

The Lady With the Dog



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ANTON CHEKHOV

Anton Chekhov is considered one of the great writers and playwrights of the 19th century, and one of the greatest fiction writers of all time. Though perhaps best known for plays like [The Seagull](#) and [The Cherry Orchard](#), Chekhov wrote over 70 short stories and also worked as a medical doctor throughout his life, often exclusively for poor patients at little or no charge. He also supported his family, which struggled with debts left to them by Chekhov's father, both from his medical practice and from writing short, humorous sketches under pseudonyms. With the encouragement of editors and fellow writers, Chekhov began to compose more serious stories under his own name and eventually broke into playwriting. He contracted tuberculosis around 1884, which prompted him to take several trips for his health that influenced his writing—one to Ukraine in 1887, after which he wrote *The Steppe*, and another to Yalta in 1897, where he then moved to try to improve his health. "The Lady with the Dog," sometimes translated as "The Lady with the Lapdog" or "The Lady with the Toy Dog," is one of the more famous stories he wrote while in Yalta. In 1901 he married the actress Olga Knipper but they largely lived apart, him in Yalta for his health and her in Moscow to pursue her career. After his death in 1904 from complications related to his tuberculosis, Chekhov's stories began to be translated into English. His work has gone through several periods of critical re-evaluation, with voices as diverse as Raymond Carver and Virginia Woolf praising the subtlety of his writing style and his ability to lay bare the complexity of human emotions. Chekhov's plays also had an influence on the "Method" acting movement, and in particular Lee Strasberg's Actors Studio.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Chekhov lived in the Russian Empire when it was still very much under the rule of the Tsars. He grew up after the last of its most radical reforms, the emancipation of the serfs in 1860, had taken place, and worked during a period of relative peace, limited economic gains, and rising nationalist sentiment. The ideological doctrine of "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality," otherwise known as the "Official Nationality," came back into fashion after a period of liberalization, making Russia more insular and less trusting of Western or European influences. Increased industrial output led to a rising, if disenfranchised, middle class and crowding in Russian cities, and the problems that would eventually lead to the October Revolution were already brewing by the time Tsar Nicholas II came to power in 1884. Chekhov wouldn't live to see the end of the Russian

Empire, or even really any of the crisis that destabilized it in the early 20th century, but the restlessness, disconnect of the upper classes, and poverty of the working people do feature in his work.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Chekhov wrote his short stories at the tail end of what is considered the "Golden Age" of Russian fiction. He wasn't quite a contemporary of notable Russian writers like Pushkin, Gogol, Lermontov, Dostoyevsky, or Tolstoy, but he was in many ways continuing and complicating the tradition of short stories like Gogol's "The Overcoat," Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades," and Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilyich." These exhibit a very sharp, if ironic, observational style and deal with ordinary yet complex and often hypocritical characters, struggling to navigate the trials of Russian society, money troubles, and matters of the heart. Chekhov's own work often drops the supernatural elements of Gogol and Pushkin in favor of more emotional and narrative ambiguity. Chekhov's fiction is unconcerned with teaching a moral lesson or providing a sense of satisfaction and closure, but instead works to evoke the emotional peaks and valleys of life as ordinary people live it. This more "realistic" style paved the way for the modernist fiction of writers like James Joyce and Katherine Mansfield. Some of Chekhov's other most famous stories include "The Bet," "Vanka," "The Black Monk," "The Bishop," and "Ward No. 6."

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Lady with the Dog (Russian: *Дама с собачкой*)
- **When Written:** 1899
- **Where Written:** Yalta, Crimea
- **When Published:** 1899
- **Literary Period:** Russian Romanticism
- **Genre:** Drama/Romance
- **Setting:** The seaside resort town of Yalta, the capital of the Russian Empire Moscow, the Russian city of St. Petersburg
- **Climax:** Gurov looks into a mirror and realizes both that he has grown old and is in love for the first time in his life.
- **Antagonist:** The contradictions of the human heart, Russian society
- **Point of View:** Third person limited

EXTRA CREDIT

Chekhov's Gun. One of the more famous terms associated with Chekhov is the idea of "Chekhov's Gun." This is a principle stating that story elements should only be introduced for a

specific dramatic purpose—that is, if the audience sees a gun hanging on the wall at the beginning of the story, it should go off before the story ends. While “The Lady with the Dog” doesn’t have a recurring story element as obvious as a pistol, every detail in the story, including the little Pomeranian, is doing some setting or character development work.

Transmedia Property. “The Lady with the Dog” has been adapted into diverse mediums: a ballet, several movies, a musical, and a notable Joyce Carol Oates short story told from Anna’s point of view, called “The Lady with the Pet Dog.”



PLOT SUMMARY

Dmitri Gurov has been in Yalta for a two weeks when a mysterious woman appears in town with her white Pomeranian. No one knows anything about the woman, and people refer to her simply as “the lady with the little dog.”

Gurov, out of a mix of curiosity, boredom, and the desire for the pleasures of an affair, strikes up a conversation with the woman, whose name is Anna Sergeyevna Von Diderits, one night at dinner. The two trade a little bit about their backgrounds: he’s a banker from Moscow who’s been married with three children for some time, and gave up on his artistic training as a singer; she’s from St. Petersburg, is only recently married, and seems quite disconnected from whatever her husband does for the government. They part, but that evening Gurov has trouble getting Anna out of his thoughts.

A week later, the two go to see a steam ship bring new people to Yalta, and then linger long after the crowds have dispersed. They later return to Gurov’s hotel room, in which he dispels a great deal of fear on Anna’s part that he is losing respect for her. The two consummate their relationship and then drive out to the scenic suburb of Oreanda to watch the sun rise. Both are incredibly moved by the scene, and soon begin a routine of dining together, stealing kisses in the gardens, sleeping together, and driving out late at night to see the natural beauty of the landscape.

Eventually word reaches Anna that her husband is sick, and she returns to St. Petersburg. Gurov goes back to Moscow shortly after, thinking that the affair has run its course. However, Gurov struggles to get Anna off his mind. The world of his wife, children, and Moscow society more generally loses all of its luster for him. In fact, he comes to see it as a hypocritical, shallow farce in comparison to his time full of true and tender emotions with Anna.

Gurov comes up with a pretext to go to St. Petersburg, where he stakes out Anna’s house but doesn’t see her. Later that evening, he attends a premiere at the opera in the hopes of spotting Anna, and in fact does. She appears to him completely unremarkable and lost in the crowd, yet remains the source of

all his happiness nonetheless.

Gurov confronts Anna outside of the opera, badly shocking her. Anna confesses that she’s also been unable to put Gurov out of her mind and promises that she will come to Moscow to see him if he will only leave the opera before people spot them together.

Anna is true to her word and begins coming to Moscow semi-regularly. The two rekindle their affair without any real consequences or threats of exposure. The strength of the relationship and the fact that they’ve been able to successfully keep it secret completely changes Gurov’s outlook on life—he is now convinced that people’s personal lives exist in the most secret parts of themselves, and is somewhat amazed he’s able to handle the double-life of his old Moscow relationships as well as his truest, best life with Anna.

