The Bridegroom

**Literary Focus:** Climax

The most exciting part of a story is called the **climax**. This is the peak of the story. Everything in the story leads to this moment. At the climax, you find out for sure what will happen to the characters.

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**Reading Skill:** Cause and Effect

"Why did this happen?" When you ask this question, you are wondering about a **cause**. A **cause** makes something happen.

"What's the result of this event?" When you ask this question, you are wondering about an **effect**. An **effect** is the result of a cause. Stories are usually a series of causes and their effects.

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**Into the Poem**

Alexander Pushkin is often called the father of modern Russian literature. Many of Pushkin's writings focus on Russian settings and folk tales. His 1825 poem "The Bridegroom" is based on a folk tale. In the tale, a young woman witnesses a terrible crime. At first, she doesn't tell anyone about the crime. Then she realizes that the man who committed the crime might become her bridegroom. What will happen on their wedding day? Will the young woman be her bridegroom's next victim? Read the poem to find out!
The Bridegroom

by

Alexander Pushkin
For three days Natasha,
The merchant’s daughter,
Was missing. The third night,
She ran in, distraught.¹

Her father and mother
Plied² her with questions.
She did not hear them,
She could hardly breathe.

**IN OTHER WORDS**  Natasha is the daughter of a businessman. She has been missing for three days. When she returns home, her parents ask her many questions. She is too upset to answer them.

Stricken with foreboding³

They pleaded, got angry,
But still she was silent;
At last they gave up.
Natasha’s cheeks regained
Their rosy color.

And cheerfully again
She sat with her sisters.

Once at the shingle-gate⁴
She sat with her friends
—And a swift troika⁵

Flashed by before them;
A handsome young man

1. distraught (dih STRAUGHT): extremely troubled.
2. plied (plyd): addressed urgently, without letting up.
3. foreboding (for BOHD ihng): feeling that something bad will happen.
4. shingle-gate: gate to the beach (a shingle is a pebbly beach).
5. troika (TROY kuh): Russian sleigh or carriage drawn by three horses.

Stood driving the horses;
Snow and mud went flying,
Splashing the girls.

**IN OTHER WORDS**  Natasha becomes her normal self again. One day Natasha is sitting with her friends near a gate. A handsome young man rushes by in a carriage. As the carriage passes, it splashes the girls with snow and mud.

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

**IN OTHER WORDS**  The man looks at the girls, and Natasha looks at him. Natasha freezes in fear. She runs straight home. She tells her parents that she recognized the man. She begs her parents to save her from this man.

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.
IN OTHER WORDS  Natasha's parents are very sad and afraid. Her father begs Natasha to tell him what happened, or at least give him a hint. Natasha won't say a word.

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.

IN OTHER WORDS  The next morning, a matchmaker visits Natasha's family. The matchmaker says a lot of good things about Natasha and thinks she will make a good wife. The matchmaker knows a young man who will make a good husband for Natasha.

“He bows low to no one,

50  he lives like a lord
With no debts nor worries;
He’s rich and he’s generous,
Says he will give his bride,
On their wedding-day,

55  A fox-fur coat, a pearl,
Gold rings, brocaded dresses.

“Yesterday, out driving,
He saw your Natasha;
Shall we shake hands

6. brocaded (broh KAYD ehd): having a raised design woven into the fabric.
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.

**IN OTHER WORDS**  The matchmaker tries to get
Natasha's father to agree to the marriage. She says that
the man is rich and generous. When this man gets
married, he'll give his wife many beautiful things. This
man saw Natasha yesterday when he was out driving.
While the matchmaker talks, Natasha becomes very
nervous.

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

**IN OTHER WORDS**  Natasha's father agrees to the
marriage. He compares Natasha's life to a bird's.
Eventually a bird needs to build a nest for its babies.
Natasha, too, should start a family of her own.

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

**IN OTHER WORDS**  Natasha is upset. She starts to shake and then laughs. To calm her down, the matchmaker splashes some water on Natasha’s face.

Her parents are distressed.
Then Natasha recovered,
And calmly she said:
“Your will be done. Call
My bridegroom to the feast,
Bake loaves for the whole world,
Brew sweet mead⁷ and call
The law to the feast.”

**IN OTHER WORDS**  Natasha calms down. She tells her parents that she’ll do what they want. She tells them to start preparing food and drinks for the wedding party. She also asks them to invite the police.

“Oh, course, Natasha, angel!
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,
Her maids sing and weep;
Then horses and a sledge

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⁷. **mead** (meed): alcoholic drink made from honey and water.
With the groom—and all sit.
The glasses ring and clatter,
The toasting-cup is passed

100 From hand to hand in tumult,\(^8\)
The guests are drunk.

**IN OTHER WORDS**  Natasha’s parents prepare for the party. Guests come. The bridesmaids lead Natasha to the party. The groom arrives on a sled pulled by horses. Everyone drinks, makes toasts, and gets drunk.

