

## **A Walk in the Woods**

***Auditions: Sunday October 15, 6:00 p.m.***

***Monday, October 16, 6:00 p.m***

### **Synopsis and Character Descriptions**

Inspired by a real incident in 1982: two arms negotiators—one Soviet, one American—leave the table to take a walk in the woods above Geneva, Switzerland, in the late summer, away from the glare of the negotiating table. They are a Soviet diplomat, Andrey Botvinnik, age 57, nearing the end of his decades-long career and John Honeyman, age 45, an American negotiator just starting his first serious negotiating assignment. The two men eventually develop a relationship, although their personalities differ. Botvinnik is friendly and enjoys American culture, Honeyman is formal and idealistic.

Playwright Lee Blessing brings to life two complex and enormously different personalities. The Russian hides his cynicism and wiliness under a hearty warmth and love of nature. The American hides his idealism and passion under a stiff formality.

And although arms negotiations—between two superpowers capable of annihilating one another—provides the backdrop, the real story here concerns the forging of a friendship under stressful, high-stakes circumstances, and in the context of profound cultural differences. It brings up questions such as: “Can enemies be friends?” and “How much should I trust?”

#### **John Honeyman:**

Has been involved in negotiations in the past, but nothing as daunting as his new assignment in Geneva to discuss nuclear arms reduction with the Soviets. He is buttoned-down, stiff, formal and mostly all business. Age range: 30’ish – mid 40s.

#### **Andrey Botvinnik:**

Nearing the end of his career, Botvinnik knows the façade and futility of arms negotiations; that it is more for show than anything. Having dealt with several previous American negotiators over the decades, he is a master of diversion and changing the subject, generally wanting to discuss anything BUT the issues at hand. He can be simultaneously frustrating, humorous and pragmatic. Age range: 50’s +

### ***Very important notes!***

- each character must learn approximately 55 pages of script. I am a stickler for verbatim so you must be able to commit to memorizing the script as it is.
- Botvinnik speaks with a *slight* Russian accent. The actor chosen for this role should be able to deliver a somewhat believable *slight* Russian accent.

# AUDITION FORM

## Actor's Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell: \_\_\_\_\_ Do You Text: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Please List any Theatrical Experience: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Part for Which You Wish to Audition: (Please list your order of preference)

\_\_\_\_\_ John Honeyman – American male – late 20's to mid 40's

\_\_\_\_\_ Andrey Botvinnik – Russian male – 50's +

Show opens Friday, January 12<sup>th</sup> and runs for 3 weekends. At this time, we are planning to begin rehearsals on Thursday, Oct 19, followed by weekly rehearsals on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Please list any commitments or travel that will conflict with our rehearsals.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### For Director's Use

Notified of Casting Decision By: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

# ACT 1

BOTVINNIK. Oh, please — Andrey.

HONEYMAN. Andrey . . .

BOTVINNIK. Andryushka, if you like. Perhaps I could call you Johnny?

HONEYMAN. John would be fine. Andrey, I appreciate your desire to become friends. Indeed, in many of my former negotiations I did become friends with those on the other side. *After* a successful settlement, not before.

BOTVINNIK. I see.

HONEYMAN. I think it's important for us both to remember that there *are* issues here.

BOTVINNIK. Of course.

HONEYMAN. Which must be resolved.

BOTVINNIK. Certainly.

HONEYMAN. Making friends is a fine thing, but not on someone else's time, so to speak. Do you follow me?

BOTVINNIK. Oh, yes.

HONEYMAN. When I took this post, it was to bring something new here. A new formula. A breakthrough.

BOTVINNIK. Yes, yes. A *breakthrough*.

HONEYMAN. A plan I personally helped develop for more than a year.

BOTVINNIK. Wonderful! Welcome! A new man with a new plan. (*Honeyman stares a moment at him.*)

HONEYMAN. I didn't have to come here, you know. I could've stayed safe behind my desk in Washington. Someone more like McIntyre could've been chosen. But, since I have a firsthand knowledge of this proposal, and since I myself have a strong record as a negotiator . . .

BOTVINNIK. At a lower level.

HONEYMAN. . . . at a lower level, I have been asked to work this one through. I have a lot to offer, Andrey. I know these issues. They haven't just sent me to enunciate policy. I'm here to get something done. I hope you'll want to help me.

BOTVINNIK. Whatever I can contribute to the spirit of things . . .

HONEYMAN. I don't want the *spirit* of an agreement. I want an agreement. An honest one — fair to both sides.

BOTVINNIK. I see. Well, who knows? As friends we will certainly . . .

