

THE IDIOT

A dramatization by Frank J. Morlock of the novel by F. Doestoevsky

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THE IDIOT

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CHARACTERS in order of their appearance

The Epanchin Doorman
Myshkin
Ganya
General Epanchin
Madame Epanchin
Aglaiia Epanchin
Ferdyshtchenko
General Ivolgin
Nina Ivolgin
Varya Ivolgin
Nastasya Phillipovna
Rogozhin

THE IDIOT

Lebedyev
Rogozhin's roughnecks
Totsky
Nastasya's footman
Katya
Antip Burdovsky
Ippolit Terentyev
Vladimir Lebedyev

ACT I

Scene i

General Epanchin's. The main stage represents the parlor of a Russian house in the 1880's. In the center rear is an anteroom leading to the entrance.

Doorman

Step into the parlor and leave your bundle here.

Myshkin

If you'll allow me I'd rather wait with you: what am I to do in there alone?

Doorman

You can't stay here. You are a visitor. Visitors are guests. Guests must wait in the parlor. Therefore you must wait in the parlor.

(Puzzled)

You really want to see General Epanchin himself?

Myshkin

Yes, I have business.

Doorman

That's no concern of mine. My business is only to announce you but I've told you already I won't unless the secretary allows it.

(Hesitates)

Are you really from abroad?

Myshkin

You mean, am I really Prince Myshkin? Yes, to both questions.

Doorman

Are you a mind reader?

Myshkin

I assure you I haven't told a lie. It's just that I am not in very flourishing circumstances right now.

Doorman

I have no doubt on that score. You are asking General Epanchin for assistance?

Myshkin

Oh, no.

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Doorman

You must excuse me. The General is busy just now.

Myshkin

Then if you don't mind, if I have to wait a long while, is there anywhere I could smoke?

Doorman

Smoke? Of course not: you should be ashamed of yourself.

Myshkin

Oh, I didn't mean in this room. But I haven't smoked in three hours and I'm used to it.

Doorman

Now how am I to announce a, a, person like you. You won't go in the parlor. A guest who won't go in the parlor? Unheard of! You are not thinking of staying with the family?

Myshkin

Oh, no. I just dropped in to make their acquaintance.

Doorman

What? You just said you had business!

Myshkin

Well you see Madame Epanchin is a Princess Myshkin. And the last of them. There are no Myshkins left but she and I.

Doorman

(Aghast)

Then you are a relation.

Myshkin

Very distant. I wrote Madame Epanchin from abroad but she didn't answer me. Nonetheless, I thought I should look her up.

Doorman

You really ought to go into the parlor.

Myshkin

But then how should I have explained it to you? Now, perhaps, you could announce me without waiting for the secretary.

Doorman

I can't. His Excellency gave special orders not to be disturbed this morning. Only Ganya Ivolgin goes in without being announced.

Myshkin

Who is he?

Doorman

He is the secretary.

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

And Madame Epanchin, when does she see visitors?

Doorman

Whenever she takes it in her head.

Myshkin

Tell me, is my Russian acceptable? I've been away a long time and I haven't spoken more than a half dozen words of Russian for the last two years.

Doorman

Why your Russian is excellent Prince it's the things you say that are unusual. Have you been away long?

Myshkin

Many years.

(Pause)

On the train people were talking about the New Courts of Justice. What are they?

Doorman

They are modeled on European courts. Are the European courts really better?

Myshkin

I don't think so. We have no capital punishment here.

Doorman

Do they in Europe?

Myshkin

Yes, I'm afraid they do. I saw a man guillotined in France.

Doorman

Did he scream?

Myshkin

There is no time. Ah, that man was weeping.

(Excited)

It is written "thou shalt no kill", so because he has killed are we to kill him? It's an outrage!

Doorman

At least there is not much pain.

Myshkin

Everyone says that. But what if the worst pain is not the bodily suffering but the certainty of annihilation? Ah, legal murder is worse than ordinary murder because it takes away a man's last hope. No! You can't treat a man like that!

Doorman

(Friendly now)

If you really want to smoke it's against the rules, but

(Ganya enters from the direction of the study)

THE IDIOT

Doorman

This gentleman, sir announces himself as Prince Myshkin.

Ganya

You are the Prince Myshkin who sent a letter to Madame Epanchin about a year ago?

Myshkin

Yes.

Ganya

And you are not here to borrow money? (Myshkin shakes his head)

Then I'm sure they will receive you.

(He returns to the study)

I'll tell the General.

(General Epanchin returns with Ganya)

Epanchin

Prince Myshkin? What can I do for you?

Myshkin

I have just returned from Switzerland where I have stayed four years because of my health. My hope is simply to make your acquaintance.

Epanchin

I have little time for making acquaintances but as you no doubt have some object . . .

Myshkin

I knew you would think that but the only reason for my visit is the pleasure of meeting you.

Epanchin

It is, of course, a pleasure for me, too, but

Myshkin

We have little in common, of course. But I return to Russia knowing no one. I must begin to make friends. And as you are the only person known to me I thought I would begin with you. We might, perhaps, be of use to one another.

(Amusing)

If you were good people and I had heard that you were good people

Epanchin

Much obliged. Where are you staying?

Myshkin

I haven't found a place yet.

Epanchin

(Worried)

So you've come straight here? And with luggage?

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

My luggage is a little bundle of linen. I shall have time to take a room this evening.

Epanchin

(Relieved)

For a moment I thought you planned to stay here.

Myshkin

(Smiling)

Only on your invitation. But actually not even then; not for any reason, but simply because that's the way I am.

Epanchin

(Blunt)

Just as well that I haven't invited you and don't intend to. I might as well make things clear there is no question of family between us so there is nothing but

Myshkin

(Amused)

Nothing but to get up and go? I knew it would be this way. Well goodbye and forgive me for troubling you.

Epanchin

(A little bit ashamed)

Don't go yet, Prince. I'm sure my wife would like to meet you if you have time

Myshkin

Oh, I have time. I'm really here only to make friends, not for assistance. But I don't want to be in the way.

Epanchin

Well if you're as you seem to be I shall be very happy to make your acquaintance. How old are you?

Myshkin

Twenty-six.

Epanchin

I took you to be younger. Tell me, have you any means at all or do you intend to take up some kind of work?

Myshkin

I hadn't more than my return fare upon returning. I have no money at all.

Epanchin

How do you intend to live?

Myshkin

I hope to get some kind of work.

Epanchin

But are you trained to any profession?

Myshkin

No you see I was very ill. Epilepsy. A Mr. Pavlishtchev used to pay my expenses in Switzerland but he died suddenly two years ago.

THE IDIOT

Epanchin

Pavlishtchev. Why, I knew him myself. Why did he pay your expenses?

Myshkin

That's something I've never been able to quite understand. But he did, until his death . . .

Epanchin

And you have no one? Absolutely no one?

Myshkin

At the moment on one. I have, however, received a letter . . .

Epanchin

Have you at least trained for something that your affliction would not prevent you from undertaking? Some easy post for instance?

Myshkin

Oh, my illness would not prevent me. But I don't really know what I am fit for.

Epanchin

Can you write Russian without mistakes?

Myshkin

Oh, yes, and my writing is excellent. I am quite a calligraphist. Let me give you a specimen.

Epanchin

By all means. And I like your readiness, Prince. You are very nice, I must say. Ganya, give the Prince some writing materials.

(Ganya does so, and Prince Myshkin busies himself)

(Ganya shows the General a portrait)

Ganya

See! It came today. At last.

Epanchin

Nastasya Fillipovna! Did she send it to you herself?

Ganya

From her own hand.

Epanchin

She promised Count Totsky and myself that tonight, at her party, she would give you her final word. To be or not to be.

Ganya

Did she say that positively?

Epanchin

Yes, but she said not to tell you beforehand.

THE IDIOT

Ganya

Remember that she has left me free until she makes up her mind.

Epanchin

You're not going to back out now?

Ganya

I didn't say that . . .

Epanchin

Are you having trouble at home?

Ganya

What difference does it make? Father is playing the fool as usual. Mother does nothing but cry; my sister hardly speaks to me. But I am my own master. If I choose to marry a whore I

Epanchin

You're all taking this very strangely. Nastasya hasn't lived with Totsky for years now. And this is your big opportunity. The Count has promised seventy-five thousand roubles to you.

Myshkin

(Looking up)

So that's Nastasya Phillipovna. How beautiful!

Epanchin

But surely you don't know her.

Myshkin

No, but I know of her.

Ganya

How is this?

Myshkin

On the train I met a man named named Rogozhin who was returning from Germany to claim his inheritance. He was in love with her before he left. It seems he got in trouble because of her. He misappropriated money of his father's to buy her a gift and his father sent him to Germany. Now his father is dead.

Ganya

Ah, the affair of the earrings. I have heard it before, too. But now it's a different matter. His father was enormously wealthy. I only hope nothing sensational will come of it.

Myshkin

Are you afraid of his millions? You are not, of course.

Epanchin

Is he a fool or a serious person, Prince?

Myshkin

He said he was coming back to claim her. I don't know. I fancied he was capable of almost any excess.

THE IDIOT

Epanchin

Then it will all depend on how it strikes her.

Ganya

(Laughing)

And you know what she is like sometimes.

Epanchin

Then don't, whatever you do, contradict her too much today. Why are you grinning? You know there is no question of my gaining anything in this.

Ganya

(Flat voice)

No. You won't.

Epanchin

Then why do you seem so pleased that this Rogozhin has turned up? Are you going to marry her?

Ganya

(Morosely)

I am.

Epanchin

Well that settles that. Now Prince, let's have a look.

(Looking)

Aha. That's prize copy. Splendid!

Ganya

(Impressed)

He IS an artist. You have a vocation.

Epanchin

There's a career in it. I think I can get you a job. I've decided to lend you some money.

(Puts up his hand)

You can repay me whenever it's convenient. Next we must find a place for you to stay. Ganya's family takes lodgers. The terms are extremely moderate. And your salary will soon be sufficient to meet it. Is it agreeable to you, Ganya?

Ganya

Perfectly. Mother will be delighted.

Myshkin

You have been very kind to me . . .

Epanchin

I have a motive. You will learn it later. You see I am perfectly straightforward.

Myshkin

Since you are so kind I have this letter that, perhaps . . .

(He starts to take it out)

THE IDIOT

Epanchin

Excuse me, I haven't a minute more now. I will inform my wife. Ganya get on with the accounts. Time. Time.
(Epanchin goes out, turning towards his wife's apartments)

Ganya

So you admire a woman like that, Prince?

Myshkin

Such an extraordinary face. She has obviously suffered. So proud. But I wonder if she is kind-hearted? That would redeem all.

Ganya

And would YOU marry such a woman?

Myshkin

I am an epileptic, I . . .

Ganya

And would Rogozhin marry her?

Myshkin

Yes. Tomorrow, and murder her in a week.

(Pause)

Why, what's the matter?

Ganya

Oh, nothing. I must attend to the accounts. Excuse me, Prince.

(He goes into the study)

(General Epanchin, Madame Epanchin and their daughter Aglaia enter)

Epanchin

Let me introduce Prince Myshkin, your namesake and your kinsman. My wife, your cousin and my daughter, Aglaia. Make him welcome and be kind to him. But now you must all excuse me, I have an appointment.

Madame Epanchin

(Irritated)

We all know where you are hurrying off to.

Epanchin

Give him your albums, Mesdames. Let him write something for you. His handwriting is really exquisite.

Madame Epanchin

Where are you off to?

Epanchin

I am going to the Count's. I'm late already. Good-bye for the present, Prince.

(He darts out)

Madame Epanchin

He's going to see her.

THE IDIOT

Aglaia

(Upset)

Maman, we have company. How can you?

Madame Epanchin

Don't interfere with me Aglaia! I'm sorry to be so rude, Prince, but Anyway, sit here by me. I noticed you are not nearly so queer a creature as you were described to be. Perhaps the table napkin is not necessary. Did you have a napkin tied around your neck at mealtimes, Prince?

Myshkin

Not since I was seven.

Aglaia

Mother, how can you mortify me so?

Madame Epanchin

Quite right. And your fits?

Myshkin

Fits? My fits don't happen very often now. In fact, I haven't had one in two years.

Aglaia

Mother!

Madame Epanchin

It is not polite to whisper in company child.

(Musing)

He speaks very well.

(In exasperation)

So it was all stuff and nonsense as usual.

(Pause. She smiles, relieved)

Come Prince, tell me your story.

Aglaia

(Really angry)

I would never say anything if I were told to like that.

Madame Epanchin

Why not? He has a tongue and I want to know. Tell me your first impression of Switzerland.

Myshkin

It was a strong impression . . .

Madame Epanchin

There you see

Aglaia

Do let him speak, at least, maman.

(Whisper)

This Prince is a great rogue and no idiot at all.

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

My first impression was a very strong one. The morning after I arrived in Basel I woke up in this beautiful strange country to the bray of an ass.

Aglaia

(Laughs helplessly)

An ass?

Madame Epanchin

That's odd. Yet there's nothing funny about it. One may even fall in love with an ass.

Aglaia

It happens all the time mother.

Madame Epanchin

She is a silly girl . . . go on Prince.

Myshkin

I've been awfully fond of asses ever since. I began to learn about how useful a beast it is.

Madame Epanchin

Why what's so funny Aglaia?

Aglaia

I've seen an ass maman, and even heard one. That's all.

Madame Epanchin

You must excuse her Prince, she's kind but thoughtless.

Myshkin

I should have said the same thing. But still I defend the ass; the ass is a good natured and useful creature.

Madame Epanchin

And are you good natured Prince?

Aglaia

You must excuse her Prince, she's kind but thoughtless.

Madame Epanchin

(Aghast)

Please believe me Prince, I spoke thoughtlessly I

Myshkin

(Laughing)

Oh, I believe you.

Madame Epanchin

I see you are a very good, kind, young man.

Myshkin

Not always.

ACT I

THE IDIOT

Madame Epanchin

Well, I am. It's a failing I have, even when I'm angry. Tell us about the things you learned in Switzerland.

Myshkin

Learned? Oh, I didn't learn much. But I was very happy there.

Aglaia

(Interestedly)

Happy? You know how to be happy? Is it possible?

Myshkin

It's just that every minute was precious to me. It would be hard to say why. Before I went there I always dreamed of what I would do in the future. There, I came to value the present so much that I could almost believe that a wealth of life was possible even between the four walls of a prison.

Aglaia

That last edifying remark I read when I was twelve in my reader.

Madame Epanchin

The Prince is a philosopher.

Aglaia

(Scornfully)

Yes. The philosophy of living as cheaply as possible. How to get the most out of nothing.

