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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

Fools

by Neil Simon

SAMUEL FRENCH

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FOR BABA

FOOLS was first presented by Emanuel Azenberg on April 6, 1981, at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre, New York City, with the following cast:

(*In order of appearance*)

LEON TOLCHINSKY ..... *John Rubinstein*
SNETSKY ..... *Gerald Hiken*
MAGISTRATE ..... *Fred Stuthman*
SLOVITCH ..... *David Lipman*
MISHKIN ..... *Joseph Leon*
YENCHNA ..... *Florence Stanley*
DR. ZUBRITSKY ..... *Harold Gould*
LENYA ZUBRITSKY ..... *Mary Louise Wilson*
SOPHIA ZUBRITSKY ..... *Pamela Reed*
GREGOR YOUSEKEVITCH ..... *Richard B. Shull*

Directed by Mike Nichols

Scenery by John Lee Beatty

Costumes by Patricia Zipprodt

Lighting by Thar[illegible] Musser

THE SETTING

TIME: Long ago

PLACE: The village of Kulyenchikov

Act One

Fools

Scene 1

Kulyenchikov, about 1890, a remote Ukrainian village. Leon Tolchinsky, *about thirty, carrying a battered old suitcase and some books tied together, arrives over a small bridge in the town square. He looks around, seems pleased, then turns to the audience.*

Leon. (*Smiles.*) Kulyenchikov, I like it! It's exactly as I pictured: a quiet, pleasant village, not too large . . . the perfect place for a new schoolteacher to begin his career . . . Well, to be honest, I did spend mornings for two years in a small children's school in Moscow teaching tiny tots rudimentary spelling and numbers, but this, *this* is my first bona-fide, professional appointment as a full-time schoolmaster. Acutally, I never even heard of Kulyenchikov until I saw the advertisement that a Dr. Zubritsky placed in the college journal. Although the position was in a remote village in the Ukraine, I jumped at the chance, but I don't mind telling you that my heart is pounding with excitement. I have this passion for teaching . . . Greek, Latin, astronomy, classic literature. I get goose bumps just thinking about it . . . (*He looks around.*) I don't see anyone around . . . Maybe I arrived a little early—I'm one of those extremely eager and enthusiastic people who's up at the crack of dawn, ready to begin his work. This is a very, very auspicious day in my life. (*We hear a ram's horn offstage.*) Oh! Excuse me.

(SNETSKY *the shepherd enters, carrying a ram's horn and a staff.*)

SNETSKY. Elenya! Lebidoff! Marushka! Olga! Where are you?

LEON. Good morning.

SNETSKY. Good morning. Did you happen to see two dozen sheep?

LEON. Two dozen sheep?

SNETSKY. Yes. There were fourteen of them. (*He continues looking.*)

LEON. No. I'm sorry.

SNETSKY. Well, if you see them, would you give them a message?

LEON. A message for the sheep?

SNETSKY. Yes, tell them the shepherd is looking for them and they should tell you where they are and I'll come and get them. Thank you. (*He starts to walk off.*)

LEON. Wait, wait. Excuse me—what is your name, please?

SNETSKY. (*Stops.*) Snetsky.

LEON. And your first name?

SNETSKY. (*Thinks.*) How soon do you need it?

LEON. Never mind. Forget your first name.

SNETSKY. I did.

LEON. I am Leon Steponovitch Tolchinsky and I am to be the new schoolteacher.

SNETSKY. Is that a fact? (*He shakes* LEON's *hand vigorously.*) I'm very honored to meet you, Leon Steponovitch Tolchinsky. I am Something Something Snetsky . . . Will you be staying the night?

LEON. You don't understand. Kulyenchikov will be my new home. I'm going to live here and teach here. I am, if I may say so, an excellent teacher.

SNETSKY. Oh, they all were. They came by the thousands, but not one of them lasted through the first night. (*He blows the horn hard.*) Oh, it's so hard to blow these, I don't know how the sheep do it.

LEON. You've had thousands of teachers?

SNETSKY. More. Hundreds! We're unteachable. We're all stupid in Kulyenchikov. There isn't a town or village more stupid in all of Mother Poland.

LEON. Russia.

SNETSKY. Whatever. All good people, mind you, but not a decent brain among them. (*He blows the horn with difficulty.*) Oh, that feels so good. I just opened up my ears. I thought you were whispering. What were you saying?

LEON. Are you telling me that every man, woman and child—

SNETSKY. All stupid. Including me. Talk to me another ten minutes and you'll begin to notice.

LEON. (*Ignores it.*) I was hired by Dr. Zubritsky to teach his young daughter.

SNETSKY. (*Bursts out laughing.*) Teach his daughter? Impossible. The girl is hopeless. Nineteen years old and she just recently learned to sit down . . . She's hopeless. She doesn't even know the difference between a cow and a duck. Not that it's an easy subject, mind you.

LEON. (*To the audience.*) Something is up here! (*He takes the ad out of his pocket.*) I thought nothing of it then, but when I first read it I *did* notice that every word in the advertisement was misspelled . . . I'm sure Dr. Zubritsky will explain it all to me. (*He steps back and turns to* SNETSKY.) You've been most helpful, Citizen Snetsky. I enjoyed our chat.

SNETSKY. As did I, Master Tolchinsky. (*He turns to*

the audience.) He's not the only one who can have private thoughts. I can have private thoughts as well. (*He tries to think.*) The trouble is, I can never think of a thought to have in private. Oh, I must be on my way. Good day, schoolmaster.

LEON. I'm sure we'll meet again.

