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Dramatic Publishing

TO MOSCOW

by

KAREN SUNDE



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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(TO MOSCOW)

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“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

TO MOSCOW

A Full-length Play
For 4 Women and 2 Men, extras, doubling

CHARACTERS

MASHA (Chekhov) Anton's valiant sister/manager
KONSTANTIN (Stanislavky) irrepensible actor-director
LYDIA (Avilov) a giddy writer friend
ANYA (played by Lydia actress) eager novice actress
ANTON (Chekhov) famous writer
LIKA (Mizina) Anton's bewitching former girlfriend, a singer
OLGA (Knipper) brilliant actress
NURSE (non-speaking, played by Anya actress)
DOCTOR (played by Konstantin actor)
COMPANY: Two are sufficient. Production crew may participate onstage.

SET: A bare backstage. Minimal elements are introduced: A free-standing movable "stage-set" door; a few chairs, a table, a trunk, a chaise and a bed.

Notes: The scenes should be free-flowing, without blackouts.

"Beat" means one beat, a split second pause.

Ellipses within a sentence indicate a slight hesitation. At the end of a sentence or the beginning of a speech they indicate interruption by another's speech or a different thought.

TO MOSCOW was presented at The Playwrights' Center, Minneapolis, and the American Globe Theatre, New York.

The world premiere was at Ankara Devlet National Theatre, Turkey, 1994-'95, with Armağan Sancar ERSİN as translator and Kazim AKŞAR as director. It featured the following cast:

MASHA İclal ÖZERGÜN
KONSTANTIN..... Atsız KARADUMAN
LYDIA Alev BUHARALI
ANTON..... Mehmet ATAY
LIKA Nesrin ÜSTKANAT
OLGA Gülseren GÜRTUNCA
ANYA..... Meltem KESKİN

The American premiere was given at Chain Lightning Theatre, New York, 1996-'97. It was produced by Claire Higgins and directed by Steve Deighan and featured the following cast:

MASHA Carol Emshoff
KONSTANTIN..... Gregory Seel
LYDIA / ANYA..... Blainie Logan
ANTON..... Kricker James
LIKA Brandee Graff
OLGA Ginger Grace
also... Stephen Kelly and Dominique Kay Reino

Set Design..... Bill Kneissl
Costume Design Meganne George
Lighting Design Scott Clyve
Sound Design Randy Morrison

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

SCENE: *Dark stage, empty. An oblique light beam may strike the back wall and glance off a tall ladder or fly system, backstage gear. At one side a door unit juts into view. From the lobby comes buoyant theatre music. From onstage, a simply fingered guitar echoes bits of the melody.*

AT RISE: *MASHA sits alone downstage, waiting. Dark, silence. Finally she starts, hearing something. Dimly from beyond lobby doors, we hear happy Russian music. Suddenly the lobby door is flung open, the music blares. KONSTANTIN is in the doorway.*

KONSTANTIN. Did he come this way? Is he here? (*He comes down the aisle, door swings shut, music dim again.*)

MASHA. Excuse me, I was just... No. Who?

KONSTANTIN (*continuing onto the stage*). I looked round and he was gone. Bim bam.

MASHA. No. He hasn't come back.

KONSTANTIN. It's incredible. You know that, of course.

MASHA. Is the act over then?

KONSTANTIN (*searching the stage*). I expected something surprising, but...

MASHA. Is it going well?

KONSTANTIN. "We need new forms!" What about that now.

MASHA. How is the audience taking it?

KONSTANTIN (*performing*). "We need new forms and if we can't have them we had better have nothing!" Aha, sing that for a while. Sure he didn't come this way?

(*KONSTANTIN moves toward the aisle. Lobby door swings open. LYDIA hurries in.*)

KONSTANTIN. I'd better check the lobby.

MASHA. Yes.

LYDIA. Marya Pavlovna?

KONSTANTIN (*passing LYDIA on his way out*). Maybe the men's room.

LYDIA. It is you, isn't it? I knew I'd know you.

MASHA. Yes, it's me, but...

LYDIA. Is he here? He dashed so. My breath flew after him. (*Searching the stage.*) Does he think he can hide?

MASHA. No. I haven't seen him.

LYDIA (*comes to shake MASHA's hand*). Pardon me, you must pardon me...but the thrill of it, ohhh: "For such happiness as being a writer or an artist...I'd live in a garret and eat nothing but rye bread" and so on. Oh, forgive me, I'm behaving so badly. I'm Lydia, you see. Lydia Avilov.

MASHA. Oh. (*She doesn't know the name.*) Lydia Avilov.

LYDIA (*overlapping, oblivious*). And how does it end? "But I should ask in return—fame. Real resounding fame!!" Ohhh...

