

# **Stories of Anton Chekov Study Guide**

## **Stories of Anton Chekov by Anton Chekhov**

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# Stories 1 through 3

## Stories 1 through 3 Summary

### Story 1: The Death of a Clerk

While watching the opera *The Belles of Corneville*, office manager Ivan Dmitrich Cherviakov happens to sneeze quite forcefully. Unfortunately, he sprays the man in front of him, who is General Brizshalov, an important official with the government. Cherviakov sees the General take his handkerchief and wipe his bald head off. Cherviakov rushes over to apologize to the important gentleman. However, the general repeatedly tells him "never mind" or "I've already forgotten." But nothing seems to satisfy Cherviakov. He feels so guilty and embarrassed that the next day he goes to see the General to apologize in person. However, the General replies that Cherviakov "must be joking." Again, Cherviakov feels slighted and returns the next day. Finally, the General gets angry and tells Cherviakov to get out. Cherviakov is so disappointed and still so guilty that he goes home, lies on the couch, and dies.

### Story 2: Small Fry

The Clerk Nevyrazimov is in a dismal assignment serving his duty in a lowly clerk position. He observes his dismal surroundings but has pity for a cockroach that scurries by. Nevyrazimov feels pity for the cockroach. He will eventually get out of this dismal environment but the poor cockroach will have to stay. He hears the church bells ring and can see those outside scurrying to go to church. It is Easter but he is poor and must earn money. He is not happy with his lot and is envious of others in higher positions. Nevyrazimov sees the cockroach again and in anger smashes it. Nevyrazimov feels better.

### Story 3: The Huntsman

Yegor Vlasych is a proud hunter riding on his horse and returning from a hunt. He passes through a meadow and hears his named called. He turns to see that it is Pelageya, a woman of about thirty years of age. Pelageya asks why Yegor has not stopped by to see her. She mentions that the last time he stopped by he hollered at her and beat her. She wants him to visit for a while. Reluctantly, he dismounts from his horse and lays out on the grass, looking up to the sky. As it turns out, the two are actually man and wife. Yegor indicates he would rather burn down his house and kill himself rather than live with Pelageya. He reminds her that he was drunk when he married her and admonishes her for marrying him. He finally takes off again, showing no emotion at all for his wife. Pelageya, however, is sad to see him go. He gives her a ruble, as if that would take the place of feeling he might have for her. In tears, Pelageya watches Yegor ride off in the distance - not knowing when he may return.



## Stories 1 through 3 Analysis

### Story 1: The Death of a Clerk

This is a case of not taking yes for an answer. Cherviakov is so prepared to receive harsh treatment for sneezing on the important General Brizzhalov that he is not satisfied by the General's nonchalant treatment of the situation. The General is perfectly satisfied with Cherviakov's initial apology. In fact, the General does not even seem to think that an apology is in order. But Cherviakov persists in apologizing until he receives the response he thinks is fitting - apparently some level of admonishment. The General is finally angered at being pestered, not by the initial sneeze. Brizzhalov orders Cherviakov to leave. Cherviakov finally gets the punishment he feels he deserves. Unfortunately, the realization that his actions were so distasteful to the important man that it caused him to die.

### Story 2: Small Fry

Nevyrazimov is a bitter person totally dissatisfied with his dismal existence and clerical position. He has been appealing to his benefactor for ten years to be transferred, obviously without success. In this story, he is drafting a letter to his benefactor in an effort to gain a better position. Nevyrazimov has been trying for so long that he does not appear to have much hope in advancing. He envies the people on the outside who are scurrying to church services longing to be one of them. He feels pity and somewhat superior to a cockroach thinking that the cockroach has no chance of getting out of his dismal surroundings. At the end, he smashes the cockroach. The act makes him feel better since he at least has power over something. Perhaps he also felt good that he freed the cockroach from his dismal surroundings.

### Story 3: The Huntsman

The arrogant hunter, Yegor, looks down on the "cow girl" Pelageya, even though she is his wife. He is openly abusive and cruel to her and would rather kill himself than have to live with her. Nevertheless, she has feelings for him and longs for the times she can see him, even though he is anything but kind or affectionate. Yegor looks down on his peasant wife and reminds her that he only married her because he was so drunk. When he departs, he gives her some money, perhaps to cover for some subconscious guilt. She takes the money but looks sadly after him as he rides away, wishing he loved her and wanted to be with her.



# Stories 4 through 6

## Stories 4 through 6 Summary

### Story 1: The Malefactor

A peasant fisherman named Denis Grigoriev is appearing before the magistrate. He is being brought up before the court by a witness who saw him taking a bolt from the train track. The magistrate tells him of his offense but Denis is having a difficult time understanding why what he did is so terrible. Denis is a fisherman and admits taking the bolt, but for good reason. He needs the weight of the bolt to sink his bait. If he does not have a good weighted sinker, his bait will not reach the most desirable catch. The magistrate informs him that another railroad bolt was found on a search of his house. Denis readily admits taking bolts but never thought taking bolts could cause derailment of a train, as the magistrate claims. Denis and his brothers have been taking bolts for years. The magistrate understands why there was a derailment last year. The magistrate sentences Denis to hard time. As he is taken away, Denis still does not understand why he is being punished.

### Story 2: Panikhida

In the village of Verkhnie Zaprudy, shop owner Andrei Andreich attends church at the Mother of God Hodigitria. He lingers after the service and notices that the priest, Father Grigory, looks angered and is pointing at someone. Andrei turns to see no one behind him and realizes that the priest is trying to get his attention. Father Grigory demands to know if Andrei left a note. The note asks that the harlot Maria be forgiven. The priest is outraged about the word "harlot" being used in a prayer request, as it is a word that should not even be spoken. Andrei justifies his use of the word since his daughter, Maria, was an actress. He then asks that a commemorative prayer (a Panikhida) be said for his daughter. The prayer begins, but as it goes on, Andrei still murmurs a prayer for the harlot Maria. He recalls when she visited how she cried at the beauty of the fields. She is sad and she is breathing as though she didn't have many more breaths to breathe. Although the prayers are said, the soul that seems to hover in the church is sad.

### Story 3: Anyuta

Anyuta is a sorrowful maid who is working for Stepan Klochkov, a medical student. She has been the maid for quite a few masters and is looking for a lasting relationship, but fears Stepan will pass her on as soon as his schooling is complete. He has no feeling at all for the maid and is ready to send her on her own. She is not pleasant to look upon and is very skinny. Also, Stepan feels she has not been doing a good job in cleaning up the place. He tells her to leave but she is so sad that he decides to let her stay for a while if she chooses to. Anyuta takes her coat off and stays.



## Stories 4 through 6 Analysis

### Story 1: The Malefactor

The fisherman takes a railroad track bolt to use as a sinker for his fishing line. He does not understand why what he did is illegal. After all, he needs a sinker to get to the best fish. The magistrate explains that what he did could result in killing people if the train went off the track. The fisherman still does not understand, since he and his brothers only take bolts that will not cause the track to fail. Since there was a derailment the year before, the magistrate now understands why. The fisherman still insists he did nothing wrong and can only see his narrow need as important and not the danger to others he is causing. The fisherman chalks it up to education. The magistrate is educated and he is not. Only an educated man could understand why it is a danger to remove the bolts.

### Story 2: Panikhida

The word "Panikhida" means commemorative prayer for the dead. The shopkeeper Andrei leaves an inappropriate prayer request for his dead daughter. He asks that the harlot Maria be forgiven. The priest takes offense at the word "harlot" being used in a prayer request. The Panikhida proceeds but the shopkeeper cannot keep from referring to his daughter as a harlot. The soul that is present in the church does not feel peace but remains sad and forlorn. Her own father looked down on her profession as an actress, referring her in a derisive manner. Maria's soul is longing for proper respect from her father but does not receive it.

### Story 3: Anyuta

Anyuta is a maid who has been passed from one master to another. She is looking for a lasting situation but is destined to be unfulfilled. Although Chekhov refers to her as a maid who does housework and chores, he may instead be drawing attention to a woman being passed from man to man, used and abused by men, then thrown aside. Chekhov, in drawing this comparison, illustrates that such a woman will not find happiness.



