

Anton Chekhov

UNCLE VANYA

in a version by
Conor McPherson

This version of *Uncle Vanya* was first performed at the Harold Pinter Theatre, London, produced by Sonia Friedman Productions on 14 January 2020.

The production was co-produced with Gavin Kalin Productions, Rupert Gavin/Mallory Factor, Patrick Gracey/Scott M. Delman, 1001 Nights Productions, Eilene Davidson Productions and Tulchin Bartner Productions in association with Len Blavatnik and Louise & Brad Edgerton.

The cast was as follows (in order of appearance):

NANA	Anna Calder-Marshall
ASTROV	Richard Armitage
VANYA	Toby Jones
TELEGIN	Peter Wight
SEREBRYAKOV	Ciarán Hinds
SONYA	Aimee Lou Wood
YELENA	Rosalind Eleazar
MARIYA	Dearbhla Molloy
<i>Director</i>	Ian Rickson
<i>Designer</i>	Rae Smith
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	Bruno Poet
<i>Composer</i>	Stephen Warbeck
<i>Sound Designer</i>	Ian Dickinson
<i>Casting Director</i>	Amy Ball CDG

Characters

SEREBRYAKOV, Aleksándr Serébryakov, 'Alexandre',
a retired professor, sixties

YELENA, Eléna Andréevna, his second wife, aged
twenty-seven

SONYA, Sófya Aleksándrovna, his daughter from his first
marriage, twenty

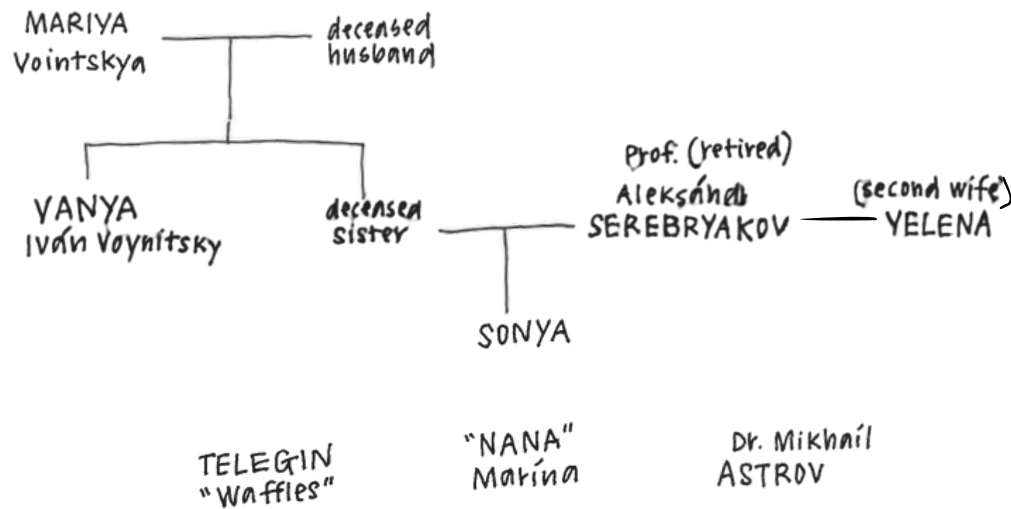
MARIYA, Mariya Vointska, 'Grandmaman', mother of the
professor's first wife

VANYA, Iván Voinítsky, her son, forty-seven

ASTROV, Mikhaíl Ástrov, a doctor, forties

TELEGIN, Ílya Ílych Telégin, 'Waffles', an impoverished
landowner, lodging with the family, sixties.

NANA, Marína Timoféevna, an elderly nanny/nursemaid to
the family



Setting

A run-down country estate in central Ukraine, June – September 1900.

ACT ONE

A late afternoon in June. A garden beneath the branches of old trees. Part of a house with a veranda can be seen. On the path a table is laid for tea and snacks. Benches, chairs, a guitar. It's overcast and heavy, the sense of a storm brewing.

NANA, a slow-moving woman in her seventies, sits knitting. ASTROV, a doctor in his forties, is strolling back and forth. He's a fine-looking man, but a sense of his mortality hangs about him, giving him a darker energy. Unseen beneath a pile of old coats VANYA sleeps on the veranda.

NANA. Will you stop walking up and down? You're making me seasick.

ASTROV. I'm sorry...

NANA. Drink some tea.

ASTROV. I'm not sure I can.

NANA. Then be done with it and have a vodka.

ASTROV. You think I'm that bad? I don't drink every single day you know!

NANA. Oh. I see. I didn't realise.

ASTROV considers for a moment.

ASTROV. Nana?

NANA. Mm?

ASTROV. How long have we known each other?

NANA. How long? Too long! I'm joking. Well, a long time. Sonya's mother was still alive, so...

ASTROV. That's right.

NANA. So what – sixteen, seventeen years?

ASTROV. Yes, it must be. You think I've changed? In that time?

NANA. Oh God yes. You used to be gorgeous. Young and dashing – we were all mad about you. And now – well – you're older...

ASTROV. Yes.

NANA....Still handsome, there's no denying that. We all like that. But also...

ASTROV. What...

NANA....Well you drink now.

ASTROV. Yes.

NANA. So...

ASTROV. No, it's true. I'm a completely different person, you're right.

NANA. You're not a completely different person but you're a drinker now, and what of it? Good for you. So what?

ASTROV. You know why I drink, don't you? Because I'm worn out! The moment I lie down, it's bang bang at the door. Up and out to someone's deathbed. Sometimes twenty miles away. And the rare nights when no one bangs at the door? Well you lie awake anyway – in dread of the knock that never comes! So of course you age and wither and get old. Who wouldn't? That's what happens.

NANA (*shrugs. Almost to herself*). If you can hold your drink, what of it?

ASTROV. You start going a bit wonky because you have to. I mean, look at this beard – have you seen it, Nana?

They laugh.

NANA. I like it!

ASTROV. No you don't!

NANA. No I do! I don't.

ASTROV. I mean everybody gets a bit... but you know... I just never really feel anything any more, that's what it is. I never look forward to anything.

NANA (*fondly, trying to rouse his spirits*). Oh Doctor...

She holds out her hand to him. He comes to her.

ASTROV. Except you, Nana. I'll always love you. When I was a little boy I had a lovely nana just like you. Gave me long deep hugs. I used to feel like nothing could harm me.

NANA. You remind me of someone too. Please – have a drink.

ASTROV (*shakes his head*). During Lent, earlier this year, I went up to Malitskóe – typhus epidemic. They'd thrown all the sick ones into huts – side by side on the floor, pigs coming in and out. Filthy. Depressing. I never stopped all day. Nothing to eat. By the time I got home I could hardly stand.

Bang bang bang on the door, they carry in this... boy. Trainee signalman. Stock car had sliced off half his foot. I got him up on the table, quickly gave him the chloroform and he – he just died. Right there. And just when you could *really do without it* – all my feelings came back. I felt like I had killed him. They were all looking at me – asking me if he was alright – and I just sat on the... Just covered my eyes. All I could think was why can't it be a hundred or two hundred years from now. You know? We'll all be gone, none of it will matter. I mean, the people then, will they even remember us? Have anything good to say about us? They'll just forget all about us.

NANA. The people may not remember but God will.

VANYA is waking up on the veranda.

ASTROV (*laughs mordantly*). Yes! Well said, Nana. (*Absently.*) Yes.

VANYA. Yes! (*Yawns and stretches, getting up, looking about.*) Yes indeed! What were we talking about?

ASTROV. Typhus.

VANYA. Lovely.

ASTROV. Good sleep?

VANYA. Too good. Horrible black hole in the middle of the day. You see this is what's happened! Ever since the professor and his young bride returned they've knocked me right off my beanpole. I take these stupid catnaps in the middle of the day which means I wander about awake all night. I've missed all the regular mealtimes, so I stuff my face with snacks which means I drink too much wine which means then I start into the liqueurs which inevitably lead me on to the spirits – which always knock me sideways – suddenly I wake up, I've missed my breakfast, I've missed my lunch, and the whole blasted nightmare starts all over again. It's no good. I need to be occupied. I need to be worn out, because of all my...

ASTROV. Your nervous energy.

VANYA. Yes – my energy, it's not nervous. It's...

ASTROV. It's edgy.

VANYA (*enjoying his friend's familiarity*). It's a *little* bit edgy. But ever since the professor came I'm... well Sonya's quicker than me, and her eyesight's better so she gets it all done before I even wake up so I'm...

ASTROV. You're cast adrift.

VANYA. I've been cast adrift. Haven't I, Nana?

NANA. The professor never even stirs till noon. Before he came we always ate our dinner at the normal hour of twelve o'clock in the afternoon, same as everyone else all over the world, didn't we, Vanya?

VANYA. Yes, Nana.

NANA. You know what time the professor eats his dinner?

ASTROV. I don't know.

NANA. Go on, guess.

ASTROV. I don't know.

NANA. Six o'clock! Six o'clock in the evening!

VANYA. Six o'clock.

NANA. Six o'clock.

ASTROV. Good Lord.

NANA. Then up he sits the whole night, reading, writing, working, insists on keeping that poor young girl he's married up with him, 'attending his needs'. Suddenly then, at three o'clock in the morning, he's ringing the bell...

ASTROV. What bell?

VANYA. He's brought a bell.

NANA. We're all supposed to come running.

VANYA. Everybody's up.

NANA. 'Tea! Tea for the professor!' At three o'clock in the morning! I ask you. No one gets a moment's rest.

ASTROV. How long are they staying?

VANYA. Staying? They're not staying – they're moving here!

ASTROV. To live?

VANYA. The university's retired him off! Took his apartment back. He can't afford to live in the city.

NANA (*attending the hot water*). I mean look at this. You know how long I've been keeping this hot water on the go now? Two hours. 'Tea! Tea for the professor!' he says two hours ago, then up he suddenly announces, 'I'm going for a walk.'

VANYA. 'A quick walk.'

NANA. A quick walk.

VANYA. 'Quick inspection.'

NANA. Quick inspection. And we're all supposed to just...

Voices and laughter are heard coming through the garden.

TELEGIN (*in the distance, indistinct*). So I ended up paying twice what I paid for it before I sold it for half what I got it for in the first place!

SEREBRYAKOV (*in the distance*). That's very good!

Upstage, beneath the branches at the far end of the garden, SEREBRYAKOV, SONYA and TELEGIN are returning from their stroll...

NANA. Give you a pain up your backside...

VANYA. Look – he'll hear you. Don't give him the satisfaction.

SONYA. And you haven't even seen what's happening at the old forest yet, Papa.

TELEGIN. Yes, wait till you see up there.

SONYA. We can go tomorrow.

VANYA. Professor! Your tea is ready.

SEREBRYAKOV (*on his way towards the house*). My dear friends. I do apologise but this excursion has inspired some startling new ideas. I feel I'd better grasp them while the blood is hot. Be so kind as to have my tea brought to my study. Thank you.

SONYA. And wait till you see the new forest!

VANYA. Of course, Professor! And, oh, anything else?

SEREBRYAKOV *halts*.

SEREBRYAKOV. I beg your pardon?

VANYA. Sorry?

SEREBRYAKOV. What are you asking me?

VANYA. No just... Anything else? Any other refreshments? A bowl of fruit? A new pair of slippers? Something from the village perhaps? I mean Nana is here – she's got nothing better to do. She could walk into town.

SEREBRYAKOV. I said just tea.

VANYA. Of course you did. Thank you, Professor.

SONYA. Uncle Vanya, you have some kind of sauce all over your trousers.

VANYA (*looking down*). What?

SONYA *goes inside with SEREBRYAKOV*.

SONYA (*as they go*). Papa, Dr Astrov's here. He's been advising us. (*Smiles back at ASTROV*.) I don't know what we would have done without him.

TELEGIN *comes to NANA*. NANA *sets about getting tea ready*.

VANYA (*scrapes at some crusted food on his pants, imitating SEREBRYAKOV*). 'I have some startling new ideas...' It's hot enough to fry a sausage and the great genius goes about in his overcoat and his gloves. (*Pulling at his trousers and wiping his hands on his waistcoat as he goes to ASTROV*.) So much for the intelligentsia, eh?

ASTROV. Hm?

VANYA. I said, so much for the intelligentsia! (*Sniffs his fingers*.)

ASTROV. Maybe he knows something we don't.

VANYA (*laughs incredulously*). Oh yeah? Like what?

Suddenly YELENA is there, a vision in the summer heat.

Madame Professor.

YELENA. Uncle Vanya.

VANYA. The others have all... (*He's suddenly lost for words*.)

He indicates vaguely towards the house. YELENA smiles courteously at ASTROV. VANYA and ASTROV watch her go into the house.

That's her. That's his wife.

ASTROV. Yes, I know.

VANYA. You ever seen a more gorgeous creature?

ASTROV. Well...

VANYA. Well what?

ASTROV. I haven't really had much time to...

VANYA.... Oh come off it – how long do you need?

VANYA *eats a few grapes*.

TELEGIN. Hey, Vanya. Don't mind the professor's young wife. Look at Marina Timofeevna here. You should have seen this one in her day, my lads!

NANA. Oh grow up!

TELEGIN. Eh? Whether I'm riding across the fields or walking into this shady garden, or even just looking at the way you lay out a table, Nana – I feel an inexpressible bliss! Suddenly one is reminded that winter is far far away, and shush, listen, shush! Vanya!

VANYA. I'm not saying anything!

TELEGIN. You hear the birds?

VANYA (*listens*). No.

TELEGIN. That's what I mean! Such a particular silence! It's so restful here. What else could anyone possibly need? And so much of that is down to you, Nana Timofeevna.

NANA. Oh eat your biscuit.

VANYA (*to ASTROV*). But you saw her eyes. Tell me you saw her eyes.

ASTROV. Whose?

