

Madame Polina

A Love Story
of East and West

by

Michael Black

“All love is a catastrophe”
Turgenev, *A Month In The Country*

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This play, in an earlier version, had a rehearsed reading at the Genesis Guild in New York (2003)

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A NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Michael Black was born in 1962, and grew up in south Manchester. He was educated at York University, where he completed a degree in European Literature and History, and then at Cambridge University, where he completed a doctorate in South African anti-apartheid literature.

His plays have been performed in London, Cardiff, Manchester, York and Edinburgh at home, and in Timisoara, Iasi and Bucharest abroad. They include *The Life To Come* (Edinburgh 1984, Cardiff 1985), *Pure Walking Evil* (London 1989, National Theatre of Romania 1990/91, Edinburgh Festival 2004) and *The Amber Room* (London, 1998).

He has been awarded three Arts Council Theatre Writing Bursaries, of which *Madame Polina* represents the last play to be finished.

The second, dating back to 1992, for the play *Panharmonicon*, he completed in 1997, and an option on the script was taken up by the commercial producers P.W. Productions. Moves are afoot to produce the play simultaneously at various European theatres.

Pure Walking Evil recently had a rehearsed reading in New York at the Genesis Guild, May 2002.

Michael's play *The Minotaur*, completed in March 2007, about Picasso and his three mistresses, set in Paris in 1945 after the liberation from the Nazis, had a reading in Paris by the Moving Parts Theatre Company, April 2009.

The Lady Of The Camellias, an adaptation of the novel by Alexandre Dumas *filis* (1848), is Michael's most recent play, completed in March 2009.

Cover illustration: *Pauline Viardot* by P.F. Sokolov (1840s)

CHARACTERS

Princess Tatiana Bakunina

Prince Mikhail Bakunin
(her brother)

Princess Urusova
(her aunt)

Anouska
(a prostitute)

Count Ivan Turgenev
(a Russian novelist)

Paulinette
(his daughter)

Nikolai
(his valet)

Pauline Viardot
(a Spanish opera singer)

Paul
(her son)

Louis Viardot
(her husband, an impresario)

A maid, various policemen, priests and renegades

ACT ONE, Scene 1

(St. Petersburg, 1848. The year of European revolutions. A woman sings a Spanish aria in a spotlight. An ornate, aristocratic room with double doors. Turgenev on stage with Nikolai carrying his bags. Tatiana enters, hugs him, the singer vanishes)

TATIANA Oh, Ivan, Ivan, you're home! At last! I want to hear all about Berlin

TURGENEV How do I look?

TATIANA You look different. Wonderful. Grown up. *Un homme du monde*

TURGENEV Travel broadens the mind

TATIANA Yes, and now you've broadened it, we can be married. Winter weddings are so wonderful

TURGENEV Perhaps we should wait for the spring. Arrangements will be so much easier...

TATIANA Maman is quite set on the winter. She wants to see St. Petersburg in the snow

TURGENEV Yes, well...

TATIANA Oh, Ivan, I've prayed for you constantly, counted the days except on Sundays, because it's a sin to think of you on Sunday. On Sundays you only think about God

TURGENEV Still the same Tatiana

TATIANA I hope so, because then you'll still love me

TURGENEV Church going is very admirable, but...

TATIANA I've been going even more since you've been away. What else was I supposed to do?

TURGENEV Tatiana, don't you think there must be more than one way of worshipping God? If you spend all your time in church, you'll never have time to do anything else

TATIANA But I had nothing else to do! Ivan, is something the matter?

TURGENEV I've been away so long

TATIANA I know! But we've all the time we'd ever want now. *(Laughing)* You do look funny with that... handkerchief... around your neck

TURGENEV It's a cravat. The height of fashion

TATIANA It makes you look pompous

TURGENEV Tatiana, I have just spent two years travelling the length and breadth of Europe...

TATIANA You know so much more than me. I know. But men are supposed to

TURGENEV That's not quite...

TATIANA Kiss me (*Pause. Turgenev does so. She falls into his arms*) I love you so much (*Enter the Princess Urusova, standing in the doorway, majestically*)

PRINCESS What a perfect picture. The happy couple, reunited in bliss (*she holds out her hand for Turgenev to kiss it*)

TURGENEV (*Bowing, he does so*) Princess. I am at your service, as ever

PRINCESS I hope so. Tatiana, you'll be late for mass

TATIANA But...

PRINCESS Run along now. Count Turgenev won't go anywhere. (*Tatiana exits. The Princess looks at Nikolai. Nikolai looks at the Princess*) And you can go too. And take those bags (*Nikolai stays where he is, looks at Turgenev*)

TURGENEV If you could Nikolai, I'd appreciate it. (*Nikolai picks up the bags*) Thank you. (*Nikolai exits*)

PRINCESS "Nikolai"? "I'd appreciate it"? "Thank you"? I can see you're still a liberal

TURGENEV I am indeed. All the more so after my travels

PRINCESS You can always tell a peasant whose master insists on educating him. They're so much more difficult. Take off your coat

TURGENEV I'd rather not. I'm cold

PRINCESS We all are. Russia is cold. In the winter...

TURGENEV Berlin, Princess can be cold in the winter too...

PRINCESS I'm waiting

TURGENEV It's my coat

PRINCESS Take it off. (*Turgenev does so. The Princess flicks his cravat, feels his waistcoat*) How much was this?, and this? Or your glorious boots? How much was the night carriage when you had only to wait until morning?

TURGENEV The cravat was a present. The waistcoat, I forget

PRINCESS What a sickly western child you've become. But the civil service will put that right soon enough

TURGENEV Is that a warning?

PRINCESS It's a piece of advice. I had a word with Prince Lvov

TURGENEV The young one? He's a friend of mine

PRINCESS The old one. He's just taken charge of the secret police. And at a time like this, the liberal, western, free thinking rubbish you've been learning in Berlin won't be tolerated here. Always presuming you've learnt anything at all

TURGENEV The Bible and estate management no. Kant and Hegel, yes

PRINCESS Who are they? Your creditors?

TURGENEV No. They're philosophers

PRINCESS And how is Prince Bakunin?

TURGENEV As loyal as ever, and intent on the cavalry

PRINCESS He's been seen with some very undesirable people

TURGENEV Have you been spying on me as well?

PRINCESS I've been mindful of your progress. If that's what you can call it. Oh, these so called revolutions! The Austrian Empire on the point of collapse, the German Diet giving votes to illiterate peasants, a poet – second rate at that – the President of France!

TURGENEV Lamartine is not second rate

PRINCESS Crowned heads rolling everywhere Ivan! It won't do!

TURGENEV Princess, Europe is not in a state of revolutionary chaos because I went to Berlin University. It's in chaos because it is. On the carriage, I've never seen so many starving faces, thousands lining the roads from Prague to the River Neva itself. The people want change

PRINCESS Well they're not going to get it in Russia

TURGENEV It's not for you to decide

PRINCESS The Tsar has decided on a policy of quarantine

TURGENEV And what good will that do?

PRINCESS There are too many people with too many new ideas

TURGENEV Old age is on the side of order, and afraid of everything

PRINCESS I'm not old!

TURGENEV No, of course not. You look radiant

PRINCESS D'you think so? After all, one never has a second chance to make a first impression

TURGENEV You look as stunning as ever. If not more so

PRINCESS Why, thank you Ivan. Would you escort me to the opera?

TURGENEV Opera in St. Petersburg?

PRINCESS My thoughts entirely. Whatever next? But it's the event of the winter, and one must be seen. And performed by a Spanish soprano no less, one Madame Polina. I was hoping you could explain it all to me

TURGENEV Princess. In Berlin I worked. I had no time for trifles

PRINCESS I don't believe that for a moment

TURGENEV Believe what you want

PRINCESS Do we have an agreement?

TURGENEV I shall keep my liberal, western, free thinking views to myself

PRINCESS It's a good marriage Ivan. She's a princess. And you're only a count

ACT ONE, Scene 2

(St. Petersburg. Turgenev's appartement. Anouska is with Prince Bakunin. He stands behind the chaise-longue with his trousers down, she has her backside in the air towards him, her skirt over her back, her face towards the audience)

ANOUSKA I saw the Tsar last week. At Madame's. Oh, go easy Prince. I'm sure it was him, because he didn't give his name, and Madame told the girls to do whatever he wanted. Three of them at once! He didn't look like he does on the coins though. Well, sort of, but not so handsome. But imagine it. Imagine saying "I've had the Tsar!"

BAKUNIN I've a good joke about the Tsar

ANOUSKA You can't joke about the Tsar. It's illegal

BAKUNIN Damn legality, it's nothing but a tale told for idiots. Tsar Nicholas is in bed one night, and he suddenly realises he's wrong

ANOUSKA What about?

BAKUNIN Everything

ANOUSKA How can the Tsar be wrong?

BAKUNIN Wrong about salt mines, wrong about the serfdom of peasants, wrong about censorship, everything! So he starts praying. "Dear God" he says, "I'm wrong, I'm wrong, the people hate me. How can I make them love me again?". And God says "what you need Tsar is a miracle, and you're talking to the right man. Go to the River Neva tomorrow morning, and walk across it. That's bound to make the people love you again". So the next morning, off to the River Neva goes the Tsar, centre of St. Petersburg. And he's walking across it, thinking how wonderful God is, and huge crowds are gathered on either side. "That's Tsar Nicholas walking on water" says a student, amazed at the vision before him. "Yes it is" says an old woman standing next to him. "Christ alive, he can't even swim"

ANOUSKA *(laughing)* That's not a joke about the Tsar, that's a joke about God

BAKUNIN It's a joke about both of them
 ANOUSKA Ah! Prince. Stop it, you're hurting
 BAKUNIN Just a little...
 ANOUSKA No. *(Turgenev walks through the door. Anouska starts hurriedly rearranging herself. Bakunin likewise)*
 TURGENEV Bakunin!
 BAKUNIN Ah, Ivan. Congratulations. A fine appartement
 TURGENEV Where's Nikolai?
 BAKUNIN How should I know?
 ANOUSKA Count Turgenev, how good to see you home *(Anouska holds her arm out to Turgenev to kiss her hand. He brushes it aside)*
 TURGENEV So you just walk in? And with Anouska? I could have been with Tatiana
 BAKUNIN Anouska looks perfectly respectable. And besides, stick Countessa in front of her name and Tatiana won't know the difference. She's that sort of girl
 TURGENEV Anouska's a very different kind of girl
 ANOUSKA Prince, I think I should go
 BAKUNIN You're staying here
 TURGENEV You're going. I'm sorry, but you must go
 ANOUSKA *(She coughs, holding out her hand to Bakunin, trying to be out of Turgenev's line of vision)* Uh...mmm
 BAKUNIN Oh, of course *(he takes out some notes from his pocket, and gives them to Anouska. She counts them)*
 ANOUSKA This isn't enough
 BAKUNIN Turgenev?
 TURGENEV *(Holding the door open)* No, I haven't got any money
 ANOUSKA *(Exiting, turning in the doorway)* Count Turgenev. You always know where I am
 TURGENEV Anouska. I've changed *(Anouska exits)*
 BAKUNIN I'll be going too
 TURGENEV *(Closing the door in front of him)* You owe me 2000 roubles. As soon as we arrived back in Russia. We agreed
 BAKUNIN Yes, but not the very day, surely!

