

TWO

Shopkeepers enters.

Mayor Aha ... Welcome, welcome, friends ...

Shopkeepers (*bowing*) Thank you, Your Honour. Very kind of you to invite us. We hope you're well, Your Honour.

Mayor I hear you may have a complaint to put to me? Who's going to speak? None of you? Not you, turdbreath? Pennygrabber? You, thimble-dick? Jizzbeard? Bumraper? No? I heard you stillborn shitbags wanted me in jail?

Anna Anton, language. This is the guest room.

Mayor Apologies, sweetness. I'm just so overcome our beautiful little flower is getting married ...

Shopkeepers We heard, Your Honour. Such wonderful news. The town is so proud ...

Mayor You heard, did you? That the Government Inspector you've been snitching to is going to marry my daughter? Huh? I won you that contract, twenty thousand roubles, and every yard of the cloth you supplied was cheap and rotten ... You donate one bloody kopeck to the orphans and strut around congratulating yourself! If the people of this town knew ... Look at you – the overstuffed overhanging gut on you ... 'I'm as good as nobility, I'm a shopkeeper.' Shopkeepers, shopkeepers ... Arsewax! Noblemen get strapped at school to learn their times-table better. You lot

get strapped so you can lie better. You knew how to rip people off before you knew the Lord's Prayer. I hate you, I spit on you, I shit on you. And the logs for the bridge – I let you charge a fortune when they were worth diddly squat. If I'd squealed on you, you'd be in Siberia now digging toilets for the next hundred years.

Shopkeepers We're so sorry, Your Honour, as God is our witness. It was evil – evil led us astray. We'll never complain again, ever.

Mayor Listen to the pitiful grovelling ... The slightest chance, you scraggy vultures would pick the gristle from my dead bones ...

Shopkeepers Have mercy on us.

Mayor Mercy? Am I hearing right? Enough. I don't bear grudges. Not

when my daughter's marrying the Government Inspector...

Shopkeepers We're so happy, Your Honour. So proud. Such wonderful news for the town.

Mayor Nine a.m. sharp tomorrow morning, I want to open my front door and see my garden teeming with the finest foodstuffs and wine and bed linen and blankets and candles

Anna And shoes and dresses and stockings.

Mayor The best you have of everything. 'Cause I will check – I will go through each shop and check and if any of you hold anything back ... Do not doubt me on this.

Shopkeepers No, sir. No we won't, sir. It will be done, Your Honour. Nine a.m. sharp.

Mayor Now get out of here.

They throng to kiss his hand and then file out.

THREE

Lyapkin-Tyapkin, Zemlyanika, Khlopov.

Lyapkin-Tyapkin Sir ... Oh ... Fortune has smiled upon us all ... You *most* of all of course, but us as well, oh, us as well ...

Zemlyanika (*kisses Anna's hand*)
Anna Andreyevna ...! (*Kisses Maria's.*)
Maria Antonovna ...! Sir, Your Honour, it's just ...

Khlopov Oh, I know, just ... just ... just ...

Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky enter.

Bobchinsky Oh, sir, may I have the honour of –

Dobchinsky – congratulating you,
sir –

Bobchinsky – upon this most wonderful of –

Dobchinsky – fortuitous occasions
... Anna Andreyevna!

Bobchinsky Anna Andreyevna!

*Both go to kiss her hand and bang their
heads off each other.*

Dobchinsky (*dazed*) Maria Anton-
ovna, may I ...

Bobchinsky Honour of ...

Dobchinsky So so happy ...

Bobchinsky Sacks of wealth ...

Dobchinsky Golden dresses and
soup ...

Bobchinsky And a baby ...

Dobchinsky A little baby ...

Bobchinsky A tiny little baby ...

Dobchinsky Eeny-weeny midget little baby ...

Bobchinsky So small you can hold him in the palm of your hand and he'll cry like this. Waah.

The Locksmith's Wife and Sergeant's Wife enter rush in.

