

The Lady Onstage (working title)

by

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CHARACTERS (1F).

OLGA	30. The Moscow Art Theater actress.
MASHA	40. Chekhov's sister, and the keeper of his legacy.
MOTHER ON THE TRAIN	40's. A huge Knipper/Chekhov fan. Easily star-struck
CHEKHOV'S MOTHER	Late 60's, or older. Chekhov's mom.
THE EX-PAT	Early 60's. Russian, living in Paris.

SETTING

A sitting room, a study, a cafe, a kitchen table.

TIME

1902, with glimpses of 1906-1910-ish.

(Olga becomes the ex-pat, and paces.
She pauses.)

THE EX-PAT

A revolution
Loves
a secret.

.
It is
What
a revolution is built on.
Secrets.

.
I did not love that revolution, and I did not keep its
secrets.
So you understand why it is I live here.
Bienvenue a Paris.

(she stops pacing, comes closer.)

THE EX-PAT

I have seen Olga Knipper only once in the thirty-five
years since I left Moscow.
Would you like to know where?
She was just over there,

(begins to point, lowers her arm.)

THE EX-PAT

On second thought, it is better not to point.
I will go there, and then come back.

(She goes, gives a significant look,
comes back.)

THE EX-PAT

Did you mark the place?
That is where I saw her, while I was myself sitting-
Come, I will show you from where.
It is better not to point.

(She goes, sits. Gives a significant
look, comes back.)

THE EX-PAT

So you can see, from where I was, to where she was, a
direct line of sight.

I saw her,
and she saw me,
and I saw her see me, and in my excitement to greet a
beloved friend, I made a mistake.
Perhaps you already see my error?
Come. I will show you where I saw it for myself.

(She stands, walks towards the place
where she showed us Olga was sitting,
stops partway there to give a
significant look, and comes back.)

THE EX-PAT

It was very plain, for as I approached, my eyes on
hers, hers on mine, the moment I reached - you know
where - she averted her gaze. Like this,

(She demonstrates looking away.)

THE EX-PAT

And I knew she could not greet me.
She did not sit there freely.
Or alone.
Do you know why?
If you don't, I do not think I can explain it all,
there is so much to it.
There is so much to Her, I do not know if you can
understand it.
You were not there at the beginning.
You did not see her building the foundation of the
Moscow Art Theater,
Which in turn has become the foundation for the
theaters of Europe,
For the theaters of America.
She has inspired a Continent of artists. At least.
But by the time I saw her here, her theater was no
longer what it had been in the beginning.
Nothing like it at all.
It had become-
but I will not speak of that here.
I will only say,
I am very, very sorry you never had a chance to see
her before.
Or hear her.
We used to sing together, and in that moment I dreamed
we might share a song right there like we once did.

(She hums a piece of Bayushki Bayu)

(The Ex-pat finishes humming a piece of Bayushki Bayu)

THE EX-PAT

I would teach it to you, but-
It is better that we do not do it here.
To speak in a language is one thing, but to sing it?
That is when you must be the most careful.
Because,
To sing without showing your soul is not singing.
That
is just making noise.
And we must be careful where we show our souls.
Generally, I do not recommend it if you are Russian.
There is a problem we have.
When you are Russian, it is especially difficult to
hide the parts of yourself that get us into trouble.
This inability of ours to keep pieces of ourselves
hidden? It is, I believe, one of the reasons why she
is as great as she is.

.
Why they all are.

.
It is why our artists rise to the top, why they are
some of the greatest the world has ever seen.
What the country is now, we will not speak of.
But her people, her artists -
See them, if you can.
Soon.
I can speak of them, but until you see one fully
immersed in her art and ideals, until then you can not
understand.
You will only have words about an idea, but you will
miss everything of the experience itself.
And words, no matter how carefully chosen, are not an
experience.
It is being in the same room that changes you.
It is sitting there, and knowing that what is in front
of you is different.
That what you are seeing is a profound moment of
truth, in a place where profound truths will not be
allowed to last.

