

Act Two

SCENE 1

The town square, early next morning. A rooster crows. SNETSKY appears and yawns in unison with crowing. SLOVITCH comes out of his shop.

SNETSKY. Slovitich, any news?

SLOVITCH. About what?

SNETSKY. About what? About the curse, of course.

Has it been lifted yet?

SLOVITCH. How would I know?

SNETSKY. Let's see if there's anything in the newspaper.

SLOVITCH. Good idea. It rained during the night.

SNETSKY. Where does it say that?

SLOVITCH. I can feel it. The paper's all damp.

SNETSKY. Maybe your dog did that.

SLOVITCH. No, no. He's housebroken. He only does it inside. (YENCHNA appears, pulling a cow that is upside down.) What's wrong with your cow?

YENCHNA. He's tired. I've been milking him since four o'clock.

SLOVITCH. Upside down?

YENCHNA. You get a little more cream that way? (She starts to leave.) Cream! Fresh cream right from the top. Drink it right from the spigot, two kopecks a mouthful! Fresh cream . . . right from the udder. (She is gone. We move to the Doctor's house. He and LENYA appear, carrying lit candles.)

Doctor. Come. Let us pray, Lenya. Pray for deliverance. Dear Lord, who art in heaven. We art in Kulyenchikov, and we art in trouble. (They are on their knees in front of the sofa.)

LENYA. We art a simple people, dear Lord.
 DOCTOR. But we're not so simple that we don't believe in you.

LENYA. Forgive us our sins, dear Lord.
 DOCTOR. We know not what we do because we know not what we do.

BOTH. God bless us, God bless our daughter, God bless the schoolmaster and God bless yourself, whoever you are. Amen.

(*There is a knock.*)

DOCTOR. Was that the door?

LENYA. No, I think it was someone knocking.

DOCTOR. Well, open it, open it! It must be the schoolmaster. (*He calls out.*) Sophia! It's time. Wake up! Give yourself a nudge. (*To LENYA, as LENYA pushes against the door.*) The other way! The other way!

(*LEON enters, breathless.*)

LEON. Do you know what time it is?

DOCTOR. Ten to six?

LENYA. Eight-fifteen?

DOCTOR. A quarter to nine?

LENYA. We don't have a clock.

DOCTOR. Pick any one you want. Ten-twenty, eleven-forty. Is there something in there you like?

LEON. You don't understand. The Count said I had only twenty-four hours to break the curse after I arrived in Kulychenikov. I arrived yesterday morning at exactly nine o'clock. It's eight o'clock now. That means I have only one hour. It doesn't even *leave* me one hour. I've just used up an entire minute telling you how much time

I haven't got left . . . Dear God, help me. Help me, dear Lord.

DOCTOR. What a shame. You just missed him. We finished services two minutes ago.

LEON. Get Sophia! We can't lose another moment. Hurry, I beg of you.

(*We hear footsteps.*)

DOCTOR. Listen! I hear footsteps coming down the stairs.

(*SOPHIA rushes in.*)

SOPHIA. Good morning, Mama. Good morning, Papa. Good morning, schoolmaster.

DOCTOR. She got all three right! This is going to be her day, I know it!

LEON. And looking more radiant than ever.

LENYA. Where shall we sit?

LEON. Doctor, with all due respect, I need Sophia's full concentration this morning. I must ask the parents to leave the room.

DOCTOR. By all means. We'll see that you're not disturbed. Goodbye, Sophia.

(*LENYA and the DOCTOR walk over to the door.*)

LENYA. Goodbye, my little angel.

DOCTOR. Do as the schoolmaster tells you.

LENYA. We'll be praying for you every minute.
 DOCTOR. If you succeed, schoolmaster, give us the signal by rapping on the window three times, followed by too short ones—

LENYA. — followed by six long ones.

DOCTOR. If you fail, rap seven times quickly —

LENYA. — followed by three times slowly.

DOCTOR. If you want lunch —

LEON. *Will you please leave! (He gently pushes them out.)*

BOTH. We're going! We're going! *(They are on the other side of the closed door.)*

LENYA. Something's not right, I can feel it in my bones.

DOCTOR. He can hear you. Lower your voice.

(LENYA bends her knees, lowering herself.)

LENYA. I'm a mother. I know about these things. Why do you look taller to me lately? *(They exit.)*

LEON. Sophia . . . Last night I decided that the task before us is one step beyond impossible. I knew I would fail and that I had to leave Kulyenchikov, like all those who have failed before me, . . . but today, looking into your eyes, I know there is no life for me without you. Therefore, we must not think of failure, we cannot afford to despair. Only a miracle can save us, Sophia, but with a majestic, supreme effort, we must try to make that miracle happen.

SOPHIA. What is a miracle?

LEON. A miracle is a wish that God makes. You are a miracle, Sophia.

SOPHIA. You mean God wished for me?

LEON. In one of his most sublime moments . . . We must hurry, Sophia. *(He picks up a book.)* This is a primary book of mathematics. It's used to teach very small children very simple problems in arithmetic.

