

# The Proposal

## Introduction

This chapter is a one-act play, a farce, by the Russian short story writer and dramatist Anton Chekhov. It is about the tendency of wealthy families to seek ties with other wealthy families to increase their estates.

## Summary

Ivan Vassilevitch Lomov, a young man of a large fortune comes to his neighbour, Stepan Stepanovitch Chubukov's house in a formal dress. Initially Chubukov thought that Lomov had come to borrow money. Then Lomov informs him that he had come to propose to his daughter. Chubukov feels very happy and goes to call her daughter.

While Chubukov is away, Lomov thinks about his decision to marry. He is thirty-five years old and suffers from palpitations. He is excitable and is not able to sleep. When he gets into the bed, then suddenly something in his left side gives a pull. He could feel it in his shoulder and head. He jumps like a lunatic, walk about a bit and lies down again. But then he feels another pull. This continues throughout the night. So, he feels that now he must get married to lead a quiet and regular life. Natalya is a good house keeper, not bad to look at and also educated. She would prove a good wife to him. Just then Natalya Stepanovna comes in. She does not know the real purpose behind Lomov's arrival. She asks Lomov about the reason behind his arrival. Lomov replied that he had known Natalya's family since childhood and have the greatest respect for them. He also says that their lands are also adjoining and his Oxen Meadows touches her birchwoods. At this Natalya interrupts him and says that Oxen Meadows belong to her family and not to Lomov.

Both fall into argument, each claiming ownership over it. Chubukov also comes and backs his daughter's claim. All is forgotten about the marriage proposal. In the heat of discussion, Lomov is much excited and his heart starts palpitating badly and he leaves.

As Lomov leaves, Chubukov tells his daughter that he had come to propose to her for marriage. Natalya then falls into a fit of hysterics and asks her father to bring him back. Chubukov goes to call him back.

Lomov comes back and Natalya asks for forgiveness. She agrees that Oxen Meadows belonged to him only. Lomov repeats the story that his aunt's grandmother had given the Meadows to the peasants of Natalya's great grandfather to use for free. In return, they had to make bricks for her. Natalya wants him to forget about the Oxen Meadows and propose to her. To divert him, she asks when he was going for shooting. This reminds Lomov about Guess, his dog, who has become lame.

Natalya says her dog, Squeezer, is superior to Guess. Contradictions and arguments start again and the subject now is that whose dog is superior.

Due to arguments, Lomov's weak heart starts palpitating again. He becomes unconscious.

As soon as Lomov gains consciousness, Chubukov gives his daughter's hand in Lomov's hand, and asks him to hurry up and get married. Natalya is also happy. Chubukov feels that a weight has come off his shoulders. He offers some champagne on this occasion.

## Message

The play is a satire on the tendency of rich Russians to marry for wealth. The author makes fun of their customs and tries to emphasise the fact that one should get married for love and compatibility.

## Extract Based Questions

1. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:

LOMOV: It's 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. Brr... It's cold! Natalya Stepanovna is an excellent housekeeper, not bad-looking, well-educated. What more do I want? But I'm getting a noise in my ears from excitement. (*Drinks*) And it's impossible for me not to marry. In the first place, I'm already 35—a critical age, so to speak. In the second place, I ought to lead a quiet and regular life. I suffer from palpitations, I'm excitable and always getting awfully upset; at this very moment my lips are trembling and there's a twitch in my right eyebrow.

(CBSE SQP 2023-24)

- (a) Which of the following is NOT a reason why Lomov thinks he must marry?

- (i) He is already 35 years old.
- (ii) He suffers from palpitations.
- (iii) He is excitable and easily upset.
- (iv) He is in love with Natalya.

- (b) Why is it fair to say that Lomov's tone, when he says "What more do I want?", is uncertain and questioning?

- (c) Read the following descriptions (i)-(iii) and identify which one correctly corresponds to the extract:

- (i) A debate is a formal discussion on a particular topic, usually with two or more people presenting different viewpoints and arguments.
- (ii) A soliloquy is a speech given by a character alone on stage, which reveals their innermost thoughts and feelings to the audience.



