

# **Dead Souls**

By Nikolay Gogol

Episode One

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1.

*The sound of an empty road. Wind in the trees. We are outside.*

**Narrator** On the outskirts of a nameless Russian town in the middle of the nineteenth century, a carriage is flying through the night.

*Suddenly, as if conjured from the air, we hear the carriage. We hear the wheels thump to the ground.*

Its driver lashing the horses as if he were running from the very devil himself.

*Just as suddenly we hear the whips, imprecations and horses.*

And it's raining.

*Torrential rain. We hear the coachman curse the narrator.*

The carriage's leather blinds were pulled down, no light could be seen inside. Its occupant remained a mystery. The only evidence of his existence was the sound of a cane thumping the underside of the carriage roof and the constantly shouted command:

**Chichikov** Onward! Onward!

**Narrator** Indeed, as the carriage turned onto the main road into the town, two wheelwrights were heard to say 'Upon my soul, now who could that be'.

*Underneath and overlapping we hear two voices indeed saying, 'Upon my soul' and 'now who could that be'. Thumps, whips, whinnying, jangling of harnesses and the sound of the carriage coming to a halt.*

The carriage had stopped outside an Inn. Its side door opened and out stepped a man. Not too thin, not too fat. Not ugly, but not all that pleasant to look at either.

**Chichikov** *(middle distance, to the driver)* You take the bags in there, I'll speak to the proprietor.

**Narrator** His hair a middling shade of dull brown.

**Chichikov** *(testily, to the narrator)* Do you mind? *(to the driver)* No, you can stable the horses afterwards. The bags!

**Narrator** An insipid pallor to his skin, his teeth dull and yellowing, a faint odour of –

**Chichikov** Yes, *thank* you.

*Chichikov hurries into the Inn.*

**2.**

*Inside the Inn.*

**Narrator** His tail coat was attempting to be fashionable. His trousers cream coloured and unflatteringly tight.

**Chichikov** (*To his manservant*) How did he get in here?

**Innkeeper** Good evening, sir.

**Chichikov** Ah! Evening it is, my fine fellow, but is it good?

**Innkeeper** What?

**Chichikov** I said, 'Evening...' - it doesn't matter. I'm looking for a room.

**Innkeeper** Certainly, sir. If I could just have your name.

**Chichikov** Chichikov.

**Innkeeper** Bless you, sir.

**Chichikov** What?

**Innkeeper** Your name, sir.

**Chichikov** Chichikov

**Innkeeper** Bless you, sir.

**Chichikov** No no.

**Innkeeper** I'm afraid the police are very insistent. I will need a name.

**Chichikov** Chichikov.

**Innkeeper** Always come in threes don't they sir? Bless you again.

**Narrator** I think he's trying to say he's called Chichikov.

**Innkeeper** (*chuckles*) Why on earth would he want to do that?

**Chichikov** Because it's my name. I am Chichikov.

**Innkeeper** As you wish, sir.

**Narrator** The innkeeper was a tubby, portly, ruddy-faced man that suggested one or two nights spent with only a bottle of port for company.

**Innkeeper** Friend of yours is he?

**Chichikov** No, I've never met him before.

**Innkeeper** Well, if you would sign the register.

**Chichikov** Certainly, certainly. (*going over and signing*) I must say it's rather a relief to see another human face after so long travelling across some of the most benighted Ukrainian flatlands.

**Innkeeper** What's that funny smell?

**Chichikov** I can't smell anything.

**Narrator** Two days confined in a carriage had certainly done little for the stranger's personal odour.

**Chichikov** (*indignant*) It's not me!

**Innkeeper** Here on business are we sir?

**Chichikov** Business, yes I think you could call it that. Let's just say I have a small transaction to effect with a number of the local landowners. (*chuckles to himself*) Tell me, there are several large estates in the vicinity?

**Innkeeper** Certainly there are sir.

**Chichikov** Very good, very good. And the lands are worked by good quantities of peasant labour I suppose?

**Innkeeper** (*regretfully*) Ah, as in all Russia, yes sir.

**Chichikov** Capital, capital. And I dare say that this area is not immune to regular outbreaks of cholera and typhus?

**Innkeeper** Indeed sir, only last year I lost my dear old mother to that cruel disease.

**Chichikov** Excellent, excellent. Well this seems ideal. I shall be glad to be your guest. Now, I should like a morning room and an evening room. And a bedroom, oh and a dressing room. I require the sun in the morning but have no use for it in the day. My bath must be exclusively for my use and if possible I should like to eat behind a screen. My driver is stabling the horses just now but he will also need somewhere to lay his head.

**Innkeeper** Very good and a room for this gentleman?

**Chichikov** Who?

**Narrator** Oh thank you very much.

**Chichikov** No!

**Narrator** Oh.

**Chichikov** I don't know who he is. I told you.

**Innkeeper** I don't have an East-facing room, I'm afraid.

**Chichikov** Oh dear.

**Innkeeper** Nor a morning room.

**Chichikov** Ah well, I can make do.

**Innkeeper** Nor a dressing room, nor a private bath for that matter.

**Chichikov** Oh well...

**Innkeeper** An evening room will be difficult to arrange, the sun rises and sets where it will, and you'll eat at table like everyone else.

**Chichikov** So, a bedroom then?

**Innkeeper** Certainly, and your man can sleep with the horses.

**Narrator** Oh, no thank you!

**Chichikov** Not you.

**Innkeeper** I'll instruct him to bring your bags to your rooms, if you would step this way, Mr...

**Chichikov** Chichikov...

**Innkeeper** Well I never.

**Chichikov** (*going*) It's actually a very old Slavic name...

**3.**  
*Bedroom.*

**Narrator** Later that evening, having dined modestly on cabbage soup and sweet pastry, just a couple of sausages, and the smallest

serving of brains with peas available to him, a roasted fowl, some more cabbage, and a trifling handful of salted cucumbers, washed down with what he was told was wine, he undid his waistcoat buttons and returned happily to his room. Focusing with difficulty, he wrote into his pocketbook the names of the town Governor, the head of the Chamber of Commerce, and sundry other pieces of information acquired during dinner. And with that, he closed his eyes, and drifted immediately into sleep, snoring for all the world like some kind of farm animal.

**Chichikov** I wasn't snoring.

**Narrator** Oh you were.

**Chichikov** I wasn't even asleep.

**Narrator** Were too.

**Chichikov** No I wasn't No I wasn't. No back answers. (*Raspberry*)

**Narrator** And with those words, our hero closed his eyes and prepared for a good night's sleep.

*Silence.*

**Chichikov** Would you get out of my bed please?

**Narrator** Oh right.

**4.**  
*Morning. Street.*

**Narrator** The next morning Chichikov paid a visit to each of the various dignitaries whose names he had so cunningly extracted from the houseman. To each he had prepared a different mode of introduction. To the Inspector of the Medical Board he complimented the health of the townsfolk.

**Inspector** (*pleased*) We do our best, Mr...

**Chichikov** Chichikov.

**Inspector** Mr Chichikov. Or is it Dr?

**Chichikov** Oh please. Just Chichikov.

**Inspector** You know, when one's efforts so often go unrewarded it means quite something to be noticed by a man of such, if you will permit me, evident discernment and accomplishment.

**Narrator** To the Chief of Police, he railed sympathetically at drunkenness.

**Chief** (*regretfully*) Ah!

**Narrator** To the Liquor Franchisee he brought a bottle of aged turnip vodka.

**Franchisee** Aha!

**Narrator** The Director of Factories he 'inadvertently' called 'your excellency'.

**DofF** Thank you.

**Narrator** The archbishop he mistakenly called 'your Holiness'.

**Archbishop** Bless you.

**Narrator** By the time met the Vice-Governor his compliments had become quite extravagant.

**Chichikov** There is a quality to the air and water here that is quite unlike any other town in the whole of the world.

**Narrator** And by the time he met the Governor, they had become wholly implausible.

**Chichikov** When my carriage first entered your town I had the oddest sensation that I was entering paradise and that the wheels were rolling on a carpet of velvet.

**Governor** I think I can be justifiably proud of my road maintenance programme.

**Narrator** Nonetheless by lunchtime, Chichikov's name was a sweet taste on the lips of all the town's leaders, and he returned to his lodgings with pockets filled with invitations to dinner, and, most importantly, a letter of introduction.

**5.**  
*The Inn. Outside.*

**Serafin** Busy morning, sir?

**Chichikov** Your master has spent the morning working, Serafin. While you no doubt idled in the straw, he has been making contacts.

**Serafin** Who with, sir?

**Chichikov** Last night through a series of subtle ruses and without drawing undue attention to myself I managed to procure the names of all the town's leading figures.

**Serafin** Oh, that was you?

**Chichikov** What do you mean?

**Serafin** One of the waiters told me some stranger was poking his nose around. I didn't realise it was you.

**Chichikov** Is my carriage ready, Serafin?

**Serafin** Ready and waiting, sir.

**Chichikov** Good. Have it brought round to the front.

**Serafin** Where are we going, sir?

**Chichikov** While you spent an lazy morning luxuriating in the sights and smells of a rural Russian stable yard, I managed to acquire an introduction to one of the greatest and most noble men of the district, a man of land and distinction. A man by the name of Andrey Vasilyevich Manilov.

**Serafin** And why are we going there?

**Chichikov** Aha!

**Serafin** What?

**Chichikov** I said, 'Aha'.

**Serafin** Aha?

**Chichikov** (*testily*) I'm being mysterious.

**Serafin** But –

**Chichikov** (*Leaving*) We leave in ten minutes!

**6.**  
*The carriage in motion. Interior.*

**Narrator** The carriage bumped uncomfortably along a badly-kept road and, after bumping his head twice on the roof of the carriage –

*Bump.*

**Chichikov** Ow!



*Bump.*

**Chichikov** Ow!

**Narrator** Chichikov mentally penned a stern letter to the Town Governor

*Scratching of a fountain pen on paper.*

and then, remembering his comments about the velvet roads, mentally tore it up again.

*Tearing of paper. Chichikov thumps his cane on the roof of the carriage.*

**Chichikov** Onward! Faster! Onward!

**Narrator** The featureless scrublands of Western Russia hurried by the carriage windows. Hummocks, fir-groves, stunted scrawny young pines, the dead stumps of old –

*A window blind being pulled sharply down.*

Why did you close the window?

**Chichikov** I'm trying to think.

**Narrator** But I'm doing description. I'm being vivid.

**Chichikov** It's not vivid, it's boring.

**Narrator** Oh how wounding.

**Chichikov** I'm just saying –

**Narrator** No don't worry about me.

**Chichikov** I just want a little peace and quiet.

**Narrator** Oh fine. I won't say another word.

**Chichikov** I don't mean to be rude.

**Narrator** It's fine. I won't say anything until we reach Manilov's Estate.

*Pause.*

**Chichikov** Well... thank you. (*Settles down.*)

**Narrator** The carriage pulled up at Manilov's Estate –

*We hear Chichikov groan.*

- and the estate's owner came out to meet them at the door.

