

Proposal

The parlor of Chubukov's estate house. Chubukov is counting money when Lomov enters and knocks meekly on the door frame. He is dressed formally, complete with gloves, hat, and cape, and is dizzy from the heat. When Lomov gets no response from knocking, he clears his throat. Chubukov looks up annoyed, but quickly changes his attitude upon seeing who it is. He runs to Lomov with an outstretched hand.

CHUBUKOV

Well, well, well! Good gracious, of all people, Ivan Vasilevich! What a surprise, et cetera, and so good to see you. How are you doing?

LOMOV

Ah, hah. Yes. I mean, how are *you* doing?

CHUBUKOV

Getting along, as they say, getting along. Come in, sit down, please. Anywhere. Good gracious, what a surprise, what a surprise.

LOMOV

A surprise?

CHUBUKOV

Well, yes, it's been so long, I nearly forgot we're neighbors!

LOMOV

You, uh... you forgot?

CHUBUKOV

No, no, of course not, just teasing you, my boy. So, what's the occasion, where are you off to?

LOMOV

Off to?

CHUBUKOV

Why the fancy clothes?

LOMOV

No, no, no, I'm here to see you.

CHUBUKOV

Well, my gracious, is must be New Year's. *(a joke not understood)* If you're here to see me. New Years. Heh, heh. Yes, well. To see me, are you?

LOMOV

Well yes, you and... yes, to see you, Stepan Stepanovich. I..

He pauses long enough to be stricken by terror. He takes a tremulous breath and tries to continue.

LOMOV

I have something to ask of you. A request, you might call it. Or maybe a... a... well, a request, for now we'll call it a request. *(a rehearsed speech)* Dear friend and neighbor that you have always been, you have always been a dear friend and neighbor. I mean... you have always been... you have always been anxious. I might even say... *(searches for another word, but can't find it)* anxious... to help me out, even to... assist me, yes, assist me from time to time. So, in light of our families having known each other for so long, I... Well, you see, you have always been... you have always been... anxious... excuse me, but could I have some water? My mouth has gone dry.

CHUBUKOV

Water? Certainly.

He moves to his cash box, closes and locks it, then pours Lomov a glass of water. As he does...

CHUBUKOV

Well, my boy, as you know I have the deepest respect, et cetera, for your fine family, so whatever you want of me is yours. I'll help you in whatever way I can, as they say.

He hand Lomov some water. Lomov takes it with a trembling hand.

LOMOV

Thank you.

He drinks.

Ah. Yes. Better. Well!

CHUBUKOV

No reason to be shy, et cetera.

LOMOV

No, not at all. Yes. My dear friend and neighbor, Stribend Stupantovich... uh, Stepan Strefrinovich. My neighbor and my friend, Stopenkovich... Stopan... Steeeee... eee... eee... Strumanko... Stepepepepep... Strupiduptoh... toh... toh... toh... toh... *(one final attempt)* Snifno Stankakrovich! *(defeated)* Can I have some more water?

CHUBUKOV

Are you alright?

LOMOV

Oh, yes, I just... (*indicating his mouth*) Thank you.

He drinks

Excuse me, I'm sorry, when I get nervous I... names, you see. And in addition to being nervous, I'm also... well... nervous. Yes, but to get to my request, I've come to ask for your... how should I put it...? Assistance. Oh, no, not that I deserve any, or expect any even, but nevertheless, here I am. (*having completely forgotten his train of thought*) Here I am! Here I am. (*finishing the water*) Yes. I...? Oh yes! My request! Yes, you have always been... anxious... a dear friend and neighbor, Strinfo Shastatrafkovich. Stree... Stroh... Strah... Str... Str... Str...

CHUBUKOV

(*saying it for him*) Stepan Stepanovich! Please get a hold on yourself!

LOMOV

That's it! What? No, no, no, *you're* Streftan Sporgvedavich! I mean... never mind. Oh, I see! I'm sorry, excuse me, of course, you're suggesting that... and you said... for me. Thank you. Yes, you're right, why so nervous! Dear friend and neighbor that you are, I'll just blurt it right out. No need to be shy. Here we go.

He begins to get down on his knees, but checks himself.

Okay. (*takes a deep breath and all at once*) I am requesting the honor of your daughter's hand in marriage, Natalona Stinkanovna... uh...Nutenya Strudenkovna... Nah... Nah... Noo... Nee...

CHUBUKOV

Natalia Stepanovna!

LOMOV

That's it!

CHUBUKOV

What has happened to you? Have you gone mad like your loony grandfa...? (*dawns on him*) You what? Natalia?! You want to marry... You want to marry... Natalia?

LOMOV

He turns and immediately starts to leave.

I knew you wouldn't...

CHUBUKOV

My boy, my boy!

He embraces Lomov.

You are the answer to my prayers! Why that daughter of mine, I thought she'd never... well, we can forget that now, as they say. My dear boy! My dear son, now!

He embraces Lomov again and pounds him on the back.

God bless you! Thank you, thank you! If this is a dream, please don't wake me up, that's all I ask! Good gracious, look at me! Going on like a fool when you can hardly wait to see the lucky girl, et cetera. You devil!

LOMOV

No, I don't really need to...

CHUBUKOV

(yelling) Natalia! She must be in the back.