- (iii) An aside is a brief comment or remark made by a character directly to the audience, which is not intended to be heard by other characters on stage.

**(d) If an actor were to enact this extract, what would he be required to focus on, while modulating his voice?**

### Answers

- (a) (iv) He is in love with Natalya.  
(b) Lomov's tone when he says "What more do I want?" is uncertain and questioning because he is trying to convince himself that Natalya Stepanovna is a suitable match for him, but at the same time, he seems to be struggling with doubts and fears.  
(c) (ii) A soliloquy is a speech given by a character alone on stage, which reveals their innermost thoughts and feelings to the audience.  
(d) The actor would be required to convey Lomov's nervousness and excitement through his voice modulation.

**2. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:**

CHUBUKOV: [aside] He's come to borrow money. Shan't give him any!

[aloud] What is it, my beauty?

LOMOV: You see, Honoured Stepanovitch ..... I beg pardon Stepan Honouritch ..... I mean, I'm awfully excited, as you will please notice ..... In short, you alone can help me, though I don't deserve it, of course ..... and haven't any right to count on your assistance .....

**(a) Chubukov suspects that Lomov had come to:**

- (i) propose to his daughter
- (ii) borrow money
- (iii) quarrel over meadows
- (iv) help him

**(b) Why did Chubukov misunderstand the purpose of Lomov's visit?**

**(c) Lomov is not able to answer properly because he is:**

- (i) excited and nervous
- (ii) sad and worried
- (iii) scared and doubtful
- (iv) surprised and anxious

**(d) Lomov has come to .....**

### Answers

- (a) (ii) borrow money  
(b) Lomov visited Chubukov's house being dressed in a formal manner. He was in his evening dress and wearing gloves. He was also very polite. So, Chubukov misunderstood the purpose of Lomov's visit.  
(c) (i) excited and nervous  
(d) propose to Chubukov's daughter

**3. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:**

LOMOV: But you can see from the documents, honoured Natalya Stepanovna. Oxen Meadows, it's true, were once the subject of dispute, but now everybody knows that they are mine. There's nothing to argue about. You see my aunt's grandmother gave the free use of these Meadows in perpetuity to the peasants of your father's grandfather, in return for which they were to make bricks for her. The peasants belonging to your father's grandfather had the free use of Meadows for forty years and had got into the habit of regarding them as their own, when it happened that ...

NATALYA : No, it isn't at all like that! Both grandfather and great grandfather reckoned that their land extended to Burnt Marsh—which means Oxen Meadows were ours. I don't see what there is to argue about. It's simply silly. (CBSE 2023)

**(a) The subject of dispute was regarding:**

- (i) free use of Meadows
- (ii) making of bricks
- (iii) peasants using Meadows
- (iv) ownership of Meadows

**(b) Find the word from the extract which means 'continuance':**

- (i) dispute
- (ii) perpetuity
- (iii) belonging
- (iv) reckoned

**(c) The grandmother of Lomov's aunt gave Oxen Meadows to the grandfather of Natalya's father in lieu of ....**

**(d) According to Natalya why did Oxen Meadows belong to them?**

**(e) Fill in the blank with ONE WORD only:**

The peasants had free use of Meadows for ..... years.

### Answers

- (a) (iv) ownership of Meadows  
(b) (ii) perpetuity  
(c) the services rendered by his peasants who made bricks for her.  
(d) Natalya claimed that both her grandfather and great grandfather reckoned that their land extended to Burnt Marsh. Thus, she considered Oxen Meadows to be her family's property.  
(e) forty



### Short Answer Type Questions

**Q 1. Why does Chubukov suspect Lomov when he comes to his house?** (CBSE 2016)

OR

**Why did Chubukov misunderstand the purpose of Lomov's visit?** (CBSE 2022 Term-2)

OR

**How was Lomov dressed when he visited Chubukov?** (CBSE 2023)

**Ans.** When Lomov came to Chubukov's house he was dressed in a formal manner. He was in his evening dress and wearing gloves. He was also very polite.



