Three Sisters

Anton Chekhov

Interpreted by A.J. Schaar

From a 1917 journal published by the Moscow Art Theatre: (MAT)

"Chekhov wrote Three Sisters in Yalta, and then rewrote it in early autumn in Moscow. He spent two to three days on each act, but there were significant breaks between the acts.

With complete sincerity he said that he had written a ***vaudeville****, and was taken aback at our amusement of this definition of Three Sisters…*

Chekhov was present for the first read-through of the play by the actors. As on another occasion when the actors plied him with questions about particular aspects of their parts which seemed unclear to them, Chekhov not only refused any lengthy explanations, but rather categorically answered them with short, monosyllabic words…

Given the ensemble playing, the friendliness of the performance, and maturity of form, Three Sisters was always seen in the theatre as the best of the Chekhov productions."

These words were written by Nemirovich-Danchenko who co-founded the MAT with Stanislavski.

Once the teacher and lover of Olga Knipper, he was the one who championed Chekhov's plays in the 1890s; returning to the MAT in 1900 to help produce their production of Three Sisters.

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For Major Love.

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Three Sisters

Andrey Prozorov[1]

Natasha Ivanovna, *His Fiancé, Then Wife*

Olga[2]

Masha[3] } *His Sisters*

Irina

Fyodor Kulygin, *High School Teacher, Masha's Husband*

Alexander Vershinin[4], *Lieutenant Colonel, Battery Commander*

Baron Nikolai[5] Tuzenbach Von Altschuler, *First Lieutenant*

Solony[6], *Staff Captain*

Ivan[7] Chebutykin, *Army Doctor*

Fedotik, *Second Lieutenant*

Rode, *Second Lieutenant*

Ferapont, *Caretaker of the County Council, a Very Old Man*

Anfisa, *The Prozorovs' Nanny, 80 Years Old*

The action takes place in an unnamed provincial town; the place of its county's local government[8].

Act One[9]

In the Prozorovs' home. A drawing room. A ballroom can be seen beyond. It is noon; the sun is warm and light inside. In the dining room their table is being set for lunch.

Olga wears the dark blue dress of a girls' high school teacher. She corrects examination books standing still and even as she moves throughout the room. Masha wears a gown of black. She sits reading with her hat in her lap. Irina wears a white gown. She stands lost in her thoughts.

OLGA: One year ago today our father died. Almost to the minute, he died on this day. The fifth of May… Happy birthday, Irina[10]. I remember it snowed of all things. I thought I'd die. You fainted, right there, and looked like a corpse too. But now you're wearing white and you look *lovely*. Alive.

(the clock strikes noon)

The clock struck then too, just the same.

(pause)

A band was playing music when they carried him away. Soldiers fired a salute over his grave. Of course, the band *had* to play and the soldiers *had* to shoot because

father was a General, a Brigade Commander. There should have been more people there, I don't care that it rained. And snowed.

IRINA: Let's think of something else!

(Tuzenbach, Chebutykin and Solyony appear beyond)

OLGA: Today's the fifth of May and the windows are all open it's so warm… though the birch trees are all bare, still. Father got his command and brought us here eleven years ago. That was in May, too. Eleven years ago this time in *Moscow*, flowers were blooming, everywhere, dazzling in the sunlight. I remember it so perfectly - the years can't stand between us, we left Moscow yesterday. Oh! This morning I woke up and I just *knew* that it was spring. Every old thing shined back at me so cheerfully and light. My heart felt like it'd break with joy. I want to go back home.

CHEBUTYKIN: Well to hell with that!

TUZENBACH: I know, it's too ridiculous.

MASHA: *(reading, whistles)*

OLGA: Stop it. You know I teach all day and I tutor most nights - I've got a headache that *never* goes away – even my thoughts are tired - my dreams are so tired nearly all of them have *died*. Four years at that school have stolen *all* of my youth. There's only one thing I have left in me to *want* anymore.

IRINA: Moscow! To go back to Moscow! Let's sell this whole place and everything here and find our way to Moscow.

OLGA: Yes, we'll go back to Moscow as soon as we can!

(Chebutykin and Tuzenbach laugh)

IRINA: Andrey will come with us and become a famous scholar. Well, no matter what, he can't stay *here.* Poor Masha though, darling's the only thing holding us back.

OLGA: Masha will visit us every year. Each year, for the whole summer.

MASHA: *(whistles)*

IRINA: From your lips to God's ears, sweet sister.

(looks out the window)

It's so beautiful out. I don't know why I'm happy! I woke up this morning and thought, 'it's my birthday,' and all of a sudden I felt so happy. I thought of being with mama before she *died* when we were little, and just, such wonderful thoughts!

OLGA: You are glowing today, my own one. I've never seen you look more lovely! Masha's lovely, too. And Andrey would be if he wasn't so fat. Some people it suits, but it doesn't suit him. And now I'm old and I'm too thin because those girls at the high school

torment me, I think. But today, it's Sunday. I can stay home in peace and my head doesn't hurt; I feel younger than yesterday. I'm only twenty-eight… It's fine. It's God's will. Still, I think if *I* had gotten married it could've all been even better. I could stay home whenever I wanted.

(pause)

I would have loved my husband.

TUZENBACH: *(to Solyony)* I can honestly say that I've tried, but nothing you say makes any sense.

(comes into the room)[11]

I forgot. Our new battery commander will come call on you today. He's called Vershinin.

(sits at a piano)

OLGA: Oh! We'll be here.

IRINA: Is he old?

TUZENBACH: I hope not, he's forty-ish.

(plays a piano key)

He seems clever. Well, not dumb. He talks and talks and talks and talks and-

IRINA: -Is he interesting?

TUZENBACH: Sometimes. He's got a wife, *her* mother[12], and two little girls of his own – and this is his *second* wife. He introduces himself everywhere and everyone he meets he tells: he has a wife and two young girls. Just wait, he'll tell you soon. His wife's a little out-there. She wears her hair in pig-tails just like a girl in school and only talks important nothings - only talks philosophy. She often tries to kill herself - just to annoy him. I wouldn't put up with someone like that for long, but he does and just complains to *everyone* about it.

SOLYONY: *(approaching from the ballroom with Chebutykin, glances at Irina)* With one arm, I can lift 50 pounds, but with both arms, I can lift 200. Easily. By this I conclude, that two men are not *twice* as strong as one, but *three* times as strong. Or more…[13]

CHEBUTYKIN: *(reading the paper as he walks)* To prevent baldness… dissolve naphthalene in alcohol… apply to scalp daily…[14]

(makes a note in a little notebook)

Make a note of that!

(to Solyony) But what I was telling you earlier: you take a cork and stick it in the mouth of a bottle, then just push a little tube through the cork… Then you take the smallest pinch of common-

IRINA: -Doctor, sweet Doctor!

CHEBUTYKIN: What, my girl, my joy?

IRINA: Tell me, why am I happy? I feel like I'm skipping through the big blue sky above me. Why is that? What for?

CHEBUTYKIN: *(kissing both her hands)* My bird in white.

IRINA: When I woke up today, I got up and I had a bath, and then suddenly it seemed to me that *everything* is clear to me and I know how to live. Sweet Ivan, I can see it all now. A person has to work. No matter who we are, work is all that gives purpose and meaning to life; work holds all our happiness and only ecstasies. I wish I were a laborer, breaking stones at dawn, or a shepherd, or school teacher, or on the railroads. I wish I weren't human. I wish I were a horse. Working. I wish I were anything except a young woman who gets up at noon and has coffee in bed and takes two hours to dress – it's horrible! Like how I want an icy drink on a really hot day, *that's* how I want to work. If I don't get up early and *work* from now on, you stop being my friend, Ivan.

CHEBUTYKIN: *(gently)* I will, I won't.[15]

OLGA: Father made us all get up at seven. Now Irina's up at seven but she stays in bed 'til nine at least, just thinking about things. Her little face looks so *serious*!

(the room laughs)

IRINA: You think it's *strange* when I'm serious. You still see me as a child, but I am twenty years old today!

TUZENBACH: Wanting to work, oh my God, how I understand you! I haven't worked - even once! I was born in St. Petersburg[16] - cold and idle - to a family that's never known work or care. I remember, as a boy, I'd come home from military school, and there was this footman who had to pull my boots off for me, and I… was a capricious child. But even then, my mother would look at me with reverence and awe…. and with wonder, if anyone *ever* looked at me differently. I was protected from work. They only just managed it! But now the time has come, for all of us, the time has come. A huge storm is coming[17], it's already close, and when it's overhead, it'll *crack,* and blow all greed, and ignorance, and prejudice, and all the god forsaken *boredom* out of our society. Everyone wants to be entertained every minute. I want to be useful. I want to work. And in 25-30[18] years, everyone else will be working, too. Everyone!

CHEBUTYKIN: I will not work.

TUZENBACH: Well, you don't count.

SOLYONY: In 25 years you'll be dead, thank God. In two years you'll be six feet under, eating flowers by their roots[19], and *if you're not…* I'm going to put a bullet through your forehead, my angel.

(takes a bottle of perfume out of his pocket and sprays his chest)

CHEBUTYKIN: And I never really did anything. Since I left the university, I've never lifted a finger, not even to read a book; I only ever read this newspaper…

(takes out of pocket another newspaper)

Here… I know from this newspaper that there once was a writer named Dobrolyubov[20], but what he wrote about, I don't know… God knows…

(hears a knock on the floor under their feet)

Here… They're calling me down, someone's come for me. They've come for me now… Wait a minute…

(hurries away, combing his beard)

IRINA: He's done something.

TUZENBACH: Yes, he went away smiling… Obviously, he'll presently bring you a present.

IRINA: I hate this.

OLGA: Yes, it's horrible. He does such stupid things.

MASHA: On a faraway shore there stands an oak,
And on that oak there hangs a chain,
Atop that chain a talking cat,
Goes walking left then right again,
Goes walking left then right again[21]

(gets up and sings softly)

OLGA: You're no fun today, Masha.

MASHA: *(humming, she puts on her hat)*

OLGA: Where are you going?

MASHA: Home.

IRINA: Hmm…

TUZENBACH: *(pointing to the door)*[22] Leave this birthday party!

MASHA: It doesn't matter… I'll come back again in the evening. Goodbye, my girl…

(kisses Irina)

I wish you health and happiness. Once upon a time when father was alive, troops of officers would come to all our birthday parties and they'd-- And today there's only a man - and a half - it's as dull as the wilderness… I'm leaving… I suffer from *melancholera*[23] – I'm no fun, don't listen to me.

(laughs through tears)

We'll talk tonight, but bye for now, sweetheart.

IRINA: *(unhappy)* Why, what…?

OLGA: *(in tears) I* know what you mean, Masha.

SOLYONY: If a man talks philosophy, you'll hear philosophy, or sophistry; if a woman talks philosophy, or two women, you'll hear – pull my finger.

MASHA: What's that supposed to *mean*, you disturbed, disturbing person?

SOLYONY: Nothing.

> Before the fellow could draw breath,
> The bear had struck with claws of death.[24]

(pause)

MASHA: *(to Olga, angry)* Stop crying!

(enter Anfisa and Ferapont with a cake)

ANFISA: Here, father[25]. You can come in, your feet are clean.

(to Irina) From the County Council, from Mikhail Ivanych *Protopopov*… Cake.

IRINA: Thanks. Thank you.

(takes the cake)

FERAPONT: What?

IRINA: *(louder)* Thank you!

OLGA: Nanny, give him some lunch[26]. Ferapont: go, she'll give you some lunch.

FERAPONT: What?

ANFISA: Let's go, father.

(looking at Olga, Ferapont doesn't hear)

Ferapont Spiridonych.[27] Let's go…

(leaves with Ferapont)

MASHA: I don't like *Protopopov*, I don't want to eat his cake. He shouldn't be invited.

IRINA: He's not invited.

MASHA: Good.

(enter Chebutykin, behind him, a smiling soldier carrying a silver samovar[28]; a buzz of amazement and complaint)

OLGA: *(covers her face with her hands)* A samovar! It's horrible!

(leaves the room to go to the table)

IRINA: Darling, doctor, what are you doing?

TUZENBACH: *(laughs)* I told you so.

MASHA: You're shameless!

CHEBUTYKIN: My sweethearts, my angels, you're my only, you're my dearest, you three are the most precious things to me in all the world. I'll be sixty soon, I'm an old man; a lonely, insignificant, old man…

There's nothing left in me that's good, except this love for you, and if it weren't for you, I would have left life's lodgings long ago…

(to Irina) Pretty one, my own one, I've known you from the day you were born… I've held you in my arms… I loved your dear mama…[29]

IRINA: This gift is too expensive!

CHEBUTYKIN: *(through tears, angry)* Too expensive... Well, absolutely!

(to the soldier) Put the samovar over thar.

(teases) Too expensive…

(the soldier carries the samovar off[30])

ANFISA: *(passing through the room opposite the soldier)* My loves, a colonel, a stranger is here. He already took off his coat, my girls, and now he's coming in. Irinushka, you be *nice*.

(leaving) And lunch is late… Lord God…

TUZENBACH: Vershinin, should be.

(enter Vershinin)

TUZENBACH: Lieutenant Colonel Vershinin!

VERSHININ: *(walks silently to Masha and Irina)*

I have the honor to introduce my*self*: Vershinin. I'm very, very happy, that, finally, I have you. And look what you've become, my, my!

IRINA: Sit down, please. We are very pleased.

VERSHININ: *(amused)* I'm so glad, I'm so glad! But you are *three* sisters. I remember *three* girls. I can't remember your faces, but your father, Colonel Prozorov, had three little girls. I remember that well; I saw you with these very eyes. How time goes by! My, my, how time goes by!

TUZENBACH: Alexander Ignatych is from Moscow.

IRINA: From *Moscow*? You're from *Moscow*?

VERSHININ: Yes, I'm from there. Your father, God rest him, was a battery commander, and I served in his very same brigade.

(as Irina heads towards the hall, to Masha) This face I begin to remember, it seems.

MASHA: Do I remember yours?… No!

IRINA: Olga! Olga! *(screams down the hall)* Olga, come on!

OLGA: *(enters from hall into the room)*

IRINA: Lieutenant Colonel Vershinin is from Moscow.

VERSHININ: You, you must be, Olga, the oldest… and you're Maria[31]… and you're Irina, the youngest.

OLGA: You're really from Moscow?

VERSHININ: Yes. I studied in Moscow and then I started my service in Moscow, served there for a long time. Finally I got my own battery here – I've been relocated here, as you can see. I don't remember you exactly, I only remember that you were three sisters. Your father still lives in my memory; I'll close my eyes and see him there, just like he's still alive. I've been there with you ever since in Moscow…

OLGA: I thought I was *sure* I remembered *everyone* from *then*, but suddenly...

VERSHININ: *(glancing at Tuzenbach)*[32] My full name is Alexander Ignatych-

IRINA: -Alexander Ignatych from Moscow, here… Now *this* is a surprise!

OLGA: Because *we* are moving *there.*

IRINA: Just think, in autumn we'll be there. Our Moscow, we were born there… On Old Basmanny street.

(both laugh)

MASHA: A fellow countryman. *(alive)* I remember now! Olga, remember when we used to talk about *The Major of Love*? You were a Lieutenant then, and you were in love, and for some reason we all teased you: *Major Love*…

VERSHININ: *(laughs).* How true, how true… *Major Love*, how true.

MASHA: Back then you only had a moustache… Oh, now you're so old!

(through tears) Oh, you're so old now!

VERSHININ: Yes, when they called me Major Love, I was still young, I was in love. Now I'm not.

OLGA: But you still have your hair, it's not even very gray. You're old, but you're not *old.*

VERSHININ: Either way, I'm forty-two. *Moscow:* how long has it been since you left?

IRINA: Eleven years. Well, what are you crying for, Masha, weirdo[33]…

(through tears) What am I crying for, too?

MASHA: Nothing. What street did you live on?

VERSHININ: On Old Basmanny.

OLGA: But we lived there too…

VERSHININ: One time I lived on German street. Happy German street, I used to look at the bright red barracks. But there was this sullen bridge there, a bridge to cross the water. The lonely grew sad on it.

(pauses)

But here, what a wide river! What a rich river!

OLGA: Yes, but it's cold. It's cold and there are mosquitoes.

VERSHININ: You! Here is such a good, healthy, good, Slavic climate. Forest, river… And the birch trees! The way they sway - I love them more than all the other trees. It's good to live here. But it's strange, the nearest railway station is twenty miles away… And no one knows why, why that is.

SOLYONY: But *I* know why, why that is.

(everyone looks at him)

Because, if the station were close, it wouldn't be far away, and if it's far away, that means, it isn't close.

(an awkward silence)

TUZENBACH: You're such a sparkling conversationalist, Solyony.

OLGA: Now I've remembered I remember you.

VERSHININ: I knew your mother.

CHEBUTYKIN: She was too good for this world, God rest her heavenly.

IRINA: Mama is buried in Moscow.

OLGA: At the famous convent...[34]

MASHA: I can't believe I'm beginning to forget her face. No one will remember ours either. In time, we'll all be forgotten.

