







M. Gorky

FIVE PLAYS

~~Second Impression~~



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TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN  
BY MARGARET WETTLIN

**М. Горький**  
**ПЯТЬ ПЬЕС**

*На английском языке*

**The Petty  
Bourgeois**

## CHARACTERS

Vasily Vasilyevich Bessemenov, 58 years old, a well-to-do house painter who is head of his guild

Akulina Ivanovna Bessemenova, 52 years old, his wife

Pyotr Bessemenov, 26 years old, his son, a student expelled from the university

Tatyana Bessemenova, 28 years old, his daughter, a school-mistress

Nil, 27 years old, his foster-son, an engine-driver

Perchikhin, 50 years old, a distant relative, a bird-man

Polya, 21 years old, Perchikhin's daughter, a seamstress who works by the day for the Bessemenovs

Yelena Krivtsova, 24 years old, a jail warden's widow who has lodgings at the Bessemenovs'

Teterov, a choir singer	} lodgers at the Bessemenovs'
Shishkin, a student	

Tsvetayeva, 25 years old, a schoolmistress and friend of Tatyana's

Stepanida, the cook

An Old Woman

A Young Boy, a house painter's apprentice

A Doctor

*The action takes place in a small provincial town.*

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## SETTING

*A room in the house of a prosperous working man. The right corner upstage is partitioned off; this narrows the back of the stage and forms a small room downstage right which is separated from the large one by a wooden archway hung with chintz curtains. A door in the back wall of the large room leads into the entrance hall and the other half of the house, where the lodgers' rooms and the kitchen are. To the left of this door stands a huge sideboard, and in the corner—a trunk. An old-fashioned clock hangs on the wall to the right of the door. Its pendulum, big as a moon, swings slowly in its glass case, and when all is quiet it can be heard to repeat in a cold, detached way: going-gone! going-gone! There are two doors in the left wall, one leading into the room of Bessemenov and his wife, the other into the room of their son Pyotr. Between these doors is a large white-tiled stove. An old sofa upholstered in oilcloth stands in front of the stove, and a big table at which the family dines and has tea stands in the middle of the room. Cheap straight-backed chairs are placed at painfully exact intervals around the walls. A china-closet downstage left contains fancy boxes, Easter eggs, a pair of bronze candlesticks, tea and soup spoons, a few wineglasses and silver goblets. A piano and an étagère with sheet music on it stand against the wall facing the audience in the small room separated by the archway. One corner of this room is taken up by a philodendron in a tub. In the right wall are two windows with potted plants on the sills. A couch is placed under the windows, and beside the couch, downstage, there is a little table.*



## ACT I

*About five o'clock in the afternoon. An autumn twilight glances in at the windows. It is almost dark in the big room. Tatyana, half-reclining on the couch, is reading a book. Polya is sitting at the table sewing.*

T a t y a n a (*reading*): "The moon came up. And it was hard to believe that such a sad little moon could throw so much tender, silvery-blue light upon the world." (*Drops the book into her lap.*) It's too dark to read.

P o l y a : Shall I light the lamp?

T a t y a n a : Don't bother. I'm tired of reading.

P o l y a : How nicely he writes! So simply and ... touchingly! Makes you want to cry. (*Pause.*) I'm dying to know how it ends. Do you suppose they'll get married?

T a t y a n a (*vexed*): What difference does it make?

P o l y a : I could never love a man like him.

T a t y a n a : Why not?

P o l y a : He's too tiresome. Always complaining. And sort of—shilly-shally. A man ought to know what he wants.

T a t y a n a (*softly*): Does Nil?

P o l y a : He certainly does.

T a t y a n a : What does he want?

P o l y a : I can't explain—not in the simple way he does. But I know one thing: he'll make it unpleasant for wicked, greedy people. He hates them.

T a t y a n a : Who is bad and who is good?

P o l y a : He can tell you. (*Tatyana says nothing, and does not look at Polya, who, with a smile, takes the book out of her lap.*) It's awfully well written. She's so attractive—so simple and straightforward, and without any airs. When you read about a woman like that, it makes you seem better yourself.

T a t y a n a : You're very naive and amusing, Polya. Stories of this sort simply annoy me. There never was a girl like that. Or a house, or a river, or a moon, either. It's all made up. Books never paint life as it really is—my life and yours, for instance.

