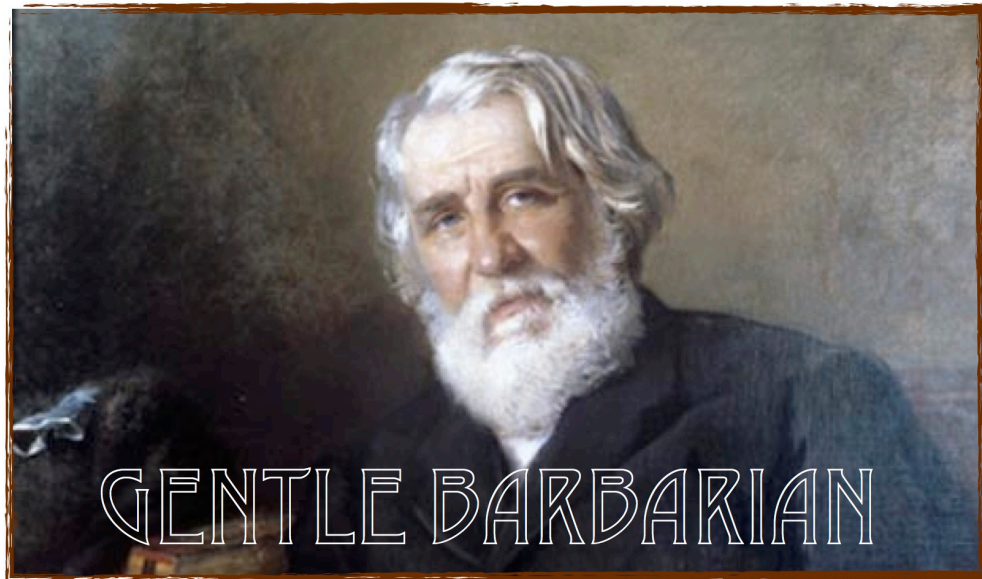


PERUSAL SCRIPT



BY
THOMAS F. ROGERS



Salt Lake City

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GENTLE BARBARIAN

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Gentle Barbarian

Characters

(4M 2W 2TG)

(in order of appearance)

Masha, a servant girl in her mid-teens

Pelagea, another servant girl in her mid-teens

Sergey Nikitich, Varvara's younger brother, in his late thirties

Nikolay Turgenev, Varvara's first son and his mother's steward, in his early forties

Varvara Turgeneva, a wealthy landowner, in her sixties

Ivan Turgenev, Varvara's second son, in his late thirties

Luka, Ivan's valet, in his early twenties

Pauline Garcia Viardot, Ivan's long term intimate

GENTLE BARBARIAN by *Thomas F. Rogers*.

4M 2W 2TG. One Interior. 2 hrs.

Based on the life of Russian author, Ivan Turgenev, this taut play is very Chekhovian in nature. Its characters are richly drawn and full of repressed sensuality. Their lives and loves interweave, creating a tapestry of Russia during the middle 1800's -- the Russia of the Tsar -- the Russia of both the privileged few and the peasant working class. It is fascinating to notice that -- despite the social upheaval that led to its eventual dissolution and once more the former USSR -- much remains as before. In its poignant irony, Turgenev's own personal story surpasses those he penned which, in Western Europe, won for him such acclaim. In the person of this humanitarian idealist, the play illustrates the hypocrisy and self-deception of many a well-intended intellectual. Contains adult situations and language.

Thomas F. Rogers –

A former director of the BYU Honors Program, Thomas F. Rogers was a professor of Russian language and literature at Brigham Young University, now retired, and the author of more than a dozen plays, many on Mormon subjects. Four of these have been published in *God's Fools* (Signature Books, 1983), which also received the Association of Mormon Letters Drama Prize that same year. Those titles are **HUEBENER**, **GOD'S FOOLS** (or **JOURNEY TO GOLGOTHA**), **FIRE IN THE BONES**, and **REUNION**. Other titles include: **THE SECOND PRIEST**, **THE SEAGULL** (Adapted from the Chekov play), **GENTLE BARBARIAN**, **FRERE LAWRENCE**, **CHARADES**, were published in a second anthology entitled *'Huebener' and Other Plays by Thomas F. Rogers*, in 1992. Then **THE ANOINTED**. He has also penned stage adaptations of Dostoevsky's novels, *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot*. The former received a BYU production, directed by Tad Danielewski, in which Tom played the role of Marmeladov. In 1995–1996 *God's Fools* was produced (in translation) by a professional repertory theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia. (While Tom was serving as an LDS mission president. He also played the role of the American double spy, Cooper in that production. Later on that mission he directed a Russian language version of *Huebener* in St. Petersburg.

He directed the premiere productions of Robert Vincek's *For the Lions to Win*, Thom Duncan's *Matters of the Heart* and Eric Samuselsen's *Accommodations* as well as States-side productions of *Huebener*. He's also directed Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* (in German) for Deutsches Teater Salt Lake City and Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, Pirandello's *It Is So If You Think So* and Pinter's *The Caretaker* for the BYU Department of Theatre.

Cited by Eugene England as “undoubtedly the father of modern Mormon drama,” he received the Mormon Arts Festival's Distinguished Achievement Award in 1998 and in 2002 a Lifetime Service Award from the Association of Mormon Letters.

His latest published stories appeared in the Summer 1991 issue of *Dialogue* (receiving an annual *Dialogue* fiction award) and in the collection *Christmas for the World*. Rogers was once the editor of *Encyclia*, journal of the Utah Academy, and author of a critical monograph, *Myth and Symbol in Soviet Fiction* (The Edwin Mellen Press). He studied at the Yale School of Drama and holds degrees from the University of Utah, Yale, and Georgetown. He has also studied theater in Poland and Russian at Moscow State University and taught at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and the University of Utah. Rogers' theatrical activity includes acting and directing in addition to writing plays. He has traveled extensively in Russia, Eastern Europe, and India. He and his wife Merriam are the parents of seven children, thirty-eight grandchildren and, so far, three great-grandchildren. They reside in Bountiful, Utah.

GENTLE BARBARIAN

ACT ONE

Scene One -- *A drawing room. The estate of Varvara Petrovna Turgeneva in central Russia. A late autumn morning in the mid-nineteenth century, before the Emancipation. The young servant girls Masha and Pelagea bustle about, dusting and straightening the furniture.*

Masha: *(pointing to a large hassock)* Don't set it there. By the window.

Pelagea: No. Before the large chair.

Masha: Who told you?

Pelagea: Mr. Turgenev. For his brother's leg.

Masha: His leg?

Pelagea: To elevate it.

Masha: Why?

Pelagea: He has the gout.

Masha: He didn't tell *me*. He would have told me if he wanted it in front of the large chair—not you.

Pelagea: Then maybe I imagined it.

Masha: Pelagea, please. You mustn't "imagine" anything. Not in this house. It's got to be just as the Mistress requires, or there'll be the Devil to pay.

Pelagea: At least they're not so strict at Yamskoe.

Masha: Shh!!

Pelagea: I hate it here!

Masha: What if she's in the next room?

Pelagea: Why did she bring me here, I wonder?

Masha: Don't be so conceited. She didn't ask for you.

Sergey: *(appearing from outdoors)* What's the trouble here?

Masha: Just a small dispute, Sir.

Sergey: Pelagea—how's she working out?

Masha: She's still quite independent, Sir. Doesn't respect my authority. But she may still settle in.

Sergey: Not 'broken in' yet, eh? Well then, as senior maid, please inform your Mistress that I'd like a word with her.

Masha: Now?

Sergey: Yes. Now.

Masha: Yes, Sir.

(She exits indoors.)

Sergey: So you're still not 'broken in.'

Pelagea: I'm doing my best, Sir.

