

THE PROPOSAL by Anton Chekov

Adaptation by Brian Molloy based on the translation by Julius West (circa 1889)

STEPAN STEPANOVITCH CHUBUKOV, a landowner
NATALYA STEPANOVNA, his daughter, twenty-five years old
IVAN VASSILEVITCH LOMOV, a neighbour of **Chubukov**.

Setting: A drawing-room in **CHUBUKOV'S** house.

(LOMOV enters, wearing a dress-jacket and white gloves.)

CHUBUKOV. My dear Ivan Vassilevitch! I am extremely glad to see you here!
(Squeezes his hand) Now this is a surprise, dear boy... How are you and so on and all that?

LOMOV. I'm well thank you. **(Pause)** And how are you getting on?

CHUBUKOV. We're just getting by somehow, thanks to your prayers, and so on. Sit down, please do.... Now, you know, you shouldn't forget all about your dear neighbours. But why are you so formal? What's the occasion? Why the evening dress, gloves, and so on and all that. Are you going somewhere?

LOMOV. No, I've come only to see you, honoured Stepan Stepanovitch.

CHUBUKOV. Then why are you in evening dress, my boy? It's as if you're celebrating New Year's Eve!

LOMOV. Well, you see, it's like this. I'm sorry to trouble you I've come to you, honoured Stepan Stepanovitch...with a request. It's not the first time I have had the privilege of coming to you for help, and you have always....., so to speak... I beg your pardon, I am *very* nervous. If you don't mind I'll drink some water, honoured Stepan Stepanovitch. **(Drinks.)**

CHUBUKOV. **(Aside)** If he's come to borrow money, he'll be sorely disappointed!
(Aloud) What is it, my dear friend?

LOMOV. You see, Honour Stepanitch... I mean, Stepan Honouritch...pardon me, I'm shaking with nerves, as you can see.... In short, you alone can help me, though I don't deserve it, of course... and I haven't any right to expect your assistance....

CHUBUKOV. Oh, don't beat around the bush boy! Spit it out and so on! Well?

LOMOV. One minute! **(Inhales deeply)** The fact is.... I've come to ask for the hand of your daughter, Natalya Stepanovna, in marriage.

CHUBUKOV. Oh dear God in heaven! Ivan Vassilevitch! Such joy! ... Can you say that again I'm not sure I heard all that and so on?

LOMOV. I have the honour to ask...

CHUBUKOV. Oh my dear boy... I'm so glad, and so on.... Yes, indeed, and all that sort of thing. **(Embraces and kisses LOMOV)** I've been hoping for this for a long time. You have always been like a son to me. God bless you both and so on and all that. Look at me, I'm blabbering like an idiot! Such happiness! **(Squeezes Lomov's cheeks)**! Oh, you rascal! ... I'll go and call Natasha, and all that.

LOMOV. **(Greatly moved)** Honoured Stepan Stepanovitch, do you think I may count on her consent?

CHUBUKOV. Why, of course she'll consent! She's in love... she's like a cat in heat.. ..and so on.... I won't be long! **(Exits.)**

LOMOV. It's cold... I'm trembling all over.... I must resolve myself. I need steely determination. If I hesitate, I'm finished. If I take time to look for an ideal wife, or for real love, then I'll never get married.... **(Shivers)**... It's so cold! Natalya Stepanovna is an excellent housekeeper. She's not bad-looking... and she went to school! What more do I want? Oh I'm getting that ringing in my ears again!. **(Drinks)** In any event, I need to marry. It's a simple as that. I'm already 35— I ought to lead a quiet and regular life with no upsets. I'm suffering from palpitations, I'm far too excitable. At this very moment my lips are trembling, and I'm getting that twitch in my right eyebrow....again! But the worst thing of all is... sleep... or the lack of it! As soon as my head hits the pillow, something in my left side—gives a pull,**(makes a stretching sound)** and I can feel it in my shoulder and head.... I jump up like a lunatic, walk about a bit, and lie down again, but as soon as I begin to get off to sleep, it happens again**(stretching sound)** there's another pull! And this may happen twenty times....

[NATALYA STEPANOVNA comes in.]

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Well, hello there! It's only you! Papa said, "Go inside there's a merchant come by to collect his goods." How have you been, Ivan Vassilevitch?

LOMOV. I've been well, honoured Natalya Stepanovna. **(He stands and bows)**

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. You must excuse my apron ... we're shelling peas for drying. Why haven't you been here for such a long time? Please sit down. **(They sit)** Won't you have some lunch?