Neither Gurov nor Anna, however, is happy that their actual marriages and the geographical distance they are keeping them apart. After some time, the two meet at Anna’s hotel room in Moscow, desperately searching for a solution that will bring them together more permanently. The hardest part of their relationship is just beginning, they realize, but Gurov feels love so strongly for the first time in his life that he is ready to try and surmount those complications.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov – Dmitri Gurov is the protagonist of *The Lady with the Dog*. An unhappily married banker on vacation by himself in Yalta when he meets Anna, he decides to start an affair with her more out of boredom than anything else. He is closer to 40 than 20, with two sons and a daughter at home, as well as a history of womanizing. However, Gurov finds Anna to be different from his past affairs, which were simple and pleasurable until they weren’t. He doesn’t quite understand Anna, and seems to think that her opinion of him is mistakenly good, yet connect to some larger, more transcendental love through his relationship with her. Gurov finds himself unable to shake his feelings for Anna after he returns to Moscow, and gradually his entire life seems to be a hypocritical lie without Anna in it. Gurov goes to St. Petersburg to restart the affair, finding himself all the more in love with Anna as they have to be increasingly secretive about their relationship. Gurov grows to see this secret love as far more valuable and true than anything else he’s experienced in his life, and he ends the story trying to find a way to be with Anna permanently. Gurov goes from chasing transitory pleasures that stave off his boredom to pursuing a genuine, tender connection with a woman who both sees him as and inspires him to be better than he is—a task all the more urgent for how comparatively late in life he’s fallen in love for the first time.

Anna Sergeevna Von Dideritz – Anna is the titular character of the story, the Lady with the dog. She travels to Yalta ostensibly for a vacation her that husband will join later on. Instead, she begins an affair with Dmitri Gurov that persists after both have left Yalta. She is described as fair-haired, with charming **grey** eyes, of medium height, and, most importantly, young. Married at 20, she's closer to being in school than to having children. While Gurov initiates their affair as a practiced womanizer, she likely responds to it as the first significant thing that's happened to her since her marriage. She cares deeply what Gurov thinks of her and thinks little of herself. Anna begins the story more or less already in the place that Gurov ultimately ends up—feeling her inner life deeply, desperate to escape her day-to-day existence with her “flunkey” husband, and hungry to be really, truly loved. She is tormented by how those desires conflict with the societal expectations of her place in the world, and throughout the affair in Yalta, she interprets her feelings for Gurov as the torments of the Devil. Gradually, however, Anna goes from passively accepting the tragedy of her situation, calling the end of the affair in Yalta the “finger of Destiny,” to actively traveling to Moscow to be with Gurov and trying to pursue a solution that will allow them to be together without having to hide it.

Gurov's Wife – Gurov's Wife has been married to Gurov for over ten years at the start of the story and had three children with him, but she does not come with him to Yalta. She is described as tall and erect, with dark eyebrows and a cold, dignified manner. While she considers herself to be very intellectual, Gurov thinks now that she's rather affected, unintelligent, and lacks any real feeling. She seems at least partially aware of Gurov's feelings for Anna after he returns to Moscow, but never directly confronts him about his infidelities. She is mostly an impediment to Gurov's happiness before, during and (one presumes) after the end of the story.

Anna's Husband – Anna's husband is some sort of official in St. Petersburg who means to come down to vacation in Yalta with Anna, but grows ill and never makes it. When Gurov sees him at the opera in St. Petersburg, he is described as “tall and stooping,” someone who seems to be continually bowing and sucking up to his superiors. He has a bald patch and comic side-whiskers, and seems proud of the very small badge he sports on his coat. This description is in keeping with the fact that Anna considers him “a flunkey,” who will get continually pushed around and never rise in his career. He both believes and doesn't believe Anna's lies about why she is traveling to Moscow when she goes to see Gurov.

Gurov's Daughter – Gurov's daughter is the one child who still lives at home with Gurov and Gurov's Wife. The only information given about her is that she is twelve years old. Neither she nor her two brothers, who are at boarding school, are described in the story. Gurov manages to have a warm relationship with his daughter, however, in one scene walking

her to school and answering questions about science while being completely occupied with thoughts of Anna at the same time.

MINOR CHARACTERS

The Pomeranian – The Pomeranian is the titular dog in “The Lady with the Dog,” which Anna brings with her on vacation to Yalta. Chekhov never reveals its actual name, and the only detail given about it is that it is a small, white dog.

An Official – The official is one of Gurov's many Moscow acquaintances. Gurov begins to tell him about Anna, but the importance and significance of their relationship passes right over the official's head.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



TRUTH IN DECEPTION

Anton Chekhov's short story “The Lady with the Dog” centers on the passionate affair between Dmitri Gurov and Anna Sergeevna. The two meet while on vacation in the city of Yalta, and what begins as a lovely yet ostensibly fleeting romance turns into a deeply meaningful relationship—one that, because both parties are married, must be maintained in secret. As Gurov in particular navigates his feelings in society beyond Yalta, he comes to feel that the “kernel” of his life with Anna is, while outwardly concealed, the most essential thing about him. Through this revelation, Chekhov's story suggests the potential for truth to be mined even from deception. At the same time, the tale's ambiguous ending questions whether such truth can survive in the light of day.

Chekhov immediately establishes Gurov's tendency towards hypocrisy and self-deception in order to highlight the transformative effect Anna has on his life. Having had many past affairs, Gurov “had been taught enough by bitter experience to call [women] anything he liked, and yet he could not have lived without the ‘inferior race’ even for two days.” He asserts that women are beneath him even as he craves their constant company. Because Gurov has for so long sought to escape his stilted marriage in meaningless affairs, at first this is what he imagines with Anna. The thought of a “swift, fleeting love affair” takes “possession of him,” though this will prove to be a sort of self-deception; his romance with Anna will be nothing like the affairs of his past. In fact, Gurov comes to feel that the “kernel” of his life with Anna is, while outwardly

concealed, the most essential thing about him. That Gurov grows to feel genuine love for the first time in his life with Anna inherently means that, in searching for fulfillment in haphazard affairs, he has been deceiving himself for years.

Though Gurov and Anna have found genuine, truthful connection with each other, the maintenance of their relationship requires a continuous, ever-broadening web of lies. While taking his daughter to school, for example, Gurov is outwardly explaining thunderstorms to his child while inwardly reflecting on his love for Anna and on this complex double life he leads. Both he and Anna must also lie to their spouses in order to see each other. Anna tells her husband that she is visiting a doctor when she goes to Moscow, while Gurov tells his wife he is going to St. Petersburg to “solicit for a certain young man.”

Anna and Gurov even feel that they are deceiving *each other*. Gurov fears Anna sees him as a better man than he really is, calling him “kind, extraordinary lofty; obviously, he had appeared to her not as he was in reality and therefore he had involuntarily deceived her.” Anna, meanwhile, worries that Gurov views her as only a common woman, despite his repeated assurances to the contrary. Somewhat paradoxically, it seems, their attempts to preserve the truth they’ve found together leads only to more paranoia and deception.

What’s more, the story suggests that *everyone* is engaging in some form of deceit. Gurov comes to believe that everything “which constituted the core of his life, occurred in secret from others, while everything that made up his lie, his shell, in which he hid in order to conceal the truth [...] all this was in full view.” He applies this logic to the world around him: “And he judged others by himself, did not believe what he saw, and always supposed that every man led his own real and very interesting life under the cover of secrecy, as under the cover of night.” Gurov’s deception, then, has opened his eyes to the truth of the society in which he lives—a truth that, ironically, suggests that everyone’s outward “shell” is a lie.

By the end of the tale, maintaining their façade has clearly begun to take its toll on Gurov and Anna—they meet to discuss a future in which they talk “about how to rid themselves of the need for hiding, for deception.” Both seem to realize that they cannot continue as they are, and that, though they have found truth in deception, that their love cannot continue to bloom in darkness. Whether their truth will survive the light, however, is notably left unsaid. By ending the story ambiguously—with no resolution as to how Gurov and Anna will maintain their relationship—Chekhov leaves the reader to question how much of people’s secret inner worlds are meaningful specifically *because* they are unknown—and untainted—by the rest of the world.



