



UNCLE VANYA

ANTON CHEKHOV

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translated by

CONSTANCE GARNETT



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CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

Alexandr Valdimirovitch Serebryakov (a retired Professor)

Yelena Andreyevna (his wife, aged 27)

Sofya Alexandrovna (Sonya) (his daughter by his first wife)

*Marya Vassilyevna Voynitsky (widow of a Privy Councillor and
mother of Professor's first wife)*

Ivan Petrovitch Voynitsky (her son)

Mihail Lvovitch Astrov (a Doctor)

Ilya Ilyitch Telyegin (a Landowner reduced to poverty)

Marina (an old Nurse)

A Labourer

The action takes place on SEREBRYAKOV's estate.

UNCLE VANYA
SCENES FROM COUNTRY LIFE, IN FOUR ACTS

ACT I

Garden. Part of the house can be seen with the verandah. In the avenue under an old poplar there is a table set for tea. Garden seats and chairs; on one of the seats lies a guitar. Not far from the table there is a swing. Between two and three o'clock on a cloudy afternoon.

(MARINA, a heavy old woman, slow to move, is sitting by the samovar, knitting a stocking, and ASTROV is walking up and down near her.)

MARINA *(Pours out a glass of tea.)* Here, drink it, my dear.

ASTROV *(Reluctantly takes the glass.)* I don't feel much like it.

MARINA Perhaps you would have a drop of vodka?

ASTROV No. I don't drink vodka every day. Besides, it's so sultry *(a pause)*. Nurse, how many years have we known each other?

MARINA *(Pondering.)* How many? The Lord help my memory.... You came into these parts... when? Vera Petrovna, Sonitchka's mother, was living then. You came to see us two winters before she died.... Well, that must be eleven years ago. *(After a moment's thought.)* Maybe even more....

ASTROV Have I changed much since then?

MARINA Very much. You were young and handsome in those days, and now you have grown older. And you are not as

good-looking. There's another thing too—you take a drop of vodka now.

ASTROV Yes. . . . In ten years I have become a different man. And what's the reason of it? I am overworked, nurse. From morning till night I am always on my legs, not a moment of rest, and at night one lies under the bedclothes in continual terror of being dragged out to a patient. All these years that you have known me I have not had one free day. I may well look old! And the life in itself is tedious, stupid, dirty. . . . This life swallows one up completely. There are none but queer people about one—they are a queer lot, all of them—and when one has lived two or three years among them, by degrees one turns queer too, without noticing it. It's inevitable (*twisting his long moustache*). Ough, what a huge moustache I've grown. . . . a stupid moustache. . . . I've turned into a queer fish, nurse. I haven't grown stupid yet, thank God! My brains are in their place, but my feelings are somehow blunter. There is nothing I want, nothing I care about, no one I am fond of. . . . except you, perhaps—I am fond of you (*kisses her on the head*). I had a nurse like you when I was a child.

MARINA Perhaps you would like something to eat?

ASTROV No. In the third week of Lent I went to Malitskoe, where there was an epidemic. . . . spotted typhus. . . . in the huts the people were lying about in heaps. There was filth, stench, smoke. . . . calves on the ground with the sick. . . . little pigs about too. I was hard at work all day, did not sit down for a minute, and hadn't a morsel of food, and when I got home they wouldn't let me rest. They brought me a signalman from the line. I laid him on the table to operate upon him, and he went and died under the chloroform. And just when they weren't wanted, my feelings seemed to wake up again, and I was as conscience-stricken as though I had killed him on purpose. I sat down, shut my eyes like this, and thought: those who will live a hundred or two hundred years after

us, for whom we are struggling now to beat out a road, will they remember and say a good word for us? Nurse, they won't, you know!

MARINA Men will not remember, but God will remember.

ASTROV Thank you for that. That's a good saying.

(Enter VOYNITSKY.)

VOYNITSKY *(Comes out of the house; he has had a nap after lunch and looks ruffled; he sits down on the garden-seat and straightens his fashionable tie.)* Yes... *(a pause)*. Yes.

ASTROV Had a good sleep?

VOYNITSKY Yes... very *(yawns)*. Ever since the Professor and his wife have been here our life has been turned topsy-turvy. I sleep at the wrong time, at lunch and dinner I eat all sorts of messes, I drink wine—it's not good for one! In old days I never had a free moment. Sonya and I used to work in grand style, but now Sonya works alone, while I sleep and eat and drink. It's bad!

MARINA *(Shaking her head.)* Such goings-on! The Professor gets up at twelve o'clock, and the samovar is boiling all the morning waiting for him. Before they came we always had dinner about one o'clock, like other people, and now they are here we have it between six and seven. The Professor spends the night reading and writing, and all at once, at two o'clock in the morning, he'll ring his bell. Goodness me! What is it? Tea! People have to be waked out of their sleep to get him the samovar. What goings-on!

ASTROV And will they be here much longer?

VOYNITSKY *(Whistles.)* A hundred years. The Professor has made up his mind to settle here.

MARINA Look now! The samovar has been on the table for the

last two hours, and they've gone for a walk.

VOYNITSKY They are coming. They are coming! Don't worry.

(There is a sound of voices; from the farther part of the garden enter SEREBRYAKOV, YELENA ANDREYEVNA, SONYA and TELYEGIN returning from a walk.)

SEREBRYAKOV Lovely, lovely!... Exquisite views!

TELYEGIN Remarkable, your Excellency.

SONYA We'll go to the plantation tomorrow, father. Shall we?

VOYNITSKY Tea is ready!

SEREBRYAKOV My friends, be so kind as to send my tea into the study for me. I have something more I must do today.

SONYA You will be sure to like the plantation.

(YELENA ANDREYEVNA, SEREBRYAKOV, and SONYA go into the house. TELYEGIN goes to the table and sits down beside MARINA.)

VOYNITSKY It's hot, stifling; but our great man of learning is in his greatcoat and goloshes, with an umbrella and gloves too.

ASTROV That shows that he takes care of himself.

VOYNITSKY And how lovely she is! How lovely! I've never seen a more beautiful woman.

TELYEGIN Whether I drive through the fields, Marina Timofyevna, or walk in the shady garden, or look at this table, I feel unutterably joyful. The weather is enchanting, the birds are singing, we are all living in peace and concord—what more could one wish for? *(Taking his glass.)* I am truly grateful to you!

VOYNITSKY *(Dreamily.)* Her eyes... an exquisite woman!

ASTROV Tell us something, Ivan Petrovitch.

VOYNITSKY (*Listlessly.*) What am I to tell you?

ASTROV Is there nothing new?

VOYNITSKY Nothing. Everything is old. I am just as I always was, perhaps worse, for I have grown lazy. I do nothing but just grumble like some old crow. My old magpie *Maman* is still babbling about the rights of women. With one foot in the grave, she is still rummaging in her learned books for the dawn of a new life.

ASTROV And the Professor?

VOYNITSKY The Professor, as before, sits in his study writing from morning till dead of night.
“With furrowed brow and racking brains,
We write and write and write,
And ne’er a word of praise we hear,
Our labours to requite.”
Poor paper! He had much better be writing his autobiography. What a superb subject! A retired professor, you know—an old dry-as-dust, a learned fish. Gout, rheumatism, migraine, envy and jealousy have affected his liver. The old fish is living on his first wife’s estate, living there against his will because he can’t afford to live in the town. He is forever complaining of his misfortunes, though, as a matter of fact, he is exceptionally fortunate. (*Nervously.*) Just think how fortunate! The son of a humble sacristan, he has risen to university distinctions and the chair of a professor; he has become “your Excellency,” the son-in-law of a senator, and so on, and so on. All that is no great matter, though. But just take this. The man has been lecturing and writing about art for twenty-five years, though he knows absolutely nothing about art. For twenty-five years he has been chewing over other men’s ideas about realism, naturalism, and all sorts of nonsense; for twenty-five years he has been lecturing and writing on things all intelligent people know about already and stupid ones

aren't interested in—so for twenty-five years he has been simply wasting his time. And with all that, what conceit! What pretensions! He has retired, and not a living soul knows anything about him; he is absolutely unknown. So that for twenty-five years all he has done is to keep a better man out of a job! But just look at him: he struts about like a demigod!

ASTROV Come, I believe you are envious.

VOYNITSKY Yes, I am. And the success he has with women! Don Juan is not in it. His first wife, my sister, a lovely, gentle creature, pure as this blue sky, noble, generous, who had more suitors than he has had pupils, loved him as only pure angels can love beings as pure and beautiful as themselves. My mother adores him to this day, and he still inspires in her a feeling of devout awe. His second wife, beautiful, intelligent—you have just seen her—has married him in his old age, sacrificed her youth, her beauty, her freedom, her brilliance, to him. What for? Why?

ASTROV Is she faithful to the Professor?

VOYNITSKY Unhappily, she is.

ASTROV Why unhappily?

VOYNITSKY Because that fidelity is false from beginning to end. There is plenty of fine sentiment in it, but no logic. To deceive an old husband whom one can't endure is immoral; but to try and stifle her piteous youth and living feeling—that's not immoral.

TELYEGIN (*In a tearful voice.*) Vanya, I can't bear to hear you talk like that. Come, really! Anyone who can betray wife or husband is a person who can't be trusted and who might betray his country.

VOYNITSKY (*With vexation.*) Dry up, Waffles!

TELYEGIN Excuse me, Vanya. My wife ran away from me with the man she loved the day after our wedding, on the ground of my unprepossessing appearance. But I have never been false to my vows. I love her to this day and am faithful to her. I help her as far as I can, and I gave all I had for the education of her children by the man she loved. I have lost my happiness, but my pride has been left to me. And she? Her youth is over, her beauty, in accordance with the laws of nature, has faded, the man she loved is dead.... What has she left?

(Enter SONYA and YELENA ANDREYEVNA and a little later, MARYA VASSILYEVNA with a book; she sits down and reads. They hand her tea, and she drinks it without looking at it.)

SONYA *(Hurriedly to the nurse.)* Nurse, darling, some peasants have come. Go and speak to them. I'll look after the tea.

(Exit Nurse. YELENA ANDREYEVNA takes her cup and drinks it sitting in the swing.)

ASTROV *(To YELENA ANDREYEVNA.)* I've come to see your husband. You wrote to me that he was very ill—rheumatism and something else—but it appears he is perfectly well.

YELENA Last night he was poorly, complaining of pains in his legs, but today he is all right....

ASTROV And I have galloped twenty miles at breakneck speed! But there, it doesn't matter! it's not the first time. I shall stay with you till tomorrow to make up for it, and anyway I shall sleep *quantum satis*.

SONYA That's splendid! It's not often you stay the night with us. I expect you've not had dinner?

ASTROV No, I haven't.

SONYA Oh, well, you will have some dinner, then! We have dinner now between six and seven *(drinks tea)*. The tea

is cold!

TELYEGIN The temperature in the samovar has perceptibly dropped.

YELENA Never mind, Ivan Ivanitch; we will drink it cold.

