

12-15-2007

Fighting the Lethargy: Creating the Role of Masha in Anton Chekhov's The Three Sisters

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Fighting the Lethargy:
Creating the Role of Masha in
Anton Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Film, Theatre and Communication Arts
Performance
Acting

by

Lisa Picone

B.A. Louisiana State University, 1993

December, 2007

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“The theatre, the theatre . . . I don’t know whether to love it or wish it to hell.”

– ***Olga Knipper***

*(from a letter to Chekhov, written five months after
his death)*

Acknowledgements

One of the things that I love about theatre is that it is a collaborative process. No artist in the theatre works alone. Creating the role of Masha in *The Three Sisters* was a challenging, yet rewarding process, but its success would not have been possible without the efforts of many people. In addition to my thesis performance, this document and my entire graduate school career, would never have come together without support from others. I will attempt to put my appreciation on paper, but no words can express the debt of gratitude I owe to all of you.

First, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my major professor, and the director of *The Three Sisters*, David Hoover. You have played an instrumental part in my education, as a teacher, and as a director. You have challenged me to overcome my weaknesses, and improve on my strengths. You have constantly forced me to dig deeper by always questioning my choices. I cherish you as a mentor, and as a friend.

I would also like to thank my graduate coordinator, Tony French. Thank you for helping me bring so many characters to life with your beautiful costume designs. I especially appreciate the dresses you built specifically for me. Thank you also for your guidance as an instructor, and as a mentor throughout my graduate school career.

Kevin Griffith, thank you for your support and instruction over the past few years. The creativity in your set design continues to amaze me. I admire you for continuing to strive for perfection in the theatre.

I am also especially grateful to the guidance I have received from FTCA Department Chair, Phil Karnell. Thank you for never accepting mediocrity, and for always pushing me past my limit. You taught me what it means to commit fully, even if it means “failing gloriously”.

I would like to extend a very big thanks to the entire cast and crew of *The Three Sisters*. To the stage management team, Melissa Gregus and Jennifer Sacks, thank you for your hard work and dedication. Thank you to Trish Vitrano for creating our world on stage, and to Katie Anderson for lighting it beautifully. Thanks to the backstage crew for your devotion to each performance. Finally, thanks to such a fantastic cast. I enjoyed sharing the stage with each and every one of you. Thank you, again, to all of you for making my thesis performance such an enjoyable and successful experience.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the rest of the FTCA faculty, staff, graduate students and undergraduate students. Whether you are someone I have worked with, shared the stage with, took a class with, or taught, you have all played a part in my graduate school experience. For that, I am grateful to all of you.

Sean Patterson, thank you for inspiring me to come to graduate school. Without your advice and counsel, I would not be where I am today.

I am also indebted to my proofing & editing team: Elizabeth Pearce, Bradley Troll, Liz Skinner, Natalie Boyd and Angie Joachim. Also thank you to John Steger for all of your technological help, and also for keeping me sane throughout this process. You are all so amazing for taking time out of your busy lives to help me. I value all of your friendships.

Finally, a very special thank you to my Mom and Dad. I could never have made it through graduate school without your love and your support. Thanks for everything.

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Abstract

This thesis serves as documentation of my efforts to define accurately my creative process as an actor in creating the role of Masha in *The Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov. This includes research, character analysis, rehearsal journal and an evaluation of my performance. *The Three Sisters* was produced by the University of New Orleans Department of Film, Theatre and Communication Arts in New Orleans, Louisiana. The play was performed in the Thrust Theatre of the Performing Arts Center at 8:00 pm on the evenings of April 19 through 21 and April 26 through 28, with one matinee at 2:30 pm on Sunday, April 29, 2007.

Keywords: Lisa Picone, The Three Sisters, UNO, University of New Orleans, Anton Chekhov

Introduction

A life-changing event occurred in my second year of graduate school at the University of New Orleans – Hurricane Katrina. This event was significant to my thesis project because it caused my graduation date to be pushed back by a semester, from May 2007 to December 2007. My thesis performance occurred Spring 2007 instead of Fall 2006.

Although I did not choose the play from which I would perform my thesis role, I did express interest in Chekhov. I was excited when I heard that UNO would mount a production of *The Three Sisters* in Spring 2007. Professor David Hoover would direct, with set design by Patricia Vitrano (her thesis project), costume design by Professor Tony French and lighting design by Katie Anderson. This decision was made prior to the Fall semester; however, my role was not chosen until the first week of the Spring semester, less than a week before auditions. For this reason, I could not begin doing script work or research on the character ahead of time. I thought this lack of preparation before rehearsals would be a hindrance, but the extensive rehearsal period dedicated to this production overcame that problem. The show was cast mid-January but did not open until mid-April. We had weeklong breaks for the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF), Region VI; Mardi Gras and Spring break, which provided the extra time I needed to immerse myself completely in the role and give a performance of which I was proud.

This document contains a thorough examination of my process in creating this role, along with a post-production evaluation of my performance. It is a culmination of my graduate schoolwork and a demonstration of the skills I have developed as a student of the performance program at UNO.

Research

The research required for this thesis project was a vital part of my process. Preparation for this role took me back to the origins of the “Stanislavski System” because of Anton Chekhov’s association with Konstantin Stanislavski and the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT). In fact, Chekhov’s style of writing inspired Stanislavski to develop this system of acting, on which my training is based. I felt that performing his work was an appropriate culmination of my graduate school experience.

A thorough understanding of Chekhov and his writing process for *The Three Sisters*, his correspondence with Olga Knipper, who originated the role of Masha, and the study of other available critical analyses of the play were essential to my creation of the role of Masha Prozorov.

About Chekhov

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was born January 29, 1860, at Taganrog on the Sea of Azov in southwestern Russia. He would eventually become the master of the modern short story, and one of the most renowned playwrights in history. He would also become known as the “Father of Subtext,” always probing below the surface and revealing the inner workings of his characters through his text.

Chekhov’s childhood was not a happy one. His father was born a serf, but was freed when Tsar Alexander II issued the Emancipation Manifesto following Russia’s loss in the Crimean War. As a free man, Chekhov’s father struggled as a grocer.

Because of his father’s poor earning capability, Chekhov had already been supporting his family by freelancing as a journalist by the time he became a doctor of medicine in 1884. In addition to medicine, “he also had a professional interest in psychiatry, social medicine,

sociology, zoology, horticulture and the philosophy of science” (Wellek 184). These interests manifested themselves in his writing in several ways, such as the recurring character of the doctor and an attention to nature.

In his early 20s, Chekhov was a prolific short story writer. He began to earn respect when his works were published in a series of publications in St. Petersburg. While he flourished as a short story writer, he began to experiment with playwriting. His first play, *Ivanov*, was produced in 1887 at the Korsh Theatre in Moscow without success.

In 1888, he wrote *The Wood Demon*. This lengthy four-act play was eventually cut, revised and published as *Dyadya Vanya* (*Uncle Vanya*) in 1897. The year before *Uncle Vanya* was published *Chayka* (*The Seagull*) had its debut performance in St. Petersburg. The play was so poorly received (with hisses from the audience) that Chekhov left the theatre in the middle of the second act and vowed never to write for the stage again. He wrote, “I am not destined to be a playwright. I have no luck at it. But I’m not sad over it, for I can still go on writing stories. In that sphere I feel at home; but when I write a play, I feel uneasy, as though someone were peering over my shoulder” (Malcolm 170).

Despite his discomfort as a playwright and the failure of his first production, he reluctantly agreed to let the newly formed Moscow Art Theatre produce *The Seagull* in 1898. This production proved more successful than the first and helped to establish Chekhov as a dramatist. The Moscow Art Theatre, in fact, was so pleased with his work that its founders, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko and Konstantin Stanislavski commissioned him to write more plays.

The Seagull was produced at the MAT in 1898. During rehearsals for the production, Chekhov developed an interest in the young woman who played Arkadina. Her name was Olga

Knipper. Soon after the production closed, they began a love affair that eventually lead to marriage. “They were married very quietly in a suburban church in Moscow on May 25, 1901. The only announcement sent out was Chekhov’s telegram to his mother: ‘Dear Mama, give me your blessings, I’m getting married. Everything will remain as before. I’m off to the koumiss cure’” (Karlinsky 388).

“Koumiss” was an Asian drink made from camel’s milk or mare’s milk and used for medicinal purposes. During the late 1890s, before he met Knipper, Chekhov had been ill with a severe case of tuberculosis. The year before *The Seagull* was produced at the MAT, he had a lung hemorrhage. Finally in 1899, suffering from the advanced stages of the disease, he exiled himself to Yalta because of its mild winters. He bought a small cottage on the water in a seaside Tatar village called Gurzuv, where he would remain for the final years of his life.

After he and Knipper were married, she continued her stage career in Moscow while Chekhov continued writing in Yalta. Their marriage “was a partnership of equals and they arranged it to provide themselves with the independence they both wanted to be a part of that marriage” (Karlinsky 389).

Dear Writer, Dear Actress: The Love Letters of Anton Chekhov and Olga Knipper documents the couple’s five-year relationship in their own words through their letters to each other. Since Knipper was making a name for herself as an actor in Moscow during Chekhov’s exile in Yalta, they were not together very often, so their letters became their only source of communication for much of their time together. These firsthand conversations between the playwright and the actor who originated the role of Masha became an invaluable tool for my creation of the role.

While in Yalta Chekhov wrote a few short stories, but drama became his focus. In 1901, he finished *Trisestry (The Three Sisters)*. It had taken him almost a year to write it due to his progressing illness and constant interruptions. In a letter to Olga Knipper on August 18, 1900, he explained, “I have the play in mind, it has taken shape and form, it begs to be put on paper, but the moment I touch the paper, the door opens and some swine comes crawling in” (Karlinsky 386).

Chekhov’s four-act drama, *The Three Sisters*, premiered at the Moscow Art Theatre on January 27, 1901. It was the first play to be written specifically for the MAT. The production was co-directed by Konstantin Stanislavski and Nemirovich-Danchenko. It is considered one of the greatest works of modern drama and one of Chekhov’s finest masterpieces.

Chekhov and Stanislavski continually argued about how his plays should be performed, and *The Three Sisters* was no exception. Chekhov insisted that his dramatic works were comedies and not tragedies and, most important, should be performed with a light touch. After the first reading of *The Three Sisters* at the Moscow Art Theatre, Chekhov left after hearing his play described as a drama and a tragedy. Stanislavski recounts, “I rarely saw him so angry. The reason, it emerged, was that he had written a happy comedy, and at the reading we had all taken the play as a drama, and wept over it. This made Chekhov think that the play was not comprehensible and it was already a failure” (Allen 22).

This was not the only thing they disagreed on during the production of *The Three Sisters*. Stanislavski insisted on embellishing his productions of Chekhov’s plays, mostly with extensive sound effects, in an attempt to create drama. For example, in Act III Chekhov’s stage direction calls for the sound of the fire brigade. Stanislavski intended for this to include wheels, footsteps, chains, bells and voices shouting.

Knipper wrote to tell him [Chekhov] that Stanislavski was planning to create a sense of ‘terrible commotion’. He replied: You write about the noise in Act III.

What noise? The noise is only in the distance, a vague muffled noise, but here on stage everyone’s exhausted, almost asleep. If you spoil Act III the whole play will be ruined and in my old age I’ll be hissed off the stage. (Allen 18)

Despite the disagreements, the Moscow Art Theatre’s production of *The Three Sisters* was an overwhelming success. In a letter to Chekhov on February 5, 1901, Knipper exclaims, “Moscow talks of nothing else but *Three Sisters*. A success for Chekhov and a success for our theatre” (Benedetti 103).

Chekhov wrote the roles of Masha in *The Three Sisters* and Ranevskaya in *The Cherry Orchard* specifically for Knipper. Masha was her favorite role. The following passage from *Dear Writer, Dear Actress* shows just how attached she felt to the role:

Late in life she attended a gala evening at the Moscow Art Theatre, in which the parting of Masha and Vershinin in *Three Sisters* was performed. At the climactic moment, a strong deep voice rang out from one of the boxes. It was the eighty-year-old Knipper, unable to restrain herself from speaking the line before the unfortunate young actress on stage could get it out. It was ‘her’ line.” (Benedetti ix)

Chekhov completed his final work, *Vishnyovy (The Cherry Orchard)*, in 1904. Less than six months after its premiere at the MAT, he succumbed to his disease. Anton Chekhov died of tuberculosis in July 1904 at the age of 43.

Chekhov's writing style

Chekhov's plays were controversial when they were first introduced, and still garner criticism today because some think they contradict the very definition of drama. The word "drama" comes from the ancient Greek verb "dran," which means "to take action or to do." Chekhov's writing is often perceived as lacking significant action. Many people believe that nothing happens in his plays. He wrote this way because he deemed that on stage, things should be as they are in real life, and not a stilted version of life.

In real life people do not spend every minute shooting each other, hanging themselves or making declarations of love. They don't spend every minute saying clever things. Rather, they eat, drink, flirt, talk nonsense. And that is what should be seen on the stage. One should write a play in which people come and go, eat, talk about the weather and play cards. And not because that is what the author wants, but because that is what happens in real life. (Allen 4)

Chekhov strove to remove the false exaggerations he saw in the theatre. This desire to create truth on stage made the inner life of his characters become more important than the external action. He said, "Do you see people tearing about, leaping up and down, and clutching their heads? Suffering should be expressed as it is expressed in life . . . not with your arms and legs, but by a tone of voice, or a glance; not by gesticulating, but by grace. Subtle inner feelings, natural in educated people, must be subtly expressed in an external form" (Allen 7).

Konstantin Stanislavski, one of the founders of the Moscow Art Theatre, agreed that a more realistic style of acting was needed on the stage. As a result, Chekhov's unique, realistic style of writing became the impetus for what would become the "Stanislavski System."

It is wrong, Stanislavski argued, to act Chekhov superficially, to play the external form of a role, without creating the inner form and inner life. It is wrong to try to act, to ‘present’ the characters. You must be – that is, you must live, exist, following the deep, inner, spiritual line of development. Stanislavski called this the line of intuition and feeling. (Allen 47)

In rehearsals for *The Three Sisters*, Stanislavski realized what Chekhov was trying to do and suddenly reformed his entire thinking about how the play should be performed. “They do not bathe in their own sorrow. Quite the opposite; they seek joy, laughter, courage; they want to live and not stagnate. I felt the truth in this view of Chekhov’s heroes, this encouraged me, and I intuitively understood what had to be done” (Allen 27).

Chekhov’s intention was to make his audience realize how boring their lives actually were so they would strive for something better. He created characters that were a mirror of what he saw in humanity not so they could sit back and cry about it but so that they could realize it and take action.

It was this way of thinking that drove Chekhov to create such compelling, multi-faceted characters. The rich subtext he created makes it a challenge and a delight for any actor to bring one of his characters to life.

Themes in The Three Sisters

During rehearsals for the Moscow Art Theatre’s original production of *The Three Sisters*, Vsevolod Meyerhold, one of the co-founders of the MAT, made notes about some of the basic themes in Stanislavski’s interpretation. “Longing for life; call to work; tragic quality against laughable (background) comedy; happiness as future destiny; work; loneliness” (Allen 26).

The search for the meaning of life and a justification for human existence are also central themes. Since Chekhov was very ill while writing the play and near the end of his life, I believe his exploration of this theme was his attempt to make sense of his own existence.

The prospect of their return to Moscow represents the sisters' hopes for living a better life than the boring, provincial life in which they are currently trapped. The monotony of their daily lives causes them to search within themselves for an answer to why they live. Part of this inward searching comes from their attempt to cope with the rapidly changing social order in Russia in the early 1900s.

The rise of the working class in Russia at the turn of the twentieth century caused the decline of the privileged class. The sisters' father, Colonel Prozorov, was a senior military officer, so the sisters were accustomed to a life with the advantages of wealth. This changing social order presented a challenge. Tuzenbach declares that he has "never worked." Irina represents the new order, declaring, "We must work." Irina looks at work in an idealistic way, thinking it will give her purpose. She soon realizes she hates it and wants life to return to the way it was.

The concept of fate is also vital in *The Three Sisters*. "The motive force for classical drama is fate, and the concept has central importance in *The Three Sisters* . . . Chekhov's sisters are not in control of their fate – they are rather its victims" (Peace 85-86). The sisters see Moscow as their fate and their future, but it is also their past.

Chekhov was enthralled with the concept of fate and he explored this through his writing, especially in *The Three Sisters* and his later works. To understand Chekhov's writing is to understand the "unpredictable nature of each moment of life and yet the peculiar consistency with which those moments add up to a given fate" (Wellek 140). Chekhov's plays do not just

examine how people behave during the monotony of their everyday lives; they also explore how each of these moments ultimately determines their fate.

The theme of entrapment was the inspiration for Professor Hoover's central image in the UNO production of *The Three Sisters*. The tall thin trees on the set represented not only the trees that surround the sisters in their provincial town, but also functioned as the columns in the house and symbolized the bars that surround them in life, preventing them from following their wishes and dreams. Masha verbalizes the entrapment she feels in her marriage through the recitation of the Pushkin poem in Act I and again in Act IV. The greatest sense of entrapment is in the sisters' inability to escape their current situation and return to Moscow.

There are several omens throughout the play that seem to warn that fate is working against them in their quest for Moscow. These omens ultimately point to their fate. First, Masha's whistling upon the mention of the sisters moving to Moscow is an indirect commentary on the possible success of them moving. "Whistling was said to be a bad omen that could raise the devil" (Peace 77). Chekhov had the ability to use subtle details like this to express his characters' thoughts. "Whistling could seem simply a trivial action, a piece of 'naturalistic' business. But it is, in fact, a detail which has been carefully selected as a subtle expression of the 'inner drama' taking place in the character" (Allen 7).

Kulygin announces that there are 13 at table, which is a bad omen. Masha admits to Vershinin that she is superstitious. These omens seem to suggest that something bad will happen if they return to Moscow. Perhaps it was Chekhov's way of suggesting that the sisters look to the future rather than the past for the pursuit of happiness. Of course, we don't know if any of the sisters ever made it to Moscow; we only know that they do not go within the five-year period of the four acts of Chekhov's play.

Character Research

Sometimes an actor studies how other actors have performed a role, not to imitate their performance, but to use it as a tool from which to learn. Seldom do actors have the opportunity to learn directly from conversations between the playwright and the actor who originated a role, especially when the role was written over 100 years ago. I was fortunate enough to have this opportunity because of the published letters between Anton Chekhov and Olga Knipper. Chekhov was in Yalta while Knipper was rehearsing *The Three Sisters* in Moscow, so their letters to each other were frequent and detailed. Having access to these letters gave me tremendous insight into Chekhov's intention for the role of Masha.

Chekhov offered this advice to Knipper on how to approach playing the role of Masha in a letter he wrote to her on January 2, 1901: "Don't pull a sad face in the first act. Serious, yes, but not sad. People who had long carried a grief within themselves and have become accustomed to it only whistle and frequently withdraw into themselves. So you can often be thoughtfully withdrawn on stage during conversations. Do you see?" (Hackett 279).

Another translation of the same letter uses slightly different wording. "People who are used to being sad inside just whistle and are often lost in thought. You often become pensive on stage when people are talking. Understand?" (Benedetti 87). I thought the phrase "lost in thought" was particularly useful in understanding Masha.

I read a published interview with Blythe Danner, who played Masha in 1976, which was also very helpful in giving me a deeper insight into the character. Nikos Psacharopoulos, founder of the Williamstown Theatre Festival, directed the production. Danner recalls, ". . . Nikos lit into me and yelled, 'Crying is not the key to Chekhov!' . . . he really wanted something deeper than that – a pain that went beneath tears . . ." (Hackett 22).

Danner had a strong connection with the character. She explains, “I had a great – settled – feeling with Masha, which went right through my being. But, on the other hand, there’s that sense of being entrapped, there’s the longing and the desire to be the bird, to be flying, to escape, to go heavenward” (Hackett 27).

Knipper wrote to Chekhov on January 13, 1901 because she was having trouble with the “tram-tam” moment between Masha and Vershinin in Act III. “The tram-tram is causing a problem. Nemirovich thinks we should sing out these signals like bugle calls, with mimed actions, of course. If we just speak them, they’ll come out as crude or incomprehensible” (Benedetti 92).

In Chekhov’s reply, dated January 20, 1901, he answers, “Vershinin delivers ‘tram-tram-tram’ as a question and you as an answer and to you this is such an original joke that you speak this ‘tram-tram’ with a smile. She says ‘tram-tram’ and laughs, not loudly, just a little . . . you are easily amused and easily angered” (Benedetti 97).

She wrote to him again on January 15, 1901, to discuss the scene in Act III in which she confesses her love for Vershinin to her sisters.

The point of disagreement with Nemirovich is Masha’s confession in Act 3. I want to do the third act in a state of nerves, in fits and starts that means the confession is strong, dramatic, i.e. the darkness of the situation gains the upper hand over the joy of love. Nemirovich wants this joy of love, so that, despite everything, is full of this love and doesn’t confess as to a crime. The second act is full of this love. For Nemirovich, Act 4 is the climax; for me, it’s Act 3.

(Benedetti 93)

She seems to work some of this out on her own as she tells him in a letter dated January 18, 1901, “I won’t play the confession in a loud voice but with strong inner drive and feeling and a glimmer of happiness if I can so express it” (Benedetti 95).

Chekhov finally sent his thoughts on the confession in a letter dated January 28, 1901.

Dearest, Masha’s confession in Act 3 isn’t one; it’s just a frank conversation. Play it highly-strung but not desperate, and don’t raise your voice, smile from time to time and above all play it so that one can feel the exhaustion of the night. And so one can feel that you are more clever than your sisters, or at least, that you think you are. As regards ‘tram-tram-tram’, do it your way. You are my interpreter.
(Benedetti 101)

Nikos Psacharopoulos’ explanation of “the stove” comment in Act II helped both Professor Hoover and myself make sense of this moment. “Look, it’s very simple. The last time that something really big happened to her, when her father died, the wind howled in the chimney. And now it’s happening again!” (Hackett 281). Masha’s comment about the noise in the stove seems to come out of nowhere, so comparing it to the last big event in her life makes it seem more deliberate than random.

In Knipper’s letter to Chekhov on January 18, 1901, she said, “I really like the shaping of Masha in the last act. The whole role is a marvel. If I ruin it, I’ll give myself up as a bad job” (Benedetti 95). Of course she didn’t ruin it. The Moscow Art Theatre’s production of *The Three Sisters* was a tremendous success. Knipper wired Chekhov immediately after opening night on January 31, 1901. Her telegram said, “Grand succès embrasse mon bien aimé” (Benedetti 102)

Character Analysis

Defining character is a multifaceted process. Acclaimed director and author Jon Jory says, “Some people believe there is no such thing as ‘character’; there is only the pursuit of the action” (Jory 172). Then he challenges this definition because it is incomplete. It does not account for the personality traits and physical characteristics of the character or the actor.

A well-written character is multilayered, sometimes with personality traits that contradict each other. For example, if one defined Masha’s personality with a broad stroke, one could paint her as a spiteful and overbearing woman, or simply, a bitch. Masha’s temperament goes much deeper than that. In his critical study of *The Three Sisters*, Richard Peace points out that “much could be said in defense of Masha – her apparent insensitivity derives from extreme sensitivity” (Peace 98). Looking at her from this angle shows her vulnerability and makes her a more sympathetic character, which makes her a more complex, richer character to portray.

Another broad stroke inherent in many of Chekhov’s characters is that of boredom, lethargy, and an inability to act. This is especially true in Chekhov’s women who were limited because of the social restrictions of the time. A woman’s duty was that of wife and mother. Only unmarried women were permitted to work and choice of occupation was limited. Masha, a married woman forced to stay home, could be easily mistaken as lethargic and bored with her life, unable to make a change.

Chekhovian women; however, tend to fight against this *oblomovism*. *Oblomovism*, “. . .a spineless laziness that lurks within many of Chekhov’s characters” (Peace 82), is a slang term that originated in pre-Soviet Russia. It is based on a character in *Oblomov*, a novel written by Ivan Goncharov. The novel is primarily about a Russian nobleman who cannot seem to find the ambition to accomplish anything. This *oblomovism* presents a challenge for all actors attempting

Chekhov. It would be easy to play Masha as spineless and lazy. The challenge lies in fighting against the temptation to wallow in despair. For this reason, fighting against this *oblomovism* or lethargy inherent in Chekhov's work became the basis for my through-line.

In *Building a Character*, Stanislavski explains "the physical materialization of a character to be created emerges of its own accord once the right inner values have been established" (Stanislavski 1). Chekhov establishes that a sense of purpose in life is of great importance in Masha's inner value system. In Act II, she tells Vershinin and Tuzenbach, "It seems to me a person must have a purpose, or be looking for one. Otherwise life is empty – empty." Her morose personality is largely due to her constant search for this meaning of life because she knows her true purpose cannot be fulfilled in her current circumstance.

The importance of education in her life may not be apparent in Act I when she tells Vershinin, "We know many useless things." However, she makes this remark because her education is useless to her in such a small provincial town, but would be appreciated in Moscow. Not only is she educated; she also appreciates others who are educated. These are the people with which she wishes to be associated. In Act II she reveals her true opinion when she tells him, "Most civilians here are coarse, dry, and uneducated. Coarseness sickens me – I feel assaulted by it. I suffer when I feel a lack of refinement, tenderness, or kindness around me."

She values family, but marriage seems to be a duty for her. These feelings come out of the relationships Masha has with her family members and her husband. She has a very strong relationship with her two sisters. When she confesses her love for Vershinin to them in Act III she tells them, "My sweet sisters, there's something I must confess. I can't keep it in anymore. I'll confess to you but not to anyone else. I want to tell you." They seem to be the only people around her with which she can confide.

Kulygin, on the other hand, is only a nuisance to her now. She stays married to him out of obligation. In Act II she tells Vershinin, “I was married at eighteen, in awe of my husband. He was a teacher, and I’d just finished school, so to me he seemed terribly important and smart. Now, unfortunately, I don’t feel that way.”

The Sanford Meisner Workbook: Playing the Part explains that the source of character is point of view; “the origins of character reside in a person’s specific attitudes toward the people and circumstances all around him or her” (Silverberg 141). Masha’s relationships are an important part of who she is, especially those of her family and her husband. In *Backwards and Forwards*, David Ball says, “Family relationships are at or near the center of almost every play. Don’t ignore this superb means for understanding the play and bringing the audience close to it” (Ball 85).

The contrast Chekhov has created between the three sisters provides a crucial dynamic to their relationship. The sisters contrast in dress, behavior and action, especially Masha and Irina. Masha is the antithetical figure to Irina in dress and mood. Irina is in high spirits for her name day in white, while Masha is morose and pensive in black. The Russian name day is a celebration of a person’s christening day or baptism.

Olga falls somewhere between the two. She is melancholy when she remembers their father’s death, but tries to put on a happy face for Irina’s name day. At the same time, she understands that the memories of their father’s death, and their happy life in Moscow, cause Masha to want to leave the name day party. She even says, “I understand you Masha.” Irina is perhaps too young for the memory to be as clear. Her attitude toward Masha is much less understanding when she berates her with, “You’re so . . .” Chekhov doesn’t finish the statement, but the actress who played Irina did so with a negative connotation which was clearly Chekhov’s

intention. Masha's mood seems to stem from her "awareness of Irina's youth and happiness and the conflicting memories she has of former name day parties" (Peace 78).

Masha's relationship with her brother Andrei is naturally not as close as the one she shares with her sisters. In Act I, she is proud of him. She brags about his violin playing and excuses his decision to choose the university over the military because it was, "Just as Papa wished." But as the play progresses, Andrei becomes a member of the County Council and develops a gambling problem. He confesses to Ferapont that he can't talk to his sisters about his life when he says, "I am afraid of my sisters, afraid they'll laugh at me, make me feel ashamed." He is right to believe this.

Masha's opinion of Andrei descends into disgust by the end of the play, mainly because he has allowed Natasha to take over their home. "The thought of what Andrei has done with our house is revolting. Disgusting. The unfairness disgusts me." In Act IV, she describes him as their "lost hope" and compares him to an eternally muted bell. She has such hope for him in Act I, and that hope dwindles into disappointment. She uses the analogy of a bell that "falls and breaks into a thousand pieces."

Masha demonstrates her sense of familial duty and her strained relationship with her husband through her actions in Act I and also through her conversation with Vershinin in Act II. Masha admits to Vershinin that she married young and at the time was in awe of her husband, but that she doesn't feel that way anymore. Even if these feelings weren't verbalized they would be evident through her actions.

Her conversations with Vershinin are relaxed and full of meaning. In contrast, her relationship with Kulygin is more formal, and their dialogues with each other are short and meaningless. They never have a real conversation throughout the entire script. In Act III, when

Masha conjugates the verb for love in Latin after Kulygin tells her that he loves her, “she is parodying his own pedantic, formalistic view of love” (Peace 84). She continues to mock him when she replies “I’m so bored” to his “I’m so happy.”

Character does not exist without the addition of the actor. “The reason great actors are so compelling is because they bring their personality to bear on everything they do . . . Remember that it is you onstage, not some mythical being called the character” (Bruder 75). So I am the final step of the analysis process. It is the given circumstances, the personality traits of the character, and my own personality and physical traits and creative imagination that will ultimately complete the character of Masha in the creation of the role. “Without imagination there can be no creativeness” (Stanislavski 21).

Through-line

When asked to explain his characters to Stanislavski, Chekhov would often reply, “It’s all in the text” (Karlinsky 393). *The Practical Handbook for the Actor* explains, “In the theatre, character is an illusion created by the words and given circumstances supplied by the playwright and the physical actions of the play (Bruder 74). Therefore, I begin my process of analysis by studying the given circumstances of Chekhov’s text.

In *Creating a Role*, Stanislavski says, “The purpose of analysis should be to study in detail and prepare *given circumstances* for a play or part so that through them, later on in the creative process, the actor’s emotions will instinctively be sincere and his feelings true to life” (Stanislavski 10).

The given circumstances in *The Three Sisters* tell us that Masha married Kulygin when she was 18 years old. She now realizes that his intelligence does not go beyond the educational realm, which bores her. She enjoys the intelligence of the military officers more because they

like to discuss philosophical topics. She misses the life she had in Moscow. The city is much more exciting than provincial life, where she is trapped. In her youth, there were always people around, especially military officers, at the many dinners, parties and gatherings in the Prozorov household. Since her father died, however, the house has been “too quiet, like a desert.” Her current life is boring and unfulfilling to her until Vershinin arrives. He is a breath of fresh air to her stagnant room. He is her temporary escape.

From these given circumstances I derived Masha’s superobjective: *to strive for a better life*. Masha struggles to remain hopeful in all that is bleak around her throughout the play. She fights against the urge to give up. Vershinin arrives and gives her a new sense of hope and a renewed energy to strive for more.

Active verbs like *strive*, *fight* and *struggle* helped me as an actor to rise beyond the *oblomovism* inherent in Chekhov’s characters. In the first read-through for our production of *The Three Sisters*, director David Hoover challenged the cast to *fight the lethargy*. This became my mantra in bringing Masha to life. I used this mantra as the basis for my superobjective but felt that it needed to be translated into a positive statement in order to provide a stronger through-line.

Masha is fighting for a better life with a stronger conviction than she is fighting against her current life, especially once she meets Vershinin. In her struggle to strive toward her goal, however, she continues to fight against being a victim of fate. She fights against not being in control of her fate instead of just letting it overtake her, but she still constantly feels its weight. Masha also fights for Vershinin, and she does not give up on her life when he leaves. She exclaims, “We must go on living.”

I also looked for evidence of this struggle in her words, in order to further support my through-line. *The Sanford Meisner Workbook: Playing the Part* explains the importance of discovering the character's "spine" or "deeper wish" by identifying key phrases in the text.

The most important of these key phrases is the Pushkin poem Masha recites several times throughout the play; in fact it is her first line in the play. The line is a quote from Alexander Pushkin's 'Prologue' to his poem "Ruslan and Lyudmila", "By the curved seashore an oak tree greening/ Wound round that oak a golden chain." The verses were a well-known Russian tradition, so "Chekhov knew the audience would be familiar with the poem when he wrote it" (Peace 79).

The van Itallie translation of *The Three Sisters* only includes the first two lines. In other translations the verse is extended in Act IV to include, "And day and night a learned tomcat/ Keeps going round and round on the chain." The extension of the verse makes Masha's confused line "A green cat?" in Act IV make more sense, so Professor Hoover agreed to let me add it in. The poem symbolizes her position in her marriage, but the extended version clarifies Masha's sense of entrapment due to Kulygin's hold on her.

The oak tree is a symbol of strength; its greenness shows vigour and a capacity for life . . . the oak tree is in a provincial backwater in direct symbolic contrast to Moscow, moreover it is attached by a golden bond (marriage) to a 'learned tomcat' (the pompous schoolmaster Kulygin) who with his prattle and fussing round and round her constantly hems her in. (Peace 79)

The objective, *to escape her marriage*, becomes important to her. But when she is with Vershinin, she desires more than simply to escape her marriage. Blythe Danner, who played the role in 1976, expressed Masha's deeper desires concerning Vershinin best. She said, ". . . here

was someone who could just grab Vershinin, take him behind the hedges and make passionate love, whose heart was – whose soul was just – dripping with passion and with need . . . It's not just the sexual need. It's more than that, it transcends that. It is really – the hunger to fill one's soul" (Hackett 26).

Masha is incomplete, in my opinion. Her life is unfulfilled. She is hungry to fill her soul with so much more than she is getting now. Masha wants *to strive for a better life* that completes her and allows her to use the education she has acquired. She wants to strive for a life that is fulfilling and in which she is constantly challenged and stimulated. This superobjective took me from the beginning to the end of the play and helped me to give a well-invested performance.

Motivation

If Masha wants to strive for a better life, what is her motivation? Why does she want it? An actor's objective is meaningless without a strong motivation behind it. The "what?" does not work effectively until the "why?" is established.

