

3 Zisters

by

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Chekhov's 3 Sisters, Hugo's Russian Reading Made Easy, and
Andrew MacAndrew's 20th Century Russian Drama

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Prologue

Andrei sits with a cup of tea and a plate of delights in front of him. He happily eats and drinks.

ANDREI

Hello, thank you for joining us for tonight's presentation of Three Sisters. We thought it might be useful to give everyone in the audience a little pre-show introduction to what you are about to see by way of synopsising the original work which we discuss at length called *The Three Sisters*. Picture, if you will, the house of Prosorov. It is 1900 and we are in provincial Russia. Act 1 opens with the three sisters: Olga, the eldest,

He picks up a butter knife.

Irina, the youngest,

He picks up a napkin.

And Masha, the sensitive artist of the family.

He picks up a spoon.

Olga discusses their father's death.

(As the Olga Knife)

Father died on this day, your name's day, Irina.

(As the narrator)

It's Irina's name's day in the play. It's like a birthday for Russians.

(As the Knife Olga)

It makes me sad to think about it and also it makes me want to go back to Moscow!

(As the Spoon Masha)

I'd like to go back to Moscow too!

(As Irina Napkin)

Our brother Andrei will be a professor and he can come to Moscow as well.

(CONTINUED)

(As the narrator)

Three men appear on the scene: Baron
Tusenbach,

He indicates the tomato.

Soleny,

*He picks up the pickle or
cucumber.*

and Chebutikin, the old doctor.

He indicates the samovar.

Tusenbach announces

(As Tomato Tusenbach)

I forgot to tell you that our new battery
commander, Lieutenant Commander Vershinin is
coming to see all of us today.

(As Napkin Irina)

NARRATOR

Soleny often comes up with ideas that aren't
relevant to the conversation.

CUCUMBER SOLENY

I can live four times as much with both hands
as I can with one hand so I conclude that two
men are more than twice as strong as one man,
maybe even three or four times stronger.

NARRATOR

The doctor reads the newspaper as he walks
in.

SAMOVAR CHEBUTIKIN

For hair falling out take two ounces of
naphthaline in half a bottle of alcohol. Oh
hello, Irina, my white Bird.

NAPKIN IRINA

Flapping around like a bird

I'm very happy today and also I think people
should work!

TOMATO TUSENBACH

I think people should work too! I've never
worked!

CUCUMBER SOLENY

We'll all be dead in twenty-five years. In two or three years you'll die of a stroke, or I'll blow your brains out.

NARRATOR

Then Masha starts crying for no reason.

Imitates Masha crying.

Chebutikin's gift, a samovar, is brought on stage. Everyone's upset about it.

NARRATOR

Then Vershinin comes in!

Vershinin's a coffee mug.

MUG VERSHININ

I'm from Moscow and I love to talk!

SPOON MASHA, KNIFE OLGA,
NAPKIN IRINA

We love Moscow!

TOMATO TUSENBACH

I love to talk too!

NARRATOR

The sisters aforementioned brother Andrei shows up!

He's a fork.

The sisters mock him for having a crush on a girl.

SPOON MASHA, KNIFE OLGA,
NAPKIN IRINA

Andrei and Natasha sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G! First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes the baby in the baby carriage!

NARRATOR

Masha's husband shows up!

He looks around and finds a saucer.

SAUCER KULYGIN
Hello, love.

He smooches Spoon Masha.

NARRATOR
Andrei's girlfriend shows up.

He finds a big wooden spoon.
Everyone makes fun of her! She runs away.
Andrei follows her.

FORK ANDREI
Don't listen to them!

WOODEN SPOON NATASHA
Why do they make fun of me?

FORK ANDREI
They're only kidding! I love you!

They kiss!

NARRATOR
Now we know everyone. Onto Act 2. It's about two years later. The setting is the same and it opens on Natasha and Andrei, who are now married and have one child. Since Act one Vershinin and Natasha have begun to have an affair and have fallen in love.

MUG VERSHININ
I love you!

SPOON MASHA
I hate my husband!

MUG VERSHININ
My life is terrible!

NARRATOR
Irina comes home from work and is tired!

NAPKIN IRINA
I'm tired from my job.

NARRATOR

And then Soleny and Tusenbach confess:

TOMATO TUSENBACH, CUCUMBER
SOLENY

We're in love with you, Irina!

NAPKIN IRINA

Do not speak to me about love.

WOODEN SPOON NATASHA

Irina and Olga have to move into the same
room!

NARRATOR

Act 3! Another year has passed.

He lights a match.

There's a fire in the town. The sisters are
mad at Andrei for gambling all of their money
away. They talk about other sister things
too.

SPOON MASHA

I'm in love with Vershinin!

KNIFE OLGA

Everyone already knows!

NAPKIN IRINA

Tusenbach's in love with me, but I don't love
him back.

KNIFE OLGA

You should marry him anyway!

NAPKIN IRINA

Fine. I will. Act 4! The soldiers are all
getting ready to leave and everyone is sad!

CUCUMBER SOLENY

Tusenbach, I challenge you to a duel!

TOMATO TUSENBACH

I accept, but don't tell Irina!

To Irina.

I'm so excited to marry you.

NAPKIN IRINA

It will be fine I guess, but I'll never love you.

NARRATOR

The two duel and Soleny wins.

He crushes the tomato with the cucumber.

But actually, this happens offstage.

*He throws them both offstage.
The napkin cries.*

The soldiers leave.

MUG VERSHININ

I must leave now.

SPOON MASHA

Please don't go.

She cries. He leaves.

KNIFE OLGA

Why are we living with such suffering? If we only knew, if we only knew.

NARRATOR

Curtain.

Scene 1

Soleny enters and greets the crowd. Maybe he even works his way through it shaking hands and introducing himself, generally hanging out. Maybe he smokes or has a drink. At some point someone lets him know it's time to start the show and he becomes very formal and performative. He should wait until everyone is paying attention to him even

if he's waiting for an agonizingly long time.