**7.**

*Outside Manilov's dacha.*

**Manilov** My dear friend, esteemed *monsieur*,

*A flurry of Slavic kissing.*

I hope you will not take it amiss if I say that we are deeply honoured by your presence on our modest estate. No, curse my foolishness and dash that word from your mind: merely honoured? No no. I do you a *grave* injustice, sir, a *grave* injustice, a man of your ostentatious accomplishments - permit me at least to say, sir, that the Manilov Estate welcomes you as a brother, as a friend, as a guest, as a Lord, as a companion of honour and a knight of the garter, as a thing of light and air and a creature of the vasty deeps. You would do me, sir, the greatest honour with which it will have been my fortune to have been blessed if you would follow me to my sitting room.

*Walking.*

**Chichikov** I take it you received the Governor's letter?

**Narrator** (*incredulous*) What did it say?

**Manilov** Indeed I did, dear friend, indeed I did and if I should tell you that ever I received a finer compliment than your visit then may you denounce me, and publish the opinion abroad that Andrey Vasilyevich Manilov is a liar - a liar sir!

**Narrator** Andrey Vasilyevich Manilov was not a liar but he was probably the most mind-bogglingly dull man in the whole of Russia.

**8.**

*The sitting room.*

**Manilov** Do me the honour of making yourself at home, sir.

**Chichikov** Why, thank you.

**Manilov** Ah, don't sit there, dear friend.

**Chichikov** What?

**Manilov** The seat covers are in need of repair.

**Chichikov** Ah.

**Manilov** Nor there, for that matter, my dear sir.

**Chichikov** No?

**Manilov** I have doubts about the solidity of the legs.

**Chichikov** Would you care to suggest where I might sit?

**Manilov** Indeed not, sir! To think that I should presume to tell a man of such rare gifts and preternatural distinction where to sit? Come come, sir, you must think me an awful oaf! My estate is yours, my chairs are yours, you must sit where you will, sir.

**Chichikov** Right. Here?

**Manilov** Ah, no, I have a plan to strengthen the back of that one but it is a plan that has yet to come to its fullest point of realization.

**Chichikov** (*Getting annoyed*) Look –

**Narrator** (*Whispers*) The one by the window.

**Chichikov** What?

**Narrator** The one by the window.

**Chichikov** Right. (*Sits.*) Thank you.

**Manilov** An excellent choice, dear friend. The finest chair in the room. I hope you will not think me amiss, dear sir, if I assert that it was the exquisiteness of your soul that drew you there.

**Chichikov** You are very kind.

**Manilov** No indeed, I am not.

**Chichikov** Well, may I say that you are.

**Manilov** No, sir, I forbid it.

**Chichikov** Sir, do permit me to insist that you are, after all, very kind.

**Manilov** Permit me not to permit you, esteemed guest. Kind I am not.

**Chichikov** Right.

*Silence. A ticking clock.*

**Manilov** Would your friend care to sit down?

**Narrator** Ooh, // rather!

**Chichikov** No he's fine.

**Manilov** As you wish, revered visitor.

**Chichikov** He's not actually my friend.

**Narrator** I'll just stand in the corner then.

**Chichikov** He just travels with me.

**Narrator** Don't worry about me.

**Chichikov** I don't know why...

*Pause.*

**Manilov** *(as if to a dog)* Lucky thing, to accompany such a miracle among men.

*Pause. Clock ticking.*

**Chichikov** You must have a considerable acreage on this estate.

**Manilov** I can see I am in the presence of a man of acute perception. I do indeed have a considerable acreage.

**Chichikov** It must take quite some tending, I should think.

**Manilov** You are precisely right, dear friend. Quite some tending indeed!

**Chichikov** And rather a lot of serfs to pay the soul-tax on.

**Manilov** Away with you, magician! Did you not come with the Governor's personal recommendation, I would suspect you of espionage. *(With wonderment)* I do indeed have 'rather a lot of serfs'.

*Pause. That clock again.*

**Chichikov** ....Tell me – dear sir – were your serfs badly affected by the typhus outbreak this last winter?

**Manilov** Ah, indeed sir, several of the souls in my possession passed on in that terrible terrible winter.

**Chichikov** Really? ... How ... many? ...would you say?

**Manilov** How many?

**Chichikov** Yes. How many? I mean, roughly. Or exactly.

**Manilov** I've no idea. Quite a number. I'll ask my steward. He should know.

*He rings a bell.*

May one enquire what interest my revered friend has in such matters?

**Chichikov** Oh, idle curiosity. A certain humanitarian interest -

**Manilov** I must demand that you forgive my impertinence in asking.

**Steward** You rang, sir.

**Manilov** Yes, my good man, how many of our peasants died in the winter?

**Steward** How many?

**Manilov** Roughly.

**Chichikov** Or exactly.

**Steward** I'm sure I don't know, sir.

**Chichikov** I should like to know precisely how many souls have died since – well, shall we say – since the last census? I would like a detailed list of them by name.

*Pause.*

You keep estate records, I presume.

**Steward** We do, sir.

**Chichikov** Well go and examine them.

**Steward** Sir?

**Manilov** Well don't look at me, my good man, do as our incomparable visitor asks!

**Steward** Sir.

*He leaves.*

**Manilov** I blush to think that you were forced to witness such insolence

**Chichikov** Not at all.

**Manilov** That display of mutiny.

**Chichikov** Think nothing of it.

**Manilov** If you wish him beaten, he shall be beaten.

**Chichikov** Don't do that on my account.

**Manilov** You are a rare and perfect specimen. I saw but a glimpse of that before.

*Silence.*

**Chichikov** It is one of the many burdens of land that one must still pay tax on the serfs in one's possession even after they have passed on.

**Manilov** It is. It is.

**Chichikov** There are, after all, another eight years until the next census. Eight more years of tax for the privilege of having a peasant work your land even when he is, shall we say, no longer in 'available for work'.

**Manilov** One rails at the injustice but what can one do?

**Chichikov** Well indeed.

*Pause. Chichikov is very uncomfortable having to come to the point.*

I might be able to help you there.

**Manilov** You might?

**Chichikov** Yes.

**Manilov** How?

**Chichikov** Well, I could buy your peasants from you.

**Manilov** Buy my peasants? My serfs? But, you know that I need them to work the land.

- Chichikov** No, not those ones. The dead ones. I want to buy the dead ones.
- Pause.*
- Manilov** Forgive me, best and most beloved of all possible guests, but I'm not sure I understand you.
- Chichikov** I propose that we draw up a Deed by which I take legal possession of all of those souls who have died since the last census.
- Pause.*
- Which bit of this aren't you getting?
- Manilov** You will have to indulge me, sir, I don't have the education that is evident in your every last gesture, down, permit me to say, to the very smallest movement of your littlest finger – but do you mean to say that you want a Deed of Purchase for my dead serfs?
- Chichikov** There is no need to announce on the Deed that they are dead. I think it wise, indeed in the fullest sense most respectful of the law, to carry them on the Deed of Purchase just as they are on the census. That is, as living.
- Manilov** Ah!
- Narrator** And with that 'Ah!' Manilov tilted his head to one side and pursed his lips. It was an expression he had once seen on the face of a government minister and it had impressed him as a most intelligent way of arranging one's features; he had mentally resolved to do likewise should the appropriate situation arise. The situation had just arisen.
- Chichikov** Sorry, he does this.
- Narrator** On Manilov's face, however, the expression implied intestinal difficulties.
- Chichikov** He's not my friend.
- Manilov** You will forgive me for wondering what the summit of all humankind, may I say, your sublime self, would gain from such an arrangement. It appears to me that you are offering to pay a considerable sum in tax while gaining nothing of any value in return.

**Chichikov** Nothing of value? Dear friend. Have I failed to convey what it means to me to know your hospitality, your friendship, your conversation?

**Narrator** *(laughs)*

**Chichikov** (Shut up) I am a stranger in these lands and yet you have welcomed me in as a friend. Is it too much to imagine that I might wish to do you some small service in return?

**Manilov** Permit large salty tears to run down this old face, dearest and most celestial of acquaintances.

**Chichikov** Permission granted, dear friend.

*Both cry great tears of undying friendship.*

*(extracting himself)* It remains only to agree a price for these souls.

**Manilov** A price, sir? A price? Kick these old legs from under me if I even contemplate setting you a price. Away with you and your price. I shall *give* you these poor souls, sir, and what is more I shall pay the notary fees myself.

*They collapse into each other's arms again.*

**9.**

*Outside the house.*

**Manilov** The documents will be drawn up by the end of the week. And is there any other small service that I may offer by way of thanks perhaps for your very existence on this mere clod of earth?

**Narrator** Oh for God's sake.

**Chichikov** Well there is one thing. There's someone I should like to look in on, I think he lives in these parts. Sobakevich. Do you know him?

**Manilov** Not well, to my undying shame.

**Narrator** Come *on*. It's cold.

**Chichikov** He's an old friend but for the life of me I cannot recall his address. I don't suppose –

**Manilov** I will give directions to your driver myself. Dear friend.

**Narrator** My legs are tired.



**Manilov** Of course, of course, in you go.

*Chichikov and the Narrator get into the coach.*

**10.**

*Inside the coach. Manilov speaking through the window.*

**Manilov** I am a sentimental old fool, sir, and run me through with a beef skewer if I say otherwise.

**Chichikov** Good bye.

**Manilov** There can be nothing good in parting from such an exemplar of all that is noble and fine.

**Chichikov** Still – cheerio.

*Thumps on the roof of the carriage.*

Onward!

*The carriage moves off.*

**Manilov** Watch out for those clouds, they seem nasty.

**Chichikov** Will do.

**Manilov** (*receding*) Though would they dare open on such a man? Man did I say? A divinity rather. A spirit from another world sent to us in human form...!

*Music*

**Narrator** But Chichikov was not listening. Instead he stared at the list of dead serfs prepared by Manilov's steward. 246 names printed neatly on several sheets of stiff cartridge paper. His plan was proving easier than he could have imagined. It had formed in his mind two years beforehand, and developed in months of careful planning. Chichikov's idea was to –

*Music.*

**Chichikov** What are you doing?

**Narrator** I'm explaining your plan.

**Chichikov** I can do that.

**Narrator** You can't explain it.

**Chichikov** I can explain it better than you can.

**Narrator** (*laughs*) I don't think so.

**Chichikov** Well I'm going to.

**Narrator** Well not if I explain it first.

**Chichikov** Well I thought of it first.

**Narrator** Well so what?

**Chichikov** Well it's my plan so I get to explain it.

**Narrator** Well when did that become a rule?

*Beat.*

**Chichikov** You ask me questions. I'll answer them.

**Narrator** Okay.

**Chichikov** First you need to know that there's a census every ten years.

**Narrator** And would I be right in thinking that the number of serfs you have at the time of the census determines how much tax you have to pay every year for the next ten years?

