THE CHEKHOV DREAMS

A play by John McKinney
CHARACTERS

JEREMY  Mid-30’s, affable, well-read, reclusive, a wounded soul.
KATE    Mid-30’s, beautiful, sophisticated, perceptive, deceased.
CHRISSY Early 20’s, cute, upbeat, eager, passionate.
EDDIE   Late 30’s, jaded, decadent, addicted to just about everything.
CHEKHOV Mid 40’s, wise, eccentric, crotchety, deceased.

SETTING

Time: The present.
Place: New York City, various locations; A lake, various times and seasons.

Author’s notes:

This play was written as a dark romantic comedy, accent on the comedy. As such, the default tempo for the play should be brisk and lively, pausing or stopping only as necessary to reflect the deeper, more serious moments. Scene transitions should occur as smoothly as possible with a minimum of set and prop handling to ensure that the story keeps moving apace. In essence the play should avoid the trap of over-indulging in the darker currents of the story and becoming labored or ponderous.

As this play explores two alternating states of mind – dreams and reality – it is intended that the design elements establish a distinctive motif for each. For example, there might be a magical, sparkling quality to the lighting to represent the water reflecting off of the lake in the dream scenes, while the real life apartment scenes might have a grittier, more somber feel especially as most of these scenes occur at night. Similarly, the dream scenes might be accompanied by a recurring ethereal theme, or “dreamscape,” which would shift in tone from light and magical to something more ominous, reflecting the main character’s psychological journey. In short, the play can be greatly served by thoughtful tech support and hopefully will be regarded as a rewarding artistic challenge for the director and designers alike.
ACT ONE

Scene 1

A lake in summer. JEREMY and KATE are having a romantic picnic. They are partly undressed and are both looking out toward the lake.

KATE
This is the saddest story I have ever heard.
(Long pause)
This is the saddest …

JEREMY
I know, I know.

KATE
Well?

JEREMY

KATE
Oooh, well done! Didn’t think you’d get that one!
(She removes the sash from her dress.)

JEREMY
Because you continue to underestimate me. See, I have something far more important than your Ivy League credentials – motivation! Okay, here we go. “Through the fence—”

KATE
(Laughs.)
Sorry. Hope I didn’t dampen your motivation!

(JEREMY strips to his tee shirt.)

KATE
(Just go.)

JEREMY
“It was love at first sight.”

KATE
Yes, it was.

JEREMY
You’re stalling.
JEREMY

*Pride and Prejudice*. Jane Austen noooo – I know that smile. You want me to *think* it was Jane Austen.

(Beat)

*Catch-22*, Joseph Heller.

Are you sure?

JEREMY (smiling)

I am now.

KATE

Damn! Someone’s been catching up on his reading.

(She removes her elastic hair band and shoots it at JEREMY. He gives her a challenging look.)

What? It’s an article of clothing. Besides, you have the advantage. I’m not wearing any underwear.

JEREMY

Then I guess this’ll be the last round. Ready?

KATE

Bring it.

JEREMY

‘They moved swiftly, silently, with purpose, under a crystalline, star-filled night in Western Siberia.”

KATE

It’s not Dostoevsky… I know it’s not Solzhenitsyn… This better not be one of your Tom Clancy novels!

JEREMY

*Red Storm Rising*! It’s a classic!

KATE

Oh give me a break!

JEREMY

What!?

KATE

Having lots of guns and explosions does not make it a classic!

JEREMY

You’re welching!
KATE
I AM NOT STRIPPING FOR TOM CLANCY!

JEREMY
You’re just mad cause I finally kicked your ass.

KATE
No… I’m not mad. I’m proud.  
(She gives him a quick kiss as if to reward her pupil.)

JEREMY
I don’t know why. It only took me ten years to beat you.

KATE
That’s why. You didn’t give up.

JEREMY
Like I said, I was motivated.

KATE
To win my heart.

JEREMY
To see you naked.

KATE
Letch.

JEREMY
Welcher.

KATE
Liar.

JEREMY
Liar?

KATE
You know perfectly well you did it for love. And that you owe your literary awakening entirely to moi.

JEREMY
So that’s how it works. I win the game but you get the credit.

KATE
You are learning! You have to admit, I’ve brought you a long way since The Snow Queen.
JEREMY
You know, I did read other books before I met you.

KATE
What? I think it’s cute that you like fairy tales.

JEREMY
She said mockingly.

KATE
She said teasingly. There’s a difference.

JEREMY
Have you ever read *The Snow Queen*? No....

KATE
You got me there. I never liked fairy tales as a kid. I much preferred Sapphic poetry. Of course I didn’t understand the lesbian overtones at the time...

JEREMY
Are you even carbon based? What kind of kid doesn’t like fairy tales?

KATE
Maybe I’d like them more if you finished yours. Any progress with your novelette?

JEREMY
Novella!
(He retaliates, giving KATE a tickle. She laughs.)
Not very well, I’m afraid.

KATE
No? What happened to all that motivation?

JEREMY
(Serious)
You took it with you when you left.

KATE
Hey. We agreed.

JEREMY
Right. Happy thoughts.
(Pause)

KATE
Do you realize it was ten years ago today that we first came to this lake?
JEREMY

That’s right, it was.

KATE

You’re a terrible liar.

JEREMY

Not true. I got away with a whopper for a while there, remember? When we first met?

KATE

Ah. The Yale thing.

JEREMY

Right.

KATE

Right.

(Covering a smile.)

JEREMY

(Seeing through her cover-up)

Oh no! You mean you knew? When did you figure it out?

KATE

The day we met?

JEREMY

Wh—! You mean that whole first month we were dating you knew I didn’t go to Yale?

(KATE nods sheepishly.)

What about when I confessed? I was dry heaving for a week getting up my nerve for that! And you already knew?

KATE

Yeah, but it was a great confession! I really loved it!

JEREMY

Ooooh! That’s it!

(He lunges for KATE and tickles her vigorously. KATE screams with delight.)

KATE

Aaaaaa! No! Please, stop! Please, please, please, please! Aaaaaaa!!! I’ll do anything!

(Her laughing subsides. JEREMY looks at her.)
JEREMY
Then come back to me.

KATE
You know I can’t do that.

(JEREMY gets off of her and moves away. The mood has darkened again. She goes to him.)

Jeremy. Come on. Don’t think about it.

JEREMY
As if there’s anything else to think about. Every day I come across some reminder. An old photo, a bottle of nail polish remover, one of your hair bands… It’s like the whole apartment’s booby trapped with your little mementos, just waiting to blow my guts out.

(Pause)

KATE
You’re not going to get all Strindberg on me, are you?

JEREMY
Actually, I was going for Bergman.

KATE
I miss you.

JEREMY
Those fucking hair bands of yours are everywhere. Under the bed…the dresser…

KATE
The correct response was “I miss you, too.”

JEREMY
I don’t think “miss you” quite covers it. The other day I was on the couch taking another crack at Ulysses – I don’t know why I bother – when I suddenly felt your legs across my lap! Just like I used to. I closed my eyes and reached down, and sure enough, I could feel your calves.

KATE
Were they shaved?

JEREMY
Like glass.

KATE
Good. I’d hate to be remembered for stubbly calves.
JEREMY
I’m glad you find this so amusing.
(Beat)

KATE
You know, there is a way for us to be together again.

What do you mean?

JEREMY
In spirit. Like Catherine and Heathcliff.

The afterlife. Well that’s looking on the bright side.

It is if you believe in it.

KATE
Do you?

I not only believe, I know.

What? How can you know?

JEREMY
You forget, I’m an expert on the subject.

So… it’s really possible?

KATE
If two people are truly committed to each other, absolutely. Just think. No more secret rendezvous… no one could keep us apart.

JEREMY
Sounds like Paradise. But how can we be sure? That we’ll meet when the time comes?

KATE
Like I said, we’d have to be truly committed to it.

JEREMY
So, if we made like a pact…
KATE
Yes. But it has to be a very solemn pact. One we could never go back on.

JEREMY
How about a blood pact?

KATE
That’s a bit melodramatic.

JEREMY
You said we had to be committed.

KATE
Committed, yes, not bloody. Anyway, we don’t have a knife so we can’t…

(JEREMY pulls out a keychain with a miniature Swiss Army knife.)

Oh! Quite the boy scout, aren’t you! All right, you do me. I can’t watch.

(She turns away as JEREMY makes a small incision in her wrist, then cuts his own. He presses his wrist to hers.)

JEREMY
Okay, now what?

KATE
We make our vows. I’ll start. I, Kate, do hereby promise to meet you in the hereafter where our souls will join forever. Okay, now you. I, Jeremy…

JEREMY
I, Jeremy…

KATE
Do hereby promise…

JEREMY
Do hereby promise…

KATE
To meet you in the hereafter…Oh my god, you’re really bleeding here!
(She looks at JEREMY’s wrist and screams. He is bleeding profusely.)

