

Dead Souls

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Episode Two

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Prologue

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!

You all know what he's been buying?

You know what he wants working his land?

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?

Nozdryov Dead souls!

Dead souls!

Chichikov runs for it.

Governor Stop him!

We hear a terrific crunch and a yell as Chichikov is rugby-tackled to the ground.

Manilov Oh I do hope they won't hurt him.

Governor Certainly not: he is an honoured guest.

Another unspeakably violent act.

We will simply keep him in a temporary holding facility until such a time as he can refute these absurd allegations in the proper manner.

Another punch. Mild crowd applause.

1.

A gaol. Rats scurrying, water dripping, you know the kind of thing.

Narrator In the east side of a nameless Russian town in the middle of the nineteenth century, Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov – businessman, traveller, entrepreneur – sat forlornly in prison.

Chichikov Well it's not strictly prison.

Narrator It's as good as.

Chichikov It's a police cell. It's a 'temporary holding facility'.

Narrator In the east side of a nameless Russian town in the middle of the nineteenth century, Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov sat forlornly in a temporary holding facility.

Chichikov Thank you.

Narrator Prior to his trial and almost certain execution.

Chichikov What are you talking about?

Narrator Oh I suppose haven't heard.

Chichikov Heard? Heard what?

Narrator Everyone's meeting at the police chief's house. They're deciding what to do with you.

Chichikov What do you mean, 'do' with me?

Narrator Well there a sizeable body of opinion that wants to see you hanged.

Chichikov Oh my God.

Narrator Don't worry. They're in the minority.

Chichikov Well thank heaven for that.

Narrator The rest think that's barbarous.

Chichikov Good for them.

Narrator They want you shot.

Chichikov Shot?

Narrator Simple, effective, virtually painless.

Chichikov I can't die. I'm too young. I've got plans. I have potential. *I have so much to give.*

Pause.

Narrator Have you?

Chichikov Yes.

Narrator No but have you though?

Chichikov Yes I have!

Narrator This is *you* we're talking about.

Chichikov You've got to help me.

Narrator What can I do?

Chichikov Get me out of here.

Narrator Oh no no no.

Chichikov What?

Narrator No can do.

Chichikov Why not?

Narrator I just tell stories. I don't get involved. We're very strict about that.

Chichikov No exceptions?

Narrator *(reading from a small book)* 'Only in the case of authorial delinquency or fatal narrative droop.'

Chichikov What if I promise to be good.

Narrator What do you mean?

Chichikov Get me out of here and I'll turn over a new leaf.

Narrator No more schemes. No more deception.

Chichikov You'll see a new Chichikov.

Pause.

Narrator I'll see what I can do.

Chichikov Just get me out of here.

Narrator leaves.

Prisoner Can I come too?

Chichikov Eurgh. No.

2.

Chief of Police's front room.

Narrator Indeed, over at the police of chief's house, the case of Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov was being deliberated on, weighed up, scrutinised and debated by the very finest minds that the town could muster.

A great babble of voices.

Inspector I say he is a wizard! From another dimension!

Franchisee Are you blind? Look at his eyebrows. Those are the eyebrows of an anarchist!

Director If a man walks like a Belgian and talks like a Belgian, I say he *is* a Belgian. A Walloon spy for the Catholic persuasion!

Babble of voices rises in dispute.

Chief Please, please, we can't all talk at once. Let us examine the facts. (a) We are currently holding a man who goes by the unlikely name of Mr Chichikov.

Derision.

(b) This so-called Chichikov has been in our local area for the last month trying to buy dead souls (may the angels keep and preserve them).

Huge outraged babble of voices.

And (c) he has not been able to give a satisfactory account of his reasons for making these purchases.

Korobochka He said he was [xxxx].

Manilov He told me he was [xxx].

Sobakevich He led me to believe he was [xxx]

Chief The question that we need to answer are: who is this man? And what is his purpose with our beloved dead souls (may God have mercy on them)?

Babble of voices.

Inspector He's a wizard!

Franchisee An anarchist!

Director A spy!

Chief's Wife None of us is safe!

Chief Don't worry yourself, Elyena, he's safely under lock and key. And the key's right here with me. Look.

He jangles the keys.

Governor But who *is* this monster?

Postmaster Goodness me, goodness me, but haven't you worked it out yet?

Narrator It was the postmaster who spoke with this quiet confidence, pulling a small box of snuff from his pocket as he did so, and half opening the box in a way to make it clear that no one else was getting anyway.

Franchisee (Yes, I've noticed that.)

Chief What do you mean, Ivan Andreych?

Postmaster I should have thought it was obvious.

Chief Well, spit it out.

Postmaster The man you have in your cells can be none other than the celebrated Captain Kopeykin.

Murmur of ignorance.

The Captain's story is a sad one, though shot through with heroism and human feeling. Let's just say it is only a matter of time before one of our great storytellers commits his story to eternity.

Narrator Hah!

People shush him.

Postmaster The story begins at an ending. The end of the campaign of 1812. Oh they were terrible days, my friends. Our Russian Motherland wept for her brave fallen children. And in those glorious days, let's just say none fought more bravely than Captain Kopeykin. Valiant he was, indomitable.

We hear the sounds of battle. Bugles, gunfire, charges and retreats.

But at such a cost, such a cost. In the final throes of battle a sly Frenchman's sabre cost him his right arm and his left leg, just below the knee. Would you stop doing that?

The sounds stop.

Narrator Only trying to help.

Postmaster Now in those days we had yet to establish the Veterans Hardship Fund, so Kopeykin, who was without family or other means of assistance, decided to make the long journey to St Petersburg with the idea of petitioning the Emperor for – let's just say – money.

St Petersburg!

Sounds of city life. Fairgrounds, chatter, music, market traders.

The Bronze Horseman! (I *said* – oh actually that's rather good, thank you) The Bronze Horseman! The Admiralty! The Nevsky Prospect! Sights – let's just say – calculated by that city's founders to dazzle the eyes and delight the mind. Oh but what intoxication they produced in the good Captain! A thousand spires, countless elegant bridges, apartments rising six, perhaps seven storeys into the clouds.

The city life gets quieter. Night time. Perhaps a mournful fiddler and a little rain.

Oh but this city costs, mind you. Oh yes, and to a man of Kopeykin's limited means, it was soon taking hungry bites of his savings. On his first day, he ate beef; on the second cheese; by the third he was boiling cabbage and let's just say drinking the juice. Yes – he was up against it and, discovering that the Emperor himself was not yet returned to the city, he resolved to pay a visit to the town Military Commission. He pulled on his

ragged uniform, pinned on his badges, jammed a wooden crutch beneath his arm, and soon he was rapping at the door.

Knock on the door. Door opens.

Adjutant Yes? Can I help you?

Postmaster Asked the duty officer.

Kopeykin I'd like to see the General please.

Postmaster Kopeykin replied.

Adjutant On what business?

Kopeykin I am a poor veteran of the Battle of Polotsk and I beg leave to request a war pension from the country for which I fought and let's just say lost so much.

Postmaster Answered Kopeykin proudly, flashing his medals.

Adjutant I see. Come back tomorrow and we'll see what we can do for you.

Postmaster And, greatly encouraged, Kopeykin heads back, stopping off at the Palkin Tavern

Sounds of a popular restaurant.

to eat a cutlet with capers and what the French call a pullet

Narrator (*almost inaudibly background*) No they don't.

Postmaster with all the trimmings, and a bottle of wine from the shores of the Caspian, before rounding the night off with an evening at the theatre.

*Voice heard on stage, indistinctly. Laughter and applause.
Fades and is replaced by daytime city noises, birds etc.*

Postmaster And so, the next day, once again Captain Kopeykin pulled on his ragged uniform, pinned on his badges, jammed a wooden crutch under his arm and set off for the Military Commission.

The door opens again.

Adjutant The General's very busy today. Come back tomorrow.

Door slams.

Kopeykin Busy?

Postmaster Thought Captain Kopeykin.

Kopeykin Of course he's busy. Why wouldn't he be busy? It would be a strange thing indeed if a General weren't busy.

Postmaster And, disappointed but not disheartened, he turned on his one heel and made his way back home, stopping off for a herring and a lemonade. But when the next day he returned to be told once again –

Adjutant The General is busy, come back tomorrow. (*Door slam.*)

Postmaster – he grew concerned.

Kopeykin How busy can this General be?

Postmaster He pondered.

Postmaster And his suspicions as well as his hunger were piqued by the delicious smell of let's just say roast goose drifting from the windows of the staff canteen. He knocked again.

Knock. Door opens.

Adjutant Oh it's you. I thought I told you –

Kopeykin But you don't understand. I'm down to my last few kopeks.

Adjutant You'll have to come back tomorrow.

Kopeykin But you don't understand! How am I to live?

Adjutant That's not the General's affair. Good bye!

Postmaster And he tried to close the door, but Kopeykin had his stick in the way and would not budge.

We hear the sounds of a struggle.

Adjutant This is an outrage sir!

Kopeykin How am I to live? How am I to live?

General (*coming to the door*) What the blazes is all this infernal racket?

Postmaster Said the General, coming to the door, wiping his lips with a fine linen napkin.

General Who is this man?

Adjutant Now you've done it.

Kopeykin I am a veteran of the Battle of Polotsk, Your High Excellency. I am completely without any means of support. In days I shall be turned onto the street without food or shelter. I have served valiantly in my country's defence and I demand that justice be done.

General Oh you do, do you? Well allow me also to demand: I demand that this man be escorted to the edge of the city and left to survive in the dark forests. Then we'll see what comes of demanding money from a General of the Russian Imperial Army.

Postmaster And they did just that. For two months, Captain Kopeykin wandered the forests alone, until he was seized by a group of robber barons. // And here is where the story begins to get very interesting... what? yes?

Chief Excuse me. Sorry, Ivan Andreych.
Did you say Chichikov is this – Captain Kopeykin?

