

Anton Chekhov's
THE SEAGULL

a play in four acts
adaptation by

Michael Perlmutter

Michael Perlmutter
1719 N. 6th St
Port Hueneme, CA 93041
805-469-2897
lmjdj@msn.com

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.)

MASHA

Being rich and being happy aren't mutually tied to each other: there are plenty of poor people happy in the world . . . so I'm told.

MEDVIEDENKO

You'd like to think so, wouldn't you?

(No reply.)

I scrape by on twenty three rubles a month; which if I were on my own would be one thing but add my mother and two sisters, and my little brother to that and somehow we make it work. We survive. We don't have a lot but we're not starving. Somehow. I mean we have to eat. But tell me, what would you have us give up? Should we stop smoking? Maybe one of us stop eating altogether? Not me, of course, I'd have to eat because I'm the one bringing in the money. But who do I turn out into the streets? You tell me.

(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:)

Nina Zarietchnaya is acting in Treplev's play.

(No reply.)

They love one another, you know. Ahh . . . I imagine their play will be a huge success and the night will end with them all over each other celebrating their passion the way . . . young people in love tend to do . . . when no one's looking . . .

(No reply. He sighs. She sighs.)

MEDVIEDENKO

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 I know . . . You don't need to say anything. I trudge here six miles . . each way . . . just so my heart can get its daily beating. But who can blame you? Really? Why should you care? What do I have to offer? A pathetic teacher's salary and an already too large family . . I get it. I understand. I do. So

(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 . . . you moralize or go on about money--specifically about what money you don't have.

(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 I felt as if my brain was struck to the left side of my head for lack of use.

(Laughing:)

Then at dinner tonight I found myself drifting off again. It's like I can't decide where I want to be. 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. Don't want to ruin the magic.

(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. But no, "that's not how we do things out here." "That's city talk, this the country. City folk come here to rest." 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.

(Laughing)

I don't get it. 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 a curtain; a raised platform, and all the scenery you could never buy. Who needs flats and doors when you've got--and look at that light. Nothing fake, nothing artificial.

TREPLEV (Continued:)

See? From where you're sitting: your eye travels directly to the lake and 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 kisses the water. Where is she?

SORIN

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--I've always looked like this. Even when I was your age people always used to think I was drunk. Never went over well with the women. Maybe that's why I never married.

(Changing the subject:)

What's got your mother in such a snit?

TREPLEV

She's just jealous. She's jealous because she's not acting tonight and Nina is.

SORIN

Did you ask her to be in the play?

TREPLEV

She hasn't even read it. She hates it because she's not the star. She can't be the star so she hates the play, she hates the performance, she hates everything about it. Was she like this when you were kids?

SORIN

There're twenty years between us: I couldn't say what she was like as a kid I was already on my own then. 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 quote all of Nekrasoff's poetry at the drop of a hat, volunteers her time feeding the homeless and visiting the sick: she's an absolute saint. But just bring up some other actress and then . . . The real Irina Arkadina comes out. No, every conversation has to be about her. Every review has to be about her: and they all have to be wonderful. Singing her praises. Moscow loves her. Out here you'd think she would want to get away from it all but it's like an addiction for her and give somebody else just a little attention and she starts to get paranoid. Nobody knows her out here and that drives her crazy. As if she wasn't bad enough already. "Don't burn three candles at the same time." "avoid the number 13" "don't whistle in a--" 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 doesn't hate your play. She'll love your play because she 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.)

TREPLEV

I want it to be different. I want it to be more than just talk. I want it to be--I want it to be so many things . . . I just want--I want my actress here, that's what I want.. Why did I tell them they could go take a swim? What happened to the theatre, Uncle? Why can't it inspire? Why does it have to just droll on? And my mother is the queen of the droll. And it's suffocating me. You sit there in a seat elbow to elbow with some stranger you'd never talk to in a million years and watch "art" in a box and it just makes me want to vomit. It makes me want to run away, that's what it does. It makes me want to leap out of seat and run as far and fast as I can. I feel like I'm Maupassant running away from the Eiffel Tower just before it crushed him under its vulgarity.

