



VANYA AND SONIA AND
MASHA AND SPIKE

BY CHRISTOPHER DURANG



★
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VANYA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE was commissioned by McCarter Theatre Center (Emily Mann, Artistic Director; Timothy J. Shields, Managing Director; Mara Isaacs, Producing Director) in Princeton, N.J. and received its world premiere with previews beginning on September 7, 2012 and opening on September 14, 2012. The Associate Producer was Adam Immerwahr; the Director of Production was David York; the Literary Director was Carrie Hughes; and the production stage manager was Cheryl Mintz. McCarter Theatre Center co-produced VANYA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE with Lincoln Center Theater (André Bishop, Artistic Director; Bernard Gersten, Executive Producer; Adam Siegel, Managing Director). The play received its New York City premiere at Lincoln Center Theater with previews beginning on October 25, 2012 and opening on November 12, 2012. The dramaturg was Anne Cattaneo; the stage manager was Jane Grey; and the assistant stage manager was Denise Yaney.

VANYA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE received its Broadway premiere at the John Golden Theater on March 14, 2013. All three productions were directed by Nicholas Martin; the set design was by David Korins; the costume design was by Emily Rebholz; the lighting design was by Justin Townsend; the original music and sound design were by Mark Bennett; casting was by Daniel Swee; and the assistant director was Bryan Hunt. On Broadway, the production stage manager was Denise Yaney, and the stage manager was M.A. Howard. The cast for all three productions was as follows:

VANYA.....	David Hyde Pierce
SONIA	Kristine Nielsen
CASSANDRA.....	Shalita Grant
MASHA.....	Sigourney Weaver
SPIKE	Billy Magnussen
NINA	Genevieve Angelson

Understudies: Keith Reddin (Vanya), Linda Marie Larson (Sonia, Masha), Heather Alicia Simms (Cassandra), Creed Garnick (Spike), Liesel Allen Yeager (Nina). Miss Yeager played Nina for part of the Broadway run. Mr. Garnick played Spike for the final month.

CHARACTERS

VANYA — 50s, living in Bucks County. Resigned to his life, more or less, at least compared to Sonia.

SONIA — his adopted sister, early 50s, living with him in Bucks County. Discontent, upset, regretful.

MASHA — his sister, 50s, glamorous and successful actress who goes gallivanting around the world.

SPIKE — an aspiring actor, 29 or younger, Masha's new companion. Sexy, self-absorbed, but otherwise outgoing and friendly.

NINA — lovely, sincere would-be actress, early 20s, visiting her aunt and uncle next door. Star struck, earnest and energetic.

CASSANDRA — cleaning lady and soothsayer, any age, any race. In the original production, she was played by an African-American actress in her 20s.

PLACE

A lovely farmhouse in Bucks County.

TIME

Set in the present.

VANYA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE

ACT ONE

Scene 1

A farmhouse in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Not enormous, but comfortable, on a hill, many trees, a barn nearby, a pond in the near distance. There used to be a shed for peacocks, but the peacocks are long gone.

The Morning Room. Sunny, a sitting place with a nice window and comfortable wicker chairs. There is a grassy section next to the morning room, and characters can enter or leave the room to the outdoors.

Vanya, 55 to 60, in a nightshirt, walks in, carrying coffee. He sits, staring out at the pond. (Note: the actors should look at the back of the theater when they are looking at the pond. The windows are imagined.) Vanya sips the coffee, which tastes good. He feels somewhat contented. He stares a bit more. Sonia enters, age 50 or so, with coffee for him. Perhaps has a diet soda for herself. She is unsure of herself, melancholy, though keeps hoping for impossible things.

SONIA. I brought you coffee, dearest Vanya.

VANYA. I have some.

SONIA. Oh. But I bring you coffee every morning.

VANYA. Well, yes, but you weren't available.

SONIA. Well, I was briefly in the bathroom, you couldn't wait?

VANYA. I don't know. The coffee was made, you weren't there, I'm capable of pouring coffee into a cup.

SONIA. But I like bringing you coffee in the morning.

VANYA. Fine. Here, take this cup and give me that one.

SONIA. Alright. (*Vanya hands her his coffee and takes the coffee she's brought.*)

SONIA. Now I feel better.

VANYA. I'm glad. (*Sonia sits. They both look out, staring in the distance.*)

SONIA. Has the blue heron been at the pond yet this morning?

VANYA. Not yet. Or it was here before I was.

SONIA. It'll probably come later. It's such a beautiful bird.

VANYA. Yes, it is. (*Sips the coffee.*) I'm afraid the other cup tasted better.

SONIA. Well it's the same coffee.

VANYA. Well maybe I put in more milk than you did. Maybe that's why it tastes better.

SONIA. Don't I usually put in the right amount of milk?

VANYA. Well, yes. I don't usually think about it. It's just that I was drinking one coffee, and liking it, and then suddenly there's a different cup of coffee, and I'm liking it slightly less. It's no big deal. I'm just making pleasant conversation.

SONIA. That's not making pleasant conversation. It's first thing in the morning, and you're implying I don't do anything right.

VANYA. I didn't say that.

SONIA. Yes, you did.

VANYA. I didn't.

SONIA. Well you implied it.

VANYA. Forget it! The coffee's delicious, I love it!

SONIA. Oh, for God's sake. Here take the original cup back.

VANYA. No, no, it's not that different. I'm sorry I said anything. (*Sonia forces him to take his original coffee cup back, the one he preferred. She takes the second cup back herself.*)

SONIA. I mean I have two pleasant moments every day in my fucking life, and one of them is bringing you coffee.

VANYA. Sonia, I'm sorry I said anything. Really the two cups are almost identical. I should have said nothing.

SONIA. Alright.

VANYA. I'm sorry. Really.

SONIA. That's alright. *(She suddenly takes the cup she's holding and smashes it on the floor, in the direction of the kitchen. Silence.)*

VANYA. Is this how you're going to be today?

SONIA. I don't know what you mean.

VANYA. YOU JUST THREW THE FUCKING COFFEE AGAINST THE WALL!

SONIA. I DIDN'T!

VANYA. You didn't??? What kind of idiot response is that?

SONIA. I don't know. It's an angry "I hate my life and I hate you" response.

VANYA. Well, it was effective then, good for you!

SONIA. Thank you! *(Silence.)* I'm sorry. I shouldn't have thrown the cup.

VANYA. That's alright.

SONIA. It's just I had bad dreams last night.

VANYA. Oh?

SONIA. I dreamt I was fifty-~~two~~^{something} and I wasn't married.

VANYA. Were you dreaming in the documentary form?

SONIA. That's not funny.

VANYA. Really, I thought it was. You are fifty-~~two~~^{something}, and you're not married.

SONIA. Whose fault is that?

VANYA. Is the answer supposed to be me?

SONIA. There isn't any answer. And if I pine for you, that's my business.

VANYA. Don't pine for me. That's ridiculous. I'm fifty-seven and I've told you for many years, I'm not interested in you in that way. I ... march to a different drummer.

SONIA. Why must you march to a drummer at all? Why couldn't we both ... walk to the sounds of a piccolo?

VANYA. What? I don't know what that metaphor means. Besides, you're my sister.

SONIA. We're not blood relations. I am your adopted sister. So I can pine if I want to.

VANYA. Look I think your pining after me is a tired reflex. I don't think you even like me anymore.

SONIA. I agree with you. It's a reflex with me now. It comes from our living together. There's no one else in the house. Ever since mother and father died. And Masha left me and you to take care of them while she was off gallivanting, having a life. Don't you feel

angry at Masha, that she's had a life?

VANYA. Yes, I do. But it's too late now to do anything about it. I must say, I always admired you for doing your duty and taking care of our elderly parents, even though you were adopted. You put Masha to shame, in my opinion.

SONIA. Thank you, I appreciate that.

VANYA. Of course she had a successful acting career, and you basically didn't have anything *else* to do.

SONIA. Well, a moment ago you gave me a lovely compliment. And now ... oh let's not talk. I'll keep my sadness to myself.

VANYA. Alright, you do that. (*Brief silence. After a while she sighs very heavily, once, twice, maybe three times. Vanya ignores it for a while, but then doesn't.*) Your sadness is very heavy this morning, Sonia. Can you lighten it any?

SONIA. No.

VANYA. Could you go to a different room?

SONIA. Leave the morning room? But I'm in mourning for my life.

VANYA. I hope you're not going to make Chekhov references all day.

SONIA. If they come up, I may.

VANYA. It's been our cross to bear that our parents gave us names from Chekhov plays. The other children made such fun of us with our mysterious names. Such was the burden of having two professor parents and so active in community theatre as well. Remember how good they were in *The Reluctant Debutante*? I don't think they were very good in the *Oresteia*, though, did you?

SONIA. No. But I don't think community theatre should do Greek tragedy.

VANYA. I don't either. Having professors for parents had its drawbacks. Father was so angry when you didn't know something. But what seven-year-old knows who wrote *The Imaginary Invalid*? Father became so enraged when I said Neil Simon. I mean, I was seven.

SONIA. And they were very, very difficult once they went mental in old age. Oh but when they were young, how wonderful our parents were, don't you think? Mother was so elegant. And Father showed affection for me often, he called me his little artichoke.

VANYA. And he liked artichokes. So it was probably a nice thing he called you that.

SONIA. Yes, I think so. And he never molested me.

VANYA. That's nice.

SONIA. God knows who my actual parents were. I have a feeling

they were two drunken Irish people who left me alone every night while they went to the pub. Until one night they were so bombed out of their minds, they walked off a cliff.

VANYA. Do you have any *nice* fantasies of who your parents were?

SONIA. No.

VANYA. I see. (*Sips the coffee.*) This has gone quite cold now.

SONIA. You're just determined to fight over the coffee, aren't you?

VANYA. No, I'm really not. I'm debating whether to go microwave the coffee.

SONIA. Do you want me to do it?

VANYA. Would you? That would be very nice of you. (*He hands her the cup. She seems calm but all of a sudden she smashes the cup onto the floor, near where the other one was smashed.*) What is the matter with you???

SONIA. Do I have to do everything?

VANYA. But you offered to take it. Are you bipolar now?

SONIA. Yes!

VANYA. Some people claim antidepressants help them.

SONIA. If everyone took antidepressants, Chekhov would have had nothing to write about.

VANYA. I'm not going to clean up the broken cups, you know.

SONIA. Me neither.

VANYA. Well, obviously there's no solution.

SONIA. The housekeeper comes today. We'll ask her to clean it up.

VANYA. What if she refuses?

SONIA. We'll fire her.

VANYA. Alright. We'll never ever pick the cups up, and instead we'll sell the house.

SONIA. You can't sell it. You don't own it. Masha owns it.

VANYA. I know Masha owns it! But if we leave broken cups and coffee smells all over the house, I'm sure she'll decide she *has* to sell it. And you and I can finally live separately since we hate each other.

SONIA. What a good idea!

VANYA. A very good idea! (*Short pause. They both look out, where presumably there is a picture window.*) It's comforting to have a pond to look at, isn't it? Pretty.

SONIA. Yes. I hope the blue heron comes later.

VANYA. I hope so too. It's like a good omen.

SONIA. Of course, it eats frogs, so it's not a good omen for them.

VANYA. No. Nature is cruel. But pretty. And for some reason I think

of the blue heron as a harbinger of good luck. *(Enter Cassandra. She's 30 to 60, dressed comfortably for cleaning. Or maybe a colorful dress, an exotic style, something she actually looks good in.)*

CASSANDRA. Beware the ides of March!

VANYA. What?

CASSANDRA. Beware the ides of March!

SONIA. March? Isn't it late August?

CASSANDRA. Beware the middle of the month! Beware of Greeks bearing gifts! *(Suddenly she feels inspiration from above, or from somewhere — her psychic powers suddenly turn on, maybe her head moves, or her eyes flutter; she is visited by visions/thoughts, and what she says she dramatically intones, sounding a bit like a speech in Greek tragedy. We should hear her words, she should make sense of them, but they should also be said fast, her mind and psyche are receiving thoughts quickly.)*

O wretches!

into the Land of Darkness we sail

in a pea green boat;

all around us is full of fire,

and the Delaware River overflows its bank,

and dismal moans rise from Bucks County,

where amity and enmity intermingle.

Portents of dismay

and calamity

yawn beneath the yonder cliff.

O fools looking behind but not looking ahead,

Dost thou not sense thy attendant doom?

VANYA. Cassandra, I have asked you repeatedly to please just say "good morning." Alright?

CASSANDRA. I see visions. Shadows of what lies ahead. It is my curse to see these shadows and my duty to warn you.

VANYA. Cassandra, I think you take your name too seriously.

CASSANDRA. My name? What do you mean?

VANYA. You know. Greek mythology. Apollo gave Cassandra second sight, but then cursed her so no one ever believed her.

CASSANDRA. Oh I know that. *(Sudden psychic thought pops into her head.)* Oh my God! I see something imminent. It's going to happen any moment. One of you is going to take two cups of coffee, and smash them onto the floor. *(She looks between them.)* It will be you, Vanya. Don't do it!

SONIA. It already happened.
CASSANDRA. Then I was right!
SONIA. No, you said it was GOING to happen, and it already has happened.
CASSANDRA. But I am correct you will want me to clean it up. Right? Where are the broken cups?
SONIA. *(Pointing.)* Right over there.
CASSANDRA. *(Looks.)* Oh my God! I was right. You did this, you, Vanya, broke the cups.
SONIA. That's right, he did.
VANYA. Just clean it up, would you please?
SONIA. Clean it up, clean it up!!!
CASSANDRA. Fie on you both! I see doom and destruction swirling around you.
VANYA. No, just say good morning. Try it.
CASSANDRA. Good morning.
VANYA. Thank you. Good morning.
SONIA. Good morning.
CASSANDRA. And yet, what's good about it? Beware of Hootie Pie.
SONIA. Who?
CASSANDRA. I don't know. Just beware of her. Or it.
VANYA. Hootie Pie. We need to keep a small notebook nearby and write all these things down. For your sanity hearing later.
SONIA. Hootie Pie. Is that a first name, "Hootie Pie"? Or is "Hootie" the first name, and "Pie" the last name?
VANYA. Or maybe Hootie Pie is a pie. And you can order it at a restaurant.
CASSANDRA. I don't know what Hootie Pie is. I just know you must beware it. *(She feels another psychic message. Maybe her head moves or maybe her eyes flutter. Something.)* And also beware of something happening to this house. *(Walks toward them, or walks in a bit of a circle.)* The house, beware. Be wary. Something bad is coming. You may lose the house.
VANYA. Lose it?
CASSANDRA. Someone will sell the house right from under you and you will become homeless. You will walk many miles to the poor house.
SONIA. Surely someone would give us a ride.
CASSANDRA. No, you will walk.
VANYA. And I don't think there are such things as the poor house anymore.

CASSANDRA. You will live in the gutter then. Excuse me, I must go and get a dustbuster and a pail of water and sponge to CLEAN UP YOUR MESS! *(She exits, angry.)*

VANYA. I wish she wouldn't come every week and tell us terrible things. It feels abusive.

SONIA. Yes, but sometimes she seems to get some of it right, no? Remember when she said a bat was going to get inside the house, and then it did at two A.M.

VANYA. Yes, true.

SONIA. Or that time she said I was going to break my middle toe, and minutes later I did.

VANYA. Yes, but that may have been some kind of hypnotic suggestion.

SONIA. Nonetheless she said those things and they happened. And when she started to talk about our losing the house, the house where we've been so happy, I became sad, and frightened.

VANYA. Where we've been so happy?

SONIA. I know I complain, but in some ways I love it here. It's where I've been since I was eight years old. I came from an orphanage, into a family that either loved me or pretended to, I get confused about that. And it's pretty here. And I love to look at the pond. I love the wild turkeys who wander about the property, I like learning they're so awkward that they sleep in trees but repeatedly fall out of them. I identify with them. I often fall out of my bed, thrashing about in my restless sleep. I am a wild turkey. I am a wild turkey. And I love the cherry orchard in the spring. All the pink blossoms, nature so resplendent.

VANYA. The cherry orchard? What cherry orchard?

SONIA. We have ten or eleven cherry trees, they blossom every spring. Do you not remember?

VANYA. I remember. But it's not an orchard. You don't call ten or eleven trees an orchard.

SONIA. I do. I wouldn't call two or three trees an orchard, but ten or eleven trees, I do call an orchard. *(Cassandra comes back with a dustbuster and cleans up the broken pieces of cups ...)*

CASSANDRA. Beware of chicken with salmonella. Beware of mushrooms that grow in the meadow.

SONIA. Just clean up the floor, would you? And besides, your entreaties never tell us what to do to protect ourselves.

CASSANDRA. Beware of thinking too much! Focus on the little

things. One foot after another. Enjoying a good cup of coffee and not smashing it onto the ground. A lovely chocolate cookie.

VANYA. Oh I'd like a cookie.

SONIA. I would too.

VANYA. Oh remember when Nana used to bring us tea and graham crackers to tide us over until dinner.

SONIA. Oh, graham crackers, graham crackers!

VANYA. And Masha would never have more than one ... she was preparing to be an actress even then, and chose to watch her figure.

SONIA. Imagine eating only one graham cracker. *(Suddenly remembering.)* Oh, Masha! I forgot to tell you. She's coming out here today.

VANYA. Masha is coming? She called?

SONIA. I forgot to tell you.

VANYA. No, you purposely don't tell me things. It's one of the ways in which you make life unnecessarily complicated.

SONIA. *(Angry, feeling criticized.)* I FORGOT to tell you. I am bipolar and I have incipient dementia.

VANYA. What time is she coming?

SONIA. In an hour or so. *(Suddenly there is the sound of a car pulling up outside.)* No ... sooner. *(Vanya realizes he's in his night-shirt and goes quickly upstairs, or maybe toward the kitchen, in order to pull on pants.)*

CASSANDRA. *(Referring to the car outside.)* Beware of Greeks bearing gifts. A Trojan horse can hide many things. Someone is with your sister, and he carries Trojans in his back pocket. I will be in the basement doing laundry. If I hear gunshots, I'll come back up. *(Cassandra exits.)*

SONIA. I really think we should get a new cleaning woman. *(Vanya returns with pants. He lets the top of the nightshirt pass as a regular shirt.)*

VANYA. Why is Masha here? Did she say? *(Enter Masha, attractive and grand, mid-50s, and looking great. With her is a handsome young man named Spike, age 27 or so. Spike is maybe dressed in worn-out jeans with rips in them. Or maybe is wearing more trendy, relaxed clothes. Sure of himself, and self-involved. Also outgoing. Masha is dressed well, a bit glamorous as if she might run into photographers somewhere.)*

MASHA. Dearest Vanya. Sweetest Sonia. How wonderful to see you. How I've missed you, and this beautiful house. *(Realizes she's missing something.)* Spike, darling, would you go to the car? I forgot

to bring my Snow White costume.

