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UNCLE VANYA

by Anton Chekhov

**TRANSLATED BY TYRONE GUTHRIE
AND LEONID KIPNIS**

This translation of the Chekhov classic by two outstanding contemporary theatrical authorities is an important addition to the Chekhov repertory, for it provides a script that is thoroughly suitable for modern productions. In his introduction to the volume, Sir Tyrone points out that in this play, as always, Chekhov offers marvelous acting opportunities, not merely to the actors who have the longest parts, but also to those whose characters appear to be less fully developed.

Sir Tyrone observes that the impression made by Chekhov's plays depends a great

see back flap

from front flap

deal upon the period of time from which they are viewed. "In the first decade of this century, when they were new," he writes, "it was their lack of event which seemed so noticeable. A group of characters compelled the attention, because they were so lifelike, so interesting, and so various; but, compared to the characters in other plays of the epoch, they did nothing. Nowadays, I do not think that audiences regret the lack of event, the lack of obvious drama in Chekhov. This means that a production of Chekhov today can afford to be less explicit both in storytelling and in the expression of character than was necessary thirty or forty years ago."

In addition to his notable career as a director, Sir Tyrone Guthrie has written a number of books about the theatre, and, with Leonid Kipnis, has translated another Chekhov play, **THE CHERRY ORCHARD** (see back of jacket). Mr. Kipnis, who died in 1968, was active in stage and film production in the United States and Canada.

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∫ *UNCLE VANYA*

SCENES FROM COUNTRY LIFE IN FOUR ACTS

by Anton Chekhov

translated from the Russian by TYRONE GUTHRIE and
LEONID KIPNIS

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A DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

by Tyrone Guthrie *page 3*

UNCLE VANYA *page 9*

Uncle Vanya

∫ *A DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION*

BY TYRONE GUTHRIE

THE impression made by Chekhov's plays depends a great deal upon the period of time from which they are viewed.

In the first decade of this century, when they were new, it was their lack of event which seemed so very noticeable. A group of characters compelled the attention, because they were so lifelike, so interesting, and so various; but, compared to the characters in other plays of the epoch, they *did* nothing. A milieu was created, but there was scarcely any activity — no big scenes, no strong situations, as in the still popular plays of Scribe and Sardou; no great rhetorical set pieces, as in Shakespeare, Racine, Goethe, or Schiller; no problems were debated, as in the theatre of Ibsen or Shaw.

Chekhov's plays, even in Russia, in Stanislavsky's productions for the Moscow Art Theatre, which were also shown in St. Petersburg and Kiev, seemed strangely lacking in the qualities which audiences had learned to regard as "dramatic." Abroad, with the barrier of translation imposed upon the original texts, they were even harder to understand.

In the English-speaking theatre it was many years before any translations appeared other than those of Mrs. Constance Garnett. Her versions have many splendid virtues, and in some ways have never been surpassed, but they do, in my estimation, lack humor and lightness. All the characters seem to be melancholy, tearful eccentrics; and for a generation Chekhov was regarded as an arch-apostle of Russian Gloom.

Gradually it began to be apparent that the emotion of Chekhov's characters is strongly tempered by humor; that the general tone of his major works is absolutely not tragic or heavily emotional; it is affectionately ironic. It is ironic that the beautiful old cherry orchard is going to be cut down to make way for a suburban real-estate development — ironic, not tragic; and Madame Ranevskaya is not, though many leading ladies have tried to make her so, a Tragedy Queen; she is a charming birdbrain. It is ironic that the three sisters never reach Moscow; but their yearning is predominantly sentimental; there is no reason to suppose that, had Moscow been achieved, they would have been any happier. Tusenbach dies in a silly, meaningless duel with a psychopath; it is ironic but not tragic; there is no reason to suppose that Irina's married life with him would have been more successful than Masha's with her schoolmaster.

Finally, *Uncle Vanya*: the formula is very similar to that of *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*. A group of characters is presented in a situation which, while potentially tragic, is treated ironically. In *Uncle Vanya* the situation between Vanya and the Professor is developed into a big scene; but, when the crisis occurs, it is not the tragic clash of incompatibles as Sophocles might have presented it; not the blood-orgy of Seneca, nor the noble mind o'erthrown of Shakespearean tragedy; it is not a thrillingly dramatic "curtain," such as Dumas, Sardou, Pinero,

even Ibsen would have been unable to resist. It is farce. The climax of *Uncle Vanya* takes place at the end of Act Three. The men exchange angry words; Vanya flourishes a gun; the women scream; the Professor flies in terror; a shot is fired. But since Vanya is the trigger-man the bullet is far off the mark. The scene ends with the protagonist collapsing in a flood of angry, frustrated, pathetic, but essentially absurd tears.

As always, Chekhov offers marvelous acting opportunities, not merely to the actors who have the longest parts, but also to those whose characters appear to be less fully developed: the nurse, the old bluestocking Maman, Waffles are all rewarding parts. In Laurence Olivier's excellent and enormously successful production with the British National Theatre Company, these three parts were taken by three senior players of the utmost celebrity and eminence. Immediately they became not one-dimensional decorations on the fringe of the play. They took their place, as intended, as essential parts of the pattern, essential voices in a piece of intricate, but beautifully intelligible, chamber music.

What of Astrov? It is my view that this part should not be played romantically. Although Sonia is deeply in love with him and Yelena too feels his charm, it is not intended, I think, that he should charm the audience. In this play he expresses the sort of sentiment which in *The Cherry Orchard* is uttered by Trofimov, the perennial student; in *The Three Sisters* similar sentiments are scored for two voices, those of Vershinin and Tusenbach. In each of these cases high-flown sentiment is put into the mouths of characters whom Chekhov, in his affectionate-ironic way, clearly did not regard as high-flyers. I believe that the same sort of irony is intended in the case of Astrov.

He *is* noble; he *is* attractive; but he is running away from his personal problems, taking refuge in overwork and alcohol. The

inference, I suggest, is that he is no less perceptively aware of the personal problems which beset him than of the ecological problems which surround him. And in both cases he is incapable of following up a correct diagnosis with an effective treatment. I think that the actor who plays Astrov must avoid the stereotype of the handsome, lonely hero fighting insuperable odds. That performance can be left for the movie version.

Nowadays I do not think that audiences regret the lack of event, the lack of obvious drama in Chekhov. Compared to those of, for example, Harold Pinter, his plays seem positively action-packed and their dialogue develops a theme almost as relentlessly as that of Sophocles.

This means that a production of Chekhov today can afford to be less explicit both in storytelling and in the expression of character than was necessary thirty or forty years ago. It is no longer expected that every picture should "tell a story." Indeed it is becoming rather old-fashioned to do so. The movies have pulled the rug from under the sort of painting in which a Lady (in full evening dress) is depicted face down on the hearthrug, what time a Gentleman (in full evening dress) "registers" stern feeling by biting his lips, while he stands at the chimney-piece with a packet of letters in his hand. A similar change has occurred in drama. Movies and television supply the public demand for narrative. With plots unraveling every hour, from breakfast till bedtime of every day, from cradle to grave, we no longer need go to the theatre to see one more plot unravel.

The greatest drama has never, I guess, depended very much upon plot; comment has always been more important than narrative. This is not to say that none of the great dramatic masterpieces have good plots; *Oedipus Rex*, for instance, has a plot as thrilling, far more simple, and rather more coherent than *The*

Perils of Pauline. But many of the great masterpieces are distinctly weak in the plot department. No one can be very much interested in the story development or surprised at the denouement of *Prometheus Bound*; it is more than its strange yet conventional story which makes *Phèdre* as great as it is; *Hamlet* certainly has a complex, but hardly a tidy, plot; Molière's plots are tidy enough but as stylized as ballad poetry, as predictable as the multiplication table, while Congreve's are barely intelligible and suffocatingly tedious; Ibsen told some good stories, but no better than many a lesser playwright; *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a masterly comedy, but *what* would one make of a synopsis of its plot?

Chekhov stands at the close of an era when narrative was an important ingredient of drama. It may, almost certainly will, become so again. But not yet. Now, and for a while, the so-called well-made play seems a dated and obvious formula. But it does not yet appear so to the audience, which, naturally, is a little behind the playwrights, actors, directors, and so on, whose business it is to be concerned with these matters.

I was interested when, a few years ago, I was connected with a production of *The Three Sisters* which its audiences gradually turned into the sort of performance to which they were accustomed and which they wanted. Without their conscious intention, the actors were pushed by the audience in the direction of big scenes, strong situations, comedy routines, emotional confrontations. After about eight or ten performances the production had become subtly but unmistakably distorted. The comedy was louder and funnier; the pathos had become sentimental, moments of delicate tension had broadened into theatricality.

Absolutely this was not the fault of the actors; there was no indiscipline, no cheap playing for personal glory or obvious ap-

plause. I could not — and as its director I was familiar with every phrase, every gesture — detect any departure from the agreed routine of the production. It was all the fault of the people “out front.” They were intelligent, eagerly sympathetic, alertly aware that the play was both funny and sad, but they were reacting as they were accustomed to react when “at the theatre,” looking for and evoking big scenes, strong situations, heroes, heroines, and all the familiar claptrap of the well-made play.

I guess they were only able to evoke the claptrap because the seeds of it were already in the production. Our performance was too like *A Play* and not sufficiently like *Real Life*.

With Chekhov a happy medium needs to be sought. The performance must be just sufficiently theatrical to “hold” an audience in a large, though not very large, house; not so theatrical that an intelligent spectator says “How theatrically effective” instead of “How true.”

The Play

Characters

SEREBRIAKOV, a retired professor

YELENA ANDREIEVNA, his wife; twenty-seven years old

SONIA, his daughter by his first marriage

VOYNITSKAYA, Maria Vassilievna, widow of a senator, mother of
the Professor's first wife and of Vanya

VOYNITSKY, Ivan Petrovich (Uncle Vanya), her son

ASTROV, a doctor in the neighborhood

TELYEGIN, Ilya Ilyich, former estate owner, now impoverished

MARINA, Sonia's old nurse

A workman

A night watchman

The action takes place in a country house in Russia about 1900

ACT ONE: The terrace. Afternoon.

ACT TWO: The dining room. Night; some time later.

ACT THREE: The drawing room, midday; some time later.

ACT FOUR: Uncle Vanya's room, the same evening.

∫ ACT ONE

Garden. Part of the house can be seen, with a terrace. A tree-lined walk. Under an old poplar is a table, set with tea things; benches, chairs, a guitar on one of the benches; not far from the table is a swing. Three o'clock on a hot, gray afternoon. MARINA, a bulky old woman, slow in movement, sits at the samovar, knitting a stocking. ASTROV is walking about nearby.

MARINA

(filling a glass of tea) Have your tea, my dear.

ASTROV

(takes glass reluctantly) I don't really want it.

MARINA

Perhaps you'd like some vodka.

ASTROV

No. I don't drink vodka every day. Anyway, it's stuffy this afternoon. *(pause)* Nyanya, how long have you and I known one another?

MARINA

(thinking) How long? Lord help me, *how long?* You came

to this part of the country . . . when? . . . Vera Petrovna, Sonia's mother, was still alive. While she was still with us, you came to see us two winters running. It must be eleven years . . . maybe more.

ASTROV

Have I changed a lot in all that time?

MARINA

Yes, a lot. You were young then, good-looking. Now you're older. The good looks aren't the same. Another thing: now you drink vodka.

ASTROV

Yes. In ten years I've become another person. And why is that? I'm overworked, Nyanya. On the go, morning to night. Rest? I don't know what rest is. Even at night one lies in bed just waiting to be dragged out to a patient. All the time that we've known one another, I haven't had a single free day. No wonder I look older! Besides life is dreary, stupid, squalid . . . life is suffocating. You're surrounded by backwoods people, nothing but wild men of the woods; you live amongst them for two or three years, and, by degrees, without noticing it, you've become one of them. It's inevitable. (*twists his long mustache*) Look at the length of this mustache! An absurd mustache. Nyanya, I've become backwoodsy . . . not stupid — yet, thank God, the brains are still where they ought to be, but the feelings have been — dulled. I don't want anything. I don't need anything. I don't love anyone . . . well, perhaps I love you. (*kisses her on the forehead*) When I was a child, I had a Nyanya like you.