SORIN

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

TREPLEV

No, I know, I know. There'll always be theatre but we need to change it somehow. A new form--to make people sit up and listen--or else why have theatre at all?

(Looking at his watch)

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 it's me but I think if she were just an ordinary woman and not Irina Arkadina, the famous actress, I could be a happier man. And when she's not on stage she surrounds herself with actors and authors and so much other self appointed royalty I just disappear into the wallpaper. I think the only reason she puts up with me is because I'm her son.

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?

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. Do you know, when I was your age I wanted just two things: to be married, and to become an author. Look what happened. It must be nice even to be an insignificant author.

TREPLEV

(Listening)

Someone's coming. Is it . . . ?

(He embraces his uncle)

Oh my God, I recognize her footsteps. What does that mean? I can't live without her, Uncle; even the sound of her footsteps is music to my ears. Why do I feel like this? I should be furious at her making me wait like this but I'm just thrilled knowing 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:)

Ooooooh.

(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 house 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:)

Time to get started. 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 just outside of court when another lawyer turned to me and said, "Sir, you have a powerful voice."

(a slight beat.)

"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 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.

TREPLEV

I love you.

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.

TREPLEV

Is the alcohol ready? Is the sulphur ready? I want big puffs of sulphur in the air when the red eyes shine out.

(JACOB does not reply but stands at the curtain's edge dripping on the ground awaiting his cue to pull the curtain. TREPLEV is left to assume by JACOB's silence that everything is in its place. To NINA.)

Are you nervous?

NINA (behind the curtain)

Very.

TREPLEV

How's the moon?

NINA (behind the curtain)

Halfway there. I am not so much afraid of your mother as I am of Trigorin. I've never met him but I've read his books--have you read his books? He's so famous. Is he young?

TREPLEV

That depends on what you consider young.

NINA (behind the curtain)

What beautiful stories he writes! He's so funny.

TREPLEV

I have never read any of them, so I couldn't say.

NINA (behind the curtain)

Your play is very hard to act, you know. There aren't any real people in it..

TREPLEV

It's a dream. It's a metaphor--it's not supposed to be real life--it's supposed to be symbolic.

NINA (behind the curtain)

There's so little action to it; it seems more like recitation a poem but it doesn't rhyme. Have you ever thought of writing poetry?

TREPLEV

(Seeing the guests coming: mouthing to JACOB:)

"Behind the curtain." "Behind the curtain."

NINA (behind the curtain)

(Continuing:)

And there's no love in your play. I think every story should really be a love story at its heart. At least every play I've ever seen. but if there's no one alive in your play then it stands to reason so there's no one to love I guess.

(TREPLEV shoos JACOB back stages. JACOB complies as the guests start to arrive. TREPLEV follows him.)

NINA (behind the curtain)

Do I look alright?

TREPLEV (behind the curtain)

Shhhh.

(PAULINA and DORN are the first to arrive.)

PAULINA

It's getting damp. You should go back in and put your galoshes on.

DORN

I'm quite warm enough, thank you.

PAULINA

You never will take care of yourself, "doctor". What would you tell your own patients, eh? You know quite well the damp air is bad for you. I guess you just like to see me suffer, don't you?. Do you realize you sat out on the terrace all night yesterday in the cold?

DORN

(Sings)

"Oh, tell me not that youth is wasted."

PAULINA

You were so enchanted by your conversation of Madame Arkadina that you didn't even notice you could see your breath coming out of your lips like the mist rising off the lake. Confess it: you like her.

DORN

I'm fifty-five years old.

PAULINA

Boys get older--they never grow up. You find her attractive, then. And fifty-five isn't old for a man. Look at you. Who're you to complain: you look magnificent? I'm sure you could have any woman you want.