SOLENY

Anton Chekhov is often regarded as one of the greatest dramatists of the Nineteenth Century. As such, a formal beginning is not only appropriate, but also the least we could do. The play was written a long time ago. Not *this* play, but *this play: The Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov! The play is emblematic of its time and continues to be produced at theatres all over the world, despite the fact that no one understands why everyone is so upset about the samovar. The play, that is *that* play not *this* play presents characters who would never exist now because they could never exist now, but the fact of the matter is they do exist now because people keep putting the play on.

We see a graveyard where the dirt is shredded up pieces of paper. The tombstones are made of pieces of late 19th Century upper crust furniture. The 3 sisters, Masha, Irina, and Olga, are buried. In the graveyard there are cigarette butts (maybe in ashtrays) and empty diet coke cans. There are also a number of objects buried in the paper, invisible to the audience. A clock strikes indicating it is almost twelve. Tusenbach enters carrying shovels and other digging equipment and Soleny leaves his intro spot and joins Tusenbach. Soleny vacillates between talking to himself, the audience, and engaging with the action onstage.

At the time Chekhov's dramas were celebrated both in his native Russia and internationally as being groundbreaking and exciting. People had never seen anything like them before.

TUSENBACH

(To Soleny while entering)

You talk such nonsense. It's exhausting just to listen to you.

SOLENY

Many scholars, both of literature and theatre,

(he should pronounce this
thee-A-tur)

have tried to pinpoint Chekhov's unique ability as a playwright. Within his plays, many have said, you will have a difficult time finding plots or dramatic climaxes, and what little happens, happens off-stage.

TUSENBACH

Just fucking dig.

SOLENY

Many of Chekhov's better known works can be said to exemplify the idea of inaction as plot.

TUSENBACH

I'll plot you.

All three of the sisters are unearthed: first Olga, then Masha, then Irina. They should be especially careful with Masha and make a big deal about her condition. It should surprise them and they need to make a decision about the implications of it.

The sisters are brought out of the ground with great care as though they are invaluable artifacts. Once they are situated comfortably Tusenbach

(CONTINUED)

and Soleny treat them as though they are afraid of touching them. They may even wear gloves when carrying them. The sisters cannot really move yet and it's a struggle for them to even talk at first. They are clearly readjusting to being out of the ground. Speech comes slowly. The men adjust them physically, which seems to push language out of them. These noises can go on as long as is necessary for the men to accomplish whatever physical tasks they need to.

SOLENY

Since action and plot in Chekhov's works take on a new structure so, too, must character.

TUSENBACH

Everyone should work. You should be happy to even have work right now.

SOLENY

Playwriting scholars will sometimes use the phrase "character is action" to express clearly to their students the importance of the desires of the characters and how those desires drive the narrative, or plot, forward.

TUSENBACH

I don't have a problem with you chatting while you work, but then you have to actually keep working.

SOLENY

With Chekhovian characters, then, we can say that the plot is often based around their inaction.

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TUSENBACH

Or at least talk about something even mildly interesting.

SOLENY

Significantly, the desires of the characters still create the plot, even if they don't act on those desires directly.

TUSENBACH

It's always so boring!

SOLENY

To truly understand character in Chekhov's work we must unpack its relationship to Constanin Stanislavski, the director who changed how Chekhov's work was seen by the world, including chekhov himself.

TUSENBACH

Shut up! Shut up! Oh my god, shut up! You're being so fucking boring! How are you even still talking?! You've been talking for so long!

Long pause, while they work in silence.

I'm sorry.

SOLENY

Working on Chekhov's plays forced Stanislavski to grapple with subtext and to subsequently rely heavily on the actors' internal motivations as expressed through small, sometimes imperceptible gestures.

These opening noises for the sisters can go on as long as is necessary or desirable.

IRINA

T-t-t-t-t-t. To. Toooooo.

MASHA

O. Ow. Oh-on. One. Won. One.

OLGA
Fa. Fa. Fa. Ffffff. F.

MASHA
Wah, wah, weeeeeee. Wana.

IRINA
Na. Na, na, na. Me. Na. Me.

MASHA
Hap, hap hap!

OLGA
Di. Die. Di. Dee. Do. Dee.

IRINA
Day. To-day.

(Remembering)
Today is my name's day.

When Olga, Masha, and Irina speak normally Tusenbach and Soleny are startled and react the way one might react if a chair starting walking around.

OLGA
(To Tusenbach and Soleny)
Gentlemen, welcome. As a bit of an introduction I'll tell you that our father died exactly some number of years ago today. It is also coincidentally my younger sister Irina's name day.

MASHA
One day--

Soleny and Tusenbach exit during Masha's line (presumably to get more equipment), cutting her off. When the men leave the sisters act like they're on an Equity break. Irina and Olga should smoke. They can take a moment

to get into this.

OLGA

Did you know that the smell flowers give off is actually their version of screaming?

IRINA

What?

OLGA

When you smell a flower that's been cut down and is sitting in a lovely vase, that beautiful smell you smell is the flower screaming in agonizing pain, trying to tell other flowers that it's in trouble.

MASHA

What about flowers that are still connected to the ground?

OLGA

Like plants that haven't been cut down?

MASHA

Yeah, those flowers smell too. Are they screaming? Is every single flower in the entire world screaming at all times?

OLGA

No, it's like how we use a whisper and a scream for different occasions.

(Pause)

Are they ever coming back? Or did they just dig us up and leave us here? And that's it?

MASHA

I could use a cigarette.

IRINA

You can't smoke, you're pregnant.

MASHA

(Imitating Irina)

You can't smoke, you're pregnant.

(Pause, Irina stares at her.)

Sorry, I'm sorry. I'm just fucking exhausted and I know this time is going to be just like

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

(cont'd)

all of the other times except this time I'm like 20 million weeks pregnant so I'm tired and bulky

IRINA

Calm down.

MASHA

Don't tell me to calm down!

IRINA

Why are you yelling at me? I haven't don't anything to you, I'm just being nice and thinking about your well being and the health of your unborn baby. And it's not like I'm the one who told you to get pregnant. And we're all here together. It's not like your situation is so much worse than mine.

