

The Proposal

Chamber Opera in One Act, freely based on the play by Anton Chekhov

by Martin Halpern

Characters:

Stepan Stepanovich, a landowner in his middle fifties; baritone

Ivan Vassilievich, a neighboring landowner in his early thirties; tenor

Nataliya Stepanovna, Stepan's daughter, in her early thirties; soprano

Time: the late nineteenth century

(Lights come up slowly on the front room of Stepan's home. Downstage, two easy chairs with small tables beside them. Upstage, a table containing a vodka decanter and vodka glasses. The front door stage left, with a coatrack beside it. A door to the rest of the house stage right.)

Piano

1

mf

Pno.

5

f

(A knocking at the front door.. Stepan enters quickly through the other door, crosses to the front door and opens it. Ivan stands there, wearing a winter coat over formal dress.)

Stepan

8

Well well!


Pno.


8

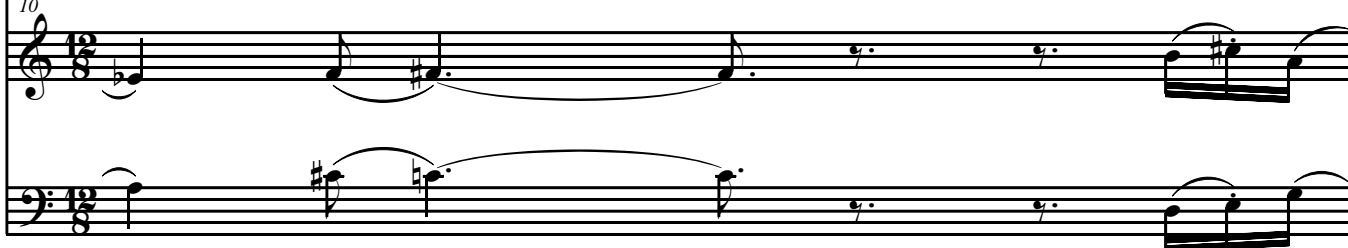
mf

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10


Ivan  **May I come in?**

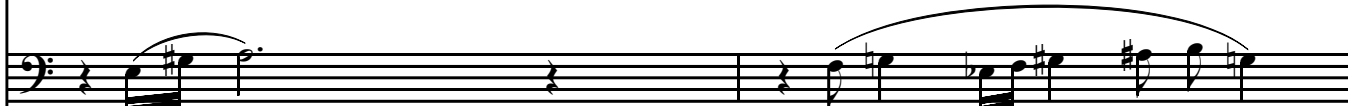
Stepan  **I - van Vas - si - lie - vich!_____**


Pno. 

(Ivan enters. Stepan closes the door behind him.)


11

Ivan  **Thank you.**


Stepan  **But of course! To what do I owe this hon - or?**


Pno. 

13 *(Taking off his coat)*

Ivan  How have you been, Step - an Step - an - o - vich?

(Taking the coat from him and hanging it on the coatrack)

Stepan  Oh reas - on - ab - ly well.

Pno. 

15

Ivan  Oh reas - on - ab - ly well.

Stepan  And you? But tell me, what brings you,

Pno. 

17 $\bullet = 48$

Stepan  all dressed up like that on New Year's Day?

Pno. 

19

Stepan

Have you come from some kind of par - ty?

Pno.

20

Ivan

Nei - ther.

Stepan

Or are you head - ing for one?

Pno.

22

Ivan

The fact is, I'm dressed like this be - cause I've come...

Pno.

Ivan

24
8

Well how shall I put it? be - cause I've come...

Pno.

Ivan

26
8

To ask a great fa - vor of you. —

Stepan

12
8

A great fa - vor?

Pno.

26
12
8

Ivan

28
8


Some - thing I hes - i - tate to ask, yet *must* ask.


Pno.


28
12
8

$\bullet = 44$

(He sits in one of the chairs.)

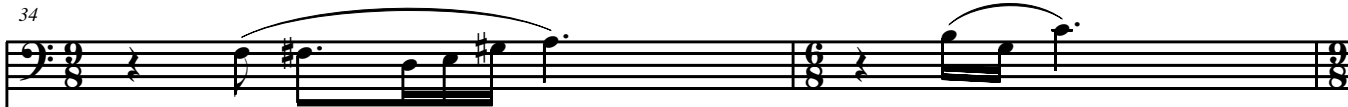
Ivan  Thank you.


