

“UNCLE VANYA”

SONYA

(Knocking at door.)

Mikhail Lvovich! You aren't asleep, are you? May I see you for a minute?

ASTROV

(Through the door.)

At once!

(A moment later comes in, with his tie and waistcoat on.)

What can I do for you?

SONYA

You can drink, if it doesn't disgust you, but, I implore you, don't let my Uncle drink.  
It's bad for him.

ASTROV

Very well. We won't drink anymore. I was just leaving. Signed and sealed. It'll be  
daylight by the time the horses are harnessed.

SONYA

It's raining. Wait till morning.

ASTROV

The storm is passing us by, we'll just get the fringe of it. I'm going. And please, don't  
ask me again to see your father. I tell him it's gout—he says it's rheumatism; I ask  
him to stay in bed—he sits up in a chair. And today he wouldn't even speak to me.

SONYA

He's spoiled. Won't you have a bite to eat?

ASTROV

Yes, perhaps.

SONYA

I like having a snack at night. I think there's something in the sideboard. In his time,  
they say, he was a great success with women, and they spoiled him. Here, have  
some cheese.

ASTROV

I've had nothing to eat all day, only drink. Your father has a difficult character.  
(Takes a bottle out of sideboard.) May I? (Drinks.) There's no one here, so I can  
speak frankly. You know, I don't think I could live in this house a month—I'd  
suffocate in this atmosphere...Your father, completely absorbed in his gout and his  
books, Uncle Vanya with his despression, your grandmother, and, to top it all off,  
your stepmother.

SONYA

What about my stepmother?

ASTROV

Everything ought to be beautiful in a human being: face, dress, soul, and thoughts. She is beautiful, there's no denying it, but...you know, she does nothing but eat, sleep, walk about, and bewitch us all with her beauty—and that's all. She has no duties, other people work for her...Isn't that so? An idle life cannot be pure. However, perhaps I am too hard on her. Like your Uncle Vanya, I am dissatisfied with life, and we're both becoming grumblers.

SONYA

Are you really dissatisfied with life?

ASTROV

On the whole, I love life, but our narrow, provincial, Russian life...I cannot endure. I despise it with all the strength of my soul. As for my own personal life, God knows there's absolutely nothing good in it. You know, when you walk through a forest on a dark night, if you see a small light gleaming in the distance, you don't notice your fatigue, the darkness, the thorny branches lashing your face....I work harder than anyone in the district—you know that—and fate is continually battering me, there are times when I suffer unbearably, but for me there is no small light in the distance. I look forward to nothing. I don't like people...It's been a long time since I've loved anyone.

SONYA

No one?

ASTROV

No one. I have a certain tenderness for your nurse—in memory of old times. The peasants are all alike, undeveloped, living in squalor; and it's too hard to get along with the intelligentsia—they tire you out. All of them, all our good friends here, think and feel in a small way, they see no farther up their noses: to put it bluntly: they're stupid. And those who are more intelligent and more out-standing, are hysterical, eaten up with analysis and introspection... They whine, they're full of hatred and morbid slander; they sidle up to a man, look at him out of the corners of their eyes, and conclude: "Oh, that one's a psychopath!" Or, "That one's a windbag!" And when they don't know what label to stick to my forehead, they say, "He's a strange one, very strange." I love forests. That's strange; I don't eat meat. That's also strange. There's no longer any spontaneous, pure, free attitude to nature or to people...None, none!  
(He is about to drink.)

SONYA

No, please, I beg you, don't drink anymore.

ASTROV  
Why not?

SONYA

It's so unlike you! You are refined, you have such a gentle voice...And more than that, unlike everyone else I know, you are a beautiful person. So why do you want to be like ordinary people who drink and play cards? Oh, don't do it, I implore you!

You always say people don't create, but merely destroy that has been given them from above. Then why, why are you destroying yourself? You musn't, you musn't! I entreat you! I implore you!

ASTROV  
(Holds out his hand to hers.)  
I won't drink anymore.

SONYA  
Give me your word.

ASTROV  
Word of honor.

SONYA  
(Presses his hand warmly.)  
Thank you!

ASTROV  
Basta! I've coming to my senses. You see, I'm quite sober now, and I'll stay like this to the end of my days. (Looks at his watch.)  
Well, let's go on: as I was saying, my time has passed, it's too late for me now...I've become old, overworked, vulgar, and all my feelings are blunted, and I don't think I could become attached to anyone. I don't love anyone and...now I never shall.  
What still captivates me is beauty. I am not indifferent to that. I believe, for instance, that if she wanted to, Elena Andreyevna could turn my head in one day...But that's not love, of course, that's not affection...  
(He puts his hands over his eyes and shudders.)

SONYA  
What's the matter?

ASTROV  
Nothing...In Lent one of my patients died under chloroform.

SONYA

It's time you forget about that. Tell me, Mikhail Lvovich...if I had a friend, or a younger sister, and you found out that she...well, let us say...loved you, how would you feel about it?

ASTROV

(Shrugs his shoulders.)

I don't know. I probably wouldn't feel anything. I should give her to understand I couldn't love her...and that my mind is occupied with other things. However, if I'm going, I'd better go. I'll say good-bye, my dear, or we'll go on talking till morning.

(Shakes her hand.)

I'll go through the drawing room, if I may, otherwise I'm afraid your uncle may detain me.

(He goes out.)

SONYA

(Alone.)

He didn't say anything to me...His heart and soul are still hidden from me...But why do I feel so happy? (Laughs for joy.) I said to him: you are refined, noble, and you have such a gentle voice..I wonder if that was out of place? His voice vibrates and caresses....I can still feel it in the air. When I said to him, about a younger sister, he didn't understand...(Wringing her hands) Oh, how dreadful it is that I am not beautiful! How dreadful! And I know I am not beautiful I know it, I know it!...Last Sunday, coming out of church, I heard them talking about me, and one woman said: "She's so kind and unselfish, but it's a pity she's so plain.." So plain...