SOCIETY AND MORALITY

Despite the illicit nature of Gurov and Anna’s affair, Chekhov refuses to pass clear moral judgment on his characters’ actions. Instead, he makes a distinction between the social expectations placed on the lovers—which the story presents as petty and deeply hypocritical—and the actual, positive change that the Gurov and Anna have on each other through the deepening of their allegedly immoral relationship. In doing so, “The Lady with the Dog” suggests the arbitrary nature of societal conceptions of morality. What’s more, that fact that society in Chekhov’s story would keep those with genuine love apart ultimately serves as a condemnation of shallow societal mores.

Gurov and Anna’s affair notably begins while they are separated from the judging eyes of society. Though there is anxiety that someone will spot them in Yalta—Chekhov writes that though they kiss in broad daylight, such displays of affection are often accompanied by “furtive looks around”—their relationship is able to grow in large part because they have the space to explore their feelings without fear of repercussions. That something so genuine can form in such circumstances suggests the oppressive nature of social expectations, which would have quashed any burgeoning attraction between Gurov and Anna before it had a chance to begin. As such, they both assume their relationship must end when they leave the fantasy of Yalta for their real lives Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Moscow is cold and dark, distinctly contrasting with the brightness of Yalta in Gurov’s memory. This further suggests the oppressive, isolating nature of the society keeping Gurov and Anna apart. Chekhov describes Gurov as a Muscovite, who “gradually became immersed in Moscow life” upon his return—“drawn to restaurants, clubs, to dinner parties, celebrations”—yet ultimately unsatisfied by shallow social preening. Indeed, as Gurov’s longing for Anna grows, so, too, does his frustration with the meaninglessness of his well-to-do Moscow existence: “Frenzied card-playing, gluttony, drunkenness, constant talk about the same thing,” Chekhov writes. “Useless matters and conversations about the same thing took for their share the best part of one’s time, the best of one’s powers, and what was left in the end was some sort of curtailed, wingless life...” Here, Gurov directly connects aimless societal pleasures with the curtailing of life—that is, they are distractions that prevent people from truly living.

By the time that Gurov sees Anna again in St. Petersburg, his sense of propriety and societal values have radically shifted. He’s lost all taste for Moscow social life and instead is filled with joy upon seeing “this little woman, in no way remarkable, lost in a provincial crowd.” The usual, expected trappings of a love story—of a woman standing out in a crowd—don’t matter. When the two finally have a chance to talk in the stairwell of the opera house, Gurov embraces Anna heedless of the

schoolboys coming up the stairs. In that moment, he's overcome his estimation of societal appearances and taken a risky step towards a more genuine relationship. Gurov's journey into love with Anna is a journey of overcoming the societal expectations that have made him unhappy towards being worthy of the woman who *does* make him happy (even if that means sneaking around).

The characters in "The Lady with the Dog" are knotty, ambiguous people who nonetheless feel genuine love for each other and allow themselves to be guided by that love. By creating a realistic, complex understanding of human actions, Chekhov rejects a binary world in which truth and faithfulness are inherently good and lying and cheating are inherently bad. In this world, people can only gauge their relative worth against their understanding of themselves.



TIME, MORTALITY, AND PURPOSE

There is little urgency in Gurov and Anna's lives at the beginning of the story. When he first sees Anna, Gurov has already been on vacation for two weeks "and was used to it," Chekhov writes, highlighting the character's idle boredom. Later, while talking with Anna for the first time during dinner, Gurov comments that he is "dragging" through his second week in Yalta, to which Anna responds, "The time passes quickly, and yet it is so boring here!" Neither appears to have a strong sense of purpose guiding their days in Yalta, instead attempting merely to escape, through a change of scenery, the unhappiness that clings to their city selves and relationships. Nor does either take much notice of or pleasure in the present moment; the lack of genuine feeling makes their days paradoxically drag even as they fly by. Only upon embarking on their romance do the two become more acutely aware of the passage of time, and, it follows, of the fact that they have met each other a little too late—both already married, and Gurov into middle age. Through the resultant poignancy of their affair, the story ultimately suggests the importance of actively pursuing relationships that make life meaningful.

Chekhov imbues the story with a sense of time through his repeated references to the changing seasons—Anna and Gurov's affair begins in summer and breaks off in autumn (Gurov tells himself, after he has put Anna on a train from Yalta back to St. Petersburg, that their parting is as natural as summer fading to fall), and their decision to try to be together more permanently occurs in winter. This seasonal cycle reflects the development of their relationship—which begins as a casual romance neither party expects to last beyond their stay in Yalta, turns an ongoing relationship that nonetheless must remain a secret, and finally becomes something that the two want to make permanent.

Even as the tenor of their relationship is subtly impacted by the passage of time, Gurov and Anna don't seem to acknowledge

any temporal restraints until the end of the story. At first, the couple remain relatively passive and idle. They fall into a steady rhythm in Yalta, developing a routine of dining, walking on the embankment, and looking at the sea together. Though they expect Anna's husband to arrive any day, and know they both must leave Yalta soon, there is a sense of timelessness to their love that belies the reality of how limited their time together actually is.

This changes at the end of the story when, after having engaged in their secret affair for months, Gurov looks in the mirror and notices that he has **gray** hair. Beyond underscoring how much time has passed and how much he has changed since meeting Anna, such evidence of aging—and, it follows, mortality—prompts Gurov to lament wasting so much of his life on shallow affairs that had been "anything else, but not love," and how "only now, when his head was gray, had he really fallen in love as one ought to—for the first time in his life." Though their partnership in Yalta felt like time out of time, this moment shows Gurov beginning to realize that they cannot continue passively engaging in their affair and must instead take active steps to pursue the life they want together before it is too late.

Gurov and Anna's response to knowing—and fearing—how short their time together might be is to love each other "like tender friends" and "forg[i]ve everything in the present." Such deep, unconditional care, the story suggests, is in part borne from awareness of the fleeting nature of life and romance. Not only does love imbue the passage of time with a sense of meaning, then, but acceptance of the inevitable march of time makes love all the more powerful.



THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF LOVE

Both Anna and Gurov interpret their initial affair in Yalta as a bout of madness—Gurov approaches

Anna when the thought of a romance with an unknown woman "suddenly [takes] possession of him," and Anna outright says to Gurov before they sleep together that she "couldn't control [herself] any longer" and that she is going "about as if in a daze, as if I'm out of my mind." Each character initially views the affair with a certain sense of shame, which they wish to excuse by insisting they are not in control of their actions. Both further question the validity of the other's desire; Anna, for instance, repeatedly asks Gurov to reassure her that she is not a trite, low woman because of her infidelity. Gurov, meanwhile, never quite knows Anna's mind and is constantly under the impression that the way she and other women see him isn't true to who he really is. It is only slowly, over the course of resuming their affair in Moscow, that both break through the self-centered passion they feel and begin seeing themselves the way the other sees them. By showing how another's affection can better one's own self-conception, the story suggests the transformative power of love.

Gurov and Anna meet because they have, separately, gone to Yalta to temporarily get away from their spouses and obligations at home. Anna stands out against the women Gurov has previously slept with and also among the vacationing society in Yalta specifically because she is a young woman with no companion but her dog. Her isolation is part of Gurov's attraction to her, yet once they begin their affair, Gurov finds her somewhat inscrutable. She often seems contradictory, and he does not understand her or what she wants. Gurov also has difficulty understanding what Anna sees in him; she thinks him "kind, extraordinary lofty," and when they first go their separate ways after Yalta, Gurov reflects that he has "involuntarily deceived" Anna because "he had appeared to her not as he was in reality."

