

# THE TEACHER

By Olivia Arieti

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*A One Act Adaptation of A. Chekhov's "The Teacher of Literature"*

**By Olivia Arieti**

**SYNOPSIS:** Nikitin, a high school teacher of literature, after pursuing happiness all his life, realizes that it can turn out unsatisfying and most of all, disgusting. Somehow his expectations fail and neither love nor personal success can overcome the shallowness of routine and mediocrity.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(2 females, 4 males)*

NIKITIN (*m*)..... A high school teacher. Late twenties. (92 lines)  
 MASHA SHELESTOV (*f*)..... 18 years old. (62 lines)  
 VARYA SHELESTOV (*f*)..... Masha's older sister. In her twenties. (29 lines)  
 SHELESTOV (*m*)..... Masha's father. (12 lines)  
 CAPTAIN POLYANSKY (*m*)..... An army officer. Stout. (24 lines)  
 IPPOLIT IPPOLITCH (*m*)..... A high school teacher. Middle-aged. (16 lines)

**DURATION:** 25 minutes.

## SETTING

SCENE 1 – The Shelestov's living room. (*Afternoon. Evening.*)

SCENE 2 – Nikitin's living room. (*Afternoon.*)

**PROPS**

- ☐ Tea and Glasses
- ☐ Tray
- ☐ Biscuits
- ☐ Cards
- ☐ Book
- ☐ Shawl
- ☐ Pen
- ☐ Diary
- ☐ Pocket Watch
- ☐ Flowers in Vase
- ☐ Table
- ☐ Couch
- ☐ Case

**COSTUMES**

The characters are dressed in late nineteenth century clothing. Varya wears and elegant gown and Masha wears a pink dress.

**SOUND EFFECTS**

- ☐ Thud of Hoofs
- ☐ Barks
- ☐ Train Whistle

## SCENE 1

**AT RISE:** *MASHA is looking out of the window. VARYA enters with the tea tray.*

**MASHA:** *(Impatient.)* I wonder when they're coming...

**VARYA:** They should be any minute now, Manya.

**MASHA:** Will you stop calling me Manya? I don't want to be called Manya, Manyusa or Marie. My name's Masha.

**VARYA:** *(Lays the table for tea.)* I'm sorry, dear, I didn't mean to upset you. *(Smiles.)* By the way, Sergey Vassilitch never took his eyes off you during the cavalcade.

**MASHA:** *(Helps her.)* Nikitin, you mean. I noticed it. We rode side by side the whole time. He's quite handsome. Doesn't know much of horses though, not even how to sit on a saddle properly.

**VARYA:** Does it really matter?

**MASHA:** Of course not... Do you think he... he-

**VARYA:** I do, Masha, I do, indeed.

**MASHA:** *(Hugs her.)* Oh, Varya, I am so happy. Say, what about Captain Polyansky? I'm sure he likes you... He wouldn't be calling so often otherwise.

**VARYA:** Well, I must admit he's nice.

**MASHA:** A bit too fat but has a good horse, even if it keeps tossing its head.

**SFX:** *Thuds of hooves. Barks.*

**VARYA:** I believe they have arrived, Masha.

**MASHA:** *(Runs to the window.)* Yes, they're here! How do I look?

**VARYA:** Lovely, as lovely as a... a rose, dear.

**MASHA:** *(Goes to the door.)* Hello there.

**POLYANSKY:** Good afternoon, ladies.

**VARYA:** Polyansky, Nikitin.

**NIKITIN:** Whew! Just made it through your dogs. One seemed very interested in my trousers. I reckon they really hate me.

**MASHA:** Luckily, it didn't get you.

**NIKITIN:** It was a pleasure riding beside you, Masha. *(Low.)* Just like flying on a winged horse.

**VARYA:** How is it down at the army, Polyansky?

**POLYANSKY:** Everything under control.

**VARYA:** And at school, Nikitin? Are your lessons over?

**NIKITIN:** For today they are.

**POLYANSKY:** We are going to play cards, aren't we?

**MASHA:** Of course, of course.

**VARYA:** I warn you, Captain, no army jokes this afternoon.

**POLYANSKY:** Alright, alright, no jokes, promise.

**SHELESTOV:** (*Enters.*) Nice to see you, gentlemen.

*POLYANSKY and NIKITIN get up.*

**MASHA:** Just in time for tea, father.

**POLYANSKY:** Good afternoon, Shelestov.

**NIKITIN:** How are you, Sir?

**SHELESTOV:** Fine, fine. (*To NIKITIN.*) I saw you riding during the parade, young man, the problem is you don't know how to handle your horse properly.

**NIKITIN:** I admit that I don't know much about riding on the whole. I am not an army officer, I am a teacher, a teacher of literature.

**VARYA:** (*Serves the tea.*) A glass of tea, Polyansky?

**POLYANSKY:** Thank you, my dear.

**MASHA:** (*Serves some biscuits.*) You must try our biscuits too.

**NIKITIN:** (*Takes a biscuit.*) Excellent, (*Looks around.*) like everything around here. If happiness exists, I am sure it is all gathered in this house, with its warm and sweet atmosphere, and most of all (*Smiles at MASHA.*) with its beautiful hostesses...