VERSHININ: Yes. We'll all be forgotten. These *words* will be forgotten. Never to be remembered again. Never to be thought of at *all*, sometimes. Sometimes, I start talking when I don't know what I'll *say*. And the next moment, the words are just gone! Just like that… It's a mystery… I think we all know what I'm talking about, *yes*. People may have said that Columbus, or Copernicus, were idiots at first. But we can't *know* what they said, because their words have been forgotten too. And people in the future may look back on *us* one day and say, you know, 'what idiots,' no matter how hard we try. But we can't know what they'll say then either, because we can't see the future.

TUZENBACH: Who knows? Maybe they'll call our lives a high-point and they'll remember us with respect. These days there's no more torture, executions, invasions… but there is still so much suffering!

SOLYONY: *(in a thin voice).* 'He talks and talks and talks and – is he interesting? Sometimes.'

TUZENBACH: Solyony, *please*, *leave me alone*.

(sits down on another seat)

You've bothered me now, at last.

SOLYONY: *(in a thin voice).* 'He talks and talks and talks and -'

TUZENBACH: *(to Vershinin)* - *Suffering*, which we observe *now* – there's so much of it! – means that our society is climbing towards a moral height we've never reached before.

VERSHININ: Yes, of course.

CHEBUTYKIN: You just said, Baron, that our life will be called a high-point; but people are still so short…

(gets up)

Look – see how short I am. You're just trying to cheer me up, like life makes any sense.

(off, a violin is playing)

MASHA: That's Andrey playing, our brother.

IRINA: He's a genius. He should be, he *will* be a famous professor someday. Papa was in the military, but his son has chosen a *lettered* career for himself.

MASHA: Papa made him.

OLGA: We've been teasing him today. Andrey, it seems, is a little bit in *love*.

IRINA: With a girl from *here*. She'll come here today for lunch, I bet.

MASHA: Oh, the way she dresses! It's not that's it's ugly, or not fashionable, it's just *pitiful* somehow. And her cheeks are just so scrubbed, *so scrubbed*! Andrey isn't in love, I won't allow it. He has *some* taste. He's just teasing us, I hope. I heard just yesterday that she goes out with that disgusting *Protopopov*, Chairman of the County Council. That's perfect.[35]

(at a side door) Andrey, come here! Andrey sweetheart, just for a minute!

(Andrey comes in)

OLGA: This is my brother, Andrey.

VERSHININ: Vershinin.

ANDREY: Prozorov.

(wipes his sweaty face)[36]

You're the new battery commander?

OLGA: Can you imagine, angel? Colonel Vershinin is from Moscow.

ANDREY: Yes? Well, *congratulations*, now my sisters won't leave you alone.

VERSHININ: I think that I've already bored them.

IRINA: Look at this: a frame for a portrait Andrey gave me today.

(shows the frame)

He *made* this.

VERSHININ: *(looking at the frame and not knowing what to say)* Yes… solid…

IRINA: So is that frame there, over the piano, Andrey made that one too.

ANDREY: *(waves his hand and walks away)*

OLGA: Andrey is brilliant, and he plays the violin, and carves different things, in one word, he's a *master*. Andrey, don't go away! He always does this – he always goes away. Come back!

(Masha and Irina take his hands and, laughing, they lead him back)

MASHA: Come back, come back!

ANDRY: Let go, please.

MASHA: You're so funny! We used to call Colonel Vershinin *Major Love,* and he wasn't angry at all.

VERSHININ: Not at all!

MASHA: And I want to call you: Andrey, the violinist – the *Virtuoso of Love!*

IRINA: Or the *Professor of Love! Doctor Love!...*

OLGA: He's in love! Andrey's in love![37]

IRINA: *(applauding)* Bravo, bravo! Andrey's in love!

CHEBUTYKIN: *(comes up behind Andrey and takes his waist with both hands)*

For Love alone,
Does Nature light,
That farthest edge,
The end of Night[38].

(roars with laughter; he's still holding the newspaper)

ANDREY: Well, enough, that's enough…

(wipes his face)

I didn't sleep all night and now I'm ill: *(blasé)* 'both sleep and insomnolency, when immoderate, are bad,' *as the saying goes*[39]. I was up until four reading, then I laid down, but nothing happened. I thought about *that* until about seven… and the early thundering… then the sun climbed into the bedroom. I want this summer, while I'm here, to translate one book from French[40].

VERSHININ: And do you read French?

ANDREY: Yes. Father (may he rest in peace) *squeezed* us in a fist of education. I'm afraid I must confess that after his death, I gained weight and got fat this past year – it's like my body has been *freed* from oppression. Thanks to father, my sisters and I know French, German, and English, and Irina even knows Italian. But at what cost!

MASHA: In this place, knowing three other languages is a useless luxury. Not even a luxury, it's just useless, like having a sixth finger. We know too much!

VERSHININ: *(laughs)* 'We know too much.' Alright. Let's say that among the hundred-thousand rude and backwards people in this city, there exists only three like you. It goes without saying: you can't defeat the darkness that surrounds you. You'll fight against the tide of life which pulls you ever farther from the shore. The sea of the hundred-thousand will wear away at you, day after day, until finally, you'll drown.

But - you won't quite disappear, you won't lose all influence. Let's say, after you've died, there are maybe six like you, then twelve, and so on, until, at long last, *you* will be the majority. In two-hundred, three-hundred years, life on earth will be unimaginably beautiful. Humanity needs a beautiful life, and if we don't have it yet, we must think of it, wait, dream of it, prepare for it, we must see and know more than has ever been seen or known by our grandfathers or fathers. *(laughs)* And you complain 'you know too much!'

MASHA: *(takes off her hat).* I'm staying for lunch.

IRINA: *(with a sigh).* Right, all that should be written down…

(Andrey goes, imperceptibly, away)

TUZENBACH: In many years, you say, life on earth will be as beautiful as these sisters. And that's true. But

to be a part of it now, although from afar, we must prepare for it now, we must work…

VERSHININ: *(gets up)*

Yes. You have so many flowers!

(looking around) This room is beautiful. I'm envious. All my life, I've lived in cramped little quarters with just two chairs and a sofa… and the furnaces *always* smoke. I've never lived a life like this one, with such flowers…

(rubs his hands) Hm! That's life!

TUZENBACH: Yes, we must *work*. Now, you may be thinking to yourselves: there's a *German* for you. But honestly, I'm Russian, I don't speak a word of German. My father had me baptized Orthodox…

(pause)

VERSHININ: *(walks the stage)*

What if you could start your life over again, knowing everything that you know now. If this life is a story we're learning to tell, so that in the next life, we could tell it so… that every detail, every choice, every *glance* would be… *perfection*. We've all done something that we'd change if we could… I wouldn't repeat a thing. At the very least, I'd find a different setting for my story. I'd *demand* a room like this room for myself, with flowers, and with light… I have a wife, and two young

girls, and my wife's suicidal and so on, and so on, and…

(Tuzenbach glances at Irina)

If my life ever begins again, I'm never getting married… Forget it!

(Kulygin enters in a dress coat)

KULYGIN: *(approaches Irina)* My dear, dear sister, let me congratulate you on this the day of your birth and wish you sincerely and with all my heart, health, and all that, and whatever I should wish a girl of your age. And to bring you this present – here, is a book.

(gives her the book)

The history of our high school for the last fifty years. Written by *me*. A totally meaningless book. I wrote it because I couldn't find anything better to do at the time - but read it anyway. Hello gentlemen!

(to Vershinin) Kulygin. Teacher at the local school, and 'councilor of the courtyard.'

(to Irina) In this book you will find a *list of names* of all those who've graduated from our local school in the last fifty years. Feci quod potui, feciant meliora potentes! I have done what I could, may those who can, do more!

(kisses Masha)

IRINA: You gave me this book last year.

KULYGIN: *(laughs)* No! In that case give it back. Or better yet give it to the Colonel. Take it, Colonel. Someday, read this when you're bored.

VERSHININ: Thank you.

(collects the book)

I'm very, very glad to have met you all…

OLGA: You're leaving? No!

IRINA: Stay with us for lunch. Please!

OLGA: I beg you!

VERSHININ: *(bows)* It seems I'm interrupting a birthday. I'm sorry, I didn't know, I didn't congratulate you…

(goes with Olga into the dining room)

KULYGIN: Today, gentlemen, is Sunday, the day of rest. May you rest. May you enjoy yourselves, each according to your age and occupation. The carpets need to be taken up for the summer and stored until the winter… Use Persian powder… The Romans were healthy because they knew how to work and they knew how to rest. They had mens sano in corpora sano – a healthy mind in a healthy body. Our headmaster often says: the most important thing in life – is its *form*…

when life loses its form, it ends! And our everyday life is the same.

(takes Masha by the waist, laughing)

Masha loves me. My wife loves me. And the window curtains. They should go with the carpets too… I am happy today, all day today I've felt just super. Masha, at four o'clock we're due at the headmaster's. He's arranged a walk for the teachers and their families.

MASHA: I'm not going.

KULYGIN: *(sorry)* Sweet Masha, why?

MASHA: I'll tell you later…

(angrily) Fine, I'll *go*, just leave me *alone*, you're *welcome*…

(leaves)

KULYGIN: *(calling after)* And then we'll spend the evening with the headmaster. In spite of his condition, that man tries hard to be social. A transcendent, a luminous personage… Swell guy. Why just yesterday he said me: 'I'm tired, Kulygin! Tired!'

(looks at clock on the wall, then at watch)

Your clock is fast by seven minutes.[41] 'Tired...' That's what he said.

(behind the scenes, a violin plays)

OLGA: Everyone, welcome, to lunch! Lunch is served!

KULYGIN: Ah, my dear Olga, my dearest girl. I worked all night almost to dawn. I was so tired, so tired, and today I feel great!

(goes down the hall to the table)

Dearest Olga.

CHEBUTYKIN: *(puts a newspaper in his pocket, combs his beard)* Lunch to be eaten? I'm glad to oblige!

MASHA: *(to Chebutykin, strict)* Look here, you: don't drink today. Do you hear? It's bad for you.

CHEBUTYKIN: I've stopped and you know that I've stopped. For *two years* there has been - no binge.

(impatiently) Sweet Mother of God, does it matter!

MASHA: I don't care. Just don't drink.

(angrily, but so her husband can't hear) God damn it. Another evening lost forever to the stupid headmaster!

TUZENBACH: If I were you I wouldn't go… just don't go.

CHEBUTYKIN: Just don't go, I agree.

MASHA: Right, 'just don't go'… This life is damned…

(goes to the hall)

CHEBUTYKIN: *(goes to her)* Ha!

SOLYONY: He talks, and talks, and…

TUZENBACH: You know that's so funny I forgot to laugh. Ha. Now cut it out, I mean it.

SOLYONY: He talks, and talks, and talks, and is he…

KULYGIN: *(having fun)* Colonel, your health! I'm just a teacher, and here at home I'm just one of the family, but to be Masha's husband… now that's wonderful, she's so wonderful…

VERSHININ: I'll try some of this dark vodka…

(prepared to drink) To your health!

(to Olga) It's so good to be here with you.

(in the living room there remains only Irina and Tuzenbach)

IRINA: Masha's so moody these days. She got married when she was eighteen, you know; she thought she'd found the cleverest man in the whole wide world! I don't think she's thought that since. He is the kindest, but not the cleverest.

OLGA: *(impatiently)* Andrey, are you *ever* going to join us?

ANDREY: *(from off)* Now.

(enters and goes to the table.)

TUZENBACH: What are you thinking about?

IRINA: I don't like your friend, Solyony. I'm afraid of him actually. Nothing he says makes any sense…

TUZENBACH: He's a very strange man. I feel sorry for him. And so annoyed, but mostly sorry. I think he must be shy… When it's just us together he's charming, but in society he's rude and, I don't know what. Don't go yet, let them sit first and stay with me. What are you thinking about?

(pause)

You're twenty today, and I'm not thirty[42]. How many years are before us now - if we could see those long rows of days with our eyes and count them… they seem to go on endlessly. All filled with love for you.

IRINA: My dear Nikolai, don't tell me about love.

TUZENBACH: *(not listening)* I have a lust for life. The struggle, the work, I have a thirst in my very soul for it, and it's fused with my love for you, Irina, and how you're so impossibly beautiful, you make all life seem beautiful too! What are you thinking about?

IRINA: You say: life seems beautiful. You're absolutely right – it only *seems* to be! Life isn't what it seems. If something stays still long enough, it *seems* like nothing's changing, but it's just that what you're looking at stays still because it's *died*… I'm crying now. Sorry, like I need to *tell* you that I'm crying.

(quickly dries her face, and smiles)

We just need to work. We're not happy so we look at life like nothing's any good. I think it's because we know so many things, but we don't know how to work. Everyone I've ever known *despises* it…

(Natalya Ivanovna enters; she is wearing a pink gown with a green belt)

NATASHA: They're already sitting down… I'm late…

(glances at the mirror, primps)

My hair looks amazing…

(sees Irina) Pretty Irina, happy birthday to you!

(kisses her hard and for a prolonged time)

You have a lot of guests, I'm all self-conscious… Hello, Baron![43]

OLGA: *(enters the living room)*

Well, here's Natalya. Hello, my dear!

(kisses her)

NATASHA: Smile, birthday girl. You have such a big party, I feel awfully out of place…

OLGA: Big, it's just us.

(in a low, frightened voice) You're wearing a green belt! Love, it's no good!

NATASHA: Is it bad luck?

OLGA: No, it just doesn't go… it's bizarre…

NATASHA: *(in a crybaby voice)* It is? But this isn't really green, it's more just a natural color.

(follows Olga down the hall)

(moving down the hall, everyone is sitting to lunch, not a soul is left in the living room)

KULYGIN: Irina, I wish you a good husband. It's time for you to fly the nest.

CHEBUTYKIN: Natalya Ivanovna, I wish *you* a good husband.

KULYGIN: Natalya Ivanova has one already in mind…

MASHA: *(she knocks with a fork on the plates). I* wish for a glass of wine! Ah-h, *crimson life*, where *had* you disappeared to!

KULYGIN: Behave yourself for three minutes, young lady.

VERSHININ: This vodka is delicious. What is this infused with?

SOLYONY: With a cockroach.

IRINA: *(also in a crybaby voice)* Ew! That's disgusting!

OLGA: And dinner will be roast turkey and sweet cakes and apples we picked. Thank God, I'm home the whole, whole day today, and tonight – home… Gentlemen, come have dinner tonight.

VERSHININ: Let *me* come tonight!

IRINA: You are welcome.

NATASHA: They don't stand on ceremony here.

CHEBUTYKIN: For love alone, does nature light, that farthest edge, the end of night.

(laughs)

ANDREY: *(angrily).* Stop it, stop it. Don't you ever get tired.

(Fedotik and Rode enter smiling with a big basket of flowers)

FEDOTIK: But they're already having lunch.

RODE: *(loudly and croupy)* Lunch? Yes, they're already having lunch…

FEDOTIK: Everyone stay where you are now, don't move.

(takes a photograph)

Perfect! Just one more… One! Two, now ready!

(takes another photograph and rushes down the hall to meet the party with the big basket of flowers)

RODE: *(loudly)* Happy birthday! I wish you everything, everything! The weather is charming today, the world's a splendor. Today, all morning I walked outside with the high schoolers. I teach gymnastics at the gymnasium.

FEDOTIK: You can move now, Irina, at least I think you can!

(takes a photograph)

You look so interesting today.

(takes a top out of his pocket)

Here, I almost forgot: a top… it makes an amazing sound…

(they pump the top – all listen)

IRINA: How lovely!

(as the top stops)

MASHA: On a faraway shore there stands an oak,
And on that oak there hangs a chain,
Atop that chain a talking cat,
Goes walking left then right again…
(tearfully) Why do I keep saying that? It's been in my head all morning…

KULYGIN: Thirteen at table!

RODE: *(loudly)* Gentlepeople, do you really believe in superstition?

(laughter)

KULYGIN: If thirteen are at this table that means someone here's in love. Is it you, Ivan, you old so and so…

(laughter)

CHEBUTYKIN: I'm a gray-haired old devil. But why is *Natalya* blushing? Oh, she can't even look me in the eye!

(loud laughter; Natasha runs away down the hall into the living room, Andrey follows her)

ANDREY: Don't, don't pay attention to them! Wait a minute… Wait, wait, wait please…

NATASHA: I'm so embarrassed… I don't know *what* I did to make them laugh at me. I just had to leave the table, I know that it was wrong to, but I just couldn't… I couldn't…

(covers her face with her hands)

ANDREY: You poor sweet thing, I beg you, I *beg* you, don't worry. Believe me darling, they were only joking. They meant well. Sweetness, oh my adorable girl, they all have good hearts, and they love me, and you. Come over to the window here with me… they can't see us here, we'll be invisible…

(looks around)

NATASHA: I'm just not used to being with these kinds of people!..

ANDREY: Oh my god you're so young. You're so cluelessly young! You sweet girl, don't worry so much!.. Believe me, please believe me… Do you know that I'm so full of love for you that I could die from Joy?… Oh, they can't see! They can't see! I don't know why, I don't know why I love you – I don't know anything. My charming, adorable, *very* clean girl… Will you marry me, darling? I love you, why do I love you?.. I've never loved anything.

(they kiss)

(Fedotik and Rode enter the room and see the kissing couple - they stand still in amazement)

LIGHTS

Act Two[44]

Set is the same as Act One.

