

THE PIGEONS IN THE ORCHARD

(A Play in Two Acts)

by

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THE PIGEONS IN THE ORCHARD

THE CHARACTERS

OLGA, Around 30, a school teacher, the first sister

MASHA, In her mid-20s, the second sister

IRINA, Nearly 18, the third sister

ANDREI, In his early 20s, the brother

DUMSKY, An elderly doctor

KULYGIN, Masha's husband, a school teacher, 30s

VERSHINSKY, Masha's lover, an army captain, late 30s

TUSENBACH, A baron, 40

NATASHA, Andrei's fiancée later his wife, mid-20s

MRS RANEVSKAYA, An elderly landowner

THE SCENE

A dull city in the Midwest

Of Old Russia

THE TIME

Autumn

1900

THE PIGEONS IN THE ORCHARD

ACT ONE, Scene 1

(The stage is divided into three areas: A living room in the center; on the right, a table and chairs, representing a dining-room and to the left, a desk and chair and a small bed, representing ANDREI's room. As the lights come up, ANDREI is standing in the center of the living room, playing a violin. Massenet's 'Meditation' from THAIS is heard. MASHA is in a chair, reading a book. OLGA sits on the sofa, grading some papers. After a moment, MASHA sighs with some irritation, and goes to a phonograph in the rear of the room. She removes the arm from the recording, and the music suddenly stops. For a moment we hear ANDREI continue to scrape at the violin, then he looks up confused. He then fixes MASHA with an angry look, and then storms out of the room. There is a moment of silence)

MASHA

Olga, I am rather worried about our brother.

OLGA

You're right to be.

MASHA

I'd say it was obvious.

OLGA

I'm afraid his method for learning to play the violin doesn't seem to be working out very well, does it?

(MASHA stares incredulously at OLGA, who continues marking her papers.
Then, there is a sudden BLACKOUT, and...)

THE SCENE IS OVER

ACT ONE, Scene 2

(The lights come up on the living room. As before, MASHA is reading a book.
OLGA is now, however, watering some very obviously dead plants)

OLGA

Masha, these were mother and father's plants. It's hard to believe they have been dead fifteen years!

MASHA

It looks like the plants have, too.

OLGA

Nonsense! They're just not feeling well. We mustn't give up hope.

MASHA

I think I have given up hope.

OLGA

I certainly hope not.

MASHA

(Closing her book) This book is so boring!

OLGA

What is it?

MASHA

ANNA KARENINA. The characters are completely unbelievable! (She rises and walks to the window) By the way, some new officers have joined the brigade, and a couple of very nice-looking ones, too!

OLGA

Don't forget that you're married.

MASHA

Do you know, Olga, I think I could forget it if you didn't keep reminding me!

OLGA

Masha, marriage is sacred. It is an institution handed down from God to man. If you remember that, you will willingly be able to do your duty.

MASHA

(Looks sourly at OLGA) Did you know there was a dead pigeon in the back yard?

(Then IRINA, the youngest sister, enters. She is carrying a small dagger)

IRINA

Life is nothing but misery, sorrow and pain, followed by eternal darkness. The agony is too much to bear. I've had enough! Goodbye, my dear sisters, but always remember I loved you more than life itself! (She plunges the dagger into her breast and falls to the floor).

MASHA

(Unconcerned, still looking out the window) Has Irina come home?

IRINA

(Popping up) Well, how was I? Was I very good or just good?

OLGA

You're improving by the day, isn't she, Masha?

MASHA

Oh God! I think my husband is coming down the street!

IRINA

I practiced my suicide on the way home from school, and a man walking by got so frightened that he fainted himself! Acting is such fun! But I still haven't decided when I finish school if I'll become an actress or a telegraph operator.

OLGA

Irina, darling, you could be making the most important decision in your life, so don't make the mistake I made or you will probably ruin your future!

IRINA

But if I'm going to be an actress, I'll have to get away from this backwater hole! I'll have to go to Moscow!

OLGA

Moscow! We should all go to Moscow!

(KULYGIN, MASHA'S husband then enters. He is carrying a pair of boots)

KULYGIN

Well, hello! Hello, everyone! And where is my loving wife?

MASHA

No one here answers to that description.

KULYGIN

(He laughs uproariously) Ha, ha! She's always making fun of me, but I don't care! I'm perfectly contented!

IRINA

Hello, Nicolai! Would you like to see me commit suicide?

