

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov

Uncle Vanya

Scenes from country life in four acts.

Translation by Graham Schmidt

For Tom Schmidt

Dramatis Personae

Serebryakov, Aleksandr Vladimirovich, a retired professor

Yelena Andreevna, his wife, 27 yrs old

Sofia Aleksandrovna (Sonya), his daughter from his first marriage

Voynitskaya, Maria Vasilievna, wife of a privy councillor, mother of the professor's first wife

Voynitskiy, Ivan Petrovich, her son.

Astrov, Mikhail Lvovich, a doctor.

Telyegin, Ilya Ilyich, an impoverished landowner

Marina, an old nanny.

A worker.

The action takes place on Serebryakov's estate.

Act I

The garden. Part of the house and a terrace are visible. Beneath a row of old poplar trees, a table set for tea, benches and chairs; on one of the benches lies an old guitar. Nearby, a bench-swing. Three o'clock in the afternoon. Overcast.

MARINA (*a stout, sedentary old woman; she sits by the samovar, knitting a stocking*), ASTROV (*paces nearby*)

MARINA (*Pours a glass of water*) Have a bite to eat, grandfather.

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

MARINA: Maybe a drop of vodka?

ASTROV: No. I don't drink vodka every day. Besides, it's stifling.

Pause.

Nanny, old girl, how long have we known each other?

MARINA (*Pondering*) How long? God knows...You first came to us...when was it?...Vera Petrovna was still alive, Sonechka's mother. In her time you spent two winters here...So eleven years now. (*Thinking*) Maybe more...

ASTROV: Have I changed much since then?

MARINA: Terribly. Before you were young and handsome, but now you're old. And your looks aren't what they were. Also, truth be told – you like a bit of vodka.

ASTROV. Yes....In ten years I've become a different man. And why is that? I've worked myself raw, Nanny. On my feet from morning 'til night, knowing no rest, then at night you sweat like a butcher under the sheets until you're hauled off to the next patient. In all the time we've known each other, I've never had a single day off. How could I not grow old? And of itself this life is dull, insipid, filthy...It drags you down, this life. You're surrounded by crackpots, nothing but crackpots; you live with them and in two, maybe three years, little by little, without noticing it you start turning into a crackpot yourself. There's no way around it. (*Twists his moustache*) Look at this silly mustache I've grown....A stupid moustache. I've become a crackpot, Nanny....I still have my wits, thank god, my mind's sharp, but my feelings have gone numb, somehow. I want nothing, need

nothing, love no one...I only have eyes for you. (*Kisses her on the forehead*) When I was a child I had a Nanny just like you.

MARINA: Maybe you want a bite to eat?

ASTROV: No. In lent, the third week, I rode to Malitskoe...Epidemic...Typhus...In the huts they were laid side-by-side...Filth, stench, smoke, calves on the floor, crowding the sick...pigs, too...I worked all day, never sat down, nothing to drink, and when I got home I had no time to rest. A switchman had just been brought from the railroad, they laid him on a table for me to operate on him, and just like that, he died on me under chloroform. And then, right when I didn't need it, I felt something awoken in me, my conscience lurched, as if I'd killed the man on purpose...I sat down, closed my eyes - just like this, and I think: those who will live one hundred, two hundred years from now and for whom we're clearing the way - will they remember us kindly? Nanny, old girl, they won't!

MARINA: People won't remember, but God will.

ASTROV: Thank you for that. That was very well said.

VOINITSKY *enters*.

VOINITSKY (*Exits from the house; he fell asleep after breakfast and looks dishevelled; he sits on a bench and straightens his fancy tie.*) Yes...

ASTROV: Sleep well?

VOINITSKY: Yes...very. (*Yawns*) Ever since the professor and his wife arrived, life's gone off the rails...I sleep at all hours, snack between meals, drink wine...It's degrading! Before I didn't have a minute to spare, Sonya and I worked and were happy, but now Sonya works by herself while I sleep, eat, drink....it's not right!

MARINA: (*nodding her head*) All off kilter! The professor rises at twelve o'clock, meanwhile the samovar's been on all morning: Everyone just waits. Before we had lunch at one o'clock, like everyone else, but with them here we eat at seven. At night the professor reads and writes, and when the clock strikes two... What heavens, grandfather? Tea! Wake up the house, start the samovar boiling....Off kilter!

ASTROV: Will they be staying for long?

VOYNITSKY (*whistles*): 'Til Gabriel's horn. The professor's decided to put down roots here.

MARINA: And now, you see? The samovar's been set for two hours, and they went for a stroll.

VOYNITSKY: Look, here they come. Don't fuss yourself.

Voices. SEREBRYAKOV, YELENA ANDREEVNA, SONYA and TELYEGIN *approach from far off in the garden. They are returning from a walk.*

SEREBRYAKOV: Breath-taking....Marvelous vistas.

TELYEGIN: Astonishing, your excellency.

SONYA: Tomorrow we'll go over to the forest preserve, papa. Do you want to?

VOYNITSKY: Ladies and gentlemen, tea is served!

SEREBRYAKOV: Dear friends, be so kind and bring the tea into my office. I still have some work to do today.

SONYA: I just know you'll like the forest preserve...

YELENA ANDREEVNAY, SEREBRYAKOV *and* SONYA *exit into the house*; TELYEGIN *sits at the table by* MARINA.

VOYNITSKY: It's hot out, stifling, and our renowned scholar wears an overcoat and galoshes with an umbrella and gloves.

ASTROV: So he takes care of himself.

VOYNITSKY: But what a wonder! Did you see how beautiful? In my life I've never laid eyes on a more beautiful woman.

TELYEGIN: Whether I'm passing through a field, Marina Timofeevna, or under a shady grove, or simply looking at this table, I feel such indescribable bliss! The weather is resplendent; the birds are singing - we all live in peace and tranquility. What more could we ask for? (*Takes a glass*) I'm sincerely grateful to you!

VOYNITSKY (*Dreamily*) Those eyes...ravishing woman!

ASTROV: Talk about something, Ivan Petrovich.

VOYNITSKY: (*Listlessly*) What's there to talk about?

ASTROV: Nothing new?

VOYNITSKY: Nothing. Everything's old. I'm the same as ever, but then again maybe worse with this idleness, I do nothing and grumble like an old buzzard. The old jackdaw, *Maman*, still chirps about women's emancipation; she's got one eye on the grave, while the other scours books for the dawn of a new life.

ASTROV: And the professor?

VOINITSKY: The professor, as always, from morning 'til deepest night, sits in his office and writes:

*With wrinkled brow and furrowed brain,
Our odes compose we all in vain,
Nor us, nor them be praised by mouths of man [pronounced "main"].*

The poor, defenseless paper! He should give autobiography a try. Now there's an exciting plot! Look – a retired professor, a learned bread-crumb, a wrinkled old carp...Gout, rheumatism, migraines, liver swollen with jealousy and envy...This old carp lives on the estate of his first wife, he lives there unwillingly, since a place in town would strain his pocketbook. He forever complains about his own misfortune, but in fact he's remarkably fortunate. (*Brittle-ly*) You have no idea how fortunate! The son of a humble clerk, a seminarian, grew into a scholar of rank and esteem, became "Your Excellency," a Senator's son-in-law and so on and so forth. But none of that's important – listen to this. For exactly twenty years the man's been reading and writing about art, while comprehending nothing – zero – about art. For twenty years he's pilfered others' thoughts about realism, naturalism and other such babble; for twenty years he wrote and thought about things intelligent people have known for quite some time, and fools couldn't care less about. That means for twenty years he's been beating the wind! And all that time what pomposity, what arrogance! He's retired, and not a single living soul knows about him, he's an absolute zero. That means that for twenty years, he's been a mountebank, an impostor. And behold: He struts about like a demigod.

ASTROV: It sounds like you envy him.

VOINITSKY: Yes, I envy him! And what success with women! Don Juan himself knew never knew such thoroughgoing success. His first wife, my sister – a gentle, exquisite creature, pure as this blue sky, generous, compassionate, with more admirers than he had students – loved him as only angels can love other beings as pure and perfect as themselves. My mother, his aunt, worships him to this day; to this day he inspires in her a kind of biblical awe. His second wife – a beautiful, intelligent woman – you saw her – married him after he'd grown old. She surrendered her youth, her beauty, her freedom, her radiance. Why? What for?

ASTROV: Is she loyal to him?

VOINITSKY: Unfortunately, yes.

ASTROV: Why unfortunately?

VOINITSKY: Because this loyalty is fake from start to finish. It's all sound and no substance. Betray an old husband whom you can't stand – that's immoral; strangle any spark of youth or vitality in yourself, that's not immoral.

TELYEGIN: (*Through tears*) Vanya, I don't like it when you speak like that. It's not right...If a person betrays his wife or husband, that means he's unfaithful...he might even betray his own country!

VOINITSKY: Shut off the faucet, Waffles.

TELYEGIN: Permit me, Vanya. My wife ran away with her lover the day after our wedding due to my unattractive appearance. Since then I've never faltered in my duty to her. To this day I love her and am faithful, I help as I'm able and sold my possessions in order to provide for the daughters that she bore her lover. Happiness has been denied me, but I still have my pride. And her? Her youth has fled, her beauty - faded according to the laws of nature, her lover passed away...What does she have left?

Enter Sonya and Yelena Andreevna; soon after, Maria Vasilievna with her book; she sits and reads; she is given tea, and sips without looking up.

SONYA (*Hurriedly, to Nanny*). The peasants are here, Nanny. Go talk with them; I'll serve the tea myself...(Pours tea.)

Nanny exits, Yelena Andreevna picks up a cup and drinks, sitting on the swing.

ASTROV (*To Yelena Andreevna*). I'm here to see your husband. You wrote that he's very sick, rheumatism and whatnot, but it turns out he's fit as a fiddle.

YELENA ANDREEVNA: Last night he was miserable and complained about the pain in his legs, but today he's fine...

ASTROV: And I galloped here non-stop for thirty versts. Well, no matter – it's not the first time. I'll stay here until morning. At the very least I'll sleep well, *quantum sanis*.

SONYA: Outstanding. It's so rare that you spend the night with us. I don't suppose you've had anything to eat?

ASTROV: No, ma'am, I haven't.

SONYA: We'll fix that and get you some food. These days we eat dinner at seven o'clock. (*Drinks*) Cold tea!

TELYEGIN: The temperature of the samovar has plunged precipitously.

