

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 9: THE PROPOSAL



THE PROPOSAL

~Summary~

-by Anton Chekov

Lomov at Chubukov's House

The play begins with the scene set in Chubukov's house. Lomov comes there and meets Chubukov. Chubukov is extremely happy to meet him. He asks him to sit down and also enquires why he was wearing an evening dress.

Lomov tells him that he has come there with a purpose. He tells him that he wants to request him about something. Suddenly he gets excited. Chubukov feels that he must have come to borrow money from him. Lomov starts to speak and talks about random things. Finally, he tells Chubukov that he has come there to ask for Natalya's hand. Chubukov gets excited at hearing this.

Chubukov's Reaction to the Proposal

Chubukov gets so happy that he starts to behave idiotically. He hugs Lomov and kisses him. Lomov tells Chubukov that he wants his consent for the marriage. Chubukov tells him that he was always hoping that he would come to ask for Natalya's hand.

Lomov Thinks About Natalya and his Life

Lomov starts trembling due to overexcitement. He says that if he would have looked for a perfect partner he would have never got one and would have remained unmarried. He feels that Natalya is a good housekeeper. He says that she is not bad-looking and is very well educated. He feels he is already too old to get married and now he should lead a quiet and regular life. He starts to jump like a mad person.

Talk Between Lomov and Natalya

Natalya comes and asks Lomov why he had not come there for a long time. She informs Lomov about the harvest. She asks him why he was dressed in an evening dress and enquired if he was going to a ball.

Before Lomov told Natalya his purpose for the visit, they were off the point. He starts telling her that he has known his family for a very long time. He also tells her how he inherited his land and



how he respects her father. He tells Natalya that his Oxen Meadows touch Natalya's Birchwood. On hearing this, Natalya says that the Oxen Meadows are theirs.

Argument Regarding Land Ownership

Natalya gets serious and tells him that Oxen Meadows do not belong to him. They actually belong to them. Lomov clarifies that he is talking about the Oxen Meadows that are between her Birchwoods and Burnt marsh. Natalya insists that they are theirs. Lomov refuses it. He tells her that his aunt's grandmother gave those meadows to her father's grandfather. The peasants used the land for forty years.

Argument Continues Between Natalya and Lomov

Natalya refuses and sticks on her point that those Meadows are theirs. Lomov on the other hand says that he has the documents to prove that it is his land. Natalya tells him that they had that land for nearly 300 years now.

Both of them continue fighting over the ownership of the land. Lomov offers to make a present of them to Natalya. She also says that she can make a present of them to him. They start shouting at each other.

Chubukov Takes Natalya's Side

Chubukov also enters the room. Natalya asks him to tell Lomov that the Oxen Meadows are owned by them. Chubukov also supports Natalya and regards the meadows as theirs. Lomov refuses. Chubukov says that by shouting Lomov cannot prove that the Oxen Meadows are owned by him.

Chubukov accuses Lomov by saying that he cannot talk to him so disrespectfully as he is twice of his age. Lomov says that he is calling his land as his and wants him to speak to him politely. He calls Chubukov a land grabber.

Lomov threatens that he would take Chubukov to the court. A lot of abuses are exchanged between them. Chubukov says that Lomov's grandfather was a drunkard. His younger aunt Nastasya ran away with an architect. Lomov felt that he was dying so he could not say anything at that time. Natalya also calls Lomov a rascal. Chubukov calls him a villain and a scarecrow. He also calls him a monster who has the courage to propose.

Chubukov Tells Natalya the Purpose of Lomov's Visit



As soon as Lomov leaves their home, Chubukov tells Natalya that he came to propose her. Hearing the word 'propose', Natalya enquires him. Chubukov tells her that Lomov had come there to propose Natalya for marriage. Hearing this, Natalya starts crying. She asks Chubukov to bring Lomov back at once.

Fight Over the Dogs

Lomov enters again. Natalya begs to be excused. They shift their talks to the dogs as Natalya tells him that the Oxen Meadows are his. They now talk about the dogs. Lomov tells Natalya that his best dog costed him 125 roubles. Natalya says that it is too much. She tells him that her father had given just 85 roubles for the Squeezer (her dog). She says that Squeezer is better than his dog. Lomov refuses and says that his lower jaw is shorter than his upper jaw. Natalya says that Squeezer is of the finest pedigree. They both continue fighting over the breed of their dogs. Chubukov enters and enquires about the matter. Chubukov also says that Lomov's dog is old and short.