.
 I was here, and could not speak to her,
 But in that moment we communicated in quieter ways
 than words.
 Shall we drink to her?

(She pours out a shot of vodka, raises
 her glass, checks her surroundings. The
 ex-pat gives a whispered toast.)

THE EX-PAT

Za prav-du.
 To truth,

(She takes a sip, puts it down.)

(A quiet, empty room, full of the
 detritus of the actress: vases of
 flowers of various age, a desk with a
 pile of opened letters scattered about,
 a couch with piles of scripts on it,
 all marked up and dog-eared. Near the
 couch, a bottle of vodka, or two, half
 gone.)

(The sound of women's shoes coming
 quickly up the stairs. The door opens,
 and slams shut.)

(Olga leans against the closed door, so
 wrapped up in winter clothes you can
 barely see her nose. She catches her
 breath.)

OLGA

Good god, what a nightmare.
 I'm sorry to have kept you waiting,

(Olga deposits her outerwear on the
 couch.)

I couldn't bear to leave when I knew I was going to
 have to look every one of them in the eye, and hear
 their small talk, and pretend they weren't all trying
 to avoid talking about the fact that I was a disaster
 tonight.

So I shut myself up in your dressing room until
 everyone had left and I was alone with the scenery and
 the guards.

train-self, which she becomes again,
chugging toward her own photograph.)

And an Olga Knipper is blocking the track! She's going
weak! She won't move!

Stop the train! Emergency Break!

Too late!

Brace yourselves!

(She derails herself as the train, and
makes appropriate exploding sound
effects.)

(She laughs.)

Only that would have been more entertaining.

(She drinks.)

•
What was the point of the years of work we've put into
this, if I can still be
utterly and completely derailed by a moment of
absolute simplicity?

It is the simplest moment, and I never second guessed
a word.

(She picks up a much used script of *The
Cherry Orchard*, and finds the spot.)

I have half a mind to rip this page out of the damned
play.

(She laughs, and rips out the page. She
reads.)

Why did I go to town for breakfast?

That horrible restaurant of yours, the tablecloths
smelled like soap.

Why did we drink so much, Leon? Why did we eat so
much? Why did we talk so much? You kept talking so
much today about nothing. About the seventies, about
decadent art forms. Who was listening? Talking to the
waiter about decadent art!

(She stops. Shakes it out. Starts
again, this time trying to get in
character.)

OLGA AS RANEVSKAYA

Why did I go to town for breakfast?

That horrible restaurant of yours, the tablecloths
smelled like soap.

Why did we drink so much, Leon? Why did we eat so
much? Why did we talk so much? You kept talking so
much today about nothing.

(She doesn't like it, and stops. Tries again.)

OLGA AS RANEVSKAYA

Why did we drink so much, Leon? Why did we eat so much? Why did we talk so much?

(It's all wrong. She stops, goes to another part of the room and tries it in a different way.)

OLGA AS RANEVSKAYA

Why did I go to town for breakfast?
That horrible restaurant of yours,

(She hates it. Tries another tactic.)

OLGA AS RANEVSKAYA

Why did I go to town for breakfast?
That horrible restaurant of yours, the tablecloths
smelled like soap.
Why did we drink so much, Leon? Why did we-
(It's still all wrong.)

OLGA

Blyat!

(She tries again)

OLGA AS RANEVSKAYA

Why did we talk so much? You kept talking so much
today about nothing. About the seventies, about
decadent art forms.

(It's worse.)

OLGA AS RANEVSKAYA

About why Olga Knipper-Chekhova is a Suka actress with
no technique, who can't make something work sometimes
to save her life.

OLGA

Suka idiot actress!
Huy idiot writer!
Why can't he just explain himself!
Clarity!
For the love of god!

It's-

Blyat Suka!

