

PROLOGUE

SOMETHING HAPPENED

Clock bells. A low rumble is heard, then the sound of an earthquake.

MOVEMENT ONE

A road. A woman, **CO**, in torn white Victorian clothing appears, holding her shoes in her hands. She is heading down the road. Walking down this road clearly requires an effort of will. She has the attitude of someone who normally knows where she is going but in this case there is no normality. She is doing the best she can. She, too has been damaged. Her home is gone and all she knows is to move forward into an uncertain future. She can barely remember who she is. She is followed by a girl, **UV**, in black who crawls rather than walks. Then a man, **I**, carrying a teacup delicately balanced on a bulky suitcase. He carries many awkward remnants of his old life. He is followed by a man, **TS**, trotting steadily along the road in bare feet, reading a book. The last figure to cross the stage, **S**, is the man who was earlier shaken by spasms. His head is bandaged. He carries a birdcage and a walking stick which he digs with determination into the ground as he travels down the road. All five characters disappear down the road.

Further along, a bowler hat lands on the road. **CO** follows, carrying a white parasol. One by one the others appear behind her, all struggling to continue their journey. Having lost their facility with speech, they speak in aphasiac fragments. The sound of the words are hollow and disjointed, as if each were calling into a well.

TS

A quarter past eight -

I

Please.

CO (*Singing*)

What is this noisy world to me?

Oh, what are friends and foes?

*Oh, that my heart were cheered,
By the warmth of requited love!*
Horrible the way these people sing.

TS

I don't know.

I don't

Tea would be nice.

UV

Who is it - Is it you?

S

Haven't had any experiences, confound it all.

I

Surprise!

S

That's all there is to it.

My leg's - gone.

C O

Every day I repeat - oh!

I

A cry from the heart.

TS

What a noise!

C O

I keep expecting something to happen

UV

The wind is up...

TS

There's more light

UV

A storm coming -

C O

Is that - music?

TS

Someone's coming.

S

Amazing!

UV

It's dreadful -

TS

Hello.

I

Done with a purpose.

C O

We are going to bypass all the illusions - that's the goal, the meaning.
Forward then.

TS

I'm tired.

C O

We are advancing toward that bright star glowing in the distance.
Nothing can hold us back.

TS

I'm tired.

C O

Forward march!

TS

I want some tea.

C O

Don't lag behind.

To live in the present we first have to make up for our past, to have done with it once and for all.

Be as free as the wind.

Marvelous visions of the future.

I have a vision...happiness.

The moon is rising!

UV

I like eating at night -

C O

There..*..happiness.

***TS**

Actual time doesn't matter.

S

Next thing I'll do is -

I

To go home again

TS

Purpose -

C O

And if we are not meant to see it, if we are not to know it, what does that matter -

TS

I know so little, oh, so little!

S

Women!

TS

Obvious we don't understand one another.

S

If you only knew how -

I

I have got somehow transformed into a sort of Hamlet or Manfred.

***S**

What's there to understand?

***TS**

Cranes for example.

S

What's there to understand?

C O

Ladies and gentlemen - the sun has set. *(Starts to move off, continuing down the road.)*

TS

They'll go on flying.

A meaning...

Look, it's snowing!

S

The devil take it.

The devil take my vanity - sucks out my blood, sucks it out -

I

This is no place.

(UV exits, following C O)

TS

What a wind! *(Exits, tossing his hat ahead of him.)*

S

You've heard of obsessions, when a man is haunted by the idea of the moon or

something? Well, I've got my moon.

I

Go away, go!

S

Same old tune.

Fraud!

Who am I - Agamemnon?

I

All over again, from the beginning. (*Exits*)

S

I don't feel like leaving.

I don't really feel like leaving -

A subject flashed through my head. (*He rushes off suddenly and disappears*)

MOVEMENT TWO

Further down the road, **C O** appears again, carrying her parasol and a picnic basket. She is followed by the others. They begin to speak in a fugue-like manner, occasionally overlapping. Unaccustomed to the sounds they are uttering, they chisel their words to sculpt newly found sentences. Words become depth sounders sent out in search of one another. They set up a roadside camp. In an attempt to reconstruct their lives, they hold a tea party and put on a play.

