The Cherry Orchard

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ANTON CHEKHOV

Born in 1860 in a port town in the south of Russia, Anton Chekhov grew up in a household ruled by an abusive father who plunged the family into bankruptcy—an imposing figure whose cruelty would inspire many of Chekhov's dramatic works and short fictions. Chekhov moved to Moscow in 1879 to attend medical school, knowing he had to support his large and struggling family—in order to make ends meet while he studied, he wrote and published satirical short stories and sketches. Chekhov would go on to make more money as a writer than a doctor, though he considered himself a physician first for much of his life. Chekhov suffered from poor health in the mid-1880s, but told very few people of his struggles with tuberculosis; while travelling to the Ukraine for his health in the late 1880s, he was commissioned to write a play, and his literary career took off in earnest. Chekhov enjoyed great success for many years. As his health continued to deteriorate throughout the late 1890s, Chekhov purchased a country estate in Yalta, where he composed some of his most famous works, including *Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and the short story "The Lady with the Dog." Chekhov died due to complications from tuberculosis in July of 1904, just six months after the Moscow Art Theater premiere of *The Cherry Orchard*; the play was his final work.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

At the start of the play, Madame Ranevsky is returning to Russia after a five-year stint in Paris. At the time of the play's setting, 1904—and the decade preceding it—Russian foreign policy was beginning to reflect a newfound alliance with France, which had in previous years been an adversary. Ranevsky's trip to Paris after following a lover there is, subtextually, a source of shame and scandal for her and her family, possibly reflecting Russian anxieties about a new era in its relationship with France. Revolutionary ideals such as the one Trophimof spouts throughout the play were beginning to take hold in Russia, as well—the Russian Revolution of 1905, which saw workers striking and peasants revolting, was just on the horizon—and the seeds of unrest and disquiet that would sprout into the even more destabilizing Russian Revolution in 1917 had certainly been sown.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Chekhov's other major dramas—*Uncle Vanya*, *The Seagull*, and *Three Sisters*—reflect and explore similar themes to the ones examined in *The Cherry Orchard*. *Vanya* also deals with the contested sale of a family's estate; *The Seagull* follows one family's small and large tragedies including unrequited love, unfulfilled dreams, and self-loathing; *Three Sisters*, composed just four years before *The Cherry Orchard*, also plays with time and employs the use of temporal leaps to chart a significant stretch of time in the lives of a family on the verge of crisis. Other plays written at the time—most notably *Ghosts* by Henrik Ibsen and *Riders to the Sea* by J.M. Synge—explore anxieties around revolutionary ideals as well as the lingering traumas that parents and children inflict upon one another.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Cherry Orchard*
- **When Written:** Early 1900s
- **Where Written:** Yalta
- **Literary Period:** Early modernist
- **Genre:** Drama
- **Setting:** A large estate in the Russian countryside
- **Climax:** Lopakhin, the once-impoverished son of peasants who has come to be a very rich man in his adulthood, reveals that he has purchased the estate of Madame Ranevsky out from under her at a local auction.
- **Antagonist:** Social change; revolution; the death of the aristocracy

EXTRA CREDIT

Comedy Tonight? Though Chekhov composed *The Cherry Orchard* with the intent that it would be performed as a comedy and a satirical look at the death of the aristocracy, Stanislavski's version of the piece was intensely dramatic and presented as a full-on tragedy. Chekhov was infuriated and confused, and wrote in letters to several friends that the famous director had "ruined" his play. Nevertheless, the production was a huge success, and the play went on to be performed throughout Russia to great acclaim.

PLOT SUMMARY

On a frosty morning in May, the aristocratic Madame Ranevsky, her daughter Anya, and their servants Yasha and Charlotte return to their family's ancestral estate in the Russian countryside from Paris. A coterie of friends, family members, and neighbors anxiously await their arrival, among them Ranevsky's brother Gayef, her eldest daughter Barbara, and her neighbors Lopakhin and Pishtchik. Ranevsky is thrilled to

be home after five years abroad, but is greeted by the sad news that unless she finds a way to pay off the interest on the estate by the end of August, the property—and the expansive **cherry orchard** that covers much of it—will be auctioned off to the highest bidder. Lopakhin urges Ranevsky to chop down the cherry orchard, divide the land up into parcels, and rent them out acre by acre to upwardly mobile members of the emerging middle class, or "villa residents," but Ranevsky will hear nothing of this plan. Instead, she lends out money she does not have to Pishtchik and tumbles back into memories of her painful exit five years ago, spurred by the death of her youngest child, Grisha who drowned at only seven years old.

As the house comes back to life, the servants Dunyasha and Ephikhodof navigate an awkward romance; elderly butler Firs, who has taken to mumbling incoherently to himself, rejoices in his mistress's return; Gayef schemes of ways to secure money through borrowing and back channels; Barbara wonders whether she will ever get a proposal from Lopakhin, who has been rumored to be considering asking her hand in marriage for several months now; and the shabby scholar Trophimof, who once served as tutor to the deceased Grisha, longs quietly for the beautiful young Anya.

In the second act, the family's servants enjoy a day out in the open fields behind the house. Despite the beautiful weather and the appearance of a friendly gathering, Charlotte, Yasha, Dunyasha, and Ephikhodof all harbor their own pain and misery which they can only air to one another—and even then, their need for connection and exorcism of their private demons all seem to fall on deaf ears. Dunyasha avoids the suicidal Ephikhodof, having fallen for the cruel, affected Yasha instead; Charlotte, the stateless child of circus performers laments that she is all alone in the world.

Ranevsky, Gayef, and Lopakhin, having come from a luxurious (and unaffordable) lunch in town, return to the estate and linger in the fields a while. Lopakhin warns Ranevsky that rumors of potential buyers are swirling and urges her to reconsider his idea about chopping down the cherry orchard, but she will not hear his "vulgar" proposal. Trophimof, Anya, and Barbara join the gathering in the field; Trophimof lectures everyone on the intellectual and social problems facing modern-day Russia, such as the lazy, snobbish "intelligentsia" and the lack of "honest and decent" hardworking individuals. When a tramp comes along and begs money off of Ranevsky, she hands him a valuable gold coin, as she does not have any smaller change; Barbara, angry that her mother is giving away money to bums when there is barely enough food back up at the house, angrily heads home. Everyone but Anya and Trophimof follows her.

Anya confesses to Trophimof that while she once loved the cherry orchard dearly, she now feels nothing when she looks at it; Trophimof suggests that Anya has realized the pain and suffering of generations of unpaid laborers once tasked with maintaining the orchards, and is sympathetic to the plight of the working class. He entreats Anya to throw her house keys down the well, and Anya excitedly agrees that she should. Trophimof predicts that despite the struggles he has faced in his life, happiness is fast approaching. Barbara calls for Anya to come up to the house, but instead, she scampers away to the river with Trophimof.

In act three, it is August, and Ranevsky has arranged for a lavish dinner party, complete with a Jewish band of musicians and lots of dancing. She has orchestrated the party to distract from her anxiety—in town, far away, the auction for the cherry orchard is taking place, and Gayef and Lopakhin have not yet returned with news of whether the property was sold or saved. Over the course of the dinner party, the servants—notably Dunyasha and Ephikhodof—act like guests themselves, incurring the ire of Barbara, who wants for them to remember their place. Ranevsky confides in Trophimof the details of her miserable relationship with her ex-lover, who writes to her nearly every day and is like a heavy but beautiful stone around her neck. Trophimof states that he is "above love," but Ranevsky mocks him, calling him a "freak" for denying his feelings for Anya.

Eventually, Gayef enters the drawing-room, crying. Ranevsky asks him what happened at the auction, but he refuses to answer, and heads upstairs to change. Moments later, a gleeful Lopakhin comes into the room; when Ranevsky asks him whether the cherry orchard was sold, he replies that it was, and when she asks him who bought it, he answers that he himself was the highest bidder. Lopakhin brags about how far he—the son of lowly peasants—has come in the world and looks forward to building a "new life" for the middle classes on the land where the orchard now stands. Ranevsky begins weeping; Anya kneels before her and comforts her, promising that they will soon plant a new orchard somewhere even lovelier.

In the fourth and final act, the house is bare and packed up; a large pile of luggage sits in the corner of the nursery. Ranevsky and her family are hurriedly and tearfully preparing to leave—they are taking a train out of town in less than an hour. As everyone hurries around, packing at the last minute, Lopakhin attempts to serve champagne to "celebrate" his ownership of the estate. Firs, meanwhile, has fallen ill, and has been sent to the hospital for treatment, according to Yasha. As Ranevsky, Gayef, Anya, and Barbara bid goodbye to their home, the sound of axes chopping down the cherry trees rumble in the distance. Anya begs Lopakhin to wait until they have left, at least, before he and his men begin dismantling their family's pride and joy.

Ranevsky, in a moment alone with Lopakhin, begs him to at last propose to Barbara; he consents. Ranevsky calls Barbara into the room and then leaves so that the two can be alone. They awkwardly discuss the weather until Lopakhin is called outside by one of his workers; Lopakhin does not propose to Barbara, and she collapses near the luggage in tears. Ranevsky helps

Barbara collect herself, and sunnily states that it's time for the entire family to start out on a new journey. As Anya and Trophimof bid a happy goodbye to the old house, Ranevsky and Gayef linger inside a moment longer, bidding their youth and happiness goodbye before locking up and leaving. After everyone has gone, an ill-looking Firs emerges from the next room; he has been left behind and "forgotten." He sits on the sofa and laments his wasted life; he lies down and appears to die as the sounds of the axes chopping down the nearby cherry trees start up again.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Madame Lyubof Andreyevna Ranevsky – In many ways the play's main protagonist, Madame Ranevsky, is the head of her family's estate—although she has, over the last five years, led them and the property into financial ruin. A spendthrift with a kind heart, Madame Ranevsky cannot help treating everyone around her to luxuries beyond her means—her altruism (or perhaps overcompensation) has gotten her into trouble, though, as she has wasted away her funds tending to a cruel lover in Paris, leaving her with very few options for saving her family's ancestral home and prized **cherry orchard**. Rather than chop down the trees and rent out the land in parcels—the suggestion of her successful, middle-class neighbor Lopakhin—Ranevsky and her brother Gayef attempt to borrow money from wealthy relatives, but cannot delay the inevitable. As it becomes clear that she will lose her home, Ranevsky dives deep into a fantasy world; she throws an extravagant party for her family, neighbors, and servants, and hopes wildly that her daughters will marry well despite knowing deep down that she has failed, through her own frivolity, to make her daughters into appealing prospective wives. Haunted by the death of her first husband and her youngest child, a boy named Grisha, Madame Ranevsky longs to hide away in fancy and memory and shirk the duties at hand. Her denial and self-absorption ultimately lead to the loss of her home and estate; at the end of the play, Ranevsky returns to Paris, uncertain of what awaits her there but with no options left in rapidly changing Russia, where she has been fallen behind the times due to her own failure to adapt.

Yermolai Alexeyitch Lopakhin – A middle-class neighbor of Madame Ranevsky, Lopakhin is the child of peasants who has recently made his way in the world and acquired quite a bit of wealth. When Lopakhin was a boy, Madame Ranevsky showed him kindness on several occasions when he suffered at the hands of his drunkard of a father—now, Lopakhin attempts to repay her kindness by helping her strategize to keep a hold on her family's ancestral home and sprawling estate. To do so, though, Lopakhin says, the beautiful and expansive (but valueless) **cherry orchard** must be cut down and parceled off into plots of land that can be rented out to the emergent members of the middle class. Ranevsky will not hear of this idea, no matter how many times Lopakhin tries to force her to see that it is the only way to survive. Ultimately, it is Lopakhin himself who purchases the estate at auction—his glee at having secured such a valuable and coveted parcel of land despite Ranevsky's obvious suffering shows how self-absorption, greed, and blind ambition are not failings exclusive to the often-oblivious aristocracy.

Anya – Madame Ranevsky's youngest daughter, Anya, is seventeen years old and, like many of Chekhov's young ingénue characters, a dreamer. She feels that happiness is just on the horizon, despite the intense financial and social struggles her family faces. Deeply loving and supportive of her mother, Anya insists even in the face of financial ruin and eviction from their ancestral home that her family will be able to make a "new life" for themselves somewhere else.

Barbara – Ranevsky's eldest daughter, Barbara, has been in charge of keeping house during the five years Ranevsky has been in Paris. Barbara is staunch, stoic, and no-nonsense; she is eternally waiting on a proposal from Lopakhin that, though much-rumored throughout the village, may never come. Barbara is aging out of her marriageable years, and her anxiety about being left behind and forced to continue doing housework for the rest of her life as her family's fortune vanishes due to her mother's irresponsible financial ways is palpable throughout the play.

Leonid Andreyitch Gayef – Ranevsky's brother is a gregarious, sentimental man who talks too much. Always gossiping about somebody or waxing poetic about a feeling, a phrase, or even a piece of furniture, Gayef largely functions as comic relief throughout the play. However, his feelings of anxiety over his family's financial future and his intense sadness and shame at ultimately losing the house are palpable and deep. Gayef schemes and plots throughout the play as to how the family can secure the funds needed to pay off the interest on their estate, but despite all of his grand ideas, Gayef is still reliant on the funds and generosity of others. In the end, Gayef takes a job in a bank, though his family seems dubious as to whether or not he will be able to hold down the common job.

Peter Trophimof – Trophimof is the "perpetual student" who once worked as a tutor to Madame Ranevsky's youngest child, Grisha, before the boy passed away suddenly at the age of seven just a little over five years ago. The shabby, idealistic Trophimof harbors secret feelings for Anya—but his revolutionary ideology and desire for Russia to march forward into a new future makes him believe he must be "above love" and sentimentality, and focus only on revolution and social change. Trophimof's denial of his own emotions confuses and hurts both Anya and Ranevsky, though in the end he sets off alongside them to greet a "new life."

Firs Nikolayevitch – Firs is the extremely elderly butler whose

staunch allegiance to Ranevsky and Gayef—and lamentation of the fact that serfs were ever liberated from their landowning masters—represents the inability of the eldest members of the lower classes to adapt to the social change sweeping Russia. Firs is clearly suffering from advanced dementia throughout the play—he mumbles to himself, treats Gayef as if he were a small boy, and is desperately hard of hearing to boot—and yet the other characters treat him as a nuisance. In the end, Firs, who is ill and needs to be taken to the doctor, is left in the empty house after everyone has gone, reflecting the abandonment and isolation social change afflicts on those most in need of support who are so often left behind.

Charlotte Ivanovna – Anya's governess Charlotte is a quirky woman of few words. She carries a gun and performs parlor tricks such as card tricks, ventriloquism, and illusions; despite her ability to brighten a room, though, Charlotte harbors a great inner sadness. The orphaned daughter of circus performers, Charlotte is stateless, and doesn't know where she was born or how old she really is. As a servant whose life is dedicated to the well-being of others, she has no one to talk to about her own problems and must instead focus on keeping everyone else around her happy and comfortable.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Dunyasha – A servant-girl who longs to take on the affectations of a real lady. She is desperately in love with Yasha, despite his cruelty, and constantly dodges Epkhihodof's awkward affections for her.

