolyosin?

KOCHKARYOV

Podkolyosin, it has to be Podkolyosin.

(Aside)

Things seem to be going according to plan. Podkolyosin's sitting in a coffee shop, I'd better run and get him.

AGAFYA

Do you think – Podkolyosin?

KOCHKARYOV

Absolutely.

AGAFYA

What about the others? Should I send them away?

KOCHKARYOV

Send them away, of course.

AGAFYA

It's so embarrassing. How could I do that?

KOCHKARYOV

Why is it embarrassing? Tell them you're still too young and you don't want to get married.

AGAFYA

They won't believe me; won't they ask why?

KOCHKARYOV

On second thought, if you really want to be rid of them, say: 'Clear off!'

AGAFYA

Goodness -- how can I say that!

KOCHKARYOV

Just try it. Take it from me: when they hear that, they'll take to their heels.

AGAFYA

But it seems insulting. Rude even.

KOCHKARYOV

So, why should you care? You'll never see them again.

AGAFYA

It doesn't seem right, somehow. Won't they get angry?

KOCHKARYOV

So what if they do? Will some harm come to you? The worst that can happen is one of them spits in your eye.

AGAFYA

Spits in my eye!

KOCHKARYOV

What's so bad about that? I know a fellow like that: a handsome man -- cheeks like apples; anyway, he gave his boss such a hard time, always bugging him for a raise. Finally the old man couldn't stand it any longer and fired a gob of spit in his face! "There's your raise," he said, "now get the hell out of here!" In the end he gave him his raise, though. So you see! What does it matter if they spit in your face? If you had no handkerchief, it would be different, but there it is right there, in your pocket. Take it out and give your face a wipe.

The doorbell rings.

There's someone at the door: it must be one of them; there isn't another way out, by any chance?

AGAFYA

Yes, of course, there's a back staircase. I'm shaking -- I'm distraught.

KOCHKARYOV

Presence of mind, that's all you'll need. Adieu!

(Aside)

Now I must fetch Podkolyosin!

SCENE II

AGAFYA and OMELETTE.

OMELETTE

I specifically came a bit earlier, miss, so we could have a little chat, at our leisure. Now, miss, with regards to the question of rank, I believe you know my position: I am a chief superintendent manager, I'm well thought of by my superiors, obeyed by my subordinates. There's only one thing I lack: a lady-companion on the path of life.

AGAFYA

Yes.

OMELETTE

And now I've found just such a companion. This companion is you. Tell me straight: yes or no?

OMELETTE looks at AGAFYA'S shoulder.

(Aside)
What a view.

AGAFYA
I'm still too young. I'm not ready for marriage yet.

OMELETTE
What was all that business with the matchmaker? Maybe you meant to say something else? Make yourself clear?

The doorbell rings.

The devils won't let me do my business!

SCENE III
The same, with ZHEVAKIN.

ZHEVAKIN
Forgive me, miss perhaps I'm too early—

ZHEVAKIN turns around and notices OMELETTE.

Ah, you have company already. My respects to you, Mr. Omelette.

OMELETTE *(Aside)*
To hell with you and your respects!

(Aloud)
So what about it, Miss? Just say the word: yes or no?

The doorbell rings; OMELETTE spits angrily.

That confounded ring again!

SCENE IV
The same, with ANUCHKIN.

ANUCHKIN
Perhaps I'm a little on the early side, miss, but I am impelled hither by—

ANUCHKIN turns and notices the others. He shrieks, and bows.

Gentlemen, my respects!

OMELETTE (*Aside*)

To hell with all these respects! Why the devil did they have to come so soon; I wish I'd broken their scrawny legs!

(*Aloud*)

So what about it? Miss, please make your decision I'm a busy man and my time is limited: yes or no?

AGAFYA (*timid*)

Oh there's no need, no need...

(*Aside*)

I haven't the faintest idea what I'm saying.

OMELETTE

What do you mean, no need? In what sense is there no need?

AGAFYA

It's nothing, nothing at all. That is, I didn't mean...

(*Takes a deep breath*)

CLEAR OFF!

(*Aside*)

Oh my God, did I really say that?

OMELETTE

'Clear off '? What's that supposed to mean: 'Clear off '? What exactly do you mean?

OMELETTE takes a step forward.

AGAFYA (*Looking at his face.*)

Ah!! He's going to kill me!

AGAFYA shrieks and flees. OMELETTE stands in astonishment. Hearing the scream, ARINA enters.

ARINA (*Looking at his face, shrieks*)

Ah! He'll kill me!

ARINA runs away.

OMELETTE

What the hell is going on!

The doorbell rings.

KOCHKARYOV [off]

Go on, go on! Don't stop there!

PODKOLYOSIN [off]

You go on ahead. I'll only be a moment: I need to get my clothes in order; my hat is crooked.

