

# LIFE SUCKS.

BY

AARON POSNER

SORT OF ADAPTED FROM

*UNCLE VANYA* BY ANTON CHEKHOV



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.

LIFE SUCKS.  
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*For all my old friends, who taught me so much.  
And for all my old friends, who didn't teach me nearly enough.  
And for all my other old friends, too...  
For all the amazing theatre artists I work with all the time,  
who always make my work so much better,  
and to whom I am deeply and eternally grateful...  
And mostly for my wife, Erin, and my daughter, Maisie,  
who are my guides, my joys, my loves...and my bright  
beacons in an all too often murky world.*

## THANK YOU

Ari Roth.

Howard Shalwitz.

Erin Weaver.

Andy White.

Theater J.

Lookingglass Theatre.

And all the actors and designers and technicians from the Theater J and Lookingglass productions.

LIFE SUCKS. was first produced by Theater J (Adam Immerwahr, Artistic Director; Rebecca Ende Lichtenberg, Managing Director) at the Aaron and Cecile Goldman Theater in Washington, D.C. It was directed by Aaron Posner; the composer and sound designer was James Sugg; the lighting design was by Nancy Schertler; the set design was by Meghan Raham. The cast was as follows:

VANYA ..... Sasha Olinick  
SONIA ..... Judith Ingber  
ELLA ..... Monica West  
BABS ..... Naomi Jacobson  
THE PROFESSOR ..... John Lescault  
DR. ASTER ..... Eric Hissom  
PICKLES ..... Kimberly Gilbert

The Midwest premiere of LIFE SUCKS. was produced by Looking-glass Theatre Company (Heidi Stillman, Artistic Director; Rachel E. Kraft, Executive Director) in Chicago, Illinois. It was directed by Andrew White, the sound designers were Chris LaPorte and Andre Pluess; the scenic and lighting design was by Brian Sidney Bembridge; the stage manager was Patia Bartlett. The cast was as follows:

VANYA ..... Eddie Jemison  
SONIA ..... Danielle Zuckerman  
ELLA ..... Chaon Cross  
BABS ..... Barbara E. Robertson  
THE PROFESSOR ..... Jim Ortlieb  
DR. ASTER ..... Philip R. Smith  
PICKLES ..... Penelope Walker

## CHARACTERS

VANYA—45. A ruminator. A kvetch. A smart, sweet, passionate, insightful, wound-tight failure.

SONIA—24. Kind, caring, and quirky. Serious self-esteem issues. Not comfortable in her body.

ELLA—36. Searching, frustrated, hopeful, and sad. Very attractive and rampantly desirable.

BABS—64. Vibrant, artistic, outspoken, and even enlightened. A great soul and scrappy wit.

THE PROFESSOR—62. Big mind, big ego, big vocabulary, small-ish soul. Selfish. Well-meaning.

DR. ASTER—52. Broken, beautiful, dissatisfied, savvy, and sad. He cares deeply and oddly.

PICKLES—40ish. An odd, sweet, loyal duck. Very literal. A relentlessly positive utopian lesbian.

## SETTING

The world should be a fairly simple, flexible space with multiple areas so that more than one thing can be happening at the same time. There should be space for actors to be when they are not “onstage” or the center of attention but where they can still be (at least partially) seen. The space should feel open, practical, and yet theatrical and even Chekhovian in some way. Since the play is about Love and Longing, that could be reflected in the setting somehow.

## **THE ACTING STYLE**

Aggressively honest. Achingly transparent. Always reaching and striving for the best way to express whatever fucked up, painful, wonderful thing needs to be expressed at the moment. Heartfelt, but never sentimental; odd (quirky, even), but never cute or clever or cloying; fast and front-footed, but never rushed; full of endless AMAZEMENT and WONDER; and always, always, always tipping toward more love, more hope, more passion and more perseverance.

## **THE ACTOR/AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP**

The characters are always the characters. They are never the actors. The characters are fully invested in the realities of their world and the web of relationships in which they are so deeply entangled... but they also know they are in a play! They know the audience is right there and that reality never leaves them. They don't need to acknowledge the audience all the time, but they are always there to be included and engaged if the actor so desires.

## **TECHNICAL TEXT NOTES**

/ indicates that the next person starts speaking there...

