

MOONCRAZED

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MOONCRAZED

A play about how a certain Chizhevskii (not the one who's a scientist) sets out with Savinien de Cyrano (of de Bergerac fame) for the Moon and other celestial bodies

Characters:

Lord Movyer (Bergerac) - French writer with a small nose or without a nose at all; 36 years old

Chizhevskii - a columnist for a Russian newspaper; also 36

Duke Arpazhon - Movyer's patron

Nikola LeBret - a friend of Movyer

Tamara - a domestic servant in the Chizhevskii household; fairly young and very attractive

Volan - a French prostitute, a plaything of the wind

Forty Holes - an elderly French prostitute

Journalist - a girl on her first assignment

Waitperson - of any age or gender

Cyrano de Movyer (Bergerac). A French novelist and playwright, who owes his posthumous fame to Edmond Rostand, who wrote a play about his life.

Born in Paris in 1619. A disciple of the philosopher Gassendi. A Musketeer. A trouble-maker.

In 1640 at the siege of Arras, he was seriously injured and ended his military career. He took up literary work, he contracted syphilis. He found himself in opposition to Cardinal Mazarin's party. In his works, he described:

1. Everlasting lamps;
2. Three-staged space rockets;
3. The experience of weightlessness;
4. The functioning of the law of gravity;
5. A transcontinental flight in a flying machine;
6. An instrument designed for recording and reproducing sound...

He died in 1655 in abject poverty. After an illness brought about by an unfortunate accident. The circumstances preceding his death have, until now, remained obscure.

DELIRIUM

A large studio, formed by the combination of several rooms. A woman in red rubber gloves is transplanting a geranium from a blue pot to a yellow one. A man, holding the TV remote in one hand and a cordless telephone receiver in the other, is eating potato chips.

Tamara

You're not even taking a break to eat.

Chizhevskii

We're not even taking a break to eat. *(Into the telephone.)* My little toad, that wretch didn't sign the grant... But what can I do?... But why are you yelling at me?... I'm not yelling at you... I... Yes. Yes. I'll tell him everything...

Tamara

Tell her that I transplanted the geranium.

Chizhevskii

Don't get so excited, you little viper... I understand, yes... I'll tell him everything... Yes. I understand... Tamara transplanted the geranium. *(He looks at the flower.)* Into the yellow one... From the balcony, I think. *(He asks the maid)* Was the soil from the balcony?

Tamara

Yes. From the Superstore package.

Chizhevskii

Yes. From the Superstore package... *(He looks questioningly at Tamara.)* There should have been two there.

Tamara

There was just one.

Chizhevskii

She says there was just one. I don't know... I didn't take it.

Tamara

Let me talk to her.

Chizhevskii

(into the telephone) Talk to her yourself. *(He passes the telephone to Tamara.)*

Tamara

(into the telephone) Hello, Tanya. There was only one package, but the pH level was fine, I checked it. I don't know... It's hot here too.

Chizhevskii

Humid.

Tamara

Humid. *(She breaks into a smile.)* Thank you... No, he's behaving himself... *(She looks at Chizhevskii.)* A bunny.

Chizhevskii

A bunny! *(Loudly.)* I'm - a bunny.

Tamara

(into the phone) Relax, don't worry... Kisses. *(She terminates the connection.)*

Chizhevskii

I'm a bunny!

Tamara

(as if in passing) You're not a bunny?

Chizhevskii

Tamar, let's agree to maintain some distance here.

Tamara

Don't you have anything to do? Take out the trash.

Chizhevskii

Tamara! Do I pay you?

Tamara

Yes.

Chizhevskii

Do I humiliate you?

Tamara

No.

Chizhevskii

Then why do you humiliate me?

Tamara

(returning the flower to its rightful place - on the microwave). I don't know... It's fun somehow. (With sincere interest, this idea has entered her head for the first time.) Are you offended?

Chizhevskii

See - even the word "offended" isn't right. I'm simply losing my gift for words; I feel humiliated, and I can't even say... what from. Why does my... helper...

Tamara

Domestic servant, just say it...

Chizhevskii

Look, I'm not afraid of that term.

Tamara

You don't have to be afraid of it.

Chizevskii

You don't have to imply that I am.

Tamara

Listen, why are you getting so sensitive?

Chizhevskii

Don't interrupt... I don't understand why my domestic servant systematically...
(He can't find the right word.)

Tamara

Well, I don't know, I need this work, I can't throw it all away just because you're offended.

Chizhevskii

I'm not asking you to quit.

Tamara

And I'm not going to. Don't even think about it.

Chizhevskii

Terrific! But I also can't leave this house. It's my house, it's my life, my...environment. It's a subtle thing. It's something you have to feel and protect. Is it possible that you have feelings... for me?

Tamara

I would say so.

Chizhevskii

I can hold onto someone else's feelings.

Tamara

I have a fiancé in Osinovskii.

Chizhevskii

Look, Tamara... This - isn't a minefield. I take a civilized stand... I don't sleep with domestics. And you can stab me in the eye with your fiancé, but I let you know in advance that there's nothing for you in this house besides... understanding and respect.

Tamara

Lighten up, writer.

Chizhevskii

I've asked you not to call me a writer.

Tamara

You won't put up with bullcrap - I won't either.
Chizhevskii cocks his ear toward something.

Chizhevskii

(to someone) It's not polite to eavesdrop.

Tamara

Again?

Chizhevskii

Take a good look. *(He points to the blind.)*

Tamara

It's the second time today.

From behind the blind comes a strange old man dressed in

the clothes of a French nobleman of modest means from the middle of the seventeenth century. His legs, in stockings, are as thin as walking sticks. On his head - sparse but long hair. At his side - a sword.

Movyer

Sir, it is not my custom to eavesdrop.

Chizhevskii

Tamara, bring him a chair.

Movyer

And if you insist on -

Tamara

You promised me that you'd explain...

Chizhevskii

So I did... *(To the old gentleman.)* If you'd wait back there for one more minute...

He politely pushes the old gentleman back behind the blind.

Chizhevskii

Well, basically...

Tamara

Do you know him?

Chizhevskii

No... well - how to put it - I don't know him. But I know him. He's a writer.

Tamara

He's also a writer?

Chizhevskii

Not "also a writer." Simply a writer. A real writer.

Tamara

Did you give him a key?

Chizhevskii

No, I didn't... How could I have given him a key? He, I don't know... He appears, that's all...

Tamara

Out of nowhere?

Chizhevskii

Yes.

Tamara

I get it now.

Chizhevskii

Please, come in.

The old man enters. Tamara brings him a chair. The old man sits down abruptly and awkwardly.

Movyer

I was not eavesdropping.

Chizhevskii

Naturally.

Movyer

If you insist on this point, I will request that you -

Chizhevskii

Oh, be quiet.

Movyer

I will be forced to... *(He puts his hand on the hilt of his sword.)*

Chizhevskii

I'm taking that away.

Overcoming the desperate and pathetic resistance of the old man, Chizhevskii seizes the sword.

Chizhevskii

Calm down. I know that you weren't eavesdropping.

*The old man quietly weeps
because of his own
helplessness and humiliation.*

Chizhevskii

Do something, Tamar. (*Tamara brings him some water.*) Do you not recognize me?

Movyer

Return the sword.

Chizhevskii

No, I'm sorry.

Movyer

(*looking closely at Chizhevskii*) Who are you?

Chizhevskii

But who are you - do you remember?

Movyer

Savinien de Cyrano, at your service.

Chizhevskii

Cyrano... de Bergerac?

Movyer

Bergerac is the name of my father's estate. I decided to add it to my last name.

Chizhevskii

I know, I know.

Movyer

If you are suggesting that the estate no longer belongs to us...

Chizhevskii

I don't care about that.

Movyer

Well, it's true. The Movyer-Bergerac estate is lost...
Lost... (*Very quietly and bitterly.*) Irretrievably.
(*Rousing himself.*) But I did not give you the right...
Where am I?

Chizhevskii

You're delirious.

Movyer

Monsieur, I can see that you do not wish me harm. In the name of humanity, please explain - what's wrong with me.

Chizhevskii

I just told you... You're raving. Everything that you see here is your delirium.

Movyer

In other words... I'm sleeping?

Chizhevskii

(as if there is nothing strange about this). Yes. Listen, please - I don't like to repeat myself. We discussed this subject in detail earlier today. *(He discovers a little piece of paper that's important to him and immediately gets distracted from his interlocutor.)*

Movyer

But I don't remember a thing.

Chizhevskii

What can I do... *(He addresses Tamara, entirely ignoring the presence of Lord Movyer.)* So you think that if I call and state everything, he'll fire me?

Tamara

I'd fire you.

Chizhevskii

Terrific. *(He resolutely dials a number on the telephone.)*

Chizhevskii

(into the phone) Roman Vitalevich! This is Chizhevskii... Roman Vitalevich. I've thought about the situation at the Czech film festival... I finally want to get the whole thing resolved. Yes... Yes... No, but you know what?... In principle, I don't have to go there... We can just order the material from Kuzmuk... He's going to shoot a documentary there anyway... No, he's not too busy... Well, worst case scenario, we could offer him a commission... No, I'm not getting upset... No... Not at all... It's turned out very well because my spouse happens to also she has other plans there well no, but we yes then it's better to

not do everything somehow well it's coming together now... Yes, I remember, I'm almost done writing it. I'll drop it in the mail to Nadia tonight. All the best, give a big hello to Marina Petrovna. *(He terminates the connection.)* What a swine.

Tamara

Is the phone off?

Chizhevskii

(seriously frightened) I pressed the button!

Tamara

Are you sure?

Chizhevskii

Well, it's for the best.

The phone rings.

Chizhevskii

Hello... No, Roman Vitalevich, I didn't forget. We're celebrating the work of the artist and the stunning resolution in the third act... Yes, they told me... No, we're not bidding farewell... *(He presses the button on the phone deliberately and carefully. Several times. He doesn't say anything.)*

Tamara

You know I can't get used to these phones. It made sense before - if you hung up, you hung up.

Chizhevskii

But how can there be so much good and so much evil in the same man?

Tamara

And what is there that's good in him?

Chizhevskii

Well, he... He knows everyone's name, he supported the photo-editor, we were meeting - and his son got hurt on a motorcycle. What am I talking about? He's a monster, just the latest one. *(He involuntarily presses the button on the phone yet again to break the connection. He eats potato chips. He offers some to Tamara and Lord Movyer. Tamara declines. Master Movyer has some.)*

Tamara

I worked in Malatskaya's house...

Chizhevskii

Who is that?

Tamara

Well, Malatskaya. She has her own factory... Cosmetic jewelry, design - all that stuff. You must know her.

Chizhevskii

I don't.

Tamara

Her cat got run over by a bicycle. A mountain bike. She almost lost her mind.

Chizhevskii

Where are you going with this?

Tamara

Well... nowhere.

Chizhevskii

Ah.

Movyer

May I disturb you?

Chizhevskii

You may. But bear in mind that I don't have much time; I have to finish up another article and send it off by nine tonight. Or nine thirty at the latest. Because Nadia the Corrector is leaving at ten and I'll ruin the issue again. Well, that is to say, I won't ruin the issue, of course, they'll put out something, but there'll be a scandal.

Movyer

Am I dead?

Chizhevskii

I don't think so. (*To Tamara.*) Tamar, can you finish a little early today? Because if you don't I definitely won't write anything. Yak-yak-yak-yak-yak... I'll get hooked into wagging tongues with you...

Tamara

All right. But this one won't let you work.

Chizhevskii

But what am I going to do with him? Let him sit there.

Movyer

Forgive me, where would I be able to...

