

Uncle Vanya
by Anton Chekov

A WORKMAN, MICHAEL ASTROFF, SONIA, HELENA, IVAN (VANYA) VOITSKI

WORKMAN: Is the doctor here? *[To ASTROFF]* Excuse me, sir, but I have been sent to fetch you.

ASTROFF: Where are you from?

WORKMAN: The factory.

ASTROFF: *[Annoyed]* Thank you. There is nothing for it, then, but to go. *[Looking around him for his cap]* Damn it, this is annoying!

SONIA: Yes, it is too bad, really. You must come back to dinner from the factory.

ASTROFF: No, I won't be able to do that. It will be too late. Now where, where-- *[To the WORKMAN]* Look here, my man, get me a glass of vodka, will you? *[The WORKMAN goes out]* Where--where-- *[Finds his cap]* One of the characters in Ostroff's plays is a man with a long moustache and short wits, like me. However, let me bid you good-bye, ladies and gentlemen. *[To HELENA]* I should be really delighted if you would come to see me some day with Miss Sonia. My estate is small, but if you are interested in such things I should like to show you a nursery and seed-bed whose like you will not find within a thousand miles of here. My place is surrounded by government forests. The forester is old and always ailing, so I superintend almost all the work myself.

HELENA: I have always heard that you were very fond of the woods. Of course one can do a great deal of good by helping to preserve them, but does not that work interfere with your real calling?

ASTROFF: God alone knows what a man's real calling is.

HELENA: And do you find it interesting?

ASTROFF: Yes, very.

VOITSKI: [*Sarcastically*] Oh, extremely!

HELENA: You are still young, not over thirty-six or seven, I should say, and I suspect that the woods do not interest you as much as you say they do. I should think you would find them monotonous.

SONIA: No, the work is thrilling. Dr. Astroff watches over the old woods and sets out new plantations every year, and he has already received a diploma and a bronze medal. If you will listen to what he can tell you, you will agree with him entirely. He says that forests are the ornaments of the earth, that they teach mankind to understand beauty and attune his mind to lofty sentiments. Forests temper a stern climate, and in countries where the climate is milder, less strength is wasted in the battle with nature, and the people are kind and gentle. The inhabitants of such countries are handsome, tractable, sensitive, graceful in speech and gesture. Their philosophy is joyous, art and science blossom among them, their treatment of women is full of exquisite nobility---

VOITSKI: [*Laughing*] Bravo! Bravo! All that is very pretty, but it is also unconvincing. So, my friend [*To ASTROFF*] you must let me go on burning firewood in my stoves and building my sheds of planks.

ASTROFF: You can burn peat in your stoves and build your sheds of stone. Oh, I don't object, of course, to cutting wood from necessity, but why destroy the forests? The woods of Russia are trembling under the blows of the axe. Millions of trees have perished. The homes of the wild animals and birds have been desolated; the rivers are shrinking, and many beautiful landscapes are gone

forever. And why? Because men are too lazy and stupid to stoop down and pick up their fuel from the ground. *[To HELENA]* Am I not right, Madame? Who but a stupid barbarian could burn so much beauty in his stove and destroy that which he cannot make? Man is endowed with reason and the power to create, so that he may increase that which has been given him, but until now he has not created, but demolished. The forests are disappearing, the rivers are running dry, the game is exterminated, the climate is spoiled, and the earth becomes poorer and uglier every day. *[To VOITSKI]* I read irony in your eye; you do not take what I am saying seriously, and--and -- after all, it may very well be nonsense. But when I pass peasant-forests that I have preserved from the axe, or hear the rustling of the young plantations set out with my own hands, I feel as if I had had some small share in improving the climate, and that if mankind is happy a thousand years from now I will have been a little bit responsible for their happiness. When I plant a little birch tree and then see it budding into young green and swaying in the wind, my heart swells with pride and I--*[Sees the WORKMAN, who is bringing him a glass of vodka on a tray]* however--*[He drinks]* I must be off. Probably it is all nonsense, anyway. Good-bye.

He goes toward the house. SONIA takes his arm and goes with him.

SONIA: When are you coming to see us again?

ASTROFF: I can't say.

SONIA: In a month?

ASTROFF and SONIA go into the house.

HELENA: You have behaved shockingly again. Ivan, what sense was there in teasing your mother and talking about perpetuum-mobile?_ And at breakfast you quarrelled

with Alexander again. Really, your behaviour is too petty.

VOITSKI: But if I hate him?

HELENA: You hate Alexander without reason; he is like every one else, and no worse than you are.

VOITSKI: If you could only see your face, your gestures! Oh, how tedious your life must be.

HELENA: It is tedious, yes, and dreary! You all abuse my husband and look on me with compassion; you think, "Poor woman, she is married to an old man." How well I understand your compassion! As Astroff said just now, see how you thoughtlessly destroy the forests, so that there will soon be none left. So you also destroy mankind, and soon fidelity and purity and self-sacrifice will have vanished with the woods. Why cannot you look calmly at a woman unless she is yours? Because, the doctor was right, you are all possessed by a devil of destruction; you have no mercy on the woods or the birds or on women or on one another.

VOITSKI: I don't like your philosophy.

HELENA: That doctor has a sensitive, weary face—an interesting face. Sonia evidently likes him, and she is in love with him, and I can understand it. This is the third time he has been here since I have come, and I have not had a real talk with him yet or made much of him. He thinks I am disagreeable. Do you know, Ivan, the reason you and I are such friends? I think it is because we are both lonely and unfortunate. Yes, unfortunate. Don't look at me in that way, I don't like it.

VOITSKI: How can I look at you otherwise when I love you? You are my joy, my life, and my youth. I know that my chances of being loved in return are infinitely small, do

not exist, but I ask nothing of you. Only let me look at you, listen to your voice--

HELENA: Hush, some one will overhear you.

[They go toward the house.]

VOITSKI: *[Following her]* Let me speak to you of my love, do not drive me away, and this alone will be my greatest happiness!

HELENA: Ah! This is agony!