Postmaster Indeed so.

Chief But didn't you also say that Kopeykin had an arm and a leg missing? Chichikov has all his limbs intact.

Long pause..

Postmaster I do feel a bit of a fool.

Groans.

What a clot. Sorry everyone! Red herring.

Chief I think we can rule out Kopeykin. Does anyone else have a theory?

The babble of voices is raised.

Narrator Who can understand the human mind? The most rational of men can abandon a belief in God, yet still fear that he will die if the fifth man to walk into a tavern has a beard. He will consider himself a student of politics and history but at the same time consult patterns in the stars. And the same jumble of idiocy and stupidity took hold of the assembled dignitaries. All of them by turns believed in rubbish, then in nonsense, before finally judging the truth to lie somewhere in between. Any thought, no

matter how idiotic, could take root in their brains. They were let's just say what the French call morons. A stupider bunch of ...

He stops because everyone has stopped talking and is staring at him. Someone coughs meaningfully.

I'll get my coat.

He leaves.

Chief's Wife Well!

Chief Anyone else with a suggestion? No? Well, permit me to draw your attention to a very real possibility that we must consider. You have seen the facts: I'm afraid to my mind, they point in only one direction. I'm sorry to say that your Mr Chichikov is in fact none other than ... Napoleon Bonaparte.

Gasps of horror.

Governor I thought he was dead.

Chief Governor, you can never trust a Frenchman.

Governor That's true, of course.

Chief Yes, Boney himself. Faked his own death and is come to Russia to gather an army of the living dead (heaven keep them from harm) that will avenge the losses of 1812.

Sound of a lady sobbing.

Fortunately for our beautiful land have captured the Necromancer. I will redouble the guard and in the morning –

A small commotion. A messenger arrives.

Policeman Sir! Sir!

Chief What is it Sergeant?

Policeman It's the prisoner, sir, he's escaped!

Gasps.

Chief Impossible. I have the keys here –

Pause. No he doesn't.

That rude chap! He's stolen them.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a grave situation. Napoleon Bonaparte, erstwhile Emperor of the French turned Military Recruiter for the Underworld is at large. We must pursue him. To horse!

Silence. Puzzlement.

After him!

A great commotion.

3.

This scene should happen at enormous speed. Chase music.

Narrator Stopping only to summon Selifan, the coachman, from his evening of quiet contemplation –

We hear the unmistakable sound of a pub.

And have him bring the coach to the prison

Chichikov ‘Temporary holding facility’ –

Narrator I unlocked the doors

Old locks, keys.

and with one bound Chichikov was free!

Chichikov Free! I’m free!

Prisoner Free! Free at last!

Chichikov Eurgh. No thank you.

Locks the door.

Prisoner Aww.

Narrator Quickly now, it won’t be long before they discover the keys are missing.

They run outside. Sound of horses, bridles, jangling, etc.

Chichikov The coach!

Selifan Evening, sir!

Chichikov You thought of everything!

Narrator I did my best.

Selifan Who are all those people, sir?

Narrator It's them! They're onto us!

Chichikov Selifan! Drive! Drive like the wind!

Crack of the whip and the carriage begins to move.

No! Once we're inside it!

Jangling as the carriage comes to a halt. They get inside.

Chief Stop that Necromancer!

Too late. The carriage rides off at a furious speed.

Napoleon Bonaparte! You haven't heard the last of this!

The carriage fades into the distance.

Fellow citizens. We face a crisis in our history. It will require courage. It will require strength. And it will require our own special brand of Russian genius, to hunt down the greatest threat to our future and our freedom that we have ever known. I ask you now: are you with me?

All Yes!

Chief Then I say: give chase!

Puzzled pause.

After them!

Cheers and they jump on their horses.

4.
Inside the carriage.

Chichikov Onward! Onward!

He thumps his stick on the carriage roof.

Are they still behind us?

Narrator No, I think we've lost them.

Chichikov What did he shout after us?

Narrator I've no idea.

Chichikov Phew, eh? (*laughs*) that was a close one.

Narrator (*Laughs*) Wasn't it! You were nearly for the (*makes a throat-slitting sound, sounds a bit like a quack*).

Chichikov (*Laughs*) I was what?

Narrator You know: nearly for the (*makes another sound, this one meant to represent hanging*).

Chichikov I don't know what you're talking about.

Narrator Nearly for the 'ready! Aim! Fire!' (*makes a series of splattering gun sounds, very realistic – maybe even on tape. Then after a pause, the sound of a body hitting the ground.*)

Chichikov Right. That.

Narrator But a very satisfactory result in any case.

Chichikov Indeed.

Narrator Even if I do say so myself.

Chichikov What do you mean?

Narrator Well, rescuing you.

Chichikov Oh. Yes. You palmed a key. Very good. But I think you'd agree I was the brains behind the operation.

Narrator What nonsense. You just sat in prison.

Chichikov Sat in prison? Sat in prison? I had the whole thing planned out.

Narrator I don't know why I bother.

Chichikov I didn't know you did.

Narrator Poo you.

Chichikov Poo you.

Pause.

Narrator There will be some who doubt the wisdom of placing a figure like Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov at the centre of any kind of story. The ladies, in particular, are impatient with the slightest imperfections of character and – no matter how deeply the storyteller penetrates into the mysteries of the human mind, no matter how the hero may redeem himself – there will be those who prefer their heroes always to be heroes. But I say to the ladies, we live in new times; the age of the hero is past. The hero has taken on the burden of story after story and now he is worked to death, his hands blistered and bleeding, his spirits darkened and thin, his virtue tattered from an excess of bravery and goodness. Now is the time for the non-virtuous man. The squalid. The pitiful. The pathetic.

Chichikov Oi!

Narrator This is not the age of Hercules. This is the age of Chichikov. For do we not see Chichikovs all around us? Perhaps you work with a Chichikov. Perhaps you have a nodding acquaintance with a Chichikov. Think of your uncles and cousins; is there not a Chichikov among them? And nothing would give me more pleasure than if, the next time you meet them, you run after them down the corridor shouting ‘Chichikov! Chichikov! Chichikov’. In an unkind way.

We hear some loud snoring.

(whispering) But anyway, let’s leave our non-virtuous hero to sleep while I tell you what happened the next day.

5.

The sound of a rural idyll. Birds, breeze, a trickling river, the trees swaying, a general sense of musicality and natural peace. A sound of digging. Whistling. We hear some shutters flung open.

Boy *(stops digging)* Good morning, Mr Tentetnikov. And what a good morning it is too!

Tentetnikov *(distantly)* Perhaps it is, boy. But what is good?

Narrator 150 miles from the last town, off the path between the main towns, enclosed in a valley and shielded by trees, lay the Estate of Andrey Ivanovich Tentetnikov. The hills stretched out as far as sight could reach, each undulation offering up a new shade of green to delight the eye; a scattering of forests, some dark, some seeming filled with light, broke up the elegant curves of the rising hills. The oak, fir, wild pear and maple were all pleasingly set against sheer escarpments of lime and clay, themselves home to an exuberant variety of plants and wildlife.

The birds sang all day in Tentetnikov's Estate, though their owner had long since ceased to enjoy the abundant natural beauty around him.

Tentetnikov (*Sighs*) Oh woe.

Narrator Tentetnikov was not an unfeeling man. Quite the opposite. Yet each morning, as he stepped out onto his balcony and stared out into his verdant dappled valley, that living poem to the richness and majesty of nature, he felt nothing but the ache in his heart.

Tentetnikov (*sighs*) Ah me!

Footman (*very distant*) Sir!

Tentetnikov (*mournfully*) Yes?

Footman (*very distant*) You have a visitor!

Tentetnikov Out here?

Footman (*very distant*) Shall I send him away?

Tentetnikov (*sighs*). Yes. No. No, tell him I'll get dressed and come down.
(*sighs*) Oh will this misery of a life never end?

Footman (*very distant*) Very good sir.

6.
The courtyard.

Footman The Master will be down in a moment.

Selifan Cheers.

Pause.

Nice place you got here.

Footman Good if you like greenery. Your master. Not a travelling salesman or nothing, is he?

Selifan No, nothing like that.

Footman Who is he then?

Selifan (*obviously reciting a learned script*) He Is A Extremely Famous Russian Novelist Who Desires To Go Incognito For A While

What With All The People Who Love His Books Wantin' A Piece Of Him.

Footman A writer eh? Oh, here he comes.

Selifan raps on the door of the carriage. Chichikov emerges from the coach as Tentetnikov emerges from the house.

Chichikov Good morrow to you dear sir. I crave your forgiveness for descending upon you like this. I imagine on an Estate like this, so far from the common trafficways, you rarely encounter visitors.

Tentetnikov It's true. We're very isolated here. No one ever visits. (*Sighs*)

Chichikov Excellent. Allow me to introduce myself. I Am A Extremely Famous Russian Novelist Who Desires To Go Incognito For A While What With All The People Who Love My Books Wanting A Piece Of Me.

Tentetnikov Is that right? Extremely famous?

Chichikov ...In, of course, my highly specialised genre of quality fiction.

Tentetnikov Maybe I've heard of you. What's your name?

Chichikov It's Chi-Chikichov.

Tentetnikov Chikichov? That's a very unusual name.

Chichikov It is by way of a *nom de plume*.

Tentetnikov I see. And what can I do for you?

Chichikov My carriage appears to have sustained a minor impairment, owing to my driver's carefree way with potholes.

Selifan (Sorry Mr Chichikichikichov.)

Chichikov I understand how much you must value your solitude but I wondered if we might stay here awhile to arrange the repair of my vehicle.

Tentetnikov (*after a pause*) Oh I suppose so. Makes no difference to me. A little human company would be welcome, I suppose. (*sighs*) I suppose you will want something to eat. There's some cabbage soup left over from last night.