**Chichikov** That's not a real question. That's just a disguised explanation.

**Narrator** Sorry.

**Chichikov** But in essence yes. If your serf dies a year after the census, you have to keep paying tax for the next nine years.

**Narrator** How does that help you?

**Chichikov** Well, if I can persuade these landowners to transfer ownership of these dead serfs to me –

**Narrator** They won't have to pay the tax any more.

**Chichikov** But, you're asking, what do I stand to gain?

**Narrator** What do you have to gain, Pavel Ivanovich?

**Chichikov** Good question. Because this is where it becomes brilliantly clever.

**Narrator** Sounds exciting. Tell me more.

**Chichikov** Well, there are certain financial institutions that loan money.

**Narrator** Banks.

**Chichikov** Yes I know banks loan money.

**Narrator** So: Banks.

**Chichikov** This isn't a bank.

**Narrator** What isn't a bank?

**Chichikov** The Board of Trustees is not a bank. It's a financial institution where you can raise a mortgage, offering land, serfs or an estate as security.

**Narrator** I see.

**Chichikov** And if I can go to them with one thousand serfs,

**Narrator** One thousand?

**Chichikov** Absolutely, they won't consider anything less.

**Narrator** Piddling small change.

**Chichikov** Hardly worth having.

**Narrator** Waste of time.

**Chichikov** Well yes.

**Narrator** Don't come in here with your forty-one serfs.

**Chichikov** Shut up.

**Narrator** And what do you get for your one thousand serfs?

**Chichikov** With a security of one thousand serfs they will loan me 100,000 roubles.

**Narrator** *(whistles appreciatively)*

**Chichikov** And in nine years time when I fail to repay the loan, they take possession of my security.

**Narrator** The dead serfs.

**Chichikov** They keep the serfs, I keep the money. 50,000 roubles. Think of it. I will be the light in women's eyes; a figure of admiration and terror. I will be the reflection of all men's aspirations and fears. I shall want for nothing. I shall be rich. I shall be kind. I shall be terrible.

*Pause.*

**Narrator** Hm.

**Chichikov** What's that Hm for?

**Narrator** No, nothing, great! Good plan.

**Chichikov** No. Spit it out.

**Narrator** Well... it's just ... don't get me wrong ... 50,000 roubles is nice to have.

**Chichikov** Well.

**Narrator** Well it does seem like an awful lot of trouble to go to just for 50,000.

**Chichikov** Oh you think so do you?

**Narrator** Yes. A bit.

**Chichikov** So, just to sum up: my plan, the most brilliant con-trick of the nineteenth century actually, *you* – (*going very childish*) Mr Uninvited Stupid Head – *you* think it's an (*silly voice*) 'awful lot of trouble'.

**Narrator** There's not need to get petty about it. I was just saying.

**Chichikov** Well don't, alright?

**Narrator** Okay fine, forget I said anything.

**Chichikov** Good.

**Narrator** Good.

*Pause. Thunder.*

As Manilov had warned, the skies opened and soon sheets of rain were lashing the side of the coach.

*Indeed so.*

- Chichikov** Now you see, *that's* petty-minded.
- Narrator** And soon it became equally obvious that the driver had got himself completely lost.
- 11.**  
*The driver's seat. Rain lashing, wheels thrumming, horses clopping and the sound of whips and bridles.*
- Selifan** Come on you donkeys!
- Whip crack.*
- I know you can hear me!
- Whip crack.*
- Narrator** The driver, Selifan, was talking to the horses.
- Selifan** Are you alright in just that?
- Narrator** No I'll be fine.
- From inside we hear the cane thumping on the roof.*
- Chichikov** (*muffled*) Onward! Onward!
- Selifan** You hear that? That's your master and mine so put your back into it.
- Whip crack.*
- Narrator** Actually it is very wet isn't it.
- Selifan** When Mr Chikichov says do something, you do it! Mr Kichikov is a mover and a shaker, you just need to look at him, so if you don't want to end up on a Frenchman's table, (*whip crack*) go like lightning.
- Narrator** The horses however ignored him.
- Horse 1** Oh the indignity.
- Horse 2** Uncouth creature.
- Narrator** They had their minds on other things.
- Horse 1** I could have been in the circus you know.

**Horse 2** Really?

**Horse 1** Mm, I had a try out with Chiarini.

**Selifan** (*distant*) Oh you want a taste of the whip do you?

**Horse 2** *Did* you? What happened?

**Horse 1** I pranced, I cantered, I did my Marengo, I was on *fire*.

**Horse 2** What did they say?

**Horse 1** Too old. Can you believe it? Me! Yes, it's a foal's game now.

**Selifan** (*distant*) Teasing me are you?

**Horse 2** Poor thing.  
Of course -  
I was up for a Broadway show, you know.  
(*Comic pause for effect*)  
They wanted me to do some hoofing.  
(*Cracks up laughing*)  
Hoofing!  
(*Laughing*)  
D'you get – Hoof –

**Horse 1** (*with a tear*) Oh the indignity.

*A sudden thumping and rattling. We hear a window slide down and Chichikov shouting up at the driver.*

**Chichikov** What's going on?

**Selifan** Beg pardon, sir?

**Chichikov** What happened to the road?

**Selifan** Don't know what you mean sir.

**Chichikov** This is a field.

**Selifan** No this is the road sir.

**Chichikov** No it isn't. It's a ploughed field.

**Selifan** Is it?

**Narrator** Yes it is actually.

*Pause and we hear the carriage bumping violently across the furrows.*

**Selifan** Well it's possible I suppose.

**Chichikov** Turn back. We can rejoin the road over there.

**Selifan** Right you are sir.

*The horse equivalent of a handbrake turn.*

**Chichikov** Not like that! You'll tip us over!

**Selifan** Don't you worry about that sir. She's steady as a rock this one.

*Great crashing sound as the carriage tips over. Shouting, clattering of reins and harnesses, horses in fear. Then the noise subsides.*

Now that is not supposed to happen with this model.

**Narrator** In fact, this was a well-known design fault with the Model T Imperial Britzka and would lead to it being withdrawn from sale five years after the events of this story.

**Chichikov** *(picking himself up out of the mud)* You drunken idiot.

**Selifan** Drunk, sir? My word of honour, sir, is it so wrong to break a little bread, sir? That's all it was sir. Break a little bread with a good man, sir. Good bread, with a good man, and a little drop of something to wash it down. Is it so wrong sir?

**Chichikov** Look at me.

**Selifan** Oh that'll wash off in the rain.

**Chichikov** Oh smashing.

**Selifan** I can see that you're upset, sir, and I would be too. If it would make you feel better, perhaps you had better teach me a lesson. I deserve to be punished, sir. Beat me.

**Chichikov** Well you're very lucky I don't.

**Selifan** Thrash me, sir, beat me black and blue. I turned over your carriage. I am no good, I need to be beaten.

**Chichikov** No I –

**Selifan** First the whip, and then the stick –

**Chichikov** No really I -

**Selifan** And then you can ask in the big house there if they have a hot poker that they'd lend you to shove –

**Chichikov** That won't be necessary, Selifan – what did you say?

**Selifan** A hot poker to shove –

**Chichikov** What big house?

**Selifan** Over there, end of the field sir.

**Chichikov** Sobakevich's estate. That must be it. Come on, let's go. We can pick the carriage up in the morning.

**Narrator** You want me to walk across the field?

**Chichikov** Absolutely. Five minutes that's all.

**Narrator** In these shoes?

**Chichikov** Oh come on.

**12.**  
*Wind and rain.*

**Narrator** Eventually, after trudging over the field for about a day –

**Chichikov** Oh don't exaggerate –

**Narrator** Well it was almost an hour –

**Chichikov** It was half an hour at most –

**Narrator** Everyone in galoshes except muggins here –

**Chichikov** We came to a -

**Narrator** That's my line.

**Chichikov** Well get on with it and stop moaning.

**Narrator** I mean, where did you get galoshes?

**Chichikov** We came to –

**Narrator** We came to a large wooden door.



*Chichikov knocks.*

I could get foot rot or something.

*Chichikov knocks.*

**Chichikov** Hello!

*Door opens a crack. A servant with a candle in one hand and a growling dog in the other.*

**Dmitry** Who's that?

**Selifan** I told you I'd get us here, didn't I? And here we are.

**Chichikov** Hello. Is Sobakevich at home?

**Dmitry** Sobakevich?

**Chichikov** Yes, your master.

**Dmitry** I don't have a master, sir.

**Chichikov** Of course you do. Who owns this house?

**Dmitry** The mistress, sir.

**Chichikov** The mistress? (*To Selifan*) So you got us there did you? (*To Fetinya*) Well would you fetch her, please?

**Dmitry** It's very late.

**Chichikov** I know it's late, would you kindly tell her that a traveller – tell her a traveller -

**Narrator** A businessman –

**Chichikov** A wealthy businessman travelling with his –

**Narrator** Retinue

**Chichikov** His retinue – requests a place to rest his head.

**Dmitry** You're covered in mud.

**Chichikov** Yes, we had a small accident.

**Dmitry** Who else have you got there?

**Selifan** How do.

**Narrator** Hello.

**Dmitry** (*To Chichikov*) What wrong with his feet?

**Narrator** Don't get me started.

**Chichikov** Would you fetch your mistress please?

**Dmitry** You wait here sir.  
*He goes.*

**Selifan** I said I got us here, sir, didn't I? You be my witness. And I have got us here. Only here isn't there, that's the only thing. If there was here, then I'd have said I got us there but I said I got us here –

**Chichikov** Shut up. You are an idiot.

**Selifan** Can't disagree sir.

**Chichikov** So what is this place?

**Narrator** Somewhere warm I hope. I need to dry my socks.

**Chichikov** Oh stop moaning.  
*Door opens again.*

**Korobochka** Hello?

**Chichikov** Good evening, madam.

**Korobochka** My man tells me you are gentlemen of affairs?

**Chichikov** My name is Chichikov, dear lady. I and my retinue had an unfortunate accident in this dreadful weather and we would be most grateful if we could -

**Korobochka** Of course, of course, do come in.

**13.**  
*Inside. The other side of the door. A large hallway.*

**Korobochka** Dmitry! Take these gentlemen's coats.

**Dmitry** Yes Madam.

**Chichikov** Thank you so much, my dear Madam er....

**Korobochka** Korobochka.

**Chichikov** Korobochka, you are surely an angel sent from heaven.

**Korobochka** Not at all, my pleasure. No, I imagine what you'd like is a nice hot bath!

**All** (*general agreement*)

**Korobochka** Wouldn't we all? Can't get the stove to work. I haven't had a hot bath since my husband died.

**Chichikov** Oh I am sorry to hear that.

**Korobochka** Not at all, the sorrow has finally passed I'm pleased to say.

**Chichikov** I am most glad. And how long have you lived here alone, may I ask?

**Korobochka** Let me see now, Mr Korobochik would have died, must be two – no – yes – two weeks ago.

**Chichikov** Oh.

**Korobochka** Now what you gentlemen would like, I imagine, is a nice meal before bed.

**All** (*general agreement*)

**Korobochka** We got nothing in. Weren't expecting visitors.

**Chichikov** I quite understand, my dear lady. It has been a long day and perhaps if your housemaid would prepare some beds for us, we could continue this charming conversation in the morning.