YELENA ANDREEVNA: That's fine, Ivan Ivanych; we'll drink it cold.

TELYEGIN: I beg your pardon madam...I'm not Ivan Ivanych, but Ilya Ilyich...Ilya Ilyich Telyegin or, as many know me on account of my unattractive appearance, Waffles. I'm Sonya's godfather, and His Excellency, your husband, knows me very

well. I reside here with you all now, on this estate...If you'd be kind enough to notice, I have lunch with you every day.

SONYA: Ilya Ilyich is our assistant, our right hand. (*Tenderly*) Here, godfather, let me pour you some more tea.

MARIA VASILIEVNA. Oh!

SONYA: What is it, grandmother?

MARIA VASILIEVNA: I forgot to tell *Alexandre*...It slipped my mind...Today I received a letter from Kharkov, from Pavel Alekseevich...It's his latest pamphlet...

ASTROV: Is it interesting?

MARIA VASILIEVNA: Interesting, though somewhat strange. He refutes the very theory that seven years ago he'd defended. It's dreadful!

VOINITSKY: Nothing is dreadful. Drink your tea, *Maman*.

MARIA VASILIEVNA: But I want to talk!

VOINITSKY: For fifty years we've been talking and talking and reading pamphlets. It's time we stopped.

MARIA VASILIEVNA: For some reason you can't stand listening when I speak. Forgive me, *Jean*, but over the past year you've changed so much that I hardly recognize you...You used to be a man of clear convictions, a beacon...

VOINITSKY: Oh, yes! I was a beacon – a beacon casting light on nothing and no one.

Pause.

A beacon....What a cruel joke. I'm now forty-seven years old. Up until a year ago I was just like you, purposefully burying my nose in these lofty books and hiding from real life, and I thought I was doing good. Bu now, if you only knew! At night I can't sleep, I'm gripped with anger and bitterness that I wasted my time so stupidly, that I could have had everything now denied me by my old age!

SONYA: Uncle Vanya, this is boring!

MARIA VASILIEVNA: (*To her son*) You speak as if your previous convictions are at fault...But they're not to blame, you are. You forget that convictions alone are nothing – a dead letter....You should have worked.

VOINITSKY: Worked? Not everyone is *perpetuum mobile* device, like your *Herr Professor*.

MARIA VASILIEVNA: And what is that supposed to mean?

SONYA: (*Imploringly*) Grandmother! Uncle Vanya! Please!

VOINITSKY: I am silent. I am silent and I apologize.

Pause.

YELENA ANDREEVNA: What wonderful weather...Balmy...

Pause.

VOINITSKY: Fine weather to hang yourself...

Telyegin takes up his guitar. Marina Walks nearby and calls the chickens.

MARINA: Tsip tsip tsip...

SONYA: Nanny, what did the peasants want?

MARINA: The same as always, on and on about those untilled fields. Tsip tsip tsip...

SONYA: Who are you calling?

MARINA: Beatrice went off with her chicks. The crows might get 'em... (*exits*).

Telyegin plays the guitar; everyone listens silently; a WORKER enters.

WORKER: Is the doctor here? (*To Astrov*) Excuse me, Mikhail Lvovich – some men are here to see you.

ASTROV. Where from?

WORKER. The factory.

ASTROV. (*Annoyed*) Many thanks. That's that, time to go...(Looks around for his hat.) Bloody hell...

SONYA: Oh, what a shame...After the factory come back for dinner.

ASTROV: No, it will be too late. Now where...*(To the worker)* Say there, be a friend and bring me a glass of vodka, will you?

The WORKER exits.

Where could it be...*(Finds his hat.)* There's a character in Ostrovsky – a man with a massive moustache and no brains...That's me. Farewell, ladies and gentlemen...*(To Yelena Andreevna)* If you ever happen to drop by – you and Sofiya Aleksandrovna, that is - I'll be sincerely pleased. I have a modest little plot, no more than thirty acres, but I keep nursery and a garden, the likes of which you won't find within a thousand versts. There's a forest preserve nearby...The overseer is old and always ill, so, effectively, I manage the place.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. They say you're quite fond of forests. Of course, that's very admirable, but doesn't it distract you from your true calling? You are a doctor, after all.

ASTROV: Only God knows our true calling.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Is it interesting?

ASTROV. Yes, it's interesting.

VOINITSKY. *(Ironically)* Very!

YELENA ANDREEVNA *(To Astrov)*. You're still young – no more than...what, thirty-six, thirty-seven?...I doubt it's so interesting as you say. Nothing but forests, day after day. It seems monotonous.

SONYA. No, it's extremely interesting. Mikhail Lvovich plants new trees every year, and they've already sent him a bronze medal and an honorary certificate. He protects old forests from eradication. If you listen to him speak, you'll agree with him completely. He says that forests beautify the earth, they teach us to comprehend beauty and instill in us a sense of reverence. Forests temper severe climates. In lands where the climate is mild, people spend less energy struggling against nature, so their temperaments are gentler and more kind. There people are beautiful, sensitive, keen and alert, refined in their speech and pleasing in movement. There art and science flourish, philosophy is not so harsh, women are treated with honor and dignity...

VOINITSKY: *(Laughing)* Bravo, bravo!...This is quite charming, but not at all convincing, therefore *(To Astrov)* my friend, allow me to keep burning logs in the stove and building sheds out of wood.

ASTROV: You can burn peat in your stove and build your sheds out of stone. By all means, cut down the trees you need, but why eradicate them all? Russian forests are splitting under the axe; we see billions of trees being destroyed, habitats for plants and animals systematically emptied, priceless landscapes disappearing, rivers shrinking and drying out, and all

because human beings lack the sense and initiative to reach down and take fuel from the earth. *(To Yelena Andreevna)* Isn't it true, my lady? You'd have to be a senseless barbarian to incinerate this beauty in a stove, to destroy that which we cannot create. Humankind is blessed with reason and imagination so it can increase that which it's been given, but to this point we've increased nothing – we've only destroyed. Forests are shrinking, rivers drying out, wildlife vanishing, the climate being ruined, and with every day the land grows fouler and more barren. *(To Vanya)* You're throwing me a sarcastic smile, everything I say sounds trivial to you, and... and maybe it really is just babble, but when I walk through a forest that I've saved from the axe, or when I hear the wind rustle through the branches of trees I nurtured with my own hands, I sense that the earth around me is, in some small way, within my power, and that if in a thousand years humankind becomes happy, then in a modest sense, it will be thanks to me. When I plant a birch and watch it grow, see it bend in the wind, my heart swells with pride, and I... *(Catches sight of the worker, who's brought in a tray with a glass of vodka)* However... *(Drinks)* Time to go. It's probably just babble, anyway. Goodbye! *(Goes to the house.)*

SONYA. *(Takes him by the arm and goes with him.)* When are you coming back?

ASTROV. I don't know...

SONYA: After another month?...

Astrov and Sonya exit into the house. Maria Vasilievna and Telyegin remain at the table. Yelena Andreevna and Vanya go to the terrace.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Once again, Ivan Petrovich, you behaved impossibly. You had to upset Maria Vasilievna with your talk about *perpetuum mobile!* And today before breakfast you picked another fight with Alexander. It's so petty!

VOINITSKY. But what if I hate him!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. There's no reason to hate him; he's just like everyone else. No worse than you.

VOINITSKY. If you could only see your face, your movements... How idly you live!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Akh, idle and boring! Everyone rails against my husband, everyone pities me; Poor girl, she has an elderly husband! This compassion for me –oh, I understand it perfectly well! Just as Astrov said: You all recklessly destroy the forests, and soon there will be none left anywhere on earth. In the same way you recklessly destroy human beings, and soon thanks to you, there will be no more faith, no purity, nor capacity for self-sacrifice. Why can't you treat a woman kindly unless she's yours? Because – that doctor's right – in every one of you there's a demon of destruction. You spare neither forests, nor women, nor one another...

VOINITSKY. I don't like this philosophizing!

Pause.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. That doctor had a weary, anxious face. An interesting face. Sonya is obviously in love with him, and I can see why. He's visited three times since I've been here, but I'm shy and I've never once had a normal conversation, I haven't shown him much kindness. He thinks I'm mean. That's probably the reason you and I are such great friends, Ivan Petrovich – we're both dreary, boring people! Boring! Don't look at me that way, I don't like it.

VOINITSKY. How can I look at you differently, if I love you? You're my joy, my life, my youth! I know...the chances you'll love me back are nil, but there's nothing I need – except let me look at you, hear your voice...

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Shh, people will hear you!

They walk toward the house.

VOINITSKY (*Walks behind her*). Let me to speak of my love, don't drive me away, and that will be my greatest joy!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. This is torture...

Both exit.

Telyegin plucks the strings of his guitar; Maria Vasilievna scribbles something in her pamphlet.

Curtain.

Act II

The dining room in Serebryakov's home. Night-time. The watchman can be heard knocking in the yard.

SEREBRYAKOV. (*Sits in a chair by an open window and dozes*) and YELENA ANDREEVNA (*Sits near him, also dozes*)

SEREBRYAKOV (*Wakes up*). Who's there? Sonya, is it you?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. It's me.

SEREBRYAKOV. You, Lenchka...The pain's unbearable!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Your wrap fell on the floor. *(Covers his legs with a rug)* I'll shut the window, Alexander.

SEREBRYAKOV. No, it's stifling...I was dozing and dreamt that my left leg belonged to someone else. I awoke from excruciating pain. No, this isn't gout, it's probably rheumatism. What time is it?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Twenty after one.

Pause.

SEREBRYAKOV. In the morning, see if we have Batyushkov in the library. I believe we have a copy.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. What?

SEREBRYAKOV. Look for Batyushkov in the morning. I remember we have a copy. But why is it so hard for me to breathe?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. You're tired. It's the second night you haven't slept.

SEREBRYAKOV. They say Turgenev's gout became angina pectoris. I'm afraid I might have it too. Loathsome, detestable old age. Damn it to hell. When I became old, I started to disgust myself. And yes it's clear you all find me disgusting to behold.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. You talk about your old age as if it's all our fault.

SEREBRYAKOV. I disgust you most of all.

Yelena Andreevna walks away and sits, at a distance.

Of course, you're right. I'm not stupid; I understand. You're young, vital and fair, you want to live, and I'm old, practically a corpse. Oh, come now. You really think I don't know? And how stupid that I'm still among the living. Just wait – soon I'll set everyone free. I won't drag this out much longer.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. I'm sick of this...for God's sake, be quiet.

