

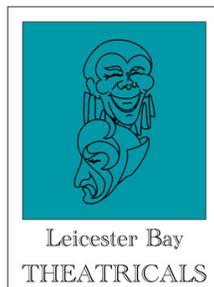
PERUSAL SCRIPT



THE IDIOT

a translation and adaptation of the Fyodor M. Dostoevsky novel
by

Thomas F. Rogers



Newport, Maine

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THE IDIOT

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CAST OF CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

General Yepanchin

Totsky

Nastasya Filippovna Barashkova

Parfyon Rogozhin

Lev Nikolaevich Myshkin

Ganya Ivolgin

Madame Yepanchin

Aleksandra Yepanchin

Adelaida Yepanchin

Aglaya Yepanchin

General Ivolgin

Maid (to Madame Yepanchin)

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

Scene One -- *A coach in the Warsaw-Petersburg express.*

Scene Two -- *Petersburg, Russia. The well appointed drawing room of NASTASYA FILIPPOVNA.*

Scene Three -- *A small study, adjacent to and screened off from the Yepanchin's drawing room.*

Scene Four -- *NASTASYA FILIPPOVNA's drawing room.*

ACT TWO

Scene One -- *ROGOZHIN's darkly lit quarters, three months later in the early morning.*

Scene Two -- *The Yepanchins' drawing room. Late the next evening.*

Scene Three -- *The same. Several days later.*

Scene Four -- *The Yepanchin Drawing room. The next day.*

Scene Five -- *The steps of a cathedral. Several days later.*

Scene Six -- *Rogozhin's quarters, as before.*

THE IDIOT by Thomas F. Rogers Translated and adapted from the Dostoyevsky novel. 7m 5W. How would the world react if the Savior of the World again suddenly appeared in the guise of just another mortal? The profound Russian writer Dostoevsky inserts such a character in each of his four major novels. In *Crime and Punishment* it is the prostitute Sonya Marmeladova. In *The Possessed* (or *The Devils*) it is the false Messiah Stavrogin. In *The Brothers Karamazov*...the maligned but holy abbot Zosima and his righteous disciple Alesha. In all literature there are in fact very few memorable 'Christ figures.' Don Quixote may be one and also another Russian author's protagonist, Boris Pasternak's Zhivago. In the opinion of this stage version's adaptor, the hero of *The Idiot*, Myshkin, is the most complete and impressive.

Myshkin's characterization and the novel itself are filled with irony. Like Christ, Myshkin is a prince (in Russian, a rank of noble, aristocratic heritage). However, his surname derives from the word for 'mouse,' in turn suggesting his meekness and the lack of regard with which he is viewed by others. Despite his earnest, self-sacrificing efforts in their behalf, he fails to influence their lives for the better, as with the general default of many an ostensible Christian. He is viewed, instead, as odd and eccentric--an 'idiot.' As with Alesha, his counterpart in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Myshkin's only success is with children, who are uncorrupted and

innocent.

Set in nineteenth-century Russia's high society milieu--both the novel and its stage version focus on Nastasya Filippovna, a beautiful woman, vied for by various men who would make her their mistress or marry her for personal gain. The lone exception, Myshkin, is willing to rescue her and redeem her reputation by offering to marry her for totally selfless reasons. "Such beauty could save the world," he declares when he first sees her portrait and recognizes her spiritual potential. Nastasya nevertheless refuses him, vengefully throwing herself into the arms of Myshkin's destructive nemesis, Rogozhin, rather than accept the forgiveness that would also require her to forgive those who have already misused her.

On an allegorical level, Myshkin's and Rogozhin's rivalry illustrates the contest between everyone's *superego* and *id* over his or her very soul (*anima*)--hence the story's universal psychological and spiritual relevance. At curtain, we view an ironic *pieta*: two men, both grief struck, sit on either side of the prostrate woman one of them has just slain, the other attempting to console him. As in his other memorable works, Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* trains a rare spotlight on, besides the lust for money and various other human failings, the chauvinistic exploitation of women, to which, in the person of a lone character (Myshkin), he contrasts the empathy and altruism mandated by Christian ideals. Although his darkest novel, *The Idiot* also displays a deep vein of hilarious humor. Its tragicomedy is near operatic and great theatre. As the critic George Steiner once observed, Dostoevsky possessed "the most natural dramatic temperament since Shakespeare."

From the INTRODUCTION of "The Collected Plays of Thomas F. Rogers, Volume 1: Perestroika and Glasnost. (Available from Leicester Bay Theatricals)

"The selections in this first volume of Tom Rogers's collected plays appear under the collective sub-title "Perestroika and Glasnost." The Russian word perestroika means "restructuring," and glasnost means "openness." Those terms refer to Communist Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's 1985-91 radical changes to Soviet economic structure, internal policy, and foreign relations. He led a major change in the leadership of the Communist Party, and decentralized economic planning in favor of market forces. He also reduced central Party control of the mass media, religious groups, and Soviet citizens whose views may have differed from those of their leaders. The results of this massive new "restructuring" and "openness" were felt across the Soviet Bloc. Communist governments collapsed, and the USSR dissolved into multiple independent republics.

The five plays in this volume suggest that on the personal level, too, "restructuring" and "openness" can cause similarly significant change. And a natural hoped-for result of pursuing such personal perestroika and glasnost is the communion which Tom Rogers wants for everyone, in all our relationships—the communion to which he has devoted his entire professional life, accompanied by all the interpersonal and even religious connotations "communion" implies.

Tom Rogers is unabashedly idealistic and ambitious. He wants to change us, and thereby to change the world. These five Perestroika and Glasnost plays by Tom Rogers cry to us in our wilderness, urging us to help prepare the world for better things, whatever the cost. These plays are bold and uncompromising theatrical explorations of the most profound and vexing social dilemmas." —**Bob Nelson, Professor of Theatre at the University of Utah**

(in this book you can peruse CHARADES, CRIME AND PUNISHMENT, GOD'S FOOLS, THE IDIOT, and THE SECOND PRIEST)

NOTE: this script is also available in the Russian language. Contact the publisher.

Thomas F. Rogers -- A former director of the BYU Honors Program, Thomas F. Rogers is professor emeritus of Russian language and literature at Brigham Young University and the author of more than a score of 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: **HUEBENER** (the first literary treatment of its subject), **FIRE IN THE BONES** (again, the first literary treatment of its subject, the 1857 Mountain Meadows Massacre), **GOD'S FOOLS** (or **JOURNEY TO GOLGOTHA**) and **REUNION**. Other titles include: **The SECOND PRIEST**, **The ANOINTED** (an Old Testament narrative with music by C. Michael Perry) and **The SEAGULL** (translated and adapted from the Chekov play). In 1992, **GENTLE BARBARIAN**, **FRERE LAWRENCE** and **CHARADES** were published in a second anthology entitled *'Huebener' and Other Plays by Thomas F. Rogers*. Rogers has also penned stage adaptations of Dostoevsky's novels **CRIME AND PUNISHMENT** and **THE IDIOT**, an opera libretto based on Hawthorne's **THE SCARLET LETTER**, a translation of Georg Buechner's **WOYCZEK** (produced at BYU), and scripts based on novels by local authors, Phillip Flammer and Ben Parkinson. The first of these received a BYU production, directed by Tad Danielewski, in which Rogers played the role of Marmeladov.

In 1995–1996 **GOD'S FOOLS** was produced (in translation) by a professional repertory theatre in St. Petersburg, Russia, where Rogers was then serving as an LDS mission president. He also played the role of the American double spy Cooper in that production. During that mission he directed LDS Church members in a stage adaptation of Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and a Russian language version of **HUEBENER**. The play has also since been produced in Finland in the Finnish language, while a German translation still awaits forthcoming performances in that language.

At BYU and in Provo, Utah, 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* and in Bountiful, Utah, a production of **HUEBENER**. Besides numerous productions in both Russian and German for the BYU Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages, he has directed Chekhov's *The Three Sisters* (in German) for Deutsches Teater Salt Lake City, where he also performed as an actor, 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," Rogers 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 published stories have appeared in volume 2, no. 2 of *Sunstone*, the Summer 1991 and Winter 2001 issues of *Dialogue* (receiving an annual *Dialogue* fiction award) and in the collections *Christmas for the World* (SLC: Aspen Books, 1991) and *The Gifts of Christmas* (SLC: Deseret Book Co., 1999). Rogers has served as editor of *Encyclia*, journal of the Utah Academy and authored two critical monographs: *'Superfluous Men' and the Post-Stalin 'Thaw'* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972) and *Myth and Symbol in Soviet Fiction* (San Francisco & New York: The Edwin Mellen Research University Press, 1992).

Rogers 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. He has intensively studied some ten languages and had extensive residences in Russia, Eastern Europe, India, China and the Middle East. 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.