The time is evening. Unseen, in the street, you can faintly hear a harmonica. The fire is out, and the room is dark. Natalya enters in a hooded cloak, with a candle. She stops by the door that leads to Andrey's room.

NATASHA: You. Andrey. What are you doing. Reading? *(she puts up her hand)* It's nothing, I'm only…

(goes to another door, glances inside, and shuts it)

There's no fire.

ANDREY: *(enters with a book in his hand and a strained smile)* Whaddayou want, Natasha.

NATASHA: Look, there's no fire… Now that the carnival[45] is here, the servants can't be trusted on their own for a *second*, you have to *look* and *look* because they just won't do their work! Last night. At midnight. I was walking through the dining room. There was a *candle burning*. Who would just leave it there? *It doesn't make sense*.

(puts down her candle)

What time is it now?

ANDREY: *(looks at his watch)* Nine fifteen.

NATASHA: But Olga and Irina aren't back yet! Nobody's home. They're just working so hard these days, poor things. Olga at the school board, Irina at the telegraph… *(sighs)* I told your sister this morning, I told her myself, I said, 'you take care of yourself Irina, sweety pie.' But does she listen? No. Did you say nine fifteen?

(Andrey looks at her)

I'm afraid Bobo[46] is sick. Why is it so cold today? Yesterday he had a fever, so of course today it's cold… I'm so afraid!

ANDREY: Natasha. The baby's fine.

NATASHA: Well… even so. It's better to be safe than sorry, and so, I'm so afraid! And I heard that tonight at ten the *carnies* are coming here. I wish they wouldn't come here, Andy-Wandy.

ANDREY: Right. Well. I don't know. They were invited.

NATASHA: This morning our baby boy woke up, and he saw me, and I just *know* that he knew that it was me. And I said, 'Bobo, hello! Hello, sweety pie!' And he laughed. Children understand everything, just everything, you know. And so I'll tell the carnies not to come.

ANDREY: *(half-heartedly)* Yes, well that's up to my sisters. This is their house, they're the hostesses here.

NATASHA: They are *too*. I get a say *too*. They're so kind…

(going) I ordered you yogurt for your dinner. The doctor says that's all you can eat, or else you're never going to lose all that weight.

(stops)

Bobo's cold. I'm afraid that he's cold because of his room, maybe. I think we *have* to put him in a different room, at least until warm weather. For instance, Irina has a room that's just perfect for a baby: it's dry and it's sunny all day long. I need to tell her to move in with Olga. They can share a room…

(Andrey looks at her)

They're gone all day *anyway*, they only spend the night here…

(pauses)

Andrey-Wandrey, why don't you say something?

ANDREY: Well I was just thinking that… There's nothing to say.

NATASHA: Right… What was it *I* was going to say to *you*?… I remember. That stinky old man from the County Council is here. He keeps asking for you.

ANDREY: *(yawning)* Send him in.

(Natasha leaves; Andrey bends over her forgotten candle - and blows it out. He looks at his book in the dark. Ferapont enters; he is in a shabby coat with his collar turned up. His ears are bandaged)

ANDREY: Hello, ghost of my future self. What have you come to tell me?

FERAPONT: The Chairman sent a book and some papers. Here…

(he serves Andrey the book and packet of papers)

ANDREY: Thank you. Okay then. Why did you come so late? It's after nine already.

FERAPONT: What?

ANDREY: *(louder)* I said you're late. You're late.

FERAPONT: Exactly. When I got here it was still light out, yes. I wasn't allowed in. They told me Sir was busy. Well and so what. If you're busy, you're busy. I don't hurry anymore.

(thinking that Andrey has asked him something)

What?

ANDREY: Nothing.

(looks at the new book)

Tomorrow is Friday. I don't have to go in, but I'll go anyway… Done and done. Home bores me…

(pauses)

Dear old man, how strange the turns, how life seems to deceive us! Today, I'm bored, there's nothing to do, I took this book in my hands – old notes from college lectures – and somehow I felt out of place… I mean, my God, I'm the secretary of the local County Council, that Council wherein presides the mighty *Protopopov.* I'm a secretary there and the most, the *most* that I can *ever hope for, is* – to be a *full member* of the local County Council! Me, a member of the local County Council, me, who dreams every night that I'm a professor at the University of Moscow, a famous, *famous* scholar, one that all the world is proud of!

FERAPONT: Well, I can't see that – but I don't hear well.

ANDREY: If you could hear well I wouldn't be talking to you. I need to talk to someone, anyone. My wife doesn't understand me. My sisters frighten me. I think it's their laughter I'm afraid of - they could laugh me into shame… I don't drink, I don't like bars, but how pleasant it would be to be sitting in one now. In a room in Moscow. Filled with Moscow…

FERAPONT: In Moscow – I heard a man telling the Council – some salesmen were eating pancakes there;

and one ate forty pancakes, and he died. Not forty, maybe fifty. I don't remember now.

ANDREY: In Moscow you can sit alone in the huge hall of some restaurant, and you don't know anyone, and no one knows you, and at the same time you're never a stranger. Here you know everyone and everyone knows you and you might as well have fallen from the moon. You're always a stranger here – just a stranger, just alone.

FERAPONT: What?

(pause)

That same man – maybe he was lying – but he said they're going to stretch a rope across the top of all of Moscow.

ANDREY: Why?

FERAPONT: I don't know. That's just what he said.

ANDREY: He lied.

(looks at his lectures)

Have you ever been to Moscow?

FERAPONT: …It's not true God never brought me there.

(pause)

Can I go?

ANDREY: You can go. Thank you.

(Ferapont leaves, Andrey is reading)

Tomorrow morning you'll come back for these papers?…

(looking up) He's gone…

(pause)

He left.

(doorbell)

Yes, things.

(he dawdles off unhurriedly)

(unseen, we hear a nurse singing to the baby as they rock him. Masha and Vershinin enter. While they talk, the candles and lamps are being lit)

MASHA: I don't know.

(pause)

I don't know. Maybe things are different in different places - but in this town at least, I'm convinced: all the best people are in the military.

VERSHININ: I want a drink. I'd love a tea.

MASHA: *(looks at watch)* They'll serve it soon. I got married when I was eighteen, and I was afraid of my husband because he was a teacher and I was barely out

of school. At the time he seemed so important and all-powerful! But not anymore.

VERSHININ: So…yes.

MASHA: I mean, I'm not talking about my husband, I'm used to him now. But among the civvies here I mean, there are so many *rude* people; they're so unkind here. And their rudeness offends me; it *hurts* me when I see someone who's not gentle enough with someone else, when I see someone being horrible for no reason. Whenever I'm with the teachers, all my husband's friends, I'm in actual physical pain.

VERSHININ: Yes… But I think: everyone is equal! Civilians or military, whoever you are, we're all equally *terrible* - and that makes us all equal!

If you listen to any 'intellectual' around here - civvy or soldier - he'll say the same thing – he'll tell you how he's sick of his wife, sick of his home, sick of his *estate* I should say. He's even sick of his *horse*. These people hold the highest positions, they've been given the highest educations, and they *say* they hold their very souls up to the highest ideals that mankind has *yet created*, so tell me, tell me Masha: *why* are their lives *so small* - so *small*? *Why?*

MASHA: *Why?*

VERSHININ: *Why* are they sick of their children? Why are they sick of their wives? And why are their wives and children always sick to death of them?

MASHA: You're cheerful today.

VERSHININ: I'm always cheerful. I just didn't have lunch today. I didn't have breakfast either. My littlest girl is sick, and whenever that happens to either of my girls, I'm sick to think of the mother they have. You should have seen her today! Jesus... She started fighting with me at seven in the morning. At nine I slammed the door and left.

(pause)

I never tell anyone about these things; it's funny, but you're the only one.

(kisses her hand)

Please don't be angry with me; if you were I'd have no one, no one at all.

(pause – a pipe buzzes)

MASHA: Just before papa died, the pipe buzzed like that.

VERSHININ: Are you superstitious?

MASHA: Yes.

VERSHININ: How mysterious.

(kisses her hand)

You're a strange and magnificent woman. You're magnificently strange! It's dark, but your eyes are still shining.[47]

MASHA: *(sits on another chair)* Here's some more light over here…

VERSHININ: I love you… How you move, how you look, I love you, I dream of…

MASHA: *(laughing softly)* When you talk to me like that, I don't know why I laugh. It feels like I'm looking down the edge of such a height. Don't say it again…

(in a low voice) But say it. It won't matter anyhow…

(covers her face with her hands)

It won't *matter anyhow.* Come here, and tell me something else!

(Irina and Tuzenbach enter through the hall)

TUZENBACH: I have three last names! My name is Tuzenbach-Krone-Altschuler, but I'm Russian Orthodox, just like you. There's not much left in me that's German, except for patience - or is it stubbornness - the way I keep bothering you. I walk with you home every evening.

IRINA: I'm so tired!

TUZENBACH: And every day I'll come to your office, every day, to walk you home. I will for twenty years before you could *ever* drive me away.

(sees Masha and Vershinin, joyfully)

Is it you two? Hello!

IRINA: I'm home, at last.

(to Masha) There was a woman who wanted to send a telegraph to her brother in Saratov to tell him that her son had died today, but she couldn't remember her brother's address. So she sent it off without one, just to Saratov. She was in tears. And I was rude to her for no reason. For no reason I just snapped and I said, '*I'm busy*.' So stupid to say. Are the carnival people coming here tonight?

MASHA: Yes.

IRINA: *(sitting in an armchair)* Then I'll rest now. I'm so tired.

TUZENBACH: *(smiling)* When you get home from work, you look like a little girl, like you're a little girl again who's *so* sad…

(pause)

IRINA: I'm just so *tired*. No, I don't like it at the telegraph, I don't like it at *all*.

MASHA: You've lost weight…

(whistles)

It does make her look younger, her face is like a boy's.

TUZENBACH: It's how she does her hair.

IRINA: I've got to find another job, this one's not what I wanted. What was I so *hungry* for, what did I *dream* about – or didn't? Work's either so busy it's annoying or so slow that it's boring, there's no poetry or happiness at all…

(there's a knock from the floor)

The doctor's knocking.

(to Tuzenbach) Darling, knock on the floor, I just can't… I'm so tired.

TUZENBACH: *(knocks on the floor)*

IRINA: Now he'll come up.

(sitting forward) Something's got to be done. Yesterday, the doctor and our Andrey went out and lost again. They say that Andrey lost 5,000[48], just like that.

MASHA: *(indifferently)* Whatever shall we do now?

IRINA: Two weeks ago he lost, in December he lost. I wish he'd hurry up and lose *everything*, maybe then we'd finally *leave*. I mean, *my God*, I dream of Moscow every night, I'm going crazy here. *(laughs)*

We'll move there in June, but before June there's still all of February, March, April, May… almost half a year!

MASHA: Just make sure *Natasha* doesn't hear about Andrey.

IRINA: *(scoffs)* Her. I don't think she cares.

(Chebutykin, looking like he just got out of bed – for he fell asleep after dinner – enters the hall, combing his beard. He sits down self-importantly at the table and takes out of his pocket, a newspaper)

MASHA: Here he comes… Has he paid his rent yet?

IRINA: *(laughs)* No. He has enough money to gamble, but the good doctor is eight months short.

MASHA: *(laughs)* Look – *see* how short he is!

(all laugh; pause)

IRINA: Why are you so quiet, Alexander?

VERSHININ: I don't know. I want a cup of tea. A tea! A tea! My kingdom for a tea!

CHEBUTYKIN: Irina!

IRINA: What do *you* want?

CHEBUTYKIN: Come here to me. *Venez ici.*

(Irina goes to sit down at the table)

I can't live without you.

(Irina lays out solitaire)

VERSHININ: Well. If you not going to give me a cup of tea, then we're going to talk philosophy.

TUZENBACH: Fantastic! What are we talking about?

VERSHININ: 'What are we talking about,' he says. Let's talk about the future!… Where we'll be in 200 years!

CHEBUTYKIN: *(sotto to Irina)* They're gonna talk about life in 200 years.

IRINA: *(sotto)* 200 years is how long this talk takes.

TUZENBACH: *(glancing)* Well let's see. I predict that after we're all dead: people will fly through the air and up to the stars. Their jackets will be cut just *slightly* differently. They will discover a *Sixth Sense* – they will - and then they will *weaponize* it! Because life *then* will be just like it is *now*. It will still seem impossibly hard and full of mystery and love. Look a *thousand* years into the future and man will still be sighing, 'Aaah, life is hard!' They'll be just like we are now – they'll be afraid, and they'll fear dying even more than they fear life.

VERSHININ: *(thinks)* I'm thinking how to tell you that you're wrong. It seems to me that little-by-little, everything on earth must *change* and is already changing before our eyes. Across 200, 300, you threw

out *1000* years – and time isn't the point – there will come a new and happy life. We won't live to see it, sure, but we're already living for it now. Working, well, suffering, we create it. That's the only purpose for our being: to create something where there's nothing: to want happiness when there's none.

MASHA: *(laughs under her breath)*

VERSHININ: Do I amuse you?

MASHA: I don't know. I've been laughing all day since the morning.

VERSHININ: You know, I went to the same school as you, and although I didn't go to the *Academy*, I do read. A lot. I don't know how to choose which books to read, so it's possible I'm not reading any of *right* ones, but the more I read, the more I want to know.

My hair is turning gray (just a little). I'll wake up tomorrow and be an old man. And still, I know so little! I know less every day! But, I know the most important thing, and I know it very well. Which is why I'd like to *prove* to you: there is no happiness. We're not happy, we've never been happy! There's only work, and more work, but just wait – because happiness is the destiny of our children's, children's, children's, children's, children.

(pause)

Not for me.

(Fedotik and Rode appear in the hall; they sit down and hum a soft accompaniment while playing a guitar)

TUZENBACH: You make it sound like we can't even be happy in dreams! What if I'm happy right now!

VERSHININ: You're not.

TUZENBACH: Ha! *(clasping his hands)* Obviously, we don't understand one another. How can I argue with you?

MASHA: *(laughs)*

TUZENBACH: *(points his finger at her)* Laugh!

(to Vershinin) Not in 200 or 1000 but in a *million* years, life will be the same as it is now. It doesn't change. It has its own laws, which we have nothing to do with, or at least, it has laws we can't see.

Birds who migrate, cranes for example, they never stop flying, no matter what they're thinking of, no matter what profound or silly thoughts are flying through their little heads, they fly not even knowing why or where. And they'll keep on flying for as long as there are cranes. No matter what deep thoughts they cry to each other as they're resting in the evenings, it doesn't *change* anything. It's as if they just want to fly.

MASHA: Doesn't that *mean* something?

TUZENBACH: *Meaning*… It's snowing, look… What's the meaning of that?

(pause)

MASHA: I think a person has to believe in something, or have something to trust, otherwise, life is just empty. There's nothing to stand on and nowhere to land. To be alive and not know: why do the cranes fly, why are children born, why do we see stars when they're *so* far away and we can't even see what's in front of our eyes… To be alive and not know: *why* are we *alive*? If there's no meaning, it's just all… *meaningless*… *(she whistles)*

(pause, Vershinin smiles)

VERSHININ: Still, it's too bad that youth doesn't last.[49]

MASHA: Gogol said: this world's a bore, gentlemen.

TUZENBACH: And *I* say: this argument's a bore, gentlemen. Well, all of you.

CHEBUTYKIN: *(from his newspaper)* Balzac got married in Berdichev.

(Irina sings softly)

I'll put it in my book. Balzac got married in Berdichev.

IRINA: *(laying solitaire)* Balzac got married in Berdichev.

TUZENBACH: Masha, have you heard? I've resigned.

MASHA: I heard. I don't see any good in it. I don't like civilians.

TUZENBACH: It won't make much difference either way… I'm not very good looking, what kind of an officer do I make? Well, yes anyway. *However*… I will be working. At least once in my life I'm going to work so hard that when I come home in the evening I'll be so exhausted that I'll fall into bed and be out like a light. Brick layers must sleep like babies.

FEDOTIK: And now! All the way from Moscow… I bought these colored crayons for you. And this little knife.

IRINA: You still treat me like a little girl, but I'm all grown up, you know.

(seeing and seizing the crayons and the knife, rapturously)

Oh my gosh, they're amazing!

FEDOTIK: And I bought a knife for myself… take a look at this, Irina… This one's a knife, and this is another knife, and another knife, and this one's a pick for your ears[50]. This one is a scissors. This is to clean your nails, I think.

RODE: Doctor, how old are you?

CHEBUTYKIN: Me? Thirty-two.

(laughter)

FEDOTIK: Now I'll show you a new way to play solitaire… *(lays out solitaire)*

(Anfisa enters with the samovar service[51]. A little after her, Natasha comes in and fusses around the table; then Solyony enters and, saying hello to people, he sits at the table)

VERSHININ: That wind!

MASHA: Yes. I'm tired of winter. It's been so long that I've forgotten summertime.

IRINA: Look, the solitaire is coming out! That means we'll make it to Moscow.

FEDOTIK: No, it isn't coming out. Lookit here you, you've got an eight on top of a two. *(laughs)* That means you won't make it to Moscow.

CHEBUTYKIN: *(from his newspaper)* Qiqihar[52]. Smallpox is ravaging.

ANFISA: *(coming up to Masha)* Masha, go drink your tea, baby.