KOCHKARYOV [off]

If I leave you, you'll give me the slip.

PODKOLYOSIN [off]

No, I won't! I promise, I won't!

SCENE V

OMELETTE, ZHEVAKIN, ANUCHKIN, and KOCHKARYOV.

KOCHKARYOV .

Typical: trust him to fix his hat.

OMELETTE (*turning to KOCHKARYOV*)

Tell me, what has gotten into that young lady? Is she stupid?

KOCHKARYOV .

Why do you ask? Did something happen?

OMELETTE .

It was quite extraordinary: she ran out of the room, screaming: "He's going to kill me! He's going to kill me!"

KOCHKARYOV .

Really, the young woman ran from you? How shocking. She does have these funny turns, you know?

OMELETTE

Tell me, are you related?

KOCHKARYOV

Yes we are related.

OMELETTE

How are you related? Can you tell me?

KOCHKARYOV

To be honest I'm not sure. Either my mother's aunt is something to her father, or my father is something to her mother's aunt. My wife knows all this; that's her business.

OMELETTE

And has she been having these funny turns for a long time?

KOCHKARYOV

Yes, since she was young.

OMELETTE

Of course it would be nice if she had more sense, but it doesn't matter. As long as all the property and furniture are present and correct, I suppose.

KOCHKARYOV

But she has nothing.

OMELETTE

What? What about the house?

KOCHKARYOV

You should see how it's built: it looks like the mason was drunk when he laid the brick, and inside the walls there are all sorts of woodchips, shavings, that kind of nonsense.

OMELETTE

You're not serious!

KOCHKARYOV

Of course I am. Don't you know how they build houses nowadays? Any old how just so long as they can raise a mortgage.

OMELETTE

Well, the house isn't mortgaged, at any rate.

KOCHKARYOV

Who told you that? That's the whole point: not only has it been mortgaged, they haven't even paid the interest for the last two years. Added to which, there's a brother who has his eye on the place; a litigator, likes to sue: he'd strip his mother, such a scoundrel.

OMELETTE

But the old witch told me ... The cheat, the crooked--

(Aside)

On the other hand, he might be lying. I'll give the old woman a proper grilling, and if what he says is all true--

ANUCHKIN

May I also trouble you with a question? I must confess, I'm not acquainted with the French tongue, and so. I find it extremely hard to judge whether a woman knows French or not. With regard to the young woman, does she, errr...?

KOCHKARYOV

Not a syllable.

ANUCHKIN

No!

KOCHKARYOV

Take it from me: I know it for a fact. She and my wife went to the same school and she was well known for being lazy. The French teacher used to hit her with a stick--

ANUCHKIN

Imagine – I knew it from the very beginning --- from the moment I saw her -- I had a premonition that she didn't know French.

OMELETTE

The hell with you and your French! How did that matchmaker ... just you wait! You should have heard how she described Agafya! What a picture -- genius! "An estate," she says, "a beautiful stone house, with silver spoons" — she made it sound better than the stuff you read in fairy tales! That old witch! Just you wait--

SCENE VI

The same, with FYOKLA

All three suitors break into screams: one line cannot be heard over the other

OMELETTE

The home is rubbish! You lying toad!

ANUCHKIN

She doesn't know any French, Fyokla!

KOCHKARYOV

Come over here, you old hag – they'll show you!

FYOKLA

What! What! Stop screaming! What do you all want?!

OMELETTE

The house was made by a drunk mason -- you old boot-sole -- there are no extensions -- you lied through your teeth -- and what about the silver spoons--

FYOKLA

I don't know, I didn't build it!

OMELETTE (*Stomping his foot*)

And it's mortgaged! You should be eaten alive by devils!

FYOKLA

Look at you -- stomping your foot! Anyone else would be grateful for my troubles -- taking care of you!

ANUCHKIN

Fyokla, you told me that she could speak French!

FYOKLA

She can, my dear, and German too.

ANUCHKIN

It seems she only speaks Russian.

FYOKLA

What's wrong with that? Russian is easier to understand, so she speaks Russian. It's a famous language: all the saints spoke Russian.

OMELETTE

You mark my words, you won't get away with this! One of these days I'll march you into the police station, then you'll find out what happens when you deceive honest people. You'll see! As for the young lady, tell her from me that she's a scoundrel! Do you hear? A scoundrel!

OMELETTE exits.

FYOKLA

Look at him! Just because he's the fattest in the room, he thinks he can lord it over everyone else. Let me tell you: you're a scoundrel yourself, that's what you are!

ANUCHKIN

I must confess, my dear Fyokla, I never imagined for a moment that you would deceive me like this. Had I known that the young lady's education was somewhat deficient, well... I would never have shown my face in this house. So there.

ANUCHKIN exits.

FYOKLA

Have you all lost your wits, or perhaps you've had one too many? You're such a picky, finicky lot! It's that stupid education of yours!