Simeon Panteleyitch Ephikhodof – The family's clerk. A bumbling, incoherent, miserable young man who has earned for himself the nickname "Twenty-two misfortunes" due to his frequent stumblings and bad luck.

Simeonof Pishtchik – One of Madame Ranevsky's friends and neighbors, Pishtchik is a large, older man who, like Ranevsky, is perpetually in debt. Unlike Ranevsky, though, Pishtchik is almost always able to miraculously secure funds at the very last minute.

Yasha – Madame Ranevsky's new manservant. A Russian who hates Russia, Yasha is "cultured"—but he is also cruel, calculating, opportunistic, and dismissive of anyone of his own class.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

SOCIAL CHANGE

The central theme of *The Cherry Orchard* is that of social change. Written in the early 1900s, the play depicts a Russia on the brink of revolution. As the aristocracy's power wanes, former serfs experience freedom, and a burgeoning middle class takes root, the central characters of the play—representative of the upper, middle, and lower classes—find themselves struggling to negotiate their relationships, loyalties, and anxieties about the changing socioeconomic landscape of their country. Through *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov dramatizes the concerns of several social strata, showing how the emergence of a middle class in Russia disrupted and negatively impacted the lives not only of the aristocrats their "new money" threatened, but also those of the servants and workers unable to thrive in the new order of things. Chekhov ultimately argues that rapid social change—though necessary for societal growth—can actually end up leaving behind the very individuals it seeks to uplift.

From its very first pages, *The Cherry Orchard* establishes itself as a story about class. Chekhov uses the titular **cherry orchard**—and the changing circumstances that threaten it—as an expansive symbol of the disappearing social order and the emergence of a new one centered around an ambitious, power-hungry middle class. At the rise of the curtain, it is a frosty May morning; the peasant-turned-businessman Lopakhin awaits the return of Madame Ranevsky, the owner of a large estate that includes an expansive cherry orchard. Though Ranevsky, who has been living abroad for five years and squandering all her money, looks forward to returning to her old life, times have changed; she is deeply in debt, and Lopakhin informs her that the only way to possibly save her property before it goes up for auction in August is to parcel it up into individual plots and rent it out to the surge of "villa residents" (a euphemism for the growing middle class) throughout the countryside. Ranevsky insists there must be another way; her reluctance to chop down her cherry orchard symbolizes her anxieties about the social change rapidly taking place around her and her desire to hold onto her position in the world—a desire that will soon prove impossible.

As the play progresses, the summer goes by, and Ranevsky continually ignores Lopakhin's repeated suggestion that she parcel up the land and rent it out. Her denial of her situation—the play's central examination of the disorienting effect of social upheaval upon the wealthy—is complemented by Chekhov's portrayal of how social innovation affects the servant class. Dunyasha, a young serving-girl working at the estate, struggles to act and dress more like a refined lady even as everyone around her calls her out for striving beyond her station; Yasha, Madame Ranevsky's aloof and cruel manservant, acts as if he is too good for others of his class, treating visits from his mother, a peasant, as burdensome annoyances and treating Dunyasha, Anya's governess

Charlotte, and Ephikhodof badly. Firs, the oldest servant in the household, laments the day serfs were liberated from the land they were bound to and seems to be living (quite literally due to his advancing dementia) in the past, when servants showed total allegiance to their masters. As the play goes on, Chekhov uses Firs's mental block when it comes to accepting social change to show how profoundly in denial members of all social classes are at the prospect of societal upheaval—and the idea that the traditions they have clung to for centuries are soon to be rendered obsolete.

In the play's third act, Ranevsky throws a lavish party to distract herself from the fact that her brother Gayef and Lopakhin are off at the big auction, supposedly attempting to save the estate. The party symbolizes her attempt to live in denial a little longer, even at the literal eleventh hour—as a member of the aristocracy, things have always come easy to Ranevsky and people like her. The idea that she might actually lose her family's home and orchard brings her anxiety, but something about it still seems implausible—until, of course, Lopakhin returns from the auction to reveal that he has purchased the orchard. Lopakhin is gleeful as he recounts how he outbid everyone else present—the son of poor, lowly peasants, Lopakhin is boastful as he realizes that he has just surpassed and usurped the very family whose charity his own once relied on to survive.

In the fourth and final act, Ranevsky and her family pack up while Lopakhin anxiously waits for them to vacate the house. As the family runs about frantically rounding up their things and attempting to say goodbye to their precious family home, the sound of axes chopping down trees wafts through the windows; Lopakhin has already hired men to fell the orchard and make way for his new "reign" over the property. The aristocracy has been toppled, and the middle class is moving in. Ranevsky and Gayef's grief is palpable, and yet Anya, Trophimof, and Yasha seem anxious to get out of the house and on with their "new lives." After everyone departs, the elderly servant Firs enters the room, and finds that he has been locked inside the house. Ill and alone, he laments that his life has come to nothing before lying down on the sofa and, presumably, dying as the sounds of the axes start up again. Firs, too, has been left behind (and left to die) by the changes sweeping Russia.

Chekhov's play tells the story of what happens when both rich and poor are left behind by the rise to prominence of a class whose concerns do not take into mind either group's needs. Chekhov could easily have made *The Cherry Orchard* about the pitiful, obsolete concerns of the wealthy, landowning class in the face of the triumph of the common people; instead, he takes a more nuanced view and incorporates the very real way in which even positive social change renders certain ways of life irrelevant and leaves even privileged families and individuals out in the cold, unprepared for the new world stretching out before them.

LOSS, GRIEF, AND CLASS

One of the most profound themes in Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* is loss. From Madame Ranevsky, her brother Gayef, and her daughters Barbara and Anya's loss of their ancestral home, to Ranevsky's lingering grief over the death of her youngest son Grisha, to Ephikhodof's resigned acceptance of his daily misfortunes, every character within the play—even the minor ones—is struggling with feelings of loss, grief, and pain. In suffusing each character's story with some measure of loss, Chekhov points out the suffering and pain that affect humanity indiscriminately, paying no mind to class, privilege, or social standing, and argues that no one is immune to, or can be protected from, feelings of loss and grief. At the same time, class allows the more privileged to indulge their grief, while the less privileged must suffer silently in order to avoid falling behind in their duties to those they are bound to serve out of tradition or necessity.

In this play, no one is safe from the alienating and demoralizing effects of loss. The undiscerning nature of pain is most acutely demonstrated through the suffering of the play's main protagonist, Madame Ranevsky. Five years ago, shortly after the death of her drunk spendthrift of a husband, Madame Ranevsky's youngest son Grisha died by drowning. In the wake of his death, Ranevsky took up with a lover who treated her poorly, and fled with the man to Paris—no doubt to escape her grief. At the start of the play, though not all of the information about what transpired in Paris is known, it is clear that Ranevsky's attempt to dodge the pain of her losses has backfired. Her youngest daughter Anya traveled to Paris to fetch her, and found her living in questionable circumstances, completely drained of funds. Ranevsky, in her suffering, fled the "duties" of her life in the country—running the estate, mothering Barbara and Anya and securing educations and marriages for them—in order to indulge her own grief and try to escape the pain of her loss. Ranevsky, due to her elevated social standing, was in a position in which she could both afford literally and figuratively to do so. She was able to behave selfishly, foolishly, and even dangerously, because her privilege protected her in many ways—even if it could not save her from being a victim of loss and pain.

The play's servant characters are also often seen struggling with intense grief and feelings of loss—though the ways they are "allowed" to express and process their feelings are very different from that of the upper-class characters. Ephikhodof, the family's clerk, is an odd man who seems unlearned in social graces and perpetually in a depressive fog. At first, Ephikhodof seems to be nothing more than an odd bit of comic relief—in the play's second act, however, he reveals that he always carries a revolver with him in case he feels the need to kill himself. Ephikhodof—whose nickname is "Twenty-two

misfortunes," due to his somber nature and propensity for getting into physical or interpersonal blunders—is dogged by a very deep sense of grief. Though the audience never learns its source, Ephikhodof's penetrating sadness goes from being a joke to a very serious matter in the span of just a couple acts. Charlotte, Anya's governess, is a funny woman skilled in tricks and illusions who, in the second act, reveals that she is the orphaned daughter of circus performers who led her around the continent from show to show, never revealing where she was born or establishing for their child a place where she truly belonged. Despite her quirky veneer and penchant for showmanship, Charlotte's waters run deep; her statelessness and loneliness wear on her, and she frequently laments how alone she feels in the world. Charlotte's words, more often than not, fall on deaf ears, and so her sense of loneliness and grief is only compounded. Chekhov uses the suffering of his minor characters to show how everyone in the world suffers in ways both seen and unseen, private and public. Loss and grief penetrate all echelons of the social stratosphere, and yet members of the lower classes such as Dunyasha, Charlotte, and Ephikhodof are forced to push their pain down and suffer in silence—or at least in obscurity—while more well-off individuals such as Ranevsky can afford to indulge their pain by, say, taking five-year jaunts to Paris so as to avoid living in the house where their child drowned.

As Chekhov explores the public and private sufferings of his characters, he makes it a point to show his audience the ways in which class influences peoples' ability to process and handle their pain. While the upper classes are allowed more leeway, the servant class, which keeps the wheels of their masters' lives oiled, must put the needs of others before their own, thus sublimating their own feelings and often—unfortunately—leading to improper, underdeveloped, or even dangerous ways of expressing the grief that they, too, feel deeply.

LOVE AND SENTIMENTALITY

Many of the characters in *The Cherry Orchard* are shown to be actively fighting against—or struggling to contain—feelings of love and sentimentality as the play goes on. The radical Peter Trophimof believes himself "above love," even though he harbors unresolved feelings for Anya; Barbara is passively waiting on a proposal from the wealthy Lopakhin, a proposal that may never come; Dunyasha longs to prove herself a sentimental lady in order to appeal to the cultured but priggish Yasha; Madame Ranevsky's cruel lover, off in Paris, has jilted her more times than she can count and yet she still harbors feelings for him. As Chekhov's characters dance around their true feelings—sometimes literally—the playwright shows that to treat sentimentality as a vulnerability or even a liability is as harmful as diving headlong into one's feelings without any consideration for others. Chekhov ultimately argues that total denial of one's feelings is just as harmful as overindulgence in or manufacturing of them, and that in order to be good to one another, people must relate to one another honestly and openly.

Many characters throughout the play attempt to deny sentimentality—most notably Trophimof, whose repeated proclamation that he is "above love" directly contradicts his romantic feelings for the beautiful and aristocratic Anya. Trophimof, a perpetual student who has long served as the family's tutor, is a revolutionary with radical ideals about the failings of the middle class, the dangers of a lazy life as a passive member of the "intelligentsia," and the evils of both wealth and sentiment, and he places his treasured ideals above his own feelings. In doing so, he hurts both Anya—to whom he promises the approach of happiness but denies his affections, effectively leading her on—and Madame Ranevsky—whose grief he writes off as sentimental, despite having witnessed firsthand, as Grisha's tutor, the intense pain the woman felt at the time of her child's loss. Chekhov uses Trophimof to show how a rejection of sentimentality on the grounds of clear-eyed revolutionary thinking—or allegiance to ideals above all else—is cruel. Trophimof's total denial of his ability to feel, give, and desire love and empathy is one extreme—but the overindulgence in sentimentality is the other, and Chekhov does not favor either end of the spectrum.

Though Chekhov implicitly indicts Trophimof's cruel, cold rejection of sentimentality, he also takes an unforgiving view of excessive romanticism of one's circumstances. Dunyasha's desire to give herself over to sentimentality is born out of her desire to appear more like a lady. In the midst of the burgeoning social upheaval throughout Russia, Dunyasha longs to rise above her station and appear more upper—or at least middle—class. She thinks that by affecting the nervous demeanor, fluttering disposition, and simpering weakness of a "lady," she will make herself more refined—not to mention more attractive to the cruel but "cultured" Yasha. Dunyasha's overindulgence in sentimentalism is shown in a comic light throughout the play, and as Dunyasha affects increasingly ridiculous habits and patterns of speech, Chekhov indicts her sentimentality at least as violently as Trophimof's calculated, self-denying pragmatism. Madame Ranevsky's sentimental disposition, too, is examined in both comic and tragic lights throughout the play. Her longing for the past, evidenced through her delving constantly into childhood memories as she returns to her family's estate, as well as her inability to resist the allure of being loved (shown through her constant waffling over whether or not to respond to her cruel ex-lover's telegrams from Paris) is clearly contemptible to Chekhov. As Ranevsky laments the loss of her youth and happiness—and her desire for her lover despite knowing that he is like a gorgeous but heavy necklace, slowly throttling her—Chekhov imbues her character with a tilt toward sentimentalism that Dunyasha

imitates and Trophimof abhors, demonstrating how sentimentalism, though often born of very real and intense feelings, can make even the most genuine suffering appear cartoonish and showy.

The Cherry Orchard was written as a comedy but is often performed as a tragedy—as it was in its world premiere at the Moscow Art Theater in 1904. The confusion as to the play's genre seems to stem from Chekhov's desire to lampoon both sentimentality and cold indifference. There is very real tragedy within the pages of the play, but his characters' sentimentality is often over-exaggerated to the point of parody. Chekhov laments the affected emotional extremes that people so often succumb to, and in many ways uses *The Cherry Orchard* to argue for measured but genuine emotional expression and intelligence—both onstage and off.

SELFISHNESS

In *The Cherry Orchard*, Chekhov places the worst human impulses under a rather unforgiving microscope. The play sets up a tense dramatic situation—Madame Ranevsky and her family will lose their ancestral home if they do not parcel off their **cherry orchard** and rent it out to their neighbors—which then unfolds over the course of several months as Ranevsky's poor spending habits, her neighbor Lopakhin's envy and ambition, and her servants' and daughters' personal dramas obscure the pressing need to save the orchard. Ultimately, the characters are all selfish in their own ways, and their individual self-absorption leads to betrayal, heartbreak, and ill will as the drama approaches its devastating end. Throughout the play, Chekhov argues that selfishness and the betrayals it engenders lead to more than just interpersonal strife. Selfishness, Chekhov posits, can fell entire communities, leaving despair and destruction in its wake.