Sergey: *(standing close to her)* That's right.... *(fondling her hair)* Always do your best to please us.

Pelagea: *(breaking free)* I don't know what you mean.

Sergey: Oh, yes, you do. I'd wager you even scratch and bite. I'll have to test that in you.

Pelagea: (*eyeing him coldly*) Don't try me, Sir.

Sergey: Then I shall.

Pelagea: I'm the Mistress' servant. Not yours.

Sergey: Don't you realize that any time I choose to ask her...? Why do you think I arranged to have you brought here?

Pelagea: *You?*

Sergey: (*advancing on her*) Be grateful that I've taken note of your...“maturity.” My hands are most capable.
(*Nikolay appears at the outer door.*)

Nikolay: You're here already, Sergey Nikitich?

Sergey: Am I too early?

Nikolay: By several hours.

Sergey: I was eager to see your famous brother after all these years. I'd like to know if he is really like everyone makes him out to be.

Nikolay: And how is that?

Sergey: You know what Count Tolstoy and Dostoevsky say of him.

Nikolay: Count Tolstoy is most ungrateful. Ivan introduced him to the court, saved him from the front lines. And how did he thank him?

Sergey: We all know the story.

Nikolay: Dueling is outlawed. It's a criminal act.

Sergey: On the books, yes. But men of honor never decline.

Nikolay: It's cruel and barbarous—like serfdom.

Sergey: (*eyeing Pelagea*) This is hardly the time to impugn our social foundations. There are too many anarchists about—stirring up the peasants.

Nikolay: My brother is not one of them.

Sergey: He has no ideals. No loyalty.

Nikolay: He has higher ideals. He loves mankind even more than Russia.

Sergey: (*going to Pelagea and again stroking her hair*) His books romanticize these ignorant, barely governable creatures. That can only lead to far more bloodletting than what he abhors in an occasional duel. Have you seen Dostoevsky's novel *The Devils*?

Nikolay: Dostoevsky licks the Tsar's boots and vilifies everyone who is not a reactionary Slavophile like himself.

Sergey: He's a far better writer than your brother.

Nikolay: My brother is decent, kind, cultivated, and, above all, humane. I'd much rather a brother of mine had those qualities than any other.

Sergey: Speaking of “cultivation,” I'm amazed at how your brother has insinuated himself into the graces of your mother's distinguished guest. I'm curious to meet her.

Nikolay: Your curiosity will be satisfied when, as invited, you return for lunch.

Sergey: (*rising to leave*) I suppose Ivan will be as smooth as ever. He'll avoid any serious argument, pretending that we unenlightened rustics couldn't possibly comprehend his sublime views.

Nikolay: Ivan follows Pushkin: “Ignore praise and do not contradict a fool.”

Sergey: Good advice, Nikolay. I'll heed it and say no more. You should heed it too when your brother comes.

For your own best good. And so should he.

Nikolay: Is that a threat?

Sergey: It's as you care to perceive it.

Nikolay: What if *I* should challenge *you* to a duel some time?

Sergey: I'd ignore it.

Nikolay: Wouldn't that sully your honor?

Sergey: I'd consider the source. You're disowned, don't forget. From you it would be a mere impertinence.

Varvara: (*entering from indoors, followed by Masha*) What's this, Sergey? Why so early?

Sergey: Just 'testing the waters,' Sister. And...

(*Eyeing Nikolay*)

...to have a word with you before your guests arrive. A private word.

Varvara: Then go somewhere, Nikolay. See to the carriage....

(*Nikolay leaves.*)

And, you maids, give the chambers a final dusting.

Masha and Pelagea: Yes, Mistress.;;;

(*They exit, indoors.*)

Varvara: Now, Brother. What have you in mind?

Sergey: It's about your sons. I've given Ivan's visit much thought. And I fear, Sister, that they're colluding.

Varvara: Colluding? That's impossible. Ivan's been away all these years, and—

Sergey: You've asked me to keep tabs on Nikolay. And you've wondered where Ivan comes by his liberal notions. Well, I've intercepted some of their letters.

Varvara: And...?

Sergey: Nikolay is the true radical. I fear the example he will set his brother. He makes no distinction between himself and your peasants.

Varvara: It's true. He behaves just like them.

Sergey: Don't forget his ludicrous marriage to one of them.

Varvara: Please don't remind me!

Sergey: As best I can tell, he will encourage a like familiarity in his sibling while he is here.

Varvara: That will never do, Sergey. What would Madame Viardot think? And what if it turned him from her? Our line, Sergey. At all costs we must preserve our line and pass it on through...

Sergey: The most capable hands?

Varvara: Yes. With all my estates intact. But Ivan is my only hope for doing so... Oh, what shall we do?

Sergey: We must separate your sons. Madame Viardot must not begin to think that Ivan and Nikolay are anything alike. She must be persuaded that Ivan's roots are as refined and aristocratic as her own and that he respects them. Then, who knows, she may find him so irresistible that she will gladly remove the remaining barriers to—

Varvara: Quite so. I cannot think her present husband begins to compare.... Why, what a thing that would be—to claim the famous European diva. To be her in-law!

Sergey: It would turn every Russian head. Every tongue would wag. And qualify you to appear at court.

Varvara: But how best estrange those two?

Sergey: Perhaps something from the distant past.

Varvara: Yes?

Sergey: It occurs to me that Nikolay, who so dotes on his brother, still has no knowledge of...a certain coincidence.

Varvara: Coincidence?

Sergey: Surely you haven't forgotten, Sister! Think. Recall the past. How it was once—before Ivan first traveled to the West....

Varvara: I'm thinking.

Sergey: It has to do with a woman. Women are always the complication.

Varvara: There was that kitchen maid.

Sergey: Not the kitchen maid.

(Gesturing in the direction of Nikolay's exit)

Another.

Varvara: Oh. Oh...yes. Why, of course. Why didn't I think of—

(Laying her fan on his lips)

Say no more, Brother. Not to me anyway. Handle it like you always do.

Sergey: As you wish. I'll see you then at dinner.

Varvara: Yes, please return then, Sergey.

(Calling)

Masha! Pelagea!

(To Sergey)

You can apprise me about Ivan and the Great Lady....

(The maids return.)

This room isn't as it should be....

(Sergey moves toward Pelagea.)

Sergey!

(He leaves. Varvara observes the maids as they further straighten the room, then returns indoors.)

Pelagea: I don't like that man.

Masha: No one likes him, Pelagea. Not even the Mistress. But don't say anything around her.

Pelagea: How can she put up with such mean company, even if he is her kin?

Masha: She abides him because he does whatever she asks.

Pelagea: But why?

Masha: He's after her inheritance.

Pelagea: But won't that go to Ivan or Nikolay?

Masha: It will be Master Ivan's some day. If he doesn't cross her the way Nikolay did....

(Nikolay enters, again from outdoors.)

Nikolay: What's this doing here?

Masha: What, Sir?

Nikolay: The hassock? It should go before the big soft chair.

Masha: Like I told her.

(Eyeing Pelagea)

Well, then...

(Pelagea moves the hassock.)

Pelagea: Is that where you want it, Sir?

Nikolay: A little farther out. My brother has long legs.

Pelagea: About your size, is he?

Masha: That's not necessary for you to know.

Nikolay: *(chuckling)* Yes. We're about the same size.

Masha: I'll take care of her for that impertinence, Master.

Nikolay: *(sitting on the hassock, still chuckling)* I don't mind.

Pelagea: Why were you disowned, Sir?

Masha: Don't ask questions!

Nikolay: Because I married one of you. Without Mother's consent.

Masha: Should you be talking this way, Sir...to us, I mean?