JEREMY
(Looking into her eyes)
To meet you in the hereafter…

KATE
Jeremy! What have you done?!
JEREMY
Where our souls will join forever!

KATE
Oh, dear God!

JEREMY
(becoming progressively fainter)
It’s okay. We’ll finally be together won’t we?

KATE
Jeremy, no, not like this!

JEREMY
Won’t we?

(We hear a loud knock on a door.)

KATE
(Still upset, but resigned.)
Yes… we’ll be together.,

(JEREMY drifts off as he lets death overtake him.)

JEREMY
Yes, because you promised, didn’t you? You promised…

KATE
Jeremy!

(The life has gone out of him. The knocking on the door continues.)

(Lights fade)
Scene 2

JEREMY’s apartment, New Year’s Eve. It is after midnight. The place is disorderly and cluttered with old mail, periodicals, pizza boxes and empty food containers from a Chinese takeout. There are also a great many books stacked haphazardly in piles all around suggesting the habitat of a well-read shut-in. The kitchen and bedroom are indicated notionally offstage. Upstage is a small balcony overlooking a courtyard. We continue to hear the knocking from Scene 1. JEREMY slowly awakens and makes his way to the door.

EDDIE (O.S.)
Heyyyyyy! Jeremy! Open up!
(Tweets noisemaker.)
Hey, you home? Of course you are. Where else would you be on New Year’s Eve but home? Probably watching the tube, whacking off to Audrey Hepburn. Let’s go, bro! Let’s bring this year in right, huh?
(Tweets noisemaker.)

(JEREMY opens the door. EDDIE blows right past him making a beeline for the portable bar.)
Aha! I knew you’d be here! If there’s one thing I can depend on in life, it’s that you have no life. But fear not – I am here to bring joy and merriment into your pathetic existence. Mind if I fix myself a drink? The blow is wearing off and I don’t want to lose the buzz.

JEREMY
Audrey Hepburn?

EDDIE
Hey, you were the one who told me how much you loved her in Breakfast at Tiffany’s. Which, if you ask me, makes you a flaming homo. Don’t you have any Grey Goose?

JEREMY
Eddie. It’s late, and I’ve really got to …

EDDIE
Wait, wait. Listen. I want to tell you my New Year’s resolution.

JEREMY
Now isn’t a good time.

EDDIE
It’s New Year’s! When else am I going to make a resolution?
(He downs the vodka straight, wincing.)
Need a chaser for this. Tell me you’ve got some beers in the fridge.
(He exits to the kitchen.)
JEREMY
Eddie, you couldn’t stick to a resolution for five minutes.

EDDIE (O.S.)
Normally, no. But this is different. Because this resolution isn’t about me. It’s about you.

JEREMY
Me.

(EDDIE returns holding two beers. He tosses one to JEREMY who catches it but does not open it.)

EDDIE
Yep. Y’see, my resolution is to save you.

JEREMY
From?

EDDIE
From your solitary confinement. I’m going to bust you out of here.

JEREMY
Oh, jeez, look …

EDDIE
No, you look. The only reason I let you get away with this hibernation thing for so long is cause you said you needed your solitude to work on your mini-novel.

JEREMY
Novella. I am working on it. I’m… still doing research.

EDDIE
Yeah? What are you researching? The long-term effects of living on Fresh Direct and Amazon.com? Bro, it’s New Year’s Eve. This used to be our night. I miss getting you shit-faced and listening to you wax romantic about Homer and Pushpin…

JEREMY
Pushkin.

EDDIE
Whoever the fuck, the point is, we used to hang out, have some laughs. I miss that. I miss your bounce.

JEREMY
My what?
EDDIE
Whenever you got excited about something you used to… bounce. Kinda like…
(He jiggles his body up and down to demonstrate.)
Now you’re like a fucking zombie. Sleeping all day…When was the last time you left this apartment? Christ, you inherited an obscene amount of money, same as me. You should be living it up… meeting people…

JEREMY
Sorry, Eddie, I’m not cut out for the champagne and limo crowd like you are.

EDDIE
That’s why we’re gonna do this in stages. Just a couple of hours a week of socializing to start. Think of it as the beginning of a new adventure. Life outside the apartment.

JEREMY
Look. I appreciate what you’re trying to do but …

EDDIE
Uh-uh! You don’t understand. You don’t have a say in the matter. This is my resolution and it’s non-negotiable. Now. Here are my terms.

Terms?!

EDDIE
First. You will take part in at least one social activity a week. It could be a wine-tasting party… volunteer work… yoga class… I don’t give a shit. As long as you’re around people. No. Not just people. Women! There have to be women involved.

JEREMY
Oh, jeez, give me a …

EDDIE
Second. You will also agree to meet me for a drink once a week so I can get a full report on your progress.

JEREMY
You’re crazy.

EDDIE
I prefer “resolved.”

JEREMY
You know, I could just agree and then blow it off.

EDDIE
But you won’t. Because unlike me, you’re a man of your word.
JEREMY
Sorry, guy. You’re gonna have to find someone else to reform.

EDDIE
Yeah. I figured you’d be difficult about this.
(He takes out a bag of cocaine and a cigarette case with drug paraphernalia and begins cutting lines.)

JEREMY
What’re you doing?

EDDIE
What’s it look like?

JEREMY
You’re doing coke? With all the drinking you’ve been doing?

EDDIE
That’s right. As long as you keep refusing my proposal, I’m gonna keep doing lines. All night, if need be.

JEREMY
What’s that going to accomplish? Other than killing yourself?

EDDIE
That’s just it. I’m counting on you to not let me kill myself. Now. According to my calculations, with all the booze, coke, X, not to mention the B-12 injections I’ve had tonight – I figure every additional line of coke is like a round of Russian roulette. Which one will cause my heart to go into a cardiac arrest? Now, you don’t want that on your head, do you? So. Whadaya say? We got a deal?

JEREMY
Eddie, come on. Don’t screw around…

EDDIE
(Imitating a game show buzzer)
Baaaapppp!!! Ohhh, I’m terribly sorry, that’s the wrong answer!
(He snorts a line, giving JEREMY a defiant look.)

JEREMY
Hey! Cut that out, right now! Jesus. So what if I like to keep to myself? Do I preach to you about substance abuse? Or your depraved sex fetishes? Which I don’t want to know about, thank you very much. So do me a favor and…
(EDDIE snorts another line.)

Goddammit! That’s enough!
(He starts to take the coke from EDDIE but EDDIE reacts quickly and fends him off. The struggle is very brief but for an instant verges on real violence.)

EDDIE
Look at you! You’re ready to fight me rather than leave your fucking cryo-chamber here, even for a few hours a week?! And you were going to lecture me on addiction? Oh sure, sleep…it’s perfectly legal, but buddy, when you wake up your life will still be on pause. And Kate will still be dead.

(JEREMY turns away. EDDIE has struck a nerve.)
Christ, you weren’t in the car with her that night but you might as well have been. The way you’ve been trashing your life these last three years. Look, I know you loved her but you can’t mourn her forever.

JEREMY
I don’t believe this. You’re a walking pharmacy and you’re telling me I’m trashing my life? That’s rich.

EDDIE
The difference is, when I waste my life, I do it in style. Take this coke. This is Calvin Klein. Pharmaceutical grade Peruvian with a few grams of Ketamine to take the edge off. An addict wouldn’t know the difference but I do. Because I’m not an addict. I’m a connoisseur. I could write a fuckin’ guidebook on the hottest after hours clubs… the best escort services. Which massage parlors give “happy endings.” Superficial people everywhere look up to me because I make empty phrases sound profound. It’s true! I’m the poet laureate of small talk! Of course it’s all meaningless crap, I know that. And for me, that’s fine. I don’t want to know the meaning of life. What a fuckin’ responsibility that would be. But you… you’re not afraid to feel things, cut yourself open, feel around. Why, I have no idea. But if you have the courage to do that, and write about it honestly – I think a lot of other people would recognize those same, fucked up feelings in themselves. Don’t you see? It’s people like you who can explain all this crazy, scary shit to people like me so when we’re old and urinating on ourselves we can take solace in knowing that even ridiculous lives like mine actually meant something. You don’t get that from a crack pipe, you get that from art… from books. To deprive the world of your gift the way you’re doing now, now that is a wasted life.

(Pause)

JEREMY
Shit. That was good.

EDDIE
I know.

JEREMY
All right. I guess a couple of hours a week wouldn’t kill me.
EDDIE
Yessss!

JEREMY
But I have a condition of my own.

EDDIE
Name it.

JEREMY
That you start turning your life around as well.