# Stories 7 through 9

## Stories 7 through 9 Summary

### Story 7: Easter Night

The narrator is telling his story. He travels down the Goltva River on Easter Night (eve) for the Easter Vigil. The monk who is manning the ferry and picks him up tells him of the death of the hierodeacon Nikolai. The monk is extremely upset because Nikolai has the gift of writing akathists, songs of praise to Christ or to a saint. The narrator asks if Nikolai's songs were published. The monk responds that no one is interested in new songs from a simple, young monk. The monk, Ieronym, lets the storyteller off on the bank where the church is located. He enjoys the mass but often thinks of the monk and of the dead Nikolai. When he is ferried back by the monk, he notices that Ieronym is staring at a young woman. He presumes that the monk is not really looking at the woman *per se*, but rather envisioning the gentle, artistic dead Nikolai.

### Story 8: Vanka

Vanka Zhukov is a nine-year-old boy. Vanka is sent off to Moscow as a shoe shop apprentice. His parents are both dead. On Christmas eve he writes his grandfather a letter. He wishes him a Merry Christmas, but also tells him how he is beaten and mistreated by the shoe shoemaker and by the other apprentices. He begs his grandfather to send for him. Vanka promises his grandfather he will take care of him when he is old. Vanka recalls the happy times he had with his grandfather - how they would pick out Christmas trees for the master and decorate them. Vanka was taught to read and write by the master's daughter. Vanka dreams of his grandfather reading his letter, but sadly that will not happen. Vanka addresses the letter to his grandfather, Konstantin Makarych with the address of "in the Village."

### Story 9: Sleepy

Vanka is the nanny for the master shoemaker's baby boy. She is so exhausted that even though the baby cries constantly, she falls asleep. She dreams of her now dead father and her mother and the village road bustling with people where she once lived. During the entire dream, she faintly hears a baby crying in the background somewhere. The shoemaker catches her sleeping and hits her soundly on the back of her head. She wakes for a while, dreams again, and then is faced with the harping mother who scolds her for falling asleep. It soon is time to get up and do the day's chores. When she is moving she can fight the sleep, but when she is stationary she drifts off. That night she is once again faced with the crying baby. In her exhaustion, she laughs when she finds the source that is confounding her from sleep. It is the baby. She strangles the baby and finally is able to sleep.



## Stories 7 through 9 Analysis

### Story 7: Easter Night

The narrator of the story is taken down the river to the Easter Vigil on a ferry manned by a novice monk named Ieronym. He is mourning the passing of another young monk named Nikolai. Nikolai is a gentle person who is gifted with the ability to write beautiful songs to Christ or to saints. He is misunderstood by the other monks who would not listen to his songs but prefer instead the songs of elders. The narrator attends the Easter Vigil but is bothered that no one relieved Ieronym on the ferry so that he could attend the service. He is haunted by Nikolai, who he wished he would have known. When he returns on the ferry, Ieronym is still manning it. Ieronym is gazing at a young woman, which the narrator interprets as his longing for his gentle friend Nikolai. Perhaps Chekhov is hinting at an unnatural affection between the monks, but that is not clear.

### Story 8: Vanka

The orphan Vanka is forced to become a shoemaker's apprentice in Moscow at the tender age of nine. He is mistreated there, beaten and starved. He writes his grandfather on Christmas eve, begging him to send for him. Vanka does not think he will survive given the conditions he is forced to endure. Vanka thinks of the happy days before his mother died and he was forced to live with his grandfather. Although he writes the letter to his grandfather, it must have been his grandfather who sent him off to Moscow. The grandfather will not receive the letter since Vanka does not name the village. Sadly, the young boy will probably not escape from his horrible situation.

### Story 9: Sleepy

Vanka is the nanny for a baby who cries all the time. Vanka is so sleep-deprived that she falls asleep singing to the baby. When she falls asleep, she dreams of her former life with her parents and the village where they lived. She dreams and longs for that old life. She is mistreated by the baby's parents, the shoemaker and his wife. They hit and deride her about sleeping while she should be attending the baby. They make her work on chores all day and tend to the crying baby all night. They have no consideration for her needs. She is so exhausted and sleep-deprived that in her stupor she kills the baby so she can have some sleep.





# A Boring Story

## A Boring Story Summary

### A BORING STORY

The narrator, Nikolai Stepanych, tells his own story. He begins by explaining that his own name is very popular and respected. He is a famous professor of medicine and a councilor. He describes himself as very old and feeble. He is wrinkled and frail. Stepanych describes his failing memory and his growing propensity toward insomnia. He looks at his fat, ungainly wife and tries to find in her the slender beauty he married. She only worries about poverty and bargains. He is embarrassed that his daughter Liza is aware of her parents' money concerns, that they have trouble paying the servants. She volunteers to sell her personal items to raise money, which bothers her father even more.

The old man goes off to university to give a lecture. Stepanych compares his lecturing skills with that of an orchestral conductor. He must do and be aware of many things at one time. When he notices the students fidgeting, he cracks a joke to regain their attention. With advancing age, however, he is losing his skills and is ashamed. He feels he should retire but cannot bring himself to do so. Stepanych fears it would kill him. He is the guardian of a young girl, Katya, whose parents are dead. Katya has an unending passion for the theatre. She feels it loftier than any other profession. After school, she decided she wanted to become an actress and left with a troupe. Katya falls in love with a fellow actor but soon becomes disillusioned with the troupe, which she describes in letters to the professor as frauds and worse. Katya tries to commit suicide once and writes that she buried her baby in Yalta. After four years away, she returns, but has become indolent and careless in appearance.

Stepanych's daughter Liza has a gentleman caller, Mr. Gnekker, who the professor dislikes. He finds him phony and resents the fancy dinners and liquors presented by his wife in order to impress this person. The professor sees the behavior of his wife and daughter as affected. They have changed and are no longer genuine. The Professor knows he is in failing health and feels he will not live much longer. Stepanych's friends and family all try to get him to get a cure, go to a doctor, but he refuses and continues to doctor himself. One late night he is interrupted by both Liza and Katya, saying they are desperately sick at heart. The professor travels to Kharkov to learn some background on his potential son-in-law. While there he learns that his daughter Liza eloped, rendering his trip meaningless. He grows very introspective in Kharkov, knowing that he will not live much longer. He has a surprise visit from Katya, who is miserable and imploring Stepanych as to what she should do with the rest of her life. He has no answer and she leaves in a huff. He realizes that he spent most of his life in light with only that last few months in darkness. Stepanych pities Katya, who is destined to spend her entire life in confusion.



## A Boring Story Analysis

Stepanych is a famous medical professor whose name and reputation are widely known and revered. He has always been proud of this fact, although toward the last portion of his life, he is experiencing financial problems not fitting for someone of his renown. Additionally, his wife and children and friends consistently present for him one problem after another. Stepanych is in bad health and is nearing the end of his life. Rather than being able to look back and enjoy the life he has lead, he is questioning the very foundation of his life. What is the true value of being famous? What great scholars has his teaching turned out? What has he really contributed?

In the twilight of his years, he is leading somewhat of a double life - the outwardly honored and glorified life of a famous scholar versus the strife of a personal life that through his introspection grows increasingly disappointing. He looks at his unattractive wife and wonders where the beauty is he married. His son is grown but still living off him. Stepanych's daughter is settling for a suitor who Stepanych deems lower class. Katya, for whom he served as guardian, lives a scandalous and empty life and has a poor relationship with the rest of his family. He is disappointed in his students and colleagues. Nothing seems to satisfy Stepanych in his declining years. He is even critical of Russian literature in these dark days.

Although he is in psychological anguish in his final months, a visit from Katya reveals a key point in his life. Most of his life he enjoyed his fame and position and work and family. Only in his ailing months is he questioning these things. The young Katya's life has been so empty, as will be the rest of her life. She will never know a minute of some of the joys of life and work that he knew, even though they seem distant now at the end.



# Stories 11 through 13

## Stories 11 through 13 Summary

### Story 11: Gusev

Gusev is a soldier returning by boat to his native Russia from the Far East. The trip will take months, and conditions on the boat are not comfortable. He is in third class with the peasants, where it is very rough and at times as hot as a steam bath. Gusev drifts off quite a bit, dreaming of his family and farm back in Russia. He can envision his younger brother and son on sleighs in the snow. He dreams of himself riding horseback down the meadow. Another returning soldier named Pavel Ivanych is very talkative and arrogant. He claims that he could have traveled in the first class quarters but he dressed like a peasant so he could be in third class since he did not have enough rubles. However, he claims to be a first-class gentlemen. He boasts constantly about all his wonderful attributes and openly criticizes Gusev and the other soldiers for their low class status. Pavel boasts about his good health as well, but the conditions are too much for him and he dies on board. Another soldier tells Gusev, who has lost weight and is frail from not been eating or drinking, that he will soon die. The soldier is correct. Gusev does not last much longer. He is sewn up in a canvas bag and after a few prayers dropped into the ocean.