MASHA. Oh yes...you write stories.

LYDIA. ...how does he dare? But he told me he'd give me a sign. I shouldn't have been surprised.

MASHA. A sign? (*Music being struck up beyond lobby doors.*)

LYDIA. Oh goodness, the fourth act already. I have to run.
(*She runs.*)

MASHA. All right.

LYDIA. I'll see you when it's over. Oh, and please, please call me Lydia.

(*LYDIA sweeps out. MASHA alone. Silence. Then, a creak upstage. From out of shadows, ANTON is walking downstage. MASHA jumps, startled.*)

MASHA. Antosha! How did you get... Where have you been? Here. (*Putting a shawl around his shoulders.*) There've been so many people.

ANTON. How soon is there a train?

MASHA. I'll look it up. Here, have this tea. It's still good and hot.

ANTON. Haven't time. Two minutes and I'll be ready. (*He flings off the shawl, moving to the door unit at the side.*)

MASHA. Antosha, it isn't over.

ANTON. Of course not. Hell is long. But I, at least, have sense enough to climb out.

(*Lobby door opens just as onstage door shuts. KONSTANTIN comes scurrying.*)

KONSTANTIN. Aha, just on the brink, in the nick, I knew it.

MASHA (*looking in her bag for timetable*). I know it's right here ...

KONSTANTIN. He got round me somehow.

MASHA. ...ahh, here.

KONSTANTIN. Beg pardon, beg pardon, extremely rude.

MASHA. That's 10 ... 40. Ten-forty.

KONSTANTIN (*bowing*). I am Konstantin Alekseev Stanislavky.

MASHA. Oh. Yes. Hello. I'm afraid he's...

KONSTANTIN. No no, wouldn't dream of disturbing him.

I'll just wait, you don't mind. (*KONSTANTIN sits beside her, watching door where ANTON disappeared. Pause.*)

Quite a draft here. (*Pause.*) You must be cold.

MASHA. No. It's all right.

KONSTANTIN. That's one thing about a theatre...

MASHA (*with timetable*). And not another till ... 12:15. 10:40 and 12:15, that's it. (*She puts it away, catches sight of her hands, rubs them.*)

KONSTANTIN. Never trust a theatre that lets you keep clean fingernails.

MASHA. Ooh.

KONSTANTIN. It's true, it's true. Something lacking when that happens. You aren't watching the performance?

MASHA. I'll see it tomorrow. Would you like some tea?

KONSTANTIN. Ah. Second night, then.

MASHA. Yes.

KONSTANTIN. Less craziness. Still, must be strange to sit back here, with all the excitement...

MASHA. I don't like the way the pressure builds.

KONSTANTIN. Oh, yes, yes.

MASHA. I tried to watch. But it sounds different. My ears don't work. They get squashed between audience's ears. (*Beat.*) How are the actors feeling?

KONSTANTIN. Now? These aren't my actors.

MASHA. Oh, I thought...

KONSTANTIN. I don't belong here.

(ANTON at the door.)

ANTON. Masha, did I finish the proofs?

KONSTANTIN *(jumping up)*. Allow me, sir...

MASHA. Yes. They're under your case, on the table there.

ANTON. Well, we're not sending them.

MASHA. Not sending...?

KONSTANTIN. ...I want to congratulate you!

ANTON. What time, Masha?

MASHA. Well, the next...the next is 10:40. Half an hour.

ANTON. I'll make it. Excuse me. Masha dear, give him the tea and tell him I have no time. But be careful. He's one of those actors. *(ANTON shuts the door again.)*

KONSTANTIN. Fine. Splendid. He knows me then.

MASHA. You are an actor?

KONSTANTIN. Oh yes, of sorts. Just imagine tonight, a lightning stroke: "Let us dream of what will be in 200,000 years." He's playing with something fresh. Pulling us into the future! One stroke, and he's blasted every theatre in the city...for presenting easy subjects "convenient for domestic use." "Convenient!" "Domestic!" I stood up and roared. People stared at me.

MASHA. I don't know. He doesn't seem very happy with...

KONSTANTIN. That's just it, that's just it!

(ANTON at door again, crosses to hand MASHA a letter.)

ANTON. Here. Send this instead of the proofs. Stop the printing, absolutely. I don't want my plays published.

MASHA (*taking letter*). You don't... Yes, but Anton, are you sure you should run off like this?

ANTON (*checking items in a notebook*). I'm not running. I'm moving quickly.

MASHA. Everyone is so thrilled.

ANTON. Thrilled? You didn't sit in that audience. You didn't have the nerve.

MASHA. No, but...