Myshkin

This talk of prison reminds me of a story. In France I met a man who had been sentenced to death but was reprieved minutes before the execution was to take place. He had already been blindfolded. He was certain that he would die. But then he wondered: What if he were not to die? He thought he would grasp each moment of life and not waste one. The thought so depressed him that he longed to be shot immediately.

Aglaia

Is that all?

Myshkin

Yes.

Aglaia

But what did you tell that story for? What does it mean?

Myshkin

Oh, I was reminded of it by our conversation.

Madame Epanchin

Did your friend live life better after his reprieve?

Myshkin

Oh, no. He nearly died of boredom.

Aglaia

It's impossible to grasp each moment.

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

Yes. I know that. But I can't believe it.

Aglaia

You think you will live more wisely than anyone?

Myshkin

Yes, I have thought that, too.

Aglaia

And you think so still?

Myshkin

Yes. I think so still.

Aglaia

That's modest.

Myshkin

Are you angry with me for preaching to you? I have lived less than others you know.

Aglaia

(Miffed)

If you're happy, then you must have lived more, not less, than others. Why do you make a pretence and apologize? And you draw edifying reflections from everything. Life is easy like that.

Madame Epanchin

I can't make out why you are so cross Aglaia.

Aglaia

(To Madame Epanchin)

It's all right maman.

(To Myshkin)

But it's a pity you haven't seen an execution. I should like to ask you one question if you had.

Myshkin

I have witnessed one.

Aglaia

Oh? I ought to have guessed it. That's the last straw! Well, did you like it? Was there much that was edifying and instructive?

Madame Epanchin

Tell us about it.

Myshkin

I just described it a little while ago. It always upsets me to tell of it.

Aglaia

Described it? To whom?

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

To your doorman.

Madame Epanchin

That's odd.

Aglaia

The Prince is a democrat. As soon as you tell us anything you seem to be ashamed of it. Why is that?

Madame Epanchin

That's not clever, Aglaia. She's a tease but not a bad girl. She likes you. I know. I know her face.

Myshkin

I know her face, too.

Aglaia

What do you mean?

Myshkin

I'll tell you afterwards.

Aglaia

What solemnity! You are just trying to arouse our curiosity. And if you're such a connoisseur of faces you certainly must have been in love. Tell us about it.

Myshkin

I have never been in love. I have been happy in a different way.

Aglaia

How? In what way?

Myshkin

All right, I'll tell you. It was in Switzerland. At the sanatorium there was a girl. I only kissed her once. She lived in our village. She was a scrub girl. A Frenchman had seduced and abandoned her. Her mother was always telling her what a disgrace she had brought on the family. The children threw stones at her. Marie put up with everything because she believed it more than anyone. When her mother died the preacher preached a sermon against Marie. He blamed her for her mother's death.

I wanted to do something for her. So I pawned my watch and gave her the money. Then I kissed her, not for love but because I pitied her. Then I talked to the children who threw stones at her. I told them her whole story. Soon they were sorry for her and stopped throwing stones. It was funny; the children came over to my side but the town remained against her. The children threw stones at the preacher after that terrible sermon.

It was the children that made her forget her unhappiness. She died of consumption. But she was happy. It was only after I left that I realized how much I loved children. It was then that I recalled their faces, their sweet faces. And that is how I understand faces. You, **Madame Epanchin**, are a perfect child in everything. In good and bad alike. You are not angry with me for saying so?

Madame Epanchin

No. It is perfectly true. I knew about it before you told me. But why do you say nothing about Aglaia, Prince? She is waiting and so am I.

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

Your daughter is exceedingly beautiful.

Madame Epanchin

So that's all. What of her qualities?

Myshkin

Beauty is a riddle.

Aglaia

And are you good at riddles Prince?

Madame Epanchin

But she is beautiful, Prince.

Myshkin

Almost as beautiful as Nastasya Fillipovna.

Aglaia

Oh, where did you see her?

Myshkin

Ganya

had her portrait, I saw it.

Madame Epanchin

Go get it from him, Prince!

Myshkin

If you like.

(He goes into the study)

Madame Epanchin

He is nice, but much too simple. A little absurd, in fact.

Aglaia

He managed to flatter us both!

Madame Epanchin

Nonsense! He did not flatter me! He's like me. He's a child. But he's got his wits about him, exactly like me.

Aglaia

Then he's not like you, maman.

Myshkin

Here it is.

(He passes a note to Aglaia who gives him a look that says she understands him)

Madame Epanchin

Yes, good looking.

THE IDIOT

Aglaia

So that's the kind of beauty you appreciate, is it?

Myshkin

Yes.

Aglaia

Why? (She looks at the note absently but then suddenly looks surprised)

Myshkin

In that face there is much suffering.

Aglaia

What power.

Madame Epanchin

What are you talking about?

Aglaia

Such beauty is power. With beauty like that one might turn the whole world upside down.

Madame Epanchin

Stuff! Prince, will you call Ganya.

(Myshkin goes to the study)

Aglaia

Maman!

Madame Epanchin

I want a word with him. That's enough. We have nothing but secrets here.

Aglaia

Maman, what are you saying?

Madame Epanchin

What is it, dear daughter? As for the Prince's hearing it, we are friends.

(Myshkin returns with Ganya)

So you are contemplating marriage?

Ganya

I beg your pardon?

Madame Epanchin

Are you getting married?

Ganya

N-no I n-no (He looks at Aglaia who looks coldly at him)

Madame Epanchin

No. You said no. Enough. I shall remember that. Wednesday morning you have said no to my question. Good bye. You have a lot to do, so here is your photograph. Give my regards to your unhappy mother. Good bye

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everyone.

(Madame Epanchin exits)

Aglaia

Maman.

Ganya

Prince, I am just going home. If you've not changed your plans about boarding with us I will take you.

Aglaia

Stay a little Prince. You must write in my album. I'll be back directly.

(She goes out, in the direction of the women's quarters)

Ganya

That was your doing. You're a shameless chatterbox.

Myshkin

I assure you you are mistaken. I didn't even know you had intentions that way.

Ganya

You heard what I said to the General. You repeated it. You are lying. When else could they have heard it?

Myshkin

I haven't said a word about it.

Ganya

Did you give the note? Answer.

Myshkin

Yes.

(Aglaia returns)

Aglaia

Here Prince. Write me something.

(The Prince moves to the writing table)

Ganya

(To Aglaia)

One word, one word from you and I am saved.

Myshkin

What am I to write?

Aglaia

I will dictate to you. Ready? Write: "I don't make bargains". Then the day and the month.

(He does)

Show it to me.

(He shows her)

Excellent! You've written wonderfully. I want to give you something for a keepsake.

ACT I

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(She gives the note)

Read this.

(Myshkin looks at her)

I know you haven't read it, and this wretch cannot have confided in you. Read it. I want you to read it.

(He reads the note)

I assure you it's all right. This man assures me that if I tell him to break off with Nastasya Fillipovna I am bound in no way to him. Notice how he underlines those words. And yet he knows that if he broke it himself without hoping for anything for me, I should have felt differently toward him. But he has a dirty soul. He knows it; but he can't bring himself to do it. Take the note and give it to him.

Myshkin

Am I to write an answer?

Aglaia

Nothing, of course. That's the best answer. Be on your guard against him, Prince, he won't forgive you for returning his note (She laughs and goes out)

Ganya

So she won't make bargains. Then I will. I'll make her smart for it. But tell me this. What have you done to deserve to be treated as a confidant? What did you say to them?

Myshkin

Certainly. I talked about Switzerland.

Ganya

Damn Switzerland!

Myshkin

Then we talked of capital punishment.

Ganya

Capital punishment.

Myshkin

Yes. Then I told them about a poor village girl.

Ganya

Damn the village girl. What else?

Myshkin

And that led me to commenting on their faces. And I said to Aglaia that she was almost as beautiful as Nastasya Fillipovna and that is how I came to mention the portrait.

Ganya

You didn't repeat what you heard earlier? You didn't? You didn't?

Myshkin

Positively.

Ganya

Then you missed something oh, damned idiot!

ACT I

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

I must tell you Ganya that once I was like an idiot. But then it was a long time ago. I can understand your anger but you've been abusive to me and so hadn't we better part?

Ganya

Excuse me, Prince. Forgive me. It's all a mess and I'm sure but, of course, it's inexcusable. Prince, come as you intended.

Myshkin

Don't apologize, I understand how hard it is for you. I'll come with pleasure.

Ganya

Yes, and everything will be decided Tonight.

CURTAIN

Scene ii

The Ivolgin's living room, cheaply but pretentiously furnished.

Ganya

One word Prince. Be so good if it won't be a bother to you don't gossip here of what happened at the Epanchins. There's degradation enough. Restrain yourself, for today, anyway.

Myshkin

I assure you I gossiped much less than you think.

Ganya

What a horrid room. Well, that's not my business I don't let the rooms.

(Exit Ganya, enter Ferdyshtchenko)

Ferdyshtchenko

I've come to warn you. Don't lend me any money for I shall certainly ask you.

Myshkin

Very well.

Ferdyshtchenko

Ferdyshtchenko

. That's me. Do you mean to pay here?

Myshkin

Yes.

Ferdyshtchenko

Well, I don't. Tell me, can one exist with such a name as **Ferdyshtchenko** ?

Myshkin

Scene ii

THE IDIOT

Why not?

Ferdyshtchenko

Good bye.

(He goes out)

(Enter General Ivolgin, by another door)

Ivolgin

It is he. It is he. The living picture. Prince Myshkin?

Myshkin

Yes.

Ivolgin

General Ivolgin. I knew your father.

Myshkin

Is it possible? My father died twenty years ago.

Ivolgin

We were in the service together.

Myshkin

Yes, he was in the Vassihkovsky regiment.

Ivolgin

No, the Byelormirsky. He was transferred just before his death. I was at his bedside. Your mother . . .

Myshkin

Yes, she died six months later from a chill.

Ivolgin

Not a chill. Not a chill. You can take my word for that, I was there. I was passionately in love with your mother. We almost quarrelled over her, your father and I in fact. You've come to live with us.

Myshkin

For a while.

Ivolgin

I must warn you. Nina is my wife . . . and she is a rare woman. And my daughter, Varya my daughter but but, in fact, my son Ganya is about to contract a disgraceful marriage.

Nina

(Entering)

Ah, Prince.

Ivolgin

Only fancy that, my dear, it appears that I used to dandle the Prince in my arms. You remember Nikolay Ivanovitch? He was still at Tver when we were there.

THE IDIOT

Nina

I'm afraid I don't. Is that your father?

Myshkin

Yes. But it wasn't Tver but

Ivolgin

It was Tver. Your friend Pavlishtchev must have forgotten.

Myshkin

Did you know Pavlishtchev?

Ivolgin

Yes, I blessed your father when he died.

Nina

Oh!

Myshkin

My father died when he was awaiting trial. I've never been able to discover what he was accused of.

Ivolgin

Oh, that. Why he would have been acquitted.

Myshkin

What happened?

Ivolgin

It was a strange affair. A private Kolpakov had stolen some boot leather. The Prince caught him and gave him a dressing down and threatened to flog him. Very good. And what does this private do? He goes back to the barracks and dies. I ask you! Well then about six months later after we had buried this scoundrel he turns up again in another regiment of the same brigade.

Myshkin

Is it possible?

Nina

My husband is mistaken.

Ivolgin

Mistaken nonsense. I was on the board of inquiry myself.

Varya

(Who has been listening)

Father, somebody wants you.

Ivolgin

Yes, yes coming, coming . . .

(He goes out)

THE IDIOT

Nina

You must overlook my husband's "eccentricities". If my husband ever asks you for payment please tell him that you've paid me. It's just to keep from muddling accounts.

(To Varya)

Varya

, what's the matter?

Varya

A present to him today from herself!

Nina

There's no hope left.

(Ganya enters)

Ganya

What? Ah, I understand. You're doing it again. Can't you be quiet?

Nina

I am not going to ask you anything you don't care to tell me of yourself I assure you. I am completely resigned. I shan't cry anymore. As for your sister . . .

Ganya

Ah, Varya again. Look I swear to you, again. No one will ever be lacking in respect for you

Nina

Will it be settled tonight?

Ganya

Yes.

Nina

How can a woman so so

Ganya

Experienced you mean?

Nina

(Bitterly)

How can she send you her portrait when you don't love her? Can you have hoodwinked her so completely?

Ganya

There you go again. No reproaches and they've begun already. We'd better drop it. As for Varya, she can please herself about it. See how she glares at me my sister.

Varya

If she comes into this house I shall leave. I shall keep my word.

(The bell rings)

THE IDIOT

Ganya

Out of obstinacy! Don't snot at me! I don't give a damn!

(The bell rings but the only one to hear it is Myshkin who goes out and admits Nastasya Fillipovna)

Ganya

Well the Prince has left us good riddance. As for the rest of you . . .

Nastasya

(In the hall)

Are you going to announce me? What an idiot.

Ganya

You can all walk out.

Myshkin

Nastasya

Fillipovna

(Everything abruptly comes to a halt)

Nastasya

What's the matter. Does no one answer the bell? Why do you look so upset, Ganya? Introduce me, please.

Varya

In my case that won't be necessary.

Ganya

This is my mother, Nina Alexandrovna.

Nina

It is a pleasure . . .

Nastasya

(Pays no attention)

Where are the lodgers? You take lodgers don't you? (Pause)

Ganya

?

Ganya

Why . . .

Nastasya

Wherever do you keep them? Does it pay? It's so small.

Nina

It's rather a bother but . . .

Nastasya

(Still paying no attention)

How you look! (To Ganya)

Scene ii

THE IDIOT

My goodness how you look this minute! (She laughs)

Myshkin

(As Ganya starts to choke)

Drink some water.

Ganya

Why, are you a doctor, Prince? (Recovering)

May I introduce you to Nastasya Fillipovna?

Nastasya

Is he a Prince? Only fancy I took him for a footman, ha ha ha.

Ganya

Prince Myshkin.

Nastasya

And I swear to you. I was ready to swear at you for a great booby, Prince. Forgive me, please. Tell me, why didn't you undeceive me just now?

Myshkin

I was a little taken aback.

Nastasya

But how did you know my name? Although, I think I have seen you somewhere. And why were you taken aback? What is there so amazing about me?

Myshkin

I saw your portrait. And I feel as though I had seen you before somewhere, too.

Nastasya

Where? Where?

Myshkin

Ah, but that is impossible. Perhaps in a dream.

(Ferdyshtchenko and the General enter)

Ferdyshtchenko

Bravo, Prince! You pay compliments well. And here is General Ivolgin, come to meet you, Nastasya.

Ivolgin

General Ardalion Alexandrovitch Ivolgin. An old soldier. And the father of a family which is happy at the prospect of including such a charming lady.

(Ferdyshtchenko gets him a seat)

I've heard my son . . .