TELYEGIN I beg your pardon, I am not Ivan Ivanitch, but Ilya Ilyitch—Ilya Ilyitch Telyegin, or, as some people call me on account of my pockmarked face, Waffles. I stood godfather to Sonetchka, and his Excellency, your husband, knows me very well. I live here now on your estate. If you've been so kind as to observe it, I have dinner with you every day.

SONYA Ilya Ilyitch is our helper, our right hand. (*Tenderly.*) Let me give you another cup, godfather.

MARYA Ach!

SONYA What is it, grandmamma?

MARYA I forgot to tell Alexandr—I am losing my memory—I got a letter today from Harkov, from Pavel Alexeyevitch... he has sent his new pamphlet.

ASTROV Is it interesting?

MARYA It's interesting, but it's rather queer. He is attacking what he himself maintained seven years ago. It's awful.

VOYNITSKY There's nothing awful in it. Drink your tea, *maman*.

MARYA But I want to talk.

VOYNITSKY But we have been talking and talking for fifty years and reading pamphlets. It's about time to leave off.

MARYA You don't like listening when I speak; I don't know why. Forgive my saying so, Jean, but you have so changed in the course of the last year that I hardly know you. You used to be a man of definite principles, of elevating ideas.

VOYNITSKY Oh, yes! I was a man of elevating ideas which elevated nobody (*a pause*). . . . A man of elevating ideas . . . you could not have made a more malignant joke! Now I am forty-seven. Till last year I tried, like you, to blind myself with all your pedantic rubbish on purpose to avoid seeing life as it is—and thought I was doing the right thing. And now, if only you knew! I can't sleep at night for vexation, for rage that I so stupidly wasted the time when I might have had everything from which my age now shuts me out.

SONYA Uncle Vanya, it's so dreary!

MARYA (*To her son.*) You seem to be blaming your former principles. It is not they that are to blame, but yourself. You forget that principles alone are no use—a dead letter. You ought to have been working.

VOYNITSKY Working? It is not everyone who can be a writing machine like your Herr Professor.

MARYA What do you mean by that?

SONYA (*In an imploring voice.*) Grandmamma! Uncle Vanya! I entreat you!

VOYNITSKY I'll hold my tongue—hold my tongue and apologise.

(*A pause.*)

YELENA What a fine day! It's not too hot.

(*A pause.*)

VOYNITSKY A fine day to hang oneself!

(*TELYEGIN tunes the guitar. MARINA walks to and fro near the house, calling a hen.*)

MARINA Chook, chook, chook!

SONYA Nurse, darling, what did the peasants come about?

MARINA It's the same thing—about the waste land again. Chook, chook, chook!

SONYA Which is it you are calling?

MARINA Speckly has gone off somewhere with her chickens.... The crows might get them (*walks away*).

(TELYEGIN *plays a polka; they all listen to him in silence. Enter a LABOURER.*)

LABOURER Is the doctor here? (*To ASTROV.*) If you please, Mihail Lvovitch, they have sent for you.

ASTROV Where from?

LABOURER From the factory.

ASTROV (*With vexation.*) Much obliged to you. Well, I suppose I must go (*looks round him for his cap*). What a nuisance, hang it!

SONYA How annoying it is, really! Come back from the factory to dinner.

ASTROV No. It will be too late. “How should I? ... How could I? ...” (*To the LABOURER.*) Here, my good man, you might get me a glass of vodka, anyway. (*LABOURER goes off.*) “How should I? ... How could I? ...” (*Finds his cap.*) In one of Ostrovsky's plays there is a man with a big moustache and little wit—that's like me. Well, I have the honour to wish you all goodbye. (*To YELENA ANDREYEVNA.*) If you ever care to look in upon me, with Sofya Alexandrovna, I shall be truly delighted. I have a little estate, only ninety acres, but there is a model garden and nursery such as you wouldn't find for hundreds of miles round—if that interests you. Next to me is the government plantation. The forester there is old and always ill, so that I really look after all the work.

YELENA I have been told already that you are very fond of forestry. Of course, it may be of the greatest use, but doesn't it interfere with your real work? You are a doctor.

ASTROV Only God knows what is one's real work.

YELENA And is it interesting?

ASTROV Yes, it is interesting work.

VOYNITSKY (*Ironically.*) Very much so!

YELENA (*To ASTROV.*) You are still young—you don't look more than thirty-six or thirty-seven... and it cannot be so interesting as you say. Nothing but trees and trees. I should think it must be monotonous.

SONYA No, it's extremely interesting. Mihail Lvovitch plants fresh trees every year, and already they have sent him a bronze medal and a diploma. He tries to prevent the old forests being destroyed. If you listen to him you will agree with him entirely. He says that forests beautify the country, that they teach man to understand what is beautiful and develop a lofty attitude of mind. Forests temper the severity of the climate. In countries where the climate is mild, less energy is wasted on the struggle with nature, and so man is softer and milder. In such countries people are beautiful, supple and sensitive; their language is elegant and their movements are graceful. Art and learning flourish among them, their philosophy is not gloomy, and their attitude to women is full of refined courtesy.

VOYNITSKY (*Laughing.*) Bravo, bravo! That's all charming but not convincing; so (*to ASTROV*) allow me, my friend, to go on heating my stoves with logs and building my barns of wood.

ASTROV You can heat your stoves with peat and build your barns of brick. Well, I am ready to let you cut down wood as

you need it, but why destroy the forests? The Russian forests are going down under the axe. Millions of trees are perishing, the homes of wild animals and birds are being laid waste, the rivers are dwindling and drying up, wonderful scenery is disappearing never to return; and all because lazy man has not the sense to stoop down and pick up the fuel from the ground. (*To YELENA ANDREYEVNA.*) Am I not right, madam? One must be an unreflecting savage to burn this beauty in one's stove, to destroy what we cannot create. Man is endowed with reason and creative force to increase what has been given him; but hitherto he has not created but destroyed. There are fewer and fewer forests, the rivers are drying up, the wild creatures are becoming extinct, the climate is ruined, and every day the earth is growing poorer and more hideous. (*To VOYNITSKY.*) Here you are looking at me with irony, and all I say seems to you not serious and—perhaps I really am a crank. But when I walk by the peasants' woods which I have saved from cutting down, or when I hear the rustling of the young copse planted by my own hands, I realise that the climate is to some extent in my power, and that if in a thousand years man is to be happy I too shall have had some small hand in it. When I plant a birch tree and see it growing green and swaying in the wind my soul is filled with pride, and I... (*seeing the LABOURER, who has brought a glass of vodka on a tray*). However (*drinks*), it's time for me to go. Probably the truth of the matter is that I am a crank. I have the honour to take my leave! (*Goes towards the house.*)

SONYA (*Takes his arm and goes with him.*) When are you coming to us?

ASTROV I don't know.

SONYA Not for a month again?

(*ASTROV and SONYA go into the house; MARYA VASSILYEVNA and TELYEGIN remain at the table; YELENA ANDREYEVNA*

walks towards the verandah.)

YELENA You have been behaving impossibly again, Ivan Petrovitch. Why need you have irritated Marya Vassilyevna and talked about a writing machine! And at lunch today you quarrelled with Alexandr again. How petty it is!

VOYNITSKY But if I hate him?

YELENA There is no reason to hate Alexandr; he is like everyone else. He is no worse than you are.

VOYNITSKY If you could see your face, your movements! You are too indolent to live! Ah, how indolent!

YELENA Ach! indolent and bored! Everyone abuses my husband; everyone looks at me with compassion, thinking, "Poor thing! she has got an old husband." This sympathy for me, oh, how well I understand it! As Astrova said just now, you all recklessly destroy the forests, and soon there will be nothing left on the earth. In just the same way you recklessly destroy human beings, and soon, thanks to you, there will be no fidelity, no purity, no capacity for sacrifice left on earth! Why is it you can never look with indifference at a woman unless she is yours? Because—that doctor is right—there is a devil of destruction in all of you. You have no feeling for the woods, nor the birds, nor for women, nor for one another!

VOYNITSKY I don't like this moralising.

(A pause.)

YELENA That doctor has a weary, sensitive face. An interesting face. Sonya is evidently attracted by him; she is in love with him, and I understand her feeling. He has come three times since I have been here, but I am shy and have not once had a proper talk with him, or been nice to him. He thinks I am disagreeable. Most likely that's why we

are such friends, Ivan Petrovitch, that we are both such tiresome, tedious people. Tiresome! Don't look at me like that, I don't like it.

VOYNITSKY How else can I look at you, since I love you? You are my happiness, my life, my youth! I know the chances of your returning my feeling are nil, nonexistent, but I want nothing, only let me look at you, listen to your voice. . . .

YELENA Hush, they may hear you! (*They go into the house.*)

VOYNITSKY (*Following her.*) Let me speak of my love, don't drive me away—that alone will be the greatest happiness for me. . . .

YELENA This is agonising.

(*Both go into the house. TELYEGIN strikes the strings and plays a polka. MARYA VASSILYEVNA makes a note on the margin of a pamphlet.*)

(*Curtain.*)

ACT II

Dining-room in SEREBRYAKOV's house. Night. A watchman can be heard tapping in the garden.

(SEREBRYAKOV, *sitting in an armchair before an open window, dozing, and* YELENA ANDREYEVNA *sitting beside him, dozing too.*)

SEREBRYAKOV (Waking.) Who is it? Sonya, is it you?

YELENA It's me.

SEREBRYAKOV You, Lenotchka! ... I am in unbearable pain.

YELENA Your rug has fallen on the floor (*wrapping it round his legs*). I'll shut the window, Alexandr.

SEREBRYAKOV No, I feel suffocated. ... I just dropped asleep and I dreamed that my left leg did not belong to me. I was awakened by the agonising pain. No, it's not gout; it's more like rheumatism. What time is it now?

YELENA Twenty minutes past twelve (*a pause*).

SEREBRYAKOV Look for Batyushkov in the library in the morning. I believe we have his works.

YELENA What?

SEREBRYAKOV Look for Batyushkov in the morning. I remember we did have him. But why is it so difficult for me to breathe?

YELENA You are tired. This is the second night you have not slept.

SEREBRYAKOV I have been told that Turgenev got *angina pectoris* from gout. I am afraid I may have it. Hateful, detestable old age. Damnation take it! Since I have grown old I have grown hateful to myself. And you must all hate the sight of me.

YELENA You talk of your age as though we were all responsible for it.

SEREBRYAKOV I am most of all hateful to you.

(YELENA ANDREYEVNA *gets up and sits down farther away.*)

SEREBRYAKOV Of course, you are right. I am not a fool, and I understand. You are young and strong and good-looking. You want life and I am an old man, almost a corpse. Do you suppose I don't understand? And, of course, it is stupid of me to go on living. But wait a little, I shall soon set you all free. I shan't have to linger on much longer.

YELENA I am worn out... for God's sake be quiet!

SEREBRYAKOV It seems that, thanks to me, everyone is worn out, depressed, wasting their youth, and I am the only one enjoying life and satisfied. Oh yes, of course!