SNETSKY. Oh, of course. Just mention my name to anyone. Snetsky the sheep loser. (*He leaves. A* MAGISTRATE, *ringing a bell, enters.* LEON *tries to stop him, but is ignored.*)

MAGISTRATE. Nine o'clock and all's well . . . Nine o'clock in the village of Kulyenchikov and all's well . . . Nine o'clock and all's well. (*He is gone.*)

LEON. (*To the audience.*) It may have been all well with him, but I was beginning to have my doubts. (*He leaves. A butcher,* SLOVITCH, *comes out of his shop with a broom. He sweeps the dirt into a pile and then sweeps it* into *the shop. The postman,* MISHKIN, *appears.*)

SCENE 2

SLOVITCH. Good morning, postman.

MISHKIN. Good morning, butcher.

SLOVITCH. A beautiful, sunny day, isn't it?

MISHKIN. Is it? I haven't looked up yet. (*He looks up.*) Oh, yes. Lovely. Very nice.

SLOVITCH. Do I have any mail?

MISHKIN. No. I'm sorry. I'm the postman. I have all the mail.

SLOVITCH. My sister in Odessa hasn't been feeling well. I was hoping I would hear from her.

MISHKIN. It's very hard to hear all the way from Odessa. Perhaps she wrote a letter. I'll look. (*He starts*

to look through the mail. We hear YENCHNA, *a vendor, calling "Fish!" offstage before she appears.*)

YENCHNA. (*Calling out, selling her wares.*) Fish! Fresh fish! Nice fresh flounder and halibut! A good piece of carp for lunch. (*She has no fish, but bunches of flowers.*)

SLOVITCH. Good morning, Yenchna.

YENCHNA. How about a nice piece of haddock? Is that a beautiful fish?

SLOVITCH. What do you mean fish? Those are flowers.

YENCHNA. They didn't catch anything today. Why should I suffer because the fisherman had a bad day? Try the carp, it smells gorgeous.

MISHKIN. I don't have any letters from your sister, Slovitch. But I have a nice letter from the shoemaker's cousin. Would you like that?

SLOVITCH. Is she sick? I hate reading bad news.

MISHKIN. No, no. In perfect health. Take it. You'll enjoy it.

YENCHNA. Can you believe my daughter hasn't written to me in over a year?

MISHKIN. Doesn't your daughter live with you?

YENCHNA. It's a good thing. Otherwise I'd never hear from her. (LEON *enters.*)

LEON. (*To the townspeople.*) Good morning. My name is Leon Steponovitch Tolchinsky. I'm the new schoolmaster.

MISHKIN. (*Bows.*) Mishkin the postman.

SLOVITCH. (*Bows.*) Slovitch the butcher.

YENCHNA. Yenchna the vendor.

LEON. How do you do. I was just talking to a shepherd named Snetsky.

MISHKIN. Oh, yes. Something Something Snetsky. We know him well.

LEON. He was pleasant enough, although—and I hope I don't seem unkind—somewhat deficient in his mental alertness.

YENCHNA. That's Snetsky, all right. (*She taps her head.*) He was kicked in the head by a horse.

LEON. Oh, well. What a pity. When was that?

YENCHNA. Tuesday, Wednesday, twice on Friday and all day Saturday.

LEON. (*Looks at* YENCHNA'S *flowers.*) What lovely and fragrant wares you have to sell, madame. Perhaps I might buy some for my new employer. How much are they, please?

YENCHNA. The flounder is two kopecks and the halibut is three.

LEON. I beg your pardon?

YENCHNA. (*Holds up a white flower.*) If it's too much, I have a nice whitefish for one and a half. (*She wraps it in a newspaper and hands it to him. He pays.*)

LEON. (*To the audience.*) Perhaps the dialect is a little different in this part of the country. (*To the group.*) I'm very eager to begin my new duties. Will one of you be so kind as to direct me to the home of Dr. Zubrisky? (*They all point in different directions.*)

ALL THREE. That way!

LEON. Thank you. Perhaps I'll go in the one direction you haven't pointed to . . . A pleasure meeting you all. (SNETSKY *appears.*) Oh, Hello again. Have you found your sheep?

SNETSKY. Not yet. (LEON *leaves.*) Who was that?

MISHKIN. The new schoolteacher.

SNETSKY. Another one? I just met one a few minutes ago, they must be having a convention here.

YENCHNA. Count Yousekevitch up on the hill isn't going to be very happy about this.

SLOVITCH. That's right. Count Yousekevitch doesn't like new schoolteachers.

SNETSKY. Why?

MISHKIN. He's afraid they'll break the curse.

SNETSKY. What curse?

SLOVITCH. The one that made us stupid since the day we were born.

SNETSKY. Oh, that one.

MISHKIN. Yes. I've been stupid for fifty-one years . . . What about you, Snetsky?

SNETSKY. I'll be dumb forty-three next July.

MISHKIN. And you, Slovitch?

SLOVITCH. Forty-one for me. What about you, Yenchna?

YENCHNA. I just turned the corner of twenty-six.

SLOVITCH. That corner must be about forty miles from here. (*They all exit.*)

SCENE 3

The home of DR. ZUBRITSKY. *The* DOCTOR *is examining a patient,* MAGISTRATE KUPCHIK. *The* DOCTOR *is administering an eye-chart test.*

MAGISTRATE. (*Covering one eye.*) K . . . E . . . 5 . . . L . . . A . . . R . . . V . . . Is that right?

DOCTOR. I don't know. It sounds good to me. (*Listening to the* MAGISTRATE'S *heart.*) Yes . . . Yes . . . Very interesting.

MAGISTRATE. Then I'm in good health?

DOCTOR. The best. The best of health. You'll live to be eighty.

MAGISTRATE. I'm seventy-nine now.

DOCTOR. Well, you've got a wonderful year ahead of you.

MAGISTRATE. (*Gets dressed.*) Good. I must keep up my strength. I'm a magistrate. Law and order must be preserved.

DOCTOR. Did you want a prescription?

MAGISTRATE. For what?

