

## **UNIT 11: The Proposal**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Anton Chekov (1860-1904) was a famous writer. He is chiefly known for his short stories. This story 'The Proposal' is a romantic story of a neighbour named Ivan Lomov. He is a landowner and often gets money from Chubukov's another landowner. Chubukov has a daughter named Natalya. Lomov comes to Chubukov with a marriage proposal for his daughter Natalya.

### **GIST**

'The Proposal' is a one-act play. Actually, it is a farce written by Anton Chekhov in 1888-89. The play is about the tendency of wealthy families to seek matrimonial ties. The real purpose is to increase their estates and landed properties. Ivan Lomov was a wealthy neighbour of another wealthy farmer Stepan Chubukov. Lomov comes to seek the hand of Chubukov's twenty-five-year-old daughter, Natalya. Lomov, Chubukov and Natalya—all three are quarrelsome people. They quarrel over petty or small issues. Each one of them has a claim over a particular piece of land. They also quarrel over their dogs. Amidst this quarrelling, they completely forget the real issue — the marriage proposal. But good sense prevails in the end. Economic good sense ensures that the proposal is made. Chubukov doesn't want to miss the opportunity. He puts his daughter's hand into Lomov's hands. He doesn't waste any time and blesses them. However, old habits die hard. The newly married couple starts their married life with a fresh quarrel.

### **DETAILED SUMMARY**

When the play begins we see that Lomov comes to meet Chubukov at his house. Chubukov who is a farmer welcomes Lomov. He asks him why he is wearing formal clothes and whether he is going to attend a function. Lomov replies that he is not going anywhere; he has come only to meet him. Lomov appears excited and perturbed. He calms himself down and begins to tell him the purpose of his visit. He tells him that he came to him many times in the past also for his help but he did not help him. Before telling the purpose of his visit, Lomov is excited once again. Chubukov thinks that perhaps he has come to ask for a loan. He makes up his mind not to help him in any way.

Lomov once again begins to tell Chubukov about the purpose of his visit. But he once again becomes excited. He talks about himself in exaggerated terms. Chubukov asks him not to beat about the bush and to talk about his purpose of coming. Lomov gathers courage and tells him that he has come to ask for his daughter Natalya's hand in marriage. On hearing this Chubukov becomes very happy, he goes in to call Natalya. But before this Lomov asks him whether Natalya would give her permission for this. Chubukov replies that she will readily accept a match like him.

Lomov is left alone in the room. His body is trembling with excitement. He thinks about his present life. He wants to settle the question of his marriage at once. He thinks that now he should not delay. He thinks about Natalya. She is a skilled house-keeper. She is educated and is not bad to look at. At this age, he should not expect a better girl than her. Now he is thirty-five years old. Now he should lead a regulated life. He is suffering from serious diseases like palpitation, excitement and insomnia. Because of these reasons, he should marry.

Just then Natalya comes in. Her father has not told her that Lomov has come to meet her. He only told her that a customer had come. Even then she welcomes Lomov. Before Lomov can speak, she starts speaking. When she mentions his beautiful dress, he is again excited. Before he can talk about his marriage to her, he starts trembling. Natalya encourages him and he recovers. He says that he will tell her everything in brief. Even then he cannot talk in a straight-forward manner. He beats about the bush. He tells her that for the Iasi many decades their families have had good relations. Their estates are also adjoining. His Oxen Warbles touch their birchwoods. Natalya protests against this. She says that the Oxen Meadows belong to her. They lay their claims to it. They start quarrelling about the ownership of the Oxen Meadows. They shout loudly at each other. They do not calm down in any way. Chubukov comes in and finds them both quarrelling. He is greatly surprised. But when he finds that they are quarrelling about the ownership of the Oxen Meadows. He also becomes angry. Instead of calming them down, he also starts quarrelling. He claims to be the owner of the Meadows. He insults not only Lomov but also his family members. Lomov becomes more excited. He uses insulting words for Chubukov, Natalya and their family members. Lomov's palpitation increases and he becomes very perturbed. He goes out of the room. Chubukov says how the foolish Lomov dared to bring a proposal for Natalya's marriage. When Natalya hears this, she is deeply shocked. She is almost unconscious. She starts weeping and asks her father to bring Lomov back. Chubukov feels sad. He says that it is the biggest misfortune to be the father of a girl. He goes out to call Lomov.