Gurov thinks, at first, that Anna sees him as better than he really is, but he does the same thing when reminiscing about their time together in Yalta. When he returns to Moscow, Gurov finds that Anna "follow[s] him everywhere like a shadow" and Gurov imagines her "younger, more beautiful, more tender than she was." The happiness he associates with their time in Yalta has colored his perception of Anna, yet it also begins to actually change his perception of himself: "he also seemed better to himself than he had been then, in Yalta," Chekhov writes.

By the end of the story both Gurov and Anna seem transformed by the other's conception of them. Rather than make excuses for the affair, they actively aim to create a life in which they can live together openly—evidencing that they have accepted the truth of each other's desire as well as the validity and worthiness of their own. Gurov and Anna solidify their love for each other only when they embrace being the person that their lover sees in them. That, Chekhov argues, is how one surmounts a self-centered experience of life and reaches out to another: people become the best version of themselves when they incorporate others' beliefs about them into what they believe about themselves.

Part I Quotes

☞ Repeated experience, and bitter experience indeed, had long since taught him that every intimacy, which in the beginning lends life such pleasant diversity and presents itself as a nice and light adventure, inevitably, with decent people—especially Muscovites, who are slow starters—grows into a major task, extremely complicated, and the situation finally becomes burdensome. But at every new meeting with an interesting woman, this experience somehow slipped from his memory, and he wanted to live, and everything seemed quite simple and amusing.

Related Characters: Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov, Anna Sergeevna Von Dideritz

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 3622

Explanation and Analysis

As Gurov observes Anna for the first time, he reflects on his previous experiences with women. He begins the story longing for simple flings, which he has long used to escape his unfulfilling life and marriage. He believes that societal complications inevitably make continuing such affairs too "burdensome," yet continues to pursue them nonetheless. Indeed, he will soon enough embark upon what he initially believes to be yet another fleeting affair with Anna. This moment establishes Gurov's hypocrisy and tendency towards self-delusion. That Gurov longs for such connections with women, despite knowing the consequences, also reveals that he is unsatisfied with his everyday existence; he wants "to live," which implies his regular life is unfulfilling and dull.

☞ Afterwards, in his hotel room, he thought about her, that tomorrow she would probably meet him again. It had to be so. Going to bed, he recalled that still quite recently she had been a schoolgirl, had studied just as his daughter was studying now, recalled how much timorousness and angularity there was in her laughter, her conversation with a stranger—it must have been the first time in her life that she was alone in such a situation, when she was followed, looked at, and spoken to with only one secret purpose, which she could not fail to guess. He recalled her slender, weak neck, her beautiful gray eyes.

"There's something pathetic in her all the same," he thought and began to fall asleep.

Related Characters: Gurov's Daughter , Anna Sergeevna



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.





GRAY




QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Modern Library edition of *Stories of Anton Chekhov* published in 2000.

Von Dideritz , Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 



Page Number: 363

Explanation and Analysis

After Gurov speaks with Anna for the first time over dinner and the two then walk along the seashore, he returns to his hotel and is consumed by thoughts of her. True to his initially hypocritical and self-deceptive nature, he dismisses Anna as pathetic even as he has clearly already become somewhat infatuated with her. He's acutely aware of the age difference between the two of them in this moment as well, which lends Anna an air of innocence and naivete. Later, however, Gurov's awareness of his own age will prompt him to reflect on his mortality and the dwindling time he has left to spend with Anna. Gurov is notably struck by Anna's gray eyes; throughout the story gray will symbolize the passage of time and be associated with the ultimately fleeting nature of life and love.

☞ Anna Sergeevna was not a dream, she followed him everywhere like a shadow and watched him. Closing his eyes, he saw her as if alive, and she seemed younger, more beautiful, more tender than she was; and he also seemed better to himself than he had been then, in Yalta.

Related Characters: Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov, Anna Sergeevna Von Dideritz

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 369

Explanation and Analysis



In contrast to the fantasies and dreams that are all that's left of Gurov's previous affairs, Anna remains a constant, vibrant presence in Gurov's everyday life in Moscow. Crucially, he doesn't just see her everywhere he goes; Gurov sees her "younger, more beautiful, more tender than she was." Gurov is beginning to transcend his expectations for this relationship (i.e., that it should be over and done with) and embrace a more generous view of both Anna and himself. Just as he envisions Anna as growing ever lovelier, Gurov also envisions himself as "better" than he was in Yalta. Being able to see himself as a better man in memory is the first step on the road to Gurov becoming a better man in

reality, and points to the transformative power of love.

Part II Quotes

☞ Then he looked at her intently and suddenly embraced her and kissed her on the lips, and he was showered with the fragrance and moisture of the flowers, and at once looked around timorously—had anyone seen them?

Related Characters: Anna Sergeevna Von Dideritz , Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 364

Explanation and Analysis

Gurov and Anna watch the arrival of a ship from the jetty in Yalta. After the crowd has dispersed and Gurov and Anna find themselves alone, Gurov takes advantage of their solitude to finally kiss her. Even as the romantic aspect of their relationship begins, however, he immediately worries about the judging eyes of society, reflecting that broader social judgment would condemn their actions regardless of the validity of their feelings.

There is also a contrast between the boldness of Gurov kissing Anna and the "timorous" way he looks around afterwards. This will plague Gurov and Anna throughout the story, as they're constantly on the lookout for others spotting them together and only truly free in isolation. The conflict between the genuine nature of their love and deception with which they have to hide it creates the story's main dramatic tension.

●● The leaves of the trees did not stir, cicadas called, and the monotonous, dull noise of the sea, coming from below, spoke of the peace, of the eternal sleep that awaits us. So it had sounded below when neither Yalta nor Oreanda were there, so it sounded now and would go on sounding with the same dull indifference when we are no longer here. And in this constancy, in this utter indifference to the life and death of each of us, there perhaps lies hidden the pledge of our eternal salvation, the unceasing movement of life on earth, of unceasing perfection. Sitting beside the young woman, who looked so beautiful in the dawn, appeased and enchanted by the view of this magical odor—sea, mountains, clouds, the open sky—Gurov reflected that, essentially, if you thought of it, everything was beautiful in this world, everything except for what we ourselves think and do when we forget the higher goals of being and our human dignity.

Related Characters: Anna Sergeevna Von Dideritz , Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov

Related Themes:   

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Explanation and Analysis

After sleeping together for the first time, Gurov and Anna travel out to the countryside of Oreanda and watch the sun rise. In the quiet stillness Gurov reflects on his surroundings, his perception colored by the joy of his new love. He realizes the “indifference” of the earth to human life and death, yet such understanding fills him with a newfound appreciation for the vastness of the world and the chance to observe the beauty that surrounds him.

He connects the loveliness of the natural world to the love he feels for Anna and even to his own morality, suggesting how, even in its early stages, this relationship has begun to change him for the better, and that the fleeting nature of life makes love all the more important. The only thing that mars the beauty of the world is the kind of shallow pleasure-seeking that Gurov has indulged in before, and he comes to make a distinction between his past behavior and his new self—discovered through his relationship with Anna.

●● Gurov listened to the chirring of the grasshoppers and the hum of the telegraph wires with a feeling as if he had just woken up. And he thought that now there was one more affair or adventure in his life, and it, too, was now over, and all that was left was the memory. . . He was touched, saddened, and felt some slight remorse; this young woman whom he was never to see again had not been happy with him; he had been affectionate with her, and sincere, but all the same, in his treatment of her, in his tone and caresses, there had been a slight shade of mockery, the somewhat coarse arrogance of a happy man, who was, moreover, almost twice her age. She had all the while called him kind, extraordinary lofty; obviously, he had appeared to her not as he was in reality and therefore he had involuntarily deceived her . . .

