

ACT III

SCENE 1

Prince Abrézkov, a sixty-year-old bachelor with moustaches, a retired army man, elegant, very dignified and melancholy-looking. Anna Dmítrievna Karénina (Victor's mother), a fifty-year-old "grande dame" who tries to appear younger, and intersperses her remarks with French expressions.

Anna Dmítrievna's sitting-room, furnished with expensive simplicity, and filled with souvenirs.

Anna Dmítrievna is writing. Footman enters.

FOOTMAN. Prince Abrézkov ...

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. Yes, certainly ... [Turns round and touches herself up before the looking-glass].

Enter Abrézkov.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. J'espère que je ne force pas la consigne....[8]
[Kisses her hand].

[8] I hope I am not forcing myself on you.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. You know that vous êtes toujours le bienvenu[9]--and to-day especially! You got my note?

[9] You are always welcome.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. I did, and this is my answer.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. Ah, my friend! I begin quite to despair. Il est positivement ensorcelé![10] I never before knew him so insistent, so obstinate, so pitiless, and so indifferent to me. He has quite changed since that woman dismissed her husband!

[10] He is positively bewitched!

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. What are the facts? How do matters actually stand?

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. He wants to marry her come what may.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. And how about the husband?

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. He agrees to a divorce.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. Dear me!

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. And he, Victor, lends himself to it, with all the abominations--lawyers, proofs of guilt--tout ça est dégoûtant![11] And it doesn't seem to repel him. I don't understand him--he was always so sensitive, so reserved ...

[11] It is all disgusting!

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. He is in love! Ah, when a man really loves ...

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. Yes, but how is it that in our day love could be pure--could be a loving friendship, lasting through life? That kind of love I understand and value.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. Nowadays the young generation no longer contents itself

with those ideal relations. La possession de l'âme ne leur suffit plus.[12] It can't be helped!... What can one do with him?

[12] For them, to possess the soul is no longer enough.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. You must not say that of him--but it's as if he were under a spell. It's just as if he were someone else.... You know, I called on her. He begged me so. I went there, did not find her in, and left my card. Elle m'a fait demander si je ne pourrais la recevoir;[13] and to-day [looks at the clock] at two o'clock, that is in a few minutes' time, she will be here. I promised Victor I would

receive her, but you understand how I am placed! I am not myself at all; and so, from old habit, I sent for you. I need your help!

[13] She inquired whether I would receive her.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. Thank you.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. This visit of hers, you understand, will decide the whole matter--Victor's fate! I must either refuse my consent--but how can I?

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. Don't you know her at all?

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. I have never seen her. But I'm afraid of her. A good woman could not consent to leave her husband, and he a good man, too! As a fellow-student of Victor's he used to visit us, you know, and was very nice. But whatever he may be, *quels que soient les torts qu'il a eus vis-à-vis d'elle*, [14] one must not leave one's husband. She ought to bear her cross. What I don't understand is how Victor, with the convictions he holds, can think of marrying a divorced woman! How often--quite lately--he has argued warmly with Spitsin in my presence, that divorce was incompatible with true Christianity; and now he himself is going in for it! *Si elle a pu le charmer à un tel point* [15] ... I am afraid of her! But I sent for you to know what you have to say to it all, and instead of that I have been doing all the talking myself! What do you think of it? Tell me your opinion. What ought I to do? You

have spoken with Victor?

[14] However he may have wronged her.

[15] If she has been able to charm him to such a degree ...

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. I have: and I think he loves her. He has grown used to loving her; and love has got a great hold on him. He is a man who takes things slowly but firmly. What has once entered his heart will never leave it again; and he will never love anyone but her; and he can never be happy without her, or with anyone else.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. And how willingly Várya Kazántseva would have married

him! What a girl she is, and how she loves him!

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV [smiling]. C'est compter sans son hôte! [16] That is quite out of the question now. I think it's best to submit, and help him to get married.

[16] That's reckoning without your host!

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. To a divorced woman--and have him meet his wife's husband?... I can't think how you can speak of it so calmly. Is she a woman a mother could wish to see as the wife of her only son--and such a son?

