Uncle Vanya

Anton Chekhov

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Characters

- ALEXANDER SEREBRYAKOV, *a retired professor*
- HELENA, *his wife, twenty−seven years old*
- SONYA, *his daughter by a former marriage*
- MME. VOYNITSKAYA, *widow of a privy councilor, and mother of Serebryakov's first wife*
- IVAN (VANYA) VOYNITSKY, *her son*
- MICHAEL ASTROV, *a doctor*
- ILYA (WAFFLES) TELEGIN, *an impoverished landowner*
- MARINA, *an old nanny*
- A WORKMAN

The scene is laid on SEREBRYAKOV'S *country estate*

ACT I

A country house on a terrace. In front of it a garden. In an avenue of trees, under an old poplar, stands a table set for tea, with a samovar, etc. Some benches and chairs stand near the table. On one of them is lying a guitar. Near the table is a swing. It is three o'clock in the afternoon of a cloudy day.

MARINA, *a stout, slow old woman, is sitting at the table knitting a stocking.*

ASTROV *is walking up and down near her.*

MARINA. [*Pouring some tea into a glass*] Take a little tea, my son.

ASTROV. [*Takes the glass from her unwillingly*] Somehow, I don't seem to want any.

MARINA. Then will you have a little vodka instead?

ASTROV. No, I don't drink vodka every day, and besides, it's too hot now. [*A pause*] Tell me, Nanny, how long have we known each other?

MARINA. [*Thoughtfully*] Let me see, how long is it? Lord — help me to remember. You first came here, into these parts — let me think — when was it? Sonya's mother was still alive — it was two winters before she died; that was eleven years ago — [*thoughtfully*] perhaps more.

ASTROV. Have I changed much since then?

MARINA. Oh, yes. You were handsome and young then, and now you're an old man and not handsome any more. You drink now, too.

ASTROV. Yes, ten years have made me another man. And why? Because I'm overworked. Nanny, I'm on my feet from dawn till dusk. I know no rest; at night I tremble under my blankets for fear of being dragged out to visit some one who is sick; I've toiled without repose or a day's freedom since I've known you; could I help growing old? And then, existence here is tedious, anyway; it's a senseless, dirty business, this life, and gets you down. Everyone about here is eccentric, and after living with them for two or three years one grows eccentric oneself. It's inevitable. [*Twisting his moustache*] See what a long moustache I've grown. A foolish, long moustache. Yes, I'm as eccentric as the rest, Nanny, but not as stupid; no, I haven't grown stupid. Thank God, my brain isn't addled yet, though my feelings have grown numb. I want nothing, I need nothing, I love no one, unless it is yourself alone. [*He kisses her head*] I had a nanny just like you when I was a child.

MARINA. Don't you want a bite of something to eat?

ASTROV. No. During the third week of Lent I went to the epidemic at Malitskoe. It was an outbreak of typhoid fever. The peasants were all lying side by side in their huts, and the calves and pigs were running about the floor among the sick. Such dirt there was, and smoke! Unspeakable! I slaved among those people all day, not a crumb passed my lips, but when I got home there was still no rest for me; a switchman was carried in from the railroad; I laid him on the operating table and he went and died in my arms under chloroform, and then my feelings that should've been deadened awoke again, my conscience tortured me as if I had killed the man. I sat down and closed my eyes — like this — and thought: will our descendants one or two hundred years from now, for whom we're clearing the way, remember to give us a kind word? No, Nanny, they'll forget us.

MARINA. Man is forgetful, but God remembers.

ASTROV. Thank you for that. You've spoken the truth.

Enter VOYNITSKY *from the house. He has been asleep after dinner and looks rather dishevelled. He sits down on the bench and straightens his fancy tie.*

VOYNITSKY. H'm. Yes. [*A pause*] Yes.

ASTROV. Have you been asleep?

VOYNITSKY. Yes, very much so. [*He yawns*] Ever since the Professor and his wife have come, our daily life seems to have jumped the track. I sleep at the wrong time, drink wine, and eat all sorts of fancy cooking for luncheon and dinner. It isn't wholesome. Sonya and I used to work together and never had an idle moment, but now Sonya works alone and I only eat and drink and sleep. Something is wrong.

MARINA. [*Shaking her head*] This house is topsy−turvy! The Professor gets up at noon, the samovar is kept boiling all the morning, and everything has to wait for him. Before they came we used to have dinner at one o'clock, like everybody else, but now we have it at seven. The Professor sits up all night writing and reading, and

suddenly, at two o'clock, there goes the bell! Heavens, what's that? The Professor wants some tea! Wake the servants, light the samovar! Lord, how topsy−turvy!

ASTROV. Will they be here much longer?

VOYNITSKY. [*Whistles*] A hundred years! The Professor has decided to make his home here.

MARINA. Look at this now! The samovar has been on the table for two hours, and they're all out walking!

VOYNITSKY. All right, don't get excited; here they come.

Voices are heard approaching. SEREBRYAKOV, HELENA, SONYA, *and* TELEGIN *come in from the depths of the garden, returning from their walk.*

SEREBRYAKOV. Superb! Superb! What beautiful scenery!

TELEGIN. They are wonderful, your Excellency.

SONYA. Tomorrow we're going into the forest preserve. Want to come, papa?

VOYNITSKY. Ladies and gentlemen, tea is ready.

SEREBRYAKOV. Won't you please be good enough to send my tea into the study? I still have some work to finish.

SONYA. I am sure you'll love the forest preserve.

HELENA, SEREBRYAKOV, *and* SONYA *go into the house.* TELEGIN *sits down at the table beside* MARINA.

VOYNITSKY. There goes our "learned scholar" on a hot, sultry day like this, in his overcoat, galoshes, carrying an umbrella and wearing gloves!

ASTROV. He's trying to take good care of his health.

VOYNITSKY. How lovely Helena is! How lovely! I have never in my life seen a more beautiful woman.

TELEGIN. Do you know, Marina, that as I walk in the fields or in the shady garden, as I look at this table here, my heart swells with unbounded happiness. The weather is enchanting, the birds are singing, we are all living in peace and contentment — what more could the soul desire? [*Takes a glass of tea.*] Much obliged to you — much obliged.

VOYNITSKY. [*Dreamily*] Such eyes — a glorious woman!

ASTROV. Come, Ivan, tell us something.

VOYNITSKY. [*Indolently*] What do you want me to say?

ASTROV. Haven't you any news for us?

VOYNITSKY. No, it is all stale. I am just the same as usual, or perhaps worse, because I've become lazy. I don't do anything now but croak like an old raven. My mother, the old magpie, is still chattering about the emancipation of women, with one eye on her grave and the other on her learned books, in which she's always looking for the dawn of a new life.

ASTROV. And the Professor?

VOYNITSKY. The Professor sits in his study from morning till night, as usual and writes, as the poet says —

> "Straining the mind, wrinkling the brow,
> We write, write, write,
> Without respite
> Or hope of praise in the future or now."

Poor paper! He ought to write his autobiography; he would make a really splendid subject for a book! Imagine it, the life of a retired professor, as stale as a piece of hardtack, tortured by gout, headaches, and rheumatism, his liver bursting with jealousy and envy, living on the estate of his first wife, although he hates it, because he can't afford to live in town. He is everlastingly whining about his hard lot, though, as a matter of fact, he is extraordinarily lucky. [*Agitated*] Only think what luck he's had! He's the son of a common deacon and has attained the professor's chair, become the son−in−law of a senator, is called "your Excellency," and so on. But I'll tell you something; the man has been writing on art for twenty−five years, and he doesn't know the very first thing about it. For twenty−five years he has been chewing on other men's thoughts about realism, naturalism, and all such foolishness; for twenty−five years he has been reading and writing things that clever men have long known

and stupid ones are not interested in; for twenty−five years he has been making his imaginary mountains out of molehills. And just think of the man's self−conceit and presumption all this time! For twenty−five years he has been masquerading in false clothes and has now retired absolutely unknown to any living soul; and yet see him! stalking across the earth like a demi−god!

ASTROV. I believe you envy him.

VOYNITSKY. Yes, I do. Look at the success he's had with women! Don Juan himself wasn't more favoured. His first wife, who was my sister, was a beautiful, gentle being, as pure as the blue heaven there above us, noble, great−hearted, with more admirers than he has pupils, and she loved him as only beings of angelic purity can love those who are as pure and beautiful as themselves. His mother−in−law, my mother, adores him to this day, and he still inspires a sort of worshipful awe in her. His second wife is, as you see, a beautiful, intelligent woman; she married him in his old age and has surrendered all the glory of her beauty and freedom and youth to him. Why? What for?

ASTROV. Is she faithful to him?

VOYNITSKY. Yes, unfortunately she is.

ASTROV. Why unfortunately?

VOYNITSKY. Because such fidelity is false and unnatural, root and branch. It sounds well, but there's no logic in it. It's thought immoral for a woman to deceive an old husband whom she hates, but quite moral for her to strangle her poor youth in her breast and banish every spark of life from her heart.

TELEGIN. [*In a tearful voice*] Vanya, I don't like to hear you talk so. Listen, Vanya; every one who betrays husband or wife is an unfaithful person, and could also betray his country.

VOYNITSKY. [*Crossly*] Turn off the tap, Waffles.

TELEGIN. No, allow me, Vanya. My wife ran away with a lover on the day after our wedding, because my face was unattractive. I have never failed in my duty since then. I love her and am true to her to this day. I help her all I can and have given my fortune to educate the children of herself and her lover. I have forfeited my happiness, but I have kept my pride. And she? Her youth has fled, her beauty has faded according to the laws of nature, and her lover is dead. What has she kept?

HELENA *and* SONYA *come in; after them comes* MME. VOYNITSKAYA *carrying a book. She sits down and begins to read. Some one hands her a glass of tea which she drinks without looking up.*

SONYA. [*Hurriedly, to* MARINA] Nanny, dear, there are some peasants waiting out there. Go and see what they want. I'll pour the tea. [*Pours out some glasses of tea.*]

MARINA *goes out.* HELENA *takes a glass and sits drinking in the swing.*

ASTROV. [*To* HELENA] I've come to see your husband. You wrote me that he had rheumatism and I don't know what else, and that he was very ill, but he appears to be as lively as a cricket.

HELENA. He had a fit of the blues yesterday evening and complained of pains in his legs, but he seems all right again today.

ASTROV. And I galloped over here twenty miles at break−neck speed! No matter, though, it's not the first time. Once here, however, I'm going to stay until tomorrow, and at any rate sleep well — *quantum satis.*

SONYA. Oh, splendid! You so seldom spend the night with us. Have you had dinner yet?

ASTROV. No, I haven't.

SONYA. Good. So you will have it with us. We dine at seven now. [*Drinks her tea*] This tea is cold!

TELEGIN. Yes, the temperature in the samovar has indeed considerably diminished.

HELENA. Don't mind, Monsieur Ivan, we will drink cold tea, then.

TELEGIN. I beg your pardon, my name is not Ivan, but Ilya, ma'am — Ilya Telegin, or Waffles, as I am sometimes called on account of my pock−marked face. I am Sonya's godfather, and his Excellency, your husband, knows me very well. I now live with you, ma'am, on this estate, and perhaps you will be so good as to notice that I dine with you every day.

SONYA. He's our great help, our right−hand man. [*Tenderly*] Dear godfather, let me pour you some tea.

MME. VOYNITSKAYA. Oh! Oh!

SONYA. What is it, grandmother?

