



WARD SIX

Arthur Reel

Adapted from the short story by Anton Chekhov

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WARD SIX

DRAMA. This adaptation of one of Anton Chekhov's most influential short stories, "Ward Six" (1892) depicts the horrors of a Russian mental ward. An idealistic new doctor accepts a post at a hospital in a small town, where he hopes to dedicate himself to helping mental patients. But after witnessing patients being mercilessly beaten and a shoeless man's feet red with cold, Dr. Rabin seeks the help of the hospital administrator, but his requests are ignored. Disillusioned, Rabin befriends a patient, Ivan Gromov, but their discussions eventually lead Rabin to see the world anew, blurring the lines between sanity and insanity, reality and illusion.

Performance Time: Approximately 90 minutes.



Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (1860-1904)

ABOUT THE STORY

Russian playwright and short story writer Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) was born in southern Russia. His father, who ran a grocery store, was physically and verbally abusive to his wife and six children. Chekhov worked most of his life as a medical doctor while writing his short stories and plays. In 1890, Chekhov visited the remote Siberian penal colony Sakhalin Island, where he spent three months interviewing convicts and settlers for a census. For the 10,000 people incarcerated on the island, Chekhov witnessed first-hand the horrors of prison life, which included forced prostitution of women, floggings, and the embezzlement of supplies. Profoundly affected by his experiences there, Chekhov felt strongly that the government had a duty to treat the convicts humanely, which inspired him to write "Ward Six" and his famous travelogue *The Island: A Journey to Sakhalin*. Chekhov is best known for his plays *The Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard* and his short stories "Ward Six" and "The Lady with the Dog."

CHARACTERS

(4 M, 1 F, 3 flexible, opt. extras)

DR. ANDREY RAGIN: Idealistic new doctor at a mental hospital who is concerned with the poor treatment of patients; male.

DR. HOBOTOV: Mental hospital administrator; flexible.

NIKITA: Brutal hospital guard who loves to beat the patients into submission; male.

IVAN/IVANA: Mental patient in Ward Six, an intelligent ex-university student; flexible.

MOISEIKA: Barefoot mental patient; flexible.

MIHAIL: Postmaster who befriends Andrey; wears a postal uniform; male.

DARYUSHA: Dr. Ragin's landlady; a widow and mother of three young children; female.

YEVGENI: Uncle to Daryusha's children; male.

EXTRAS (opt.): As mental hospital patients.

Note: For flexible roles, change the script accordingly.

SETTING

The action of the play takes place in a small town near Moscow, 1892. Dr. Hobotov's office has a desk and two chairs. Andrey's room has a bed, a bookcase filled with books, two chairs, a small table, and a window. Ward Six has several cots or beds.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Act I

Scene 1: Andrey's room at a rooming house.

Scene 2: Ward Six.

Scene 3: Dr. Hobotov's office, the next day.

Scene 4: Andrey's room, one month later.

Scene 5: Ward Six, later that night.

Act II

Scene 1: Dr. Hobotov's office, several months later.

Scene 2: On a street; Andrey's room.

Scene 3: On a foggy street; Andrey's room.

Scene 4: Ward Six, later that night.

Scene 5: Ward Six, the next morning.

Scene 6: Ward Six, several days later.

PROPS

Suitcase
Books
Beer glasses
Box of candy
Charts
Cane
Handkerchief
Large box
Mental hospital dressing gown, for Andrey

SOUND EFFECTS

Crash
Moaning
Music to create feeling of strangeness
Knock
Bells
Chimes
Chorus of voices

**“WHAT AM I?
OH, DEAR GOD,
WHAT AM I?”**

—MIHAIL

ACT I SCENE 1

(AT RISE: A rooming house in a small town near Moscow, 1892. Andrey enters, carrying a suitcase, followed by Daryusha, the landlady. Andrey inspects the room.)

ANDREY: So this is to be my room?

DARYUSHA: Yes. How do you find it?

ANDREY: Pleasant.

DARYUSHA: And the rest of the house?

ANDREY: Comfortable.

DARYUSHA: I keep everything very neat.

ANDREY: I can see that.