Nastasya

You are a pretty one! Why do you never come and see me? Do you shut yourself up or is it your son's doing? It wouldn't compromise anyone . . .

THE IDIOT

Ivolgin

Children of this century and their parents . . .

Nina

Nastasya

Fillipovna, please excuse my husband for a moment, someone is asking to see him.

Nastasya

Oh, but for a long time I've been waiting to see him. You won't leave me, General, you won't go away?

Nina

I promise you he shall come and see you but now he needs rest.

Nastasya

Ardalion Alexandrovitch, they say you need rest.

(She pouts)

Ivolgin

My dear. My dear.

Varya

Come away, mother!

Nina

I'll see this through to the end

Ganya

(To Myshkin)

Get him away somehow. This is horrible. Please. Oh, the bitch!

Nastasya

Are you retired, General?

Ivolgin

Yes. And in disgrace. Ever since the scandal two years ago on the railway about a lap dog.

Nastasya

What was it? And on the railway, too. Let me see, I think . . . but tell me about it.

Ivolgin

Oh, it was a stupid affair, not worth repeating. It was all about Prince Byelokonsky's governess' mistress Schmidt

Nastasya

You must tell me!

Ferdyshtchenko

I've never heard it before. C'est du nouveau.

Varya

(Desperately)

Scene ii

THE IDIOT

Father, there's someone to see you.

Ivolgin

It's a very simple story. I was on my way to Moscow on a very important affair. I sat in one of the compartments smoking my cigar. I was there first, mind you. After a while two ladies with a lap dog seated themselves opposite me. The window was open and there were many other compartments. I paid them little attention beyond noting they were attractive. But suddenly I realized they were staring at me. And in no friendly way. One of them quizzed me with her lorgnette.

Then, without any warning at all the other one took the cigar out of my mouth and hurled it out the window. A savage woman, savage. I was infuriated. But I managed to be a gentleman. I smiled. I bowed courteously, picked up the lap dog and sent it after the cigar.

Nastasya

(Clapping her hands)

You are a monster.

Ferdyshtchenko

Bravo, bravo.

Nastasya

And what did the lady do?

Ivolgin

She smiled sweetly and without the slightest warning brought her handbag down on my head. Quite a savage type.

Nastasya

And you?

Ivolgin

I shook my fist at her, that's all. And then, do you know, she insisted I struck her. That wouldn't have been so bad had it not turned out that she was some sort of friend of Princess Byelokonsky and the other one was the Princess's eldest daughter. I have been a social outcast ever since.

Nastasya

But this is quite a coincidence. I read the very same story in the Independent a week ago. Only it happened between a Frenchman and an Englishman. Even to the details.

(Only Ferdyshtchenko laughs)

Ivolgin

(Pale)

I assure you the very same thing happened to me.

Nastasya

What, exactly the same? At two ends of the continent? Fancy that!

Ivolgin

(Hoarsely)

But note that the incident occurred to me two years ago.

Scene ii

THE IDIOT

(A doorbell rings)

Nastasya

(Convulsed)

Ah, there is that.

Ganya

Father, I beg you to come out and let me have a word with you.

(Enter Rogozhin and Lebedyev and some ruffians)

(Rogozhin's voice is heard from the outside)

Voice I'll just announce myself.

(Enter Rogozhin)

Rogozhin

Ah, here he is, the Judas. How are you, Ganya, you scoundrel?

Lebedyev

Here he is. Here he is himself.

Rogozhin

You didn't expect Parfyon Rogozhin did you? (Suddenly sees Nastasya)

Then it's true. Well you shall pay for this! (But the presence of the other ladies disconcerts him. Then he spots

Myshkin

)

What! Are you here, too, Prince?

Ganya

But what do you want? This isn't a stable. My mother and sister are here.

Rogozhin

We see them.

Lebedyev

Yes, note that we see them.

Ganya

Look, just who are you?

Rogozhin

He doesn't remember.

Lebedyev

He doesn't remember.

Rogozhin

Don't you know Rogozhin? Why it's hardly six months since I lost two hundred roubles to you and your cheating friends. But never mind that. I've got lots more money now. I can buy and sell you. you'll crawl on hands and

THE IDIOT

knees. Nastasya Fillipovna, don't turn me away. Tell me: are you going to marry him?

Nastasya

Certainly not! And what has put it into your head to ask such a question?

Rogozhin

But they told me you were engaged to him. To him! As if it were possible.

(Delighted)

I told them it was impossible. Ah, this is wonderful. I can buy and sell him. I can buy him off for a thousand roubles. That's right, isn't it, Ganya? You scoundrel. You'd take it, wouldn't you? Or isn't it enough? Here. I came to get you to sign the agreement to do it. Name your price.

Ganya

Get out of this house you drunk.

(Lebedyev whispers to Rogozhin)

Rogozhin

That's right. Here are eighteen thousand roubles, Nastasya. Be mine. There.

(He tosses them to her)

And there's more to come.

Lebedyev

No, no, no. You're going about this the wrong way.

Rogozhin

Quiet fool, I (He looks at Nastasya)

It seems you are right. I am a fool.

Nastasya

Eighteen thousand to me? Ah, one can see that he is a peasant.

Rogozhin

Forty thousand, then forty. Cash down.

Nastasya

The bourgeois gentleman.

Rogozhin

A hundred then! I've give you a hundred thousand today!

Lebedyev

You are mad! You are mad! They'll send for the police and then where will you be?

Nastasya

He is drunk and boasting.

Rogozhin

I'll have it before evening. Get it for me, Lebedyev.

(To Nastasya)

I'll show you that I won't stick at anything.

THE IDIOT

Ivolgin

(Rising thunderously)

What is the meaning of this!

Rogozhin

Whom have we here? Come along old fellow, I'll buy you a drink.

Ivolgin

You will? I like brandy you know.

Rogozhin

Then it will be brandy. Napoleon brandy for the general.

Varya

This is too disgusting! Is there no one among you who will take this shameless woman away?

Nastasya

She calls me a shameless woman. And I came here like a fool to invite them to my party this evening. Is that how you let your sister treat me, Ganya?

Ganya

(Grabbing Varya's arm)

What have you done?

Varya

Let go of me!

Ganya

Apologize! Apologize to her.

Varya

Let go of me.

(She twists, but cannot get free)

Ganya

You will apologize.

(Varya spits in his face)

Nastasya

What a girl. Bravo! I congratulate you.

(Ganya is about to pulverize Varya when Myshkin steps in)

Myshkin

That's enough

Ganya

(Slapping him)

So you're always going to get in my way, are you?

THE IDIOT

Nina

My God, my God.

Myshkin

You may hit me, but not her.

(Suddenly he moves away)

How ashamed you will be of what you've done.

(He covers his face, the party crowds around him)

I'm all right.

Rogozhin

Ah, he will regret it. You will be ashamed, Ganya, for having insulted such a gentle lamb. Prince, drop them, curse them. Come along I'll show you what a friend Rogozhin can be.

Nastasya

I certainly have seen your face somewhere.

Myshkin

Aren't you ashamed? Surely you are not what you pretend to be now?

Nastasya

I really am not like this. He is right.

(She goes out and says something to Nina, then kisses her hand)

(Ganya rushes after her)

Nastasya

Don't come with me! Good bye 'till this evening. You must come, do you hear? (She goes)

Rogozhin

You've lost the game, Ganya.

(He goes out, followed by his gang)

Varya

(To Myshkin)

How is it she obeyed you?

Myshkin

In what way?

Varya

You said she wasn't like that. Yes, you're right, she isn't. But then why did she do it? And why did she stop?

(Nina and Ferdyshtchenko help the General out)

Ganya

Prince, I behaved like a scoundrel. Forgive me please.

Myshkin

I had no idea you were capable of this.

THE IDIOT

Ganya

Of owning my fault . . . yes, I think I am.

Myshkin

(Pointing to Varya)

Here is one whose pardon you ought to ask too.

Ganya

No, they're all my enemies. They never forgive.

Varya

I will forgive you.

Ganya

And will you go to the party tonight?

Varya

If you insist. Judge for yourself if it's wise for me to do so.

Ganya

She's not like this you know. It's her tricks.

Varya

I know that. But she was laughing at you, all the same. It isn't worth the bother, it really isn't.

Ganya

They think I don't know it isn't worth it.

Myshkin

You don't have to go through with it.

Ganya

Now I do. After this. Before I was hesitating.

Myshkin

It surprises me

Ganya

Why?

Myshkin

Your confidence that Nastasya Fillipovna will marry you.

Ganya

She will.

Myshkin

And the money?

Ganya

I'll get it.

Scene ii

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

Why are you so sure?

Ganya

Because that's the arrangement with Totsky.

Myshkin

Totsky her paramour.

Ganya

"Keeper" is the word, I believe. You know, if I were more of a hypocrite I should have snared her easily. If I'd sweetened the pill she would have believed I loved her. All I had to do was talk about the rights of women and all that balderdash. Or how she shouldn't have one mistake held against her. But I didn't. I made it clear. I make no secret I'm marrying her for her money. And how she hates me because I won't play games with her.

Myshkin

Can you have loved her until today?

Ganya

At first. But that's enough! Once we are married she'll behave quietly. And so will I. But if she proves mutinous I'll abandon her and take the money with me. I will not be ridiculous.

Myshkin

Yet why should she step into the trap when she sees what misery it will mean for her?

Ganya

Perhaps she wants to be trapped. Perhaps she loves me in her own way.

Myshkin

Still, you could find many a wealthy girl who

Ganya

After this? Hardly! I'm a scoundrel but now the important thing is to persevere.

(Pause)

Ah, one thing. I thought you were rather taken with Nastasya Fillipovna.

Myshkin

Yes, I like her.

Ganya

Not in love by any chance?

Myshkin

N-no.

Ganya

But he is embarrassed. Oh, well. I assure you she is a girl of virtuous life now. You imagine she is living with Totsky? Not for ever so long. You may pay your addresses without fear. Well, I'm off to arrange things.

Myshkin

Wait!

THE IDIOT

Ganya

Yes?

Myshkin

When she invited everyone to the party did that include me?

Ganya

You wish to go?

Myshkin

Yes I have an object

Ganya

Well then come, I'll arrange matters.

(EXIT)

(CURTAIN)

Scene iii

Nastasya

Fillipovna's elegant drawing room later that night.

(A party is in progress)

Epanchin

He's innocent. He will amuse us.

Ferdyshtchenko

Especially as he has invited himself.

Epanchin

And what of that?

Ferdyshtchenko

Why he must pay for his entrance then.

Epanchin

Unlike you.

Ferdyshtchenko

Spare me, General. I am here in a special position.

Epanchin

What special position are you in?

Ferdyshtchenko

Why everyone has wit except me. To make up for the defect I ask leave to speak the truth. Only witless people do so. I am only kept and received so that I may talk in this manner. Can such a person as I be received in the same company with a gentleman like yourself and Mr. Totsky?

THE IDIOT

Epanchin

You're talking nonsense again.

(Nastasya laughs)

Ferdyshtchenko

The Prince will begin by singing us a popular song.

Nastasya

(Dryly)

I don't think so, and please don't get excited . . .

Ferdyshtchenko

Ah! If he is under special protection, I will be indulged, too.

A Footman Price Myshkin.

Nastasya

(Going to him)

I am sorry that I forgot to invite you earlier. And I'm very glad you've come.

Myshkin

I had such a longing to see you that I forgive me.

Nastasya

Don't ask forgiveness. That would ruin everything.

Myshkin

You are so perfect!

Nastasya

You think so, do you? You are mistaken. I'll remind you of that later. Come let me introduce you. I believe the only person you don't know is Mr. Totsky.

Totsky

I am delighted Prince.

Myshkin

You are very kind.

Epanchin

Buy why has he come?

Ganya

That's clear enough. He took one look at Nastasya Fillipovna and come he must. Besides, he confessed himself to me.

Myshkin

I've made you no confession. I simply answered your question.

THE IDIOT

Ferdyshtchenko

Bravo, bravo! That's sincere and sly, too.

Totsky

Don't shout, Ferdyshtchenko.

Epanchin

One wouldn't have expected such enterprise from you Prince. Why I looked on you as a philosopher.

Ferdyshtchenko

And judging from the way the Prince blushes, he is cherishing only the most honorable intentions.

Nastasya

What time is it?

Ganya

Half past ten.

Nastasya

It is early yet. Shall we have some champagne?

Ferdyshtchenko

This party is dead. I suggest we liven it up a bit. I know an excellent game.

Nastasya

Well?

Ferdyshtchenko

Each one tells the most reprehensible act of his or her life. No lying. It will break the ice a bit. Everyone feels a bit superior to anyone else. This way we all learn each others' foibles.

Totsky

Ridiculous. It's just a form of bragging.

Nastasya

That's just what's wanted, Count.

(Eagerly)

You see it really would be nice, volunteering of course. We really aren't very lively.

Totsky

What if it's something that can't be told before ladies?

Ferdyshtchenko

Why, don't you tell it then. There are plenty of other stories.

Myshkin

But I don't know which of my actions I consider the worst.

Ganya

What proof is there I shan't tell lies?

THE IDIOT

Ferdyshtchenko

Well it's fascinating to see what lies a man will tell. But there's no worry about you, Ganya, for we all know your most reprehensible action.

Totsky

Are you really in earnest, Nastasya?

Nastasya

If you are afraid of wolves you mustn't go into the forest.

Totsky

But telling the truth is in the worst possible taste.

Ferdyshtchenko

I'll start. Tell me, do you think a person can steal and not be a thief? I assure I have stolen, but I am not a thief. It happened the year before last. I asked the daughter of Semyon Ivanovitch to play the piano. She got up from where she was sitting and obliged me. On her table was a three rouble note. I pocketed it.

Ganya

Why?

Ferdyshtchenko

I have no idea.

Ganya

Were you suspected?

Ferdyshtchenko

No, but the maid was. Do you know I preached to her and tried to persuade her to confess. Later that night I spent the money on very expensive wine to celebrate. I felt absolutely no guilt about it. Still don't.

Nastasya

There's no doubt it's the worst thing you've ever done.

Totsky

That's a pathological incident, not an action.

Nastasya

And the servant?

Ferdyshtchenko

Turned away the next day, of course.

Nastasya

And you let that happen?

Ferdyshtchenko

You couldn't expect me to peach on myself, could you?

Nastasya

How loathsome!

Scene iii

THE IDIOT

Ferdyshtchenko

Well, what do you expect. A man's worst actions are always loathsome. General, your turn.

