

SIDE ONE - CHICHIKOV & NARRATOR

Narrator But Chichikov was not listening. Instead he stared at the list of dead serfs prepared by Manilov's steward. 246 names printed neatly on several sheets of stiff cartridge paper. His plan was proving easier than he could have imagined. It had formed in his mind two years beforehand, and developed in months of careful planning. Chichikov's idea was to –

Chichikov What are you doing?

Narrator I'm explaining your plan.

Chichikov I can do that.

Narrator You can't explain it.

Chichikov I can explain it better than you can.

Narrator (laughs) I don't think so.

Chichikov Well I'm going to.

Narrator Well not if I explain it first.

Chichikov Well I thought of it first.

Narrator Well so what?

Chichikov Well it's my plan so I get to explain it.

Narrator Well when did that become a rule?

Beat.

Chichikov You ask me questions. I'll answer them.

Narrator Okay.

Chichikov First you need to know that there's a census every ten years.

Narrator And would I be right in thinking that the number of serfs you have at the time of the census determines how much tax you have to pay every year for the next ten years?

Chichikov That's not a real question. That's just a disguised explanation.

Narrator Sorry.

Chichikov But in essence yes. If your serf dies a year after the census, you have to keep paying tax for the next nine years.

Narrator How does that help you?

Chichikov Well, if I can persuade these landowners to transfer ownership of these dead serfs to me –

Narrator They won't have to pay the tax any more.

Chichikov But, you're asking, what do I stand to gain?

Narrator What do you have to gain, Pavel Ivanovich?

Chichikov Good question. Because this is where it becomes brilliantly clever.

Narrator Sounds exciting. Tell me more.

Chichikov Well, there are certain financial institutions that loan money.

Narrator Banks.

Chichikov Yes I know banks loan money.

Narrator So: Banks.

Chichikov This isn't a bank.

Narrator What isn't a bank?

Chichikov The Board of Trustees is not a bank. It's a financial institution where you can raise a mortgage, offering land, serfs or an estate as security.

Narrator I see.

Chichikov And if I can go to them with one thousand serfs,

Narrator One thousand?

Chichikov Absolutely, they won't consider anything less.

Narrator Piddling small change.

Chichikov Hardly worth having.

Narrator Waste of time.

Chichikov Well yes.

Narrator Don't come in here with your forty-one serfs.

Chichikov Shut up.

Narrator And what do you get for your one thousand serfs?

Chichikov With a security of one thousand serfs they will loan me 50,000 roubles.

Narrator (*whistles appreciatively*)

Chichikov And in nine years time when I fail to repay the loan, they take possession of my security.

Narrator The dead serfs.

Chichikov They keep the serfs, I keep the money. 50,000 roubles. Think of it. I will be the light in women's eyes; a figure of admiration and terror. I will be the reflection of all men's aspirations and fears. I shall want for nothing. I shall be rich. I shall be kind. I shall be terrible.

Pause.

Narrator Hm.

Chichikov What's that Hm for?

Narrator No, nothing, great! Good plan.

Chichikov No. Spit it out.

Narrator Well... it's just ... don't get me wrong ... 50,000 roubles is nice to have.

Chichikov Well.

Narrator Well it does seem like an awful lot of trouble to go to just for 50,000.

Chichikov Oh you think so do you?

Narrator Yes. A bit.

Chichikov So, just to sum up: my plan, the most brilliant con-trick of the nineteenth century actually, you – *Mr Uninvited Stupid Head* – you think it's an '*awful lot of trouble*'.

Narrator There's not need to get petty about it. I was just saying.

Chichikov Well don't, alright?

Narrator Okay fine, forget I said anything.

Chichikov Good.

Narrator Good.

SIDE TWO - NARRATOR & CHICHIKOV

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

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

Chichikov *(Laughs)* I was what?

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

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

Narrator Nearly for the 'ready! Aim! Fire!' *(makes a series of splattering gun sounds, very realistic)*.

Chichikov Right. That.

Narrator But a very satisfactory result in any case.

Chichikov Indeed.

Narrator Even if I do say so myself.

Chichikov What do you mean?

Narrator Well, rescuing you.

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

Narrator What nonsense. You just sat in prison.

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

Narrator I don't know why I bother.

Chichikov I didn't know you did.

Narrator Poo you.

Chichikov Poo you.

