

fools

LEON / SLOVITCH / SNETSKY MISHKIN / YENCHNA

SLOVITCH. Good morning, postman.

MISHKIN. Good morning, butcher.

SLOVITCH. A beautiful, sunny day, isn't it?

MISHKIN. Is it? I haven't looked up yet. (*He looks up.*) Oh, yes. Lovely. Very nice.

SLOVITCH. Do I have any mail?

MISHKIN. No. I'm sorry. I'm the postman. I have all the mail.

SLOVITCH. My sister in Odessa hasn't been feeling well. I was hoping I would hear from her.

MISHKIN. It's very hard to hear all the way from Odessa. Perhaps she wrote a letter. I'll look. (*He starts to look through the mail. We hear YENCHNA, a vendor, calling "Fish!" offstage before she appears.*)

YENCHNA. (*Calling out, selling her wares.*) Fish! Fresh fish! Nice fresh flounder and halibut! A good piece of carp for lunch. (*She has no fish, but bunches of flowers.*)

SLOVITCH. Good morning, Yenchna.

YENCHNA. How about a nice piece of haddock? Is that a beautiful fish?

SLOVITCH. What do you mean fish? Those are flowers.

YENCHNA. They didn't catch anything today. Why should I suffer because the fisherman had a bad day? Try the carp, it smells gorgeous.

MISHKIN. I don't have any letters from your sister, Slovitch. But I have a nice letter from the shoemaker's cousin. Would you like that?

SLOVITCH. Is she sick? I hate reading bad news.

MISHKIN. No, no. In perfect health. Take it. You'll enjoy it.

YENCHNA. Can you believe my daughter hasn't written to me in over a year?

MISHKIN. Doesn't your daughter live with you?

YENCHNA. It's a good thing. Otherwise I'd never hear from her. (*LEON enters.*)

LEON. (*To the townspeople.*) Good morning. My name is Leon Steponovitch Tolchinsky. I'm the new schoolmaster.

MISHKIN. (*Bows.*) Mishkin the postman.

SLOVITCH. (*Bows.*) Slovitch the butcher.

YENCHNA. Yenchna the vendor.

LEON. How do you do. I was just talking to a shepherd named Snetsky.

MISHKIN. Oh, yes. Something Something Snetsky. We know him well.

LEON. He was pleasant enough, although—and I hope I don't seem unkind—somewhat deficient in his mental alertness.

YENCHNA. That's Snetsky, all right. (*She taps her head.*) He was kicked in the head by a horse.

LEON. Oh, well. What a pity. When was that?

YENCHNA. Tuesday, Wednesday, twice on Friday and all day Saturday.

LEON. (*Looks at YENCHNA's flowers.*) What lovely and fragrant wares you have to sell, madame. Perhaps I might buy some for my new employer. How much are they, please?

YENCHNA. The flounder is two kopecks and the halibut is three.



LEON. I beg your pardon?

YENCHNA. (*Holds up a white flower.*) If it's too much, I have a nice whitefish for one and a half. (*She wraps it in a newspaper and hands it to him. He pays.*)

LEON. (*To the audience.*) Perhaps the dialect is a little different in this part of the country. (*To the group.*) I'm very eager to begin my new duties. Will one of you be so kind as to direct me to the home of Dr. Zubrisky? (*They all point in different directions.*)

ALL THREE. That way!

LEON. Thank you. Perhaps I'll go in the one direction you haven't pointed to . . . A pleasure meeting you all. (*SNETSKY appears.*) Oh, Hello again. Have you found your sheep?

SNETSKY. Not yet. (*LEON leaves.*) Who was that?

MISHKIN. The new schoolteacher.

SNETSKY. Another one? I just met one a few minutes ago, they must be having a convention here.

YENCHNA. Count Yousekevitch up on the hill isn't going to be very happy about this.

SLOVITCH. That's right. Count Yousekevitch doesn't like new schoolteachers.

SNETSKY. Why?

MISHKIN. He's afraid they'll break the curse.

SNETSKY. What curse?

SLOVITCH. The one that made us stupid since the day we were born.

SNETSKY. Oh, that one.

MISHKIN. Yes. I've been stupid for fifty-one years . . . What about you, Snetsky?

SNETSKY. I'll be dumb forty-three next July.

MISHKIN. And you, Slovitch?

SLOVITCH. Forty-one for me. What about you, Yenchna?

YENCHNA. I just turned the corner of twenty-six.

SLOVITCH. That corner must be about forty miles from here. (*They all exit.*)