The selfishness and self-absorption of the aristocracy is rich material for Chekhov's drama about social change. As he explores how myopic self-obsession is both a defining quality of upper-class life and a major instrument in its destruction, Chekhov examines the selfish tendencies of a few key characters. Madame Ranevsky—despite being a victim in many ways, and occasionally reading as a deeply sympathetic, pitiful character—is self-absorbed and ignorant of other people's needs. She spends the money her family and their servants need to survive on luxurious lunches for herself and her friends, and gives extravagantly to the poor, though more out of naivete and an inability to say no (for fear of looking poor herself) than any actual desire to help them. Her financial irresponsibility is compulsive and unchecked, and this selfish quality has resulted in the financial ruin of her entire family. Moreover, when offered the opportunity to save her estate—and the livelihoods of her servants and those in her employ to boot— Ranevsky feels that it is beneath her to sacrifice her beloved cherry orchard and parcel it up into rented plots of land. This is a selfish move entirely—Ranevsky knows that her family is depending on her to save them, and yet prizes her own love of the orchard and her happy memories of walking through it as a child over making a move that could benefit someone other than herself.

Though the aristocracy is self-absorbed to the point of parody, the emerging middle-class, Chekhov demonstrates, is also given to selfishness and shameless ambition. Chekhov uses Lopakhin—a solitary man so consumed with and delighted by his own advancement that he ignores the needs of everyone else around him—to indict the selfish single-mindedness of the go-getting middle class, as well. Lopakhin initially appears to be on Ranevsky's side—he is grateful to the kindness she showed to him in his youth, and appears to want to help her save the cherry orchard. As she rejects his idea time and time again, however, his frustration becomes evident—and when it is time to show his support for Ranevsky and her family, Lopakhin chooses his own prosperity over theirs. On the day of the auction, Ranevsky anxiously awaits the results of the bidding during a lavish house party. When her brother Gayef walks in the door, tearful and utterly defeated, she knows she has lost everything; when Lopakhin comes in the door moments later, elated and giggling, she realizes she has lost it all to him and his ambition. Lopakhin begins gleefully recounting how he outbid everyone else at the auction and won the cherry orchard for himself. He is proud of his achievement—the son of peasants, who, at one time in his life, could barely afford shoes in the winter, has become the owner of one of the most coveted properties in the region—but as he boasts of his good fortune, he does not even stop to think of how cruel he is being. Madame Ranevsky has lost everything—her home, her land, and her family's legacy—yet the self-absorbed Lopakhin is blind to her suffering, or perhaps just doesn't care, so proud is he of his own advancement. At the end of the play, as Ranevsky and her daughters pack up their belongings and struggle to get out of the house in time to make their train while still managing to say goodbye to their fond memories of the home, they hear the sounds of axes already starting to chop down the cherry trees in the orchard. Anya and Trophimof both indict Lopakhin for his carelessness and lack of tact—and yet Lopakhin, eager to set his plan in motion and begin making money off the villas he will build on the land the orchard occupies, can hardly wait until they are out of the house to begin pursuit of his own dream. Lopakhin's ignorance and selfishness in this scene rivals—and even perhaps trumps—Ranevsky's in the earlier acts, showing how the upper classes do not corner the market on shameless self-interest.

Chekhov, through his examination of his characters' selfishness, demonstrates how egocentric thought ultimately ends up serving not even the self-interested individual perpetuating it. Selfishness destroys more than interpersonal relationships—it threatens legacies, traditions, and the very foundations of

society, and it is not only the practice of the ignorant upper classes. The selfish desire to prove oneself, to overcome outdated institutions, and to acquire wealth and status at the expense of others is, unfortunately, an ugly practice of the middle class as well, and a pitfall to which no one, not even the ostensibly self-aware, is immune.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE CHERRY ORCHARD

The play's central symbol is the titular cherry orchard, which stretches across the expansive country estate that belongs to Madame Ranevsky and her family. At the start of the play, Ranevsky has just returned to Russia from a five-year stint in Paris; low on funds and in danger of losing the estate, her wealthy middle-class neighbor Lopakhin informs her that in order to pay off her interest and save her home she must cut down the cherry orchard, parcel the land up into one-acre plots, and rent it out to other members of the emergent middle-class (so-called "villa residents"). Ranevsky is appalled by the idea—she refuses to part with her beloved cherry orchard, and so, in the end, loses the property at auction to none other than Lopakhin himself, who gleefully plans to immediately employ his own plan to carve up the orchard for profit.

The cherry orchard, then, is a symbol of the aristocracy's desire to maintain a chokehold on their properties and possessions despite the rapid social, economic, and political change unfolding all around them. As the middle class begins to emerge in Russia, old ways of life become unsustainable, and even the privileged landed gentry must make sacrifices to stay afloat. Ranevksy's inability to adapt is symbolic of the aristocracy's paralyzing shock in the face of social change, and the cherry orchard—which, in the play's final act, is already being chopped down by Lopakhin's workers even before Ranevsky and her children are fully moved out of the house—represents the violent dismantling of the upper class.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Thrift edition of *The Cherry Orchard* published in 1991.

Act 1 Quotes

MADAME RANEVSKY: Cut down the cherry orchard! Excuse me, but you don't know what you're talking about. If there is one thing that's interesting, remarkable in fact, in the whole province, it's our cherry orchard.

LOPAKHIN: There's nothing remarkable about the orchard except that it's a very big one. It only bears once every two years, and then you don't know what to do with the fruit. Nobody wants to buy it.

GAYEF: Our cherry orchard is mentioned in Andreyevsky's Encyclopaedia.

[...]

FIRS: In the old days, forty or fifty years ago, they used to dry the cherries and soak 'em and pickle 'em, and make jam of 'em, and the dried cherries...

GAYEF: Shut up, Firs.

FIRS: The dried cherries used to be sent in wagons to Moscow and Kharkof. A heap of money! The dried cherries were soft and juicy and sweet and sweet-smelling them. They knew some way in those days.

MADAME RANEVSKY: And why don't they do it now?

FIRS: They've forgotten. Nobody remembers how to do it.

Related Characters: Firs Nikolayevitch, Leonid Andreyitch Gayef, Yermolai Alexeyitch Lopakhin, Madame Lyubof Andreyevna Ranevsky (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Madame Ranevsky has just returned to Russia from a five-year stint in Paris to find that her family's ancestral hold is in danger of being auctioned off in order to pay off their outstanding interest. Ranevsky's wealthy neighbor—a man named Lopakhin who, though the son of lowly peasants, has risen through the social ranks to become a member of the emergent Russian middle class—suggests that Ranevsky take advantage of the middle class's desire for estate living and cut down her cherry orchard, parcel up the land into one-acre plots, and rent it out. Ranevsky finds the idea offensive, and insists in this passage that her cherry orchard is valuable and "remarkable." Her brother Gayef backs her up, and their butler, the elderly Firs, also longs for the way things were

done in the olden days. Fir's remark that "nobody remembers" how to properly process and sell the cherries harvested from the orchard reflects how greatly times have changed—and how obsolete Ranevsky's orchard, in its current state, has become, despite her reluctance to admit it.

GAYEF: Do you know how old this cupboard is, Lyuba? A week ago I pulled out the bottom drawer and saw a date burnt on it. That cupboard was made exactly a hundred years ago. What do you think of that, eh? We might celebrate its jubilee. It's only an inanimate thing, but for all that it's a historic cupboard.

[...]

GAYEF *(touching the cupboard):* Yes, it's a wonderful thing... Beloved and venerable cupboard; honor and glory to your existence, which for more than a hundred years has been directed to the noble ideals of justice and virtue. Your silent summons to profitable labor has never weakened in all these hundred years. *(Crying.)* You have upheld the courage of succeeding generations of our human kind; you have upheld faith in a better future and cherished in us ideals of goodness and social consciousness. *(A pause.)*

Related Characters: Leonid Andreyitch Gayef (speaker), Yermolai Alexeyitch Lopakhin, Simeonof Pishtchik

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9-10

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage—shortly after Gayef and Ranevsky have balked at Lopakhin's plan to modernize their estate in order to save it—Gayef reverently speaks directly to an old cupboard that has been in the family for a hundred years. Though inanimate, ornate, and ultimately useless, Gayef is in awe of the cupboard, and imbues it with values of courage and nobility while Lopakhin awkwardly stands by and watches. This passage shows how deeply Gayef reveres the past, and how loath he—and, by extension, his sister Ranevsky—are to accept the social changes that have swept their country. Their blatant and unrepentant sentimentality where the past is concerned reflects a self-centered, myopic view of the world, and an intense longing for a time when their social class reigned unchallenged.

GAYEF *(opening the other window):* The orchard is all white. You've not forgotten in, Lyuba? This long avenue going straight on, straight on, like a ribbon between the trees? It shines like silver on moonlight nights. Do you remember? You've not forgotten?

MADAME RANEVSKY *(looking out into the garden):* Oh, my childhood, my pure and happy childhood! I used to sleep in this nursery. I used to look out from here into the garden. Happiness awoke with me every morning! And the orchard was just the same then as it is now; nothing is altered. *(Laughing with joy.)* It is all white, all white! Oh, my cherry orchard! After the dark and stormy autumn and the frosts of winter you are young again and full of happiness; the angels of heaven have not abandoned you. Oh! If only I could free my neck and shoulders from the stone that weighs them down! If only I could forget my past!

Related Characters: Madame Lyubof Andreyevna Ranevsky, Leonid Andreyitch Gayef (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 11-12

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Gayef and Ranevsky gaze out at their orchard together and reminisce about the past. Ranevsky in particular is deeply moved and upset as she looks out on the expanse of their property—she remembers happy times from her childhood, and laments that though the angels have not "abandoned" the orchard, they seem to have abandoned her. Ranevsky knows that the only way she will be able to consent to Lopakhin's plan is to "forget her past"—and yet she worries openly that she will not be able to. She compares her sentimentality for the past to a heavy stone around her neck, a metaphor that will recur throughout the play. The past is like a gorgeous and ornate necklace—beautiful, but heavy and burdensome, and though it threatens to incapacitate Ranevsky, she cannot seem to free herself of it.

GAYEF: I'll go [to the bank] on Tuesday and talk [the loan] over again. *(To BARBARA)* Don't howl! *(To ANYA)* Your mamma shall have a talk with Lopakhin. Of course he won't refuse her. And as soon as you are rested you must go to see your grandmother, the Countess, at Yaroslav. We'll operate from three points, and the trick is done. We'll pay the interest, I'm certain of it. *(Taking sugar candy.)* I swear on my honor, or whatever you will, the property shall not be sold. *(Excitedly.)* I swear by my hope of eternal happiness! There's my hand on it. Call me a base, dishonorable man if I let it go to auction. I swear by my whole being.

Related Characters: Leonid Andreyitch Gayef (speaker), Madame Lyubof Andreyevna Ranevsky, Anya, Barbara

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 14-15

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Gayef comes up with a plan to save the orchard. He and his sister Ranevsky are reluctant to go along with their neighbor Lopakhin's idea and cut down their expansive cherry orchard in order to rent out parcels of the land—in other words, they do not want to modernize and adapt to the fact that playing off the emerging middle class's desires would benefit their family. They are so afraid to even acknowledge that Russia is changing that they are desperate to come up with other, less effective plans in order to maintain for themselves the illusion that they are still in control of their property, legacy, finances, and fate. As Gayef scrambles to think of "points" of attack from which he and his nieces can secure additional funds, his blatant disregard for the more common-sense approach becomes evident—and yet he is, delusionally, still certain in his "whole being" that his roundabout way of getting loans will work.

Act 2 Quotes

LOPAKHIN: Excuse me, but in all my life I never met anybody so frivolous as you two, so crazy and unbusinesslike! I tell you in plain Russian your property is going to be sold, and you don't seem to understand what I say.

MADAME RANEVSKY: Well, what are we to do? Tell us what you want us to do.

LOPAKHIN: Don't I tell you every day? Every day I say the same thing over and over again. You must lease off the cherry orchard and the rest of the estate for villas [...]

MADAME RANEVSKY: Villas and villa residents, oh, please... it's so vulgar!

GAYEF: I quite agree with you.

LOPAKHIN: I shall either cry, or scream, or faint. I can't stand it! You'll be the death of me. *(To GAYEF.)* You're an old woman!

Related Characters: Leonid Andreyitch Gayef, Madame Lyubof Andreyevna Ranevsky, Yermolai Alexeyitch Lopakhin (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 20-21

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, everyone is enjoying a pleasant summer day out in the field. Lopakhin, Ranevsky, and Gayef have just been for a lavish lunch in town, which Ranevsky footed the bill for despite her overwhelming debts. In this passage, Lopakhin—for what seems to be the umpteenth time—urges Ranevsky to follow through with his plan to lease off the cherry orchard in order to save the estate. Ranevsky will not hear of the "vulgar" idea, however, unable to see that her own careless spending and rejection of modernity is vulgar in and of itself. Lopakhin is so frustrated with his neighbors Gayef and Ranevsky—as, it is implied, he has been hounding them about listening to him all summer long—that he calls Gayef an "old woman," implying that he is both behind the times and emasculated in his inability to secure stability for his family.

FIRS: I've been alive a long time. When they found me a wife, your father wasn't even born yet. And when the Liberation came I was already chief valet. But I wouldn't have any Liberation then; I stayed with my master. *(A pause.)* I remember how happy everybody was, but why they were happy they didn't know themselves.

LOPAKHIN: It was fine before then. Anyway they used to flog 'em.

FIRS *(Mishearing him):* I should think so! The peasants minded the masters, and the masters minded the peasants, but now it's all higgledy-piggledy; you can't make head or tail of it.

Related Characters: Yermolai Alexeyitch Lopakhin, Firs Nikolayevitch (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22-23

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the elderly—and slightly insane—Firs complains that Liberation ruined everything. Though serfs were freed from their masters on that fateful day, Firs—unable or unwilling to strike out on his own and live independently of a master—chose to stay on with his. When Lopakhin sarcastically agrees with Firs, remarking that things were "fine" back when masters brutally flogged their serfs (essentially land-bound slaves), Firs takes up the same position unironically. Firs, the oldest character in the play and in many ways the individual who longs most for the past, has been unable to adapt to the changes that have taken place since Liberation. His dottiness and thick mental fog indicate that his position is backwards and confused—and yet he sticks firmly to his belief that things were more orderly and intuitive when peasants minded their masters and masters lorded over the lives of their serfs and servants. It is significant that Firs, unable to adapt to the changing times, is accidentally left behind at the end of the play, locked inside the old estate to die.

LOPAKHIN: I should like to know what your opinion is of me?

TROPHIMOF: My opinion of you, Yermolai Alexeyitch, is this. You're a rich man; you'll soon be a millionaire. Just as a beast of prey which devours everything that comes in its way is necessary for the conversion of matter, so you are necessary too.

Related Characters: Peter Trophimof, Yermolai Alexeyitch Lopakhin (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Trophimof tells his neighbor Lopakhin—a wealthy businessman who has worked his way up from nothing—that he is like a "beast of prey." Trophimof does not necessarily like Lopakhin's blind ambition, or the ways in which he is climbing higher and higher socially and financially. However, the forward-thinking Trophimof knows that "beasts" like Lopakhin are "necessary for the conversion of matter"—in other words, the transformation of the social order into a more progressive and inclusive one that values more than just the members of the upper classes and the aristocracy. Trophimof, an idealistic young man, often indicts other characters in the play for their selfish way. Despite this, he is quite self-absorbed in his own manner, more concerned with spouting ideology than empathizing with others' feelings or motivations.