ACT ONE

Scene One—*A coach in the Warsaw-Petersburg express. An autumn day in the 1860s. Two young men, ROGOZHIN and MYSHKIN, sit across the aisle from each other. Both are in their late twenties. The former, shabbily dressed, is dark, swarthy, passionate, animated. In his hands is a large knife that he toys with as he converses. He frequently punctuates his discourse with outbursts of nervous laughter. MYSHKIN is light-complected, of slight build, calm and ascetic. His summer weight attire is, by contrast with ROGOZHIN's, West European. His only luggage is a cloth-wrapped bundle. Hanging from his neck is a large tin cross which, as he converses, he holds in his hands and contemplates.*

ROGOZHIN: So it's you I'll be sharing this seat with to Petersburg.

MYSHKIN: So it seems.

ROGOZHIN: How did you get a ticket? I got the last one in Pskov. Had to bribe them and pay double. Half under the counter.

MYSHKIN: I caught this train in Warsaw. There were fewer passengers then.

ROGOZHIN: You've been abroad?

MYSHKIN: In Switzerland.

ROGOZHIN: You don't say!

MYSHKIN: I've been away for four years. I was sent to a sanitarium.

ROGOZHIN: You've been ill then?

MYSHKIN: I suffer from a nervous ailment—a kind of epilepsy.

ROGOZHIN: Didn't they cure you?

MYSHKIN: Not really.

ROGOZHIN: So why did you return?

MYSHKIN: My benefactor, who'd been paying my expenses, passed away. It was then that I wrote my distant relative, Mrs. Yepanchin.

ROGOZHIN: Yepanchin?

MYSHKIN: I've not heard back from her. That's why I'm going to Petersburg. To seek her out.

ROGOZHIN: Where will you stay?

MYSHKIN: I'm not sure.

ROGOZHIN: Well, if you are really a relative of General Yepanchin's wife, you have good prospects. What's your name?

MYSHKIN: Lev Nikolaevich Myshkin.

ROGOZHIN: (*laughing*) Wonderful! That's wonderful! Your given name means 'lion' and your surname means 'mouse.' It's an old name, too. It crops up in Karamzin's *History of Russia*. But one doesn't encounter it anymore.

MYSHKIN: That's true. I'm the last remaining Prince Myshkin. I'm not sure where General Yepanchin's wife enters our line.

ROGOZHIN: Do you know the Rogozhins? The name means 'rough textured cloth.'

MYSHKIN: Are you a Rogozhin?

ROGOZHIN: Yes. Parfyon Rogozhin.

MYSHKIN: You're from Pskov?

ROGOZHIN: No. Petersburg. But I just got news of my father's death.

MYSHKIN: May the angels sustain you in your sorrow.

ROGOZHIN: Oh, it's no sorrow. Believe me!

MYSHKIN: No ... ? And why, may I ask, were you in Pskov?

ROGOZHIN: To keep my distance from him.

MYSHKIN: Your father?

ROGOZHIN: Yes. The old man and I didn't get along.

MYSHKIN: I'm sorry.

ROGOZHIN: He'd have killed me by now if I'd stayed at home.

MYSHKIN: Why is that?

ROGOZHIN: He was a miser, you see.

MYSHKIN: And you pressed him for money?

ROGOZHIN: On account of Nastasya Filippovna.

MYSHKIN: Nastasya Filippovna?

ROGOZHIN: A famous lady—the 'companion' of Mr. Totsky, the wealthy landowner and industrialist.

MYSHKIN: And you were somehow drawn to her, were you?

ROGOZHIN: The first time I saw her I fell madly in love.

MYSHKIN: Where was that?

ROGOZHIN: On the Nevsky Prospect. She was just entering her carriage. Such a ravishing beauty.

MYSHKIN: But what of her character?

ROGOZHIN: Oh, there's all kinds of talk about her and Totsky. But the jealous always talk that way. And there's been no proof. So then I learned of Mr. Totsky's plan.

MYSHKIN: Plan?

ROGOZHIN: Yes. And I vowed I would have her.

MYSHKIN: What plan?

ROGOZHIN: I learned from a good source that Totsky wanted to settle down—marry, that is, into a respectable family. He's already fifty-five. But he didn't know how to free himself of his present, long standing entanglement with Nastasya Filippovna. Well, hearing that, I for sure couldn't get her off my mind. As fate would have it, the very next morning, my late old man entrusted me with two five thousand ruble government bonds. I was to sell them, pay off one of his agents, and bring back all the rest. Well, I sold them. But I didn't bother with the agent.

MYSHKIN: Oh, my!

ROGOZHIN: Instead, I went directly to the English shop and bought a pair of ear rings with a diamond in each one the size of a nut. Then I got my friend to go with me to her place. I was too shy to tell her who I was. So I got my friend to make the presentation: "From Parfyon Rogozhin," he said, "as a token of his admiration when he saw you the other day."

MYSHKIN: And how did she respond?

ROGOZHIN: She opened the box and smiled: "Thank your friend, Mr. Rogozhin, for his kind attention."

Then she bowed to us and left the room.

MYSHKIN: How did that make you feel?

ROGOZHIN: I was ready to die with ecstasy.

MYSHKIN: But what about your father?

ROGOZHIN: When I thought of that I wanted to throw myself in the river.

MYSHKIN: How did you handle him?

ROGOZHIN: How, you mean, did he handle me? He took me upstairs, locked the door, and beat me, I swear, within an inch of my life—worse than ever before—then promised to return and wish me a special ‘good night.’ I knew what that meant.

MYSHKIN: Why didn’t he just finish you off then and there, if that’s what he had in mind?

ROGOZHIN: His greed got the better of his anger. So he left me long enough to visit Nastasya Filippovna.

Well, after bowing, weeping, and pleading with her, he finally prevailed. She brought out the box and flung it at him: “Here, you old grey beard, are your ear rings,” says she. “They’re ten times more precious to me now that I know the risk and danger your Parfyon went to. Convey to him my deep gratitude.”

MYSHKIN: And in the meanwhile you ran off to Pskov?

ROGOZHIN: That’s right. But now I can make up to her the ear rings and more ...

MYSHKIN: How is that?

ROGOZHIN: I was like you till now, with only a bundle and hardly any shoes. But suddenly I’m a millionaire. My father forgot to make out a will, and as his only heir I’ve been awarded his two and a half million.

MYSHKIN: My congratulations ...

ROGOZHIN: Why, Prince, am I telling you all this? Why am I so drawn to you? Why with some others do we crave such ... intensity ... ?

(A long pause.)

MYSHKIN: I talked with a man a while ago who had once been sentenced to death by firing squad. Just before it was to be carried out he got a reprieve and a lighter sentence. But while he stood at the execution site, which lasted about a quarter of an hour, he fully expected that he would shortly die. He said that he could never forget what he experienced then—the crowd and the soldiers who stood about. The pillars to which they had already bound three of his comrades. The priest who approached each of them with the cross. He said that those few remaining minutes were an eternity to him and like an unsurpassable treasure. He bade farewell to his comrades, even taking the time to ask one of them a very incidental question and showing great interest in the man’s answer. Then he wondered what it would soon be like: he was twenty-seven years old, healthy and strong, but within a few short minutes what would he be? Where would he be? Would he any longer be anyone at all? Then he noticed the golden tower of a nearby church, sparkling in the bright sun, and imagined that the blinding rays of light were his new home and that in another three minutes he would merge with them. But then he thought: if just now I didn’t have to die—if my life continued—I would turn every minute into a century and never waste another second. This thought so embittered him that he wanted to be shot and have it over with in the very next instant.

ROGOZHIN: So did the man reform himself? After his life was spared?

MYSHKIN: I asked him that very question. He told me that since then he had squandered his time just as before ...

ROGOZHIN: Do you think you would do any differently?

MYSHKIN: *(laughing)* I’d like to think so.

ROGOZHIN: Really?

MYSHKIN: Yes ... I'd already witnessed an actual execution once. In Lyon. At the guillotine.

ROGOZHIN: Was it interesting? Did you learn something from it?

MYSHKIN: It wasn't enjoyable. In fact it made me ill. But I couldn't avert my gaze. As the condemned man mounted the scaffolding, he looked in my direction. And at that instant I understood everything. I could tell that as he rode there from the prison he'd said to himself: "It's still a long way off. There are still three streets to cross. And there's a bakery shop up ahead on the right. It will be a long time till we reach it. There are thousands of people out there. So much noise and shouting. Nothing will happen. Then, as they brought him to the platform and he stood before its steps, he suddenly began to cry. He was a strong, manly fellow. He'd been a fierce criminal, they say. But he stood on those steps, unable to move his feet. His face was as white as a piece of paper. He must have become nauseous and found it hard to breathe ... They brought him onto the platform. The priest put a cross to his lips—a silver, four cornered cross. Just as he did so, the man opened his eyes and greedily kissed it. They say that on such occasions people rarely faint, that instead the mind works like some furious, sped up machine. I imagine he had a number of extraneous thoughts just then: "That man staring at me has a wart on his forehead. The lowest button on the executioner's uniform is rusty. Each moment a new point of concentration, with everything else whirling about it. And continuing like that till the last fraction of a second when his head was already lying on the block and he heard the iron blade come sliding down. And possibly for the slightest millisecond afterward, the head knew it was already severed. Or maybe—what a thought!—for even another five seconds. And during that interval it knew *everything*.

