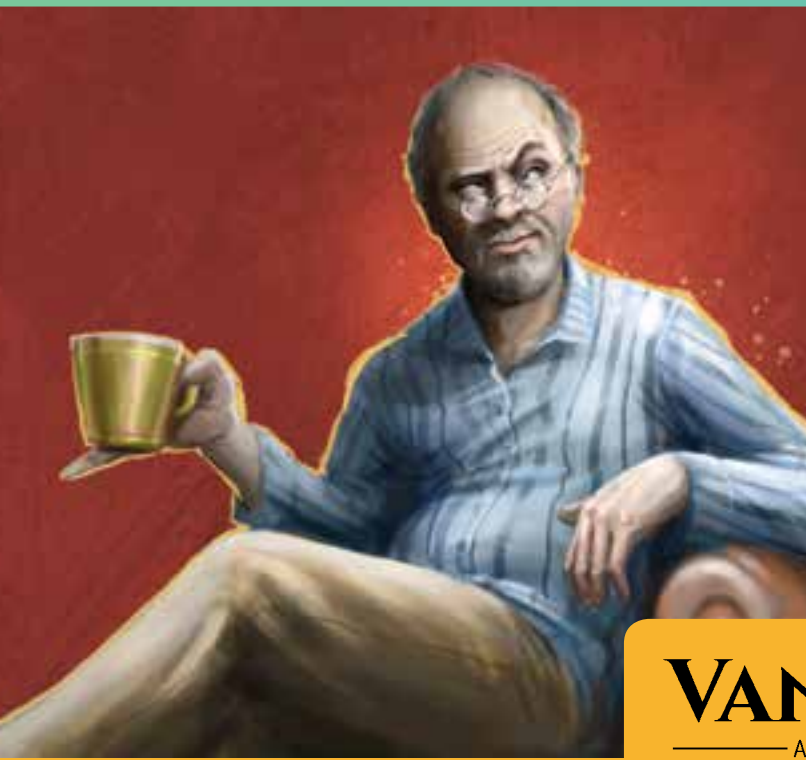


# INSIDE OUT

A STUDY GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



**VANYA**  
— AND —  
***Sonia***  
— AND —  
**MASHA**  
— AND —  
**SPIKE**



# VANYA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE SYNOPSIS

NINA: "Oh, I sense sadness. Don't be sad. Life is wonderful, isn't it?"

—*Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*

Vanya and Sonia (named after Chekhovian characters by their theatre loving, academic parents) have lived their entire lives in the family's farmhouse in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. While they stayed home to take care of their ailing parents, their sister Masha has been gallivanting around the world as an oft-married successful actress and movie star, leaving Vanya and Sonia to feel trapped and resentful at home. Meanwhile, the soothsayer/cleaning woman, Cassandra, warns them of terrible events to happen in the near future — events which do come true. Masha sweeps in with her boy-toy Spike to alleviate their misery if only for a few nights. Masha has plans of her own and she will see them fulfilled. The quiet household is thrown into a tumult as issues of sibling rivalry, regret, love and lust erupt.

## THE PLAYWRIGHT— CHRISTOPHER DURANG

Christopher Durang was born in Montclair, New Jersey on January 2, 1949, the son of Patricia Elizabeth, a secretary, and architect Francis Ferdinand Durang, Jr. He grew up in Berkeley Heights, NJ and attended Catholic schools as a child. He received a BA in English from Harvard and an MFA in playwriting from the Yale School of Drama. He lives in Bucks County with his partner, John Augustine.

Durang's plays often deal critically yet humorously with serious issues such as child abuse and Roman Catholic dogma and culture. His plays include *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You*, *Beyond Therapy*, *Baby with the Bathwater*, *A History of the American Film*, *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, *The Actor's Nightmare*, *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge*, and *Miss Witherspoon*.



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## INSIDE OUT

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### **VANYA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE**

By Christopher Durang

Producing Partners:  
Margot and Allan Frank,  
Robert & Judi Newman

**OCT 10 – NOV 16**  
**RICKETSON THEATRE**

Durang has appeared as a film actor in the comedy *The Secret of My Success, Mr. North, Penn and Teller Get Killed, House Sitter* and *The Cowboy Way*. He also has written *Wanda's Vision*, six one-acts for PBS.

