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SF PERUSALS

THREE DAYS IN THE COUNTRY

A Version of Turgenev's
A Month in the Country

by Patrick Marber

SAMUEL FRENCH

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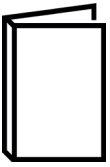

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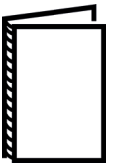

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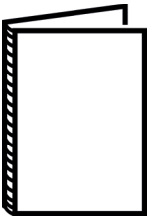

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Patrick Marber was born in 1964. He lives in London with his wife and their three sons.

Ivan Turgenev was born in Orel in central Russia in 1818. He studied at the universities in Moscow, St Petersburg and Berlin and worked briefly for the civil service before turning to writing. *A Month in the Country* was published in 1855, but not staged until 1872. As well as other plays and short stories, he wrote several novels, including *Fathers and Sons*, which examined the social, political and philosophical issues of the time. Living mainly in Baden-Baden and Paris, he was acquainted with a number of influential writers and met Dickens and Trollope among others on his travels to England. Turgenev was widely perceived to be the first major Russian writer to achieve great success in Europe. He died in Paris in 1883.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My grateful thanks to Sonia Friedman, who commissioned this play. It was her idea that I should do a version of *A Month in the Country*, and her enthusiasm and encouragement have been invaluable.

I worked from a literal translation by Patrick Miles who gave me numerous notes on the original, alerted me to details I'd missed and was a fantastic source of wisdom and humour throughout the writing and rehearsing of the play.

Ian Rickson read every draft, advised, counselled and radically improved the thing throughout its period of composition. It was the first play I'd written for seven years and I couldn't have done it without him.

The original company of actors at the National Theatre were a pleasure to work with. Their great spirit and brilliance here acknowledged.

Finally, Turgenev. He said, modestly, that his play was way too long and undeserving of performance. *A Month in the Country* is rarely performed in its entirety (it would take well over four hours) and has been reconceived and "versioned" throughout its long life. I adored being in Turgenev's world and responding to it with this shorter – at times faithful, at other times unfaithful – account of my time there.

PM, June 2015

THREE DAYS IN THE COUNTRY

First presented in the Lyttelton auditorium of the National Theatre, London, on 21 July 2015. The cast was as follows:

ARKADY	John Light
NATALYA	Amanda Drew
KOLYA	Tom Burgering / Joshua Gringras / Joel Thomas
VERA	Lily Sacofsky
ANNA	Lynn Farleigh
LIZAVETA	Debra Gillett
RAKITIN	John Simm
SCHAAF	Gawn Grainger
BELYAEV	Royce Pierreson
SHPIGELSKY	Mark Gatiss
BOLSHINTSOV	Nigel Betts
MATVEY	Nicholas Bishop
KATYA	Cherrelle Skeete
ENSEMBLE	Paige Carter, Mark Extance, Matthew Lloyd Davies, Mateo Oxley, Cassie Raine, Lisa Tramontin

Director	Patrick Marber
Designer	Mark Thompson
Lighting	Neil Austin
Music and Sound	Adam Cork
Movement	Polly Bennett
Music Director	Sam Cable

Stage Manager	David Marsland
Deputy Stage Manager	Fiona Bardsley
Assistant Stage Manager	Polly Rowe
Staff Director	Daniel Raggett

This play is dedicated to Ian Rickson

CHARACTERS

ARKADY – a rich landowner, forties
NATALYA – his wife
KOLYA – their son, ten
VERA – their ward, seventeen
ANNA – Arkady's mother, sixties
LIZAVETA – Anna's companion, around fifty
RAKITIN – a friend of the family, forties
SCHAAF – a German tutor
BELYAEV – Kolya's new tutor, twenties
SHPIGELSKY – a doctor
BOLSHINTSOV – a rich neighbour
MATVEY – a servant
KATYA – a maidservant

Arkady's country estate, Russia. Inside and out.

Three days in the mid-nineteenth century.

Summer.

ONE

The drawing room. Late afternoon.

SCHAAF, **ANNA** *and* **LIZAVETA** *at a baize table playing cards.*

NATALYA *lies on a sofa, reading a novel.* **RAKITIN** *watches her.*

RAKITIN You haven't turned a page for ten minutes.