So, Chubukov suspects that Lomov had come to borrow money.

But actually Lomov had come to ask for his daughter's hand in marriage. He is not sincere when he says that he had always loved Lomov and he was like his own son as he had already decided not to give any money to Lomov.

**Q 2. How did Chubukov react when Lomov asked for the hand of his daughter in marriage? (CBSE 2019)**

**Ans.** Chubukov was very happy when Lomov asked for the hand of his daughter in marriage. Natalya was well passed the marriageable age and Chubukov was eager to see her settled. Lomov was their neighbour, he had a good income and his family was respectable. Therefore, Chubukov was overwhelmed on receiving a marriage proposal from Lomov.

**Q 3. Why does Lomov decide to marry?**

**OR**

**Which two issues about himself convinced Lomov of his decision to get married? (CBSE SQP 2022 Term-2)**

**Ans.** Lomov decides to marry because he is already thirty-five. He wants to lead a quiet and regular life. Because of loneliness in his life he is suffering from many diseases. He suffers from palpitations and sleep disorder. Therefore, he wants to marry to experience the feeling of companionship.

**Q 4. 'I'm trembling all over, just as if I'd got an examination before me.' What does Lomov mean by his statement?**

**Ans.** Lomov had come to propose Natalya. So, by saying the above sentence he wanted to imply that he was quite anxious and also excited at the same time. He awaited Natalya's response just as a student awaits his result.

**Q 5. Natalya is considered to be a perfect match for Lomov. Explain.**

**Ans.** Natalya is an excellent housekeeper. She is not bad-looking. She is well educated too and comes from a rich family. These qualities of Natalya make her a perfect match for Lomov.

**Q 6. Which point starts a quarrel between Lomov and Natalya?**

**OR**

**Why does Natalya quarrel with Lomov?**

(CBSE 2022 Term-2)

**Ans.** The ownership of Oxen Meadows is the point which starts a quarrel between Lomov and Natalya. Lomov asserts that the land belongs to his family while Natalya says that it is her family property.

**Q 7. Why did the peasants begin to believe that the Meadows were their own?**

**Ans.** The grandmother of Lomov's aunt gave the Meadows for temporary use to the peasants of Chubukov's grandfather. The peasants used the land for forty years and got accustomed to it as if the Meadows were their own.

**Q 8. Why does Natalya ask Chubukov to bring Lomov back?**

**Ans.** Chubukov tells Natalya that Lomov had come with a proposal of marriage with her. So, she asks Chubukov to bring Lomov back.

**Q 9. What was Lomov's opinion about Squeezer?**

**Ans.** Lomov considered Squeezer an overshot, which meant that the dog was a bad hunter. He was sure that the dog's lower jaw was shorter than the upper. He thought anybody could find a dog like Squeezer almost under every bush.

**Q 10. How does Natalya behave with Lomov when he comes back?**

**Ans.** Natalya apologises to Lomov when he comes back. She says that Oxen Meadows belong to him. She asks Lomov whether he was going to start shooting soon. She wants to divert Lomov's attention from the topic of Oxen Meadows and wants that he should propose to her.

**Q 11. What is the second point of quarrel between Lomov and Natalya? (CBSE 2020)**

**Ans.** The second point of the quarrel between Lomov and Natalya is their dogs, Guess and Squeezer. Lomov and Natalya get into an argument on whose dog is better.

**Q 12. What is the play 'The Proposal' about?**

**Ans.** The play, 'The Proposal', depicts the calculated approach to marriage, that was common in the 19th century Russia, especially among the wealthy. This play is a satire on such money driven marriages. The two main characters of this play, namely, Lomov and Natalya get ready to wed each other only on account of economic security, knowing fully well that they do not get along well.