OLGA

Not now, darling! Hello, Nicolai Sergeyevitch, but what are you doing carrying those boots?

KULYGIN

They belong to our principal. I told him I'd be happy to bring them home with me and give them a good polishing. I'm so sorry I'm late, but I stayed to polish all the blackboards in the entire school.

MASHA

For heaven's sake! Doesn't the custodian do that?

KULYGIN

Not when I beat him to it! Well, come on, Masha. Let's go home. How amazing! Here I am, planning to spend the entire evening polishing the principal's boots and yet I'm perfectly contented! (He exits).

MASHA

(Sighs, strangles an imaginary neck) I wonder if they will EVER do away with capital punishment. (She then exits. There is a sudden BLACKOUT, and...)

THE SCENE IS OVER

ACT ONE, Scene 3

(The living room. OLGA is marking papers. DUMSKY and TUSENBACH enter)

DUMSKY

I'm going to tell you my life story, Baron.

TUSENBACH

(He yawns) I don't have time to listen to all that.

DUMSKY

I will skip to the good parts. It all began... Let me think... Ah, I remember. A few years ago I was coming home from the hospital. I had just operated on a boy's leg. It later turned out to be the wrong leg, but the point is, as I strolled down the street, smelling the spring flowers, staring into a clear blue sky, suddenly a pigeon fell out of that sky and landed at my feet, dead as a door nail. And in a flash, everything was as clear as a bell to me. Do you understand what I'm saying?

TUSENBACH

I don't understand nonsense, doctor.

DUMSKY

I am telling you that in that moment I suddenly understood I had wasted my life, every single second of it.

OLGA

But doctor, it wasn't all wasted. After all, you were mother and father's dearest friend.

DUMSKY

That is true, my dear. But I have been a terrible doctor. Perhaps the worst ever! What's more, I've never read a book. In fact, I've never even wanted to read one. Yes, a totally worthless life, Baron, and yet I also knew that God would forgive me.

TUSENBACH

Doctor, you know as well as I that there is no God.

DUMSKY

(He shudders slightly) Bad news for me!

OLGA

But doctor, for the sake of our dear parents, we all forgive you.

DUMSKY

Thank you, my dear, and it is true that I have suffered. God, I've suffered terribly, and especially today! My bunions are killing me!

OLGA

How thoughtless of me! I'll get you some salt water to soak them in. (She exits).

TUSENBACH

Doctor, you're an old scoundrel. Sometimes I think you didn't even know their parents.

DUMSKY

Ah, Baron, life has passed me by.

TUSENBACH

It's your own fault, isn't it?

DUMSKY

Yes, it is, and at times it's been agony to think of that. It almost makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up! (He yawns) But then I fill my belly with a quail and a good bottle of wine and I say 'The Hell with it!'

(OLGA then returns to the living room, carrying a pail of salt water)

OLGA

Here you are, doctor. Now come over here and let me take off your shoes and socks and we'll give those bunions of yours a good soaking.

DUMSKY

What a wonderful child, Baron! She's meant everything to me.

OLGA

(Removing DUMSKY'S shoes and socks) It is true, isn't it, doctor, that father and mother were terribly happy in Moscow?

DUMSKY

Good Lord, yes, my child! We were all terribly happy there!

OLGA

Tell me more about them doctor.

DUMSKY

Wonderful people, my child, terribly happy—

TUSENBACH

I believe it's time for me to be going. But tell me, Olga, isn't Irina Nicolayevna's eighteenth birthday coming soon? Please tell her there is something I'd like to discuss with her.

OLGA

Yes, of course, Baron, and we're having a big party. Everyone is coming.

TUSENBACH

Goodbye. (He stops on his way out) By the way, these plants are all dead. (He exits).

DUMSKY

Nasty fellow!

OLGA

But doctor, you were telling me about Moscow!

DUMSKY

Ah yes! What remarkable trees! I especially remember the poplars—

OLGA

(Indulgently) But I think you were talking about father and mother.

DUMSKY

Oh yes. Wonderful people and how happy they were. How happy we all were in Moscow.

OLGA

In Moscow, yes... Moscow... (She looks dreamy, as DUMSKY lies back in his chair and relaxes. There is A BLACKOUT, and...)

