

UNCLE VANYA

BY
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TRANSLATED BY
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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

UNCLE VANYA
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The world premiere of UNCLE VANYA was produced by Steppenwolf Theatre Company (Martha Lavey, Artistic Director; Michael Gennaro, Managing Director) in Chicago, Illinois, on June 14, 2001. It was directed by Sheldon Patinkin; the scenic design was by Joey Wade; the costume design was by Kristine Knanishu; the lighting design was by Jaymi Lee Smith; the sound design and original music were by Joe Cerqua; the dramaturg was Matthew Eliseo; and the stage manager was Michele A. Kay. The cast was as follows:

MARINA Rondi Reed
ASTROV Jeff Perry
VOINITSKY (UNCLE VANYA) Austin Pendleton
SEREBRYAKOV Robert Breuler
YELENA Sally Murphy
SONYA Monica Payne
TELEGIN Kirk Anderson
MARYA VASSILEVNA Ann Wakefield
YEFIM Erick Jacobson

CHARACTERS

MARINA, an old peasant woman, Sonya's nanny

ASTROV, a country doctor

VOINITSKY (UNCLE VANYA), a country gentleman

SEREBRYAKOV, a retired professor of art

YELENA, his wife

SONYA, Serebryakov's daughter from a first marriage, Vanya's niece

TELEGIN (WAFFLES), their neighbor

MARYA VASSILEVNA, Vanya's mother and Sonya's grandmother

YEFIM, a farmhand

A WORKMAN

PLACE

The action takes place on the Serebryakov estate.

UNCLE VANYA

ACT ONE

A garden. A table is set for tea. It is three o'clock in the afternoon. It is overcast. Onstage are Marina and Astrov.

MARINA. (*Pouring a cup of tea.*) Have something, dear heart.

ASTROV. (*Not taking the cup.*) Don't feel like anything.

MARINA. Maybe a thimbleful of vodka?

ASTROV. No. I don't drink vodka every day. Besides, it's too muggy. (*Pause.*) Nanny, how long have we known each other?

MARINA. How long? Lord help me recall... You came here, to these parts... When was that?... Sonya's mother, dear Vera, was still with us. You were with us two winters before she passed... That would make it around eleven years gone by. Even more, maybe.

ASTROV. Have I changed much since then?

MARINA. Oh, yes. You were young then, and handsome. You've gotten older. And your looks aren't what they used to be. And I might add, you drink now.

ASTROV. Yes... Ten years, and I've become a different person. How did it happen? Work my fingers to the bone, Nanny. From morning till night, I'm on my feet, I know no peace, and at night, I lay under the covers, I'm scared that they'll drag me out of bed to some other sick man. In the whole time we've known each other, I haven't had one day off. How could you help but get old? Yes, life itself is boring and stupid and filthy. It tears you apart, this life. Surrounded by "eccentrics," knee-deep in eccentrics; after a couple of years, you notice that slowly, imperceptibly, you're turning into one of them. A forgone conclusion. Look at this gigantic moustache I've grown. Stupid moustache. I've become an eccentric, Nanny. I've gotten dumber, although I'm not a complete idiot yet, thank

God, my brains are still where they should be, but my feelings have...deadened. I don't want anything, I don't need anything, I don't love anyone... Except you. I still love you. You know, when I was a little boy, I had a nanny just like you.

MARINA. Have a little something, won't you?

ASTROV. No. During Lent, the third week, I went to Malitskoye. Epidemic there. Typhus raging. In their shacks, people were crammed together side by side... Filth, stink, smoke, a calf on the floor there, next to the sick... Piglets, too... I worked there the entire day, never sat down, nothing to eat, nothing to drink. I came home, didn't even catch my breath when they bring me this railroad switchman. Lay him on the table, so that I can operate on him, and he up and dies on me under chloroform. Then, just when I don't need them, my feelings come rushing back, and then my conscience chimes in, telling me that I killed that man. I sat down, closed my eyes—and I start thinking: What will they think of us, in a hundred, two hundred years, those who come after us, who we're clearing the road for today, will they have anything good to say about us? Nanny, will they even remember us?

MARINA. People might not remember us, just so long as God does.

