

LENYA. (*Bends her knees, making herself shorter.*) How low do you want my voice?

DOCTOR. That's low enough. Bring the book, it's on the shelf. (*She goes over to the bookshelf, knees bent as she walks. To LEON.*) Young man—have you ever heard of the Curse of Kulyenchikov?

LEON. I can't say that I have.

DOCTOR. You can't say that? It's not hard. Even Lenya can say that.

LENYA. (*Standing by the bookshelf.*) "The Curse of Kulyenchikov."

LEON. What is this curse, Doctor?

DOCTOR. Two hundred years ago, a curse was put on this village that struck down every man, woman, child and domestic animal, including all their ancestors for generations to come, leaving each and every one of them—and this you'll find hard to believe—with no more intelligence than a bump on a log.

LEON. Doctor, I don't believe in curses. Curses are old wives' tales.

DOCTOR. You're thinking of Noychka. In Noychka all the old wives have tails. That was *their* curse. Ours is altogether different.

LEON. But where did the curse come from? And who would inflict such cruel punishment on such a peaceful and simple village?

(LENYA has returned with the book.)

DOCTOR. Who indeed? It's all documented in *The Book of Curses*. (*He blows dust off the cover into LEON's face. To LENYA.*) I thought you said you dusted this.

LENYA. I did. I put dust on it yesterday.

DOCTOR. (*To LEON.*) Here. Read it for yourself. The page is marked.

LEON. (*Opens the book. The page is sticky and gummy.*) It's all stuck together.

LENYA. We marked it with maple syrup. Read it to us. (*They all sit on the Doctor's sofa.*)

LEON. (*Reading.*) "On the morning of April II, in the year 1691, in the village of Kulyenchikov, two young people fell hopelessly in love."

LENYA. I knew it. Whenever young people fall in love, you know a curse is coming.

LEON. But surely you've heard all this before?

DOCTOR. Many times. But we never understand it. It's a very well thought out curse.

LENYA. So what happens?

LEON. "The boy was a young, handsome but illiterate farmer named Casimir Yousekevitch. The girl was the daughter of the most learned man in the town, Mikhail Zubritsky."

LENYA. Zubritsky! I've heard that name before.

DOCTOR. I've seen it! I've seen it! On a front door somewhere. In this neighborhood.

LEON. It's on your front door. *Your* name is Zubritsky.

DOCTOR. (*With profound insight.*) Wait a minute! That means that the young man in the curse may possibly be related—to our front door. (*He and LENYA walk over to the door, open it and look out.*)

LEON. (*To the audience.*) Mind you, I'm dealing with the intelligentia now! . . . I continue: "The young girl's name was Sophia Zubritsky." (*To the Doctor.*) May I ask the name of your young daughter?

DOCTOR. Sophia.

LEON. Sophia? Sophia Zubritsky! The identical name of the girl in the curse over two hundred years ago.

DOCTOR. I can't believe it. Unless our daughter has been lying about her age. (*He and LENYA have come back. Each stands behind a chair.*)

LEON. "The match was doomed from the start. When Sophia's educated father learned that young Casimir was illiterate, he forbade Sophia ever to see Casimir again. Six months later Sophia married a young student, and that winter Casimir, distraught and despondent, took his life by plowing his own grave and planting himself in it. Upon hearing of his son's death, Casimir's father, Vladimir Yousekevitch—"

THE ZUBRITSKYS. (*Shaking the chairs.*) Tremble, tremble, tremble, tremble.

LEON. "—Casimir's father, Vladimir Yousekevitch—"

THE ZUBRITSKYS. Tremble, tremble, tremble, tremble.

LEON. "—Casimir's father, Vladimir Yousekevitch—"  
THE ZUBRITSKYS. Tremble, tremble, tremble, tremble.

LEON. "—who caused people to tremble at the mention of his name—"

LENYA. Next time don't mention his name.

LEON. "—Casimir's father, Vla—"

THE ZUBRITSKYS. (*With a short chair shake.*) Tremble—  
LEON. "—and So-and-So, sometimes known as the Sorcerer because of his ability to summon the powers of the Devil himself, brought all his wrath and fury down upon Kulyenchikov . . ."

DOCTOR. Here it comes! Here it comes!

LEON. "A curse! A curse upon all who dwell in Kulyenchikov!" he cried out. "May the daughter of

Mikhail Zubritsky, murderer of my only son, be struck down by the ignorance that caused my son's death! May stupidity engulf her brain! May incompetence encumber her faculties! May common sense become uncommon and may reason become unreasonable! May her children be cursed as well. And may all their children be cursed for eternity! May all who live in Kulyenchikov be born in ignorance and die in ignorance, unable to leave this cursed village until my final vengeance has been satisfied!"

LENYA. That would explain why the train doesn't stop here.

LEON. (*To the audience.*) My initial impulse was to panic, even my secondary impulse was to panic . . . To educate is one thing, to break curses is another.

DOCTOR. Excuse me, but are you all right, Master Tolhinsky?

LEON. Yes. I'm fine. I—I was just thinking.

DOCTOR. Lenya . . . he was thinking.

LENYA. He was thinking.

DOCTOR. (*To LEON.*) What's it like?

LEON. You mean you don't know what thinking is?

DOCTOR. I don't and she certainly doesn't.

LEON. *Thinking?* It's the thoughts that come to one's mind. It's the process which enables us to make decisions.

DOCTOR. Decisions? No. I don't think we're capable of that.

LEON. But surely you know what it is you want.

LENYA. Oh, dear God, yes. We desperately want someone to help us. Not so much for us, we've already lived our lives. But for your child, our sweet daughter, Sophia.

LEON. Did you hear what you just said?