YELENA Be quiet! You make me miserable!

SEREBRYAKOV I make everyone miserable. Of course.

YELENA (*Through tears.*) It's insufferable! Say, what is it you want of me?

SEREBRYAKOV Nothing.

YELENA Well, be quiet then. I implore you!

SEREBRYAKOV It's a strange thing, Ivan Petrovitch may speak and that old idiot, Marya Vassilyevna, and there is nothing against it, everyone listens—but if I say a word everyone begins to feel miserable. They dislike the very sound of my

voice. Well, suppose I am disagreeable, egoistic and tyrannical—haven't I a right, even in my old age, to think of myself? Haven't I earned it? Haven't I the right, I ask you, to be quiet in my old age, to be cared for by other people?

YELENA No one is disputing your rights. (*The window bangs in the wind.*) The wind has got up; I'll shut the window (*shuts the window*). There will be rain directly. No one disputes your rights.

(*A pause; the watchman in the garden taps and sings.*)

SEREBRYAKOV After devoting all one's life to learning, after growing used to one's study, to one's lecture-room, to the society of honourable colleagues—all of a sudden to find oneself here in this vault, every day to see stupid people, to hear foolish conversation. I want life, I like success, I like fame, I like distinction, renown, and here—it's like being an exile. Every moment to be grieving for the past, watching the successes of others, dreading death. I can't bear it! It's too much for me! And then they won't forgive me my age!

YELENA Wait a little, have patience: in five or six years I shall be old too.

(*Enter SONYA.*)

SONYA Father, you told us to send for Doctor Astrov yourself, and now that he has come you won't see him. It isn't nice. You've troubled him for nothing.

SEREBRYAKOV What good is your Astrov to me? He knows as much about medicine as I do about astronomy.

SONYA We can't send for all the great medical authorities here for your gout.

SEREBRYAKOV I am not going to talk to that crazy crank.

SONYA That's as you please (*sits down*). It doesn't matter to me.

SEREBRYAKOV What's the time?

YELENA Nearly one o'clock.

SEREBRYAKOV I feel stifled.... Sonya, fetch me my drops from the table.

SONYA In a minute (*gives him the drops*).

SEREBRYAKOV (*Irritably.*) Oh, not those! It's no use asking for anything!

SONYA Please don't be peevish. Some people may like it, but please spare me! I don't like it. And I haven't the time. I have to get up early in the morning, we are haymaking tomorrow.

(*Enter VOYNITSKY in a dressing-gown with a candle in his hand.*)

VOYNITSKY There's a storm coming on. (*A flash of lightning.*) There, look! Hélène and Sonya, go to bed. I have come to take your place.

SEREBRYAKOV (*Frightened.*) No, no! Don't leave me with him! No! He will be the death of me with his talking!

VOYNITSKY But you must let them have some rest! This is the second night they have had no sleep.

SEREBRYAKOV Let them go to bed, but you go too. Thank you. I entreat you to go. For the sake of our past friendship, don't make any objections! We'll talk some other time.

VOYNITSKY (*Mockingly.*) Our past friendship.... Past....

SONYA Be quiet, Uncle Vanya.

SEREBRYAKOV (*To his wife.*) My love, don't leave me alone with him! He will be the death of me with his talking!

VOYNITSKY This is really getting laughable.

(Enter MARINA with a candle.)

SONYA You ought to be in bed, nurse darling! It's late.

MARINA The samovar has not been cleared. One can't very well go to bed.

SEREBRYAKOV Everyone is kept up, everyone is worn out. I am the only one enjoying myself.

MARINA *(Going up to SEREBRYAKOV tenderly.)* Well, master dear, is the pain so bad? I have a grumbling pain in my legs too, such a pain *(tucks the rug in)*. You've had this trouble for years. Vera Petrovna, Sonetchka's mother, used to be up night after night with you, wearing herself out. How fond she was of you! *(A pause.)* The old are like little children, they like someone to be sorry for them; but no one feels for the old *(kisses SEREBRYAKOV on the shoulder)*. Come to bed, dear... come, my honey... I'll give you some lime-flower tea and warm your legs... and say a prayer for you...

SEREBRYAKOV *(Moved.)* Let us go, Marina.

MARINA I have such a grumbling pain in my legs myself, such a pain *(together with SONYA leads him off)*. Vera Petrovna used to be crying, and breaking her heart over you.... You were only a mite then, Sonetchka, and had no sense.... Come along, come along, sir...

(SEREBRYAKOV, SONYA and MARINA go out.)

YELENA I am quite worn out with him. I can hardly stand on my feet.

VOYNITSKY You with him, and I with myself. This is the third night I have had no sleep.

YELENA It's dreadful in this house. Your mother hates everything except her pamphlets and the Professor; the Professor is irritated, he does not trust me, and is afraid of you;

Sonya is angry with her father, angry with me and has not spoken to me for a fortnight; you hate my husband and show open contempt for your mother; I am overwrought and have been nearly crying twenty times today.... It's dreadful in this house.

VOYNITSKY Let us drop this moralising.

YELENA You are a well-educated and intelligent man, Ivan Petrovitch, and I should have thought you ought to understand that the world is not being destroyed through fire or robbery, but through hatred, enmity and all this petty wrangling.... It ought to be your work to reconcile everyone, and not to grumble.

VOYNITSKY Reconcile me to myself first! My precious... (*bends down and kisses her hand*).

YELENA Don't! (*Draws away her hand.*) Go away!

VOYNITSKY The rain will be over directly and everything in nature will be refreshed and sigh with relief. But the storm has brought no relief to me. Day and night the thought that my life has been hopelessly wasted weighs on me like a nightmare. I have no past, it has been stupidly wasted on trifles, and the present is awful in its senselessness. Here you have my life and my love! What use to make of them? What am I to do with them? My passion is wasted in vain like a ray of sunshine that has fallen into a pit, and I am utterly lost, too.

YELENA When you talk to me about your love, I feel stupid and don't know what to say. Forgive me, there is nothing I can say to you (*is about to go out*). Good night.

VOYNITSKY (*Barring her way.*) And if you knew how wretched I am at the thought that by my side, in this same house, another life is being wasted, too—yours! What are you waiting for? What cursed theory holds you back? Understand, do understand...

YELENA (*Looks at him intently.*) Ivan Petrovitch, you are drunk!

VOYNITSKY I may be, I may be...

YELENA Where is the doctor?

VOYNITSKY He is in there... he is staying the night with me. It may be, it may be... anything may be!

YELENA You have been drinking again today. What's that for?

VOYNITSKY There's a semblance of life in it, anyway.... Don't prevent me, Hélène!

YELENA You never used to drink, and you did not talk so much.... Go to bed! You bore me.

VOYNITSKY (*Kisses her hand.*) My precious... marvellous one!

YELENA (*With vexation.*) Don't. This is really hateful (*goes out*).

VOYNITSKY (*Alone.*) She is gone (*a pause*). Ten years ago I used to meet her at my sister's. Then she was seventeen and I was thirty-seven. Why didn't I fall in love with her then and make her an offer? It might easily have happened then! And now she would have been my wife.... Yes.... Now we should both have been awakened by the storm; she would have been frightened by the thunder, I should have held her in my arms and whispered, "Don't be frightened, I am here." Oh, wonderful thoughts, what happiness; it makes me laugh with delight—but, my God, my thoughts are in a tangle. Why am I old? Why doesn't she understand me? Her fine phrases, her lazy morality, her nonsensical lazy theories about the ruin of the world—all that is absolutely hateful to me (*a pause*). Oh, how I have been cheated! I adored that Professor, that pitiful gouty invalid, and worked for him like an ox. Sonya and I squeezed every farthing out of the estate; we haggled over linseed oil, peas, curds, like greedy peasants; we grudged ourselves every morsel to save up halfpence and farthings and send him thousands of

roubles. I was proud of him and his learning; he was my life, the breath of my being. All his writings and utterances seemed to me inspired by genius. . . . My God, and now! Here he is retired, and now one can see the sum total of his life. He leaves not one page of work behind him, he is utterly unknown, he is nothing—a soap bubble! And I have been cheated. . . . I see it—stupidly cheated. . . .

(Enter ASTROV in his coat, but without waistcoat or tie; he is a little drunk; he is followed by TELYEGIN with the guitar.)

ASTROV Play something!

TELYEGIN Everyone is asleep!

ASTROV Play!

(TELYEGIN begins playing softly.)

ASTROV *(To VOYNITSKY.)* Are you alone? No ladies here? *(Putting his arms akimbo sings.)* “Dance my hut and dance my stove, the master has no bed to lie on.” The storm woke me. Jolly good rain. What time is it?

VOYNITSKY Goodness knows.

ASTROV I thought I heard Yelena Andreyevna’s voice.

VOYNITSKY She was here a minute ago.

ASTROV A fine woman. *(Examines the medicine bottles on the table.)* Medicines! What a lot of prescriptions! From Harkov, from Moscow, from Tula. He has bored every town with his gout. Is he really ill or shamming?

VOYNITSKY He is ill *(a pause)*.

ASTROV Why are you so melancholy today? Are you sorry for the Professor, or what?

VOYNITSKY Let me alone.

ASTROV Or perhaps you are in love with the Professor's lady?

VOYNITSKY She is my friend!

ASTROV Already?

VOYNITSKY What do you mean by "already"?

ASTROV A woman can become a man's friend only in the following sequence: first agreeable acquaintance, then mistress, then friend.

VOYNITSKY A vulgar theory.

ASTROV What? Yes... I must own I am growing vulgar. You see, I am drunk too. As a rule I get drunk like this once a month. When I am in this condition I become coarse and insolent in the extreme. I don't stick at anything then! I undertake the most difficult operations and do them capitably. I make the most extensive plans for the future; I don't think of myself as a crank at such times, but believe that I am being of immense service to humanity—immense! And I have my own philosophy of life at such times, and all you, my good friends, seem to me such insects... microbes! (*To TELYEGIN.*) Waffles, play!

TELYEGIN My dear soul, I'd be delighted to do anything for you, but do realise—everyone is asleep!

ASTROV Play!

(*TELYEGIN begins playing softly.*)

ASTROV We must have a drink. Come along, I fancy we have still some brandy left. And as soon as it is daylight, we will go to my place. Right? I have an assistant who never says "right," but "roight." He is an awful scoundrel. So we will go, shall we? (*Sees SONYA entering.*) Excuse me,

I have no tie on (*goes out hurriedly*, TELYEGIN *following him*).

SONYA Uncle Vanya, you have been drinking with the doctor again. You are a nice pair! He has always been like that, but why do you do it? It's so unsuitable at your age.

VOYNITSKY Age makes no difference. When one has no real life, one has to live on illusions. It's better than nothing, anyway.

SONYA The hay is all cut, it rains every day, it's all rotting, and you are living in illusions. You have quite given up looking after things.... I have to work alone, and am quite done up.... (*Alarmed.*) Uncle, you have tears in your eyes!