MARINA

Would you like something to eat?

ASTROV

No. In the third week in Lent I went to Malitzkoie. There was an epidemic there. Typhoid fever. In the huts people were lying about in heaps . . . the filth, the stench, the fumes . . . calves lying about the floor along with the sick . . . young pigs as well . . . I worked the entire day, never once sat down, didn't even take so much as a mouthful of water. Then, when I got home, no rest either. They brought a switchman from the railroad; I got him onto the table and he died under the chloroform. And then, as if it were the slightest use, then my feelings awoke and my conscience began to prick; you'd think I'd killed him on purpose. I sat down, shut my eyes — just like this — and started to think: people who live a hundred or a couple of hundred years after us, and for whom we are now clearing the way, will they remember us with a kind word? No, Nyanya, they won't.

MARINA

People won't but God will.

ASTROV

Thank you. Well said.

VOYNITSKY (UNCLE VANYA) *comes out of the house. He has had a sleep after lunch and looks disheveled. He sits down on a bench and straightens his elegant tie.*

VANYA

Yes . . . (*pause*) . . . Yes.

ASTROV

Had a nice sleep?

VANYA

Yes . . . very nice. (*yawns*) Since the Professor and his wife have come to live here our whole life has been thrown out of gear. I don't sleep at the proper time; at lunch and

dinner I eat all sorts of fancy stuff, drink wine . . . it's no good, you know. Before, there wasn't an idle moment; Sonia and I were working away like anything. Now Sonia works by herself. I only sleep, drink, eat . . . It's no good.

MARINA

(*shaking her head*) Such goings-on! The Professor doesn't get up till noon and the samovar's been on the boil since early morning. When they weren't here, we always had our dinner at one o'clock like everyone else. But now that they're here, it's at seven. At night the Professor reads and writes; then, suddenly, at two in the morning, his bell goes . . . What is it . . . Tea! People have to be wakened up for him, the samovar has to be put on . . . Such goings-on.

ASTROV

Are they going to be here for long?

VANYA

(*whistles*) A hundred years. The Professor's decided to come and live here for good.

MARINA

And just look! The samovar's been on the table for two hours and where are they? Out for a walk.

VANYA

Here they are now. Don't get so excited.

Voices are heard from farther off in the garden. Returning from their walk are SEREBRIAKOV, YELENA, SONIA, *and* TELYEGIN.

SEREBRIAKOV

Charming, charming . . . wonderful views.

TELYEGIN

Extraordinary, Your Excellency.

SONIA

Tomorrow, let's go and see the forestry, Papa. Would you like to?

VANYA

Tea, ladies and gentlemen.

SEREBRIAKOV

Send my tea to my study, would you, friends? I still have work to do.

SONIA

(*to SEREBRIAKOV*) I know you'll love the forestry . . .

YELENA, SONIA, *and SEREBRIAKOV go into the house*; TELYEGIN *sits at the table beside* MARINA.

VANYA

Hot; stuffy actually; and our Great Scholar is in his overcoat, galoshes, with his umbrella and gloves.

ASTROV

He takes good care of himself.

VANYA

How exquisite she is! Exquisite. I've never seen a more beautiful woman in my entire life.

TELYEGIN

(*to MARINA*) Whether I ride across the fields, Marina Timofievna, or whether I walk through shady groves, if I look at this table even, I am overwhelmed by a feeling of inexplicable bliss! The weather — enchanting; the birds — singing away; all of us — living in peace and harmony . . . what more can we desire? (*taking a glass of tea*) Thank you from the depths of my being.

VANYA

(*dreamily*) The eyes . . . a marvelous woman.

ASTROV

Say something, Ivan Petrovich.

VANYA

What?

ASTROV

No news?

VANYA

None. Everything's exactly the same as ever. I'm exactly as I was. A little worse maybe; I've got lazy; I don't do a thing — just grumble like an old curmudgeon. My old jackdaw of a mother still cackles about women's emancipation, with one eye on the sepulcher and the other peering into her learned books for the dawn of a new life.

ASTROV

And the Professor?

VANYA

The Professor, as ever, sits in his study from early morn till dewy eve writing, writing, writing, writing. I pity the unfortunate paper! Why isn't he writing his autobiography? There's a thrilling subject. A retired professor, if you please, dry as a bone, dull as ditchwater . . . gout, rheumatism, migraine, and enlarged liver, the result of spleen and envy. This dullard lives on the estate of his first wife, and stays here against his will, because he can't afford to live in the city. He never stops bemoaning his hard lot, but, in fact, he's extremely fortunate. Just think what a fortunate man: the son of a country preacher, he won a scholarship to the university, managed to collect a good degree and was made a full professor; then he became the son-in-law of a senator and so on and so forth. But none of that is important. The point is this: the fellow has been lecturing and writing for a good

twenty-five years about art. And he doesn't understand the first thing about art. For twenty-five years he's been regurgitating other people's ideas about realism, naturalism, and other nonsense; for twenty-five years he's been lecturing and writing about things with which intelligent people have been familiar for ages and in which unintelligent people are utterly uninterested: that means that for twenty-five years, he's been pouring nothing into an empty bottle. But what conceit! What pretensions! Now he's retired and there isn't a living soul who knows who he is. He's totally obscure. That means that for twenty-five years he's been holding a position for which he was unqualified. But just look at him . . . prancing around like a demigod!

ASTROV

You're jealous.

VANYA

Yes, I'm jealous. What success he has with women! There never was a more successful Don Juan! His first wife, my sister, a dear, gentle thing, innocent as the blue sky, noble, warmhearted, with more suitors than he had pupils — she loved him as only an angel of innocence should love one as innocent and sublime as herself. My mother, his mother-in-law, worships him to this very day; to this very day he excites in her a feeling of awe and reverence. His second wife, beautiful and intelligent — you saw her just now — she married him when he was already an elderly man, she has devoted to him her youth, beauty, freedom, brilliance. For what? Why?

ASTROV

Is she true to the Professor?

VANYA

Yes, I'm sorry to say.

ASTROV

Why sorry?

VANYA

Because this truth is false from beginning to end. It's an illogical, empty gesture. To be unfaithful to an old husband, whom one can't abide, that is immoral; but for the poor thing to try to suppress her youth and vital feelings, that is not immoral . . .

TELYEGIN

(*plaintively*) Vanya, I don't like to hear you talking like that. Really I don't . . . if a person is disloyal to a person's husband or a person's wife — well, it means that this person isn't a loyal person. Why, he could be disloyal to his country.

VANYA

(*irritably*) Turn it off, Waffles!

TELYEGIN

No, please, Vanya. My wife ran away with the man she loved the very day after our wedding, because of my unattractive exterior, you see. But that didn't make me forsake my duty. I still love her. I'm still faithful to her. I help her in every way I can. I've spent everything I possess to bring up her children by that other man. I lost my happiness, yes; but I still have my pride. But what about her? She isn't young any longer; her prettiness has faded, such is the law of nature; her lover is dead. What has *she* got left?

Enter SONIA, YELENA, and, a little later, MARIA VASSILIEVNA with a book. She sits and reads. They give her tea. She drinks it, without taking her eyes from the book.

SONIA

(*to* MARINA, *urgently*) Some peasants have come. Do go and speak to them. I'll look after the tea.

Exit MARINA. SONIA *pours the tea*; YELENA *takes her cup to the swing*.

ASTROV

(*to* YELENA) I came to see your husband. You wrote that he was very ill, rheumatism and something else. But apparently, he's perfectly well.

YELENA

He wasn't well last night, complained of pain in his legs; but today he's better.

ASTROV

And I've broken my neck galloping thirty miles. Oh well. It's not the first time. I'll stay here overnight and get a good night's sleep for once.

SONIA

Good. You so seldom stay here for the night. I don't suppose you've dined.

ASTROV

Well, no, I haven't.

SONIA

Then you'll dine with us. We dine at seven now. (*drinks*) The tea's cold.

TELYEGIN

The temperature in the samovar *has* dropped appreciably.

YELENA

It doesn't matter, Ivan Ivanovitch, we'll drink it cold.

TELYEGIN

Excuse me, please . . . not Ivan Ivanovitch, Ilya Ilyich . . . Ilya Ilyich Telyegin; or, as a certain person called me,

on account of the fact that my face has been marked by smallpox, Waffles. Once upon a time I stood godfather to little Sonia here and His Excellency, your good husband, knows me very well indeed. I live with you now, on this estate . . . and I daresay you've been gracious enough to notice that I have dinner with you every day.

SONIA

Ilya Ilyich is the greatest help to us. He's our right-hand man. (*affectionately*) Let me give you some more tea, Godfather.

MARIA VASSILIEVNA

Ach!

SONIA

What is it, Grandmother?

MARIA VASSILIEVNA

I forgot to tell Alexander . . . I'm losing my memory . . . I had a letter from Kharkov today, from Pavel Alexeivich . . . he sent his new pamphlet.

ASTROV

Interesting?

MARIA VASSILIEVNA

Interesting, but strange somehow. He's gone back on what he said seven years ago. It's disturbing.

VANYA

It's not disturbing at all. Have your tea, Mama.

MARIA VASSILIEVNA

But I want to discuss it.

VANYA

We've been discussing and discussing for fifty years; and reading pamphlets. It's time to stop it.

MARIA VASSILIEVNA

For one reason or another, you seem to find it unpleasant

when I want to discuss things. Forgive me, Jean, but this last year you've changed so that I simply don't recognize you. You used to be a man of clear-cut ideas, an enlightened man.

VANYA

Exactly. I was an enlightened person who didn't shed a single gleam of light . . . (*pause*) an enlightened person! Could there be a more poisonous joke! I'm forty-seven. Till last year I deliberately tried like you to blind myself with all your learned nonsense, so as not to see what life is really like. And I thought this was the right thing to do. But now, if you'd like to know, I don't sleep at night. I'm driven wild thinking how stupidly I've wasted the years when I could have been enjoying all those things for which I'm now too old.

SONIA

Uncle Vanya, not again!

MARIA VASSILIEVNA

(*to VANYA*) You sound as though you were attacking your own former opinions. But they're not to blame. You are. You forget that opinion by itself is nothing, just so much waste matter . . . opinion has to be translated into action.

VANYA

Action! It isn't everyone who can be a nonstop scribbling machine like your Herr Professor.

MARIA VASSILIEVNA

And what do you mean by that?

SONIA

Grandmother, Uncle Vanya, please . . .

VANYA

Not a word more, not a word. I apologize.

YELENA

What a lovely afternoon . . . not too hot.

VANYA

A lovely afternoon to hang oneself.

TELYEGIN *tunes his guitar*. MARINA *comes around the corner of the house calling fowl*.

MARINA

Chook, chook, chook!

SONIA

Nyanya, what did the peasants want?

MARINA

The usual thing—about the waste ground . . . chook, chook, chook!

SONIA

Who are you calling?

MARINA

Biddy has disappeared with her chicks . . . I just hope the crows don't get them. (*exit MARINA*)

TELYEGIN *plays a polka*. All listen in silence. A workman comes in.

WORKMAN

Is the doctor here? (*to ASTROV*) Oh, Doctor, they've come to fetch you.

ASTROV

Who have?

WORKMAN

The men from the factory.

ASTROV

(*annoyed*) Thank you — very much. Well, there you are! One has to go . . . (*looks for his cap*) Too bad, damn it!

SONIA

Yes; what a shame. When you've finished at the factory, come back to dinner.