SEREBRYAKOV. It so happens that thanks to me everyone's sick, bored, wasting their youth, while I alone luxuriate in my own joy and vitality. Yes, of course!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Be quiet! You're tearing me apart!

SEREBRYAKOV. I tear everyone apart. Indeed.

YELENA ANDREEVNA (*through tears*) This is unbearable! Tell me – what is it you want from me?

SEREBRYAKOV. Nothing.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Then be quiet. I beg you.

SEREBRYAKOV. Strange. When Ivan Petrovich or that old idiot Maria Vasilievna start to speak – silence falls, everyone listens, but when I so much as open my mouth everyone gets depressed. Even my voice is disgusting. Alright – perhaps I'm disgusting, I'm selfish, I'm oppressive - but then at my age haven't I the right to be just a little selfish? Haven't I earned it? I'm asking you – don't I have the right to a peaceful old age, to others' sympathy and attention?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. No one is disputing your rights.

The window knocks from the wind.

The wind kicked up. I'll close the window. (*Closes it*) Soon it will rain. No one is disputing your rights.

Pause; the watchman sings a song in the garden.

SEREBRYAKOV. To work all one's life in the name of learning, grow accustomed to an office, to a lecture hall, to esteemed colleagues – and suddenly, to find oneself in this crypt, spend every day in the company of fools with their frivolous conversations...I want to live, I crave success, renown, acclaim, but here – it's like living in exile. Every minute I yearn for the past, following others' successes, fearing death...I can't take it! I haven't the strength! And here I'm not even forgiven my old age!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Wait, be patient: In three or four years I'll be old, too.

Enter Sonya.

SONYA. Papa, you ordered Doctor Astrov sent for yourself, and now that he's here, you refuse to see him. It's impolite. He's gone to so much trouble...

SEREBRYAKOV. What do I need your Astrov for? He knows as much about medicine as I do about astronomy.

SONYA. Don't summon an entire medical faculty here on account of your gout.

SEREBRYAKOV. I refuse to speak with that lunatic.

SONYA. Do as you like. *(Sits)*. I don't care.

SEREBRYAKOV. What time is it?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Two.

SEREBRYAKOV. It's stifling...Sonya, hand me those drops from the table!

SONYA. Right away. *(Gives him a medicine bottle)*

SEREBRYAKOV. *(Upset)* Akh, but not these! I can't ask for anything!

SONYA. Please, don't be cross. Maybe some people enjoy it, but not me. Spare me. I don't like it; tomorrow morning I have to get up early; there's hay to mow.

Enter VOINITSKY in a robe, holding a candle.

Lightning.

Everyone clear out! *Helene*, Sonya, go to bed, I've to come relieve you of your post.

SEREBRYAKOV. *(Frightened)* No, no! Don't leave me with him! No. He'll talk me to death.

VOINITSKY. You have to give them some peace! They haven't slept for two nights.

SEREBRYAKOV. Let them sleep, but you go too. I thank you. I beg you. In the name of our former friendship, don't object. We'll talk later.

VOINITSKY. *(Grins)* Our former friendship....former...

SONYA. Be quiet, Uncle Vanya.

SEREBRYAKOV. *(To his wife)* Darling, don't leave me with him! He'll talk me to death.

VOINITSKY. This is turning comic.

Enter Marina with a candle.

SONYA. Go to bed, Nanny, dear. It's late.

MARINA. The samovar never got put away. Who could sleep?

SEREBRYAKOV. No one's asleep, everybody's worn out, only I am deliriously happy.

MARINA. *(Approaches Serebryakov gently)* What is it, grandfather? Does it hurt? These legs of mine tic and throb, tic and throb...*(adjusts his wrap)* That pain of yours has been around for years. Vera Petrovna, God rest her soul, little Sonya's mother, she were awake a'night, too, wasting away....Oh, how she loved you...

Pause.

Old ones are like children, all they want's a little pity, but nobody has any pity. *(Kisses him on the shoulder.)* Come, grandfather, let's go to bed...Come, my little sunshine...I'll brew you up some lime-flower tea, warm those legs for you...Pray to God for you...

SEREBRYAKOV. *(Touched)* Let's go, Marina.

MARINA. These legs of mine tic and throb, tic and throb *(Leads him away, with Sonya.)* Vera Petrovna, used to be, she'd cry and cry, wasting away...And you, my Sonya, you were a tiny, silly little thing...Come, grandfather, let's go...

Serebryakov, Sonya and Marina exit.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. He's worn me out. I can barely stand.

VOINITSKY. He's worn you out, and I've worn myself out. I haven't slept in three nights.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. There's a pall over this house. Your mother hates everything except her pamphlets and professor; the professor is irritated, mistrusts me and fears you; Sonya's angry at her father, angry at me and hasn't said a word to me for two weeks now; you hate my husband and brazenly scorn your own mother; I'm irritated and almost cried today at least a dozen times...There's a pall over this house.

VOINITSKY. Enough philosophizing!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Ivan Petrovich, you are educated and intelligent, and you ought to understand that the world won't be destroyed by fires, but by hate, bitterness, and all these petty grudges...You shouldn't be bickering, but bringing people

together.

VOINITSKY. But bring the two of us together first! Darling...*(Takes her by the hand.)*

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Stop it! *(Pulls her hand away)* Go away!

VOINITSKY. Any minute now the rain will pass, and all nature will be refreshed and breathe easy. I alone am not refreshed by the storm. Day and night I'm haunted by the thought that my life is irretrievably lost. My past is gone –squandered on junk, and the present is horrifying in its absurdity. Here – take my life and my love. What will I do with them, what good are they to me? My feelings fade uselessly into nothing, like sunbeams cast into a pit, and I myself am fading away.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. When you speak to me about your love, my mind clogs up and I don't know what to say. Forgive me; there's nothing I can say to you. *(Starts to go.)* Good night.

VOINITSKY. *(Blocking her path.)* And if you only knew how I suffer from the thought that here, in this very house, another life is being snuffed out – yours! What are you waiting for? What damned philosophy stands in your way? Seize the moment – seize it...

YELENA ANDREEVNA. *(Stares fixedly into his eyes)* Ivan Petrovich, you're drunk!

VOINITSKY. Possibly, possibly...

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Where is the doctor?

VOINITSKY. He's here...spending the night. Possibly...everything is possible!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. So you were drinking today? What for?

VOINITSKY. Because it feels like being alive...Don't stop me, *Helene!*

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Before you never drank and you didn't talk so much...Go to sleep! You're boring me.

VOINITSKY. *(Takes her by the hand)* My darling...wondrous woman!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. *(In despair)* Leave me alone. This is disgusting. *(Exits)*

VOINITSKY. *(Alone)* She's gone...

Pause.

Ten years ago I met her at my late sister's home. She was only seventeen, and I was thirty-seven. Why didn't I fall in love and propose to her then? I could have done it! And now she'd be my wife...Yes...Now she'd be awakened by the storm, scared of the thunder, and I'd hold her in my arms and whisper, "Don't be frightened, I'm here." Oh, wondrous thoughts, so delightful, I'm even laughing...but god, these thoughts are tangled in my head...Why am I old? Why doesn't she understand me? Her rhetoric, lazy morality, lazy ideas on the world's destruction – I find it all deeply revolting.

Pause.

Oh, how I am deceived! I adored that professor, that gout-ridden worm, I worked like a ox for him! Sonya and I squeezed the last drops from this estate; like grasping peasants we sold vegetable oil, peas, cottage cheese, even shorted ourselves and spared every last kopek, so we could send thousands to him. I took pride in him and his knowledge, I lived, I breathed for him! Everything he wrote and pronounced seemed touched with genius...God, and now? He's retired, and now I see the sum total of his life. When he dies not a single page of his work will live on, he's completely obscure, a nobody! A soap bubble! And I am deceived...I see it – foolishly deceived...

ASTROV enters in a frock coat, without his waistcoat and tie; he's tipsy. TELYEGIN follows with a guitar.

ASTROV. Play!

TELYEGIN. Everyone's asleep, sir!

ASTROV. Play!

Telyegin softly strums the guitar.

(To Voinitsky) You're alone here? No ladies? *(Arms akimbo, he sings softly)* The hut is fled, the stove is dead, the master's nowhere to lay his head..." Well the storm woke me up. Quite a sprinkle. What time is it?

VOINITSKY. Who the hell knows.

ASTROV. I thought I heard Yelena Andreevna's voice.

VOINITSKY. She was just here.

ASTROV. Magnificent creature. *(Sees medicine bottles on the table.)* Medicine. What prescriptions don't we have? From Kharkov, from Moscow, from Tulsk...Every city in Russia's had it with his gout. Is he sick or putting on?

VOINITSKY. Sick.

Pause.

ASTROV. What's got you so depressed today? Feeling sorry for the professor?

VOINITSKY. Leave off.

ASTROV. Or perhaps, Mrs. Professor stole your heart?

VOINITSKY. She's my friend.

ASTROV. Already?

VOINITSKY. A woman is a man's friend after the following sequence: First an acquaintance, then a lover, and after *that*, a friend.

ASTROV. A vulgar philosophy.

ASTROV. Why? Yes...I'll admit, I've become vulgar. You see, I'm drunk. Typically I tie one on like this once a month. When I'm in this state, I become exceedingly brash and arrogant. Everything's a cinch! I undertake the most intricate operations and perform magnificently; I envision sweeping plans for the future; at these moments I don't feel like a crackpot – I believe I serve an awesome humanitarian purpose...awesome! At these moments I have my own philosophy and all of you, my brothers, you all seem like teensy little bugs...microbes. *(To Telyegin)* Waffles, play!

TELYEGIN. My friend, I'd play for you gladly, with all my heart, but listen – the house's asleep!

ASTROV. Play!

Telyegin softly plays.

Let's have us a drink. Come on; I think there's cognac left. And at first light, we'll ride over to my place. *Haway*. I had an assistant who never said "Come on," just "*Haway*." Lousy swindler, he was. *Haway*. *(Sees Sonya, who's just entered.)* I apologize, I'm not wearing a tie. *(Quickly exits; Telyegin follows him.)*

SONYA. So, Uncle Vanya, you got drunk with the doctor again. Two birds of a feather now, eh? He's always been that way, but you – at your age it's quite unseemly.