Chichikov Your kindness is beyond compare, my dear sir. We will be gone from here in a matter of hours

7.
A large echoey room.

Narrator (*speaking softly*) Mysteriously, the repair to the wheel served mainly to reveal problems with the axle; repairing the axle only brought more clearly to attention certain deficiencies in the brakes. Soon, Chichikov's –

Chichikov Chikichov –

Narrator (Sorry) Chikichov's 'matter of hours' had become a matter of days, and it wasn't long before the matter of days had become a matter of weeks.

Chichikov Well you needn't say it like that. Mr Tentetnikov doesn't mind. You don't mind, do you?

Tentetnikov Hm? No. No I don't mind.

Chichikov There, you see? He doesn't mind my being here.

Tentetnikov Here, not-here, makes no difference. (*Sighs.*)

Silence.

Chichikov I took a walk down by the stream this morning. Sensational.

Tentetnikov So they say.

Silence.

Chichikov What about your library eh? (*He whistles appreciatively*) First class, absolutely first class. Books, eh? What would we do without them?

Tentetnikov They save on wallpaper.

Narrator Some days Chikichov would remark on the merits of Mr Tentetnikov's cravat; on others it would be Tentetnikov's waistcoat's that received the fullest attention. On occasions, Chikichov would describe a goose he once saw; on others his subject would be the latest shape in beards. And with one-sided topics of such moment the weeks fairly flew by.

Silence. Pencil.

Tentetnikov You know, I heard the strangest rumour in the village.

Chichikov What's that?

Tentetnikov The gardener's lad said that Napoleon Bonaparte has returned to Russia and is trying to raise an army.

Chichikov Bonaparte? But he's dead isn't he?

Tentetnikov That's what I thought.

Chichikov How odd. Pay it no heed.

Tentetnikov I suppose so. (*Sighs*)

Silence. Pencil.

Chichikov I suppose, being as you are shut off from the rest of the world, you manage to escapes the ravages of illness and disease that blight so many other of the major landed estates.

Tentetnikov No, no. Illness reaches even here sir.

Chichikov Is that so?

Tentetnikov Yes, last year for example we lost forty-five souls to the typhoid fever.

Chichikov How interesting. And tragic.

Tentetnikov Yes. (*Sighs*)

Silence. Pencil.

Chichikov Are you sketching?

Tentetnikov Oh just doodling. There's nothing else to do.

Chichikov Do let me see, my dear friend.

Tentetnikov No, really. It's nothing.

Chichikov goes over to see.

Chichikov But it's very good. Really.
Who is she?

Tentetnikov (*shuddering sigh*)

Chichikov My dear sir! Compose yourself!

Tentetnikov (*weeping*) Why? What does it matter? Nothing matters. If she doesn't see me, what care I who observes my tears? Nothing matters any more.

Chichikov My dear friend. You must tell me. Is she ... dead?

Tentetnikov She might as well be. I can't see her.

Chichikov Why? Please, my dear friend, tell me what happened.

Tentetnikov I have broken with her father.

Chichikov Ah. The father.

Tentetnikov The way he treated me. I could not stand that sort of behaviour. No man could.

Chichikov (*soothingly*) I'm sure.

Tentetnikov I am a man of property and standing. I insist upon respect.

Chichikov As is your right, sir.

Tentetnikov And for him to talk to me like that.

Chichikov What did he say?

Tentetnikov He called me –

Chichikov What?

Tentetnikov He dared to call me –

Chichikov Yes?

Tentetnikov 'My dear chap.'

Pause.

Chichikov He did what sorry?

Tentetnikov I know. Unbelievable isn't it?

Chichikov You broke off the engagement ... because he called you ... 'my dear chap' ?

Tentetnikov Well what else could I have done?

Narrator Inwardly Chichikov thought:

Chichikov You are a complete and utter total deep-fried nutcase.

Narrator But instead he said.

Chichikov Quite right, what a nerve!

Tentetnikov I deserve some respect. 'My dear sir'. 'Young sir' if you must. But 'my dear chap'? No no no. Andrey Ivanovich Tentetnikov can be pushed too far!

Chichikov I saw at once you were a man of principle. Even when your principle costs you so dear.

Tentetnikov Yes. My darling Ulinka.

He sobs again.

I'll never see her again.

Narrator (Well go on.)

Chichikov (What?)

Narrator (Offer to help.)

Chichikov (Help *him*?)

Narrator (Uh uh uh! New leaf, remember.)

Chichikov (Yes but –)

Narrator (Tcht! You promised.)

Pause. Chichikov sighs crossly.

Chichikov (Oh all right.)

Narrator (Thank you.)

Chichikov My dear friend, you were insulted. You made your feelings very plain. But perhaps now is the time to make amends, to allow the hurt to fade into distant memory, to gather those heartstrings that once were broken and mend them with love.

Narrator (What?)

Chichikov (I don't know.)

Tentetnikov I am sorry. I know I should. But I have my pride; I will not grovel to that man. Whatever it costs me. (*Sobs.*)

Chichikov I, grovel? Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov does not grovel.

Narrator (Well –)

Chichikov (Shut up.) No indeed. I say merely that you might permit me to pay a visit to this man, as a visitor in the region, to pay him my respects and yours.

Tentetnikov You? But why would you?

Chichikov You ask me why? (Yes, why?)

Narrator (...Consider it the smallest repayment -)

Chichikov Consider it the smallest repayment for the kindness you have shown in welcoming me into your house as your guest.

Tentetnikov What a strange man.

Narrator Thought Andrey Ivanovich Tentetnikov.

Chichikov What an idiot.

Narrator Thought Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov.

Chichikov I shall leave first thing. Who will I have the honour of meeting?

Tentetnikov His name is General Betrishchev.

8.
Courtyard. Morning. Horses.

Narrator And indeed, bright and early, Chichikov awoke, dressed himself with vaguely military crispness, and seated himself in Mr Tentetnikov's carriage, the master having gratefully offered him use of it for the day. Andrey Ivanovich himself paced the library in a more than usual state of tension and excitement.

We hear the coach set off. The narrator begins walking alongside it. By the end of the speech he is running.

Not daring to believe that Chichikov's plan could succeed it was with a tear in his eye that he watched the carriage leave the courtyard and unseen by anyone he waved them off with one of his monogrammed cambric handkerchiefs.

Wait for me!

9.

A large comfortable parlour. If this were TV we would notice that everything is perpendicular, papers arranged with their edges parallel to the table edges, carpets unruffled, furniture plain.

Betrishchev Never heard of you.

Chichikov I have a small but loyal following.

Betrishchev Don't have much time for books meself.

Chichikov No?

Betrishchev No.

Chichikov I see.

Narrator If the General were a colour, he would be purple.
In fact, the General was a colour, and that colour was purple.

Betrishchev What did he say?

Chichikov Nothing. He's talking to himself.

Betrishchev Talking to himself? First sign, you know. Oh yes, one day it's talking to yourself, then before you know it he's running naked through the barracks shouting the Czar's in love with a monkey. Been there a dozen times. Kindest thing is to shoot them, what? Save them making a fool of themselves and the regiment.

Chichikov Couldn't agree more.

Narrator (You're not going to shoot me are you?)

Chichikov On the estate where I'm lodging currently there's a really magnificent library.

Betrishchev Any books on war?

Chichikov Books on ... ?

Betrishchev War. War books. Books on war. Has he got any?. No I didn't think so.

From this point, Chichikov and the Narrator should be backing each other up, ad libbed a little. Overlapping each other.

Narrator Well actually –

Betrishchev Yes?

Narrator Mr Chichikov's friend is – er – writing one.

Betrishchev What?

Chichikov (Brilliant.) Yes. He's writing a book. Right now. A book. A book about war. One of those – war books.

Betrishchev War?

Chichikov In fact, in fact, he's writing it about Generals.

Narrator That's right, Generals.

Betrishchev Generals?

Chichikov Yes. A war book about Generals.

Betrishchev Which Generals?

Chichikov Oh just Generals ... in general.

Betrishchev Modern Generals? Ancient Generals? Major-Generals? Lieutenant-Generals? Russian Generals? (*dangerously*) French... Generals?

Chichikov No – no. Russian. Definitely.

Narrator Definitely Russian.

Betrishchev Of What era?

Chichikov The era? Good question. What era did he say?

Narrator Yes – ooh – the era – what *was* it?

Chichikov Was it the – oh it's on the tip of my tongue.

Betrishchev Well, the Napoleonic campaign for example?

Chichikov *That's* the feller.

Narrator Bingo.

Chichikov How could I forget?

Narrator Definitely Napoleonic.

Betrishchev You may be interested to learn that I gained these medals in that campaign.

Chichikov *Did you now?*

Narrator I thought I recognised them.

Betrishchev Yes. Is your friend looking at any particular battles?

Chichikov Oh – now *is* he? Is he?

Narrator Oh I'm sure he must – mustn't he?

Chichikov He did tell me.

Narrator Terrible memory for names.

Betrishchev Borodino perhaps?

Chichikov (*tentatively*) Did you – fight – at Borodino?

Betrishchev I did.

Chichikov What an extraordinary – isn't it?

Narrator Mad coincidence. Because that is the very – didn't he say?

Chichikov Main section of the book.

Narrator Borodino Borodino Borodino – day and night! Give me a break!
I'm sick of hearing about it!

Chichikov Not really because we love war and killing.

Narrator War and killing. Brilliant.

Betrishchev Well. If this friend of yours is hoping to write a truly authoritative history, he should really come and talk to me. I should be pleased to give him my account.

Chichikov We'll certainly pass that on to Tentetnikov, won't we?

Narrator Soon as we get back.

Betrishchev Did you say Tentetnikov?

Chichikov Why yes, do you know him?

Betrishchev I did. He and my daughter had an understanding at one time.
But then took offence at something or other. Damned if I know what it was.

Chichikov How interesting. I had no idea.

Betrishchev Always struck me as a very high-strung sort of fellow.

Chichikov Really? Maybe once. I couldn't say. But now he's a lion of a man.