DOCTOR. I don't know. Some people like prescriptions. Here, take this to the druggist. Pick out something you like and take it three times a day with a little water. Goodbye, sir.

MAGISTRATE. How much do I owe you, Doctor?

DOCTOR. Oh, forget it. Forget it. If I ever go to medical school you can send me a little something.

MAGISTRATE. Oh, thank you. Goodbye.

(LENYA *enters. She is exuberant and excited.*)

LENYA. Nikolai! Nikolai! He's here. He's come! He arrived not two minutes ago. He's young. He looks strong, determined. Maybe he'll be the one, Nikolai. Maybe this one will finally be our salvation.

DOCTOR. Calm yourself, Lenya. Who's come? Who'll be our salvation?

LENYA. The new—er—The new—what do you call them? They come and they—er—The ones who—We had one once but no more.

DOCTOR. Oh, God. I know. I know who you mean.

LENYA. They have a place, and then you go to the place—

DOCTOR. And they point to you and they say—er—they ask you if you—er—

LENYA. And if you don't, they say, "Why didn't you? Next time I'll *make* you."

DOCTOR. And he's outside?

LENYA. He's just down the street.

DOCTOR. Well, show him in, Lenya. Show him in. And pray God this is the one who will deliver us and all of Kulyenchikov from this dreadful—er—this—er—Oh, God, what is it we have again?

LENYA. I know. I know what you mean. It sounds like *nurse* . . .

DOCTOR. Nurse.

LENYA. Or *hearse* . . .

DOCTOR. Hearse.

LENYA. Something like that.

DOCTOR. Or something like that. (*There is a knock.*) Or is it a knock?

LENYA. We have a knock? (*She goes to the door.*)

DOCTOR. Yes, yes. Open the knock. (*She* pushes *on the door.*) The other way, the other way. (*She opens it.* LEON *stands there.*)

LENYA. Won't you come in, young man?

LEON. Dr. Zubritsky? Madame Zubritsky? I am delighted to be in Kulyenchikov. I am Leon Steponovitch Tolchinsky.

DOCTOR. So you are the new—the new—

LEON. Yes! I am he.

DOCTOR. It's he, Lenya, the new—the new—

LENYA. But you look so young to be a—to be a—

LEON. Not at all. I think in time you will find that I am, if I may say so, one of the best young—well, I don't want to seem immodest.

DOCTOR. No. Please. Be immodest. We *love* immodesty.

LENYA. The more immodest the better. The best young what? *What*?

LEON. The best young teacher in all of Russia!

DOCTOR. (*Excited.*) *A teacher!!!* He's a teacher!! The new teacher is here.

LENYA. *Thank God the teacher is here!!*

LEON. Thank you. Thank you. I'm most gratified at this most warm and overwhelming reception.

DOCTOR. Make yourself at home, teacher. Take off your coat, teacher. Lenya, bring the teacher a cup of tea. Sit down, teacher.

LENYA. Would you like some tea, teacher? Or maybe some paper and pens, teacher? Perhaps you would like to start teaching right away, teacher?

LEON. Well, no one's more eager than I am. Madame Zubritsky, this is for you. (*He hands her the flowers.*)

LENYA. Oh, whitefish. I saw them on sale today. Thank you. (*She takes them.* LEON *looks at the audience, bewildered.*)

DOCTOR. How can we help you?

LEON. Well, there are a few questions I wanted to ask you first.

DOCTOR. Questions! That's what they ask. When they point to you and you don't know. He knows. He knows what questions are. I can tell this one's going to be a good teacher.

LENYA. Would you be so kind, Master Tolchinsky, to—to ask us a question. Any question at all.

DOCTOR. It means a lot to us. It's been so long since anyone has asked us a good "school" question . . . *Please*! (*They all sit.*)

LEON. Well, there are questions and there are question. Do you want a question on mathematics or a question dealing with science or perhaps a philosophical question?

DOCTOR. The first one. The first one sounds good. The philosophical question. Ask us that one.

LEON. Very well, if you wish . . . What is the purpose of man's existence?

DOCTOR. What a question . . . Lenya, did you ever hear such a beautiful question?

LENYA. I'm speechless . . . To think someone would ask *us* a question like that.

LEON. Are you interested in the answer?

DOCTOR. Not today, thank you. To be asked one question like that in a lifetime is more than we ever expected. The answer should be given to someone much more worthy than we are.

LEON. But it's your birthright. Knowledge is *everyone's* birthright.

DOCTOR. Everyone not born in Kulyenchikov.

LEON. I don't understand.

LENYA. You would if you knew about the nurse.

LEON. What nurse?

DOCTOR. Not the nurse, the hearse.

LEON. The hearse?

LENYA. He means the purse.

LEON. What kind of purse?

DOCTOR. The kind of purse that inflicts the wrath of God upon all those poor souls who were unfortunate enough to be born in this pitiful village.

LEON. Do you mean, perhaps, a curse?

DOCTOR. *Curse!!* That's what it is! I *knew* it sounded like that.

LENYA. We were so close. *So* close!

LEON. What is this curse you speak of, Dr. Zubritsky?

DOCTOR. Lenya, bolt the door. Draw the curtains.

LENYA. I can't draw curtains. I can draw a cat or a fish—

DOCTOR. Never mind. Lower your voice.

LENYA. (*Bends her knees, making herself shorter.*) How low do you want my voice?

DOCTOR. That's low enough. Bring the book, it's on the shelf. (*She goes over to the bookshelf, knees bent as she walks. To* LEON.) Young man—have you ever heard of the Curse of Kulyenchikov?

LEON. I can't say that I have.

DOCTOR. You can't say that? It's not hard. Even Lenya can say that.

LENYA. (*Standing by the bookshelf.*) "The Curse of Kulyenchikov."

LEON. What is this curse, Doctor?