Pause

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

Chichikov Oi!

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

SIDE THREE - INNKEEPER & CHICHIKOV

Innkeeper Good evening, sir.

Chichikov Ah! Evening it is, my fine fellow, but is it good?

Innkeeper What?

Chichikov I said, 'Evening...' - it doesn't matter. I'm looking for a room.

Innkeeper Certainly, sir. If I could just have your name.

Chichikov Chichikov.

Innkeeper Bless you, sir.

Chichikov What?

Innkeeper Your name, sir.

Chichikov Chichikov

Innkeeper Bless you, sir.

Chichikov No no.

Innkeeper I'm afraid the police are very insistent. I will need a name.

Chichikov Chichikov.

Innkeeper Always come in threes don't they sir? Bless you again.

Narrator I think he's trying to say he's called Chichikov.

Innkeeper (*chuckles*) Why on earth would he want to do that?

Chichikov Because it's my name. I am Chichikov.

Innkeeper As you wish, sir. Well, if you would sign the register.

Chichikov Certainly, certainly. (*going over and signing*) I must say it's rather a relief to see another human face after so long travelling across some of the most benighted Ukrainian flatlands.

Innkeeper What's that funny smell?

Chichikov I can't smell anything.

Narrator Two days confined in a carriage had certainly done little for the stranger's personal odour.

Chichikov (*indignant*) It's not me!

Innkeeper Here on business are we sir?

Chichikov Business, yes I think you could call it that. Let's just say I have a small transaction to effect with a number of the local landowners. (*chuckles to himself*) Tell me, there are several large estates in the vicinity?

Innkeeper Certainly there are sir.

Chichikov Very good, very good. And the lands are worked by good quantities of peasant labour I suppose?

Innkeeper (*regretfully*) Ah, as in all Russia, yes sir.

Chichikov Capital, capital. And I dare say that this area is not immune to regular outbreaks of cholera and typhus?

Innkeeper Indeed sir, only last year I lost my dear old mother to that cruel disease.

Chichikov Excellent, excellent. Well this seems ideal. I shall be glad to be your guest. Now, I should like a morning room and an evening room. And a bedroom, oh and a dressing room. I require the sun in the morning but have no use for it in the day. My bath must be exclusively for my use and if possible I should like to eat behind a screen. My driver is stabling the horses just now but he will also need somewhere to lay his head.

Innkeeper I don't have an East-facing room, I'm afraid.

Chichikov Oh dear.

Innkeeper Nor a morning room.

Chichikov Ah well, I can make do.

Innkeeper Nor a dressing room, nor a private bath for that matter.

Chichikov Oh well...

Innkeeper An evening room will be difficult to arrange, the sun rises and sets where it will, and you'll eat at table like everyone else.

Chichikov So, a bedroom then?

Innkeeper Certainly, and your man can sleep with the horses.

SIDE FOUR - KOROBOCHKA & CHICHIKOV

Korobochka I understand you're in business, Mr Cheekychops?

Chichikov That's quite right, madam. In a manner of speaking.

Korobochka You see now I am cursing myself that I sold my honey to the merchants. I am sure you would have bought it from me.

Chichikov Well, actually –

Korobochka And I suppose you'll be wanting hemp. But I'm afraid I've sold most of that too.

Chichikov Oh dear.

Korobochka I have perhaps half a pood.

Chichikov Half a –

Korobochka Pood.

Chichikov Goodness.

Korobochka However, I simply will not let you leave here with only my semipood. I must have something you wish to buy.

Beat.

Chichikov Tell me, madam. Your serfs, your peasants: how are they?

Korobochka How are they?

Chichikov I mean to say: have you suffered much loss in their numbers?

Korobochka Oh yes, sir, incalculably so, incalculably. Why only yesterday my blacksmith exploded.

Chichikov Exploded?

Korobochka Indeed he did, sir. Just as though something were burning within him, a jet of blue flame burst from his chest, and he was entirely consumed by it, black as coal he was by the end, my dear friend. Black as coal. And he was such a good blacksmith too.

Chichikov The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. So you've really been hit hard, haven't you? Oh dear. What a shame.

Korobochka And still I have to pay the wretched soul tax, though their souls are, let us speak frankly, no longer in my possession.

Chichikov Indeed. Oh the injustice. But then perhaps you should let me have them?