SPIKE. Okay.

MASHA. And don't forget the shepherd's crook.

SPIKE. Okay. *(To Vanya and Sonia, friendly, wised-up.)* Women, huh? *(Spike exits.)*

MASHA. Sweetest Vanya, dearest Sonia. How I've missed you. You both look the same. Older. Sadder. But the same. It's wonderful to see you, Vanya. Oh, and you too, Sonia.

SONIA. Yes, hello. I'm easy to miss.

MASHA. You are! I often miss you! I'm in a play or a movie, and I think of my dear Sonia, and think, oh I miss her! I must call her. Then I get called to the set and months go by and I forget to call. Life happens, no?

SONIA. Not here it doesn't. We sit still a lot. We look out the window. We bicker. We long for what the world cannot give. We are in our twilight years, and we realize we have never really lived.

MASHA. *(Lightly.)* Oh, that's too bad ... *(Back to herself, happy.)* Oh I wish I had time to sit still. I'm always busy, I'm always on the TV, or flying off to some foreign country to make a movie. Oh I wish I had time to read the classics, sit in a chair, and just read. Do you read the classics, Sonia?

SONIA. No. I think of it, but I have too much free time. There's so much I could fill the free time with, I can't make decisions. So I do nothing. I am a wild turkey, I am a wild turkey.

MASHA. Really? How alarming. *(Softer, to Vanya.)* What's the matter with her?

VANYA. She's referring to falling out of bed. She's fine. Masha, you look wonderful as usual. But what did you say about a Snow White costume?

MASHA. Oh did I forget to tell Sonia?

SONIA. Um ... probably. Tell me what?

MASHA. Well I got a lovely invitation from that extremely wealthy woman who bought the Dorothy Parker house up the road. She's one of our neighbors here, and she's dying to get to know people in the area, and so she's throwing a costume party. And she asked me to come.

VANYA. Well she hasn't asked us to come.

MASHA. Well you're not famous. She's inviting famous people and literary people, and interesting people. And, of course, you and Sonia are very interesting. And I told her that, so she wants both of

you to come with me and Spike tonight.

VANYA. Spike? (*Enter Spike, carrying a large garment bag, which holds the costume, and a shepherd's crook. He finds somewhere to hang up or put down the garment bag and the crook.*)

SPIKE. (*Friendly, charming.*) Yup, that's my name. Don't wear it out.

VANYA. I'll try not to.

SPIKE. Okay, I got the costume and this weird shepherd's thing.

MASHA. Thank you, Spike.

SONIA. Is Spike the name you were given at birth?

SPIKE. No, it's my acting name. My real name was Vlad. But my agent said that that was hard to hear, and I was wearing my hair all spikey that day, and he said, why don't you call yourself Spike. And so I do.

MASHA. Spike is a very gifted actor. He was almost cast in the sequel to *Entourage*, *Entourage 2*. HBO thought he was wonderful.

SPIKE. Yeah, I should've gotten that part.

MASHA. But, darling, you came very close. They brought you in to network. You were down to the last three.

SPIKE. Yeah. And they put me up in a fancy hotel.

MASHA. Well, of course.

SONIA. Maybe you'll come close to getting another part soon.

MASHA. Well next time he'll *get* the part.

SPIKE. Yeah, it's only a matter of time.

VANYA. I'm sorry, who is Spike? Is he your driver?

MASHA. He's my beloved!

VANYA. He looks ten.

MASHA. Oh, Vanya darling, don't exaggerate. He's twenty-nine if he's a day. And I'm only forty-one. Possibly forty-two. (*Masha and Spike kiss with abandon and passion.*)

SONIA. Hello. You're not alone in the room. Hello.

MASHA. Sorry, it's all rather new for me.

SONIA. Really? You've had five husbands.

SPIKE. I like older women.

VANYA. I'm relieved to hear it.

SPIKE. Hey, a spark is either there or it's not, right, Mashie?

MASHA. Isn't he adorable?

VANYA. He's attractive. I'm not sure if he's adorable.

SONIA. Really. Every time I see you, Masha, you make me feel bad. First you don't notice me in the room somehow, and say hello to me as an afterthought. And now here you are nearing your dotage,

and you've hooked up with some young stud. While I am forced to live through a succession of tedious days and tedious nights, and I never have fallen in love with anyone. Nor anyone with me. I'm sorry I was adopted into this family. I wish I had been left in the orphanage, and killed myself. Excuse me. (*Sonia exits upstairs.*)

SPIKE. Wow, intense.

MASHA. Oh, she's always been jealous of me, I'm really sick of it. I can't help if I'm beautiful and intelligent and talented and successful, can I?

VANYA. No, I guess you can't.

SPIKE. But the unhappy orphanage lady thinks I'm a stud, that's nice. (*He walks over to Vanya and says provocatively.*) What about you? Do you like how I look?

VANYA. What?

MASHA. Now, Spike, I'm sure Vanya thinks you're a perfectly nice-looking young man. Let's leave it at that. (*To Vanya.*) He craves attention slightly. But all good actors do.

SPIKE. I'm hot!

VANYA. Oh yes? Shouldn't you leave that for others to say?

SPIKE. (*Laughs good-naturedly.*) No, I mean I'm warm. The air is warm, I'm *hot*. (*Looking out the window.*) That pond that's out there. Can you swim in it?

VANYA. Swim in it? It's not very deep. You can wade in it.

SPIKE. Yeah. Maybe I'll do that.

MASHA. Really, darling, you want to wade in a pond?

SPIKE. Yeah, it's a hot day.

MASHA. I guess it is. There are frogs in the pond you know.

SPIKE. I like frogs.

MASHA. Did you bring a swim suit?

SPIKE. No, I can just strip to my underwear. See you later, babe, I'm gonna go cool off in the pond.

MASHA. Well, if that's what you want, darling. (*To Vanya.*) He's so unpredictable. (*Very comfortable, but also liking people to watch him, Spike takes his shoes off, then takes his shirt off, then takes his pants off. With abandon, he throws his clothes onto a couch or chair. He puts his shoes back on. He is now only in his underwear. He looks very good. He starts toward the pond, but gives Masha a quick kiss on his way out.*)

SPIKE. See you later! (*He moves quickly out of the room, but oddly ruffles Vanya's hair on his way outside. It's a playful gesture but Vanya*

finds it strange. Spike happily exits onto the grass, looking forward to wading and frogs ...)

MASHA. The younger generation is like that. They strip to their underwear right in front of everybody.

VANYA. Did he do that because he knows I'm gay?

MASHA. I rather think he did that because he knows I'm straight.

VANYA. Well it's very peculiar. Did you tell him I'm gay?

MASHA. No, why would I? And are you gay? I'm sorry, did we have some conversation I forgot?

VANYA. No, I guess we didn't. I just ... assumed you assumed.

MASHA. Oh, I did. I just thought maybe you were still in denial. Or had become asexual from so many years of abstinence. Oh, I've been a bad sister. I'm sorry, darling. Where is Sonia? Oh that's right, I upset her. Well I'll apologize later.

VANYA. I must say, I'm a trifle surprised to see you with this young, young man. How old is he?

MASHA. *(Takes his hand.)* Oh, Vanya dear, I'm so happy I'm with Spike. He's so adventurous and free, he gives me energy. We've been together three months.

VANYA. Well he's handsome. Is he a good idea?

MASHA. Don't be judgmental. I've been very lonely for several years ever since Robert left me for Angelina Jolie.

VANYA. Angelina Jolie?

MASHA. I just say that to make myself feel better. He left me for someone who looked a little like Angelina Jolie. So I comfort myself with saying it was she. Still I haven't been able to hold on to my husbands, I don't know why. I'm talented, charming, successful — and yet they leave me. They must be insane. *(Enter Sonia.)*

SONIA. Why is that young man naked in the pond?

VANYA. He's naked? *(Looks out the window, interested.)* Sonia, he's wearing underpants. That's not naked.

SONIA. Well, underpants, naked, it's the same to me.

VANYA. You need glasses.

SONIA. I need a life. I need a friend. I need a change. But nothing ever changes.

MASHA. Now, now, please don't get down in the dumps.

SONIA. That's easy for you to say. You have a life, you have a career.

MASHA. Oh, I wish you wouldn't feel jealous of me. It just exhausts me. Even if you were an actress, God forbid, we wouldn't ever go up for the same parts. I'm a leading lady, while you are much more of a ...

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VANYA. Masha, I don't think you should finish that sentence.

SONIA. Thank you, Vanya.

VANYA. You're welcome, Sonia.

MASHA. Well, it's not as if my career has been without disappointments, just like your life, Sonia. I've suffered too. I'm a movie star, but am I known as a classical actress on the stage?

SONIA. No you're not.

MASHA. Exactly! That's a path I didn't get to take. Remember when that famous acting teacher was going to cast me as Masha in *Three Sisters*. He said I was born to play that role. Imagine how wonderful I would've been. *(To Vanya and Sonia, suddenly acting the lines:)* "Oh my sisters, let us go to Moscow! To Moscow, let us go." I would have said that with an ache in my voice and my soul, and it would have been heartbreaking. I feel the public doesn't know how heartbreaking I can be. *(Genuinely.)* Oh missed opportunities! Regret, regret, regret!

SONIA. Regret, regret!

MASHA. Please don't change the focus to yourself, Sonia. I'm talking now. You can talk later.

SONIA. When?

MASHA. Four-thirty. *(Back to her story.)* Oh that famous acting teacher said I was born to play the classics. And that once I did *Three Sisters*, he said I would have one classical triumph after another. I'd be the American Judi Dench. But I had to go do that movie about the nymphomaniac serial killer. It was a terrible script, but I was so good in it that it became this enormous hit and, of course, we made five of them eventually. Did you see all of them?

VANYA. Oh yes, we certainly did. We liked you very much. They were extremely violent though. Sonia had to look away from the screen a lot.

SONIA. Yes I did.

MASHA. Oh darling, sensitive, tedious Sonia. You can't face life, can you? *(Sonia begins to respond, but Masha stops her.)* No, don't answer. You can talk at four-thirty.

SONIA. Why four-thirty?

MASHA. That's my nap time. *(When Sonia looks horrified.)* I'm kidding, I'm kidding. Four-thirty is the cocktail hour, a half an hour early. I usually have a Black Russian. And a drink as well. Oh, I'm amusing myself, sorry. *(Focuses back on her story.)* Anyway, as I

SON

was saying, that movie, *Sexy Killer*, really changed my life — it took me from being a respected actress to being a global celebrity. And there is a difference. “Fame, thou glittering bauble.” Who said that?

VANYA. Captain Hook.

MASHA. The real Captain Hook?

VANYA. There wasn't a real Captain Hook. He was just in *Peter Pan*.

MASHA. “Fame, thou glittering bauble.” Such an interesting thing for a pirate to say. And then they begged me to do a sequel, and it seemed inescapable to me. We made five of them. And those movies made me millions. But my point was the theatre lost a great tragic classical actress when I didn't play my namesake Masha in that famous acting teacher's production of *Three Sisters*. That's my point!

SONIA. You keep talking about this famous acting teacher. Who are you referring to?

MASHA. Derek Seretsky.

SONIA. Who?

MASHA. Derek Seretsky. Maybe he wasn't famous. He was famous to me.

VANYA. When did you study with him?

MASHA. Oh, many years ago, I can't remember dates or decades. I just live. I recall I had three fabulous sessions with him. He taught a combination of Stanislavskian sense memory mixed with Meisner repetition technique. I'd say, “Oh, Olga, let's go to Moscow,” and he'd say back to me, “Oh, Olga, let's go to Moscow?” And I'd say, “Oh Olga — let's GO to Moscow.” And he'd say, “Oh, oh, oh, Olga, let's go to MosCOW.” And then I said, “Ho, ho, ho, let's go to Moscow, Olga. Moscow, Moscow, Olga. Oh, Oh, Olga, let's go!” I'm sorry, this is sounding incredibly false as I'm saying it. It makes one think I would've been horrible in *Three Sisters*. Maybe I would have been. (*Suddenly shouts emphatically.*) No, no, I would've been great! Let's not talk about it anymore. Let's talk about something else. Sonia, what's new with you?

SONIA. I'm not allowed to speak until four-thirty.

MASHA. Everyone's so touchy here. No, you can talk.

SONIA. How old is Spike exactly?

MASHA. Let's talk about something fun. We're going to a party tonight, and a costume one at that. I love costume parties.

SONIA. We don't have any costumes to wear, Masha.

MASHA. Yes, you do. I asked Hootie Pie to organize some costumes for both of you, and they're in the car.

VANYA. (*Worried.*) Hootie Pie?

SONIA. (*Worried.*) Who is Hootie Pie?

MASHA. Why do you both look frightened? (*Enter Cassandra, she's clearly been listening just offstage.*)

CASSANDRA. I was right! Didn't I say "Beware of Hootie Pie"? I saw this coming, I warned you, but did you listen?

MASHA. Who is this person?

CASSANDRA. I wonder, could I get your autograph? My niece is a big fan of yours, she loves all those *Sexy Killer* movies.

MASHA. Oh how nice. I'd be happy to give her an autograph.

CASSANDRA. Make it out to Rebecca Sue, if you would. (*Hands Masha a small card to sign.*)

MASHA. Alright. Becky Sue. (*Masha signs the card, gives it back to Cassandra.*) Give my best to your niece. And who are you?

VANYA. This is Cassandra, she's our cleaning woman.

CASSANDRA. They never listen to me. And this morning, I had a sense that Vanya and Sonia must beware of an entity called Hootie Pie.

MASHA. Well, she's not an entity.

VANYA. What is she then?

MASHA. She's my new assistant and completely devoted to me.

SONIA. It might be fun to go to a party, Vanya. I've wanted to see the house Dorothy Parker used to live in. Do you know her suicide poem? It was very witty, at the same time it actually made you want to kill yourself.

MASHA. You know, I'm feeling rather hungry after my long drive. (*To Cassandra.*) Would you mind making a light lunch for all of us?

CASSANDRA. I am the cleaning lady. I am not the cook.

MASHA. Could you not make us a modest repast? A *salade niçoise*. An artichoke quiche perhaps. I would certainly pay you something for your trouble.

CASSANDRA. I don't want to.

MASHA. Alright. Give me back that autograph I gave you.

CASSANDRA. No.

MASHA. Yes.

CASSANDRA. Alright, I'll make you lunch. (*Exits, grouchy.*)

MASHA. Don't feed us your anger, please.

SONIA. I'm starting to like the idea of a party. A party could be fun. Maybe I'd meet someone. Or in any case, the people there wouldn't know me and wouldn't have a bad impression of me, and

maybe I could be witty at the party, and make new friends. What do you think, Vanya?

VANYA. (*Thinks it doubtful, but tries to agree.*) Uh, sure.

MASHA. I'm going as Snow White. I wanted Spike to go as Prince Charming, but I think he's going as a rap star. You must talk him into Prince Charming, would you, Vanya? And Hootie Pie came up with good ideas for both of you. Vanya, you can be one of the seven dwarfs, we think you should go as Grumpy.

VANYA. I don't want to go as Grumpy.

MASHA. It suits you.

VANYA. No. If anything I should go as Doc. The one with the wire rim glasses and the beard. I think I look like him now that I'm older.

MASHA. Well I suppose you can be Doc. He's not as memorable as Grumpy.

SONIA. What costume did you bring for me?

MASHA. Hootie and I thought you could go as Dopey.

SONIA. What?

MASHA. You know, the dwarf Dopey. And he's clean shaven, so you wouldn't have to wear a beard.

SONIA. I don't want to be Dopey! (*Starts to cry.*)

MASHA. Darling, Sonia, forgive me. Which dwarf do you want to be?

SONIA. I don't want to be a dwarf!

MASHA. But, darling, I only brought two dwarf costumes. That's all Hootie Pie made up for me.

SONIA. Fuck Hootie Pie!

MASHA. Well, who do you want to be then? Goodness, all this fuss over costumes, it's just a party for heaven's sake.

SONIA. I don't want to go as your dwarf. I want to go as ... Jean Harlow. Or Marlene Dietrich.

MASHA. Well I must say. I'm the one who was invited, and I'm going as Snow White. And obviously the rest of you should go in a costume connected to ME. Snow White is the central figure. I can't have you traipsing around, pathetically trying to be Marlene Dietrich.

VANYA. Oh dear. This is getting out of control. Masha, Sonia doesn't want to be a dwarf and I must say I understand her feeling. I don't mind going as a dwarf, I'm happy to be a dwarf. But isn't there some other fairy tale figure that's appealing that Sonia could go as.

MASHA. No, it has to be from *Snow White*, it has to be connected.

Oh I have an idea. Sonia, do you want to go as the wicked witch with the wart on her nose? *(Sonia stands up to Masha with firmness.)*

SONIA. I do not wish to be a witch with a wart on my nose, Masha. I am going to go as the BEAUTIFUL evil queen BEFORE she turns into the wicked witch. The one who says mirror, mirror on the wall, and so on. And I will look good in my costume!

MASHA. Well I don't know that Hootie Pie can organize such a costume by tonight ...

SONIA. I will get the costume myself. There's a secondhand store in Upper Black Eddy. I will drive there this afternoon and I will find some sort of Beautiful Evil Queen costume that I will wear tonight.

VANYA. Good for you, Sonia.

MASHA. Well I don't see why you're both ganging up on me. You can see why I don't come here that much. And what kind of name for a town is Upper Black Eddy? Pennsylvania scares me sometimes.

SONIA. Well what kind of name do you prefer? *(Contemptuously.)* Manhattan? The Upper West Side?

MASHA. Sonia, I'm sorry if I offended you about the dwarf costume. But you do whatever makes you happy. I only want to be around happy people. *(Sonia looks out the front window, by chance.)*

SONIA. Who is that young woman Spike is talking to down at the pond?

MASHA. *(Immediately worried.)* What young woman? *(All three of them look out the window. Masha looks quite concerned and leaves the morning room quickly and stands on the grass, calling out toward the pond.)* Spike! Spike! We need you up here. *(She comes back into the room.)* He can't hear me. Do you have a gong or anything?

VANYA. What for?

MASHA. I just want to make a noise and summon him back.

SONIA. We don't have a gong. You probably could take a big pot and bang it with a metal spoon.

MASHA. Oh what a good idea, thank you, Sonia. *(Goes off to kitchen.)* Cassandra! I need a pot! *(Masha exits toward the kitchen.)*

SONIA. *(Not confrontational; being honest.)* I don't think you believe I'll meet anyone at this party. I think you looked at me with pity as I said that.

VANYA. *(Trying to be kind.)* No, not at all. One should stay open to unexpected possibilities. I think you could meet someone there tonight.

SONIA. Our lives are over, aren't they?