Epanchin

I've done some pretty nasty things but the one I'm going to tell about is easily the basest. It happened a long time ago when I was a mere ensign! My orderly and I were staying with an old lady who kept house for us. One day she stole a cock of mine. The matter was never cleared up but she was the only one who could have done it. First chance we got we moved. However, we forgot to take our kitchen pot and we had nothing to cook our soup in. She refused to give it back to my orderly because she claimed we had broken one of her pots. I was boiling. I went back and gave her a piece of my mind. She as sitting on the stoop and made no answer. Suddenly, I realized she was dead. The whole thing shook me badly. I wasn't able to forget about it until about ten years ago when I endowed an almshouse for indigent women.

Ferdyshtchenko

That's cheating. You've told us your best action.

Nastasya

Yes, General. I never imagined you had such a good heart. I am disappointed.

Epanchin

Can't be helped. Your turn, Totsky.

Nastasya

No, it's my turn. Tell me Prince my old friends here want me to be married? What do you think? Shall I be married or not? As you say I will do.

Myshkin

To whom?

Nastasya

To Ganya.

Myshkin

No, don't marry him.

Nastasya

So be it. Ganya, you have heard the Prince's decision? Well, that's my answer, once and for all.

Totsky

Nastasya

Fillipovna!

Epanchin

Dear girl

Nastasya

Why what is the matter? How distressed you all look!

Totsky

But you promised quite voluntarily and to break it like this before people.

THE IDIOT

Nastasya

Before people? I don't understand you. Aren't we in the company of intimate friends? You heard me tell the Prince I would abide his decision. If he had said yes, I would have given my consent at once. My whole life was hanging in the balance. What could be more serious?

Epanchin

What has the Prince to do with it? And what is the Prince after all?

Nastasya

He is only a man I have met in my whole life that I believe is my sincere friend.

Ganya

I have only to thank Nastasya Fillipovna for the extraordinary delicacy with which she had treated me. But the Prince, the Prince is

Nastasya

Is after the seventy-five thousand, do you mean? Don't deny it. You certainly meant to say it. And, dear, Count, I forgot to add, take back that money. I set you free for nothing. It's time you were free. Nine years and three months. Tomorrow a new leaf; but today is my birthday, and I am doing what I like for the first time in my whole life. Tomorrow I shall leave this flat for good, and there will be no more parties, friends.

(She jumps up)

Epanchin

, Totsky **Nastasya**

Fillipovna! Nastasya Fillipovna!

(A violent ring of the bell)

Nastasya

Ah. Here's a way out. It's time at last. I beg you be seated friends.

Ferdyshtchenko

Rogozhin

and his hundred thousand, not a doubt of it.

(The maid enters)

Katya

There's a dozen men here and they're all drunk. They say it's Rogozhin and that you know.

Nastasya

That's right, Katya, show them all in at once.

Katya

Not all of them. They're in a disgraceful state. Shocking.

Nastasya

Let them all in, Katya. Don't be afraid or they'll come in without your showing. What a commotion they are making. Perhaps you are offended, friends, at my receiving such company in your presence? I am very sorry and I beg your pardon. I am very very anxious that you should witness this final scene

THE IDIOT

Epanchin

I am afraid that my position will not

Nastasya

Of course. I hadn't thought of that, but I wanted you to be beside me at this moment.

Epanchin

Then from devotion to you, dear lady I will stay. But I advise you to reconsider.

Ferdyshtchenko

Rogozhin

himself.

(They all enter)

Epanchin

(To Totsky)

What do you think, Count? Hasn't she taken leave of her senses? I mean not allegorically but in the literal, medical sense.

Totsky

She's always been disposed that way.

Lebedyev

(Stepping forward, extending a package to Nastasya)

Here!

Nastasya

What's this?

Rogozhin

(Gasping)

A hundred thousand.

Nastasya

So, he's kept his word! What a man! Sit down please. I shall have something to say to you later. Well, have your friends sit down. There are plenty of arm chairs.

(The embarrassed ruffians do sit down)

What's the matter with them? Don't they want to? (Holding up bundle)

This, friends, is a hundred thousand roubles. This afternoon he shouted like a madman that he would bring me a hundred thousand this evening and I've been expecting him all the time. He was bidding for me. He's kept his word.

It all happened at Ganya's this afternoon. I went to pay a visit to his mother in my future home and there his sister wanted to turn me out. She spat in her brother's face. She is a girl of character.

Epanchin

Nastasya

!

THE IDIOT

Nastasya

What's the matter, General? Is it improper to tell the truth? Let's give up the humbugging. What good has it done me to behave like a virtuous woman for five years. I've been a silly fool. Rogozhin has ended all that. He comes in and lays his money down on the table.

Ganya

, I see you are still angry. Could you really have meant to make me one of your family? Me, Rogozhin's woman? What did the Prince say just now?

Myshkin

I didn't say you were Rogozhin's woman. You don't belong to him.

Nastasya

I simply can't understand what possessed me to enter an honorable family. I wanted to see how far you'd go and you really surprised me. I expected a great deal but not that. Is Rogozhin right when he said you'd crawl on all fours for three roubles?

Rogozhin

Yes, he would, too!

Nastasya

It would be different if you were starving. But why bring a wife you hate into your house? Yes. I do believe you'd murder for money. As for that bouquet holder (she indicates Epanchin) I say nothing.

Epanchin

Is this you? Is this you, Nastasya? You, so refined, with such delicate ideas?

Nastasya

This is my day, General. I would have my fling! My red-letter day. I've been waiting for a long time. And look at Count Totsky, laughing.

Totsky

I'm not laughing. I am listening with the greatest attention.

Nastasya

Why have I been tormenting him for the last five years and not letting him go? He has kept me like a countess. He even sought me out a respectable husband. Would you believe it I have not lived with him the last five years and yet I've taken his money as though I had a right to it? I've been completely lost to all sense. And do you know I might have married? And not Ganya, either. I might have married the Count, for spite. He would have. He urged it himself. He was lying, of course. But he's easily tempted and can't restrain himself. But he wasn't worth the anger. I'd better be in my proper place: in the streets. I'm leaving and taking nothing with me. Who'll take anyone with nothing? Ask Ganya if he'll have me! Why even Ferdyshtchenko wouldn't.

Ferdyshtchenko

Perhaps Ferdyshtchenko wouldn't. You see I am a candid person. But the Prince would take you. Ask him.

Nastasya

Is that true?

Myshkin

It's true.

THE IDIOT

Nastasya

As I am, with nothing?

Myshkin

I will Nastasya Phillipovna.

Epanchin

Here's a new development. I might have expected it.

Nastasya

Here's a find. And simply from goodness of heart, too, I have found. What are you going to live on, if you are so in love that you, a Prince, are ready to marry Rogozhin's woman?

Myshkin

I am going to marry an honest woman, not Rogozhin's woman.

Nastasya

You think I am honest?

Myshkin

Yes.

Nastasya

That's an old fashioned fancy. Nowadays the world has grown wiser.

Myshkin

No I consider you will be doing me an honor, not I, you. You have suffered and come out of that hell. Why then are you ashamed and ready to go? You have given back the money. No one else would do that. **Nastasya**, I love you. I would die for you. If we are poor, I'd work.

(Sniggers from Lebedyev and Ferdyshtchenko)

Myshkin

But, perhaps, we shan't be poor, but very rich. I don't know for certain. I had a letter from Mr. Salazakin that informed me I may receive a very large inheritance.

(Silence)

Epanchin

He's raving. This is a perfect madhouse.

Totsky

You say Salazakin? He is well known to me. A very reputable lawyer. I know his handwriting if you would let me have a look at it. I might tell you.

Epanchin

What next? What next?

Totsky

It's genuine. By uncontested will of your aunt you will inherit a large fortune without any difficulty.

THE IDIOT

Epanchin

Impossible!

Totsky

You can take Salazakin's word as gospel. I congratulate you. You are now worth at least two million roubles possibly more.

Ferdyshtchenko

Bravo! The last of the Myshkins.

Lebedyev

Hurrah!

Epanchin

It's a fairy tale, that's what it is. Well, I congratulate you I congratulate you.

Nastasya

Then I am really a Princess? It's a surprise ending. But why are you all standing, friends? I think someone asked for champagne. Katya, come here. I am going to be married. Did you hear? To the Prince. He has two millions, he is Prince Myshkin and he is marrying me.

Katya

And a good thing too, my lady; it's high time. It's not a chance to miss.

Nastasya

Sit down beside me, Prince. That's right. And here they are with the wine. Congratulate us friends!

Ferdyshtchenko

Hurrah!

Lebedyev

This is not so extraordinary; Princes have married gypsies.

Epanchin

Prince, consider what you are doing.

Nastasya

No, General! I am a Princess now, do you hear? The Prince won't let me be insulted. Count, congratulate me, too. I can sit beside your wife now everywhere. It's a good bargain, a husband like that? Two millions and a Prince and an idiot too? Rogozhin. I've made a better arrangement.

Rogozhin

Give her up!

Katya

For you? He's going to marry her.

Rogozhin

I'll marry her, too. I'll marry her at once, this minute. I'll give up everything.

THE IDIOT

Katya

Drunkard!

Nastasya

Do you hear Prince? That's how a peasant bids for your bride.

Myshkin

He is drunk. He loves you very much.

Nastasya

How can you marry a woman who almost went off with that . . . peasant?

Myshkin

You were in a fever. You're in a fever now. Almost delirious

Nastasya

And won't you feel ashamed when people tell you afterwards that your wife was a kept woman?

Myshkin

No I shan't be ashamed. It wasn't your doing.

Nastasya

And you will never reproach me with it?

Myshkin

Never.

Nastasya

Be careful. Don't answer for your whole life.

Myshkin

Nastasya

, why dwell on it? You wanted to ruin yourself irrevocably. But you are not to blame for anything. What does it matter what **Rogozhin** or Ganya do? You are proud, Nastasya, and, perhaps, foolish enough to blame yourself. You want looking after, Nastasya, and I will look after you. I shall respect you all my life.

Totsky

He is an idiot! But he knows that flattery is the best way to get at people. It's sheer instinct.

Epanchin

Poor fellow.

Nastasya

Thank you, Prince. No one has ever talked to me like that before. They've all tried to buy me. But no decent man has ever thought of marrying me. Did you hear that, Count? What do you think of what the Prince said? It was almost improper, don't you think? Rogozhin, don't go away yet! But you are not going, I see. Perhaps I shall come with you after all. Where do you mean to take me?

Rogozhin

To Moscow.

Scene iii

THE IDIOT

Myshkin
Nastasya

Nastasya

Did you really think I meant it? Ruin a child like that? That's more in the Count's line: he is fond of children.

Totsky

Nastasya

!

Nastasya

Come along, Rogozhin! Get your money ready. Never mind about wanting to marry me, let me have the money all the same. Perhaps I shan't marry you after all. You thought if you married me you'd save money? Not very likely. I'm a whore, Totsky's whore. Don't forget that!

Rogozhin

There's no need to

Nastasya

You ought to marry General Epanchin's daughter now, Prince. Not me. I won't ruin you. You don't think so now but you would reproach me afterwards; and I couldn't bear that.

Myshkin

I would never reproach you.

Nastasya

Which would be worse. For then I would reproach myself. Come along, **Rogozhin**

!

Myshkin

Is it possible?

Nastasya

Did you think I meant it? I am proud, as you say. Simply for the pride of being able to boast of rejecting a Prince I am going into the gutter. What sort of wife would I make you? And look at poor Ganya! He won't get your money now, Count. But I'll comfort you, Ganya, myself! Come on, Rogozhin, let's go.

Rogozhin

Let's go. Hey, Lebedyev, get ready the wine.

Nastasya

Have plenty of wine ready. I want to drink. And there will be music.

Rogozhin

Yes, yes. Don't go near her. She's mine! All mine. My queen. Don't come near her. Don't come near her.

Nastasya

Why are you bellowing? I can still kick you out. I can if I choose. I haven't taken your money yet. Give it here. Is there a hundred thousand in it?

THE IDIOT

Rogozhin

Yes. Yes. I assure you.

Nastasya

Look, Prince, look! See what a whore your betrothed is. You should laugh. The General wants you for his daughter. A much better bargain. Why are you crying, Prince? You should laugh as I do.

(She is not laughing)

It is better so, Prince. It is better so. We should not have been happy. You are right, we've met before. In my dreams. I've always dreamt of someone like you. Some kind and good and honest AND so stupid he wouldn't let me see me for what I am. I used to dream like that until I nearly went out of my mind. Rogozhin, are you ready?

Rogozhin

Ready. Don't come near her.

Lebedyev

The troikas are ready with bells.

Nastasya

Ganya

, I want to compensate you. Why should you lose everything? **Rogozhin**
, would he crawl on all fours for three roubles?

Rogozhin

He would.

Nastasya

Then listen, Ganya; I want to see into your soul for the last time. You've been torturing me, now it's my turn. You see this roll? There are a hundred thousand roubles. I'm going to throw it in the fire. Now if you can pull it out, bare-handed, no tongs, it's yours. You'll burn your fingers a little but it's a hundred thousand and I shall admire your spirit. If you don't it will burn. I won't let anyone else touch it. It's my money! It's my wages for a night with Rogozhin. Is it my money, Rogozhin?

Rogozhin

Yours, yours, my queen!

Nastasya

Then stand back. I may do what I like.

Epanchin

She's out of her mind completely. Oughtn't we to tie her up?

Totsky

I told you she is a woman of glaring effects. An alluring woman!

Lebedyev

Madame! Royal lady! Omnipotent lady! (He is on his knees)

Tell me to pick them out. I'll get right in. I have thirteen children all of them orphans.

(He tries to get in the fire)

Nastasya

Get away! All stand back! Ganya, why are you standing still? Don't be shy. Pick it out. If you don't you'll hang

THE IDIOT

yourself afterward.

Lebedyev

Lady! (He rushes forward, only to be clouted by Rogozhin)

Rogozhin

That's like my queen. That's style. Which of you pickpockets would do a thing like that?

Ferdyshtchenko

I'd pull it out with my teeth for a paltry thousand.

Lebedyev

It's burning! It's on fire!

Ferdyshtchenko

Pick it out!

Nastasya

Ganya

, don't show off. For the last time, I say . . .

Ferdyshtchenko

Pull it out! Pull it out, you concerted jacknapes. It'll be burned. Oh, damn you!

Lebedyev

Dear lady, it will be burned.

(Ganya walks out of the room, Nastasya pulls the money out with the tongs)

Lebedyev

Only a poor little thousand spoilt.

Nastasya

It's all his! He wouldn't do it, so his vanity is even greater than his greed. Rogozhin, march! Goodbye, Prince. You are the first man I have seen in my life. Goodbye, Count, merci.

(Myshkin rushes after her)

Epanchin

Pray, think what you are doing, Prince! Give it up. I speak as a father.

(The Prince has gone)

(Myshkin's voice: To Moscow! Follow the troikas!)

