

## **DEATH OF IVAN ILYCH**

A Full-Length Chamber Opera in One Act  
From the 1886 Novella by Leo Tolstoy

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A Co-Premiere Partnership  
With Orlando Opera  
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## SUMMARY

We start at the end with Pyotr Ivanovich attending the wake of his colleague, Ivan Ilych. He meets with the doctor and superficial pleasantries give way to the cause of death. The doctor admits sadly he could not diagnose the ailment, nor prescribe a cure. They agree it's a shame that Ivan Ilych died so young. Pyotr Ivanovich, who is now looking to leave, must pay his respects to the widow Praskovya Fedorovna. She is distraught and asks Pyotr Ivanovich with some assistance as a widow in need. With manipulation, she hopes for a greater pension or a grant of money. He sympathizes, but feels he is not the one to ask. As Pyotr Ivanovich prepares to leave, he encounters the doctor and Gerasim, Ivan Ilych's manservant. They both remind him that death is a fate for us all - *respice finem*.

We go back to the beginning to find the family enjoying a quiet evening. Ivan Ilych is admiring the trappings of his home and believes everything is just right. A stabbing pain in his side returns, leaving him in a foul mood. Perhaps it was his fall off the ladder? Praskovya Fedorovna asks her husband to see a doctor and Ivan Ilych reluctantly agrees.

The doctor assures Ivan Ilych that while he could not identify the problem, he expects a full recovery if he avoids rich foods and alcohol. He also recommends time off work and bedrest. Later, Praskovya Fedorovna fusses over her husband, who appears ungrateful for her help. Once gone, Gerasim pours a dram of schnapps for his master and holds his feet up, which gives Ivan Ilych some relief from the pain. Ivan Ilych wonders aloud why he ever became a judge, a position that has brought him no joy. He then laments his unhappy marriage. "I guess it was love. At least as I understood it."

It is night and Ivan Ilych is alone with his thoughts. He notices a crack of light coming from between the drapes. He painfully gets out of bed and looks behind the curtain to take in the beauty of the full moon. He considers the larger world, the ineffability of life, and the unfathomable distance of the moon. He hangs his head knowing some things are beyond his reach and can never be fully understood.

Gerasim wakes Ivan Ilych after a difficult night's sleep and offers his master some tea – he declines. Gerasim then helps his master with a fresh shirt for the doctor's visit. Ivan Ilych feels better and agrees to the tea. The doctor arrives and begins his examination. Ivan Ilych laments his sleepless nights and constant pain, but he feels he is ignored when the doctor suggests more morphine. Ivan Ilych cuts the doctor's visit short when Gerasim arrives with tea. "If I am not going to die today, and you'll not prescribe a cure. Let me enjoy my tea in peace."

Praskovya Fedorovna, dressed elegantly for an evening out, reminds Ivan Ilych she is taking Vladimir to the theater. "Do you not remember?" He does not. She continues on and on, but Ivan Ilych finally becomes annoyed and asks her to leave. Praskovya Fedorovna will not have her disagreeable husband spoil her evening and leaves. Gerasim injects his master with morphine to ease the pain and Ivan Ilych awakens in a fever dream. He ponders the unsolvable and incomprehensible questions of his life. He recalls his childhood and believes his life like a

falling stone, “flying further and further towards its terrible end.” He questions if he lived a life worth living? He comes to believe his life, up until now, has been: “The most simple. The most ordinary. The most terrible.” Praskovya Fedorovna returns unexpectedly, but Ivan Ilych is confused why she is back so soon, His wife states she’s been gone for hours and already late. Ivan Ilych, knowing he has not been a loving husband, asks his wife for forgiveness. Praskovya Fedorovna is moved and together they recall their courtship. She tells him she fell in love with his dancing and they waltz for a bit in reminiscence. Ivan Ilych’s knees buckle and they are both reminded again that he is sick and dying. Both admit to being scared for what lies ahead.

Praskovya Fedorovna is alone with the doctor. He states that there are no other treatments available for her husband. Praskovya Fedorovna says she will find another doctor who will listen; she wants her husband to live. The doctor tells her Ivan Ilych's death is a certainty and both must accept this irrefutable fact.

Praskovya Fedorovna invites the priest to their home so her husband may confess and receive communion; he will not go to heaven otherwise. Ivan Ilych has no interest, but reluctantly agrees for his wife’s sake. He confesses to the priest he led an unworthy life of pleasant falsehoods. He lived for the expectations and the approval of others. The priest reminds Ivan Ilych these are not sins. Ivan Ilych questions God and asks why he allows suffering. The priest states he will return when Ivan Ilych’s heart is open to God. The priest finally leaves, and Ivan Ilych feels renewed and hopeful. Perhaps he has given up too early. He wants to live a different, better life. But hope is short lived and Ivan Ilych's condition declines further. He angrily calls out to God. “If life has no meaning, then why create life? Why was he put here, if only to die? His questions go unanswered.

It’s late at night and Praskovya Fedorovna is holding vigil for her dying husband. Both are asleep when their son Vladimir enters the bedroom. The boy is unable to understand fully what is happening, but feels he belongs here with his dying father and grieving mother. The boy takes a throw from the bed and curls up at the foot of his father’s bed. His mother wakes and beckons Vladimir in her arms. Praskovya Fedorovna hums the boy a gentle lullaby and soon they are both asleep.

The priest, the doctor, Praskovya Fedorovna and Gerasim pray together for the dying man. The doctor calls everyone to the deathbed to say goodbye. Vladimir, overwhelmed with grief, calls out to his father and Ivan Ilych momentarily regains consciousness. The boy falls into his father’s arms and Ivan Ilych asks his family for forgiveness. Ivan Ilych sends the boy away so he will not witness his death. In delirium, Ivan Ilych calls for death and finds light at the bottom. He dies with joy.