The best motivation is one that comes as close as possible to a life-or-death situation. In my opinion, Masha may as well be dead if she is not living life to the fullest. If she is not constantly striving for more and surrounded by people who are engaging and stimulating to her, she withdraws. She demonstrates this in Act I before Vershinin arrives as she is buried in her book during the name-day celebration. Masha, of course, does not feel like it is much of a celebration. She feels as if it is more like "a desert."

With this in mind, I define Masha's motivation in terms of living in a vibrant social sense or dying in a sense of withdrawing from social situations. Masha's motivation is that if she does not get what she wants she will withdraw or wither away and her life will become meaningless, so she will cease to live.

Obstacles

What is getting in the way of Masha achieving her objective? If she wants a better life, why doesn't she move back to Moscow and pursue it? "A play's conflict is between what someone wants and what hinders the want: the obstacle" (Ball 28). There are several obstacles that force Masha to stay where she is, virtually trapped in her environment.

In *Backwards and Forwards*, David Ball describes four different types of dramatic conflict: me against myself; me against other individuals; me against society; and me against fate, the universe, natural forces or God. Masha is fighting against all four of these.

She is in conflict with herself primarily due to her sense of duty and the importance of her family. She feels a sense of duty to her husband, but fulfills her duty to him begrudgingly. In Act I, her comment "What an unbearable life!" is directly related to her duty of having to go with him to "another evening at the principal's." She also feels a sense of responsibility to her sisters. She would never do anything scandalous at the risk of hurting them or bringing scandal to the Prozorov name.

She is also in conflict with herself because she frequently appears to be giving up all hope of striving for a better life. In Act I she says, "Well, let's drink. Life is beautiful. To hell with tomorrow." Masha struggles with hoping for something better. She thinks that it's difficult to have hope for tomorrow because the result may not live up to her expectations. She can't plan it, so she might as well live today to the fullest. This attitude is prevalent at Irina's name-day party in Act I, which also happens to be the anniversary of their father's death. The sisters bring up memories of the past, reminding Masha that her life is not what she hoped for, and it is also not as good as it was in the past. It seems as if she is often battling with herself. In Act IV she says,

“My life is a failure . . . Nothing matters anymore.” But soon after she turns it around with, “We have to go on living – somehow, start again.”

She is in conflict with other individuals. Her husband Kulygin is an obstacle that prevents her from changing her life for the better. He is satisfied with the current situation and is resistant to change. He goes so far as to not affect change that he even tells her, “I support you” as she grieves for Vershinin in Act IV. Vershinin’s wife and children are also obstacles. His wife repeatedly tries to kill herself, which constantly tears him away from Masha, but he cannot leave her because she is the mother of his children.

Masha is also in conflict with Natasha. The sisters do not like Natasha; Chekhov makes that evident from the very beginning. Masha goes into great detail in Act I when she tells Vershinin how oddly she dresses. Natasha is a force that moves into her life and takes over her family home. There seems to be nothing anyone in the Prozorov family can do to prevent it from happening. In Act IV, Natasha’s victory becomes apparent when Masha realizes “there can be no return to the old life as her refusal to set foot in the house again makes plain” (Peace 80).

Masha is in conflict with society. She was born in a time period when women did not have the freedoms we have today. Women were expected to get married and have children. If they did not marry, they were limited in their choices of occupation.

Finally, Masha is in conflict with fate and the universe. In her quest for her purpose on this earth, she continues to question if anyone will remember her – if her presence on this earth will be significant at all. In Act I she tells Vershinin, “We’ll all be forgotten” as if she had given up on the idea. But Vershinin inspires her to go on living no matter what. At first, she struggles to figure out why she lives, “but now (Act IV) she merely asserts the need to live” (Peace 116).

Rehearsal Journal

The following is a diary I kept during my rehearsal process for *The Three Sisters* that serves as documentation of the daily objectives of each rehearsal, as well as my thought process behind the creation of the role of Masha. I endeavored to be as concise as possible in my thoughts as I focused on what was accomplished each day in rehearsal. I also made notes on what I needed to work on, and things I needed to think about as an actor. I found the creation of this journal to be extremely beneficial in my process as an actor.

I specifically noted blocks of time when there was no rehearsal scheduled. This was a unique rehearsal process in that the read-through was 12 weeks before opening night. This is about double the length of a normal rehearsal period at UNO. But due to Mardi Gras, KCACTF Regional Convention, Spring break and a few other events, only six weeks of actual rehearsal time remained over a 12-week period. I thought the disjointedness of the rehearsal schedule would be challenging in terms of focus. I think the result, however, was actually the opposite. The extended period of time gave me more time to research and prepare for the role. Also, stepping away and coming back to it as we did allowed me to come in fresh with new perspectives each time, rather than getting stagnant or getting burned out with what I was doing. I was very happy with the end result, and I would not change anything about the rehearsal process.

Monday, January 29: First read-through

OBJECTIVE: Meet the cast, read the play, introduction of design concepts

The table read is such a great first step to any rehearsal process. It allows the cast members to familiarize themselves with each other and their characters, and the director to hear the play read aloud for the first time.

David Hoover discussed his process for choosing the translation with which we would work. He read through several different translations and found that there were some things he liked and disliked about all of them. Ultimately he went with the translation by Jean-Claude van Itallie because it was the shortest – not a bad call since the play will still be lengthy for today’s audience.

I had already read through the play several times, once or twice after I learned I would play Masha. I had also done some general research on Chekhov and on the play itself. It was exciting to finally get to work.

The main challenge we found during the initial read was the pronunciation of all of the different Russian names in the script. It will be a challenge that we will all have to overcome. Fortunately, David has arranged for a Russian friend of his to work with us on correct pronunciations. She will also come in and view the show toward the end of the rehearsal process and give us her critique.

A personal challenge I identified during the read was that I will have to find Masha’s voice and its nuances. Also, David decided we would not do this show in dialect but with American Standard Speech. I will need to work on improving my American Standard Speech and suppressing my local accent for this show.

The table read also offered us a chance to see Patricia Vitrano’s set design model. She plans to use a circular stage divided into three sections with tall columns or trees to represent the caged-in feeling the characters have throughout the play. Her central image is that of a gerbil on a spinning wheel. This is the image from which she developed the idea of the circular stage. The trees are like prison bars trapping the sisters in their rural setting. Her color scheme is very natural and warm. I am anxious to see the fully constructed set.

The Three Sisters is a play in four acts with no specific scenes. However, David broke the play up into “French scenes” (based on entrances and exits) for the purpose of creating a more efficient rehearsal schedule. The blocking rehearsals note which “scenes” were worked and their corresponding page numbers.

Tuesday, February 6: First blocking rehearsal

OBJECTIVE: Block and work Act I, scenes i & ii (pages 7-12 & 12-15)

The first rehearsal was very exciting for me because even just working out blocking started to give me a better feel for the character in her own environment. This is something that cannot be accomplished just by reading a script or even through doing analysis work. As an actor, I need to begin to live as the character in order to find what makes her tick.

Before my first word was spoken in Act I, I identified my first challenge – whistling. Masha whistles to break the silence or to divert her own attention from the dreadful chatter of her sisters. I can barely whistle. I have never really been able to do it well. I will have to find a way to make it sound more natural and to make sure it will be heard.

Another challenge I identified was in finding Masha’s investment level in what is going on around her. She is reading a book as her sister Olga drones on about her father’s death and her sister Irina’s name day. Masha is not interested in joining in on this conversation, as it is too depressing. It is a reminder to her about how dreadful her life has become. I must identify in which moments she is detached and in which moments she is interested. I must decide what moments will cause a reaction. This is a very difficult fine line I must teeter on as an actor in order for my character to be believable and still seem invested in the scene, since I have no lines for the first five pages of the script. I discussed the situation with David. His outlook was that she

is not necessarily into the book, but the book is the least painful thing around her; that is why she gives it so much attention. I like that idea and will put it to use.

I was able to see clearly at this rehearsal that Irina is the antithesis of Masha. I've read about this idea in researching the play, but hearing the words aloud and watching Chrissy Garrett develop the character of Irina made it more real for me. Irina is opposite in attitude, mood, mannerisms, speech and in dress from Masha. Even without costumes, I could see and feel this air of lightness in Chrissy.

During this first rehearsal I began to play with Masha's physicality a bit. I don't know why, but I want her to touch her chest gently with one hand. Maybe she strokes the fabric of her dress for comfort or as a distraction. I think I would like her to make small but deliberate gestures with one hand. This will be a lot easier to explore when I get off book.

Wednesday, February 7: Vocal coaching session with Aimée Hayes

OBJECTIVE: Read through lines so Aimée can correct pronunciation

By coincidence, I am taking a Voice class this semester with Aimée Hayes, who has offered to coach me and other members of the cast in American Standard Speech. We had a 30-minute session today in which I read through my lines and she coached me in correct pronunciation. We identified several challenges that I will need to focus on. First, I need to soften the "r" sound. The New Orleans accent tends to be more of a hard "r." In American Standard Speech the "r" should not be dropped (as in British dialect), but just softened.

My second challenge is the "ou" combination as in "house." My New Orleans accent tends to cause me to swallow and widen this sound. Aimée worked with me on rounding this sound, bringing it forward and adding more air.

Another thing we worked on is something Aimee calls the “liquid u” as in “education.” Instead of “edju” it needs to soften and flow as in “edew.” We also worked on switching the “wh” sound to “hw” as in “where.”

The vocal coaching session was very helpful because it forced me to pay closer attention to the placement of the sounds, as is important in any dialect work. It will also help me find Masha’s voice, and further define how she sounds.

Wednesday, February 7: Blocking rehearsal

OBJECTIVE: Block and work Act I, scenes iii & iv (pages 16-23)

This was the first rehearsal with Kulygin, Vershinin and Masha on the same stage. It created a completely different dynamic for her. My focus felt awkward and uncomfortable. When I was standing between the two of them on stage I felt trapped with nowhere to go, not knowing where to direct my focus. I am still trying to define how to split my focus between the two of them. I am sure this will come. I think it is probably difficult for Masha to look at Vershinin when Kulygin walks into the room, but I am not sure. I will have to explore the dynamic of Masha being in the same room with these two men in future rehearsals.

I have already decided that Masha becomes intrigued in Vershinin during his monologue about the meaning of life. He says that “An intelligent educated person is never superfluous” and “it’s important to know more than our ancestors.” It suddenly hits Masha that unlike Kulygin, who is pompous and book smart, Vershinin is a person of real intelligence, one who can philosophize and form ideas for himself.

David and I decided that in order for this hint of interest to come across to the audience, Vershinin and I will have to find a moment to connect during his monologue to drive me to the

point to make the pronouncement that I am “staying for lunch.” I will need to work on this with Derrick Deal.

I’d like to play with not being able to look at Vershinin too much after this moment for fear that he, or someone else in the room, will know what I am thinking. I will have to find some moments to give him focus, and some moments to look away.

After this subtle connection with Vershinin, Kulygin enters the room. My blocking for two large chunks of the scene is to stand in a corner when her husband enters the room because she cannot stand to be around him. It is as if she is punished. Even though it is difficult to stand facing an imaginary wall with nothing to do, I think I can make this work.

Thursday, February 8: Blocking rehearsal

OBJECTIVE: Block and work Act II, scene ii (pages 27-31)

During rehearsal tonight, I realized how much Masha’s demeanor during Act II differs from that in Act I. During Act II she is happier – smiling, giggling and acting almost like a schoolgirl. We can see at this point that her relationship with Vershinin has developed into quite a close friendship, although we do not know to what extent their closeness has become. We did discuss in rehearsal that I will have to decide for myself what has happened between them in the past year and a half.

Act I is more difficult for Masha. She is unhappy and unfulfilled in her life. Just as she about to leave the name day party, Vershinin enters and offers her a glimmer of hope.

At the beginning of my scene with Vershinin in Act II, we are coming in from outside. It is snowing, but David blocked it as if we had first come into a foyer and shed our outer garments. We enter arm in arm. We are definitely comfortable with each other now. Masha even teases Vershinin a little. Masha is much lighter and freer than she was in Act I. Vershinin

provides a release for her. She now has someone whom with she can truly talk. Vershinin represents everything that was lacking in her life in Act I. I will have to figure out how to effectively make this transition in her demeanor.

Monday, February 12: Blocking rehearsal

OBJECTIVE: Block and work Act II, scenes iii & iv (pages 32-40)

The first hint of Masha resenting Vershinin's family comes in this scene. After he leaves to go home to take care of his wife, she takes her anger and frustration out on everyone in the room. I have to make an effort to control this outburst and refocus my anger as more of a release. I do not want it to come off as if I am playing *to take my anger out on others* but rather *to release my frustration*. The antithesis of the above might be an even stronger choice. I could try *to hold back my anger*. I will have to figure out where to go with this over time. I will have to gradually pull back what I am doing in order to achieve this result.

This also marks another stage in the transition of the character's demeanor – from numbness and detachment in Act I, to giddiness and relief early in Act II, to frustration and bitterness late in Act II. After Masha snaps at everyone at the table in Act III, there is a moment when Natasha comes to advise her. I am not sure how to react to this other than to ignore her, and have it drive my frustration further. I guess a small part of it should be *to appease*. I have to find the line between *to appease* and *to ignore* or *to dismiss*. I am not sure at this point how I can make this moment work.

After Natasha leaves, Masha has a moment with Irina. We sit on the window seat for a while "peas and carrotting." "Peas and carrots" is a term actors use to describe background murmuring on stage because if you say "peas and carrots" repeatedly, it looks to the audience like you are having a real conversation. Chrissy and I actually do have real conversations in

character on stage (something I love about her). I started to think about the physicality of our “peas and carrots” moment; for example, how are we sitting? Maybe it is a somewhat relaxed version of the more formal physicality of Act I. We are both frustrated with and tired of our lives. Chrissy pointed out that we are pretty much miserable at home, so I can let that help inform my movement.

I am starting to think about the different melodies Masha hums or whistles. What do they sound like? I’d kind of like to whistle a section of a familiar tune that wouldn’t be recognizable, but I am not sure if that would work.

I decided to focus on my Alexander posture today – as if a string were holding me up from the top of my head. This is something we are working on in our voice class that I wanted to try to incorporate into the show. I thought I would have a problem keeping my head in alignment because of the rake in the audience of the Thrust Theatre, but I realized I can look up at the top row with my eyes, so it works.

My biggest problem spot at the moment is crying. I am not yet adept at crying on stage. I also struggled with this in *Dancing at Lughnasa* (Fall 2006 at UNO). I hope I can figure out a way to make my crying moments believable, and not too melodramatic.

Tuesday, February 13: Working rehearsal

OBJECTIVE: Run & work Act I

This was the longest rehearsal to date and it was quite tedious at times – mainly because some actors are coming into rehearsal unprepared. In addition, we spent an awful lot of time discussing one actor’s pronunciation of certain words, which actually became comical at times. It’s as if he is saying words and not really thinking about what is important. I think it’s just

because he doesn't know the lines. Overall though, it was a productive rehearsal and it made me feel that we have something finally coming together. That is exciting.

I made some discoveries in this rehearsal, and also came up with new questions. In Act I, I am having a difficult time figuring out Masha's level of attachment or detachment to what's going on around her. She spends most of the time reading and not engaging in conversation with her sisters. However, I think she is half listening to everything in the room. I still have to decide exactly to what things she gives focus, to what things she decides to engage, and to what things she consciously decides to ignore or tune out.

I also need to develop some kind of build to the decision that I want to leave. What triggers it? Why don't I leave sooner? When I say I am going to leave and I don't, what holds me back? Ultimately it is Vershinin, but there is some other reason I don't leave right away.

Wednesday, February 14

OFF – Valentine's Day

Week of February 19

OFF – Mardi Gras Week

Week of February 26

OFF – KCACTF Regional Conference

Tuesday, March 6: Working rehearsal

OBJECTIVE: Work and run Act II

This rehearsal was very challenging. We started 30 minutes late due to late actors, so we weren't able to do a run. Also, I was sick so I had a difficult time speaking and maintaining my energy.

I did feel like I made a few more discoveries, and that I am starting to play stronger actions. One moment I worked on tonight was my first line in Act II, when I enter with Vershinin. The line, “I don’t know,” is a response to an unwritten question. David challenged me at rehearsal to tell him to what I thought Masha was responding. I had come up with a theory that Vershinin is asking Masha what her fascination is with the military. For example, does she really like them more than civilians or is it just out of habit that she continues to socialize with them? That may seem like too much of a surface response, but it makes sense to me because of how she responds in the monologue that follows. David accepted it as a valid answer so that will be my impetus for the scene. It gives me something to respond to in this opening moment between Masha and Vershinin. I think it was brilliant of Chekhov to have them enter in the middle of a conversation; it immediately grabs the audience’s attention.

I am beginning to feel how much more fun Act II is for Masha than Act I. I am starting to get a better sense of the complete change in her demeanor. In Act I she is filled with tension, and in Act II she is much more relaxed and even giddy. It is Vershinin that allows her this release. Her mood is a lot lighter while flirting with Vershinin and gossiping with Irina about Natasha; however, there is still the underlying heaviness of Vershinin’s message that we can never truly be happy weighing her down.

Wednesday, March 7: Blocking rehearsal

OBJECTIVE: Block and work Act IV

It will take me a while to find the investment level I need for this Act. At this point everything seems forced, especially Vershinin’s exit. Also, the end of the play is not yet coming together for me. I have to find the build. I may not get to where I need to be until we start running the show. I don’t think the investment in this Act can come by running it alone.

One line I delved into tonight was, “Goodbye. Have a good trip!” Masha says this after the soldiers are already gone. I think she is being sarcastic, maybe mocking them. Once again, I don’t think I will truly find the answers for this Act until we are running the show in its entirety.

Thursday, March 8: Blocking rehearsal

OBJECTIVE: Block and work Act III

At the top of Act III, Masha seems to be sleeping while the town burns down. I think she is probably so exhausted she can’t sleep and when Natasha enters the room she makes things even worse. David made the decision for me to strangle my pillow as if it were Natasha before I leave the room. I am using Natasha’s attack on Anfisa to drive Masha out of the room. I like strangling the pillow because it gives me further motivation to leave and not to verbally attacking Natasha.

The sound of Vershinin’s voice brings Masha back into the room. The “tram-tam” becomes their love song – the way they can communicate without words. Derrick and I did not discuss this moment before rehearsal, so when he began the tune on stage, I just went with it and tried to develop something with him that made sense musically. I think I will have to work with Derrick to try to get this exchange to the point where it works as communication. Right now it feels disjointed and forced and there is no interaction.

Once I achieve the connection I want with Vershinin, I will contrast this with the words I speak to Kulygin. I want it to feel like Vershinin and Masha can communicate without words, yet Kulygin and she can’t communicate with them.

Masha’s demeanor in Act III is on a bit of a roller coaster. It starts with the exhaustion of the fire and the frustration with Natasha, continues with the excitement of the exchange with Vershinin, plummets with Kulygin, peaks with the confession of her love to her sisters and hits a

slight road bump when Andrei enters the room. Of course, in the end, Vershinin saves her with his final “tram-tam” calling her to meet him. I think this is probably going to be one of the more difficult Acts in terms of investment in what is going on around me because so much happens that affects my character.

Monday, March 12: Working rehearsal

OBJECTIVE: Work and run Act I

Working in a thrust theatre has a lot of advantages, but there are also challenges. I began to think tonight about what I could do as an actor to be aware of my physical position in this space. I realized that as I sit on the small sofa in the first half of Act I, my back is to the stage right audience the entire time. I began to look for opportunities to shift my body position along with my focus to different sides of the room, thereby opening myself up more to a larger portion of the audience. For example, Solyony makes it easy for me to turn away when he says to Chebutykin that, “I’ll lose patience with you, my angel, and lodge a bullet in your forehead.” I can use this moment to shift my weight around so that I am turned away from him and facing the stage right audience. In addition to opening up to certain audience members, I think shifting my focus physically will give me more options to sitting in one spot for a while.

David asked me to try “just as father wished” (to Irina about Andrei) as a pungent comment. My action was previously *to remind her with a light reprimand*, but this note leads me to agree with her a little more – to sort of commiserate with her about Andrei becoming a professor instead of joining the military. I also thought tonight about Masha’s comment about knowing three languages. Based on Andrei’s comment, “what an effort it all cost us,” how do I feel about our father’s insistence of us learning so many languages? Masha also makes a negative comment about it: “an absurd extra growth . . . we know many useless things.”

Tuesday, March 13

Rehearsal was cancelled tonight because the stage was painted this afternoon and the paint is still wet. We are very frustrated to miss a night of rehearsal after two weeks off. We convened at a local tavern to discuss the situation further.

Wednesday, March 14: Working rehearsal

OBJECTIVE: Run and work Act IV

I really want to tell Fedotik and Rode goodbye! It is scripted that they meet Masha at the back of the stage and she goes out with them as they make their goodbyes to her. Unfortunately, because of the way our production is staged, I am in the vom and they are exiting upstage, so there is no way to make it work. I really feel cheated that I am missing out on this important goodbye especially since Masha had a chance to bond with these men when they went out for Carnival after Natasha kicked them out of the house. In addition to this, Ryan Bruce and T. Joe Seibert are two of my favorite people in the show. They bring so much life onto the stage with every one of their entrances. Rode and Fedotik do mention Masha in the script, and I know Chekhov had intentions for them to say their goodbyes to each other, so that makes me feel a little better. I know it seems like I am spending a lot of thought on one simple stage direction, but these are the thoughts I am having in rehearsal.

On a more serious note, one of my favorite moments in the show is my conversation with Chebutykin about my mother. We know he loved her, and I suspect it was a similar love to that which Masha feels for Vershinin. Masha takes this opportunity to connect with Chebutykin about this subject. David asked me my opinion about the significance of Masha's line, "Is Mine here?" She explains that she is referring to her man because that is how her cook used to refer to hers. I

think “Mine” is Vershinin, not Kulygin. Chebutykin makes this connection when we compare “Mine” to his love for Masha’s mother.

I am having trouble with the transition from “I’m boiling in here” to “There’s brother Andrei.” I am trying to use Andrei as just one more irritation in my life adding to why I have become vulgar and mean. The analogy to the bell is awkward. I am having trouble making it work.

My exit line is also awkward. I think Masha notices the birds because they are happy, they are free and they are leaving – everything that she is not. However, once again, it’s not that I haven’t figured out the meaning, it’s that I haven’t figured out how to convey it.

The second half of Act IV is also challenging for me. First is the outburst after Vershinin leaves and then the ending, which is feeling very forced and unnatural for me at this point. It seems like we have worked Act IV less than earlier acts, so I am hoping that these things will become clearer to me with more rehearsal.

Thursday, March 15 – Monday, March 19

OFF – Continue to work on lines

Tuesday, March 20: Working rehearsal

OBJECTIVE: Work and run Act I

I need to work on Masha’s reaction to Olga’s reprimand for the whistle. My first instinct was *to snap back and glare*. David suggested I pull this back a little and turn the action into *to stare her down*. Of course, I like that a lot better.

David gave me a note this evening that I need to control my arms. Apparently I am waving my arms around when I explain that I want to leave the name day party because it is too

gloomy. I need to work on controlling my gestures and my physicality in general. I want to make Masha's gestures smaller and more precise.

I also need to work on vocal musicality and pace. Masha is more matter of fact than I am playing her right now. I am finding that I need to find more subtlety in what I am doing to find this character.

I have identified several things I need to work on. I need to work on the blocking between Andrei's entrance and Kulygin's entrance. It feels awkward. I need to think about the toast: "Well, let's drink. Life is beautiful. To hell with tomorrow." Right now it feels as if it is coming out of nowhere. I have to think about how it can be more motivated. The stare at Natasha right before that is also a somewhat awkward moment. I will need to fix that as well. It's frustrating to try to work while people are still not off book. I know I will have more of a chance to play around with what I am doing in real runs.

Wednesday, March 21

OBJECTIVE: Work and run Act II

Why do Vershinin and Masha talk about the weather? I just had that thought for the first time tonight.

David thinks that I need to work on my turns in the scene with Vershinin. For example, I need to go from "you make me laugh" to "you frighten me" with more subtlety. I feel this applies to my performance throughout the show. I need to find the subtlety in it.

David also felt I needed to add more passion to Masha's meaning of life speech, which is her response to Tuzenbach's philosophizing. I think it is not coming off with enough passion because I don't yet understand its meaning. Once I understand why she is saying it, the passion will come.

Thursday, March 22

OBJECTIVE: Work and run Act III

I am trying to fine tune the moment I sit up in bed, and when I decide to get up and leave. I decided that Natasha's line, "I forbid you to sit in my presence. Get up! Get out of here!" is what stirs me to sit up. I watch for a moment with my pillow, and then I get up and exit the room. I have been playing around with different spots to exit. I am trying to find the point that drives Masha out of the room. It's somewhere just after Natasha yells at Anfisa. It may be a slightly different point every night, but I think it will eventually evolve to be the same spot every night. Right now it is slightly earlier than the cue in the script, but I feel it is more important for me to find what feels natural in the moment than to follow what the script says. Of course, that is true of most scripted stage directions. I like to use them as a guide, not an absolute. Otherwise, I am not truly living in the moment.

Monday, March 26

OBJECTIVE: Work and run Act IV

I feel as if I have been neglecting Act IV a little, which is not good because it is filled with so much depth. It will take a lot of work to make everything work effectively. It's been a week and a half since we last worked on it, and frankly, there is so much going on in the previous acts that I haven't suffered for a lack of things on which to focus. Working on it tonight made me realize that I have a lot of work to do before I am able to fully invest in this Act. I am looking forward to running the show in its entirety tomorrow night. The run will give me a sense of character arc, and maybe lead me closer to the investment level it will take to make my performance in this act believable.

Tuesday, March 27

OBJECTIVE: First run-through

The first run was a little rough, but not terrible. Lines are a problem for a lot of people, and there are some sections where actors are unsure of blocking, especially when there are a lot of us on stage at once. I feel confident that all of this will come together in time. We still have a couple of weeks before we open, so I think we are in a good place.

I do have some specific notes for myself. In Act I, I need to further define my reactions. I am still trying to find the line between what I am paying attention to, and what I am actively ignoring. It's feeling better and more natural for me all the time. But I feel some of my reactions are too big or too much. I need to work on toning everything down. I must determine the least amount of expression I can give and still convey a reaction.

I also need to work on refining my moments with Vershinin, especially when Masha realizes that they have met before. Both of the lines in reference to this, "how you've aged" and "you only had a mustache back then," are feeling forced and not natural.

Another moment I am having trouble with is the violin cue, which leads to Andrei's introduction. We don't have sound yet, so I am hoping it may work better when the sound comes. Right now it feels like another moment that comes out of nowhere.

I am also having trouble with the "I'm staying for lunch" line. It is one of my favorite lines and I think it is one of Chekhov's many brilliant moments in this play. I think it needs specific timing along with just the right action in order to work effectively. I really want it to draw a reaction out of Vershinin. To me, it is a moment of clarity for Masha. When Vershinin speaks of it being "important to know more than our ancestors. And you complain of knowing too much," I think it is the first time she has heard someone turn her words around to make an

intelligent argument. It intrigues her. It is the most riveting thing she has heard in a long time. So she goes from being bored and wanting to leave, to being intrigued and wanting to stay all in that moment. I think that's a lot to convey with that line, but I am hoping to achieve something close to that.

Another moment I am trying to improve on my own is the section where I cross to the piano when Kulygin enters the room. When the blocking was first given to me I felt like I was standing there doing nothing. I know my action is *to hide* or *to escape*, but I felt like I needed some business. I began playing around with reading the book, but that didn't work. I think arranging the flowers works better. After I cross to the other side of the piano, I am going to make myself a drink. Giving myself specific business to do while I am there will help distract me from the conversation in the room.

David gave me a note tonight to lighten up on the line "Another damned night at the principal's. To hell with it." I guess this goes along with my general feeling that I need to tone everything about Masha down to the smallest level I can, while still getting my playable action or intention across.

Act II went a little more smoothly than Act I tonight. There are a few particular moments I need to work on. I am not yet happy with the scene between Vershinin and Masha. I am hoping this will come. Also, the blocking doesn't feel right at certain moments when I am by the window. I will have to make it feel more natural, and somehow make it work.

David asked me how Masha feels about Natasha reprimanding her in French after Vershinin leaves. I was playing *to dismiss her* or *to ignore her*, but I guess this action is not strong enough. I will change it to something more like *to stare her down*, which will be a

stronger, and more active. David suggested that maybe Masha thinks it's pretentious. I will try to use this as motivation during our next run.

I also feel I need to motivate the waltz a little better. Right now, it feels like it is coming out of nowhere. I also need to work on the beat before I leave. It's not yet feeling right.

Act III did not go smoothly tonight mainly because of lines. It is slow going, but I feel confident we will get there. David gave me something to think about in this Act. He asked what the beat change was on "Andrei mortgaged the house." This is an important moment that I had not thought much about up to this point. Masha goes from trying to push Kulygin out of the house, to complaining to Irina that Andrei has mortgaged the house. I have to figure out where this is coming from, and what I am trying to do in that moment.

Act IV was okay, but the blocking at the very end seems strange and forced. Hopefully Kat Johnston, Chrissy and I will figure out what we can do to make it feel more natural.

Everything will gel a little better once we are all more confident in our lines and our blocking. We are not picking up cues like we should, so the pace is off and I feel the entire show is dragging. It's such a long show; I fear we won't get moving fast enough to keep the audience's attention. We still have time, but I am nervous nonetheless.

In order to give us more feedback on our American Standard dialect, Aimée watched the first half of the run tonight. I still have to work on softening the letter "r," especially when they fall at the end of a word. Her note was that it sounds like regionalisms. She also heard a bit of a drawl on the words "tonight" and "quiet." I need to work on opening up and softening these sounds.

Aimée gave me a general note: when I was at ease I sounded fine, but when I began to work myself up my accent returned. I will have to find these moments and concentrate on my

speech patterns. She specifically mentioned that I must support my voice when I have the outburst at the table after Vershinin leaves in Act II.

In addition to vocal notes, Aimée also gave me some other things to think about. I realized from some of her notes that I am not playing strong enough actions to get my intentions across. It was good to have an outside perspective on my performance. Her thoughts were insightful to me, which I appreciated. The following were some of her notes to me:

Try the liquid ‘u’ on ‘educated.’ It may be fun as playing the ‘u’ matches what you are saying about refinement. Your creation of the refinement of the character works and feels like the right track – can you enjoy saying the words? It’s the pleasure of saying to someone (Vershinin) who ‘gets’ it and you, too. So vocally, are you impressing him? Connecting to him? Or using fem wiles – all by using those specific words? ‘Laughing since morning,’ I thought, why? What did you do that morning and why do you say it to Vershinin? Whatever happened let it inform your vocal expression.

Wednesday, March 28

OFF – Tennessee Williams Festival One-Act Winner *Small Things* opens

Thursday, March 29 – Wednesday, April 4

OFF – Tennessee Williams Festival & Spring break

Thursday, April 5

OBJECTIVE: Run and work Acts I and II

Rehearsal was so refreshing today because there were no classes scheduled due to Spring break. It was wonderful to be able to rehearse in the middle of the day with no other distractions and with energy! Usually we rehearse at the end of a long day when I am tired.

The first sound I make in the show is a whistle. David gave me the note today to “let the fart noise drive me to whistle.” (Yes, the first sound in the show that is my thesis performance is a fart noise!) When I got this note, I realized that I hadn’t thought enough about what the impetus was for the whistle.

Every time I whistle, it is in response to something unpleasant. The first time is after the fart noise (which is not scripted; David added it) and the second time is when Olga and Irina are discussing moving to Moscow, and they suggest I would visit them in the summer.

The whistling is my attempt to lighten the mood and change the environment that is obviously causing me misery. The heavy mood in the room is so dreadful to me; it eventually drives me to want to leave on my sister’s name day party. David directed me to keep the tune happy and upbeat, which will help to make my intention clear.

Of course my first line in the show is the quotation of the Pushkin poem. I am trying to figure out what makes Masha say it aloud. I think she identifies with the poem because it reflects how she feels about her own life. She is the oak tree greening. She is a strong woman in the prime of her life. Her marriage is the golden chain wound round her, binding her so that she can no longer grow. Maybe this poem is a realization of what is really holding her back. Saying it aloud reinforces it in her mind. My problem right now is not as much understanding the meaning itself, but getting the meaning across.

David directed me today to make my first monologue less important. I have been playing this litany of excuses about why she wants to leave on Irina’s name day very deliberately as a defense. David thinks it would work better if it was less important and more like a stream of consciousness about her disenchantment with the whole day. I think this will work much better

for Masha. She is going to do what she wants to do regardless of the opinion of others, so it is not necessary for her to defend herself.

David also directed me to play a stronger action on my line to Solyony. “What do you mean, you dreadful man?” I have been playing *to belittle* but David wants me *to intimidate*. It is a much stronger choice, and I think it works well. Masha is a strong woman who would definitely stand up for herself against a weasel like Solyony.

The moment Masha tells Vershinin that I don’t recognize him at all is not coming across very clearly because it is not yet clear to me. David gave me a very specific action to play today that I think works well in the moment. It also makes it quite funny in my opinion. He wants me *to deter* him with that comment, as if his remembering me is a complete turnoff. I really like the dynamic that playing this action creates between us as opposed to playing it straight like I was trying to do earlier. It is a much more nuanced choice.

A small physical thing I am still trying to determine is exactly how I hold the handkerchief. It is a very simple thing to hold a handkerchief, but I think the more specific choices I make about Masha’s physicality that are different than mine will add more layers to the character.

I am also still trying to decide what my initial reaction is to Kulygin entering the room. I am initially playing *to shun* (him) or *to retreat* from the room. I think this is the correct reaction for Masha to have at Kulygin’s entrance. I think where I am missing it is by playing it as simply a reaction to him entering the room. I need to add to that the fact that it is a complete interruption to the pleasant environment that has been created by Vershinin’s presence. I think the second reason for my retreat will create a more dynamic reaction for me. It will keep everything in line with my main objective of the constant pursuit of something better. Vershinin creates something

better within Masha and in her environment, which is the complete opposite of what Kulygin does for her. His entrance in the room destroys this “better” mood, and causes her retreat.