CO

What time is it?

TS

I thought I would never live through it.

C O

It's light already.

I thought you had gone. I slept through it.

TS

You were in a dead faint, as though you were dead.

C O

Went dead to sleep sitting up. If only you might've awakened me.

***TS**

And the clock was striking...*....

***C O**

I remember when I was fifteen....

I

It's hot!

C O

My father punched me in the face with his fist. I remember it as if it were today.

TS

It was raining.

C O

A bull in a china shop.

TS

I don't want to think about it.

UV

I lie in continual terror. This life swallows one up completely. Little by little you become strange yourself and never notice it.

C O

Here's this book that I was reading without any attention and fell asleep.

UV

I've turned into a queer fish.

TS

I remember perfectly. As if it were yesterday. When I woke this morning, I saw the spring light. My soul responded to that light, and I wanted so much to go

back home. Don't whistle. Please. How can you.

***I**

You won't believe me, but I've covered fifteen miles in less than three hours. I'm worn out. Just feel my heart. See how it's thumping. Do you hear? Tum-tum-tum-tum-tum.

(S enters abruptly, banging his walking stick on the ground. All turn to stare at him. The pace quickens.)

C O

What's the matter with you? You're all...

S

I mourn for my lost life. I am unhappy.

C O

My hands are shaking. I'm going to faint.

I

I might die.

UV

Maybe you'd like something to eat.

TS

My head is splitting. Strange thoughts come to me.

S

Why?

C O

Better remember who you are. Better remember who you are. Better remember who you are.

S

I don't understand.

C O

There I go again....Pardon the expression, but accidents like these...they're simply phenomenal.

(Suddenly, this accumulation of activity and speaking stops. They look at each other uneasily. After a moment of discomfort and disorientation, the following occurs in stillness, as if suspended in time.)

S

I think something is going to happen here soon.

TS

The main thing in life is form - when things lose their form, they lose their identity.

C O

When he talks, one doesn't know what he means. It doesn't make sense.

S

It's too late to change my ways.

C O

What's wrong with me? I'm shivering all over.

I

What's the use of discussing things with people like you?

TS

He doesn't live on food like the rest of us. He lives on philosophy.

I

You and I, brother, are past the age of thinking about a philosophy of life.

S

I have to hurry. I can't stay. I just can't.

C O

It must be time to go.

(They jerk into action again, attempting to continue with the tasks at hand.)

UV

I sat down. I sat down, and shut my eyes - and I began to think, just like this.
Those people who live after us in two or three hundred years - for whom we are
struggling to clear the way, to beat out a road - will they remember and speak
kindly of us?

***C O**

*Will she recognize me, I wonder? Will she know me again, I wonder? I am going to
faint. I am going to faint.*

I

What can I do about it now?

TS

I suddenly felt glad and remembered my childhood.

(A bell rings. They move into a fugue state.)

TS

And such thoughts moving me. Such wonderful thoughts - such memories...

UV

The bell!

TS

And what a happy life I dreamed of then.

I

Let's go and do somersaults.

C O

I am like a little girl again. Can you believe it?

TS

Today I'm free. I haven't got a headache, and I feel younger than I was
yesterday. All's well, God is everywhere.

C O

My dog eats nuts.

S

This morning I woke up with a splitting headache. As if brain were glued to my skull. And I unexpectedly fell asleep again, and now all my bones ache and I can hardly breath. (*pause*) I'm a complete wreck my life's a nightmare.

I

What a memory!

TS

I'm sick of listening to you. He likes to hear himself talk. I would have left long ago.

C O

At last you've come.

I

I'm going to have a swim and chew some paper.

S

That dog will howl all night again.

UV

People have to be waked out of their sleep.

TS

I feel as if I were sailing, a broad blue sky above me, great white birds flying by. Why is that? Why? When I got up today it suddenly struck me that the world made sense. It was all clear to me - the way I had to live. I know it all. We must live by the sweat of our brow. That is the whole meaning of life. All happiness. All enthusiasm. Oh, it's awful!

S

I've nowhere to go, confound it all. (*pause*) Let's go.

TS

A new age is dawning.

UV

Don't worry.

