

charts. . . . [*Goes to the door and stops.*] No, uncertainty is better. . . . At least there is hope . . .

ELENA ANDREYEVNA: What did you say?

SONYA: Nothing. [*Goes out.*]

ELENA ANDREYEVNA [*alone*]: There is nothing worse than knowing someone's secret and not being able to help. [*Musing*] He is not in love with her—that's clear, but why shouldn't he marry her? She isn't beautiful, but for a country doctor, and at his age, she would make an excellent wife. She's clever, and so kind, so pure. . . . No, that's wrong, wrong. . . . [*Pause*] I understand that poor girl. In the midst of desperate boredom, with some sort of gray shadows floating around her instead of people, and hearing only the banalities of those who can do nothing but eat, drink, and sleep—he sometimes appears, unlike the rest, handsome, interesting, fascinating, like a bright moon rising in the darkness. . . . To yield to the charm of such a man, to forget oneself . . . It seems that I, too, am somewhat carried away. Yes, I am bored when he's not here, and I smile just thinking of him. . . . Uncle Vanya says I have mermaid's blood in my veins. "Let yourself go for once in your life." . . . Well? Perhaps that's what I ought to do. . . . To fly, free as a bird, away from all of you, away from your sleepy faces and your talk, to forget you even exist in the world. . . . But I'm a coward, timid. . . . My conscience would torment me. . . . He comes here every day, I can guess why, and even now I feel guilty. I am ready to fall on my knees before Sonya, and ask her to forgive me . . . to weep. . . .

[*Enter ASTROV with a chart.*]

ASTROV: Good day! [*Shakes hands.*] You wanted to see my handiwork?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA: Yesterday you promised to show me your work. . . . Are you free?

ASTROV: Oh, of course. [*Spreads a map on a card table and fixes it with thumbtacks.*] Where were you born?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA [*helping him*]: In Petersburg.

ASTROV: And where did you study?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA: At the Conservatory.

ASTROV: I don't suppose this will interest you.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA: Why not? It's true, I am not familiar with country life, but I've read a great deal.

ASTROV: I have a table of my own in this house . . . in Ivan Petrovich's room. When I am completely exhausted—to the point of stupefaction—I drop everything and run in here to amuse myself with this thing for an hour or two. Ivan Petrovich and Sofya Aleksandrovna work at their accounts, clicking the abacus, I sit near them at my own table and dabble away—and I feel snug, at peace . . . and the cricket chirps. But I don't permit myself this pleasure very often, once a month. . . . [*Pointing to the map*] Now, look here. This is a map of our district as it was fifty years ago. The dark and light green represent forests; half of the entire area was covered with woodland. The parts that are cross-hatched with red were inhabited by wild goats and elk. I designate both the flora and the fauna here. On this lake there were swans, geese, ducks, and, as the old people say, a powerful lot of birds of all sorts, no end of them; they flew in clouds. Besides villages and hamlets, you can see, scattered here and there, various settlements, small farms, hermitages of the Old Believers, water mills. . . . There were a lot of horned cattle and horses. That's shown in blue. For example, in this district the blue is thick; there were herds of horses here, three to every homestead. [*Pause*] Now let us look lower down. This is how it was twenty-five years ago. Already only one third of the area is woodland. There are no longer any goats, but there are elk. Both the green and the blue are paler. And so forth and so on. Now let's go to the third section: a map of the district as it is today. The green appears here and there, but in patches, not solid; the elk are now extinct, the swans, the grouse. . . . There's not a trace of the settlements, farms, hermitages, water mills. On the whole it is a picture of gradual and unmistakable degeneration, which in another ten or fifteen years will be complete.

You will say that there are cultural influences at work, that the old life must naturally give place to the new. Yes, I understand, and if in place of these devastated forests there were highways, railroads, if there were factories, mills, schools, and the people had become healthier, richer, more intelligent—but, you see, there is nothing of the sort! There are still the same swamps and mosquitoes in the district, the same dearth of roads, the same dire poverty, typhus, diphtheria, fires. . . . We have here a case of degeneration resulting from a struggle for existence that is beyond man's strength; a degeneration due to stagnation, ignorance, complete lack of understanding, as when a man who is freezing, hungry, sick, to save what is left of life for his children, instinctively, unconsciously, grabs at anything that might satisfy his hunger or warm him, and in doing so destroys everything without a thought for tomorrow. . . . And nearly everything has been destroyed; and so far nothing has been created to take its place. [*Coldly*] But I can see by your face that this doesn't interest you.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA: But I understand so little of all this . . .

ASTROV: There's nothing to understand, it's simply uninteresting.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA: To be quite frank, my thoughts were elsewhere. Forgive me. I want to put you through a little interrogation, and I am embarrassed, I don't know how to begin.

ASTROV: Interrogation?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA: Yes, an interrogation, but . . . a rather innocuous one. Let's sit down. [*They sit down.*] It concerns a certain young person. We'll speak as honest people, as friends, without beating about the bush. We'll have a little talk and then forget about it. Yes?

ASTROV: Yes.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA: It concerns my stepdaughter, Sonya. Do you like her?

