

THE GENERAL'S VISIT

By Olivia Arieti

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THE GENERAL'S VISIT

A One Act Adaptation of A. Chekhov's Story, "The Privy Councillor"

By Olivia Arieti

SYNOPSIS: General Ivan Gundasoff has no money to go abroad so he decides to spend the summer with his sister Klavdia and her son, Andrusha. Great preparations are made to receive such an important guest, but Ivan ends up disappointing everyone. He doesn't resemble a general at all with no epaulettes, swords or trunks full of gunpowder. Furthermore, Ivan is most frivolous and impulsive, he complains about everything and ends up causing chaos in the whole household. This drives poor Klavdia to the point of a nervous breakdown.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 females, 5 males)

- ANDRUSHA (m)..... In his early teens. (23 lines)
- KLAVDIA ARHIPOVNA (f)..... Andrusha's mother, the widow
of a lieutenant. (64 lines)
- IVAN GUNDASOFF (m)..... The general. Andrusha's uncle.
A thin little man who doesn't
look like a general at all. He
moves with quick movements
and boyish nimbleness.
(51 lines)
- TATIANA (f)..... Klavdia's niece. Twenty years
old. Pretty, shy and reserved.
(22 lines)
- THEODORE PETROVITCH (m)..... Tatiana's fiancé. Manager of
the estate. Dark hair, curly
beard. Has the aspect of a
gypsy; gloomy yet passionate
and fearless. (7 lines)
- GREGORY POBEDIMSKI (m) Andrusha's tutor. In his
twenties. He has the attitude of
a learned fellow, slightly
contemptuous. (20 lines)

SPIRIDON (m) The tailor. (7 lines)
IRINA (f) The maidservant. (12 lines)

DURATION: 25 minutes.

TIME: Late 19th century.

SETTING: Russia, a farm house.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

SCENE 1: The living-room.

SCENE 2: The porch, few months later.

SET: A coffee table and chairs.

COSTUMES

The characters are dressed according to the late nineteenth century style.

IVAN GUNDASOFF – Wears a white silk shirt, a white military cap and a light blue necktie.

ANDRUSHA and POBEDIMSKI – Wear tight trousers and short jackets.

TATIANA – First enters in a pink blouse and skirt, then changes in a flower patterned dress.

IRINA – Wears a white blouse, long skirt, and a big apron.

KLAVDIA ARHIPOVNA – Wears a black dress and her hair up.

SPIRIDON – Wears a loose jacket and a cap.

THEODORE – Wears a traditional Russian shirt with long sleeves and buttons at the collar and boots.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Mors is a Russian fruit drink made of berries, sugar and water.

PROPS

- Books- Including one History Book (POBEDIMSKI)
- Guitar (POBEDIMSKI)
- Letter (KLAVDIA)
- Knitting Needles (KLAVDIA)
- Yarn (KLAVDIA)
- Yardstick (SPIRIDON)
- Pencil (SPIRIDON)
- Paper (SPIRIDON)
- Cloths (IRINA)
- Tray (IRINA)
- Jug – Containing Mors like liquid (IRINA)
- Glasses (IRINA)
- Embroidery (TATIANA)
- Needles (TATIANA)

Do Not Copy

SCENE 1

AT RISE: *ANDRUSHA is standing by the window. POBEDIMSKI enters with a pile of books.*

POBEDIMSKI: No time to look out of the window, Andrusha, we've got to start our lessons.

ANDRUSHA: *(Bored.)* I know, I know.

POBEDIMSKI: *(Dumps the books on the table.)* What would you like to begin with today? Science, perhaps?

ANDRUSHA: Oh no, not science.

POBEDIMSKI: Latin?

ANDRUSHA: No, no, no Latin today, Pobedimski, I beg you.

POBEDIMSKI: *(Takes out the history book.)* Well, that means we'll start with history then.

ANDRUSHA sits at the table. KLAVDIA bursts in, excited, a letter in her hand.

KLAVDIA: No lessons now, my dear boys, no lessons at all! *(Slumps on the chair.)*

ANDRUSHA: What happened, mom?

KLAVDIA: What happened? I've just received this letter from my brother, Ivan Gundasoff, and your uncle, Andrusha. *(Reads the letter.)* An affection of the liver obliges me to spend every summer abroad, but as I have no funds this year with which to go to Marienbad, I'll come to stay with you and my dear nephew at Kotchneffka...