LOMOV

Don't go to any trouble...

CHUBUKOV

(louder) Natalia! You wait right here, I'll go get her...

LOMOV

My dear friend and neighbor, *(carefully)* Stepan Stepanovich, I am deeply moved. Deeply. Moved. By your proposal. What did I say? Approval, I mean approval. Haha. Yes. Deeply. Moved. Now, can you tell me honestly... what about her?

CHUBUKOV

What do you mean?

LOMOV

Will she...?

CHUBUKOV

What have you heard?

LOMOV

Heard? Should I have heard something?

CHUBUKOV

Of course not.

LOMOV

Oh.

CHUBUKOV

No reason in the world.

LOMOV

Good.

CHUBUKOV

I'll go get her.

LOMOV

No, I mean, will she...

CHUBUKOV

Will she what?

LOMOV

...approve? Do you think?

CHUBUKOV

Do I think...? Of course she will, of course! A handsome fellow like you! Of course, she's wild about you, as they say, madly in love, et cetera. I'll go get her...

LOMOV

Alright. Yes. Thank you.

Chubukov rushes out. Lomov reaches for the water, but his hands are so sweaty that he can't lift the pitcher. He frantically wipes them on his coat, and finally succeeds, but then is trembling so badly that he misses the glass. Now he needs to wipe up the spill, but has no scarf or handkerchief, so he resorts to using a pillow from the loveseat. After mopping up the water, he carefully hides the wet spot by turning the pillow around. During this...

LOMOV

This is worse than a final exam. No wonder it's taken me thirty-six years, this is awful. How do other people do it? Never mind, I've done it. The worst is over. I hope she's nice. I seem to remember that she's... well, maybe she's grown up. You just can't keep expecting that the ideal wife is going to come looking for you. At some point you simply have to plow the field in front of you, stones and all. She sure keeps a chilly house. I must take a mental note, make sure she learns to keep the house warm. But everything is neat and tidy, that's a point in her favor. And while I don't remember that she's any beauty, no one could really call her ugly, either, so... Besides, you reach a certain age when a tidy house means more than... My it's cold in here. She's written her name in this book, well then, that's something. I think a woman should read, it opens up conversation. That's good. Very good. I am absolutely certain I've made the best possible choice, given the circumstances. I feel completely calm about...

He stops suddenly and shakes his head.

Damn! Ringing in my ears. Too much stress. A wife will be good, yes, good relief from stress. I have to settle down, at my age you have to consider your health. Keep this up, I could go any minute, what with my heart the way it is, not to mention my twitches. Always twitching. If it's not my nose, it's my foot. Or my eyes. Weak nerves. I've got to get some sleep. Last night the twitching woke me up, which gave me stabbing pains in my head which hurt my bad shoulder, so I had to get up and pace until I was so exhausted I'd fall asleep in spite of it all, but after a few minutes I woke up with sore legs from all the walking, and that started the twitching again, so I had to get up and pace some more...

Natalia Stepanovna enters. She is a plain, sensible woman in her late twenties. She is puzzled to find Lomov in the room, pacing frantically.

NATALIA

Oh. Ivan Vasilevich. How odd. Papa ran in yelling something about a customer begging for the goods... I didn't know what to make of it, but... Well, what a surprise. There's no one else here? I mean, it's been so long! Well! So, what have you come to buy?

LOMOV

Buy?

NATALIA

Mm hm.

LOMOV

No, no, I... Well, as I was saying to Strufnick Sbro... bree... broo... fee... fee... fee... Hah.

He paces furiously. This drives Natalia wild but she tries to be polite.

NATALIA

Yes. Pardon my apron, I was in the back shelling peas. But, it's been ages. Please, sit down. Would you like to join us for lunch?

LOMOV

I've already.

NATALIA

Sit, please. I won't mind at all if you *sit down* and smoke. Here. Take some matches.

He takes the box of matches and in trying to open it, spills them everywhere.

LOMOV

Oh no. I'm sorry, I...

He gets down to scoop them up.

That's so easy to do... NATALIA

I'm terribly sorry, I'll just... LOMOV

Don't worry, just let me... NATALIA

No, no, I can... LOMOV

You just sit down and relax... NATALIA

No, I couldn't... LOMOV

SIT DOWN! NATALIA

He does. She picks up the matches and tries to make conversation. Lomov is not at all cooperative.

NATALIA
Lovely weather today. Not like yesterday with all that rain! The men couldn't work at all yesterday. *(pause)* Did you get your hay in? *(pause)* I was so worried that it would rain again, I had the whole field done, but then if it does rain, the hay will rot, so I don't know if I did the right thing. What do you think? *(pause)* You're right, I should have waited. *(about the matches)* Well, that's most of them. *(pause)* You look so... dressed up. What's the occasion? A dance? *(he's perplexed)* Your clothes.

LOMOV
Oh these! I just... I'll come right to the point, Nutoonia Storpinozna... Nortania Smrontinozna... Noo... Naaa... Nubububub... Can I help myself to some more water, please?

NATALIA
Are you well?

LOMOV
(as he drinks) Very well. Thank you! Very well. Well... so to speak. I do have this... *(he chokes on the water)*

NATALIA
You shouldn't drink and talk at the same time.

She rises and hits him on the back.