I am putting too much of a mysterious quality on some of my moments with Vershinin. David wants me to give it all a more sexual tone. First is the stove moment. I realize the mistake I have been making with this moment now that David has pointed it out and has asked me to redefine it. The exchange is:

MASHA: That noise in the stove... Just before Papa’s death the stove made the same noise – the same noise.

VERSHININ: Are you superstitious?

MASHA: Yes.

I have been making the mistake of playing up my superstition before Vershinin points it out to me. I need to make the stove a signal that something significant in my life is about to happen. Vershinin will deem from this that I am superstitious – I don’t need to play the whole thing as – as David put it “Agatha Christie.” Instead, I need *to lead him on* by pointing out the significance of the noise in the stove.

Another moment where I need to add more sexual tension is the interruption of our intimate moment by the entrance of Irina and Tuzenbach. My line is, “Someone’s coming. Talk about something else.” I have been playing *to cower*, afraid I will be caught doing something I am not supposed to be doing. David wants me to try the stronger choice of *to snap* as if their entrance is ruining my moment. I think it works much better.

Friday, April 6

OBJECTIVE: Run and work Acts III and IV

David decided to add a moment that I think is hilarious. When Natasha references me sleeping, I am to raise my head and look at her with disgust as if to say, “How can I sleep with all of this racket!” He decided to cut the pillow strangling moment, which is fine with me. The intention will now all be internalized which is more consistent with what I am trying to do with the character anyway. So externalizing that physical action will now help me internalize the moment a little better.

I had been having trouble with the “tram-tam” moment with Vershinin so today I tried playing *to savor the moment*. I feel like it worked much better.

I also changed my action on the “amo-amas-amat” moment with Kulygin today after discussing several options with David. I had been playing *to snap back at him*, but changed it to *to appease him*. David thinks this will be a better lead in to the turn I make to discuss Andrei with Irina. By appeasing him, I have a better chance of getting him out of the room so I can be alone with Irina. This action is enhanced when I put my hands on him pleading, “Go Fyodor.” It feels much better and gives the scene a lot more levels than when I was snapping on everything.

I made progress on the monologue in which Masha confesses her love for Vershinin to her sisters. In the first part I am playing *to bubble over*, as if I can’t hold it in anymore. This leads into advising Irina to not settle, and trust that there is more out there for her. I feel this direction helps Masha make a stronger connection with her sisters, especially Irina, than having the moment be completely about her.

We also did some really good work on Act IV today. I have some real difficulty with this Act, and I know I need more work. I hope I can refine these moments this week as we run the show every night.

Monday, April 9

OBJECTIVE: First run-through

Act I ran about 45 minutes tonight. Not bad. I think we are settling into a good pace with it. It felt good overall. I still need to work on motivating the first whistle. It feels forced. I am also feeling awkward when Kulygin enters the room and I migrate to the piano. I must find some other physical business to keep me occupied. I am trying to work on the “Oh, I’ll go,” moment with Kulygin when he asks me to go to the Principal’s house with him. There is something about our reactions to each other that is not quite working. We will get it, though. I’m not too worried.

There are other technical issues that need to be worked out that are always discovered during early run-throughs. I need to make sure my volume is strong enough, especially at the dining table upstage. Also, I need to discuss with Kat when she can return the handkerchief to me. I give it to her when Masha consoles her after telling her she is going to leave, then I need it again for her crying spell after Vershinin’s entrance. I know this will be easily solved. David wants me to deliver my “person and a half” line quicker. It’s a dig at Solyony. I guess I am dragging it out too long.

Act II ran 40 minutes and felt very sloppy. It is not nearly as tight as Act I for some reason. The good news is that I feel I am beginning to find my character’s arc from one Act to the next. This is hard to measure without running all four Acts consecutively.

Technically, I need to double check cues, lines in certain spots and some blocking issues. I’m not sure why none of us are solid in Act II, but I suspect the challenge is that Chekhov jumps

from scene to scene on the stage. There are several things going on at once and characters are in and out of different conversations.

On a positive note, I felt good about my scene with Vershinin tonight. It felt giddy, in a good way. I tried something new with the stove line, and I think it worked much better than what I was doing before. David wants me *to comfort* Vershinin, and not to touch him on my “you’re feeling low” line. Right now I am doing something playful and sexual that isn’t working.

Act III felt fantastic! I had a major breakthrough during the section where I confess my love for Vershinin to my sisters. I love this moment because I think it is the only time the three of us are on stage alone interacting with each other. Tonight I found that if I refuse to acknowledge Olga’s wish for Irina to marry the Baron, I have a clear lead in to my monologue about Vershinin.

Tonight, when Olga told Irina to marry the Baron, I found myself playing *to burst at the seams* to want to tell her to go to Moscow, live her dream and find her true love. So, when I finally find the perfect moment to let it out, I found myself bubbling over *to release* my confession. The second part of the monologue comes out as a tender moment of Masha advising her younger sister. It felt really good.

I also discovered something about Andrei’s entrance into the room. At first, I was playing *to ignore him*, and shoot looks at my sisters concerning him. My instinct was *to smirk at him* at one point. As soon as I did this tonight, I realized it was wrong. I realized I must FIGHT to not give him my attention. This choice will force me to work harder.

As good as the moments in Act III felt tonight, my exit still felt stilted. Vershinin missed his cue, which didn’t help. I need to motivate it by wanting to meet him to escape the tension in the room. Masha does not want to deal with Andrei at that moment.

Act IV felt better than it had before but could still be stronger. My “I’m boiling in here” moment is starting to feel more natural. The monologue before my first exit, which is so strange, is also starting to feel better. My line about Andrei and the bell is not working right now. It doesn’t feel motivated, so it’s coming out awkwardly.

David thinks I am losing my exasperation at Vershinin’s leaving a little too quickly. He thinks I should have an attempt at composure that doesn’t work at first. I will try it. It may help because crying scenes are difficult for me. I also don’t like the final moment at all. It feels so sappy and stilted and it also feels LONG. I hope we will find a way to make it work.

I lost track of keeping time for Acts III and IV, but the entire rehearsal ran three hours. A lot of time was spent working out scene changes tonight, though. There is so much to coordinate, but we have a great stage management team so I know it will all eventually run smoothly. If we have smooth scene changes and better pacing, I know we can shave a considerable amount of time off of the play.

Tuesday, April 10

OBJECTIVE: Second run-through

Things are starting to feel better, and my notes to myself are beginning to get more technical. The opening section felt better tonight. I am finding moments to engage. I am completely absorbed in the book, except for a few subtle moments. When my sisters come near me it makes more sense for me to engage in what they are saying.

Now David thinks my “person and a half” line is too fast. I need to find something in between last night and tonight. He had a few other notes for me in Act I, but they were all very picky technical things.

I began to think about the arc of my relationship with Andrei tonight. In Act I, I am so proud of him and want to show him off. This turns to a slight indifference and a bit of concern in Act II, and progresses to a boiling point of being completely put off by him in Act III. I think this creates an interesting dynamic between these two characters that I will enjoy exploring.

The moment Kulygin enters in Act I still feels awkward. I need to find something else to do, and maybe a different way to motivate my exit from the main action in the room. My physical movement felt better tonight, though.

Act II felt much better tonight. The entire act was cleaner and there was more energy on stage. Also, I personally felt a clearer sense of relief for Masha in Act II compared to Act I. Technically, I am still working on the “stove” moment. But my “you’re feeling low” moment with Vershinin felt better. Playing the action *to console him* worked for me.

Act III felt good again tonight, which is encouraging. I discovered that I must watch my breath and my vocality in my monologue. My breath felt short, and I felt like everything was coming from the throat when it needs to come from a deeper place.

I’m still working on the “amo-amas-amat” moment with Kulygin. It seemed a little too forceful tonight. Last night was better. I need to remember to make it softer.

David wants me to touch Andrei before I exit, which I like. When I started thinking about their relationship earlier, I realized she starts to lose him at the end of the play. Having a moment with him here allows her to attempt *to grasp* at her relationship with her brother. David wants the word “my” to be more operative in “MY fate, MY destiny.” This will help further motivate the moment I advise Irina.

I was also late on my Act III exit tonight. The goodbye has to happen immediately after my “tram-tam.” Tonight I took too long to leave. However, I allowed Vershinin’s “tram-tam” to be a release from the tension in the room, which worked better.

I was late on my entrance cue tonight for Act IV. That won’t happen again. I have figured out where I need to enter to make a clear transition between Irina’s exit and my entrance.

I am having trouble with the swing in Act IV. It is awkward and difficult to use. David had asked me to prolong my hysteria after Vershinin leaves, and that worked. He wants me to cling to him a little longer to make it harder for them to pull me off of him. It’s hard to make this moment real and not melodramatic, but that is what I am working toward; I think I am getting there.

The moment of comparing Andrei to a bell is still awkward. David wants me to turn right and notice Andrei again for the end, “That’s Andrei.” Maybe that will help.

The final moment improved from last night. David wants us to work harder to convince ourselves of what we are saying. That should help to make the mood more sincere and have us *striving for something better* in the end of the play. I like the feeling of Masha coming full circle, so I feel like giving this energy to the final moment will help.

Wednesday, April 11

OBJECTIVE: Third run-through

I start thinking about a lot of little details during run-throughs in order to refine and fine-tune my performance. Tonight I started thinking about the book Masha reads at the top of the show. It’s obviously a book of Pushkin poetry. Is it hers? Would she take it home with her? Since she doesn’t, I’ve decided it is a book at the house she decided to pick up that day. The poem is a well-known Russian poem. Chekhov included it because he knew the audience would

be familiar with it. So Masha has read the poem before, but I think at this moment she identifies with it differently than she has before. That's why the poem strikes her at this moment. It is something she is very familiar with that she is suddenly seeing in a new light.

We worked out scene transitions tonight. It went relatively smoothly considering the amount of props we are trying to get on and off, especially in Act I with the dishes and the cake. I was given an easy job. I am responsible for striking cake.

My entrance in Act III is not specific, but I generally enter where it is scripted. The cue is around the section that Vershinin says "...what else will they have to bear in this world...My girls by the front door in their nightgowns..." David wants me to try to come on sooner so I can listen to more of his story. I have been timing my entrance when he is facing downstage. We will have to work this out.

I know I had a note to myself to check lines, which I did, but for some reason I continue stumbling on the crane line in Act III. There are a few other line notes I gave myself tonight. I need to spend some more time reviewing lines before the next run-through.

Act IV is starting to feel better, including the end. Chrissy summoned some beautiful tears tonight. I wish I could do that. I have not yet mastered all of my emotions on stage.

David changed my entrance in Act IV tonight from the stage left vom to the stage right vom. We have already established that the duel is happening off left so it makes more sense for me to come in from the right. I also got a note to walk softly. All of us girls are clunking around in our high-heeled boots, and it is difficult for us not to sound like a herd of horses.

Aimée watched the run-through tonight and gave me a few useful vocal notes. I tend to sometimes overcompensate for my "yat" and go into what Aimée calls a "Brit thing." I did it tonight on the word "why." I need to be careful of that. Also, I need to make sure I always hit the

“v” at the end of “Protopopov.” She also suggested I try to stay in my deeper resonance, especially during the love scene because she thinks I currently sound a little nasally in that scene.

Thursday, April 12

OBJECTIVE: Fourth run-through

We are now one week from opening. I feel confident that we are in a really good place one week out. I am starting to feel the character inside and out. I am still working on my hands. David calls them “stone hands.” Although he hasn’t said much about my hands during this rehearsal process, I am still conscious of them because I know it is one of my weaknesses.

Acts I and II went pretty smoothly. I think my lower register is working better for me. I am paying more attention to my words, based on Aimée’s comments last night, but it is hard for me to know what I am doing without someone listening to me.

Acts III and IV were also smooth tonight, which is a great sign one week out. I liked the energy of my confession monologue in Act III. Also, I thought that my strange exit line in Act IV worked for the first time tonight.

Natasha Ramer, our Russian advisor, watched our rehearsal tonight and after having a conversation with her about the run, David decided he wanted me to harden Masha a little early in the show. If she is more bitter and mean at first, then Vershinin becomes more of a breath of fresh air for her when he arrives. It makes sense to me. I like working with two extremes rather than something in the middle, which is what I have been doing.

David also directed me to take the poem more to myself, instead of playing *to exclaim* it, as I have been doing. His note indicates to me that whatever I am doing is not working. So it is my job, as an actor, to try to do what it takes to make it work.

Derrick and I also got a note today that our scene needs more sexual heat. There must be more tension between us every time we are in the same room together. Hopefully we can make this happen soon.

Friday, April 13

OFF

Saturday, April 14

OBJECTIVE: Cue to cue

Tech rehearsal was very long today, but ran smoothly. Katie Anderson's lighting is going to look beautiful on Trish's set. I am excited about the technical aspects of this show. Once everything comes together, the lights and the set are going to offer us a perfect environment on which to perform.

Sunday, April 15

OBJECTIVE: First tech run-through

I was able to try David's new direction of making Masha a harder character today. Chekhov says she is so deeply depressed that she is withdrawn. I tried to use that as the reason behind her hard exterior. I did like that this direction gave me further to go when Vershinin arrived, and something more to build on in Act II. It creates a greater dynamic having her start from a more extreme place.

I tried to tame my laughing a bit in Act II. I worked hard to hold in my giddiness rather than making the easy choice to let it out. I think I took out too much, and as a result, missed one of my cues. I need to find a happy medium.

I am having trouble with the section with Natasha after Vershinin leaves in Act II. I haven't quite defined Masha's reaction to her speaking French. I need to make it more specific.

The addition of the technical elements went quite smoothly today. I had trouble hearing a couple of the sound cues, particularly the baby's cry and the waltz in Act II. Not being able to hear the waltz makes it difficult for me since I have to dance and sing in time with the music. I am sure this problem will be easily solved.

David was happy with the run today. He told us we are on schedule right now, which is good. His overall note is for us to "take the air out," which means to tighten the pauses and increase the pace of the show. This is a common note to get at this stage of the process.

David gave me a note "to undress Vershinin with my eyes" in Act I, after I declare what a "damned unbearable life" I have. I notice him and it drives me to search for something more bearable.

We still need MORE SEXUAL HEAT in Act II!! If I am still getting the note, it is obvious that what I am doing is not coming across. Of course, it needs to come from both Derrick and me in order for it to work. I hope we can make some kind of connection by Thursday. David thinks if I touch him on "You're feeling low," and play *to comfort him* more than *to console him* it will be a stronger choice. He also wants me to have more of a connection with Vershinin during the Baron's speech about philosopher cranes. Finally, in Act II, David directed me to play a stronger action on "Petty, bourgeois bitch!" I've been taking it to myself, and swallowing it a little. David wants me to do the opposite.

David added a small "tra-ra" for me at my Act III exit, which I think will help better motivate my exit. It's a little awkward right now because Vershinin's "tra-tam-tam" comes out of nowhere.

Monday, April 16

OBJECTIVE: First dress rehearsal

I didn't feel well today. I get frequent headaches, and sometimes they are debilitating. Today it was bearable enough for me to get through the run, but I had a difficult time investing fully. The pain impeded my concentration. I missed one of my whistle cues and my Act III entrance was completely wrong, but despite these minor errors, it was a good run.

My costume is fantastic; however, it is wool, which is not very comfortable on stage. It is hot and itchy. I hope I will get used to it; it just wasn't easy tonight because I didn't feel well. I do like working with the weight of the heavy top skirt on top of the full petticoat. The costume helps to restrict my movement a little, which is good for the character physically.

Tuesday, April 17

OBJECTIVE: Second dress rehearsal

I had a massage today from UNO alumnus and massage therapist Cammie West. She is a miracle worker who made my headache virtually disappear. I am ready to open!

Since I felt better, I was able to focus more on the run this evening. My costume is still a little problematic because it is so hot and itchy. I started to get a rash on my upper body from wearing it two nights in a row, so I think I will bring in a long-sleeved cotton shirt to wear underneath to protect my skin.

Working with the oil lamp on stage is difficult. At one point I was trying to turn it down, and I actually turned it way up. We all need to be careful with them.

I started arranging the flowers on the piano on Kulygin's entrance in Act I. This is a good, distracting activity for Masha.

Wednesday, April 18

OBJECTIVE: Final dress rehearsal

The run was really solid tonight. I think I have defined everything I have questioned over the last several weeks, and I feel good about my performance. I am excited about finally putting it in front of an audience tomorrow.

I am a little concerned about the length of the show from the audience's perspective; however, I think the show is good, so hopefully the length won't be as much of an issue.

I wore an undershirt with my costume tonight, which really helped lessen the itching and irritation the wool was causing my skin.

Thursday, April 19

OPENING NIGHT

Fantastic!!! That is the one word I will use to describe this night. I was ready to get this show in front of an audience and it was exciting. We had a relatively small house. Since I am the box office manager at UNO, I am familiar with the daily house count. Being the box office manager and performing in the show can be a little stressful at times, but I have managed to work out a system in which I can do both effectively.

Tonight, we were only about half-full. But in traditional UNO opening night fashion, the audience was filled with many students and friends, so it was a responsive audience. I felt we gave a really strong performance tonight. Hopefully David and the rest of the cast will agree.

Friday, April 20

Second performance

I was nervous about the second night slump most shows commonly experience. Opening night excitement usually dwindles by the second performance. In addition, we are usually performing to a less theatre-savvy audience than the opening night crowd.

To make matters worse, we had a very small audience tonight. We performed to 30 people in a 120-seat theatre. As Masha would say, “It was like a desert!” Despite all this, I feel like we gave another really solid performance tonight, and we had great energy.

To add to my nervousness about having tonight be another great show, David Cuthbert, theatre critic for *The Times-Picayune* was in the audience. I knew this because I made his reservation. I told David, but I didn’t tell the rest of the cast. I am hoping for a good review of my thesis performance and good publicity for UNO.

Saturday, April 21

Third performance

Apparently some of the audience members have been complaining that the theatre is too cold. They are starting to wonder if we want them to really feel like they are in Russia!

Unfortunately, we don’t have control of the air conditioner in the Performing Arts Center. It is all controlled from the UNO Physical Plant. Sometimes when we ask them to turn the air on, it’s freezing, and when we tell them it is too cold, it seems they turn it off instead of turning it up, and then it feels like an oven. I do not understand why there is no such thing as a comfortable temperature in the Thrust Theatre. Personally, I’d rather bring a sweater than sweat. But a few audience complaints later, there was no air in the theatre tonight.

As a result, I was hot, sweaty and uncomfortable in my wool dress, and felt very lethargic. It wasn't just me, though. The entire cast was flat, especially in Act I. I had a friend in the audience, and she even mentioned to me that she thought the pace in Act I really dragged. I think somewhere in the middle of Act II the air came on and things started to pick up. I wouldn't say the performance was terrible; I just think we got off to a slow start. The house was a little better tonight. We were back up to about a half-full audience.

Overall I feel good about our opening weekend. We've had a successful three-day run. It's been thrilling, but I am tired and ready for the break. I look forward to coming in fresh Thursday night after the four-day break.

Thursday, April 26

Fourth performance

Tonight the theatre was nearly sold out. We had our largest house yet with 110 audience members. The full theatre gave us a great energy on stage, and as a result, everyone gave another solid performance. I can't complain about that! I think we were energized from the break, and ready to do it again. Some of the cast members said this was our best night yet. I am just glad that everyone is happy and that we are enjoying a successful run.

Friday, April 27

Fifth performance

It was an exciting day in the media for UNO Theatre. We got a blurb in the *Lagniappe* section of the Times-Picayune today. It was exciting to get publicity for the show, but I was a little disappointed because I was hoping for a full review. It's Jazz Fest weekend and David Cuthbert explained that he planned to give us a review, but he got very little space in this issue. Nonetheless, we are happy to get publicity.

Al Shea reviewed us on the WYES television program “Steppin’ Out.” He gave us his highest rating of four claps. He showed several good production photos, and had really good things to say about the production and about UNO Theatre in general; however, he butchered all of the cast members’ names.

We had an okay house tonight. It was a little less than half-full. Our performances were solid. I think we are very consistent, which is a good place to be with a show.

Saturday, April 28

Sixth performance

Tonight was my personal worst performance. I’m not sure how bad it was compared to other nights, but it just didn’t feel good to me. I think as an actor, the difference between a good performance and what I would think is a terrible performance is minor. Perhaps that’s what I am telling myself to make myself feel better. Of course, the show was videotaped tonight, so this will be the show that lives in history as my thesis performance. Let’s hope it wasn’t as bad as I thought. On a positive note, we had a decent house (a little more than half-full) and some of the other cast members thought tonight was their best show. I know we have a good show, and that is what we have to focus on every time we step foot on the stage.

Sunday, April 29

Final performance

This is the end of the fun part. It’s been a great run. I am proud of myself, my fellow cast mates, the crew, the director, and the design team – everyone involved in this production that contributed to its success. It was a really positive experience that I very much enjoyed. We had about 80 audience members today, which was great for a Sunday afternoon, especially during Jazz Fest.

After the show we had a mini-strike. Apparently someone wants to use our set to film something, so we did not entirely break it down. We still had a fun wrap party complete with pizza and conversation of good memories and laughs associated with our run.

Scored Script



Anton Chekhov's

THREE SISTERS


A Drama in Four Acts

A Newly Revised Version By
Jean-Claude van Itallie

★



★
DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



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THREE SISTERS was produced by Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director; Barry Grove, Managing Director), in New York City, in December, 1982. It was directed by Lynne Meadow; the set design was by Santo Loquasto; the costume design was by Dunya Ramicova; the lighting design was by Pat Collins and the music was by Jonathan Sheffer. The cast was as follows:

OLGA	Lisa Banes
MASHA	Dianne Wiest
IRINA	Mia Dillon
ANDREI	Jeff Daniels
NATASHA	Christine Ebersole
KULYGIN	Baxter Harris
VERSHININ	Sam Waterston
TUZENBACH	Bob Balaban
SOLYONY	Stephen McHattie
CHIBUTYKIN	Jack Gilford
FEDOTIK	Brian Hargrove
RODE	Gene O'Neill
MESSENGER	Jerome Collamore
ANFISA	Margaret Barker
MAID	Rosemary Quinn

THREE SISTERS was produced by American Repertory Theatre (Robert Brustein, Artistic Director), in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on December 1, 1982. It was directed by Andrei Serban; the set, costume and lighting designs were by Beni Montresor; the music was by Richard Peaslee. The cast was as follows:

VERSHININ	Alvin Epstein
OLGA	Marianne Owen
MASHA	Cheryl Jannini
IRINA	Cherry Jones

CHEBUTYKIN	Jeremy Geidt
TUZENBACH	John Bottoms
SOLYONY	Tony Shalhoub
ANFISA	Anne Pitonaik
FERAPONT	Richard Spore
KULYGIN	Richard Grusin
PROZOROV	Thomas Derrah
NATASHA	Karen MacDonald
FEDOTIK	Jamie Haines
RODE	Mark Driscoll

THREE SISTERS was presented on WBAI radio, in New York City, in October, 1979. The cast included: Seth Allen, Shami Chaikin, Wendy Gimbel, Sandy Kadet, Linda Hunt, Karen Ludwig, Rosemary Quinn, Jean-Claude van Itallie, David Willinger, David Wolpe.

Jean-Claude van Itallie's version in English of Anton Chekhov's THREE SISTERS was first produced at Rokeby Estate in Rhinebeck, New York, in July 1979. It was directed by Lawrence Sacharow.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PROZOROV, ANDREI SERGEYVICH

NATALYA IVANOVNA, his fiancée, later his wife

His sisters: OLGA, MASHA and IRINA

KULYGIN, FYODOR ILYICH, a high school teacher, Masha's husband

VERSHININ, ALEXANDER IGNATYEVICH, Lieutenant Colonel, Battery Commander

TUZENBACH, NICOLAI LVOVICH, BARON, army lieutenant

SOLYONY, VASILY VASILYEVICH, army captain

CHEBUTYKIN, IVAN ROMANYICH, army doctor

FEDOTIK, ALEXEI PETROVICH, army lieutenant

RODE, VLADIMIR KARLOVICH, army lieutenant

FERAPONT, caretaker at the County Council, old

ANFISA, the nanny, in her eighties

The play takes place in a provincial Russian town.

THREE SISTERS

ACT ONE

The Prozorovs' house. A sitting room with colonnades, behind which we see a larger room, the main hall. It's noon. Outside it's bright, sunny. In the main hall the table is being set for lunch. Olga, in the dark blue uniform of a teacher at the girls' high school, correcting students' notebooks, sits, gets up, walks about. Masha, in black, sits reading a thin book, her hat on her knees. Irina, in white, stands daydreaming.

OLGA. The fifth of May, Irina — your name day. Papa died just a year ago. It was so cold then, and snowing. I didn't think I'd survive. You fainted, and lay like a corpse. Just a year ago, and look — we can talk about it, the pain's not unbearable. You're wearing white, and your face is beaming. *(The clock strikes twelve.)* Just like it struck a year ago. *(Pause.)* I can still see them carrying him. I can hear the music, and the guns saluting at the cemetery. There weren't many people there for a general, commander of brigade. Of course, it was raining — snowing and heavy rain.

IRINA. Why think about it? *(Behind the columns in the main hall Baron Tuzenbach, Chebutykin, and Solovyov can be seen by the table.)*

OLGA. It's warm. We can open the windows wide today. The birches here don't have leaves yet at this season. Eleven years since we left Moscow, when Father was given command of the brigade — eleven years, and it's still crystal clear in my mind. In early May it's warm in Moscow. Flowers bloom, the city's flooded with sunlight. I feel as if I had been there yesterday. My God, this morning I awoke, saw the light, the spring — I was full of joy, and wanting so to go home.

CHEBUTYKIN. To hell with that.

Superobjective: To strive for a better life.

BEAT 1

Objective: To fight the lethargy.

Actions:

1. to break the monotony
2. to tune out

TUZENBACH. It's nonsense, of course. (*Masha, who's been sitting dreamily over her book, begins quietly whistling a song.*) 1

OLGA. Don't whistle, Masha. How can you? (*Pause.*) Since I started working at the high school, and tutoring every afternoon — I have a constant headache. I think like an old woman. I'm becoming an old woman. For four years I've felt my energy, my youth, drain from me drop by drop, day by day. I dream only of one thing ...

IRINA. To go to Moscow — to sell this house, everything — to go to Moscow ...

OLGA. Yes! To go to Moscow soon. (*Chebulykin and Tuzenbach laugh.*)

IRINA. Our dear brother will probably be a professor. Anyway he won't want to stay here. The only problem is our poor Masha.

OLGA. Masha will come to Moscow for the summer, every year. (*Masha whistles quietly.*) 2

IRINA. God willing, it will all happen. (*She looks out the window.*) So beautiful today. Why do I feel so happy? This morning when I remembered it was my name day, I felt joy suddenly — just like when I was a child and Mama was alive. Suddenly what wonderful feelings, what feelings!

OLGA. You look radiant today — beautiful. So does Masha. Andrei would look good too, only he's getting fat — it doesn't suit him. And I've aged. I'm too thin. It's from getting angry at the high school girls. But today I'm free — I can stay home, I have no headache, and I feel younger than yesterday. I'm only twenty-eight.... It's all for the best. It's all God's will. Still, it might have been better if I'd married and stayed home. (*Pause.*) I would have loved my husband.

TUZENBACH. (*To Solony.*) You're too full of rumors. I can't listen anymore. (*He comes into the sitting room.*) I forgot to tell you — today you'll have a visit from our new battery commander, Vershinin. (*He sits at the piano.*)

OLGA. Good. That's fine.

IRINA. Is he old?

TUZENBACH. Not that old. Forty, forty-five. (*He plays softly.*) He seems very nice. Definitely not stupid. But he likes to talk.

IRINA. Is he interesting?

TUZENBACH. Yes, I suppose so. But he has a wife, a mother-in-law, and two little girls. He always talks about his wife and little girls. It's his second marriage. The wife is a sort of half-wit. She wears braids like a child, talks furiously about intellectual things, and occasionally attempts suicide — probably just to annoy him. I would have left her long ago. But he's patient — he just complains.

SOLYONY. (*Entering from the main hall with Chebutykin.*) I can lift thirty kilos with one hand. With two I can lift eighty or eighty-five. I conclude — two men are more than twice as strong as one, maybe three times as strong, maybe more ...

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Reading from the newspaper as he walks.*) For baldness — ten grains of naphthalene to a half liter of alcohol. Dissolve, and apply daily. (*He makes notes in his notebook.*) We'll make a note of that. (*To Solyony.*) So, you push a cork pierced by a small glass tube into a bottle. Then take a pinch of alum, the most ordinary substance in the world ...

IRINA. Ivan Romanyich, my dear Ivan Romanyich!

CHEBUTYKIN. What? What, my little angel, my delight?

IRINA. Why do I feel so happy today? I feel I have sails, and above me an endless wide blue sky with great white birds gliding. Why do I feel like that? Why?

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Tenderly kissing both her hands.*) My white bird ...

IRINA. This morning when I got up and bathed, suddenly everything seemed clear to me. I know how to live now, dear Ivan Romanyich. I know. Each of us must work by the sweat of his brow. Work is the meaning of life — its goal, happiness, and joy. The worker getting up at dawn to break stones on the road is happy. So is the shepherd, and the teacher of little children, and the engineer on the railway.... God, it's easy for a man. But better to be an ox, a horse — anything — than a young woman who wakes up at noon, has coffee in bed, and spends two hours dressing. That's dreadful. I need to work, just as I need to drink water on a hot day. And if I don't start getting up early, if I continue doing nothing, you must stop being my friend, Ivan Romanyich.

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Tenderly.*) All right. I promise.

OLGA. Papa taught us to get up at seven. Irina wakes at seven but stays in bed 'til nine, dreaming — serious dreams. (*She laughs.*)

IRINA. I'm still little to you. You're always surprised when I'm serious. I'm twenty.

TUZENBACH. The longing for work — God, how I understand it. I've never worked, never. I was born in Petersburg — a cold city where people do nothing. My family never knew work nor care. When I'd come home from the Cadet Corps, a footman removed my boots. I was frivolous, said and did whatever I wanted. My admiring mother was amazed the whole world wasn't as charmed by me as she was. I was sheltered. Will that world last? I doubt it. Its hour has struck. Something vast is coming toward us, a powerful storm is brewing — a good one. It's coming soon. In its wake laziness, snobbery, prejudice against work, our whole morbid boring society will be swept away. I'll work, and in twenty-five or thirty years everyone will work — everyone.

CHEBUTYKIN. Not me.

TUZENBACH. You don't count.

SOLYONY. Thank God, in twenty-five years there's a good chance you'll be dead. You'll have apoplexy soon or I'll lose patience with you, my angel, and lodge a bullet in your forehead. (*He takes a vial of perfume from his pocket, puts some on his chest and hands.*)

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Laughing.*) It's true, I've never done a damn thing. Since I left university, I haven't lifted a finger. I don't even read books. Only newspapers. (*He takes a newspaper from his pocket.*) Here — I read there was once a writer named Dobrolyubov. But what did he write? I have no idea. God knows. (*A knocking is heard from the floor below.*) They're calling me from downstairs. Someone needs me. I'll be right back. (*He hurries out, combing his beard.*)

IRINA. He has something up his sleeve again.

TUZENBACH. Yes, he had his poker-faced solemn look. It's probably a present for you.

IRINA. No. That's so embarrassing!

BEAT 1 Actions (cont.):

3. to proclaim
4. to exhale
5. to minimize
6. to reassure
7. to caress
8. to celebrate
9. to reminisce
10. to relive
11. to downgrade
12. to insult
13. to scoff at
14. to diminish
15. to surrender
16. to brush off
17. to confide
18. to apologize
19. to drift
20. to condemn
21. to reprimand

OLGA. It's awful. He's so extravagant.

MASHA. "By the curved seashore, an oak tree greening.
Wound 'round that oak, a golden chain ..."³ *(She gets up, singing softly.)*

OLGA. You're not very cheerful today, Masha. *(Masha puts on her hat, still singing softly.)* Where are you going?

MASHA. Home.⁴

IRINA. That's strange ...

TUZENBACH. You're leaving on a name day?

MASHA. I don't care.⁵ I'll be back tonight.⁶ Good-bye, my sweet.⁷ *(She kisses Irina.)* Again — health and happiness.⁸ In Papa's time, thirty, forty officers came here on name days —⁹ it was exciting.¹⁰ Now there's only a person¹¹ and a half.¹² It's too quiet.¹³ It's like a desert.¹⁴ I'm leaving.¹⁵ I'm not feeling cheerful.¹⁶ Don't mind me.¹⁷ *(She smiles through her tears.)* We'll talk later.¹⁷

Good-bye, my darling. I'm off.¹⁸ I don't know where.¹⁹

IRINA. *(Displeased.)* You're so —

OLGA. *(Through tears.)* I understand you, Masha.

SOLYONY. When a man philosophizes, the result is sophistication or sophistry. When a woman philosophizes, or two do, the result is — nothing.

MASHA. What do you mean, you dreadful man?²⁰

SOLYONY. Nothing. "Lying under a tree, he thought he had time to spare. He looked up too late to see the oncoming bear." *(Pause.)*

MASHA. *(To Olga, angrily.)* And stop crying.²¹ *(Anfisa and Ferapont enter. Ferapont carries a cake.)*

ANFISA. Come in, little daddy. Come in. Your feet are clean. *(To Irina.)* It's from the County Council, from Protopopov, Mikhail Ivanovich — a cake.

IRINA. Thank you. Tell him thank you. *(She takes the cake.)*

FERAPONT. What?

IRINA. *(Louder.)* Tell him thank you.

OLGA. Nanny dear, give him some cake. Go, Ferapont. Have some cake.

FERAPONT. What?