ASTROV

No; it'll be too late . . . well, there you are! (*to the workman*) Get me a glass of vodka, would you, like a good chap. (*workman goes*) There you are! (*finds his cap*) There's a character in one of Ostrovsky's plays — big mustache, small ability — that's Yours Truly. Well, ladies and gentlemen, I have the honor . . . (*to YELENA*) If you care to have a look at my place one day, with Sofia Alexandrovna, I shall be delighted. I have a small place, only thirty acres, but, if you're interested, there's a model plantation and a tree nursery. You won't find another like it in a radius of a thousand miles. It marches with the Government Forestry Scheme . . . the man in charge of that is old and always sick, so, in fact, I look after everything.

YELENA

They've been telling me how interested you are in forestry. I'm sure it's extremely useful, but doesn't it interfere with your real vocation? After all, you're a doctor.

ASTROV

A person's real vocation is only known to God.

YELENA

Is it interesting?

VANYA

(*with irony*) Oh very!

YELENA

(*to ASTROV*) You're still a young man. You look about thirty-six or thirty-seven . . . I don't suppose it's as interesting as

you say. Forest, forest, forest . . . monotonous, I should have thought.

SONIA

No. It's tremendously interesting. Every year the doctor plants new trees and they've sent him a bronze medal and a diploma already. And he's very much concerned that the older plantations shouldn't all be cut down. If you were to hear him talk, you'd agree with him completely. He says the forests make the earth beautiful; they teach people to understand the beautiful and inspire them with exalted feelings. Forests soften the extremes of climate. In countries with a temperate climate people don't waste so much energy fighting against nature, so that they're softer and gentler. People in those countries are handsome, graceful, sensitive; their speech is musical, their movements graceful. Science and art flourish amongst them; their philosophy isn't gloomy, their attitude to women is one of gracious nobility . . .

VANYA

(*laughing*) Bravo! Bravo! . . . charming, all of it, but unconvincing. So (*to* ASTROV) allow me, my dear fellow, to go on burning logs in my stove and to build my barns of timber.

ASTROV

You can burn peat in your stove and build your barns of stone. Oh, I admit you can thin a forest, if you have to, but why lay it flat? The forests of Russia are ringing under the blows of the axe, hundreds of millions of trees are being felled, the birds and animals are being turned out of their homes, the rivers are becoming swamps, they're drying up; glorious scenery is being destroyed forever and all this because man hasn't the sense to stoop down and pick up his fuel off the ground. (*to* YELENA) Isn't that true, my dear

lady? Only an insensitive savage would stoke his stove with all this beauty, would destroy what we cannot replace. Man has been endowed with intelligence and creative power in order to multiply what has been given to him; but up till now he hasn't created; he has only destroyed. The forests are getting smaller and smaller; the rivers are drying up; wildlife is becoming extinct; the climate is ruined; and each and every day the earth gets more impoverished and ugly. (*to VANYA, who is looking ironic*) Don't look at me like that. I daresay I sound like a crank. But, you know, when I go through a forest belonging to the peasants, which I've saved from the axe, or when I hear the wind whisper in the leaves of young trees which I've planted with my own hands, I realize that I do have some small power to influence the climate; and if a thousand years from now, people are happy, it will, to some minute extent, be due to me. When I plant a birch and see it put forth leaves and sway in the wind, I feel a thrill of pride and . . . (*sees the workman bringing him a glass of vodka on a tray*) Oh well . . . (*drinks*) Time to be off. I suppose in the end all this is nothing but the talk of a crank. Well — I have the honor . . .

SONIA

When will you be back?

ASTROV

I don't know.

SONIA

Not for months again?

ASTROV goes into the house. SONIA takes his arm and goes with him. MARIA VASSILIEVNA and TELYEGIN are at the table. YELENA and VANYA go to the terrace.

YELENA

You've been impossible again. Must you exasperate your mother by talking about a nonstop scribbling machine? And at breakfast you quarreled with Alexander again. It's so petty.

VANYA

But I hate him.

YELENA

There's nothing in Alexander to hate. He's just the same as everyone else. He's not a bit worse than you are.

VANYA

If you could only see your face; the way you move! What an indolent life you lead! Really too indolent for words.

YELENA

Indolent, yes; indolent and boring! Everyone speaks ill of my husband. Everyone looks pityingly at me; poor thing, she's married to an old husband. That pity for me — oh how clearly I can see it for what it is. It's exactly as Astrov was saying just now: there is all this insensate destruction of the forest and pretty soon there'll be nothing left on the face of the earth. In just the same insensate way you men destroy people; and soon, thanks to you, there will be no loyalty, no integrity, no capacity for self-sacrifice left on earth. If a woman doesn't belong to you, can't you men look at her in a dispassionate way? Why not? It's because — and this doctor is right — there's a demon of destruction in every one of you; so you have no compunction about destroying either the forests or the birds or women — or one another.

VANYA

I don't care for this.

YELENA

That doctor has a tired, sensitive face, an interesting face.

One can see that Sonia likes him; she's in love with him; and I can understand her feeling. He's been here three times while I've been here; but he makes me shy, I haven't once really talked or been nice to him. He must think me a perfect beast. Do you know, I think I know why you and I are such friends. It's because we're both indolent, bored creatures. Indolent. Don't look at me like that. I don't like it.

VANYA

How else can I look at you. I love you. You are my joy, my life, my youth! I know there's only the very smallest chance that you should feel the same way about me, no chance at all, really. But I don't mind. I just want to look at you, to listen to your voice . . .

YELENA

Quiet! They'll hear you.
They go toward the house.

VANYA

Let me tell you of my love. Don't send me away. Just that will make me the happiest . . .

YELENA

This is dreadful . . .
They disappear into the house. TELYEGIN strums a polka; MARIA VASSILIEVNA makes a note in her exercise book.

CURTAIN

∫ ACT TWO

The dining room. Night. From the garden the tapping of the watchman can be heard. SEREBRIAKOV sits at an open window, dozing in a chair. YELENA sits nearby, dozing too.

SEREBRIAKOV

(waking up) Who's there? Is it you, Sonia?

YELENA

It's I.

SEREBRIAKOV

Oh, it's you, is it, my dear . . . such insupportable pain!

YELENA

Your blanket has fallen off. *(she wraps it around his legs)*

Let's close the window, Alexander.

SEREBRIAKOV

No, don't. I'm stifling . . . I'd just dozed off and I dreamt that my left leg belonged to somebody else. Strange. I woke up with an agonizing pain. No; it's not gout — rheumatism, probably. What time is it?

YELENA

Twenty past twelve. (*pause*)

SEREBRIAKOV

In the morning look in the library for Batushkov. I think we have it.

YELENA

What?

SEREBRIAKOV

In the morning look for Batushkov. We used to have it, I remember. Why is it so hard to breathe?

YELENA

You're tired. This is the second night you haven't slept.

SEREBRIAKOV

They say that Turgenev's gout led to angina pectoris. I'm afraid it'll be the same with me. Growing old is damnable and disgusting. To hell with it! I've grown old and I can't endure myself and I don't suppose you can any of you endure even to look at me.

YELENA

You speak as if your getting old was our fault.

SEREBRIAKOV

And you, for one, find me disgusting. (*YELENA gets up and sits farther away from him*) You're quite right. I'm not a fool. I understand. You're young, healthy, handsome, eager for life. I'm an old man — a corpse almost. It's true, isn't it? D'you think I don't understand? It's all wrong that I'm still alive. But you won't have long to wait; I shall soon set you all free. I shan't be here much longer.

YELENA

I'm utterly worn out. For goodness' sake don't go on and on and on.

SEREBRIAKOV

I quite see. Thanks to me everybody's worn out, bored to death, made old before their time. I'm the only one who's having a high old time; the only one to revel in the joys of life. Oh yes; oh yes.

YELENA

That'll do! You're killing me!

SEREBRIAKOV

Oh yes! Kill everybody, naturally.

YELENA

(*weeping*) I can't bear it! Tell me what do you want?

SEREBRIAKOV

Nothing.

YELENA

Then please, please, be quiet.

SEREBRIAKOV

It's funny — if Uncle Vanya says something, or that old fool Maria Vassilievna, it's all right; everybody pays attention. But if I so much as utter a single word, everybody gets upset. The very sound of my voice disgusts them. All right; suppose I am disgusting. Suppose I am a selfish tyrant, at my age don't I have some right to be selfish? Haven't I earned it, eh? Haven't I the right to a peaceful old age, eh? To a little consideration?

YELENA

No one is denying your rights. (*the window bangs in the wind*) The wind's come up. I'll shut the window. (*does so*) It's going to rain. No one is denying your rights.

The watchman in the garden taps and sings on his round.

SEREBRIAKOV

A man devotes his entire life to scholarship; he gets used to

his study, to the lecture hall, to learned colleagues and suddenly, without rhyme or reason, he finds himself buried in this tomb. Day after day he sees the same stupid people, he has to listen to their inane chatter . . . I want to *live*. I love success, I love celebrity, fame; and here I am — languishing in exile. To long every moment for the past, to see other people enjoying success, to be afraid of death . . . I can't bear it! I simply haven't the strength. And to crown everything, they can't forgive me for being old!

YELENA

Wait! Just have patience. In five or six years I shall be old too.

SONIA *comes in*.

SONIA

Papa, you made us send for Dr. Astrov; and when he came, you refused to see him. That's not nice. You brought him here for nothing.

SEREBRIAKOV

What do I want with your Astrov? He knows no more about medicine than I do about astronomy.

SONIA

Well, we can't call in the entire medical profession just because you have gout.

SEREBRIAKOV

I simply refuse to talk to that madman.

SONIA

Just as you like. It's all one to me. (*sits down*)

SEREBRIAKOV

What time is it?

YELENA

One o'clock.

SEREBRIAKOV

It's stifling . . . Sonia, give me my drops. They're on the table.

SONIA

Yes, of course. (*she fetches the medicine*)

SEREBRIAKOV

(*irritably*) Not those. One can't ask for the simplest thing!

SONIA

Please don't be unreasonable. Some people may like it, but I don't. Besides I haven't the time. I have to be up early. We're making hay.

VANYA *comes in, wearing a dressing gown and carrying a candle.*

VANYA

There's a thunderstorm coming up. (*lightning*) There! Helène and Sonia, go to bed. I've come to take your place.

SEREBRIAKOV

(*nervous*) No, no! Don't leave me with him. No, he'll talk me to death.

VANYA

But they must get some rest. This is the second night running that they've had no sleep.

SEREBRIAKOV

Very well. They may go to bed. But you go too. Thank you. But, *please* go. For the sake of our past friendship don't argue. We'll talk another time.

VANYA

Our past friendship . . . past.

SONIA

Uncle Vanya, be quiet.

SEREBRIAKOV

(*to his wife*) My dear, don't leave me alone with him. He'll talk me to death.

VANYA

This is getting ridiculous.

MARINA *comes in with a candle.*

SONIA

Nyanya, go to bed. It's late.

MARINA

The samovar's still on the table. I can't go to bed.

SEREBRIAKOV

Nobody's getting any sleep. Everyone's worn out. I'm the only one who's having a good time.

MARINA

(*comes to SEREBRIAKOV and speaks gently*) What's the matter, my dear? Pain? My legs are hurting too. Hurting dreadfully. (*she arranges the rug over his legs*) You've been ill like this for a long time. Vera Petrovna, God rest her, Sonia's mother, she used to sit up with you night after night, though it nearly killed her . . . she loved you so much. (*pause*) Old people are like children. They want people to be sorry for them. But no one is sorry for old people. (*lays her face on SEREBRIAKOV'S shoulder*) Let's go to bed, my dear . . . come. I'll make you a hot drink. I'll warm your feet. I'll pray to God for you.

SEREBRIAKOV

(*moved*) Yes, let's go, Marina.

MARINA

My legs are hurting too, my legs are hurting too. (*she and SONIA help him*) Vera Petrovna nearly killed herself, she cried so much . . . you were only a *little* girl then, So-

nitchka, just a funny little girl . . . come along, my dear, come along.

SEREBRIAKOV, SONIA, *and* MARINA *go*.

YELENA

He's killing me. I can hardly keep on my feet.

