

bored at home. [Pause.] Isn't it funny, my dear old fellow, how things change? And isn't life a swindle? Today I was bored and at a loose end, so I picked up this book, my old university lecture notes, and couldn't help laughing. God, I'm secretary of the county council and the chairman's Protopopov. I'm secretary, and the most I can ever hope for is to get on the council myself. Me—stuck here as a councillor, when every night I dream I'm a professor at Moscow University, a distinguished scholar, the pride of all Russia.

FERAPONT. I don't know, sir, I'm a bit hard of hearing.

ANDREW. If you could hear properly I don't suppose I'd talk to you at all. I must talk to someone, but my wife doesn't understand me and I'm somehow afraid of my sisters, afraid they'll laugh at me and make me look a complete fool. I don't drink and I don't like going into bars, but if I could drop in at Testov's in Moscow right now, or the Great Muscovite Hotel—why, it would suit me down to the ground, old boy.

FERAPONT. There was a contractor at the office a few days back telling us about some businessmen in Moscow. They were eating pancakes, and one of them ate forty and died, or so he said. It was either forty or fifty, I don't rightly remember.

ANDREW. When you sit down in a big Moscow restaurant you don't know anyone and nobody knows you, but you still don't feel out of things. Now here you know everybody and everybody knows you, but you don't seem to belong at all. You're the odd man out all right.

FERAPONT. What's that? [Pause.] The same man was saying—he may have been having me on of course—that there's an enormous rope stretched right across Moscow.

ANDREW. What for?

FERAPONT. I don't know, sir. It's what the man said.

ANDREW. Nonsense. [Reads the book.] Have you ever been to Moscow?

FERAPONT [after a pause]. No, the chance never came my way. [Pause.] Shall I go now?

ANDREW. Yes, you can go. Good night. [FERAPONT goes.] Good night. [Reading.] You might come and fetch some papers tomorrow morning. Off with you then. [Pause.] He's gone. [A bell rings.]

Oh, what a life. [Stretches himself and goes off slowly to his own room.]

[Singing is heard off stage—the nanny is rocking the baby to sleep. MASHA and VERSHININ come in. While they talk to each other the MAID lights the lamp and candles.]

MASHA. I don't know. [Pause.] I don't know. A lot depends on habit of course. After Father's death for instance it was ages before we got used to having no orderlies about the place. But quite apart from what one's used to, I still think what I'm saying's perfectly fair. Other places may be different, but in this town the most decent, the most civilized and cultivated people are the military.

VERSHININ. I'm a bit thirsty, I could do with some tea.

MASHA [glancing at her watch]. They'll be bringing some in a minute. I got married when I was eighteen, and I was scared of my husband because he was a schoolmaster and I'd only just left school myself. I thought he was terribly clever, and oh so learned and important. But things have changed since then, I'm sorry to say.

VERSHININ. Yes, I see.

MASHA. Anyway, I'm not talking about my husband. I'm used to him. But civilians in general are often so rude, disagreeable and bad-mannered. Rudeness bothers me, really upsets me. It's painful to meet people who aren't as considerate, or as kind and polite, as they might be. As for schoolteachers, my husband's colleagues, I find their company sheer torture.

VERSHININ. Yes. Though I should have thought there was nothing to choose between civilians and soldiers, at least in this town. It's six of one and half a dozen of the other. Listen to any educated person in this place—soldier or civilian, it makes no difference—and you'll find he's fed up with his wife, fed up with his house, fed up with his estate and fed up with his horses. A Russian feels so much at home when his thoughts are up in the clouds, but tell me—why is his everyday life so very earthbound? Why?

MASHA. Why?

VERSHININ. Why is he fed up with his children and fed up with his wife? Why are his wife and children fed up with him?

MASHA. You're in rather a bad mood today.

VERSHININ. Perhaps I am. I missed lunch, had nothing to eat since breakfast. One of the girls is a bit unwell, and when my children are ill I always get worried and feel so guilty because their mother's the way she is. Oh, if you could have seen her this morning, she really is beneath contempt. We started quarrelling at seven o'clock, and at nine I walked out and slammed the door. *[Pause.]* I never talk about it, the funny thing is I never complain to anyone but you. *[Kisses her hand.]* Don't be angry with me. Apart from you I have no one, no one in the world. *[Pause.]*

MASHA. What a noise the stove's making. The wind howled in the chimney before Father died, made a noise just like that.

VERSHININ. Are you superstitious then?

MASHA. Yes.

VERSHININ. How strange. *[Kisses her hand.]* You're a wonderful, marvellous woman. You're wonderful, marvellous. It's dark in here, but I can see your eyes shining.

MASHA *[moving to another chair]*. There's more light over here.

VERSHININ. I love you, love you, love you. I love your eyes, I love the way you move, I dream about you. You're a wonderful, marvellous woman.

MASHA *[laughing softly]*. When you talk like this it somehow makes me laugh, though it frightens me as well. Please don't talk that way again. *[In an undertone.]* No, it's all right, go on, I don't care. *[Covers her face with her hands.]* I don't care. There's somebody coming, you'd better talk about something else. *[IRINA and TUZENBAKH come in through the ballroom.]*

TUZENBAKH. I have a triple-barrelled name, Baron Tuzenbakh-Krone-Altschauer, but I'm just as much of a Russian as you are. There's not much trace of any German ancestry about me, except perhaps that I'm so persistent and stubborn about inflicting myself on you. I walk home with you every evening.

IRINA. I'm so tired.

TUZENBAKH. And I shall go on calling for you at the post office and bringing you home every evening. I'll keep it up for the next ten or twenty years if you don't tell me to go away. *[Noticing MASHA and VERSHININ, delightedly.]* Oh, it's you. Hallo.

IRINA. Well, here I am, home at last. *[To MASHA.]* Just now a woman came into the post office and wanted to send a telegram to her brother in Saratov to tell him her son died today, but couldn't remember the address. So she sent it without a proper address, just sent it to Saratov. She was crying. And I was rude to her for no reason at all, told her I'd no time to waste. Wasn't that stupid of me? Are those carnival people calling tonight?

MASHA. Yes.

IRINA *[sitting down in an armchair]*. Must have a rest. I'm so tired.

TUZENBAKH *[with a smile]*. When you come back from work you always look so young and pathetic somehow. *[Pause.]*

IRINA. I'm tired. Oh dear, I don't like working at the post office, I really don't.

MASHA. You've got thin. *[Whistles.]* You seem younger too and you've begun to look like a little boy.

TUZENBAKH. It's the way you do your hair.

IRINA. I must find another job because this one doesn't suit me. The things I'd hoped for and wanted so much—they're just what it doesn't give me. It's sheer drudgery with nothing romantic or intellectual about it. *[There is a knock on the floor from below.]* That's the doctor banging. *[To TUZENBAKH.]* Would you give him a knock, Nicholas? I can't, I'm too tired.

*[TUZENBAKH knocks on the floor.]*

IRINA. He'll be up here in a moment. Something ought to be done about this business. The doctor went to the club with Andrew yesterday and they lost again. I heard Andrew was two hundred roubles down.

MASHA *[apathetically]*. It's a bit late to do anything about that now.

IRINA. He lost money a fortnight ago and also in December. The sooner he loses the lot the better, it might mean we'd leave this place. My God, do you know, I dream about Moscow every night? I feel as if I'd gone out of my mind. *[Laughs.]* We're moving there in June, but it's, let me see—February, March, April, May—almost six months till June.

MASHA. The only thing is, Natasha mustn't find out about his gambling.