

*Anton Chekhov's*  
THE SEAGULL

a play in four acts  
adaptation by

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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

YACOB, 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.

**A NOTE ON THE DIALOGUE:**

1. A slash “ / ” indicates the character with the next line of dialogue begins his or her speech (overlapping dialogue).
2. Dialogue in brackets “ [ ] ” is unspoken, although the character is thinking it.  
*(please note these passages will also be highlighted in grey in this script)*
3. Dialogue in parenthesis “ ( ) ” is spoken aloud but is an aside.  
*(also note that these passages are NOT highlighted and SHOULD BE read aloud)*
4. Grammatical errors; sentences beginning in lower case; or UPPER CASE; used in place of common punctuation (even a few misspellings), were, indeed, intended.

*All I wanted was to say honestly to people: "Have a look at yourselves and see how bad and dreary your lives are!" The important thing is that people should realize that, for when they do, they will most certainly create another and better life for themselves. I will not live to see it, but I know that it will be quite different, quite unlike our present life. And so long as this different life does not exist, I shall go on saying to people again and again: "Please, understand that your life is bad and dreary!"*

— **ANTON CHEKHOV**,  
*letter to Alexander Tikhonov*

## ACT 1

(A lakeside park set on the SORIN family estate. Shrubbery and trees align the edges of our scene. A makeshift platform and curtain have been set up 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 sun setting behind us throws its last rays of light across our scene. We hear the coughing and hammering of the crew finishing the final touches of construction behind the closed curtain. MASHA and MEDVIEDENKO enter from the left, returning from a walk.)

MEDVIEDENKO

So ...  
Black? [Again?] Why?

MASHA

I'm in mourning.

MEDVIEDENKO

For [what]?

MASHA

My life.

MEDVIEDENKO

[Why do I even ask?]

... And why do you have to talk like that? You—you should be happy. You have a wonderful life: You're ... you're healthy. You live [on a beautiful estate—]Your father ... works—he may not own it, but he runs it—it's a good job. Look at me: I[look at my job: I] spend the better part of the day sitting in a room with one window and a sea full of juvenile delinquents [who] don't know whether they want to overthrow the government or which finger they should pick their noses with: and what do I get [for it]: twenty-three rubles a month. [But do] you see me walking around as if I'm at my own funeral?

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

MASHA

You think being rich and being happy are mutually tied to each other: there are plenty of poor people happy in the world ... (or so I'm told).

MEDVIEDENKO

You'd like to believe that, wouldn't you?  
I know poor; I teach their children .. I scrape by on twenty three rubles a month; which maybe 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. We don't have a villa overlooking a lake but we're not starving. I mean we eat. But tell me, if you were me, what would you have us give up? Should we stop smoking? Maybe we should draw straws and one of us stop eating altogether? Not myself, 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 pause.)

MASHA

Do you think this is what hell is like?

MEDVIEDENKO

All this [talk about] death. It's just a game: you know you really don't want to die.

MASHA

I don't have to die: I already am. Now I'm just waiting for my body to catch up. Because the law demands it. So, I wait. And evidently you wait with me.

MEDVIEDENKO

[I don't want to die either; and neither do you. ] If you *were* to do anything—

MASHA

[I already am.]

MEDVIEDENKO

Your parents would go to jail. [Have you thought of that]?

MASHA

It's a stupid law.

MEDVIEDENKO

But then again no one I've ever known has been convicted for it. I can't even remember ever hearing of anybody even being charged.

MASHA

You know a lot of dead people?

MEDVIEDENKO

[Now you're just talking nonsense.]

(Another 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] ... soon ...

(Searching for a segue:)

Don't you find it interesting that Nina Zarietchnaya is starring in Treplev's play?

(No reply.)

Rather than his mother, the famous actress, and instead he casts the daughter of the landowner next door?

(No reply.)

[You know it'll have to be a] love [story. And when it's over, after their play is a huge success, I imagine the night will end with the two of them celebrating their passion without an audience around, the way] ... young people in love [tend to do ... when no one's looking ... ]

(No reply. He sighs. She sighs.)

MEDVIEDENKO

So remind me why do I walk here every day? Why do I torment you? Why do I torment myself? Because I love you, Masha.

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

There, I've said it. Take a gun to 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 thrashing. But who can blame you? Really? Why should you care? What do I have to offer? Only a pathetic teacher's salary and an already too large of a family .. it makes perfect sense. I understand. So ....