Stepan  Well come, sit down and tell me._____ Will you take some lunch?

Pno. 

Ivan  No thanks. Though a lit - tle vod - ka might help.

Pno. 

Stepan  So ear - ly in the day? Well why not?

Pno. 

(Crossing to the upstage table)

36

Stepan

It is a hol-i-day. I might e-ven join you.

Pno.

(He pours vodka from the decanter into two glasses, crosses back to Ivan and hands him one of the glasses.)

38 = 48

Ivan

Thank you.

Stepan

Here you are.

Pno.

(Lifting his glass)

40

Ivan

(Lifting his glass) To the new year.

Stepan


A toast, to the new year.

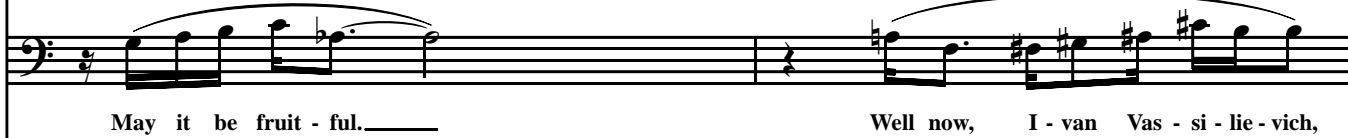
Pno.


(Both swig down the vodka. Stepan sits in the other chair and lays his glass on the table.)

$\bullet = 44$

42


Ivan  May it be fruit - ful.

Stepan  May it be fruit - ful. Well now, I - van Vas - si - lie - vich,

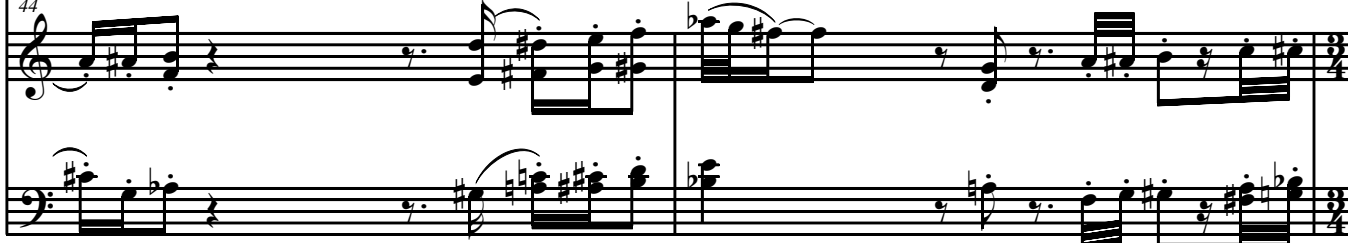
Pno. 

(Laying his glass on the table and rising)

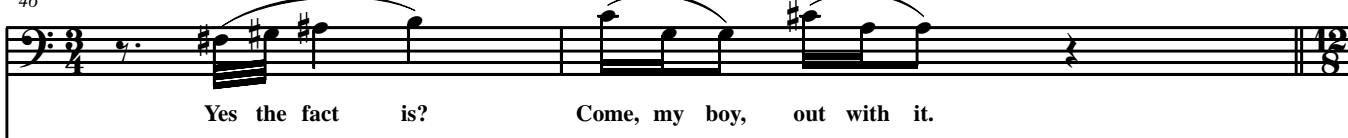
44

Ivan  Well the fact is...

Stepan  what's on your mind?

Pno. 

46

Stepan  Yes the fact is? Come, my boy, out with it.

Pno. 

48 $\bullet = 44$

Ivan

Af - ter much... de - lib - er - a - tion,

Pno.

49

Ivan

I've come to make a pro-po - sal.

Stepan

A pro - po - sal? You mean,

Pno.

51

Ivan

Not ex - act - ly. Though they might be in - volved, in a way.

Stepan

re - gard - ing our lands?

Pno.

53

Stepan

How en - ig - mat - ic! So what, ex - act - ly, are you pro - pos - ing?

Pno.

55

Ivan

As I'm sure you know, for some years now I've been, as they say,

Pno.

57

Ivan

sow - ing wild oats. Of course.