### Story 12: Peasant Women

Dyudya owns a large house and lodges traveling gentlemen on his grounds in the village of Raibuzh. Matvei Savvich is such a traveler who arrives with a young boy, Kuzka, who is an adopted orphan. Matvei tells the story of how he came to adopt the boy. In his hometown, he lived near a family who son Vasya is married to the widow Mashenka. Vasya is summoned for service in the army. Matvei begins dropping by Mashenka's house to help her and visit. It is not long before the two were in love and living as man and wife. Vasya returns from service. Matvei has grown tired of Mashenka and is glad her husband has returned. Mashenka is not happy and wants to stay with Matvei. Ultimately, Mashenka poisons Vasya with arsenic. She is sent to prison and dies a short time later. Matvei then takes the orphaned boy. Upon hearing of this, Dyudya's daughters-in-law contemplate poisoning him and his son so they can escape their horrid existence. They do not wind up killing the men, largely due to Mashenka's fate after poisoning her husband.

### Story 13: The Fidget

Olga Ivanovna's wedding is held. She is marrying Osip Stepanych Dymov, a doctor and titular councilor. Olga is very talented - accomplished at singing, acting, sculpting, piano, and really anything she tries. One of her main talents is befriending celebrities. Her friends are curious why she has married the dull and scholarly Osip. She says she loves him because of the care and attention he gave her father when he was sick. After they



marry, Olga still makes the rounds of all celebrity and artsy friends. Her husband does not object, but as a scientist does not understand the value of art. When Olga is away on an artisan's holiday, one of her fellow artists named Ryabovsky tells Olga of his undying love for her. At first she feels guilty and resists, but finally admits she loves him too. Ryabovsky grows bored with Olga and she returns to Osip. He is so happy to see her that she does not confess about Ryabovsky as she had planned. Olga becomes obsessed with Ryabovsky, begging for his love and following him around town. Osip is aware of his wife's feelings but remains quiet. Osip contracts diphtheria and dies.

## Stories 11 through 13 Analysis

### Story 11: Gusev

This is a sad story of a soldier dreaming of returning home to Russia after serving in the Far East. He has a most unpleasant experience in the third class facilities, which are hot and uncomfortable. His dreams of being home, and in some cases being in the snow, are his only relief from the loneliness and the unbearable heat. He is a quiet and unassuming man and puts up with a boastful contemporary who talks incessantly. Unfortunately, there is no happy ending as Gusev dies on board and is thrown overboard. The tale includes what happens to the canvas bag containing Gusev's body after it's thrown in the ocean. A shark plays with the bag and rips it, releasing Gusev. The story ends with imagery of the sky turning beautiful colors with a triumphal arch in the horizon. The surrealism suggests that nature (the shark) freed Gusev so that he could enter heaven (the triumphal arch) and that God is pleased (the sky turns beautiful colors and the ocean is calmed). Gusev is a good man, one who God is pleased to welcome into heaven.

### Story 12: Peasant Women

The story that Matvei tells is of falling in love with a married woman. He kindly lays this at the feet of the woman since much vileness and evil come from the female sex. When the woman's husband returns from the army, Matvei is happy since he has grown tired of the woman, Mashenka. However, much to his chagrin, she pledges her undying love for him and rejects her husband. They both wind up beating her unmercifully. She, in turn, poisons her husband, is sentenced to hard labor in Siberia, but dies soon after her sentence begins. Matvei adopts their son. The landowner's daughters-in-law considering poisoning him and his son but do not want to follow Mashenka's fate. The story depicts women as generally evil versus the innocent, victimized men led astray by them. Perhaps Chekhov wanted to point to the unfair perception that society at the time had of women.

### Story 13: The Fidget

Olga Ivanovna is so caught up in her worship of people she deemed celebrities and gifted that she failed to realize the worth of her own husband. He is a scientist, a doctor, and did not appreciate or understand the arts. All Olga thought of is when the next time



she would be with celebrities and artists. She has an affair with a fellow artist who is cruel and mistreats her. She sacrifices her relationship with her kind husband over this man who did not care for her in the least. She catches another woman with her lover and finally realizes it is over with him. She vows to be a good a faithful wife to her husband, but it is too late. He contracts diphtheria and dies. His colleagues are all saddened and praise what a great man he was. Only after his death does Olga realize that the true celebrity in her life had been her husband.



# Stories 14 through 16

## Stories 14 through 16 Summary

### Story 14: In Exile

A young Tartar has been wrongly convicted of stealing horses and beating a man. He has been sentenced to hard labor in Siberia. He tells Semyon, nicknamed the Explainer, about the beautiful and intelligent wife he left behind and that she and his mother will come to live in Siberia. The Explainer tells him a long story about another man who was banished to Siberia. His wife and daughter came and lived in Siberia just three years. The wife became bored and began an affair with an officer and finally left for Russia. Some years later, the daughter is grown and still in Siberia. She became very ill, contracting consumption. The man spends all his money on trying to cure the daughter. The man wants to fetch another doctor he heard of, but the Explainer tells him he must wait due to the weather. The Tartar, in broken Russian, tells the Explainer he is bad and that the gentleman who wants to save his daughter is good. The convicts all go inside their hut except the Tartar, who can be heard crying and howling outside like a dog.

### Story 15: Ward No. 6

Ward No. 6 is a hospital psychiatric ward. There are five men in this ward in varying stages of madness. Nikita is an old soldier who watches over the ward but mistreats the men and steals from them. Ivan Dmitrich's father died and left him and his mother penniless. Not long after, his mother died and he was alone. It was difficult for him socially as he was distrustful and had many idiosyncrasies. His psychological problems deepened as he became paranoid that he was going to be arrested and put in chains. When he goes off running wildly in the streets, he is evaluated by a doctor who orders him transferred to Ward No. 6 at the town's hospital. The ward is overrun with cockroaches and mice and its patients are mistreated and neglected by the caretakers and staff.

Dr. Andrei Yefimych Ragin had been interested in a philosophic career but was goaded into pursuing medicine by his father. Upon being assigned to the hospital, he was appalled at the poor conditions of the hospital, and in particular Ward No. 6. Although he had good intentions, he soon becomes disheartened and discontinues daily visits, stopping by only when necessary. Though educated and learned, Andrei is reserved and timid. It is difficult for him to give orders or resolve conflicts. Andrei spends much time reading and alone in thought. He yearns for the exchange of intellectual ideas and philosophic thought.

Upon a visit to Ward 6, Andrei encounters Ivan Dmitrich. After just minutes, Andrei understands that he has finally met someone in the town who is interesting and intelligent and who thinks in a deep, philosophical manner. Andrei begins stopping by to converse with Ivan several times a day. Ivan is bitter, telling Andrei he has led a simple



life free of suffering while he, Ivan, has suffered unduly. Doctors and staff begin to notice the inordinate amount of time Andrei is spending with Ivan and question his sanity. An old friend, Mikhail Averyanych, invites him on an extended trip to Moscow, Warsaw, and other locations. During the trip, Andrei becomes so annoyed by the mindless prattle of Mikhail that he feigns illness and stays in the hotel to escape being subjected to Mikhail's endless chatter.

Upon returning, Andrei had been replaced at the hospital by Dr. Khobotov. Andrei moves to a small apartment and is destitute. Khobotov and Mikhail visit one evening, their banalities causing Andrei to scream at them to leave. A short time later, on the pretense of needing his advice, Khobotov takes Andrei to Ward No. 6 and leaves him there to stay as a patient. After repeated attempts to leave, he is brutally beaten by the caretaker. Andrei realizes the horrid situation he finds himself and the next morning dies of a stroke.