NATALYA I'm a slow reader.

RAKITIN No you're not.

NATALYA *turns a page, continues to read.* **RAKITIN** *watches.*

SCHAAF Hearts!

ANNA Again?

SCHAAF Yes. I have the hearts.

ANNA You're a lucky old devil.

LIZAVETA Our pain is his pleasure.

SCHAAF Play, good ladies.

ANNA Be warned, Professor, you'll scare us off.

SCHAAF *lays a card down, takes the trick.*

LIZAVETA He's a demon!

SCHAAF It is only money.

LIZAVETA *writes down the score in a small notebook.*
SCHAAF *shuffles the cards and they continue to play.*

NATALYA Must you stand there?

RAKITIN I'm your guest, you invited me here! You summoned me, three days ago.

Back at the card table:

SCHAAF Hearts!

ANNA Not again?

LIZAVETA His luck is both disturbing and suspicious.

ANNA *(to* **NATALYA***)* Natasha, sevens and eights are pouring out of him!

LIZAVETA He bleeds hearts!

NATALYA You lose every day – stop playing with him!

SCHAAF No! They like to suffer, it is a peculiarity of the female.

Their game continues.

NATALYA *(to* **RAKITIN***)* Did you see my husband?

RAKITIN He's down at the weir. He was explaining a seemingly complicated detail to the workmen. To clarify his point he waded in, right up to his waist.

NATALYA Well, he does like to slosh about.

RAKITIN The men were astonished.

ANNA Where's Kolya?

SCHAAF Where indeed? The boy is late for my tutorial.

LIZAVETA Late? That's odd; he *lives* for his German lessons.

NATALYA They went for a walk. He'll be back.

SCHAAF *(to* **LIZAVETA***)* You to play, good lady.

The game continues.

NATALYA Were you in Petersburg?

RAKITIN Yes. Some business.

NATALYA And some pleasure?

RAKITIN No one you know. Then I journeyed to the Krinitsyns and endured a memorably unpleasant fortnight.

NATALYA Tell me all.

RAKITIN The Krinitsyns are young, beautiful, married a year... and they want to kill each other. By next spring their mutual loathing will have blossomed. By winter their marriage will have frozen. And then they'll have some children.

NATALYA How did you pass the time?

RAKITIN We drank.

NATALYA You explored the limits of country life.

RAKITIN And then I received your letter. Why did you send for me?

NATALYA I don't remember.

RAKITIN You wrote, "I'm in despair, please come at once."

NATALYA You should've ignored me.

RAKITIN You know I can't.

NATALYA Ignore me!

At the card table:

LIZAVETA Ha! He's lost a trick!

ANNA He's defeated!

LIZAVETA *and* **ANNA** *chuckle.* **KOLYA** *comes in with a bow and arrow. He sees* **NATALYA** *with* **RAKITIN** *and heads towards* **ANNA** *instead.*

KOLYA Grandma.

He presents the bow and arrow.

ANNA What a fine weapon. Who made it?

BELYAEV *and* **VERA** *appear in the doorway. They stand there, golden.*

KOLYA *(points to* **BELYAEV***)* He did. He took his knife and some hazel and just did it. The arrow head is very sharp, it's flint.

ANNA *touches the point, pretends to be hurt.*

ANNA Oww! It's *lethal.* You be careful.

NATALYA May I see?

KOLYA *hands her the bow and arrow. She inspects it.* **KOLYA** *watches, hoping she'll approve.*

(to **BELYAEV***)* It's beautifully made.

Everyone watches as **NATALYA** *pulls back the bow and releases. It thrums. She fires at* **RAKITIN***; he mimes a soft blow to the heart.*

And now, your German lesson.

SCHAAF *rises from the card table.*

KOLYA But we're going to feed the horses. *Please!*

NATALYA Vera, return this boy in ten minutes. Go!

__KOLYA__ is out of the door. __VERA__ and __BELYAEV__ follow him. __SCHAAF__ sits.

RAKITIN *(to __LIZAVETA__)* Who was that?