Epanchin

I am sorry genuinely, sorry. She is a lost woman. But the Prince isn't for her now. He's too good a match. Now, I have a daughter . . .

Totsky

Amongst the Japanese they say anyone who has received an insult goes to his enemy and cuts open his stomach

THE IDIOT

before him. I never saw the point before. Ah, she is a woman of great effects. An alluring woman alluring.

CURTAIN

ACT II

In this act the Prince's circumstances have obviously improved. But he is still awkward and shy and deferential. Only his clothes are better.

Scene i.

Rogozhin

's palace. A knock. Rogozhin himself answers it. He stops and stares at Myshkin.

Myshkin

Parfyon, perhaps I've come at the wrong moment. I can go away, you know.

Rogozhin

Not at all, not at all. Come in. You are welcome. Why do you stare so? Sit down.

Myshkin

Did you know that I was coming today or not?

Rogozhin

I thought so, I was right. But how could I tell for sure?

Myshkin

Why be so cross about it?

Rogozhin

Why do you ask?

Myshkin

Even as I got out of the train this morning, I saw two eyes that looked at me just like you did.

Rogozhin

You don't say. Whose eyes were they?

Myshkin

I don't know. I felt almost sweat pouring over me, as I did when I had fits five years ago.

Rogozhin

Well, perhaps, it was your fancy, I don't know.

Myshkin

Perhaps. Are you settled here for good?

Rogozhin

Yes, I am home. Where else should I be?

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

It's been a long time since we met. I've heard such things about you, not like yourself.

Rogozhin

People will say anything.

Myshkin

You've turned off all your followers.

Rogozhin

(Morosely)

Yes.

Myshkin

(Embarrassed)

I guessed it was your house from quite a distance.

Rogozhin

How was that?

Myshkin

Before I had an idea that you lived in such a house. When I saw it, I knew it must be yours. It's so dark. You are living here in darkness. Is that your father? (Pointing to a portrait)

Rogozhin

Yes, it is.

Myshkin

He wasn't one of the Old Believers was he?

Rogozhin

No. Why do you ask?

Myshkin

Will you have your wedding here?

Rogozhin

Yes.

Myshkin

Will it be soon?

Rogozhin

You know yourself that doesn't depend on me.

Myshkin

Parfyon, I am not your enemy. I won't interfere with you in any way. When she fled from you in Moscow and came to me and asked me to save her from you we lived apart.

Rogozhin

All that time? A full month?

ACT II

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

You know it. I came here with a purpose. I wish to persuade her to go abroad for her health. I don't mean to accompany her. She is ill, **Rogozhin**, and needs care. I have never concealed from you that I have always felt it would be better for both of you to part. But since you have made it up I will go without seeing her. You said you understood how I felt once. But here you are looking at me with hatred. I will go now and I won't come back.
(He rises)

Rogozhin

Stay with me a little. It's a long time since I've seen you.
(He holds his head on his hands)

When you are not here, I hate you. But you haven't been sitting here ten minutes when you are as dear to me as ever. Stay with me a little.

Myshkin

You believe me when I am with you?

Rogozhin

I believe your voice. Later, I will suspect your words. I understand, of course, that we can't be put on a level you and I.

Myshkin

Why do you add that? Now you are irritated again.

Rogozhin

Our opinion is not asked in the matter. It's settled. You see we love in different ways. You say you love her with pity. There's no pity for her in me. And she hates me, too, more than anything. Would you believe it, I haven't seen her for five days because I don't dare? She'll ask me "What have you come for?" She has covered me with shame.

Myshkin

Shame? How can you?

Rogozhin

Though you didn't know, she ran away to you on our wedding day

Myshkin

But you yourself know

Rogozhin

Didn't she shame me in Moscow with that Hussar? I know for certain she did. And even after she had fixed the wedding day.

Myshkin

Impossible!

Rogozhin

I know it for a fact. She's not that type you say? Not with you. But with me, yes. I know for a fact that simply to make a laughingstock of me oh, the tricks she played me in Moscow!

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

And you are marrying her now? What will you do later?

Rogozhin

It's five days since I've been with her. She keeps telling me that I don't own her. Sometimes, it's true, she only does this to scare me. She is always laughing at me somehow. But sometimes she is really sullen and won't say a word. I give her presents and she gives them to her maid. I watch her house. She knows it. She asks me what I would do if I caught her with another man. She doesn't have to ask. I couldn't stand it. She knows.

Myshkin

What does she know?

Rogozhin

How do I know? I've never been able to catch her. In Moscow I was always on her track. I told her what she was one day.

Myshkin

You told her?

Rogozhin

Yes.

Myshkin

Well?

Rogozhin

She said she'd never marry me. She wouldn't even take me for her lackey. I beat her black and blue.

Myshkin

Don't you see you can't go on this way?

Rogozhin

Who better than I? She wouldn't forgive me though I begged her on my knees. She went out with all her friends and laughed at me. She came back alone. She said they were all cowards and afraid of me. But she laughed, she wasn't afraid. She went to bed and didn't even lock the door. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't eat. The next morning she laughed at me but she was friendly enough. She asked me if I would punish her once I married her. I told her the truth: I didn't know. She didn't even regard me worth her anger. Later, she said she'd marry me. Do you know why? Because it was as good a way as any to ruin herself. Then she fixed the day and a week later she ran off to Lebedyev. When I found her, she said she wanted to wait a while. That's how we stand now what do you think of all that? What do you think of it yourself?

Myshkin

What do you think of it yourself?

Rogozhin

Do you suppose I think?

Myshkin

I won't hinder you in any way.

THE IDIOT

Rogozhin

How is it that you give in to me like this? Have you quite got over loving her? You used to be miserable anyway. I saw that. Why have you come here? From pity?

Myshkin

You think I am deceiving you?

Rogozhin

No, I believe you. It's just that I can't make it out. Is your pity greater than my love?

Myshkin

There's no distinguishing your love from hate. It will pass then and, perhaps, the trouble will be worse. I tell you this, brother

Rogozhin

That I shall murder her.

Myshkin

You hate her bitterly for this love, for all this torture you are suffering. Why does she go through with it? Any man would be better because because you really may murder her, Rogozhin, and she knows that only too well by now. Is it because you love her so passionately? That may be it. There are women who want just that sort of love only.

Rogozhin

Why are you smiling at my father's portrait?

Myshkin

It struck me that if it hadn't been for this love you would have become exactly like your father. You would have lived a quiet life, heaping up money.

Rogozhin

Laugh away; but do you know she said the very same thing not long ago. It's queer how you both say the same thing.

Myshkin

She has been here?

Rogozhin

Yes. She stood there and looked at the portrait. She told me I was headstrong, passionate, and if it weren't for my intelligence, I'd go to Siberia. Can you imagine? It's the first time she had ever spoken to me so. She saw some books and told me I should educate myself. She said she'd prepare me a list of books to read. It was the first time she ever talked to me like that. For the first time I breathed like a living man.

Myshkin

Perhaps God will bring you together.

Rogozhin

That will never be.

Myshkin

Don't be without hope. Surely if she marries you, she will see your good qualities. If that were not so it would be

THE IDIOT

as foolish as to deliberately drown herself, or tempt murder.

Rogozhin

That's just why she's marrying me! Just why! Because she expects to be murdered. Do you pretend not to understand what's at the root of it?

Myshkin

I don't understand you.

Rogozhin

Well, perhaps, you really don't. They say you are not quite right. She loves another man just as I love her. And do you know who he is? It's you.

Myshkin

Me?

Rogozhin

You. She's loved you ever since that day. She's told me so. But she won't marry you. She won't ruin you. She keeps saying she won't disgrace you. But it doesn't matter. She can marry me.

Myshkin

But why did she run away from me then?

Rogozhin

And back and forth and back and forth? All sorts of ideas come to her, poor thing. She cries, she laughs. She ran away from you because she loved you. She was trying to be noble. She doesn't think she's worthy. She would have drowned herself long ago if it weren't for me. You know why? Because I am more dreadful than the water. She marries me from spite from spite!

Myshkin

How can you do it then?

Rogozhin

You're thinking you must prevent it?

Myshkin

I didn't come here with that idea.

Rogozhin

But you have it now. Well that's enough.
(He is toying with a knife)

Myshkin

It's all jealousy. All morbidity. What are you doing?

Rogozhin

Leave it alone.

Myshkin

I had a premonition of all this. I wanted to root it out of my heart, **Rogozhin**, but it's not so easy. Well, goodbye. But what are you doing?

THE IDIOT

(Myshkin has picked up the knife, but Rogozhin snatches it from him)

Myshkin

Do you cut the pages with it?

Rogozhin

Yes.

Myshkin

But it's a garden knife.

Rogozhin

So? Does it matter?

Myshkin

But it is quite new.

Rogozhin

Why shouldn't I buy a new knife?

Myshkin

I'd better go.

(He gets up)

Rogozhin

Do you believe in God?

Myshkin

What a strange question.

Rogozhin

I was looking at that picture.

Myshkin

At that picture? It might make one lose one's faith.

Rogozhin

That's what it is doing.

Myshkin

What do you mean? I was joking. Why did you ask that?

Rogozhin

Many people don't believe nowadays.

Myshkin

All I know is that a few days ago an atheist was killed by a religious man for his atheism. The religious man prayed to God as he cut his friend's throat. It was an act of piety, you see.

Rogozhin

(Laughs)

THE IDIOT

I like that. That beats everything.

Myshkin

Yesterday, a drunken soldier sold me a silver cross. Of course, it was made of tin. But I bought it. He was so happy to have cheated me. I let him cheat me. It made him happy.

Rogozhin

Have you got it with you?

Myshkin

Yes.

Rogozhin

Show me. Give it to me.

Myshkin

Why? I'd rather . . .

Rogozhin

I'll wear it and give you mine.

Myshkin

You want to change crosses? Certainly. We will be brothers.

Rogozhin

Don't be afraid. Though I've taken your cross, I won't murder you for your watch.
(He embraces him)

Myshkin

Take her then. She's yours. I've given in to you. Remember **Rogozhin**

. . .

(Myshkin falls into a fit)

Rogozhin

Prince, what is wrong? Ah, it's his fit. His fit . . .

(CURTAIN)

Scene ii

The scene is Lebedyev's garden. There are some trees and a small garden. At the audience's right is the house. At the rear a stone wall with gates is visible. The gates are open. In the center are garden seats and tables. The time is spring.

Lebedyev

That monster has been here every morning to ask after your health.

Myshkin

Why do you call him a monster?

THE IDIOT

Lebedyev

Because I wish to show that I am no longer on his side and that I am not afraid of him.

Myshkin

And why are you always approaching me as if you wanted to whisper a secret in my ear?

Lebedyev

I am abject. I feel it. As it happens I do have a secret to tell you. A person you know wishes an interview with you, in secret.

Myshkin

Why in secret? I'll go to her today, myself.

Lebedyev

Because she is afraid of Aglaia Ivanova.

Myshkin

I've forbidden you to mention Aglaia to me. Ever since you've had the ridiculous notion she's in love with me.

Lebedyev

It seems Nastasya Fillopovna shares my opinion. It is Nastasya's wish that Aglaia should become your wife.

Myshkin

This is absurd.

Lebedyev

It is not so absurd. She has written to Aglaia about you.

Myshkin

What? I don't believe it.

Lebedyev

I've seen the letters. And I believe, but I'm not sure, that Aglaia replies to them.

Myshkin

This grows more and more incredible.

(A servant escorts in the Epanchins)

(Enter the servant, General Epanchin, Madame Epanchin, Mademoiselle **Epanchin**

)

This is a delightful surprise.

(The Prince and Lebedyev rush to find the ladies chairs)

Madame Epanchin

Prince, you're very lively. I expected to find you on death's door. I confess, your good health vexes me no end.

Are you staying long?

Myshkin

Perhaps the whole summer.

THE IDIOT

Madame Epanchin

You are alone, aren't you? Not married?

Aglaia

Maman!

Myshkin

No, not married.

Madame Epanchin

Why haven't you come to us? Why do you stay with that person? Why does he wriggle about like that?

Lebedyev

I am abject, abject. I feel it.

Madame Epanchin

He is mad.

Myshkin

No, no.

Madame Epanchin

Drunk like the last time?

(General Ivolgin enters)

Ivolgin

Good morning, Prince. Ah, who have we here? Aglaia Ivanova. I used to carry you in my arms.

Madame Epanchin

You are lying, sir, as usual.

Aglaia

You've forgotten, maman, he really did.

Ivolgin

Dear me. I did. Fancy that. I used to be a guest in your house Ivan Fyodorovitch.

Madame Epanchin

And see what you've come to now. You should cry.

(Ivolgin draws himself up to go)

Madame Epanchin

Ardalion Alexandrovitch, my dear man. Stop a minute, we are all sinners. Come see us again.

(Ivolgin goes)

Lebedyev

That's what comes of speaking the truth. Tears!

THE IDIOT

Epanchin

Was that Ganya I just saw?

Myshkin

Yes. He is my steward now. He has changed much.

Madame Epanchin

Well, his sister hasn't. Do you know she was carrying messages from **Ganya** to Aglaia?

Myshkin

I know he deceives me at times.

Madame Epanchin

Know it and go on trusting him? Oh, why didn't you come to stay with us instead of this Lebedyev!

Myshkin

Well, I was forbidden . . .

Madame Epanchin

When? By whom?

Myshkin

By Aglaia.

Madame Epanchin

What!

Myshkin

I am not agreeable company for a young lady. My gestures are unsuitable. I've no sense of proportion. My words are incongruous. And so I have no right. It is impossible not to laugh at me sometimes. It is so, isn't it?

Aglaia

Why do you humble yourself before them? Them! Them! There's no one here worth your little finger. Why have you no pride?

Epanchin

Why did you forbid the Prince the house?

Aglaia

Why do all of you torture me, every one of you? They're all pestering me on your account, Prince. Why? Nothing will induce me to marry you. I never will on any consideration. As though one could marry an absurd creature like you! Why, why do they tease me and say I'm going to marry you? You're in the plot with them, too.

Epanchin

No one has ever teased you about it, that I know of . . .

Madame Epanchin

No one has ever thought of such a thing. Who has been teasing her? Is she raving?

THE IDIOT

Aglaia

Everyone has been talking about it. Everyone. For the last three days. I will never, never, never marry him.
(She sobs)

Epanchin

But he hasn't even . . .

Myshkin

I haven't asked you.

Madame Epanchin

What's that?

Myshkin

It's not my fault Aglaia Ivanova, I never it never entered my head. Nor shall I ever

(Aglaia looks at him and laughs hysterically)

Myshkin

Well then, it's all right.

Madame Epanchin

Oh dear, she's in love with him. It's worse than I feared.

Epanchin

But how can she be in love after that display?