### Story 16: The Black Monk

Andrei Vasilyevich Kovrin, master of arts, is suffering from frayed nerves. He visits the country house of his former guardian, Pesotsky, to get away from the rush of the city. Pesotsky is a famed horticulturist with acres of robust flowers, plants, and trees. Pesotsky's daughter Tanya lives with her father and helps with the plants and flowers. Andrei tells Tanya of the legend of the Black Monk. A thousand years ago, a monk dressed in all black was roaming the Arabian desert. The sun causes multiple mirages of the monk to be transmitted from one end of the atmosphere to the other. These images are perhaps on Mars or on the Southern Cross by now, but are now due to reappear again on earth. Andrei goes on a stroll in the forest and sees a large black monolith appear in the distance. It sails toward him and becomes small as it manifests itself into a monk. The monk nodded and smiled at him as it passed. Andrei feels exhilarated but fears that the others will think him mad and keeps the incident to himself.

Pesotsky worries about who will manage his horticultural business once he is gone. He tells Andrei that he would not be happy with anyone other than Andrei as a son-in-law. Andrei takes a stroll in the garden and once again encounters the Black Monk, who tells him that he is one of God's chosen, selected to serve the eternal truth and represent the magnificent future of mankind. Andrei fears he is insane since the monk admits he is a phantom. The Monk tells him that it is perfectly fine if Andrei is mad. Tanya agrees to marry Andrei. Tanya is thrown into unexpected fits of emotion. Pesotsky is worried about the survival of his orchard. Andrei, oblivious to any problems, meets with the Black Monk several times a week. Once Andrei is married, the Black Monk continues to visit him. Tanya catches Andrei talking to himself (thinking he is talking to the Black Monk). She is upset and tells him he is insane. Tanya and her father take Andrei to the doctor, where he begins treatment.

Andrei receives treatment and returns to the orchards. His renewed sanity has made him very unhappy and he is unpleasant to be around. Andrei leaves his wife and lives with another woman. He becomes more angry and ill. He receives a letter from Tanya



that her father has died, for which she blames him and wishes that he perish. Andrei is visited by the Monk, who he tells he should have listened to him long ago. Andrei feels his genius again, calls out to Tanya as he falls to the floor and bleeds to death. His new companion finds him on the floor, dead with a smile frozen on his face.

## Stories 14 through 16 Analysis

### Story 14: In Exile

This is a sad tale of a young man's banishment to Siberia. He sorely misses his wife and has hopes she will come to live there. One of his fellow convicts tells him the sad tale of another who had his wife come only to lose her to another when she became bored with Siberia. The man's daughter contracts consumption and he spends all his time and resources trying to find a cure for her. Finally, the young man, referred to as the Tartar, realizes what a bleak environment it is and how hopeless his situation is.

### Story 15: Ward No. 6

A bright young man, Ivan Dmitrich, is committed to the psychiatric ward at the town's hospital. The conditions are terrible in Ward No. 9. Patients are neglected and abused by hospital staff. Dr. Andrei Yefimych Ragin is assigned to the hospital. He is a reserved man who finds the townspeople shallow and uninteresting. They gossip and play cards, which Andrei finds unbearably boring and banal. Andrei longs for meaningful conversation and exchange of philosophical thought with someone. Andrei visits Ward No. 6 and encounters Ivan Dmitrich. Even though Ivan is insane, Andrei enjoys conversing with him. Ivan is interesting and intelligent and capable of deep philosophical thought. Andrei begins visiting so often that the other doctors and staff begin to question his sanity. He eventually is committed to Ward No. 6 as an inmate. He dies the very next day from a stroke. This surreal story foretells the ramifications of a communistic society where free thought is silenced and punished. Andrei's demise represents the death of the spirit when humankind loses its freedom.

### Story 16: The Black Monk

Andrei escapes to the country because he is stressed and overworked. He stays with his former guardian and his daughter. He has hallucinations and sees a Black Monk, who tells him he is genius, chosen by God and will serve the eternal truth. Andrei fears he is mad but the Monk tells him it does not matter whether he is mad or not - he is chosen by God. He marries Tanya, who discovers that he is mad and takes him for treatment. The treatment is successful and he is no longer mad. Andrei no longer sees the Monk; however, he becomes miserable and is unpleasant to be around. He leaves his wife and lives with another woman. Tanya sends him a message that her father died and that she blames him. He is very ill when the Monk returns and again makes Andrei believe in himself. He feels his genius again and comfort from the Black Monk and dies with a smile on his face. Like "Ward No. 6", this story is symbolic of the pitfalls of



suppressing thought and freedom. Once Andrei had to conform to "sanity" his spirit died - insanity representing freedom of thought.



# Stories 17 through 19

## Stories 17 through 19 Summary

### Story 17: Rothschild's Fiddle

Yakov Ivanov is a coffin maker in a small village. He is bitter that people live to an old age in the village and therefore orders for coffins are not frequent. For extra money, Yakov plays the fiddle in a Jewish orchestra, usually for weddings. Yakov is a bitter and cantankerous man and picks fights with members of the orchestra. He particularly finds contemptible a Jew named Rothschild. Yakov is abusive and threatening to Rothschild. He is not used in the orchestra often due to his abusive behavior. Yakov's wife becomes very ill. She reminds him that they had a young child who died years before, but Yakov does not remember. When Yakov's wife dies, he becomes very remorseful of how cruel he was to his wife, how miserly he was, and how he mistreated others like Rothschild. As he falls ill and as he confesses to his priest, he tells him to give his fiddle to Rothschild. After he dies, Rothschild begins playing Yakov's fiddle in the orchestra.

### Story 18: The Student

On Good Friday, a young seminary student, Ivan Velikopolsky, is walking through the meadow and passes the widows' gardens, so named from the two women who tended them: Vasilisa and her daughter Lukerya. He comments that the night is cold just as it was on the night that Peter denied Christ. Ivan related the entire story of how Jesus predicted Peter would deny him three times before the cock crows. The women both change their demeanor. Vasilisa begins to weep and Lukerya looks exceedingly pained. Ivan leaves the women and at first does not understand their reactions. But he suddenly felt joy. The past, he thought, is connected with the present in an unbroken chain. He had just seen both ends: he touch one end and the other moved.

### Story 19: Anna on the Neck

Fifty-two-year-old Modest Alexeich marries Anya, a girl barely over eighteen. Anya married Modest only for his money. She wanted to help her father and younger brothers. However, after she married him, she found him to be a miser and did not allow her any money at all. Anya was afraid of him but was miserable and sorry she married him. A Christmas charity ball was coming up and Modest told Anya to get a new ball gown. Ready for the ball, she looked exceptionally beautiful. Modest told her to cozy up to His Excellency's wife since she would have influence to get him the a better position. She was such a hit at the ball that she came to everyone's notice, including His Excellency. After that evening, Anya was never afraid of her husband again and began spending his money however she liked. His Excellency began seeing Anya on a regular basis. He presented Modest with the Anna second degree pin for his neck.



## Stories 17 through 19 Analysis

### Story 17: Rothschild's Fiddle

Yakov realizes too late that the important things in life are how one treats people. One of the most important and valuable possessions he has is his fiddle. Since he cannot reconcile himself with his wife and child because they are dead, he compensates by willing his fiddle to Rothschild, to whom he was very cruel. Rothschild plays Yakov's fiddle in the orchestra where the beautiful music it produces can be interpreted as Yakov's plaintive sorrow and regrets.

### Story 18: The Student

Ivan the student moves the two peasant women with the story of Peter denying Christ. Even though these widows have hard lives, the story of Peter touches their spirit. Though centuries pass, the love of Christ is alive and touching mankind. Ivan walks away, feeling that life is delightful and wondrous.

### Story 19: Anna on the Neck

This is a story of people using people. Anya married the older man, Modest, for his money. Modest used her beauty to gain a promotion. His Excellency used Anya for his own needs. Anya used his Excellency for her ego and importance. Although she did not have access to the money at first, Anya learned that Modest needed her for advancement, realizing she had influence that he needed a trade-off for his money. His Excellency wanted a relationship with a young, beautiful girl, and Anya wanted the power and position that relationship provided.