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. But what is to be done, my dear friend? Of course it would be better if he married a girl whom you knew and liked; but since that's impossible ... Besides it's not as if he were going to marry a gipsy, or goodness knows who ...! Lisa Protásova is a very nice good woman. I know her, through my niece Nelly, and know her to be a modest, kind-hearted, affectionate and moral woman.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. A moral woman--who makes up her mind to leave her husband!

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. This is not like you! You're unkind and harsh! Her husband is the kind of man of whom one says that they are their own worst enemies; but he is an even greater enemy to his wife. He is a weak, fallen, drunken fellow. He has squandered all his property and hers too. She has a child.... How can you condemn her for leaving such a man? Nor has she left him: he left her.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. Oh, what mud! What mud! And I have to soil my hands with it!

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. And how about your religion?

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. Of course, of course! To forgive, "As we forgive them that trespass against us." Mais, c'est plus fort que moi![17]

[17] But it's beyond me!

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. How could she live with such a man? If she had not loved anyone else she would have had to leave him. She would have had to, for her child's sake. The husband himself--an intelligent kind-hearted man when he is in his senses--advises her to do it....

Enter Victor, who kisses his mother's hand and greets Prince Abrézkov.

VICTOR. Mother, I have come to say this: Elisabeth Andréyevna will be here in a minute, and I beg, I implore you--if you still refuse your consent to my marriage ...

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA [interrupting him] Of course I still refuse my consent ...

VICTOR [continues his speech and frowns] In that case I beg, I implore you, not to speak to her of your refusal! Don't settle matters negatively ...

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. I don't expect we shall mention the subject. For my part, I certainly won't begin.

VICTOR. And she is even less likely to. I only want you to make her acquaintance.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. The one thing I can't understand is how you reconcile your desire to marry Mrs. Protásova, who has a husband living, with your religious conviction that divorce is contrary to Christianity.

VICTOR. Mother, this is cruel of you! Are we really so immaculate that we must always be perfectly consistent when life is so complex? Mother, why are you so cruel to me?

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. I love you. I desire your happiness.

VICTOR [to Prince Abrézkov] Prince!

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. Of course you desire his happiness. But it is not easy for you and me, with our grey hairs, to understand the young; and it is particularly difficult for a mother grown accustomed to her own idea of how her son is to be happy. Women are all like that.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. Yes, yes indeed! You are all against me! You may do it, of course. Vous êtes majeur.[18] ... But you will kill me!

[18] You are of age.

VICTOR. You are not yourself. This is worse than cruelty!

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV [to Victor] Be quiet, Victor. Your mother's words are

always worse than her deeds.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. I shall tell her how I think and feel, but I will do it without offending her.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. Of that I am sure.

Enter footman.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. Here she is.

VICTOR. I'll go.

FOOTMAN. Elisabeth Andréyevna Protásova.

VICTOR. I am going. Please, Mother! [Exit.]

Prince Abrézkov also rises.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. Ask her in. [To Prince Abrézkov] No, you must please stay here!

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. I thought you'd find a tête-à-tête easier.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. No, I'm afraid ... [Is restless] If I want to be left tête-à-tête with her, I will nod to you. Cela dépendra.[19] ... To

be left alone with her may make it difficult for me. But I'll do like that if ... [Makes a sign].

[19] It will depend.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. I shall understand. I feel sure you will like her. Only be just.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. How you are all against me!

Enter Lisa, in visiting dress and hat.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA [rising] I was sorry not to find you in, and it is kind of you to call.

LISA. I never dreamed that you'd be so good as to call.... I am so grateful to you for wishing to see me.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA [pointing to Prince Abrézkov] You are acquainted?

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. Yes, certainly. I have had the pleasure of being introduced. [They shake hands and sit down] My niece Nelly has often mentioned you to me.

LISA. Yes, she and I were great friends [glancing timidly at Anna Dmítrievna], and we are still friendly. [To Anna Dmítrievna] I never

expected that you would wish to see me.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. I knew your husband well. He was friendly with Victor, and used to come to our house before he left for Tambóv. I think it was there you married?

LISA. Yes, it was there we married.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. But after his return to Moscow he never visited us.

LISA. Yes, he hardly went out anywhere.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. And he never introduced you to me.

Awkward silence.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. The last time I met you was at the theatricals at the Denísovs'. They went off very well; and you were acting.

