

## First Flight

### (Class X – NCERT English)

#### Chapter 11: The Proposal – Anton Chekhov

##### Detailed Summary (Expanded, Exam-Oriented)

The Proposal is a one-act farce (a light humorous play) written by Anton Chekhov, the famous Russian playwright. It is a comedy that satirizes the upper-class Russian society of the 19th century, focusing on themes of marriage, property disputes, and the absurdity of pride and ego.

The play begins with Ivan Vassilevitch Lomov, a 35-year-old landowner, arriving at the house of his neighbor, Stepan Stepanovitch Chubukov. Lomov is dressed in formal evening dress and white gloves, indicating that he has come for some important purpose.

Chubukov, who is Lomov's neighbor and the father of Natalya (also called Natalia), receives him warmly. Chubukov is surprised and delighted to see Lomov dressed so formally. He suspects that Lomov has either come to borrow money or to ask for some favor.

Lomov is extremely nervous. He keeps adjusting his clothes, fidgeting, and acting anxiously. After some hesitation, he reveals the purpose of his visit - he has come to propose marriage to Chubukov's 25-year-old daughter, Natalya.

Chubukov is overjoyed. He had been hoping for this proposal for a long time. Natalya is 25 years old, which was considered quite old for an unmarried woman in that society. Chubukov immediately agrees and goes to call his daughter, leaving Lomov alone to compose himself.

Lomov reflects on his decision. He thinks about how he is already 35 years old and should settle down. He has a weak heart, suffers from palpitations, gets upset easily, and has insomnia. He believes marriage will bring order and regularity to his life.

Interestingly, Lomov's thoughts about Natalya are not particularly romantic. He does not speak of love or affection. Instead, he considers her a good housekeeper and not bad-looking. His reasons for marriage are practical rather than emotional - he is of a suitable age, and she is a suitable candidate.

Natalya enters the room wearing a house dress, not knowing that Lomov has come to propose. She is surprised to see him in formal attire. They begin making small talk. Lomov tries to lead the conversation toward the proposal but keeps getting distracted and nervous.

In his nervous state, Lomov mentions his land and, by chance, brings up the Oxen Meadows - a piece of land that borders both their properties. He casually mentions that his Oxen Meadows touch

Natalya's birch woods.

Natalya immediately objects. She claims that the Oxen Meadows belong to her family, not to Lomov. Lomov insists they are his. What starts as a minor comment quickly escalates into a heated argument about property ownership.

Both Lomov and Natalya become increasingly agitated. They raise their voices, interrupt each other, and refuse to listen to reason. Each provides their version of the land's history, citing their grandparents and great-grandparents. The proposal is completely forgotten as they argue about the land.

Natalya calls her father, Chubukov, to settle the dispute. When Chubukov enters and hears the argument, instead of calming them down, he joins Natalya's side and begins shouting at Lomov. He insists that the Oxen Meadows belong to the Chubukov family.

The argument becomes more heated. All three are now shouting at each other. Lomov brings up old documents and agreements. Chubukov claims his aunt's grandmother gave the land to Lomov's grandfather's peasants for free use, not permanent ownership. They insult each other, and the situation becomes increasingly absurd.

Lomov starts experiencing physical distress. His heart begins palpitating, his foot goes numb, and he feels something pulling in his side. But he is too proud and stubborn to stop arguing. The dispute over the Oxen Meadows continues with no resolution.

Finally, Lomov storms out of the house in anger, clutching his chest and complaining about his heart. Chubukov and Natalya are left fuming. Chubukov calls Lomov names and makes disparaging comments about him.

But then Natalya asks her father why Lomov had come to visit in the first place. When Chubukov reveals that Lomov had come to propose marriage, Natalya is shocked and immediately regrets the quarrel. She realizes she has driven away her suitor over a silly argument about land.

Natalya becomes hysterical. She cries and begs her father to bring Lomov back immediately. She says she wants to get married and asks her father to quickly call Lomov before he leaves the property. Her attitude toward the Oxen Meadows suddenly changes - now she is willing to concede that they belong to Lomov if only he will return.

Chubukov rushes out and manages to bring Lomov back. When Lomov returns, he is still upset about the argument. Natalya, now determined to get engaged, tries to change the subject and end the quarrel. She says they can discuss the Oxen Meadows later.

They attempt to have a civil conversation. Natalya brings up a different topic - hunting. Lomov mentions that he is going hunting tomorrow with his dog, Guess. Natalya immediately contradicts him, saying that Guess is not as good a dog as their dog, Squeezer.

And just like that, another argument begins! This time they quarrel about whose dog is better. Lomov insists that Guess is a superior hunting dog - a true pedigreed dog that cost a lot of money. Natalya argues that Squeezer is younger, better, and more valuable.

