

**THE YALTA
GAME;
THE BEAR;
AFTERPLAY**

**THREE PLAYS BY
BRIAN FRIEL**



**DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.**

THE YALTA GAME; THE BEAR; AFTERPLAY
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For Cassie

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THE YALTA GAME

**BASED ON A THEME IN
“THE LADY WITH THE DOG”
BY ANTON CHEKHOV**

THE YALTA GAME was first produced in the Gate Theatre (Michael Colgan, Artistic Director), Dublin, Ireland, on October 2, 2001. It was directed by Karel Reisz, the set design was by Eileen Diss, the costume design was by Dany Everett, the lighting design was by Mick Hughes, the composer was Conor Linehan, the sound design was by John Leonard, and the literal translation was by Úna Ní Dhubhghaill. The cast was as follows:

DMITRY DMITRICH GUROV Ciarán Hinds
ANNA SERGEYEVNA Kelly Reilly

CHARACTERS

DMITRY DMITRICH GUROV

ANNA SERGEYEVNA

THE YALTA GAME

The stage is furnished with a table with a circular, marble top; two or three chairs which can be used outdoors or indoors; and perhaps a couch.

Dmitry Dmitrich Gurov is thirty-nine. His hair is beginning to turn grey. He wears his straw hat at a jaunty angle and carries a cane. He is now enjoying the late summer sun in Yalta. An exuberant military band is playing in the distance. Gurov listens for a few moments.

GUROV. *(To audience.)* Stirring, aren't they? Seventh Hussars from the camp over in Balaclava.

He calls an imaginary waiter.

Another coffee when you find a second.

He listens to the music again and conducts vigorously.

(To audience.) Make you want to charge into combat, wouldn't it?

The music begins to fade.

Believe me, when the summer season is at its height, there is no resort in the whole of the Crimea more exciting, more vibrant, than Yalta. The crowds. The bustling restaurants. The commotion of different languages. The promenade. The elegant municipal park. The obligatory day trip to the silver waterfall at Oreanda. The nightly ritual of going down to the quay and watching the new arrivals pouring out of the Theodosia ferry with its lights dancing and expectant. And of course the mysterious Black Sea itself that embraces and holds all these elements together, especially at night when the water is a soft, warm lilac and the moon throws a shaft of gold across it. *(To the imaginary waiter.)* Thank you kindly. And sugar? Excellent.

He now spreads out on a seat and tilts his straw hat forward so that his eyes are almost concealed.

(*To audience.*) But of course the town square is the heart of Yalta. That's where the tourists congregate and sip coffee from morning until night. And from under their straw hats and parasols, silently, secretly they scrutinize one another. It is the great unacknowledged Yalta game. And it is played in a kind of dream-state—and at the same time almost voraciously.

(*Softly.*) That couple is back. Where were they yesterday? Not married, are they? Madam, please! Certainly not married. There's that Greek boy again. Still coughing. His eyes are so disengaged—what disappointment is he trying to recuperate from? When that husband dies this winter, as indeed he will, what will become of her? Has she the resolution to stagger on? Oh, yes, she has. Look at her staring into space—she's already making all the icy calculations.

They're new. French, are they? Has she been crying? Haven't exchanged a word all afternoon. He's clearly a prig. And his foot never stops tapping. Young lady, you shouldn't let him see how desperately you love him.

It's a day-long diversion, drinking coffee and divining other lives or investing the lives of others with an imagined life. Harmless enough, I suppose.

Madam, please! This is a public square!

You know the season is coming to an end when you see the first of the shutters going up and the wind whips up a choking dust and there is only a score of coffee-drinkers left to invent one another.

And slowly the vibrancy and excitement subside and the place becomes...not yet desolate, but just a little dejected. And you realize you have to disengage yourself from these dreamy pleasures and this otherworld routine and think about going back to Moscow—work, children, wife.

Pause.

Home. That requires a little...effort.

I had been in Yalta for almost two weeks and on my second-last day, about three in the afternoon, I was sitting in the square with the remnants of the faithful. And suddenly a young woman appeared. Out of the Marino Hotel. White blouse. Grey skirt. Simple little hat. And a fawn Pomeranian at her heels. And came across the square

towards our corner, walking briskly with her head down as if she wanted to be under observation for as short a time as possible.

And the straw hats and parasols stirred ever so slightly.

Enter Anna Sergeyevna with her imaginary dog. She is twenty-two. She sits and calls a waiter.

ANNA. One coffee, please. Black. *(To dog.)* Sit—sit.

GUROV. *(To audience.)* Now that's new. That's interesting. Twenty? Twenty-two? Not more. Russian? Oh yes. Married? Think so. Why? Instinct; and the dog maybe. Is there a husband back in the hotel? Maybe not here at all? Why not? Let's find out.

ANNA. *(To audience.)* I sent my husband a telegram when I got here two days ago: "DEAR NIKOLAI, ARRIVED SAFELY. HOTEL MARINO COMFORTABLE. WEATHER MIXED. DOING A LOT OF WALKING. GET SONIA TO SHAMPOO ALL THE UPSTAIRS CARPETS."

