

# THREE SISTERS

BY ANTON CHEKHOV

TRANSLATED BY  
CURT COLUMBUS



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PLAY SERVICE  
INC.

THREE SISTERS  
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Originally produced by the Arden Theatre Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,  
Terrence J. Nolen, Producing Artistic Director; Amy Murphy, Managing Director.

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THREE SISTERS will be produced by the Arden Theatre Company (Terrence J. Nolen, Producing Artistic Director; Amy Murphy, Managing Director) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on March 26, 2014. It will be directed by Terrence J. Nolen; the scenic design will be by Eugene Lee; the costume design will be by Olivera Gajic; the sound design will be by Jorge Cousineau; the composer will be James Sugg; and the stage manager will be Alec E. Ferrell. The cast will be as follows:

ANDRE PROZOROV .....	Luigi Sottile
NATASHA .....	Rebecca Gibel
OLGA PROZOROV .....	Sarah Sanford
MASHA PROZOROV .....	Susannah Flood
IRINA PROZOROV .....	Mary Tuomanen
FYODOR KULYGIN .....	Charlie Thurston
LT. COL. ALEXANDER VERSHININ .....	Ian Merrill Peakes
STAFF CAPT. VASSILY SOLYONY .....	Sam Henderson
DR. IVAN CHEBUTIKIN .....	Scott Greer
2 <sup>ND</sup> LT. ALEXI FEDOTIK .....	Jake Blouch
2 <sup>ND</sup> LT. VLADIMIR RODÉ .....	Kash Goins
FERAPONT .....	Lou Lippa
ANFISA .....	Cathy Simpson
BARON NIKOLAI .....	James Ijames

## CHARACTERS

ANDRE PROZOROV

NATASHA, his fiancée, later his wife

His sisters:

OLGA PROZOROV

MASHA PROZOROV

IRINA PROZOROV

FYODOR KULYGIN, a high school teacher

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ALEXANDER VERSHININ,  
the battery commander

BARON NIKOLAI TUZENBACH, also lieutenant in  
the battery

STAFF CAPTAIN VASSILY SOLYONY

DR. IVAN CHEBUTIKIN, military doctor

2<sup>ND</sup> LIEUTENANT ALEXI FEDOTIK

2<sup>ND</sup> LIEUTENANT VLADIMIR RODÉ

FERAPONT, the night watchman for the town council,  
an old man

ANFISA, the Prozorovs' eighty-year-old nanny

## SETTING

The action takes place in a provincial county seat.

# THREE SISTERS

## ACT ONE

*The Prozorov home. Olga, Masha and Irina are in the living room, behind which can be seen another large room, the dining room. Outside, it is sunny and bright.*

OLGA. Father died exactly one year ago today, on this very day, the fifth of May, your birthday, Irina. It was so cold, it was snowing. I didn't think I would survive, you were lying there passed out, like a dead thing. But it's a year later and it's not even hard to think about it, you're all dressed up in white, your face is glowing ... *(The clock strikes twelve.)* Remember, the clock chiming then. *(Pause.)* Remember, they carried Father into the cemetery, the music was playing, and they gave him a twenty-one-gun salute. He was a general, a brigade commander, although there weren't many people at the service. Then it started to rain. Heavy rain and snow.

IRINA. Why go over this again! *(In the dining room, Tuzenbach, Chebutikin and Solyony enter.)*

OLGA. Today it's warm, we can have the windows wide open, even though the birches have just begun to bud. Father received his assignment to the brigade and we left Moscow eleven years ago, I remember it really well, it was the beginning of May, just at this time of year, and there were already flowers in Moscow, it was warm, bathed in sunlight. That was eleven years ago, and I still remember leaving like it was yesterday. Good God! I woke up this morning, I saw it was a bright sunny day, and my heart shook with happiness, because I wanted to go back home so badly.

CHEBUTIKIN. The hell you need two of 'em!

TUZENBACH. Of course, that's horseshit. *(Masha, lost in her reading, whistles part of a tune.)*

OLGA. Don't whistle, Masha! If you would! (*Pause.*) It's because I'm at that school every day, I'm teaching until all hours, my head is constantly throbbing, and these things go through my brain, actually, it's making me old. In fact, in the four years I've been teaching at that school it feels like my youth and my strength have been oozing out of me every day, drop by drop. But that just makes me dream about one thing that much more ...

IRINA. Move back to Moscow. Sell this house and be done with everything here and move back to Moscow ...

OLGA. Yes. Move back to Moscow, as soon as possible.

IRINA. Because our Andre's going to be a college professor, I'm sure he is, anyway he won't stay around here. Only poor Masha will be left behind.