VANYA. Young Mrs Professor. (*Savouring the sound of her name*.) Yelena.

ASTROV. I really didn't notice!

VANYA. You're no use.

TELEGIN. Well, Vanya, how are you today?

VANYA. Hm?

TELEGIN. Any news?

VANYA. Is that some kind of joke, Waffles? What news could there possibly be? Everything's the same as ever except worse.

TELEGIN. That's not true.

VANYA. It is, you know! I sit around getting fatter – and the fatter I get the more annoyed I am with everyone. And my mother! Jesus Christ. (*Hungrily eating some bread on the table, eating cheese, etc.*) She's exactly the same.

ASTROV. Where is she?

VANYA. Up in the professor's study! This is what I'm saying! She remains completely in thrall to him. Translating his papers, researching his billions of footnotes. She'll never change. Still wanging on about women's rights as though it's some abstract, alien concept rather than something that actually might improve her own wasted life. Nana, have you offered the doctor a drink?

NANA. Yes.

ASTROV. I'm working.

VANYA. Working where?

ASTROV (*getting up agitatedly, moving away from VANYA, looking at the house*). The professor summoned me.

VANYA. Oh well of course! He's an incorrigible hypochondriac. We all tiptoe around his ailments while he composes his latest treatise. (*Recites.*) 'With straining brain and wrinkled brow he worked into the night, yet the only thing the twit produced was when he took a sh...' [shite.]

NANA (*interrupting*). Vanya!

VANYA. He's spent thirty years writing papers no one understands for journals no one ever reads. Thirty years of

utter obscurity all the while hogging his post as professor from someone who actually has talent. So not only has he *offered* nothing to the world, he's actually *deprived* it.

ASTROV. You sound jealous to me, Vanya.

VANYA. Too right I'm jealous! I mean can someone please explain to me his effect on women? His first wife, my poor late sister, she was so sweet, so intelligent! She could have had her pick from anybody in the world, but no – it had to be him. And now – his second wife, a full forty years younger than him, beautiful, stunning, clever, you know – and she's thrown it all away on this old knobbly croaker – for what? I mean why?

ASTROV. She must be in love.

VANYA. You *are* joking?

ASTROV. Is she faithful to him?

VANYA. Inexplicably – yes.

ASTROV. Why inexplicably?

VANYA. Well, it makes no sense! Where's the morality in denying your youth and your vitality? Pissing it away on some conceited old duffer. Don't tell me that's moral – it's immoral.

TELEGIN. Vanya, please, I hate that language. Your casual manner, disparaging people. The way I see it, anyone who deceives their wife or their husband is an unreliable person who might just as easily one day betray their country.

VANYA. Oh spare me, Waffles, will you? For God's sake.

TELEGIN. I don't mean to upset you, Vanya, but look at me. On the very day after my wedding, my wife left me.

VANYA (*he's heard this one many times before*). Here we go.

TELEGIN (*ignoring VANYA, going to ASTROV*). The day after we were married! Yes. After just one single solitary night of almost conjugal bliss, she left me in the morning –

soon as the sun *peeped* up – to go back and be with her old, much older, boyfriend. She said it was purely to do with my physical appearance so there was nothing I could do about it.

However, I have remained faithful to her to this day. Yes for over fifty years, I've supported her and every single one of her illegitimate children, as is my duty.

You can still see her, down in the village. She's a haggard old woman now. Her beauty has entirely vanished. Her lover is long dead and what has she left to show for it all? Nothing. And look at me. You see, hm? I still have my pride, Vanya – you cannot deny it.

Short pause. TELEGIN presents himself to VANYA.

VANYA *looks at TELEGIN for a moment.*

VANYA. Good... God...

SONYA (*calling as she comes out*). Nana! Nana, there are some peasants on the lawn outside. Will you see what they want? I'll do the tea.

NANA. Yes, my love.

NANA goes into the house as YELENA comes out carrying a jug and some glasses.

SONYA. Tea, Doctor? Please have something?

ASTROV (*watching YELENA*). Oh, go on then.

SONYA smiles, going to the table. ASTROV watches YELENA carry a fresh jug of water to a table. SONYA watches ASTROV looking at YELENA.

SONYA. Uncle Vanya?

VANYA. Mm?

SONYA. Tea?

VANYA (*shakes his head*). Mm-hm.

TELEGIN helps SONYA. YELENA drifts away from the table, looking a little lost.

ASTROV. Hello.

YELENA. Hello.

ASTROV. You may or may not be aware that I've come to see your husband.

YELENA (*with realisation*). Oh Doctor... yes, it's...

ASTROV. You wrote to me last night saying he was very ill.

YELENA. Yes, I'm...

ASTROV....But now it appears he's been walking all over the estate.

YELENA. You see, yesterday he was terrible, the pains in his legs were excruciating. He literally couldn't get up and now suddenly he's...

ASTROV. He does know I live twenty miles from here?

YELENA. What can I say? It's...

ASTROV. And it's not the first time.

SONYA. You're here now, Doctor. Stay. I don't suppose you've eaten anything.

ASTROV. Well I haven't as a matter of fact.

SONYA. Then it's settled. You'll have dinner with us. We never dine till after six, so you'll have to stay the night I'm afraid, but we'll make it perfect for you. I'm sorry Papa dragged you out. This tea is cold.

ASTROV. It's alright. I'm too hot today anyway.

TELEGIN. You see what's happened is...

He fuffs about with the hot water, tapping it and lifting the lid.

...It's quite clear – there has been a significant decline in temperature in the water.

VANYA. Oh, you think that's what's happened? Thanks, Waffles.

YELENA. Never mind, Ivan Ivanych, we'll drink it cold.

TELEGIN (*crashes the lid on the hot water, approaches YELENA*). Excuse me. I'm sorry, excuse me, madam, can I just set something straight with you? It's not Ivan Ivanych, it's Íl'ya Íl'ch. Íl'ya Íl'ch Telegin, or as Vanya likes to call me on account of my periodic bouts of acne – Waffles – because I don't mind answering to this or that or to any of these names, but please call me by something I recognise as my name. Thank you.

He starts to walk away, but can't let it go, returning to confront YELENA.

You might have noticed my name on any of the numerous occasions we have been repeatedly introduced? Because I actually live here. With you. In this house. You may even perhaps have noticed me dining with you every day? Three times a day. Every day. Íl'ya Íl'ch. Alright? My name is Íl'ya Íl'ch. Thank you. I'm sorry about this, but I find it's just better to clear the air about these things.

VANYA. No, nicely handled, Waffles. You tell her.

YELENA *smiles at VANYA*.

SONYA (*embracing TELEGIN*). My godfather Íl'ya Íl'ch is our rock, our support and our right-hand man. Isn't that right?

TELEGIN. I'm... yes.

MARIYA comes out to the veranda to take a break. Her dress is a little more modern, or bohemian, than the others. She carries a cigarette holder.

SONYA (*to TELEGIN*). Let me get you something nice. (*To MARIYA.*) Tea, Grandmaman? It's cold I'm afraid.

MARIYA. I'm fine, thank you, my dear. Dr Astrov! No one told me you were here! How are you?

ASTROV. Very well, Mariya Vasilievna, all fine. How are you?

MARIYA. Well, thank you – ironically we are busier than ever since the professor retired.

ASTROV. Yes, Vanya told me!

MARIYA. Now that he's no longer teaching he has so much more time to write, so we're never finished translating, reading proofs – we hardly stop for a moment. Oh!

SONYA. What's the matter, *Grandmaman*?

MARIYA. Oh Yelena... or Sonya... although, I don't want to disturb him now that he's writing but I meant to tell *Alexandre* – (To ASTROV.) the professor – that I received Pavel Alekséevich's new pamphlet today in the post from Kharkov – my memory is really going...

VANYA. What??! Dear God in heaven will somebody do something! Alert the professor! There's a pamphlet in the scullery!

MARIYA. Yes yes, sarcasm, of course, *Jean*, very clever. (To ASTROV.) The professor has been waiting specifically for this pamphlet.

ASTROV. It must be very interesting.

MARIYA. What's very interesting is that Mr Alekséevich has suddenly more or less refuted all the positions he has held for the last twenty years – which of course has grave implications for the professor's most recent essays which have only just been published and may well be just as quickly out of date!

VANYA. Oh... who *cares*, Mama! Really!

MARIYA. What do you mean who cares?

VANYA. Just relax and be quiet, and drink your tea.

MARIYA. Don't tell me to be quiet. I'll talk if I want to.

VANYA. There's too much talk! And talk and talk. You've been talking and reading bloody pamphlets for the last fifty years! And what good has it done anyone?

MARIYA. What good has it done?!

VANYA. So just give it a rest. (*Beat.*) That's all I'm saying.

MARIYA. Oh that's all you're saying. You were asleep on the floor over there half an hour ago! Don't suddenly pipe up and tell me to stop talking. You show some respect to your mother – that you would even speak to me like that in front of everyone! I've no idea what's come over you this past year. You used to cheer us all up! Tell us all to keep going! Didn't he? All you do now is cause fights. Upsetting everybody. What's wrong with you?

VANYA. Yes – It's always been left to me to cheer everybody up and it's been bloody exhausting. Well here it is – I'm forty-seven now. And I'm...

ASTROV (*doubtfully*). Forty-seven?

VANYA. Yes forty-seven! And I'm too long in the tooth to go around fooling myself that the professor's pamphlets and all our toiling and working to make sure he can keep churning them out is worth the bloody candle. Alright?

SONYA. Yes, Uncle Vanya, that's fine thank you, you have rehearsed these views many times, we have guests with us now so why don't we...

VANYA (*embarrassed and angry*). And I'll tell you why I never sleep – because I'm too... fucking... pissed off! I've been such a *fool*! Wasting my whole life away! For what!

MARIYA. Don't blame your principles for leading you here...

VANYA. Principles!

They talk over each other, barely listening to the well-rehearsed grievances of the other.

MARIYA. You shared the very same principles the professor sought to espouse...

VANYA (*affronted*). I never shared his principles! I can't believe that you'd...

MARIYA....And I sought diligently to bring to a wider audience – and you were happy to help.

VANYA. What bloody choice did I have?!!

MARIYA. It's you who have failed, *Jean*, because you abandoned your principles.

VANYA. Oh here we go... Yes, that's...

MARIYA. Your principles have not failed. You have failed – why? Because you've never done anything.

VANYA (*scoffs*). 'Principles!' What principles, that's what I'd like to...

MARIYA....And you criticise me for talking? Ha! That's all you ever were – all talk, and you still are!

VANYA. I mean how does one even begin to *discern* his principles?

SONYA (*throughout the ongoing*). *Grandmaman*, please... Vanya... I beg of you please!

TELEGIN *gets up uncomfortably, considers leaving. Picks up the guitar uncertainly.*

VANYA. We can't all be pamphlet regurgitators like Herr Professor up there...

MARIYA....Oh yes – of course, that's right. Don't equate laziness with rebelliousness. You never learned the difference!

VANYA....Because some of us refuse to worship nobodies, alright? When we can see there's no point!

MARIYA. What do you mean by that?

VANYA. Just as I say! I mean what I mean when I say what I say – what part of what I say confuses you? Every part? Or just most of it? Or...?

SONYA. Stop it!! Just stop it!! Both of you – stop it!!

Pause.

VANYA. I'm not saying anything. (*Trying to smile, gamely playing it down.*) What did I say?

MARIYA *is frozen with cold fury. She looks down, holds her hand to her mouth, thinking silently, then goes. All are quiet for a few moments.*

YELENA. Isn't the weather so nice? I mean it's not *too* hot and it's not too...

VANYA. No – I was reading in the paper the other day that apparently this is the perfect weather for slitting your wrists. Something to do with the science of it. The blood flow.

YELENA *can't help smiling at VANYA. TELEGIN is strumming a few chords on the guitar, tuning it a little.*

NANA. Chook chook! (*Coming round the corner throwing seeds, trying to entice a hen from under the house.*) Chook chook!

SONYA. Nana! What did the peasants want?

NANA. Same as they always want – they want to look through the compost. Chook chook?

SONYA. Which one are you calling?

NANA. The speckled mommy with the chicks. The crows will get them.

She goes on searching. TELEGIN picks out a simplified Chopin 'Nocturne'. Everybody listens in silence. Then MARIYA returns.

MARIYA. I'm sorry, excuse me, Doctor, there's a man outside says there's been an accident.

TELEGIN *stops playing.*

ASTROV. Where?

MARIYA. The factory.

ASTROV. When?

MARIYA. Some time this morning. They say someone's been crushed.

ASTROV. Some time this morning? Right... Thank you. Right well, I'll have to... (*Searches round for his stuff, his bag, his hat, etc.*)

SONYA. Oh Doctor, do come back for dinner, won't you?

ASTROV. Oh no, it's far too far to the factory. I couldn't keep you all waiting. (*Sings a music-hall catchphrase they all know.*) 'How should I go if I don't know the way?'

TELEGIN and SONYA join in with him: 'How could I leave when you beg me to stay?'

TELEGIN (*alone*). 'Only Ramesses knows...'
They smile.

ASTROV. I'll tell you what; I'll quickly take a glass of that vodka if it's going.

MARIYA fixes ASTROV a drink.

Of course, you know who I'm like now, with this beard? That chap in Ostrovsky's play 'I am a man of large moustaches and small abilities!'

They laugh.

TELEGIN. 'Who believes in the invisible yet doubts the things he sees...'

MARIYA hands the drink to SONYA.

SONYA. I disagree. I think it makes you look more distinguished. Older. Distinguished.

SONYA gives ASTROV the drink. ASTROV smiles at SONYA, then knocks the drink back in a desperate gulp. He grins sheepishly, catching his breath as the fiery liquor goes down.

Have another. Before you go.

ASTROV doesn't refuse. SONYA takes the glass. ASTROV turns to YELENA.