SCENE VII

FYOKLA, KOCHKARYOV, ZHEVAKIN

KOCHKARYOV laughs at FYOKLA.

FYOKLA (*To KOCHKARYOV*)

What are you laughing about?

KOCHKARYOV (*Laughing*)

Matchmaker, you call yourself! Matchmaker! Mistress of the matrimonial art! Old hand at the marriage business!

KOCHKARYOV continues laughing.

FYOKLA

Ha, ha, very funny! Your mother was crazy to have you!

FYOKLA exits in frustration.

SCENE VIII

KOCHKARYOV, ZHEVAKIN

KOCHKARYOV (*still laughing*)

Oh, I can't do it, it's too much!

ZHEVAKIN also starts to laugh.

Oh dear, I'm exhausted. If I laugh any more, I'll burst every vein in my body.

KOCHKARYOV collapses, tired of laughing.

ZHEVAKIN

I'm very pleased to see you have such a cheerful disposition. Back when I sailed to Sicily we had a young sailor named Petukhov: he also liked a good laugh. You only had to show him one finger -- that's all -- and he'd start laughing, honest to God, he'd laugh all day. Before you knew it you'd be laughing too!

KOCHKARYOV (*taking a breath*)

Holy God, have mercy! What did she think she was doing, the stupid woman? How did she imagine she was going to get anyone married? Now, when I fix a marriage, I do it right.

ZHEVAKIN

Really? You can arrange marriages?

KOCHKARYOV

Certainly! I'll marry anyone to anyone.

ZHEVAKIN

In that case, would you marry me to the young lady here?

KOCHKARYOV

You? Why?

ZHEVAKIN

What do you mean, why do I want to get married? That's a rather peculiar question! It's obvious why.

KOCHKARYOV

But surely you know she has no assets, none at all!

ZHEVAKIN

All the less to worry about. It's a pity, of course, but she's such a delightful young lady, with such exquisite manners, you could get by with just that.

Gesturing with his hands.

A little room. A little screen or a partition. A sofa--

KOCHKARYOV

But what is it about her that you like so much?

ZHEVAKIN

To tell you the truth, the thing I liked most was her plumpness. I'm very partial to plumpness in a woman.

KOCHKARYOV (*Aside*)

And he's all skin and bones.

(*Aloud*)

No, you definitely shouldn't marry.

ZHEVAKIN

Why not?

KOCHKARYOV

You shouldn't, that's all. I mean -- between you and me -- what sort of figure do you have? Chicken legs.

ZHEVAKIN

Chicken legs?

KOCHKARYOV

Chicken legs -- Exactly! Look at yourself!

ZHEVAKIN

What do you mean, chicken legs?

KOCHKARYOV

You have legs like a chicken, that's what.

ZHEAKIN

I can't help feeling that there may be something rather personal about this...

KOCHKARYOV

I'm only telling you because I know you're a man of discernment; I wouldn't say it to anyone else. I will find you a wife but not this one.

ZHEVAKIN

No thank you, I do not wish to marry anyone else. Please be so kind as to marry me to this one.

KOCHKARYOV

Very well, but on one condition: you must not interfere and you must not show your face. I'll arrange everything in your absence.

ZHEVAKIN

But how can you do it all without me? Surely I'll have to show myself at some point.

KOCHKARYOV

No need. Go home and wait; it'll all be done by this evening.

ZHEVAKIN (*wringing his hands*)

This is better than expected! Don't you need some sort of reference? The captain's log from my days abroad perhaps? The young lady might wish to satisfy her curiosity -- it'll only take a moment to fetch them.

KOCHKARYOV

I need nothing, just run along home. I'll give you a call before the day is done.

KOCHKARYOV pushes ZHEVAKIN out.

Like hell I will.

What's going on? What's keeping Podkolyosin? Something's up. He can't still be adjusting his hat! I should go and fetch him.

SCENE IX

KOCHKARYOV, and AGAFYA

AGAFYA (*looking round*)

Have they all gone? No one left?

KOCHKARYOV

They've all gone, no one's left.

AGAFYA

Oh thank God, I was shaking! I've never been so scared in my life. That Mr. Omelette is so terrifying! He would be such a tyrant to any woman he married. I keep thinking he'll come back at any minute.

KOCHKARYOV

Don't worry, he won't come back. I'll wager my own head that neither of those two show their faces here again.

AGAFYA

What about the third one?

KOCHKARYOV

Third one?

ZHEVAKIN (*Sticking his head round the door*).

I'm just dying to hear what sort of things she says about me... my little daffodil!

AGAFYA

Mr. Zhevakin!

ZHEVAKIN (*Wringing his hands*)

Here we go, here we go!

KOCHKARYOV

Ah him! I wondered who you had in mind. A complete nobody, a half-wit!