THE SCENE IS OVER

ACT ONE, Scene 4

(Lights up on the living room: MASHA sits in 'her' chair, reading. DUMSKY is snoring, his feet still in a pail of water. ANDREI can be dimly seen, in his room, sawing at the violin. We hear the Massenet softly, as OLGA enters)

OLGA

See what I have, Masha! Mother and father's canary! I've had him stuffed! Now let's see. Where shall I put him? I know, right here with the plants! (She puts the stuffed canary on one of the dead plants). Doesn't he look happy!

(ANDREI can be seen putting down his violin. He goes to the phonograph, stops the music and then enters the living room. When he sees OLGA and MASHA, he seems to consider leaving again: a silence, except for DUMSKY'S snoring)

ANDREI

I want a pen and paper.

OLGA

There is some in the drawer. Andrei, darling, your playing has improved so much.

ANDREI

You're nuts. (He takes pen and paper from a drawer and exits to his room).

MASHA

Olga, I've heard rumors that Andrei is infatuated with some local girl. Do you know who she is?

OLGA

I've heard those rumors, but they are ridiculous! That girl is a coarse creature, Masha, with large vulgar breasts and a gross sensual body! Why, she is nothing more than a crass exhibitionist! Andrei would never have anything to do with a creature like that!

(The lights then dim on the living room and come up on ANDREI, sitting at his desk. He speaks aloud, as he composes his letter)

ANDREI

To my darling Natasha, whose lips are like two ripe cherries I would love to bite into, whose breasts are like two clouds which brush against the moon in the night. How I would love to have them brush against my waiting lips! Oh, Natasha...

(And then there is a cross-fade back to OLGA and MASHA in the living room)

OLGA

I'm sure the very thought of her repulses him!

MASHA

Perhaps, but I'm afraid our brother is rather strange.

OLGA

Of course he is! He's an artist! He is sensitive. He is creative. He is always thinking of spiritual things. Trivialities like the human body are beneath him!

(And then there is another cross-fade back to ANDREI, still composing his letter)

ANDREI

Yes, for you, Natasha, I would even sacrifice my violin. I would give up my music for one kiss and to feel our bodies pressed together and melted by the heat of our passion. (He suddenly stops, looks at what he has written, wads it up and throws it away) I'd better start over again. (He writes) Dear Natasha, How are you? I have had a cold.

(And then another cross-fade, returning to MASHA and OLGA in the living room)

MASHA

By the way, Olga, I've met a captain. He's one of those new officers who have joined the brigade, and I've invited him to visit us here.

OLGA

Masha, that sounds improper! You're a married woman!

MASHA

It's all right, Olga. The captain is also married.

OLGA

I still don't think it's right. But perhaps this captain has a conscience and he won't come. I'm going to pray that will happen, Masha. (She closes her eyes, begins a silent prayer).

(Then, as OLGA is praying, VERSHINSKY enters. He is very formal, military)

MASHA

Hello, captain, how nice you came. Olga, I would like you to meet Captain Vershinsky. (OLGA looks very distressed, perhaps because her prayers failed).

VERSHINSKY

(He kisses OLGA'S hand) I am at your service, madam. My, what a charming room! So warm and cheerful!

OLGA

(Pleased) Thank you, Captain! It is full of wonderful memories of our dead parents.

VERSHINSKY

Well, I have certainly been looking forward to meeting you. I've heard so many good things about you in town.

OLGA

How nice, but tell us captain. Why didn't you bring your wife?

VERSHINSKY

I'm afraid my wife took an overdose of sleeping pills earlier today.

OLGA

Heavens! Is she all right?

VERSHINSKY

I'm sorry to say she is a highly neurotic woman.

OLGA

But she is your wife. Surely it is your duty to love her and care for her.

MASHA

Like so many people who have never tried it, captain, Olga thinks a great deal of the state of matrimony. Would you like a cup of tea?

OLGA

Well, I will pray for her, captain. And I will pray that you see your own duty. (She suddenly turns away and begins to pray again).

VERSHINSKY

(To MASHA) Is she often like this?

MASHA

I believe she is having a bad day. She is a teacher, and someone at school is writing her obscene notes.

VERSHINSKY

Well, it hasn't really been my day, either.

MASHA

Perhaps we can change that. Tell me. Do you believe in love at first sight?

VERSHINSKY

No, I don't.

MASHA

Neither do I. How amazing! We already have something in common. And what is your attitude concerning adultery?

VERSHINSKY

Personally, I think a person should have experience something before he can venture an opinion on the subject.

(They seem on the verge of kissing, when ANDREI suddenly enters the room)

ANDREI

Who is this character?