.

There's no point.

I'm a failure.

I'm out of ideas.

.

My idea bank is as empty as this glass.

At least I can refill one of them,

(she pours more vodka, drinks.)

I am despairing.

This

Is despair.

My face, my hands, my eyes.

The way I hold this glass.

I can feel the despair weighing down my legs, and my back.

If only I had to perform despair, right now, I could do it perfectly.

A perfect truth.

Just sitting here.

Drinking.

Exuding despair in its stupidest, finest form.

(she laughs)

Maybe,

Maybe we should write the next play ourselves.

2 women,

Drinking vodka,

Exuding despair.

(she laughs)

You know what the men would say, if they were here.

Actually, I can tell you exactly what Anton's words would have been.

If I've already read this one to you before, indulge me and pretend you've never heard it.

(She pulls out a letter from Chekov that is in an easy to reach place, and reads it out loud in her best Chekhov impression)

OLGA AS CHEKHOV

Once and for all, you must stop worrying whether you will succeed or fail. Your job is to work, bit by bit, day in and day out, steadily, and to be ready for the mistakes and failures that will inevitably come.

Follow your instinct and let others get wrapped up in the competitions of success and failure.
 What is important at the beginning is to write or act and know that you are not yet doing it well enough.

(She laughs.)

OLGA

So, my dear writer, I am definitely not yet doing it well enough.
 I know I am not yet doing it well enough, so you will be pleased.
 Still, I apologize to you, dear writer, for ruining your words.

(She bows in apology to imaginary Chekhov)

OLGA

And to you, my teacher.

(She bows in apology to imaginary Nemerovich-Danchenko.)

OLGA

And to you, my director. For not yet doing it well enough.

(She bows in apology to imaginary Stanislavsky.)

(Olga grabs a hat or sock or some other nearby object, and turns it into a simple puppet as she jumps into an impression of Stanislavsky. It is a game she plays often. The puppet gives a moving speech.)

OLGA AS MOCK STANISLAVSKY

You will do it well enough.
 And you will get there.
 Remember - there are no small roles! Only small actors!

Today, Hamlet, tomorrow peasant #4, but even as
 peasant #12 you are an artist!
 Lateness!
 Laziness!
 Caprice!
 Hysterics!
 Ignorance of the role!
 They are all equally harmful, and must be rooted out!
 Do you know how long we discussed, how deeply we felt,
 how thoroughly we investigated every question before
 us before we began to begin?
 Well!
 I will tell you:
 The peace conference at Versailles did not consider the
 dilemmas of the world with the clarity and exactitude
 that we brought to the discussion of the foundation of
 this Great Enterprise:
 the Moscow!
 Art!
 Theatre!
 The questions we pondered were of the utmost
 importance.
 They were questions of pure art!
 Artistic ideals!
 Scenic ethics!
 Organizational plans!
 In short - everything.

(Olga quickly forms another puppet,
 operates it with her other hand. This
 one is Nemerovich-Danchenko. The 2nd
 puppet enters the scene.)

OLGA AS MOCK NEMEROVIC-D.

This is all true.
 You talked a Great Deal.

OLGA AS MOCK STANISLAVSKY

A great deal about Olga Knipper!

OLGA AS MOCK NEMEROVICH-D

That is true, a great deal about Olga Knipper.

OLGA AS MOCK STANISLAVSKY

And many others.
 Like actor A.

OLGA AS MOCK NEMEROVICH-D

Oh yes! I remember actor A.

OLGA AS MOCK STANISLAVSKY

We examined each other:

Tell me what you think of Actor A.

OLGA AS MOCK NEMEROVICH-D.

Actor A,

Do you consider him to be talented?

OLGA AS MOCK STANISLAVSKY

Very much so.

OLGA AS MOCK NEMEROVICH-D.

Shall we take him into the troupe?

OLGA AS MOCK STANISLAVSKY

Certainly not.

