

# *UNCLE*

*by Lee Blessing*

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\*\*\*\* July 29, 2015 version \*\*\*\*

*Casting Note:*

**There is a cast of six. One actor plays both WARING and SEREBRYAKOV**

**The voice of PAUL's wife should be provided by the actress playing YELENA**

**BEINGS from other worlds are played by available cast members**

*Cast*

*(in order of appearance)*

**PAUL WAYMILLER, a Chekhov scholar, 30's**

**WARING BURTON, his uncle by marriage, 50's**

**IVAN PETROVICH VOYNITSKY (VANYA), 47**

**DR. MIKHAIL ASTROV, 40**

**SOFIA ALEKSANDROVNA SEREBRYAKOVA (SONYA), 20's**

**YELENA SEREBRYAKOVA, 27**

**ALEXANDER SEREBRYAKOV, 60's**

**VARIOUS CREATURES, BEINGS and ENTITIES from other worlds**

**Now**

**Garden of a lake home, north of the City**

## *Scene One*

(Upstage an eerie light throbs—oscillating from a low level to blindingly bright. Its pulses are accompanied by a LOW, UNEARTHLY SOUND.

In the foreground is a sunken garden. An old stone wall partially rings the area. Hint of northern forest. A lake in one direction, a house in the other. Late afternoon.

A carpet extends from just in front of the light and runs in a wide arc which circles around and ends back at the light. Three or four signs in the shape of arrows stand along the carpet, all pointing the same direction.

PAUL and WARING enter from the house. Astounded, WARING stares at the light upstage)

WARING

What *is* that thing?!

PAUL

You see it too, eh? That's good to know.

WARING

My God. My God, Paul! What on earth—?

PAUL

Actually, only part of it's on Earth.

WARING

How long has it been here?

PAUL

A week. It's ruined my schedule. I'm almost a chapter behind.

WARING

And this is what the strange lights are? The noises at night?

PAUL

I'm sorry if it keeps you up.

WARING

What *is* it?!

PAUL

A wormhole.

WARING

A *worm*—?

PAUL

Damn gateway to some other universe.

WARING

Are you sure? How do you know?

PAUL

Believe me, Uncle Waring, I know. And not just one other universe, either. Might be thousands. Millions, even.

WARING

Millions?

PAUL

Who knows? Maybe an infinite number.

WARING

My God. So you're saying it's a . . . a—?

PAUL

Cosmic sinkhole. Or garbage disposal, depending on what comes out.

WARING

Something comes *out*?!

PAUL

Right here at the end of my yard. Why does everything happen to me?!

WARING

You have to report this.

PAUL

I'm not reporting it.

WARING

You have to!

PAUL

I'm not reporting it to anybody. Wouldn't have told you, except you're right across the inlet.

WARING

You can't keep it a secret.

PAUL

I can try.

WARING

Paul—

PAUL

I refuse to let this thing ruin my summer! I have a book to finish.

WARING

But the rest of the family's coming up. In two weeks every house on the inlet will be—

PAUL

Two weeks is all I need!

(as the light suddenly dims and pulses with a LOW,  
UNEARTHLY SOUND)

See? It's fading—comes and goes. It's been shrinking, too. Might be gone before anyone else comes up. Wormholes are notoriously unstable.

WARING

So are you, if you think you can keep this quiet.

PAUL

I can't let a circus descend on me right now. I have too much at stake.

WARING

You're just writing a book.

PAUL

I'm writing *the* book. My gateway to tenure.

WARING

Have you no sense of proportion?

PAUL

Why'd I even show you? I knew you wouldn't understand.

WARING

Maybe you should call Paige.

PAUL

No. For the next two weeks I'm doing nothing but writing. And you are going home. This . . . thing will have to fade away on its own. Promise me you'll keep it secret.

WARING

What about the things that . . . come out?

PAUL

It's not a problem.

WARING

It's isn't?! What exactly does—?

PAUL

Nothing. A mixed bag.

WARING

How do they . . . ? What do they—?

PAUL

Look like? I don't know—humanoid, other. It doesn't matter.

WARING

Are they here? Are they around?

PAUL

Will you stop worrying? What do you think the carpet's for?

WARING

The carpet?

PAUL

And the arrows.

WARING

I don't understand. How does that—?

(Suddenly there's an UNEARTHLY SOUND. The wormhole grows very bright)

PAUL

Damn it! Well, here you are—see for yourself.

WARING

See what? Oh, my *God*—!

(A CREATURE emerges out of the now blinding wormhole. It should be large, have arms and legs, but also some unpleasant combination of wet fur, feathers and a shell. An antenna maybe? Flowers growing out of it?)

WARING (cont'd)

What in God's name—?!!

(PAUL calmly approaches the CREATURE, which appears dazed, and ushers it along the carpet)

PAUL

Hello. Hello. Welcome. How are you? Right this way, please.

WARING

What are you doing?



PAUL

Little trick I picked up.

(to the CREATURE)

Feeling dizzy? Understandable. Just stay on the carpet, watch the signs. That's right. That's the way.

(The CREATURE follows PAUL in a slow circle until it once again approaches the wormhole)

WARING

I don't understand.

PAUL

Just follow the light. All the way, right into the bright, shining light. All the dizziness will pass away, and—there you *go!*

(PAUL shoves the CREATURE back into the wormhole)

WARING

What was that?!

PAUL

Nothing. Creature from another world.

WARING

What did you . . . ? How did you . . . ?

PAUL

No matter who comes through that wormhole, they're dazed. They see an arrow, they follow it. Gives me just enough time to get them out of here again.

WARING

You mean you—?

PAUL

Throw them back, wherever they came from. Or . . . wherever they go next, I suppose.

WARING

But isn't that wrong?

PAUL

Hold on. I'll consult my guide on interdimensional ethics.

WARING

I was just—

PAUL

We have no idea what these things are. You actually want 'em around?

WARING

But . . . but what about science?

PAUL

Is science going to finish my book? Science can study the next wormhole.

WARING

Paul—

(The wormhole brightens to blinding again. UNEARTHLY  
SOUND crescendos. PAUL groans)

PAUL (cont'd)

I knew it. They tend to come in threes.

(A STRANGE BEING, this one crouched over and  
almost entirely gelatinous, rolls out of the wormhole.  
It doesn't have a head and seems to have wheels  
instead of forepaws. PAUL gives it the same drill)

PAUL (cont'd)

Hello. Hello. Glad you could make it. Long trip? Dizzy? Please stay on the carpet. Follow the  
arrows. Can you see the arrows? Do you have eyes?

WARING

What *is* that thing?!

PAUL

No judgments! We move along the carpet and toward the light. That's all we do. That's right.  
That's right.

WARING

Are they all from the same world?

PAUL

I severely doubt it.

(to the STRANGE BEING)

Very good! Just move along into the light. That's right. That's right. Right . . . *in!*

(kicking the STRANGE BEING into the wormhole)

And that is how we get rid of gooey strangers. Want to do the next one?

WARING

I don't think so.

PAUL

Come on. Once in a lifetime experience.

WARING

(as the *son et lumiere* of the wormhole starts up again)

No! No! Paul, I mean it—!

PAUL

Come on—

WARING

No, I—

(A MUMMY-LIKE ENTITY enters. She has feet but no arms. She seems to be wrapped from her head down to mid-calf in a seamless garment. It covers her face as well—everything but her mouth, which is always open. She takes short, shuffling steps)

PAUL

See? Not so bad.

(PAUL gestures for WARING to escort her)

WARING

Hello. Hello. Welcome.

(The ENTITY turns to WARING. She suddenly gives a horrible SCREAM. WARING tries to run. PAUL stops him)

WARING (cont'd)

*Let me go!*

PAUL

It's just noise! Move her along! You can do it!

WARING

Excuse me? Miss?

(The ENTITY SCREAMS AGAIN, even more horribly.  
WARING escorts her along the carpet)

WARING

Paul—!

PAUL

You're doing great! Ask her if she's dizzy!

WARING

Just . . . this . . . way . . . Miss . . .

(as she SCREAMS again)

*Paul—!!*

PAUL

The arrows! The arrows!

WARING

Follow the . . . arrows—

PAUL

Tell her she's almost there!

WARING

You're almost . . . almost—

(as she SCREAMS)

*Paul!*

PAUL  
Kick her!

WARING  
What—?!

PAUL  
*Kick her!!!*

(She's at the brink of the wormhole again. WARING gives her a delicate kick. She stumbles forward into the light, SCREAMING as she goes)

WARING  
Omigod, omigod, omigod—!!

PAUL  
Easy, Uncle. Great work. See? The whole thing's entirely manageable.

WARING  
I think I'm having a heart attack.

PAUL  
You're fine. It's just things from another world.

WARING  
Things . . .

PAUL  
Feeling a little dazed? You should go home and forget about all this.

WARING  
I . . . have to go home.

PAUL  
Great idea.

WARING  
Going home now . . . Going to lie down for a while . . .

PAUL

Excellent. Remember: no word of this to anyone. At least for the next two weeks. It'll probably be gone by then. If not, we'll reassess.

WARING

Reassess . . . Okay. Okay . . . Which way is my house?

PAUL

Just follow the road.

WARING

Right . . .

PAUL

All the way around, last one on the left. Do I need to go with you?

WARING

No, no, I'll be . . . fine.

PAUL

I've got to get back to work. Thanks for coming over.

WARING

I . . . I . . . wouldn't have . . . You know . . .

PAUL

Missed it?

WARING

Right. Right . . .

(WARING exits. PAUL starts into his house, but the wormhole starts to power up again)

PAUL

Again?!

(He moves to the wormhole as a very human-appearing ALIEN enters. He's dressed in a sparkly, futuristic robe.)

His voice is high-pitched, mechanical. He's mildly dazed,  
but not as much as the others)

PAUL (cont'd)

Hello.

HUMANOID ALIEN

Hello!

PAUL

You speak. That's great.

HUMANOID ALIEN

I speak several million languages.

PAUL

Fabulous. This way, please.

HUMANOID ALIEN

I bring you answers to all your problems.

PAUL

That's wonderful. Stay on the carpet, please. Follow the arrows.

HUMANOID ALIEN

Arrows? Oh, yes. Sorry. I bring you an end to all strife. Cures for every disease. Immortality!  
These are my gifts to your world.

PAUL

Great, but actually I'm working on a book right now about a play, *Uncle Vanya*. Ever heard of it?

HUMANOID ALIEN

You will have food in abundance. Universal love—

PAUL

Super. I'm on a schedule, so we've got to keep moving. That's right. That's right.

HUMANOID ALIEN

Where are we going?

PAUL

I have no idea.

(Paul gives the HUMANOID ALIEN a hearty shove)

HUMANOID ALIEN

(disappearing into the light)

I could save you—!

(He's gone. Instantly the wormhole powers down)

PAUL (cont'd)

Thank. God.

(to the wormhole)

Now, may I please have some peace?

(PAUL exits into his house. After a moment, the wormhole silently brightens, but only to a low level. Its SOUND too is barely audible. UNCLE VANYA, a little dazed, steps out of the wormhole. He seems to have stepped directly out of Chekhov's play: same fashionable tie, slightly rumpled suit. Disoriented, he stares at the house, then at the lake, then back at the wormhole—from which SONYA now enters. They speak Russian, but of course we hear it as contemporary English, with no Russian accent)

SONYA

Where did I . . . ? How did . . . ?

VANYA

Sonya?

SONYA

What happened? Where's grandmother? Where's nurse? Where's Waffles? Where's—?

VANYA

The house?



SONYA

I don't remember walking out.

VANYA

Neither do I.

(of the little arrows)

What are these?

SONYA

I don't know. They go in a line that leads to . . .

(They look back at the wormhole)

VANYA

Are we supposed to walk back in?

PAUL

(rushing out from the house)

Hello, hello, hello! My God, I didn't even hear it this time!

VANYA

Who are you?

PAUL

Please, if you'll just stay on the carpet—

SONYA

Where are we? What's going on?

PAUL

You speak Russian? Amazing. I've studied Russian all my— Doesn't matter. If you could just follow the arrows . . . That's right—

VANYA

No! Stop! Stop right there! *Who—are—you?*

PAUL

It's so odd that you're Russian.

VANYA

Answer me!

PAUL

No need to get angry. I'm a scholar. I'm American, but I've studied Russian for —

SONYA

You speak very well.

PAUL

Thank you.

VANYA

What's your *name*?

PAUL

Paul. Paul Waymiller. I don't mean to rush you, but if you could keep —

SONYA

What's happened? Where are we?

PAUL

Just another stop along the way. If you'll please —

VANYA

No! Not till I know what's going on! I am Voynitsky. Ivan Petrovich.

PAUL

What?

VANYA

This is my niece, Sofia Alexandrovna.

PAUL

Sofia . . . ?

SONYA

Call me Sonya.

PAUL

Sonya? And he's . . . ? He's . . . ?

SONYA

My Uncle Vanya. Yes.

PAUL

(suspicious)

O—kay . . .

VANYA

What part of Russia are we in?

PAUL

Russia?

SONYA

If you're American, why are you here?

PAUL

Because this is America?

SONYA

What?

VANYA

That's impossible. We were just—

PAUL

Where did you come from?

SONYA

From there. From the light.

PAUL

Oh no, you didn't. No, no, no—this is . . . Okay, who set this up?

VANYA

What do you mean?

PAUL

It's Waring, right? Waring sent you guys?

VANYA

Who?

PAUL

My uncle Waring. The one who's paying you.