DUMSKY

(Suddenly rouses) Olga, Olga, my dear, more hot water! My feet are freezing!

VERSHINSKY

(To MASHA) An interesting family you have here. (Then A BLACKOUT, and...)

THE SCENE IS OVER

ACT ONE, Scene 5

(Lights up on the living room: OLGA walks around the room, holding a cage, into which she has now put the canary. DUMSKY enters with some snacks)

DUMSKY

I had a terrible day, Olga, my dear. Prescribed the wrong medication again, and the patient broke out in hives! That always seems to make me hungry. Will you have a snack with me?

OLGA

As soon as I find a spot to hang Sasha's cage, doctor. (She then hangs the cage in a window) Ah! Don't you think Sasha will be happy there?

DUMSKY

Who can define happiness? Certainly not I! I'm not intelligent enough! (He eats) This herring is wonderful, my dear.

OLGA

Doctor, I am terribly upset about Masha. I'm afraid she is having an illicit affair with that captain, and I don't know what to do about it.

DUMSKY

You could try one of these pickled eggs.

OLGA

And then there's Andrei. He hardly ever picks up his violin any longer. I'm afraid if we don't get to Moscow soon, he will completely abandon interest in his art. Oh, if only mother and father were still alive. Doctor, you were their friend. What would they have done?

DUMSKY

Well, my dear, I remember one morning your father skipped his breakfast.

OLGA

You mean because he was thinking through a problem like mine?

DUMSKY

Up at eleven: He was the early riser. Then he walked into the garden without taking a single bite to eat. In my opinion, never a wise decision—

OLGA

I'm sure, but what is your point?

DUMSKY

My point is that he walked into the garden and two minutes later, the gardener was calling for me. Your father had gone white as a sheet! He claimed a wild canary had flown up his nose and gotten stuck there. I diagnosed a nervous breakdown due to skipping breakfast. So, you see, my dear, don't try to think on an empty stomach! I believe someone gave me a book on the subject once. I never opened it, of course.

OLGA

Maybe I'll try some herring.

DUMSKY

Sorry, my dear, I'm afraid I finished these off. But I'll be glad to get more.

OLGA

Tell me, doctor, do you ever wonder what people who live a hundred years from now will think of the lives we have led?

DUMSKY

No, I never do. (He grabs his back) Good Lord, my back feels like a dishrag someone is wringing out. Why me? Of all the useless fools in this world, why was I the one chosen to suffer so?

OLGA

Because you are so good!

DUMSKY

Hm. It doesn't seem fair. I'll get more herring. (He hobbles off, holding his back).

(And then ANDREI enters. He is carrying his violin. That makes OLGA happy)

OLGA

Andrei, you have your violin! Then my prayers have finally been answered! You're going to continue with your practicing!

ANDREI

Wrong again! (He smashes the violin)

OLGA

Andrei, your violin!

ANDREI

I'm giving it up. I was only playing the stupid thing because you wanted me to. Besides, who needs the violin? Now I have the real thing! I'm in love!

OLGA

In love! With whom, Andrei! Surely, it can't be that vulgar creature you've been seen with recently! I won't believe that! I refuse to believe that!

(NATASHA then enters. OLGA looks at her, then runs from the room in tears)

NATASHA

I get the feeling your sister doesn't like me.

ANDREI

Don't pay any attention. Did you get my letter?

NATASHA

Oh, Andrei, it was beautiful! I'm so sorry you had a cold.

ANDREI

(He now tries to embrace her) There was so much more I wanted to say. I'm very glad you stopped by, Natasha.

NATASHA

(Holds him off) Please Andrei, your sister might come out.

ANDREI

She'll be in her room crying for the rest of the day.

NATASHA

Do you know on the way over I passed a wedding party. It was so splendid! Don't you think people look happy when they're getting married?

ANDREI

Listen, Natasha, do you know I've never kissed a woman?

NATASHA

By the way, Andrei, I had a very odd dream the other night. May I tell you about it?

ANDREI

Later. Natasha, you don't think it's strange I've never kissed a woman, do you?

NATASHA

Listen, please! In my dream I was walking down a street. It was a filthy, ugly street, very much like the street my family lives on—

ANDREI

I mean it's not like I don't *think* about kissing women. I mean it's not as if I thought about kissing *men*.