P o l y a : They write about what's interesting. As if there was anything interesting about the way we live!

T a t y a n a (*irritably, ignoring what she says*): I often get the

impression that the people who write books hate me and want to pick a quarrel with me. They seem to say: "This is better than you think, and that's worse."

P o l y a : It seems to me all writers must be good, kind men. What wouldn't I give to set eyes on a writer!

T a t y a n a (*musingly*): They never describe the nasty, irksome things as I see them. They do something to them—enlarge them—make them seem tragic. And as for the good things—they just make them up. Nobody ever makes love the way the books describe it. And life isn't tragic at all. It just flows on quietly and monotonously, like a big murky river. Your eyes get tired from watching it, and your mind gets so dull that you don't even bother to ask yourself what makes it flow.

P o l y a (*lost in reverie*): I *would* love to see a writer. All the while you were reading, I kept thinking to myself: what's he like? young? old? dark?

T a t y a n a : Who?

P o l y a : The author.

T a t y a n a : He's dead.

P o l y a : What a pity! Has he been dead long? Was he young when he died?

T a t y a n a : Middle-aged. He drank.

P o l y a : Poor thing. (*Pause.*) What makes clever people drink? Take that lodger of yours, the choir singer—he's clever and he drinks. I wonder why?

T a t y a n a : Because he's sick and tired of everything.

P y o t r (*coming out of his room looking the worse for sleep*): It's dark as the grave in here. Who's sitting over there?

P o l y a : Me. And Tatyana Vasilyevna.

P y o t r : Why don't you light the lamp?

P o l y a : We're enjoying the twilight.

P y o t r : The smell of icon oil seeps into my room from the old man's room. Maybe that's why I dreamt I was swimming down a gummy sort of river. It was hard going, and I lost my bearings—couldn't make out the shore-line. Bits of things kept floating past, but the minute I caught on to them they crumbled because they were rotten. A crazy dream. (*Walks back and forth whistling.*) Time for tea, isn't it?

P o l y a (*lighting the lamp*): I'll bring it in. (*Goes out.*)

P y o t r : Somehow this house of ours gets particularly dull and dreary in the evening. All these antediluvian things seem to swell up and get bigger and heavier and fill up space until

there's no air left to breathe. (*Hammers on the sideboard with his fist.*) Take this hippopotamus—it's been standing in one and the same place for eighteen years. Eighteen years! They say life goes rocketing ahead, but this sideboard hasn't budged an inch since the day it was put here. I kept banging my head against it when I was a little chap and I still keep banging into it morally, so to speak. An idiotic piece of furniture. More of a symbol than a sideboard.

T a t y a n a : How tiresome you are, Pyotr! You ought not to live the way you do.

P y o t r : What way?

T a t y a n a : Never going anywhere. Except upstairs to see Yelena. You go there every evening, and that's a great worry to mother and father. (*Pyotr doesn't answer, just keeps walking up and down and whistling.*) You can't imagine how tired I get these days! The noise and disorder at school wear me out. Here at home it's quiet and orderly, although it's noisier since Yelena moved in. I tire so easily. And the winter holiday is still a long way off. November . . . December. . . (*The clock strikes six.*)

B e s s e m e n o v (*putting his head through the door of his room*): Chattering away, chattering away, and I don't suppose you've written that petition yet.

P y o t r : I have so.

B e s s e m e n o v : You certainly took your time about it! Tck, tck, tck. (*Disappears.*)

T a t y a n a : What petition?

P y o t r : Suing merchant Sizov for seventeen rubles fifty kopeks—the cost of painting the roof of his shed.

A k u l i n a I v a n o v n a (*enters with another lamp*): Raining again. (*Goes to the sideboard, takes out the tea things and lays the table.*) It's chilly in here. The stove's been lighted, but it's chilly just the same. The house is old and full of cracks. Oh, Lordy, Lordy! Your father's pettish again, children. Says his back aches. He's getting old. And everything's going wrong—so many cares and expenses!

T a t y a n a (*to her brother*): Were you at Yelena's last night?

P y o t r : Ye-es.

T a t y a n a : Was it lively?

P y o t r : The usual thing. We drank tea, sang songs, got into an argument. . .