Korobochka Let you have them?

Chichikov Yes - let me have them.

Korobochka But how can I let you have them, Mr Cheekychops? They're dead.

Chichikov Exactly why you should transfer them to me, Mrs Korobochka.

Korobochka Call me Nastasya. You wouldn't have me dig them out of the ground would you my dear sir? *(laughs)*

Chichikov No, no, we would merely transfer ownership of them on paper. The souls would still be registered as living.

Korobochka You do know they're dead?

Chichikov Yes. I know they're dead.

Korobochka Dead as mutton sir. They're not coming back.

Chichikov Yes. I know what dead means.

Korobochka And you want them?

Chichikov Yes. Call it an idle fancy but I am touched by your plight.

Korobochka *(unconvinced)* Oh?

Chichikov Yes, so if you give me your dead serfs –

Korobochka Give?

Chichikov Well, I suppose I could buy them.

Korobochka I'm not sure. You see I've never sold a dead person before.

Chichikov Well no of course you haven't! How could a - dear sweet charming lady like yourself have had occasion to sell a dead person.

Korobochka I have sold living serfs, of course. Two of the dearest girls to a priest it was. I did not receive their full value. They could weave napkins and all sorts.

Chichikov Yes, indeed, dear Mrs Korobochka –

Korobochka Nastasya, please.

Chichikov Nastasya, but these were living servants.

Korobochka Indeed, and living servants can be so very mischievous. Who knows what the going rate is for dead ones?

Chichikov The going rate? They're completely useless to anyone. There is no going rate.

Korobochka Well you must not blame them for that, dear sir, they *are* dead.

SIDE FIVE - MANILOV & CHICHIKOV

Manilov My dear friend, esteemed monsieur,

A flurry of Slavic kissing.

I hope you will not take it amiss if I say that we are deeply honoured by your presence on our modest estate. No, curse my foolishness and dash that word from your mind: merely honoured? No no. I do you a grave injustice, sir, a grave injustice, a man of your ostentatious accomplishments - permit me at least to say, sir, that the Manilov Estate welcomes you as a brother, as a friend, as a guest, as a Lord, as a companion of honour and a knight of the garter, as a thing of light and air anda creature of the vasty deeps. You would do me, sir, the greatest honour with which it will have been my fortune to have been blessed if you would follow me to my sitting room.

Chichikov I take it you received the Governor's letter?

Manilov Indeed I did, dear friend, indeed I did and if I should tell you that ever I received a finer compliment than your visit then may you denounce me, and publish the opinion abroad that Andrey Vasilyevich Manilov is a liar - a liar sir!

Do me the honour of making yourself at home, sir.

Chichikov Why, thank you.

Manilov Ah, don't sit there, dear friend.

Chichikov What?

Manilov The seat covers are in need of repair.

Chichikov Ah.

Manilov Nor there, for that matter, my dear sir.

Chichikov No?

Manilov I have doubts about the solidity of the legs.

Chichikov Would you care to suggest where I might sit?

Manilov Indeed not, sir! To think that I should presume to tell a man of such rare gifts and preternatural distinction where to sit? Come come, sir, you must think me an awful oaf! My estate is yours, my chairs are yours, you must sit where you will, sir.

Chichikov Right. Here?

Manilov Ah, no, I have a plan to strengthen the back of that one but it is a plan that has yet to come to its fullest point of realization.

Chichikov Right. (*Sits.*) Thank you.

Manilov An excellent choice, dear friend. The finest chair in the room. I hope you will not think me amiss, dear sir, if I assert that it was the exquisiteness of your soul that drew you there.

Chichikov You are very kind.

Manilov No indeed, I am not.

Chichikov Well, may I say that you are.

Manilov No, sir, I forbid it.

Chichikov Sir, do permit me to insist that you are, after all, very kind.

Manilov Permit me not to permit you, esteemed guest. Kind I am not.

Chichikov Right.

Silence. A ticking clock.

You must have a considerable acreage on this estate.

Manilov I can see I am in the presence of a man of acute perception. I do indeed have a considerable acreage.

Chichikov It must take quite some tending, I should think.

Manilov You are precisely right, dear friend. Quite some tending indeed!

Chichikov And rather a lot of serfs to pay the soul-tax on.