NATASHA

But, suddenly, at the end of this awful street, I came to a large and beautiful field, sort of like the one near *your* street—

ANDREI

Natasha, you're beautiful. You remind me of someone—

NATASHA

Andrei, PLEASE! Anyway, I came to this beautiful field, but it was full of dead pigeons. It was depressing. But I went around and I stroked each pigeon, and when I did, like magic, it turned into a baby! And then I woke up. Wasn't that a beautiful dream, Andrei?

ANDREI

I guess so.

NATASHA

But I wondered what it meant. So I went and asked the priest, and he said it meant that I was going to be a wonderful mother.

ANDREI

Kiss me, Natasha! (He grabs her) You're so beautiful! I love you! Kiss me, Nicolai—

NATASHA

Andrei! You just called me Nicolai!

ANDREI

I meant Natasha.

NATASHA

Who do you know named Nicolai?

ANDREI

It was a mistake, Natasha! Kiss me! (He grabs her, kisses her).

(However, DUMSKY then re-enters, carrying another platter of herring)

DUMSKY

What! What's this!

NATASHA

Oh! (She pushes ANDREI away)

ANDREI

For God's sake, doctor! What are you doing!

DUMSKY

Oh, it's you, Andrei Nicolayevitch. I've brought some herring. Would you care for some?

ANDREI

Doctor! Do you mind?

DUMSKY

Oh, have I interrupted something? Oh well, go right ahead. I'll just sit over here and finish off the herring. (He does so).

ANDREI

Incredible!

DUMSKY

Yes! It is truly superb! (He licks his fingers).

NATASHA

Andrei, didn't he call you Andrei Nicolayevitch?

ANDREI

Yes, that's right. My father was named Nicolai. Natasha, to hell with that old fool! Kiss me! (He tries to kiss her again. She lets him. Then A BLACKOUT, and...)

THE SCENE IS OVER

ACT ONE, Scene 6

(OLGA, MASHA, VERSHINSKY and TUSENBACH are in the living room.
OLGA is playing solitaire. ANDREI can be dimly seen in his own room)

OLGA

(Sighs) Playing solitaire is so lonely.

MASHA

(Worried about OLGA) Captain, why don't you entertain us with some of your tricks?
(To OLGA) The captain was the winner in the brigade's amateur talent contest, weren't you, captain?

VERSHINSKY

Three years in a row, if I must say so myself.

TUSENBACH

You'll have to if you want it said.

MASHA

Please, captain, do something to entertain us.

VERSHINSKY

Gladly, if someone will turn down the lights and focus that lamp on the wall over there.
(He then proceeds to do shadow puppets with his hands) Here is a rabbit.

MASHA

Wonderful! Olga, do you see?

OLGA

I can't see. Someone has turned off the lights.

VERSHINSKY

And here is a giraffe.

TUSENBACH

What time did you say Irina Nicolayevna was coming home? (He picks up a clock) By the way, this is a marvelous old clock!

OLGA

It's terribly precious to us, Baron. Please be careful with it. It's been in the family for years.

VERSHINSKY

And here is my personal favorite, a flying crane.

TUSENBACH

I'd be very interested in it if you would ever care to sell.

OLGA

We could never part with it, could we, Masha?

MASHA

No. But simply out of curiosity, Baron, what sort of offer did you have in mind?

OLGA

Masha!

VERSHINSKY

And here is a new one I'm working on. (He does another).

MASHA

That's splendid, captain! What is it?

VERSHINSKY

I haven't decided yet. What would you say it looked like?

MASHA

What do you think, Olga?

OLGA

I can't think! I'm too upset! (She goes over to the birdcage) I'm so worried about Andrei and that creature!

MASHA

Maybe things aren't as bad as you think. Perhaps they're not even considering marriage.

OLGA

Yes, perhaps you're right! And even if they were, we might be able to change her! Why, in time she might come to love and appreciate art and beauty as we all do!

MASHA

That would be well and good, of course, but in the meantime I think we also need to think about our financial problems.

TUSENBACH

I would consider five hundred roubles for the clock.

OLGA

We'll never sell the clock!

MASHA

Tell me, Olga, when was the last time our dear doctor paid rent?

OLGA

Why he has *never* paid rent! The doctor lived with mother and father—

MASHA

(Sotto voce) Off them, I think.

OLGA

He was their dearest friend. He is like one of the family! If we charged him rent, mother and father would turn over in their graves!

MASHA

Baron, would you consider six hundred?

OLGA

No! Not for six hundred thousand!