Related Characters: Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov, Anna Sergeevna Von Dideritz

Related Themes:    

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Explanation and Analysis

After Gurov puts Anna on a train back to St. Petersburg, he stands on the platform and reflects on the relationship that he assumes is now ended. He justifies this ending to himself by deeming the whole experience a dream from which he has “just woken up.” For the moment, he has ended this adventure seemingly in the same spot he was in at the start of the story: bored, unhappy, and feeling old.

Unlike in his previous affairs, however, Gurov feels remorse for having “deceived” Anna into thinking so well of him. He seemingly doesn’t make the connection between that remorse and the anxiety that Anna has expressed about deserving *his* good opinion. The fact both care what the other thinks of them betrays a stronger attachment than Gurov is willing to admit just yet. Although he feels he’s lead her on, Anna saw in him qualities he does not yet see in himself. His “deception” has led to a genuine connection between the two of them, and Gurov will ultimately grow to see himself as Anna sees him. This suggests that truth and deception are not as cut and dry as societal morality would suggest.

Part III Quotes

●● He gradually became immersed in Moscow life, now greedily read three newspapers a day and said that he never read the Moscow newspapers on principle. He was drawn to restaurants, clubs, to dinner parties, celebrations, and felt flattered that he had famous lawyers and actors among his clients, and that at the Doctors' Club he played cards with a professor. He could eat a whole portion of selyanka from the pan...

Related Characters: Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov

Related Themes: 



Page Number: 369

Explanation and Analysis

When Gurov returns to Moscow from Yalta, he's briefly distracted by all the old pleasures and habits of his life in the big city. He slips back into petty societal hypocrisies, as well as indulging his appetite for good food and the flattery of the well-to-do. This is the rhythm of his life before he met Anna and there is a genuine affection and pleasure to it, but that pleasure is shallow, hypocritical, and no longer enough for Gurov. Chekhov lets this paragraph drift off into an ellipsis, suggesting that Gurov ultimately can't be satisfied by the life he once led.

●● A month would pass and Anna Sergeevna, as it seemed to him, would be covered by mist in his memory and would only appear to him in dreams with a touching smile, as other women did. But more than a month passed, deep winter came, and yet everything was as clear in his memory as if he had parted with Anna Sergeevna only the day before. And the memories burned brighter and brighter.

Related Characters: Anna Sergeevna Von Dideritz , Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov

Related Themes:  

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●● Those words, so very ordinary for some reason suddenly made Gurov indignant, struck him as humiliating, impure. Such savage manners, such faces! These senseless nights, and such uninteresting, unremarkable days! Frenzied card-playing, gluttony, drunkenness, constant talk about the same thing. Useless matters and conversations about the same thing took for their share the best part of one's time, the best of one's powers, and what was left in the end was some sort of curtailed, wingless life, some sort of nonsense, and it was impossible to get away or free, as if you were sitting in a mad-house or a prison camp!

Related Characters: Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov, An Official

Related Themes:  

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Explanation and Analysis

Gurov attempts to tell an official that he's dining with about Anna, but that official doesn't seem to hear him or think the confession is important, instead commenting on the quality of the fish they'd just eaten. This is the final straw for Gurov, who has by this point already grown frustrated with the shallow nature of Moscow society, and spurs him to decide to pursue his relationship with Anna. Here, Gurov completely rejects the shallowness and falseness of what Moscow society has to offer, recasting it as nothing but "gluttony, darkness, constant talk about the same thing." He now sees the greediness and lust of this world as a totally imbalanced, hypocritical way to live and in fact an impediment to true happiness.

Before, in Yalta, it was his affair with Anna that was a sort of madness. Now, it is society itself that is "a mad-house or a prison camp." Gurov switches from using deceptive means to seek pleasure in a socially acceptable way to seeing society itself as deceptive and blinding to genuine joy.

●● Anna Sergeevna came in. She sat in the third row, and when Gurov looked at her, his heart was wrung, and he realized clearly that there was now no person closer, dearer, or more important for him in the whole world; this small woman, lost in the provincial crowd, not remarkable for anything, with a vulgar lorgnette in her hand, now filled his whole life, was his grief, his joy, the only happiness he now wished for himself; and to the sounds of the bad orchestra, with its trashy local violins, he thought how beautiful she was. He thought and dreamed.

Related Characters: Anna Sergeevna Von Dideritz , Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov

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Explanation and Analysis

Gurov goes to the opening of an opera and spots Anna entering among the throng of St. Petersburg well-to-dos. This is another important moment of truth for Gurov, as he realizes upon seeing Anna again that he cannot deceive himself any longer by denying the strength of his feelings for her.

Moreover, his love for Anna transforms how he sees the rest of the world. While on the surface, there is nothing remarkable about Anna, that does not matter at all to Gurov. It is instead his deep connection to her that fills his whole life. No one but Gurov is having this reaction to Anna, and that uniqueness is part of what makes their connection so precious. Anna can be both “lost in the provincial crowd” and fill the whole of someone’s world.

Part IV Quotes

☞ He had two lives: an apparent one, seen and known by all who needed it, filled with conventional truth and conventional deceit, which perfectly resembled the lives of his acquaintances and friends, and another that went on in secret. And by some strange coincidence, perhaps an accidental one, everything that he found important, interesting, necessary, in which he was sincere and did not deceive himself, which constituted the core of his life, occurred in secret from others, while everything that made up his life, his shell, in which he hid in order to conceal the truth—for instance, his work at the bank, his arguments at the club, his “inferior race,” his attending official celebrations with his wife—all this was in full view.

Related Characters: Gurov’s Daughter , Anna Sergeevna Von Dideritz , Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov

Related Themes:   

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Explanation and Analysis



One day after Gurov and Anna have resumed seeing each other in Moscow, Gurov walks his daughter to school on his way to go be with his lover. He thinks about the double-life he is leading, calling it “a strange coincidence” that the outward life he leads is the shallow one while his secret life

is the one that’s truly meaningful to him. Gurov distinguishes between his “core” self and a “shell” that protects the secret most dear to him.

Chekhov complicates both Gurov’s and the reader’s understanding of truth through the suggestion that truth must be hidden away and protected in order to remain uncorrupted and genuine. Gurov goes from leading a fairly open yet self-deceptive life to a life in which deceives the world so that he does not have to deceive himself while he’s with Anna.

☞ And he judged others by himself, did not believe what he saw, and always supposed that every man led his own real and very interesting life under the cover of secrecy, as under the cover of night. Every personal existence was upheld by a secret, and it was perhaps partly for that reason that every cultivated man took such anxious care that his personal secret should be respected.

Related Characters: Gurov’s Daughter , Anna Sergeevna Von Dideritz , Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov

Related Themes:  



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Explanation and Analysis

Gurov continues reflecting on his relationship with Anna as he walks his daughter to school. Gurov builds on the personal realizations he’s had about himself and the ways in which he deceives the world in order to create a safe space for the genuine emotion of his relationship with Anna. He then applies that need for secrecy, privacy, and deception to all mankind. Chekhov suggests that it’s human nature to keep some things, often the most important things, to oneself in order to protect the purity of those feelings and experiences, and that the shielded nature of one’s inner-life is what allows people to power through all the posturing and demands of society.

☞ His head was beginning to turn gray. And it seemed strange to him that he had aged so much in those last years, had lost so much of his good looks. The shoulders on which his hands lay were warm and trembled. He felt compassion for this life, still so warm and beautiful, but probably already near the point where it would begin to fade and wither, like his own life.