MASHA

Really, Irina? When I lean over I feel like I'm going to throw up baby. Do you have any idea what that feels like?

IRINA

Ew, really?

MASHA

Yes. Do you have any idea what that feels like!?

IRINA

Okay! I'm sorry!

MASHA

It's okay!

(Pause)

I'm sorry I yelled at you. And that I'm apparently crying now for no reason. I'm feeling very emotional!

OLGA

I always get so emotional when we first get dug up. Also you're pregnant.

(CONTINUED)

MASHA

Oh am I? Am I, Olga? Am I really? What was your first fucking clue?

OLGA

Stop yelling at me!

MASHA

You stop yelling at me!

IRINA

Everyone stop yelling at everyone!

OLGA

Fine!

MASHA

Fine!

IRINA

Everything's going to be fine. They'll come back. The one guy seems kind of pretty smart--

OLGA

And the other guy?

IRINA

He barely said anything at all. We don't know anything about him yet.

OLGA

He said enough. And they didn't even speak to us, like we're not even here. Does that seem like an auspicious beginning to you?

IRINA

Not necessarily, but it also doesn't necessarily seem inauspicious either. Maybe they're nervous, maybe they don't know what to do with us, maybe they have instructions specifically not speak to us. We have no idea.

MASHA

My god, my head is killing me.

(Remembering, irate.)

They walked out in the middle of me talking.

OLGA

(To Irina)

You think that they have a boss and that the instructions he gave them were "go dig up the three sisters and make sure you don't talk to them?" That's what you think happened?

IRINA

I'm not saying anything happened, I'm saying that we obviously can't know what happened because they just showed up and haven't said anything to us at all so maybe we should just wait and see instead of worrying that something bad is going to happen and then getting mad about it before it even fucking happens.

MASHA

Do you remember that one time that one guy came and kept just asking us what we wanted and then when we told him he would go, "no, what do you Waaaaaaaaaaaaant? Capital W!"

They all laugh!

Here they come.

Tusenbach and Soleny reenter.

OLGA

Alright, let's start this death to slow music.

IRINA

You don't know it's going to be that.

The men begin stretching the women's bodies out in a very specific way. The stretching results in a distinct shift in the women's movement, which after the exercises should seem more constrained, and ladylike. Irina tries for a formal introduction.

(CONTINUED)

IRINA

Hello. Very good to meet you both.

OLGA

We were just beginning to tell you about our father. I remember it was cold then, when our father died, and it snowed.

MASHA

The snows of yesteryear.

OLGA

Yes, well, I remember thinking that I'd never live through it, it seemed so awful at the time. Irina was so upset that she fainted. But it was some exact number of years ago now so we can reflect on all of it calmly.

A clock strikes again.

Funny, I remember the same clock striking then as it does now. Which seems an odd thing to remember, given that it probably happens every day, consistently, many times throughout the day.

IRINA

There's no point in going over all of that again at the moment, Olga. These men have no interest in hearing the story of father's death.

OLGA

No, you're right. And today it's warm. I only brought it up because I was thinking about how ten years before the some exact number of years ago that father died he received command of a brigade and took us out of Moscow.

With the word "Moscow" all of the lights change. Tusenbach and Soleny react, but the sisters act like it's part of the line.

That was also in the beginning of May I remember that everything in Moscow

(CONTINUED)

Same effect.

was already well in bloom. I remember it as clearly as though it were yesterday. It was warm and everything in the world was covered in sunshine. And this morning I woke up and everything was bathed in sunshine and I was filled with this incredible longing to go back to Moscow.

Moscow effect. All of the sisters wait for the men to respond and they don't. They wait for an absurdly long time before Tusenbach speaks his line.

TUSENBACH

(Yelling, to the sisters)

MY NAME IS TUSENBACH.

The sisters are surprised by his shouting and just stare at him.

HELLO!

IRINA

Is there something wrong?

TUSENBACH

AND THIS IS SOLENY.

IRINA

Why are you shouting at us?

TUSENBACH

YOU MUST BE THE THREE SISTERS.

IRINA

Why is he shouting at us?

SOLENY

(His reply should be directed to the audience, not Irina)

Chekhov's characters, do not speak directly to one another. Rather they reveal themselves through a series of parallel monologues.

TUSENBACH

WE CAME HERE TO UNBURY YOU. WE HAVE READ ALL ABOUT YOU.

SOLENY

Chekhov is a master of understatement.

OLGA

My god, I have a splitting headache.

TUSENBACH

They can't understand me. They said they'd be able to understand us.

SOLENY

He's often been called "the father of psychological realism."

TUSENBACH

What the fuck are you talking about? Can you focus for two fucking minutes? The whole fucking thing falls apart if we can't understand what the fuck it is they're saying!

MASHA

Can you not understand what we're saying? MY NAME IS MASHA.

SOLENY

The lengthy speeches delivered by his characters reflect their hopes and dreams, delusions, and perceived failures.

Tusenbach has absolutely no idea what the women are saying.

TUSENBACH

You sound insane! Help me figure out what the fuck to do!

The sisters look at each other. Masha tries whistling.

OLGA

Really, Masha? Whistling? You think he can't understand my lengthy speech in his mother tongue, but whistling might help? I just said I have a headache. I've got this asshole screaming in my ear.

Masha stops whistling.

SOLENY

Chekhov does not make his points explicitly through the words of his characters.

TUSENBACH

WE ARE VERY PLEASED TO MEET YOU.

OLGA

Oh, for fuck's sake. We can understand you! Stop screaming in my face!

Tusenbach realizes the sisters are trying to communicate.

TUSENBAH

They're trying to communicate with us!

Soleny and all three sisters give him a "you idiot" look.

MAY I HOLD YOUR HAND?

IRINA

Maybe if we yell too?

MASHA

(To Tusenbach)

FUCK! OFF!

SOLENY

When we see how much Chekhov's characters complain, the word we conjure up most readily is obviously not "understated."

TUSENBACH

Begins wildly unpacking the supplies they brought with them, looking for something in particular.