OLGA AS MOCK NEMEROVICH-D.

Why?

OLGA AS MOCK STANISLAVSKY

Because!

He has adapted his whole self to his career,
his talent to the whims of the public,
his personality to the whims of his manager,
and whatever is left to theatrical cheapness.
A man so ruined cannot be saved.

OLGA AS MOCK NEMEROVICH-D

And what about actress B.

OLGA AS MOCK STANISLAVSKY

Actress B?

She is decent, but won't do for us.
She does not love art.
What she loves is herself in art.

OLGA AS MOCK NEMEROVICH-D

I quite agree.

(beat. The puppets think.)

OLGA AS MOCK NEMEROVICH-D

What of Olga Knipper?

OLGA AS MOCK STANISLAVSKY

Olga Knipper!

(the puppets examine Olga.)

OLGA AS MOCK STANISLAVSKY

Yes.

Yes, we must pay a great deal of attention to her.
She has ideals for which she is fighting.
She is a woman of her ideals.

(Stanislavsky puppet gives a nod of approval. Nemerovich-Danchenko gives a nod back, and begins to carefully and meticulously add Olga to an imaginary list.)

OLGA

When I was in your dressing room tonight, waiting for everyone to leave, I was thinking about choices. Big choices, life choices. To be or not be. To act, or not act. I was thinking about Anton, about the choice to be married and not married at the same time. And maybe that's why our being married never made sense to some people. Because some days, I was The Actress. And some days, I was The Actress Wife. Most days, it was just The Actress. Who wrote long letters, and did nothing to take care of her husband.

.

(she laughs)

Yes, I was the perfect sometimes wife. All fun when I was there, all conveniently quiet as soon as I left. But it did feel like an impossible opposite:
Absent Wife.
The Absent Wife isn't usually a thing.
The Absent Husband, that's a thing.
Absent Husband
Absent Father
Absent Brother
Absent Son, novels are built on them.
All gone to war, or gone to sea, or off on some adventure that will make him a hero.

But the Absent Wife!

She isn't a category of hero.

She isn't a category at all, she's just:

Gone.

Gone, gone, gone.

And because she is, everyone thinks nothing but the worst of her.

.

But really, I am very lucky.

Because I had love,

I had Anton,

And I also had the theater.

Anton And the theater.

Wife And Actress.

And why not? I never needed it to be an Or, and Anton didn't need it be either.

Writer And Husband worked just fine for him, nobody ever wondered why he never made it an Or.

Can you imagine?

"Anton, now that you are a husband, don't you think it's time that you stopped this whole writing thing?"

(She laughs)

No, of course he never heard that.

But how many times do you think I heard "Now that you are a wife, don't you think it's time to give up this acting thing?"

They should be grateful.

Look at all the wonderful letters Anton left because we never gave up the And for an Or.

(Olga folds the letter she took out,
and opens the drawers packed with
letters.)

(Olga becomes Masha.)

MASHA

You see?

My brother kept every letter that was ever written to him in here. This drawer for personal correspondence, this one over here for business.

(She closes the first drawer, and opens

up the business drawer to show how neatly packed it is too.)

MASHA

Anton was very careful about keeping them organized, and I have done my part to keep them so. It makes things very easy to find if you know what you're looking for.

(She closes the business drawer, goes back to the personal one. Opens it.)

MASHA

Here is everything from Olga Knipper. Olga Knipper-Chekhova, I should say. Though the last part of that name never seemed to fit as well as the first. It's a funny thing about names. Everyone goes about changing them when they get married, adding a last name here and there to let the world know whose family you started belonging to, and whose family you ended up belonging to, how your alliances or priorities have changed, and what was once just your own life and your own name is now connected to a new person, a new family, a new life. But what is a new name without taking on a new life? Why take it? What is the point of going through all the trouble of connecting yourself to a man, A very sick and frail man at that, Calling yourself his wife, taking his name and adding it to your own, but adding nothing else in life to connect you? What is the point in that?

