

# **IVANOFF**

by

Anton Chekhov

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# Ivanoff

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## Characters

NICHOLAS IVANOFF, perpetual member of the Council of Peasant Affairs

ANNA, his wife. Nee Sarah Abramson

MATTHEW SHABELSKI, a count, uncle of Ivanoff

PAUL LEBEDIEFF, President of the Board of the Zemstvo

ZINAIDA, his wife

SASHA, their daughter, twenty years old

LVOFF, a young government doctor

MARTHA BABAKINA, a young widow, owner of an estate and daughter of a rich merchant

KOSICH, an exciseman

MICHAEL BORKIN, a distant relative of Ivanoff, and manager of his estate

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA, an old woman

GEORGE, lives with the Lebedieffs

FIRST GUEST

SECOND GUEST

THIRD GUEST

FOURTH GUEST

PETER, a servant of Ivanoff

GABRIEL, a servant of Lebedieff

GUESTS OF BOTH SEXES

The play takes place in one of the provinces of central Russia

## ACT I

The garden of IVANOFF'S country place. On the left is a terrace and the facade of the house. One window is open. Below the terrace is a broad semicircular lawn, from which paths lead to right and left into a garden. On the right are several garden benches and tables. A lamp is burning on one of the tables. It is evening. As the curtain rises sounds of the piano and violoncello are heard.

IVANOFF is sitting at a table reading.

BORKIN, in top-boots and carrying a gun, comes in from the rear of the garden. He is a little tipsy. As he sees IVANOFF he comes toward him on tiptoe, and when he comes opposite him he stops and points the gun at his face.

**IVANOFF.** [Catches sight of BORKIN. Shudders and jumps to his feet] Misha! What are you doing? You frightened me! I can't stand your stupid jokes when I am so nervous as this. And having frightened me, you laugh! [He sits down.]

**BORKIN.** [Laughing loudly] There, I am sorry, really. I won't do it again. Indeed I won't. [Take off his cap] How hot it is! Just think, my dear boy, I have covered twelve miles in the last three hours. I am worn out. Just feel how my heart is beating.

**IVANOFF.** [Goes on reading] Oh, very well. I shall feel it later!

**BORKIN.** No, feel it now. [He takes IVANOFF'S hand and presses it against his breast] Can you feel it thumping? That means that it is weak and that I may die suddenly at any moment. Would you be sorry if I died?

**IVANOFF.** I am reading now. I shall attend to you later.

**BORKIN.** No, seriously, would you be sorry if I died? Nicholas, would you be sorry if I died?

**IVANOFF.** Leave me alone!

**BORKIN.** Come, tell me if you would be sorry or not.

**IVANOFF.** I am sorry that you smell so of vodka, Misha, it is disgusting.

**BORKIN.** Do I smell of vodka? How strange! And yet, it is not so strange after all. I met the magistrate on the road, and I must admit that we did drink about eight glasses together. Strictly speaking, of course, drinking is very harmful. Listen, it is harmful, isn't it? Is it? Is it?

**IVANOFF.** This is unendurable! Let me warn you, Misha, that you are going too far.

**BORKIN.** Well, well, excuse me. Sit here by yourself then, for heaven's sake, if it amuses you. [Gets up and goes away] What extraordinary people one meets in the world. They won't even allow themselves to be spoken to. [He comes back] Oh, yes, I nearly forgot. Please let me have eighty-two roubles.

**IVANOFF.** Why do you want eighty-two roubles?

**BORKIN.** To pay the workmen to-morrow.

**IVANOFF.** I haven't the money.

**BORKIN.** Many thanks. [Angrily] So you haven't the money! And yet the workmen must be paid, mustn't they?

**IVANOFF.** I don't know. Wait till my salary comes in on the first of the month.

**BORKIN.** How is it possible to discuss anything with a man like you? Can't you understand that the workmen are coming to-morrow morning and not on the first of the month?

**IVANOFF.** How can I help it? I'll be hanged if I can do anything about it now. And what do you mean by this irritating way you have of pestering me whenever I am trying to read or write or---

**BORKIN.** Must the workmen be paid or not, I ask you? But, good gracious! What is the use of talking to you! [Waves his hand] Do you think because you own an estate you can command the whole world? With your two thousand acres and your empty pockets you are like a man who has a cellar full of wine and no corkscrew. I have sold the oats as they stand in the field. Yes, sir! And to-morrow I shall sell the rye and the carriage horses. [He stamps up and down] Do you think I am going to stand upon ceremony with you? Certainly not! I am not that kind of a man!

ANNA appears at the open window.

**ANNA.** Whose voice did I hear just now? Was it yours, Misha? Why are you stamping up and down?

**BORKIN.** Anybody who had anything to do with your Nicholas would stamp up and down.

**ANNA.** Listen, Misha! Please have some hay carried onto the croquet lawn.

**BORKIN.** [Waves his hand] Leave me alone, please!

**ANNA.** Oh, what manners! They are not becoming to you at all. If you want to be liked by women you must never let them see you when you are angry or obstinate. [To her husband] Nicholas, let us go and play on the lawn in the hay!