EDDIE
(A peel of laughter.)
Me? Forget it. I have way too many vices. That’s my charm.

JEREMY
You don’t have to give them all up. Just give up one of them. Starting with Calvin, here.

(EDDIE clutches his bag of cocaine protectively.)
Think of it as the beginning of a new adventure.

EDDIE
Bastard.

JEREMY
What’s wrong? I thought you were resolved.

EDDIE
Alright, you know what? Fine. I’ll resell it. Buy a few cases of Dom Perignon or something. No, really, I will. You have my word.
(Off JEREMY’s look)
Shit!
(He hands over the coke.)

JEREMY
Hey. You’ve still got your charm.

EDDIE
Fuck you.
(He finishes his drink in one swallow.)

EDDIE (cont.)
Aah, what the hell. I did what I came to do. Time to hit The Rack.

JEREMY
There, you see? You’re turning over a new leaf already. I’ve never known you to go to bed before dawn.
EDDIE
I’m not going to bed. I’m going to The Rack.
(Off JEREMY’s look)
It’s an S&M club. They’ve got these private spanking rooms... Hey, why don’t you join me? We can make it part of our arrangement.

JEREMY
I think I’ll start with something a bit tamer, thanks.

EDDIE
Suit yourself.

JEREMY
Actually, I have toyed with the idea of taking an acting class.

EDDIE
An acting class? Oh, right! You can work on a really hot sex scene from like a Mickey Rourke movie or something.

JEREMY
Nooo... I just think plays are a form of literature that needs to be experienced in order to ...

EDDIE
Yeah, whatever. Listen, I’ll come by next week and we’ll grab that drink. This is going to be your year. I can feel it.

(They hug. EDDIE starts to leave.)

JEREMY
Hey, Eddie...

EDDIE
Come on, don’t spoil it. You would have done the same for me.

JEREMY
Risk killing myself? I don’t know about that.

EDDIE
You never know what you’re capable of until you try.
(Pause)

JEREMY
You’re right. You do make empty phrases sound profound.

EDDIE
It’s a gift. Happy New Year.
(EDDIE exits. JEREMY subconsciously picks up the can of beer EDDIE tossed to him earlier.)

JEREMY
Sure. Get out more. What could happen?  
(He pops open the can, which explodes in his face.)

(Lights fade to:)

Scene 3

A city street outside acting class. Late afternoon. JEREMY crosses, followed quickly by CHRISSY.

CHRISSY
Excuse me? Jeremy?

(JEREMY stops.)
It’s Jeremy, right?

JEREMY
Yeah…

CHRISSY
You left class so quickly… we never set up a time to get together.  
(Off JEREMY’s look)  
So we can rehearse our scene?

JEREMY
Don’t we rehearse in class?

CHRISSY (laughing)
No! We have to rehearse on our own. I guess this is your first acting class, huh?

JEREMY
(Frustrated, realizing he’s overcommitted himself.)
Right… rehearsal.

CHRISSY
Oh, don’t worry. We still have some time. But we should get started if we’re going to work on The Seagull! I can’t believe we got assigned that play!

JEREMY
Yeah, I know what you mean. Uchhh… I hate Chekhov.

(At the same time)
I love Chekhov!  
(Both react.)
What? How can you not like Chekhov?

JEREMY
You mean other than the fact that his plays are suicidally depressing?

CHRISSY
I don’t think his plays are …

JEREMY
Oh, come on! All his characters do is wallow in misery for hours on end!

CHRISSY
I’m sure if you look at it a little more …

JEREMY
Look, I’m dealing with my own issues right now, okay?! I don’t need to work on a Chekhov play to bring me down even more!  
(A beat. He catches himself.)
I’m sorry. I said I’d work on it. I’ll …

CHRISSY
No, no, look, I’m going to check back with Jeanne… maybe see about getting another partner…

JEREMY
Oh. Uh, sorry, I didn’t mean you had to…

CHRISSY
No, no, it’s just – you’re a beginner… I’m more experienced… I think maybe we should work with people at our own level.

Oh. Right. Yeah. Makes sense.

I just think it’s best if, y’know…

JEREMY
Right. No, you’re right. You should find someone else. You’re a good actress.

CHRISSY
Well. I don’t know about that.

JEREMY
Oh yeah, that scene you did today from *The Owl and the Pussycat*? You were great. You played that hooker so well I thought you really were a bimbo.
CHRISSY

Excuse me?

JEREMY

Yeah, in fact when the teacher assigned us to work together I thought, oh no, I’m gonna be stuck with that airhead!

(Seeing CHRISSY’s reaction)

Oh no, I don’t think you’re an airhead… Or actually I did think you were an airhead. But it’s a compliment! I … I mean you acted like an airhead. No! I mean…

CHRISSY (laughing)

It’s okay. Thank you. That’s very nice of you to say.

(Pause)

Well. Take care.

JEREMY

You too.

(Just as they are about to part…)

CHRISSY

I’m… I’m sorry about whatever… you’re going though.

JEREMY

Thanks.

CHRISSY

Um, I mean if it’s not too personal… May I ask, was it love related? Or did someone pass away…?

JEREMY

Both.

CHRISSY

Oh.

(She takes this in. After a moment she takes out her cell phone.)

CHRISSY (cont.)

So if we’re not going to work on Chekhov we need to meet and decide what play to work on.

JEREMY

I thought we were going to work with people at our own level.

CHRISSY

That’s stupid. How can you learn to act with another beginner? Number?

(Lights fade to:)
Scene 4

JEREMY’s apartment, late afternoon. JEREMY enters and removes his coat. He picks up a notebook and begins to write but very soon he loses whatever spark of inspiration he had as he begins a descent into sadness and grief. As his eyes close there is a lighting change as well as an ethereal soundscape effect indicating the dream state. KATE appears. She smiles at him and approaches, extending her hand. He takes it, returning her smile. She lifts him up and ushers him to the couch in preparation for making love. The entire sequence should play like a slow, modern dance piece. They do not speak, but from the way they are looking at each other they appear to be communicating telepathically. Over the “dreamscape” we hear a passage from the couple’s blood pact vows from Scene 1, with echo effect.

I Kate…

KATE (V.O.)

I, Jeremy…

JEREMY (V.O.)

Do hereby promise…

KATE (V.O.)

Do hereby promise…

JEREMY (V.O.)

To be with you in the hereafter, where our souls…

KATE (V.O.)

Will join forever!

JEREMY (V.O.)

I, Kate…

KATE (V.O.)

(The passage re-loops on top of itself with quickening tempo, their voices merging into a cacophonous crescendo on the words, “I promise.”)

KATE & JEREMY (V.O.)

Do hereby promise… I promise… I promise… I promise…

(At this point KATE is leaning over JEREMY on the couch, their lips almost touching. Just as they are about to kiss, however, a male figure enters. It is EDDIE. KATE rises and exits via the balcony.)
KATE (V.O.)

Jeremeeeee....

(The effect suddenly fades. Lights up on:)

Scene 5

JEREMY’s apartment, early evening. JEREMY is lying on the couch still in “kissing position” from the dream. He wakes up to see EDDIE standing over him instead of KATE. (EDDIE’s line, “Jeremy!” should immediately follow the trailing echo of KATE’s “Jeremeeeee” so that their voices overlap.)

EDDIE
Jeremy! Yo! Wake up! You left the door open ya tard!
(He jostles JEREMY and turns on the lights.)
She’s gonna be here any minute! Come on, man. You made a promise!

What?

JEREMY

EDDIE
You’ve got to at least look presentable.

(He remembers.)

JEREMY

(He remembers.)

Shit.

(JEREMY puts on a shirt and begins tidying up the apartment, throwing empty pizza boxes under the couch, etc. EDDIE goes to the shopping bag and removes a handful of votive candles and begins lighting them and placing them around the room.)

EDDIE
Don’t worry, I’ve got your back. Okay, so here’s the plan.

JEREMY

What plan? I thought you were going to help me clean up. What are you doing?

EDDIE
I said I’d help you. I didn’t say anything about cleaning. Now pay attention. Seduction 101, Lesson One. Women love candles. No one knows why. But trust me, at ten cents a pop these bad boys are the most cost effective aphrodisiac ever invented. Turns any casual get-together into a mating ritual.
(He lights and places the last candle.)
There. With any luck she won’t notice you’re living like a serial killer.
(He removes a bottle of port wine from the bag.)
Okay. Once she’s relaxed, offer her a glass of port. Port has more cachet than just “wine,” but more importantly it has more alcohol. Which will make both of you more attractive.
(He pulls a CD from the inside jacket pocket.)
Music. This mix never fails. Starts out slow, builds up to ramming speed in about an hour. Now. If all goes well, I got you these.
(He pulls out a box of condoms from the bag.)
Twisted Ribbed Magnums. I got the Tingly Mint flavor. That way after you pull out she can still give you head without having to ...