HONEYMAN. No, no—listen.

BOTVINNIK. Yes?

HONEYMAN. What I'm saying about friendship is that it takes us away from the central point.

BOTVINNIK. Which is?

HONEYMAN. Commitment. Mutual commitment to the hard work of negotiating a treaty. We need to find our rewards *there*—in difficult problems, worked on together and solved together. That's the sort of personal relationship I'm seeking here. That's what I would like. (*A beat.*) Andrey, how do you feel about what I'm saying?

BOTVINNIK. Well . . .

HONEYMAN. I'd really like to know.

BOTVINNIK. Would you?

HONEYMAN. Very much.

BOTVINNIK. Very well. I feel . . . (*He leans close to Honeyman.*)

HONEYMAN. Yes?

BOTVINNIK. You have a string on your suit.

HONEYMAN. A string? A thread, you mean?

BOTVINNIK. A thread, yes. Here. (*Botvinnik plucks it off.*) So. Now you look fine. What shall we talk about?

HONEYMAN. You're changing the subject.

BOTVINNIK. I am?

HONEYMAN. Yes.

BOTVINNIK. Really? I'm sorry. What was it please?

HONEYMAN. I was told you like changing the subject.

BOTVINNIK. Not at all. That's a very nice suit, by the way.

HONEYMAN. Mr. McIntyre said it's your favorite ploy.

BOTVINNIK. I never use ploys. Is it Italian?

HONEYMAN. English.

BOTVINNIK. Really? Everything I have is Italian.

HONEYMAN. Are we done talking about this now?

BOTVINNIK. About what?

HONEYMAN. About suits.

BOTVINNIK. If you like.

HONEYMAN. Yes, I do like. Thank you. (*A beat.*) So, will you answer my question.



BOTVINNIK. What question?

HONEYMAN. My question about whether or not you agree that we shouldn't be friends.

BOTVINNIK. Was that the subject? Before? That I changed?

HONEYMAN. Yes, it was.

BOTVINNIK. Ah. Well, my answer is of course that I agree with you.

HONEYMAN. You agree?

BOTVINNIK. Yes.

HONEYMAN. That we shouldn't be friends?

BOTVINNIK. Yes.

HONEYMAN. That's not what you said before.

BOTVINNIK. But then I didn't know your view. Now I do, and I want to agree with you.

HONEYMAN. You want to agree with me.

BOTVINNIK. Yes.

HONEYMAN. Why?

BOTVINNIK. Because you are my friend.

HONEYMAN. I can't be your friend. That's my whole position.

BOTVINNIK. Yes. And I agree.

HONEYMAN. You can't agree.

BOTVINNIK. But I do.

HONEYMAN. You're contradicting yourself.

BOTVINNIK. I know. But I will go to any length to keep a friend. *(A beat. They stare at each other.)*

HONEYMAN. I was told you liked to contradict yourself.

BOTVINNIK. Will you pardon me a moment? *(Botvinnik takes out a small, plastic eyedropper, places drops in his eyes.)*

HONEYMAN. Is something wrong with your eyes?

BOTVINNIK. Hm? No, no. They become very dry, that's all. It is most uncomfortable. I'm sorry.

HONEYMAN. Are you seeing a doctor?

BOTVINNIK. Several of them. Over the last month or two. Swiss doctors. It is nothing.

HONEYMAN. What do they say?

BOTVINNIK. Do you want this for your files?

HONEYMAN. I was only . . .

BOTVINNIK. I will tell you. They tell me I have Sjogren's syndrome.

# ACT 2

BOTVINNIK. I will be replaced. (*A beat.*)

HONEYMAN. When are you leaving?

BOTVINNIK. A week or two.

HONEYMAN. A week . . . ! How soon'll you be replaced?

BOTVINNIK. A month or two.

HONEYMAN. Andrey . . . !

BOTVINNIK. Are you worried about delay? That is your job, delay. In all my years here it has been one, long delay. So tell me—do you have a favorite color besides orange? I would like to get you something.

HONEYMAN. A farewell gift?

BOTVINNIK. Yes. (*A beat.*)

HONEYMAN. Are they making you retire?

BOTVINNIK. Of course not.

HONEYMAN. Is it because you pushed for our proposal? Did you get in trouble with . . .

BOTVINNIK. You Americans always think the same thing. Kremlin intrigue. Trips to Siberia. No, I merely intend to go home. It is time.

HONEYMAN. Is it a medical problem?

BOTVINNIK. No.