VANYA. Yes I think so.

SONIA. Still, I'll go to the party. And I won't go dressed as a dwarf. *(Reenter Masha with a big pot and a big metal serving spoon.)*

MASHA. I had to struggle with her to get a pot out of the kitchen. And she started to do all that "Beware this" and "Beware that" business. She's very difficult. *(Masha goes outside again and makes very loud noises banging the pot. Calling.)* Spike! Spike! We need you! Spike!

VANYA. Oh look, he's seen her. He's waving.

MASHA. *(Calling.)* Lunch is almost ready. *(Seeing something.)* No, don't bring the girl. There's not enough lunch. Tell her to go home.

VANYA. Oh, the girl's coming with him. *(Masha comes back into the house, angry.)*

MASHA. I don't know if he can't hear me or is pretending he can't. Oh God. She's very pretty. And she's very young.

SONIA. Masha, I'm sure the power of your money and your connections will keep Spike at your side for a long time.

MASHA. Oh. That's a comforting point. Thank you. I shouldn't be intimidated by a young girl, should I? Plus I don't actually know how pretty she is, maybe she's hideous. *(Enter Spike and Nina. Nina is in her early 20s, and is very pretty and luminous.)*

SPIKE. Look who I met at the pond.

MASHA. Oh did you meet someone?

SPIKE. Yes. She's visiting her aunt and uncle who live next door. And you're her favorite actress, and she came over here hoping to meet you.

MASHA. Oh how charming. Welcome, lovely little nymph.

NINA. Hello. Oh, it's so thrilling to meet you. My aunt and uncle said to me you mustn't go bother them, and plus she's never ever there, but then we had our binoculars out and we saw your car drive up, and I thought, I can't believe she's here! I can meet Masha Hardwicke. A woman who has achieved fame and success in theatre and in motion pictures. I LONG to make theatre my life, and you're an idol to me. And I'm only here for three days, and I hoped I could meet you, but then I didn't dare think it would actually happen. But it has.

MASHA. *(Sort of friendly.)* Yes, you're meeting me. Hello. Hello.

NINA. And today is my name day, can you imagine? Americans like to say "birthday," but I like to say "name day" because I love the

plays of Anton Chekhov and Irina in *Three Sisters* is always saying “it’s my name day.”

MASHA. Ah, well. It’s lovely to meet you. You’re so very pretty and luminous, and full of youthful hope and enthusiasm. I wonder if it makes it hard for older people to be around you.

NINA. I’m sorry, what?

MASHA. Nothing. My unconscious was speaking, pay no mind. Happy name day. What is your name by the way?

NINA. I’m Nina.

MASHA. (*Furious.*) GOD DAMN IT!

VANYA. What’s the matter?

MASHA. That crazy psychic in the kitchen told me to “Beware of Nina” and now her fucking name is Nina!!!

NINA. What? I’m sorry, what?

SONIA. Hello, Nina, I have a feeling no one is going to introduce me, I’m kind of like furniture in the room rather than a person. But I’m Sonia, Masha’s sister. Although I’m adopted and don’t really belong here. Or anywhere. And this is my brother Vanya.

VANYA. Hello, Nina. Happy name day.

NINA. How lovely to meet you. And what a funny joke about the furniture. (*Everyone looks confused.*)

SPIKE. I told Nina I’d introduce her to my manager. And I invited her to the costume party.

MASHA. (*Taking that in.*) You invited her. How nice. I have an idea! Spike, why don’t we skip the party and hop in the car and race back to New York City right this minute. I suddenly want to see a Broadway show. How late is the half-price ticket booth open, does anyone know?

SPIKE. No, I wanna go to the party. And Nina is so excited to meet you. She just worships you. (*A bit flirtatiously.*) As do I.

MASHA. (*Taking in what he said, a bit mollified.*) Well, that’s sweet of you to say, Spike. I ... uh ... am flattered Nina looks up to me. Hello, Nina. Happy name day.

NINA. Thank you. (*Enter Cassandra.*)

CASSANDRA. Lunch will be a little delayed. I dropped the omelets on the floor. I’m going to have to start over. (*Sees Nina, points at her.*) What did I say? BEWARE OF NINA!

MASHA. Cassandra, Nina is visiting from next door, and she’s a lovely aspiring actress.

CASSANDRA. Well, I warned you, but the curse of Apollo keeps

everyone from acting on my warnings. (*Feels drawn to make a bit of a speech.*)

Oh mystery and misery, descends upon me like a thunder cloud,
Pregnant with rain and Jupiter's arrows.

The terrible burden of true prophecy, of my unwanted but
unstoppable prelude.

Look out, look out — all around us are lions and tigers and bears.

Oh my, the omelette is a failure, I crush it beneath my foot.

The libation bearers bring guts and entrails
And parents' children chopped up and served in a shepherd's pie.
Something tastes wrong with it — little wonder!

Next time you won't go killing Agamemnon, will you?

He's already dead. My car needs to be inspected,

How can I keep all these facts in my head when I see calamity
and colossus

Lumbering up the walkway?

Oh wretches, oh misery, oh magical mystery tour.

Beware the future. I know you will not abide me,

You ignore because I am not tall.

But I am right! I see disaster ahead for all of you!

Lunch in about twenty minutes! (*She strides out.*)

NINA. Oh she's a wonderful actress, too. What was that from,
what she just recited?

MASHA. It was from one of the Greek tragedies, I think. But I
believe she embellished it slightly.

NINA. Tell me ... I wonder if this is a stupid question. But what is
the difference between acting in a movie and acting onstage?

MASHA. No, it's not stupid at all. In film, you are acting in front of
a camera, and you need to speak in a normal voice. And onstage, you
are in a sort of wooden box in front of people who are looking at you
and you must speak more loudly. So that they can hear you.

NINA. I see, yes. What was your favorite role onstage?

MASHA. My favorite role onstage. Well I loved all the Ibsen I did,
and the Chekhov, and the Shakespeare. Google me when you go
home. Besides I'm not the only actor in the room. Spike is wonder-
fully talented. He was almost cast in *Entourage 2*.

NINA. Yes, he told me.

MASHA. Spike, why don't you ... (*Suddenly notices he's still in his un-
derwear.*) Goodness, you're still in your underwear. Spike, dear, why

don't you do the opposite of a strip tease, and put your clothes back on, and then you can show Nina the audition you did. I coached him. SPIKE. Oh, okay. *(He starts to put his clothes back on. But it's immediately sexual, as if he's in a strip club.)* First I have to take my shoes off, so I can put my pants back on. *(He takes his shoes off.)* And now it's time for the jeans. *(He pulls on his jeans, but very seductively; gyrating his body.)* But I'm not going to zip the zipper up all the way. Not just yet. *(Everyone has been staring at him, not quite sure what else to do. Vanya moves closer and sits on the floor, watching him unabashedly.)*

MASHA. Maybe we don't need to watch Spike while he's dressing.

SPIKE. No it's alright, I don't mind. *(Masha gets focused on arranging some of the furniture for the upcoming audition. Spike is getting into his reverse strip tease.)* I'm going to leave the zipper a little undone. Because I know I'm going to tuck in my shirt when I get to putting that on.

SONIA. Should we leave the room until he's finished?

SPIKE. No, I'm almost done. Now I could do the shirt first, or I could do the belt first. I think I'll do the belt. *(He kind of plays with the belt before putting it on. Or he puts it on, but makes a big deal of it ... Masha re-focuses on him as he does more sexual gyrating ...)*

MASHA. What are you doing? Are you insane?

SPIKE. *(He was just obeying.)* You told me to do a reverse strip tease.

MASHA. Did I? Well I'm sure I didn't mean it. Just get dressed for God's sake.

SPIKE. Okay, okay. *(To Nina.)* The older generation is all uptight about their bodies.

MASHA. Okay, now your clothes are back on, very good, thank you. We all had a lovely time.

SPIKE. Gosh, you're in a weird mood today.

NINA. Well maybe I should be going.

SPIKE. No. I was going to show you my audition. Unless you don't want to see.

NINA. No, I'd love to see. *(Everyone sits down to watch him.)*

SPIKE. The original series *Entourage* is about this young actor who's making it big in the movies, and it's about the guys who hang around him — his friends, his manager, his agent. Everyone wants a piece of him.

NINA. I'd be so nervous if I ever had to audition. But I'd be so thrilled, too.

SPIKE. Yeah, it's tough to audition. I was real lucky to have a pro like Masha coach me.

MASHA. Yes, let's get to the audition now.

SPIKE. So I was auditioning for the spin-off series *Entourage 2*. And it has a different setup because in this one there's an up-and-coming actor who's starting to make it big in the movies, but he's played by somebody else, so the implication is it's another character.

MASHA. It's not an implication. He is another character.

SPIKE. (*Kind of laughs, realizes he got confused.*) Right. I know that. His name is Bradley Wood, and he's the lead. And in *this* version, his entourage is this old dame who's his agent, and this young guy on coke who's his manager, and his best friend from high school who's a girl who has a crush on him but she has this disease that gives her convulsions so she can never kiss anybody, 'cause she gets convulsions. And I live next door to a rabbi who's played by Judd Hirsch. But he's not on every week.

MASHA. Yes, yes. Let's move it along, pacing, pacing.

SPIKE. Okay, and he's been having an affair with his older agent lady, but he's thinking of moving on to another agent. So the scene is between Bradley Wood and his lady agent.

NINA. I see.

SPIKE. Okay he comes into the room, and the manager is there. "Hey, good-looking. How's tricks?" And Masha used to read the other lines. Do you remember them, Masha?

MASHA. Kind of. But I think you should try to do it as a monologue ... we'll all intuit what the other lines are.

SPIKE. Oh, okay. (*He likes the challenge. He changes his body language, and begins the scene, maybe unbuttons his top three shirt buttons.*) Hey, good-looking. How's tricks? (*Dutifully ad-libs listening to make it a monologue.*) What? Who told you that? Hey, don't cry. Come on, give me a smile. Besides it's not definite. (*Pointedly listens.*) Well ... yeah, it's true, I did meet with some agents at CAA. I thought they were real impressive. I mean, they can call up Sandy Bullock, they can call up Julia Roberts. You gotta face it, you don't know that caliber of person. What? (*He listens.*) What about loyalty? What about my career? What about my getting ahead? Yeah, I know you put in a lot of time with me. But I put a lot time in with you, too. And I don't know ... I think I might like CAA better. What? (*Listens.*) Oh, that. Well, yeah, just 'cause I go to another agent doesn't mean we have to stop sleeping together occasionally. Well I

think it's occasional. I mean I sleep with other people, too. I want to be successful, I can't just sleep with one old broad all the time. Oh, I'm sorry, don't cry. I think of "old broad" as a term of affection. (*Listens.*) Oh yeah? Well fuck you! (*He bows, smiles.*)

MASHA. Wasn't that good? (*Masha leads the applause. Nina is sincere and thinks it was good. Vanya and Sonia are a touch shell-shocked but applaud anyway.*)

NINA. Oh that was wonderful. I can sense great things in your future.

SPIKE. Yeah, cool. Thanks. (*Enter Cassandra.*)

CASSANDRA. Luncheon is served. It's Campbell soup and tuna fish sandwiches. I was only asked to make lunch for four, but I did stretch it to five, though the sandwiches are a little skimpy with the tuna fish. (*Exits.*)

MASHA. Well, the lunch sounds repellent, but shall we go in?

NINA. (*To Masha.*) Oh you're so kind to invite me to lunch, but I mustn't impose any further. And you did invite me to the costume party, so I'll come back for that, shall I?

MASHA. Yes, dear. That would be lovely. Why don't you come over at seven-thirty, it's just a little ways away, at the Dorothy Parker house.

NINA. Wonderful. I'll see you later. It was a pleasure to meet you all. (*To Masha.*) And a special honor to meet you, Miss Hardwicke. (*Nina exits. Bit of a pause from everyone.*)

MASHA. Well. That was ... fun. I need to go lie down. I think I'll forgo the tuna fish sandwiches.

SONIA. And I need to drive to Upper Black Eddy, and find a costume.

MASHA. Spike, do you want to take a nap with me?

SPIKE. I think I'll have the soup and sandwich.

MASHA. I think I'm getting a headache. Excuse me.

SPIKE. I'll come up in a bit and give you a massage.

MASHA. That would be lovely, thank you. (*Exits to upstairs.*)

SONIA. Vanya, do you want to come with me?

VANYA. You know, the soup and sandwich doesn't sound so bad to me. I think maybe I'll stay and have lunch.

SONIA. Alright. See you later then. Goodbye, Spike. (*Exits.*)

SPIKE. So it's just you and me, pal.

VANYA. Yes.

SPIKE. Time to tie on the old feed bag, right? (*Friendly, but has a flirtatious vibe; he sort of does with everyone.*)

VANYA. Oh yes, right.

SPIKE. Tell me, did you like my audition? Feel free to be honest.
VANYA. Um ... I liked it very much. I don't see why HBO didn't cast you. I think they must be ... muddled.
SPIKE. Yeah, screwed up, huh? Come on, old guy, let's go chow down, and you can tell me more of what you thought. *(They start to exit to the dining room.)*
VANYA. *(Not sure what else he can say.)* Tell you more? Alright ... *(They exit to the dining room.)*

Scene 2

Sound of a doorbell.

MASHA. *(Calling from offstage.)* Come in! The door is open. *(Enter Masha dressed like Snow White, and carrying a shepherd's crook. Her costume is based on the old Walt Disney cartoon: she has a bright blue bodice, with puffy sleeves around her shoulders. She has a big yellow skirt to the floor, and a red bow in her hair. She looks good, but it's a somewhat dominating costume. It is possible she is still putting parts of the costume on. Meanwhile Nina has let herself in and enters the morning room. She is dressed like a princess. She holds a fairy wand.)*
NINA. Hello. Oh my, you look beautiful.
MASHA. Oh dear, I didn't talk to you about costumes, did I? Whatever are you dressed as?
NINA. I didn't have anything, but my aunt and uncle took me to K-Mart, and I'm a princess.
MASHA. Oh you are? I see. I didn't get it. I thought you were a child dressed in her mother's clothes.
NINA. I'm sorry. I wasn't expecting to go to a costume party.
MASHA. No, that's quite evident.
NINA. What are you dressed as?
MASHA. What am I dressed as? You can't tell?
NINA. I think so. Are you that silent screen actress from the old movie who lives in a mansion and says, "I'm ready for my close-up, Mr. DeMille"? What's her name?
MASHA. No, I'm not Norma Desmond. Although when I'm

around you, I feel like her. You must be reading my aura.

NINA. I never really saw the movie. I just saw the clip where she says, “ready for my close-up.” So who are you dressed as?

MASHA. I’m dressed as Snow White. The Walt Disney version.

NINA. I’ve never seen *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Is it like *The Little Mermaid*?

MASHA. (*A touch annoyed.*) No. One’s about a mermaid, and the other’s about dwarfs.

NINA. I see.

MASHA. Now since I’m Snow White, I feel all the other people going to the party with me must *relate* to Snow White. (*Enter Vanya dressed like one of the seven dwarfs. Big floppy knit cap, and a pumpkin-colored shirt with a belt around and brown pants.*) You see — like that. That’s Grumpy, one of the seven dwarfs.

VANYA. Doc.

MASHA. Right. Doc. Another one of the seven dwarfs.

VANYA. You look lovely, Nina.

MASHA. No she doesn’t. She looks like a child dressed for Halloween. I’m afraid I can’t have it.

NINA. (*Sad but obedient.*) Oh. Well maybe I can’t go then. I’m sorry I didn’t have the right costume.

VANYA. Masha ...

MASHA. No, no, Nina. I’m not saying you can’t go to the party. I’m so sorry. I’m really being a bully, but when you’re my age — whatever that age is — you get used to having your way. I suppose I’m monstrous, but lovable monstrous, I hope. Besides, the good news is I have an extra costume that DOES relate to *Snow White*, and if you’ll just put it on, then we’ll all be very happy. Now wait here, I have to ask Spike where he put it.

NINA. Oh I can’t wait to see what he’s wearing.

MASHA. Really? Why?

NINA. Well, I can’t wait to see what everyone’s wearing.

MASHA. Okay.

VANYA. What is he going as?

MASHA. He’s going as Prince Charming. It took a long time to convince him, so everyone tell him he looks sexy. Not you, Nina. Vanya, you tell him. I’ll be right back. (*Masha suddenly takes both of Nina’s hands.*) Thank you, Nina, for being so cooperative. (*Ends the moment, moves on, exits to the second floor.*)

NINA. I wonder what costume she has for me.

VANYA. I'm afraid I know. I believe you're going to be a dwarf like me. Dopey.

NINA. I'm just so happy to be included. I love to be around artistic people, who create things, who act, who value the arts.

VANYA. Well Masha obviously fits that. I'm afraid Sonia and I are just ... two lumps on a log.

NINA. Oh I don't think so. I feel you both have hidden reservoirs that just haven't been tapped. Or maybe you're secretly creating things, and not telling anyone.

VANYA. That's remarkable that you say that. I have been writing something ... I haven't told anyone, not even Sonia.

NINA. I thought so. I sensed it. Is it a TV pilot?

VANYA. No, it's a play. In progress. And I was thinking of that play Konstantin writes in *The Seagull*. And it's very experimental and mysterious, and I can never tell if it's meant to be a play ahead of its time or just a play that's ... rotten. And so I thought I might like to write my own version of that play, but relate it to now and see if it would ... be good or not.

NINA. Oh I'm so honored you told me this. I feel certain it's good. I always feel so sorry for Konstantin when I read that play, they were so mean to him.

VANYA. Well, life is hard for everyone, I guess.

NINA. You remind me of my uncle, only nicer and more artistic. He burps a lot and doesn't speak much. But you don't burp that I've noticed, and you're quiet but then you speak when spoken to. May I call you Uncle Vanya?

VANYA. If you like.

NINA. Why don't I do a reading of your play tomorrow for everyone?

VANYA. Oh I don't know if I want the others to hear it. It may be terrible. I wrote something when I was little, and my father joked and said it was pathetic.

NINA. How is that a joke?

VANYA. Good question.

NINA. Let me read it tomorrow. Either privately for you. Or, the braver choice, for everyone.

VANYA. Alright. I didn't expect to befriend you.

NINA. I'm glad you did.

VANYA. I thought you were going to be more Spike's friend.

NINA. He is awfully handsome.

VANYA. Yes I imagine he is.

NINA. Isn't it terrible that attractive people are so charismatic?

VANYA. Yes, terrible. *(Enter Masha with a box, followed by Spike. Spike is dressed as a romantic fairy-tale prince. Tights, a crown, a loose white shirt with a V-neck which laces up.)*

MASHA. We finally found it.

SPIKE. You said she didn't have a costume. She's wearing a costume.

MASHA. It doesn't go with Snow White. Nina understands.