VANYA

You're being killed by him; and I'm killing myself. This is the third night running that I've had no sleep.

YELENA

Things are not well in this house. Your mother loathes everything except her pamphlets and the Professor; the Professor is all on edge. He doesn't trust me and he's afraid of you; Sonia is angry with her father, angry with me — she hasn't said a word to me for two weeks, you detest my husband, and openly despise your mother; I'm all on edge, I've been on the verge of tears twenty times today . . . things are not well in this house.

VANYA

Well, let's leave it at that.

YELENA

You're an educated man, an intelligent man. Surely you must understand that the world is not being destroyed by anarchists and incendiaries but by envy, hatred, and petty malice. Instead of grumbling at everyone you should be trying to keep the peace.

VANYA

Then first you must help me to be at peace with myself. Oh, my dear one . . .

YELENA

Don't. (*takes away her hand, which he is trying to kiss*) Go away.

VANYA

The rain will be over by now. Everything out there will be fresh again, able to breathe. But to me the storm has brought no relief. All day and all night the same hateful thought suffocates me: that my life is lost beyond recall. I have no past; I've squandered it like a fool on trifles; and as for the present — it's just an agonizing muddle. Well — here are my life and love! How dispose of them? What to do with them? My love is withering away; my life has already withered.

YELENA

You speak to me of your love. I'm numb. I simply don't know what to say. (*she starts to go*) Good night.

VANYA

Oh, if you only knew how it hurts me that right beside me, in this very house, another life is withering — yours. What are you waiting for? What damnable scruples hold you back? Can't you see? . . . Can't you see?

YELENA

(*looking at him hard*) Ivan Petrovich, you've been drinking.

VANYA

Maybe I have . . . possibly I have.

YELENA

Drinking again today? But why?

VANYA

Drinking is now my life. Don't try to stop me, Helène.

YELENA

You never used to drink. You never used to talk so much . . . go to sleep. You're boring me.

VANYA

(*kissing her hand*) My dear . . . my loveliest . . .

YELENA

(angry) Leave me alone. It's revolting. (YELENA goes)

VANYA

(alone) She's gone. Ten years ago, I used to meet her at my sister's. She was seventeen then and I was thirty-seven. Why didn't I fall in love then? Why didn't I propose to her then? It would have been so easy. And now she would be my wife . . . yes. The thunderstorm would have wakened us both up. She would have been frightened. I would have held her in my arms and whispered: "Don't be afraid. I'm here." Ah! The thought of it! How delightful. I'm laughing, actually. But, oh my God, what a muddle I'm in! Why am I old? Why can't she understand me? And all that grand talk of hers, her slack morality, her absurd, indolent ideas about the destruction of the world . . . Oh, it's all so utterly contemptible! (pause) I've been made a fool of. I used to worship that Professor, that pitiful gout-ridden being. I did business with greedy peasants, we bargained over linseed oil, beans, cheese; we went short of food ourselves, so that, penny by penny, we could scrape up a few thousand to send to him. I was proud of him and his learned career. I lived for him, breathed for him; every word he wrote, every pompous pronouncement he made, seemed to me the expression of genius . . . and now! Oh dear God! Here he is — on the shelf — and the sum of his life's work is now revealed. When he dies he won't leave . . . a single significant page behind him. He's totally unknown. a nonentity! A soap bubble! And I've been made a fool of. I see it now. I see it now. I've been made a stupid fool.

ASTROV comes in. He wears his coat but has taken off waist-coat and tie. He is drunk. TELYEGIN follows him, bringing his guitar.

ASTROV

Strike up!

TELYEGIN

But everyone's asleep.

ASTROV

Strike up! (TELYEGIN *plays softly; to VANYA*) All alone? No ladies? (*sings softly*) I was wakened by the thunder. What a glorious downpour! What time is it?

VANYA

God knows.

ASTROV

I thought I heard Yelena Andreievna's voice.

VANYA

She was here just now.

ASTROV

Stunning woman! (*looks at the table which is crowded with medicine bottles*) Medicine! What do we have? What don't we have! Prescriptions from Kharkov, Moscow, Tula . . . he's been plaguing every city in the country with his gout. Is he really ill, or is he shamming?

VANYA

He is ill. (*pause*)

ASTROV

What's the matter? Sorry for the Professor?

VANYA

Leave me alone.

ASTROV

Perhaps you're in love with Mrs. Professor.

VANYA

We're friends.

ASTROV

Already?

VANYA

What does that mean?

ASTROV

A woman can only be a man's friend in the following order: first acquaintance; then mistress; and only then friend.

VANYA

What a vulgar idea!

ASTROV

What? . . . oh . . . yes. I'd better admit it. I've become rather vulgar. You may also observe that I'm drunk. It's my rule to get drunk once a month; and then I become rude and insolent — right up to the hilt. Then everything feels great. I perform the most intricate operations and perform them brilliantly; I chart the most ambitious course for the future; at such times I don't seem to be a crank any more and I believe that I can confer vast benefits upon mankind . . . vast. At such times I even create my own system of philosophy, in which all you human beings seem no more than the tiniest little insects — microbes. (*to TELYEGIN*) Strike up, Waffles!

TELYEGIN

My dear boy, I should simply love to play, but do remember that everyone in the house is asleep.

ASTROV

Strike up! (*TELYEGIN plays softly*) Let's have another drink. Come along; there's still some cognac in there. When day breaks we'll go over to my place, all rightie? The fellow in my dispensary says "all rightie" all the time; "all rightie," he says. He's a terrible fellow. (*SONIA comes in; ASTROV sees*

her) Oh, excuse me . . . I took off my tie. (ASTROV *hurries out, followed by* TELYEGIN)

SONIA

You too, Uncle Vanya? Drunk with the doctor again? Birds of a feather . . . He is drunk constantly, but you . . . It's not suitable at your age.

VANYA

Age has nothing whatever to do with it. If one has no real life one has to live in a dream world. It's better than nothing.

SONIA

The hay is cut. Day after day it rains. The hay's lying rotting and you have to live in a dream world. You're letting everything slide. I have to do all the work and it's too much for me. (*startled*) Uncle, you're crying.

VANYA

Crying? Nonsense. Just then you looked exactly like your poor mother . . . (*kisses her hands and face*) My sister, my darling sister. Where is she now? If she only knew! Oh, if she could only know!

SONIA

What, Uncle? If she only knew what?

VANYA

Oh, what's the good? Nothing . . . later . . . nothing. I'll go.

VANYA *goes*. SONIA *knocks on the dining room door*.

SONIA

Doctor! You aren't asleep, are you? One moment.

ASTROV

(*behind the door*) Coming. (*enters after a moment; he has now put on waistcoat and tie*) What is it?

SONIA

You can drink, if you want to, but, *please*, don't encourage my uncle to drink. It's bad for him.

ASTROV

Very well. We won't drink any more. I'm going home now. Everything's under control. By the time the horses are ready it'll be daylight.

SONIA

It's raining. Wait till morning.

ASTROV

The storm is passing us by; we shall only get the tail end of it. I'm off. Oh, and please don't call me out again to your father. I tell him gout. Rheumatism, he says. I tell him to stay in bed. He gets up. And today all of a sudden he refuses even to speak to me.

SONIA

He's spoilt. (*looks into sideboard*) Won't you have a bite?

ASTROV

Yes, thank you.

SONIA

I like having a bite in the middle of the night. There must be something in here. They say that in the past he's had great success with women and they spoilt him. Have some cheese.
Both eat, standing at the sideboard.

ASTROV

I haven't had a thing to eat all day. Just drink. Your father is a difficult man. May I? (*takes glass from sideboard and pours drink*) There's no one about so one can speak freely. You know, I don't think I could live in this house, not even for a month. The atmosphere would choke me . . . your father has completely retreated into his gout and his books;

Uncle Vanya and his hypochondria; your grandmother and, finally, your stepmother . . .

SONIA

What about my stepmother?

ASTROV

Everything about a human creature should be beautiful — face, clothes, spirit, thoughts. She is beautiful, one must admit, but all she does is eat, sleep, walk, cast a spell on us with her beauty — and nothing more. She has no responsibilities; other people do everything for her — isn't that so? But an idle life can't be a clean life. (*pause*) Perhaps I'm being a bit hard on her. I'm disgruntled, like your Uncle Vanya. We've turned into a pair of old fogies.

SONIA

Are you disgruntled?

ASTROV

Life, in general, I love. But this narrow, Russian provincial life of ours, that I cannot endure. I loathe it with all the strength of my being. And as to my own personal life: well, by God, there simply isn't one good thing about it. Imagine it's a dark night and you're making your way through the forest. If there's just one far-off gleam of light, you don't notice how tired you are, nor how dark it is, nor the brambles that scratch your face. I work like no one else in the district. You know that, very well. I'm up against every kind of difficulty. Sometimes I'm so miserable I don't know how to bear it. But there's no light ahead of me. As far as I'm concerned, I don't look forward to anything. I don't love anybody. I haven't loved anybody for years.

SONIA

Not anybody?

ASTROV

Nobody. Oh, I'm fond of your Nyanya for old times' sake. But the peasants — well, they're all alike, primitive and dirty, every single one of them. And as for the educated people: it's hard to get on with them. They're wearisome. All these good friends of ours have little shallow minds and little shallow feelings — all of them. They can't see beyond the end of their noses, they're just stupid. And the cleverer ones, the ones with a wider horizon; they're neurotic, eaten up by doubts and fears . . . they snarl and slander and bite each other's backs. They edge up to one another with sidelong looks and write him off as a psychopath or her as a chatterbox. As for me they don't know what label to stick on me, so they say "He's an odd one — a wild man of the woods." I love the forests and that's odd. I don't eat meat — that's odd too. They no longer have any immediate, simple, spontaneous relation either to nature or to people . . . not any longer. (*he is about to drink*)

SONIA

(*checking him*) No. Please. Please. Don't have any more.

ASTROV

Why not?

SONIA

It's not right for you. You're such a fine man. You have such a gentle voice . . . more than that: you are — more than anyone I know — you are remarkable. Why do you want to be like ordinary people, drinking and playing cards. Please don't, please! You're always saying that people aren't creative; they only destroy what has been bestowed on them from above. So why — why are you destroying yourself? Don't do it. Please, please don't.

ASTROV

(gives her his hand) I won't drink any more.

SONIA

Give me your promise.

ASTROV

Word of honor.

SONIA

(squeezing his hand) Thank you.

ASTROV

There. I've sobered up. I'm stone sober and I'll stay that way to the end of my days. *(looks at his watch)* So, let's go on where we left off. What I say is: my time's past. It's too late for me now . . . I'm not young any more. I'm overworked. I'm in a rut. My sensibilities are blunted. And I don't believe I can feel affection for anyone. I'm not in love and I won't fall in love again. But by one thing I can still be touched — beauty. I'm not insensitive to beauty. Do you know something? I think that if Yelena Andreievna wanted to, she could turn my head in a single day . . . but that's not love, that's not affection. *(puts his hands over his eyes and shudders)*

SONIA

What is it?

ASTROV

Nothing. In Lent a patient of mine died under chloroform.

SONIA

You mustn't go on thinking about that. *(pause)* Tell me, Doctor, supposing I had a friend, or a younger sister, say, and supposing you found out that she . . . let's say . . . loved you. How would you feel about that?

ASTROV

(shrugging) How should I know? Nothing, probably. I'd give

her to understand that I couldn't fall in love with her; that I've got other things to think of. Well, if I'm going I'd better be off. Goodbye, my dear, we could keep this up till morning. (*shakes her hand*) I'll go out through the drawing room, if I may, otherwise I'm afraid your uncle will detain me. (ASTROV goes)

SONIA

(*alone*) He didn't say anything to me. I still don't know anything about his real self. But why am I so happy? (*laughs with joy*) I said to him you're such a fine man, you have such a gentle voice . . . perhaps it wasn't the right moment. His voice throbs and caresses . . . I hear it in the air. When I said that about a younger sister he didn't understand. (*wrings her hands*) Oh, how horrible it is that I'm not beautiful! How horrible! And I know that I'm not beautiful. I know it, know it. Last Sunday as we were coming out of church, I heard them talking about me and one woman said: "She's a good, kind girl. Too bad that she's not beautiful." Not beautiful. YELENA comes in.