(She takes out some letters from the drawer.)

MASHA

We all of us could have gone on just fine without anyone getting married. Why they did it will always be a mystery to me.

(She takes a letter out of it's envelope, and unfolds it.)

MASHA

I don't dislike her. It would be a lie to say anything other than I love her dearly, she is like a sister to me.

Truly.

We have had our differences, we have had our arguments.

We wouldn't be nearly as much like sisters if we didn't.

And if she had not married Anton, our arguments would have been fewer. But it's no matter now. We are done with arguments.

(She reads the opening of the letter, quickly.)

MASHA

This is not a good one,

(She folds it, puts it back in the envelope, back in the file, back in the drawer. She closes the drawer.)

MASHA

The study is exactly as he left it.

I have always been very careful to keep it that way. Did you know, the only things that are not original are the panes of these windows? I had to replace all the windows years ago.

But other than that, it is all exactly as he left it. The organization is all his.

I've kept it, but it is all his system.

Stories are here,

Letters are here,

Plays are here,

Papers and books to be read are here.

The stories are my favorite.

(She opens it, and pulls out a small book. Reads the title.)

MASHA

"In the Ravine".

This is a good one.

Of course, I think they're all good,

(A shiver.)

MASHA

I am sorry it is not warmer in here.
 You would think that it would be warmer, given how far south we are.
 But there are times when it is colder in Yalta than in Moscow.
 Which, when it happened, drove him crazy.
 Because the truth is, he hated being here, when everything else was there.
 But what could we do?
 It is not a very forgiving disease.
 And he was not know for being careful.
 That was my job.
 To keep him careful.

(She pulls out another newspaper,
 checks the day.)

MASHA

Ah. Here it is.

(She opens it.)

I have always thought this was the nicest review he ever got.
 Maybe it is only because it was so important at the time for it to be a good one.

(She scans the article.)

MASHA

She is mentioned only once, right here.

(She points to a line.)

MASHA

They were not yet very close.
 They had only met, but he already considered her to be exceptionally talented.
 And his only comment to me after reading this was about how she did not get nearly the praise she deserved.
 He had not seen the performance himself, he would not see it for months and months since it was winter and he could not travel.

But after reading the best review he would ever get, his only comment was that Olga Knipper was not praised nearly enough.

(She reads more of the article, smiles.)

(Olga puts down the newspaper review.)

OLGA

What if,
 What if after a bad performance, the actress, if she wanted to, was perfectly free to come out to the audience and not take a bow during the curtain call. And instead she could go out there and say:
 I'm sorry, that wasn't a good performance tonight. If you want your money back, or would like to see an improved performance tomorrow, please come and see me. What a relief that would be!
 To know that the audience knew that you knew you ruined it that night.
 And maybe then they would come back tomorrow, and it would all go just fine.
 Now that would be truth onstage.

.

(She picks up a book, and opens it.)

(Olga becomes Mother On The Train who flips through a book of Chekhov she is holding.)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

Ooh, I'm sorry, I don't remember, I don't remember,

(She finds it.)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

Aha! It was this one. I know because I marked the page.
 See? I marked the page. It was so exciting, so important, that we marked the page that same day so

that we would always know where it happened.
 It happened on,
 I don't remember what day. I'm sorry! Oh, I'm sorry we
 didn't mark the day, it was such a day and I so wish I
 could remember the exact date of it.
 Ooh, maybe we did mark it in the back here!

(She flips to the end of the book.)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

No,
 Maybe the front!

(She flips to the front of the book)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

No!
 Oh, I'm so sorry I don't remember.
 But we did mark the page.