(They all sit pensively. Silence reigns, broken only by the mumbling of old FIRS. Suddenly a distant sound is heard as if from the sky, the sound of a string breaking, dying away, melancholy.)

MADAME RANEVSKY: What's that?

LOPAKHIN: I don't know. It's a lifting-tub given way somewhere away in the mines. It must be a long way off.

GAYEF: Perhaps it's some sort of bird... a heron, or something.

TROPHIMOF: Or an owl...

MADAME RANEVSKY *(shuddering):* There's something uncanny about it!

FIRS: The same thing happened before the great misfortune: the own screeched and the samovar kept humming.

GAYEF: What great misfortune?

FIRS: The Liberation.

Related Characters: Firs Nikolayevitch, Leonid Andreyitch Gayef, Yermolai Alexeyitch Lopakhin, Madame Lyubof Andreyevna Ranevsky (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

The strange, melancholy noise like the sound of a string breaking is heard twice throughout the play—in this passage, and at the very end. The sound is one of the most mysterious elements in the drama; though its source is unknown, it seems to inspire intense feelings and unrest in each character. Here, as the sound is heard by all for the first time, it seems to portend a "great misfortune"—or at least a vast change. As the play is largely concerned with social change—and the uselessness in trying to stop it or hold it off—the sound seems to indicate that change is coming, and upon hearing it, each character knows deep in his or her bones that something is coming down the pike. Despite this, characters such as Lopakhin and Gayef (and even the forward-thinking Trophimif) try to ignore it or explain it away.

ANYA: What have you done to me, Peter? Why is it that I no longer love the cherry orchard as I did? I used to love it so tenderly; I thought there was no better place on earth than our garden.

TROPHIMOF: [...] Think, Anya, your grandfather, your great-grandfather and all your ancestors were serf-owners, owners of living souls. Do not human spirits look out at you from every tree in the orchard, from every leaf and every stem? Do you not hear human voices? ...Oh! It is terrible. Your orchard frightens me. When I walk through it in the evening or at night, the rugged bark on the trees glows with a dim light, and the cherry trees seem to see all that happened a hundred and two hundred years ago in painful and oppressive dreams. [...]

ANYA: The house we live in has long since ceased to be our house; and I shall go away, I give you my word.

TROPHIMOF: If you have the household keys, throw them in the well and go away. Be free, be free as the wind.

ANYA: How beautifully you put it!

Related Characters: Peter Trophimof, Anya (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 26-27

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Anya laments that she is unable to love the cherry orchard as well as she once did, in the days of her more ignorant youth. When she asks Trophimof (who loves her, a fact she may or may not be aware of) what he has "done to" her, he answers that he hasn't done anything; rather, Anya has on her own come into the unsettling knowledge that the orchard that represented luxury, comfort, and safety to her family also represented thankless toiling and oppression for the many generations of serfs who worked the land in the days before liberation. Trophimof wants Anya to see things from his point of view, and go along with his revolutionary ideology—and, in this passage, she seems to. As the play goes on, though, Anya's radical desire to throw away her house keys and abandon the estate—so fervent in this moment—will wane, calling into question her commitment to taking up Trophimof's ideals.

Act 3 Quotes

PISHTCHIK: The worst of it is, I've got no money. A hungry dog believes in nothing but meat. *(Snoring and waking up again at once.)* I'm just the same... it's nothing but money, money with me.

[...]

(A sound of billiards being played in the next room. BARBARA appears in the drawing-room beyond the arch.)

TROPHIMOF *(teasing her):* Madame Lopakhin! Madame Lopakhin!

BARBARA *(angrily):* Mouldy gentleman!

TROPHIMOF: Yes, I'm a mouldy gentleman, and I'm proud of it.

BARBARA *(bitterly):* We've hired the band, but where's the money to pay for it?

(Exit BARBARA.)

TROPHIMOF *(to PISHTCHIK):* If the energy which you have spent in the course of your whole life in looking for money to pay the interest on your loans had been diverted to some other purpose, you would have had enough of it, I dare say, to turn the world upside down.

Related Characters: Barbara, Peter Trophimof, Simeonof Pishtchik (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28-29

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Madame Ranevsky has hired a band to play for a lavish dance party at the estate. In this scene, money is on everybody's mind—as it is, of course, throughout much of

the play. Pishtchik, one of Ranevsky's well-off but frivolous neighbors, is concerned about his own finances, even in the middle of a joyful party. Barbara, who has been caring for the house in her mother's absence these last five years, expresses her concern that there is no money left to pay for even the party unfolding right at this moment. She abruptly leaves after expressing this concern "bitterly" but seemingly to no one in particular—Barbara is bothered by her family's finances, but unwilling to linger in thoughts of practical approaches to solving their money problems. Trophimof, who believes himself "above love" and above money as well, points out that if the wealthy but irresponsible individuals in the play such as Pishtchik focused their energies on some other, more useful pursuit, they wouldn't have to worry about money. Instead, they'd be making and actually earning money rather than just borrowing, loaning, and fretting about it incessantly.

MADAME RANEVSKY: Oh, if only I knew whether the property's sold or not! It seems such an impossible disaster, that I don't know what to think... I'm bewildered... I shall burst out screaming, I shall do something idiotic. Save me, Peter; say something to me, say something...

TROPHIMOF: Whether the property is sold to-day or whether it's not sold, surely it's all one? [...] You mustn't deceive yourself any longer; for once you must look the truth straight in the face.

MADAME RANEVSKY: [...] You settle every important question so boldly; but tell me, Peter, isn't that because you're young, because you have never solved any question of your own as yet by suffering? [...] show me just a finger's breadth of consideration, take pity on me. Don't you see? I was born here, my father and mother lived here, and my grandfather; I love this house; without the cherry orchard my life has no meaning for me, and if it *must* be sold, then for heaven's sake tell me too! *(Embracing TROPHIMOF and kissing him on the forehead.)* My little boy was drowned here. *(Crying.)* Be gentle with me, dear, kind Peter.

Related Characters: Peter Trophimof, Madame Lyubof Andreyevna Ranevsky (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

As the party goes on, Madame Ranevsky, the hostess, cannot even enjoy her own event. Gayef and Lopakhin are off at the auction, and have not yet returned with news of what has transpired there—Ranevsky frets endlessly, and, in this passage, seeks comfort from Trophimof. Trophimof does not offer her any real comfort, though—selfishly, he is too concerned with spouting his own ideology in hopes that Ranevsky will see the "truth." She did not ask him for the truth, though; she asked him, as a friend, to make her feel better. After Trophimof's blunt and rather cruel response, Ranevsky begs him not to dismiss her concerns out of hand. Not only has he very little life experience or familiarity with true suffering, but he is purposefully refusing to even try to see things from her point of view. This is one of the few passages in the play where Chekhov doesn't seem to be mocking Ranevsky's frivolous concerns or foolish attachment to the past. Here, he shows what is truly going on in her head, and renders her sentimentality and longing more relatable and grounded in real suffering.

BARBARA: Haven't you gone yet, Simeon? You seem to pay no attention to what you're told. [...]

EPHIKHODOF: Allow me to inform you that it's not your place to call me to account.

BARBARA: I'm not calling you to account; I'm merely talking to you. All you can do is walk about from one place to another, without ever doing a stroke of work; and why on earth we keep a clerk at all heaven only knows.

EPHIKHODOF *(offended)*: Whether I work, or whether I walk, or whether I eat, or whether I play billiards is a question to be decided only by my elders and people who understand.

BARBARA *(furious)*: How dare you talk to me like that! How dare you! I don't understand things, don't I? You clear out of here this minute! Do you hear me? This minute!

EPHIKHODOF *(flinching)*: I must beg you to express yourself in genteeler language.

BARBARA *(beside herself)*: You clear out this instant second! Out you go! Twenty-two misfortunes! Make yourself scarce! Get out of my sight!

Related Characters: Simeon Panteleyitch Ephikhodof, Barbara (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Barbara reprimands the family's clerk Ephikhodof, who has broken a pool cue while playing billiards at Ranevsky's party. Barbara is angry with Ephikhodof for shirking his status as a servant and playing games during the party as if he were one of the guests. Ephikhodof, a man of a new generation and a new view of the social order, believes it is his right to eat and play games at the party given by his employers if he wants to. His simple statement of his belief enrages Barbara, who, like her mother and her uncle, seems unable—or merely unwilling—to accept the social changes sweeping Russia. She becomes shrill and emotional, speaking cruelly and disdainfully to Ephikhodof, nervous to have her authority challenged or erased altogether.

MADAME RANEVSKY: Who bought it?

LOPAKHIN: […] I bid nine thousand more than the mortgage, and got it; and now the cherry orchard is mine! Mine! *(Laughing.)* Heaven's alive! Just think of it! The cherry orchard is mine! Tell me that I'm drunk; tell me that I'm off my head; tell me that it's all a dream! […] If only my father and my grandfather could rise from their graves and see the whole affair, how their Yermolai, their flogged and ignorant Yermolai, who used to run around barefooted in the winter, how this same Yermolai had bought a property that hasn't its equal for beauty anywhere in the whole world! I have bought the property where my father and grandfather were slaves, where they weren't even allowed into the kitchen. I'm asleep, it's only a vision, it isn't real… 'Tis the fruit of imagination, wrapped in the mists of ignorance. […] Come everyone and see Yermolai Lopakhin lay his axe to the cherry orchard, come and see the trees fall down! We'll fill the place with villas; our grandsons and great-grandsons shall see a new life here […] Here comes the new squire, the owner of the cherry orchard!

Related Characters: Yermolai Alexeyitch Lopakhin, Madame Lyubof Andreyevna Ranevsky (speaker), Barbara

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lopakhin returns from the auction with news that he has purchased Ranevsky's estate—and her beautiful cherry orchard. Though Lopakhin criticized the orchards as being frivolous and unremarkable in previous acts, he is clearly overjoyed to be its owner—and, in this monologue, reveals that he has indeed harbored a sentimentality for it all long, albeit in a very different sense than Ranevsky. Lopakhin wants to possess the cherry orchard solely for the purpose of felling it. In doing so he will continue his ravenous, ambitious climb up the socioeconomic ladder. By renting out the land, he will also symbolically pave way for a "new life" for the members of the middle class, taking a small kind of vengeance on a place that enslaved his father and grandfathers and prevented them from rising in the way he has been able to himself. Lopakhin's blatant joy in the face of Ranevsky and Barbara's obvious pain is deeply selfish, and yet he is unable to stop himself from going on and on about his position as the "new squire" who will replace the old guard of the aristocracy and turn its institutions to ashes.

ANYA: Mamma! Are you crying, mamma? My dear, good, sweet mamma! Darling, I love you! I bless you! The cherry orchard is sold; it's gone; it's quite true, it's quite true. But don't cry, mamma, you've still got life before you, you've still got your pure and lovely soul. Come with me, darling; come away from here. We'll plant a new garden, still lovelier than this. You will see it and understand, and happiness, deep, tranquil happiness will sink down on your soul, like the sun at eventide, and you'll smile, mamma. Come, darling, come with me!

Related Characters: Anya (speaker), Peter Trophimof, Madame Lyubof Andreyevna Ranevsky

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lopakhin has left the room—Ranevsky, devastated, has sunk into a chair to weep over the loss of her estate and beloved cherry orchard. Her youngest daughter, Anya, comes to her side to comfort her, and, in doing so, abandons the revolutionary, progressive ideology she espoused in the previous act. Anya allowed Trophimof to get her excited about the prospect of throwing away her keys to the estate and abandoning the orchard forever. Now, though, seeing her mother's suffering, Anya vows instead to help her mother replicate their circumstances elsewhere. What Anya truly believes is unclear—but what is evident is that she is easily swept up in feeling and sentiment, and given over to offering comfort and solidarity

to others rather than forming her own worldview.

Act 4 Quotes

LOPAKHIN: In the spring I sowed three thousand acres of poppy and I have cleared four thousand pounds net profit. [...] So you see, I cleared four thousand pounds; and I wanted to lend you a bit because I've got it to spare. What's the good of being stuck up? I'm a peasant... As man to man...

TROPHIMOF: Your father was a peasant; mine was a chemist; it doesn't prove anything. *(LOPAKHIN takes out his pocket-book with paper money.)* Shut up, shut up... If you offered me twenty thousand pounds I would not take it. I am a free man; nothing that you value so highly, all of you, rich and poor, has the smallest power over me; it's like thistledown floating on the wind. I can do without you; I can go past you; I'm strong and proud. Mankind marches forward to the highest truth, to the highest happiness possible on earth, and I march in the foremost ranks.

LOPAKHIN: Will you get there?

TROPHIMOF: Yes. *(A pause.)* I will get there myself or I will show others the way.

Related Characters: Peter Trophimof, Yermolai Alexeyitch Lopakhin (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Lopakhin attempts to give Trophimof—a poor young student—some money for his journey back to Moscow to attend classes. Trophimof, though, proudly insists that he doesn't need the money—it has no power over him. He has, throughout the play, displayed his contempt for money in his conversations with Anya, Pishtchik, and Ranevsky, and here he boldly asserts to Lopakhin that in the "march forward to the highest truth," his happiness will exclude monetary gain. When Lopakhin asks him if he will really be able to get to such a point, Trophimof at first answers confidently—then, after a pause, reconsiders his answer, and promises instead to at least "show others the way" to his ideal of freedom from money and its constraints.

ANYA *(in the doorway)*: Mamma says, will you stop cutting down the orchard till she has gone.

TROPHIMOF: Really, haven't you got tact enough for that?

(Exit TROPHIMOF by the hall.)

LOPAKHIN: Of course, I'll stop them at once. What fools they are!

(Exit after TROPHIMOF.)

Related Characters: Yermolai Alexeyitch Lopakhin, Peter Trophimof, Anya (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

As Madame Ranevsky, her family, and her servants bustle about the house packing to leave their estate behind, the sounds of Lopakhin's hired workers cutting down the cherry orchard out back can already be heard. In this passage, Anya asks Lopakhin to stop cutting down the trees until they are all out of the house, as a show of respect. Trophimof, in love with Anya and sympathetic to her and Ranevsky's pain (despite his earlier reluctance to show any sentimentality towards them or their orchard) agrees, and expresses his disappointment in Lopakhin. Lopakhin, then—out of either genuine embarrassment or forced compliance—hurries off to stop his workers from chopping. Lopakhin's eagerness to get his plan in motion and begin securing even more wealth for himself is evident in the fact that his workers have already begin clearing the orchard before the property is vacant. As a member of the emergent middle class, Lopakhin has no sentimentality for the days in which the aristocracy ruled unchecked, and his hurry to get the destruction of the orchard underway symbolizes his longing for the destruction of the old social systems that held him and his family back for so many generations.