TUSENBACH

Speaking of the doctor, the captain and I ran into him on our way here.

VERSHINSKY

Rather, he ran into us! He was stewed to the gills! We disarmed a bunch of youngsters who were taking turns knocking off his hat with rocks.

MASHA

Olga, it sounds as if your doctor has gone on another bender.

OLGA

I don't believe it! He hasn't taken a drink in years, and he only drank to forget mother and father! No, gentlemen, you are certainly mistaken.

(And then, however, DUMSKY enters. And he is, naturally, very intoxicated)

DUMSKY

Ladies and gentlemen, what ridiculous lives we lead!

TUSENBACH

Please speak for yourself, doctor!

OLGA

Doctor, what has happened? Have you been drinking? Is it the pain of losing mother and father?

MASHA

If it was pain, he's not feeling it now!

DUMSKY

Ladies and gentlemen, what a foolish, pitiful existence! We suffer. We grow old, and then we die, and we learn nothing! We really ought to philosophize about that!

VERSHINKY

An excellent idea! I won the brigade championship last year.

OLGA

Doctor, you are intoxicated! I'm afraid something terrible has happened! What was it?

DUMSKY

You're right, my dear. I saw something horrible coming home from the hospital. I was crossing Raskolnikov Street when I saw a girl, a young beauty, struck by a carriage! It was ghastly! The poor child must have been severely injured!

OLGA

What did you do?

DUMSKY

As you can see, I went and got drunk.

OLGA

But doctor, you're a doctor!

DUMSKY

There's the truly horrible part! I knew, being such a terrible doctor, I could do nothing for her. In fact, I might even make things worse! Dear God, how guilty we are! And yet, do you know, I can't help blaming God just a little bit for making us the way we are!

MASHA

Doctor, what was it our parents saw in you?

OLGA

Masha, how can you ask that! (She goes and strokes DUMSKY'S head) His sufferings have purified his soul.

DUMSKY

That's true. But you're right, Masha. They were saints and I... I sinned against them!

MASHA

You sinned against them? What do you mean by that, doctor?

(But before DUMSKY can reply, ANDREI enters the room. He glares at them)

ANDREI

Why are these people always hanging around!

OLGA

Andrei, we were just going to have some lunch. Why don't you join us?

ANDREI

I'm going out. It's like Moscow Central Station around here! (He exits).

OLGA

(Frantically calling after him) Out! What do you mean out? Where!

TUSENBACH

I'm beginning to understand why Irina is never here!

(However, IRINA does then enter. She is bent over and is using a cane to walk)

IRINA

How tired I am! How weary!

OLGA

Irina, darling, whatever has happened!

IRINA

I feel so tired, so old. (She suddenly appears to go catatonic, her arms held straight out like tree limbs).

OLGA

Irina! Doctor, should we call a doctor?

DUMSKY

My advice would be useless.

IRINA

(She starts laughing) Hello, everyone. I'm trying out for the school play, and there are only two parts left, an old woman and a tree.

VERSHINSKY

The tree was excellent.

MASHA

Listen, why don't we all go and eat before my husband shows up?

(However, at that moment KULYGIN does arrive. He is carrying a manuscript)

KULYGIN

Hello! How perfectly contented I am to see you all. And Masha, my sweet! Are you happy to see me?

MASHA

(Biting sarcasm) Aren't I always?

KULYGIN

(He laughs) Ha, ha! How delightfully she mocks me! I assure you it makes me the happiest man in the world!

VERSHINSKY

(Puzzled, to TUSENBACH) Is he insane?

TUSENBACH

Yes, but he's perfectly contented to be so.

KULYGIN

I'm so happy to be here on Irina Nicolayevna's name day—

MASHA

That is not until Wednesday.

KULYGIN

Well, no matter! I've brought a gift, anyway. (To IRINA) This is for you, my dear. It is a history of our school with particular emphasis on the outstanding qualities of our current principal. It's an excellent book. I wrote it myself.

IRINA

But you gave me one of these last year.

KULYGIN

This is the updated version.

DUMSKY

(He has picked up the clock and is looking at it) How well I remember this wonderful old clock. It came all the way from Moscow with your dear parents and me. We spent many enjoyable evenings, just waiting to hear it chime.

MASHA

It doesn't chime.

DUMSKY

We finally figured that out.

TUSENBACH

You're drunk, doctor. You had better let me take it.

DUMSKY

Nonsense, I'm fine!

