

# The Bridegroom

Alexander Pushkin

Translated by D. M. Thomas

For three days Natasha,  
The merchant's daughter,  
Was missing. The third night,  
She ran in, distraught.  
5 Her father and mother  
Plied her with questions.  
She did not hear them,  
She could hardly breathe.

Stricken with foreboding  
10 They pleaded, got angry,  
But still she was silent;  
At last they gave up.  
Natasha's cheeks regained  
Their rosy color.  
15 And cheerfully again  
She sat with her sisters.

Once at the shingle-gate  
She sat with her friends  
—And a swift troika<sup>1</sup>  
20 Flashed by before them;  
A handsome young man  
Stood driving the horses;  
Snow and mud went flying,  
Splashing the girls.

25 He gazed as he flew past,  
And Natasha gazed.  
He flew on. Natasha froze.

1. **troika** (troi' ka) *n.*: Russian carriage or sleigh drawn by a specially trained team of three horses abreast.

Headlong she ran home.  
"It was he! It was he!"  
30 She cried. "I know it!  
I recognized him! Papa,  
Mama, save me from him!"

Full of grief and fear,  
They shake their heads, sighing.  
35 Her father says: "My child,  
Tell me everything.  
If someone has harmed you,  
Tell us . . . even a hint."  
She weeps again and  
40 Her lips remain sealed.

The next morning, the old  
Matchmaking woman  
Unexpectedly calls and  
Sings the girl's praises;  
45 Says to the father: "You  
Have the goods and I  
A buyer for them:  
A handsome young man.

"He bows low to no one,  
50 He lives like a lord  
With no debts nor worries;

## ◆ Build Vocabulary

**foreboding** (fōr bōd' in) *n.*: Feeling that something bad will happen



The Lights of Marriage, Marc Chagall, Kunsthhaus, Zurich

▲ **Critical Viewing** What might you infer about Natasha's marriage based on this painting? [Infer]

55 He's rich and he's generous,  
Says he will give his bride,  
On their wedding-day,  
A fox-fur coat, a pearl,  
Gold rings, brocaded<sup>2</sup> dresses.

60 "Yesterday, out driving,  
He saw your Natasha;  
Shall we shake hands  
And get her to church?"  
The woman starts to eat  
A pie, and talks in riddles,  
While the poor girl  
Does not know where to look.

2. **brocaded** (brō kād' ed) *adj.*: Woven, raised design in a cloth.

65 "Agreed," says her father;  
"Go in happiness  
To the altar, Natasha;  
It's dull for you here;  
A swallow should not spend  
70 All its time singing,  
It's time for you to build  
A nest for your children."

75 Natasha leaned against  
The wall and tried  
To speak—but found herself  
Sobbing; she was shuddering  
And laughing. The matchmaker  
Poured out a cup of water,

80 Gave her some to drink,  
Splashed some in her face.

Her parents are distressed.  
Then Natasha recovered,  
And calmly she said:

85 "Your will be done. Call  
My bridegroom to the feast,  
Bake loaves for the whole world,  
Brew sweet mead<sup>3</sup> and call  
The law to the feast."

"Of course, Natasha, angell  
90 You know we'd give our lives  
To make you happy!"  
They bake and they brew;  
The worthy guests come,  
The bride is led to the feast,  
95 Her maids sing and weep;  
Then horses and a sledge<sup>4</sup>

With the groom—and all sit.  
The glasses ring and clatter,  
The toasting-cup is passed

100 From hand to hand in tumult,  
The guests are drunk.

#### BRIDEGROOM

"Friends, why is my fair bride  
Sad, why is she not  
Feasting and serving?"

105 The bride answers the groom:  
"I will tell you why  
As best I can. My soul  
Knows no rest, day and night  
I weep; an evil dream  
110 Oppresses me." Her father  
Says: "My dear child, tell us  
What your dream is."

"I dreamed," she says, "that I  
Went into a forest,  
115 It was late and dark;

3. **mead** (mēd) *n.*: Drink made of fermented honey and water.

4. **sledge** *n.*: Sleigh.