LISA. No ... Yes ... Of course ... I did act. [Silence again]. Anna Dmítrievna, forgive me if what I am going to say displeases you, but I can't and don't know how to dissemble! I have come because Victor Miháylovich said ... because he--I mean, because you wished to see me.... But it is best to speak out [with a catch in her voice] ... It is very hard for me.... But you are kind.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. I'd better go.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. Yes, do.

Prince Abrézkov takes leave of both women, and exit.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. Listen, Lisa ... I am very sorry for you, and I like you. But I love Victor. He is the one being I love in the world. I know his soul as I know my own. It is a proud soul. He was proud as a boy of seven.... Not proud of his name or wealth, but proud of his character and innocence, which he has guarded. He is as pure as a maiden.

LISA. I know.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. He has never loved any woman. You are the first. I do not say I am not jealous. I am jealous. But we mothers--your son is still a baby, and it is too soon for you--we are prepared for that. I was prepared to give him up to his wife and not to be jealous--but to a wife as pure as himself ...

LISA. I ... have I ...

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. Forgive me! I know it was not your fault, but you are unfortunate. And I know him. Now he is ready to bear--and will bear--anything, and he would never mention it, but he would suffer. His wounded pride would suffer, and he would not be happy.

LISA. I have thought of that.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. Lisa, my dear, you are a wise and good woman. If you love him you must desire his happiness more than your own. And if that is so, you will not wish to bind him and give him cause to repent--though he would never say a word.

LISA. I know he wouldn't! I have thought about it, and have asked myself that question. I have thought of it, and have spoken of it to him. But what can I do, when he says he does not wish to live without me? I said to him: "Let us be friends, but do not spoil your life; do not bind your pure life to my unfortunate one!" But he does not wish for that.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. No, not at present....

LISA. Persuade him to leave me, and I will agree. I love him for his own happiness and not for mine. Only help me! Do not hate me! Let us lovingly work together for his happiness!

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. Yes, yes! I have grown fond of you. [Kisses her. Lisa cries] And yet, and yet it is dreadful! If only he had loved you before you married ...

LISA. He says he did love me then, but did not wish to prevent a friend's happiness.

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. Ah, how hard it all is! Still, we will love one another, and God will help us to find what we want.

VICTOR [entering] Mother, dear! I have heard everything! I expected this: you are fond of her, and all will be well!

LISA. I am sorry you heard. I should not have said it if ...

ANNA DMÍTRIEVNA. Still, nothing is settled. All I can say is, that if it were not for all these unfortunate circumstances, I should have been glad. [Kisses her].

VICTOR. Only, please don't change!

Curtain.

SCENE 2

A plainly furnished room; bed, table, sofa. Fédyá alone.

A knock at the door. A woman's voice outside. Why have you locked yourself in, Theodore Vasílyevich? Fédyá! Open ...!

FÉDYA [gets up and unlocks door] That's right! Thank you for coming. It's dull, terribly dull!

MÁSHA. Why didn't you come to us? Been drinking again? Eh, eh! And after you'd promised!

FÉDYA. D'you know, I've no money!

MÁSHA. And why have I taken it into my head to care for you!

FÉDYA. Másha!

MÁSHA. Well, what about "Másha, Másha"? If you were really in love, you'd have got a divorce long ago. They themselves asked you to. You say you don't love her, but all the same you keep to her! I see you don't wish ...

FÉDYA. But you know why I don't wish!

MÁSHA. That's all rubbish. People say quite truly that you're an empty fellow.

FÉDYA. What can I say to you? That your words hurt me, you know without being told!

MÁSHA. Nothing hurts you!

FÉDYA. You know that the one joy I have in life is your love.

MÁSHA. My love--yes; but yours doesn't exist.

FÉDYA. All right. I'm not going to assure you. Besides, what's the good? You know!

MÁSHA. Fédyá; why torment me?

FÉDYA. Which of us torments?

MÁSHA [cries] You are unkind!

FÉDYA [goes up and embraces her] Másha! What's it all about? Stop that. One must live, and not whine. It doesn't suit you at all, my lovely one!

MÁSHA. You do love me?

FÉDYA. Whom else could I love?

MÁSHA. Only me? Well then, read what you have been writing.