MME. VOYNITSKAYA. I forgot to tell Alexander — it slipped my mind — I received a letter today from Paul Alexevitch in Kharkov. He has sent me a new pamphlet.

ASTROV. Is it interesting?

MME. VOYNITSKAYA. Yes, but strange. He refutes the very theories which he defended seven years ago. It is appalling!

VOYNITSKY. There's nothing appalling about it. Drink your tea, mamma.

MME. VOYNITSKAYA. But I want to talk.

VOYNITSKY. For fifty years we've talked and talked and read pamphlets. It's about time we stopped.

MME. VOYNITSKAYA. It seems you never want to listen to what I have to say. Pardon me, Jean, but you have changed so in the last year that I hardly know you. You used to be a man of settled convictions and had an illuminating personality —−

VOYNITSKY. Oh, yes. I had an illuminating personality, which illuminated no one. [*A pause*] I had an illuminating personality! You couldn't have made a more bitter joke. I'm forty−seven years old. Until last year I endeavoured, as you do now, to blind my eyes by your pedantry to the truths of life. But now — Oh, if you only knew! If you knew how I lie awake at night, heartsick and angry, to think how stupidly I've wasted my time when I might have been winning from life everything — but now I'm too old.

SONYA. Uncle Vanya, how boring!

MME. VOYNITSKAYA. [*To her son*] You speak as if your former convictions were somehow to blame, but you yourself, not they, are at fault. You have forgotten that a conviction, in itself, is nothing but a dead letter. You should have *done* something.

VOYNITSKY. Done something! Not every man is capable of being a writer *perpetuum mobile* like your Herr Professor.

MME. VOYNITSKAYA. What do you mean by that?

SONYA. [*Imploringly*] Grandmother! Uncle Vanya! Please stop it!

VOYNITSKY. I am silent. I apologise and am silent. [*A pause.*]

HELENA. What a fine day! Not too hot. [*A pause.*]

VOYNITSKY. A fine day to hang oneself.

TELEGIN *tunes the guitar.* MARINA *appears near the house, calling the chickens.*

MARINA. Chick, chick, chick!

SONYA. What did the peasants want, Nanny?

MARINA. The same old thing, the same old nonsense about the waste land. Chick, chick, chick!

SONYA. Why are you calling the chickens?

MARINA. The speckled hen has disappeared with her chicks. I'm afraid the crows have got them. [*Walks away*]

TELEGIN *plays a polka. All listen in silence. Enter* WORKMAN.

WORKMAN. Is the doctor here? [*To ASTROV*] Excuse me, sir, but I've been sent to fetch you.

ASTROV. Where are you from?

WORKMAN. The factory.

ASTROV. [*Annoyed*] Thank you. There is no way out, I've got to go. [*Looking around him for his cap*] Damn it, this is annoying!

SONYA. Yes, it's too bad, really. You must come back to dinner when you're finished at the factory.

ASTROV. No, I won't be able to do that. It'll be too late. Now where, where — [*To the* WORKMAN] Look here, my man, get me a glass of vodka, will you? [*The* WORKMAN *goes out*] Where — where — [*Finds his cap*] One of the characters in Ostrovsky's plays is a man with a long moustache and thin wits, like me. However, let me bid you good−bye, ladies and gentlemen. [*To* HELENA] I should be really delighted if you would come to see me some day with Miss Sonya. My estate is small, a little more than eighty acres, but if you are interested in such things I should like to show you a nursery and seed bed whose like you will not find within a thousand miles of here. My place is surrounded by government forests. The forester is old and always ailing, so I superintend almost all the work myself.

HELENA. I have always heard that you were very fond of the woods. Of course one can do a great deal of good by helping to preserve them, but does not that work interfere with your real occupation? You are a doctor, after all.

ASTROV. God alone knows what a man's real occupation is.

HELENA. And do you find it interesting?

ASTROV. Yes, very.

VOYNITSKY. [*Sarcastically*] Oh, extremely!

HELENA. You're still young, not over thirty−six or seven, I should say, and I suspect that the woods don't interest you as much as you say they do. Nothing but tree after tree — I should think you would find them monotonous.

SONYA. No, the work is very interesting. Dr. Astrov watches over the old woods and sets out new forests every year, and he has already received a diploma and a bronze medal. If you'll listen to what he can tell you, you'll agree with him entirely. He says that forests are the ornaments of the earth, that they teach mankind to understand beauty and attune his mind to lofty sentiments. Forests temper a stern climate, and in countries where the climate is milder, less strength is wasted in the battle with nature, and the people are kind and gentle. The inhabitants of such countries are handsome, tractable, sensitive, graceful in speech and gesture. Their philosophy is joyous, art and science blossom among them, their treatment of women is full of exquisite nobility —−

VOYNITSKY. [*Laughing*] Bravo! Bravo! All that's very pretty, but it's also unconvincing. So, my friend [*To* ASTROV] you must let me go on burning firewood in my stoves and building my sheds of planks.

ASTROV. You can burn peat in your stoves and build your sheds of stone. Oh, I don't object, of course, to cutting wood from necessity, but why destroy the forests? The woods of Russia are trembling under the blows of the axe. Millions of trees have perished. The homes of the wild animals and birds have been desolated; the rivers are shrinking, and many beautiful landscapes are gone forever. And why? Because men are too lazy and stupid to stoop down and pick up their fuel from the ground. [*To* HELENA] Am I not right, Madame? Who but a stupid barbarian could burn so much beauty in his stove and destroy that which he cannot make? Man is endowed with reason and the power to create, so that he may increase that which has been given him, but until now he has not created, but demolished. The forests are disappearing, the rivers are running dry, the wild life is exterminated, the climate is spoiled, and the earth becomes poorer and uglier every day. [*To* VOYNITSKY] I see irony in your look; you don't take what I am saying seriously, and — and — after all, it may very well be nonsense. But when I pass village forests that I have preserved from the axe, or hear the rustling of the young trees set out with my own hands, I feel as if I had had some small share in improving the climate, and that if mankind is happy a thousand years from now I'll have been a little bit responsible for their happiness. When I plant a little birch tree and then see it budding into young green and swaying in the wind, my heart swells with pride and I — [*Sees the* WORKMAN, *who is bringing him a glass of vodka on a tray*] however — [*He drinks*] I must be off. Probably it's all nonsense, anyway. Good−bye.

He goes toward the house. SONYA *takes his arm and goes with him.*

SONYA. When are you coming to see us again?

ASTROV. I can't say.

SONYA. Not for a month again?

ASTROV *and* SONYA *go into the house.* MME. VOYNITSKAYA *and* TELEGIN *remain near the table.* HELENA *and* VOYNITSKY *walk over to the terrace.*

HELENA. You have behaved shockingly again. Ivan, what sense was there in teasing your mother and talking about *perpetuum mobile?* And at lunch you quarreled with Alexander again. Really, your behaviour is too petty.

VOYNITSKY. But what if I hate him?

HELENA. You hate Alexander without reason; he's like every one else, and no worse than you are.

VOYNITSKY. If you could only see your face, the way you move! Oh, how tedious your life must be, absolutely tedious.

HELENA. It is tedious, yes, and boring! You all abuse my husband and look on me with compassion; you think, "Poor woman, she's married to an old man." How well I understand your compassion! As Astrov said just now, see how you thoughtlessly destroy the forests, so that there will soon be none left. So you also destroy mankind, and soon loyalty and purity and self−sacrifice will have vanished with the woods. Why cannot you look calmly at a woman unless she is yours? Because, the doctor was right, you are all possessed by a devil of destruction; you have no mercy on the woods or the birds or on women or on one another.

VOYNITSKY. I don't like your philosophy.

HELENA. That doctor has a sensitive, weary face — an interesting face. Sonya evidently likes him, and she's

in love with him, and I can understand it. This is the third time he's been here since I have come, and I haven't had a real talk with him yet or made much of him. He thinks I'm disagreeable. Do you know, Ivan, the reason you and I are such friends? I think it's because we are both boring and tedious. Yes, tedious. Don't look at me in that way, I don't like it.

VOYNITSKY. How can I look at you otherwise when I love you? You are my joy, my life, and my youth. I know that my chances of being loved in return are infinitely small, don't exist, but I ask nothing of you. Only let me look at you, listen to your voice —

HELENA. Hush, some one will overhear you.

[*They go toward the house.*]

VOYNITSKY. [*Following her*] Let me speak to you of my love, don't drive me away, and this alone will be my greatest happiness!

HELENA. Ah! This is agony! [*Both go into the house.*]

TELEGIN *strikes the strings of his guitar and plays a polka.* MME. VOYNITSKAYA *writes something on the margins of her pamphlet.*

The curtain falls.

ACT II

The dining−room of SEREBRYAKOV'S *house. It is night. The tapping of the* WATCHMAN'S *rattle is heard in the garden.* SEREBRYAKOV *is dozing in an arm−chair by an open window and* HELENA *is sitting beside him, also half asleep.*

SEREBRYAKOV. [*Rousing himself*] Who is here? Is it you, Sonya?

HELENA. It's me.

SEREBRYAKOV. Oh, it is you, Nelly. This pain is intolerable.

HELENA. Your shawl has slipped down. [*She wraps up his legs in the shawl*] Let me shut the window, Alexander.

SEREBRYAKOV. No, leave it open; I am suffocating. I dreamt just now that my left leg belonged to some one else, and it hurt so that I woke. I don't believe this is gout, it is more like rheumatism. What time is it?

HELENA. Half past twelve. [*A pause.*]

SEREBRYAKOV. I want you to look for Batyushkov's works in the library tomorrow. I think we have him.

HELENA. What?

SEREBRYAKOV. Look for Batyushkov tomorrow morning; we used to have him, I remember. Why do I find it so hard to breathe?

HELENA. You're tired; this is the second night you've had no sleep.

SEREBRYAKOV. They say that Turgenev got angina of the heart from gout. I am afraid I am getting angina too. Oh, damn this horrible, accursed old age! Ever since I have been old I have been hateful to myself, and I am sure, hateful to you all as well.

HELENA. You speak as if we were to blame for your being old.

SEREBRYAKOV. I am more hateful to you than to any one.

HELENA *gets up and walks away from him, sitting down at a distance.*

SEREBRYAKOV. You are quite right, of course. I am not an idiot; I can understand you. You are young and healthy and beautiful, and longing for life, and I am an old man, almost a corpse already. Don't I know it? Of course I see that it is foolish for me to live so long, but wait! I shall soon set you all free. My life cannot drag on much longer.

HELENA. You're overtaxing my powers of endurance. Be quiet, for God's sake!

SEREBRYAKOV. It appears that, thanks to me, everybody's power of endurance is being overtaxed; everybody is miserable, only I am blissfully triumphant. Oh, yes, isn't it obvious?

HELENA. Be quiet! You're torturing me.

SEREBRYAKOV. I torture everybody. Obviously.

HELENA. [*Weeping*] This is unbearable! Tell me, what is it you want from me?

SEREBRYAKOV. Nothing.

HELENA. Then be quiet, please.

SEREBRYAKOV. It is funny that everybody listens to Ivan and his old idiot of a mother, but the moment I open my lips you all begin to feel ill−treated. You can't even stand the sound of my voice. Even if I am hateful, even if I am a selfish tyrant, haven't I the right to be one at my age? Haven't I earned it? Haven't I, I ask you, the right to be respected, now that I am old?

