

Anton Chekhov's
THE SEAGULL

a play in four acts
adaptation by

Michael Perlmutter

abridged version

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CHARACTERS

IRINA ARKADINA, an actress, possibly in her late fifties (admits to 43 under certain circumstances)

CONSTANTINE TREPLEV, her son 25

PETER SORIN, her brother 65

NINA ZARIETCHNAYA, a young girl, the daughter of a rich landowner 19

ILIA SHAMRAEFF, the manager of SORIN'S estate, fifties

PAULINA, his wife, late forties

MASHA, their daughter, mid twenties

BORIS TRIGORIN, an author, 35 - 40

EUGENE DORN, a doctor, mid fifties

SIMON MEDVIEDENKO, a schoolmaster, late twenties / early thirties

JACOB, a workman, 30-40

A COOK, age open

A MAIDSERVANT, age open

SETTING - RUSSIA 1893

ACT I	The park on the SORIN family estate. A summer evening at sunset.
ACT II	The lawn in front of the SORIN house. Mid day. Three days later.
ACT III	The dining room of the SORIN house. Morning. One week later.
ACT IV	A sitting-room in the SORIN house. Evening. Two years later.

ACT 1

(A lakeside park set on the SORIN family estate. Shrubbery and trees align the edges of our view. A makeshift stage has been erected in this small clearing at the edge of the lake, blocking our view of the shore itself. A bench, a few chairs and tables have been setup to view the 'stage'. It is dusk and the setting sun casts its last rays of light gloriously on the stage; the sun setting behind us throwing its last rays of light across our scene. We hear the coughing and hammering of the crew finishing the last touches of construction behind the closed curtain.

MASHA and MEDVIEDENKO enter from the left, returning from a walk.)

MEDVIEDENKO

Why black? What are you in mourning for?

MASHA

My life.

MEDVIEDENKO

What do you mean? You have a wonderful life: You're . . . you're healthy. Your father may not be rich but he's got a job: he works. Look at me: I have to get by on twenty-three rubles a month. Do you see me walking around at my own funeral?

(MASHA sits at one end of the bench. MEDVIEDENKO following suit sits beside her. Slight pause.)

MEDVIEDENKO

I scrape by on twenty three rubles a month; which if I were on my own would be one thing but add to that: my mother and two sisters, and my little brother and . . . somehow we make it work. We survive.

(There is an awkward silence . MASHA turns and just looks at him for a moment then back at the stage.)

MASHA

Is the play going to start soon?

MEDVIEDENKO

Yes . . . that . . .

(Searching for a segue:)

MEDVIEDENKO (Continued:)

Nina Zarietchnaya is acting in Treplev's play.

(No reply.)

They love one another, you know.

(No reply. He sighs. She sighs.)

MEDVIEDENKO

Ahh Remind me why do I walk here every day? Why do I torment you? Why do I torment me? Because I love you, Masha.

(No reply--but there again he never expected one.)

There, I've said it. Shoot me now. But . . . you don't need to say anything. I understand. I only trudge here six miles . . each way . . . just so my heart can get its daily beating. Why should you care? Only a pathetic teacher's salary and an already too large family . . I get it. I understand

(Pause. MASHA takes out her snuff box and openly uses the same. Pause. She offers the same to MEDVIEDENKO.)

MEDVIEDENKO

No, thank you.

(The pause continues.)

MASHA

I think it's going to rain.

(MEDVIEDENKO throws his head back looking up to the heavens for guidance if it weren't for the fact his eyes are closed.)

MASHA

Oh, Simon, it's not you. Well, yes, it *is* you. All you ever do is talk . . .

(Laying herself across his lap as if he were only an extension of the bench.)

To you being poor is the greatest tragedy that can happen to a person but I think it's about a thousand times easier to go around begging in rags than to . . . ah, you wouldn't understand . . .

(MEDVIEDENKO is torn at this moment between, longing, lust and his keen awareness that for Masha he is nothing more than piece of furniture. MASHA , however just stares out into the sunset. PETER SORIN leaning on a cane, and TREPLEV, his nephew, enter from right.

MASHA, fully aware of their entrance continues to stare out into the setting sun.)

SORIN

I don't know which is worse. Actually being retired or just living out here in the country. Last night I went to bed at ten and woke up nine this morning and then at dinner tonight I found myself drifting off again. Maybe I'm testing death.

TREPLEV

Uncle, I do believe you should have never left Moscow.

(He catches sight of MASHA [whose gaze has drifted off to stare at him] and MEDVIEDENKO [trying not to look embarrassed by their positions.]

We're not seating anyone yet. We'll call you when play begins.