Betrishchev (*almost to himself*) So, Andrey Ivanovich is writing a book on Borodino, is he? Well well.

Chichikov Well well indeed.

Narrator Well well well.

Betrishchev People change. The world moves on, what?

Narrator What?

Chichikov I literally could not agree with you more.

Betrishchev Well well.

Narrator A notable change came over the General. His severity softened. An almost avuncular quality entered into his manner. Even his colouring joined in the celebrations, mellowing from a deep purple to an almost carefree scarlet.

Betrishchev Tentetnikov. Well well well.

Narrator He even began to laugh.

Betrishchev Ha ha ha!

Narrator And Chichikov also laughed, but in deference to the General's war record, he chose a less prominent vowel with which to do so.

Betrishchev Ha ha ha.

Chichikov Ho ho ho.

Betrishchev I insist that you stay for dinner.

Chichikov I would be most honoured, General.

Betrishchev We're having cabbage soup.

Chichikov My favourite.

10.
Dining room. The next day.

Narrator So great was the change in the General's spirits that a full reconciliation with Tentetnikov was effected the very next day. And the following evening all five of us were sitting around the General's table as if we were the very oldest of friends.

Betrishchev I think this calls for another bottle.

Tentetnikov Allow me, Your High Excellency.

(As he passes Chichikov, sotto voce:)

You are a miracle-worker, Chikichov

Chichikov It was nothing.

Tentetnikov What did you say to him?

Chichikov We showed you in your best light. That's all.

Tentetnikov I owe you my life, my happiness. Is there anything I can do for you?

Chichikov Well, actually, you did mention a few days ago those souls of yours who died last winter –

Tentetnikov Hold on I better get this bottle. I'll be right back.

Narrator You're not still after those dead souls?

Chichikov A plan is a plan.

Betrishchev Chikichov!

Chichikov General!

Betrishchev Today I have seen the light return to my daughter's eyes. I thank you. Without your astonishing news, I would not have seen it.

Ulinka What news, Papa?

Betrishchev Your father is a fool, my dearest one. A silly fat-headed fool. I misjudged that young man. He's got a good sensible head on him.

Chichikov I cannot tell you what good it does to my heart to see the two of you so happy together.

Ulinka These last few months have been agony.

Betrishchev Oh, my dear, no need to go over all that again.

Ulinka Some evenings I have done nothing but cry in my room.

Betrishchev No more tears.

Chichikov I hope you'll be very happy together.

Narrator And indeed, a change had come over Chichikov too. That evening, seeing the lovers reunited he had begun to imagine himself sitting at a grand dinner table beside a Mrs Chichikov. With perhaps, from the nursery, the distant sound of a brace of little Chichikovs. He imagined being the head of a family, presiding over a family home, a grand residence that stood perhaps on an estate of his own.

Chichikov (*musings*) This is the Chichikov Estate!

Narrator He mused.

Chichikov You are now entering Chichikovia.

Narrator He pondered.

Chichikov Welcome one and all to Chichland.

Narrator That's just silly.

Ulinka What?

Chichikov Nothing.

Narrator It suddenly seemed to Chichikov that he must have these things, if only to show the world and himself that he had lived and existed, that his span of years had left an imprint that he had not merely passed over the earth like a shadow.

Music underscores this reverie. Off.

Betrishchev Tell me what you want.

Chichikov Pardon me?

Betrishchev My daughter's happiness is beyond price but you must take something. I insist upon it.

Chichikov Well –

Betrishchev Anything.

Chichikov I hear there was a bad outbreak of Typhoid Fever last winter –

Tentetnikov returns.

Tentetnikov Here we are!

Betrishchev Reinforcements!

Tentetnikov You know I was just talking to the girls in the kitchen

Ulinka Oh *were* you?

Laughter.

Tentetnikov Quite innocently, I assure you. But they told me the strangest thing.

Betrishchev What's that?

Tentetnikov There have been some strangers in the village, asking questions.

Betrishchev What's so strange about that?

Tentetnikov Well they say they're looking for a man who buys dead souls.

Ulinka Dead souls?

Tentetnikov That's what they said.

Ulinka But how horrible. *(Her voice quavers)*

Tentetnikov Oh darling, please don't upset yourself.

Ulinka *(tearful)* What a horrible thing.

Tentetnikov Don't worry. I told them, if he's coming anywhere round here, he won't come to us. He'll go to my Aunt Aleksandra Ivanovna in Kiev. She's absolutely loaded. She's got more serfs than she knows how to count. She must have thousands of dead souls buried on her estate.

Ulinka *(tearful)* You mustn't joke about it.

Betrishchev Don't you worry yourself my dear. I can assure you that if anyone – *anyone* – comes to our door trying to buy dead souls, or dead horses, or dead anything, well ... upstairs in my room, I have a trunk, and in that trunk I have a rifle – snatched from the dying hands of a perfidious Frenchman and, as God is my

witness, I follow the principle we followed in 1812. Shoot first!
Think second!

Tentetnikov You not eating your soup, Chikichov?

Chichikov (*dry-mouthed*) No. No.

Narrator In fact, we should probably be –

Chichikov On our way.

Narrator Moving on.

Tentetnikov Moving on?

Chichikov The carriage is mended so –

Narrator Hit the road.

Tentetnikov Well. What can I say? Thank you.

Chichikov Not at all.

Ulinka From both of us.

Chichikov It was my pleasure.

Tentetnikov Watch out for Bonaparte!

Chichikov Will do.

Betrishchev Shoot first! Think second! Like we did at Borodino!

Tentetnikov Borowhato?

Betrishchev What?

Chichikov Now I really do have to go.

Narrator Toodle-oo.

We follow them out the door.

Tentetnikov You said a funny word. (*Laughs*)

Betrishchev There was nothing funny about Borodino, sir.

Tentetnikov There! (*Laughs*) You said it again! Borodingo!

Betrishchev Take that back sir!

Ulinka Father! Father! Put the stick down!

Tentetnikov (*Laughs*) Butterbongo!

Sound of crockery smashing.

11.

In the carriage. In motion.

Narrator Well. That went okay.

Chichikov How did they find us?

Narrator They didn't.

Chichikov Not yet.

Narrator You'd know if they were really on your trail.

Chichikov And as long as we keep one step ahead –

Narrator And keep a low profile –

Chichikov Don't stay in one place too long –

Narrator And don't try to buy dead souls –

Chichikov Aww. Really?

Narrator Yes really.

Chichikov What not even one or two?

Narrator You've had enough.

Chichikov What about little ones?

Narrator No! No dead souls for you!

Chichikov Oh alright.

Narrator Good.

Chichikov You're probably right.

Narrator You know I am.

Chichikov It's only money.

Narrator That's the spirit.

Chichikov There's more to life than money.

Narrator Exactly.

Chichikov There's power, fame, fancy clothes.

Narrator Love, goodness, honour.

Chichikov ...And – those things too.

Silence. The carriage bumps along.

Chichikov Would you ever own land?

Narrator Never really thought about it.

Chichikov Nor me. I was just thinking.

Narrator I don't know what I'd do with it.

Chichikov Farm it.

Narrator Obviously.

Chichikov Obviously. I'd grow – potatoes?

Narrator Goes without saying. Wheat. You'd probably want fields of wheat.

Chichikov Arable land. Whatever that is.

Narrator Chickens maybe. Raise chickens.

Chichikov Cows in a shed.

Narrator Cows are a must.

Chichikov Chickens for eggs, cows for milk. It's the Law.

Narrator It's the way of nature.

Chichikov It's the Law of Farming.

Narrator The Farmer's Law.

Chichikov What about you, Selifan?

Selifan Oh don't ask me sir. I wouldn't have the first idea.

Chichikov Maybe not, but you can join in.

Selifan Never had cause to think.

Chichikov Still. Humour us.

Selifan Well if I had a small acreage (*laughs*) I don't know, I think I'd probably end up, who knows?, investing in small-scale agricultural machinery, working a four-field rotational system on the Dutch model, experimenting for the first three years to find the optimal ratio between the economies of scale made possible through Euro-industrial farming techniques and a prudent diversification to avoid the threat of monoculture and all its attendant risks of sharp market fluctuation and financial exposure to environmental change.

Pause.

Chichikov Ah, the simple country wisdom of the uneducated classes.

Narrator The old ways are the best.

Pause. The carriage bumps along.

Chichikov Selifan?

Selifan Yes sir?

Chichikov Who's driving this coach?

Selifan Oh ... bugger...

He clambers out of the carriage.

Chichikov (*casually*) By the way – I don't suppose – by any chance – you happened to catch the name of Mr Tentetnikov's Aunt?

Narrator Aleksandra Ivanovna, why?

Chichikov Oh, no reason. (*Yawns.*) Well, good night.

Narrator (*suspiciously*) Good night...

12.

A door. Thumping on the door. Pause. Thumping.

Steward (*from inside*) Coming, I'm coming.

Door opens.

Who are you?

Chief Forgive my intrusion but I and my associates are on the trail of a dangerous criminal. Perhaps you could help us.

Steward If I can.

Chief The man we are looking for is a rat-faced fellow with a pinched mean expression. He favours dandified coats and tight trousers. There is a curious smell emanating from –

Steward We have had a man of that description staying at these premises.

Chief You do? Did you hear that, boys?

The small crowd behind him stir restively.

He has a keen interest ... in dead souls.

Steward Yes, our gentlemen seemed most interested in the numbers of those deceased.

Crowd excitement.

Chief Excellent! And he goes under the name of Chichikov.

Steward (*Thinks*) The man we had staying here was called Chikichov.

Crowd disappointment.

Chief Ah well. I won't take up any more of your time. Try the next village, boys! Thank you for your help.

Crowd leave saying thank you.

13.

A field. Cold, windy.

Narrator The next day, we found ourselves in a small village surrounded by large estates a little to the north of the Dnieper River and we began making some enquiries about the landowners in the district.

Peasant Kostanzhoglo.

