

# AFTERNOON AT THE COUNTRY HOUSE

By Olivia Arieti

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ISBN: 978-1-60003-871-6

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**PUBLISHED BY BROOKLYN PUBLISHERS**

**1-888-473-8521**

## AFTERNOON AT THE COUNTRY HOUSE

*A One Act Adaptation of "AT A COUNTRY HOUSE" By A.P. Chekhov*

**By Olivia Arieti**

**SYNOPSIS:** Genya and Iraida are desperate, their father, Rashevitch, never stops talking and his favorite topic is aristocracy; blue blood has become a true obsession for the egoist man! He has scared away the few visitors that happened to drop in their remote country house and now the girls are afraid to die old spinsters. They see their last chances in Dmitry, the handsome bank clerk and in the gentle law student, Meier, but will Rashevitch ever accept as sons-in-law two young men from the working class?

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(3 females, 3 males)*

PAVEL ILYITCH RASHEVITCH (m)..... Long hair, grey beard,  
conceited. *(82 lines)*

GENYA (f)..... 24; Pavel's daughter. Wears her  
hair down. Shy. *(24 lines)*

IRAIDA (f)..... 22; Pavel's daughter. Wears her  
hair done on her head. Livelier  
than her sister. *(30 lines)*

MEIER (m) ..... 30's; law student. Stout, gentle,  
slightly clumsy. *(33 lines)*

DMITRY VASILYEVITCH (m)..... 30's; bank clerk. Handsome.  
*(29 lines)*

ANNA (f)..... The maidservant. *(6 lines)*

**DURATION:** 25 minutes.

**SETTING:** Russia, a house in the country.

## PRODUCTION NOTE

Rashevitch is a most conceited, boisterous fellow, his movements are quick and he often smooths his beard.

## COSTUMES

The characters are dressed according to the late nineteenth century style. Genya and Iraida wear long skirts and laced blouses. Rashevitch wears a short reefer jacket, narrow trousers and a pince-nez. Dmitry and Meier elegant suits.

## PROPS

- Knitting Needles
- Book
- Briefcase containing Papers

## SET

The living-room of Rashevitch's country house. Russian carpets, a sofa, chairs, a looking-glass, candles placed here and there. A small table with glasses and a bottle of liquor.

**AT RISE:** GENYA and IRAIDA are seated on the sofa. IRAIDA is reading, GENYA is knitting.

**GENYA:** (*Sighs.*) If only we lived in the city; I can't stand the country any longer, Iraida, or this house that seems lost in the middle of nowhere.

**IRAIDA:** Summer and winter are all the same here; nowhere to go, no one to visit and hardly anyone coming to visit us. A truly wasted youth is ours, that's what it is.

**GENYA:** What a dull life! We'll die old spinsters.

**IRAIDA:** Thanks to father who scares off the few decent souls that happen to drop in.

**GENYA:** His bragging and boasting is so unnerving.

**IRAIDA:** Not to mention his obsession with aristocracy.

**GENYA:** Poor mom, Aunt Olga says that his talking has driven her into the grave.

**IRAIDA:** Say, I wonder if Meier is an aristocrat too.

**GENYA:** For sure father believes he is.

**IRAIDA:** (*Smiles.*) I bet our law student likes you a lot, Genya.

**GENYA:** Come on now.

**IRAIDA:** I can tell by the way he looks at you and he surely doesn't come here to listen to father's sermons only.

**GENYA:** I wonder how long he'll keep visiting us though.

**IRAIDA:** Really can't understand how father can be such a toad.

**GENYA:** Iraida, please, control yourself.

**IRAIDA:** I'm sorry, sis, but sometimes I really hate his conceitedness. He believes to be the most learnt fellow in the world, but he's nothing more than a pathetic charlatan.

**GENYA:** That's enough, Iraida, really enough.

**IRAIDA:** (*Giggles.*) Well, I thought it was more delicate than toad.

**GENYA:** (*Giggles.*) Coming to think of it, it is.

**RASHEVITCH enters.**

**RASHEVITCH:** Always laughing, girls, better not be too naughty now. Our dear Meier should be coming along this afternoon. Have you already had your tea?

**GENYA:** Yes, and now (*Gets up.*) I have a few letters to write before dinnertime.

**IRAIDA:** (*Gets up.*) I'm off too, father.

*GENYA, IRAIDA exit hurriedly. ANNA enters.*

**ANNA:** A gentleman asks to see you.

**RASHEVITCH:** A stranger?

**ANNA:** Yes, sir.

**RASHEVITCH:** Well, show him in, Anna, show him in.

*ANNA exits, DMITRY VASILYEVITCH enters. Has a briefcase.*

**RASHEVITCH:** What can I do for you, Sir?

**DMITRY:** I'm Dmitry Vasilyevitch, from the bank. (*Opens the briefcase, takes out a paper.*) The interests you owe for your estate, Pavel Ilyitch Rashevitch, have not been paid for the last two quarters...