VOINITSKY. Age has nothing to do with it. When people have no real life, they live out fantasies. It's better than nothing.

SONYA. Our hay's all mown, every day it rains, everything's rotting, and you're living out fantasies. You've quit farming completely...I work alone and I'm totally exhausted...*(Frightened.)* Uncle, there are tears in your eyes!

VOINITSKY. What tears? It's nothing...nonsense...for a moment you looked just like your late mother. My dear...*(Earnestly kisses her hands and face.)* My sister...My dear sister...Where is she now? If only she knew! Oh, if only she knew!

SONYA. What? Knew what, Uncle?

VOINITSKY. I feel so...sad...Nevermind...Later...Nothing...I'll go...
(Exits.)

SONYA *(Knocks on the door.)* Mikhail Lvovich? Are you asleep? I'd like a moment with you!

ASTROV. *(From behind the door.)* Coming! *(After a few seconds, enters; he is wearing his waistcoat and tie.)* What is it?

SONYA. Drink if you want, but please, don't let Uncle join you. It's bad for him.

ASTROV. Very well. We won't drink anymore.

Pause.

I'm going home now. It's done, signed and sealed. I'll have the horses harnessed by sunup.

SONYA. It's raining. Wait until morning.

ASTROV. The storm's passing – we'll only catch the edge of it. I'm going. Please, don't call me here for your father anymore. I tell him it's gout; he says rheumatism. I ask him to lay down, and he sits up. And today he wouldn't even see me.

SONYA. He's spoiled. *(Goes to the cupboard.)* Care for a snack?

ASTROV. Sure, why not.

SONYA. I love midnight snacks. I'm sure we've something in the cupboard. They say all his life he's had success with women, and his women all spoiled him. Here – have some cheese.

They both stand at the cupboard and eat.

ASTROV. Today I had nothing to eat, I only drank. Your father has a difficult personality. *(Takes a bottle from the cupboard.)* May I? *(Downs a glass.)* There's no one around, so I'll be frank. You know, I don't think I could spend a single

month in this house; I'd suffocate in this air... Your father hides behind his gout and his books, Uncle Vanya with his gloom your grandmother, and then there's your stepmother...

SONYA. What about her?

ASTROV. A human being should be beautiful in every way – face, style, soul and intellect. She's beautiful, no question, but... but she only eats, sleeps, goes for strolls, charms everyone with her beauty – and nothing more. She has no responsibilities, others wait on her... Isn't it so? And an idle life cannot be virtuous.

Pause.

But then maybe I'm being too hard on her. I'm unhappy with my life, like your Uncle Vanya, and we're both turning into old buzzards.

SONYA. You're unhappy with life?

ASTROV. In general I love life, but this – our backwards, vulgar, Russian life – I can't stand it and loathe it with every fiber of my being. As for my own personal life, God knows there's no hope there. You know when you're walking through the woods at night, if in the distance you see a tiny flickering light, then you don't notice your exhaustion, the darkness, thorns tearing at your face... As you know, I work like no one else in the district, fate drives me forward without stop, sometimes I suffer unbearably, *but for me there's no light in the distance*. I want nothing for myself, don't love people... I haven't loved anyone in a long time.

SONYA. No one?

ASTROV. No one. I feel a certain tenderness toward your dear Nanny – for old times' sake. The peasants are one and the same, coarse and ignorant, and it's hard to get on with the intelligentsia. They're exhausting. Every last one of them – even those we know - obsesses over petty thoughts and sentimentality, and can't see past their own noses. Twits and fools. And those who're slightly smarter, more ambitious - they're hysterical, drowning in theories... They snivel, moan, cast aspersions, sidle up to a man, size him up and say, "Oh, this one's a psychopath!" or "He's a casuist!" And when they don't know what label to slap on my forehead they say, "He's a strange person." I love the woods – that's strange; I don't eat meat – that's strange too. Free, open, and liberated attitudes toward nature and human beings are now forbidden... lost... That's it - lost! (*Starts to drink.*)

SONYA. (*Stops him.*). No, I ask you, I beg you, don't drink anymore.

ASTROV. Why not?

SONYA. It doesn't suit you! You're refined, you have such a gentle voice... And what's more, you're not like anyone I

know...you're beautiful. Why do you want to be like ordinary people who drink and play cards? Oh, don't do it, I beg you! You always say that people don't increase, but destroy what they've been given. Then tell me, why are you destroying yourself? Don't do it – I beg you, I beseech you - don't.

ASTROV (*Takes her hand.*). I won't drink anymore.

SONYA. Give me your word.

ASTROV. Word of honor.

SONYA. (*Squeezes his hand.*) Thank you!

ASTROV. *Basta!* I sobered up. See? I'm completely sober and will remain so 'til the end of my days. (*Looks at his watch.*) Right, let's continue. I was saying that my time's passed, it's too late for me... I've grown old, coarse, numb and overworked, and it seems I'm no longer capable of normal relationships with other people. I love no one and... I'll never love again. Only one thing turns my head: Beauty. I'm not indifferent to it. I believe that if Yelena Andreevna ever wanted to, she could turn my head one day... But that's not love, not devotion... (*Covers his face with his hand and shudders.*)

SONYA. What is it?

ASTROV. It's...during Lent a patient of mine died under chloroform.

SONYA. It's time to forget.

Pause.

Tell me, Mikhail Lvovich... If you had a friend, or a younger sister, and if you found out that she... well, let's say, she liked you – how would you react to that?

ASTROV. (*Shrugs his shoulders.*) I don't know. I suppose I wouldn't react at all. I'd let her understand that I can't love her... and that she's not on my mind. And with that, it's time to go. Let's say our goodbyes, my friend, or else we'll be at it until morning. (*Squeezes her hand.*) If it's alright with you, I'll go out through the living room – I don't want your uncle to see me. (*Exits.*)

SONYA (*Alone*). He said nothing to me...His heart and soul are hidden from me, so why do I feel so happy? (*Laughs with happiness.*) I told him, you're refined and noble, you have a gentle voice... Was that necessary? His voice murmurs and soothes... I can even feel it in the air. But when I mentioned about a younger sister, he didn't understand... (*Wrings her hands.*) Oh, how awful it is to be plain! How awful! And I know I'm plain, I know it... Last Sunday when we were leaving church, I heard some old women talking about me, and one of them said, "She's kind, generous, but what a pity she's so

plain"... Plain...

Enter Yelena Andreevna.

YELENA ANDREEVNA (*Opens a window*). The storm has passed. What lovely air!

Pause.

Where is the doctor?

SONYA. Gone.

Pause.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Sofie!

SONYA. What?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. How long are you going to keep nurturing this grudge? We haven't done one another any harm. Why are we enemies? Enough...

SONYA. I wanted to say something, too... (*Hugs her.*) Enough.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Exceptional.

Both are invigorated.

SONYA. Did Papa lie down?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. No, he's sitting in the living room... We haven't spoken to each other for an entire week, and God knows what for... (*Sees the open cupboard.*) What's this?

SONYA. Mikhail Lvovich was hungry.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. I found some wine...let's drink – to *brudershaft*.

SONYA. Let's.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. From the same cup... (*Pours.*) It's better this way. Friends?

SONYA. Friends.

They drink, and kiss three times.

I wanted to make peace for so long, but I was ashamed, I don't know why...

YELENA ANDREEVNA. What are you crying for?

SONYA. Nothing, it's nothing.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. There, there... *(Cries.)* You silly girl, now I'm crying too...

Pause.

You're mad at me because you think I married your father for money... Believe me, I swear – I married him for love. I adored him as a scholar and an eminent man. My love wasn't genuine, it was artificial, but back then I thought it was genuine. It's not my fault. And ever since our wedding day you've been staring daggers at me with those eyes of yours.

SONYA. Peace, now, peace! Let's forget.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. You shouldn't look that way – it doesn't suit you. You have to have faith, otherwise it's impossible to live.

Pause.

SONYA. Tell me the truth, as a friend... Are you happy?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. No.

SONYA. I knew it. One more question. Be honest – would you rather have a young husband?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. What a little girl you are. Of course I would! *(Laughs.)* Go on, something else, ask away...

SONYA. Do you like the doctor?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Yes, very much.

SONYA. *(Laughs.)* I have a silly face... right? He just left, but I keep hearing his voice, his footsteps, and when I look out

that dark window, I see an image of his face. Let me tell you everything... But I can't talk so loud, I'm embarrassed. Come to my room, we'll talk there. Don't I look silly? I admit... Tell me about something?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. What?

SONYA. He's smart... He can do anything, everything... He cures the sick, plants forests...

YELENA ANDREEVNA. It's not about forests or medicine... Sweetheart, listen, it's his talent! Do you have any idea what *talent* means? Boldness, freedom of mind, breadth of vision... He plants a tree and instantly he knows what it will mean a thousand years into the future, he feels joy for all humanity. Such people are rare, and need to be treasured... So he drinks, sometimes he's crude – so what? In Russia, there's no way a talented man can be virtuous. Just think of the life this doctor leads. Unspeakable filth, snow, blizzards, vast distances, savage hoards, sickness and deprivation everywhere you look – under those conditions, for a man who works and struggles day-in, day-out, it's hard to get through forty years clean and sober... (*Kisses her.*) I wish you happiness, from the bottom of my heart... (*Stands up.*) And I'm dreary, a minor character... In music, in my husband's house, in every thinkable way, I've been nothing but a bit player. To be honest, Sonya, when you think about it, I'm very, very unhappy! (*Walks anxiously about the stage.*) There's no happiness for me on this earth. None! Why are you laughing?

SONYA. (*Laughs, covers her face.*) I'm so happy...happy!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. I feel like playing... I want to play something right now.

SONYA. Play. (*Hugs her.*) I can't sleep....Play!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Yes. Your father's awake. When he's sick, music makes him angry. Go and ask. If he says yes, then I'll play. Go.

SONYA. Yes. (*Exits.*)

The watchman knocks in the yard.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. It's been such a long time since I played the piano. I'll play and I'll cry, I'll cry like a fool. (*At the window.*) Is that you, Yefim?

GUARD'S VOICE. It's me!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Stop knocking – the master's not well.

GUARD'S VOICE. I'll go away! (*Whistles.*) Here boy! Blue! Come here, Blue!

Pause.

SONYA. *(Returns)*. We can't!

Curtain.

Act III

The living room in Serebryakov's home. Three doors: right, left and center. Midday.