(to Vershinin) Please, your royal highness… Excuse me, your *grace*, I've forgotten your name…

MASHA: Bring it here to me, nana. I'm not going over there.

IRINA: Nana!

ANFISA: I'm *com-ing*!

NATASHA: *(to Solyony)* Babies understand everything. I'll say, 'hello, Bobo, hewwo cutey pie!' And he'll look at me sort of… squinty. Like he knows what's going on. You'll think I'm just saying this because I'm his mama, but believe me: he's an exceptional child.

SOLYONY: *(smiling)* If that child were mine, I would fry it in a frying pan and eat it.

(picks up a cup, and sits down in a corner)

NATASHA: *(covers her face with her hands)* Horrible man. You're a-

(notices he's gone)

MASHA: Happy people don't notice if it's summer or winter. If this room were in Moscow, I wouldn't mind the storm.

VERSHININ: The other day I read a book by a French Minister. He wrote it while he was in prison. (Panama.) The way he described the birds that he saw outside his window, how he watched them through the bars. It would almost break your heart. It was Joy. He'd never noticed the birds, you see, before he was in prison. And when he's free again, he won't notice them any more. That'll be you when you're in Moscow. You won't see it when you're there. All our life we live in prison. Happiness is somewhere else.

TUZENBACH: *(picks a box up from the table)* What happened to the chocolates?

IRINA: Solyony. He ate them.

TUZENBACH: *All* of them?

ANFISA: *(serving tea)* A note came for you, your holiness.

VERSHININ: For me?

(takes the note)

From my daughter.

(reads)

Of course… I'm sorry, Maria, I have to slip away. I don't even get to drink my tea.

(gets up with agitation)

It's always the same…

MASHA: What is it? A secret?

VERSHININ: *(quietly)* My wife's poisoned herself. Again. I have to go. I'll leave without telling others. Unless you think it won't spoil the mood.

(kissing Masha's hand)

My dearest, most beautiful lady… I'll leave without a word…

(leaves)

ANFISA: Where did he go? I made him his tea… Whatever.

MASHA: *(angry)* Could you *please* just leave me alone! You're always *bothering* me, you never just leave me *alone*…

(goes to the table)

I'm so sick of you, stupid old lady!

ANFISA: What are you so upset about now? Sweetheart!

ANDRE: *(off)* Anfisa!

ANFISA: *(mocking)* 'Anfisa!' Don't get up…

(leaves)

MASHA: *(at the table, angrily)* Let me sit down!

(shoves the cards on the table)

Put these cards away. Drink your tea!

IRINA: *(unimpressed) You* drink your tea, you're evil.

MASHA: If I'm evil then don't speak to me. Don't even *look* at me.

CHEBUTYKIN: *(laughing)* Don't even look at her, don't even look…

MASHA: You're sixty years old but you act like you're six. You don't give a *damn* about anyone else.

NATASHA: *(sighs)* Oh Masha, why use language like that in polite conversation? With your beauty, you *could* be welcome in *decent* social circles, you know.

(surprised amusement)

Honestly: you would be just *charming* if it weren't for the things that you say. Je vous prie, pardonnez moi, Marie, mais vous avez des maniérs un peu grossiéres.[53]

TUZENBACH: *(stifling a laugh)* Could I… could I… There, I think there's some cognac there…

NATASHA: Il parait, que mon Bobo déjà ne dort pas[54], he's woken up. He's sick today. I'll go check on him, excuse me.

(leaves)

IRINA: Where did Alexander disappear to?

MASHA: Home. His wife's done something to amaze us all. Again. *(smiles)* How *does* she do it?

(Irina laughs)

TUZENBACH: *(goes to Solyony and hands him a decanter of cognac)* You're always sitting by yourself, thinking about – I have no idea what. What do you say, let's make peace. Let's drink.

(they drink)

I'll play the piano all night tonight, I'll play the trash that people like, and to that I say… I say okay!

SOLYONY: Why did you say 'let's make peace'? I'm not at war with you.

TUZENBACH: You just always make it feel like something's happened between us. Your character's a *strange* one, now admit it.

SOLYONY: I am strange! Who is not strange? Be angry not, Aleko![55]

TUZENBACH: What's this got to do with Aleko…

(pause)

SOLYONY: When I'm with someone just one-on-one, I'm just like anyone else. But when I'm in a crowd, I feel like I'm in the wrong place, or time… and I know that I say stupid things. But I'm more honest and more honorable than many, than *most*. And I can prove it, too.

TUZENBACH: I get angry with you more than I'd like to. You're just always making fun of me in public! But you like me for some reason. So we're alright. Let's get drunk. Drink!

SOLYONY: Drink.

(they drink)

I am against you, Baron. I mean I've never had anything against you. But I'm just like Lermontov[56]. *(quietly)* I even look like Lermontov… at least that's what they say…

(he takes perfume out of his pocket and pours it on his hands)

TUZENBACH: I… have resigned. Basta! I've been thinking about it for five whole years and I've finally decided to quit. I'm going to work.

SOLYONY: Forget your dreams, Aleko…
In these gypsy tents you fashion,
From your Life you cannot flee,
There's no escaping Fatal Passion,
No escaping Destiny[57].

(while Solyony speaks, Andrey enters quietly with a book and sits down beside a candle)

TUZENBACH: I'm going to work.

CHEBUTYKIN: *(going into the living room with Irina)*

The feast was authentic from Constantinople: a roast onion soup, and for le plat de resistance – chekhartma! That's a kind of meat.

SOLYONY: *Cheremsha*[58] is not a kind of meat, it's a kind of onion.

CHEBUTYKIN: No, my angel. *Chekhartma* is not a kind of onion, it's a way they roast lamb.

SOLYONY: And I tell you, cheremsha – is onion.

CHEBUTYKIN: And I tell *you*, chekhartma – is lamb.

SOLYONY: And I tell *you*, cheremsha – is onion.

CHEBUTYKIN: What am I doing - I'm not going to argue with you! You've never been to Constantinople, and you've never eaten chekhartma.

SOLYONY: I've never eaten it because I hate it. Cheremsha smells like garlic…

ANDREY: *(pleadingly)* Enough, enough! I beg you!

TUZENBACH: When are the carnival people getting here?

IRINA: They promised us nine, which means ten.

TUZENBACH: *(hugging Andrey)*

Say Andrey… do ya think she's my baby, think she's my honey, think she's my rag time gal?

(singing) Think she'll send me a kiss by wire?

ANDREY: *(singing to Irina)* Baby my heart's on fire…

TUZENBACH & ANDREY: *(dancing and singing)* If you refuse me, honey you'll lose me, and you'll be left *alone*, so baby telephone…

CHEBUTYKIN: *(joining for the finale)* And tell me I'm your own![59]

(laughter)

TUZENBACH: *(kisses Andrey)* God damn it, let's have a drink. Andrew, let's drink to you! And I am you, Andrew, and I'm going with you to Moscow U.

SOLYONY: To which? Moscow has two universities.

ANDREY: Moscow has one university.

SOLYONY: And I tell *you* – two.

ANDREY: And I tell you it has *three* universities. That way, we're both right!

(random applause and laughter; Andrey grins, Solyony looks aside)

SOLYONY: Moscow has two universities.

(grumbles and boos)

Moscow has *two* universities: the old and the new. And if you don't like hearing that, if my words have somehow baffled you - I can stop speaking to you. I can even go into a different room…

(he leaves through one of the doors which he shuts behind him)

TUZENBACH: Bravo, bravo!

(laughs)

And now ladies and gentlemen: let us begin. If you watch carefully, you'll see that I am sitting down to play. It's so funny he's so salty…

(sits down behind the piano and plays a song)

MASHA: *(dancing the waltz alone)* The baron is drunk, the baron is drunk, the baron is drunk!

(Natasha comes in)

NATASHA: *(to Chebutykin)* Doctor[60]!!

(she says something to Chebutykin, then quietly leaves. Chebutykin touches Tuzenbach on the shoulder and whispers something to him, the music stops)

IRINA: What?

CHEBUTYKIN: We have to leave. Good night everyone.

TUZENBACH: Goodnight everyone. We have to leave.

IRINA: But… the carnival people?

ANDREY: *(uncomfortable)* Won't be coming. Sweetheart, Natasha says that Bobo's sick, and that's why… In a word… I don't know. I absolutely do not care.

IRINA: *(shrugs her shoulders)* So Bobo's sick, so what!

MASHA: Then one by one they disappeared into the night. We're being hunted; we must run.

(to Irina) Bobo isn't sick. She is. She's *bourgeois* – you know what that is? A low mind in high heels.

(Andrey goes into his room. Chebutykin follows him; standing in the hall to say goodbye.)

FEDOTIK: Some surprises are bound to be sad ones. I'd counted on tonight, but if the baby is sick, then, I'll bring him a present tomorrow.

RODE: *(loudly)* Today I took a nap in the afternoon on purpose! I thought I'd be dancing the night away! Now it's only nine o'clock!

MASHA: Let's go outside, we can talk loudly there and decide what to do.

(we hear: Goodnight! Farewell! God bless you! *We hear the funny, tipsy laugh of Tuzenbach. Everyone is leaving. Anfisa (and a maid) tidy the table, put out the lights, and leave. We hear someone singing. Andrey, putting on his coat and hat, quietly enters the dark room with Chebutykin)*

CHEBUTYKIN: I didn't have time to get married. Life flashed me by, like lightning. And I was madly in love with your mother, but she was already married…

ANDREY: There's no reason to get married. It's just a different way to waste your time.

CHEBUTYKIN: So, it may be so, but it can be very lonely. And no matter how you look at it, loneliness is a terrible thing, my dear friend…Although in reality…of course, nothing means anything anyway.

ANDREY: *(abruptly)* Let's go.

CHEBUTYKIN: Why the rush?

ANDREY: I'm afraid of my wife stopping us.

CHEBUTYKIN: Ah!

ANDREY: I won't play tonight, I'll just watch for a while. I feel so… Doc, what should a person do if they feel like they can't catch their breath?

CHEBUTYKIN: Don't ask me! I don't remember. I don't know.

ANDREY: Let's go out the back way.

(they leave – the stage is empty. The doorbell rings. Then the doorbell rings over and over again. Voices are heard and then laughter)

IRINA: *(tip toeing in)* Who's there?

ANFISA: *(enters whispering)* It's the carnival people.

(the doorbell rings again)

IRINA: Tell them no one is here. Tell them I'm sorry.

(Anfisa leaves. Irina thinks for a moment and then paces around the room. Solyony appears in a doorway)

SOLYONY: *(at a loss)* Great, now everyone's invisible… Where is everyone?

IRINA: They're all gone.

SOLYONY: How strange. You… you're here all alone?

IRINA: All alone.

(pause)

Goodnight.

SOLYONY: Before, I behaved badly. Badly, again, I should say. You're never like that, you're not like anyone else, you're so good and you're so beautiful… you can see the *truth*. I think you could even see *me*. Can you see me? I love you. Death, take me now! I love you!…

IRINA: Goodnight! Go away.

SOLYONY: Take me now!

(going after her)

You're a heaven on earth!

(catching her, though tears) Every step we take, you know, we walk on the unmarked graves of things forgotten, *old* things, *fantastic* things, we walk on the

graves of *monsters* whose terror to behold we can only *fathom*... But when I look at *you*, I *understand*, that terror means we walk on hallowed ground, with every step. I've never seen eyes like yours in any living, mortal face.

IRINA: *(coldly)* Stop it, Solyony.

SOLYONY: This is the first time that I've told you that I love you, and as I'm standing here, I'm no longer on earth. I'm on another planet.

(he rubs his forehead, then tenderly) Anyhoo. It would be easy to take you by force - but that wouldn't make you love me. I know that. You have nothing to fear from me. But I won't tolerate a rival. I swear to you by all that's holy, I'll kill anyone who tries to take you from me. God, you're *perfection*!

(Natasha appears with a candle. She peeps in at Solyony and Irina and then, pretending not to see them, she passes through to the door to Andrey's room)

NATASHA: Are you here Andrey? Only if you're invisible. Oh, I'm sorry, Solyony, I didn't know you were here still. I'm not dressed.

SOLYONY: I don't care. Goodnight!

(he exits)

NATASHA: You look tired, you poor baby!

(kisses Irina) You should go to bed early tonight.

IRINA: Is Bobo back to sleep?

NATASHA: He is. But he's fitful. That *reminds* me, there's something I've been wanting to tell you, but you're never here and I never have time… The room that Bobo's in now is always cold and damp, at least that's how it seems to me. And your room is just so nice for a nursery. Sweetheart, sweety pie, you're moving in with Olga.

IRINA: *(not understanding)* Quoi?

(we can hear horses and sleigh bells approaching the house)

NATASHA: You and Olga will share a room, for now, and your room will be for baby Bobo. He is such a *cutie*! I told him today, 'Bobo, you're mine, you're all *mine*!' And he looked up at me with his beady little eyes.

(the doorbell rings)

That must be Olga. She's home so late.

(Anfisa approaches Natasha and whispers in her ear)

NATASHA: Protopopov? What a funny man. Protopopov's come by, he wants me to go for a ride with him in his sleigh. *(laughs)* Men…

(the doorbell rings again)

Somebody's an eager beaver. I'll just go for a quick ride, I'll be back in fifteen minutes, cross my heart. *(to Anfisa)* Tell him I'm coming.

(Anfisa rushes off. The doorbell rings again)

Well I *hope* that's Olga this time.

(Natasha goes off to get her things)

(Irina sits and thinks. Kulygin and Olga enter the room, followed by Vershinin)

KULYGIN: Here *you* are. But they said there would be a whole *party!*

VERSHININ: How strange, I only left a half hour ago. We were waiting for the carnival folks to show…

IRINA: One by one they disappeared into the night.

KULYGIN: And Masha's disappeared? Where has she disappeared to? And why is *Protopopov* waiting down there on the street? Who is he waiting for?

IRINA: Don't ask me questions… I'm so tired.

KULYGIN: As you wish, little sphinx…

OLGA: You think *you're* tired. I've been *tortured*.

(sits down)

The headmistress is sick so now I'm doing all of her work as well as my own. My head, my head, my

head… You must have heard that Andrey lost 5,000 playing cards last night…The whole *town* is talking about it.

KULYGIN: Yes. Well I'm tired *too*.

(sits down)

VERSHININ: Well my wife just tried to *kill* herself.

(sits down)

She used poison this time. But she's fine and I'm glad. At least *she's* resting… But what I want to know now is where everyone went? What happened here? If our pretty sphinx won't tell us her secret, then I'll wish you ladies good night. Kulygin, come with me somewhere, anywhere. I can't go home again right now, I just absolutely can't… So what do you say?

KULYGIN: I say I'm tired. Not tonight.

(getting up)

Oh, I'm tired. But where is my wife? Please tell me, Irina. Did she go home?

IRINA: *(shrugs her shoulder)*

KULYGIN: *(takes Irina's hand and kisses it)* Au revoir, little bird. Tomorrow evening, we shall rest. A whole weekend stands before us, my sweet sister. All is well.

(going) I'd been so much looking forward to this pleasant evening here with friends, dancing with my wife… but – o, fallacen hominum spem! How deceitful are the hopes of men. Cicero: accusative exclamatory case.

VERSHININ: I'll go alone.

(humming, he turns and leaves, followed by Kulygin)

OLGA: My head's exploding, Andrey's losing, everyone's talking, I'm going to bed.

(going) Tomorrow I'll be *free*. Oh my God, I'm so glad! Freedom…

(she leaves)

IRINA: *(alone)* They're all gone now. They were being hunted…

(on the street, carnival music begins to play)

NATASHA: *(in a fur coat and hat passes through the hall)* I'll be home in half an hour, sweety pie. I'm just going out for a *quick* ride! *(she giggles and shuts the door behind her)*

IRINA: *(viciously)* I WANT TO GO TO MOSCOW.

LIGHTS

Act Three[61]

We are in Olga and Irina's room. To the left and right are their beds, fenced with screens. It's three in the morning. Offstage, we hear fire alarms that started a long time ago. We can see that no one has been to bed yet. Masha is lying on a sofa with a pillow over her face, dressed, as always, in black. Olga and Anfisa enter. Olga opens a closet.

ANFISA: They're hiding underneath the stairs now… I told them, 'come out,' and they didn't move. So I told them, 'you can go sit *upstairs* if you like.' And they didn't move. They just cried and cried. They said, 'we can't move, we don't know where our father is.' Have you ever heard anything like it?[62] Outside, they're hardly wearing what God gave them.

OLGA: I know.

(tossing dresses and things from the closet into Anfisa's arms)

Take this, take this, this and this… My GOD, why has this happened? That whole street went up in flames, it really must have. Take this, this, Vershinin almost lost his house – his wife was so frightened she ran here without their girls. Fedotik lost everything, nothing is left.

ANFISA: Olga, I can't carry… would you call Ferapont to help?

OLGA: Like he would *hear* me…

(shouting towards the door)

Somebody's there! Come here! Who's there?

(we see the door open, a red glow beyond, we hear the galloping of horses pass the house)

This is worse than a nightmare – if this were a nightmare I'd be getting some SLEEP.

(a shadow grows larger… and Ferapont enters)

OLGA: My God, it's you. Take *these* down *there*. There are young ladies hiding underneath the stairs.