ANDRUSHA: He's the one who is a general, right?

KLAVDIA: Oh yes, he's a privy councillor, a general. Perhaps, that's why the only thought of him makes me tremble. What can a poor uneducated woman like me talk to him about? Fifteen years have passed since I last saw him. Oh my!

ANDRUSHA: I bet he has epaulettes and carries a sword.

POBEDIMSKI: Quite possible. He certainly took part in lots of battles.

ANDRUSHA: He must be pretty old too.

KLAVDIA: I'm sure your uncle has been sent here for your benefit, Andrusha; perhaps, your poor father has sent him from up there thinking of all the good he might do for you.

ANDRUSHA: My father?

KLAVDIA: (*Hugs him.*) Your dad or your good angel, my little darling. How happy I am, boys. (*Goes to the door. Loudly.*) Irina, Irina! (*Paces the floor, agitated.*) However can we get everything ready with such a short notice?

IRINA enters.

IRINA: Madam?

KLAVDIA: Inform all the servants that we're about to have a special guest. My brother, General Ivan Gundasoff is arriving and the entire house must be set anew; the silverware polished, the panes washed, the tapestry refurbished, the floors scrubbed to the point of glistening...

IRINA: Yes, Madam.

KLAVDIA: Also the garden must be trimmed; oh my, there's so much to do.

IRINA: I'll see to it at once.

KLAVDIA: And have the tailor sent in immediately.

IRINA: Jakov will fetch him and take him here.

KLAVDIA: Bring also the cloths for Spiridon to see, Irina.

IRINA exits.

KLAVDIA: Oh dear, I'm so glad to have my brother here, but however shall I survive to all this?

TATIANA enters.

TATIANA: What's going on, Aunt Klavdia? I've just seen Irina running here and there calling all the servants.

KLAVDIA: My brother, the general, is coming to spend the summer with us. You all know that two of my brothers had died, that one has become an actor and one a general.

TATIANA: I'm so happy for you and for Andrusha, aunt Klavdia.

KLAVDIA: I am overjoyed, Tatiana, my brother Ivan here at last!

POBEDIMSKI: It will be pleasant to talk with somebody new.

KLAVDIA: Oh yes, but I must warn you that the general is not of our world, trust me.

ANDRUSHA: Stop worrying, mom, everything will be alright.

KLAVDIA: (*Strokes his hair.*) I really hope so, Andrusha, I really do.

IRINA enters. Puts the cloths on the table.

IRINA: The tailor has just arrived, Madam.

KLAVDIA: Show him in, Irina, show him in.

IRINA exits.

TATIANA: Well, I better go and look for some fashionable gowns too.

TATIANA exits. SPIRIDON enters, his yardstick in his hands.

SPIRIDON: My dear Madam Klavdia, whose wedding is so imminent to summon me in such haste?

KLAVDIA: No, no, it's not a wedding, Spiridon, but it's the arrival of my brother, General Ivan Gundasoff. These boys here need a new suit for they will certainly have to accompany him in his many visits to friends and authorities, I believe.

SPIRIDON: Step forwards, boys, and let me take your measures.

ANDRUSHA, POBEDIMSKI step forwards, SPIRIDON takes their measurements.

SPIRIDON: So, so, our Andrusha has grown quite taller, I see... (*To POBEDIMSKI.*) Throw your head back, young man, fine, that's it... and now raise your arm.

KLAVDIA: Take care not to spoil the cloth, Spiridon, it's the best we have.

SPIRIDON: (*Writes the measures on a sheet of paper.*) No worry, no worry at all.

KLAVDIA: (*Gives him the cloth.*) You'll be an unlucky man if you do, my dear Sir.

SPIRIDON: You'll have the dandiest fellows there are, Madam Klavdia. Why do you think I walk all way down to the city so often? For no other reason than to catch a glimpse of how our young men dress there.

KLAVDIA: (*Sighs.*) Goodness knows how odd fashion is these days. If my brother didn't live in St. Petersburg, I assure I wouldn't have my boys dressed in such a manner.

SPIRIDON: There is nothing to be done about that, it's the spirit of the times.

KLAVDIA: Be quick, Spiridon, and bring the boys those suits as soon as possible.

SPIRIDON: (*Gathers the paper, cloths.*) I'll set down to work at once, Madam.

SPIRIDON exits.

KLAVDIA: Oh dear, all this pressure will drive me mad!

IRINA enters hurriedly.