\* on either side of a word or phrase means that that line or word should be tailored specifically to the actual actors playing the roles in that given production...

# LIFE SUCKS.

## The Launch: Love & Longing!

*The cast comes on. They talk to the audience...*

VANYA. Okay, so...

SONIA. Here we go!

BABS. (*Not without irony...*) More art!

PICKLES. (*À la Fantasy Island...*) Look boss! The play! The play!

VANYA. (*Already mildly annoyed by her...*) C'mon, please...

ASTER. So, yeah, right, well...

ELLA. Thanks for coming.

BABS. We're the *actors*. And you, of course, are the *audience*.

PICKLES. We couldn't do this without *you*. I mean, think about it. Without you, we'd have a kind of... "one hand clapping" situation.

*They all ponder that...*

VANYA. I don't even know / what that

PICKLES. Or, I guess, more like NO hands clapping. I mean, without you it's like we don't / even exist.

VANYA. (*To Pickles, gently, but seriously...*) Shhhh...

ASTER. Right, so... Cell phones off. Exits there and there, no photography or recording, blah blah blah. You all know these things, right?

PROFESSOR. Our play transpires in four succinct acts... just like Chekhov's original, superior play. We'll take an intermission between Acts Two and Three.

BABS. And if *you* won't unwrap things *really slowly* thinking we'll hear them less that way, then we won't either. I'm not sure why we seem to think if other people can't see us, they can't hear us either,

but...*it's not true*. So, if we can just save loud candies till intermission or after the show that'd be terrific.

SONIA. Shakespeare calls his plays our "two hours' traffic on the stage..." and while we might / not be able—

ELLA. This one might be a bit more like two hours stuck in traffic...

SONIA. That's not / what I was going to say...

VANYA. Most of it is going to be about love and longing. Yep. That's right, campers. *LOVE*. And *LONGING*.

SONIA. That's not *all* it's about.

VANYA. Pretty much. So you can't say you weren't / warned.

ASTER. Well, this is off to a lovely start...

PROFESSOR. It's also about the audacious, ludicrous, and protean nature of the obstreperous and ever-feckless human heart.

PICKLES. (*Amazed by his pretentiousness...*) Holy Toledo, Batman...

SONIA. It's also about not getting what you want.

ELLA. Yes. Or getting what you thought you wanted but then... you know...

PICKLES. Or the opposite of all that.

BABS. (*A possibility...*) Or the inverse.

PROFESSOR. (*With deep insight...*) Or the *contra positive*.

VANYA. What does that even mean?

ASTER. It's also about how disastrously, irretrievably fucked up the world is, and the insanity of the choices we humans have made for the last four hundred years.

SONIA. Right...

VANYA. Right. That too.

BABS. (*Dropping in...*) And about *loss*.

*Beat. They all take that in...*

VANYA. Yeah, well, so if you *aren't* interested in love and longing and loss...

ASTER. (*Reminding him of his perspective...*) Ummm...

VANYA. ...and how fucked up the world is...then you may have, you know, *chosen your night's entertainment badly*. And you can

actually leave right now if you want and you'll get a full refund for your ticket. Plus a dollar for your trouble.

BABS. You can probably catch \*Mary Zimmerman's production of *Wonderful Town* at the Goodman.\* I've heard really great things...

PICKLES. But thanks for coming...!

VANYA. Or going...

BABS. Oy vey...

ASTER. Really, Vanya?

VANYA. So, okay, let's get this *fakokta* thing started...!

*Folks head offstage or into positions to begin...*

SONIA. (*To us, in confidence...*) Seriously, it's not that bad. Vanya's just...Vanya.

Anyway, you'll see. This is our play.

It's called LIFE SUCKS.

Thanks for coming.

Okay. Everyone ready?

Okay, then, off we go...!

## ACT ONE: ALL THE PEOPLE

### 1.0 Work

*Aster and Babs are talking. She drinks very small glasses of vodka. He is clearly a bit agitated and distracted. He looks offstage surreptitiously from time to time in the direction the walking party will eventually enter from...*

ASTER. You know what my problem is? Do you?

BABS. *(She's thinking...)* Ummm...

ASTER. You know what my fucking problem is?

BABS. Astound me...!

ASTER. I work too hard.