LOMOV. No, thank you, I've had some already.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Please smoke if you like. The weather is glorious now, but yesterday it was so wet that the field hands couldn't do anything all day. How much

hay have you stacked? Actually, I got a bit enthusiastic today and had a whole field cut, and now I'm regretting it because I'm afraid the hay may rot. Should I have waited a bit? Yes, I ought to have waited a bit. But look at you! Why, you're in evening dress! Well you do look nice! Are you going to a party or something? Tell me!

LOMOV. (Excited) You see, honoured Natalya Stepanovna... the fact is, I've come here to see if you would...to ask you to hear me out.... Of course you'll be surprised and perhaps even a bit angry, but I... (**Aside**) It's really cold!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. What's the matter? (**Pause**) Well?

LOMOV. I shall try to be brief. You must know, honoured Natalya Stepanovna, that I have long, since my childhood, in fact, had the privilege of knowing your family. My late aunt and her husband, from whom, as you know, I inherited my land, always had the greatest respect for your father and your late mother. The Lomovs and the Chubukovs have always had the friendliest, and I might almost say the most affectionate, regard for each other. We are close neighbours. Of course you already know this! My land borders yours! My Oxen Meadows touch your birchwoods and....

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. One moment, please forgive the interruption, but you said, "*My* Oxen Meadows...." But are they yours?

LOMOV. Yes, they are mine.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. (Laughing) What are you talking about? Oxen Meadows are ours, not yours!

LOMOV. No mine, honoured Natalya Stepanovna.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Well, I never knew that before. How do you make that out?

LOMOV. How? I'm talking about the Oxen Meadows, on that tiny patch of land wedged in between your birchwoods and the Burnt Marsh....

NATALYA STEPANOVNA.....and the Burnt Marsh.... ahh yes, yes.... No they're ours.

LOMOV. No, you're mistaken, honoured Natalya Stepanovna, they're mine.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Now think very carefully, Ivan Vassilevitch! How long have they been yours?

LOMOV. How long? As long as I can remember.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Now really wait just a minute!

LOMOV. I can show you the documents, honoured Natalya Stepanovna. It's true Oxen Meadows, were once the subject of some dispute, but now everybody knows that they are mine. There's nothing to argue about. You see, my aunt's grandmother gave the free use of these Meadows in perpetuity to the peasants of your father's grandfather, in return for which they were to make bricks for her. The peasants belonging to your father's grandfather had the free use of the Meadows for forty years, and had got into the habit of regarding them as their own, when in fact they actually belonged to...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. You are wrong! Both my grandfather and great-grandfather reckoned that their land extended to Burnt Marsh—which means that Oxen Meadows were ours. There is no point in arguing. It's simply ridiculous!

LOMOV. I have the papers, Natalya Stepanovna!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Oh I see.... You're just making fun of me.... This is a big joke! We've had the land for nearly three hundred years, and then we're suddenly told that it isn't ours! Ivan Vassilevitch, I can hardly believe what you are saying. These Meadows aren't valuable. They only come to about 12 acres, but that's not the point. It's the unfairness! I can't stand unfairness.

LOMOV. Didn't you hear what I said! Your great grandfather's peasants, as I have already had the honour of explaining to you, used to bake bricks for my aunt's grandmother. Now my aunt's grandmother, being a decent woman...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Who cares about all this grandfathers and grandmothers business! The Meadows are ours, and that's all there is to it.

LOMOV. They're Mine.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Ours! You can go on about it until you are blue in the face and you can wear fifteen dress-jackets, but I tell you they're ours, ours, ours! I don't want anything that belongs to you and I won't give up anything of mine thank you very much!

LOMOV. Natalya Stepanovna, I don't care about the Meadows, but I am acting on principle. If you like, I'll give them to you as a gift!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. If there is any giving to do - I'll do it, because they're mine! I cannot believe your behaviour! Up to this we have always thought of you as a good neighbour and friend. Last year we lent you our threshing-machine, which meant us putting off our own threshing till November. Now you treat us as if we were gypsies. Giving me my own land, indeed! In my opinion that's not at all neighbourly! In fact, I think it's downright insulting!

LOMOV. Then you think I'm some sort of land grabber? Never in my life have I grabbed anybody else's land, and I won't allow anybody to accuse me of having done so.... (**drinks more water**)...Oxen Meadows are mine!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. It's not true, they're ours!

LOMOV. Mine!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. It's a lie! I'll prove it! I'll send my mowers out to the Meadows this very day!

LOMOV. What?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. My mowers will be there this very day!