ANFISA. Come, little daddy. Come, Ferapont. Come with me. *(Anfisa and Ferapont leave.)*

BEAT 1 Actions (cont.):

- 22. to split
- 23. to flail
- 24. to dismiss
- 25. to scold
- 26. to concur (with disapproval)
- 27. to tsk

MASHA. I don't like that Protopopov, Mikhail Ivanovich or Mikhail Potapovich ²² whatever his name is. ²³ You shouldn't have invited him. ²⁴

IRINA. I didn't.

MASHA. You were right. ²⁵ *(Chebutykin enters followed by a soldier carrying a silver samovar. There is a murmur of astonishment and disapproval.)*

OLGA. *(Covering her face with her hands.)* A samovar! How awful. *(She goes into the hall.)*

IRINA. Ivan Romanyich, my dear — what have you done?

TUZENBACH. *(Laughing.)* What did I tell you?

MASHA. Ivan Romanyich, you should be ashamed. ²⁶

CHEBUTYKIN. My darlings, my sweet little angels — I have no one but you. You're my dearest in the world. I'm nearly sixty — old, alone, and insignificant.... My love for you is the only good thing I have. Without it I would have left this world long ago ... *(To Irina.)* My darling, I've known you since you were born.... I carried you in my arms.... I loved your poor mama ...

IRINA. But why such expensive presents?

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Half-moved, half-angry.)* Such expensive presents?... Leave me alone. *(To the soldier.)* Put the samovar out there. *(Mimicking Irina's tone.)* Such expensive presents. *(The soldier puts the samovar in the main hall.)*

ANFISA. *(Coming across the room.)* My darlings, a colonel is here. He's not someone we know. He's taking off his coat now. He's coming, my darlings. Be nice to him, Irinushka.... Be polite. *(As she leaves.)* And it's lunch time.... Oh, Lord.

TUZENBACH. It must be Vershinin. *(Vershinin enters. Tuzenbach announces him.)* Lieutenant Colonel Vershinin.

VERSHININ. *(To Masha and Irina.)* May I present myself? Vershinin. I'm happy to be here at last. My, how you've grown. My.

IRINA. Won't you sit down? We're pleased to meet —

VERSHININ. *(Cheerfully.)* I'm happy to be here, very happy. There are three of you, aren't there — three sisters? I remember three little girls. I don't remember your faces, but I know your father, Colonel Prozorov, had three little girls. I

BEAT 2

Objective: To engage in conversation.

Actions:

1. to deter (coquettishly)
2. to lighten the mood
3. to search
4. to exclaim
5. to nudge
6. to tease
7. to recall
8. to pshaw
9. to realize
10. to sympathize with
11. to hold back the tears

saw them. How time flies. My, how it flies.

TUZENBACH. Alexander Ignatyevich is from Moscow.

IRINA. From Moscow? You come from Moscow?

VERSHININ. Yes, of course. When your father was a battery commander, I was an officer in the same brigade. *(To Masha.)* Hmm, it seems to me I recognize you, a little.

MASHA. I don't recognize you at all.¹

IRINA. Olya, Olya! Olya, come quickly! *(Olga comes from the hall.)* Colonel Vershinin is from Moscow!

VERSHININ. So you're Olga Sergeyvna, the eldest. And you, Maria.... And you, Irina — the youngest ...

OLGA. And you are from Moscow?

VERSHININ. Yes. I studied in Moscow, and did my military service in Moscow. I lived there a long time — until I was appointed battery commander here. And here I am, as you can see. To tell the truth, I don't remember you well. I just remember three sisters. But I have a clear memory of your father. If I close my eyes I see his face. I was often at your house in Moscow ...

OLGA. I thought I remembered everyone, and now suddenly ...

VERSHININ. My name is Alexander Ignatyevich.

IRINA. Alexander Ignatyevich. From Moscow.... What a surprise!

OLGA. You know, we're going back.

IRINA. We're hoping to be there by fall. It's our home — we were born there.... On Old Basmanny Street ... *(Olga and Irina laugh with pleasure.)*

MASHA. What a surprise to meet a fellow Muscovite.² *(Excitedly.)* Yes — now, wait a minute.³ I have it!⁴ You remember, Olya⁵ — we called him the lovesick major.⁶ You were a lieutenant, and in love.⁷ So to tease you, we called you a major, God knows why ...⁸

VERSHININ. *(Laughing.)* That's right, that's right — the lovesick major. It's true ...

MASHA. You had only a moustache then.⁹ Oh, how you've aged!¹⁰ *(Through tears.)* How you've aged!¹¹...

VERSHININ. Yes, the lovesick major was young and in love.

BEAT 2 Actions (cont.)

- 12. to divert
- 13. to initiate conversation
- 14. to ponder
- 15. to put off
- 16. to discount

It's not the same now.

OLGA. But you don't have a single gray hair. You've aged, but you don't look old.

VERSHININ. Yes, well, I'm forty-two now. I'm in my forty-third year. How long ago did you leave Moscow?

IRINA. Eleven years. Why are you crying, Masha, you silly? *(Through tears.)* Now I'm starting.

MASHA. It's nothing.¹² Where did you live?¹³

VERSHININ. Old Basmanny Street.

OLGA. So did we!

VERSHININ. Later I lived on German Street. From German Street I walked to the Red Barracks. I had to pass over a gloomy bridge. Alone, crossing that bridge — just to hear the water made me sad. *(Pause.)* But here there's a big and vigorous river! A marvelous river!

OLGA. Yes, but it's cold here, too cold and full of mosquitoes.

VERSHININ. Come, it's a healthy climate — a good, Slavic climate. There's the forest, the river.... And the birches — the sweet, gentle birches, my favorite trees. Living is good here. It is strange, of course, that the station is twelve miles from town.... And no one knows why.

SOLYONY. I do. *(They all look at him.)* If the station were closer — it wouldn't be farther. And since it's farther — it's not closer. *(An embarrassed silence.)*

TUZENBACH. Vasily Vasilyevich, what a joker.

OLGA. Now I recognize you. I remember you.

VERSHININ. I knew your mother.

CHEBUTYKIN. She was so good, God rest her soul.

IRINA. Mama's buried in Moscow.

OLGA. At the new cemetery of the Blessed Virgin.

MASHA. You know, I'm already beginning to forget her face. ~~No one will remember us either!~~ ^{We'll all be forgotten.}

VERSHININ. Yes, forgotten. That's our fate. There's nothing we can do about it. A day will come when everything which seems important to us today will be forgotten, or irrelevant. *(Pause.)* It's strange. We can't know now what will seem important to the future, and what will seem ridiculous. The

BEAT 2 Actions (cont.):

- 17. to brag
- 18. to justify
- 18a. to cry out
- 19. to slander
- 20. to squash
- 21. to sneer
- 22. to revile
- 23. to disprove
- 24. to validate
- 25. to laugh off
- 26. to gossip
- 27. to summon
- 28. to coax

discoveries of Copernicus or Columbus seemed useless and laughable then, while nonsense written by an idiot seemed true. What we think is true may one day seem strange, stupid, dishonest, or even shameful ...

TUZENBACH. Who knows? Maybe they'll say this was a great time. Maybe they'll speak of us with respect. After all, there's no more torturing, executions, or invasions — though there's enough suffering.

SOLYONY. (*In falsetto, as if calling little birds to feed.*) Here, tsik tsik, tsik. Here, tsik, tsik, tsik. But no grain for the Baron — just let him philosophize.

TUZENBACH. Vasily Vasilyevich, will you please leave me alone.... (*He changes seats.*) You're starting to annoy me.

SOLYONY. (*Falsetto.*) Here, tsik, tsik, tsik. Here, tsik, tsik, tsik.

TUZENBACH. (*To Vershinin.*) God knows we have suffering, but maybe the *kind* of suffering we have shows we've already reached a certain moral level ...

VERSHININ. Yes, yes, of course.

CHEBUTYKIN. Baron, you just said our time may be great — but our people are small ... (*He gets up.*) Look how small I am, for instance. You're just saying our time is great to console me. (*A violin is heard playing off-stage.*)

MASHA. That's Andrei, our brother, playing. ¹⁷

IRINA. Andrei is our intellectual. He'll be a professor probably. Papa was military, but his son chose the university.

MASHA. Just as Papa wished. ¹⁸

OLGA. We've teased him today. I think he's a little in love.

IRINA. She's from here. We'll probably have the pleasure of her company today.

MASHA. How she dresses! ¹⁹ My God, her clothes aren't just ugly or unfashionable ¹⁹ — they're pathetic! ²⁰ A gaudy bright yellow skirt with a weird fringe and a red blouse! ²¹ And her cheeks — shiny with rouge! ²² Andrei can't be in love with her, it's impossible! ²³ He has taste, after all! ²⁴ He's just teasing us! ²⁵ Yesterday I heard she might marry Protopopov, president of the County Council. So that's good ²⁶. (*She turns toward the door and calls.*) Andrei! Come! ²⁷ Come here, darling, just for a mo-

BEAT 2 Actions (cont.):

- 29. to encourage
- 30. to buoy
- 31. to placate
- 32. to pinch his (Andrei's) cheeks
- 33. to needle

ment. ²⁸ *(Andrei enters.)*

OLGA. Here's my brother, Andrei Sergeyevich.

VERSHININ. Vershinin.

ANDREI. Prozorov. *(He wipes the sweat from his face.)* You're the new battery commander?

OLGA. Can you believe it? Alexander Ignatyevich is from Moscow.

ANDREI. Really? Then I congratulate you. Now my sisters will allow you no peace.

VERSHININ. It's I who have already succeeded in boring them.

IRINA. Look at the little frame Andrei gave me today. *(She shows him the frame.)* He made it himself.

VERSHININ. *(Looking at the frame, not knowing what to say.)* Yes. It's — a frame.

IRINA. And the one there on the piano. He made that too. *(Andrei waves his hand modestly, moving off.)* He's a scholar, plays the violin, and makes all sorts of little things out of wood. He can do anything. Andrei, don't go away. You're always leaving. Come here. *(Masha and Irina, laughing, take him by the arm, bring him back.)*

MASHA. Come here, ²⁹ come on. ³⁰

ANDREI. Will you leave me alone, please.

MASHA. How funny he is! ³¹ When we called Alexander Ignatyevich "the lovesick major," he was never angry. ³²

VERSHININ. Never.

MASHA. I'm going to call you the lovesick violinist! ³³

IRINA. Or the lovesick professor ...

OLGA. He's in love! Andryusha's in love!

IRINA. *(Applauding.)* Bravo! Bravo! Again! Andryusha's in love!

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Coming up behind Andrei, putting both arms around his waist.)* Love — we are made only for love. *(He bursts out laughing. He is still holding his newspaper.)*

ANDREI. Come on, come on now, that's enough. *(He wipes his face.)* I couldn't sleep. I really don't feel well. I read 'til four, and when I finally turned off the light, I couldn't sleep. I was thinking of too many things. And dawn is early now. I

BEAT 2 Actions (cont.)

- 34. to jeer
- 35. to jest
- 36. to ridicule
- 37. to despair
- 38. to entice

was invaded by sunlight. During the summer, since I'm staying here, I intend to translate a book from the English.

VERSHININ. You know English?

ANDREI. Yes. My father, God rest his soul, made us learn many things. It's funny, and maybe stupid, but I confess that since he died, I've started getting fat — as if my body had been released from a corset. Thanks to Papa, my sisters and I know French, German, and English. Irina even knows Italian. But what work to learn all that.

MASHA. In a town like this knowing three languages is a luxury³⁴ maybe not a luxury but an absurd extra growth³⁵ a sixth finger³⁶. We know many useless things.³⁷

VERSHININ. What a funny idea. (*He laughs.*) We know many useless things! An intelligent educated person is never superfluous — even in a sad gloomy town like this. If there were only three of you among the hundred thousand in this vulgar backwater, and even if you couldn't conquer the shadows, the ignorance around you, even if little by little you yielded, became lost in the crowd, and life suffocated you — still, you wouldn't disappear without traces. After you, six people like you would spring up, then twelve, and so on, until people like you become the majority. In two or three centuries life on earth will be indescribably beautiful, astonishing. And that's what we must work toward — it's what Humanity needs. We must sense it coming, expect it, dream about it — prepare it. So you see it's important to know more than our ancestors. (*He laughs.*) And you complain about knowing too much.

MASHA. (*Taking off her hat.*) I'm staying for lunch.³⁸

IRINA. (*With a sigh.*) Really, you should write that down. (*Andrei has discreetly left.*)

TUZENBACII. You say it will be many years before life is wonderful and beautiful. All right. But we can take part in it even now, from far off — we can prepare ourselves for it, we can work ...

VERSHININ. (*Getting up.*) Yes. Well. So many flowers. (*Glancing around.*) What beautiful rooms! I envy you! I've dragged around my whole life in little rooms with a couple of chairs,

a couch, and smoky chimneys. Flowers like these are what I've missed ... *(He rubs his hands together.)* Ah, well.

TUZENBACH. We must work. You're probably thinking what a sentimental German he is. But I'm Russian, word of honor — I don't even speak German. My father is Orthodox. *(Pause.)*

VERSHININ. *(Pacing.)* I often say to myself — what if we could start again, this time with awareness. What if this life were, so to speak, only a first draft, and another a final copy. I think we'd try not to repeat ourselves, or at least to create a different ambiance — rooms like yours, for instance, full of light and flowers. I have a wife and two little girls. My wife is not in good health and so on and so on. Well, if I had it to do again, I wouldn't marry — I wouldn't. *(Kulygin enters in the uniform and coat of a high school teacher.)*

KULYGIN. *(Coming up to Irina.)* My dear sister, allow me to congratulate you and present my sincere wishes for your good health and anything else a girl of your age might wish. And to offer you this little book — *(He holds out a book to her.)* — the fifty year history of our high school — an unimportant book I wrote in my spare time. But — read it anyway. Hello everyone. *(To Vershinin.)* Kulygin, high school professor. *(To Irina.)* You will find in it a list of all who have completed their studies in our high school for the past fifty years. *Feci, quod potui, faciant meliora potentes.* *(He kisses Masha.)*

IRINA. But you gave it to me already, for Easter.

KULYGIN. *(Laughing.)* Really? Then, give it back, or no, better yet, give it to the Colonel. Here, Colonel. Read it when you have nothing else to do.

VERSHININ. Thank you. *(He prepares to leave.)* I am so happy to have met you.

OLGA. You're leaving? Oh, no. No.

IRINA. You'll stay to lunch. Please. Stay.

OLGA. Please do stay.

VERSHININ. *(Bowing.)* It seems I dropped in on a name day. Forgive me. I didn't know. I haven't congratulated you. *(He follows Olga into the hall.)*

KULYGIN. Today, my friends, is Sunday — day of rest.

BEAT 3

Objective: To avoid Kulygin.

Actions:

1. to shun
2. to shove
3. to succumb
4. to shut out
5. to warn
6. to lecture
7. to coddle
8. to patronize
9. to cut off
10. to punish
11. to slap

Therefore let us rest, and amuse ourselves — each according to his age and station. In summer, it is appropriate to take up the rugs, to store them in mothballs until winter. The Romans enjoyed good health because they knew how to work, and how to rest. *Mens sana in corpore sano.* Roman life followed a fixed form. Our high school principal says form is essential to life — that which loses its form is doomed. That's true in our lives too. (*Laughing, he puts his arm around Masha's waist.*) Masha loves me. My wife loves me. And the curtains leave with the rugs. Today, I'm cheerful, in a wonderful mood. Masha dear, at four we go to the principal's house. There's a nature walk for teachers and their families.

MASHA. I'm not going.

KULYGIN. (*Vexed.*) Masha, why not?

MASHA. We'll talk about it later.² (*With anger.*) Oh, all right, I'll go.³ Just leave me alone now, please.⁴ (*She moves off.*)

KULYGIN. We'll spend the evening with the principal. Despite ill health, our principal makes being social his first duty — an excellent man, a luminous personality. Yesterday, after a meeting, he said to me, "I'm tired, Fyodor Ilyich, I'm tired." (*He looks at the clock, then consults his watch.*) Your clock is seven minutes fast. He said to me, "I'm tired." (*A violin is heard playing off-stage.*)

OLGA. My friends, come eat now, please. Lunch is ready. We're having pirog!

KULYGIN. Dear, dear Olga — yesterday I worked from morning 'til almost midnight. I was exhausted. But today, dear Olga, I'm happy. (*He goes into the main hall. Chebutykin puts his newspaper into his pocket, combs his beard.*)

CHEBUTYKIN. We're having pirog? Perfect.

MASHA. (*To Chebutykin, severely.*) But be careful⁵ — there's to be no drinking today.⁶ Do you understand?⁷ It does you no good.⁸

CHEBUTYKIN. Oh, come, come. That's all over. It's two years since I've been drunk. (*Impatiently.*) And besides, dear little girl, what difference does it make?

MASHA. I don't care.⁹ I forbid you to drink¹⁰ — I forbid it.¹¹ (*With anger, but lowering her voice so her husband doesn't hear.*)

12. to disdain
13. to wash my hands of it
14. to mock
15. to smear

20

BEAT 3 Actions (cont.)

16. to grab attention

17. to throw caution to the wind

IRINA. Is life beautiful? Maybe. But maybe you're wrong. For us, three sisters — life hasn't been beautiful yet. It's stifled us like a weed. You see — tears. No need for that ...

(She quickly wipes her eyes, smiling.) We must work. We must work. If we're sad and see life darkly, it's because we don't work. We're born of people who had only contempt for work. *(Natalya Ivanovna enters. She wears a pink dress with a green belt.)*

NATASHA. They're sitting down already ... I'm late ... *(She glances furtively in the mirror, fixes her hair.)* My hair's not too bad ... *(Seeing Irina.)* Dear Irina Sergeyevna — all my congratulations. *(She kisses her effusively again and again.)* You have so many guests. I'm embarrassed.... Hello, Baron. *(Olga comes back into the sitting room.)*

OLGA. Ah, here's Natalya Ivanovna. Hello, dear. *(They kiss.)*

NATASHA. Congratulations. You have so many guests — it makes me feel shy.

OLGA. Come, come, they're only friends. *(Lowering her voice, alarmed.)* But, my dear, that green belt — it's not right.

NATASHA. Is it bad luck?

OLGA. No, but it doesn't go with.... It looks odd ...

NATASHA. *(In a teary voice.)* Oh, it's not really that green. It's really a dull green. *(She follows Olga into the main hall. Everyone sits at table. No one is left in the sitting room.)*

KULYGIN. Irina dear, I hope you'll find a good fiance soon. It's time you were married.

CHEBUTYKIN. And you too, Natalya Ivanovna. I wish you a good little fiance.

KULYGIN. Natalya Ivanovna already has a good little fiancé.

MASHA. *(Hitting a plate with a fork.)* Well, let's drink! Life is beautiful. To hell with tomorrow. ¹⁶ ~~17~~

KULYGIN. C minus for manners.

VERSHININ. This is excellent. What did you put in it?

SOLYONY. Cockroaches.

IRINA. *(Tearfully.)* Ugh, that's disgusting.

OLGA. Tonight we're having roast turkey and apple tart. I'm home all day today, thank God, and tonight. Come back tonight, my friends.

VERSHININ. And — may I come back too?

BEAT 3 Actions (cont.)

18. to regress

19. to snap out of it

20. to ponder

IRINA. Please.

NATASHA. They don't stand on ceremony here.

CHEBUTYKIN. Love — we are made only for love. *(He laughs.)*

ANDREI. *(Angry.)* Stop. Gentlemen, aren't you tired of that yet? *(Fedotik and Rode enter carrying a large basket of flowers.)*

FEDOTIK. Oh, they're already having lunch.

RODE. *(In a loud voice, mispronouncing his r's.)* They're having lunch. Yes, so they are.

FEDOTIK. Just a moment. *(He takes a photograph.)* That's one. Good. One more. *(He takes another photograph.)* That's two. Good. That's it. *(They take the basket into the main hall where they are greeted loudly.)*

RODE. *(In a loud voice.)* Congratulations — all the best. It's delicious out today, marvelous. I walked all morning with my students, teaching them gymnastics.

FEDOTIK. You can move, Irina Sergeyvna — it's all right. *(He takes a photograph.)* You look very pretty today. *(He takes a spinning top out of his pocket.)* This top, by the way, makes a remarkable sound.

IRINA. Oh, how pretty!

MASHA. "By the curved seashore, an oak tree greening.
Wound 'round that oak, a golden chain ~~is~~." *(Plaintively.)* Why do I keep saying that? It's been going through my mind since morning ...²⁰

KULYGIN. We're thirteen at table!

RODE. *(Loudly.)* Might you be given to superstition, ladies and gentlemen? *(Laughter.)*

KULYGIN. If we are thirteen at table, it's because we have lovers among us. Are you one of them, Ivan Romanyich? *(Laughter.)*

CHEBUTYKIN. Me — I'm an old sinner. But why does Natalya Ivanovna look disturbed? Is there something I don't know? *(General laughter. Natasha leaves the table, runs into the sitting room. Andrei follows her.)*

ANDREI. Come, don't pay any attention. Wait. Stop, please.

NATASHA. I'm ashamed. I don't know what's the matter with me. They're laughing at me. I know I shouldn't leave

the table like that, but I don't know ... I can't ... I can't ...
(*She covers her face with her hands.*)

ANDREI. My darling, please calm down. They're only joking. I promise you, they have only the best of intentions. My dear, my sweet, they're good people. They have kind hearts, they love us very much. Come over by the window where they can't see us ... (*He looks around him.*)

NATASHA. I'm not accustomed to going out into society!
ANDREI. Oh youth, wonderful youth! My little one, my baby, my sweet baby — calm down. Trust me. I feel so happy, full of love, full of — No, no one can see us, no one. How have I come to love you so much — since when? Oh, I don't know anything. My darling, you're so pure, good. I love you. Be my wife. I love you, I love you as I've never ... never ...
(*They kiss. Two officers enter. Seeing the couple they stop, stupefied.*)

ACT TWO

Same setting. Eight o'clock at night. We faintly hear sounds of an accordion coming from the street. No light. Natalya Ivanovna enters in a dressing gown, holding a candle. She stops by the door of Andrei's room.

NATASHA. What are you doing, Andryusha? Reading? No, it's nothing — I don't want to bother you. *(She opens another door. She looks inside. She closes it again.)* No — no light. *(Andrei enters, a book in hand.)*

ANDREI. What is it, Natasha?

NATASHA. I'm checking to see no candles are left burning. Servants forget everything at carnival time. We have to watch them — make sure nothing happens. At midnight yesterday I went by the dining room, and saw a candle burning. I asked who'd left it. Of course no one would say. *(She puts the candle on the table.)* What time is it? *(Andrei looks at his watch.)*

ANDREI. Eight fifteen.

NATASHA. Olga and Irina aren't back. They work so hard, poor lambs — Olga at the teacher's council, Irina at the telegraph office. *(She sighs.)* This morning I said to Irina — Sweetheart, you must take care of yourself. Of course she doesn't listen to me. Eight fifteen, you say? I'm afraid our little Bobik isn't feeling so well. He's so cold. Yesterday he had a fever, and today he's an icicle. I'm frightened for him.

ANDREI. Now, Natasha, there's nothing wrong with the baby.

NATASHA. Still, it would help to put him on a diet. Really, I am frightened. And I was told the carnival maskers are coming at nine. Do they have to come, Andryusha? Darling, it would be much better if they didn't.

ANDREI. I don't know. It's not up to me. They were invited.

NATASHA. This morning when our little one woke up, he looked at me and smiled — he recognized me. Hello, Bobik, hello, my little darling, I said. And you should have heard him laugh. Children understand everything, absolutely everything. Andryusha, I'll tell the servants we won't receive the carnival maskers, all right?

ANDREI. (*Hesitating.*) But — that's up to my sisters. They're in charge here.

NATASHA. I'll tell them too. They're so understanding. (*She starts to leave.*) We'll have yogurt for dinner. Doctor says if you want to lose weight, eat only yogurt. (*She stops.*) Bobik is so cold. His room is too chilly. Can't we put him in another one — at least until warm weather? Irina's room, for instance, is not humid. It's sunny. It's perfect. I'll tell Irina she can share Olga's room for a while. She's never home during the day anyway. She only sleeps there ... (*Pause.*) Andryusha dear? Say something.

ANDREI. I was thinking about something else.... Anyway, I have nothing to say.

NATASHA. There was something I wanted to say. Oh, yes. Ferapont is here from the County Council. He wants to see you.

ANDREI. (*Yawning.*) Tell him to come in. (*Natasha goes out. Andrei reads by the light of the candle which Natasha has forgotten. Ferapont comes in wearing an old overcoat with the collar turned up, and a headband around his ears.*) Hello, my friend. What's new?

FERAPONT. The president has sent you a book, and some papers. Here. (*He holds out a book and papers to Andrei.*)

ANDREI. Thank you. Good. But why are you here so late? It's past eight.

FERAPONT. What?

ANDREI. (*Raising his voice.*) I said, you're here late. It's past eight.

FERAPONT. That's true. But when I came to the house, it was still light. They wouldn't let me up. They said the master's busy. Well, if he's busy, he's busy. I'm in no hurry. (*Thinking Andrei asked him something.*) What?

ANDREI. No, nothing. (*He looks at the book.*) Tomorrow's

Friday. The council doesn't meet. I'll come by anyway. It'll keep me busy. It's too boring at home, too boring ... *(Pause.)* Well, little grandfather, how life changes and plays tricks on us. Today when I was bored, I picked up this old notebook — my university course. What a laugh. My God, I'm secretary to the County Council, of which Protopopov is president. I'm secretary, and the best I can hope for is to become a member, a member of the County Council — I who dream every night I'm a university professor in Moscow, a famous scholar, the pride of Russia.

FERAPONT. Probably ... I can't hear very well ...

ANDREI. If you heard better, I wouldn't talk to you. I have to talk to someone. My wife doesn't understand me. And I'm afraid of my sisters, afraid they'll laugh at me, make me feel ashamed. I don't usually drink or go to cafes, but, my friend, what I wouldn't give to spend just one hour at Testov's, or at the Great Muscovite in Moscow.

FERAPONT. I hear — some contractor told the council — in Moscow the merchants eat pancakes. One merchant ate forty pancakes. He died. Maybe forty, maybe fifty. I don't remember.

ANDREI. In Moscow you sit in a huge restaurant where no one knows you, and you don't know anyone — but you don't feel alone. Here you know everyone, everyone knows you — but you feel as lonely as a stranger, as lonely as a stranger ...

FERAPONT. What? *(Pause.)* That same contractor said — only maybe he was lying — they stretched a cable across the whole of Moscow.

ANDREI. What for?

FERAPONT. I don't know. The contractor said it.

ANDREI. Nonsense. *(He leafs through the book.)* Have you ever been to Moscow?

FERAPONT. *(After a silence.)* No. Never. It's not God's will *(Pause.)* Can I go now?

ANDREI. Yes. Take care. *(Ferapont goes out.)* Take care now. *(He reads.)* Come back in the morning for these papers.... You may go ... *(Pause.)* Well. He's gone. *(The doorbell rings.)* So. That's how it is. *(He stretches, goes unhurriedly into his room. Off-*

BEAT 4

Objective: To savor time alone with Vershinin.

Actions:

1. to shrug
2. to dig deeper
3. to discover
4. to deduce
5. to reveal
6. to build up
7. to compliment
8. to praise
9. to flirt
10. to assure
11. to divulge
12. to legitimize
13. to confess
14. to attest
15. to recover
16. to frown on
17. to pan
18. to disapprove
19. to crush
20. to scorn
21. to exhaust
22. to recoup
23. to caress
24. to smooth
25. to condemn
26. to clarify
27. to sulk
28. to soak in
29. to comfort

stage a nurse sings a lullaby to put the child to sleep. Masha and Vershinin enter. As they speak, a maid lights a lamp and some candles.)

MASHA. I don't know.¹ (Pause.) I don't know.² Yes, it may, in part, be habit.³ After Papa died, for example, it took a while to get used to having no orderlies in the house.⁴ But apart from that, however it may be anywhere else, it's obvious to me that in this town at least⁵ the noblest,⁶ the finest,⁷ and most educated people⁸ are the military officers.⁹

VERSHININ. I'm thirsty. I'd like some tea.

MASHA. (Glancing at her watch.) They'll bring it soon.¹⁰ I was married at eighteen, in awe of my husband.¹¹ He was a teacher, and I'd just finished school, so to me he seemed terribly important and smart.¹² Now, unfortunately, I don't feel that way.¹³

VERSHININ. Yes. Of course.

MASHA. But I'm used to him.¹⁴ — I don't mean him.¹⁵ Most civilians here are coarse,¹⁶ dry,¹⁷ and uneducated.¹⁸ Coarseness sickens me.¹⁹ I feel assaulted by it.²⁰ I suffer.²¹ When I feel a lack of refinement,²² tenderness,²³ or kindness around me.²⁴ When I'm unlucky enough to have to be around teachers,²⁵ my husband's colleagues,²⁶ I'm miserable.²⁷

VERSHININ. Yes. But civilian or military, they're all the same in this town, all the same. Just listen to the educated people here. Everything exasperates them — their wives, homes, land, horses — everything. The Russian worships philosophical thinking and ideals. But why does he live in such a mediocre way? Why, hmmm?

MASHA. Why?²⁸

VERSHININ. Why can't he bear being around his wife or children? Why can't his wife or children bear being around him?

MASHA. You're feeling low today.²⁹

VERSHININ. That's possible. I've eaten nothing since this morning. One of my daughters is sick. When my little ones are sick I become anxious. I feel remorse for having given them such a mother. If you could only have heard her this morning. She has no common sense. We started fighting at

BEAT 4 Actions (cont.)

- 30. to deflect
- 31. to aggrandize
- 32. to enchant
- 33. to expose
- 34. to lure
- 35. to stifle laughter
- 36. to restrain
- 37. to retain control
- 38. to bubble over
- 39. to release
- 40. to burst
- 41. to break away
- 42. to diminish

seven. I left at nine, slamming the door. *(Pause.)* I never talk about it. It's strange — I complain only to you. *(He kisses her hand.)* Don't be angry at me. I have only you, only you in the world ... *(Pause.)*

MASHA. That noise in the stove...³⁰ Just before Papa's death the stove made the same noise³¹ — the same noise.³²

VERSHININ. Are you superstitious?

MASHA. Yes.³³

VERSHININ. That's strange. *(He kisses her hand.)* You're a wonderful woman, magnificent — just wonderful, magnificent! It's dark in here, but I can see your eyes shining.

MASHA. *(Changing seats.)* There's more light over here.³⁴

VERSHININ. I love, I love, I love — I love your eyes, your way of moving. I dream about you. You're wonderful, magnificent!

MASHA. *(Laughing softly.)* When you talk like that, it makes me want to laugh³⁵ and it frightens me.³⁶ Stop, please stop.³⁷ *(In a low voice.)* No, say it³⁸ don't care.³⁹ *(She covers her face with her hands.)* I don't care.⁴⁰ Someone's coming.⁴¹ Talk about something else!⁴² *(Irina and Tuzenbach enter from the hall.)*

TUZENBACH. I have a triple name. I'm Baron Tuzenbach Krone-Altschauer. But I'm Russian and Orthodox — just like you. There's nothing German about me, except maybe my patience, and my stubbornness in insisting on annoying you by walking you home every night.

IRINA. I'm so tired.

TUZENBACH. I'll meet you at the telegraph office and walk you home every night for ten years, twenty years — unless you chase me away. *(Seeing Masha and Vershinin, joyously.)* It's you. Good evening.

IRINA. Home at last. *(To Masha.)* A woman came to send a telegram to her brother in Saratov — to tell him her son died today. She couldn't remember his address. She said just send it to Saratov. She made me send it there with no street address. And I was rude to her, for no reason. I said, you're wasting my time. She cried. I was so stupid. Are the carnival maskers coming tonight?

MASHA. Yes.⁴

BEAT 5

Objective: To bond with Irina.

Actions:

1. to encourage
2. to commiserate
3. to lift her spirits
4. to kid
5. to resign
6. to dish
7. to present
8. to admonish
9. to poke fun at

IRINA. (*Falls into an armchair.*) I have to rest. I'm tired.

TUZENBACH. (*Smiling.*) When you come home from work you look like a little unhappy child. (*Pause.*)

IRINA. I'm tired. I don't like the telegraph office. I don't, no.

MASHA. You've lost weight ²... (*She gives a little whistle.*) It makes you look younger ³ like a street urchin. ⁴

TUZENBACH. It's her hair.

IRINA. I have to find other work. This work is not good for me. It lacks everything I've ever wanted. It's work without poetry, without spirit ... (*Someone knocks on the floor.*) It's the doctor. (*To Tuzenbach.*) Knock back for me, please ... I can't move anymore ... I'm too tired ... (*Tuzenbach knocks on the floor.*) He's coming up. We must do something. Yesterday the doctor and Andrei played again, and they lost. Andrei lost two hundred roubles.

MASHA. (*Indifferently.*) So, what can we do about it? ⁵

IRINA. He lost two weeks ago, and he lost in December. If only he'd lose everything fast — then we could leave. My God, I dream of Moscow every night. I'm going crazy. (*She laughs.*) We're leaving in June. There's still February, March, April, and May — almost half a year!

MASHA. Let's hope Natasha doesn't find out he lost. ⁶

IRINA. I don't think she cares. (*Chebulykin enters. He just woke up from his after-dinner nap. He combs his beard, sits at the table in the main hall, pulls a newspaper from his pocket.*)

MASHA. There he is. ⁷ Has he paid his rent? ⁸

IRINA. (*Laughing.*) No, not a kopek for eight months. He's probably forgotten.

MASHA. (*Laughing.*) He looks so important! ⁹ (*General laughter. A pause.*)

IRINA. Why don't you say something, Alexander Ignatyevich?

VERSHININ. I don't know. I'd like some tea. I'd give my life for a glass of tea. I've had nothing since this morning ...

CHEBUTYKIN. Irina Sergeyvna!

IRINA. What?