TURGENEV I need the money to pay the rent

BAKUNIN Stay at the Princess Urusova's

TURGENEV I need to work

BAKUNIN Work at what?

TURGENEV (*Pause*) My writing

BAKUNIN You! Write! You haven't got the discipline to write your own name

TURGENEV I'm completely serious

BAKUNIN That's a very dangerous thing to say. I'd stick with the civil service

TURGENEV Why?

BAKUNIN Because you're not very brave. And you'd be useful. They spy on us, you could spy on them. Tell me what the forces of reaction are up to

TURGENEV I'd be desk bound and depressed, ordering grain from the Ukraine, and sending vodka to Vladivostok

BAKUNIN Besides, you'll never get published

TURGENEV I am being published

BAKUNIN Where?

TURGENEV In *The Contemporary*

BAKUNIN Novel, poetry, what?

TURGENEV Short stories

BAKUNIN Oh, very quaint. And what about the censors?

TURGENEV I had a word with Prince Lvov

BAKUNIN Prince Lvov's a cretin

TURGENEV What makes you say that?

BAKUNIN He's a censor! He must be a cretin!

TURGENEV As a matter of fact, he was very helpful. He pointed out he has to cross something out to justify his position, so he suggested I write in parts I don't want published anyway. And then he crosses them out

BAKUNIN He'll cross out the wrong parts

TURGENEV He's privately sympathetic to our cause

BAKUNIN Oh, is he now. I suppose the Tsar prays for us as well

TURGENEV (*Holds his hand out*) I need 2000 roubles

BAKUNIN Why d'you want to write anyway?

TURGENEV To campaign for the emancipation of the peasants, to enlighten, to educate

BAKUNIN (*Despairing*) 'Art'. There is a problem about the money

TURGENEV There's always a problem about money

BAKUNIN This is a real problem. I am no longer Prince Mikhail Bakunin

TURGENEV You look like him to me

BAKUNIN I've disinherited myself. It's plain Mikhail Bakunin from now on, which has its financial consequences

TURGENEV You've done what?!

BAKUNIN I've disinherited myself. In Berlin, Ivan, I saw the light. Look at Europe! Revolutions everywhere! So I wrote to my father saying in the light of his systematic exploitation of the masses, it was no longer possible for me to associate with him. Heroically, I renounced all right to his clearly ill-gotten gains

TURGENEV Exploitation of the *what*?

BAKUNIN The masses. Anouska. The peasants. He owns thousands of them, each one a legal slave. His to buy and sell, whip or kill or otherwise abuse at his leisure

TURGENEV I know all that

BAKUNIN Then what else could I do?

TURGENEV You could have given me 2000 roubles first!

BAKUNIN That would have been dishonest

TURGENEV What d'you call this?

BAKUNIN Russia cannot stand alone. My father is an enemy of the people, and I've faced up to it. So is your mother

TURGENEV Bakunin. You're mad

BAKUNIN If we take money from them, we're the same as them

TURGENEV I think you should know I've already been warned to be discreet

BAKUNIN Who by?

TURGENEV The secret police. Effectively

BAKUNIN You see! They're already scared

TURGENEV Now is not the time for open rebellion

BAKUNIN You're a coward

TURGENEV I'm a realist, and you're an idiot

BAKUNIN Inherit your mother's estate, and you're an enemy of the people
yourself

TURGENEV Refuse it, and it'll just be sold to someone even crueller than she is

BAKUNIN Yes, but after the revolution that won't matter

TURGENEV Revolution? In Russia? Forget it

BAKUNIN Oh, it'll happen, you'll see. And I thought you'd like to join the cell

TURGENEV What cell?

BAKUNIN The Organisation's secret sedition cell

TURGENEV Bakunin. Go down to the postal office, and retrieve your letter whilst
you still can

BAKUNIN I gave it straight to the post master. The deed is done

TURGENEV I thought I knew you

BAKUNIN I thought I knew you. Still, if you want to waste your time writing,
that's up to you

TURGENEV I want the emancipation of the peasants as well

BAKUNIN I want more than that

TURGENEV Such as?

BAKUNIN Revolution!

*(Bakunin exits, leaving the door swinging open. Turgenev closes it
after him. He breathes deeply, as if contemplating the situation. He
looks at his watch. He tidies the cushions on the chaise-longue, his
demeanour obviously changing for the better. He checks his
appearance in the mirror, straightens his cravat, and then puts out
most of the candles in the room. The lights go down. He lies on the
chaise-longue. There is a knock at the door, in a clear code)*

TURGENEV Entre! *(The door swings open, and a Woman stands there, backlit in
her clear finery)*. So, you're here

WOMAN Yes, I'm here *(she lets her coat drop off her shoulders on to the floor)*

TURGENEV How much have you missed me?

WOMAN *(Sitting astride Turgenev on the chaise-longue)* Oh, it's been so long

ACT ONE, Scene 3

(Tatiana in a chair facing an imaginary dressing table and the audience. Princess Urusova standing behind her, and combing her fulsome hair. There are two Orthodox priests swinging incense in the background. The lighting is murky, mysterious)

TATIANA I want it to be the most splendid wedding ever
PRINCESS And so it will be
TATIANA Will the Tsar really be there?
PRINCESS I shall see to it. The Tsar, and the Tsarina, and the Crown Prince in full uniform escorted by your brother Prince Bakunin. And winter weddings are so wonderful. The sky will be blue, and the sun will bless your union. The snow will glisten with pristine purity
TATIANA And yet. Ivan. Why does he prefer the spring?
PRINCESS There's never a man married who wouldn't rather put it off indefinitely for lack of fortitude. It's the nature of the weaker sex
TATIANA And sometimes, the things he says! I pray for him, but he's even had me doubting he's a Christian
PRINCESS Pray my child, and trust in the Lord
TATIANA And everything will be alright?
PRINCESS Everything
TATIANA My piety cannot be doubted. And yet, Princess...
PRINCESS Yes my child?
TATIANA What is a carnal sin?

ACT ONE, Scene 4

(Turgenev's appartement. Morning, half-lit, the curtains still drawn. Turgenev knocks on the bedroom door of the appartement, using the same code the Woman used at the end of Act One, Scene2)

WOMAN Entre

TURGENEV *(Opening the door)* Your escape is assured. *(The Woman comes out, fully clothed, with a cape on)* My dreams made flesh *(He kisses her, and goes to embrace her)*. The nights are never long enough

WOMAN You mean the morning comes too soon. Ivan!

TURGENEV Tonight?

WOMAN I have engagements

TURGENEV Who with?

WOMAN You know who with

TURGENEV Then tomorrow night

WOMAN Ivan, I must go

TURGENEV One last kiss. *(She kisses him. He tries to make it last longer. Nikolai comes out of the kitchen, and immediately pulls open the curtains. Light floods in)*

TURGENEV *(Shielding his eyes)* Nikolai!

WOMAN I must go *(She exits through the appartement's front door)*

NIKOLAI About the provisions Count

TURGENEV Did you see that?

NIKOLAI See what?

TURGENEV There's been a woman here. Overnight

NIKOLAI Has there really Count?

TURGENEV Yes. A beautiful, charming, captivating woman, and I'd be grateful...

NIKOLAI And I thought it was your great aunt

TURGENEV No. I don't have a great aunt

NIKOLAI Of course not Count. Silly me

TURGENEV And stop calling me Count

NIKOLAI Yes, Count

TURGENEV *(Nikolai starts tidying up the appartement)* Nikolai. In a democracy,
we're all equal

NIKOLAI But we don't live in a democracy Count. We live a post-feudal
autocracy shortly to collapse due to the dialectical inevitability of its
internal contradictions

TURGENEV Who told you that?

NIKOLAI Prince Bakunin

TURGENEV Huh! You've seen the last of him. And no more Counts

NIKOLAI Excuse me, Count. But if we're equal, we're as free as each other.
And if we're free, then I'm free to call you Count if I want to

TURGENEV Why would you want to do that?

NIKOLAI Because you're ordering me about

TURGENEV No I'm not

NIKOLAI You are *(Bakunin enters, rushing through the door of the
appartement, looking ragged, and breathing heavily. He sits down on
the chaise-longue, and, finding a bottle of vodka on the table, starts
swigging from it)*

BAKUNIN Comrade, comrade, thank you

TURGENEV Bakunin! What the...

BAKUNIN I was that close. This close *(he continues to breathe heavily, as if
unable to say more. He swigs more of the vodka)*

TURGENEV Nikolai. What provisions do we need?

NIKOLAI Black bread. Pickles. Butter if we're lucky, salted cheese. *(Looking at
Bakunin)* And vodka

TURGENEV Would you mind getting them for me? Please?

NIKOLAI Certainly Ivan, don't mention it

BAKUNIN Food, food

TURGENEV Oh, and champagne, cured ham, caviar? I must entertain

NIKOLAI This week's rent has gone Count

TURGENEV Then take it out of next week's!

NIKOLAI But...

TURGENEV It's just the removal expenses. It'll work out. *(Pause)* Well go on then

NIKOLAI It'll take me hours to queue. Last week it was bread, this week it'll be ham. Two hours...

TURGENEV Oh, rubbish

NIKOLAI How would you know?

TURGENEV If you're cold, take my coat (*Nikolai does so, and goes to the door*)

BAKUNIN Oh God

TURGENEV (*Sees Nikolai still standing at the door, staring at Bakunin*) Well go on then!

NIKOLAI (*Wrapping up*) I might be away for some time (*Nikolai exits, shutting the door behind him. Turgenev stares at Bakunin. Bakunin stares back, swigging more vodka*)

BAKUNIN Have you decided about the Organisation yet?

TURGENEV The answer was 'no', and it still is (*A loud knock at the door. Bakunin rushes into the bedroom, slamming the door. The knocking continues, louder, more frantic. Turgenev opens the door. In walks the Princess Urusova*) Princess!

PRINCESS Don't worry. I haven't brought Tatiana. You might deserve everything coming to you, but she doesn't

TURGENEV What am I supposed to have done?

PRINCESS What haven't you done?

TURGENEV I'm not sure

PRINCESS The fruits of a western education! Salt mines forever! The Bakunin family name in ruins! Oh, but the Tsar will put a stop to all this Berlin University nonsense now, and a good thing too! So much for your Hant and Kegel!

TURGENEV Kant and Hegel

PRINCESS And Ivan. An engaged man does not see Anouska Petranova in his own appartement!

TURGENEV (*Lighting a cigarette*) Ah, I can explain that...

