

# PLATONOV

BY

ANTON CHEKHOV

TRANSLATED BY

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*Dedicated to Brian Kulick*

## CHARACTERS

ANNA PETROVNA VOYNITSEVA — a young widow

SERGEY PAVLOVITCH VOYNITSEV — her stepson

SOFYA VOYNITSEVA — his new bride

PORFIRY SEMYONOVITCH GLAGOLYEV — a wealthy neighbor

CYRIL PORFIRYEVITCH GLAGOLYEV — his son

PAVEL PETROVITCH SHCHERBUK — retired army, creditor

MARYA YEFIMOVNA GREKOVA — a chemistry student, 20

NIKOLAI IVANOVITCH TRILETSKY — a young doctor

MIKHAIL VASILYEVITCH PLATONOV — a schoolteacher

ALEKSANDRA (SASHA) IVANOVNA — married to Platonov

OSIP — a horse thief, 30

MARKO — an old messenger

YAKOV — servant to Anna Petrovna

# PLATONOV

## ACT ONE

### Scene 1

*Drawing room. Voynitsev's summerhouse. A French window opens onto the garden. Modern and antique furniture. A grand piano. A music stand with violin and some music.*

*Anna sits at the piano, playing a Chopin ballade. Nikolai comes in, picks up the violin, and begins to accompany her (badly). Anna stops playing, and looks at him.*

NIKOLAI. What?

ANNA. I'm bored.

NIKOLAI. Shall we have a smoke? That should cheer you up. It would cheer me up. I'm dying for a smoke. My kingdom for a smoke. *(She gives him cigarettes.)* I'll keep them so I don't have to bother you later. *(They light up.)*

ANNA. Still bored. *(He takes her hand.)* So. Doctor. How's my pulse?

NIKOLAI. Oooohhh. *(He kisses her hand.)* I love this hand. It's exquisite. It should be in a museum. Like satin. And the scent ... How do you get that scent?

ANNA. It's called soap.

NIKOLAI. A game of chess?

ANNA. All right.

NIKOLAI. What shall we play for? The usual ten roubles? Or should we make it a kiss?

ANNA. A kiss from your lips? I'd rather have anthrax.

NIKOLAI. Ten roubles it is then. I'm starving, when do we eat?

ANNA. You're always starving. Your move. Oh, you have moved. That's where you're going? You need to *think* first. I move here.

NIKOLAI. After my knight. The weeds of crime bear evil fruit. When do we eat?

ANNA. Hard to say. Chef has dipped into the sherry and is just a little bit intoxicated.

NIKOLAI. I'm starving!

ANNA. How can you be starving? You ate a whole pie an hour ago.

NIKOLAI. Your point being? (*Moves piece.*) Take that! You eat to live, I live to eat.

ANNA. You're not trying to amuse me again, are you? Have I ever laughed at anything you have said?

NIKOLAI. Watch out for your bishop now. You don't laugh because you have no sense of humor. Your move.

ANNA. I'm thinking. I'm thinking.

NIKOLAI. Move without thinking. (*Licks his lips.*)

ANNA. What are you doing?

NIKOLAI. I'm getting ready for my kiss.

ANNA. What about your young Marya Grekova?

NIKOLAI. What about her?

ANNA. Aren't you ...

NIKOLAI. What?

ANNA. Together.

NIKOLAI. I don't know.

ANNA. Well, what do you do with the girl?

NIKOLAI. I visit her. We go for walks in the shade. I bore her with my observations. We hold hands. She straightens my tie ...

ANNA. And?

NIKOLAI. And nothing.

ANNA. Do you love her?

NIKOLAI. (*Pause.*) I guess so.

ANNA. You are such a moron.

NIKOLAI. Thank you.

ANNA. And you have left your castle unprotected.

NIKOLAI. On purpose. It's a trap.

ANNA. Well, don't set a trap for her, your young Marya Grekova. I like her. She's intelligent. She's going to be a chemist. Don't you dare ruin her.

NIKOLAI. Ruin her.

ANNA. Don't lay siege to her, only to abandon her when she

succumbs. Marry her or end it now, and think before you choose. With what, though? You're brainless. You can't move there, that's check. No, bring her to me, I'll look her over, and tell you what to do.

NIKOLAI. She doesn't trust you.

ANNA. What?

NIKOLAI. You're friends with Platonov. She can't stand him. He's always teasing her and flirting with her. He seems to think it's his duty to punish her for being young. Your move.

ANNA. Check. I'll take care of Platonov. Where is he? Why isn't he here? (*Looks at the clock.*) He's beyond being late. It's been six months. This is really very rude of him.

NIKOLAI. The man's a pig. He doesn't care.

PORFIRY. (*Entering with Sergey.*) In those days we loved our women. We revered them. Put them on a pedestal. That's where they belonged. They were better than us.

ANNA. Will you stop cheating?

NIKOLAI. What are you talking about, cheating?

ANNA. How did my castle get there?

NIKOLAI. That's where you moved it.

ANNA. So I did. Your castle is about to crumble. And your king's days are numbered.

PORFIRY. We were also devoted to our friends. We would go through fire for them.

SERGEY. (*Yawning.*) Those were the days, all right.

NIKOLAI. These days we have the fire brigade go through fire for our friends.

ANNA. Check, check, check!