CHEBUTYKIN. Come here. *Venez ici!* (*Irina goes to him, sits*

BEAT 6

Objective: To bask in the enjoyment of intelligent conversation and time spent with Vershinin.

Actions:

1. to giggle
2. to hide the truth

at the table.) I can't do anything without you. *(Irina lays out the cards for a game of Patience.)*

VERSHININ. Well, if there's no tea, at least let's talk.

TUZENBACH. Let's talk. About what?

VERSHININ. About what? For instance, let's imagine life in two or three hundred years.

TUZENBACH. Well, maybe we'll fly in balloons, the cut of jackets will be different, we'll have discovered a sixth sense, maybe even developed it — I don't know. But life will be the same — difficult, full of unknowns, and happy. In a thousand years, just like today, people will sigh and say, oh, how hard it is to be alive. They'll still be scared of death, and won't want to die.

VERSHININ. *(After a moment of thought.)* How to explain? It seems to me everything does change, little by little. It's changing in front of our eyes. In a century or two, or in a millennium, people will live in a new way, a happier way. We won't be there to see it — but it's why we live, why we work. It's why we suffer. We're creating it. That's the purpose of our existence. The only happiness we can know is to work toward that goal. *(Masha laughs softly.)*

TUZENBACH. Why are you laughing?

MASHA. I don't know. I've been laughing since this morning. **2**

VERSHININ. I studied the same subjects you did. I didn't just go to military school. I read. Of course, maybe I didn't choose the right books, maybe I should have read something else. The more I live, the more I want to know. My hair's turning white, soon I'll be old — and yet I know so little, so little. But I believe I know the essential, and I know it without doubt. How to explain? There isn't, there can't be happiness for us. We'll never know happiness. For us there's only work, only work. Happiness is for our distant descendants.

(Pause.) Not for me but for my children's children, or for their children. *(Fedotik and Rode appear in the main hall. They sit, start to sing softly, accompanying themselves on the guitar.)*

TUZENBACH. So, according to you, I can't even dream of happiness? But what if I am happy?

BEAT 6 Actions (cont.)

3. to challenge
4. to philosophize
5. to conclude
6. to emphasize
7. to illustrate
8. to build on
9. to exclaim
10. to plead
11. to make plain
12. to enlighten
13. to declare
14. to deflate
15. to berate
16. to sneer

VERSHININ. You aren't.

TUZENBACH. (*Throwing up his hands, laughing.*) Well, clearly, we don't agree. How can I convince you? (*Masha laughs softly. He points at her.*) Well, laugh if you want. (*To Vershinin.*) Life will be the same not only in two hundred years, but in a million years. Life doesn't change. It remains the same. It conforms to its own laws, and those laws don't concern us. We can't know them anyway. Migrant birds, cranes for instance, must fly. Whatever sublime or insignificant thoughts cranes may have — they fly, they fly on, migrate. Cranes don't know why or where they're flying. They fly, and they will fly. If there are philosopher cranes, they can philosophize — as long as they fly.

MASHA. So, what does that mean? ³

TUZENBACH. Mean? Look, it's snowing. What does that mean? (*Pause.*)

MASHA. It seems to me a person must have a purpose, or be looking for one.⁴ Otherwise life is empty⁵ — empty.⁶ We can live not knowing why cranes fly,⁷ why children are born⁸ or why there are stars in the sky⁹ — but we have to know why we live!¹⁰ Otherwise life is meaningless,¹¹ silly!¹² (*Pause.*)

VERSHININ. Yes — and sad when youth is over.

MASHA. As Gogol says, "Ladies and gentlemen, to live in this world is boring."¹³

TUZENBACH. And as I say, ladies and gentlemen — to win an argument with you is impossible. That's enough. I give up.

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Reading a newspaper.*) Balzac was married in Berdichev. (*Irina hums softly.*) We'll make a note of that. (*He makes a note in his notebook.*) Balzac was married in Berdichev. (*He goes back to his reading.*)

IRINA. (*Completing a game of Patience, dreamily.*) Balzac was married in Berdichev.

TUZENBACH. The die is cast. Do you know, Maria Sergeyvna, that I've handed in my resignation?

MASHA. I've heard.¹⁴ I'm not cheering.¹⁵ I don't like civilians.¹⁶

TUZENBACH. Too bad. (*He gets up.*) I don't look like a soldier anyway, do I? I'm not handsome. Well, so what? I'll work. For the first time in my life, I'll work 'til I drop. And

BEAT 6 Actions (cont.)

- 17. to pooh-pooh
- 18. to long for
- 19. to appeal to
- 20. to pout

when I get home, I'll sleep like a log. *(He goes toward the main hall.)* Workers must sleep very well.

FEDOTIK. *(To Irina.)* I bought you some colored pencils at Pyzhikov's on Moscow Street. And this little knife ...

IRINA. You still treat me like a child. I'm grown up. *(She takes the pencils and the knife, joyously.)* Oh, how pretty!

FEDOTIK. This knife I bought for myself. Look — one blade, two, this for cleaning your ears, little scissors, and a nail file ...

RODE. *(In a loud voice.)* Doctor, how old are you?

CHEBUTYKIN. Me? Thirty-two. *(Laughter.)*

FEDOTIK. I'll teach you a different solitaire. *(He spreads out the cards. They bring in the samovar. Anfisa settles herself next to it. Natasha arrives, fusses around the table. Solyony enters. After greeting everyone, he sits at the table.)*

VERSHININ. There's a wind today.

MASHA. I'm tired of winter. I've forgotten what summer's like. ~~18~~

IRINA. It's going to work out. I can see it — We're going to Moscow!

FEDOTIK. No, you're not. See — the eight's covering the two of spades. *(He laughs.)* It won't work out. I don't think you'll go to Moscow.

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Reading.)* Several cases of smallpox in Tsitsikar.

ANFISA. *(Approaching Masha.)* Come have some tea, Masha my little one. *(To Vershinin.)* You too, your honor.... Forgive me, I've forgotten your name. ~~19~~

MASHA. Bring the tea here, Nanny dear. I don't want to go over there. ~~20~~

IRINA. Nanny dear.

ANFISA. Coming.

NATASHA. *(To Solyony.)* Babies understand everything perfectly. Hello, I said to my little Bobik. Hel-lo, darling, I said. And he gave me a look. He did. I suppose you think that's just a mother talking. But I tell you he's exceptional. He is.

SOLYONY. If that child were mine — I'd roast him and eat him. *(He goes into the sitting room, his glass of tea in his hand.)*

BEAT 6 Actions (cont.)

- 21. to share
- 22. to dream
- 23. to pry
- 24. to let go

BEAT 7

Objective: To redirect my anger.

Actions:

- 1. to lash out
- 2. to push away
- 3. to mutter
- 4. to suppress an outburst

He sits in a corner.

NATASHA. *(Covering her face with her hands.)* Oh, how crude!

MASHA. If I lived in Moscow, I wouldn't care about the weather.² When you're happy, you don't care about the weather.²²

VERSHININ. I just read the journals of a French minister sentenced for the Panama Affair. He writes with ecstasy and passion about the birds he sees outside the window of his prison cell. Before, he'd never noticed birds. Now he's free, probably back to his old ways — and to hell with birds. You'll be like him. When you're living in Moscow, you probably won't even notice it. There's no happiness for us. Happiness doesn't exist. We can only want it.

TUZENBACH. *(Picking up a box from the table.)* Where are the bon-bons?

IRINA. Solyony ate them.

TUZENBACH. All of them?

ANFISA. *(Bringing the tea.)* A letter for you, your honor, dear.

VERSHININ. For me? *(He takes the letter.)* It's from my daughter. *(He reads.)* Of course. Again. Excuse me, Maria Sergeyvna I'll just slip out. I won't have tea. *(He gets up, disturbed.)* Same old story.

MASHA. What is it? ²³ If I'm not being too ²⁴

VERSHININ. *(Lowering his voice.)* My wife has swallowed poison again. I have to go. I'll just slip out. How painful it all is. *(He kisses Masha's hand.)* My dear Masha — so sweet and good. I'll just slip out. *(He goes out.)*

ANFISA. Where? Where's he going now? His tea is here. Where's he going, I —

MASHA. *(Angrily.)* Stop nagging.¹ Leave me alone.² *(She goes with her tea toward the big table.)* Tiresome old woman.³

ANFISA. Why are you angry, my darling?

ANDREI'S VOICE. Anfisa!

ANFISA. *(Imitating him.)* Anfisa! He never lifts a finger, that one.

MASHA. *(In the main hall, angrily.)* Will you make room here, please?⁴ *(She disturbs the cards on the table.)* You're always play-

BEAT 7 Actions (cont.)

- 5. to nag
- 6. to blow up
- 7. to fizzle out
- 8. to mope
- 9. to wallow

ing cards. Why don't you have tea?⁵

IRINA. You're being mean, Mashka.

MASHA. Then don't talk to me.⁶ Just leave me alone.⁷

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Laughing.*) Just leave her alone. Just leave her alone.

MASHA. And you — at sixty you're like a child ⁸ always talking nonsense about God knows what.⁹

NATASHA. (*Sighing.*) Masha, the way you talk! With your looks, my dear, you'd go far in Society — but, I can tell you, not with that way of talking. *Pardonnez-moi, Marie, je vous en prie, mais vous avez des manieres un peu grossieres.*

TUZENBACH. (*Stifling a laugh.*) I'd like some ... um, I think, some cognac. I'd like some ...

NATASHA. *Il parait que mon Bobik ne dort deja pas.* He's awake. My little Bobik isn't feeling well today. I am going to see him now. Excuse me. (*She goes out.*)

IRINA. And Alexander Ignatyevich? Where's he gone?

MASHA. Home.¹⁰ His wife is acting up again.¹¹ (*Tuzenbach goes to join Solyony, a small decanter of cognac in his hand.*)

TUZENBACH. Here you are. Always alone in your corner, ruminating on God knows what. Shall we make peace? Let's have some cognac. (*They drink.*) I suppose I'll be at the piano all night, playing whatever they want. God knows that's fine with me.

SOLYONY. Why make peace? Are we having a fight?

TUZENBACH. It seems to me there's something going on between us. Or you have a strange personality.

SOLYONY. (*He recites.*) "I am a strange one, who is not? Do not be angry at me, Aleko."

TUZENBACH. Who's Aleko? What does he have to do with it?

SOLYONY. Alone with someone, I'm just like everyone else. In a group I feel isolated and tongue-tied, so I say whatever comes to mind. But I'm a man of honor, and ready to prove it.

TUZENBACH. Well, I'm angry with you. When we're with people, you're always pestering me. But I like you, God knows why. I want to get drunk today. And so what? Drink up!

SOLYONY. Drink up! *(They drink.)* I have nothing against you personally, Baron. But I've been told I have the character of Lermontov. *(Lowering his voice.)* I've been told I even look like Lermontov. *(He takes a perfume vial from his pocket, sprinkles some perfume on his hands.)*

TUZENBACH. I handed in my resignation. Basta! It's done. I hesitated five years, and now it's done. I'll work.

SOLYONY. *(Reciting.)* "Do not be angry with me, Alcko. Forget, oh forget your dreams ..." *(During their conversation Andrei enters noiselessly, carrying a book. He sits near a candle.)*

TUZENBACH. I'll work.

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Coming into the sitting room with Irina.)* Then they treated us to a real Caucasian banquet — onion soup and chekhartma roast.

SOLYONY. Cheremsha isn't meat. It's a plant, of the same genus as the onion.

CHEBUTYKIN. No, no, my angel. Chekhartma isn't onion — it's roast lamb.

SOLYONY. I say cheremsha is onion.

CHEBUTYKIN. And I repeat — chekhartma is roast lamb.

SOLYONY. Cheremsha is onion.

CHEBUTYKIN. Why argue with you? You've never even been to the Caucasus. You've never eaten chekhartma.

SOLYONY. No, I hate it! Cheremsha stinks of garlic.

ANDREI. *(Pleading.)* Enough, friends! Please!

TUZENBACH. When are the carnival maskers coming?

IRINA. They said nine. It must be time.

TUZENBACH. *(Putting an arm around Andrei, singing.)* "My little porch, my little porch, my own little porch of mine."

ANDREI. *(Dancing and singing.)* "My little porch, made of wood, made of wood."

CHEBUTYKIN. "My little porch, all shingled with maple wood." *(Laughter.)*

TUZENBACH. *(Kissing Andrei.)* What the hell, drink up. Andryusha, we'll drink to you, my darling. I'll follow you to Moscow, Andryusha — to the university.

SOLYONY. Which one? There are two universities in Moscow.

BEAT 8

Objective: To dig myself out of the dumps.

Actions:

1. to join in the party
2. to release tension
3. to let loose
4. to hoot
5. to parody
6. to corral the others
7. to bad-mouth
8. to ridicule
9. to hiss
10. to incite (the men)
11. to conspire

ANDREI. No, only one.

SOLYONY. I say there are two.

ANDREI. Well, three if you like. The more, the merrier.

SOLYONY. There are two universities in Moscow. (*Murmuring, hissing.*) Two — the old one and the new one. But if you refuse to listen to me, if I irritate you — I'll shut up. I'll go — to the next room. (*He goes out by one of the doors.*)

TUZENBACH. Bravo, bravo! (*He laughs.*) Start, my friends. I'm at the piano. Funny fellow, that Solyony. (*He plays a waltz.*)

MASHA. (*Waltzing alone.*) The Baron is drunk,¹ the Baron is drunk² the Baron is drunk!³ (*Natasha enters.*)

NATASHA. (*To Chebutykin.*) Ivan Romanyich! (*She talks into his ear, then goes out noiselessly. Chebutykin touches Tuzenbach's shoulder, whispers to him.*)

IRINA. What is it?

CHEBUTYKIN. It seems it's time for us to leave. Take care of yourselves.

TUZENBACH. Good night. It's time to go.

IRINA. What happened? What about the carnival maskers?

ANDREI. (*Embarrassed.*) There won't be any carnival maskers. You see, my dear, Natasha says Bobik isn't feeling well, so.... Anyway, I don't know anything about it. It doesn't matter to me.

IRINA. (*Shrugging.*) Well, if Bobik isn't well ...

MASHA. Too bad for us.⁴ We're driven out,⁵ we leave. (*To Irina.*) Bobik's not sick, she is.⁷ See?⁸ (*She taps her forehead with her finger, indicating Natasha is deranged.*) Little petty bourgeois bitch!⁹ (*Andrei goes into his room. Chebutykin follows him. The others say good-bye in the main hall.*)

FEDOTIK. That's too bad. I'd been looking forward to spending the evening here, but, of course, if the child is sick — I'll bring him a toy tomorrow ...

RODE. (*In a loud voice.*) I took a nap after dinner, on purpose. I thought we'd dance all night. It's only nine!

MASHA. Come out into the street.¹⁰ We'll talk there, decide what to do.¹¹ (*From off-stage we hear "good-bye," and "take care of yourself," and Tuzenbach's gay laugh. All are gone. Anfisa and the*

maid clear the table, put out the lights. We hear the wet nurse singing. Andrei enters quietly, dressed to go out. Chebutykin is talking to him.)

CHEBUTYKIN. I had no time to marry. Life went by too fast — in a flash. Of course I loved your mother madly, but she was married ...

ANDREI. One shouldn't get married. It's boring.

CHEBUTYKIN. Maybe, but loneliness — no matter how you look at it — is horrible, my dove. Although, in the end ... of course, it's all the same.

ANDREI. Let's go out quickly.

CHEBUTYKIN. Why hurry? There's time.

ANDREI. I'm afraid my wife will stop me.

CHEBUTYKIN. Ah! I see.

ANDREI. I won't gamble tonight. I'll just look. I don't feel well. What should I take for shortness of breath, Ivan Romanyich?

CHEBUTYKIN. Why ask me? How should I know? I don't remember, my darling.

ANDREI. We'll go out through the kitchen. *(They go out. The bell rings once, then again. Voices, laughter.)*

IRINA. *(Entering.)* What is it?

ANFISA. *(Whispering.)* The carnival maskers. *(The bell rings again.)*

IRINA. Nanny dear, tell them we're out. All of us. Ask them to forgive us. *(Anfisa goes out. Irina paces, thinking, agitated. Solyony enters.)*

SOLYONY. *(Surprised.)* No one? Where did they go?

IRINA. Home.

SOLYONY. That's strange. Are you alone?

IRINA. Alone. *(Pause.)* Good-bye.

SOLYONY. I behaved badly. I behaved without tact. But you're not like the others. You're pure. You see the truth. You understand me — only you. I love you — profoundly, infinitely.

IRINA. Good-bye! Go.

SOLYONY. I can't live without you. *(He follows her.)* Oh, my happiness! *(Through tears.)* Those incredible eyes. How marvel-

ous they are, astonishing — I've never seen anything like them.

IRINA. (*Coldly.*) That's enough, Vasily Vasilyevich!

SOLYONY. I'm speaking of my love to you for the first time! I'm not on earth anymore. I'm on a different planet. (*He rubs his forehead.*) Well, never mind. One can't force a person to love. But I will not allow any rival to win you — never! I swear by all that's holy — I'll kill any rival.... Oh, my beautiful one. (*Natasha crosses the stage carrying a candle. She half opens and looks through a door, then another. She passes in front of her husband's room.*)

NATASHA. Andrei's in his room. We'll let him read. Excuse me, Vasily Vasilyevich, I didn't know you were here. I'm in my nightgown ...

SOLYONY. So what? Good-bye. (*He goes out.*)

NATASHA. Poor little Irina, you look so tired. (*She kisses Irina.*) You should go to bed earlier.

IRINA. Is Bobik asleep?

NATASHA. Yes, but he's not well. By the way, dear, there's something I've been wanting to talk to you about, but either you're not home, or I'm busy. Bobik's room is too cold, too damp. Yours would be better for him. And, darling, you can stay with Olya-dear.

IRINA. (*Who doesn't understand.*) Where? (*The little bells of a troika are heard stopping in front of the house.*)

NATASHA. You'll share Olya's room, and Bobik will have yours. He's so adorable. Today I said to him, you're mine, Bobik, you're mine. And he looked at me with those pretty little eyes. (*The bell rings.*) It's probably Olga. She comes in so late. (*The maid approaches Natasha, speaks into her ear.*) Protopopov? What a funny fellow! It's Protopopov. He's come to invite me for a troika ride. (*She laughs.*) Men are so funny. (*The bell rings.*) Is someone here? Shall I go? Just for a fifteen minute ride? (*To the maid.*) Tell him I'm coming. (*The bell rings.*) That must be Olga. (*She goes out. The maid goes out too, running. Irina, in an armchair, thinks. Olga, Kulygin, and Vershinin enter.*)

KULYGIN. What's happening? I heard there was a party

here.

VERSHININ. How strange. When I left half an hour ago, carnival maskers were expected ...

IRINA. Everyone left.

KULYGIN. Masha too? Where is she? And Protopopov — why is he waiting downstairs with a troika? Who's he waiting for?

IRINA. Don't ask so many questions ... I'm tired.

KULYGIN. My, aren't we nervous ...

OLGA. The meeting just now finished. I'm half dead. The head-mistress is sick, and I'm taking her place. My head — my head hurts, my poor head. *(She sits.)* Yesterday Andrei lost two hundred roubles gambling. The whole town is talking about it.

KULYGIN. Me too. The meeting tired me too. *(He sits down.)*

VERSHININ. My wife just wanted to scare me. She almost poisoned herself, but it's all right now. I'm happy, I'm released. So, we have to go? Too bad. I wish you sweet dreams. Fyodor Ilyich, let's go somewhere — the two of us. I can't stay at home, it's not possible. Come.

KULYGIN. I'm too tired, I can't go anywhere. *(He gets up.)* Tired. Has my wife gone home?

IRINA. Probably.

KULYGIN. *(Kissing Irina's hand.)* Good-bye. Tomorrow and the day after, I can rest all day. Good night. *(He gets ready to leave.)* I would like to have tea! I counted on an evening in good company. *Fallacem hominum spem* — accusative case with exclamation points!

VERSHININ. So, I'll go alone. *(He goes out with Kulygin, whistling.)*

OLGA. My head hurts — hurts, hurts. Andrei lost.... Everyone's talking about it.... I'm going to bed. Tomorrow I'm free. Oh God, what happiness. Free tomorrow, free the day after. My head, my poor head. *(She goes out.)*

IRINA. *(Alone.)* All gone. No one left. *(An accordion is heard playing from the street. The wet nurse sings. Natasha, in fur coat and hat, crosses the hall, followed by the maid.)*

NATASHA. I'll be back in half an hour. I'm just going for a little ride. *(She goes out.)*

IRINA. *(Alone, suddenly very sad.)* To Moscow, to Moscow! To Moscow!

ACT THREE

Olga and Irina's room, with beds behind screens on the left and right. It is two or three in the morning. Evidently no one has yet gone to bed. We hear the alarm sounding for a fire in town which has been burning for some time. Musha, wearing black as usual, is lying on the couch. Olga and Anfisa enter.

ANFISA. They're sitting by the stairs. I said to them, please come upstairs — don't just sit there. But they just sit, and they cry, "Where's Papa? He might have burned up, God help him." What a thing to think! And there are people in the courtyard too — half naked.

OLGA. *(Taking clothes out of the closet.)* Take this gray one, this one too, this blouse, and the skirt, Nanny dear. My God, how dreadful — all Little Kirsanov Street burned down. Here, take this one too. *(She throws another dress into her arms.)* Those poor Vershinins, so frightened — their house nearly burned. They must stay here. We can't let them leave. Poor Fedotik. He's lost everything — he has nothing left now ...

ANFISA. Please call Ferapont, Olyushka. I can't carry all this.

OLGA. *(Ringing.)* No one's answering tonight ... *(She calls from the door.)* Come here. Anyone. Come! *(Through the open door we see the red glow of the fire. We hear the firemen's wagon passing the house.)* It's dreadful, it's making me sick! *(Ferapont enters.)* Here, take all this down. By the stairs you'll see the two Miss Kolotilins. Give them this, and this ...

FERAPONT. Yes, Miss. Moscow burned too — in 1812. And, by God, weren't the French surprised?

OLGA. Go now — go.

FERAPONT. Yes, Miss. *(He goes out.)*

OLGA. Give them everything, Nanny dear. What do we need? Give them everything. I'm so tired, I can hardly stand up. Don't let the Vershinins leave. The girls can sleep in the sitting room, and Alexander Ignatyevich downstairs with the

BEAT 9

Objective: To bury my head in the sand.

Actions:

1. to stare down in disgust
2. to burn

Baron. Fedotik too. Or he can stay in the main hall. Of course, as if he'd planned it, the doctor's drunk — totally drunk. So we can't put anyone in with him. And Vershinin's wife — can sleep in the sitting room!

ANFISA. (*Wearily.*) Olyushka, dear, don't send me away. Please — don't send me away!

OLGA. What are you talking about, Nanny? No one is sending you away.

ANFISA. (*Resting her head on Olga's breast.*) My treasure, my sweet Olga, I work hard — I work hard, I do. And now when I'm getting feeble — go away, they say. Where do you want me to go? Where can I go? I'm past eighty. I'm almost eighty-two.

OLGA. Sit down, little Nanny. Poor thing, you're tired. (*She makes her sit down.*) Rest, rest, my darling. There. You're so pale! (*Natasha enters.*)

NATASHA. They've asked us to form a Committee to Assist the Homeless. I think it's a good idea. It's the duty of the rich to help the poor. Bobik and little Sophie are asleep, little angels, without a care in the world. There are so many people in the house — everywhere people, in every corner. The house is full of people, and there's flu going around. I'm scared for the children.

OLGA. (*Not listening to her.*) It's quiet in this room. You can't see the fire.

NATASHA. Yes. My hair must look terrible. (*In front of the mirror.*) They say I'm getting fat.... It's not true, it's not true!

[7] Masha's sleeping. She's tired, poor thing. (*To Anfisa, coldly.*) I forbid you to sit in my presence! Get up! Get out of here. (*Anfisa goes out. A pause.*) Why do you keep that old woman? I don't understand you.

OLGA. (*Stupefied.*) Excuse me, but I don't understand you.

NATASHA. She's not needed. She's a peasant — she can go live in the country.... She's a luxury. I like order — no unnecessary servants in my house. (*She caresses Olga's cheek.*) My poor lamb, you're tired. Our headmistress is tired. When my Sophie's a big girl, and goes to high school — I'll be frightened of you.

OLGA. I won't be headmistress.

NATASHA. You'll be elected, Olechka. It's been decided.

OLGA. I won't accept. I can't — it's beyond my strength. *(She drinks some water.)* You're so rude to Nanny. Forgive me, but I can't bear it. I can hardly see straight.

NATASHA. *(Moved.)* Forgive me, Olya, forgive me. I don't mean to hurt you. *(Masha gets up, takes her pillow, goes out. She looks angry.)* 2

OLGA. My dear, try to understand us. Maybe we had an unusual upbringing, but I can't bear that sort of thing. To treat servants like that makes me ill ... I lose heart. It kills me.

NATASHA. Forgive me, forgive me ... *(She kisses her.)*

OLGA. Each rudeness, however slight — each harsh word, wounds me.

NATASHA. It's true I often don't think before I speak. But, my dear, you do agree — she could perfectly well live in the country.

OLGA. She's been with us for thirty years.

NATASHA. But she can't work anymore! Either I don't understand you, or you refuse to understand me. She can't work anymore. She just sleeps and rests.

OLGA. So, let her rest.

NATASHA. *(Surprised.)* What do you mean, let her rest? She's a servant! *(Through tears.)* I don't understand you, Olya. I have a nursemaid and a wet nurse. We have a housemaid and a cook. What good does that old woman do us? What good does she do us? *(We hear the alarm.)*

OLGA. I've aged ten years tonight.

NATASHA. We must understand each other, Olya. You're at the high school, and I'm at home — you worry about teaching, and I'll take care of the house. When I talk about servants, I know what I'm talking about. I know what I'm talking about! She goes tomorrow, that old thief, that old hag! *(She stamps her feet.)* That witch! No one here has the right to contradict me! No one here has the right to contradict me! *(Gaining control of herself.)* Listen, if you don't move downstairs, we'll never stop quarreling. It's terrible. *(Kubygin enters.)*

KULYGIN. Where's Masha? It's time to go home. The fire's almost out. *(He stretches.)* Only one neighborhood burned. With this wind, the whole town could've been in flames. *(He sits.)* I'm exhausted. Olechka, my dear, I often say to myself — if there'd been no Masha, I would have married you. You're so good, Olechka. I'm tired. *(He listens.)*

OLGA. What is it?

KULYGIN. As if he'd planned it — the doctor's having an alcoholic fit. He's dead drunk. *(He gets up.)* I think he's coming this way. Do you hear him? He's coming. *(He laughs.)* What a character. I'm hiding. *(He goes toward the armoire, hides in the corner.)* What a devil he is.

OLGA. He didn't drink for two years. Now suddenly he's started again. *(She goes with Natasha toward the back of the room. Chebutykin enters. He walks as if he weren't drunk. He crosses the room, stops, looks in front of him, then goes toward the sink, washes his hands.)*

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Mournfully.)* To hell.... To hell with them all.... They think I'm a doctor, that I can cure everything. But I remember nothing. I've forgotten everything. I remember nothing, absolutely nothing. *(Olga and Natasha go out without his noticing them.)* To hell with them all. Last Wednesday I treat a woman in Zasypi — and she dies, yes. It's my fault. I knew something, a little something, twenty-five years ago. But now I know nothing, absolutely nothing. Maybe I'm not human. Maybe I just dream I have arms and legs and a head. Maybe I don't exist. Maybe I just dream I walk, eat, and sleep. *(He cries.)* Oh, if only I didn't exist. *(He stops crying. He speaks mournfully.)* To hell with them all. At the club last week someone mentions Shakespeare and Voltaire. I haven't read them, but I pretend I have. And so do the others. Oh, misery — hell. When I think about that woman who died Wednesday because of me, and about everything else — it's too terrible to bear. I'm disgusting. And I drink ... drink. I'm disgusting. *(Irina, Vershinin, and Tuzenbach enter. Tuzenbach wears new and elegant civilian clothing.)*

IRINA. Let's stay here. No one will bother us.

VERSHININ. The whole town would have burned without

the soldiers. They're good soldiers — *(He rubs his hands together with enthusiasm.)* good people, and good soldiers.

KULYGIN. *(Coming from behind the armoire, approaching them.)* Excuse me. Gentlemen, can you tell me the time?

TUZENBACH. Nearly four. It's dawn.

IRINA. They're all in the main hall. No one's even thinking of leaving. Your Solyony's there too. *(To Chebutykin.)* You should go to bed.

CHEBUTYKIN. It doesn't matter. But thank you. *(He combs his beard.)*

KULYGIN. Drunk as a lord, our Ivan Romanyich. *(He pats him on the shoulder.)* Bravo. As the ancients said, *in vino veritas*.

TUZENBACH. They want me to organize a benefit concert for the homeless.

IRINA. We couldn't do it — who would play?

TUZENBACH. We can do it if we want. In my opinion, Masha plays the piano beautifully.

KULYGIN. She plays the piano beautifully!

IRINA. But she's forgotten. She hasn't played in three ... or four years.

TUZENBACH. Only I understand music in this town. I understand music, and I swear to you Masha plays well. She has talent.

KULYGIN. You're right, Baron. You're right, of course. I love her very much, Masha. She's a fine woman.

TUZENBACH. To play like an angel, and to feel that no one, no one understands you ...

KULYGIN. *(With a sigh.)* Yes. But would it be proper for her to play in a concert? *(Pause.)* I don't know, my friends — I don't know. Maybe it would. But, to be perfectly frank, our principal is a fine person, very fine, extremely intelligent — but his ideas are a little.... Well, it's not his decision, of course, but, if you like, I'll ask him what he thinks. *(Chebutykin picks up a little porcelain clock, examines it.)*

VERSHININ. I'm so dirty from the fire, I hardly look human. *(Pause.)* Oh — I heard yesterday they may transfer the brigade, to Poland, or Tchita.

TUZENBACH. I heard that too. Well — the town will be

deserted.

IRINA. And we'll be leaving too.

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Letting the ceramic clock fall and break.)*

Smithereens. *(A pause. All seem sad and confused.)*

KULYGIN. *(Picking up the debris.)* Breaking such a valuable object, Ivan Romanyich — you deserve less than zero in conduct!

IRINA. Poor Mama's clock.

CHEBUTYKIN. Maybe. Maybe Mama's. Maybe I didn't break it. Maybe it's all a dream anyway. Maybe we only dream we exist, but we don't. I don't know. Nobody knows. *(He goes toward the door.)* Why are you looking at me, all of you? Natasha's having an affair with Protopopov. You sit there, and don't see that, do you? Natasha's having an affair with Protopopov. *(He sings.)* "Allow me to offer you this fig ..."

VERSHININ. Yes. *(He laughs.)* How strange it all is. *(Pause.)* The fire starts. I run home. The house is out of danger, but my two little girls stand at the door, half dressed, their mother not there. Near them busy people, horses, barking dogs, and on their little faces — alarm, horror, helplessness, and God knows what else. I see those faces, and my heart stops. My God, I think, what else will they have to bear in their lifetimes, these little ones? I take them and run, thinking — what else will they have to bear in this world? *(We hear the alarm. A pause.)* We arrive here to find their mother screaming and angry. *(Masha comes in carrying her pillow. She sits on the couch.)* My girls by the front door in their nightgowns, the street glowing red from the fire, and the terrible noises.... It makes me think such things happened in the past too — the enemy arrives suddenly, pillaging, burning. But how different, then and now. And soon, in two or three hundred years, they'll view us with the same horror and amazement. What we have will seem to them awkward, heavy, uncomfortable, and strange. What a life they'll have — what a life! *(He laughs.)* Forgive me — there I go again, philosophizing. But indulge me, my friends. I feel very much like philosophizing tonight. *(Pause.)* It's as if in the midst of sleep for the moment there are only three of you awake in this town.

BEAT 10

Objective: To comfort Vershinin.

Actions:

1. to embrace
2. to float
3. to kiss goodbye

But in the future there'll be more. With you as examples, more and more people will change, become more like you. Finally even you will be surpassed. Others will spring up even better than you. *(He laughs.)* I'm in an extraordinary mood. I feel very much like living. *(He sings.)* "Love, queen of the ages, how sweet her ecstasies ..."

MASHA. Tram-tam-tam. ¹

VERSHININ. Tam-tam ...

MASHA. Tra-ra-ra. ²

VERSHININ. Tra-ta-ta ... *(He laughs. Fedotik enters.)*

FEDOTIK. *(Dancing.)* Burned, burned, all burned down!

Everything gone! *(Laughter.)*

IRINA. What's so funny about everything being burned?

FEDOTIK. *(Laughing.)* Everything, everything burned. Nothing left. My guitar burned, all my photos burned, my letters burned, and the notebook I bought for you — burned. *(Solyony enters.)*

IRINA. No, Vasily Vasilyevich. Please, go. You can't come in here.

SOLYONY. Why is the Baron allowed in, and I am not?

VERSHININ. Quite right — it's time for all of us to go. How's the fire?

SOLYONY. Seems to be dying down. It's very peculiar the Baron is allowed in here, and I am not. *(He takes a vial of perfume from his pocket, puts some on himself.)*

VERSHININ. Tram-tam-tam?

MASHA. Tram-tam. ³

VERSHININ. *(Laughing, to Solyony.)* Let's go to the main hall.

SOLYONY. We'll remember this. We could press it further now, but "it would annoy the geese, I fear." *(He looks at Tuzenbach.)* Here, tsik, tsik, tsik ... *(Solyony, Vershinin, and Fedotik go out.)*

IRINA. Solyony stinks of tobacco smoke. *(She looks at Tuzenbach with surprise.)* The Baron's sleeping! Baron! Baron!

TUZENBACH. *(Waking up.)* So tired. The brickyard. No, I'm not delirious. I'm talking about the brickyard. I'm going to

BEAT 11

Objective: To castigate the men. (Tuzenbach, Kulygin & Andrei.)

