

PERUSAL SCRIPT

THE SEAGULL

Translated and Adapted by Thomas F. Rogers
(from the play by Anton Chekhov)



Salt Lake City

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THE SEAGULL

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THE SEAGULL
by A. P. Chekhov - translation: T. F. Rogers
DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Irina Nikolaevna Arkadina, married name Trepleva, actress
Konstantin Gavrilovich Treplev, her son, a young man
Petr Nikolaevich Sorin, her brother
Nina Mikhajlovna Zarechnaja, a young girl, the daughter of a wealthy land owner
Ilja Afanasevich Shamraev, a retired lieutenant, Sorin's steward
Polina Andreevna, his wife
Masha, his daughter
Boris Alekseevich Trigorin, a writer
Evgenij Sergeevich Dorn, a doctor
Semjon Semeniovich Medvedenko, a teacher
Jakov, a worker
Cook
Maid

The action takes place at Sorin's estate. Between the third and fourth acts there is an interval of two years.

Synopsis Of Scenes

ACT ONE -- A section of park in Sorin's estate -- early evening

ACT TWO -- An area of lawn -- next day noon

ACT THREE -- Sorin's dining room -- sometime later

ACT FOUR -- Sorin's drawing room -- two years later -- early evening

THE SEAGULL Adapted and Translated by Thomas F. Rogers from the Chekhov original. 7M 5W 1G. **THE SEAGULL** is a slice-of-life drama set in the Russian countryside at the end of the 19th century. The cast of characters is dissatisfied with their lives. Some desire love. Some desire success. Some desire artistic genius. No one, however, ever seems to attain happiness. Some critics view *The Seagull* as a tragic play about eternally unhappy people. Others see it as a humorous albeit bitter satire, poking fun at human folly. ORDER #3064

InterConnections

One of life's most important purposes and functions—its greatest source of fulfillment, at least for me—is to commune, to “connect,” with others at ever deeper levels of understanding, mutual acceptance, sharing, identification by merging into one another's lives. And yet, how we tend to stifle our inclination, our need to do so, therewith missing the satisfaction and joy—the very nourishment to our souls—that alone derive from such communion, such connection. We do this largely, I think, from fear—fear of rejection. It is easily the most tragic tendency in human affairs and leads not only to emptiness and depression, but to resentment, hostility, and vengeful scapegoating. It lies at the root of the psychology that engenders and exacerbates all conflict and war, whether public or domestic, at every interpersonal level. If the devil inspires anything in us, it is our fear and subsequent disregard of each other, hence of ourselves. There are doubtless practical reasons—limits of attention and energy and time and availability—which preclude our attaching ourselves to or demonstrating our affinity for other than a certain number. But this should never serve—as it mostly does—as a pretext for our not universally caring for and about everyone of whom we become aware or who sooner or later enters our presence.

ACT ONE

A section of park in Sorin's estate. A wide formal lane leads from the front of the stage into the park toward a lake, upstage, before which stands a platform that has been hastily assembled for an amateur performance. The lake is not visible. To the left and to the right of the platform are small bushes, several chairs and a table. The sun has just set. On the platform behind a lowered curtain are Jakov and other workers; coughing and hammering are heard. Masha and Medvedenko come from the left, having returned, from a stroll.

MED: Why do you always wear black?

MASH: I am in mourning for my life. I am unhappy.

MED: (*pensively*) Why? I don't understand. You are healthy. Your father isn't rich, but you have enough. My life is much harder than yours. I only earn 23 rubles a month, including deductions. But I don't mourn for myself.

(They sit down.)

MASH: It has nothing to do with money. Even a pauper can be happy.

MED: That's true in theory but not in practice. I, my mother, and my two sisters and little brother all have to live off of my 23 rubles. We can live on just the plainest food and drink. Without tea and sugar. But it's hard.

MASH: (*glancing at the platform*) The performance is about to begin.

MED: They say that Nina is performing. Zarechnaja. The play's by Konstantin Gavrilovich. They're in love with one another, and today their souls will fuse in a single artistic enterprise. But we--our souls have no common ground. I love you; I can't sit at home because of my longing for you. Every day I walk six verts on foot and six back again in order to meet with your indifference. I know I have no means, no titled family. What can attract you in a man like myself?

MASH: Nonsense.

(Taking snuff)

Your love touches me but I can't reciprocate it. That's all.

(Offering him tobacco)

Help yourself.

MED: No, thank you.

MASH: It's stifling. There will be a storm tonight. All you do is philosophize or talk about money. You think there is no greater misfortune than poverty, but in my opinion it's a lot easier to go about in rags and to beg than ... You wouldn't understand ...

(Sorin and Treplev enter from the right.)

SOR: (*leaning on a cane*) I never get along well in the country, brother, and, it's a sure thing, I'll never get used to it. Last night I went to bed at ten and this morning I got up at nine feeling as if my brain had been stuck to my skull from so much sleep.

(Laughing)

After dinner I fell asleep again, and now I'm all undone as if I'd had a nightmare.

TREP: It's true, you ought to live in the city.

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(Noticing Masha and Medvedenko)

Ladies and gentlemen, I'll call you when we're ready, but for now you may not stay here. Please go somewhere else.

SOR: *(to Masha)* Masha, be kind enough to ask your daddy to untie his dog so that it won't howl. My sister couldn't sleep all last night again.

MASH: Tell my father yourself. I don't intend to. Please don't bother me.

(to Medvedenko)

Let's go!

MED: *(to Treplev)* Just so you'll let us know before it starts.

(Both leave.)

SOR: That means the dog will howl all night again. It's the story of my life: I've never lived in the country like I wanted to. I used to take my leave for twenty-eight days and come here in order to get rested up, but there was so much nonsense that already after the first day I wanted to go back.