(handing him things)

Give them, and give them…

FERAPONT: What? *(he can't hear)* In 1812, Moscow was on fire. Oh my goodness, oh my God, those French people were so surprised.

OLGA: Go, just go…

FERAPONT: What?

(he leaves)

OLGA: Nana, help me, just give everything away. We don't need anything, please just give it all away…

These people have no homes to go to now, we'll make beds inside for as many as we can. The Vershinins too, we can't let them go home – it's too near the danger. Who *knows* what else could happen tonight…

ANFISA: *(crying) Please*, don't make me go, Olga! For the love of God, please don't make me go away!

OLGA: See? It makes sense that you'd say that right now… But what are you talking about, Nana? No one is going to send you away.

ANFISA: You were such a perfect little girl, I never had to worry about you. But I do work hard, and I can *still* work. I know I'm getting old. I know everybody says that they think I'm going senile, because they already think that I'm too old to hear. And maybe they're right. But where would I go? Where would I go? I'm so old!

OLGA: You need to *sit*... You're just tired, poor thing.

(sitting her down) You have a rest, tonight's been hell. My God, you look white as a sheet.

(Natasha enters)

NATASHA: NOW they're saying they want money to help the 'victims of the fire.' Whatever. It's a nice thought. Help the poor. Noblesse oblige. The duty of the *rich*. Bobo and Sofia are fast asleep like nothing's going on. But there are filthy people everywhere, everywhere you look. They're hanging all over my

house. You know there's been flu in the town. I'm afraid that the children will catch it.

OLGA: *(not listening to her)* The fire isn't here. Here it's calm.

NATASHA: Yes… I must look like such a mess.

(goes to a mirror) They're saying I've gotten fat… It's a lie. IT'S A LIE. Oh, Masha's sleeping, she's all tired out, poor thing…

(seeing Anfisa) Don't you DARE sit in front of me! Get up! Get OUT!

(Anfisa exits; pause)

Why you keep that old woman, I don't understand!

OLGA: *(astonished)* I don't understand either…

NATASHA: I don't know why she's here. She should go back to where she came from. Just, I like my house to be *nice*! You know? I don't want a bunch of useless people who just *hang around* all day!

(stroking Olga's cheek) You poor thing, you must be so tired too. Our *headmistress* is tired. When my Sofia grows up and goes to your school, I'll be so afraid of you…

OLGA: No, not headmistress! Not that…

NATASHA: Yes *that,* Olga. It's already been decided.

OLGA: God help me... You were so cruel to Nana just now.

(drinks water) I'm sorry, I just can't stand it… it went black behind my eyes there…

NATASHA: *(annoyed)* No *I'm* sorry, Olga. I know that it's so easy to upset you.

(Masha gets up, grabs her pillow and leaves, angry)

OLGA: Unkindness does upset me.

NATASHA: Sorry, sorry… *(kisses her)*

OLGA: Even the smallest unkind word…

NATASHA: OK, I understand, look. I know I speak my mind, and I'm sorry it offends you: but you know as well as I, she should be sent to greener pastures.

OLGA: She's been with us 30 years…

NATASHA: And *now* she can't work anymore! Either I don't understand you, or *you* don't *choose* to understand me! She is incapable of working. She just sleeps or sits!

OLGA: Then just let her sit.

NATASHA: *(floored)* What do you *mean* just let her sit! She's a *servant*!

(in tears) I don't understand you, Olga. I have a nanny. I have a nurse. I have a maid, I have a cook. *Why* do I need someone who just *sits*? I mean, WHY?

(an alarum)

OLGA: Tonight will make me as old as her…

NATASHA: Look. We need to talk. You – go to work. And I – am at home. You teach. And I – run this house. So if I say something about the hired help – I *know*, what I'm talking about. I *know*, what-I-am-talk-ing-ab-out. *Capeesh*? How's *that* for Italian for you.

(stamps her foot)

Tomorrow. I want her out. I want her gone. *Tomorrow*. Or else, so help me, I'll drag her out to the woods myself – whatever chair she's *sitting* in and all - and *afterwards,* I'll tell the children that she's living on a farm. She's a useless old bitch! She should die like a dog. And don't you DARE try to stop me. Don't you DARE.

(reasonably) That's all…You know, if you don't move downstairs into the basement, we'll never stop *quarreling* like this. It's terrible.

(enter Kulygin)

KULYGIN: Have you seen Masha? It's time to go home. They say the fire is finally under control.

(stretches)

Only one block burned down, but because of the wind… it seemed like the whole world was on fire.

(sits down)

Olga, my dear… I often think: if it weren't for Masha, I'd be all over you[63], I would marry you, Olga. You're Good.

OLGA: What?

KULYGIN: The doctor is drunk. Tonight of all nights. I think he did it on purpose. That may be him coming this way… listen… Yes, it must be him. *(laughs)* Let's hide.

(going behind one of the screens) It could be someone come to rob us! Murder us in our beds!

OLGA: He's been sober for *years*, so of course it's *tonight*.

(hides behind the 2nd screen with Natasha)

(Chebutykin enters; not staggering, as if sober, he walks through the room.

He halts, watching.

He comes quite close to where they are hiding.

He goes to the washstand and washes his hands)

CHEBUTYKIN: *(deadpan)* Take 'em, Satan… Fuck them all[64]… They think that I'm a doctor. They think I know how to cure things. But I don't know anything. I

know absolutely nothing, I've forgotten everything, and I know nothing.

(he looks for a towel. Olga and Natasha, unnoticed by him, leave the room)

Fuck it. Last Wednesday I treated a girl, and she died, and it was my fault that she died. Yes… Maybe 25 years ago, I thought that I knew something, but now I know I don't know anything. I don't even know if I'm human. Maybe I'm just imagining these hands, and legs, head. I don't know if I even exist. Maybe I'm just a bad dream…

(cries) GOD I WISH THAT I DIDN'T EXIST!

(stops crying; deadpan) Fuck 'knowing'… Three days ago I was talking at the club; talking about Shakespeare, Voltaire… I hadn't read them, hadn't read a single word, but I made a face like I had, and I nodded right along like I knew them *very* well.

(makes knowing face, nodding).

And the rest of them were doing it too, they were just making the same face as me. Nobody KNOWS *anything*! Nothing's <u>REAL</u>!

But that girl that I murdered on Wednesday, I remember… I remember everything… so I had a little drink.

(Irina, Vershinin, and Tuzenbach enter. Tuzenbach is in civilian clothes, new and fashionable)

IRINA: Let's sit in here.

VERSHININ: If it weren't for the soldiers, the whole place would have burned! Dress them in gold, for they're heroes tonight!

KULYGIN: *(coming up to him)* What time is it, hero?

TUZENBACH: It's already four o'clock. The sun's already rising.

IRINA: They're all just *waiting* down there; no one wants to go home. Solyony is waiting down there too… *(to Chebutykin)* You too, doctor, you should go.

(Chebutykin looks at her)

Go home to bed.

CHEBUTYKIN: *(generously)* No. None for me… but I thank you… *(combs his beard)*

KULYGIN: *(laughs)* My god you're so drunk, good thing you're a doctor!

(claps his shoulder)

In vino veritas, as the ancients say.

TUZENBACH: They asked me to arrange a gala concert to help the victims of the fire.

IRINA: *(vacantly)* But, who is there…

TUZENBACH: *(looking into her eyes)* There's me, if you want… Or Masha could play instead, she plays piano like an angel.

KULYGIN: Like an angel!

IRINA: She's forgotten how to play. She hasn't played in years.[65]

TUZENBACH: Nobody here understands music, not a soul. But I do understand it, and I give you my word, that Masha could play for a *Pasha*. I swear to you now: she is almost good.

KULYGIN: You're right there, Baron. I love her so much. Mash, she *is* almost good.

TUZENBACH: To be able to play like that and at the same time *know,* that nobody can really hear you play. They don't understand what they've heard.

KULYGIN: Yes… But would it be decent for her to show herself on a stage, for the entertainment of who knows who?

(pause)

I mean, I don't know anything. Maybe it's a good thing. But I do have to say, the headmaster: he's a good man, even a very good man, and he's very clever, but he does have his *views*… I know it's none of his business, but could ask him. If you like.

CHEBUTYKIN: *(takes a porcelain clock in his hands and looks at it)*

VERSHININ: I'm all sooty from the fire. I'm like a pencil sketch person who got erased.

(pause)

I heard yesterday that they want to transfer our brigade to somewhere far away. One said, to the Kingdom of Poland, to friends – others said to the Land of Cheats.[66]

TUZENBACH: I heard that too. What? This place will seem like a ghost town if you leave.

IRINA: I'm leaving too!

CHEBUTYKIN: *(throws down the porcelain clock, which shatters)*

Smithereens.

(pause. Everyone is upset and no one knows what to say)

KULYGIN:*(picking up a shard)* To break such a beautiful thing... This will go in your permanent record.

IRINA: This clock was mama's before she died.

CHEBUTYKIN: Maybe… hers, maybe this was hers. Maybe, I didn't break it, and it only *seems* to be broken. Maybe it only *seems* that we are here, and in actual fact, we are not. I don't know. You don't know.

(standing at the door)

What are you all looking at? Natasha is having a love-affair with Protopo-blah[67], and you don't see *that*… You all sit there and you don't see *that*, and Natasha is having a love-affair with Protopoblah.

(sings) Yes, we have no bananas, oh bring back my Bonny to me…[68]

(he leaves)

VERSHININ: So… *(laughs)* Life *is* odd!

(pause)

When the fire first started, I ran like hell for home. When I got close, I could see that our house was safe and sound and out of danger, but my two little girls were standing on the doorstep, all ready for bed, with no mother in sight, and people were clamoring, and horses were galloping, dogs… And the girls, the look on those faces was terror, wonder, a *prayer?* I don't know how to say what it was, but my heart broke when I saw those little faces. My God, I thought, this is only the beginning, what else will they have to go through in this life-- in this long life? I grabbed them and I flew with them each in an arm, and all I could think as I ran through the flames was: what *else* will they have to go through? What will happen when I won't be there?

(an alarm, pause)

I got here, their mother was here, and she was screaming, making a *scene*.

(Masha enters with her pillow and sits on the couch)

VERSHININ: And when I saw my little girls, standing on that doorstep, all ready for bed, and the street was red with fire, and the noise was terrible, I thought: this has all happened before. Years and years ago. The enemy would come, charging from the hills. They came without warning to raid, and to rob, and to burn it all down… And tonight, I thought, there's no difference between then and now. Nothing changed…

And more time will pass, and in two-three hundred years, the people living then will look back on us in the same way - with a kind of disbelief. And they'll make fun of how old-fashioned we were, and they'll say that we were ignorant, and that we lived hard lives, strange lives compared to theirs. The way we think about how life was 200 years ago, it will be the same for them. Something we read about having been real - and we know it was probably real - but we never can quite make ourselves believe it. It will never be real to them. Or real to anyone else. It will only be real to us. And so their lives will be the same, as ours. Their lives will be the *exact same* as ours. Their lives will begin where ours did, they won't begin where ours ended. And then the fire will come for them.

But if everything's always the same and nothing changes, that would mean that *Tuzenbach* was right, and that can't be! (*laughs)*

I'm sorry. I love philosophy. Should I stop, or should I go on?

(pause)

Everyone's asleep. As I was saying: So what will life be like in two or three hundred years? We can only imagine… Because we can see, with our own eyes, there's already *you three*. So in generations to come, there must be more, and more and more, and *then* the time will come, when *everything* has changed, your way. Life will go *your way*.

And then the time will come when there will be ladies living amongst us even lovelier than you!… *(laughs)* I'm in the strangest mood today - I want to live!…

(sings) Oh, it's only a paper moon, sailing over a cardboard sea, but it wouldn't be make believe, if you believed in me… *(laughs)*

MASHA: *(hums.)*

VERSHININ: *(hums.)*

MASHA: *(hums?)*

VERSHININ: *(hums!)*[69] *(laughs)*

(Fedotik enters, dancing)

FEDOTIK: Burnt up, burnt down! It's all gone now! *(laughs)*

IRINA: That's very funny. Everything burned?

FEDOTIK: *(laughing)* It's all gone now. Nothing is left. The guitar is burnt, and the camera is burnt, and all of my letters… But! A notebook I wanted to give you - also burnt.

(enter Solyony)

IRINA: No, you are not welcome. Go from this place, vampire, you are not invited in.

SOLYONY: Why is it the baron can come in, but I cannot?

VERSHININ: We all should go, count. How's the fire?

SOLYONY: They say it's quiet now. No. I think that this is really very funny, *why* is it the baron can come in, but I cannot?

(he takes out a bottle of perfume and sprays himself)

VERSHININ: *(hums?)*

MASHA: *(hums.)*[70]

VERSHININ: *(laughs, to Solyony)* Let's step into the hall.

SOLYONY: Okay, but take note: I once met a goose. All this goose did was boast. So I said to that bird, 'you're not fit to be roast.'[71] …

(points at Tuzenbach)

Honk.[72]

(exits with Vershinin and Fedotik)

IRINA: Now it smells like Solyony… *(surprised)* The baron is asleep! Baron! Baron!

TUZENBACH: *(startling awake, to nobody in particular)* I was asleep, however… brick factory… I'm not crazy, obviously, I'll be at the brick factory soon. I'll be a brick factory worker… It's already agreed.

(to Irina, tenderly) You look so pale and beautiful … I think, your paleness clears away the darkness in the air, like light… Oh, come *with* me, come away with me to work.

MASHA: My dear Nikolai, get out of here.

TUZENBACH: *(laughs)* You're here too? I didn't see.

(kisses Irina's hand)

Farewell, I go… I look at you now, and I remember everything, like once upon a time, on your birthday, you, so alive, so funny, so serious, talked about the

joys, the *ecstasies* of work… it seemed like she'd imagined such a happy life! Where is she?[73]

(kisses her hand)

You have tears in your eyes. Lie down in bed baby, it's getting light now… a new day begins… If you'd only let me give my life for you!

MASHA: My dear Nikolai! Out… Well, what are you waiting for?

TUZENBACH: I'm getting out…

(leaves)

MASHA: Are you asleep, Fydor?

KULYGIN: Ah?

MASHA: You should go home.

KULYGIN: Sweet Masha, darling Masha…

IRINA: She's so tired. Let her be.

KULYGIN: I'll go home right away… My wife is so good, she's amazing… I love you, my only love…

MASHA: *(angrily)* Amos, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant.[74]

KULYGIN: *(laughs)* No, right, she's amazing. To think, I married you seven years ago, it seems like only

yesterday. Honest words. No, truly, you're an amazing woman Masha. And I'm happy, happy, happy!

MASHA: *(stands)*

And I'm not, not, not.

(sits)

And get out of my head… It's simply outrageous. There's a *needle* in my *brain*, I can't keep quiet anymore. It's about Andrey… He has mortgaged this estate to the bank, and all of the money has gone to his wife, and this estate does not belong to him alone, but to the four of us. And he must know this, if he is a decent man.

KULYGIN: You *hound* on that, Masha! Why? Andy's in debt to everyone. Well, and God bless him.

MASHA: It's just simply outrageous.

(lies down)

KULYGIN: *(proud)* You and I are not poor. I work, I go to school, I give lessons in the night… I am an honest man. Above average… Omni mea mecum porto[75], as it were.

MASHA: There's nothing I *need*, it's just the *injustice*. It's simply outrageous.

(pause)

Go home, Fydor.

KULYGIN: You're tired. Rest for half an hour. You close your eyes, and I'll be right out there. Waiting for you… *(kisses her)* I'm happy, happy, happy.

(exits)

IRINA: I mean really, should we chop Andrey into pieces, or let him die *slow* in the *nearness* of that woman! Once, he was going to be a professor, but yesterday he actually boasted that he's been made (finally) a member of the local county council. He's a full member now, and *Protopopov* is the chair… It's the talk of the town, the *laugh* of the town, and he's the only one who doesn't know, who doesn't see… And when everyone ran to the fire, he sat here at home in his room and he paid no attention at all. He played the violin while it burned. Horrible, horrible, and most horrible…*(sobs)* I just can't, I just can't anymore!... I can't, I can't, I can't!...

(Olga enters, tidies up around the table)

IRINA: *(loudly sobs)* I do not want to live, I do not want to live, I don't want to do *this* anymore!...

OLGA: *(startled)* What is it, what is it! Sweetheart!

IRINA: *(sobbing)* Where? Where did everything go? Where is it? Oh my God, my God! I've forgotten everything! Everything! Everything is mixed up in my head. I can't remember, the Italian for window, or ceiling… *Everything* gets forgotten, it's forgotten every day, and life goes away and it *never comes back, never*,

and we'll *never* leave for Moscow… I know, we'll never go.

OLGA: Sweetheart, sweetheart…

IRINA: *(holding back her sobs)* I'm sorry… I just can't go back to work. I *shan't* go back to work. I'm *done*, I'm just so *done*! First it was the *telegraph,* now it's *government administration.* And I *hate* it, and I hate *everything,* the things they make me to do… I'm twenty-four years old, I've been working for a long time, and now my brain is broken, and I don't like how I look, and now I'm old, I'm so *oooold* now, and nothing, nothing, nothing makes me happy anymore, and time goes by and it all seems, like you're going to have a *beautiful*, a *real* life SOMEDAY, YOU KNOW, but it just keeps getting farther away as you go, it's like watching it get smaller as you fall over a cliff. How I'm alive, how I haven't *killed* myself yet, I *honestly* don't understand…

OLGA: Don't cry, sweetheart, please don't cry… It hurts me to see you like this.