HELENA. No one is disputing your rights. [*The window slams in the wind*] The wind's rising, I'd better shut the window. [*She shuts it*] We'll have rain in a moment. Your rights have never been questioned by anybody. [*Pause*]

The WATCHMAN *in the garden sounds his rattle and sings a song.*

SEREBRYAKOV. I have spent my life working in the interests of learning. I am used to my library and the lecture hall and to the esteem and admiration of my colleagues. Now I suddenly find myself plunged in this wilderness, condemned to see the same stupid people from morning till night and listen to their futile

conversation. I want to live; I long for success and fame and the stir of the world, and here I am in exile! Oh, it is dreadful to spend every moment grieving for the lost past, to see the success of others and sit here with nothing to do but to fear death. I can't stand it! I don't have the strength. And they will not even forgive me for being old!

HELENA. Wait, have patience; I'll be old myself in four or five years.

SONYA *comes in.*

SONYA. Father, you sent for Dr. Astrov, and now when he comes you refuse to see him. It's inconsiderate to give a man so much trouble for nothing.

SEREBRYAKOV. What do I care about your Astrov? He understands medicine about as well as I understand astronomy.

SONYA. We can't send for the whole medical faculty, can we, to treat your gout?

SEREBRYAKOV. I won't talk to that madman!

SONYA. Do as you please. [*She sits down.*] It's all the same to me.

SEREBRYAKOV. What time is it?

HELENA. After midnight.

SEREBRYAKOV. It is stifling in here. Sonya, hand me that bottle on the table.

SONYA. Here it is. [*She hands him a bottle of medicine.*]

SEREBRYAKOV. [*Crossly*] No, not that one! Can't you understand me? Can't I ask you to do a thing?

SONYA. Will you stop throwing tantrums? Some people may like it, but you can please leave me out of it. I don't like it. Besides, I haven't the time; we're cutting the hay tomorrow and I must get up early.

VOYNITSKY *comes in wearing a dressing gown and carrying a candle.*

VOYNITSKY. A thunderstorm is coming up. [*The lightning flashes*] There it is! Go to bed, Helena and Sonya. I've come to take your place.

SEREBRYAKOV. [*Frightened*] No, no, no! Don't leave me alone with him! Oh, don't. He will talk me to death.

VOYNITSKY. But you must give them a little rest. They have not slept for two nights.

SEREBRYAKOV. Then let them go to bed, but you go away too! Thank you. I implore you to go. For the sake of our former friendship do not protest against going. We will talk some other time —−

VOYNITSKY. [*Smiles ironically*] Our former friendship! Our former —−

SONYA. Hush, Uncle Vanya!

SEREBRYAKOV. [*To his wife*] My darling, don't leave me alone with him. He will talk me to death.

VOYNITSKY. This is ridiculous.

MARINA *comes in carrying a candle.*

SONYA. You must go to bed, Nanny, it's late.

MARINA. I haven't cleared away the tea things. Can't go to bed yet.

SEREBRYAKOV. No one can go to bed. They are all worn out, only I enjoy perfect happiness.

MARINA. [*Goes up to* SEREBRYAKOV *and speaks tenderly*] What's the matter, master? Does it hurt? My own legs are aching too, oh, so badly. [*Arranges his shawl about his legs*] You've had this illness such a long time. Sonya's poor mother used to stay awake with you too, and wear herself out for you. She loved you dearly. [*A pause*] Old people want to be pitied as much as young ones, but nobody cares about them somehow. [*She kisses* SEREBRYAKOV'S *shoulder*] Come, master, let me give you some lime−flower tea and warm your poor feet for you. I shall pray to God for you.

SEREBRYAKOV. [*Deeply touched*] Let us go, Marina.

MARINA. My own feet are aching so badly, oh, so badly! [*She and* SONYA *lead* SEREBRYAKOV *out*] Sonya's mother used to wear herself out with sorrow and weeping. You were still little and silly then, Sonya. Come, come, master.

SEREBRYAKOV, SONYA *and* MARINA *go out.*

HELENA. I'm absolutely exhausted by him, and can hardly stand.

VOYNITSKY. You're exhausted by him, and I'm exhausted by my own self. I haven't slept for three nights.

HELENA. Something is wrong in this house. Your mother hates everything but her pamphlets and the professor; the professor is irritable, he won't trust me, and fears you; Sonya is angry with her father, and with me, and hasn't spoken to me for two weeks; you hate my husband and openly sneer at your mother; I'm at the end of

my strength, and have come near bursting into tears at least twenty times today. Something is wrong in this house.

VOYNITSKY. Leave philosophy alone, please.

HELENA. You are cultured and intelligent, Ivan, and you surely understand that the world is not destroyed by villains and conflagrations, but by hate and malice and all these petty squabbles. It's your duty to make peace, and not to growl at everything.

VOYNITSKY. Help me first to make peace with myself. My darling! [*Seizes her hand and kisses it.*]

HELENA. Let go! [*She drags her hand away*] Go away!

VOYNITSKY. Soon the rain will be over, and all nature will sigh and awake refreshed. Only I'm not refreshed by the storm. Day and night the thought haunts me like a fiend, that my life is lost for ever. My past does not count, because I frittered it away on trifles, and the present has so terribly miscarried! What shall I do with my life and my love? What can I do with them? This wonderful feeling of mine will be wasted and lost as a ray of sunlight is lost that falls into a dark chasm, and my life will go with it.

HELENA. I somehow can't think or feel when you speak to me of your love, and I don't know how to answer you. Forgive me, I have nothing to say to you. [*She tries to go out*] Good−night!

VOYNITSKY. [*Barring the way*] If you only knew how I'm tortured by the thought that beside me in this house is another life that's being lost forever — it's yours! What are you waiting for? What damned philosophy stands in your way? Oh, understand, understand —−

HELENA. [*Looking at him intently*] Ivan, you're drunk!

VOYNITSKY. Perhaps. Perhaps.

HELENA. Where's the doctor?

VOYNITSKY. In there, spending the night in my room. Perhaps I'm drunk, perhaps I am; nothing is impossible.

HELENA. Have you been drinking today? Why do you do that?

VOYNITSKY. Because in that way I get a taste of being alive. Don't try to stop me, Helena!

HELENA. You never used to drink, and you never used to talk so much. Go to bed, I'm tired of you.

VOYNITSKY. [*Bending down to kiss her hand*] My sweetheart, my beautiful one —−

HELENA. [*Angrily*] Leave me alone! Really, this has become too disagreeable.

HELENA *goes out.*

VOYNITSKY [*Alone*] She's gone! [*A pause*] I met her first ten years ago, at my sister's house, when she was seventeen and I was thirty−seven. Why didn't I fall in love with her then and propose to her? It would've been so easy! And now she would have been my wife. Yes, we would both have been waked tonight by the thunderstorm, and she would've been frightened, but I would have held her in my arms and whispered: "Don't be afraid! I'm here." Oh, enchanting dream, so sweet that I laugh to think of it. [*He laughs*] But my God! My head reels! Why am I so old? Why won't she understand me? I hate all that rhetoric of hers, that morality of indolence, that absurd talk about the destruction of the world — I hate it all — [*A pause*] Oh, how I've been deceived! For years I've worshipped that miserable gout−ridden professor — worked like an ox for him. Sonya and I have squeezed this estate dry for his sake. We've bartered our butter and curds and peas like misers, and have never kept a morsel for ourselves, so that we could scrape enough money together to send to him. I was proud of him and of his learning; I received all his words and writings as inspired, and, dear God, now? Now he's retired, and what's the total of his life? Not a page of his work will survive! He's absolutely unknown, and his fame has burst like a soap−bubble. I've been deceived; I see that now, foolishly deceived.

ASTROV *comes in. He has his coat on, but is without his waistcoat or tie, and is slightly drunk.* TELEGIN *follows him, carrying a guitar.*

ASTROV. Play!

TELEGIN. But every one is asleep.

ASTROV. Play!

TELEGIN *begins to play softly.*

ASTROV. [*To* VOYNITSKY] Are you alone here? No ladies about? [*Sings softly with his arms akimbo.*]

"The hut is cold, the fire is dead;
Where shall the master lay his head?"

The thunderstorm woke me. It was a heavy shower. What time is it?

VOYNITSKY. The devil only knows.

ASTROV. I thought I heard Helena's voice.

VOYNITSKY. She was here a moment ago.

ASTROV. What a beautiful woman! [*Looking at the medicine bottles on the table*] Medicine, is it? What a variety we have; prescriptions from Moscow, from Kharkov, from Tula! Why, he's been pestering all the towns of Russia with his gout! Is he ill, or simply pretending?

VOYNITSKY. He's really ill. [*A pause*]

ASTROV. What's the matter with you tonight? You seem sad. Is it because you're sorry for the professor?

VOYNITSKY. Leave me alone.

ASTROV. Or in love with the professor's wife?

VOYNITSKY. She's my friend.

ASTROV. Already?

VOYNITSKY. What do you mean by "already"?

ASTROV. A woman can only become a man's friend after having first been his acquaintance and then his mistress — then she becomes his friend.

VOYNITSKY. What vulgar philosophy!

ASTROV. What do you mean? Yes, I must confess I'm getting vulgar, but then, you see, I'm drunk. I usually only drink like this once a month. At such times my audacity and impertinence know no bounds. I feel capable of anything. I attempt the most difficult operations and do them magnificently. The most brilliant plans for the future take shape in my head. I'm no longer a poor fool of a doctor, but mankind's greatest benefactor. Greatest! I evolve my own system of philosophy and all of you seem to crawl at my feet like so many insects or microbes. [*To* TELEGIN] Play, Waffles!

TELEGIN. My dear boy, I would with all my heart, but do listen to reason; everybody in the house is asleep.

ASTROV. Play!

TELEGIN *plays softly.*

ASTROV. I want a drink. Come, we still have some brandy left. And then, as soon as it's day, you will come home with me. O−Key? I have an assistant who can't say "OK," always says "O−Key." Awful rascal. So, O−Key? [*He sees* SONYA, *who comes in at that moment.*]

ASTROV. I beg your pardon, I have no tie on. [*He goes out quickly, followed by* TELEGIN.]

SONYA. Uncle Vanya, you and the doctor have been drinking again! The old boys have been getting together! It's all very well for him, he's always done it, but why do you follow his example? It looks bad at your age.

VOYNITSKY. Age has nothing to do with it. When real life is missing, one must create an illusion. It is better than nothing.

SONYA. Our hay is all cut and rotting in these daily rains, and here you are busy creating illusions! You've given up the farm altogether. I've done all the work alone until I'm at the end of my strength — [*Frightened*] Uncle! Your eyes are full of tears!

VOYNITSKY. Tears? Nonsense, there are no tears in my eyes. You looked at me then just as your dead mother used to, my darling — [*He eagerly kisses her face and hands*] My sister, my dearest sister, where are you now? Ah, if you only knew, if you only knew!

SONYA. If she only knew what, Uncle?

VOYNITSKY. My heart is bursting. It's awful. No matter, though. I must go. [*He goes out.*]

SONYA. [*Knocks at the door*] Dr. Astrov! Are you awake? Please come here for a minute.

ASTROV. [*Behind the door*] In a moment.

He appears after a short delay. He has put on his tie and waistcoat.

ASTROV. What do you want?

SONYA. Drink as much as you want to, if you don't find it revolting, but I implore you not to let my uncle do it. It's bad for him.

ASTROV. Very well; we won't drink any more. [*A pause*] I'm going home at once. It's all settled. It'll be dawn by the time the horses are harnessed.

SONYA. It's still raining; wait till morning.