SOPHIA. Do you think it's too advanced for me?

LEON. I don't think so, Sophia. We can't go back any

further than this book. Now, let us begin . . . *(He opens the book to the first page. A large number one fills up the page.)* One is the figure, the word, the symbol for a single item. One finger, one Sophia, one Leon, one book . . . Now then, I am holding up one finger, Sophia. Now I am holding up a second finger. One plus one is two. Would you repeat that for me, Sophia.

SOPHIA. Which part?

LEON. One —

SOPHIA. One.

LEON. Plus one —

SOPHIA. Plus one.

LEON. Is Two!

SOPHIA. Is two!

LEON. Yes! Yes! Wonderful. We're making headway. Slow, invisible headway . . . I'm very, very proud of you, Sophia. Are we ready to go on?

SOPHIA. Yes. History, please. I hope I can master it as well as I have mathematics.

LEON. Well, I honestly don't think we've conquered mathematics yet. There are problems that could come up. Let's continue. One plus two is three.

SOPHIA. Am I finished with one plus one?

LEON. You are if you remember the answer.

SOPHIA. I remembered it before. Is it necessary to remember it again?

LEON. Of course it's necessary to remember it again. It's necessary to remember if for *always*.

SOPHIA. You mean you will always be asking me what one plus one is?

LEON. No! Once you tell me, we can move on to other things. Like one plus two and one plus three, and so on. But if you can't remember what one plus one is, then the answer to one plus two is meaningless.

SOPHIA. Do you know how much one plus one is?

LEON. Certainly.

SOPHIA. Then why is it necessary for me to know? Certainly, if you have such esteem and affection for me, you will tell me the answer whenever I ask you.

LEON. But I won't always be around to tell you. You have to know for yourself. In case other people ask you.

SOPHIA. No one here ever asks questions like that. Even if I told them, they wouldn't know if it was the right answer.

LEON. Because they are cursed with ignorance. And we are trying to lift that debilitating affliction.

SOPHIA. You're getting angry with me. What's the point of being educated if you get angry? When you didn't ask me such questions, you always said the loveliest things to me. Is this what it's like to be intelligent?

LEON. No, Sophia. It is I who am not being intelligent. It's frustration and impatience that drives me to such crude behavior. Forgive me. We'll start from the beginning again. One plus one is two. Repeat.

SOPHIA. One plus one is two. Repeat.

LEON. *No!* Don't repeat the word "repeat." Just repeat the part before I say "repeat" . . . Now watch me carefully: One plus one is two. *Repeat!*

SOPHIA. What were you like as a little boy?

LEON. (*Angrily.*) What was I like as a little boy?

SOPHIA. You're shouting again.

LEON. (*Tries to placate her.*) I was inquisitive. Probably. Wondering why we were put on this earth and what the purpose of man's existence was.

SOPHIA. The purpose of man's existence . . . !

LEON. (*Shouts.*) *I've had enough of that.* Sophia, you must stop asking me questions. Our time is nearly gone.

SOPHIA. Then how am I to learn?

LEON. Sophia, you must answer what I ask, not what you want me to answer.

SOPHIA. Then I will learn only what *you* want me to know. Why can't I learn what I want to know?

LEON. Because what you want to know is of no practical value. What I want to teach is acceptable knowledge.

SOPHIA. Is knowing what you were like as a little boy not acceptable knowledge?

LEON. Of course not. It's of no significance at all.

SOPHIA. But it's much more interesting than that which is significant.

LEON. But I'm not trying to interest you. I'm trying to educate you.

SOPHIA. I know. But while you fail to educate me, you never fail to interest me. I find that very significant.

LEON. There is nothing like the logic of an illogical mind! Let's try one more time.

(*The Doctor and LENYA appear outside. LENYA peers through the transom.*)

DOCTOR. She must be speaking rabbit like a bunny by now.

(*SLOVITCH comes out of his shop.*)

SLOVITCH. How much longer is this going to take? I haven't sold a sausage all morning.

(*MISHKIN appears.*)

MISHKIN. Good morning, Dr. Zubritsky.

DOCTOR. (*To LENYA.*) What's going on?

(*LEON is on the floor banging his head in dismay.*)

LENYA. I think he's teaching her gymnastics.

MISHKIN. Dr. Zubritsky, I have an urgent letter for schoolmaster Tolchinsky.

DOCTOR. Quiet, please. This is a school zone.

(*YENCHNA and SNETSKY appear.*)

MISHKIN. I have an important letter for him. It's marked urgent, so I only went to three wrong houses first.

DOCTOR. Can't you see he's busy? Bring it back later.

LENYA. I don't like the way it's going. I just don't like the way it's going.

DOCTOR. Let us pray. Let us all pray to the Lord that this young man will deliver us from bondage. Let us ask for his blessing. Very religious on this side, semireligious on the other . . . (*LEON comes out.*) Quiet! Quiet, everyone! The schoolmaster wants to speak . . . Please, God, let this be the answer to our prayers.