(Laughing)

I was always glad to get away from here ... Now I'm retired and I've nowhere to go. Whether you want to or not, you have to keep on living.

JAKOV: *(to Treplev)* We're going to go for a swim, Konstantin Gavrilovich.

TREP: All right, but be in your places within ten minutes.

(Looking at his watch)

We'll begin soon.

JAKOV: I heard you.

(He leaves)

TREP: *(glancing at the platform)* Now that's a theatre for you. The curtain, wings on both sides, and in the distance empty space. No decorations. The view extends directly ahead to the lake and to the horizon. We'll raise the curtain exactly when the moon appears at 8:30.

SOR: Grandios!

TREP: If Nina's late it will ruin the whole effect. She should be here now. Her father and her stepmother smother her. It's as hard for her to get out of that house as if she were in prison.

(Straightening his uncle's tie)

Your hair and beard need combing. They ought to be trimmed.

SOR: *(combing his beard)* It's the tragedy of my life. In my youth I looked the same way--as if I were constantly drunk. Women have never loved me.

(Sitting down)

Why is my sister in such bad spirits?

TREP: Why? She's bored.

(Sitting next to him)

She's jealous. She opposes me. She's opposed to the production and she's against my play because Nina is in it and she isn't. She doesn't understand my play but she already hates it.

SOR: *(laughing at him)* You're just imagining.

TREP: She's upset that Nina will make a sensation on this petty little stage instead of herself.

(Glancing at his watch)

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She's a real curiosity--my mother. She's indisputably talented, intelligent, capable of weeping over any book or reciting all of Pushkin from memory, and of nursing the sick like an angel. But just try to praise Duse in her presence. You can only praise her, write about her, shout and applaud her extraordinary interpretation of *The Lady of the Camellias*. Because here in the country she can't have those stimulants, she is bored and bad tempered, and we are all her enemies, we are all to blame. She's also superstitious--afraid of three candles or the number "thirteen." She's stingy. She has 70,000 in the bank in Odessa--I know that for a fact. But just ask her for a loan, and she'll burst into tears.

SOR: You've imagined that she doesn't like your play. Don't be so upset. Your mother adores you.

TREP: (*detaching the petals of a flower*) She loves--she doesn't love, she loves--she doesn't love, she loves--she doesn't love.

(*Laughing*)

You see, my mother *doesn't* love me. She wants to live, to wear bright clothes, but I'm already twenty-five years old, and I constantly remind her that she is no longer young. If I weren't around, she'd only be thirty-two, but when I'm around she has to be forty-three, and for that she hates me. She also knows that I don't worship her kind of theatre. She loves the theatre. She thinks that she serves mankind and the sacred art, but in my opinion the today's theatre is only full of narrow cliches. When the curtain goes up all of these great talents, these priests and priestesses of the sacred art depict to us in the light of the setting sun, in a room with three walls, how people eat, drink, love, walk, and wear fine clothes.. When you try to extract a moral from these banal scenes it's not a very sublime one. You can at best only apply it to your household routine. When they portray one and the same thing in a thousand variations, one and the same thing, always the same thing--then I flee like Maupassant fled from the Eiffel Tower, which oppressed him so with its vulgarity.

SOR: We can't do without the theatre.

TREP: We need new forms. New forms are what we need, and if there are none, then it would be better not to need anything at all.

(*Looking at his watch*)

I love my mother, I dearly love her. But she leads such a senseless life, always carrying on with this hack writer. She is constantly gossiped about in the newspapers--and it wears me. Sometimes the simple egotism of a common mortal speaks within me, and I am sorry that my mother has always been such a famous actress. If she were just a common woman I'd be much happier. Uncle, what can be more awful and stupid than my situation: she's always had guests about her: celebrities, artists and writers, and in their presence I've always been a nobody. They only tolerate me because I am her son. Who am I? What am I?. I have no talent, no money, and according to my passport, I am a Kievan bourgeoisie. My father was also a Kievan bourgeoisie, but he was at least a famous actor. So, when these artists and writers so graciously acknowledge me in mother's salon, I always feel as if they are appraising my insignificance. I understand their looks well enough and suffer from their condescension ...

SOR: Tell me, what kind of a man is this hack writer? I can't figure him out. No one can tell me anything about him.

TREP: He's simple but intelligent, a little melancholy. Very respectable. He'll soon be forty and he's already very prosperous. As for his writing, well what can I say? He's clever and talented. But you wouldn't want to read Trigorin after you'd looked at Tolstoy or Zola.

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SOR: As for me, I admire anyone who writes. I once passionately yearned to do two things: I wanted to marry and I wanted to be a writer, but I didn't manage to do either one. Yes, it would have been a fine thing to have been even a minor writer.

TREP: *(hearing something)* I hear footsteps.

(Embracing Sorin)

I can't live without her ... Even the sound of her feet excites me ... I'm insanely excited.

(He quickly goes toward Nina Zarechnaja, who has just entered.)

My enchantress, my dream ...

NINA: *(agitated)* I'm not late? Surely, I'm not late ...

TREP: *(kissing her hands)* No, no, no ...

NINA: All day I was so anxious. Afraid my father wouldn't let me come ... But just now he rode off with my stepmother ... The sky was red, the moon was already rising, and I raced my horse, I raced it so.

(Laughing)

But I am happy.

(She squeezes Sorin's hand.)

SOR: Your little eyes are full of tears. Tsk--Tsk! That won't do!

NINA: It's nothing ... Look how out of breath I am. In a half hour I must leave again. We must hurry. For heaven's sake, you mustn't detain me. Father doesn't know that I'm here.