Chizhevskii

Down the hall, second door on the right. Take him, Tamara - show him how to turn on the light. *(Realizing that this might embarrass the vulnerable Movyer, he gets irritated.)* Sit down, I'll take him myself.

Chizhevskii and Movyer exit into the hallway. Tamara examines the sword. Chizhevskii returns. He moves around the room, carefully selecting a path of motion that doesn't intersect with Tamara's path of motion. He goes to his worktable, he attempts to work. He can't work - it's Tamara.

Chizhevskii

(in a fit of anger, he almost smashes his unfortunate computer mouse) Okay, I, can't not pay attention to you. But... why do you carry on with me as if I can't not pay attention to you? What's with the constant hinting... This walking about... It's unprofessional.

Tamara

I'm cleaning.

Chizhevskii

Then clean. But do it modestly and precisely, you don't have to clean right under my nose. What's with the exhibition, what is that you've pinned on? *(He's talking about her apron.)* What do you hope to gain by this?

Tamara

Nothing.

Chizhevskii

Nothing? It's mean, mean, it's treacherous and... It's a provocation. You're a provocateur, Tamar; do you really not know how that affects me?

Tamara

What?

Chizhevskii

A woman in a uniform.

Tamara

(clearly pleased) How would I know.

Movyer comes in. He starts to slip on the smooth floor. If Tamara had not supported him, he would have fallen.

Movyer

(to Tamara) I'm much obliged.

Chizhevskii

How do you feel?

Movyer

Terrific. As much as that's possible at my age.

Chizhevskii

How old are you?

Movyer

Thirty-six.

Chizhevskii

(offended for some reason) Funny.

Tamara

(explaining) He's also thirty-six.

Chizhevskii searches the shelves for a book he needs. He finds it. He leafs through it.

Movyer

Monsieur, I demand that you answer all of my questions at

once, without any excuses or abusive remarks. Otherwise, I will find the means to defend my honor, and you will find occasion to bitterly regret your own impoliteness.

Chizhevskii

(not looking away from his reading) Listen, brother... I'm not going to stand on ceremony with you. I don't want to hear you babbling things in some ancient tongue. If you say something, say it with plain human speech. Without all the "monsieurs" and "sirs"... So I don't have to hear that stuff anymore. Otherwise, I'll send you down to the devil's stepmother. I have things to do; you've arrived at a very bad time.

Movyer

I can only speak the way that I speak.

Chizhevskii

You will speak the way that I say. I am your delirium, I give the orders here. You will speak like a normal person, without histrionics and all these phrases that go over my head.

He demonstrates what kind of phrases. For this, he brushes his right hand over his head toward his left ear.

Movyer

I am a man of my own epoch. I cannot speak as you do. It is impossible.

Chizhevskii finally tears himself away from his reading.

Chizhevskii

What do you mean, impossible? Are you understanding me right now? Well, I'm not speaking French.

Movyer

Indeed.

Chizhevskii

Don't you forget - from the very moment that you land here, you are under my complete command; you are obliged, no, not obliged - you are doomed to carry out everything that I

demand of you. And especially since I'm not planning to demand anything of you (I've got bigger fish to fry) then, if you want, talk with Tamara.

Movyer

My darling Amazonian, do not heed his impertinence...

Chizhevskii

Did you not understand me?

Movyer

I do not wish to converse with Tamara.

Chizhevskii

All the better. Sit, over here - look at some magazines.

He considers the conversation ended.

Tamara

Should I heat up a little soup?

Chizhevskii

Will you have some soup?

Movyer

What sort?

Chizhevskii

A little light broth with homemade noodles, tiny meatballs, and greens.

Movyer

I will.

Chizhevskii

And I will. No, I won't. If I eat soup, I'll want to lay down, then I'll fall asleep, then I'll need to wake up, take a shower, have tea, phone the wife, they'll blow up a trolleybus and I'll have to see it, then re-group, take an aspirin, phone the wife and, of course, I won't have checked the mail. I'll check the mail, have coffee, dinner, an aspirin, phone the wife. After all that, I won't be able to do an ounce of work. And the issue will be ruined. I'm not having soup.

Movyer

Then nor will I.

Chizhevskii

Eat. You don't have to work.

Movyer

I don't want to.

Chizhevskii

As you wish.

He's silent for some time.

Chizhevskii

Tamara, bring us the soup, or I'll feel guilty about him being hungry.

Tamara goes to the kitchen.

Chizhevskii

(becoming melancholy) Well... They got their way.

Movyer

Who?

Chizhevskii

All of you. The world's instruments. They torment me, humiliate me. She didn't say there, "I won't bring the soup until you write." She won't say that. It's more important to her to imagine that she saved me with this soup. If God grants that I somehow get this article written, it will look like the soup wrote it for me. Like she wrote it for me. But you see, in point of fact, the soup is rubbish. I understand that the noodles are homemade, that the broth is tasty...technically speaking, you can't complain. But there's nothing in it that, I don't know... has been created with pride. There's no desire to impress. It's simply soup! Feed yourself, writer, give the organism what it needs. Practical soup. And the article will be exactly the same. Without inspiration. They're very closely connected, these things, you have to feel that, honor it.

Movyer

You're a writer?

Chizhevskii

I'm not a writer. And I don't like that word. However, that you've gone and shown some interest in me, that you've so... lowered yourself - I count that in your favor.
(Without any sort of segue.) Look how Konchalovsky's wife cooks. Now, that I understand.

Movyer

But Tamara's not really your wife?

Chizhevskii

No. But you have to... grow. Strive toward something. So my whole life is taken up with housekeepers. No, my wife is on vacation now... at the shore. *(Without a segue)* Savinien, we do need to have a talk...

Movyer

I've been requesting that for a long time.

Chizhevskii

What would be better - before our soup or after?

Movyer

Before is better.

Chizhevskii

(shouting) Tamar, hold off for a bit. We need ten minutes...

Tamara

I'm bringing it already.

Chizhevskii

Do you hear me? Give us ten minutes.

Tamara

(in a voice that forebodes nothing good) Fine.

Chizhevskii walks about the studio, painstakingly selecting his words.

Chizhevskii

So you were asking whether I happen to be a writer. I said that I'm not. Because a "writer" is a person who believes in something. He has some principle, a conviction, perhaps - a vice, a neurosis, a fate... Something that's - big

somehow. Does this make sense, what I'm talking about here?

Movyer

Ha.

Chizhevskii

Well yes... To someone not like yourself... I've got a question related to that...

Tamara

Should I bring it now?

Chizhevskii

What - have ten minutes gone by?

Tamara

What am I - a stopwatch?

Chizhevskii

(to Movyer, with the intonation of someone who's suffering)
Now do you understand?

Movyer

(sincerely) I do.

Chizhevskii "suffers" for a little while. Then he takes some time to recover his train of thought.

Chizhevskii

And so, I'm not a writer. Because I don't have any convictions.

Movyer

None at all?

Chizhevskii

Well, no. I don't have any internally non-contradictory convictions. Anything I might say, I could easily disprove myself.

Movyer

The philosopher Gassendi, of whom I consider myself a disciple...

Chizhevskii

I'll permit you to speak later. For now, you're listening to me. I am not a writer, I'm a reviewer, a critic. Which is to say, I take myself pretty seriously... But why, why do I, a gifted and lazy human being, allow myself to write: "I would particularly like to commend the stunning resolution in the third act?" Why do I write that? Do you think that I would really like to commend it?

Movyer

Don't write it.

Chizhevskii

Answer the question. Do you think that I would really like to commend this artistically bankrupt resolution?

Movyer

No.

Chizhevskii

You're wrong. I do. Because it's professional to do so, and I know that it's expected of me.

Movyer

But this resolution, is it actually so bad?

Chizhevskii

Actually, it's not so bad, and that's how I'm writing about it... But leaving that aside, I could remain entirely true to myself and proclaim it both good and utterly useless and god knows how amazing. And for each of my inner decisions and half-decisions, and it's the half-decisions that are most horrifying - due to laziness, due to mediocre soup, due to the television that's on in my neighbor's apartment... For each half-decision, each half-assessment, each castrated half-opinion - you will find not only arguments and words but heart-felt sap... That's what's deadly.

Movyer

But in this particular situation you have not lied.

Chizhevskii

True. In my defense, I have not lied. But you see there are other situations. When lying, when spreading this provincial artistic glee - would only win... would only gain me friends. From amongst those who really don't like

this shit. But I don't need friends.

Movyer

I don't need friends either.

Chizhevskii

I don't need friends!

Movyer

I don't need friends.

Chizhevskii

Friends are unnecessary to me.

They hug each other. They weep. They've found one another. Tamara brings in her tray with a gait that won't tolerate any objections.

Chizhevskii

Here's another theme... We won't take Tamara specifically -

Tamara

Where won't you take me?

Chizhevskii

Nowhere. We won't take you as a theme.

Tamara

(setting out the dishes) But if you go, will you take me?

Chizhevskii

Go where? We're not going anywhere.

Tamara

I know that you're not going anywhere. But if you do go somewhere, will you take me?

Chizhevskii

But we're not even thinking of going somewhere.

Movyer

We'll take you, we'll take you, don't worry.

Tamara

(to Chizhevskii) And is it so hard for you to make a

promise?

Tamara goes out.

Chizhevskii

No, nevertheless, Tamara is a theme. So what do you think - what role does she play in my life?

Movyer

But isn't it what people would suspect?

Chizhevskii

Well, it's a little like that, but - it's the opposite.

Movyer

I surrender, I don't understand.

Chizhevskii

Tamar is the whetstone of my resolve. Do I need to explain what a whetstone is?

Movyer

In general? Of course not.

Chizhevskii

I'll explain anyway. A whetstone is a rock for sharpening things. A grindstone. No, that's not right. A grindstone is something else. A grindstone is what they press grapes on.

Movyer

Yes, I know.

Chizhevskii

I see that you know. But don't I have a right to show my erudition?

Movyer

You do.

Chizhevskii

Or am I to demonstrate it before Tamara? Or wait until Tanya comes back from the resort? *(He clarifies.)* Tanya is my wife.

Movyer

(quickly) Would you be so kind as to explain what a grindstone is? I've long wanted to know.

Chizhevskii

I will, but keep in mind that you've already spoiled all the fun of it for me.

Movyer

It's good that I know that I'm asleep. It's pleasant like this.

Chizhevskii

In iconography there is a motif - Christ on the grindstone. Christ is depicted in a special type of barrel - with a screw and a press up above, and they're squeezing grapes. But there's blood pouring from his wounds, it's as if it's flowing. So that allegorically the Savior is understood as a cluster of grapes. Well, you understand: "This is my blood you drink" - that's the whole point.

Movyer

I understand.

Chizhevskii

And so. The grindstone that Christ is on, that's not the kind of grindstone, the little grindstone on which they sharpen knives.

Movyer

Aha.

Chizhevskii

Tamar is a sharpener, but she's in no way a grindstone.

Movyer

A sharpener, but not a grindstone.

Chizhevskii

Not a grindstone. That's important. She's a whetstone, a rock for sharpening things. On her I sharpen -

Tamara enters.

Tamara

How's the soup?

Chizhevskii

The soup is terrific.

Chizhevskii gives a sign to

Movyer, which Tamara doesn 't notice. They begin to eat the soup.

Tamara

Should I bring the salt?

Chizhevskii

No, everything's fine.

Tamara exits.

Chizhevskii

And so... *(He takes a few more spoonfuls of soup.)* By the way, the soup's not bad.

Movyer

The soup's very good.

Chizhevskii

And so... *(He finally leaves the soup alone.)* And so, so, so, ah hell... That's what you get for eating - everything slips away... I really had something quite intelligent to say.