SONYA

We don't know anyone named—

PAUL

Stop—please. It's *very* cute. He clearly went to a lot of trouble. But this is not the day for it, so—

VANYA

What are you talking about?

PAUL

Just . . . drop the character?

VANYA

Drop the—?

PAUL

I should've shown him the wormhole days ago. He would've cancelled this.

SONYA

Is he crazy?

PAUL

Can you please cut the act? Where's the rest of you? He must've hired a whole cast. Anything less wouldn't be Waring.

SONYA

Who?

PAUL

My uncle. Rich, time-on-his-hands Uncle Waring. He always finds the worst possible moment to make some over-the-top gesture he thinks will motivate me.

(turning toward the lake, yelling)

Are you home yet?! Two weeks, Uncle Waring! That's all I've got! Can't deal with distractions!

VANYA

Who are you talking to?

PAUL

You're from the city, right? Are you really actors, or just Russian speakers? He paid for your costumes, I hope.

SONYA

Costumes?

PAUL

Did you all drive up in a minibus or something? Where is it? End of the driveway?

VANYA

(pointing at the wormhole)

No, no! We came through that.

PAUL

There's no way in the world you came through that.

VANYA

How do you know?

PAUL

Because you're *fictional*.

VANYA

He makes no sense at all.

PAUL

Oh, yeah? How's this for sense? If you and your merry ilk aren't back on the road in two minutes, I'm calling the police. How does that—?

(DR. ASTROV enters from the wormhole, dazed.  
His feet are spread wide)

PAUL (cont'd)

How does . . . ? How does . . . ?

SONYA

Doctor Astrov!

ASTROV

What happened to my horse?

VANYA

Are you all right?

ASTROV

Yes . . . Yes, I think so.

PAUL

How does . . . ? How does . . . ?

ASTROV

Who's he?

SONYA

An American.

ASTROV

What's he doing here?

VANYA

No idea.

SONYA

His Russian's good, but he makes no sense.

ASTROV

I don't understand . . . How did I get here?

SONYA

Like us, probably. There was a light—

ASTROV

There was a light!

VANYA

There was a light.

ASTROV

And now, we're . . . Where?

VANYA

We're not sure. He says America.

ASTROV

America? How is that possible?

PAUL

How does . . . ? How . . . ?

ASTROV

Is that all he says?

VANYA

Forget him. All he's done is rave. Now he's catatonic.

SONYA

A moment ago we were safe in the house, doing accounts. How did we *get* here?!

VANYA

Stay calm. Things could be worse.

SONYA

How? How could they be worse?!

(SEREBRYAKOV and YELENA enter from the wormhole.  
YELENA's dazed. SEREBRYAKOV seems chipper, even  
though he limps badly and uses a cane)

SEREBRYAKOV

What a quick trip! I must have dozed off. Are we at the station?

ASTROV

Professor!

SONYA

(hugging her)

Yelena—!!

SEREBRYAKOV

What are you doing here? You're not going to Kharkov, are you?

ASTROV

No, Professor.

VANYA

No one is, you sleeping idiot. Something strange has happened.

SEREBRYAKOV

It has? Who's that?

(They all look at PAUL, who stares open-mouthed. Suddenly PAUL faints. BLACKOUT, except for the wormhole which at first dims, then disappears completely with a "BEE-OOP!")



## Scene Two

(Late morning, two days later. No trace of the wormhole. The arrows and carpet are gone. Chairs and a table have been added to the garden, plus an antique samovar with dishes for tea and cakes. A guitar leans against the table. SEREBRYAKOV is in a wheelchair)

The chairs are arranged in a semi-circle downstage of the table. PAUL, VANYA and ASTROV sit watching SONYA and SEREBRYAKOV, who hold Russian-language scripts of *Uncle Vanya* in their laps as though waiting to perform a scene. PAUL sits in front of them, ready to direct. They're not actors, and in fact they're not trying to perform so much as read what they've been asked to read)

SEREBRYAKOV

" . . . Sonya, give me my pills from the desk."

SONYA

Desk?

PAUL

Just mime it.

SONYA

Oh.

(doing so)

"Here you are."

SEREBRYAKOV

"Not those! Can't I ask anyone for anything!?"

(to PAUL)

I never said this.

SONYA

Yes, you did.

SEREBRYAKOV

It makes me sound terrible. I don't understand—why are we doing this?

SONYA

Yes, why?

PAUL

I told you, I need to finish my book. For some unknowable reason, you've been transported into my back yard: unfortunate for you, amazingly fortunate for me, since you're exactly the people I'm writing about. You're going to help me make my deadline—isn't that great? Where's Yelena? She's supposed to be in this scene. Yelena?! Can you *please* get out here?

YELENA

Hello, everyone. Forgive me.

(YELENA enters from the house, script in hand.  
She's gorgeous. Both VANYA and ASTROV rise  
instantly and move to help her to a seat next to  
SEREBRYAKOV, who puts his foot on her lap)

PAUL

Um, that's not necessary. She doesn't massage your feet here.

SEREBRYAKOV

She does if it hurts, and it *hurts*. I can't help it if I have gout.

ASTROV

It's rheumatism, not gout. Don't be vain.

PAUL

All right. Fine. Let's get back to the scene. Sonya's line—the most important part.

VANYA

Why is that the most important?

PAUL

Because the book's named for her. *Sonya—Belief, Abnegation and Self-Sabotage in Chekhov's World: Longing in the House of Obligation.*

SEREBRYAKOV

Awfully long title—

PAUL

It's scholarly. You should appreciate that.

ASTROV

I don't understand. Just because we're characters in some play in your world—

PAUL

*Uncle Vanya*. It's a classic.

SEREBRYAKOV

Doesn't sound like a classic to me.

VANYA

How would you know?

SEREBRYAKOV

I've spent my life in the academy!

VANYA

*Asleep*.

YELENA

Why's it about Sonya?

PAUL

Stop, all of you! Listen. This is a *quid pro quo*. You help me; I'll help you—in *two weeks*. Once I turn my manuscript in, I'll help you adjust to your new world. 'Til then, you need to help me. I'm stuck in the last chapter. As good as he is, Chekhov leaves some big questions. For example, what the hell is *wrong* with you people?

ASTROV

What are you talking about?

PAUL

You're all *miserable*. Rich or poor, beautiful or plain, married or not, healthy or not—it doesn't matter. All you do is complain and feel sorry for yourselves.

SEREBRYAKOV

Ridiculous.

PAUL

It is? Then show me the scenes in the play with all the light, happy music. I seem to have missed those.

YELENA

It's only a play—

PAUL

No, no. We've already established that in your world this play is exactly what happened, all summer long. This play *is* you.

VANYA

What of it? We have the right to be whoever we are. We don't need your permission.

PAUL

But you do need to help me understand. Sonya, why are you the way you are?

SONYA

What? I don't know . . .

PAUL

Exactly. I wouldn't expect you to—which is why we have to work through these scenes. You have to tell me what you were thinking, what you were feeling.

VANYA

Question.

PAUL

Yes?

VANYA

If the play's about me, why's your book about Sonya?

ASTROV

Yes, I was wondering that.

YELENA

Me too.

PAUL

Everyone writes about you, Vanya. My publisher needs a fresh perspective. Plus I think Sonya's crucial. You provide all the superficial, ironic fireworks in the play, but Sonya's the mature one.

SEREBRYAKOV

Sonya?

SONYA

Is it so hard to believe?

PAUL

This can be fun if you let it. We have tea, we have cake, a garden—it really is your world. You'll see, two weeks will fly by.

(as they groan)

You are, all of you, my dearest dream come true. I've dedicated myself to Chekhov—the samovar, the guitar . . . Look: I'm standing next to the divine Yelena. To me you were always fictional, but here you are. I'm holding the hand of—

SEREBRYAKOV

My wife.

PAUL

Sorry. How's the wheelchair working out? You were limping so badly—

SEREBRYAKOV

It's fine, fine.

PAUL

Broke my leg a couple years ago; that's why I even have it.

SEREBRYAKOV

Get to the point.

PAUL

Oh, yes. Um, so while the wormhole may be gone—

SEREBRYAKOV

Why do you keep calling it that? There's no worm big enough to—

VANYA

Not that kind of wormhole, you dunce! He's told us a dozen times.

SONYA

Don't be cross, Uncle. It's difficult for everyone.

PAUL

I think if we can just keep on schedule, everything will work out fine. Sonya, go ahead and say your next line.

SONYA

"Don't be spoiled, Father. Other people may put up with it, but not me—I don't have the time. We're up early tomorrow to make hay."

PAUL

Great! Stop right there.

SONYA

But— Vanya's supposed to enter?

PAUL

Unimportant. Doesn't matter.

VANYA

Doesn't matter?

PAUL

Not in the least. Sonya—

VANYA

(muttering to ASTROV)

It's called *Uncle Vanya*.

PAUL

*Shhh!* Sonya, you see how you are? Powerful. Dismissive of your own father. Able to stand up for yourself.

SONYA

So?

PAUL

So, you're strong. You're not just a drudge, managing an estate for others.

SONYA

Is that how I'm seen?

PAUL

It's how you see yourself, at the end of the play. Why do you think that is?

SONYA

I . . . I have no idea.

SEREBRYAKOV

I do. It's because she's not married.

SONYA

Father—!

PAUL

You think so?

SEREBRYAKOV

Absolutely. Plus she's getting a little long in the tooth to have much hope of a husband now.

PAUL

What do you think about that, Sonya?

SONYA

I—! I—!

PAUL

Do you want a husband?

SONYA

I—! I—!

PAUL

'Cause here's what I see: you have power. Down deep, you're not the put-upon, long-suffering, romantically hopeless self-denier that others—scholars, even—make you out to be. You're far more complex.

SONYA

I . . . am?

PAUL

For example. How do you feel about your father right now?

SONYA

My father? I . . . I don't know . . .

PAUL

Yes, you do. You know exactly how you feel. You're just repressing it.

SONYA

Repressing?

PAUL

Freud—you're a little early, don't worry about it. What would you do with your father right now, if you could do anything?

SONYA

Anything?

PAUL

Anything.

SONYA

I'd . . .

PAUL

Yes?

SONYA

I'd . . .



You'd what? PAUL

I'd . . . SONYA

Say it. PAUL

I can't. SONYA

Say it, Sonya. Help me with my book. PAUL

I'd . . . I'd . . . SONYA

*Say it!* PAUL

No! SONYA

*SAY IT!* PAUL

I'd blow him up! SONYA

With dynamite? PAUL

Yes! With dynamite! SONYA

Sonya—! SEREBRYAKOV

SONYA

Lots and lots and lots of dynamite!

PAUL

Yes! Exactly! *That's* how you feel! I knew it!

(Stricken by what she's said, SONYA starts for the house)

PAUL (cont'd)

Please don't leave! There's another scene.

(SONYA stops, unsure what to do. She diverts to the table and sits facing away from everybody, trying to compose herself)

PAUL (cont'd)

No progress without pain, I guess. Good, though. Wonderful work. So. Where were we?

VANYA

I protest. This is abusive. Even if you do plan to help us, it doesn't give you the right to treat us like slaves.

PAUL

Slaves? You're not slaves. You're free to go any time.

YELENA

We can?

PAUL

Of course. You can strike out on your own whenever you like, in a country where you don't know the language or the customs, with no money or friends—

ASTROV

We get your point.

VANYA

It doesn't matter. You still need to treat us better.

PAUL

Better than you treat yourselves?

SEREBRYAKOV

When you do finally choose to help us—

PAUL

Yes?

SEREBRYAKOV

How will you get us to Russia?

PAUL

I won't.

VANYA

You won't? Why not?!

PAUL

Believe me, it's not the Russia you left.

ASTROV

What do you mean by that?

PAUL

Can we please discuss this later?

ASTROV

You're talking about the rest of our lives.

PAUL

All right, all right. I'll do this quickly. Then we get back to our scene study, yes? Okay, um . . . Doctor Astrov, what year is it? In your world.

ASTROV

1899.

PAUL

What year do you think it is here?

YELENA

We don't know. You wouldn't tell us.

PAUL

I didn't want to—not for the next two weeks. But here, obviously, it's further in the future. In fact, it's over a hundred years later. We're in the Twenty-First Century.

YELENA

My God.

PAUL

I didn't tell you because I need to protect you. Our worlds are not quite identical. I can't allow you to be polluted.

YELENA

Polluted?

PAUL

By the differences. Not 'til my book's finished. Once it's done, you'll have all the information you want.

ASTROV

The Twenty-First Century? It's so hard to accept.

PAUL

It's not all bad news. Here, listen. Does this sound familiar?

(reading from the play)

"The people living a hundred years from now, for whom we're clearing a path, will they remember us kindly?"

ASTROV

I said that. This summer.

PAUL

Exactly! It's right here in the play. And now I can tell you the answer. Yes! Yes, we do remember you kindly. You're dearer to us than you could have dreamed.

ASTROV

Extraordinary.

YELENA

What about that light thing? Can't we go back to our own world through that . . . that . . . ?

PAUL

Wormhole? It's gone. Disappeared two days ago, right after you showed up. Even if you could go into it again, there's no knowing where you'd end up.

YELENA

So . . . we're stranded.

PAUL

But is that bad news? In your world you were depressed. None of your lives was working out.

SEREBRYAKOV

Mine was.

VANYA

This seems awfully convenient. We're sucked up by a light, and who do we find? A man who seems to have all the answers *except* how we can get back to our estate.

PAUL

It's not my fault if—

VANYA

Get the wormhole back.

PAUL

I can't. But why would it matter? You're here now.