ZHEVAKIN

What's all this? I don't understand—

AGAFYA

But to look at he seems so pleasant.

KOCHKARYOV

A drunk!

ZHEVAKIN

A what? I don't follow, honest to God, I don't follow.

AGAFYA

Not a drunk, not that too?

KOCHKARYOV

Believe you me, he's a pervert and degenerate!

ZHEVAKIN (*loudly*)

Wait a minute, stop that -- that's not at all what I wanted you to say. A word or two in my favour, a little praise perhaps -- but to speak of me like this -- thank you most kindly, but you can save that for someone else!

KOCHKARYOV (*Aside*)

Why the devil did he have to come back?

(*To AGAFYA*)

Just look, you can see for yourself: he can barely stay on his feet. You should see how he wobbles around! You must send him packing; get rid of him!

(*Aside*)

That Podkolyosin's still not here. The wretch! I'll show him!

KOCHKARYOV exits.

SCENE X
AGAFYA and ZHEVAKIN

ZHEVAKIN *(Aside)*

He promised to sing my praises and instead he abuses me! What a man, what a strange man!

(Aloud)

Miss, you must not believe--

AGAFYA

Forgive me, I'm not well. I have a slight headache.

AGAFYA tries to leave.

ZHEVAKIN

Is there something about me that's not to your liking?

(Gesturing to his head)

Is it the bald spot I have here?

It's nothing, it's a medical condition; the hair will grow back in no time.

AGAFYA

I couldn't care less about what you have.

ZHEVAKIN

Let me assure you, miss, when I put on a black suit it gives me a lighter complexion.

AGAFYA

I'm so happy for you. Goodbye!

AGAFYA exits

SCENE XI
ZHEVAKIN alone

ZHEVAKIN

Miss, I ask you, please tell me the truth: why? What is it? Do I have some fault, is that it?

She's gone! So strange! This is the seventeenth time this has happened to me, and always in the exact same way: at first everything is fine, then when we're about to seal the deal -- would you believe it? They turn me down.

Pacing around the room.

Bride number seventeen! What does she want, really? What could I do? What right does she have?

Thinking.

I could understand it if there was something wrong with me. But I don't think you could say that.

Looks at himself.

Nature's done right by me.

I really don't get it! Perhaps I should go home and dig around for those little poems of mine. No young lady could possibly resist them...

I don't understand it! Everything seemed to be going so well...

ZHEVAKIN exits.

SCENE XII

PODKOLYOSIN and KOCHKARYOV

KOCHKARYOV (*looking behind him*)

He didn't notice us! Did you see the long face on him?

PODKOLYOSIN

He got rejected, just like the others?

KOCHKARYOV

Refused at point-blank.

PODKOLYOSIN (*Smiling, content*)

It must be horrible to be turned down like that.

KOCHKARYOV

Yes awful! Horribly awful.

PODKOLYOSIN

I still can't believe it. Did she really say she prefers me to all the others?

KOCHKARYOV

What do you mean: "prefers?" She's crazy about you. Its true love: you should have heard the sweet names she called you. She's boiling -- boiling with passion!

PODKOLYOSIN (*Chuckles*)

It's true: women have a way with words. Words you and I could never think up: my little mugsy-wugsy, my cocksy-cockroach, my witty kitty...

KOCHKARYOV

Those are nothing! Just wait until you get married: in the first two months you'll hear something really special. You'll hear words, my friend, words that will make you melt.

PODKOLYOSIN (*Chuckles*)

No!

KOCHKARYOV

I'm an honest man. Listen, there's no time to waste. Make your proposal to her, open your heart, and ask for her hand with no further ado.

PODKOLYOSIN

What do you mean: "with no further ado"?

KOCHKARYOV

With no further ado! And here she is!

SCENE XIII

Same, with AGAFYA.

KOCHKARYOV

I give you, miss, this mortal you see before you. Never before was a man so struck by the mighty forces of love -- God help him, a fate I would not wish on my worst enemy...

PODKOLYOSIN (*Nudging*)

Don't overdo it.

KOCHKARYOV (*To PODKOLYOSIN*)

Its fine!

(*To AGAFYA*)

You have to be forward with him: he's very shy; try and let yourself go. Twitch your eyebrows a little -- like this. Or give him a look -- a sudden look -- and knock him out.

Look at him, the scoundrel! Or wave your shoulder under his nose, like this. It's a pity you put on this dress. Maybe it's okay.

(Aloud)

I will leave you two! I might take a little peek at the dining-room and kitchen, I need to start making the arrangements: the caterer will be here soon, to take the dinner order, and the wine may already be on its way... Farewell!

(To PODKOLYOSIN)

Be brave!

KOCHKARYOV exits.

SCENE XIV

PODKOLYOSIN and AGAFYA.

AGAFYA

Please, dear sir, do take a seat.

They sit. Silence.