Sergeant's Wife Can I –

Locksmith's Wife (*pushes in front of her*) Congratulations, Anna Andreyevna! I'm so pleased. They told me your daughter was getting married and I said, oh, she must be so pleased and you must be, you must be so pleased, this is what you've been waiting for, a good match, a wonderful match for your daughter. Fate has answered you as only fate can. It's all

happened just the way you wanted it. I am so pleased. I cried and cried, didn't I? I was wailing. The tears are still running down my face, d'you see? See them? I can't stop them. So pleased.

Police Superintendent enters.

Superintendent Congratulations, sir, me and the lads at the station wish you prosperity for many years to come.

Mayor Thank you, thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you. Please take a seat, all of you, Mishka, more chairs.

Lyapkin-Tyapkin Please share with us the happy news. How did it happen?

Mayor It was extraordinary how it happened. I knew he was working up

to something and then he just came out with it.

Anna His Excellency made the proposal to me in a hugely respectful and refined and heartfelt manner. He is a writer after all, a significant literary figure of St Petersburg. His phrasing was immaculate. ‘My life is worth not one kopeck, Anna Andreyevna, as I stand here before you in awe and admiration ...’

Maria Mummy ...

Anna Actually, he was on his knees when he said it – and, as I said, such intensity, such depth of feeling, those dark eyes ...

Maria Mummy, he went down on his knees to *me*.

Anna I could have said no. I could have. I could have said, ‘No, I won’t

allow you to have her, she's not ready, she's not quite mature enough.' I could've. But I didn't.

Mayor He threatened suicide.

The guests gasp.

He did. 'My life is in your hands.' Gave me a scare, let me tell you ...

Guests Good Lord. Incredible ...

Lyapkin-Tyapkin What an extraordinary young fellow ...

Khlopov Oh, I know ...

Zemlyanika Sir, this is your deserved reward for years of hard work and noble service for our town.

Guests (*applause*) Hear, hear!

Zemlyanika (*aside*) The biggest pigs get the biggest prizes.

Lyapkin-Tyapkin Shall I bring one of my borzois round for you?

Mayor Thank you, no. I won't be needing a dog.

Zemlyanika But where is he? Where is the lucky groom-to-be?

Mayor Called away – just for a day – very important business.

Anna He's gone to ask for his father's blessing.

Mayor And tomorrow or the day after he'll be ... (*Sneezes.*)

All Bless you.

Mayor Yes, returning to us tomorrow or the day after to— (*Sneezes.*)

Superintendent You're not coming down with anything, sir?

Bobchinsky He hasn't been ill a day in his life ...

Dobchinsky He'll live to be over a hundred. Older.

Zemlyanika (*aside*) I hope it's a lonely painful death, Your Honour ...

Sergeant's Wife (*aside*) I hope you burn in hell for eternity.

Mayor Thank you all for your kind wishes. I wish you the same back.

Anna We did talk about keeping on the house here but, to be honest, the atmosphere is just too, how can I put it? Too constricting. Too provincial. And then there's the general lack of vitality and initiative and style ... It's just not very nice. And I mean what would it look like, a General's wife living out here in a town no one can even find on the map ...

Lyapkin-Tyapkin A General?

Mayor Keep it to yourself for now.
All of you keep it to yourselves.

Lyapkin-Tyapkin (*aside*) A General?
Do me a favour.

Zemlyanika (*aside*) A General?
Sweet Jesus ...

Khlopov (*aside*) A General? Fuck's
sake ...

Lyapkin-Tyapkin And can we stay
in contact with you, yes? You'll be
able to pull a few strings for us.

Mayor Of course. If you hear nothing
at first, just keep trying.

Khlopov I'm planning to take my
son to Petersburg to enter him for
state service next year. You'll keep an
eye on him? Be a surrogate father to
him?

Mayor Contact me nearer the time.

Anna Anton, we can't help every Boris, Ivan and Yuri.

Sergeant's Wife (*aside*) Hear that? Ripping the piss out of us. Washing her scraggy hands of us. I told you she would. She was always like that. A fat old sow sitting in a trough.