**14.**  
*A bedroom.*

**Narrator** And indeed a manservant prepared us all a lovely bed. Which was a bit of a squeeze, but very comfortable nonetheless.

**Korobochka** Now is there anything I can have my man bring you up?

**All** No no...

**Korobochka** Because it's no trouble.

**Chichikov** Please don't give us another thought, dear lady.

**Korobochka** I must say it's very nice to have a proper gentleman staying in the house. I haven't had a gentleman in this house since poor Mr Korobochik died.

**Narrator** In the whole two weeks?

**Korobochka** Not a one. Will you require another blanket?

**All** No, no...

**Korobochka** And what about you, dear sir. Would you like me to tickle your feet?

**Chichikov** I'm sorry?

**Korobochka** Mr K would never get to sleep without a little tickling of the feet.

**Chichikov** You are inordinately kind, dear sweet lady, but I think I shall go without.

*Pause.*

**Korobochka** You're sure now.

**Chichikov** Absolutely.

**Korobochka** Well good night then.

**All** Good night.

**Korobochka** This corridor can be drafty. Would you like the door open or closed?

**Chichikov** Closed, I think.

**Korobochka** Of course, well, good night then.

**All** Good night.

*The door is closed firmly. We hear the latch click. Pause.*

**Chichikov** Perhaps – you would close it – after you've gone out?

**Korobochka** Of course, dear sir, as you wish.

*She opens the door.*

**Korobochka** Well good night then.

**All** Good night.

*She leaves and shuts the door behind her.*

**Chichikov** Good night.

**All** Good night.

*Silence.*

**Narrator** And soon the room was quiet and still, disturbed only by the sound of Chichikov's bestial snoring.

**Chichikov** Go to sleep.

**15.**

*Morning. Same room.*

**Narrator** Light streamed in to the small back bedroom and Chichikov gazed in wonder at the estate revealed so spectacularly by the morning sun.

**Korobochka** I see you're gazing in wonder at the estate revealed so spectacularly by the morning sun.

**Chichikov** Ah!

**Korobochka** Did I startle you?

**Chichikov** I thought I'd locked the door, that's all.

**Korobochka** (*flirtatiously*) I have my ways.

**Chichikov** Ah, charming.

**Korobochka** I came to tell you that my girl has laid out breakfast for you.

**Chichikov** Oh good.

**Korobochka** When you're ready to come down.

**Chichikov** Certainly, just finishing my ablutions.

**Korobochka** I'll be waiting for you, Mr Cheekychops.

**Chichikov** Right. What?

**16.**

*Dining room.*

**Narrator** (*with his mouth full*) Oh! In the dining room a terrific spread - sorry I wasn't expecting - (*swallows*) that's better. I'll start again. (*Starts again*) In the dining room a terrific spread was laid out for breakfast. Mushrooms, baked pies, dumplings, cheese tarts, doughnuts, pancakes, fritters with onion, fritters with poppy seeds, fritters with anchovies and best of all fritters with curds.

**Chichikov** Fritters with curds? Where?

**Narrator** Oh.

*Pause.*

**Chichikov** Greedy pig.

**Korobochka** (*sailing by*) Do help yourself my dear Mr Cheekychops.

**Chichikov** Ha ha, magnificent! (Don't leave me alone with her.) Good lord, egg pie.

**Narrator** Euww.

**Chichikov** It's delicious.

**Narrator** No thank you.

**Korobochka** I hope you won't mind if I steal Mr Cheekychops away from you.

**Narrator** (*giggles*) Not at all.

**Chichikov** Oh -

**Korobochka** I understand you're in business, Mr Cheekychops?

**Chichikov** That's quite right, madam. In a manner of speaking.

**Korobochka** You see now I am cursing myself that I sold my honey to the merchants. I am sure you would have bought it from me.

**Chichikov** Well, actually -

**Korobochka** And I suppose you'll be wanting hemp. But I'm afraid I've sold most of that too.

**Chichikov** Oh dear.

**Korobochka** I have perhaps half a pood.

**Chichikov** Half a -

**Korobochka** Pood.

**Chichikov** Goodness.

**Korobochka** However, I simply will not let you leave here with only my semi-pood. I must have something you wish to buy.

*Beat.*

**Chichikov** Tell me, madam. Your serfs, your peasants: how are they?

**Korobochka** How are they?

**Chichikov** I mean to say: have you suffered much loss in their numbers?

**Korobochka** Oh yes, sir, incalculably so, incalculably. Why only yesterday my blacksmith exploded.

**Chichikov** Exploded?

**Korobochka** Indeed he did, sir. Just as though something were burning within him, a jet of blue flame burst from his chest, and he was entirely consumed by it, black as coal he was by the end, my dear friend. Black as coal. And he was such a *good* blacksmith too.

**Chichikov** The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. So you've really been hit hard, haven't you? Oh dear. What a shame.

**Korobochka** And still I have to pay the wretched soul tax, though their souls are, let us speak frankly, no longer in my possession.

**Chichikov** Indeed. Oh the injustice. But then perhaps you should let me have them?

**Korobochka** Let you have them? You must try a pancake or two. Dip them in melted butter, my dear sir.

**Chichikov** Yes – thank you, later – let me have them.

**Korobochka** But how can I let you have them, Mr Cheekychops? They're dead.

**Chichikov** Exactly why you should transfer them to me, Mrs Korobochka.

**Korobochka** Call me Nastasya. You wouldn't have me dig them out of the ground would you my dear sir? (*laughs*) Have a flan.

**Chichikov** No, no, we would merely transfer ownership of them on paper. The souls would still be registered as living.

**Korobochka** You do know they're dead?

**Chichikov** Yes. I know they're dead.

**Korobochka** Dead as mutton sir. They're not coming back.

**Chichikov** Yes. I know what dead means.

**Korobochka** And you want them?

**Chichikov** Yes. Call it an idle fancy but I am touched by your plight.

**Korobochka** (*unconvinced*) Oh?

**Chichikov** Yes, so if you give me your dead serfs –

**Korobochka** Give?

**Chichikov** Well, I suppose I could buy them.

**Korobochka** I'm not sure. You see I've never sold a dead person before.

**Chichikov** Well no of course you haven't! How could a - dear sweet charming lady like yourself have had occasion to sell a dead person.

**Korobochka** I have sold living serfs, of course. Two of the dearest girls to a priest it was. I did not receive their full value. They could weave napkins and all sorts.

**Chichikov** Yes, indeed, dear Mrs Korobochka –

**Korobochka** Nastasya, please.

**Chichikov** Nastasya, but these were living servants.

**Korobochka** Indeed, and living servants can be so very mischievous. Who knows what the going rate is for dead ones?

**Chichikov** The going rate? They're completely useless to anyone. There *is* no going rate.

**Korobochka** Well you must not blame them for that, dear sir, they *are* dead.

**Chichikov** I'm not blaming them!

**Korobochka** In any case, who's to say that having a dead peasant about the place might not come in handy (*beat*) in an emergency.

**Narrator** Chichikov wanted to say:



**Chichikov** You are an idiot!

**Narrator** Instead he said:

**Chichikov** I do understand your concerns.

**Korobochka** Perhaps you would rather buy some lard?

**Chichikov** No I really don't want to buy some lard. I want to buy your dead serfs.

**Korobochka** What is wrong with my lard?

**Chichikov** Nothing, nothing is wrong with –

**Korobochka** I'll have you know my lard is spoken of in hushed tones.

**Chichikov** I have no doubt –

**Korobochka** It has a smoky sweetness that is the envy of the district.

**Chichikov** And when I return I shall sing its praises to the Governor, now please –

**Korobochka** You know the Town Governor?

**Chichikov** I do indeed, madam. Indeed I dined with him and his delightful wife only two days ago.

**Korobochka** Well why did you not say so, my dear sir? Why of course you may take possession of my old serfs.

**Chichikov** Thank you madam.

**Korobochka** I think a nice round fifteen roubles would be a suitable sum.

**Chichikov** Fifteen roubles?

**Korobochka** It would seem a reasonable sum.

**Chichikov** I might say, madam, that Manilov was kind enough to give me his souls without charge.

**Korobochka** Manilov did?

**Chichikov** But, no matter, fifteen roubles it is.

**Korobochka** And I would be very grateful to you, dear sir, if you would ballyhoo my flans to the Governor.

**Chichikov** Consider them ballyhooed.

**17.**

*Carriage in motion*

**Narrator** And producing some legal paper from a box, Chichikov wrote while Korobochka went through the long list of serfs who had died the previous winter.

**Chichikov** Eighteen? All that fuss for eighteen serfs?

**Narrator** Every little helps.

**Chichikov** I paid fifteen roubles for these corpses.

**Narrator** And makes 264.

**Chichikov** She's a swindler that's what she is.

**Narrator** Only 736 to go.

**Chichikov** Sobakevich better have a good haul that all I'm saying.

**Narrator** 736 till the big thousand.

**Chichikov** And look at these names. 'Alexandr the Glazier'. 'Bobik the Builder'? She's making them up. Look at this 'Yuri Tekyurkhatov'.

**Narrator** Why have we stopped?

**Chichikov** Oh yes.

*Thumps on the roof with his cane.*

Onward, Selifan, onward!

**Narrator** I can hear voices.

**Chichikov** Oh take a look outside and see what the problem is.

**18.**

*Outside the carriage. Two carriages are facing each other on a narrow dirt road.*

**Narrator** The carriage had stopped because facing it on the narrow rural road was another carriage. It was more ornate than Chichikov's,

silk blinds at the windows rather than leather, and with a team of six horses to Chichikov's two.