LIZAVETA The new tutor. *Belyaev*. He appeared a few weeks ago to "supplement" Professor Schaaf. He's one of his former students from the university – his protégé.

SCHAAF No, he is not! Ladies, do we play?

They resume their game. __SHPIGELSKY__ enters, carrying a leather bag.

MATVEY Doctor Shpigelsky has arrived.

SHPIGELSKY They can see that! And you don't announce a doctor. *(to __MATVEY__)* As well you know. *(to __ANNA__)* Dear lady, please tell me you're annihilating the German, tell me you've inserted a stake through his heart.

ANNA He is staggering...

LIZAVETA He totters...

SCHAAF But he is not yet fallen.

SHPIGELSKY *(to __LIZAVETA__)* Madam, I have some new pills for you. Oh, I like your – what would you call it?

LIZAVETA ...Clothing?

SHPIGELSKY And the way it has relationship with your hair.

He bows to __LIZAVETA__ then goes over to __NATALYA__.

Madam. Are you well?

NATALYA I had a fever but it passed.

SHPIGELSKY You should've sent for me!

NATALYA There was some medicine from last time.

SHPIGELSKY They don't last for ever. Even the finest potions can separate. You give them a shake but the magic has evaporated. *(to* **RAKITIN***)* Why are you sniggering? *(to* **NATALYA***)* Please...

She offers her arm and he takes her pulse.

Hmm. *Nerves*. You gush. You're a spring. You don't walk enough. You need to run about.

NATALYA Where?

SHPIGELSKY Scamper in the fields. Fill your delicate lungs with air. *Perspire*.

RAKITIN You men of science are mightily impressive.

SHPIGELSKY *(to* **NATALYA***)* May we speak in private?

RAKITIN *sighs, wanders off.* **SHPIGELSKY** *observes him a moment.*

Each time I see him he's aged a decade.

NATALYA To the matter.

SHPIGELSKY Your ward. The exquisite Vera. Subject: her future. A good and noble friend has asked me to discover your intentions.

NATALYA He seeks her hand in marriage?

SHPIGELSKY You have it.

NATALYA Who is he?

SHPIGELSKY My friend is one of your neighbours.

He vaguely gestures in a northerly direction.

NATALYA Bolshintsov?

SHPIGELSKY I couldn't say.

NATALYA Then how may I consider the proposal?

Pause.

SHPIGELSKY It's Bolshintsov.

NATALYA Then it's "no". I'm insulted you think him worthy of Vera.

SHPIGELSKY I concede he lacks *your* natural grace but he's respectable, willing and very rich. I sense you're unmoved.

NATALYA I am stone.

SHPIGELSKY Well, she'll have to marry someone.

NATALYA Yes, but not anyone! Your friend is deadly. Do thank him for his unwelcome interest.

VERA *enters with* **KOLYA.** *He approaches* **RAKITIN,** *confidentially.*

KOLYA Are you busy?

RAKITIN No.

KOLYA Please could you find me some glue?

RAKITIN Yes.

He doesn't move.

KOLYA Now?

NATALYA Kolya!

SCHAAF *has risen from the card table.*

ANNA Professor, would you care to settle up?

SCHAAF *bows and hands over a few coins to* **ANNA** *and* **LIZAVETA.**

SCHAAF Tomorrow it will return to its owner.

He approaches **KOLYA.**

Erlauben Sie, Master Kolya.

KOLYA Guten Tag, Herr Professor.

SCHAAF Kommen Sie, mein Herr.

He tries to lead **KOLYA** *off,* **KOLYA** *slightly resists.*

NATALYA *(to* **KOLYA***)* You've been playing all day, go and learn something!

KOLYA What, Mother? What must I learn?

NATALYA Now: German. Later: manners.

KOLYA *(to* **RAKITIN***)* Don't forget the glue.

SCHAAF *leads* **KOLYA** *off.* **RAKITIN** *exits.*

VERA *(to* **SHPIGELSKY***)* Good day, good Doctor.

NATALYA You're flushed.

VERA I'm exhausted!

VERA *flops on to a sofa.* **NATALYA** *and* **SHPIGELSKY** *observe her.*

NATALYA A *child.*

SHPIGELSKY There's really no need.