ASTROV. The storm's blowing over. This is only the edge of it. I must go. And please don't ask me to come and see your father any more. I tell him he has gout, and he says it is rheumatism. I tell him to lie down, and he sits up. Today he refused to see me at all.

SONYA. He has been spoilt. [*She looks in the sideboard*] Won't you have a bite to eat?

ASTROV. Yes, please. I believe I will.

SONYA. I love to eat at night. I'm sure we shall find something in here. They say that he has made a great many conquests in his life, and that the women have spoiled him. Here's some cheese for you.

[*They stand eating by the sideboard.*]

ASTROV. I haven't eaten anything today. I've just been drinking. Your father has a very difficult nature. [*He takes a bottle out of the sideboard*] May I? [*He pours himself a glass of vodka and drinks*] We're alone here, and I can speak frankly. Do you know, I couldn't stand living in this house for even a month? This atmosphere would stifle me. There's your father, entirely absorbed in his books, and his gout; there's your Uncle Vanya with his depression, your grandmother, and finally, your step−mother —

SONYA. What about her?

ASTROV. A human being should be beautiful in every way: the face, the clothes, the mind, the thoughts. Your step−mother is, of course, beautiful to look at, but don't you see? She does nothing but sleep and eat and walk and bewitch us, and that's all. She has no responsibilities, everything is done for her — am I not right? There's no integrity in an idle life. [*A pause*] However, I may be judging her too severely. Like your Uncle Vanya, I'm discontented, and so we're both grumblers.

SONYA. Aren't you satisfied with life, then?

ASTROV. I like life in general, but I hate and despise it in a little Russian country village, and as far as my own personal life goes, by heaven! there's absolutely no redeeming feature about it. Haven't you noticed if you are riding through a dark wood at night and see a little light shining ahead, how you forget your fatigue and the darkness and the sharp twigs that whip your face? I work, you well know, as no one else in the district works. Fate beats me on without rest; at times I suffer unendurably and I see no light ahead. I have no hope; I don't like people. It's a long time since I've loved any one.

SONYA. You love no one?

ASTROV. Not a soul. I only feel a sort of tenderness for your old nanny for old−times' sake. The peasants are all alike; they're stupid and live in dirt, and the educated people are hard to get along with. One gets tired of them. All our good friends are petty and shallow and see no farther than their own noses; in one word, they're stupid. Those that have brains and more to offer are hysterical, devoured with a mania for self−analysis. They whine, they hate, they pick faults everywhere with unhealthy sharpness. They sneak up to me sideways, look at me out of a corner of the eye, and say: "That man is a lunatic," "That man is a wind−bag." Or, if they don't know what else to label me with, they say I am strange, odd. I like forests, so that's strange. I don't eat meat; that's strange, too. Simple, natural relations between man and man, or man and nature, don't exist. [*He tries to take a drink;* SONYA *prevents him.*]

SONYA. I beg you, I implore you, don't drink any more!

ASTROV. Why not?

SONYA. It's so unworthy of you. You're well−bred, your voice is sweet, you're so different from everyone else I know — you're a fine, good man. Why do you want to be like the common people that drink and play cards? Oh, don't, I beg you! You always say that people don't create anything, but only destroy what heaven has given them. Why, oh, why, do you destroy yourself? Oh, don't, I implore you not to! I entreat you!

ASTROV. [*Gives her his hand*] I won't drink any more.

SONYA. Promise me.

ASTROV. I give you my word of honour.

SONYA. [*Squeezing his hand*] Thank you.

ASTROV. I've done with it. You see, I'm perfectly sober again, and so I shall stay till the end of my life. [*He looks his watch*] But, as I was saying, life holds nothing for me; my race is run. I'm old, I'm tired, I'm mediocre; my sensibilities are dead. I could never attach myself to any one again. I love no one, and never shall! Beauty alone has the power to touch me still. I am deeply moved by it. Helena could turn my head in a day if she wanted

to, but that's not love, that's not affection —

[*He shudders and covers his face with his hands.*]

SONYA. What is it?

ASTROV. Nothing. During Lent one of my patients died under chloroform.

SONYA. It's time to forget that. [*A pause*] Tell me, doctor, if I had a friend or a younger sister, and if you knew that she, well — loved you, what would you do?

ASTROV. [*Shrugging his shoulders*] I don't know. I don't think I should do anything. I should make her understand that I couldn't return her love — after all, I've got other things on my mind. I must start at once — it's time for me to go. Good−bye, my dear girl. At this rate we'll stand here talking till morning. [*He shakes hands with her*] I'll go out through the sitting−room, because I'm afraid your uncle might detain me. [*He goes out.*]

SONYA. [*Alone*] Not a word from him! His heart and soul are still hidden from me, and yet for some reason I'm strangely happy. I wonder why? [*She laughs with pleasure*] I told him that he was a good man and that his voice was sweet. Was that the proper thing to do? I can still feel his voice vibrating in the air; it caresses me. [*Wringing her hands*] Oh! how terrible it is that I'm not pretty! I'm plain, I know it. As I came out of church last Sunday I heard people talking about me and I overheard a woman say, "She's a nice, kind girl, but what a pity she's so ugly!" So ugly!

HELENA *comes in and throws open the window.*

HELENA. The storm is over. What delicious air! [*A pause*] Where's the doctor?

SONYA. He's gone. [*A pause.*]

HELENA. Sonya!

SONYA. Yes?

HELENA. How much longer are you going to sulk at me? We haven't hurt each other. Why not be friends? It's time we ended this.

SONYA. I've wanted to — [*She embraces* HELENA] Let's make peace.

HELENA. Oh, that's splendid. [*They are both moved.*]

SONYA. Has papa gone to bed?

HELENA. No, he is sitting up in the drawing−room. Heaven knows what reason you and I had for not speaking to each other for weeks. [*Sees the open sideboard*] What's this?

SONYA. Dr. Astrov has just had supper.

HELENA. There's some wine. Let's seal our friendship.

SONYA. Yes, let's.

HELENA. Out of one glass. [*She fills a wine−glass*] It's better like this. So, we're friends, are we?

SONYA. Yes. [*They drink and kiss each other*] I've long wanted to make friends, but somehow, I was ashamed to. [*She weeps.*]

HELENA. Why are you crying?

SONYA. I don't know. It's nothing.

HELENA. There, there, don't cry. [*She weeps*] Silly! Now I'm crying too. [*A pause*] You're angry with me because I seem to have married your father for selfish reasons. I swear to you, if that means anything to you, that I married him for love. I was fascinated by his fame and learning. I know now that it was not real love, but it seemed real at the time. I'm innocent, and yet your clever, suspicious eyes have been punishing me for an imaginary crime ever since my marriage.

SONYA. Peace, peace! Let us forget the past.

HELENA. You must not look at people that way. It's not becoming to you. You must trust people, or life becomes impossible. [*A pause*]

SONYA. Tell me truly, as a friend, are you happy?

HELENA. Truly, no.

SONYA. I knew it. One more question, tell me frankly, do you wish your husband were young?

HELENA. What a child you are! Of course I do. [*Laughs*] Go on, ask me something else.

SONYA. Do you like the doctor?

HELENA. Yes, very much indeed.

SONYA. [*Laughing*] I have a stupid look on my face, haven't I? He's just gone out, and his voice is still in my

ears; I hear his step; I see his face in the dark window. Let me say all I have in my heart! But no, I can't speak of it so loudly. I'm ashamed. Come to my room and let me tell you there. I seem foolish to you, don't I? Talk to me about him.

HELENA. What can I say?

SONYA. He is intelligent. He can do everything. He can cure the sick, and plant forests.

HELENA. It is not a question of medicine and forests, my dear, he is a man of genius. Do you know what that means? It means he is brave, profound, and has great vision. He plants a tree and his mind travels a thousand years into the future, and he sees visions of the happiness of the human race. People like him are rare and should be cherished. What if he does drink and act roughly at times? A man of genius cannot be a saint in Russia. There he lives, cut off from the world by cold and storm and endless roads of bottomless mud, surrounded by a rough people who are crushed by poverty and disease, his life one continuous struggle, with never a day's respite; how can a man live like that for forty years and keep himself sober and unspotted? [*Kissing* SONYA] I wish you happiness with all my heart; you deserve it. [*She gets up*] As for me, I'm a tiresome, unimportant person. In music, in romance, in my husband's house — everywhere, in fact, I've always been an unimportant person. When you come to think of it, Sonya, the truth is — I'm really very, very unhappy. [*Walks excitedly up and down*] Happiness can never exist for me in this world. Never. Why do you laugh?

SONYA. [*Laughing and covering her face with her hands*] I am so happy, so happy!

HELENA. I want to play the piano now. I might play a little something now.

SONYA. Oh, do, do! [*She embraces her*] I couldn't possibly go to sleep now. Do play!

HELENA. In a minute. Your father is still awake. Music irritates him when he's ill, but if he says I may, then I'll play a little. Go, Sonya, and ask him.

SONYA. Very well.

[*She goes out. The* WATCHMAN'S *rattle is heard in the garden.*]

HELENA. It's a long time since I've played anything. And now, I'll sit and play, and cry like a silly girl. [*Speaking out of the window*] Is that you rattling out there, Yefim?

VOICE OF THE WATCHMAN. It's me.

HELENA. Don't make such a noise. Your master is ill.

VOICE: OF THE WATCHMAN. I'm going away this minute. [*Whistles a tune.*] Hey you dogs, Zhuckha, Malchik!

SONYA. [*Comes back*] He says, no.

The curtain falls.

ACT III

The drawing−room of SEREBRYAKOV'S *house. There are three doors: one to the right, one to the left, and one in the centre of the room.* VOYNITSKY *and* SONYA *are sitting down.* HELENA *is walking up and down, absorbed in thought.*

VOYNITSKY. We were requested by the Herr Professor to be here at one o'clock. [*Looks at his watch*] It's now a quarter to one. It seems he has some communication to make to the world.

HELENA. Probably a matter of business.

VOYNITSKY. He's never had any business. He writes nonsense, grumbles, and eats his heart out with jealousy; that's all he does.

SONYA. [*Reproachfully*] Uncle!

VOYNITSKY. All right. I beg your pardon. [*He points to* HELENA] Look at her. Wandering around and ready to fall over from sheer idleness. A sweet picture, really.

HELENA. I wonder you're not tired, droning on in the same key from morning till night. [*Despairingly*] I'm dying of this boredom. What'll I do?

SONYA. [*Shrugging her shoulders*] There's plenty to do if you would.

HELENA. For instance?

SONYA. You could help run this place, teach the children, care for the sick — isn't that enough? Before you and papa came, Uncle Vanya and I used to go to market ourselves to sell our own flour.

HELENA. I don't know anything about such things, and besides, they don't interest me. It's only in idealistic novels that women go out and teach and heal the peasants; how can I suddenly begin to do it?

SONYA. How can you live here and not do it? Wait awhile, you'll get used to it all. [*Embraces her*] Don't be bored, dearest. [*Laughing*] You feel miserable and restless, and can't seem to fit into this life, and your restlessness is infectious. Look at Uncle Vanya, he does nothing now but follow you like a shadow, and I have left my work today to come here and talk with you. I'm getting lazy, and don't want to go on with anything. Dr. Astrov hardly ever used to come here; it was all we could do to persuade him to visit us once a month, and now he's abandoned his forestry and his practice, and comes every day. You must be a witch.

VOYNITSKY. Why are you so down? [*Vigorously*] Come, my dearest, my beauty, be sensible! The blood of a mermaid runs in your veins. Oh, won't you let yourself be one? Give free rein to your nature for once in your life; fall head over heels in love with some other water sprite and plunge down head first into a deep pool, so that the Herr Professor and all of us just throw up our hands.