# Stories 20 through 22

## Stories 20 through 22 Summary

### Story 20: The House with the Mezzanine (An Artist's Story)

An artist lives on the country estate of a friend, Pyotr Petrovich Belokurov. He and Pyotr visit neighbors for dinner and amusement. The house has a mezzanine floor with windows that look like eyes when lit at night. Lydia and Zhenya are the young daughters who live there. Lydia is interested in local politics and urges Pyotr to get involved to fight against the party of the current government officials. Lydia considers the artist to be frivolous and non-serious. She pursues civic improvements and charitable causes while he is but a landscape artist. The artist is more in tune with the younger sister, Zhenya, who is as idle as the artist is. Lydia helps the poor and sick while the artist thinks hard labor causes illness and the solutions to all of man's woes is possible through high-level intellectual thinking. The artist and Zhenya fall in love. After Zhenya tells her mother and sister, she and her mother leave for extended travel. The artist receives a note from Zhenya that Lydia would not stand for her having a relationship with the artist. He leaves immediately and years later runs into Pyotr. Lydia is still in the house and has gotten more political. He does not know the whereabouts of Zhenya. The artist holds out hope that they will some day be together.

### Story 21: The Man in a Case

In the village of Mironositskoe, a teacher named Belikov is a man who wore a cover on his galoshes, and has a cover on his watch and umbrella. At home he has a canopy and covers his head in a blanket. Even his face is covered with a tall collar. Belikov cannot stand any deviation from rules or standards and is totally inflexible. In his view, any turn away from the norm could only result in disaster. Despite his odd personality, he meets a woman, Varenka, who is willing to marry him. At the prospect of marriage, Belikov becomes very thin, pale, and frazzled. He gets into a disagreement with Varenka's brother, who did not like him from day one. The brother, Mikhail, threw him out and down the steps just when Varenka and some other girls were coming home. Their laughs sent him home where he went to bed and never go up again. Lying in his coffin, his face looked at peace and a slight smile was noticeable.

### Story 22: Gooseberries

Ivan Ivanych, a teacher, tells the tale of him and his brother, Nikolai. Nikolai, who is a government worker, wants to get a place of his own in the country. Ivan feels his brother will be wasting his life locking himself up in the country. Ivan pores over the advertisements of country places for sale with gardens, fruit, flowers, etc. But one thing that Nikolai insists upon is that the place have gooseberries. He tried to save his money but finally took the easy way out and married a widow who owned a country place. Nikolai was so stingy that his wife did not have adequate food or care and soon died.



Nikolai then bought a larger place. It did not have gooseberries but he immediately bought gooseberry bushes to plant. Ivan comes to visit his brother. He looks much older but has an independent streak he never had before. He now speaks his mind and is at peace and he constantly eats gooseberries. Ivan leaves his brother's place feeling depressed and sad and not wanting to return to the city life.

#### Story 22: Gooseberries

Ivan envies his brother's escape from the fast life in the crowded city. Nikolai had a dream and held to it. Even though Ivan felt Nikolai would be locked away from real life, Nikolai had the freedom to live his life as he wanted and his country estate provided everything he wanted and needed. Nikolai is happy and content. The gooseberry represents to him all his wants and needs. Ivan was depressed because he was returning to a life that did not give him peace and was empty and meaningless.

## Stories 20 through 22 Analysis

#### Story 20: The House with the Mezzanine (An Artist's Story)

The artist suffers from the strong-willed Lydia, who disdains his intellectual approach to life. His love for the milder sister Zhenya goes unrequited as Lydia will not allow her younger sister to be with the lazy artist. Upon first seeing the house at night, he felt alive when seeing the sleepy eyes of the mezzanine floor. The light went out not only in the house but also in his spirit when he lost Zhenya, but he holds out that they will someday be together.

#### Story 21: The Man in a Case

Belikov is the man in a case symbolic of his want/need for insulation from the outside world, in particular other people. Belikov hid from life, thinking that taking the safest route would avoid problems. He could never speak out against or for anything. Belikov remained hidden inside himself. Being coerced into marriage was his undoing. Being forced to share any aspect of himself with another person was so unbearable that he died, winding up in a box from which he would never have to leave.

#### Story 22: Gooseberries

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# The Medical Case

## The Medical Case Summary

Story 23: The Medical Case

The young doctor Korolev is called to a factory where the owner's daughter is quite ill. Korolev must travel from Moscow, quite a distance to the factory. Korolev reaches the factory and meets his patient, Liza, her mother Mrs. Lialikov, and the governess. Liza tells him that her heart is racing and that she cannot sleep at night because of it. He examines her and finds no problem with her heart or any other health issue. Mrs. Lialikov asks him to stay the night because the condition usually hits Liza at night. Reluctantly, he decides to stay the night and is shown to his room. The factory is noisy and looks like it is run by the devil himself. He visits Liza early the next morning. He tells her that her problem is that she is not happy at the factory, that she is not meant for this lifestyle. Korolev tells her that in fifty years society will be different and the children in the future will reject this kind of lifestyle. When he leaves for Moscow the next morning, Liza sees him off, looking fresh and more content.

## The Medical Case Analysis

Story 23: The Medical Case

The girl who is ill and needs a doctor is Liza, who is the daughter of the owner of a large factory on the outskirts of Moscow. The doctor, Korolev, examines her and finds her in good health. They are about the same age and he concludes that her problem is psychological and that her current lifestyle does not suit her wants and needs. He tells her that in the future, young people will reject this kind of lifestyle and find better ways to live. His words are prophetic of the Russian revolution coming some twenty years later.



# The Darling

## The Darling Summary

Kukin, an entrepreneur and owner of the Tivoli, marries the young Olga Semyonovna, who is known to her friends and neighbors as "darling." Olga is very supportive of the theater and the acts that Kukin brings in, although some are not popular and make no money. Kukin goes off to Moscow to recruit some new acts, but falls ill and dies while still there. Months later Olga meets one of her neighbors, Vassily Andreich Pustovalov, who owns a lumberyard. They eventually marry and she settles into a life with Vassily. After six years of marriage, Vassily falls ill and dies. Olga is very aggrieved but several months later begins seeing Vladimir Platonych, the veterinarian, who is separated from his wife. A relationship develops, but ends when Vladimir leaves for Siberia with his regiment. Olga is lonely and miserable and is unable to form an opinion of her own since she had never been without a partner. Years later, however, Vladimir returns, but with his wife and son. Olga allows them to have the main house and she moves into one wing. Vladimir's wife goes off to Kharkov and Vladimir is off on business most of the time. Olga grows very close to Sasha, the boy. She starts to think of him as her own. However, Vladimir's wife calls for Sasha to come to Kharkov which is very upsetting to Olga. However, Vladimir returns and Olga feels comfort that Sasha will stay with her.

## The Darling Analysis

This is the only story where Chekhov's protagonist is a woman. However, Olga is a woman very dependent upon men. She has two husbands and a lover, from whom she develops all her ideas. When she is abandoned by her lover, she cannot put a thought together - she cannot mold even the concept that a bottle is standing upright. When she is left to tend to the young son of Vladimir, she becomes enthralled with him and feels like his mother and defers to his wants and needs just as she did with her husbands. Olga (woman) is nothing without Vladimir (man).

# On Official Business

## On Official Business Summary

Dr. Starchenko and the Coroner Lyzhin travel to the Zemstvo, or councilor's office in the investigation of a dead person. The death was suspected suicide but there was reason to think it may have been homicide. Lyzhin stays the night in the same room as the corpse. Lyzhin is attended to by the beadle, Loshadin. Starchenko had left earlier to stay with a neighbor but later returns for Lyzhin. The neighbor, von Taunitz, has four beautiful daughters and a houseful of music and gaiety. A blizzard causes Starchenko and Lyzhin to stay an extra night, but they finally head out after that. The beadle Loshadin was anxious for the doctor and coroner to return so that the matter about the dead man can be resolved. Lyzhin realizes that Loshadin is one of those people who are connected to everyone and shares a common soul with all.

## On Official Business Analysis

The young coroner Lyzhin and a doctor are called in to resolve the possible suicide of a village man some distance from Moscow. Lyzhin encounters a servant, Loshadin, who is wise and caring and serves many men. Lyzhin and the doctor spend several nights in the grand home of a neighbor before they return to the village for the autopsy. Loshadin encourages the coroner to resolve the matter because the townspeople are upset. Loshadin is a man who serves many and cares for all. Lyzhin realizes that although Loshadin has an outwardly low life, he is rich in his gift of common spirit with all men.





