



Preview Script

Two Sisters

by Caroline Harding

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Cast

Anya : early 40's, 'free with her favours' to many men, has a limp, drinks a lot
Sonia : mid 40's, stuck in a loveless marriage

Set

The inside of Anya's spartan lodgings in a small Russian town circa 1880. On the floor centre stage is a wooden coffin complete with an easily removable lid. Anya must be able to lie flat inside the coffin, and both Anya and Sonia must be able to sit in it together (with their knees up). In the room is a table with one leg shorter than the other three which is propped up by a copy of the Bible. Also in the room is a wooden chair and a large trunk. Hanging on a wall is a portrait of Anya.

Props

- A Bible
- Two practical room lanterns
- A bottle of vodka
- Several glasses
- Several enamel plates with some cutlery
- A loaf and some slices of bread
- Cheese and a few cucumbers
- Candles in holders (approx 4 – 8)
- Anya's sketches (approx 10 - 15)
- An envelope with a note inside

Sound Effects

- 1) A composite of : a sprightly Russian waltz fading into the sound of howling wind and lashing rain; echoing footsteps on stairs that slowly trudge up, one by one; heavy breathing (out-of-breath); a key in a lock; a door creaking open.
- 2) Two single loud knocks on a door
- 3) One single loud knock on a door
- 4) One single loud knock on a door
- 5) A violin in the room below playing the following :-
 - a) a soft lament, which changes to a sprightly waltz
 - b) another tune
 - c) yet another tune
 - d) a lively jig, which changes to a snatch of the funeral march
 - e) yet one more tune, which stops abruptly
 - f) 'speaking' saying "yes"
 - g) 'speaking' saying "maybe"
 - h) a merry tune which continues through the end of the play to form the curtain call and playout music.

Conventions Used

Text in upper case is shouted, and underlined text is spoken with emphasis.

First Performed

'Two Sisters' was first performed in July 2006 at the Buxton Festival followed by a regional tour of the UK. Caroline Harding and Candida Gubbins (both of whom are successful theatre and TV actors) took the roles of Sonia and Anya, and the production was directed by Chris Gascoyne (best known as Peter Barlow in 'Coronation Street'). It was nominated for two Manchester Evening News Awards at the 24/7 New Writing Festival in Manchester that year for Best Play and Best Performances.

TWO SISTERS

A small village somewhere in Russia, 1880. SFX of: a sprightly Russian waltz fades into the sound of howling wind and lashing rain; echoing footsteps on stairs, slowly trudging up one by one; heavy breathing; a key in a lock; a door creaking open.

Anya enters with a lantern. She has a pronounced limp. The spartan room is in darkness. The audience can just make out the outline of a coffin sitting in the middle of the room.