Nikolay: Why not? That's one of the benefits. I can talk freely with whomever I want. I don't have to pretend any more that there's some ridiculous difference between us. We're all Russians. Your ancestors were just more unfortunate: Their crops failed, so they borrowed money from mine. Then the next year a drought came. The crops failed again, and there was nothing left to do but sell their land and themselves with it. That was just a few centuries ago. And now you're my mother's slaves.

Pelagea: Serfs.

Nikolay: *Slaves.* There's no difference. "Serf" sounds more quaint, more homey. That's all. In other countries they're from some savage land. Another race. Another color. Otherwise, there's no difference....

(Looking into her eyes)

How we've mistreated you!...

Pelagea: Will your brother be as good as you?

Nikolay: "Good"?

(Laughing)

You think I'm "good"?

Pelagea: I think you're very good. The nicest master I've ever known.

Nikolay: Yes, Pelagea, he's a very good man.

(Staring at her, intently)

And I hope *you*'ll find him so.

Pelagea: Me? Why?

Nikolay: Because... Well, because I do. He's worked hard for your future emancipation. You know about his famous book, I suppose. Even the Tsar has read it. They say that after the first few pages he exclaimed, "Why, they're people too—just like us!" What did you think of it?

Pelagea: Of what?

Nikolay: My brother's book?

Pelagea: I can't read.

Nikolay: Oh, yes. Of course.

Pelagea: So, will I like him as much as I like you?

Nikolay: I'm sure you will. He's...more impassioned than I. When he feels deeply about something...or someone—well, then he's like our mother. You can't stop him. But he's never unkind—not intentionally.

Pelagea: When does his train arrive?

Nikolay: He's coming by carriage. He took the train only as far as Moscow.

Masha: Will you meet him?

Nikolay: We already sent the carriage with my mother's driver. His valet will be with him—Luka.

Masha: Luka! He wasn't even fourteen when the Master took him away. I wonder what he looks like now—if he's as handsome as he was then.

Pelagea: What's he like, this Luka?

Masha: He was rather shy back then. Good—yes, good and decent. I hope he hasn't changed too much.

Pelagea: (*to Nikolay*) Is your brother married?

Masha: Pelagea, you're too personal.

Nikolay: No, he isn't. And I doubt he'll ever marry. He's madly in love with a married woman.

Masha: How sad!

Pelagea: How romantic!

Masha: Pelagea!

Nikolay: Pelagea's right. It's quite romantic. One of the most talked about liaisons in all Europe. You see, this woman happens to be the incomparable Pauline Garcia Viardot.

Pelagea: Viardot? Sounds French.

Nikolay: Her husband is a wealthy Parisian realtor. She's Spanish. You've never heard of her?

Pelagea: No.

Masha: Anyone who knows anything about music has heard of Madame Viardot. She is the greatest opera singer presently alive.

Nikolay: And now I'll tell you both a secret. Why do you think my mother redecorated all these rooms just this past summer?

Pelagea: Master Ivan is coming home.

Nikolay: Not just for him. For Madame Viardot.

Pelagea: Is she coming too?

Masha: Good heavens! When?

Nikolay: Today. She'll be with us till the month's end—then on to Petersburg. She's starring there in the season's first opera.

Pelagea: So she's the "distinguished guest" Sergey Nikitich had in mind!

Masha: They're coming together?

Nikolay: Oh, no. That would never do. She's a married lady, don't forget. And Russia is still very provincial—with high public standards. She's coming on the noon train.

Masha: Good heavens!

Pelagea: Will we see her then?

Nikolay: Yes. In fact, the Mistress has assigned you to be the Lady's maid while she is here.

Pelagea: How wonderful!

Masha: Why not me, Sir? I know something about opera.

Nikolay: I'm sorry, Masha. My mother needs you in her boudoir. She prefers the way you press her dresses. And she doesn't want to look inferior to Madame Viardot.

Masha: She won't. I'll make sure.

(The sound of horses' hooves and a carriage.)

Nikolay: There's my brother's carriage.

(He goes outdoors.)

Pelagea: Oh, I'm so nervous!

Masha: Calm yourself, Pelagea. No matter how you feel inside, you must never show it. That's the cardinal rule. If you don't measure up, you know where you'll go next.

Pelagea: To the fields.

Masha: Just remember that when you get too giddy. If Madame doesn't like you and tells the Mistress—

Pelagea: I'll remember....

Ivan: *(entering, with a cane and supported under either arm by Nikolay and Luka)* Can it be? Can this be our boyhood home—still so charmingly arranged? Why, it's like a salon in the Rue de Montparnasse. Even Pauline will take notice. Mother does have fine taste.... Ah, but is that chair for me? Help me to it, will you? My left leg has given out completely....

(Nikolay gestures to the girls, who rush to Ivan and also assist him to the large chair, then lift his left leg onto the hassock.)

That's it...ah, yes. So much better.... Luka, bring in the luggage....

(Luka returns outdoors.)

Nikolay: How was your trip then?

Ivan: Wearisome, as always. And it's such a dreary time of year.

Nikolay: Why, it's a beautiful fall day.

Ivan: But so foreboding. It sentinel the winter. All life will soon depart. Why must there be winter, Nikolay...?

(Noticing the girls)

But who's this?

Masha: I'm Masha, Master Ivan. I was only ten when you left us.

Pelagea: I'm Pelagea. I was transferred here from Yamskoe just a week ago—

Nikolay: After Marfa passed away. Please summon the Mistress, Masha.

Masha: Yes, Sir....

(She exits inside.)

Ivan: Marfa's dead? She was my nurse. Saw me into this world. Oh, how dark it suddenly is. What a cloud has descended. This and autumn too. Even Pauline can't cheer me up now.

Pelagea: Then I'll try, Sir.

Ivan: And just how, young lady, do you propose doing so?

Pelagea: By doing whatever you say.

Ivan: You mean it?

Pelagea: Yes.

Ivan: Do you...fully realize what you are saying?

Pelagea: I trust you, Sir. If it would please you, I'd like to hear something you've written. I heard the steward read something once at Yamskoe.

Ivan: It must have been from my *Sportsman's Sketchbook* or the *Poems in Prose*.

Pelagea: *Poems in Prose*, I think.

Ivan: I don't keep all of that in my head, you know.

Pelagea: I suppose not.

Ivan: Here are a few lines. What I don't exactly recall I'll improvise.

Pelagea: (*clapping her hands*) Just for me?

Ivan: Just for you. Now listen: "I stood on the crest of a sloping hill. In front of me spread the motley ripe rye—now like a golden, now a silvery sea. But no sultry breeze coursed through it. A heavy thundercloud massed upon the horizon. Everything held its breath. Everything languished beneath the ominous gleam of the sun's last rays. I glanced at the blue mass, and confusion consumed me. 'Be quick, then!' I thought. 'Flash out, golden serpent! Rumble, thunder! Advance and discharge, evil cloud! Put an end to this painful torment!' But the cloud still did not stir. As before, it crushed the distant dumb earth, waxing ever larger and darker. Then, from out of its blue monotony flashed, like a piece of lace or a snowball, something spirited and smooth. It was a white dove. It flew onward, straight onward, and vanished into the forest. Moments passed—the cruel silence still reigned. Then behold! There fluttered now two such pieces of lace, wending their way back home.... The storm broke at last. I could hardly reach the first shelter. The wind shrieked, a mad thing. Rent in bits, low-hanging, rust-hued clouds swirled onward: everything rocked and whirled amid the slanting columns of a furious downpour. Fiery green lightning blinded and threatened certain destruction. Abrupt claps of thunder discharged like cannon. The air almost smelled of sulphur. But there, under the eaves, on the very edge of a garret window, side by side, now nested, were those two white doves: she who had flown after her companion and, with saving grace, had brought him safely home. See how they ruffle their plumage, each touching with its wing the wing of the other. It is well with them! And it is well with me as I gaze at them. Though I am alone...as always, alone...."