S

What a mess!

TS

The time has come, a massive cloud is descending upon us, a powerful, invigorating storm is gathering. It's on its way, I feel it already.

UV

It's hot!

***I**

Hot!

C O

I'm frozen.

TS

You don't matter.

C O

I must tell you something. It cannot wait another moment.

TS

In twenty-five years you'll be dead - thank God.

S

Like it or not, you have to go on living.

C O

Hah! (*giggles*)

(They jolt into action again, setting up the tea party.)

C O

Now what? Same old story. (*Bell ring*)

UV

I've never seen a more beautiful woman. Her eyes, exquisite. With one foot in the grave, she's still rummaging through her books for the dawn of a new life.

*(Singing) The hut is cold, the fire is dead
Where shall the master lay his head?*

***C O**

*I don't know what to make of it. If only I could get to sleep. I didn't sleep the whole way,
I was so anxious. I won't be a minute. Thank god you've come.*

S

There is our theater! Absolutely no scenery! The audience has an open view of the horizon. The moon rises.

I

I would stop talking nonsense if I were you. * You never give me the chance to talk to anyone alone.

***TS**

Here we are.

S

It's the tragedy of my life. And all the rest of it.

I

Oh, will you stop driveling, and for heaven sake avoid passionate speech making.

S

Oh, she's bored. She's jealous. She is a psychological curiosity.

C O

Don't tell me about it, don't...

S

We are all her enemies. It's all our fault. She's superstitious, afraid of the number thirteen, or three candles on a table.

C O

She has nothing left, nothing.

UV

Her fine phrases,* her lazy morality,* her nonsensical theories about the ruin of the world,* all this is absolutely hateful to me.

***C O**

What's happening? Oh my God! Oh my God!

TS

He's up to something.

C O *(Suddenly C O hyperventilates and convulses as a real memory surfaces)*

Uha - Uha - Uha - Uha -

S

Calm down. You are nervous and the rest of it. Set your mind at rest.

C O

There's nothing to it. It's all a dream.

I

How tired I am of you all.

TS

How annoying.

C O

In Paris I flew in a balloon!

UV

The life of a soap bubble.

TS

My kingdom for a cup of tea.

S

Loves me - loves me not - she kisses me or she spits on me - she takes me into her heart - or she throws me out of the house. She doesn't love me. Why should she? She wants to live, to love... She knows I don't respect contemporary theater. She imagines she's serving humanity, the cause of sacred art. But as I see it, our theater is in a rut - it's so damn conventional. The modern stage is

nothing but an old prejudice, nothing but a sad and dreary routine. They strive to squeeze out a moral from the flat, vulgar pictures and the flat vulgar phrases, a little tiny moral, easy to comprehend and handy for home consumption. In a thousand variations they offer me always the same thing over and over again. I run and keep on running as fast as Maupassant ran from the brain crushing vulgarity of the Eiffel Tower. But the stage is certainly an important factor in culture. We must have new forms. That's what we want. And if there are none, then it's better to have nothing at all.

TS

No!

C O

The birds are singing.

S

That depresses me.

TS

How odd...

(Once again, they are motionless, caught up in a suspension like an inhaled breath.)

C O

What time is it now? It must be past two. It must be time to go.

I

All this has tired me to the point of making me ill. I have a headache. I can't sleep. There are noises in my ears. There's simply nowhere where I can get any peace.

C O

What bliss!

TS

It is as dead as the bottom of the sea.

C O

One would hardly know you. How you've changed! Who are you? I don't remember? What now? I've lost all my hairpins. Yoohoo! There I go again. I

just knew it.

UV

Her youth over
Her beauty faded.
Man she loved dead.

C O

I can't bring myself to believe it. Time flies.

I

My mind's so confused.

S

What could be more desperate and absurd than my position?

I

I find myself in the grip of a kind of indolence. I can't understand myself or other people.

UV

Forgive my saying so, but you've changed. I hardly know you.

C O

You haven't changed a bit.

S

In times gone by I had two great wishes. But I accomplished neither.

I

I would like to tell you the whole story from the beginning. It is so long and complicated that I could hardly hope to finish it. There's nothing remarkable about me. I don't feel any love or pity just a sort of indifference and lassitude. The owl it screeches every night.