Related Characters: Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov, Anna Sergeevna Von Dideritz

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 375

Explanation and Analysis



Towards the end of the story, Gurov arrives to a hotel room to meet Anna only for her to burst into tears at having to hide their love. As he goes to comfort her he spies himself in a mirror and is struck by the sudden realization that his hair is turning gray—a sign that he has aged. Gurov is suddenly confronted with his own mortality and the fleeting nature of his time with Anna, who is approaching the point when she, too, will begin to show physical signs of aging.


Even though the last few years have been the most emotionally significant of his life, Gurov realizes he has “lost so much of his good looks.” The world didn’t stop just because Gurov fell in love, and there’s the palpable sense that part of what makes his love with Anna so complex, tragic, and meaningful is the fact that it’s happening a little too late for both of them. Like everything else in life, love is temporary. Gurov responds to this sense of time slipping away from him by feeling a selfless compassion for Anna. Gurov has aged, but he has also grown to truly care about others.

“Why did she love him so?” Women had always taken him to be other than he was, and they had loved in him, not himself, but a man their imagination had created, whom they had greedily sought all their lives; and then, when they had noticed their mistake, they had still loved him. And not one of them had been happy with him. Time passed, he met women, became intimate, parted, but not once did he love; there was anything else, but not love.

And only now, when his head was gray, had he really fallen in love as one ought— for the first time in his life.

Related Characters: Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov, Anna’s Husband

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 375

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after seeing his reflection in the mirror, Gurov switches from reflecting on his gray hair to thinking about the affairs he had with women before Anna. He realizes that his previous understanding of how to find love with women was inadequate and shallow. Women saw “not himself, but a man their imagination had created,” which is much the same way that Gurov initially interpreted Anna’s attraction to him—that is, as a false, unrealistically good version of him.

Now, however, instead of looking for an idealized woman or chasing happiness, Gurov has cultivated a relationship with Anna in which he allows her to help him see the best version of himself. He has fallen in love “as one ought,” in a way that is self-enhancing instead of self-centered. Of course, as beautiful and profound a realization as this is, it comes when his hair is gray. Gurov can’t help but regret all the time he has wasted, and that regret helps spur him to action to be with Anna.

He and Anna Sergeevna loved each other like very close, dear people, like husband and wife, like tender friends; it seemed to them that fate itself had destined them for each other, and they could not understand why he had a wife and she a husband; and it was as if they were two birds of passage, a male and a female, who had been caught and forced to live in separate cages. They had forgiven each other the things they were ashamed of in the past, they forgave everything in the present, and they felt that this love of theirs had changed them both.

Related Characters: Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov, Anna Sergeevna Von Dideritz

Related Themes:    

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Explanation and Analysis

Near the end of the story, while in a hotel room with Anna, Gurov reflects on what their relationship really means: forgiveness, tenderness, sincerity, and change. While the two don’t understand why their timing has been so poor or why there are such seemingly insurmountable societal obstacles to their relationship, they don’t respond with meanness or spite. They instead feel a sense of forgiveness. Whatever society may think of it, theirs is an incredibly generous, transformative love, and one that goes beyond

the immediate pleasures of an affair. The goodwill engendered by this love spurs transformative growth for

both Gurov and Anna.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART I

After having been on vacation in Yalta for two weeks, Dmitri Gurov spots a new arrival: a young woman who routinely walks through the seaside town with her little white Pomeranian dog. No one knows who the woman is, referring to her simply as “the lady with the little dog.” Nevertheless, Gurov, somewhat bored by his time in Yalta, is struck by her appearance and air of the mystery around her.

Gurov reflects on his experience with women. He has a twelve-year-old daughter and two sons with his wife, whom he married young and has long been unfaithful to. His bitter experiences have led him to believe women are “an inferior race,” yet he cannot go more than two days without their company.

One evening the lady with the dog sits at the table next to Gurov’s during dinner. Her appearance suggests she is both married and bored, and Gurov quickly becomes taken with the idea of a “fleeting liaison” with “an unknown woman.” He strikes up a conversation, which they continue during a walk after dinner. Gurov tells the lady he is a banker from Moscow and learns that she is a married woman from St. Petersburg named Anna Sergeevna.

That night, in his hotel room, Gurov fixates on details about Anna such as her youth and beautiful eyes. He notes that she is not much older than his own daughter, and that the experience of being alone in a strange place and pursued by a man must be new for her. He can’t quite shake the feeling that she’s different from other women he’s been with, even as he asserts there is “something pathetic in her all the same.”

Gurov’s first introduction to Anna—the titular lady with the dog—is marked by his observations of her appearance, foreshadowing the story’s exploration of outward perception versus people’s inner worlds. Gurov is also established here as a man unsatisfied by his “real” life; it is in this state of mind that he first is intrigued by a woman who seems outside of his dull societal experiences.



Gurov is hypocritical; he can’t live without women even as he dismisses them as being inferior to men. He is both a product and victim of Russian social mores, doing all that is expected of him as a man of a certain status (getting married, having a family, and even fooling around), and yet remaining deeply unsatisfied.



In his first meeting with Anna, Gurov assumes that their relationship will be like the many affairs of his past. This will prove far from the truth, of course, making this moment one of self-deception for Gurov.



Though Gurov professes to want a fleeting romance with Anna, his inability to shake her from his mind later suggests that their relationship will be different—and more meaningful—than his past affairs. Anna’s youth also serves to highlight Gurov’s age, which will later add a sense of poignant urgency to their relationship. Finally, Gurov is effectively deceiving himself when he calls Anna “pathetic” despite his attraction to her.



PART II

A week after their initial meeting, Gurov and Anna spend a hot Yalta day together, having ice cream and soft drinks. In the evening, they go out to the jetty to see a steamer bring passengers in to Yalta, along with a crowd full of strollers, people holding bouquets, old women “dressed like young ones,” and a number of generals.

The steamer takes the steamer a long time to come into port, which gives Anna and Gurov even more time together. Once the ship arrives, Anna seems captivated, looking at the passengers “as if searching for acquaintances” and then turning to Gurov with shining eyes. Anna begins to talk a lot, asking a many questions and then quickly forgetting them, before dropping her lorgnette at one point in the crowd.

After the crowd disperses, Gurov and Anna remain on the docks for a moment as though they are waiting for someone else to depart from the steamer. When no one does, Gurov suddenly kisses Anna on the lips, before nervously looking around to see if anyone had spotted them. He then suggests that they go to her hotel room. As they both walk quickly away from the docks, Gurov reflects on the many women he has been with, some “cheerful” and “grateful,” others—like his wife—insincere and hysterical, and finally those women were beautiful yet domineering and cold.

Once they’re back in the room, after consummating their relationship, Gurov is again struck by how different Anna is from other women that he’s been with in the past. She seems awkward and timid in her youth and declares that Gurov must no longer respect her. Gurov grows bored and annoyed by her naivete, and he eats a watermelon while she frets.

Gurov tries to reason with Anna that her anxieties are unfounded. Anna wells up and confesses that she’s come to Yalta to try and get away from her “lackey” of a husband and “to live.” She insists she is pure, honest woman. She also feels “tormented by curiosity,” that she married too young and can no longer control herself. Here desire is mad, something set on her by the Devil.

There isn't much in the way of excitement for Gurov and Anna in Yalta, and the society they're among appears faintly pretentious. Everyone who goes out to see the steamer is putting on a bit of a show. Gurov and Anna are teetering on the edge of beginning their relationship.