Pelagea: (*tearfully*) Oh, you poor, poor man.

Ivan: Did I make you cry? I'm sorry. Here, we'll change the mood some. It's still about a—well, about a kind of bird. I'll quickly improvise.

Pelagea: You will?

Ivan: Just for you: I sit at my window in the early morning. It is the first of May. The flush of dawn is still to come, but the dark, warm night is already paling, already grown chill. No fog has risen, as yet no breeze. All is still silent and of a single hue. But in the rarefied air, in the chill of the dew's harsh dampness, I sense an awakening. Suddenly, into my chamber, through the open window, flies, lightly fluttering, a strange and lovely creature. The regular heaving of its wondrous breast is barely palpable. I start. I look more intently: it is no bird. It is a tiny, winged woman, clad in a long, billowing robe. Except for the glorious fiery tresses that cascade about her fine featured face, her hue is like mother-of-pearl. Only the under side of her delicate wings, so modestly concealed and but slightly visible, glows with the tender flush of scarlet—like a creviced rose, about to burst into bloom. She floats teasingly near me. Then her tiny face breaks into a radiant smile, her large, luminous eyes now laughing.

(*Pelagea giggles.*)

In their merry playfulness, their capricious flight, their diamond rays fairly shiver.

(*Pelagea giggles again.*)

I dart toward her. But she therewith flutters through the window and headlong away. In the garden, in the lilac wilderness, a turtledove greets her with its first cooing. And at the spot where I last beheld her the milky-white sky flushes a soft crimson. Oh, I recognize thee, goddess of fancy! Hast thou who descends

upon young poets visited me by sheer accident? O poetry! O youth! O virginal beauty of woman! Again, if only for an instant, gleam before me in the early morning of yet another spring day...

Pelagea: (*ecstatic, though again in tears*) Oh, oh...I can't speak. You've made me feel—what is it?

Ivan: Your own wondrous sensibility!

Pelagea: How can your mere words so move me?

Ivan: It's the magic of imagination, my sweet, combined with the profound feelings that lie within each of our breasts, but which we seldom recognize or think to arouse from their deep, hidden slumber—until, that is, two such breasts—our two doves, if you will—however briefly, come together....

Pelagea: I don't know what you mean.

Ivan: Have you ever observed an old stone on the seashore when, at high tide on a sunny spring day, the sparkling waves beat upon it from all sides—strike and caress and drench its mossy head with crumbling pearls of glittering foam? The stone remains the same old stone, but brilliant colors now start forth upon its surly exterior—bearing witness to that distant time when the molten granite was just beginning to harden and still glowed with fiery hues. So does your young womanly soul attack my old heart from all quarters. Beneath your touch it once more glows with the faded traces of its pristine fire! The waves at last retreat, but, though a keen breeze dries them, the colors remain and only gradually dim until another time when other delicious, virginal waves come to caress and bathe and revive what, no matter how old we are, is still, deep down, always there.

Pelagea: I...I've never seen things so vividly in all my life. I'm...so stirred.

Ivan: With life?

Pelagea: Yes.

Ivan: With joy?

Pelagea: Yes.

Ivan: With heightened passion?

Pelagea: Yes. Yes.

Ivan: With...love?

Pelagea: I'm...not sure.

Ivan: A moment ago you were still a little girl. Now, sweet Pelagea, you are a woman. Rise to your full stature.

Pelagea: (*swooning*) How?

Ivan: You did say, didn't you, that you were mine to command?

Pelagea: I did.

Ivan: Then, to begin with, I command you to give me a kiss.

Pelagea: A kiss?

Ivan: A kiss.

Pelagea: Here in front of—

Ivan: I can't wait. "The wine is drawn. It must be drunk...."

Pelagea: Well, then...

Ivan: Here, on my lap.

(She climbs onto Ivan's lap.)

Now.

(They kiss.)

Pelagea: Was that all right?

Ivan: It was very...all right. Except—

Pelagea: Except?

Ivan: Except it wasn't long enough.

Pelagea: Oh.... May I tell you something, Sir?

Ivan: You may.

Pelagea: Would you believe that you are the first man I've ever...kissed?

Ivan: No. That's impossible. You're...how old?

Pelagea: I just turned sixteen.

Ivan: And you've been at Yamskoe how long?

Pelagea: I was born there.

Ivan: And you've never even—

Pelagea: Never even.

Ivan: However did you manage?

Pelagea: It wasn't easy.

Ivan: In that case I...well, I'm very privileged, aren't I? But your kiss really wasn't long enough.

Pelagea: Then I'll try again.

Nikolay: Ivan....

Ivan: Yes?

Nikolay: I wouldn't.

Ivan: Wouldn't?

Nikolay: Kiss her again. Not that way.

Ivan: You must be jealous. Here, let's show him then....

(Ivan and Pelagea clinch tightly. A prolonged kiss. Varvara enters, followed by Masha.)

Varvara: Ivan. What's this? It's not Madame Viardot?

(Ivan and Pelagea unclinch.)

Ivan: Mother!...

(Pelagea scurries off Ivan's lap and stands at attention.)

Varvara: Surely that's not Madame Viardot?

Ivan: No, Mother.

Varvara: Just watch yourself when Madame Viardot's around. We don't want to disappoint her, do we? I trust, for that matter, that no one within the sound of my voice will disappoint her because if you do—

Ivan: I'm sure we'll all be very well behaved, Mother dear.

Varvara: Then give me a kiss too.

Ivan: I'll have to blow you one, darling. I can't stand up....

(He blows her a kiss.)

Varvara: Those horrible French cooks. Poor baby, they'll put you in your grave. Can't Pauline take better care of you? She wouldn't neglect you so if you were her husband.

Ivan: Mother, that's impossible.

Varvara: But why? You're both artists. You know all the great names—Flaubert, Maupassant, Henry James,

George Sand.

Ivan: Who do you think introduced us?

Varvara: Who?

Ivan: Monsieur Viardot.

Varvara: Oh, really? But he can't have your appeal. Or your wealth. Your prospects, anyway—provided you keep pleasing Mommie.

Ivan: You don't know Pauline, dear. I'm just very lucky that she...cares for me.

Varvara: Well, I'll make her acquaintance shortly. And I'm sure I can prevail on her. Her train's almost due. Is the carriage ready?

Nikolay: It is.

Varvara: Then you come with me, Nikolay. Luka must stay and attend his master.

Nikolay: Yes, Mother.

Varvara: When Viardot arrives, you must call me Mistress, like all the others.

Nikolay: Yes...Mistress....

(Varvara and Nikolay exit. Ivan takes out his notebook and begins to write. From time to time he looks up as the others converse, then writes some more.)

Luka: Is it really you? Masha?

Masha: Yes, Luka.

Luka: You're...very attractive.

Masha: You're...very...grown up.

Luka: I'm glad to see you again.

Masha: So am I.

Luka: Do you remember, just before I left with the Master—the words we exchanged back then?

Masha: It's been a long time. I wasn't sure we'd ever meet again. But, yes, I remember.

Pelagea: As a matter of fact, she's been talking about you all morning.

Masha: Pelagea, how dare you! I...I must set the table.

Luka: May I help you?

Masha: *(flustered, but despite herself)* If you wish....

(She exits indoors. Luka follows.)

Ivan: So...we're alone now. Just the two of us.

Pelagea: Yes, Sir.

Ivan: You know, you are very lovely. I was drawn to you the moment I came in that door.

Pelagea: But, Sir. I'm so very young.

Ivan: You mean, I'm so very old, don't you?

Pelagea: Oh, no, Sir.

Ivan: Don't worry. I won't take advantage.

(Suddenly amused)

Besides, how could I? I can't move from this chair or walk about the room without your help.

Pelagea: You could always command me.