Lomov again enters the room. Natalya thinks that she will not annoy him this time. She tries to please him. She says that the Meadows belong to him. She tries to change the topic so that he could propose to her. But he is still not all right. He is feeling disturbed. He does not come to the point. Lomov starts praising the qualities of his dog Guess, which he has purchased for 125 roubles. But Natalya says that her dog Squeezer which she purchased for 85 roubles is much better than Lomov's dog Guess. Both of them praise the qualities of their dogs. Now they start quarrelling on this topic. They again start shouting at each other. In the meantime, Chubukov comes. Instead of putting an end to their quarrel, he also starts quarrelling. In this dispute, Lomov's condition deteriorates and he falls on the chair, unconscious. Both the father and the daughter think that he has died. Natalya starts lamenting that her chance of getting married has gone.

After sometime. Lomov comes to his senses. Chubukov tells Lomov that Natalya is willing for marriage. So he should marry her. Natalya expresses her willingness. Chubukov does not want to lose even a moment and joins their hands. He asks them to kiss each other. But soon, they start quarrelling again. They start debating the qualities of their respective dogs. Chubukov tries to calm them down. With this, the play comes to an end.

### Extract Based comprehension Questions

1. Its cold... I'm trembling all over, just as if I'd got an examination before me. The great thing is, I must have my mind made up. If I give myself time to think, to hesitate, to talk a lot, to look for an ideal, or for real love, then I'll never get married.

#### Questions.

- (a) Who is saying, "I'm trembling all over as if I had got an examination before me"?
- (b) What is the great thing that the speaker is talking about?
- (c) What state of Loom's mind does the passage reflect?
- (d) Why did Loom not want to wait for real love?

#### Answers.

- (a) Ivan Vassilevitch Lomov.
- (b) The speaker is talking about real love and marriage.
- (c) His mind reflects that way he would never get married because it is difficult to get an idea or real love.
- (d) This was because he was anxious to get married.

2. "Then you make out that I'm a land grabber? Madam, never in my life have I grabbed anybody else's land and I shan't allow anybody to accuse me of having done so. Oxen Meadows are mine!"

#### Questions.

- (a) Who is 'Madam' in the above lines?
- (b) In which situation does Lomov call himself a 'land grabber'?
- (c) What had happened to the speaker?
- (d) What will he not allow the other?

#### Answers.

- (a) Natalya
- (b) Natalya accuses Lomov of grabbing Oxen Meadows. So, Lomov says that he is not a land grabber.
- (c) The speaker got infuriated with Natalya for having called him a land grabber.

(d) He will not allow anybody to accuse him of having grabbed anyone's land.

3. What a surprise! We've had the land for nearly three hundred years, and then we're suddenly told that it isn't ours! Ivan Vassilevitch, I can hardly believe my own ears. These Meadows aren't worth much to me. They only come to five dessiatins and are worth perhaps 300 roubles, but I can't stand unfairness. Say what you will, I can't stand unfairness.

### **Questions.**

- (a) Who speaks the above lines and to whom?
- (b) How much are the meadows worth?
- (c) Who is the speaker of these lines?
- (d) What is difficult for the speaker to believe?

### **Answer**

- (a) Lomov speaks these lines to Natalya.
- (b) They worth perhaps 300 roubles.
- (c) Natalya Stepanovna
- (d) That the Meadows don't belong to the speaker.

### **Character Sketch**

#### **1. Natalya:**

Natalya is talkative and short-tempered. She is very much concerned about her family's honour and land. She is argumentative also. She argues with Lomov about the ownership of Oxen Meadows and the superiority of her dog Squeezer. She is very keen to get married.

#### **2. Stepan Stepanovitch Chubukov:**

Stepan Stepanovitch Chubukov is a landowner. He has a helping nature towards Lomov. He loves his daughter and plays the role of a good father. He is in search of a good match for his daughter. He is a good selector of words. He calls Lomov my angel, treasure, etc. This shows his cunningness. When Chubukov finds Lomov fighting with Natalya, he immediately changes and starts to support his daughter. He uses many ill words for Lomov and tells him to leave his house.

**Short Answer Questions (30-40 words):**

Q1. Describe Lomov's first meeting with Natalya.

Ans. Lomov goes to his neighbour Chubukov's house to ask for the hand of his daughter Natalya. He is in a fix how to make the marriage proposal. He talks in a roundabout manner. He makes a mention of his meadows which touch their birchwoods. At this, a quarrel ensues between them over the ownership rights the meadows.

Q2. Why is Lomov anxious to marry Natalya?

Ans. Lomov wants to settle the question of his marriage at once. He thinks that now he should not delay. He thinks about Natalya. She is a skilled house-keeper. She is educated and is not bad to look at. At this age, he should not expect a better girl than her. He is suffering from some serious diseases. Because of these reasons, he is anxious to marry Natalya.

Q3. How does Lomov speak warmly of Chubukov's family in the beginning? Why does he change his stand?