SPIKE. I think she looks pretty.

MASHA. It doesn't matter if she looks pretty if it doesn't relate to Snow White. We all agreed Snow White was the theme.

SPIKE. None of us agreed to it.

MASHA. Shut up.

NINA. It's alright, I want to make Miss Hardwicke happy. I'm willing to wear whatever costume she wants me to.

MASHA. Thank you, dear. *(To Spike.)* Go get the paper bag for her head, would you? *(To Nina.)* No! I'm just kidding. Please call me Masha.

NINA. Thank you.

MASHA. Now why don't you go change in the bathroom off the kitchen.

SPIKE. That's the size of a closet.

MASHA. She's a small girl, I'm sure she'll fit fine.

NINA. Alright, I'll be back soon. *(She exits to the kitchen.)*

MASHA. Vanya, how do you think Spike looks as a prince?

VANYA. I think he looks very good.

MASHA. What else.

VANYA. He looks sexy. Though for the full effect, maybe he should go in his underwear.

SPIKE. That's what I said.

MASHA. You have been in your underwear entirely too much today. Let's not argue. I'm turning into a harpy. Let me change my aura. Everyone be quiet a moment. *(With her hands she pushes the air around as if that is the upset aura she wants to be rid of. Pushing the aura away makes her feel better. She relaxes her body and breathes easier.)* Oh I feel better. Life is good. And Spike, you look wonderful as Prince Charming.

SPIKE. Thank you. You make a hot Snow White. *(Spike and Masha kiss. Vanya looks away politely. Enter Sonia. She is in a sparkling sequin gown that takes over the room. She's wearing glittering earrings, bracelets, and a tiara. She looks very good. It might be a beautiful,*

strong turquoise color. She doesn't look like the Evil Queen in Snow White. But she does look good.)

SONIA. *(In a Maggie Smith voice.)* Mirror, mirror on the wall. Who is the fairest of them all? Is it me, Sidney? Tonight, let it be me.

MASHA. What is that you're doing?

SONIA. *(Her regular voice.)* I'm the Evil Queen from *Snow White*, as played by Maggie Smith on the way to the Oscars.

MASHA. Well, Maggie Smith has nothing to do with ... oh, never mind, I give up, it's fine. You're the Evil Queen, that's what I'll tell everyone.

SONIA. *(In Maggie Smith voice.)* As played by Maggie Smith about to win an Oscar. Oh, Sidney, do you think I'll win? I already have one Oscar for *Miss Jean Brodie* — *(Does her Maggie Smith voice with Scotland accent.)* "Little gels, I am in the business of putting old heads on young shoulders" — *(Back to the core Maggie Smith voice.)* but it would be lovely to win a second Oscar, my first one is so lonely on the mantelpiece. Do you agree, Sidney? Will I win tonight? Tonight let it be me, Sidney.

SPIKE. Sidney? Sidney Kowalski?

MASHA. It's Stanley Kowalski, not Sidney Kowalski.

SONIA. *(In Maggie Smith voice.)* Sidney, I may have to get a little drunk before they read the nominations. Don't go traipsing off to other tables, leaving me unattended. Not tonight, Sidney.

MASHA. I don't understand what she's doing.

VANYA. Sonia is doing Maggie Smith in *California Suite*. She plays an actress married to a gay man named Sidney, played by Michael Caine, and in the movie they go to the Oscars together.

SONIA. *(In Maggie Smith voice.)* That's right. In the film she plays an actress nominated for an Oscar who then doesn't win the Oscar, poor thing ... But in her real life she was nominated for playing the nominated actress, and then went on to WIN it. The nominated actress who lost the Oscar became the nominated actress who won the Oscar. It was all rather Pirandellian. And rather cheeky.

MASHA. You look very good tonight, Sonia. *(Pause.)* I think we should switch costumes.

SONIA. What?

MASHA. No, I'm kidding. I'm making a self-aware joke about how competitive I am. Spike, go to the kitchen and see if Nina has gotten tangled up in a door knob or something.

SPIKE. Okay. *(He exits.)*

MASHA. I don't know why I thought going to a costume party would be fun. And every time I come to this house, I get unhappy.

VANYA. Speaking of the house, the storms have been getting much worse, Cassandra says it's climate change and we're all going to be dead in ten years, but in any case, we need to get the roof repaired.

MASHA. Oh, I've been meaning to tell you. I've decided to sell the house. I mean, I pour buckets of money into it, and I'm never here, and neither of you have money to put into the house, and Hootie Pie nicely offered to look at my expenses, and she pointed out I'm pouring all this money into this old house I hardly ever go to.

SONIA. I can't believe my ears. We grew up here. Our roots are here.

MASHA. Well, let's not be sentimental. I still make movies, but they don't pay me as much as they used to.

VANYA. Sonia, "Beware of Hootie Pie" wasn't about the costumes, it was about selling the house.

SONIA. Masha, this Hootie Pie is clouding your judgment. Don't throw away the house we love, and we've lived in all our lives. And what about the cherry orchard?

MASHA. What cherry orchard?

SONIA. We have a large cluster of cherry trees, don't you remember them from childhood?

MASHA. Oh slightly, I guess. Aren't there only nine or ten of them?

SONIA. THEY ARE AN ORCHARD!

MASHA. Lower your voice. They're only trees.

VANYA. Masha — so you're going to sell the house and put us out on the street??

MASHA. Oh nonsense, you can get an apartment.

SONIA. But this is our home.

MASHA. Goodness, such fuss. I shouldn't have mentioned it now. Forget about it, let's just go enjoy the costume party, alright? Spike! Hurry up! *(To Vanya and Sonia.)* Do you wish to ride with us?

VANYA. I think Sonia and I will take our own car.

MASHA. Yes that sounds fine. Look, stop looking so upset. Financially I have to be practical. Now let's forget it for now, and go have a lovely time at this party, alright? *(Calls out.)* Spike, hurry up! I'm going to the car. *(Masha exits. Vanya and Sonia look at one another. Spike and Nina enter from the kitchen. Nina is dressed as Dopey. The costume is way too big for her, though she looks kind of adorable.)*

SPIKE. What was Masha yelling about?

VANYA. She's waiting for you in the car.

SPIKE. Oh, okay. (*Calling in direction of Masha.*) Coming! (*Spike heads out to the driveway. Nina starts to follow him but crosses back to Vanya and Sonia.*)

NINA. I feel so fortunate. You're all so nice to me here. But can I ask something? How do you think I look?

VANYA. I think you look wonderful.

NINA. Really? Thank you. And Sonia, you look stunning. Your costume is much better than the Snow White one.

SONIA. Yes, I think I have one-upped her tonight. She has ways to win in the long run however.

NINA. Oh I sense sadness. Don't be sad. Life is wonderful, isn't it? Oh Uncle Vanya, dear Sonia — this morning I woke up with no hopes for my artistic endeavors, and by this evening I have the chance of an agent through Spike, and I'm going to a party with a world-class actress and movie star. Oh, life is like a long, long pathway in the forest, filled with wonderful surprises ahead. Artistic fulfillment, fame, fortune ... love. Do you agree?

SONIA. (*Tough and not agreeing.*) Sure.

VANYA. (*Kinder.*) Yes, yes. All those things. (*Masha calls from outside, or enters an outer room and shouts inside.*)

MASHA. Hey, Dopey! Get in the car, I don't like waiting for people. People wait for me, not the other way around, okay?

NINA. (*To Vanya and Sonia.*) See you at the party. (*Masha goes back toward the car, with Nina following close behind. Vanya and Sonia look at each other.*)

SONIA. Masha is selling the house. And she says, "Let's go enjoy the party."

VANYA. I know. We gave up all those years taking care of our parents, but we forgot to make a life for ourselves.

SONIA. Oh God.

VANYA. Do you want to skip going to the party? We could see if there's a cake in the kitchen, and eat the entire thing, and then roll about on the floor until we pass out in a sugar-induced semi-coma.

SONIA. Ah, you're remembering how we spent last New Year's Eve here. That was fun. But I don't want to do that tonight. No, we're dressed in costumes, we never leave the house, I say ... (*In Maggie Smith voice.*) Let's go to the party, Sidney. (*Vanya offers his arm, he and Sonia exit.*)

End of Act One

ACT TWO

Scene 1

After the party. Sounds of a car driving up.

Sonia and Vanya come in and go to the morning room.

VANYA. What's the matter with Masha?

SONIA. *(In a good mood, enjoying that Masha isn't in a good mood.)*
I don't think she had a good time.

VANYA. She was talking to lots of people. I assumed she was enjoying herself.

SONIA. Sssssh. Here she comes. *(Masha comes in, in a bad mood.)*

MASHA. Oh for God's sake. *(Calls out to the car.)* I don't see why she can't walk home. Doesn't she just live next door? *(Spike, also annoyed, follows her in.)*

SPIKE. It's dark out. She could fall in a ditch.

MASHA. She's young, it wouldn't hurt her.

SPIKE. Masha, stop calling out the door that it's alright if Nina falls in a ditch.

MASHA. I didn't wish it on her. I just thought ... well, if you were going to drive her to her door, why didn't you drop her off first, when you and I were in the car ... and now ... you're going out on a second trip.

SPIKE. Masha, I just drove back here first, not thinking. What are you afraid of? Do you want to drive *with* me, as I drive Nina to her door?

MASHA. No. Certainly not. And I'm not afraid of anything. Just don't be long.

SPIKE. Alright. I'll see you in a bit.

MASHA. Alright, darling.

SPIKE. *(Thrown away, bit hard to hear.)* Don't wait up. *(Exits.)*

MASHA. *(To Vanya and Sonia.)* I just don't see why he didn't drop her off first. You know what I mean?

VANYA. None of us thought of it. I mean she left from here, so it seemed logical to bring her back here.

MASHA. Wait a minute. Did he just say “don’t wait up”?

VANYA. Did he? I’m not sure.

SONIA. Yes, he did say that. I was surprised you didn’t fall to the ground and hold on to his foot.

MASHA. What?

SONIA. When he said “don’t wait up.” I thought you would say something.

MASHA. No he must have said something that sounded like that. I mean he’s just taking her next door. It couldn’t take longer than five minutes.

SONIA. Maybe he’ll go in and meet her family. Maybe she’ll offer him a cup of tea. Or a brandy. And it can take a very long time to sip a brandy. And they’ll have a long, long conversation.

MASHA. What is the matter with you today? You’re so hostile to me.

VANYA. Don’t fight, you two.

MASHA. I just feel nervous about if he said “don’t wait up” or not.

VANYA. Maybe he didn’t say it. I don’t know what he said.

MASHA. Everything seems wrong today. And I’m going to give Hootie Pie a piece of my mind. The Snow White costume was a big bust. Nobody knows the Walt Disney version anymore, so they had no idea who I was supposed to be. And Nina, that nasty, grasping young girl, asked me if I was Norma Desmond. And someone else said Little Bo Peep. And several people thought I was a Hummel figurine.

SONIA. People seemed to like my costume.

MASHA. Well, Sonia, don’t be so happy about it. You’re happy at my expense.

SONIA. Am I? Am I allowed to be happy ONLY when you’re happy? Is that one of the rules of being around Masha?

VANYA. Let’s unwind and not argue. I’m going to go make tea for all of us. Stop talking about upsetting things. Think calming thoughts.

SONIA. Can it be Sleepytime tea?

VANYA. Yes, it can. *(Vanya exits. Masha and Sonia sit down. They’re quiet for a bit.)*

SONIA. I love Sleepytime tea.

MASHA. I prefer caffeinated tea.

SONIA. I’m sorry about what I said about Spike taking Nina home. Actually, he mumbled, I’m not sure what he said. And I

hope he'll be back very soon. I don't want you to be unhappy.

MASHA. Thank you. (*A moment of peace.*)

SONIA. Though you don't care whether *I'm* unhappy since you want to sell the house out from under us.

MASHA. I PAY ALL THE BILLS AND IT'S TOO EXPENSIVE!

SONIA. Fine! Vanya and I will get prescription sleeping pills and kill ourselves. Will that make you happy?

MASHA. You enjoy complaining too much to kill yourself. You'll go to your grave complaining. And you cheated on your costume tonight. You said you were going as the Evil Queen but no one got "Mirror Mirror" from you, they got Dame Maggie Smith winning a fucking Oscar. If you had gone as a dwarf, my costume would have worked. Snow White needs at least three dwarfs for the costume to make sense.

SONIA. Oh stop talking about your costume, I'm sick of hearing about it.

MASHA. I should have called up Equity and hired seven Equity actors to be all seven dwarfs, and then you and Vanya could've just stayed home.

SONIA. I'm glad we went to the party. And people liked me. (*Does Maggie Smith voice.*) Yes they did. I had a good time. Didn't I, Sidney?

MASHA. I should've known better than to let you choose your own costume. Anyone who wears a tiara and sequins is always going to be the winner.

SONIA. Masha, you have won in so many ways throughout your entire life, can you REALLY not survive one night where I wore a costume that people liked more than the one you wore? Not even for *one night* are you willing for me to outshine you?

MASHA. You often outshine me.

SONIA. When?

MASHA. I don't know. When I'm not here, you outshine me. Besides, it's unimportant who preferred whose costume at some stupid party. I'm just having a hard time. Do you mind? I'm getting older, my five marriages didn't work out, I had this young man, I thought, but he seems to be lusting after Nina, and at least five other women at the party. He's clearly over-sexed. And I just feel old and vulnerable. Forgive me for having feelings.

SONIA. Well I have feelings too! I'm unhappy too! I haven't lived. You've had five marriages, they failed, but you had them. My

relationships with men have been limited to “here’s your change, ma’am,” at the supermarket. I took care of YOUR parents, Vanya and I did, and then we never left because ... we didn’t know how to leave. We became numb during those fifteen years taking care of them.

MASHA. Well I’m sorry you felt numb, but I was working so I could pay the bills.

SONIA. And then when they both got Alzheimer’s! His was worse, he was always taking off his clothes, and going to the neighbors’ garage where he’d sit naked in their car until they came out to use it. We were always apologizing for him.

MASHA. This is all in the past. Get over it.

SONIA. You just left us here. If I tried to reach you, you were always filming in Morocco or something. After a while they stopped recognizing me. But they talked about you constantly. “Where is Masha?” they’d say to me. “She’s making a fucking movie,” I said. And they’d say, “Isn’t that wonderful. She’s so pretty and delightful.” And then I’d change their diapers, all the while thinking, why isn’t Masha here?

MASHA. I was paying the bills! I was paying *your* bills. I paid for the house, the doctors, the food. I paid for the snow plowing. I paid for the lawn care. I paid for the heat, the electricity, I sent you both a monthly stipend because I knew you couldn’t work and what you were doing was hard. And I’m sorry if you hated taking care of them, but someone had to earn the money to pay for it all, and it was ME!

SONIA. I didn’t hate taking care of them. I just said it was hard. And sometimes I liked it. They needed me, they needed Vanya. When they died, I felt sad ... sadder than you. You didn’t cry once at the funerals.

MASHA. I hide my feelings.

SONIA. Nonsense, you parade your feelings. You put them on display onstage and in the movies. It’s exhausting to be around you.

MASHA. And you exhaust me. Your self-pity exhausts me!

SONIA. And I’m glad my costume stole your thunder, and that people liked me as Maggie Smith, and thought I was fun, I liked that. But so what? My life is pointless. I haven’t lived! I haven’t lived! *(She cries.)*

MASHA. *(While Sonia is crying.)* Well I *have* lived and made my money and messed up all my relationships, and now I have nothing!

No one loves me, I have no future, my life is over! *(She cries. They both cry violently. Vanya returns, carrying a tray with a teapot and three cups and saucers. He's shocked by their upset.)*

VANYA. Good God. What's going on here?

SONIA. I haven't lived!

MASHA. My life is over!

VANYA. Oh for God's sake. Cheer up. *(Sonia and Masha go back to weeping. Their crying is getting a little less intense though. Like two hysterical children, they start to get tired and their crying subsides.)*

VANYA. Now, now. Whatever is the matter?

SONIA. My life is empty. And I forget something every day. I can't remember the Italian for window or ceiling.

VANYA. Window is finestra, ceiling is soffitto.

SONIA. That doesn't sound familiar. I don't think I know Italian.

VANYA. Well, you haven't forgotten it then, have you?

SONIA. No.

MASHA. You're giving her all the sympathy. Give me some.

VANYA. Alright. I'm sorry you're upset.

MASHA. I can't remember things either. I can't remember why I should keep living.

VANYA. Now, now, you're just feeling blue.

SONIA. Our lives are over. Vanya's too.

MASHA. It's true. Let's cry some more. *(Masha and Sonia try to cry some more, but their crying lasts only a little while. They're like spent children. Everyone gets quiet for a moment.)*

VANYA. Oh, listen to that silence.

MASHA. It's lovely. "True silence is the rest of the mind; it is to the spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment."

VANYA. Who said that?

MASHA. I don't know. Maybe it's from a play I was in.

VANYA. "True silence is the rest of the mind." *(Silence. Suddenly sound of the car pulling up.)*

MASHA. *(Suddenly wired, back in her drama.)* Is that the car? Does it mean he's come back? *(Enter Spike.)*

SPIKE. Oh you're all up. Hi.

MASHA. Spike, darling! *(Masha embraces Spike enthusiastically,)* Oh, I'm so glad to see you! I was afraid you'd be longer! *(Kisses him desperately, but then pulls back, trying to cover her tracks.)* Now, I'm not needy. I'm just glad to see you.

SPIKE. Well, it's nice to be wanted.

MASHA. Oh, you are, darling. Come, let's go to bed. I'm exhausted. I want to forget that horrible party and this stressful day, and sleep in ... ecstasy.

SPIKE. Ecstasy. *(To Vanya and Sonia, rolls his eyes; then back to Masha.)* Well, I'll try ... *(Masha starts to take Spike upstairs, but stops to say goodnight to Vanya and Sonia.)*

MASHA. Good night, you two. Don't forget: true silence is ... food for the brain. Oh I forgot already. Never mind. *(Masha and Spike exit.)*

SONIA. I'm so exhausted.

VANYA. Have some tea. *(She sips her tea. So does he.)* You were so outgoing at the party tonight, you spoke to many people.

SONIA. Many people spoke to me. I enjoyed myself.

VANYA. I was amazed to see you so animated. And friendly.

SONIA. I think we can thank Maggie Smith for that. And the dress. Masha is right, I think sequins are a girl's best friend.

VANYA. Well, you made quite a hit.

SONIA. I guess I did. But it wasn't really me. It was because I pretended to be someone else.

VANYA. Or the more sanguine interpretation is that you found a different part of your personality and you released it tonight.

SONIA. Oh don't be the household Pollyanna. My life is horrible, and don't you forget it. One nice evening in thirty years doesn't count for much.

