

**The Three Sisters**  
**By Anton Chekhov**  
**Translation by Sonia Moore**

**Act I**

(The clock strikes twelve as the curtain rises.)

Olga, in a teacher's uniform, is pacing and correcting school papers. Irena, dressed in white, is daydreaming at the window, Masha, dressed in black, lying on the chaise reading a book of poems.)

*(Olga: What thoughts and images would be in your mind when you hear the clock strike twelve? Why would you stop correcting papers, take a long pause and choose to sit down? Irena: Are you daydreaming about the future, about marrying a handsome officer and living in Moscow? Masha: Why are you wearing black to your sister's Saint's Day Party? What are you reading and what is your mood?)*

(Pause. Olga stops correcting papers, sets them on the table and sits.)

*(How does Olga feel about her father? Here you must choose an image of someone you know, have known or create in your imagination, that you might feel about the same way as Olga feels about her departed father. If you create an imaginary image use exacting details. If you choose a real person, they do not need to have died.)*

**Olga:** *(To recall and compare.)* Father died exactly a year ago, on this very day, the fifth of May—your saint's day, Irina.

*(To compare the past to the present. Recall a similar day in your experience.)* It was cold, and snowing was falling. *(Take a brief pause before you say the next line and imagine how that might have felt at the time.)* It seemed to me that I would never live through it, *(Here you may see an imaginary image of Irena fainting.)* and you were lying unconscious as if you were dead.

*(To compare the contrast from a year ago, and to encourage Irena that the future will be bright. Perhaps you would pick up your speech tempo a bit and slightly*

*raise your voice.*) And now a year later we can talk of it easily, (*Would you look at Irena here?*) you are already wearing a white dress, your face glows.

(Pause)

*(It has been suggested that Olga recalls the sound of the clock striking because she is a bit superstitious. The clock is the trigger for her memory and the speech.)*

And the clock was striking then, too. (*You can use your imagination to recall the clock striking and the following event of the funeral.*)

(Pause)

*(Your inner-monologue during this pause needs to connect your last spoken line to the next spoken line in one continuous thought. What would be your thoughts and images during this pause? Use your imagination to see the horse-drawn hearse slowly progressing to the cemetery.)* It comes back to me that when father was carried away, (*Use your imagination to recall the sound of a military band playing funeral music and firing a salute. Have you ever been to a military funeral or seen one on film?*) music was playing and at the cemetery they fired a salute.

*(Olga is not boasting here about her father being a brigadier general, instead she laments that there were only a handful of people attending, and this makes her sad again.)* He was a general, in command of a brigade, and yet there were only a few people. (*To excuse and forgive. See the images before speaking the line.*)

But it was raining then. Heavy rain and snowing.

*(Why do you think Irina interrupts here? At what point in Olga's speech does she stop her daydreaming and listens to Olga?)*

**Irina:** *(To kindly stop her sister from dwelling on the past.)* Why remember?

*(She returns to her daydreaming.)*

*(What would be Masha's reaction to this short interplay between Olga and Irina?)*

**Olga:** *(Olga crosses to Irina and looks through the window.)*

*(What is Olga's intention? If you were in her 'shoes' why would you cross to Irina here?)*

*(To celebrate the day)* Today it is warm. The windows can stay wide open, *(to compare)* but the birches have no leaves yet. *(See your image for Olga's father.)*

*(What does Moscow mean to Olga and symbolize in the play? Find an image that holds an analogous feeling for you.)*

Father took command of the brigade and left Moscow with us eleven years ago, and I remember clearly that at the beginning of May in Moscow everything is already in bloom, everything is immersed in sunshine. Eleven years have passed, but I remember it all as if we've left yesterday.

*(What does it mean to you to long for something as much as Olga longs to go home? Why does she say that "joy stirred in my soul," could it be that she is thankful that the year of mourning is over?)*

*(To long for and hope)* My God, this morning I woke up and saw a flood of sunshine, saw the spring, and joy stirred in my soul, and I wanted passionately to go home.