DOCTOR. Two hundred years ago, a curse was put on this village that struck down every man, woman, child and domestic animal, including all their ancestors for generations to come, leaving each and every one of them—and this you'll find hard to believe—with no more intelligence than a bump on a log.

LEON. Doctor, I don't believe in curses. Curses are old wives' tales.

DOCTOR. You're thinking of Noychka. In Noychka all the old wives have tails. That was *their* curse. Ours is altogether different.

LEON. But where did the curse come from? And who would inflict such curel punishment on such a peaceful and simple village?

(LENYA *has returned with the book.*)

DOCTOR. Who indeed? It's all documented in *The Book of Curses.* (*He blows dust off the cover into* LEON'S *face. To* LENYA.) I thought you said you dusted this.

LENYA. I did. I put dust on it yesterday.

DOCTOR. (*To* LEON.) Here. Read it for yourself. The page is marked.

LEON. (*Opens the book. The page is sticky and gummy.*) It's all stuck together.

LENYA. We marked it with maple syrup. Read it to us. (*They all sit on the* DOCTOR'S *sofa.*)

LEON. (*Reading.*) "On the morning of April 11, in the year 1691, in the village of Kulyenchikov, two young people fell hopelessly in love."

LENYA. I knew it. Whenever young people fall in love, you know a curse is coming.

LEON. But surely you've heard all this before?

DOCTOR. Many times. But we never understand it. It's a very well thought out curse.

LENYA. So what happens?

LEON. "The boy was a young, handsome but illiterate farmer named Casimir Yousekevitch. The girl was the daughter of the most learned man in the town, Mikhail Zubritsky."

LENYA. Zubritsky! I've heard that name before.

DOCTOR. I've seen it! I've seen it! On a front door somewhere. In this neighborhood.

LEON. It's on your front door. *Your* name is Zubritsky.

DOCTOR. (*With profound insight.*) Wait a minute! That means that the young man in the curse may possibly be related—to our front door. (*He and* LENYA *walk over to the door, open it and look out.*)

LEON. (*To the audience.*) Mind you, I'm dealing with the intelligentsia now! . . . I continue; "The young girl's name was Sophia Zubritsky." (*To the* DOCTOR.) May I ask the name of your young daughter?

DOCTOR. Sophia.

LEON. Sophia? Sophia Zubritsky! The identical name of the girl in the curse over two hundred years ago.

DOCTOR. I can't believe it. Unless our daughter has been lying about her age. (*He and* LENYA *have come back. Each stands behind a chair.*)

LEON. "The match was doomed from the start. When Sophia's educated father learned that young Casimir was illiterate, he forbade Sophia ever to see Casimir again. Six months later Sophia married a young student, and that winter Casimir, distraught and despondent, took his life by plowing his own grave and planting himself in it. Upon hearing of his son's death, Casimir's father, Vladimir Yousekevitch—"

THE ZUBRITSKYS. (*Shaking the chairs.*) Tremble, tremble, tremble, tremble.

LEON. "—Casimir's father, Vladimir Yousekevitch—"

THE ZUBRITSKYS. Tremble, tremble, tremble, tremble.

LEON. "—Casimir's father, Vladimir Yousekevitch—"

THE ZUBRITDKYS. Tremble, tremble, tremble, tremble.

LEON. "—who caused people to tremble at the mention of his name—"

LENYA. Next time don't mention his name.

LEON. "—Casimir's father, Vla—"

THE ZUBRITSKYS. (*With a short chair shake.*) Trem—

LEON. "—and So-and-So, sometimes known as the Sorcerer because of his ability to summon the powers of the Devil himself, brought all his wrath and fury down upon Kulyenchikov . . ."

DOCTOR. Here it comes! Here it comes!

LEON. "'A curse! A curse upon all who dwell in Kulyenchikov!' he cried out. 'May the daughter of

Mikhail Zubritsky, murderer of my only son, be struck down by the ignorance that caused my son's death! May stupidity engulf her brain! May incompetence encumber her faculties! May common sense become uncommon and may reason become unreasonable!! May her children be cursed as well. And may all their children be cursed for eternity! May all who live in Kulyenchikov be born in ignorance and die in ignorance, unable to leave this cursed village until my final vengeance has been satisfied!'"

LENYA. That would explain why the train doesn't stop here.

LEON. (*To the audience.*) My initial impulse was to panic, even my secondary impulse was to panic . . . To educate is one thing, to break curses is another.

DOCTOR. Excuse me, but are you all right, Master Tolchinsky?

LEON. Yes. I'm fine. I—I was just thinking.

DOCTOR. Lenya . . . he was thinking.

LENYA. He was thinking.

DOCTOR. (*To* LEON.) What's it like?

LEON. You mean you don't know what thinking is?

DOCTOR. I don't and she certainly doesn't.

LEON. *Thinking?* It's the thoughts that come to one's mind. It's the process which enables us to make decisions.

DOCTOR. Decisions? No. I don't think we're capable of that.

LEON. But surely you know what it is you want.

LENYA. Oh, dear God, yes. We desperately want someone to help us. Not so much for us, we've already lived our lives. But for your child, our sweet daughter, Sophia.

LEON. Did you hear what you just said?

LENYA. No, I wasn't listening.

LEON. It was a decision. You decided to help your daughter because you thought about it. You are capable of thought. You think.

LENYA. No, I don't think so. It just came out.

LEON. Yes. Out of your head where your brain is lodged. The center of thoughts. And if it's possible to have even one tiny infinitesimal insignificant thought, then it's possible to expand those thoughts to ideas—and ideas into comprehension—comprehension into creativity—and finally, supreme *intelligence*!!

DOCTOR. Would I be able to open up jars? I have terrible trouble opening up jars.