VANYA. Alright, fine.

SONIA. *(Sips her tea.)* Oh, now the tea's lukewarm.

VANYA. Do you want to throw it on the ground?

SONIA. No, I'm too tired.

VANYA. That's good. *(They both put their tea down on the table.)*

~~VANYA~~ VANYA. Oh God, what are we going to do about the house?

SONIA. I am a wild turkey. I have not lived. I am a wild turkey.

VANYA. Me too. *(They stare ahead, not too happy. Music, lights dim.)*

Scene 2

Lights up. Morning. Cassandra comes into the house, looks around quickly to see that no one is downstairs yet.

She is holding some odd Mardi Gras-like stick with colored streamers on it and is going around the room, shaking it. We can assume she's doing something magical or superstition-related, a "cleansing" ceremony.

Then she picks up a little Snow White doll — the doll is dressed pretty much the same as Masha was dressed last night.

Cassandra takes out a pin, and sticks the doll. From upstairs, Masha screams: "Aaaaaaaaaaggghhh!" Cassandra is surprised and encouraged that the pin-sticking worked so quickly. She sticks the pin in the doll again. From upstairs, Masha screams: "Aaaaaaaaaaggghhh!" Cassandra looks at the doll and gets close to its face. She moves the doll up to her forehead. She is visibly sending her thought waves to Masha through the doll.

CASSANDRA. Did your brain hear that, you sexy killer, you? *(Sends in some additional thoughts.)* "I do not want to sell the house, I do not want to sell the house. And whenever I *do* think of selling the house, I get a little pain." *(Sticks the pin in the doll again.)*

MASHA. *(Offstage.)* Aaaaaaaaaaggghhh! Vanya! Vanya, come here.

CASSANDRA. Oh, it's bad to use voodoo, but it's for a good cause. *(Imparts this thought to the doll.)* Beware of selling the house. You have more money than you need, you greedy movie star. Don't toss your brother and your sister into the trash pile. *(Stern and said with a rhythm.)* It's a bad chile that puts its loved ones on the trash pile. It's a bad chile that puts its loved ones on the trash pile.

VANYA. *(Offstage.)* Masha, what's the matter?

MASHA. *(Offstage.)* There's something wrong with the bed. Or the sheets. There are pins in them.

CASSANDRA. Ooooh, I'm thinking of selling the house. (*Sticks pin in doll.*)

MASHA. (*Offstage.*) Aaaaaaaaggghh.

VANYA. (*Offstage.*) But you're not even near the bed.

MASHA. (*Offstage.*) I'm not making it up.

VANYA. (*Offstage.*) Wait, I need coffee, do you both want some?

SPIKE. (*Offstage.*) Yeah, man, that'd be good.

MASHA. I can't figure out what this is.

~~VANYA.~~ (*Offstage.*) ~~I'll be right back.~~ (*Cassandra realizes Vanya is about to come downstairs, she looks at the doll and tries to hide it. Vanya enters and she quickly puts the doll behind her.*) ~~Cassandra~~

CASSANDRA. Beware!

VANYA. Of what?

CASSANDRA. Everything.

VANYA. Why are you here? This isn't one of your cleaning days.

CASSANDRA. I'm worried about you and Sonia. I had presentiments last night. Masha must not sell the house. The market is still soft anyway, doesn't she know that? But it's a bad thing for her to do, she needs to watch over you and Sonia. I'm tired of foretelling the future, but then the bad things happen anyway. I want to *change* the future, I want to *change* this situation.

VANYA. Well, goodness, that's very generous of you, Cassandra. I appreciate your concern.

CASSANDRA. You're welcome. Why don't I go make that coffee for you?

~~VANYA.~~ That would be nice, thanks. (*The conversation has relaxed Cassandra and she forgets about the doll behind her back and lets her arms hang at her side as she starts to go to the kitchen.*)

~~Vanya.~~ Wait a minute, what's that in your hand?

CASSANDRA. Nothing.

VANYA. What is that doll you're holding?

CASSANDRA. It came in a cereal box.

VANYA. Cassandra, is that a voodoo doll?

CASSANDRA. Good God, is that what this is?

VANYA. That's the exact costume that Masha wore last night. How did you know that?

CASSANDRA. I'm psychic. Also, I saw Spike hang it up in the bedroom yesterday.

VANYA. And is that why Masha has been screaming this morning?

CASSANDRA. I really couldn't say.

VANYA. I don't approve of voodoo. Though I admit I'm sort of impressed. You stick the pin in the doll and Masha feels it?

CASSANDRA. It's just a pin prick, but it makes its point.

VANYA. Well don't do it anymore.

CASSANDRA. Alright, I won't. You wanna try?

VANYA. No.

CASSANDRA. You sure?

VANYA. No I don't want to try.

CASSANDRA. Go ahead, try.

VANYA. Well ... It doesn't hurt much, right?

CASSANDRA. That's right. I send her thought waves about the house, then I zap her. I'll tell you when. "I want to sell the house."
(Cassandra points, and Vanya sticks a pin in the doll. No noise upstairs.)

VANYA. Oh, it didn't work.

CASSANDRA. That's odd. Well, it just proves my other worldly powers. Here, let me do it. Masha, listen to my brain: "I want to sell the house."
(Sticks pin in the doll.)

MASHA. *(Offstage.)* Aaaaaaaaagghhhh! *(Vanya is amazed, and Cassandra is pleased. They look excited and happy, maybe laugh even. Or do a happy celebration dance. Right at this moment, Spike comes in wearing a T-shirt and underpants, and wearing untied sneakers. He's amused that they seem so happy.)*

SPIKE. What are you two so happy about?

VANYA. Nothing. *(Cassandra realizes she's holding the doll, quickly puts it behind her back.)*

SPIKE. What's behind your back?

CASSANDRA. *(Pretending to see something behind him.)* Oh my God! A bat! Look out! *(Cassandra dramatically points behind him. Spike turns around. The second he does Cassandra throws the doll to Vanya, who hides it behind his back. Spike turns back, a bit confused at their motion. Vanya suddenly waves the Mardi Gras streamer stick up and down in front of Spike's face, and surreptitiously throws the doll to Cassandra, who quickly puts it in her bag. Spike is slightly confused but still amused at their seeming playfulness.)*

SPIKE. What bat?

CASSANDRA. It must have flown upstairs.

SPIKE. I hope Masha doesn't see it. She's already hysterical about whatever these weird pin-prick things are.

CASSANDRA. Oh, she's having trouble with pricks? Women often do.

SPIKE. Ha, ha. *(To Vanya.)* Is the coffee ready?

VANYA. No, I was talking. *(Enter Masha in a somewhat elaborate dressing gown, like a movie star of an earlier era. She looks stressed and disheveled though.)*

MASHA. Is the coffee not ready? I need to call Hootie Pie this morning, and I really need my coffee first. And Spike, darling, you forgot your running shorts. You can't go running in the neighborhood in your underwear. *(Hands him the shiny running shorts she's carrying.)*

SPIKE. Oh, right.

CASSANDRA. I'll make the coffee, but before I do, I have a morning warning to impart. *(Said with conviction and dramatic intoning.)*

O Citizens of Athens,
the temple of Athena
rocks with ages of wines long past their vintage.
Our vines have tender grapes.
Do not stamp on these grapes.
Or on the hearts of your flesh and blood
Beware the nocturnal flying creatures
Beware the hawk, the eagle, the vulture.
Beware the Hootie Owls of Bucks County.
Avoid all real estate transactions for the next twenty years.
You will sell at a loss!
Wait 'til the market improves, you foolish citizen of Athens!
And ponder on proximity, how close one thing is to another.
Young men are meant for young women.
Or at least women whose decades are within hailing distance.
You can't hail a taxi that is thirty miles away
So why then hail a young man who is but ten and twenty,
while you are ten and twenty and twenty and a whole
bunch of change.

(Masha looks furious at Cassandra.)

These words come not from me but from the Goddess Athena,
And from the Furies who are furious.

Beware, one of you in this room, I'm not quite sure who.

But the initial is M.

I will go make coffee.

(Exits.)

MASHA. God, I just can't stand her. *(Feels pin prick.)*
Aaaaaaaaagggh! What is that??? These pin-prick things. Are they
in the air?

VANYA. I don't know what it is. *(Enter Sonia in her nightgown. So Vanya is in his nightshirt, Masha is in her elaborate dressing gown, Spike is in his underpants and T-shirt, and now Sonia too is in her "sleep" clothes.)*

SONIA. What was all this screaming going on this morning? Masha, was that you? And why is Cassandra here?

VANYA. She had an impulse to come here today. I'll explain later.

SONIA. Is there coffee?

MASHA. It's in process. *(Sits.)* You know, I met a real estate person at the party last night, her name is Agnes, and she's from a real estate company called Country Meadows Real Estate. She's going to be calling me sometime this morning.

SONIA. Really? Why?

MASHA. Why do you think?

VANYA. Let's not talk about this right now. Let's at least wait until coffee. Or Armageddon, whichever comes first.

MASHA. Alright.

SONIA. Alright.

SPIKE. You know, I think I'm going to go for my run. *(He pulls on the shiny running shorts Masha brought down.)*

MASHA. Isn't he handsome?

SPIKE. I don't think I want the T-shirt. Feel freer without it. *(Takes off his T-shirt, hands it to Vanya, makes eye contact.)* Here, hold this for me, would you? See you later. *(He goes out the front door for his run. Vanya is confused/bothered/titillated by being given the T-shirt.)*

VANYA. Why does he take his clothes off so much?

SONIA. Because he can?

MASHA. He's been a little off on this visit. I don't understand all this removal of clothing. I mean in the entertainment industry you do have to be seductive a lot, but I start to think Spike is ... joking with you a bit, Vanya.

VANYA. What do you mean joking?

MASHA. Well an actor knows to give the audience what it wants. And really, Vanya, you seem very interested whenever he takes his clothes off.

VANYA. Well he keeps doing it in front of us. I don't know where else to look.

MASHA. You can read a book.

VANYA. Alright, the next time he takes his clothes off, I'll read

a book. (*Hands her the T-shirt.*) Here, you hold this, would you, I don't want it.

MASHA. I must say he was wonderful in bed last night. (*Feels the pin-prick suddenly.*) Aaaaaaaaaaghhhh! What is that???

(*Enter Cassandra.*)

CASSANDRA. We're out of coffee. I could make you beef bouillon.

MASHA. Oh for God's sake, I'm getting a terrible headache. Can someone go to a store and get me some coffee?

SONIA. The nearest store is six miles. The Wawa.

MASHA. The Wawa? Like Helen Keller?

SONIA. Yes exactly. Helen Keller learns the word for water, and then they all have coffee.

MASHA. Oh God, no coffee. I can't cope.

CASSANDRA. I will drive to Wawa and bring you all back coffee. And maybe some donuts?

SONIA. Oh donuts, donuts!

CASSANDRA. Now the three of you go back to bed for a while, or you're going to be cranky all day. (*Exits to the driveway.*)

MASHA. Yes, I want to go back to bed. Oh, but there are all those pin things still.

VANYA. No, I have a feeling it'll be alright for a while.

MASHA. Why do you say that?

VANYA. Um ... I don't know. Just an intuition.

SONIA. You could sleep in the empty small bedroom on the third floor.

MASHA. Oh that's a good idea. Thank you, Sonia. (*Exits back upstairs to the bedrooms. Sonia looks to the window.*)

SONIA. Oh, the blue heron isn't at the pond. Why do I feel that's a bad omen?

VANYA. It's just eating fish and frogs somewhere else. Maybe it'll show up later.

SONIA. I hope so. (*Sonia and Vanya stare out the window. Sonia in particular looks worried. Music, lights dim to black.*)

Scene 3

Music and lights indicate a brief amount of time passing. The morning room is empty.

Enter Spike, energetically coming back from his run. He does some stretching exercises.

Nina enters the house.

NINA. Uncle Vanya? Uncle Vanya? (*Looks around. Looks in the direction of the offstage stairs.*) Uncle Vanya? I'm here.

SPIKE. Oh, it's Nina. How's it hangin'? (*Spike enters the room.*)

NINA. Oh hello. I'm looking for Vanya. I was going to read the play he's written.

SPIKE. Oh, he's written a play? Is there a part for a handsome young man?

NINA. I haven't read it yet. My, you are in very good condition. I congratulate you.

SPIKE. Oh, thanks. Yeah, I figure if you got it, flaunt it.

NINA. Oh. I'm still working on projection and interpretation. I guess flaunting will come later.

SPIKE. Yeah 'cause you never know when your big break will happen. Look at *Jersey Shore*.

NINA. Oh I don't want to. I like Ingmar Bergman and the Merchant Ivory films. I just saw *Smiles of a Summer Night*, it's beautiful. Have you ever seen it?

SPIKE. I don't think so. Who's in it?

NINA. Gunnar Björnstrand, Eva Dahlbeck, and Ulla Jacobsson.

SPIKE. Ah. I'll have to miss it sometime. (*Enter Vanya.*)

VANYA. Nina, I thought I heard you down here.

SPIKE. Where's my T-shirt?

VANYA. Masha took it upstairs. She's in the third floor bedroom.

SPIKE. Oh, I'll go see her.

VANYA. She said she was getting a very strong headache ...

SPIKE. Okay, I won't expect her to put out. Catch you later. (*Spike*

goes upstairs.)

NINA. He's so attractive. *(They both look after him.)* Except for his personality, of course.

VANYA. Yes. I would agree with that. Of course he's young.

NINA. Did you bring your play?

VANYA. It's a partial play, of course. And it's about the weather. I'm very concerned about it. We've been here forty-five years, and the last six or seven years, the weather has been much more violent and extreme.

NINA. Oh yes. Global warming. My uncle doesn't believe in it.

VANYA. Well I hope he lives a long, long time and suffers through it. I'm sorry, that's not nice to say.

NINA. That's alright. So tell me about the play. What's my character like?

VANYA. Well, it's not a traditional character, it's a ... molecule.

NINA. It's not a person?

VANYA. It has thoughts and feelings, but it's not a person.

NINA. Gosh, I wonder if I'll know how to act being a molecule.

VANYA. You should just be yourself. The molecule speaks in words, and has emotions ... so you should not worry about what a molecule really is, and whether it can speak. But let it be a leap of faith, and just go with the flow of the words.

NINA. Hmmmm, I feel this may be a crossroads for me. At this moment I can choose to be one of those actors who argues and frets and challenges endlessly, and who makes rehearsals an enormous trial. Or *(Short pause.)* I can be one of those who listens and says, "Alright" and just tries to make it work. I think I'll choose to become the second kind. And take a leap of faith.

VANYA. Oh. What good news. Let's go out by the pond, I don't want anyone to overhear us. And you can read it aloud to me out there. *(Vanya and Nina start to exit toward the outdoors.)*

NINA. I brought my MP3 player in case you want music underneath if I read to everyone. Is that a good idea?

VANYA. Oh I don't know. Maybe. Let's hear it first, and see if we should ... ask others to ... you know ... *(Vanya and Nina exit toward the pond. Phone rings. Enter Cassandra from outside, carrying a few bags of groceries.)*

CASSANDRA. I'll get it! *(Answers the phone.)* Hello. Who wants to know? Agnes from Country Meadows Real Estate? YOU GOT THE WRONG NUMBER, DON'T CALL HERE AGAIN!

(Cassandra slams the phone down violently. Laughs and laughs. Maybe waves that Mardi Gras streamer thing around, joyously. Sonia walks downstairs.)

SONIA. Goodness, who did you yell at?

CASSANDRA. It was a wrong number. I got coffee and other stuff. *(Phone rings again. Cassandra looks angry, and picks up the phone.)* I TOLD YOU NOT TO CALL BACK! *(Listens.)* Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you were someone else. Who did you want to talk to? Well, she's right here. *(Cassandra offers Sonia the phone.)*

SONIA. Who is it?

CASSANDRA. *(To phone.)* Who's calling please? *(To Sonia.)* Joe.

SONIA. I don't know who that is.

CASSANDRA. *(To phone.)* She doesn't know you. *(To Sonia.)* Should I hang up angry or polite?

SONIA. Wait, I'll take the call. *(Answers the phone.)* Hello, this is Sonia. Who is this please? *(Cassandra exits with her bags off to the kitchen.)* Joe? I'm afraid I don't ... Oh yes, Joe from last night! The party, yes. What? Yes, this is Sonia. My voice sounds different? Oh. Uh. *(Thinks quickly.)* Wait a minute, I have a frog in my throat. *(Pretends to cough, and then switches to using her Maggie Smith voice.)* Hello, Joe. How are you today? Oh your head hurts a little. I hope you're not an alcoholic. You're not. That's good! But you like to get drunk sometimes. Well, it's a good man's failing. I'm a crack addict. No, darling ... I'm just teasing. It was very nice to meet you last night. Remind me, what was your costume? A raincoat. Uh-huh. Anything else? A fedora. Uh-huh. So you were pretending it was raining in 1946, is that right? Oh — you were Sam Spade. The detective. I'm sorry, I should have remembered that. And Maggie Smith was actually in a movie where Peter Falk played Sam Spade, and she played Nora Charles. From *The Thin Man*. *(Frowning, kind of changing her mind, still in the Maggie Smith voice.)* You know, Joe, I have to go back to my own voice for a little while, do you mind? *(Switches back to her normal voice.)* I'm sorry, I'm a little confused. Did you really think that was my voice last night? Oh I see. Well I must have forgotten to give you the proper explanation last night. I was telling everyone I was the Evil Queen as played by Maggie Smith. But I guess by the time I met you, I had gotten tired of explaining, and you just assumed that was my real voice.

But this is my real voice, actually. It's sort of boring compared to Maggie Smith. But nonetheless, I am who I am and I'm stuck

with it. I'm remembering the person who was Sam Spade. You have a very nice face. Oh I'm remembering, you said you were a widower. Is that right? I'm sorry. Two years. No, I'm not a widow. I'm a ... *(Stops for a second, chooses not to say she's never been married.)* ... I've been picky. Uh-huh. Glamorous?? *(Laughs.)* Oh, I must be honest and assure you I'm NOT glamorous. I look a fright most of the time. Daily, in fact. And except for last night, I've never gotten all dolled up. Alright, you think of me as glamorous, I guess I should just accept it. I admit it, I'm glamorous. Do your glasses need a new prescription, Joe? They don't, alright, that's good to know. Um ... *(Thinks a second.)* ... I'm a little confused. Why are you calling me today? *(Listens.)* Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Oh. Because you like me. How odd. What? I said, how nice. Thank you. Although maybe it's my imitation of Maggie Smith you like. I don't do any other imitations, I'm afraid.