(Another long pause)

ROGOZHIN: Come see me, Prince. We'll get rid of those rags and adorn you in a fine marten coat. We'll stuff your pockets with money. Then we'll go visit Nastasya Filippovna, you and me. Will you come?

MYSHKIN: I'll gladly come. I thank you for liking me.

ROGOZHIN: Are you also a ladies' man?

MYSHKIN: I ... no. I've been ill since childhood. I have no knowledge of women.

ROGOZHIN: Then that makes you something of a holy fool, Prince ... You do believe in God, don't you?

MYSHKIN: Why do you ask?

ROGOZHIN: Because you've been abroad. I was told that in Russia there are more unbelievers than in other countries.

MYSHKIN: As for faith in God—I had an encounter or two after I crossed the border, before I got on this train. First of all, I fell into conversation with one of your Russian atheists. A very learned man. But as we talked, one thing struck me: while he insisted that he didn't believe in God, he was really saying something else. And I recalled that whenever I have spoken with non-believers or read their books, it's always been the same: despite their words, they're really saying something altogether different. I even said as much to him, but I must not have expressed myself clearly because he didn't seem to understand ... That night I took lodging in the border town at a place where—everyone was talking about it—there'd been a murder just the night before. Two peasants, no longer young and acquaintances from their youth, had taken a room together. But one of them had noticed that his friend was wearing a new silver watch on a yellow beaded chain. This man was no thief. He was a simple, honest peasant, and not poor either. But that watch so tempted him that he could finally no longer restrain himself. So, when that night his comrade turned his back to him, he took out his knife and—first lifting his eyes to heaven, crossing himself, and silently

praying, Lord, for Christ's sake, forgive me!—cut his friend's throat with a single stroke the way they slaughter sheep and took his watch from him.

ROGOZHIN: (*laughing hysterically*) I love it! It's wonderful! One man doesn't believe in God at all. And another believes in Him to the point that he prays while slitting another man's throat. No, my Prince, you couldn't have thought that up. It's too wonderful!!

MYSHKIN: The next morning, before boarding this very train, I strolled through the town. Suddenly I noticed a drunken soldier, staggering towards me on the boardwalk: Buy my cross, sir. I'll sell it for twenty kopecks. It's genuine silver! In his hand he held a large Byzantine crucifix on a tattered blue ribbon, but you could tell it was only made of tin. I gave him twenty kopecks and hung his cross on my neck. I could see how pleased he was that he'd fooled a gentleman. Then he set off to drink up the money for which he'd sold it. But as we parted I said to myself that I must be slow to condemn one who sells his Christ. God alone knows what is contained in drunk and weak hearts. Then I happened on a young mother with a nursing child. The baby suddenly smiled at her mother—for the first time, according to the mother, since the child's birth. The mother reverently crossed herself and said to me: "Just as a mother rejoices when she beholds her child's first smile, so God rejoices when from heaven he sees a sinner kneel and pray to him with all his heart." Such a profound thought from the mouth of a simple peasant. Who knows? This woman may have been the wife of that same drunken soldier ... Listen, Parfyon, about the question you put to me: the essence of religion has nothing to do with reason or crimes or atheism. And you will see it more clearly and more often in a Russian heart. That's my conclusion ...

(Suddenly standing)

The train's stopped. We seem to have arrived and must go our separate ways.

(He starts to leave.)

ROGOZHIN: Lev Nikolaevich! That cross you bought from the soldier—do you still have it?

MYSHKIN: I'm wearing it.

ROGOZHIN: Show it to me.

(MYSHKIN does so.)

Let me have it.

MYSHKIN: You really want it?

ROGOZHIN: Yes. And you take mine.

MYSHKIN: You want to exchange crosses? Then I do too, Parfyon.

(They exchange crosses.)

Now we're brothers! Let me embrace you ...

(They embrace, Rogozhin reluctantly.)

ROGOZHIN: (*laughing, then suddenly very serious*) I took your cross, but I won't cut your throat for your watch...

(He turns and quickly leaves.)

Scene Two—*Petersburg, Russia. The well appointed drawing room of NASTASYA FILIPPOVNA*

BARASHKOVA. Afternoon of the same day. Two middle-aged gentlemen—GENERAL YEPANCHIN and TOTSKY—sit together at one end of the room.

YEPANCHIN: How did she find out?

TOTSKY: Who? Nastasya Filippovna?

YEPANCHIN: No. My wife! Who told her?

TOTSKY: About what?

YEPANCHIN: About the pearls, Totsky. You aren't listening.

TOTSKY: Forgive me, General. My thoughts are with your daughter.

YEPANCHIN: I tell you, it's Hell to pay when my wife becomes suspicious.

TOTSKY: Just tell her the pearls were a reward to your secretary, Ganya Ivolgin. For his long and faithful service. So he can win Nastasya's heart—which is also true.

YEPANCHIN: That choker was far too expensive. No one rewards a servant like that. She'll never believe it.

TOTSKY: Time will pass, General. Your wife will be distracted by Aleksandra's wedding, and the incident will fade from her memory. If only Nastasya consents. Then with Nastasya discretely attached to your household—

YEPANCHIN: Say no more, Totsky. Walls have ears. Besides, here she comes.

(NASTASYA FILIPPOVNA enters. The men rise.)

NASTASYA: Please be seated, Gentlemen. I'm honored by your visit. But why so early in the day?

TOTSKY: Forgive us, my dear. We gave you little notice, and we won't tarry. So allow me to be direct.

NASTASYA: You are always direct, Totsky.

TOTSKY: Yes. Well, as you probably know, General, when my dear neighbors, Nastasya's parents, perished in that terrible fire—she was only six at the time—I took upon myself the responsibility for her care and upbringing.

YEPANCHIN: Most magnanimous!

TOTSKY: It was the least I could do. Her father had been my closest friend. That was, of course, at my estate in the provinces. Later I brought her to Petersburg.

NASTASYA: In my teens. After you were 'attracted' to my 'beauty.' Your words, Totsky.

TOTSKY: I don't deny it. So I gave you the finest training in manners and in the French language. With a Swiss governess. But then rumours started.

NASTASYA: Not entirely untrue.

TOTSKY: I am here, Nastasya, to make amends. And to ask for my freedom.

NASTASYA: *Your* freedom, Totsky? You have always had *your* freedom and fully enjoyed it.

TOTSKY: I offer no excuses. I am an incorrigible sensualist. That is why, more than anyone, I deserve to be pitied. Nastasya, I wish to marry.

NASTASYA: Not me, I suppose.

TOTSKY: No. The General's daughter ...

NASTASYA: I see.

TOTSKY: And I will not be at peace until I have your guarantee.

NASTASYA: Guarantee?

TOTSKY: That you will not interfere.

NASTASYA: Interfere?

TOTSKY: Make trouble.

NASTASYA: Trouble?

TOTSKY: Call our former ... relationship to the world's attention.

NASTASYA: Which the world already knows about.

TOTSKY: But which the world will continue to ignore if it is not mentioned. You will be well compensated—
secured for life. General Yepanchin has made a most generous provision ... if you're only of a mind to
accept ...

NASTASYA: Speak on.

TOTSKY: General?

YEPANCHIN: Dear Nastasya Filippovna, you already know my fine young secretary, Mr. Ganya Ivolgin. Very
handsome too, I may add.

NASTASYA: Yes, I'm aware of him.

TOTSKY: A splendid young man.

YEPANCHIN: A most conscientious employee.

NASTASYA: And ...

YEPANCHIN: (*clearing his throat*) So, out of gratitude to Mr. Ivolgin and out of admiration for you, dear
Nastasya Filippovna, I have decided to propose an alliance between you and Mr. Ivolgin with a lifelong
sinecure for you both as members of my staff and my ... household.

NASTASYA: I see.

TOTSKY: You have, I trust, no strong objections to Mr. Ivolgin? The General and I have deliberated this match
for some time—with the interest of you both primarily in mind.

NASTASYA: 'Primarily'?

TOTSKY: Why, yes ... Therefore, please consider both the General's unusual kindness and what I also
propose to offer you. Consider it seriously, and for your best good do not give in to that prideful desire to
play the martyr which is your tendency.

NASTASYA: And what have you to offer, Totsky?

TOTSKY: Why, a dowry of course.

NASTASYA: How much?

TOTSKY: Nastasya!

NASTASYA: How much?

TOTSKY: The by no means small sum of seventy-five thousand rubles. This is news, by the way, to the
General.

YEPANCHIN: It is indeed. And I am duly impressed. Yes, duly.

TOTSKY: Well, my dear?

NASTASYA: Gentlemen. I see that you have given this matter much thought ... much consideration. I have no
particular objection to Mr. Ivolgin. Though he is rather young, if he is in fact amorously drawn to me—

YEPANCHIN: Oh, that he is. There is no doubt.

NASTASYA: Perhaps I could love him in time.

TOTSKY: There is no doubt of that either!

NASTASYA: But he must personally assure me.

YEPANCHIN: That he shall, whenever you say.

NASTASYA: I'm pleased he's so diligent.

YEPANCHIN: He supports his whole family, did you know?

NASTASYA: That's impressive. But I must also be assured that he has no reservations about my past. None whatsoever!