VOINITSKY, SONYA *(seated)* and YELENA ANDREEVNA *(walks about the stage, thinking about something)*.

VOINITSKY. The Herr Professor expressed his wish that we gather here today in this very living room at one o'clock. *(Looks at his watch.)* A quarter of one. He wants to deliver a message to the world.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Probably business.

VOINITSKY. He's got no business. He writes twaddle and spreads worry and envy – nothing else.

SONYA. *(Reproachfully)* Uncle!

VOINITSKY. Too true. Guilty. *(Gestures to Yelena Andreevna.)* Just marvel at her! How she walks, teetering from sheer idleness. Delightful – utter joy!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. All day long you buzz, buzz, buzz – don't you get sick of it? *(Wistfully)* I'm dying of boredom and don't know what to do with myself.

SONYA. *(Shrugs her shoulders.)* Feeling at loose ends? There's plenty to do if you want.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Such as?

SONYA. Get involved running the farm, teach, tend to the sick. Loose ends? Before you and Papa came, Uncle Vanya and I used to ride to the market and sell flour.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. I don't know how. Besides, it's not interesting. It's only in socio-political novels that people teach and tend to sickly peasants – how am I, out of the clear blue, supposed to go and teach or cure anyone?

SONYA. I don't understand why you can't just go and teach. Give it some time – you'll get used to it. *(Hugs her.)* Don't be bored, my dear. *(Laughs.)* You're bored, can't find a place for yourself, but this boredom and idleness is catching. Look: Uncle Vanya does nothing, he only follows you around like a shadow, and I left my work and came running to you to talk. Now I'm idle – it's horrible! Doctor Mikhail Lvovich used to stop by only rarely, once a month, he couldn't be bothered, but now he visits every day, he forgets all about forests and medicine. You must be a sorceress.

VOINITSKY. What's this despair? *(Lively.)* My darling, radiant creature, find your wits! There's mermaid's blood coursing through your veins – be a mermaid! For once in your life, let go, dive hopelessly in love with some water sprite, the maelstrom surging over you, dumbfound the Herr Professor and make us all throw up our hands, amazed!

YELENA ANDREEVNA: *(Enraged)* Leave me alone! This is sadistic! *(Starts to leave.)*

VOINITSKY. *(Stops her.)* Now, now, darling, my joy, forgive me...I apologize. *(Kisses her hand.)* Truce.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. You'd try an angel's patience, you know.

VOINITSKY. As a token of peace and harmony, I'll bring you a bouquet of roses this instant; I put it together it for you this morning... Autumn roses – beautiful, mournful roses... *(Exits.)*

SONYA. Autumn roses – beautiful, mournful roses...

Both of them look out the window.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Here it is September already. How'll we make it through the winter here?

Pause.

Where is the doctor?

SONYA. In Uncle Vanya's room. He's writing something. I'm glad Uncle Vanya's gone, I need to talk with you.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. About what?

SONYA. About what? (*Lays her head on Yelena's chest.*)

YELENA ANDREEVNA. There, there...(*Strokes her hair.*) Sweetheart...

SONYA. I'm plain.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. You have beautiful hair.

SONYA. (*Looks to check herself in the mirror.*) No! When a woman's plain they tell her, "You have beautiful eyes, you have beautiful hair"... I've loved him for six years, love him more than my own mother; every minute I hear him, feel the press of his hand; and when I look at the doorway it feels like he'll walk through it any second. And look at this, I'm always coming up to you to talk about him. He's been here every day, but he doesn't even look at me, doesn't see...It's agony!! I have no hope, none at all!! (*In despair.*) I go up to him all the time, try to say something, look him in the eyes... I've lost my pride and have no control over myself...I lost it yesterday and told Uncle Vanya that I love him... And the servants all know I love him. Everyone knows.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. What about him?

SONYA. No. He doesn't notice me.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. (*In thought*) He's a strange man...You know what? Let me talk to him...I'll be discreet, drop some hints...

Pause.

Honestly, how can you go on like this, not knowing...Let me do it!

Sonya affirmatively nods her head.

Outstanding. He loves you, he loves you not... It'll be easy to find out. Dear girl, don't be embarrassed and don't worry – I'll be discreet, he won't even know. All we have to do is answer the question: yes or no?

Pause.

If no, then he shouldn't come here anymore. Right?

Sonya affirmatively nods her head.

It's easier if you don't see him. We won't put it off - we'll find out right away. He was going to show me some sketches...Go and tell him I want to see him.

SONYA. (*Extremely anxious*) You'll tell me the whole truth?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Yes, of course. I think no matter what the truth is, it won't be as awful as this terrible suspense.

SONYA. Right, yes...I'll tell him you want to see his sketches...(Goes and stops near the door.) No, suspense is better...at least there's hope...

YELENA ANDREEVNA. What?

SONYA. Nothing. (*Exits.*)

YELENA ANDREEVNA (*alone*). Nothing is worse than knowing a person's secret and not being able to help. (*Thoughtfully.*) He doesn't love her – that's clear, but why shouldn't he marry her? She isn't beautiful, but for a country doctor, at his age, she'd make a wonderful wife. She's clever, kind, decent...no, that's not...this is wrong...

Pause.

I understand that poor girl. In the midst of desperate boredom, surrounded not by people, but these grim shadows, hearing their petty conversations, watching them do nothing but eat, drink, and sleep, and then *he* appears, different than everyone else, handsome, compelling, captivating, like a month of sunshine in a dim season. To give in to the allure of a man like that, to let go... I might be a little in love with him myself. I'm bored when he's gone, and now I'm smiling just thinking about him...That Uncle Vanya says I have mermaid's blood in my veins. "Give in, for once in your life"... Well, maybe I should?...To fly away, free as a bird, from all of you, all your dreary faces, your conversations, to fly and forget you even exist on this earth...But I'm a coward, I'm shy...A slave to my conscience...He visits every single day, and when I think of why he's here I feel guilty, ready to fall on my knees before Sonya, to beg forgiveness, to burst into tears...

ASTROV (*Enters with maps*). Good afternoon! (*Presses her hand.*) You wanted to see my sketches?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Yesterday you promised to show me your work...Are you free?

ASTROV. Oh, yes. (*Spreads the maps over a card table and fastens the corners with pins.*) Where were you born?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. (*Helping him*). In St. Petersburg.

ASTROV. And where did you go to school?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. The Conservatory.

ASTROV. Then this probably won't be interesting for you.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Why? It's true, I don't know the country, but I've read a lot.

ASTROV. Here in the house I have my very own table...In Ivan Petrovich's room. When I'm worn out, to the point of absolute exhaustion, I drop everything and run over here to amuse myself with my drawings for an hour or two...Ivan Petrovich and Sofia Alexandrovna tally up the accounts, and I sit next to them at my table, daubing away...and I feel warm, serene, and the cricket chirps. But I don't allow myself the pleasure very often – maybe once a month...*(Points to the map.)* Now look here. This picture is our district as it appeared fifty years ago. Dark and light-green indicate forests; half the total area is covered with forest. Green with red cross-hatching means elk and goats...I show both flora and fauna here. This lake was home to swans, geese, ducks, and as old folks say, flights of birds in force, hidden and seen; they sailed like clouds. Aside from towns and villages, scattered here and there you see different settlements, little farmsteads, Old Believers' monasteries, watermills...there were large herds of cattle and horses. Those are in light-blue. For instance, in this county the blue's laid on thick; here there were enormous herds, and three or four horses to every stable.

Pause.

Now look further down. This was twenty-five years ago. By that time, only a third of the previous livestock near the woods remained. There are no goats, but there are elk. The green and blue are even lighter. And so on, and so forth. Let's move on to part three: A map of the district today. Green in places, but patchy and sparse: Salmon, geese, wood grouse – all gone...Of the previous settlements, little farmsteads, monasteries, mills – not even a trace. In general, a portrait of gradual and conspicuous degradation which, apparently, should take another ten to fifteen years to finish. You'll say there are cultural influences, that the old life naturally gives way to the new. Yes, I concur, if they were clearing forests to lay streets and railroads, if there were factories, foundries schools, then the people would become healthier, more prosperous and happy, but here we see nothing like that! In the district you'll find the same swamps and mosquitoes, the same undeveloped wasteland, typhus, dyptheria, fires...What we are dealing with is degradation arising from a desperate struggle for survival; this degradation results from inertia, ignorance, and a complete lack of self-awareness, when a freezing, hungry, sickly man, for the survival of himself and his family, thoughtlessly and instinctively grasps at anything that could ease his hunger, destroys anything for a bit of warmth...without thinking about the future...Almost everything's been laid waste, and we, in turn, created absolutely nothing. *(Coldly.)* By the look on your face I can tell you're not interested.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. But I understand so little...

ASTROV. There's nothing to understand, it's simply uninteresting.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. To be honest, I have something else in mind. I'm sorry. I need to conduct an...interrogation, and I'm embarrassed, I don't know how to begin.

ASTROV. Interrogation?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Yes, an interrogation, but...an innocent one. Let's be seated!

They sit down.

The matter concerns a certain young woman. We will talk like decent people, like friends, no taking offense. We'll talk and then forget what the conversation was even about. Yes?

ASTROV. Yes.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. The matters concerns my stepdaughter Sonya. Do you like her?

ASTROV. Yes, I respect her.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Do you like her as a woman?

ASTROV. *(Hesitates.)* No.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Just a couple more, and that's it. You haven't noticed anything?

ASTROV. Nothing.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. *(Takes her by the hand.)* You don't love her, I can see by your eyes...She's suffering...Understand that and...stop coming here.

ASTROV. *(Stands up.)* My time is up...Actually, there's never any time...*(Shrugs his shoulder.)* When could I? *(He's embarrassed.)*

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Ugh, what a distressing conversation! I feel so anxious, like I've hoisted a thousand pound weight on my back. Well, thank god that's over. We'll forget, like we never spoke at all, and...and you'll go. You're an intelligent man, you understand...

Pause.

I'm blushing.

ASTROV. If you had said something a month or two ago, then perhaps I'd have given it some thought, but now...*(Shrugs*

his shoulders) But if she's suffering, then of course... There's just one thing I don't understand: Why did you need that interrogation? (*Looks at her eyes and wags his finger.*) Clever girl!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. What's that supposed to mean?