Ivan: Yes.... That's very tempting. To command you. But, as I said, I'm opposed to coercion. That's why I so oppose serfdom. Does that impress you a little?

Pelagea: I don't know, Sir. I've never thought about those things. Or questioned my...status.

Ivan: Never questioned? Or never dared?

Pelagea: Both, I guess.

Ivan: It takes my breath away.

Pelagea: What does, Sir?

Ivan: That crack in your voice—that slight hesitation in the middle of a word. It's as if I knew you already.
And, yes, intimately.

Pelagea: Please, Sir.

Ivan: I only tell you this because it is so. I'm not making it up. Any of it. You're so familiar—endearingly familiar.

Pelagea: I don't know what to say.

Ivan: Tell me about yourself then. Who are your kinsmen?

Pelagea: I never knew my real father.

Ivan: Your mother was violated, was she? That's how you were conceived? Like so many others? Was it one of the serfs at Yamskoe? Or my mother's steward?

Pelagea: It was no one there. My mother was a servant in this household, they tell me—sent to Yamskoe when she became pregnant.

Ivan: Then we should be able to determine your father's identity. That would have been—you're how old?

Pelagea: Just sixteen, Sir.

Ivan: That was the year I went to the West for the first time.

Pelagea: What made you go West?

Ivan: My mother sent me. So I could experience "the world," as she put it. To season me in shrewdness for the day I would inherit her estates.... But tell me of *your* mother. Do you miss her now they've brought you here?

Pelagea: I've missed my mother since I was five. She died then.

Ivan: I'm sorry. Was it some illness?

Pelagea: She was murdered.

Ivan: No.

Pelagea: By the man they—your mother—forced her to marry. He did the plowing at Yamskoe. He drank a lot. And when he was drunk he became jealous because I was someone else's child. He tried to kill me too, but my mother's scream, before she died, brought others to my rescue.

Ivan: How did they deal with him?

Pelagea: Your mother had him castrated, then pulled apart by the horses he plowed with. As a lesson to the rest of us.

Ivan: Did you have to witness it?

Pelagea: Yes, the way I'd witnessed my mother's murder. The Mistress thought it would make me feel better.

Ivan: Did it help...satisfy you?

Pelagea: I've never had any satisfaction from life.

Ivan: None at all?

Pelagea: None.

Ivan: Not even when I kissed you today?

Pelagea: Not really.

Ivan: You responded as if...it satisfied you.

Pelagea: We learn to dissemble. Oh, don't misunderstand me. It didn't disgust me. I'm sure I could get used to it. It's just that the sensation was...so new.

Ivan: You can't mean it.

Pelagea: It's true though. My mother's experience made me wary. I've fought plenty of them off—field hands, the other servants, and, yes, even the steward at Yamskoe, who's at least seventy years old. I think that's why they got rid of me when your mother requested their "most compliant" female servant. I wasn't compliant at all. I wasn't any fun for them. And they wanted to play a joke on her—at my expense.

Ivan: I'm sorry about your mother. I really am. And I'll try to find out who the man was who took advantage of her here at the manor. I'll see that he is dealt with.

Pelagea: Don't do that. It can't help any.

Ivan: It's the principle I'm thinking of. Without principles, without standards we would all revert to barbarians. If you think it might cheer you up and if you have no strong objections—as I said, I would never force you—then why don't you climb back on my lap. I'll teach you how the French kiss. Just so you know. It's very arousing.

Pelagea: Do you want me to, Sir?

Ivan: I'd...be very grateful.

Pelagea: Then I'll comply. It's my duty to please you....

(She again climbs on his lap. Just as she does so, Luka enters.)

Pelagea: Oh.

Ivan: It's all right. Luka's seen me with young ladies before. Just stay on my lap. We'll resume our lesson after Luka reports.... You had something to tell me, Luka?

Luka: Well, only that—Master, I hope we stay here a good long time.

Ivan: Why, Luka? Are you finally homesick? You know we'll be following Madame Viardot to Petersburg at the end of the month.

Luka: No, Master. I'm not really homesick.

Ivan: What then?

Luka: It's Masha. She's...well, we were very close back then, even though we were quite young. We even made vows to each other. It may not have meant anything at the time, but now she's grown up so—and so very beautiful.

Ivan: So she compares favorably, does she, with Madame Viardot's maid?

Luka: Please, Master, don't mention that one. Besides, Masha's a native Russian girl. I understand everything she says. I haven't been with a Russian girl for eight years now.

Ivan: And did you get better acquainted setting table?

Luka: We did.

Ivan: Did she let you kiss her?

Luka: She did, Master. And I didn't have to ask her.

Ivan: It's a wonder you didn't break a plate or two.

Luka: We were...careful.

Ivan: *(to Pelagea)* You see. Masha's not shy. It goes with being a housemaid. It really does. And it's very

pleasurable.

(To Luka)

Anything more?

Luka: That's all, I guess. I just wanted you to know that I still like her a lot—in case—

Ivan: I'll keep it in mind, Luka. But no promises. She's my mother's maid, remember. And my mother would have to give her consent. I'd insist on that.

Luka: I understand.

Ivan: Be patient. You're a good fellow. I'll do what I can for you.

Luka: Thank you, Sir.

(He leaves.)

Ivan: And now for our lesson. Are you ready?

Pelagea: Whenever you say, Sir.

Ivan: I've always admired hair like yours. Such gorgeous radiant tresses.... Well, we shall begin by unbuttoning your collar. Such a sweet little button....

(As he undoes her collar, the lights dim.)

Scene Two -- *The same. An hour later. Ivan is still in his chair, alone. He is half asleep—his hair disheveled and his clothing partly undone. The sound of a carriage.*

Ivan: *(awaking)* It must be she...

(Smoothing his hair and straightening his clothes, then calling)

Masha! Luka! They're here!

(Masha and Luka rush in.)

Go meet them. Be good to her. Bring in the lady's luggage....

(Masha and Luka rush out. Seconds later, amid loud talk and bustle, they return with various pieces of luggage, following the entourage: Varvara, Nikolay, Pauline, and Pelagea.)

Pauline: No, really, my dear. It was a pleasant journey. The fall is such a beautiful time of year. My favorite season. And the landscape—it's endless. Who'd have thought that Russia was so immense....

(Noticing Ivan)

Mon cher!

(She rushes to his chair, deftly embraces him, then, drawing back, pecks him on the cheek.)

How is my pet?

Ivan: My foot's worse. Travel's hard on it.

Pauline: Ah, yes. Your sweet *pie*. But it's elevated now—like the doctors prescribe. You'll be invigorated before you know it—now that you're home again, in your mother's bosom, so to speak.

Ivan: Now that you're here, my darling. You are my true home—your bosom is my—

Pauline: Tut! And what a delightful woman Varvara Petrovna is. We have so much in common. We discussed our sons all the way here.

Ivan: Yes, but is there any comparison? Your children are still so young. They require so much of you.

Varvara: That never changes. Their requirements just become more extravagant...

(Eyeing Ivan)

...and expensive.

Ivan: Mother, that's unfair. I told you that as soon as my English anthology comes out, I'll wire you back that latest advance. With interest if you wish. And Nikolay here—he works for wages, doesn't he?

Varvara: Enough of that. What are these servants doing, gawking so and listening to private matters? Off with you!...

(Masha and Pelagea exit.)

Remember your place, Luka. Stop standing there and help them with the Lady's luggage. Do all she asks of you.

Luka: *(also exiting)* Yes, Mistress....

Varvara: Such an illustrious guest! We must freshen ourselves and change for dinner. You must be famished.

Pauline: I'm eager to sample the local cuisine.

Varvara: I hope, my dear, that we won't disappoint you. In your honor I've brought in a Petersburg chef, trained in Bordeaux. And I've imported your finest French wines.

Pauline: How thoughtful....

(Varvara and Pauline exit.)