S

I am insanely happy.

UV

I want to talk.

TS

What can that mean? What can that mean? Nothing happened.

CO

Don't worry, something will turn up if not today then tomorrow! *(Bell ring)*

(They lurch into action again, setting up a tea-party in the midst of their improvised campground.)

UV

I used to be a shining personality. I tried to blind myself on purpose to avoid seeing life as it is. I thought I was doing the right thing. I can't sleep at night because of the disappointment and anger I feel at how stupidly I let time fly by. Oh the years I've wasted when I could have had everything. It's so dreary, I'll hold my tongue.

*CO

A young lady should never forget herself. There's nothing I dislike so much in a girl as loose behavior. I'd love to just stare at you a while, talk.

CO

You are magnificent, as always.

TS

What? I don't like this. What are you doing? You are shameless. I am glad. Very glad. I remember. I forget your faces. How time does fly! Oh, how time flies. Now I seem to remember your face. I don't remember you. I don't really remember you. You know, it is so vague, really, so vague. I can close my eyes and see him as he was. I used to think I remembered everybody, but.... I remember. Do you remember? That's it. What a surprise! And I'm crying too. Nobody knows why. I know why. Because if it was near it wouldn't be far off, and it's far off, it can't be near. Now I know who you are. I remember. I'm beginning to forget her face. We'll be forgotten in just the same way. Yes, they'll forget us. It's our fate, it can't be helped.

CO

He can say what he likes, I don't care.

TS

Yeah!

S

I'm not late am I? No, no, no! There's a red glow in the sky, the moon is beginning to rise. But now I'm happy. See how difficult it is for me to breathe. I have to hurry. I can't stay, I just can't. My heart is full of you. We are alone. What sort of tree is that. Why is it dark? It's evening already; everything looks darker. It's time to begin.

C O

I can't sit still! I can't do it! This happiness is more than I can bear. Laugh at me. I am a fool!

S

Are you nervous? I'm embarrassed.

(Pandemonium erupts)

***TS**

Wasn't it thought that some rubbish written by a fool, held all the truth?

***C O**

I'm off in a moment, there's no time to talk.

***S**

One must depict life not as it is, nor as it should be, but as it appears in dreams.

***C O**

Well, I'll be brief. There's a way out. Listen to me carefully. I don't quite understand what you mean. Excuse me, but you don't know what you're talking about. Come on, make up your mind! Shut up!

***UV**

Forests temper the severity of the climate, in countries where the climate is mild less energy is wasted on the struggle with nature. So people are softer and milder. In such countries the people are beautiful, subtle and sensitive. Art and learning flourish among them. Their philosophy is not gloomy. Their attitude towards women is full of refined courtesy.

***I**

Maybe you can see through me. You don't like me, and you don't conceal it. I've only got to open my mouth and say one word. We're left here alone. It's a hideous existence.

***UV**

Only a thoughtless barbarian could burn beauty like this. We are endowed with reason and creative force to increase what has been given us; until now; we have not created but destroyed.

***C O**

They knew the way to do things then...And where are those ways now?

***S**

But you like to give me pain. (Sings loudly) Never say youth is wasted.

S

What do you want of me? **Be quiet!**

(Everyone stops, looking to the source of this outburst. S is triumphant.)

S

The stage has gone to the dogs. There were mighty oaks, but now we see nothing but stumps. When does the thing begin?

*O Hamlet, speak no more
Thou turnst my eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct.
Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed.
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty-*

We are about to begin!

Attention please! *(Pause)* I'll begin. *(He knocks three times on the ground and speaks in a loud voice.)* Ye venerable, hoary shadows, ye who hover o'er this ocean at night, I bid ye, sink us into a sleep and let us dream what will be in two hundred thousand years. In two hundred thousand years there will be nothing. Show us this nothing. For thousands of centuries the earth has born no living creature, and this poor moon light its lamp in vain. In the meadows cranes no longer

awaken with a cry, May beetles are silent in the lindens.

TS

Cheep, cheep, cheep....