ASTROV. Well, it's been nice to have the honour. If you should ever feel like an excursion, Sonya knows my place. I'd be truly delighted.

YELENA. Thank you.

ASTROV. It's a small enough estate – ninety acres, but there's an orchard and a large government forest beside me. The old

chap in charge is always sick, so it's really me who takes care of it – Sonya loves it. Very nice for a wander, should you feel inclined.

SONYA gives ASTROV another drink. He sips it.

YELENA. Yes – Sonya has told me all about it already, and how well you look after everything. I hope it doesn't interfere with your real vocation too much.

ASTROV. Only God knows our real vocation.

YELENA. The forest is your true love...

ASTROV. Well it's just so interesting.

VANYA (*without enthusiasm*). It's fascinating.

YELENA. But I've always heard that's an older man's work. You don't look what, more than forty?

ASTROV. Oh? (*To VANYA, smiling.*) Thank you!

YELENA. Nothing but tree after tree, you don't find it monotonous?

ASTROV. No, in fact I...

SONYA. It's precisely the opposite. Dr Astrov plants new spans of forest every single year – he's already received a bronze medal for it and a diploma. You don't mind me saying that?

ASTROV smiles sheepishly, looking down.

And he saved the old forest from being destroyed. We must go, I'll show you, and if you listen to what he says, in thirty minutes it will change how you see the world.

VANYA. The world no less.

SONYA. Don't listen to Vanya. I hadn't realised how much we depend upon the forests. Do you know that forests actually soften the climate?

VANYA. I've heard it all now.

SONYA. And when the climate is less severe, humans expend less energy, so we can become more responsive, and develop

our culture and our language. The arts and sciences flourish in temperate climates. Women especially are treated with more courtesy. It's been shown.

MARIYA (*not too impressed*). Courtesy...

MARIYA notices that TELEGIN has fallen asleep in his chair.

He's gone.

She goes to the house to get him a rug.

VANYA. It's a lovely idea, Astrov, and I'm glad it makes Sonya happy, but if you don't mind, I'll continue making a nice fire with my logs and building my barns out of wood thank you very much.

ASTROV. You could burn peat in your stoves and build your barns out of stone. I mean, of course, chop down a tree here and there if you need to, but why destroy the whole forest?

VANYA. Well I'm not destroying the whole...

ASTROV. As we speak, swathes of forest are perishing under the axe. Without their roots, the soil turns to dust and blows away. The rivers dry up, gone for ever because you're too lazy to pick up fuel from the ground?

VANYA. It's not all down to just me!

ASTROV. We have the unique capacity – alone amongst all creatures – to appreciate the miracle of creation, and what are we doing? Destroying the lot.

VANYA. God, I'm knackered.

VANYA gets himself a drink of vodka.

ASTROV. Vanya always gives me that ironic look – like I'm always so bloody serious all the time – and I know I'm as cranky as the next fellow. But there are moments, you know, when I go down past the peasants' woods or see a span of forest I've planted bursting into bloom – and I realise that, I mean, to *some* extent, the climate is in my power. And

because of some small thing we do, someone a hundred years from now will be happier because of it, well that's... I'm not joking – it does something to me – to my... [soul.] Well. If you will do me the honour of allowing me to take my leave.

ASTROV finishes his drink. SONYA takes his glass.

SONYA (*taking his arm, walking with him*). When will you come back and see us?

ASTROV. God, I don't know.

SONYA. Don't leave it another month, promise me that much!

ASTROV and SONYA go through the house. TELEGIN, sleeping, emits one loud snore. YELENA and VANYA are alone. They smile at TELEGIN snoozing.

YELENA. And as for you, Ivan...

VANYA. Now it's 'Ivan'!

YELENA. What are we going to do with you?

VANYA. Do what with me?

YELENA. Do you really have to antagonise your poor mother like that?

VANYA. She antagonises me.

YELENA. And this morning too. You had a go at poor *Alexandre*. He was really upset with you, you know.

VANYA. I can't help it if I loathe him.

YELENA. What's the point in loathing him? He's only as bad as anyone else, and certainly no worse than you!

VANYA. You're one to talk! Don't think I can't see the sheer effort it takes you. Just to live from moment to moment.

YELENA. Oh yes, the effort and the boredom! Since when is it any of your business?

VANYA (*defensively*). Well that's...

YELENA. And don't pretend it's because you have sympathy for me...

VANYA....Of course I have sympathy for you...

YELENA. I heard you, Vanya – you have no pity for the woods or the forest or the birds or women or for anyone else.

VANYA. Eh – I'm not sure that's quite what I said! Anyway where's all this philosophy coming from everybody all of a sudden?!

YELENA (*suddenly on another, inner, thought*). Huh. That doctor – he has such an exhausted look on his face.

VANYA. And look at me! *I'm exhausted!*

YELENA. Yes, but he has an interesting face.

VANYA. Thanks.

YELENA. And Sonya is clearly mad about him. I can understand it.

VANYA. Of course you can.

YELENA. You know he's visited three times since I've been here?...

VANYA....But who's counting?...

YELENA....And I've always been too intimidated to speak with him! I've never even said hello or been nice to him. Now Sonya says he thinks I'm moody...

VANYA....I wonder why...

YELENA....I mean you do know why you and I get on so well, don't you?

VANYA. Because you like me?

YELENA. No – because we're the most tedious, boring people on the whole estate. We are! Tedious!

VANYA laughs and looks at her tenderly.

And don't look at me like that! I don't like it!

VANYA. How else am I supposed to look at you? I love you.

YELENA. Stop.

VANYA. You're the only thing on earth that makes me happy. Makes me feel I was ever young. Makes me appreciate my life. I know the chances of you feeling anything similar are practically zero, but just let me look at you, just let me hear your voice...

MARIYA emerges from the house shaking out a blanket for TELEGIN.

YELENA. Vanya, your mother is coming. Will you stop it?

VANYA. Don't send me away. Just let me sit with you and I'll be the happiest...

YELENA turns on VANYA with sudden ferocity.

YELENA. You're driving me mad!!! Just leave me alone!

YELENA goes. MARIYA stands watching her go. TELEGIN wakes up, sitting up straight. He smiles at MARIYA who puts the blanket on his lap.

TELEGIN. Where is everybody?

MARIYA. Go back asleep.

TELEGIN. I wasn't asleep! Was I? Well, Vanya! Any news?

MARIYA looks at VANYA. VANYA looks away.

Black.

ACT TWO

July. Night. Distant thunder. A dining room that has evolved into a study. On the dining table are piles of books and papers where SEREBRYAKOV works. Various mismatched easy-chairs stand about. An upright piano sits against a wall. Beyond the windows a lightning storm is approaching. A watchman can be heard banging a low bell in the garden. SEREBRYAKOV is sitting in an armchair dozing, papers have fallen from his lap and a book hangs in his hand by his side. YELENA stands gazing out the open window.

SEREBRYAKOV (*waking from a dream*). Oh no, no, no...
no...

YELENA. *Alexandre... Alexandre*, you're dreaming...

SEREBRYAKOV. Oh God, I'm frozen.

YELENA. Your rug has fallen off.

YELENA *retrieves the rug*.

SEREBRYAKOV (*head in his hands, relieved to be free of his dream*). Oh... Sonya...

YELENA. It's not Sonya, it's me.

SEREBRYAKOV. Oh Lénochka! Forgive me. I'm sorry. The pain's back.

YELENA. I'll shut the window.

SEREBRYAKOV. No, no it's fine, really. I just... I can't catch my breath. I fell asleep. I didn't even realise. I dreamed this wasn't my leg – that it belonged to someone else – it's agonising.

YELENA. It's your gout, *Alexandre*.

SEREBRYAKOV. No. This can't be gout. It must be something else, my God; the pain... What time is it?

YELENA *doesn't answer, she looks out the window*.
SEREBRYAKOV *looks at his books*.

Yelena. Did you find that volume of Batyúshkov I asked you for?

YELENA. What?

SEREBRYAKOV. Can you find me that volume of Batyúshkov I asked you about? Why can't I... it's as though I can't get a breath.

YELENA. You need sleep. You got none last night, now this tonight...

SEREBRYAKOV. It's just these new ideas I have. If I don't get them up and running, they'll be gone.

YELENA. And what of it? You're retired, take your time. Accept it.

SEREBRYAKOV. But you can't just turn your brain off. You're in a race against the clock. You know Turgenev suffered a heart attack because of his gout? Because of the pain? And just – bang! I mean that's what could... [happen to me.] I daren't even look in the mirror any more. I see my father scowling back at me from his deathbed. He had a horrible death. And what's worse is you're so fully aware of how revolting people find you. They leave you in no doubt.

YELENA. Oh now it's my fault.

SEREBRYAKOV. I only speak objectively. Lénochka, it's nothing personal. You're young, you're healthy; you want to live, why shouldn't you? But I have a feeling it won't be long now. Yelena? Did you hear what I said?

YELENA. Yes, alright. Please just stop.

SEREBRYAKOV. Stop what?

YELENA. What do you want? What? Stop hounding me!

SEREBRYAKOV. Hounding you? Well of course. I've completely worn you out, haven't I? It would be perfectly understandable, if you wanted to just... I mean...

YELENA. Oh yes? And go where? With what? Let's just be quiet, alright?

SEREBRYAKOV. You know what's really funny? When Vanya starts talking? Or his mother speaks? Everyone is scrupulously attentive to their drivel! I so much as say two words and suddenly everyone wants to kill themselves. (*Shrugs.*) You lose the right to exist. That's... That's the...

YELENA. No one is denying you your rights.

The window is banging. YELENA gets up to close it.

No one is disputing your rights.

A watchman taps a bell somewhere off in the distance.

SEREBRYAKOV (*getting up to stretch his leg, leaning on a chair*). You spend your whole life growing and learning and developing your expertise – leading the way. And everyone depends on you and then, suddenly – you're old! That's it! You're from the past and the past is gone.

You end up living in a kind of... tomb. And I still want to live. I can't help it. I want to publish great works. I want to be successful.

YELENA *sighs*.

What's wrong with that? This was a huge mistake, you know. Coming out here. There's nothing here! It's like being dead but you're not even allowed to be. It's...

YELENA (*leaning in the window, looking out*). Yes, well... Time is killing me just as certainly as you.

SONYA *comes in*.

SONYA. Papa, you asked for the doctor. He's waited for hours. I can't believe that you would do this again.

SEREBRYAKOV. What doctor?

SONYA. Dr Astrov, who else?

SEREBRYAKOV. Ugh! He's so bloody conceited!

SONYA. What do you want?! We can't send for the medical faculty of St Petersburg every time you get pins and needles! Just let him have a look!

SEREBRYAKOV. No. I can't stand him.

SONYA. Right! Wonderful. Well I'm not telling him. You can tell him yourself.

SONYA *sits down*.

SEREBRYAKOV. Where are my glasses? What time is it?

YELENA (*absently, automatically*). Past midnight.

SEREBRYAKOV. Sonya, bring me my drops from the table.

Enter VANYA. He stands there unsteadily for a moment holding a candle.

SONYA. Here.

SEREBRYAKOV. Not those ones. Those are my morning ones. I'll be up all bloody night.

SONYA. Alright! No need to be rude! Perhaps other people pander to that behaviour, but you can spare me – I've to be up in two hours for the haymaking.

VANYA. I'm not so sure about that. There's a storm brewing. In case anyone wants to know.

Lightning, then VANYA says:

Et voilà.

Distant thunder breaks.

Helène, Sonya, go to sleep, I have come to relieve you.

SEREBRYAKOV. No no, don't leave me with him! He'll talk me to death.

VANYA. I won't say a word.

SEREBRYAKOV. No, Vanya, I can't, I'm not in good form. I don't want an argument.

VANYA (*coming to SEREBRYAKOV, putting a hand drunkenly on his shoulder*). But we must give them some rest! Come on, my old banana. Be reasonable. (*Beat.*) Me old sausage.

SEREBRYAKOV. No – I'm asking you, Vanya. In the name of our former friendship, don't antagonise me.

VANYA. Our friendship? 'Our former...'

SONYA. Uncle Vanya...

SEREBRYAKOV. I know what you're doing. I know what's going to happen. So please. I'm too tired.

VANYA. This is almost funny. Isn't it? Almost funny?

NANA *comes in with a candle*.

NANA. Oh yes, all still up, everybody everywhere...

SONYA. Go to bed, Nana, it's so late.

NANA....Nothing cleared away... How can I go to bed?

SEREBRYAKOV. And here we go again. I've kept everyone up again. Everybody's worn out, I know. I know.

VANYA. We love you! What are you talking about? Don't start behaving like an old twit!

SEREBRYAKOV (*to the others*). You see?

SONYA. Vanya, go to bed. Nana, let's get everyone to bed.

VANYA. I just got up! I'm only trying to help!

NANA. Shush, shush, shush. All the geese go gack, gack, gack, gack.

NANA *gets SEREBRYAKOV's drops, sets about putting them on his tongue*.

Day and night, day and night. Don't mind them, Professor. Old people are just like children really – we want someone to feel sorry for us but no one feels sorry for us. You come with me. I'll make us lime-flower tea and I'll rub your feet, and say a little prayer to God for you... Come, come on.

VANYA *looks out at the storm flashing*.

VANYA. I'd love a walk out in that. Anyone? See the sky?

SEREBRYAKOV *is going with NANA. SONYA helps, gathering his things*.

No?

NANA (*going out with SEREBRYAKOV and SONYA*).

I always think about poor Vera – she used to worry all the time about your legs. She would sit with me and cry. Do you remember? Sonya, you would sit with us too but you wouldn't understand.

SEREBRYAKOV (*at the doorway*) Wait. Vanya. Here.

SEREBRYAKOV *takes a watch and holds it out to VANYA*.

VANYA. What.

SEREBRYAKOV. Take it.

