

padhai | Class X

English

Notes



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First Flight

The Proposal

– ANTON CHEKOV

Detailed Explanation:

The Proposal is a **one-act play** and a farce written by Anton Chekhov, structured around **humour, disputes, and irony**. The action unfolds in the drawing room of Chubukov's house, where **Ivan Vassilevitch Lomov**, a prosperous yet highly anxious neighbour, arrives dressed in a formal jacket and white gloves to seek **Natalya Stepanovna's** hand in marriage. His overly formal appearance and visible nervousness immediately establish a comic atmosphere. Initially, Chubukov assumes that Lomov has come to request a loan, creating dramatic irony, since the audience later discovers that Lomov's true intention is to propose marriage. Once Lomov finally states his purpose, Chubukov becomes extremely pleased, as the alliance appears **socially and economically advantageous** for both landowning families.

When left alone with Natalya, Lomov attempts to speak in an affectionate yet practical manner, explaining his reasons for marriage. He presents himself as a man who has reached "a **critical age**" and desires "a quiet and regular life." His speech reveals his **insecurity, nervous** temperament, and **calculated approach** to marriage. However, before he can formally propose, their conversation shifts to a dispute over **Oxen Meadows**, a small piece of land situated between Natalya's birchwoods and the Burnt Marsh. What should have been a romantic exchange quickly turns into a heated argument. This abrupt change is deeply ironic, as a marriage proposal is nearly ruined by a land dispute. Their repeated use of "ours" and "mine" creates humour, while their rising anger reflects how pride outweighs affection or logic. Natalya's statement that the land is "not worth much" but that she "cannot tolerate unfairness" highlights her stubborn and possessive nature.

The argument intensifies when Chubukov enters the scene. Instead of resolving the conflict, he becomes even more aggressive, turning the disagreement into a **full-scale family quarrel**. The dialogue becomes filled with exaggeration and insults, as each character attacks the other's family background and integrity. Lomov refers to Chubukov as a "**grabber**," while Chubukov calls him a "**pettifogger**" and accuses his family of madness. This excessive use of insults is characteristic of **farce**, exposing the immaturity and ill temper of individuals who appear socially respectable. Lomov, already in poor health, begins to clutch his chest and complain of **palpitations**, numbness, and severe discomfort. His exaggerated physical distress adds comic hyperbole and demonstrates his inability to cope with emotional strain.

After Lomov leaves angrily, Chubukov reveals his intention to propose marriage, prompting a drastic change in Natalya's behavior as she urgently wants him back. Her eagerness for marriage and impulsive nature are evident. When Lomov returns, she quickly concedes the disputed land to him to restore peace, but true understanding remains absent. Their conversation shifts to shooting and dogs, leading to a comedic yet intense quarrel over which dog, Lomov's Guess or Chubukov's Squeezer,

is superior, highlighting the absurdity of their serious approach to trivial matters.

This second dispute becomes even more absurd than the first. Lomov and Chubukov exchange exaggerated accusations and offensive remarks such as “**intriguer,**” “**old rat,**” “**Jesuit,**” and “**pup.**” These insults reveal their lack of emotional control and maturity. Chekhov employs farce, verbal irony, and exaggeration to highlight how ego and social pride dominate behaviour. Lomov’s dramatic cries – “My heart’s burst!” and “I die!” – further intensify the comic effect and portray him as a **hypochondriac** overwhelmed by minor stress. Natalya and Chubukov briefly believe that he is dead, turning the situation chaotic and theatrically exaggerated.

When Lomov regains consciousness, Chubukov quickly completes the proposal by placing Natalya’s hand in his and giving his blessing. Although the engagement is finalised, the conclusion remains humorous rather than harmonious. Immediately after agreeing to marry, Natalya and Lomov resume arguing about the dogs, while Chubukov calls for **champagne**. The ending reflects sharp situational irony: despite achieving the purpose of the visit, the emotional conflict remains unchanged. Thus, the play suggests that the marriage is based not on love but on convenience, economic considerations, and impulsive behaviour. Through this comic disorder, Chekhov exposes the **absurdity of human pride**, the superficial nature of **arranged alliances**, and the tendency of trivial issues to overshadow important decisions.

Reference Information:

1. Genre of the play: The Proposal is a one-act farcical play by Anton Chekhov, relying on exaggeration, absurdity, and trivial conflicts for humour.
2. Original title: The play was initially titled A Marriage Proposal.
3. Time of writing: It was written during 1888–89.
4. Setting: The entire action occurs in the drawing room of Chubukov’s house, reflecting a domestic and social environment.
5. Social background: The characters belong to wealthy landowning families, where marriage is seen as a practical alliance to strengthen property and social ties.
6. Lomov’s appearance: Lomov arrives wearing a formal dress-jacket and white gloves, indicating the seriousness of his visit.
7. Chubukov’s first suspicion: He initially assumes Lomov has come to borrow money, which contributes to dramatic irony.
8. Natalya’s age: Natalya Stepanovna is twenty-five years old, making marriage socially urgent.

9. Lomov's character note in the text: He is described as "a large and hearty, but very suspicious, landowner."

10. First major dispute: The first conflict arises over Oxen Meadows, a disputed land between Natalya's birchwoods and the Burnt Marsh.

11. Value of the meadows: Natalya claims the land is of little value—about five dessiatins and around 300 roubles—but refuses to give it up on principle.