HELENA. [*Angrily*] Leave me alone! How cruel you are! [*She tries to go out.*]

VOYNITSKY. [*Preventing her*] There, there, my beauty, I apologise. [*He kisses her hand*] Forgive me.

HELENA. Confess it — you'd try the patience of an angel.

VOYNITSKY. As a peace offering I'm going to fetch a bouquet of flowers which I picked for you this morning: some autumn roses, beautiful, sorrowful roses. [*He goes out.*]

SONYA. Autumn roses, beautiful, sorrowful roses!

[*She and HELENA stand looking out of the window.*]

HELENA. September already! How shall we live through the long winter here? [*A pause*] Where's the doctor?

SONYA. He's writing in Uncle Vanya's room. I'm glad Uncle Vanya has gone out, I want to talk to you about something.

HELENA. About what?

SONYA. About what? [*She lays her head on* HELENA'S *breast.*]

HELENA. There, there, that will do. [*Stroking her hair*] Don't, Sonya.

SONYA. I'm ugly!

HELENA. You have lovely hair.

SONYA. No! [*She turns to look at herself in the mirror*] No, when a woman is ugly they always say she has

beautiful hair or eyes. I've loved him now for six years, I've loved him more than one loves one's mother. I seem to hear him beside me every moment of the day. I feel the pressure of his hand on mine. If I look up, I seem to see him coming, and as you see, I run to you to talk of him. He's here every day now, but he never looks at me, he doesn't notice my presence. It's agony. I have absolutely no hope, no, no hope. [*Desperately*] Oh, my God! Give me strength to endure. I prayed all last night. I often go up to him and speak to him and look into his eyes. My pride is gone. My self−control. Yesterday I couldn't control myself and told Uncle Vanya I was in love, and all the servants know it. Every one knows that I love him.

HELENA. Does he?

SONYA. No, he never notices me.

HELENA. [*Thoughtfully*] He's a strange man. Listen, Sonya, will you allow me to speak to him? I'll be careful, only hint. [*A pause*] Really, to be in uncertainty all these years! Let me do it!

SONYA *nods an affirmative.*

HELENA. Good! It'll be easy to find out whether he loves you or not. Don't be ashamed, sweetheart, don't worry. I'll be careful; he won't notice a thing. We only want to find out whether it is yes or no, don't we? [*A pause*] And if it is no, then he must stop coming here, is that so?

SONYA *nods.*

HELENA. It will be easier not to see him any more. We won't put off the examination an instant. He said he had some sketches to show me. Go and tell him at once that I want to see him.

SONYA. [*Very agitated*] Will you tell me the whole truth?

HELENA. Of course I will. I am sure that no matter what it is, the truth will be easier for you to bear than this uncertainty. Trust me, dearest.

SONYA. Yes, yes. I'll say that you want to see his sketches. [*She starts out, but stops near the door and looks back*] No, it is better not to know — at least — then there may be hope.

HELENA. What do you say?

SONYA. Nothing. [*She goes out.*]

HELENA. [*Alone*] There's no greater sorrow than to know another's secret when you can't help them. [*In deep thought*] He's obviously not in love with her, but why shouldn't he marry her? She's not pretty, but she's so clever and pure and good, she would make a splendid wife for a country doctor of his years. But, no, that' s not exactly it at all. [*A pause*] I can understand how the poor child feels. She lives here in this desperate loneliness with no one around her except these colourless shadows that go mooning about talking nonsense and knowing nothing except that they eat, drink, and sleep. Among them appears from time to time this Dr. Astrov, so different, so handsome, so interesting, so charming. It's like seeing the moon rise on a dark night. Oh, to surrender oneself to his embrace! To lose oneself in his arms! I'm a little in love with him myself! Yes, I'm lonely without him, and when I think of him I smile. That Uncle Vanya says I have the blood of a mermaid in my veins: "Give free rein to your nature for once in your life!" Perhaps it's right that I should. Oh, to be free as a bird, to fly away from all your sleepy faces and your talk and forget that you have existed at all! But I'm a coward, I'm afraid; my conscience torments me. He comes here every day now. I can guess why, and feel guilty already; I should like to fall on my knees at Sonya's feet and beg her forgiveness, and to cry.

ASTROV *comes in carrying a portfolio.*

ASTROV. How do you do? [*Shakes hands with her*] Do you want to see my sketches?

HELENA. Yes, you promised to show me what you had been doing. Have you got time now?

ASTROV. Of course I have!

He lays the portfolio on the table, takes out a sketch and fastens it to the table with thumb−tacks.

ASTROV. Where were you born?

HELENA. [*Helping him*] In St. Petersburg.

ASTROV. And educated?

HELENA. At the Conservatory there.

ASTROV. Then this probably won't interest you.

HELENA. Oh, why not? It's true I don't know country life very well, but I've read a great deal about it.

ASTROV. I have my own desk there in Ivan's room. When I'm absolutely too exhausted to go on I drop everything and rush over here to forget myself in this work for an hour or two. Ivan and Miss Sonya sit rattling at

their counting−boards, the cricket chirps, and I sit beside them and paint, feeling warm and peaceful. But I don't permit myself this luxury very often, only once a month. [*Pointing to the picture*] Look there! That is a map of our district as it was fifty years ago. The green tints, both dark and light, represent forests. Half the map, as you see, is covered with it. Where the green is striped with red the forests were inhabited by elk and wild goats. Here on this lake, lived great flocks of swans and geese and ducks; as the peasants say, there was a power of birds of every kind. Thick as clouds in the sky. Beside the hamlets and villages, you see, I have dotted down here and there the various settlements, farms, hermit's caves, and water−mills. This country carried a great many cattle and horses, as you can see by the quantity of blue paint. For instance, see how thickly it lies in this part; there were great herds of them here, and every house had three horses. [*A pause*] Now, look lower down. This is the district as it was twenty−five years ago. Only a third of the map is green now with forests. There are still some elk, but there are no goats left. The blue paint is lighter, and so on, and so on. Now we come to the third part; our country as it appears today. We still see spots of green, but not much. The elk, the swans, the wood−grouse have disappeared. It is, on the whole, the picture of a regular and slow decline which it will evidently only take about ten or fifteen more years to complete. You may perhaps object that it is the march of progress, that the old order must give place to the new, and you might be right if roads and railways had been run through these ruined woods, or if factories and schools had taken their place. The people then would have become better educated and healthier and richer, but as it is, we have nothing of the sort. We have the same swamps and mosquitoes; the same disease and want; the typhoid, the diphtheria, the burning villages. We are confronted by the degradation of our country, brought on by the fierce struggle for existence of the human race. It is the consequence of the ignorance and unconsciousness of starving, shivering, sick humanity that, to save its children, instinctively snatches at everything that can warm it and still its hunger. So it destroys everything it can lay its hands on, without a thought for the morrow. And almost everything has gone, and nothing has been created to take its place. [*Coldly*] But I see by your face that you're bored.

HELENA. I know so little about such things!

ASTROV. There is nothing to know. It simply isn't interesting to you, that's all.

HELENA. Frankly, my thoughts were elsewhere. Forgive me! I want to submit you to a little examination, but I'm embarrassed and don't know how to begin.

ASTROV. An examination?

HELENA. Yes, but quite an innocent one. Sit down. [*They sit down*] It's about a certain young girl I know. Let us discuss it like honest people, like friends, and then forget what has passed between us, shall we?

ASTROV. All right.

HELENA. It's about my step−daughter, Sonya. Do you like her?

ASTROV. Yes, I respect her.

HELENA. Do you like her — as a woman?

ASTROV. [*Slowly*] No.

HELENA. One more word, and that will be the last. You haven't noticed anything?

ASTROV. No, nothing.

HELENA. [*Taking his hand*] You don't love her. I see that in your eyes. She is suffering. You must realise that, and not come here any more.

ASTROV. I'm past all that, yes, [*Stands up*] and then I haven't the time. [*Shrugging his shoulders*] Where shall I find time for such things? [*He is embarrassed.*]

HELENA. Ugh! What an unpleasant conversation! I'm as out of breath as if I'd been running three miles uphill. Thank heaven, that's over! Now let's forget everything as if nothing had been said. And — and you go away now. You're sensible. You understand. [*A pause*] I'm actually blushing.

ASTROV. If you'd spoken a month or two ago I might perhaps have considered it, but now — [*He shrugs his shoulders*] Of course, if she is suffering — but I cannot understand why you had to put me through this examination. [*He searches her face with his eyes, and shakes his finger at her*] Oho, you are clever!

HELENA. What does that mean?

ASTROV. [*Laughing*] You are a clever one! Let's say that Sonya is suffering, but what does this examination of yours mean? [*He prevents her from retorting, and goes on quickly*] Please don't put on such a look of surprise; you know perfectly well why I come here every day. Yes, you know perfectly why and for whose sake I come!

Oh, my sweet tigress! don't look at me that way; I'm an old bird!

HELENA. [*Perplexed*] A tigress? I don't understand you.

ASTROV. Beautiful, sleek tigress, you must have your victims! For a whole month I've done nothing but seek you eagerly. I've thrown over everything for you, and you love to see it. Now then, I'm sure you knew all this without putting me through your examination. [*Crossing his arms and bowing his head*] I surrender. Here you have me — now, eat me.

HELENA. You've gone mad!

ASTROV. [*Laughs through clenched teeth*] You're shy!

HELENA. I'm a better and stronger woman than you think I am. [*She tries to leave the room.*]

ASTROV. [*Barring her way*] I'm leaving today and I won't be back, but — [*Takes her by the arm and looks around*] Where can we meet? Tell me quickly, where? Some one may come in — tell me quickly. [*Passionately*] You marvelous, wonderful woman! One kiss, just let me kiss your fragrant hair.

HELENA. I swear to you —

ASTROV. [*Stopping her from speaking*] Why swear anything? No need for that. No need to say anything. Oh, how lovely you are — what hands! [*He kisses her hands.*]

HELENA. Enough of this! [*She frees her hands*] Leave the room! You've forgotten yourself.

ASTROV. Tell me, tell me, where can we meet tomorrow? [*He puts his arm around her waist*] Don't you see that we must meet, that it's inevitable?

He kisses her. VOYNITSKY *comes in carrying a bunch of roses, and stops in the doorway.*

HELENA. [*Without seeing* VOYNITSKY] Have pity! Leave me alone! [*lays her head on* ASTROV'S *chest*] No! [*She tries to break away from him.*]

ASTROV. [*Holding her by the waist*] Be in the forest tomorrow at two o'clock. Will you? Will you?

HELENA. [*Sees* VOYNITSKY] Let me go! [*Goes to the window deeply embarrassed*] This is appalling!

VOYNITSKY. [*Throws the roses on a chair, and speaks in great excitement, wiping his face and neck with his handkerchief*] Nothing — yes, yes, nothing.

ASTROV. [*Inwardly upset*] The weather is fine today, my dear Ivan; the morning was overcast and looked like rain, but now the sun is shining again. Honestly, we've had a very fine autumn, and the wheat is looking fairly well. [*Puts his map back into the portfolio*] But the days are growing short. [*Goes out*]

HELENA. [*Goes quickly up to* VOYNITSKY] You must do your best; you must use all your power to get my husband and myself away from here today! Do you hear? I mean it, this very day!

VOYNITSKY. [*Wiping his face*] Oh! Ah! Oh! All right! I — Helena, I saw everything! Everything!