PRINCESS I should hope so! She's your whore! And keep that smoke away from me

TURGENEV (*Holding up the cigarette*) They're perfectly harmless, in fact they stop winter colds

PRINCESS Ivan, I no longer believe a single word you say

TURGENEV *(Pause)* Anouska Petranova is not my whore
 PRINCESS Not your whore! I engaged her for you!
 TURGENEV *Before* I went to Berlin
 PRINCESS Ivan, she's the best in St. Petersburg
 TURGENEV *Was* the best. She looked rather jaded to me
 PRINCESS Do you love Tatiana?
 TURGENEV *(Pause)* No. I'm still searching for my soul-mate
 PRINCESS Of course, but in the meantime, one has to be married!
 TURGENEV It would be too brutal
 PRINCESS And to think of all the planning. You marry a good, sweet girl like
 Tatiana, whilst Anouska takes care of your less savoury needs. I don't
 know what yours are, but she's bound to...
 TURGENEV Princess, I don't want my life planned by you, or by anyone else
 PRINCESS Ivan, there are small prisons and big prisons, ask Bakunin
 TURGENEV Why?
 PRINCESS Because prison is where he's going. A life sentence to Siberia, you
 mark my words. How much did you know about the bomb?
 TURGENEV What bomb?
 PRINCESS Oh, come on! Prince Bakunin has just blown up the Crown Prince!
 TURGENEV Is he dead?
 PRINCESS Not yet
 TURGENEV There must be a mistake
 PRINCESS There are witnesses. Well?
 TURGENEV What d'you take me for?
 PRINCESS You tell me. You're Bakunin's best friend...
 TURGENEV Princess, I'm innocent. I give you my word
 PRINCESS Before God?
 TURGENEV I'm an agnostic
 PRINCESS Pah! What about this 'Organisation'? If you won't tell me, perhaps
 you'd like to tell the secret police
 TURGENEV Princess, I know nothing. Nothing at all. And I'm as outraged as you
 are. I'll visit the hospital immediately, after which I'll retire discreetly
 to the estate

PRINCESS No, no. If you are innocent, stand your ground in St. Petersburg. And if you won't marry Tatiana, then at least be publicly frivolous. Chase a Countessa or two

TURGENEV If I am to lavish my affections, it must be sincere

PRINCESS Not too sincere Ivan. Romantic sincerity can be so gushing in the young. *(Church bells start ringing, and continue for the rest of the scene)* Oh, may the Lord have Mercy! The Crown Prince has left us. I must pray. And whatever you do Ivan, no more of this writing nonsense. They always suspect writers *(The Princess exits hurriedly. Turgenev stands, dazed)*

TURGENEV Bakunin! *(Shouting)* Bakunin!

BAKUNIN *(Sheepishly coming out of the bedroom, with his hands up in mock surrender)* I was going to tell you

TURGENEV It was you then?

BAKUNIN Of course. Comrade Bakunin, scourge of the privileged

TURGENEV You mean you're proud of it?

BAKUNIN Not exactly. It was an accident

TURGENEV Throwing a bomb at the Crown Prince? An accident?

BAKUNIN We meant to blow up the Tsar. But the Crown Prince got in the way. Just one of those things. Damn

TURGENEV Who's 'we'?

BAKUNIN I'm not at liberty to say. Revolutionary discipline

TURGENEV You're not at liberty at all. And you're not staying here

BAKUNIN You do realise you're implicated

TURGENEV *(Opening the door)* You're going

BAKUNIN Not this again. And who's the new whore?

TURGENEV There isn't one

BAKUNIN Judging by the perfume in your boudoir, she must be the Queen of Sheba

TURGENEV I suppose she's implicated too

BAKUNIN You're all implicated. Unless you hand me over. And you haven't got the guts

TURGENEV Out. Now

BAKUNIN I've got the 2000 roubles. (*He holds out the money*) In used ten rouble notes. Untraceable

TURGENEV What's that? Blood money?

BAKUNIN As a matter of fact, I won it gambling

TURGENEV (*Goes to take the money*) Thank you

BAKUNIN (*Taking it back*) Ah. I'm leaving, I'll need it

TURGENEV It's mine!

BAKUNIN You can't afford all this without it can you? As extravagant as ever

TURGENEV How long d'you need to stay?

BAKUNIN Until the cell can smuggle me out

TURGENEV And how long is that?

BAKUNIN You have no idea how difficult the life of an avenger of the masses really is, do you?

TURGENEV 2000 roubles. Seven days

BAKUNIN (*Giving Turgenev the money*) I'll be as quiet as a mouse

TURGENEV Yes, you will

BAKUNIN (*Holding up a ream of blank paper*) Written any great novels yet?

TURGENEV I've been busy

BAKUNIN Doubtless. With the new whore

TURGENEV She's not a whore

BAKUNIN No. They never are at first. "I'll give it all up, I never knew what love was, you're the only one that matters. You're the best lover in the world". I mean you're paying her to say all that

TURGENEV I'm not paying her

BAKUNIN You're not paying her? Then she must be a whore!

TURGENEV You simply don't understand the Western mind

BAKUNIN Oh, and I suppose you do. Western, eh?

TURGENEV I didn't say that

BAKUNIN Where did you meet her?

TURGENEV I was making a philosophical point

BAKUNIN Berlin? Paris? Madrid?

TURGENEV You've got completely the wrong idea

BAKUNIN Have I met her?

TURGENEV No, and you're not going to. She'd think you were a thug

BAKUNIN I'll tell you about the West. Liars, cheats, bourgeois capitalists...

TURGENEV You see? The same ignorant Slavic prejudice...

BAKUNIN It's true. Westerners know the price of everything and the value of nothing. They march around the world stealing everything in sight, and when they've stolen everything they can carry, they sell it back to the original owners at four times the price. The Western mind; money, money, money, full stop

TURGENEV In that case, why doesn't she want paying?

BAKUNIN I thought you said she wasn't Western (*Nikolai re-enters, with the provisions. He looks at Turgenev, and then fixes Bakunin with a stare*)

NIKOLAI Someone... has just blown up the Crown Prince

TURGENEV We know. It's terrible

NIKOLAI Cleared the food queues though. (*Taking provisions out of a bag*)
Black bread, pickle, salted cheese. And vodka

BAKUNIN Food, food. I'm starving

TURGENEV Is that it?

NIKOLAI No butter, no caviar

TURGENEV I can't live on that

BAKUNIN (*Tearing the bread apart*) Then I'll live on it

TURGENEV Just a minute...

NIKOLAI (*From the bottom of his bag*) Oh, and ham

TURGENEV No champagne?

NIKOLAI No Count. Not on your money

TURGENEV (*Takes out the 2000 roubles*) There you are. Another 2000 roubles

NIKOLAI You won't buy much with that

TURGENEV What?!

NIKOLAI They've withdrawn all ten rouble notes from circulation

TURGENEV Since when?

NIKOLAI Since this morning. Inflation

TURGENEV (*To Bakunin*) Did you know about this?

BAKUNIN Ah, Nikolai. You've saved my life

TURGENEV With my money

BAKUNIN He went out and bought it

TURGENEV *(Picking at the food, gingerly)* Bought what?

NIKOLAI This is Russia Count. Not Berlin, not Paris...

BAKUNIN Assassination! Devaluation! Revolution!

TURGENEV This isn't ham. It's pure fat

BAKUNIN *(Eating all of it)* Tastes like ham to me. Comrade, comrade, thank you

TURGENEV And you can stop this 'comrade' nonsense immediately

BAKUNIN What about you and your 'Counts'?

TURGENEV That's Nikolai. I'm trying to stop him

BAKUNIN *(Together)* Comrade

TURGENEV *(Together)* Nikolai

NIKOLAI So far, there have been five 'Counts' and three 'Comrades'. I've been counting

BAKUNIN He's not a Count. He's a vacillating liberal

NIKOLAI Once a Count, always a Count. That's what I say

BAKUNIN *(To Turgenev)* There you are! What chance social change through art?

TURGENEV Now just a minute. I'm not accountable for my birth

BAKUNIN A count's not accountable for anything. That's the whole point

NIKOLAI You're still a Count. Same as Count Bakunin

TURGENEV He's not a Count. He's a Prince

BAKUNIN Was a Prince. Now I'm a Comrade

TURGENEV You're not a Comrade. You're a criminal. *(A knock at the door. Bakunin splutters out the vodka he's been drinking, and rushes back into the bedroom. Nikolai gets rid of the third drinking glass, plate etc. The door knocks again)* Nikolai. See who it is. But don't let them in. *(Turgenev picks up a pamphlet)* *The Communist Manifesto?* And get rid of this! *(Nikolai opens the door, and goes outside it, closing it behind him. Turgenev keeps tidying the debris of eating. Nikolai re-enters)* Who is it?

NIKOLAI A Monsieur Louis Viardot

TURGENEV Louis Viardot! Where's my pen...

NIKOLAI You know him Count?

TURGENEV Yes, er, no. No. I've heard of him. *(Turgenev starts organising his desk as if he were deep in thought, writing. He crumples up pieces of*

paper, and throws them on the floor. He finds his pen, and sits down at his desk. Adopts a studious pose, writing) Show him in

NIKOLAI (*Opens the door*) Monsieur Louis Viardot

LOUIS (*Bowing*) Count Turgenev. I see I'm disturbing you

TURGENEV No, no, not at all (*they shake hands*). Nikolai. What time is it?

NIKOLAI Eleven o'clock Count

TURGENEV Good heavens. I've written the night through

LOUIS The artist at work

TURGENEV Yes. A vodka?

LOUIS It's very early

TURGENEV It's late for me

LOUIS Oh, why not?

TURGENEV Nikolai, two vodkas. (*Nikolai pours them. From this point in the scene, he is also drinking quietly on his own*) You must forgive me, Monsieur Viardot, for not calling on you

LOUIS Louis, please

TURGENEV Your opera venture here has been the talk of St. Petersburg, but I...

LOUIS Don't mention it. I can see how busy you are

TURGENEV Well, yes, but even so. I hear your wife is quite magnificent, but I haven't yet managed to see a single performance

LOUIS Please, we're not royalty, Count Turgenev...

TURGENEV Ivan...

LOUIS Ivan, and we've had so many callers

TURGENEV How the East needs the liberal west

LOUIS Ah, how the decadent West needs the East

TURGENEV Perhaps, but I saw your wife sing in Berlin, so I could imagine the stir she'd call here!

LOUIS You were in Berlin?

TURGENEV Yes, at the university

LOUIS You knew my wife?

TURGENEV Unfortunately, only from afar

LOUIS Well, we should certainly be able to change that! You see, I'm not only an impresario, I'm also something of a translator, and well, I've

been so fascinated by St. Petersburg, I've started searching around for some of your writers...

TURGENEV They're a mixed bag I'm afraid

LOUIS It's the young ones I want, with something fresh and new. I'd like to translate them for publication in the West

TURGENEV Well, what a splendid idea

LOUIS And so, I came to you

TURGENEV Me?

BAKUNIN *(Entering from the bedroom, with a different set of clothes on; a military uniform)* I suppose you have to start somewhere

LOUIS Indeed I do. I'm sorry, I...

BAKUNIN Prince Dragon Dragonovich Dragonsky, 5th Cossacks, from darkest Dagestan, at your service *(he clicks his heels and bows)*

TURGENEV Monsieur Viardot, I'm very flattered

LOUIS Do you have anything finished?

TURGENEV Well, yes, but everything's still packed away. Isn't it. Nikolai

NIKOLAI Yes Count

TURGENEV I've just changed my appartement you see...

LOUIS But you could send something to me?

TURGENEV With pleasure

BAKUNIN They're only short stories

LOUIS Quality, not quantity, Prince Dragonsky

BAKUNIN You'll be lucky to get either. I was at school with the young Count before he went to Berlin and took up with this art nonsense, and, sorry to say, it's addled his brain. Besides, he's no discipline. Reject him, and he'll sulk. Encourage him, and he'll hang around your coat tails for a life time

TURGENEV You must excuse Prince Dragonsky. This morning he is very upset. As we all are

LOUIS Is there a bereavement?

BAKUNIN Some seditious bastard has just blown the Crown Prince to smithereens. It's more than a bereavement, it's a crime against God!