**Selifan** What do you think you're playing at!

**Narrator** So far in this tale, I have not dwelt upon the lower class of character. I am perfectly aware of how repellent such ordinary folk are to decent people, and I hesitate to introduce them even now. But with the two carriages squared up to one another, a battle of wits ensued.

**Coachman** Didn't you hear me shouting? I told you to move to the

*The Narrator coughs loudly.*

right.

**Narrator** In the course of the debate that followed, these low fellows, I regret to say, used the full resources of the Russian language. Mindful, however, that there may be ladies attending this tale I shall do my best to spare their blushes.

*In what follows, the narrator 'bleeps' the asterisked sections. At first this is by a variety of coughs but perhaps the sounds could get more creative: whistles, raspberries, quacks, etc.*

**Selifan** No, why don't *you* move to the \*\*\*\*ing left, you \*\*\*\*\* son of a \*\*\*\*\*.

**Coachman** You drunk old \*\*\*\*\*, just you come over here and say that.

**Selifan** Drunk am I? You \*\*\*\*ing say that again, you \*\*\*\*ing little \*\*\*\*\*.

**Coachman** Oi \*\*\*\*! Just move your \*\*\*\*ing little \*\*\*\*\* of a coach, and let the big boys through.

**Selifan** Just you \*\*\*\*ing try it, you fat \*\*\*\*.

**Coachman** Right! You asked for this! Hold on ladies.

**Narrator** Taking Selifan at his word, the coachman marshalled his horses and drove straight at his rival's carriage, veering to the left at only the last minute.

*A terrible sound of thundering hoofs, jangling harnesses, and scraping and splintering wood against wood.*

As the two coaches passed, the curtain in the other carriage billowed out and Chichikov caught a glimpse of a woman.

*Everything slows down.*

Her golden hair caught in the daylight, her skin glowing with pale white light, a look of amused concern in her eyes and the beginning or end of a smile on her gentle pink lips.

**Chichikov** *(reverie)* Who is that?

*Time back to normal; the splintering finishes and the horses ride off in the background.*

*A knocking sound.*

**Narrator** *(from outside the coach)* I can't open the door.

**Chichikov** What?

**Narrator** It doesn't look very pretty from out here.

**Chichikov** Selifan!

**Narrator** Need a new paint job at least.

**Chichikov** *(Thumps on the ceiling)*

**Selifan** *(through the other window)* Afternoon.

**Chichikov** What have you done to my coach?

**Selifan** Terrible innit? If I catch that dirty little \*\*\*\*\* I'll give him a piece of my mind.

**Chichikov** You don't have enough to spare. That's all I need. In this kind of work you have to be unobtrusive. In – out – that's the plan. Gone before they know what's hit them. And thanks to Selifan, I now have the most recognisable carriage in Europe. Can you get us to a coaching house?

**Selifan** In no time. We'll ride like the wind, sir.

**19.**  
*Inn.*

**Narrator** And indeed we did, if the wind were a third-hand carriage with a scrape down one side, a door that doesn't work, driven by a drunken Ukrainian. But, true to his word, he found an Inn, where Chichikov went under an assumed name.

**Chichikov** Good afternoon, landlord, my name is ... Jim.

**Narrator** And also an assumed identity.

**Chichikov** I work for a.... big shop.

**Landlord** Good for you sir.

**Chichikov** Could I have some ale please.

**Landlord** What, you mean like beer?

**Chichikov** Yes. I drink beer. That's the sort of man I am.

**Narrator** Brilliant. You are now completely undercover.

*We hear, outside, a series of shouts and a carriage pulling up. It comes to a rather crashing halt. A voice shouts:*

**Nozdryov** Alt! (*roars with laughter*)

**Chichikov** Oh lord!

**Narrator** What is it?

**Chichikov** A man I met at the Governor's house. Nozdryov.

**Narrator** Ah!

**Chichikov** Hide me!

**Narrator** Too late!

*The door crashes open.*

**Nozdryov** Lock up yer daughters!

*Desultory cheer from the regulars.*

Boris! A drink for everyone still standing! And two drinks for the ones on the floor!

**Innkeeper** Coming up.

**Nozdryov** Well well well, look who it ain't.  
I spy with my little eye something beginning with C!  
Everyone's favourite steam locomotive!  
(*imitates steam train pulling away*) Chi-chi-kov, chi-chi-kov, chi-chi-kov etc. (*ad lib, eventually everyone in the bar joining in.*)  
To Chichikov!

*Everyone cheers.*

**Chichikov** Hello.

**Nozdryov** Not often you get that kind of welcome eh?

**Chichikov** No.

**Nozdryov** Be a pal and pay my tab. I lost every last cent I had at cards. I had to sell my carriage. Ended up hitching a ride with a chap called Bob. Bobbee! Five days at the fair. I was *this* close to making my fortune off those girlie-men! If I'd only had another fifty roubles I would have bought this Inn from out under the feet of Mr Boris. (*Crescendo*) Bo-ris! Bo-ris! Bo-ris! Bo-ris! Bo-ris! Bo-ris! Boris the Beer!

**Chichikov** How much did you lose?

**Nozdryov** Six or seven.

**Chichikov** That's not too bad.

**Nozdryov** Hundred.

**Chichikov** Kopecks?

**Nozdryov** Roubles. Kopecks are for children. I wouldn't even pick one up off the floor. And I pawned my watch! Hah, look at me, I don't know what time it is!

**Chichikov** You're lucky they stopped then.

**Nozdryov** Lucky? I was only getting started. I'd have won it back and more. That's real luck, my friend.

**Chichikov** But you didn't. You lost.

**Nozdryov** Strategy, dear boy, strategy! Now in Krasny, they *know* how to play cards. I used to know a man there: Captain Potseluyev. He'd clap his hands, 'another bottle of Bordello'. (He called Bordeaux Bordello.) The Funniest Man I Ever Met – fact! We'd start playing cards at 6.00. Next morning, they open up the bar, and if we're not still sitting playing, I'm a Dutchman and my name is Jan van der Hoove. And, by God, would we drink. They'd only kick us out when they'd run out of booze to give us. One night, get this, I drank seventeen bottles of champagne.

**Narrator** No you didn't.

**Nozdryov** Cross my heart and hope to die.

**Narrator** You *would* have died. It's not possible.

**Nozdryov** Care to make it interesting? One hundred roubles says I can drink 17 bottles. You bring them here, I'll drink them.

**Narrator** You haven't *got* a hundred roubles.

**Nozdryov** I will have! That and a king-size hangover!

**Narrator** You're just being silly.

**Nozdryov** Chicken! (*makes chicken sounds*)

**Narrator** Nozdryov was an inveterate liar, infamous around the Ukraine for his pointless pretences.

**Nozdryov** I once had a bright blue horse, you know!

**Narrator** His absurd exaggerations.

**Nozdryov** Yesterday I jumped over that barn!

**Narrator** His meaningless boasts.

**Nozdryov** I can kill a man with a pair of shoes!

**Narrator** And hours would pass without a single true word being spoken.

**Nozdryov** 'Tis said I came from the stars.

**Chichikov** (*very bored*) Oh really.

**Nozdryov** I have the power of second sight.

**Chichikov** How interesting.

**Nozdryov** I am immune to all known diseases.

**Chichikov** Very handy.

**Nozdryov** Only last year, cholera swept one way across my estate - typhus the other. Servants dropping around me. Did I cough once the entire winter? No sir!

**Chichikov** Well lucky old you.  
Wait a minute, did you say, your estate?

**Nozdryov** That's right.

**Chichikov** Does he have an estate?

**Landlord** He does, yes.

**Chichikov** What sort of size is this estate of yours?

**Nozdryov** It's hard to say. The forest continues for many miles and my lands finish at the end of it. I haven't to this day walked to the edge,

**Landlord** Well that's nonsense. Since when did you own that forest?

**Nozdryov** Oh nonsense, is it, you girlie-man? I bought that forest fair and square three days ago.

**Landlord** But you said you were at the fair three days ago.

**Nozdryov** Oh! And I suppose all of a sudden a fellow can't sign property deeds on a forest if he's 250 miles away!

**Landlord** No, he can't.

**Nozdryov** What say we get another drink?

**Chichikov** Certainly, a vodka?

**Nozdryov** You're twisting my arm – oh alright!

*Chichikov goes.*

**Narrator** There will be some who say, no one's really like that. But they're wrong. Idiots like this man are to be found everywhere. They may wear a different hat, a different suit of clothes, but the same loathsome, bullying braggarts may be found in every bar in the world.

**Nozdryov** Who are you talking about?

*Chichikov returns.*

**Chichikov** Two vodkas

**Narrator** Don't I get one.

**Nozdryov** Friend of yours?

**Chichikov** He's nobody.

**Nozdryov** Here's to us! Somebodies! Not nobodies! And not girlie-men!

**Chichikov** Your health!



- Nozdryov** Your health!
- They drink and slam the glasses down on the table.*
- Chichikov** Now, my dear friend, I am going to ask you a favour but before I do you must promise me you will say yes.
- Nozdryov** Well, what's the favour?
- Chichikov** I'll tell you, but first you must promise me you will agree to my request.
- Nozdryov** What about another vodka first?
- Narrator** *(reluctantly)* I'll get them.
- Chichikov** Do you agree?
- Nozdryov** Go on then, you have my word.
- Narrator** And Chichikov explained his proposition, the souls (God rest them) that he wanted to buy and the financial benefit that would accrue to Mr Nozdryov, carefully avoiding any appearance of urgency or excitement. Nozdryov was clearly tempted and to complete the deal Chichikov explained the purity of his motives.
- Chichikov** I want merely, as a friend, to relieve you of the burden of taxation.
- Nozdryov** *(Roars with laughter.)* Pull the other one.
- Chichikov** *(flustered he rethinks)* Alright, well, perhaps that isn't quite the whole story. The truth is that I am engaged to a young lady – aristocratic, her carriage is pulled by six white horses – but her family have very high standards – as you can imagine – and they will not permit their daughter to marry anyone with less than a thousand serfs –
- Nozdryov** *(Roars with laughter)* Priceless! Priceless! You should go on the stage!
- Chichikov** *(angrily, but resigned, very confidential)* Very well. The real reason that I need these serfs is this. And you must promise not to tell a single soul
- Nozdryov** Word of honour.

**Chichikov** *(voice very low)* I have worked out a scheme where I can use these deeds of ownership on dead souls as securities against a substantial loan.

**Nozdryov** A loan?

**Chichikov** That's right. And by the time the loan needs repayment, I'll be miles away and the deeds will be worthless. And I will be 50,000 roubles the richer.