VANYA

What does *that* mean?

PAUL

Just that you're clearly where . . . Fate I guess, wants you.

VANYA

"Fate"?

PAUL

For lack of a better word.

VANYA

But you're the one who's happy, not Fate. How do we know you're not the one who created this light?

PAUL

I told you: wormholes just are.

VANYA

So you say.

PAUL

They're theoretical. No one's ever seen one before.

VANYA

That *is* convenient.

PAUL

More than convenient. It's unbelievable—

(VANYA suddenly grabs PAUL by the lapels)

VANYA

*Isn't it?!*

SONYA

Uncle—!

YELENA

Vanya, let him go!

VANYA

How do we get home!?

PAUL

You don't—

VANYA

(shaking him hard)

I need a better answer!

ASTROV

Vanya—!

SONYA

Uncle!

PAUL

It's the truth!

VANYA

Bring it *back!*

PAUL

I can't—!

VANYA

Now!!

PAUL

I'm *sorry—!*

VANYA

What *are* you?! An imbecile?! A magician?! A demon—*what!?!?*

PAUL

I'm a college professor—!

VANYA

(throwing him down in disgust)

*Agggghhh—!!* I should have known.

(to SEREBRYAKOV)

He's worse than you.

(SONYA rushes to help PAUL as VANYA stalks over to where the wormhole was)

SONYA  
Are you all right?

PAUL  
Yes, I'm . . . Thanks.

SEREBRYAKOV  
More tea, Vanya?

VANYA  
Quiet!

SONYA  
Doctor, help me.

ASTROV  
Nothing broken?

PAUL  
I'm fine.

ASTROV  
Up we go then.

(ASTROV and SONYA help PAUL back to his seat)

PAUL  
Thanks. Thank you, Sonya.

(SONYA immediately goes back to the table. This  
Time she sits facing the others)

PAUL (cont'd)  
Vanya—

VANYA  
Why do you call me that? I don't know you. We're not related. You're not my friend.



ASTROV

Perhaps we should change the subject for a while. Just to calm down.

YELENA

Good idea.

PAUL

I'm sorry if I offended you, but why wouldn't I be happy you're here? All I ask is two weeks. It's the least you can do for Chekhov. He immortalized you.

YELENA

I can't believe he wrote plays.

PAUL

Beautiful plays, full of human frailty, and failure and ironic resignation.

YELENA

In our world he's a short-story writer. That's all.

PAUL

He may have given up playwriting in your world. He almost did here.

YELENA

I still don't understand. Why should Chekhov write about us?

PAUL

Because he knew you, he loved you, he imagined you fully. He looked deep inside and saw that each of you has terrible self-esteem—

SEREBRYAKOV

*I don't.*

PAUL

But that you also struggle, heroically at times, for self-respect. He loved your hopeless efforts to think well of yourselves—

SONYA

Are we being complimented or insulted?

PAUL

Oh, the highest compliment of all. Your struggle's universal. All of you fail, but you dream of being better. Even though you're afraid and vain and lazy to the bone—

VANYA

What on earth is your point?

PAUL

My point is that because I study this play I know you—better than you know yourselves.

ASTROV

Absurd.

PAUL

Is it? You're ashamed of your moustache. And you drink too much.

(to SONYA, with a nod at ASTROV)

You're in love with this man, but he finds you too plain to reciprocate.

(to YELENA)

You're intelligent and beautiful, but you float through life aimlessly—of use to no one, least of all yourself.

(to VANYA)

You're even more useless, but you think you could have been Schopenhauer, which is—you know, just sad.

(to SEREBRYAKOV)

And everyone—everyone—hates you.

SEREBRYAKOV

They do not! They . . . they . . .

(as the others avert their eyes)

*Oh—!*

PAUL

We should get back to work. The next scene is Yelena and Astrov.

(off a general groan)

Come on, everyone. We can make this fun if we want. You both stand here.

ASTROV

(taking his script, moving where PAUL indicated)

You really picked Sonya?

PAUL

What?

ASTROV

For your book, I mean. Why her? Why not me?

YELENA

Or me?

SEREBRYAKOV

Or me?

VANYA

It's called *Uncle Vanya*.

PAUL

Please you two, just read from there. Sonya, come closer. I want you to follow along carefully.

(Reluctantly, SONYA joins them)

YELENA

"I need to interrogate you, Doctor. And . . . it's embarrassing. I don't know how to start."

ASTROV

"Interrogate?"

YELENA

"It's completely innocent." It says we sit?

PAUL

Oh, right. Don't bother.

YELENA

"I need to ask you about a certain young person. Let's talk honestly, like friends, without any hedging. Just talk and then forget about it. All right?"

ASTROV

"All right."

VANYA

Sonya's not in this? I don't understand. If it's about Sonya—

PAUL

*Shhhhh—!*

YELENA

"My stepdaughter Sonya. Do you like her?"

PAUL

Oooh, that's so important. Can you say it with more feeling?

YELENA

I'm not an actress.

PAUL

Right. Right, sorry.

(to ASTROV)

Your line then.

ASTROV

"Yes, I respect her very much."

YELENA

"Do you like her as a woman?"

ASTROV

"No".

(to PAUL)

I'm sorry, it says I pause before I answer. Should I do that?

PAUL

Not important.

SONYA

Not important? Not *important*?

PAUL

You want the pause?

SONYA

It says he pauses!

PAUL

We can have him do it. Doctor?

ASTROV

The pause, you mean? How long?

PAUL

I don't know . . . How long should the pause be?

SONYA

Forever! It should be forever!

YELENA

Oh, for God's—

SONYA

Before he says no? Before he crushes my entire life?!

PAUL

Even so, it's not really in the spirit of a play to pause forever.

(off SONYA's baleful stare, to ASTROV and YELENA)

Okay, let's just presume you did pause before you said no, and . . . go from there.

SONYA

No! No more. This is . . . simply cruel.

PAUL

It's accurate though, right? This is what you said?

(YELENA and ASTROV mutter simultaneously)

YELENA

We did.

ASTROV

Yes.

SONYA

Why do I have to see this scene at all? I wasn't there!

PAUL

But you set it in motion. You asked Yelena to talk to him, knowing the sort of man-trap she is—

YELENA

I beg your pardon!

PAUL

You enlisted the “help” of the very person likeliest to ruin all your chances with the doctor. Why? That’s the question I’m trying to answer—

SONYA

Yelena’s not my enemy; she’s my stepmother!

PAUL

Your evil stepmother, in this case. Face it, Sonya. In many ways, you are your own worst enemy.

SONYA

I’m a good person! I’m hard-working and sincere, and I’m *soft-spoken!* And I’m . . . I’m honest.

PAUL

Even with yourself?

(PAUL motions to YELENA)

YELENA

“A couple more words then, and we’re done. Tell me, have you noticed nothing?”

ASTROV

“Noticed? No.”

SONYA

“No.” “No.” Is that the only word he knows?

YELENA

It says I take his hand.

PAUL

Do it.

YELENA

"You don't love her. It's in your eyes."

SONYA

Why are they holding hands? Why are they —?

PAUL

Shh. They did, so they are.

YELENA

"Sonya is suffering. You need to understand and stop coming here."

ASTROV

"I'm too old to . . . Who's got the time . . . ?" And now I shrug?

(as PAUL nods)

"When could I ever . . . ?" And then it just says I'm embarrassed.

PAUL

Were you embarrassed?

ASTROV

Yes, certainly. But also . . .

PAUL

What?

ASTROV

Irritated.

PAUL

Because . . . ?

ASTROV

I didn't want to talk about Sonya. I wanted to—

PAUL

Proposition Yelena?

SONYA

*Oh—!*

YELENA

*You're* the one who told me to talk to him.

SONYA

About me! *You flirted* with him, you held his hand—!

YELENA

Everyone wants to make love to me; it doesn't matter what I do!

SONYA

That's no excuse!

(to ASTROV)

And you. You never loved me.

ASTROV

I never said I did.

SONYA

Why not!? You saw how I felt about you. Everyone did. Why couldn't you love me?

ASTROV

You're too plain. Isn't she?

(SEREBRYAKOV, VANYA and YELENA nod, mutter together)

SEREBRYAKOV

You have a point—

VANYA

I suppose—

YELENA

Looks aren't everything—

SONYA

*That's not why.*

ASTROV

It isn't?

PAUL

Why do you think it is, Sonya? Say it. Tell him the reason.



SONYA

You're incapable of love. You never loved anyone. You never will.

PAUL

He did say he loved the old nurse, in the first scene of the —

SONYA

Will you please shut *up*?!

(to ASTROV again, as though seeing him clearly for the first time)

To think I spent years dreaming about an absurd, loveless . . . drunk.

PAUL

That—was—wonderful!

SONYA

*Wonderful?!!*

PAUL

Exactly what I'm looking for! The moment when Sonya sees herself as she really is, stripped of all illusions—even those that Chekhov left her.

(as SONYA stalks into the house)

Sonya! Come back! We need to discuss what's really happening in the scene! You set it up! You set it all up! *Sonya!*

(PAUL hurries into the house after her)

SEREBRYAKOV

Is there any more cake?

(Lights shift)

### *Scene Three*

(Same day, early afternoon. PAUL escorts SONYA toward the table. The chairs are no longer in a semicircle. The empty wheelchair's by the house)

SONYA

What is it you want?

PAUL

Please don't be angry. I'm sorry if I put you in an awkward position.

SONYA

Awkward? I was humiliated.

PAUL

It wasn't my intention—far from it. While everyone's finishing lunch I was hoping we could clear the air. The fact is, I haven't been entirely honest with you.

SONYA

About what?

PAUL

About why you're the center of my book.

SONYA

So you don't think I'm the most important?

PAUL

No, no—I do. But I also, um . . . God knows I've tried to control myself, tried to maintain the proper academic distance. But it's impossible. Sonya, ever since I first read *Uncle Vanya* . . . I've been in love with you.

SONYA

You've what?

PAUL

I love you. You're so strong and good and enduring—

SONYA  
And plain?

PAUL  
I never said that.

SONYA  
Everyone else did. And you got them to.

PAUL  
Only so you'd see—

SONYA  
How plain I am.

PAUL  
No, no—

(as she starts to go)

Please stay! Please? Let me explain. I have so much to tell you, I— You know what I did the moment I finished *Uncle Vanya* for the first time?

SONYA  
What?

PAUL  
I masturbated.  
(as she starts again to go)

No—wait! I masturbated for the very first time! I was twelve, and I wasn't thinking about Yelena's striking but superficial beauty or how she and Astrov flirted with the idea of an affair. I was thinking of you!

SONYA  
This is not attractive.

PAUL  
(grabbing her hand)  
I'm not good around people, I admit it. But try to hear what I'm saying. Your purity, your dedication, your faith in a God who will one day—maybe not today, maybe not in our lifetime—

PAUL (cont'd)

be merciful, *these* are the things that made me physically excited. You see? You're not plain to me. You're life itself, the ideal woman. The *template*. The essence of beauty, not its trappings.

SONYA

I don't know what you're —

PAUL

Sonya, marry me!

SONYA

What?

PAUL

Be my wife.

SONYA

I've known you two days.

PAUL

And I've known you forever — since I was twelve, anyway. I've loved you all my life. But you were a character, a fiction, an ideal in Chekhov's mind — too pure to be real. Still, I always told myself if I ever met a woman like you I'd propose to her on the spot.

SONYA

Please —

PAUL

And now here you are! Not a copy, but the real thing!

SONYA

This is too sudden —

PAUL

Not sudden enough! You and I were meant to be together. I've been waiting for you my whole life —

SONYA

Since you were twelve.

PAUL

You know what I mean! I've never loved any woman but you.

(His CELL RINGS. He pulls it from his pocket)

PAUL (cont'd)

Damn, I thought I turned that off.

SONYA

What's that?

PAUL

Cellphone. Telephone. I'll explain later.

(looking at it)

I have to take this; just be a minute. Hello? Oh, hello! Surprised to hear from you, thought you were up on the mountain. Actually, I can't talk right now. Right in the middle of something.

What? Skype later tonight? Fine. Thanks, darling. Love you too. 'Bye.

(putting away his cell)

Where were we?

SONYA

Who was that?

PAUL

Nobody. My wife.

SONYA

(as VANYA and ASTROV come out of the house)

Your *wife*?!

VANYA

Wife?

ASTROV

You have a wife?

PAUL

Yes. Her name's Paige. She's out of town. Haven't I mentioned her?

SONYA

Not 'til now.

ASTROV

Where is she?

PAUL

Tierra del Fuego. Tip of South America? She's been down there two years, doing scientific research. She studies lichens. Did you know lichens might be a cure for Mad Cow disease? Of course you don't. Anyway, Paige is rich, her whole family is. They own every house on the inlet.

SONYA

She's your *wife*?

PAUL

It's not what you think. Look—no wedding ring. I vowed when I was twelve never to wear one for anyone but you. Or your equivalent in our world, should I ever find one.

VANYA

What's going on?

SONYA

Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

(SONYA heads toward the lake. PAUL falls on his knees in front of her. As he speaks YELENA and SEREBRYAKOV come out of the house)

PAUL

Sonya, wait! Please! My life was dominated by being in love with someone who didn't exist! I thought I could never get married. Then I met Paige, and she was wonderful—

(scuttling in front of SONYA again as she tries to get past)

Not a template! Not a template, though. But someone like me—a researcher, who didn't mind being alone, out in the field, away from people. She's a lichenologist. She's almost never home.

SONYA

You want two wives?

