



Champagne for  
Chekhov

## CHAMPAGNE FOR CHEKHOV

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one act play

by

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## CHAMPAGNE FOR CHEKHOV

### DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ANTON (CHEKHOV) FAMOUS RUSSIAN PLAYRIGHT, SHORT STORY WRITER,  
NON-PRACTICING COUNTRY DOCTOR,  
ORIGINALLY BORN INTO PEASANTRY

OLGA (KNIPPER) ANTON'S WIFE, RUSSIAN ACTRESS,  
FAMOUS FOR PLAYING MASHA IN CHEKHOV'S PLAY  
"THE THREE SISTERS"

ILYA – PEASANT, MINER

LUDA – PEASANT WOMAN, MIDWIFE

MESSENGER – DELIVERS TELEGRAMS (NON-SPEAKING)

MAXIM (GORKY) – FAMOUS RUSSIAN WRITER, BURLY FRIEND

PRISONER – SAKHALIN ISLAND PRISONER

STUDENT – YOUNG RUSSIAN GRADUATE STUDENT ON HOLIDAY

DOCTOR – GERMAN MEDICAL PRACTITIONER, COMPETENT

### SYNOPSIS

Unexpected guests pay Anton Chekhov a visit  
at the most poignant moment of his life.

### PLACE

Hotel room. Badenweiler, Germany.

### TIME

2:00 A.M., July 15, 1904.

## CHAMPAGNE FOR CHEKHOV

**SETTING:** *A hotel room furnished with a bed, night stand, couch, table with a lamp, and coat rack.*

**AT RISE:** *The stage is quiet and dark midnight blue, except for moonlight shining through a solitary window.*

*After a short while, a man, ANTON, coughs once—a turberculitic cough.*

*It subsides.*

*Then...two coughs.*

*Silence for an appropriately dramatic time.*

*This time, comedically, three coughs—we're going for laughs here—we're expecting four next—but instead we get a full coughing fit.*

*OLGA, lying on a couch, flips on a lamp.*

*The lamp throws off a warm light, illuminating a cozy room.*

*She gets up and tends to the man in a comfortable down bed.*

Darling, what can I do?

**OLGA**

*The man, ANTON, throws off a heavy blanket, and lies there, like a victim, under a thinner blanket.*

Water?

**OLGA**

*He shakes his head.*

**ANTON**

I am so sorry to be waking you...where are my manners?...waking you, the most minimal of inconveniences: I am so sorry to put you through all this.

**OLGA**

Don't you worry about me.

*She dips a washcloth in a bowl on a nightstand and dabs his forehead.*

*He enjoys it.*

*When she pulls her arm away, he seizes her by the wrist.*

*She is startled by his sudden aggressive move.*

**OLGA**

*(coy)*

Anton?

*He pulls her in.*

**ANTON**

Promise me...you will find a husband...one who is as fit as an ox...not like this broken country doctor...a doctor who can't even cure himself of a simple cough.

**OLGA**

*(pulls away from such nonsense)*

I am not making any such promises.

*He tries to get up, as if trying to follow her.*

**OLGA**

What do you need? I can get it for you.

**ANTON**

I want to go to the moon.

*He struggles to make it out of the bed, but can't.*

**OLGA**

That's the fever talking.

**ANTON**

You think so?

**OLGA**

Da. You're talking kind of funny.

**ANTON**

Only need to get as far as that window.

**OLGA**

Tomorrow, we'll ask the hotel to move your bed.

**ANTON**

*(waves her off, gently)*

No need to go to such lengths.

*OLGA walks away and occupies herself with tidying up, with her back to ANTON.*

*Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op 18: II. Adagio Sostenuto starts.*

● MUSIC: [https://youtu.be/n6yn3S\\_wwgM?t=5](https://youtu.be/n6yn3S_wwgM?t=5)

*The light of the room fades to a warm yellow-orange light one would expect from a large chandelier in a great hall.*

*ANTON opens the blanket and gracefully steps out of bed dressed in a fine suit and wearing his characteristic pince-nez.*

**ANTON**

Can you hear it?

**OLGA**

Hear what?

**ANTON**

The adagio from the second.

**OLGA**

I don't hear anything.

**ANTON**

Moscow, 1901.

*He embraces her from behind—a bit frisky—turns her around, and slow dances with her. She accepts.*

**ANTON**

He almost didn't make it back.

**OLGA**

Who?

**ANTON**

Sergei. Remember that disastrous premiere of the first? The critics raked him over the coals. It took eight years for him to make a comeback.

**OLGA**

Nine.

**ANTON**

Nine?

*OLGA confirms joyously.*

**ANTON**

And, look, what kind of comeback he had...after his muse braved her return.

**OLGA**

That's loyalty.