VOYNITSKY Tears? Not a bit of it... nonsense.... You looked at me just now so like your dear mother. My darling... (*eagerly kisses her hands and face*). My sister... my dear sister... where is she now? If she knew! Ah, if she knew!

SONYA What, uncle? Knew what?

VOYNITSKY It's painful, useless.... Never mind.... Afterwards... it's nothing... I am going (*goes out*).

SONYA (*Knocks at the door.*) Mihail Lvovitch, you are not asleep, are you? One minute!

ASTROV (*Through the door.*) I am coming! (*A minute later he comes out with his waistcoat and tie on.*) What can I do for you?

SONYA Drink yourself, if it does not disgust you, but I implore you, don't let my uncle drink! It's bad for him.

ASTROV Very good. We won't drink any more (*a pause*). I am just going home. That's settled and signed. It will be daylight by the time they have put the horses in.

SONYA It is raining. Wait till morning.

ASTROV The storm is passing over, we shall only come in for the end of it. I'm going. And please don't send for me again to see your father. I tell him it's gout and he tells me it's rheumatism; I ask him to stay in bed and he sits in a chair. And today he wouldn't speak to me at all.

SONYA He is spoiled. (*Looks into the sideboard.*) Won't you have something to eat?

ASTROV Well, perhaps.

SONYA I like eating at night. I believe there is something in the sideboard. They say he's been a great favourite with the ladies, and women have spoiled him. Here, have some cheese. (*Both stand at the sideboard and eat.*)

ASTROV I have had nothing to eat all day, only drink. Your father has a difficult temper. (*Takes a bottle from the sideboard.*) May I? (*Drinks a glass.*) There is no one here and one may speak frankly. Do you know, it seems to me that I could not exist in your house for a month, I should be choked by the atmosphere.... Your father, who is entirely absorbed in his gout and his books, Uncle Vanya with his melancholy, your grandmother, and your stepmother too....

SONYA What about my stepmother?

ASTROV Everything ought to be beautiful in a human being: face, and dress, and soul, and ideas. She is beautiful, there is no denying that, but... You know she does nothing but eat, sleep, walk about, fascinate us all by her beauty—nothing more. She has no duties, other people work for her.... That's true, isn't it? And an idle life cannot be pure (*a pause*). But perhaps I am too severe. I am dissatisfied with life like your Uncle Vanya, and we are both growing peevish.

SONYA You are dissatisfied with life, then?

ASTROV I love life as such, but our life, our everyday provincial

life in Russia, I can't endure. I despise it with every fibre of my being. And as for my own personal life, there is absolutely nothing nice in it, I can assure you. You know when you walk through a forest on a dark night, and a light gleams in the distance, you do not notice your weariness, nor the darkness, nor the sharp twigs that lash you in the face.... I work—as you know—harder than anyone in the district, fate is forever lashing at me; at times I am unbearably miserable, but I have no light in the distance. I expect nothing for myself; I am not fond of my fellow creatures.... It's years since I cared for anyone.

SONYA You care for no one at all?

ASTROV No one. I feel a certain affection for your nurse—for the sake of old times. The peasants are too much alike, undeveloped, living in dirt, and it is difficult to get on with the educated people. They are all wearisome. Our good friends are small in their ideas, small in their feelings, and don't see beyond their noses—or, to put it plainly, they are stupid. And those who are bigger and more intelligent are hysterical, morbidly absorbed in introspection and analysis.... They are forever whining; they are insanely given to hatred and slander; they steal up to a man sideways, and look at him askance and decide "Oh, he is a neurotic!" or "he is posing." And when they don't know what label to stick on my forehead, they say "he is a queer fellow, very queer!" I am fond of forestry—that's queer; I don't eat meat—that's queer too. There is no direct, genuine, free attitude to people and to nature left among them.... None, none! (*Is about to drink.*)

SONYA (*Prevents him.*) No, please, I beg you, don't drink any more!

ASTROV Why not?

SONYA It's so out of keeping with you! You are so refined, you have such a soft voice.... More than that even, you are

unlike everyone else I know—you are beautiful. Why, then, do you want to be like ordinary people who drink and play cards? Oh, don't do it, I entreat you! You always say that people don't create but only destroy what heaven gives them. Then why do you destroy yourself, why? You mustn't, you mustn't, I beseech you, I implore you!

ASTROV (*Holds out his hand to her.*) I won't drink any more!

SONYA Give me your word.

ASTROV My word of honour.

SONYA (*Presses his hand warmly.*) Thank you!

ASTROV Enough! I have come to my senses. You see, I am quite sober now and I will be so to the end of my days (*looks at his watch*). And so, as I was saying, my time is over, it's too late for me. . . . I have grown old, I have worked too hard, I have grown vulgar, all my feelings are blunted, and I believe I am not capable of being fond of anyone. I don't love anyone . . . and I don't believe I ever shall. What still affects me is beauty. That does stir me. I fancy if Yelena Andreyevna, for example, wanted to, she could turn my head in one day. . . . But that's not love, that's not affection . . . (*covers his face with his hands and shudders*).

SONYA What is it?

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

SONYA You ought to forget that by now (*a pause*). Tell me, Mihail Lvovitch . . . if I had a friend or a younger sister, and if you found out that she . . . well, suppose that she loved you, how would you take that?

ASTROV (*Shrugging his shoulders.*) I don't know. Nohow, I expect. I should give her to understand that I could not

care for her ... and my mind is taken up with other things. Anyway, if I am going, it is time to start. Goodbye, my dear girl, or we shall not finish till morning (*presses her hand*). I'll go through the drawing-room if I may, or I am afraid your uncle may detain me (*goes out*).

SONYA (*Alone.*) He has said nothing to me.... His soul and his heart are still shut away from me, but why do I feel so happy? (*Laughs with happiness.*) I said to him, you are refined, noble, you have such a soft voice.... Was it inappropriate? His voice trembles and caresses one ... I still feel it vibrating in the air. And when I spoke to him of a younger sister, he did not understand.... (*Wringing her hands.*) Oh, how awful it is that I am not beautiful! How awful it is! And I know I am not, I know it, I know it! ... Last Sunday, as people were coming out of church, I heard them talking about me, and one woman said: "She is a sweet generous nature, but what a pity she is so plain...." Plain....

(*Enter YELENA ANDREYEVNA.*)

YELENA (*Opens the window.*) The storm is over. What delicious air! (*A pause.*) Where is the doctor?

SONYA He is gone (*a pause*).

YELENA Sophie!

SONYA What is it?

YELENA How long are you going to be sulky with me? We have done each other no harm. Why should we be enemies? Let us make it up....

SONYA I wanted to myself... (*embraces her*). Don't let us be cross any more.

YELENA That's right. (*Both are agitated.*)

SONYA Has father gone to bed?

YELENA No, he is sitting in the drawing-room.... We don't speak to each other for weeks, and goodness knows why....
(*Seeing that the sideboard is open.*) How is this?

SONYA Mihail Lvovitch has been having some supper.

YELENA And there is wine too.... Let us drink to our friendship.

SONYA Yes, let us.

YELENA Out of the same glass... (*fills it*). It's better so. So now we are friends?

SONYA Friends. (*They drink and kiss each other.*) I have been wanting to make it up for ever so long, but somehow I felt ashamed... (*cries*).

YELENA Why are you crying?

SONYA It's nothing.

YELENA Come, there, there... (*weeps*). I am a queer creature, I am crying too... (*a pause*). You are angry with me because you think I married your father from interested motives.... If that will make you believe me, I will swear it—I married him for love. I was attracted by him as a learned, celebrated man. It was not real love, it was all made up; but I fancied at the time that it was real. It's not my fault. And ever since our marriage you have been punishing me with your clever, suspicious eyes.

SONYA Come, peace! peace! Let us forget.

YELENA You mustn't look like that—it doesn't suit you. You must believe in everyone—there is no living if you don't (*a pause*).

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

YELENA No.

SONYA I knew that. One more question. Tell me frankly,

wouldn't you have liked your husband to be young?

YELENA What a child you are still! Of course I should! (*Laughs.*) Well, ask something else, ask away....

SONYA Do you like the doctor?

YELENA Yes, very much.

SONYA (*Laughs.*) Do I look silly ... yes? He has gone away, but I still hear his voice and his footsteps, and when I look at the dark window I can see his face. Do let me tell you.... But I can't speak so loud; I feel ashamed. Come into my room, we can talk there. You must think me silly? Own up.... Tell me something about him.

YELENA What am I to tell you?

SONYA He is clever.... He understands everything, he can do anything.... He doctors people, and plants forests too....

YELENA It is not a question of forests and medicine.... My dear, you must understand he has a spark of genius! And you know what that means? Boldness, freedom of mind, width of outlook.... He plants a tree and is already seeing what will follow from it in a thousand years, already he has visions of the happiness of humanity. Such people are rare, one must love them.... He drinks, he is sometimes a little coarse—but what does that matter? A talented man cannot keep spotless in Russia. Only think what sort of life that doctor has! Impassable mud on the roads, frosts, snowstorms, the immense distances, the coarse savage peasants, poverty and disease all around him—it is hard for one who is working and struggling day after day in such surroundings to keep spotless and sober till he is forty (*kisses her*). I wish you happiness with all my heart; you deserve it... (*gets up*). But I am a tiresome, secondary character.... In music and in my husband's house, and in all the love affairs, everywhere in fact, I have always played a secondary part. As a matter of fact, if you come

to think of it, Sonya, I am very, very unhappy! (*Walks up and down the stage in agitation.*) There is no happiness in this world for me, none! Why do you laugh?

SONYA (*Laughs, hiding her face.*) I am so happy ... so happy!

YELENA I have a longing for music. I should like to play something.

SONYA Do play something! (*Embraces her.*) I can't sleep.... Play something!

YELENA In a minute. Your father is not asleep. Music irritates him when he is ill. Go and ask his leave. If he doesn't object, I'll play. Go!

SONYA Very well (*goes out*).

(*Watchman taps in the garden.*)

YELENA It's a long time since I have played the piano. I shall play and cry, cry like an idiot. (*In the window.*) Is that you tapping, Yefim?

WATCHMAN'S
VOICE Yes.

YELENA Don't tap, the master is unwell.

WATCHMAN'S
VOICE I am just going (*whistles*). Hey there, good dog! Come, lad! Good dog! (*A pause.*)

SONYA (*Returning.*) We mustn't!

(*Curtain.*)

ACT III

The drawing-room in SEREBRYAKOV's house. Three doors: on the right, on the left and in the middle. Daytime.

(VOYNITSKY *and* SONYA *seated, and* YELENA ANDREYEVNA *walking about the stage, thinking.*)

VOYNITSKY The Herr Professor has graciously expressed a desire that we should all gather together in this room at one o'clock today (*looks at his watch*). It is a quarter to. He wishes to make some communication to the world.

YELENA Probably some business matter.

VOYNITSKY He has no business. He spends his time writing twaddle, grumbling and being jealous.

SONYA (*In a reproachful tone.*) Uncle!