PODKOLYOSIN

Tell me, miss, are you fond of canoeing?

AGAFYA

Canoeing?

PODKOLYOSIN

In the summer it's quite fun to go canoeing.

AGAFYA

Yes, I go canoeing with friends sometimes.

PODKOLYOSIN

I wonder what kind of summer it'll be.

AGAFYA

A good one, I hope.

They sit in silence.

PODKOLYOSIN

Tell me, miss, what's your favourite flower?

AGAFYA

I like flowers with a strong scent; carnations.

PODKOLYOSIN

Flowers go well with women.

AGAFYA

Yes, it's a very pleasant pastime.

They sit in silence.

AGAFYA

What church did you go to last Sunday?

PODKOLYOSIN

The Ascension. The week before I went to another one. But if you ask me, it doesn't matter which church you go to. The one that's prettiest inside is best.

They sit in silence. PODKOLYOSIN drums his fingers.

PODKOLYOSIN

The holiday will be soon.

AGAFYA

Yes, in a month, I think.

PODKOLYOSIN

Less than a month, even.

AGAFYA

It's sure to be fun.

PODKOLYOSIN .

Today's the eighth. Ninth, tenth, eleventh... twenty-two days to go.

AGAFYA

So soon!

PODKOLYOSIN

And I'm not even counting today.

They sit in silence.

PODKOLYOSIN

Aren't we a splendid nation!

AGAFYA

How so?

PODKOLYOSIN

The workers, I mean. I walked past a house on the way to the department, and the window washer was there. Just washing away.

AGAFYA

Is that so? Which street?

PODKOLYOSIN

On the street I take every day to the office. I have to report to the office every day.

They sit in silence. PODKOLYOSIN begins to drum his fingers again. He takes is hat and bows.

AGAFYA

You're not leaving?

PODKOLYOSIN

I'm boring you.

AGAFYA

Oh no, not at all! Actually, I must thank you for passing the time so wonderfully.

PODKOLYOSIN *(Smiling)*

I thought I was boring you.

AGAFYA

No, not at all.

PODKOLYOSIN

Well, in that case, perhaps you might allow me to call you, one evening perhaps...

AGAFYA

I'd like that.

They exchange bows. PODKOLYOSIN exits.

SCENE XV
AGAFYA alone.

What a man! What a fine man. You cannot not fall in love with a man like that. He's so modest and so thoughtful. His friend was right. A pity he left so soon -- I would have liked to listen to him. Such a pleasure to talk to him. The best thing about him is that he doesn't waste time on small talk. I would love to have said a couple more things, but I was nervous and my courage failed me -- my heart started to flutter. Such a fine man. I must go and tell Auntie!

AGAFYA exits.

SCENE XVI
PODKOLYOSIN and KOCHKARYOV enter.

KOCHKARYOV

Why do you want to go home? What rubbish! Why go home?

PODKOLYOSIN

Why should I stay here? I've said all that needs to be said!

KOCHKARYOV

You mean, you've opened your heart to her?

PODKOLYOSIN

Well, not exactly; I haven't quite opened my heart yet.

KOCHKARYOV

Now he tells me! And why not?

PODKOLYOSIN

What do you expect? We didn't even danced around the subject, so how was I supposed to say, out of the blue: "Miss, let's get married!"

KOCHKARYOV

What did you say, then? What were you talking about for the last half hour?

PODKOLYOSIN

We discussed all sorts of things, and I'm very happy with the way it went; we spent time in the most agreeable fashion.

KOCHKARYOV

Tell me this: when are you going to propose? We have to leave for the church in an hour!

PODKOLYOSIN

What, are you -- crazy? Today? The church?

KOCHKARYOV

Why not?

PODKOLYOSIN

Today? The wedding?

KOCHKARYOV

You gave your word; you said you would be ready as soon as I got rid of the others.

PODKOLYOSIN

We can't do it right away; give it a month, at least, let me think on it.

KOCHKARYOV

A month!

PODKOLYOSIN

Yes, a month!

KOCHKARYOV

A month! Have you lost your senses?

PODKOLYOSIN

Less than a month is no good.

KOCHKARYOV

But I've already given the caterer the dinner order, you door knob! Listen to me, Podkolyosin, don't be an ass, my dear friend: you must get married now.

PODKOLYOSIN

What are you saying? How can I get married now?

KOCHKARYOV

Please, Podkolyosin, I beg you. If you won't do it for yourself, then do it for me.

PODKOLYOSIN

It can't be done.

KOCHKARYOV

It can, my dear friend, anything can be done. I beg you, please don't, please don't make a scene, my dear, dear friend!

PODKOLYOSIN

It can't be done, and that's that. It wouldn't be right.

KOCHKARYOV

What do you mean, it wouldn't be right? Where did you hear that? Judge for yourself: you're an clever man. I'm not saying this to flatter you; I'm not saying this because you're a deputy minister; I'm saying this because I truly like you. Stop this, my dear friend, try and see things reasonably.