Anya *(Mumbling under her breath)* What a night! *(With heavy limping footsteps she stumbles about in the dark and sighs heavily).* Isn't it ever going to stop raining!? What a life. *(She lights two lanterns in the room).* I'm too old for this ... there. Pity the poor devils with no roof over their heads tonight ... there, that's better! *(She turns round, sees the coffin, and screams).* What's that doing here? There's a coffin in my room; why is there a coffin in my room? *(Stumbling around).* HELP! HELP! ... where am I? Can't be my room; must be in the wrong room. *(She stumbles to the door).* Number five, that's me! That's definitely me! Oh God! Oh God ... it's a sign; oh no, it's a sign. *(She starts to sob).* I don't want to die alone ... help! ... I'm not ready ... I'm too young, ish ... What do I do now? Pray? Should I pray? ... Erm ... Dear Lord make me an instrument of your ... um ... our ... er ... Our Father who art in ... um ... where's the Bible? It must be here somewhere ... I was given it by ... somebody ... *(She tugs the Bible from under a table leg which sends the table crashing, then opens the Bible and quotes at random)* ... "The Lord loves the Israelites, though they love the sacred raisin cakes" ... what does that mean? *(She flips through and quotes).* "Ceremonial cleansing of a diseased person", I don't think I've got that o Lord! ... "For he knoweth whereof we are made, he remembereth that we are but dust" ... I'm going to be dust! ... Am I going to be dust, o lord?! ... That's that then. I'm doomed. Where's the vodka? *(SFX loud knock, then another loud knock).* If that's you, the Grim Reaper, your honour, sir, could you come another day? It's not convenient at the moment, I think there's been some mistake ... I've probably got at least another ten years in me ... if you could just let the vodka take it's natural course, it'll get me in the end, everyone says ... *(SFX loud knock).* What about Madame Kerlou? Down the passage. She's very old. She won't mind ... André, André, if that's you back from the dead ... I'm sorry, I'm sorry ... my soul's not worth that much, Andre, I've made a shambles of my life, as you can see ... *(SFX another loud knock).* Can I just take a few things with me? *(She starts gathering her belongings randomly)* ... A little drink for the journey ... *(she sees her portrait on the wall)* ... my portrait, you painted it, André, I can't leave that behind ... I ... *(she attempts to prise it off the wall)* ... I can't get it off the wall ... *(she breaks down and sobs).* I don't want to go ... does it hurt?

Sonia *(Offstage)* ANYA! Let me in! What are you up to in there?

Anya Sonia! Thank God! Sonia, Sonia ... I'm coming, wait ...

Sonia *(Offstage)* Are you entertaining the army in here? I wouldn't put it past you.

Anya opens the door and clings to Sonia.

Anya Sonia! Sonia!

Sonia Get off.

Anya *(Pointing at the coffin)* Look, look, look!

Sonia I've got one! I just came round to tell you ... how odd!

Anya Not odd. Not odd. It's a sign!

Sonia What?

Anya Pinch me!

Sonia Pardon?

Anya We'll pinch each other; one of us might wake up.

Sonia walks away, so Anya pinches her.

Sonia Ow! That Hurt *(She pinches Anya).*

Anya Ow! Not that hard! *(She pinches Sonia).*

Sonia Stop it!

Sonia pinches Anya on both arms. Anya pushes Sonia; Sonia pushes Anya to the ground.

Sonia What happened to your chair? Get up!
Anya I told you; I told you we should never have gone to that séance tonight, we've disturbed the spirit world, they're all disrupted and now they're out for vengeance. They want us.
Sonia They want you more like ... I've led a blameless life.
Anya "The end of your life is at hand. Repent".
Sonia I'm sorry?
Anya That's what that séance woman told me, you heard. You get someone trying to contact her dog, and I get "The end of your life is at hand, repent"! ... ridiculous woman, I could tell she didn't like me.
Sonia You drank too much and flirted with her husband
Anya She had it in for me before that ... jealous ... can you reach over for that vodka? I seem to have lost the use of my legs.
Sonia Leg, you mean.
Anya Don't mock the afflicted. I may be lame but I can still turn heads.
Sonia *(She gives Anya a bottle)* Stomachs more like!
Anya How did she manage to get a man like that? She must be twice his age, and portly, with a massive derriere.
Sonia Maybe he likes it.
Anya Didn't look like it to me; I can always tell.
Sonia Expert on other people's husbands.
Anya I've never looked twice at yours.
Sonia Nobody has.
Anya *(Suddenly screaming and getting up)* I've just thought, the coffin, what if it's ... occupied? *(Pause)*. Go on then.
Sonia Don't look at me, it's your funeral.
Anya You've got one too.
Sonia I'm hoping they'll take that husband of mine instead; he's roughly my size.
Anya Just look inside the coffin and tell me ... if there's anything in it.
Sonia I've never known anyone as insignificant as Yakov. No one would notice he'd gone.
Anya *(Moving towards the door)* I'm going to the door, I shall keep it open, in the meantime, you will slide the top off carefully and we'll get ready to run if we have to. *(She exits briefly, then re-enters)* ... I'll have the head start on account of the limp.