The moon was faintly  
Shining behind a cloud;  
I strayed from the path;  
Nothing stirred except  
120 The tops of the pine-trees.

"And suddenly, as if  
I was awake, I saw  
A hut. I approach the hut  
And knock at the door  
125 —Silence. A prayer on my lips  
I open the door and enter.  
A candle burns. All  
Is silver and gold."

#### BRIDEGROOM

130 "What is bad about that?  
It promises wealth."

#### BRIDE

"Wait, sir, I've not finished.  
Silently I gazed  
On the silver and gold,  
The cloths, the rugs, the silks,  
135 From Novgorod,<sup>5</sup> and I  
Was lost in wonder.

"Then I heard a shout  
And a clatter of hoofs . . .  
Someone has driven up  
140 To the porch. Quickly  
I slammed the door and hid  
Behind the stove. Now  
I hear many voices . . .  
Twelve young men come in,

145 "And with them is a girl,  
Pure and beautiful.  
They've taken no notice  
Of the ikons,<sup>6</sup> they sit

5. **Novgorod**: City in the northwestern part of Russia.

6. **ikons** (i kanz') *n.*: Images of Jesus, Mary, a saint, or another sacred Christian religious figure.

#### ◆ Build Vocabulary

**tumult** (tōō' mult) *n.*: Noisy commotion

To the table without  
 150 Praying or taking off  
 Their hats. At the head,  
 The eldest brother,  
 At his right, the youngest;  
 At his left, the girl.  
 155 Shouts, laughs, drunken clamor . . . ”

BRIDEGROOM  
 “That betokens merriment.”

BRIDE  
 “Wait, sir, I’ve not finished.  
 The drunken din goes on  
 And grows louder still.  
 160 Only the girl is sad.

“She sits silent, neither  
 Eating nor drinking;  
 But sheds tears in plenty;  
 The eldest brother

165 Takes his knife and, whistling,  
 Sharpens it; seizing her by  
 The hair he kills her  
 And cuts off her right hand.”

“Why,” says the groom, “this  
 170 Is nonsense! Believe me,  
 My love, your dream is not evil.”  
 She looks him in the eyes.  
 “And from whose hand  
 Does this ring come?”  
 175 The bride said. The whole throng  
 Rose in the silence.

With a clatter the ring  
 Falls, and rolls along  
 The floor. The groom blanches,  
 180 Trembles. Confusion . . .  
 “Seize him!” the law commands.  
 He’s bound, judged, put to death.  
 Natasha is famous!  
 Our song at an end.

## Guide for Responding

### ◆ Literature and Your Life

**Reader’s Response** Do you admire Natasha?  
 Why or why not?

**Thematic Focus** What does the poem suggest  
 about the power of choice versus that of chance or  
 fate?

**Questions for Research** Name another song  
 or ballad that, like “The Bridegroom,” tells a story.  
 Then write one or more questions you could  
 research about the song or ballad.

#### Check Your Comprehension

1. What unexplained event occurs at the very  
 beginning of the poem?
2. What upsets Natasha when she’s sitting with her  
 friends at the gate?
3. Describe her changing reactions to the marriage.
4. Summarize the events of the wedding.

### ◆ Critical Thinking

#### INTERPRET

1. Where was Natasha during the three days she  
 was missing? **[Infer]**
2. Why does she refuse to reveal where she was to  
 her parents? **[Analyze]**
3. What accounts for her changing reactions to the  
 marriage? **[Infer]**
4. Do you think Natasha had the “evil” dream she  
 describes? Explain. **[Interpret]**
5. How does Natasha’s behavior at the beginning of  
 the poem contrast with her behavior at the end?  
**[Compare and Contrast]**
6. Why does Natasha become famous?  
**[Draw Conclusions]**

#### EVALUATE

7. Is the title of the poem effective in grabbing your  
 attention and hinting at the poem’s story?  
 Explain. **[Criticize]**

#### COMPARE LITERARY WORKS

8. Compare and contrast the authors’ use of fate  
 as a theme in the story and the ballad. **[Compare  
 and Contrast]**