**BRIDEGROOM**

“Friends, why is my fair bride
Sad, why is she not

105 Feasting and serving?”

The bride answers the groom:

“I will tell you why
As best I can. My soul
Knows the rest, day and night

110 I weep; an evil dream
Oppresses me.” Her father
Says: “My dear child, tell us
What your dream is.”

**IN OTHER WORDS**  The bridegroom asks why Natasha is so sad. She tells everyone she’s been having a bad dream. Her father asks her to tell them her dream.

“I dreamed,” she says, “that I

115 Went into a forest,

\(^8\) tumult (TOO muhlt): noisy commotion.
It was late and dark;  
The moon was faintly  
Shining behind a cloud;  
I strayed from the path;  

120 Nothing stirred except  
The tops of the pine trees.

“And suddenly, as if  
I was awake, I saw  
A hut. I approach the hut  

125 And knock at the door  
—Silence. A prayer on my lips  
I open the door and enter.  
A candle burns. All  
Is silver and gold.”

**IN OTHER WORDS**  Natasha tells them her dream:  
She goes out walking in the forest one night and gets lost.  
Suddenly, she sees a little house. She knocks at the door,  
but no one answers. Natasha is scared, but she goes into  
the house. Inside, a candle is burning. The house is  
decorated with silver and gold.

130 **BRIDEGROOM**  
“What is bad about that?  
It promises wealth.”

**BRIDE**  
“Wait, sir, I’ve not finished.  

135 Silently I gazed  
on the silver and gold,  
The cloths, the rugs, the silks
From Novgorod,\(^9\) and I
Was lost in wonder.

140 “Then I heard a shout
And a clatter of hoofs . . .
Someone has driven up
To the porch. Quickly
I slammed the door and hid

145 Behind the stove. Now
I hear many voices . . .
Twelve young men come in,

**IN OTHER WORDS** The bridegroom thinks that Natasha’s dream means that she’ll be wealthy in the future. However, Natasha says she is not finished telling her dream. She says that while she is admiring the house, a group of twelve young men arrive. Natasha hides behind the stove.

“And with them is a girl,
Pure and beautiful.

150 They’ve taken no notice
Of the ikons,\(^{10}\) they sit
To the table without
Praying or taking off
Their hats. At the head,

155 The eldest brother,
At his right, the youngest;
At his left, the girl.
Shouts, laughs, drunken clamor . . .”\(^{11}\)

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9. **Novgorod**: city in the northwestern part of Russia.
10. **ikons**: images of Christ, the Virgin, and saints, used in the Eastern Orthodox Church (also spelled *icons*).
11. **clamor** (KLAM uhr): loud noise.
IN OTHER WORDS  Natasha continues telling her dream. She says that the men have a beautiful young girl with them. The men and the girl sit down at the table. The men make a lot of noise and get drunk.

BRIDEGROOM

160 “That betokens merriment.”

BRIDE

“Wait sir, I’ve not finished. The drunken din goes on And grows louder still.

165 Only the girl is sad.

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

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

IN OTHER WORDS  The bridegroom tells Natasha that her dream means that she’ll have fun in the future. However, Natasha says she’s not finished telling her dream. She says that in her dream, the girl is not having fun. She’s not eating or drinking. She’s crying. Then, one of the men takes out a knife and kills the girl. He cuts off her right hand.
"Why," says the groom, "this
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?”

The bride said. The whole throng
Rose in silence.

With a clatter the ring
Falls, and rolls along
The floor. The groom blanches,12

Trembles. Confusion . .
“Seize him!” the law commands.
He’s bound, judged, put to death.
Natasha is famous!
Our song at an end.

IN OTHER WORDS  The bridegroom says the dream
doesn’t mean anything. Natasha points out that the ring
he gave her comes from the dead girl’s hand. Everyone
looks. The ring falls and rolls along the floor. The
bridegroom turns white with fear. The police arrest the
bridegroom. He’s tried, convicted, and put to death.

12. blanches (BLANCH ihz): turns pale.
Climax: Plot Chart

Now that you've finished reading "The Bridegroom," think back to the main events in the poem. Then, fill in the plot chart below with the key events that lead to the exciting climax. If you'd like, you might want to draw some little pictures to illustrate some of the events or the climax itself.

Climax:

Event #4:

Event #3:

Event #2:

Event #1:
Natasha witnesses a terrible crime.

End of story:
The bridegroom is put to death, and Natasha becomes famous.
"The Bridegroom"

A. Match words and definitions. Write the letter of the correct definition next to each word.

___ 1. din  a. feeling that something bad will happen
     b. means or signifies
     c. loud noise
     d. having a raised design woven into the fabric
     e. happiness

___ 2. brocaded
___ 3. foreboding
___ 4. betokens
___ 5. merriment

B. Choose three words from above. Use each word in a sentence.

1. ____________________________

2. ____________________________

3. ____________________________

C. Match the words in the left column with the clues in the right column. Write the correct letter in the blanks.

___ 1. clamor  a. the opposite of full of hope
   ___ 2. Blanches  b. might describe the face of a frightened person
   ___ 3. foreboding  c. another way to say "pressed for information"
   ___ 4. distraught  d. how a person might feel after a pet dies
   ___ 5. plied  e. the opposite of silence