## CHARACTERS

(4 men, 1 woman, 1 boy)

IVAN ILYCH	<i>Baritone</i> (forties) An unexceptional man and a conformist with a high regard for appearances and social standing. ( <i>i-vin il-le-ich</i> )
PRASKOVYA FEDOROVNA	<i>Soprano</i> (thirties) Ivan Ilych's wife and mother to his son. A plain and sometimes hostile woman.
GERASIM	<i>Tenor</i> (twenties) Ivan Ilych's manservant. A wholesome and honest peasant. ( <i>jer-az-im</i> )
PYOTR IVANOVICH/ PRIEST	<i>Bass-Baritone</i> (forties) A fellow judge and colleague; a man who avoids uncomfortable truths. A caring priest who is an idealist. ( <i>pee-o-ter</i> )
DOCTOR	<i>Bass</i> (older than fifty) IVAN ILYCH's doctor, a pragmatist.
VLADIMIR	<i>Non-Singing Role</i> (looks eight-years old) Ivan's son. A sensitive child, uncorrupted by society's beliefs.

## ORCHESTRATION

String Quintet, Oboe, Piano

## TIME AND PLACE

1882, St. Petersburg, Imperial Russia

## SETTING

The interior of the house of IVAN ILYCH. It could be a bare stage filled with set pieces and no walls.

***A Staging Note:*** *This libretto has detailed stage directions and notes for singers. These were created by the librettist and composer for a collaborative understanding of mood, tone, pacing and tempo. They are only suggestions of how the opera could be performed. There is more freedom in singing, staging and design than the libretto might suggest.*

## OPERA STRUCTURE

<b>PRELUDE:</b>	<b>Ending</b> Orchestral
<b>SCENE ONE:</b>	<b>It is a sad affair, is it not?</b> <i>PRASKOVYA, PYOTR IVANOVICH, GERASIM, DOCTOR</i>
<b>SCENE TWO:</b>	<b>Are you alright?</b> <i>IVAN ILYCH, PRASKOVYA</i>
<b>SCENE THREE:</b>	<b>My fall from grace?</b> <i>IVAN ILYCH, DOCTOR</i>
<b>SCENE FOUR:</b>	<b>It's not really a choice, is it?</b> <i>IVAN ILYCH, GERASIM, PRASKOVYA</i>
<b>FIRST INTERLUDE:</b>	<b>Moonlight</b> Orchestral
<b>SCENE FIVE:</b>	<b>Does it really matter?</b> <i>IVAN ILYCH, GERASIM, PRASKOVYA, DOCTOR</i>
<b>SCENE SIX:</b>	<b>Do you not remember?</b> <i>IVAN ILYCH, PRASKOVYA</i>
<b>SCENE SEVEN:</b>	<b>What shall I tell my husband?</b> <i>PRASKOVYA, DOCTOR</i>
<b>SCENE EIGHT:</b>	<b>Am I not already dying?</b> <i>IVAN ILYCH, PRASKOVYA, PRIEST</i>
<b>SCENE NINE:</b>	<b>Are you still there?</b> <i>IVAN ILYCH, GERASIM</i>
<b>SECOND INTERLUDE:</b>	<b>Lullaby</b> <i>PRASKOVYA</i>
<b>SCENE TEN:</b>	<b>Where is death?</b> <i>ENSEMBLE</i>
<b>FINALE:</b>	<b>Beginning</b> Oboe solo

**PRELUDE: Ending**

**SCENE ONE: It is a sad affair, is it not?**

*[The opera opens with a poorly attended wake. Lying in repose is the deceased IVAN ILYCH. PYOTR is deeply uncomfortable and wonders if the length of his appearance is enough. It's not. PYOTR looks to fill a bit more time and approaches the DOCTOR who sips tea.]*

DOCTOR:

Are you family or a friend?

PYOTR:

More a colleague than a friend.

We have known each other since childhood.

We studied law as schoolmates  
at the School of Jurisprudence.

THE DOCTOR:

You are both judges?

PYOTR:

Yes. And you?

DOCTOR:

His doctor.

PYOTR:

I was told he was getting better.

I guess that was not so.

*[DOCTOR sips his tea.]*

PYOTR:

I always meant to see him.

We have all been busy with work.

DOCTOR / PYOR:

We all have obligations.

Obligations.

PYOTR:

His post was kept open.  
Out of respect, you know.  
But life moves on.  
My brother-in-law will  
get his position  
My wife says I do nothing  
for her family.  
Perhaps... You've not met her.

*[They both chuckle]*

PYOTR:

Nothing to speak of.

PYOTR:

Such a shame.  
He was not so very old.  
It is all very sad.  
But tell me,  
What really was wrong?

I see.

A shame.

DOCTOR:

Will you attend the funeral?

PYOTR:

I am afraid I'm do in court.

DOCTOR / PYOTR:

We all have obligations.  
Obligations.

PYOTR:

I am playing bridge tonight.  
It's late but still I'm hoping they will cut me in.

DOCTOR:

Best to put family first.

I'm sure she will be pleased.

DOCTOR:

Did he pass-on any property?

DOCTOR:

Such a shame.  
He was not so very old.  
All very sad.

I could not really say.  
He had seen many doctors.  
No one could diagnose the ailment.  
No one could prescribe the cure.  
A shame. A shame.

DOCTOR / PYOR:  
Obligations.

PYOTR:  
Speaking of,  
let me see the widow before I leave.

DOCTOR:  
It was a pleasure to meet you.

DOCTOR:  
The pleasure was mine.

*[PYOTR approaches GERASIM to ask for his coat and hat and then walks over to PRASKOVYA for a quick goodbye. There is the awkward tension of “what does one say?”]*

PYOTR:  
My condolences, madame.

PRASKOVYA:  
Thank you for coming.  
Ivan Ilych often spoke of you  
as a good friend.

PYOTR:  
Really? Oh yes.  
Did he suffer?

*Tout cela a été difficile. (spoken)*  
Up until the end.  
He screamed unceasingly, incessantly.  
Not for minutes, but for hours.  
Three frightful days of suffering.  
Only moments before he died.  
When he sent poor Vladimir away.  
Now the matters of the funeral.  
It distracts rather than consoles.  
The expense of it! Who knew?  
Two hundred rubles for the plot,  
The church service, the choir.  
I must take care of it all myself.