TREP: It's time to begin then We must call the others.

SOR: I'll go after them. Right away.

(He goes to the right, singing.)

"In France two grenadiers ... "

(glancing about)

I was singing once when a comrade prosecutor said to me: "Excellency, you have a powerful voice ... "

Then he thought a little and added: "But a wretched one."

(He exits, laughing.)

NINA: My father's wife won't permit me to come here. They say this is a regular Bohemia ... But I am drawn to this lake, like a seagull ...

(She looks about.)

TREP: We are alone.

NINA: I think somebody is here.

TREP: Nobody ...

(A kiss.)

TREP: Don't leave early, I beg you.

NINA: If I come to you, then I'll stand the whole night in your garden, looking up at your window.

NINA: You mustn't. The night watchman will see you. Trezor isn't used to you. He'll bark.

TREP: I love you.

NINA: Shhh ...

TREP: *(hearing footsteps)* Who's there? Is it you, Jakov?

JAKOV: *(behind the platform)* It is.

TREP: Take your places. It is time. Is the moon rising?

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JAKOV: It is.

TREP: Do you have the wood alcohol? And the sulfur? When the red eyes appear we must smell the sulfur.
(*To Nina*)

Take your place, all is ready. Are you afraid?

NINA: Very. Your mother--oh, it's nothing. I'm not afraid, but Trigorin is out there ... I'm ashamed of acting in front of him. Such a famous writer. Is he young?

TREP: Yes.

NINA: What marvelous stories he writes!

TREP: (*coldly*) I wouldn't know. I haven't read them.

NINA: It's hard to act in your play. There are no real persons in it.

TREP: Real persons! One must not depict life the way it actually is or like it ought to be but as it manifests itself in dreams.

NINA: There is so little action in your play. It's hardly more than a recitation. And I think that any play must have love in it ...

(*Both exit behind the platform. Polina Andreevna and Dorn enter.*)

POL: It's getting damp. Go back and put on your galoshes.

DORN: I'm warm enough.

POL: You don't take care of yourself. It's impudence. You are a doctor, and you know very well that damp air is harmful, but you want me to suffer; you purposely sat all night on the terrace ...

DORN: (*singing*) "Don't say that our youth has perished."

POL: You were so enamored with Irina Nikolaevna that you didn't even notice the cold. Admit it, you like her.

DORN: I'm fifty-five years old.

POL: Nonsense. That's not old for a man. You are well-preserved and still please the ladies.

DORN: Well, what do you want me to do about it?

POL: You're all ready to fall in front of any actress. All of you!

DORN: (*humming*) "I am a new man in your presence ..." If in our society we revere actors and actresses and treat them with greater respect than, say, our merchants, then that is as it ought to be. It proves that we are still idealists.

POL: Women have always hung about your neck. Is that idealism?

DORN: (*shrugging his shoulders*) Women have always seen a lot of good in me. In the first place they have respected the fact that I am such a competent doctor. Ten ... fifteen years ago, you remember, I was considered the only decent obstetrician in the whole province. Next, I have always been an honest man.

POL: (*taking his hand*) My dear!

DORN: Quiet, someone's coming.

(*Arkadina enters on the arm of Sorin, along with Trigorin, Shamraev, Medvedenko and Masha.*)

SHAM: She played brilliantly at the Market Theatre in Poltava in 1873. Such an inspiration! Her acting was miraculous! And, pray tell me, where have we a comedian the likes of Chadin? As Raspljuev he had no equal. He was better than Sadovsky. Believe me, dear lady. Where is there anyone like him anymore?

ARK: You bring up such ancients. How should I know!

(*She sits down.*)

SHAM: (*sighing*) Pashka Chadin! There are none like him anymore. The stage is in decline, Irina Nikolaevna!

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Where once there were mighty oaks, now there are only stumps.

DORN: There are few very gifted ones today, it's true. But your average actor is much more competent.

SHAM: I can't agree with you. Besides, it's a matter of taste. *De gustibus aut bene., aut nihil.*

(Treplev appears from behind the platform.)

ARK: My dear son, when will it begin?

TREP: In a moment. I beg your patience.

ARK: *(reciting from Hamlet)* "Oh Hamlet, speak no more! Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul, and there I see such black and grained spots as will not leave their tinct."

TREP: "Nay, but to live in the rank sweat of an enseamed bed, stewed in corruption, honeying and making love over the nasty sty!"

(A horn is sounded from behind the platform.)

TREP: Ladies and gentlemen, we are about to begin! Your attention please!

(Pause.)

I will speak the first lines.

(He taps with a baton and speaks in a loud voice.)

Oh you, honorable, ancient shades that pass at night above this lake, hear us, and allow us to dream of that which will transpire in another 2,000 years.

SOR: In another 2,000 years there will be nothing left.

TREP: Then let us portray that nothing.

ARK: I'm already asleep.

(The curtain rises. The view of the lake becomes visible: the moon is on the horizon, its reflection visible in the water; Nina sits on a large rock, dressed in white.)

NINA: People, lions, eagles and partridges, horned deer, geese, spiders, silent fish inhabiting the water, starfish and you creatures one cannot see with the naked eye--in a word, all life, having completed your sad cycle, you are now extinct ... It has already been many centuries since the earth has known a single living creature. This poor moon lights its lamp in vain. Cranes no longer waken in the meadows, calling to one another, and May beetles no longer chirp in the linden groves. It is cold, cold, cold. All is empty, empty, empty. Horrible, horrible, horrible.

(Pause.)

