

## ==Carnival & the Carnival People==

### SUMMARY:

The "carnival people" coming over to party were people (regular rural tourists AND carnival performers) in town for Russian Mardi Gras.

The festival takes place pre-Lent so there's lots of rambunctious behavior that otherwise wouldn't be acceptable.

The whole family, especially the sisters, would have been out and about at events all week where they'd invite cool people to join them for the party. -jb

The carnival people are often left open for interpretation, but a first window into this tradition came from an essay about Chekhov and "foreignness" that refers to *"the noisy Mardi Gras gathering of the officers and the family"*. Various productions have made the decision that the carnival party is actually a [Maslenitsa celebration](#) - analogous to Mardi Gras / Carnival in the West. It's the last week before Lent, and so is a kind of blowing-off-steam before the Lenten season:

***Maslenitsa** is a Russian folk holiday that incorporates some traditions that date back to pagan times. It is celebrated during the last week before the Great Lent; that is, the seventh week before Easter. Maslenitsa is a direct analog of the Roman Catholic Carnival. Maslenitsa has a dual ancestry: pagan and Christian.*

*Maslenitsa also includes masquerades, snowball fights, sledding, swinging on swings and plenty of sleigh rides. The mascot of the celebration is usually a brightly dressed straw effigy of Lady Maslenitsa, formerly known as Kostroma. As the culmination of the celebration, on Sunday evening, Lady Maslenitsa is stripped of her finery, and put to the flames of a bonfire.*



So, "carnival people" could be read to simply mean "festival revelers" - people who were in town celebrating and sledding and eating blinis etc., and are continuing the Maslenitsa party into the night - and it could be read to mean "festival organizers" - i.e. carnies, all the tribes with a float in the Mardi Gras parade in big extraordinary masks.

In any case, it's likely that the sisters have been to some Maslenitsa events over the week, met some revelers or carnies, people with extraordinary abilities, and invited them all over for a giant festival celebration at their house.

And then there's this little gem about typical celebrations through the week. Bold below is mine:

On Tuesday, young men might search for a fiancée to marry after lent. On Wednesday sons-in-law may visit their mother-in-law who has prepared pancakes and invited other guests for a party. Thursday may be devoted to outdoor activities. People may take off work and spend the day sledding, ice skating, snowball fights and with sleigh rides. On Friday sons-in-law may invite their mothers-in-law for dinner. **Saturday may be a gathering of a young wife with her sisters-in-law to work on a good relationship.**

Auspicious, then, that it's Natasha, the sisters' young wife, who sends away the revelers, ruining the night for her sisters-in-law.