PYOTR:  
Was he conscious?  
  
How is your son?

PRASKOVYA:

How is a widow to grieve?

This may not be the time, I know,  
but there is something I wish to ask.  
It is advice on matters of money.  
There is the pension, of course,  
but it's certainly not enough.  
I'm hoping for a grant for a widow in need.  
We have large debts and no savings.  
It's only Vladimir and myself.  
Perhaps, you could help us?

PYOTR:

This must be trying.

PYOTR:

It never really is.

PYOTR: *(feeling awkward)*

Uh...I am not a lawyer.

PRASKOVYA:

Are you not a judge?

PYOTR:

I'm not really the one to ask.

*[PRASKOVYA fails to gain more assistance or sympathy from PYOTR. She sighs, stands, and offers him her hand. He presses it. GERASIM waits for PYOTR with his coat and hat.]*

PYOTR:

I am sorry for your loss, madam.

PRASKOVYA: *(with annoyance)*

This is all very difficult.

*[PYOTR approaches GERASIM who hands him with his coat and hat. The DOCTOR is also about to leave. ]*

PYOTR / DOCTOR:

Well, Gerasim.

It is a sad affair, is it not?

The passing of your Master.

GERASIM:

We shall all submit to God's will.  
Death is the fate for all of us.

DOCTOR:

*Respice finem*

GERASIM:

*Respice finem*

PYOTR: *(uncomfortably)*

Yes, of course.

*[PYOTR and the DOCTOR exit.]*

**SCENE TWO: Are you alright?**

*[IVAN ILYCH, PRASKOVYA, and VLADIMIR are having a quiet evening as a family. VLADIMIR reads a book, while IVAN ILYCH and PRASKOVYA look around the newly redecorated parlor.]*

IVAN ILYCH:

This room turned out just right.

and upholstery  
but not overdone.

Yes...

Just the way I like it.

Refined and dignified!

Everything in its place.

PRASKOVYA:

The wallpaper  
Tasteful.

Yes...

Just the way you like it.

Yes! Just right.

*[IVAN ILYCH gets up from the armchair, but he seizes in pain and sits down again. PRASKOVYA finally looks from her work with concern.]*

PRASKOVYA:

Are you still bruised?

IVAN ILYCH:

Nothing but my pride.

PRASKOVYA:

I remember how you frightened me,  
you poor man!

IVAN ILYCH:

You were arranging the drapes,  
I had to show you how it's done.  
I climbed the ladder and missed a rung.

PRASKOVYA:

Poor thing.  
Always so particular

IVAN ILYCH:

I went flying.  
I went flying.  
Flying!

PRASKOVYA:

You went flying.  
Flying.  
Flying!

*[They both chuckle a bit.]*

IVAN ILYCH:

I looked ridiculous.  
And it hurt like hell!

PRASKOVYA: *(gently scolds)*

Language, Papa!

*[They all laugh and IVAN ILYCH gives VLADIMIR a cheeky wink.]*

IVAN ILYCH:

Good thing I was once an athlete.

PRASKOVYA:

*Mon coeur*, you were never an athlete.

*[They chuckle again but IVAN ILYCH seizes up again in pain. He can hardly breath.]*

PRASKOVYA:

Are you alright?

IVAN ILYCH: *(catching his breath)*

I am fine.

PRASKOVYA:  
You're not alright.

IVAN ILYCH:  
I said, I'm fine.

PRASKOVYA:  
You have been hiding this.

IVAN ILYCH:  
I said, I'm fine!

PRASKOVYA:  
I want you to see the doctor.

IVAN ILYCH:  
I said, I'm fine!  
Such a fuss.  
You make too much of things.

*[The pain in IVAN ILYCH'S side subsides, but it has left him in a foul mood. He notices a deep scratch in the surface of the side table ]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
Look!  
Look at this!  
A scratch in our new table!

PRASKOVYA:  
We will get it repaired.

We'll buy another table.  
We'll buy another table.

PRASKOVYA:  
Accidents happen.  
Things get broken.  
Tables get scratched.

IVAN ILYCH:  
I don't want it repaired.  
I don't want another table!  
I don't want another table!  
Why do I work myself to death?  
Is it so much to ask,  
to care for nice things?

PRASKOVYA:  
Everything can be fixed. *(spoken with anger)*  
We were having a pleasant evening.

IVAN ILYCH: *(coldly)*  
Were we?

*[They sit all in uncomfortable silence until PRASKOVYA notices her son.]*

PRASKOVYA:  
Vladimir, *mon trésor*.  
It is time for bed.  
I'll come tuck you in.

*[VLADIMIR is engrossed in his book and does not make a move.]*

IVAN ILYCH: *(with annoyance)*  
Listen to your mother!  
Go to bed!

*[VLADIMIR quickly stands and kisses both his parents on the cheeks and exits. IVAN ILYCH looks at his wife with annoyance.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
Have you changed your hair?

PRASKOVYA:  
I tried something new.

IVAN ILYCH  
I prefer it the other way.

*[PRASKOVYA does not acknowledge the insult. IVAN ILYCH painfully stands.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
I'm going to bed.

PRASKOVYA:  
Perhaps that is best.

*[IVAN ILYCH realizes he has acted like a cad and softens.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
Perhaps you are right.  
I will see the doctor.

PRASKOVYA: *(holding herself together)*  
I will make the appointment.

IVAN ILYCH:  
Good Night.

*[IVAN ILYCH waits for response.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
My apologies.

*[PRASKOVYA finally looks up and takes pity.]*

PRASKOVYA: *(softy)*  
Good night.

IVAN ILYCH:  
Good night.

*[IVAN ILYCH painfully exits. PRASKOVYA waits until he is gone to cry.]*

### **SCENE THREE: My fall from grace?**

*[IVAN ILYCH sits on a stool with his jacket and tie off. The doctor stands over him.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
Something must be wrong.

DOCTOR:  
It is difficult to tell.  
Perhaps it was your fall.