Sonia slowly moves towards the coffin lid. SFX of a distant thunder crash is heard. She crosses herself.

Sonia *(In mock horror)* God help us all!
Anya *(Offstage)* Run! Quick! Come on! *(She tiptoes back on, frightened)*. What is it? What is it?
Sonia Completely empty. *(She laughs)*. That was quite convincing don't you think? I should have been an actress.
Anya Don't you care? Aren't you afraid? *(She goes to get the vodka)*.
Sonia Of an empty coffin? Not really. You're not going to die! There's a perfectly simple explanation, which ...
Anya *(Interrupting)* What's that then? Why have we both got coffins in our rooms?!
Sonia Someone's planted it. Probably that séance woman, we didn't tip her enough and you tried to get off with her husband.
Anya It's scared me. It makes me think about, you know. *(She sits on the trunk)*.
Sonia What?
Anya Death; don't you ever wonder about it?
Sonia Not as much as you.
Anya It's important to contemplate ... how bad it could be.
Sonia Alright. How bad do you think it could be? I know you're dying to tell me, so to speak. *(She sits next to Anya on the trunk)*.
Anya It could be worse than anything you'd ever imagined. It could be ... having to face all the people you've ... wronged, or it could be like getting stuck forever having to talk to someone you've been cruel to, like that stutterer Vasily.

Sonia Who?

Anya He worked for Father. In the orchard. We used to run in the opposite direction whenever we saw him. You knew a simple conversation was going to take hours, and then when he did try and talk, we used to just ride over him and make up what he was going to say ... “ggg ggg ggood mmmorning mmm” ... “Good morning my love? You really are forward, Vasily!”. You know who I mean, Andre painted him once, he was fascinated by his nose; spent hours trying to mix the purple.

Sonia That’s it is it?

Anya I’m just trying to offer a possibility. It could be much worse, depending on your misdemeanours, I suppose. Take murder, for instance, what’s the punishment for that do you think?

Sonia Two stutterers talking to each other in a foreign language and you have to translate.

Anya Revenge is mine ...

Sonia What?

Anya In the Bible. It means don’t punish people on earth yourself, because God has something up his sleeve for them when they get there which is more awful than we could ever think of. Take ...

Sonia *(Interrupting)* Perhaps you should do a lecture tour.

Anya ... take murder for instance ...

Sonia Good God! Murder, murder! *(She gets up and walks away)*. Can’t we just for once have a conversation that doesn’t involve death and revenge and people killing each other ... We should be having interesting, witty conversations about famous people we’ve met ...

Anya ... we haven’t met any ...

Sonia ... important books we’ve read ...

Anya ... I haven’t read any ...

Sonia Like those salons in Paris. We should be laughing merrily.

Anya Should we? We haven’t laughed for twenty-five years, why start now? Often I see people in the street with their heads thrown back. Laughing without effort. It’s fascinating to watch. How do they do that, I ask myself? *(She attempts a false abandoned laugh)*.

Sonia Don’t do that!

Pause. Sonia sits on the chair.

Anya If the coffin’s empty, it means it’s for me then, doesn’t it? What do we do now? Just sit and wait perhaps. Or confess our sins. *(She gets up)*. Repent.

Sonia Repentance! Please tell me, Anya, what do I have to repent? Name one thing, anything ... I lead a relentless life of thankless drudgery, grinding and repeating my days with four children and a small husband. My only misdemeanor was to marry a man I didn’t love ... which is more of a terrible mistake than a sin. Pass the vodka.

Anya picks up the bottle and crosses to Sonia.

Anya You didn’t have to marry Yakov.

Sonia Of course I did ... in my predicament.

Anya It was the decent thing to do, you have to admit, taking you on like that ...

Sonia He wanted a skivvy. Someone who could lift the logs. He’s too small ... Where did it all go wrong?