JEREMY
Eddie! For crying out loud, it’s not a date! She’s my scene partner! I hardly know the girl! Anyway, I have no interest in dating her.

EDDIE
Oh. So she’s ugly.

JEREMY
No, actually she’s very attractive. I just don’t want to ...

EDDIE
Yeah? Like, what, a little attractive...
(Cupping his hands close to his chest)
Or really attractive?
(Extending hands much farther out)

JEREMY
(Reluctantly playing along, giving a hand cupping measurement)
She’s… pretty attractive.

EDDIE
So, what’s the problem?

JEREMY
For one thing, she’s way too young for me. I mean she probably hasn’t lived life much yet, you know?

EDDIE
Oh, excuse me Rip Van Winkle. And you have?

JEREMY
Eddie, just drop it, all right?

(A knock at the door.)
Shit. That’s her now.
EDDIE
Don’t worry, I’ll get the door. You finish cleaning up.

JEREMY
All right, but do me a favor. Try not to stare at her breasts the first second you meet her?

EDDIE
I shall be the soul of discretion.

(JEREMY looks at EDDIE suspiciously then exits to the kitchen with the remaining trash. EDDIE opens the door. CHRISSY enters.)

Hi! You must be the scene partner.

CHRISSY
That’s me!

EDDIE
I’m Eddie. Jeremy’s dashing older brother.

CHRISSY
Chrissy. Nice to meet you.

EDDIE
Here, let me take that. Oh. Nice coat.
(He helps her with her coat.)

CHRISSY
Oh, thanks!

(EDDIE holds her coat up in the air as if to examine the workmanship but instead uses it as a screen so he can freely stare at her breasts.)

EDDIE
Yes. Very nice.
(He hangs the coat on a coat stand.)
Jeremy was just telling me how much he’s looking forward to working with you.

CHRISSY
Oh, great.

EDDIE
Yeah, he thinks you’re really hot.

(CHRISSY reacts with concern. JEREMY enters just in time to hear EDDIE’s last line.)
Eddie!

What? That’s what you said...

Wh--?! I never ...

(To CHRISSY)
I’m sorry, I never said you were “hot.” I would never say that.
(Realizing how this sounds.)
I mean, not that you’re not hot! I mean you are! I mean…
(Looking for a way out)
You obviously have... a very... low percentage of body fat.

You’ll have to forgive my brother’s lack of social skills. He’s been something of a hermit these last few years. Working on his novel.

Novella. And I haven’t...

Oh! So you’re a writer?

Oh, he’s incredibly gifted. Sensitive... romantic... and he’s not gay! Go figure.

So are you published?

No...

But he will be. The book he’s writing is a masterpiece.

Don’t listen to him. He’s never read it.

Yeah, I did. I... kinda hacked into your computer.
(Off JEREMY’s reaction.)
Well, you wouldn’t show it to me! Anyway this mini-novel of his... it’s gonna be a best seller for sure. Not that he needs the money. Did he tell you he’s independently wealthy?

Eddie! Aren’t you late for your Narcotics Anonymous meeting?
EDDIE (laughing)
Yeah, right! (Pause) Oh. Right. Well. I’ll let you two thespians get at it. Later, bro.
(to CHRISSY)
Nice meeting you.

CHRISSY
Nice to meet you.

(EDDIE starts to exit.)

EDDIE
Oh, and bro. I don’t know what you’re talking about. She’s not too young for you!

(JEREMY closes his eyes, mortified. EDDIE exits.)

CHRISSY
Okay, we need to get something straight. This isn’t a date.

JEREMY
I know. Believe me, that’s not what I was thinking.

CHRISSY
Yeah? So what’s with all the candles? Power failure?

JEREMY
That was my brother’s idea. Believe me, the last thing I want to do is date you.

(A beat)
I’m sorry, I didn’t mean… I mean I’m sure a whole army of guys would want to date you. No, I didn’t mean like you were into dating an entire army… It’s just that I’m not interested in you that way. Not that you’re not interesting! I mean…

CHRISSY (laughing)
It’s okay! I get it. Sorry if I was overly cautious. I’ve had issues with guys who try to turn rehearsal into something more. Sooo…

JEREMY
Oh. So my plays are in this pile here. Go ahead and pick anything you like.

(He leads her to a stack of books downstage.)

CHRISSY
Okay…

(She sits on the floor and begins going through the books. JEREMY hands her a cushion from the couch, inadvertently revealing the box of condoms that were hidden there.)
JEREMY
Oh, here. Take this. You’ll be more comfortable.

CHRISSY
Thanks. So can I ask you something?

(JEREMY sees the condoms and quickly grabs them, nervously bobbling them in the air a couple of times, then hurls them offstage. We hear the sound of something glass or ceramic breaking. CHRISSY looks in that direction, puzzled.)

JEREMY
Mice. Heh, New York. What can you do, right? You were saying?

CHRISSY
(Looking around for mice, a bit creeped out)
I was just wondering… what’s your book about?

JEREMY
Oh. I’m kind of embarrassed to say.

Well now you have to.

CHRISSY

JEREMY
It’s sort of a modern-day fairy tale. It’s about a boy who falls in love with a princess, but to win her hand he has to confront all these evil creatures – each one embodying a dark side of his own personality.

Battling his demons!

CHRISSY

JEREMY
Exactly. Like the Firewolf. A wolf that can…

CHRISSY
Lemme guess. Turn itself into fire?

JEREMY
How keenly perceptive.

CHRISSY (laughing)
I knew my college education wouldn’t go to waste!

JEREMY
Anyway, the boy figures out that wolf is actually a manifestation of his own anger. Eventually he defeats the wolf by learning to tame his anger.
Cool! So how does it end?

I don’t know. I never finished it. I kinda lost my spark.

You’ll get it back.

You think?

Sure. It’s like acting. You can work on a role for weeks and weeks and never get it. Then out of the blue, something clicks – and – OH MY GOOOOOD, look at this!

(She holds up an old, partly dilapidated book.)

The Snow Queen! Wow, how old is this?

It’s from my childhood.

So it’s an antique! I love this story! I practically memorized it as a kid!

Really? Me, too!

Oh! Oh! Oh! I just love the part where Gerda finds Kay who’s heart has been turned to ice, and when he sees her crying it melts his heart and …

And he comes back to life.

(Pause)

Hm.

What?

I can’t understand how someone who appreciates a story as beautiful and touching as The Snow Queen cannot like Chekhov.

Well I don’t understand how someone as upbeat as you can stand him.
CHRIS

He’s one of the most loved playwrights of all time!

JER

Well, yeah. By actors.

CHRIS

What’s that supposed to mean?

JER

Everyone knows actors love to cry. So for an actor, playing Chekhov must be Nirvana. But for the rest of us it’s about as much fun as a colonoscopy.

CHRIS

So never mind what all the theater critics think, or teachers or directors…

JER

Who at one time were all actors.

CHRIS

Hey. It’s okay. I understand. Some people just don’t appreciate his genius.

JER

Some people assume he’s a genius because that’s what they were told.

CHRIS

His writing is beautiful!

JER

His sentences are six miles long!

CHRIS

You can’t judge his plays just by reading them! You have to see them performed!

JER

Oh, I have! Regrettably. I went to a Chekhov festival once? Let’s just say “Chekhov” and “festival” are two words that should never be used in the same sentence.

CHRIS

Which plays did you see?

JER

Does it matter? They’re all the same play as far as I can see. Everyone’s miserable and everyone wears black. They’re not plays, they’re wakes. And nothing changes! All his characters are just as hopeless at the end of the play as they are at the beginning. It’s like the message of all his plays is, “give up.” And when one of his characters has a monologue? God help us. You sit there listening
to this adjectival tide pouring out of their mouths about how somebody doesn’t love them back or how they’ve fallen on hard times and they have to sell the cherry orchard. Well boo-fucking-hoo! I’m just all broken up that Masha can’t go to fucking Moscow! You call that misery? They don’t know what misery is!

(Pause)

CHRISSY
You’re right. We shouldn’t work on Chekhov.

(She resumes searching through the books.)

JEREMY
I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to fly off like that.

CHRISSY
It’s okay.

JEREMY
Look, I know you were looking forward to …

CHRISSY
I said it’s okay.

(Pause)

Really. It’s no big deal.

(Pause. Finally, unable to resist)

Even though everyone says playing Chekhov changes your life as an actor forever. And even though I’ve been dying to work on The Seagull for years. And by the time I get another chance I’ll probably be too old to play Nina… That’s why I wanted to play the part so much! I don’t think I ever wanted anything so much in my entire life, except maybe once when I was five and I wanted a puppy! This adorable little half shih-tzu mutt our neighbors were giving away. But I didn’t get the puppy, either!