# Stories 26 and 27

## Stories 26 and 27 Summary

### Story 26: The Lady with the Little Dog

Dmitri Dmitrich Gurov meets a mysterious lady, Anna Sergeevna, who always walks with a white dog. Dmitri is married but has been unfaithful for many years. Though he enjoys being with women more than men, he considers women to be an inferior race. Dmitri and Anna have a long affair, for which Anna feels exceedingly guilty. Anna returns to her husband and says goodbye to Dmitri forever. Dmitri returns to his family life in Moscow. The memory of Anna burns brighter by the day and he longs to see her again. He travels to her city and finds her at the opening of an opera. Dmitri confronts her, but she is afraid and tells him to leave, promising she will come to Moscow. Anna began coming to Moscow to see him. For the first time in his life, Dmitri was truly in love. Anna felt the same way. He thought that someday they must part but the more he saw her the more he knew that was not true.

### Story 27: At Christmastime

Vasilisa has not seen her daughter in four years. After she married, she and her husband left for Petersburg. Vasilisa heard from Yefimya a few times, then not again. Vasilisa hires the tavern keeper's brother Yegor to write a letter for her. The letter contains news from the village and wishes to the couple for a happy Christmas. The letter is delivered to the son-in-law, Andrei, who drops it off to his wife. She is tending to her three children that her parents do not know she has. Yefimya cries when she reads the letter. She is grateful to get the news but it makes her sad and reminds her how much she misses them. Andrei leaves her to return to work, slightly remembering that Yefima had given him some letters in the past that he forgot to mail.

## Stories 26 and 27 Analysis

### Story 26: The Lady with the Little Dog

Dmitri is a married man who has been unfaithful to his wife many times over the years. He meets Anna in Yalta and begins an affair that he thinks will end as easily as all the others. Instead, he begins to have strong feelings for her and cannot let her go. Dmitri finds her in her home town and she begins visiting him in Moscow. Although he vows it must be over, he know it will not end. The story ends with the comment that "the most complicated and difficult part was just beginning", indicating that perhaps they will wind up together and leave their respective spouses.

### Story 27: At Christmastime

Andrei, the son-in-law, has made everyone miserable. He "forgot" to mail letters his wife wrote to her parents. Not getting the letters from their daughter caused misery to her parents. Andrei's children have been deprived of their grandparents. But he is unconcerned and oblivious to their pain. The small pleasures that the old couple and their daughter could have shared were thrown away by the unfeeling Andrei.



# In the Ravine

## In the Ravine Summary

In the small village of Ukleyevo, located down a steep ravine, Grigory Tsybukin lives with his second wife Varvara and his deaf son Stepan and his beautiful wife Aksinya. He also has an older son Anisim, who is a police detective. Grigory is in the trading business - everything from feathers for ladies' hats to vodka, pigs, and leather. However, he cheats his customers, for which Varvara feels much shame and guilt. Aksinya has a good business head and helps out. The village has four factories - three cotton mills and one tannery. Anisim comes home on an unexpected visit and Grigory and Varvara decide that he should marry. In a nearby village, they find a young, though poor beauty named Lipa. The families get together and agree to the pairing. Grigory and Varvara arrange for an elaborate wedding and a large celebration afterward.

Anisim paid for the wedding with counterfeit money. When this is revealed, he is arrested and imprisoned. Anisim is sentenced to years of hard labor in Siberia and suffers the loss of all his property. Grigory is devastated by his son's fate and decides to make a new will leaving everything to Anisim's son, Nikifor. Aksinya is furious that after all her hard work she would get nothing. She exclaims that she is leaving and rushes in to the kitchen where Lipa is doing laundry. Aksinya scoops up a dipper of boiling water and pours it over the baby laying nearby. The baby Nikifor dies and Aksinya demands that Lipa leave the grounds, never to return. Aksinya takes over the business and dominates its operations. She is looked upon as a savvy businesswoman with much power; however, many feel she has unfairly shoved Grigory aside. Grigory becomes more depressed, not eating for days at a time. The story ends with Grigory running into Lipa. He has tears in his eyes when she kindly offers him some of her food.

## In the Ravine Analysis

Grigory Tsybukin is a tradesman in the small village of Ukleyevo. He is highly successful and respected but he routinely cheats his clients. He has two sons, the younger one, Stepan, is deaf and mentally challenged. Stepan is married to the beautiful and ambitious Aksinya. The older brother Anisim is a police officer in another town. Anisim marries the young Lipa and has a son. Anisim is convicted of a felony and sentenced to hard labor in Siberia. Grigory changes his will, leaving everything to Anisim's young son, Nikifor. Aksinya kills the baby so that she is not left out of the will. Grigory becomes depressed in his advancing years and allows Aksinya to take over his business. Even though it was Anisim who was convicted of passing counterfeit money, Grigory is guilty of cheating people all his life without being caught. He feels guilty that his son and grandson suffered because of his sins.



# The Bishop

## The Bishop Summary

Bishop Pyotr is presiding over the Palm Sunday vigil. In the sea of people, he thinks he spots his mother, who he has not seen in years. When he returns to the monastery that evening, another priest tells him that his mother stopped by to see him and will return the next day. The Bishop is happy to hear that it was his mother he saw and begins recalling happy childhood memories. He is reunited with his mother but notices that she treats him in a formal manner and does not seem relaxed. The Bishop starts to notice that many in his congregation are treating him in an almost fearful manner. This is all bothering him, on top of which he is not feeling well physically. The Bishop became very ill and his mother attending to him finally forget his lofty position and treated him with the tenderness and familiarity of a mother. The Bishop died and was soon replaced. His mother went to live with another relative and became timid about telling people that she once had a son who was a Bishop. She thought they may not believe her, and some of them did not.

## The Bishop Analysis

Bishop Peter was a kind leader of the church. He reunites with his mother who he had not seen for many years. He is distressed that she seems to be timid around him, that she is in awe of his lofty position. He dreams of his childhood when she was close and loving toward him. The Bishop contracts typhoid fever and is very ill. His mother tends to him, and the loving attitude she had toward him in childhood returns. The Bishop longs for his mother to return to the woman of his childhood memories. Unfortunately, it is his sickness and death that compels her to return to motherly ways.

# The Fiancée

## The Fiancée Summary

Nadya is twenty-three years old and has been dreaming of marrying since she was sixteen. She is now engaged to Andrei Andreich, but for some reason she is sad. Sasha, an artist and the son of an old family friend, is visiting. He tells Nadya that she and her mother, grandmother, and fiancé all seem to do nothing. Nadya is offended by his words but keeps thinking of him. Sasha, who seems weak and ill, again speaks of her idle life and encourages her to attend school. Nadya realizes that she no longer loves Andrei and perhaps never did. She tells her mother, who is not sympathetic. Nadya tells Sasha about her feelings and that she wants to leave with him the next day. They will pretend that Nadya is seeing him off at the station. Instead, she will have her luggage and will travel with him to Moscow and go on to Petersburg herself where she will begin studies. The next summer, she visits Sasha before she travels home. He appears more frail than ever. Once at home, her mother receives a telegram that Sasha has died. Nadya returns to school that fall.

## The Fiancée Analysis

Nadya is engaged to a young man but realizes that she is not in love with him. Her friend Sasha tells her that she and her mother, grandmother, and fiancé are all idle and do not have meaningful lives. On the urging of her friend Sasha, she breaks her engagement and travels to Petersburg to begin studies. Although Sasha dies after her first year at school, Nadya is thankful to him for his advice and happily returns to school. She knows she made the right decision in breaking her engagement and assuming a meaningful life.



# Characters

## Nikolai Stephanych appears in A Boring Story

Nikolai Stephanych's name is very popular and respected. He is a famous professor of medicine and a councillor. Stephanych is very old, with false teeth and wrinkled face. Stephanych describes his failing memory and his growing propensity toward insomnia. Even though he has aged and becoming decrepit, he is very disappointed that his wife aged as well. He looks at his fat, ungainly wife and tries to find in her the slender beauty he married. She only worries about poverty and bargains.

Stephanych is still supporting a grown son in the military, which he seems to resent. He is embarrassed that his daughter Liza is aware of her parents' money concerns, that they even have trouble paying the servants. Stephanych is a guardian for a young girl, Katya, who lost her parents when she was young. As Katya matures, she decides she wants to be an actress and leaves town with an acting troupe. This move leads to heartache for Katya, who eventually returns to Stephanych. He is supportive of her even though his wife and daughter are cold and non-receptive to her. In his declining years, Stephanych turns more and more to Katya for support. He feels that his wife and daughter do not support him and do not understand him. He starts spending evenings talking with Katya and her guests. His family begins to resent the time he spends with Katya and lures him away to go on an extended trip.