YEPANCHIN: Of course, my dear. And he will, I know, so assure you.

NASTASYA: Is that what you wished to discuss?

YEPANCHIN: Why, yes.

NASTASYA: Then I will excuse myself ...

(The men rise. NASTASYA FILIPPOVNA exits. The men turn to leave.)

YEPANCHIN: It went better than I imagined!

TOTSKY: Almost too smoothly.

YEPANCHIN: She's very decisive. Very commanding. But that makes her all the more ...

(Looking about him, then in a whisper, smiling)

enticing. And how lovely she is—a veritable bouquet, a field of fresh spring blooms.

TOTSKY: A snake may still nest amid their petals.

YEPANCHIN: A snake, eh? Then I'll try to tame it. That makes her all the more beguiling ...

(The lights fade.)

Scene Three—*A small study, adjacent to and screened off from the Yepanchin's drawing room—both part of the full set and visible to the audience. An hour later. MYSHKIN enters with his bundle, preceded by the YEPANCHINS' handsome but frail young secretary, GANYA, who carries a large portfolio. Throughout the scene GANYA suppresses a recurring cough.*

GANYA: Wait here, please. And leave your bundle there. Are you here to see the General himself?

MYSHKIN: I'm here about a certain—

GANYA: I didn't ask the nature of your business. I only wish to announce you and whom you've come to see ... You're ... from abroad, did you say?

MYSHKIN: I think you meant to ask if I am really Prince Myshkin. That is my name. I did not lie to you.

And I *am* distantly related to the General's wife. I only intend to make their acquaintance. That's all.

GANYA: What do you mean by "That's all"? You just said you had some kind of business.

MYSHKIN: Well, I might ask for their advice on a matter.

GANYA: *(perplexed)* Then you wish to meet both of them?

MYSHKIN: I do ...

GANYA: *(retrieving a note from his vest, suddenly soft and confidential)* When you speak with the youngest daughter, Aglaya, please give her this for me. But don't let anyone else see it. Promise?

MYSHKIN: I promise.

GANYA: It's not sealed.

MYSHKIN: I promise I won't read it ...

GANYA: Then I'll announce you. Please have a seat...

(He exits. MYSHKIN seats himself.)

YEPANCHIN: *(after several beats, entering the room with GANYA)* In a word, Ganya, you have my heartfelt congratulations. It's all arranged with Nastasya ...

(To MYSHKIN)

How, Sir, may I assist you?

MYSHKIN: I only came to make your and your family's acquaintance. I just arrived by train—from Switzerland.

YEPANCHIN: I have little time for making new acquaintances. Unless it's for a useful purpose.

MYSHKIN: I am distantly related to your wife. I realize that is not a purpose. It's just that I've been away for four years, and I'm terribly out of touch. So I thought to myself: perhaps I should begin with my relations.

YEPANCHIN: Where are you staying?

MYSHKIN: Nowhere so far.

YEPANCHIN: Did you come to stay with us?

MYSHKIN: I would never do such a thing without an invitation. Nor even with an invitation. It's not my nature.

YEPANCHIN: Then it's well I did not invite you, nor intend to do so.

MYSHKIN: This is how I imagined our conversation would go. You see, I never received an answer to my letter, and ... well, goodbye, then. Forgive my disturbing you ...

YEPANCHIN: *(taken by MYSHKIN's meekness)* Wait, Prince. Although I don't know you at all, it's possible my wife would like to meet her relative. Wait a moment if you can spare the time. Do you have a position somewhere? Or an offer?

MYSHKIN: None.

YEPANCHIN: How do you intend to live then?

MYSHKIN: Any work will do.

YEPANCHIN: You talk like a philosopher. Are you well read?

MYSHKIN: I am.

YEPANCHIN: How's your handwriting?

MYSHKIN: It's my one talent. I'm a calligrapher. Allow me to give you a sample.

YEPANCHIN: Sit over there, Prince. Ganya, hand the Prince a pen and paper.

(GANYA reaches into his portfolio, unintentionally extracting a large photograph.)

Who's that? Nastasya Filippovna? Did she send it herself?

GANYA: Just today when, upon your advice, I went to see her.

YEPANCHIN: Did she ask for *your* portrait?

GANYA: No. And maybe she won't. You haven't forgotten the party this evening, General? You were also especially invited.

YEPANCHIN: Of course, I remember. In fact, Ganya, she has promised to give us her decision then. So be prepared.

GANYA: Don't forget, Sir, that she gave me full freedom of choice until she makes up her mind. Then I shall have the last word.

YEPANCHIN: Why, what do you mean? Haven't you already agreed--

GANYA: I have not, Sir.

YEPANCHIN: What are you trying to do to us?

GANYA: Nor have I outrightly refused, Sir.

YEPANCHIN: I should hope not, my boy. It is no longer a matter of *your* not refusing but of the pleasure

and happiness with which you will receive her if she accepts you. I hope you understand that. . . How are things at home?

GANYA: At least I'm in charge *there*. My father still makes a fool of himself. I no longer speak to him, but I keep him in check. Or try. I'd have kicked him out before now if it weren't for Mother . . .

YEPANCHIN: I can't understand your mother. When she came to me the other day, she acted as if our little arrangement were some kind of disgrace. "You wouldn't allow your daughters to be in *her* company!" she exclaimed. On my word, how can she not understand—

GANYA: Her *place*, Sir? When she returned home I told her to mind her business. In any event, all at home is still relatively tranquil because my future is still not certain. But, believe me, a storm is brewing, and—

MYSHKIN: (*bringing his calligraphy to the other two and noticing the photograph*) So this is Nastasya Filippovna. How amazingly beautiful!

YEPANCHIN: You know her too?

MYSHKIN: Yes.

YEPANCHIN: But you've been in Russia less than twenty-four hours. How, dear fellow?

MYSHKIN: Through Rogozhin.

YEPANCHIN: Rogozhin?

(*To GANYA*)

What do you make of this?

GANYA: I've heard of Rogozhin. A merchant's son and a dissipate. That's all.

YEPANCHIN: (*to GANYA*) In any event, Totsky has come to a firm decision. And what we are after is strictly for your good. Or don't you trust me? You are an intelligent fellow, and I am counting on you. So, are you willing, or aren't you? If not, please say so.

GANYA: I'm . . . yes, I'm still willing.

YEPANCHIN: Good. I'll say no more. . .

(*Noticing MYSHKIN's calligraphy*)

But what's this? It's exquisite. Why, you're an artist, my dear sir—not just an ordinary calligrapher. That decides it. You're in my hire. But first allow me to recommend that you accompany my young friend here, Mr. Ivolgin. He'll take you to his home. His mother rents rooms and takes in boarders. She'll accept my recommendation. I highly esteem her. Her husband, a retired general, is a former colleague of mine with whom, due to certain circumstances, I have regrettably broken.

(*Handing MYSHKIN money.*)

Also allow me to present you with this advance. Now I'll go call my wife, your relative, and my daughters. Be nice to them. They can help you. . .

(*He exits. MYSHKIN appraises the portrait of NASTASYA FILIPPOVNA.*)

GANYA: So, you like this woman, do you, Prince?

MYSHKIN: An amazing countenance! She's had no ordinary life. You can see she has suffered. Deeply. It's in her eyes. Such a proud face too. I can't tell if she's compassionate. But what a difference it would make. Such beauty could save the world.

GANYA: Would you marry such a woman?

MYSHKIN: I can't marry. I'm not well.

GANYA: Would Rogozhin marry her?

MYSHKIN: I think so. But he might slit her throat a week later.

(GANYA shudders. Meanwhile, YEPANCHIN returns with MADAME YEPANCHIN and their three daughters. GANYA retires to his desk in the adjacent study.)

YEPANCHIN: There he is, my dear. The last to bear your family name. Take him to your bosom. Please stay for lunch, Prince. And now excuse me, please. I'm in a hurry. I'm already late for—

MADAME YEPANCHIN: We know who you're hurrying to.

YEPANCHIN: *(ignoring her)* And show him your albums, young ladies. Have him write in them. His penmanship's extraordinary. My regards to you all...

(He rushes out.)

MADAME YEPANCHIN: Welcome to our abode, Prince.

(Gesturing toward the study.)

My husband and Ganya work in there, and this is where we receive our guests and sometimes spend the long evenings. Aleksandra, our eldest daughter, practices the piano. Adelaida paints, but never finishes anything. And Aglaya, the youngest, just sits and does nothing. I don't seem to accomplish much either. But please tell us about yourself, Prince. How did you like Switzerland?

MYSHKIN: Switzerland? At first the fact that everything was *foreign* depressed me. But then, upon arriving in Basel, I heard the braying of a donkey in the market square. And I felt better.

(The girls giggle.)

MADAME YEPANCHIN: That's strange...

(Glaring at her daughters)

But maybe not so strange. One could fall in love with a donkey. It happened in mythology. Please continue, Prince.

MYSHKIN: Since then I've been very fond of donkeys ...

ADELAIDA: I saw a donkey once, Mama.

AGLAYA: And I've heard one bray before.