(She starts to cry.)

JEREMY
Oh jeez. Look, I’m sorry! All right! We’ll work on The Seagull. Really, it’s okay. Come on don’t …

(CHRISSY’s crying turns to laughing. JEREMY realizes he has been duped.)

CHRISSY
Sorry, but you know us actors. We just love to cry. Oh, don’t worry, I won’t hold you to it.

JEREMY
That’s very generous of you.
CHRISSEY
No, really, I was being selfish. I didn’t realize Chekhov’s plays could make anyone so sad. Someone like you (Pause) You should be happy.

JEREMY
And Chekhov makes you happy?

CHRISSEY
Very much so.

JEREMY
In heaven’s name, why?

CHRISSEY
I don’t know. I mean, okay, I know his plays don’t have fairy tale endings, but… maybe that’s why. I mean, we’ve all been in love with someone who didn’t love us back, right? Or been through hard times, or had our hopes crushed?

JEREMY
Right…?

CHRISSEY
So when we see Chekhov’s characters feeling that way… it lets us see that… That we’re not alone! Which in a way is a kind of joy, isn’t it? 

JEREMY
Well, yeah, I guess…

CHRISSEY
(Taking the book from JEREMY)
And that’s the kind of joy we as actors can create with this play! We’d be reminding people that… they’re not alone! That we’re all suffering together! To know you’re connecting with people like that, you can’t imagine how satisfying that is!

JEREMY
I’ll be damned. You actually make it sound tempting.

CHRISSEY
You mean you’ll consider it?

JEREMY
Consider what?

CHRISSEY
Doing the scene! Oh, you won’t be sorry! You’re going to find it so rewarding. I promise! (Pause) Oh, I know, I know, I know – it won’t be easy. Everyone says how difficult it is to play Chekhov but I’ll help you! We’ll help each other! We’ll
figure it out! Together! I know we can! I know it! Please say yes! Please, please, please, please, please, please, please, please!

Oh for god’s sake. All right.

Really?

Sure. We’ll “suffer together.”

Oh, thank you!

(She hugs him. JEREMY reacts stiffly. She lets go.)

I’m sorry. I get a little carried away sometimes. I hope I wasn’t too...

Oh no. It’s fine. I wasn’t using those coupla ribs, anyway.

My fiancé always tells me I’m too physical with people.

Your fiancé? (Beat) Congratulations.

Thanks. Well, we haven’t actually set a date yet. But I know he’s the one.

Yeah? What makes you so sure?

You’ll laugh.

No I won’t.

I dream about him a lot. (Pause) I know, that sounds so corny.

No. No, it’s not.

(Pause)
CHRIS
So I have a few minutes. You want to go over the scene a bit, get the feel of it?

JEREMY
Sure if I can find my copy of the ...

(She hands him his copy of the play.)
...play. Where shall I begin?

CHRIS
How about the beginning of your monologue?

JEREMY
That’s what I was reading.

CHRIS
Oh! Good acting!
(Laughs.)

JEREMY
(Stiff, amateurish.)
“Where shall I begin? You know, some people have what’s called an idée fixe – for example, when a person thinks about nothing but the moon, day and night.
(He shoots a glare at CHRIS.)

JEREMY (cont.)
I should be able to relax, forget everything, but no! There’s a heavy iron ball already on the move in my head.”
(Breaking character, laughing)
This is ridiculous!

CHRIS
It’s probably just a bad translation. We’ll just have to find a way to make it sound natural.

JEREMY
Yeah? I can’t wait to hear you make this sound natural.
(In a mocking falsetto)
“It must be a dream!”

CHRIS
Well I wouldn’t say it like that. It’s more like… “It must be a dream.”
(Repeating, trying different emphasis)
“It must be a dream.” “It must be a dream!” Oh god. This is impossible!

JEREMY
Let’s face it. We’re gonna suck!
CHRIS

No! Don’t say that! We just have to connect with it somehow. Come on. Let’s try it from here, where we first meet.

JEREMY

Okayy…

CHRIS

“Good morning, Mr. Trigorin!”

JEREMY

“Good morning. A most unexpected turn of events. I think we’ll be leaving today. That’s a pity. I don’t often get the chance to meet young girls.” Blech.

CHRIS

Will you stop ragging on Chekhov? He’s the father of modern drama!

JEREMY

Yeah? Well, then modern drama’s a mongoloid crack baby with no hope and no future!

CHRIS

Oh yeah? Well – F you!

JEREMY

“F you?” (laughing) You gotta be kidding me!

CHRIS

I don’t swear. What’s so funny about that?

(She picks up a cushion from the couch and hits him with it. A pillow fight ensues. It escalates. Laughs, screams. CHRIS climbs on top of him and is about to deliver the coup de gras when they freeze, suddenly remembering themselves. An awkward beat as they both suddenly separate, embarrassed.)

CHRIS

Well, I should go.

JEREMY

Right. I mean, yeah, I’ve got to…

(She gets up. As JEREMY adjusts the cushions he finds something sticking out of the cracks. She notices.)

CHRIS

Find something?
JEREMY

(Covering)
Scrounging for quarters.

CHRISSY

So, you want to pick this up again tomorrow?
(JEREMY escorts her to the door.)

JEREMY

Like it’ll do any good. Come on, this is impossible. You said so yourself.

CHRISSY

Well, what could be more thrilling than achieving the impossible? Same time tomorrow?

JEREMY

If we must.

CHRISSY

If you’re trying to convince me you’re not enjoying this then you really are a bad actor.

JEREMY

Is that so!

CHRISSY

Mm-hm. Your body language is giving you away. You’re kind of bouncing right now. Like a puppy. It’s adorable.

(He stops bouncing.)

CHRISSY

See you tomorrow.
(She exits.)

JEREMY

Right. Tomorrow.

(He lingers by the door, smiling. He then remembers the object he found on the couch. He opens his hand and looks at. It is a woman’s hair band. Lights fade to:)
Scene 6

The lake, nighttime. We hear the dreamscape effect similar to Scene 4 but slightly darker, more ominous. KATE appears. She is skinny dipping in the moonlight, her naked form discreetly obscured by backlighting or perhaps a scrim. She moves fluidly, seductively, like a siren in the opening credits of a James Bond film. We hear water splashing as she swims. JEREMY enters.

JEREMY

Kate?

(KATE “surfaces,” laughs and swims away. A game of hide-and-seek ensues.)

Kate, where are you?

(KATE surfaces again and makes a striking movement with her hand. We hear a splash. From offstage, a sprinkle of actual water sprays JEREMY from his blind side. KATE laughs.)

Come on. Quit horsing around.

KATE

I’m thinking of a word.

JEREMY

Not now. Come on, I want to talk to you. Can you come out, please?

KATE

Not until you guess the word! It’s a four-letter word for intercourse ending in “k.”

JEREMY

Kate …

KATE

Mr. Serious tonight. Oh, all right. Throw me my towel?

(He does so. KATE steps out of the moonlight and into the darkness, appearing on stage a moment later with the towel wrapped around herself.)

Talk!

JEREMY

Could you sit down first?

KATE

No. That’s the word. “Talk!” (Laughs)

(She sits.)
KATE
So. You’ve got some explaining to do, mister. Leaving me in this romantic setting all by my lonesome…

JEREMY
Yeah, well that’s kind of what I wanted to talk about. We may not be able to see each other quite so much. At least for a while.

KATE
Oh? Anything wrong?

JEREMY
No, nothing’s wrong. Actually …

KATE
Ooh. Cramp. Would you mind? (She extends her foot across his lap. He rubs it.)

JEREMY
Actually I have good news. I’ve started writing again.

KATE
Really! That’s wonderful. Higher. (He rubs slightly higher.)
So you’re working on your novelette? (He shoots her a look, she giggles.)

JEREMY
My novella, yes. In fact I’m on the last chapter now.

KATE
Really! Higher.

JEREMY
Yeah. So anyway, that’s why I haven’t been sleeping as much.

KATE
So you’re almost done, then. A little higher.

JEREMY
Yeah, except this ending is killing me. Can’t seem to crack it. Plus I’ve got this acting class which is cutting into my time so …

KATE
Excuse me… Acting class?

JEREMY
I promised Eddie I’d get out and socialize more. Figured it would be a different way to study literature.
I see. And have you been?

Studying?

Socializing.

Oh. No, not really. It’s mostly a lot of memorization… research… Anyway, we have to present a scene from *The Seagull* next week and …

*The Seagull? But you hate Chekhov!*

Yeah, well… I thought I’d give him another shot. I mean he is the father of modern drama.

Actually, Ibsen’s considered the father. Chekhov’s more like the eccentric uncle.

Whatever. I just thought maybe I’ll like him this time.