TUSENBACH

Hand it to me!

DUMSKY

No! (They tussle over the clock)

OLGA

Please! Be careful!

TUSENBACH

Give it to me!

DUMSKY

No! I want it!

MASHA

(Sharply) Put it down! Now!

(Simultaneously they look at MASHA and take their hands off the clock. It shatters)

OLGA

The clock! Oh, God!

MASHA

I'll super glue it. Now why don't we all go and eat before something else happens?

TUSENBACH

Needless to say, I withdraw my original offer.

(DUMSKY, VERSHINSKY, MASHA and a stricken OLGA enter the dining room)

TUSENBACH

(He detains IRINA who is also about to enter the dining room) Excuse me, Irina Nicolayevna, there is something I'd like to discuss with you.

IRINA

Yes, Baron?

TUSENBACH

I believe in a few days you will be eighteen and no longer a minor, am I correct?

IRINA

Yes, in a few days I'll be a grown woman! I can hardly wait to see what it will be like.

TUSENBACH

Perhaps I can help you discover that.

IRINA

What do you mean?

TUSENBACH

Permit me to be straightforward. After all, I am a Baron. How would you like to go away with me to Moscow?

IRINA

I appreciate your offer, but I think eighteen is too young to get married.

TUSENBACH

I entirely agree.

IRINA

Oh, I see. But I want to be a great actress.

TUSENBACH

That presents no problem. I will buy you a theatre.

IRINA

That's terribly kind of you. However, I think I should tell you that I don't find you handsome.

TUSENBACH

That doesn't bother me, if it doesn't bother you.

IRINA

But I've already auditioned for the school play, and I'm sure to get the part of the old woman, and I'm terribly excited about it!

TUSENBACH

Well, keep my offer in mind.

IRINA

Oh, I certainly will! You know it looks as if it will be terribly exciting being grown up! But let's go into the dining room now. I want to show everyone my demented axe murderess before they eat! (She pulls him towards the dining room. Then there is A BLACKOUT, and...)

THE SCENE IS OVER

ACT ONE, Scene 7

(The living room: OLGA is trying to feed the stuffed canary. DUMSKY is now sitting on the sofa. He has a cold, wet rag covering his forehead)

OLGA

Doctor, poor Sasha won't eat! But perhaps a miracle will happen. We can't give up hope, can we?

DUMSKY

My dear Olga, your faith is an inspiration.

OLGA

We must have faith to continue living, mustn't we?

DUMSKY

And what is it you have such faith in, my dear?

OLGA

The past! The present is a nightmare, and I'm afraid the future looks even worse!

DUMSKY

Yes, your faith is a true inspiration.

OLGA

Oh, doctor, somehow, some way, we must get to Moscow!

DUMSKY

But you should be very happy today. It's Irina's name day, and there will be a big party with plenty of guests. Why, Masha will be here along with that gallant captain.

OLGA

(Shakes her head in dismay) Her illicit lover, I'm afraid!

DUMSKY

And the Baron will be here.

OLGA

I hold him entirely responsible for breaking our precious clock!

DUMSKY

I agree. But then Andrei will be here.

OLGA

Oh, God, if he brings that horrible vulgar girl I don't know what I'll do!

DUMSKY

Yes, a nice little group! It ought to cheer you up immensely!

OLGA

But doctor, you're not feeling well. Promise me you won't drink again.

DUMSKY

Of course I'll promise you, my dear.

OLGA

Thank you.

DUMSKY

(He sighs) But what good is the promise of a worthless old reprobate?

OLGA

Perhaps it would cheer me up if you told me a story about Moscow, doctor. Were mother and father terribly in love in those days?

DUMSKY

Oh, terribly. Of course like all married couples they had their little differences.

OLGA

That is understandable, I'm sure.

DUMSKY

Oh certainly. (He chuckles a little) I remember one time your mother tried to remove your father's left arm with a carving knife.

OLGA

What!

DUMSKY

She was always interested in my operations, and I had been telling her about a gangrene operation I had performed: on the wrong man, naturally. Anyway, your mother got it into her head that your father's arm was gangrenous. Fortunately, your father protested indignantly. Fortunately, I say, because it turned out your mother's diagnosis was wrong.

(Before OLGA can respond to that, MASHA and VERSHINSKY enter laughing)

MASHA

Ha, ha! Good afternoon, Olga! Hello, doctor. How is your hangover?

