

# The Marriage Proposal

*by Anton Chekhov*

**Adapted by  
Paul Caywood**

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## STORY OF THE PLAY

*The Marriage Proposal* shows how hilarious and ridiculous a situation can become when the excitable and "ailing" Lomov comes to propose to the attractive, but equally excitable, Natalia. They soon enter into rowdy quarrels about land boundaries and hunting dogs. Will they marry? Will they fight their way through life? This adaptation has been created especially for high school students. About 30 minutes.

### ***Notes from Paul Caywood***

In a successful performance of "The Marriage Proposal," the actors would seem to be saying to the audience, "Don't judge our comedy intellectually. You aren't supposed to believe that a couple became engaged in this ridiculous manner nor that ordinary people fight so fiercely - and laughably - over the quality of dogs and the ownership of land. For the moment, we simply ask you to accept the outrageous situation and enjoy the antics and foolishness of the characters of the play." The two violent arguments (*about the dogs and the land*) must begin with the actors smiling and speaking tactfully, each one of them trying to convince the other that his or her reasoning is right. But when sensible persuasion fails, logic ceases and self-centeredness begins. The absurd arguments rise in volume and intensity to a shouting rage. The overwhelming emotions of the characters and the distinct and different personalities of Lomov, Chubukov, and Natalia Stepanovna are what provoke the humor of the play.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(2m, 1w)*

**STEPAN STEPANOVITCH CHUBUKOV:** (*Step-ahn Ste-pahn-o-vitch Chu-bu-koff*) An elderly landowner.

**NATALIA STEPANOVNA:** (*Na-tal-yuh Step-uh-noff-nuh*)  
Daughter of Chubukov, in her mid-twenties.

**IVAN VASSILEVITCH LOMOV:** (*Ee-vahn Va-sil-uh-vitch Lo-moff*) A neighboring landowner, thirty-five.

**TIME:** An autumn day in the late 1890s.

**SCENE:** A sitting room in Chubukov's house in the country, in one of the Russian provinces.

### **CHARACTER NOTES**

All three of the characters are excitable and outspoken. Lomov is a hypochondriac and has, no doubt, always used his pains, be they real or imagined, to get what he wants. Chubukov is an elderly man who uses a cane, partly to support himself and partly to threaten those who dare to challenge him. He is a successful farmer in a Russian province and can ordinarily convince, cajole, or flatter people (*such as the Count*) into seeing and doing things his way. But when he does not accomplish this quietly, he resorts to yelling, threatening, and declaring he will kill himself, which, of course, no one takes seriously. Natalia Stepanovna is as excitable as her father. And since she is the daughter of a landowner, she has the advantages of influence, social position, and money. She also has good looks, an outgoing personality, and a doting father. So, one can see that these "advantages" have created a spoiled young woman. When smooth talk does not work, Natalia Stepanovna does not hesitate to argue, shout, demand, or become hysterical. Chekhov brought these three volatile, but likable, characters together to produce explosive situations and uproarious laughter.

### **NAMES**

In Russia, even today, people's first and middle names are often used in conversation, especially when the speaker is trying to impress or influence the one with whom he is conversing. With a little practice, the pronunciation of the names of people and dogs will come easily. Other names mentioned in the script include:

Ugadi (*Oo-gah-dee*) and Otkatai (*Ote-kah-ty*)  
Miramov (*Meer-uh-moff*) and Marukinsky (*Mah-ruh-kin-sky*)

### **PROPERTIES**

|                     |                    |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| Sofa                | Small table        |
| Tablecloth          | Two armchairs      |
| Wine decanter       | Three wine glasses |
| Small water pitcher | Water glasses      |
| Cane                |                    |

### **COSTUMES**

CHUBUKOV is in his work clothes and could be mistaken for one of the peasants laboring in his fields. He wears dark-colored, baggy knee pants, a loose smock with a sash or wide belt, boots, and a knitted wool cap.

NATALIA STEPANOVNA has been helping in the kitchen. She wears a simple, everyday dress, which is ankle-length, drab-colored, and may have a collar. If the dress does not have a collar, Natalia has likely tied a large handkerchief around her neck, since it would have been hot in the kitchen. She has on an apron of contrasting color. Her shoes are dark and simple.

LOMOV is in formal dress. He wears a dark suit, the coat being somewhat longer than usual, a light-colored vest, a formal shirt with starched front and wing-tipped collar, studs, bow tie, and black shoes.

## THE MARRIAGE PROPOSAL

*(The scene of the play is the Chubukov living room. A sofa with pillows on it is at LC and a small table with an armchair on each side of it is at RC. On the table are a wine decanter, both wine and water glasses, and a small water pitcher. The only entrance to the room is an opening UC. UC off R is the front door of the house and UC off L is a hallway leading to the other rooms. When the curtains open, the voice of CHUBUKOV is heard UC off R. In a moment, he and LOMOV enter, with Chubukov leading the way. Chubukov uses a cane, but he is not dependent on it for support.)*

**CHUBUKOV:** *(Offstage.)* What's this I see? My dear fellow! Ivan Vassilevitch! *(Entering UC.)* I'm glad to see you. This is a surprise. How are you?