The bodies of living creatures have disappeared in the dust, and eternal matter has transformed them into stones, into water, and clouds, while their souls have all fused into a single spirit. The universal world spirit--that is I ... I ... In me reside the souls of Alexander the Great and Caesar and Shakespeare and Napoleon, and of the most infinitesimal worm. In me consciousness has fused with animal instinct. I remember everything, and within me every life is relived once again ...

(Fireflies appear.)

ARK: This is rather decadent.

TREP: *(exploring her)* Mama!

NINA: I am all alone. only once in a hundred years do I open my lips in order to speak. My voice echoes despondently across this wasted land, where there are none to hear ... And you, pale fires, you do not hear me ... The stagnant marsh begets you before the dawn. You wander mindlessly until the dusk, without a will, without life's throbbing. Fearing that at any instant life might arise within you, the Father of Eternal

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Matter, the devil, produces in you an exchange of atoms as in the rocks and in the water, and you're never the same. Only spirit remains constant and unchangeable in the entire universe.

(Pause.)

Like a prisoner cast into an empty deep well, I do not know where I am or what awaits me. I can only perceive that in the difficult and cruel struggle with the devil, the Father of material forces, whom I am fated to conquer. Afterward, matter and spirit will harmoniously combine, and then will be ushered in the Kingdom of the Universal Will. But that will happen only gradually, after many millenia, after the moon and bright Sirius and the earth have turned into dust ... Until then horror, horror ...

(Pause; two red spots appear above the lake.)

Now approaches my powerful adversary, the devil. I see his horrible crimson eyes ...

ARK: I smell sulfur. Is this necessary?

TREP: Yes.

ARK: *(laughing)* Such an effect.

TREP: Mama!

NINA: He is searching for man ...

POL: *(to Dorn)* You've taken off your hat. Put it back on, or you'll catch cold.

ARK: The doctor took his hat off in the devil's presence because he's the Father of Eternal Matter!

TREP: *(flaring up, loudly)* The play has ended! Enough! Curtain!

ARK: Why so angry?

TREP: Enough! Curtain! Draw the curtain!

(Stamping his feet)

Curtain!

(The curtain descends.)

TREP: It's my fault! I forgot that only the elect may write plays and perform them on stage. I interrupted their monopoly! I ... I ...

(He wishes to say something, but waves his hands and leaves to the left.)

ARK: What's the matter with him?

SOR: Irina, little mother, you mustn't be so indifferent to his youthful ambition.

ARK: What did I say to him?

SOR: You offended him.

ARK: He himself warned us that his play was a joke, and so I looked upon it as a joke.

SOR: All the same ...

ARK: Now, it would seem, he has written a masterpiece! It turns out, if you please, that he has constructed his platform and suffocated us with sulfur not for a joke but as a demonstration ... He wanted to instruct us how to write and what to perform. But it was so boring. Those constant sallies against me, those jibes--for heaven's sake, they would bore anyone! Such a capricious, conceited child.

SOR: He wanted to amuse you.

ARK: Indeed? Then why didn't he choose a traditional play instead of forcing upon us this decadent raving. For the sake of a joke I am prepared to listen to raving, but not to these pretensions about new forms, about a new era in art. Besides, there are no new forms here. There is only so much stupidity.

TRIG: Everyone writes as he wishes and as he is able.

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ARK: Let him write as he wishes and as he is able, but leave me in peace.

DORN: Jupiter, you are angry ...

ARK: I am not Jupiter. I am a woman.

(She lights a cigarette.)

I am not angry. I am only upset that a young man spends his time in such a tedious fashion. I didn't mean to humiliate him.

MED: No one has good grounds for separating spirit from matter, since spirit itself may be composed of material atoms.

(In a lively fashion, to Trigorin)

Now the thing to write a play about and produce on stage would be how your brother lives--a teacher. Life is difficult, difficult!

ARK: That would be a suitable subject, but let's not discuss plays or atoms just now. It's such a marvelous evening. Do you hear, my friends? Someone is singing!

(She listens attentively)

How beautiful!

POL: It's from over there on the shore.

(Pause.)

ARK: *(to Trigorin)* Sit next to me. Ten--fifteen years ago, here, on the lake, we would listen to music and sing the whole night long. Here along the shore there were six family estates. I remember the laughter, the noise, the shooting, and, above all, the romances ... The *jeune premier* and idol of all six estates was, I give you ...

(Nodding to Dorn)

the doctor. He is still en chanting, though not quite so irresistible ... But my conscience is beginning to bother me. Why did I humiliate my poor boy? I am distraught.

(Loudly)

Kostja! Son! Kostja!

MASH: I'll go look for him.

ARK: Please do, my dear.

MASH: *(going to the left)* Yoo-hoo! Konstantin Gavrilovich! Yoohoo!

(She exits.)

NINA: *(coming out from behind the platform)* Apparently we won't be performing the rest. I must go. Good day!

(She kisses Arkadina and Polina Andreevna.)

ARK: Bravo, Bravo! You overwhelmed us. Such a profile, such an enchanting voice. It's hard to believe, and it's a sin to sit out your life in the country. You have a great talent. Do you hear? You must go on the stage!

NINA: Oh, that is my dream!

(Sighing)

But it will never happen.

ARK: Who knows? Allow me to introduce you. This is Trigorin, Boris Alekseevich.

NINA: Oh, I am so honored ...

(Blushing)

I've read all of your--

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ARK: *(sitting next to her)* Don't be embarrassed, my dear. He is a famous man, but he has a simple soul. You see, he too is blushing.

DORN: I suppose we can raise the curtain now. It looks so strange like that.

SHAM: *(loudly)* Jakov, raise it, brother--the curtain!

(The curtain rises.)

NINA: *(to Trigorin)* It's a strange play, don't you think?