**ANTON**

*(with tears in his eyes)*

I was so happy for him. A model for everyone: "Never give up!"

*She hugs him mightily.*

**OLGA**

That's the spirit!

**ANTON**

Never give up on your art!

**OLGA**

*(pushing away, as if inspecting him)*

Are you trying to vex me?

*ANTON laughs.*

**ANTON**

Never!

*She too joins him in laughing.*

*The light slowly fades to green.*

*The music slowly fades out from here.*

**OLGA**

Oh, look! There's someone approaching.

*The door opens and a Russian peasant, ILYA, slowly approaches ANTON.*

**ILYA**

Dr. Chekhov, thank you for everything you have done for me. Look at me...

*(does a half swing each way)*

...I'm well again.

*ANTON throws off his jacket, and now looks like a country doctor, with a stethoscope around his neck.*

*OLGA picks up his coat, annoyed, and hangs it on the coat rack.*

*He gently dabs ILYA's chest with the stethoscope; turns him around and does the same to his back.*

*Looking for Olga, Anton inadvertently looks at the audience and winks.*



Cough!

**ANTON**

*ILYA coughs as ordered.*

*ANTON turns him around.*

Indeed you are!

**ANTON**

*ANTON shakes hands with ILYA, who offers money. ANTON quickly dismisses the gesture.*

*Before this is concluded, ANTON is distracted by yet another person entering—a peasant midwife, LUDA.*

*ILYA exits efficiently, stage left.*

*LUDA holds out her hands.*

For you, Dr. Chekhov!

**LUDA**

What is it?

**ANTON**

It's not much.

**LUDA**

*She hands him some money and some bread.*

Oh, how kind, but...

**ANTON**

*LUDA starts walking away.*

...completely unnecessary.

**ANTON**

*ANTON takes a bite of her bread.*

**ANTON**

Please! Payment not necessary. I thank you all the same.

*LUDA rushes back, falls to her knees and hugs his legs and kisses his hand.*

**ANTON**

Any more of that, and they will have to put me in robes.

*He hands her back the money.*

**ANTON**

But the bread I'm keeping.

*LUDA smiles, gets up, and keeps looking back in reverence at ANTON as she exits stage left.*

*He takes a hearty bite out of the bread.*

**ANTON**

Delicious! Do you have any more?

*OLGA laughs.*

*ANTON hands OLGA what remains of the bread.*

*A MESSENGER enters with a telegram.*

**ANTON**

*(Russian, "Thank you")*

*Spasiba.*

*(to Olga)*

I wonder what news he brings.

*ANTON hands him a tip. The MESSENGER is appreciative and exits stage left.*

*ANTON opens the letter.*

**ANTON**

Gorky is on his way. You must meet him.

*MAXIM GORKY enters...the lighting changing into a light blue.*

**MAXIM**

Anton Pavlovich...

**ANTON**

Alexei Maximovich...

*MAXIM heaves his heavy coat toward OLGA, as if she is a common maid.*

*ANTON And MAXIM embrace forcefully.*

**ANTON**

Olga, I want you to meet Maxim. Maxim, this is Olga Knipper...my wife.

**MAXIM**

Enchanted.

*Embarrassed, MAXIM, realizes his faux pas, and retrieves his coat from OLGA.*

**ANTON**

What brings you this distance? What news from Moscow?

**MAXIM**

*(looking him up and down)*

I heard you're in a crisis. How are you?

**ANTON**

Any idiot can face a crisis—it's the day-to-day living that wears me out.

*Talking to OLGA...*

**MAXIM**

He never changes...the old curmudgeon.

**ANTON**

Join us?

**MAXIM**

I wish. I must be off...back to Nizhny Novgorod. Oh, I wanted to tell you...I read that short story you sent me.

**ANTON**

*(eager)*

What did you think of it?

**MAXIM**

Can't wait to put my name on it.

*MAXIM winks at OLGA.*

*ANTON is not fooled, but is pleased just the same.*

*And with that, MAXIM exits in a flourish.*

*The light fades to red.*

*At the door is a dangerous looking man, in prison garb, shackled.*

*He arduously makes his way toward ANTON. OLGA hides behind ANTON.*

*The PRISONER carries a knife in his hand.*

**ANTON**

What is the meaning of this?

**PRISONER**

Dr. Chekhov?

**ANTON**

Yes?!

**PRISONER**

*(manifesting the knife)*

Do you see this?

*(approaching, looking threatening)*

If I had met you earlier in my life, I may never have been in this situation. I want to thank you for visiting us at Sakhalin Island, and reporting on our plight in the katorga.

**ANTON**

Where are you from, sir? Why do I detect a familiar dialect?

**PRISONER**

Taganrog, your hometown. You showed us it was possible to rise above being a peasant. It's an honor to know there was hope after all.