S

Empty, empty, empty. Terrible, terrible, terrible. The bodies of living creatures have turned to dust and all their souls have merged into one. I am that World Soul. In me there live the souls of Alexander, of Caesar, Shakespeare, Napoleon, and also the soul of the smallest worm.

CO

What's he talking about?

I

I understand.

S

In me human consciousness has merged with animal instinct. I remember all, all, all, and every life that is within me I live through again. I open my lips to speak, and my voice echoes mournfully in the void, and no one hears.

CO

What's he talking about?

S

In the universe only spirit remains permanent and immutable. I don't know where I am and what awaits me. Only one truth has been revealed to me: I am destined to triumph. Then matter and spirit will fuse in glorious harmony, and the kingdom of universal freedom will come to pass. Till then, horror, horror.

CO

You talk too much.

I

I understand. You can tell me about your depression.

CO

I never lose hope. I'll be thinking everything's gone down the drain, I'm sunk,

and wham! You'll see something will turn up, if not today well then tomorrow. The starlings are singing! You haven't forgotten? You remember, don't you? You haven't forgotten? Oh, my childhood, my innocent childhood! Happiness awoke with me every morning! It just like this, nothing has changed. All, all white. After the dark, dismal autumn and the cold, cold, winter you are young again, full of happiness. The angels of heaven have not abandoned you. Oh! If only I could free my neck and shoulders from the stone that weighs them down! If only I could forget my past. Look there she is! * There's no one really there, really. It only looked like it.

***UV**

Well they're gone.

TS

We are very petty. See how little I am. All right, that's enough. I couldn't sleep all night. Shut my eyes. Couldn't sleep. Everything racing through my mind. Nothing happened. Before I knew it, it was dawn.

C O

He never gives up.

Go away. You smell of chicken.

S

I don't mind listening to nonsense now and again for fun; but I see nothing but evil disposition.

C O

If only God would help us!

I

The owl's screeching again. You know, I'm beginning to think that fate's cheated me. Lots of people who are probably no better than me are happy. Do you think I don't know what my illness is? It's boring to talk about that. Why don't they respond to love with love? I can feel their hatred day and night, even in my sleep. I think it's probably true. What frightening thoughts I have. There are lots of things you can't understand. It is I that am surprised... What are you here for? Go on talking. I cut all my connections, just like cutting off dead leaves with a pair of scissors. Now it's different. I sit and listen to the owl screeching.

TS

Nothing happened!

C O

Can't you think of a new line? That's old and stale. Do I go on living, so to speak, or do I shoot myself. Just in case, I always carry a revolver with me. See. Let me give a last bit of advice. Don't flap your hands about! Get out of the habit. All the same, I like you. Damn, it's cold. It must be time to go. I've had enough of shooting the breeze with you people. Loafing has done me in. Take your nasty things! *(She gathers up her belongings and moves off down the road.)*

UV

I am so happy. I have a longing for music. It's been a long time since I've played. I shall play and cry, cry like an idiot. *(She follows C O off down the road)*

S

What a glorious evening! It was all laughter, and noise and the firing of guns... and love-making, love-making without end.

TS

Let's have some cognac. Some trash that passes for music. I'm getting plastered tonight. Drink up! There was going to be a party. Yeah! Go, party, GO! *(He moves off. S and I remain.)*

(S unexpectedly kicks I, knocking him off his suitcase, brutally grabs I's framed dog portrait, and tears off. At a loss, I hesitates and then follows him, running.)

MOVEMENT THREE

A storm is brewing. The wind is whipping through the trees. **C O** appears first, playfully dancing, talking and singing. One by one the characters appear on the road. They are dancing, singing, and talking. In the midst of a folk dance, there is another crack of lightning and they remember the disaster.

S

What can I do...What can I do...

TS

Alright that's enough.

S

What can I do?

UV

Not a moments rest.

TS

What if we could start over?

I

Let's have a....

UV

I want...I want to....I want to hear...

I

Let's have a...

UV

I want to hear music.

TS

God dammit! Let's have a drink.

S

To one who doesn't remember where she came from or why she's alive.

TS

What if we could start over; if we could remember the life we lived.

UV

Before the disaster, the same thing happened. It is quiet again.

The next moments are painfully slow and deliberate. A clock chimes.