Uh-huh. Go to dinner? Um ... well ... I ... maybe. Saturday? Well I'm not sure, let me check my book. *(She moves the phone away from her mouth and frowns; thinks for a while; she feels nervous about saying yes, wonders what to say, makes a decision.)* I'm sorry, Joe. I'm not free Saturday. Yes, it's too bad. Another time. Yes, well. Hold on a minute, would you? *(She holds the phone away, trying to think through if it makes sense to not accept this man's invitation; she's finding it very hard to make a decision; then:)* Joe. I looked at my book again, and I made a mistake. It's Sunday I'm busy. I am free Saturday. The day that you mentioned. *(He apparently took a second to take it in.)* Yes, I am free. *(Makes a face to herself, oh Lord, now she's said yes.)* Yes, Saturday. That would be lovely. *(Listens, repeats back.)* Weekends are best for you. Oh that means you have a job then. Nothing. Just I was trying to think what's the matter with you, and I couldn't come up with anything. *(As Maggie Smith.)* Maybe you're mentally deficient. *(Surprised at his response; goes back to her own voice.)* Oh you laughed. Oh well good.

So Saturday at six P.M., you'll pick me up. I'm at Fifty-five Hollyhock Road. Yes very near where the party was. Yes, it was a nice party. Oh, and you know, if you need to cancel, I'll certainly understand. Well, alright, I just mean in case you *had* to. *No*, I would like to go. You don't mind if I don't use my Maggie Smith voice, do you? Oh that's good. I'll just use it for emphasis. Otherwise just ... this voice. Thank you, Joe. *(A compliment.)* Oh. Nice of you to say. I'll see you Saturday. *(She hangs up the phone. She is extremely*

confused. Perhaps no one has ever asked her out before. She thinks it's maybe a joke, and she thinks it's real. She's sort of upset, and she's sort of delighted. She's afraid of expectations, and it's hard not to have some hopes. She sits in a chair and doesn't know what she feels, but it's a mix of lots of things.)

Scene 4

Later in the afternoon.

Vanya, Nina and Cassandra are in the morning room, preparing for the play reading. Cassandra is looking at a piece of paper, reading it.

Nina has changed to a costume: she is in a diaphanous white dress, floor-length, pretty, suitable for being in a Greek chorus. She may have a garland in her hair.

VANYA. *(To Cassandra.)* What do you think? Are you willing to read this part of it?

CASSANDRA. Sure! Now am I a molecule or a TV weather person?

VANYA. Well you're probably a hologram actually, but why don't you ignore that and just think of yourself as a TV weather person.

CASSANDRA. Alright.

VANYA. Would you turn on the music when I give you the cue?

CASSANDRA. Sure. *(Masha enters, ready for the reading.)*

MASHA. You said three-thirty. So is it time now?

VANYA. Yes, I guess it is.

MASHA. *(Calls offstage.)* Spike! Sonia! Hurry up, everyone. He's ready! *(Spike and Sonia come in. Sonia maybe helps Vanya move a chair or two, if needed. Masha and Spike sit on a couch together. Cassandra, holding her paper, is also seated. Sonia now sits as well.)*

VANYA. Thank you for coming. You're all looking at me. That's so odd. I told Nina I had written something somewhat based on the experimental play that Konstantin writes in *The Seagull*. And she read it for me today, and she wanted very much to read it aloud

for you. Although I apologize. It's silly to take up your time with something that is probably no good at all.

NINA. Uncle Vanya, you mustn't tell the audience that what they're about to hear is no good.

VANYA. Yes, I suppose that's taking self-effacement to an unnecessary extreme.

SONIA. Vanya, dear, we want to hear it.

SPIKE. Yeah, sounds interesting.

MASHA. I have a splitting headache, but I too wish to be supportive.

VANYA. Well thank you. Now I wrote it for one voice, but Nina and I conferred and we decided that certain sections should be read by other people. So just know that some of us may pop up from our seats from time to time. The setting is the universe once the earth no longer exists. Enter a molecule. *(Vanya sits with the audience. A bit nervous, but serious about it all. Sonia is seated next to Vanya. Vanya gestures to Cassandra to push the button on the MP3 player; she does and mysterious music begins. Nina begins.)*

NINA. People, lions, eagles, partridges, raccoons, porpoises, opossums, hedgehogs, woodchucks, geese, spiders, octopuses, foxes, wild turkeys, frogs, and blue herons.

All living creatures are dead. The earth is no more. It split apart into atoms, cells, tiny molecules.

I am one such molecule. And I am lonely.

I miss people, animals, books, oatmeal.

But they're all gone now.

The world ended sometime in the twenty-first century.

In the final days, it was frightening to turn on the morning weather report. *(The mysterious music ends. Cassandra stands, and reads from her piece of paper.)*

CASSANDRA. Good morning, welcome to the weather. Carol Erickson couldn't be here today, so I'm filling in.

This morning Berks County is getting a tornado.

This afternoon Bucks County will have an earthquake.

This evening Berks, Bucks and Montgomery Counties will have a thunderstorm and you may find you have survived the tornado and the earthquake, but after the insane record rainfall we had in July, all the trees are going to fall over and squash your house and your car and maybe you.

And now the national forecast. Chunks of Florida fell into the ocean yesterday. It was kind of funny, except people died.

Tomorrow more chunks are gonna fall into the ocean. So move to the center of the state if you can. Or hover above it all in a helicopter if you can do that.

Arizona and Texas have finished their 320th day without rain, and the entire two states are now on fire. And that's the weather.

NINA. It was a horror. Horror, horror, horror. The world was like a patient who desperately needed the intensive care unit. And yet there was no intensive care to be had. Those who had pills, any pills, took them all at once and hoped to die. (*Spike, who started out finding the play a pleasant distraction, is losing interest and is getting fidgety. Masha tries to get him to stop acting so antsy.*)

Luckily, three simultaneous meteorites came crashing out of the sky and put everybody out of their misery.

And just like that the earth was no more.

And what of a brother and sister who used to sit in a morning room and watch a pond out the window?

(*Nina motions for Vanya and Sonia to come up. They stand side by side and have typed pages with them.*)

VANYA. Good morning, Sonia.

SONIA. Good morning, Vanya.

VANYA. Did you sleep well?

SONIA. I don't know. Are we alive or are we dead?

VANYA. We are molecules but we're remembering the past, and mourning its end.

SPIKE. I don't understand this play!!!

MASHA. Sssssssh. (*The people reading the play are aware of the interruption but ignore it, move on.*)

SONIA. I remember looking out the window at the pond for years and years. Sometimes it was boring, but I miss it.

NINA. I miss washing my hair.

CASSANDRA. I miss iced tea. I don't like that line. I miss *Law and Order: SVU*.

SONIA. I miss my self-pity. It was fun. (*Gives Vanya a look, not entirely liking this line.*)

NINA. I miss ... having plans for the future.

VANYA. I miss boring chores which in retrospect seem wonderful. Putting the dishes away. Making a list of things to do. Licking the mail, and driving to town to ...

SPIKE. "Licking the male"! (*Laughs.*) That's kind of raunchy, old man.

VANYA. (*A bit thrown, annoyed.*) Licking the mail one is about to

bring to the post office. Letters one has written. Licking the stamp that goes on the letter.

SPIKE. Licking the stamp? *(Doesn't understand.)*

VANYA. Forget it, I'll rewrite it. Maybe we should stop.

MASHA. No, I like it. Keep going. *(Crosses to Vanya to encourage him.)* It's much better than Konstantin's play. It's more varied.

VANYA. Okay. Whose line is it? *(Masha is nearer to a chair by Sonia, so she sits there. She doesn't return to her seat on the couch.)*

NINA. Mine. I miss baby powder.

VANYA. I'm sorry, the "I miss" section is going on too long. Let's jump to the top of the next page. *(Vanya can't return to his seat by Sonia, since Masha is in it. He is forced to sit next to Spike on the couch.)*

NINA. Alright. How sad to be a molecule! How sad to be a speck. *(Spike's cell phone makes a small tinkle sound — a "you have a text message" sound, brief. Spike without hesitation reads the message, smiles, and starts to type a text back. He is truly unaware that it might be inappropriate to do this now. His texting goes on for a while ... Masha gives him a signal to stop, but he holds up his finger indicating "give me a sec." Nina feels a good actress should just carry on, so she continues, and mostly pretends not to notice.)* How did the world come to end? Were there Cassandras we didn't listen to? Did we keep an oil burner too long?

MASHA. Spike, stop that. *(Spike again gestures "give me a minute," and goes back to texting.)*

NINA. Why didn't we switch to solar panels? Why didn't we buy an electric car? Why didn't we ... *(Vanya has had enough.)*

VANYA. Excuse me. What are you doing? It's very rude.

SPIKE. I'm still listening. I can multitask. I can drive and text, or watch a movie and tweet.

VANYA. You can multitask, how wonderful. You can tweet. You twitter and tweet, you email and text, your life is abuzz with electrical communication. *(Brief breath.)* I know older people always think the past was better, but really — instead of a text with all these lower case letters, and no punctuation, what about a nicely crafted letter, sent through the post office? Or a thank you note.

SPIKE. Yeah, yeah, it was real elegant back then, I get it. You had to wait five days for a letter, but it was real nice. Time marches on, dude. *(Vanya is fed up with Spike, but he's also upset about the weather, about losing the house, about his life, and about so many awful changes in the world and country. He explodes, his thoughts are almost ahead of him.)*

VANYA. WE USED TO LICK POSTAGE STAMPS BACK THEN. Obviously you've never heard of that. They didn't just peel off ready-made with sticky stuff on the back — the sticky stuff had to be triggered by your wet tongue. It took time. If you were sending out many letters, you could be licking postage stamps for ten minutes or so.

We used typewriters back then. And white-out for corrections. And carbon paper for copies.

We had telephones and we had to dial the number by putting our index finger in a round hole representing two to zero. If the number was 909-9999, it could take *hours* just to dial the number. We had to have PATIENCE then. And we used to lick postage stamps. It was unpleasant, but it had to be done.

We didn't multitask. Doing one thing at a time seemed appropriate. But I guess *you* can *sort* of listen to a play and *sort* of send a message and *sort* of play a video game ... all at once. It must be wonderful ... (*Spike is starting to get uncomfortable with Vanya's upset, and he gets up from the couch to walk away, but Vanya steps in front of him.*) I know I sound like a crank, but I don't like change. My play is about scary change in the weather. But there are other changes too that have happened. (*Vanya is starting to address everyone in the room, not always specifically, but sometimes. Sonia and Masha are interested by what he's saying, but also a bit concerned that he is having an outburst. Cassandra and Nina both like Vanya and pay attention, but worry a bit for him too.*) There are 785 television channels. You can watch the news report that matches what you already think. In the '50s there were only three or four channels, and it was all in black and white. And there were no child stars who became drug addicts like Lindsay Lohan. I mean, Hayley Mills was in the original *Parent Trap*, and she grew up to be a sensible, nice woman.

There was no *South Park*. We saw *Howdy Doody* starring a puppet. Then there was *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* — starring two more puppets, and a sweet lady named Fran. We watched puppets back then! (*Sonia crosses to Vanya sympathetically and tries to get him to sit down. He is on a roll, and barely senses her; and gently encourages her to sit down instead. He doesn't stop talking, he keeps going.*) There was the *Perry Como Show*. He was soothing. *The Dinah Shore Show*. She was charming.

The Bishop Sheen Show was on Sunday evening. A Catholic Bishop had his own TV show. And he gave SERMONS. On TV.

We weren't Catholic, but we watched him anyway. He said sensible things. On television.

The Ed Sullivan Show was on before *Bishop Sheen*, and he had opera singers on. And performers from current Broadway shows. Richard Burton and Julie Andrews would sing songs from *Camelot*. It was wonderful. It helped theatre be part of the national consciousness, which it isn't any more.

And he had Señor Wences on, who had a Spanish accent and was a ventriloquist. And he painted a mouth on his fist, and he would make it speak. (*He speaks in funny voice — high one, very low one, high one — and uses his hand and thumb to imitate the way Señor Wences used his hand as a speaking puppet. High.*) “Hello,” (*Low.*) “Hello,” (*High.*) “Hello.” (*Low.*) Hello. His act lasted about ... seven hours. As a child I thought to myself, this must be what eternity feels like. And yet that's a good concept for a child to have. SPIKE. I thought you were talking about things you liked in the past. VANYA. You're right. I'm inconsistent. I don't know what I'm saying. Be quiet. BE QUIET.

We licked postage stamps, and we sent letters.

I preferred Bishop Sheen to Señor Wences. Bishop Sheen was a good speaker, and he used his real mouth rather than one drawn onto his fist, and this made me take him more seriously. I remember him talking about the seed falling on the good soil, falling on the bad soil, the seed falling on rock. In other words, build your life on a strong foundation.

Of course, I haven't done that. But I meant to. Bishop Sheen said I should. I guess I got lost. But it was interesting to hear him talk that way. It was *articulate*. I don't think much is articulate in the world anymore.

And I'm saying this all in retrospect. I didn't think it when I was ten. I was just trying to get through life one day at a time when I was ten. (*To Spike.*) And I didn't have a life ahead of me where I was going to be almost cast in *Entourage 2*. But I guess you're having a good life, and I had foolish one.

Tell me, do they have any older characters on *Entourage 2*? Do they need someone in their late 50s, who has had a useless life and is looking back feeling bitter? Might I audition for that part? Could you check? (*Masha is worried about Vanya. She crosses to him.*)

MASHA. Vanya, darling, you seem overwrought, and you're talking way more than usual. Do you not want to go lie down somewhere?

VANYA. I have the remainder of my life to nap. I'm not done yet. WE LICKED POSTAGE STAMPS! We didn't have answering machines. You had to call people back. (*Masha moves away.*) We ate Spam, just like the soldiers in World War II did. (*To Spike.*) Have you *heard* of World War II?

We played Scrabble and Monopoly. We didn't play video games, in some virtual reality, where we would kill policeman and prostitutes as if that was some sort of entertainment.

The popular entertainment wasn't so insane back then. It was sometimes corny, but sincere. We all saw the movie *Davy Crockett* and wore coonskin caps.

That may not sound sane, wearing those caps, but it was very innocent. And we *all* did it, there was a solidarity about it, unlike being alone in your room killing prostitutes in a video game.

We followed *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*. Which starred the real life Ozzie and Harriet Nelson.

But *Adventures* was a strange word for the show because it was *extremely* uneventful. They did things like ... make popcorn in the kitchen. Or ... look for missing socks.

In retrospect they seemed medicated.

It was a stupid show, but it was calming. You didn't feel it was stirring people up and creating serial killers.

I'm sorry I'm getting off the point. But my point is the '50s were idiotic but I miss parts of them. When I was thirteen I saw *Goldfinger* with Sean Connery as James Bond, and I didn't get the meaning of the character name of "Pussy Galore." Went right over my head. Nowadays, three-year-olds get the joke. They can barely walk and they know what Pussy Galore means.

The weather is changing, the culture is very weird. I'm not a conservative, but I do miss things in the past.

I Love Lucy was pretty wonderful. And the whole country watched it. We saw *Davy Crockett*. And *The Mickey Mouse Show*. Boys just past puberty would fixate on Annette Funicello.

We didn't identify with rock stars, we identified with Mouseketeers. Annette, Darlene Gillespie, Cubby O'Brien.

My favorite was Tommy Kirk who was one of the Hardy Boys on the Mickey Mouse show. Later he starred in Disney's *Old Yeller*, about a boy and his dog. His father was fighting in the Civil War, but Tommy was the one who took the responsibility for being the grown-up. Not his mother or younger brother.

And initially he didn't want the dog, but then he bonded with it. And at the end of the film Old Yeller gets rabies and foams at the mouth, and poor Tommy Kirk has to shoot his dog, crying his eyes out as he does so.

It was a traumatic moment in our national past. A shared one.

I wondered what happened to Tommy Kirk, and I did a Google search and I learned that sometime after he was in *Son of Flubber*, Walt Disney found out that Tommy Kirk was gay and he fired him. He dropped his contract.

Meanwhile Tab Hunter was gay too, but HIS studio just saw to it that he went on pretend dates with starlets. They didn't fire Tab Hunter. They starred him in movies opposite Sophia Loren, for God's sake. Tommy Kirk on the other hand was mistreated, and I TAKE IT PERSONALLY. As I expect he does too.

He stopped making movies. He took drugs for a period. And then later he got better and became a minister. And now he runs a rug cleaning business. I guess he's alright.

But he's had to go through the same changes I have — no more licking of postage stamps, no more typewriters or letters, no more shared national TV shows like *Ozzie and Harriet*, which even though it was boring still it was a SHARED MEMORY BETWEEN US. There are no shared memories anymore.

Now, now there's Twitter and email and Facebook and cable and satellite, and the movies and TV shows are all worthless, and we don't even watch the same worthless things together, it's all separate. And our lives are ... disconnected.

And you come in here and say you almost had a part on *Entourage 2* as if that's an achievement of some kind. And I don't know what you're talking about. I'm worried about the future. I miss the past. I don't want to talk anymore. I'm going to go sit in the other room. I don't know why I exploded. Sorry. (*Exits.*)

SPIKE. Wow, what's up with him? That was a major flip out.

SONIA. I think I better go after him.

NINA. Can I come? (*Sonia and Nina exit after Vanya.*)

SPIKE. You come from a crazy family.

MASHA. You come from a family who taught you no manners. Why did you find it necessary to text during Vanya's play?

SPIKE. Well he didn't have to go nuts about it.

MASHA. (*Takes his phone out of his hand.*) What were you texting

for God's sake? (*Reads.*) "I'll meet you at the airport 8 A.M. Tuesday. Love you."

SPIKE. It's my cousin. I'm bringing her to the airport.

MASHA. How thoughtful. And usually you're never thoughtful. I recognize the screen name you're writing to. HootiePie at gmail.com.

CASSANDRA. Beware of Hootie Pie.

MASHA. I didn't realize Hootie Pie was your cousin.

SPIKE. She's not. Hootie Pie and I ... are in love.

MASHA. In love? With my personal assistant?

CASSANDRA. And Hootie Pie shall be called Spawn of the Devil.

SPIKE. Does she have to stay here?

MASHA. Suddenly I like her.

CASSANDRA. Thank you. Suddenly I like you.

SPIKE. Alright then. On Tuesday morning Hootie and I will be flying to Aruba for two weeks. And then we're renting an apartment together. I was going to tell you on Monday.

MASHA. Well you've told me today. Cassandra, please call a taxi for Spike. I want him to get on an uncomfortable bus and go back to New York and be out of my life.

SPIKE. I was gonna tell you. I didn't want to ruin your weekend.

MASHA. Well that's just so thoughtful of you, thank you. And how good to know how loyal and helpful Hootie/Spawn of the Devil has been. Was she ever going to tell me she was quitting?

SPIKE. She was going to send you an email.

MASHA. An email. How classy.

SPIKE. She was afraid to tell you in person.