(MADAME RANEVSKY and GAYEF remain alone [in the nursery.] They seem to have been waiting for this, throw their arms round each other's necks and sob restrainedly and gently, afraid of being overheard.)

GAYEF *(in despair):* My sister! My sister!

MADAME RANEVSKY: Oh, my dear, sweet lovely orchard! My life, my youth, my happiness, farewell! Farewell!

ANYA *(calling gaily, without)* Mamma!

TROPHIMOF *(gay and excited):* Aoo!

MADAME RANEVSKY: One last look at the walls and the windows… Our dear mother sued to walk up and down this room.

GAYEF: My sister! My sister!

ANYA *(without):* Aoo!

MADAME RANEVSKY: We're coming. *(Exeunt.)*

Related Characters: Peter Trophimof, Anya, Madame Lyubof Andreyevna Ranevsky, Leonid Andreyitch Gayef (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Everyone but Ranevsky and Gayef has left the house, ready to set off for the train station, where they'll all embark on separate journeys. In this brief scene, Ranevsky and Gayef try to soak up, for the very last time, all of the memories of their youth and happiness—even as the members of the younger generation call gaily and excitedly for them to catch up. After much encouragement, Ranevsky and Gayef muster their strength and wrench themselves away from their childhood nursery, knowing that they will never see it—or their treasured orchards beyond—ever again. Once again, Ranevsky and Gayef are reticent to lose their aristocratic footing and embrace the social change that is sweeping Russia, though all of the younger characters seem excited by the prospect of a new life.

(The stage is empty. One hears all the doors being locked, and the carriages driving away. All is quiet. Amid the silence the thud of axes on the trees echoes sad and lonely. The sound of footsteps. FIRS appears in the doorway. He is dressed, as always, in his long coat and white waistcoat; he wears slippers. He is ill.)

FIRS *(going to the door and trying the handle):* Locked. They've gone. *(Sitting on the sofa.)* They've forgotten me. Never mind! I'll sit here. […] Life has gone by as if I'd never lived. *(Lying down.)* I'll lie down. There's no strength left in you; there's nothing, nothing. Ah, you… job-lot!

(He lies motionless. A distant sound is heard, as if from the sky, the sound of a string breaking, dying away, melancholy. Silence ensues, broken only by the stroke of the axe on the trees far away in the cherry orchard.)

Related Characters: Firs Nikolayevitch (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 48-49

Explanation and Analysis

In the play's final moments, everyone clears out of the house at last—everyone, that is, but old Firs, who has sadly been left behind. Everyone in the play—servants, aristocrats, students, and businessmen—has been so selfish, so focused on the future, so wrapped up in their own small and petty dramas that they have collectively abandoned the elderly and infirm Firs within the house, which no one is scheduled to return to for months and months. As Firs laments his wasted life and realizes he has no strength left to even seek help for himself, he lies down on the sofa—perhaps to die. He listens as the sounds of the breaking string, which portends the end of an era in Russian history, and the chopping-down of the cherry orchard. Firs—the last holdout of a bygone generation—has been literally and metaphorically left behind as the rest of the characters have, however reluctantly, given in to the new social order and left to pursue their dreams. Unable to adapt, Firs has been left to die a slow and painful death all alone, as modernity encroaches on the very house that has become a veritable prison for him.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1

It is nearly dawn on a frosty morning in May. In the yard of a grand estate, a large **cherry orchard** is in bloom; a serving-girl named Dunyasha enters a room "which is still called the nursery" many years after it has been used as such to find Lopakhin in a chair with a book in his hand. Lopakhin realizes Dunyasha brings news of a train's arrival; it is nearly two in the morning, and growing light already, and the train is over two hours late. Lopakhin came to meet the owner of the estate, Madame Ranevsky, at the station, and chides Dunyasha for letting him fall asleep in his chair.

The opening scene, which shows Lopakhin alone in a room of Madame Ranevsky's house as if in charge of the place while the cherry orchard is visible from the window, foreshadows the play's central conflict—the struggle between Lopakhin and Ranevsky for control and ownership of the estate and the orchard.

Lopakhin recalls a time when he was fifteen years old. His father had struck him in the face and made him bleed; Madame Ranevsky came out to the courtyard, brought the young Lopakhin inside, and cleaned his wounds. She assured the "little peasant" that things would get better for him as he grew older. Lopakhin muses that Ranevsky's prediction has come true: though he grew up the son of a peasant, he is now dressed finely, and has "turned rich."

Lopakhin's rising station in life is indicative of the social change that is taking place all across Russia. The middle class is emerging, fighting for rights and relevance—and Lopakhin, whose childhood was difficult and often painful, is at the forefront of the movement.

Lopakhin notices that Dunyasha is trembling and asks her what the matter is. She answers that she feels faint. Lopakhin chides Dunyasha for attempting to act "too refined"—she is dressed like a lady, and adopting a lady's affectations, but ought to remember that she is only a maid after all.

Dunyasha is a serving girl, and of a class lower than Lopakhin, yet even she too is striving to adopt the mannerisms of the upper class and the aristocracy. The social change sweeping Russia has affected everyone.

Ephikhodof, the estate's clerk, enters with a bouquet. His boots squeak noisily as he comes into the room. He hands the bouquet to Dunyasha and tells her it comes from the gardener, who has picked it for the dining room. Dunyasha goes off to put the flowers away and retrieve a beverage for Lopakhin. Ephikhodof makes small talk with Lopakhin about the weather and his squeaky boots, but Lopakhin does not engage with the man, and instead tells him he's annoying. Ephikhodof resignedly states that though each day some misfortune befalls him, he is used to such misery, and always smiles through it. Dunyasha returns, and he leaves.

The bumbling, self-pitying Ephikhodof here provides comic relief. In squeaky shoes, with a cloud of misery over his head, Ephikhodof seems resigned to his destiny to fail and suffer—as the play goes on, this sentiment will be explored more deeply, and the dark side of Ephikhodof's character will come to light.

Dunyasha confides in Lopakhin the fact that Ephikhodof has proposed to her—she is uncertain of what to do about it. Though she is fond of him—and though she knows he "adores" her—he is an unfortunate man who has earned for himself the nickname of "Twenty-two misfortunes." Lopakhin hears Madame Ranevsky approaching. Dunyasha says she's so excited she's going to faint, and the two of them run outside to meet the approaching carriages. A hubbub is heard in the next room as the elderly servant Firs enters the nursery from outdoors, having collected Ranevsky from the train station. Alone in the room, he mumbles to himself incoherently.

As the house begins coming back to life, Chekhov sets up the relationships that will be tested as the play's action commences in earnest. Dunyasha's desire to rise above her station means that even though she likes Ephikhodof well enough, she is unsure about committing to him—the interpersonal drama between characters will expand and deepen as more servants like Firs and members of the aristocracy like Ranevsky are introduced.

Ranevsky, her daughters Anya and Barbara, and Anya's governess Charlotte enter the room in a bustle. Gayef (Ranevsky's brother), Lopakhin, Dunyasha, and a neighbor named Pishtchik are with them. The teenaged Anya is overjoyed to be home, as is Ranevsky, who looks around the nursery with joyful tears in her eyes. Barbara, who has stayed on as the lady of the house in Ranevsky's absence, assures Ranevsky and Anya that their rooms have been kept the same as they were when Ranevsky left. Ranevsky comments that the nursery was the room she used to sleep in as a little girl; beginning to cry, she confesses she still feels like a little girl.

The house springs to life as Ranevsky and her coterie return. Ranevsky and Anya—who have been away from the house for five years and a few months, respectively—are overjoyed to return to their house, and clearly emotionally invested in the place, which holds many memories for both of them. Ranevsky feels herself transformed by returning to the house.

The group hurries from the room to explore the rest of the house; Anya and Dunyasha stay behind. As Dunyasha helps Anya remove her overcoat and hat, Anya complains that she did not sleep at all on the four-day journey from Paris. Dunyasha, overcome with excitement, tells Anya that Ephikhodof has proposed to her while Anya has been away collecting her mother from France. Anya seems bored, and more concerned with her own messy hair than Dunyasha's news. When Dunyasha tells Anya that a man named Trophimof has arrived at the house, though, Anya brightens up.

Anya is shown here to be largely unconcerned about anyone other than herself—especially the servants. She brightens at Trophimof's name, but before that, pays absolutely no attention to Dunyasha's news. Dunyasha, meanwhile, is attempting to connect with her lady Anya by relaying to her news that she thinks Anya will find exciting, revealing Dunyasha's desire to grow closer to Anya, a member of the social class she aspires to.

Barbara comes back into the room, and sends Dunyasha to go prepare coffee for Madame Ranevsky. Dunyasha leaves, and Barbara fawns over Anya, grateful that her "pretty one" is back. Anya describes all she has been through—she left for Paris last month, and has had to endure the company of the odd Charlotte, who kept trying to amuse her with card tricks, for weeks. Barbara apologizes for sticking Anya with Charlotte, but reminds Anya that she could not have traveled so far alone at only seventeen.

Anya again sees the people who serve her and make her life more comfortable and safe as a nuisance. She laments having to travel across the continent with her governess, who performed lame tricks—even though Charlotte, in this description, seemed to be literally bending over backwards to entertain and comfort Anya.

Anya describes arriving in Paris to find her mother living on the fifth floor of a large house, entertaining a strange group of people. Barbara can hardly stand to hear how their mother was living. Anya tells Barbara that their mother doesn't have a penny left—and yet Ranevsky is still living beyond her means, dining in expensive restaurants, tipping waiters lavishly, and doting on her manservant Yasha, who is a "rascal." Anya asks if the interest on the house's mortgage was paid while she was away, and Barbara sadly replies that it hasn't—the property is due to be sold in August.

Anya and Barbara worry about their irresponsible, spendthrift mother, whose five-year excursion to Paris (a selfish and solitary endeavor) has compromised her family's financial standing—and possibly even her daughters' futures.

Lopakhin interrupts the sisters' tense moment by making a sound at the door. Barbara shakes her fist at him, and he goes away. Anya asks if Lopakhin has proposed to Barbara yet. Barbara answers that though everyone around seems to believe the two will get married, Lopakhin is so busy with his business that he hasn't asked her yet. Dunyasha returns with coffee, and Barbara laments the family's hardships. If only, she says, they could find a way to marry Anya off to a rich man, all of their debts would be paid, and Barbara would be able to get free of the house and stop worrying about how to keep it in good standing. Outside, birds begin chirping; Barbara remarks how late it is and ushers Anya off to bed.

The girls see their only prospects of financial rescue as entering into a smart marriage. Anya wants Barbara to marry Lopakhin, while Barbara has even loftier dreams for her younger sister Anya.

Yasha enters, and Dunyasha reminds him of who she is—he has been living abroad a long while, and she is worried he will not remember her. Yasha aggressively gropes her; Dunyasha screams and drops a saucer. Yasha exits quickly. Barbara comes back in to ask what all the commotion is; Anya follows her, dreamily reflecting on the horrors their family has endured recently. Six years ago, Ranevsky's husband died; just a month later, her youngest son, Grisha, drowned in the river at only seven years old. Their mother ran away to Paris without looking back. Anya worries that the arrival of Trophimof—who was Grisha's tutor—will bring up awful memories.

Anya and Barbara are blind to their servants' dramas (and traumas), focused only on the pain their own family has suffered. Though Ranevsky has truly been through a lot, and the problems she has faced are significant, the girls are obsessed with the past and unaware of the suffering and oppression still happening all around them.

Firs enters, babbling to himself. His mistress has come home again, he says; he is so happy he feels he could die in peace now. Ranevsky, Lopakhin, Gayef, and Pishtchik reenter as well. Anya goes off to bed, kissing her mother and uncle goodnight. Barbara tells Lopakhin and Pishtchik to head home, but Ranevsky insists the men stay for coffee. Lopakhin expresses his happiness at having Ranevsky back; though he has changed a lot, he says, he wants for her to see him as she once did, through her "wonderful, touching eyes." Lopakhin marvels at how though his father was Ranevsky's father's serf, he loves Ranevsky like a sister—she has done so much for him over the years. He wishes he could say something more "charming and delightful" to Ranevsky, but must be off to catch the train, and has bad news to deliver before he does.

Though Ranevsky is a member of the aristocracy—and, considering all the social upheaval in Russia, in a position where she could be much-hated—she seems to command respect, loyalty, and even love. Firs is so devoted to her that he seems to have no other purpose in life than making her happy, while Lopakhin desires her approval and attention despite the fact that he is in the awkward position of having once been part of a family in service to her as well.

Lopakhin explains that in order to pay the interest on the estate, the whole thing has been put up for auction at the end of August. He encourages Ranevsky not to fret—he has a plan for how she can save her home. The property is in a desirable part of town, close to both the railway and the river. If Ranevsky parcels her land up, puts villas on each acre, and leases them out, she can make good money and keep her land—this plan, though, requires cutting down **the cherry orchard** to make room for the villas. Angered, Ranevsky declares she'll never cut down the orchard—it is the most "remarkable" thing about the whole province.

Lopakhin warns Madame Ranevsky that she is in trouble—but in the same breath, offers her a solid plan for saving her estate, orchard, and fortune. Ranevsky, though, stubbornly refuses to even entertain the idea. As the play goes on, the cherry orchard will become symbolic of struggle between the old guard and the new; the aristocracy and the burgeoning middle class. Ranevsky's stubbornness—and Lopakhin's ambition—will clash again and again as they struggle to assert their own way of life.

Lopakhin remarks that the only "remarkable" thing about the **orchard** is how infrequently it blooms. He advises Ranevsky to commit to his plan—there is no other way to save the property. Firs begins babbling about how in the olden days the cherries used to be harvested, dried, and sold in the cities. Gayef tells Firs to "shut up." Ranevsky asks Firs why no one does this with the cherries now—no one remembers how to, Firs answers. Lopakhin urges Ranevsky to see that whereas villages were once full of only landed gentry and their serfs and peasants, an emerging middle class ("villa residents") has now sprung up all across the countryside.

Lopakhin attempts to get Ranevsky to see that the orchard has no value other than sentimental value—but for Ranevsky, a person on the verge of losing everything but her memories, sentimentality is a kind of lifeblood. Firs, a servant, also longs for the past, and the traditions and customs that have been left behind as the years have marched on.

Gayef dismisses this as "gibberish." Barbara enters with a telegram for Ranevsky. Ranevsky promptly rips it up, as it is from Paris, and she is "done" with Paris. Gayef begins talking about a cupboard in the nursery—it is one hundred years old, and though "inanimate," it is "historic." He begins talking to the cupboard itself, honoring it as "beloved and venerable" and thanking it for serving their family for so many generations. Lopakhin says he needs to leave—he promises to come again in a few weeks. He says goodbye to everyone, and when he reaches Ranevsky, he urges her to consider his idea about the villas—if she accepts his proposal, he'll give her 5,000 pounds on the spot. Barbara chides Lopakhin for bothering her mother, and Lopakhin leaves hastily.