TRIG: Oh, there's a lot I don't understand. I enjoyed what I saw. You played with such feeling. And the set was very attractive ... There must be a lot of fish in that lake.

NINA: There are.

TRIG: I love to fish. I love nothing so much as to sit at evening on a riverbank and watch a float.

NINA: But I would think there could be no other pleasure for someone who had experienced the ecstasy of creation.

ARK: *(laughing)* Mercy! Don't talk that way. He is utterly undone when people say such things to him.

SHAM: I remember how once at the Moscow Opera, when the famous Silva had just struck low C, a bass from our local choir suddenly called back from the gallery: "Bravo, Silva!" --but a whole octave lower. You can imagine how amazed we were. Just like that:

(In a low bass)

"Bravo, Silva ... " Everyone in the theatre simply froze on the spot.

(Pause.)

DORN: The angel of silence has just passed over us.

NINA: It's time for me to go. Farewell.

ARK: Where to? Where to so early? We won't let you go.

NINA: Papa is expecting me.

ARK: What kind of a man is that, really? ...

(They kiss.)

Well, what can we do? It's a pity, such a pity to let you go.

NINA: If you only knew how difficult it is for me to leave you!

ARK: Someone must escort you, my little one.

NINA: *(frightened)* Oh, no, no!

SOR: *(pleading with her)* Wait!

NINA: I can't, Petr Nikolaevich.

SOR: Stay just another hour. Please do.

NINA: *(debating, tearfully)* No, it's impossible!

(She squeezes his hand and quickly exits.)

ARK: A truly unfortunate girl. They say that her late mother willed her husband her immense holdings and all of her property down to the last copeck and that now this girl is left with nothing because her father has already deeded it to his second wife. It's astounding.

DORN: Yes, to do him full justice, her papa is a real cad.

SOR: *(rubbing his frozen hands)* Let us go, my friends, it's getting too damp. My legs ache.

ARK: They look so stiff, as if they were made of wood. Well, let us go, you pitiful old man.

(She takes him by the arm.)

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SHAM: (*offering his wife his arm*) madame?

SOR: I hear that dog barking again.

(*To Shamraev*)

Be so kind, Ilja Afanasevich, have them untie him.

SHAM: It's impossible, Petr Nikolaevich. I'm afraid of thieves breaking into the barn. I've stored millet there.

(*To Medvedenko*)

Yes, a whole octave lower: "Bravo, Silva!" And not even a professional singer, just a member of the local choir.

MED: How much salary does a choir member earn?

(*All exit except for Dorn.*)

DORN: (*alone*) I don't know ... Perhaps I don't understand anything, or else I've gone mad, but I liked that play.

There is something to it. When that girl spoke about loneliness and then, when the devil's red eyes appeared, my hands trembled. It's fresh, original ... Here he comes, I'll try to say something especially nice to him.

TREP: (*entering*) Anyone here?

DORN: I'm here.

TREP: Masha's been looking for me all over the park. Such an unbearable creature.

DORN: Konstantin G, just the same, it immensely impressed me. You are a very talented man. You must keep writing.

(*Treplev shakes his hand, then impulsively embraces him.*)

DORN: My, how nervous you are. Tears in your eyes ... What was I about to say? Yes ... you took your subject from the sphere of abstract ideas. And that's as it should be because a work of art must always express a profound thought. Only what is serious can also be sublime ... How pale you are!

TREP: And so you think I should ... continue to write?

DORN: Of course ... But only describe what is most important, what is eternal. I've lived a rich life, as you know, and I have a modicum of taste. I am satisfied. But if I had experienced that exaltation of spirit that artists know at the moment of creation, then I think I'd detest my physical shell and everything-I've ever done and remove myself from this earth for the distant heights.

TREP: Excuse me, but where is Nina?

DORN: And there's something else. A work of art must have a clear and definite idea. You have to know why you are writing; otherwise, if you follow the path of art without a definite goal, you'll get lost, and your talent will destroy you.

TREP: (*impatiently*) Where is Nina?

DORN: She's gone home.

TREP: (*despairingly*) What shall I do? I want to see her ... I must see her ... I will go ...

(*Masha enters.*)

DORN: (*to Treplev*) Calm yourself, my friend.

TREP: I'll go just the same. I must go.

MASH: Konstantin Gavrilovich, return to the house. Your mother is waiting for you.

TREP: Tell her I have left. And leave me in peace! All of you! Please leave me alone! Don't come with me!

DORN: But, but, my dear fellow ...

TREP: *(through tears)* Farewell, doctor. Thank you ...
(He leaves.)

DORN: *(sighing)* Youth, youth!

MASH: When they can say nothing else, then they say: "Youth, youth ..."
(She sniffs tobacco.)

DORN: *(taking her tobacco and throwing it in the bushes)* Such filth! ... It sounds as if they're playing something indoors. I must go.

MASH: I must tell you one more time. I must speak with you ...
(Upset)

I don't love my father ... but I am drawn to you. For some reason I feel in my heart that you are close to me ... Help me. Help me, or else I will make a terrible mistake. I will make a mockery of my life and destroy it ... I can't any longer ...

DORN: Help you? How?

MASH: I suffer so. Nobody, nobody knows how much I suffer!
(Placing her head against his chest, quietly)

I love Konstantin.

DORN: How nervous you all are! How terribly nervous! And so much love ... Oh, bewitching lake!
(Tenderly)

But what can I do, my child? What ... what?

ACT TWO

An area of lawn arranged for croquet. In the distance, right, is the house with a large terrace. The sun glistens on the lake, which can be seen to the left. Flower beds are also visible. It is noonday and very warm. To the side of the croquet area, in the shade of an old linden tree, Arkandina, Dorn and Masha are seated on a bench. An open book lies on Dorn's lap.