Anya November the twenty-fourth, 1855. Do you know how old Andre would be if he’d lived? Forty-seven! Probably all distinguished and bohemian, although he might have left us by now for younger ones.

Sonia No he wouldn’t; I was too good a cook. Sometimes I could kill him for leaving us. If he wasn’t already dead.

Anya I don’t think he was planning it.

Sonia Congenital heart defect. At twenty-five! Why?

Anya Why what?

Sonia Look at us ... Andre dies, I was pregnant and you threw yourself out of a window and crippled yourself; and have since destroyed your life. In the detached way a scientist would dissect a frog. Pulling out the entrails and walking away from the slab ...

Anya So I’m the scientist and my life is represented by the frog?

Sonia No. Yes. You're the scientist and the contents of the frog is your life.

Anya What's the frog then, metaphorically?

Sonia *(Confused)* Um ... no it's gone ... *(She moves away)*.

Anya If only we could just get on with our lives.

Sonia It was twenty years ago; I don't think either of us will be getting on with anything somehow.

Anya It'll be twenty-five years next month; twenty-five years! Where did it all go? Where did my life go!?

Sonia You poured a lot of it down your throat I should imagine.

Anya So aggravating to have your happiness cut off so young. Perhaps I'll light a candle for him.

Sonia It wouldn't mean anything would it?

Anya Why not?

Sonia Lighting a candle in church when you've no faith.

Anya I never said I had no faith ... I'm coming round to it ...

Sonia Yes, you're getting older, and you think you'd better start getting some points upstairs. From on high. What's happened to your portrait? It's gone all askew. *(Going over to the portrait)*.

Anya I was attempting to get it off the wall.

Sonia *(Looking at the portrait)* Do you think he was any good? As an artist?

Anya Why do you say that?

Sonia He never seemed to be able to do hands. Yours look like limp old cauliflowers.

Anya He was trying to suggest movement. He was trying to convey my inner restlessness via my hands.

Sonia Also you've got one light blue eye and one dark blue eye.

Anya Eyes are like the sea, mercurial, unpredictable.

Sonia Unpredictable paint mixing more like.

Anya He was beautiful though, to look at.

Sonia Historically, many sisters have fallen in love with the same man. It's not unusual. French literature is littered with it.

Anya I wouldn't have thought you'd have much call for literature now.

Sonia Being married to a corn grinder you mean, and having to feed little corn grinder mouths ... or is it Greek?

Anya What?

Sonia Greek literature. It always ends in tragedy. Someone gets poisoned.

Anya Why do you say that?

Sonia Most women in novels end up poisoned or poisoning someone or throwing themselves under a train, or in your case, out of a second floor window, shortening your left leg by four and a half inches. How does one man manage that, do you think?

Anya He had ... that thing.

Sonia Thing?

Anya That 'je ne sais quois'. Like, when I first met him.

Sonia Here we go ... I met him as well. *(She moves to the chair)*.

Anya It was my sixteenth birthday party. He had been bought home by father for me.

Sonia Yes, yes ... Father had bought him home to paint your portrait.

Anya Which is why, he was mine first ... But what I'm trying to say is; at that party, standing in the middle of the room with his hair flopping all over his face, my breath was so sharp, it hurt. I noticed the other women ... it was just something he had. Even the ones who said "I don't know what all the fuss is about", you could see their white knuckles as they talked to him, gripping the chair, scraping at the wood.

Sonia *(Wandering over to the coffin)* Lovely coffin. Beautiful silk. Bit small for you, though. I think they've ordered the wrong size. *(She shouts heavenwards)*. OI! I KNOW SHE'S ONLY A LITTLE DWARF, BLESS HER, BUT SHE'LL NEED ANOTHER COUPLE OF INCHES!

Anya Stop it! You're being blasphemous and disrespectful; you'll invoke the wrath of ... whoever it is who's been sent to get me.

Sonia Who's that then?