CO (*ringing bell*)

What time is it?

UV

It's a quarter to...

C O

Dunyasha,...

...ask the musicians if they'll have some tea.

UV

...All right, all right, I'm sorry.

CO

It was a stupid day for the musicians to come; it was a stupid day to have this dance...

UV

Why be miserable? (*With animation*) Come, my precious, my splendid one, be sensible!

C O

Well, well, it doesn't matter...

UV

You have mermaid blood in your veins - be a mermaid! Let yourself go for once in your life! Plunge headlong into the abyss.

C O

(*Applauding*) Bravo! Bravo!

UV

Come, come, my dearest, forgive me...

C O

And still no sign of Leonid.

UV

I apologize.

C O

I can't understand what's he's doing all this time in town.

UV

Peace.

C O

It must be all over by now the property's sold; or the auction never came off; why does he keep me in suspense so long?

UV

I'll bring you a bunch of roses; I gathered them for you this morning.

TS

(Angrily) To hell with them...To hell with them...To hell with them all.... To hell with them...To hell with them...To hell with them all....

S

Don't be afraid, mother, there's no danger. Uncle often has these fits now. You'd better lie down, uncle.

It's bad for his health living in the country. He's miserable. Now if, in a sudden burst of generosity, you could lend him a thousand or two....

C O

Grandma sent us fifteen thousand to buy the property in her name - she doesn't trust us - but it wouldn't be enough even to pay the interest. My fate is being decided today, my fate...

TS

They think I'm a doctor and can cure everything, and I know absolutely nothing.

S

Please change my bandage, mother. You do it so well.

C O

Why do you get so angry? He does tease you, but why not? You can marry Lopakin if you want; he's a nice interesting man; Of course, if you don't feel like it, don't. Nobody wants to force you, my pet.

TS

To hell with them.

I

Before you say anything, I know you like a drink but please don't encourage the count. It's bad for him. I've asked you all a thousand times not to do this. Look, vodka all over my papers...crumbs...cucumbers.

TS

Last Wednesday I attended a woman in Zasya - and she died, and it's my fault she died.

I

If that silly old baby dies - God forbid. It is I who'd feel bad about it, not you...What is it you want? What is it?

CO

Don't tease. Don't you see that I'm upset enough already?

S

No, mother. That was a moment of terrible desperation, I couldn't control myself. It won't happen again.

I

I'm so ashamed.

S

You have the hands of an angel. I remember a long time ago, when you were still acting in the Imperial Theater - I was quite little then - there was a fight in the courtyard of the house we lived in; a washerwoman who lived there got beaten up. Remember? When they picked her up she was unconscious. You took care of her until she was well. Do you remember?

TS

Yes...I used to know a certain amount twenty five years ago, but I don't remember anything now.

S

Two ballerinas lived in our building then...

TS

Nothing.

S

They used to come over for coffee.
They were very religious.

I

I don't really care...I've got a headache.

S

(Pause) Lately... I find that my love for you is as tender and generous as when I was a child. I have no one left now but you.

TS

Perhaps I'm not really a man,...I'm only pretending that I've got arms and legs and a head; perhaps I don't exist at all, and only imagine that I walk, and eat, and sleep.

I

At twenty we're all heroes, we can do anything, but at thirty we're exhausted and useless....Go now off you go, you must be tired of me.

C O

(In great agitation) Why isn't Leonid back? Oh, if only I knew whether the property's sold or not!

TS

(Cries) Oh, if only I didn't exist!

C O

It seems such an impossible disaster, that I don't know what to think. I feel quite lost. Honestly, I feel I could burst out screaming. I shall do something idiotic. Help me. Say something. Speak!

I

I'm a rotten, pitiful, contemptible creature. Oh, God, how I despise myself! I hate my voice, my footsteps, my hands, these clothes, my thoughts. Isn't it ridiculous?

TS

(Stops crying; angrily.) The devil only knows...

I

I can't make my brain, or my hands, or my feet do what I want them to.

TS

Day before yesterday they were talking in the club; they said, Shakespeare, Voltaire...I'd never read, never read at all, and I put on an expression as if I had read. And so did the they. Oh, how beastly! How petty! Then I remembered the woman I killed on Wednesday...and I couldn't get her out of my mind, and everything in my mind became crooked, nasty, wretched...So I went and drank.