**RASHEVITCH:** Oh yes, I...

**DMITRY:** It seems that the fines and arrears have reached a considerable amount.

**RASHEVITCH:** How much?

**DMITRY:** (*Shows him the paper.*) More than two thousand rubles, Sir, more than two thousand.

**RASHEVITCH:** A true gentleman always honors his debts, young man, you should know better. Say what you like, but the sense of honor and nobility is a virtue accurately nourished and passed down by heredity in high-born families.

**DMITRY:** Of course.

**RASHEVITCH:** Simply consider Richard Coeur-de-Lion or Frederick Barbarossa, who thanks to their noble marriages, have transmitted their nobility and bravery to their sons and grandsons.

**DMITRY:** (*Puzzled.*) Richard Coeur-de-Lion? Frederick Barbarossa? I can't make your point, Sir...

**RASHEVITCH:** Aristocracy, my dear fellow, aristocracy and the perseverance of its noble qualities are the point; therefore, my sense of honor is adamant. However, I trust you've heard of those valiant fellows.

**DMITRY:** (*Annoyed.*) Richard Coeur-de-Lion was king of England and so called because of his reputation as a great military leader and warrior.

**RASHEVITCH:** And Barbarossa?

**DMITRY:** German king and Holy Roman emperor; his long red beard was the reason of the name.

**RASHEVITCH:** Hum, not bad for a simple clerk, not bad, indeed.

**DMITRY:** A clerk's memory is as good as an aristocrat's one, but the issue was another, Sir. I must report to the director when you will...

*IRAIDA enters.*

**IRAIDA:** Oh, I'm sorry to interrupt, but I was looking for my book.

**RASHEVITCH:** Come, Iraida, come.

**IRAIDA:** I was sure I left it here...

**RASHEVITCH:** Dmitry Vasilyevitch, let me introduce you to my youngest daughter, Iraida Rashevitch.

**DMITRY:** Pleased to meet you, Miss Iraida Rashevitch. (*Sees the book on the sofa. Gives it to her.*) Perhaps, this is what you were looking for?

**IRAIDA:** Oh, yes, that's it.

**DMITRY:** Hum, Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*... in French...

**RASHEVITCH:** My daughters have studied French and speak it as fluently as refined maidens should. They are no sexton's children, my good sir, upon my soul, they aren't.

**IRAIDA:** (*Blushes.*) The gentleman may not be interested in that, father.

**DMITRY:** (*Hurriedly.*) Not at all, not at all, I am most interested.

**RASHEVITCH:** Let me serve our guest a glass of liqueur before he leaves.

**DMITRY:** No, thank you, I must run off, other urgent matters are waiting.

**RASHEVITCH:** I shall not keep you from your duty, young man. Remember to tell your director that the question will be settled. *(Claps him on the shoulder.)* Never worry when you deal with honorable people.

**DMITRY:** *(Puts back the paper in the briefcase.)* I will, I assure you. Good bye, Pavel Ilyitch Rashevitch, *(Looks at IRAIDA.)* good bye, Miss Iraida Rashevitch. I sincerely hope to see you again. *(Exits.)*

**IRAIDA:** Who is he, father? I've never seen him before around here.

**RASHEVITCH:** A plebeian, I'm afraid, a poor plebeian, despite his knowledge of history is fairly good. Thank goodness our friend, Meier, isn't. Such refined manners and elegant demeanor can belong to nobody but to a true aristocrat!

**IRAIDA:** Father, please...

**RASHEVITCH:** Wouldn't our aspiring magistrate be a good match for your sister?

**IRAIDA:** Not because of his blue blood if ever he has any.

**RASHEVITCH:** What silly daughters. Who else could I pass my estate to?

**IRAIDA:** And all your worries as well. I must inform you that we will run out of food soon and there's already no wood for the winter.

**RASHEVITCH:** Hum, that's bad, that's bad, indeed.

**IRAIDA:** I don't believe blue blood can solve all problems. *(Exits.)*

**RASHEVITCH:** *(Walks up and down.)* What silly girls! They should know better than longing after lowly suitors.

*ANNA enters.*

**ANNA:** Mr. Meier is here.

**RASHEVITCH:** *(Happily.)* At last, at last, a keen gentleman to talk to! *(Loudly.)* Come in, Meier, come in.

*MEIER enters. ANNA exits.*

**RASHEVITCH:** It's always a pleasure to have you here.

**MEIER:** Thank you, Pavel Ilyitch Rashevitch, the pleasure is mine. To tell the truth, your house is the only place where I really find myself at home. Your company and your daughters' one make me feel as though I were among my own people.