Anya I ... I'm not sure.

Sonia I don't think you'll get the top dog. Far too busy to worry about a middle-aged cripple like you. He'll send a minion.

Anya Perhaps you should go and fetch the priest.

Sonia Perhaps you should.

Anya I've got to wait here. It's my destiny.

Sonia I'm not going back out in this thank you very much. You'll just have to confess your sins to me and I'll pass on the pertinent bits. Leave out all the sniffing 'ended up in a garret room'.

Anya You should be comforting me.

Sonia What could you have done? What could you possibly have to confess? Except for sleeping with the odd passing soldier. And that married doctor. And that very young cobbler. And the man who arrived from Yalta with a parcel. Came on the ten o'clock, delivered the parcel, went back on the ten-thirty. Quite a feat even for you. When the grim reaper finally turns up, Anya, he'll have absolutely no information to take upstairs. "I'm sorry, o lord, but I've drawn a complete blank with this one, she seems to have locked herself away in a hovel for the last twenty-four years, with only the occasional foray into a man's wallet".

Anya A girls got to live.

Sonia Not one momento, not one indication of a life, except a couple of portraits with vegetable hands.

Anya There didn't seem any point in carrying on. And then it sort of stuck. Anyway, what about you? Sacrificing yourself. Marrying a man you hardly knew.

Sonia It was the best available practical solution. I carried on. Have carried on. In spite of everything. I noticed that no one was beating a path to your door.

Anya Excuse me, I could have married that Frederick Von Whatsit ...

Sonia A fifty-two year-old pock marked, clapped out, absinthe-ridden old horse-thief. The man who bankrupted our father, took our home, causing our mother to lose her marbles.

Anya He was always quite nice to me. Anyway it was Father who tried to sue him, but Frederick Von Dusseldorf won.

Sonia Mother never liked him.

Anya Mother might have been the greatest beauty for miles around, but she was a snob. We didn't have any friends. When they lost all their money, the only person to come to their rescue was little Erma, a woman who neglected her own young family to wet nurse us, bowing and scraping to them for years. Talk about decency. She found us those rooms above that restaurant, she nursed Mother, fed her soup from the only silver spoon left so she could preserve her gentility. Cared for her until she expired from embarrassment. Huh! At sixteen I had a glittering party ... by the following year I was teaching that bunch of ingrates at the village school! For board and lodging! You were quick enough to move in on Andre; offering yourself as a housekeeper! ... got yourself right in there. Why didn't I think of it?

Sonia You couldn't cook. Or sew. Or clean up after yourself, let alone anyone else, and those are the requirements of the job. Mind you, you couldn't teach either.

Anya True.

Sonia Which is probably why you became a professional mistress. Which is probably what finished Father off when he found out.

Anya I can't help being too shallow to have had a proper education. They left us to our own resources. Anyway I've always been very discreet.

Sonia Discreet? Women stand in front of their husbands when they see you coming, barricading the way.

Anya I only became ... what I became, after we lost Andre; I would have remained faithful to him for the rest of my life. I loved him with everything I had. And he loved me. He loved us both.

Sonia Yes, although you were a bit too much at first.

Anya Too much?

Sonia Always bouncing up and down like an over-eager puppy ... not that you'd know it now to look at you. Lost your bounce now. It fell into that bottle.

Anya An over-eager puppy? Huh! It must have grown on him ... you were all cool and swanish ... swanlike; you were a swan gliding about ... he liked the bounce!

Sonia And the begging ... "Love me, love me". (*She does a begging dog impression*).

Anya I loved him, what was the point in hiding it?

Sonia Mother always used to say you should keep a little back; you should say to yourself, “I’m young, I’m beautiful, and I’ve got a little secret”.

Anya I knew her secret. Marry money, carry on regardless even though you’ve disappointed everyone with your coldness. I knew her little secret - Arrogance and Avarice.

Sonia That’s two little secrets.