PORFIRY. In Moscow last year I saw a young man at the opera. He was crying, he was so moved by the music.

SERGEY. You don't say.

PORFIRY. I do say. But the point I'm making is that all the people around him found his tears amusing. They laughed at him, causing him to flee the theater in shame. In my day people respected emotion, no one laughed at tears.

NIKOLAI. (*Under his breath, to Anna.*) In your day, people were idiots.

ANNA. Shh!

PORFIRY. In my day, people who loved music didn't have to leave the theater. You're yawning, am I boring you?

NIKOLAI. (*As before.*) You're boring me.

ANNA. Shh!

SERGEY. No, not at all. Maybe we could change the subject, though.  
PORFIRY. I'm just saying, in my day we had respect for women, for friends, and for feelings.

SERGEY. And nowadays we don't?

PORFIRY. It grieves me to say it, but nowadays we don't.

NIKOLAI. (*Leaning in.*) Check!

ANNA. Your cologne, I can't breathe. (*She coughs and moves away.*)

NIKOLAI. (*Does a little dance.*) That's it, on the verge of losing so you blame my scent and quit. That means I win. You owe me ten roubles.

ANNA. Sergey, give this deranged psychopath ten roubles. (*To Glagolyev.*) So you think women belong on a pedestal?

PORFIRY. Yes, I do.

SERGEY. He's a romantic. (*Nikolai picks up a violin and, with enthusiasm, plays badly.*)

ANNA. Nikolai, you're making noise, not music. Put the fiddle away.

NIKOLAI. My music is so moving I'm going to cry. (*He laughs.*)

PORFIRY. That's right, go ahead and mock me. You prove my point exactly.

NIKOLAI. And what exactly is your point?

SERGEY. Oh, for God's sake, don't encourage him.

PORFIRY. We've lost something of substance and value. Platonov agrees with me.

NIKOLAI. Friend Platonov is hardly an authority.

PORFIRY. I agree with you there. Platonov is not an authority on anything. He is, however, a shining example of the confusion that characterizes the modern era. He is the hero of the as-yet-unwritten great Russian novel of our time. No, people these days are without weight, and how could they be otherwise. There's no moral compass. We cannot find our footing. A great uncertainty has woven its way into the fabric of our lives. Chaos reigns. And Platonov is at the very center of this chaos.

PLATONOV. (*Entering with Sasha.*) Say hello, Sasha. (*She nods to the people in the room.*) Your ladyship. (*Kisses both of Anna's hands.*) My chair. (*Embraces his chair.*) How I've missed you. (*Kisses his chair.*) Not my chair, it's my throne. (*Sits in the chair and gives a kingly wave.*)

ANNA. Well, Your Majesty, you are a cruel, thoughtless, and evil monarch. You're late! Sasha, dear, how are you?

SASHA. All right, I guess.

PLATONOV. We have been hibernating like bears. We've just



emerged from our cave, squinting into the light. Can you smell it, Sasha?

SASHA. Yes. *(She and her husband laugh.)*

PLATONOV. Human flesh. Wonderful smell.

ANNA. How's life, Mikhail?

PLATONOV. Horrible. Six months of nothing but eating, drinking, and sleeping.

SASHA. It's been a little boring.

PLATONOV. Little boring? Paralytically boring. Thank God you've returned and opened the house for the season. And thank God we are here.

ANNA. And for that you get a cigarette. Nikolai. *(They light up.)*

PLATONOV. Bless you. *(Sasha whispers in his ear.)* What? Why didn't you tell me? Sergey. Congratulations. I never thought you'd do it. It's official, you're married? Another nail in your coffin.

SASHA. Misha!

PLATONOV. Are you working?

SERGEY. They offered me a teaching position but the pay is an insult.

PLATONOV. You're not taking it?

SERGEY. I don't see how I can.

PLATONOV. Big mistake. One which you will come to regret.

ANNA. Change the subject. Sasha, dear, why were you so late getting here?

SASHA. Misha had to fix the birdcage and I had church. We had a mass sung for Misha's father.

PORFIRY. When did he die, Platonov?

PLATONOV. Three, four years ago.

SASHA. Three years, eight months. *(Pause.)*

PORFIRY. We once served on the same jury, your father and I. A surveyor was on trial for taking bribes. We all wanted to convict, but your father wouldn't let us. He argued for acquittal, fought us tooth and nail for hours. Finally he said, "If you can swear you don't take bribes yourselves, I will find him guilty." *(He laughs.)* Well, of course, we couldn't. So, we had to let him off. A great man, your father. So kind.

PLATONOV. He wasn't kind to me. All I ever saw in those eyes of his was disappointment. What I hated most about him was how peacefully he died. As if he'd led an honest life.

PORFIRY. Do not speak ill of the dead.

PLATONOV. You've got it wrong. Speak ill of everything.

# PLATONOV

by Anton Chekhov  
translated by John Christopher Jones

9M, 4W

PLATONOV is Chekhov's first play, and it went unproduced during his lifetime. Finding himself on a downward spiral fueled by lust and alcohol, Platonov proudly adopts as his motto "speak ill of everything." A shining example of the chaos that reigned in his era, Platonov is a Hamlet whose father was never murdered, a Don Juan who cheats on his wife and his mistress, and the hero of the as-yet unwritten great Russian novel of his day.

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