VANYA. It's your watch.

SEREBRYAKOV. I know.

VANYA. My sister gave it to you.

SEREBRYAKOV (*shrugs*). I want you to have it.

Pause. VANYA takes it.

Alright?

NANA. That was a lovely thing to do. Come on, this way.

SEREBRYAKOV *goes out with NANA and SONYA. YELENA and VANYA are alone*.

YELENA. I'm so sick of it. I can hardly stay on my feet.

VANYA (*brightly*). You're sick of him and I'm sick of myself! It's a... (*Makes a drunken circular triangular shape in the air.*) perfect parallelagism.

YELENA. God, look at you. You're educated and intelligent. You should be working to reconcile us all, but you do nothing.

VANYA. Yelena, I need you to reconcile me to myself before I can even think about doing any of that.

YELENA. Stop it. Take your hand away. Go away.

MARIYA enters.

Mariya.

VANYA (*he's used to this*). She's asleep.

MARIYA. There's a girl. She's under the wall.

NANA appears and leads MARIYA off.

It's really more her expression than anything else. If I give her my hand I won't be able to leave.

They've gone. VANYA looks out at the sky.

VANYA. Soon the rain will pass. Everything will be clean. Everything will breathe again. But I'll still be trapped here. Day, night, what's the difference? It's all the same to me now – because I've wasted my life. Wasted my love in all the wrong places. Like the sun shining down a deep dark hole. Utterly pointless.

YELENA. Vanya?

He looks at her.

You know what happens every time you start talking to me about love?

VANYA. No. Tell me.

YELENA. I feel completely dead.

VANYA. Well that's not good!

YELENA. Yes – I never know what to say to you. (*Pause.*) Goodnight.

She tries to leave but VANYA grabs her, surprising her. They clatter into some chairs.

VANYA. Oh Yelena, what really kills me? Will I tell you? I don't even care if my life amounts to nothing; it makes no difference

to anyone, but to see you wasting *your* life?! What mad arrangement have you made, in your mind I mean, to justify it?

YELENA. Vanya, you're drunk.

VANYA. So what?

YELENA. Oh get off me! Go find the doctor! Where is he?

YELENA pulls free of VANYA.

VANYA. In my room.

YELENA. Drinking?

VANYA nods.

Yes! Wonderful! What good does drinking do either of you?

VANYA. It kills the days.

YELENA. Of course. Excellent! You were so much nicer when you never drank. You never went around so sad as you do now. It wears us all out...

YELENA goes to leave.

VANYA. Yelena.

YELENA turns to VANYA.

You don't even know how wonderful you are.

YELENA. I've asked you to stop, Vanya. You're doing it on purpose now!

YELENA goes.

VANYA (*to audience*). This is nothing. Our conversations always end like this. Ten years ago I used to meet her at my sister's house. She was seventeen. And I was only thirty-seven. *That's* when I should have... Should have proposed to her then. She probably would have said yes – she wouldn't have known any better.

She'd be my wife now. Storm would have woken her up. She'd come looking for me. And I'd take her in my arms and say 'Shh. I'm here. It's only a storm.' These are the kind of

thoughts that swirl round in my head incessantly now that I'm old.

She never understands what I'm saying. She gets into these long-winded arguments, lecturing me. Like somehow I'm to blame for the dreadful state of her world.

Her husband, the professor. I worked like an ox to keep him going. Keep his money coming in. We squeezed every drop from the estate – me and Sonya. Vegetable oil, dried peas, you name it we sold it. Kept nothing for ourselves. We were proud of his position you see. Made us all feel like somebody. We lived and breathed for him to tell you the truth.

And now? Here he is. Back. Not a penny to his name. Not one page of anything he ever wrote is read by anyone. He's nothing. A soap bubble – pop.

And I was cheated out of my life – for that. For nothing. And here's the funny part – I always thought I was cleverer than him!

ASTROV comes in, barefoot, wearing only his untucked shirt and trousers as though he was sleeping. He holds a nearly empty bottle and two glasses.

ASTROV. Oh just play something for God's sake!

TELEGIN comes in behind him carrying his guitar.

TELEGIN. Sh! People are asleep!

ASTROV. He won't play!

TELEGIN. If you promise to keep your voice down, I'll play very quietly. I'm not really able to play properly you know.

ASTROV. Then what are you always carrying that bloody thing around for?

TELEGIN. It was my father's. It's an affectation really.

ASTROV. Bloody hell. Well affect to play something then.

TELEGIN starts playing gently.

Yes, that's... that's alright! All alone, Vanya? No ladies? *(Stretches out his arms and sings.)* 'No bed for the master, no moon in the sky, oh my love won't you open the door...' I had actually fallen asleep. Bloody rain woke me up. What time is it?

VANYA. The devil knows.

ASTROV. I thought I heard Yelena's voice?

VANYA. She's gone.

ASTROV. Oh. I've seen what you mean by the way.

VANYA. About what.

ASTROV. Her eyes. *(Examines SEREBRYAKOV's medicines.)* Amphetamine. Morphia. Prescriptions from everywhere: Kharkov, Moscow... *(Takes a few amphetamine drops.)* You think he's putting it on?

VANYA. No, he's sick.

ASTROV. What has you so miserable today?

VANYA. Nothing.

ASTROV. It's such sweet torture, mm? To love another man's wife.

VANYA. We're not in love – we're friends, that's...

ASTROV. Friends already?

VANYA. What?

ASTROV. A woman can only become a man's friend in this order – first acquaintance, second lovers, and only after that – friends.

VANYA. You're such a bloody vulgarian.

ASTROV. That's true – when I drink. Because then all of you – all my friends and everybody I know – appear to me as mere insignificant insects – mere microbes. Waffles, play something else for God's sake!

TELEGIN. We're waking the whole house.

ASTROV. Oh play something!

TELEGIN. You will be quiet?

ASTROV. Yes! I promise!

TELEGIN *begins playing softly.*

Vanya.

VANYA. What.

ASTROV. There's no brandy left. When dawn breaks I say we head on over to my place. Stay with me, Vanya. I've a new medical assistant, brews his own spirits. He never says 'Alright' he can only say 'Awight?' He's a total reprobate – they say he killed someone in a card game. (*Gives a little laugh.*) 'Awight?' he says – as he leads me astray...! 'Awight!' I say, and I'm very far from awight. Oh come on, Vanya! Don't be like... (*Sees SONYA in the doorway.*) Excuse me; I've forgotten to...

ASTROV *goes out past SONYA, TELEGIN skulking out with him.*

SONYA. Drunk with the doctor again. You're like two sad old tramps... It's horrible.

The hay's been cut, nothing's been baled, the whole lot's getting soaked in the storm. You leave me to do everything – why are *you* crying?

VANYA. No I'm... You looked so like your mother there for a second. Oh my poor sister. Where is she now? Hm? Dead. If only she knew.

SONYA. Knew what?

VANYA. I don't know.

VANYA *smiles at her, kisses her on the head and leaves.*
SONYA *sits alone for a few moments, the rain coming down outside.* ASTROV *knocks on the door jam. He has his boots, his tie and waistcoat on. He presents himself.*

ASTROV. Now. That's better. Were you looking for me?

SONYA. Don't let my uncle drink any more.

ASTROV. I give you my word. There's nothing *to* drink. I'm going home now anyway.

SONYA. It's raining. Wait till it's bright. We can have breakfast.

ASTROV (*shakes his head*). Storm's going straight over. And please don't ask me to come and see your father any more. I tell him it's gout, he says it's rheumatism. I ask him to lie down; he gets up and goes hiking. Today he wouldn't even speak to me.

SONYA. He's so spoiled. Would you like something to eat?

ASTROV. Yes I would actually.

SONYA. Night-time snacks are my favourite. (*Pulls some things out of the sideboard, including a corked-up half bottle of red wine.*) There's usually something in here. My father's always had great success with women; his whole life and they've all spoiled him. Look, cheese.

They both stand together cutting cheese and bread and munching hungrily.

ASTROV. God, I just realised I haven't eaten anything in two days. (*Uncorks the wine, pouring them both a tumbler.*) You know there's no one here I can speak frankly with, Sonya? You're the only one. Your Uncle Vanya – he's depressed you know. Your grandmother. Your father – God! Your stepmother too. I don't know how you do it. I'd suffocate.

SONYA. What about my stepmother?

They look at each other, both chewing.

ASTROV. What?

SONYA. You said my stepmother – Yelena.

ASTROV. Yelena! Oh don't get me wrong. She's beautiful. She's stunning! But everything about a person should be beautiful. Not just the face. Their soul, their thoughts should

be beautiful. I mean she is beautiful – she is. But Jesus Christ she takes no responsibility for anything. That's not... I mean, maybe I'm being too severe... who am I to judge a creature like that? Ah, I'm getting old. Me and Vanya. Just grumpy old men now. Fed up with life.

SONYA. You're not fed up with life.

ASTROV. Not with life. But this horrible, provincial, you know...

He makes an ugly face – they laugh.

...life! I absolutely despise that kind of life.

SONYA. But your... personal life.

ASTROV. My personal life? Well, God knows there's nothing to speak of there.

He gazes at SONYA. She looks away, afraid of the intensity of the moment.

You know how, if you've ever been lost in the woods at night and you suddenly see a light in the distance? You strike out for it and you don't notice or don't care about the prickly branches in your face, you just go straight towards it?

That's how it is for me – working – I work and work and work and I get stabbed by all the... but there's no light any more. I no longer expect anything really, for myself I mean.

SONYA. Is there no one? I mean...

ASTROV (*dismissively*). Ah! The peasants – they're all afraid of me. And the supposed intelligentsia – I don't bother any more. They sidle up behind you and they say, 'He's a bit strange isn't he? He's a vegetarian, he's always in the forest.' They don't know what to call you so they label you some bloody psychopath!

ASTROV is pouring himself more wine, but SONYA stops him.

SONYA. No, please. No more.

ASTROV. What's wrong?

SONYA. It really doesn't suit you, you know. You normally have such a lovely gentle voice. You're not like anyone else I've ever met.

ASTROV. Aw Sonya...

SONYA. You know what I mean. You're not like ordinary men who go about drinking and playing cards. You hate to see people destroying things – and yet you destroy yourself. I'm asking you not to.

ASTROV. I'll never drink again.

SONYA. Hmph! You're giving me your word on that.

ASTROV (*extends his hand*). My word of honour.

SONYA (*shakes his hand without much confidence*). Alright. Well thank you.

ASTROV. Well that's it! I'm sober now. And that's the way I'll stay. Till I die. (*Takes a watch with a broken strap from his pocket and looks at the time.*) Although it's probably too late for me now. I've worked myself too hard. No feelings. No... I lost a patient, Sonya. During Lent. Died under the chloroform. And you know what the funny thing is?

Pause.

SONYA. Yes?

ASTROV gives a tiny forlorn laugh.

ASTROV. I'm... I'll...

He starts to go.

SONYA. Mikhail?

ASTROV turns, looks at her.

If I had... say a friend, or a younger sister, and say she... that you found out she was in love with you. What would you... I mean, would you...

ASTROV. I wouldn't do anything. I'd just tell her I couldn't... love her, you know. I can't even think straight any more. I'm going to go. Come here.

ASTROV takes both SONYA's hands. She gazes into his face.

Thanks for the grub, and the hospitality and you're such a lovely girl, Sonya. Really.

She looks away bashfully.

(Laughing.) You are! What?

SONYA. Nothing.

ASTROV. What?

SONYA *(laughs)*. Nothing!!

ASTROV. Thank you, alright? Just thank you! That's all!

He kisses the side of SONYA's head platonically. She looks down, almost unable to bear it.

Right – I'm going to go out this way. If I run into your Uncle Vanya I'll never get home. Goodnight.

SONYA is alone.

SONYA. He gives me nothing. He never does. Yet I'm so happy – every time I see him! Ugh, I said to him 'You're so intelligent... you have such a nice voice...' What must he think! 'If I had a sister who liked you...' Ugh! What an idiot! Of course when he talks about love he immediately mentions Yelena – of course. Last Sunday coming out of the church I was behind two old women who didn't know I was there. 'Sonya Alexandrovna' they said. 'She's a nice girl, but such a pity about her face.'

YELENA comes through and opens the window. Dusk is rising in the sky. The rain has stopped.

YELENA. Where's the doctor?

SONYA. Gone home.

YELENA. Oh.

Pause.

Sonya.

SONYA. Mm.

YELENA. How much longer do you plan to be like this with me for?

SONYA. Like what?

YELENA. Like this way – this...

SONYA. I'm not being any way with you. *(Pause.)* What way?

YELENA. It doesn't matter. I just want us to make up.

SONYA. Well that's what I want!

They embrace.

YELENA *(holding SONYA)*. Yes. Good. Thank God.

They part.

SONYA. Is Papa asleep?

YELENA. Of course he isn't. He's in his room. He's not speaking to me now! *(Looking at snacks and wine.)* Who's this for?

SONYA. Mikhail. *(Quickly.)* The doctor. He hadn't eaten all day.

YELENA. Oh let's have some wine.

SONYA. Yes.

YELENA. Drink a toast to each other – share a glass – right. You go.

SONYA gulps half the wine, hands the glass to YELENA, wiping her mouth. YELENA gulps the rest.

SONYA. I have been trying to make it up with you, you know. But I've always felt too ashamed somehow.

SONYA's face crumples; she puts her hand to her eyes.

YELENA. Oh don't cry...

SONYA. No, it's... just me.

YELENA *comforts* SONYA.

YELENA. Oh no. That's alright. Now I'm crying! God.

They laugh, both wiping their eyes.

I know why you're angry. It's perfectly understandable. You think I married your father so I could get ahead.

SONYA. No...