FÉDYA. It will bore you.

MÁSHA. It's you who wrote it, so it's sure to be good.

FÉDYA. Well then listen. [Reads] "One day, late in autumn, my friend and I agreed to meet on the Murýgin fields, where there was a close thicket with many young birds in it. The day was dull, warm, and quiet. The mist ..."

Enter two old gipsies, Másha's parents, Iván Makárovich and Nastásia Ivánovna.

NASTÁSIA [stepping up to her daughter] Here you are then, you damned runaway sheep! [To Fédya] My respects to you, sir! [To Másha] Is that how you treat us, eh?

IVÁN [to Fédya] It's wrong, sir, what you're doing! You're ruining the wench! Oh, but it's wrong ... You're doing a dirty deed.

NASTÁSIA. Put on your shawl! March at once!... Running away like this! What can I say to the choir? Gallivanting with a beggar--what can you get out of him?

MÁSHA. I don't gallivant! I love this gentleman, that's all. I've not left the choir. I'll go on singing, and what ...

IVÁN. Say another word, and I'll pull the hair off your head!... Slut!... Who behaves like that? Not your father, nor your mother, nor your aunt!... It's bad, sir! We were fond of you--often and often we sang to you without pay. We pitied you, and what have you done?

NASTÁSIA. You've ruined our daughter for nothing ... our own, our only daughter, the light of our eyes, our priceless jewel--you've trodden her into the mire, that's what you've done! You've no conscience.

FÉDYA. Nastásia Ivánovna, you suspect me falsely. Your daughter is like a sister to me. I care for her honour. You must think no evil ... but I love her! What is one to do?

IVÁN. But you didn't love her when you had money! If you'd then subscribed ten thousand roubles or so to the choir, you might have had her honourably. But now you've squandered everything, and carry her off by stealth! It's a shame, sir, a shame!

MÁSHA. He has not carried me off! I came to him myself, and if you take me away now, I shall come back again. I love him, and there's an end of it! My love is stronger than all your locks ... I won't!

NASTÁSIA. Come, Másha dearest! Come, my own! Don't sulk. You've done wrong, and now come along.

IVÁN. Now then, you've talked enough! March! [Seizes her hand] Excuse us, sir! [Exit the three gipsies].

Enter Prince Abrézkov.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. Excuse me. I have been an unwilling witness of an unpleasant scene....

FÉDYA. Whom have I the honour?... [Recognises the Prince] Ah, Prince Abrézkov! [They shake hands].

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. An unwilling witness of an unpleasant scene. I should have been glad not to hear, but having overheard it, I consider it my duty to tell you so. I was directed here, and had to wait at the door for those people to come out--more particularly as their very loud voices rendered my knocking inaudible.

FÉDYA. Yes, yes--please take a seat. Thank you for telling me: it gives me the right to explain that scene to you. I don't mind what you may think of me, but I should like to tell you that the reproaches you heard addressed to that girl, that gipsy singer, were unjust. That girl is as morally pure as a dove; and my relations with her are those of a friend. There may be a tinge of romance in them, but it does not destroy the

purity--the honour--of the girl. That is what I wished to tell you; but what is it you want of me? In what way can I be of service?

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. In the first place, I ...

FÉDYA. Forgive me, Prince. My present social standing is such, that my former slight acquaintance with you does not entitle me to a visit from you, unless you have some business with me. What is it?

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. I won't deny it. You have guessed right. I have business with you; but I beg you to believe that the alteration in your position in no wise affects my attitude towards you.

FÉDYA. I am sure of it.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. My business is this. The son of my old friend, Anna Dmítrievna Karénina, and she herself, have asked me to ascertain directly from you what are your relations ... May I speak out?... your relations with your wife, Elisabeth Andréyevna Protásova.

FÉDYA. My relations with my wife, or rather with her who was my wife, are entirely at an end.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. So I understood, and that is why I accepted this difficult mission.

FÉDYA. At an end, and, I hasten to add, not by her fault, but by mine--by my innumerable faults. She is, as she always was, quite irreproachable.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. Well then, Victor Karénin, or rather his mother, asked me to find out what your intentions are.