(CONTINUED)

The Book, The Book! Did you remember to pack
The Book?! Come here and help me find it!

Next begins the section that I like to think of "Speech Torture." It's important that while this is agonizing for the sisters they aren't physically restrained during any part of it. They can't leave because, quite simply, they have no where else to go. This section might be a nice place for face conducting, for example. Tusenbach finds the book. Soleny begins reading from it. He has the unpleasant task of narrating Speech Torture.

SOLENY

When we use the term "understated" we obviously aren't referring to the characters themselves, rather we're describing Chekhov's manner of expressing his own point through the oblique veil of the characters' fears and desires.

TUSENBACH

We'll need to civilize them quickly because it's almost time for Lieutenant Commander Vershinin to arrive.

SOLENY

It has frequently been stated, even by people who ought to know better, that Chekhovian acting cannot possibly be acquired from books: but those who make this statement either know nothing of the matter, or have failed through not setting to work on a commonsense plan.

TUSENBACH

We cannot understand you if you don't speak like ladies!

(CONTINUED)

IRINA

What a horrid thing to say.

MASHA

When you talk like that, it somehow makes me laugh, although you actually frighten me. Please don't say it.

TUSENBACH

(Instructing the sisters)

Now, ladies, we must get you all ready for Lieutenant- Commander Vershinin, our battery commander.

SOLENY

(Reading)

To attack Chekhovian speech and acting haphazard is courting failure at the outset. The right way to proceed is: students must first learn to stretch their faces properly. This is only the work of less than a quarter of an hour; and when the student has mastered this, she can at one begin stringing noises into words and then subsequently words into sentences. Only then can she be understood.

MASHA

I don't know. I really don't! Of course, the force of habit is very strong.

OLGA

You must try to understand, my dear--perhaps it's because of our strange upbringing--but I can't stand your attitude. It really gets me down, makes me actually sick.

SOLENY

(Reading)

That is to say, each word, with rare exceptions, always must have a meaning in and unto itself and also be a part of the larger whole.

TUSENBACH

We really do need to get you prepared for Vershinin.

MASHA

Sure, we wouldn't want to appear unkempt for a complete fucking stranger.

OLGA

Do you think there's any chance this new one will be less of a dickhead than these two?

MASHA

I don't know. If he outranks them that might mean something.

IRINA

Is this another old guy like the last one?

TUSENBACH

(To Soleny)

This is all taking longer than I expected. He likes things to be in a certain state when he arrives.

Silence.

SOLENY

The chief point is to cultivate an inwardness and a delicacy. There is no need to broadcast emotions loudly. If you are experiencing them internally then the audience will surely observe them. Another point is to know which syllable takes the stress, and to emphasize that syllable strongly when speaking.

TUSENBACH

Takes the book from Soleny and reads.

(Pointedly to the sisters,
maybe he's even yelling)

Forgot to-tell. To-day by you with visit will-be our new battery commander Vershinin.

The sisters check in with each other and then Irina tries

(CONTINUED)

something.

IRINA

He-is old?

TUSENBACH

Tusenbach is delighted that it is working and the sisters are learning to speak as ladies.

Not very, forty, maybe forty-five at most.
He's apparently very famous, little one.

Irina gives him a look, which he does not notice.

He's not stupid, but talks way too much.

IRINA

She tries again to confirm her hypothesis.

Interesting-man?

TUSENBACH

Oh, interesting enough, I suppose, but he has a wife and a mother-in-law and two daughters. Everywhere he visits he immediately announces that he has a wife and two daughters. He'll do it here too. The wife is somewhat insane: wears her hair in braids, says lofty things, philosophizes, and constantly attempts suicide. I guess just to spite her husband. Or maybe for some legitimate reason that I just don't care to think about. I would have left her a long time ago, but he just stays and complains.

Soleny somehow comes across Andrei. Andrei is extracted from the ground (if he comes out of the ground) with less care than the sisters.

(CONTINUED)

OLGA

Seriously?

The men are delighted to be able to understand them. The women accept the condition of having to speak this way begrudgingly.

To-day it-is-warm, one-may windows keeps wide-open, and birch-trees yet not budded. Father received brigade and went-out with us out-of Moscow

The Moscow effect again.

eleven years ago and, I distinctly recollect, in beginning of-May, there, at this season in Moscow

Moscow.

already all in bloom, it-is-warm, all poured-over with-sun. Eleven years have-passed, and I remember there all, as though we-had-left yesterday.

My god! To-day in-morning I-woke-up, saw mass of-light, saw spring, and joy agitated itself in my soul, it-wanted-itself on-to birthplace passionately.

(Pause)

From-that that I-am every day in college and afterwards give lessons till evening, by me constantly aches head and such thoughts, exactly I already grew-old. And in same affair, for these four years, until I-serve in college, I feel, how out-of me go, every day along drops, and strengths, and youth. And only grows and strengthens the-one dream.....

IRINA

To-go-away to Moscow.

The Moscow effect happens again.

OLGA

Yes! More-quickly to Moscow.

There's that word again.

IRINA

(While looking into a window)

God will-give all will-arrange-itself. Good weather to-day. I not know, from-what by me on soul is-so clear! To-day in-morning I-remembered, that I-am the celebrated-one and suddenly felt joy, and remembered childhood, when still was alive mamma. And what marvelous thoughts agitated me, what thoughts!

OLGA

To-day thou all shinest, thou-seemest extraordinarily pretty. And Masha also is-pretty. Andre would be good, only he filled-out very, this to him not goes. And I grew-old, grew-thin strongly, from-that, it-must be, that am-cross in college, on girls. There to-day, I-am free, I at-home, and by me not aches head, I feel myself younger than yesterday. To-me twenty eight years only...All well, all from God, but to-me seems, if-I should-go-out for-husband, and whole day sat at home, then this would be better.

(Pause)

I should love my-husband.

TUSENBACH

Yes, yes, that's all very interesting. More importantly you're going to be visited by a man you've never met before and have no interest at all in knowing. We must get you all cleaned up and ready to speak and act properly before he arrives.