Madame Epanchin

You'll see. Oh, dear.

Aglaia

You've refused me? You've refused me for good haven't you, Prince? You shan't change your mind?

Myshkin

No.

Aglaia

Then you may give me a kiss.

Epanchin

Well, this beats all!

(Ganya enters, to Lebedyev)

Ganya

Why don't you tell him about these people? They'll come in of themselves if you don't. Prince, there are three men to see you, but **Lebedyev**, here, won't let them in to you.

Myshkin

Who are they?

THE IDIOT

Lebedyev

The son of Pavlishtchev and his friends. They are not worth it.

Myshkin

The son of Pavlishtchev! Let him in.

Aglaia

It will be a very good thing if you put a stop to this at once, yourself.

Madame Epanchin

I want this disgusting claim to be stopped at last, too.

Myshkin

It seems everyone knows about my affairs.

Aglaia

It's all over town. They've put out a disgusting pamphlet.

Myshkin

Let them in.

(The three boys, all in their teens come in)

Antip

Antip

Burdovsky, the son of Pavlishtchev.

Vladimir

Vladimir

Dobtorenko, Mr. Lebedyev's nephew.

Lebedyev

I'd like to forget that.

Vladimir

I'm not about to let you.

Ippolit

Terentyev. Ippolit Terentyev.

Myshkin

I did not expect any of you. I asked Ganya to deal with this. However, I have no objection to a personal explanation. If you would step inside, I have my friends here, so if it won't take too long . . .

Vladimir

So many friends as you like, but allow us to point out you might have treated us politely and not left us waiting two hours in your servants' quarters.

Antip

Of course, this is behaving like a Prince, but I am not your servant, I

THE IDIOT

Ippolit

It was like a Prince.

Myshkin

Gentlemen, I only heard this minute you were here.

Ippolit

But what right have you to submit this to your friends?

Myshkin

But if you'll just step inside

Antip

Anyone can see what their judgment would be. You've no right . . . your friends . . . so there!

Madame Epanchin

Here, read this! This is what they circulate about you.

Myshkin

It would be better not.

Madame Epanchin

Read it aloud or we shall quarrel.

Vladimir

Here, I'll be glad to.

"Proletarians, hear an episode of daily justice. Here is an anecdote of a scion of the nobility whose grandfather was ruined by roulette, whose father had to serve as a sub-lieutenant.

"Our scion wearing gaiters like a foreigner shivered in an unlined coat.

"He returned to Russia from Switzerland where he had been under treatment for idiocy.

"Left a baby at his father's death (a death fortuitously occurring while his father was on trial for scandalous misconduct), he was supported by the charity of a very rich landowner we will call him P. Until he was twenty the idiot Prince could speak no language, not even his native Russian.

"Suddenly, P died leaving no will, of course. But instead of falling on hard times our hero inherited a fortune from an entirely unexpected source. Our idiot became a very desirable match. An aristocrat, a millionaire, an idiot what better qualifications for a husband."

Epanchin

This passes my comprehension.

Myshkin

Leave off.

Madame Epanchin

Read it. Read it. If you stop we shall quarrel.

THE IDIOT

Vladimir

(Continues)

"But now a new development. The licentious P had seduced a servant girl in his youth. The result was a son. P cared for them for a while but in the end forgot about them.

"A lawyer approached the Prince on behalf of the son. You think this innocent Prince would want to repay the huge sums expended? Not a bit. 'Do you think I am an idiot?' cries the Prince. 'Here's a hundred roubles.' Of course it was flung back in his face. The Prince was no idiot."

Epanchin

This is beyond anything. It is as if a hundred lackeys had composed it.

Ippolit

How dare you make such insulting suppositions?

Myshkin

Allow me to speak. I say nothing of the article, it's all untrue. I am sure none of you had a hand in it.

Ippolit

I knew nothing of the article. I don't approve of the article.

(He coughs)

Antip

I knew but I had the right

Myshkin

Did you make that up yourself?

Vladimir

We refuse to recognize any right to ask those questions.

Myshkin

I only wondered Mr. Burdovsky could bring himself but since you seek publicity why to you object to the presence of my friends?

Lebedyev

It is only through the goodness of your heart that you receive them.

Epanchin

Perfectly right.

Myshkin

Enough, Lebedyev, enough.

Vladimir

No, excuse me, Prince, that's not enough. Do you think we come here to quibble legality? We know we have no legal claim on you. We appeal to you on moral grounds. We don't beg, we demand. We come here with our heads erect.

THE IDIOT

Antip

We demand, we demand, we demand, we don't beg.
(He breaks off in a fit of coughing)

Myshkin

I am sorry, gentlemen. I thought it might be better for us to be perfectly open with one another. Frankly, the case struck me as a swindle no personal reflection gentlemen. I knew none of you. If you only knew how many times I've been taken in since I came into my fortune.

Vladimir

Prince, you are wonderfully naïve.

Myshkin

At any rate, I was convinced Tchebarov was a shyster of some sort. Later, I decided Pavlitshtchev might really have a son. But I was amazed he should be so willing to disgrace his mother's name. For even at that time Tchebarov threatened me with publicity.

Antip

The son you've no right you've no right.

Ippolit

The son is not responsible for the conduct of his father and the mother is not to blame.
(He coughs silently)

Myshkin

All the more reason for sparing her.

Vladimir

You go beyond naivete, Prince.

Ippolit

But what right had you!

Myshkin

None. But I was amazed at Mr. Burdovsky's willingness to betray his mother's secret. I was convinced Tchebarov was a scoundrel who had egged Mr. Burdovsky on to such fraud by deceit.

Vladimir

This is intolerable.

Myshkin

It seems I agree with you in large part but for something you've left out. But what made you publish that article? If you come here with dignity why do you behave in a manner so mean?

Antip

Sir, sir, this, this

Ippolit

As for the article, I don't approve of it. It was written by him here (indicates Vladimir) but publicity is the legal right of all. As to the presence of your friends, we wanted them here. We only protested to preserve our rights.

THE IDIOT

Vladimir

That's true, we agreed about that.

Myshkin

But why did you begin by making such a fuss then?

Vladimir

As to the article, it is severe, I grant. But how can one let such a flagrant case pass? As to the guilty, so much the worse. The public benefit before everything. The beneficial example. As to the facts, I had them on very good authority.

Myshkin

But why did you publish the article without being sure I did not intend to satisfy your claim? I tell you plainly before everyone here that I will.

Aglaia

This is insufferable.

Madame Epanchin

Heavens!

Myshkin

Allow me, please. When this attorney, Mr. Tchebarov, made his appearance I was convinced he had taken advantage of your simplicity, Mr. Burdovsky

Antip

You've no right. I am not simple it's

Ippolit

This is insulting to the highest degree.

Myshkin

I decided that Mr. Burdovsky must be a simple person and that therefore I must help him. First by opposing Mr. Tchebarov and then by giving him ten thousand roubles.

Ippolit

What? Only ten thousand?

Antip

I won't agree to take ten thousand.

Vladimir

Antip

, take it, take it. Afterwards, we shall see.

Ippolit

We are not fools, Mr. Myshkin, whatever your grand friends may think.

Myshkin

In the first place, my fortune is not as large as you take it to be. In the second place Pavlishtchev never spent anywhere near ten thousand roubles on me. I cannot offer him more than what is due him. But why are you

THE IDIOT

getting angry, gentlemen? Ah, it's as I thought.

Mr. Burdovsky is a helpless man like me. That's why I entrusted Ganya Ivolgin with this matter. He told me this morning that he had proof the whole thing was a swindle and that Mr. Burdovsky was not the son of Pavlishtchev at all. I am sure it was all got up by Mr. Tchebarov.

I shall, of course, be glad to give up ten thousand in memory of Mr. Pavlishtchev but it must go to a school. Ganya, please explain to them as you did to me.

Ganya

(Bows ironically)

You do not deny, Mr. Burdovsky, you were born two years after your mother was legally married? The date can be too easily proved.

Ippolit

No, no. There was a mistake in the article.

Ganya

Well, then it may be easily shown that you are not his son, for Mr. Pavlitchev was in Germany for a whole year previous to your birth. I have obtained a letter so proving. If you wish to see proof and experts to examine the handwriting

Burdovsky If it is so, I've been deceived, deceived not by Tchebarov but long before. I don't want any experts. I don't want to see you, I believe you, I withdraw my claim. I want no money. Goodbye.

Ganya

If you could stay a few moments Mr. Burdovsky, I may have turned up a few facts of which you would not care to remain in ignorance.

Vladimir

Antip

, I told you before it was not certain.

Ganya

Mr. Burdovsky could hardly have known that Pavlishtchev was absent from Russian twenty years ago.

Ippolit

Allow me, what's all this rigmarole for? We accept the fact the case is over. Are you trying to show what a clever detective you are?

Ganya

Don't get so excited. I only wish to reassure Mr. Burdovsky that Mr. Pavlishtchev's relations with his mother were honorable whatever appearances there may have been to the contrary. Those appearances gave rise to gossip. You see Mr. Burdovsky, Pavlishtchev was in love with your mother's sister but the marriage was prevented. Before you were born the lady died. Your mother was about ten at the time and she was an orphan. Mr. Pavlishtchev brought her up as his own daughter. He provided her with a dowry. After she was married he continued to allow her money. It was after your birth that her husband moved to another town. It was there that the situation was misunderstood and the rumors started. Then Mr. Pavlishtchev died suddenly without leaving a will.

Vladimir

This is disgusting.

THE IDIOT

Ippolit

It really is insupportable. What's the object of it?

Ganya

I simply wish Mr. Burdovsky to know I look upon him as an honorable man. Everyone, even Tchebarov, was behaving honorably. Mr. Burdovsky took up his defense not in his own interest but in the service of truth and progress, that is why we offer you

Myshkin

Ganya

, don't insult them

Antip

I don't want your money. Here is the money you sent me! How dared you! How dared you!

Ippolit

Two hundred and fifty roubles as charity! (He coughs)

Aglaia

The article said a hundred.

Myshkin

I am to blame. I ventured to offer you ten thousand, I ought to have done it differently but now I can't because you despise me.

Madame Epanchin

This is a madhouse.

Aglaia

How can you humble yourself before them? They are not fit to shine your shoes. How can you humble me like this? Mother, do something!

Vladimir

Yes, Prince, one must do you justice. You know how to offer your friendship and your money in a way that it's impossible for an honorable man to take it under any circumstances. You're either a bit too innocent or a bit too clever. You know best which.

Ganya

Excuse me, but there's only a hundred roubles here.

Myshkin

Let it be, let it be, Ganya.

Vladimir

No, don't let it be. That's a hundred and fifty roubles missing. That's not merely a detail. The point is we refuse your charity. We'll pay back your hundred and fifty roubles.

Madame Epanchin

I shall lose my mind here. Enough. It's time to call a halt to this nonsense. Enough, Ivan Fyodorovitch! Let me alone. You hadn't the sense to take me away before. You are the head of the family. You might have thought of your wife and daughter. Now we can find the way out of this chaos and infamy without you.

THE IDIOT

(To Myshkin)

So you ask their forgiveness for offering them a fortune? (To Vladimir)

And what are you laughing about you braggart? You know the Prince will offer it again tomorrow.

(To Myshkin)

You will, won't you? Won't you?

Myshkin

I shall.

Aglaia

You can't. You can't degrade yourself like this. I won't let you.

Madame Epanchin

So, that's what you're reckoning on. I see through you all.

Vladimir

There's chaos and infamy to be found everywhere, Madame.

Madame Epanchin

But not so bad. Not so bad as yours. This stuttering fellow won't take your money. But I'll bet he'd murder you. That's not dishonorable. That's just noble indignation. They come here with their noses in the air and behave like lackeys. And then you go and beg their pardons. Isn't it chaos? Isn't it infamy? So you'll go to them tomorrow, Prince?

Myshkin

Yes.

Madame Epanchin

Then I don't want to know you. And you'll go to this atheist, too? (Indicating Ippolit)

How dare you laugh at me?

Aglaia

Maman, this is shameful.

Ippolit

Don't worry young lady, she cannot attack a dying man. I shall be very glad to explain why I laughed.

(He coughs blood)

Madame Epanchin

He is dying, yet he must hold forth. You are not fit for talking. You should simply go lie down.

Ippolit

I shall. I shall as soon as I go home. I shall be dead in a fortnight. I should like to say two words to you at parting.

Madame Epanchin

Are you crazy? You want nursing. It's not time to talk. Go to bed.

Ippolit

If I go to bed I shan't get up again till I die. I would have done so yesterday but I put it off so I could come here.

Only I am awfully tired

THE IDIOT

Madame Epanchin

Sit down. Sit down. Here's a chair.

Ippolit

Thank you, thank you and you sit down so we can talk. This is the last time I shall be out in the air. I am not very sentimental but I am awfully glad all this happened here.

Madame Epanchin

You can't talk. You can hardly breathe.

Ippolit

I shall be better in a minute. Why do you want to refuse my last wish? I know you are good natured the Prince is good natured we are all ridiculously good natured.

Madame Epanchin

(Sits)

That's true. Only don't get excited. You've softened my heart. But I am not going to apologize to anyone.

Ippolit

You seem to think we were shameless in our article. But we got our information from none other than that gentleman over there.

(Indicated Lebedyev)

Madame Epanchin

Is it true?

Lebedyev

It's holy truth.

Madame Epanchin

Why he seems proud of it!

Lebedyev

I'm abject, abject. I feel it.

Madame Epanchin

How can you have anything to do with such a creature, Prince? I will never forgive you.

Lebedyev

The Prince will forgive me.

Ippolit

(Laughs)

I know the Prince will forgive him. I've learned to respect the Prince extremely. You know it's all very funny. Burdovsky wanted to vindicate his mother. The Prince sincerely wants to help Burdovsky. And here they stand like enemies. You all hate Burdovsky because you think his conduct has been unseemly, rude, no matter how sincere. Appearances, that's all you care for. I'm sure that no one has loved his mother as Burdovsky has. I know Prince, you've sent Burdovsky's mother money on the sly. Now Burdovsky will accuse you of indelicacy. I swear that's how it will be. Ha, Ha, Ha.

(He chokes)

THE IDIOT

Madame Epanchin

Are you through? Now go to bed.

Ippolit

I shall say goodbye. General, I have the honor of inviting you to my funeral. All of you in the wake of the General.

Madame Epanchin

You had better rest the night here.

Ippolit

Do you know I came here to see the trees? That's not ridiculous is it? Do you know I am not eighteen? Do you know why you are afraid of us? You are afraid of our sincerity though you despise me.

Madame Epanchin

No one despises you, sit down.