IVAN ILYCH:  
My fall from grace?

DOCTOR:

Your fall from the ladder.  
Besides the pain in your side,  
nothing is conclusive.

IVAN ILYCH:

What about my appetite?

DOCTOR:

You needed to lose weight.

IVAN ILYCH:

Well then,  
what is to be done?

DOCTOR:

Nothing, really.  
Sleep and bedrest  
I predict a full recovery.

IVAN ILYCH:

All I want to do is sleep.  
I am always irritable.  
Everything is upsetting.

DOCTOR:

Sleep is the best...  
Do not upset yourself.

DOCTOR:

Follow my instructions:  
No rich foods,  
full bed rest,  
no sturgeon,  
no smoking,  
no alcohol.

IVAN ILYCH:

Wine, perhaps?

DOCTOR:

Would you like to get better?

IVAN ILYCH:

Yes.

DOCTOR:

Then no.

No wine.

IVAN ILYCH:

When will I see results?

DOCTOR:

When you follow my instructions.

Consider a leave of absence.

I will prescribe you a tonic  
and something for the pain.

IVAN ILYCH:

So, if I ignore it, it will go away?

DOCTOR:

Like most things.

IVAN ILYCH:

Thank you, doctor.

DOCTOR:

Remember, bedrest!

I will visit you in a week.

IVAN ILYCH:

Until then.

DOCTOR:

Until then.

IVAN ILYCH/ DOCTOR:

Until then.

**SCENE FOUR: It's not really a choice, is it?**

*[IVAN ILYCH, in a dressing gown, trousers and slippers, sits in a chair beside the bed. GERASIM closes the curtains for the night and adjusts the bedding. PRASKOVYA fusses. GERASIM goes about his work good-naturedly, while VLADIMIR sits on the bed and observes his parents.]*

PRASKOVYA:

Have you taken your medicines?  
You will not get better if you don't.

IVAN ILYCH:

I did.

PRASKOVYA:

You always forget  
and I must remind you.

IVAN ILYCH:

I will!

PRASKOVYA:

You have gotten more disagreeable.  
Special meals prepared  
that you won't eat.  
Staying up late playing cards  
against your doctor's orders.  
That's a lie!

IVAN ILYCH:

Mush!

Only once!

IVAN ILYCH:

SO WHAT! *(yelling)*

PRASKOVYA:

I am doing this for your sake!

IVAN ILYCH:

Are you? *(spoken)*

*[They both sigh deeply. PRASKOVYA throws her hands up and exits.]*

PRASKOVYA: *(calling off stage)*  
Vladimir!

*[The boy jumps down and gives his father a kiss on the cheek. It's returned lovingly.]*

PRASKOVYA: *(yelling off stage)*  
Vladimir!

*[IVAN ILYCH playfully swats his son's bottom and the boy exits quickly.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
Gerasim?

*[IVAN ILYCH holds up an empty glass he's been hiding from his wife.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
If you could?

*[GERASIM reaches for the secret stash. Opens the bottle and pours his master a dram of schnapps.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
Our secret, ha?

*[IVAN ILYCH gives him a wink and drinks. GERASIM smiles without judgment.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
Oh, if you could  
move that footstool  
under my feet and a pillow.

*[GERASIM places IVAN ILYCH'S feet onto the footstools]*

GERASIM:  
I'll bring two.  
If it pleases.

*[IVAN ILYCH smiles and nods his head. GERASIM lifts IVAN ILYCH'S legs and places them on top of the pillows.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
Much better.  
Gerasim, are you busy?

GERASIM:  
I've done everything  
except chop the wood.

IVAN ILYCH:  
Hold my legs up a bit higher,  
if you could?

*[GERASIM stands before IVAN ILYCH and lifts his master's legs higher.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
I'm not sure why that feels better.  
Well, this looks ridiculous.

*[They both chuckle. IVAN ILYCH puts his feet down and GERASIM returns the stool.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
I dislike being ill.  
Your Mistress is intolerable.  
Although I'm not looking  
forward to returning to work.  
It makes me wonder why I became a judge.

GERASIM:  
Was your father a judge?

IVAN ILYCH:  
My father was a bureaucrat.  
My life was planned.  
I did what was expected.  
I would always become a judge.  
I'm not sure why I did it.  
There was never any joy.  
I guess one is rarely satisfied  
with what they have.

GERASIM: (*naïvely*)  
Why is that?

IVAN ILYCH:  
It's human nature to  
always compare.  
Always want better,  
always want more.  
It never seems enough  
until it's taken from you.

GERASIM:  
You have a wonderful life.

IVAN ILYCH: (*with impatience*)  
I have nothing to complain of.

IVAN ILYCH / GERASIM  
To complain of.

IVAN ILYCH: (*in a reverie*)  
I loved my independence.  
I loved my time in college.  
The freedom of my youth.  
*Il faut que jeunesse se passe.*  
That spirited time when  
youth must have its fling.  
It was when I felt the most alive.  
When everything lay ahead.  
A joy I never felt at the time.  
It's not really a choice, is it?  
Marriage, I mean.  
I guess it was love.  
At least as I understood it.  
We knew the match was not ideal,  
but still suitable.  
My wife was no great beauty,  
but still was pretty enough.  
She told me she loved me.  
So, I thought, "it's time."

IVAN ILYCH:

Why shouldn't I marry?"  
Don't misunderstand me.  
I love my wife and my son.  
Still, if I had a chance  
To make the choice again,  
I wouldn't.

GERASIM:

What choice would you have made?

*[IVAN ILYCH is unable to answer and downs the last of his schnapps.]*

GERASIM:

Would you like more schnapps?  
Our secret.

IVAN ILYCH:

No. I'm sorry, Gerasim.  
You have logs to chop.  
I keep you from your work.

GERASIM:

This is my work, sir.  
Tending to the family.

IVAN ILYCH:

I take too much of your time.

GERASIM:

It's no trouble, sir.  
No trouble at all.