Chichikov No. (*Chuckles.*) Sorry. (*Speaking as if to a child*) Do You Know Who Owns This Estate?

Peasant Kostanzhoglo.

Chichikov Huh. (*sighs, again, as if to a child, really acting it out*) The Big Man – Very Important – In The Big House. Hm? Big House?

Peasant Aye. Kostanzhoglo.

Chichikov It's no use, I can't understand his accent.

Peasant I don't have an accent.

Chichikov Oh you speak Russian!

Peasant Course I speak Russian. What do you think I am, a peasant?

Pause.

Well, technically yeah I am but still. No need to be patronising.

Chichikov Well I have asked you three times about the landowner.

Peasant And I told you three times. It's Mr Kostanzhoglo.

Chichikov I see. And the next Estate?

Peasant That'd be Mr Koshkaryov.

Chichikov Kostanzhoglo and Koshkaryov. Thank you.

Narrator Chichikov gazed at the peasant before him and, not for the first time, observed the difference between the fine bone structure of men like himself born to own and farm large estates and the coarse ugly physiognomy of the brute peasant whose skulls were if anything more animal than human.

Peasant Oh! Is that right?

Sound of a punch. Chichikov falling to the ground.

Chichikov You really have got to stop doing that.

Narrator Sorry.

14.
Lodgings. Small room.

Narrator Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov had got it into his head that he wanted to become a landowner and he should visit Kostanzhoglo and Koshkaryov's Estates to get a sense of the latest farming techniques. I told him he couldn't afford it but

would he listen? Oh no, Mr Chichikov always knows best. And anyway I told him what for and he said some actually very hurtful things back to me and I suppose I said some things back to him and one thing led to ... well anyway he left in a huff. In fact he didn't return until nightfall.

We hear Chichikov getting into bed. Silence.

And what sort of time do you call this?

Chichikov Oh! I thought you were asleep.

Narrator Asleep, hah! As if I could! I've been *sick* with worry.

Chichikov You don't need to worry about me.

Narrator Does he leave a note? No, he just goes off without a by-your-leave.

Chichikov I just went out.

Narrator Oh. Just out. For eight *hours*?

Chichikov Could we talk about this in the morning?

Narrator You went to see that woman, didn't you? Tentetnikov's rich Aunt.

Chichikov I have nothing to say.

Narrator I knew it.

Chichikov I'm going to sleep now.

Narrator Just tell me: there's someone else isn't there? You've found another storyteller.

Chichikov Good night.

15.

Field. Lots of agricultural activity. Perhaps even some industrial sounds. Steam-powered equipment for example.

Narrator The next morning we paid a visit to see Konstantin Fyodorovich Kostanzhoglo, a man whose affection for the land was matched only by his fondness for money.

Kost'zhoglo Do you love soil, Mr –

Chichikov Mr –

Kichikov.

Kost'zhoglo Do love soil Mr Kichikov?

Chichikov (*laughs derisively*) 'Love soil'? Nooo!

Kost'zhoglo You cannot farm if you don't love soil.

Chichikov (*backtracking*) Well, I *like* soil. Some soil I like very much. But love? I don't know if –

Kost'zhoglo You see, some of these chaps, young farmers, they spend their lives on what? (*loathing in all these italicised phrases*) Going to *alehouses... after the theatre... with friends?*

Chichikov And that's a... bad ... thing?

Kost'zhoglo Are you mad? Are you a bad-brain? Let me tell you something my young friend. I would happily – *happily* – exchange the chance ever to step into another alehouse just to have warm moist soil run between my fingers.

Chichikov Really?

Kost'zhoglo I would gladly never – and that's *never* – visit a theatre again, if only I were guaranteed the chance to gaze at a freshly ploughed field once a month for five years.

Chichikov Golly, that *is* committed.

Kost'zhoglo You have to love the land. You have to love it. I would gladly cut off ties with all of my friends to spend just one day in a year – just one day – buried up to my waist in good Russian soil. Crumbly, moist, melt in your mouth.

Chichikov Melt in your *what?*

Kost'zhoglo I have been a farmer here man and boy, Mr Kichikov, man and boy.

Chichikov Oh. Lucky you –

Kost'zhoglo On my twelfth birthday, my father gave me the lower field down by the stream. And you know what I did?

Chichikov Um. Um. You grew apples?

Kost'zhoglo Apples? Apples? Are you mental? Are you a damaged man? I split the field, half of it flax, half of it turnips. That was

September. A year later I made 4000 for the flax, 5000 for the turnips. Thank you very much.

Chichikov 9000 in a year?

Kost'zhoglo And I planted all the seed myself. I run the most efficient Estate in the Ukraine. You know, there are some folk as believe that farming is the way to get rich quick.

Chichikov (*excited*) Oh really?

Kost'zhoglo But they're wrong.

Chichikov (*disappointed*) Oh really.

Kost'zhoglo Listen to me my young friend. If you want to get rich quick, you'll never get rich at all. If you are prepared to wait, to respect the seasons, plant the seed, wait until it is ready to harvest, let the earth tell you when *it* is ready, then, I promise you, rivers and rivers of gold will flow into your hands. Walk with me.

Narrator Of all the many agricultural lessons Kostanzhoglo taught him, this simple farming advice would ring through Chichikov's head for the rest of the day.

Kost'zhoglo (*resounding*) Rivers and rivers of gold will flow into your hands.

Narrator He found himself strangely attracted to the nobility of nature and the rigours of the farming life.

Kost'zhoglo (*resounding*) Rivers and rivers of gold...

Chichikov When I am a landowner

Narrator Thought Chichikov.

Chichikov I will farm like Kostanzhoglo.

Kost'zhoglo (*resounding*) Rivers and rivers...

Chichikov Yes alright, you've made your point.

Narrator And Chichikov continued to turn these words over in his mind as Kostanzhoglo proudly showed him over every single inch of the Estate.

16.

Another field. An hour later.

Kost'zhoglo For six years on the trot the fisherman would come down here.

Chichikov (*Very bored now*). Oh really.

Kost'zhoglo And you know what they did?

Chichikov No.

Kost'zhoglo They'd dump fishscales on my land.

Chichikov Well fancy.

Kost'zhoglo And what do you think I did?

Chichikov I don't know.

Kost'zhoglo Well what would you do?

Chichikov Throw them away?

Kost'zhoglo Throw them away? Are you mad? Are you King of the Simpletons? Throw away perfectly good fishscales? Let me tell you something my young friend. I boiled them up. Yes sir, boiled them up. Made glue: *sold* the glue. Pocketed a tidy 40,000.

Chichikov For fish glue?

Kost'zhoglo For fish glue. This way. There's a fallow field behind this hedge that will interest you very much.

17.

Another bloody field. Another bloody hour later.

Narrator Chichikov had always considered himself a quick learner but after two hours of wandering around the estate, he still did not seem to have got the hang of Kostanzhoglo's attitude to farming.

Chichikov Well I must say it's breathtaking, Mr Kostanzhoglo. The views alone –

Kost'zhoglo Oho! Views is it? Let me tell you something my panoramic young friend. No 'view' ever brought home two kopeks to put in the pot. So let's hear no more of views.

Chichikov Quite right. Views? Pah.

Kost'zhoglo I would gladly poke out both of my eyes if I knew I could still enjoy the smell of freshly ploughed earth.

Chichikov (*unconvincingly*) Me too.

Kost'zhoglo You are looking for an acreage in the area?

Chichikov I'm very new to this game, sir. I shall need to educate myself more fully in the art and cultivation on –

Kost'zhoglo Oho! It's education now is it? Let me tell you something my pedagogical young friend. No educated person ever had two kopeks to jingle in his pocket. You've no need of education. There's an estate, not far from here, owned by one Khlobuyev. You know him?

Chichikov I – I don't.

Kost'zhoglo He's let it go to rack and ruin. It's a crime! He has more debts than bad ideas. He would gladly sell, and for a good price too. Go see him this afternoon.

Chichikov Ah well I've arranged to see Mr Koshkaryov this afternoon.

Kost'zhoglo Oh what are you wasting your time with that fool for?

Chichikov Well, in the town they said he had some innovative ideas –

Kost'zhoglo Oho! So it's ideas now is it? Let me tell you something my philosophical young friend. No 'idea' ever walked into a smart Moscow shop and bought a lady's fur hat with a quilted lining as a surprise for the fancy woman he keeps at his own expense in a small flat on north side of the city.

He's said a little too much.

So let's hear no more of ideas.

18.

Large wood-panelled room.

Narrator In fact, despite Kostanzhoglo's warning, Chichikov was determined to keep his mind open in the matter of Colonel Koshkaryov. Loving the land is all very well but he did not have forty years to develop much of an affinity with topsoil. Hearing that Koshkaryov's Estate was run on much more abstract, rational principles, he found himself warming to the idea of rational farming rather than mystical oneness with nature. After all, he thought –

Chichikov What were we put on this earth for, if not to contribute just one small step in humanity's great march towards its perfect self-realisation?

Narrator Though in actual fact this sort of rubbish only started to go through his head once he had met the Colonel.

Koshkaryov Good afternoon. Are you my 4 o'clock?

Narrator The Colonel was standing behind a large brass lectern, a quill in his hand.

Chichikov Your –

Koshkaryov You do have an appointment?

Chichikov Yes.

Secretary This is Mr Kikichov.

Koshkaryov The man who wants advice on farming.

Chichikov Yes.

Koshkaryov Then you have come to the right place. This is not just a farm, it is a glimpse of the future, Mr Kikichov.

Chichikov Oh, that sounds interesting.

Koshkaryov Indeed it is. Organised entirely on rational principles, based on pure scientific knowledge, motivated exclusively by the highest principles of humanity, progress and reason, this farm is the most efficient estate in the whole of the Ukraine.

Chichikov Oh really? Only that Konstantin Fyodorovich Kostanzhoglo claimed that *his* farm was the most efficient.