In this passage, Ranevsky attempts to sever herself from a part of her (recent) past, while her brother Gayef waxes poetic and at great length about an inanimate object which, like the cherry orchard, has only sentimental value now. Lopakhin can hardly stomach this display of selfish sentimentality, and, on his way out, even attempts to bribe Ranevsky into carrying out his plan—which is for her own good.

Gayef calls Lopakhin a snob, and then apologizes, as he realizes Barbara is rumored to be betrothed to him. Pishtchik says that Lopakhin is a "worthy individual." He asks Ranevsky to borrow money from her—his own interest is due tomorrow. Barbara and Ranevsky insist they have no money; Pishtchik assures them he'll find some, somehow. Last time interest was due, he thought he'd never come up with it—but a railway was laid down through his land, and he was compensated. Something unexpected, he says, will surely happen again; maybe his wife will even win the lottery.

There is a complicated social web that the characters are balancing on precariously. Barbara is in a position in which she needs to marry Lopakhin to save her own estate, though he is of a lower social class. Pishtchik, though himself a member of the landed gentry, is so strapped for cash that he has found himself at the mercy of Ranevsky—or a miracle. The aristocracy, who once had everything, now need to rely on members of other social classes (or even fate) to continue the life they once took for granted.

Ranevsky has finished her coffee and insists it's time for bed. Barbara remarks that the sun has come up—she goes to the window and opens it, allowing in the sweet **orchard** air and the sound of starlings. Gayef and Ranevsky look out the window, remembering their childhood fondly. Ranevsky awoke with happiness every morning; now, she and Gayef lament that they must sell the orchard to pay their debts. For a brief moment, Ranevsky thinks that she can see their mother wandering in the orchard, but it is only a trick of the light. She laments that she cannot forget her past.

Despite teetering on the brink of ruin, Gayef and Ranevsky cannot disentangle themselves from their past—or their sentimental longing for a return to it. The wheels of time, though, only spin forward; if the two siblings do not get their act together, they will soon be left behind.

Trophimof, a shabby and bespectacled student, enters the room. He greets Ranevsky—he says once he heard that she'd returned, he could not wait until the morning. Ranevsky embraces him and begins crying. Barbara chides Trophimof for upsetting her mother. Ranevsky soon begins teasing Trophimof, though, asking him how he has grown so old. She asks if he's still a student, and he answers that he is a "perpetual student."

Trophimof—a student who served as tutor to Ranevsky's late son, Grisha—represents, to Ranevsky, her more painful memories of the past. Like her memories of childhood, though, her memories of Trophimof upset her only briefly; her nostalgia is so strong that even the painful parts of her past hold their own allure.

Ranevsky prepares to head off to bed; Pishtchik asks to spend the night at the estate, and reminds Ranevsky that he needs to borrow money in the morning. They all head off to bed except for Gayef, Barbara, and Yasha. Barbara reminds Yasha that his mother has come up from the village, having heard of his return, and has been waiting for him in the servants' quarters since yesterday. Yasha remarks that his mother is a nuisance, then goes off to greet her.

Yasha is a servant who sees the members of his own social class—even his own mother—as burdensome nuisances. His boorish cruelty towards Dunyasha earlier, and now his annoyance with his mother, reveal a cold, calculating, ambitious interior concerned only with his own comfort and advancement.

Barbara and her uncle discuss Ranevsky. Barbara laments that her mother is terrible with money. Gayef wishes there was a way for their family to miraculously come into enough to support Ranevsky's "illness" of being a spendthrift—perhaps Anya could marry a rich man, or perhaps they could beg money from their aunt in Yaroslav, a rich Countess who unfortunately does not like Gayef or Ranevsky very much. Gayef admits that his sister married poorly and has led an unvirtuous life full of "sin." Barbara realizes that Anya is standing in the doorway, and has overheard them.

Barbara and Gayef's conversation reveals a strange lack of allegiance to Ranevsky—whereas Firs, Lopakhin, and other servants and neighbors rejoice at the woman's presence, her own nuclear family has only bad things to say about her. They blame her for their own misfortunes, though neither of them has taken any concrete action to earn money, save their estate, or help Ranevsky stabilize her own emotions and actions.

Anya says she still can't sleep. Gayef kisses Anya's hands, crying, and apologizes for insulting her mother. Anya forgives Gayef; everyone loves him and respects him, she says, but he really needs to learn how to hold his tongue. Talking badly about others, she says, does nobody any good. Gayef apologizes again and promises to watch what he says from now on.

Gayef's long-winded nature is frustrating to other members of his family—especially when the things he talks about are narrow-minded, self-centered, and even offensive.

Before he goes to bed, there is one last thing Gayef wants to discuss with the girls: he wants to try to secure a loan from the bank to pay the interest on the estate. He plans to go on Tuesday to talk with somebody. He urges Anya to try and get Ranevsky to ask Lopakhin for a loan in the meantime, and insists Anya herself go to Yaroslav to visit the countess. If they "operate from three points," he is certain that between the three of them they'll be able to come up with enough money. He swears on his "whole being" that the property will not be sold.

Gayef outlines a plan for how to save the estate—but it is devoid of any actual work or strategy, and simply involves begging for money from others. Gayef's bullheaded confidence in the idea that his plan will work despite its inherent selfishness shows just how self-absorbed and out of touch with the times the man really is.

Anya expresses her great relief and embraces her uncle. Firs enters the room—he seems to think that Gayef is still a young boy, and urges him to get off to bed. Gayef kisses the girls goodnight, and goes off to sleep; Firs hobbles along after him. Anya tells Barbara that her mind is at last at rest. Barbara begins telling Anya about a nasty thing that happened while she was away, but soon realizes that Anya has fallen asleep sitting in a chair. She hurries Anya off towards the bedroom; in the **orchard**, a pipe begins playing. Anya comments on the nearby "bells." Trophimof enters the room from one end as the girls exit through a door on the other; he watches Anya go sleepily towards her own quarters, and says quietly to himself, "My sunshine! My spring!"

The end of the first act continues to show Anya's dreamy disinterest in almost everything around her—she can't even stay awake to listen to one of her own sister's stories. In this passage, Anya's aloof self-absorption is set up to be in direct conflict with the young, liberal, and radical student Trophimof's ardent desire for her.

ACT 2

Charlotte, Yasha, Dunyasha, and Ephikhodof are out in the open fields behind the house, at the edge of the cherry orchard. It is the end of the day, near sunset. Ephikhodof plays the guitar while Charlotte mends the buckle of her gun's strap. Charlotte tells the story of her life, though no one seems to be listening. She is the child of long-dead circus performers, and as a young girl she was a part of their act. She has no idea how old she is, or what country she comes from originally. She longs to talk to people about her life, but has "no friends or relations," and no one to converse with.

In this scene, the servants are seen alone together for the first time. They, too, are shown talking about their pasts almost exclusively—but whereas Ranevsky, Gayef, and the others look back on their pasts with happy longing and sentimentality, Charlotte's past—and, it is implied, the pasts of her fellow members of the working-class—is full of pain, loneliness, and misery.

Ephikhodof plays the guitar and sings, attempting to get Dunyasha's attention—she is, however, infatuated with Yasha, and pays no one else any mind. Dunyasha admires how cultured Yasha has become during his travels abroad, and Ephikhodof attempts to brag about his own "cultivation." He pulls a revolver out of his pocket and explains that he always carries it with him, in case he should decide to kill himself.

Dunyasha's simpering "ladylike" affect, employed to get Yasha's attention, is contrasted against Ephikhodof's dramatic and violent grab at Dunyasha's own attention. Ephikhodof seems to harbor a lot of the same loneliness as Charlotte, and even intense self-loathing.

Charlotte, having finished mending her own gun strap, slings her rifle over her shoulder and leaves, lamenting how "stupid" her companions are and her own loneliness. Ephikhodof asks if he can speak to Dunyasha in private. She asks him to go back up to the house and fetch her cloak; he goes off to do so, stating that he knows now what to do with his revolver. He leaves Dunyasha and Yasha alone; Yasha remarks what a "stupid fellow" Ephikhodof is, and, in spite of herself, Dunyasha worries Ephikhodof is going off to kill himself. She explains to Yasha that she has grown weak, delicate, and nervous; she is afraid of everything, and in this way has become quite like a proper lady.

The fact that there are two guns in this scene is a nod to the concept of "Chekhov's gun," a statement on writing in which Chekhov famously stated that if a gun is shown in an early scene, it must go off by the end of the play. The "gun" that will go off in this play is not a literal one, but a more metaphorical blast—one which will nonetheless level the characters in the drama just as effectively and tragically.

Dunyasha confesses that she has fallen in love with Yasha. Yasha, yawning, states that he believes any girl who falls in love is "immoral." He hears footsteps approaching, and instructs Dunyasha to sneak back up to the house so that they won't be seen together. She goes, and just a few moments later, Ranevsky, Gayef, and Lopakhin arrive in the field, having been in town for a luxurious lunch. Lopakhin is urging Ranevsky to make up her mind about his villa idea, but she refuses to answer him—she is busy digging in her own purse for money, lamenting how freely she squanders it despite the grave state of affairs up at the house; the servants are eating nothing but peas, and even Ranevsky and her daughters can afford nothing but soup. Agitated, she drops her purse, scattering coins everywhere. Yasha bends to collect them.

Yasha has no time for Dunyasha, and cannot even fake the slightest interest in her. He slights and abuses her at every turn, and yet she remains infatuated with him. Mirroring Dunyasha's fruitless attempts at connection with Yasha, Ranevsky enters the scene—having just spent a ludicrous amount of money at lunch—and laments the way in which her horrible spending habits are almost out of her control.

As Yasha scrounges in the dirt for money, Ranevsky chides herself for having such poor spending habits—and chides her brother Gayef for talking on and on at lunch, wistfully longing for the olden days in front of the waiter. Gayef says he's "incorrigible," rather resignedly. Yasha laughs at Gayef, and Ranevsky sends her manservant away. He returns her purse to her and goes, laughing all the while.

Faced with his own failings and mistakes, Gayef blithely remarks that he is "incorrigible," or unchangeable. This self-absorbed complacency is a direct indictment of the aristocracy's entitled, smug nature.

Lopakhin reveals that a famed millionaire wants to buy the property. Gayef insists that they'll be able to avoid the auction once the money from their aunt in Yaroslav comes through. Lopakhin scoffs that the two siblings are "crazy and unbusinesslike," and asks why they refuse to accept the simple fact that their land will soon be sold. Ranevsky asks Lopakhin to tell them what to do. Frustrated, he explains that he's already told them, several times—lease off the **cherry orchard** for villas at once. Ranevsky denounces his proposal as "vulgar." Lopakhin, unable to contain himself, calls Gayef an "old woman" and turns to leave.

In this passage, Lopakhin grows deeply frustrated by Gayef and Ranevsky's refusal to see reason and accept his plan. Their denial verges on the comical, and Chekhov certainly intended for their "crazy and unbusinesslike" demeanor to poke fun at the out-of-touch aristocracy. Moreover, Ranevsky and Gayef, in this moment, mirror their friend Pishtchik, who believes that a financial miracle is always just around the corner.

Ranevsky begs Lopakhin to stay and help her think of something else. She admits she has been "very, very sinful," and starts outlining all the ways she has failed throughout her life. Her first husband was a drunk whose only talent was racking up debts. After his death, the lover she took treated her cruelly; her youngest son's death prompted her to flee to Paris, but her no-good beau followed her there and drained her funds only to take up with another woman and leave her. Ranevsky pulls a telegram from her pocket and reveals that her lover is still writing to her, begging for her to forgive him and return to Paris to be with him. She tears the telegram up.

When Lopakhin grows seriously angry, Ranevsky catches onto the seriousness of the matter and changes gears, asking for his help instead of denying it. At the same time, she launches into a self-centered tale about her own pain and misfortune, as if to excuse her actions. When she rips her telegram up, it seems to signal—as it did in the first scene—that she wants to let go of the past, but as the audience will soon see, Ranevsky is still not ready to abandon her orchard.

Music plays in the distance—Gayef identifies its source as a local Jewish band. Ranevsky insists they invite the band to the house one night to play for them as they have a little party. Lopakhin says he went to the theater the night before and enjoyed himself during a funny play—Ranevsky implies that Lopakhin has no sense of humor. Lopakhin begrudgingly agrees with her; how could he have learned to have taste, he says, when his own father, a peasant and an idiot, taught him nothing all his life and only ever beat him when drunk. Lopakhin admits that he himself has had no education and is embarrassed by his poor penmanship.

When Ranevsky hears the band, she is delighted, and immediately begins looking forward to her next frivolity—hosting a party. When Lopakhin attempts to make small talk along these lines, though, Ranevsky makes fun of him. Though Lopakhin has been irritated with Ranevsky since she returned, her opinion of him still matters, and he concedes, when she calls him out on pandering to her, that he is ashamed of himself.

Ranevsky suggests Lopakhin marry Barbara; she would help him feel better about himself. Lopakhin agrees that he should, but then the two fall into silence. Gayef announces he's been offered a job at the bank, but Ranevsky scoffs, implying that her brother could never hold a job.

Each character in the play—even Lopakhin—is facing down his or her own inertia. Lopakhin swears to marry Barbara, but can't motivate himself to propose; Gayef wants to start working, but his sister believes he'll fail.

Firs enters with an overcoat for Gayef, whom he continues to treat like a very young boy. He mumbles about how happy he was in the old days, when peasants and their masters had clear-cut relationships; even when serfs were liberated, Firs brags, he chose to stay with his master. Gayef tells Firs to "shut up," and switches the topic to his own plans to secure a loan through an acquaintance. Both Ranevsky and Lopakhin predict this will never come to pass.

Firs's disorientation is contrasted against his clear desire for a return to the past. He is suffering from dementia, and yet doesn't seem to be fully living in the past—he knows that times have changed, and longs to return to an era that has since passed him by.

Trophimof, Anya, and Barbara approach the field. Ranevsky embraces her daughters while Lopakhin teases Trophimof for being so old and still a student. Trophimof is sensitive and reacts defensively, asking Lopakhin to leave him alone. Lopakhin offers Trophimof the chance to state his own opinion of him as a way of settling the score. Trophimof tells Lopakhin that he is, in his quest for more and more material wealth, like "a beast of prey which devours everything that comes in its way"—destructive, but "necessary for the conversion of matter."

Trophimof's revolutionary, radical socioeconomic ideas are set up in this passage, as he relents that Lopakhin's blind ambition is "necessary" in the process of converting the social order of Russia from one dominated by the aristocracy to one more about the common people.