**IVANOFF.** Don't you know it is bad for you to stand at the open window, Annie?  
[Calls] Shut the window, Uncle!

[The window is shut from the inside.]

**BORKIN.** Don't forget that the interest on the money you owe Lebedieff must be paid in two days.

**IVANOFF.** I haven't forgotten it. I am going over to see Lebedieff today and shall ask him to wait

[He looks at his watch.]

**BORKIN.** When are you going?

**IVANOFF.** At once.

**BORKIN.** Wait! Wait! Isn't this Sasha's birthday? So it is! The idea of my forgetting it. What a memory I have. [Jumps about] I shall go with you! [Sings] I shall go, I shall go! Nicholas, old man, you are the joy of my life. If you were not always so nervous and cross and gloomy, you and I could do great things together. I would do anything for you. Shall I marry Martha Babakina and give you half her fortune? That is, not half, either, but all--take it all!

**IVANOFF.** Enough of this nonsense!

**BORKIN.** No, seriously, shan't I marry Martha and halve the money with you? But no, why should I propose it? How can you understand? [Angrily] You say to me: "Stop talking nonsense!" You are a good man and a clever one, but you haven't any red blood in your veins or any--well, enthusiasm. Why, if you wanted to, you and I could cut a dash together that would shame the devil himself. If you were a normal man instead of a morbid hypochondriac we would have a million in a year. For instance, if I had twenty-three hundred roubles now I could make twenty thousand in two weeks. You don't believe me? You think it is all nonsense? No, it isn't nonsense. Give me twenty-three hundred roubles and let me try. Ofsianoff is selling a strip of land across the river for that price. If we buy

this, both banks will be ours, and we shall have the right to build a dam across the river. Isn't that so? We can say that we intend to build a mill, and when the people on the river below us hear that we mean to dam the river they will, of course, object violently and we shall say: If you don't want a dam here you will have to pay to get us away. Do you see the result? The factory would give us five thousand roubles, Korolkoff three thousand, the monastery five thousand more--

**IVANOFF.** All that is simply idiotic, Misha. If you don't want me to lose my temper you must keep your schemes to yourself.

**BORKIN.** [Sits down at the table] Of course! I knew how it would be! You never will act for yourself, and you tie my hands so that I am helpless.

Enter SHABELSKI and LVOFF.

**SHABELSKI.** The only difference between lawyers and doctors is that lawyers simply rob you, whereas doctors both rob you and kill you. I am not referring to any one present. [Sits down on the bench] They are all frauds and swindlers. Perhaps in Arcadia you might find an exception to the general rule and yet--I have treated thousands of sick people myself in my life, and I have never met a doctor who did not seem to me to be an unmistakable scoundrel.

**BORKIN.** [To IVANOFF] Yes, you tie my hands and never do anything for yourself, and that is why you have no money.

**SHABELSKI.** As I said before, I am not referring to any one here at present; there may be exceptions though, after all-- [He yawns.]

**IVANOFF.** [Shuts his book] What have you to tell me, doctor?

**LVOFF.** [Looks toward the window] Exactly what I said this morning: she must go to the Crimea at once. [Walks up and down.]

**SHABELSKI.** [Bursts out laughing] To the Crimea! Why don't you and I set up as doctors, Misha? Then, if some Madame Angot or Ophelia finds the world tiresome and begins to cough and be consumptive, all we shall have to do will be to write out a prescription according to the laws of medicine: that is, first, we shall order her a young doctor, and then a journey to the Crimea. There some fascinating young Tartar---

**IVANOFF.** [Interrupting] Oh, don't be coarse! [To LVOFF] It takes money to go to the Crimea, and even if I could afford it, you know she has refused to go.

**LVOFF.** Yes, she has. [A pause.]

**BORKIN.** Look here, doctor, is Anna really so ill that she absolutely must go to the Crimea?

**LVOFF.** [Looking toward the window] Yes, she has consumption.

**BORKIN.** Whew! How sad! I have seen in her face for some time that she could not last much longer.

**LVOFF.** Can't you speak quietly? She can hear everything you say. [A pause.]

**BORKIN.** [Sighing] The life of man is like a flower, blooming so gaily in a field. Then, along comes a goat, he eats it, and the flower is gone!

**SHABELSKI.** Oh, nonsense, nonsense. [Yawning] Everything is a fraud and a swindle. [A pause.]

**BORKIN.** Gentlemen, I have been trying to tell Nicholas how he can make some money, and have submitted a brilliant plan to him, but my seed, as usual, has fallen on barren soil. Look what a sight he is now: dull, cross, bored, peevish---

**SHABELSKI.** [Gets up and stretches himself] You are always inventing schemes for everybody, you clever fellow, and telling them how to live; can't you tell me something? Give me some good advice, you ingenious young man. Show me a good move to make.