Koshkaryov Poppycock! Pure poppycock!

Chichikov Is it?

Secretary It may interest you to know that projected yields over a fifteen year period divided into five quintiles suggest that in three of those five Koshkaryov Farming will outperform Kostanzhoglo by a ratio of seven to six.

Chichikov So – with your methods – a farm always succeeds? It always makes money?

Koshkaryov And how could it fail? Our principle is organisation. Reason. For every process in farming, there is a best way. We have groups working at every level of our enterprise investigating, exploring, researching the most advanced agricultural methods and applying them.

Chichikov Excellent.

Koshkaryov Here at Koshkaryov Farming we aim to produce happy, rounded peasants with a broad range of skills. Do you know, when I first came to this estate, not a single serf could play the piano?

Chichikov You don't say.

Koshkaryov Now they all can. Now if I could only get them into German trousers...

Chichikov German trousers?

Koshkaryov The German trouser has a proven impact of 58% on productivity. 63% when it's a woollen trouser.

Chichikov Coo.

Koshkaryov Walk with me.

19.

A wood-panelled corridor. An hour later.

Koshkaryov ... The Research and Development Committee reported that fields are not themselves rational entities and therefore had no place on a modern farm.

Chichikov Fields?

Koshkaryov Yes, I don't know if you've ever seen one, but they're very messy, I hear

Chichikov You 'hear'?

Koshkaryov It's a perfect example of how we work. The Research and Development Committee reports; The Building and Works Committee acted. We built a suite of offices over the fallow fields, and converted the lake into a recreational area.

Chichikov So you have no fields at all?

Koshkaryov None. It's a wholly rational enterprise. Now, along this corridor, we have the Health and Safety Executive, the Quality Assurance Agency and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Narrator Koshkaryov's farm was notable for the extraordinary number of departments whose work nobody understood and whose reason for existing nobody could remember.

Koshkaryov Let's take a quick look inside the Building and Works Committee. Oh, it appears to be locked. One moment, soon fix that.

He rings a tiny bell. The Secretary appears.

Secretary Yes, sir.

Koshkaryov I don't seem to be able to get into Building and Works.

Secretary I'll call the undersecretary.

He rings a tinier bell. The undersecretary appears.

Under-Sec You rang?

Secretary The Colonel needs to get into the Building and Works Committee Room.

Under-Sec I'll get onto it right away, sir.

She rings an even tinier bell.

Irina You rang?

Koshkaryov (You see? Complete efficiency at every level. Right the way down the chain.)

Under-Sec Where's the vice-under-secretary?

Irina Semyon gets a Thursday off every seventh week. I'm the acting-vice-under-secretary.

Under-Sec We need to get into the Building and Works Committee Room.

Irina Oh they've moved, sir.

Under-Sec Moved?

Irina To the fourth floor.

Under-Sec The fourth floor? But we only have three floors.

Irina Quite right, sir. They issued a strongly-worded report six months ago complaining of the fact.

Koshkaryov (You see, Kikichov? Initiative!)

Under-Sec And are we building the requisite additional floor?

Irina That will be underway once the Architectural Council have produced their final plans and the Committee for Visual Harmony have reported on those plans.

Under-Sec I see. So what happened to the Building and Works Committee?

Irina They unanimously agreed to reconvene themselves as a peripatetic body with a broad fact-finding brief.

Koshkaryov (There, you see? Constant movement, innovation, progress.)

Under-Sec And where are they?

Irina I believe they're engaged in a six-month study of international public works. With particular reference, if memory serves, to the Mediterranean Coast.

Under-Sec Thank you, acting-vice-under-secretary, that will be all.

Irina Sir.

Secretary Thank you, under-secretary, that will be all.

Under-Sec Sir.

Koshkaryov Thank you, secretary, that will be all.

Secretary Sir.

Koshkaryov You see? The ruthless efficiency of a well-oiled machine.

Narrator Chichikov had approached this new estate convinced that Koshkaryov could not be as stupid as Kostanzhoglo had said. And he was right. Koshkaryov was much, much stupider.

Chichikov Wouldn't it have been quicker for you to ask that young woman yourself rather than go through all the bells and people –

Koshkaryov Are you, may I ask, of the anarchist persuasion? We must have order, sir. Without order, sir, man is a wild thing. We have to have discipline, structure.

Chichikov And your Building and Works Committee. Isn't it possible they're just having a holiday at your expense?

Koshkaryov What? No, no.

Chichikov Are you sure?

Koshkaryov It would have been discovered. The vice-chairman brackets systems close brackets would have picked it up in a flash.

Chichikov Well let's talk to him.

Koshkaryov Ah well, you can't do that. He's carrying out a comparative study of internal monitoring systems across Europe.

Chichikov And where is he now?

Koshkaryov I'd have to check.

Chichikov The Mediterranean coast, perhaps?

Koshkaryov Do you know, I think you're –

Pause.

Koshkaryov But this is monstrous. Something must be done. Immediately.

Chichikov I should think so too.

Koshkaryov Corruption in the system! No hesitation, no delays. It must be dealt with and now!

Chichikov That's the way.

Koshkaryov I will set up an internal enquiry.

Chichikov Right.

Koshkaryov Since you brought this matter to my notice I would like you to be its chair.

Chichikov I really couldn't –

Koshkaryov Chair? What am I thinking of: 'President of the Board of Enquiry'.

Chichikov No, really.

Koshkaryov Chief Investigating Officer?

Chichikov Honestly.

Koshkaryov Head of Being in Charge?

Chichikov Don't be silly.

Koshkaryov A man of conviction. I like that. Well, it has been a pleasure meeting you. In fact, I insist that you come to dinner.

He sweeps out.

Chichikov That's very kind of you.

Koshkaryov Submit your application to the Department of Food and Leisure!
Good bye!

20.

Wood-panelled room.

Narrator The Colonel also recommended that Chichikov pay a visit to Mr Khlobuyev, intimating that his acreage could be picked up for a song, adding that while the estate was currently encumbered with a large number of untidy fields, this could soon be rectified by erecting a series of business centres in their place. However, not having sufficient funds to pay even the very low price of 35,000 roubles that Khlobuyev was rumoured to be offering, Chichikov kept a low profile, didn't ask anyone about dead souls, and generally behaved himself.

Until three weeks later, when Chichikov received a message requesting his attendance in Kiev where some good news awaited him.

Chichikov (*opening a letter*) It's a message!

Narrator Yes, I just said that.

Chichikov We have to go to Kiev!

Narrator Yes, I said that bit too.

Beat.

Chichikov Did you mention that it would be -

Narrator ...good news. Yes.

Chichikov Spoilsport.

Narrator This was surprising enough. But even more surprising was once we arrived at the appointed place to find –

Chichikov Tentetnikov!

Narrator Tentet – I was going to say that.

Chichikov Too slow.

Narrator It's not a competition.

Chichikov Sez you.

Narrator It seemed that Tentetnikov's lapse over Borodino had been forgiven once it had been explained to the General that the young man found the subject of that great battle so stirring that if he did not make light of the matter he could be thrown into a deep melancholy. Which appeared to be the mood we found the young man in.

Tentetnikov (*solemnly*) Pavel Ivanovich.

Chichikov (*solemnly*) Andrey Ivanovich. I was very sorry to hear –

Tentetnikov Yes, yes.

Narrator What? What?

Tentetnikov She was very old, of course. One mustn't be surprised.

Narrator Who was?

Chichikov I only met her once, but her grace and goodness made an enormous impression on me.

Narrator Who? Who?

Solicitor (*distantly*) If you could all be seated, thank you.

People sitting.

Narrator (What's going on?)

Chichikov (Shh.)

Solicitor I have here the will of Mrs Aleksandra Ivanovna Khanasarova.

Narrator (Who's that?)

General shushing.

Solicitor The will is recent, signed and sealed less than a month ago, and its contents are as follows. To my son, Nikolai, I leave my house and its immediate grounds. May it be the home to you that ever it was to me.

Narrator (Is this the rich aunt?)

Chichikov (Might be.)

Solicitor To my cousins Anna and Ivan Vasilyev, I leave my orchards. May the fruit in those orchards ripen for as long as you both shall live. To my dear nephew, Andrey Ivanovich –

Huge sob from Tentetnikov.

– I leave my coin collection. May it bring you great pleasure and much fun.

Slightly more muted sob from Tentetnikov.

And to my new friend, Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov –

Narrator (What?)

Solicitor I leave 40,000 roubles. May the goodness of his soul and the nobility of his character continue to delight and inspire the countryside as it did me in my last month of life. This concludes the reading of the will.

21.

Ten minutes later. Brighter and livelier.

Tentetnikov That was a surprise.

Chichikov Yes. Completely and utterly unexpected in every way.

Tentetnikov I didn't know you even knew my aunt.

Chichikov I didn't. I just popped in one day, say hello.

Tentetnikov You must have made quite an impression.

Chichikov Obviously got her on a good day.

Tentetnikov Well. Congratulations.

Chichikov And you too – *you* got the coin collection, you lucky devil.

Tentetnikov Yes. I got the coins.

Pause.

Well. Bye then.

Chichikov See you!

Tentetnikov goes. Pause.

What?
Why are you looking at me like that?

Narrator Was that where you went that time?

Chichikov I may have paid her a visit, yes.

Narrator And she gave you all her money?

Chichikov What can I say? She took a liking to me. I'm a very likeable person.

Narrator Are you?

Chichikov Yes.

Narrator To whom?

Chichikov Lots of people.

Narrator This is *you* we're talking about.

Chichikov Look, you ask me to turn over a new leaf. I turn over a new leaf. I go to see a poor old woman –

Narrator A rich old woman –

Chichikov A rich old poor old woman, living on her own, I pay her a visit out of the goodness of my heart. I told her my story, that I had been – yes I admit it – a wicked man. The whole dead souls thing. I told her that I had found my blundering way back to the path of goodness. And that now I wanted to put something back, farm a little land, sow a little wheat, raise a little chicken. Just live a simple life, in harmony with the world. Not fighting it.