LEON. (*Aside.*) Be firm, Leon. Be staunch . . . (*To the* DOCTOR.) Patience! We will break this curse, I promise you! By the simple, everyday, painstaking work of education. We must begin at once. I should like to start by seeing your daughter, Sophia.

DOCTOR. Sophia?

LEON. Yes, it occurs to me that since the curse started with the young Sophia two hundred years ago, perhaps the key to ending it lies with her direct descendant. Can I see Sophia?

LENYA. Not from here. She's up in her room. We would have to send for her.

DOCTOR. Do what the schoolmaster asks.

LENYA. She may be taking her singing lesson now.

LEON. She takes singing lessons? From whom?

LENYA. A canary. He does the best he can.

DOCTOR. No words, mind you. Just the tunes.

LEON. I understand. The girl, madame. Please.

DOCTOR. (*To* LENYA.) Remember, sweetheart, upstairs and to the left. (*She goes. To* LEON.) You'll find her a most delicate and sensitive girl. Not like the

others in the village. She has so many interests, always occupied.

LEON. Occupied with what?

DOCTOR. Oh, she likes to do interesting things . . . like touching things—wood, paper, metal. She likes drinking water.

(LENYA *returns.*)

LENYA. Master Tolchinsky. May I present our daughter . . . (*She looks at piece of paper in her hand to remind her of* SOPHIA's *name.*) Sophia Irena Elynya Zubritsky. (SOPHIA *enters.*) Sophia, this is the new schoolmaster, Leon Tolchinsky.

LEON. Miss Zubritsky! (*He turns aside, dazed.*) Is that my breath that has just been taken away? Is that vision before me human or have I too been cast under the spell? Never have I felt such a stirring beneath my breast . . . Watch yourself, Leon! She is your pupil, not the object of your dormant feelings of passion. (*He turns back to them.*) Excuse me.

DOCTOR. Do you know what he was just doing, Sophia? He was *thinking*! Isn't that wonderful?

SOPHIA. Yes, Mama.

DOCTOR. Papa! She is Mama and I am Papa.

LEON. Won't you please sit down, Miss Zubritsky? (*She sits slowly, carefully, and when she is down, the* DOCTOR *embraces* LENYA *and says, "She did it! She did it!," then turns to* LEON.)

DOCTOR. Wasn't that a beautiful sit?

LEON. Yes. Very nice. Lovely. (*To* SOPHIA.) Miss Zubritsky—may I call you Sophia?

SOPHIA. Sophia?

DOCTOR. It's your name, sweetheart.

LENYA. Say "Yes," darling. Say, "Yes, you may call me Sophia."

LEON. Please, madame. We must allow the girl to speak for herself. (*To* SOPHIA.) I should like very much to be your friend. Would it please you if I called you Sophia? (SOPHIA *looks puzzled.*)

DOCTOR. It's been so long since she's taken a test.

LEON. I think she wants to say something.

SOPHIA. I—I would be very pleased to have you call me Sophia.

DOCTOR. There you are!

LENYA. I'm so proud. So proud!

LEON. Please. It's very distracting to the girl's concentration. (*To* SOPHIA.) I've come a very long way to help you with you education. I have every reason to believe that under ordinary circumstances, you have the capability of being an extremely bright and intelligent young woman, that deep inside you somewhere is an intellect just crying to be heard, that you have enormous powers of reason. But someone has put a cloud over these powers and it is my intention to remove this cloud so that enlightenment can once more shine through those unbelievably crystal-clear blue eyes once again . . . But I need your help, Sophia. Will you give me that help?

SOPHIA. Yes. You may call me Sophia.

DOCTOR. She did it again. That's two in a row.

LEON. (*Aside.*) Get a grip, Leon. Nothing in life comes easy . . . (*To* SOPHIA.) I should like to ask you a few very simple questions. If we are to begin your education, it is important that I know at what point to begin. It won't be taxing, I promise you. I would never want to be the cause of a furrow or frown on that fair face . . . Now, then—what is your favorite color?

SOPHIA. My favorite color?

LEON. Yes, is it red or blue or green or orange? Any color at all. Which one is your favorite?

DOCTOR. I used to know that one.

LEON. I'll ask you once again, Sophia. What-is-your-favorite-color?

LENYA. Why is he being so hard on her? This isn't a university.

SOPHIA. My favorite color—

LEON. Yes?

SOPHIA. —is yellow.

LEON. Yellow! Her favorite color is yellow! Why, Sophia? Why is yellow your favorite color?

SOPHIA. Because it doesn't stick to your fingers as much.

LENYA. (*Aside, to the* DOCTOR.) I think she's wrong. I think it's blue that doesn't stick to your fingers as much.

LEON. That's a very interesting answer, Sophia. There is a certain logic to her response. The fact that that logic escapes me completely doesn't alter the fact that she has something in mind. Sophia, I'm going to ask you something quite simple now. I'm going to ask you to make a wish. Do you know what a wish is?

SOPHIA. Yes. A wish is something you hope for that doesn't come true.

LEON. Well, perhaps we can change all that. If you could make a wish that did come true, anything at all, what would you wish for?

SOPHIA. What would I wish for?

LEON. Yes, Sophia, what would you wish for?

SOPHIA. I would wish that I could fly like a bird . . . to soar over buildings and trees . . . to float on the wind and be carried far away . . . over mountains and lakes

. . . over forests and rivers . . . to meet people in other villages . . . to see what the world was like . . . to know all the things that I shall never know because I must always remain here in this place.

LEON. Sophia, that is the most beautiful wish I have ever heard. (*To the* ZUBRITSKYS.) Don't you see what her wish means? To fly like a bird means to sever the bonds that chain her to ignorance. She wants to soar, to grow, she wants knowledge! And with every fiber of my being, from the very depths of my soul, I shall gather all my strength and patience and dedication, and I make this promise that I, Leon Steponovitch Tolchinsky, shall make Sophia Zubritsky's wish come true.