PODKOLYOSIN

No, I can't--

KOCHKARYOV

Podkolyosin! Friend! Buddy! Old pal! Do you want me to get down on my knees?

PODKOLYOSIN

Well—

KOCHKARYOV gets down on his knees.

KOCHKARYOV

Look, I'm on my knees! I'm begging you, look. Do me this one favour and I will never forget it, my dearest friend--

PODKOLYOSIN

I can't brother, I really can't--

KOCHKARYOV

Please don't be so stubborn!

PODKOLYOSIN

It can't be done, old friend, and that's the truth.

KOCHKARYOV

You stupid man!

PODKOLYOSIN

Swear away, if you must.

KOCHKARYOV

You stupid, stupid man! I've never known anyone so stupid.

PODKOLYOSIN

Go on, curse away!

KOCHKARYOV

Why did I try so hard, why did I go to all this trouble? It was all for your own good, you idiot! What's it to me?

PODKOLYOSIN

Who asked you?

KOCHKARYOV

That's it! I give up; I couldn't care less about you and this marriage business.

PODKOLYOSIN

Who asked you to go to all this trouble? I certainly didn't! Fine, go ahead, drop the whole thing.

KOCHKARYOV

Don't you see, you'll be done for, you'll be lost without me! If I don't marry you off, you'll continue to play the fool for the rest of your life.

PODKOLYOSIN

So? What's that to you?

KOCHKARYOV

I'm concerned about your welfare, you jackass.

PODKOLYOSIN

I don't need your concern.

KOCHKARYOV

Then, go to hell!

PODKOLYOSIN

Very well, I will.

KOCHKARYOV.

Go then! It's that way; over there!

PODKOLYOSIN

Thank you, I will.

KOCHKARYOV

And while you're at it, I hope you break your leg! Yeah! I wish, from the very bottom of my heart, that a drunken cab driver rams his cab right into your gullet! You're nothing but an old rotting paper bag – deputy minister, ha! Take it from me: it's all over between us; I hope I never see you again!

PODKOLYOSIN

Okay, fine.

PODKOLYOSIN exits.

KOCHKARYOV

Go rot in hell with your old friend the devil!

(Shouts after him)

You stupid man!

SCENE XVII

KOCHKARYOV alone.

Was there ever another like him? What an idiot! Idiot. I'm one to talk. Let me ask you, all of you, tell me what you think: am I not a moron, a complete and utter jackass? Why do I go to all this trouble, shouting myself hoarse? You tell me: what's he to me? We're not even related! And what am I to him? His maid, his assistant, his crony? What do I care? Why tire myself out like this -- may the bastard rot in hell! You wouldn't catch anyone else doing all this for him! The no good, rotten -- what a sickening, plain looking face he has! I'd like to take you, you stupid stubborn man, and whack you on the nose, the ears, the mouth, the teeth -- I'd beat you black and blue!

Then, to add insult to injury, he just doddles off home without so much as an au revoir, salut, or even an adieu; it's all water off a duck's back to him -- that's what makes it so unbearable! He'll go back home and lie on his couch smoking. Such a waste of a man! There are some ugly faces in this world, but his; you couldn't make one as ugly as his if you tried!

No -- I can't stand for it -- I'll go and get him! I can't let him off the hook -- that evil ugly bastard IS. Getting. Married!

KOCHKARYOV exits.

SCENE XVIII
Enter AGAFYA.

AGAFYA

My heart is beating so fast, and I can't understand why. Wherever I look I see Podkolyosin. He is standing, there. It's true, though, you can't escape your fate. I keep trying to think about something different – I tried playing cards -- but no matter what I set my mind to Podkolyosin keeps popping up in my head. Oh my god. I'm about to take the plunge!

They'll take me from here to the church... they'll leave me alone. Alone with a man -- ooh! It gives me the shivers just thinking about it. Farewell to my life as a single woman!

AGAFYA starts to cry.

I've been happy for so long. There I was, living my single life and now I have to get married!

There'll be no end to my troubles: children –little boys, always fighting; and there'll be little girls and they'll grow up and they'll have to find husbands too. All fine if they find kind ones. But what if they marry drunks? Or gamblers?

AGAFYA crys again.

I had no chance to enjoy life as a single woman -- I'm not even 27 and I'm getting married...

AGAFYA changes her voice.

Where's Podkolyosin?

SCENE XIX
AGAFYA, PODKOLYOSIN, and KOCHKARYOV.

KOCHKARYOV pushes PODKOLYOSIN onstage through the door with both hands.

PODKOLYOSIN (*stumbling*)

I have come to see you, miss, to explain something.... But first I need to ask you something: will you think it's weird?

AGAFYA (*looking down*)

Weird?