YELENA. No – it's alright – it's what everybody thinks. But I swear to God – I married him because I loved him. Of course I was attracted to him because he was famous and respected – of course – all of that – and yes I thought that was love. I mean now I know – but *at the time* I thought it was. Real love. So please – don't blame me. You've given me that punishing look since the day we got married...

SONYA. Let's just forget about it.

YELENA. You really shouldn't give people that look you know, Sonya – you have no idea how crushing it is. If you don't think someone believes you it's actually impossible to live actually.

SONYA. I'm sorry. I want to be friends. But honestly – are you happy?

YELENA. Of course I'm not happy!

SONYA. Would you be happier, do you think? If your husband was younger?

YELENA. Don't be so naive!! Of course I would!! (*Laughs.*) Go on; ask me anything. Anything you like.

SONYA. Do you like the doctor?

YELENA. The doctor? That's where we're going is it? Yes, very much. And I know how much you do.

SONYA. I have that stupid look on my face, do I? I get it whenever he's here. And when he's gone I still hear him,

I can smell him! (*Self-effacingly.*) I stare out into the night and I can see him there, plain as day!

They laugh.

You don't suppose anyone can hear us do you? We could go to my room. This so embarrassing!!

They laugh.

Tell me – what do you think of him? Tell me something.

YELENA. What can I tell you?

SONYA. You see how clever he is. All the things he can do – there's nothing he *can't* do! Works with his hands – he heals people! And the forest...

YELENA. Well that's because he's – it doesn't matter what he does, whether it's the forest or medicine or... He has talent. He has insight.

SONYA. That's right.

YELENA. His mind is free to imagine...

SONYA. Yes!

YELENA. So that when he plants a sapling he already visualises a fully-grown tree and he understands what that means to someone's future happiness.

SONYA. I know.

YELENA. Can you imagine how horrible his life must be? He has all that potential and how does he spend his day? Trudging through impassable mud on the road – vast distances in blizzards, arriving too late to help some poor, doomed soul in some shed somewhere. No wonder he drinks! He's had thirty years of it!

SONYA. I know.

YELENA *kisses* SONYA.

YELENA. I'd love to see you happy. See you both happy. I've given up on it for myself.

SONYA. You?!

YELENA. I'm just a footnote at the end of your father's life.
And there are no happy endings down in the footnotes, just
optional details – like me. Why are you smiling?

SONYA. I'm sorry it's just... the doctor! I'm sorry!

YELENA *smiles and embraces SONYA.*

YELENA. I'd love to play something.

SONYA. Oh do – please do. We're never going to sleep now!
Play something!

YELENA (*goes to the piano*). Just ask your father if it's alright
will you? Music always gets on his nerves when he's sick.

SONYA. He won't mind.

YELENA. Just ask him. Please. Just to be sure.

SONYA *shakes her head at YELENA and goes. YELENA is
alone. She begins to play. SONYA comes in and watches
YELENA.*

SONYA. Yelena. (*Pause.*) Yelena.

YELENA *stops playing.*

He says no.

YELENA *sits silently for a moment.*

Black.

ACT THREE

*September. Lunchtime. A living room. Upstage, glass doors lead
to a conservatory with ferns and plants. Another door leads to
the hallway, another to the garden.*

VANYA and SONYA are listening while YELENA plays the
piano quietly, picking her way slowly through a tune. She lays
her head on the piano, playing with one hand.

VANYA. Sonya. (*Pause.*) Sonya.

SONYA. Mm?

VANYA. What time is it?

SONYA (*without checking*). Four minutes since the last time
you asked me. A quarter to one.

VANYA. A quarter to one. (*Pause – tries a different voice.*)
'A quarter to one.' (*In a bass voice.*) 'A quarter to one.'
Quarter to one. Quarter to one. Yes. (*Short pause.*) Fifteen
minutes until we hear why the distinguished professor has
instructed us all to gather in the drawing room. (*Short
pause.*) He has something he wishes to announce to the
world at one o'clock.

YELENA (*playing spare notes softly*). Something about his
business affairs.

VANYA (*incredulous*). Business affairs? What business affairs?

SONYA (*warning*). Uncle...

VANYA. What? (*Pause.*) Look at her. Hm? She's almost falling
off the piano stool. Someone should paint her and call it
'Lazy Afternoon,' no, 'Lazy Life Lady'. No. 'Lazy... Lazy
Life'. 'Lazy Afternoon Lady...' No, 'Lady on a Lazy...'

YELENA. Oh shut up! It's your bloody voice droning on and
on. How can I help it? I'm surprised you don't talk yourself

to sleep. (*Hits a discordant chord and gets up.*) I'm actually dying of boredom! I can feel it! (*Points to her face aggressively.*) In here. What the hell is one supposed to do with oneself around here? There's nothing!

SONYA. I could find you plenty to do.

YELENA. Like what?

SONYA. There's a million things that need doing!

YELENA. Oh yes, farm work!

SONYA. Or teaching? Children for miles around here can't read or write you know.

YELENA. No thank you.

SONYA. Help the old people, the sick people. (*A sudden idea.*) Uncle Vanya and I used to always enjoy going to the market to sell flour! That's something we could...

YELENA. Sell flour?! I don't know how to do any of that. Only people in books go out and teach beggars to read and feed sick peasants. You really think that's me?

SONYA. It could be you! You haven't even tried. I bet children would love you. Don't lose heart, Yelena! I know it's hard. You don't know what to do – but look – (*Comes and hugs YELENA.*) we're all doing it to each other. It's contagious! Uncle Vanya has all but retired, it seems.

And I'm no better – here's me hiding in here with both of you, avoiding work, looking for idle chat. Even the doctor, he's practically abandoned his practice. We used to be lucky to see him once a month – now he's here every day and forests be damned. I think you've put a spell on him, actually.

YELENA. *Me?*

VANYA. Absolutely – she's right. You know, I have a feeling you have mermaid blood in your veins. You lure sailors on to the rocks. And we're all drowning in your waters. So let yourself go! For once in your life!

YELENA. Oh shut up, Vanya!

VANYA leaps up and grabs YELENA in a dance. YELENA smiles while they pretend to waltz for a few moments.

VANYA. I know what you're thinking.

YELENA. Really?

VANYA. In a world full of ugliness why has God chosen me to be so handsome?

YELENA. That's exactly what I was thinking. It's because you deserve it. You deserve to be handsome.

VANYA. Well – I can't help it.

YELENA (*to SONYA*). We should have a ball here. Proper dancing. Proper music.

SONYA. And invite who exactly?

YELENA. Well *I* don't know! Someone interesting!

She looks at VANYA, smiling at the idea.

VANYA. Hey, hey, hey – watch it.

YELENA. What?

VANYA. You'll do that to me once too often you know.

YELENA. Do what?

VANYA. Look at me like that.

YELENA turns to SONYA, laughing at VANYA's audacity.

And you do know I'm only joking. You're not a mermaid. You're a giant squid.

YELENA hits VANYA, but continues dancing with him.

And as a token of my sorrow I shall bring you the last roses from the garden. Sad roses, autumn roses.

VANYA goes out.

SONYA (*mimicking VANYA*). Sad roses. Autumn roses.

YELENA laughs. They stand together looking out.

YELENA. September already. How are we going to live through a whole winter here? Where's the doctor?

SONYA. In Vanya's room – working – on his maps. I need to ask you something.

YELENA. What about?

SONYA (*laying her head on YELENA's shoulder*). Oh what about what about what about! (*Despairing.*) You know what about.

YELENA. Sh... There now. I know.

SONYA. I'm so ugly.

YELENA. You're not ugly.

SONYA. I am.

YELENA. Of course you're not! You have lovely hair, such expressive eyes...

SONYA. Lovely hair! Nice teeth! People only say that kind of thing about women who aren't good looking. You know I've been in love with the doctor for six years now? More than I ever loved my own mother? I hear his voice, feel his hands squeezing mine, every time I look at the door I expect him to come in – but when he actually arrives it's like he doesn't even see me. I pray every night for some change – next day I go up to him and I look in his eyes and we start talking but... I mean... I hate myself. Last Sunday even Uncle Vanya took me aside – to ask me what was wrong. I just told him I have a cold, I'll be alright. But everybody knows – they must know.

YELENA. So *he* must know...? The doctor.

SONYA. I don't think he's ever noticed.

YELENA. Well, he's an unusual man. Look, let me speak with him.

SONYA *looks at YELENA sharply*.

No, no I'll be careful. I won't say anything. But I'll... let me... it won't be difficult. I'll find out – he won't even notice I'm doing it. But we have to know – yes or no. And if it's no – he'll have to stop coming here.

SONYA *nods*.

And it'll be easier then, not seeing him every day. He said he wanted to show me some chart or map or something – go and get him – tell him it suits me now.

SONYA. You'll tell me exactly what he says?

YELENA. The whole truth – whatever it is, it's got to be better than the uncertainty you live with now.

SONYA. Yes. Yes. I'll tell him you want to see his charts.

SONYA *goes, but suddenly comes back*.

But sometimes uncertainty and not knowing something can be better than – you know...

YELENA. Really?

SONYA. No. No, I'll get him.

SONYA *goes*. YELENA *is alone*.

YELENA. She tells me her deepest secret – but there's nothing I can do. And no one in the world can help. Because he simply isn't in love with her. I mean you could say – well why doesn't he just bloody marry her anyway? At his age, he'd be lucky to have Sonya! She's bright, she's clever, she's good at the accounts, she hasn't a bad bone in her body. But of course, that's not about any of that, is it? She just wants him to love her.

And you know, I can see it, you know, from her point of view. Living here surrounded by all these grey blobs with all their pointless breakfasts and sleepwalking and napping and into this arrives someone so different – and so alert and alive.

So handsome and interesting and attractive – like waking to find the moon rising in your bedroom window. Of course you lose yourself in him!

It's even happened to me a little, it's perfectly understandable. He's funny. He says interesting things, unexpected things. Who wouldn't find that attractive?

Huh, Uncle Vanya. Says I have mermaid's blood in my veins. 'Let yourself go for once in your life!' Maybe I should. Fly away from all these sleepy faces. And forget I was ever here. Of course, I'm far too much of a coward for that. The doctor comes here every day now. I know why he comes. I should have fallen to my knees in front of Sonya and begged her forgiveness just now. I know why he comes. Sad roses. Autumn roses.

ASTROV stands in the doorway carrying his charts. He watches YELENA for a moment.

ASTROV. Hello.

YELENA. Oh hello. You promised you'd show me.

ASTROV. I'm no artist.

YELENA. No, I'd like to see.

ASTROV. Alright – well you've been warned. (*Starts spreading his maps across a table.*) Where were you born?

YELENA. Petersburg.

ASTROV. You studied there?

YELENA. Yes – music.

ASTROV. At the conservatoire?

YELENA. Yes.

ASTROV. Well that's impressive. I doubt any of this will be that interesting for you.

YELENA. Oh no – it's just I know so little about really living in the country. I mean I've read so many books, I love Turgenev but I've never actually... The reality's a little more...

ASTROV. Real?

YELENA. Yes!

ASTROV puts a few little ornaments on the corners of his map to keep it open.

ASTROV. Vanya lets me work here. I keep all my gear in his room and when I get exhausted – I mean on the point of total collapse – I throw everything in a bag, come out here and work on these. Vanya – and Sonya – they're so good – they indulge me.

YELENA (*smiles*). Aw...

ASTROV (*smiles*). They click away counting on their abacuses, doing their accounts, and I sharpen my pencils and we all sit in silence together and I do these. I always feel so warm and content – it's a simple pleasure really – I don't do it often, maybe once a month. The mapping.

YELENA. It's beautiful.

ASTROV looks at YELENA while she examines the map, drinking her in, her closeness. She looks at him. He remembers himself, looking at the map.

ASTROV. So anyway – this represents the whole area. Here's us here.

YELENA. Where?

ASTROV. Right here. See?

YELENA. Oh yes, there we are.

ASTROV. The dark green and the light green, forest. Half of this map is forest. Anywhere you see these different coloured lines there were wild elk, horses, wild cats.

YELENA. Oh?

ASTROV. Not very big. But bears, antelope, exotic birds, a whole cosmos – of creatures.

YELENA. Really?

ASTROV. Oh yes. These crosses, here? The old hamlets and villages – small farmsteads – and here is where all the heretics used to gather, practise the old religion. They're gone now. So, blue lines here, horned cattle, wild horses. This is all a hundred years ago, right? We're looking at the past here.

He rolls out another map – holds it up.

Now – look – twenty-five years ago, and two thirds of the forest is gone. No wild goats. Some elk. Very little blue at all here. But I'll keep going. Because this...

He rolls out another, covering the first map, weighting it with the ornaments.

This is the present, this is now. There is some green. Not much. The elk have disappeared, no swans now, no grouse. The old settlements have gone, no farms, no monasteries, no mills. In other words this is a picture of steady irreversible decline. Ten more years and the destruction will be complete.

You say 'Well that's progress! Nothing stays the same. No point wanging on about the good old days!' And yes – that's fine if in place of the ruined forests we were seeing decent roads and schools with better educated, healthier people – but look! There's nothing of the sort! Swamps, mosquitoes, mud tracks, typhus, and diphtheria – the same old back-breaking struggle for existence – stagnation and decay. Who can take responsibility for anything when they're hungry and they're sick? If you're trying to save your child from pain and cold you snatch at anything that might keep you warm for a few hours, but without realising it you're destroying the very habitat that sustains you – because you can't think about the future – who has time for that? That's a luxury!

I can see by your face that I've alarmed you. That's not what I...

YELENA. Oh no, it's not that – yes, I mean it is obviously... terrible and it's just... My mind is...

ASTROV. Well of course...

YELENA. And I... I wanted to ask you about something and I'm finding it difficult to know where to begin.

ASTROV. Ask me about what?