DORN

What are you trying to tell me?

PAULINA

All you men are the same. Ready to fall to your knees over an actress. What is it about them?

DORN

(Sings)

"Once more I stand before thee."

PAULINA

You're all just little boys at heart. Or lower.

DORN

It . . . has nothing to do with--It's only natural for society to admire its artists. Why shouldn't we treat them differently than--say--merchants. They're celebrities.

PAULINA

Oh, and so when women line up to throw themselves at you--is that your celebrity speaking?

DORN

(Shrugging his shoulders)

I've had a number of women keep me company over the years, yes but . . . I'm sure it had to do with me being a doctor, which I guess you could say is a celebrity of sorts. But you have to remember when I came here ten years I was the only doctor in this town. But I have always been respectful of them and they of me.

(PAULINA softly takes hold of his hand. DORN catches sight of the rest coming and takes back his hand.)

DORN

Your husband.

(DORN continues onto a seat as PAULINA waits for her husband (SHAMRAEFF) and to take his arm as he passes. ARKADINA comes in on SORIN'S arm; TRIGORIN, SHAMRAEFF, MEDVIEDENKO, and MASHA complete the group.)

SHAMRAEFF

She was wonderful--breathtaking--and at the Poltava Fair in 1873? No one has ever done that role as well as she did--and no one ever will. Unless, of course, you

(referring to IRINA ARKADINA)

were to take the role--that I'd like to see--I would love to see. And Tchadin, the comedian, whatever became of him? Did you ever see him as Rasplueff--he was better than Sadofski--where do you think he is now?

ARKADINA

How would I know--he was before my time--why would you ask me such things?
(She sits down.)

SHAMRAEFF

(Sighing)

Pashka Tchadin! Lord, he could make us laugh. They don't have anyone like that anymore. Theatre's not what it used to be that's for certain. Pillars, they were: pillars: Oak trees. Now they're only stumps.

DORN

I'll grant you there may be fewer stars today but that's only because the caliber of the acting bar has been set so much higher than it was back then.

SHAMRAEFF

You're wrong. If you ask me today's actors are nothing but lazy--
(again referring to Irina:)
Present company excluded, of course.

(IRINA just smiles--choosing not to respond further.)

DORN

Well, we'll just agree to disagree then..

SHAMRAEFF

It's a matter of taste, I guess.

DORN

I guess.

(Enter TREPLEV from behind the stage.)

ARKADINA

(Seeing Treplev:)

Thank god.

(To Treplev, a bit cooler than her words might convey:)

When will the play begin, my dear boy?

TREPLEV

(Looks back to check the position of the moon before answering:)

In . . . just a moment. Be patient.

ARKADINA
(Quoting from Hamlet)

My son,
"Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul; And there I see such black grained spots As will not leave their tinct."

(A horn is blown behind the stage.)

TREPLEV
Attention. Ladies and gentlemen. Welcome. Take your seats.
(But of course, everyone already has.)
Good. Thank you. The play is about to begin.

MEDVIEDENKO
What's the name of the play?

TREPLEV
The name? It doesn't have a name.

ARKADINA
It has to have a name. Every play has to have a name. What're you going to call it when people ask, "what did you do last night?" "I went to see a play." "What play?" "I don't know: it didn't have a name."
(waits a beat:)
I'm done. Go ahead.

(A pause.)

TREPLEV
It doesn't have a name.
(He takes a breath before he begins. He taps the floor with a stick, and speaks in a loud voice)
O, ye time-honoured, ancient mists that drive at night across the surface of this lake, blind you our eyes with sleep, and show us in our dreams that which will be in twice ten thousand years!

SORIN
(Aside:)
I'm afraid there won't be anything here in twice ten thousand years.

TREPLEV
(Playing off his Uncle's remark:)
Then let them now show us that nothingness.

ARKADINA

Yes, let them--we'll all b