DORN: And it stands to reason that for society to pamper its novelists by drawing them into a circle--

ARK: *(to Masha)* Let's stand up.

(They both stand.)

Now stand beside me. You are twenty-two years old, and I'm almost twice your age. Evgenij, which of us appears the younger?

DORN: You, of course.

ARK: There, you see. But why? Because I am active. I feel deeply, I'm constantly in the fray, while you sit, always in the same place, and you're only half alive. I also have a certain rule: Never anticipate the future. I never think about old age or death. What will be will be.

MASH: And I feel as if I were born long ago. I drag my life about like a long endless train. Life rarely excites me.

(She sits down.)

I'm silly, of course. I need to stir myself and throw it all off.

DORN: *(quietly singing)* "Tell her, my flowers ... "

ARK: I am also impeccably correct, like an Englishman. I bridle myself in, as the saying goes, and I'm always dressed and groomed *comme il faut*. I never allow myself to leave the house in just a blouse or with my hair uncombed, even for the garden. Never. I've preserved myself by never getting dowdy, never letting myself go like some ...

(She walks up and down the lawn, her hands on her hips.)

How's that? Don't I remind you of a little bird? I could even play a fifteen-year-old girl.

DORN: Just the same, I'll continue reading.

(He picks up his book.)

We stopped with the grain merchants and the rats ...

ARK: Yes, the rats ... Read, please.

(She sits.)

Better still, give it here. I'll read. It's my turn.

(She takes the book and searches through it.)

And the rats. Here it is.

(Reading)

"And it stands to reason that for society to pamper its novelists by drawing them into its circle is as dangerous as for the grain merchant to rear rats in his barn. Society adores them just the same. And so, when the *grande dame* sets her eyes on a writer, she bombards him with compliments, endearing remarks and all

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sorts of personal favors." Well, that may be true of the French, but not with us. We have no such stratagems. When one of us wishes to captivate a writer, she is already up to her ears in love with him. You don't have far to look. Take myself and Trigorin, for example.

(Sorin enters, leaning on a cane, and with him, Nina. Medvedenko pushes an empty wheel chair behind them.)

SOR: *(as if comforting children)* We're happy now, aren't we? Today we're quite content, aren't we?
(To his sister)

We're happy indeed! Father and stepmother have driven off to Tver and now we are free for a whole three days.

NINA: *(sitting next to Arkadina and embracing her)* I am happy! Now I belong to you.

SOR: *(sitting in the wheel chair)* She is very beautiful today.

ARK: You're attractive, smartly dressed ... You understand that sort of thing.
(She kisses Nina.)

But we mustn't praise you too much. It's unlucky. Where is Trigorin?

NINA: He's fishing. By the bath house.

ARK: You'd think he'd get tired of that?
(She continues reading.)

NINA: What is that?

ARK: Maupassant's "On the Water," my sweet.
(she reads several lines to herself.)

But it's neither interesting nor true.
(She closes the book.)

I'm so restless. Tell me, what's the matter with my son? Why is he so bored and so unpleasant? He spends whole days on the lake. I hardly ever see him.

MASH: He is distraught.
(To Nina, timidly)

Please, read his play to us!

NINA: *(shrugging her shoulders)* Are you serious? It's not very interesting!

MASH: *(restraining her excitement)* Whenever he reads anything, his eyes burn and his face pales. He has such a beautiful, sad voice--and the manners of a poet.
(Sorin audibly snores.)

DORN: Pleasant dreams!

ARK: Petrusha!

SOR: ... Yes?

ARK: Were you sleeping?

SOR: A little.

ARK: You're not taking the cure, brother. Shame on you.

SOR: I'd be happy to take the cure, but the doctor doesn't want me to.

DORN: Take the cure at age sixty!

SOR: Even a sixty-year-old wishes to live.

DORN: Then take valerian drops.

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ARK: I think he ought to go to a sanatorium.

DORN: So: Then let him go. Or let him not go.

ARK: What's that supposed to mean?

DORN: It doesn't mean a thing. That's all.

(Pause.)

MED: Sorin ought to quit smoking.

SOR: Nonsense.

DORN: No, it's not. Wine and tobacco destroy our personalities. After a cigar or a glass of vodka you are no longer Petr Nikolaevich but Petr Nikolaevich plus somebody else. Your ego diffuses, and you begin to see yourself as a third person--a "he," not an "I."

SOR: *(laughing)* You can say such things. You've already lived out your life, but I? I served in the department of justice for twenty-eight years, but I still haven't lived. I haven't experienced anything worthwhile. So you can understand why I still want to live. You are sated and indifferent, and you're inclined to philosophize. I, on the other hand, want to live, to drink sherry at dinner, to smoke cigars, etc., etc. That's my position.

DORN: one should take life seriously, but to seek a cure at sixty years of age, to regret that in one's youth one didn't live it up is, you'll excuse me, just plain fickle.

MASH: *(standing)* It must be time for lunch.

(She walks indolently, dragging one foot.)

My foot's gone to sleep ...

(She exits. Pause)

SHAM: *(flaring up)* In that case, I resign! Find yourself another steward!

ARK: Every summer it's this way, every summer they insult me! I'll not set foot in this place again!

(She exits to the left, in the direction of the bath house. A moment later she is seen entering the house, Trigorin following her with tackle and a pail)

SHAM: This is an outrage! I've had my fill of it. Have all the horses brought to me this minute!

(He exits)

NINA: *(to Polina Andreevna)* You refuse Irina Nikolaevna, the famous actress? Surely her every wish, her every caprice, is more important than how you run this farm! I can't believe it!