ASTROV. Thank you. That was well put. (*Voinitsky [Uncle Vanya] comes out of the house. He has fallen asleep after breakfast.*)

VANYA. Yes... (*Pause.*) ... Yes...

ASTROV. Nice nap?

VANYA. Yes... Very. (*Yawns.*) Since the professor and his "spouse" have come to live with us, it's as if we've all run off the rails... I fall asleep at odd hours, eat strange "delicacies" for breakfast and lunch, I drink wine! It's not healthy, none of it! Before, we never had a free moment, Sonya and I, worked all the time, and now, well Sonya is still working. Me, I sleep, eat, drink... Not good at all!

MARINA. Such a state! The professor doesn't get out of bed till noon, and the kettle is boiling all morning. Everything waits on him. Before they came, we ate lunch at one o'clock, like good, Christian people everywhere. Now, lunch is at seven at night! All night long, he's reading and writing, then he rings the bell around two in the morning... What is it, dear heart? He wants tea! Wake everybody up for him, put the kettle on... Such a state!

ASTROV. Are they here for long?

VANYA. About a hundred years. The professor has decided to move his headquarters here.

MARINA. Just look now. The tea's been ready for over two hours, and they all go off for a walk.

VANYA. Here they come, here they come... Don't upset yourself. (*Voices heard off. From the heart of the garden, returning from their stroll, are Serebryakov, Yelena, Sonya, and Telegin.*)

SEREBRYAKOV. Beautiful, just beautiful... Spectacular view.

TELEGIN. Remarkable, Your Honor.

SONYA. Tomorrow, we're going to the tree nursery, Papa. Would you like that?

VANYA. Tea is served, ladies and gentlemen.

SEREBRYAKOV. My friends, would you be so kind as to bring my tea into the study? There are several things which need my attention today.

SONYA. I'm sure you would love the tree nursery... (*Yelena, Serebryakov, and Sonya exit into the house. Telegin sits at the table next to Marina.*)

VANYA. It's hot, it's muggy, and this great, learned man is wearing his overcoat, his galoshes, his gloves, and carrying an umbrella.

ASTROV. It pays to take precautions, I suppose.

VANYA. But isn't she beautiful! Isn't she? So beautiful! I have never in all my life seen such a beautiful woman.

TELEGIN. Whether I am wandering the fields, Nanny, or strolling in a shady garden, or simply looking at this table, I feel inexplicably blessed! The weather is perfect, the birds are singing, we are living, all of us, in peace and harmony—what more could we ask? (*Taking a cup of tea.*) Thank you so very, very much!

VANYA. Her eyes... A miraculous woman!

ASTROV. Tell us something new, Vanya.

VANYA. What would you like to hear?

ASTROV. Anything, anything but this.

VANYA. But there is nothing else. Nothing new. Everything else is old. Like before. I myself have gotten worse, gotten lazy, don't do anything except grumble, like some old crackpot. And my old "hen," Maman, keeps cackling on about the emancipation of women. She's got one eye on the grave, but the other is still searching for the dawn of a new life in those intellectual booklets of hers.

ASTROV. And the professor?

VANYA. And the professor sits at his desk, in his study, from

morning to the middle of the night, scribbling away like always!

“Straining his mind, he furrows his brow,
And composes his odes through the night.
But the public won’t praise him. He cannot see how,
No one reads a word that he writes.”

The poor paper! He’d be better off starting his memoirs. Now there’s a fascinating subject! The discarded academic, don’t you know, that dried-up old turd, that Caspian cockroach! His gout, his rheumatism, his migraines—all of his envy and his jealousy have distended his liver! That old cockroach is only still alive because of my sister. He lives without a care, in town, with his hands in somebody else’s pockets. He complains incessantly about his misfortunes, but in reality, he’s unbelievably lucky. You cannot believe how lucky he is! The son of a simple sexton, a seminarian, muscles his way through academia to become chair of his department. Becomes “Your Honor,” because his father-in-law, my father, was a senator and so on and so forth. It’s all meaningless, by the way, because here’s the really important thing: This man has been reading and writing about art for exactly twenty-five years now, and do you know, that he knows precisely *nothing* about the subject! For twenty-five years, he’s been spewing out other peoples’ thoughts about realism, naturalism, and other such nonsense; twenty-five years of reading and writing about a subject which intelligent men already understood a long time ago, and that idiots couldn’t care less about! In other words, twenty-five years of spilling his seed on the hard, dry ground. And in all that time, he’s been so self-important, so pretentious. He leaves his position at the university, and not a single soul remembers him, he’s a complete unknown. For twenty-five years, it turns out he was simply taking up space. But look at him now, he moves among us like a demigod! ASTROV. Sounds to me like you envy him.