TURGENEV Hence the ringing of the bells

BAKUNIN They don't ring double peel for nothing you know! Still, back to the regiment, and crack down with some healthy repression

LOUIS But surely, if someone has killed the Crown Prince, it's precisely because you're so repressive

BAKUNIN And what would you suggest?

LOUIS You must educate people. And to educate them you must make them free

BAKUNIN Only from the mouth of a westerner! Do that, and the whole damned place would fall apart

TURGENEV You're right Louis. And it's exactly why I write

LOUIS And what do you write?

TURGENEV I'm campaigning for emancipation. The condition of the peasants is the real evil

NIKOLAI The condition of the peasants!?! What d'you know about my condition?

TURGENEV You don't understand

NIKOLAI Yes I do

TURGENEV And you're not a peasant. You're my valet

NIKOLAI I'll be a peasant if I want to be a peasant. It's not a crime

BAKUNIN Well said Com... I mean your man, Turgenev, has ideas above his station. Treachery and sedition, I can sniff it out at a hundred paces

LOUIS Oh, that's rather far fetched isn't it? Surely this young man has...

TURGENEV Nikolai, the fact is that if you wrote the things I write, no one would pay any attention

NIKOLAI And what's so different about you?

BAKUNIN He's a Count. And don't you forget it

LOUIS *(Silence)* Well, gentlemen. This has been a robust and vigorous discussion. But I must be on my way. Count Turgenev, I am relying on...

TURGENEV ...I will honour my pledge. I'll send you my work within the week

LOUIS I look forward to it. Good day then

TURGENEV Nikolai. Ah *(Nikolai stays where he's sitting, with a vodka bottle. Turgenev holds the door for Louis)* Thank you so much

LOUIS Until we meet again. And my deepest sympathies to you all (*Louis exits*)

TURGENEV And what was the meaning of that?

BAKUNIN Just testing my new disguise

TURGENEV You nearly ruined everything

BAKUNIN Terribly sorry

TURGENEV And since your money is worthless...

BAKUNIN It's alright. I know. I'm leaving

TURGENEV And Nikolai! Anything to say for yourself?

NIKOLAI I'm sorry Count. I'm pissed

TURGENEV And my old uniform back please

BAKUNIN If you want that back, I'm staying

TURGENEV It's mine

BAKUNIN Ah, but I need it. It's part of the disguise. Prince Dragonsky. (*A melodramatic whisper*) Vanish into the aristocratic throng, and thence away

TURGENEV Then you leave now

BAKUNIN (*Going to shake hands*) Nikolai

TURGENEV (*Opening the door*) Out. Now

BAKUNIN (*At the door*) Write well for your western friend

TURGENEV At least he doesn't murder people

BAKUNIN No. And I can see why you like him. The same weak liberalism. The same ability to live with shabby compromise

TURGENEV Bakunin. Who do you think you are?

BAKUNIN I'm everywhere. But no one ever knows quite where until it's too late

ACT ONE, Scene 5

(Pauline Viardot [the Woman] in her dressing room, wearing a dressing gown. There is the same coded knock on the door as in Act One, Scenes 2 and 4. The coded knock is repeated. She opens the dressing room door. Turgenev is standing in the doorway, with a small bunch of roses, and a bottle of champagne)

PAULINE My favourite cravat *(they kiss each other passionately)*

TURGENEV And not a soul knows

PAULINE Very ingenious. But then I am

TURGENEV You are indeed

PAULINE Our brilliant disguise

TURGENEV Butter wouldn't melt in your mouth

PAULINE No. Not butter. Besides, you can't get it here

TURGENEV You can get anything at a price. Champagne! *(opening the bottle, and pouring it)*. How was your audience with the Princess Urusova?

PAULINE Who? Oh, tiresome, but then, so many of them are. How did you know?

TURGENEV *(Taking off his coat, flings it over a chair)* Because you met my fiancée at the same time

PAULINE Pardon?

TURGENEV Tatiana, the Princess Bakunina

PAULINE No! She can't be!

TURGENEV The very same

PAULINE Ivan, how hilarious!

TURGENEV She's very sweet

PAULINE Terribly

TURGENEV She's loyal, faithful, God fearing, forever in church...

PAULINE And quite crushingly dull

TURGENEV Touché

PAULINE Will you marry her? (*Turgenev kisses her passionately, and loosens her dressing gown*) I think you should

TURGENEV (*Turgenev lights a cigarette, offers one to Pauline, who accepts*) I saw your performance tonight

PAULINE And?

TURGENEV Brilliant

PAULINE Louis doesn't think I rehearse enough

TURGENEV Nonsense. You were perfect

PAULINE I may be perfect in St. Petersburg, but perform like that in Milan, or Paris, and well... There were times when I was struggling (*she stubs out the cigarette*)

TURGENEV I didn't notice

PAULINE You don't know much about opera

TURGENEV I know enough

PAULINE You know what I've taught you. But I know what Louis's taught me. And Louis knows more than anyone

TURGENEV Good for him

PAULINE No. Good for me

TURGENEV What's wrong with St. Petersburg?

PAULINE Nothing. I adore St. Petersburg. You know that

TURGENEV But we're not as important as Milan or Paris?

PAULINE I never said that

TURGENEV You did

PAULINE The public isn't as discerning here. Yet

TURGENEV Oh, I know, we're so far behind the West, we've been in the dark ages for so long...

PAULINE Ivan...

TURGENEV I won't be patronised

PAULINE I'm not patronising anyone

TURGENEV I'm your lover, not some music pupil

PAULINE I know, but you should marry her. What harm would it do?

TURGENEV I am the only one?

PAULINE Ivan, of course you are (*she kisses him on the forehead. The door knocks*) Who is it?

MAID *(From outside)* More reviews madam

PAULINE One minute. *(Whispers)* Behind the screen. Please *(Turgenev hides behind it)* Come in *(the maid enters, with several vast bouquets of flowers)*

MAID And flowers

PAULINE Oh. Thank you *(the Maid exits, Turgenev reappears)*. But I do have admirers. From afar

TURGENEV *(Reading the dedications on the bouquets)* Prince Lavretsky. Count Chernyshevsky. These men are buffoons

PAULINE I'm sure. I've never met them and doubtless never will. There are 800 people in the audience, Ivan. Every single night

TURGENEV *(Turgenev goes to hold her)* My Polina. My Polyana

PAULINE Ivan, darling, it's dangerous you being here. It's much easier if I come to you

TURGENEV But you haven't been

PAULINE We've been busy

TURGENEV Who with?

PAULINE With the likes of your fiancée. And your Princess

TURGENEV It's been so long

PAULINE It's been three nights

TURGENEV *(Trying to further loosen her dressing gown)* Three nights is an eternity

PAULINE Ivan, it's not safe

TURGENEV Mine are the most beautiful flowers. By far. Quality, not quantity. And what about my new jacket? I thought it rather becoming

PAULINE Ivan, sometimes, the most becoming quality in a lover is the grace of his leave taking

TURGENEV And sometimes it's the ardour that prolongs him *(he tries loosening her dressing gown again)*

PAULINE Prolongs him in what? *(Turgenev looks down her cleavage)* It's too dangerous

TURGENEV That's the charm

PAULINE Sometimes

TURGENEV Always

PAULINE *(She lifts his chin up)* Sometimes, but...

TURGENEV But not now?

PAULINE No. Tonight the charm is in maintaining the disguise

TURGENEV The disguise is becoming tedious

PAULINE You mean you're becoming jealous

TURGENEV Me? Jealous of who?

PAULINE My husband. Which is exactly what a lover shouldn't be. Now will you please go *(she picks up his coat. He declines to put it on)*

TURGENEV I'm not jealous

PAULINE Good

TURGENEV Tomorrow afternoon?

PAULINE Perhaps

TURGENEV But if I was jealous, why shouldn't I be?

PAULINE Because you already have more than you should have, whilst Louis has less than he knows

TURGENEV It's not enough

PAULINE There isn't any more

TURGENEV I want more

PAULINE That's a very dangerous thing to say

TURGENEV When we were in Berlin...

PAULINE We're not in Berlin any more

TURGENEV We almost lived together

PAULINE I wasn't married

TURGENEV But surely...

PAULINE Ivan, you're gushing

TURGENEV *(Pause)* Do you enjoy my torment? To be confronted with your husband in all good faith! It's obviously you who suggested Louis take an interest in my writing

PAULINE Oh no it wasn't. That's the last thing I would have done. He made his own acquaintance in his own way

TURGENEV But why me?

PAULINE How should I know?

TURGENEV You must have hinted

PAULINE Not a word

TURGENEV Then why not?

PAULINE Because it's hardly in my interests for you to know one another! I could have cursed him when he mentioned he'd seen you

TURGENEV He'll think I'm very good

PAULINE You are very good. When you write

TURGENEV He asked if I'd met you

PAULINE He's naïve. Almost as naïve as you

TURGENEV You said it was a marriage of convenience

PAULINE It is. It's very convenient I appear loyal

TURGENEV It's not for me

PAULINE I live two lives, why can't you?

TURGENEV Because I don't want to! Because I despise the deceit! Because I want all of you!

PAULINE (*Silence. She touches his brow*) Ivan, Ivan...

TURGENEV Besides, just how *convenient* can you be? Do you...?

PAULINE No, of course I don't

TURGENEV Are you sure?

PAULINE Ivan, what d'you take me for?

ACT ONE, Scene 6

(Tatiana facing an imaginary dressing table. Princess Urusova behind her, cutting off her hair. Two priests swing incense behind her and sing Gregorian chants. Lighting is murky, mysterious)

- TATIANA My brother a revolutionist? My fiancé an accomplice? My world is broken
- PRINCESS There my child, you at least are innocent. Why else would the sisterhood accept you?
- TATIANA Why would he not marry me?
- PRINCESS Because his mind is not his own
- TATIANA Then whose is it? Does he ‘fornicate’ with whores?
(Cut to different area of the stage. Turgenev holding a letter)
- TURGENEV A nunnery? A life in a nunnery her sentence since I will not marry a woman I can’t love?! *(Shouts)* Princess!
(Cut back to the area of the Princess and Tatiana)
- PRINCESS His head has been turned by glitter and insincerity
- TATIANA And is ‘fornication’ a carnal sin? And must I confess my own dreams of him? I dream of a strong embrace and a garden full of laughing children
- PRINCESS You must pray my child. And confess nothing but your virtue
- TATIANA And yet the Bakunin family name is ruined. My piety counts for nothing
- PRINCESS It counts for everything with God
- TATIANA But my brother a bomb thrower! Which is worse? Godlessness or violence?
- PRINCESS They are the same. And you must be brave. *(Cutting off the last of Tatiana’s hair, which falls to the ground)* The Mother Superior awaits you

TURGENEV *(Walking over to the hair on the ground, picking it up)* And of course the blame is all mine, a rose goes rejected and ruined with me the culprit!

LOUIS *(Entering)* Ivan, Ivan, you look tired! Written the night through again! Sorry to barge in, but I couldn't leave without seeing you

TURGENEV Leave?

LOUIS Yes, Pauline and I are going back to Paris in the morning

TURGENEV But why the sudden departure?

LOUIS My wife is pregnant!

TURGENEV Pregnant?