Movyer

Tamara is the whetstone of your resolve.

Chizhevskii

That I remember. But now the power of this pronouncement has vanished somewhere. It seems like we ate it... But now, actually, this shows - whether the soup is prepared with heart, or not. *(He shouts.)* Tamara!

Tamara appears.

Tamara

More?

Chizhevskii

(after a brief, energetically extended pause) You know what - sure

Tamara

And for you?

Movyer

Please.

Tamara exits with the empty dishes.

Chizhevskii

Right there, you saw it... I run into this every day. The contradictions tear me apart, thousands of information streams flow through me, I get scattered, defeated, I have all this stuff to do... God knows how I survive. And then this one comes in and says... *(He imitates Tamara.)* More?

Movyer

That's not the worst thing she could say.

Chizhevskii

Well, I agree with you there.

Tamara brings a tray with more soup. During Chizhevskii's speech, she sets the dishes on the table and does not react at all to the idea being conveyed by her employer.

Chizhevskii

True, it's not the worst thing... Because the potential range is enormous. She could say that she doesn't want to live anymore. There's no ethical limitation - an entirely amoral, selfcentered...
Matilda. *(To Tamara.)* What, why are you silent, why are you silent over there, shaking your teets? Say something. She's silent because she's hurt. *(To Movyer.)* I'm only this brave with you here. On my own, I'm afraid to sneeze in her direction.

Tamara withdraws.

Chizhevskii

My wife is on vacation. And, like a cursed man, I'm forced to pour out all my troubles to a domestic servant.

Movyer

Your wife will soon return.

Chizhevskii

(waves his hand) My wife simply doesn't listen to me. *(He takes another two spoonfuls of soup.)* This one at least pretends. And so... Tamara is the whetstone of my resolve to recognize my absolute nothingness - not pettiness - pettiness is what a writer would say. No - nothingness! Nothing but a godless pseudo-bull. Because a bull is an organizer, a healthy ox, an energetic, athletic little guy. Or even a puny crackerjack, but a methodical - that's the key word - a "methodical" crackerjack... Not a lot of heart, but methodical as a woodpecker... Knows everything. Who to be rude to, whom to offer a good word, whose ass to lick clean to the bone... But most importantly... he understands practical matters. It's a living knowledge, refined every day and... hard-nosed. He who kisses ass - that man is a breadwinner. He who doesn't - *(He whistles to indicate "end of story. ")*... My wife is on vacation. It's totally disgusting.

Movyer

What's disgusting?

Chizhevskii

The ordinary world - it's such crap. I'm also a humanist, I know how to kiss ass... But to do that as a profession? I'd rather get a noose, I'd - honestly - I'd rather go into writing... I'll write dialogue for the box. Do you know I became a critic through a misunderstanding? The love-dove - my wife - I thought I'd go to a conference with my wife... Well, you know how it happens, to keep her company.

Movyer

It happens.

Chizhevskii

But you want it to be like, you know... there are these personal growth seminars, where you pay people money to corrupt your brain - and so the main activity there is to place two monkeys opposite one another and give them a task... One monkey shouts to the other, "What do you want?" and the other one says what she wants. Like this: *(He sits himself in front of Movyer. He shouts into his face.)* "What do you want? What do you want? What do you want? What do you want?... " Half an hour like that. And you must reply. And what's more, you reply loudly to each shout and something new each time. I think it's a sensible exercise. After half an hour, surprising things come out... And so,

if you consider it from that kind of serious, personal-growth perspective, it turns out I want to write plays. I could do it. Maybe I don't have the ability to invent the plots, but I could write the dialogue. Or do it for the idiot box. Like I said... Yeah, and so... about Tamara.

Movyer

What is the idiot box?

Chizhevskii

Don't interrupt.

The phone rings.

Chizhevskii

Hello. My little viper, I'm very, very busy... No. I didn't look. Maybe Tamara looked. All right, I'll find the second package of soil and transplant it myself... It's normal... What tone? I'm speaking normally... *(He shouts.)* A normal tone! *(Affectionately.)* Kisses. Yes. I love you too. *(He ends the conversation.)* And so, Tamara is a grindstone.

Movyer

A whetstone.

Chizhevskii

(spits) I messed it up myself. Right - a whetstone. Tamara is a whetstone. I take a civilized position on this - don't change for your wife. Don't change for your wife in the abstract. That's infantilism... But then concretely, whenever it's convenient, don't change and that's all... Not because I'm afraid of something or incapable of it. Or because I'm afraid...

Movyer

You already said "afraid."

Chizhevskii

And I'll say it again... I'm afraid. Which is to say, on the contrary, I'm actually - not afraid of anything. Well, that is, I'm so afraid of everything that nothing scares me anymore...

Movyer

Does Tamara like you?

Chizhevskii

She has a deep, deep antipathy. Looking at her soberly, she's a battle machine of love and passion. Everything about her fits, nothing is distorted, nothing sticks out... Well, things stick out, but appropriately. Everything, down to the most trivial level, is thought through, everything works, everything shines. Her character, say what you will, is good: not spiteful but also not syrupy, what's really needed for life - a heart with spunk. And that's deadly. It's the easy route, the infamous wide gates... The kind that will go to Siberia for you. The wife of a Decembrist, a perfect blintz.

Tamara enters.

Tamara

May I clear?

Chizhevskii

Stand still and be quiet.

Tamara stands still and is quiet. Chizhevskii and Movyer examine Tamara. They exchange very meaningful glances.

Chizhevskii

Thank you, Tamar.

Tamara

Shall I clear?

Chizhevskii

Just leave us be.

Tamara, a little hurt, leaves the men.

Chizhevskii

Well, what do you think?

Movyer

Brilliant.

Chizhevskii

Let's be honest - perfection.

Movyer

And nothing's happened between you?

Chizhevskii

Nothing has and nothing will.

Movyer

Yes, history -

Chizhevskii

Because if I took her, tomorrow I would need to get friends, to introduce to her, so she wouldn't be bored. The day after tomorrow - some other kind of nonsense... And after a week I'd agree to... invite them all to the dacha. And that would be the end! Therefore, Tamara will die a little girl. (*He realizes that he's gotten carried away.*) I'm getting carried away, of course: she has a fiancé in Osinovskii.

Movyer

Yes, she's far from a little girl.

Chizhevskii

Yes, she's far from a little girl...

Movyer

But what about your wife?

Chizhevskii

Tanya?

Movyer

Well, yes. What's she like?

Chizhevskii

She's the same. Exactly the same.

Movyer

It's all quite complicated.

Chizhevskii

Super-complicated...

Movyer

You know I have similar problems -

Chizhevskii

Uh, no... The paper won't wait. Of course, you heard me out, although you didn't have a choice. But I'm not going to hear you out... Please don't be offended.

Movyer

But how? That's not fair.

Chizhevskii

It's fair.

Movyer

It's not fair.

Chizhevskii

It's fair.

Movyer

It's not.

Chizhevskii

Look, why the hell do you all keep tormenting me? Why the hell does everyone torment me? They're in collusion. One ceases, and another begins... What do you need out of me? *(He shouts.)* What do you need? What do you need? What do you need? What do you need? What do you need? What do you need? What do you need? What, what?

He notices that Movyer has disappeared. He calms down. He sits at the computer. He sluggishly tries to peck at the keyboard.

REALITY

The room of Lord Movyer. A few of the most essential pieces of furniture. A pile of books. Movyer is waking up.

Movyer

(quietly) LeBret... .LeBret... *(He cries out with a weak voice.)* Anyone!

There is no answer. With great difficulty, Movyer sits up. And then he rises from the bed. He is dressed in a simple nightshirt. By pushing a chair in front of him, he reaches the table. He attempts to pour himself some water or wine. At that moment, Nikola LeBret, Movyer's devoted friend, enters the room.

LeBret

God be praised.

He puts Movyer back into bed. He gives him wine from a glass.

Movyer

Was I asleep for a long time?

LeBret

I hate to admit it, but I was already thinking that you'd never wake up. You were screaming. *(He feels Movyer's forehead.)* There's no fever now.

Movyer

And what was I screaming?

LeBret

I couldn't make out a single word. *(He puts a cup of some beverage to the sick man's lips.)* Your duke promised to come by.

Movyer

We should at least order a ham of some kind.

LeBret

Have you spent your whole life acting as an independent poet in order to grovel now before this Arpazhon?

Movyer

Yes, I've recognized the way things are, I've acknowledged him as my patron. But he does not demand of me any degrading services.

LeBret

Think again; you wrote two madrigals for his mistress...

Movyer

Yes, I did.

LeBret

Earlier, you would not have written a single line - even for a king...

Movyer

Or maybe I would have.

LeBret

You would not.

Movyer

I would.

The Duke of Arpazhon enters.

Duke

(seeing that Movyer is attempting to rise from bed) Don't get up, I beg you... *(To LeBret.)* LeBret, you're here too? You don't abandon a friend in misfortune. That's commendable. Whereas I was riding by here and thought, let me look in on my great writer...I'll see where the money is going.

Movyer

I am grateful to you for the honor that you have rendered by your visit. May I be so bold as to offer you some wine.

Duke

(rapidly) No, no, no... I will not be drinking anything, nor touching anything. LeBret? Show me the kindness of notifying the coachman that I will come down in five minutes.

With a small bow, LeBret exits in silence.

Duke

He does not like me; I can sense that.

Movyer

You are mistaken.

Duke

Yes, I'm often mistaken. Because I am naive.

Movyer

Perhaps - I don't have that problem.

Duke

Precisely. (*Without a segue.*) Savinien, what are you writing these days?

Movyer

After the premiere, I allowed myself three weeks of complete tranquility. LeBret transported me from Paris. We stayed with his father, in Chevreny. I recuperated and pondered the final section of "On the Government and People of the Sun."

Duke

Is that a continuation of your "Journey to the Moon"?

Movyer

"On the Government and People of the Moon," if you will.

Duke

You literary men are so sensitive... You think that the rearrangement of a few words will change something.

Movyer

A few words can mean a great deal.

Duke

O-puh! I get it, old chap... That shows that you really consider me a brute. If you could hear yourself: "A few words can mean a great deal"! Are you not ashamed, Savinien? You're saying that to me, your patron and only defender?

Movyer

I...

Duke

No, it's true, I'm offended. You talk to me as if I'm a Turk who keeps Aristotle in his stables. You are a May rose, and I am a cow that chomps on your head.

Movyer

Your highness, allow me to explain myself.

Duke

I'm listening to you, Lord Movyer.

Movyer

I only wanted to...

Duke

Proceed.

Movyer

Your highness... *(He blushes, trembles, and mumbles something.)*

Duke

Who would even bother with you?

Movyer

Your high...

Duke

Pull yourself together. I am your friend... your admirer. You think I'm a dimwit - let that be on your conscience. Your strange behavior, the inexplicable pauses, the blushing, the trembling, the absurd little words, your half-conscious state - there must be an explanation for all of this. Were you using mercury preparations?

Movyer

Yes... I had the misfortune of being treated with ointments that had a mercury base.

Duke

Well there you have it... I must admit that I'm a little disappointed. Until recently, I thought that you were an original. It pleased me that I could find a common language with a man who spurns social convention. But, as it turned out, all of this was only the consequence of medical treatment. You're not an original; you're... a syphilitic!

Movyer

Fortune has not been kind to me. But the illness has not disturbed my muse.

Duke

You know, Savinien, I'm not a shopkeeper, I'm not a slave to petty morality. But you know there do exist, after all... proprieties... condoms, if nothing else. Why, explain to me, why Lord Moliere, with whom you are not unfamiliar, does not have syphilis and yet this does not prevent his plays from drawing full houses? Could you possibly explain this to me?