Lomov Drops to the Ground

Lomov suddenly falls. Natalya asks her father what has happened to him. Chubukov thinks that he has difficulty in breathing. Natalya feels Lomov is dead. Chubukov then calls for water as well as a doctor.

Chubukov Asks Lomov to Marry Natalya

Chubukov seems helpless. He starts accusing himself. He asks for a knife and a pistol. He calls himself the most unhappy of men. Lomov starts reviving. Lomov says that he sees stars. He asks where he is. Chubukov says that he should hurry up and marry Natalya. He also tells him that she is willing to marry him. Natalya becomes extremely happy on hearing this. Chubukov also feels happy and offers some champagne for this occasion.

Conclusion of The Proposal

In the chapter – The Proposal displayed the quarrelsome nature of the characters of the play and how a wealthy family ruthlessly encouraged marriage with another wealthier family as a means to enhance their economic condition.



NCERT SOLUTION

Questions (Page No. 157)

(THINKING ABOUT THE TEXT)

Question 1: What does Chubukov at first suspect that Lomov has come for? Is he sincere when he later says “And I’ve always loved you, my angel, as if you were my own son”? Find reasons for your answer from the play.

Answer: Initially, Chubukov suspected that Lomov had come to borrow money from him as he was wearing an evening dress. Chubukov was not sincere at all when he told Lomov that he had always loved him and that he treated the young man like his own son. He had made up his mind that he would not give a single penny to Lomov, if he tried to borrow money from him. He also used all kinds of insults to ridicule Lomov during the argument by calling him ‘pettifogger’, ‘old rat’, ‘Jesuit’, etc. However, when Lomov asked for his daughter’s hand in marriage, his attitude changed immediately and he rushed out and called his daughter, Natalya Stepanovna.

Question 2: Chubukov says of Natalya: “... as if she won’t consent! She’s in love; egad, she’s like a lovesick cat...” Would you agree? Find reasons for your answer.

Answer: Chubukov believed that Lomov was an ideal marriage prospect for his daughter, Natalya. He was indeed waiting for this proposal. However, when Lomov expressed his doubt about Natalya’s consent to the marriage proposal, Chubukov immediately affirmed him saying that even his daughter was in love with him. In the play, we have noticed that Natalya constantly argued and disagreed with Lomov in every respect. When Lomov left after the argument, Chubukov told her that he had actually come with a marriage proposal for her. On hearing this, Natalya started weeping and asked her father to bring back Lomov at once. The statements that show she was actually in love with him are, “Ah! she said, Bring him back! Back Ah! Bring him here. Quick, quick! Fetch him!”

Question 3:

- i. Find all the words and expressions in the play that the characters use to speak about each other, and the accusations and insults they hurl at each other. (For example, Lomov in the end calls Chubukov an intriguer; but earlier, Chubukov has himself called Lomov a “malicious, doublefaced intriguer.” Again, Lomov begins by describing Natalya as “an excellent housekeeper, not bad-looking, well-educated.”)
- ii. Then think of five adjectives or adjectival expressions of your own to describe each character in the play.
- iii. Can you now imagine what these characters will quarrel about next?



Answer: (i) The words and expressions that have been used in the play by various characters to describe each other are listed below:

Chubukov: intriguer, grabber, old rat, Jesuit

Natalya: a lovesick cat, an excellent housekeeper, not bad-looking' well-educated.

Lomov: a good neighbour, impudent, pettifogger, malicious, double-faced intriguer, rascal, blind hen, turnip-ghost, a villain, a scarecrow, the stuffed sausage, a monster, the wizen-faced frump, pup, fool, milksop, etc.

(ii) & (iii) Activity to be done by yourself.

Questions (Page No. 157-159)

(THINKING ABOUT LANGUAGE)

Question I:

1. This play has been translated into English from the Russian original. Are there any expressions or ways of speaking that strike you as more Russian than English? For example, would an adult man be addressed by an older man as my darling or my treasure in an English play?

Read through the play carefully, and find expressions that you think are not used in contemporary English, and contrast these with idiomatic modern English expressions that also occur in the play.