SOPHIA. If you could do that, schoolmaster, I would be in your debt—forever.

LEON. She touches me so. Your daughter has such a sweet soul and such a pure heart. We must begin as soon as possible. Not another moment must be lost. I shall return in the morning at eight o'clock sharp. (*To* SOPHIA.) What subject shall we begin our studies with, Sophia?

SOPHIA. I should like to begin with—languages.

LEON. Languages! Of course! Even I should have thought of that. Languages it shall be, my dear, sweet Sophia . . . And what language shall we begin with first?

SOPHIA. (*Thinks.*) Rabbit, I think.

LEON. *Rabbit*?

DOCTOR. A very hard language, rabbit. Hardly anyone speaks it anymore.

LENYA. As long as she gets a few phrases, it's enough to bagin with.

SOPHIA. Am I through for today?

LEON. Yes.

SOPHIA. Then I shall go to my room.

LENYA. Watch how she gets up from the chair. Watch! You didn't see it. Sophia, do it again.

LEON. It's not necessary. She's already past getting up from chairs.

DOCTOR. They're so much smarter than in our day.

SOPHIA. Until tomorrow, schoolmaster.

LEON. In all my life, I have never looked forward to a morning as much as tomorrow's.

SOPHIA. I think you are the most beautiful schoolteacher I have ever seen, Master Tolchinsky. I pray that you don't despair of Kulyenchikov . . . and that you will stay with us forever. (*She leaves.*)

LENYA. She found the door! She found the door!

DOCTOR. I've never seen Sophia so radiant . . . Lenya, are you thinking what I'm thinking?

LENYA. I'm not even thinking what *I'm* thinking. What are you talking about?

DOCTOR. I think our Sophia has taken a liking to the new schoolmaster.

LEON. If it is true, Dr. Zubritsky, then standing before you is the happiest man on the happiest planet in the universe. Tell me, is she spoken for?

DOCTOR. Spoken for?

LEON. Does she have any suitors? Any young men desperately in love with her?

DOCTOR. We—we don't talk of such things.

LEON. Why not?

DOCTOR. There is no one. No one at all. Not even *him.*

LEON. *Him*?

LENYA. He didn't mean him. He meant someone else who isn't him.

LEON. There is someone. Who is it? I must know. It's of the greatest concern to me.

DOCTOR. If I told you who him was, you must promise never to say it was I who told you it was him.

LEON. I promise.

DOCTOR. Have you ever heard of . . . Count Gregor of Kulyenchikov?

LEON. I can't say that I have.

DOCTOR. You can't say that? It's not that hard. Even Lenya can say that.

LENYA. Count Gregor of Kul—

LEON. (*Annoyed.*) Yes! Yes! I can say it. Who is he?

LENYA. He's—he's one of them. The ones who put the purse on us.

LEON. You mean—a Yousekevitch?

DOCTOR. The last of his line.

LEON. Tell me about him and Sophia.

DOCTOR. He proposes marriage twice a day.

LEON. Twice a day?

LENYA. Six-fifteen in the mornings, seven-twenty at nights.

LEON. He cares for her that much?

DOCTOR. He cares only about avenging his ancestors. If a Zubritsky marries a Yousekevitch, they will be satisfied and the nurse will be over.

LEON. Does Sophia care for him?

DOCTOR. She has said no for many years, but she can't resist much longer. The poor girl wants to sleep late just one morning.

LEON. What kind of a man is this Count Yousekevitch?

LENYA. You know . . . like the rest of us.

LEON. You mean he is cursed as well?

DOCTOR. He still lives in Kulyenchikov. He's not permitted to leave here either.

LEON. I understand. If I have a rival, I am more

determined than ever to break this curse. God bless you both for your faith in me. Tomorrow the education of Sophia Zubritsky begins. In all my excitement, I forgot to ask. What about lodgings?

DOCTOR. Oh, don't worry about it. We'll be very comfortable right here.

LEON. Of course. I'll see you in the morning.

LENYA. Master Tolchinsky! Please! Ask us again! Ask us the question. It makes us feel . . . important.

LEON. Yes, certainly. What is the purpose of man's existence?

LENYA. I'm all choked up again. I'm sorry I asked.

DOCTOR. One moment! I—I think I know. I think I know the answer.

LEON. To the purpose of man's existence?

LENYA. What are you talking about?

DOCTOR. It's true. The first time I heard it I didn't understand. But now, suddenly something came to me. I know my limitations, but still, I think I really know the answer . . . Oh, my God, what if I'm right?

LEON. (*Excitedly.*) Tell me, Dr. Zubritsky. Tell me what you think the answer is.

DOCTOR. I think—it's *twelve*!

LEON. *Twelve*?

DOCTOR. It's wrong; I can tell by your face. Fourteen?

LEON. I think you missed the point.

DOCTOR. It's less than a hundred, I know that. Even *I'm* not that stupid. Eighty-three . . . forty-six.

LEON. (*Moving on.*) We'll discuss it when we get to philosophy. Don't think about it. Get some sleep. Good night. Until tomorrow. (*He walks out to the street and screams.*) *TWELVE?*

LENYA. Why didn't you leave well enough alone? Why must you have answers? Aren't questions beautiful enough?

LEON. (*In the street.*) *TWELVE!*

DOCTOR. But what if I am right? I could have sold the answer. We could have made a fortune. (*They leave . . . the set goes off.* LEON *reappears.*)

LEON. (*To the audience.*) That's it. I'm leaving now, so I'll say goodbye. I *was* going to stay and try to break the curse, but when he siad "Twelve," I knew it was time to go . . . What I must do now is try to forget Sophia. I must!

SOPHIA'S VOICE. Schoolmaster!

LEON. Sophia? Where are you?