*Pause. Then Nozdryov roars with laughter again.*

**Nozdryov** I've never heard such a pack of lies in my life!

**Chichikov** But it's the truth!

**Nozdryov** Why would you go to so much trouble?

**Narrator** That's what I said!

**Nozdryov** For 50,000 roubles that a man might win playing cards? No no no, you'll have to do better than that, you lying hound!

**Chichikov** I'm not lying.

**Nozdryov** Seriously, though – and I say this to you as a friend – you are a liar and if I were your superior I'd have you hanged from the nearest tree! *(Roars with laughter.)*

**Chichikov** Well I don't care what you think. You have already promised, if you remember, to give me those serfs.

**Nozdryov** Not until you tell me the truth, you rascal!

**Chichikov** Alright, sell me the serfs if you don't trust me.

**Nozdryov** Sell them? And I suppose you'd want them at a bargain rate,

**Chichikov** They're costing you money. You're the one trying to get a bargain.

**Nozdryov** Not at all, not at all. I'll happily give them away. Buy a stallion from me and I'll throw them in as an extra.

**Chichikov** What would I want a stallion for?

**Nozdryov** I paid 10,000 for him, but he's yours for three.

**Chichikov** I'm not running a stud farm.

**Nozdryov** Pay me two now and I'll accept the other thousand next week, how's that?

**Chichikov** I don't need a stallion.

**Nozdryov** I'll throw in the light-chestnut mare.

**Chichikov** I just want those serfs.

**Nozdryov** Both horses, plus a month's supply of hay: two thousand. My final offer.

**Chichikov** No, absolutely not. I don't need any horses.

**Nozdryov** What about dogs?

**Chichikov** What about them?

**Nozdryov** Special dogs. 20 roubles the pair.

**Chichikov** How special?

*Pause.*

**Nozdryov** They can fly.

**Chichikov** No thank you.

*Pause.*

**Nozdryov** A barrel organ?

**Chichikov** No.

**Nozdryov** It plays the Marseilleise.

**Chichikov** Even so.

**Nozdryov** Well I suppose I'd better give them to you then.

*Starts dealing cards.*

**Chichikov** What are you doing?

**Nozdryov** Did *you* want to deal?

**Chichikov** What are you doing with the cards?

**Nozdryov** So we can play for my serfs.

**Chichikov** Why can't you just give me them.

**Nozdryov** I virtually am. You've seen my luck at cards. See? Look! The nine of clubs! Oh you devil of a card! Will I never be free of you?

**Chichikov** I really don't want to play cards.

**Nozdryov** Why ever not?

**Chichikov** I don't like cards.

**Nozdryov** I used to think you were decent. Now I see that you are a girlie-man.

**Chichikov** I am not a 'girlie-man'.

**Nozdryov** Yes you are. As girlie as a man can be.

**Chichikov** Just give me the serfs.

**Nozdryov** Not a hope! I was quite prepared to hand them over for free, and throw in my French barrel-organ at that. But now that I know you are a girlie man I won't part with them. Not for all the riches of the world.

**Chichikov** You made a binding agreement. Before witnesses.

**Nozdryov** What witnesses?

**Chichikov** Him.

**Narrator** Hello.

**Nozdryov** Him? He doesn't count.

**Chichikov** You are a liar, sir.

**Nozdryov** You take that back.

**Chichikov** I certainly shall not. I am a man who stands *by* his word!

**Nozdryov** Well I shall make you!  
*He draws a gun. Gasps from the drinkers.*

**Chichikov** Don't be a fool. Put the gun down.

**Nozdryov** Am I a liar?

**Narrator** Selifan! Selifan!

**Nozdryov** Tell me: am I a liar?

**Chichikov** I just wanted the serfs.

**Nozdryov** Tell me: am I a liar?

*Cocks pistol.*

*The door bursts open. In comes a military officer .*

**Officer** Which one of you is Mr Nozdryov?

**Nozdryov** Who's asking?

**Officer** I am an officer with the Imperial Guard

**Nozdryov** I'm Nozdryov.

**Officer** I have here a warrant for your arrest.

**Nozdryov** Arrest? What for?

**Officer** Shooting at the landowner, Mr Maksimov, while under a state of intoxication.

**Nozdryov** Nonsense. I don't even have a gun.

**Chief** ... What's that in your hand sir?

**Nozdryov** Oh *this* is a gun, yes. Thank the Lord. I managed to snatch it from the hand of this accursed gentleman... oh...

**Chief** Who, sir?

**Nozdryov** He was just here...

**20.**

*The carriage. Interior.*

**Chichikov** Onward! Onward!

*Music.*

**Narrator** While Nozdryov's attention was distracted the landlord had ushered us through the coal cellar and out to the safety of the carriage. As Chichikov ruminated on his lucky escape he had cause also to observe that in all other matters luck had turned against him. The easy success at Manilov's had turned into the poor return from Korobochka and nothing at all from Nozdryov.

Looking from the window he watched in the distance as another carriage made its lonely way through the fading light of a Ukrainian evening. A single lamp burned within the carriage and Chichikov watched it trace a journey past stumps and hedges. Where it was going, Chichikov would never know. Who was its occupant? What journey were they undertaking? For what purpose?

What Chichikov did not know is that the carriage contained the widow Korobochka and her destination was the estate at Manilov.

*We fly across the fields, wind whistling around us and enter Korobochka's carriage.*

Since her departure, a terrible suspicion had grown in her mind.

**Korobochka** What did he want those serfs for?

**Chichikov** (*Remembered*) 'I am touched by your plight.'

**Korobochka** Tommyrot!

**Chichikov** (*Remembered*) 'They're completely useless to anyone.'

**Korobochka** Poppycock! *He* seemed to want them badly enough

**Narrator** The thought that she had perhaps been swindled out of something truly valuable had become unbearable.

**Korobochka** Exactly. Unbearable.

**Chichikov** (*Remembered*) 'Manilov was kind enough to give me his souls without charge.'

**Korobochka** Manilov will know what's going on.

*The carriage pulls away from us.*

**Narrator** Although the encounter between Korobochka and Manilov would eventually cause Chichikov no small trouble, his fortunes were about to lift. Though it did not appear so at the beginning.

**21.**  
*A study.*

**Sobakevich** (*roars*) What??

**Chichikov** I'm sorry, Mr Sobakevich. I was led to believe that the Governor might have written a letter of introduction for me.

**Sobakevich** Oh you're him!

*Picks up the letter.*

**Chichikov** That's right.

**Sobakevich** I don't need the Governor to tell a good man from the bad! Impertinence.

*Screws up the letter.*

So. You're Chichikov, are you?

**Chichikov** That's right, sir.

**Sobakevich** And who's this long drink of water?

**Narrator** I'm nobody.

**Sobakevich** What's wrong with your leg?

**Narrator** I forgot my galoshes.

**Sobakevich** What sort of a name is that? 'Chichikov'?

**Chichikov** It's a Slavic name, actually, a rather old and –

**Sobakevich** I'll say what's Slavic and what's not in my house.

**Chichikov** Right you are.

**Sobakevich** Well, since you're here, you'd better sit down.

**Chichikov** Thank you very much.

*They sit.*

**Narrator** Sobakevich was a stout man. Very tall. And was wearing a large dark brown fur coat, with matching trousers. The legs and arms were too long for him and, together with his huge beard, the effect was to make him look exactly like a great bear.

**Sobakevich** *(roars)* What?

**Narrator** *(scared)* Nothing.

*Pause.*

**Chichikov** (*making conversation*) I was having lunch with the head of the Chamber of Commerce. He spoke very highly of you.

**Sobakevich** Did he?

**Chichikov** He did. Such a splendid man.

**Sobakevich** Who?

**Chichikov** The chairman.

**Sobakevich** Well he may seem splendid to you but he is a fool the like of which the world has never seen.

**Chichikov** (*Having another go*) No man is without his imperfections, of course, but take the Governor, for instance. Now he really is an outstanding man.

**Sobakevich** If you like brigands!

**Chichikov** The Governor?

**Sobakevich** Let him loose on the high road and he'd cut your throat for a kopeck.

**Chichikov** ...I hadn't seen that side of him, I must confess.

**Sobakevich** He and the Vice-Governor together are Gog and Magog. I will not have their names mentioned in this house! The only decent man in the town is the Public Prosecutor –

**Chichikov** Oh yes, a most excellent man.

**Sobakevich** And even he's a swine. Where's my thief of a manservant?

*He leaves. Pause.*

**Narrator** (*whispering*) Sobakevich's study was entirely inhabited by small squat pieces of furniture in dark brown wood. It was almost as if Sobakevich had chosen to furnish his study in small wooden replicas of himself. As if the whole room were an emanation of his massive personality.

*Sobakevich returns and sits.*

**Sobakevich** Now. That fool of a Governor says that you have a business matter to discuss.

**Chichikov** I can come back another –



**Sobakevich** Spit it out, man!

**Narrator** And so, haltingly, and with terror in his eyes, Chichikov explained his proposition, this time adding the new detail:

**Chichikov** I am erecting a monument to the serfs of the Ukraine and I wish to furnish it with names.

**Narrator** Sobakevich sat listening impassively, looking like he had been issued with a human face that was still only at an experimental stage. His eyes did not flicker. His expression did not change. As Chichikov was speaking he began to wonder if there were even a soul in that body, or if it were simply a mountain of flesh.

*Pause.*

**Sobakevich** So. You need dead serfs.

**Chichikov** Well I don't 'need' them as such –

**Sobakevich** Either you need them or you don't.

**Chichikov** Then I suppose after a fashion, I do.

**Sobakevich** Then I suppose 'after a fashion' I am willing to sell.

**Chichikov** You are?

**Sobakevich** Certainly. They're of no particular use to me.

**Chichikov** How many souls are we talking about.

**Sobakevich** Since the last census? (*Looks it up*) 187 souls have been lost on this estate.

**Narrator** Mentally, Chichikov shouted:

**Chichikov** Woo-hoo!

**Narrator** Out loud, he said:

**Chichikov** Most interesting. Perhaps we could fix a price for the lot?

**Sobakevich** Shall we say one hundred roubles per soul?

**Narrator** Outwardly, Chichikov shouted:

**Chichikov** You're having a laugh!

**Narrator** Inwardly, he said:

**Chichikov** That's a trifle steep.

**Sobakevich** What??

**Narrator** (Sorry, I got them the wrong way round.)

**Sobakevich** Take it or leave it. It's all the same to me.

**Chichikov** Perhaps we've forgotten the nature of the merchandise here. I was thinking rather more in the nature of eighty kopecks per soul.

**Sobakevich** Don't be absurd.

**Chichikov** I'm not being absurd, sir.

**Sobakevich** If you find yourself some halfwit prepared to sell you registered serfs at eighty kopecks a piece, good luck to you but not here.