He has been awarded numerous fellowships and high profile grants including a Guggenheim, a Rockefeller, and a CBS playwriting fellowship. He is a

member of the Dramatists Guild Council and was inducted into the American Theatre Hall of Fame in 2012. In addition, *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* was awarded a Tony for Best Play of 2013. He is currently running the Julliard playwriting program with playwright Marsha Norman.

[www.christopherdurang.org](http://www.christopherdurang.org).

[http://en.wikipedia/wiki/Christopher\\_Durang](http://en.wikipedia/wiki/Christopher_Durang)

## BIOGRAPHY OF ANTON CHEKHOV

“What matters most is to break out of the rut. Everything else is unimportant.”

— Anton Chekhov

The grandson of a serf, Anton Chekhov was born on January 29, 1860 in the poorest neighborhood of Taganrog, a Russian port city near the Black Sea. His grandfather had bought his own freedom and that of his family some 20 years prior to Chekhov's birth. Although the system of serfdom was abolished in 1861, this new freedom existed mainly on paper; in reality, there was still a great deal of poverty among the peasants and working class. Chekhov's father ran a small shop until he went bankrupt and was forced to flee the little town in order to avoid debtor's prison.

Chekhov stayed in Taganrog on a scholarship and sent his family a small sum each month. At 19, he began studying medicine in Moscow (receiving his MD in 1884) and writing stories and articles for a variety of periodicals. Many of his stories were humorous and he began to have financial and critical success. In fact, his writing career more than supplemented his medical practice, as he often treated patients for free. He once said of his dual professions: “Medicine is my lawful wife and literature is my mistress; when I get tired of one I go to the other.”

After having two volumes of short stories published, Chekhov's first play, *Ivanov*, was produced in 1887 inciting a riot of catcalls and laughter, ending in a brawl and an immediate cancellation of

all other performances. Around this same time, Chekhov became aware of his failing health. Although he refused to admit it, he had contracted tuberculosis — a fatal disease of the lungs common during this period. His next play, *The Wood Demon*, was performed in December 1889 and also was a failure. Chekhov decided to take a break from playwriting. After an eight-month visit to Sakhalin Island — a Siberian penal colony where he studied the appalling conditions — he published a sociological report on the topic.

Fortunately, Chekhov did return to writing plays. On October 17, 1896, *The Seagull* premiered in Moscow. When this production failed as well, Chekhov declared: “This is the end. I shall not write another play.” Were it not for Russian theater artists Constantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, Chekhov might have remained a short story writer. They convinced him to let their new company, the Moscow Art Theater, attempt another production.

*The Seagull* was remounted as a triumphant success for the Moscow Art Theater in December 1898. Stanislavsky and Chekhov had a number of artistic differences. Chekhov once demanded that an actress be immediately recast, called Stanislavsky's acting “paralytic” and said that under his direction, the characters in *Uncle Vanya* had become “cry-babies.” Nevertheless, Chekhov continued to work with the company, using scenes and characters from *The Wood Demon* to create *Uncle Vanya*, which premiered there. Later he would write *The Cherry Orchard* (considered by many to be his

masterpiece) especially for the company.

During the summer of 1901, Chekhov married Olga Knipper, an actress with the Art Theater. The couple was often separated as Chekhov's health had deteriorated to such a degree that he needed to stay in Yalta, a resort on the Black Sea, for the climate, while she stayed in Moscow to perform. In 1904, under the advice of his doctor, Chekhov traveled with Olga to the Black Forest

in Germany, telling one of his friends: "I am going away to die like a dog." He did enjoy some small improvements in his health, but in July 1904, Anton Chekhov died of the tuberculosis that had plagued him throughout his life.

Allen, Andrea. *Seattle Repertory Theatre Playgoers Guide: Uncle Vanya*. Seattle, WA: 1996.

Hingley, Ronald. *A New Life of Anton Chekhov*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1976.

## ANTON CHEKHOV'S SHORT STORIES

"So I turn out a sort of patchwork quilt rather than literature. What can I do? I simply don't know."