LOUIS Yes! What wonderful news! Your short stories are excellent by the way, and I'd be honoured to translate them. *Sketches From A Hunter's Album*. Is it a deal? *(He grasps Turgenev's hand and shakes it vigorously)* Good, good. But still, I mustn't disturb the artist at work! And you must keep writing. You have a rare talent

TURGENEV Pregnant?

LOUIS It's such a shame you haven't met her I know. But of course you can visit us!
(Cut to the Princess and Tatiana area of the stage)

TATIANA I dream of a strong embrace and a garden full of laughing children

PRINCESS *(Looking at Turgenev)* Pregnant?
(Cut to Turgenev area of the stage)

LOUIS *Au revoir* Ivan, St. Petersburg has been wonderful. Only a shame I never had the chance to go hunting. I hear those Russian wolves can be fearsome opponents

TURGENEV Yes, I shoot myself

LOUIS Then that's another reason for you to visit us! *Adieu!* *(Louis exits)*

TURGENEV Nikolai!

NIKOLAI *(Entering)* Yes Count

TURGENEV Get my coat

NIKOLAI She wants to go Count. She's gone back to Europe...

TURGENEV This is Europe...

NIKOLAI Western Europe. France. She's married...

TURGENEV I know that!

NIKOLAI *(Helps Turgenev with his coat)* Pregnant, and it's over

TURGENEV Nikolai! I must see her! *(He opens the appartement door to exit. Standing in it is an Officer holding a uniform, who enters)*

OFFICER Count Turgenev? Count Ivan Sergevich Turgenev?

TURGENEV Talk to my valet

OFFICER Is this your uniform Count?

TURGENEV I, er, ... Yes. Where did you get it?

OFFICER Count Ivan Sergevich Turgenev. I have orders to seal your appartement, and confine you under house arrest until further notice

TURGENEV *(To Princess)* Is this your doing?

PRINCESS *(Turning away from Tatiana towards him)* Well. Caught by a Spanish harlot. Remember Ivan, operatic Venus or inconstant trollop, either way she'll ruin you

INTERVAL

ACT TWO

(France, 1852. A rule of Act Two is that the longer the Russians are on stage, the more murky and mysterious the lighting...)

Turgenev on stage with bags alone, his clothing more understated than in Act One. He is also noticeably older – grey hair, slightly less upright deportment. Pauline sings a Spanish aria in a spotlight...)

- LOUIS *(Entering)* Ivan, at last! We've waited and waited for news *(Louis embraces him, and turns the gaslight up)* Gaslighting! What d'you think? The very latest invention. No more mysterious darkness...
- TURGENEV Yes, it's wonderful
- LOUIS I wrote constantly, but heard nothing
- TURGENEV They confiscated my mail
- LOUIS Whatever for?
- TURGENEV They probably thought you were the agent of some revolutionary cell
- LOUIS Oh, come! There's a world of difference between a liberal and a revolutionist
- TURGENEV Not to a secret policeman
- LOUIS Ivan
- TURGENEV *(The two men embrace)* Louis *(Pauline stops singing)*
- BAKUNIN *(From the shadows)* I can see why you like him. The same weak liberalism. The same ability to live with shabby compromise *(he vanishes)*
- LOUIS And you look better than I could have hoped for
- TURGENEV Four years under house arrest, confined to the same buildings, the same peasants, the same trees, the same steppes, the same Russian winter
- LOUIS But all that time to write!
- TURGENEV Yes and no. Until the police had rifled everything, they wouldn't even let me pick up a pen

LOUIS Well don't we westerners have life easy! Truth to say, life's been embarrassingly prosperous. I've been translating, your work and others too, arranging concerts, commissioning operas...

TURGENEV And Madame Viardot?

LOUIS Why singing of course! Never more so, and never to more acclaim. It really is extraordinary, because between you and me she does have her faults. Naturally, she's a rather limited mezzo-soprano, needs having extended the range, but there are cracks...

TURGENEV It's her presence. She spell-binds people

LOUIS Yes, she has a strong look. It's her *mirada fuerte*. And of course, you saw her once, in Berlin

TURGENEV I did indeed. *(Pause)* And your child?!

LOUIS Why yes of course! Paul. He's a handsome young thing

TURGENEV *(Pauline enters, standing in the doorway, unseen, holding a bouquet of flowers)* I'd love to meet him

PAULINE *(Advancing to centre stage)* Louis, my dear, who might this be?

LOUIS Pauline, we have a very important guest. Allow me the honour of introducing my great friend, Count Ivan Sergevich Turgenev

TURGENEV Simply Ivan, please

PRINCESS *(From the shadows)* The Spanish harlot. Remember Ivan, operatic Venus or inconstant trollop, either way she'll ruin you *(she vanishes)*

PAULINE Count Turgenev. Oh, yes, you're the Russian novelist. We haven't met, have we?

TURGENEV *(Turgenev bows, and kisses her hand)* Madame Viardot. At your service. Louis has been telling me all about your splendid bounty

PAULINE I'm sure he exaggerates. *(Arranging the flowers)* Louis, darling, I think that's all except for the wine. Perhaps you could choose some from the cellar

LOUIS Why yes of course. I'd completely forgotten. Ivan, I leave you in my wife's splendid care

TURGENEV It's an honour

LOUIS And now you're finally here, there are so many things we must do, including a damn good shoot! *(Louis exits)*

PAULINE *(Silence. Looking at Turgenev's bags)* You obviously intend to stay for some time

TURGENEV I have no plans beyond a new translation for Louis. *(Pause)* There's enough food here to feed an army

PAULINE We're preparing a soirée. *(Pause)* So you have a new novel?

TURGENEV I do indeed

PAULINE And what is the title?

TURGENEV *Fathers And Sons. (Silence. Turgenev repeats the coded knock of Act One on the table top arranged with food)* Not one word, not one sign, not one hint of explanation, just some second rate vanishing act at your husband's beck and call!

PAULINE It was my decision

TURGENEV I don't believe that

PAULINE You don't want to believe that

TURGENEV You could have written

PAULINE To say what? To say I was perfectly happy without you?

TURGENEV To say you loved me!

PAULINE I was overwhelmed by you. I was young

TURGENEV Whose is the child?

PAULINE Louis's of course. He's a wonderful father

TURGENEV Can I see him?

PAULINE Of course. But unfortunately he's away at school

TURGENEV How very convenient

PAULINE The teaching is so much better. His reading's coming on leaps and bounds

TURGENEV You're hiding him from me

PAULINE I'm hardly likely to conceal my own son simply on the off-chance some lonely Russian count might travel the entire length and breadth of Europe to pay me an unwanted visit!

TURGENEV I came to see Louis

PAULINE Then see Louis. And then go

TURGENEV I demand an explanation!

PRINCESS *(From the shadows)* The Spanish harlot. Remember Ivan... *(she vanishes)*

TURGENEV And I don't believe this motherly devotion performance for one moment

PAULINE Ivan, Louis and I have found a way of living together without getting under each other's feet. Your feet are too big

TURGENEV I spent four years under house arrest, the day of your leaving haunting me day and night. It was hell...

PAULINE I nearly died in child birth. That was hell. And oh yes, house arrest must have been quite dreadful. Confined to a mere 50,000 acres! Nothing to do except shoot all day and drink! I'm not Louis Ivan. I'm not so easily hoodwinked. I don't harbour day dreams of new social orders, overthrowing tyrants or whatever. And besides, even your letters have one eye on posterity. You're not a lover, you're a stylist

TURGENEV Polina, you are everything to me

PAULINE I don't want you

TURGENEV You wanted me once

PAULINE You were rather dashing and impressive once. But I don't want a lover anyway. And if I did, I'd want one who knew what he wanted and knew how to get it, not some cowering out of place liberal wandering round Europe like a lost mongrel. *(Silence)* Go back to Russia, put your life in some order, and marry Tatiana

TATIANA *(From the shadows)* You know so much more than me. I know. But men are supposed to. *Un homme du monde (she vanishes)*

TURGENEV I can't

PAULINE Then marry someone like her

ANOUSKA *(From the shadows)* Marry me. I'm more like her than you know, with a heart overflowing with love and more loyal than a gun dog *(she vanishes)*

TURGENEV And then?

PAULINE And then I'll come to your wedding

TURGENEV 'I live two lives, why can't you?'

PAULINE Because what's past is past

TURGENEV I shall unpack my bags
(Pauline exits. Turgenev remains)

TATIANA *(From the shadows)* I dream of a strong embrace. And a garden full of laughing children. The sky will be blue, and the sun will bless our union *(she remains centre-stage)*

PRINCESS *(From the shadows)* How can you reconcile yourself to being the cause of such unhappiness? And how can you so shamelessly chase a woman who so clearly doesn't want you?

TURGENEV And how can you speak such cant? You, who manipulates everything to your own advantage!

PRINCESS Where is my advantage in Tatiana's retreat?

TURGENEV You can still control her

BAKUNIN *(From the shadows)* And what about me? A nun for a sister and bomb-making for a profession. The hellhound on your trail...

ANOUSKA *(From the shadows)* Or me? An honest heart, but a whore to boot!

TURGENEV Is it any wonder I seek another? With spirits like yours to chase me at every turn!

PRINCESS You are a child of Russia. And a life there can still be yours

BAKUNIN The Organisation needs people of your stature

TURGENEV Organisation?! What Organisation! Show me one other member...

BAKUNIN I'm sworn to secrecy

TURGENEV Show me. Even one...

ANOUSKA Me. I'm a member. I joined because Bakunin said you'd joined

TURGENEV Anouska, don't you see? There is no Organisation. He just says there is and no one can prove it one way or the other because he insists it's all underground. Don't you see it's just a way of ensnaring you?

BAKUNIN Maybe she joined because she's ashamed of herself. And maybe because she wants revenge

TURGENEV Revenge for what?

BAKUNIN Revenge at her status. She is a prostitute after all

TURGENEV Yes, but you're the one who treats her like one!

PRINCESS I had a word with Prince Lvov

TURGENEV The old one?

PRINCESS The young one. He's in charge of the secret police

TURGENEV What?

PRINCESS The old order is much stronger than you think. But you are free to resume a public life, provided you understand the rules

TURGENEV If it's a matter of renouncing Bakunin, then that's simple

PRINCESS It's a matter of renouncing your liberalism. The one follows on from the other

TURGENEV I can't. I am a liberal. I believe in decency, compassion. Democracy

PRINCESS Guff. Ivan. What is to become of you? And who are you?

TURGENEV I'm a prototype.

PRINCESS Yes, but what does that mean? And what have you left? (*Repeats the coded knock*) Is she all you have to live for Ivan? And what does your life amount to? A one man lonely outpost of reasonability

TURGENEV It amounts to an attempt, however foolish, to find myself. I'm a Russian, I speak French in polite society, I've lived in Paris, Berlin... I'm a European...

PRINCESS I could reach straight into your chest and strangle your very heart. The coroner's verdict? Death by sudden heart failure, probably brought on by too much alcohol. No one would be any the wiser

TURGENEV Then do it

PRINCESS (*Holding out her hand in a fist*) I will constrict you yet

TURGENEV You can't kill me

BAKUNIN Can you breathe?