FÉDYA [growing excited] What intentions? I have none. I set her quite free! Moreover, I will never disturb her peace. I know she loves Victor Karénin. Well, let her! I consider him a very dull, but very good and honourable man, and I think that she will, as the phrase goes, be happy with him; and--que le bon Dieu les bénisse![20] That's all ...

[20] May God bless them!

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. Yes, but we ...

FÉDYA [interrupting] And don't suppose that I feel the least bit jealous. If I said that Victor is dull, I withdraw the remark. He is an excellent, honourable, moral man: almost the direct opposite of myself. And he has loved her from childhood. Perhaps she too may have loved him when she married me--that happens sometimes! The very best love is unconscious love. I believe she always did love him; but as an honest woman she did not confess it even to herself. But ... a shadow of some kind always lay across our family life--but why am I confessing to you?

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. Please do! Believe me, my chief reason for coming to you was my desire to understand the situation fully.... I understand you. I understand that the shadow, as you so well express it, may have been ...

FÉDYA. Yes, it was; and that perhaps is why I could not find satisfaction in the family life she provided for me, but was always seeking something, and being carried away. However, that sounds like excusing myself. I don't want to, and can't, excuse myself. I was (I say with assurance, was) a bad husband. I say was, because in my consciousness I am not, and have long not been, her husband. I consider her perfectly free. So there you have my answer to your question.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. Yes, but you know Victor's family, and himself too. His relation to Elisabeth Andréyevna is, and has been all through, most respectful and distant. He assisted her when she was in trouble ...

FÉDYA. Yes, I by my dissipation helped to draw them together. What's to be done? It had to be so!

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. You know the strictly Orthodox convictions of that family. Having myself a broader outlook on things, I do not share them; but I respect and understand them. I understand that for him, and especially for his mother, union with a woman without a Church marriage is unthinkable.

FÉDYA. Yes, I know his stu ... his strictness, his conservatism in these matters. But what do they want? A divorce? I told them long ago that I am quite willing; but the business of taking the blame on myself, and all the lies connected with it, are very trying....[21]

[21] Under the Russian law divorce was only obtainable if ocular evidence of adultery was forthcoming, and a great deal of perjury was usually involved in such cases.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. I quite understand you, and sympathise. But how can it be avoided? I think it might be arranged that way--but you are right. It is dreadful, and I quite understand you.

FÉDYA [pressing the Prince's hand] Thank you, dear Prince! I always knew you were a kind and honourable man. Tell me what to do. How am I to act? Put yourself in my place. I am not trying to improve. I am a good-for-nothing; but there are things I cannot do quietly. I cannot quietly tell lies.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. I don't understand you! You, a capable, intelligent man, so sensitive to what is good--how can you let yourself be so carried away--so forget what you expect of yourself? How have you ruined your life and come to this?

FÉDYA [forcing back tears of emotion] I have led this disorderly life

for ten years, and this is the first time a man like you has pitied me!
I have been pitied by my boon-companions, by rakes and by women; but a reasonable, good man like you ... Thank you! How did I come to my ruin?
First, through drink. It is not that drink tastes nice; but do what I will, I always feel I am not doing the right thing, and I feel ashamed.
I talk to you now, and feel ashamed. As for being a Maréchal de la noblesse, or a Bank Director--I should feel ashamed, so ashamed! It is only when I drink that I do not feel this shame. And music: not operas or Beethoven, but gipsies!... That is life! Energy flows into one's veins! And then those dear black eyes, and those smiles! And the more delicious it is, the more ashamed one feels afterwards.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. How about work?

FÉDYA. I have tried it, but it's no good. I am always dissatisfied with it--but what's the use of talking about myself! I thank you.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. Then what am I to say?

FÉDYA. Tell them I will do what they wish. They want to get married, and that there should be no obstacle to their marriage?

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. Of course.

FÉDYA. I'll do it! Tell them I will certainly do it.

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. But when?

FÉDYA. Wait a bit. Well, say in a fortnight. Will that do?

PRINCE ABRÉZKOV. Then I may tell them so?

FÉDYA. You may. Good-bye, Prince! Thank you once again!

[Exit Prince].

FÉDYA [sits for a long time and smiles silently] That's the way, that's the way! It must be so, must be, must be! Splendid!

Curtain.