### **FIRST INTERLUDE: Moonlight**

*[It is night and IVAN ILYCH is alone in his bed. He sits up and looks about. He is finally left alone with his thoughts. Everything is still. He notices a crack of light coming from between the drapes. He becomes curious and gets out of bed painfully and makes his way across the room. He looks behind the curtain and takes in the beauty of the full moon. He then throws the curtains open and the room fills with moonlight. IVAN ILYCH is transfixed and reaches out to place his hand against the glass. He considers the*

*larger world, the ineffability of life, and the unfathomable distance of the moon. He hangs his head knowing some things are beyond his reach and can never be fully understood.]*

**SCENE FIVE: Does it really matter?**

*[It is morning. GERASIM enters a basin of warm water, a towel, and a new nightshirt. IVAN ILYCH rouses from sleep and sits up; he looks terrible.]*

GERASIM:

Did you sleep well, sir?

IVAN ILYCH:

No.

GERASIM:

Would you like tea?

IVAN ILYCH:

No.

GERASIM:

Would you like to move onto the...?

IVAN ILYCH:

What time is it?

*[GERASIM shrugs]*

IVAN ILYCH:

My watch,  
if you could.

*[GERASIM points to the pocket watch on the side table. IVAN ILYCH checks the time.]*

IVAN ILYCH:

Half-past eight.  
Are they up?

GERASIM:

Vladimir has left for school.  
The mistress is still in bed.  
She told me to wake her  
if you called for her.

IVAN ILYCH:

Let her sleep.

GERASIM:

The doctor comes today.  
I'll give you a bath and a fresh shirt.

IVAN ILYCH:

Does it really matter?

GERASIM:

You'll feel better being clean.

*[IVAN ILYCH grabs the nightshirt and steps behind the dressing screen to put it on.]*

IVAN ILYCH:

Gerasim.

GERASIM:

Yes, sir?

IVAN ILYCH:

You must forgive me  
for being helpless.

GERASIM

Why, sir?

It's no trouble at all.

IVAN ILYCH:

Things will be easier for everyone  
once I'm gone.

GERASIM: *(taken back)*  
Once you're gone?

IVAN ILYCH:  
No one saying this.  
I'm not getting any better  
and I feel that I'm dying.

GERASIM:  
You'll get better.  
You'll see.

IVAN ILYCH:  
I'm not.  
Thank you, Gerasim.  
Perhaps I'll have some tea.  
Yes, bring me tea.

GERASIM:  
Of course, sir.

*[A bell is heard.]*

GERASIM:  
That must be the doctor.  
Shall I send him in?

*[IVAN ILYCH shrugs. GERASIM exits and quickly returns with the DOCTOR who takes off his gloves.]*

DOCTOR: *(cheerfully)*  
Good Morning!  
Goodness, it is cold.  
How are we feeling today?

*[DOCTOR rubs his hands to warm them. He then takes his wrist to check his pulse.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
I'm in agony.

DOCTOR:

Just relax and breathe slowly.

*[DOCTOR takes out his stethoscope and listens to his heart.]*

DOCTOR:

How are you sleeping?

IVAN ILYCH:

If only it would come quicker.

*[DOCTOR checks the glands under his jaw.]*

DOCTOR:

I will prescribe a sedative.

IVAN ILYCH:

This cannot continue on.

*[DOCTOR places the stethoscope on his back.]*

DOCTOR:

Inhale.

Now hold your breath.

Now exhale.

IVAN ILYCH:

Always the same.

DOCTOR:

This would be easier

if you were quieter!

*[DOCTOR begins respiratory percussion by placing one hand on IVAN ILYCH'S back and tapping with the other.]*

IVAN ILYCH:

Forever the pain.

*[DOCTOR taps.]*

DOCTOR:  
Perhaps more morphine.

IVAN ILYCH:  
This is impossible!

*[DOCTOR taps.]*

DOCTOR:  
I will prescribe you more.

IVAN ILYCH:  
An hour and then another.

*[DOCTOR taps.]*

DOCTOR:  
Your lungs sound better.

IVAN ILYCH:  
You're not listening to me.

*[GERASIM returns with tea service.]*

IVAN ILYCH: *(to GERASIM)*  
I'll have a cup please.

DOCTOR:  
In the middle of an examination?

*[GERASIM pours and hands him a cup of tea.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
Yes. We are done

DOCTOR:  
No. We are not.

IVAN ILYCH:

If I'm not going to die today,  
and you'll not prescribe a cure,  
at least allow me this simple pleasure.  
Let me enjoy my tea in peace!  
Good day.

*[IVAN ILYCH ignores everyone, sips his tea and stares out the window.]*

**SCENE SIX: Do you not remember?**

*[IVAN ILYCH sleeps fitfully. There is now a Russian icon on the side table. PRASKOVYA enters grandly in a lovely evening dress and fine jewelry. She looks both guilty and pleased with herself. PRASKOVYA realizes her husband is asleep and wonders if she should wake him. VLADIMIR enters in an overcoat and stands at a distance, afraid to move closer. IVAN ILYCH wakes and looks at them confused.]*

IVAN ILYCH:

Who's there?

PRASKOVYA: *(taken back)*

*Mon coeur. It's me.*

*[IVAN ILYCH sits up with more lucidness]*

IVAN ILYCH:

Oh? Oh, yes.

Where are you going?

PRASKOVYA:

Where am I going?

Do you not remember?

I told you this morning.

Do you not remember?

We're going to the theatre.

Do you not remember?

You told me, "Take Vladimir."

Do you not remember?

You insisted on the box.

Do you not remember?

PRASKOVYA:  
Sarah Bernhardt, remember?

*[IVAN ILYCH struggles to remember but gives-up.]*

I would not go otherwise.  
Do you not remember?  
But the box is paid for.  
Do you not remember?  
Helena and daughter were going.  
Do you not remember?  
They couldn't go alone.  
Do you not remember?  
It is *Adrienne Lecouvreur*.  
Do you not remember?  
Sarah Bernhardt, such a talent.  
Peerless, entrancing,  
the elegance and realism of her acting.  
I am certain, I am certain, I am certain,  
it will be a lovely evening!