Ivan: Well, what do you think?

Nikolay: You refer to Pauline, of course.

Ivan: Of course.

Nikolay: She's formidable.

Ivan: Isn't she?

Nikolay: I couldn't handle her though. I'd be uncomfortable in her presence. I wouldn't know what to say to her.

Ivan: I don't either, half the time. But she never wants for words. She takes care of everything. Looks after you—as if you were her little boy.

Nikolay: Like Mother.

Ivan: Except, with Pauline, you don't resist. You're flattered. It's perfectly enjoyable.

Nikolay: That's where you and I are different. To be fulfilled, to be really content, I have to be in charge.

Ivan: Then you must be very unhappy here.

Nikolay: Since Vera died, it doesn't seem to matter. Before that, I was very happy—even with the disinheritance.

Ivan: Why do you stay here?

Nikolay: What would I do? I have no skills. Who would employ me besides Mother? This way I can look after her—and your interests as well—in ways she would never notice or acknowledge.

Ivan: You really are something of a peasant, Nikolay. The good people of the earth—I believe in them. We couldn't survive without them. I admire you, Nikolay. I love you. More than you know.

Nikolay: I know you do. And I sleep soundly these days. I always did. That's enough.

Ivan: You inspire me. Yes, you do. I even envy you right now. I'll write you up some day. In a story if not my next novel.

Nikolay: I need to tell you something.

Ivan: Yes?

Nikolay: It's about Pelagea.

Ivan: Isn't she lovely? It's unseemly, I know. She's so very young. Of course, Pauline is the great love of my life. No one can ever replace her. But this Pelagea—I tell you, her fate is already sealed. And the fact that she's still a virgin—I can tell she's not lying to me—why, that makes her all the more desirable. I can't hold back much longer, Nikolay. Maybe even tonight. Of course, I'd never force her, but she's 'compliant' enough. She even knows that word. She holds back just enough to be irresistible. I thank Heaven that women do this to me. I hope they always will. And imagine feeling this way with Pauline under our very roof. Tell me, didn't God just make us this way so that we can't help ourselves?

Nikolay: She's your daughter...

(A long pause.)

Ivan: What? Who?

Nikolay: Pelagea is your daughter. You need to know that. That's what I wanted to tell you. Why you mustn't take her in your arms that way—and not with that in mind.

Ivan: I don't believe you. How could she be? I've been away all these years—since before she was born. I seldom went to Yamskoe, and never for that. I knew no one there, had no affairs there.

Nikolay: Her mother was sent there from this estate as soon as you went to Europe that first time. Mother had you go there when she did so that you wouldn't know the girl was pregnant. *And by you.*

Ivan: Nikolay, is this the truth?

Nikolay: Ivan, why would I lie to you?

Ivan: Which girl was she? Her mother?

Nikolay: You don't remember?

Ivan: There were so many.

Nikolay: Her name was Aglaya....

Ivan: Aglaya.

Nikolay: She worked here in the kitchen.

Ivan: Ah, yes. That one. She was distinctive. Lovely. I was smitten by her too. She was one of the first I felt I was really in love with. Not like that Katerina Mother engaged to break us in. How old was she? Nearly thirty? And a widow. How old were we then?

Nikolay: Around fourteen--Mother's way of proving our manhood, to make sure one of us could provide her an heir. It's why she wants you to marry Pauline, don't you see?

Ivan: But that's impossible. Pauline will never divorce Louis. Besides, he's my *benefactor*.

Nikolay: Are the Viardots still intimate?

Ivan: As much, I'm afraid, as she and I.

Nikolay: How much is that?

Ivan: The last time we were... 'intimate' was... too long ago for me to remember. But I'm hoping that—by bringing her here, so far from Paris and Louis—I can rekindle the spark in her. She'll be here several weeks—with no one else to turn her head. Unless it's you.

Nikolay: Don't worry. I'll keep a safe distance.

Ivan: And then, while she's in Petersburg, I'll be there too, so that... you see now, don't you, why I've needed another woman?

Nikolay: I suppose I do.

Ivan: You've had them, surely. Since Vera, I mean.

Nikolay: Actually, I haven't.

Ivan: How can you stand it?

Nikolay: I think of her instead. I still mourn her.

Ivan: How you must have loved her then.... It was shortly before my last trip abroad when, to the surprise of us all, you joined yourself to her.

Nikolay: I couldn't tell anyone beforehand, Ivan.

Ivan: Not even me?

Nikolay: Not even you. If Mother had found out, she'd have interfered.

Ivan: All the same, I wish you had told me when the two of you first became serious. I was gone—how long, six months?—when I got word of her death. In all that time you never wrote me about how you were getting along. That would have interested me.

Nikolay: I didn't need to talk about it.

Ivan: It was just that matter of fact, was it? That 'natural'?

Nikolay: That's how it was. She was fully a part of me. She still is.

Ivan: Astonishing! Wonderful, but astonishing.... You know, it amazes me that you turned out so normal, so...humane. Look what happened to Father. Drank himself to death!

Nikolay: He didn't love our mother. He was unfaithful many times over.

Ivan: She drove him to it. If she ever loved him at all, it was far too possessively. She ran his life just like she runs ours. He couldn't stand the suffocation. Why, do you remember that summer long ago when we went to the dacha and stayed there for months?

Nikolay: I remember. Father insisted.

Ivan: That new family showed up. They'd bought the neighboring dacha—a widow, her young son and daughter.

Nikolay: That's right.

Ivan: It was the first time I became interested in women. The young girl, Zinaida, was about Pelagea's age. How she took my fancy!

Nikolay: She took all of our fancy. Their place swarmed with suitors.

Ivan: She had me there a great deal in the daytime. I was her plaything—her pet; when she played house, I was her little boy. She was truly my "first love." I adored her.

Nikolay: I gave up on her. There were too many others already standing in line to get a nod from her. And she flirted with each of them in turn. Made each feel he was her favorite beau.

Ivan: She allowed me to be with her when the others weren't around because I was so young. She didn't take me seriously, though I prayed she might and dreamed every night that she would at last take me into her arms. It all ended in the fall, just as we were packing to return home and go to school.

Nikolay: Yes, and the summer after that they were gone. They'd sold their dacha to someone else. We never saw them again.

Ivan: You know why, don't you?

Nikolay: I don't recall.

Ivan: Maybe I never told you. It was one of those sultry, late summer nights. I couldn't sleep for thinking of

her. I got out of bed. As usual, you were sound asleep—sleeping the deep, contented sleep of those at peace with themselves, those with a clear conscience. I dressed and tiptoed out of our room. I was mysteriously drawn by some force—I couldn't tell why—to the field between our dacha and theirs. The moon was full. It was dead night, but everything was surprisingly visible. And then I saw them.

Nikolay: *Them?*

Ivan: By that large gnarled gum tree--a single silhouette, with the moon behind them. Passionately embracing. Tearing at each other's clothes. I couldn't take my eyes away until I recognized first her, my Zinaida, and then her lover. Then I quickly turned away and came back to the dacha. I didn't go to bed though. I stayed awake till morning. And until we went home a week later I didn't speak to her. I think she knew that *I* knew, and that it could not continue--that her situation was impossible. Maybe she finally told her mother.

Nikolay: Who was he? Her lover?

Ivan: Father, of course.

Nikolay: Yes, of course.

Ivan: I don't hold it against him. I understand now like I never could have then. Poor man.... Why, Kolya, do you think our mother is the way she is?

Nikolay: You know the saying as well as I: "Scratch a Russian"—

Ivan: "And you get a Tartar." You blame it then on the Mongol Invasion?

Nikolay: Something like that. We're not pure Russian, remember—not as "pure" as most of our peasants.