Anya She was jealous of us. She was always trying to blow out our candles because they shone brighter than hers.

Sonia How fascinating professor.

Anya No listen! She noticed that Father turned to us more. We were what he thought she was when he met her. We were a clean slate, a new possibility with the same face. Or at least similar features.

Sonia One of the many things I’ve noticed about you over the years is that you sound knowledgeable and convincing on subjects you know absolutely nothing about. Spouting ridiculous rubbish with a straight face.

They part. Anya sits on the trunk, Sonia sits on the chair.

Anya Do you know what the scythe’s for?

Sonia Where are we going now?

Anya The grim reaper’s scythe is for gathering souls. In a general sweep, then they sort out the good from the bad when you get up there. I think we should have paid more attention to God, Sonia, we’ve completely ignored him.

Sonia You don’t have to turn to him until the very last minute, anyway.

Anya How do you know?

Sonia It’s in the bible somewhere isn’t it? “I’ll always welcome a sinner, if they confess”. I’ve often wondered why people have sat in that confessional box all their lives, and not realised that apparently, you can have running credit, and pay for it in one job lot at the end. It’s unfair really. Take little Erma, sewing all those kneelers, kneeling on them, making cakes, dusting down the priest. Years of blind faith just so you can get in upstairs when really you could have had a hedonous orgy all your life and said “Sorry about that”, the day before.

Anya Some people are just happy he’s there; believe he’s there. It gives them strength. That’s wonderful, don’t you think?

Sonia Whoever he is I’m punishing him. He’s sweating it out up there to see whether he can break me.

Anya Why would he want to break you?

Sonia He took away my child.

Anya I don’t think you can blame God for losing little Elise. The others are a comfort, aren’t they, surely? Raising children has some sort of purpose.

Sonia Children break your heart ... nobody tells you that. Worrying about them, vigils over them during illnesses ... the weight of the responsibility makes you old ... *(Pause. She goes to Anya).* Do you remember the night she was born?

Anya Of course. I was there

Sonia Yes, yes you were. She was such a tiny little thing.

Anya A month early.

Sonia Nobody tells you. About that feeling.

Anya Unconditional love.

Sonia No. Fear. Whoever it is up there that moves the stars around ... they could take everything from you. It puts you in a very weak position. Before, you didn’t care, but now, you have everything to lose. She had his dark hair, his black, black eyes; those massive eyes. When they looked at you, you forgave them everything. The laugh, the one dimple on the left cheek, the same kink in the right ear. She’d only just learnt to walk, do you remember? We put a small object in each hand and she walked alone, she thought she was holding our hands ... but she was doing it on her own. Then the following week, the coughing, that horrible bark ...

Anya ... we did everything we could ...

Sonia ... the endless nights, boiling kettles, pacing the room, the Doctor, the same Doctor who had pronounced Andre dead ... “I’m sorry for your troubles, Sara”, he hadn’t even remembered my name ... I couldn’t let her go ... my arms wouldn’t let me do it. “You can sit with her tonight”,

he said, "but tomorrow, I'll have to take her". I sat there all night in the dark not letting anyone in ...

Anya ... yes ...

Sonia ... reliving every moment of her tiny little life. Trying to burn the memories in. For weeks afterwards I had to find the same weight to carry around with me. It was no comfort, but a physical need. One and three quarter small bags of flour, wrapped up in a shawl. That's what she weighed. One and three quarter bags of flour ... I wonder what she'd weigh now. She might be an enormous baker's wife, helping herself to the cakes! Or perhaps she would have inherited Andre's artistic abilities; perhaps we'd all be living in a beautiful villa by the sea ... Whenever the winter's bad or there's an outbreak, I watch the children quietly for signs. I don't go to them and comfort them if they catch a chill, because I feel angry, angry that they have made me love them. I am wondering which one will be taken next. Which one would I be prepared to lose? Is it Nikolai who follows my every move, waiting for a smile; or Peter, so small and quiet, who can make anything out of two pieces of wood and some string, and shows me the results so proudly; or little Katya, so fearless, who laughs at the world, and fights any corner she's backed into; or Sasha, dogged and hardworking. They think I'm indifferent to them, and keep a respectful distance, even though I know they love me with the same passion as little Elise. But they appear strong. Good peasant stock, thank God. *(The silence gives way to the sound of a melancholy violin. A soft lament).* What's that?