TURGENEV Yes. No. (*He clutches his chest*) Yes! I demand the right to breathe

PRINCESS Very good. You 'demand'. No 'reasonability' there. An improvement. A statement beyond compromise. But I hope I've demonstrated my powers

TURGENEV You didn't succeed

BAKUNIN I didn't really try. Never forget a hellhound is very fond of his prey

TURGENEV You could stalk someone else

BAKUNIN Oh no. I'm too attracted to you. After all, I couldn't be a hellhound without you

TATIANA I can shrivel your loins, make you ashamed of the very means of your continuance. You denied me my children and I shall deny you the possibility of your own

TURGENEV I have a child

TATIANA Then why won't she admit to it?

TURGENEV Because she's married

PRINCESS And she wants to remain married

TURGENEV So it would appear

TATIANA Then if you love her why do you pursue her?

TURGENEV Because I must

PRINCESS Where's the 'reasonability' in that?

TURGENEV I don't know. I have no choice

PRINCESS Ah ha! A liberal admitting to fate at last!

TURGENEV It is my child, of that I'm sure

BAKUNIN What does your life amount to? I think this is the core. Are you the advocate of liberal decency, or are you just another absentee landlord? Nikolai!

TURGENEV What's Nikolai got to do with it?

PRINCESS Reasonability is a disease

TURGENEV And it's also your word not mine

BAKUNIN Nikolai!

NIKOLAI (*From the shadows*) What do you want?

PRINCESS We want an assessment of your employer

NIKOLAI Go away. I'm busy (*he starts to exit*)

TURGENEV Nikolai. Wait. Please (*Nikolai stops*)

NIKOLAI I work seven days a week Count. I'm not on holiday

TURGENEV I know. And I'm grateful

BAKUNIN How's the estate?

NIKOLAI Never yielded more, even if I say so myself

PRINCESS You say too much. For a peasant. You always have done

NIKOLAI I'm not a peasant. I'm the estate manager

PRINCESS Pah!

TURGENEV Have you built the school?

NIKOLAI We opened it last year Count

TURGENEV Do they go?

NIKOLAI Most of them. But you can't force them

TURGENEV I told you Nikolai. Never force anyone

NIKOLAI No Count

TURGENEV And is there a doctor?

NIKOLAI Of course there's a doctor

TURGENEV I had some good ideas, didn't I?

NIKOLAI Yes, I did

PRINCESS It's typical. He makes all the choices that cripple you with indecision

BAKUNIN And you dismiss him out of fear. He's living proof peasants can think for themselves

PRINCESS Without the peasants there is no God, for the fear of the peasants is the very thing that creates Him, and the Tsar also. We keep the people in fear and ignorance to create our own rule. Is there another way of maintaining order?

BAKUNIN Reactionary drivel. History should be divided into two parts. From the ape to the destruction of God. And from the destruction of God to the divinity of man

PRINCESS The reign of the Church works. We keep the majority in ignorance to encourage their piety, and so upon death they more easily achieve the innocence of lambs

BAKUNIN To the slaughter!

PRINCESS To lie down with the lion. True Heaven is the innocence of not knowing, a kind of happiness all of its own. An enigma within an enigma

TURGENEV So you love your country, but despise the people in it. If Russia were by some miracle to become both prosperous and happy, you'd both be utterly miserable because you'd have no one left to terrify! I love Russia, but is it any wonder I choose to live somewhere else?

PRINCESS It's that Spanish harlot. Madame Polina Viardot. And I hate her

TURGENEV It's you. Can I never escape?

BAKUNIN No

NIKOLAI I agree with the Count. But with reservations

PRINCESS You can keep your opinions to yourself

BAKUNIN But why? Nikolai, enlighten us

NIKOLAI Very well. (*Spoken extremely quickly*) No one should have only one never changing political ideology. After all, it's in the nature of ideology to be rigid, and the nature of life to be infinitely variable. As

for Christianity, it's a spent force. Christ on the Cross is too weak to believe in, and priests peddle ignorance to disguise their own. As for anarchism, it contains the seeds of its own failure, because to succeed politically you need organisation, the one thing anarchism denies. And as for Communism, any Communist state would quickly prove inherently corrupt in practice precisely because Communism is inherently utopian in theory. The dictatorship of the proletariat would in fact rapidly degenerate into the suppression of the proletariat by an ever more repressive State. But of course, that's only my opinion.

(Pause) Now if you'll excuse me... *(he exits)*

TURGENEV You see! He's a man of the future! He's questioning, sceptical, and he thinks for himself. A born liberal

NIKOLAI *(Re-entering)* Oh, and also, as for liberalism, it means well, but is fundamentally flawed in believing most people are essentially reasonable when there's scant evidence to suggest that they actually are *(he exits)*

BAKUNIN It would seem he condemns all of us

TURGENEV Yes, and perhaps he's a right to
(Anyutka, a peasant girl, enters, stands centre stage, holding her bag)

PRINCESS Prototypes are always flawed Ivan

TURGENEV Yes, but they can be improved. The liberal state is guaranteed by the sovereignty of a parliament. Nikolai forgot to say that...

PRINCESS Pah! You'll believe in a Duma next

TURGENEV I believe in one already

PRINCESS And where will you go now?

TURGENEV Back to Paris

PRINCESS She doesn't want you. And your life is rapidly becoming a catastrophe

TURGENEV All love is a catastrophe. You crave for it constantly, and when it arrives you realise it can destroy you

PRINCESS But this is not love. It's obsession, delusion

TURGENEV It's love to me

PRINCESS *(Looking at Anyutka)* And who is this?

- TURGENEV A piece of me you know nothing about
- PAULINE (*Entering. Princess, Bakunin, Tatiana, Anouska vanish. She turns up the gaslight*) Ivan, so you have returned
- TURGENEV I have returned
- PAULINE And some very odd things have started to happen since you did. Mysterious fires have broken out all over town. A sergeant shot his commanding officer at the barracks for no reason. And the murder rate has more than doubled. They say there's an escaped lunatic stalking the woods. I'm quite terrified to go out alone, and every other woman I know is too
- BAKUNIN (*From the shadows*) Most revolutionaries are exactly the same. Sheep. So we begin with the titles – secretary, treasurer, president and so on. And then add sentimentality, because for most people justice is a sentimental idea. You treat it rather like a stray dog – it's a nuisance, but you must be nice to it. And I give everyone plenty of time to talk, because the real trick is to unite people by their fear of having opinions, because you have to be brave to have real opinions, and most people aren't. And so they force themselves into being revolutionists simply because they're afraid of being reactionaries
- ANOUSKA (*From the shadows*) I'm supposed to be the one that throws the bomb that kills the Tsar, and the Tsarina, and their children. And I'm constantly afraid. I'm haunted by that creeping fear that leaves you only when you go to sleep, except that you don't really sleep at all. And it's all I ever wake up with, the fear of being caught, but worse, the fear of not being able to live with myself. I've trained myself to keep calm, but inside and forever, I'm petrified (*Bakunin and Anouska vanish*)
- PAULINE Whenever you're here Ivan, my life is full of problems. Why is that, d'you think?
- TURGENEV Are you well?
- PAULINE Exceedingly well thank you. And you?
- BAKUNIN (*From the shadows*) And once people are afraid, I can implicate them in all sorts of crimes, and then they're trapped. They can't escape except through death, and all because they don't have the courage to

hold an original opinion. In other words, they will do exactly as I say, or to put it another way, starting from the standpoint of unlimited freedom, I arrived at the formulation of unlimited tyranny. And just to make sure, I make everyone so insecure that they constantly spy on each other and denounce themselves to me at the earliest opportunity

ANOUSKA *(From the shadows)* On a bright new first dawn of a new world, I want to be able to look up at the sky with a clear conscience. But how can I do that after throwing a bomb at a child?

BAKUNIN Never until we stop being sentimental about children will the revolution triumph. The child of the Tsar is the next Tsar, and the sooner he's dead the better

ANOUSKA But what if our means corrupt our ends?

BAKUNIN Is it really worse to be a murderer than a common whore? *(Bakunin vanishes)*

TURGENEV Why yes, of course it is!

ANOUSKA But you still threw me out of your appartement

TURGENEV Bakunin had no right to take you there

ANOUSKA You used to be kind to me. You used to use me too. But that woman has changed everything

PAULINE Ivan, who are you talking to?

PRINCESS *(From the shadows)* Of course it's always the real sluts who make the greatest mistakes. You're not supposed to fall in love with your clients! *(She vanishes)*

ANOUSKA Ivan was never that

TURGENEV I was. Another man with another prostitute. Neither of us is sacred, and neither of us is damned

PAULINE Ivan! Who are you talking to?

TURGENEV Anouska. You must understand this. Bakunin thinks he's the leader of an international organisation. But it's all a myth in his own head. Which is how you start the first group. The danger is that maybe all you need is a few hundred trained psychopaths and you can destroy everything. Maybe civilisation is that fragile. The danger is the myth might create the Organisation. And you're too good for that

PAULINE Ivan!

ANOUSKA Never once have I woken with delight at finding the man who sleeps next to me is the man I love. Except with you. And then you paid me
(*She vanishes*)

PAULINE Ivan...

TURGENEV I'm sorry. I was expecting to see Louis. It's just ideas for a new book...

PAULINE He's visiting a publisher. But I don't expect he'll be long

TURGENEV Still working as hard as ever

PAULINE Luckily for you, yes

TURGENEV What does that mean?

PAULINE I mean, simply, it's fortunate he's so committed to your work

TURGENEV Why shouldn't he be?

PAULINE I have no idea. I didn't...

TURGENEV It's very good work

PAULINE So you forever remind me. (*Pause*) Have you a new novel?

TURGENEV Yes

PAULINE What's it called?

TURGENEV *Virgin Soil*. I don't think I'll write any more...

PAULINE I see. Are you married?

TURGENEV No. I don't live my life at your beck and call

PAULINE (*Looking at Anyutka, still centre stage*) And who might this be?

TURGENEV This is my daughter

PAULINE Your daughter?

TURGENEV Yes. My daughter. By a peasant girl. I thought you'd like to meet her

PAULINE I see. What's her name?

TURGENEV Her Russian name is Anyutka. Don't you think she's pretty?

PAULINE Yes, she is, although unrefined

TURGENEV That will change

PAULINE Since you've decided to admit to her, let us hope so

TURGENEV We have decided to admit to her

PAULINE I beg your pardon? Ivan, we have been over for a very long time

TURGENEV Anyutka's mother died when she was very young. She's in need of kind and generous love, so naturally, I thought of you

PAULINE Ivan. Is this some kind of joke?

TURGENEV I've brought her to live with you. Her name is to be Paulinette, she is to learn French, and to call you Maman, and me Papa

PAULINE This is absurd

TURGENEV This is my child. And my child is not absurd

PAULINE Ivan, I am married to Louis. Remember! How can 'Paulinette' call me Maman?

TURGENEV How can your son call Louis 'Papa'

PAULINE I see. And how does Paulinette feel about this?

TURGENEV As yet she speaks only Russian. Polina. I don't think she quite understands

PAULINE Neither do I

TURGENEV You do. Perfectly

PAULINE Your daughter, you say?

TURGENEV You're jealous

PAULINE Of a liaison with a peasant girl!? Ivan, I can't possibly...

TURGENEV If you don't take Paulinette, I shall tell Louis of our affair. And that I am Paul's father

PAULINE But you're not

TURGENEV I think I am

PAULINE You wouldn't

TURGENEV I would

PAULINE You're all the same aren't you! Scratch a Russian, and there's a tyrant underneath. Even you. I'm an opera singer, not a statue, and a woman not a wet nurse. I'm flesh and blood Ivan, I move! Call yourself a liberal...