SNETSKY. Ah-men!

LENYA AND YENCHNA. Ah women!

DOCTOR. (*To LEON.*) Is my daughter—you know—empty or full?

LEON. She is the same as always. I have only moments and I must ask this quickly, because I may not have the intelligence to ask this later. Because of my deep and unbounded devotion for your daughter, Sophia, I would like to ask for her hand in marriage. I ask this of you now while I still love her. In a few minutes I may not know the meaning of the word. When the clock in the church steeple strikes nine, I hope you will have an answer for me. (*He goes back inside.*)

DOCTOR. He's a nice young man. I'll say that. Very ambitious. Lenya, what do you think?

LENYA. If the man can't break a simple curse, how's he going to put bread on the table?

MISHKIN. And what about Tremble?

DOCTOR. Who?

MISHKIN. Tremble Tremble. You know, up on the hill. The one who throws the water.

SNETSKY. Mishkin's right. It's his curse. He would never permit such a marriage.

MISHKIN. Wait! There is one chance. If a stranger marries a Kulyenchikovite before he becomes like us, then he is free to take her away from here.

DOCTOR. I didn't know that.

MISHKIN. It was added to the curse two years ago . . . to make it more exciting.

SLOVITCH. You would never see your daughter again, but you would know she was happy and getting smarter every day.

SNETSKY. Oh, give it, Doctor. Give her your permission.

YENCHNA. If you don't give it to her, give it to me.

DOCTOR. I don't know. It's a decision, and I can't make decisions. Let's leave it to God. Let God make the decision.

(*They get on their knees and pray.*)

SOPHIA. What are you doing, Leon?

(*LEON sits, musing.*)

LEON. Having my last thoughts. One final pleasurable moment of reason.

SOPHIA. Then I was right. A wish is something you hope for that doesn't come true.

LEON. I'm sorry. I cannot help you soar over mountains and lakes, Sophia. But I will not leave you. I will remain here for the rest of my days, not basking in the light of your beauty but cowering in the darkness of my own ignorance . . . for that is the measure of my esteem and affection for you.

SOPHIA. I would do anything to save you from this calamity . . . anything! (*Prelude chimes.*) Oh, run, Leon. Run for your life. There are ignorant girls in other villages you could learn to love.

LEON. Listen to me carefully and remember it forever. I love you with all my heart.

(*The bells begin.*)

SNETSKY. Listen! The church bell!

LEON. I may never say these words again. (*Bell.*)

SLOVITCH. The time is up!

LEON. Savor it, Sophia. Keep the memory of what I say. (*Bell.*)

YENCHNA. Her last chance to marry. I know the feeling.

LEON. The way I gaze lovingly into your eyes as I do now.

LENYA. Say it, husband. Give them permission to marry. Quickly. (*Bell.*)

LEON. All the love I would have given you in a lifetime must be compressed into a final instant. (*Bell.*)

DOCTOR. Yes. I'll give it. I'll go in there and give my permission right now.

LEON. Goodbye, sweet Sophia. I did not love you long, but I loved you well. (*Bell.*)

DOCTOR. I'll just wait to see what time it is first.

LEON. Tell everyone in Kulyenchikov that I—(*Bell.*)

LEON *freezes, a dumb look on his face.*)

MAGISTRATE. (*On the balcony.*) Nine o'clock and all's well!

(*They all rush into the house.*)

DOCTOR. Wonderful news, Master Tolchinsky!

SOPHIA. Mama! Papa! Everyone! The schoolmaster has something to say. Let us all listen . . . Leon, didn't you want to say something?

LEON. (*Bewildered, befuddled.*) Yes, but you said we should all listen.

(*The Magistrate has joined them.*)

YENCHNA. Oh, oh!

SNETSKY. He's got a look on his face I've seen before.

SLOVITCH. It's the same one you've got on your face.

SOPHIA. (*To LEON.*) No, I meant that we will all listen while you tell us what you have to say.

LEON. Oh! I see . . . Thank you . . . Actually, I don't have much to say.

SNETSKY. There's no fool like a new fool.

DOCTOR. Young man, do you still want to marry my daughter?

LEON. Marry your daughter! Oh, no, sir, you do me too great an honor.

YENCHNA. I knew he'd never make it when he bought the whitefish from me.

MAGISTRATE. All right, move along. Break it up, you've all seen a ninny-poop before. Let's keep it moving. Come on.

(YENCHINA, *the* MAGISTRATE, SNETSKY and SLOVITCH leave.)

MISHKIN. (*To* LEON.) If you ever want this urgent letter, let me know. Not that anything in your life is urgent anymore. (*He puts the letter back in his pouch and leaves.*)

LENYA. Sophia, darling, go in the garden and plant some vegetables. We'll have salad tonight for dinner. (*She leaves.*)

DOCTOR. So, young man—what are your plans now that everything has fallen apart at the top?

LEON. I'm not sure. This absense of thought will take some getting used to
DOCTOR. Well, you might try politics. You sound very well suited for it.