—Chekhov's letter to A. S. Suvorin,  
October 27, 1888

Chekhov's stories first appeared in Nicholas Leykin's weekly St. Petersburg paper called *Oskolki (Splinters)* in September 1882. He wrote to support his family and to pay for his medical school tuition and fees.

His stories are characterized by many factors. First, he economized on language; he never wrote more than he needed. He used colors to convey the changing feelings of his characters. For example, in the story "The Lady with the Dog," the aging Dimitri's hair is graying, but the sea at Yalta is suffused with color like the young woman he is wooing. The stories tend to eschew straightforward linear progression; the reader is to question what has happened before the story began.

The stories are full of ambiguity and often end elusively. Chekhov leaves us with hope for a new and splendid life, but no assurance for it.

His stories express ordinariness, possibly because of his upbringing. Born the son of a tyrannical father in a small, provincial town, Chekhov's melancholy moods may have been environmentally and mentally caused. As a human being, Chekhov, the

doctor, went out of his way to help the poor and needy.

His stories are full of the civilized professionals and the enlightened, philanthropic gentry who express reason and justice for all. Yet, at times, the stories seem to challenge this position. Sometimes, decency and rationality lead to failure. At other times, the do-gooder types are revealed as vain, nasty individuals.

For all the gloominess, comedy is a key element in Chekhov's stories, as he was drawn to life's oddities. Humor is seen in such characters as mothers-in-law, inebriated men and foreigners who could not speak Russian very well. Chekhov liked to portray the humorous foibles of Russian merchants, peasants and shopkeepers as well as high officials who bully low officials and low officials who aspire to higher office.

Chekhov brought a new way of looking at reality that required new methods to express. His works embrace trivia, patterns of daily life and unresolved endings.

<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/chekhov/section1/html>

<http://www.the-guardian.com/books/2010/feb/06/anton-chekhov-short-stories>

Hingley, Ronald. *A New Life of Anton Chekhov*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976.  
Rausch, Richard and Cassill, R.V. *The Norton Anthology of Short Stories*. New York: W.H. Norton and Co., 2006.

# PLOT SUMMARIES OF CHEKHOV'S MOST FAMOUS PLAYS

"Any idiot can face a crisis—it's day to day living that wears you out."

—Anton Chekhov

## *The Seagull*

An aging actress, Arkadina, pays a summer visit to her son Konstantin and brother Sorin on a country estate. Konstantin is an emotional and passionate young man, an aspiring writer who wants to write on his own terms. He has written a play that is unconventional both in structure and subject matter. His desire is to show it to a group of people at a makeshift outdoor theatre at his Uncle Sorin's estate; the group will include his actress mother Arkadina and Trigorin, a successful novelist. Both these individuals are so self-absorbed with their own fame that they dismiss Konstantin's play. The only person who seems interested is Dorn, Sorin's doctor. Konstantin has recruited Nina, a neighbor's daughter, to appear as the lead in the play. Of course, Konstantin is in love with Nina, who does not return his affections. Nina is attracted to Trigorin and he to her. Although she carries on with a poor local schoolteacher named Medvedenko, Masha, the daughter of Sorin's estate manager, loves Konstantin, a love which also goes unrequited. Nina wants to become an actress, but she seems more enthralled with the idea of celebrity than with being a real actress. The question becomes whether any of these artistic individuals can reach happiness given their competing desires.

## *Three Sisters*

In a small provincial Russian town, three sisters — Olga, Masha and Irina — are observing the first anniversary of their father's death as well as celebrating Nina's name day. The three women, all under the age of 30, grew up in Moscow with their brother Andrei; they often reflect on the happiness and sophistication they enjoyed there. None of them is finding happiness in this small town; most of the excitement in their lives comes from their interactions with the soldiers who are stationed

nearby. Olga, the oldest sister and already considered a spinster at 30, cares for the other siblings in a motherly manner, never marries and begrudgingly accepts a position as headmistress in a girls' school. Middle sister Masha, a trained concert pianist, marries young; she has a volatile affair with a Lieutenant and is eventually heartbroken by his transfer. However, she finally reconciles with her husband. Irina, the youngest, has a childish enchantment with the world and dreams of returning to Moscow and finding romance. She finally settles for Baron Tuzenbach whom she respects but does not love. The Baron is shot in a duel with another of Irina's admirers; at this point, she decides to devote her life to work and service. At the play's end, the sisters embrace as they watch the soldiers depart.