PODKOLYOSIN

Please, miss, tell me the truth: will you think it's odd?

AGAFYA (*looking down*)

Odd -- I don't understand.

PODKOLYOSIN

Tell me the truth: you will think it's strange, what I'm about to tell you?

AGAFYA

Strange? No, whatever you say --

PODKOLYOSIN

Ah, but you've never heard anything like this. What I wanted to say is...

AGAFYA lowers her eyes further. KOCHKARYOV comes in unnoticed and stands behind PODKOLYOSIN.

Maybe I should wait until later.

AGAFYA

No tell me, what is it?

PODKOLYOSIN

It's er ... To be honest, I was going to ask you something, but I'm still not sure...

KOCHKARYOV (*Aside, cross*)

Oh god, what a man! A parody of a man, a satire of a man!

AGAFYA

What's there to be sure about?

PODKOLYOSIN

It's just that I keep having doubts.

KOCHKARYOV (*Aloud*)

This is impossible, so utterly impossible! Look here, miss, listen to me: he's asking for your hand, he wants to tell you he cannot live without you. The only thing he's asking; do marry him.

PODKOLYOSIN (*Pushes him back, very alarmed. Aside to Kochkaryov.*)

For God sakes, man, what do are you doing!

KOCHKARYOV

Well, miss, what of it? Will you make this mortal man a happy man?

AGAFYA

I'm not quite sure how I could make someone a happy man ... But in fact. Yes. Yes I will.

KOCHKARYOV

Of course, of course you will! See look at that! We could've done this ages ago. Give me your hands!

PODKOLYOSIN

Just a moment!

PODKOLYOSIN tries to whisper something into KOCHKARYOV'S ear. KOCHKARYOV makes a fist, and furrows his brow. PODKOLYOSIN gives KOCHKARYOV his hand.

KOCHKARYOV (*Joining their hands together*)

There! I give my consent and approval to your union. Marriage is a wonderful thing... Well. It's not like hailing a cab and driving off into the sunset – no not that kind of wonderful; it's a commitment, it's an obligation...

Oh look at that. We're pressed for time, so I'll tell you about the obligation stuff after the wedding. Come on, Podkolyosin, give the bride a kiss.

AGAFYA lowers her eyes.

It's all right, miss, it's the way world. Let him kiss you.

PODKOLYOSIN

With your permission, miss, if I might be so bold.

PODKOLYOSIN kisses her hand, and holds it.

What a charming little hand! How is it possible to have such a charming hand? With your permission, miss, I would like us to marry here and now.

AGAFYA

What! No, isn't that a little fast--

PODKOLYOSIN

I wish it could be sooner – let's get married this very minute! This second!

KOCHKARYOV

Bravo! Well said! Such a noble man! Honestly, I always believed in you. You dear lady, hurry up and go get dressed: to tell the truth, I already sent for the guests, they went straight to the church. Your wedding dress is ready, I'm sure.

AGAFYA

It's been ready for ages. I'll be dressed in a moment!

SCENE XX

KOCHKARYOV and PODKOLYOSIN.

PODKOLYOSIN

Well, old pal, I am grateful! I see what a good thing you've done for me. My own father wouldn't have done what you've done for me. You acted out of pure friendship and for that I thank you. This coming spring I will pay a visit to the grave of your late father, and tell him what you've done for me.

KOCHKARYOV

Don't mention it, old pal, the pleasure was mine. Hang on a moment: let me give you a kiss.

KOCHKARYOV kisses PODKOLYOSIN on one cheek. Then the other cheek.

May God give you a life of happiness.

KOCHKARYOV kisses him again.

Of health. And prosperity. With a town full of children.

PODKOLYOSIN

Thank you, brother. Finally, I've learned the true meaning of life. Now I see a new world in front of me in which all is alive with motion, living, feeling, sort of evaporating somehow – it's hard to explain, really. But before this, I saw nothing. I didn't understand a thing! In fact I was totally ignorant, I simply lived from day to day, like any other man.

KOCHKARYOV

Good! I'm very happy for you! Now let me run along and check on the arrangements; I will be back in a minute.

(Aside)

I'd better hide his hat, just in case.

KOCHKARYOV picks up PODKOLYOSIN's hat and takes it with him.

SCENE XXI
PODKOLYOSIN alone.

It's true, though. Did I have a purpose to my life? No. I had no idea, no idea at all. Yes, what sort of life did I have as a bachelor? What purpose did I serve, what good did I do? I lived my life: I did my job, I went to the office, I had dinners and I slept. I was an empty man – the most simple, ordinary man!

Now I see how stupid all those people are who don't get married; when you think about it, it's amazing how many of them there are, just wandering aimlessly with their eyes closed. If I were a king, I'd issue a decree that everyone must get married. Absolutely everybody. In my kingdom there wouldn't be a single unmarried person!