Do you want to use my handkerchief.

Narrator (*through a sob*) Thank you.

Chichikov Are you okay?

Narrator (*bravely; big breath*) Yes. I'm fine.

Chichikov And you know. (*As if the idea hadn't remotely occurred to him*) I'll probably... be able to put in an offer for Khlobuyev's Estate now. Funny isn't it? The way things work out. I'll leave it for a bit though. No need to rush.

22.
Khlobuyev's country house.

Narrator And an unhurried twenty-five minutes later we were standing discussing the sale in the drawing room of Mr Khlobuyev, who was as keen to drive up the price of the Estate as the Estate itself seemed keen to drive it down.

Khlobuyev Now this is a lovely room.

Chichikov *Is it?*

Khlobuyev I had it redecorated last year.

Chichikov *Did you?*

Khlobuyev You'll notice the very unusual appearance of the walls.

Chichikov Yes.

Narrator It's dry rot, isn't it?

Khlobuyev Is it?

Chichikov I think so.

Khlobuyev They told me it was a design.

Chichikov Ah. Still. Nice windows.

Khlobuyev Ah but don't touch the –
A pane of glass shatters on the floor.

Narrator Sorry!

Khlobuyev It happens all the time. I ran out of money to pay for putty.

Chichikov Is putty expensive?

Khlobuyev So my glazier says. 15 roubles a pot apparently.

Chichikov Can we look upstairs?

Khlobuyev ...Do you need to?

Chichikov What's the matter with upstairs?

Khlobuyev It's not so much a matter of upstairs – there's nothing wrong with upstairs; the upstairs is perfect of its type – it's the question of *getting* upstairs. The staircase has suffered a degree of neglect over the years, I regret to say. While the first step can always be

trusted, the second step is unreliable. The third step is a false friend and the fourth not to be attempted. I have the gravest doubts about the fifth and curse me if this morning I didn't detect some give in the sixth.

Chichikov Perhaps we had better not go upstairs.

Khlobuyev I can happily report complete confidence in the seventh step, however, and –

Chichikov What about the Estate itself?

Khlobuyev The lower field is undergoing a process of natural irrigation.

Chichikov (Meaning –?)

Narrator (Flooded.)

Chichikov The upper field then?

Khlobuyev We had a small fire there, alas. It does not look its best just at present and I should hate to expose it to the embarrassment of public view.

Chichikov How about the middle field?

Khlobuyev It's a curious thing, but it appears to have blown away.

Chichikov How much are you asking for this estate?

Khlobuyev 35,000 roubles is, I think, a reasonable offer for lands into which my family has poured 300 years of love and devotion. I could not accept any less – I'm sorry, my dear sir, but 35 it must be. I take on, you understand, a considerable loss at that figure. I ask you, therefore, in friendship, that we shake on that figure and have done with it. I have some pride. I have some honour. I have my family to think of. It would insult the good name of Khlobuyev to haggle over this home, this hearth, this harbour.

Beat.

Chichikov 20,000?

Khlobuyev (*desperate*) Anything, I'll take anything.

Chichikov 15,000 then?

Khlobuyev It's a deal.

Chichikov counts out the money.

I must say it will be some small relief to relinquish the responsibilities of this estate.

Chichikov ... 200, 250, 300, 350...

Narrator you mean farming?

Khlobuyev No, the entertaining.

Chichikov ...500, 550, 600, 650...

Narrator The entertaining?

Khlobuyev (*this gathers speed*) Oh yes, believe me, sir, keeping up the land is nothing to keeping up appearances. The drain on one's purse. The dinners, of course, the balls, twice a season; the dancing classes, it all adds up. The musical soirées, the sacred recitals, the salons.

Beat.

The poetry evenings, the thespian mornings, the literary luncheons, the weekend house parties, you know. (*Chuckles*)

Beat.

Drop-in visitors, long-stay guests, live-in domestics, tied peasants, smallholders, largeholders, travelling salesmen, itinerant musicians, penniless cousins, indigent nephews, destitute aunts.

Beat.

The cobbler, the baker, the tinker, the taylor, the cook, the clerk, the candlestick maker, the oilman, the coalman, the milkman, the dustman. They must all be paid. Local dignitaries, civic leaders, regional deputies, provincial administrators, government inspectors, titular councillors, mayors, mothers, monks from Minsk, inspectors of works, licensers of vittels, exterminators of vermin and grinders of wheat.

Beat. And now tongue-twistingly fast:

Informers, reformers, performers, pro formas, tax assessors, census-takers, undertakers, bodysnatchers, well-wishers, ill-wishers, flat-earthers, pigeon-fanciers, fox-hunters, grouse-shooters, moose-worriers, wick-trimmers, glass-cutters, window-cleaners, bypassers, trespassers, off-roaders, free-loaders,

front-loaders, backpackers, and a man called Grigory who thinks he's an anchovy.

Narrator What does he do?

Khlobuyev Not a great deal.

Chichikov ...14900, 14950... 15000 roubles! There you are.

Khlobuyev I'm most grateful.

Chichikov Not at all.

Khlobuyev Thank you so much.

Chichikov A pleasure.

Khlobuyev An honour to do business with you sir.

Chichikov Likewise.

Pause.

Khlobuyev Are you going to – let go of the money?

Pause. Chichikov is very reluctant.

Chichikov ... of course.

Khlobuyev We must celebrate.

Chichikov As you wish.

Khlobuyev Some champagne! (*Claps his hands twice*) Koshka!

Chichikov Oh very nice.

Koshka Yes sir?

Khlobuyev Run to town and fetch us a bottle of champagne.

Koshka Yes sir. On the account?

Khlobuyev The Estate account, yes.

Chichikov That would be my account would it?

Khlobuyev This is your Estate now, Pavel Ivanovich.

Chichikov Yes –

Khlobuyev You are a landowner. You have responsibilities.

Chichikov I suppose that's true.

Khlobuyev Better get two bottles, Koshka. Oh and, Koshka –

Koshka Yes, sir?

Khlobuyev I've sold the Estate, so you're fired.

Koshka Very good sir.

Chichikov A landowner!

Narrator Thought Chichikov.

Chichikov I have an estate!

Narrator He realised.

Chichikov May I take a look outside?

Khlobuyev Certainly!

23.
Outside.

Narrator And as he surveyed his domain, he began to understand the grave responsibility that landowners bear on their shoulders; their stewardship of the land, the ancient yeomanry of the soil. And as these high responsibilities made their impression on his spirit he felt his features rearrange themselves in an expression of unimaginable nobility.

Peasant Trapped wind?

Chichikov What?

Peasant I know that expression. Trapped wind is it?

Chichikov No.

Peasant I get it awful after cabbage soup.

Chichikov Go away.

24.
Koshkaryov's office. Tinkle of a bell.

Secretary Yes, sir?

Koshkaryov Any messages?

Secretary Just two sir.

Koshkaryov Well?

Secretary The works outing to go paint-catapulting in the Siberian forest – should I add your name to the list?

Koshkaryov Leave the dates with me and I'll see what I can do. And the other?

Secretary There's a man downstairs wants to know if you've seen Napoleon Bonaparte in the area.

Koshkaryov I see. Well give me his details and I'll call his people.

Secretary That'll be all.

Leaves. Beat.

Koshkaryov Did you say Napoleon Bonaparte?

25.

Large room, airy, light, there is a window open.

Narrator Chichikov soon moved in to the big house. He appointed me as his secretary and Selifan, the loyal coachman, as his factotum.

Selifan What?

Chichikov My factotum.

Selifan What's a factotum?

Beat.

Chichikov I don't know.

Selifan Because I wouldn't want to do anything –

Chichikov Butler. You can be my butler. You can butle for me.

Narrator News spread around the village and Chichikov soon laid plans for a celebratory dinner to introduce the locals to their new neighbour.

Chichikov (Only the important locals.)

Narrator And as coaches, carriages and britzkas began to arriving at the door, Chichikov made the last-minute arrangements.

Chichikov Selifan!

Selifan Sir.

Chichikov Would you close that window? There's a terrible draft.

Selifan That window doesn't close, sir. The frame's warped. I'll call out the carpenter tomorrow.

Chichikov Good. And ask him to fix the floorboard by the door. It's loose. So, what do you think, Selifan?

Selifan It's big. It's old. It's a nice house, Mr Chichikov, sir.

Chichikov Yes. Yes it is. And it's mine, Selifan. But I won't let it change me though. Wealth. Fame. I'm still the same old Chichikov, don't you worry.

Selifan That's good to hear, sir.
Shall I serve the larks tongues after the quails' eggs, sir or at the same time?

Chichikov At the same time! Obviously!

We begin to hear voices in an anteroom to this one.

Selifan I think the guests have arrived, sir.

Chichikov Well, go and attend to them.

Narrator Well I think I owe you an apology.

Chichikov Hm?

Narrator I doubted you and I was wrong. You *have* turned over a new leaf.

Chichikov An orchard of leaves.

Narrator I'm impressed.

Chichikov Couldn't have done it without you.

Narrator No no. It was all you.

Chichikov You had a lot to do with it.

Narrator Let's just say 50:50.

Chichikov 70:30.

Narrator In whose favour?

Chichikov Shall we let the guests in?

26.

Cocktail party.

Narrator The whole of Ukrainian society seemed to have turned out for Chichikov's estate-warming. As far as the eye could see, there were Collegiate Councillors, Provincial Secretaries, State Councillors. Tentetnikov stood with Ulinka, watched over by General Betrishchev, his face a gentle crimson. Kostanzhoglo debated soil management with Koshkaryov. Everyone admired Chichikov's quietly stylish decorations, the light and air of humble simplicity about the room

Kost'zhoglo Good light.

Koshkaryov Good air.

Tentetnikov Quiet.

Ulinka But stylish.