**Q 13. How can we say that Natalya was continuously successful in maintaining an upper hand during her arguments with Lomov? (CBSE SQP 2022-23)**

**Ans.** Natalya from the beginning of her arguments with Lomov answered all the queries of Lomov with confidence and full detail. When Lomov questioned her ownership over Oxen Meadow, she countered his each and every point and showed conviction and belief during the arguments. She heard all the points made by Lomov patiently and gave him possible justifiable answers with full confidence.



## Long Answer Type Questions

**Q 1. Neighbours must have a cordial relationship which Lomov and Natalya do not have. Describe the first fight between them. (CBSE 2016)**

**OR**

**Among neighbours we should have cordial relations and not lose our temper. How do Natalya and Lomov lose temper on trivial issues?**

(CBSE 2018)

**Ans.** It is said that we should maintain cordial relations with our neighbours. At the start of the play, Chubukov welcomes Lomov in his home and is delighted when he hears that Lomov had come to propose to his daughter. However, the problem arises



when monetary matters creep in. In the course of his address to Natalya, Lomov says that his Oxen Meadows touch Natalya's birchwoods. This starts an argument between him and Natalya. Natalya says that the Oxen Meadows are theirs. But Lomov says that the Meadows belong to him. His aunt's grandmother gave their free use to the peasants of Natalya's father's grandfather. In return, they were required to make bricks for her. The peasants used them freely for forty years. So, they started treating them their own. Natalya objects to it. She replies that they have had them for nearly three hundred years and hence they belong to her family. Both stick to their arguments and fight verbally. Chubukov also joins in the fight and asserts his daughter's claim. They then start hurling abuses at each other's family members. Lomov says that Natalya's grandfather had been tried for embezzlement and that her mother was humpbacked. Chubukov and Natalya retort that Lomov's grandfather was a drunkard and her younger aunt had run away with an architect. Lomov was much agitated by this argument and left Natalya's house in a hurry.

**Q 2. Forgiveness is the foundation of a cordial relationship. Do you agree? How is this message conveyed in the play 'The Proposal'? (CBSE 2023)**

**Ans.** Yes, it is true that forgiveness is the foundation of all the cordial relationships in our society. Without forgiveness, no relationship can flourish and thrive. Most of the time enmity is developed due to the communication gap or misunderstanding. Lack of tolerance and mismanagement of anger too lead to enmity. Anton Chekhov has appropriately conveyed the message of forgiveness in the play 'The Proposal'.

In the play 'The Proposal', we see that Lomov, who goes to his neighbour, Chubukov's house with a marriage proposal gets involved in quarrel twice.

It is only the lack of forgiveness that creates unnecessary misunderstandings and leads to quarrel on petty issues. The matter is not sorted out until they forgive each other.

**Q 3. 'The Proposal' is a great comedy and full of great humour. Explain the statement.**

**OR**

**Farce is a kind of comedy which includes situations and dialogues that are ridiculous, exaggerated and even absurd. Evaluate the play, 'The Proposal', as a farce.**

(CBSE SQP 2022 Term-2)

**OR**

**Chekhov has used humour and exaggeration in the play to comment on courtship in his times. Illustrate with examples from the lesson, 'The Proposal'. Also mention the values, you think, any healthy relationship requires.**

(CBSE 2015)

**Ans.** 'The Proposal' is really a great comedy. It is full of great humour. This is a result of the foolish behaviour of Lomov, Natalya, and her father, Chubukov. Lomov comes to Natalya's house to propose. During the course of his address, he refers to Oxen Meadows as his own property. But Natalya says they belong to her family. Their argument is highly comical. They start accusing each other. Lomov says Chubukov's mother was 'hump-backed'. Chubukov says Lomov's father was a 'gambler'. His younger aunt ran away with an architect. They call each other 'intriguer', 'pup', 'old rat', etc. These are highly humorous. When Lomov is called back by Natalya, then again they fight over whose dog is superior. Amidst all this, Natalya's eagerness in marrying Lomov also appears to be comical. When Chubukov asks Lomov to kiss, Lomov asks 'Kiss whom'. This is again humorous.