Movyer

Moliere is a little boy. A thief and a fawner.

Duke

Yes? I have different information. In fact, I've heard from many people that he is a master of biting satire, an original, and a highly gifted literary man.

Movyer

He stole two scenes from me.

Duke

Savinien, only failures talk like that... Everyone steals. They say that even you have lifted from Lucian, Thomas More, and also some Spaniard... I forget.

Movyer

Do you mean "The Man in the Moon or the Journey of Domingo Gonzales"?

Duke

Something like that.

Movyer

You've got bad sources. That's a novel by Francis Goodwin - he's an Englishman. And I refer to him directly in my preface.

Duke

It's not important, I simply wanted to remind you that every action has as its object an objective. Did I just make a pun? Has as its object an objective. Write it down, I'll give it to you.

Movyer

(sourly) Merci.

Duke

For the most part, I don't give a damn: whether you have syphilis or a heart attack, whether you stole or were stolen from... I want my patronage to be used by an individual of the highest standard, the brightest gem in the crown of French *belles lettres* - he who is talked about in the queen's salon. In a word, an individual worthy of the patronage of the esteemed Duke of Arpazhon! Where did you disappear to after the premiere?

Movyer

It was a failure. There was someone I had to visit.

Duke

It was not a failure. Everyone was waiting to see what the archbishop would say. If you had approached him, he most likely would have expressed his gratitude to you... And everyone would have known how to react to your scribblings. But you ran away, like a coward at the most decisive moment of the battle. I had a higher opinion of you, Movyer. I have no need of a battered-down, aching old man; I need the deBergerac of the days of the Tour de Nesle. The bully, the drunk, the master of impromptu. I need rumors about your romantic escapades, accounts of your binges and ravings. Within reasonable limits, I am prepared to spend enormous sums of money on all of that. Smarten up, for god's sake. And drop the syphilis. No more syphilis. It's possible that I myself have had it since I was fourteen years old. So what? Do you see me limiting myself? We live in the seventeenth century; people don't die from it anymore. This very day I'll send you some powder and a tailor. Apparently, you are departing tomorrow to see your cousin, de Neufvilette?

Movyer

I haven't visited her in over two years.

Duke

That's nothing to worry about. Show up at her place at the height of the reception, as if nothing has happened; try to get noticed.

Movyer

And then what?

Duke

It doesn't matter. You can blush or flush, stammer or talk

through your hat - in your usual way. Everyone will decide that you are secretly in love and suffering because of it.

Movyer

In love with my cousin?

Duke

Cyrano, do not insult my knowledge of the world. Being in love with one's cousin is more honorable than flying away to the moon. Such people are desired guests in any circle. Maybe they will even invite you to the discussion evenings at the Marquise Rambouillet. And then we'll see who's the best writer in France.

Movyer

But I will not start writing better just because Mademoiselle Rambouillet offers to receive me.

Duke

But really, you don't need to write anymore. What you have written is enough. You could have managed quite well without the Mazarin pamphlet. Think of how many better writers there have been who basically never wrote a line in their entire lives. But then, do you want to know my opinion... Not the opinion of the Duke of Arpazhon, not the opinion of your patron, but the opinion of your friend and... simply your friend.

Movyer

Your opinion is precious to me.

Duke

Perhaps I'm not a great expert, but I am certain... Moliere writes better than you. And he's younger. So I advise you not to lose this opportunity to come to your senses. Shape up, Movyer!

*He goes to exit. Movyer
springs up from bed. He runs
up to the Duke on his
stumbling, bare, pale legs.*

Movyer

When they have forgotten Moliere, my name will be known by every scholar!

Duke

This is untrue, but it pleases me to hear you talk like that.

Movyer

What is Moliere? The rewriting of old farces in a new way. All of it is old Italian and Spanish junk that he found in a dust bin, which is where he himself belongs.

Duke

Really, what's the matter with you? It's like you've gone mad.

Movyer

I know Moliere quite well. He and I went together to the lectures of the immortal philosopher Gassendi, where they taught us to call into question the most serious authorities. What did Moliere take away from those lectures?

Duke

What indeed?

Movyer

A virtuosic ability to catch flies and pull them, with the help of some thread, through his nostrils into his mouth.

Duke

But what's wrong with that? I myself love to catch flies. *(He makes several attempts to catch a fly. On his fourth attempt, he succeeds.)* Did you see that? No, really, did you see it?

Movyer

Vague platitudes, glib dialogue... Not a single new idea. A complete and precise set of salon witticisms... Can anyone really take his hackwork seriously?

Duke

(studying the captured fly with fascination) How, did you say... through his nose?

Movyer groans. He returns to his bed. He jumps into it. He buries his head in the pillows.

Duke

(in an unusually good disposition of spirit) You've cheered me up, Savinien... I saw passion, I saw an offended intellect. Now for that Bergerac my purse is always open.

Movyer

(sitting up briskly in bed) My offended intellect -

Duke

(frightened and unusually loud) Silence!

Movyer, not expecting such a peremptory outburst, looks at the Duke in amazement.

Duke

(putting a finger to his lips) Shhhh! You almost created a major misfortune.

Movyer

(already calm) I'll still say whatever I want about you.

Duke

I'm not the point here. I've mixed with literary men for a long time, and I don't give one denier about your abuse. You were about to condemn money. Come on, admit it, you wanted to say something like, "My intellect *(He makes a demonstrative gesture.)* HM-HM... on your open purse." Am I correct?

Movyer

That's exactly what I wanted to say.

Duke

Well enough of that. You may spit... on whomever you like. Even on that... cardinal. Which, however, you've already done in your pamphlets and for which you will probably still have to pay. But I advise you not to spit on money. That rapacious, rancorous wretch. Even in your head. Believe me - I've saved you from a very, very big misfortune.

With a groan, Movyer again buries his head in the pillows.

Duke

Yes, that's right. There, in the pillows, is your kingdom. Your worlds, your little worlds, your nonexistent machines, your imaginary, weighty problems, far from the life of the people. What "People of the Moon," what "People of the Sun"? I go to the theatre in order to discover myself, to discover that which I already know. I don't care a whit for your attacks on the Jesuits, for your arguments with Pythagorus or even, and may His Holiness forgive me, for your new refutations of the existence of God. That's all - passé! You can write it for your beloved Gassendi, read it to him, read it to other idiots like yourself. The marquises want to laugh. If the marquises laugh - you're a good writer. If they don't laugh - you're bad. It's all very simple. They laugh - you're good. They don't laugh - you're bad. Moliere knows the people's language; he writes in the people's language and FOR the people.

Movyer

(into a pillow) For the marquises.

Duke

I hear what you're muttering over there. Yes, and also for the marquises; the marquises are people too. Look at what vital themes he chooses... Absurdly precise things! Two provincial petit-bourgeoisie, who have read a lot of novels, make themselves out to be aristocrats... Now that's sharp! That really hits the mark! I got to see how Mademoiselle d'Juso reacted to it. She was so furious she almost strangled her lapdog. Now that's a success! And what have you got? A debate of the topic, "What happens if a Christian eats a Muslim?" How does such rubbish get into your head? Who's going to read that?

Movyer

(unable to contain himself, rising halfway up in bed) The debate to which you refer will immortalize my name... Where a Christian ends and a Muslim begins in God's eyes is the most important, most central question of humanity. If we don't respond to it now, we'll regret it later.

Duke

Who do your Muslims trouble today? Wake up, Savinien, you're way out of touch.

Movyer leaves the bed completely. He is roused by

the argument.

Movyer

Maybe they don't understand me now, maybe I'm just reaching a few individuals...But when my predictions start to come true -

Duke

They won't.

Movyer

They will.

Duke

Fine. If you want, I'll also make some predictions.

Movyer

(heatedly) Go ahead!

Duke

Do you know how you might get fame?

Movyer

No - how?

Duke

If some idiot is found, or more likely - some shrewd and gifted poet, who will work up your biography into an adventure story. He will make you a disfigured lover, who flies about the stage, brandishes a sword, reads poetry and commits noble follies. I predict - in this play you will be a Gascon. He'll give you a nose like *this*.

Movyer

What garbage. I'm not a Gascon; I was born in Paris.

Duke

This will be revenge for your dullness... And so if they write such a play, or even if you write it yourself, I tell you... Only then they might, *might* remember you. Or rather - they'll forget you completely. Because in this play there won't be any "People of the Sun." Or any syphilis, for God's sake.

Movyer

That's not right. They will remember me when it's proven that man and all the animals are composed of a multitude of

tiny organisms, when multi-stage rockets fly to the stars, when society is delivered from pedants, when it shakes off the yoke of religion, obliterates the barriers of thought, and discovers the law of mutual attraction... That's when they'll remember me.

Duke

All that is garbage. No one is going to shake off religion; people are slaves and they like it that way. And as for all the rest... You yourself don't believe in your little talking books, in men who will give birth to children... I've carefully read all of your ravings. Do you believe all this yourself?

Movyer

I've seen it in my dreams. I'm a materialist. If I've seen it, it exists. Or it is capable of existing. Or it will be. *(Suddenly, a thought has come into his head.)* Oi. *(He sits on the bed.)*

Duke

Do you feel sick?

Movyer

I remembered my dream. In this dream I was in a strange place. It was probably the future.

Duke

And what, they had rockets there that fly to the moon?

Movyer

No, there weren't any rockets. There was... soup.

Duke

What kind of soup?

Movyer

You know, nothing special... broth, noodles, meatballs, greens.

Duke

I feel sorry for you, Cyrano. You've been betrayed by your own fantasies. I feel sorry for you. You're a tragic figure.

He takes a few coins out of his purse; he stacks them in

a neat pile on the table. He exits. After a while, LeBret comes into the room.

LeBret

What happened?

Movyer

LeBret.

LeBret

Good Lord, what's the matter?

Movyer

LeBret. Do I really look like a Gascon?

TRANSIENT THINGS

Chizhevskii

Tamara, why don't we talk about important things?

Tamara

What do you mean? We do. Weren't you talking to me about Sandra Bullock yesterday?

Chizhevskii

We should talk about what excites us.

Tamara

Sandra Bullock doesn't excite you?

Chizhevskii

She does. But that's just trendy stuff. Whereas we should talk about transient things. Note the difference. Why don't we share anecdotes?

Tamara

I'm sharing.

Chizhevskii

I mean in general. Why am I not interested in discussing impressions, subtle things, with you? Why?

Tamara

You don't love me.

Chizhevskii

I love you, Tamar. But because of that you don't cease to be a primitive person, made more for action... I feel cramped with you, Tamar... I wait for you to get here... I wait. Then you appear... The interminable pacing begins. Yes, I have endured it, I'm enduring and...I will endure. But you're just so... good.

Tamara

Good.

Chizhevskii

That's the whole problem. Tamar, I beg you. I'm in a very strange period of my life right now... I have to resolve to do something.

Tamara

Resolve away.

Chizhevskii

I need to change my job, I need, honestly, to change my wife...

Tamara

Change away.

Chizhevskii

You're preventing me.

Tamara

That's not true.

Chizhevskii

Yes it is. I don't want to change my wife because of you...

Tamara

But who's suggesting that you change because of me? Calm down, this doesn't suit you.

Chizhevskii

Tamara, everything that I want to suit me, will suit me.

Tamara

You're out of your league. You don't have to get upset.

Chizhevskii

There. This is a point on which we *don't* agree. It's the

point of civilization's collapse. You can't even admit that I am capable of leaving someone even if I don't have my eyes on someone else. Or even if the person who I have my eyes on is out of my league. You're a commoner.

Tamara

I'm a domestic servant.