NATALYA It was a sordid proposal.

SHPIGELSKY We all have cause for shame but in this respect I don't. I must go and see your coachman.

NATALYA What's wrong with him?

SHPIGELSKY Boils.

He starts to exit. **RAKITIN** *is entering with a pot of glue.*

She's more volatile than usual. I assume you know why?

RAKITIN You're the doctor.

SHPIGELSKY Ah, but you're the expert.

SHPIGELSKY *exits.* **ANNA** *and* **LIZAVETA** *at the card table.* **VERA** *on the sofa.* **NATALYA** *collects her book, sits, tries to read.* **RAKITIN** *stands in the middle of the room. He watches* **VERA**. *Then* **ANNA** *and* **LIZAVETA**. *Then* **NATALYA**. *They are still, languorous.*

RAKITIN Portrait. A country scene: "Four Ladies and Man with Pot of Glue."

LIZAVETA Perhaps a stroll before dinner?

ANNA No, I need a rest.

LIZAVETA I'm glad to see Kolya so changed. A month ago he was permanently enraged. Nothing could cheer him. Well, *I* couldn't. But I'm appalling with children, I don't have the patience.

ANNA They need you to devote your time. It requires sacrifice. All other gestures of love are irrelevant.

ANNA *watches* **NATALYA**, *who stares at her book.*

My husband had no time. Men rush about mistaking activity for *purpose*. And then they die, mystified: "I've done nothing, I wasted my life." You've been wise to avoid them.

LIZAVETA I think they avoided me.

ANNA It's a blessing.

VERA *(to* **NATALYA***)* What are you reading?

NATALYA At the ball last week there was no one to talk to. I drifted around looking pitiful. A kindly old countess with one rheumy eye decided to adopt me. At considerable length she told me of the slow, slow death of her beloved husband. I felt I had died with him. Her consolation has been this novel: "You haven't read it? Oh, but you must. It's delightful." Now I can say that I have and it's not.

She snaps the book shut. **VERA** *chuckles.*

Where's the tutor?

VERA He went to wash himself.

NATALYA Why?

VERA We were crossing the field, to the stables. He crept up on a cow and jumped on its back. It started running and bucking. Belyaev was thrown in the air. He fell in a most inconvenient place. Kolya said, "At least it was a soft landing."

She chortles. **NATALYA** *stands, paces a little.*

NATALYA The animal was frightened, he shouldn't have upset it.

VERA I know. But it was funny.

NATALYA You might want to change for dinner.

VERA *gets up.* **NATALYA** *kisses her forehead.*

You look very pretty today.

VERA *goes to leave.* **RAKITIN** *passes her the glue. They share a little joke and* **VERA** *exits.*

ANNA Natasha, what did the doctor want?

NATALYA Nothing at all.

ANNA He's a pest. *(stares a moment)* You're too pale.

ANNA *and* **LIZAVETA** *exit.*

NATALYA *dismisses* **MATVEY** *and* **KATYA.**

RAKITIN *and* **NATALYA** *are alone.*

NATALYA I'm too pale.

RAKITIN Why did you send for me?

NATALYA Too pale for what?

RAKITIN Why?

She holds out her hand, he presses it. Tenderly.

NATALYA You're too kind. Too constant. You shame me. Please don't look at me like that.

RAKITIN I can't help my face. I'll do what I can with my countenance. But my feelings won't change.

NATALYA You're condemned.

RAKITIN I'm grateful to be certain of something in this world. You're an angel.

NATALYA I'm really not.

RAKITIN And yet you are.

I see myself on that street in Moscow. With your husband. Two young men. Twenty years ago. "Look." He nudged me. "Look." I looked: *you*. Walking your little dog. Your proud, tender praise as it cocked its leg. As if he'd performed a miracle. Arkady said, "I don't care who she is or where she's

from, I'm going to marry that woman." You were fifteen seconds away from us. I failed to speak, to contest his position. Fifteen seconds. Twenty years. And here we are.

NATALYA You misremember.

RAKITIN No I don't.

NATALYA There was no leg-cocking. She was a bitch.