IVAN ILYCH: *(drained of energy)*  
I'm sure.

*[PRASKOVYA takes pity on her husband.]*

PRASKOVYA:  
How are you feeling?

*[IVAN ILYCH shrugs.]*

PRASKOVYA:  
Would you prefer I stay home?

IVAN ILYCH:  
No. Please go.

PRASKOVYA:  
Vladimir, *mon trésor*.  
Remember my opera glasses.

PRASKOVYA:

Tell Gerasim to bring my cloak.

The carriage is waiting.

*[VLADIMIR exits and PRASKOVYA kisses IVAN ILYCH on the cheek. He is repelled.]*

PRASKOVYA:

Sleep well.

I will see you when...

IVAN ILYCH:

Please go!

PRASKOVYA:

Perhaps you need more morphine.

I shall have Gerasim give you more.

Otherwise we will be...

IVAN ILYCH:

Go away!

PRASKOVYA:

I know you are in pain,

so I've tried to be patient

but I will not have you spoil my evening!

I deserve this.

*[She smooths out her dress and exits, her head held high. IVAN ILYCH is relieved she is gone and he settles back. GERASIM enters and quietly prepares a morphine shot for his master. He delivers the injection.]*

GERASIM:

This will ease the pain?

IVAN ILYCH:

No. It never does.

GERASIM:

Shall I hold your legs?

IVAN ILYCH:  
It no longer helps.

GERASIM:  
Of course, it does.

IVAN ILYCH:  
Please, please leave me.

*[GERASIM quietly exits but sits on a chair near the bedroom door, alert to his Master's call. IVAN ILYCH looks up in despair and then with growing anger.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
To suffer unceasing agonies.  
To ponder the unsolvable.  
The questions are the same.  
The incomprehensible.  
The unanswerable.  
Why must this be so...  
why must this be so?

Beyond this,  
besides this,  
is there truly nothing?  
Can this be death?  
Why death?  
With no reason to look forward,  
I must now live in the past.  
Memories most remote  
of my childhood long, long ago.  
My nurse, my brothers, our toys,  
hot summer days,  
ripe French plums,  
warm cherry tarts.  
The memory of their taste.  
To know now what I lost.

Life, a falling stone,  
flies further and further  
towards its terrible end.

IVAN ILYCH:

Flies further and further.

I fly! I fly!

Life starts as a bright spot  
and slowly becomes dimmer,  
afterwards only darker,  
then proceeding,  
proceeding more rapidly,  
more rapidly, more rapidly,  
more rapidly, more rapidly,  
rapidly, rapidly, rapidly  
rapid, rapid, rapid.  
Why did I think I still had time?

Life, a falling stone,  
flies further and further  
towards its terrible end,  
flies further and further  
I fly!

Comprehending the impossible.  
An explanation, there is none.  
Have I lived a life worth living?  
Having done what was expected?  
My life has no meaning.  
My life had been  
the most simple,  
the most ordinary,  
the most terrible.

*[PRASKOVYA tiptoes past the dozing GERASIM and approaches IVAN ILYCH who is startled at her return.]*

IVAN ILYCH:

Have you not left?

PRASKOVYA:

The play has long finished  
and we are returning.

PRASKOVYA:

It has been hours and  
Already quite late.  
I just tucked Vladimir into bed.

PRASKOVYA:

Have you been awake all this time?

IVAN ILYCH: *(confused and near tears)*  
I'm not sure.

*[PRASKOVYA tucks him back in.]*

PRASKOVYA:

Are you in pain?

*[IVAN ILYCH is at a loss for words and she takes pity. He imagines her before as a beautiful young woman.]*

IVAN ILYCH: *(spoken tenderly)*  
Forgive me.

PRASKOVYA: *(spoken dismissively)*  
*Mon coeur.*

IVAN ILYCH:  
Forgive me for not understanding.  
Forgive me for not being tender.

PRASKOVYA: *(taken back)*  
*Mon coeur.*

IVAN ILYCH:  
I'm scared for myself.  
I am scared for you.

PRASKOVYA: *(sadly)*  
*Mon coeur.*

IVAN ILYCH:  
You will lose your husband.  
Our son will lose his father.  
Forgive me.

*[PRASKOVA has forgotten she once loved this man.]*

PRASKOVYA: *(tenderly)*  
*Mon coeur*, of course.

IVAN ILYCH:  
Is this how it ends?  
Remember we were once in love.  
At the altar of our wedding,  
we promised to grow old together.

*[It's been years since he was this kind.]*

PRASKOVYA:  
Remember our courtship?

IVAN ILYCH:  
I remember how you pursued me.

PRASKOVYA:  
I was determined to make you love me.

IVAN ILYCH:  
You used everything short of black magic.

PRASKOVYA:  
You do not know that.

IVAN ILYCH/ PRASKOVYA:  
You cast a spell,  
to be sure.  
I was smitten.

IVAN ILYCH: PRASKOVYA: *(teasingly)*  
Was it my charm? Charm?  
My good looks? Good Looks?  
You have neither.

IVAN ILYCH:  
My sense of humor?  
My *savoir faire*?

PRASKOVYA:  
No. Not that either.

IVAN ILYCH:  
Then what was it?

PRASKOVYA:  
It was your dancing.  
Your confidence,  
power and grace.

IVAN ILYCH:  
I loved dancing with you.

IVAN ILYCH/ PRASKOVYA:  
Swept up in your arms.  
Swept up in your arms.  
I loved dancing with you.  
I hoped we would dance a lifetime.

*[PRASKOVYA takes her husband's hand and they begin to gently waltz.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
Why did we stop dancing?

PRASKOVYA: *(wistfully)*  
I don't know.

*[IVAN ILYCH knees buckle suddenly, but PRASKOVYA keeps him from falling. She struggles to get her husband back on the edge of the bed. He is humiliated.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
How did we become these people?

PRASKOVYA:  
These people...

IVAN ILYCH:  
You must know I've been faithful.  
Yet I betrayed my marriage.  
I treated you with  
indifference, contempt...