The argument over the dogs becomes as heated as the earlier one about land. They compare the dogs' qualities, their breed, their hunting abilities, and their prices. Neither is willing to concede that

the other's dog might be better.

Once again, Chubukov is drawn into the argument. He defends Squeezer and attacks Lomov's dog, Guess. The three of them are soon shouting at each other again, this time about dogs instead of land. The proposal is once more forgotten in the heat of the quarrel.

Lomov becomes more and more agitated. His health conditions worsen - he feels dizzy, has palpitations, and complains about his eyes and side. But he continues arguing stubbornly, refusing to back down about his dog's superiority.

Suddenly, in the middle of the argument, Lomov collapses! He falls into a chair, apparently unconscious or having some kind of attack. Natalya screams that he is dead. Chubukov panics, calling for water and doctors.

There is chaos as they try to revive Lomov. Chubukov laments, saying Lomov has died before getting married. He melodramatically declares he will shoot himself. The absurdity of the situation reaches its peak.

But then Lomov stirs and slowly regains consciousness. As soon as he opens his eyes and shows signs of recovery, Chubukov - not wanting to waste any more time or risk another argument - immediately announces that Natalya accepts the proposal and they are engaged.

Lomov, still dazed and confused, barely understands what is happening. Chubukov pushes Natalya toward Lomov and tells them to kiss. The engagement is finalized in this chaotic, unromantic manner.

Chubukov is relieved and calls for champagne to celebrate. He gives them his blessing. But even as they are supposedly celebrating their engagement, Natalya and Lomov are still arguing! They continue their dispute about the dogs even after getting engaged.

The play ends with this absurd scene - the newly engaged couple arguing about whose dog is better, while Chubukov calls desperately for champagne. The proposal that should have been a romantic occasion has turned into a series of ridiculous quarrels, but somehow, despite everything, the engagement has happened.

## Central Themes

### 1. Satire on Marriage

The play satirizes how marriage in upper-class society was treated as a business transaction rather than a union based on love. Practical considerations like property and status matter more than emotions.

### 2. Pride and Ego

All three characters are too proud to admit they might be wrong. Their egos prevent them from resolving conflicts sensibly.

### 3. Materialism

The characters are obsessed with material possessions - land, dogs, property. These material concerns overshadow human relationships.

#### 4. Absurdity of Social Conventions

The play mocks the ridiculous social conventions and behaviors of the upper class, where trivial matters become major disputes.

#### 5. Communication Failure

The characters repeatedly fail to communicate effectively. Arguments erupt over misunderstandings that could easily be resolved.

### Character Analysis

#### 1. Ivan Vassilevitch Lomov

A 35-year-old landowner who is nervous, hypochondriac (constantly worried about his health), proud, and stubborn. He wants to marry for practical reasons. He is easily agitated and gets into arguments despite his weak heart.

#### 2. Natalya Stepanovna

A 25-year-old unmarried woman who is proud, argumentative, materialistic, and stubborn. She is desperate to get married but cannot control her temper. She values her property and possessions highly.

#### 3. Stepan Stepanovitch Chubukov

Natalya's father and a landowner. He is materialistic, interfering, loud, and quick-tempered. He joins arguments instead of mediating them. He is eager to get his daughter married.

### Important Vocabulary (With Meanings)

- **Proposal** – an offer of marriage
- **Palpitations** – noticeably rapid heartbeats
- **Impudence** – disrespectful behavior
- **Hypocrite** – someone who acts falsely
- **Intriguer** – a person who plots or schemes
- **Malicious** – intending to do harm
- **Scarecrow** – an insulting term for someone unattractive
- **Dispute** – a disagreement or argument
- **Peasants** – poor farmers or agricultural laborers
- **Guzzler** – someone who drinks excessively
- **Embezzler** – someone who steals money entrusted to them
- **Hermit** – a person living alone
- **Excavate** – to dig out or unearth
- **Lunatic** – insane person

## Exam-Ready Key Points

- Lomov, 35, comes to propose to his 25-year-old neighbor Natalya
- He is nervous, has health issues, wants marriage for practical reasons
- Before proposing, he mentions Oxen Meadows land
- Huge argument erupts over who owns the Oxen Meadows
- All three (Lomov, Natalya, Chubukov) quarrel loudly
- Lomov leaves in anger without proposing
- Natalya learns he came to propose - desperately wants him back
- Lomov returns, they try again
- Another argument starts - this time about whose dog is better
- Lomov collapses, apparently from stress and health issues
- While he is unconscious, Chubukov announces the engagement
- Even after engagement, they continue arguing about dogs
- Play satirizes upper-class obsession with property and pride
- Shows marriage as business transaction rather than romantic union