Chizhevskii

Even if you are a domestic servant, you're a commoner all the same.

Tamara

Well, maybe.

Chizhevskii

Why did you agree? That's not like you.

Tamara

No reason.

Chizhevskii

Come on...

Tamara

You know, I also...

Chizhevskii

Okay, Tamar, we'll figure things out... Wake me up in half an hour? All right? Only not like last time. You *must* wake me up.

Tamara

I woke you.

Chizhevskii

Technically, you woke me.

Tamara

I woke you just fine.

Chizhevskii

You woke me very poorly. You're a lousy waker.

Tamara

Screw you.

Chizhevskii

You, Tamar, are... (He takes a long time choosing his words.) Florence Nightingale.

He exits. Tamara furiously cleans up the room. Then she weeps.

ON THE STREETS OF PARIS

Madame Jojo provides room and board to twenty orphan girls. Limited funds do not permit her to maintain the poor girls in the luxury that her good heart would like to. Solely for that reason, her wards can be found in the narrow, crooked side streets near the marketplace. Along one of these side streets, two old gentlemen are walking. The one who is older leans on the arm of the one who is younger. The older man gestures to beckon a charming young street girl.

Movyer

What is your name, child?

Volan

Volan, plaything of the wind.

Movyer

And what is your given name?

Volan

Jolee.

Movyer

Jolee. Tell me, Jolee, where can I find Mademoiselle Forty Holes?

Volan

I arrived from the provinces only yesterday, I don't know everyone in Paris by name yet.

LeBret

A scrawny, pock-marked monkey, who looks like a chicken.

Volan

Who used to work at the Mouffetard Market?

Movyer

That's the one.

Volan

She went to see her child, out in the country.

Movyer

Does she really have a child?

Volan

A daughter. She was supposed to give birth this morning.

Movyer

Who's giving birth?

Volan

Well who are you asking about?

Movyer

I'm asking about Mademoiselle Forty Holes.

Volan

That's what I'm telling you: Yesterday, Mademoiselle Forty Holes received a letter from her daughter, saying that she, that is, the daughter of Mademoiselle Forty Holes, her name is Marianne, was expecting to give birth this morning. Who she's giving birth to - she herself doesn't know. But she was swollen something fierce - so probably, a boy.

Movyer

Imagine, LeBret, she's already a grandma, and I didn't even know she was a mother. *(He gives Jolee a small coin.)* Thank you, Mademoiselle. We'll drop by another time.

Volan

Is there something I can tell her?

Movyer

When she returns, tell her that Savinien was asking for her. She'll understand.

Volan

Half-Hog Savinien or Rotten-Nose Savinien?

Movyer

Rotten-Nose Savinien.

He takes off his hat and bows ceremoniously.

Volan

But, maybe I could help with something?

Movyer

(pensively) Actually, with this young gentleman.

LeBret shakes his head.

LeBret

I'm just walking with you for company.

Movyer

(to the girl, in an apologetic tone) No, forgive us, we had better wait until Mademoiselle returns.

Volan

Well what the hell?

Movyer

You see, I'm not exactly an ordinary client. There was a series of circumstances which -

Volan

What, are you a snob or something? Come on? Perhaps you don't find me pleasing? Just say so.

LeBret

(standing up for his old comrade) Now you've obviously been told that the monsieur is ill. And he doesn't wish to infect you. Is that really not clear?

Volan

Well what's the difference. I'm not planning to live forever.

Movyer

We're not even going to discuss it. *(A new idea comes into*

Cyrano's head.) Better yet... I'm in need of a drug, which the mistress recommends you add to certain clients' wine so that they fall asleep and you can examine their pockets freely.

Volan

Do you think that just because I'm from the country I'm a fool? You could be sleuths.

Movyer

All sleuths have eyes like fish. Are our eyes like that?

Volan

There are many different kinds of fish.

Movyer

(satisfied) True enough. But you can see, after all, that if we are fish, then we are doubtlessly noble, courageous, true-to-our-words fish, who wouldn't hurt a country girl for anything - especially one who just came in from the provinces yesterday.

Volan

And who's still not very well oriented to everything here.

Movyer

And who's still not very well oriented to everything here. You can trust us. Your colleague oftentimes furnished us with this substance.

Volan

I really do love to trust people. It's just that there's such craziness.

LeBret

That's more like it... What will your poison cost us?

Volan

Let's see, with a discount... four pistols.

LeBret

Well, you're a vamp, madam!

Movyer

Take the money. *(He gives her money and receives a vial of a soporific.)* Let's go, LeBret.

Volan

Hold on. Could I come with you?

Movyer and LeBret look at each other.

THE PEPPER

Chizhevskii is talking with Movyer.

Chizhevskii

Poisoning yourself is not the way out. Please understand: I'm not giving you a morality lecture, I'm talking about one's responsibility to his talent.

Movyer

I'm sick. I'm just sick. I am tired.

Chizhevskii

Well, I don't know... there are other methods. Have you tried distracting yourself in some way? Girls - anything.

Movyer

I can't.

Chizhevskii

Well, yes. Syphilis is syphilis.

Movyer

That's not the problem. The physical pain is only half of it. I'm worn out; I can't bear the burden of my visions anymore.

Chizhevskii

You know, maybe the twentieth century didn't produce anything extraordinary. But there's one thing about it that I greatly admire: it put an end to visionaries. So don't attempt to gain my pity on that point.

Movyer

But my fantasies exceed everything that humanity has experienced up to now. One mortal body is incapable of containing the breadth of the universe. The weight of untold worlds is bending me low to the ground.

Chizhevskii

It's all child's play. I'll say it once again: Auschwitz, Hiroshima... After that, your fantasies will be disregarded.

Movyer

I don't know what Auschwitz is...

Chizhevskii

Thanks be to god.

Movyer

But my visions -

Chizhevskii

What do you mean by visions?

Movyer

My marvelous journeys. I've been to the Moon, I've wandered through the Garden of Eden, I've conversed with the prophet Elijah...

Chizhevskii

Tamara. *(He suppresses Movyer's protest.)* Quiet. Tamar, come here quick!

Tamara runs in, frightened.

Tamara

What happened?

Chizhevskii

Tamara. Tamara, you are a woman of the 21st century. You have accumulated within you the historical experience of the past. At least, theoretically... I'm now going to tell you a story ... Have a seat. I'm going to tell you a story. It's a novel by a certain fashionable writer of the 17th century. And you're going to tell me if it captivated you or not.

Movyer

This isn't fair.

Chizhevskii

Tamar, do you understand what's required of you?

Tamara

I understand.

Chizhevskii

All right, here's the story... Once, a pepper came home, and there was a book lying on the table. The book began to shine and transported him to the Moon. There, he stepped on a heavenly apple, argued with the local chief, and then he was picked up by four-legged people. They took him for the hen of a Spaniard - there was already a Spaniard there by this point, for some reason. They put them in the same cage so that they would have children. But no children came. And the four-legged princess understood that he wasn't an animal and began to converse with him. Then he felt at ease

Tamara

The pepper?

Chizhevskii

The pepper. He felt at ease. And he...sort of started to study the local customs. He associated with such characters as the demon Socrates, the prophet Elijah, someone else. He examined everything, described everything. And flew back. He landed in Canada. Did that captivate you?

Tamara

Yes.

Chizhevskii

Get out. Get out, please.

Tamara exits. Movyer giggles.

Chizhevskii

That doesn't mean anything. She said it to spite me.

Movyer

I'm of the same opinion.

Chizhevskii

You probably think you're pretty cool. But you're not cool.

Movyer

Who else can boast of having been on the Moon?

Chizhevskii

Let's speak frankly, graphomaniac to graphomaniac.

Movyer

Fine.

Chizhevskii

Let's take your novel "Blah Blah Blah and the People of the Moon."

Movyer

(he wants to correct him, but he changes his mind) All right. Blah Blah Blah and the People of the Moon.

Chizhevskii

As you know, I looked through it during my spare time here... Very weak when it comes to plot. It's weak in general. A cheap, incomplete, foggy allegory... Flawed logic. Something happens. Then something else happens, but the second event in no way follows from the first, isn't linked to it in any way. It's just plop, plop, plop. Throw everything into a pile, stick one bit to another somehow and - voila, a novel! Not bad, perhaps, for your era. But, I'll tell you frankly that this book did not stand up to the test of time. So what makes Shakespeare great? If he uses an image, the image is located in a system. It's not plucked out of thin air, it's connected with other images. The result is a kind of associative cluster. Thanks to that, it all acquires a certain integrity.

Movyer

Technically, I agree with you. But! Does it have to derive from problems that the writer discovered for himself? What is Shakespeare?

Chizhevskii

Oh please not the old saw that Shakespeare wasn't original...

Movyer

An arrant plagiarist!

Chizhevskii

I don't even want to talk with you anymore.

Movyer

I'll admit he had the resources of a powerful poet. But as

a thinker - a total lightweight!

Chizhevskii

Who are you to say that!

Movyer

Shakespeare was a virtuosic, highly educated compiler. Or he seemed highly educated: an ignoramus, a boor, a parasite.

Chizhevskii

Get out of my house!

Movyer

A carrion-eater, who gnawed on ragged plots.

Chizhevskii

What I wouldn't give to have the honor of being the delirium of Sir William.

Movyer

That's your misfortune, critic Chizhevskii. You're not his delirium, you're my delirium, the delirium of the unhappy, sick, and dying Movyer de Cyrano.

Chizhevskii

If you only knew how that infuriates me.

Movyer

What's not to like... After all, if you think about it, this reflects very well on my imagination. I, and not Shakespeare, imagined this room; during my sick-bed reveries I created you, Tamara, and your relationship, balanced on the verge of disaster. I've placed in your lips phrases whose meanings I don't understand myself. I've created a strange world, speeding toward its demise, a world that spurns me and yet is so perfect that it continues to develop even when I don't look after it.

Chizhevskii

Do you want me to encourage you in some way? That won't happen. The world you've created is bad. It's a shitty world.

Movyer

But it's the world in which you exist. And you don't have any other. And without it, you're nothing.

Chizhevskii

I suppose. However, that's not a reason to kiss your ass. Do you know that in this world weak people get hurt? That those who aren't needed don't get called again? Do you know that "Sevpromzernovosh" was purchased with shameful procedural violations of an open auction? Do you know that Martinov, the director, sleeps with actresses but doesn't give them roles?

Movyer

That's not good.

Chizhevskii

Not good! It's awful. And do you know that in this world, created through your delirium, there are deceitful newspapers, corrupt television leaders, a petty, vindictive troll who leads a huge unjust government -

Movyer

Who is that, what's his name?

Chizhevskii

Bush.

Movyer

Bush?

Chizhevskii

Bush. Why - what were you thinking?

Movyer

Nothing. Out of all that you just said, I only understood the word "newspaper."

Chizhevskii

Oh, that reminds me... I have you to thank for my career as chief idiot at a newspaper. Thank you - I always dreamed of sitting from dawn to dusk with my eyes fixed to a computer screen.

Movyer

Somehow I haven't noticed that you're particularly strained.

Chizhevskii

Well, I'm not going to strain myself anymore. Because when

the newspaper needs something - Chizhevskii comes running, but when Chizhevskii needs something - Kuzmuk goes to the Czech film festival. Do you know Kuzmuk?

Movyer

No

Chizhevskii

Of course you don't. If you knew him, you'd have poisoned yourself.

Movyer

I did poison myself.

THE DELIRIUM OF MADEMOISELLE FORTY HOLES

A small table in a contemporary cafe. The Journalist and Mademoiselle Forty Holes are reading the menu.

Forty Holes

I need something that will wake me up...

Journalist

Then just get a double espresso.