MASHA. You know, she doesn't need to be. I find myself feeling sudden and enormous relief about having you out of my life, and Hootie Pie too. (*Noticing Cassandra is still here.*) Cassandra, did you call the taxi?

CASSANDRA. We don't have a taxi in town.

MASHA. Well ... can you solve it?

CASSANDRA. I can drive him myself.

MASHA. Good. I'm liking you more and more.

CASSANDRA. And vice versa. Ms. Hardwicke, I want to apologize for something.

MASHA. What?

CASSANDRA. (*Pause.*) I don't want to say, but I just want to apologize.

MASHA. I appreciate it. Thank you very much. (*Turns back to*

Spike.) Goodbye, Spike. It was fun, sort of, have a good life, I've been a fool, so long. Now please go get your things and go with Cassandra and be banished to a bus.

SPIKE. I'm sorry if I hurt you.

MASHA. I'm sorry if you hurt me too. But you may not have. I notice my headache is gone.

SPIKE. May I kiss you?

MASHA. No.

SPIKE. ... May I shake hands?

MASHA. Yes. *(They shake hands.)* I wish you success.

SPIKE. Thank you. *(Spike exits up to the bedroom.)*

CASSANDRA. *(Said simply, marveling in retrospect how correct her warning has been.)* Beware of Hootie Pie.

MASHA. Indeed. *(Phone rings. Masha picks up. Into the phone.)*

Hello? Who? Oh, Agnes. *(Whispers to Cassandra.)* It's that woman about the house. *(Back to the phone.)* YOU GOT THE WRONG NUMBER, DON'T CALL HERE AGAIN! *(Hangs up.)*

CASSANDRA. That's exactly what I said earlier today.

MASHA. We are clearly sharing some psychic connection. And I welcome it. *(Calls offstage.)* Vanya, Sonia! Come in here please! *(Vanya and Sonia enter, followed by Nina.)*

MASHA. I am not selling the house. Hootie Pie is a manipulator and a liar, and she was wrong about the Snow White costume, and clearly all her other suggestions are wrong too. So in no way will I consider the suggestion she made that I sell the house.

SONIA. What happened?

MASHA. Cassandra is driving Spike to the bus, he's out of my life, he's running off with Hootie Pie.

SONIA. Oh. I'm sorry.

MASHA. Don't be. I'm feeling very good ... except for the fact I have such very bad taste in men. And I don't know why I wanted to sell the house. Oh, I have less money than I used to. And I was going to turn down this film where they want me to play a grandmother, which I am not anxious to do. But I think I'll take it for the money. It would pay the mortgage for like a year. You know, I don't know why I didn't think this earlier, but I don't have a husband, I don't have children ... but the roots I do have are here, aren't they? With you two. *(Vanya and Sonia give Masha a hug. She hugs back. They hold it for a bit, then separate.)*

CASSANDRA. Uh-oh. Lover boy's coming down the stairs. *(Spike*

comes down the stairs. He looks good, is carrying a small overnight bag. Everyone is kind of uncomfortable. Spike does not seem uncomfortable.)

SPIKE. *(Friendly, nice, as if nothing's happened.)* Thank you all for a lovely weekend. I enjoyed meeting all of you.

SONIA. Yes, it was lovely. We all had a great time. *(She looks at everyone else, making a "is he crazy or what" face.)*

VANYA. I'm sorry about my tirade. I didn't mean to go ballistic.

SPIKE. That's okay. Always good to get things out. Thank you, Masha, it was great getting to know you.

MASHA. Yes, lovely to meet you. You must send me photos of you and Hootie Pie cavorting in Aruba.

SPIKE. Really?

MASHA. Yes. I'll put them on the refrigerator with all the coupons.

SPIKE. So long, Nina.

NINA. Goodbye, Spike.

CASSANDRA. Come on, Spike-y. Let's head to the bus.

SPIKE. *(Sure of himself and proclaiming his name:)* Spike! *(Spike gives a wave to them, and exits with Cassandra. A brief bit of silence.)*

MASHA. I think I need to take a walk by the pond and digest the entirety of the last fifteen minutes. And maybe the last fifteen years. I think I mostly feel happy, but I can't figure out why. Oh, and Vanya — I LOVED your play, although you did upstage it with your harangue at Spike, which I also loved.

VANYA. Oh, thanks. And Nina was very good.

MASHA. Yes, she was.

NINA. Oh thank you. Was I? I know I stood up straight and spoke loudly, but wasn't sure I entirely inhabited being a molecule.

MASHA. Oh, writers ask you to play such difficult things. I thought you were very good as a molecule, rather ethereal, which I always had hoped molecules would be.

NINA. Really? How wonderful.

MASHA. Now let me go take my walk and evaluate my life. *(Exits to the grass, and the pond.)*

VANYA. You know, Sonia — we've got to get jobs. We can't expect her to keep sending us a monthly stipend, when we just sit home doing nothing. How much is minimum wage, does anyone know?

NINA. I think it's seven dollars and some change.

SONIA. Work. Really? Who would ever hire us?

VANYA. That unfortunately is a good question.

NINA. I saw a help wanted sign at CVS Pharmacy.

SONIA. Oh God. I'd prefer death.

NINA. Oh, I'm sorry, I thought you wanted a job.

SONIA. No, Vanya thought I should have a job. I think I should have a cocktail.

VANYA. Well, we'll have to keep talking about it. There may be things we can do ...

SONIA. Oh I'm sure they'll pay us fifteen cents.

VANYA. Sonia, you're right, it'll be really difficult and maybe awful. But if Masha has the generosity to continue paying for this house, we have to earn something to contribute to our living expenses.

SONIA. Oh dear. Well maybe I'll marry Joe and he'll end up being really wealthy.

VANYA. What? Who?

SONIA. I got a phone call. Someone from the party. Asked me to dinner. His name is Joe. Of course, it's just dinner ... I'm sure he won't like me, but if he does like me, oh I'd so prefer that to CVS Pharmacy.

VANYA. Well that's great that someone called you.

SONIA. I know. I never meet anyone, I don't think I've been to a party in twenty years. It's encouraging but of course I mustn't get my hopes up.

NINA. You must always get your hopes up.

SONIA. Really? That sounds wise but scary.

NINA. I have so loved meeting you both. Dear Sonia, dear Uncle Vanya. I am going to come out to visit my aunt and uncle more often, so I can see you both. *(Nina hugs them both, exits.)*

VANYA. She's very sweet. I like her.

SONIA. Yes, she is nice. Although I can only stand a little bit of people wondering how to play a molecule.

VANYA. Oh look, she forgot her music playing thing. *(Picks it up, music starts to play.)* Oh I turned it on. How do you turn it off? *(The music is the Beatles' "Here Comes the Sun.")*

SONIA. Don't turn it off. It's nice. The Beatles.

VANYA. Nina has such surprising taste. Foreign movies, the Beatles. She may be living in a time warp. *(Masha reenters.)*

MASHA. I'm back. My dark night of the soul was very brief, and I got lonely. What are you two doing?

SONIA. We're listening to music.

VANYA. Nina left her music thing.

MASHA. Oh, the Beatles, nice.

SONIA. Let's sit and wait for the blue heron to come.

VANYA. It usually comes in the morning.

SONIA. I think it'll come late afternoon today. To celebrate.

VANYA. Well we can hope.

SONIA. Always hope.

VANYA. And if it doesn't come this afternoon, I'm almost positive it'll be back in the morning. *(Slight pause.)*

MASHA. What a day. "Oh, Olga, let's go to Moscow."

SONIA. I don't want to go to Moscow. *(Pause.)* I like it here. *(They all three stare out the window. Their bodies start to move, idiosyncratically but in rhythm, with the music. Lights dim.)*

End of Play

PROPERTY LIST

2 cups of coffee
Dustbuster
Large garment bag
Shepherd's crook
Small card
Pen
Pot
Metal serving spoon
Box
Teapot
3 cups and 3 saucers
Doll that looks like Snow White
Pins
Mardi Gras-like stick with streamers
Bag
Bags of groceries
Phone
Pieces of paper
MP3 player
Cell phone
Overnight bag

SOUND EFFECTS

Car pulling up
Doorbell
Phone ringing
Mysterious music
Text message sound

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The first three names in the title — Vanya, Sonia and Masha — come from Chekhov plays. Spike is a very modern name, and it is meant to be jarring. Usually if I say the title aloud, people laugh when they hear the last name in the list.

The play is not based on Chekhov, nor is it a parody of Chekhov. Chekhov is more of a personal jumping-off point for me. It's as if I took characters and themes from Chekhov and put them in a blender.

I also wrote it so you don't have to know Chekhov to enjoy it.

Early in the first scene, Vanya and his adopted sister Sonia bemoan the fact that their professor parents named them and their sister Masha after Chekhov characters, and how difficult it made their lives in school when their classmates would make fun of their odd names. It is set in America in the present time. It is set in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

I had such a wonderful production of this play.

It was commissioned by McCarter Theatre Center in Princeton, N.J. And it was co-produced by Lincoln Center Theater in New York City. The production was the same at both theaters: the director was Nicholas Martin, the cast was (in alphabetical order) Genevieve Angelson as Nina, Shalita Grant as Cassandra, Billy Magnussen as Spike, Kristine Nielsen as Sonia, David Hyde Pierce as Vanya, and Sigourney Weaver as Masha.

This was my fourth time having Nicholas (Nicky) Martin direct a play of mine. His first direction was *Betty's Summer Vacation* at Playwrights Horizons and he won an Obie award for his direction. (And actress Kristine Nielsen won an Obie for her role as Mrs. Siezmagraff, and I won an Obie for playwriting, and our set designer Thomas Lynch won a lifetime Obie that year as well.)

Nicky went on to direct a revival of *Laughing Wild* at the Huntington Theater in Boston (acted by Debra Monk and myself). Then he did a wonderful production of *Why Torture is Wrong, and the People Who Love Them* at the Public Theater.

About the cast — I met Sigourney Weaver at Yale School of Drama and was lucky to have her perform in many of my plays over the years (including *The Nature and Purpose of the Universe*, *Titanic*, *Das Lusitania Songspiel* [a cabaret we co-authored and performed together], *Beyond Therapy*, and *Sex and Longing*). I had her in mind when I wrote the grandiose actress Masha, and I was thrilled when her schedule allowed her to play the role.

Kristine Nielsen has been in my last five plays! *Betty's Summer Vacation*, *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge*, *Miss Witherspoon*, *Why Torture is Wrong and the People Who Love Them*, and now *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*. Writing the role of Sonia, I was thinking of Kristine — she is wonderfully funny as an actress, but she can also be heart-breaking as well. And I knew that she would bring those strengths to the role of Sonia.

We were lucky to get David Hyde Pierce as Vanya. I have long been proud that David got his Equity card playing the small but juicy role of Andrew the waiter in the Broadway version of my play *Beyond Therapy*. I kept in touch with him over the years, as he appeared in many plays and then became famous as Niles on the TV sitcom *Frasier*. After that show finished its long run, David came back to New York theater and promptly won a Tony award for the delightful musical *Curtains*. David was nuanced in his role as Vanya — disappointed with his life but kind of at peace with it (unlike Sonia who is furious about her life); but Vanya's repressed upset about the world explodes into a harangue toward the end of the play, and David was just stupendous doing this speech.

The three “young’uns” were new to me. Well, I had seen Shalita Grant perform in various plays when she was an acting student at Juilliard School, where I teach. I asked her to be in the first reading as Cassandra, and she was so good that she was in about five more readings, and she kept the part.

Billy Magnussen was new to me and he was original and hilarious as Masha's much younger boy-toy. And Genevieve Angelson was straight out of NYU Drama and brought wonderful youthful enthusiasm and appropriate earnestness to her Nina.

The play was enthusiastically embraced by the McCarter Theatre audiences and then by the Lincoln Center audiences, and I started to wonder if the play could go to Broadway. The audience seemed so happy with the journey of the play — much was funny, some was touching, and I seemed to have written a “well-made” play, in which problems for the characters in Act One get resolved by the end of Act Two.

Various producers saw the play, but they were either overwhelmed with other projects or weren't drawn to move it. I felt a little discouraged, though I then thought “well, you only need one producer to show up who wants to move it.”

And that one producer did show up — Joey Parnes. Or Saint Joey Parnes as I like to call him. Producer Larry Hirschhorn quickly joined him, and we were off and running. Joey and Larry found many more producers and investors, and the play sold very well and the word of mouth was strong, and the play eventually won the Tony for Best Play.

I am going to quickly talk about the six characters in the play. And then I am adding an essay I wrote for the Lincoln Center Theater Review about my reaction to Chekhov and how it affected this play.

Now, as to the characters:

VANYA. He feels disappointed with his life — he has mostly lived in the house he grew up in. I feel that he went to college but then came home expecting to stay only a while. But he stayed the rest of his life, partly to take care of his parents as they suffered a long period of illness and then died. He is gay, but very quiet about it. I have not written whether he ever had any sexual experiences, or romantic ones. I feel he probably had a couple in his late twenties that no one knew anything about, but then felt guilty about it. And then he kind of shut himself down. As written, he clearly finds Spike very attractive — in a way that is exciting, but also extremely bothersome.

Vanya is smart, and he is diplomatic, especially when trying to keep his two sisters from fighting with each other. This trying to calm

upset people is a major part of his personality. And he keeps a lot of his feelings to himself — which partially explains the explosion of his Act Two harangue.

SONIA. She was adopted. She was 8 when she joined the family. Vanya was probably 10 or 11, Masha was probably 13 or even 14. When their parents decided to adopt Sonia, they undoubtedly told their two older children to be kind and welcoming. And I think Vanya did like Sonia pretty quickly, and they were closer in age. Masha was already in her own world — she was pretty, boys liked her, she wanted to be an actress even from that young age. So Sonia was a bit of a bother to Masha — and she either didn't pay attention to her or sometimes got annoyed at her.

Sonia is insecure about her looks, which made her awkward with boys in school, and with men afterwards. One could make this information serious and sad, but Kristine Nielsen has such buoyancy to her acting and comedy that you believed her bitterness and insecurity but you also saw that she had things she enjoyed and an overall energy to her. Kristine went beat to beat; she never played an overall “I am bitter” or “I am depressed.” For instance, when Vanya says he admired how Sonia helped their parents when Masha was off having a movie-star life, Kristine seemed quite cheered momentarily by his compliment. She lit up, in fact. Seconds later he then takes back the compliment (without quite thinking), and she reacted strongly to that with underlying bitterness.

Also important: Sonia stands up for herself by refusing to go to the costume party as a dwarf like Masha wants — and when she comes back in a glittery gown that makes her look really good, she opens up new possibilities for herself. She's actually good at talking to people at the party. Her imitation of Maggie Smith seems to unleash a playful side of herself. That is very much how Kristine played it; she had such an impish glint in her eyes as she came in and showed off her costume and her imitation. Luckily, Maggie Smith's wonderful way of speaking is so distinctive that a) she is somewhat easier to imitate than a lot of people, and b) even if your Sonia can only do a so-so imitation, that's okay too, as long as she's having fun with it.

I actually agree with Vanya that at the party Sonia released a part of herself that had been hidden. And in her phone call, she is initially enjoying talking to Joe but then becomes frightened by the idea of a date and pretends to look it up in her non-existent date book. She struggles and struggles to decide whether to risk this date, or whether to stay safe and never leave home. How I loved it that sometimes an audience member would call out “Say yes!” Oh, and they moaned when she says “no” — and then were so relieved when she changed her mind and decided to take the risk. Kristine was wonderful in the speech.

MASHA. Masha is a successful actress and movie star who has a glamorous life, and is a millionaire from her successful *Sexy Killer* movies. She is very self-involved, and one of her beliefs is that she could have been a famous interpreter of classic plays. She is used to getting her way, and she really takes over all the air in the room when she comes for her visit. There are many prototypes of the self-involved, glamorous actress: Madam Arkadina in Chekhov’s *The Seagull*, Judith Bliss in Noël Coward’s *Hay Fever*, and Bette Davis as Margo Channing in the classic film *All About Eve*. (If you love theater, watch that movie sometime, oh you young person you.)

Masha also has insecurities. She claims she would have been brilliant in *Three Sisters* but then momentarily worries she would have been terrible. I loved how Sigourney went from worrying she would have been bad to suddenly shouting at Vanya, “No! I would have been great!” Adding “Let’s change the topic ...”

Although Masha’s had 5 marriages, they didn’t last. And as we learn in the play, her three-month relationship with Spike is about to come to an end. She’s feeling older and vulnerable. That argument that Sonia and Masha have at the beginning of Act Two is actually quite realistic in what they say to each other — they are both angry and unhappy with their lives, and angry at one another’s positions. I wrote a stage direction at the end of the argument saying, “They both cry violently.” I knew that would probably be funny, but as Kristine and Sigourney just wailed and wailed, it was both believable and yet hilarious that they had pushed themselves so into utter despair.

I must say that part of what happens in comedy is that the actors somehow communicate to the audience “you are allowed to laugh,

even though there are serious moments in the play.” It is possible to act this play TOO seriously, and it would not be funny. So do cast people who can be real and yet also funny.

On this topic, David Hyde Pierce was quoted in the *L.A. Times* about acting in my plays in general and this play in particular:

... as Pierce observes, “Chris hears things differently than the rest of us. He’s like some sort of woodland creature with a heightened sense of hearing and sight. He picks up on little nuances of our language and culture that may be bobbling around in our subconscious, but we might not notice.”

... It is not, however, so easy to perform Durang’s plays, adds Pierce. “One of the challenges of Chris’ plays is, because they’re so funny and the situations are so absurd, it can be tempting to play the characters as caricatures. But they aren’t caricatures. They are real human beings, and the actors who are best at playing Durang are the ones who are best at allowing the humanity in those voices to come through.”

So allow the humanity to come through, but be careful early on to let the audience know that it’s okay to laugh. (Mike Nichols often says that the first laugh is the most important one. I agree; even if it’s a small laugh, the audience knows the play is a comedy, but it switches to serious from time to time. And sometimes — as in Vanya’s harangue — it is both serious and funny at the same time.)

One more thing about Masha — when she breaks up with Spike, to her surprise, her headache goes away. And she rediscovers the family connection she feels with Vanya and Sonia — she had forgotten about it, but it comes back at the end. I didn’t know it was going to when I was writing it, but I was surprised and glad when I wrote it that way. And Sigourney, David and Kristine were lovely and believable in this near-to-the-end section.