YELENA. It's really... harmless. Sit down. You don't have to sit down. It's not... I know this young person and... I'm

going to be just really honest with you and like two friends we can have this chat, alright? And then we just forget we ever spoke about it – alright?

ASTROV. Alright.

YELENA. This matter concerns my stepdaughter Sonya. Do you like her? Yes or no?

ASTROV. Of course I do.

YELENA. Yes of course, but do you like her... as a woman.

ASTROV. What do you mean as a woman?

YELENA. You haven't noticed anything over... time?

ASTROV. No. Should I?

YELENA. Alright. You don't love Sonya, that much is clear. Listen she's in agony about this. So it would be better for everyone if you stopped coming by... so often... it's...

ASTROV. Are you serious? Bloody hell! Look, my days for all that carry-on are over. Anyway even if they weren't, I wouldn't be able to... I mean where would I find the time for all that?

YELENA. Ugghhhh! What an unpleasant and embarrassing conversation! Thank God it's over. Now let's forget it. The weight has lifted. And you should go. You're an intelligent person. I know you understand and...

ASTROV. No, no, I understand. You know, the thing is... If you had said this to me, a month or two ago... Things were... I probably would have given it some thought. But things have... I mean... why do you ask me all this?

YELENA. What do you mean?

ASTROV. I mean, why now?

YELENA. I don't...

ASTROV. You think you're being clever.

YELENA. No I don't.

ASTROV. I mean, suppose Sonya is suffering, because of me, what's it to you?

YELENA. How can you ask me that?

ASTROV. Look, I'm too old. I've seen too much – you can't pretend you don't know.

YELENA. Doctor...

ASTROV. I beg myself not to return, yet here I am – every day – I'm hardly ever at home – I've given up everything else.

So please – don't pretend it doesn't give you any satisfaction – to see me like this.

YELENA. Of course we all like to see you, Doctor. What do you mean 'see you like this'?

ASTROV. Like this! Like some helpless animal lost in the woods at night. But the fox knows exactly where I am, don't you?

YELENA. What fox?

ASTROV. You! And there it is – there's nothing more I can say. But you knew that before I stepped in the room. Before you sent for me.

YELENA. I didn't 'send' for you!

ASTROV. Yes you did.

YELENA. You're out of your mind.

ASTROV. And suddenly now you're shy.

YELENA. I'm not shy, I'm just not what you take me for.

ASTROV. It's alright. I'm going. I won't come back here. But... (*Takes her hand.*) Please... tell me where we can meet. Before someone comes. Just tell me. You know I'm mad about you.

YELENA. Listen, I swear...

ASTROV. Why swear? There's no need to swear anything. Look at you.

YELENA. That's enough now, just... you've forgotten yourself.

ASTROV. Yes. I know. Tell me where we'll meet. Tomorrow. You know it's inevitable. We must see each other.

YELENA searches his eyes, her heart rate rocketing. They kiss as VANYA comes to the door from the garden. He stands in the doorway, holding some roses, watching. YELENA breaks away, she hasn't seen VANYA.

YELENA. Doctor, I'm begging you, please... you have to leave.

She lays her head on his chest. He holds her.

ASTROV. No.

YELENA. Yes.

ASTROV. The forest. Tomorrow. Two o'clock. Say yes. Say you'll come.

YELENA looks at ASTROV then realises VANYA is there. She's mortified.

VANYA. No, no. It's fine. It's alright.

VANYA wipes sweat from his neck with his handkerchief, puts the flowers down on a table.

ASTROV. Ivan! How are you today? You know – the weather is nowhere near as bad as it should be. It was overcast this morning and I thought 'Ohp! We'll have rain!' But look – the sun is shining! A perfect autumn day, the crops will be in great nick! (*He's rolling up his maps.*) Only thing is though – the days are getting shorter. And there's nothing we can do about that.

He goes out. YELENA comes to VANYA.

YELENA. Vanya, promise me. You'll do everything you can; you'll use all your influence to make sure that myself and my husband leave here today. Do you hear me? This very day.

Voices are heard approaching. SEREBREYAKOV, SONYA, TELEGIN and NANA are coming.

You hear me? I must get away from here today. Tell me you'll help me.

VANYA *stands looking at her.*

TELEGIN. I myself am not feeling well either, your Excellency. I haven't been well for days. My head, my tummy...

SEREBRYAKOV. Where the hell is everybody? I hate this house. It's like a damned maze. Twenty-six rooms, anybody wanders off – you don't see them for days! (*Picks a bell from a table and rings it.*) Someone ask Mariya Vasilievna and Yelena Andréevna to come in!

YELENA. I'm here.

SEREBRYAKOV. Alright then, ladies and gentlemen – please – sit down.

SONYA *comes to YELENA.*

SONYA. What did he say?

YELENA. I'll tell you later.

SONYA. It wasn't good. He's not coming any more – that's it, isn't it?

YELENA *nods.*

SEREBRYAKOV (*to TELEGIN*). One can always come to terms with ill health – but you know what'll really kill you? Boredom. I feel like I've fallen out the bottom of the earth and landed on some alien planet. Will you all please sit down! Sonya! Sonya!

SONYA *doesn't respond.*

Can't she hear me? Nana – you too, Nana.

NANA *sits with her knitting.*

Ladies and gentlemen. Friends, Romans, Russians, lend me your ears. (*Laughs.*) What's that from, Waffles?

TELEGIN. What?

SEREBRYAKOV. What's that from?

TELEGIN. What's what from?

VANYA *can't stand it. He starts to go. The others sit, taking their places, chattering quietly.*

VANYA. You probably don't need me, I'm assuming, so I'll just...

SEREBRYAKOV. No! No – on the contrary, Ivan Petrovich – this concerns you. Please sit.

VANYA. What business of yours could possibly concern me?

SEREBRYAKOV. Vanya – I've offended you somehow... Have I annoyed you in some way? If I have – please forgive me.

VANYA. No, just please don't be so bloody condescending. What do you want?

MARIYA *comes in.*

SEREBRYAKOV. And finally – here's *Maman* – ladies and gentlemen. I shall begin. (*Pause.*) Ladies and gentlemen. I have invited you all here today in order to inform you that the Government Inspector General is coming to visit us. (*Pause.*) That's a joke. (*Silence.*) It's a joke! However, joking aside. I have gathered you all here, today, ladies and gentlemen, to ask for your help and advice, and knowing as I do your customary kindness, I hope that I shall receive it.

I am a man of learning, of books, and have always been a stranger to the practical life. I can't survive without guidance from people in the know, and I ask you, Ivan Petrovich, and you too, Ílya Ílych, and you, *Maman*... for your views in this.

The fact is *manet omnes una nox*, that is, one night awaits us all. I'm old, and sick, and I need to put my affairs regarding my property in order. I'm not thinking of myself, my life is already at an end but I have a young wife and an unmarried daughter. I must think of them.

Alright. Here it is. It has become impossible for me to continue living in the country. I was not created for the country. I can't work here. I'm blocked up and I... I can't do it!

MARIYA. I've always said this!

SEREBRYAKOV. I know.

MARIYA. You need the movement and bustle of the city. The salons and the intrigue and the gossip. That's who you are!

SEREBRYAKOV. I know, *Maman*. You know me better than I know myself.

MARIYA. Without that you're...

ASTROV *drifts in and watches from near the doorway.*

SEREBRYAKOV. I know! And there it is! But to live in the city on the means which we are receiving from this estate is impossible. So – what to do?

If, for example, we sell the forest, we get a lump sum, live in the city for a year on the proceeds – for a year or two. But once we sell it – it's gone. And the money's gone! So we must seek out such measures as will guarantee us all a *constant, eternal, fixed* income going forward – and for the *rest of our lives*. I have therefore devised just such a measure and have the honour to submit it for your consideration.

He takes out a piece of paper with some messy notes jotted all over it.

I'm not going to bamboozle you with financial detail – I'll just spell it out in general outline. Our estate yields on average not more than two per cent per annum. However, if we *liquidate* our assets – i.e. the whole estate – and convert it into *cash*, hm? Which can then be converted into stocks and shares – i.e. *ploughed* into the stock exchange, I mean really forcefully, you know *rammed* in there – according to my calculations we will receive easily four or even five per cent per annum! Notwithstanding a lump sum of a few thousand rubles which I would retain – in order to purchase a modest villa in Finland, simply so I might continue my work during the holidays – and where of course you would all be most welcome to visit. Which I hope goes without saying. Now. What do you think?

Pause.

VANYA. Wait a moment... I think my hearing must be failing. Can you repeat what you just said?

SEREBRYAKOV. Convert the money into stocks and shares and with the excess remaining buy a villa in Finland.

VANYA. No, not the part about Finland – I got that. There was something else you said?

SEREBRYAKOV. It's quite simple, Vanya. I propose to sell the estate.

VANYA. That's the bit! Sell the estate, excellent! Brilliant idea. And what would you have me and my mother, Nana, Waffles and Sonya here do with ourselves?

SEREBRYAKOV. Well that's what we're all here to discuss! (*Laughs.*) What do you think I'm doing here?

VANYA. Right, but just bear with me a moment. Up till now I've been under the impression that this estate belongs to Sonya. My late father bought it as a dowry for my sister, Vera. Therefore under the law the estate passed to her daughter, Sonya.

SEREBRYAKOV. Yes, 'under the law', if you want to be pedantic about it, of course the estate belongs to Sonya. No one is disputing that. I am proposing that this is done for Sonya's benefit!

VANYA. Right – because I'm struggling to understand this – although in fairness I do admit I may have lost my reason some time ago.

MARIYA. *Jean*, please don't contradict *Alexandre*. Who else among us has his learning? Who else can know what's best for us? If that's what the professor decides, it's settled.

VANYA. I need a drink of water.

SEREBRYAKOV. We need to be practical! Getting agitated isn't going to help anyone, Vanya. I'm not saying that my plan is ideal. I wish we didn't have to do it. If there's unanimous objection, I may even be obliged to reconsider, but that's what we need to ascertain!

VANYA. Right.

VANYA *pours some water and takes a drink, looking out the window, trying to gather his thoughts.*

TELEGIN. Your Excellency. I think I might be of some assistance here. My brother Grigory Ilyich's wife's brother, perhaps you know him – Konstantin Trofimovich Lakedemonov – he holds a Master's degree from Tübingen. The question of unanimity is one he holds in great regard. You are absolutely correct to pursue its...

VANYA. Hold on a minute, Waffles, we're talking business now – the philosophy can wait. (*To SEREBRYAKOV.*) Actually, here, ask *him*. (*Points to TELEGIN.*) This estate was bought from his uncle.

SEREBRYAKOV. Ask him what?

VANYA. Because he'll tell you – the estate was bought for ninety-five thousand rubles. My father paid only seventy thousand down, with a remaining debt of twenty-five. The estate could only be afforded if I renounced my inheritance...

TELEGIN. This is correct.

VANYA. I signed away my share in favour of my sister, your first wife, whom I passionately loved – alright? – to make it all possible. What's more, I then – stupidly – worked like an dog for twenty years to pay off all of the debt – so in actuality my share of this estate cost me double what it would have cost anybody else – yet I still have absolutely nothing on paper to show for it! Nothing! And you propose to sell it out from under me?!

SEREBRYAKOV. I regret that I started this discussion.

VANYA. The only reason this whole estate is free of debt is because of my personal efforts. *I'm* the only reason it's actually worth selling at all! Except now that I'm too old to do anything about it I'm gonna get thrown out on my ear!

SEREBRYAKOV. Is this just wilful misunderstanding or...? What are you saying?

VANYA. I'm saying that for twenty-five fucking years I have managed this estate, sent you more money than any land agent ever would have, *and* raised your daughter for you in your absence, and during all that time you haven't once ever thanked me.

MARIYA. *Jean!* You will stop this now!

VANYA. And! And in that entire time and even now – I have never received more than two hundred rubles a year! Two hundred rubles! *A year!!* Children in the city get more pocket money than that! And not once has it crossed your mind to add so much as a ruble more.

SEREBRYAKOV. Vanya, for Christ's sake! How was I to know? You could have taken more for yourself, as much as you wanted. I would never have known!

VANYA. You mean why didn't I steal the money? Why didn't I have the initiative to pilfer your account? Well I'm realising now I should have! That would have been the right thing to do – because I wouldn't be a beggar now – facing the street!

MARIYA (*sternly*). *Jean!*

SEREBRYAKOV. No one is facing the street...

TELEGIN (*coming to VANYA, trying to calm him*). Vanya, my old pal, don't do this to yourself. Everything can be discussed. Look, my hands are shaking too. Let's have a cup of tea – we'll all discuss the professor's plans and we can come to a...

VANYA. Twenty-five years I've been stuck in here – like a rat running round a pipe – stuck in here – still living with my mother – never going anywhere...

SEREBRYAKOV. This is impertinence!

VANYA. Blue in the face telling Sonya what a great man you are, how frightfully busy you must be. And your fame and your works and your books. All those nights we should have been resting or meeting people or being sociable or just having some time of our own – no, we wasted them away. God, when I think of it!

TELEGIN. Don't, Vanya, don't. It's not worth it.

SEREBRYAKOV (*angrily*). I don't understand what it is you want!

VANYA. But we'd all been duped, hadn't we? That you were some form of higher being who understood more than we could ever see. But my eyes have been open a long time now, mate! I see it all!

SEREBRYAKOV (*disparaging*). Of course you do...

VANYA. Yes! I do!

SEREBRYAKOV. And what is it, pray tell, that you see? What great insight have you to impart to the world?

VANYA. Oh it's very simple. You lecture everybody about art and politics and life and people but you don't have the faintest understanding about art or real people or the way real people think and feel and need to be loved! All those essays of yours that I struggled to get through, thinking I was stupid because I couldn't make head nor tail of them, I realise now you've been having us all on!

SEREBRYAKOV. This is pointless. There's no point in talking to him like this. I'll be in my room.