POL: *(in desperation)* What can I do? Put yourself in my position: what can I do?

SOR: *(to Nina)* Let's go to my sister. We will implore her not to leave. shan't we?

(Looking in the direction in which Shamraev exited)

Such an unbearable man! Such a despot!

NINA: *(restraining him)* Sit, sit. We will wheel you.

(She and Medvedenko push the wheel chair.)

Oh, how awful it is!

SOR: Yes, yes, it's awful. But he won't leave us, I'll talk with him.

(They exit. Only Dorn and Polina Andreevna remain.)

DORN: People are tiresome. Indeed, they ought to get rid of your husband, but that old grandmother Petr Nikolaevich and his sister will only end up begging his pardon. Wait and see!

POL: He did send the carriage horses to the field. And every day such dissension. If you only knew how it upsets me! I'm getting ill. Look, I'm shaking. I can't bear his rudeness.

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(Imploringly)

Evgenij, dear, beloved, take me to you. Our time is passing, we're no longer young. If we would only stop hiding and lying, even now, at the end of our lives ...

DORN: I'm fifty-five years old. It's already too late to change my life.

POL: I know, you refuse me because you're still having affairs with other women. You can't satisfy us all. I understand. Forgive me for wearying you.

(Nina appears beside the house. She is picking flowers.)

DORN: Don't say that.

POL: I envy them so. Of course, you can't avoid them, Doctor. I understand ...

DORN: *(to Nina, who has meanwhile been approaching them)* How are the others?

NINA: Irina Nikolaevna is crying, and Petr Nikolaevich is having an attack of asthma.

DORN: *(standing)* I'll have to give them both valerian drops.

NINA: *(giving him the flowers)* For you!

DORN: *Merci bien.*

(He goes toward the house.)

POL: *(following him)* What lovely little flowers! ... *(near the house, in a spiteful voice)* Give them to me! Give me those flowers!

(Taking them, she tears them into pieces and throws them away. They both enter the house.)

NINA: *(alone)* How terrible to see a famous actress cry over nothing! And isn't it strange that such a famous writer, the public's idol--a man they write about in newspapers, whose picture they sell, whose books are translated into foreign languages--fishes all day long and is overjoyed when he catches two chub? I thought that famous people were proud and inaccessible, that they disdained crowds and that with their fame and glory they avenged themselves on others for envying them, their wealth and reputation. But they still cry, go fishing, play cards, laugh and get angry like everyone else.

TREP: *(entering hatless with a rifle and a dead seagull)* Are you alone?

NINA: Yes.

(He puts the seagull at her feet.)

NINA: What are you doing?

TREP: I was base enough to kill this bird. I lay it at your feet.

NINA: What's wrong with you?

(She picks up the seagull and examines it.)

TREP: *(after a pause)* I will soon kill myself in the same way.

NINA: I don't understand.

TREP: I have felt this way ever since you've changed toward me. Your glance is cold, my presence disturbs you.

NINA: You're so irritable these days, you express yourself so incomprehensibly, in symbols. And that seagull is another symbol, I suppose ...

(She puts the seagull on the bench.)

Forgive me. I'm too simple a creature to understand you.

TREP: It began the evening we tried to perform my play. Women can't forgive failures. I burned it--every scrap of it. If you only knew how miserable I am! Your aloofness is terrifying, incomprehensible. It's as if I had

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just awakened and noticed that the lake was dried up, that it had drained into the earth. You say you are too simple to understand me. But what is there to understand? You didn't like the play, you despise my inspiration, you think me mediocre, insignificant, like all the others ...

(Stamping his feet)

It's as if I had a spike in my brain. Damn that spike and damn the pride that sucks my blood like a snake!

(Seeing Trigorin, who enters, reading a book)

Now there's an authentic talent. He enters like Hamlet, reading his book.

(Imitating)

"Words, words, words ... " The sun still hasn't touched you yet, but you are already smiling, your glance has melted its rays. I won't disturb you.

(He quickly exits)

TRIG: *(writing in his book)* She uses snuff and drinks vodka. Always wears black. The teacher loves her.

NINA: Good day, Boris Alekseevich.

TRIG: Good day. It seems that circumstances require us to leave today. I won't be seeing you for a while. And that's a shame. I don't often get to meet such interesting young ladies. I can no longer imagine how it feels to be so young. That's why the ingenues in my stories aren't very convincing. If for just one hour I could change places with you, then I would know how you think and what you are made of.

NINA: And I would give anything to change places with you.

TRIG: Why?

NINA: So that I could know what a talented writer thinks. How it feels to be famous. How one reacts to fame.

TRIG: How? In no particular way. I've never even thought about it.

(Pensively)

I suppose one of two things: Either you are exaggerating my fame, or it's something I've failed to notice.

NINA: But when you read about yourself in the newspapers ...?

TRIG: Oh, I enjoy the critics' praise, and when they tear me apart, then for at least two days I'm not in a very good mood.

NINA: What a strange world! If you only knew how I envy you! Our fates are so different. Most people can hardly bear to drag out their wearisome, obscure existence. All resemble one another, all are equally miserable. Others like yourself are one in a million. You've been allotted such an interesting life--a life so full of meaning. You are truly fortunate.

TRIG: I? *(shrugging his shoulders)* You speak about fame, about happiness, about an interesting life, but to me all these lovely words are, forgive me, like so much marmalade. And I never eat marmalade. But you are very kind. I--

NINA: Your life is so beautiful!

TRIG: What is so beautiful about it?

(Looking at his watch)

I should go now and do some writing. I'm sorry, I just don't have the time to ...

