

money! But the house doesn't belong just to him, but to all four of us! How could he?

KULYGIN: Well, he owes a lot of money.

MASHA: But it's outrageous. *[She lies back down.]*

KULYGIN: You and I aren't poor.

MASHA: No, I don't need anything. It's the injustice that makes me furious. *[pause]* Go home, Fyodor!

KULYGIN: *[kissing her]* You're tired, rest a bit. I'll sit and wait for you at home. Sleep . . . *[going]* I'm content, I am content, I am content. *[He goes out.]*

IRINA: Our Andrey has grown petty and small. He's dried up and aged since he married that woman! He has no spark. He's stopped preparing to become a professor altogether. Yesterday he was actually bragging about being on the county council, which is run by Protopopoff. The whole town's talking and laughing and he's the only one who knows nothing and sees nothing. And now, even during the fire, he just sits in his room and plays the violin. *[nervously]* It's a nightmare. *[crying]* I just can't bear any more! I can't! *[sobbing aloud]* I can't . . .

*[OLGA enters]*

OLGA: *[alarmed]* What is the matter, what is it, my darling?

IRINA: *[sobbing]* Where's it all gone? Where is it? Oh, my God, my God! I've forgotten everything. I've forgotten. It's muddled in my head. I don't remember what the Italian word for window is, or the ceiling there. I'm forgetting it all, life's slipping away and we will never go to Moscow. I realize that now—we'll never go.

OLGA: Oh my sweet love . . .

IRINA: *[restraining herself]* Now I know misery. I thought that answer was work, but I'm sick of it! First telegraph operator, now council secretary, and I despise everything they give me to do. My brain's dried up. I'm getting thin, ugly, and old, and there's no satisfaction of any kind. Life no longer has any sense of possibility. Why haven't I killed myself? I can't understand why . . .

OLGA: Don't cry, my little girl, don't cry.

IRINA: I'm not crying. I'm not. I'm sick of it. All that is over.

OLGA: My angel, I'm talking to you as a sister and friend, if you want my advice, marry the Baron!

*[IRINA weeps silently.]* You respect and value him. He's not good looking, but he's decent. I myself would marry without love. I'd marry anyone who proposed if he was an honorable man. I'd even marry an old man. I would.

IRINA: I kept believing I'd meet the real one in Moscow. But it's no more than a silly dream . . .

OLGA: *[embracing her sister]* My dear, beautiful sister. I understand it all. When the Baron left the military and came to see us in civilian clothes, he seemed to me so homely that I actually cried. He asked, "Why are you crying?" How could I tell him! But if God grants that he marry you, I'll be so happy.

*[NATASHA crosses the stage from the right door to the left, without speaking, a candle in her hand.]*

MASHA: *[sitting up]* She walks about as if she was the one who started the fire.

OLGA: Masha, you old silly! You are the silliest one in our silly family. *[a pause]*

MASHA: I need to confess, my precious sisters. I'll die if I don't say it. *[quietly]* And you know it before I speak it. *[a pause]* I love . . . that man . . . Vershinin.

OLGA: *[going behind her screen]* Stop it. I won't listen.

MASHA: What can I do? First I thought he was strange, then I felt sorry for him. Then I began to love him . . . to love his voice, his words, his little girls, even his misfortunes.

OLGA: *[behind the screen]* I'm not listening!

MASHA: Oh, Olga, you're the silly one. I'm in love—that's my fate. And he loves me. Is it wrong? *[taking IRINA by the hand and drawing her nearer]* You read novels and think you understand all about love, but when you fall in love yourself, you begin to see that you know nothing. My loves, my sisters. I've confessed to you, now I'll be silent. I will.

IRINA: What a night! *[a pause]* Olga! *[OLGA looks out from behind the screen.]* Did you hear? They're taking the brigade away from us.

OLGA: That's only a rumor.

IRINA: We'll be all alone . . . Olga!

OLGA: Yes?

IRINA: I respect the Baron, I value him, I'll marry him, all right? Only let's go to Moscow! I beg you, let's go! There's nothing in the world like Moscow! Let's go. Olga! Please! Let's go!

*[CURTAIN]*