A violin begins to play.

SOLENY

(As a way of introducing
Andrei)

The gender dynamics in Chekhov's oeuvre, while fascinating, are often problematic and present a challenge for contemporary directors who bring a thoughtful approach feminism and representations of women.

TUSENBACH

A man?

(To the sisters)

Do you know this man?

MASHA

That's Andrei, our brother.

TUSENBACH

I SAID, "DO YOU KNOW THIS MAN?"

IRINA

You have to talk like an asshole or they can't understand you.

MASHA

This is Andrei plays, our brother.

IRINA

Our-brother probably, will-be professor, he all the-same not will-start live here. Only there-is stoppage behind poor Masha.

ANDREI

Hello, sisters. Hello, gentlemen.

MASHA

They can't understand you if you speak normally.

TUSENBACH

Hello, my good man. So glad you could have joined us.

The men immediately understand everything Andrei is saying, Andrei accepts that and goes about cleaning himself up. The

(CONTINUED)

sisters try to follow suit and clean themselves up only to be restrained by Soleny and Tusenbach.

ANDREI

These guys are great.

(To Soleny and Tusenbach)

You guys are great! This party is great!

(Generally)

Where's Natasha?

He starts digging around for Natahsa. Eventually over the course of the next section he locates her rotting corpse, pulls it up and starts fixing it up pretty. For their part Soleny and Tusenbach continue dressing the sisters and then move onto makeup. They should be incredibly skilled at this as though their job in the army requires them to travel to various grave sites, dig up corpses and then fix them up to be in beauty contests. The look should be extravagant.

MASHA

I think we can get dressed, thank you.

Tusenbach doesn't understand.

We ourselves-dress, much courteous.

TUSENBACH

No, no, we couldn't allow that. You must look like classic beauties and I don't think you're capable of doing it right. If you were you would have already done it yourselves.

SOLENY

Putting on Irina's eye makeup.

The three sisters, of course, share the predicament of futility.

(CONTINUED)

IRINA

OUCH!

She tries to punch him in the face, but is restrained. The men are having the time of their lives, the women are in agony.

When I to-day awoke, rose and washed, then to-me suddenly started to-seem, that for me all clear on this world, and I know, how one-must live. Man must labour, work in sweat of face, whoever-he-may-be, and in this alone is contained meaning and aim of-his life, his happiness, his enthusiasms. How well to-be a-workman, who rises hardly light and beats stones on street, or a-shepherd, or a-teacher, who teaches children, or engine-driver on iron way--

TUSENBACH

(Interrupting)

A longing for work, how I understand that! I was just telling Soleny all about it. I've never worked in my life! I was born to a family which knew neither cares, nor hard labor. I remember when I came home from military school a servant pulled my boots off of me. At the time--

IRINA

(Interrupting)

God mine, better to-be an-ox, better to-be simple horse, only should work, than a-young one (woman), who rises at twelve o'clock of-day--

TUSENBACH

(Interrupting)

I behaved like a complete brat while my mother look upon me with reverence and would be astonished when others looked at me otherwise. They sheltered me from labor--

(CONTINUED)

IRINA

(Interrupting)

Afterwards drinks in bed coffee, afterwards two hours dresses...oh how this-is awful! In hot weather thus sometimes one-wants to-drink, as to-me it-wanted--

TUSENBACH

(Interrupting)

But a storm is coming and will blow off all of our societal laziness! I'll work! We'll all work!

Pause.

*Andrei tries to style
Natasha's hair but the whole
thing kind of falls apart.*

(While doing her hair)

So...what do you like?

*Irina stares at him for a long
time, then speaks.*

IRINA

Masha-to-day not in mood. She went-out for-husband eighteen years, when he seemed to-her the cleverest man.

TUSENBACH

What are you thinking about?

*Irina gives me a cold, hard
stare.*

Soleny? He's a strange man. It's sad. When he's in private he acts completely normal, even clever at times. But as soon as gets in front of people he goes completely insane. We have so many years in front of us. So many days for me to love you.

IRINA

(Exploding finally)

Not speak to-me about love!

TUSENBACH

(Not listening, doing her
hair)

I have a passionate thirst for life! I want to struggle and labor and I can feel these things in my soul blending with my love for you.

IRINA

Not speak to-me about love!

(A genuine, desperate attempt
to get him to understand her)

You say: life is-beautiful, By us, three, sisters, life not was yet beautiful. Flow by me tears. This not necessary...To-work necessary. From-that to-us not-cheerful, and look at life so gloomily, because not we-know labour. We were-born from people, despising labour.

TUSENBACH

(Still not listening)

Irina, you're so beautiful and life to me seems beautiful too. What are you thinking about?

OLGA

Father accustomed us to-rise at seven o'clock. Now Irina awakes at seven and, along extreme measure, till nine lies and about something thinks. And face serious!

(Sardonically)

Thou to-day not jolly, Masha.

*Masha, squirming, tries to get
back to her hole in the
ground.*

Where are you going?

MASHA

Home.

She is restrained.

Andrei!

ANDREI
What?

MASHA
Stop it.

IRINA
Andrei, that is disgusting.

ANDREI
You never liked her!

MASHA
That is not what this is about.

ANDREI
She's got just as much a right to be here as any of you.

MASHA
No, this is completely unacceptable. Put her back in the ground.

ANDREI
She's so much nicer now.

OLGA
She's a rotting corpse and she has maggots all over her!

IRINA
You didn't even like her that much when she was alive!

ANDREI
I like her now!

OLGA
Andrei, Put your wife's decomposing body back into the ground and come help us deal with this situation.

Andrei finishes with Natasha and begins to set her rotting corpse next to Masha. He tries to include her in whatever activities are going on. At this point, makes the decision

that he also cannot understand the sisters unless they speak in the Hugo language.

ANDREI

(To Natasha)

My darling, please don't be upset. Don't pay any attention to them at all. They're just joking, I promise you, they don't mean any harm.

OLGA

I know you can understand what I'm saying. Andrei!