*He fixates on the knife for an uncomfortable time (as if contemplating stabbing ANTON, but making peace with himself)...then hands his knife to ANTON.*

**PRISONER**

*(Russian, "I am grateful.")*

Blagodaryu.

*The PRISONER exits with the same labored difficulty as he had entered.*

*ANTON and OLGA look at each other.*

*ANTON hands the knife to OLGA, who walks away to use it to cut up the bread into slices on a cutting board.*

*The light slowly fades back to normal.*

*ANTON uses this time to walk over to the bed and climb back in, covering himself again with the thinner blanket.*

*OLGA turns around and returns to his bedside.*

*ANTON is motionless.*

**OLGA**

Anton? Can you hear me?

*She runs to the door and exits. We hear banging on doors in a hallway.*

*She returns.*

*Shortly thereafter, a young Russian STUDENT arrives.*

**STUDENT**

*(still waking up)*

Why the haste, madam?

**OLGA**

My husband needs help. Please go fetch the doctor. Quickly!

**STUDENT**

Right away, madam!

*He leaves in haste.*

*OLGA is pacing around the room, worried.*

*ANTON rouses in his bed.*

*OLGA, not noticing, sits down on the couch and puts her head in her hands.*

*We hear nothing.*

*Then a sniffle from Olga.*

**ANTON**

*(weakly)*

Do you believe... (mumbling)

*OLGA stops cold; runs to his side.*

**OLGA**

*(wiping her tears away)*

What, dear?

**ANTON**

Do you believe we will see each other again, Masha?

**OLGA**

No, I think this one life is it.

**ANTON**

Then, even with all its suffering, it's better to have lived than to never have existed at all.

*OLGA hugs him tightly, ANTON clutches her with the same ferocity.*

*They have this quiet, private moment before...*

*Some noises emanate from outside the door as the DOCTOR and the STUDENT run in.*

*The STUDENT remains at the door.*

*OLGA backs away from the bed to make room for the DOCTOR, who drops his bag on the floor.*

**ANTON**

*(German, "I am dying.")*

*Ich sterbe.*

**OLGA**

What did he say?

**DOCTOR**

A little secret he was trying to keep from you.

**OLGA**

What can you do, good doctor?

**DOCTOR**

I could order him an oxygen pillow.

**ANTON**

What's the use? Before it arrives, I'll be a corpse.

**DOCTOR**

Then, there's only one thing that can be done.

*He walks over to the student.*

**DOCTOR**

Run down to the hotel lobby...

*...quieter as he approaches, whispering his final instructions to him.*

*The STUDENT exits.*

**DOCTOR**

*(shouting after him)*

Quickly!

*He takes his stethoscope out, and applies it to ANTON'S chest.*

*He looks around at OLGA—revealing nothing but a blank, knowing stare.*

*OLGA takes refuge in a chair, the full weight of what is happening bearing down on her.*

*The student returns with a bottle of champagne and a tray with three glasses.*

*OLGA gets back up.*

*The DOCTOR swiftly uncorks the champagne bottle, and pops the cork into the ceiling, champagne volcanoing.*

*Hastily, he pours three glasses, handing the first to OLGA, the second to ANTON, and taking the third for himself.*

**DOCTOR**

A toast!

**ANTON**

What's the use?

**DOCTOR**

To a life well lived.

*He raises his glass.*

*OLGA and ANTON slowly raise their glasses at each other.*



*ANTON smiles at OLGA.*

**ANTON**

It's been so long since I've had champagne.

*ANTON sips the champagne.*

*The DOCTOR and OLGA each take single, polite sips from their glasses.*

*ANTON takes his final sip, finishes off the glass, then hands it to OLGA.*

*He makes himself comfortable in bed, as if intending to sleep on his left side.*

*They tenderly watch him in his short routine.*

*A short while later, it is clear he is gone.*

*Everyone stands limp in supreme silence.*

*After a moment, we first hear, and then see, the fluttering of a moth as its shadow, big and small, projects itself against the wall.*

*The fluttering goes on for some time.*

*OLGA goes over to the window, opens it.*

*The light in the room dims, as the Russian STUDENT switches off the light.*

*The DOCTOR and STUDENT quietly exit, leaving OLGA by herself.*

*The moonlight is the only source illuminating the dark midnight blue room.*

*A short while later, the fluttering dies away.*

*A beat.*

*The soft, triumphal ending of  
Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2 in C  
minor, Op 18: II. Adagio Sostenuto fades in.*

● MUSIC: [https://youtu.be/n6yn3S\\_wwgM?t=473](https://youtu.be/n6yn3S_wwgM?t=473)

*In the dark, ANTON gets out of the bed  
and dances with OLGA—as the music plays  
out.*

END OF PLAY