LOMOV. I'll break their necks if they set foot on my land!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. You dare!

LOMOV. (**Clutches at his heart**) Oxen Meadows are mine! You understand? Mine!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Please don't shout! You can carry on as you please in your own house, but here I expect you to behave as a gentleman!

LOMOV. If it wasn't for the excruciating palpitations and these throbbing murmurs ripping through me and my temples near bursting point, I'd talk to you in a different way! (**Yells**) Oxen Meadows are mine!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Ours!

LOMOV. Mine!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Ours!

LOMOV. Mine!

(Enter **CHUBUKOV.**)

CHUBUKOV. What's going on? What's all the shouting for?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Papa, please tell to this *gentleman* who owns Oxen Meadows, him or us?

CHUBUKOV. (To **LOMOV**) The Meadows are ours!

LOMOV. But, Stepan Stepanitch, how can they be yours? Please be reasonable man! My aunt's grandmother gave the Meadows for the temporary and free use of your grandfather's peasants. The peasants used the land for forty years and got as accustomed to it as if it was their own, but what happened was.....

CHUBUKOV. Excuse me.... You have forgotten that the peasants didn't pay your grandmother and all that, because the Meadows were in dispute, and so on. And now every dog in the village knows that they're ours. It means that you haven't seen the survey plans.

LOMOV. I'll prove to you that they're mine!

CHUBUKOV. You won't prove it.

LOMOV. I shall!

CHUBUKOV. Why yell like that? You won't prove anything by yelling. I don't want anything of yours, and don't intend to give up anything of mine. Why should I? And furthermore if you intend to go on arguing about it, I'd just as soon give the meadows over to the peasants than let you have them. So there!

LOMOV. I don't understand! How have you the right to give away somebody else's land?

CHUBUKOV. I'll decide whether I have the right or not. Because, young man, I'm not used to being spoken to in that tone of voice, and so on and all that. I, young man, am many years your senior, so I ask you to speak to me without getting yourself into a state, and so on.

LOMOV. No, you think I'm a fool and you want to take advantage! You call my land yours, and then you want me to talk to you calmly and politely! Good neighbours don't behave like that, Stepan Stepanitch! You're not a neighbour, you're a land grabber!

CHUBUKOV. What's that? What did you say?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Papa, send the mowers out to the Meadows at once!

CHUBUKOV. What did you say, sir?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Oxen Meadows are ours, and I will never give them up, never, never, never!

LOMOV. We'll see! I'll have the matter taken to court, and then we'll see who it belongs to!

CHUBUKOV. To court? You go ahead can take it to court, and all that! By all means do! I know you; you're just looking for a chance to go to court, and so on.... All your people were like that! Your family is famous for suing anybody and everybody!

LOMOV. Keep my family out of this! The **Lomovs** have always been honourable, law abiding people, not like some I won't mention...like your grandfather who was arrested for embezzlement for instance!

CHUBUKOV. You Lomovs are crazy, all of you!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. All, all, all!

CHUBUKOV. Your grandfather was nothing more than a drunk, and your younger aunt, Nastasya Mihailovna, ran away with an architect....That's right, an architect and so on.

LOMOV. And your mother was a hunchback! (**Clutches at his heart**) Oh my God Something's pulling in my side.... my head is pounding..... I need water!

CHUBUKOV. Your father was a gambler and a cheat!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. And your aunt was a gossip and a backbiter!

LOMOV. My left foot is paralyzed! You're a snake and a.... Oh, my heart... And it's an open secret that before the last elections you bribed... my eyes are gone blurry.... Where's my hat?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. It's low! It's dishonest! It's mean!

CHUBUKOV. And you're just a malicious, two faced liar! Yes!

LOMOV. Here's my hat.... My heart! Which way? Where's the door? Oh... I think I'm dying.... My foot's quite numb.... (**He goes to the door.**)

CHUBUKOV. (**Following him**) And don't set foot in my house again!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Take it to court! We'll see!

(**LOMOV staggers out.**)

CHUBUKOV. He can go to hell! (**He walks about excitedly.**)

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Creep!

CHUBUKOV. Crook!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. The monster! First he takes our land and then he has the cheek to abuse us.

CHUBUKOV. And to think that that upstart, that monkey brain has the confounded nerve to make a proposal, and so on and all that! A proposal!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. What proposal?

CHUBUKOV. Why, he came here to propose to you.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Propose to me? Why didn't you tell me that before?