(She flips back to the story.)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

"In the Ravine".
 My son was reading it, sitting by the train window
 like this:

(She pretends to be her young son,
 sitting on a train seat engrossed in
 the book.)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

He turned page after page, utterly engrossed.
 He has always been utterly engrossed as a reader, my
 son Alexi. Always quite the reader.
 When he turns a page, unlike some readers who lean
 back casually and look as though they are wandering
 through the story without any kind of real momentum,
 when my son Alexi turns a page it is with such a
 hunger in his eyes that I sometimes believe, when I
 see it, that he would rather die a thousand deaths
 than not read what comes next!
 Such a hunger!
 He had just turned a page, this one here - we marked
 it!
 And the hunger was strong in his eyes when she leaned
 back to him, like this, from two seats forward, she

leaned back and said

(she leans and speaks in an imitation
of Olga)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

How do you like that story?

(She laughs)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

That's what she asks, can you imagine?

But Alexi didn't answer. He didn't even look up until
I poked him for being rude to a nice woman on the
train, I poked him like this:

(she pokes)

And said, "Alexi, did you hear?"

Without looking up he mumbled something about it being
quite good.

Now.

Most anyone would have taken that as a great offense,
but not her, not her.

She leaned back again with a devilishly playful little
smile on her face, and asked him,

She asked him, my son, with the hunger in his eyes,
she asked:

Do you know who wrote that story?

Who wrote it? You may have well have asked him his own
name - such a question! Who wrote it.

"Anton Chekhov", he said and as he did gave her a look
that clearly told her she was an idiot for having to
ask when it said Chekhov right there on the cover.

Oh! That look of his! How embarrassed we both were
later to remember it.

But instead of taking offense, she leaned back and
whispered something to my Alexi that made his eyes
fling open as wide as the heavens, and he jumped up
and begged for the honor of shaking her hand.

And can you imagine! At that point I still did not
know who she was.

Ooh! I am so ashamed to think of it now. So ashamed!
And do you know, I had seen her perform 'The Seagull'
four times - Four times!

And I spent 90 minutes on a train, speaking with her
on the greatness of Chekhov, never once realizing who
she was.

I never have let Alexi hear the end of it for not letting me in on the secret. Not even a hint! Not a word! Not a breath! And she was sitting right here, the whole time, like this.

(She demonstrates Olga sitting.)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

And I sat right there, like this.

(she demonstrates herself sitting.)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

Four times I had seen her onstage!
But if you had asked me right then to guess who the woman was, her name would have never entered my mind. I never would have believed a woman could so completely transform herself if I had not seen her as her own un-acted self. I would have declared it impossible. She could not possibly be the same! She was transformed!

And there I was, just sitting, like this.

(She demonstrates herself sitting)

And her, so close, like this:

(Demonstrates Olga sitting.)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

So many times I have thought back to that first time I saw her onstage. It was beyond anything I had ever seen!

And the ending. Oh! The ending. It was remarkable.

I can still feel what it was to sit there, and-

I will set the scene.

I am sitting, like this.

And onstage, they say:

(Mother on the train picks up a compilation of Chekhov plays, and flips through to find a page.)

(Mother on the Train reads aloud in her best imitation of a dramatic voice.)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

There was an article from America in this magazine about two months ago that I wanted to ask you about, among other things. I am very much interested in this question.

(She whispers.)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

You must take Madame Arkadina away from here; what I wanted to say was, that Constantine has shot himself.

(She pauses for dramatic effect.)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

And then, I will never forget it, I wrote it here after 'Curtain Falls', in pencil of course, never ink, only pencil.
It felt like

(She consults her notes)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

An age and a day and a night.
For an age, and a day, and a night we leaned in, like this,

(She leans in)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

And we listened for more, like this.

(She listens for more.)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

But that was it!
Over!
The end!
We were so surprised, so moved, so surprised.
Do you know, I had never seen anything like it, there had never been
Anything like it!

(She leans forward, listening for more.
She whispers.)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

Not one of us clapped.