12. Lomov's claim: He argues that the land was only temporarily given for use to Natalya's ancestors, so it legally belongs to him.

13. Second major dispute: The next argument concerns the superiority of the dogs Guess and Squeezer.

14. Cost of Guess: Lomov states he paid 125 roubles for Guess.

15. Cost of Squeezer: Natalya claims her father bought Squeezer for 85 roubles.

16. Lomov's health complaints: He repeatedly mentions palpitations, side pain, numbness, and dizziness, supporting his portrayal as a hypochondriac.

17. Natalya's reversal: Upon learning about the proposal, she immediately insists on bringing Lomov back.

18. Chubukov's role in the proposal: He forces the engagement by joining their hands and giving his approval.

19. Ending of the play: The couple continues arguing even after engagement, showing that conflict is a constant in their relationship.

20. Major literary devices: The play employs farce, situational and dramatic irony, hyperbole, and repetition, seen in events like Lomov's exaggerated illness and repeated quarrels.

21. Nature of conflict: The play includes both external conflict (between characters) and internal weakness (Lomov's nervous nature).

22. Title significance: The title suggests a serious proposal, but the chaotic events create irony by turning it into a comic situation.

Detailed Character Sketches

Ivan Vassilevitch Lomov

Ivan Vassilevitch Lomov is a wealthy, suspicious landowner and Natalya's prospective husband. He approaches marriage practically, displaying anxiety and formality. Quick-tempered and prideful, he engages in trivial disputes over Oxen Meadows and his dog, Guess. A hypochondriac, he frequently complains about ailments, using exaggerated expressions that highlight his dramatic, yet comic, personality, making him both serious and absurd.

Natalya Stepanovna

Natalya Stepanovna is a 25-year-old woman characterized as energetic, assertive, and argumentative. Though she appears sensible, her stubbornness and possessiveness emerge during disputes. Her prioritization of pride over logic is evident, particularly in her impulsive behavior regarding marriage. Despite being an "excellent housekeeper" and "well-educated," she is depicted as fiery and immature.

Stepan Stepanovitch Chubukov

Stepan Stepanovitch Chubukov, Natalya's father, is a wealthy landowner. Initially warm and affectionate, he quickly reveals a practical and opportunistic nature, suspecting Lomov of seeking a loan. His enthusiasm for the marriage proposal shifts to joining the arguments, highlighting the comedic elements of his character. Chubukov is more focused on finalizing the marriage than addressing emotional concerns.

Central Message

The central idea of *The Proposal* is that human beings often allow ego, pride, and trivial disagreements to dominate important relationships. Through exaggerated situations, Chekhov criticises the superficiality of socially convenient marriages and exposes the childish behaviour hidden beneath respectable appearances. The play also suggests that marriage in such societies is often treated as a practical arrangement rather than an emotional bond. It further warns that lack of self-control can turn even joyful moments into conflict.

Narrator's Tone

As a dramatic work, the play does not have a continuous narrator, but the overall tone created by the playwright is comic, satirical, ironic, and mocking. The humour arises from exaggerated quarrels, insults, and sudden emotional changes, which highlight the characters' foolishness and lack of maturity.

Word Meanings

Proposal – a formal offer of marriage or a plan.

Farce – a humorous play with exaggerated and improbable situations.

Drawing-room – a room used for receiving guests.

Formal – serious and proper in behaviour or dress.

Suspicious – inclined to doubt others.

Request – a polite demand.

Consent – agreement or permission.

Critical age – an important stage requiring decision-making.

Palpitations – rapid or irregular heartbeats.

Excitement – heightened emotional state.

Implore – to beg earnestly

Meadows – open grasslands.

Wedged – tightly fixed between objects.

Birchwoods – areas filled with birch trees.

Marsh – wet, low-lying land

Perpetuity – lasting forever.

Peasants – rural labourers or farmers.

Dessiatins – a unit of land measurement.

Roubles – Russian currency.

Principle – a firm belief or rule.

Reasonable – fair and logical.

Grabber – one who takes others' property unfairly.

Mowers – people who cut grass.

Pettifogger – one who argues over trivial matters.

Embezzlement – dishonest use of entrusted money.

Lunacy – madness

Hump-backed – having a curved back.

Heated – emotionally intense or angry.

Evidence – proof.

Blackcock – a game bird.

Misfortune – bad luck.

Lame – unable to walk properly.

Purebred – of pure lineage

Well-sprung ribs – well-built body (of a dog).

Muzzle – nose and mouth of an animal.

Neck-and-neck – very close competition.

Whipper-in – person controlling hunting dogs.

Worrying a sheep – attacking livestock.

Interfere – to intrude unnecessarily.

Intriguer – a scheming person.

Jesuit – used as an insult implying deceit.

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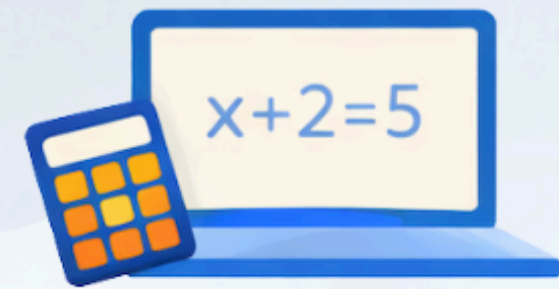
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