PAUL

No, no! I'm moral; I want to divorce her and marry you.

SONYA

This is horrible!

PAUL

(scuttling in front of her as she tries to get past him again)

Paige and I got married knowing we wouldn't live together for years. Not 'til her field work's done. We don't have children, she's half a world away—

SONYA

I wish I was!

PAUL

We're place-holders for each other, that's all.

SONYA

You sound like the worst husband material on the planet.

PAUL

I'm the best!

(as she finally sweeps past him)

I have never, ever wavered—!

SONYA

(exiting toward the lake)

Since you were twelve!

PAUL

(collapsing on the ground)

Sonya—!

SEREBRYAKOV

(back in the wheelchair by now)

He's married?

VANYA

Brilliant deduction.

ASTROV

Apparently she's rich.

SEREBRYAKOV

Really?

YELENA

How can he propose when he's already married?

ASTROV

I guess it *is* a different world.

SEREBRYAKOV

How rich is your wife?

VANYA

Leave him alone. Can't you see he's insane?

SEREBRYAKOV

Tell us about her. What's her name?

(PAUL crawls to the table, drags himself up into a chair)

PAUL

Paige. Her name's Paige. What's it matter? I hardly ever see her.

SEREBRYAKOV

I could never be without my wife, even for a day. Isn't that right?

YELENA

Apparently.

(to PAUL)

You must get lonely.

VANYA

So it would seem.

SEREBRYAKOV

Do you trust your wife? Being away so much?

YELENA

Don't be vulgar.



SEREBRYAKOV

It's a fair question.

ASTROV

The question is, can she trust him.

PAUL

I really need to speak with Sonya. Have to straighten things out. Do you mind if I just—?

VANYA

If you touch a hair on her head—

PAUL

Oh, God no! Never. Never in a million years.

(VANYA relents. PAUL rushes off toward the lake)

ASTROV

Amazing. I can't believe it.

VANYA

Proposing when he's already married?

ASTROV

Proposing to *Sonya*.

SEREBRYAKOV

There's someone in the world for everybody, even if it's an entirely different world. *Damn* these feet of mine. They hurt so much. Yelena, will you rub them?

VANYA

The never-ending massage begins anew.

SEREBRYAKOV

Reassuring, isn't it? Whatever world we're in, my feet will always be there to rub.

(Disgusted, VANYA wanders up to where the wormhole was. ASTROV follows)

ASTROV

Are you trying to wish it back?

VANYA

No use. It's gone forever. Somewhere in a distant world *Maman*, Waffles and Nanny have stared at our empty places and . . . moved on. Your horse was found by someone, rider-less on a country road.

(to YELENA and SEREBRYAKOV)

Your bags have arrived at the station without you. The last signs of us in that world. Given how dismal our lives were, perhaps we should be grateful.

SEREBRYAKOV

Speak for yourself. We weren't all failures.

VANYA

How dare you say that? Sonya and I worked for years to support your bloated lifestyle.

SEREBRYAKOV

Perhaps you should have aimed higher. You should too, Yelena—my toes are the sorest.

(sighing with relief)

So much better! I could be happy anywhere, as long as there was someone to rub my feet.

VANYA

Why do you let him treat you like that?

SEREBRYAKOV

Don't listen to him. A little harder, my dear.

VANYA

This is intolerable! Sitting around here with an obsessive idiot—

ASTROV

Our host, you mean?

VANYA

Reliving the most miserable summer of my life.

YELENA

We were all awful this summer. We said terrible things.

SEREBRYAKOV

Not me. I didn't say anything I was ashamed of.

VANYA

Everything you said was shameful! You tried to sell the estate, illegally, out from under Sonya— your own daughter.

SEREBRYAKOV

You tried to shoot me!

VANYA

I'm sorry I missed! You would have stolen all Sonya had. I alone defended her. I was the only one who was honest and clear-eyed.

YELENA

And absurd.

ASTROV

And suicidal.

SEREBRYAKOV

And a cry-baby.

VANYA

I did not cry!

ASTROV

You did, Vanya.

YELENA

Sonya told us. You wept.

SEREBRYAKOV

You sobbed.

VANYA

So what?! You would too, if things had conspired against you the way— I had no future! Life was a brick wall!

SEREBRYAKOV

Yelena, my feet. Why have you stopped rubbing?

VANYA

Will you please stop doing that? You're not his servant. You're not even his wife.

SEREBRYAKOV

What are you talking about?

VANYA

The two of you were married in our former world, not this one.

SEREBRYAKOV

We were married before God. We're joined forever, everywhere in the universe.

VANYA

That's only one universe. Our host claims there are more—an infinite number. Is there a different God for each one? If so, this young woman is free as a bird. And if she should happen to see some younger, stronger branch she'd like to perch on—

ASTROV

Please! How many boorish advances must Yelena Andreyevna repel before she can live in peace?

VANYA

You tell me, hypocrite.

ASTROV

At least I was subtle!

YELENA

You're monstrous, both of you! How can you speak this way? Especially in front of Alexander.

SEREBRYAKOV

They don't bother me. Every man tries to steal you away, but no one ever does. You're a faithful beast. Why have you stopped again?

VANYA

How do you keep from slapping this man?

YELENA

You're the one I should slap.

VANYA

You sir, are the picture of arrogant complacency.

SEREBRYAKOV

And you are a terrible shot!

VANYA

(pulling a revolver from his pocket)

Maybe I should try again!

YELENA

My God—!

ASTROV

Where did you find that?!

VANYA

Right where Sonya hid it. I was going to use it on myself, once you left.

ASTROV

Give it to me!

VANYA

Oh, no—not playing that game again.

YELENA

Vanya, please—

VANYA

(aiming at SEREBRYAKOV)

Shall I shoot him right now?

ASTROV

For God's sake, put it down!

SEREBRYAKOV

Don't worry. He'll fail at this too. It's his nature.

VANYA

(taking a step closer to him)

Awwrrrgghhh—!!

SEREBRYAKOV

Can't even pull the trigger, can you? Why don't you shout "bang" again? That should put you in the mood.

YELENA

Alexander!

SEREBRYAKOV

You should have seen it, Doctor. He actually shouted "Bang!" right in the middle of shooting at me. As though he were a circus clown. Ridiculous!

VANYA

(putting the revolver next to SEREBRYAKOV's head)

Does this feel ridiculous?

(The others watch in stunned silence. Behind all of them, unnoticed, the wormhole starts to reappear, slowly fading up without any sound)

VANYA (cont'd)

I could do it before God, I swear.

SEREBRYAKOV

Even now you could miss me.

YELENA

Look—!

(YELENA points at the wormhole, which grows brighter. Its UNEARTHLY SOUND begins to rise)

ASTROV

My God—!

SEREBRYAKOV

The light!

YELENA

We can go back!

ASTROV

Wait! What if it takes us somewhere else? Some other world?

SEREBRYAKOV

(trying to rise)

He only told us that to keep us here.

VANYA

Don't move.

SEREBRYAKOV

Don't be an ass. This is our chance. We can go home!

ASTROV

No! We don't know where it leads. We could be killed.

SEREBRYAKOV

*Damn* these feet! Help me up, Yelena.

VANYA

What should we do?

SEREBRYAKOV

Go!

VANYA

I'm frightened—!

SEREBRYAKOV

Then blow your own brains out, we're going!

(The SOUND rises steadily. The light grows and grows, becoming almost blinding again)

SEREBRYAKOV (cont'd)

Come, Yelena! We have to do it now!

VANYA

You're not taking her anywhere!

YELENA

*Please*, Uncle! Put the gun away!

VANYA

But—

SEREBRYAKOV

This may be our only chance! Yelena, *help!*

(The SOUND and light intensify)

YELENA

(trying to help SEREBRYAKOV up)

Doctor, help me—!

ASTROV

No, it's too dangerous!

SEREBRYAKOV

(grabbing YELENA's arm)

To hell with them! I'm your husband! Get me out of this chair!

(The SOUND is almost deafening, the light at its most intense. SONYA hurries in from the lake. PAUL rushes in after her. PAUL stands stunned at the size of the wormhole's current light show, but SONYA instantly rushes to VANYA and grabs him by the arm)

SEREBRYAKOV

There he is! Yelena, don't let him stop us!



SONYA

Uncle! It's back! Let's go!

VANYA

No!

SONYA

But the estate needs us!

VANYA

Too dangerous!

SEREBRYAKOV

Damn it, Yelena, you stupid cow! *Do your duty!*

(as YELENA suddenly grabs the back of the wheelchair)

No, no! Help me up!

(as she pushes the chair toward the wormhole instead)

What? Oh, all right. Anything to be rid of this gaggle of morons! Not too fast! I don't want to tip!

Yelena! YELENA—!! AAAAAAAAAAAGGHHHHH—!!!

(YELENA rolls SEREBRYAKOV into the wormhole, letting go just as he disappears. Almost instantly, the SOUND AND LIGHT ARE GONE, as is the wormhole itself. YELENA stands staring at where it used to be. VANYA has pocketed his gun, unnoticed by PAUL)

SONYA

My God.

ASTROV

He's gone.

YELENA

(returning, passing VANYA)

Bang.

VANYA

I would've done it. I would have.

PAUL

What in hell happened?!

ASTROV

The wormhole just . . . opened up and, and . . .

PAUL

And what?

YELENA

And ate my husband.

PAUL

But . . . how could he—? How could you—?

YELENA

What can I say? He was eager to get back.

PAUL

He's not going back! Not necessarily. We have no idea where— Absolutely no idea!

YELENA

He's going somewhere. That's the main thing.

SONYA

He was your husband.

YELENA

Don't worry. With his luck he's already on the train, and the conductor's rubbing his feet.

SONYA

He was my father.

YELENA

Miss him?

(YELENA exits into the house)

SONYA

Yelena—!

(weeping, throwing herself into VANYA's arms)

Oh, Uncle! Uncle—!

VANYA

It's all right, little one. It's all right. Go ahead and cry. Go ahead. Go ahead.

(ASTROV stares at where the wormhole was. From the house comes the SOUND OF YELENA PLAYING SOMETHING DRAMATIC—LISZT PERHAPS?—ON THE PIANO inside the house. PAUL extends a hand towards the crying SONYA, but draws it back under VANYA's glare. Lights shift)

## Scene Four

(Evening. ASTROV and VANYA sit at the table. PAUL sits nearby, STRUMMING THE GUITAR. The samovar's gone, replaced by a bottle of vodka. It's clear they've been drinking for a while. PAUL's open laptop is on the table)

ASTROV

What a woman! I thought she was formidable, but I had no idea. Rolling her husband into oblivion that way . . . It's the act of a goddess!

VANYA

Don't exaggerate.

ASTROV

What would you call it?

VANYA

The last straw. The only logical choice for a trodden-upon spouse. She'll find a much better man next time.

ASTROV

You, for example?

VANYA

Why not?

ASTROV

Because she likes me better. She embraced me—passionately, wholeheartedly.

VANYA

When?

ASTROV

When she and her husband were leaving for the train. We were alone. "For once in my life," she said. She assumed we'd never see each other again. But now she's right there in that house, *sans* husband, hoping I'll embrace her again.

VANYA

She embraced you because she was leaving. Totally safe—she was letting you down easy.

ASTROV

She never embraced you at all.

VANYA

She will.

PAUL

Pardon me, gentlemen? May I ask a question? Even though you've been catapulted across the universe and a century of time, am I to presume all either of you can think about is having sex with Yelena?

ASTROV

Yes.

PAUL

You're not curious about anything else? Say, the history of the last hundred years?

ASTROV

You said you wouldn't tell us. Not for two weeks.

VANYA

There's nothing to read in the house. You locked everything up in a closet.

PAUL

Still, you could be wondering. But no. You're just . . . fixated on having sex with Yelena. Why?

ASTROV

Because we haven't yet. With her, I mean.

VANYA

Not with her.

PAUL

So men everywhere are just—?

VANYA

You're one to talk. Proposing to Sonya.

PAUL

I couldn't help myself.

ASTROV

So, you understand.

PAUL

It's completely different. Sonya meant everything to me. Now I've ruined everything. Destroyed the one chance I had to find complete happiness.

VANYA

It's what you deserve, for treating my niece that way. I ought to kill you.

ASTROV

But luckily, we have vodka.

VANYA

If you ever do it again, I will kill you.

ASTROV

Unless we have vodka, which we do. Honestly Paul, I don't know why you're complaining. You're rich, you have a wife who's never here . . . If that's not complete happiness—

PAUL

Don't get me wrong. Paige is amazing. So dedicated. So . . . But aren't we all looking for the deepest, most lasting, most intimate relationship possible? Shouldn't we want our spouse to share everything? To be there every minute?

ASTROV

That may be the most frightening thing I ever heard.

VANYA

Enough of this! It's time I stood up and did something moral and . . . upright.

ASTROV

You going to pee?

VANYA

No, you fool. I'm going to change my life. I'm going to marry Yelena.

ASTROV

She doesn't want you!

VANYA

Of course she does.

PAUL

Actually, she doesn't. You don't want her either, though. You think you do, but you don't.

VANYA

How would you know?

ASTROV

He knows you better than you know yourself.

VANYA

Oh, shut up.

(to PAUL)

How do you know?

PAUL

You almost proposed to Yelena when she was a teenager. But you didn't, for good reason: she's too much for you. The only real emotion she instills in you is terror.

VANYA

That's absurd!

PAUL

To you, Yelena's as frightening as that wormhole.

VANYA

I was not "afraid" of the wormhole.