Narrator What did I tell you?

Betrishchev Very pleasant room, Chichikov. Restful.

Chichikov I'm glad you approve, General.

Betrishchev Nice big room this. Just the right size for a relief map of the Borodino hills. Now we were dug in at the Rayevski Redoubt, roughly where your fireplace is, and word came that Murat was planning an assault...

Kost'zhoglo Mr Chichikov. I wonder if you could solve a debate I'm having with our ignorant neighbour.

Koshkaryov This soil-loving muckspreader maintains that you have hired in an outsider to manage your estate. I was sure you had chosen someone from inside the village.

Chichikov You're both correct. I have chosen Selifan as my butler and estate manager. He's got some very exciting ideas, isn't that right, Selifan?

Selifan Oh I don't know about that sir. I just thought it might be worth introducing regular monitoring of soil type against the taxonomies being developed in Britain and France while we invest in steam technology to assist the ploughing and improve yields and then work towards moving the lower field to hydroponics and aquacultural research.

Chichikov I think there may be something in this old farmer's lore.

Kost'zhoglo Goodness.

Koshkaryov Gracious.

Dinging of a glass.

Tentetnikov Could I have everyone's attention, please?

The babble subsides.

I hope, Pavel Ivanovich, you won't mind if I take the floor to welcome you, on behalf of us all, to the Dnieper valley and congratulate you on the strong beginnings you have made as a landowner.

Hear hears.

Pavel Ivanovich is too modest to list his accomplishments, but I shall. Writer, a military historian, adventurer, merchant, philosopher, and farmer, Mr Chichikov is a Renaissance Man. I was trying to describe Mr Chichikov to some visitors only yesterday and the phrase that came unbidden to my lips was: he is a hero of our time.

Hear hears.

I am particularly in his debt. Without his kind intercession, I might never have regained the love of my life, my darling Ulinka.

Aaahs and applause.

Some were surprised when my dear and much-loved old aunt should chose to recognise Pavel Ivanovich's virtues in her will. But not I. To me, Pavel Ivanovich is the best of men and I ask you raise your glasses to Mr Chichikov!

'Chichikov'

Chichikov My dear friend. Friends. Your welcome touches me more than you can know. But we've had enough speeches. Ladies and Gentlemen, dinner is served.

Warm sounds of approval and anticipation. The doors open. Everyone slowly falls silent.

Can I – Can I help you officer?

Officer Is your name Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov?

Chichikov Um. Yes.

Officer Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov, I am hereby arresting you on a charge that several weeks on a date to be determined you did deliberately procure or make a forgery of the will of Aleksandra Ivanovna Khanasarova for reasons of personal gain.

Gasps.

Tentetnikov My aunt?

Chichikov This is nonsense.

Officer The original will has been discovered.

Chichikov So she didn't destroy it –

Officer As has the woman who forged the will to your dictation.

Chichikov Oh.

Narrator What – what's this about, Chichikov?

Chichikov Nothing. Dear friend, nothing to be concerned about. Clearly a case of mistaken identity.

Officer Furthermore, I have three witnesses to another possible or actual attempt to defraud the public census.

Chichikov To what?

Officer Is this the man, madam?

Korobochka Good day Mr Cheekychops.

Chichikov Korobochka!

Officer And the other two witnesses. Can you confirm that this is the man who identified himself to you as Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov?

Manilov Indisputably, who else would have such poise and elegance of –

Sobakevich That's him, officer. Bonaparte!

Officer Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov. We have witnesses who swear that some months ago you approached each of them asking to buy something of theirs. Could you tell us what that might be?

Chichikov It was nothing illegal.

Officer Nonetheless.

Chichikov It was dead souls, that's all. Just some dead souls.

Gasps from the crowd.

It wasn't illegal. There's nothing illegal about it.

The crowd back away from him.

Narrator The crowd began to edge away from Chichikov, as he blustered.

Chichikov It's all a terrible misunderstanding.

Narrator He counter-accused.

Chichikov This man is in the pay of Russia's enemies. They want me silenced!

Narrator And he pleaded.

Chichikov Don't let them take me!

Narrator The crowd stared accusingly.

Chichikov (What am I going to do?)

Narrator (How could you?)

Chichikov (It was only a little forgery.)

Narrator (You promised. Turned over a new leaf, you said.)

Chichikov (I tried.)

Narrator (I feel betrayed.)

Chichikov (I've been better though.)

Narrator (I feel so unclean.)

Chichikov (You have to do something.)

Narrator (Not this time.)

Chichikov (I promise. That was the last bad thing. This is the new Chichikov.)

Narrator (I've heard it all before.)

Chichikov (Just do this, just get me out of here. You'll see.)

Pause.

Narrator (Oh alright. Do as I say.) As he turned to face the crowd, they seemed to see a new Chichikov stood before them. His back straighter than before, a new nobility in his eye. And with a voice trembling with feeling, he started to speak.

Chichikov My guests, good friends. I have been a scoundrel, the lowest of men. The officer is right; I forged that will – though you must believe me when I say that Aleksandra Ivanovna had been moved by my tale and wished to do all in her power to make my dream of a small acreage reality. It was only when I heard of her ailing health that I knew she would not be able to put her plan into action. I decided to put it into action for her; that was wrong. I know that now.

As for the dead souls, the plan was to hurt no one. I beg of you, as God is my witness, I hoped only to achieve, by harmless subterfuge, a social position, a decency and respect that I believe – I truly believe – is the birthright of every man.

What is this world? When a good man is forced to the bad to gain recognition of his fundamental human dignity?

Friends, I stand before you. Chastened, stripped bare. I am at your mercy. My life has been like a ship, tossed on the stormy sea. I wished no one harm. I sought only to secure for myself the still waters of the simple life. I know that you must not forget; I will not ask that. Forgetfulness makes a fool of forgiveness. Forgiveness and remembrance, now that is a challenge worthy of the heart of a good man. What will you?

Music.

Narrator Around the room, there was not a woman without a tear slipping down her cheek, not a man who had felt something softening in his heart. It was as though a new warmth had passed through

the room, and in all of their minds, a single word was forming: 'forgiveness'. Chichikov's eloquence, // his sincerity, his evident depth of feeling, and genuine humility before the – what?

Music off abruptly.

Tentetnikov Excuse me!

Narrator What is it?

Tentetnikov Are you talking about us?

Narrator Yes, if I could -

Tentetnikov It's just that I don't we *are* all thinking about forgiveness, are we?

Murmuring of 'no'.

Narrator (Look, who's telling this story?)

Music. It should run down like a battery tape player whenever the Narrator's being interrupted.

His genuine humility before the court of human judgment weighed heavily with the assembled group. And didn't each of them, in their own separate way, feel as though a little of God's love –

Kost'zhoglo No. Sorry, it doesn't wash.

Tentetnikov That's right. You can't *make* us forgive him.

Narrator Feel as though a little of God's love had reached down and touched their hearts that day –

Koshkaryov It isn't working. Sorry, Chichikov. You've got to face your punishment.

Silence. A stand-off.

Narrator (Now what do we do?)

Chichikov (Plan B)

Narrator (Plan B?)

Chichikov Selifan! The window! Run!

Chichikov runs to the window, and climb through.

Narrator Chichikov!

Officer Stop that storyteller!

The guests grab the narrator.

Narrator Let go of me! Chichikov! Chichikov!

He struggles free and follows.

Officer Everyone! Give chase!

Baffled moment of silence.

After them!

27.
Rain. The coach. They run to the coach and Chichikov gets in.

Chichikov *(running)*. We go now!

Selifan Where, sir?

Chichikov Onward!

Selifan But where to sir?

Chichikov Doesn't matter. Onward!

28.
Inside the coach.

Chichikov What are you waiting for?

Sound outside of the crowd approaching.

Selifan The reins are tangled sir.

Chichikov Well hurry up and untangle them. They're coming this way.

The crowd are very near. Through the commotion:

Narrator *(outside)* Chichikov? Chichikov!

Chichikov Hurry up, Selifan!

Selifan *(indistinct)* Nearly got it sir.

Narrator Chichikov, let me in. They're almost here.

Chichikov Onward! Onward!
He thumps his stick on the roof of the carriage.

Narrator Chichikov! Open the door!
Chichikov pulls down the blind.
Chichikov? What are you doing? Pull the blind up and let me in.
They're almost here.

Selifan *(indistinct)* That's us, sir. Hold on.
Carriage starts to move.

Chichikov Onward! Onward!

Narrator Chichikov? Chichikov?
29.
The coach gathers speed and disappears into the distance. We hear the dying shout of 'Onward! Onward!'

Narrator Chichikov!
The carriage is gone. The rest of the crowd has caught up with him.

Officer He's got away. Where's he gone?

Narrator I don't know.
30.
Inside the carriage. Chichikov thumping the roof with his stick and shouting.

Chichikov Onward, Selifan, onward! Give them a taste of the whip!
We hear the whip and the carriage builds in speed.
That's it! That's it! We're flying now! We're flying!
Faster and faster.
Road like air beneath us.
Surely we are a thing of heaven.
We are history itself.
The whirlwind power of the mighty horse.,
Hooves barely touch the earth.

The reins jangling, the air thundering, the carriage a thing of smoke and fire.
Make way, earth, make way!

Narrator **31.** But now his carriage is clattering without direction, blindly through the driving rain, in a night so dark that the coachman can't see the end of his whip.

The fields stretch out for miles on either side.
The mountains scrape angrily at the distant skies.

I told other stories. Overcoats, Noses, Government Inspectors. Sometimes in those stories, I'd see a carriage, blinds down, cloud of dust. Did I put it there? I don't know.

Some say the carriage passed through the plains of Russia for another twenty years. Some say it was another sixty. Other say it drives there yet. But of its inhabitant there was never any sign. Only the leather blinds drawn down, the thump of a stick on the carriage roof, and an old coachman making dark slashes on the backs of the four thin and ghost-grey horses.