HELENA. [*In great agitation*] Do you hear me? I must leave here this very day!

SEREBRYAKOV, SONYA, MARINA, *and* TELEGIN *come in.*

TELEGIN. I am not very well myself, your Excellency. I have been ailing for two days, and my head —

SEREBRYAKOV. Where are the others? I hate this house. It is a regular labyrinth. Every one is always scattered through the twenty−six enormous rooms; one never can find a soul. [*Rings*] Ask my wife and Madame Voitskaya to come here!

HELENA. I'm here already.

SEREBRYAKOV. Please, all of you, sit down.

SONYA. [*Goes up to* HELENA *and asks anxiously*] What did he say?

HELENA. I'll tell you later.

SONYA. You're trembling, aren't you. [*Looking quickly and inquiringly into her face*] I understand; he said he wouldn't come here any more. [*A pause*] Tell me, did he?

HELENA *nods.*

SEREBRYAKOV. [*To* TELEGIN] One can, after all, become reconciled to being an invalid, but not to this country life. The ways of it stick in my throat and I feel exactly as if I had been whirled off the earth and landed on a strange planet. Please be seated, ladies and gentlemen. Sonya! [SONYA *does not hear. She is standing with her head bowed sadly forward on her breast*] Sonya! [*A pause*] She does not hear me. [*To* MARINA] Sit down too, Nanny. [MARINA *sits down and begins to knit her stocking*] I crave your indulgence, ladies and gentlemen; hang your ears, if I may say so, on the peg of attention. [*He laughs.*]

VOYNITSKY. [*Agitated*] Perhaps you don't need me — may I be excused?

SEREBRYAKOV. No, you are needed now more than any one.

VOYNITSKY. What is it you want of me?

SEREBRYAKOV. "Want of you"? — but what are you angry about? [*A pause*] If it is anything I have done, I ask you to forgive me.

VOYNITSKY. Oh, drop that tone and come to business; what do you want?

MME. VOYNITSKAYA *comes in.*

SEREBRYAKOV. Here is mother. Ladies and gentlemen, I shall begin. [*A pause*] Ladies and gentlemen, I have invited you here to announce that an inspector general is coming to visit us — Joking aside, I do have something serious to say. I want to ask you for your assistance and advice, and knowing your unfailing amiability I think I can count on both. I am a book−worm and a scholar, and am unfamiliar with practical affairs. I cannot, I find, dispense with the help of well−informed people such as you, Ivan, and you, Telegin, and you, mother. The truth is, *manet omnes una nox*, that is to say, our lives are in the hands of God, and as I am old and ill, I realise that the time has come for me to dispose of my property in regard to the interests of my family. My life is nearly over, and I am not thinking of myself, but I have a young wife and unmarried daughter. [*A pause*] I cannot continue to live in the country; we were not made for country life, and yet we cannot afford to live in town on the income derived from this estate. We might sell the woods, but that would be an expedient we could not resort to every year. We must find some means of guaranteeing to ourselves a certain more or less fixed yearly income. With this object in view, a plan has occurred to me which I now have the honour of presenting to you for your consideration. I shall only give you a rough outline, avoiding all details. Our estate does not pay on an average more than two per cent on the money invested in it. I propose to sell it. If we then invest our capital in bonds, it will earn us four to five per cent, and we should probably have a surplus of several thousand roubles, with which we could buy a summer cottage in Finland —

VOYNITSKY. Hold on! Repeat what you just said; I don't think I heard you quite right.

SEREBRYAKOV. I said we would invest the money in bonds and buy a cottage in Finland with the surplus.

VOYNITSKY. No, not Finland — you said something else.

SEREBRYAKOV. I propose to sell this place.

VOYNITSKY. Aha! That was it! So you're going to sell the place? Wonderful. That's a brilliant idea. And what do you propose to do with my old mother and me and with Sonya here?

SEREBRYAKOV. That will be decided in due time. We can't do everything at once.

VOYNITSKY. Wait! It's clear that until this moment I have never had a grain of sense in my head. I've always been stupid enough to think that the estate belonged to Sonya. My father bought it as a wedding present for my sister, and I foolishly imagined that as our laws were made for Russians and not Turks, my sister's estate would come down to her child.

SEREBRYAKOV. Of course the estate is Sonya's. Has any one denied it? I don't want to sell it without Sonya's consent; on the contrary, what I am doing is for Sonya's good.

VOYNITSKY. This is absolutely incomprehensible. Either I have gone mad or — or —

MME. VOYNITSKAYA. Jean, don't contradict Alexander. Trust to him; he knows better than we do what is right and what is wrong.

VOYNITSKY. I won't. Give me some water. [*He drinks*] Go ahead! Say anything you please — anything!

SEREBRYAKOV. I can't imagine why you are so upset. I don't pretend that my scheme is an ideal one, and if you all object to it I shall not insist. [*A pause.*]

TELEGIN. [*With embarrassment*] I not only nourish feelings of respect toward learning, your Excellency, but I am also drawn to it by family ties. My brother Gregory's wife's brother, whom you may know; his name is Konstantin Lakedemonov, and he used to be a master of arts —

VOYNITSKY. Stop, Waffles. This is business; wait a bit, we will talk of that later. [*To* SEREBRYAKOV] There now, ask him what he thinks; this estate was bought from his uncle.

SEREBRYAKOV. Ah! Why should I ask questions? What good would it do?

VOYNITSKY. The price was ninety−five thousand roubles. My father paid seventy and left a debt of twenty−five. Now listen! This place could never have been bought had I not renounced my inheritance in favour of my sister, whom I deeply loved — and what's more, I worked for ten years like an ox, and paid off the debt.

SEREBRYAKOV. I regret ever having started this conversation.

VOYNITSKY. Thanks entirely to my own personal efforts, the place is entirely clear of debts, and now, when I have grown old, you want to throw me out, neck and crop!

SEREBRYAKOV. I can't imagine what you are driving at.

VOYNITSKY. For twenty−five years I've managed this place, and have sent you the returns from it like the most honest of servants, and you've never given me one single word of thanks for my work, not one — neither in my youth nor now. You allowed me a meagre salary of five hundred roubles a year, a beggar's pittance, and have never even thought of adding a rouble to it.

SEREBRYAKOV. What did I know about such things, Ivan? I am not a practical man and don't understand them. You might have helped yourself to all you wanted.

VOYNITSKY. Yes, why didn't I steal? Don't you all despise me for not stealing, when it would have been only justice? And I should not now have been a beggar!

MME. VOYNITSKAYA. [*Sternly*] Jean!

TELEGIN. [*Agitated*] Vanya, old man, don't talk in that way. Why spoil such pleasant relations? [*He embraces him*] Do stop!

VOYNITSKY. For twenty−five years I've been sitting here with my mother like a mole in a burrow. Our every thought and hope was yours and yours only. By day we talked with pride of you and your work, and spoke your name with veneration; our nights we wasted reading the books and papers which my soul now loathes.

TELEGIN. Don't, Vanya, don't. I can't stand it.

SEREBRYAKOV. [*Wrathfully*] What under heaven do you want, anyway? I don't understand!

VOYNITSKY. I used to think of you as a superior being and knew your articles by heart; but now the scales have fallen from my eyes and I see you as you are! You write on art without knowing anything about it. Those books of yours which I used to admire are not worth one copper kopeck. You've made fools of us all!

SEREBRYAKOV. Can't any one make him stop? I am going!

HELENA. Ivan, I command you to stop this instant! Do you hear me?

VOYNITSKY. I refuse! [SEREBRYAKOV *tries to get out of the room, but* VOYNITSKY *bars the door*] Wait! I haven't done yet! You've wrecked my life. I've never lived. My best years have gone for nothing, have been ruined, thanks to you. You're my most bitter enemy!

TELEGIN. I can't stand it; I can't stand it. I am going. [*He goes out in great excitement.*]

SEREBRYAKOV. But what do you want? What earthly right have you to use such language to me? Nonentity! If this estate is yours, then take it, I don't want it!

HELENA. I'm going away out of this hell this minute. [*Shrieks*] This is too much!

VOYNITSKY. My life has been a failure. I'm clever and brave and strong. If I had lived a normal life I might have become another Schopenhauer or Dostoyevsky. I'm losing my head! I'm going crazy! Mother, I'm in despair! Oh, mother!

MME. VOYNITSKAYA. [*Sternly*] Listen to Alexander!

SONYA *falls on her knees beside* MARINA *and nestles against her*.

SONYA. Oh, Nanny, Nanny!

VOYNITSKY. Mama! What shall I do? But no, don't speak! I know what to do. [*To* SEREBRYAKOV] And you will understand me!

He goes out through the door in the centre of the room and MME. VOYNITSKAYA *follows him.*

SEREBRYAKOV. Tell me, what on earth is the matter? Take this lunatic out of my sight! I cannot possibly live under the same roof with him. His room [*He points to the centre door*] is almost next door to mine. Let him take himself off into the village or into a cottage on the estate, or I shall leave here at once. I cannot stay in the same house with him.

HELENA. [*To her husband*] We're leaving today; we must get ready right now for our departure.

SEREBRYAKOV. What a perfectly dreadful man!

SONYA. [*On her knees beside* MARINA *and turning to her father. She speaks through tears*] You must be kind to us, papa. Uncle Vanya and I are so unhappy! [*Controlling her despair*] Have pity on us. Remember how Uncle Vanya and Granny used to copy and translate your books for you every night — every, every night. Uncle Vanya and I have toiled without rest; he would never spend a penny on us, we sent it all to you. We've not eaten the bread of idleness. I'm not saying this as I should like to, but you must understand us, papa, you must show

some sympathy.

HELENA. [*Very upset, to her husband*] For heaven's sake, Alexander, go and have a talk with him — explain! Please!

SEREBRYAKOV. Very well, I shall have a talk with him, but I won't apologise for a thing. I am not angry with him, but you must confess that his behaviour has been strange, to say the least. Excuse me, I shall go to him.

[*He goes out through the centre door*.]

HELENA. Be gentle with him; try to quiet him. [*She follows him out.*]

SONYA. [*Nestling nearer to* MARINA] Nanny, oh, Nanny!

MARINA. It's all right, my baby. When the geese have cackled they will be still again. First they cackle and then they stop.

SONYA. Nanny!

MARINA. [*Strokes her hair*] You're trembling all over, as if you were freezing. There, there, little motherless child, God is merciful. A little lime−flower tea, and it'll all pass away. Don't cry, my sweetest. [*Looking angrily at the door in the centre of the room*] See, the geese have all gone now. The devil take them!

A shot is heard. HELENA *screams behind the scenes.* SONYA *shudders.*

MARINA. Oh, a curse on you!

SEREBRYAKOV. [*Comes in reeling with terror*] Stop him! stop him! He's gone mad!

HELENA *and* VOYNITSKY *are seen struggling in the doorway.*

HELENA. [*Trying to wrest the revolver from him*] Give it to me; give it to me, I tell you!

VOYNITSKY. Let me go, Helena, let me go! [*He frees himself and rushes in, looking everywhere for* SEREBRYAKOV] Where is he? Ah, there he is! [*He shoots at him. A pause*] I didn't get him? I missed again? [*Furiously*] Damnation! Damnation! To hell with him!

He flings the revolver on the floor, and drops helpless into a chair. SEREBRYAKOV *stands as if stupefied.* HELENA *leans against the wall, almost fainting.*

HELENA. Take me away! Take me away! I can't stay here — I don't care if you kill me, but I can't stay here —

VOYNITSKY. [*In despair*] Oh, what am I doing? What am I doing?

