

SYNOPSIS OF *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*

When Madame Ranevskaya's little son, Grisha, was drowned only a year after the death of her husband, her grief was so overwhelming that she was forced to go to Paris in order to forget, and she remained away for five years. The Easter before her return to her estate in Russia, she sent for her seventeen year-old daughter Anya to join her. To pay the expenses of the trip and that of her daughter, Madame Ranevskaya had been forced to sell her villa at Mentone, and she had nothing left. She returned home to find that her whole estate, including a cherry orchard, so famous that it was mentioned in the Encyclopedia, was to be sold at auction to pay her debts. Madame Ranevskaya was heartbroken, but her old friend Lopakhin, a merchant whose father had once been a serf on her ancestral estate, proposed a way out. He said that if the cherry orchard were cut down and the land divided into lots for rental to summer cottagers, she would not be able to realize an income of at least twenty-five thousand roubles a year.

Madame Ranevskaya could not endure the thought that her childhood home with all its memories should be subjected to such a fate, and all the members of her family agreed with her. Her brother Gayev, who had remained behind to manage the estate, was convinced that there must be some other way out, but none of his ideas seemed feasible at the moment. It would be fine, he thought, if they all came in for a

legacy, or if Anya could be wed to rich man, or if their wealthy aunt could be persuaded to come to their aid. But the aunt did not entirely approve of Madame Ranevskaya, who, she felt, had married beneath her.

The thought that Gayev himself might do something never occurred to him; he went on playing billiards and munching candy as he had done all his life. Others who made up the household had similar futile dreams. Varya, an adopted daughter, hoped that God might do something about the situation. Pishchik, a neighbouring landowner, who had been saved financially when the railroad bought a part of his property, advised a policy of waiting for something to turn up

Lopakhin, who had struggled hard to attain his present position, was frankly puzzled at the family's stubborn attitude. He had no illusions about himself; in fact, he realized that, compared with these smooth-tongued and well-mannered aristocrats, he was still only a peasant. He had tried to improve himself intellectually, but he fell asleep over the books with which he was supposed to be familiar.

As he gazed at the old cherry orchard in the moonlight, the cherry orchard which seemed so beautiful to Madame Ranevskaya, he could not help thinking of his peasant ancestors, to whom every tree must have been a symbol of oppression. Trofimov, who had been little Grisha's tutor, and who was more expressive of this thought to Anya, with whom he was in love.

The cherry orchard was put up at auction. That evening Madame Ranevskaya gave a ball in the old house, an act in keeping with the unrealistic attitude of her class in general. Even her aged servant, Fiers, supported her in this view by his loyalty to her and her brother. Lopakhin arrived at the party with the news that he had bought the estate for ninety thousand roubles above the mortgage. When he announced that he intended to cut down the orchard, Madame Ranevskaya began to weep. She planned to return to Paris.

Others were equally affected by the sale of the cherry orchard. Gayev, on the basis of the transaction with Lopakhin, was offered a position in the bank at six thousand roubles a year, a position he would not keep because of his laziness. Madame Ranevskaya's servant, Yasha, was delighted over the sale because the trip to Paris would mean for him an escape from the boredom of Russian life. But for Dooniasha, her maid, the sale meant the collapse of her hopes of ever marrying Yasha, and a lifelong bondage to Yepikhodov, a poor, ineffectual clerk. To Varya, Madame Ranevskaya's adopted daughter, it meant a position as housekeeper on a nearby estate. To the landowner, Pishchik, it was the confirmation of his philosophy. Investigators had found valuable minerals on his land, and he was now able to pay his debt to Madame Ranevskaya and to look forward to another temporary period of affluence. Fiers alone was unaffected. Departure of the family was the end of of this old servant's life, for whatever it had been worth, but he was more concerned