CHUBUKOV. That's why he was dressed up in that silly suit and all that. The stuffed sausage!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. He came to propose to me? Oh my God! (**Falls into a chair and wails**) Bring him back! Oh my God! Get him back. Oh my God! Please make him come back!!

CHUBUKOV. Make who come back?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Quick, quick! Go... Go get him! (**Hysterics.**)

CHUBUKOV. What's that? What's the matter with you? (**realizes**) Oh, what have I done! Fool! I'll hang myself!... I'll shoot myself! ...I'll hang myself then I'll shoot myself!!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. I'm going to die! Get him!

CHUBUKOV. Don't yell! I'm going.

(**Runs out. A pause.**) (**NATALYA STEPANOVNA wails.**)

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. What have they done to me! Oh make him come back! (**Wailing**)Please!

(**A pause.**)

(**CHUBUKOV enters Breathless**)

CHUBUKOV. (**Panting**) He's coming ...he's coming back and all that and so on! Talk to him yourself this time. I leave it to you and all that and so on.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. (**Wails**) Get him!

CHUBUKOV. (Yells) He's coming, I told you! Oh, what a burden, Lord, to be the father of a grown-up daughter! I'll cut my throat! I will, indeed! We cursed him, we abused him and drove him out, and it's all your doing... yours!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. No, it was you!

CHUBUKOV. I tell you it's not my fault. (**LOMOV appears**) Now you talk to him yourself (**Exits.**)

(**LOMOV enters, exhausted.**)

LOMOV. My heart's beating wildly.... My foot's gone to sleep.... There's something keeps pulling in my side.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Forgive us, Ivan Vassilevitch, we were all a little heated.... I remember now: Oxen Meadows really are yours.

LOMOV. My heart's almost bursting ...My Meadows... *Both* my eyebrows are twitching now!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. The Meadows are yours, yes, yours.... Do sit down.... (**They sit**) We were wrong....

LOMOV. I did it on principle.... the land is worth little to me, but the principle...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Yes, the principle. Now please let's talk about something... else.

LOMOV. I have the evidence you see. My aunt's grandmother gave the land to your father's grandfather's peasants...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Yes, yes, (**raises her voice**)...That's enough! (**Aside**) I wish I knew how to start.... (**Aloud**) Will you be going hunting this season?

LOMOV. I'm thinking of having a go at the geese and grouse, after the harvest. Oh, have you heard? My best dog Guesser has gone lame.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. What a pity! How did it happen?

LOMOV. I don't know.... he must of twisted it, or got bitten by some other dog. He's my very best dog, to say nothing of how much he cost me. I gave Mironov 125 for him.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. You were robbed, Ivan Vassilevitch.

LOMOV. I think it was a bargain. He's a first-rate dog.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Papa only paid 85 for his hound Messer, and Messer is much better than Guesser!

LOMOV. Messer is better than Guesser? How do you mean! (**Laughs**) Messer better than Guesser!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Of course he's better! Messer is still young, but on points and pedigree there is no comparison.

LOMOV. But Natalya Stepanovna, you forget that Messer has an overshot jaw, and an overshot jaw always means the dog is a bad hunter!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Overshot, is he? That's news to me!

LOMOV. I assure you that his lower jaw is shorter than the upper.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. You've measured it have you?

LOMOV. Yes. He's all right at chasing the pack, of course, but if you want him to get hold of anything...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. In the first place, our Messer is a thoroughbred animal, the son of Lesser and Stresser, whereas your Guesser is the son of Slusher and Pusher and has no pedigree whatsoever. He's just a flea bitten old wreck.

LOMOV. He is old, but I wouldn't take five Messers for him.... Why, how can you even...? Guesser is a proper dog; as for Messer, well he's just a joke of a hound. If you had paid 25 for him it would have been 20 too much!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Ivan Vassilevitch. Are you being obnoxious on purpose today? First you pretend that the Meadows are yours; now you are saying that Guesser is better than Messer. I don't like people who refuse to face facts. You know perfectly well that Messer is a hundred times better than your ridiculous Guesser.

LOMOV. I see. Natalya Stepanovna, that you consider me either blind or stupid. You must realize that Messer is overshot!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. It's not true.

LOMOV. It is!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. It's not true!

LOMOV. What are you shouting for?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. What are you lying for? Guesser is only fit to be shot, and you dare to compare him with Messer!

LOMOV. Excuse me; I cannot continue this discussion: my heart is palpitating again.

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. You are typical of those hunters who are all full of talk but useless when it actually comes to hunting!