SONYA. [*Softly*] Oh, Nanny, Nanny!

The curtain falls.

ACT IV

VOYNITSKY'S *bedroom, which is also his office. A table stands near the window; on it are ledgers, letter scales, and papers of every description. Near by stands a smaller table belonging to* ASTROV, *with his paints and drawing materials alongside them a portfolio. On the wall hangs a cage containing a starling. There is also a map of Africa on the wall, obviously of no use to anybody. There is a large sofa covered with oilcloth. A door to the left leads into an inner room; one to the right leads into the front hall, and before this door lies a mat for the peasants with their muddy boots to stand on. It is an autumn evening. The silence is profound.* TELEGIN *and* MARINA *are sitting facing one another, winding wool.*

TELEGIN. Be quick, Marina, or we shall be called away to say good−bye before you have finished. The carriage has already been ordered.

MARINA. [*Trying to wind more quickly*] There's only a little left.

TELEGIN. They are going to Kharkov to live.

MARINA. They do well to go.

TELEGIN. They have been frightened. The professor's wife won't stay here an hour longer. "If we are going at all, let's be off," says she, "we shall go to Kharkov and look about us, and then we can send for our things." They are travelling light. It seems, Marina, that fate has decreed for them not to live here.

MARINA. And quite rightly. What a storm they've raised this afternoon — and all that shooting! It was shameful!

TELEGIN. It was indeed. The scene was worthy of the brush of Ayvazovsky.

MARINA. I wish I'd never laid eyes on them. [*A pause*] Now we'll have things as they were again: breakfast at eight, dinner at one, and supper in the evening; everything in order as decent folks, as Christians like to have it. [*Sighs*] It's a long time since I have eaten noodles, old sinner that I am.

TELEGIN. Yes, we haven't had noodles for ages. [*A pause*] Not for ages. As I was going through the village this morning, Marina, one of the shop−keepers called after me, "Hi! you hanger−on!" I felt it bitterly, I can tell you.

MARINA. Don't pay the least attention to them, my dear; we're all "hangers−on" in God's eyes. You and Sonya and all of us. Everyone must work, no one can sit idle. Where is Sonya?

TELEGIN. In the garden with the doctor, looking for Ivan. They fear he may lay violent hands on himself.

MARINA. Where's his pistol?

TELEGIN. [*Whispers*] I hid it in the cellar.

MARINA. [*With a grin*] What a sinful business!

VOYNITSKY *and* ASTROV *come in from outside.*

VOYNITSKY. Leave me alone! [*To* MARINA *and* TELEGIN] Go away! Go away and leave me to myself, at least for an hour. I won't have you watching me like this!

TELEGIN. Yes, yes, Vanya. [*He goes out on tiptoe.*]

MARINA. The gander cackles; ho! ho! ho!

[*She gathers up her wool and goes out.*]

VOYNITSKY. Leave me alone!

ASTROV. I would, with the greatest pleasure. I ought to have gone long ago, but I won't leave you until you have returned what you took from me.

VOYNITSKY. I took nothing from you.

ASTROV. I'm not jesting, don't detain me, I really must go.

VOYNITSKY. I took nothing of yours. [*Both sit down*]

ASTROV. You didn't? Very well, I'll have to wait a little longer, and then you'll have to forgive me if I resort to force. We'll have to bind you and search you. I mean what I say, I tell you.

VOYNITSKY. Do as you please. [*A pause*] Oh, to make such a fool of myself! To shoot twice and miss him

both times! I'll never forgive myself.

ASTROV. When the impulse came to shoot, it would have been better if you had put a bullet through your own head.

VOYNITSKY. [*Shrugging his shoulders*] Strange! I attempted murder, and am not going to be arrested or brought to trial. That means they think me mad. [*With a bitter laugh*] Me! I'm mad, and those who hide their worthlessness, their dullness, their blatant heartlessness behind a professor's mask, are sane! Those who marry old men and then deceive them under the noses of all, are sane! I saw you kiss her; I saw you in each other's arms!

ASTROV. Yes, sir, I did kiss her, sir; so there. [*He puts his thumb to his nose.*]

VOYNITSKY. [*His eyes on the door*] No, it's the earth that is mad, because she still lets you exist.

ASTROV. That's nonsense.

VOYNITSKY. Well? Am I not a madman, and therefore irresponsible? Haven't I the right to talk nonsense?

ASTROV. That line's old as time! You're not mad; you're simply a ridiculous fool. You're full of beans. I used to think every fool was out of his senses, but now I see that lack of sense is a man's normal state, and you're perfectly normal.

VOYNITSKY. [*Covers his face with his hands*] Oh! If you knew how ashamed I am! These piercing pangs of shame are like nothing on earth. [*In an agonised voice*] I can't endure them! [*He leans against the table*] What can I do? What can I do?

ASTROV. Nothing.

VOYNITSKY. You must give me something! Oh, my God! I'm forty−seven years old. I may live to sixty; I still have thirteen years before me; an eternity! How will I be able to endure life for thirteen years? What shall I do? How can I fill them? Oh, don't you see? [*He presses* ASTROV'S *hand convulsively*] Don't you see, if only I could live the rest of my life in some new way! If I could only wake some still, bright morning and feel that life had begun again; that the past was forgotten and had vanished like smoke. [*He weeps*] Oh, to begin life anew! Tell me, tell me how to begin, what to begin with.

ASTROV. [*Crossly*] What nonsense! What sort of a new life can you and I look forward to? We can have no hope.

VOYNITSKY. None?

ASTROV. None. Of that I am convinced.

VOYNITSKY. Give me something at least. [*He puts his hand to his heart*] I feel such a burning pain here.

ASTROV. [*Shouts angrily*] Stop it! [*Then, more gently*] It may be that in one or two hundred years posterity, which will despise us for our blind and stupid lives, will find some road to happiness; but we — you and I — have but one hope, the hope that we may be visited by visions, perhaps by pleasant ones, as we lie resting in our graves. [*Sighing*] Yes, brother, there were only two respectable, intelligent men in this district, you and I. Ten years or so of this life of ours, this miserable life, have sucked us under. Its rotten atmosphere has poisoned our blood, and we have become as contemptible and petty as the rest. [*With vigor*] But don't keep trying to talk your way out of it! Give me what you took from me, will you?

VOYNITSKY. I took nothing from you.

ASTROV. You took a little bottle of morphine out of my medicine−case. [*A pause*] Listen! If you're positively determined to make an end to yourself, go into the woods and shoot yourself there. Give up the morphine, or there will be a lot of talk and guesswork; people will think I gave it to you. I don't like the idea of having to perform a postmortem on you. Do you think I should find it entertaining?

SONYA *comes in.*

VOYNITSKY. Leave me alone.

ASTROV. [*To* SONYA] Sonya, your uncle has stolen a bottle of morphine out of my medicine−case and won't give it back. Tell him that his behaviour is — well, unwise. Besides, I haven't time for this, I must be going.

SONYA. Uncle Vanya, did you take the morphine? [*A pause*]

ASTROV. Yes, he took it. I'm absolutely sure.

SONYA. Give it back! Why do you want to frighten us? [*Tenderly*] Give it back, Uncle Vanya! My misfortune is perhaps even greater than yours, but I'm not plunged in despair. I endure my sorrow, and shall endure it until my life comes to a natural end. You must endure yours, too. [*A pause*] Give it back! [*Kisses his hand*] Dear, darling Uncle Vanya. Give it back! [*She weeps*] You are so good, I'm sure you'll have pity on us and

give it back. You must endure your sorrow, Uncle Vanya; you must endure it.

VOYNITSKY *takes a bottle from the drawer of the table and hands it to* ASTROV.

VOYNITSKY. There it is! [*To* SONYA] And now, we must get to work at once; we must do something, or else I won't be able to endure it.

SONYA. Yes, yes, to work! As soon as we have seen them off we'll go to work. [*She nervously straightens out the papers on the table*] Everything is in a muddle!

ASTROV. [*Putting the bottle in his case, which he straps together*] Now I can be off.

HELENA *comes in.*

HELENA. Are you here, Ivan? We're leaving in a moment. Go to Alexander, he wants to speak to you.

SONYA. Go, Uncle Vanya. [*She takes* VOYNITSKY 'S *arm*] Come, you and papa must make peace and be friends; that is absolutely necessary.

SONYA and VOYNITSKY go out.

HELENA. I'm going away. [*She gives* ASTROV *her hand*] Good−bye.

ASTROV. So soon?

HELENA. The carriage is waiting.

ASTROV. Good−bye.

HELENA. You promised me you'd go away yourself today.

ASTROV. I haven't forgotten. I'm going at once. [*A pause*] Are you frightened? [*Takes her hand*] Is it so terrible?

HELENA. Yes.

ASTROV. Couldn't you stay? Couldn't you? Tomorrow — in the forest —

HELENA. No. It's all settled, and that's why I can look you so bravely in the face. Our departure is fixed. One thing I must ask of you: don't think too badly of me; I'd like you to respect me.

ASTROV. Ah! [*With an impatient gesture*] Stay, please stay! Confess that there is nothing for you to do in this world. You have no object in life; there's nothing to occupy your attention, and sooner or later your feelings must master you. It's inevitable. It would be better if it happened not in Kharkov or in Kursk, but here, in nature's lap. It would then at least be poetical, it's even beautiful in autumn. Here you have the forests, the houses half in ruins that Turgenev writes of.

HELENA. How comical you are! I'm angry with you and yet I'll always remember you with pleasure. You're interesting and original. You and I will never meet again, and so I'll tell you — why should I conceal it? — that I'm just a little in love with you. Come, one more shake of our hands, and then let's part good friends. Let's not bear each other any ill will.

ASTROV. [*Having shaken hands*] Yes, go. [*Thoughtfully*] You seem to be sincere and good, and yet there's something strangely disquieting about your personality. No sooner did you arrive here with your husband than every one whom you found busy and actively creating something was forced to drop his work and give himself up for the whole summer to your husband's gout and yourself. You and he have infected us with your idleness. I've been swept off my feet; I've not put my hand to a thing for weeks, during which sickness has been running its course unchecked among the people, and the peasants have been pasturing their cattle in my woods and newly−planted forests. Go where you will, you and your husband will always carry destruction in your train. I'm joking of course, and yet I'm strangely sure that had you stayed here we should have been overtaken by the most immense devastation. I'd have gone to my ruin, and you — you would not have prospered. So off with you! *Finita la comedia!*

HELENA. [*Snatching a pencil off* ASTROV'S *table, and hiding it with a quick movement*] I'll take this pencil to remember you by!

ASTROV. How strange it is. We meet, and then suddenly it seems that we must part forever. That's the way in this world. As long as we are alone, before Uncle Vanya comes in with a bouquet — allow me — to kiss you good−bye — may I? [*He kisses her on the cheek*] So! Splendid!

HELENA. I wish you every happiness. [*She glances about her*] For once in my life, I shall! and scorn the consequences! [*She embraces him impetuously, and they quickly part*] I must go.

ASTROV. Yes, go. If the carriage is there, then start right now.

HELENA. I think they're coming. [*They stand listening.*]

ASTROV. *Finita!*

VOYNITSKY, SEREBRYAKOV, MME. VOYNITSKAYA *with her book,* TELEGIN, *and* SONYA *come in.*

SEREBRYAKOV. [*To* VOYNITSKY] Let's let bygones be bygones. I have gone through so much in the last few hours that I feel capable of writing a whole treatise on the conduct of life for the instruction of posterity. I gladly accept your apology, and myself ask your forgiveness. [*He and* VOYNITSKY *kiss each other three times.*]

VOYNITSKY. You'll be receiving the regular amount as before. Everything will be just the same.