The old man is a lecturer extraordinaire. Stephanych compares his lecturing skills with that of an orchestral conductor. He must do and be aware of many things at one time. When he notices the students fidgeting, he cracks a joke to regain their attention. With advancing age, however, he is losing his skills and is ashamed. He feels he should retire but cannot bring himself to do so. Stephanych fears it would kill him. At night he is plagued with insomnia, forgetfulness, and failing health. He has become increasingly dissatisfied with his family and friends and is generally dispirited. Nearing the end of his life he comes to the realization that his famous name means nothing, and he becomes very introspective and examining what he wants in life.

## Dr. Andrei Yefimych Ragin appears in Ward No. 6

As a young student, Andrei Yefimych Ragin had been interested in a philosophic career but was goaded into pursuing medicine by his father. After being a practicing physician for a number of years, Andrei is assigned to the local hospital and is appalled at the poor conditions of the hospital, and in particular Ward No. 6. Although he had good intentions, he soon becomes disheartened and discontinues daily visits, stopping by the depressing ward only when necessary. Though a highly educated and learned man, Andrei is reserved and timid by nature. It is difficult for him to give orders or resolve conflicts. As a result, Andrei is socially reclusive and spends much of his free time reading and alone in thought. However, because of his nature and long-time interest in



philosophy, he yearns for the the exchange of intellectual ideas and philosophic thought. Unfortunately, there are no individuals with similar interests in the small town in which he lives

Upon a routine visit to Ward 6, Andrei encounters one of the inmates, Ivan Dmitrich. After speaking with the brilliant though insane young man for just minutes, Andrei realizes that he has finally met someone in the town who is interesting and intelligent and who thinks in the same deep, philosophical manner as he does. Andrei begins stopping by to converse with Ivan several times a day. Ivan is bitter, telling Andrei he has led a simple life free of suffering while he, Ivan, has suffered unduly. Andrei enjoys the exchanges with Ivan so much that he begins to visit the patient as much as three times a day. Doctors and staff begin to notice the inordinate amount of time Andrei is spending with Ivan and question his sanity. In an effort to help him, an old friend, Mikhail Averyanych, invites Andrei on an extended trip to Moscow, Warsaw, and other locations. During the trip, Andrei becomes so annoyed by the mindless prattle of Mikhail that he feigns illness and stays in the hotel to escape being subjected to Mikhail's endless chatter. He misses his daily conversations with young Ivan.

Upon returning, Andrei discovers that he has been replaced at the hospital by another physician, Dr. Khobotov. Andrei is destitute and moves to a small apartment. Khobotov and Mikhail visit one evening, yet their banal conversation causes Andrei to scream at them to leave. A short time later, on the pretense of needing his advice, Khobotov takes Andrei to Ward No. 6 and leaves him there to remain as a patient. After repeated attempts to leave, he is brutally beaten by the caretaker. Andrei realizes the horrid situation he finds himself and the next morning dies of a stroke.

## **Varkaappears in Sleepy**

Varka is the nanny in "Sleepy" who is so deprived of sleep that she becomes delusional and kills the baby she is watching.

## **Gusevappears in Gusev**

Gusev is a discharged private returning by ship from duty in the Far East to Russia.

## **Olga Ivanovnaappears in The Fidget**

Olga Ivanovna is the woman obsessed with celebrities and who does not appreciate her husband until he becomes ill and dies.

## **Andrei Kovrinappears in The Black Monk**

Andrei Kovrin is a masters of arts. He sees a vision of the legendary Black Monk.



## **Yakov Ivanov appears in Rothschild's Fiddle**

Yakov Ivanov is a coffin maker in his town and also plays a fiddle in the Jewish orchestra.

## **Grigory Tsybukin appears in In the Ravine**

Grigory Tsybukin is a tradesman in the small village of Ukleyevo

## **Bishop Pyotr appears in The Bishop**

Bishop Pyotr is reunited with his mother after not seeing her for nine years.

## **Anna Sergeevna appears in The Lady with the Little Dog**

Anna Sergeevna is the mysterious lady with the dog that Dmitri Dmitrich Gurov meets in Yalta.





## Objects/Places

### **Boriskova appears in The Black Monk**

Boriskova is of the locations Andrei Kovrin visits on his travels and it is also where the Pesotskys live.

### **The Village of Siyanovo appears in The House with the Mezzanine**

Siyanovo is the village where many houses had burned down and Lydia was trying to collect money for the families to rebuild.

### **The Crimea appears in A Medical Case**

A region referred to in several of the stories, including "A Medical Case."

### **Verkhnie Zaprudya appears in Panikhida**

The village of Verkhnie Zaprudya is where the story "Panikhida" takes place.

### **Yalta appears in The Lady with the Little Dog**

A large portion of the story "The Lady with the Little Dog" takes place in Yalta.

### **Ukleyevo appears in In the Ravine**

The village of Ukleyevo is the location for the story "In the Ravine." It is a small town where nothing much ever happens.

### **Siberia appears in Peasant Women**

Referred to in several stories as the location where criminals are sent to do hard labor, Siberia is mentioned in "In the Ravine", "In Exile" and "Peasant Women".

### **Moscow appears in Vanka**

The major city is referred to in several of the stories, including "Ward No. 6", "Vanka" and "The Lady with the Little Dog."



## **Goltva River appears in Easter Night**

The monk, Ieronym, takes townspeople down the Goltva River to the Easter Night celebration at the local church.

## **Mironosiskoe appears in The Man in a Case**

Mironosiskoe is the village where the story "The Man in a Case" takes place.



# Themes

## Class

In "Death of A Clerk" the protagonist Cherviakov is a clerk who sneezes on a high-ranking government official. Cherviakov feels the need to be punished since he violated such an important person. Though the government official is not offended, Cherviakov is not satisfied until the official throws him out, but not because he sneezed on him but because he keeps bothering him about it. But since Cherviakov is a lower class, he cannot get over offending a higher class person, the angst of which leads to his death.

In "The Small Fry" the lowly clerk feels superior over a cockroach. While in "The Huntsman", a servant on the estate is asking the master why he has not been by for a while even though the last time he came by he abused her. As it turns out, the servant, Pelageya, and the hunter are married. But the higher class hunter looks down on his wife. He married her when he was drunk and is abusive and cruel to her. In "The Boring Story" the professor looks on his daughter's suitor with class antagonism.

The Russian serfs were freed in the 1870s. These stories take place a little after that time. The lower class people of Russia during this time were so conditioned to be mistreated that they almost felt slighted if they were not. Though the appearance of this theme is somewhat surreal in some of the stories, it is representing the culture at the time.

## Religion

The lowly clerk in "The Small Fry" is looking out the window envying the higher class people able to answer the church bells on Easter and attend service. The poor fisherman who is sentenced to hard labor crosses himself in an effort to deal with his fate. There are references to the Mother of Heaven (Mary). The title of one story "Panikhida" means an Orthodox (Eastern) prayer to commemorate the dead. Also in "Panikhida" there is a reference to the blessed Mary of Egypt. The madman Ivan Dmitirch in "Ward No. 6" attributes to Dostoevsky and Voltaire the concept that if there were no God, people would have invented him.

In "Panikhida" the story takes place in a church. The protagonist Andrei Andreich is being scolded by the priest who is angered that Andrei left a note referring to Maria as a "harlot." In "Easter Night" the story relates the tale of a novice monk who misses another monk who has died. In the story, the protagonist states that whoever dies on the eve of Easter or on Easter day will surely get into the Kingdom of Heaven.

On Good Friday in "The Student", the seminarian Ivan passes by two peasant women, mother and daughter, who are both widows and are leading difficult lives. He recounts the story of Peter denying Christ three times before the cock crows. The story moves one woman to tears and the other to anguish. As Ivan concludes, the past is connected



with the present in unbroken chain of events flowing from one out of the other. Despite their strife, Christ is touching their spirit with a story from so many centuries before.

## **Attitude toward Women/Abuse of Women**

Chekhov reflects the culture at the time wherein the woman is an inferior member. In "The Huntsman", the abandoned wife is hopeful that her roaming husband visits her even though he abuses her. In the "Panikhida", the grieving father is requesting a prayer for his daughter, Maria the harlot. Anyuta is a hapless maid who is passed from one gentleman to the next. In "Sleepy", the nanny is abused and given no human consideration.