YELENA

(*opening the window*) The storm's over. How lovely the air feels. Where's the doctor?

SONIA

He's gone. (*pause*)

YELENA

Sophie.

SONIA

What?

YELENA

How much longer are you going to be cross with me? We

haven't done each other any harm. So why should we be enemies? It's time to make it up.

SONIA

I'd like that too. (*embraces her*) I won't be cross any more.

YELENA

Good.

Both are moved.

SONIA

Has Papa gone to bed?

YELENA

No; he's sitting up in the drawing room. He and I haven't really spoken to each other for weeks on end and God alone knows why. Why is the sideboard open?

SONIA

The doctor had some supper.

YELENA

Here's some wine. Let's pledge our friendship.

SONIA

Yes, let's.

YELENA

From the same glass. (*pours wine; they drink*) That's better. Now we're really friends.

SONIA

Really friends. (*they kiss*) I've been wanting to make it up for ages but I couldn't somehow . . . (*she cries*)

YELENA

Why are you crying?

SONIA

No reason.

YELENA

Don't cry . . . don't cry . . . (*she cries too*) Now I'm cry-

ing too. So silly! (*pause*) You're cross with me because you think I married your father as a matter of convenience. If my word means anything to you, then I swear that I married him for love. I was swept off my feet because he was a learned and celebrated man. It wasn't a real love, but at the time I thought it was real. It's not my fault. And you . . . ever since the wedding day you've been accusing me with the suspicion and mistrust in those clever eyes of yours.

SONIA

But now we've made peace. Peace. Let's forget what's past.

YELENA

You shouldn't look at a person like that. It's not like you. You should trust people; otherwise life becomes impossible. (*pause*)

SONIA

Tell me truthfully, as a friend . . . are you happy?

YELENA

No.

SONIA

I thought not. One more question: tell me honestly, don't you wish you had a young husband?

YELENA

What a child you still are! Of course I do. (*laughs*) Ask me another.

SONIA

Do you like the doctor?

YELENA

Yes, very much.

SONIA

(*laughing*) Will you think me terribly silly? Will you? He's just left and I can still hear his voice, his footstep, and, when

I look out of the window into the darkness, there is his face! Let me try to tell you what I mean . . . only I mustn't speak it out loud. I'm ashamed. Let's go to my room and talk there. Tell me: do you think I'm silly? . . . Talk to me about him.

YELENA

What shall I say?

SONIA

Well, he's intelligent . . . he knows everything, he can do anything . . . heal the sick, plant forests . . .

YELENA

It's not just a matter of forests or medicine . . . my dear, you must understand this: This doctor is exceptional. Do you know what it takes to be exceptional? Courage, an independent mind, a far-ranging imagination . . . he plants a tree and already he is picturing what it will be in a thousand years. He dreams of the happiness of mankind. Men like that are rare. One has to love them. Oh, he drinks, sometimes he's coarse. But what does that matter? In Russia even an exceptional person cannot escape contamination. Think for yourself what the life of a doctor like this must be — the roads impassable for mud; frost, blizzards, vast distances; rough, primitive people, poverty everywhere, sickness. Those are the conditions in which he works day in day out. At the age of forty he can't always be clean and sober. (*kisses SONIA*) I wish you happiness with all my heart. You deserve it. (*stands up*) As for me, I'm a boring, irrelevant creature. Whether it's in music, in my husband's house, in matters of romance or anything else, I'm nothing but an irrelevant creature. You know, Sonia, when I come to think it over, I'm very unhappy. (*she walks about in great agitation*) There can be no happiness for me in this world — none at all! Why are you laughing?

SONIA

(laughs and hides her face) I'm so happy . . . so very, very happy.

YELENA

I should so love to play . . . I think I shall. *(goes to piano and opens it)*

SONIA

Yes, do! I couldn't go to sleep now. Do play.

YELENA

Yes, I will. Your father isn't asleep. When he's ill, music annoys him. Go and ask him if he'll let us play. Go on.

SONIA

Yes, I'll ask him. *(SONIA goes)*
The night watchman is heard tapping in the garden.

YELENA

I haven't touched the piano for ages. I shall play and cry and cry like a perfect fool. *(at window)* Is that you, Yefim?

WATCHMAN

(offstage) Yes, ma'am, it's me.

YELENA

Please don't make such a noise. The master isn't well.

WATCHMAN

I'll go further off. *(whistles to dogs)* Hey! Zhutschka! Maltchik! Zhutschka!

SONIA

(coming back) He says you mustn't!

CURTAIN

∫ ACT THREE

The drawing room. Three doors, left, right, and center. It is daytime; UNCLE VANYA and SONIA are sitting; YELENA walks about, deep in thought.

VANYA

The Herr Professor was gracious enough to express his desire that we should all assemble in this drawing room at one o'clock. (*looks at watch*) It is now a quarter to one. He wishes to make an announcement to the world.

YELENA

Business of some kind, I suppose.

VANYA

He hasn't any business. He writes rubbish, grumbles and is jealous. Nothing else.

SONIA

(*reproachfully*) Uncle!

VANYA

All right. All right. I shouldn't have said it. (*indicating*

YELENA) There's a sight for sore eyes! . . . walking around, but so lazy she can hardly put one foot in front of the other. Charming, I must say! Really charming!

YELENA

You keep on buzz-buzz-buzzing. Aren't you tired of it? (*With a sigh*) I'm simply dying of boredom. I don't know what to do.

SONIA

(*shrugging*) There's plenty to do, if you only wanted to.

YELENA

For instance?

SONIA

Well, you might help in the house; give lessons; look after sick people. Isn't that enough? When you and Papa weren't here, Uncle Vanya and I used to go to the market and sell flour.

YELENA

I don't know how to do any of those things. And, anyway, they're not interesting. It's only in romantic novels that people give lessons and visit the sick poor. Anyway, how could I start nursing and giving lessons all of a sudden?

SONIA

I can't understand how you can bear not to. Try it. You'd get used to it. (*embracing her*) My dear, don't let yourself be bored. (*laughs*) You're bored; you can't fit in. But boredom and idleness are infectious. Look: Uncle Vanya doesn't do anything; just follows you about like a shadow. I drop what I'm doing and come flying to talk to you. I've become lazy, unbelievably lazy! And the doctor — well, he hardly ever used to come here — once a month, maybe — he could hardly be persuaded to come; but now — he comes here every

day. He's dropped his forestry and his doctoring as well. You're an enchantress, I believe.

VANYA

Why *are* you so indolent? (*with agitation*) My dear, my lovely one, why not make some use of your intelligence? Let me tell you: in your veins flows the blood of a mermaid. Very well then, *be* a mermaid! Break out, for once in your life, fall head over ears in love with a merman — and dive headlong into deep water. The Herr Professor and all the rest of us will be utterly dumbfounded.

YELENA

(*angry*) Leave me alone. You're very unkind. (*she starts to go*)

VANYA

(*stopping her*) No, no, my heart's delight, forgive me . . . I apologize. Sorry!

YELENA

You know, you'd try the patience of a saint.

VANYA

As a token of peace and goodwill, I'll bring you a bunch of roses. I picked them this morning — autumn roses . . . beautiful, sad roses. (*VANYA goes*)

SONIA

Autumn roses . . . beautiful, sad roses.

SONIA *and* YELENA *both look out of the window.*

YELENA

September already. How shall we live here through the whole winter? (*pause*) Where's the doctor?

SONIA

In Uncle Vanya's room. He's writing. I'm glad Uncle Vanya went away. I want to speak to you.

YELENA

What about?

SONIA

What about? (*hides her face in YELENA'S breast*)

YELENA

There, there! (*strokes SONIA'S hair*) My dear, my dear.

SONIA

I'm not beautiful.

YELENA

You have lovely hair.

SONIA

No. (*turns to look at her reflection in the glass*) No; when a woman is not beautiful, people always say: "You have wonderful eyes; you have lovely hair." I've loved him for six years. I love him more than I love my mother. I seem to hear his voice all the time; I can feel his handshake and I keep looking at the door and waiting for him to come in. And — you must notice — I come to you all the time to talk to you about him. Now he's here every day . . . never looks at me, doesn't even notice me. It hurts so terribly. I haven't any hope — none — none. (*in despair*) Oh God, give me strength! I was praying all night . . . I often go close to him, start to speak to him, gaze into his eyes . . . I have no pride any more, I can't control myself . . . yesterday, I couldn't stop myself from confessing to Uncle Vanya that I'm in love; and all the servants know that I'm in love with him — everyone knows.

YELENA

And he?

SONIA

He doesn't even notice me.

YELENA

(*thoughtfully*) He's a strange man . . . you know what? If you'll let me, I'll speak to him. I'll do it tactfully — just a hint. (*pause*) You really can't go on in such a state of uncertainty. May I? (SONIA *nods*) Good. Either he does love you or he doesn't. It won't be hard to find out. Don't be embarrassed, my dear; don't take it so hard. I'll question him very cautiously. He won't even notice. All we need to know is just one thing; yes, or no. (*pause*) If it's no, he mustn't come here any more. Right? (SONIA *nods again*) It'll be easier if you don't see him again. We'll question him this minute. He wanted to show me some drawings. Go and tell him I should like to see him.

SONIA

(*hesitantly*) You'll tell me the absolute truth?

YELENA

Of course. The truth, whatever it may be, is still more bearable than uncertainty. Trust me, my dear.

SONIA

Yes . . . yes. I'll tell him you'd like to see his drawings. (*starts to go but turns at the door*) No. The uncertainty is better . . . There's still hope then.

YELENA

What do you mean?

SONIA

Nothing. (*she goes*)

YELENA

(*alone*) There's nothing worse than to know somebody else's secret and not be able to help. He's not in love with her — that's obvious. But why shouldn't he marry her? She is not beautiful, but for a country doctor of his age, she'd make a

splendid wife — intelligent, kind, wholesome . . . and yet — and yet. (*pause*) Poor girl! Here she is surrounded by unspeakable boredom; a boredom peopled by gray ghosts, who talk in platitudes, take no interest in anything but food, drink, sleep. And then — every now and again — *he* comes — such a contrast to all the others, good-looking, interesting, attractive. It's as if the moon were to rise in the surrounding darkness . . . to surrender to the charm of such a person, to be taken out of oneself . . . I really believe I'm a little attracted to him myself. Yes; when he's not there, I miss him, and then I smile at the thought of him . . . poor, dear Uncle Vanya said that in my blood there flows the blood of a mermaid. Break out, for once in your life, he said . . . Shall I? Perhaps it has to be so. Oh to fly away from all of you free as a bird; to fly away from you all, from all your somnolent faces, all your dull chat! Oh to forget your very existence! But I don't dare. I'm a coward. My conscience would torment me. He comes here every day, and I can guess why. And I feel guilty about it. I feel I ought to fall down on my knees to Sonia, and beg her with tears to forgive me.

ASTROV

(*enters with charts*) Good day. (*shakes hands*) You wanted to see my handiwork?

YELENA

Yes; you said I might. Is this a good moment?

ASTROV

Of course. (*fixing charts to a card table with thumbtacks*)
Where were you born?

YELENA

(*helping with charts*) In Petersburg.

ASTROV

And educated?

YELENA

In the Conservatoire of Music.

ASTROV

Then I don't suppose you'll be interested in all this.

YELENA

Why not? It's true I don't know anything much about country life, but I've read a good deal about it.