LEON. Oh, this is an old suit. If I went into politics I would need all new clothes.

DOCTOR. This is really just one doctor's opinion, but when you catch a curse you really catch a curse. (*To* SOPHIA.) Don't stay up too long. I want you to go up on the roof later and take the canary for a walk. (*He leaves.*)

LEON. I'm sorry, Sophia. Weren't we in the middle of a lesson when the clock began to chime? What were we saying?

SOPHIA. You said that you loved me and that I should savor it and keep it as a memory because soon you would not love me ever again. Do you not love me now, Leon?

LEON. Love you? I'm not quite sure I know what the word means. Perhaps if you kissed me. Would you like to?

SOPHIA. With all my heart.

LEON. No, I meant—
SOPHIA. I know what you meant. (*They kiss warmly.*) Oh, Leon! The less you know, the better you kiss!

LEON. And the better I kiss, the more brilliant I become! Oh, my dear sweet Sophia, look at me! Look at me and tell me what you see! (*He has jumped up on the Doctor's sofa.*)

SOPHIA. I see a very good kisser dirtying my father's sofa.

LEON. No, Sophia. You see a man of intellect inspired by love. I am not cursed, Sophia. I still have my intelligence. I only pretended to be stupid.

SOPHIA. You pretended to be stupid?

LEON. Yes.

SOPHIA. That doesn't sound very intelligent to me.

LEON. It will soon, I promise.

SOPHIA. But the curse . . .

LEON. It had no effect on me. Oh, I was plenty worried, I admit. Especially when the clock struck nine. But when nothing happened, I suddenly realized—you can't be cursed unless you *permit* yourself to be. Kuliyen-chikov's lack of intelligence is self-inflicted, caused by fear and guilt and the relinquishing of your own self-esteem to a tyrannical power. Do you understand what I'm saying?

SOPHIA. Everything but the explanation.

LEON. If a parent tells you you are a naughty child from the day you were born, you will grow up believing you are a worthless human being. And from the day you were born, you were told you were all stupid. Now do you understand?

SOPHIA. Not as well as before.

LEON. I know that telling it doesn't change it. You

must be shown. When I was standing there, I suddenly became inspired. I hit upon a plan that will break this curse and save you from Yousekevitch.

SOPHIA. What is it?

LEON. You must marry Yousekevitch.

SOPHIA. Are you still pretending to be stupid?

LEON. No, Sophia. I don't mean Count Gregor.

SOPHIA. Oh, thank goodness. You had me frightened half to death.

LEON. You will marry me, Sophia. I will be Yousekevitch. Do you understand?

SOPHIA. Don't ask me that question anymore.

LEON. Trust me, Sophia. The wedding will take place tomorrow. Tomorrow the curse will be over. Tomorrow you will be intelligent. Tomorrow you will love me, Sophia.

SOPHIA. Could I have a kiss just to tide me over?

LEON. Of course, my sweet. I must go set my plan in action.

SOPHIA. I'm so excited, Leon. Tonight I will clear all the nonsense out of my head to prepare for all the knowledge that will be coming in. I love rearranging things. (*She leaves.*)

LEON. (*To the audience.*) The plan begins. I must find Count Yousekevitch. (*He leaves, YOUSEKEVITCH appears, and addresses the audience.*)

GREGOR. Was he just talking about me? You like him, don't you? Better than me, right? Admit it . . . I would give up all my wealth and powers if I could be the hero. I wouldn't have to wear this dumb outfit . . . people would applaud when I come on. You're not even listening to me, are you? All you care about is getting those two kids together . . . I hope it's raining when you leave here. (*He starts to leave. LEON rushes onstage.*)

LEON. Oh, good day, Count Yousekevitch. You remember me? Something. Something Tolchinsky.

GREGOR. (*To the audience.*) Listen to this conversation. What is it, Something?

LEON. I couldn't help overhearing what you just said. I want you to know that even though I've lost most of my intelligence—

GREGOR. —all of it.

LEON. —all of it—I am not without some feelings. It pains me to know that being disliked makes you so unhappy.

GREGOR. Oh, That's easy for you to say. You don't like me either, do you?

LEON. Well, I don't dislike you.

GREGOR. But do you like me?

LEON. No. Not much.

GREGOR. You see!

LEON. Because you never do anything redeeming.

Why not?

GREGOR. I don't know. I was brought up that way, I guess. My father taught me since I was a little boy, if you want to hold your power over these people, you must never be nice to them. Always make them fear and tremble.

LEON. Did you like your father?

GREGOR. Oh, he was all right, I guess.

LEON. You didn't like him, did you?

GREGOR. Don't tell anyone. When I was nine months old I tried to crawl away from home.

LEON. There you are! Then, the answer to being liked is to do something redeeming. Isn't there something good you could do for the village?

GREGOR. You mean like a barbecue?

LEON. Well, it's a start. But I was thinking of

something on a much grander scale. Like lifting the curse.