Ans. In the beginning, Lomov speaks quite warmly about Chubukov's family. He reminds Natalya that he knows the Chubukovs since his childhood. His aunt and uncle had great respect for her family. Both the families have been most friendly and close neighbours. Lomov changes his opinion about the Chubukovs when he picks up a quarrel with Natalya and Chubukov over the ownership of Oxen Meadows.

Q4. Justify the title of the play. 'The Proposal' Or What is the theme or the message of 'The Proposal'?

Ans. Anton Chekov has aptly titled the play, 'The Proposal'. The title justifies the main theme—the marriage of Natalya and Lomov. No doubt, both Lomov and Natalya want to be life partners. However, unnecessary quarrels over Oxen Meadows and their dogs Squeezer and Guess temporarily spoil their game. The message is very clear. The main issue must not be clouded and lost sight of by indulging in unnecessary and avoidable quarrels.

**Long Answer Questions (100 -150 words)**

Q1."The way Chubukov, Natalya and Lomov fought over petty issues is against the behaviour and mannerisms of good neighbours" Comment. What would you have done to resolve the issue? (If you were in the place of Chubukov)

Ans. Lomov and Chubukovs were neighbours. Lomov came to Chubukovs to propose Natalya. But instead of proposing they started fighting over petty issues like oxen meadows and quality of dogs.

This is not the quality of good neighbours. Neighbours should live like friends. There should be a positive relationship between the two neighbours.

There should be understanding and patience among neighbours. The fight between Looms and Chubukovs could have been avoided if handled carefully. The issue of meadows could be resolved calmly and quietly by a good conversation. There must have been some documents showing the ownership of the meadows or both the parties could be convinced by making them understand that if they got married, the meadows will belong to both of them.

Similarly, the issues of dog could be solved instead of counting the negative points of each other's dogs. They can discuss the positive features of the dogs. Thus the issues could be resolved.

Q2. Describe the incidents of humour in the play, 'The Proposal'?

Ans. 'The Proposal' is certainly a humorous play. The very entry of Lomov in a formal dress and the way Chubukov greets calling him 'darling', 'my treasure' or 'my beauty' make one laugh. Marriage proposal, supposed to be romantic turns to be humorous as the way Natalya and Lomov indulge in arguments over petty issues like ownership of Oxen Meadows and superiority of dogs makes the play humorous. The critical terms that the characters use for each other like a scarecrow, turnip ghost, blind hen, stuffed sausage, etc., force one to laugh. The hysterical fit of Natalya when she comes to know about the proposal and the wailing of father and daughter when they think Lomov is dead create immense humour. Finally, the way Natalya puts her hand in Lomov's under continuous arguments indicating acceptance of the proposal is really humorous. Thus we see that the whole play is replete with humour, making it a humorous play.

Q3. Chubukov has all the attributes of a quarrelsome rich Russian landlord. Instead of solving the problems, he only adds fuel into the fire in their quarrel over Oxen Meadows and the dogs. Justify the statement.

Ans. Chubukov represents a typical rich landlord of 19th century Russia. He seems to be fairly rich and resourceful. Even his neighbour Lomov acknowledges the frequent help rendered to him by Chubukov. He lends his threshing machine to Lomov. On account of this help, he has to put off their own threshing till November. Chubukov is quite practical. He knows that Lomov can be a good match for his daughter Natalya. So, he at once gives his assent to Lomov's proposal of marrying her. Actually, he has been waiting for such a proposal for a long time. Chubukov is a landlord and can't resist his hunger for land. He opposes the claim of Lomov over the ownership of Oxen Meadows. He even threatens to send his mowers out to the Meadows. Chubukov can be quite quarrelsome, abusing and insulting. He always sides with his daughter. He picks up a quarrel on Oxen Meadows. He calls Lomov "a land grabber" and "villain". He abuses his grandfather of being a "drunkard" and his father a 'gambler'. He jumps into the quarrel and adds only fuel to the fire.

However, Chubukov is a great opportunity. He grabs the opportunity the moment Lomov comes into the senses. He makes Natalya kiss and embrace Lomov and gets them married.

### **Unsolved Questions Short Answer Questions**

1. How does Natalya react when she comes to know that Lomov had come to propose?
2. Natalya was not Lomov's real love. But still, he wanted to marry her. Give two reasons for his decision.
3. Which qualities are common in all the three characters in the play 'The Proposal'?

### **Long Answer Questions**

- a) 'Discussions and disputes seldom solve a problem.' Describe the dispute between Natalya and Lomov over their dogs and their superiority.
- b) "And I've always loved you, my angel as if you were my own son." These words are spoken by Chubukov to Lomov. But do you think he really loves Lomov as his own son? Is he sincere in his feelings towards him? Discuss