Stepan

Met - a - phor - i - cal - ly speak - ing. As did I, in my youth. So?

Pno.

Ivan

59
8

Well the time has come for me to end all that.

Pno.

Ivan

61
8

There - fore, Step - an Step - an - o - vich... I have come to ask for the hand.

Stepan

Yes there - fore?

Pno.

61

f *mp*

Ivan

63
8

of your daught - er, Nat - al - yia Ste - pan - ov - na.

Pno.

63

f

64 *(Rising)*

Stepan Her hand? You mean, in mar - riage?

Pno. *mp*

65

Ivan That is... what I mean.

Stepan But say it a - gain. I

Pno. *mf*

67 *(Turning away)*

Ivan Just as I feared. You don't ap - prove.

Stepan want to be sure I heard you cor - rect - ly. Did I

Pno. *f* *mf*

(Turning back)

Ivan *69*
8 — You mean, you do?

Stepan
say that? Don't rush me. First, I must un - der-stand this.

Pno. *69*
f *mf*

Stepan *71* ♩ = 36
There has been a friend - ship be - tween you

Pno. *71*
mp

Stepan *72*
since ear - ly child - hood.

Pno. *72*
mf

73

Stepan

But up to now, on - ly a friend - ship.

Pno.

74

Ivan

8

But on Nat - al - yia's?

Stepan

At least on *your* side. _____ Well

Pno.

75

Ivan

8

I see.

Stepan

let's just say she has long since stopped hop - ing that more might come of it. _____

Pno.

mf

77 $\bullet = 40$

Ivan

8 Then let her hope a - gain!

Pno.

78

Ivan

8 For my new year's res-o-lu-tion has been to change my ways,

Pno.

80

Ivan

8 and prove wor-thy of her hand.

Stepan

Well this does come as a sur-prise,

Pno.

82

Ivan

Stepan

Pno.

I'm glad to hear that!

though not an un - wel - come one.

83

Ivan

Stepan

Pno.

Yes,

So why don't I send her to you, and see what comes of this.

85

Ivan

8 please do. Thank you.

Stepan

Have some more vod - ka if you'd like.

Pno.

(Stepan exits into the house. Ivan crosses quickly to the table and pours vodka into a glass.)

87

Ivan

8 I think I may. Oh I'm tremb - ling all o - ver,

Pno.

(Swigging down the vodka)

89

Ivan

8 like be - fore an ex - am - in - a - tion. But my mind's made up.

Pno.

f *mf*

91
Ivan *8* I need a more or - dered, — more reg - u - lar life.

Pno. *mp*

93 *(He lays the glass back down.)*
Ivan *8* I want child - ren! And who but Nat - al - yia

Pno. *mf*

95
Ivan *8* can give me all that?

Pno.

Ivan 97
8
So what if I'm not in love with her, what - ev - er *that* means.

Pno. 97

Ivan 99
8
She's heal - thy, in - tel - li - gent,

Pno. 99

Ivan 100
8
an ex - cel - lent house - keep - er,

Pno. 100

101
Ivan
8
and not at all bad - look - ing.

Pno.

102
Ivan
8
And she's been pin - ing for me all these years!

Pno.

103
Ivan
8
With time, I might come to love her, what - ev - er that means.

Pno.

mp *mf*

Ivan

105

8

So what more can I want? What more can I reas - on - ab - ly want

Pno.

105

mp

Ivan

107

8

at this stage in my life?

(Nataliya enters, wearing an apron over a plain dress.)

Pno.

107

mf

Nataliya

108

Oh, it's on - ly you! Pa - pa just said we've a guest.

Pno.

108

f *mf* *mp*

110

Natalya

He did - n't say who.

Ivan

Good af - ter - noon, Nat - a - sha.

Pno.

mf

tr (*b*)

112

Natalya

Same to you. Ex - cuse this a - pron.

Ivan

And a hap - py new year to you.

Pno.

114

Natalya

I was shel - ling peas. But why are you dressed so for - mal - ly?

Pno.

116

Natalya

Ivan

Pno.

Why not?

Well the fact is... Can we sit down?

118

(Both sit in the easy chairs.)

Natalya

Ivan

Pno.

Be - gin what?