The values that a healthy relationship requires are that of trust and honesty.



## Practice Exercise

### Extract Based Questions

**1. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:**

God could not have made a mistake, nor could he have denied Lencho what he had requested.

Immediately, Lencho went up to the window to ask for paper and ink. On the public writing-table, he started to write, with much wrinkling of his brow, caused by the effort he had to make to express his ideas. When he finished, he went to the window to buy a stamp which he licked and then affixed to the envelope with a blow of his fist.

**(a) He went to the window to:**

- (i) scold the postman
- (ii) meet the postmaster
- (iii) take the money
- (iv) ask for paper and ink

**(b) Why was Lencho angry?**

**(c) Lencho thought that:**

- (i) God made a mistake
- (ii) the postmaster was mistaken
- (iii) God could not make a mistake
- (iv) None of the above

**(d) What did Lencho buy?**



**2. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:**

No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite. Even in the grimmest times in prison, when my comrades and I were pushed to our limits, I would see a glimmer of humanity in one of the guards, perhaps just for a second, but it was enough to reassure me and keep me going. Man's goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished.

- (a) What comes naturally to the human heart?
- (b) State whether the given statement is True or False.  
A few people are born hating another person.
- (c) People must learn to hate. Elaborate.
- (d) Which word in the extract is opposite in meaning to the word 'exposed'?

**3. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:**

His parents and his brothers and sister had landed on this green flooring ahead of him. They were beckoning to him, calling shrilly. He dropped his legs to stand on the green sea. His legs sank into it. He screamed with fright and attempted to rise again flapping his wings. But he was tired and weak with hunger and he could not rise, exhausted by the strange exercise. His feet sank into the green sea and then his belly touched it and he sank no farther. He was floating on it and around him his family was screaming, praising him and their beaks were offering him scraps of dog-fish.

- (a) His parents landed ..... him.
  - (i) behind
  - (ii) beside
  - (iii) ahead of
  - (iv) beneath
- (b) Why did the young seagull cannot rise?
- (c) ..... sank into the sea.
  - (i) Young seagull
  - (ii) His sister
  - (iii) Young seagull's neck
  - (iv) Young seagull's legs
- (d) Who were beckoning him?

**4. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:**

"Hey, a tea garden!" Rajvir cried excitedly.

Pranjol, who had been born and brought up on a plantation, didn't share Rajvir's excitement.

"Oh, this is tea country now," he said. "Assam has the largest concentration of plantations in the world. You will see enough gardens to last you a lifetime!"

"I have been reading as much as I could about tea," Rajvir said. "No one really knows who discovered tea but there are many legends".

**(a) Why was Pranjol not as excited as Rajvir about the tea gardens?**

- (i) He disliked looking at tea gardens.
- (ii) He had worked in tea gardens himself.
- (iii) He had grown up in and around tea gardens.
- (iv) He was bored with tea gardens.

**(b) What does Pranjol mean by saying that Assam has the largest concentration of plantations in the world?**

**(c) How according to Rajvir does the world know about the discovery of tea?**

**(d) Select the option that correctly captures the application of the word 'cried' as used in line 1 of the extract.**

- (i) Jaspreet cried a lot in spite of winning second place in a competition.
- (ii) Jaspreet cried out loud when she saw a white tiger in the sanctuary.
- (iii) Jaspreet cried for hours when the police were unable to find her lost pet.
- (iv) Jaspreet has barely cried since she was three years of age.

**5. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:**

The aircraft was waiting to take off; I was rushed through to it by infuriated officials. Luckily, the seat booked for me was at the extreme front. I covered the floor around my feet with newspapers, rang for the air hostess and gave her a parcel of fish (for Mij) to keep in a cool place. I took her into my confidence about the events of the last half hour. I have retained the most profound admiration for that air hostess; she was the very queen of her kind. She suggested that I might prefer to have my pet on my knee and I could have kissed her hand in the depth of my gratitude.