Ivan: Who was that fourteenth century ancestor of ours—that vicious, slant-eyed nomad who drank Russian mead from his enemies' skulls? And which of our women did he tumble in the dirt to breed into us such destructive passion?

Nikolay: We only do to our serfs what was done to us centuries before.

Ivan: Will it ever end? How do you get rid of such bad seed? It's like the germ of a plague that keeps cropping up every other generation—either with the starkest cruelty, as in *Mother*, or with the madness for love in oneself, or—

Nikolay: Or the servile submissiveness in me? Which is really most hurtful, I wonder?

Ivan: I wonder.... And so this Pelagea is my natural daughter?

Nikolay: I'm afraid so.

Ivan: And I'm the very man I was going to hunt down and make pay for it.... Just moments ago I wanted her—wanted her in the worst way and maybe still do. But that cannot be. Look what I've brought on her already—and on her mother. I must somehow make it up to her.

Nikolay: Are you going to tell her?

Ivan: *(removing a pencil and piece of paper from his pocket and writing a note which he then folds and places in his vest)* I must. I will legitimize our relationship: Mother already has a future heir—though she may not know it.

Nikolay: Be careful, Ivan. Mother must never find out, or she'll disown you too.

Ivan: There's one thing I don't understand. Why did she ever risk bringing Pelagea back here—knowing I was coming and would surely run into her?

Nikolay: She's forgotten. Aglaya was nothing to her. She hasn't kept track of the child in some time. There are too many of them, and they're all interchangeable as far as she's concerned.

Ivan: That's true.

Nikolay: That's all the more reason not to call it to her attention...

(Varvara and Pauline return, attended by Pelagea.)

Varvara: Well, have you men had a good chat?

Ivan: We have.

Varvara: And did you discuss the women in your life?

Ivan: We did.

Varvara: You said only the kindest things about us, I presume.

Ivan: We spoke of our mother as could only her flesh-and-blood sons.

Varvara: I believe you. It could not be otherwise. Thank Heaven, my sons are—unlike the world at large—neither deceitful nor treacherous. Ivan never was. And Nikolay, I'm confident, learned his lesson some time ago.

Masha: *(appearing at an inner doorway)* Dinner is served.

Varvara: It's about time! My arm, Nikolay. The hussy here will help Ivan.

Pauline: And so will I.

Varvara: Really, my dear. That's beyond the call. Where's his valet?

Pauline: I don't mind...

(With Pelagea's assistance, helping Ivan out of his chair)

We do this all the time in Paris, don't we, sweet?

Ivan: Yes, whenever my foot's bad.

Pauline: And whenever my back goes out he returns the favor.

Varvara: How delightful that you depend so on each other. How edifying.....

(Ivan suddenly begins to moan.)

Pauline: What is it, *mon cher*?

Ivan: I'm not sure. A stomach pain. Forgive me, Mother. Assemble your guests. I'll join you later.

Varvara: Are you sure, Ivan dear.

Ivan: Yes, Mother. It's not serious.

Pauline: We'll look in on you.

Ivan: Thank you.

(Ivan is assisted back to his chair. The others retire to the dining room. As they do so, Ivan retrieves the note he wrote earlier and places it in Pelagea's hand. A few beats go by. The company's voices are heard from offstage: laughs, titters, exclamations. Then Sergey appears in the doorway.)

Good day, Sergey Nikitich.

Sergey: What's this?

Ivan: As you see, I'm indisposed.

Sergey: From too much high living, I'd say.

Ivan: Yes, you would say that. We've been expecting you.

Sergey: My carriage broke down. The potholes are terrible. Your mother's steward does not maintain things as he should. He's too easy on the serfs. I've made a lifelong study of how best to govern one's—

Ivan: Slaves.

Sergey: What?

Ivan: Slaves, you were about to say.

Sergey: Why not at all—one's "serfs"—the Lord's less privileged. Their greatest need is the direction of enlightened landowners—

Ivan: Slaveholders!

Sergey: It's a matter of regulation—

Ivan: Suffocation!

Sergey: Beneficent control—

Ivan: Evil torture!

Sergey: And it applies to all we do. Nothing surpasses the tried and tested. And that, Ivan, you and your breed seem not to understand. If you could only be more like Count Tolstoy. He educates his serfs but would never send them into the wild world to die, dissolute and drunk in some gutter.

Ivan: Count Tolstoy has another side. There's a young boy on his estate, apprenticing as coachman. This boy more resembles the Count than any of his nine legitimate sons. But do you think the Count deigns to converse with him—to bring him into his household?

Sergey: That is the Count's affair. He provides for him.

Ivan: But the feeling--where is the feeling for his own flesh and blood?

Sergey: It's not the first such case, as you should know.

Ivan: What do you mean?

Sergey: You've 'sown your oats' as much as anyone.

Ivan: That's right. Mother even encouraged it.

Sergey: Only with those she thought appropriate. But there were others, weren't there? We should not be so free with ourselves, so impulsive. Feelings are dangerous and destructive. That is why control is so necessary. I've made a study of it.

Ivan: "Study a lifetime, and you may still die a fool."

Sergey: Let me tell you this, Ivan. You cannot be a decent, God-fearing citizen with such a cavalier, cynical, French attitude.

Ivan: Dear Uncle, in this disordered world thousands of ultimately unverifiable faiths have tried to impose some transcendent pattern on human existence—often quite arbitrarily—in the process, alienating men from each other and creating a hostility that is the very antithesis of what those faiths presume to stand for. Serfdom is only one of the consequences.

Sergey: You, Sir, are a Voltairist—a "free thinker" in disguise.

Ivan: No disguise, Uncle. Voltaire was a lone voice of reason and compassion in the superstitious, maniacal society of his day. He alone inveighed against the Christians' burning of witches. If we are honest and fair, we must confess that Voltaire was probably the most humane and therefore most Christlike man who walked the earth during his entire century.

Sergey: That's blasphemy!

Ivan: Call it what you will, Uncle. But there is really only one thing I have ever believed or rejoiced in: the handiwork of God or Whoever created what we call this pristine world. To dismiss or deplore any natural form or any two-legged creature is, it seems to me, the ultimate insult to that Creator. So often in the name of God and country petty, unfeeling, self-aggrandizing factions draw such harsh lines and take adversarial positions. If to do so is what qualifies a man as God-fearing and a loyal citizen, then—forgive me—I will have none of it. I will, as your Dostoevsky somewhere argues, return my "entrance ticket"—both to society

and to God's order if that's how God must have it—which, by the way, I do not for a moment seriously entertain. But I will never demean or dismiss or fail to admire in any of its manifestations that mysterious, wondrously sensitive, at times surprisingly lucid and generous, so divinely potent creation, if there ever was one—my fellow creature, Man! That is my worship!

Sergey: Come, Ivan. All your fancy sentiments don't mean a thing. I once thought the way you do. But, believe me, no one will stand by you and your lofty ideals because in this life it is "everyone for himself."

Ivan: Then I will stand alone. With my ideals.

Sergey: No, you won't even do that. You too must serve your own self-interest. So you might as well do it in the company of others with God's holy name upon your lips. Otherwise, one day they will all abandon you and you will find yourself very, very lonely.

Ivan: You think so, Uncle?

Sergey: I do.

(Suddenly, following Masha, Varvara rushes into the room, flushed and brandishing a silver fork. Nikolay and Pelagea come to the inner door.)

Varvara: Where is she?

Ivan: Who, Mother?

Varvara: Masha! What do you mean by displaying this cutlery instead of my best service?

Masha: But, Mistress, I—

Varvara: *(waving the fork)* Look here. A spot of tarnish. This wasn't worked on, and you weren't supposed to use it.

(She suddenly grasps Masha's arm, twisting it behind her and forcing her to her knees.)

Don't lie to me!

Nikolay: *(having meanwhile intervened and holding back his mother's arm)* Mother, no!