(Another pause. MASHA takes out a snuff box from her her bodice 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 ... and moralize or go on about money—mostly about how much you don't have.

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

Think about it, if you had money, what would you do with it? Tell me your dreams.

(At a loss for words and a growing awareness that her head is in his lap, MEDVIEDENKO says nothing; for Masha: point made.)

MASHA

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

(After a small bit of reflection—unmoved from her position:)

Just think: if I were to marry you and then I finally did kill myself: you would be going to jail instead of my parents.

In a way I am saving you, Simon.

MEDVIEDENKO

You have the most peculiar way of looking at things.

MASHA

You don't need to thank me.

(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 what I hate about this more: my being put out to pasture or the pasture itself. Last night I went to bed at ten and didn't wake up until nine this morning, feeling as if my brain was stuck to the left side of my head for its apparent lack of use.

(choosing to laugh as always his better practice:)

Then at dinner tonight I couldn't help myself just drifting off again. It's as if I'm testing out my own death and I can't quite decide where I want to be.

TREPLEV

Give yourself time, Uncle,—I know it's not like it was for you in Moscow.

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

TREPLEV (Continued:)

We're not seating anyone yet. We'll call you when the play begins. Don't want to ruin the magic.

(MASHA unenthusiastically sits up accordingly.  
MEDVIEDENKO crosses his legs quietly.)

TREPLEV

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 so much last night it kept my sister up half the evening.

MASHA

You'll have to ask him yourself ... I can't.  
(To Medviedenکو:)

Simon?

MEDVIEDENKO

... 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 wail all night long again tonight Why? This is my home.

TREPLEV

I know.

SORIN

I retired here because it's supposed to be good for my health but it's killing my sanity. But no, "that's not how we do things out here." "That's city talk, this is the country. You city folk re supposed to come out here to rest." I remember coming here for summers when I was your age; ready to leave first day. Everything here is just wrong.

(Laughing:)

But: Here I am: retired; so, where else do I have to go? I'm stuck here. What is it people see in this place?

YACOB

(Stepping out from behind the curtain; to Treplev:)

If it's alright with you, we are going to take a quick swim in the lake, Mr. Constantine.

TREPLEV

The play starts in ten minutes.

YACOB

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

(The sky's eminent sunset cascades across the horizon creating an idyllic backdrop.)

TREPLEV

(As he goes:)

Ten minutes.

SORIN

I just don't get it.  
What is all this?

TREPLEV

(Looking over the stage:)

It's a ... Just like a real theatre stage, right? We've got your curtain; a raised platform, and all the scenery you could never buy. No flats, no door, who needs windows And painted backdrops when you have [the real thing]? And look at that light. Nothing fake, nothing artificial. Sit here.

SORIN

I'm already [sitting] ..

TREPLEV

Please. I chose this seat for you.

(As Sorin takes his new position:)

TREPLEV (Continued:)

From where you're sitting: your eye travels directly to the lake and you'll see the moon rising on its edge at exactly

(Checks his watch:)

Fourteen minutes!

(Hollering out to Yacob and the workers:)

We start in fourteen minutes! I need you here in five!

SORIN

It's cold.

TREPLEV

Where's Nina?

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

TREPLEV

She should be here / already; If we don't start right when the moon just—

SORIN

Is that the name of the neighbor girl you've been seeing? She seems nice, I'm sure she's not going to miss your little debut.

TREPLEV

She *is* the debut. God, if her parents—she said she could get away, she told me she could get away, I trusted she could get away, if she doesn't get away—but getting away from them is like escaping a prison.

(He straightens Sorin's collar.)

Uncle, your hair ... You have a comb? Honestly, you should just shave it all off.

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 .. mother.

Jealous I asked Nina to act in my play and not her.

SORIN

You didn't ask?

TREPLEV

She just would have said, "no" and I would have asked Nina anyway. So, I skipped—and Nina's better. Just not punctual.

SORIN

You should have asked.

TREPLEV

She hasn't even read it. She hates it because she's not the star. If she can't be the star—so she hates the play, she hates the performance, she hates everything about it.

SORIN

She is your mother.  
She tries.

TREPLEV

When?

(Nervously checks his watch.)

On the stage? Yes: she's brilliant—she can cry on cue. Or when she's feeding the homeless or visiting the sick: she's an absolute saint. She's brilliant. And she must be told and reminded of her brilliance on a daily basis. It's exhausting.

(He is now up and pacing; regarding Nina—for a moment:)

Oh my god, where is she? And she's superstitious to a fault.