ASTROV. (*Laughs.*) Clever girl! Let's assume Sonya is suffering – I can see that, but why invent this interrogation? (*Interrupts her, vigorously.*) Please, don't look so surprised, you know very well why I come here every day... Why and for whom I come here – you know that perfectly well. You shrewd little vixen, don't look at me like that, this sparrow's been down this way before...

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Vixen? I don't know what you're talking about.

ASTROV. Soft, seductive huntress... you need victims! Here I am, I've done nothing for an entire month, I threw it all aside, I thirst for you – and it pleases you, thrills you... What are you waiting for? You've conquered me, and you it before your interrogation. (*Arms folded, head bowed.*) Go ahead, have at me!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. You've lost your mind!

ASTROV. (*Laughs through his teeth.*) You're shy...

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Oh, I am more decent and honorable than you know! I swear to you! (*Goes to leave.*)

ASTROV. (*Blocks her way.*) I'm leaving today, I won't visit any more, but... (*takes her by the hand, looks around*) where can we see each other? Tell me now: where? Someone might come in, quickly, speak... (*Passionately.*) How wondrous, you exquisite... One kiss... Let me kiss just your fragrant hair...

YELENA ANDREEVNA. I swear...

ASTROV (*Stops her from speaking.*) Why swear? There's no need to swear. No more words... Oh, what a miracle! These hands! (*Kisses her hands.*)

YELENA ANDREEVNA. No, enough, no more... Get away... (*Takes her hands away.*) You're forgetting yourself.

ASTROV. Tell me, just tell me where we'll meet tomorrow (*Takes her by the waist.*) Look, you can't escape it, we have to meet. (*Kisses her; at that moment Voinitsky enters with a bouquet of autumn roses and stops at the door.*)

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Take pity on me... leave me alone... (*Rests her head on Astrov's chest.*) No! (*Starts to leave.*)

ASTROV. (*Holds her by the waist.*) Meet me tomorrow at the forest preserve... Two o'clock... Yes? Yes, you're coming?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. (*Having seen Voinitsky*). Let go! (*In extreme embarrassment, moves away to the window.*) This is terrible.

VOINITSKY. (*Sets the roses on the table; shaken, he takes a handkerchief from his pocket*). It's nothing...right...nevermind...

ASTROV (*Glowing*). The weather today is eminently bearable, Ivan Petrovich. This morning was overcast, it seemed about to rain, but now the sun is out. Frankly, autumn is turning out quite nicely...(*Rolls up the maps and places them in a tube*). Except the days are getting shorter...

YELENA ANDREEVNA. (*Quickly approaches Voinitsky*). You will attempt, you will wield every ounce of your influence in order that I and my husband leave this place today! Do you hear me? This very day!

VOINITSKY. (*Wipes his face*). Ah? Well, yes...good...I saw everything, Helene, everything...

YELENA ANDREEVNA. (*Nervously*). Do you hear me? I must leave this place this very day!

Enter Serebryakov, Sonya, Telyegin and Marina.

TELYEGIN. Personally, your excellency, I'm feeling a bit queasy, myself. Two days now I've been stuck in bed. My head feels like it's in a vice...

SEREBRYAKOV. Where is everybody else? I don't like it in this house. It's a labyrinth. Twenty six cavernous rooms, people staggering about, and it's impossible to lay eyes on anyone or anything. (*Calls out*.) Call in Maria Vasilievna and Yelena Andreevna.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. I'm here.

SEREBRYAKOV. Ladies and gentlemen, please be seated.

SONYA. (*Approaches Yelena Andreevna impatiently*). What did he say?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Later.

SONYA. You're trembling? Are you angry? (*Intently scrutinizes her face*.) I understand...He said he won't come here anymore...Yes?

Pause.

Tell me: Yes?

Yelena Andreevna affirmatively nods her head.

SEREBRYAKOV (*To Telegin*). One can reconcile oneself to ill health no matter the affliction, but I cannot assimilate this country way of life. I have the sense I've landed on another planet. Be seated, ladies and gentlemen, I implore you. Sonya!

Sonya doesn't hear him, she stands, dejectedly hanging her head.

Sonya!

Pause.

She can't hear. (*To Marina*.) You too, Nanny – take a seat.

Nanny sits and knits a stocking.

Please, ladies and gentlemen. Rest your ears, as they say, on the nail of attention. But let's leave joking aside. This is serious business. Ladies and gentlemen, I have gathered you to request your counsel and support and, knowing your steadfast generosity, I hope I shall receive them. I am a scholar, a man of letters and I have always felt myself a stranger in practical affairs. Without guidance from capable individuals I become quite lost and I ask you, Ivan Petrovich, and you, Ilya Ilyich, you *Maman*...The matter is such, that *manet omnes una nox*, meaning we all labor under the hand of god; I am old and sick, and therefore pursue the timely dispensation of all worldly ties, insofar as they concern my family. My life is over; I think not of myself, but of my young wife and daughter.

Pause.

To continue living in the country is impossible for me. We were not made for the country. To live in the city on such means as we receive from this estate is impossible. If we were to sell, for example, the forest, that would be an extreme measure which could not be taken annually. Measures must be sought by which to guarantee us a steady, more or less predictable amount income. I have thought of one such measure and am honored to submit it for your consideration. Forgoing details, I will lay it out in general terms. Our estate yields an average of no more than two percent. I propose to sell it. If we could turn the proceeds into interest-bearing securities, then we will clear from four to five percent, and I predict there will even be a surplus of a few thousand more - which would allow us to purchase a small dacha in Finland.

VOINITSKY. Wait...I think I didn't hear you right. Repeat what you just said.

SEREBRYAKOV. Turn the money into interest-bearing securities and with the remaining surplus, purchase a dacha in

Finland.

VOINITSKY. Not Finland...You said something else.

SEREBRYAKOV. I propose to sell the estate.

VOINITSKY. Yes, that's it. You will sell the estate, stupendous, a capital idea...But where will you send me, my elderly mother and Sonya?

SEREBRYAKOV. We shall consider it all in good time. Not now.

VOINITSKY. Hold on. Apparently, until now I haven't had a single drop of common sense. Until now, I was stupid enough to think that this estate belongs to Sonya. My late father purchased this estate as a dowry for my late sister. Until now I'd been so naïve as to read the interpret the law quite literally, and I thought the estate passed from my sister to Sonya.

SEREBRYAKOV. Yes, the estate belongs to Sonya. Who's arguing? Without Sonya's blessing I will not consent to sell it. Furthermore I proposed it for Sonya's own benefit.

VOINITSKY. This is inconceivable, absolutely inconceivable! Either I've lost my mind or...or...

MARIA VASILIEVNA. *Jean*, don't contradict Alexander. Listen to him – he knows better than us what is good and what is bad.

VOINITSKY. No, give me some water. (*Drinks water.*) Tell me, what do you want, what do you want!

SEREBRYAKOV. I don't understand what you're upset about. I don't say that my proposal is ideal. If everyone finds it unsuitable, then I won't insist.

Pause.

TELYEGIN. (*Flummoxed*). Your excellency, as pertains to scholarship, I have not only a sense of reverence, but also family ties. My brother Grigory Ilyich wife's brother, a man named Konstantin Trofimovich Lakedemonov, held a master's degree...

VOINITSKY. Hold on, Waffles, we're talking business...Wait until later...(To *Serebryakov*.) You ask him. This estate was purchased from his uncle.

SEREBRYAKOV. Akh, why should I ask him? What for?

VOINITSKY. This estate was purchased at that time for ninety five thousand rubles. My father paid only seventy thousand

and left a debt of twenty five thousand. Now you look here...This estate would never have been bought if I hadn't given up my inheritance for my sister, whom I was dear to me. What's more, I worked for ten years like a ox, and paid off the entire debt...

SEREBRYAKOV. I wish I'd never started this conversation.

VOINITSKY. The estate is clear of debt and keeps running thanks only to my personal efforts. And just when I reach old age, they want to throw me out by the neck!

SEREBRYAKOV. I don't understand what you're getting at!

VOINITSKY. For twenty-five years I managed the estate, I worked, I sent you money like a most conscionable clerk, and all that time you never once thanked me. The whole time – from my youth to this day – I've never received my salary of 500 rubles a year – a trifling sum! – and it never once occurred to you to increase that by a split ruble!

SEREBRYAKOV. Ivan Petrovich, how could I know? I am not a practical person and I understand nothing. You could have increased it yourself, if you'd liked.

VOINITSKY. Why didn't I just steal it? Why don't you all curse me for not stealing? It would have been fair, and now I wouldn't be a pauper!

MARIA VASILIEVNA. (*Severely*). *Jean*

TELYEGIN. (*Anxious*). Vanya, dear friend, stop, don't do this...I'm shaking...Why ruin a good relationship? (*Kisses him.*) Don't do this.

VOINITSKY. Twenty five years I sat right here with this mother, like a mole, trapped behind these walls...All our thoughts and feelings belonged to you alone. Day and night we talked about you, about your work, we took pride in you, we spoke your name with reverence; we wasted nights pouring over your texts and journals, which I now deeply loathe!

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

SEREBRYAKOV. (*Boiling.*) I don't understand, what do you want?

VOINITSKY. For us you were like a god; we learned your articles by rote...But now my eyes are open! I see everything! You write about art, but understand nothing about art! All of your work, which I loved, isn't worth half a kopeck! You bamboozled us!

SEREBRYAKOV. Ladies and gentlemen! Silence him, once and for all! I'm leaving!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Ivan Petrovich, I demand you be silent! Do you hear me?

VOINITSKY. I will not be silent! (*Barring Serebryakov's way.*) Wait, I'm not finished yet! You ruined my life! I haven't lived, I haven't lived! For your sake I've wasted, squandered the best years of my life! You are my worst enemy!

TELYEGIN. I can't take it...I can't...I'm leaving...(*Extremely upset, he leaves.*)

SEREBRYAKOV. What do you want from me? And what right do you have to speak to me that way? You nothing! If the estate is yours, then take it, I want nothing to do with it!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. I'm getting out of this hell right now! (*Screams.*) I can't take it any longer!

VOINITSKY. My life is gone! I have talent, boldness, wit...If only I'd lived a normal life, I might have been a Schopenhauer, a Dostoevsky...What a damn fool thing to say! I'm losing my mind...Mommy, I'm in despair! Mommy!

MARIA VASILIEVNA. (*Severly.*) Listen to *Alexandre!*

SONYA. (*Falls to her knees in front of Nanny and presses to her.*) Nanny! Nanny!