PRASKOVYA:  
I treated you with  
resentment, anger...

IVAN ILYCH / PRASKOVYA:  
This marriage we created.  
I was often left to wonder,

IVAN ILYCH:  
as a father and a husband...

PRASKOVYA:  
as a mother and a wife...

IVAN ILYCH / PRASKOVYA:  
Is this all there is?

IVAN ILYCH:  
Perhaps it's the wrong question.

IVAN ILYCH / PRASKOVYA:  
Who I'm I? Is this it?  
What I'm I? Is this it?  
Why I am here?  
Is this all there is?

PRASKOVYA: (*speaking*)  
Ivan Ilych, I am scared.

IVAN ILYCH: (*speaking*)  
I am too.

*[They embrace and IVAN ILYCH unexpectedly cries on her shoulder.]*

**SCENE SEVEN: What shall I tell my husband?**

*[PRASKOVYA stands with the DOCTOR downstage in a pool of light on a darkened stage. PRASKOVYA is beside herself.]*

DOCTOR:

It was never his appendix.  
An operation will do him no good.

PRASKOVYA:

There must be another cure.

DOCTOR:

I cannot diagnose his illness.

PRASKOVYA:

None of the doctors can!  
First it was a floating kidney,  
then blocked intestines.

PRASKOVYA:

Finally cancer of the pancreas.  
He's my husband!  
He wants to live!

DOCTOR:

Nothing, nothing seems conclusive.  
It's all very puzzling.  
All very puzzling.

DOCTOR:

This is not unheard of.  
Looking for hope at the end.

PRASKOVYA:

My husband is afraid of death!

DOCTOR:

No Madame.  
He's afraid of dying.  
It's the waiting.  
It's the not knowing.

PRASKOVYA: *(spoken in anger)*  
You must save his life!

DOCTOR:  
Doctors prolong life.  
We make life better  
if we treat the person  
and not just the ailment.  
Madame, you must understand.  
Your husband is dying.

PRASKOVYA: *(with determination)*  
All I know is how to be a wife  
and I am far too old to remarry.  
What will become of me?  
You must help me.  
You must save my husband's life!

DOCTOR:  
Your husband is dying! *(yelled)*  
We can ease his sufferings  
with opium and morphine.  
Shall I talk to your husband?

PRASKOVYA:  
I will find another doctor!  
One that will listen to me.

DOCTOR:  
I can refer you to other doctors,  
but they will tell you the same.  
Death is irrefutable.  
Death is irrefutable,  
irrefutable.

*[PRASKOVYA breaks down in tears as she finally faces the truth of it.]*

PRASKOVYA: *(breathlessly)*  
I know.  
I know...

**SCENE EIGHT: Am I not already dying?**

*[Days have passed. IVAN ILYCH lies on his back, staring upwards. PRASKOVYA implores her husband.]*

PRASKOVYA:

Please, *mon coeur*.

Not without a confession.

Not without sacraments.

IVAN ILYCH:

You know how I feel about this.

PRASKOVYA:

Do this for me, Ivan Ilych.

*[IVAN ILYCH relents. GERASIM exits quickly and returns with the PRIEST.]*

PRIEST: *(with kindness)*

Good to see you again.

You have not been to church in some time.

*[PRIEST turns his back to open his satchel. IVAN ILYCH shoots PRASKOVYA a look.]*

PRIEST:

Still, it's not too late.

*[PRIEST takes out a vile of oil, a cross, and prayer book. He then hands an icon to PRASKOVYA who places it on a side table with the others.]*

PRIEST:

God's love heals and  
redemption is open to all.

*[PRIEST looks at PRASKOVYA who lingers.]*

PRIEST:

Perhaps we can be alone.

PRASKOVYA:

Oh yes, of course.

[PRASKOVYA exits.]

PRIEST:

Let us begin with a confession.

IVAN ILYCH: (*with resentment*)

I confess I lead an unworthy life,  
unworthy life.

PRIEST:

This is not how we begin.

IVAN ILYCH:

My life has been false.

My life has been a lie.

I lived, as I should have.

I lived the way I was told.

Everything correctly.

*Comme il faut*

I lived for what was pleasant.

I lived for what was decorous.

I lived for everyone but myself.

IVAN ILYCH:

A life of falsehood.

A life of deceit.

Am I not already dying?!

Am I being punished?

Why must I be made to suffer?

Why must this be so?

Why should any of us

need to suffer?

Misery is God's will?

I'm questioning him!

PRIEST:

Then you may not like his answer.

PRIEST:

Confession is a sacrament.

Please stop,

please stop.

PRIEST:

That is not a sin!

PRIEST:

An honorable life is not a sin.

The wages of sin is death.

You are, my son.

No, my son.

No one escapes life

without pain and suffering.

This is God's will.

This is God's will.

Are you blaming God?

IVAN ILYCH:

I no longer NEED to believe in God.  
I am damned and already in Hell.

*[THE PRIEST calmly places his belongings back in his satchel.]*

PRIEST: *(with sincerity)*

You don't know the pain of Hell.

IVAN ILYCH:

I'm beyond redemption.

PRIEST: *(with kindness and understanding.)*

That is not true.

Your heart must be open to God.

*[IVAN ILYCH turns away.]*

PRIEST:

I'll come back when you're ready to confess.

*[The PRIEST waits for a response, there is none. THE PRIEST then exits past PRASKOVYA who is surprised and confused by his quick departure. She walks back into the bedroom to find IVAN ILYCH looking much brighter.]*

PRASKOVYA:

Did you confess?

IVAN ILYCH:

I did.

PRASKOVYA:

Do you feel better?

IVAN ILYCH: *(without irony)*

Immensely.

IVAN ILYCH:

I feel somehow renewed, hopeful.

A weight has been lifted.

I want a different life.

I want to live!

I want to live!

The hope that I might live!

I must get better!

PRASKOVYA:

A different life.

I want a different life.

I'm hopeful you will live.

I want you to get better!

You must get better!