SPIKE. Spike is Masha’s “beloved,” as she says. But basically they have been together for three months, and their age difference is

really rather big. Spike genuinely likes and finds Masha attractive, but as a young man he has a non-stop eye for lots of women, including young women. Billy Magnussen was extraordinary in this role. He brought lots of his own impulses to the role — for instance, he was kind of like a hyper-active child. But he wasn't mean or aggressive, just very full of life and very full of how life is going well for him. He is also extremely comfortable with his body ... and he likes people looking at him. He is indeed straight, but I have him be flirtatious with Vanya from time to time. I have known some straight men who are very comfortable with their sexuality, and in a subtle way seem very comfortable knowing gay guys are attracted to them. So I took that and exaggerated it a bit with Spike. It is important that it comes from a playful place in Spike, and not something hostile or mean.

Another color that Billy brought to this role was that sometimes he seemed like a regular, “normal” boyfriend. In Act Two, when Masha expresses great relief that he was back from driving Nina home, he was friendly and sweet to her; a little amused at her insecurity, but also understanding and nice. It was good to see colors like that.

We had auditions for Spike for the L.A. production, and a number of the actors who came in tried to copy Billy. And I realized that Billy made choices that were great for him and the play, but when actors tried to copy him — especially the hyper-active things — it seemed fake on them. I believe that actors who play Spike need to find out what works for them, and not copy Billy. The choices will be close ... but, well, just trust me ... if you're cast as Spike, figure out your own impulses, and if some are the same as Billy's, that's fine because it's coming from you. But if you're just doing it because it looked right on Billy, ask your director for help finding out how to do your own, believable Spike. (Sorry if it sounds unclear how to do that ... but I did feel a number of the people auditioning were copying Billy's choices without having the emotional or comic truth behind what they were doing.)

CASSANDRA. I have always loved the Greek tragedy character of Cassandra, who sees the terrible future ahead and warns people, but the god Apollo has cursed her so that no one believes what she prophesies. Cassandra has pretty much no connection to Chekhov,

but my impulse was to give Vanya and Sonia a cleaning woman who had the name Cassandra and could indeed see the future, at least somewhat. She is wrong about who threw coffee cups, but she is right that somebody did throw them. She has no idea who or what Hootie Pie is, but the name pops into her head, and Hootie Pie eventually has quite a large effect on everyone.

Because Cassandra is from Greek tragedy, I gave my Cassandra sudden flashes of what was ahead — and I had her speak in semi-Greek-tragedy style. Shalita Grant did these speeches to perfection, so much so that I didn't realize how hard a role it can be. You have to make sense of the words, but you must say them quickly, as if it's all shooting out of your brain in a quick surge. You need to somehow sound a bit like Greek tragedy — these words are not typical in regular conversation — but you also need to seem like the same cleaning woman who came in a few minutes ago. So know what you're saying, mean what you're saying, and say it pretty fast. The audience should follow it but never get ahead of it. And it should never be slow or conversational. I hope that helps.

Cassandra also cares for Vanya and Sonia, and she is worried for them when Masha is going to sell the house. This is a warm and human side of Cassandra, and I was happy it showed up when I was writing it. I also enjoy that Cassandra and Masha ended up liking each other at the end — they sure didn't start that way. And as Masha says, they now have a “psychic” connection.

NINA. Nina is indeed somewhat like Nina in *The Seagull*. In Chekhov, she is an aspiring actress, and she is agog at meeting Madam Arkadina. But my Nina is also American; she initially finds Spike attractive, but then she gets turned off by how self-involved he is. And she has rather classy tastes — the films of Ingmar Bergman and the Merchant-Ivory films are literary and very much not like “regular” American movies. And Nina has a friendship spark with Vanya which is unexpected for both of them. She is very young and full of hope, and her speech at the end of Act One is true for her, but it is impossible for older people to listen to and agree with. (Though Vanya graciously agrees with what she says, not wanting to discourage her.) When Sonia, talking about her upcoming date, says “but of course I mustn't get my hopes up,” Nina replies, “You

must always get your hopes up.” Which actually is a wise thing to say to Sonia, who has spent her life expecting failure. So Nina is sweet and youthful, and she has some wisdom to her as well.

A little more on actors. The final month of the Broadway run, Masha was played by Julie White, Nina by Liesel Allen Yeager, and Spike by Creed Garnick. They were all three terrific.

And I just saw the L.A. production at the Mark Taper Forum, directed by David Hyde Pierce. Kristine Nielsen, Shalita Grant and Liesel Allen Yeager played their roles again. And new to the play were Christine Ebersole as Masha, Mark Blum as Vanya, and David Hull as Spike. They were also quite marvelous. (Nicholas Martin’s schedule did not allow him to direct, so he asked David Hyde Pierce to direct. David did a wonderful job, based on Nicky’s production.)

Well, that’s all I can think of for now. I hope you have a happy time if you are putting on the play. And if you’re just reading the play, I hope you enjoy it.

Goodbye! So long! Bye!

—Christopher Durang
February, 2014

MY LIFE WITH CHEKHOV

I read plays from a very young age. Probably because my mother did.

She read to me from *Winnie-the-Pooh* when I was little — not a play, of course, but lots of good dialogue. My two favorite characters were windbag Owl, who bored everyone, and gloomy, worrying Eeyore.

My mother loved James Thurber and Noël Coward and *The New Yorker*. Thurber had lots of wonderful dialogue, too. And I find the arch sound of Coward's dialogue very funny. My mother's and my favorite Coward play was *Hay Fever*, about the chaotic and grandiose Bliss family, and how they ignore and insult their houseguests.

So I was hungry to read the famous plays, the classic plays.

CHEKHOV ENCOUNTER NO. 1

Chekhov in my childhood

When I was fourteen, I tried to read my first Chekhov play. I always looked at the cast of characters to figure out who was who.

The Russian names in Chekhov, though, intimidated me — Irina Nikolayevna Arkadina (Madame Trepliova by marriage) was the first character listed in *The Seagull*. Much harder to take in than Judith Bliss in *Hay Fever*.

Then there was Konstantin Gavrilovitch Trepliov (Kostia), who was Irina Nikolayevna Arkadina's son. But below him on the list was Boris Aleksyeevich Trigorin, who was "a writer."

And the character names in the text were Arkadina, Trepliov, and Trigorin. And the last two names seemed similar to me, as well as unfamiliar. And the characters had very long speeches, and after a while, I felt that I wasn't ready to read Chekhov.

So I went back to reading *Blithe Spirit* or the musicals I loved, such as Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel*.

I wrote comic plays of my own, as well as two musical comedies that my Catholic high school put on. My college guidance counselor was a smart and worldly priest, and he suggested I apply to all these famous schools. My grades were good but not spectacular, but he told me that I should stress the playwriting I had done in school. To my utter surprise I got into Harvard.

CHEKHOV ENCOUNTER NO. 2

The Seagull

Harvard did not have a theater major, which I knew when I applied. I thought, as a would-be playwright maybe I should be well-rounded. Which I am not. In terms of my education, I ended up only semi-rounded, with large, gaping holes in my knowledge. I really couldn't be a contestant on *Jeopardy!*

The English department did offer some theater classes. And during the first week of my freshman year I auditioned to get into an acting seminar.

The list of who got in was posted, but there was a throng of people standing in front of the list. I decided to wait until the crowd thinned out, and I stood by a striking young woman who was barefoot and wisely avoiding the crowd so as not to have her feet trod upon.

I was bushy-tailed and friendly my freshman year (before I entered the Dark Night of My Soul sophomore year), and I asked the barefoot young woman how her audition for the George Hamlin acting seminar had gone. She looked at me and said, in a resonant voice, "Mr. Hamlin said my Saint Joan was the finest he had ever seen."

Well that was a bit of conversation stopper. I later wished I had said, "Ah, that's what he said to me too." But I didn't. Plus he hadn't. I think he found my Saint Joan to be mediocre. And she got into the seminar, and I didn't. But a few years later I got to see her in a student production of *Three Sisters*, and she was very good. But I am ahead of myself. I still hadn't figured out how to read Chekhov.

I signed up for an enormous lecture class called "Contemporary American and British Theatre, From the 1950s Through the Present." This sounded like bliss to me. *And* it was taught by a famous professor who was also a playwright — William Alfred, a much beloved teacher and scholar who in 1966 had had an Off-Broadway success with his Irish-family play *Hogan's Goat*, which gave actress Faye Dunaway her first professional success.

The class was in a large lecture room. Professor Alfred walked to the podium. He announced that in order to fully understand modern American and British drama, we needed to know something about the plays that preceded them. And so we were going to read a Greek tragedy, a Roman play, a Molière, a Shakespeare, a Chekhov, a Shaw, etc. until we got to the modern-day playwrights. This was rather far

from the published syllabus, but it also sounded terrific.

The assigned Chekhov was *The Seagull*, the play I had tried to read when I was fourteen.

I did better reading the play this time — and I made my own character list, which was easier to follow.

But it wasn't until Professor Alfred read scenes aloud that I had the door to Chekhov opened for me.

In a rumpled suit, and with a friendly Irish face, Alfred was a brilliant lecturer, full of wisdom, but he was also a wonderful reader of plays. For some reason, he read aloud not from *The Seagull* but from *Three Sisters*, which I had not read yet. He chose the complicated scene where Baron Tuzenbach is talking to Irina, who says she will marry him even though she's not in love with him. She no longer believes she can be happy. The baron accepts this, and they are to marry the next day. But there is an unspoken upset between them because they both know he is about to go off and fight a duel. And they are saying nothing about it. And Professor Alfred read this scene with such a sense of fragility and the uncertainty of life that I suddenly heard how the characters were meant to chatter and then to express something deeply felt, but then to rush back to chatter again. I feel he showed me the enormous vulnerability and sadness that can lie right beneath commonplace conversation, both in Chekhov and in life.

My senior year, I was lucky to be accepted into a small play-writing seminar he taught.

CHEKHOV ENCOUNTER NO. 3

The Seagull and Vanessa Redgrave

I went to the movies a great deal in college. And in my sophomore year suddenly there was a movie version of *The Seagull*, directed by Sidney Lumet. It was meandering, and talented Simone Signoret wasn't right for Arkadina.

But, oh my, there was Vanessa Redgrave playing Nina.

I think it's an impossibly difficult role, but Redgrave's portrayal was the perfect Nina I had imagined when I read the play for Professor Alfred's class. Her Nina was charming but so, so intense — her youth was painfully raw, her insecurity palpable, her infatuation with the theater was almost humorous, and she gushed at everyone a bit too much. She was spectacular.

But the character's youthful hope dies very quickly. Konstantin falls in love with her, but when she doesn't respond he suddenly deposits a dead seagull at her feet. This was seemingly his extremely inappropriate way of saying, "Please don't ignore me. I love you." Nina, meanwhile, falls for the writer Trigorin. They fall in love, she has a baby, the baby dies, Trigorin loses interest in Nina. In Act Four she comes back secretly to visit Konstantin. In despair and grief, she keeps saying, "I am a seagull."

It is very hard to play that scene. But Ms. Redgrave knew how to make that mad scene work. It's an imperfect film, but watch it for her sometime.

CHEKHOV ENCOUNTER NO. 4

Three Sisters

I mentioned my Dark Night of the Soul during my sophomore year. It might also be called depression. And it lasted into my junior year as well. I lost my Catholic faith (I left it on the ground, like a dead seagull), and I lost my bushy-tailed exuberance and could only react to dark, despairing literature.

A teaching fellow whose small class I was in correctly pointed out to me that I didn't like the poet Wordsworth because I was angry he wasn't Beckett. That was quite an accurate statement he made, and his taking the time to try to unravel my brain helped me a lot in managing to pass his course. Later, in my thirties, I grew to like Wordsworth. But all that rattling on about nature drove me crazy in my youth. I wanted psychological angst and hopelessness. That is, I didn't *want* it, but it's what I was feeling, and I needed it reflected back to me so I felt less alone. The melancholy of Chekhov suited me very well.

In my junior year, I saw *Three Sisters*. It was being done by the Harvard Dramatic Society.

The production was directed by an undergrad, Leland Moss, who had been inspired by Jerzy Grotowski, a famous, experimental Polish theater director. This inspiration made for some nontraditional staging in the play — when star-crossed lovers Masha and Vershinin had a scene, other actors would say their dialogue, while Masha and Vershinin would get down on their knees and growl and purr and paw each other. I guess they were leopards in love or something. Maybe they were lions. I don't

think they were raccoons, because they weren't eating garbage.

Sorry to be flip, and I'm sure the growling-crawling behavior is far from a fair description of what Grotowski meant. And I know he was significant in the history of experimental theater. Though as a comic writer, I find it hard not to look back at the "inner animal" sections and find them kind of funny.

Besides which, what I really liked about the production was all the *regular* acting in it. Most of the play — two-thirds maybe? — was just young actors embodying their roles with intelligence and passion. And the play was new to me; I had not read it.

Of course, I did know that the recurring lament of the three sisters was their desire to "go to Moscow," where they grew up and where life seemed stimulating and hopeful.

I already liked Beckett and the existential feel of waiting for Godot, who never came — and the three sisters seemed a precursor to that. They longed to go Moscow, and yet they never went. The ending of *Waiting for Godot* is this:

VLADIMIR. Well? Shall we go?

ESTRAGON. Yes, let's go.

(They do not move. End of play.)

Similar to Olga, Masha and Irina. "Oh, my sisters, let's go to Moscow." *They do not move.*

The cast was excellent. That barefoot girl who got into the acting seminar played Masha, and was terrific. (Her name was Susan Yakutis.) Nancy Cox was very good as the oldest, already spent sister Olga. And the sisters' beloved brother Andrei was played by a Harvard senior named André Bishop. Yes, that André Bishop, who is the Artistic Director of Lincoln Center Theater. (I didn't know him then.) He was poignant and tortured as Chekhov's Andrei.

A strange thing happened in this production. Laurie Heineman was so good as Irina that she became the protagonist for me.

It is Irina's "name day" (birthday) in Act One, and Heineman's Irina was *so* convincingly full of excitement and youthful hope for the future that I was riveted. When she was onstage, I only watched her. I clocked her every movement and emotional shift.

In Act Three, time has not been kind to Irina. She has a boring job at the Town Council. She imagined she'd meet the man of her dreams once they moved to Moscow. But they keep not going to Moscow, and instead her only choice is a loveless marriage to Baron Tuzenbach. She is disappointed in her beloved brother Andrei, who has made a disastrous marriage to the bullying Natasha, and is gambling and has given up his dreams of being a professor. They have all given up their dreams.

Heineman's shift from joy to despair was riveting. Starting with a startling "Where has it all gone to? ... where is it," Irina progresses quickly to how hopeless her life seems, how she feels muddled and is forgetting everything. She says, "I don't remember the Italian for 'window' or 'ceiling.' And every day I'm forgetting more and more ..."

Because I had never read the play, the weird specificity of forgetting foreign words for "window" and "ceiling" jumped out at me as a beautiful and heart-breaking line. It positively haunted me. It imbedded itself in my brain.

I guess *Three Sisters* is actually my favorite Chekhov play.

CHEKHOV ENCOUNTER NO. 5

Oh, Uncle Vanya

I read *Uncle Vanya* on my own. And I saw a wonderful production directed by Mike Nichols in 1973 at Circle in the Square, with an exciting cast of George C. Scott, Nicol Williamson, Julie Christie, Elizabeth Wilson, Lillian Gish, and Barnard Hughes. I paid ten dollars for standing-room, and it was thrilling to see.

And if the "Italian for window and ceiling" lines haunted me in *Three Sisters*, it was Sonya's devastating lines at the end of the play that transfixed me here. Vanya has had an emotional meltdown and has tried to shoot the professor, missing each time. And now Vanya and his niece Sonya are left alone, both rejected by the people they love, and both with no hope of any kind. Like me on Mondays. (No, just kidding.)

And Sonya says, "What can we do? We shall go on living. We shall suffer through a long succession of tedious days and tedious nights."

Reading the play I stopped right there. "Long succession of

tedious days.” I don’t feel that every day, though I did my middle two years at college. And I don’t know why I find such a despairing sentiment doesn’t depress me; it moves me. It shows me that other people feel awful at certain times. It’s the opposite of the people who rush in and say “Cheer up!” to you when it’s the wrong time to say that.

Oh I don’t know. I guess I love the emotional sadness in Chekhov.

CHEKHOV ENCOUNTER NO. 6

Chekhov meets Dostoevsky meets Chris and Albert

My senior year at college, my depression lifted. A longer story, but lifted it did. I was accepted into the Yale School of Drama with a play I had written in two days — a burst of energy after not writing for a couple of years.

I made three important friendships at Yale: fellow playwright Albert Innaurato, actress Sigourney Weaver, and fellow playwright Wendy Wasserstein.

Albert and I both were raised Catholic, and we both had nuns in our plays. We had a brief period of distrust — was the school big enough for two nun-writing authors?

However, Albert made me laugh, and we became friends. We co-wrote and performed in two cabaret pieces. And we also wrote a very odd, playful musical together — *The Idiots Karamazov*. The set-up was that Constance Garnett was translating *The Brothers Karamazov*, but she was old and crazy and kept mixing it up with Chekhov and Eugene O’Neill and Charles Dickens — it was a literary roller coaster.

It was done first as an undergrad project (directed by Albert). Then it was a Drama School project starring acting student Meryl Streep as Constance. (Whatever happened to her? Ha-ha.) And then, as a professional production at the Yale Repertory Theater, still starring Meryl, and I was unexpectedly cast as the monk Alyosha.

In the first scene, Constance introduces the Karamazov brothers, but when they enter they sing a spirited song called “O, We Gotta Get to Moscow.” The lyrics included these lines: “O, we gotta get to Moscow, make a check-off list and pack, and we’ll leave this town behind us, and we’re never coming back ... O, we gotta get to

Cleveland, San Francisco or L.A., and we'll sell the cherry orchard, and we'll give the pits away ... Goodbye now, Uncle Vanya, don't you cry now, Gotta get to Moscow, Moscow right now!"

It was a crazy and chaotic play, and it was Albert's and my first professional production.

CHEKHOV ENCOUNTER NO. 7

I had the idea to write *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* a few years ago, when I realized that I was now the age that Vanya was (or seemed to be). And, like Vanya and other Chekhov characters, I started to reassess choices made in the past.

I live in a stone farmhouse with my partner, the writer-actor John Augustine, on a small hill in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. I choose to live here for the quiet and the trees, and there is a small pond where a blue heron comes and sees what is available to eat.

But I started to think to myself, What if I didn't live with my partner here, but with my adopted sister, and the two of us had spent fifteen years taking care of our elderly and eventually incoherent parents. What if we never left the house we lived in as children, and felt jealous of our older sister, who was a glamorous stage and film star. She sends us money, but our lives feel empty and unexciting. What if my life had been closer to a Chekhov play?

By the way, I also have cherry trees around the house. About nine of them, I'd say. Very pretty two weeks a year.

My play is not a parody. It is set in the present day. Once I finished the first draft, I started to say to people, "The play takes Chekhov characters and themes and puts them into a blender."

Throughout my life, I keep reacting and reacting to Chekhov.

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