ANDREI

(Still to Natasha)

Oh, it's so wonderful! So great to be young! My dear, sweet one, there's no need to be upset.

SOLENY

The sisters equate Moscow and their former lives there with the idea of any possible happiness. Their current situation proves stifling and claustrophobic.

TUSENBACH

(To everyone)

I forgot to tell you: today you will be visited by our new battery commander Vershinin.

MASHA

You've told us that 3 times already!

Tusenbach should be putting the final touches on the women.

TUSENBACH

Vershinin is particular, he likes things to be done a certain way. When he arrives you'll need to behave appropriately: observe causality, cherish your objectives, and everything moves in a line.

(CONTINUED)

OLGA

What the hell are you talking about?

Vershinin enters.

VERSHININ

Hello! I'm very pleased to introduce myself to you! I'm very glad to meet you and be by you at long last. I have a wife and two daughters! Nice to meet you!

OLGA

Tries to go to him and is restrained.

Commander Vershinin, I'm glad you've arrived finally. There seems to be a misunderstanding about--

VERSHININ

(Not listening at all)

How nice, how nice! But, surely, there are three of you sisters?

TUSENBACH

Alexander Vershinin from Moscow.

VERSHININ

I remember--three little girls. I wouldn't have recognized you, but I remember very well that your father Colonel Prozorov, had three little girls. Ah, how time passes!

(to Andrei)

Hello. My name's Vershinin. I've come from Moscow.

ANDREI

I'm Andrei. If you're from Moscow my sisters will not give you any rest at all. You'll have to excuse me, I'm a bit out of sorts from having been buried for so many decades.

VERSHININ

I see you speak English then?

ANDREI

Yes, my father believed firmly in oppression by education.

Both men laugh like this is the funniest joke of all time.

OLGA

Yes, Lieutenant Commander, it's been a long time, but if you do remember us, or our father, please help us now.

Vershinin looks confused for a moment. Tusenbach retrieves the book and hands it to him.

TUSENBACH

You'll need to use this.

VERSHININ

(Reading from the book)

Honour have to-introduce-myself: Vershinin. Very, very glad, that, at-last, I-am by you. How I glad, how I glad!

A moment. The sisters are all disappointed. Irina decides to engage.

IRINA

Seat yourself, please.

They all sit around awkwardly for a moment.

You from Moscow?

VERSHININ

Yes from-there. Your late father was there battery commander, and I in same brigade officer.

(To Masha)

There your face a-little remember, it-seems.

MASHA

Masha is stunned for a moment and then speaks.

(CONTINUED)

And I you not...

She begins to sing and then cry.

OLGA

I understand you, Masha.

ANDREI

(To Natasha)

Nothing to be afraid of, Natasha. Our boy is quite well.

VERSHININ

(To Tusenbach)

Why is she crying?

TUSENBACH

Oh she just does that.

VERSHININ

They were supposed to be ready when I got here.

TUSENBACH

They are ready. Look at their hair. They didn't just come out of the ground looking like that.

VERSHININ

Why aren't they *acting appropriately*?

TUSENBACH

They will. We were just getting warmed up when you got here. Look, try again.

VERSHININ

(To the sisters)

You must be Olga, the oldest...and you're Masha...and you're Irina, the youngest.

OLGA

You from Moscow?

VERSHININ

Yes, I did my studies there and then I was stationed there too. I served in Moscow for a long time before receiving command of this

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

VERSHININ (cont'd)

battery and moving here. I don't remember any of you personally but I remember you as three sisters and, of course, I remember your father very well. All I have to do is close my eyes and he stands there before me as if he were still alive. I used to come to your house in Moscow--

IRINA

You from Moscow. There, unexpectedness!

OLGA

But we there move.

IRINA

We-think, towards autumn already shall-be there. Our own town, we were-born there...

MASHA

Now have remembered! Thou-rememberist, Olga, by us they-said: "amorous major." You were there lieutenant and with somebody were in-love, and you all teased major.

VERSHININ

Yes, yes, that was me.

MASHA

By you were then only moustaches...Oh, how you grown-old!

VERSHININ

Yes, I was young young when they called me that. Now I am old. I have a wife and two daughters!

OLGA

But by you yet not one grey hair. You grew-old, but yet are-not old.

VERSHININ

Well I'm forty-three. How long have you been away from Moscow?

Masha begins to cry.

IRINA

Well, what though, Masha, weepst. Too I shall-weep.

MASHA

I nothing.

ANDREI

(Mourning the loss of Natasha)

My wife is a wife. She's honest and steady, but she's not a real person. Not any more. I'm telling you this as my friend.

VERSHININ

No!

Andrei starts to dress himself in women's clothes and do his own hair and makeup. The other men can understand him to a point and then he crosses the threshold and he must also speak like the women.

(To Andrei)

What are you doing? You can't just take your clothes off for no reason!

(To Irina and Masha)

And, you two, why the fuck are you crying?

(To everyone)

This is Chekhov! You can't just do things for no reason! Everything has to happen because the thing before it happened! It's causality! It's the basis of plot!

Soleny clears his throat as if to speak. Vershinin gives him a look stopping him.

We're just going to a regular fucking thing with regular characters and they'll have objectives and super-objectives and then they'll encounter obstacles and sometimes the obstacles will be external like other people, but sometimes they'll be internal like "the character's own fear" and shit like that.

(To Masha)

You! Try again. Ask me something. Do you understand me? You-ask something of-me.

(CONTINUED)

A moment. Everyone takes a minute to catch up.

MASHA

And in what street you lived?

VERSHININ

In Old Basmannaya.

OLGA

And we there also...Now and I have-remembered you. I-remember.

VERSHININ

I knew your mother.

IRINA

Mama in Moscow buried.

MASHA

Imagine, I already begin to-forget her face. Thus too about us not they-will remember. They'll-forget.

VERSHININ

Yes. They'll forget. Everyone will forget about us some day. That's our destiny and the destiny of all mankind. Everything that seems serious to us, or very important, there will come a time when it will be forgotten, or, will seem not-important.