(The girls titter. MYSHKIN laughs with them.)

MADAME YEPANCHIN: Please forgive them, Prince. They're good girls, but light minded.

MYSHKIN: I'm not offended. Besides, donkeys are useful and good-hearted.

MADAME YEPANCHIN: And are you good hearted, Prince?

(The girls laugh again, even louder.)

MADAME YEPANCHIN: *(flustered)* I wasn't making the comparison, Prince. Believe me!

MYSHKIN: *(also laughing)* Oh, I believe you. I do!

MADAME YEPANCHIN: It's very good of you to laugh along with them. I see that you're very congenial.

MYSHKIN: Not always, I'm afraid.

MADAME YEPANCHIN: Well, please go on. Perhaps you can recall something more interesting than a donkey. What about the scenery?

MYSHKIN: Lucerne was beautiful, but it also depressed me.

ALEKSANDRA: Why was that?

MYSHKIN: I'm not sure. I was still unwell then.

ADELAIDA: I'd love to go abroad. I haven't found anything to paint for almost two years now. Give me a subject, Prince.

MYSHKIN: I should think you would only need to look and then paint whatever's there.

ADELAIDA: I don't know how to look.

MADAME YEPANCHIN: What riddles you speak, Adelaida. Please, Prince, just tell us something nice about Switzerland.

MYSHKIN: I only went there to restore my health. But after I settled down I was happy enough.

AGLAYA: Happy? You've learned how to be happy? Then please teach us.

ALEKSANDRA: (*laughing*) Yes, teach us.

MYSHKIN: (*also laughing*) I have nothing to teach you. I spent almost the whole time in one small village.

ALEKSANDRA: Then tell us about your love life. Surely you've been in love.

MYSHKIN: I've never been in love. I've been happy in another way.

AGLAYA: What way was that?

MYSHKIN: All right, I'll tell you. My companions in the Swiss village were children. It angered their parents because the children were always with me. But what were they afraid of? You can tell a child everything ... The children didn't like me at first though. At first they laughed at me. And then when they saw me kiss Marie—

AGLAYA: Marie!

ALEKSANDRA: Aha!

MYSHKIN: They threw stones at me. I only kissed her once...

(*The girls giggle.*)

No, please. It has nothing to do with love. Marie lived with her invalid mother, an old woman. They were very poor. Marie was twenty, but weak and thin. She'd contracted consumption long ago but still went from house to house—washing floors, cleaning clothes, sweeping out the yards, herding animals. A Frenchman had come through the village and taken her away with him, then abandoned her. After she returned home, people stopped being nice to her. They spit on her as they would some loathsome insect. She went about in rags, barefoot. It was then that the children—about forty of them—began to tease her and pelt her with mud. At her mother's funeral the pastor publicly accused her of bringing on her mother's death. It was then that I met her by a hedge outside the village. I gave her money and kissed her to let her know how sorry I was for her and that I had never considered her guilty. Just then a number of children came by. I realized they had followed us. They began to whistle. They clapped their hands and laughed, and Marie ran away. I tried to talk to them, but they threw stones at me too. But as the days went by, I kept talking to them. I told them everything. And then they pitied Marie once more and began to greet her and bring her food. She almost went insane with joy. And now the children took great delight in my love for her.

AGLAYA: 'Love,' you say?

MYSHKIN: Only in this did I deceive them. I let them think I was in love with her when I only pitied her. I could see that was how they wanted it. When she finally became too weak to go outdoors, the children began to visit her. It was because of them that she died almost happy. She still considered herself a terrible transgressor. But the children hovered like birds about her window, each morning calling out: "*Nous t'aimons, Marie.*" She died soon after. The children have tended her grave ever since, planting roses and bringing to it fresh cut flowers ... I experience such inordinate happiness in the presence of children. Perhaps I seem like a child myself. I'm also sometimes taken for an idiot. I was in fact very much an idiot

when I was so very ill ... But I have to tell you ladies that when I first looked at your kind faces—I study faces very attentively—and when I heard your first words, I was again at ease the way I haven't been since leaving Switzerland.

ADELAIDA: Tell us—I'm curious—what you read in our faces.

MYSHKIN: You, Miss Adelaida, have a happy face, the most likable of the three. You are very attractive. You also have a beautiful and kind face, Miss Aleksandra, but you harbor a secret sorrow. You have a kind heart, without question, but you aren't happy ... Please don't be angry, Madame Yepanchin. But in your face I also see—despite your age—a perfect child in everything that is good ... and in everything bad.

MADAME YEPANCHIN: Bravo, Prince. My husband told us to test your honesty. What you say is absolutely true. I am a child and know it. I also think we are very much alike. But why didn't you say anything about Aglaya?

MYSHKIN: I can't right now.

MADAME YEPANCHIN: Why not? Surely she's very attractive.

MYSHKIN: Indeed, she is so beautiful that one fears to look at her.

MADAME YEPANCHIN: And what of her character?

MYSHKIN: It's hard to assess such beauty. Such beauty is a riddle ... Yes, Miss Aglaya, you are very beautiful—almost as beautiful as Nastasya Filippovna.

MADAME YEPANCHIN: What Nastasya Filippovna? Where did you see Nastasya Filippovna?

MYSHKIN: Your secretary, Mr. Ivolgin, was showing her portrait to the General before the General announced me.

MADAME YEPANCHIN: Please go to Ganya and bring the portrait to me. I'd like to see it ...

MYSHKIN: *(going into the study to GANYA)* Did you hear?

GANYA: *(sotto voce)* Why did you blab about it? You *are* an idiot!

MYSHKIN: Forgive me. I wasn't thinking ...

(MYSHKIN returns to the ladies, but stares for a time at NASTASYA FILIPPOVNA's portrait, then, suddenly bringing it to his lips, kisses it. He then hands it to MADAME YEPANCHIN. As ALEKSANDRA and ADELAIDA hover around her, he approaches AGLAYA, who stays by herself. He whispers)

Mr. Ivolgin asked me to give you this.

(AGLAYA takes GANYA's note, staring at MYSHKIN for several moments, then looks away.)

MADAME YEPANCHIN: *(staring the whole time at the portrait)* So you admire such features, do you, Prince?

MYSHKIN: I do.

MADAME YEPANCHIN: Why is that?

MYSHKIN: There is so much suffering in that face. Such power!

MADAME YEPANCHIN: Power?

MYSHKIN: Such beauty is power. One could transform the world with such power!

MADAME YEPANCHIN: *(calling)* Ganya!

GANYA: Yes, Ma'am?

(He leaves his desk and comes to her.)

MADAME YEPANCHIN: *(to MYSHKIN)* You see, Prince, it's all secrets now! Etiquette's no longer

in order. Candor and integrity are called for. Marriages are being arranged. And I don't like these marriages!

ALEKSANDRA: Mama, what are you saying?

MADAME YEPANCHIN: It's all right. The Prince can hear what I have to say. We're friends. Ganya, are you about to be married?

GANYA: *(suddenly flustered)* Married?
(Looking furtively at AGLAYA)

How married?

MADAME YEPANCHIN: Then are you getting married, if you prefer that expression?

GANYA: N-no. I'm not.

MADAME YEPANCHIN: No? Did you say "No"? Very good. I shall remember that on this day at this very hour you said "No" to my question. What day is it? Wednesday?

ADELAIDA: Yes, it's Wednesday, Mama.

MADAME YEPANCHIN: And what is the date?

GANYA: The twenty-seventh.

MADAME YEPANCHIN: Very well, Ganya. Here's your portrait. You may return to your work. And give my regards to your unfortunate mother. Now I must dress for an appointment. Come, girls. Farewell, Prince. Come to us often. I understand you'll be staying with the Ivolgins.

AGLAYA: Please wait, Prince. You must write in my album. Papa said you are a calligrapher. I'll be right back.

ADELAIDA: *(pressing MYSHKIN's hand)* I must go too, Prince.

ALEKSANDRA: Farewell, Prince.

(The ladies leave.)

GANYA: *(attacking MYSHKIN)* It's your doing! You blabbed to them that I was getting married! You shameless gossip!

MYSHKIN: *(calmly)* You're mistaken, I assure you. I didn't know you were marrying.

GANYA: You lie! You heard the General say so this evening, and then you passed it on. Who could have told them except you?

MYSHKIN: I didn't say a word.

GANYA: And why, idiot, did you even mention that portrait?

MYSHKIN: Forgive me, it just slipped out. I had just commented that Miss Aglaya was almost as beautiful as Nastasya Filippovna.

GANYA: Did you give her my note?

AGLAYA: *(reentering, with her album)* Here it is! And here's a pen. I'll dictate.
(MYSHKIN seats himself.)

GANYA: *(drawing AGLAYA aside)* A word, just one word from you, and I am saved.
(AGLAYA stares back at him, as she did earlier at MYSHKIN.)

MYSHKIN: What would you like me to write?

AGLAYA: Write: I do not bargain. Now write the date. And show it to me.
(MYSHKIN does so.)

AGLAYA: Excellent! Your handwriting is marvelous. Thank you. Now let me present you with a little remembrance. *(staring at GANYA)* In private ...