S

Coward.

TS

...thank you...

CO

I see nothing.

I

I regret nothing, but my soul trembles with fear at the thought of tomorrow... Sarah! I swore I'd love her for ever...How....I don't understand it. She's going to die ...and I.....I'm ashamed! Run away. *(Pause)* Sasha says she's in love with me - and I get drunk with it, I forget everything else in the world, and I start shouting: " a new life! Happiness!" But the next day I don't believe in the new life any more than I believe in ghosts...What is it that's the matter with me then? What is this precipice that I seem to be pushing myself over?...I feel like putting a bullet into my head!...

CO *(ringing bell)*

You settle every important question so boldly; You are bolder, honester, deeper than we are, but reflect, show me just a finger's breadth of consideration, take pity on me. Don't you see? I was born here, my father and mother lived here, and my grandfather; I love this house; without the cherry orchard my life has no meaning for me, and if it must be sold, then for heaven's sake sell me too. My little one drowned here.

(TS takes clock into his hands and examines it. He drops the clock which breaks to pieces.)

(Three minutes of silence).

UV

I saw everything, everything.

TS

I thought I would never live through it.

UV crawls to the picnic basket and with great difficulty opens it, rummages around and pulls out a revolver.

UV

I'm going. You are my bitterest enemy. I am going mad. I am so unhappy. *(She points the revolver in her mouth and pulls the trigger)* Missed. *Now she points the revolver at CO)* BANG!

CO

She needs to be alone. *(She gathers her things and exits off down the road)*

UV

(Pointing the revolver at S) BANG!

S

Who is it? Is it you?

UV

(Pointing the gun at I) BANG!

I

It's time.

UV

Bang! Missed. Missed again. What was I doing? Oh. *(She runs off disappearing down the road).*

S

(Picking up his belongings one by one) This forehead is mine, these eyes are mine, this lovely silky hair is mine. You are all mine. *(Exits)*

I

Now I understand. (*Exits*)

TS

(He tosses his hat, following it onto the stage his belonging strapped on his back once again. He pauses near his hat, looks in both directions, picks up his hat with his toes, tosses it gaily in the air and onto his head. His movement and voice are vaudevillian.)
What do you have against me? (*He trots merrily off down the road, reading his book.*)

MOVEMENT FOUR

The five re-appear further down the road, walking. It is apparent that experience has altered them. They stop to take a group photograph. Since reliving the physical events of the disaster, they now remember where they have come from and what they have experienced. The quality of their speech is light and lucid, as if the words were suspended in the cool air that follows a storm.

S

What next?

TS

We'll meet again sometime. We'll hardly recognize one another. We'll say, "How do you do?" And we'll be very nervous and embarrassed. (*Takes a picture*) Keep still... Once more, for the last time.

CO

To those who are going away! And to those who are staying! It must be time to go. It's time to go. Life goes on.

I

This life of ours...human life is like a flower, gloriously blooming in a meadow: along comes a goat, eats it up - no more flowers.

S

I spoke so much about new forms, and now I feel myself slipping into a rut.

TS

Good-bye, trees! Good-bye, echo! Good-bye, I must go. Thank you for everything, for everything.

S

You can't let yourself go to pieces standing by the seashore waiting for the weather to turn. It's not as bad as it seems.

I

One must just struggle against all these gloomy thoughts. That's just madness.

C O

I think I know why I'm alive. Well, it doesn't matter. That's not what makes the wheels go round. There I go again.

TS

I'm satisfied. God, I hope it all works out. I've been lucky all my life, I'm happy. People have such different fates. Something happened. I can't remember. A thousand people hoist a huge bell, loads of money and work go into the effort, and suddenly it slips and smashes to pieces. Just like that and for no reason. I've got an old-fashioned watch. It seems to be falling asleep. (*looks at watch*) It's about time, I think. Everything's all muddled up in my head.

S

You go about aimlessly in the crowd, zigzagging to and fro, you live with its life, you fuse your individuality with its, and you begin to believe that a Universal Spirit is really possible.