HELENA *embraces* SONYA.

SEREBRYAKOV. [*Kissing* MME. VOYNITSKAYA'S *hand*] Mother!

MME. VOYNITSKAYA. [*Kissing him*] Have your picture taken, Alexander, and send me one. You know how dear you are to me.

TELEGIN. Good−bye, your Excellency. Don't forget us.

SEREBRYAKOV. [*Kissing his daughter*] Good−bye, good−bye all. [*Shaking hands with* ASTROV] Many thanks for your pleasant company. I have a deep regard for your opinions and your enthusiasm, but let me, as an old man, give one word of advice at parting: do something, my friend! Work! Do something! [*They all bow*] Good luck to you all. [*He goes out followed by* MME. VOYNITSKAYA *and* SONYA.]

VOYNITSKY [*Kissing HELENA'S hand fervently*] Good−bye — forgive me. I'll never see you again!

HELENA. [*Touched*] Good−bye, my dear.

She lightly kisses his head as he bends over her hand, and goes out.

ASTROV. [*To* TELEGIN] Tell them to bring my carriage around too, Waffles.

TELEGIN. All right, old man. [*Goes out*]

ASTROV *and* VOYNITSKY *are left behind alone.* ASTROV *collects his paints and drawing materials on the table and packs them away in a box.*

ASTROV. Why don't you go to see them off?

VOYNITSKY. Let them go! I — I can't go out there. I feel too sad. I must go to work on something at once. To work! To work!

He rummages through his papers on the table. A pause.

The tinkling of bells is heard as the horses trot away.

ASTROV. They've gone! The professor, I suppose, is glad to go. He couldn't be tempted back now by a fortune.

MARINA *comes in.*

MARINA. They've gone. [*She sits down in an arm−chair and knits her stocking.*]

SONYA *comes in.*

SONYA. They've gone. [*Wiping her eyes*] God be with them. [*To her uncle*] And now, Uncle Vanya, let's do something!

VOYNITSKY. To work! To work!

SONYA. It's been a long, long time since you and I have sat together at this table. [*She lights a lamp on the table*] No ink! [*She takes the inkstand to the cupboard and fills it from an ink−bottle*] How sad it is to see them go!

MME. VOYNITSKAYA *comes slowly in.*

MME. VOYNITSKAYA. They have gone.

She sits down and at once becomes absorbed in her book.

SONYA *sits down at the table and looks through an account book.*

SONYA. First, Uncle Vanya, let's write up the accounts. They're in a dreadful state. Come on, begin. You take one and I'll take the other.

VOYNITSKY. In account with — Mr. — [*They sit silently writing.*]

MARINA. [*Yawning*] The sand−man has come.

ASTROV. How still it is. Their pens scratch, the cricket sings; it's so warm and comfortable. I hate to go. [*The tinkling of bells is heard.*]

ASTROV. My carriage has come. There now remains but to say good−bye to you, my friends, and to my table here, and then — away! [*He puts the map into the portfolio.*]

MARINA. Don't hurry away; sit a little longer with us.

ASTROV. Impossible.

VOYNITSKY. [*Writing*] And carry forward from the old debt two roubles seventy−five —

The WORKMAN *comes in.*

WORKMAN. Your carriage is waiting, sir.

ASTROV. I heard it. [*He hands the* WORKMAN *his medicine−case, portfolio, and suitcase*] Look out, don't crush the portfolio!

WORKMAN. Very well, sir. [*Goes out*]

ASTROV. Well, now — [*Goes to say good−bye*]

SONYA. When shall we see you again?

ASTROV. Hardly before next summer. Probably not this winter, though, of course, if anything should happen you'll let me know. [*He shakes hands with them*] Thank you for your kindness, for your hospitality, for everything! [*He goes up to* MARINA *and kisses her head*] Good−bye, old Nanny!

MARINA. Are you going without your tea?

ASTROV. I don't want any, Nanny.

MARINA. Won't you have a drop of vodka?

ASTROV. [*Hesitatingly*] Yes, I might.

MARINA goes out.

ASTROV. [*After a pause*] My trace horse has gone lame for some reason. I noticed it yesterday when Peter was taking him to water.

VOYNITSKY. You should have him re−shod.

ASTROV. I'll have to go around by the blacksmith's on my way home. It can't be avoided. [*He stands looking up at the map of Africa hanging on the wall*] I suppose it's roasting hot in Africa now.

VOYNITSKY. Yes, I suppose it is.

MARINA *comes back carrying a tray on which are a glass of vodka and a piece of bread.*

MARINA. Help yourself.

ASTROV *drinks the vodka.*

MARINA. To your good health, my dear! [*She bows deeply*] Eat your bread with it.

ASTROV. No, I like it so. And now, all the best to you! [*To* MARINA] You needn't come out to see me off, Nanny.

He goes out. SONYA *follows him with a candle to light him to the carriage.* MARINA *sits down in her armchair.*

VOYNITSKY. [*Writing*] On the 2d of February, twenty pounds of butter; on the 16th, twenty pounds of butter again. Buckwheat flour — [*A pause. Bells are heard tinkling.*]

MARINA. He's gone. [*A pause.*]

SONYA *comes in and sets the candle stick on the table.*

SONYA. He has gone.

VOYNITSKY. [*Adding on an abacus and writing*] Total, fifteen — twenty−five —

SONYA *sits down and begins to write.*

MARINA. [*Yawning*] Oh, ho! The Lord have mercy.

TELEGIN *comes in on tiptoe, sits down near the door, and begins to tune his guitar.*

VOYNITSKY. [*To* SONYA, *stroking her hair*] Oh, my child, I'm terribly depressed; if you only knew how miserable I am!

SONYA. What can we do? We must live our lives. [*A pause*] Yes, we shall live, Uncle Vanya. We shall live through the long procession of days before us, and through the long evenings; we shall patiently bear the trials that fate imposes on us; we shall work for others without rest, both now and when we are old; and when our last hour comes we shall meet it humbly, and there, beyond the grave, we shall say that we have suffered and wept, that our life was bitter, and God will have pity on us. Ah, then dear, dear Uncle, you and I shall see that bright and beautiful life; we shall rejoice and look back upon our sorrow here; a tender smile — and — we shall rest. I have faith, Uncle, fervent, passionate faith. [SONYA *kneels down before her uncle and lays her head on his hands. She speaks in a weary voice*] We shall rest. [TELEGIN *plays softly on the guitar*] We shall rest. We shall hear the angels. We shall see heaven all shining with diamonds. We shall see all evil and all our pain sink away in the

great compassion that shall enfold the world. Our life will be as peaceful and tender and sweet as a caress. I have faith; I have faith. [*She wipes away her tears with a handkerchief*] My poor, poor Uncle Vanya, you are crying! [*Weeping*] You have never known what happiness was, but wait, Uncle Vanya, wait! We shall rest. [*She embraces him*] We shall rest! [*The* WATCHMAN'S *rattle is heard in the garden;* TELEGIN *plays softly;* MME. VOYNITSKAYA *writes something on the margin of her pamphlet;* MARINA *knits her stocking*] We shall rest!

The curtain slowly falls.

Notes

Following notes are by James Rusk and A. S. Man, 1998:

TITLE

Vanya is a familiar diminutive of the Russian name Ivan — the title's English equivalent would be "Uncle Johnny."

CHARACTERS

privy councilor: a high rank in the Russian civil service

ACT I

Nanny, nurse: *nyanka*, a pet name for a female nurse or nanny

Sonya's mother: lit. *Sonechka*, a pet name for Sonya; her mother's name was Vera Petrovna, but modern English adaptations of the play don't need to use the name and patronymic as in Russian.

typhoid: Fell uses "eruptive typhoid", while some other translators have "typhus" here. They are two different diseases, but both epidemic. It makes no difference to the play which it really was.

Straining the mind...: From the poem "Other People's Views" (1794) by I. I. Dmitriyev (1760−1837)

I've come to see your husband. It was very impolite of the family to ignore the doctor's presence for so long, a point not lost on a Russian audience.

quantum satis: As much as needed (prescription terminology); still used today but more likely abbreviated as "q.s." or replaced by the similar Latin "p.r.n."

Pardon me, Jean...: "Jean" is the French version of "Ivan." The Russian upper class spoke French among themselves extensively in the early 19th century, but by the time of this play (1896) using French was considered pretentious.

perpetuum mobile: non−stop

Ostrovsky's plays: A. N. Ostrovsky (1823−1886) is considered by many to be the greatest Russian dramatist between Gogol and Chekhov

nursery and seed bed: At the time this play was adapted from the one−act play "The Wood−Demon," Chekhov, a physician, was living in the Crimea and loved nothing so much as spending his time working in his garden, where he planted many fruit trees. However, the note of pomposity and dandyism that Astrov displays here should not be overlooked.

ACT II

Watchman's rattle: Russian estates often had night watchmen. They tapped both to warn possible trespassers and to let their employer know they were awake. Typically, the tapping consisted of two strokes in two seconds, a five second pause, and then the sequence was repeated.

Nelly: lit., *Lenochka*, a pet name for Yelena (Helena)

Batyushkov's works: K. N. Batyushkov (1787−1855), Russian poet

Turgenev: I. S. Turgenev (1818−1883), famous Russian novelist

lime−flower tea: a Russian folk remedy

I can't think or feel: modern audiences, with a modern view of adultery, may consider Helena insincere here and thus disregard what she is saying, but it is more complex than that. Although she is falling in love, she cannot say it openly, since she is married to another. That is not to say that adultery was less common then, but it was not openly approved.

Barring the way: The doctor's crude persistence might not seem in character to modern audiences, but evidently this is exactly how Russian men behaved.

ACT III

at the Conservatory: Helena must have been a very good musician to study at the world−famous St. Petersburg Conservatory

forget myself: This is a difficult speech, as Astrov is unconsciously making love to Helena, while Helena's feelings must obviously be in great conflict. At the same time, the whole speech is ironical with its pretensions to art and nature and painting of Russian history.

an inspector general is coming: Russian audiences would immediately recognize the joking reference to Gogol's satirical play "The Inspector General"

manet omnes una nox: "Night awaits us all," from Horace, *Odes*, I, 28, 15

summer cottage in Finland: a *dacha*, a vacation home (at the time of the play Finland was part of Russia)

and not Turks: In the 19th century, Turkish law allowed a husband to retain the dowry even if his wife died

Schopenhauer or Dostoyevsky: Arthur Schopenhauer (1788−1860) was a German philosopher and F. M. Dostoyevsky (1821−1881) was a great Russian novelist. (A bit of comic irony here, because each was a great pessimist about success in this world.)

Oh, Nanny, Nanny!: Oh, *Nyanechka, Nyanechka*, another pet name for a nanny

Mama! What should I do?: The word translated as Mama is *Matushka*, an old−fashioned word for mother

ACT IV

brush of Ayvazovsky: I. K. Ayvazovsky (1817−1900) painted stormy seas and naval battles, Chekhov visited his estate in 1888 and described him as an old man married to a young and very beautiful woman

You're full of beans: lit., "you're a clown full of peas"

Finita la comedia!: The comedy is over (Italian)

for your hospitality: lit., "for your bread and salt"

trace horse: In the Russian troika, or cart with three horses, the two outside horses are called trace horses