**Tchebutikin** *(Offstage)* Oh, sure!

**Baron Tusenbach:** *(Offstage)* Of course, nonsense.

*(What would be your reaction when you hear the men arguing off stage? Chekhov places this interruption in order to subtly foreshadow how trivia will enter into the character's lives and perhaps play a significant role in the destiny of the sisters.)*

(Masha, pensive over her book, whistles softly.)

*(Why does Masha whistle here? We learn later that the book of poems she is reading haunts her. Masha's seed in the play is happiness, yet today she is depressed and feels chained to a marriage she does not want. Perhaps she feels that she will not be able to return and doubts that any of them will be able to go back home.)*

**Olga:** *(To stop)* Don't whistle, Masha—*(To chide/reproach)* how can you!

*(In good society whistling was considered to be a sign of bad manners. Is Olga reacting to how she might do so with her students?)*

(Pause. Masha sits up on the chase.)

*(If you were playing Masha, why do you think you would sit up, what would be your intention and action?)*

*(To excuse herself as a form of apology to Masha. (How does Olga feel about teaching at the high school? What images would you have in mind here?)*

It is because I'm at the high school every day and giving lessons till evening, that my head aches continually, *(To complain)* and my thoughts are those of an old woman. Really, these four years I've been teaching, I have felt my strength and youth leaving me every day, drop by drop. *(To long for. See the image of your dream in your mind.)* And only one dream grows and strengthens....

**Irina:** *(To make plans in order to convince herself and Olga.)* To leave for Moscow. Sell the house, to finish with everything here, and to Moscow. *(What does Moscow symbolize to Irina? If you are playing Irina what images hold the same analogous meaning for you?)*

**Olga:** *(To insist)* Yes! To Moscow as soon as possible! *(What would be Olga and Masha's reaction and inner monologue to Irina's following lines?)*

**Irina:** *(To continue making plans)* Brother will probably be a professor, and all the same he won't live here. *(To worry about Masha)* Yet, the obstacle is poor Masha. *(She crosses and sits next to her sister.) (What is Masha's reaction and why does Irina cross to her?)*

**Olga:** *(Crossing to Masha and Irina.) (Why does Olga cross?)*

*(To encourage both sisters)* Masha will be coming to Moscow for the whole summer, every year.

*(Masha is softly whistling.)*

*(Does Masha believe this? If not, why? If you were playing Masha what would hold this meaning for you?)*

**Irina:** *(To hope)* God willing, it all will work out. *(Looking out of the window.)*

*(Irina is a sensitive young woman. What thoughts would bring up joy for you in this role?)* The weather is good today. I don't know why my soul is so bright!

*(To celebrate)* This morning I remembered it was my saint's day and suddenly I felt joy, and I remembered my childhood when mother was still alive. *(Here all the sisters must recall an image/memory of the mother)* And such marvelous thoughts stirred me, such thoughts.

**Olga:** *(To compliment and encourage)* Today you are radiant, you seem exceptionally beautiful. And Masha is beautiful, too. *(To criticize. What is the relationship between the sisters and Andrei? Although they love him they criticize and tease him, why? Who would be your image for Andrei?)* Andrei would be good looking, but he's gotten heavy, it's not becoming to him. *(To worry and reproach herself)* And I've grown older and much thinner, probably because I get angry with the *(What do the 'girls' and the 'school' mean to Olga, and what images hold the same meaning for you?)* girls in school. *(To compare)* I'm free today and am home and my head's not aching. I feel younger than yesterday. *(To regret)* I'm only twenty-eight, only...it is all good, it all comes from God, but I feel that if I had *(Olga longs for a different life, what do you long for?)* married and stayed home all day, it would have been better. *(What is in the pause that follows? Don't rush it, fill it in!)*

(Pause)

*(To long for)* I'd have loved my husband.

*(What would be Irina and Masha's reaction to Olga's statement?)*

End