VANYA. No, wait, no, you don't get away that easily.

YELENA. Vanya. Please, just... let him go.

VANYA (*barring SEREBRYAKOV's way*). You've ruined my life! Don't you understand that? You've destroyed me!

TELEGIN (*going out*). I can't... I can't... I'm going.

SEREBRYAKOV. What in God's name do you want from me, man? What do you want me to do about your life? What life? If you think this estate is yours – why don't you just take it, have it. You think I need it? I'll be gone in a few years! I have no need of it!

VANYA. What are you talking about? It's not even yours to give me!!

YELENA. I'm leaving now!! (*Shouts.*) Do you hear me? I can't do this!

SEREBRYAKOV. Oh, Lénochka!

VANYA (*walking away from SEREBRYAKOV*). If I'd just gone and lived a normal life – continued with my writing – I could have been another Schopenhauer, another Dostoevsky.

SEREBRYAKOV. Oh yes, of course...

VANYA (*he comes to MARIYA*). Oh Mama, what am I going to do?

MARIYA *takes his hand*. ASTROV *drifts out of the house to the garden*.

MARIYA. You will listen to the professor.

SONYA *leans into NANA*.

We all live under sufferance. I'm not going to beg.

SEREBRYAKOV. Listen. Mariya. No one has to beg for anything. This is a proposal. It's a discussion...

MARIYA. Yes, I know what it is. Please, Vanya. Some decorum.

VANYA. Decorum?

MARIYA. Decorum!! Yes! Decorum!! To think you had the good fortune to be born a man – a human being with agency and respect, and what have you done with it? Sweet damn all! What I wouldn't have done with that freedom! The time to pull your boots on and fight for your rights was long before this. That day is long passed, so you choose to blame everybody else. But you're too vain to even see that. So don't ask me what to do. I don't know. I have no idea.

MARIYA *picks up her things and goes*.

Silence.

VANYA. Alright. No, it's alright. I know what to do. (*To SEREBRYAKOV*.) I know what it is. You think you're just going to forget about me, don't you? You'll wipe your hands of all of us and be gone. That's what you think, isn't it?

VANYA *goes*.

SEREBRYAKOV. 'Another Schopenhauer'! That's all we need! I hear him every night you know – he's in the room right below me – shouting in his sleep. I offered him, 'Move into a room in the village – I'll pay for it.' 'Move into one of the barns' I said to him. 'We'll fix it up.' But oh no – not good enough. Nothing's good enough. So that's it. *I'm moving out*. It's done, it's settled.

YELENA. Yes – we're leaving here today. We have to pack. We have to do it now.

SONYA. Papa. You don't understand. It's just that Uncle Vanya... and me too... we're just both... I suppose it's just that neither of us have ever...

SEREBRYAKOV. I can't help it if the man is a non-entity, Sonya. I never forced him to achieve nothing! He's managed that all by himself.

SONYA. But Papa, it's just... Uncle Vanya, *Grandmaman* and me too – we copied out your papers for you, translated them for you, corrected them...

SEREBRYAKOV....No one needed to correct them...

SONYA....We annotated them, bound them for publication...

SEREBRYAKOV. I could've got anyone to do that! Why didn't you just...?

SONYA. Well no we... As soon as our estate work was complete we were straight back in here – I mean we *wanted* to. The papers were all over the floor – I'm not saying it very well. I'm just asking you to be compassionate.

SEREBRYAKOV. Compassionate?

SONYA. Yes – show some compassion!

SEREBRYAKOV. Don't tell me I don't have compassion, Sonya! It's too late! We have to be practical. No one ever wants to face the truth in this house. That's the...

YELENA. *Alexandre* – for God's sake go and explain it to him.

SEREBRYAKOV. I've explained it! Jesus Christ! Someone else needs to tell him. Sonya, you realise I'm doing this for you too. You do realise that? You tell him. There's no way out – unless we all want to putrefy – and mummify together in this tomb! Is that what he wants? Is that what you want for yourself, Sonya?

Pause.

Sonya?

YELENA. Don't make Sonya do it! Go to Vanya!

SEREBRYAKOV. Me go to him?

YELENA. Yes you! Who else! Just do it – talk with him!

SEREBRYAKOV. Alright – don't get upset! I'll explain it again. If anyone thinks it'll help. I'll go to him.

He follows VANYA out.

YELENA. Be gentle to him. *Alexandre. Alexandre?*

YELENA *goes out after* SEREBRYAKOV.

(Off.) Be kind and understanding – let him calm down.

SEREBRYAKOV *(off)*. No one understands more than me, Yelena – that's the problem – I've been *too* understanding! For too long!

NANA *comes to* SONYA.

NANA. Don't mind them, my little chuck. The geese gack gack gack and nobody minds. So they stop. They stop. Look at your hands shaking. They feel as though you've been out in the snow. Some lime tea and raspberry tea and everything will be right as rain. My poor little orphan girl. Doesn't Nana always make it better?

Shouting is heard from offstage, VANYA is saying, 'But I have something to show you!' SEREBRYAKOV is shouting 'Yelena!' YELENA is shouting, 'Vanya! No! No!' VANYA is calling, 'No, Honestly! It'll only take a second, come back!', etc...

Oh listen to them, the silly geese. The devil will find them all at this rate.

A gunshot rings out. YELENA is screaming. SONYA stands, startled.

Oh my lord...

SEREBRYAKOV runs in.

SEREBRYAKOV. Stop him. Someone stop him. He's gone mad.

YELENA and VANYA come through, fighting, stumbling and falling. MARIYA comes to the doorway, her hands to her face, screaming.

YELENA. Give it to me! Vanya! Give it to me at once!

VANYA. Let me go! Yelena! Let me go!

YELENA falls, VANYA frees himself.

Where is he? Where is he? There you are!!!

VANYA fires a pistol at SEREBRYAKOV. Screams erupt in the room. A vase shatters but SEREBRYAKOV isn't injured.

VANYA fires again but the gun only clicks. He tries again, but only gets a click. VANYA approaches SEREBRYAKOV, about to hit him with the gun. SEREBRYAKOV cowers.

VANYA lowers the gun.

Oh to hell with it. To hell with you all.

YELENA. Take me away from here. Take me away or kill me.

But I can't stay here. I can't.

VANYA stands, bereft.

VANYA. Sonya.

SONYA reaches for the pistol, taking it from him.

Oh Sonya. What am I going to do?

Black.

ACT FOUR

Dusk. Later in the evening of the same day. A high-ceilinged drawing room which has evolved into the estate office.

A large table by the window stacked with ledgers and correspondence. Another writing desk which SONYA uses. High shelves with books and estate records. A smaller table ASTROV uses for his cartography – with a jar of pencils, paints, rulers, etc.

There is a starling in a birdcage and a large, incongruous, very old, map of Africa dominates one wall.

There's a huge sofa with some blankets folded on it. A door with glass panels leads to the main hallway, another leads to a series of anterooms, glimpsed beyond, containing boot racks, walking sticks, gardening tools, coats hanging up, etc. A mat has been laid here for people to wipe their feet.

VANYA also uses this room to sleep in. And the more one looks, the more one sees his personal items strewn about.

TELEGIN and NANA are sitting together, winding yarn for knitting. The sun is setting through the windows. A few candles flicker in the room. The scene should become gradually darker as night falls. By the end, the room is lit only by candlelight.

TELEGIN (*restlessly looking over his shoulder*). Is this going to take much longer?

NANA (*couldn't care less*). Nearly done.

TELEGIN. We're going to miss our chance to say goodbye!

NANA. I said we're nearly finished, hold still!

TELEGIN. Apparently they're headed for Kharkov – Kharkov of all places!

NANA. They must be desperate.

TELEGIN. They are! I heard her – Yelena – shouting in their room. Said she won't stay here one minute longer. 'Send for our things later!' She said.

NANA (*unimpressed*). What 'things'? Really...

TELEGIN. It just wasn't to be. They were never meant to live here. It wasn't predestined. Or else it *was* predestined, but *this* is what was predestined. Not that.

NANA *looks at him*.

NANA. What are you talking about?

TELEGIN. Sorry. I can never stop talking when I'm upset. You know that.

NANA. Ah it's better for everyone! He starts too many fights, that one – the professor. It's an absolute disgrace. And that's all.

TELEGIN. Kharkov. I hate Kharkov. And the people! It's like the living dead.

NANA. Good enough for them. And we can get back to the old ways, Ílya Ílyich, breakfast at six, dinner at noon, and in the evening we'll sit down to a light supper. Everything in its proper order again. The way normal people live! Like Christians live! It's been far too long since we had noodles. It's really a sin.

TELEGIN. Ah noodles! Now you're talking!

Pause. TELEGIN looks down, ashamed.

NANA. What's the matter?

TELEGIN. Hm?

NANA. What's that look for?

TELEGIN. Oh nothing. I was just remembering something the shopkeeper in the village said to me this morning. I had forgotten my wallet. He was so rude about it. 'You were always a sponger,' he said.

NANA. What?!

TELEGIN. Yes – he said we're all spongers up here, living off the work of others. Said we should all be thrown out. Really hurt me the way he said it.

NANA. I hope you put him in his place.

TELEGIN. I was too embarrassed to tell you the truth; no one came to my defence so I just left.

NANA. What an ignorant pig. We're all living off God's charity anyway. Shopkeepers most of all! How dare he? Nobody here has lived an idle life. Sonya never stops. Vanya has almost killed himself with work. Where is Sonya?

TELEGIN (*gets up and goes to the window, looking out*). Last I saw, she was with the doctor, looking for Vanya.

NANA. Come here. Tell me. What did you do? With the pistol?

TELEGIN. I broke it up. Stashed it all over the cellar. It never happened, alright?

NANA. Well of course! Unbelievable.

A door slams out in the anteroom.

VANYA (*off*). Will you leave me alone, please?

VANYA comes through followed by ASTROV who hangs by the door when he sees the others, not wanting to alarm them.

(*Unable to face TELEGIN and NANA.*) Oh God, out, out!

TELEGIN. We're going – it's alright.

NANA. Gack gack gack...

TELEGIN and NANA make their way out.

VANYA. I've asked you to leave me alone.

ASTROV. Listen, nothing would give me more pleasure. (*Aggravated – hissing, trying not to shout.*) I'm not even supposed to be here!! But you have something belonging to me and if you think I'm...

VANYA. I don't have anything of yours.

ASTROV. Vanya, I'm keeping my temper, I can't *be* here you understand me?! Give what you took and I'll be gone.

VANYA. I don't have it – whatever you think I have. I don't have it.

ASTROV. Right then, I'm going nowhere. If you force me I'll have to take it from you – I mean physically.

ASTROV *goes after VANYA who darts between the furniture.*

VANYA. Alright.

ASTROV. I mean it. I'll tie you up and search you. You think I'm joking?

VANYA. Do what you want.

VANYA *surrenders – holding up his arms.* ASTROV *searches VANYA's pockets.*

I've made such a total fool of myself!! Even if I'd hit him it wouldn't be so bad. But to miss him from three feet away – twice!

ASTROV. You'd have had better luck shooting yourself.

VANYA. And what's worse – no one does a thing about it! No one attempts to arrest me because they think I'm sick in my head. They think that that I'm... pitiful. (*Beat.*) I saw you – with her in your arms.

ASTROV *stops searching VANYA, finding nothing.*

ASTROV. That's right and you know what I have to say to you about that? (*Blows a raspberry.*)

VANYA. Mother Earth is mad for sustaining the pair of you.

ASTROV. Again I say – (*Blows a raspberry.*) Anyway, don't flatter yourself. (*Starts looking round the room.*) No one thinks you're mad. Everybody just thinks you're an idiot. One who's been fatally starved of love. In other words you are completely normal.

VANYA. This is worse than any physical pain, you know. The shame. What am I going to do now? I mean, what the hell can I do?

ASTROV (*looking through drawers, under papers*). There's nothing you can do.

VANYA. Jesus. There must be something. I'm forty-seven years old. If I live till I'm sixty, that's another twelve...

ASTROV. Thirteen...

VANYA....thirteen years! How can I live through thirteen more years of this? How do you fill up thirteen fucking years?! (*Wipes away tears.*) Just think if somehow you could wake up on some clear tranquil morning and everything – all your past – was forgotten and you could just start to live a new life.

ASTROV. Oh come on, Vanya! You don't get a new life. Old codgers like you and me? We're stuck here now. This *is* our life. Our situation is hopeless.

VANYA. Don't say that.

ASTROV. I'm only telling you the truth.

VANYA. Give me something will you? My head is going like a train.

ASTROV (*shouts*). I said stop it, Vanya!

VANYA. I'm sorry.

ASTROV. Come here.

ASTROV *comes to VANYA and holds him.*

Listen. In a hundred, or two hundred years – this what I always think about – I think about those people – a hundred years from now, they'll have figured it all out. They'll be looking back on us and they'll say, how sad it is to think all those people were so unhappy. But you and me? Right now? Here's what we can hope for. Are you listening?

VANYA *nods.*

When you and I and Ílya Ílych and Nana and your mum are all slumbering – in our graves – we'll be visited by such pleasant visions we won't even realise we're dreaming! How nice that will be, eh? Hm?

VANYA *nods*.

You see, you and I are the only two intelligent people who ever lived around here, Vanya. That's half our trouble! And I really feel like in the last, what, ten years or so, we've let this horrible provincial small stupid life out here really get in on us. And kill us in a way. And...

But hey, come here, look at me – don't start distracting me with all this yak yak yak – give me back what you took from me.

VANYA. I haven't.

ASTROV. Vanya, you have taken a whole bottle of morphine from my bag. If you really want to do yourself in – walk out there into the forest and put a bullet in your brain, but don't do it with my medicine. They'll think I gave it to you and I'll be struck off. It's enough that I'll have to do your post-mortem without it being my last job.