Now how shall I be - gin? Of course you know

120

Ivan

Pno.

how close - ly our fam - i - lies are con - nec - ted. My late aunt Son - ya,

mp

122

Ivan

8

who left me my es - tate, had deep re - spect for your late moth - er.

Pno.

124

Natalya

Yes I *do* know that. So?

Ivan

8

As did I. More - ov - er, our es - tates are al - so

Pno.

124

mf *mp*

126

Ivan

8

close - ly con - nect - ed, since my mead - ow

Pno.

126

Ivan

127

8

lies right next to your birch wood. There-fore, Nat - a - sha...

Pno.

mf

Natalya

129

♩ = 44

Ex - cuse the in - ter - rup - tion, but to what mead - ow

Pno.

f

Natalya

131

rit. ----- ♩ = 40

are you re - fer - ring?

Ivan

8

The love - ly one

Pno.

mf

(Springing to her feet)

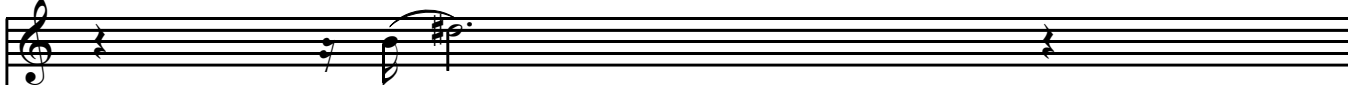
133

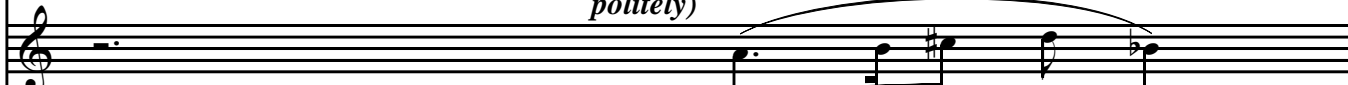
Natalya  But that is - n't your mead - ow,


Ivan  where we played as child - ren.

Pno.  *f*

135

Natalya  it's ours!

Ivan  No, you're mis - tak - en.

Pno.  *mf*

(Rising politely)

136

Natalya

Ivan

Pno.

It's part of our es - tate!_____

It's part of my es - tate._____

137

Natalya

Ivan

Pno.

I have doc-u-ments to prove that!_____

Well so have I. But please, let me go on.

f

139

Natalya

Ivan

Pno.

I can hard - ly be - lieve my ears! For three hund - red years_____

mp

141

Natalya

— we've owned this land, and now you tell me that mead-ow

Pno.

mf

143

Natalya

does - n't be - long to us? — Well I'm a-fraid it does!

Ivan

I'm a - fraid it does - n't. —

Pno.

145

Natalya

Oh yes it is,

Ivan

This real - ly is - n't im - por - tant. —

Pno.

146

Natalya

as a mat - ter___ of prin - cip - le!

Pno.

mp

147

Natalya

A gift?

Ivan

If you'd like, I could make you_____ a gift of that mead - ow._____ Now

Pno.

mf

149

Natalya

You can't make a gift of what you don't own! No you

Ivan

please, let me...___ But I do own it._____

Pno.

(Crossing to the door)

(Stepan enters quickly.)

151

Natalya

don't! Pa - pa! Come in here! Quick - ly!

Ivan

Pno.

f

153

Natalya

Send some men to mow our mead - ow at once!

Stepan

Yes? What is it?

Pno.

mf

$\bullet = 48$

155

Natalya

To show that it's ours!

Stepan

But why?

Pno.

156

Natalya

Be - cause he says it's his!

Stepan

But why must that be shown?

Pno.

157

Natalya

Ivan

Stepan

Pno.

Oh my! Is it yours?_

It is Step-an - Step-an - o - vich.

mp

159

Natalya

Ivan

Pno.

not! And I'll prove that in court if I must.

f

160

Natalya

And you'll see who wins!

Ivan

You'd take this to court?

Pno.

161

Natalya

Nor do I.

Stepan

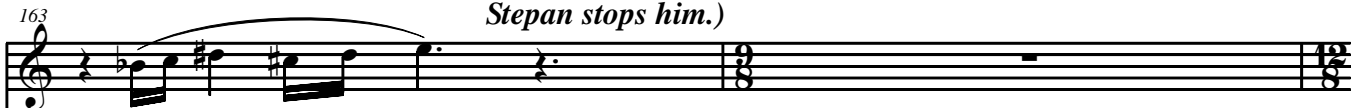
Oh some-thing's hap-pened here — that I don't like.