PAUL

You wouldn't go in; Sonya couldn't drag you. Yelena's young, even now. She's beautiful, talented. If you married her, she couldn't help but expose your second-rate nature.

VANYA

Second-rate!

PAUL

Believe me, she'd be wheeling you into the first available wormhole.

ASTROV

He's right. You're not in her class.

PAUL

Deep down you know it. It's why you're sobbing at the end of Chekhov's play.

VANYA

Will you stop talking about that infernal play?! I was not sobbing. I was . . . adjusting.

PAUL

To total failure. An utterly wasted life.

VANYA

Can you remind me again why you *like* Chekhov?

ASTROV

I did have to talk you out of suicide.

VANYA

I don't care! Nobody's happy! Nobody. Look at you: that ridiculous moustache. You only wear it to repel women. That's what it is, you know: *repellent*.

PAUL

We're not talking about Dr. Astrov—

VANYA

And you! Drinking the night away while you fall behind on your book—

PAUL

I'm not behind! Much . . .

VANYA

Proposing to an innocent girl while your unfaithful wife wanders the world.



PAUL

I never said she was unfaithful!

VANYA

You never said she wasn't. Honestly, I have no idea why you're married at all. What do you get out of it?

PAUL

Lots of things.

VANYA

Like what?

PAUL

Respectability. Stability. Predictability—

ASTROV

Any sex?

PAUL

It's not about sex. Not about a lot of sex . . .

VANYA

Passion?

PAUL

Yes! We have lots of passionate discussions about . . . about—

ASTROV

Lichens?

PAUL

No. Well, sometimes. But no! About dedication. About committing our lives to the progress of humankind.

VANYA

Theatre and lichens?

PAUL

What's wrong with that?

VANYA

This isn't passion; it's solitary confinement.

PAUL

It's just for now. We're saving the rest of it for when her field work's done. Once she's home for good, we'll have plenty of time for intimacy, kids—the whole thing. We planned it all out in grad school.

VANYA

Meanwhile she tries out a lot of other men along the way?

PAUL

It's not like that! I deeply resent your—

VANYA

How do you know when the time comes you'll even like each other?

PAUL

Of course we'll . . . ! Just because we like to plan ahead—

ASTROV

Vanya has a point here. What besides money is really keeping you together?

PAUL

Security!

ASTROV

Security?

PAUL

Knowing someone's going to be there, at the end of a . . . long wait. We send postcards—dozens and dozens. It's a little old-fashioned, but you want to see?

VANYA

Dear God, no! What I want is the truth. Are you telling us that your wife, in all these years of being alone, has never had even one affair?

ASTROV

It is a little hard to believe.

(They stare at PAUL. It gets uncomfortable)

PAUL

All right. Once. She had one affair. Satisfied?

VANYA

Getting there. When?

PAUL

Years ago. She apologized. I forgave her, and that was that.

VANYA

So you think.

ASTROV

Good point.

PAUL

It's not about keeping score! It's about the good of humanity. Paige and I are doing important research. Fleeting attachments aren't important.

ASTROV

Attachments like Sonya?

PAUL

That's not fair. I didn't even think Sonya was real. How was I supposed to feel when I met her?

ASTROV

Wonder who your wife's meeting right now.

PAUL

In Tierra del Fuego? Nobody. It's always freezing down there. Constant storms.

VANYA

Know what I think? I think your wife's having one fling after another while you're stuck up here finishing your pitiful book and hoping to make her proud.

ASTROV

It's possible.

VANYA

Admit it. You don't understand the first thing about marriage. I can't believe I've listened to a word you've said. You're a joke, insufferable.

ASTROV

You know what he is?

VANYA

What?

ASTROV

He's Waffles.

VANYA

My God, you're right. He is Waffles!

PAUL

I am not.

VANYA

The shoe fits. Your wife abandons you, and all you can think about is your duty to *her*.

PAUL

Waffles was completely different! His wife left him on their wedding night.

ASTROV

Waffles.

VANYA

Definitely Waffles.

PAUL

Don't be ridiculous. Chekhov only put him in the play for balance—to show the absurdity of living *too* virtuous a life. Of staying faithful to a . . . to a—

VANYA

Big whore?

PAUL

She's not a whore! She had one affair!

VANYA

That you know of!

PAUL

And I deserve it. I deserve it for . . . being in love with someone else. What you're saying is absurd. Paige loves me almost as much as she loves lichen. She's calling me tonight!

ASTROV

From the other end of the world.

PAUL

It's very intimate on Skype. We can see each other.

VANYA

From the other end of the world.

PAUL

She can't be here all the time. She has research to constantly monitor and, you know . . . bolster.

VANYA

Wonder who she's bolstering now.

(ASTROV and VANYA laugh. SKYPE RINGS  
on PAUL's laptop. He hurries to answer)

PAUL

Paige? Paige! How are you?

(VANYA and ASTROV move behind PAUL, to look on)

PAIGE'S VOICE

I'm fine. I'm back at our lab in Puerto Williams.

PAUL

I thought you were out collecting samples.

PAIGE'S VOICE

I was. But a blizzard hit while we were on the mountain, and — Who's that behind you?

PAUL

What? Oh, a couple friends.

PAIGE'S VOICE

They look sort of antique.

PAUL

They're helping with my book.

PAIGE'S VOICE

Great.

PAUL

So, was it tough on the mountain?

PAIGE'S VOICE

Very. Winds got up to seventy miles per hour. We almost died, but we did manage to bring back a lot of lichens.

PAUL

I'm glad you're safe. Who was on the mountain with you?

PAIGE'S VOICE

On the mountain?

PAUL

You said "we" almost died.

PAIGE'S VOICE

Oh, right.

(to someone unseen with her)

What are you doing here? Get out.

PAUL

Who's that?

PAIGE'S VOICE

Nobody.

(to the unseen person)

Go away. I'm Skyping.

PAUL

Who's that with you?

PAIGE'S VOICE

Just a colleague. Wandered in by mistake.

(to the other person)

I'm talking to my husband.

PAUL

Paige?

PAIGE'S VOICE

*My husband. Yes. Stop it!*

PAUL

Are you all right?

PAIGE'S VOICE

I'm fine! He's just goofing around. My new research partner—the one I was stuck with up on the mountain. We're happy to be alive so, you know, we're . . . goofing.

*(sotto voce)*

*Stop tickling me! Get out! Now!*

PAUL

Paige?

PAIGE'S VOICE

Yes, honey?

*(sotto voce)*

Don't *touch* me there!

PAUL

How long were you up on that mountain? In the tent, I mean?

PAIGE'S VOICE

Two days. The storm was unrelenting.

PAUL

Must've been hard to keep warm.

PAIGE'S VOICE

We used our survival techniques. You know, got in the same sleeping bag and . . . things.

PAUL

Right.

(at the SOUND of a MUFFLED CRASH over SKYPE)

What was that?

PAIGE'S VOICE

What? Oh, nothing—

(nervous, to the unseen person)

Just leave it. Don't go in there. Will you please stop moving around!?

PAUL

What's going on?

(SOUND of a TOILET FLUSHING)

PAIGE'S VOICE

(to the unseen person)

That's not your bathroom! What are you trying to—?

PAUL

Honey—? What's going on?

PAIGE'S VOICE

Oh, my God! Look at the time! Gotta go. Sorry!

(SKYPE SOUND OFF. PAUL closes his laptop)



PAUL (cont'd)

And that's how, um . . . how Skyping works.

ASTROV

Who was that with her?

PAUL

Just another scientist. Someone on her, you know . . . team.

VANYA

Must have been team captain.

(VANYA bursts into laughter. ASTROV joins him)

ASTROV (cont'd)

We're sorry. We're very sorry. It's just that, if this world is the same as ours—

PAUL

Basically.

ASTROV

Then . . . You really are Waffles!

VANYA

He is! He *is!*

(ASTROV and VANYA dissolve in laughter.

PAUL stares at them, disgusted)

PAUL

Ilya Ilyich Telegin—

VANYA

Waffles!

PAUL

Was a smallpox victim as a child. Hence his pockmarked face, hence his cruel nickname—

ASTROV

Waffles!

PAUL

But he's a member of your class.

VANYA

Not for years.

ASTROV

He's ruined—lost his land years ago.

VANYA

He works for us!

PAUL

I still think you're being very hard on him.

VANYA

Not as hard as he is on himself. Sitting around, strumming his guitar all day, while his wife has a family with another man.

ASTROV

(starting to laugh again with VANYA)

And he won't divorce. He's still married to her!

PAUL

All right, all right! I get the parallel. But Paige is not that woman. And I am not Waffles!

VANYA

(picking up the guitar, offering it to PAUL)

Here. Do you know any dirges?

PAUL

Stop it.

ASTROV

We're not criticizing. If you need to stay married for the money—

PAUL

I'm gainfully employed! I'm up for tenure. Once my book's accepted—

VANYA

Fine, fine, fine. Who cares? The only way you're ever going to learn is by example. To that end, I will now enter the house and propose to Yelena.

ASTROV

You're drunk.

VANYA

And all the more fit for my task. Observe closely. I'm striking while the iron's hot, making hay while the sun shines, stealing a march on my . . . my . . . whatever.

ASTROV

(as VANYA starts towards the house)

Disaster looms.

VANYA

Yelena and I are meant to be together. Our hearts have sought each other since the day we first met. But the attraction was so overpowering—

ASTROV

That she married another man.

VANYA

You'll see! The divine *Helene* is about to transform before your eyes into my lawfully wedded—  
(suddenly stopping, transfixed)

Wedded . . .

ASTROV

Yes?

VANYA

Wedded . . .

PAUL

Wedded what?

(Passing out, VANYA pitches forward and face-plants in the lawn. ASTROV and PAUL stare at each other, break into laughter and pour another drink. Lights shift)

*Scene Five*

(Afternoon, a couple days later. YELENA and  
SONYA enter from the lake)

YELENA

What beautiful views. It's really not that different from your estate.

SONYA

Except there's no one to talk to besides ourselves.

YELENA

There's Paul.

SONYA

The lunatic who spends all day embarrassing us?

YELENA

It won't be long now. Soon we can start our new lives.

SONYA

I want my old life. If Uncle hadn't hesitated, we'd be home by now.

YELENA

Why would you go back? Your father worked you to death on that estate. He's probably there now, waiting to put you back in the traces like an old mule.

SONYA

At least there I knew what I was for. I was of help to people. So was Uncle Vanya.

YELENA

Vanya's no help here. Falling down drunk the other night?

SONYA

The others had to carry him to bed. That's not like my uncle. You see what this place does to people?

YELENA

It's not the place. It's us.

SONYA

What do you mean?

YELENA

You, for example. You think you don't fit in here, but that's the old Sonya. What does new Sonya think?

SONYA

New Sonya?

YELENA

You're changing every day. We all are. I know a secret about new Sonya.

SONYA

You do, do you?

YELENA

I know who she likes.

SONYA

Who?

YELENA

Paul.

SONYA

*That's ridiculous!*

YELENA

I see how you look at him since he proposed.

SONYA

He's married.

YELENA

So?

SONYA

Don't you have morals anymore?

YELENA

Clearly, they're being revised.

SONYA

You're totally wrong. All I want is to meet someone from this world who *isn't* Paul.

(WARING enters from around the corner of the house. He hums "The Theme from Summer Place" and nervously eyes the area where the wormhole was. He suddenly notices the women)

WARING

Oh—!

SONYA

(turning, seeing him)

Oh—!!

WARING

I'm sorry, pardon me! Didn't mean to frighten you—

SONYA

What?

YELENA

Who are you?

WARING

What?

YELENA

What's he speaking?

SONYA

I don't know.

WARING

What language are you speaking?

SONYA  
What?

WARING  
Who—are—you?

YELENA  
What?

WARING  
I'm Waring. Paul's uncle. Where's Paul?

SONYA  
Paul?

WARING  
Yes—Paul. Is Paul around?

SONYA  
Are you related to Paul?

WARING  
What on earth are you speaking? Is that Russian?

YELENA  
Russian! Yes. Yes, we're Russian.

WARING  
I took some Russian in grade school. Cold War and all. Let me try.  
(haltingly)  
The lake is very, um . . . joyful with . . . with ravens under the . . . the . . . flower . . . bunker.

SONYA  
Dear God.

YELENA  
Let me speak to him in English.



SONYA

You know any?

YELENA

Enough.

(to WARING)

Do—not—speak—Russian.

WARING

What? Oh! Oh. I see. Sorry. Maybe Paul's in the house. *Pa-ul—!?*

(PAUL hurriedly enters from the house, carrying scripts, his laptop and the guitar. He calls to ASTROV, who's still inside)

PAUL

Just get him out here! It's time to do the scene!

ASTROV (off)

I'll try.

WARING

Paul?

PAUL

(turning, surprised)

Waring—! What are you doing here?

WARING

Actually, Paige called. I was just coming over to—

PAUL

I've been trying to get in touch with her for days. What did she say?

WARING

Aren't you going to introduce me to these charming ladies? They seem to be from Russia or something.

PAUL

Yes. Well, sort of. Listen, Waring—

WARING

I didn't know you had guests. We were just talking, and —

PAUL

(to YELENA, as he puts things down)

What did you tell him?

SONYA

Nothing.

YELENA

He can't understand us?

PAUL

Oh. Right.

WARING

So? Introductions?

PAUL

Waring, these ladies are, um . . . Oh, what the hell? They came through the wormhole.

WARING

(taking a step back)

They did?

PAUL

Relax—they're perfectly normal Russian women. They're characters, that's all. From *Uncle Vanya*.

