

Brute, The

Smirnov *Grigory S. Smirnov, landowner and lieutenant of cavalry, retired.*
At the time of his death, your late husband was in my debt to the tune of 1200 roubles. Tomorrow ma'am, I must pay the interest on a bank loan. I have therefore no alternative but to ask you to pay me the money today.

Mrs Popov Today, Mr Smirnov, I have no ready cash in the house. In any case, today is exactly seven months from Mr Popov's death. On a such a day you will understand that I am in no mood to think of money.

S Madam, if you don't pay up now they'll seize my estate.

P You can have your money. ... Tomorrow. ... That is, the day after tomorrow.

S I don't need the money the day after tomorrow. I need it today.

P I'm sorry Mr ...

S Smirnov!

P Yes, of course. But you can't have it today.

S Not in the mood, huh? Exactly seven months since Popov's death, huh? How about me? What do you think I should do? Take a running jump and shove my head through the wall? Take off in a balloon? God damn it all to hell, if you'll pardon the expression, you're not in the mood. I'm in a rage! I'm in a positively towering rage! Every nerve in my body is trembling at forty to the dozen!

P Luka, go and get help from the farm!

S Consider the logic of it. A fellow creature is desperately in need of cash, so desperately in need that he had to seriously contemplate hanging himself, and this woman, this mere chit of a girl, won't pay up, and why not, because she's not in the mood! Oh the logic of women! Come to that, I never have liked them. I could do without the whole sex. Talk to a woman? I'd rather sit on a barrel of dynamite, the very thought gives me gooseflesh.

P Mr Smirnov, do you know how to behave in the presence of a lady?

S No, madam, I do not know how to behave in the presence of a lady.

P Just what I thought. I look at you and I say ugh! I hear you talk and I

say to myself that man doesn't know how to talk to a lady.

S 'You don't know how to talk to a lady, Mr Smirnov'. Look here, Mrs Popov, I've known more women than you've known pussy cats. I've fought three duels on their account. I squandered half my fortune on the sex. But there's an end to everything, dear madam. Burning eyes, dark eyelashes, ripe, red lips, dimpled cheeks, heaving bosoms, soft whisperings - I don't give a rap for that sort of nonsense any more. A faithful woman is a freak of nature - like a cat with horns.

P Who is faithful then? Man! Men faithful! That's a new one! Let me tell you something. Of all the men I have ever known, my late husband Popov was the best. I loved him and there are women who know how to love, Mr Smirnov. I gave him my youth, my happiness, my life. I worshipped the ground he trod on - and what happened. The best of men was unfaithful to me, Mr Smirnov. He made love to other women before my very eyes. But in spite of all Mr Smirnov, I was faithful. Unto death. And beyond. I am still faithful, Mr Smirnov!

S Expect me to believe that? As if I couldn't see through all this hocus-pocus.

P How dare you? How dare you insinuate?

S You may have buried yourself alive, Mrs Popov, but you haven't forgotten to powder your nose.

P Get out! Get out you!

S Can't you even be polite with me Mrs Popov?

P With you? You're a wild animal, you were never house-broken!

S And what right do you have to talk to me like that?

P Like what?

S You have insulted me madam.

P What of it? Do you think I am scared of you?

S So you think you can get away with it because you are a woman. A creature of poetry and romance, huh? Well, it doesn't go down with me. I hereby challenge you to a duel. I propose we fight it out.

P Trying to scare me again? Just because you have big fists and a voice

like a bull? You're a brute.

S No-one insults Grigory S. Smirnov with impunity. And I don't care if you are a female

P Brute! Brute! Brute!

S The sexes are equal, are they? Fine: then it's just prejudice to expect men alone to pay for insults. I hereby challenge-

P All right! You want to fight it out? All right! Let's fight it out.

S And let it be here and now!

P Here and now! All right! I'll have Popov's sabres here in one minute. Slashing one of Popov's sabres through your silly head will be a pleasure.

S A duel! That's equality for you! But what a woman! Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were gleaming! And by God, she's accepted the challenge. What a woman. Phew! What a shame I have to kill her.

P Sabres, Mr Smirnov. But before we start, you had better show me how it is done. I am not at all familiar with these things. In fact I never gave a sabre a second look.

S Well, it's like this. You hold it this way. My God, what eyes she has, they are setting me on fire.

P This way?

S Yes, that's right. The main thing is, keep cool, aim where you want to cut, and don't let your arm jump.

P My blood is up. I won't be happy till I've drilled a hole in that skull of yours.

P What's the matter? Scared?

S That's right, I'm scared.

P Oh, come on, what's the matter with you?

S Well, Mrs Popov, I like you.

P Good God! He likes me does he? The gall of the man!

S Listen Mrs Popov. Are you still mad at me? I'm in the devil of a temper myself, of course. But then, you see - what I mean is - the fact is ... well, is it my fault, damn it, if I like you. I could fall in love with you.

P I hate you.

S What a woman! I never saw anything like it. Oh, I'm lost, I'm done for.

P Leave here or I'll kill you.

S What bliss to die of a wound that was inflicted by that little velvet hand! To die gazing into those enchanting eyes. I'm out of my mind. Think for one second. Then decide. Will you marry me?

P We will fight it out, get going. No excuses! No delays! We will fight it out.

S I have fallen in love. I love you. I love you as I have never loved before. I'm on my knees like a fool and I offer you my hand, dear lady. Will you or won't you? You won't? Then don't!

P I didn't say anything.

S What?

P Oh, nothing, you can go. Go! I detest you! But just a moment. Oh, if you knew how furious I feel. My fingers have gone to sleep holding that horrid thing. What are you standing around for? Get out of here.

S I'm pretty disgusted with myself - falling in love like a kid, going down on my knees like some moongazing whippersnapper. I'll never forgive myself for this.

P Take your hands off me, I hate you.

(kiss)

Luka (entering) Mercy on us! Holy Saints above!