**BORKIN.** [Getting up] I am going to have a swim. Goodbye, gentlemen. [To Shabelski] There are at least twenty good moves you could make. If I were you I should have twenty thousand roubles in a week.

[He goes out; SHABELSKI follows him.]

**SHABELSKI.** How would you do it? Come, explain.

**BORKIN.** There is nothing to explain, it is so simple. [Coming back] Nicholas, give me a rouble.

**IVANOFF** silently hands him the money

**BORKIN.** Thanks. Shabelski, you still hold some trump cards.

**SHABELSKI** follows him out.

**SHABELSKI.** Well, what are they?



**BORKIN.** If I were you I should have thirty thousand roubles and more in a week.  
[They go out together.]

**IVANOFF.** [After a pause] Useless people, useless talk, and the necessity of answering stupid questions, have wearied me so, doctor, that I am ill. I have become so irritable and bitter that I don't know myself. My head aches for days at a time. I hear a ringing in my ears, I can't sleep, and yet there is no escape from it all, absolutely none.

**LVOFF.** Ivanoff, I have something serious to speak to you about.

**IVANOFF.** What is it ?

**LVOFF.** It is about your wife. She refuses to go to the Crimea alone, but she would go with you.

**IVANOFF.** [Thoughtfully] It would cost a great deal for us both to go, and besides, I could not get leave to be away for so long. I have had one holiday already this year.

**LVOFF.** Very well, let us admit that. Now to proceed. The best cure for consumption is absolute peace of mind, and your wife has none whatever. She is forever excited by your behaviour to her. Forgive me, I am excited and am going to speak frankly. Your treatment of her is killing her. [A pause] Ivanoff, let me believe better things of you.

**IVANOFF.** What you say is true, true. I must be terribly guilty, but my mind is confused. My will seems to be paralysed by a kind of stupor; I can't understand myself or any one else. [Looks toward the window] Come, let us take a walk, we might be overheard here. [They get up] My dear friend, you should hear the whole story from the beginning if it were not so long and complicated that to tell it would take all night. [They walk up and down] Anna is a splendid, an exceptional woman. She has left her faith, her parents and her fortune for my sake. If I should demand a hundred other sacrifices, she would consent to every one without the quiver of an eyelid. Well, I am not a remarkable man in any way, and have sacrificed nothing. However, the story is a long one. In short, the whole point is, my dear doctor-- [Confused] that I married her for love and promised to love her forever, and now after five years she loves me still and I-- [He waves his hand] Now, when you tell me she is dying, I feel neither love nor pity, only a sort of loneliness and weariness. To all appearances this must seem horrible, and I cannot understand myself what is happening to me. [They go out.]

**SHABELSKI** comes in.

**SHABELSKI.** [Laughing] Upon my word, that man is no scoundrel, but a great thinker, a master-mind. He deserves a memorial. He is the essence of modern ingenuity, and combines in himself alone the genius of the lawyer, the doctor, and the financier. [He sits down on the lowest step of the terrace] And yet he has never finished a course of studies in any college; that is so surprising. What an ideal scoundrel he would have made if he had acquired a little culture and mastered the sciences! "You could make twenty thousand roubles in a week," he said. "You still hold the ace of trumps: it is your title." [Laughing] He said I might get a rich girl to marry me for it! [ANNA opens the window and looks down] "Let me make a match between you and Martha," says he. Who is this Martha? It must be that Balabalkina--Babakalkina woman, the one that looks like a laundress.

**ANNA.** Is that you, Count?

**SHABELSKI.** What do you want?

**ANNA** laughs.

**SHABELSKI.** [With a Jewish accent] Vy do you laugh?

**ANNA.** I was thinking of something you said at dinner, do you remember? How was it--a forgiven thief, a doctored horse.

**SHABELSKI.** A forgiven thief, a doctored horse, and a Christianised Jew are all worth the same price.

**ANNA.** [Laughing] You can't even repeat the simplest saying without ill-nature. You are a most malicious old man. [Seriously] Seriously, Count you are extremely disagreeable, and very tiresome and painful to live with. You are always grumbling and growling, and everybody to you is a blackguard and a scoundrel. Tell me honestly, Count, have you ever spoken well of any one?

**SHABELSKI.** Is this an inquisition?

**ANNA.** We have lived under this same roof now for five years, and I have never heard you speak kindly of people, or without bitterness and derision. What harm has the world done to you? Is it possible that you consider yourself better than any one else?

**SHABELSKI.** Not at all. I think we are all of us scoundrels and hypocrites. I myself am a degraded old man, and as useless as a cast-off shoe. I abuse myself as much as any one else. I was rich once, and free, and happy at times, but now I am a dependent, an object of charity, a joke to the world. When I am at

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