VOYNITSKY Well, well, I am sorry (*motioning towards* YELENA ANDREYEVNA). Just look at her! she is so lazy that she almost staggers as she walks. Very charming! Very!

YELENA You keep buzzing and buzzing away all day—aren't you tired of it? (*Miserably.*) I am bored to death. I don't know what I'm to do.

SONYA (*Shrugging her shoulders.*) Isn't there plenty to do? If only you cared to do it.

YELENA For instance?

- SONYA You could help us with the estate, teach the children or look after the sick. There's plenty to do. When father and you were not here, Uncle Vanya and I used to go to the market ourselves and sell the flour.
- YELENA I don't know how to do such things. And they are not interesting. It's only in novels with a purpose that people teach and doctor the peasants. How am I, all of a sudden, apropos of nothing, to go and teach them or doctor them?
- SONYA Well, I don't see how one can help doing it. Wait a little, and you too will get into the way of it (*puts her arm round her*). Don't be depressed, dear (*laughs*). You are bored and don't know what to do with yourself, and boredom and idleness are catching. Look at Uncle Vanya—he does nothing but follow you about like a shadow. I have left my work and run away to talk to you. I have grown lazy—I can't help it! The doctor, Mihail Lvovitch, used to come and see us very rarely, once a month; it was difficult to persuade him to come, and now he drives over every day. He neglects his forestry and his patients. You must be a witch.
- VOYNITSKY Why be miserable? (*Eagerly.*) Come, my precious, my splendid one, be sensible! You have mermaid blood in your veins—be a mermaid! Let yourself go for once in your life! Make haste and fall head over ears in love with some water-sprite—and plunge headlong into the abyss so that the Herr Professor and all of us may throw up our hands in amazement!
- YELENA (*Angrily.*) Leave me in peace! How cruel it is! (*Is about to go out.*)
- VOYNITSKY (*Prevents her.*) Come, come, my dearest, forgive me.... I apologise (*kisses her hand*). Peace!
- YELENA You would drive an angel out of patience, you know.
- VOYNITSKY As a sign of peace and harmony I'll fetch you a bunch of roses; I gathered them for you this morning. Autumn

roses—exquisite, mournful roses... (*goes out*).

SONYA Autumn roses—exquisite, mournful roses.... (*Both look out of window.*)

YELENA It's September already. However are we to get through the winter here? (*A pause.*) Where is the doctor?

SONYA In Uncle Vanya's room. He is writing something. I am glad Uncle Vanya is gone. I want to talk to you.

YELENA What about?

SONYA What about! (*Lays her head on YELENA's bosom.*)

YELENA Come, there, there... (*strokes her head*).

SONYA I am not good-looking.

YELENA You have beautiful hair.

SONYA No! (*Looks round so as to see herself in the looking-glass.*) No! When a woman is plain, she is always told "You have beautiful eyes, you have beautiful hair."... I have loved him for six years. I love him more than my own mother. Every moment I am conscious of him. I feel the touch of his hand and I watch the door. I wait, expecting him every moment to come in. And here you see I keep coming to you simply to talk of him. Now he is here every day, but he doesn't look at me—doesn't see me.... That's such agony! I have no hope at all—none, none! (*In despair.*) Oh, my God, give me strength.... I have been praying all night.... I often go up to him, begin talking to him, look into his eyes. I have no pride left, no strength to control myself. I couldn't keep it in and told Uncle Vanya yesterday that I love him.... And all the servants know I love him. Everybody knows it.

YELENA And he?

SONYA No. He doesn't notice me.

YELENA (*Musing.*) He is a strange man. . . . Do you know what? Let me speak to him. . . . I'll do it carefully—hint at it. . . . (*a pause*). Yes really—how much longer are you to remain in uncertainty? Let me!

(SONYA *nods her head in consent.*)

YELENA That's right. It won't be difficult to find out whether he loves you or not. Don't you be troubled, darling; don't be uneasy. I'll question him so tactfully that he won't notice it. All we want to find out is yes or no (*a pause*). If it's no, he had better not come here, had he?

(SONYA *nods in agreement.*)

YELENA It's easier to bear when one doesn't see the man. We won't put things off; we will question him straight away. He was meaning to show me some charts. Go and tell him that I want to see him.

SONYA (*In violent agitation.*) You will tell me the whole truth?

YELENA Yes, of course. It seems to me that the truth, however dreadful it is, is not so dreadful as uncertainty. Rely on me, dear.

SONYA Yes, yes. . . . I shall tell him you want to see his charts (*is going, and stops in the doorway*). No, uncertainty is better. . . . One has hope, at least. . . .

YELENA What do you say?

SONYA Nothing (*goes out*).

YELENA (*Alone.*) Nothing is worse than knowing somebody else's secret and not being able to help. (*Musing.*) He is not in love with her—that's evident; but why should he not marry her? She is not good-looking, but she would be a capital wife for a country doctor at his age. She is so sensible, so kind and pure-hearted. . . . No, that's not it. . . . (*a pause*). I understand the poor child. In the midst of

desperate boredom, with nothing but grey shadows wandering about instead of human beings, with only dull commonplaces to listen to, among people who can do nothing but eat, drink and sleep—he sometimes appears on the scene unlike the rest, handsome, interesting, fascinating, like a bright moon rising in the darkness.... To yield to the charm of such a man... forget oneself... I believe I am a little fascinated myself. Yes, I feel bored when he does not come, and even now I am smiling when I think of him.... That Uncle Vanya says I have mermaid's blood in my veins. "Let yourself go for once in your life." Well, perhaps that's what I ought to do.... If I could fly, free as a bird, away from all of you—from your sleepy faces, from your talk, forget your existence.... But I am cowardly and diffident.... My conscience troubles me.... He comes here every day. I guess why he comes, and already I have a guilty feeling. I am ready to throw myself on my knees before Sonya, to beg her pardon, to cry....

ASTROV (*Comes in with a chart.*) Good day! (*Shakes hands.*) You wanted to see my handiwork.

YELENA You promised yesterday to show me.... Can you spare the time?

ASTROV Oh, of course! (*Spreads the map on a card table and fixes it with drawing pins.*) Where were you born?

YELENA (*Helping him.*) In Petersburg.

ASTROV And where did you study?

YELENA At the School of Music.

ASTROV I expect this won't be interesting to you.

YELENA Why not? It's true that I don't know the country, but I have read a great deal.

ASTROV I have my own table here, in this house... in Ivan

Petrovitch's room. When I am so exhausted that I feel completely stupefied, I throw everything up and fly here and amuse myself with this for an hour or two. . . . Ivan Petrovitch and Sofya Alexandrovna click their counting beads, and I sit beside them at my table and daub away—and I feel snug and comfortable, and the cricket churrs. But I don't allow myself that indulgence too often—only once a month. . . . (*Pointing to the map.*) Now, look here! It's a picture of our district as it was fifty years ago. The dark and light green stands for forest; half of the whole area was covered with forest. Where there is a network of red over the green, elks and wild goats were common. . . . I show both the flora and the fauna here. On this lake there were swans, geese and ducks, and the old people tell us there were "a power" of birds of all sorts, no end of them; they flew in clouds. Besides the villages and hamlets, you see scattered here and there all sorts of settlements—little farms, monasteries of Old Believers, water-mills. . . . Horned cattle and horses were numerous. That is shown by the blue colour. For instance, the blue colour lies thick on this neighbourhood. Here there were regular droves of horses, and every homestead had three on an average (*a pause*). Now look lower down. That's how it was twenty-five years ago. Already, you see, only a third of the area is under forest. There are no goats left, but there are elks. Both the green and the blue are paler. And so it goes on and on. Let us pass to the third part—a map of the district as it is at present. There is green here and there, but only in patches; all the elks have vanished, and the swans and the capercaillies too. . . . Of the old settlements and farms and monasteries and mills there is not a trace. In fact, it's a picture of gradual and unmistakable degeneration which will, apparently, in another ten or fifteen years be complete. You will say that it is the influence of civilisation—that the old life must naturally give way to the new. Yes, I understand that. If there were highroads and railways on the site of these ruined forests, if there were works and factories and schools, the peasants would be healthier, better off, more intelligent; but, you see, there is nothing of the

sort! There are still the same swamps and mosquitoes, the same lack of roads, and poverty, and typhus and diphtheria and fires in the district. . . . We have here a degeneration that is the result of too severe a struggle for existence. This degeneration is due to inertia, ignorance, to the complete lack of understanding, when a man, cold, hungry and sick, simply to save what is left of life, to keep his children alive, instinctively, unconsciously clutches at anything to satisfy his hunger and warm himself and destroys everything heedless of the morrow. . . . Almost everything has been destroyed already, but nothing as yet has been created to take its place. (*Coldly.*) I see from your face that it doesn't interest you.

YELENA But I understand so little about all that.

ASTROV There's nothing to understand in it; it simply doesn't interest you.

YELENA To speak frankly, I am thinking of something else. Forgive me. I want to put you through a little examination, and I am troubled and don't know how to begin.

ASTROV An examination?

YELENA Yes, an examination . . . but not a very formidable one. Let us sit down. (*They sit down.*) It concerns a certain young lady. We will talk like honest people, like friends, without beating about the bush. Let us talk and forget all about it afterwards. Yes?

ASTROV Yes.

YELENA It concerns my stepdaughter Sonya. You like her, don't you?

ASTROV Yes, I have a respect for her.

YELENA Does she attract you as a woman?

ASTROV (*After a pause.*) No.

YELENA A few words more, and I have done. Have you noticed nothing?

ASTROV Nothing.

YELENA (*Taking him by the hand.*) You do not love her ... I see it from your eyes.... She is unhappy... Understand that and... give up coming here.

ASTROV (*Gets up.*) My day is over. Besides, I have too much to do (*shrugging his shoulders*). What time have I for such things? (*He is confused.*)

YELENA Ough! What an unpleasant conversation! I am trembling as though I'd been carrying a ton weight. Well, thank God, that's over! Let us forget it. Let it be as though we had not spoken at all, and... and go away. You are an intelligent man... you'll understand (*a pause*). I feel hot all over.

ASTROV If you had spoken a month or two ago I might, perhaps, have considered it; but now... (*he shrugs his shoulders*). And if she is unhappy, then of course... There's only one thing I can't understand: what induced you to go into it? (*Looks into her eyes and shakes his finger at her.*) You are a sly one!

YELENA What does that mean?

ASTROV (*Laughs.*) Sly! Suppose Sonya is unhappy—I am quite ready to admit it—but why need you go into it? (*Preventing her from speaking, eagerly.*) Please don't try to look astonished. You know perfectly well what brings me here every day.... Why, and on whose account, I am here, you know perfectly well. You charming bird of prey, don't look at me like that, I am an old sparrow....

YELENA (*Perplexed.*) Bird of prey! I don't understand.

ASTROV A beautiful, fluffy weasel.... You must have a victim! Here I have been doing nothing for a whole month. I have dropped everything. I seek you greedily—and you are awfully pleased at it, awfully.... Well, I am conquered; you knew that before your examination (*folding his arms and bowing his head*). I submit. Come and devour me!