VOINITSKY. Mommy! What can I do? Don't, don't say a word. I know what I must do! (*To Serebryakov.*) You will remember me! (*Exits up center stage.*)

Maria Vasilievna goes after him.

SEREBRYAKOV. Ladies and gentlemen, once and for all, what is going on? Take me away from that lunatic! I cannot stay under the same roof as him! He lives here (*pointing at the up-stage center door*), almost on top of me...Move him into the village, in the servants' quarters, or else I'll move, but to stay in the same house with him is unacceptable...

YELENA ANDREEVNA. (*To her husband*). We're leaving here today! We're packing up to leave this minute.

SEREBRYAKOV. Insignificant man!

SONYA. (*On her knees, turns to her father; nervously, through tears.*) You must be merciful, papa! Uncle Vanya and I are so unhappy! (*Holding back despair.*) You must be merciful! Remember when you were younger, Uncle Vanya and grandmother translated all your books, copied out all your texts...Night after night! Uncle Vanya and I worked without rest, we were scared to waste a single kopeck and we sent it all to you...We stinted ourselves on bread! I'm saying it wrong, it's coming out wrong, but you must understand us, papa. You have to be merciful!

YELENA ANDREEVNA. (*Upset at her husband.*) Alexander, for god's sake, make peace with him...I beg you, please.

SEREBRYAKOV. Fine, I'll clear the air with him...I did nothing wrong, I am not angry, but you must admit, his behavior is strange, at the very least. Look - I'll go to him. (*Exits up center stage.*)

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Be gentle with him, calm him down...(*Exits behind him.*)

SONYA (*Clutching at Nanny*). Nanny, Nanny!

MARINA. There, baby girl. The geese honk and they stop...honk and they stop...

SONYA. Nanny!

MARINA. (*Strokes her head*). You're trembling, you feel like like you're frozen... There, there, child, god is merciful. Some linden tea or raspberries, it will pass...Don't speak, child...(*looks through the middle door with anger.*) Out of here, geese, leave off this place!

Backstage a shot rings out as Yelena Andreevna screams; Sonya gives a start.

What's that?

SEREBRYAKOV. (*Runs in, shaking with fear.*) Stop him! Stop him! He's gone insane!

YELENA ANDREEVNA and VOINITSKY struggle in the doorway.

YELENA ANDREEVNA (*Tries to take the revolver away*). Give it here! Give it, I say!

VOINITSKY. Let go, *Helene!* Let me go! (*Pulling free, he runs in and searches for Serebryakov with his eyes.*) Where is he? Ah, he's right there!

(*Shoots at him*). Bang!

Pause.

I didn't hit him? Missed again?! (*Enraged.*) Damn, damn...damn it all to hell...(*Drops the revolver on the floor and collapses in exhaustion.*)

SEREBRYAKOV is shaken; YELENA ANDREEVNA leans against the wall; she's furious.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Get me out of here! Get me out of here, throw me out, but...I can't stay here, I can't!

VOINITSKY. *(In despair)*. What am I doing! What am I doing!

SONYA. *(Quietly)*. Nanny, Nanny!

Curtain.

Act IV

Ivan Petrovich's room; this is at once a bedroom and the estate's managing office. At the window is a large table with volumes of accounting ledgers and various kinds of paper, a desk, a dresser, and scales. The table is smaller than Astrov's; at that table are materials for drawing; nearby there is a portfolio. There is a birdcage with a starling. On the table is a map of Africa, apparently of no use to anyone. An enormous couch upholstered with oilcloth. To the left is a door leading to the servants' chambers; to the right is a door to a corridor; beneath the right-hand door is a mat, to keep peasants from tracking in mud. An autumn evening. Peaceful.

TELYEGIN and MARINA sit opposite one another, winding woolen yarn.

TELYEGIN. Hurry up, Marina Timofeevna – any minute now they'll call to say goodbye. They've already ordered the horses brought around.

MARINA. *(Tries to wind the yarn more quickly)*. Almost done.

TELYEGIN. They're leaving for Kharkov. That's where they'll live.

MARINA. Good riddance.

TELYEGIN. They got quite a scare ... 'That's it,' Yelena Andreevna says, 'I won't stay an hour longer here... That's it; we're leaving... We'll stay in Kharkov,' she says, 'we'll get settled and then send for our things...' They're travelling light. So, Marina Timofeevna, seems they weren't meant to live here. Not meant to be... The course of fate.

MARINA. Good riddance. They just raised fisticuffs and cannonry – a plain disgrace!

TELYEGIN. Yes, a plot worthy of the brush of Aivozovsky.

MARINA. Hope I never lay eyes on such a one.

Pause.

We'll go back to the old way. Morning tea around seven o'clock, lunch from one to two, and evenings – we'll gather for dinner; everything in its place, like people favor....The Christian way. *(Sighs.)* It's been such a long time since I've had noodles.

TELYEGIN. Yes, we haven't made noodles for such a long time.

Pause.

A long time...This morning, Marina Timofeevna, I'm in the village and a shopkeeper taps me on the shoulder, "Hey you, freeloader!" and I felt so, so bitter!

MARINA. Don't pay a bit of attention, grandfather. We're all freeloaders on god. You, Sonya, Ivan Petrovich – none of us is idle, we all work! There, there...where is Sonya?

TELYEGIN. In the garden. She's with the doctor, they're both on foot, looking for Ivan Petrovich. They're afraid he might lay hands on himself.

MARINA. And where's the pistol?

TELYEGIN. *(Whispers.)* I hid it in the cellar!

MARINA. *(Laughs.)* Bless us sinners!

VOINITSKY and ASTROV enter from the yard.

VOINITSKY. Go away. *(To Marina and Telegin.)* Get out of here, leave me alone for once! I won't have supervision.

TELYEGIN. Right away, Vanya. *(Exits on tip-toe.)*

MARINA. [Goose sound] Goose: Honk honk! *(Gathers the wool and exits.)*

VOINITSKY. Leave off!

ASTROV. With great pleasure, I should have left hours ago, but I repeat, I won't leave until you return what you took from me.

VOINITSKY. I took nothing from you.

ASTROV. This is serious – don't hold me up. I should have left a long time ago.

VOINITSKY. I took nothing from you.

They both sit.

ASTROV. Really? Well then, I'll give it a little more time, but then, I'm sorry, I shall have to employ force. We'll tie you up and search you. I say this in complete seriousness.

VOINITSKY. Do what you want.

Pause.

What a fool I was: Shot twice and missed both times! I'll never forgive myself.

ASTROV. If you felt like firing off a shot, maybe you should have plunked one in your own head.

VOINITSKY. *(Shrugs his shoulders)* Strange. I attempted murder, and no one's arresting me, no one's putting me on trial. That means I must be insane. *(Bitter laugh.)* I'm insane, while *sane* people put on a veil of scholarship, masking their ignorance, fatuity and outright malice. *Sane* people marry the elderly, and then brazenly betray them. I saw, I saw you kissing her!

ASTROV. Yes, I was kissing her. Here's one for you. *(Thumbs his nose.)*

VOINITSKY. No, the world is insane for supporting you.

ASTROV. Now, that's just stupid.

VOINITSKY. So? I'm insane, I'm demented, I have the right to say stupid things.

ASTROV. Bull. You're not insane; you're just a crackpot. A bean stalk. I used to think every crackpot was insane, deranged, but now I believe the normal condition for human beings is crackpottery. You are completely normal.

VOINITSKY. *(Covers his face with his hands)* I'm so ashamed! If only you knew how ashamed! This feeling of shame goes beyond any kind of pain. *(In despair.)* It's unbearable! *(Leans over the table.)* What can I do? What can I do?

ASTROV. Nothing.

VOINITSKY. Give me something! Oh, my god...I'm forty-seven years old. Let's say I live to be sixty; that means I still have thirteen years to live. Thirteen years – what will I do with that time? How will I fill those thirteen years? You...you see...*(Grabs Astrov's hand)* You see, if I could live what remains of my life in some new way. To wake up on a clear, peaceful morning and feel like you've started anew, that your entire past is forgotten, disappeared like smoke. *(Weeps.)* To start life over again...Tell me...where do I start...

ASTROV. *(Annoyed.)* Get hold of yourself! What new life?! Our situation – yours and mine – is hopeless.

VOINITSKY. It is?

ASTROV. I'm convinced.

VOINITSKY. Give me something...*(Points to his heart.)* It's on fire.

ASTROV. *(Shout, furious)* Stop it! *(Calms down.)* Those who will live one hundred, two hundred years after us and who will curse us for how we've so stupidly and feebly squandered our lives – maybe they will find the way to happiness, but as for us...You and I have only one hope left. The hope, after we lie down in our graves, for dreams, maybe even pleasant ones. *(Sighs.)* Yes, brother. In the whole district there were only two decent, intelligent human beings: Me and you. But somehow ten years in this vile backwater have dragged us down; its fumes seeped into our bones and we've become just like everyone else. *(Urgently.)* But enough of this witless sniffing – give me back what you took from me.

VOINITSKY. I took nothing from you.

ASTROV. You took a bottle of morphine from my medicine bag.

Pause.

Listen, if you're dead-set on killing yourself, then go into the woods and shoot yourself there. Give me the damned morphine, or else there will be conversations, speculation, and people will think I gave it to you...It's bad enough that I'll have to perform your autopsy...You think that will be interesting?

Enter Sonya.

VOINITSKY. Leave me alone.

ASTROV. *(To Sonya.)* Sofia Alexandrovna, your Uncle took a bottle of morphine from my medicine bag and won't give it back. Tell him that it's...unwise, in the end. And besides, I've got not time for this. I have to leave.

SONYA. Uncle Vanya, did you take the morphine bottle?

Pause.

ASTROV. He took it. I'm sure of it.

SONYA. Give it back. Why would you frighten us? *(Tenderly.)* Give it back, Uncle Vanya! My life is no happier than yours, but I don't despair. I endure, and I will endure until my life comes to an end....Be patient and endure.

Pause.

Give it back! *(Kisses his hand.)* Dear, wonderful Uncle Vanya, please, give it back! *(Weeps.)* You are kind, take pity on us and give it back. Be patient, Uncle Vanya, and endure!

VOINITSKY. *(Retrieves the bottle from his desk and gives it to Astrov.)* Here, take it! *(To Sonya.)* But now we have to get down to work, right now we have to do something, or else...I can't take it...