## *The Cherry Orchard*

The widow Madame Ranevsky returns home from Paris to find her family estate has been heavily mortgaged to pay for her extravagances and is to be auctioned off. Traveling with her is her daughter, Anya, and Anya's governess, Charlotte. The duo is met by her brother, Gayev, the estate manager, Varya, and other members of the staff. The widow seems incapable of recognizing and acting on her desperate situation. Lopakhin, a wealthy neighbor, offers to lend Madame Ranevsky 50,000 rubles if she will permit the land to be divided into lots for summer tourists. This would mean the estate's famous cherry orchard would be cut down, so the plan is rejected. Several other plans are proposed but nothing is resolved. In the midst of some summer servant courtships, Lopakhin tries to get the family to be more practical, but Madame Ranevsky confesses that she squandered her fortune on her unfaithful lover in Paris and is not capable of solving the problem financially.

August arrives and the estate must be auctioned to meet the mortgage payments. Brother Gayev attends the auction hoping the sale will be enough to satisfy the creditors. Lopakhin returns

with Gayev and announces that he, Lopakhin, bought the estate, a place where his father was once a serf. He intends to cut down the cherry orchard, but seeing Madame Ranevsky's sorrow, he says he wishes life could be changed.

In the autumn Madame Ranevsky readies to depart for Paris where she will live on money from her great-aunt and Anya will attend school. All the staff have found some work except for the old servant, Firs. As the curtain descends, Firs is locked in the house as the axe strokes are heard falling on the beloved cherry orchard.

### *Uncle Vanya*

On the Serebryakov estate autumn is fading before the onslaught of the severe Russian winter. Ivan Petrovich Voynitsky (Vanya), his old mother, Marya, his niece, Sonya, and their impoverished permanent guest, Telegin, lead a quiet,

idyllic existence on the estate which Vanya and Sonya manage. But the arrival of the owner, the retired art professor, Serebryakov, and his beautiful young wife Yelena Andreyevna, set the whole establishment in disarray. The presence of the lovely Yelena awakens in Vanya passions and emotions he has never before experienced. Yelena also excites the interest of Dr. Astrof, a frequent visitor to the house; in spite of herself, Yelena is attracted to the alcoholic doctor.

In the course of his visit, the egotistical Serebryakov is racked by gout, arthritis and a sense of frustration. His requests and complaints upset the whole household, but especially Vanya, who blames all his ills on the professor.

Somewhere between a comedy and a melodrama, the play, subtitled "Scenes from Country Life," is a human portrait, both cynical and satirical, of Russian life.

## BUCKS COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

Bucks County was one of the three original counties in Pennsylvania; it was named by William Penn in 1682 after Bucks County, also called Buckinghamshire, in England, the county where he lived. Bucks County was originally much larger than it is today. Northampton County was formed in 1752 from part of Bucks County while Lehigh County was formed in 1812 from part of Northampton County.

General George Washington and his troops camped in Bucks County as they prepared to cross the Delaware River to take Trenton, New Jersey by surprise on the morning of December 26, 1776. Their successful attack on Britain's Hessian forces was a turning point in the American War for Independence. The town of Washington Crossing, Pennsylvania and Washington Crossing Historic Park were named to commemorate the event.

As of the 2010 census, there were 625,249 people living in the county. The racial makeup of the county was 86.6% White, 3.9% African-American, 0.3% Native American, 4.1% Asian and

4.4% Latino. The median income for a household in the county is \$59,727. About 3% of families live below the poverty line.

Like the rest of the Philadelphia region, Bucks County has experienced a rapid increase of immigrants since the 2000 census. Known for its very large and established Eastern European population, most notably the Russian community, but also the Ukrainian and Polish communities, Bucks County is now seeing a rapid surge of other immigrant groups. Bucks County also is home to large prominent Roman Catholic and Jewish populations.

The southern third of the county between Philadelphia and Trenton, New Jersey, often called Lower Bucks, is located in the Atlantic Coastal Plain which is flat and near sea level and contains the county's most populated and industrialized area.