T a t y a n a : Who against whom?

P y o t r : Nil and Shishkin against me.



Maxim Gorky surrounded by the cast of *The Petty Bourgeois* as produced by the Moscow Art Theatre in 1902.

Tat'yana: Naturally.

Pyotr: Nil grew ecstatic, as usual. He gets on my nerves. Prophet of courage and love of life! Absurd. To hear him talk you'd think this uncertain life of ours was a sort of Uncle Sam who at any minute would shower blessings on us. Shishkin expounded on the beneficial effects of milk and the harmful effects of tobacco. And he accused me of having a bourgeois outlook.

Tat'yana: The same old thing.

Pyotr: Quite.

Tat'yana: Do you like Yelena very much?

Pyotr: Not a bad sort—cheery and attractive.

Akulina Ivanovna: A giddy creature, if you ask me. She does nothing but fritter her time away. Company every blessed evening—sipping and munching, singing and dancing. She'd do better to go out and buy herself a wash-stand—washes in a basin and splashes the water all over the floor. The boards'll rot.

Tat'yana: I went to a social at the club last night. Somov was there—you know him, member of the Town Council and patron of our school. He barely nodded to me—barely nodded, mind you, but when Judge Romanov's mistress came into the room he rushed over to her and bowed and kissed her hand as if she were the governor's wife!

Akulina Ivanovna: Think of that, now! Instead of taking the arm of an honest girl and walking proudly down the hall with her for everybody to see!

Tat'yana (*to her brother*): It's the limit! In the eyes of such people a schoolmistress deserves less respect than a loose, painted woman!

Pyotr: Forget it. It's beneath you. As for that woman, she may be loose, but she doesn't paint.

Akulina Ivanovna: How do you know? Have you licked her cheek? A fine thing! Your sister's insulted and you stand up for the woman who's the cause of it!

Pyotr: Please, mother!

Tat'yana: It's impossible to talk in front of mother. (*Heavy steps are heard in the hall.*)

Akulina Ivanovna: Tut-tut! None of your lip! Instead of marching up and down like that, Pyotr, you might carry in the samovar. Stepanida's been complaining it's too heavy for her.

Stepanida (*brings in the samovar, puts it on the floor beside the table, straightens up, and says to her mistress in a*



*gasping voice*): Like it or lump it, I'm telling you once again I've not got the strength to carry such a weight. My pins won't hold up under it.

Akulina Ivanovna: I suppose you'd like us to hire somebody special to carry in the samovar?

Stepanida: That's your business. Let the choir singer carry it in—won't do him no harm. Pyotr Vasilyevich, be so kind as to lift it up on the table. I just can't.

Pyotr: Here. Umph!

Stepanida: Thanks. (*Goes out.*)

Akulina Ivanovna: That's an idea, Pyotr; you speak to the choir singer. Let him carry in the samovar. It really—

Tatyana (*sighing*): Oh, for goodness' sake, mother!

Pyotr: Perhaps I ought to ask him to fetch the water, scrub the floors, clean the chimney, and wash the clothes while he's at it?

Akulina Ivanovna (*with a disparaging wave of her hand*): Now why should you run on like that? All those things get done in good time and without his help. But as for the samovar—

Pyotr: Every evening you raise the vital question of who is to bring in the samovar. Nothing will be done about it until you hire a man-of-all-work, mark my word!

Akulina Ivanovna: What do we need a man for? Your father looks after the house and yard himself.

Pyotr: That's what I call being stingy. And it's not pretty to be stingy when you've got all that money in the bank.

Akulina Ivanovna: Shh! Hold your tongue! If your father hears you, he'll give you a taste of money in the bank! Was it *you* put it in?

Pyotr: Listen, mother—

Tatyana (*jumping up*): Oh, Pyotr, must you? I can't stand it another minute!

Pyotr (*going up to her*): Sorry. A fellow gets drawn into these squabbles before he knows it.

Akulina Ivanovna: A fine thing to say! As if it was a crime to talk to your mother!

Pyotr: The same thing, day after day! It damps a person's spirits. Makes him feel as if he was lined with soot. Or rust.

Akulina Ivanovna (*calling*): Father! Come and have tea!

Pyotr: When my time's up I'll go back to the university