2. Look up the following words in a dictionary and find out how to pronounce them. Pay attention to how many syllables there are in each word, and find out which syllable is stressed, or said more forcefully.

palpitations	interfere	implore	thoroughbred
pedigree	principle	evidence	misfortune
malicious	embezzlement	architect	neighbours
accustomed	temporary	behaviour	documents

3. Look up the following phrases in a dictionary to find out their meaning, and then use each in a sentence of your own.

(i) You may take it that

(ii) He seems to be coming round

(iii) My foot's gone to sleep



Answer:

1. The expressions that are not used in contemporary English include:
 - i. “my darling”, “my angel”, “my beloved”, “my beauty”, “my treasure” – All these expressions were used for an adult man by an older man.
 - ii. “...and all that sort of thing” – This expression does not explain what it is, just leaves it as it is.
 - iii. “...and all that” – This expression leaves the sentence as it is.
 - iv. “how may you be getting on?” – In this expression, Lomov is asking Chubukov about his well-being.
 - v. “the scarecrow”, “the stuffed sausage”, “the wizen-faced frump” – These expressions were used by Chubukov to hurl abuses to Lomov.

Some of the modern English expressions used in the play were:

Lomov addressing Natalya: “Madam”, “my heart”, “honoured Natalya Stepanovna”.

Lomov addressing Chubukov: “Honoured Stepan Stepanovitch”, “I beg pardon Stepan Honouritch”.

Chubukov addressing Lomov: “My dear fellow”.

Chubukov insulting Lomov: “malicious, doublefaced intriguer”, “fool”, “guzzling gambler”.

Natalya to Lomov: “shout yourself hoarse”

2. Activity to be done by yourself.
3. (i) You may take it that I’m lying, but I’m actually not feeling well.
(ii) He seems to be coming round after the tragic accident that he met last year in which he lost his wife.
(iii) My foot’s gone to sleep after exercising in the gym for two hours.

Question II:

Reported Speech

You must have noticed that when we report someone’s exact words, we have to make some changes in the sentence structure. In the following sentences fill in the blanks to list the changes that have occurred in the above pairs of sentences. One has been done for you.

1. To report a question, we use the reporting verb asked (as in Sentence Set 1).
2. To report a statement, we use the reporting verb _____.
3. The adverb of place here changes to _____.
4. When the verb in direct speech is in the present tense, the verb in reported speech is in the _____ tense (as in Sentence Set 3).



5. If the verb in direct speech is in the present continuous tense, the verb in reported speech changes to _____ tense. For example, _____ changes to was getting.
6. When the sentence in direct speech contains a word denoting respect, we add the adverb _____ in the reporting clause (as in Sentence Set 1).
7. The pronouns I, me, our and mine, which are used in the first person in direct speech, change according to the subject or object of the reporting verb such as _____, _____, _____ or _____ in reported speech.

Answer:

2. To report a statement, we use the reporting verb said/declared.
3. The adverb of place here changes to there.
4. When the verb in direct speech is in the present tense, the verb in reported speech is in the past tense.
5. If the verb in direct speech is in the present continuous tense, the verb in reported speech changes to past continuous tense. For example, am getting changes to was getting.
6. When the sentence in direct speech contains a word denoting respect, we add the adverb respectfully in the reporting clause.
7. The pronouns I, me, our and mine, which are used in the first person in direct speech, change according to the subject or object of the reporting verb such as he/she, him/her, their or his/her's in reported speech.

Question III: Here is an excerpt from an article from the Times of India dated 27 August 2006. Rewrite it, changing the sentences in direct speech into reported speech. Leave the other sentences unchanged.

“Why do you want to know my age? If people know I am so old, I won’t get work!” laughs 90-year-old A. K. Hangal, one of Hindi cinema’s most famous character actors. For his age, he is rather energetic. “What’s the secret?” we ask. “My intake of everything is in small quantities. And I walk a lot,” he replies. “I joined the industry when people retire. I was in my 40s. So I don’t miss being called a star. I am still respected and given work, when actors of my age are living in poverty and without work. I don’t have any complaints,” he says, adding, “but yes, I have always been underpaid.” Recipient of the Padma Bhushan, Hangal never hankered after money or materialistic gains. “No doubt I am content today, but money is important. I was a fool not to understand the value of money earlier,” he regrets.

Answer: 90-year-old A.K. Hangal, one of Hindi cinema’s most famous character actors, asked laughingly why we wanted to know his age. He said that if people knew he was that old, he would not get work. For his age, he is rather energetic. We asked him about the secret. He replied that his intake of everything in small quantities was the secret and he walked a lot. He said that he



had joined the industry when people usually retire. He was in his 40s, so he did not miss being called a star. He was still respected and given work, when actors of his age were living in poverty and without work. He said he had no complaints and added that he had always been underpaid. Being the recipient of the Padma Bhushan, Hangal never hankered after money or materialistic gains. He said that no doubt he was content at present, but money was an important aspect. He said regretfully that he was a fool not to understand the value of money before.