SONYA *comes in*.

VANYA. I don't have it! I swear to God!

ASTROV. Sonya – I'm supposed to be gone hours ago but your uncle has taken a bottle of morphine from my bag. It's already getting dark, please ask him to give it back will you?

SONYA. Give it back this minute! Why would you frighten us like that? Come on! I'm at least as unhappy as you, probably even more so, but I'm not giving up!

They laugh.

I'll endure it to the bitter end and I'm not doing it on my own, so you better hang on with me – or I'll kill you! (*Kisses him.*) Oh Uncle Vanya. For me. Give it back.

VANYA *takes the medicine from his underpants and hands it to ASTROV.*

VANYA. Keep me busy won't you, Sonya? You'll give me something to do.

SONYA. I promise. As soon as everyone is gone – we'll sit down to work, the two of us, just like always, alright? There's an absolute ton of invoices – for every account. We've never let it pile up like this in our whole lives!

VANYA *and SONYA laugh a little together.*

ASTROV (*putting his things away*). Well, I better...

YELENA *comes in*. ASTROV *looks at her. She looks at ASTROV for a moment, unprepared to see him, but she gathers herself quickly.*

YELENA. Vanya. We're... we're leaving. *Alexandre* wants to see you before we go.

VANYA. Oh God...

SONYA. Do go. Make your peace with him, Vanya. Come on, I'll go with you.

VANYA. Jesus Christ. What a day.

SONYA *goes out with VANYA*. YELENA *and ASTROV are alone for a moment.*

YELENA. Right, well, I'm leaving, so...

She goes and shakes hands with ASTROV.

ASTROV (*holding her hand*). Don't go.

YELENA (*shakes her head*). You promised me you'd leave.

ASTROV. I know. I'm leaving now. Please don't take fright. Is it really so terrible? To be loved?

YELENA (*fights the pain of her emotions*). Yes.

ASTROV. Stay one more day. See me tomorrow. Come to the forest.

YELENA. No. It's already been decided. That's why I can look at you so fearlessly. But I will ask you one thing. Please think better of me than you do. I'm more than you take me for and I would like you to respect me.

ASTROV. Respect you? How can I respect you? You have no aim in life! You do absolutely nothing to occupy your attention – so it may not be today or tomorrow, but sooner or later you'll have to give in to this feeling – it's inevitable. Better that you give in to it here – in the bosom of nature – at least the autumn is beautiful here. Don't live to regret everything in a dump like Kharkov! Out here, we have the forest, all these quaint old run-down estates; out here at least we can dream we are in a Turgenev novel...

YELENA. Oh stop being so absurd. You make me so angry, Dr Astrov, but all the same, I do want you to know that I will remember you with pleasure. You are an interesting, original person. We'll never see each other again, so why bother keeping it a secret? I was actually quite smitten with you – for a time – so there we are. Let's shake hands and part as friends. And remember me kindly. Alright?

ASTROV nods. They shake on it. She breaks away, but doesn't leave, rather picking something up off a desk, examining it, realising it's dirty, putting it down, rubbing her hand on her dress.

ASTROV. You know, it's so strange. I look at you and I see a well-intentioned, warm-hearted person, yet everywhere you go you wreak havoc!

YELENA. No I don't!

ASTROV. You do! You don't mean it, but no sooner do you arrive and everyone who was working here, busy with something, creating something, everyone abandons everything to attend you – and your husband – and all your various dissatisfactions.

YELENA. Oh please.

ASTROV. Yes! Both of you. You've infected everybody with your idleness, including me! I haven't done a damn thing this whole month. People are sick; the peasants let their animals graze on my land; everything I've planted has been destroyed...

YELENA. That's hardly my fault, Doctor!

ASTROV. Part of me wonders if you had stayed here how long it would be till our devastation is total.

YELENA *looks at* ASTROV.

I'd be finished within a few months. Well there it is. 'Our revels now are ended.'

YELENA (*stands thoughtfully*). I want to take something to remember you by, Doctor. May I?

ASTROV *gestures to his desk. But YELENA approaches him, taking a pencil from his breast pocket.*

This pencil? Is this the one you use?

ASTROV. Yes.

YELENA *takes it.*

YELENA. It's so strange, isn't it? Just as we come to know each other, suddenly we must never see each other again.

ASTROV. It's the way with everything. Will you allow me to kiss you – before Uncle Vanya comes? Just to say goodbye?

He comes closer.

Is that alright? Can I?

YELENA *doesn't move. Looking down. ASTROV moves to kiss her, as his lips touch her cheek she moves away.*

YELENA (*she looks around*). For once in my life!

She embraces ASTROV. They hold each other in a long silent moment. YELENA releases her emotions, her body sobbing silently into ASTROV's breast.

ASTROV (*quietly*). Shhh...

YELENA. People are coming. I have to go.

ASTROV. Yes.

YELENA *moves away, wiping tears from her cheeks. Voices are coming down the hall. SEREBRYAKOV comes in,*

followed by MARIYA, carrying a book. TELEGIN, VANYA and SONYA follow.

SEREBRYAKOV. There you are! Right. Well. Look it's been decided. We're all going to leave this all behind us. It's been a stressful time and a stressful day and I've been turning this all over in my mind and I dare say it's inspired me – I feel a new paper coming on, Mariya Vasilievna! Yes! A kind of guide as to how one should live one's life.

MARIYA. How wonderful!

SEREBRYAKOV. I've accepted Vanya's apologies. And I...
(Turns to VANYA.) I ask you to forgive me too. There it is, alright?

VANYA and SEREBRYAKOV *kiss three times.*

VANYA. So we'll just... go back to the way it was – I'll send you exactly the same as before, alright? And we'll...

SEREBRYAKOV. Goodbye.

VANYA. Alright?

SEREBRYAKOV (*kissing MARIYA's hand*). Maman...

VANYA. Is that...? I mean...

MARIYA (*kisses SEREBRYAKOV*). Alexandre. Please have your photograph taken in the city – I want to see you both looking fine and urbane and... (To YELENA.) You make sure he does now. (To SEREBRYAKOV *with sudden candour*.) What are we going to do?

YELENA *embraces SONYA.*

SEREBRYAKOV. Oh Maman. It's all for the best.

TELEGIN. Goodbye, your Excellency. Don't forget us, alright?

SEREBRYAKOV (*kissing SONYA, shaking ASTROV's hand*). Listen. I thank you all for the pleasure of your company. I do respect your way of thinking and your enthusiasms and your energy for things, but permit an old man to make one observation with his parting words. We must, all of us, ladies

and gentlemen; we must be practical and face up to the practicalities. Now! My best wishes to you all.

SEREBRYAKOV *goes out followed by MARIYA and SONYA. VANYA takes YELENA's hand and presses his forehead to her fingers.*

VANYA. I'll probably never see you again now.

YELENA (*moved*). Vanya. Dear sweet Vanya.

She kisses him on the forehead. He closes his eyes.

She goes.

ASTROV. I'll tell you what, Waffles. You couldn't ask someone to bring my stuff round would you?

TELEGIN. Of course.

TELEGIN *goes out. VANYA and ASTROV are alone.*
ASTROV *sets about clearing his maps and equipment off his table.*

ASTROV. You not going out to see them off?

VANYA. No. I can't. (*Looks round.*) I need something to... you know, something to do.

VANYA *goes and starts rummaging through the papers and ledgers.*

ASTROV. Well that's it. They're gone. Professor's relieved I'd say. You won't see him back here for a very long time I should think. If ever.

NANA *comes in.*

NANA. They're gone.

She sits in an armchair and retrieves her knitting. VANYA stands looking at a recent ledger. ASTROV is packing his stuff away, fastening his case of art materials. SONYA comes in.

SONYA. They're gone. (*Blesses herself and wipes her eyes with a hankie.*) Right! Uncle Vanya. Where were we?

VANYA. January... February...

SONYA. It feels like forever since we sat here together. Oh look there's no ink!

SONYA goes to the cupboard to get ink for the inkwell.

MARIYA comes in slowly, looking about and listening as though she expects SEREBRYAKOV to come back.

MARIYA. They're gone.

MARIYA takes her book and sits but can't concentrate. She stares at the floor, stares out. SONYA looks through her accounts.

SONYA. First thing, Vanya, we can start writing out these ones. We got a letter from the factor this morning asking us for our invoices. I can't believe none of these have been sent. Let's start here, you do the first, I'll do the next one and so on... can you see?

VANYA *(starts writing)*. Mm-hm... 'Account... Mister...'

SONYA. I feel really sad now they're gone you know.

SONYA and VANYA write in silence. NANA yawns.

NANA. I'm ready for the hills.

ASTROV sits watching them all. He's reluctant to go. Finally he gets up.

ASTROV. Pens scratching in the silence. The crickets are singing. All is warm and cozy. *(Laughs.)* I just don't want to leave! Well. All that's left to do is say goodbye. Goodbye, table. Goodbye, friends.

NANA. Why are you always fussing about? Stay! Sit down!

ASTROV. I can't. I have an obligation.

VANYA. 'Which leaves an outstanding balance of two rubles and seventy-five kopeks...'

TELEGIN comes in.

TELEGIN. Doctor.

ASTROV. Yes that's...

TELEGIN. Let me give you a hand.

ASTROV. Oh thanks.

TELEGIN starts carelessly folding ASTROV's charts.

(A little too sharply.) Oh no – I don't want to bend those.

TELEGIN. Oh, I...

ASTROV takes them.

ASTROV. I'll keep them rolled up. Keeps them flat.

TELEGIN. Oh of course. I'm not thinking. Sorry about that.

ASTROV. No, I'm sorry. Just, you know, works in progress.

TELEGIN. I'll leave those to you, then!

TELEGIN takes some of ASTROV's stuff out.

ASTROV. Thanks. Thanks, Waffles. Right. Well...

SONYA. When will we see you again?

ASTROV. I imagine it won't be until next summer now. It's hardly possible in the winter and... though of course, if there's an emergency or you need me, just let me know and I'll... I'll come.

He shakes hands with SONYA.

Thank you for all the meals and the hospitality and... well thanks for everything.

He goes and kisses NANA on the head.

Cheerio, Nana.

NANA. You're going without any tea?!

ASTROV. I don't want any, Nana, really.

NANA. A drop of vodka then? For the long road ahead.

ASTROV. Well... Maybe I...

NANA. I knew, you see!

NANA goes out. ASTROV stands there a little awkwardly.
Finally thinks of something to say.

ASTROV. My old horse, Belka, back at the stable at home.
She's gone lame.

VANYA. Oh no... poor old Belka.

ASTROV. Mm. Not sure what I'll do with her now.

VANYA. Bring her down to the smith at Rozhdestveno.

ASTROV. Yes. I'll have to. See what he says. Can't be helped.
Can you imagine the heat in Africa right now? (Short pause.)
Vanya?

VANYA. Hm?

ASTROV. The heat in Africa. Right this minute.

VANYA. What about it?

ASTROV. Must be absolutely unbearable.

VANYA. Yes, can you imagine?

ASTROV....yes...

NANA comes in with a tumbler, half full of vodka, and
a piece of bread and cheese.

NANA. Now.

ASTROV. Oh! Your good health.

ASTROV swallows the vodka.

NANA. Eat something,

ASTROV (coughing). No I couldn't. Thanks, Nana, that'll do
me now. (To NANA, who is putting the tray down.) No, no,
don't see me out. There's no need. (To MARIYA.) Mariya
Vasilievna.

MARIYA. Doctor.

SONYA brings a candle to see ASTROV out.

ASTROV (to SONYA). Alright?

SONYA. Hm? Yes!

ASTROV smiles at SONYA. She looks down and leads him
out. He follows her.

NANA sits in her armchair. VANYA writes.

VANYA. 'Second of February, Lenten oil, twenty funts,
buckwheat meal...'

Pause.

NANA (listens). He's gone.

Pause. SONYA comes in. She places her candle on the table.
NANA and MARIYA watch her surreptitiously.

MARIYA. Sonya.

MARIYA holds out her hand. SONYA comes and holds
MARIYA's hand for a moment – a little reassuring squeeze
from MARIYA.

VANYA (calculating). Which makes... fifteen rubles and
twenty-five kopeks...

SONYA returns to her work.

NANA (yawning). Oh my goodness...

TELEGIN comes in. He picks up his guitar and quietly starts
strumming. VANYA gets up and rubs his face. He goes to
where SONYA sits and stands near her.

VANYA. Oh Sonya.

He playfully, softly, bounces his fist on her shoulder. He
blows air through his mouth.

God, I just feel so completely...

Pause.

SONYA. I know. What can we do? We have to live. We have days
and days and days ahead of us. Endless evenings. And we'll
bear it all with good grace. We'll do our work and we'll
support everyone who relies on us. We'll do it now and

continue to do it till we're old, and we'll accept our time of dying and afterwards we'll say, yes we suffered, yes there were times we wept and times when we could hardly keep going.

And God will smile on us. And you and I will see, Uncle Vanya, we'll see that life is radiant and beautiful and dignified and we'll look back on these unhappy moments and we'll feel nothing but compassion and we'll smile – and we'll take our rest. (*Looks at VANYA.*) I believe that, Vanya, I do!

She puts her arms round VANYA's waist and her head on his tummy while he looks down at her, smiling sadly.

We'll hear the angels. The whole sky will be full of diamonds and we'll see all the evil in the world, and all the suffering and pain, all engulfed by the mercy that's going to fill up the whole world. And our lives will be as sweet and gentle as a caress. I believe it. I do. And I know, Uncle Vanya, that you have yet to see happiness in this life. I know. But just you wait. And then you'll see. We will rest. We'll rest.

A watchman quietly rings the hour on a bell somewhere off in the distance. TELEGIN plays gently. MARIYA writes in her book and NANA knits.

We'll rest.

Slow fade.