GREGOR. How can I? It won't be lifted unless Sophia marries me.

LEON. Or another Yousekevitch.

GREGOR. There is none. I'm the last of the line.

LEON. Unless you had a son.

GREGOR. But I'm not even married. I may be a villain, but I don't fool around. Maybe that's why I'm so unhappy.

LEON. You don't have to be married. You can adopt a son.

GREGOR. Adopt a son? Who?

LEON. Me!

GREGOR. You?

LEON. I'm single, available, ready and willing. I'm not very intelligent but I will be once the curse is lifted.

GREGOR. I've always wanted a son. Someone to take on fishing trips.

LEON. I never really had a father.

GREGOR. My boy, Leon. I'd spoil you like anything.

LEON. That's okay, Dad.

GREGOR. And then people would like me, wouldn't they?

LEON. They do now. Look at their faces. They're smiling at you. Even up there. (*He points to the audience. GREGOR looks out, pleased.*)

GREGOR. (*To the audience.*) Yes! I see! Oh, God bless you. You don't know what this means to me.

LEON. Then, let us go and sign the adoption papers and notify Sophia's family. Are you ready, Dad?

GREGOR. Let my just watch them smiling at me again. (*To the audience.*) Thank you. Thank you all of you. Maybe we can all have lunch together next week . . . In

the meantime, you're all invited to my son's wedding! (*To LEON, as they exit.*) The first thing I'm going to do is have your shoes bronzed!

(*They are gone. Wedding decorations fly in as we hear bright, cheerful music. SNETSKY, SLOVITCH, MISHKIN and YENCHNA are dancing. All dressed in their best. GREGOR and LENYA approach from opposite sides of the stage. The music has slowed down to a procession.*)

SCENE 2

MISHKIN. Doesn't Mrs. Zubritsky look beautiful?
YENCHNA. Isn't it bad luck for the mother of the bride to see the postman before the wedding?

(*He hides behind YENCHNA.*)

SNETSKY. This is it, Slovitich—after two hundred years the curse will finally be gone.

SLOVITCH. I just had a terrible thought.

SNETSKY. What's that?

SLOVITCH. Suppose they lift the curse and I find out I was really dumb in the first place?

LENYA. They're coming! They're coming! Quiet, everyone! I have a sponge cake in the oven.

(*LEON appears.*)

LEON. (*To the audience.*) Remember, if I still appear stupid, I'm only pretending. It's all part of the plan.

LENYA. (*To GREGOR.*) You must be very proud of him.

GREGOR. He's been my son for ten minutes and he's never given me a moment of trouble.

(*The Doctor and SOPHIA, in bridal gown, appear.*)

YENCHINA. There but for me goes her.

MISHKIN. I hope she remembers to give me her change of address.

(*The Magistrate appears.*)

MAGISTRATE. We are gathered here today, dear friends, to witness the joining of two souls in holy matrimony. It is only the good will and generous benevolence of our dear friend the Count that makes this blessed union possible.

ALL. Thank you, Count.

MAGISTRATE. Will the groom step before me.

GREGOR. That's you, *mein kind*.

(*LEON steps forward.*)

MAGISTRATE. And will the bride step forward.

(*SOPHIA steps out, but LENYA restrains her.*)

LENYA. No, Sophia, the bride! The bride!

DOCTOR. (*To LENYA.*) What's the matter with you?

(*He places SOPHIA next to LEON.*)

SOPHIA. Leon, your plan was brilliant.

LEON. Thank you, Sophia.

MAGISTRATE. And who giveth away this bride?

DOCTOR. I giveth away this bride.

MAGISTRATE. Why do you giveth away this bride?

DOCTOR. Because he asketh me for her. And I nod-deth my head. And he taketh her.

MAGISTRATE. Do you, Leon, son of Count Gregor Mikhailovich Breznofsky Fyodor Youssekevitch—

ALL. (*Shaking.*) Tremble, tremble, tremble, tremble . . .

GREGOR. No, no. Not today! You don't have to do it today. It's a holiday.

ALL. Oh, thank you . . . Very kind . . . How nice of you . . .

MAGISTRATE. Do you, Leon, take Sophia, to have and to hold from this day on?

LEON. I have.

MAGISTRATE. No. I do.

LEON. You do?

MAGISTRATE. No, *you* do.

DOCTOR. He will. He does, Say it.

LEON. "He will, he does." I said it.

DOCTOR. Don't say what I say. Say what he says.

LEON. What did he say?

GREGOR. "I do." Just say "I do"!

LEON. My papa says I do!

GREGOR. I'm beginning to hate this curse, I swear to God.

God.

MAGISTRATE. And do you, Sophia, take Leon, in sickness and in health, for better or for worse, for as long as you both shall live?

SOPHIA. I do.

LENYA. With a brain like that she could have gotten anyone.

MAGISTRATE. The ring, please.

GREGOR. I have it. The ring that Casimir

Yousekevitch was going to place on the young Sophia two hundred years ago. (*He gives LEON a huge ring.*)

LENYA. What an onion!