IRINA: I'm not crying, I'm not crying… I'm done… Well, *now* I'm not crying. I'm done…I'm so *done*!...

OLGA: Sweetheart, let me say this, as a sister, as a friend, if you want my advice, marry the baron!

IRINA: *(quietly sobs)*

OLGA: Because you respect him, you know, you know what I mean…He's, it's true, he's not handsome, but he's such a good guy, and… Because being married doesn't have to mean being in love... I, at least, I think so. I'd marry someone without love. I'd marry anyone who asked me, it wouldn't matter who, as long as it was someone nice. Even an old man would do…

IRINA: I was waiting to get to Moscow. I thought my love would find me there, and I've dreamed of him for so *long*… But it turns out dreams aren't real. The darkness is what's real, as we dream in our own drool.

OLGA: *(hugging her)* My sweet, sweet sister, I understand, I really do; when the baron first came to us out of uniform I thought he looked so forgettable that I started to cry. He asked me, 'What on earth are you crying for?' What could I say! But if God brought him here to marry you, I'd feel blessed. A different life for you; a very different life.

(with a candle, Natasha crosses through the scene, from a door far right to a door far left, silently)[76]

MASHA: *(sits up)* A long cross like that - maybe *she* started the fire…

OLGA: You are such an idiot.

(pause)

MASHA: I have to tell you something. My sisters. I'm about to tell you something that I'll never tell anyone

else. What I am about to say, I will never say again. I only get to say this thing – the thing that I'm about to say – once.

(quietly) This is a secret… and I'm going to tell it to you… Now…

(pause)

I love, love, LOVE that man. He was here just now. He was standing just there. You saw him too. I love Vershinin.

OLGA: *(gets up and goes behind a screen)* I'm not listening. I was never here.

MASHA: Whatever shall we do!

(peeks her head over) The first time I saw him, I thought… he was strange. And then I thought he was sad. And then somehow my heart went out to him… and then I fell in *love*, I love his voice, I love his thoughts, I love his sadness, his two girls…

OLGA: *(behind the screen)* I'm not listening.

MASHA: Then that makes us the Idiot and the Oddity[77]… I just love him. And it's meant to be. He's The One. It's kismet, cosmic, karmic, call it whatever you like… and *he loves me*… Is that terrifying? YES. I don't *think* I care if this is right or wrong?

(takes Irina by the hands and brings her close)

And as for you… Somehow we'll make it through. How, I don't know. But everything just happens in an instant, so you never know how things are going to change…When you read about life in books, it seems like there's nothing new under the sun, and you *convince* yourself, that you know *everything*.

But when you fall in love, it's just so obvious, that nobody knows anything at all, and each one of us alone, must decide by ourselves, what is it that we Believe… My Sisters Three. That is what I had to say. And now… now… it will never be said again. I'll be like the madman in Gogol's story: *--but silence… --but silence…*[78]

(Andrey comes in, followed by Ferapont)

ANDREY: *(loudly)* Just tell me what you WANT. I don't UNDERSTAND.

FERAPONT: *(at the door, impatiently)* I already told you TEN TIMES.

ANDREY: Firstly, you address me with RESPECT. I already told you ten times, YOUR LORDSHIP.

FERAPONT: The firefighters, YOUR LORDSHIP, ask, if they can cut through your garden to the river. All night they've had to go around, and around – it's just pure punishment.

ANDREY: Well, fine, tell them fine.

(Ferapont exits)

Jesus. Where's Olga?

(she comes out from behind the screen)

Could you give me your key to the cabinet, I've lost mine. It's such a small key.

(Olga silently gives him a key, Irina gets up and goes behind her screen; pause)

ANDREY: What a huge fire! It's subsiding now… My God, Ferapont was frustrating just then. I can't believe I made him call me… Your Lordship…

(pause)

Why don't you say something, Olga?

(pause)

It's time to stop all this nonsense, stop pouting, let's move on… You're here as well, Masha, and Irina is too: perfect. Let's get this over with, once and for all. What do you all have against me? What?

OLGA: Leave it, Andrey. Til tomorrow.

(emotional) I can't take any more from tonight!

ANDREY: *(he's very embarrassed)* Don't be upset. I'm just very calmly asking: what do you all have against me? Tell me the truth.

VERSHININ, FROM OFF: *Oh it's only a paper moon…*

MASHA: *Sailing over a cardboard sea…*

(to Olga) Goodnight, Olga, God bless you…

(goes behind the screen, kisses Irina) Sweet dreams baby…

Goodnight, Andrey. Leave them alone, they're exhausted… Til tomorrow…

(exits)

OLGA: Yes, Andrey, til tomorrow.

(goes behind her screen)

Sleep.

ANDREY: I'll just say this and then I'll go. Now… Firstly, you've all got something against Natasha, my wife. I've noticed your *smirks* since our wedding day. Natasha is a beautiful, honest woman, she's very direct, and very clean – in my opinion. I love and respect my wife, and you should understand, I *demand* that she be treated with respect by everyone else as well. I repeat, she is a good, honest person, and your whole attitude towards her… I'm sorry, but grow up.

(pause)

Secondly, you all seem upset that I'm not a professor. I'm not a famous scholar. But I *do* work for the council. I am a *full member* of the local county council, and I consider this line of work to be just as noble, and just as

important, as serving intelligent thought. I am a full member of the local county council, and I'm *proud* of it… if you want to know.

(pause)

Thirdly… I still have one more thing to say… I mortgaged this place, and I didn't ask your permission… And it was wrong of me, it was, and I beg your forgiveness. I had to pay down my debts… Over half a million[79]!… I don't play cards anymore, I haven't played for a long time now, but the main thing is, in my defense, because you're girls, you get military pensions, and I don't get *any*… *satisfaction*, so to speak…

(pause)

KULYGIN: *(at the door)* Masha isn't here? *(alarmed)* Where is she? This is…

(exits)

ANDREY: They aren't listening... Natasha is an excellent person!

(walks the stage silently, then stops)

When I got married, I thought we'd be happy… that we'd *all* be so happy… But God… *(weeps)* Oh my sisters, don't believe me, don't believe…

(exits)

KULYGIN: *(at the door, alarmed)* Where is Masha? Wasn't Masha just here? I just…

(exits)

(an alarm, the stage is empty, a knocking)

IRINA: *(behind the screen)* Who's knocking on the floor?

OLGA: It's the doctor. He's drunk.

IRINA: Such a peaceful night!

(pause)

Olga?

(peeks out from behind her screen)

Have you heard? They say they're moving the brigade away, somewhere far away.

OLGA: They say a lot of things.

IRINA: We'll be left all alone… Olga!

OLGA: Hm?

IRINA: I do respect, I *like* the baron, he's kind, and I'll marry him, I will, I will, only *please* let's go to Moscow! I'm begging you, let's go. GOD, I WANT TO GO TO MOSCOW.

LIGHTS

Act Four[80]

An old garden outside the Prozorov house. A long path can be seen, lined with trees. At the end of the path, we can see a river. On the far side of the river, we see a forest. To the right, is the veranda of the house; a table stands with bottles and glasses – it seems someone has been drinking champagne. It is noon. Passersby occasionally cut through the garden – soldiers quickly cut through.

Chebutykin is sitting in an armchair, waiting to be called for; he wears a cap and has a walking stick. Sitting on the veranda, we see Irina, Tuzenbach, and Kulygin with a medal around his neck – and without his moustache. Fedotik and Rode come down the steps, dressed in field kit.

TUZENBACH: *(rises, and kisses Fedotik)* You, are one of the good guys. We've seen some times together.

(kisses Rode) Once more for luck. Goodbye, my friend.

IRINA: Until the next time!

FEDOTIK: There won't be a next time. This is goodbye. We'll never see each other again!

KULYGIN: Who knows! *(wipes his eyes, smiles)* I'm crying.

IRINA: Someday we'll meet again.

FEDOTIK: Maybe. But by then you won't recognize me. I'll be a stranger to you. And that's the way we'll say 'hello.'

(taking his camera) Stay where you are now… One last time.

RODE: *(hugs Tuzenbach)* I'll never see you again!

(kisses Irina's hand) Thank you for everything, for everything!

FEDOTIK: *(annoyed)* Yes, but wait!

TUZENBACH: God, I hope that I recognize you. Write to us. Be sure to write.

RODE: *(looks around the garden)* Goodbye, trees. *(calls)* GOP GOP! [81]

(pause)

Goodbye, echo!

KULYGIN: You should get married there in Poland… You'd dance the *polka* at your wedding! *(he laughs)* *'Kochany!'* [82]

FEDOTIK: *(looks at his watch)* There's less than an hour left. Solyony's going on the barge, and the rest of us are in line ranks. Three batteries will leave divisionally today, tomorrow another three – and then this place will have some peace and quiet.[83]

TUZENBACH: God-forsaken boredom.

RODE: Where is Masha?

KULYGIN: In the garden.

FEDOTIK: Let's go say goodbye to her.

RODE: Farewell friends. I have to leave, otherwise I'll cry.

(quickly hugs Tuzenbach and Kulygin, and kisses Irina's hand) Life was perfect here…

FEDOTIK: *(to Kulygin)* This is for you to remember us by… Here is a book, and it has a little pencil… Here we go…

(they walk away, both look back)[84]

RODE: *(calls)* GOP!

KULYGIN: *(shouts)* GOODBYE!

(upstage, we see them meet Masha and say goodbye to her; she walks off with them)

IRINA: They've gone…

(she sits on the bottom step of the terrace)

CHEBUTYKIN: They forgot to say goodbye to me.

IRINA: Why didn't *you* say goodbye to them?

CHEBUTYKIN: Because I forgot, too. But I'll be with them soon. I'm leaving tomorrow. Yes… One more day. In a year they'll let me retire. And then I'll come back here, and live out the rest of my days near you. I get my pension in just one year more.

(puts his newspaper in his pocket, and takes out another)

I'll come back here and I'll change my life. I'll be so quiet and goo… *good*…

IRINA: You need to change your life, darling. Somehow, you truly *need* to.

CHEBUTYKIN: Yes. I know. *(quietly sings)* Ta ra ra… boom de ay… I caught the bride's bouquet…[85]

KULYGIN: Yours is a hopeless case, doctor. A truly hopeless case.

CHEBUTYKIN: Yes, unless *you'd* teach me. I'd improve, I have no doubt.

IRINA: He's shaved off his moustache. I can't bear to look!

KULYGIN: What?

CHEBUTYKIN: I could say what your face looks like now, but I won't.

KULYGIN: What! This is an acceptable style, this is modus vivendi.[86] The headmaster shaved his

moustache, and so I did too, with steel[87], I shaved it off. Nobody likes it, but I don't mind. I'm happy. With or without a moustache, I'm the same man. I'm a happy man.

(Kulygin sits down. Upstage, Andrey pushes in a baby carriage)

IRINA: *(buttering)* Doctor, darling, dear, dear doctor, I'm *so* worried. You were on the boulevard yesterday. Tell me what happened.

CHEBUTYKIN: No. What happened? Nothing happened. It's nonsense.

(reads his paper) All of this is nonsense.

KULYGIN: They say that Solyony and the baron met yesterday on the boulevard near the theatre…

CHEBUTYKIN: Stop! Well, by what right…

(waves his hands angrily and goes towards the house)

KULYGIN: …They met near the theatre. Solyony made fun of the baron, and the baron finally snapped and he said something insulting…

CHEBUTYKIN: I don't know. You don't know. It's nonsense.

KULYGIN: At school, a seminary teacher once wrote 'nonsense' on an essay, and the student thought that it said '*nonanus*' – he thought it was a Latin word.

(laughs) Hilarious. They say Solyony is madly in love with Irina, and so he hates the baron… That's understandable. Irina's a very good girl. And she even looks like my Masha, the same thoughtful eyes. Only yours, Irina, are softer. Masha's are beautiful in their own way. I love her.

(somewhere off in the garden, 'Hey! Gop gop!'[88])

IRINA: *(startled)* Somehow everything is frightening me today.

(pause)

I've got everything ready to go. After lunch, I'm going to send my things ahead. And tomorrow I'll marry the baron and become a baroness, and then we'll set off for the brick factory.[89] And the day after tomorrow, I'll start *teaching* at a school. My new life begins. God help me. When I passed the teaching exam I cried for joy, I was so happy.

(pause)

I can't wait til they come for my things.

KULYGIN: Ideas alone, and seriously few, do not a well-laid plan make. But I wish you all the best from the bottom of my heart.

CHEBUTYKIN: My darling girl… my heartbeat… I'll never catch up to you now. I'm a bird who's too broken to fly anymore. You fly, sweetheart. FLY, by God!

(pause)

(to Kulygin) A man must have no vanity at all to look like that.

KULYGIN: Gee thanks. *(sighs)* Today the military leaves, and everything goes back to the way it was before. No matter what you're thinking, Masha's a good woman, and I love her very much. I'm glad of my fate. Fates can be so very different…

In the excise tax department works a man called Kozirov[90]. He went to school with me, but never passed the fifth form, because he couldn't grasp the concept of: ut consecutivum[91]…a temporary compromise. Now he lives in poverty, and he's perpetually ill, and whenever I see him, I say, 'hello, ut consecutivum.' And he says, 'yes precisely, ut consecutivum.'

Then he coughs.

And here, I've been lucky for all of my life. I'm happy. I'm even Knight of Stanislaus, second degree[92], and now I get to teach others this ut consecutivum. Of course, I'm an intelligent man, more intelligent than many, but that's not what happiness is all about…

(inside the house, the piano is heard playing 'Maiden's Prayer')[93]

IRINA: And tomorrow night I won't have to hear this 'Maiden's Prayer' again, I won't have to meet Protopopov.

(pause)

Protopopov is sitting in the living room.

KULYGIN: Is our headmistress here yet?

IRINA: No. They've sent for her. If only you knew how hard it's been for me to live here alone, without Olga… Lucky her, living at the school, busy all day, but I'm all alone, bored, because there's nothing to do unless it's moving to an even worse room… So I decided: if it isn't my fate to go to Moscow, then so be it. That's my fate. There's nothing to be done. All that is, is God's will, and Nikolas made me an offer… And so? Like I said: I decided. He's a *good* man, it's surprising even, how *good* he is… And the moment I made up my mind I felt like I'd turned into a fairy, I was having fun again, and it was easy for me, and I wanted to do something, really *do* something… But then something happened yesterday, and I don't know what it was, but I can feel it lurking towards me.

CHEBUTYKIN: '*Nonanus*.' Nonsense.

NATASHA: *(at the window)* The headmistress is here!

KULYGIN: The headmistress is here! Come on, let's go and meet her!

(goes with Irina into the house)

CHEBUTYKIN: *(read his paper and sings softly)* Ta-ra-ra boom de ey, I caught the bride's bouquet…

(Masha comes close; in the distance, Andrey is pushing the baby carriage)

MASHA: He sits there, he just sits…

CHEBUTYKIN: And?

MASHA: *(sits down).* Nothing…

(pause)

Did you love my mother?

CHEBUTYKIN: Oh yes.

MASHA: Did she love you?

CHEBUTYKIN: *(after a pause)* That, I don't remember.

MASHA: Is my man here? Our cook used to call our street's policeman that: my man. Is my man here?

CHEBUTYKIN: Not yet.

MASHA: When you snatch at happiness in fragments, piece by piece, and then lose them, like I do, then piece by piece, you go mad.

(at her heart) I'm molten lava.

(looking at Andrey in the distance) Look, there's Andrey, that's our brother… All hope is lost. It takes thousands of people to put a big bell into a high tower. They need a lot of labor and a lot of cash to do it, and as

they lift it into the air – it suddenly falls. Suddenly, and for no reason at all - for no reason that we can tell. That bell… is Andrey.

ANDREY: When will this place quiet down. It's so noisy.

CHEBUTYKIN: Soon.

(looks at his watch) My watch is vintage. It chimes.

(he winds the watch, it chimes) The first, second and fifth batteries will leave in exactly one hour.[94]

(pause)

I leave tomorrow.

ANDREY: Forever?

CHEBUTYKIN: I don't know. Maybe, I'll be back in just a year. God knows… But it won't make any difference either way.

(somewhere in the distance we hear a harp and a violin)

ANDREY: There'll be nobody left. We should put a dust cover over the town.

(pause)

Something happened yesterday around the theatre; everyone's talking about it, but I don't know what it is.

CHEBUTYKIN: It's nothing. It's stupid. Solyony made fun of the baron, and the baron lost his temper and he said something insulting, and it seems that Solyony felt that that obliged him to challenge the baron to a duel.

(looks at his watch) It's time, it seems. Already… Half past noon, in the beech grove, *(pointing into the distance)* there you are, on the other side of the river… Pew pew[95].

(laughs) Solyony imagines, that he's Lermatov. He even writes *poems*[96]. It would be one thing if he were joking, but this is his third duel.

MASHA: Whose?

CHEBUTYKIN: Solyony's.

MASHA: What about the baron?

CHEBUTYKIN: What about the baron?