Varvara: Don't oppose me, Nikolay!

Nikolay: I will.

Masha: Mistress, forgive me. It wasn't me.

Varvara: Then who was it?

Masha: It must have been Luka. He was helping me.

Varvara: Luka!

Masha: I pointed to the correct drawer. He must have mistaken it.

Varvara: Had he permission to help you?

Masha: No, Mistress. He just offered to.

Nikolay: Mother, you must return to our guest. You don't want her to witness this.

Varvara: *(collecting herself)* That's true... We'll look into this later. That Luka has forgotten his place. He must be whipped. Come, Sergey. At times like this you are my only consolation.

Sergey: Yes, Incomparable One.

Varvara: Not now, Sergey.

Sergey: Exemplar of that impeccable husbandry which both nurtures and delights—

Varvara: *(suddenly impatient)* Not now, Sergey. Just shut your mouth and take my arm.

Sergey: As you wish, Most Noble, Most—

Varvara: Sergey!

Sergey: Yes, of course, Gracious—

Varvara: Hush now!

(Varvara strikes Sergey on the mouth with her fan.)

Sergey: *(pianissimo)* Ow-oo-oo!...

(Varvara and Sergey return inside.)

Nikolay: How are you feeling, Brother?

Ivan: It's nothing, Nikolay.

Nikolay: I hope so....

(Nikolay returns to the dining room.)

Masha: *(following him)* Look after him, Pelagea. I must serve the guests.

Ivan: Then come back, Masha. When you are free. I'd like a word with you.

Masha: Certainly, Master.

(She exits.)

Pelagea: Can I bring you something, Sir?

Ivan: No. Please stay here. Keep me company. Here—on the hassock...

(Pelagea seats herself next to Ivan.)

Ivan: Actually, I feel very well. There's nothing wrong with me except for my leg.

Pelagea: There isn't?

Ivan: No. I needed to speak to you.

Pelagea: Is that what the note says?

Ivan: Yes.

Pelagea: I thought so. But I can't read it.

Ivan: Forgive me. You deserve better. You must learn to read. and have the best education. I'll see to it.

Pelagea: Why me?

Ivan: That's what we must talk about, Pelagea. Dearest Pelagea, please hear me out.

Pelagea: I'm listening.

Ivan: Your mother's name—I just found out—was Aglaya. The one from this household.

Pelagea: Yes.

Ivan: How...can I tell you?

Pelagea: Tell me what?

Ivan: Please try to understand. You are...I am, it seems, *your father*.

Pelagea: *You?*

Ivan: Yes. Your mother and I were...*intimate*. Just a few times before I first went abroad. I didn't know then that she was expecting you or later what they did to her. But now that I know...I want to make it up to you. Can you forgive me?

Pelagea: *You are my father?*

Ivan: It seems quite certain. And, as I look at you now, I have even less doubt. I see myself in you, and also your mother as I remember her then. You're very much like her--so lovely.

Pelagea: Yet less than an hour ago you touched me, told me that—

Ivan: I didn't know then. Nikolay told me after you left the room....

Pelagea: I see.

Ivan: I view you now in an entirely different light. I feel responsible for you. I want to make it all up to you—*everything*.

Pelagea: Why?

Ivan: Because you are my flesh and blood, and—please don't misunderstand me—for that I love you.

Pelagea: The way you “loved” my mother, then quickly forgot her? You, the great man who sheds tears for us peasants? The great lover of mankind—at least in the books that make you so rich and famous?

Ivan: I had no choice then. I didn't realize that—

Pelagea: If you are really my father, may I tell you how I feel about you?

Ivan: Please...please do.

Pelagea: *I detest you*. And I don't want to have anything to do with you—ever again!

Ivan: Please. Please. I understand. But let me at least be of some help...some service. Use me.

Pelagea: I don't ‘use’ people the way you do. I don't operate that way.

Ivan: Listen to me! With this revelation both our lives have suddenly changed. And surely—with time—for the better. Do you realize that you are the eventual sole heir to these estates? You are no longer a serf—at least in my eyes. Nor will you be when the Emancipation arrives. In the meanwhile, you must come with me to Petersburg in the guise of my servant. And then to Paris. I'll place you in the finest finishing school and eventually introduce you to Europe's highest society. You're very attractive, and—once you are literate and well read, learn manners and how to talk and dress—you'll have a wonderful debut. Then we'll even chance telling the Mistress. And if she still won't accept you, I'll find a fine match for you in Europe. I'll even risk her disinheriting me. I'll—

Pelagea: No!

Ivan: *No?*

Pelagea: I'll have nothing to do with your plans.

Ivan: But why?

Pelagea: Because they come from *you*!

Ivan: Do you really detest me so?

Pelagea: I have nothing more to say.

Ivan: You're breaking my heart!

Pelagea: *(with a cold stare)* Good...!

(Pelagea leaves. Several beats. Then Luka appears from outdoors.)

Luka: *(excited)* Master!

Ivan: Yes.

Luka: I can't contain myself!

Ivan: Why, Luka? Believe me, there's nothing to excite one so.

Luka: Oh, but there is. That wonderful Masha--we've talked some more. Oh, Master, no one was ever so beautiful.

Ivan: Not until today, you mean.

Luka: You must help me, Master--help me claim her. Then I will serve you forever—even after the Emancipation and until my dying day.

Ivan: Well, I will do what I can. In fact, I've already asked her to return here while the others dine so that I can speak with her.

Luka: I kiss your hand, Master.

Ivan: *(looking toward the other room)* Hurry off now before she sees you.

Luka: Master, you don't know what this means to me. I'm yours to command—forever....
(He exits.)

Ivan: *(to himself)* I don't know, Luka. I really don't understand much at all any more.
(Masha enters.)

Masha: Yes, Master?

Ivan: Sit down, Masha.
(She does so.)

This concerns Luka too.

Masha: Oh?

Ivan: Do you like him? Do you find him attractive? Be honest.

Masha: Yes, I...like him. I always did.

Ivan: Could you fall in love with him?

Masha: If you'll allow me to say it, Master, I think we already love each other.

Ivan: Would you be willing to marry him if I got permission?

Masha: *Marry?* But I don't think the Mistress would allow it.

Ivan: Oh, I'm sure she will if I put it to her in just the right way. My mother has never refused me anything.

Masha: But why? Why would you do this?

(Sergey comes to the inner doorway and observes them, unnoticed.)

Ivan: Because Luka's been a faithful servant to me for some time now. And he likes you. He even asked me to speak for your hand.

Masha: He did?

Ivan: Yes. So what do you say?

Masha: Well, then., yes, of course. Does this mean you'll be looking for another valet?

Ivan: On the contrary. This way you can travel with us and assist him in caring for me. We'll have a wonderful life, the three of us. You'll see Europe—Switzerland, France, Bavaria. You'll live well and very comfortably, and you'll be free of the tyranny of this household.

Masha: I can't believe it.

Ivan: It's true.

Masha: I'm suddenly very happy. At least I think I am.

Ivan: He loves you. He really does. I've never seen anyone so carried away with another human being....
I'm quite a good matchmaker, don't you think?

Masha: You're...you're wonderful, Sir.

Ivan: Why...thank you, Masha.

Masha: I must return to the guests, Master.

Ivan: Of course. Oh, Masha!!

Masha: Yes, Master.

Ivan: Before you go, just tell me once more, will you?

Masha: Tell you?

Ivan: That I am "wonderful." The way you said it just a moment ago--with that same intonation.

Gentle Barbarian by *Thomas F. Rogers*

Masha: You are *wonderful*, Master.

Ivan: Again, please. Look at me as you say it.

Masha: Master, you are *really very wonderful*.

(A long stare between them. As Sergey returns to the dining room, the lights dim.)

17 more pages in Act Two