You. Like Chekhov.

(Laughing)

Impossible!

Well, what could be more thrilling than achieving the impossible?

(No longer laughing.)

What indeed.

(She removes her leg.)

So. I assume you have a scene partner?

Oh. Yeah.

So what’s she like?

She’s… nice.
Nice?

Yeah, I mean she’s… you know…
(Pause)

Nice.

Right.

Anything else?

What do you mean?

Well. Is she attractive?

I don’t know. I mean, what is “attractive” anyway?

Someone you’re attracted to.

Me? No. I mean, she’s like way too young… and so naïve. I mean, she doesn’t seem to realize that being eager to get something doesn’t mean you’re going to get it. Of course she gets away with it because she’s so innocent and vulnerable and you don’t want to hurt her so you give her what she wants which only makes it worse cause then she’s just going to keep on being eager and upbeat and cheery and… So that’s why, you know, I’m not attracted to her.

Oh, Jeremy. Deceit just isn’t your forte! (A beat) I’m going to miss that about you.

What do you mean, “miss that?”

You’ve found someone. And you’ve come to say goodbye.

Goodbye? What, ‘cause of my scene partner? That’s ridiculous!
KATE
Oh really? A week ago you were opening a vein. Now you’re writing again… taking classes… Something’s rekindled your spirits and it wasn’t me.

JEREMY
Kate …

KATE
It’s all right. I’m glad. Really. You should move on.
(forcing back the tears)
Sorry. This is harder than I thought it would be.

JEREMY
Hey… hey. You and me, we’re it. Forever. We made a pact. When my time comes …

KATE
Sorry. Doesn’t work that way. You can’t expect love in the hereafter and a fling or two on the side while you’re waiting. Like I said, you have to be committed.

JEREMY
I am committed. Listen, I’ll drop the class. It’ll be like before. I’ll sleep more.

KATE
And how do you think that would make me feel, knowing you’re giving up everything for me? No. We can’t go back. And we can’t go on. You said you were looking for an ending… This is it.

JEREMY
What? No! I’m not leaving you.

KATE
Yes you are. By degrees, which is worse. Please… it’ll make my suffering easier knowing you’re happy.

JEREMY
What do you mean, “suffering?”

KATE
I just meant being without you, that’s all.

JEREMY
What’s going to happen to you when I’m gone?

KATE
Nothing.
JEREMY
No, seriously, what’ll it be like for you? What goes on after death?

KATE
I told you, nothing.

JEREMY
That’s not an answer. Now I want to know, what happens when I’m not—?

KATE
NOTHING! Because when you don’t think of me, that’s all there is! Nothing! There’s no light, no sound, no feeling… just a numb, empty void! Dante’s Inferno was a fucking amusement park!

(He reaches out to her but she rejects his pity.)
It’s all right. I figure it’s my penance. For all the times I kept putting off our marriage.

JEREMY
Don’t. Don’t blame yourself.

KATE
Why not? You won’t. If only I’d said “I do” we could be curled up on your couch right now fighting over the remote, watching each other get fat. But there was always just one more party, y’know? One more chance to be the center of attention. And now, here I am, the consummate party girl, alone for all eternity. You’ve got to love the irony of it!

(He embraces her. She cries.)

JEREMY
My god, why didn’t you tell me?

(A beat. To himself:)
You wanted me to move on.
(He looks at her.)
You said we can be together if we’re truly committed. I’ve got a bottle of sleeping pills in my medicine chest…

KATE
Jeremy, no …

JEREMY
We’ll be together. It’s what we both want!

KATE
Is it? Are you sure? What if you change your mind?

JEREMY
I won’t change my mind…
KATE
Last week you took up acting. Next week…

JEREMY
Not next week, not ever.

KATE
…maybe it’ll be butterfly collecting!

JEREMY
But if it makes you feel better, we’ll wait a week. All right? This time next week, if I haven’t changed my mind, I’ll join you.

KATE
No, my mind is made up.

JEREMY
So is mine.

(A beat. KATE sees he is as determined as she is. Perhaps more so.)

KATE
All right. We’ll wait a week. One week from today.

Done.

JEREMY
But if I sense even the slightest hes …

(JEREMY kisses her quickly and with great conviction. When the kiss is over KATE is no longer resisting.)

So I guess I’ll see you in a week, then.

JEREMY
Hey, I’m in no rush. In fact, I thought we were just getting started.

KATE
Oh, darling, no. You need to go. You need to make your decision on your own, without my influence. I need to be sure you have no regrets.

JEREMY
So we won’t see each other for a week? So no…

(He imitates a porno soundtrack.)

KATE
Definitely no…

(She mimics the soundtrack reference.)
JEREMY
You’re killing me.

(They both laugh at the irony of the phrase.)

KATE
I’m thinking of a word.

JEREMY
It better not be talk.

KATE
It isn’t.

(She coaxes JEREMY to the prone position, pulling the edges of the blanket together to form a cocoon around them. She removes her towel and flings it out of the cocoon as they begin to make love. CHEKHOV enters. He is wearing late 19th Century attire and carries a walking stick. He faces out toward the lake and begins to speak with a heavy Russian accent. It is understood that he is speaking aloud the text that he is writing.)

CHEKHOV
They moved quickly, silently, under a star-filled night in western Connecticut…

(Appears dissatisfied with this line.)

KATE
What was that?

CHEKHOV
Western… Belarus.

KATE
There’s someone over there!

CHEKHOV
But they didn’t notice the stars… or the moon… or the water lapping against the shore.

(CHEKHOV turns back and sees KATE looking at him. He smiles and waves.)

KATE
Oh my god, he sees us!

CHEKHOV
They were too much in love.

KATE
Who is that?
JEREMY
I have no idea!

KATE
Well you should know! It’s your dream!
(She gets up, wrapping herself in the towel.)

JEREMY
What are you doing?

KATE
Look, why you brought in some strange man to watch us have sex is your issue. You need to work that out. I’m going for a swim. Come find me when he’s gone!
(She steps behind the scrim, drops her towel, and “dives” into the water. We hear a splash.)

JEREMY
Kate! No, come back! Achhh. Christ.
(He quickly dresses and approaches CHEKHOV.)
Hey! Excuse me! Whoever you are… Listen, my girlfriend and came here to be alone? So if wouldn’t mind …

CHEKHOV
Your girlfriend is no longer here. She is at the lake in Connecticut.

JEREMY
What do you mean? That’s where I am now.

CHEKHOV
You were. Now you are in Russia.

JEREMY
What?!

CHEKHOV
You don’t recognize it? It is the lake from *The Seagull*.

JEREMY
What the fuck am I doing here??!!!

CHEKHOV
Most likely to work out a problem. That is usually what dreams are for.

JEREMY
Look, my only problem is I was this close to having some fantastic sex but I got hijacked to fucking Russia!
CHEKHOV
Oh, believe me. You have much worse problems than that.
 (KATE reappears, skinny dipping in the moonlight.)

KATE
Jeremee! Come join me! The water is perfect!

JEREMY
I’m coming!
 (He starts to run toward her but suddenly begins moving in slow motion.)
What the f—?

CHEKHOV (Laughing)
Uch! I hate those dreams! You try to run but you can barely move. So frustrating!

KATE
Jeremy! Where are you? Jeremy?

JEREMY
Kate!
 (KATE disappears.)
She’s gone!

CHEKHOV
I told you, you have to work out your problem first. You know, you should really take up fishing. Very relaxing but most of all it teaches patience.

JEREMY
Yeah, great, thanks for the fuckin’ Zen lesson. Look, I need to get back to …

CHEKHOV
It is a shame you won’t finish that book of yours. Achh, but what do you care, right? You have more important things to do, like “doing the deed,” am I right?
 (Laughing)
“Hide the salami?” “Take a log to the beaver—”

JEREMY
Excuse me but… who the fuck are you?

CHEKHOV
I’m sorry. I have forgotten my manners. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Anton Pavlovich Chekhov.
 (He rises, clicks his heels and extends his hand.)

JEREMY
Chekhov? The Chekhov? You’re shitting me!
CHEKHOV

That is disgusting!

JEREMY

No, it’s an expression. You know, joking? Putting me on?

CHEKHOV

Oh. You mean “fucking with you.” I just learned that one yesterday. I just love your American English! So colorful! Bunghole. Blowjob. Motherfucker!

(Laughs.)

JEREMY

Yeah, yeah, listen. I’ve really got to…

CHEKHOV

Did you know in my day I was considered the master of the novella? Oh yes, wrote a great many of them. Not to mention over a hundred short stories. Now people only remember my plays. My stories are all but forgotten. Do you know why?

JEREMY

Is this going to be one of your longer speeches?