WARING

Characters? You mean they're fictional? How is that possible?

PAUL

Infinite number of universes. Anything can come out. That's what infinite means.

WARING

My goodness. Are there more? How many are there?

PAUL

Four. Used to be five but . . . it's a long story. Anyway, this is Yelena, and this is Sonya.

WARING

I'll say hello in Russian. Good day. Delighted to be inside you.

PAUL

(as the women avert their eyes)

Please don't speak Russian. Ladies, this is my Uncle Waring. He's rich and entirely useless.

YELENA

Paul's got an uncle too, Sonyechka. And he's rich.

SONYA

Stop it.

WARING

Where are the others?

PAUL

They'll be here in a second. So, what did Paige have to say?

(ASTROV enters from the house with VANYA)

ASTROV

Here he is. Come on, Vanya.

VANYA

Why do we have to do another scene? Who's that?

PAUL

My Uncle Waring. Waring, this is Dr. Astrov and Vanya.

WARING

From the play! At least you have the title character.

VANYA

What's he doing here? Does he speak Russian?

YELENA and SONYA

No.

PAUL

My uncle and I need to have a little talk. Then we can start the scene and—

VANYA

That's it. I quit!

PAUL

Vanya—

VANYA

Do not call me Vanya!

PAUL

I'm sorry. Ivan Petrovich—

VANYA

We waited around all morning while you worked on your notes. Either we do this right now, or I'm out!

ASTROV

(quietly to PAUL, with a subtle drinking gesture)

He's a little nervous around Yelena. Ever since—

PAUL

All right, all right! Waring, can you wait while we do a scene?

WARING

Watch, you mean? I'd love to. Actors are some of my favorite people.

PAUL

She's married.

WARING

(indicating SONYA)

What about her?

PAUL

She's a man. Everyone got your scripts? Good. Please find a seat. Vanya—

VANYA

Will you *stop*—!?

PAUL

Ivan Petrovich. Sorry. I need you here. Please. And Sonya, right here.

(VANYA sits, the play in his lap. SONYA stands near him)

PAUL (cont'd)

From where we left off yesterday.

VANYA

Which was?

PAUL

"This is so painful".

VANYA

"This is so painful. My child, I'm in such pain!"

(looking up)

I never said this.

SONYA

Yes, you did.

VANYA

Did I?

PAUL

You did. And you should be crying.

VANYA

I was not crying.

PAUL

Suit yourself. I'm tired of asking. Sonya?

SONYA

"There's nothing to do. We have to live. We will live—through endless rows of days, endless nights, suffering the trials fate has stored up for us. We'll work for others, always, without any peace—and when our time comes we'll die, quiet and obedient."

VANYA

(to SONYA)

I still don't know how you thought this was going to cheer me up.

PAUL

Shh! Keep going.

SONYA

"And when we're beyond the grave we'll say we suffered, we wept, that it was bitter for us. And God will pity us, and you and I, dearest Uncle, will see a life that's bright, magnificent, refined. We'll look back on this day's unhappiness with a tender smile, and we'll rest. I believe it, Uncle—deeply, passionately. We shall—"

PAUL

Kneel.

SONYA

What?

PAUL

Kneel and put your head on his hands.

SONYA

That wouldn't be comfortable.

PAUL

But you do it, right? It's what you did.

SONYA

I suppose. But . . .

PAUL

So?

SONYA

It doesn't feel right now.

PAUL

You're not feeling; you're acting.

SONYA

Still—

PAUL

Will you just kneel? We haven't got all day. It's what you did, right? In life, in the play—

SONYA

I don't want to kneel in front of you.

PAUL

Why not?

SONYA

Because you're not my master.

PAUL

I'm not even in the scene!

SONYA

I don't care.

PAUL

How? How do you think I'm trying to be your master?

SONYA

Oh, I don't know. Maybe proposing to me when I'm a complete stranger—?

PAUL

I apologized for that!

SONYA

When I'm new to this world? When I'm your guest? When I'm utterly dependent on you for everything?

PAUL

I agree, it was inappropriate. Can we please move on?

SONYA

Why would you do something like that? When you say you've always loved me, at least since you were twelve—

PAUL

All right! All right! You do not have to kneel! Can we please continue?

SONYA

I think if a man truly loved a woman, he'd respect her opinion.

PAUL

I respect the hell out of your opinion.

SONYA

You don't sound like it.

PAUL

What do you want?! I said you don't have to kneel.

SONYA

It's not about kneeling—

PAUL

What do you mean, it's not about kneeling?! If it's not about kneeling, then get down on your —

SONYA

It's about how I feel when you ask. It feels wrong.

PAUL

So I'm not *asking* right?

SONYA

If you were more sensitive—

PAUL

Sensitive!? *Sensitive!*? I love you more than my own life, and you say I'm not *SENSITIVE!!?*



SONYA

I can't kneel if I don't feel safe!

PAUL

Fake it!

SONYA

I'm not an actress—

PAUL

I'm not asking for Meryl-fucking-Streep! Just do what you actually did! Just do it! Before the sun sets! Before I'm so far behind on my book I'll never get done, and I'll never get tenure, and my wife won't care anyway because for all I know she's being unfaithful with half of *South America*. Not that I give a damn, since I'm clearly in love with you and not her. Not that it matters, since I've blown all my chances with you, and you wouldn't marry me even if I were single and the last man on *earth*! So, please. Please. If I can't have you, and I can't have Paige and I can't have tenure . . . let me *please* have Chekhov: my personal sojourn in his beautiful little hell of endless, life-disappointing self-knowledge.

WARING

Is this all in the play?

PAUL

Quiet!

SONYA

What's he saying?

PAUL

Nothing. It doesn't matter. Say your line.

SONYA

You still want me to kneel?

PAUL

Yes!

VANYA

Don't yell at her!

PAUL

Stay in the scene!

WARING

What're they saying?

PAUL

Nothing!

SONYA

What's he saying?

PAUL

Shut up, everybody! Shut up! Waring, be quiet or go home. Sonya, you promised to do this exactly as you did it in real life. It's the least you can do for the help I'm giving you, no matter how . . . *odd* you think I am.

SONYA

I think you're *very* odd.

PAUL

I don't care! This is my last chance to concentrate, to watch the play's final moment—the payoff, the key to Sonya's character, the crowning symphony of irony.

SONYA

I wasn't being ironic—

PAUL

He was, not you! *Chekhov* was being ironic.

SONYA

Maybe you should propose to Chekhov.

PAUL

Maybe I will!

SONYA

You should! You never loved me, you loved Chekhov. But Chekhov is a monster. He has no ambition for the real me. He only needs a long-suffering, slightly stupid saint with her heart on her sleeve. He doesn't want me to change!

PAUL

He's not about change! He's not about personal growth. He's about suffering, irony, limitation—

SONYA

Are you?

(PAUL has no answer. A beat)

WARING

Are you doing the scene right now?

PAUL

(working to control himself)

Sonya, however you feel about Chekhov, the fact is, you're the only one in the play who's of true worth. The only one who believes in redemption. Your father was a cynical phony who tried to steal your inheritance. Yelena threw herself away on him, trading everything for an easy life. Dr. Astrov was fading into the very forests he dreamed of saving. All he wanted was a drink and a way out of the room.

ASTROV

That's rather harsh.

PAUL

His whole summer was slow, spiritual suicide. Vanya was the worst—

VANYA

Me? I was the rebel!

PAUL

The apotheosis of mid-life crisis. Standing around with a bunch of wilting roses while others were busy getting laid.

VANYA

It was her husband's fault! I could have been a Schopenhauer!

PAUL

(to SONYA)

They all gave in to cynicism, but not you. You alone did not despair. You believe that God is merciful. You are Chekhov's gift to us. His lone act of generosity. His voice, whispering to us that even though God has provided a world of meaningless, unending toil—that accepting that toil selflessly, without question, can and will redeem us. You're the soul of this play. Will you show me that soul? Will you, if you have one atom of feeling for me, let me see that soul?

SONYA

Nope.

(SONYA turns and strides into the house)

YELENA

I thought I was the soul.

ASTROV

I was.

VANYA

Oh, please. It's called *Uncle Vanya*.

WARING

Is the scene over?

PAUL

No! Nobody move. Waring, pick up the guitar.

WARING

What?

PAUL

The guitar!

(WARING picks up the guitar as PAUL, script in hand, kneels and puts his head on VANYA's hands)

PAUL (cont'd)

"We shall rest."

PAUL (cont'd)

(consulting the script)

No. Exclamation point.

(doing it that way)

“We shall rest!”

(consulting the script again)

But she’s exhausted.

(doing it that way)

“We shall rest!”

(consulting the script again)

Uncle, strum the guitar.

WARING

What?

PAUL

Strum the damn guitar!

WARING

Oh—yes.

PAUL

Softly!

WARING

Sorry.

(WARING strums the guitar. As PAUL speaks,  
SONYA appears again on the porch, watching)

PAUL

(as WARING strums)

“We’ll hear angels. We’ll see the heavens bright with diamonds—see all the wickedness of the earth, all our sufferings drowned in a mercy that will fill the world. And our lives will become peaceful, tender, sweet as a caress. I believe it. I believe.”

(rising a bit)

And now I wipe away your tears.

VANYA

I'm not crying.

PAUL

(pretending to wipe Vanya's tears)

"Poor, poor Uncle Vanya. You're crying."

VANYA

You're the one who's crying.

PAUL

"You've never been happy. But wait, Uncle Vanya. Wait. We shall rest." And I embrace you.

VANYA

(as PAUL does so)

This is uncomfortable.

PAUL

"We shall rest."

(letting VANYA go)

And the watchman knocks, Vanya's mother makes a note on her pamphlet, the nurse darns a sock.

"We shall rest."

(PAUL rises, drained. WARING stops strumming. PAUL stands, looking directly at SONYA. She exits into the house)

PAUL (cont'd)

Thanks, everyone. That's . . . that's all I need. Sorry if I was . . . critical.

(The others slowly exit into the house. PAUL takes the guitar from WARING, who starts clapping)

PAUL

Shh! Shh, shh, shh . . .

WARING

Wasn't that the end?

PAUL

It's not a performance.

(sitting heavily)

You think a man can love literature? Love a character, I mean? As much as . . . he should love a human being?

WARING

That's an odd question. Why do you ask?

PAUL

Because it's so hard with humans.

WARING

Loving literature does provide the advantage of getting done, I suppose. Closing the book. Just have to be sure you're not closing the book on yourself, eh?

PAUL

You were going to tell me something.

WARING

What? I was?

PAUL

About Paige?

WARING

Oh! Oh, right! Paige. My goodness, I forgot. Um . . . yes, well . . . Paige.

PAUL

Spit it out. I'm ready for anything.

WARING

She's having an affair, and she wants a divorce.

PAUL

*What!?*

WARING

You said spit it out—

PAUL

I was Skyping with her just the other—

WARING

I know. She asked me to tell you. She's 'way too guilty to call you herself.

PAUL

She's having an affair?

WARING

As we speak, apparently. It's very passionate. I'm so sorry.

PAUL

You were just sitting here with that? All this time?

WARING

You're the one who told me to wait.

PAUL

Who is it? Who's this lover she's—?

WARING

A colleague. Fellow lichenologist, mycologist, phycologist—what isn't he? Anyway, they were in a storm together, up on the mountain—

PAUL

Protecting their lichens, yes.

WARING

And, to keep warm, they were forced to rub their bodies together in the same sleeping bag for seven straight days.

PAUL

Seven? But she said they were only up on the mountain for two— Oh . . .

WARING

Perhaps I'd better—



PAUL

Who is this guy? What's his name?

WARING

Charles something. Is it really important?

PAUL

I don't know. Maybe not.

WARING

Apparently he's the world's leading expert on the crustose placodioid variety of lichen. I guess no woman could resist that kind of star power.

PAUL

Is she really in love with him?

WARING

She must be. She's moving straight ahead with the divorce.

PAUL

This is so . . .

WARING

I know. I'm sorry. But let's face it: no one in the family ever knew what you two had in common other than . . . self-involvement.

PAUL

We were waiting, that's all. 'Til she was back home for good. Then things were going to get, you know, much better.

WARING

Of course.

PAUL

She said it was like lichens. They can live hundreds of years on . . . next to nothing.

WARING

Speaking of sustenance, there is the matter of the pre-nup.

PAUL

She's talking about that already?

WARING

You know Paige. Very organized.

PAUL

I'll have nothing. I came into the marriage with nothing.

WARING

Normally that would be true. The good news is, Paige feels guilty enough to waive the pre-nup.

PAUL

You're kidding.

WARING

She's willing to give you a respectable settlement. Plus this house, if you want it.

PAUL

That's incredible! I've got to hear this from Paige. Can we call her?

WARING

She won't take a call from you. She wouldn't know what to say.

PAUL

We'll get your laptop and Skype her. She'll think it's you.

WARING

Might work.

PAUL

I have to know where I stand as soon as possible.

WARING

How come?

PAUL

Because of Sonya. We're in love! Well, I am. She thinks I'm crazy.

WARING

Good start. Maybe before you—

PAUL

You think it's too soon to propose?

WARING

Lots of people wait for the divorce.

PAUL

Yeah. Yeah. I really need to nail this down with Paige. Thank you, Uncle Waring. Thanks for the best news of my life! Now all I have to do is convince Sonya I'm not crazy!