DARYUSHA: When Hobotov came by and said the new doctor was arriving, I immediately prepared the best room in the house. A new doctor is just what we need, I told him. He promptly agreed. "Yes, a new doctor—you'll find him an exceptional human being." That's exactly what he said.

ANDREY: It makes me feel at ease...

DARYUSHA: You may call me Daryusha. I'm a widow, with three children. And I promise you, my children will not interfere with your privacy.

ANDREY: I like children...

(A loud crash is heard.)

DARYUSHA: My children are very quiet, in fact, they hardly ever cry. (Another crash.) They are simply adorable children. They will give you no trouble whatsoever.

YEVGENI: (Offstage.) Dar-yushka!

DARYUSHA: Coming, Yevgeni!

YEVGENI: (Offstage.) Dar-yushka!

DARYUSHA: Now and then I have a visitor—the children's uncle.

YEVGENI: (*Offstage.*) Dar-yushka!

DARYUSHA: He makes a bit of a fuss...

ANDREY: (*Embarrassed.*) I am...inclined to understand.

DARYUSHA: You're an understanding man, doctor.

ANDREY: Thank you.

DARYUSHA: You shall be a great comfort to those at the hospital.

ANDREY: I'm looking forward to my work there.

DARYUSHA: There are so many ill ones. Why, they seem possessed by the devil. (*Makes sign of the cross.*)

ANDREY: I'm here to assist them...

DARYUSHA: Sometimes, in the night, I hear weird cries, as if they were being beaten.

ANDREY: Beaten?

DARYUSHA: Yet I know they are not. It's a fine hospital...they tell me so.

ANDREY: Yes, I've been told that, too.

DARYUSHA: You'll like it there. But those screams...

ANDREY: Sick people often scream.

DARYUSHA: But why?

YEVGENI: (*Offstage.*) Dar-yushka!

DARYUSHA: (*Shouts.*) Coming, Yevgeni!

ANDREY: They have vast imaginations—too vast. And then there are always nightmares, even while awake.

DARYUSHA: Yes, so I've heard.

(*Daryusha makes the sign of the cross. Yevgeni enters.*)

YEVGENI: (*To Daryusha.*) Ah, so there you are.

DARYUSHA: (*Introducing.*) This is our new doctor...Andrey Yefimich Ragin.

(*Yevgeni clasps Andrey's hand.*)

YEVGENI: And what is your position?

ANDREY: My position?

YEVGENI: How do you find our town? Nice, eh?

ANDREY: I've just now arrived.

YEVGENI: Have you strolled through it?

ANDREY: I haven't even been to the hospital where I am to work.

YEVGENI: Well, you'll find it quite interesting, doctor. Fine oaks...an excellent park...and the public buildings...what sturdy houses. Except for one thing.

ANDREY: Yes?

YEVGENI: The people who work in them. The people who live here.

ANDREY: Well, people are people, wherever you go.

YEVGENI: They call themselves human beings, but they are worth as much as an old galosh.

ANDREY: Well, now...I wouldn't go quite that far. (*Nervous laugh.*)

YEVGENI: You look a fine sort, doctor. We understand each other. So I'm letting you in on a little advice...as a friend. (*Draws closer.*) They are all pigs.

ANDREY: Pigs?

DARYUSHA: Yevgeni, please...

YEVGENI: (*To Andrey.*) The whole kit'n caboodle. Barbarians.

ANDREY: Barbarians?

DARYUSHA: Yevgeni, I beg—

YEVGENI: (*To Andrey.*) Gangsters. Look out for them, doctor. Nowhere will you find a bigger pack of charlatans.

ANDREY: Well, surely, I'll—

(*Yevgeni extends his hand to Andrey.*)

YEVGENI: I'll be looking forward to conversations with you. (*They shake hands.*) In the meantime, watch yourself.

ANDREY: Truly, I'll—

YEVGENI: Just don't put a knife in their hands. They'll slit your throat. Goodbye.

(Yevgeni smiles at Andrey and exits. Pause.)

DARYUSHA: Forgive him, doctor. He's really such a gentle person.

[END OF FREEVIEW]