(*She appears on the balcony.*)

SOPHIA. Down here. I had to see you once more.

LEON. Without a wrap? In the cold night air, you'll come down with a chill.

SOPHIA. Oh, I never catch colds.

LEON. You don't.

SOPHIA. I've tried. I've just never learned how to do it.

LEON. Be grateful . . . Some things are not worth knowing.

SOPHIA. I know that something has happened a long time ago that prevents me from knowing what happened a long time ago. If only you knew me the way I might have been instead of the way I am.

LEON. But if you were not the way you are, then I would not have come here to help you to become the way you might have been. (*Aside, quickly.*) Careful! You're beginning to think like her.

SOPHIA. Could you—could you ever care for someone who never became the way I might have been?

LEON. Could I ever care for someone who never became—I see what you mean. I see what you're getting at. Yes. Yes, I could. I would. I shall. I will. I have. I do.

SOPHIA. Is that rabbit you're speaking? It's hard to follow.

LEON. If it sounds like gibberish it's because you do that to me, Sophia. When thoughts come from the heart they sometimes trip over the tongue.

SOPHIA. Then I must watch where I walk when you speak . . . I must go. Everything depends upon tomorrow.

LEON. And if not tomorrow, then the tomorrow after tomorrow. And all the tomorrows for the rest of my life, if that's what it takes.

SOPHIA. No. It all rests on tomorrow. If we fail, we shall never see each other again.

LEON. Never see each other? What do you mean?

SOPHIA. I never know what I mean. I do have thoughts but they seem to disappear when they reach my lips.

LEON. If I ever reached your lips, I would never disappear.

SOPHIA. Would you like to kiss me?

LEON. With all my heart.

SOPHIA. No. I meant with your lips.

LEON. An even better suggestion.

SOPHIA. Hurry. Hurry.

(*He climbs up to the balcony.*)

LEON. I'm climbing as fast as I can.

(*She disappears.*)

LEON. (*Arrives on the balcony.*) Where are you?

SOPHIA. (*Appears below.*) Up here.

LEON. (*To the audience.*) If only she were ugly, I'd be halfway home by now. (*To* SOPHIA.) Stay where you

are. I'll come to you.

SOPHIA. All right. (*But he doesn't move.*)

LEON. (*To the audience.*) After a while you get the hang of it.

SOPHIA. (*Reappears on the balcony.*) Here I am.

LEON. My kiss, sweet Sophia. (*They kiss.*)

SOPHIA. As we kissed I felt a strange flutter in my heart.

LEON. So did I.

SOPHIA. You felt a flutter in my heart as well? How alike we are. And yet your hair is so much shorter . . . I must go. I'm about to fall asleep and I want to get to bed in time. (*She leaves.*)

LEON. (*To the audience.*) I know the dangers of loving such a simple soul. It would mean a lifetime of sweet, blissful passion—and very short conversations at breakfast. (*There is a clap of thunder.*) I'd best find some comfortable lodgings. (*He descends. There is another clap of thunder.*)

SCENE 4

SNETSKY. (*Running onstage.*) Was that you?

LEON. I beg your pardon?

SNETSKY. Were you responsible for making that dreadful noise?

LEON. Of course not. That was thunder and lightning. It's caused by extreme atmospheric pressures in the skies above us.

SNETSKY. Well, whoever did it is going to get Count Yousekevitch very angry at us.

LEON. Count Yousekevitch?

SNETSKY. He's the one who lives in the big house on

top of the hill. Every time he hears someone make that noise, he throws water down on us.

LEON. No, no, Snetsky, that's rain. Rain!

(YENCHNA *appears. She carries flowers.*)

YENCHNA. Umbrellas! Umbrellas for sale! Get your umbrellas before he throws the water.

LEON. Yenchna, no one throws water. It's rain from the skies caused by a buildup of condensed moisture.

YENCHNA. You can tell that to these fools, but I used to be a substitute teacher . . . Umbrellas!

LEON. Excuse me, but would either one of you know of a place to stay?

(SLOVITCH *appears with* MISHKIN.)

SLOVITCH. What's going on? What's all the racket?

MISHKIN. I knew it. I knew he would throw water down on us today. Every time I wash my cow, you know he's going to throw water.

LEON. Mishkin, would you happen to know—(*Prelude chimes, which precede the actual ringing of the steeple bell.*)

SLOVITCH. Oh-oh. It's time for Count Yousekevitch to propose again.

MISHKIN. This could be the day. One yes from her and we could all be smart again.

LEON. You mean you want Sophia to marry him?

SNETSKY. Not unless she wanted to. But it would be nice to remember my first name.

LEON. But that's a terrible sacrifice to ask of Sophia. Surely you wouldn't ask that of her.

YENCHNA. What kind of sacrifice? To live in a big

house up on the hill . . . To have little macaroons whenever you want . . . To have a maid brush your teeth in the morning . . .

LEON. But does she love him?

SNETSKY. I beg your pardon?

LEON. Does she love him?

SLOVITCH. We don't have any.

LEON. You don't have any what?

SLOVITCH. Love! It's part of the curse.

LEON. I don't understand.

MISHKIN. I hear him coming. You'd better leave, schoolmaster. He doesn't like people around. (SLOVITCH, MISHKIN *and* SNETSKY *leave.*)

LEON. Yenchna! Is it true there is no love in Kulyenchikov?

YENCHNA. I wouldn't know. My late husband's been gone almost fourteen years.

LEON. I'm sorry.