(pause)

MASHA: I must be hearing things… Nevertheless, I say, it shouldn't be allowed. He could hurt the baron, even kill him.

CHEBUTYKIN: The baron's a good man, but one baron more, one less – does it really matter? So! It doesn't matter!

(in the distance we hear 'Ay, ay!')

You can wait. That's Skortsov[97] shouting, one of the seconds. He's sitting in a pleasure boat…

(pause)

ANDREY: In my opinion, to participate in a duel, or even to be present at one, even as a doctor… It's immoral.

CHEBUTYKIN: It only seems to be… You see, we are not, there is nothing in the world, we do not exist, it only seems that we exist… so it really doesn't matter what your *opinion* of it is!

MASHA: They talk a lot, don't they…

(walking away) A climate where it snows in the blink of an eye, and yet one still finds all these endless conversations…

(stopping) I won't go in that house, I can't go in there… When Vershinin comes, tell me…

(turning down an alley) The birds are already flying south…

(looks up) Swans or geese… So lovely, so lucky…

(exits)

ANDREY: This will be a haunted house, the officers gone, you gone, Irina gone, I'll be here all alone.

CHEBUTYKIN: What about your wife?

(Ferapont enters with papers)[98]

ANDREY: My wife's my wife. She's very kind, kind of, but there's something in her core that's like a snarling, sightless, scaly animal. In any case, she isn't human. I'll tell you this, as a friend, and you're the only one I'd ever say this to: *I love Natasha*. I do. But sometimes, she's so amazingly awful that I just black out! And I can't understand why I love her so much, or, why I love her at all.

CHEBUTYKIN: *(melts out of his chair).* I take it, I'm leaving tomorrow, and we may never see each other again, so here's my advice. You know, put on a hat, pick up a stick, and leave. Leave, just go, go, and don't look back. And the farther you go, the better it gets.

(Solyony walks upstage with two officers; upon seeing Chebutykin they turn toward him; the two officers walk on)

SOLYONY: Doctor, it's time! It's already half past noon.

(he exchanges greetings with Andrey)[99]

CHEBUTYKIN: Presently. You make me tired all of you.

(to Andrey) If anyone asks for me, Andrey, tell them I'll be right back… *(sighs with frustration)* Oh God!

SOLYONY: Before the fellow could draw breath, the bear had struck with claws of death.

(going to him) Why do you sigh, old man?

CHEBUTYKIN: Excuse me?

SOLYONY: How's your health?

CHEBUTYKIN: *(angrily)* Like butter.[100]

SOLYONY: The old man worries needlessly. I'll just indulge myself a bit, I'll wing him, like a woodcock.

(takes out perfume and sprays it on his hands) I've poured a whole bottle on my hands today, but they still smell. I smell like a corpse.

(pause)

Anyhoo… do you remember my poem? The man who's a rebel weathers storms without cease, As though fighting with storms clouds will make them rain Peace.

CHEBUTYKIN: Yes. Before the idiot could draw breath, the bear had struck with claws of death.

(he leaves with Solyony)

(offstage we hear 'Ay, ay!' 'Gop, gop!' And Andrey is joined by Ferapont)

FERAPONT: Just sign the papers…

ANDREY: *(on edge)* Just leave me alone! Leave me alone! I beg you!

(walks away with the stroller)

FERAPONT: You have to sign papers, that's what papers are for.

(he follows Andrey upstage;

Irina and Tuzenbach enter in straw hats;

Kulygin crosses the stage shouting, 'Ay! Masha, ay!')

TUZENBACH: There's the only man who'll be glad to see the military go.

IRINA: That's understandable.

(pause)

It's like a ghost town.

TUZENBACH: Darling, I have to go.

IRINA: Where?

TUZENBACH: I have to go to town before it gets dark… to see a friend.

IRINA: Fibber… Nicholas, why are you so scattered today?

(pause)

What happened yesterday by the theatre?

TUZENBACH: *(moves impatiently)* I'll be back in an hour and be with you again. [101]

(kisses her hand) My darling…

(touching all over her face) Five years have gone by since I first fell in love with you, and I can't get over it, you seem more beautiful to me now than ever before. Look at this hair! Look at these eyes! I'll take you away tomorrow, we'll be together, we'll get rich, and all of my dreams will come true. So you'll be happy. There's only one thing, only one: you don't love me!

IRINA: It isn't in my power! I'll be your wife, and I'll be faithful, and I'll be *yours* in all things, but there's just no love in me, I can't help it!

(cries) I've never loved anyone, ever. I've dreamed of love, I've dreamed of love for so long now, by day and by night, but my soul's like a grand piano that somebody locked and lost the key.

(pause)

You look tired.

TUZENBACH: I couldn't sleep. There's only one thing in this life that frightens me and keeps me up at nights: it's the thought of that lost key. Please say something.

(pause)

Say something!

IRINA: *(frustrated)* What? What do you want me to say? What?

TUZENBACH: Anything.

IRINA: *(angrily)* 'Anything! Anything!'

(pause)

TUZENBACH: What stupid little things become important in this life. How can such small words be unforgettable. Oh, please don't say another word! And don't worry.

Just look at those trees. I feel like I'm seeing them for the very first time, hello maples, hello birches. I feel like they're looking at me, with curiosity, almost like they know what happens next. Such beautiful trees should have beautiful lives beside them.

(shouts, 'Ay! Gop gop!')

I have to go, it's time… Look there, that tree has died, but it still sways in the wind with all the others. Death is no more terrible than that right there. When I die, I'll be just like that tree. I'll still be a part of your life somehow, one way or another. Goodbye, my love…

(kisses her hand)

Those papers you left me, they're on my desk, underneath the calendar.

IRINA: I'm going with you.

TUZENBACH: No you don't!

(he hurries down the path, then stops and calls to her) Irina!

IRINA: Yes?

TUZENBACH: *(not knowing what to say)* I didn't have my coffee this morning. Ask them to make me some.

(he goes quickly away)

(Irina watches after him in thought, then she moves upstage and sits on a swing. Andrey enters with the baby carriage, followed by Ferapont)

FERAPONT: Andrey, these papers aren't for me, they're for the treasury. None of this is my idea.

ANDREY: I don't know what happened to my youth, when I was young, I was delightful, I was intelligent, and all the universe blazed before me filled with promise and with hope! That was then! And then somewhere early on we all got boring, and dreary, and dull, and depressing, and stupid, and stodgy, and useless, and lame, and repetitive…

This town has existed for 200 years, it contains 100,000 residents, and there's not one of them who's *different* from any of the others, there's not one person who's dedicated their life to the pursuit of contemplative ideals, not one, in the past or in the present, there's not one scientist, not one artist, not one person who's even *marginally* more different than anybody else, no one who can arouse *envy*, or passionate longing to be just like *that*.

We just eat, drink, sleep, and die… eat, drink, sleep, and die, so to break up the vicious monotony, we talk trash, drink vodka, play cards, and litigate, and the wives cheat on the husbands, and then the husbands lie, and they pretend that they can't see what's going on behind their backs, and *irresistibly* somehow, an evil force is brought to bear upon their children, and the Divine Spark is extinguished from inside them, and they become just as miserable as their parents are, identically miserable, identically *dead*, just like their mommies and daddies… Come see the invisible man…[102]

(to Ferapont, foully) What do you want?

FERAPONT: Sign the papers?

ANDREY: Oh my God.

FERAPONT: *(presents papers)* The doorman at the Bureau of the Chamber says… It seems, he says, that the winter in St. Petersburg reached frosts of two hundred below.

ANDREY: This present moment displeases me - so I think of the future, and I feel so much better to think: how simple, how easy everything will be, I can see a light shining in the distance – it's Freedom! I'll be free, and my children will be free, from beer and from bureaucracy, from geese and cabbages, from naps that they don't want to take and I don't want to make them take, free from *sys*tematic *de*humani*za*tion!....

FERAPONT: 2,000 people froze to death, it seems. They say the rest were scared stiff. It was St. Petersburg, or Moscow – I'm afraid I couldn't say.

ANDREY: *(overwhelmed by a sweeping emotion of tenderness)* Come to me my sisters, my wonderful sisters! *(through tears)* Masha, I know that you're close…

NATASHA: *(at the window)* Who is it talking so loudly out here? Is it you, Andrey? You're going to wake up Sofia. Il ne faut pas faire de bruit, la Sofia est dormée déjà. Vous être un ours.[103] *(angrily)* If you're going to talk, give the stroller to someone else. Ferapont: take the baby from the master.

FERAPONT: I hear you.[104] *(takes the carriage)*

ANDREY: *(embarrassed)* I was speaking quietly.

NATASHA: *(inside the window, cooing)* Bobo! You monkey! Naughty Bobo!

ANDREY: *(looking through the papers)* Okay. I'll go look at these, and I'll sign what needs signing, then you can go carry them right back again…

(he goes into the house, looking at the papers; Ferapont pushes the baby carriage into the garden)

NATASHA: *(inside the window)* Bobo, can you say 'mama'? Baby, look! Who is that? It's Aunty Olga! Can you say, 'hello Aunty Olga!'

(wandering musicians, a man and a girl, are playing the violin and the harp; from the house comes Vershinin, Olga, and Anfisa and they listen silently for a minute; Irina approaches)

OLGA: Our garden's like a thoroughfare, come one come all to walk or ride. Nana, let's give those musicians something!..

ANFISA: *(giving them something)* God bless you, with all my heart.

(the musicians bow and leave)

Poor things. Starving artists.

(seeing Irina) Irinushka, hello!

(kisses her) Mm! Baby girl, I am living the life! You should see how I live! I'm in rooms with Olga in government housing – the Lord is looking out for me in my old age. Not to tempt fate, but I have never lived like this… The apartment is *big*, and it's paid for by the government, and I have a whole room to myself, and my own bed. And it's paid for by the government! I wake up at night and I just feel – oh God, oh My God, there's nobody who's happier than me!

VERSHININ: *(looks at his watch, to Olga)* It's time to go, my dear. Time's up.

(pause)

I wish you the moon, and all of the stars… Where's Masha?

IRINA: She's somewhere in the garden. I'll go look for her.

VERSHININ: Thank you. I can't be late.

ANFISA: I'll go look too. *(calls)* Masha!

(she disappears into the garden with Irina, we hear them calling) Hello-oo!

VERSHININ: All good things must come to an end. This is where we say goodbye.

(looks at his watch) The city gave us something like a breakfast, there was champagne, and the mayor gave a speech, and I ate and I listened, but my heart was here, with you…

(looks around the garden for Masha) Come on, you.

OLGA: Will we ever meet again, someday?

VERSHININ: Probably… not.

(pause)

My wife and both my girls will stay here for another two months; please, if something happens, if…

OLGA: Yes, yes, of course. Don't worry.

(pause)

It’s funny, when life becomes a memory, it all seems like a dream. But the present seems like nothing, until it’s in the past.

(pause)

Nothing seems to go the way we plan. I didn’t want to be a headmistress, and yet. And Moscow, well, I guess it’s not to be…

VERSHININ: Well… Thank you for everything. Forgive me for anything that I’ve done wrong… I talk a lot, I know, I talk too much – so forgive me for that too, and remember me… *dashingly*.

OLGA: *(wipes her eyes)* Where could Masha be…

VERSHININ: What else do people say at goodbyes? Do they philosophize?.. *(laughs)* Life is hard. To many, if not to most of us, life seems downright hopeless, and yet, I have to say, I’ve seen a light shining out there in the distance, growing brighter every day. In the not too distant future, we’ll be living in that light.

(looks at his watch) I have to go…

(pause)

There’s a huge, empty void that we’ve filled up with wars, if we just fill it with something better, everything will be alright. There, I think we’ve done it, Olga, we’ve found the secret to life, let’s go tell the world!

(looks at his watch) Except I’m out of time…

OLGA: Here she is.

(Masha enters)

VERSHININ: I've come to say goodbye.

(Olga moves aside, so as not to interfere with their farewell)

MASHA: *(looks him in the face)* Goodbye…

(a long, drawn out kiss)

OLGA: Enough, enough…

MASHA: *(violently sobs)*

VERSHININ: Write to me… Don't forget! Let me go… it's time… Olga, take her… I have to go… I'm late…

(he kisses Olga's hand, hugs Masha to him once more, and quickly leaves)

OLGA: Enough, Masha! Baby, you have to stop before…

(Kulygin enters)

KULYGIN: *(shyly)* It's alright, let her cry, she's alright… My remarkable Masha… My Mash… You're my wife, and I love you, no matter what… I'm not upset with you, I'm not going to reproach you with a single thing… Olga as my witness… We'll just start over again, and I'll never say a word, or even hint…

MASHA: *(trying to get a hold of herself)* On a faraway shore, there stands an oak, and on that oak there hangs a chain… there hangs a chain… I'm going insane… On a faraway shore there stands an oak… On a faraway shore…

OLGA: Calm yourself, Masha… You'll make yourself sick… Get her some water.

MASHA: I'm not crying anymore.

KULYGIN: She's not crying anymore… She's a brave girl…

(a shot echoes in the distance)

MASHA: On a faraway shore there stands an oak, and on that oak there hangs a chain… a talking cat… a talking oak… I can't remember now…

(drinks water) F minus for my life… I don't need anything anymore… I'll be alright soon… Not that it matters… How far away is a faraway shore? How faraway can it be if it's always in my head? I've lost my mind.

(Irina enters)

OLGA: Calm yourself, Masha… that's a good girl… let's go inside.

MASHA: *(angrily)* I'm not going in there.

(sobs, but immediately stops) That's not my home anymore, and I'm never going in there again…

IRINA: Let's sit together, and not say a word. Tomorrow I'm going away…

(pause)

KULYGIN: Yesterday I confiscated this from one of the boys at school…

(puts on a fake moustache and beard) Now I look like the German teacher… Don't you think? Those boys are so funny.

MASHA: You do look like the German teacher.

OLGA: *(laughs)* Yes.

MASHA: *(sobs)*

IRINA: Stop it, Masha!

KULYGIN: A lot like him.

(Natasha enters)

NATASHA: *(to a maid)* What? Sofia is sitting with Protopopov, and Bobo can go out for a ride with Andrey. How can such small children be so much work…

(pause)

Irina, you're leaving us tomorrow – it's too sad. Stay at least another week.

(upon seeing Kulygin, she shrieks; he laughs and takes off the fake moustache and beard)

Jesus, you startled me.

(to Irina) I've gotten used to having you around, do you think it will be easy for me after you're gone? I'm giving your room to Andrey and his violin – let him saw away in there! – and his room will be for Sofia. Such a wonderful, wonderful child! My sweet baby girl! Today she looked at me with such serious eyes and said - 'mama!'

KULYGIN: A beautiful baby, it's true.

NATASHA: Tomorrow I'll be all alone. *(sighs)* I've ordered all these birch trees to be cut down, especially that dead one. I don't like how it looks in the evening…

(to Irina) Sweety-pie, that belt is all wrong… it's not doing you any favors. You need something bright with that dress. I've ordered them to plant flowers here, flowers everywhere, it's going to smell divine…

(deadly) Why is there a fork lying on this bench?

(goes toward the house, to the maid) Why is there a fork lying on a bench, I ask you?

(a beat, she screams) Silence when you speak to me!

KULYGIN: There she blows!

(offstage, a march strikes up; they all listen)

OLGA: They're leaving.

(Chebutykin enters)

MASHA: Our friends are leaving. C'est la vie… I hope that they find happiness!

(to her husband) Let's go home. Where have my hat and coat got away to this time?

KULYGIN: I put them inside… I'll go get them right away.

OLGA: Yes, let's all go home. It's time.

CHEBUTYKIN: Olga!

OLGA: What is it?

(pause)

What is it?

CHEBUTYKIN: It's nothing… I don't know how to tell you…

(he whispers in her ear)

OLGA: *(shocked).* No!

CHEBUTYKIN: Yes… it's a hell of a story… but I'm tired, I'm so tired now, I don't want to say anymore… *(bitterly)* Anyway, it wouldn't matter anyhow!

MASHA: What happened?

OLGA: *(hugs Irina)* Today happened…I don't know how to tell you this, Irina…

IRINA: *(impatiently)* What? Tell me: what? For the love of God!

(she cries)

CHEBUTYKIN: The baron has just been killed in a duel.

IRINA: *(quietly sobs)*[105] I knew it, I knew it…[106]

CHEBUTYKIN: *(goes upstage and sits on a bench)* Exhausting…

(he takes out of his pocket, a newspaper) Let them cry…

(quietly sings) Ta ra ra boom de ay… I caught the bride's bouquet…

Nothing matters anyway!

(the sisters stand and hug)

MASHA: Oh, how can the music play on! Our friends are leaving us, and one of them has left us for good, and yet life goes on somehow. And on… and on!…

IRINA: *(puts her head on Olga's shoulder)* Someday, we'll understand all of this, what so much suffering was for, we'll know the secret to life, but in the meantime, we'll just live… We need to *do* something, really *do* something! Tomorrow, I'll go on my own, and I'll teach at the school, and I'll dedicate my life to really *doing* something there. It's autumn now, and winter will be here soon, and a blanket of snow will cover this ground, but I won't be here, I'll be alive, I'll be alive…

OLGA: *(hugging both her sisters)* That music plays so cheerfully, I think I want to live too! Oh my God! In time, we'll die and be forgotten, our faces, our voices, how many sisters we were, but pain is forgotten too, just as distant times seem only filled with joy, Time will bring peace and happiness to earth, and even though they won't know who we were, we'll be remembered in a way, whenever they say a kind word or prayer. Oh, my sweet sisters! That music plays so happily, it seems like it must know the secret, it must know why we live and why we cry… Tell us why, tell us why!