**RASHEVITCH:** (*Claps his shoulder.*) Glad to hear that, son. Believe me, I am proud to have such a dignified young man as my guest. Say what you like, from the standpoint of equality Mitka, the swineherd may be a man the same as Goethe and Frederick the Great...

**MEIER:** For sure...

**RASHEVITCH:** But if you consider it from a scientific base, you can't deny that blue blood is not a mere prejudice or a feminine invention; it has an historical justification. For no reasons high-born families have guarded themselves against marriage with their inferiors.

**MEIER:** So you would object to your daughters marrying an ordinary fellow?

**RASHEVITCH:** My dear boy, no gentleman of high rank would ever marry someone from the lower ones or vice versa. That's what segregated blue blood from plebeian. (*Chuckles.*) Refusing such evidence would be exactly like refusing to recognize the antlers on a stag.

**MEIER:** I understand your point of view, but I'm not too sure I can share it.

**RASHEVITCH:** Nonsense, nonsense, you are a law student and you're still full of illusions of equality and fraternity, but pure nobility must be strictly preserved and treasured.

**MEIER:** (*Sighs. Low.*) Poor me.

**RASHEVITCH:** (*Smooths his beard.*) I am an incorrigible Darwinian and words as lineage, aristocracy and noble blood are not empty sounds to me.

**MEIER:** Of course.

**RASHEVITCH:** By the way, you do recall our great Darwin, don't you?

**MEIER:** (*Chuckles.*) I may still be a student, but I certainly know the value of the illustrious scientist and of his theory of evolution.

**RASHEVITCH:** You must admit that no one from the riff-raff has given us science, literature or art.

**MEIER:** Well, I...

**RASHEVITCH:** (*Interrupts.*) Our fellowmen owe all that to aristocracy, trust me. Take Mother-Russia now, and you'll see how her best people were of aristocratic origin. I can mention as many as you like, Pushkin to begin with...

**MEIER:** Our greatest romantic poet!

**RASHEVITCH:** Oh yes, and also Tolstoy...

**MEIER:** (*Hurriedly.*) Count Leo Tolstoy, author of the renowned masterpiece, "War and Peace".

**RASHEVITCH:** (*Pleased.*) Very good, very good, indeed! (*Sneers.*) No son of a cook could have such a deep knowledge, my dear boy.

**MEIER:** I must say that...

**RASHEVITCH:** (*Enthusiast.*) Wait, wait, let me mention also Lermontov, Turgenev, Gontcharov... Oh yes, the list is long, and all blue blooded fellows, not one a sexton's child.

**MEIER:** No, no, that's not correct, Gontcharov, the novelist, was born into a family of merchants.

**RASHEVITCH:** The exception that proves the rule, nothing but that.

**MEIER:** They were wealthy, but still merchants. (*Looks at his watch, gets up.*) Well, I suppose it's time for me to go, Rashevitch.

**RASHEVITCH:** (*Pushes him back down.*) Not at all, not at all, you can't leave without dining with us, my dear Meier.

**MEIER:** (*Uneasy.*) I really wouldn't want to...

**RASHEVITCH:** (*Goes to the door. Loudly.*) Genya, Iraida, come, we have a guest here. (*Claps MEIER'S shoulder.*) You are always welcome to sit down at my table, young man.

*GENYA, IRAIDA enter. MEIER gets up.*

**MEIER:** Nice to see you, Miss Genya, Miss Iraida.

**RASHEVITCH:** Our guest is staying for dinner, girls.

**MEIER:** (*Smiles.*) Seems I can't do otherwise.

**RASHEVITCH:** Let's have a drink while we're waiting. Will you serve them, Iraida?

**IRAIDA:** Yes, father. (*Serves the drinks.*)

**MEIER:** I... I hope you are fine, Miss Genya.

**GENYA:** Oh, yes, I...

**RASHEVITCH:** (*Interrupts.*) You must know that my daughters have been educated as true aristocrats and have attended the finest boarding schools.

**IRAIDA:** (*Sighs.*) What a happy time it was.

**GENYA:** Father, I believe that...

**RASHEVITCH:** Wait, Genya, do not interrupt, and let me tell our aspiring magistrate that you both speak French perfectly. (*Chuckles.*) I bet my daughters can hold a conversation even at Versailles.

**MEIER:** (*Looks at GENYA.*) Most certainly, Sir.

**RASHEVITCH:** Come on, girls, light the candles, let's make the atmosphere warmer for our friend here.

*GENYA, IRAIDA light the candles.*

**MEIER:** Thank you, Rashevitch, but believe me, I am already at ease here with you and (*Looks at GENYA.*) your sweet daughters...