Anya It's a violin.

Sonia Where's it coming from???!!!

Anya It's Krepikov. Downstairs. Number four. He's come back from the Opera. He's second violin.

The violin carries on. Sonia stamps her foot on the floor and calls out downstairs.

Sonia PLAY US SOMETHING A BIT MERRIER, KRAPOV!

Anya Krepikov.

Sonia KREPIKOV! WE NEED CHEERING UP! *(The violin carries on).*

Anya Krepikov's not in the mood tonight.

Suddenly the music changes to a sprightly waltz and Sonia whirls herself around, singing loudly along.

Anya You're very reckless tonight; you're starting to worry me.

Sonia We were good dancers. I can't remember the last time I danced.

Anya I can.

Sonia Dance the man's part with me, how we learnt ... just roughly, you don't have to over-exert yourself.

Anya I couldn't over-exert myself if there was a gun to my head. *(Sonia hums the waltz as they dance. Anya eventually stumbles).* I'm a cripple you know; you don't ever seem to make allowances.

Sonia Do you remember that stable hand ... Volto?

Anya Yes, he was wayward, his father kept having to apologise for him.

Sonia He taught us that flip, do you remember, one summer? You make a run up and then sort of somersault. We were supposed to be sketching but ...

Anya ... I was quite good at sketching.

Sonia It's all in the preparation, of course.

Anya What are you doing? You'll kill yourself, or is that the point?

Sonia prepares and executes a bad somersault, crashing down.

Sonia Something like that, anyway. Go on, you have a go ...

Anya I'm a cripple! The only thing I'm good at is swigging vodka and having a bit of a lie down.

The violin strikes up again.

Sonia Krepikov's off again. *(She sits next to Anya).* Have you slept with him as well?

Anya Just the once. He's not as beautiful as his music. Poor as well unfortunately.

The violin still plays; they listen.

Anya Perhaps you should have a love affair.

Sonia Oh, I've had enough of all that. The only reason I've had all those children is to get out of intimacy for unlimited amounts of time.

Anya It's not that bad ... you can forget yourself sometimes, an almost loving embrace, you can pretend ... anything, if you close your eyes.

Sonia What a strange person you are.

Anya The last affair I had was two months ago; a jeweller. He had a squint. He worked such long hours trying to hold a magnifier in his eye. I struck up a conversation in a café because I thought he was winking at me. I told him he should try swallowing a few diamonds, bringing them home and selling them on, or at least give me a couple. I wouldn't have minded. They would have washed. I'm down to my last few kopeks now. This is my last best dress. I'm in the wrong game really, considering I'm sixteen and a recluse.

Sonia Yes, that would lessen your chances considerably.

Anya Perhaps I'll go to church.

Sonia Lighting candles? Praying for money?

Anya No, there might be a few nice gentlemen there. Perhaps kneeling in the pews. I could go close possibly, and do some quiet sobbing. *(She gets up)*. I know, you be him, and I'll be me.

Sonia *(Getting up)* Who am I?

Anya A kindly gentleman in a pew.

Sonia Why can't I be you?

Anya Because I'm me anyway, and I need the practice, being me. Engaging with a gentleman.

Sonia *(Starting to kneel)* How old am I?

Anya No more than sixty-five.

Sonia *(Lecherously grabbing her)* Come here my dear, you're a nice young thing ...

Anya Get off! We're in church!

Sonia *(Kneeling)* My dear, dear wife; how I miss you. I love you. They'll never be anyone but you. *(Anya kneels down next to her and pretends to cry)*. Are you alright my dear?