Pno.

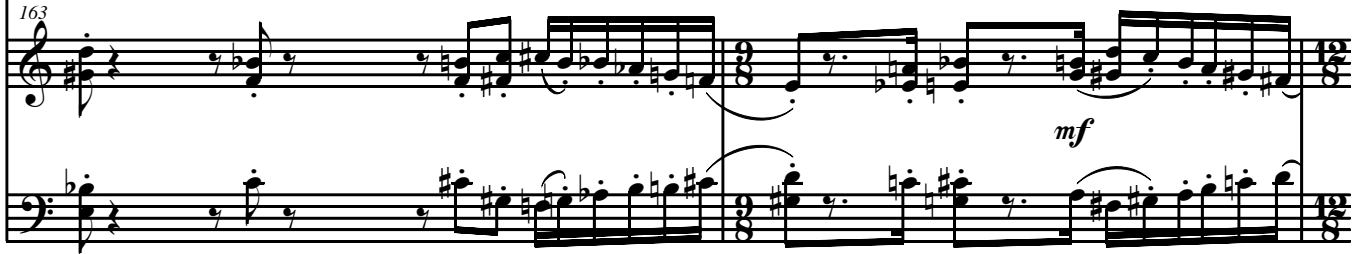
mf *f*


$\bullet = 40$

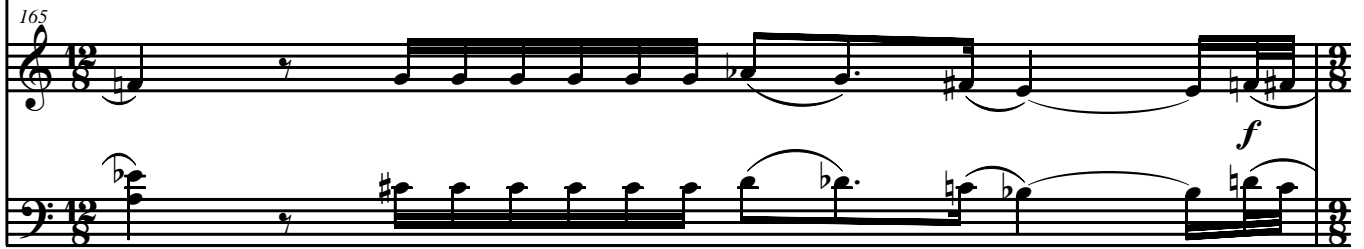
(Ivan turns toward the front door.
Stepan stops him.)

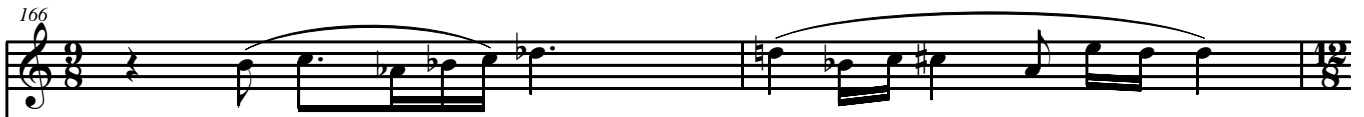
163
Natalya 
So I think he should leave.

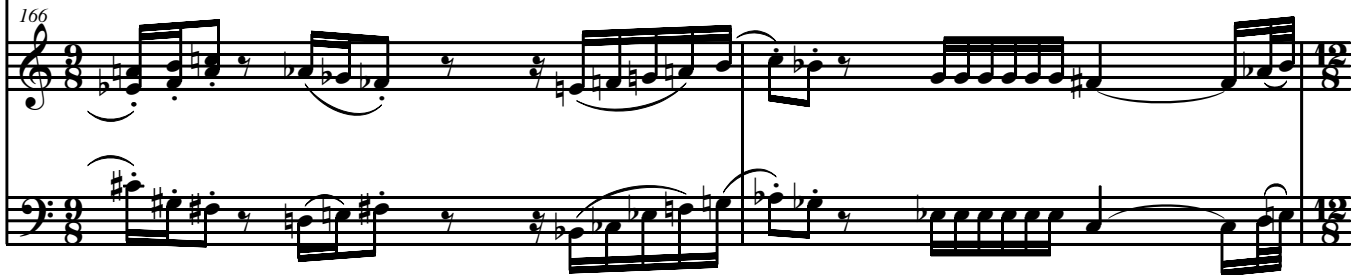
Stepan 
No! Don't!