YELENA You are mad!

ASTROV (*Laughs through his teeth.*) You—diffident....

YELENA Oh, I am not so bad and so mean as you think! I swear I'm not! (*Tries to go out.*)

ASTROV (*Barring the way.*) I am going away today. I won't come here again, but... (*takes her hand and looks round*) where shall we see each other? Tell me quickly, where? Someone may come in; tell me quickly.... (*Passionately.*) How wonderful, how magnificent you are! One kiss.... If I could only kiss your fragrant hair....

YELENA I assure you...

ASTROV (*Preventing her from speaking.*) Why assure me? There's no need. No need of unnecessary words.... Oh, how beautiful you are! What hands! (*Kisses her hands.*)

YELENA That's enough... go away... (*withdraws her hands*). You are forgetting yourself.

ASTROV Speak, speak! Where shall we meet tomorrow? (*Puts his arm round her waist.*) You see, it is inevitable; we must meet (*kisses her; at that instant VOYNITSKY comes in with a bunch of roses and stands still in the doorway*).

YELENA (*Not seeing VOYNITSKY.*) Spare me... let me go (*lays her head on ASTROV's chest*). No! (*Tries to go out.*)

ASTROV (*Holding her by the waist.*) Come to the plantation tomorrow..at two o'clock.... Yes? Yes? You'll come?

YELENA *(Seeing VOYNITSKY.)* Let me go! *(In extreme confusion goes to the window.)* This is awful!

VOYNITSKY *(Lays the roses on a chair; in confusion wipes his face and his neck with his handkerchief.)* Never mind... no... never mind.

ASTROV *(Carrying it off with bravado.)* The weather is not so bad today, honoured Ivan Petrovitch. It was overcast in the morning, as though we were going to have rain, but now it is sunny. To tell the truth, the autumn has turned out lovely... and the winter corn is quite promising *(rolls up the map)*. The only thing is the days are getting shorter... *(goes out)*.

YELENA *(Goes quickly up to VOYNITSKY.)* You will try—you will do your utmost that my husband and I should leave here today! Do you hear? This very day!

VOYNITSKY *(Mopping his face.)* What? Oh, yes... very well... I saw it all, Hélène—all....

YELENA *(Nervously.)* Do you hear? I must get away from here today!

(Enter SEREBRYAKOV, TELYEGIN and MARINA.)

TELYEGIN I don't feel quite the thing myself, your Excellency. I have been poorly for the last two days. My head is rather queer....

SEREBRYAKOV Where are the others? I don't like this house. It's a perfect labyrinth. Twenty-six huge rooms, people wander in different directions, and there is no finding anyone *(rings)*. Ask Marya Vassilyevna and Yelena Andreyevna to come here.

YELENA I am here.

SEREBRYAKOV I beg you to sit down, friends.

SONYA (*Going up to YELENA ANDREYEVNA, impatiently.*) What did he say?

YELENA Presently.

SONYA You are trembling! You are agitated! (*Looking searchingly into her face.*) I understand.... He said that he won't come here again... yes? (*A pause.*) Tell me: yes?

(YELENA ANDREYEVNA *nods.*)

SEREBRYAKOV (*To TELYEGIN.*) One can put up with illness, after all; but what I can't endure is the whole manner of life in the country. I feel as though I had been cast off the earth into some other planet. Sit down, friends, I beg! Sonya! (*Sonya does not hear him; she stands with her head drooping sorrowfully.*) Sonya! (*A pause.*) She does not hear. (*To MARINA.*) You sit down too, nurse. (*Nurse sits down, knitting a stocking.*) I beg you, my friends, hang your ears on the nail of attention, as the saying is (*laughs*).

VOYNITSKY (*Agitated.*) Perhaps I am not wanted? Can I go?

SEREBRYAKOV No; it is you whom we need most.

VOYNITSKY What do you require of me?

SEREBRYAKOV Require of you.... Why are you cross? (*A pause.*) If I have been to blame in any way, pray excuse me.

VOYNITSKY Drop that tone. Let us come to business. What do you want?

(*Enter MARYA VASSILYEVNA.*)

SEREBRYAKOV Here is *maman*. I will begin, friends (*a pause*). I have invited you, gentlemen, to announce that the Inspector-General is coming. But let us lay aside jesting. It is a serious matter. I have called you together to ask for your

advice and help, and, knowing your invariable kindness, I hope to receive it. I am a studious, bookish man, and have never had anything to do with practical life. I cannot dispense with the assistance of those who understand it, and I beg you, Ivan Petrovitch, and you, Ilya Ilyitch, and you, *maman*.... The point is that *manet omnes una nox*—that is, that we are all mortal. I am old and ill, and so I think it is high time to settle my worldly affairs so far as they concern my family. My life is over. I am not thinking of myself, but I have a young wife and an unmarried daughter (*a pause*). It is impossible for me to go on living in the country. We are not made for country life. But to live in town on the income we derive from this estate is impossible. If we sell the forest, for instance, that's an exceptional measure which we cannot repeat every year. We must take some steps which would guarantee us a permanent and more or less definite income. I have thought of such a measure, and have the honour of submitting it to your consideration. Omitting details I will put it before you in rough outline. Our estate yields on an average not more than two percent on its capital value. I propose to sell it. If we invest the money in suitable securities, we should get from four to five percent, and I think we might even have a few thousand roubles to spare for buying a small villa in Finland.

VOYNITSKY Excuse me ... surely my ears are deceiving me! Repeat what you have said.

SEREBRYAKOV To put the money in some suitable investment and with the remainder purchase a villa in Finland.

VOYNITSKY Not Finland.... You said something else.

SEREBRYAKOV I propose to sell the estate.

VOYNITSKY That's it. You will sell the estate; superb, a grand idea.... And what do you propose to do with me, and your old mother and Sonya here?

- SEREBRYAKOV We will settle all that in due time. One can't go into everything at once.
- VOYNITSKY Wait a minute. It's evident that up to now I've never had a grain of common sense. Up to now I have always imagined that the estate belongs to Sonya. My father bought this estate as a dowry for my sister. Till now I have been simple; I did not interpret the law like a Turk, but thought that my sister's estate passed to Sonya.
- SEREBRYAKOV Yes, the estate belongs to Sonya. Who disputes it? Without Sonya's consent I shall not venture to sell it. Besides, I am proposing to do it for Sonya's benefit.
- VOYNITSKY It's inconceivable, inconceivable! Either I have gone out of my mind, or... or...
- MARYA Jean, don't contradict Alexandr. Believe me, he knows better than we do what is for the best.
- VOYNITSKY No; give me some water (*drinks water*). Say what you like—say what you like!
- SEREBRYAKOV I don't understand why you are so upset. I don't say that my plan is ideal. If everyone thinks it unsuitable, I will not insist on it.
- (*A pause.*)
- TELYEGIN (*In confusion.*) I cherish for learning, your Excellency, not simply a feeling of reverence, but a sort of family feeling. My brother Grigory Ilyitch's wife's brother—perhaps you know him?—Konstantin Trofimitch Lakedemonov, was an M.A....
- VOYNITSKY Stop, Waffles; we are talking of business.... Wait a little—later.... (*To SEREBRYAKOV.*) Here, ask him. The estate was bought from his uncle.
- SEREBRYAKOV Oh! why should I ask him? What for?

VOYNITSKY The estate was bought at the time for ninety-five thousand roubles. My father paid only seventy thousand, and twenty-five thousand remained on mortgage. Now, listen. . . . The estate would never have been bought if I had not renounced my share of the inheritance in favour of my sister, whom I loved dearly. What's more, I worked for ten years like a slave and paid off all the mortgage. . . .

SEREBRYAKOV I regret that I broached the subject.

VOYNITSKY The estate is free from debt and in a good condition only owing to my personal efforts. And now that I am old I am to be kicked out of it!

SEREBRYAKOV I don't understand what you are aiming at.

VOYNITSKY I have been managing this estate for twenty-five years. I have worked and sent you money like the most conscientious steward, and you have never thanked me once in all these years. All that time—both when I was young and now—you have given me five hundred roubles a year as salary—a beggarly wage!—and it never occurred to you to add a rouble to it.

SEREBRYAKOV Ivan Petrovitch, how could I tell? I am not a practical man, and don't understand these things. You could have added as much to it as you chose.

VOYNITSKY Why didn't I steal? How is it you don't all despise me because I didn't steal? It would have been right and I shouldn't have been a pauper now!

MARYA (*Sternly.*) Jean!

TELYEGIN (*In agitation.*) Vanya, my dear soul, don't, don't . . . I am all of a tremble. . . . Why spoil our good relations? (*Kisses him.*) You mustn't.

VOYNITSKY For twenty-five years I have been here within these four walls with mother, buried like a mole. . . . All our

thoughts and feelings belonged to you alone. By day we talked of you and your labours. We were proud of you; with reverence we uttered your name. We wasted our nights reading books and magazines for which now I have the deepest contempt!

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

SEREBRYAKOV (*Wrathfully.*) I don't know what it is you want.

VOYNITSKY To us you were a being of a higher order, and we knew your articles by heart... But now my eyes are opened! I see it all! You write of art, but you know nothing about art! All those works of yours I used to love are not worth a brass farthing! You have deceived us!

SEREBRYAKOV Do stop him! I am going!

YELENA Ivan Petrovitch, I insist on your being silent! Do you hear?

VOYNITSKY I won't be silent. (*Preventing SEREBRYAKOV from passing.*) Stay! I have not finished. You have destroyed my life! I have not lived! I have not lived! Thanks to you, I have ruined and wasted the best years of my life. You are my bitterest enemy.

TELYEGIN I can't bear it... I can't bear it... I must go (*goes out, in violent agitation*).

SEREBRYAKOV What do you want from me? And what right have you to speak to me like this? You nonentity! If the estate is yours, take it. I don't want it!

YELENA I am going away from this hell this very minute (*screams*). I can't put up with it any longer!

VOYNITSKY My life is ruined! I had talent, I had courage, I had intelligence! If I had had a normal life I might have been a Schopenhauer, a Dostoevsky... Oh, I am talking like

an idiot! I am going mad.... Mother, I am in despair!
Mother!

MARYA (*Sternly.*) Do as Alexandr tells you.

SONYA (*Kneeling down before the nurse and huddling up to her.*)
Nurse, darling! Nurse, darling!

VOYNITSKY Mother! What am I to do? Don't speak; there's no need!
I know what I must do! (*To SEREBRYAKOV.*) You shall
remember me! (*Goes out through middle door.*)

(MARYA VASSILYEVNA *follows him.*)

SEREBRYAKOV This is beyond everything! Take that madman away! I
cannot live under the same roof with him. He is always
there (*points to the middle door*)—almost beside me....
Let him move into the village, or into the lodge, or I will
move; but remain in the same house with him I
cannot....

YELENA (*To her husband.*) We will leave this place today! We
must pack up this minute!