The Journalist beckons a waitperson and places the order. She pulls out a dictaphone and fastens a microphone to the chest of Mademoiselle Forty Holes. Mademoiselle Forty Holes takes in all these manipulations, which are incomprehensible to her, with a stoical calm.

Journalist

Mademoiselle Forty Holes, first of all, I want to thank you for agreeing to give an interview to our newspaper.

Forty Holes

It is a big honor for me -

Journalist

Tell us about this great Frenchman.

Forty Holes

Yes, what a Frenchman... He was born in Paris in 1619. However, up until the age of twelve, they lived in the Movyer-Bergerac chateau, 25 kilometers from the city. Then they sold the estate, and the family moved to Paris -

Journalist

I need to interrupt you. You're telling us well-known facts... Whereas readers of our newspaper are interested in your unmediated impressions. What kind of person was he? How did you first meet?

Forty Holes

He had only just settled in the Latin Quarter -

Journalist

Yes, yes, yes - the Latin Quarter in more detail...

Forty Holes

The Latin Quarter. The area between St. Germaine Boulevard and the bank of the River Seine. Paris University is located there. They instruct the students in Latin; therefore, it's called the Latin Quarter.

Journalist

Did the students act disgracefully? After all, it was the quarter for nightlife, wasn't it?

Forty Holes

They acted disgracefully. However, the Quarter is famous primarily because it has numerous cultural and architectural monuments -

Journalist

But how did Lord Movyer disgrace himself?

Forty Holes

What does that matter?

Journalist

It's interesting to our readers. Cyrano de Bergerac is

quite popular with the public; we're incredibly lucky that, thanks to your illness, we have an opportunity to interact with someone who knew him personally.

Forty Holes

Yes, I am ill... I was going to see my daughter and I caught a cold along the way... I took to my bed. I'm delirious. But I'm fine.

Journalist

And we're fine. Thanks to you, we have an opportunity to learn more about how the legendary Cyrano spent his youth.

Forty Holes

He studied a lot.

Journalist

Did he fight a lot of duels?

Forty Holes

Duels, yes...

Journalist

And did he have any women?

Forty Holes

Of course.

Journalist

But did you... get close to him? I'll ask you directly: did you get intimate with him?

Forty Holes

I don't remember now. There were so many. Perhaps we did get intimate.

Journalist

How could you forget someone like him?

Forty Holes

Little girl. I'm a whore, after all. If I remembered every John, I'd go out of my mind.

Their coffee arrives. Forty Holes politely says "Thank you" to the waitperson. The Journalist does not.

Forty Holes

That's good coffee.

Journalist

Well, is there anything you can tell me?

Forty Holes

Why not? Certainly.

Journalist

What has stayed in your mind? The most vivid memory.

Forty Holes

I remember how he came running to me once; it was autumn...
A tumultuous autumn.

Journalist

That's very good.

Forty Holes

I had never seen anyone like him...

Journalist

Beautiful...

Forty Holes

On the Moon, he said to me, there are signs of life. I simply collapsed. (*She speaks with increasing fascination.*) I pictured it all at once - an enormous celestial body in relative proximity to Earth. A population exists whose external appearance is not like our own. But they feel and suffer exactly as we do; the same questions trouble them - where are the ends of the Universe, what would happen if a Christian were to eat a Muslim...

Journalist

That troubles you?

Forty Holes

Very much.

Journalist

Well, not me.

Forty Holes

Why doesn't it trouble you?

Journalist

It doesn't, that's all...

Forty Holes

Strange.

Journalist

Tell me about his romantic adventures.

Forty Holes

But that's what I'm doing. He believed that if you were to throw an orange, and there was a man sitting on the orange and he also threw an orange, then the second orange would travel at a speed two times greater than the speed of the first orange. And, if there was also a man sitting on the second orange -

Journalist

But that's so boring.

Forty Holes

You simply haven't understood. You see, he described the principle, thanks to which it's possible to attain incredible speeds. To fly to celestial bodies. How in the world could that be boring?

Journalist

I asked you about adventures...

Forty Holes

That's what I'm telling you about. He had adventures every day. Once, he imagined that he was a Spaniard. Another time, it seemed to him that he had started to distinguish poems by their smell. They blindfolded him and brought over a book. And he guessed which poet it was. It didn't work with novels, though. All novels smell like mice.

Journalist

But when did he fall in love with his cousin?

Forty Holes

He fell in love with his cousin? I didn't know that.

Journalist

I get the feeling that I know more about him than you do.

Forty Holes

It's hard for me to say. I'm not an expert.

Journalist

Can I tell you honestly - you've been very little help to me. You haven't helped me at all. I didn't receive a single piece of useful information from you. I have to pay for your coffee now, but I don't want to; there's no one who'll reimburse me. I really hope that you don't get better. You lived behind a fence and you'll rot behind a fence. Go back to your own people, to your stinking France. You'll never get to your grandchild. Just die, bitch! Whore!

Forty Holes makes a frightful scream. She wakes up. She realizes that it was only a dream. She starts to laugh.

WASHING ONE'S HANDS

LeBret and Volan are sitting on the bed of Movyer, who is lying there without moving or showing any signs of life. The Duke walks before them, back and forth, like an instructor before school children who have done something wrong.

Duke

(to Volan) Tell me, little one, what this gentleman said to you.

Volan

He said that he needed to conclude a journey. And then he downed it all... But that's forbidden; even we only put in six drops...

Duke

And he drank it all?

Volan

And he drank it all.

Duke

Splendid. And what if I hadn't run into you? If Madame Lemerse had not called me to come admire the new Italian statue "David and the Wounded Lioness"?

Movyer

I will forsake this world all the same.

Duke

Savinien, I'm souring like milk to your appalling phrases. If a writer says, "I will forsake this world all the same," he's not a writer but a farmhand. And you know I wouldn't even pardon my farmhands for such poor taste.

Movyer

Your insults do not upset me anymore.

Duke

What... you've grown bold? You drink some cheap poison and a duke's not a duke to you. Well, I won't allow you to go - just to spite you.

Movyer

In the time that it takes you to call a doctor, in the time that it takes him to wash his hands... Too late.

Duke

Savinien, I still have a secret little bit of respect for you. But I wouldn't have messed around with any doctor; I'd have turned you inside out right here with an old folk method. Now don't look at me like that... Yes, yes, yes! And I wouldn't have used a goose quill (although you have quills here aplenty, you've stocked up enough quills for ten novels)... No, Savinien - two fingers in the mouth - your just deserts.

LeBret

Your highness!

Duke

Sit down, LeBret. You've shown your colors. A friend! A schoolmate! A beast is what you are, not a friend...

LeBret

Sir!

Duke

You don't exist to me anymore.

LeBret

But permit me to...

Duke

(ignoring LeBret's shrieks) Savinien, my boy... What the hell is happening to you? How could you commit such a crime against taste?

*Movyer is already
apprehending things quite
poorly.*

Movyer

Even on the verge of the grave no one will hear complaints about my fate from me.

Duke

(spits) Devil take it - another classic line. There's not going to be any grave, my friend...

Movyer

You won't stop me. I will flee all the same. To the 21st century, to hell, to the Moon...

Duke

Well praise God! I can only dream that you would fly away again somewhere... I could finally stop turning red whenever I admit that I'm your patron...

Movyer

I want to meet the demon Socrates again, the prophet Elijah...

Duke

Now listen here. You deserve a good lashing, but in place of that I'm going to save you.

Movyer

The demon Socrates, the prophet Elijah... prophet Elijah. *(He makes a parting gesture.)* I can no longer be saved.

Duke

We'll see.

Movyer

I'm going. Farewell.

He actually begins to die a little.

Duke

Okay! Fine, I'm going too. I'll seek out Lord Moliere and lift his spirits with the story of how de Bergerac poisoned himself in order to make up for the inadequacies of his fancy.

Movyer

Demon Socrates, prophet Elijah.... You wouldn't do that.

Duke

Don't you doubt it. I'm going to do exactly that.

Movyer

But it's not true!

Duke

First of all, it is true. Second of all, who would care whether or not it's true, even if it weren't true. It sounds like the truth, which is to say, like gossip. What more do you need? No, farewell... Rest in peace (Another pun! Bravo, bravo, Duke.) - I'll take care to ensure that your oblivion is complete, disgraceful and quick. Four years I wasted on you... You think that the Duke is stupid. Maybe he's not a writer, no, the duke is not a writer! But I'm not stupid. You can keep your tales of the Tour de Nesle! If you don't want to see in me a man who wants to see a hero in you - forget about it.

Movyer

Hold on... Hold on...

Duke

I'm - gone (*He takes two steps toward the door, then returns.*) Outside! - They're waiting! Waiting for news. I will arrive and say, "Bergerac killed himself!" O, this is news! This will be news... for weeks! How they will console me... I will instantly become the hero and the idiot who nannied a talentless shopkeeper of poetry for four years.

Yes, they'll console me. Do you know how Madame Supee consoles? Or Mademoiselle de Kudempise? Have you heard of "a dewy rose, a nightingale's kiss in a grove at the break of morning"? You don't know. And I won't tell you. They'll console me, yes... they'll console me! But will I be consoled? (*Movyer almost tumbles out of bed.*) Don't die!

Movyer

I'm dying.

Duke

You will not die until I permit you to.

Movyer

You said that I have no fancy.

Duke

You don't have any fancy left... Not for half a crappy line...

Movyer

You cannot say that I have no fancy...

Duke

No... You are - a stuffed fighting cock, a moon-crazed, emasculated dreamer... The Un-Bergerac!

Movyer

And you...

Duke

I'm listening.

Movyer

You are...

Duke

Speak, don't be shy...

Movyer

A fool.

Duke

More!

Movyer

A cretin.

Duke

More!

Movyer

A fool... cretin.

Duke

And you are a timorous, entirely vile wisp, a mincing, falsely lionized mummy, a worn-out philosophizing little jack-off... You are a rash, a cow patty, a verse-spitter, a rust-bucket, scum of the earth, a polecat, a writer, a moon-bum...

Movyer

And you... You...

Duke

Well come on already...

Movyer

Eh-eh-eh...

Duke

Everyone! Everyone heard it! Lord Movyer, the one and only Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac, our own Hercules. (*Movyer winces.*) And you thought that no one knew? How else did you refer to yourself? Hercules, Savinien, Alexander de Bergerac?! Alexander - that's not the one from Macedonia, is it? And so, the aforementioned Lord Savinien de Bergerac has killed himself! His final words were: "eh-eh-eh-eh"!

Movyer

I... That's not true... Eh-eh-eh!

Duke

Lord Moliere, I'm coming to see you! (*He looks to see what effect his words produce.*) What - even that doesn't help? Then I really am going.

The Duke walks toward the door. He waits for them to stop him. But they do not stop him. Then, he stops himself.

Duke. Why do I return?

Volan

Only you can know.

Movyer

Go to hell, go to The Pope, to Moliere...

Duke

I'm not going to any Moliere. He's sponsored by the king. It does me a lot of good to be second to the king. No sir, I'm stuck with you; it's my lot now to drag you by the ears to greatness...

LeBret

Do you not understand that he's dying. He's dying.

Duke

He's not dying. The author of "The Death of Agrippine" cannot die so lamely.

Movyer

I'm not dying.

Duke

(victoriously) Ah! What did I say?! One mention of Moliere's name cleanses him better than a dozen enemas. *(Remembering that he swore to ignore LeBret.)* I'm still not talking to you.

Movyer

Fine, I can admit the obvious... I haven't died and I'm feeling better.

Duke

What they say is true - that which doesn't kill us makes us stronger. I'm curious - what does your madam use to make this poison?