ANTON. Disgusting. It was disgusting.

KONSTANTIN. *Exactement*. Bravo!

MASHA. Your friends will be disappointed. You're expected...

ANTON. Friends!? No one will know what to say to me. The best... will wear tortured faces. And any single one of them who encouraged me to commit this crime against myself is stricken from my book. Forever.

KONSTANTIN. My dear sir, I want your next play for my company. (*Everything stops. Pause.*)

ANTON. I don't write plays. (*Beat.*) Not if I live 700 years.

(He sweeps back through door. KONSTANTIN pushes after him. At the same instant, the lobby door swings open, and someone slips into the aisle. Sound of boos, applause, catcalls. The door swings shut again.)

KONSTANTIN (*following ANTON*). But the actors tonight were ridiculous! Imbeciles! Strutting and crowing...

MASHA (*calling*). Anton, I think it's over.

LIKA (*pause, from the aisle*). Masha. (*MASHA, uncertain, peers into the dark house. LIKA moves closer.*) Don't remember me?

MASHA. No... I'm sorry, I...

LIKA. I wonder if Antosha will.

MASHA (*perplexed, then shock*). Lika? Lika!

LIKA (*steps onto the stage*). That bad, is it? And I tried to fix up special.

MASHA. Oh no no, it's... oh, Lika. (*Rushes to hug her.*) You're all right.

LIKA. Strange to say. And in spite of appearances.

MASHA (*as LIKA slowly circles*). That's silly, you look... just...

LIKA (*primps mockingly*). Maarvelous—considering. A bit of Parisian *savoir faire*? Drop it anyway. I saw myself clear enough in your face.

MASHA. How long have you been back? We've been so worried.

LIKA. Have you.

MASHA. Of course. What do you think?

LIKA (*shrugs*). That girls who misbehave have it coming.

MASHA. Lika!

LIKA. Well it's never the man, is it? He's back with his wife. So everything's all right.

MASHA. But you... By then you were...

LIKA. Bearing happy tidings? Never mind. There's nothing left to show.

MASHA. Don't, Lika!

LIKA. What did you think I'd have to say? (*Pause.*) I saw the play, Masha.

MASHA. Then it is over. The play.

LIKA. "Nina." Why did he do it, Masha?

MASHA. You don't think he meant ...

LIKA. Of course he did. The whole gallery is buzzing.

That girl Nina is me.

MASHA. No, Lika.

LIKA. Hah. Thinks she's going off to find herself ... in love,
in art?

MASHA. It may seem that way, but ...

(MASHA turns to watch ANTON coming through the door. LIKA turns and steps away. KONSTANTIN follows ANTON.)

KONSTANTIN. You need a new kind of acting. Take a line like "My leg has gone to sleep."

ANTON *(sorting letters)*. Here, Masha.

KONSTANTIN. It's brilliant! Brilliant bit of real life. Disarming.

ANTON. You can post these in the morning.

KONSTANTIN. But how is one of these "actresses" going to show herself off with a line like that?

ANTON. And if you will, call Yavorskaya ...

KONSTANTIN. "My leg has gone to sleep." Ach, you're not listening.

ANTON. Explain that I understand her nervousness and do not blame her for the disastrous performance. *(Turning back into the room.)* I'm sorry, Konstantin, there's no point.

MASHA. Anton ... Anton, look. Here's ...

ANTON *(glances at LIKA, who is turned away)*. Oh excuse me, in such a rush, you see.

MASHA. Anton, it's ...

LIKA. Never mind, it'll come to him.

ANTON (*beat*). Lika?

LIKA (*turning to him*). Well. Seems I haven't lost my voice, anyway.

ANTON (*sudden explosion*). Likusha! (*Runs to embrace her.*) Queen of all the swans. Come, come. (*Kissing both her hands.*) Did I pack the bullwhips, Masha? This crocodile is getting it for deserting us.

LIKA. Am I.

ANTON. Persuade me not to. Here I am—rapacious, unmerciful. And there you—ravishing light at the moment of catastrophe.

LIKA. Yes? Which catastrophe?

ANTON (*pulling her round*). Hold on to her, Masha. Chain her down. Three flicks of a tail and we're off. (*Exits into room.*)

KONSTANTIN (*bows, from doorway*). Excuse me, ladies. (*Follows ANTON again.*)

LIKA (*collapsing*). Oh God!

MASHA (*sorting letters*). He wants to cancel the printing. But we need the money. He's neglected his practice all season.

LIKA. God. He's just the same.

MASHA. He's very glad to see you.

LIKA. So he says.

MASHA (*patting her*). Lika, dear Lika.