163
Pno. 
mf

165
Stepan 
We can work this out, some - how.

165
Pno. 
f

166
Natalya 
Not here, and not to-day! I hand - le all such mat - ters here,

166
Pno. 

168

Natalya *and I say a court must set - tle this!*

Ivan *I'm a-fraid she's right,*

Pno. *mp*

170

Ivan *Step - an Step - an - o - vich. I should - n't have come here to - day.*

Pno. *mf*

172

Ivan *So with your per - mis - sion, I will take my leave.*

Pno.

(Ivan crosses quickly to the front door, grabs his coat, and exits)

Ivan

174

8

Good day, and hap - py new year.

Pno.

174

f

Natalya

175

$\bullet = 36$

The dev - il take him!

Stepan

Oh Nat - ash - a,

Pno.

175

ff *mp* *mf*

Stepan

177

what have you done? Don't you re - a - lize why he came here

Pno.

177

179

Natalya

No I don't, and I don't care.

Stepan

all dressed up like that? _____

179

Pno.

tr *f*

3

3

180

Natalya

He must nev - er en - ter this house a - gain!

Stepan

Nat - ash - a, lis - ten to me.

180

Pno.

182

Natalya

All right, I'm list - en - ing.

Stepan

Please lis - ten to me! He came to make a pro - pos - al.

Pno.

mp

184

Natalya

What kind of pro - po - sal?

Pno.

mf

185

Natalya

Mar - riage to whom?

Stepan

Of mar - riage. _____

Pno.

186

Natalya

Im - pos - si - ble!

Stepan

Have I an - y oth - er daught - ers?

Pno.

f

188

Natalya

There is noth - ing be - tween us, that way! Nev - er has been!

Pno.

mf

190

Stepan

May - be not, un - til to - da - ay.

Pno.

191

Natalya

What do you mean, "un - til to - da - ay"?

Pno.

192

Stepan

He's made a new year's res - o - lu - tion, hop - ing to start a new life,

Pno.

194

Natalya

At his side?

Stepan

with you at his side.

Pno.

195

Stepan

And in his bed, of course.

Pno.

f

196

Natalya

Oh my God! Why did - n't you tell me?

Pno.

197


Stepan

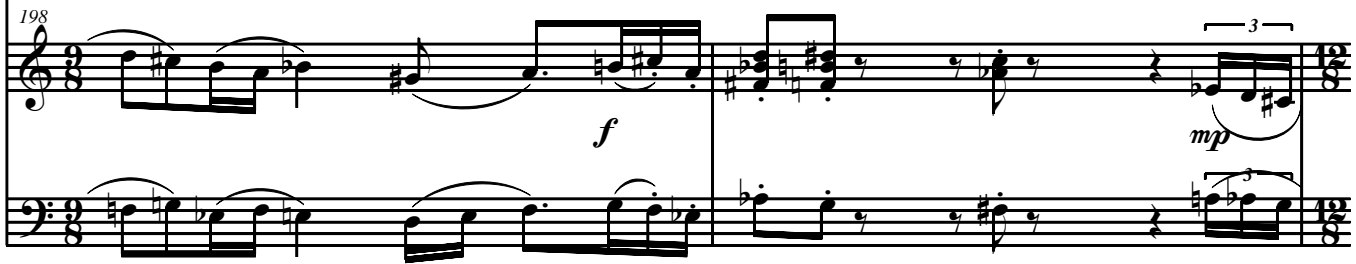
He would have told you him - self, if you had - n't.

Pno.

mf

198
Natalya  Well go! Bring him back!

Stepan  made such a fuss a - bout that mead - ow.

Pno.  *f* *mp*


200
Stepan  He may not come back, now!

Pno.  *mf*

(Stepan crosses to the front door, grabs his coat and exits quickly.)