Ippolit

Ah, it's a good thing that I am dying. I am too sincere, too sensitive. If it weren't for this consumption I should have killed myself. What does my sincerity, my sensitivity mean to anyone? It convinces no one. It makes them laugh. Please don't laugh at the foolish fellow

Madame Epanchin

Do tell me, Ivan Fyodorovitch, what is to be done now? Be so good as to break your majestic silence

Myshkin

I shall be very glad if he will stay here.

Ippolit

No. I am going with them.

(Indicating by his attempt to join them Vladimir and Antip)

Myshkin

Ah, that is what I was afraid of.

Ippolit

Ah, you were afraid of that were you? I hate every one of you. I hate you all, every one of you, but you most, you idiotic, philanthropic, millionaire. This has all been your contriving you planned this. You led me on to breaking down. You drove a dying man to shame. I don't want your help. Don't you dare triumph.

Lebedyev

He is ashamed of his tears. That was bound to happen. Bravo, Prince, you saw right through him.

Myshkin

I invite you to stay here among the trees as long as you like.

Ippolit

Well that does it! What right have you? What right? That's the last straw. Well, I won't stay. But I want to tell you a little story before I go. I had intended to write it but why bother? It is for your benefit, yours all of you it is dedicated to you so why bother to write it when I can tell it just as easily?

THE IDIOT

Epanchin

Hadn't you better not?

Vladimir

Ippolit

?

Ganya

Don't really

Ippolit

So I'm not to tell it? Are you afraid?

Myshkin

What of?

Ippolit

If you don't want to hear it, you don't have to stay. I don't force anyone

Madame Epanchin

He orders people out of another person's house. Wonderful.

Ganya

And how if we all get up and go away?

Ippolit

You don't like me, at all.

Myshkin

Couldn't you tell us later?

Ippolit

I want to tell it now. It is the story of an eighteen year old boy who is dying of consumption. He comes with his friend to help that friend to vindicate a wrong that was done his mother. It turns out there was nothing to vindicate. It was all an embarrassing mistake. But the person to whom they have applied is not satisfied. He must humiliate them with his charity. He invites this boy to stay at his villa so that he can cough out his remaining days under the smug eyes of his benefactor. He wishes to put the consumptive under obligations. He knows the boy loves sunshine. How can he refuse? He will die there feeling grateful to his benefactor having thus expiated the wrong of having been rude to that great person. He will see how magnanimous is this noble Prince. And end his life in abject humiliation. If he refuses, why he behaves like a churl. What right has this Prince to put him in such a position? There is no alternative left for the young man but suicide. As it happens he has a pistol in his pocket. He ends his life right there before the Prince and all his friends after having given his explanation.

Madame Epanchin

Good heavens, he will kill himself.

(She goes and throws her arms around him)

Ganya

He will not kill himself.

THE IDIOT

Epanchin

No, he will not shoot himself. This is all braggardoccio.

Ganya

It's absolutely nothing to me.

Lebedyev

You can't let him do that here.

Antip

He has the right. He has the right.

Ippolit

You are really very eager to see me do it. Did you imagine that I did not foresee all this hatred? I shall go. Let me go.

Myshkin

Let him go.

Vladimir

Yes, let him go.

Ippolit

(Pulls out his pistol and attempts to shoot himself)

(There is a click but no report)

Madame Epanchin

Good heavens!

Ganya

It did not fire.

(The gun is taken from Ippolit by Ganya)

Epanchin

It was not loaded. Sheer braggardoccio

Ganya

It was loaded. The cap is missing.

Antip

If–anyone–ever–insinuates–that–he–knew–the–pistol–was–not–in–proper–order–he–will–have–to–answer–to–me!

(Ippolit has completely broken down)

Myshkin

Put him to bed, Ganya. He will not harm himself again.

(Ganya and Lebedyev lead off the sobbing Ippolit)

THE IDIOT

Madame Epanchin

We must thank you Prince for the agreeable entertainment you have given us all. Come along home, Aglaia.

Antip

And we shall go, too, Prince.

(The Prince remains alone and finally sinks down in a garden seat)

(Nastasya Fillipovna enters. She is watchful as if she might have been followed. She has obviously been hiding for some time.)

Nastasya

Are you happy? Only say one word to me. Are you happy now? Today, this minute? She was here. What did she say?

Myshkin

Calm yourself, calm yourself.

Nastasya

I love you, Myshkin. Don't be angry. I don't put myself on a level with you. I want you to be happy. Happy with her.

Myshkin

But she does not love me. In fact, she told me so just now although why I can't say. I had never spoken of it to her.

Nastasya

Are you in love with her?

Myshkin

I have been, yes, without knowing it.

Nastasya

That must be why she told you she wasn't in love with you. To put the idea in your head.

Myshkin

I have heard that you are trying to bring us together. Really, **Nastasya**

...

Nastasya

I am doing it for my own sake. In renouncing you I renounce the world. I am dead now. Do you know how I know? I see it in Rogozhin's eyes. Those eyes are silent but I know their secret. I always fancied he had a corpse hidden in the house . . . that house of his . . . so dark. A corpse wrapped in leather under the floorboards.

Myshkin

You should marry him or set him free.

Nastasya

I can't. You are innocent. And in your innocence lies all your perfection. What have you to do with my passion for you? Nothing. My love is my own. You are now altogether mine. I shall be all my life beside you. Goodbye my darling.

THE IDIOT

(Pause)
I shall soon die.
(She runs out)

(Aglaia returns)

Aglaia
Was that Nastasya Fillipovna?

Myshkin
Yes.

Aglaia
(Unexpectedly)
Why did that young man try to kill himself?

Myshkin
Because he wanted us to tell him that we loved him very much and that we respected him.

Aglaia
I used to do that when I was a little girl. I thought I'd poison myself. I would lie in my coffin and they would weep over me. You have no right to be so harsh with him. You have no tenderness, nothing but truth so you judge harshly.

Myshkin
Why did you come back?

Aglaia
I told maman that I forgot my gloves. But that was a fa la la.

Myshkin
A fa la la?

Aglaia
A lie, silly. I came back because I want to make you a proposition that you should be my friend. Why are you staring at me all of a sudden? Perhaps, you don't care to accept my proposition ?

Myshkin
But I don't really understand.

Aglaia
Why do you suppose I came back? Perhaps you look on me as a fool as they do at home?

Myshkin
I didn't know they looked on you as a fool. I don't look on you so.

Aglaia
You don't look on me so? Very clever on your part. Particularly cleverly expressed.

Myshkin
I think you are very clever. When you said there's no tenderness, only truth in me and it is unjust, perhaps you hit

THE IDIOT

on something. I shall remember that and think it over.

Aglaia

I've wanted to tell you this for a long time. You're better than any of them. You're mentally afflicted but the mind that matters in you is better than in any of them. It's something, in fact, they have never dreamed of. I told the others that. I think only maman understood.

Myshkin

You are like your maman.

Aglaia

Thank you. You have a great respect for her then?

Myshkin

Yes.

Aglaia

I'm glad because people sometimes laugh at her. I've been thinking a long time and at last I've picked you out. I don't want them to laugh at me anymore. I don't want to have suitors. I want I want well I want to run away from home and I want you to help me.

Myshkin

I don't believe it.

Aglaia

Yes, yes, yes! Run away from home. I don't want to be teased about marriage anymore. I want to tell someone everything and so I've chosen you. I want to speak freely of everything. They suddenly began saying that I was waiting for you and that I loved you. I don't want to get married. I don't want to be a useless social butterfly. I propose to take up teaching. Couldn't we go in for education together?

Myshkin

I want to help, Aglaia, but are you serious?

Aglaia

If you won't consent I shall marry . . . Ganya. I don't want to be looked at as a horrid girl and accused of goodness knows what.

Myshkin

Are you mad? Who accuses you? And of what?

Aglaia

Everyone. For two years now. I read a French novel because I wanted to find out what was what. Do you know papa tried to convince me I didn't understand what was meant? I told them I'm not a little girl. Maman almost fainted when she heard me.

Myshkin

Of course, you're not. Have you always lived at home?

Aglaia

I've never been anywhere. Why are you laughing at me? Don't make me angry. You must think I'm in love with you and that I'm making a tryst with you.

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

I confess that I was afraid earlier that you might be; now I see

Aglaia

You dared to imagine! Do you think I've come all the way back alone so that we shall be caught and compromised and that you might be forced to marry me?

Myshkin

You should be ashamed. How could you let such a nasty idea enter your innocent heart?

Aglaia

I'm not ashamed at all. How do you know that my heart is so innocent? I'm sorry. I used a very stupid expression. I said that just to test you. Take it as though it were unsaid.

(Pause, then forcing herself . . .)

Myshkin

, what was that woman doing here?

Myshkin

Oh, if I could tell you everything.

Aglaia

I know everything! You lived for a whole month in the same flat with that woman with whom you ran away.

(Pause)

I don't love you at all.

(Pause)

I love Ganya.

Myshkin

That is not true.

Aglaia

Then am I lying? I gave my word day before yesterday in this very garden.

Myshkin

That's not true. You've invented all that.

Aglaia

You're wonderfully polite. Let me tell you he's reformed. He loves me more than his life. He burned his hand before my eyes to prove it.

Myshkin

Burned his hand?

Aglaia

Yes, his left hand. You may believe it or not, I don't care.

Myshkin

Did he bring a candle with him?

Aglaia

Yes. What's so unusual about that?

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

A whole one? A candlestick?

Aglaia

Oh, well no. A half one a candle end. It doesn't matter. Let me alone. He left his finger in it a whole half an hour.

Myshkin

His hands weren't burned yesterday.

Aglaia

Do you know why I told you that fib just now? When you lie you must be able to add a little something eccentric to give it the ring of truth. It didn't work because I didn't do it properly. I wanted to put you to shame for your behaviour.

Myshkin

My behavior?

Aglaia

Yes, yours and hers.

Myshkin

You are unjust to me.

Aglaia

What was she doing here? Six months ago you offered her your hand in the presence of everyone. Don't interrupt me. Then she ran off with **Rogozhin**. Then she ran from him to you and back to him again. And here you are on her trail again. It was for her sake, for her sake you came here, wasn't it?

Myshkin

Yes, for her sake. To help her.

Aglaia

How I despise you.

Myshkin

There isn't really much I can do to help her.

Aglaia

If you came not knowing why then you love her very much.

Myshkin

No, I don't love her. If only you knew with what horror I recall the time I spent with her.

Aglaia

Tell me everything.

Myshkin

I've wanted to. That poor girl thinks she is the most fallen, the most vicious creature in the whole world. She says otherwise but she believes it. She believes it. She ran from me because she wanted to do something shameful. Then she could punish herself for doing it.

THE IDIOT

Aglaia

Did you ever preach such sermons to her?

Myshkin

Oh, no. I loved her too much to talk. But afterwards she guessed all.

Aglaia

What did she guess?

Myshkin

That I only pitied her, that I didn't love her anymore.

Aglaia

How do you know she doesn't love Rogozhin?

Myshkin

She only laughs at him.

Aglaia

And did she ever laugh at you?

Myshkin

No.

Aglaia

Do you know she writes me letters?

Myshkin

I have heard so. I didn't believe it.

Aglaia

Do you know what she writes me?

Myshkin

I can imagine. I shouldn't be surprised at anything.

Aglaia

She wants me to marry you. She tells me that you love me. Did you tell her you were in love with me?

Myshkin

Not until today.

Aglaia

You mean you are?

Myshkin

Yes.

Aglaia

(Not pursuing it)

What am I to do with this situation? I cannot go on receiving them.

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

I'll try to make her stop.

Aglaia

Then you're a man of no heart! Surely you must see she loves only you. These letters, do you know what they mean? It's jealousy. Do you suppose she really will marry Rogozhin? She'll kill herself on her wedding day.

Myshkin

God knows, Aglaia, I would give up my life to help her. But I can't love her now, and she knows it.

Aglaia

Then sacrifice yourself: it's just in your line. And don't call me **Aglaia**. You ought to raise her up. Why you do love her, you know.

Myshkin

I can't sacrifice myself like that, not anymore. In her pride she will never forgive me for my love and we shall both come to ruin. Just as she will with Rogozhin. Can there be love after what I've gone through? No, it's something else, not love.

Aglaia

But you've come here for her sake, not to marry me?

Myshkin

Yes, for her sake.

Aglaia

(Angry)

You may say, you may believe that your woman is insane, but I have nothing to do with such insane fantasies. I beg you Prince, take these letters and fling them back to her from me. And if she dares write to me again tell her I shall complain to my father and have her put into a house of correction.

Myshkin

You can't feel like that. It's not true.

Aglaia

It's the truth! It's the truth!

Madame Epanchin

(Entering)

What's the truth? What's the truth?

Aglaia

It's the truth that I am going to marry Ganya! That I love Ganya and that I'm going to run away from home with him tomorrow. Do you hear? Is that enough for you? (She runs away)

Madame Epanchin

You'll be so kind as to give an explanation.

(At this moment a knife thuds into the tree next to which Myshkin is standing)

Good lord! Those nihilists have tried to assassinate you.

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

No, it's Rogozhin's knife.

Madame Epanchin

What will you do?

Myshkin

(Wearily)

Give it back to him.

CURTAIN

ACT III

Scene i.

Summer **Lebedyev**

's garden. A small walled garden with several entrances. Many trees. Lebedyev's house is to the right of the audience.

(At rise, Lebedyev is sitting morosely, Myshkin enters)

Myshkin

Why so gloomy, Lebedyev?

Lebedyev

I have encountered a severe calamity in the last twenty-four hours.

Myshkin

What's the matter?

Lebedyev

I have lost twenty-four roubles from my coat pocket.

Myshkin

How did it happen?

Lebedyev

The fruits of drinking. I left the pocket book in the overcoat when I changed coats in the hall. It is true when God will chastise a man he first will deprive him of all reason. I got drunk and forgot about it till this morning.

Myshkin

Could you have dropped it?

Lebedyev

Anything is possible. But I never left the house. If I dropped it according to the laws of nature and of nature's God the article would be on the floor. It is not on the floor.

Myshkin

Perhaps, you put it somewhere?

ACT III

THE IDIOT

Lebedyev

I've been through everything.

Myshkin

Perhaps, someone found it?

Lebedyev

Or picked my pocket. If they found it they would have come forward they have not come forward.

Myshkin

This distresses me very much. But who? That's the question.

Lebedyev

You define the problem with wonderful exactitude, Prince.

Myshkin

Do you suspect anyone?

Lebedyev

The servant is out of the question. So are my children. One of the visitors then.

Myshkin

Utterly impossible.

Lebedyev

Utterly impossible. But so it must be! I could hardly have robbed myself.

Myshkin

There is Ganya, his father General Ivolgin, Ferdyshtchenko and Ippolit Terentyev. I exclude the General.