LIKA. Why didn't he come when I needed him. (*Beat. Gets up.*) I'm going, anyway.

MASHA. Oh you mustn't. He was so angry before. It pleased him to see you.

LIKA. A pleasing distraction, that's it. Tell him he's too much for me. It's dangerous.

(*LYDIA comes sweeping through lobby doors, and towards MASHA.*)

LYDIA. It was so beautiful, breathtaking—a masterpiece!

LIKA (*fastening her coat*). Goodbye, then. I'll call you.

MASHA. Lika, don't go.

LYDIA. And ohh, I can't tell you the joy...to have been the one who inspired...(*She continues onto the stage, crossing LIKA on her way out.*) He used my words, my inscription to him. And that was the sign! Right there on stage, in his play: "If ever my life can be of use to you, come and take it." Oh, Marya, I'm so happy. I've been his inspiration. The girl Nina is me! (*LIKA stops. MASHA looks at LIKA.*)

MASHA. That's...

LIKA. Perhaps I'll stay after all.

MASHA. That's remarkable. It's unfortunate, but he's taking the 10:40, and...

LYDIA. Oh, I don't want to see him. Not now. Not with so many people. He'll understand. Just please, if you will...give him this tiny note?

MASHA. Of course.

LYDIA. And I'll dash off into the night.

MASHA. Yes.

LYDIA. He'll understand. (*Begins to leave.*) I'm so glad we've met.

MASHA. I too, thank you. (*LYDIA sweeps out past LIKA.*)

LIKA. And thank you, Madame Avilov.

MASHA. She's married?

LIKA. *Mais oui.*

(LIKA begins to sweep out, mimicking LYDIA. ANTON hurries on, KONSTANTIN after.)

KONSTANTIN. Just say you'll visit us at least.

ANTON. I'm sorry. I've no interest in revolutions. *(ANTON has a case and haphazard stack of papers he is gathering into it. LIKA moves slowly back, drawn by ANTON.)*

KONSTANTIN. A quarter of an hour at rehearsal and I promise you'll...

ANTON. There's really no point. I do not write plays. Now: ladies? *(KONSTANTIN throws his hands up and sits on the edge of the stage.)*

MASHA. Here's a note, from a woman who just...

ANTON *(smells it)*. Hah. Lydia has been here. *(Giving MASHA more letters.)* I'd already written her. Avilov. Post it anyway. Now...darling delicious Lika, you're coming to the train. I need a tasty farewell. And then in the morning you'll come to us, and...

LIKA. No, much as I adore you, I...have another engagement.

ANTON. Who is he! I'll bite his ears off.

LIKA. Make up a name for him. Then you can do as you please.

ANTON. He's a dirty degenerate buzzard called Kakaholtz. I'll jump up and down on him till he squeaks. *(She embraces him quickly and moves toward the lobby door.)* Do come tomorrow, angel. Be nice to me. We'll plan our trip to the Crimea. Just us two.

LIKA *(stops dead)*. The Crimea?

KONSTANTIN *(sitting, writing in his notebook)*. Anton Pavlovich, perhaps you'd prefer to meet us at...

LIKA (*sharply*). With what intention this time. Any at all? (*Turns back.*) How much of me can you use? (*Laughs.*) It's terrible. The inside of my life is eaten way, and you're still making the same jokes. "Come to me. I'm bored without you." What about when I say "I need you. Come." Oh no, I'm not allowed. Well. Perhaps you were disgusted. I'd shamed myself with a married man. But I hadn't. Not nearly so much as I'd shamed myself with you. And you knew it. I begged you not to invite me. I asked you to help me forget you. You're the reason I ran off with him—and you knew it. "Come to me," you say. But what is it all about. What do you want? (*Beat.*) Maybe it's just your work—to squeeze my life out of me.

MASHA. Lika, no. Please be calm.

LIKA. And you too. You're a kind of team, a brother-sister conspiracy: Capture her, draw her in, but careful, careful, only so far, keep her at arm's length. A delightful specimen, aren't I? You planned it all! A scientific experiment, eh, Antosha? How did I do for you, eh? Not bad, not bad. Good enough for four acts anyway. Oh, you like them with a flair for life. And I've lived for you, haven't I—lots of drama, scandal, hysterics. The only way it would be better is if I'd shot myself! (*Silence.*)

ANTON (*quiet*). In the play...the man shoots himself. The woman endures.

LIKA. Yes, well. Can't have too many deaths in one plot. But, Antosha, did you have to use the baby too? Couldn't you have left my dead daughter to me! (*LIKA holds, glaring at ANTON, then quickly leaves.*)

KONSTANTIN. That was an exit! My lord, what temperament. (*Stunned pause.*)