LOMOV. Please be quiet. (**moaning**) Shut up! My heart's bursting!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. I won't shut up.

(Enter **CHUBUKOV.**)

CHUBUKOV. What's the matter now?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Papa, tell us truly, which is the better dog, our Messer or his Guesser.

LOMOV. Stepan Stepanovitch, please tell me just one thing: is your Messer overshot or not? Yes or no?

CHUBUKOV. And suppose he is? What does it matter? He's the best dog in the district for all that, and so on.

LOMOV. But isn't my Guesser better? Tell me honestly!

CHUBUKOV. Don't excite yourself, dear boy.... Allow me.... Your Guesser certainly has his good points.... He's pure-bred, firm on his feet, has well-sprung ribs, and all that and so on. But, if you want to know the truth, that dog has two defects: he's old and he's short in the muzzle.

LOMOV. You'll have to excuse me but I'm having severe heart murmurs.... Let's face the facts....shall we? You will remember that on the Marusinsky hunt my Guesser ran neck-and-neck with the Count's dog, Fresher while your Messer was chasing up the rear.

CHUBUKOV. He got left behind because the Count hit him with his whip.

LOMOV. He had good reason. The dogs are supposed to run after a fox, but Messer went and started chasing a sheep!

CHUBUKOV. It's not true!... Now, I'm very liable to lose my temper, and so, let's stop arguing. You started because everybody is always jealous of everybody else's dogs. Yes, we're all like that! You no sooner notice that some dog is better than your Guesser than you begin with this, that... and so on... and all that.... I remember everything!

LOMOV. I remember too!

CHUBUKOV. (Teasing him) I remember, too.... What do you remember?

LOMOV. My heart... my foot's gone to sleep.... I can't...

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. (**Teasing**) My heart.... What sort of a hunter are you? You'd be better off lying down in a darkened room than chasing after foxes! (**Mocking him**) Oh My heart!

CHUBUKOV. Yes really, what sort of a hunter are you, anyway? Let's change the subject in case I lose my temper. You're not a real hunter and let's leave it at that!

LOMOV. And are you a hunter? You only go hunting to get in with the Count and all his wealthy friends. Oh, my heart... You're a sneaky, Social climber!

CHUBUKOV. What? I'm a social....? (**Shouts**) Shut up!

LOMOV. Snake!

CHUBUKOV. Young brat!

LOMOV. Old rat!

CHUBUKOV. Shut up or I'll shoot you like a partridge! You fool!

LOMOV. There, there, there it is... my heart's burst! My shoulder's come off.... Where's my shoulder? I'm dying. (**Falls into an armchair**) Call a doctor! (**Faints.**)

CHUBUKOV. Fool! (**Imitating him**) I'm sick! My Heart is pounding!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. You can't even ride a horse properly! (**Looks at LOMOV**) Papa, what's the matter with him? Papa! Look, papa! (**Screams**) Ivan Vassilevitch!..... He's dead!

CHUBUKOV. Oh... What is it? What's the matter?

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. (**Wails**) He's dead... dead!

CHUBUKOV. He's dead? (**Looks at LOMOV**) My God! Water! A doctor! (**Lifts a glass to LOMOV'S mouth**) Drink this!No, he's not drinking, He *is* dead and all that. Why don't I put a bullet into my brain? I deserve to die! Give me a knife! Get me a pistol! [**LOMOV moves**] Oh He seems to be coming round.... I think he'll live. Here drink some water! That's right....

LOMOV. I see stars...it's very blurry.... Where am I?

CHUBUKOV. Now listen, just hurry up and get married
(**He puts LOMOV'S hand into his daughter's**) She's willing and all that and so on. I give you my blessing but please just leave me in peace!

LOMOV. Eh? What? Who?

CHUBUKOV. She says yes! Well? Go on. I

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Oh you're alive... Yes, yes, I'm willing...

CHUBUKOV.

LOMOV. Eh? Kiss who? () ... Well...Yes that's very nice! Excuse me, what's going on? Oh, now I remember... my heart... stars... I'm happy. Natalya Stepanovna.... () My leg is still paralyzed....

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. I... I'm happy too....

CHUBUKOV. (**Aside**)What a weight off my shoulders!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA.) So... now you can admit that Messer is better than Messer.

LOMOV. He's worse!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Better!

(They continue to argue)

LOMOV. He's better!

NATALYA STEPANOVNA. Worse! worse! worse!

CHUBUKOV. (**Aside**) And they lived happily ever after!

(Calls for Champagne ! Champagne! As the lights go down.)

END OF PLAY