Not one of us moved.
 Not one of us breathed.
 It was a spell they had cast, and not one of us wanted
 to break it.
 An age and a day and a night, yes, it was, I wrote it
 down right here.
 I think we scared her half to death with that
 stillness,
 You know how I know it?
 She fainted.
 Right there!
 As the curtains came down in front of her, she
 fainted! Onstage! Like this,

(She pretends to faint)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

I knew the writer.
 I knew his words.
 But I had never seen them like That.
 Nobody had never seen anything like that!
 It was a spell, and we were left like this

(She listens, leans in)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

And then -
 Everyone at once, never ever have I heard anything
 like it!
 Every single one of us, moving from such a spell, into
 thunderous applause.
 It was like this -

(She jumps up and imitates a wild round
 of applause)

MOTHER ON THE TRAIN

For the actor!
 The writer!
 Director!
 Musicians!

(She stops.)

And do you know what?
 By the time we were done my hands were so red and so
 raw that they stayed that way for three days.
 Three days!

That was how long and hard we applauded.

(Olga stares at her hands. Stares at her ring. Plays with it.)

OLGA

Maybe it is the vodka talking, but there are days when I feel the miscarriage to be a relief.

.

And do you know what makes me angry?
 What I get blamed for, not by everyone, but by some,
 and not always out loud but you can tell they are
 thinking it,
 I get blamed for there being no young Anton Chekhov
 for the world to remember the old one better by.
 Nobody regrets there is no young Olga Knipper in the
 world to remember me by!
 If I had died first, maybe it would be different.
 But everyone wants a child for Anton to have been able
 to pass his genius on to.
 What I would have passed on plays no part.
 Anton left plenty for the world to remember him by.
 Books, plays, stories, letters.
 Criticism of his books and plays and stories, if you
 want to count everything in this world that would not
 exist were it not for Anton Chekhov.
 Just in this room even.
 Look how much he's left us to remember him by!
 (She gets up, and as she lists the
 things, drops them into a pile.)

Story.

Story.

Collection of stories.

Play.

Letters.

Play.

More stories.

More stories.

That man had stories coming out of his ears.

Look at this. And I don't even have all of them.

Photographs.

Collection of plays.

Letters.

Letters.

Letters.

Thing after thing for the world to remember him by.
 What will we leave?
 What will we be remembered by?
 Yes, people applaud us now,
 but applause doesn't last.
 It can't be written down.
 It happens, and then it is gone.
 And even if you give the best performance the world
 has ever seen,
 the applause won't last till the morning.
 We hear it, we bow, and then it's gone.
 And the next day, we earn it again. Or don't earn it.
 And every day we start over.
 With nothing but whatever energy, or pride, or doubt
 that morning gives us.
 It is exhausting.

(She becomes old, and becomes Chekhov's
 Mother who takes a sip of vodka, and
 considers carefully as she sets it down
 again.)

.
 Stop explaining, let us have some more

(She pours more vodka.)

I also know that they are saying things about the
 choices you made that are not all nice.

(sip)

You had no way of knowing.

He did not let you see his frailty, if he could help
 it.

He could live off of the energy of your visit,
 And recover after.

Yes,

It is very easy to hide the severity of a condition
 behind a letter.

You did not know.

I believe you.

(sip)

No. No. You must understand this.

It is very important that you understand:

He loved the actress.

You loved the writer.

You acted for him, he wrote for you.
It was a loop that could not be broken.

.

(sip)

No, I never saw it as a choice.
The way I saw it, any choice had been made a long time ago, and the decision making was over before you met.

(sip)

You were not far away because you decided to be.
You were far away because you stuck to the path that brought you together in the first place.

(sip)

(Olga sits, staring at her Vodka. She has been staring at it for some time.)

OLGA

That I am miserable in the theater.
And I would be even more miserable without it.

(More vodka.)

Because here is the thing,
And I do not understand it:
I have forgotten what we were working toward. We can call it truth, or truth onstage, but that's not really it. They are words, they are connected, but they are not really It.