The Idiot by Fyodor M. Dostoyevsky -- Adapted and Translated by **Thomas F. Rogers**

(GANYA returns to his desk in the study. AGLAYA hands MYSHKIN GANYA's note)

Read this. I know you haven't read it till now and that you're not this man's ally. I want you to read it—aloud.

MYSHKIN: But I promised ...

AGLAYA: *Now ...*

MYSHKIN: *(reading)* "You once uttered a single word that brightened the dark night of my life. Say that word again and rescue me from destruction! I don't dare hope for more. I don't deserve it. After that single assurance I shall accept my poverty and joyfully bear my shabby circumstances. Don't be angry at the boldness of one so desperate, who is now drowning and thus dares with a final effort to save himself from destruction. Ganya."

AGLAYA: The author assures me that the expression 'break it all off' would in no way obligate me. As you see, he gives me his written guarantee. But notice how crudely he discloses his secret design. He knows that, had he broken it all off on his own, I might then have felt differently toward him and become his friend. This he knows, but still demands a pledge. In exchange for the one hundred thousand he stands to lose he wants the assurance that I will consider marrying him. As for that earlier word from me, he lies. I only expressed my pity for him—once. He has presumed all the rest and has not ceased trying to catch me out. Enough. Return this note to him. But if you still plan to live under his roof, be careful. He will never forgive you for doing so.

(She presses MYSHKIN's hand, then exits. MYSHKIN goes to the study and hands GANYA the note.)

MYSHKIN: You heard, didn't you?

GANYA: I hear everything they ever say...

MYSHKIN: Where did I put my bundle. Ah, yes. There it is.

GANYA: So she doesn't "bargain." Then I will. And she'll come to heel ... But how could you -- such a genuine idiot!—when you'd never met before—how could you win her confidence in less than two hours?

MYSHKIN: I don't know how to explain it.

GANYA: What did you say to them to make them like you so? What did you talk about?

MYSHKIN: We talked about Switzerland.

GANYA: To hell with Switzerland!

MYSHKIN: Then I told them about a poor Swiss girl--

GANYA: To hell with your poor Swiss girl! Did Aglaya show my note to the old woman?

MYSHKIN: Not while I was with them. And I doubt she had time after she left the room ... Look, if you'd rather, I won't come with you. I'll find some other lodgings ...

GANYA: *(suddenly contrite)* Forgive me, Prince. You see what a fix I'm in. If you only knew how much, you'd forgive me.

MYSHKIN: I don't require apologies. And I can tell that you're so irritable because of the strain you're under. All right. Let's go to your place.

(GENERAL IVOLGIN, GANYA's father, appears in the study.)

GANYA: Father! Why are you here?

IVOLGIN: I was on the street, taking in some fresh air. I saw my esteemed former colleague General Yepanchin leave the house. So I knew he would not be here and that the ladies would likely not come out

from their rooms unless my son Ganya announced me, and—

GANYA: And that I had just received my monthly salary.

IVOLGIN: (*ignoring him, to MYSHKIN*) I should introduce myself: General Ivolgin, retired and unhappy.

MYSHKIN: Prince Myshkin.

IVOLGIN: Prince Myshkin? Then you must be the son of my childhood comrade, Nikolay Petrovich.

MYSHKIN: No. My father was Nikolay Lvovich.

IVOLGIN: Lvovich? Yes, of course. Lvovich.

(*Embracing MYSHKIN*)

Would you believe that I used to carry you in my arms? Your father and I entered the army together. In the Belomirsky regiment.

MYSHKIN: My father was in the Vassilevsky regiment.

IVOLGIN: Ah . . . that was later. He transferred there just before he died. I went to his bedside and gave him my blessing. Your mother—

MYSHKIN: My mother died a half year later—from a cold.

IVOLGIN: No. Not from a cold. Believe me. I was there. I buried her. She died from grief for her departed husband. Why, did you know that the Prince, your father, and I, childhood friends that we were, almost murdered each other on her account? I was passionately in love with your mother at the time of their betrothal. The Prince took note and challenged me. He produced two pistols. We held them at each other's hearts—just a handkerchief's length between us. We stared at each other. Then suddenly, at the same moment, tears flooded our eyes. Our hands trembled. We embraced and immediately outdid each other in magnanimity. "She's yours!" he shouted. "No, yours!" I replied . . . But where are you staying, dear Prince?

MYSHKIN: General Yepanchin suggested I take rooms with your family.

IVOLGIN: Wonderful! The General himself? Well, that's something! Then go ahead, Ganya, and inform your mother.

GANYA: Just one more thing, Father. Please refrain from asking the Prince for any money. And if he asks you, Prince, don't give him any. The rent should be paid directly to my mother . . .

(*He exits.*)

IVOLGIN: You can see what a catastrophe I've endured—and without a fair trial. That's why I must rent rooms!—a former Governor General. You may wonder what provoked my total exclusion from high society. Well, I'll tell you. It happened just two years ago. Till then General Yepanchin and I were the closest of friends. It was so stupid, and all on account of the Princess Belkonsky's governess, a certain Mrs. Schmidt. It was shortly after the opening of the Smolensk railway line, you see. I had business out of town and found myself in a first class car. I was alone and smoking a cigar, as is my custom. It's not forbidden. Nor is it exactly permitted. So I was sitting by an open window. All at once two fashionable ladies entered, one in light blue, the other in black silk. With a tiny lapdog. Speaking English. Well, I continued smoking, carefully blowing the smoke out of the window. The dog, which sat on the lap of the lady in blue, was no larger than my fist, with little black and white paws and wearing a silver collar. After a time I became aware that the ladies were staring at me—one of them through her tortoise-shell lorgnette. But they did not deign to say a word. If they'd only said something, just warned me. Instead, all at once, the one in light blue snatched the cigar from my hand and tossed it out the window. A moment passed. Then, without a word, with utmost courtesy and calm, ever so delicately, I reached out my hand and with just the tips of

two fingers plucked the small creature off her lap and flung it after my cigar out the window. There was just a brief yelp. Meanwhile the train rushed toward its appointed destination. I was right, wasn't I? If cigars are prohibited on trains, then dogs should be too.

MYSHKIN: What happened next?

IVOLGIN: That's where the trouble really started. Still not uttering a word or giving me the slightest warning, the woman in blue slapped me on the cheek.

MYSHKIN: And what did you do?

IVOLGIN: I didn't hit her very hard. I swear. Just touched her. But, as it turned out, she was the Princess Belkowsky's governess and the other—the Princess's eldest daughter. Best friends of the Yepanchins. Later I even tried to apologize. But I was totally rejected, excommunicated by their entire circle.

MYSHKIN: Forgive me, General. I read this same account in the newspaper *Independence* just yesterday after crossing the Russian border. Only the incident had occurred the week before in a train on the Rhine between a Frenchman and two English women. The article had the very same descriptions—the color of the women's dresses and a lapdog with black and white paws ...

IVOLGIN: I assure you, Prince, that's exactly what happened to me.

MYSHKIN: The same incident in every detail—at opposite ends of the Continent? I can show you the account. I still have the paper.

IVOLGIN: Please note, Prince, that it happened to me first. My case was at least two years earlier ...

MYSHKIN: (*indulgently*) I see ...

IVOLGIN: But there's another tragedy at our house. A marriage is being plotted. It's an unusual marriage—between a woman of questionable reputation and a young man who might have become a Chamberlain. As long as I breathe, however, that woman will not enter my home—the home of a man with thirteen bullets in his chest. You don't believe me? Why, Pirogov even telegraphed to Paris and then left besieged Sevastopol to fetch Nelaton, the Paris court doctor, who, in the name of science, received a safe conduct and then traveled to besieged Sevastopol to examine me. It's known to all the highest authorities and the most renowned surgeons. "There's that Ivolgin with thirteen bullets in him," they say. And I should allow that female of questionable reputation into my domicile? Never!

(*The lights dim.*)

Scene Four—*NASTASYA FILIPPOVNA's drawing room. Evening of the same day. Assembled are GENERAL YEPANCHIN, TOTSKY, and GANYA.*

NASTASYA: (*to GANYA*) So, you say you invited this new lodger of yours to my celebration?

GANYA: (*still suppressing an occasional cough*) I thought you wouldn't mind. He was so impressed by your picture.

YEPANCHIN: Uncannily, he recognized you when he first saw it.

NASTASYA: But you say he is some kind of 'idiot'?

GANYA: Not really. He just says exactly what he thinks. Never tries to hide anything. He has no discretion.

YEPANCHIN: It's his childlike innocence. He'll be a reliable employee.

NASTASYA: He sounds very interesting.

MAID: (*coming from an outer hall*) Another guest, Mademoiselle.

MYSHKIN: (*entering behind her*) Nastasya Filippovna ...

NASTASYA: I'm presiding at a party just now. Who sent you? What's your business?

MYSHKIN: I came on my own.

NASTASYA: By whose permission?

GANYA: This is the Prince.

NASTASYA: What Prince?

GANYA: Myshkin. Our renter.