His reply came this morning: "I MISS YOU SO BADLY. BUT IT WILL BE A WONDERFUL BREAK FOR YOU. IT WILL MAKE A NEW WOMAN OF YOU. ENJOY IT. I WILL JOIN YOU JUST AS SOON AS I CAN GET AWAY. ALL MY LOVE TO MY INFANT. NIKOLAI."

He was forty then. I could have been his "infant." And I could see his quiet earnest eyes as he wrote the words—he thought that being his infant must make me feel so assured. And even though the panic to get away from Pargolovo had already lost some of its urgency now that I was here, the words "my infant" animated that restlessness again and I had to keep telling myself that yes, Yalta would restore me, give my life some calm again, show me how much I had to be grateful for. Or at least reconcile me to what I had settled for.

GUROV. *(To Anna.)* You just missed the Hussars. Trying to quicken the blood for battle.

Pause.

He's a handsome little fellow.

ANNA. Yes.

GUROV. Is he a bit spoiled?

ANNA. She.

GUROV. *(To dog.)* I beg your pardon.

ANNA. Birthday present from Nikolai, my husband.

GUROV. Very nice. (*Aside.*) Nikolai! An octogenarian with a bulbous nose—and a drip. (*To Anna.*) Has she a name?

ANNA. Not yet.

GUROV. Very intelligent eyes. Understanding. May I give her a biscuit?

ANNA. If you wish.

GUROV. Here, girl.

Gurov withdraws his hand quickly.

Hey, I'm only being agreeable.

ANNA. She's nervous.

GUROV. I'm not going to harm you.

Pause.

First time in Yalta?

ANNA. Yes.

GUROV. You'll be back. I come every year; part holiday, part work.

Pause.

I'm an accountant in a bank.

Brief pause.

Although I did my degree in philology.

Brief pause.

One hundred and seventy years ago.

Brief pause.

I'm not the most brilliant banker in Moscow. Have you been to Oreanda?

ANNA. Sorry?

GUROV. Oreanda—the waterfall. Almost an hour from here. Well worth a visit. There's a train every—

He breaks off suddenly, leans into her and speaks very softly, almost conspiratorially.

Don't look now; but there's a young man over there on your right. Pink cravat, white shoes. See him?

ANNA. Yes?

GUROV. Watch what he's slipping into his coffee.

ANNA. Sugar?

GUROV. Liquid heroin.

ANNA. He's not!

GUROV. Don't stare.

ANNA. How do you—?

GUROV. Had to be taken down from the top of the cathedral spire last Sunday. Before Vespers. They say his wife ran off last month with a cavalry officer.

ANNA. God!

GUROV. One-armed. Tragic story. And do you see that frail little creature in the satin dress—looks as if she's about to die?

ANNA. Where?

GUROV. No. Further left.

ANNA. The black dress?

GUROV. She's in charge of the elephants in the Moscow Zoo.

ANNA. That little white-haired lady with the—?

GUROV. And the husband, the enormous man with the grey beard?

Gurov examines his nails.

He knows you're talking about him.

ANNA. I'm not—

GUROV. (*Loudly.*) They expect some rain this afternoon. But it is that time of year, isn't it? (*Softly again.*) At least twenty-five stone weight. Too much brandy. Once the principal dancer at the Kirov.

ANNA. That man was a ballet—?

GUROV. Known in those days as Il Folletto. The Elf. Italian. She's German. They got married while they were still at college—just like me. And each has refused to learn the other's language; so that when they want to communicate, they write notes to one another.

ANNA. They don't!

GUROV. In broken English.

ANNA. I think you're trying to make a—

THE YALTA GAME; THE BEAR; AFTERPLAY

three plays by Brian Friel

THE YALTA GAME. Developed from a theme in Chekhov's 1899 story "The Lady with the Dog." Two strangers meet on holiday and almost manage to convince one another that disappointments are "merely the postponement of the complete happiness to come..." (1 man, 1 woman.)

THE BEAR. Elena Popova, a young and attractive widow, has immersed herself in the role of mourning for her philandering but now dead husband. Luka, her frail and ancient manservant, tries in vain to snap her out of it. Then Gregory Smirnov barges in... (2 men, 1 woman.)

AFTERPLAY. 1920s Moscow, a small, run-down café. Uncle Vanya's niece, Sonya Serebriakova, now in her forties, is the only customer. Until the arrival of the Three Sisters' put-upon brother Andrey Prozorov. (1 man, 1 woman.)

"[THE YALTA GAME] captures the egotism of love and the lack of fulfilment and self-knowledge that can lie even at the heart of sexual passion..."

—**The Daily Telegraph (UK)**

"Friel's [THE BEAR] is superbly funny, vivid, keenly alert to Chekhov's modern sensitivities to gender issues..."

—**Financial Times (UK)**

"Brian Friel's audacious, Chekhovian epilogue [AFTERPLAY] is short, masterful and hilarious... prior knowledge of Chekhov is neither assumed nor required. ...Friel inhabits the characters so masterfully you are ultimately less preoccupied with the backstory than increasingly fearful for their future."

—**The Guardian (UK)**

Also by Brian Friel
DANCING AT LUGHNASA
MOLLY SWEENEY
THREE SISTERS (Chekhov)
and others

DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.

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