TURGENEV What?

PAULINE I don't want you, but you keep coming back. And now this (*points at Paulinette*). That's tyranny to me

TURGENEV (*Coded knock as in Act One*) I've submitted to you long enough

PAULINE Very well Ivan. But I fear for the consequences

TURGENEV If you treat Paulinette as your own, you have nothing to fear

PAULINE (*Pause*) Oh, Ivan. How has such love turned to this blackmail? I thought it best if we never saw each other again, we're from such different worlds. You're a Russian novelist, and I'm a Spanish opera

singer after all. I thought you'd forget me, I thought I'd forget you. But I missed you every day, and Louis forever champions you. And so I've kept hold of you in some cruel half-life. I almost died, I even wanted to kill myself, but how could I do that to you as well, and to Louis...

TURGENEV ... And to opera. But then opera has stunted so much

PAULINE What does that mean?

TURGENEV I've always had to fight to find space with you

PAULINE You mean I must retire. Oh, I hear the whispers as well, although no critic will dare openly say it

TURGENEV No one can pretend to the throne of Carthage forever

PRINCESS *(From the shadows)* The throne of Carthage? What sort of a woman d'you take her for? *(She vanishes)*

PAULINE And now motherhood will occupy me instead! And doubtless this happy event will mean we see more of each other as well! It's so important Paulinette Anyutka Turgenevna Viardot has a stable upbringing, don't you agree

TURGENEV You know I'm right

PAULINE I know I'm haunted by you. Why pretend any more? Paul is your son Ivan. I can see it in his eyes, his hands, his face, everything. I sent him away to school because I'm terrified of the day Louis notices. Are you angry with me?

TURGENEV Not any more *(they kiss, passionately. Enter Louis. The embrace ends. Pauline holds Paulinette's head up, and caresses her brow)*

PAULINE Louis! Isn't it wonderful. Ivan is here again, and with his daughter

LOUIS Get out. And take your daughter and your duplicity with you!

PAULINE Louis! I can explain

LOUIS Caught in the act at last!

(There is a smash of breaking glass, and several men, all renegades, jump through the drawing room window, with guns)

MAN ONE Get down!

PAULINE What's happening!

MAN ONE Get down! Hands behind your heads. On the floor

LOUIS But...

MAN TWO D'you want to be shot?

MAN ONE To the windows, and start firing!
*(Embellishment, "Vive le commune, liberté, égalité, fraternité" etc.
 Smoke. Lights down, briefly the stage appears dark, smoky and bare)*

TURGENEV *(Turgenev appearing from the smoke)* Bakunin, Bakunin!

PRINCESS *(From the shadows)* I thought you'd renounced him

TURGENEV I have renounced him

PRINCESS I thought your liberalism rejected violence

TURGENEV Of course it does. But I need his help

PRINCESS There's nothing a Russian likes less than another Russian who constantly sings the praises of living somewhere else. Or in your case living with someone else

TATIANA *(From the shadows)* Oh, Ivan, I've prayed for you constantly, counted the days except on Sundays, because it's a sin to think of you on Sunday

ANOUSKA *(From the shadows)* Ivan, be careful

TURGENEV Bakunin!

PRINCESS All believers hate doubters. In the Apocalypse is it written "I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth". Liberalism is an abomination

TURGENEV Bakunin! *(All others exit)* Bakunin!

BAKUNIN *(From the shadows)* Count Turgenev. So you too have turned renegade

TURGENEV Hardly. You're a revolutionist besieged in the city of Paris. I'm just a disillusioned romantic

BAKUNIN But my dear fellow, what about the emancipation of the peasants?! I'm sure your novels and all that humanitarian concern greatly impressed the Tsar. "Gosh... Turgenev says we're cruel! We must stop!". But then your naïvety always was touching

TURGENEV You owe me 2000 roubles

BAKUNIN You're not serious, surely

TURGENEV Perhaps we can barter

BAKUNIN With what?

TURGENEV Get Madame Viardot out of Paris. The Prussians have invaded France, and she's trapped in the Commune

BAKUNIN Well, so revolution has finally caught up with you! The wheel of history my friend, how strangely she moves. All is quiet, you all tell me I'll fail. Nothing changes for twenty, thirty, forty years, and then suddenly! In one or two days, a new world is born, the phoenix rises...

TURGENEV You'll still fail

BAKUNIN Revolutions never fail. Nothing is ever the same again, whatever happens. So what is success? Polina Viardot. Trapped in the Commune, eh?

TATIANA *(From the shadows)* Leave her there. Leave her there and let her die

PRINCESS *(From the shadows)* Leave her there. And recover your senses

BAKUNIN And why d'you think I can help you?

TURGENEV You have influence with these people

BAKUNIN And why should I want to help you?

TURGENEV I really have no idea. For old times' sake

BAKUNIN You always were comical. Sentimental and misguided. But I'll see what I can do. Just her I presume though?

PRINCESS *(From the shadows)* Leave her there

BAKUNIN Turgenev. Just her?

TATIANA *(From the shadows)* Leave her there. And return to me

BAKUNIN Just her?

TURGENEV *(Pause)* No. And Louis Viardot as well

BAKUNIN Aren't you missing a rather golden opportunity?

TURGENEV I'm sorry?

BAKUNIN Well, everybody knows this Madame Viardot won't leave her husband. So why don't I just rescue her? You'd be her hero, and I could easily dispose of Monsieur, leaving you with no rivals

TURGENEV You have a perfect conspiratorial mind

BAKUNIN I know. Well?

TURGENEV Get both of them

TATIANA *(From the shadows)* You idiot

PRINCESS *(From the shadows)* You fool. You spurn the chance of seizing her alone, even when it's offered

TURGENEV Are you suggesting Bakunin is right?

PRINCESS I'm suggesting all's fair in love and war

TURGENEV I disagree

PRINCESS Ivan, who are you?

TURGENEV I'm a European

PRINCESS Yes, but what does that mean?

TURGENEV To be European is to be the person no one ever listens to. Yet

ANOUSKA *(From the shadows)* Ivan. Ivan

PRINCESS He doesn't even see you

ANOUSKA I'm proud of you

PRINCESS But how can he be proud of himself?

LOUIS *(Turning up the gaslight)* Ivan!

TURGENEV Louis! How are you feeling?

LOUIS *(Entering)* Oh, things are settling down again. In fact, I was talking to a publisher about a complete set of your novels only this morning! And imagine it! Me in the middle of a real revolution! Mind you, half the suburbs are destroyed, and there's not a country house left standing in twenty miles

BAKUNIN *(From the shadows)* I am the way and the darkness. I am the incendiary original, the world's first terrorist, the breather of hatred and flames until everything is destroyed. Anouska, throw the bomb

ANOUSKA *(From the shadows)* No

BAKUNIN Throw it!

TURGENEV No

BAKUNIN Throw it

ANOUSKA No

LOUIS It's almost as if someone was determined to save us! Perhaps one day a new spirit will burst forth in peoples' hearts and on a bright new day we shall all breathe deeply with fresh hope anew!

TURGENEV Yes. Where's Polina?

BAKUNIN *(From the shadows)* Fire only for violence, fire only for a future of the world in cinders, justice through destruction until nothing is left. I

am the fire raiser who will blow everything up and strip everyone
naked

TURGENEV You are nothing. And I will never stop resisting you

BAKUNIN The child of the Tsar is the next Tsar, and I'll throw the bomb myself!

ANOUSKA (*From the shadows*) Am I still guilty? What if I'd gone to the police?

But then I was terrified too. Ivan. Am I guilty too?

IVAN I don't know. And am I guilty as well?

(*Silence. Darkness*)

LOUIS (*Turning up the gaslighting*) Ivan. Ivan, please sit down. Now, your
daughter, Paulinette, carries a strange coincidence of name

TURGENEV In honour of Polina's singing

LOUIS Her singing?

TURGENEV These translations look as excellent as ever

LOUIS Oh, good. There's one phrase though...

TURGENEV That? That's Russian for 'seed drill'

LOUIS (*Marking the correction*) 'Seed drill'. Of course. Ivan, Pauline has
been frank with me, and told me of your request that Paulinette live
here with us

TURGENEV There's no mystery. I just want her to have the benefits of a western
education, and where better than Paris?

LOUIS I see

TURGENEV It's so important the young learn more of Europe

LOUIS Of course

TURGENEV But I can see now I should have talked to you both

LOUIS Ivan, really

TURGENEV Really?

LOUIS Regardless of the arrangements of accommodation, why should
Paulinette call Pauline 'Maman'?

TURGENEV To help her feel secure. In fact, it was Polina's idea

LOUIS Of course it was. My wife has explained the history of your affair,
Ivan, which I found amusing, since she seemed to think it came as a
revelation. I've known of something since your release from house
arrest. And I chose the following course. If my wife was to have
affairs, then better she has them with someone I know than with

someone I don't, since at least she remains within my orbit, so to speak. And professionally speaking, it also meant that you too, via your affair, with my wife, also remained within my orbit through my work as your translator. And of course, your stays were but temporary. Thus, I considered myself abused, but not ultimately disadvantaged. Do you follow?

TURGENEV We really must go shooting together some time

LOUIS Yes we must. But first we must clear the air

TURGENEV Then Polina must be here too

LOUIS On the contrary. It's high time I took control. If Paulinette is to live with us, then you wish to do likewise. Am I right?

TURGENEV Yes

LOUIS To be next to Pauline?

TURGENEV To be with my daughter. Not to mention our common work of translation

LOUIS And is Pauline's account of your *d'alliance* complete?

PRINCESS (*From the shadows*) Operatic Venus, or inconstant trollop?

TURGENEV (*Pause*) Yes

LOUIS I don't believe you. How long has it been going on?

TURGENEV About thirty years. On and off

LOUIS And when did it start?

TURGENEV In Berlin. When I was still a student

LOUIS Before we were married?

TURGENEV Yes. You could say you stole her from me

LOUIS What!

TURGENEV In a roundabout sort of way

LOUIS So all this time you've been clinging on...

TURGENEV Amongst other things...

LOUIS I see. My solutions didn't assume so long a duration

TURGENEV Clearly

LOUIS We've both been had

TURGENEV No. We've all been had. Polina included

LOUIS I could still throw you out

TURGENEV Go ahead

LOUIS I could demand you never set eyes on my wife again

TURGENEV I'd say 'no'. And so would she

LOUIS Would she?

TURGENEV Why don't you ask her

LOUIS Thirty years! For so long, I've been bewildered by the death of love, and my responsibility for it. How the flame diminishes! But Pauline pretended to constancy, and you were impeccable, so all the while I continued to delude myself, even when...

TURGENEV You Louis, are blameless

LOUIS And deceived and hurt and belittled! D'you not think me man enough even to object, because I object now, vehemently!

TURGENEV I'm not proud

LOUIS Are you happy with your conduct?

TURGENEV No, not at all

LOUIS How can you live with yourself! I took you for a decent man!

TURGENEV I am a decent man

LOUIS I have never had an affair in my life!

TURGENEV She was mine first

LOUIS But then she married me!

TURGENEV *(Pause)* Louis. You and I are both going to have to live with Polina. We all are. As is Paulinette. Will you agree?

BAKUNIN *(From the shadows)* I can see why you like him. The same weak liberalism, the same ability to live with shabby compromise

LOUIS *(Silence)* What do you propose we do?