CHEKHOV

Because people no longer read to learn about life. They read to escape it! They do not want books that make them feel, they want books that make them numb! There is no substance. No poetry. Ah. But then I began reading your little book.

JEREMY

You read it? What did you think?

JEREMY

As soon as I read the first page, I thought, Fascinating. A modern day fairy tale. Maybe that is what the world needs.” So I read on, and I thought, what an amazing piece…

JEREMY

Oh, thank y …

CHEKHOV

…of shit!

JEREMY

What?

CHEKHOV

Your dialogue sucks ass! And I don’t even want to get into that suicide at the end! Oh, I forget, you have not come up with the ending yet, have you?
A suicide.

I told you that in confidence. You must promise me not to end it like that.

I don’t know, I kinda like it …

(CHEKHOV thwacks him with his walking stick.)

Promise me!

Okay! Cheez! But I don’t get why it’s so wrong. You ended The Seagull with a suicide.

Really. Are you sure? It is not shown on stage.

We hear the gun shot. The last line of the play is “Kostya killed himself.”

Actually, the line is “Kostya shot himself.” Which as we know, he has done before.

So… he could still be alive… and the cycle is starting over again.

Possibly. But I let the audience decide. I did not piss all over them by telling them what to think. You have got everybody saying exactly what they are feeling. Hey! Ass douche! Ever heard of subtext?

You know, I really don’t give a shit what you think of my writing. ‘Cause guess what, I really don’t think a whole lot of yours. As far as I’m concerned you’re just a creaky relic who’s gotten by on luck and hype. In fact, I think your plays suck! There, somebody finally said it!

Fine. You don’t want my help? No problem. It is … as you say… your funeral.

Wait. Hold on. You really think my book has potential?
CHEKHOV
Possibly. With work. A lot of work!

JEREMY
What makes you so sure?
(Beat)

CHEKHOV
You know, I, too, was a recluse. Absolutely hated going out in public. And yet I had a great desire to help people. Even now I feel the calling. People are starving for substance. For stories that can help them understand themselves. Your novella could be such a story.

JEREMY
And you can help me?

CHEKHOV
Me? Oh no. I am just a creaky relic who has gotten by on luck and hype.

JEREMY
Okay, okay. I’m sorry. You’re obviously the expert, not me. I would be honored if you could give me some advice.

CHEKHOV
Ah... so. Now you’re all buddy-buddy with me. You spineless, dickless, ball-less scum bag!

JEREMY
Okay! Yes. You’re right. I was wrong... I ...

CHEKHOV (laughing)
Sorry! I could not resist! I am just having fun with these new words!

JEREMY
So... You’ll help me then?

CHEKHOV
On one condition.
(Off JEREMY’s reaction)
My scene. Do it properly.

JEREMY
You mean from The Seagull? Why?

CHEKHOV
Because! Everybody fucks up that scene! Just once I would like to see it done right. Find the center of it. Uncover its riches.
But I’m not really an actor …

Don’t act. *Feel.*

But those lines! They’re so grandiose and …

(Off CHEKHOV’s look)

Sorry.

Ssssstupid! The secret is not in the lines, it is… how do you say… between them.

(A knock at the door.)

Between the lines. But how do I do that?

I am sorry, I must go now.

But I still don’t under…

You had better answer the door.

Wait!

(The knocking continues.)

(Lights fade to:)
Scene 7

JEREMY’s apartment. Midnight. The knocking from the previous scene continues. JEREMY answers the door.

JEREMY

Chrissy.

Hi. I hope I didn’t wake you.

JEREMY

No, not at all. What’s wrong?

CHRIS

Oh… it seems so silly now. I needed to talk to someone and I was on my way to Carl’s but, I don’t know, when I got there I just kept walking and… found myself outside your building. I hope I’m not …

JEREMY

It’s okay. What happened?

CHRIS

I… I had a nightmare. I thought maybe it would help to… I don’t know, I feel like an idiot coming here like this.

JEREMY

It’s all right. Come on. Tell me about it.

(He walks her to the couch. They sit.)

CHRIS

I was with Carl. We were walking along this ridge. I think it was somewhere in Scotland. Or maybe Ohio. Anyway, we were walking along and suddenly the ground started opening up between us! I looked down, and it was like this abyss! I looked at Carl but he was still walking along like nothing was wrong while the ground kept crumbling beneath me… and then I fell and—! That’s when I woke up. I was so scared. You know, they say if you die in your dreams you die in real life.

JEREMY

That’s an old wives tale. I died in my dream just last week and I’m still here.

CHRIS

I knew you were the right person to talk to! So what do you think my dream means?

JEREMY

Well, you’re obviously feeling anxious about something…
CHRIS

You think I have trust issues with men.

JEREMY

What?

CHRIS

It’s okay. You can say it. I know that’s what Carl would say.

JEREMY

Is that what you think?

CHRIS

I don’t know. Maybe. My dad wasn’t exactly a model of trustworthiness. I think that’s why I ended up with Carl. He may not be the most passionate guy in the world but he’s honest. I think he’s the first honest guy I ever met. (Pause) I think you’re the second.

JEREMY

Thanks.

CHRIS

It’s not a compliment. You’re just not cut out for lying.

JEREMY

I think I could pull off a good lie if I wanted.

(CHRIS laughs. JEREMY appears offended.)

CHRIS

Ohhh… I think it’s wonderful that you’re like that! That’s why I’m so glad we’re friends.

JEREMY


(He fake punches her shoulder.)

CHRIS

Well, I should go. I’m keeping you up.

(She turns to leave, but still appears to be uneasy.)

JEREMY

You know… whenever I have nightmares it’s the damnest thing. I always have this fear it’s going to pick up where it left off. Totally irrational, I know, but I’m always petrified to go back to sleep.
CHRISSY
So what do you do?

JEREMY
Well, if I’m alone I might pick up a book, try to take my mind off it. But if I was in an acting class and my scene partner was awake, I think the best thing would be to work on our scene.

Now?

CHRISSY

JEREMY
Why not? You’re here.

Well... all right, then!

(JEREMY picks up the play; they both move to the couch.)

JEREMY
You know, I’ve been thinking. Maybe we should be focusing less on “acting” and more on “feeling.” Sorry, that probably makes no sense.

CHRISSY
No! That makes perfect sense! Instead of trying to figure out our objectives we should just try to figure out what they’re feeling.

(JEREMY pretending to understand)

Right...

CHRISSY
For example. Nina wants to be an actress, but what she’s feeling is… trapped. That’s why she falls in love with Trigorin.

JEREMY
Love? That’s ridiculous. They’ve hardly met.

CHRISSY
That wouldn’t stop her. She’s young, impulsive... and he’s a great writer. To her, he’s exciting.

JEREMY
Yeah, but he’s so dark and cynical...

CHRISSY
Exactly. He’s complex. Makes him all the more attractive.
Yeah?

CHRIS
Oh yeah. She’s totally crushing on him. Though I don’t know why he’s interested in her.

JEREMY
Oh that’s easy. I mean she’s young, beautiful... fun to be around...

CHRIS
Yeah?

JEREMY
Oh yeah. I think he’s quite smitten with her.

(They both lean closer to study the script.)

CHRIS
Well if he likes her so much why doesn’t he make a pass at her?

JEREMY
She has a boyfriend.

CHRIS
Who? Kostya? She doesn’t really love him. No, I think he’s worried his mistress will find out.

JEREMY
Arkadina.

CHRIS
Right. He’ll never leave her.

JEREMY
Unless -- he thinks he has a chance with Nina. Maybe that’s why it’s so important for him to win her over in this scene!

CHRIS
Because he’s supposed to be leaving the next day!

JEREMY
Right! So it’s his only chance to win her heart!

(Looking at the text)
Funny. None of the words really say that, do they?
JEREMY
No. It’s all going on between…

CHRISSY
Between the lines! Right! Oh, I can’t wait to try this now!
(She reads.)
“Good morning, Mr. Trigorin!”

JEREMY
(Better than before, but still very arch)
“Good morning! A most unexpected turn of events. I think we’ll be leaving today. So I don’t expect we’ll see each other again. That’s a pity. I don’t usually get the chance to meet young girls. Interesting young girls, that is.” Ughh. Could this guy be any more uptight?

CHRISSY
Maybe you need to relax a little.
(She touches his shoulder.)
Oh my gosh, you’re wound up like a spring! Here.
(She begins massaging his shoulders.)
You know, acting starts with the body. If you’re body’s not relaxed the emotions get blocked.

JEREMY
Yeah?

CHRISSY
Uh-huh. Take a deep breath.
(He does so, but it is a rather shallow breath.)
Deeper. From here.
(She lightly touches the side of his ribcage. He lets out a quick squeal. She laughs.)
You’re ticklish! That’s a good sign! You’re releasing tension. Now breathe out… In… out…. In… out… Good. Oh. And another thing… if you don’t mind a suggestion…

JEREMY
No, no, suggest away.