Bucks County also is experiencing rapid growth in biotechnology, along with neighboring Montgomery County. The Greater Philadelphia area has become the second largest area of biotechnology in

the United States, only behind Boston. Projections indicate that by 2020 one out of four people in Bucks County will work in biotechnology.

Another important asset of the county is tourism. The northern regions are known for their natural scenery and farmland. Colonial history and proximity to major urban areas including Philadelphia, New York City, Allentown, Reading and Atlantic City. Popular attractions in the area include the shops and artist' studios of New Hope, Peddler's Village, Washington Crossing Historic Park, and Quakertown Farmer's Market, popular on weekends.

Many writers and artists based in New York City have called Bucks County home, settling mainly in the small area between Doylestown and New Hope, along the Delaware River. Notable residents have included Margaret Mead, Pearl S. Buck, Oscar Hammerstein II, Moss Hart, Dorothy Parker and S. J. Perelman. Present day residents include Stan and Jan Berenstain, Stephen Sondheim, composer Joe Renzetti and the entertainer Pink.

[www.buckscounty.com](http://www.buckscounty.com)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bucks\\_County-Pennsylvania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bucks_County-Pennsylvania)

## AGE AND HOLLYWOOD

"I want to grow old without face lifts. They take the life out of a face, the character."

— Marilyn Monroe

As an aging actress, Masha has experienced firsthand how few leading roles are written for women over 40, especially in movies. Typically, women in their 40s are relegated to the background, playing someone's mom or wife.

Risa Bramon Garcia, a casting director, says, "The problem happens when writers and producers don't see women as being sexual after 40 — by sexual I mean complex human beings who are attractive and appealing, vital and powerful, in their 40s and 50s and beyond." <sup>1</sup>

Aging in general makes American society uncomfortable. The camera magnifies wrinkles and imperfections, and audiences don't want the reminder of their aging selves reflected on the faces of movie idols. Many actresses turn to

plastic surgery or to some other method of hiding their age.

Hollywood often casts younger women in older roles: a 32-year-old chief of staff on a hospital show played by a 20-year-old; a 28-year-old actress plays the mother of a 27-year-old actor (Angelina Jolie and Colin Farrell in *Alexander*). In Hollywood's mind, 45 is old, whereas 45 in real life can be an age of coming into one's own.

Slowly, youth obsessed Hollywood is changing. In recent years, there have been notable actresses who have become stars after age 40. Consider Octavia Spencer (from *The Help*) who won an Oscar at age 41. Anna Gunn landed the role of Skyler White on the critically-acclaimed show "Breaking Bad" at age 40, and Melissa Leo won an Oscar at age 50 for her role in *The Fighter*.

1. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/>

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paige-morrow-kimball/aging-out-hollywoods-prob-b-3999544.htm>.

## A FEW NAMES AND TITLES

**Maggie Smith** — Tireless British actress who won an Academy Award for her performance in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. She has been in the Harry Potter movies and is currently in the PBS series *Downton Abbey*.

***Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*** — Animated film produced by Walt Disney productions in 1937. Based on the German fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm, it is the first full-length cel-animated feature film and the earliest in the Walt Disney Animated Classics series. The seven dwarfs are Snow White's protectors; their names in the Disney version are Doc, Grumpy, Happy, Sleepy, Bashful, Sneezy and Dopey. The popularity of the film has led to it being re-released theatrically many times until its home video release in the 1990s.

**Vlad the Impaler** — the Prince of Wallachia (1431-1476) was a member of the House of Draculesti also known by another name, Dracula. He is revered as a folk hero in Romania as well as other parts of Europe for his protection of the Romanian people. His reign was marked by extreme cruelty, especially death by impaling. The name of the vampire Count Dracula in Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula* was inspired by Vlad's patronymic.

**Cassandra** — The daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecuba of Troy. Apollo gave her the power of prophecy in order to seduce her, but when she refused him, he gave her the curse of never being believed. According to legend, Cassandra was beautiful but, because no one believed her ravings, considered insane.



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## *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*

# STUDY QUESTIONS

### Pre-Performance Questions

- 1) How do we perceive the past? Do people tend to celebrate or regret the past?
- 2) Why is there usually strife between generations? What fuels generational differences?
- 3) What is your definition for sibling rivalry? Does the definition change when dealing with step-, half and adopted siblings?
- 4) What is the difference between satire and parody?