Volan

I don't know.

Duke

Don't lie, my child. God damns liars to happy marriages.

Volan

(frightened) I think she gathers mould from watermelon rinds.

Movyer

That means that even ordinary mould has some secret power. One day, people will capture it for their use.

Duke

You're raving again; that means you're getting better... Say something else.

Movyer

I see our young people teaching their elders, I see flaming mushrooms, ships as big as islands, seas without water, black fountains, celestial wells, flying worms, underground towers, frozen fires, people without heads, hearts made of honey, pocket-sized stars -

Duke

Pocket-sized stars, bottomless mountains, porcelain teeth, bones of steel, riders without horses, voices without mouths, a universe without boundaries, France without a king... I can also do that.

Movyer

But see I would not have been able to say "France without a king."

Duke

(enthusiastically) Ho-ho! You caught me, old chap! Yes, you're in fine form, you rogue... *(He threatens Cyrano with his finger)* All I need to do now is inform on myself. *(He laughs merrily.)* It's good that our king is a man with a broad spirit and doesn't encourage denunciations. No, there's nothing worse than a vindictive, narrow-minded man on the throne. God save the king!

All

(sincerely, including Cyrano) God save the king!

Duke

So, but now to you, Cyrano... Do what you want, so long as I don't see you here anymore...

Movyer

But -

Duke

No "buts." If you don't take off for your Moon, I swear that before too long a beam will fall on your head.

Movyer

But, my lord... Where's the logic? You save me from death in order to kill me...

Duke

I saved you from a cowardly, shameful exit. That's true. I find you quite likable, Cyrano, as a person, I understand you, I admire your genius, I love your strange fantasies... I would be happy to have been the author of your ravings myself. But! But, but, but... But, but, but, but... *(He sings.)* But, but-but-but... But, butbutbut. But please understand this... without a tragic ending, you're a total nothing.

Movyer

You said yourself that you admire me...

Duke

I do admire you... as a private individual. But I want you to be admired in the public realm... by those same notorious marquises. By that same Madam Myusak... She's a fool, but I value her opinion.

Movyer

Why doesn't Madam Myusak read my work...

Duke

How petty you literary men still are... She's not about to read anyone's work, especially since she hardly knows how to read in the first place.

Movyer

But I'm no longer planning to die...

Duke

Then fly up to your Moon. Preferably, with witnesses.

Movyer

I'm old and sick.

Duke

Well then, an unfortunate incident will occur in your life no later than next Thursday.

LeBret

(to the Duke) Sir.

Duke

No later than next -

LeBret

Sir, listen to me now... He won't fly for anything if you threaten him. He'll refuse out of principle.

Duke

You're probably right. After all, we're dealing here with the archetypal hero story...Listen, Movyer, I'm not threatening you...

Movyer

We could at least try it.

Duke

What a fellow! Nasty, obstinate. I adore him. So then, you're going to the Moon?

Movyer

I haven't decided yet.

Duke

Which method will you choose this time? You have lots of them, after all. I recall when you tried rubbing yourself with dew.

Movyer

I slept in the dew, I rubbed myself with ox brains...
LeBret, bring me my helmet...

*LeBret brings in an iron
helmet fitted with buckles.*

Movyer

The iron helmet - my latest invention. Demonstrate for us, Lebret.

*Lebret puts on the helmet and
fastens the small straps
under his chin.*

Movyer

If you throw a magnet up into the air, the helmet is pulled toward it. Then you need to throw the magnet again. The helmet is again pulled toward the magnet. Next, you throw

the magnet once again -

Duke

It's a shame. If you could know, my dear friend, how much I don't want to trouble with your murder. I have to associate with the sort of scum that you writers don't understand at all. And - right away, while you have not yet taken your own life; indeed, we can't leave you alone for even a second...

LeBret

You just said that you wouldn't threaten him.

Duke

I'm not threatening him. Really - am I threatening you?

LeBret

I will tell everyone what you are planning.

Duke

(starting to pay attention to LeBret again) Well it turns out that you are not hopeless after all. That is a strong, strong move. No, you're a clever one. Absolutely, you absolutely need to tell everyone... Of course, of course... Why didn't I think of that myself?

LeBret

I'll reveal that you were plotting a murder.

Duke

Yes, exactly. Reveal it. I will deny it, but rather - reluctantly... And then a log will actually fall on his head. Perfect! What could be better than a tragedy foretold? A tragedy for which there was a warning. *(To Cyrano.)* As a playwright, you can certainly appreciate that.

Movyer

Yes, it's powerful.

Duke

It is powerful! My God, Cyrano, how it pains me that you have to die. In spite of everything, you do foster an atmosphere of free thought, of colorful thought around yourself. Even mediocrity flourishes in your presence. What a pity that it will all soon come to end.

Movyer

Pity is not the right word.

LeBret

But everyone will know, Sir, that you are the murderer.

Duke

Cyrano, tell your friend not to disgrace himself...

Movyer

You should never... Don't disgrace yourself.

Duke

Yes, everyone will know that I gave the order to throw a log from a roof onto the head of the obstinate little poet. But you see I need something like this.

LeBret

I don't understand.

Duke

Yet Lord Movyer does... Do you understand it, Lord Movyer?

Movyer

Yes, I understand... But I cannot accept it.

Duke

There - that's just your way, the Bergerac way. I understand but I refuse to accept it. No metaphors are necessary. You don't need to say anything more. A poet! He penetrated the soul of a villain, he saw his truth, he comprehended it... He kept it to himself, but he recognized a sick soul. Yes, yes, LeBret, I have a sick soul too; your master surely noticed.

Movyer

I didn't notice anything.

LeBret

He's not my master.

Movyer and LeBret look at one another. There is bewilderment and, mixed with this, dislike.

Duke

I admire myself. With one phrase I set best friends against one another. That's it, I should end on the highest note. Farewell, deBergerac; I await your new novel or your obituary.

He exits. Mover pours himself some wine.

THE ROADS OF FRANCE**Forty Holes**

The roads in France are very bad. I got jolted in the carriage from the potholes, and so I got sick. Fever, it's called. Roads are the root of all evil. That's why I like my work - you never have to go anywhere. We often talked about that. And he pondered everything so deeply that you simply never stopped being amazed. Apparently, in the future, cities will move from one place to another. I'd say, "How in the world will they move when the roads are so bad?" And he'd say that they would construct special roads - like they construct buildings now. That seemed to me such a beautiful metaphor...

SIMPLY DELIRIUM**Chizhevskii**

(without expression) What is going on? I - am nowhere. My homeland, which I love, is asleep. My homeland, which grieves me, is eating my friends for lunch. Maybe they don't know me. But they're my friends. And they're being eaten. And my enemies are being eaten. But my enemies are people too. I'm nowhere. My wife stepped out or left altogether - I don't know. It's possible, of course, to find out, here's the number which she's calling me from; it's clear enough what the first four numbers mean, but I'm scared to understand it, although I do. She wants to get revenge on me or she wants to change me or she simply wants to not be where I am. Or she's simply relaxing. It's unclear. I have ceased to be on the other side of everything bad and pathetic; I am bad and pathetic myself now. I didn't tell the craven masses around me and in me to stop in time. That's why I had time for music and talk shows. That's why I burned myself up with strong drink. Or why I will soon. That's why I haven't saved those who I

promised to save. Today I told my boss something about his work: "Yes, it's splendid, except for the jokes." And although it really was splendid, it wasn't necessary to say that. I have been in every country, I have seen every way of life; they are all bad. Earlier I knew that life was possible only in a library. Now I don't even believe that anymore. The world went fishing for me... and it caught me. Back when space creatures weren't yet televised rubbish, I dreamed of living long enough to see them or to receive signals from them. Now I have. This evening I got drunk - my wife said that I accidentally threw away her hair-pin. But I didn't throw it away. When they blew up the Towers, it was merely a reason to make peace with my girlfriend. When they teleported a photon, I was out fishing. Atlantis, I look for it ardently; it wasn't the right time to not find it again. The clones are getting sick of clones. Last Saturday I bought a newspaper. The salesclerk said: it's yesterday's. I said: it's okay, the news won't get old right away. On page one, written in big letters it said: Scientists discover immortality. It turned out I was wrong. That was old news by Wednesday. Boeing is making cars that can fly. There is life on Mars. In my apartment today, Cyrano de Bergerac was walking around. He was eating soup. I kicked him out, and I didn't regret it. I don't have time. If he shows up again, I'll kick him out again.

Chizhevskii hits a button to get a loud call coming in over the phone. He speaks into the receiver.

Two thousand forty... Of course, with the spaces... I specifically asked you - with the spaces or without... I'm not an idiot. Without the spaces, it's a thousand six hundred and ninety six characters. Two o'clock is the best I can do... But how much do you need? No, you tell me exactly. How much??? Okay... okay... Okay, do you hear what I said? Fine! Next time you can write it yourself. Great, I'll send it right away. Yes, yes, yes... You owe me a beer. Later.

He walks around the room; he doesn't know what to do with himself.

Chizhevskii

Tamara! Are you still here? Tamara, let's get married!

No one responds. Apparently, Tamara went to the store. Chizhevskii pulls a bottle of vodka from the refrigerator and looks at it for a long time. He wipes off the hoarfrost with his finger. The vodka perspires just fine. He puts it back in its place.

Chizhevskii

It's not meant to be.

HANDS

Forty Holes

I hate village midwives. I went to one, she didn't wash her hands, didn't even wipe them - I took off to find another one. Who in the world acts like that? Then they're surprised that every third one has yellow fever? There's nothing surprising about it. It's been known for a long time: you've got to wash your hands.

OX BRAINS

LeBret

What a depraved beast!

Movyer

Who do you mean?

LeBret

Arpazhon.

Volan

He's a nice fellow.

Movyer

Jolee is right. By comparison with some of my acquaintances, the duke is simply a dove.

LeBret

Well this little dove has a mind to bite you in the dark with a log.

Movyer

I don't doubt that in the least.

LeBret

What to do? What to do? (*He tries to get himself under control*) First of all, I need to calm down. The calm mind will come up with a solution for us.

Movyer

The calm mind is the traitor of traitors. He's exactly the one I hate.

LeBret

That's just words... You know I've wanted to tell you for a long time that you have a slavish soul too.

Movyer

Ho-ho. An uprising on the ship?

LeBret

It's true, you are a slave to words. You don't command them, they command you. The word "traitor" comes into your head and you can't sit still until you've stuck it on someone.

Movyer

True, I'm a slave to the Word. It's the one lord who I'm prepared to serve not only with my sword but also with my bright heart.

LeBret

Be quiet already. No one needs your toothpick of a sword or your rotten blood muscle. You have no friends, no patron, no health, no money. All that remains is a more or less lucid intellect - and you aim to quarrel with *it*.

Movyer

That's precisely the one I won't stand by. If you like it so much, you can have it. Why have you attached yourselves me? Why do you torment me? Get out everyone! Be gone! (*He yells.*) You wretches! You talentless sponges! You leeches!

LeBret

Do you have any money left?

Movyer

A little.

He gives the money to LeBret.

LeBret

(addressing Jolee) My dear, run to the butcher, tell him that Lord de Bergerac urgently needs some ox brains for interplanetary rubbing.

Movyer

Don't go anywhere, Jolee. We aren't going to fly to the Moon.

LeBret

Ox brains are a proven method.

Volan

(stashing the coins) I've heard something like that too.