Actions:

1. to nudge gently
2. to push
3. to shove
4. to plead
5. to budge
6. to repel
7. to appease
8. to press
9. to stab
10. to annihilate
11. to release
12. to pound
13. to disgust
14. to burst
15. to condemn
16. to disclose
17. to reason
18. to bear down
19. to let go

work there. I've asked them. (*To Irina, tenderly.*) You're so pale and beautiful. Enchanting. Your pale face lights up the night. You're sad, unhappy with living. Come with me. Come with me — we'll work together!

MASHA. Nicolai Lvovich, go.¹

TUZENBACH. (*Laughing.*) Are you there? I didn't see you. (*He kisses Irina's hand.*) Good-bye. I'm going. Looking at you, I remember how you were on your name day — it seems so long ago. You were cheerful, happy, talked about the joys of work. And I dreamed of such a happy life. What happened to it? (*He kisses her hand.*) You have tears in your eyes. You should sleep. It's dawn, daybreak. If only I could give my life for you.

MASHA. Go, Nicolai Lvovich.² Really. Go! Please...³⁴

TUZENBACH. I'm going. (*He goes out.*)

MASHA. (*Lying down.*) Are you asleep, Fyodor?⁵

KULYGIN. Huh?

MASHA. Go home.⁶

KULYGIN. My sweet, my precious Masha.

IRINA. She's tired. Let her rest, Fedya.

KULYGIN. I'm going. Now. My wonderful wife, my sweet, my only — I love you.

MASHA. (*With some anger.*) Amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant.⁷

KULYGIN. (*Laughing.*) She's amazing. Really. I'm her husband seven years, and yet I feel as if we were married yesterday. Really, you're amazing. I'm so happy, I'm so happy, I'm so happy.

MASHA. I'm so bored,⁸ I'm so bored,⁹ I'm so bored.¹⁰ (*She sits up.*) I can't not think about it.¹¹ The thought keeps hammering at me.¹² It's revolting.¹³ I can't not talk about it.¹⁴ It's Andrei.¹⁵ He's mortgaged the house, and his wife has pocketed the money.¹⁶ But the house belongs to us, all four of us — not just to him.¹⁷ He has to acknowledge that, if he's honest.¹⁸

KULYGIN. Why talk about it, Masha? It can't help. Andrei's riddled with debts. Leave him alone.

MASHA. Anyway, it's disgusting.¹⁹ (*She lies back down.*)

BEAT 11 Actions (cont.)

- 20. to back off
- 21. to justify
- 22. to drive away

KULYGIN. We're not poor. I work at the high school, and I tutor. I'm an honest man, simple. *Omnia mea mecum porto.*

MASHA. It's not that I want anything.²⁰ It's the unfairness that disgusts me.²¹ *(Pause.)* Go, Fyodor.²²

KULYGIN. *(Kissing her.)* You're tired. Take a nap for half an hour. I'll be downstairs waiting for you. *(He goes toward the door.)* I'm so happy, I'm so happy, I'm so happy. *(He goes out.)*

IRINA. It's true. Our Andrei has become petty and insignificant. He's aged so with that woman. He wanted to be a university professor. Now he's proud to be a member of the County Council — of which Protopopov is president. The whole town talks about it, laughs. He's the only one who doesn't know. And when everyone runs to the fire, he sits in his room not caring, playing the violin. *(Nervously.)* Oh it's hideous — hideous, hideous! *(She cries.)* I can't bear any more. I can't. I can't! *(Olga comes in, starts tidying her dressing table. Irina cries loudly.)* Kill me, I can't bear any more! Kill me!

OLGA. *(Frightened.)* What is it? Darling!

IRINA. *(Sobbing.)* Where? Where's it all gone? Oh, God, my God, I've forgotten everything! I can't think straight. I don't even know how to say "window" or "ceiling" in Italian anymore. I'm forgetting more every day. And life is passing — it'll never come back. We'll never, never go to Moscow ... I know it — we're never going to leave ...

OLGA. My darling.... Darling ...

IRINA. *(Controlling herself.)* I'm miserable. I can't work anymore, I don't want to work anymore. I've had enough, enough! First it was the telegraph office, now it's the County Council. I hate and have contempt for everything they make me do there. I'm almost twenty-four. I've worked a long time. My brain is drying out. I'm thinner, uglier, and older — and nothing, nothing, no happiness. Time is passing — and I'm farther and farther from what's real, what's beautiful. I'm approaching a cliff. I'm desperate. I don't know why I'm alive, I don't know why I haven't killed myself.

OLGA. Don't cry, sweetheart, don't cry. It hurts me.

IRINA. I'm not crying. That's enough. You see, I'm not cry-

BEAT 12

Objective: To share with my sisters.

Actions:

1. to scoff
2. to accuse
3. to embrace
4. to confide
5. to bubble
6. to caution
7. to contain
8. to leak
9. to swell
10. to open up
11. to proclaim
12. to simmer
13. to admit
14. to burst
15. to explode
16. to beseech
17. to amaze
18. to touch
19. to gush
20. to smoulder
21. to impress
22. to involve
23. to lighten
24. to mock
25. to bask
26. to claim
27. to take in
28. to confess
29. to grasp

ing. It's over.

OLGA. Darling, listen to me. I'm telling you as your sister and your friend — marry the Baron. (*Irina cries softly.*) You respect him, and appreciate him. No, he's not handsome, but he's good and pure. One doesn't marry for love. One marries because one must. That's how I feel about it. I would have married any man who asked me, even an old man — as long as he was a good person.

IRINA. I was waiting. I thought when we go to Moscow, I'll meet the one I'm destined to meet. I've dreamed of him, I love him. But that's silly, just silly.

OLGA. (*Embracing her sister.*) My darling little sister, I understand — I do. When the Baron resigned from the army and came here in civilian clothes — he seemed so unattractive I cried. He asked, "Why are you crying?" What could I say? But if God wants you to marry him, I'll be happy. That would be different, very different. (*Natasha, a candle in her hand, crosses the stage from right to left in silence.*)

MASHA. (*Sitting up.*) Look at that. ¹ From the way she walks — you'd think she lit the fire. ²

OLGA. Don't be stupid. You're stupid, Masha. You're the most stupid person in the family, if I may say so. (*Pause.*)

MASHA. My sweet sisters, ³ there's something I must confess. ⁴ I can't keep it in anymore. ⁵ I'll confess to you, but not to anyone else. ⁶ I want to tell you. ⁷ (*Lowering her voice.*) It's my secret, but I want to tell you. ⁸ I can't keep it in anymore. ⁹ (*Pause.*) I love ¹⁰ — I love ¹¹ that man! ¹² The man who was just here! ¹³ Why hide it? ¹⁴ I love Vershinin. ¹⁵

OLGA. (*Behind the screen.*) Stop it. I can't hear you anyway.

MASHA. What to do? ¹⁶ (*She holds her head.*) First I thought he was strange. ¹⁷ Then I felt sorry for him! ¹⁸ Then I started to love him! ¹⁹ his voice, ²⁰ how he speaks, ²¹ his troubles, ²² his little girls! ²³

OLGA. (*Behind the screen.*) I can't hear you. Whatever nonsense you're saying, I can't hear you. ²⁴

MASHA. It's you who's stupid, Olya. I love him. ²⁵ That's my destiny, my fate. ²⁶ And he loves me. ²⁷ I'm frightened. ²⁸ It's not supposed to be this way, is it? ²⁹ (*She takes Irina's hand, pulls it*

BEAT 12 Actions (cont.)

- 30. to hold
- 31. to clutch
- 32. to illustrate
- 33. to unravel
- 34. to advise
- 35. to reveal
- 36. to hush
- 37. to clinch
- 38. to whisper
- 39. to rejoice
- 40. to bear hug
- 41. to soothe
- 42. to caress
- 43. to condescend
- 45. to entreat
- 44. to explain
- 45. to reason

toward her.) Oh, darling, how are we going to live?³⁰ What will happen to us?³¹ In a novel it's simple, it all works out.³² But when you're in love yourself, you realize no one knows anything.³³ We each have to decide for ourselves.³⁴ My darlings, sweet sisters, I've confessed.³⁵ Now I won't say any more.³⁶ I'll be like the madman in Gogol — silent,³⁷ silent!³⁸ *(Andrei enters, followed by Ferapont.)*

ANDREI. *(Irritated.)* What do you want? I don't know what you want.

FERAPONT. *(Stopping at the door, impatiently.)* I've told you ten times, Andrei Sergeyevich.

ANDREI. First of all, don't call me Andrei Sergeyevich. Call me your honor.

FERAPONT. It's the firemen, your honor. They want to go through your garden to the river. Otherwise they have to go around.

ANDREI. All right. Tell them it's all right. *(Ferapont goes out.)* So irritating, all of them. Where's Olga? *(Olga comes out from behind the screen.)* I was looking for you. Give me the key to the cupboard. I've lost mine. Your little key. *(Olga hands him the key in silence. Irina goes behind her screen. A pause.)* It was a big fire. It's dying down now. Oh, the hell with it — Ferapont annoyed me, so I said something stupid. Your honor. *(Pause.)* Why don't you say something, Olya? *(Pause.)* Isn't it time to drop this nonsense? Stop sulking for no rhyme or reason. You're here, and Masha and Irina too. Fine. Let's have it out now, once and for all. What do you have against me? What? I'd like to know.

OLGA. Let's not talk now, Andryusha. We'll see tomorrow. *(Upset.)* What a horrible night.

ANDREI. *(Very embarrassed.)* Don't worry, Olga, I'm not — I'm completely calm. What do you have against me? Tell me.

VERSHININ'S VOICE. *(From off-stage.)* Tram-tam-tam!

MASHA. *(Standing, raising her voice.)* Tram-tam!³⁹ *(To Olga.)* Good-bye, Olga.⁴⁰ God keep you!⁴¹ *(She goes behind the screen, kisses Irina.)* Sleep well!⁴² Good-bye, Andrei!⁴³ Leave them alone. They're tired!⁴⁴ Talk tomorrow!⁴⁵ *(She goes out.)*

OLGA. Yes, Andryusha. We'll talk tomorrow. *(She goes behind the screen.)* Time to sleep now.

ANDREI. I'll say it, and then I'll go. In the first place, you seem to have something against my wife, ever since I married her. I believe Natasha's a good person. She's honest, straightforward, and honorable. I love her — I respect her, you understand. I want others to respect her too. I tell you again — she's honest and honorable. And your disagreements with her, forgive me, are just whims. *(Pause.)* Secondly, I suppose you're angry because I'm not a professor devoting myself to higher learning. But I'm a member of the County Council, and that work is just as sacred and important. I'm a member of the County Council and proud of it, if you want to know. *(Pause.)* Thirdly — one more thing. I've mortgaged the house without asking your permission. I admit that, and ask your forgiveness. It's my debts thirty-five thousand. I don't gamble anymore, I gave up gambling. My only excuse is that you, the girls, have a pension, and I have no income, so to speak.

KULYGIN. *(From the door.)* Masha's not here? *(Anxious.)* That's odd. Where is she? *(He goes out.)*

ANDREI. You're not listening to me. Natasha is an excellent woman, she's honest, she's honorable. *(He paces, then stops.)* When I married her, I thought we'd all be happy. But, oh my God ... *(He cries.)* My darling precious sisters — don't believe me, don't believe a word I say. *(He goes out.)*

KULYGIN. *(At the door, anxious.)* Where's Masha? She's not here? That's very odd. *(He goes out. We hear the alarm. The stage is empty.)*

IRINA. *(Behind the screen.)* Olya, who's knocking on the floor?

OLGA. The doctor. He's drunk.

IRINA. This night is an agony! *(Pause.)* Olya! *(Her head appears from behind the screen.)* Did you hear what he said? They're going to transfer the brigade — send it away.

OLGA. It's just a rumor.

IRINA. Then we'll be alone here. Olya?

OLGA. Yes?

IRINA. Olga, I respect and appreciate the Baron. He's an excellent man — I'm willing to marry him. I agree. Only — let's go to Moscow. Please, let's go! Moscow is what's best in the world! Let's go, Olya. Let's go!

ACT FOUR

The formerly private garden of the Prozorovs, now sometimes crossed by passersby to reach the river through a long avenue of pines.

To the right the terrace of the house. A bottle and glasses are on a table — champagne has just been drunk. It's noon. On the other shore of the river a forest can be seen. Five soldiers pass through rapidly.

Chebulykin, in a placid mood he maintains throughout the act, sits in an armchair in the garden, waiting to be called. He wears an officer's hat and holds a cane. Irina, Kulygin, and Tuzenbach say good-bye to Fedotik and Rode in dress uniform on the terrace steps. Kulygin has a medal around his neck, his moustache is shaved off.

TUZENBACH. *(Kissing Fedotik.)* You're a good man. We've been friends. *(He kisses Rode.)* Again. Good-bye, dear friend.

IRINA. Good-bye.

FEDOTIK. Not good-bye. Farewell. We'll never see each other again.

KULYGIN. Who knows? *(He wipes his eyes, smiling.)* Now me too — I'm crying.

IRINA. Maybe we'll meet again, some day.

FEDOTIK. Maybe, in ten or fifteen years. We'll hardly recognize each other. We'll say hello politely. *(He is taking a photograph.)* Don't move. The last one.

RODE. *(Embracing Tuzenbach.)* We won't see each other again. *(He kisses Irina's hand.)* Thank you for everything — everything!

FEDOTIK. *(Emotionally.)* Please don't move!

TUZENBACH. We'll meet again, God willing. Write us. Be sure to write.

RODE. *(Glancing lovingly at the garden.)* Good-bye, trees. *(He*

shouts.) Hop-hop! *(Pause.)* Good-bye, echo!

KULYGIN. Who knows, maybe you'll marry in Poland. Your Polish wife will kiss you and call you "kochane." *(He laughs.)*

FEDOTIK. *(Looking at his watch.)* We have less than an hour. From our battery, only Solyony rides in the barge. We march with the troops. Today three batteries, in formation — the other three tomorrow. Then you'll have peace and quiet.

TUZENBACH. And deadlly boredom.

RODE. Where's Maria Sergeyvna?

KULYGIN. Masha's in the garden.

FEDOTIK. We want to say good-bye to her.

RODE. Good-bye. I have to go, or I'll cry ... *(He quickly embraces Tuzenbach and Kulygin, kisses Irina's hand.)* Such happy times here.

FEDOTIK. *(To Irina.)* Here's a memento — a notebook and pencil... We'll go that way, toward the river ... *(They move off, both looking back.)*

RODE. *(Shouting.)* Hop-hop!

KULYGIN. *(Shouting.)* Good-bye! *(At the back of the stage Fedotik and Rode meet Masha. She goes out with them as they make their good-byes to her.)*

IRINA. Come ... *(She sits on the bottom step of the terrace.)*

CHEBUTYKIN. They forgot to say good-bye to me.

IRINA. And you, why didn't you say good-bye to them?

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes, I forgot too. I don't know why. Anyway, I'll see them soon — I'm leaving tomorrow. Yes.... Just one more little day. Then, in a year, I get my pension, and I'm back — to finish my days with you. Only one little year 'til I get my pension. *(He stuffs a newspaper into his pocket, pulls out another.)* And when I'm back — total reformation. I'll be good — very good, completely respectable.

IRINA. It's true, dear old friend, you have to change your ways. You have to.

CHEBUTYKIN. I know. I know. *(He sings quietly.)* Ta-ra-ra boom dia, just one more little day.

KULYGIN. Incurrigible, our Ivan Romanyich — incurrigible.

CHEBUTYKIN. If I were your student, I'd get an A.

IRINA. Fyodor's shaved off his moustache. I can't bear to

look at him.

KULYGIN. Why?

CHEBUTYKIN. I could tell you what you look like, but I won't.

KULYGIN. Too bad! It's the fashion, the *modus vivendi*. The principal shaved off his moustache. I've shaved off mine. I've been made school inspector. No one likes the way I look, but that doesn't bother me. I'm happy, with or without a moustache. (*He sits. At the back of the garden, Andrei pushes his child in a baby carriage.*)

IRINA. Ivan Romanyich, you're my friend. Tell me. I'm worried. You were on the boulevard last night. Tell me what happened there.

CHEBUTYKIN. What happened? Nothing. Nothing happened. (*He reads his newspaper.*) Just nonsense.

KULYGIN. People say Solyony and the Baron had an argument on the boulevard near the theatre —

TUZENBACH. Please, let's not talk about it. Stop it. Really. (*He gestures, goes into the house.*)

KULYGIN. Near the theatre Solyony picked on the Baron. The Baron wouldn't put up with it, and insulted Solyony ...

CHEBUTYKIN. I know nothing about it. Just nonsense.

KULYGIN. At a seminary once, a teacher wrote the word "nonsense" on a student paper. The student thought he'd written "notable," in Latin. (*He laughs.*) Incredibly funny. They say Solyony's in love with Irina, so he hates the Baron. It's natural. Irina is a charming young girl — just like Masha, always lost in thought. But you have a softer character, Irina. Of course, Masha has a good character too. I love my Masha. (*From the end of the garden we hear "Yoo-hoo," and, "hop-hop."*)

IRINA. (*Shuddering.*) Everything frightens me today. (*Pause.*) I'm all packed. I send off my things after dinner. Tomorrow I marry the Baron, and we leave for the brickworks. The next day I teach school — with God's help begin a new life. When I passed my teaching exam, I cried — I was so happy, so grateful. (*Pause.*) A cart will come for my things later.

KULYGIN. That's very nice, although I daresay not very sensible. High-minded ideals, but not very sensible. But that

doesn't stop me from wishing you the best of —

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Moved.*) My angel, my dove, my little golden girl. You've gone so far, all of you. I can't catch up. I've stayed behind like an old migrant bird who can't fly anymore. Fly, fly away, my dears, and may God keep you well. (*Pause.*) Fyodor Ilych, you shouldn't have shaved off your moustache. KULYGIN. Oh, leave me alone. (*He sighs.*) The army leaves today. Everything will be the way it was. I don't care what anyone says, Masha is an honorable woman and a good one. I love her, and I thank God for my luck. We're not all lucky. A worker in the tax office was in class with me in high school. He was left back in tenth grade because he couldn't understand *ut consecutivum*. Now he's poor as a church mouse, and sick too. When I meet him on the street, I say, hello, *ut consecutivum*! He says, "Yes, *consecutivum*, that's right," and he coughs. But I'm lucky. Look how happy I am. They even gave me the Stanislaus medal, second degree. And I teach others that famous *ut consecutivum*. Of course, it's true I'm brighter than most people, but happiness doesn't lie there. I know that. (*In the house someone plays "The Maiden's Prayer" on the piano.*)

IRINA. As of tomorrow night I'll never have to hear "The Maiden's Prayer" again, and I won't have to see Protopopov. (*Pause.*) Protopopov is there again, in the sitting room ...

KULYGIN. The headmistress isn't here yet?

IRINA. No. She's been sent for. It's been so painful living here without Olya. She's headmistress, living at the high school, busy all day. And I'm alone, bored. I have nothing to do. I hate my room. But if it's my fate I can't go to Moscow, then I can't — that's that. I yield. It's my fate. There's nothing I can do about it. We all depend on the will of God. The Baron proposed, I thought about it, and said yes. He's an excellent man. It's amazing how good he is. And suddenly, now, it's as if I had wings. I'm happier, I feel lighter, and I want to work again — work. But something happened yesterday, something mysterious. I feel something's hanging over me, and I don't know what it is.

CHEBUTYKIN. Nonsense — "notable" nonsense.

BEAT 13

Objective: To distract myself.

Actions:

1. to praise
2. to smirk
3. to blush
4. to explore
5. to probe
6. to slip
7. to recall
8. to soak in
9. to investigate
10. to grab
11. to grasp
12. to unleash
13. to simmer
14. to boil
15. to give up
16. to educate
17. to analyze
18. to undo
19. to resign

NATASHA. *(At the window.)* Here comes the headmistress!

KULYGIN. The headmistress is here. Let's go. *(He goes into the house with Irina.)*

CHEBUTYKIN. *(Reading his newspaper, singing softly.)* Ta-ra-ra boom dia, just one more little day. *(Masha approaches. Toward the back Andrei pushes the baby carriage.)*

MASHA. There he is, the picture of peace and tranquillity — all innocence.²

CHEBUTYKIN. So?

MASHA. *(Sitting.)* So nothing.³ *(Pause.)* Did you love my mother?⁴

CHEBUTYKIN. Very much.

MASHA. Did she love you?⁵

CHEBUTYKIN. *(After a silence.)* That I don't remember.

MASHA. Is Mine here?⁶ In the old days our cook, Marfa, called her policeman that.⁷ Mine.⁸ Is Mine here?⁹

CHEBUTYKIN. Not yet.

MASHA. When you grab at bits of happiness,¹⁰ crumbs¹¹ — and even that's taken away, you become vulgar,¹² mean!¹³ *(She points to her chest.)* I'm boiling, in here!¹⁴ *(She looks at her brother Andrei pushing the carriage.)* There's brother Andrei, our lost hope!¹⁵ It takes a hundred people to hoist a bell!¹⁶ so much labor and money to cast and hoist a bell!¹⁷ Then suddenly it falls and breaks into a thousand pieces — just like that, for no reason!¹⁸ That's Andrei.¹⁹

ANDREI. When will it be quiet in that house? What a racket!

CHEBUTYKIN. Soon. *(He looks at his watch.)* This is an old watch. It rings. *(He winds the watch. It rings.)* The first, second, and fifth battery leave precisely at one. *(Pause.)* And I leave tomorrow.

ANDREI. Forever?

CHEBUTYKIN. I don't know. Maybe I'll be back in a year. Although — who knows? What difference does it make? *(We hear from far off the sounds of a violin and harp.)*

ANDREI. The town'll be empty — as if we were being put under glass. *(Pause.)* Something happened yesterday by the theatre. Everyone's talking about it. I don't know what it was.

BEAT 13 Actions (cont.)

- 20. to pry
- 21. to press
- 22. to move on
- 23. to appeal to
- 24. to beseech
- 25. to implore
- 26. to wring
- 27. to bash
- 28. to frown on
- 29. to rattle
- 30. to halt
- 31. to confront
- 32. to sigh
- 33. to long for

CHEBUTYKIN. Nothing. Some nonsense. Solyony tried to provoke the Baron who got carried away and insulted him. Things turned sour. Solyony challenged him to a duel. (*He looks at his watch.*) I think it's time. Twelve thirty in the state forest, there, on the other side of the river pif-paf! (*He laughs.*) Solyony thinks he's Lermontov. He actually writes poetry. It's gone beyond a joke — it's his third duel.

MASHA. Whose? ²⁰

CHEBUTYKIN. Solyony's.

MASHA. And the Baron's? ²¹

CHEBUTYKIN. The Baron's what? (*Pause.*)

MASHA. I'm not thinking straight. ²² Should we let them do this? ²³ He might wound the Baron? ²⁴ He might even kill him! ²⁵

CHEBUTYKIN. The Baron's a good man. But one baron more or less — what difference does it make? Too bad. I don't care. (*From beyond the garden someone shouts, "Yoo-hoo, hop-hop."*) Wait a minute. That must be the second — Skvortsov, out there in a boat, waiting. (*Pause.*)

ANDREI. Duels are immoral. It's immoral to help them happen — even as a doctor.

CHEBUTYKIN. That's just an idea. We're not even alive. The world is a dream. We don't exist, we only think we do. So what difference does it make?

MASHA. Talk, talk, talk the livelong day... ²⁶ (*She takes a few steps.*) God, to have to live in this climate? ²⁷ It might actually snow today. ²⁸ And to have to hear this endless talking ²⁹. (*She stops.*) I refuse to go into that house. I can't! ³⁰ As soon as Vershinin comes, let me know ³¹. (*She walks toward the pines.*) The birds are leaving already ³². (*She looks up.*) Swans, or ducks — my darlings, my happy ones ³³. (*She goes out.*)

ANDREI. The house will be empty now. The officers are leaving, you're leaving, my sister's getting married, and I'll be alone.

CHEBUTYKIN. What about your wife? (*L'erapont enters, bringing papers.*)

ANDREI. A wife is a wife. She's honest and honorable, sometimes even a good person. But there's something animal in her — blind and stung, hard to the touch. She's not quite

human. I say this only to you. I can only talk to you. I love her, but sometimes she seems vulgar. Then I'm confused. I don't know why I love her so, or even why I ever loved her. CHEBUTYKIN. (*Getting up.*) I'm leaving tomorrow, my friend. We may never see each other again. So listen to me. Pick up your hat and cane — and go ... Go. Don't look back. The farther you go, the better. (*Solyony and two officers appear at the back. Solyony approaches Chebutykin. The officers go out.*)

SOLYONY. Doctor, it's time — almost twelve thirty. (*He bows to Andrei.*)

CHEBUTYKIN. I'm coming, I'm coming. You're so boring, all of you. You make me sick. (*To Andrei.*) If anyone asks, Andryushka, I'll be back soon. (*Sighing a great sigh.*) Arghhhhh ...

SOLYONY. "Lying under a tree, he thought he had time to spare. He looked up too late to see the oncoming bear." (*He goes with him.*) What are you groaning about, old man?

CHEBUTYKIN. Leave me alone.

SOLYONY. How do you feel?

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Angrily.*) Fine, just fine. Just leave me alone.

SOLYONY. No reason for an old doctor to worry. I won't indulge myself. I'll just wing him — like a bird. (*He takes a vial of perfume from his pocket, puts some on his hands.*) I've emptied a whole bottle of perfume on them today. (*Looking at his hands.*) But they still smell. They smell of corpse. (*Pause.*) There. Do you know this? "Restless, he seeks the storm, as if the storm would bring him peace."

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes. "Lying under a tree, he thought he had time to spare. He looked up too late to see the oncoming bear." (*Solyony and Chebutykin go out. We hear shouts of "hop-hop," and "yoo-hoo." Andrei and Ferapont enter.*)

FERAPONT. It's papers to sign.

ANDREI. (*Nervous.*) Leave me alone. Leave me alone, please. (*He leaves, pushing a baby carriage.*)

FERAPONT. But the papers. That's what papers are for — to sign. (*He goes toward the back of the stage. Irina comes in with Tuzenbach who is wearing a boater. Kulygin crosses the stage, shout-*

ing, "Yoo-hoo, Masha, yoo hoo!")

TUZENBACH. There goes the only person in town delighted to see the army leave.

IRINA. It's understandable. *(Pause.)* The town will be deserted.

TUZENBACH. *(Looking at his watch.)* Darling, I'll be back in a little while.

IRINA. Where are you going?

TUZENBACH. To town.... To see some friends off.

IRINA. That's not true ... Nicolai, why are you so distracted today? *(Pause.)* Is it what happened last night in front of the theatre?

TUZENBACH. *(With an impatient gesture.)* I'll be back in an hour. I'll see you then. *(He kisses her hands.)* Oh, my joy. *(He looks at her closely.)* I've loved you for five years, and you still seem more beautiful every day. Your hair — so marvelous. Those eyes. Tomorrow, I take you away, and we'll work. We'll be rich. My dreams will come true — you'll be happy. There's just one thing missing, one — you don't love me.

IRINA. That's not in my power. I'll be your wife, your faithful, obedient wife. But it's true, I'm not in love with you. What can I do about it? *(She cries.)* I've never known love. I've dreamed about it. But my heart is locked, like the keyboard of a precious piano — and the key is lost. *(Pause.)* You look worried.

TUZENBACH. I didn't sleep last night. But I'm not worried — there's nothing in my life to frighten me. I'm just tortured by that lost key. I lose sleep over it. Say something to me. *(Pause.)* Say something.

IRINA. What? What can I say?

TUZENBACH. Something.

IRINA. I can't. That's enough. *(Pause.)*

TUZENBACH. I know it's silly. It's funny how in life sometimes a detail can take on such importance for no reason. You can laugh at it, but you can't stop thinking about it. Let's forget it now. I'm happy. It's as if I'm seeing these pines for the first time — these maples, these birches. And they're looking at me too, with curiosity. They're waiting.

How beautiful trees are. Life should be beautiful around them. (*We hear cries, "Yoo-hoo! Hop-hop!"*) I have to go. It's time. Look at that tree — it's dead, but it's swaying in the wind with the others. I think when I die, I too will still be alive in some way. Darling, good-bye ... (*He kisses her hands.*) Your papers, the ones you gave me, are on my table, under the calendar.

IRINA. I'm going with you.

TUZENBACH. (*Worried.*) No! No! (*He leaves rapidly, but stops in the pines.*) Irina?

IRINA. What?

TUZENBACH. (*Not knowing what to say.*) I — had no coffee this morning. Will you ask them to make me some? (*Irina remains standing, thoughtful, then goes toward the back, sits on the swing. Andrei enters, pushing the baby carriage. Ferapont follows him.*)

FERAPONT. Andrei Sergeyevich, these are not my papers. They are the administration's. I didn't invent them.

ANDREI. What happened? What happened to the way I was? Young, joyous, smart — I had dreams, marvelous ideas. I was full of hope for the future. Why, when we grow up, must we become boring, dull, insignificant, lazy, callous, useless, and miserable? This town is here two hundred years, has a hundred thousand inhabitants, and each is identical to the next. There's not one hero, leader, scholar, or artist, no one remarkable, no one to envy or make you want to walk in their footsteps. No one here does anything but eat, drink, sleep and then die. When others are born — they too just eat, drink, and sleep. Afraid of dying of boredom, they entertain themselves with malicious gossip, vodka, card games, and intrigue. Wives deceive husbands. Husbands lie, pretend to see nothing, hear nothing. And the children are lost, sucked in by the irresistible pull of vulgarity which finally snuffs out their divine spark. They too become the living dead, each identical to the next, as pitiful as their parents. (*To Ferapont, angrily.*) What do you want?

FERAPONT. What do I want? I want you to sign these.

ANDREI. You're so irritating.

FERAPONT. (*Handing him the papers.*) The janitor at the tax office said in Petersburg last winter it was two hundred degrees below.

ANDREI. Everything disgusts me, except the future. Thinking about the future, I feel lighter and more spacious. I see the light of freedom shining in the distance, my children and I freed from laziness, drink, goose and cabbage supper, the after-dinner nap — freed from the slothful life of parasites.

FERAPONT. Two thousand people died of the cold, he said. Everybody's scared in Petersburg. Maybe it was Moscow. I don't remember.

ANDREI. (*Suddenly moved.*) My sisters. My darling, wonderful sisters! (*Through tears.*) Masha, my sister!

NATASHA. (*Through the window.*) Who's talking so loud out there? Is that you, Andryusha? You'll wake Sofochka. *Il ne faut pas faire du bruit, la Sophie est dormée déjà. Vous êtes un ours.* (*Getting angry.*) If you're going to talk, give the baby to someone else. Ferapont, take the carriage from your master.

FERAPONT. Yes, ma'am. (*He pushes the carriage.*)

ANDREI. (*Confused.*) I was being quiet.

NATASHA. (*Behind the window, caressing her child.*) Bobik, little rascal — Bobik, naughty little Bobik! Bobik!

ANDREI. (*Examining the papers.*) All right, all right. I'll look through these, sign what needs to be signed. Then you can take them back to the Council ... (*He goes toward the house reading the papers. Ferapont pushes the baby carriage toward the end of the garden.*)

NATASHA. (*At the window, caressing her child.*) Bobik, what's your mama's name? Little sweetheart, who's there? It's Auntie Olya. Say hello to Auntie — hello, Olya. (*Wandering musicians, a man and a young woman, play the violin and the harp. Vershinin, Olga, and Anfisa come out of the house to listen to them quietly. Irina joins them.*)

OLGA. Our garden has become a public way. People cross it on foot and on horse. Give them something, Nanny.

ANFISA. (*Giving coins to the musicians.*) Here you are, dear hearts. God bless you. (*The musicians bow and leave.*) Poor things. A full stomach makes no music. (*To Irina.*) Hello,

Arisha. *(She kisses her.)* Well, little one, aren't I the lucky one? Here I am living at the high school with Olyushka, in an official apartment. God is good to me in my old age, poor sinner that I am. I never before had such a life. The apartment is big — my own little room, my own little bed. I have all that. I wake up in the night and think, "Dear Mother of God, no one in the world is luckier than I am."

VERSHININ. *(Looking at his watch.)* We're leaving right away, Olga Sergeyvna. It's time to — *(Pause.)* With all my heart I wish you — Where is Maria Sergeyvna?

IRINA. Somewhere in the garden. I'll find her.

VERSHININ. If you'd be so kind, I must hurry.

ANFISA. Me too. I'll go find her. *(She shouts.)* Mashenka! Yoo-hoo! *(She goes with Irina toward the back of the garden.)* Yoo-hoo! Yoo-hoo!

VERSHININ. Everything ends. Now we must be apart. *(He looks at his watch.)* The town gave us a luncheon today with champagne. The mayor made a speech. I ate and listened, but my heart was here with you. *(Looking at the garden.)* I've become accustomed to you.

OLGA. Will we ever see each other again?

VERSHININ. I don't think so. *(Pause.)* My wife and little girls will still be here for two more months. If anything happens — if they need — please ...

OLGA. Of course. Don't worry. *(Pause.)* Tomorrow there won't be a single soldier left. It'll all be memory. And I suppose we'll start a new life. *(Pause.)* Nothing ever happens the way we want it. I didn't want to be headmistress, but I am. And it seems we're not to go to Moscow.

VERSHININ. Well, thank you again. Forgive me if for any reason ... I talked too much. Forgive me for that too. Remember me well.

OLGA. *(Wiping her eyes.)* Where's Masha? Why doesn't she come?

VERSHININ. What can I tell you before leaving? What shall I philosophize about one last time? *(He laughs.)* Life is hard. To many it seems flat and hopeless. But still, little by little, things get better. There's more clarity in the world. The time

BEAT 14

Objective: To pick myself up and start again.