Lebedyev

Of course. You wouldn't have me suspect Ganya?

Myshkin

What folly!

Lebedyev

Or Mr. Terentyev who is dying?

Myshkin

No.

Lebedyev

That leaves Ferdyshtchenko.

Myshkin

Yes, but proof is necessary.

Lebedyev

Yes, yes. I told the General of my plight. He was indignant beyond anything I expected. He has agreed to help me find either the purse or the thief. In fact, the General suspects Mr. Ferdyshtchenko. He told me so.

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

Yes. I heard of it from Ganya before he left.

Lebedyev

When did he leave?

Myshkin

Around six–fifteen. His usual time.

Lebedyev

That's interesting. He must have gotten up before six to tell Ganya of his suspicions of Ferdyshtchenko. Whereas I did not learn of the robbery until after seven.

Myshkin

Listen, Lebedyev. Keep quite about it, I beg you.

Lebedyev

I'm abject, Prince. But I don't like to cause pain. Don't worry about it.

(Rogozhin enters the garden)

Rogozhin

(To Lebedyev)

Vanish scum.

Lebedyev

Monster! (He runs off)

Rogozhin

I haven't been long finding you.

Myshkin

Why have you come?

Rogozhin

I hear you're going to marry Aglaia Ivanova.

Myshkin

Yes, it's all agreed.

Rogozhin

You know I am to be married the same day?

Myshkin

Yes, yes.

Rogozhin

You're a strange fellow.

Myshkin

Why are you so bitter against me? Because you tried to kill me? I tell you I only remember that we exchanged

THE IDIOT

crosses. I look upon what happened as madness. I understand how you felt. Let there be no anger between us.

Rogozhin

As though you could feel anger.

Myshkin

You still hate me so.

Rogozhin

I don't like you. You are kind. You have never deceived me. You never will. But I don't like you, all the same. What makes you think I've repented of it?

Myshkin

Perhaps you can't. I don't ask you to. As long as you think she loves me and not you, you can't help it. But, perhaps, she only uses that as a pretext to torment you, because she loves you more than anyone.

Rogozhin

I'm afraid not. But I understand you've been having the same sort of treatment.

Myshkin

What have you heard?

Rogozhin

I see now it's true. I didn't come here without a purpose. Aglaia Ivanova wants to meet Nastasya here, now in our presence. They should be along shortly.

Myshkin

Is it possible?

Rogozhin

I was detailed to get you.

Myshkin

But why? At whose suggestion? For what reason?

Rogozhin

At your fiancee's suggestion for reasons we'll soon learn. Here they come. Don't they look sweet? Oh, are they jealous.

Myshkin

Aglaia

, what's this all about?

Aglaia

You'll see. Nastasya Fillipovna and I have become great friends, haven't we, dear?

Nastasya

It was very charming.

Aglaia

You know, of course, why I asked you to come?

ACT III

THE IDIOT

Nastasya

No, I haven't the slightest idea.

Aglaia

You understand everything, but you pretend you don't on purpose.

Nastasya

Why should I?

Aglaia

You want to take advantage of my position. I am, as it were, your hostess since I invited you.

Nastasya

You're responsible for that, not I. I don't know what your object is.

Aglaia

Restrain your tongue. That is your weapon. I've not come to fight you with it.

Nastasya

Ah, you have come to fight then! Would you believe it, I thought you were more intelligent.

Aglaia

You misunderstand me. I don't like you but I have not come here to fight you.

Nastasya

Why have you come then?

Aglaia

I came to speak to you as one human being to another.

Nastasya

And how do two human beings speak to one another?

Aglaia

You have written me letters. I want to answer them in person. In your letters you ask me to marry the Prince.

Nastasya

Yes. And you have agreed.

Aglaia

But not because of you. I felt sorry for the Prince because he is a simple hearted man. I know the story of his unhappy love for you. You were incapable of loving him. You could not love him for you love nothing but your own shame and the delicious thought that you have been injured and wronged.

Myshkin

Aglaia

, stop it.

Aglaia

, I knew you would come back here. I knew he would follow you. I felt dreadfully hurt and wounded on his account. Don't laugh. If you laugh you are not worthy to understand that.

THE IDIOT

Nastasya

You see that I am not laughing.

Aglaia

It's nothing to me, laugh as much as you like. When I began to question him he told me that he no longer loved you but the memory of it pierced his heart. I knew from the way he talked that anyone who chose could deceive him and still find forgiveness. That is why I came to him.

Nastasya

I LOVED HIM and for the same reason!

Aglaia

(Cutting)

No doubt you understand now what I want of you.

Nastasya

Perhaps, but tell me yourself.

Aglaia

I want to learn from you what right you have to meddle with his feelings for me? What right have you to declare to either of us that you love him after running away from him in such an insulting and degrading way?

Nastasya

I have never told you or him that I love him. But you are right, I did run away from him.

Aglaia

What about those letters? Who asked you to begin matchmaking? I thought at first you wanted to turn me against him by reminding me of his connection with you.

Nastasya

No! I never meant that.

Aglaia

No. I came to see that. You thought you were being noble. You're playing the role. Why don't you marry Rogozhin who loves you and would make you happy if you'd only let him, instead of you pretending to be a martyr, He says your head is turned by poetry because you live in idleness.

Nastasya

And you don't live in idleness?

Aglaia

How dare you speak to me like that?

Nastasya

(Surprised)

I don't see that I have been rude to you.

Aglaia

If you want to be a respectable woman why didn't you give up your seducer, Totsky, without all the histrionics?

THE IDIOT

Nastasya

What do you know of the situation that you assume the right to judge me?

Aglaia

I know you didn't go off to work. Oh, no. You went to Rogozhin so you can go on posing as a fallen angel. I don't wonder that Totsky thought it worth seventy-five thousand roubles to get rid of you. God, the wages of sin.

Nastasya

Stop it! Stop it! You don't understand at all.

Myshkin

Aglaia

, you're being unjust.

Aglaia

If you wanted to be respectable you'd have become a washerwoman.

Nastasya

Look at her! Look at her! And I thought you were an angel. Since you won't tell why you have come here I'll tell you. You've come because you're afraid.

Aglaia

(Amazed)

Afraid of you?

Nastasya

Yes, because you still don't know which of us he loves best. And you're fearfully jealous.

Aglaia

(Faltering)

He told me that he hates you.

Nastasya

Perhaps; I am not worthy of him. Only, only, I think you're lying! He cannot hate me, cannot hate me, Aglaia; he could not have said so.

Aglaia

(Childishly)

He does. He does! Tell her so Myshkin, tell her so or I shall hate you forever.

Nastasya

I'm not afraid of you. I've only to tell him and he'll throw you up forever and marry me at once. Do you hear? At once!

Aglaia

(Terrified)

No!

Nastasya

And you'll have to run home alone. Shall I? Shall I?

THE IDIOT

Aglaia

If you don't come with me at once, if you don't take me, if you don't give her up, she can have you. I don't want you.

Nastasya

Myshkin

, will you turn away from me?

Myshkin

(Appealing to Aglaia)

Don't do this to me!

Aglaia

You hesitate. You hesitate. I don't want you. I hate you.

(She runs)

To her . . . go to her, your loose woman! I don't care. I'll marry **Ganya**

. Go to her.

(Myshkin runs toward her but it is too late)

Myshkin

Aglaia

!

Nastasya

You follow her? Her? (She faints, but Myshkin has returned and folded her in his arms)

Mine, mine. Is that proud young lady gone? Why should I give you up to her? Go away Rogozhin.

(Rogozhin looks at them and picks up his hat. He is beaten and he knows it.)

Will you marry me, Prince?

Myshkin

If you wish it, Nastasya.

(Rogozhin walks out without looking back)

Nastasya

My God, my God, what am I doing to you?

(CURTAIN)

Scene ii

The same garden. A morning in the fall. The trees are bare and there are leaves on the ground.

Lebedyev

enters the garden. The Prince is alone, dejected. It is brisk Autumn.

Myshkin

Have you heard any news of Nastasya?

THE IDIOT

Lebedyev

None, Prince.

Myshkin

Why did she go back to Rogozhin on our wedding day? Why?

Lebedyev

I do not know, Prince.

Myshkin

I went to his house this morning and stood there for an hour. No one answered but I'd swear someone was watching me from behind the curtain.

Lebedyev

You can't follow her forever.

Myshkin

No, no. But I must know that she is safe.

Lebedyev

If there's news I'll tell you. Perhaps if we changed the subject.

Myshkin

Yes, yes, change the subject. Have you found the four hundred roubles?

Lebedyev

Why yes, in fact, I have.

Myshkin

Thank God.

Lebedyev

It is no small matter to a man in my humble circumstances.

Myshkin

But how did you find it?

Lebedyev

Very simple, I found it under the chair on which my coat had been hung.

Myshkin

But that's impossible. Why, you told me yourself you had searched everywhere. Suddenly it turns up.

Lebedyev

Suddenly it turns up.

Myshkin

And then the General?

Lebedyev

Ah yes, the General. I left it under the chair.

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

But what for?

Lebedyev

Oh, nothing but curiosity. I wanted the General to find it. For since I had found it, why shouldn't the General? I put it so that it was completely in view. But the General simply hasn't noticed it.

Myshkin

Then it is still under the chair.

Lebedyev

Oh, no. It vanished from under the chair and now it has turned up in the pocket of my coat. But I take no notice of it.

Myshkin

And the General?

Lebedyev

He's been angry all day. Tomorrow though, I mean to find the pocket book.

Myshkin

How can you humiliate a man like that a most honest man?

Lebedyev

You're right. He is honest. He lies and he steals but he's honest. I shall find it immediately.

Myshkin

You're an impossible fellow, Lebedyev.

Lebedyev

I know it. I feel it.

Myshkin

Where is Ganya? He usually comes at this time.

Lebedyev

(Uneasy)

He's gone for the day.

Myshkin

Oh, that's too bad. I wanted him to take a message to the Epanchins.

Lebedyev

Perhaps I

Myshkin

I shouldn't ask you, but they refuse to admit me.

Lebedyev

But after all

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

But I want to see Aglaia.

Lebedyev

But then how could you have let it happen? Aglaia will not share you with anyone.

Myshkin

Yes, yes, you are right. I am to blame. I never saw such hatred in anyone's eyes.

Lebedyev

But she is a mad woman.

Myshkin

No, I am speaking of Aglaia. She was terrible.

Lebedyev

Yes, and there was no reason for her to feel that way. It was only your pity for Nastasya Fillipovna. It was your inexperience. From the very first it began with falsity, that night I met you for the first time and you offered her your hand. It was a democratic feeling on your part; a sense of chivalry not love that motivated you. And you were exhausted by travel, your head was spinning.

Myshkin

Yes, yes, that's exactly how it was

Lebedyev

You were intoxicated with enthusiasm. The question is whether it was genuine emotion or intellectual enthusiasm! After all, she may not have deserved scorn, but did she deserve praise?

Myshkin

Yes, that all may be so.

Lebedyev

Could all her suffering justify such pride?

Myshkin

But compassion?

Lebedyev

Yes, but how could you humiliate Aglaia out of compassion for Nastasya? Was Aglaia suffering less than Nastasya? How could you allow it?

Myshkin

I didn't allow it. I was running after Aglaia when Nastasya fell down fainting. And since then they haven't let me see Aglaia.

Lebedyev

But you still should have run after Aglaia.

Myshkin

But Nastasya would have killed herself. Oh, if Aglaia would only let me explain. She will understand. She will understand.

THE IDIOT

Lebedyev

After you were going to marry Nastasya again?

Myshkin

But I was just marrying her, that's all. She wanted me to. I had to until she ran away.

Lebedyev

You were going to marry her without loving her then?

Myshkin

No, no. I love her with my whole heart. Why she's a child. Quite a child.

Lebedyev

And you love Aglaia too?

Myshkin

Yes. Yes.

Lebedyev

Then you want to love both of them? Think what you're saying.

Myshkin

Without Aglaia I must see her. If only I could tell her everything. There's something in all this that I can't explain to you, I can't find the words. Aglaia will understand.

Lebedyev

No, Prince, she won't understand. She loved you like a woman not like an abstract spirit. Do you know, my poor Prince, the most likely thing is that you've never loved either of them.

Myshkin

I don't know. Perhaps, you're very clever, Lebedyev, but I don't know. For God's sake let's go to her. For God's sake!

Lebedyev

She's not here, Prince.

Myshkin

Listen, I'll write to her. You take a letter.

Lebedyev

Spare me such a commission, Prince. I've been trying to tell you she eloped with Ganya this morning.

Myshkin

Have I lost her then?

Lebedyev

(Going)

I am sorry, Prince

(Lebedyev goes out, Rogozhin enters from the garden)

THE IDIOT

Rogozhin

Come with me, brother, I want you.

Myshkin

Where is she?

Rogozhin

At my house.

Myshkin

How is she feeling? Is she upset?

Rogozhin

No, she is not upset.

Myshkin

Was it you who looked at me from behind the curtain?

Rogozhin

Yes.

Myshkin

The porter said no one was home.

Rogozhin

The porter doesn't know. We were both there; she and I. But we were being very quiet.

Myshkin

It's dark in your house.

Rogozhin

We'll need candles.

Myshkin

Is she dead?

Rogozhin

Yes.

Myshkin

You was it you?

Rogozhin

It was I.

Myshkin

I had a foreboding.

Rogozhin

I came so that we could spend this night together. All three of us. We'll put her between us.

THE IDIOT

Myshkin

Yes, yes

Rogozhin

We won't let them take her away.

Myshkin

Not on any account. Certainly not.

Rogozhin

That's what I've decided. Not to give her up on any account to anyone. We must be very quiet.

Myshkin

Oh, we'll be quiet. Very quiet.

Rogozhin

I've been with her ever since. All the time. I only left her to get you. She wants you there.

Myshkin

Yes, yes, of course.

Rogozhin

The only thing I am afraid of is the smell.

Myshkin

Let's get flowers.

Rogozhin

But it will make us sad to see her with flowers all around her.

Myshkin

Tell me, did you do it with the knife . . . the same one?

Rogozhin

The same one.

Myshkin

Tell me. At my wedding. At the church door. Did you mean to kill her then?

Rogozhin

I don't know.

Myshkin

Was there a great deal of blood?

Rogozhin

None at all.

Myshkin

Then she's still pretty?

THE IDIOT

Rogozhin

Come along. She's waiting for you.

Myshkin

Yes. Shh. We'd better hurry. We have only tonight. And I think I can hear footsteps. Yes, footsteps.

Rogozhin

Footsteps?

Myshkin

Yes, they're trying to take her away from us. We must hurry and bolt the door. We must hurry.

Rogozhin

Come brother.

(Rogozhin supports the excited Myshkin off as the curtain descends)

CURTAIN