VANYA. Of course I do! Look at his success with women! Don Juan never had it so good! His first wife, my beautiful sister, a gentle soul, pure as a clear blue sky, generous, sweet-natured, had more suitors than he had students. How she loved him. She loved him like an angel, pure and simple. My own mother, his mother-in-law, still worships him, and he fills her with holy terror. His second wife, smart, lovely—you just saw her—married him, and he was already old! She’s given him her youth, her beauty, her freedom, her light. For what? Why?

ASTROV. She’s faithful to him?

VANYA. Unfortunately, yes.

ASTROV. Unfortunately?

VANYA. Yes, because her faithfulness is false, from beginning to end. She has plenty of rhetoric, but there's no logic in it! To betray that old man, whom you can barely tolerate—that's immoral. But to strangle your poor youth and your living feelings—isn't that immoral, too?

TELEGIN. Vanya, I hate what you are saying. It's, well, it's not right... To deceive your wife or your husband, that's just, well, such a man could deceive his people and his homeland, too!

VANYA. You can turn off the waterworks, Waffles.

TELEGIN. Let me speak, Vanya. My wife ran out on me the day after our wedding with her lover on account of my unsightly appearance. Still, in spite of all that, I would not break my vows to her. I love her to this day and have always been faithful to her, I help her as I can, I have given over much of my estate for the education of her children, whom she produced with her lover. I have been deprived of my own happiness, but I still have my pride. And her? Her youth has passed by, her looks have faded, according to the laws of nature, and her lover has passed away. What does she have left? (*Enter Sonya and Yelena, followed a moment later by Marya Vassilevna with a book. Marya Vassilevna sits and reads. She is given tea, and drinks it without looking.*)

SONYA. (*To Marina.*) Nanny, some peasants have come to the kitchen door. Go find out what they want, I need some tea... (*Marina exits.*)

ASTROV. (*To Yelena.*) I've come to examine your husband. You wrote that he was very sick, rheumatism and something else, but he seems to have recovered.

YELENA. Yesterday evening he was depressed, complaining about the pain in his legs, and today, it's nothing...

ASTROV. And I nearly broke my neck, galloping the whole way here. Well, who cares, it isn't the first time. In any case, I'll be staying until tomorrow, so at least I can get some sleep, quantum satis.

SONYA. That's wonderful. You don't get to spend the night very often. You haven't eaten yet, have you?

ASTROV. No, my dear, I haven't.

SONYA. Well, you can eat with us. We eat lunch these days around seven. (*Drinks.*) Ugh, cold tea!

TELEGIN. The temperature of the water has fallen quite significantly.

UNCLE VANYA

by Anton Chekhov
translated by Curt Columbus

6M, 4W (doubling, flexible casting)

A comic drama about summer love. When a retired professor and his beautiful young second wife arrive at their remote family estate to settle down, they disrupt the quiet farm life with their city ways. Against a late-summer country landscape, the inhabitants of the house quickly discover new passions and revisit old loves. In this new translation, Chekhov's comedy conjures the lifelong contemplation of what is and what might have been.

"...the dialogue flows, and it never recalls the stilted Victorian English of so many older translations... Columbus's choices achieve the desired effect of translation: a sense of transparency. Columbus's words never get in the way of Chekhov's drama..."

—Chicago Reader

"Curt Columbus's excellent, deft translation retains the dark comedy and flavor of Chekhov, while making it easily accessible to modern audiences. In spite of its dusky contemplation of the human condition, this UNCLE VANYA is enormously entertaining..."

—Windy City Times

"...[an] accessible and unfussy translation..."

—Chicago Tribune

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