Actions:

1. to savor the moment
2. to recite nervously
3. to scatter
4. to explode
5. to expel
6. to collect myself
7. to suppress
8. to panic
9. to compose
10. to break down
11. to lose it
12. to quiet

is probably not far off when life will be luminous. *(He looks at his watch.)* I have to leave. So far Humanity's been occupied with war — campaigns, invasions, and victories. But we're past that now. There remains a great void demanding to be filled. But how? The world is looking desperately for a solution. We'll find something — eventually. Hopefully soon. *(Pause.)* If only we could combine the love of work with learning, and learn to love work — *(He looks at his watch.)* It's time.

OLGA. Here she is. *(Masha enters.)*

VERSHININ. I've come to say good-bye ... *(Olga moves off a little so as not to disturb them.)*

MASHA. *(Looking him in the eyes.)* Good-bye ... *(A long kiss.)*

OLGA. That's enough, enough. *(Masha sobs.)*

VERSHININ. Write to me. Don't forget me. You must let me go — it's time. Hold her, Olga Sergeyvna. I have to — it's time. I'm late ... *(Deeply moved, he kisses Olga's hands, embraces Masha again, goes out rapidly.)*

OLGA. Enough, Masha. Enough, my darling. *(Kulygin enters.)*

KULYGIN. *(Troubled.)* It's all right, let her cry. Leave her alone. My good little Masha, my gentle Masha — you're my wife, and I'm glad of it in spite of everything. I'm not complaining, I don't reproach you — Olya is my witness. We'll be just as we were — never a single word, not the slightest mention ...

MASHA. *(Trying to hold back her sobs.)* "By the curved seashore, an oak tree greening. Wound 'round that oak, a golden chain.² Wound 'round that oak, a golden chain, a golden chain ³." I'm going crazy.⁴ "By the curved seashore, an oak tree greening."⁵

OLGA. Calm down, Masha, calm down. Give her some water.

MASHA. I'm not crying anymore.⁶

KULYGIN. She's not crying anymore. She's being good. *(A shot reverberates dully in the distance.)*

MASHA. "By the curved seashore, an oak tree greening. Wound 'round that oak, a golden chain."⁷ A green cat?⁸ "An oak tree greening.⁹ I can't think straight!¹⁰ *(She drinks some water.)* My life is a failure!¹¹ I don't need anything now!¹² I'll calm

BEAT 14 Actions (cont.)

- 13. to calm
- 14. to surrender
- 15. to quiz
- 16. to grapple
- 17. to entreat
- 18. to refuse
- 19. to object
- 20. to protest
- 21. to give in

down.¹³ Nothing matters anymore.¹⁴ What does that mean — “by the curved scashore?”¹⁵ Why are those words in my head? I can't think straight!¹⁶ (*Irina enters.*)

OLGA. Calm down, Masha. That's right. Be reasonable. Let's go in.

MASHA. (*With anger.*) I will not go into that house!¹⁸ (*She starts to cry, but controls herself.*) I will not go in there!¹⁹ I won't go in.²⁰

IRINA. Let's sit here, the three of us. We don't have to say anything. You know I'm leaving tomorrow ... (*Pause.*)

KULYGIN. Look what I confiscated in the fifth grade yesterday. (*He puts on a false beard and moustache.*) I look like the German professor, don't I? (*He laughs.*) Don't I? Children are funny.

MASHA. Yes, you look German.²¹

OLGA. (*Laughing.*) It's true, you do. (*Masha cries.*)

IRINA. Enough, Masha.

KULYGIN. I look like the German professor, don't I? (*Natasha enters.*)

NATASHA. (*To the maid.*) What? Mr. Protopopov will take care of Sofochka. Give Bobik to Andrei Sergeyevich in the garden. Children are such a nuisance. (*To Irina.*) You're leaving tomorrow, Irina? That's too bad. Why don't you stay with us a little longer, at least another week? (*She gives a little cry, seeing Kulygin who, laughing, takes off his false beard and moustache.*) Lord, you scared me! (*To Irina.*) Don't think your leaving will be easy for me — I'm used to you. I'll put Andrei into your room with his violin. He can scratch away there all he wants. His room will be for my little Sofochka — darling child, so adorable. Today she looked at me with her pretty little eyes, and said, “Mama.”

KULYGIN. She's a beautiful child.

NATASHA. Well, tomorrow I'll be all alone here. (*Sighing.*) The first thing I'll do is have this avenue of trees cut down, and that maple. It's so ugly at night. (*To Irina.*) My dear, that belt doesn't suit you at all. It's tasteless. You need something brighter. And I'll have little flowers planted everywhere. It'll

BEAT 14 Actions (cont.)

- 22. to resolve
- 23. to discharge
- 24. to submit
- 25. to request
- 26. to grip
- 27. to yank
- 28. to cheer up
- 29. to bolster
- 30. to console
- 31. to unite
- 32. to encourage
- 33. to enliven
- 34. to strive

smell so nice. (*Sternly.*) What is this fork doing on this bench? (*She goes into the house, speaking to the maid.*) What is this fork doing on this bench? I'm speaking to you! (*She shouts.*) Be quiet!

KULYGIN. She's off again. (*From off-stage we hear the military band playing a march. All listen.*)

OLGA. They're leaving. (*Chebutykin enters.*)

MASHA. Our soldiers are leaving. Well, have a good trip, everyone! ²²~~To her husband.~~ We have to go home. ²³~~Where's my hat?~~ My cape? ²⁴

KULYGIN. I put them inside. I'll get them. (*He goes into the house.*)

OLGA. Yes. Time to go home.

CHEBUTYKIN. Olga Sergeyvna!

OLGA. Yes? (*Pause.*) What?

CHEBUTYKIN. Nothing. I don't know how to tell you. (*He speaks into her ear.*)

OLGA. (*Frightened.*) Oh, no! It's not possible.

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes. What a business. I'm tired, worn out. I don't want to talk about it. (*Vexed.*) Anyway, it doesn't matter.

MASHA. What is it? ²⁵

OLGA. (*Embracing Irina.*) Oh, what a hateful day. My darling, I don't know how to tell you.

IRINA. What? Say it fast! What is it? Oh, for God's sake. (*She cries.*)

CHEBUTYKIN. The Baron was just killed in a duel.

IRINA. (*Crying softly.*) I knew it, I knew it. (*Chebutykin goes to the back, sits on a bench.*)

CHEBUTYKIN. I'm worn out. (*He takes a newspaper out of his pocket.*) Let them cry. (*He sings.*) Ta-ra-ra boom dia, just one more little day. In the end, it's all the same, isn't it? (*The three sisters remain standing, close against each other.*) ²⁶

MASHA. The music! ²⁷ How happy it sounds! Listen. ²⁸ They're leaving us. One has already gone forever. ²⁹ We've been left alone to start our lives over again. ³⁰ We have to go on living ³¹ — somehow, start again. ³² We have to go on living ... ³³

IRINA. (*Leaning her head on Olga's breast.*) Some day they'll know — it'll be clear, no more secrets. But not now. Now we must work, go on living. Tomorrow, I'll leave alone. I'll work. I'll teach at the school. I'll give my life to whoever needs it. It's autumn, almost winter. Soon the snow will cover everything, but I'll be working — I'll work.

OLGA. (*Her arms around her sisters.*) Such happy music, so bold. It makes you want to live. Oh, God, time will pass, and we'll be gone forever. We'll be forgotten — our faces and voices forgotten. No one will remember who or how many we were. But our suffering will make a difference, create joy for those who come after us. There'll be happiness and peace on earth, and they'll say good things of those who live now — they'll bless us. Oh, my sisters, my dears, our lives aren't over yet. We have to live. Such happy music, so joyous! Just a little longer, and we'll know why this life, this suffering. If only we knew, if only we knew ... (*Little by little the music is further off. Kulygin, cheerful and smiling, brings the hat and cape. Andrei pushes the baby carriage in which Bobik sits.*)

CHEBUTYKIN. (*Singing softly.*) 'A-ra-ra boom dia, just one more little day. (*Reading his newspaper.*) It's all the same. Doesn't matter to me — it's all the same.

OLGA. If only we knew, if only we knew ...

Project Evaluation

As an actor, it is difficult for me to gauge the success of a production in which I am involved. Audience reaction is one way to judge the success or failure of a show. After all, what is the purpose of theatre if not to affect the audience in some way? The audience consensus for UNO's production of *The Three Sisters* was that it was well acted, but many did not like the script. There were a few "Chekhov enthusiasts" who raved about the production as a whole, which was very satisfying to hear after putting in so many hours of rehearsal, and so much hard work.

Professor Hoover did such a good job of bringing out the comedic moments and focusing on the dramatic moments without making them tragic. When Blythe Danner played Masha in 1976 she said, "The problem with so many productions is either the comic is overstressed or the tragic, and very rarely do you have the melding of the two. . . I think the paradox Chekhov draws so beautifully comes from a very accurate observation of life" (Hackett 20). In my opinion, our production was a successful melding of the comic and the dramatic.

One example of a comic scenario Professor Hoover created was when Kulygin tells me in Act IV that things will go on as they always have. I have almost finished sobbing at this point but upon hearing this I wail. It got a laugh almost every night. Several people who saw the show told me this was one of their favorite moments.

Professor Hoover and the cast also managed to create a production that captured the attention of the better part of our audience. Most current-day audiences are used to climactic structure and plot-oriented action. A character-driven play, full of subtext, (and clocking in at almost three hours long) was a difficult sell. The fact that even a fraction of the students who saw the show enjoyed it, or thought that the acting was good, marks a success for our cast and crew.

Al Shea gave us his highest rating of four claps on the WYES television program “Steppin’ Out,” on Friday April 27. He called our production “stirring,” said it was “done very well” and said he was “mesmerized.” He thought the set and the costumes were perfect, and thought the cast was “excellent” and “beyond recasting.” He noted that David Hoover “attempted to put as much humor and action as he could into a talkie play,” and applauded UNO for putting this piece on the stage. All in all it was a great review and he encouraged everyone to go see the show.

If it is difficult to measure the success of a production in which I am involved, it is even more challenging to judge my own performance. I feel that my training and my experience have helped me to be able to do a better job of self-assessment, but it is always beneficial to have an outside opinion. For this reason, I do rely partially on audience feedback to gauge my own performance.

It is important to me to put forth my best effort to present an engaging and believable character in every performance, but since this role was my thesis, it was of utmost importance to me. It was a great relief to come off of the stage opening night and hear positive comments about my performance. I usually expect this from people I know, but when I hear it from people I don’t know it becomes even more meaningful.

One of my students came to the show and afterward said her husband told her that he thought Masha and Irina were the two most believable characters in the show. Receiving feedback from friends whose opinions I respect is also very meaningful. One friend, a respected local actor, told me it was some of the best work he’d seen me do. Another friend, a well-known local playwright, sent me an email about how much she loved the show. She wrote, “The entire

cast was perfection! I love that it wasn't played entirely straight, which gave the play more depth and was not depressing throughout."

After the production closed, I had a meeting with FTCA Department Chair, Phil Karnell, to get his assessment of my performance. Professor Karnell has a reputation of being meticulously critical. I learned early on in my graduate school career that if he said nothing, it was a good sign. Positive comments from him are rare, and because I respect his experience and his insight, his review of my performance was very important to me. When I asked him what he thought of my performance he said, "I liked it" and "it was solid." I was pleased with this assessment.

Next, I asked what criticisms he had of my performance. He said his main problem with what I did was in Act III during the confession scene. The "I love" in Masha confessing her love of Vershinin to her sisters was not right in his opinion. He thought it needed to be "salvation" for Masha. He thought the entire confession was "too surface" and "not deep enough to bring out the other side of her." He also thought my actions on "I love. I love," were too similar. He thought after the first one, I needed to catch myself and realize that I was too frightened to continue.

That one scene was the only one he commented on in detail. The rest of his review was positive. That was a difficult moment, but it was one of many in the play. I feel that I have come so far as an actor since I started this program in Fall 2004 and comments like these from a well-respected professor in the department validate my efforts here.

As for my own assessment of my work, I was mostly pleased with my portrayal of Masha Prozorov. Of course, as an actor I am never truly satisfied. I am always striving for perfection, which is nearly impossible on stage. If I could go back and do it differently, I think I would have spent more time getting deeper into the meaning of certain moments. The beautiful thing about

Chekhov is that there is so much subtext, that I could probably study the script for years and still find new things.

I would dig deeper into the section in Act IV when Masha notices the birds. I know the birds represented an escape that was unattainable to her, but I was never quite satisfied with my actions in this section. My problem was that I was never active enough. I never quite achieved the urgency to make it work. Blythe Danner describes this moment beautifully. “Well, that moment could have been done, you know, very poetically. And I remember so well having trouble with that moment and Nikos jumping up on stage, and yelling, ‘Birds, birds, birds – you want them to escape – fly, fly get away while you can!’ And it wasn’t poetic at all; it was – active, impatient! As if he were just – shooing them away” (Hackett 24).

I would delve more into Masha’s confession to her sisters, which Chekhov said was not a confession at all. Chekhov said it was “a frank conversation” to be played “highly strung, but not desperate.” This is the scene Professor Karnell pointed out as the major weakness in my performance.

One thing I was very proud of was my vocal performance. When I entered the graduate program, one of my biggest weaknesses was my voice. I have always had a powerful voice and strong projection, but I didn’t know how to use it properly. I was constantly using my higher register, and not paying attention to resonance. I remember in my first semester review with Professor Karnell, his biggest criticism in my performances was my voice. I feel that this performance, and this character, gave me the opportunity to show how I have grown vocally.

Blythe Danner describes where she wanted to be vocally with this character. I also had this take on her from the beginning, even before I read Danner’s interview, because it just works for Masha.

I always thought of her, (Masha) in this orchestra of characters, that we all played, as the cello, the contralto. I think of her as having a very deep resonance or passion . . . I tried to stay in a very low, deep place for this part. A place that connected me to her sensuality. Working on Masha I found a very visceral sense of her character . . . I think that the creative urge, the purest and most creative urge, comes from the place in the body where we all begin, where we create life, our center. (Hackett 25-26)

I learned a lot during this process. I was glad I had the opportunity to perform a role written during the modern period of drama. I am a fan of the work produced during this period, especially Ibsen and Chekhov. Previously I had only read it, so it was an honor to have created a role written by one of the greatest dramatists in history.

I knew this role would be more challenging to create than a contemporary role, especially because of Chekhov's writing style, but I rose to the challenge. Under Professor Hoover's direction, I dug deep beneath the surface of the text to pull out all of Chekhov's rich subtext, and created a character that was nuanced and multi-dimensional.

Did I learn the "key" to performing Chekhov? I think the key is to keep it upbeat, to always look beneath the surface of the text, and then to take Chekhov's advice. "Everything must be done very simply," Chekhov said, "just as in life. It must be done as if they spoke about it every day" (Allen 7).

In working on this thesis project, I have had a chance to review not only what I learned during this production, but also how far I have come during my graduate school career. In a short six-semester period at the University of New Orleans, I have learned a lot about myself, and

about my craft. Most important, I learned to be aware of my weaknesses. Even if I haven't completely overcome them, I am aware, so I can continue to work on them.

In order to build this awareness of my weaknesses, I have learned to dig for criticism. I now prefer criticism to praise. Who am I kidding? I love the praise; I thrive on it. However, three years ago I only wanted to hear the praise and never the criticism. Now, after the compliments, I tend to pry for criticism, especially if I am talking to someone who knows theatre, and whose opinion I respect. That is the only way I can learn and grow as a performer.

I have learned more about my rehearsal process. I usually prefer to go over the top with my performances, and then pull back. I start out "larger than life," then use this same intensity level and investment, but pull back to a level that is more believable. This works for me because it's always easier to pull back than to give more.

I think I have improved in a lot of different areas. Most important, I am more confident and more willing to take risks. In the words of Professor Karnell, I am willing to "fail gloriously."

I have developed greater control over my body and voice. I still tend to act "from the neck up" as David Hoover constantly reminds me, but as I mentioned earlier, I am aware of this problem, so I can continue to work on it.

I have learned that I am an actor that needs a hand prop. Professor Hoover used to call me "stone hands" in acting class. During a rehearsal for *Comedy of Errors* (Spring 2006 at UNO) he put a fan in my hand, and suddenly, I had a new focus. Using a hand prop works for me. I don't think it's a crutch. I think it's a valuable tool to be utilized whenever possible.

I have learned that I need to work on finding more levels. This was one of my goals before I began graduate school. I have improved leaps and bounds since I started; however, this is something I can continue to work on, and continue to try to improve.

I have learned that I am not good at crying on stage. I know this about myself, but I didn't quite realize how unrealistic it was, until I read the student papers on *The Three Sisters*. Many of the students complimented me on my performance, but if there was one criticism that stood out above all others, it was my crying. Many students said it was fake and unbelievable. I have tried to work on this, but I have obviously not figured out how to make it believable. I am aware that this is something I really need to work on.

But how do you really judge the success of a production, or even of one performance? I work with a local theatre troupe, Running With Scissors that mostly performs comedic spoofs. Most of the scripts are original works, so we are always adding and refining jokes during rehearsals. Sometimes we second-guess whether a joke is just funny to us, or whether it will be funny to the audience. Our conclusion is usually that if it makes one person laugh, it is worth including.

With the University of New Orleans' production of *The Three Sisters*, I know that at least one person was affected; at least one person was moved. This is documented in several of the student reviews I read. (A few examples are included in the Appendix.) I am sure many people who saw it had never seen a Chekhov play performed. Some of them actually liked it. If we made one person think, if we made one person acquire a new appreciation for theatre, it was worth it for me. That is how I define success.

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Appendix A: Poster

*The University of New Orleans,
Film, Theatre, and Communication Arts department
presents*

THREE SISTERS *by* ANTON CHEKHOV

*DIRECTED BY
DAVID W. HOOVER*

UNO Performing Arts Center Thrust Theatre

APRIL 19, 20, 21

8-00PM

APRIL 26, 27, 28

8-00PM

APRIL 29

2-30PM

Call 280-SHOW for tickets and information

Appendix B: Program

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS
DEPARTMENT OF FILM, THEATRE, AND COMMUNICATION ARTS
PRESENTS

THE THREE SISTERS BY ANTON CHEKHOV

DIRECTED BY
DAVID W. HOOVER

SCENE DESIGN
TRICIA VITRANO*

LIGHTING DESIGN
KATIE ANDERSON

COSTUME DESIGN
TONY FRENCH

STAGE MANAGER
MELISSA GREGUS

APRIL 19-21 AND 26-29, 2007
UNO THRUST THEATRE
PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the MFA (Scene Design)...

CAST

PROZOROV, ANDREI SERGEYVICH JARED GORE
NATALIA IVANOVNA JOYCE DEAL
(HIS FIANCÉE, LATER HIS WIFE)
OLGA KAT JOHNSTON
(HIS SISTER)
MASHA LISA PICONE *
(HIS SISTER)
IRINA CRISSY GARRETT
(HIS SISTER)
KULYGIN, FYODOR ILYICH JONATHAN MARES
(A HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER, MASHA'S HUSBAND)
VERSHININ, ALEXANDER IGNATYEVICH DERRICK DEAL
(LIEUTENANT COLONEL, BATTERY COMMANDER)
TUZENBACH, NICOLAI LYOVICH, BARON BLAKE BALU
(ARMY LIEUTENANT)
SOLYONY, VASILY VASILYEVICH JAMES YEARGAIN
(ARMY CAPTAIN)
CHEBUTYKIN, IVAN ROMANYICH LUIS Q. BARROSO
(ARMY DOCTOR)
FEDOTIK, ALEXEI PETROVICH T. JOE SEIBERT
(ARMY LIEUTENANT)

*IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MFA IN
PERFORMANCE (ACTING)

RODE, VLADIMIR KARLOVICH RYAN BRUCE
(ARMY LIEUTENANT)

FERAPONT BRADLEY TROLL
(CARETAKER AT THE COUNTY COUNCIL, OLD)

ANFISA LIZ SKINNER
(THE NANNY, IN HER EIGHTIES)

CONSTANTINE JOSH SIMPSON
(SOLDIER, HOUSE SERVANT)

THE PLAY TAKES PLACE IN A PROVINCIAL RUSSIAN TOWN.

ACT I

THE PROZOROV'S HOUSE. MAY, 1901. 12:00 NOON.

ACT II

THE SAME, A YEAR AND A HALF LATER, JANUARY. NIGHT.

15 MINUTE INTERMISSION

ACT III

THE BEDROOM SHARED BY OLGA AND IRINA. A YEAR AND A
HALF LATER. 3:00 A.M.

A BRIEF PAUSE

ACT IV

THE GARDEN OF THE PROZOROV HOUSE. TWO YEARS HAVE
PASSED. 12:00 NOON.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

"IT IS NECESSARY, THAT ON THE STAGE, EVERYTHING
SHOULD BE AS SIMPLE AND AS COMPLEX AS IN LIFE."

- ANTON CHEKHOV

Department of Film, Theatre, and Communication
Arts

Chair

Phillip Karnell

Faculty

Michelle Benoit	J. Stephen Hank
Debra Daniel	David W. Hoover
Anthony French	John McGowan-Hartmann
Kevin Graves	J. Hampton Overton
Kevin Griffith	Robert Racine
Julie Gustafson	

Adjunct Faculty

Dollie Eaglin	James Winter
Aimee Hayes	Dalt Wonk
Allen Moyer	

Staff

Petri Laihonon

Graduate Assistants

Lorne Boni	Jennifer Ledet
Derrick Deal	Terry Marek
Joyce Deal	Sarah McKnight
Lori Dewitt	K. Allen Myers
Willie Horton	Lisa Picone
Joshua Johnston	Leah Scantlen
Kathleen Johnston	Adam Schwartz
Jessica Cook	Tricia Vitrano

CREW

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR KEVIN GRIFFITH
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER JENNIFER SACKS
MASTER CARPENTER JAMES JENNINGS
SOUND DESIGN CHRISTOPHER WALTMAN
ADDITIONAL SOUND DESIGN DAVID HOOVER
SOUND ENGINEER/ ELECTRICIAN NOLAN REESE BEAVER
SOUNDBOARD OPERATOR MELISSA ELLIOT
LIGHTBOARD OPERATOR MELISSA GREGUS
PROPS DESIGN TRICIA VITRANO
MASTER/ACQUISITION TERRY MAREK
FURNITURE ACQUISITION JESSICA COOK
COSTUME DESIGN ASSISTANT TINA VOIGHT
HAIR/WIGS JESSI NORTON
BOX OFFICE MANAGE LISA PICONE
PUBLICITY & PROMOTIONS DIRECTOR DEBRA DANIEL
PUBLICITY & PROMOTIONS ASSISTANT LORI DEWITT
POSTER DESIGN TRICIA VITRANO

SPECIAL THANKS

FTCA CLASSES 1100, 1800, 2800, 3800
KEITH CHRISTOPHER - NEW ORLEANS OPERA
TULANE UNIVERSITY
NATASHA RAMER

PLEASE SILENCE ALL CELL PHONES,
PAGERS, BEEPERS & ALARM WATCHES
PRIOR TO PERFORMANCE.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION

WHO'S WHO IN THE CAST AND CREW

Blake Balu (Tuzenbach) Blake Balu is a New Orleans actor, director, and singer/songwriter. He is a first year graduate student in Performance in Film and Theatre here at UNO. Blake's recent acting credits include *Dancing at Lughnasa* (UNO), *Thick as Thieves* (Le Chat Noir), *Biloxi Blues* for which he received both a Big Easy Award nomination and a Marquess Award, *Brecht on Brecht*, *The Zoo Story*, *The Haunted Host*, and Tennessee Williams' *The Traveling Companion*.. His directing credits include Tennessee Williams' *The Lady of Larkspur Lotion*, and *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*. Blake is also a producer for the local independent film company Reyo-san Pictures.

Luis Q. Barroso (Chebutykin) Mr. Barroso is an MFA Directing student in the FTCA department. He has taken part in all the FTCA productions this season having appeared as Father Jack in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Gramps in *Dinner With the Luminants* and having served as the director of *Small Things*. This is Mr. Barroso's second brush with *The Three Sisters* having played the role of Kulygin many, many years ago for the New Orleans People Playhouse. Other favorite roles he has played include Georges in *La Cage Aux Folles* (Tulane Summer Lyric), Sterling in *Jeffrey* (Contemporary Arts Center), Caesar in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (Dog and Pony Theatre Company), Fagin in *Oliver* (Rivertown Repertory Theatre), Perchik in *Fiddler on the Roof* (Le Petit Theatre), Hysterium in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (Royal Comedy Company), and Rooster in *Annie* (Gainesville Theatre Alliance). Mr. Barroso is a longtime member of Theatre Communications Group and the Puppeteers of America. He is currently the interim artistic director of DRAMA! and is a retired instructor in the Gifted and Talented Program for the Orleans Parish school district. He got very exhausted after reading this bio. He hopes you won't.

Ryan Bruce (Rode) Ryan Bruce is a 3rd year theatre student. His appearances on stage at UNO include: *Baal*, *Our Country's Good*, *Shakespeare's R&J*, and *A Waltz Between*. Ryan has also appeared on stage at the Shakespeare Festival at Tulane in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

Derrick Deal (Vershinin) Derrick is a native of New Orleans. He finished his undergraduate education with a BA in Drama and Communications from Dillard University. He is a second year MFA acting student here at UNO. Derrick has a very extensive theatre resume with his most recent productions being a staged reading of *Weird* at Le Petit, Le Chat Noir's *The Polar Bear* and *The Comedy of Errors* here at the greatest MFA program in the country – the University of New Orleans. Enjoy tonight's show and thank you for coming.

Joyce Deal (Natalya) Joyce Deal is a second year MFA acting student in the Film, Theatre, and Communication Arts Department at UNO. She has a B.A. in Speech Communications and Theater Arts from Dillard University. She has performed in theatre productions throughout high school, undergraduate and graduate with a long list of performance credits. She was last seen in the UNO production of *The Comedy of Errors*. She credits her wonderful parents for helping to shape her in life and throughout her career – and instilling in her that if you work hard at your goals all things are possible.

Chrissy Garrett (Irina) Chrissy was last seen at UNO in *Dinner with the Louninants* (Shirley Bunson) and *Dancing at Lughnasa* (Rose). She read the role of Harper in *Weird*, the Tennessee Williams One Act Play winner, also directed by David Hoover. Other past performances include *The Polar Bear Exhibit* (Linda) at Le Chat Noir's Fifth Annual New Plays Festival, UNO's *Our Country's Good* (Meg), *Fiddler on the Roof* (Chava) at Tulane Summer Lyric, *The Robber Bridegroom* (Rosamund) at Rivertown, *The Skin of Our Teeth* (Mrs. Antrobus), and *The Tempest* (Miranda) at Loyola. Special thanks to the director for entrusting me to this timeless piece and love to the cast and crew, especially my sisters. To my family & friends- we'll get reacquainted after the show. Thanks for coming!

Jared Gore (Andrei) Jared Gore loves the theatre. He is in his fourth year at the University of New Orleans. He has been seen on stage in such hits as *The Comedy of Errors*, *Our Country's Good*, *Get Flanagan*, and that totally awesome 80's hit *Dinner with the Louninants*. His one act play *My Name is Chainsaw* won the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival Region VI Developmental One Act something or other. So that was cool. He is currently searching for an elderly couple looking to adopt a husky 23 year old that can afford to send him to school for a playwriting MFA. References are available. Of course he would like to thank Elizabeth and his parents for their unwavering support.

Kat Johnston (Olga) Kat Johnston is a third year MFA Candidate in the Performance Program at UNO. Past UNO credits include Kate in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Liz Morden in *Our Country's Good*, Ellen Woodward in *Get Flanagan* and Sophie in *Baal*. This is likely her last show as a UNO student and she would like to thank all of the UNO faculty, staff and students for helping her grow so very much as an actor these past three years. *Three Sisters* has been a wonderful way to wrap up her scholastic career. She is excited to journey into the working world, but sad to leave her final educational home. Thanks for everything!

Jonathan Mares (Kulygin) is a junior drama major making his second appearance on the UNO stage. Last spring at UNO he was Angelo in *The Comedy of Errors*. He has performed at Jesuit High School, True Brew, Rivertown, JPAS, Houma Civic Center, Biloxi Grand Theatre, Fine Arts Center, Saenger Theatre-

Biloxi, and Actors Theatre of New Orleans among others. Some of his past credits include: *The Exonerated* (Male Ensemble #2), *Harvey* (Dr. Sanderson), *Hair* (George Berger), *Biloxi Blues* (James Hennessey), *Chicago* (Harrison), *Zombie Prom* (Eddie Flagante), *Chess* (Ivan Molokov), *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Bob Ewell), *Copacabana* (Rico Castelli), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Cheswick), and *Les Miserables* (Jean Valjean). He has also appeared as an extra in numerous commercials and feature films. Much love to my parents.

Lisa Picone (Masha) Lisa Picone is a third year MFA Acting candidate in the Performance Program in Acting. This role is in partial fulfillment of her thesis requirements. Previous UNO credits include Susan Louminaut in *Dinner with the Louminauts*, Agnes in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Adriana in *Comedy of Errors*, Johan's Mother in *A Waltz Between*, Mary Brenham in *Our Country's Good*, Mrs. Lear in *Get Flanagan*, Luis in *Baal*, Ellie in *Wrinkles* and Evelyn in *The Shape of Things*. She was a finalist in the 2005 Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival Irene Ryan Acting Scholarship competition. She is an active member of Lakefront Players and is also a member of Alpha Psi Omega, The National Theatre Honor Society. Locally, Lisa performs with the New Orleans-based theatre troupe Running With Scissors where she was last seen as Crystal Pitt in *Grenadine McGunkle's Double Wide Christmas*. Lisa received a B.A. in Mass Communications from LSU. She would like to thank the FTCA faculty, staff and students, especially David Hoover, Melissa and Jen and the cast and crew of *The Three Sisters*. She also thanks Sean Patterson for getting her here and sends extra special thanks to mom and dad for the free rent and the undying support of her love for theatre. Finally, she thanks everyone at this performance that support UNO theatre by being here.

T. Joe Seibert (Fedotik) Joe was last seen on the Rivertown stage in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* and has also appeared in that theatre's productions of *Urinetown* and *South Pacific*. He has performed in several plays at UNO, including *Dinner with the Louminauts*, *Loose Hog in the House of God*, *Get Flanagan*, and *Fuddy Meers*. This past summer, he was in *Romeo and Juliet* (Benvolio) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Starveling), both at the Shakespeare Festival at Tulane, and became the newest addition to the Patchwork Players. Other credits: *The Day They Shot John Lennon*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Actor's Nightmare*, and *You Can't Take It With You*. production of *Annie* and Scene Designer of *Small Things* which was the winner of the Tennessee Williams Festival One Act Play competition.

Katie Anderson (Light Design) Katie received her BA in drama from UNO in 2005, after finishing her degree work as a visitor at LSU. In Baton Rouge, she was on staff at the Union Theater and designed lights for the LSU Operas, *La Tragedie de Carmen*, *Les Dialogues des Carmelites*, *Così fan Tutte*, and most recently in March, *Willie Stark*. In November of last year, she had the pleasure of lighting

Dancing at Lughnasa as a guest designer at UNO. Her academic credits include designs for LSU's studio presentation of *The Shadowbox* and UNO's summer theater project, *Shakespeare's R&J*. It is an honor to return to UNO and work with the faculty and students once again.

Melissa Gregus (Stage Manager) is very excited about stage managing her first main stage show at UNO. She will be graduating in May and intends on pursuing Stage Management professionally in New York. She would like to thank David for responding to her e-mails promptly, her parents for seeing every show she does no matter how bad they may be, her Jen- for staying in step with her everyday of her busy life, and for every person who helped move furniture during rehearsals... you're amazing. Oh, and she would like to send a special thanks to Anton Chekhov for the brilliant literary schema he set forth for all other writers.

Jennifer Sacks (Asst. Stage Manager) is very happy to be graduating in May. After graduation she plans on fleeing back to New York City where she has been lucky enough to spend the last two summers. She would like to thank her ever supportive family, who has put up with more than she cares to admit. She would also like to thank Melissa for, well, everything. Additionally she would like to thank all those people who, when she says she is in theatre, a) automatically assume she's an actor b) when they find out she isn't an actor, automatically assume it's because she couldn't cut it as an actor c) automatically assume that by theatre she meant film and d) when they find out she isn't in film, automatically assume that it's because she couldn't cut it in film. Thanks!

Nolan Reese Beaver (Sound Engineer/Master Electrician) Nolan is a Junior Film and Theatre student at UNO. He has previously served in this same capacity for *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *Dinner With The Louminauts*. He has done production and post-production sound work on numerous films both with UNO and independently, including *Scenes From a Closet*, *Karma* and *The Fence*.

Jessi Norton (Hair/Wigs) is an undergraduate student at UNO majoring in theatre. Her past credits include *Trains*, *It's A Wonderful Life*, *1940s Radio Hour*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Westside Story*, and *The Comedy of Errors*. She is very pleased to be working with all the wonderful people in this production.

David W. Hoover (Director/Sound Design) is the Director of the Performance Program at the University of New Orleans. His credits at UNO include a tropical *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Imaginary Invalid*, *Candida*, *Ghosts*, *Assassins*, *Blood Brothers*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Educating Rita* and *The Merchant of Venice*. For the Tennessee Williams Literary Festival he has directed Alec Baldwin, Elizabeth Ashley, John Goodman, Stephanie Zimbalist, Eli Wallach, and Anne Jackson. In New Orleans his work has been seen at Le Petit Theatre du Vieux Carre, Tulane Summer Shakespeare Festival, Rivertown Rep, Le

Chat Noir, Southern Rep, and Tulane Summer Lyric. He has worked at several other prestigious theatres including The Guthrie, the Dallas Theatre Center, American Southwest Theatre Company, Shakespeare Festival of Dallas, and The Lyceum. David is the recipient of the Big Easy, Marquee, and Storer Boone awards, having been recognized recently for his direction of *Our Country's Good*. David has directed four original scripts for KCACTF, two of which received National recognition. He is a member of the Society of American Fight Directors, ATHE, and the Southwest Theatre Association. Productions he has directed have been invited five times to the Regional Festival of the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival and his MFA Directing students have been invited three times and were all later invited to the Kennedy Center. Internationally he has been an adjudicator in London, lectured at the Universite de Sorbonne in Paris and has taught extensively in Italy and Mexico. David received an Artist Fellowship award from the Louisiana Division of the Arts; the first award of its kind made to a director. Last summer David enjoyed a new role – that of playwright, having written the well-received *Casting Stones* for Le Chat Noir's 2006 New Plays Festival.