(MASHA unenthusiastically sits up accordingly.

MEDVIEDENKO crosses his legs quietly.)

Go away, please.

SORIN

Miss Masha, will you kindly have a word with your father and ask him to leave that dog of his off its chain tonight? It howled all night again last night and kept waking my sister up half the night.

MASHA

You'll have to ask him yourself . . . I can't.

(To MEDVIEDENKO:)

Simon?

MEDVIEDENKO

(Pausing a moment longer:)

I'll be right with you.

(MASHA heads out before him, not looking back, knowing he'll follow.)

MEDVIEDENKO

You will let us know when the play begins?

(No answer. MEDVIEDENKO carefully rises and exits following MASHA out.)

SORIN

That dog is going to howl all night again. Why does it have to be like this? You'd think you could live the life you want after you retire. It's my house, after all. I remember coming here for summers when I was your age; first day in I'd be so frustrated by their nonsense I couldn't wait to leave. Life here is just wrong.

SORIN (Continued:)

Now look at me: I'm retired now and where else do I have to go? I'm stuck here. What do people see in this place?

JACOB

(Stepping out from behind the curtain; to TREPLEV)

We are going to take a quick swim in the lake, Mr. Constantine.

TREPLEV

The play starts in ten minutes.

JACOB

We know. We'll be back. The lake's right there.

TREPLEV

(As he goes:)

Ten minutes.

SORIN

I just don't get it.

TREPLEV

(Looking at the stage)

Well, Uncle, what do you think? Just like a real stage, right? We've got our curtain; a raised platform, and all the scenery you could never buy. Nothing fake, nothing artificial. See? From where you're sitting: you'll see the moon rising right on its edge at exactly

(Checks his watch:)

Fourteen minutes!

(Hollering out to Jacob and the workers:)

We start in fourteen minutes!

SORIN

That's nice.

TREPLEV

Where's Nina?

(SORIN just stares at him--oblivious to who Nina is.)

TREPLEV

She should be here by now. The whole effect will be lost if we don't start right when the moon just--

SORIN

(Overlapping; cued by 'She should be here by now':)

The girl you're seeing? Don't worry yourself: she wouldn't miss your theatrical debut.

TREPLEV

She is the debut. She should have been here by n--God, if her parents--she said she could get away--but getting away from them is like escaping a prison.

(He straightens SORIN'S collar)

Uncle, you hair . . . You have a comb? Honestly, you should think about trimming.

SORIN

(Smoothing his beard)

It's just the way I look--don't fuss with it--

(Changing the subject:)

What's got your mother in such a snit?

TREPLEV

She's just jealous.

SORIN

Did you ask her to be in the play?

TREPLEV

She hasn't even read it.

SORIN

Your mother is your mother.

TREPLEV

She's frustrating that's what she is.

(Nervously checks his watch.)

She's a star, of course, I'll give her that much: she's brilliant on stage: she can cry on cue and all, volunteers her time feeding the homeless and visiting the sick: she's an absolute saint. She's also superstitious to a fault and she holds onto every cent she's ever made like it's the last one she'll ever have. I happen to know for a fact that she has seventy thousand rubles in a bank at Odessa, but she'll burst into tears if you ask her to lend you a penny.

SORIN

Your mother loves you.

TREPLEV

Really? You think so? Why? Because it's in her nature? Let's ask nature then, shall we?

(Pulling a flower to pieces)

She loves me, loves me not; loves--loves me not; loves--loves me not!

(Laughing)

See? Nature says, "no." What she loves is to dress up and be the center of the everyone else's life. I'm twenty-five years old and look at me: a constant reminder that she's not. When I'm not around she's thirty-two. When I am: she's forty-three and she hates me for it. She loves the theatre because from the cheap seats you can't see the age lines. I hate the theatre. I hate what it's become. People just sitting around talking, complaining, nothing happens.

(There is a pause.)

SORIN

Yes but what we do if we didn't have theatre? Talk to each other?

TREPLEV

Don't get me wrong: I love my mother, I love her I do but she leads a stupid life. She's always going on about that writer of hers--

SORIN

Boris Trigorin.

TREPLEV

(Continuing:)

And she lives in constant fear that the newspapers won't like her.

SORIN

He seems nice.

TREPLEV

And I'm tired of it.

SORIN

Is he?

TREPLEV

Maybe if she were just an ordinary woman and not Irina Arkadina, the famous actress, I could be a happier man.

SORIN

Nonsense.