(Pause)

And another interesting thing to think about is this: there's no way we can possibly know what will count as sublime or important, and what will seem pitifully funny . It may be that our present lives will, with time, seem strange, uncomfortable, may be even sinful.

MASHA

In this town to-know three languages unnecessary luxury. We know much superfluous.

VERSHININ

Is that so! You know too much! Well, for my part, I don't believe there is anywhere in the world that has no use for educated

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

VERSHININ (cont'd)

people! for man it's necessary to have a beautiful life, and if not now then he must wait and prepare himself. He must know and see more than his ancestors. And you complain that you know too much!

MASHA

(Genuinely)

Yes, very simply...This life damned...unbearable...

ANDREI

Well, but it's up to my sisters...this is their house after all.

MASHA

Soon they-will-give. Me they-gave-out for-husband, when to-me was eighteen years, and I of-my husband was-afraid, because he was a-teacher, and I then hardly had-finished-course. He seemed to-me then awfully learned, clever and important. And now already not that, to my-regret.

VERSHININ

Yes, if you listened to any married man, civilian or military, he would say he was tired to death, sick of his house, bored with his estate and exhausted from his horses. To a Russian man lofty thoughts come naturally so why is it that in his home life he doesn't aspire to them?

MASHA

What?

VERSHININ

Why does he get bored with his children and sick of his wife? And why do they get tired of him?

MASHA

You to-day a little not in mood.

VERSHININ

I haven't eaten yet today. Well, breakfast I guess, but no lunch. Plus one of my daughters is sick. Well, not sick, but unwell, I'd say. And whenever that happens I start feeling guilty because they have such a mother. If you would have seen her today! We started fighting at seven this morning and at nine I finally stormed out and slammed the door behind me. I never stop talking about this, but only to you. Don't be angry with me. I have no one, but you. And my wife. And my children. But other than that only you. You're so beautiful and magnificent. It's dark, but I can still see the sparkle in your eyes.

MASHA

There it-is-lighter.

VERSHININ

I love your eyes, and the way you move. I dream about it.

MASHA

When you speak with me so, then I some why laugh, although to-me is-terrible. Not repeat, I-beg you...And to-the-rest, speak, to-me all the-same.

IRINA

How I am-tired.

TUSENBACH

I'll come to the telegraph office and walk you home every day. I'll do it for ten, twenty years as long as you don't physically chase me away I'll continue to harass you.

(Noticing the other women)

Oh hello! How do you do?

IRINA

There-I at-home at-last. I-am-tired.

(CONTINUED)

TUSENBACH

(With a smile)

When you come home from work you look like a
young, unhappy girl.

(CONTINUED)

IRINA

I-am-tired. No, not like telegraph, not like.

TUSENBACH

That comes from your hairstyle.

IRINA

Is-necessary to-see another situation; this-one not for me. Labour without poetry, without thoughts...

VERSHININ

I don't know. I want some tea. I'd give my life for a cup of tea. I haven't eaten anything since morning!

No one moves. The sisters stare at him.

VERSHININ

Well, I guess if there won't be any tea then let's philosophize!

TUSENBACH

About what?

VERSHININ

About what? Let's dream, for instance, about what life will be like in two-hundred or even three-hundred years.

TUSENBACH

What will happen then? Will we fly around on air balloons? Or will they wear interesting jackets? But life will still be the same: difficult, full of mysteries and happy. And in a thousand years man will still sigh and say "it's difficult to live!" And just as now even as he says that he will fear and not want death.

VERSHININ

Nevertheless, it's a pity that youth has passed.

MASHA

By Gogol it-is-said: "is dull to-live on this world, gentlemen!"

VERSHININ

What a wind!

MASHA

Yes, winter wearied me. I already forgot what summer. Happy-is that-one, who not notices summer is-now or winter. But to-me seems, if I were in Moscow so I-should-refer indifferently to weather.

SOLENY

What would have been incompetence in an average playwright was sheer genius in Chekhov. Casualness in the revelation of facts, meticulous indirectness, and extreme simplicity complicated by ambivalent feelings and the ambitiousness of self-deception on the part of the characters help to make the naturalness of Chekhov's "naturalism" poetic rather than literal or ordinary.

The pageant is over. Masha gets first place, Irina second, and Olga third.

The scene immediately changes to a forced wedding. Vershinin gets everyone set up.

Masha marries Vershinin, Irina marries Tusenbach, Soleny tries to marry Irina, but then ends up with Olga.

VERSHININ

Of course! Happiness doesn't exist! We only wish for it!

MASHA

Let-me-alone! Peace from thee there-is-not. Once I bad-tempered, not speak with me. Not touch me!

ANDREI

It's better not to marry anyway because marriage is such a bore.

The other men act confused. Vershinin picks up the book and reads.

VERSHININ

I, brother, to-morrow shall-go-away may-be, never not shall-see-each-ther, so there-is my advice. Put-on cap, take in hands stick and go-away! And go without looking-back. And-- the further shalt-go-away--the better!

ANDREI

Takes a moment to understand what's going on, then replies.

To-marry not necessary. Not necessary, because it-is dull!

VERSHININ

That's true, but loneliness is also a horrible thing!

Soleny tries to hold Irina's hand. She slaps it away.

IRINA

Cease, Soleny!

SOLENY

(Actually trying to engage)

Recently I conducted myself not tactfully. But you are unique, unlike anyone else. You see the truth. You alone can understand me. I love you, I love you deeply.

(Sadly)

While Chekhov often presents a world where characters feel no purpose, they often have strong connections to one another and close personal relationships.

He nurses his rejection and

(CONTINUED)

then turns to Olga.

OLGA

The rapid, widespread and long lasting popularization of "psychologically" oriented plays was due to a number of factors. One, which is of limited relevance to this discussion, is the continued impact of television and film writing on theatrical forms. The other is the focus on psychology in American actor training.

Soleny looks at her. There is a moment. They are in love!

SOLENY

Chekhov often portrays characters with some measure of success as cruel, self-interested and pompous.

OLGA

In large part the American fascination with "psychologically" based actor training has been responsible for the ongoing trend in America theatre to champion journeys based in linear causality and characters dogmatically bound to objectives and obstacles.