(PAUL hugs him, does a strange little dance for joy, pulls off his shirt and whirls it over his head. At the same time, SONYA enters from the house, stopping and staring at this display)

PAUL

*EeeeeeeeeeyyyyyAAAAAOWWWWWW!!!!!!!!!!!!!!* I'm not crazy! I'm not crazy at all!!!

(noticing SONYA)

Oh. Hi.

*Scene Six*

(A half hour later. WARING sits at the table working on his laptop. SONYA stands impatiently staring at the lake)

WARING

I hope Paige is in her room.

PAUL

She's got to be.

SONYA

Why am I here?

PAUL

Please, just . . . stay. I want to talk to you as soon as I'm done with this.

WARING

She may be out in the field again—

(as SKYPE DINGS)

Oh—Paige! There you are. Hello.

PAIGE'S VOICE

Waring? What do you want?

WARING

Oh. Well, I—

PAUL

(shifting WARING out from in front of the laptop)

Paige--it's me.

PAIGE'S VOICE

Paul—! What are you—? No, it's not a good time—

PAUL

Paige, wait! Listen, please! Waring's told me everything, and I . . . I forgive you.

PAIGE'S VOICE

You do?

PAUL

I'm not going to say I wasn't shocked. But Waring said you're very passionate about this . . . Charles fellow.

PAIGE'S VOICE

Oh Paul, I feel so guilty. I'll make it up to you. We'll rip up the pre-nup and do a whole new settlement.

PAUL

Thank you. That's very kind. I just want you to know that I wish you well in the future.

PAIGE'S VOICE

Oh, same here. I really mean it.

PAUL

Hope we didn't interrupt your work.

PAIGE'S VOICE

Not at all. Charles and I were just taking a nap, and — Oh, sorry.

PAUL

That's all right. You guys . . . get some sleep. We'll talk later.

PAIGE'S VOICE

Thanks. You're being wonderful about this. I'm so sorry it had to end this way.

PAUL

Me too.

PAIGE'S VOICE

At least we have the kind of relationship that allows us to break up in a civilized way.

PAUL

Thank God for that.

PAIGE'S VOICE

Will you be all right?

PAUL

Oh . . . sure. It'll take a while, but I'll be fine. Thanks for asking.

PAIGE'S VOICE

It caught me completely off guard. It's all so different from what you and I had. The things he's shown me about fungi—

PAUL

Yes. I'm sure it's amazing.

PAIGE'S VOICE

Thanks again for understanding.

PAUL

You bet.

PAIGE'S VOICE

Well . . . Good-bye for now.

PAUL

Good-bye.

WARING

Oh, Paige? Before you go, I just wanted to say how proud I am of you and Paul. You're being so mature about this.

PAIGE'S VOICE

Thanks, Uncle Waring.

WARING

I don't think it's an accident that both of you have found a new love so quickly—

PAIGE'S VOICE

What?

PAUL

Waring.

PAIGE'S VOICE

What do you mean, "both" of us?

PAUL

He doesn't mean anything.

WARING

(turning the laptop toward SONYA)

Don't be silly. I mean her. Paul's friend, Sonya.

PAUL

Waring—

WARING

She only speaks Russian, but her voice is very pleasant.

PAIGE'S VOICE

Paul? How long has this been going on?

WARING

How long has it been, Paul? A week, or—?

PAIGE'S VOICE

A week? He didn't know anything a week ago.

WARING

Isn't it amazing how fate arranges—?

PAUL

(grabbing the laptop)

Paige, listen! That woman is unimportant. She's a guest, from Russia.

PAIGE'S VOICE

So you . . . *imported* her?

PAUL

*No!* I barely know her!

PAIGE'S VOICE

Do you love her?

PAUL

What?

PAIGE'S VOICE

You can't lie to my face, Paul. You never could. Do you love her?

PAUL

That's a silly question . . .

PAIGE'S VOICE

Is that a yes?

PAUL

It's none of your business—

PAIGE'S VOICE

We're married!

PAUL

Not for long. And how about you? Are you really saying Charles is only your second affair?

PAIGE'S VOICE

Has Waring been talking to you?

WARING

No!

PAUL

No, but see? He doesn't have to. It comes out! It's real, so it comes out!

PAIGE'S VOICE

What if I have had the occasional lover? You and I are constantly alone. Neither of us is made of stone—



PAUL

You're apparently made of Silly Putty!

PAIGE'S VOICE

It was unrealistic for us to marry. Waiting for when we'd finally be together—

PAUL

You're the one who suggested it!

PAIGE'S VOICE

*Do you love her!?*

PAUL

*Yes!* Yes, okay?! I love her. I've always loved her.

PAIGE'S VOICE

Always—?!

PAUL

You wouldn't understand. But every time I touched you, I thought of her. Every time I saw you, I thought of her. It was the only thing that made seeing you and touching you . . . *bearable!*

PAIGE'S VOICE

What a terrible thing to say.

PAUL

You wanted the truth.

WARING

Paul—

PAIGE'S VOICE

You really are a swine!

PAUL

You're the one who's humping the fungus licker!

PAIGE'S VOICE

I told you never to call us that!

PAUL

Well, if the mold fits—!

PAIGE'S VOICE

I'll tell you one thing: he's better than your thrift-store czarina—!

PAUL

You know what you really are? A huge, self-involved ball of ego!

WARING

Paul—!

PAUL

And so am I! Thank God we've finally been released from each other!

PAIGE'S VOICE

That's it. That's it! I'm not changing the pre-nup!

PAUL

Good! I don't want a nickel from you!

PAIGE'S VOICE

You're not getting one!

WARING

Paul—

PAUL

I expect no less from the Empress of Unfair!

PAIGE'S VOICE

It's better than unfair; it's *legal*!

PAUL

Take your money and stuff it in a sleeping bag, right alongside the Lichen King!

PAIGE'S VOICE

He's a great scientist!

PAUL

Enjoy Tierra del Fuego! I'm going to get my tenure, and live with the woman I love and teach the subject I—

PAIGE'S VOICE

Tenure? *Tenure?* You can kiss tenure goodbye! The amount of money I give that school? They'll do whatever I want! And I want you out on your can!

(This hits PAUL hard. He stares open-mouthed)

PAIGE'S VOICE (cont'd)

What do you think now? Hard to be the poor-but-proud academic when you don't have a *job*. See how well your little Russian nobody lives on nothing!

(As PAUL slowly starts to speak, SONYA, drawn perhaps by the new tone in his voice, wanders near, stealing glances at the screen)

PAUL

There's only one person in this marriage I hated more than you, Paige. Me. I settled for you. That means I settled for myself. I said, "Okay. I'll drop my bags and sit down forever. Don't have to be anyone. Don't have to touch anyone. Just sit, trace my finger down the page of a book no one reads anymore. Feel the paper, stare at the letters—black coats and hats and shoes scattered across a field of snow—that's enough for a life: the cares and dreams of people a hundred years ago. It's what I deserve. Why should I have more?" Take the money. Take the money and my job and do whatever you want. I'm free of it now. Free of the lies we told ourselves about the future. Free of the . . . nothing . . . we called marriage. Free of pretending I don't have to exist.

(PAUL moves away from the laptop. He stares at the lake while WARING picks up the laptop)

WARING

I'm sure he didn't mean it.

PAIGE'S VOICE

Thanks, Uncle Waring, for telling me the truth.

WARINGb

I wasn't trying to—

PAIGE'S VOICE

Got to go now. Charles needs me in bed. The fact is, we hardly ever get out of it!

PAUL

Oh, for God's—!

(He rushes back to the laptop with SONYA in hand.)

PAUL (cont'd)

Paige! *Paige!* Look at your screen! I have something to show you.

PAIGE'S VOICE

Make it quick!

PAUL

This is Sonya! Sofia Alexandrovna! I'm kissing her because I love her!

PAIGE'S VOICE

(as PAUL does so)

*Ohh—!* I hope she likes *starving!*

(SKYPE DISCONNECTS)

WARING

Well. That was . . . intense.

PAUL

(to SONYA, still in his arms)

I'm sorry. I was just— I . . .

(SONYA suddenly kisses PAUL again. Then, just as suddenly, she pulls back and slaps him. She rushes into the house. PAUL stands stunned)

WARING

I can't help feeling this was partly my fault.

(Lights shift)

## *Scene Seven*

(Morning, a few days later. VANYA sits on the porch step, gazing wistfully at the place where the wormhole used to be. After a moment, ASTROV enters from the house. He wears a light, short-sleeved shirt and Bermuda shorts. He carries coffee in a Starbuck's mug)

VANYA

Ugh. I can't bear to look at you.

ASTROV

It really is much cooler. You should try it.

VANYA

I prefer clothes from my own world.

ASTROV

Moving soon. We have to be ready for our new life.

(as VANYA returns to staring)

It's never coming back.

VANYA

It might.

ASTROV

It's been days and days.

VANYA

It'll come back. When it does, I'm going.

ASTROV

You should be thinking about something more concrete.

VANYA

Like proposing to Yelena?

ASTROV

Yes, if that's what you really want. You could even try it sober.

VANYA

You're not going to propose to her yourself?

ASTROV

Proposing is not what I have in mind.

VANYA

Yelena's all I can think of. Every day I pick flowers for her. I bring them to the house and stop just short of the door. Can't make myself go in.

ASTROV

No one wants to be rejected.

VANYA

I do the rejecting. She doesn't have to. I go back in the woods and toss them on a little pile of dead flowers I've made there. That's my life: that little pile.

ASTROV

She may not be ready for another husband. Look what happened the last time. Yelena's a woman in transition. No one knows what she's turning into, least of all herself. That's why I'm biding my time. Waiting for the right moment.

VANYA

Time stands still as long as you've got that moustache.

ASTROV

You have no understanding of tonsorial splendor. This moustache sends deep messages of virility and . . . independence.

VANYA

It'll keep you independent, all right.

(suddenly overcome)

I can't bear it! What is there for me, if I don't have Yelena?

ASTROV

Some woman in this world, I expect.

VANYA

Who won't know me at all, who— Who *can't* know me. What was my life? What was my life if now I'm here, cut off from everything I ever—?

ASTROV

We can't help what happened, Vanya.

VANYA

*Why* can't we? *Why* doesn't it . . . come *back*?!

(They stare out for a moment. ASTROV sips his coffee)

ASTROV

Did you read the print-outs Paul gave us?

VANYA

About Russian history? Propaganda. I don't believe a word of it.

ASTROV

If it's true, and you did manage to get back, you'd be living through the thick of it.

VANYA

The Twentieth Century in Russia was not that bad.

ASTROV

Which part do you find most inviting? The urban rebellions? World war? The revolution that levels the classes and leads to an endless line of czars by another name?

VANYA

You know what I mean.

ASTROV

Mass executions? Prison camps? Starvation of millions—?

VANYA

That's enough.

ASTROV

A second world war? Scores of millions dead?

VANYA

Stop it!

ASTROV

That's just the first half of the century—

VANYA

I don't care! I'm going back. You're not talking me out of it.

ASTROV

And to think: *I* was worried about deforestation.

(after a beat)

At least give me the gun, Vanya.

VANYA

No. The wormhole could take me to a land full of wild beasts.

ASTROV

Yes—Russia.

VANYA

Do you think Yelena would go back with me?

(ASTROV laughs out loud)

ASTROV

Sorry.

VANYA

(as ASTROV takes another sip)

The light took me when I was weeping. I couldn't bear the thought of a life of . . . drudgery. Meaninglessness. Now, I long for it. Sitting in that room doing accounts, everyone all around, no one speaking. No need to get up again until I'm . . . eighty.

ASTROV

There's more to life than that, Vanya.

VANYA

No. There isn't.



(YELENA strides out of the house, dressed in stylish and somewhat revealing light summer clothes. She carries two dresses on hangers)

YELENA

Good morning, gentlemen.

(as the men make a feeble attempt to stand)

Don't bother standing. Paul says it's no longer *de rigueur*, except among the most refined. Which one of these dresses do you think for the trip?

(holding up a light-colored summer dress with a low neckline)

This?

(holding up a classic little black cocktail dress)

Or this, since I'm in mourning? Paul says I can take some of his wife's clothes if I promise to send them back. Also, he's taking me somewhere called a mall while his credit cards still work?

ASTROV

What are you talking about?

YELENA

I have no idea. But he says I'll like it. I hope I like Brighton Beach. Apparently it's in Brooklyn, which sounds so musical. And Brighton Beach! I just know it's warm and sunny and . . . stylish!

ASTROV

We can only hope.

YELENA

It's so wonderful—Paul finally unlocked the closet and got out all these women's magazines! They're shiny, and they're full of clothes! I can't read them of course, but it doesn't matter. They're nearly all pictures, and they smell like perfume! The women in there are having much more fun than I did! They're happy and beautiful, like Eve in the Garden. Some of them are even nude! If they look that good, can you imagine how well they think? They must be leaders of society. There must be amazing new ways to be a woman! It gives me so many ideas. Doctor, come in the house.

ASTROV

What? Why?

YELENA

It's time to be as free as they are. Come on—we're going to be happy and beautiful.

ASTROV

(rising)

I'm not sure I—

(as she grabs him by the moustache)

Ow—!

(She pulls him into the house by the moustache)

YELENA

Don't argue. I've dreamt of this for ages.

ASTROV

Ow! OW! Stop that! That really hurts—!

YELENA

Not for long!

(They're gone. VANYA stares after them, then sighs and lowers his head. WARING and PAUL enter from the lake. After a while, VANYA raises his head to watch them)

WARING

It took a while, but I got Paige to agree to sell me this place. She wanted to burn it down. Of course, she doesn't know about the wormhole. I decided not to tell her. Talk about complicating a sale . . .