- (a) The officials were very angry with the author because .....
- (b) State whether the given statement is True or False.  
The author's seat was in the middle.
- (c) What did the air hostess suggest?
- (d) Complete the analogy with a word from the text:  
profound : subtle :: enraged : .....

**6. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:**

Her first journey—what careful, painstaking, elaborate plans she had had to make for it! She had thriftily saved whatever stray coins came her way, resisting every temptation to buy peppermints, toys, balloons and the like and finally she had saved a total of sixty paise. How difficult it had been, particularly that day at the village fair, but she had resolutely stifled a strong desire to ride the merry-go-round, even though she had the money.

**(a) She had planned:**

- (i) carefully
- (ii) painstakingly
- (iii) in detail
- (iv) All of these



**(b) How did she save the money?**

**(c) What was particularly difficult to resist for Valli?**

- (i) Toys
- (ii) Peppermints
- (iii) Merry-go-round
- (iv) Balloons

**(d) What does 'resolutely' mean?**

**7. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:**

At length, Kisa Gotami met a man who replied to her request, "I cannot give thee medicine for thy child, but I know a physician who can."

And the girl said, "Pray tell me, sir; who is it?" And the man replied, "Go to Sakyamuni, the Buddha."

Kisa Gotami repaired to the Buddha and cried, "Lord and Master, give me the medicine that will cure my boy."

The Buddha answered, "I want a handful of mustard-seed." And when the girl in her joy promised to procure it, the Buddha added, "The mustard-seed must be taken from a house where no one has lost a child, husband, parent or friend."

**(a) What did the Buddha want Kisa Gotami to understand?**

**(b) State whether the given statement is True or False.**  
Kisa Gotami had two sons.

**(c) The mustard seeds must be taken from where no one has lost a:**

- |              |                   |
|--------------|-------------------|
| (i) child    | (ii) parent       |
| (iii) friend | (iv) All of these |

**(d) Complete the analogy with a word from the text:**  
request : order : : questioned : .....

### Short Answer Type Questions

**Q 8. Why did Lencho write a letter to God?**

**Q 9. In what way did the young seagull land on the green sea?**

**Q 10. Why does the narrator say, 'I landed and was not sorry to walk away from the old Dakota...?'**

**Q 11. Why does Anne Frank feel diary writing is a strange experience?**

**OR**

**What makes writing a diary a strange experience for Anne Frank?**

**Q 12. How were the bakers' accounts maintained?**

**Q 13. What proves Kodavu people's Arab descent?**

**Q 14. When did the drinking of tea start?**

**Q 15. How did Maxwell get the otter?**

**Q 16. What happened when an elderly woman entered the bus and sat beside Valli?**

**Q 17. Natalya is considered to be a perfect match for Lomov. Explain.**

### Long Answer Type Questions

**Q 18. What does Nelson Mandela mean by an 'extraordinary human disaster'?**

**Q 19. 'The narrator was desperate to know about where he was and who the other pilot was'. What does this tell you about him? Was it in his nature to pay gratitude to others?**

**Q 20. How does Anne feel about her father, her grandmother, Mrs Kuperus and Mr Keesing? What do these tell you about her?**

**Q 21. Describe a traditional Goan village baker.**

**Q 22. Explain how one can enjoy life in the region of Coorg.**

**Q 23. What queries did the people make about the otter in London? Which was the most surprising query for the author?**

**Q 24. On the basis of your reading of 'Madam Rides the Bus', write the character sketch of Valli.**

**Q 25. 'The life of mortals in this world is troubled and brief and combined with pain ...'. With this statement of the Buddha, find out the moral value that Kisa Gotami learnt after the death of her child.**

**OR**

Life is full of trials and tribulations. Kisa Gotami also passes through a period of grief in her life. How does she behave in those circumstances? What lesson does a reader learn from the story of her life? Given any two points how you would like to act in the midst of adverse circumstances.