TREPLEV

Did you know I never finished college, did you know that? Do you know why? Neither do I. I told her I got bored with it but the truth is I pulled through that third year by the skin of my teeth. I couldn't hack it. So here I am: no money, no brains and to the rest of the world I don't even exist. Like my father before me-- but at least he was a famous actor in his time. And when these celebrities my mother litters our house with deign to notice me at all it's just to measure my insignificance. Do you know what it's like to live like that? Insignificant?

SORIN

What is Trigorin like, by the way? I can't understand him, he's always so quiet.

TREPLEV

(A beat.)

He's clever enough. Simple . . . that would describe him best: simple. Like his writing: simple, pleasant enough, but if you've read Tolstoy or Zola you somehow you can't really enjoy Trigorin.

SORIN

I always wanted to be a writer. Fascinating lifestyle. When I was your age I wanted just two things: to be married, and to become an author.

(He sighs.)

TREPLEV

(Listening)

Someone's coming.

(He embraces his uncle)

Oh my God, I recognize her footsteps. What does that mean? I should be furious at her making me wait like this but I'm just thrilled she's here.

(He goes quickly to meet NINA, who comes in at that moment)

"Nymph in the orisons."

NINA

What?

(Excitedly)

It can't be that I am late? Am I late? No, I'm not late.

TREPLEV

(Kissing her hands)

No, no, no! You're right on time. You're here.

NINA

The moon hasn't--

(Checking out the stage:)

Oooooh.

NINA (Continued:)

(Rattling off her thoughts as she checks out the stage, lights and seating.)

I didn't know if I could get away in time. I swear I thought I was going to be sick--I was running a fever this morning and I thought my parents would never leave--I was so afraid my father would spoil it all but he and his wife left for a drive so I ran as fast as I could to get here--then I thought to myself--what am I doing? So I ran back took the horse and got out the horse and let her do the running for me then when I saw the moon starting to lift and I knew I had to get here--I'm not too late, am I?

(To Sorin:)

Good to see you.

(She shakes hands with SORIN.)

SORIN

My dear, you look as if you've been crying. You mustn't do that.

(TREPLEV begins lighting torches along the perimeter.)

NINA

It is nothing, it's nothing. The wind. So, we have to hurry. I have to be gone in half an hour before father--

(To TREPLEV:)

You can't ask me to stay: I can't stay--so don't ask me. I can't stay. I'm so excited. Are you excited?

(Sharing the secret with SORIN:)

My father doesn't know I'm here.

TREPLEV

(Watching for JACOB, spying the moon's position while rushing to get the torches lit:)

I have to call the audience.

SORIN

I'll go. I was just heading in anyway.

(He starts off toward the house singing to himself--then stops:)

I sang that song once when just outside of court when another lawyer said to me, "Sir, you have a powerful voice." "a powerful voice--but a decidedly disagreeable one."

(He exits laughing at his own amusement and picks back up singing as his voice trails off with him.)

NINA

I'm not late, am I? I'm not late. My father and his wife never want me to come here; they call this place Bohemia. They're afraid I'll become an actress. But

NINA (Continued:)

what would be so wrong with that? I love the lake. Do you love the lake? It pulls me here like the gulls. It calls to me. Or is it you?

(She glances about her.)

Well?

TREPLEV

(Lighting the last of them:)

One more torch.

NINA

Is somebody coming? I think somebody's--

TREPLEV

(Moving in to her--torch in hand:)

No.

(He moves in to kiss her. (They kiss one another. A stolen moment--but a lingering one.)

NINA

Careful, you don't want to set me on fire.

(As TREPLEV moves away from her with the torch and finishes lighting the last stand, NINA touches her hair to be sure of its quaff--her eye is caught by the foliage above her.)

What kind of tree is that?

TREPLEV

An elm.

NINA

Why does it look so dark?

TREPLEV

It's nighttime; everything looks dark at night.

(He puts out the hand torch and sets it down.)

Don't go away early, I beg you.

NINA

I have to.

TREPLEV

I'll just follow you.

You can't.

NINA

I will.

TREPLEV

You mustn't.

NINA

TREPLKEV

I'll stand in your garden with flowers at my feet and my eyes on your window till morning.

NINA
(Fixing her hair--combing it out any nettles from the horse ride.)

You wouldn't last that long--first: the watchman would see you and even if you could allude him Treasure would start barking because she's not used to you yet--it'd be a miracle if you got away with an hour.

I love you.

TREPLEV

NINA
(Responding to his remark rather than his looks:)

You're cute.

TREPLEV
(Listening:)

Who is that? Is that you, Jacob?

JACOB
(Steps out again from behind the curtain--but now dripping wet.)

Yes, sir.

TREPLEV
(Changes the subject:)

Alright, everybody take your places then. How's the moon?

NINA
(Taking her place behind the curtain.)

Yes, sir.