SONYA. Yes, work. As soon as everyone leaves, we'll sit down and get to work...*(Anxiously figets with paper lying on the table).* What a mess.

ASTROV. *(Places the bottle in his medicine bag and snaps it shut.)* Now it's time to leave.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. *(Enters.)* Ivan Petrovich, are you here? We're leaving now. Go see Alexander; he wants to tell you something.

SONYA. Come, Uncle Vanya. *(Takes Voinitsky by the arm.)* Let's go. You and Papa should make peace. That's certain.

Sonya and Voinitsky exit.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. I'm leaving. *(Offers Astrov her hand.)* Goodbye.

ASTROV. Already?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. The horses are already loaded.

ASTROV. Goodbye.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Today you promised me that you're leaving this place.

ASTROV. I promise. I'm leaving now.

Pause.

Were you frightened? (*Takes her hand.*) Is it really that scary?

YELENA ANDREEVNA. Yes.

ASTROV. What if you stayed? Ah? Tomorrow at the forest preserve...

YELENA ANDREEVNA. No...it's already decided...And that's why I can look you in the eye. Because we're leaving....There's just one thing I ask: think kindly of me. I want you to respect me.

ASTROV. Akh! (*A gesture of impatience.*) Stay, I beg you. Open your eyes – there's nothing for you on this earth, you have no purpose, nothing to hold your attention, and sooner or later you'll give in to your desires, anyway. It's inevitable. Better to realize that not in Kharkov or Kursk, but here, in the shadow of nature...It would at least be poetic, even very beautiful...Think of the woods, broken down old country homes, straight out of Turgenev...

YELENA ANDREEVNA. You're so funny....I'm angry at you, but even so...I'll remember you very fondly. You're an interesting, original person. We'll never see each other again, so why hide it? I've even fallen for you just a little. Well, let's shake hands and part as friends. When you think of me, be happy.

ASTROV (*Kisses her hand.*) Yes, you're leaving...(In thought.) You seem like a good, sincere person, but there's something strange about you, I can't quite make it out. You show up with your husband, and everyone who'd been working, bustling, creating - they all dropped everything and for the entire summer waited on you and your husband's gout. The two of you infected us all with your idleness. I fell in love, squandered a whole month pining, and in that time people got sick, peasants grazed their cattle in my forests, over my young trees...So, no matter where you go with your husband, destruction's not far behind... I'm joking, of course, but still...Strangely, I'm convinced that were you to stay, the devastation would be colossal. I would die, and you...it would be bad. So, you're leaving. *Finita la commedia!*

YELENA ANDREEVNA. (*Takes a pencil from the table and quickly hides it.*) I'll take this pencil to remember you by.

ASTROV. Strange...We got to know each other and then suddenly...we'll never see each other again. Like everything on this earth....While no one's here, before Uncle Vanya enters with a bouquet, let me...kiss you...To say goodbye...Yes?

(Kisses her on the cheek.) There now...delightful.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. I wish you nothing but the best. *(Looks around.)* To give in, for once in my life *(Kisses him passionately, and both immediately back away from one another.)* I have to go.

ASTROV. Hurry, go. If the horses are ready, then you're off.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. I think someone's coming.

Both listen.

ASTROV. *Finita!*

Enter Serebryakov, Voinitsky, Maria Vasilievna with a book, Telyegin and Sonya.

SEREBRYAKOV *(To Voinitsky)*. 'From our eyes, let fall these grudging scales, and peace.' Since the events of a few hours past, I have lived through so much and emended such beliefs, that I feel I could write an entire treatise on the art of living for the benefit of posterity. I heartily accept your apology and offer mine in return. Farewell! *(Kisses Voinitsky three times.)*

VOINITSKY. You will receive punctually receive just the same payments as formerly. Everything will be as it was before.

Yelena Andreevna embraces Sonya.

SEREBRYAKOV *(Kisses Maria Vasilievna's hand.)* Maman...

MARIA VASILIEVNA *(Kisses him)*. Alexander, visit us again and send me your photo. You know how dear you are to me.

TELYEGIN. Farewell, your excellency! Don't forget us!

SEREBRYAKOV *(Having kissed his daughter)*. Farewell...Farewell, everyone! *(Offers to shake Astrov's hand.)* I thank you for the pleasant company...I respect your opinions, your interests and elan, but allow an old man to add, upon our parting, just one piece of advice: Friends, we have to do the job! We have to do the job! *(Bows to all assembled.)* All the best! *(Exits; Maria Vasilievna and Sonya follow.)*

VOINITSKY. *(Firmly, urgently kisses Yelena Andreevna's hand)*. Goodbye...Forgive me...We'll never see each other again.

YELENA ANDREEVNA. *(Moved.)* Goodbye, dear friend. *(Kisses his head and exits.)*

ASTROV. *(To Telyegin)*. Waffles, go tell them to ready my horses, while they're at it.

TELYEGIN. Right away, my friend. *(Exits.)*

Only Astrov and Voinitsky are left.

ASTROV *(Gathers up pencils from the table and places them in his suitcase)*. Aren't you going to see them off?

VOINITSKY. Let them go, I...I can't. I feel depressed. I should do something right away...Work, to work! *(Rummages in the papers on the table.)*

Pause; The sound of bells.

ASTROV. They're gone. The professor's relieved, I'll bet. He wouldn't come back here if you offered him your weight in gold.

MARINA *(Enters)*. They're gone. *(Sits in a chair and knits a stocking.)*

SONYA *(Enters)*. They're gone. *(Wipes her eyes.)* God grant they travel safe. *(To her uncle.)* Well, Uncle Vanya, let's do something.

VOINITSKY. To work, to work...

SONYA. It's been a long, long time since we sat together at this table. *(Turns on the lamp.)* Seems like we're out of ink...*(Takes an inkwell, goes to the cabinet in the study.)* But now I'm sad they're gone.

MARIA VASILIEVNA. *(Slowly enters)*. They're gone! *(Sits and sinks into her reading.)*

SONYA *(Sits at the table and pages through a book of accounts)*. First thing, Uncle Vanya, let's write up all the accounts. They're an awful mess. Today they sent us another bill. Write. You write one bill, I'll write the other...

VOINITSKY. *(Writes.)* "Bill...Dear sir..."

Both write in silence.

MARINA *(Yawns.)* Sleepy time for me...

ASTROV. Stillness. The pens scratch, the cricket chirps. It's warm, cozy...I don't feel like leaving here.

The sound of bells.

They've brought up the horses...The only thing left, it seems, is to bid you goodbye, my friends, bid goodbye to my table and – off we go! *(Places the maps in a folder.)*

MARINA. What are you fussing for? Sit a while.

ASTROV. I can't.

VOINITSKY. *(Writes)*. "Of the prev-vi-ous debt, two se-ven-ty five..."

The worker enters.

WORKER. Mikhail Lvovich, your horses are ready.

ASTROV. Very well. *(Gives him the medicine bag, suitcase and folder.)* Here you go. Make sure not to bend the folder.

WORKER. Yes sir. *(Exits.)*

ASTROV. Well...*(Starts to say goodbye.)*

SONYA. When will we see you again?

ASTROV. Not until summer, probably. Not this winter...Though naturally, if something happens, be sure to let me know – I'll come over. *(Presses her hand.)* Thank you for your hospitality and kindness...In a word, for everything. *(Goes to Nanny and kisses her on the head.)* Goodbye, old girl.

MARINA. You're leaving like that, no tea?

ASTROV. I don't want any, Nanny.

MARINA. Maybe you'd like a drop of vodka?

ASTROV. *(Uncertainly.)* I suppose...

Marina exits.

(After a pause.) My trace-horse started limping for some reason. I noticed again yesterday, when Petrushka was leading her to water.

VOINITSKY. She needs a new shoe.

ASTROV. Means I'll need to head over to Rozhdestvenno, to the blacksmith's. No way 'round it. (*Goes to the map of Africa and looks at it.*) Probably a heat-wave in Africa right now – they're burning up!

VOINITSKY. Yes, probably.

MARINA (*Returns with a tray, carrying a glass of vodka and a piece of bread.*) Here.

Astrov drinks the vodka.

To good health, grandfather. (*Bows deeply.*) Have a nibble of the bread.

ASTROV. No, I'm fine...Well then, all the best! (*To Marina.*) Don't see me out, Nanny old girl. There's no need.

He exits; Sonya follows him with a candle to see him out; Marina sits in her chair.

VOINITSKY (*Writes.*) "February second vegetable oil twenty pounds... February sixteenth again vegetable oil twenty pounds... Buckwheat..."

Pause. The sound of bells.

MARINA. He's gone.

Pause.

SONYA (*Returns, places the candle on the table.*) He's gone...

VOINITSKY (*Checks the accounts and makes a note.*) Total...fifteen...twenty-five...

Sonya sits and writes.

MARINA (*Yawns.*) Oh, bless us sinners...

Telyegin enters on tip-toe, sits by the door and quietly strums his guitar.

VOINITSKY (*To Sonya, stroking her hair.*) My dearest child, it's so hard! Oh, if you only knew how hard for me!

SONYA. What's to be done? We have to live!

Pause.

We will live, Uncle Vanya. We will live through a long, long run of days, endless nights; we will patiently endure the trials Fate sends to us; we will labor for others, now and in our old age, knowing no rest, and when our time comes, we will die humbly and there, beyond the grave, we will say how we suffered, how we wept, how bitter we felt, and god will have mercy on us, you and I, uncle, dear uncle, we will see a bright, beautiful, gorgeous life, we will rejoice, and look on our current sadness with tenderness, with a smile – and we will rest. I believe, Uncle Vanya, I believe deeply, passionately...*(Falls on her knees before him and puts her head on his hand; in a weary voice.)* We will rest!

Telyegin quietly strums his guitar.

We will rest! We will hear the angels, we will see heaven sparkling in diamonds, we will see all earthly pain, all of our suffering overrun with compassion that will fill up the whole world, and our life will be serene and gentle, sweet, like a caress. I believe, I believe...*(Wipes tears from her eyes.)* Poor, poor Uncle Vanya, you're crying...*(Through tears.)* You've known no joy in your life, but wait, Uncle Vanya, wait...We will rest...*(Embraces him.)* We will rest!

The watchman knocks.

Telyegin quietly plays; Marina Vasilievna writes in her pamphlets; Marina knits a stocking.

We will rest!

The curtain slowly descends.