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Uncle Vanya

Anton Chekhov · *1898* · *Marian Fell (1912)*

On a country estate, Ivan Voitski—Uncle Vanya—has spent his life managing the land for a professor he once revered. The professor and his young wife visit, and the house discovers how much time has been wasted. A shot misses. Sonia, in the last quiet, promises that they shall rest. This is Marian Fell's 1912 English; the niece is Sonia, not Sonya.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What can be done with a wasted life, and is Sonia's promise that 'we shall rest' faith, or only the last kindness left?

"We shall rest. We shall hear the angels. We shall see heaven shining like a jewel."

Sonia · The close, to Vanya, after the others have gone

Astroff, the doctor, loves the forests and cannot love his own fatigue. Yelena's beauty disrupts the house without her meaning to. Vanya, realizing the professor is a petty idol, tries to shoot him and fails even at revolt. No one is carried off into a new life. Work resumes at the same table. Sonia's last speech is a Christian hope spoken in exhaustion: they will work, and they shall rest, and the pain will sink in a great compassion. Fell's wording is the text this site hosts. Do not sweeten the missed shot or harden the last speech into mere irony.

KEY CHARACTERS

Ivan Voitski (Uncle Vanya)
The manager of the estate, who has given his life to another man's career and cannot get the years back.

Sonia (Sofia Alexandrovna)
The professor's daughter, hard-working, plain, and the voice of the last hope. In this translation she is Sonia, not Sonya.

Astroff
The country doctor, tired, devoted to the forests, unable to begin a new life.

Professor Serebrakoff and Yelena
The retired scholar and his young wife, whose visit exposes the house.

Marina and Telegin
The old nurse and the impoverished neighbor with a guitar, who remain.

WE SHALL REST

> *"I have faith, Uncle, fervent, passionate faith."*
> **Sonia** · Act IV

> *"We shall rest. We shall hear the angels. We shall see heaven shining like a jewel."*
> **Sonia** · The close

Grades 10–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01
A Visit That Lasts Too Long
ACT I

The professor's household has changed the hours of the estate. Astroff talks of maps and wasted woods. Vanya begins to say aloud that the old admiration was a mistake.

- Marina, the nurse, is already the play's measure of endurance.
- The tea, the samovar, and the late dinner are a comedy of disruption.
- Sonia's unspoken love for Astroff is visible if you look.

02
Storms in a House
ACT II

A night of drink, music, and talk. Vanya tells his misery; Sonia tries to work and to hope; Yelena is restless and not free.

- The professor's illness is also a tyranny of attention.
- Astroff's mind is on the forests and on his own worn-out youth.
- Kindness and resentment share the same rooms.

03
A Map, and a Kiss
ACT III

Astroff shows Yelena the maps of what the district has lost. Sonia asks her to find out whether the doctor could love her; the answer is no, and Yelena and Astroff are themselves drawn together for a moment. The professor then proposes to sell the estate.

- The maps are a sermon: waste is not only a private feeling.
- Sonia's hope is broken quietly.
- The plan to sell is the insult Vanya cannot bear: his life was the estate.

04
A Missed Shot
ACT III, THE CLOSE

Vanya, in a rage of wasted years, fires at the professor and misses. The house is in uproar. The visitors will leave.

- The shot is Chekhov's anti-climax: even despair can fail.
- No one is killed; the tragedy is the life, not a corpse.
- Teach the attempt as a moral crisis, not as a thrill.

05
We Shall Rest
ACT IV

The professor and Yelena go. Astroff goes. Vanya and Sonia sit down to the accounts again. Sonia, her head on his hands, promises rest, angels, and a heaven like a jewel.

- The table of work is the same table as before the visit.
- Sonia's faith is 'fervent, passionate' in this translation, and it is spoken in a weary voice.
- The last music is Telegin's guitar, not a resolution offstage.

> *"I have faith, Uncle, fervent, passionate faith."*
> **Sonia** · Act IV, just before 'We shall rest'

A Wasted Life | Work | Hope of Rest | Beauty and Disruption | The Land

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 10–12

1. The hosted text is Marian Fell's 1912 English translation (Project Gutenberg #1756). In this text the niece is Sonia (not Sonya), and the doctor is Astroff (not Astrov). Quote Fell, not a later English version.
2. Exact close: "We shall rest. We shall hear the angels. We shall see heaven shining like a jewel." Shortly before: "I have faith, Uncle, fervent, passionate faith." She also says, in the same stretch, "we shall rest" with a tender smile imagined for the after.
3. Vanya fires a pistol at the professor and misses. Treat the attempt gravely; the play's point is the wasted life, not the gunplay.
4. Sonia's last speech is a Christian hope. Do not reduce it to sarcasm, and do not pretend the play has otherwise comforted her.

Quotations are verbatim from the Marian Fell (1912), Project Gutenberg #1756, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/chekhov-uncle-vanya/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.