ASTROV

I have my own table in this house — in Uncle Vanya's room. When I'm exhausted to the point of stupor, I run away and come here and play with all this . . . (*indicating charts*) for an hour or two. Uncle Vanya and Sonia are clicking away at their abacus and I sit there beside them at my table and scratch away at my charts . . . and it's warm, cosy, the cricket is chirping away. But I don't allow myself this pleasure very often — just once a month. (*showing chart*) Now, look at this! It's a map of our district as it used to be fifty years ago. The dark and light green represents the forests. A good half of the area is under forest. Where the green is crosshatched with red there used to be deer and wild goats. You see I indicate flora as well as fauna. On this lake there used to be swans, wild geese, duck, and the old people say there used to be birds of every sort and kind in enormous numbers. They used to darken the sky. And then, as well, there used to be villages, hamlets, even some *very* small, scattered ones; and little religious settlements, or a water mill. Then there were many, many head of cattle and horses. You can see this indicated in blue; there, for instance, the blue

lines are thick; there used to be quantities of horses, three to every house. (*pause*) Now, look at this: this is the district as it was twenty-five years ago. Now the forest only covers one third of the whole area. The goats have disappeared entirely, but there are still some deer. The green and blue areas are shrinking . . . and so on and so forth. Now we come to the third chart. It shows the district as it is today. There's still some of the green color left, but only in small patches. Deer, swans, and black game have disappeared, so have villages, hamlets, farms, water mills — gone without leaving a trace. It's a picture, in fact, of gradual but unmistakable decay. In some ten or fifteen years this decay will have become total. You will say that this is the result of progress, that, in the course of nature, old ways must give place to new. Well, that I would understand if there were highways and railroads in place of the destroyed forests, if there were factories, mills, schools . . . then people would be healthier, better off, more intelligent. But there is nothing of the kind. The swamps, the mosquitoes, the lack of roads, the poverty, diphtheria, typhus, fires — they're all the same as ever . . . and the reason conditions are going from bad to worse is that the struggle for existence is too hard. The degeneration is due to inertia, ignorance, and a total lack of any sense of responsibility. When a shivering, hungry, sick man tries to keep body and soul together — his own and his children's — instinctively he snatches at whatever will feed and warm him, without thought for the morrow . . . he destroys everything within range. Practically everything has been destroyed and nothing is being created to compensate . . . (*coldly*) but I can see that you're not interested.

YELENA

But I understand so little about it.

ASTROV

There's nothing to understand. You just aren't interested.

YELENA

Quite honestly I *was* thinking of other things. Do forgive me. I want to ask you one or two questions. But I'm embarrassed. I don't know quite how to begin.

ASTROV

Questions.

YELENA

Yes; questions; but quite innocuous ones. Let's sit down. (*they do so*) It's about a young girl . . . let's talk quite frankly, like two friends. We won't beat about the bush. We'll talk and then forget all about it. Right?

ASTROV

Right.

YELENA

It's about my stepdaughter, Sonia. Do you like her?

ASTROV

Yes, very much.

YELENA

Do you like her as a woman?

ASTROV

(*not immediately*) No.

YELENA

Just a word or two more, then we'll finish. Haven't you noticed anything?

ASTROV

No.

YELENA

(taking his hand) You don't love her. I can see it in your eyes . . . she's very unhappy . . . see what that means . . . and . . . don't come here any more.

ASTROV

(standing up) I'm too old for that sort of . . . besides I've no time . . . *(shrugging)* When should I . . . *(he is embarrassed)*

YELENA

Phew! What a difficult conversation! I'm trembling all over. I feel as if I'd been lugging a huge weight . . . well, thank God it's over! Let's pretend that we've never had such a chat and you — must go away. You're an intelligent man; you can understand . . . *(pause)* I'm blushing from head to foot.

ASTROV

If you'd told me this a month or two ago, then I might have thought about it. But now . . . *(shrugs his shoulders)* but, if she's unhappy, then of course . . . but there's one thing I don't understand: Why did *you* have to put me through this interrogation, eh? *(wags a finger at her)* You're a deep one!

YELENA

What does that mean?

ASTROV

A deep one. So Sonia is unhappy, very well. But why this interrogation from you? *(she tries to speak but he prevents her and goes on with excitement)* Please don't look surprised. You know very well why I come here every day . . . you know very well why I come and who I come to see. Don't look like that, my dear sparrow-hawk, I'm too old a little bird to be caught by you.

YELENA

Sparrow-hawk? What do you mean?

ASTROV

You're a beautiful, furry wildcat, that's what you are! You've just got to pursue your prey! For a whole month now I haven't done a stroke of work, I dropped everything, so desperately hungry was I to be with you. And you like that, don't you — very much . . . and now what? You've conquered me. You knew all about this, there was no need for the interrogation. (*crosses his arms and bows his head*) Very well — I surrender. Come and gobble me up.

YELENA

Have you gone out of your mind?

ASTROV

(*sneering*) Bashful, eh?

YELENA

I'm not so evil and low as you think. I swear it. (*she is about to go*)

ASTROV

(*stopping her*) I'm going away today and I shan't come back . . . but . . . (*he takes her hand, looks around*) where shall we meet? Quick; tell me where. Somebody may come. Tell me. Quick. (*passionately*) What a wonderful exquisite creature you are! . . . Just one kiss . . . just to kiss that hair, which smells so sweet . . .

YELENA

I swear to you . . .

ASTROV

Don't swear anything. One should never swear. It's unnecessary. Don't swear. What's the good of a lot of words? Oh, how beautiful! . . . what hands! . . . (*kisses her hands*)

YELENA

That's enough . . . go . . . (*pulls her hands away*) You're forgetting yourself.

ASTROV

Tell me . . . tell me, where shall we meet tomorrow? (*takes her round the waist*) You see, my dearest, it's inevitable. We must be together. (*kisses her*)

UNCLE VANYA *enters with a bunch of roses. He stops in the doorway.*

YELENA

(*unaware of VANYA'S presence*) For pity's sake . . . leave me alone (*puts her head on ASTROV'S chest*) No (*tries to go*)

ASTROV

(*holding her around the waist*) Meet me tomorrow in the forest . . . two o'clock . . . yes? Yes. You'll be there?

YELENA

(*sees VANYA*) Go away. (*in deep embarrassment she moves to the window*) This is frightful!

VANYA

(*putting the flowers on a chair, mops his face and neck with a handkerchief*) It doesn't matter . . . yes . . . it doesn't matter.

ASTROV

(*casually*) Not bad weather, eh? . . . Bit overcast in the morning, looked like rain, but now the sun's out . . . marvelous autumn weather actually, not even a frost. (*starts to roll up his charts and put them away*) Just one thing, though, the evenings are drawing in.

YELENA

(*moving quickly to VANYA*) Please do your very best to ar-

range that I and my husband leave here today. Do you understand, today.

VANYA

(mopping his brow) What? Oh, yes . . . all right. Helène, I saw everything.

YELENA

(agitated) Do you understand, I must leave here today.

SEREBRIAKOV *comes in, with* SONIA, TELYEGIN, *and* MARINA.

TELYEGIN

. . . and for my part, Your Excellency, I'm not in the best of health either. I've been feeling poorly for two days. It's my head, sort of . . .

SEREBRIAKOV

Where are all the others? I detest this house, it's a perfect labyrinth . . . twenty-six enormous rooms, everybody scattered about where you can't find them. *(rings bell)* Please ask my mother-in-law and my wife to come here.

YELENA

I'm here.

SEREBRIAKOV

Do sit down, everybody.

SONIA

(going eagerly to YELENA) What did he say?

YELENA

Later.

SONIA

You're trembling. You're upset. *(looks at her closely)* I see . . . he said he wouldn't come here again . . . yes? Tell me . . . yes?

YELENA *nods.*

SEREBRIAKOV

(to TELYEGIN) Illness one can put up with, but what I just cannot endure is the pattern of life in the country. I feel as if I'd dropped off the earth onto some remote planet. Please sit down, everybody. Sonia! (*SONIA doesn't hear him; she stands in dejection with bowed head*) Sonia!! She doesn't seem to hear one. (to MARINA) And you, sit down too, Nyanya. (*MARINA sits down, still knitting her stocking*) Now listen everybody; hang up your ears, if I may coin a phrase, on the nail of attention. (*he laughs*)

VANYA

(*agitated*) Do you need me? May I go?

SEREBRIAKOV

Certainly not. We need you more than anybody else.

VANYA

What do you want with me?

SEREBRIAKOV

What's the matter? Why are you so disagreeable? (*pause*) If I've done anything to offend you, please forgive me.

VANYA

Oh stop that! Let's get to business. What's it all about?

MARIA VASSILIEVNA *comes in*.

SEREBRIAKOV

Ah, here is Maman. Now we can begin. (*pause*) I have requested your presence, my friends, to announce that a government inspector is coming to pay us a visit. But this is not the moment for jokes. This is a serious matter. I've called you together, friends, to ask for your help and advice; and since I am not unaware of your kindness in the past, I hope I may count on it now. I am a scholar; a man of books. I have always been a stranger to practical affairs; so I have

never been able to dispense with the advice of knowledgeable persons. Therefore I am asking you, Ivan Petrovich, and you, Ilya Ilyich, you Maman . . . that fact is that “*Manet omnes una nox*,” that is to say, we are all in God’s hands. I am old, ill, and therefore I think that the time has come to make such arrangements in respect to my property as may concern my family. My life is over; I’m not thinking of myself at all. But I do have a young wife, an unmarried daughter . . . (*pause*) For me to continue to live in the country is out of the question. We are not suited to country life. But to live in town on the income which we receive from this estate — well, that’s out of the question too. Now suppose, to take an example, one were to sell the forest, that would be an extraordinary measure, which could not be repeated every year. No. It is necessary to look for a means which will guarantee us a steady, more or less assured, annual income. I have thought of such a means; and I have the honor to submit it to you for discussion. Laying aside the details, I will present it in general terms. Our estate here brings in on the average no more than two percent of the capital value. I propose to sell it. The money so received should be invested in interest-bearing securities. We could then get between four and five percent and I think there might even be a few thousands left over, which would enable us to buy a summer place in Finland.

VANYA

Just a moment . . . I don’t think I can have heard you right. Say it again.

SEREBRIAKOV

The money so received should be invested in interest-bearing securities, any surplus to be spent on a place in Finland.

VANYA

Not Finland. You said something else.

SEREBRIAKOV

I suggested selling the estate.

VANYA

That's it. You sell the estate. Splendid. A magnificent idea . . . and what are your intentions about the disposal of myself and my old mother, and Sonia?

SEREBRIAKOV

We shall discuss everything in due course. We can't settle everything at once.

VANYA

Wait. Up to this moment I don't seem to have had the slightest glimmer of sense. Up to now I've been foolish enough to think that this place belongs to Sonia. My late father bought the place as a dowry for my sister. I must have been very simple. I supposed that the laws of inheritance stood as they were. I thought that the place would pass from my sister to Sonia.

SEREBRIAKOV

Of course the estate belongs to Sonia. No one is disputing that. Without Sonia's consent I should never presume to sell it. And, anyway, I'm proposing to do so for Sonia's benefit.

VANYA

It's unbelievable . . . unbelievable! Either I've gone out of my mind, or else . . . or else . . .

MARIA VASSILIEVNA

Jean, don't contradict Alexander. Believe me, he knows better than we do what's right and what's wrong.

VANYA

Some water, please. (*drinks water*) Say whatever you like, whatever you like.

SEREBRIAKOV

I can't understand what all the fuss is about. I don't claim that my proposal is ideal. If everybody objects to it, I shan't press it.

TELYEGIN

(*shyly*) Your Excellency, my feeling about scholarship is not only one of reverence but of family pride. The brother of my brother Grigory's wife, you may possibly know of him, sir, Konstantin Trofimovich Lakedaemonov, was a Master of Arts.

VANYA

Shut up, Waffles, we're talking business — wait. Later. (*to SEREBRIAKOV*) Ask him. This place was bought from his uncle.

SEREBRIAKOV

Why should I ask him? What would be the point?