SOLENY

At the end of the play we find the three sisters weeping, clinging together (instinctively clinging to their past) and looking, as at the beginning to some brighter future.

OLGA

You keep just making plays about the same thing, they're all about some guy triumphing or not triumphing over some set of circumstances which, for some reason, always take like an excruciatingly long feeling hour to explain. Or about why we should all feel weird about our families, but everyone already knows how to feel weird about their families--that is the one thing that everyone knows! Or they're plays about why Twitter

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

OLGA (cont'd)

sucks or why video games are like reality. Or else they're just the same old plays that everyone's seen a million times, and if you don't like the play then you're an idiot and don't understand the basis of anything and how humans are always the same forever and all time and how are you such a monster?! But they could be so much more than that. You're allowed to do whatever you want. Chekhov did! Wouldn't you like to see a play that makes you feel the same way you do when you smell the inside of your nose or your own spit. Or see one that reminds you of the time you got jealous because your partner fell in love with the person next to him on the plane for four hours, but it happened like ten years before you met him, or the time your mom left you at the pool when you were little and you got home like ten minutes later and she has just realized you were missing and you cried and cried? Don't you want to see a play that feels like how it feels when you break your glasses or right after you throw up or when you hit the wrong button, but somehow the right thing came up anyway?

SOLENY

I would, I really would.

They kiss! They love each other!

VERSHININ

If it weren't for the soldiers the entire town would have burned down. Brave soldiers. Golden people!

TUSENBACH

Dawn is coming.

IRINA

All are-sitting in saloon here, nobody not goes-away. And your Soleny sits...

(CONTINUED)

VERSHININ

Yesterday I heard they want to transfer the entire brigade somewhere far away, maybe Poland. Maybe somewhere else.

TUSENBACH

I heard that too. What then? The entire town will be deserted.

IRINA

No, please, go-away.

MASHA

Baron, go-away from-here.

TUSENBACH

(To Irina)

I look at you now. You're so beautiful. I remember on your name's day you were so happy, talking about the joys of labor.

MASHA

Baron, go-away!

(Pleading)

I-wearied, wearied. And there not goes-out by me from head...I about Andrei. He-mortgaged this house at the-bank, and all the-money took his wife, but house belongs not to-him alone, but to-us four! He must this know, if he honest man.

(Looking at Andrei)

There Andrei, ours brother...All hopes perished. Thousands of-people raised the-bell, spent was much labour and money, and it suddenly fell and broke-itself.

IRINA

(To Tusenbach)

I shall-be thy wife and faithful-one, but of-love there-is-not. I not loved not once in life. By thee uneasy look.

OLGA

Will-be, Masha! Cease dear...Calm-yourself, Masha.

MASHA

I must not cry...

(A change, to anger)

Unsuccessful life...Nothing to-me now not necessary...I soon will-become-quiet. All the-same.

OLGA

Calm-thyself, Masha Let-us-go into the-room.

MASHA

Not shall-go I thither. I into house already not go and not shall-go.

IRINA

(To Andrei)

You became so cruel, Andrei.

(To her sisters, a switch)

Come, let-us-sit together. But to-morrow I go-away. Throw me out! Throw me out! I can't stand this any more! Where has it all gone?! I've forgotten everything, I'm going fucking insane! I can't remember the Italian word for "window" or for "ceiling" and it didn't used to be like this or maybe it always was and we didn't notice, but I keep forgetting everything so I can't even tell any more and we're never actually going back to fucking MOSCOW!

OLGA

(Trying to calm her)

My dear sister--

IRINA

No! FUCK THIS! I am twenty four fucking years old and I am an adult human animal. And I have been dead for some specific but indeterminate amount of time and I've seen a lot of stupid side shows come through here and I've had enough!

OLGA

Don't cry, Irina.

IRINA

I'm not crying! Masha is crying! Stop crying, Masha! I know you're pregnant, but stop crying! This has gone too far and I'm watching my beautiful life go further and further away and I'm fucking sick of it!

(To the men)

My sister is pregnant! And we are all people and we are tired and we just want to do our own thing so pack up this insane fucking circus and leave us the fuck alone! I am fucking tired of being dug up and trotted around like a doll! Hasn't anyone have any new fucking ideas for the last two hundred years or is that just too much to ask for? The only thing anyone can think to do is the same thing that everyone has already agreed is good?! That can't be true! And I know you can fucking understand what I'm saying! I know you can hear me! I know you can understand what I'm saying! You want to act like you can't understand me and interrupt me all of the time? Well understand this!!!

The sisters all have a real good old fashioned freak out. They attack the men with the exception of Andrei in the most cartoonish way possible and kill them. If at all possible, huge mallets should be involved. Andrei stays in his clothes with hair and makeup done and avoids the fighting, but is also not made a victim. Olga's relationship with Soleny's death should be sad and complicated as they truly were in love.

SOLENY

(Dying words)

The exhaustion many of his characters face contributes to what some have termed his

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(cont'd)

"cruel audacity" because he refuses to grant a happy ending to anyone.

After it's all over they calm down, take their hair down, and take their make up off. They change their clothes to be their original outfits.

Then, exhausted, they get back into their opening positions. Olga and Irina light cigarettes.

ANDREI

I didn't say a thing. Oh, I was just thinking of something...and then, what else is there to say?

Olga offers him a cigarette. He takes it and lights it.

MASHA

Oh.

OLGA

What?

MASHA

There's music playing. They're all gone now. We'll wait forever. We'll start over again. We'll start our lives over again.

IRINA

It's fall now, but winter's coming again. I was just wondering, do you think we'll ever know why they keep making us do this again and again?

OLGA

The music sounds so lovely. And I only just want to live happily. Time will just keep passing, and one day we'll all go away forever. And all of these horrible things...well, never mind.

(CONTINUED)

IRINA

Tomorrow I'll finally leave and go away by
myself.

MASHA

It's always the same.

*The sisters stand and then
position themselves for the
beginning of the play.*

END OF PLAY