Anya *(As if startled)* Oh! I didn't see anyone else here! I thought I was alone! Forgive me!

Sonia Can I offer you any assistance? *(She helps her to her feet)*.

Anya Oh! You're too kind! That's a lovely fob watch.

Sonia Yes, my wealthy wife gave it to me just before she died. Now I'm all alone, rattling around a large house. Just me and the servants.

Anya Don't you have any children?

Sonia No, none of those unfortunately.

Anya How sad. What kind eyes you have, they remind me of someone. Oh yes, my dead husband.

Sonia Really!

Anya Yes. Alack alas alas alack alas. Yes. He was a distinguished officer in the cavalry. He met an unfortunate end.

Sonia How did he die, pray?

Anya I'm not sure ... I mean ... He ... he ... I cannot speak about it.

Sonia Perhaps he fell off his horse in the course of his honourable duty. Saving his valet's life but striking his head upon a stone, thus rendering himself dead.

Anya Yes. I think you may be right. That's very likely.

Sonia Which regiment was he with?

Anya Pardon?

Sonia Which Cavalry regiment was your husband with?

Anya Um. He'd moved about a lot. Here and there.

Sonia I'm not sure that's possible madam; you'll have to look into it. Well, where can I assist you to madam?

Anya I am for the train station. I am on my way back to Kiev, which is where my shabby yet genteel abode abides.

Sonia Do have tea with me before you depart. My man and horses are at the church gates awaiting me.

Anya You are too kind.

Sonia Perhaps you'll allow me to perform as many acts of indecency on your person as a man my age of sixty-four is capable of, in exchange for my fob watch.

Anya I believe I'll need a great deal more than your fob watch; thank you good afternoon.

Sonia No thank you. Good afternoon.

They come out of 'character'.

- Sonia** You'll have to get your facts straight, and you'll have to go to the next town, everyone around here knows you and has probably had you.
- Anya** My work is taking me further afield. Perhaps I'll move.
- Sonia** Where to?
- Anya** A city perhaps. Rich pickings there I should think.
- Sonia** You'd never survive.
- Anya** How do you know?
- Sonia** You're the weakest person I've ever met. You've no stamina.
- Anya** I'm frail and womanly. I can't help it if I wasn't cut out to be a log-chopping child-bearer.
- Sonia** Go to Moscow and seek your forty year-old limping fortune, I'm sure you'll be a dazzling success.
- Anya** You've put me off now.
- Pause.*
- Sonia** I'm starving, What have you got?
- Anya** Vodka.
- Sonia** *(Picking up a plate)* How old's this bread?
- Anya** I've no idea, press your finger in.
- Sonia** It'll do. *(She picks up another plate).* Bit of cheese. Couple of cucumbers ... *(Clanking the plates, she starts to gets into the coffin).*
- Anya** What are you doing?!
- Sonia** Having a last supper.
- Anya** What are you doing in my coffin!?
- Sonia** It's quite comfortable. Come on, try it on for size.
- Anya** Are you mad?
- Sonia** Of course. *(Anya starts to clamber in).* Steady.
- Anya** Move up a bit then ...
- Sonia** Nobody seems to have taught you the art of getting into a coffin gracefully. What do we look like do you think?
- Anya** Couple of fools.
- Sonia** All we need now is a paddle each. *(The violin plays).* I wonder what the time is. I suppose I should be getting back to my coffin. The little miller will be waiting up for me and looking all doleful, or asleep and making all those hideous noises men make at night ... "Why don't you ever sit with me at night, Sonia", he says, "Everyone told me when I married you, you were such a catch, even if you were carrying another man's child ... but it's so lonely, so lonely". I couldn't agree more, I say. *(She gets out of the coffin).*
- Anya** Don't go yet.

... in this Preview Script, the remainder of the play has been deleted from here ...

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