**LOMOV:** *(UC, right of Chubukov.)* I'm not well, thank you. How are you?

**CHUBUKOV:** Oh, so-so. Sit down, my friend. *(Indicates right end of sofa. LOMOV sits.)* Tell me, why all this ceremony? *(Pointing to Lomov's formal coat.)* Are you on your way to a formal engagement?

**LOMOV:** No, no. I have no engagement, except with you, Stepan Stepanovitch. I've come to you, to trouble you ... with a request. You've helped me before - I beg your pardon - I'm getting excited. I'll have a drink of water, if you please.

**CHUBUKOV:** *(Aside, as he gets LOMOV some water from the pitcher on the table.)* Ah-ha! He's come to borrow money! Well, I won't give him any. *(Hands glass of water to LOMOV.)* What is it, dear Lomov?

**LOMOV:** *(Takes a drink.)* You see, Stepanovitch - Pardon me, Stepan - I mean - *(Drinks more.)* I'm terribly nervous. *(Drinks more.)* What I mean to say is - *(Tugs at his collar.)* You're the only one who can help me, though I don't deserve it - and I have no right whatsoever to make this request of you - *(Finishes the water in the glass.)*

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*(LOMOV hands CHUBUKOV the water glass and he goes above the table RC, places the glass there, and remains above the table.)*

**CHUBUKOV:** Oh, don't beat about the bush, Ivan Vassilevitch. Tell me what your request is.

**LOMOV:** *(Stands, takes a deep breath.)* The fact is ... I've come to ask for the hand of your daughter, Natalia Stepanovna, in marriage.

**CHUBUKOV:** *(Mouth drops open.)* What did you say? I didn't quite hear you.

**LOMOV:** I have the honor to ask -

**CHUBUKOV:** *(Rushes to LOMOV, seizes his arms, and interrupts.)* Yes. Yes! Oh, my good friend, I've been hoping for this. I've always looked upon you as if you were my son. And now ... *(Wipes away a tear.)* I'm overcome!

**LOMOV:** Do you think I can hope for your daughter's acceptance?

**CHUBUKOV:** You mean a fine boy like you doubts that she won't accept you in a minute? She's as lovesick as a cat. *(Starts out UC.)* I'll go and tell her you're here.

*(Overjoyed, giggling, HE almost dances out of the room.)*

**LOMOV:** *(Watches CHUBUKOV go, then pulls his coat closer about himself.)* It's cold in here. My whole body is trembling as if I were going to take an examination. *(Takes a step downstage and talks to the audience.)* My mind is made up. I must settle the matter now. For if a man thinks about something too much, or if he hesitates too long or talks about it for ages, or if he waits for the ideal woman or for true love, he'll never get married. Brr! *(Rubs his hands together.)* It's cold! *(LOMOV crosses L of armchair RC and looks around.)* I know that Natalia Stepanovna is an excellent housekeeper. She's not at all bad looking. And she's well educated. So what more could I ask? *(Hitting his head with wrist.)* I'm so excited my ears are roaring. *(Crosses in front of sofa.)*

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**LOMOV:** *(Cont'd.)* I'm thirty-five years old, and that's a critical age, you might say. And I must live a well-ordered life. *(Sits on sofa, puts his hand to his chest.)* For I have a weak heart, with continual palpitations. And I'm sensitive and excitable. My lips are trembling, *(Hand to left temple.)* and the pulse in my left temple is pounding like a hammer. *(Falls back on the sofa.)* But the worst of all is sleep! At night I hardly begin to doze when something in my left side *(Sits up and clutches his left side.)* starts to pull and tug, *(Grabs his right shoulder.)* and then there's a twitching in my right shoulder *(With his hands to his head.)* and a throbbing in my head. *(Stands.)* I jump up like a madman. I walk about the room. Then ...

*(Suffering, he struggles around the sofa, clinging to the back and then the arm, and lies down.)*

**LOMOV:** *(Cont'd.)* I lie down again. *(Rises up.)* But the moment I fall asleep, I get this awful cramp in my right leg. *(Grabs his right leg, then looks at the audience.)* And that's the way it is all night long.

*(NATALIA enters UC, wiping her hands on her apron. She comes C.)*

**NATALIA:** *(Very graciously.)* Ah-ha! It's you, Ivan Vassilevitch! *(She extends her hand to him.)*

**LOMOV:** *(He is embarrassed as he shakes her hand.)*  
Good day, my dear Natalia Stepanovna.

**NATALIA:** Papa told me to come in here. He said a dealer had come to buy something.

**LOMOV:** No, no.

**NATALIA:** You must forgive my apron and this old dress. We're shelling peas today. *(She sits on L end of sofa.)* You should come to see us more often. You've not been here for so long. Do sit down. *(LOMOV sits on R end of sofa.)* Would you like something to eat?

**LOMOV:** Thank you, no. I've just had lunch.

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