**RASHEVITCH:** They also sing very well.

**IRAIDA:** Now, father...

**RASHEVITCH:** They might sing something for us after dinner.

**MEIER:** Only if they feel like it.

**RASHEVITCH:** They will, they will. My daughters have a refined and cordial spirit; we care for manners and in Rashevitch's home you can find the same hospitality you would find at court.

**GENYA:** Father's values are always noble.

**RASHEVITCH:** Indeed. Perhaps, I am an idealist, an old Quixote, but I believe in what I assert. No fear of being considered beyond times can make me fraternize with the riff-raff and preach equality with money-lenders and innkeepers...

**IRAIDA:** (*Shakes her head.*) Here we go again...

**RASHEVITCH:** Nothing more criminal, believe me. Upon my soul, I'll shake hands with no son of a cook nor will he ever sit down at my table!

**GENYA:** Oh dear...

**RASHEVITCH:** *(TO MEIER. Louder.)* You surely recall how the knights of the west repelled the invasions of the Mongols, and we must do the same, unite and strike together against our enemy before it's too late.

*GENYA looks at MEIER, sighs. RASHEVITCH fills the glasses again.*

**RASHEVITCH:** Oh yes, let's give up all sort of sloppy sentimentality and as soon as a plebeian comes near us, we will shout straight in his ugly face, *(Shouts, menacing.)* Paws off! Go back to your kennel, you cur! *(Points his finger at MEIER.)* We'll say that straight in his face!

**MEIER:** Oh no, I can't do that, I absolutely can't.

**RASHEVITCH:** Why not?

*ALL stare at MEIER. Moments of silence.*

**MEIER:** *(Uneasy.)* Because I... I am of the artisan class myself.

*RASHEVITCH'S pince-nez falls from his nose.*

**RASHEVITCH:** *(Puts his pince-nez back on his nose.)* From the riff-raff?

*MEIER nods.*

**GENYA:** *(Looks at IRAIDA.)* Oh my.

**IRAIDA:** *(Low.)* As tactless as usual; a real toad!

**MEIER:** My father was a simple workman, but I believe there's nothing wrong with that.

*No reply.*

Yes, I belong to the working class, Rashevitch, and I am proud of it.

**GENYA:** *(Embarrassed.)* Father didn't mean to offend you, Meier.

**IRAIDA:** For sure...

**RASHEVITCH:** Well, well, our future magistrate belongs to the artisan class... (*Thoughtful.*) Well, well...

**MEIER:** Perhaps, I'd better go...

**GENYA:** No, no, please.

**RASHEVITCH:** I reckon I've been a bit incautious; it was just a silly misunderstanding.

**MEIER:** (*Uneasy.*) You might not want me to sit at your table any more...

**RASHEVITCH:** (*Paces the floor.*) So you are also as sensitive and unforgiving as those intellectuals of today.

**MEIER:** No, no, that's not the point, Rashevitch.

*ANNA enters.*

**ANNA:** Dmitry Vasilyevitch wishes to see you, Master.

**RASHEVITCH:** Again?

**ANNA:** He says it's a very urgent matter.

**RASHEVITCH:** Show him in then.

*ANNA exits.*

**RASHEVITCH:** What on earth does he want now?

**IRAIDA:** (*Low, happy.*) He's back!

*DMITRY enters.*

**DMITRY:** Good afternoon, Sir.

**RASHEVITCH:** What is so urgent, young man?

**DMITRY:** The matter must be settled within tomorrow, Pavel Ilyitch Rashevitch. The director of the bank, Count Viktor Nikolay said that the whole estate, house and land will pass to the bank if you do not pay the interests you owe.

**GENYA and IRAIDA:** Oh, no!

**RASHEVITCH:** Upon my soul, I am an honorable person and if I give my word...

**DMITRY:** Banks can't wait too long, Rashevitch. I realize it's hard to accept, but times have changed, money has replaced nobility, and labor idleness. Our merchants have become the high society of today.

**RASHEVITCH:** Indeed.

**DMITRY:** The working class is the most productive and liveliest expression of our times, Sir.

**MEIER:** *(Nods.)* Most true. Refusing to acknowledge it would be like refusing to recognize the antlers on a stag.

**RASHEVITCH:** I remember using that expression myself, young man...

**MEIER:** It seems that the old intelligentsia is ignorant, outdated... They know nothing of economy, the latest science.

**RASHEVITCH:** The only economy I know is domestic economy.

**DMITRY:** That's not enough, trust me. If I may, Pavel Ilyitch Rashevitch, when was the last time you read a book?

**RASHEVITCH:** Well... I can't remember exactly... ten... no, perhaps twenty years ago.

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