NASTASYA: Oh ... Really ... Prince Myshkin? Please pardon me, Prince. You look like—I assumed you were somebody's lackey ... They say you knew me by my picture. But how? Where have you seen me before?

MYSHKIN: I cannot say. Perhaps in a dream ...

NASTASYA: (*to the others*) Strange. It's as if I knew him from somewhere ... (*to MYSHKIN, taking his arm*) Thank you for coming.

MYSHKIN: You are perfection itself—even your paleness . . . your thinness. I couldn't have imagined you any other way.

NASTASYA: You are just as they say. Just as strange...

(*Seating him with the others*)

So you think I'm perfect. Well, you're quite mistaken. I'll show you. Just wait ... Now how about a parlor game? I know just the one. And I beg you all to play it—for my pleasure.

YEPANCHIN: What is it?

NASTASYA: Each of you must agree to reveal the most shameful thing he ever did in his entire life. But you must promise to be totally honest—neither to hold back nor to lie.

YEPANCHIN: Fascinating!

TOTSKY: Ridiculous!

NASTASYA: I think it would be a lot of fun. Here, I've put your names on these pieces of paper. There they go—into Totsky's hat. We'll ask the Prince to draw them out and announce the order of confession.

GANYA: What if what we have to tell would be ... indecent?

TOTSKY: Then don't tell it.

NASTASYA: But you must!

YEPANCHIN: I can't make up my mind. I'm not sure which of my deeds was the worst.

GANYA: How will you know if I lie?

NASTASYA: That's what's so fascinating—to see how a man *would* lie. And just think how we will all look at one another tomorrow after we've told our stories.

TOTSKY: You can't be serious, Nastasya.

NASTASYA: (*teasing*) Those who fear wolves should not enter the forest!

TOTSKY: But such a business can never turn out well!

NASTASYA: Please draw, Prince! What's the order?

MYSHKIN: The first is Ganya. Then the General. Then Mr. Totsky. And finally myself.

NASTASYA: Good. All right, Ganya. We're waiting.

GANYA: I don't tell stories well ... I ... Tell me, Prince, do you agree that, as it seems to me, there are a lot

more thieves in this world than people who aren't thieves—that there's in fact no one who hasn't stolen something at some time in his life?

MYSHKIN: There's truth in what you say ... but also some exaggeration.

GANYA: Have you never stolen anything, Prince?

YEPANCHIN: Oh, how silly! One needn't ask. We're all human, aren't we?

NASTASYA: Please tell your story, Ganya. You're stalling.

GANYA: All right ... I stole something once, though, let me assure you, I'm really not a thief. And I really don't know what impelled me to do it. It was when our family still made the rounds of fashionable homes. On a Sunday at the country house of the Semyon Ishchenkos, while their daughter was playing the piano, I noticed a green three-ruble note lying on the mistress's work table. So, when no one was looking, I picked it up and put it in my pocket. I really don't understand what made me do it. About a half hour later they noticed it was missing and started to interrogate the maids. They began to suspect one of them named Darya. I entered in, commiserating with her when she began to cry but also urging her to confess, assuring her that the mistress would be forgiving. Just then—while preaching to her with that note all the time in my very own pocket—I had an unusually pleasant sensation. But later that evening I used the note to buy a bottle of Lafitte in a nearby restaurant. I was anxious to get rid of it. I didn't feel particularly conscience struck at the time, nor have I since, though I would probably never do such a thing again. Believe me or not, just as you wish. And now you all know.

NASTASYA: Except that I strongly doubt it is the *worst* thing you have ever done, dear boy.

TOTSKY: It was. It was of no significance—just a psychological response.

MYSHKIN: What happened to the maid?

GANYA: She was dismissed the next day.

MYSHKIN: And you let that happen?

GANYA: Do you really think I could have exposed myself?

NASTASYA: How filthy!

GANYA: So you want us to tell you about the meanest thing we ever did and edify you at the same time?

Well, since we're all equals in this game, allow me to say that you need only wait until you hear from the others here—those who have lived longer than I and who are so much more influential. Don't be impressed because each of them dresses so fine and has his own carriage. Only consider how they acquired their elegant trappings.

YEPANCHIN: You forget yourself, young man. You go too far!

TOTSKY: Perhaps we should end this now.

NASTASYA: General, it's your turn, I believe. Please don't refuse. I was planning at the end to tell you all something from my own biography.

TOTSKY: What, pray tell?

NASTASYA: But that will not be possible if you don't all take a turn.

YEPANCHIN: In that case, my dear, I am prepared to tell you about my entire life. But, in compliance with the rules, I'll settle for a single instance—a little anecdote ... Like the rest of you, gentlemen, I've done a number of things that were not entirely proper, but, strange as it may appear, it is this one small incident which I consider the most shameful of all. It's been thirty-five years already, but I still cannot recall it without experiencing a deep pang in my heart. It was an extremely stupid thing. I was a young second

lieutenant, and life in the army was terribly dull. My pay was very meager too. I had rented rooms in the broken down house of an old widow. Then I was transferred. After a few days, my orderly informed me that the miserly old woman had kept the bowl he used to serve our soup in. It was the last of many such occasions when she'd managed to cheat us. I went storming back to her, all in a rage. There she sat in a corner, hiding from the sun, her cheek propped against her hand. I gave it to her—"You such-and-such!"—in real Russian style. Then it occurred to me that she'd been staring at me the whole time with bugged out eyes and had never said a word. Flies buzzed about, even lit on her, but she didn't bother to wave them off. Finally I drew close to her and asked a few questions. No answer ... Others found her later and confirmed that she had died at, I figure, the same time I'd been scolding her ... Now that woman was old. It was time for her to go. But this angry young second lieutenant had sent her to the other side with some choice Russian oaths—and all for a lost bowl! Since then, over the years, despite my prominence and considerable achievements, I still deeply regret what I did then. In fact, I could not rest well until, fifteen years ago, I went to the almshouse and provided two old ladies with beds for the rest of their days. I'm even thinking of making it a permanent endowment ... Though I've done perhaps other unsavory things in my lifetime, I consider this the unkindest of all.

GANYA: Instead of telling us about a truly base deed, Sir, you've just related one of your most magnanimous actions.

NASTASYA: Indeed, General, I did not imagine you had such a big heart ... Well, Totsky. . .

TOTSKY: I also sadly confess that, among my several thoughtless acts, one stands out in particular. It occurred about twenty years ago. I was visiting my newly married friend Ordyntsev during the Christmas holidays. A new French novel by Dumas *fils* had just come to our attention. As a result, camellias were very much in demand. Another young fellow, Peter Vorokhovskoy, became infatuated with Madame Ordyntsev and, as I learned, was going mad trying to find some to send her by the eve of the forthcoming ball. She had in fact expressed a partiality for red ones. Her husband, Ordyntsev, had promised to obtain some. But one of the lady's rivals had already bought up all that were left in the entire province. It became clear that, should Peter find some, he might at this point easily turn the woman's head, and Ordyntsev was desperate. The day before the ball, Peter in fact informed me that he had located an eccentric old gentleman in another district who raised red carnations as a hobby. The next morning he intended to travel there and acquire some at any price. Well, it was then I made up my mind. The next day, before dawn, I arrived at the old man's place and pled for all his red carnations—a matter of life and death! I told him. He finally relented but would take no money. Upon my return, I sent them all to Ordyntsev. I do believe it saved their marriage.

NASTASYA: And what of Peter?

TOTSKY: When he found out, I thought he might try to kill me. In fact, he became feverish and went into convulsions. Later he volunteered for service in the Caucasus and was shortly after killed in the Crimea. My conscience has suffered for years now with the realization that, though unintentionally, I sent him to his death.

GANYA: So I'm cheated again! Shamelessly cheated!

TOTSKY: No one made you reveal your baseness. Take a lesson from your betters.

NASTASYA: You're quite right, Totsky. It's a tedious game. We must end it.

YEPANCHIN: But you promised to tell us about yourself, Nastasya Filippovna.

NASTASYA: So I did ... Prince, Totsky and the General badly want me to marry. What do you think? Should I marry or not? I will do what you say ...

MYSHKIN: Marry ... whom?

NASTASYA: (*pointing to GANYA*) Mr. Ivolgin ...

MYSHKIN: N ... no. Don't do it!

NASTASYA: (*to GANYA*) Then I shan't. You heard the Prince's verdict. That's my answer.

TOTSKY: Nastasya Filippovna!

YEPANCHIN: Nastasya Filippovna!

NASTASYA: What is it, gentlemen? Why, just look at you!

YEPANCHIN: But you also promised—

NASTASYA: That is my story, gentlemen. Don't you like it? You heard me tell the Prince that I would do as he told me. Had he said "Yes," I'd have consented. But he said "No," and so I refuse.

YEPANCHIN: But the Prince—why the Prince?

NASTASYA: Because the Prince is the first man in my entire life I could ever believe in.

GANYA: Can't you see that the Prince—

NASTASYA: Wants Totsky's seventy-five thousand rubles? That's what you were about to say, Ganya. Don't deny it! Well, dear Totsky, I forgot to say that you can keep your seventy-five thousand. I emancipate you—at no cost. After nine years and three months, you too can breathe again. As of tomorrow I will also lead another life. And here, General, are your pearls. Give them to your wife. I will also leave this apartment tomorrow. There will be no more parties!

