

THREE DAYS IN THE COUNTRY

A VERSION OF TURGENEV'S
A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY

BY

PATRICK MARBER



THREE DAYS IN THE COUNTRY

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This play is dedicated to Ian Rickson

Three Days in the Country was first presented in the Lyttelton auditorium of the National Theatre, London, on July 21, 2015. It was directed by Patrick Marber, the set and costume designs were by Mark Thompson, the lighting design was by Neil Austin, the music and sound design were by Adam Cork, and the stage manager was David Marsland. The cast was as follows:

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

Acknowledgments

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

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

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

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

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

PM, June 2015

Dramatis Personae

ARKADY, a rich landowner, forties

NATALYA, his wife

KOLYA, their son, ten

VERA, their ward, seventeen

ANNA, Arkady's mother, sixties

LIZAVETA, Anna's companion, around fifty

RAKITIN, a friend of the family, forties

SCHAAF, a German tutor

BELYAEV, Kolya's new tutor, twenties

SHPIGELSKY, a doctor

BOLSHINTSOV a rich neighbour

MATVEY, a servant

KATYA, a maidservant

Place

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

Time

Three days in the mid-nineteenth century.
Summer.

THREE DAYS IN THE COUNTRY

ACT ONE

The drawing room. Late afternoon.

*Schaaf, Anna and Lizaveta at a baize table playing cards.
Natalya lies on a sofa, reading a novel. Rakitin watches her.*

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

NATALYA. I'm a slo--w reader.

RAKITIN. No you're not.

Natalya turns a page, continues to read. Rakitin watches.

SCHAAF. Hearts!

ANNA. Again?

SCHAAF. Yes. I have the hearts.

ANNA. You're a lucky old devil.

LIZAVETA. Our pain is his pleasure.

SCHAAF. Play, good ladies.

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

Schaaf lays a card down, takes the trick.

LIZAVETA. He's a demon!

SCHAAF. It is only money.

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

NATALYA. Must you stand there?

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

Back at the card table:

SCHAAF. Hearts!

ANNA. Not again?

LIZAVETA. His luck is both disturbing and suspicious.

ANNA. (*To Natalya.*) Natasha, sevens and eights are pouring out of him!

LIZAVETA. He bleeds hearts!

NATALYA. You lose every day—stop playing with him!

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

Their game continues.

NATALYA. (*To Rakitin.*) Did you see my husband?

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

NATALYA. Well, he does like to slosh about.

RAKITIN. The men were astonished.

ANNA. Where's Kolya?

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

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

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

SCHAAF. (*To Lizaveta.*) You to play, good lady.

The game continues.

NATALYA. Were you in Petersburg?

RAKITIN. Yes. Some business.

NATALYA. And some pleasure?

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

NATALYA. Tell me all.

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

NATALYA. How did you pass the time?

RAKITIN. We drank.

NATALYA. You explored the limits of country life.

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

NATALYA. I don't remember.

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

NATALYA. You should've ignored me.

RAKITIN. You know I can't.

NATALYA. Ignore me!

At the card table:

LIZAVETA. Ha! He's lost a trick!

ANNA. He's defeated!

Lizaveta and Anna chuckle. Kolya comes in with a bow and arrow. He sees Natalya with Rakitin and heads towards Anna instead.

KOLYA. Grandma.

He presents the bow and arrow.

ANNA. What a fine weapon. Who made it?

Belyaev and Vera appear in the doorway. They stand there, golden.

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

Anna touches the point, pretends to be hurt.

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

NATALYA. May I see?

Kolya hands her the bow and arrow. She inspects it.

Kolya watches, hoping she'll approve.

(To Belyaev.) It's beautifully made.

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

And now, your German lesson.

Schaaf rises from the card table.

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

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

Kolya is out of the door. Vera and Belyaev follow him. Schaaf sits.

RAKITIN. *(To Lizaveta.)* Who was that?

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

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

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

MATVEY. Doctor Shpigelsky has arrived.

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

ANNA. He is staggering...

LIZAVETA. He totters...

SCHAAF. But he is not yet fallen.

SHPIGELSKY. *(To Lizaveta.)* Madam, I have some new pills for you. Oh, I like your—what would you call it?

LIZAVETA. ...Clothing?

SHPIGELSKY. And the way it has relationship with your hair.

He bows to Lizaveta then goes over to Natalya.

Madam. Are you well?

NATALYA. I had a fever but it passed.

SHPIGELSKY. You should've sent for me!

NATALYA. There was some medicine from last time.

SHPIGELSKY. They don't last forever. Even the finest potions can separate. You give them a shake but the magic has evaporated. *(To Rakitin.)* Why are you sniggering? *(To Natalya.)* Please...

She offers her arm and he takes her pulse.

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

NATALYA. Where?

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

RAKITIN. You men of science are mightily impressive.

SHPIGELSKY. *(To Natalya.)* May we speak in private?

Rakitin sighs, wanders off. Shpigelsky observes him a moment.

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

NATALYA. To the matter.

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

NATALYA. He seeks her hand in marriage?

SHPIGELSKY. You have it.

NATALYA. Who is he?

SHPIGELSKY. My friend is one of your neighbours.

He vaguely gestures in a northerly direction.

NATALYA. Bolshintsov?

SHPIGELSKY. I couldn't say.

NATALYA. Then how may I consider the proposal?

Pause.

SHPIGELSKY. It's Bolshintsov.

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

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

NATALYA. I am stone.

SHPIGELSKY. Well, she'll have to marry someone.

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

Vera enters with Kolya. He approaches Rakitin, confidentially.

KOLYA. Are you busy?

RAKITIN. No.

KOLYA. Please could you find me some glue?

RAKITIN. Yes.

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8 men, 5 women

In rural nineteenth-century Russia, a tangle of hopeless romances brings chaos to a country estate. Natalya, the wife of the wealthy estate-owner, is in love with her son's tutor; a neighbor has taken a liking to Natalya's ward, who has her eyes set elsewhere; and Natalya's long-time friend Rakitin may crave more from their platonic relationship. A tale of young love, old love, and everything in between, *Three Days in the Country* is a riveting update on Turgenev's heartbreaking classic.

"[Marber] must take a bow. For it is an evening where the wit of the dialogue captivates. And, as in an elegant dance, the play keeps turning on its own heel, moving between comedy and anguish, reminding us of love as an impractical joke."
—*The Guardian (UK)*

"Patrick Marber turns out another gem... The translation underlines the idea that Turgenev is our contemporary: there's nothing turgid about the crisp, taut dialogue, by turns droll and searing."
—*The Telegraph (UK)*

"[THREE DAYS IN THE COUNTRY] is full of humour and yearning. ...Marber's adaptation is emotionally eloquent and disarmingly funny, delicately fretted with melancholy."
—*TheStage.co.uk*

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