OLGA. She can come visit us in Moscow every year, for the whole summer. (*Masha quietly whistles a song.*)

IRINA. God, please let everything turn out right. (*Looks out the window.*) It is nice out today. I don't know why I feel so light! I woke up and remembered it was my birthday, and all of a sudden I started to feel so happy, I remembered being a little girl, when Mama was still alive. I started to think all kinds of wonderful things, I got so excited!

OLGA. You look so pretty today, you're just glowing. And Masha's beautiful, too. Andre would look handsome, but he's gotten so heavy, it doesn't look good on him. And I've gotten so skinny, so old, really, probably because I'm always yelling at the girls at school. Today I feel free, though, I'm home, and my head doesn't hurt for once, I feel younger than yesterday. I'm only twenty-eight ... Everything is good, God watches over all of us, it just seems to me that if I were married and sat at home all day, things would be better. (*Pause.*) I would love my husband.

TUZENBACH. (*To Solyony.*) You talk such horseshit, I'm tired of listening to you. (*Enters the living room.*) I forgot to tell you. You should have a visit today from our new battery commander, Lieutenant Colonel Vershinin.

OLGA. Well, then. We'd be delighted.

IRINA. Is he old?

TUZENBACH. No, not very. Maybe forty, forty-five at the most. Seems like a nice guy. He's not stupid, that's for sure. Only he talks a lot.

IRINA. Is he interesting?

TUZENBACH. Seems to be, he's here with his wife, and his mother-in-law, they have two little girls. It's his second marriage. Everywhere he goes, he tells everyone he has a wife and two little girls. He'll tell you, too. His wife is a little crazy, she wears her hair in these long braids and talks like a textbook, spouting philosophy, she keeps trying to kill herself, too, to get back at her husband. I would have left her a long time ago, but he puts up with it and just complains.

SOLYONY. (*Enters the living room with Chebutikin.*) With one hand, I can only lift about fifty pounds, but with two, I can lift nearly two hundred pounds. From this I can deduce that two men are not merely twice as strong as one, but maybe three times as strong, maybe more ...

CHEBUTIKIN. (*Enters reading his newspaper.*) To stop hair loss ... an ounce of naphthalene to one-half bottle of alcohol spirits. Shake well and apply daily. Let's write *that* down! (*To Solyony.*) So, like I was telling you, put the cork in the bottle, then put a glass tube through the cork. Then, you take a pinch of plain old, every day alum ...

IRINA. Doctor, my sweet Doctor!

CHEBUTIKIN. What is it, my baby girl, my sunshine?

IRINA. Why am I so happy today, do you know? It's like I'm sailing full sail, a great blue sky above me and flocks of white birds wheeling overhead. Why is that? Why?

CHEBUTIKIN. You're my little white bird ...

IRINA. I woke up this morning, got up and washed my face, and all of a sudden it all became so clear to me, I know how to live life. My sweet Doctor, I see it all. A person needs work, hard work, something that makes you sweat, something you can't live without, something that is the meaning and the goal of your life. It's your happiness, your joy. It would be so good to be a worker who gets up at the crack of dawn and goes off to pave the roads, or farm the fields, or teach children, or work on the railroad ... God, I'd rather be an ox or a plow horse that really works, than a girl who wakes up at noon, drinks her coffee in bed, then gets dressed around two ... that's just horrible! You know how when it gets really hot, and all you want is a cool drink of water? Well, I want to work as much as that. And if I don't start getting up early and working hard, I want you to reject me, Doctor.

CHEBUTIKIN. I will reject you. I will.

OLGA. Our father made us get up at seven in the morning. Now Irina sleeps right past seven and is still lying in bed at nine, thinking about something. And such a serious face! (*Laughs.*)

IRINA. You think I'm still a little girl, that's why it seems strange to you that I have a serious look on my face. I'm twenty years old.

TUZENBACH. That longing to work, God, I certainly understand that. I haven't really worked ever in my life. I was born in Petersburg, where it's too cold to do anything, and my family never worked, never needed to. I remember coming home from the academy, there was a servant waiting to take off my boots, and I was so nasty to them, but my mother always put me on a pedestal, she smiled at whatever I did, and she couldn't understand why other people didn't think of me the same way. They shielded me from work. They weren't very successful, not very. The time is coming, when a storm will roll in over all of us, a powerful, strong outburst, that is very close at hand, it will blow away the laziness, the indifference, this bias against real labor, this wicked boredom. I'm going to work, everyone will work in another twenty-five or thirty years. Everyone!

CHEBUTIKIN. I won't.

TUZENBACH. You don't count.