Ranevsky asks Trophimof to continue the lecture he was giving them all yesterday about "the proud man." Trophimof offers his opinion that there is no place for pride in humanity—people must give up admiring themselves and instead devote themselves to hard work. Mankind, he says, must march forward in order to perfect its strength. The "intelligentsia" are lazy and useless, and though they rest on the laurels of their intelligence, they know next to nothing about art or philosophy. The new Russian middle class purports to be enlightened and down-to-earth simultaneously, but they snobbishly treat those below them like "animals" and live lives that do not reflect the experience of the common man. Lopakhin agrees with Trophimof—in his own business, he deals with a great many people, and has realized just how few "honest and decent" individuals there are.

Trophimof shares his humanist, revolutionary ideology with the group. They seem to hang on his every word—but whether they are taking him seriously or simply seeing him as entertainment is unclear. Trophimof does not advocate blindly for the expansion of the middle class; he knows that some of them are snobs and inauthentic intellectuals who long to affect the behavior of the aristocracy rather than work on building their country into a more inclusive, equal space. Lopakhin agrees with this ideology in theory—though whether he will emerge as a conscious proponent of it remains to be seen.

Everyone sits silently for a while, until a far-off noise—"the sound of a string breaking, dying away, melancholy—" reaches their ears. Lopakhin suspects it's a mechanism in the mines a long way off; Gayef thinks it must have been a bird. Ranevsky shivers and says there was something uncanny about the noise. Firs remarks that he heard the exact same noise years ago, just before the liberation of the serfs.

The sound—ominous, uncanny, and unsettling—seems to portend that something as revolutionary as liberation is on the horizon. The characters seem to on some level know this as they speculate almost desperately about what the noise could be, or mean.

Ranevsky urges everyone to head back to the house. She sees that Anya has tears in her eyes, and asks if she's all right; Anya answers that she's just fine. Trophimof sees someone coming down the road—it is a tramp, who asks the way to the railway station. Gayef gives him directions. Before heading off, the tramp asks for a small coin. Ranevsky rummages through her purse; unable to find a coin of a small value, she gives the beggar a whole gold coin. The tramp leaves, laughing.

Ranevsky continues to let money slip through her fingers as she awards a passing tramp a valuable gold coin. She is squandering her family's little remaining money in order to maintain an appearance of wealth and prestige—or perhaps is having trouble reeling in her old habit of spending thoughtlessly.

Barbara cries out that she is going home—she is angry with her mother for giving a beggar a gold coin when their family can hardly afford to eat. Ranevsky admits that she has been "stupid," and promises to hand over her purse to Barbara once they're back to the house. She asks Lopakhin if he'll lend her some money, and he agrees to. Ranevsky tells Barbara that Lopakhin will soon propose to her; through tears, Barbara begs her mother not to joke about such serious things.

Ranevsky acknowledges that she has made a mistake—but rather than do anything to fix it or prevent it in the future, she relies on other people (namely, the off chance that Barbara and Lopakhin will wed) to fix things for her, making mention of the delicate subject despite the awkwardness it creates.

Everyone but Trophimof and Anya heads back to the house; Anya says she's grateful the bum came along since he frightened everyone off, allowing herself and Trophimof to be alone at last. Trophimof laments that Barbara never leaves the two of them alone—she is afraid they will fall in love with one another if left to their own devices. Trophimof declares, though, that he is "above love"—he sees it as petty and illusory, a bourgeois pursuit that prevents the forward march of change. Anya claps her hands, remarking upon how beautiful Trophimof's speeches are.

Anya and Trophimof have a strange relationship. They both long for one another, but the first chance they have to be alone, Trophimof speaks only about how he is "above love." Rather than being upset or put off, Anya seems to go right along with Trophimof's ideology—perhaps implying that she's not really absorbing what he's saying, but instead congratulating herself for just listening to the man.

Anya asks Trophimof what he's done to her—she no longer loves her once-precious **cherry orchard**. She once thought there was no better place on earth, but now doesn't see it in the same light. Trophimof ventures that perhaps Anya, having grown up, can understand that the cherry orchard was tended for years and years by slaves—perhaps, he thinks, she can see human spirits and hear human voices peeking out from the trees. In order to enjoy the present, he speculates, the past must be redeemed, and for this to happen, there must be suffering. Anya agrees with Trophimof—the house they all live in is no longer theirs. She gives Trophimof her word that she will soon go away from it. He urges her to throw her house keys down a well and be free of her ties to the estate. Anya enthusiastically agrees that she should.

In this passage, Anya complicates her motives even further, clouding her already ambiguous political and moral leanings. She describes feeling no connection to the cherry orchard any longer—Trophimof suggests that, as she has grown older, Anya has come to understand the suffering that has gone into keeping the orchard alive, and is repulsed by it. Anya echoes Trophimof's suggestion, and even goes so far as to vow that she will leave the house behind—but, as the play unfolds, Anya's moral waffling will continue.

Trophimof says that though he has had a difficult life marked by strife and inconstancy, he feels the approach of happiness at last. Anya, seemingly ignoring him, notes that the moon is rising. Offstage, Barbara calls for Anya to come inside. Trophimof, as if not to lose Anya's attention, tells her that the rising moon signifies their approaching happiness. Barbara continues calling for Anya—Anya, however, asks Trophimof to come with her down to the river, where it is "lovely." They scamper away as Barbara's cries continue.

Trophimof feels that happiness is approaching at last—though, again, whether he means his and Anya's individual happiness or their happiness together remains unclear. Though they scamper off together at the end of the act, their behavior towards one another in the following acts will call into question exactly how they feel about one another, and what their relationship really is.

ACT 3

A party is going on at the house. The Jewish band is playing, and, in the drawing-room, everyone is dancing merrily in pairs. Everyone makes their way into the sitting room for a break. Pishtchik and Trophimof come first; Pishtchik explains that he has had two strokes already, but did not want to sit out the dancing. He drunkenly confesses that he has no money—yet, like a hungry dog who believes in nothing but meat, he keeps chasing it.

In contrast to the somber, somewhat intellectual tenor of the previous act, the third act opens with a frivolous, noisy dance party. The festivities are well under way, as Pishtchik is already drunkenly rambling about his ravenous desire for money in one of the most honest speeches about finance in the entire play.

Barbara appears in the doorway—Trophimof, teasing her, calls out "Madame Lopakhin" over and over. In response, Barbara calls him a "mouldy gentleman." She laments that though her mother has hired the band, there is no way of paying for it, and then abruptly returns to the dancing.

Barbara's offhand comment about her mother's inability to pay for the party just before she returns to the dancing shows that though Barbara is concerned about money, she has no idea of how to fix her or her family's situation.

Trophimof turns back to Pishtchik and tells him if the energy he had spent throughout his life trying to secure more and more funds had been directed at something more useful, Pishtchik would have enough funds to "turn the world upside down." Pishtchik says that though he owes 31 pounds in interest the day after tomorrow, he's already secured 13 pounds of it. He pats his jacket pocket, but then becomes nervous—he cries out that he has lost his money, but then feels deeper in his jacket, and realizing it is there after all. He notes that he has, in just a few seconds, worked himself up into a sweat.

This scene serves to deepen Trophimof's contempt for people who, like Pishtchik, worry incessantly about money but have done almost nothing in their lives to earn money or safeguard themselves against the problems and pitfalls that accompany wealth.

Ranevsky and Charlotte enter. Ranevsky asks where Gayef is—she wonders what could be taking so long. Trophimof suspects that Gayef has been unsuccessful at the auction. Ranevsky laments that today—auction day—was a "stupid" day for a party. She sits down and sings to herself while Charlotte begins doing card tricks and ventriloquism to keep everybody entertained. After a few tricks, she pulls out a shawl and shakes it out; Anya appears, as if by magic, behind it. Everyone applauds. Charlotte shakes out the shawl once more, and this time conjures Barbara. She leaves the drawing room; Pishtchik, enchanted by Charlotte, hurries after her.

Though Ranevsky states that it is a "stupid" day for a party, it does seem that she may have thrown the party for the purpose of distracting herself from her worries about the auction. Charlotte's conjuring tricks seem like they should lighten the mood and help distract Ranevsky from her troubles at hand, but Ranevsky is immune even to her servants' attempts to bring some levity to the situation.

Ranevsky laments that there is still no sign of her brother. She has not enjoyed the magic show at all. She wonders whether the property has sold, or whether the auction didn't even happen; she hates being in suspense. Barbara attempts to soothe her mother by assuring her that Gayef has purchased their land back—after all, their rich aunt in Yaroslav sent him funds and the power of attorney to purchase it in her name. Ranevsky says the money from Yaroslav would barely even cover the interest. She puts her head in her hands and miserably states that her fate is being decided without her.

Ranevsky knows that things are looking bad—any attempts to distract her or comfort her made by her friends, family, or servants is no use. She has gotten herself into a terrible spot, and knows that not even the gift of money from her wealthy aunt is enough to reverse the damage she caused to her estate and her family.

Trophimof starts teasing Barbara again, calling her Madame Lopakhin. Barbara teases Trophimof right back. Madame Ranevsky urges Barbara not to get so upset and just go ahead and marry Lopakhin already. Barbara insists she can't marry without a proposal—in two whole years, the man has never asked for her hand, and can barely be bothered with her.

Barbara's whole life is dedicated to fixing her mother's mistakes—like looking after the house in her five-year absence and chiding her for overspending. Even Barbara's romantic life is not her own—but simply a tool for her family's financial advancement, and this weighs on her heavily.

Yasha enters the room and informs everyone, laughing, that Ephikhodof has just broken a billiard cue in the next room. Barbara, incensed, storms off to investigate. Ranevsky urges Trophimof to go easy on Barbara—the girl is unhappy enough already. Trophimof laments that Barbara has spent the whole summer trying to keep him and Anya apart even though the two of them are "above love."

Despite Ranevsky's anxieties about her own problems, this is, after all, a party—and as such, interpersonal dramas of all kinds are being brought up and aired out.

Ranevsky worries that the property has sold—she hates not knowing. She begs Trophimof to say something that will comfort her. He tells her that whether the property sells today or whether it remains in her hands, "it's all over with it long ago;" the path to the past and the way things once were is "overgrown." Ranevsky tells Trophimof that because he is still young and has not known true suffering, he looks toward the future with starry eyes. She asks him to take pity on her—she was born in this house, as was her father and her grandfather; she loves it, and without the home and the **cherry orchard**, her life has no meaning. Finally, she adds that this house was the place her little boy drowned.

Ranevsky seeks comfort from Trophimof—but the man is so focused on his own idealism and his desire to impress upon Ranevsky the changing social atmosphere of the country that he can offer her none. Ranevsky, in a surprisingly honest and genuine moment, lays bare the depths of her suffering—though they might look like "rich people problems" to some, she is in deep emotional turmoil as she faces down losing the place that has meant so much to her family. Trophimof, not Ranevsky, is the selfish one in this moment.

Ranevsky reaches into her purse for a handkerchief and pulls out with it a telegram, which she drops to the floor. Trophimof picks up the telegram and hands it back to Ranevsky. She confides in him that her ex-lover in Paris writes her every day—he is ill again, and wants her to come care for him. She asks Trophimof what she should do—she feels that her lingering love for him despite all his abuse is "like a stone tied round her neck." Though it drags her down, it is precious, and she loves it.

Ranevsky's cruel, thoughtless ex-lover is like a stone tied around her neck. Ranevsky used this metaphor to describe her relationship even with the happier parts of her past earlier in the play; Ranevsky is so plagued by thoughts of the past that she cannot differentiate between the parts of her history that are an albatross and those that are a comfort.

Trophimof urges Ranevsky to see that her lover has robbed her; he is a rascal who will never treat her right. Ranevsky tells Trophimof that he is young, and cannot understand the matters of love—he himself is not even in love with anyone, and as such is a "freak." He is not "above love"—he just can't make up his mind. Trophimof is "aghast" at Ranevsky's cruel words, and exits the room, shouting that "all is over" between the two of them.

Ranevsky has been seeking comfort in Trophimof—but he gives her none. She attempts to deflect and accuse him of being closed-off and cruel (perhaps to excuse her own sentimentality, which is slowly ruining her,) and Trophimof takes great offense.

The sound of a crash comes from another room, followed by Barbara and Anya's screams and laughter—Anya runs in laughing about how Trophimof has fallen down the stairs. A waltz starts up, and everyone goes off to dance. Trophimof has not left the party, and Ranevsky apologizes to him, inviting him to dance with her. He accepts.

Despite their heated exchange just moments ago, Trophimof and Ranevsky mend fences—perhaps they each realized that they were both being selfish and cruel to one another.

Firs and Yasha watch everyone dancing. Firs confesses he's not feeling well—the luxurious, grandiose parties of old are no more, and the family's parties have become shabby and embarrassing. Yasha, yawning, says he wishes Firs would die.

Firs longs for the past; but the idea of a return to the past, and its constricting social structures, is tiring and unappealing to the pretentious Yasha.

Ranevsky, needing a rest, returns to the sitting-room. Anya comes into the room—she reports that she has just heard someone in the kitchen saying that the **cherry orchard** was sold. Anya goes back out to dance with Trophimof. Ranevsky, more anxious than ever, bids Yasha go find out who purchased the cherry orchard; Yasha replies that the stranger spreading the rumor has already left the party. Conspiratorially, he leans close to Ranevsky and asks her to take him away from Russia—the country is "barbarous," he says, and the two of them should return to Paris, and forget about the cherry orchard entirely.

Yasha is only looking out for himself. In this passage, he reacts to the rumor that the cherry orchard has sold not with sympathy towards his mistress, but instead with pleas for her to use the occasion of her great loss to take Yasha on an adventure and leave Russia behind.

Pishtchik enters and sweeps Madame Ranevsky away for a waltz. Dunyasha comes into the room and powders her face—she does not enjoy dancing, she says, for it makes her feel faint. She brags to Yasha that one of the other guests—a gentleman from town—told her she was pretty as a flower. Yasha yawns and leaves the room. Ephikhodof enters and greets Dunyasha, asking why she's been ignoring him. Though he has grown accustomed to misfortune, he wants an answer to his proposal. Dunyasha tells Ephikhodof to leave her alone; he remarks that he meets each misfortune with "smiles and even laughter."

Chekhov shifts his gaze, in this passage, from what the "upper-class" guests are getting up to at the party to what the servants are experiencing. Dunyasha is still attempting to make Yasha love her by acting more like a lady—and Yasha is still ignoring her. Ephikhodof, too, is attempting to make himself seen, but is only met with more misfortune and embarrassment.

Barbara enters the room in a huff. She chides Ephikhodof for breaking the billiard cue and Dunyasha for shirking her duties as a maid during a party. Ephikhodof retorts that he is allowed to play billiards if he wants to, despite being in the family's employ as their clerk; Barbara orders him to "clear out" immediately. Ephikhodof asks Barbara to speak to him in "genteeler language." Barbara, once again, orders him to get out of her sight, and he leaves hurriedly, threatening to "lodge a complaint" against Barbara. She picks up a walking stick and is about to leave the room to strike Ephikhodof—she raises the stick above her head and brings it down just as Lopakhin comes around the corner. Lopakhin thanks her for the "warm reception."