LeBret

Be quiet. *(To Movyer, seriously.)* You need to fly. *(But he takes the money back.)*

Movyer

My friends. I don't know how to explain it to you... I... could fly to the Moon. I don't need ox brains or magnets, I don't need dew or rockets. My restless, my devilishly restless mind will transport me there in the blink of an eye. I simply... don't want to go to the Moon. I don't have anything more to do there. I know everything about that world, where they pay for meals with poems, where armies of equal strength do battle, where the wind pushes cities around like fallen leaves. I've already seen all that. A different, unknown world is calling me. I simply don't know how to explain it to you...

LeBret

Don't say anything. Wherever you go, I will go too.

Volan

And I as well. I'm just that stubborn.

EQUAL ARMIES

Forty Holes

Two armies assemble; special individuals count them so that the number of soldiers is equal on both sides; a locality

is selected that doesn't give an advantage to anyone. And then the battle begins. Each warrior tries to choose a competitor of equal force. So that they are of the same height, the same weight... So that their experience level is about identical. Otherwise - the victory doesn't count. If someone is feeling bad that day, they try to assign him an ailing competitor. It's also important that the weapons be identical, all equally divided. Because otherwise it's not a victory, and it means nothing. And when he told me this, you won't believe it, but I wept. It means that somewhere fairness exists. Perhaps on the moon, but it exists... And suddenly everything was all right.

ABOVE THE WALLPAPER

All the company - Tamara, Mover, LeBret, and Volan - are standing by the sleeping Chizhevskii.

Tamara

(commanding) All together... Three-four!

All

Arise!

Chizhevskii, like a slow automaton, sits up in bed. He rubs his face with his hands. He rubs it for a long time. Those standing near the bed giggle.

Chizhevskii

And who are these two?

Mover

This is my old friend Nikola LeBret.

Chizhevskii

(shaking his hand) I've heard of him.

Mover

And this is... Jolee.

Volan

Or Volan - a plaything of the wind. *(She laughs merrily.)*
Whichever you like more.

Chizhevskii

I like Jolee more. I knew a Jolee once. She came here to study the language. They put her up in our dormitory. They said to her: Oh, how nice that you've arrived today, we're going to visit Chizhevskii - it's his birthday. And she says: Oh, how lovely, I happen to have a bottle of Calvados - she had brought it from France. So she takes this Calvados, but it's not the standard kind, because, in general, Calvados is not an especially noble drink, it's ordinary apple vodka, which they distill with mould -

Volan

We know.

Chizhevskii

But this was some kind of expensive Calvados, she had brought it specifically, thinking that it would make a fine gift for someone. Because she wasn't rich herself, she was a student. Well then, they come into the room, and Chizhevskii is lying on the floor looking as if he'd just been taken down from the cross -

Volan

Chizhevskii - that's you?

Chizhevskii

Chizhevskii is me. I'm simply telling the story in the third person so that it doesn't look like I love to talk about myself.

Volan

That's what I thought.

Chizhevskii

Well then... She comes in, and Chizhevskii is lying on the floor... She somehow puts together a sentence, because she doesn't know the language well at this point... "Chizhevskii, I am Jolee...", something like that... "I want to wish you a happy birthday!" And she gives him this Calvados. Chizhevskii took the bottle, thanked her and smashed it against the wall - into smithereens. He had just a minute before this decided to give up drinking, because he was feeling very bad after some port and champagne. But

of course she didn't know this. She got very upset. And that's the whole story.

Tamara

What a hero you turned out to be. A bottle against the wall. What a hero!

Chizhevskii

I wasn't telling the story for you.

Tamara

Oh, this is too much.

Volan

But what happened afterwards with Jolee?

Chizhevskii

But that's not important. I won't even speak about what happened afterwards with her on principle. It was simply a sketch. Without any sequel.

Volan

But did he give up drinking?

Chizhevskii

He did not give up drinking.

Movyer

Chizhevskii, I've returned.

Chizhevskii

Why all of a sudden?

Movyer

I want to propose that you come fly with me.

Chizhevskii

I don't want to go to your moon. What's there that I haven't seen?

Movyer

There is a different world. A world bigger and more beautiful than the moon. It holds even more mysteries and marvels.

Chizhevskii

Even more?

Movyer

(pointing up with his hand) What do you see there?

Chizhevskii. Wallpaper. What an idiotic idea to stick wallpaper on the ceiling. Tamara, if I get divorced, promise me that we won't stick wallpaper on the ceiling.

Tamara

I promise.

Movyer

But what's above the wallpaper?

Chizhevskii

I get what you're alluding to. However, I'm going to resist it out of principle in order to punish your foolish penchant for the beautiful. The Rozhko family lives above the wallpaper, above that - the Samokhins. But there's nothing above the Samokhins, because that's where the roof is.

Movyer

There is nothing above the Samokhins.

Chizhevskii

You are so unbreakable. It's been put to you in no uncertain terms: I get what you're alluding to.

Movyer

What?

Chizhevskii

(simply) The sun.

All

The sun?

Movyer

Yes, the sun! A world of oceans where fiery demons splash about. A world of enormous mirrors, a world of flaming ice. A world of just tsars and bottomless wells.

Chizhevskii

What people won't dream up in order to get out of work.

Movyer

We're out of here!

Chizhevskii

Fly away; who's keeping you.

Movyer

I need you.

Chizhevskii

Like a cow needs a saddle.

Movyer

You are my most beautiful and incomprehensible nightmare.
Don't leave me.

Chizhevskii

It's even touching.

Movyer

They torment you here. But there, on the sun, in a world of flaming fantasies, there won't be any Tamara with her exhausting soup, nor a wife who spits on your sorrows, nor a boss who gathered up peasant children so that he could look like Lord Byron with them in the background... None of that will be there.

Chizhevskii flicks him off.

Chizhevskii

Do you see this? Look, look! *(He's begun addressing Movyer in a completely indecent way.)*

Movyer

But they do torment you.

Chizhevskii

Of course, they torment me! God bless them all! But it is I, I myself who chose the people who have the right to torment me, to tear at my heart and destroy me with love and indifference and everything that is supposed to destroy a close friend. I chose them... I won't let them go.

Movyer

All right. You have spoken to me disrespectfully, insolently. I have endured it. However, my endurance has reached its end. *(He shakes off about twenty years.)* I can understand your devotion to your chosen executioners - your wife, your lover, your friends. But how can I understand your loyalty to those abusive monsters in the box? Those

swollen, haggard mugs, those self-satisfied masturbating monkeys? *(He turns on the television. There's just such a face there.)* This is the first time I'm seeing him. But I can read him like an open book - a slave, a liar, a secret murderer! Why are you loyal to a secret murderer? Who, which god, what fetters have fastened you to unjust judges, fawning slaves, talentless clowns? Why do you let them into your building? What keeps you near them? Their smells? Their droppings? The hope of becoming just like them - powerful, fat, and shameless?

Chizhevskii

Not shameless.

Movyer

Fly with me. On the Sun there aren't - and there won't be - respectable thieves or spying kings; the hairdressers there aren't considered fonts of wisdom, no one is interested in their views on life.

Chizhevskii

Now that last argument is strong. All the others, so-so.

Movyer

We're going!

Chizhevskii

It's possible we'll go. Why not?

Movyer

It will be fantastic. Let's go, right now.

Chizhevskii

Let's go! But why the rush?

Volan.

He's rushing because if he doesn't fly away, they'll throw a log on his head.

Movyer is staggered. He instantly ages about twenty years. He sits in a little corner and begins to whimper plaintively.

LeBret

(he is crying) Volan, what have you done... Volan? How could you?

Volan

What, isn't it true?

LeBret

Jolee. Look at Jolee. Look at her carefully. What is about to happen is not yet the finale. I simply want you to look at her. For a long time. Do not be like Jolee.

The stage is plunged into darkness. Jolee humbly stands in a beam of light. For one minute and twenty seconds.

THE CENTRAL STUMP

A major clean-up is taking place in Chizhevskii's apartment. Chizhevskii is vacuuming. Tamara is dusting the shelves. Chizhevskii is, as per his habit, talking on and on.

Chizhevskii

What's interesting is something else. So, now it seems, what's stopping me from having it out with him? No, it wouldn't work. The self-preservation instinct always kicks in. "Yes, Roman Vitalevich! Understood, Roman Vitalevich!" But you know maybe I really could tell him off. There's nothing stopping me now.

Tamara

Here's what's interesting: if Cyrano de Bergerac dies and we, as his delirium, also cease to be -

Chizhevskii

Cease to be - that's very well put.

Tamara

Don't laugh. I know that I'm stupid.

Chizhevskii

Tamar, I'm not laughing, I simply said that you found exactly the right words.

Tamara

Then tell me: if we cease to be, will your Roman Vitalevich also cease to be?

Chizhevskii

I don't know.

Tamara

And the whole world, everything generally?

Chizhevski

I have a theory. Most likely, an objective world does still exist somewhere. And the fantasies of various people are drawn toward this objective world, like dust to a television.

Tamara

I don't get it.

Chizhevskii

Well, imagine we had - a cabbage. The central stump - that's the objective world, the world that actually exists. But around it are many, many leaves of cabbage. Each cabbage leaf - that's someone's delirium. Each one adheres to the stump and takes its shape, but it's already a little bit different.

Tamara

Are we a cabbage leaf too?

Chizhevskii

It turns out we are. When the person who's delirious ceases to dream or dies, or engages in business... the cabbage leaf withers. But the stump remains. Other leaves grow on it.

Tamara

But is your boss a leaf or a stump?

Chizhevskii

I don't know. A leaf, I hope. Though anything's possible. *The telephone rings.*

Chizhevskii

Oh, hi... What?... I greeted you just fine. Well everything, everything... Calm down, my little toad. Yes,

I'll meet you... Fine, I wrote it down. Just so you're not frightened - it's possible that we'll be having a certain character living with us... Don't yell! He will. Yes, I've decided... Don't yell! I love you, I kiss you, I'll meet you!

He throws down the receiver.

Tamara

I don't want to die like this.

Chizhevskii

You said it. On the other hand, we still have a lot of time...

Tamara

Didn't they send him to his death?

Chizhevskii

They did. However, he didn't die right away... After they banged him with the log, he slipped into delirium for another two weeks. So he'll be tagging along with us right here from dusk to dawn.

Tamara

Two weeks isn't much.

Chizhevskii

It's better than nothing. Of course, it won't be peaceful... Tanya will be back. And our friend here has syphilis. A madhouse.

Tamara

It won't be peaceful.

Chizhevskii

Okay. There's no evil without some good... At least I'll have a good long talk with him. And you and Tanya can transplant the flowers.

Tamara

We can. I found one more package.

Chizhevskii

But I looked everywhere.

Tamara

She stashed it in the wardrobe.

Chizhevskii

I should have thought of that.

Tamara

But, when Cyrano dies, will we die too?

Chizhevskii

Tamar, how should I respond to that, in your view? "We will die, Tamara," yes?

Tamara

We won't die?

Chizhevskii

We will die, but I simply can't respond like that.

Tamara

Why not?

Chizhevskii

Because I'm a person with some remnants of good taste. It would be better to use your formulation...

Tamara

Cease to be?

Chizhevskii doesn't answer but simply waves his hand at Tamara. Movyer comes in. He has a sheaf of books in his hands.

Tamara

Oi, already...

Movyer

I haven't disturbed you?

Chizhevskii

You have.

Tamara

We wanted to clean up before you arrived.

Movyer

I would have been happy to arrive later... However, you understand. It didn't depend on me.

Tamara

We understand.

Movyer

I'm here for good. With my things.

Chizhevskii

Yes, we get it. Sit here. I'll finish vacuuming, we'll have tea.

Tamara

I baked a cake.

*Chizhevskii vacuums. Lord de
Movyer sits on a chair,
holding a sheaf of books on
his knees. He sits quietly;
he tries not to disturb
anyone.*

CURTAIN