SOLYONY. You won't be around in another twenty-five years, thank God. In two or three years, either you'll die of a stroke or I'll get furious with you one day and put a bullet in your temple, angel mine. (*Takes a small bottle of cologne out of his pocket and splashes it on his chest and hands.*)

CHEBUTIKIN. (*Laughs.*) Actually, I've never done a single thing. I haven't lifted a finger since I graduated from college, haven't read a goddamn thing, no books anyway, I only read newspapers. (*Takes another newspaper from his pocket.*) See here ... I can find in my newspaper that there is this Dobrolyubov, who seems to be a writer. Of course, what he wrote, I can't say ... God knows ... (*The sound of knocking comes from the floor below.*) Well ... I'm being summoned, someone has come to see me. I'll be right back ... don't move ... (*Hurries off.*)

IRINA. He's up to something.

TUZENBACH. Yes. He has that look about him, he's obviously bringing you some kind of present.

IRINA. It's so embarrassing!

OLGA. It's really awful. He's always doing such stupid things.

MASHA. "Down by the cove, there stands an oak of green, around



this oak a golden chain ... Around this oak a golden chain ... ” (*She stands up and hums a tune.*)

OLGA. You're not in a very good mood, Masha. (*Masha keeps humming and puts on her hat.*) Where are you going?

MASHA. Home.

IRINA. That's strange ...

TUZENBACH. You can't leave a birthday party!

MASHA. Anyway. I'll come back later. Goodbye, sweetheart. (*Kisses Irina.*) I wish you all the best, health and happiness ... It's just that when Father was alive, there were so many people here for our birthdays, thirty, forty officers, all the noise, now there's maybe a person and a half, and it's quiet, like a tomb ... I'm leaving. Don't listen to me, I'm just not in the mood for a party, that's all. (*Laughing through tears.*) We'll talk later, I'm going to say goodbye, sweetie, and go off somewhere.

IRINA. (*Upset.*) Oh, you are so ...

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

SOLYONY. If a man starts talking philosophy, then it's either philosophy or sophistry. If a woman starts philosophizing, or even two women, then it's just pull my finger.

MASHA. What exactly are you trying to say, you horrible, strange man?

SOLYONY. Nothing. He hadn't even caught his breath, when the bear pounced. (*Pause.*)

MASHA. (*Angrily to Olga.*) Stop whining! (*Anfisa enters with Ferapont, who has brought a cake.*)

ANFISA. In here, dear heart. Come in, your feet are clean. (*To Irina.*) From the town council, Mr. Protopopov sent a cake.

IRINA. Thank you. (*Takes the cake.*) Thank him for me.

FERAPONT. Wha — ?

IRINA. (*Louder.*) Thank him for me!

OLGA. Nanny, give him some of the cake. Ferapont, go on and they'll give you some of the cake.

FERAPONT. Wha — ?

ANFISA. Let's go, dear heart. Let's go. (*Exits with Ferapont.*)

MASHA. I don't like that Protopopov, that Mikhail somethingovich, whatever his name is. You shouldn't have invited him.

IRINA. I didn't invite him.

MASHA. Well, that's just great then. (*Chebutikin enters, followed by a soldier carrying a large, silver samovar.*)

# THREE SISTERS

by Anton Chekhov  
translated by Curt Columbus

9M, 5W

Somewhere in the backwoods of Russia, the three Prozorov sisters — Olga, Masha and Irina — live in the large, beautiful house their father has left them. Raised to be bastions of refinement and taste, but stranded amongst smalltown folk with no ambition, they cling desperately to memories of the bright, thriving Moscow they left as children. Unable to bear the ordinariness of their lives, tempers flare and all manner of appetites go unchecked, eliciting wild and dangerous responses from those around them and turning the proper Prozorov home into a place where anything can happen. Curt Columbus' *THREE SISTERS* is Anton Chekhov's rich tapestry of heartbreak and bad behavior.

*"Chekhov once said that life is both complex and simple, [and] THREE SISTERS, by mining the utter, giggly absurdity of its characters, captures that paradox pristinely. Columbus' new translation is more economical than lyrical, but it suits [the] black-box aesthetic to hear Masha dryly recall someone as 'Mikhail Something-ovich' ... poised between suffering and silliness, striking in its bald honesty and bold emotion."*

—**Time Out Chicago**

*"... intensely appealing ... [Columbus' translation is] unfussy and theatrically adept ... fresh, no-nonsense ... smoldering sexual energy ... if ever there was a THREE SISTERS that thoroughly removed itself from urban sophistication — and its kissing-cousin, pretentious theater — this is the one."*

—**The Chicago Tribune**

**Also by Curt Columbus**  
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