IRINA: (*Cries.*) Madam Klavdia, Madam Klavdia!

KLAVDIA: Irina, what is it? What happened?

IRINA: The general, Madame Klavdia, your brother, Ivan Gundasoff has arrived.

KLAVDIA: My brother here? What on earth are you saying?

IRINA: He just got off the carriage and is about to come in.

KLAVDIA: Good gracious, he has arrived quite in advance.

IRINA: He said he loves to surprise...

IVAN enters.

IVAN: That's exactly it, my dear sister. (*Loudly.*) Surprise, surprise!
(*Hugs her.*)

KLAVDIA: Oh my goodness, I can't believe it!

IVAN: You better, for it's me, your brother, Ivan Gundasoff, right in front of you.

KLAVDIA: What a pleasant surprise!

IVAN: Your servant is already carrying up the trunks into my room.

ANDRUSHA: (*Low, to POBEDIMSKI.*) They must be full of uniforms and gunpowder.

POBEDIMSKI: You bet.

KLAVDIA: Come, Andrusha, come and greet your uncle.

ANDRUSHA: (*Bows.*) Pleased to meet you, Uncle Ivan.

IVAN: So this is our Andrusha.

KLAVDIA: (*Proudly.*) The comfort of my life, brother.

IVAN: (*Pats his head.*) A fine little fellow, a fine little fellow, indeed. Do you go to school?

ANDRUSHA nods.

KLAVDIA: I'm proud to say that Andrusha is extremely gifted, and his attainments are so remarkable that he might even enter the military academy.

IVAN: So he might... upon my word and honour...

KLAVDIA: And this is Andrusha's tutor, Gregory Pobedimski.

POBEDIMSKI: (*Bows, melodramatically.*) I have the honour to introduce myself to your worshipful highness. I am a pedagogue, a former student at the Veterinary College.

TATIANA enters in a flowery gown.

IVAN: (*Opens his arms, astonished.*) Heavens and earth, who is that?

TATIANA: Oh I'm sorry, I didn't know you had visitors, Aunt Klavdia; I simply wanted to show you my gown.

IVAN: It's as lovely as its bearer, upon my word and honor.

KLAVDIA: Come, Tatiana, come, this is my brother, the privy councillor, Ivan Gundasoff; he has arrived earlier than expected.

IVAN: Surprise, I love to surprise, I do. And you, too, sister, seem to do the same, one can't take a step here without encountering some surprise, upon my word and honour!

IVAN kisses TATIANA'S hand.

TATIANA: (*Blushes.*) I am honoured to meet you, General Ivan Gundasoff.

IVAN: The pleasure is totally mine, Miss Tatiana.

KLAVDIA: She is the daughter of my sister and since her death, has been living with us.

TATIANA: Well, I must go now, Irina needs some help in the kitchen.

TATIANA exits hurriedly.

KLAVDIA: You, too, boys, better run off and see if you can get down to some of your lessons.

ANDRUSHA: Yes, mother. (*Lowly, to POBEDIMSKI.*) He doesn't look like a general at all.

POBEDIMSKI and ANDRUSHA exit.

IVAN: Upon my word, what a lovely niece you have, Klavdia.

KLAVDIA: She is engaged to Theodore Petrovitch, our manager here.

IVAN: So she is...

KLAVDIA: Why have you never married, brother?

IVAN: I have never married because...

KLAVDIA: Why not?

IVAN: What shall I say? (*Walks up and down, uneasy.*) Perhaps, because things didn't turn out that way. When I was young, I worked too hard to have time to enjoy life. And then, when I wanted to have some fun, I was fifty years too old. But don't you think this is a too boring subject for conversation, sister?

KLAVDIA: Perhaps, it is. Well then, let's consider more practical issues... what would enjoy for your meals?

IVAN: Not much, not much, besides, I never have dinner at noon, but at seven as I'm used to have in the city. I will remain quite long in my room as I have important matters to carry out. The governor himself might call one of these days.

KLAVDIA: The governor here?

IVAN: I am used to receiving visits from the high authorities and of course, they must have a duly welcome.

KLAVDIA: Good, good gracious...

IVAN: I am sure I can rely on your exquisite sense of hospitality, sister.

KLAVDIA: (*Low.*) That's easier said than done.

IVAN: And now let's take a walk in the park, Klavdia. You've got such an enchanting place here, so lovely and sweet that if I had known

how beautiful it was, nothing could have taken me abroad all those years.

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