VANYA

At that time, the place was bought for ninety-five thousand. Father only paid seventy thousand and there was a debt of twenty-five thousand. Now listen: this place couldn't have been bought at all, if I hadn't agreed to forgo my share of the inheritance, in favor of my sister, whom I loved dearly. And then, on top of that, I worked like an ox for ten years to clear the debt.

SEREBRIAKOV

I'm sorry I embarked on the whole business.

VANYA

The estate is clear of debt. It's in good order, entirely because

of my efforts. And now, when I'm getting old, they want to throw me out.

SEREBRIAKOV

I don't know what point you're trying to make.

VANYA

For twenty-five years I've managed this place. I've worked for you and sent you money like the most conscientious steward. And all this time you never thanked me once. All this time — both in our young days and now — I got from you a salary of five hundred rubles a year — a pittance! And you never once thought of raising my pay, not even by one single ruble.

SEREBRIAKOV

Ivan Petrovich, how could I have known? I'm not a practical man. I don't know anything about matters of this kind. You could have raised your own salary to any figure you liked.

VANYA

Why didn't I steal? You all despise me, don't you, because I didn't steal. That would have been the right thing to do and now I wouldn't be a beggar.

MARIA VASSILIEVNA

(*sharply*) Jean!

TELYEGIN

(*agitated*) Vanya, my friend, don't. Don't. It's so awful. Why spoil good relations? (*kisses VANYA*) Don't.

VANYA

For twenty-five years this old mother of mine and I sat within these four walls. I was like a mole . . . all our thoughts and feelings were focused on you — only on you. In the daytime we talked about your achievements, we were proud of you,

uttered your name with the deepest reverence, and at night we sat up till all hours reading those books and articles of yours, for which I now feel the utmost contempt!

TELYEGIN

Don't, Vanya, don't . . . I can't . . .

SEREBRIAKOV

(*angrily*) I don't understand. *What do you want?*

VANYA

To us you belonged to a higher order of being. We knew all your writings by heart . . . but now my eyes have been opened. I see everything! You write about art, but you don't understand the first thing about art. All those works of yours, which I once loved so much, aren't worth a penny-piece. You've imposed upon us!

SEREBRIAKOV

Ladies and gentlemen, do try to calm him down. I'm leaving.

YELENA

Ivan Petrovich, stop it! I insist! Do you hear?

VANYA

I won't stop! (*preventing SEREBRIAKOV from leaving*) You stay here. I haven't finished. You've ruined my life. I've had no life at all. Thanks to you I have frittered away, have utterly wasted, the best years of my life. You're my worst enemy!

TELYEGIN

I can't . . . I can't . . . I'm going away. (TELYEGIN *goes in great agitation*)

SEREBRIAKOV

What do you want from me? And what right have you to speak to me like this? You're a nobody. If the estate is yours, take it! I don't want it!

YELENA

I'm leaving this horrible place this very minute. (*shouting*)
I can't stand it another minute.

VANYA

My life is a dead loss. I have talent, intelligence, courage . . . if I'd lived a normal life, I could have been a Schopenhauer, a Dostoevsky . . . I don't think I know what I'm saying . . . I'm losing my mind . . . Mother, dearest, I'm in despair. Mother!

MARIA VASSILIEVNA

(*severely*) Listen to Alexander!

SONIA

(*kneeling in front of MARINA*) Nyanya, darling Nyanya!

VANYA

Mother! Tell me what I'm to do. No, don't tell me, there's no need. I know myself what to do. (*to SEREBRIAKOV*) You won't forget this.

He goes, followed by MARIA VASSILIEVNA.

SEREBRIAKOV

Will somebody kindly tell me what all this means?? Keep that madman away from me! He and I cannot stay under the same roof! He lives there (*pointing at the door by which VANYA left*) right beside me. He must move — down to the village, or into the cottage. Or else I shall move out. But I cannot stay in the same house with him.

YELENA

We'll leave today. We must make the arrangements this very minute.

SEREBRIAKOV

Insignificant Nobody!

SONIA

(still on her knees) Father, forgive him. Uncle Vanya and I are so miserable. Do forgive him. Remember when you were younger, Uncle Vanya and grandmother would sit up all night translating books for you, copying your manuscripts — the whole night long, the whole night. Uncle Vanya and I used to work the whole time. We didn't dare to spend anything on ourselves. We sent it all to you. We earned our keep. I'm putting it so badly. I'm not really saying what I mean. But please, try to understand. You must forgive him.

YELENA

(to her husband) Alexander, for God's sake make it up with him. I implore you.

SEREBRIAKOV

Very well. I'll make it up with him . . . I'm not accusing him of anything. I'm not angry. But you must allow that his behavior was, to say the very least of it, odd. Very well. I'll go to him.

SEREBRIAKOV *and* YELENA *go out after* VANYA

YELENA

Be nice to him. Try to calm him down.
They are gone.

SONIA

(still clutching MARINA) Nyanya! Nyanya!

MARINA

It's all right, pet. Gabble, gabble go the ganders, then they stop. Gabble and stop.

SONIA

Nyanya!

MARINA

(strokes her hair) You're shaking as if you were cold! It's

all right, little orphan. God is merciful. A hot drink and you'll be all right. Don't take it to heart so, little orphan. (*looks toward the door*) Those ganders are beside themselves . . . stupid things. (*a shot; a scream from YELENA; SONIA trembles*) Whatever next!

SEREBRIAKOV

(*rushing in, terrified*) Hold him! Hold onto him! He's gone mad!

VANYA and YELENA struggle in the doorway.

YELENA

(*trying to get the revolver away from him*) Give it to me! Give it to me, I say!

VANYA

Let go, Helène, let me alone. (*he frees himself; comes in search of SEREBRIAKOV*) Where is he? Ah, there he is! (*shoots*) Damn! (*pause*) Missed him again! Another miss! (*furiously*) Fiend! Fiend! To hell with him! (*hurls revolver on the floor and falls totally exhausted into a chair*)

SEREBRIAKOV is dumbfounded. YELENA leans fainting against the wall.

YELENA

Take me away from here! Take me away! Kill me . . . I can't stay here. I can't.

VANYA

(*in desperation*) What am I doing? What am I doing?

SONIA

(*softly*) Oh, Nyanya, Nyanya!

CURTAIN

∫ ACT FOUR

Uncle Vanya's room. This is his bedroom as well as the office of the estate. Near the window is a large table with ledgers and papers of all kinds, pigeonholes, scales. There is a smaller table for Astrov; on this are painting and drawing things, a portfolio, a starling in a cage. On the wall there is a map of Africa, not apparently needed by anybody. There is a huge divan covered with oilcloth. To the left is a door to the rest of the house, to the right a door to outside; at the right door there is a mat, so that the peasants will not dirty the floor. An autumn evening. Silence. TELYEGIN and MARINA are sitting vis-à-vis, winding wool.

TELYEGIN

Quicker, Marina Timofyevna. They'll be calling us to go and say goodbye. They've already sent word to have the carriage brought round.

MARINA

(trying to wind faster) Only a little more.

TELYEGIN

They're off to Kharkov. They're going to live there.

MARINA

Good thing, too.

TELYEGIN

They got a fright. "I won't stay here another minute," Yelena Andreievna says. "We'll go, we'll go," she says. "We'll live," she says, "in Kharkov. We'll take a look around, then we'll send for our stuff." They're traveling light. What it amounts to, Maria Timofyevna, is this: it's not their destiny to live here. No, it's not their destiny . . . predestined fatalism.

MARINA

It's best so. Such goings-on — shouts and yells, shooting . . . shameful, that's what it is, shameful.

TELYEGIN

Yes, indeed. A stormy scene, a subject for the brush of Aivasovsky.

MARINA

I never saw such goings-on. But now it'll be like old times again. Tea at eight in the morning; dinner at one, and supper in the evening; everything as it should be, like real people, Christian people. (*sighs*) It's ages since I tasted noodles, God help me!

TELYEGIN

Yes, it's ages since we had noodles. (*pause*) Yes. Do you know what, Marina Timofyevna? I went down to the village this morning and one of the shopkeepers shouted after me "You're a hanger-on." So hurtful.

MARINA

Pay no attention, my dear. We're all hangers-on in the eyes of God. You and Sonia and Ivan Petrovich — you, none of you sit on your hands. Everyone of us works hard — every one. Where's Sonia?

TELYEGIN

Up the garden. She and the doctor are searching everywhere for Uncle Vanya. They're frightened he'll do himself some mischief.

MARINA

Where's his pistol?

TELYEGIN

(*whispers*) I've hidden it in the cellar.

MARINA

Such wickedness!

UNCLE VANYA *and* ASTROV *come in*.

VANYA

Leave me alone! (*to MARINA and TELYEGIN*) Go away. Leave me alone for at least an hour. I can't stand being watched over.

TELYEGIN

At once, Vanya. (*tiptoes out*)

MARINA

Gobble, gobble, gobble, goes the gander! (*MARINA gathers up her wool and goes*)

VANYA

You leave me alone, too.

ASTROV

With the greatest pleasure. I wanted to leave hours ago, but, as I told you before, I'm not leaving till you give me back what you took.

VANYA

I haven't taken anything.

ASTROV

Now listen; don't keep me any longer. I should have left hours ago.

VANYA

I haven't taken anything of yours.
Both sit down.

ASTROV

No? Very well. I'll wait a little while longer, and then — forgive me, it will be necessary to use force. We shall tie you up and search you. I mean what I say.

VANYA

Just as you like. (*pause*) To make such an utter fool of oneself! To shoot twice — and miss! I can never forgive myself.

ASTROV

If you're so keen on shooting, why not point the gun at your own head?

VANYA

(*shrugging*) Funny! I try to kill, I make an attempt at murder, and I'm not arrested. They don't bring me to trial. That means they think me insane. (*a bitter laugh*) I — insane. And I suppose people are not insane who go around disguised as professors, as learned panjandrums, in order to hide their incompetence, deadly dullness, and abysmal lack of feeling. People are not insane who marry old men and then deceive them in full view. I saw it . . . I saw it . . . I saw you hugging and kissing her!

ASTROV

Yes, I kissed her. (*makes "a long nose"*) That to you!

VANYA

(*looking at the door*) No; the whole world is a madhouse and we're all prisoners in it.

ASTROV

That's stupid talk.

VANYA

All right. I am insane, irresponsible, so I have a right to say stupid things.

ASTROV

That's a stale trick. You're not insane at all. You're just an oddity. I used to think that all oddities were madmen. But now I think that being odd is the normal human condition. You're completely normal.

VANYA

(covering his face with his hands) I'm so ashamed! If you only knew how ashamed! This feeling of shame hurts more than any pain. It's unbearable! *(he bends over the table)* What am I to do? What am I to do?

ASTROV

Nothing.

VANYA

Give me something! Oh, my God! . . . I'm forty-seven. If I live to be sixty there are thirteen years ahead of me — thirteen years. How shall I ever live out those thirteen years? What shall I do? How can I occupy them? Oh, can't you understand? *(presses ASTROV'S hand emotionally)* Can't you understand? If one could only live the rest of one's life in some kind of new way . . . to awake on a bright still morning and feel that you're beginning a new life, all the past forgotten, blown away like smoke. *(cries)* To begin a new life . . . tell me how to begin again . . . where to begin again.

ASTROV

(irritated) Oh, you and your new life! What sort of new life? You and I are a pair of hopeless cases.

VANYA

Yes?

ASTROV

Yes. I'm convinced of it.

VANYA

Give me something. (*indicates his heart*) I have a burning feeling here.

ASTROV

(*shouts angrily*) Shut up! (*more kindly*) Those who will live a hundred, two hundred years after us will despise us because we lived such stupid, insipid lives. And it may be that they will find a way to be happy. But we — you and I — have only one hope: the hope that when we sleep in our graves we shall be visited by dreams, yes, perhaps even by pleasant dreams. (*sighs*) Yes, my dear, old friend. In the whole of this district there are only two decent, intelligent men — you and I. But in no more than ten years you and I have been sucked into the morass of this despicable life; the vapors of decay have poisoned our blood and we've become just as commonplace as all the rest. (*abruptly changing his tone*) Now look! Don't you try to pull the wool over my eyes. Give me back what you took.