ARKADY *enters, clothes still wet from the weir. He fixes himself a drink.*

ARKADY I have great respect for the Russian peasant. He is resourceful and he is shrewd. But you explain a thing to him – he nods – you communicate in precise detail that which is required – he nods – you reiterate the supreme importance of the instruction and he nods *decisively* – he's got it. And then he simply doesn't do it. Hasn't started. It's as if the conversation never occurred. "But it was yesterday, I told you specifically, you nodded." "Did I?" "*Yes!*" "Very sorry, will you explain it again, *Master*?" The sarcasm he engenders in that one word. They mock me every day – but with such invention I can't help admiring it.

RAKITIN Why don't you let the river flow as it demands?

ARKADY Because it floods the damn field. Has done for centuries. I promised my father I'd deal with it.

MATVEY *enters, hands* **ARKADY** *some linen to clean himself with.*

It's not difficult to build a weir. Give me Germans, we'd do it in a week. The German *likes* to work; he listens, learns, wants to get it right. The Russian prides himself on getting it wrong.

Waves away **MATVEY**, *who exits.*

Don't laugh, I'm in mortal pain!

RAKITIN That's why I'm laughing.

ARKADY It's all your fault.

RAKITIN Oh, naturally.

ARKADY The day I inherited this you should've counselled me to stay in the city.

RAKITIN I did!

ARKADY But you didn't assert it! You should've taken me by the throat and said, "In the name of all that is holy don't go and live in the country."

RAKITIN You love it here.

ARKADY Not today.

BELYAEV *enters.*

You've been over to the barn?

BELYAEV Yes, sir.

ARKADY Are they still struggling with the first frame?

BELYAEV No, sir, they've started on the third.

ARKADY And the log-sets, did you tell them how I want it done?

BELYAEV ...Yes, sir.

ARKADY *(sighs)* What did they say?

BELYAEV They said that four logs lashed horizontally is their practice and tradition. They suggested that no other method will work.

ARKADY *My* method.

BELYAEV They communicated – firmly – that all other methods are destined for disaster.

ARKADY *(to* **RAKITIN***)* Have I shown you my new winnowing machine?

RAKITIN I think I'd remember if you had.

ARKADY Well you must come now. It produces a hurricane – blows your head off.

RAKITIN Oh, good.

RAKITIN *and* **ARKADY** *make to exit.* **ARKADY** *turns back.*

ARKADY Do you want to come?

NATALYA I've seen it.

ARKADY Have you?

NATALYA Yes.

ARKADY *and* **RAKITIN** *exit.* **BELYAEV** *faces* **NATALYA**, *about to exit.*

Why did you jump on a cow?

BELYAEV To amuse Kolya.

NATALYA It's wrong. You do know that? It is simply wrong to jump on a cow.

BELYAEV My apologies.

Pause.

NATALYA Your room and so on. All to your satisfaction?

BELYAEV I've never lived anywhere so beautiful.

NATALYA Yes, I thought that once. And my son?

BELYAEV I like him very much.

NATALYA Is he learning anything?

BELYAEV *hesitates.*

You may speak freely.

BELYAEV He's not confident. But he's responding well to encouragement. And he has a great spirit. I can see potential.

NATALYA Before you came…he was a little withdrawn. My husband has the estate to oversee…and…we're neither of us as…present as we might be. As a child needs.

I've been unwell. I was.

I want Kolya to remember his childhood as…

I've been distracted. I fear it's affected him. How could it not?

We've neglected him. You've transformed him.

Please continue to be sensitive to his needs.

BELYAEV I will.

NATALYA Then again, those people who say they had a golden childhood. What on earth were they doing?

She stares at **BELYAEV**, *then looks away.*

Whenever my father called us to his study…my brother and I would cross ourselves in terror. Once my brother grew up he broke with him. Never spoke to him again. But I stayed… and I longed for his return.

She is momentarily stricken, vulnerable. **BELYAEV** *makes a slight move towards her, she stops him with a gesture.*

My father went blind. He became fond and kind. But I was still scared of him. When he held me, even as he murmured his love, I was taut with fear. I was never free in his presence.

He's dead.

People fear me as I feared him.

Are you afraid of me?

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