SORIN

Who're we talking about now?

TREPLEV

Mother. Who does anyone ever talk about? Who else are we allowed to talk about? And she holds onto every red cent she's ever made like it's the last one she'll ever have.

SORIN

That's just her way.

TREPLEV

No: 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

She's going to love your play because she loves you.

TREPLEV

Really? 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!

(showing Sorin the stem:)

Nature says, "Not."

SORIN

They'll be here.

TREPLEV

All mother loves is to dress up and be the center of 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. How she explains away that you and her are brother and sister is beyond me. I think that's why 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, Uncle. 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? When I was a child I thought it was so invigorating. Why can't it inspire anymore? Why does it have to just droll on? And why does my mother have to be the queen of the droll? It's suffocating. You find yourself sitting 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 my 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? We'd have to talk to each other.

TREPLEV

I love my mother but ... if you don't have something to say, why do theatre at all?  
(again at his watch:)

I know, it's just nerves. I talk too much when I'm nervous but she leads a stupid life.

(Switching subjects entirely:)

And did she have to bring ...

SORIN

Her latest beau?

TREPLEV

The "writer".

SORIN

Boris Trigorin.

TREPLEV

If you can call him that [a writer].

SORIN

He seems nice.

TREPLEV

“Yes he does, doesn’t he?”

(SORIN chooses Not to respond.)

TREPLEV

I’m so tired of it.

SORIN

He’s a little younger but your mother ... is your mother.

TREPLEV

When I went to college those three years .. she would eye my classmates.

SORIN

I wouldn’t go that far. Is that why you [gave it up early]?

TREPLEV

Truth be told? I told her I got bored but I I couldn’t ... it all started going over my head and ...

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 day. He was somebody for a moment. And when these self-important celebrities my mother litters our house with deign to notice me at all it's just to measure my own 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

Simple. He's clever enough but .. that would be the best way to describe him: 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: a smile at best—no laugh.)

TREPLEV

Did you hear that?

(Not knowing what else to do—he embraces his uncle.)

It's her: Oh my God, I think I recognize her footstep; what does that mean? I should be furious with her at her making me wait like this but .. I'm just—[I'm just thrilled knowing she's here.] This isn't making sense.

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

"Nymph in thy orisons."

NINA

What?

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

TREPLEV

(Kissing her conventionally on the 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 to 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.

(NINA 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

What? No. It's nothing. The wind, it blew my make-up ... So, we have to hurry. I have to be gone in half an hour before father—

TREPLEV

(following her closely, unable to distance himself:)

It's perfect, right?

And look at the view.

You're here now, that's all that matters.

You look fantastic.

NINA (Continued:)

(Back 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 Yacob, spying the moon's position while rushing to get the torches lit:)

Then we have to get started. I have to call the audience.

SORIN

I'll go. I was needing to get my wrap, 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 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? Don't tell me I'm 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?  
Well?

TREPLEV

Breathe.

Just breathe.

Just look at me.

TREPLEV

(Lighting the next to last:)

One more torch.

NINA

Is somebody coming? I think somebody's—

TREPLEV

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

No.

(He moves in. They kiss. A stolen moment—albeit a lingering one.)

NINA

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

(As TREPLEV moves away from her with the hand torch to 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.

NINA

You can't.

TREPLEV

I will.

NINA

You mustn't.

TREPLEV

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

NINA

(Fixing her hair—combing out any nettles from the horse ride.)

You wouldn't last that long—first: the watchman would see you and even if you could keep clear of 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

Who is that? Is that you, Yacob?

YACOB

(Steps out again from behind the curtain—dripping wet.)

Yes, sir.

TREPLEV

How long've you—

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

NINA

(Moving behind the curtain.)

Yes, sir.

TREPLEV

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

(YACOB 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 Yacob'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 all 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, did you know that? There aren't any real people in it.

TREPLEV

It's a metaphor—it's not supposed to be real people—it's supposed to be symbolic.

NINA (Behind the curtain)

There's so—there's no—there's so little action [to it]; it seems more like reciting a poem but it doesn't rhyme. Maybe it should rhyme.

TREPLEV

(Seeing the guests coming: mouthing to YACOB:)

("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 YACOB back stages. YACOB 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 on your galoshes.

DORN

My feet are [fine, they're] warm enough; thank you.

PAULINA

If you were to catch a cold, who would doctor the doctor? Would you say that to your own patients or are you happier trying mine [patience]?