OLGA

Hello, Masha. May I ask what is so funny?

MASHA

The captain was just telling me that yesterday his wife tried to start her self on fire.

OLGA

That is not funny!

MASHA

It was the way the captain told it.

VERSHINSKY

(He hands a package to OLGA) I have brought a bottle of perfume for Irina Nicolayevna's party.

OLGA

(Coolly) Thank you.

MASHA

But where is everyone, Olga? Where is Irina?

OLGA

She'll be here soon. She went to get something special for the party.

(TUSENBACH then enters. He brings with him a slightly obscene statuette)

TUSENBACH

Good afternoon to everyone! (He shows the statuette to OLGA, who looks askance) I have here a small token of my esteem for Miss Irina.

VERSHINSKY

I also brought a bottle of French champagne.

DUMSKY

How thoughtful of you, captain! (OLGA looks at him) None for me, of course.

(And then IRINA enters. She is awkwardly carrying a large, sealed box)

IRINA

Hello, everyone, I've brought a surprise!

DUMSKY

(Embraces her) Ah, Irina, my sweet, how like your dead mother, you are!

IRINA

I'm sure that's a compliment.

VERSHINSKY

Irina Nicolayevna, please accept a bottle of perfume on this happy occasion.

IRINA

Thank you very much, captain.

TUSENBACH

Congratulations, Irina. I have brought you a fertility symbol.

IRINA

How thoughtful of you, Baron!

TUSENBACH

Tell me. Is there any news on your audition for the school play?

IRINA

Not yet. I'm sure I'll get the good news any day. But why doesn't everyone go into the dining room? Isn't that cake ready yet?

DUMSKY

Captain, permit me to open your wine. (He grabs the wine, exits).

OLGA

Please, go and seat yourselves, and I'll bring the cake. (She also exits, as the lights go down on the living room and come up on the dining room, as they enter it).

IRINA

All right! Now everyone sit down! I have a surprise! (They take their seats)

DUMSKY

(He re-enters with wine and glasses) An excellent vintage, captain! I just sampled it to make sure it wasn't corked.

VERSHINSKY

(Noticing a good amount is missing, he gives DUMSKY a sour look, as he takes the bottle and pours some out) Well, then, let us now drink to Irina Nicolayevna's name day. May all her hopes be realized, and I'm sure we are all honored to be celebrating her name day. (They toast).

IRINA

Thank you so much, captain! I like the part about my hopes being realized, but I'm sure they will be! And now for my surprise! (She opens the box and takes out hats) Party hats! One for everybody! (She hands them all paper hats. Reluctantly they take them) Now put them on! Come on, don't be spoilsports! Now where's Olga?

(IRINA then exits to find OLGA. The rest of the company looks embarrassed)

DUMSKY

(After an awkward silence) Well, what shall we discuss? Perhaps we should philosophize.

TUSENBACH

Wearing these hats, doctor, what topic would you suggest?

VERSHINSKY

(Ever the 'straight man') I have one. Last year when I won the brigade philosophizing championship, we discussed what the people who live a hundred years from now will think of the life we presently lead.

TUSENBACH

That is silly. Why don't we discuss what sort of life *they* are likely to lead?

DUMSKY

An excellent idea, Baron! I say they will be idiots like us.

TUSENBACH

Please speak for yourself!

VERSHINSKY

I wonder what sort of clothing they will wear.

TUSENBACH

Perhaps they won't wear any clothing at all.

(IRINA and OLGA enter with a cake, in time to hear TUSENBACH'S remark)

IRINA

Who won't wear any clothes? What a funny idea!

OLGA

Please, Baron, this is a party!

IRINA

And you all look so funny in your hats, too! What a wonderful party!

OLGA

I'm going to cut the cake now. (She tries to cut the cake, but her hands are shaking) No, I'm too unhappy to cut cake. And where is Andrei? He should be joining in the fun! (She slashes at the cake) Please, don't mind me! Everyone, enjoy yourself!

MASHA

Here, Olga! Let me help.

IRINA

Olga, no wonder you're not having fun. You forgot your hat! (She passes a hat to OLGA, who does with it whatever the actress playing her deems appropriate).

(And then, ANDREI enters with NATASHA, who dressed up, rather gaudily)

OLGA

Andrei! Thank God you're here! Where in heaven's name have you been?

ANDREI

Getting married. Natasha and I got married this afternoon. (They stare at them).

OLGA

Oh my God!