SEREBRYAKOV An utterly insignificant creature!

SONYA (*On her knees, turns her head towards her father;
hysterical through her tears.*) You must be merciful,
father! Uncle Vanya and I are so unhappy! (*Mastering
her despair.*) You must be merciful! Remember how,
when you were younger, Uncle Vanya and grandmamma
sat up all night translating books for you, copying your
manuscripts... all night... all night... Uncle Vanya and I
worked without resting—we were afraid to spend a
farthing on ourselves and sent it all to you... We did not
eat the bread of idleness. I am saying it all wrong—all
wrong; but you ought to understand us, father. You must
be merciful!

YELENA (*In agitation, to her husband.*) Alexandr, for God's sake
make it up with him... I beseech you!

SEREBRYAKOV Very well, I will talk to him. . . . I am not accusing him of anything, I am not angry with him. But you must admit that his behaviour is strange, to say the least of it. Very well, I'll go to him (*goes out by middle door*).

YELENA Be gentle with him, soothe him . . . (*follows him out*).

SONYA (*Hugging Nurse.*) Oh, Nurse, darling! Nurse, darling!

MARINA Never mind, child. The ganders will cackle a bit and leave off. . . . They will cackle and leave off. . . .

SONYA Nurse, darling!

MARINA (*Stroking her head.*) You are shivering as though you were frozen! There, there, little orphan, God is merciful! A cup of lime-flower water, or raspberry tea, and it will pass. . . . Don't grieve, little orphan. (*Looking towards the middle door wrathfully.*) What a to-do they make, the ganders! Plague take them!

(*A shot behind the scenes; a shriek from YELENA ANDREYEVNA is heard; SONYA shudders.*)

MARINA Ough! Botheration take them!

SEREBRYAKOV (*Runs in, staggering with terror.*) Hold him! hold him! He is out of his mind!

(*YELENA ANDREYEVNA and VOYNITSKY struggle in the doorway.*)

YELENA (*Trying to take the revolver from him.*) Give it up! Give it up, I tell you!

VOYNITSKY Let me go, Hélène! Let me go! (*Freeing himself from her, he runs in, looking for SEREBRYAKOV.*) Where is he? Oh, here he is! (*Fires at him.*) Bang! (*A pause.*) Missed! Missed again! (*Furiously.*) Damnation—damnation take it. . . . (*flings revolver on the floor and sinks on to a chair,*

exhausted. SEREBRYAKOV is overwhelmed; YELENA leans against the wall, almost fainting).

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

VOYNITSKY *(In despair.)* Oh, what am I doing! What am I doing!

SONYA *(Softly.)* Nurse, darling! Nurse, darling!

(Curtain.)

ACT IV

VOYNITSKY's room: it is his bedroom and also his office. In the window there is a big table covered with account books and papers of all sorts; a bureau, bookcases, scales. A smaller table, for ASTROV; on that table there are paints and drawing materials; beside it a big portfolio. A cage with a starling in it. On the wall a map of Africa, obviously of no use to anyone. A big sofa covered with American leather. To the left a door leading to other apartments. On the right a door into the hall; near door, on right, there is a doormat, that the peasants may not muddy the floor. An autumn evening. Stillness.

(TELYEGIN *and* MARINA *sitting opposite each other winding wool.*)

TELYEGIN You must make haste, Marina Timofeyevna, they will soon be calling us to say goodbye. They have already ordered the horses.

MARINA (*Tries to wind more rapidly.*) There is not much left.

TELYEGIN They are going to Harkov. They'll live there.

MARINA Much better so.

TELYEGIN They've had a fright.... Yelena Andreyevna keeps saying, "I won't stay here another hour. Let us get away; let us get away." "We will stay at Harkov," she says; "we will have a look round and then send for our things...." They are not taking much with them. It seems it is not ordained that they should live here, Marina

Timofeyevna. It's not ordained.... It's the dispensation of Providence.

MARINA It's better so. Look at the quarrelling and shooting this morning—a regular disgrace!

TELYEGIN Yes, a subject worthy of the brush of Aivazovsky.

MARINA A shocking sight it was (*a pause*). We shall live again in the old way, as we used to. We shall have breakfast at eight, dinner at one, and sit down to supper in the evening; everything as it should be, like other people... like Christians (*with a sigh*). It's a long while since I have tasted noodles, sinner that I am!

TELYEGIN Yes, it's a long time since they have given us noodles at dinner (*a pause*). A very long time.... As I was walking through the village this morning, Marina Timofeyevna, the man at the shop called after me, "You cadger, living upon other people." And it did hurt me so.

MARINA You shouldn't take any notice of that, my dear. We all live upon God. Whether it's you or Sonya or Ivan Petrovitch, none of you sit idle, we all work hard! All of us.... Where is Sonya?

TELYEGIN In the garden. She is still going round with the doctor looking for Ivan Petrovitch. They are afraid he may lay hands on himself.

MARINA And where is his pistol?

TELYEGIN (*In a whisper.*) I've hidden it in the cellar!

MARINA (*With a smile.*) What goings-on!

(*Enter VOYNITSKY and ASTROV from outside.*)

VOYNITSKY Let me alone. (*To MARINA and TELYEGIN.*) Go away, leave me alone—if only for an hour! I won't endure being watched.

TELYEGIN Certainly, Vanya (*goes out on tiptoe*).

MARINA The gander says, *ga-ga-ga!* (*Gathers up her wool and goes out.*)

VOYNITSKY Let me alone!

ASTROV I should be delighted to. I ought to have gone away ages ago, but I repeat I won't go till you give back what you took from me.

VOYNITSKY I did not take anything from you.

ASTROV I am speaking in earnest, don't detain me. I ought to have gone long ago.

VOYNITSKY I took nothing from you. (*Both sit down.*)

ASTROV Oh! I'll wait a little longer and then, excuse me, I must resort to force. We shall have to tie your hands and search you. I am speaking quite seriously.

VOYNITSKY As you please (*a pause*). To have made such a fool of myself: to have fired twice and missed him! I shall never forgive myself for that.

ASTROV If you wanted to be playing with firearms, you would have done better to take a pop at yourself.

VOYNITSKY (*Shrugging his shoulders.*) It's queer. I made an attempt to commit murder and I have not been arrested; no one has sent for the police. So I am looked upon as a madman (*with a bitter laugh*). I am mad, but people are not mad who hide their crass stupidity, their flagrant heartlessness under the mask of a professor, a learned sage. People are not mad who marry old men and then deceive them before the eyes of everyone. I saw you kissing her! I saw!

ASTROV Yes, I did kiss her, and that's more than you ever have!

VOYNITSKY (*Looking towards the door.*) No, the earth is mad to let

you go on living on it!

ASTROV Come, that's silly.

VOYNITSKY Well, I am mad. I am not responsible. I have a right to say silly things.

ASTROV That's a stale trick. You are not a madman: you are simply a crank. A silly fool. Once I used to look upon every crank as an invalid—as abnormal; but now I think it is the normal condition of man to be a crank. You are quite normal.

VOYNITSKY (*Covers his face with his hands.*) I am ashamed! If you only knew how ashamed I am! No pain can be compared with this acute shame (*miserably*). It's unbearable (*bends over the table*). What am I to do? What am I to do?

ASTROV Nothing.

VOYNITSKY Give me something! Oh, my God! I am forty-seven. If I live to be sixty, I have another thirteen years. It's a long time! How am I to get through those thirteen years? What shall I do? How am I to fill them up? Oh, you know... (*squeezing ASTROV's hand convulsively*); you know, if only one could live the remnant of one's life in some new way. Wake up on a still sunny morning and feel that one had begun a new life, that all the past was forgotten and had melted away like smoke (*weeps*). To begin a new life.... Tell me how to begin it... what to begin....

ASTROV (*With vexation.*) Oh, get away with you! New life, indeed! Our position—yours and mine—is hopeless.

VOYNITSKY Yes?

ASTROV I am convinced of it.

VOYNITSKY Give me something.... (*Pointing to his heart.*) I have a scalding pain here.

ASTROV (*Shouts angrily.*) Leave off! (*Softening.*) Those who will live a hundred or two hundred years after us, and who will despise us for having lived our lives so stupidly and tastelessly—they will, perhaps, find a means of being happy; but we... There is only one hope for you and me. The hope that when we are asleep in our graves we may, perhaps, be visited by pleasant visions (*with a sigh*). Yes, old man, in the whole district there were only two decent, well-educated men: you and I. And in some ten years the common round of the trivial life here has swamped us, and has poisoned our life with its putrid vapours, and made us just as despicable as all the rest. (*Eagerly.*) But don't try to put me off: give me what you took away from me.

VOYNITSKY I took nothing from you.

ASTROV You took a bottle of morphia out of my travelling medicine-chest (*a pause*). Look here, if you insist on making an end of yourself, go into the forest and shoot yourself. But give me back the morphia or else there will be talk and conjecture. People will think I have given it you. It will be quite enough for me to have to make your postmortem. Do you think I shall find it interesting?

(*Enter SONYA.*)

VOYNITSKY Leave me alone.

ASTROV (*To SONYA.*) Sofya Alexandrovna, your uncle has taken a bottle of morphia out of my medicine-chest, and won't give it back. Tell him that it's... really stupid. And I haven't the time to waste. I ought to be going.

SONYA Uncle Vanya, did you take the morphia? (*A pause.*)

ASTROV He did. I am certain of it.

SONYA Give it back. Why do you frighten us? (*Tenderly.*) Give it back, Uncle Vanya! I am just as unhappy, perhaps, as you are; but I am not going to give way to despair. I am

bearing it, and will bear it, till my life ends of itself. . . .
You must be patient too (*a pause*). Give it back! (*Kisses his hands.*) Dear, good uncle, darling! give it back! (*Weeps.*) You are kind, you will have pity on us and give it back. Be patient, uncle!—be patient!

VOYNITSKY (*Takes the bottle out of the table-drawer and gives it to ASTROV.*) There, take it! (*To SONYA.*) But we must make haste and work, make haste and do something, or else I can't . . . I can't bear it.

SONYA Yes, yes, work. As soon as we have seen our people off, we'll sit down to work. (*Nervously turning over the papers on the table.*) We have let everything go.

ASTROV (*Puts the bottle into his case and tightens the straps.*) Now I can set off.

(*Enter YELENA.*)

YELENA Ivan Petrovitch, are you here? We are just starting. Go to Alexandr, he wants to say something to you.

SONYA Go, Uncle Vanya. (*Takes VOYNITSKY by the arm.*) Let us go. Father and you must be reconciled. That's essential.

(*SONYA and VOYNITSKY go out.*)

YELENA I am going away. (*Gives ASTROV her hand.*) Goodbye.

ASTROV Already?

YELENA The carriage is waiting.

ASTROV Goodbye.

YELENA You promised me today that you would go away.

ASTROV I remember. I am just going (*a pause*). You have taken fright? (*Takes her hand.*) Is it so terrible?

YELENA Yes.

