

# THE BLACK MONK

CAPTURED LIVE ON STAGE AT  
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## The Black Monk

A master of arts named Andrei Kovrin has strained his nerves and been advised to take a vacation by his doctor. After spending three weeks on his own estate, Kovrin decides to visit his former guardian Yegor Pesotsky, a renowned horticulturist. When he arrives at Pesotsky's home, Kovrin finds the old man and his daughter Tanya, worried about a coming frost. Kovrin sits up all night with Tanya to watch over her father's plants and learns how much Yegor values his orchard.

While with Pesotsky and his daughter, Kovrin is restless and does not sleep much, but he talks a great deal and drinks a lot of wine. One evening, he regales a story to Tanya about a legend that has been preoccupying him...A monk dressed in black, who wandered in the desert 1,000 years ago and set off a series of mirages so that it seemed as though his image was seen walking in different countries all over the world. The crux of the legend is that 1,000 years after the day the monk walked, his mirage would return to earth and reappear to men. After saying this, Kovrin leaves to walk by himself in the garden and catches sight of a tall black column like a whirlwind racing towards him. As it approaches, he realizes that it is the monk. Upon returning to the house, Yegor and Tanya remark how radiant and inspired Kovrin looks, although Kovrin decides not to tell them what he has seen.

After supper, old Yegor comes to Kovrin's room and gently encourages him to marry his daughter, convinced that any other man would take her away and his life's work would fall into ruin. The next day, Kovrin mediates a quarrel between Pesotsky and Tanya, and again Kovrin sees the black monk in the garden. The monk tells Kovrin that he is one of God's chosen. When Kovrin asks the monk whether he is mad and if this is an illusion, the apparition confirms that he is indeed real. Kovrin is now assured of his own loftiness and decides to marry Tanya. After marrying, Kovrin continues to meet the monk several times a week while walking around Pesotsky's estate.

In time, Tanya notices these hallucinations and concludes that her husband is mentally ill. She sets out to "cure" Kovrin, but he becomes convinced that without the black monk's guidance he is doomed to a life of mediocrity. He becomes bitter and antagonistic towards his loved ones, and eventually the couple drift apart.

His physical health deteriorating rapidly, Kovrin moves in with a woman who takes care of him. He receives a letter from Tanya blaming him for her father's death, which has resulted in the orchard's destruction. He recalls how spiteful he was to Yegor and Tanya, and experiences an emotion akin to terror. At that moment, though, the monk appears, chiding Kovrin for thinking that he was deranged and not believing in his own brilliance. The story ends with Kovrin experiencing one final hallucination; the black monk guides him toward incorporeal genius and he dies with a smile.



## Analysis

*The Black Monk* was written in the summer of 1893 and published in January 1894. The author used appropriately poetic language to convey the complexity of his subject. Chekhov's text is filled with images of momentous energy: the orchard is "plunged in smoke," characters race to get their work done, and the monk's arrival is heralded by a rapid whirlwind. The story of Kovrin's descent into madness is, thus, one of frenzied motion conveyed in harmonious prose. In this way, it is very similar to a piece of music, and we see how Chekhov's musical prose adds momentum to his narrative. In particular, the protagonist's description of the bay at Yalta is neatly cadenced: he notes that the sea "looked at him with its multitude of light blue, dark blue, turquoise and fiery eyes." Like a great classical composer, Chekhov tempers his drama with a note of tranquility: the protagonist dies in the throws of a terrible and bloody fit, yet he is found with a "blissful smile ... congealed on his face."

Chekhov shows how Kovrin's madness triumphs absolutely. It even destroys the last vestige of reason in his life—Yegor's prized orchard—where "the trees were arranged like chess pieces, in straight and regular rows like ranks of soldiers." *The Black Monk* thus introduces the theme of the ruined orchard that Chekhov would later use in his play *The Cherry Orchard*.

**Director:** Kama Ginkas  
**Design:** Sergey Barkhin

## CAST

**Andrei Kovrin:** Sergey Makovetskiy  
**Yegor Pesotsky:** Valery Barinov  
**Tanya Pesotskaya:** Julia Svezhakova  
**Black Monk:** Igor Yasulovich

## CREW

**Stage Manager:** Natalia Aksenova  
**Lighting:** Tatiana Bronnikova  
**Sound:** Maria Bacharnikova