VANYA

I didn't take anything.

ASTROV

You've been at my traveling medicine chest. You took a phial of morphia. (*pause*) Listen: if you simply must commit suicide, go out in the forest and shoot yourself. But give me back the morphia. If you don't, there'll be a lot of gossip, rumors will fly around and people will think that I gave it to you . . . it's quite enough for me to have to make the post-mortem and open you up . . . d'you think I look forward to that?

SONIA *comes in.*

VANYA

Go away.

ASTROV

(*to SONIA*) Your uncle has pinched a phial of morphia out of my case and won't give it back. Tell him that it's not a very bright thing to do. Besides, I've no time. I want to be off.

SONIA

Uncle Vanya, did you take the morphia?

ASTROV

He did. I'm quite sure of it.

SONIA

Give it back. Why do you want to frighten us? (*gently*) Give it back, Uncle Vanya. Perhaps I'm just as unhappy as you, but I don't give way. I'm trying to bear it and I shall go on trying to the end of my days. And you must do the same. Give it back. (*kisses his hand*) Dear, kind, good Uncle, give it back! (*cries*) You're so good, you'll have pity on us and give it back. Try to bear it, Uncle, try to bear it.

VANYA

(*takes phial out of drawer and hands it to ASTROV*) Here! (*to SONIA*) But we must work. We must get to work at once, otherwise I shan't be able . . . shan't be able . . .

SONIA

Yes. Yes. Work. As soon as we've seen them off we'll get down to work. (*nervously sorting papers on table*) Everything's in such a muddle . . .

ASTROV

(*putting morphia into medicine case, which he straps up*) Now I can be off.

YELENA *comes in.*

YELENA

Oh, you're here, Ivan Petrovich. We're leaving directly. Do go to Alexander. He wants to say something to you.

SONIA

Yes, do go, Uncle Vanya. (*takes him by the arm*) Come along. Papa and you must make it up; you really must.

SONIA *and* VANYA *go*.

YELENA

I'm leaving. (*gives her hand to ASTROV*) Goodbye.

ASTROV

Already?

YELENA

The carriage is at the door.

ASTROV

Goodbye.

YELENA

You promised me today that you'd be leaving here for good.

ASTROV

I hadn't forgotten. I'm just going. (*pause*) Afraid? (*takes her hand*) Is it really so frightening?

YELENA

Yes.

ASTROV

Hadn't you better stay? Tomorrow in the forest.

YELENA

No. It's all settled. That's why I can face you like this. It's because we're going away . . . There's just one thing: Don't think too badly of me. I'd like you to remember me with respect.

ASTROV

(*with a gesture of impatience*) Oh! Please don't go. Confess;

you have nothing in the world to do; you have no aim in life; you have nothing to occupy your mind; and, sooner or later, your feelings will get the better of you. It's inevitable. So, rather than Kharkov or Kursk, why not here in the heart of the country . . . at least it's poetical and very beautiful, surely . . . we have the forest here and tumbledown country houses in the Turgenev manner . . .

YELENA

What an odd creature you are! I'm angry with you, and yet . . . my memories of you will be affectionate. You're an interesting, original man. We shall never see each other again, so . . . why should I hide it? I was a little bit carried away by you. Let's shake hands and part good friends. Don't think too badly of me.

ASTROV

(*taking her hand*) All right. Go . . . (*thoughtfully*) You seem to be a good woman, a sensitive woman, but there's something strange too about your whole personality. You land in here with your husband, and everyone who was toiling and slaving here — to some purpose too, had to drop whatever they were doing and dance attendance for an entire summer on your husband's gout and you. Both of you — he and you, infected everyone with your own idleness. As for me, I was carried away — for a whole month I didn't do anything, while people were ill, the peasants grazed their cattle in my young plantations . . . so that everywhere you and your husband went, you brought destruction. Oh, I'm only joking . . . but, even so, it's — odd. And I'm convinced that your staying on here would have a devastating effect. It would certainly be the ruin of me; and it wouldn't do you any good either. So — go. *Finita la commedia!*

YELENA

(takes a pencil from the table and quickly hides it) I shall take this as a memento.

ASTROV

It's funny. We get to know one another and suddenly, for no adequate reason, we shall never meet again. That's the way things are on this planet . . . but while there's no one here, and so long as Uncle Vanya doesn't come in with a bunch of roses, let me kiss you . . . a farewell kiss . . . yes? . . . *(kisses her on the cheek)* There . . . that's that.

YELENA

I wish you all that . . . *(looks around)* Oh, well, for once . . . *(she embraces him passionately; both break away immediately)* We must be off.

ASTROV

Yes. Go. If the carriage is ready, you'd better be on your way.

YELENA

I think I hear them.
Both listen.

ASTROV

Finita!

SEREBRIAKOV *and* VANYA *come in*, MARIA VASSILIEVNA *with a book*, TELYEGIN, *and* SONIA.

SEREBRIAKOV

(to VANYA) . . . so we'll let bygones be bygones. D'you know, I've lived through so much in these past hours and thought so much about it all that I really believe I could write a whole essay for the benefit of posterity: A Guide to Life . . . there! I'm glad to accept your apology and beg you to accept mine. Goodbye. *(kisses VANYA three times)*

VANYA

You'll get the same amounts as before — sent regularly. Everything shall be as it was.

YELENA *embraces* SONIA. SEREBRIAKOV *kisses* MARIA VASSILIEVNA'S *hand*.

MARIA VASSILIEVNA

(*kissing* SEREBRIAKOV) Do have your photograph taken again, Alexander, and send me one. You know how fond of you I am.

TELYEGIN

Goodbye, Your Excellency, don't forget us.

SEREBRIAKOV

(*having kissed* SONIA) Goodbye . . . goodbye, everybody.

(*shakes* ASTROV'S *hand*) Thank you for the pleasure of your company . . . I respect your theories, your enthusiasm, your energy, but permit me as an old man to include just one thing in my little speech of farewell: Ladies and gentlemen, deeds not words! Deeds not words.

SEREBRIAKOV *goes, followed by* MARIA VASSILIEVNA *and* SONIA.

VANYA

(*kisses* YELENA'S *hand warmly*) Goodbye . . . goodbye . . . we shan't meet again.

YELENA

(*moved*) Goodbye, my dear. (*kisses him on the forehead*)

ASTROV

(*to* TELYEGIN) Waffles, tell them to bring *my* horses round too.

TELYEGIN

Yes, my dear fellow.

TELYEGIN *goes; only* ASTROV *and* VANYA *remain*.

ASTROV

(putting his paints into bag) Why don't you go and see them off?

VANYA

They must see themselves off. I can't . . . I'm too depressed. Must get busy as soon as possible . . . to work . . . to work. *(sorts papers on table)*

Pause. The sound of the departing carriage bells.

ASTROV

They've gone. I'll bet the Professor's glad. You couldn't tempt him back at any price.

MARINA

(coming in) They've gone. *(sits down and knits her stocking)*

SONIA

(coming in) They've gone. *(dries her eyes)* God grant they'll be happy. *(to VANYA)* Now, Uncle Vanya, let's get to work.

VANYA

Work, yes; work.

SONIA

It's a long while since we sat together at this table. *(lights a lamp)* There's no ink. *(takes inkpot to cupboard and fills it)* I'm sorry they left.

MARIA VASSILIEVNA

(coming in slowly) They've gone. *(sits down and loses herself in her book)*

SONIA

(sits at table and opens a ledger) First of all, Uncle Vanya, let's get the books written up to date. We've let everything get in a muddle. Some people have written twice for their accounts. You do this lot, I'll do these.

VANYA

(writing) To the account of . . .

Both write in silence.

MARINA

(yawning) I'd like to be in beddy-byes.

ASTROV

The silence . . . the scrape of the pens . . . the chirp of the cricket. So warm — and cozy. It's hard to tear oneself away. *(jingle of harness bells is heard)* They're bringing the horses round. Well, friends, I've got to say goodbye. Goodbye to you, goodbye to my table. I'm off. *(puts his charts away)*

MARINA

What's all the fuss about? Sit down.

ASTROV

I mustn't.

VANYA

(writing) To account rendered, two, seventy-five . . .

A workman comes in.

WORKMAN

Doctor. The horses are ready.

ASTROV

Yes, I heard. *(gives him doctor's bag, portmanteau, and portfolio)* Here, take these. Be sure not to crush this. *(indicating charts in portfolio)*

WORKMAN

Very good. *(workman goes with luggage)*

ASTROV

Yes. *(moves to say goodbye)*

SONIA

When shall we see each other?

ASTROV

Not before summer, I should think. Hardly in the winter. Of course if anything happens, you'll let me know and I'll come over. (*shakes hands with SONIA*) Thank you for having me. You've all been very kind. Thanks for everything. (*goes to MARINA, kisses her on the forehead*) Goodbye, you dear old thing!

MARINA

You're going without your tea.

ASTROV

Don't want any, Nyanya.

MARINA

I suppose you'd like some vodka.

ASTROV

(*after a hesitation*) Yes . . . perhaps I would. (MARINA goes; *after a pause*) My off horse is limping. I noticed it yesterday, when she was being watered.

VANYA

She needs to be reshod.

ASTROV

I'll have to stop at the blacksmith's. Oh well. (*looks at map of Africa*) I suppose down in Africa it's frightfully hot now.

VANYA

I daresay.

MARINA

(*comes back with vodka and a piece of bread on a tray*) Here you are. (ASTROV drinks the vodka) Your health, my dear boy. (*bows deeply*) Eat the bread.

ASTROV

No. I don't need it . . . and now . . . (*to MARINA*) Don't see me off, Nyanya, it's not necessary.

ASTROV *goes*; SONIA *follows with a candle to see him off*;
MARINA *sits in her chair*.

VANYA

(*writing*) February 2: Linseed oil twenty pounds. February 16: Linseed oil again twenty pounds. Buckwheat.
Pause. The harness bells are heard.

MARINA

He's gone. (*pause*)

SONIA

(*comes back; puts candle on table*) He's gone.

VANYA

(*counts on abacus and then writes*) Fifteen plus twenty-five
. . .

SONIA *sits down and starts writing*.

MARINA

(*yawns*) Forgive us our sins . . .

TELYEGIN *tiptoes in; sits near door; quietly tunes his guitar*.

VANYA

My child, I feel crushed . . . crushed. You've no idea how
. . . crushed.

SONIA

What can we do? Life has to go on. (*pause*) We have to go on with our lives, Uncle Vanya. We have a long, long string of days ahead of us, long nights; we must put up with the trials which are in store for us. From now on, and until we grow old, we shall be working for other people and we shan't know what it is to rest. And when our hour strikes, we shall be quite prepared to die. And then beyond the grave we shall say that we endured sorrow and tears and that we knew the taste of bitterness; and God will have mercy upon us; and you and I, Uncle, dear Uncle, we shall enter a wonderful,

glorious, gracious life; we shall be joyful and we shall look back on our present sorrows with a smile of sympathy and we shall rest. I believe this, Uncle, I believe it intensely, passionately. (*kneels and puts her head on his hands; in a tone of weariness*) We shall rest. (TELYEGIN *plays softly on the guitar*) We shall rest! We shall hear the song of the angels, see the whole of the heavens glittering with diamonds; we shall see how all earth's ills, all our sufferings, will be drowned in a compassion, which will fill the entire world. Our life will become sweet, quiet, gentle as a caress. I believe it. I believe it. (*she wipes away his tears*) My poor, poor Uncle Vanya, you are crying. (*through her own tears*) You have known no joy in this life. But wait, Uncle Vanya, we shall rest. (*embraces him*) We shall rest. (*the night watchman is heard knocking; TELYEGIN plays softly; MARIA VASSILIEVNA makes a note in her notebook; MARINA is knitting*) We shall rest.

SLOW CURTAIN