(the music plays softer and softer as they move away; Kulygin comes on happy, smiling, he's bringing Masha's hat and coat[107]; Andrey comes on pushing the baby carriage with Bobo)

CHEBUTYKIN: *(singing over the music)* Ta ra ra boom de ay… I caught the bride's bouquet…

(reading the paper) This doesn't matter! None of this matters!

OLGA: Tell us why, tell us why!

LIGHTS

‘Fragments’ Notes and Anecdotes

[1] Prozorov suggests ‘insight, perspicuity’

[2] Olga is the name of Chekhov’s wife

[3] Masha is the name of Chekhov’s only sister

[4] Alexandr is the name of Chekhov’s eldest brother, and ‘Vershinin’ means ‘heights, summit.’ Fun fact: Stanislavski who originated the role was also the tallest member of the company, so this name may well have held a triple meaning

[5] Nikolai is the name of Chekhov’s *second* eldest brother

[6] Solyony directly translates as ‘salty’

[7] Ivan is the name of Chekhov’s second to youngest brother

[8] The idea for the town ‘like Perm’ as Chekhov says, came from visiting his youngest brother Mikhail, where a battery was camped. Supposedly, a military man proposed to his sister Masha there

[9] **26 years before the play begins**

Anfisa joins the Prozorov household, Olga aged 2. Anfisa aged 50

Somewhere between 17-11 years before…

'Mama' dies

11 years before play begins

The Prozorovs leave Moscow

Irina aged 9, Masha aged 10, Olga aged 17, Vershinin aged 31 (a lieutenant)

3 years before the play begins

Masha (aged 18) marries Kulygin (already a teacher)

1 year before the play begins

General Prozorov dies on May 5, 1899, at noon

Act I

Summer. May 5, 1900.

Irina turns 20, Masha is 21, Olga is 28, Vershinin is 42

[10] This more directly translates to ‘Name Day’ or ‘Saint’s Day.’ A Christening by a different name. The adaptations that use ‘Name/Saint’s Day’ will often tell you what Chekhov said, literally. The ‘Birthday’ translations will often tell you what they think he meant. This is a birthday translation

[11] Interesting that Solyony makes no reply?

[12] This is the only time Vershinin’s mother-in-law is mentioned, which begs several questions about the state of his home life. Knowing Chekhov’s meticulous construction within small details, this is something to be considered?

[13] Many translations correct Solyony’s math, but we believe the joke is intentional ☺

[14] This remark reflects a private joke between Chekhov and Knipper, something she once wrote to him about an acquaintance

[15] The Russian word used means both ‘I will’ and ‘I won’t’

[16] Chekhov loathed St. Petersburg because his plays were never received well there until after they’d become hits in Moscow

[17] Presciently, the Russian Revolution began in 1917. *Three Sisters* was written in 1900 while there was still no male heir to the Tzar; a cause of palpable tension for the royal family

[18] This is how Chekhov wrote it – we respect his decision to leave the wording up to the actor.

[19] Literally translates, ‘you’ll be paralyzed.’ Noting the bizarre specificity of this, it still seems un-conversational in a scripted way, so we’re picking up this haunting little French colloquialism for ‘dead.’ Seems to suit Solyony’s Byronic self-styling

[20] He invented the concept of the 'superfluous man'

[21] This is the beginning of Pushkin's *Ruslan and Ludmilla,* a story written for the 'young queens of [Pushkin's] heart' about a magical land where stories come true – the pacing cat tells the story of a young princess who vanishes on her wedding night and goes on to have many adventures…

[22] This stage direction is not original, but the exclamation point at the end of the line is. Most translations change this to a question, but we believe this explains the sense

[23] A pet word coined by Chekhov, used in family correspondence. The familiarity seems particularly charming as he wrote Masha for his wife, Olga

[24] Solyony quotes *The Peasant and the Farmer* by Ivan Krylov, the 'Aesop of Russia'

[25] Always worth noting when Chekhov employs the word 'father' in this play… When first reading this in Russian it struck us that Ferapont may actually be Anfisa's father because, whereas she is given the age of 80, Chekhov simply describes Ferapont as 'a very old man' – however, there is no further information to conclude or dis-conclude from. And 'father' is certainly used as a familiar term in his pastoral short stories

[26] Chekhov's word translates to 'pie' as in a meat pie, presumably. But going from 'cake' to 'pie' in English seemed needlessly confusing, and they are in fact having 'lunch.' So, just so everyone is clear, Ferapont and all the others will be eating 'pie' for lunch

[27] Anfisa, forgive us. We choose to keep the full, patronymics for the older generation so show the familiarity that the sisters use when going by their own first names and calling the soldiers by theirs. Since Time is such a

centerpiece, we believe this helps show mankind's steady progression away from Formality

[28] Tellingly, a samovar was traditionally a gift that a groom would give his bride upon an anniversary. This may well speak to Olga's reaction - having to actually leave the room

[29] We have a pet theory: because of the doctor's affection towards Irina, it's likely that either A. she may be his daughter, or B. she may look the most like her mother

[30] It may be worth noting that they keep the samovar

[31] Masha is a pet name of Maria

[32] This stage direction is added because Tuzenbach has already mentioned this, and Vershinin seems to give him no quarter. This particular scenelette is marvelously round-about with characters catching each other's phrases and tossing them out again, it's like a chorus of row, row, row your boat…

[33] Etymologically, this checks out. Weird takes it origin in Middle English, *Wyrd,* meaning (apropos) Fate. And we've been hanging 'o's on things for centuries… Choosing this word, along with words like 'gosh' and 'fibber' to help reinforce how very young they are to be so direful…

[34] Novodevichy – a part of the New Virgin Convent. Chekhov will be buried there himself

[35] Lifted this from the French translation, *c'est parfait.* It seemed too perfect to resist. The original translates as 'and good.' *Comme ci comme ca*

[36] Since we know he's just been playing the violin, this seems to suggest that he was *PLAYING* the violin. Arguably, brilliantly

[37] This triptych of remarks seems to provide a clean little window into each sister's kind of imagination…

[38] Source unknown - supposedly from an opera-vaudeville of 1808

[39] Hippocrates

[40] Chekhov writes 'English,' but it seemed jarring, considering… Fun fact: French versions translate the character's bad French-speaking into bad English (included in relevant footnotes)

[41] This means that the actual moment of the Colonel's death's anniversary was seven minutes into this act – they missed it

[42] This may be meant sincerely, it may also be a joke. Other language suggests he's closer to 40

[43] Interesting that Tuzenbach doesn't greet her. All the men seem *impressed* with Natalia – is Tuzenbach simply struck by her looks? Did they maybe once have a thing?

[44] Early February, a Thursday night, one and a half years later

[45] Pancake Week! Maslenitsa moves from year to year because it precedes Russia's Lent. The celebrations culminate in 'Forgiveness Sunday.' In America, this carnival most closely resembles a snowy Mardi Gras

[46] At the time, it was fashionable to give children English names, like 'Bob.' Unfortunately for Natasha, 'Bobik' was a name that was mostly given to dogs. For this reason, we are proudly debuting 'Bobo' into the Chekhov canon

[47] Echoes a beautiful little line in Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*, "what eyes he has. Dark and brilliant as fire.' Masha compares herself to the Madman in Act III

[48] The text says 200 rubles – but $5000 (US) (to us) is what that would have represented at the time

[49] Alternative: I'm remembering who I was going to be.

[50] Remember, the knives are out

[51] Welcome back, samovar

[52] Pronounced: chee-chee-har. A city in the Heilongjiang province of China

[53] I beg you pardon, Marie, but you have a bit rough manners

[54] It seems that my Bobo sleeps not already

[55] Solyony quotes 'The Gypsies' an epic poem by Pushkin. Aleko is the main character. He falls wildly in love with a gypsy woman, and she loves him in return for years, even marrying him. But in time, she falls in love with another man and ruthlessly pushes Aleko aside - although she's terrified of Aleko's jealousy. Forebodingly, Aleko kills her lover, then his wife, then he simply walks away

[56] Lermontov came to fame because of the death of Pushkin. He wrote a poem, 'The Death of a Poet,' that accused the court and intelligentsia of being complicit in the great man's death. In the wake of his rise to fame – or infamy – he was arrested and exiled multiple times for being simply scandalous (publicly falling in love with a 9-year-old, fighting duels, etc.). It seems Lermontov attempted to embody the romantic life of a Byronic hero in the same way Solyony is attempting to embody the romantic life of Lermontov

[57] As in footnote 24, these are the final 4 lines of ‘The Gypsies’

[58] Cheremsha *is* a kind of onion, and Chekhartma *is* a kind of roast lamb

[59] (What follows is Chekhov as written – the above song, ‘Hello Ma Baby’ was written in 1898 by the songwriting duo ‘Howard and Emerson’ out of Tin Pan Alley. As far as we can tell, Russian musicians and Russian people eagerly sought out American/Western music in the 19th century, and we *know* that Tuzenbach plays the up-to-date ‘trash that people like’):

TUZENBACH: *(hugging Andrey)* Akh, vy seni, moyi seni, seni novye moyi…

ANDREY: *(dancing and singing)* Seni novye klenovye…

CHEBUTYKIN: *(dancing)* Reshotchat-ye

This is a Russian folksong that tells the story of a young couple who are in love, but forbidden to see each other by the girl’s father. It’s filled images of birds flying and searching for a place to land. The lyrics here are the first and last 4 lines of the song, literally translated: *Ah you porch, my porch, my brand new porch / New porch made of maple / Trellis me!* This simple song was made internationally famous in the 1968 film version of Tolstoy’s War and Peace. For reference search ‘Ah Vy Seni’

[60] It seems there’s a thriller quality that starts here

[61] Summer, two and a half years later

[62] Sounds like the Three Sisters to this translator

[63] In English, the phrase “all over you” dates to 1859. In French and Finnish, the phrase is (and has been) standard conversation. This is how the Russian seems to translate

[64] The fucks in this speech are present in the Russian, and also in a French translation, though almost never in English. They do help make sense of the ladies’ exit

[65] In the original, ‘she hasn’t played in 2-3 years.’ The specificity seemed un-conversational, but what Chekhov seems to be quietly implying is that she hasn’t played since she’s been having her affair with Vershinin

[66] This is a direct lift from the 1921 ‘Slavo’ version which is a Russian archival text

[67] Russian translates as ‘wash out,’ and sounds like ‘vym’ - written like ‘Protopo-vym.’ Similarly, it’s run together in the next use, ‘Protopovym’

[68] The tune to *Bring back my Bonny* dates to 1746 and was very popular in 1881. *Yes, We Have No Bananas* are variant lyrics penned in 1937, which soared in popularity in 1939 when a host of stars and starlets made their own recordings. While things change – they do not change… This variant is based on a real-life Greek grocer who started every sentence with ‘yess.’ The original Russian song roughly translates as ‘will you take this date-fruit…’ Original song’s name was unknown to Chekhov

[69] The original Russian reads:

MASHA: Trom-tom-tom…

VERSHININ: Tom-tom…

MASHA: Tra-ra-ra?

VERSHININ: Tra-ta-ta. *(laughs)*

When the original cast asked what this passage meant, Chekhov evasively replied, 'it's just a joke'

[70] As before: VERSHININ: Trom-tom-tom. MASHA: Trom-tom.

[71] Some say this is a play on 'The Boastful Geese' a prose short story by Ivan Krylov. For some reason, Chekhov rhymes this. We can only imagine it's because he meant that Solyony must have penned the rhyme himself. Literally translated, it's something like, 'I could follow my thought to its natural conclusion, but I'm afraid, the geese would laugh.' Most translations interpret this as, 'I would become so angry, that I would scare the geese.' That doesn't come together in a satisfactory way to this translator. This is a marriage of thoughts seems to make the most sense, because Chekhov's beat suggests that Solyony has in fact authored this poem, that this is more accurately the story of 'The Boastful Geese,' and that Solyony is going out with a bang using some unexpected language, a thinly veiled threat, and geese

[72] Literally, 'cheep cheep cheep.' Solyony also has this in Act I repeatedly, which is now 'he talks and talks…' But we are not going to use that refrain here because the *chicken* sound is now up against a *goose,* so. Let's make Tuzenbach the goose who's not fit to be roast… The intent is still a taunt like *are you chicken…*

[73] Chekhov shifts from 'you' to 'she'

[74] Latin conjugation for love, 'I love, you love, he/she loves….'

[75] Omnia mea mecum porto is a quote that Cicero ascribes to Bias of Priene. Bias of Priene, one of the Seven Sages of Greece, is said to make the statement during the flight from his hometown, with the apparent meaning that his true possessions are his character and his wisdom: *All that is mine I carry with me*

[76] This section with the 3 of them seems to take on a film noir quality

[77] Not Chekhov's, his is more like, '*you're* the idiot.' But Chekhov also talks about how much cleverer Masha thinks she is than her sisters in this speech, so an Iliad and Odyssey reference seemed apropos

[78] Everyone should read Diary of a Madman. It's objectively fantastic

[79] Again, inflated to today's figures for context. The original is 35,000 rubles. It is a Shocking sum

[80] Fall, a few months later

[81] Exactly how it would have been read at the MAT. Many versions translate this as yoo-hoo, oho, or hello (which is rather pretty with Rode's reprise of this followed by Kulygin's 'goodbye'). But after saying GOP (many) times, we believe it is birdcall. Migrating bird imagery is all through this play…

[82] 'Darling, dearest' in Polish

[83] Militaristic language is a marked change in this act.

[84] Our Tuzenbach realized that while he's no longer in the scene past this, he's never directed to leave. It seems likely that he'd move at the same time Fedotik and Rode do, because people just do that, don't they; move at the same time, like birds. We'd guess that he's going inside to double-check that he left everything as it should be for Irina

[85] The Russian literally translates as, 'Ta ra ra boom de ay, I'm sitting on a pedestal.' There are a LOT of versions of this song in a LOT of languages – we haven't found anything like Chekhov's 'pedestal-sitting' lyric in any English version. This is a vaudeville music hall song that originated in Boston in 1891. Across versions, the story ends something like, 'I'd like it known and understood, I'm not too bad and not too good!'

[86] Latin: Way of Life

[87] Literally, 'when I was promoted I shaved it off.' But the Russian for 'promoted' translates so closely to 'steel' (the same way English speakers use steel like *steeled against fear.* We like the manliness of this for Kulygin here, and the word evokes a kind of duel or fight. Also appropriate, 'steal.' The same thought as 'promotion,' we believe, can still be inferred by him pointing out his medal

[88] Birdcalls

[89] What an unlikely juxtaposition…

[90] The name means, 'a trump card'

[91] This Latin phrase is obscure and seems largely to be known to the world by this very speech

[92] The imperial medal of distinction that he's wearing. Third degree is the most junior class, awarded to all government and military employees, as well as civilians who served the

empire with a blameless record, and who had status in the Russian nobility

[93] We believe this must be Natasha playing because Irina's comment implies that it happens every night. At this point, Bobo would be about 2.5-3 years old, and Sofia is still an infant, so it can't be either of them. While it could be Tuzenbach, they're going away together, so it can't be a habitual song of his or she'd still be hearing it. Masha hates going into the house and hasn't played in years. And it doesn't seem like Protopopov is there all the time because his being in the living room seems like a newish development (due most likely to Sofia). That said, if it is Natasha, it's a very pretty song to play

[94] They will leave at 1:30pm. The watch has just chimed 12:30pm; it's chimed the time of the duel

[95] The sound Chekhov wrote and would have been made at the MAT

[96] It can be inferred that Solyony has been making Chebutykin listen to his poems…

[97] Means 'starling'

[98] Chekhov has Ferapont entering after 'what about your wife?' but then he has Ferapont join Andrey about a page later, so he must leave at some point?…

[99] As in Act II where Chekhov has Solyony 'say hello to people,' he's the only character that Chekhov gives this kind of liberty to. Some kind of improvisation on the actor's part must be implied

[100] Literally, like cow's butter, but yes, this is the original retort

[101] His language here becomes charged to melodramatic proportions, but naturalistically, as if he's actually experiencing the entire enormity and reality of The Present Moment, which doesn't happen very often, but we've all felt it before

[102] Chekhov demanded that in the last monologue, Andrey be very passionate. 'He should almost threaten the audience with his fists!' – VV Luzhsky, *Solntse Rossii*

[103] Poor French, translates, 'you must make no noise. Sofia is sleeping already. You are a bear'

[104] So she *must* be loud

[105] Chekhov gives Irina this stage direction twice, the first time is when Olga says she should marry the baron

[106] "Irina does not know that Tuzenbach is off to fight in a duel; but she surmises that something untoward happened the day before, which might have serious and therefore evil consequences. And whenever a woman surmises, she says, 'I knew it, I knew it." –Chekhov to I.A. Tikhomirov, January 14, 1901

[107] This is the first time we explicitly see Masha's coat, and Chekhov has drawn our attention to it in his lines, and stage directions, for the final tableau. Perhaps, it isn't all black?