In "The Boring Story", Katya is an actress who had a child out of wedlock. She is looked down upon by the other women. The narrator professor of the story observes that there is a backwardness in women. However, the professor sees the benefit of allowing women to be educated as men. This perhaps illustrates Chekhov's view that women should be treated on more equal terms.

In some of the other stories, women's plights are somewhat surreal, perhaps to draw attention to a black spot in society. One theme that runs throughout entire collection is that nearly all of the protagonists are men. Any stories told in the first person are men, which is no doubt a sign of Chekhov's time. Again, in "The Lady with the Little Dog", Dmitri "almost always spoke ill of women" and considers them an inferior race. In "Peasant Women", Matvei Savvich tells the tale of falling for a married woman. He attributes this occurrence to the evil of women. He states, "There's a lot of evil and all sorts of vileness in this world from the female sex."



# Style

## Point of View

The majority of Chekhov's stories are written in the narrative, omniscient point of view. The advantage to the reader this style provides is knowing the thoughts, feelings and actions of all characters.

However, a handful of stories from this collection are written in first person. The story "Easter Night" is written in the first person perspective. From this perspective, the reader is able to see only the one-dimensional view of the protagonist and then make some of his or her own conclusions about the state of reality the character is residing in. "The House with the Mezzanine" is also told in first person.

In "The Boring Story" the story is presented by the protagonist Professor Stepanych, who provides a stinging critique of modern Russian literature. By using one of his own characters as a vehicle, Chekhov is able to provide what was no doubt the current trend of criticism against the modernists in Russian literature, of which Chekhov was one. The last one third of this story showcases the introspection of the professor. While he is writing his diary about what has occurred, at the same time he is indicating how he really feels about the occasion.

## Setting

The overall backdrop for Chekhov's collection of stories is Russia. There is quite a range of settings in these stories—from the dismal setting of a dreary duty room in "The Small Fry" to the rolling fields of the countryside where "The Huntsman" rides. In the story "Panikhida", the Goltva is the river the narrator takes back and forth to the paschal, or Easter Vigil. The nine-year-old Vanka, who is an orphan, is packed off to Moscow to serve as an apprentice to a shoemaker. Professor Stepanych travels to Kharkov to conduct a background check on his potential son-in-law. Kharkov is also a destination of a returning soldier in "Gustev."

Imagery of the upper class home of the time is provided in the detailed description of the interior decor in "The Fidget." The "beautiful clutter" includes Chinese parasols, easels, colorful rags, daggers, and walls covered in folk prints and hung up bast shoes and sickles, a scythe, and rake, thus achieving decor in "Russian style." In the story "In Exile", the characters are Russian citizens banished to the harsh environment of Siberia. Siberia is also the destination of felons sentenced to hard labor in the stories "Vanka" and "In the Ravine."

Many of the locations where the stories take place are small towns and villages that the author does not place. Also, some of the locales are country estates that have large houses and peasants who live nearby and depend on the large landowners for sustenance. The country estates are described with gardens and rolling meadows



where rye and wheat are grown. When a wintry scene is described, the grounds are described with the deep snow and frosty conditions of those cold months.

## Language and Meaning

Chekhov illustrates the class distinctions in late nineteenth century Russian. The serfs had just been freed but the spillover of the classes is still ingrained in society. He overstates these distinctions in a surreal manner to draw attention to the issues the culture was still laboring under.

Chekhov uses brilliant and colorful imagery in his descriptions and phrasing. For example, in "Easter Night" the protagonist describes the monk as curving himself into a question mark. In another example, Chekhov describes someone moving silently as passing by like a gnat or a mosquito. In "The Boring Story" a young man is described as having a waxed little mustache that gives his plump face a toy-like expression. In "Ward No. 6" the imagery Chekhov uses as he questions the life cycle is dramatic: Why do brain centers, speech, genius . . . all sink into the ground and then whirl around the sun ultimately turning into clay? In "The House with the Mezzanine" the artist speaks of tearing his heavy heart out of his breast.

In "A Boring Story" Chekhov chides himself and his contemporaries when the old professor Stephanych states his preference for French literature, saying he is not particularly drawn to modern Russian literature since it seems more handicraft than art. Of course, Chekhov himself is considered a modern.

## Structure

Chekhov is one of the modern era writers who structures his stories in a smooth, logical way—unlike some Russians like early Gogol, who provided great imagery but wrote in a verbose though fragmented manner that leaves gaps and confusion in his storytelling. Chekhov was expert at constructing the story around the reader's growing understanding of the main character. Chekhov wrote in a compassionate way and cared about his characters even though they often had tragic endings. In "Death of a Clerk" Chekhov bases his story on a silly precept that a man sneezes on another but can never apologize enough. The very short story's climax is that when the man finally gets exasperated by the pestering the man goes home and dies. He finally got what he deserved?

Chekhov organizes some of his tales in a manner that presents a moral to the story at the ending. In "A Boring Story" the professor is proud of his fame and reputation. However, as he is growing old and sick, he begins to realize that his fame and reputation had really not been important and that he really could not show much success from them. In the end, he rejected his fame and just wished for happiness for his family and friends.

The stories are dated from 1883 through 1903, during which time the reader can observe that Chekov's storytelling skills grew in richness and dimension.



## Quotes

"The cockroach fell on its back and desperately waved its legs. . . Nevyrazimov took it by one leg and threw it into the lamp. The lamp flared and crackled . . . and Nevyrazimov felt better." *The Small Fry*, p. 8

"Suppose they issued a decree that I absolutely had to live with you, I'd either burn down the cottage or lay hands on myself." *The Huntsman*, p. 11

"What's that on your shoulders—a head or some other object?" *Panikhida*, p. 22

"It was dark . . . the world was lit by starts. For the sake of the festive parade, all of them, from small to large had come out in the sky washed, renewed, joyful and all of them to the last one quietly moved their rays." *Easter Night*, p. 33

"Breathing my last, I will still believe that science is the most important, the most beautiful and necessary thing in man's life, that it has always been and always will be the highest manifestation of love, and that only by science will man conquer nature and himself." *A Boring Story*, p. 65

"You're totally unacquainted with reality, and you've never suffered, but, like a leech, have only fed on the sufferings of others, while I have suffered constantly from the day of my birth to this very day. Therefore I tell you frankly that I consider myself superior to you and more competent in all respects. It's not for you to teach me." *Ward No. 6*, p. 201

"The past, he thought, is connected with the present in an unbroken chain of events flowing one out of the other. And it seemed to him that he had just seen both ends of that chain: he touched one end, and the other moved." *The Student*, p. 266

"To leave town, quit the struggle and noise of life, go and hide in your country place, isn't life, it's egoism, laziness, it's a sort of monasticism, but a monasticism without spiritual endeavor." *Gooseberries*, p. 314

"Nothing was accidental, everything was filled with one common thought, everything





had one soul, one purpose, and to understand it, it was not enough to think, not enough to reason, one probably had to have the gift of penetrating into life, a gift which apparently was not given to everyone." *On Official Business*, p. 357

"She was crying from anxiety, from a sorrowful awareness that their life had turned out so sadly; they only saw each other in secret, they hid from people like thieves! Was their life not broken?" *The Lady with the Little Dog*, p. 375

"It was as if a shadow had been cast over the yard. The house became darker the roof rusted, the ironclad door of the shop, heavy, painted green, became discolored, or, as the deaf man said, "got gristled"; and it was as if old man Tsybukin himself grew darker." *In the Ravine*, p. 405

"Not long ago you were a child, a little girl, and now you're already a fiancée. There's a constant turnover of matter in nature. And you won't notice how you yourself become a mother and an old woman and have a daughter as rebellious as mine is." *The Fiancée*. p. 447



## Topics for Discussion

Describe the what happened to Katya after she left with the acting troupe.

What is the fisherman Denis Grigory taking off the railroad track and why is it a danger? What happens to him because of his actions?

What does Andrei Andreich request in a prayer and why is Father Grigory upset with him?

What is Olga Ivonovna's passion in life? What does she finally realize about her husband's worth?

What is the legend of the Black Monk?

What type of factories are in the small village of Ukleyevo and what effect do they have on the environment of the town?

Describe Lipa, the girl Grigory found for his son, Stephan. What is the one feature she has that is considered to be strange and unattractive?