MAGISTRATE. Place the ring on her finger.

(*LEON has great difficulty getting it on her finger.*)

LENYA. He's not going to be very handy around the house.

MAGISTRATE. Repeat after me, please: "With this ring, I thee wed."

ALL. With this ring, I thee wed.

MAGISTRATE. Just the bride and the groom, thank you.

LEON AND SOPHIA. With this ring, I thee wed.

MAGISTRATE. Before I pronounce this holy union, is there any among you who has just cause or reason why Leon and Sophia should not be joined in eternal wedlock? (*Pause.*) Then with the power invested in me as Chief Magistrate of the village of Kulyenchikov, I now pronounce thee—

GREGOR. (*Stepping forward.*) Welllll, maybe there's one tiny little thing.

MAGISTRATE. You have an objection to this marriage?

GREGOR. You bet I have! This boy is not my son . . .

This son is not my boy!

LEON. What are you saying, Father?

GREGOR. You think I'm crazy? Why should I give up a cute little bundle of noodle brains like her?

LEON. But the adoption papers . . .

GREGOR. They're false. You trusted me so much you didn't even read them. Here are the documents as proof. I did not adopt him, I divorced him! According to these documents, we are not father and son, we are no longer husband and wife!

LENYA. Dear God, my daughter almost married a divorced woman. (*She faints in the Doctor's arms.*)

SOPHIA. Leon . . . Is this part of the plan?

LEON. No, Sophia. I'm sorry.

GREGOR. But fear not, dear friends. I may be a venomously treacherous snake, but I'm not a wet blanket. There will be a wedding.

DOCTOR. My daughter will not marry an impostor.

GREGOR. An impostor, no. But a Yousekevitch, yes! You have pledged your daughter's hand in marriage, good doctor, to a Yousekevitch. And a pledge once given must be honored.

MAGISTRATE. That is the law. I helped write it myself. Doctor. It's true. I even voted for it.

GREGOR. And I am the only true Yousekevitch here.

SOPHIA. Leon, will you not object to this marriage?

LEON. What can I do, Sophia? I am helpless.

MAGISTRATE. Come on. Come on. I haven't all day. GREGOR. Say the words. Let's get it over with. There's been a hotel room booked for this honeymoon for two hundred years.

DOCTOR. I'm sorry, daughter. With all my heart, truly sorry. (*He places SOPHIA next to GREGOR.*)

LENYA. At least she'll get better dinners at his place.

MAGISTRATE. Dearly beloved—

GREGOR. We did that part. We heard that. I do. Ask her, she's the one.

MAGISTRATE. And do you, Sophia, take Count

GREGOR, for as long as you both shall live.

LENYA. Say it, darling. You'll be rich and smart. It's better than happiness.

SOPHIA. Goodbye, Leon . . . goodbye forever. I do.

MAGISTRATE. Then with the power invested in me as chief magistrate of the village of Kulyenchikov—

LEON. You didn't say the other part.

MAGISTRATE. What other part?

LEON. The part if anybody objects, and I object.

GREGOR. What's that?

MAGISTRATE. On what grounds?

LEON. On the grounds that I didn't receive my urgent letter yet.

GREGOR. What kind of grounds is that?

MISHKIN. I have an urgent letter for schoolmaster Tolchinsky.

LEON. For me? Whatever could it be?

GREGOR. Finish the ceremony while he's reading the letter.

MAGISTRATE. I can't do that. It's against the law.

DOCTOR. It's true. I even voted for it.

(LEON has taken letter from MISHKIN. He sits down to read it. All except GREGOR surround him and listen.)

LEON. It's bad news. I'm afraid. My uncle and sole remaining relative has just died in St. Petersburg leaving me nothing but all his debts.

SNETSKY. When you're going downhill, it gets faster at the bottom.

LEON. Before he died, he said he blamed all his misfortunes on the selfish and vindictive character of his distant relatives and that even changing his name to Tolchinsky never helped him escape destiny's finger.

DOCTOR. What was his name before Tolchinsky?

LEON. Yousekevitch.

YENCHINA. Oh-oh!

GREGOR. Those distant relatives will haunt you every time!

SOPHIA. Leon! Do you realize what this means?

LEON. No. What?
DOCTOR. He'll know in a few minutes. Schoolmaster, take your place next to my daughter. This time she's going to marry the right one!

LEON. (To the audience.) It didn't say that at all. It's a bill from my former college saying I still owe them for last year's tuition.

SNETSKY. Hurry, Leon, hurry.

LEON. (To the audience.) I have planted the bomb in their minds. I now pray God—for the explosion! (He rushes to SOPHIA's side.)

MAGISTRATE. Hurry up. Places, everyone. I don't want to spend the rest of my life marrying this girl . . . Are we ready, everyone!

ALL. Ready!

MAGISTRATE. Do you, Leon—

LEON. I do.

MAGISTRATE. And do you, Sophia—

SOPHIA. I do.

MAGISTRATE. If there is anyone here who objects—

ALL. No one objects!