PAUL

Smart.

WARING

Once I own it, I'll rent it out to you. It's the least I can do for that little Skyping gaffe.

PAUL

Thanks, Uncle Waring.

WARING

How are things with Sonya? Is she speaking to you yet?

PAUL

No.

WARING

For a girl who came out of a wormhole, she sends a lot of mixed signals. It's a shame she couldn't understand what you said to Paige. I would have married you on the spot.

PAUL

That's . . . heartwarming.

VANYA

What are you talking about?

PAUL

What? Nothing much.

VANYA

He said the word wormhole.

PAUL

No, he didn't. Did he?

VANYA

Is it coming back?

PAUL

I have no idea.

VANYA

Yes, you do. You know exactly. And you're *not telling*.

(VANYA stalks into the house)

WARING

What was that all about?

PAUL

Nothing. He's out of sorts.

WARING

When are you taking them to Brighton Beach?

PAUL

Tomorrow. I've arranged a couple apartments there. They should be comfortable.

WARING

Is Sonya going?

PAUL

I think so. Yesterday though, I caught her staring where the wormhole used to be.

WARING

You know Paul, I've been giving that wormhole a great deal of thought.

PAUL

You have?

WARING

We need a long-range plan, in case it does keep returning.

PAUL

I suppose.

WARING

First of all, we can't tell anyone. The government would swoop right in. But what if you were the wormhole's caretaker?

PAUL

What do you mean?

WARING

You know, kicking whatever comes out back in, or—in the case of these Russians—slipping them quietly into society. Your choice; I'd leave it completely up to you.

PAUL

Would you pay me?

WARING

Something nominal, sure. But the real money will come from your new project.

PAUL

My new—?

WARING

Let's be practical here. You're washed up as a scholar.

PAUL

I wouldn't say—

WARING

Not that there's money in that anyway. So what have you got? Some real talent as a writer, I suppose. Remember those stories you showed me, that you wrote as a kid?

PAUL

The science-fiction . . . ?

WARING

Those were very good.

PAUL

What are you suggesting, Waring?

WARING

What I always suggest: the obvious. You need something worthwhile to write about. You have a back yard, it has a wormhole—

PAUL

*Pulp fiction?*

WARING

Exactly! One of the greatest movies ever made. You'd have to pretend the wormhole's fictitious of course. But even if it never comes back you've already got enough material from real life right here in your—

PAUL

I can't do that! I'm a scholar, I have a reputation—

WARING

Not for long. And what's the point? No one reads the things you write. You need to give America what it wants: aliens creeping and squiggling and squelching into our universe and doing whatever when they get here. That'll be the creative part. Naturally, you'll kick the real ones back into the wormhole—but you'll see them, touch them, smell them. Endless inspiration for your stories!

PAUL

You want me to write about aliens?

WARING

*Please?* Would you finally write about something that matters? We care about aliens, deeply. Look at the Internet, read the tweets, the retweets—we never lose our hunger. You could do a whole series!

PAUL

For money?

WARING

For tons of money. The books alone will make you rich. Once it goes to HBO—

PAUL

I don't know. All I can think about right now is having Sonya.

WARING

Have an income first, it goes so much better. You can't tell me you're afraid of a little work.

PAUL

Chekhov says work is the only thing that redeems a person.

WARING

Smart man. What's he say about love?

PAUL

That it's an endless disappointment.

(SONYA comes out of the house. She stops when she sees PAUL. Neither says anything. SONYA walks in a wide arc around the two men, who are at the table. She looks away

when PAUL looks at her. Then she looks at PAUL when he's looking away. WARING watches them both. SONYA exits toward the lake)

WARING

Yes, indeed. A very smart man.

(Lights shift)

## *Scene Eight*

(Noon, the next day. SONYA and VANYA sit at the table. SONYA stares at the lake, VANYA at where the wormhole was. After a silent moment they begin to talk but do not look at each other)

SONYA

It's never coming back.

VANYA

It has to.

SONYA

Why? Is it really that bad, Uncle?

VANYA

I will not be taken away from a world in which I have yet to make my mark.

SONYA

What if you already made your mark, and . . .

VANYA

And what?

SONYA

It was invisible?

(VANYA sighs. Suddenly in the house YELENA can be heard PLAYING THE PIANO: COLE PORTER'S "LET'S DO IT")

SONYA

I *wish* she'd stop that.

(PAUL and ASTROV come around the corner of the house. ASTROV's moustache has been shaved off)



PAUL

Car's all packed. Ready to go?

(calling over the music)

Yelena! We're ready!

(as the PLAYING stops)

Sonya, are you sure you don't want to change into something cooler?

SONYA

I'm fine, thanks.

(YELENA enters from the house, in the light-colored dress)

YELENA

What a beautiful day for an adventure! An entire world stands naked before us.

ASTROV

Not to mention my upper lip.

YELENA

You look wonderful.

ASTROV

Still can't get used to it.

YELENA

At least now I can find your mouth.

(YELENA traces his lips with a finger and slips into his arms)

VANYA

He can never love you the way I do. He can't love anyone—not deeply, abidingly.

YELENA

Who says that's what I want?

VANYA

Don't be absurd. You want to get married—

YELENA

I am married. Or was. Maybe I still am—who knows? The point is I didn't enjoy it. But I do enjoy the doctor. Especially now that I've cleared the forest from his face.

(She kisses ASTROV. SONYA looks away. VANYA groans)

PAUL

I'm sorry things haven't worked out better for you, Ivan Petrovich.

VANYA

(standing)

And I'm sorry your marriage exploded. Can we *please* get started?

PAUL

Yes, we should get on the road.

ASTROV

Time to see the beach!

PAUL

You'll like it. Everyone speaks Russian there.

(to VANYA)

So. Ready?

VANYA

As any man on the gallows, I suppose.

PAUL

It'll be great, you'll see.

VANYA

The chance to fail in not one but two different worlds?

(ASTROV and YELENA start out)

ASTROV

We're going to ride in an automobile.

YELENA

Sixty miles an hour! I hope I don't get overcome.

ASTROV

I hope you do.

(Laughing, they exit around the corner of the house.  
SONYA takes VANYA's hand)

SONYA

It's a new world, Uncle. A chance to be better, not worse.

VANYA

Come along, then.

SONYA

Actually, I have something to say to, um . . .

VANYA

(as she nods towards PAUL)

Him? You're not speaking to him.

SONYA

Please?

VANYA

(glaring at PAUL)

I'll be waiting.

(VANYA exits around the house)

PAUL

Sonya? What is it?

SONYA

Will you marry me?

PAUL

What?!

SONYA

I know you're already married, but that's over, yes?

PAUL

Yes, but—

SONYA

And you said you've loved me forever, yes?

PAUL

I . . . Yes—

SONYA

Or at least since you first masturbated.

PAUL

Sonya—

SONYA

I don't hate you. I've been trying for days to hate you, but I can't. You've humiliated me and bored me with all those scenes from Chekhov—

PAUL

Scenes from your life—

SONYA

Don't interrupt. You presumed you knew what's best for me. You proposed to me when you were already married. You thought I was exactly the same as a literary character and always would be.

PAUL

I was only—

SONYA

You didn't treat me like a person at all. Even now I'm not a person to you, not really.

PAUL

I don't understand what you—

SONYA

And still I don't hate you. Why?

PAUL

I don't know.

SONYA

I think God made the light.

PAUL

What?

SONYA

God's never careless. He wouldn't bring me on a pathway of light for no reason. It doesn't matter how many universes there are. God is infinite, and He has a purpose.

PAUL

I don't believe in God.

SONYA

And I still don't hate you. You see?

PAUL

Not entirely.

SONYA

You think you know who I am when even *I* don't know. You think I'll never change, but all I'm doing is changing. You have no idea if you'll love the Sonya I'm going to become, yet you still want to be my husband. Don't you?

PAUL

Yes I do, but—

SONYA

Then everything about our relationship will be a challenge.

PAUL

Yes, apparently, but—

SONYA

Don't you see? It will be a lifetime of *work*.

(He takes a beat, then pulls her to him and  
kisses her. When the kiss ends, he steps back)

PAUL

I may be no good at marriage.

SONYA

We'll work at it.

PAUL

What if I can't give up that much of myself?

SONYA

You already have.

(He smiles. They kiss again. Behind them the wormhole  
begins to reappear, accompanied by muted noises. VANYA  
enters from around the house)

VANYA

How long do we have to wait in the—?

(seeing them)

What are you—?!

(seeing the wormhole)

My God—!! The wormhole!

(PAUL and SONYA turn and see the wormhole  
brighten and get louder)

PAUL

It's back!

VANYA (cont'd)

I'm going.

SONYA

Uncle, no!

VANYA

(grabbing SONYA's hand)

Come with me!

SONYA

Let me go—!

VANYA

You can't stay here! He's practically raping you!

SONYA

I love him!

(off VANYA's skeptical look)

I don't hate him.

VANYA

(dragging her toward the wormhole)

You'll forget him in a day! Come *on!*

PAUL

Let her go!

(PAUL grabs her free hand and tries to pull her away.  
The wormhole grows brighter, louder)

SONYA

Let me go! Both of you!

PAUL

No!

VANYA

Damn it, there's no time!

SONYA

Please—!

PAUL

It's a cosmic roulette wheel! You don't know where you're going!

VANYA

Away from here—that's all that matters!

PAUL

Leave Sonya!

VANYA

She's my niece! I need her!

PAUL

Even if you get back, you'll fail again. You always fail!

VANYA

You don't know that!

PAUL

Character is destiny!

VANYA

(producing his revolver)

*Let her go!*

SONYA

Dear God—!

(to PAUL)

Paul! He'll shoot!

PAUL

(still holding on)

I know! It's Chekhov! All guns have to go off by the last act!

VANYA

Please, Sonya! You have to come! I can't run the estate without you.

PAUL

Who says you're going to the estate?! You'll probably end up in an ocean of battery acid!



SONYA

Let me go!

VANYA

No!

PAUL

Then I'll come with you!

VANYA

Never!

PAUL

I'll help you on the estate!

VANYA

No room! We already have a Waffles!

(VANYA tries to hit PAUL in the head with the pistol but only manages a glancing blow. At the same time, SONYA manages to pull free. VANYA looks at her desperately, then rushes into the wormhole)

SONYA

*UNCLE—!!*

(PAUL, instantly clearing his head, staggers to the wormhole's entrance and thrusts his hand inside)

PAUL

Grab my hand! Vanya, grab my—!!

(A GUNSHOT is heard inside the wormhole. PAUL whirls around and falls, holding his left hand in pain)

SONYA

Paul—!! Are you all right?!

PAUL (cont'd)

Aggh!! Aggh!! Fucking *Chekhov*—!!

(As he writhes in pain, the brightness and noise of the wormhole swiftly diminish to almost nothing. ASTROV and YELENA hurry in around the corner of the house. As they do, the wormhole disappears altogether with a sharp BEE-OOP!)

ASTROV

The wormhole!

YELENA

What happened!? Are you all right?

PAUL

(holding his bloody left hand)

He shot me! The bastard—!

ASTROV

Vanya?

YELENA

Where is he?

SONYA

He went in! He's gone! Forever.

ASTROV

Where did he shoot you? In the hand?

PAUL

Yes!

YELENA

Can you still drive?

(Lights shift)

## Scene Nine

(Early evening, a couple weeks later. Only two chairs at the table, facing the area of the wormhole—which glows dimly, silently. The carpet and arrows from Scene One are back in place. PAUL, his left hand bandaged, sits writing long-hand at the table)

SONYA

(entering from the house with a postcard)

Mail came. Yelena and Astrov sent a postcard.

PAUL

(looking at it)

How retro. Turn of the century—the *last* century. Didn't know you could get that many people on one beach.

SONYA

Yelena's learning English. She can already say, um . . .

PAUL

(reading what SONYA points at)

"Get the fuck away from me." Hm, useful.

SONYA

What's it mean?

PAUL

Uh, "I love New York".

SONYA

How's your hand?

PAUL

It's okay. Aches now and then. Doesn't keep me from writing.

SONYA

I'm sorry you lost your ring finger.

PAUL

What can I say? Irony at every turn.

(as the wormhole brightens and becomes AUDIBLE)

Oops. Research time.

(SONYA moves close to the wormhole as a WEIRD, ALIEN BEING comes out of it. It should be different from those seen in Scene One, but no less flamboyant. She quickly takes its picture using PAUL's cell)

SONYA

(with a gracious smile)

Hello. How are you? Feeling a little dazed? Please walk this way.

PAUL

(writing furiously)

What's it smell like?

SONYA

Horse dung and cherries.

(to the ALIEN)

Just follow the arrows. Right around this way. That's right—

PAUL

How many eyes?

SONYA

Um . . . seven. No, nine.

PAUL

Gills?

SONYA

None.

PAUL

(surprised)

None?! Hunh.

SONYA

(to the ALIEN)

Just a little further and—

(kicking the ALIEN back into the wormhole)

There you *go!*

(The wormhole dims down again, quieting as well.

SONYA returns to sit next to PAUL)

SONYA

I'm only doing this until your hand's better.

PAUL

I know.

SONYA

Then I have to learn English. I have things to do.

(As PAUL keeps writing, SONYA puts her hand on PAUL's bandaged hand, causing him discomfort)

PAUL

Ouch. Tender.

(She takes her hand off of his)

SONYA

Sorry.

(As PAUL writes, he puts his damaged hand on hers. She rests her head on his shoulder. They wait for the next alien)

*The End*