ASTROV You had better stay, after all! What do you say?
Tomorrow in the plantation—

YELENA No. It's settled. And I look at you so fearlessly just
because it is settled. I have only one favour to ask of
you: think better of me. I should like you to have a
respect for me.

ASTROV Ugh! (*Makes a gesture of impatience.*) Do stay, I ask you
to. Do recognise, you have nothing to do in this world,
you have no object in life, you have nothing to occupy
your mind, and sooner or later you will give way to
feeling—it's inevitable. And it had better not be at
Harkov, or somewhere in Kursk, but here, in the lap of
nature.... It's poetical, anyway, even the autumn is
beautiful.... There is the forest plantation here, half-
ruined homesteads in the Turgenev style....

YELENA How absurd you are.... I am angry with you, but yet... I
shall think of you with pleasure. You are an interesting,
original man. We shall never meet again, and so—why
conceal it?—I was really a little bit in love with you.
Come, let us shake hands and part friends. Don't
remember evil against me.

ASTROV (*Pressing her hand.*) Yes, you had better go... (*musings*).
You seem to be a good, warmhearted creature, and yet
there is something strange about your whole personality,
as it were. You came here with your husband, and all of
us who were at work, toiling and creating something, had
to fling aside our work and attend to nothing all the
summer but your husband's gout and you. The two of
you have infected all of us with your idleness. I was
attracted by you and have done nothing for a whole
month, and, meanwhile, people have been ill, and the
peasants have pastured their cattle in my woods, of
young, half-grown trees.... And so, wherever you and
your husband go, you bring destruction everywhere.... I
am joking, of course, yet... it is strange. And I am
convinced that if you had stayed here, the devastation

would have been immense. I should have been done for... and you wouldn't have fared well either! Well, go away. *Finita la comedia!*

YELENA *(Taking a pencil from his table and hurriedly putting it in her pocket.)* I shall take this pencil as a keepsake.

ASTROV It is strange.... We have been friends and all at once for some reason... we shall never meet again. So it is with everything in this world.... While there is no one here—before Uncle Vanya comes in with a nosegay—allow me to kiss you at parting.... Yes? *(Kisses her on the cheek.)* That's right.

YELENA I wish you all happiness. *(Looks round.)* Well, so be it! For once in my life! *(Embraces him impulsively and both simultaneously draw rapidly apart from each other.)* I must go—I must go!

ASTROV Make haste and go. Since the carriage is there, you had better set off.

YELENA There's someone coming, I believe. *(Both listen.)*

ASTROV *Finita!*

(Enter SEREBRYAKOV, VOYNITSKY, MARYA VASSILYEVNA, with a book; TELYEGIN and SONYA.)

SEREBRYAKOV *(To VOYNITSKY.)* Let bygones be bygones. After what has happened, I have gone through and experienced so much in these few hours, that I believe I could write a whole treatise on the art of living for the benefit of posterity. I gladly accept your apologies and apologise myself. Goodbye! *(He and VOYNITSKY kiss each other three times.)*

VOYNITSKY You shall receive regularly the same sum as hitherto. Everything shall be as before.

(YELENA ANDREYEVNA embraces SONYA.)

SEREBRYAKOV (*Kisses MARYA VASSILYEVNA's hand.*) *Maman....*

MARYA (*Kissing him.*) Alexandr, have your photograph taken again and send it to me. You know how dear you are to me.

TELYEGIN Goodbye, your Excellency! Don't forget us!

SEREBRYAKOV (*Kissing his daughter.*) Goodbye goodbye, everyone. (*Shaking hands with ASTROV.*) Thanks for your pleasant company. I respect your way of thinking, your enthusiasms, your impulses, but permit an old man to add one observation to his farewell message: you must work, my friends! you must work! (*He bows to them all.*) I wish you all things good!

(*Goes out, followed by MARYA VASSILYEVNA and SONYA.*)

VOYNITSKY (*Warmly kisses YELENA ANDREYEVNA's hand.*) Goodbye.... Forgive me.... We shall never meet again.

YELENA (*Moved.*) Goodbye, dear Ivan Petrovitch (*kisses him on the head and goes out*).

ASTROV (*To TELYEGIN.*) Waffles, tell them, by the way, to bring my carriage round too.

TELYEGIN Certainly, my dear soul (*goes out*).

(*Only ASTROV and VOYNITSKY remain.*)

ASTROV (*Clearing his paints from the table and putting them away in his portmanteau.*) Why don't you go and see them off?

VOYNITSKY Let them go, I... I can't. My heart is too heavy. I must make haste and occupy myself with something.... Work! Work! (*Rummages among his papers on the table.*)

(*A pause; there is the sound of bells.*)

ASTROV They've gone. The Professor is glad, I'll be bound.

Nothing will tempt him back.

MARINA *(Enters.) They've gone (sits down in an easy chair and knits her stocking).*

SONYA *(Enters.) They've gone (wipes her eyes). Good luck to them. (To her uncle.) Well, Uncle Vanya, let us do something.*

VOYNITSKY Work, work....

SONYA It's ever so long since we sat at this table together *(lights the lamp on the table)*. I believe there is no ink *(takes the inkstand, goes to the cupboard, and fills it with ink)*. But I feel sad that they have gone.

(MARYA VASSILYEVNA comes in slowly.)

MARYA They've gone *(sits down and becomes engrossed in reading)*.

SONYA *(Sits down to the table and turns over the pages of the account book.)* First of all, Uncle Vanya, let us make out our accounts. We've neglected it all dreadfully. Someone sent for his account again today. Make it out. If you will do one account, I will do another.

VOYNITSKY *(Writes.) "Delivered... to Mr..." (Both write in silence.)*

MARINA *(Yawning.)* I am ready for bye-bye.

ASTROV How quiet it is! The pens scratch and the cricket churrs. It's warm and snug. I don't want to go. *(There is the sound of bells.)* There are my horses.... There is nothing left for me but to say goodbye to you, my friends—to say goodbye to my table—and be off! *(Packs up his maps in the portfolio.)*

MARINA Why are you in such a hurry? You might as well stay.

ASTROV I can't.

VOYNITSKY *(Writes.)* “Account delivered, two roubles and seventy-five kopecks.”

(Enter a LABOURER.)

LABOURER Mihail Lvovitch, the horses are ready.

ASTROV I heard them. *(Hands him the medicine-chest, the portmanteau and the portfolio.)* Here, take these. Mind you don't crush the portfolio.

LABOURER Yes, sir.

ASTROV Well? *(Goes to say goodbye.)*

SONYA When shall we see you again?

ASTROV Not before next summer, I expect. Hardly in the winter. . . . Of course, if anything happens, you'll let me know, and I'll come *(shakes hands)*. Thank you for your hospitality, for your kindness—for everything, in fact. *(Goes up to nurse and kisses her on the head.)* Goodbye, old woman.

MARINA You are not going without tea?

ASTROV I don't want any, nurse.

MARINA Perhaps you'll have a drop of vodka?

ASTROV *(Irresolutely.)* Perhaps.

(MARINA goes out.)

ASTROV *(After a pause.)* My trace-horse has gone a little lame. I noticed it yesterday when Petrushka was taking it to water.

VOYNITSKY You must change his shoes.

ASTROV I shall have to call in at the blacksmith's in Rozhdestvennoye. It can't be helped. *(Goes up to the*

map of Africa and looks at it.) I suppose in that Africa there the heat must be something terrific now!

VOYNITSKY Yes, most likely.

MARINA *(Comes back with a tray on which there is a glass of vodka and a piece of bread.)* There you are.

(ASTROV drinks the vodka.)

MARINA To your good health, my dear *(makes a low bow)*. You should eat some bread with it.

ASTROV No, I like it as it is. And now, good luck to you all. *(To MARINA.)* Don't come out, nurse, there is no need.

(He goes out; SONYA follows with a candle, to see him off; MARINA sits in her easy chair.)

VOYNITSKY *(Writes.)* "February the second, Lenten oil, twenty pounds. February sixteenth, Lenten oil again, twenty pounds. Buckwheat..." *(A pause.)*

(The sound of bells.)

MARINA He has gone *(a pause)*.

SONYA *(Comes back and puts the candle on the table.)* He has gone.

VOYNITSKY *(Counts on the beads and writes down.)* "Total... fifteen... twenty-five..."

(SONYA sits down and writes.)

MARINA *(Yawns.)* Lord have mercy on us!

(TELYEGIN comes in on tiptoe, sits by the door and softly tunes the guitar.)

VOYNITSKY *(To SONYA, passing his hand over her hair.)* My child, how my heart aches! Oh, if only you knew how my heart

aches!

SONYA There is nothing for it. We must go on living! (*A pause.*) We shall go on living, Uncle Vanya! We shall live through a long, long chain of days and weary evenings; we shall patiently bear the trials which fate sends us; we shall work for others, both now and in our old age, and have no rest; and when our time comes we shall die without a murmur, and there beyond the grave we shall say that we have suffered, that we have wept, that life has been bitter to us, and God will have pity on us, and you and I, uncle, dear uncle, shall see a life that is bright, lovely, beautiful. We shall rejoice and look back at these troubles of ours with tenderness, with a smile—and we shall rest. I have faith, uncle; I have fervent, passionate faith. (*Slips on her knees before him and lays her head on his hands; in a weary voice.*) We shall rest!

(TELYEGIN *softly plays on the guitar.*)

SONYA We shall rest! We shall hear the angels; we shall see all Heaven lit with radiance; we shall see all earthly evil, all our sufferings, drowned in mercy which will fill the whole world, and our life will be peaceful, gentle and sweet as a caress. I have faith, I have faith (*wipes away his tears with her handkerchief*). Poor Uncle Vanya, you are crying. (*Through her tears.*) You have had no joy in your life, but wait, Uncle Vanya, wait. We shall rest (*puts her arms round him*). We shall rest! (*The watchman taps.*)

(TELYEGIN *plays softly*; MARYA VASSILYEVNA *makes notes on the margin of her pamphlet*; MARINA *knits her stocking.*)

SONYA We shall rest!

(*Curtain drops slowly.*)



Uncle Vanya
was published in 1897 by
ANTON CHEKHOV.
It was translated from Russian in 1923 by
CONSTANCE GARNETT.

This ebook was transcribed and produced in 2025 for
[STANDARD EBOOKS](#)
by
DEVIN O'BANNON,
and is based on digital scans from the
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The cover page is adapted from
Alfred Sisley,
a painting completed in 1876 by
[PIERRE-AUGUSTE RENOIR](#).
The cover and title pages feature the
LEAGUE SPARTAN and SORTS MILL GOUDY
typefaces created in 2014 and 2009 by
[THE LEAGUE OF MOVEABLE TYPE](#).

This edition was released on
JUNE 30, 2026, 2:48 A.M.
and is based on
REVISION 3E5A4EE.
The first edition of this ebook was released on
OCTOBER 4, 2025, 3:30 P.M.
You can check for updates to this ebook, view its revision history, or
download it for different ereading systems at

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