BABS. Oh. *(Looking off where the others are walking.)* I thought you meant—

ASTER. *(He misses her point...)* I work way too fucking hard. *(Sorry, Babs...)*

BABS. *(Oh, I don't care...)*

ASTER. People are always, let's go here or let's do this or why don't you take a little break and I'm always, no no no, I can't, I can't, I've gotta *work*. That's what I say, constantly. "Gotta *work*." Like the world'll fucking end if I / don't *work*.

BABS. You swear too much.

ASTER. It's true, I do.

BABS. You do.

ASTER. You drink too much.

BABS. You're right, I do.

ASTER. We are none of us perfect.

BABS. You *do* work too much.

ASTER. I know!

BABS. But I / don't think—

ASTER. And to what end? I don't have, you know, a wife...or *children*. And even if I did, money screws kids up nine times out of eleven—*(To the audience...)* don't google it, I made it up, but still...cool, sane rich kids are the total exception and we all know it.

BABS. Want another drink?

ASTER. No. I have to go. I gotta wo—Did you hear that? It's ridiculous! I can't stop myself. Like some absurd machine... "Gotta work. Gotta work. Gotta work." And do you think people in 100 years will care how hard we worked? A few great geniuses, maybe, or an artist or two... But most of us? The normal people. Will anyone care? Not a chance. But still...!

And do you know what's even crazier than working so hard?

BABS. Enlighten me!

ASTER. You know what I do on those rare occasions when I'm not working.

BABS. You count groundhogs! Or...grouse, or...?

ASTER. Well, yeah, *that*, I do do that, but that's not crazy, that's the one sane thing I do, that's my work for the nature conservancy and... *(Fully realizing what she said.)* Hey, I'm not counting *grouse*, I'm tracking patterns of population and—

BABS. What's the crazier thing?

ASTER. Sorry?

BABS. You said you did something crazier than wasting your life working so much. So now, you know...I'm just dying to know what that could be.

ASTER. I work out. For hours. Sweat my ass off picking stuff up... and putting it down again. Picking it up, putting it down. Picking it up, putting it down, pushing on things! And pulling on things! And *running in place*—for hours! There cannot be anything more ridiculous in modern life than a treadmill. You ever imagine what an alien would think if the first place they saw was a gym. Or worse, some ridiculous doctor in his own little living room just running in place for *hours*

# LIFE SUCKS.

by Aaron Posner

3M, 4W

In this brash reworking of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, a group of old friends, ex-lovers, estranged in-laws, and lifelong enemies gather to grapple with life's thorniest questions—and each other. What could possibly go wrong? Incurably lustful and lonely, hapless and hopeful, these seven souls collide and stumble their way towards a new understanding that LIFE SUCKS! Or does it?

*"[LIFE SUCKS.] is altogether wise, profoundly humane, hilarious, quirky, endearing and, in countless clever ways, brilliantly faithful to its source... Posner has managed to find his own voice in the process, bringing a playful, far from cynical, fourth-wall-piercing originality to the story..."*  
—Chicago Sun-Times

*"...adrenaline-fueled, hyper-aware... [Posner] sticks lovingly close to Chekhov's plot. ...[He] gives huge and equal bearhugs to Chekhov's absurd comedy and touching pathos while leaving room to banter with the audience. ...sassy yet heartfelt..."*  
—The Washington Post

*"...very smart and self-aware... a light and airy conversation-starter of a show that's just satirical enough to fulfill those who'd rather sit in traffic than watch anything by Chekhov and clever and accurately Chekhovian enough to pleasure those who love the source play. ...hugely enjoyable..."*  
—Chicago Tribune

*"...[a] delightful Chekhov riff... The play defies traditional categories like 'comedy' or 'drama,' so let's just settle for calling it 'fantastic.'"*  
—Time Out Chicago

*"Comic gold... Filled with laughs and anarchic asides... Posner's ear for comedy is reminiscent of Mel Brooks in his prime."*  
—BroadwayWorld.com

*"Life sucks, maybe, but watching the Posner play is pure bliss."*  
—DCTheatreScene.com

**Also by Aaron Posner**  
CYRANO (Hollinger)  
MY NAME IS ASHER LEV  
STUPID FUCKING BIRD  
and others

**DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.**

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