Anna isn't as socially adept or polished as Gurov is, and her eyes shine with an excitement that is both curiosity at the spectacle and affection for Gurov.



Gurov and Anna may be looking for her husband to depart from the boat, and also simply lingering out of a desire not to part quite yet. Finally finding themselves away from the prying eyes of society, they're free to act on their feelings for one another. Gurov's thoughts on past women again reflect his history of unsatisfying, shallow affairs and unhappiness in his marriage.



So far, Gurov has been attracted to Anna but hasn't really considered her feelings on the matter. These are especially fraught, contrasting with Gurov's previous experience with affairs. He hardly considers the possibility that she genuinely likes him and wants him to think well of her. He will eventually come to be a more tender and sincere person through her influence.



Anna reveals that her motives for being in Yalta are very similar to Gurov's. She's fleeing an unhappy marriage and a sense of confinement in her day to day life. She worries that desire, earnest but socially unacceptable, might be the Devil's work; however, the affair will prove a more genuine love than either party has with their spouses.



Gurov tenderly comforts Anna to assuage her concerns about being perceived as a trite woman, still noticing how scared and unhappy she seems to be. Once he successfully cheers her up, the two “began laughing.”

Whatever misgivings Anna has about starting an affair, they're not strong enough that Gurov can't overcome them. Her wanting to be a woman who loves an honest, pure life and hates sin is just a story. Gurov is able to tell a far more convincing one.



Later, Gurov and Anna drive out from Yalta to the scenic suburb of Oreanda. “Not a soul” is out at the time. Gurov learns a little bit more about Anna’s husband, including that he is descended from a German family although he is Russian Orthodox himself. The two of them find a place near a church to watch the sun rise.

Gurov and Anna find the freedom to connect away from society's prying eyes. Germans were a distinct ethnic minority in Imperial Russia, often keeping to their own religion and language, so the fact that Anna's husband comes from that background but considers himself Russian Orthodox perhaps suggests how important it is to him to fit in, echoing Anna's comment about him being a “lackey.”



Gurov and Anna sit in silence. Gurov observes the natural surroundings, reflecting on how the sea has sounded the same since long before there was a town called Yalta, and how it will sound the same long after. Sitting next to Anna, who looks “so beautiful in the dawn,” Gurov comes to connect such natural constancy to a transcendental love for all creation.

Anna already is having a transformative effect on Gurov, who, in his happiness, feels an appreciation for the world around him. His blossoming love for Anna allows him to access a more universal love for the natural world and a desire to be the best version of himself.



A watchman interrupts Gurov’s silent musing, and the two poignantly realize that the moment they’ve both shared has ended. They decide to head back to Yalta.

Nothing lasts forever. The watchman's abrupt interruption punctures Gurov and Anna's reverie and is a reminder that their affair is only possible away from the prying eyes of the rest of the world.



Gurov and Anna develop a routine of meeting for meals, kissing in gardens, and driving out late in the evening to look at nature. Anna continues to be anxious about Gurov’s opinion of her and Gurov continues to reassure her that he finds her both beautiful and fascinating. The “complete idleness” of their days, combined with the proximity to the sea, the sight of “idle” people, and threat of being seen themselves makes Gurov feel yet ever closer to and more strongly about Anna.

Even as Anna and Gurov's affair deepens and they develop something of a routine, there's still anxiety—both that they will be discovered and, for Anna, that Gurov doesn't respect her enough. There's a tension between the idleness of how they're spending their time, the growing intensity of their feelings, and the threat of being found out. It's possible the affair wouldn't be so memorable if it weren't such a potent mix of all three.



Word finally comes that Anna’s husband is sick, forcing Anna to return to St. Petersburg. Gurov takes her to the train station. As the train is boarding, Anna seems to accept their parting. She does not cry, but again, looks “sad, as if ill.” She predicts that she and Gurov will never see each other again and that it is right, because they should never have met. The train pulls away from the station, leaving Gurov alone on the platform.

The two prepare to resume their obligations, thinking this will be the end of the affair. Anna recognizes the tragic mistiming of her and Gurov's relationship, and tries to let go of her feelings for him because they were never meant to be. Gurov doesn't feel the full weight of that tragedy in this moment, but he will come to.



Gurov also comes to feel “as if he had just woken up” and accepts the affair as a sweet madness that has now ended. He feels he has involuntarily deceived Anna, who seems to think him a better man than the man he really is. There is “a breath of autumn” in the air, and he decides it is time for him to return to his life in Moscow.

Gurov also tries to leave the affair behind, connecting it to the brightness of summer giving way to the cool of autumn. He does not yet see himself as Anna sees him, though through her love will eventually come to accept her vision of him.



PART III

Gurov returns to his Moscow routine—going through life with his wife and his daughter, dining out, and entertaining in his bourgeois social circle. It already feels like winter in Moscow. This is a society that he was born to and initially takes some pleasure in returning to. However, all his previous hobbies quickly seem to lose their former charms and he finds them false.

Chekhov again invokes seasonal language to signal the passing of time and contrast the chill of Moscow with the warmth and happiness of Yalta. Gurov has already been changed by Anna, coming to view Moscow society as shallow and dark. Still, Gurov is a Muscovite, and does, temporarily get caught up in the flattery and fine living of his home.



Deep winter arrives, and Gurov still can't shake thoughts of Anna from his mind. He begins romanticizing their time together in Yalta and to feel Anna's presence everywhere he goes. He can nearly hear her breathing or the rustle of her skirt. In his memories Anna is even younger and more beautiful, and he, too, is a better version of himself. His torment is all the worse because he cannot tell anyone else about her.

Gurov realizes that the connection he had with Anna is more genuine and significant than anything else in his life. She's become a part of him, which is why he sees her lurking behind corners and all but hears movements. The fact that he cannot tell anyone about her only ups the intensity of his feelings. The secrecy he has to maintain contributes to him keeping Anna in his mind—she has nowhere else to go.



Gurov has to settle for talking vaguely of love, but even this raises his wife's suspicions, and she tells him that he doesn't suit the part of a fop. He obliquely shares the importance the affair has taken on in his mind with an official, but when the man proves to care way more about fish than the story, Gurov grows angry with all of Moscow society. He thinks the world around him is fully of shallow, pretentious people living “wingless” lives.

Gurov fully disconnects from the pleasures of Moscow society. Anna has prompted him to reconsider all the petty distractions of his life, underscoring the transformative power of love.



Gurov comes up with a pretext to go to St. Petersburg to try and see Anna. He takes a hotel room and easily finds out the street where Anna and her husband live. He also learns that they live well and that her husband is known and respected in town.

It seems like it should be harder for Gurov to find this woman whom he has been secretly holding in his heart for months, but it is in fact as easy as asking a hotel porter. She is only secret and dear to Gurov.



Gurov goes to the street where Anna lives and stands by an imposing-looking **gray** fence just opposite it. He considers what would happen if he went up to the house itself, weighing the possibility that her husband might answer the door and that his showing up on her doorstep might ruin everything. To do so would be “tactless.”

Gurov's plan to see Anna is comically simple and straightforward—he just posts up outside of her house and waits. Concerns about social propriety once again keep them apart, however.



Gurov decides not to approach the house, and instead watches its comings and goings without seeing Anna. At one point, he hears a piano playing inside and thinks it must be Anna at the keys. Eventually Gurov retreats back to his hotel room and, frustrated, falls asleep.

The next morning, Gurov spots a poster for the opera “The Geisha” and decides to attend the premiere on the chance that Anna may also be there. When he goes, the opera is packed, and Gurov judges how provincial and silly both the theater and the crowd is.