Barbara, threatened by the idea that her servants are shirking their duties and behaving like guests at the party they are supposed to be working, lashes out at the accident-prone Ephikhodof. Ephikhodof stands up for himself, infuriating Barbara, who seems as if she is about to resort to physical violence at the moment Lopakhin returns from the auction.

Excitement buzzes through the next room as everyone realizes that Lopakhin is back. Ranevsky runs into the room, asking what took him so long, and where Gayef is. Lopakhin looks joyful—he says that Gayef is just behind him. The auction ended hours ago, but the men missed the train, and were forced to wait for the next one. Gayef enters, crying. He passes some parcels to Firs and says he's going upstairs to change—he is tired, and hasn't eaten all day.

Lopakhin and Gayef's very different states upon their return from the auction is evidence that good news is not in store for Madame Ranevsky, her family, and their orchard.

Ranevsky calls after him, asking about the **cherry orchard** and whether it was sold; Lopakhin answers that it was. Ranevsky asks who bought it, and Lopakhin answers that he himself did. Ranevsky is overwhelmed; she staggers, nearly falling over. Barbara throws her house keys to the ground and leaves. Lopakhin is clearly overjoyed—he begins telling everyone about the sale. He outbid everyone at the auction, and now, he gleefully shouts, the cherry orchard is his at last. He thinks he must be drunk or dreaming; he can hardly believe his good luck. He wishes his father and grandfather could see him now—he who ran around barefoot in the winter, with no money for shoes, has now bought a property that hasn't an equal in beauty anywhere else in the world.

Lopakhin's glee at having purchased the orchard is put on a shameless display as he monologues about his good fortune. Lopakhin doesn't seem to be able to read the room, so to speak, and selfishly goes on about his own triumph and success. Meanwhile, Ranevsky and her family, gathered around him, soak in the realization that their family's estate is gone forever due to their own poor planning and selfish ways.

Lopakhin, still smiling dreamily, bends down and picks up Barbara's keys. He jingles them merrily, and then asks the musicians—who have stopped playing—to resume their song. He vows that he will "lay his axe to the **cherry orchard**" soon, fill the place with villas, and make it so that the band's sons and grandsons will soon "see a new life here." The band resumes playing.

Lopakhin's promise to cut down the cherry orchard soon reveals his desire to disrupt the social order once and for all, cementing the triumph of the middle class over the outdated, useless institutions of the aristocracy.

Ranevsky sinks into a chair and weeps. Lopakhin goes to her and asks why she wouldn't have listened to him—there is no changing what has happened now. Pishtchik comes over to Lopakhin and takes him by the arm. He tells Lopakhin he is being insensitive, and urges him to leave Ranevsky alone. As Pishtchik leads Lopakhin out of the drawing room, Lopakhin bumps into a table, toppling an expensive candelabra; he laughs, saying it's no matter, as he can now pay for everything.

Lopakhin seems to realize that all his grandstanding has upset Ranevsky further—but rather than offer her comfort, he reminds her that she was complicit in her family's own fall from power and propriety.

Anya and Trophimof enter the room; Anya goes to Ranevsky and kneels at her feet. She comforts her crying mother. Though the **cherry orchard** is sold and gone, she says, there is still so much life before them; the two of them will go away, Anya says, and plant a new orchard somewhere, even lovelier than this one. Happiness, Anya promises, will soon be upon them once again.

Though Anya promised to leave her home and the cherry orchard behind without remorse at the end of the last act, she now promises her mother that they will go somewhere else and find a way to duplicate their former life, indicating that Anya, too, has a good deal of sentimentality for the part of her life that has started ending this evening.

ACT 4

The nursery has been stripped of curtains and decorations, and all of the furniture has been stacked in one corner. A feeling of emptiness pervades the bare room. At the back of the room, by the door to the hall, are several suitcases and bundles. Lopakhin stands alone in the room, waiting; Anya and Barbara's voices can be heard in the hall as they bid the neighboring peasants goodbye. Yasha, holding a tray of champagne glasses, enters, remarking that the "common people" are "good fellows but rather stupid."

The nursery, in the first act, was a warm meeting-room that served as the place where many characters reconnected with one another after years apart. Now, it is bare and empty, virtually soulless—it is the place, perhaps, where several characters will see each other for the last time.

Ranevsky and Gayef come in from the hall. Ranevsky is not crying, but she is pale and twitchy. Gayef reprimands Ranevsky for giving the rest of her money away to the peasants—she insists she couldn't help it, and then hurries from the room. Gayef follows her. Lopakhin calls after them, asking them to come back in and have a drink to say goodbye. They do not answer, and he tells Yasha to drink the lot himself—there are just twenty minutes before Yasha must accompany Ranevsky to the station.

Ranevsky's foolish spending habits are still in effect—she could not help, one last time, giving all she had away. Lopakhin seems to want to make amends—or simply toast his own good fortune—but he is alone in his good cheer, and everyone else is too busy packing to pay him much mind at the moment.

Trophimof enters, looking for his galoshes. He can't find them anywhere. Lopakhin tells Trophimof that he himself is going to Karkof today to spend the winter there working—he has spent the summer here, and has been idle for much of it. He asks if Trophimof is returning to Moscow for yet another year of university, and Trophimof replies that he is. Lopakhin offers Trophimof money for the journey, but Trophimof rebuffs him.

Lopakhin tries to engage Trophimof in conversation—he wants at least one person to pay him attention. He even tries to give Trophimof money, implying that now that Lopakhin is a wealthy man, he knows people will only like him for his money.

Lopakhin keeps trying to offer Trophimof money, encouraging him not to be stuck up. Trophimof says that even if Lopakhin offered him 20,000 pounds he would not take it; he is a free man, and money has no power over him. All he is concerned with is marching forward and seeking happiness. He vows to get there himself—or at least show others the way. Outside, the sound of axes chopping down **cherry trees** can be clearly heard.

Trophimof claims to be above money as well as love—he has seen what pain money has brought into Lopakhin, Ranevsky, and her family's lives and wants no part of it. As he considers what his own role will be in the new world stretching out before him, the sounds of the old one vanishing come through the windows.

Lopakhin says it's time to start off for the station, and bids Trophimof goodbye. He asks him if he's heard that Gayef got a job at the bank; before Trophimof can answer, Anya appears in the doorway, and relays that Madame Ranevsky has asked if they can wait till she's gone to start chopping down the **cherry orchard**. Trophimof chides Lopakhin for having no tact and goes out into the hall. Lopakhin, embarrassed by his foolish workers, leaves the room, too, to pause the work in the orchard.

Lopakhin has tactlessly—and selfishly—tried to start having the cherry orchard chopped down before Ranevsky and her family's very eyes. When he realizes what he has done, he seems to be embarrassed—although he could be feigning embarrassment in order to seem less selfish than he truly is.

Anya asks Yasha if Firs has gone to the hospital yet; Yasha replies that he told the staff this morning that Firs needed a doctor, and they are sure to have sent him by now. Anya asks Ephikhodof, who is walking through the room, to confirm whether Firs has been sent to the hospital. Ephikhodof replies that there's no point in sending Firs for medical care; he's old, and "it's time he was dispatched to his forefathers." He leaves the room, and so does Anya.

Everyone is concerned about Firs except for Ephikhodof, who says what no one else will say (but which many others are no doubt thinking): Firs is old, ill, and unprepared for the new journeys everyone else is embarking on.

Barbara calls for Yasha—his mother has come to bid him goodbye. Yasha impatiently remarks that his mother is annoying him. Dunyasha, who has been busying herself with preparing the luggage, approaches Yasha before he leaves the room. She begs him to look at her just once before he leaves her, and then, crying, throws her arms around him. Yasha continues drinking champagne and begs her to stop crying—someone is coming.

Yasha is selfish and cruel as ever, regarding his mother's and Dunyasha's attempts to bid him farewell as nuisances—the final barriers between him and getting out of Russia forever on Ranevsky's dime.

Ranevsky, Gayef, Anya, and Charlotte enter the room. It is nearly time for them to go to the station, and Ranevsky walks around the room bidding the house goodbye. She goes to Anya, and asks if Anya is all right—she replies that she is in fact happy, as the two of them will soon build a new life. Gayef remarks that now that the anxiety over whether the **orchard** will be sold or not has been settled, they can all relax and pursue new lives—he is looking forward to his job at the bank, and remarks that even Ranevsky is looking more relaxed. Ranevsky admits she is looking forward to returning to Paris and living off the money sent from Yaroslav—though she worries it will not last very long.

As the play nears its end, everyone seems to be more or less okay, despite the great tragedy that has befallen Ranevsky and her family. They have all decided to make the best of things—and though Gayef will have to work for perhaps the first time in his life and Ranevsky will have to try to learn how to live on a budget, they are still faring very well and avoiding poverty and misery.

Anya, who is going to a nearby university to study, promises to work very hard and pass her examinations so that she can get a place for herself and her mother to live. She kisses her mother's hands and, aloud, promises that they will have long, peaceful autumn evenings together someday soon. Ranevsky assures Anya that she will come back from Paris so Anya's dream can come true.

Anya, dreamy as ever, seems to both want to reassure her mother—and be reassured herself—that things will work out all right for them, and that they will be able to return, at least emotionally, to the way things once were between them.

Lopakhin and Pishtchik enter; Gayef predicts that Pishtchik has come to borrow money, and excuses himself from the room. Instead, Pishtchik pays Lopakhin back some money he owes him—he explains that he is flush with cash, as some Englishmen found valuable white clay on his land. He hands Ranevsky some money, too, and marvels at his own miraculous fortunes. He bids Ranevsky goodbye tearfully, wishing her well and lamenting that "everything in this world has come to an end."

Though a miracle did not save Ranevsky and her family in the end, one has certainly saved Pishtchik—the indiscriminate nature with which the universe rewards some and punishes other is displayed cruelly and ironically in this passage as Pishtchik throws money at his friends while Ranevsky is still working through the immense loss of property and status.

Ranevsky says that although she's ready to leave, she still has two things on her mind. She's still worried about Firs—Anya reassures her that Firs has indeed been sent to the hospital. Ranevsky's second worry is Barbara, who is used to doing household work—now that she has nothing to do, she is like a "fish out of water," and is in a terrible depression. Anya and Charlotte leave the room. Ranevsky turns to Lopakhin and asks him why he won't propose to Barbara. He admits that he doesn't understand why he hasn't either, and vows to do it this instant.

Ranevsky, seized by a sudden desire for a last grab at turning things around for at least one member of her family, corners Lopakhin into asking Barbara to marry him. Perhaps Ranevsky thinks that with all Lopakhin has taken from their family, he can at least repay them in this one small way.

Ranevsky calls Barbara into the room and then exits. After a moment, Barbara enters—she is looking for something she cannot find. Lopakhin asks what she's looking for, but she won't tell him. He asks her where she's off to, and she tells him she's going to keep house for another wealthy family about fifty miles away. Barbara goes over to the luggage and starts rummaging through it. Lopakhin tells her that he, too, is off to another village; he is leaving Ephikhodof to look after the estate. The two discuss the weather for a moment, and then there is an awkward pause.

It is clear almost from the moment that Barbara enters the room that Lopakhin is not going to propose. It is painful to watch as Barbara, one last time, puts herself at Lopakhin's mercy—with just a few words, he could rescue her from her fate, but he is either too selfish or too self-loathing to advance his relationship with Barbara any further.

A voice calls for Lopakhin, and he quickly hurries out of the room. Barbara sits on the floor and sobs. Madame Ranevsky comes back in. Seeing Barbara on the floor, she tells her it's time to leave. Barbara wipes her eyes, and says she can't miss the train; otherwise, she won't make it to her new work appointment on time. Ranevsky calls for Anya to get ready; Anya, Gayef, and Charlotte enter along with Ephikhodof, who starts taking the luggage out.

Lopakhin does not want to marry Barbara after all, and leaps at the chance to get away from her after seemingly having been pressured into proposing by Madame Ranevsky. Ranevsky seems to know that it is useless to pursue Barbara's future any further, and instead rather coolly tells her eldest daughter that it's time to move on and accept her fate.

Ranevsky sunnily states that it's time for them all to start out on their new journeys. Anya, too, is excited. Trophimof comes in, followed by Lopakhin. They begin taking things out of the house. Ranevsky asks for just one more moment to look at the walls and the ceilings. Lopakhin asks Ephikhodof to take one last look around the house. Barbara pulls an umbrella from a bundle of rugs and pretends to strike Lopakhin; he pretends to be frightened, going along with her game. Trophimof calls everyone out of the house. Anya sunnily bids the house and her "old life" goodbye, and goes out with Trophimof. Lopakhin begins locking up. Everyone heads out except for Ranevsky and Gayef.

Ranevsky is feigning positivity as she confronts the fact that her final moments in the house are upon her. She is not the only one faking her emotions—Barbara, too, feigns levity with Lopakhin, who has just doomed her, essentially, to a life as a housemaid for another wealthy family. Anya, however, seems genuinely excited to be rid of her "old life" and start anew—as one of the youngest characters in the play, she is perhaps the most well-equipped to bounce back and adapt to the new order of things.

Ranevsky and Gayef embrace one another and sob quietly, lamenting the loss of their youth and happiness. Outside, Anya and Trophimof call for them excitedly. The siblings take one last look at the room, and then leave together. The stage is empty, and the sound of doors locking and carriages driving away can be heard outside. There is silence for a moment, and then the thudding of axes in the **cherry orchard** begins again, louder than before.

Though Ranevsky and Gayef are miserable at the thought of abandoning their home, the younger generation—notably Anya and Trophimof—are calling gaily for their elders to join them in their excitement about the prospect of a new life, and indeed a new world.

Firs appears in the doorway; he is looking very ill. Everyone has left him behind. He goes to the door and tries the handle, but it is locked. He remarks that he has been forgotten. He sits down on the sofa, sure that Gayef will soon return to switch out his coat for a warmer one. He mumbles to himself, stating that "life has gone by as if [he'd] never lived." He lies down on the sofa; he has no strength left. He lies motionless. The melancholy sound of a string breaking is heard again. As it fades away, the stroke of the axe in the **cherry orchard** is the only sound that remains.

The play's final moments function on two levels: literal and metaphorical. Literally, Firs has been left behind by everyone else in the play, and is going to die alone in the house he dedicated his life to while it falls down around him. Metaphorically, the same thing has happened to the entire way of life—and social system—that once governed Russia. The return of the strange, melancholy noise portends that swift change is on the horizon—and indeed it is, as Lopakhin's men get back to work chopping down the cherry orchard and making way for the new world.

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