YENCHNA. That's a long time to be late. I wish he was dead. (*She leaves.*)

LEON. I'm breaking out in a cold sweat. The possibility of losing Sophia terrifies me . . . I'm going to eavesdrop. (*He hides begind a tree.*)

GREGOR. (*Offstage.*) Sophia! (*Strumming a balalaika,* GREGOR YOUSEKEVITCH *appears.*) Sweet Sophia! Time to wake up, my pretty one . . . time to get proposed to. She's asleep! Perhaps a pebble will awaken her. (*He picks up a pebble and tosses it up to the balcony. We hear a crash of glass.* DR. ZUBRITSKY *appears in a nightshirt, holding a candle.*)

DOCTOR. Who did that?

GREGOR. It is I, Count Yousekevitch.

DOCTOR. Good evening, sir. (*He bows and knocks his head on the railing.*)

GREGOR. I've come to propose.

DOCTOR. Well, you're a little late. I'm married almost twenty-six years.

LENYA. (*Offstage.*) Nikolai! Nikolai!

DOCTOR. I'm out here, Lenya. What did you want?

(LENYA *appears. She holds a lit candle.*)

LENYA. Some bandages. My feet are bleeding . . . who are you talking to?

GREGOR. It is I, Madame Zubritsky. Count Yousekevitch. I've come to propose to Sophia.

LENYA. She's busy throwing water on the drapes. They're on fire.

DOCTOR. The drapes are on fire?

LENYA. I had to light something . . . I couldn't find my candle.

(SOPHIA *comes out.*)

SOPHIA. Papa, what's going on?

DOCTOR. Did we wake you, darling?

SOPHIA. No. I was reading by the light of the drapes.

GREGOR. I must be crazy marrying into this family.

DOCTOR. Count Yousekevitch wants to propose to you, darling. Go ahead, Count Yousekevitch.

GREGOR. Can't we be alone?

DOCTOR. No. No. I think Sophia should hear this, too.

GREGOR. Very well. Will you marry me, Sophia?

LENYA. Oh, my God, this is so romantic. I just wish my feet weren't bleeding.

SOPHIA. I'm sorry, Coung Yousekevitch, but marriage is a very great step to take and I don't wish to make it

while I do not have the intelligence to know what I am stepping into. Good night, sir. Good night, Mama, good night, Papa.

LENYA. Good night, son. When you're through reading, darling, put out the drapes.

GREGOR. I do not give up easily. I'll be back in the morning.

DOCTOR. Good night, your grace.

LENYA. Good night, Grace. (*They bow low.*)

DOCTOR. Watch what you're doing, you're burning my mustache.

GREGOR. (*Aside.*) Having them for in-laws in a curse worse than the curse.

LEON. Pray God it never happens.

GREGOR. Who's that? Who's there? Come out, I say!

LEON. Forgive me, sir. I was just passing by. May I introduce myself. I am—

GREGOR. I know who you are. You're the new schoolmaster who has come here in a pathetic attempt to break the curse of Kulyenchikov.

LEON. As I have just witnessed your pathetic attempt to win Sophia.

GREGOR. Everyone's a critic. The curse can only be broken if you can educate her, which you can't . . . or if she marries me.

LEON. Which apparently she won't. Why don't you pursue some other girl?

GREGOR. Because Sophia is beautiful. Did you ever see the other girls in the village? They look like me!

LEON. For a man so powerful, you seem to have an inordinate lack of self-esteem. I am sorry for you. Good day, sir.

GREGOR. Not *good* day. *One* day.

LEON. I beg your pardon?

GREGOR. Were you not aware that if at the end of one brief day you have not succeeded to raise her intellect you must be gone from our village? To remain for even one second past the allotted time means you will fall victim to the curse yourself. (*To the audience.*) I love that part.

LEON. I cannot believe such nonsense. Threaten me all you want, sir, but I will never leave. To be quite honest, I love Sophia Zubritsky.

GREGOR. Love??? There is no love in Kulyenchikov. It's all part of the curse.

LEON. You mean Sophia cannot love me?

GREGOR. You have one day to find that out, sir. One single day. Twenty-five measly hours.

LEON. Twenty-four.

GREGOR. What?

LEON. There are twenty-four hours in a day.

GREGOR. I believe you are thinking of February, sir. Good night. (*He leaves.*)

LEON. But is it true? If I cannot teach Sophia to think in twenty-four hours, she will never be able to love me?

(SOPHIA *appears on the balcony.*)

SOPHIA. Leon!

LEON. Sophia! Are you all right?

SOPHIA. I must talk to you. Someplace where we'll not be seen.

LEON. Wherever you say.

SOPHIA. Can you meet me here?

LEON. Yes. When?

SOPHIA. Now!

LEON. Now? Yes. Of course. That's where I am.

SOPHIA. Come up here. Hurry, Leon, hurry. It's of

the utmost importance. I overheard your conversation with the Count. (*He climbs up to the balcony.*) Leon, I cannot be taught. You must leave Kulyenchikov at once.

LEON. Never without you.

SOPHIA. Then take me with you. Tonight.

LEON. But the curse—

SOPHIA. It cannot be broken. But we can live in the swamp and eat brown roots and I will become old and ugly and more stupid and more ignorant and never love you but at least we'll be together.

LEON. Well, that wasn't exactly what I had in mind.

SOPHIA. Then we are lost.

LEON. No, no, Sophia. I will teach you. I will break this curse. Tomorrow, I promise you.

SOPHIA. Oh, Leon, I wish I could love you.

LEON. You will, Sophia. Tomorrow. I promise.

SOPHIA. Until tomorrow. (*She goes inside. He climbs down.*)

LEON. I wish she'd sleep in the kitchen.

(SOPHIA *reappears.*)

SOPHIA. Leon! Come back! Hurry, hurry.

(*He climbs back up.*)

LEON. What is it?

SOPHIA. I couldn't sleep. I'm so frightened.

LEON. Don't be frightened, Sophia.

SOPHIA. If I could know the feeling of loving you for just one day, I would endure a hundred thousand years of curses . . . Good night, Leon. God bless you and keep you. (*She leaves.*)

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