TURGENEV I don't think there's a great deal we can do. Thirty years is a long time

LOUIS Indeed. If I allow Paulinette to live here, will you promise to tell me the truth?

TURGENEV This, Louis, is the one time in my life when it would be unforgivable to lie

LOUIS Thank you. Has Pauline told you whether Paul is your son or mine?

TURGENEV She has...

LOUIS And...

TURGENEV Paul is your son Louis, definitely. Why else would I have gone to such lengths with Paulinette?

PAULINE *(Entering)* Louis. Ivan. Have you decided our fate?

BAKUNIN *(From the shadows)* They speak of fate! Fate to describe their shabby threesome! They speak of Fate for such a thing whilst I would consume the world in flames!

PRINCESS *(From the shadows)* He speaks of fate! Fate to describe the murdering of innocents and children!

BAKUNIN The child of the Tsar is the next Tsar. The sooner dead...

TATIANA *(From the shadows)* Fate! Fate to describe this *ménage à trois* when my fate has been chaste and pure. And miserable!

TURGENEV There's nothing in that to blame on me. That was the plan of the Princess...

PRINCESS Fate! Your Fate was to be my arrangement so your life would be respectable and true to Mother Russia

TURGENEV I chose another way. Surely I have the right?

ANOUSKA *(From the shadows)* Fate! How can you all speak of fate when you have hampered Ivan from finding his own at every turn?

TURGENEV Anouska

ANOUSKA Count

TURGENEV I remember you. And I spurned you. And I'm sorry

TATIANA Fate! My Fate was to be your loyal wife. And now my Fate is to pray, and to sacrifice

TURGENEV But love is not sacrifice and ignorance isn't bliss

PRINCESS It is to her

TURGENEV If leaving her was necessary to write...

PRINCESS ... you mean to cling to that woman

TURGENEV ... then so be it

PRINCESS So you will still not return to us?

TURGENEV No. Never. I am going to Oxford in England. They've offered me an honorary doctorate...

PRINCESS Then die. *(She holds out her hand in a fist to reach as if within Turgenev's heart)* Die

BAKUNIN *(Doing the same)* Die

TATIANA *(Doing the same)* Die

TURGENEV No

ALL OTHERS Die

TURGENEV No. Ah. No

ALL OTHERS Die *(Turgenev falls to the ground. The spirits surround him)* Die.
(Chanting) Die

TURGENEV No

ANOUSKA No

TURGENEV Anouska *(he holds out his hand to her. She grabs it)*

ALL OTHERS Die

ANOUSKA No

ALL OTHERS Die

TURGENEV *(Holding his chest)* No *(He starts to rise)*

ANOUSKA No. Rise Ivan, rise

TURGENEV Anouska

ANOUSKA I love you Ivan

ALL OTHERS *(Turning on Anouska)* Die

BAKUNIN Prostitute

TATIANA Die you whore

PRINCESS Die you slut

BAKUNIN Die

TURGENEV *(Standing)* No! *(Anouska falls to the ground)* No!

ALL OTHERS *(Surrounding Anouska)* Die. Die

ANOUSKA I love you Ivan

ALL OTHERS Die *(Anouska dies, darkness descends)*

TURGENEV What have you done?

BAKUNIN She was a slag and incapable of killing. The Organisation had no use
for her
*(They vanish, Anouska's body remains where she has died, lying
across the front of the stage. Enter Pauline, who turns the
gaslighting up, bright and clear)*

PAULINE Ivan! Are you alright? You look as white as a sheet. *(She fetches a
chair with a blanket)* Come and sit down

TURGENEV Where is Louis?

PAULINE I'll go and find him. And make sure you rest
(Pauline exits. Enter Paulinette, running)

PAULINETTE Papa. I've just beaten Uncle Louis at chess!

TURGENEV Well done!

PAULINETTE And Maman is going to teach me to sing!

TURGENEV And your French is improving constantly. Now come here. I'm your father, and I've done what I've done. And I hope I've done something right *(he holds his chest in pain)*. Illness has become what has always eluded me, a faithful spouse. I can rely on it to wake me in the morning, and stay with me at dusk. *(Laughing)* Look at this. This is what Louis calls my 'life's work'. My *oeuvre*. So many bits of paper. He's been on at me for months to sort it out, but it's very boring. The scribblings of a man in two places at once, or nowhere in particular, clinging to the edge of another man's nest... *(Pauline enters with Louis. He is semi-crippled, with a stick, and she helps him walk, holding his arm. She guides him to a chair next to Turgenev, and puts a blanket over his legs)*

PAULINE There, now, you're better today Louis. And Ivan, you must exercise as well. Paulinette, would you be good, and bring us some tea, please

LOUIS Ah! Tea

TURGENEV What about some vodka?

PAULINE I think tea

PAULINETTE Yes, Maman *(she exits)*

LOUIS I can't stand this. How long can a man live such a half-life?

PAULINE Louis, take your medicine. Then you'll be better

LOUIS If only I could believe you

PAULINE Have I ever lied to you?

TURGENEV Oh God, this gout. Polyana, must I wear this blanket? I get so hot

PAULINE Now, you know what the doctor said, you must stay well wrapped up

TURGENEV My thighs are like logs on a fire

PAULINE You're exaggerating. As usual. *(Turgenev starts to take the blanket off)* Ivan! Keep it on! Now, both of you, you'll never get better if you don't do as I say. Can I get you anything?

TURGENEV *(Together)* No

LOUIS *(Together)* No. You'd have to leave us

TURGENEV And you mustn't do that

LOUIS That would be awful, even for five minutes

PAULINE Oh, both of you, please! *(Paul enters, a young man in his early twenties. He is carrying his bags. Paulinette follows him with the tea)*

LOUIS Ah, Paul! The great day. Off to university

PAUL Yes. Papa...

LOUIS No I haven't got any money. You've cost me a fortune already

PAUL *(Turning round)* How do I look?

PAULINE You can't go like that!

PAUL Why ever not?

PAULINE That cravat. You look ridiculous

PAUL It's the height of fashion. I bought it in Paris yesterday

PAULINE Whatever next?

PAUL Maman. It's my neck

PAULINE It is indeed, so be careful with it. And listen. There's an allowance awaiting your arrival in Berlin. Now your father won't insist, but I most certainly will. I want to see receipts

PAUL But Maman...

PAULINE And no 'buts'

TURGENEV *(Taking an envelope from his jacket)* Paul. I have a small sum for you here

PAULINE Ivan! How many times...

TURGENEV You're only young once

PAUL Thank you Uncle Ivan

TURGENEV *(whispering)* And I don't want to see any receipts at all

PAULINE I heard that

PAUL Yes, well. I don't want to miss the train. Just think, I'll be there tomorrow evening

TURGENEV Good Heavens. In my day the carriage took days...

PAUL The railways will revolutionise Europe! Papa. Uncle Ivan. Paulinette *(he kisses her)*

PAULINETTE Good luck Paul. I do so envy you

PAUL Maman *(he kisses her)*

PAULINE Goodbye Paul. And don't forget to write
 LOUIS Yes. And enjoy yourself, but work hard
 TURGENEV Yes. And don't do anything I wouldn't do
 PAUL Of course not
 PAULINETTE Papa. Can I see Paul to the railway station?
 TURGENEV Yes. Of course, but come straight back
 PAUL *Au revoir* then
 ALL Goodbye (*Paul exits. Paulinette following, carrying one of his bags. Pauline wipes her eyes with a handkerchief. Pause*)
 TURGENEV Louis, we must be good. Polina is upset
 LOUIS Heavens, yes we must
 TURGENEV Polyana, I wrote something yesterday
 PAULINE Really, what's it called?
 TURGENEV *Senilia*
 LOUIS A fine title, a fine title
 TURGENEV Louis
 LOUIS Ivan
 TURGENEV Don't you think she's a wonderful woman?
 LOUIS Magnificent. Why d'you think I married her?
 TURGENEV Superb. Why d'you think I...
 LOUIS Sublime
 TURGENEV Unsurpassed
 LOUIS Unrivalled in the annals of womanhood
 TURGENEV Even the gods must be jealous
 LOUIS There's just one thing
 TURGENEV What's that?
 LOUIS It's a pity there weren't two of her
 PAULINE Please, both of you, stop it

(Pauline cries)

 LOUIS We were only trying to cheer you up
 TURGENEV Honestly
 LOUIS We've let you down

TURGENEV All this illness

LOUIS No consideration

TURGENEV None at all

LOUIS You would have thought one of us could have remains healthy

TURGENEV Quite. We've let you down

LOUIS Dreadful fellows

TURGENEV Awful

PAULINE You haven't let me down at all. Now please, you'll tire yourselves.
You must sleep

TURGENEV I dread sleep. Every time I sleep I hallucinate

ALL *(Bakunin, Tatiana, Princess from the shadows)* Die

LOUIS It's the morphine. Take him off the morphine

PAULINE If he doesn't take the morphine, he can't sleep for all the pain

ALL *(Bakunin, Tatiana, Princess from the shadows)* Die

LOUIS Ivan, d'you want to know something

TURGENEV What?

LOUIS I think I'm dying

TURGENEV Really. So do I

LOUIS Me or you?

TURGENEV Both of us

LOUIS It's a certainty

TURGENEV A dead certainty *(they both laugh)*

LOUIS What do you hallucinate?

TURGENEV I dream I'm being attacked by a pack of wolves

LOUIS I dream of hunting

TURGENEV Ah, shooting!

LOUIS Hunting. *(Using his walking stick as a gun)* Bang, bang

TURGENEV Could you shoot one of my wolves?

LOUIS I doubt it. My eye's gone

TURGENEV Oh dear. Is there no hope then?

LOUIS *(Falling unconscious)* None at all Ivan, none at all

PAULINE Louis, Ivan, please! And try and get some sleep. *(Frantically)* Louis,
Louis...

EPILOGUE

(1882. Paris. The Viardot residence. There is the sound of a soprano singing the same aria Pauline has sung earlier. As the lights go up, Pauline and Paulinette are dressed in black. Pauline is playing the piano, Paulinette is singing. There is a large pile of papers on a table. Pauline stops playing the piano abruptly, in mid-song. Paulinette stops singing)

PAULINETTE Is there anything I can get you?

PAULINE No Paulinette, but I think that's enough for today. Your singing has improved enormously

PAULINETTE Thank you Maman. But I'll never be as good as you

PAULINE No, you won't. But you're much better than you were. *(Pause. Pauline goes over to the papers on the table. She flicks through them. Russian priests swinging incense and singing Gregorian chants appear in the background)* First Louis, and then Ivan. So suddenly... And what a strange funeral. A Russian church in Paris full of so many curious people, exiles, diplomats, misfits. But the tributes were touching. *(Silence. Paulinette starts sobbing)* There, there, you mustn't weep. His life stopped slowly after one or two hiccups. And we must be thankful there wasn't more pain. *(The chants are augmented by bells)* I have made arrangements for the body to be taken to Russia, and I think you should accompany it

PAULINETTE Will you not attend?

PAULINE No. I had more than my fair share of Ivan alive. *(Pause)* Paulinette, I know I'm not very popular with you Russians. I know I've ignored you, perhaps even been cruel. But Ivan and I... *(both women start weeping profoundly. They come to embrace each other, centre stage).* There are things beyond us.

THE END