There's a thought: in a few minutes I'll be a married man. You get married and suddenly you find yourself in heaven, such bliss you can only see in fairy tales, bliss you can't describe, there are no words for it. No words.

Silence.

But then again; it's a funny thought. A scary thought. Terrifying! You tie yourself up, for the rest of your life, for the century, forever! Once it's done there's no getting out of it, no second thoughts, nothing: it's done and cannot be undone. In fact, there's already no going back: any minute now I'll be tying the knot. I can't get out of it now -- the guests are waiting, the preparations have been made.

Is it really too late to leave? Yes. Yes! Of course it is: the guests are standing in the doorway. They'll ask why. It can't be done, it's not possible.

Oh look: there's a window. It's open. I can jump through it? No, I can't. It's not proper. It's too high. Could I? No. It wouldn't be right. Besides it's too high up.

PODKOLYOSIN goes to the window.

Actually, it's not all that bad. No, I can't. I don't even have my hat. I can't possibly go without my hat! Hmm, come to think about it, I could. Why don't I give it a try?

He climbs on the window ceil.

God bless me!

He jumps onto the street.

That was really high.

We can hear the voice of a cab driver: "ready to go, sir?". Noise of cab driving off.

SCENE XXII
AGAFYA and FYOKLA

AGAFYA enters in her wedding gown. She enters with her head down, very shy.

AGAFYA

What's come over me! I feel so embarrassed, and I'm trembling all over. I wish Podkolyosin could just disappear -- just slip out of the room.

She looks around timidly.

Where is he? There's no one here. Where did he go?

She opens the door to the hallway, and speaks down the hall.

Fyokla, where did Podkolyosin go?

FYOKLA (*off*)

He's there.

AGAFYA

"There"? Where?

FYOKLA (*Enters*)

He was sitting here, in this room.

AGAFYA

He's not here now, can't you see!

FYOKLA

He can't have left the room; I was sitting in the hall.

AGAFYA

Where is he then?

FYOKLA

I can't think where; perhaps he left by another exit, down the back stairs, or maybe he's sitting in Arina's room?

AGAFYA

Auntie! Auntie!

SCENE XXIII
The same, and ARINA.

ARINA enters all dressed up.

ARINA

What's going on?

AGAFYA

Is Podkolyosin in your room?

ARINA

No, he should be here. He hasn't come to see me.

FYOKLA

He wasn't in the hall either, I was sitting there the whole time.

AGAFYA

He's not here: you can see for yourself!

SCENE XXIV
The same with KOCHKARYOV.

KOCHKARYOV

What's going on?

AGAFYA

Podkolyosin's not here.

KOCHKARYOV

"Not here"? Has he gone?

AGAFYA

No, he hasn't gone either.

KOCHKARYOV

What do you mean: he's not here, and he hasn't gone?

FYOKLA

Where could he possibly go? I was sitting in the hall the whole time and I never left my seat.

ARINA

He couldn't take the back staircase either.

KOCHKARYOV

What the devil's going on? I mean, he couldn't just vanish into thin air, without even leaving the room. I wonder if he's hiding somewhere. Podkolyosin! Where are you? Stop playing the fool, and come on out! This isn't funny! You should have left for the church!

He looks behind the closet, and peaks under the chairs.

He can't have left, it's impossible; his hat is in the other room, I put it there deliberately.

ARINA

Let's ask Dunyashka. She was on the street. Dunyashka! Dunyashka!

SCENE XXV

The same, with Dunyashka.

ARINA

Where's Podkolyosin, have you seen him?

DUNYASHKA

Yes ma'am, he jumped out the window!

AGAFYA shrieks and clasps her hands together.

ALL THREE WOMEN

The window?!

DUNYASHKA

Yes. He jumped, and left.

ARINA

Are you telling the truth?

KOCHKARYOV

You're lying!

DUNYASHKA

Honest to God, he left! Other people saw him too!

ARINA (*Stepping up to KOCHKARYOV*)

Is this a practical joke?! Hoping to laugh at our expense? Thought you'd shame us? In my sixty years I've never known such disgrace. For this I should spit in your face! You scoundrel! Humiliating a young girl! I am a simple woman – but I would never. You call yourself a gentleman! I see your gentle blood is only good for swindling people!

ARINA exits angrily, taking AGAFYA with her. KOCHKARYOV stands dumbfounded.

FYOKLA

Look at you now! The one who could arrange weddings without a matchmaker! My men may be an odd group, bastards, plucked hens, but window-jumpers? I humbly beg your pardon sir, but I don't have any of those.

KOCHKARYOV

This is absurd, something must have gone wrong. I'll run and bring him back!

KOCHKARYOV exits.

FYOKLA

Yes, off you go! Fancy yourself a matchmaker! The marriage business. If the groom runs out the door, that's one thing, but when he jumps out of the window -- I can only send my condolences!