(Laughing)

You just stepped on my favorite corn. And that's an irritation ... No, let's talk. Let's talk about my beautiful, bright life. But where shall we begin?

(Meditating)

There are compelling ideas--when, for instance, a man thinks day and night long about the moon ... I have my own moon. Day and night I'm obsessed with one overwhelming thought: I have to write, I have to write ... I barely complete one tale when I must immediately begin the next, then a third and a fourth ... I write incessantly, as if I were riding horses in some relay. And I can't help it. What is so beautiful about that, I ask? No, life is ruthless! Here I am with you, but I'm not content. Every instant I keep remembering that an unfinished tale is waiting there for me. Look at that cloud. It resembles a grand piano. So I tell myself that I must mention somewhere in one of my stories that a cloud passed by resembling a grand piano. I smell heliotrope. I make a quick note: its cloying smell, its sombre color recall a summer evening. I take a stock of you and myself in every word, in every phrase, and then I hurry to lock up all these words and phrases in my literary store house: they may come in handy! When I finish a piece, I rush to the theatre or I go fishing. They're the only places I can rest, forget myself. But, no, even there a great cannonball rolls about in my head: a new subject, I am already drawn to my desk. I rush again to write and write. And thus it is, every time. I have no tranquility. I consume myself for the sake of the honey I distill for others I don't even know. I gather pollen from the finest flowers, tear them up, and trample on their roots. Am I not insane? Do my friends treat me as if I were normal? "What are you scribbling now? What will you give us next?" It's always the same, always the same. And it seems to me that--with all of their attention, their praise, their admiration--they are deceiving me as they would a sick man. I even sometimes fear that they are sneaking up to take me to an asylum. In those early years, in those finest years, when I first began to write, it was a constant torment. A minor writer, especially when he's still unrecognized, strikes himself as awkward and non-adept--superfluous. His nerves become strained. He can't avoid the literary and artistic crowd. But no one notices him. He's afraid to look anyone boldly in the eye. He's like an incurable gambler who has no money ... I've never seen my readers, but somehow I imagine them as rather unfriendly and suspicious. I fear my public. And whenever I produce a new work, I always envision the fat ones as hostile and the thin ones as cold and indifferent. How awful it is! What torment!

NINA: But surely the process of creation gives you many sublime moments.

TRIG: While I'm writing, I'm content. And also when I read my proofs, but they hardly appear in print when I see that it's not like it should be, that it's a mistake and shouldn't have been written at all, and I become vexed and feel worthless.

(Laughing)

The public--what do they say?: He's clever, he's talented ... but he's hardly a Tolstoy!" Or "It's an attractive piece, but Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* is much better." It will be that way until they nail the plank over my coffin: clever, talented--but nothing more. When I die, my friends will walk past my grave and say: "Here lies Trigorin. He was a good writer, but he didn't write as well as Turgenev."

NINA: Forgive me, I refuse to believe you. You are only spoiled with your success.

TRIG: With what success? I've never pleased myself. I don't respect myself as a writer. Worst of all, I often don't understand what I am writing. I love this water, those trees, that sky. I respond to nature. It awakens my passion, my unbridled desire to write. But I am not just a landscape painter, I'm also a citizen. I love my country and my people and believe that as a writer I am obligated to speak about their trials, their future, science, human rights and so on. So I write about everything. I rush about, get angry and scurry in all directions like a fox chased by the hounds. I see that life and science are constantly moving forward, while I am falling further and further behind like a peasant who has missed his train. In the long run I feel that I am

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only capable of depicting landscapes and that in everything else I am false--false to the marrow of my bones.

NINA: You've worn yourself out with work. You don't have the time or the inclination to appraise it. You can afford to be dissatisfied, but to others you are great and wonderful! If I were a writer like you, I would give my entire life to the masses, and I would know that their happiness consists alone in being raised to my level. And that they would gladly pull me forward by harnessing themselves to my chariot.

TRIG: To my chariot! Am I Agamemnon?

(They both smile)

NINA: For the joy of being a writer, or an actress, I would endure the enmity of loved ones, poverty, disappointment. I would live in a garret and only eat black bread. I would suffer, knowing my imperfections, but I would in turn demand fame--real, tumultuous fame.

(She covers her face with her hands.)

My head is swimming ... Ough!

(Arkadina's voice is heard from the house: "Boris Alekseevich!")

TRIG: She's calling me. To pack, most likely. But I don't want to leave.

(He glances at the lake.)

What bliss! Enchanting!

NINA: Do you see the house and the garden on the far shore?

TRIG: Yes.

NINA: It's my late mother's estate. I was born there. I have spent my life by this lake, and I know every island on it.

TRIG: It's lovely here!

(Seeing the gull)

What's this?

NINA: A gull. Konstantin killed it.

TRIG: A beautiful bird. No, I don't want to leave. Try to convince Irina Nikolaevna she ought to stay.

(He writes in his notebook.)

NINA: What are you writing?

TRIG: I'm just making a note. A subject just occurred to me.

(Pocketing the notebook)

The subject for a short story: since childhood a young girl has lived on the shore of a lake--a girl like you; she loves the lake, like a gull, and, like a gull, she is happy and free. But, by chance, a man comes along, sees her, and, having nothing better to do, destroys her, like this seagull ...

(Arkadina appears in the window.)

ARK: Boris Alekseevich, where are you?

TRIG: Coming! ...

(He moves off, looking back at Nina, then toward Arkadina in the window.)

What is it?

ARK: We are staying.

(Trigorin goes into the house.)

NINA: *(approaching the footlights, after a moment's thought)* A dream!

END ACT TWO

(19 pages of Act Three and Act Four)