**MASHA:** That's very nice of you, Nikitin.

**NIKITIN:** (*Moves to the window.*) Even your garden is lovely, so rich of trees and colourful flowers; really delightful.

**VARYA:** Don't you think you're being too kind to us, Sergey Vassilitch?

**SHELESTOV:** (*Coughs.*) Some more tea, Varya, fill up the glass.

**NIKITIN:** The weather too is milder over here. What more can you ask from life?

**POLYANSKY:** A good game of cards, a good game of cards!

*ALL laugh.*

**NIKITIN:** I am sure that even the sad moans of your pigeons, Shelestov, are their only means of expressing joy.

**SHELESTOV:** Egyptian pigeons, young man, rare Egyptian pigeons.

**NIKITIN:** Happiness, my dearest friends, is what really counts in life. It is the natural essence of our existence,-

**VARYA:** Stale, Nikitin, quite stale.

**NIKITIN:** (*Louder.*) the pure spirit of love.

**VARYA:** Our professor always wants to teach us something, he doesn't have enough of teaching literature to his own students.

**POLYANSKY:** Now, now, Miss Varya, no arguments either.

**NIKITIN:** I am firmly convinced of what I have just said.

**SHELESTOV:** (*Shakes his head.*) Loutishness, nothing more. That's what I said to the Governor the other day: "Yes, your Excellency, loutishness, that's exactly it." (*Gets up.*) And now, thank you for your company, gentlemen, but I must go back to my study.

*POLYANSKY, NIKITIN get up.*

**SHELESTOV:** See you all for dinner.

**POLYANSKY:** Thank you, Sir.

*SHELESTOV exits.*

**NIKITIN:** If I may, I must also add that I believe (*Looks at MASHA.*) there is even more happiness in store for me... (*Low. Touches MASHA'S hand.*) Don't you think so, Masha?

**MASHA:** (*Withdraws her hand, blushes.*) You're embarrassing me...

**POLYANSKY:** (*Chuckles.*) I wish I had a theory on perfect happiness too.

**NIKITIN:** Of course, my colleague and roommate, Ippolit can't understand what it is... for there's nothing more important for him than his maps and dates.

**POLYANSKY:** Good old Ippolit Ippolititch! Seems to be missing the best part of life.

**NIKITIN:** He is, indeed. Whenever you talk about love, he replies by asking you the date of the battle of Kalka.

**MASHA:** Depressing.

**VARYA:** I remember, Sergey Vassilitch, your mentioning an essay on Pushkin seen as a psychologist, for your school examinations...

**NIKITIN:** I did.

**VARYA:** How can you possibly imagine your students up to it? Besides, we all know that Pushkin cannot be considered a psychologist.

**NIKITIN:** I may quote examples from his writings to prove it.

**VARYA:** If you were talking about Dostoevsky, it would be different, but Pushkin was a poet, a great poet, nothing more. *(Moves close to NIKITIN.)* He doesn't describe the darkest corners of the human soul as far as I'm concerned.

**NIKITIN:** He does, he does, but you can't see it.

**POLYANSKY:** I, too, can assure you, my dear, that Pushkin was a psychologist. I may even quote a few lines from Lermontov to show you.

**NIKITIN:** *(Shrugs his shoulders.)* Forget it, Polyansky. It would be totally useless.

**VARYA:** Futile, I'd say. You better stick to your happiness theory and let psychology to those who are not blinded by stale illusions, Nikitin.

**POLYANSKY:** We said no arguments.

**VARYA:** Alright, I'm sorry, I'm really sorry.

**POLYANSKY:** What about our game, folks?

**VARYA:** Oh yes, I'll get the cards at once. *(Gets two packs of cards.)*

*ALL sit at the table.*

**MASHA:** *(To NIKITIN.)* Don't mind Varya. She just can't help arguing, she can't.

**NIKITIN:** *(Low.)* I have to talk to you, Masha. You must come with me to the garden after dinner... Can't wait any longer...

**MASHA:** I will, promise.

**VARYA:** *(Gives POLYANSKY the cards.)* Here you are.

**POLYANSKY:** We are going to play "fate", aren't we?

**NIKITIN:** That's fine for me.

**POLYANSKY:** *(Laughs.)* Can't forget Shebaldin, the last time we played, he was with us too.

**VARYA:** You're talking about the *Mummy*, I reckon.

**POLYANSKY:** Exactly. the founder of our Dramatic Society. (*Deals one pack round.*) He was "fated" to go to the nursery and kiss the nanny. (*Laughs louder.*) And he kissed her passionately, very, very ardently, indeed!

*ALL laugh except NIKITIN.*

**POLYANSKY:** Hey, Nikitin, what's the matter? You aren't laughing.

**NIKITIN:** It wasn't funny at all, for he had just asked me if I had read Lessing on the dramatic art of Hamburg.

**POLYANSKY:** (*Lays the other pack on the table face downwards.*) So what?

**NIKITIN:** I hadn't, (*Loud.*) I hadn't read it. He was horrified, waved his hands as if he had just burnt his fingers. Never felt so miserable. (*Thoughtful.*) I am a teacher of literature after all, I should have read it.

**VARYA:** Absolutely. You should have read Lessing.

**POLYANSKY:** (*Lifts the top card of the second pack.*) Well, well... the one who has this card is "fated" to... to hear the confessions of us all.

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