**Chichikov** Forgive me, sir –

**Sobakevich** I dare say if you go south you might be able to buy a few useless layabouts for eighty kopecks. But every one of my souls is the genuine article. Yes indeed. Take Mikheyev, the carriage-maker. Not a carriage passed through his workshop that didn't come out sprung to perfection - and it would last, mind you! He'd do the lacquering himself. And the varnishing.

**Chichikov** (*Cautiously*) Ye-es, but –

**Sobakevich** And what about Stepan Probka, my old carpenter?. You'd have to go a long way to find another to match him. The Russian Infantry wanted him. I said no. This high he stood, built like a battlement. Eighty kopecks indeed!

**Chichikov** Yes but - they're all dead.

**Sobakevich** I know they're all dead. You think I'd sell you such men when they were alive?

*A pause of bafflement for Chichikov and QED for Sobakevich.*

**Chichikov** What about a rouble fifty?

**Sobakevich** For a man like the cobbler, Telyatnikov, who would make you a pair of boots that last ten years?

**Chichikov** He's not making boots now though is he?

**Sobakevich** More's the pity! More's the pity!

**Chichikov** Two roubles. I really can't go any higher.

**Sobakevich** I tell you what I'll do. Seventy-five roubles a soul, in cash, but only because I've taken a liking to you.

**Chichikov** Two roubles.

**Sobakevich** 'Two roubles' 'two roubles'! You parrot! Come back to me with a real offer, then we'll talk.

**Chichikov** Two roubles, that's my final offer.

**Sobakevich** Fifty roubles per soul, that's mine.

**Chichikov** Then I'm afraid my business here is concluded. Thank you for your hospitality.

*Gets up to go.*

**Sobakevich** You drive a hard bargain sir. But I drive harder! I will accept ten roubles per soul.

**Chichikov** Certainly not.

**Sobakevich** Five then, you vulture.

**Chichikov** Two roubles fifty I said and I shall not add a kopeck more.

**Sobakevich** You have a boiled turnip for a heart, sir. At least give me three roubles each.

**Chichikov** Sorry. No can do.

*Pause.*

**Sobakevich** Well then. Because I have taken a liking to you, I shall accept your offer, you poisonous snake. It means a considerable loss to me, of course, but damn me if I cannot help giving pleasure to my fellow man.

**Narrator** Mentally, Chichikov was delighted:

*We hear samba music. Chichikov whoops, he hollers, he trills and dances around the room.*

**Narrator** Outwardly, he remained calm.

**Chichikov** I'll have the deed of purchase drawn up in the morning.

**Sobakevich** I'll write out the list of souls myself, you hound of hell.

**22.**

*Walking back to the carriage. Exterior.*

**Chichikov** Selifan? Your master is a genius.

**Selifan** I know that sir.

**Chichikov** I could see he was going to buckle.

**Narrator** Right.

**Chichikov** These men, they act tough, but when they meet someone with a real eye for business, they back down pretty soon.

**Selifan** Is that right, sir?

**Chichikov** When you've been in business as long as I have –

**Narrator** What – a week?

**Chichikov** (*Ignoring him*) When you've been in business as long as I have, you pretty soon learn how to size up your opponent. I took one look at Mr Sobakevich and I thought, this man is all hot air. One jab and he'll pop.

**Selifan** So where to now sir?

**Chichikov** Back to town. Onward! Onward!

**23.**

*The Carriage. Interior.*

**Chichikov** 187 new souls. That makes 451 all together.

**Narrator** (*Very bored*) Yes.

**Chichikov** Did you see the way I looked him in the eye?

**Narrator** Yes I did.

**Chichikov** Do you remember what I said?

**Narrator** Yes I do.

**Chichikov** I said, 'I'm afraid my business here is concluded.'

**Narrator** Yes I know.

**Chichikov** Oh he knew he'd met his match. You could see it in his eyes.

**Narrator** Oh I am so bored.

**Chichikov** I stood my ground. /// I stared him in the eye. I said 'Two roubles and fifty, you mollusc! You worm! I won't pay you another kopeck so long as I live, and I'm prepared to fight to the death! Because I am Chichikov! (*fades out*)

**Narrator** (*overlapping from the ///*) Chichikov was in high spirits for the whole of the three-hour journey back to town. He would perhaps have been less ebullient if he had known that shortly after his departure, Sobakevich received a second set of visitors that evening.

**24.**  
*Sobakevich's study.*

**Sobakevich** And what the devil do you two want?

**Manilov** Incomparable sir, permit me to –

**Korobochka** Have you had a visitor here this evening?

**Sobakevich** And what the devil business is it of yours, miss?

**Manilov** We crave your forgiveness, dear superlative sir -

**Korobochka** Did he buy something from you? Something unusual?  
Something you've never sold before?

*Pause.*

**Sobakevich** You'd better sit down. What's this about?

**25.**  
**Narrator** The next day, Chichikov awoke and went off to the Chamber of Commerce to register the change of ownership of his souls. As he passed from window and desk to office, he would sometimes say:

**Chichikov** I hope to transport all of my serfs to Kherson.

**Narrator** To others he would indicate:

**Chichikov** It's a fine estate I have out there. But you don't get the same class of soul out there.

**Narrator** And to all he would urge:

**Chichikov** I beg you: please do not breathe a word about my souls.

**Narrator** So that naturally, within hours, everyone in town knew about Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov, the Kherson landowner, and his souls.

**26.**  
*'Vox Pops'. All separate, with different ambience, different accents.*

**Narrator** Excuse me, sir. Have you heard anything about Mr Chichikov's serfs.

**Man** Yes I did hear something about that. I say good luck to him. If I had that kind of money, I'd probably do the same.

---

**Woman** I don't like it. They come over here and they steal our souls. I mean it's not right is it?

---

**Old Man** I heard it was 400.

**Old Man 2** 500 I heard.

**Narrator** Where did you hear that?

**Old Man 2** Yevgeny in the coffee shop.

**Old Man** Yevgeny don't know nothing.

**Old Man 2** He says he saw them.

**Old Man** The serfs?

**Old Man 2** Paraded through the street he said.

**Old Man** He don't know nothing

---

**Man 2** My question is: if he takes all them serfs, are we going to have a shortage? Cos if we are, I don't think that's fair.

---

**Woman 2** He must be bloody loaded, scuse my French.

---

**Man 3** 1000 serfs? Very nice. Course it's small change to a man like Chichikov I reckon. Oh yes, these guys they like to splash it about a bit.

---

**Old Man** What a millionaire, you think?  
**Old Man 2** No it was another word.  
**Old Man** What's bigger than a millionaire?  
**Old Man 2** Yevgeny had this word.  
**Old Man** I don't know why we're listening to Yevgeny all of a sudden.  
**Old Man 2** Gazillionaire. That's it. Chichikov's a gazillionaire, he reckons.  
**Old Man** Is a gazillion more than a million?  
**Old Man 2** Oh yep. Definitely.

---

**Woman** I think he's quite dishy.  
**Narrator** Do you?  
**Woman** Yeah. I heard he's a bit of a stallion, you know what I mean?  
**Narrator** Chichikov?  
**Woman** Yeah.  
**Narrator** *Really?*  
**Woman** I was talking to this woman in the baker's who seemed to know.

---

**Korobochka** I just want to know what's going on. We sold our souls. Who did we sell them to? What's he going to do with them?

**27.**  
*Street sounds. Summer. Birds*

**Narrator** News whipped through town like fire in a summer forest and everywhere livened the spirits of the townpeople. The thought that they had in their midst a Kherson landowner, a romantic and a gazillionaire to boot made them feel that their town had been somehow blessed. Lovers felt a little closer that summer; children played wilder games in the streets; everyone walked a little taller, spoke a little louder, and held their opinions with greater confidence because Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov was in their town.

Every morning would bring calling cards, anonymous love letters, requests for advice, invitations, exhortations and introductions to the most exclusive houses in town.

*A party in progress.*

**Chief** I will not hear of it, Pavel Ivanovich.

**Chichikov** I really have to go.

**Archbishop** But you can't desert us, Pavel Ivanovich. The Kherson lands will wait. Surely you won't miss the Midsummer Procession.

*General pleading.*

**Chief** Or the Harvest Pumping?

*Cries of enthusiasm.*

**DofF** The Festival of the Sun!

*Pleas and exhortations.*

**Chichikov** Absolutely not, dear people, I must return to my Estate.

*Disappointment.*

**Chief** Mr Chichikov, as Chief of Police, and, I hope, a friend, I urge you in the strongest possible terms, to accept the Governor's invitation to the ball on Friday. It is the height of the Ukrainian social calendar. People have come from Poltava, Kiev.

**Chichikov** I really should be heading back. That Estate won't farm itself!

**Chief** And hundreds and hundreds of the most beautiful women in the region.

**Chichikov** Did you say Friday?

**Narrator** Chichikov!

**Chichikov** I suppose I *could* cancel a few things.

**Narrator** Pavel!

**Chichikov** Oh alright then.

*Celebration.*

**Narrator** He wasn't ignoring me deliberately. The whirlwind around him, he must have found it difficult. Sometimes I wouldn't get to talk to him for a whole evening. No, I'm sure it wasn't deliberate. And anyway, we'd always – Selifan and I – get to see him at the end of the evening as we'd carry him back to the Inn.

28.

*Night. Street. Chichikov is absolutely wankered.*

**Chichikov** Cellphone. Cellophane. What's your name again?

**Selifan** Selifan, sir.



**Chichikov** Oh yeah, oh yeah.

**Narrator** Not so loud.

**Chichikov** (*whispering*) Tomorrow morning I want to inspect my serfs. I want them all standing in formation in front of the Inn. And you better tell them that I tolerate no disobedience.

**Narrator** We're almost there. Almost there. Just keep the noise down.

**Chichikov** I will not keep the noise down. I am Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov! The Kherson Landowner!

*Shutters fly open.*

**Woman** Do you know what time it is? What on earth do you – is that Pavel Ivanovich?

**Chichikov** At your service, my dear woman, and good night to you.

**Woman** (*simpering*) And a very good night to you, Mr Chichikov?  
(*Giggles girlishly.*)

**Chichikov** I have had a very good night! I shall have many good nights! I am the Kherson landowner! I am Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov!

**Narrator** No I don't think it was deliberate. And his presence really did seem to lift everyone's spirits. The priest saying goodnight with his bells thought that they had sounded fuller and brighter in the last few weeks.

*We hear church bells tolling midnight.*

Up in another bedroom, on the other side of town, a lieutenant, trying on four pairs of shoes he'd had made for him, walked up and down in them, declaring that no boots had been so exquisite nor fitted so well as they had since Pavel Ivanovich had come to town.