Manilov Away with you, magician! Did you not come with the Governor's personal recommendation, I would suspect you of espionage. I do indeed have 'rather a lot of serfs'.

Pause. That clock again.

ChichikovTell me – dear sir – were your serfs badly affected by the typhus outbreak this last winter?

Manilov Ah, indeed sir, several of the souls in my possession passed on in that terrible terrible winter.

Chichikov Really? ... How ... many? ...would you say?

Manilov How many?

Chichikov Yes. How many? I mean, roughly. Or exactly.

Manilov I've no idea. Quite a number. I'll ask my steward. He should know.

SIDE SIX - NOZDRYOV, CHICHIKOV & NARRATOR

Nozdryov Well well well, look who it ain't.

I spy with my little eye something beginning with C! Everyone's favourite steam locomotive!

(imitates steam train pulling away) Chi-chi-kov, chi-chi-kov, chichi-kov

(ad lib, eventually everyone in the bar joining in.) To Chichikov!

Everyone cheers.

Chichikov Hello.

Nozdryov Not often you get that kind of welcome eh?

Chichikov No.

Nozdryov Be a pal and pay my tab. I lost every last cent I had at cards. I had to sell my carriage. Ended up hitching a ride with a chap called Bob. Bobbee! Five days at the fair. I was this close to making my fortune off those girlie-men! If I'd only had another fifty roubles I would have bought this Inn from out under the feet of Mr Boris. (Crescendo) Bo-ris! Bo-ris! Bo-ris! Bo-ris! Boris the Beer!

Chichikov How much did you lose?

Nozdryov Six or seven.

Chichikov That's not too bad.

Nozdryov Hundred.

Chichikov Kopecks?

Nozdryov Roubles. Kopecks are for children. I wouldn't even pick one up off the floor. And I pawned my watch! Hah, look at me, I don't know what time it is!

Chichikov You're lucky they stopped then.

Nozdryov Lucky? I was only getting started. I'd have won it back and more. That's real luck, my friend.

Chichikov But you didn't. You lost.

Nozdryov Strategy, dear boy, strategy! Now in Krasny, they know how to play cards. I used to know a man there: Captain Potseluyev. He'd clap his hands, 'another bottle of Bordello'. (He called Bordeaux Bordello.) The Funniest Man I Ever Met – fact! We'd start playing cards at 6.00. Next morning, they open up the bar, and if we're not still sitting playing, I'm a Dutchman and my name is Jan van der Hoove. And, by God, would we drink. They'd only kick us out when they'd run out of booze to give us. One night, get this, I drank seventeen bottles of champagne.

Narrator No you didn't.

Nozdryov Cross my heart and hope to die.

Narrator You would have died. It's not possible.

Nozdryov Care to make it interesting? One hundred roubles says I can drink 17 bottles. You bring them here, I'll drink them.

Narrator You haven't got a hundred roubles.

Nozdryov I will have! That and a king-size hangover!

Narrator You're just being silly.

Nozdryov Chicken! (*makes chicken sounds*)

Narrator Nozdryov was an inveterate liar, infamous around the Ukraine for his pointless pretences.

Nozdryov I once had a bright blue horse, you know!

Narrator His absurd exaggerations.

Nozdryov Yesterday I jumped over that barn!

Narrator His meaningless boasts.

Nozdryov I can kill a man with a pair of shoes!

Narrator And hours would pass without a single true word being spoken.

Nozdryov 'Tis said I came from the stars.

Chichikov (*very bored*) Oh really.

Nozdryov I have the power of second sight.

Chichikov How interesting.

Nozdryov I am immune to all known diseases.

Chichikov Very handy.

Nozdryov Only last year, cholera swept one way across my estate - typhus the other. Servants dropping around me. Did I cough once the entire winter? No sir!

Chichikov Well lucky old you. (*Beat.*) Wait a minute, did you say, your estate?

SIDE SEVEN - SOBAKEVICH & CHICHIKOV

Sobakevich So. You need dead serfs.

Chichikov Well I don't 'need' them as such –

Sobakevich Either you need them or you don't.

Chichikov Then I suppose after a fashion, I do.

Sobakevich Then I suppose 'after a fashion' I am willing to sell.

Chichikov You are?

Sobakevich Certainly. They're of no particular use to me.

Chichikov How many souls are we talking about.

Sobakevich Since the last census? (Looks it up) 187 souls have been lost on this estate.