### Post-Performance Questions

- 1) How do the set, costume and lighting designs help to tell the story?
- 2) How does the play give homage to Anton Chekhov? What devices are used and where does it reverberate and resonate?
- 3) How would you describe the relationship between Vanya and Sonia? How does Masha fit in with the rest of the family? How would you describe their family?
- 4) What is the connection between the family and the farmhouse?
- 5) How does each character feel about the past and the events that have happened to them? How do they feel about the future?
- 6) How would you describe the character of Cassandra and Spike? How do they fit into the world of the play?
- 7) What fuels the conflict between Nina and Masha?
- 8) What was the result of the costume party? Why was the theme of Snow White chosen? How did the different characters feel after the party took place?

# UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCES

Make your experience unforgettable when you join us for one of these insightful, educational events:

## Insider Perspectives

Get an exclusive insider's perspective of each play when you join us for a professionally-moderated discussion with our creative team. Held at The Academy Theatre, Robert and Judi Newman Center for Theatre Education, 13th St. and Arapahoe. Free.

Oct 10 | 6pm | *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*

## Page to Stage Book Club

Read the book, see the play and join the discussion. Held at the Tattered Cover, 2526 E. Colfax Ave. Free.

Nov 12 | 5:30pm | *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*

## Page to Stage Discussions

Delve into the creative process behind our shows when you join our actors, playwrights and directors for an in-depth discussion about their work. Held at the Tattered Cover, 2526 E. Colfax Ave. Free.

Nov 4 | 12pm | *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*

## Talkbacks with the Cast

Join a fun and engaging discussion with the actors directly after select performances. Free.

Oct 19 | *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*

## Talkbacks with Higher Education Advisory Council

Participate in a topical discussion led by members of our academic community held directly after select performances. Free.

Nov 9 | *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*

## Theatre & Theology Talkbacks

Join Pastor Dan Bollman of the Rocky Mountain Evangelical Lutheran Synod to examine each show through a theological lens directly after select performances. Free.

Nov 11 | *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*

## Theatre Thursday

Enjoy a complimentary cocktail, tasty bar bites, live music and a ticket to the show.

Nov 13 | 5pm | Ricketson Theatre | \$50 with code THURSDAY

*Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*

# WANT TO KNOW MORE?

## The Denver Public Library recommends:

### Read!

*Absurdistan* by Gary Shteyngart

Blending together both humorous and absurd elements, this novel tells the story of Misha, the son of the 1,238th richest man in Russia who just wants to go back to New York City to be with his hot Latina girlfriend. After a family accident, however, he is denied re-entry to the US — but, all hope is not lost, for he tries to get a Belgian passport from a crooked consular officer in the tiny nation of Absurdistan. Will he make it out and figure out if a ‘normal life’ is ever even in the realm of possibility?

### Watch!

*Vanya on 42nd Street* (The Criterion Collection, 2012)

Louis Malle’s final film and critically acclaimed production, this is certainly not one to miss. This performance of David Mamet’s adaptation of the Chekhov classic is taped inside of a run-down theater near Times Square and features a stellar cast (including Julianne Moore, Wallace Shawn and Brooke Smith). The lines between theater and reality are blurred seamlessly in this fantastic adaptation of a play about people wondering what their lives have really been about all this time.

### Listen!

*The Weird Sisters* by Eleanor Brown

This story introduces three sisters, Cordy, Bean and Rosalie, who have returned to their childhood home, and the different ways they react to being reintroduced to their extremely eccentric and literary family. Their father (a professor of Shakespeare that speaks almost entirely in verse) named them after different heroines in the Bard’s plays. Each of them is faced with their own personal challenges in defining what adulthood should be for them, and what their roles in the family are.

### Download!

*Chekhov, 11 Stories* by Anton Chekhov

Go back to the original inspiration for Christopher Durang’s hit absurdist show with this collection of stories. Make sure to read “The Black Monk,” where a man blissfully chats with the vision of a monk in one of Chekhov’s greatest works. Stories also include “The Kiss,” “The Helpmate” and “Expensive Lessons.” Available for download from ebooks.  
[denverlibrary.org](http://denverlibrary.org).



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