YEPANCHIN: Nastasya Filippovna!

MAID: (*appearing from the outer hall, frightened*) Another gentleman is here. He insists on seeing you!

ROGOZHIN: (*appearing behind her, drunk and disheveled, but wearing a large diamond tie pin and another large diamond on one of his fingers*) Fairest creature!

NASTASYA: Rogozhin!

ROGOZHIN: (*placing a large parcel on her table*) Here!

NASTASYA: What is it?

ROGOZHIN: A hundred thousand!

NASTASYA: So you kept your word. You're some man. Please be seated.

ROGOZHIN: (*noticing MYSHKIN, surprised*) What? You're here too?
(*MYSHKIN nods.*)

NASTASYA: Gentlemen! Here are the hundred thousand that earlier today Rogozhin vowed he'd bring me. It's his bid for me. He only started with eighteen thousand. But I held out for a hundred. He keeps his word! And I'm worth one hundred thousand to him. Don't be angry, Ganya. Did you really mean to have me in your family? Totsky's slut? Remember what the Prince said?

MYSHKIN: I did not call you Totsky's slut. You aren't any man's slut!

NASTASYA: But tell me, Ganya, is it true—what Rogozhin told me—that for three rubles you'd crawl to Vasilevsky Island?

ROGOZHIN: That he would!

NASTASYA: It would be one thing if you were starving. But you have a good salary. And then to bring a wife

you hate into your house—because you do hate me! The whole world's gone mad, lusting for money. Yes, I'm shameless. But you're far worse. As for the fellow here who told us about the carnations ... I'll say no more. Better to walk the streets. Or carouse with Rogozhin. Or else—who will take me for nothing? Will you, Ganya?

GANYA: No. I would not. But the Prince will. Look at him.

NASTASYA: Is it true, Prince?

MYSHKIN: (*whispering*) It's true.

NASTASYA: Just as I am, with no dowry?

MYSHKIN: Yes.

NASTASYA: But how will you manage to support Totsky's slut?

MYSHKIN: I'll be marrying an honest woman, not Totsky's slut.

NASTASYA: But how can you marry when you yourself need someone to nurse you?

MYSHKIN: I am nothing. But you have suffered and come, purified, out of Hell. I will die for you, and I won't allow anyone to say a word against you. If we were poor, I'd work for you. But we will likely not be poor. While in Switzerland I received this letter from Moscow, from a certain Skalazkin. It indicates that I may receive a large inheritance.

YEPANCHIN: Skalazkin? Let me see.

(*Taking MYSHKIN's letter*)

I know him. I know his writing...

(*Returning the letter*)

It's quite authentic ... Without any doubt, you will indeed receive an immense sum of money from the will of an aunt who, I happen to know, has been dead already five months now. On your mother's side.

(*Embracing MYSHKIN*)

I congratulate you, Prince, on acquiring a million and a half rubles, maybe more.

NASTASYA: Bravo, Prince!

(*The others move forward and shake MYSHKIN's hand.*)

YEPANCHIN: And to think that this morning I lent the poor fellow twenty-five rubles.

NASTASYA: So I am a princess then! I wasn't expecting this. Everyone accepts me now. See, even Totsky shakes my hand. Now your wife will sit next to me wherever we meet, won't she, General? You're too late, Rogozhin. Have your money. I'm richer than any of you. I'm marrying a prince who is also an idiot, they say. What more could one want?

ROGOZHIN: (*to MYSHKIN*) Give her up!

(*Everyone laughs.*)

I'll give you all I have.

(*All laugh again, louder.*)

NASTASYA: Listen, Prince. This is how a peasant bargains for a bride.

MYSHKIN: He's drunk, but he deeply loves you.

NASTASYA: Won't you be ashamed when they say I almost ran off with Rogozhin?

MYSHKIN: You were only raving.

NASTASYA: Or that you married Totsky's mistress?

MYSHKIN: You didn't choose to live with him.

NASTASYA: And will you never reproach me that I did so?

MYSHKIN: Never. Just try to understand. You were ready to ruin yourself—irrevocably. Afterward, you'd have never forgiven yourself because you are not at fault in any way. You need to be cared for. When I saw your portrait this morning, it was as if you were calling me. I shall respect you forever.

TOTSKY: *(to the GENERAL)* An idiot, but he knows how to flatter!

YEPANCHIN: A refined man ... but doomed.

NASTASYA: Thank you, Prince. No one ever spoke to me this way before. What do you make of it, Totsky? Almost indecent, wouldn't you say? Rogozhin—don't rush off. Where would you take me tonight?

ROGOZHIN: To Yekaterinhof.

YEPANCHIN: Nastasya Filippovna. What are you saying?

NASTASYA: *(gesturing toward MYSHKIN)* Did you really think I would ruin such an innocent babe? That's what Totsky would do. He's the cradle snatcher. Come, Rogozhin. Give me your money. Did you imagine you could keep it and marry me too? Prince, you should marry the General's daughter, Aglaya. Ganya might have won her, but he bargained for her too. You're all the same.

YEPANCHIN: This is Sodom—Sodom!

NASTASYA: *(still to MYSHKIN)* You said I was perfect. A fine perfection to trample on a million with a title and go slumming. What kind of wife would I be for you then? And, Totsky, if I've just thrown a million out the window, what makes you think I'd settle for your Ganya for a mere seventy-five thousand? Take your seventy-five thousand. Rogozhin outbid you ...

(To MYSHKIN)

What? You're crying?

(To her MAID)

And, Katya, you too? But I'll leave you lots of things. It's true, Prince. I dreamed of you long ago—of a man who would say, "It's not your fault, Nastasya Filippovna, and I adore you." I'm a dreamer like you. But nothing would have come of it. You'd have despised me afterward. It's better that we part on good terms. And I'll console dear Ganya too.

(Brandishing ROGOZHIN's packet)

Here's a hundred thousand. Why should Ganya lose everything? But is it really true, Rogozhin, that he would crawl to Vasilevsky for three rubles?

ROGOZHIN: Absolutely true, my angel!

NASTASYA: Then listen, Ganya. I want to look deeply into your soul one last time. You see this bundle? It contains a hundred thousand. If I go with Rogozhin, it belongs to me. It's mine to dispose of. But now I'm going to throw it on the fire—before all these witnesses. As soon as it flares up, crawl to the grate and pull it out with your bare hands. Do that, and it's yours. You'll just scorch your fingers some, but think of it—a hundred thousand! If you don't, it will burn. It's mine, and no one else may rescue it. It's mine for a night with Rogozhin. Isn't that right, Rogozhin?

ROGOZHIN: That's right, my joy! My queen!

NASTASYA: Very well ...

(She stirs the fire in the fireplace with tongs, then tosses the package on the flames.)

YEPANCHIN: She's mad! Shouldn't we tie her up?

(To TOTSKY)

She's mad, isn't she?

TOTSKY: I told you she's a colorful woman.

YEPANCHIN: But a hundred thousand!

(Falling to his knees)

Please, dear lady, order me to retrieve it. I'll put my old grey head right in there too.

NASTASYA: Stay back! Make room for Ganya ... Well, Ganya, why are you standing there? Don't be ashamed. Crawl! It's a fortune!

ROGOZHIN: A real queen!

(GANYA stands, staring at the fire, then at NASTASYA.)

YEPANCHIN: I'll pull it out with my teeth!

NASTASYA: Ganya, don't be foolish. For the last time—

YEPANCHIN: Go on, you ass! It's starting to catch fire!!

(GANYA suddenly turns away, moving toward the door, then collapses in a faint. NASTASYA retrieves the bundle with the tongs, blows on it and tosses it next to GANYA.)

Just the outer notes are a little singed. Otherwise, they're perfectly whole. And it's all his. Do you hear, gentlemen! He held out. His vanity exceeded his greed. Leave it beside him until he comes to. Now, Rogozhin, let's go. Farewell, Prince. You're the first real man I've ever known. Farewell, Totsky. *Merci!* I'm off with Rogozhin—no longer Totsky's slut! Now Rogozhin's whore!

(NASTASYA and ROGOZHIN leave. MYSHKIN rushes after them. YEPANCHIN and TOTSKY rush to the window. Several beats.)

YEPANCHIN: They're driving off in Rogozhin's troika. And Myshkin just hailed another. He's following them ... What a pity. She's a doomed woman! Doomed and gone mad!

TOTSKY: It reminds me of a certain custom among the Japanese. If a man's been insulted, he goes to his opponent and says, "You insulted me, and now to repay you I've come to disembowel myself before your very eyes." Saying this, he then rips open his belly in front of the other, doubtless with great satisfaction. There are strange people in this world, dear General ...

YEPANCHIN: *(musing)* Who could not be captivated by such a creature?

TOTSKY: What one might have made from such beauty and such a personality! Despite all my efforts and the training I gave her—it's all for nothing.

YEPANCHIN: A diamond in the rough.

TOTSKY: Haven't I said so many times?

I N T E R M I S S I O N