Chichikov Most interesting. Perhaps we could fix a price for the lot?

Sobakevich Shall we say one hundred roubles per soul?

Chichikov That's a trifle steep.

Sobakevich What??

Sobakevich Take it or leave it. It's all the same to me.

Chichikov Perhaps we've forgotten the nature of the merchandise here. I was thinking rather more in the nature of eighty kopecks per soul.

Sobakevich Don't be absurd.

Chichikov I'm not being absurd, sir.

Sobakevich If you find yourself some halfwit prepared to sell you registered serfs at eighty kopecks a piece, good luck to you but not here.

Chichikov Forgive me, sir –

Sobakevich I dare say if you go south you might be able to buy a few useless layabouts for eighty kopecks. But every one of my souls is the genuine article. Yes indeed. Take Mikheyev, the carriagemaker. Not a carriage passed through his workshop that didn't come out sprung to perfection - and it would last, mind you! He'd do the lacquering himself. And the varnishing.

Chichikov (*Cautiously*) Ye-es, but –

Sobakevich And what about Stepan Probka, my old carpenter?. You'd have to go a long way to find another to match him. The Russian Infantry wanted him. I said no. This high he stood, built like a battlement. Eighty kopecks indeed!

Chichikov Yes but - they're all dead.

Sobakevich I know they're all dead. You think I'd sell you such men when they were alive?

A pause of bafflement for Chichikov and QED for Sobakevich.

Chichikov What about a rouble fifty?

Sobakevich For a man like the cobbler, Telyatnikov, who would make you a pair of boots that last ten years?

Chichikov He's not making boots now though is he?

Sobakevich More's the pity! More's the pity!

Chichikov Two roubles. I really can't go any higher.

Sobakevich I tell you what I'll do. Seventy-five roubles a soul, in cash, but only because I've taken a liking to you.

Chichikov Two roubles.

Sobakevich 'Two roubles' 'two roubles'! You parrot! Come back to me with a real offer, then we'll talk.

Chichikov Two roubles, that's my final offer.

Sobakevich Fifty roubles per soul, that's mine.

Chichikov Then I'm afraid my business here is concluded. Thank you for your hospitality.

Gets up to go.

Sobakevich You drive a hard bargain sir. But I drive harder! I will accept ten roubles per soul.

Chichikov Certainly not.

Sobakevich Five then, you vulture.

Chichikov Two roubles fifty I said and I shall not add a kopeck more.

Sobakevich You have a boiled turnip for a heart, sir. At least give me three roubles each.

Chichikov Sorry. No can do.

Pause.

Sobakevich Well then. Because I have taken a liking to you, I shall accept your offer, you poisonous snake. It means a considerable loss to me, of course, but damn me if I cannot help giving pleasure to my fellow man.

SIDE EIGHT - TENTETNIKOV & CHICHIKOV

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

Tentetnikov No, no. Illness reaches even here sir.

Chichikov Is that so?

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

Chichikov How interesting. And tragic.

Tentetnikov Yes. *(Sighs)*

Silence.

Chichikov Are you sketching?

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

Chichikov Do let me see, my dear friend.

Tentetnikov No, really. It's nothing.

Chichikov goes over to see.

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

Tentetnikov *(shuddering sigh)*

Chichikov My dear sir! Compose yourself!

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

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

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

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

Tentetnikov I have broken with her father.

Chichikov Ah. The father.

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

Chichikov *(soothingly)* I'm sure.

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

Chichikov As is your right, sir.

Tentetnikov And for him to talk to me like that.

Chichikov What did he say?

Tentetnikov He called me –

Chichikov What?

Tentetnikov He dared to call me –

Chichikov Yes?

Tentetnikov ‘My dear chap.’

Pause.

Chichikov He did what sorry?

Tentetnikov I know. Unbelievable isn’t it?

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

Tentetnikov Well what else could I have done?

Chichikov Quite right, what a nerve!

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

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

Tentetnikov Yes. My darling Ulinka. *He sobs again.* I’ll never see her again.

Pause. Chichikov sighs.

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

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

Chichikov I, grovel? Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov does not grovel. No indeed. I say merely that you might permit me to pay a visit to this man, as a visitor in the region, to pay him my respects and yours.

Tentetnikov You? But why would you?

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

Tentetnikov What a strange man.