IVAN ILYCH / PRASKOVYA:

And be given another chance.

Let us hope and plan.

Let us have a different life.

A wonderful life,

IVAN ILYCH / PRASKOVYA:

A happy life.

A better life together!

IVAN ILYCH:

Together.

PRASKOVYA:

*Mon coeur!*

I am SO glad that the priest,

the priest came!

IVAN ILYCH:

As am I.

As am I.

*[They kiss and embrace.]*

### **SCENE NINE: Are you still there?**

*[IVAN ILYCH wakes slowly in pain. Things have gotten worse. GERASIM prepares a shot of morphine for his master.]*

IVAN ILYCH:

Who is there? *(spoken)*

GERASIM:

Gerasim, sir.

It's all right.

IVAN ILYCH:

No. Go away.

GERASIM:

Morphine will help you sleep.

I know this relieves the pain.

IVAN ILYCH:

No. Go away.

GERASIM:

Please, sir.

IVAN ILYCH:

The pain is more or less

But it never goes away.

It's hopeless.

GERASIM:

Sir...*(spoken)*

GERASIM: *(sweetly)*

As long as there is life,  
there is hope.

As long as there is hope,  
there is life.

To live without hope,  
is no life at all.

There is always hope.

There is life.

*[IVAN ILYCH is touched by his naïveté, but the sentiment is rejected.]*

IVAN ILYCH:

You need your rest.

We both need to sleep.

IVAN ILYCH:  
Go to bed now.

GERASIM:  
Rest well, sir.

*[GERASIM tucks in IVAN ILYCH and exits the bedroom but places a chair near the door. GERASIM sits and waits faithfully for his master call. IVAN ILYCH sits up to see if he is alone. He looks heavenward in anger.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
Are you still there?!  
Are you still watching?!  
Why have you done this?  
Are you still there?!  
Are you? Are you?!  
Are you still watching?!  
Why have you done this?  
This life, this pain.  
Pushed further and further down,  
but never to the bottom.  
If there is nothing.  
Nothing? Nothing!  
Then why life?  
Of course, no answer! *(spoken bitterly)*  
There is no meaning?  
There is none.  
Are you still there?  
Are you still watching?

*[IVAN ILYCH lays back and continues to stare upward, hopeful for any answer.]*

## **SECOND INTERLUDE: Lullaby**

*[The lights are slowly brought up to find IVAN ILYCH finally sleeping soundly. PRASKOVYA sleeps in the chair beside the bed with an open book in her hand. Everything is momentarily still. In his nightshirt, VLADIMIR enters and tip-toes past GERASIM. He looks about the room and finds his mother. VLADIMIR then studies his father. The boy is unable to understand fully what is happening, but feels he belongs here with his dying father and grieving mother. The boy then takes a throw from the*

*bed, wraps himself in it and curls up at the foot of his father's bed. PRASKOVYA opens her eyes and sees her son. Soon it will only be the two of them. PRASKOVYA puts the book on the side table and opens her arms. VLADIMIR falls into them. She hugs and kisses him; she must be strong for both of them. PRASKOVYA begins to hum her boy a gentle lullaby. The boy puts his head in his mother's lap and soon they are asleep.]*

**SCENE TEN: Where is death?**

*[IVAN ILYCH stares at the ceiling, unaware of his surroundings. The DOCTOR checks his pulse and GERASIM watches from the door. PRASKOVYA with a tchotchke (a prayer rope) prays silently, while VLADIMIR looks on helplessly. The PRIEST signals for PRASKOVYA, GERASIM, and DOCTOR together.]*

ALL:

Oh, God of spirit and flesh,  
rest the souls of Thy departed,  
departed servants.  
A place of brightness and rest,  
where sickness and sorrow fled.  
Pardon every transgression,  
which they have committed,  
whether by word or thought or deed.  
For no one lives and does not sin.  
Thou art a good and merciful God.  
Grant rest to Thy servants  
who have fallen asleep.  
Death shall not die  
but death is not the end.  
There is always life.  
Lord have mercy  
Lord have mercy  
Amen

IVAN ILYCH: *(in breaths)*

Oh!

Oh!

DOCTOR: *(softly)*

Madam, it is time.

*[They gather around the bed, but IVAN ILYCH looks at them all with no recognition.]*

DOCTOR:  
Time to say your farewells.

*[PRASKOVYA reaches out to VLADIMIR. The boy is overwhelmed.]*

VLADIMIR: *(Cries out.)*  
Papa!

*[IVAN ILYCH becomes lucid momentarily and recognizes his son and his surroundings. IVAN ILYCH reaches out for his son.]*

VLADIMIR: *(spoken)*  
Papa!

*[VLADIMIR runs to his father. IVAN ILYCH pulls the boy close and kisses him. The boy weeps on his father's chest. A spot of bright white light begins to illuminate IVAN ILYCH. He looks at his wife and child.]*

IVAN ILYCH: *(breathlessly)*  
Sorry.  
Forgive.  
Forego.

*[PRASKOVYA weeps. IVAN ILYCH looks at this wife and points weakly to his son.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
Take away.

*[GERASIM leads the boy gently away. IVAN ILYCH struggles to breathe as the spot light continues to brighten, while the other stage lights dim.]*

IVAN ILYCH: *(spoken)*  
Where is death?  
Where is it?  
WHERE IS IT!

*[GERASIM enters again and stands close.]*

IVAN ILYCH:  
So, there it is!  
There it is!  
Light!  
Light at the very bottom.  
What a joy!  
What a joy!

*[While the spot becomes blinding white on IVAN ILYCH, lights darken on the ensemble.]*

ALL:  
God rest his soul.

IVAN ILYCH:  
Joy! Joy!

ALL:  
God rest his soul.  
God rest his soul.

IVAN ILYCH:  
Joy!

*[They ALL cross themselves.]*

**MUSICAL FINALE: Beginning**

*[IVAN ILYCH dies finding joy. The white spot begins to slowly fade. Everyone remains in silhouette and long shadows. The oboe solo finishes on blackout.]*

END OF OPERA