ASTROV: Yes, I respect her.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA: Do you like her as a woman?

ASTROV [*after a pause*]: No.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA: One or two more words—and that's the end of it. Have you noticed nothing?

ASTROV: Nothing.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA [*taking his hand*]: You don't love her, I see it in your eyes. . . . She is suffering. . . . Understand that and . . . stop coming here.

ASTROV [*gets up*]: My day is over. . . . Besides, I have no time. . . . [*Shrugs his shoulders.*] When have I got the time? [*Embarrassed*]

ELENA ANDREYEVNA: Ough! What an unpleasant conversation! I am so upset, I feel as though I had been carrying a great weight. Well, thank God, we have finished. Let's forget it, just as if we hadn't talked at all, and—go away now. You're an intelligent man, you understand. . . . [*Pause*] I'm blushing all over. . . .

ASTROV: If you had told me this a month or two ago, I might perhaps have considered it, but now. . . . [*Shrugs his shoulders.*] And if she is suffering, then, of course . . . There is only one thing I don't understand: why did you find this interrogation necessary? [*Looks into her eyes and shakes a finger at her.*] You're a sly one!

ELENA ANDREYEVNA: What does that mean?

ASTROV [*laughing*]: Sly one! Let us assume that Sonya is suffering, I am quite prepared to think it possible, but why this interrogation? [*Preventing her from speaking, with animation*] Please, don't try to look surprised, you know perfectly well why I come here every day. . . . Why, and on whose account, you know very well, indeed. . . . You charming bird of prey, don't look at me like that, I'm no gosling.

ELENA ANDREYEVNA [*bewildered*]: Bird of prey? I don't understand. . . .

ASTROV: A beautiful, fluffy little weasel. . . . You must have victims. Here I've been doing nothing for a whole month, I've dropped everything, and avidly seek you out—and that pleases you enormously . . . enormously! . . . Well then? I am conquered, but you knew that even without an interrogation! [*Folds his arms and bows his head.*] I submit. Here I am, devour me!

ELENA ANDREYEVNA: You are out of your mind!

ASTROV [*laughs sardonically*]: You're timid. . . .

ELENA ANDREYEVNA: Oh, I am not so low—I am not so bad as you think! I swear it! [*About to go*]

ASTROV [*barring her way*]: I'll leave here today, I won't come again, but . . . [*Takes her hand and looks around.*] Where shall we meet? Tell me quickly: where? Someone may come in, tell me quickly. . . . [*Passionately*] What a wonderful, glorious . . . One kiss. . . . Just let me kiss your fragrant hair——

ELENA ANDREYEVNA: I swear to you——

ASTROV [*preventing her from speaking*]: Why swear? You don't have to swear. There's no need for words. . . . Oh, how beautiful you are! What hands! [*Kisses her hands.*]

ELENA ANDREYEVNA: That's enough now . . . go away. . . . [*Withdraws her hands.*] You are forgetting yourself.

ASTROV: Tell me, tell me! Where shall we meet tomorrow? [*Puts his arms around her waist.*] You see, it's inevitable, we've got to see each other.

[*He kisses her; at that moment VOINITSKY comes in with a bouquet of roses and stops in the doorway.*]

ELENA ANDREYEVNA [*not seeing VOINITSKY*]: Have pity

on me . . . leave me alone. . . . [*Lays her head on ASTROV's chest.*] No! [*Tries to go.*]

ASTROV [*holding her by the waist*]: Come to the plantation tomorrow . . . about two o'clock. . . . Yes? Yes? You will come?

ELENA ANDREYEVNA [*seeing VOINITSKY*]: Let me go! [*In great confusion goes to the window.*] This is awful!

VOINITSKY [*puts the bouquet on a chair; agitatedly wipes his face and neck with a handkerchief*]: Never mind . . . No . . . Never mind . . .

ASTROV [*with bravado*]: The weather today, my dear Ivan Petrovich, is not so bad. It was overcast in the morning, as if it were going to rain, but now the sun is shining. As a matter of fact, it's turned out to be a beautiful autumn . . . and the winter crops are quite promising. [*Rolls up the map.*] The only thing is . . . the days are getting shorter. . . . [*Goes out.*]

ELENA ANDREYEVNA [*quickly going up to VOINITSKY*]: You must try, do your utmost, to see that my husband and I leave here today! Do you hear? Today!

VOINITSKY [*mopping his face*]: What? Oh, yes . . . very well. . . . I saw everything, Hélène, everything . . .

ELENA ANDREYEVNA [*nervously*]: Do you hear me? I must leave here this very day!

[*Enter SEREBRYAKOV, SONYA, TELYEGIN, and MARINA.*]

TELYEGIN: I don't feel so well myself, Your Excellency. It's two days now that I've been ailing. There's something the matter with my head. . . .

SEREBRYAKOV: But where are the others? I don't like this house. It's a perfect labyrinth. Twenty-six enormous rooms, people wander off in all directions and you never can find anyone. [*Rings.*] Ask Maria Vasilyevna and Elena Andreyevna to come here.