*We hear stentorian snoring.*

The centre of these attentions had made a decision to leave at the weekend. He could have left earlier but, he reasoned, there's only one opportunity you get to be the guest of honour at the Governor's ball.

## **29.**

*Exterior. The Governor's mansion. A ball in progress. A small orchestra is playing inside. Laughter and conversation and the chinking of glasses can be heard drifting out onto the lawn as*

*Chichikov's carriage comes to a halt on the gravel drive leading up to the house. This whole sequence should be very fluid; Chichikov on the move the whole time. Imagine that he is wearing dark glasses and a sharp suit.*

**Valet** Evening sir!

**Chichikov** Good evening, Yakov.

**Valet** Great honour to have you with us, Mr Chichikov sir.

**Chichikov** Thank you, Yakov.

*He walks up the steps towards the house.*

**Woman** Well hello, Pavel Ivanovich.

**Chichikov** Good evening, madam.

**Woman** Do you dance? I should like to mark my card with your name, Mr Chichikov.

**Chichikov** Get in line, baby. Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov marks his card for no one.

*The door is opened for him.*

**Butler** Good evening sir.

**Chichikov** Evening Fyodor.

**Butler** Grisha! Tell the Governor the guest of honour has arrived!

**Chichikov** Good crowd is it, Fyodor?

**Butler** Everyone is here sir.

**Chichikov** The head of the Chamber of Commerce?

**Butler** Of course.

**Chichikov** The Director of Factories?

**Butler** He was among the first to arrive, sir.

**Chichikov** The Chief of Police?

**Butler** Everyone sir.

*The Governor bustles in.*

**Governor** Pavel Ivanovich, most honoured guest! Welcome, welcome! Fyodor, what are you thinking of? Take the gentleman's coat and hat.

**Butler** Sir.

**Governor** We're so pleased you could join us.

**Chichikov** Only too happy to show my face for a bit.

**Governor** Will we not have the pleasure of your company long?

**Chichikov** Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov has a great number of calls upon his time. I'm sure you understand.

**Governor** *(Hiding his disappointment)* Naturally, we are very fortunate to have you in our town at all, dear sir. The party is in the ballroom, sir, if you would care to accompany me.

*Walking.*

**Chichikov** Sure. Lead on.

**Governor** Everyone's terribly excited that you're coming. You've really put our town on the map. People have been coming in from miles around.

**Chichikov** That's understandable.

**Governor** It's just through these doors.

**Chichikov** How do I look?

**Governor** Exquisitely turned out as ever, sir.

**Chichikov** Let's go in.

**Governor** Oh and some old friends are here to see you. Korobochka, Manilov and Sobakevich.

**Chichikov** *(thrown)* What?

*The doors are thrown open and Chichikov, slightly wrong-footed now, is thrust forward. The conversations cease and the orchestra comes to a halt.*

*(For reference, I am imagining a large bright ballroom, with a grand staircase leading from the double doors which run from*

*floor to ceiling down into the room where the guests are gathered and the orchestra is playing.)*

**30.**

*We are still in that frozen moment but now at the other end of the hall.*

**Narrator** Before Chichikov arrived, the festivities had been conducted with a kind of reserved hysteria. In anticipation of his arrival, all conversations were held lightly, ready to be dropped at a moment's notice. Most of the guests had found excuses to remain near the main doors. Women refused all offers of dances and moved awkwardly around the room. There was a pretence at gaiety, though everyone knew the ball would only begin when the guest of honour arrived.

When the great doors opened to reveal him, a hush descended on the room. The orchestra at once forgot to play and all eyes turned towards him.

*Pause.*

**Chichikov** Hello.

*Beat. Then everyone surges towards Chichikov, voices, women's voices especially, calling 'Pavel Ivanovich! Pavel Ivanovich!'.*

**Governor** Please! Please! Pavel Ivanovich, our honoured guest, cannot stay all evening.

*The crowd groan with disappointment.*

But he tells me he will do his best to get round everyone in the room before he goes.

*The crowd cheer.*

**Narrator** And Chichikov began to move through the room, spreading smiles of joy as he went. These smiles were infectious; it was impossible not to be swept up in these ever widening circles of laughter and happiness. Even I was soon engulfed in the happiness pulsing from the lone figure passing through the crowd.

**31.**

*Front of the hall again. Chichikov is meeting and greeting a succession of guests. First in line is the Chief of Police.*

**Chief** Very great honour to have you in our town sir.

**Chichikov** I'm happy to be here, Nikolay, happy to be here.  
And what's your name, Miss?

**Elyena** It's Fyodorovichkina, Mr Chichikov.

**Chichikov** Very pretty name. Call me Pavel.

**Elyena** Oh thank you. I wonder if you would sign this – it's for my sister?

**Chichikov** Pleased to, Fyod. And what's her name?

**Elyena** It's... also Fyodorovichkina.

**Chichikov** There you go, kid.

**Director** Good evening, sir. It's Dmitri Andreyevich, the director of  
factories, I don't know if you remember –

**Chichikov** Course I do.

**Director** I wonder if you'll have time to visit our new factory development  
in the Northern lanes?

**Chichikov** Nice offer Dmitri.

**Director** We shall all miss you when you go, Pavel Ivanovich.

**Chichikov** Likewise, Dmitri, likewise. (*low voice*) Ah.

**Korobochka** How very nice to see you, Mr Cheekychops.

**Chichikov** Mrs Korobochka, and Mr Manilov I see.

**Manilov** I would not have you think I joined willingly in this ambush, my  
best beloved and mathematically sublime friend.

**Sobakevich** We've got a couple of questions to ask you.

**Chief** Something wrong, Pavel Ivanovich?

**Chichikov** Nothing at all! Old friends! (Let's talk outside.)

**32.**  
*Outside. The lawn.*

**Korobochka** You said it was an act of charity.

**Sobakevich** You wanted those souls for some monument to serfdom.

**Manilov** I did form the impression that you took on those souls in gratitude for my company.

**Korobochka** This smells fishy.

**Chichikov** We're by the ornamental pond.

**Korobochka** We've rumbled you, Mr Chichikov.

**Chichikov** Have you?

**Sobakevich** We know your game.

**Chichikov** You do?

**Manilov** My esteemed colleagues believe – though be assured, august acquaintance, that this is a belief that I do not share – that you are a conman.

**Chichikov** (*blanches*) A con-man?

**Korobochka** We want to know the real reason you've been collecting these dead serfs.

**Sobakevich** Come on! Spit it out! We know you're hiding something.

*Pause.*

**Chichikov** Very well. I suppose I had better let you in on my secret.

**Korobochka** I knew it.

**Chichikov** Ever since I was a boy my mother doted on me. I was her perfect boy. Everything I did delighted her, and she would always tell me that I would one day be a landowner. Well, two months ago, I received word (*break in the voice*) that mother was dying. Well I panicked, I thought, my mother will not go to heaven without seeing her son as the landowner she always wanted. So I devised this scheme with the dead serfs. I had intended to return to my mother's sickbed to show her the roll-call of souls in my possession. I just wanted.... (*emotion*) I'm sorry ... I just wanted my mother's last memory of me was as a success. (*Sobs*)

**Sobakevich** (*Starting aggressively*) That is the most ... beautiful story ... I have ever heard.

**Manilov** I had placed you in the starry firmament. I had no notion just how high you twinkle.

**Korobochka** Pavel Ivanovich, I feel very ashamed. I thought you acted selfishly. I had even begun to think this might be some enormous bank fraud.

*Chichikov laughs somewhat hysterically.*

I was wrong.

**Chichikov** Shall we go back inside? (You suckers, thought Chichikov to himself.)

*He chuckles.*

**33.**

*Doors thump open, we're back in the ball.*

**Guests** Pavel Ivanovich, we've missed you! Where have you been? (etc.)

**Governor** Thank goodness you've returned. We've been waiting to begin the dancing.

**Chichikov** Old friends, that's all. Let the dancing begin.

**Governor** Ladies and Gentlemen, please take your places for the quadrille!

*The orchestra strikes up a quadrille.*

**Chichikov** Mrs Korobochka?

**Korobochka** I would be delighted.

*The couples whirl around. We stay with Chichikov and Korobochka and as they whirl we occasionally catch the narrator trying to speak.*

**Narrator** ...ichikov! ... where have you been ... worried sick ...

**Korobochka** Who *is* that man?

**Chichikov** Nobody. A hanger-on.

**Narrator** ... leave now ... going to be trouble ... spotted Nozdryov ...

**Chichikov** Leave me alone!

**Korobochka** What's he saying?

**Chichikov** I have absolutely no idea!

**Korobochka** It sounded like he was saying 'Nozdryov'. Who's that?

**Chichikov** Nozdryov?

*Under the music some shouting can be heard. It is Nozdryov, standing at the top of the stairs into the ballroom, calling out drunkenly, 'Pavel! Pavel!'.*

**Narrator** For the second time that evening, conversations were abandoned and all eyes turned towards the door, where there seemed to be some kind of commotion.

*The orchestra, once again, comes to a halt. There is a silence.*

**Chichikov** (Gasps) It's Nozdryov.

*Nozdryov makes his way drunkenly down the main staircase from the doors into the ballroom. He never gets all that near and his voice rings out hollowly in the silence.*

**Nozdryov** Pavel, you rogue!

**Governor** I don't know who you are sir, but will you kindly stop talking to our honoured guest in that disrespectful manner. This is Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov.

**Nozdryov** Oh yes! Your honoured guest! Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov! The Kherson landowner!

What have you told them, Pavel Ivanovich?

What have you told them?

**Governor** What ever is the fellow babbling about? Someone remove him.

**Nozdryov** Told you about his lands, has he?

**Governor** I do apologise Pavel Ivanovich. (To Nozdryov) We're quite aware of his extensive property, thank you. We do not need your assistance.

**Nozdryov** Oh yes, I stopped at the Inn on my way here –

**Governor** We can all see that!

*Laughter.*

**Nozdryov** And they told me all about his lands – and the hundreds of souls he's going to have working them.



*Comes a little closer.*

But did you tell them what's *really* special about those souls, Pavel?

Did you tell them?

You all know what he's been buying to farm his estate?

**Chichikov** Governor, stop him. Shut him up.

**Nozdryov** I'll tell you.

*(Shouting)* Dead souls!

That's what he's buying!

**Governor** What on earth is he talking about, Pavel Ivanovich?

**Chichikov** *(speechless)*

*The crowd shift uncomfortably.*

*Chichikov runs.*

**Governor** Stop him someone.

**Narrator** Chichikov! Chichikov!

**Nozdryov** Tell them, Pavel. Tell them all.

*The words echo around the room.*

Dead souls!

Dead souls!

***End of episode one.***