Whatever it was has been long buried by the act of work itself, so many hours and days and nights and days of nothing but the theater and actors and more actors and seeing nothing of life!
Don't you feel like you are missing something of life?
I feel it is passing me by while I do nothing but work.

Work work work for some goal I'm not even sure is there.

And still, I am convinced, that were I to stop working toward this thing I may never reach, I would be even more miserable.

Is that not a tragic discovery?

Or perhaps it's actually a comic one, and I will wake up and laugh at myself in the morning.

I will find it all so funny, I will not be able to

catch my breath for laughing.

(more vodka.)

(she laughs)

Ideals!

(she laughs)

(drinks)

It is a very

.

Intangible thing, isn't it.

Purpose.

The Point of bringing art to people who may or may not want it.

It is very hard to work at something when you can't tell if it has any impact.

(drinks)

I do not know

If I will Ever

See an impact.

(drinks)

Now that!

Is a discovery.

I am looking for

A sign.

That this is all worthwhile.

And!

I see now, that this is a great discovery:

There are no signs.

And!

(drinks)

It could all be pointless anyway.

.

Ha!

That, I think you will agree, is funny.

(more vodka)

I welcome it!

I raise my glass to a life lived for what may be meaningless.

Za huy-nyoo! [To nonsense!]

(drinks)

But I still believe in it.

I believe in whatever it is we do, even if it's nothing.

I see no one, because of it.

I throw away most of the time I have on earth,

Because of it.

Sim uznayesh, budit vremya,
 branoye zhityo,
 smyelo vdyenish nogu f stremya
 i vazmyosh ruzhyo.

Ya sedeltse boyevoye
 sholkom razoshyu.
 Spi, ditya mayo radnoye,
 bayushki bayu.

Bogatýr tý budish s vidu
 i kazak dushoi.
 Pravazhat' tibya ya výdu,
 tý makhnyosh rukoi.

Skolko gorkikh slyoz ukradkoi
 ya f tu notsh pralyu!
 Spi, moi angel, tikho, sladko,
 bayushki bayu.

Stanu ya toskoi tomit'sya,
 byesutyeshno zhdát',
 stanu tselý dyen' molit'sya,
 po notsham gadat'.

Stanu dumat', shto skutshayesh
 tý f tshuzhom krayu.
 Spi-zh, paka zabor nye znayesh,
 bayushki bayu.

Dam tibye ya na darogu
 obrazok svyatoi,
 tý yevo, molyasya bogu,
 stav pyered saboi.

Da, gotovyas v boi apasný,
 pomni mat' svayu.
 Spi, mladynets, moi prekrasný,
 bayushki bayu.

(*Translation at end of script.)

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF LULLABY

Sleep, good boy, my beautiful,
bayushki bayu,
quietly the moon is looking
into your cradle.

I will tell you fairy tales
and sing you little songs,
but you must slumber, with your little eyes closed,
bayushki bayu.

The time will come, then you will learn
the pugnacious life,
boldly you'll stem your foot into the stirrup
and take the gun.

The saddle-cloth for your battle horse
I will sew you from silk.
Sleep now, my dear little child,
bayushki bayu.

You will look like a hero
and be a cossack deep in your heart.
I will hurry to accompany you,
you will just wave your hand.

How many secret bitter tears
will I shed that night!
Sleep, my angel, calmly, sweetly,
bayushki bayu.

I will die from longing,
I will wait inconsolably,
I will pray the whole day long,
and at night I'll tell fortunes.

I will think that you are in trouble
far away in a foreign land.
Sleep now, as long as you don't know sorrows,
bayushki bayu.

I will give you on your way
a small holy icon,
and when you pray to God, you'll
put it right in front of you.

When preparing yourself for the dangerous fight
please remember your mother.
Sleep, good boy, my beautiful,
bayushki bayu.