Tony French (Costume Design) joined UNO's Department of Drama and Communications (as it was formerly called) in 1992 and has designed costumes for *On the Verge*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Going Under*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *Measure for Measure*, *Blood Brothers*, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, *The Imaginary Invalid*, *Father's Prize Poland China*, *Arbeit Macht Frei*, *Modigliani*, *Ghosts*, and *Lot's Daughters*. He also designed costumes for Southern Rep's area-premiere productions of *In Walks Ed* and *Bat Boy* and for the Hope Repertory Theatre, Southern Repertory Theatre, and the Shakespeare Festival at Tulane. He has an MFA in Costume Design from Carnegie-Mellon University.

Kevin Griffith (Technical Director) Assistant Professor and Scene Designer for the Department of Film, Theatre, and Communication Arts, Kevin has a BFA in Theatre with emphasis in Design and Technology from Arkansas State University and an MFA in Design and Theatre Technology from The University of Southern Mississippi. He also has designed professionally for regional theatre, dance, and opera. Recent work includes scenery for *The Importance of Being Earnest* as a guest artist with Arkansas State University Theatre, Design Mentor/Technical Director for the Academy Of The Sacred Heart's spring 2007

Josh Simpson (Constantin) Josh, A.K.A. Montana, is proud to be making his debut in the Thrust Theatre in his second semester at UNO. He also feels privileged to be sharing the stage with some of the best actors UNO has to offer and looks forward to more shows in the future. He would like to thank his mom.

Elizabeth Skinner (Anfisa) Elizabeth is a senior FTCA major at UNO, a member of Alpha Psi Omega, and the president of Lakefront Players. You may have seen her in *My Name is Chainsaw*, *Comedy of Errors*, and *As You Like It*, but you may

not recognize her tonight. She wishes to thank David for his persistence in doing Chekhov, her parents for supporting her even though she decided to go into theatre and Jared for four years of absolute joy.

Bradley Troll (Ferapont) Bradley is a graduate student pursuing an MFA in Playwriting. He is a graduate of McNeese State University, where he obtained an MA in English Lit and a BS in Communications with a minor in Theatre. Although this is Bradley's stage debut at UNO, he appeared in many productions at McNeese, including John in *Oleanna*, Neils Bohr in *Copenhagen*, and Mushnik in *Little Shop of Horrors*. Other favorite roles include Felix in *the Odd Couple*, Millet in *Fuddy Meers*, and the multiple, multi-gendered roles of *Sylvia*. Bradley also directed McNeese's first entirely student-produced main stage show, *Lobster Alice* as well as the Governor's Program for Gifted Children's production of Moliere's *the Miser*. His original play, *the Neutral Ground*, was chosen winner of the 2006 Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival Region VI 10 Minute Play competition. Bradley hopes to further his playwriting career here at UNO and add to it's already stellar literary reputation.

James Yeargain ((Solyony) James Yeargain is proud to be working with this fantastic cast and crew. He was last seen on this stage as Jeremy Louninaut in *Dinner With The Louninauts*. He will next be seen in Tulane Shakespeare Festivals production of *Coriolanus*. He thanks David for letting him play anything and, as always, all his love to Susannah for loving his weirdness.

Tricia Vitrano (Scene Design/Props Design) Three Sisters by Anton Chekhov is Tricia Vitrano's MFA Thesis set design project. She designed Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* Fall 2006, *Loose House in the House of God* for The Tennessee Williams Festival Spring 2005, and designed the costumes for *Wrinkles* Fall 2004. She has also worked on various films and commercials that were shot locally. She would like to thank her family and friends for all their support and encouragement.

Season

Dancing at Lughnasa

by Brian Friel

Sept. 28-30, Oct. 5-8

Thrust Theatre

Winner of the 1992 Tony award for best play, this Irish memory play by acclaimed author Brian Friel is a testament to the human spirit, and provides an insight into the complexity of family ties.

Dark Night Read: Berlin, USA

Original Play by Gabrielle Reisman

Oct. 2

Lab Theatre

When a pair of New Orleanians wake up after a power outage to find their living room has somehow collided with an East Berlin squat from 2001, they must work with their new German roommates to put their world back together again, despite rising tempers, rising floodwaters, and eviction notices from the German police.

Dinner with the Louminants

Original Play by Jason Cutler

Nov. 9-11, 16-19

Thrust Theatre

The Louminants are an absurd family of users and abusers living in their own little world of self-created hatred, despondence, and decay. But when the upbeat Bunsons come over for dinner, bringing with them more cultural vapidty yet also a positive world view and perhaps a little hope, will the Louminants learn from the experience or continue blindly down the path of destruction they have made for themselves?

Dark Night Read: Fleeing Katrina

Original Play by Rob Florence

Nov. 13

Lab Theatre

From the *Book of Exodus* to *Heart of Darkness*, from the *Odyssey* to *On the Road*, the JOURNEY is one of civilization's most ancient and enduring narrative genres. Hurricane Katrina spawned more than one million more narratives. *Fleeing Katrina* is a series of interspersed monologues based on real, inspiring tales of survival.

Dark Night Read: My Name is Chainsaw

Original Play by Jared Gore

Dec. 4

Lab Theatre

A best friend's suicide triggers Mike, a twenty-something working a dead-end job, to re-evaluate his life and identity.

Small Things

Williams One Act Winner by Cary Pepper

March 28-31

Lab Theatre

Hoyt, a middle age man weary of life, is contemplating suicide. His doorbell rings. When he opens it, could salvation be on the other side? Can Drew, a young door-to-door evangelical man, provide the one true answer? The play ends with a positive, life-affirming answer of "yes" to these questions.

The Three Sisters

by Anton Chekhov

April 19-21, 26-29

Thrust Theatre

Considered by most to be Anton Chekhov's masterpiece, *The Three Sisters* tells the story of three daughters of a departed military father living in a provincial Russian town and lamenting the passing of better times and longing for the excitement of Moscow.



THE UNIVERSITY *of*
NEW ORLEANS

The University of New Orleans Department of
Film, Theatre, and Communication Arts is
accredited by the National Association of
Schools of Theatre (NAST).

The following members of the Cast and Crew of
THE THREE SISTERS
are members of Alpha Psi Omega,
The National Theatre Honor Society

Jessica Cook
Chrissy Garrett
Jared Gore
Melissa Gregus
Kat Johnston
Lisa Picone
Jennifer Sacks
Elizabeth Skinner

Appendix C: Production Photos









Appendix D: Student Reviews

Between the skillful direction of David Hoover and the demonstrative interpretations committed to by the cast, Chekhov's "The Three Sisters" passes quickly. Its distinctive characters blend cohesively together creating a true sense of what is being dreamed of, experienced, and learned by each of the sisters, leaving only their hopes to linger on at the end.

From the beginning Lisa Picone, who plays Masha, is marvelous as the main focus of the play. Her strong personality continually secretes the anguish she tries to hide, while maintaining her aristocratic heritage of dignity confined in deafening pride. As the middle sister, her striking features speak volumes. Without saying a word, Picone expresses Masha's distaste for the life that has imprisoned her and the marriage for which she sees no escape. Masha roles her eyes and changes her facial expressions, all the while maintaining a stone demeanor, up until her interactions with Vershinin, who give her pause. Picone's brilliance is her ability to make you experience her burning pain. When the hope she has for a different life is presented in Vershinin, she finally allows the love she has for him to be released and her body language portrays happiness and hopeful dreams. Masha is overcome by excitement when she admits her love for Vershinin to her sisters, then is overcome by the gripping reality that her dream is being ripped away. Johathan Mares who plays Kulygin, Masha's husband, eloquently demonstrates how his confining love is unyielding. In the end, Masha rewards the denial he has maintained throughout, by accepting his confining love and again Picone imprisons Masha, by only revealing a stoic demeanor.

Alexander Vershinin, played by Derrick Deal, is by far the strongest character when on stage. He represents what the Prozorov family longs for and sparks the flame that will burn within Masha until it is choked again by his departure. Vershinin enters with conviction. His powerful personality excites the sisters by connecting them to their past and the dreams of Moscow they all long for. Derrick portrays a demeanor that explodes with energy and cements the crucial point that life will only begin when they too have left the

boredom that smothers them. Derrick projects his voice strong at the beginning and carries a sculptured expression which keeps demonstrating his being separate from all of them. However, as the play progresses his projection is reigned in to give level footing to everyone around him. His voice reveals the love and concern he has for his daughters and his face displays the changes that have taking place in his marriage and distaste for his wife. Towards the end, he is in love and demonstrates this by moving more casually, not standing as straight, and softening his facial features. Reeled in by Masha, Derrick allows for Vershinin to playfully sing with her. It is the strong gripping embrace and lingering kiss that takes place between Derrick and Picone that sets about to put everything "back in order." As Vershinin turns away never to return, Derrick pauses, straightens, then in a steady gait exits the stage.

Chrissy Garrett plays the youngest sister, Irina masterfully. At times Garrett allows Irina to be seen as a young adult who wants to be grown up and allowed to experience work; Irina believes work in Moscow is the only way to fulfill her life. Garrett falling to the floor to playfully look mesmerized by a toy top spinning there also is used to show the younger side of Irina. After experiencing work Garrett's face shows how jaded Irina has become and the discontent of how her life has changed. Garrett plays this beautifully by going the gambit of feelings. Garrett facially reveals the resolution of a loveless marriage she is to accept and the swallowing of work that she now knows will strangle her life away. I would be amiss if I were not to mention James Yeargin who portrayed the character of Solyong, or Luis Barroso who portrayed the character of Doctor Chebutykin, both of whom kept the audience elevated in laughter and intrigue all the while helping Garrett's character to grow. Yeargin used humor to express Solyong's inadequacies, and then overcompensated for them by becoming crass, stomping, and holding an ax to finally change the outcome of Irina's life by a duel. The comedic irony of Chebutykin behaviors allowed Barroso to demonstrate how futile he felt his abilities were by reading newspapers and drinking too much. Within Irina's life Chebutykin accepts her, then just when she needs him most he resolves to leave her behind only to be clasped to her sisters as she tries to hold on to what lingering hope exists within her.

Life in the World of Chekhov:
A Review of "Three Sisters"

Only once before in my life had I seen a work by Anton Chekhov before I went to the Sunday matinee performance of "Three Sisters". The play that I viewed previously was a performance of "Uncle Vanya", and it was not a pleasant experience. After seeing this second Chekhov play, I gather that most of his works consist of lots of character development and very little plot action. Because of this, the actors on stage really have to be energetic and on in order to avoid complete and utter boredom. For me, Vanya was a snoozer. Everything that the actors said was static and fell flat. My second outing with Anton, however, was quite a different experience.

For the most part, every actor in this production of "Three Sisters" did a good job of keeping the play moving. Even in the rare occasion that it did fall flat, it didn't fall very far. There were several actors and characters that caught my eye, but the one that I adored the most was the man who played the family doctor.

As I said in class, his character seemed like the most realistic one to me. Every little motion or mannerism he made seemed like a part of his personality, as if the

director scoured the streets and dragged him onto the stage. He provided small bits of comic relief without being silly, which in the end just made him seem charming. He really showed some complexity when he was required to appear drunk on stage (his character being an alcoholic and all). There was just something heartbreaking about seeing this mostly jovial character break down.

Now, as far as the actual three sisters are concerned, Lisa Picone (the sister named Masha) did the best job in my opinion. For most of the first act she was just sitting on her couch and reading a book while the rest of the cast recited dialogue, but the entire time she was really in the scene. I've heard the phrase that "acting is reacting", and if this is the case then she is truly a great actress. To me, acting really isn't as much about the broad strokes as it is about the tiny details, and she had many. Her facial expressions I found to be particularly effective. She used the raising of her eyebrows to her advantage, and it gave her character a kind of sass that I really think worked.

There was no actor in the ensemble that I really disliked all that much. Like I said, I felt that everyone seemed to really connect with each other on stage. Well, that's a lie. There was this one guy. I think the actor's name was Derrick or something like that. Man, oh man. Talk about a hack. If that guy ever makes it in the acting world, I will be surprised (obviously, I kid).

In all seriousness though, the entire cast brought Chekhov's sometimes-dull situations to life with the way they used the dialogue and interactions with each other. At no time did I find myself bored. Close to hypothermia, yes, but never bored. And, unlike some of my colleagues, I actually *wanted* to know how the play ended. Bravo, I say.

Review of "Three Sisters"

"Three Sisters" was an interesting and well thought out production. The costumes fit the description of the characters and the props used were sufficient to bring light to the play. I noticed all of cues used to cause action and even studied the positioning of objects on the stage. During the play, I had become very intrigued with every aspect from the hair style to the newspaper being read by James's character. The only downside was the play lasted three complete hours and I saw the young lady pouring the leaves of Fall onto the stage...my attention span is very limited. With good spirits and hope, the actors had a grand performance. There were several actors that caught my eye.

Alexander Ignatyevich Vershinin, the man himself...laughs out loud. Derrick was good. I enjoyed having him present on stage and he had to have a leading role. His monologues were good and adding that he had a wife and kids at home gave the play a little flare. However, I think his character was so typical of any soldier or battery commander. He managed to fall in love with Marsha at a very crucial time in his life...I do believe the final kiss was one of the powerful moments in the play. Furthermore, I wonder why he holds his arm by his side all the time when he speaks. I wonder if it was apart of his character or just something to count cues.

I noticed many of the cues when Natalya would come in. It will always be when something bad is about to happen or when there is not a kind thought present on stage. She represented bad taste. I could not believe how much she changed from the first dinner after she met Andrei's family and friends. She really became such a bitch and

hated her after she suggested they sell the house to cover the debt of her husbands gambling addiction. Often we see people like Natalya in our present day life that tries to erase the memories of their past and become new members of the blue-vein society. Ms. Deal performed well, she lived it. It was good to see a sista, working it out on stage. For me, it seemed so typical for her to play a wild, mean, unintelligent, no good character...you tell me. I guess drama is a matter of life and death.

Lately, I have become my susceptible to love stories and things of that nature. Marsha was by far my favorite character. Lisa Picono became apart of her. In the beginning, I loved how she would look at her sister while reading. Saying so much, yet not saying anything at all. She projected better than of the other characters and used the stage as an open field to get all of her emotions out especial when she had a boring professor as a husband. From looking at her, I noticed she was a seasoned actor and really practiced hard for the play. She established herself with purpose. Marsha reminded me of a middle child of a normal family, one who never got a lot attention yet they were the most independent and regretful.

Anfisa should have been regretful for allowing Natalya to speak to her in a rude manner while using derogatory terms. If was Anfisa, I would have had to smack her one time, just to spice it up a little. However, Liz did a good job. It is not easy being a young person trying to act as an eighty year old nanny. It takes mental and physical ability to manage a complex task.

Well, overall the play was worth seeing again. Also, who ever designed the scene backdrop and costumes are awesome. It takes a lot of skill and creativity to produce that

caliber of quality. I look forward to being a season ticket holder at UNO...that will be my alumni contribution to the University of New Orleans.

Three Sisters

I thought overall Three Sisters was a pretty good play with a great deal of talent. I'll start with the actors according to how they are listed in the program. Jared Gore for some reason reminds me of Jack Black. My original thought was that he took an easily boring character and put a spin on it, which made him enjoyable to watch. However, I thought as the play went on he could have had more levels to his character. He seemed to stay this cute, boyish person, who did not grow at all, which in turn ended up boring me. It wasn't clear to me what his objective was. I thought he picked good actions and choices in the beginning, but then I thought he needed stronger choices in the end. I believe he lacked investment from the middle on to the end. He had good volume, but at some points he mumbled, and I couldn't really understand what he was saying. He was not believable to me.

Joyce Deal had a lot of investment, but she did not articulate very well. At some points, I felt she knew she wasn't speaking clearly and tried to overcompensate, which took away from her performance. I thought she had a clear objective. I thought she picked good actions and choices. Her movements at some points looked awkward. I did think she had a good first moment on stage. I thought she had good facial expressions. One thing I have written down is one of her lines, "You should say something." I found

she didn't give a long enough beat to the other character before she said this line, and it made it too rushed and recited. She was believable at points in the play.

Kat Johnston has great articulation. However, I found her performance to be boring. Technically speaking, she has great movement, physicality, blocking, facial expressions, diction, and volume (most of the time). However, I didn't believe her at all, at any point. She has this thing where she tended to do this laugh at the end of every line, which took away from whatever she was saying because it was so bothersome to me that she had obtained this nervous laugh. I thought her voice did not match her physicality. I thought the crying in the beginning was bad. The whole "my head hurts" lines were done poorly. I did not believe her.

Lisa Picone was fabulous (of course). I thought she had fantastic reactions. I even thought her reading the book was just great; she was really involved in whatever she was reading. She would smile at some points while reading and do little things to make it believable. Her diction, volume, investment, and movements were great. I thought her and Derrick Deal put enough tension between them in the beginning to make you wonder about them. I thought she used her "air" well. She would sigh or gasp, and it was made clear as to why she was doing it. I have written down "a person and a half" because I really liked the way she said that. She had great energy throughout. I thought her crying at the end was great, especially when her husband said, "it will go back to normal," and she let out a big burst of tears. I also have written down that I really like the way she said, "I'm so bored, I'm so bored, I'm so bored." She picked very strong, precise choices, which made her objective clear. I believed her.

Chrissy Garrett was also fabulous. She had great reactions, facial expressions, and articulation. Her movements were very precise and fluid. I thought her rant in Act II about "time passing" was excellent and immaculate. She had great volume, investment, and choices. She had a lot of motivation and energy on stage. Her objective was clear. I believed her, and at the same time she was a lot of fun to watch.

Jonathon Mares was alright. In one of his first lines, he said, "years," and it bothered me because the way he said it made it sound like two syllables, instead of one. I thought he was somewhat boring to watch. I thought at the end when Masha talked about her life being a failure, he could have gone further in making the audience feel sorry for him. The way he played it, I felt bad for him for about one minute, and then he went back to being annoying. I thought his character was just not well played. He mumbled some of his lines, but for the most part I could understand him. He had good volume, but his movements were awkward. It seemed like investment was there, but he lacked clear, precise choices. I thought he was for the most part unbelievable.

I thought Derrick Deal was excellent. His articulation, choices, actions, movements, and investment were on point. He was very enjoyable to watch and maintained energy throughout. He was confident and fluid. I liked his laugh. He had great investment and motivation with a clear objective. He was very believable.

Blake Balu was for the most part good. I thought him playing the piano was bad. It looked to over the top to be real. I thought he had good investment and motivation. His volume was pretty good, as well as his articulation. He sometimes looked like he was unsure of his blocking. I thought he could have picked stronger choices and given more levels to his character. He was somewhat believable.

James Ycargain was annoying. I think he could have picked better choices. I found his character to be irritating more than powerful and hateful. I thought at a lot of points he sounded like he was trying too hard to act. However, I believe he had the best line of the play. "If that child were mine, I'd roast it, and eat it." Simply the greatest line I have ever heard. I thought he had a clear objective, but I also thought his objective was stated in given circumstances. His volume and articulation were both good. His movement was okay most of the time. He was, at some points, believable.

Luis Barroso was okay, but he reminded me of the same part he played in "Dinner with the Luminants." Nothing aggravates me more than seeing the same character that I have already seen from a different play. His volume was okay, but he was muffled on some of his lines. His movement was good. When he was not involved in the dialogue, I felt like he would not react to anything going on between the different characters on stage. However, when he was speaking I thought he did well. His objective was not clear to me. He lacked investment and was unbelievable to me.

Joe Seibert and Ryan Bruce were very good. I thought that the energy and pace picked up when they were on stage. They were entertaining without going too over the top. They were articulate and had good projection. Their movements were fluid, and they did a good job working off of each other. Their objectives were clear, and their choices and actions were strong. They were believable. I also enjoyed Ryan playing the guitar; it was interesting to me because it went very well with the dialogue being spoken.

Bradley Troll was humorous at points, but could have made this a much more memorable part. I felt like he did exactly what the script told him to do and didn't go above and beyond. He was mumbling, but had good volume. His movement was good.

He had a clear objective, but lacked investment. He was in need of stronger choices. I thought he was unbelievable. However, I wrote down one of his lines that I thought was terrific and immaculate the way he said it. “.....pancakes...he died.....” I can’t remember what was going on for this line, but I do remember thinking he should have done more of this!

Liz Skinner was pretty good. However, I thought her voice sounded too young to look so old. I thought she had a good pace and good movements. She had great facial expressions and strong actions. Her objective was clear. She had a lot of investment. For having such a small part, I consider her performance to be memorable. She was believable.

Montana was... well, what can I say? He was the highlight of the show. For having no lines, he did very well. He had great reactions and very good, fluid movements. He had a clear objective. I can imagine how hard it must be to use just your body, face, and air to show your objective, actions, and choices, and I thought he did exquisite. He was very believable.

Three Sisters

The focus of this paper will be the three sisters, as it is titled. Olga, the eldest sister, seemed like a very one-dimensional character. From beginning to end, she was stuck in the emotional trap of being frustrated. Her words seemed to be to comfort everyone but instead her actions came across as if she was trying to annoy them. Her outburst of crying when the old doctor and soldier entered was comical because it seemed to have come from nowhere. It was no motivation behind it. Sometimes she also didn't seem to react to the other's responses to her (such as Masha's annoyance with her). In dealing with situations, such as Andrey's gambling or the doctor's drinking, she played the action of to appease, weakening her character, when to reprimand and to confront may have been better choices. Her high moments of anger (as with Natasha's treatment toward the nanny) or fits of crying did not build. The outburst came too suddenly and faded too quickly.

As far as her physicality and vocality, her voice had an unnaturally high pitch without much inflection or variation. When she said she was tired, she did not move in such a manner. Her walk and presence was not that of head mistress and head of the household that she was supposed to be.

The second oldest, Masha, had a very dynamic character. In the beginning of act one, though she had few lines, her unspoken moments were played well. While being engrossed in her book, her posture and facial reactions portrayed well what she was

thinking (such as her annoyance with Olga). Her action to shut out the other sisters was well established without speaking. When the soldier from Moscow, Alexander Ignatyevich enters, her demeanor quickly changes. It seemed as if she played the action of alluring him too soon. (Later when she is in love with him, she says she thought him a bit strange at first, but her previous actions don't suggest as much). Her outburst of crying at his ageing lacked motivation. Her detest for her husband was well invested, but when she concedes to Alexander about her despair with her marriage and disgust for civilians it is not believable. Her physicality doesn't portray vulnerability. When Alexander is doting on her and kissing her hand, she plays the action of enticing him well she suggests there is more light by the couch. Her comedic moments are often unspoken. The choice to cry harder when her husband mentioned going back to life as it was before was very funny. Overall her beat changes were clear and well transitioned throughout the play.

Irina was also a well developed and invested character. She played her moment to moment reactions well. However, I did not believe her in the beginning when she kept saying she was happy. It was as if she was trying to convince herself. Her reactions are conveyed well through her physicality.

One character that really stood out to me besides the sisters was Alexander Ignatyevich. From the moment he entered, he had great energy, which prevailed throughout the play. His presence was very domineering, created by his prominent walk to establish his rank as commander. All of his movements were motivated, creating a captivating presence. He has good comedic timing, (as when he reacts to Irina showing him the picture after he says he can almost picture their father's face, and when he

responds to the frames Andrey made). His actions to evoke pity from Masha about his wife and to enchant her with his love for her are all well conveyed.

Three Sisters Review

Three Sisters was an interesting play, and despite what I originally thought, its considerable length was an asset. The four acts really allowed the actors to reveal their characters' personalities and quirks.

I was first struck by James' character, Solyony. He seemed to always chime in at the wrong time with his awkward, at times tasteless, humor. The way he played the part, you really got the impression that he was oblivious to the fact that he made people uncomfortable. A good example was when he yelled "ROACHES!" as the wine's special ingredient. From his tone, you know he thought this was just the funniest thing in the world.

As the play continued, he awkwardly hovered near one of the sisters, continuing with his questionable outbursts. Only when he confesses his love for her does his real creepiness show through. He himself acknowledges that he's awkward when in groups, but James' portrayal truly shows that he has no idea of the extent, as he truly creeps out the sister. His character is both comic relief and someone to feel sorry for.

I also noticed your part of Vershinin. The first thing that struck me was your body language- walking in formally with one hand behind your back, but at the same time natural and loose. I realized this is how I should have played the servant in my scene. Everything from your accent to the way you kissed the sisters' hands showed this is a high class, respectable character. Perhaps

furthering his status, he stays a bit mysterious and (I feel) doesn't quite show what his true feelings toward Mascha are. Also, you really appeared to live the part, for example when you came in after the fire, you began to sit down on the bed, but Vershinin being such a gentleman, chose to sit on the floor rather than dirty the bed.

All of the soldiers stayed in part, actually. I noticed just before the fourth act when you all were carrying the set pieces, you guys were still in character- doing it in a coordinated manner befitting soldiers.

I also liked Mascha's part. She seemed very believable in her love of Vershinin and her ignoring her own husband. The only thing I thought was bad was where she starts crying in scene I, seemingly without reason, and then just as abruptly stops about 20 seconds later. It seemed very fake and barely related to the actual events going on around her.

Finally, I liked the Professor. He was a good source of comic relief and I liked how he too was somewhat oblivious to the events around him, and was entertained by his adamant stance on unimportant things. As David pointed out in class, his character was always almost yelling, but I thought that suited him, like when he trips over the carpet and demands to know why it's not in storage. That feels like something a naturally loud person would say. Also he was totally in the dark about Mascha and Vershinin, as he seemed to concentrate more on work and his awesome, stiff moustache.

Overall, with the exception of a few out-of-character outbursts, I feel everyone did a good job in living their parts. Like *Small Things*, I feel it has been a useful experience for me.

May 1, 2007

I caught the closing performance of Three Sisters and generally I found that the acting improved as the show went on. Overall I was pleased with the performance of the actors, but there were a few gaps where I felt there was room for improvement.

Chrissy Garrett played the youngest of Andrei's sisters. Early on in the show I had misgivings about her abilities. In the first act she delivered a monologue which I felt she played on one level. However, she really caught me by surprise in the third act. I found Irena's meltdown in the bedroom scene was most believable. I felt she was really in the moment and bought her minute to minute reality.

Lisa Picone played Andrei's sister, Masha. The given circumstances of the character make the role interesting—Picone's portrayal did not. Overall I found she was way too presentational. She seemed incapable of reaching into the emotional depth of the character. In act one her character's crying jag was really fake and unbelievable. Lisa displayed no minute to minute reality. I found her to be a poor reactor--she only brushed against believability when she was allowed to take stage.

Masha's husband was played by Jonathan Mares. I think that his character should have been played more bombastically. His character is spoken about as being annoying and irritating yet we don't get to see it as much as we could have. In the third act the subtlety of his "I am so happy" declarations were too subtle—the subtext could have been played more. I also feel that he should have displayed more urgency when looking for Masha (who was off with her lover) towards the end of the show.

Also lacking in urgency was Jared Gore at the top of his performance. Early on his character, Andrei, explodes—having been pushed too far. I felt that his energy went up appropriately but not his urgency—he came across as loud but not as fed up.

Fine performances were given by Joyce Deal, Kat Johnston, Derrick Deal (who displayed a perfect physical characterization in his role), and a host of supporting players—excepting Ryan Bruce who played his none-the-less entertaining comic relief on the top rather than letting it emerge from the situations his character was in. The worst performance of the day belonged to Liz Skinner who, though hunched over the entire play, at no time convincingly played a woman in her 80's—in contrast to Bradley Troll who hit closer to the mark with his characterization. The best performance was given by Luis Q. Barroso who never faltered for one moment during the entire show. I felt he was absolutely most believable throughout.

The University of New Orleans' production of *The Three Sister* by Anton Checkhov was well done in all aspects. The work “. . . is a naturalistic play about the decay of the privileged class in Russia and the search for meaning in the modern world” (Wikipedia). This particular production was successful in conveying the unending sameness and dissatisfaction that life offers. The use by Checkhov of three sisters permitted the playwright to contrast each sister's state – working versus non-working, married versus single – and to show that each was equally discontented by their circumstances and remained so even as their circumstances altered. Checkhov skillfully used the characters of Vershinin and Tuzenbach as a foil, allowing them to philosophize about the future. Their grand visions and their constant repeating of the justification of present unhappiness for the betterment of future generation served as a spur for the audience to realize that while change in the world is inevitable, the human condition will always remain the same. As for the ending, I would personally have preferred if Masha and Kulygin would have given more indication of a reproach Mont, and if Irina would have realized only after Tuzenbach's death that she loved him. This would have made an excellent culmination to the absurdity of life, but then, Mr. Checkhov didn't need my assistance to write an excellent work.

However, for the remainder of my paper, I will concentrate on the stage, stage design by Tricia Vitrano, and the lighting design by Katie Anderson. The thrust stage used in this

production was well suited to the play. "The thrust stage brings the audience and performers into a more intimate relationship than does the proscenium arch theatre, because more of the audience is closer to the action than is possible in a proscenium theatre of the same size" (Brockett 285). The set worked well as the emotional intensity of Chekhov's play is more intimate and personal than in many dramas. The actors' fervor might well be lost in a more open stage area. By bringing the actors closer to the audience, each character's intensity and despair was more easily transferred from the actors to the audience.

"Scene design *creates a floor plan* that provides opportunities for movement, composition, character interaction, and stage business" (Brockett 361). The stage design for The Three Sisters was equally well placed as Ms. Vitrano's creation kept the small stage segmented as action moved from the forefront to the mid-stage depending on the requirements of each scene in the play. It was well crafted by the stage personnel allowing the audience to view all the players' interaction, and yet to easily conceptualize the transfers of action from the "sitting room" to the "dining room" in the first and second act or the "sitting area" to the "sleeping area" of Olga and Irina's bedroom in Act III. (It should also be noted that the paper Mache trees were excellent.)

The stage lighting also added to the play. As one would expect, down stage was well lit when called for as the largest portion of the play took place there. However, it appeared to me that there was some differentiation between down stage and mid-stage light as well. This combined with the design of the stage achieved the feeling of segmentation between the two areas where no true differentiation existed. In the upstage area, the paper Mache trees and the lighting allowed for the audience to easily assume when appropriate the trees that surrounded the Prozorov residence.

In conclusion, the entire experience was one I did not expect from a college theatre experience. While I was particularly taken with the stage design and lighting, I also found the acting above the caliber of previous university theatre experiences. Additionally, the theme of the play and the emotional range of the actors, particularly all three sisters, was moving. My fellow classmates may be too young to truly comprehend the importance of Checkhov's play. They, lucky for them, are still in the first act of their lives: however, as I am moving from the third act to the finale in mine, the wisdom and the pathos given in the performances served Mr. Checkhov quite well.

Appendix E: Newspaper Clippings

Chekhov at UNO

The melancholy music of Chekhov's dialogue certainly provides contrast to the joys of jazz. David Hoover's excellent, beautifully acted production of **"The Three Sisters"** at the University of New Orleans points up the folly of Chekhov's characters, who would rather live in the past, the future, somewhere else (preferably Moscow), anywhere but in a turn-of-the-century provincial Russian army town.

Tonight-Saturday at 8, Sunday at 2:30 p.m. at the UNO Performing Arts Center, Lakefront campus. Tickets \$12; \$8 students. Call (504) 280-7469.

TimesPicayune Lagniappe section Friday, April 27, 2007

trodding the boards

by Patrick Shannon, III

E-mail: nedcat@earthlink.net

The Three Sisters Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*

was given an elegant and lovely production in a recent showing at the UNO Thrust Theatre Performing Arts Center.

Directed with sensitivity and grace by David W. Hoover, with an evocative set by Tricia Vitrano, sensitive and beautiful lighting by Katie Anderson, as college productions go this was one of the best I have seen. Student actors played their roles with subtlety, and an understanding beyond their years. It was wonderful to see how they had mastered their roles so well wearing the fine period costumes of Tony French in this lyrical drama which examines the lonely and quietly desperate lives of Russian aristocrats who always seem to see the grass as greener on the other side of the fence, longing for something different to happen in their sad apparently empty pedestrian days on a country estate. How the three sisters long to go to the grand city of Moscow.

Among the students who created well defined roles of great tenderness and bewilderment that both mesmerized and moved the heart of the audience were Joyce Deal (Natalya), Chrissy Garrett (Irina), Jared Gore (Andrei), Kat Johnston (Olga), Jonathan Mares (Kulygin), Lisa Picone (Masha), T. Joe Seibert (Fedotik), Blake Balu (Tuzenbach), Ryan Bruce (Rode), Derrick Deal (Vershinin), Josh Simpson (Constantin), Elizabeth Skinner (Anfisa), Bradley Troll (Ferapont), James Yeargain (Solyony), and the incomparable Luis Q. Barroso (Chebutykin).

Vita

Lisa Picone was born December 14, 1970, at Montelepre Hospital, on Canal Street in New Orleans. She graduated Mount Carmel Academy high school in New Orleans in 1988, and received B.A. in Mass Communications in 1993 from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. Upon graduation from LSU, Lisa worked in advertising for about 10 years before she decided to pursue a career in the theatre. In 2002, she officially left the advertising industry and went on a regional tour with a production of *My Way: A Tribute to Frank Sinatra*. In the fall of 2004 Lisa entered the performance program at the University of New Orleans in pursuit of a Master of Fine Arts. Lisa plans to pursue a career in professional acting, teaching and film-related work in the New Orleans area.