I

Take your hat and go home. Melancholy! Anguish. Inexplicable grief. I ought to write poetry. To realize that you've outlived your time. I laughed at myself, and it seemed the birds were laughing at me, too.

TS

The birds are migrating already. (*looks up*) Swans. Or maybe they're geese. You happy things. Here's my advise. Put on your hat, pick up your stick, and get out of here. Don't look back. And the further away you get, the better. Who's making all that noise?

C O

Vive la France! We should be on our way. There's not much time. Someone here smells of herring! We're starting a new life. Yes, everything's fine now. Yes, my nerves have quieted down, that's so. On autumn evening we'll read many books, and a new and wonderful world will open up for us. Don't worry. Here's

where I head for the hills. The rest later. Marvelous weather we're having. Yes. Now we can go.

S

You remember me? I've have an idea. It's dull but not so bad once you're use to it. I'm going. My head is spinning! Here am I with my tremulous rays and the twinkling stars and the distant sound of a piano fainting on the perfumed air.

UV

I was really a little bit in love with you. I am joking, of course. Have you ever noticed, if you are riding through a dark forest at night and you see a little light shinning ahead you forget your weariness and the darkness and the sharp twigs that lash at your face? I suppose that in Africa the heat must be terrific now.

TS

Thank you for everything. Forgive me if things were... I talked a lot - too much, I know. Forgive me for that too, and don't think badly of me. It's time I went! Humankind is looking for something, and will certainly find it. Oh, if it only happened more quickly! It's time. What? Oh, listen to the music!

I

A new life! I can't write poetry. Idleness is idleness. Weakness is weakness. I don't know any other names for them. What a queer, crazy logic. In this world everything is simple. Boots are black, sugar is sweet. I wander about my friends like a shadow. (*Clapping.*) Bravo, bravo. (*By this time I has given each of his belonging to the others. He starts to move off in the direction from which he has come, pauses, looks in the direction the group is headed.*) I feel youth waking up in me! (*Exits in the direction from which he has come.*)

S

Who's out there? Is it you? There's someone here. Do you hear the wind? What was I saying? Oh, yes... And God help all homeless wanders. It's time I was on my way. What was I talking about? It isn't all the things I dreamt about, but the capacity to endure. To bear your cross and have faith. I'm no longer afraid of life. Men, lions, eagles, geese, spiders, silent fish who dwell in the deep, and those the eye cannot behold - all, all, all living things, have run their sorrowful course. (*Heads off in erratic spurts down the road until he is gone.*)

TS

And now we have to start our lives all over again... We have to go on living...

There will come a time when everybody will know why, for what purpose, there is all this suffering, no more mysteries. The music is so gay, it almost seems as if a minute more, and we'd know why we live, why we suffer. If only we knew. If only we knew. (*Trots off down the road, reading, and disappears.*)

C O

I'll only take a minute. How odd, I can't find it anywhere... Can't remember. Yes, life here is over and done with... Last year at this time it was snowing. Remember? We must be going. It's time. On our way! (*Attempts, unsuccessfully, to stand.*) I remember when I was six years old. Now that's what I call licking the glass clean. Good-bye to our old life. My life, my youth. I have to move on. We must be going. It's time. On our way. We're coming. Yoohoo! It's time to go. It's time to go. It's time to.... No strength left. Nothing's left. Nothing. (*She is unable to move.*)

UV

We must go on living. We shall live through a long chain of days and weary evenings. We shall patiently bear the trials that fate sends us. We shall say that we have wept, that we have suffered, that life has been bitter to us. I see a life that is bright, lovely, beautiful. We shall rejoice and look on these trouble of ours with tenderness, with a smile - and we shall rest. I have faith. I have fervent, passionate faith. Our life will be peaceful, gentle, and sweet as a caress. You are crying. (*Walks off down the road and disappears.*)

C O , despondent, is left alone. She suddenly stands, picks up her belongings, walks onto the road and resolutely faces the direction in which she must go. Slowly, heroically and with a light laugh, she lifts her parasol and begins to walk off down road. The last image of the play is four figures walking down the road. They each carry I's belongings. S is the last to disappear. The steady rhythm of his walking stick expresses the determination to keep going.