HONEYMAN. It's just that you've seemed more . . . distracted than usual. In the sessions.

BOTVINNIK. Me? What about you? Pushing old men in the street.

HONEYMAN. That was . . .

BOTVINNIK. You don't have to apologize. No—I have served for many years here by doing absolutely nothing. Now it is time for a new man to come and do absolutely nothing. In this way we achieve continuity of results. (*Holds his hand out to shake again.*) So. It has been very pleasurable with you. I thank you and say good-bye.

HONEYMAN. (*Not taking his hand.*) Why are you leaving?

BOTVINNIK. I told you. Shake.

HONEYMAN. Why are you leaving?

BOTVINNIK. There is no real reason. I am losing . . . concentration at the table—a little bit. My mind is beginning to wander . . . slightly . . . when I am there.

HONEYMAN. To wander?

BOTVINNIK. More and more. (*A beat.*)

HONEYMAN. Why not take some time off? A week or two? Maybe that would . . .

BOTVINNIK. That would do nothing. I am degenerating. It happens to everyone. Each day now I feel like I could say . . . anything. The worst thing. At the worst moment. It is an interesting feeling. It's like my brain is drying up, instead of my eyes. Work without hope is a dry thing. It is better, more realistic. But it is very dry. Will you miss me?

HONEYMAN. Don't go.

BOTVINNIK. I have to.

HONEYMAN. Rest a little. You can come back.

BOTVINNIK. The decay is inevitable.

HONEYMAN. It's not inevitable. Don't go. We're working on something here, Andrey.

BOTVINNIK. On what?

HONEYMAN. On *something*. My God — we've established a process, the two of us. If you're replaced, that's all gone.

BOTVINNIK. No, it isn't. The new man will . . .

HONEYMAN. The new man will not be you. (*A beat.*)

BOTVINNIK. You're very flattering. But let me make a suggestion. If you are so unhappy that I am leaving, then why don't you leave too?

HONEYMAN. Don't be ridiculous.

BOTVINNIK. It's not ridiculous. I go back to Leningrad, you go back to Vah-sow. We are both better off.

HONEYMAN. In what way?

BOTVINNIK. In every way. Listen to me — you're a good negotiator. You're smart, tough, charming. You can say no almost as well as me. They will keep you here a long time. And after long enough, you will be like I am now.

HONEYMAN. You're fine now.

BOTVINNIK. I don't even remember why I'm here. Leave when I do. Otherwise you will break down.

HONEYMAN. I won't.

BOTVINNIK. This morning you were almost arrested.

HONEYMAN. That was a freak accident.

BOTVINNIK. You will have more of them.

HONEYMAN. What if I do? What's it matter, as long as I'm here, working?



BOTVINNIK. Working for what? For progress? There is no progress here. Only the illusion. Every treaty we negotiated has been followed by an unprecedented arms buildup. Twenty-five years ago, we signed our first treaty. We had a few hundred warheads each. A few hundred. Today — thirteen treaties later — how many warheads do we have? Fifty thousand. If our leaders ever do accept real cuts, it will only be to gain a political advantage. When the advantage disappears, the cuts will too. There will be new weapons building. There will always be new weapons building. (*A beat.*) So listen to me: you are still young. Why grow old in this way?

HONEYMAN. Why should you care? You're leaving.

BOTVINNIK. I'm still your friend.

HONEYMAN. *Friends share hope!* If you go home now, we will never have been friends. Do you understand? We will have been colleagues, associates, counterparts, fellow workers on the same problem. Representatives, delegates, instruments of policy — but never — *never* — friends.

BOTVINNIK. (*Softly.*) I am *your* friend.

HONEYMAN. *Why!*? What do I do for you that makes you feel like a friend to me? What? Is it that we do the same thing? Have the same job?

BOTVINNIK. Of course not . . .

HONEYMAN. Then what? I don't think it's that we tell the same jokes. I don't think I tell any jokes at all, do I? I think I'm a pretty serious, stiff, even priggish type of person, wouldn't you say?

BOTVINNIK. At times.

HONEYMAN. All the time! And yet you like me. You want to be my friend. Why is that, Andrey? Do you want to get something from me? A bargaining advantage perhaps?

BOTVINNIK. Of course not . . .

HONEYMAN. You're damn right, of course not — you don't even remember why you're here. So what is it? What's the force that impels us towards each other? What is it we recognize in each other that makes us want to be friends? What is our special handicap as negotiators?

BOTVINNIK. (*Quietly.*) A conscience.

HONEYMAN. A conscience. Exactly. (*A beat.*) Do you think