Gurov spots Anna amidst the crowd. Despite the fact that she seems outwardly unremarkable in the “provincial” theater, he realizes that she is the light of his life. He cannot help but thinking and dreaming about the two of them being together.

Gurov spots Anna’s husband as well. He is a slightly balding man with side-whiskers who is continually stooping, as if he’s bowing to some superior. Gurov decides that he really does look like a lackey.

During the opera’s intermission, Gurov approaches Anna in her seat. He scares her badly with his reappearance, which in turn frightens *him*. The orchestra starts tuning up and confrontation suddenly seems to Gurov like a terrible mistake.

Anna leads Gurov away from the seats into a staircase off of the main auditorium and, in something of a panic, demands to know why Gurov has come. Despite Gurov’s attempts to explain himself, Anna plows ahead, revealing how both unhappy and still in love with him she is.

Anna asks what he’s doing and Gurov responds by pulling her to him and kissing her, even as a pair of schoolboys pass them on the stairway and more people appear to coming up behind them. Anna pushes him away.

Gurov trusts that an opportune moment will come for him to see Anna, yet this passive attitude proves futile.



Now that he has an eye for the shallowness of society, Gurov only has negative opinions about the pretension of St. Petersburg’s finest. His reaction is colored by how ingenuine he feels the crowd and the whole spectacle to be. “The Geisha” is notably a musical comedy of mistaken identities and people marrying the wrong partners.



Gurov is now operating wholly by his own standards of beauty and merit. While Anna outwardly isn’t remarkable, she is still the most beautiful thing in the world to him. His feelings for her transform how he views the world around him.



Gurov well could be projecting Anna’s opinion and his own opposition onto Anna’s husband and how servile he seems to appear. He does look the part, though.



The moment that is supposed to be the height of romance—two lovers meeting again after a long time apart—is instead filled with tension. Unlike their isolation in Yalta, there are too many eyes on them for Gurov and Anna to be completely genuine with each other.



Gurov and Anna are as in love with each other as ever. Their lies to themselves about the affair being over were just that—lies. The revelation that Anna feels exactly the same for him as Gurov does for her is tempered by the societal predicament they’re in.



Gurov is now in a position where he doesn’t quite care if the two of them are spotted, but then again, this isn’t his city. Anna is in more danger than he is, and though she doesn’t deny her feelings for him, she makes sure to push him away. These two aren’t quite in sync yet.



Anna reiterates her love for Gurov and promises to go to Moscow to see him if he leaves the theater, and then she heads down the stairs. Gurov stands there for a moment, and then does as she asks and leaves.

Anna's unhappiness is threefold: she is terrified of discovery and needs Gurov to leave; she is not happy with her husband and will remain unhappy until she sees Gurov again; she can't fully embrace a happy life with Gurov because they're married to other people. All Gurov can do in this moment is as she asks.



PART IV

After an indeterminate number of months, Anna begins coming to Moscow on a medical pretext to see Gurov. Her husband both does and doesn't believe the false reason that she gives him but makes no attempt to stop her from going.

It seems shockingly easy to conduct an affair, even though Gurov and Anna are hyper-conscious of the consequences that will happen if they are discovered. Anna deceives her husband in such a way that he both does and doesn't believe her—it's more convenient for him, and his position in society generally, to believe her fiction.



Gurov develops a pattern of meeting Anna at her hotel after she sends a porter to notify him of her arrival. The two are able to continue their affair without anyone else in Moscow knowing about it.

Again, the shallow nature of Moscow society is such that it is actually easy for Gurov and Anna to do what seems to them to be the hardest and most significant thing in the world: be with each other.



On a winter morning, Gurov walks his daughter to school on his way to see Anna. He explains to his daughter that it's snowing because, though it is above freezing near the surface of the earth, it is colder in the atmosphere where snow forms. He is inwardly amazed that he's both able to answer his daughter's questions while his inner, secret thoughts are consumed by Anna.

Gurov is amazed by the ease with which he's able to have a double life and by the fact that his secret life is the one that's actually meaningful to him. His explanation of snow reflects that his own feelings appear different depending on close to him one is; his false, cold surface belies fiery passion underneath.



Gurov reflects on the ways in which the affair has changed his outlook on life: he knows that everything in which he is truly honest and sincere about he hides from other people. He now believes that everyone's most vital and interesting life is hidden from the world.

Gurov appreciates that everyone has some secret, inner life that keeps them pushing through the expectations and obligations of the world. A secret—some vital inner passion—is in fact necessary for people to live fully and truthfully.



After dropping his daughter off, Gurov gets to Anna's hotel room and is hardly in the door before the two embrace as though they have been apart for years. Anna almost immediately breaks down crying about having to keep their love hidden "like thieves," and questions whether their life is "broken." Gurov rings down for some tea.

Anna and Gurov are, even after falling so in love, in the same boat as when they began: Anna deeply upset, Gurov so perplexed by her emotion that he orders something to drink. Now, however, Gurov and Anna are acutely aware of how the time has passed since they last saw each other, and of how much that waste of time is wearing on them. Instead of not knowing what to do with all the idle time they have, they are now hungry for what little time they can get.



Gurov concludes that his attachment to Anna and her attachment to him are more serious, and more permanent, than is convenient for an affair. He goes to comfort her and catches a glimpse of himself in the hotel mirror. Noticing his **gray** hair, Gurov realizes just how much he's aged in the time he's known Anna.

Gurov reflects again on how his love for Anna is different from all the other relationships he's experienced before in his life. He's known many women and suspects that they did not love him but loved something they created in their imaginations. He realizes this is the first time he's ever really been in love with someone, and he laments that love has come to him so late in life.

Gurov thinks further, to how he and Anna love each other and forgive each other unconditionally. He realizes he can no longer argue away or deny his connection to her or his desire to be "sincere and tender" in her company. He understands that their love has changed both of them so radically they aren't going to be able to walk away from each other.

Gurov finally makes the decision that he wants to embrace the way he is with Anna all the time, not just in stolen, secret moments. He comforts Anna and suggests that the two of them, now that they've had time to express their sadness about their situation, try to think of some way out of the problem of their respective marriages.

The two spend a long time thinking. While no solution comes to them, Gurov concludes that this hardship is only the beginning of the story of his and Anna's relationship, and that they have long, complicated, and difficult road ahead of them.

It's only in this moment—after having accepted the seriousness of their love—that Gurov grasps something that seems to have haunted Anna for much longer: the bad timing of their love. Seeing himself in the mirror prompts Gurov to reflect that they do not have endless time together and must more actively fight for their happiness.



Gurov grapples the bitter unfairness of having fallen in love so late in life and appreciates his own mortality. The realization of the quick passage of time makes him appreciate his relationship all the more and will push him to fight for his life with Anna.



This is Chekhov's articulation of true love: a desire to be the person that a loved one sees, and a willingness to be sincere and tender, to set aside the petty deceptions and justifications of outward society in exchange for real feeling and connection. Through an affair—something often dismissed as shallow, low, and immoral—Gurov and Anna have become better people. Though slightly too late, perhaps they wouldn't have made the transformation if they weren't running out of time.



The final step for Gurov and Anna to take is to try to be as close outwardly as they are inwardly. They aren't quite in a place of not caring what society thinks of them or completely casting off their obligations, but they're ready to try and come up with a solution instead of passively accepting the limitations as fate or their desires as madness.



Chekhov ends the story on an ambiguous note—Gurov and Anna don't figure out a way to be happily ever after, but neither are they just giving up. Instead, the story leaves the reader with the sense that their love is going to be hard, tragic, over too soon, but worth the difficulty all the same.





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