201
Natalya  Well try an - y - way!

Stepan  All right, I'll try.

Pno.  *f*

(Nataliya crosses to one of the chairs and sinks into it.)

Pno.

mp

Nataliya

Oh what *have* I done? What *have* I done?

Pno.

Nataliya

Let a fool - ish pride come be - tween me

Pno.

Nataliya

and a chance at hap - pi - ness? Stu - pid, stu - pid Nat - ash - a!

Pno.

mf

211 *(Stepan re-enters.)*

Natalya

Why did - n't you let him speak?

Pno.

f

213 $\bullet = 40$ *(Rising quickly and turning to him)*

Natalya

And? *(Hanging his coat on the coatrack)*

Stepan

All right, I called to him. He stopped walk - ing, and turned.

Pno.

mf

215

Natalya

And? And? But?

Stepan

I asked him to please come back. He looked puz - zled.

Pno.

f

217 $\bullet = 36$

Natalya

Thank heav - en!

Stepan

But he - start - ed this way. Let's see what hap - pens now.

Pno.

mf

219

Stepan

Just try to be... dip - lo - ma - tic.

Pno.

221

Natalya

Yes, I will try to be dip - lo - ma - tic.

Pno.

f

(A knocking at the front door)

(Ivan opens the door. Ivan enters.)

222
Stepan

Here he is. Cour - age now!

222
Pno.

223
Natalya

Ah! Thank you for com - ing back.

223
Pno.

mp

224
Natalya

I do, I - van Vas - si - lie - vich. _____

8
Ivan

You have some - thing fur - ther to say to me? _____ What is it?

224
Pno.

226 $\bullet = 40$

Natalya

I'm a-fraid I spoke in haste be-fore. That mead - ow *may* be yours.

Ivan

Well

Stepan

Good.

Pno.

228

Ivan

well! I'm glad to hear that. So you *won't* take it to court?

Pno.

mf *mp*

230

Natalya

No need to, now.

Stepan

Ex - act - ly.

Pno.

231

$\bullet = 36$

Natalya

But you can make a gift of it,

Pno.

232

Natalya

if you're still so in-clined.

Ivan

I don't un-der-stand.

Pno.

mf

tr (#)

3

234 *(Stepan helps Ivan out of his coat.)*

Ivan
8
What does this mean?

Stepan
It means, my boy,

Pno.

236 *(He hangs the coat on the coatrack.)*

Stepan
that the two of you should get mar - ried, _____ as soon as pos-sib-le.

Pno.

238

Stepan
I give my con - sent, here and now.

Pno.
f

239

Ivan

Oh but... does she con-sent?

Pno.

240

Stepan

Why don't you ask her, as you would have be-fore?

Pno.

mp *mf*

241

Ivan

Well do you, Nat-a-sha?

Pno.

mp

243

Natalya

On one con - di - tion. _____ That you *do* make me a gift

Ivan

8

What would *that* be?

Pno.

mf

245

Natalya

of the mead - ow we played in as child - ren.

Pno.

tr

246

Ivan

8

Oh yes it is!

Stepan

Well that's hard - ly nec - es - sar - y now.

Pno.

247
Ivan
8
As a ges - ture I will make to my life - long friend,

Pno.

248
Ivan
8
- on her be - com - ing my wife.

Pno.

249
Natalya
Stepan
Ah yes, a fit - ting ges - ture.

Then I con - sent,

Pno.

251

Nataliya I - van Vas - si - lie - vich. —

Ivan Yes heav - en be tha - anked!

Stepan Heav - en be tha - anked! — So go a - head, kiss her.

Pno. *f*

(Ivan takes Nataliya in his arms and kisses her on the lips.)

253

Stepan Good!

Pno. *tr*

(Ivan and Nataliya stand holding hands and looking into each others' eyes.)

255

Stepan Two fine fam - i - lies u - ni - ted!

Pno.

256

Natalya

U - ni - ted!

Ivan

U - ni - ted! _____ All time to

Stepan

For all time to come!

Pno.

258

Natalya

All time to come!

Ivan

come!

Stepan

We must drink to that! But not with vod - ka!

Pno.

*(Calling into
the house)*

260

Stepan

Cham - pagne! Some - one bring cham - pagne!

Pno.

(Blackout.)

262

Pno.

ff