MAGISTRATE. Going once . . . Going twice . . . Going three times . . . That's it! I now pronounce you *man and wife*!

(There is a loud thunder clap. The stage darkens, then gets lighter. All have fallen to the ground except LEON, who watches them.)

SNETSKY. I have never heard a noise like that in all my life.

SLOVITCH. It felt as though my head had cracked open.

SNETSKY. Like What?

SLOVITCH. Like my—head had cracked open. (*He and SNETSKY look at each other.*) I'm afraid to ask it.

SNETSKY. Go ahead. Ask it.

SLOVITCH. But what if we're wrong?

SNETSKY. And what if we're right? . . . Ask it! . . .

Ask it!

SLOVITCH. Cat?

SNETSKY. Cat. C-a-t, cat!

SLOVITCH. Dog!

SNETSKY. Dog. D-o-g, dog!

SLOVITCH. Oh, my God, it's a miracle!

SNETSKY. Miracle. M-i-r-a-c-l-e, miracle!

MISHKIN. Yenchna! . . . Yenchna—seven and five?

YENCHNA. Twelve.

MISHKIN. And twelve?

YENCHNA. Twenty-four.

MISHKIN. And forty-eight?

YENCHNA. Seventy-two! . . . Name five world

capitals.

MISHKIN. Athens, Bucharest, Cairo, London,

and—(*He is stuck.*)

LEON. You can do it!

MISHKIN. Constantinople!

(*They all cheer.*)

MAGISTRATE. (*Rises.*) The quality of mercy is not strained; it droppeth like the gentle rains from heaven.

(SLOVITCH and SNETSKY are up.)

SLOVITCH. That's beautiful. Did you make that up?

MAGISTRATE. I think so. Where else would it have come from?

LENYA. Nikolai! I—I feel funny. Weak in the knees.

A dizziness in my head.

(*The Doctor helps her up.*)

DOCTOR. It's all right, my dear. Your blood is just pulsating from the excitement. Sometimes that can cause the adrenal glands to oversecrete, resulting in a sudden rush to the head.

LENYA. I—I never knew you were such a brilliant doctor.

DOCTOR. I'm just an average doctor. I worry about you because—I love you, my dear.

LENYA. And I love you, Nikolai. Even when I couldn't say it, in my heart I knew I loved you.

SOPHIA. Leon . . . Are you now as you were before I became what I am?

LEON. I am more than I have ever been or dreamed could be possible.

SOPHIA. I love you, Leon.

LEON. I adore you, Sophia.

GREGOR. You mean it's over? The curse is over?

DOCTOR. See for yourself, Count Gregor.

YENCHNA. Land! I should have put my money in land. You can never go wrong with real estate.

(SNETSKY and SLOVITCH leave.)

MISHKIN. It depends, of course, on the political situation. With a czarist government, land reform is a very delicate issue.

(YENCHNA and MISHKIN leave.)

GREGOR. Such brilliant conversation. All my power over them is gone.

DOCTOR. Power is a useless weapon over the enlightened, Count Gregor. We are all equal citizens here.

LENYA. You mean men are all equal citizens. Women have been subjugated long before there were any curses.

DOCTOR. Lenya, you know I love you, but that's a very radical point of view. (*The Doctor and LENYA leave.*)

SOPHIA. It was your faith and courage that won over ignorance.

LEON. No, it was your pure heart and trusting soul that gave me that faith and courage. It was love that destroyed the curse, Sophia, not my puny efforts.

SOPHIA. I don't wish to argue the point, Leon. I just think you should allow me room to express my own views.

LEON. I welcome your views, Sophia, but I think you should have all the facts before you become so adamant.

(*Sophia leaves.*)

GREGOR. Well, you got your wish, schoolmaster.

LEON. Yes . . . What about you, Count Yousekevitch? What are your plans now that you're intelligent?

GREGOR. Thanks to you, I'll probably have to work for a living now. Well, cousin, my congratulations. I wish you a long and happy marriage.

LEON. Thank you . . . any may I wish the same good fortune to you.

GREGOR. Please. I've been cursed once in my life, I know when I'm well off. (*He leaves.*)

LEON. (*To the audience. During his speech, the cast*

members appear as he mentions them.) When you think of it, it's not such a bizarre story, after all. Be honest. Haven't you all met someone in your life who came from a place like Kulyenchikov? An aunt, an uncle, a neighbor . . . your boss! Of course, once the curse was lifted, we became like any other small town or village in any other part of the world, susceptible to all the "ups and downs" of normal life—well, the magistrate, for example. (*The Magistrate appears.*) After two more years in office, greed got the better part of him and he was convicted for taking bribes for political favors. He served two years in jail and eventually sold his memoirs for a fortune. (*Mishkin appears.*) Mishkin gave up the postal service and became a writer. He wrote a six-hundred-page story about the Curse of Kulyenchikov and sent it off to a publisher. Unfortunately, it got lost in the mail. (*Yenchina appears.*) Yenchina, a shrewd business woman, put all her money in real estate and now owns seventeen houses in Kulyenchikov, including Count Gregor's. And as an investment for the future, she bought land in six other towns that had curses on them. (*Slovitch appears.*) Slovitch, with all his savings, bought four more butcher shops in a village that really needed only one and went bankrupt in a month, confirming his greatest fears that with or without a curse, he didn't have much brains. (*Snetsky appears, walks like a dandy.*) Snetsky, with his newly acquired intelligence, found his sheep, gathered his wool, and became a wealthy philanthropist. (*Gregor appears in a monk's robe.*) Count Yousekevitch became more and more lovable, studied theology, and is now the local monk. During the drought seasons he goes up on the hill and prays to God to throw water down on us. (*LENYA appears, looking officious.*) My dear mother-in-law,

FOOLS

Mrs. Zubritsky, suddenly found a voice of her own. She became the first woman mayor of Kulyenchikov and eventually consul governor of the Northern Ukraine Sector. Her husband sees her by appointment only. (*The Doctor appears.*) Dr. Zubritsky became one of the finest doctors in all of Russia. He became the personal physician to the royal family and was recently elected to the Academy of Sciences. However, he still has trouble opening jars. (*Sophia appears, carrying a baby.*) As for Sophia, she was—and still is—a miracle. Not that we don't have our differences, not that all our days are blissfully happy, but she has a wisdom that can never be found in books. She has, in turn, become my teacher, and I have learned there is no spirit on earth, evil or otherwise, that can destroy a pure heart of devoted love. As for myself, I remained a schoolmaster and dedicated my life to the education of the unenlightened . . . After all, there are so many Kulyenchikovs in this world.

CURTAIN

FURNITURE AND PROPERTY PLOT

Furniture plot

Zubritsky house: two chairs, table, swivel chair
Built in: desk, armoire, cabinet

ACT I—Preset

S.R.
Leon's satchel w/ map, clipping, cardboard
Handkerchief
Pocket watch
Small book pack
Ran's horn
Shepherd's rod
Coins
Broom (or preset inside butcher's shop.)
Chicken (plump?)
Bucket & towel
Monocle
String bag

Onstage

Doctor's desk:

papers
pens
prescription pad
Samovar—S.R. of armoire
Curse book (on cabinet w/ dust)

S.L.

Mailpouch w/ postcard & mail
Flower basket w/ newspaper & flowers (one white)
Stethoscope (or on doctor's desk)
Coins

COSTUME PLOT

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FOOLS

String bag
Whistle

ACT II—Presel

S.R.
Chicken to pluck
Bucket
Ram's horn
Shepherd's rod
Mail pouch w/ urgent letter
Large book pack (5) including math book
Pocketwatch
Small apple
Pocket knife
Whistle
Shopping bag (or inside butcher shop)
Ring in box
Legal papers
Broom
Lunch bag
Baby
Small book pack

O.S.

Newspaper (butcher shop door)

S.L.

Cow
Whistle
Brass candle holders w/ candles (2)
Matches
Monocle
Newspaper?
String bag
Prayer book (and pencil)

LEON

Brown Suit—aged
Sweater vest—grey
Shirt with Collar put on
Tie
Cap
Ankle boots
Tee Shirt
Underwear
Socks
Tights (allergic to wool)
Wedding—
Embroidered wedding shirt
Braided leather thong-belt
Sash
Jewelry—watch in vest

SNETSKY

Russian Trousers
Shirt of two layer nets
Suspenders (unseen)
Stockings in leg wrappings
Shoes—woven
Backpack
Tee Shirt
Underwear
Socks
Brown Hat
Wedding—
Red tie
Broom with flowers
Coda—
Sheepskin vest
Designer Ram's horn case

75

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FOOLS

MISHKIN
 Bitches
 Uniform jacket—Act II and Coda
 Vest

Shirt

Boots

Cap

Underwear

Tee shirt

Socks

Wedding—

Embroidery shirt

Sash

Flowers on Mail Bag

Coda—Jacket

SLOVITCH

Bitches

Apron

Embroidered Shirt

Boots

Straw Boater

Tee Shirts

Underwear

Socks

Wedding—

Bow Tie

Flowers on Hat

Coda—Remove flowers

SOPHIA

ACT I—

Lime green net blouse on green underbodice

Hair ribbons—blue

FOOLS

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Blue (aqua) skirt
 Aqua Kid shoes
 Stockings
 Undergarments
 Change—nightgown and slippers

ACT II—

Blue Organza blouse

Blue silk strip skirt

White organza apron (pinafore)

Wedding—

Wedding Dress

Head piece with veil

Satin Boots

Coin necklace

Gold braid in Hair

Coda—Replace Act II dress without pinafore add shawl

COUNT GREGOR

Riding Bitches

Embroidered Vests

Baldrick

Shirts

Overcoat

Cap

Cravat

Tiepin

Watchchains

Boots

Wedding—

remove cape

add coat

baldrick

embroidered vest