CHRISSY
Well, you don’t exactly seem like you’re inflamed with passion. You’re supposed to be turned on by this girl, right? Maybe if you used a substitution.

A substitution?

CHRISSY
Make believe I’m someone you have the hots for. Your ultimate dream girl.
JEREMY
My dream girl. Okay…

CHRISSY
Alright, so we’re having a romantic moment together. How would she sit? Indian style? Curled up next to you?

JEREMY
She use to… I think she might put her legs across my lap.

Like this?
(She does so.)

JEREMY
Yeah.

CHRISSY
It’s okay, you can touch my legs. I’m your dream girl, remember? Now. When you say your lines, say them to her. And don’t be afraid to be a little predatory.

Predatory?

CHRISSY
Yeah. I mean, this is a guy who has an eye for the ladies. Maybe if you kind of glance at my body or something while you’re talking to me.

I can’t do that!

JEREMY
It’s okay. You have my permission.

Really? Okay…

CHRISSY
(Reading)
“Good morning, Mr. Trigorin!”

JEREMY
(Less stiff, more genuine)
“Good morning! A most unexpected turn of events. I think we’ll be leaving today. So I don’t expect we’ll see each other again. That’s a pity. I don’t usually get the chance to meet young girls. Interesting young girls, that is.”
(On the word “interesting,” JEREMY glances at CHRISSY’s breasts. CHRISSY laughs.)
JEREMY (cont.)

I’m sorry!

CHRIS

No, it’s fine! That was great!

JEREMY

Really? I was pretending to be my brother.

CHRIS

I think it’s working. Keep doing that.

JEREMY

Oh, come on. I can’t look at you like that the whole scene.

CHRIS

Tch! You’re such a gentleman!

JEREMY

Well, maybe if I had a drink or something. To loosen me up.

CHRIS

Excellent idea!

JEREMY

I’ve got a bottle of port in the kitchen. Would you --?

CHRIS

I’d love some! Here, let me. You get the glasses.

JEREMY

Great. You know, I think maybe this substitution bit is working. Although I still can’t make sense of that crazy moon obsession thing.

CHRIS

Well, it is a full moon tonight. Maybe it would help to say our lines out on the balcony.

JEREMY

It’s freezing cold out.

CHRIS

So it’ll be that much nicer when we come back in.

JEREMY

Okay!
(CHRISSY exits to the kitchen. JEREMY takes two wine glasses from the bar. Outside the window, KATE appears from behind a scrim. She looks at JEREMY with a mischievous, penetrating smile. JEREMY does not see her.)

JEREMY (Cont.)
It’s funny isn’t it, what they say about a full moon? How it makes people go crazy. Personally I always thought that was just a lot of …
(He turns toward the window and sees KATE.)
Aaaaaaaah!!!

(JEREMY drops one of the glasses, smashing it to pieces. KATE disappears as CHRISSY rushes back in with the wine bottle. He quickly closes the curtain.)

CHRISSY
What is it?

JEREMY
Bats.

CHRISSY
Bats? On your balcony?

JEREMY
Yeah. Most people don’t realize bats live all over the city.

CHRISSY
I thought they hibernate in winter.

JEREMY
I must’ve woke ‘em up. Anyway, you don’t want to go out there.

CHRISSY
Oh. Too bad. Well, we can still have the wine….

JEREMY
Uh, sure. Let me just sweep this up.
(As he goes to the closet to get a broom, CHRISSY goes to peek out the curtain. JEREMY sees her.)

CHRISSY
Oh, would you mind getting another glass from the kitchen?

Sure.
(The ploy works. She goes to the kitchen. Keeping one eye on her and one eye on the balcony, JEREMY opens the closet door revealing KATE. JEREMY screams and slams the door shut.)
JEREMY

Aaaaaaaa! Choo!

CHRISSY

Gezundheit!

JEREMY

Actually, you know, I think I may be coming down with a cold all of a sudden. Maybe I should try and get some sleep.

CHRISSY

Ohhh. What a shame! Are you sure?

JEREMY

Yeah, I think it’s best.

CHRISSY

Oh. All right. Well, at least let me clean that up for you. Where’s your broom, in here?

JEREMY

No, really. I’ll take care of it.

CHRISSY

Okay, if you insist…

(JEREMY leads CHRISSY to the door. She stops.)

Oh! You know we never talked about how to end the scene.

JEREMY

(Glancing back at the closet)
Right. Ending the scene.

CHRISSY

In the script, Arkadina calls out to you from off stage. I was thinking we could just pretend to hear her lines. I think the class will understand.

JEREMY

Sure. Sounds good.

CHRISSY

Ha. Arkadina’s kind of a funny character, don’t you think? Every little thing is a matter of life and death to her.

(A loud pound of a fist is heard from the closet.)

JEREMY

Huh. Listen to that. The plumbing in these old buildings…
CHRISSY

I didn’t hear anything.

(CHRISSY grabs her coat from the coat stand.)

Hey, I think we’ve made some real progress tonight. All right, well, get some rest and I’ll see you tomorrow, okay?

(She hugs him. He reacts stiffly, nervously.)

Pleasant dreams.

(She exits. JEREMY crosses and opens the closet door. KATE is not there. JEREMY turns downstage appearing confused and disturbed.)

END OF ACT ONE
ACT TWO

Scene 1

An after-hours S&M club. Flashing strobes. Throbbing dirge-like house music. JEREMY and EDDIE are sitting at a table. EDDIE, surrounded by empty shot glasses and a beer chaser, is smiling as he looks out at the half-naked cage dancers, leather-clad dominatrix’s, acts of bondage and other nefarious activity one associates with such a venue. JEREMY is looking greatly disturbed as he nurses a single beer.

JEREMY
I can’t believe I let you talk me into this.

EDDIE
Into what? We agreed to meet for drinks… we’re having drinks. So the waitresses happen to be wearing leather aprons.

JEREMY
All they’re wearing is leather aprons!

EDDIE
(As he watches one of the waitresses passing by)
Yeahhh! So. Progress report. How are things going with your scene partner? What’s her name?

JEREMY
Chrissy.

EDDIE
Chrissy, right. You two doing any home construction yet?

JEREMY
What?

EDDIE
You know. Insert tab A into slot B?

JEREMY
Wh—? No! Nothing like that!

EDDIE
Too bad. You should be tapping that ass. Maybe do some tea-bagging…

JEREMY
Hey! Don’t talk about her like that. I mean it.

EDDIE
Sorry.
(Pause. He looks at JEREMY, then smiles.)
Unbelievable. Only you.

JEREMY
What?

EDDIE
First girl you meet in three years and you fall for her like a blind roofer.

JEREMY
What? Nooo… I’m not… there’s no… We’re just friends.
(Off EDDIE’s look)
All right. Maybe… a slightly visually impaired roofer.

EDDIE
Ha-haaa!

JEREMY
But it’s not like anything’s going to happen. First of all, she’s taken.

What, she’s married?

EDDIE
Well …

JEREMY

EDDIE
Ehhhh, that doesn’t mean a thing. I sleep with married women all the time.

You do?

EDDIE
Sure. Adds to the excitement. Bro, you think marriage means “hands off?” All it means is “hands under the table.” You know in Greek, the word for “marriage” is the same word for “danger?” Marriage is like a passport to the best kind of sex there is – forbidden sex. The danger of being caught! Adultery... S&M… bondage… it’s all the same. The more we’re not supposed to do it, the more we want it. And not just guys, women, too. Hell, why do you think I come to this place? Half the women here are married!

JEREMY
You know, Eddie, I can always count on you for an uplifting outlook. That’s really true, the Greek thing?

EDDIE
Nah, I just made that up to make a point. The thing is, women are just as attracted to the Forbidden as men are. Even your scene partner. Trust me.
JEREMY
I don’t know. I don’t think Chrissy’s like that. On the other hand, she’s not married yet. She’s just engaged.

EDDIE
Engaged? Oh god, forget it.

What?

JEREMY
Save yourself. Run. Get out now while you still can.

EDDIE
You mean engaged is worse than married?

JEREMY
Are you kidding? Engaged is a whole different ball game. People who are engaged genuinely believe they’ll be together till the end of time. It’s all bullshit, of course, but try talking them out of it. And you know what? No one should talk them out of it. It’s like telling a kid there’s no Santa Claus. It’s… immoral.
(He fixates on a sex show or somesuch going on in front of him.)

JEREMY
Yeah… you’re probably right. Besides, I’m sure she’s better off.

What do you mean?

JEREMY
Eddie, I gotta tell you something. I really think I’m going insane.

EDDIE
Insanity is just genius in reverse.

What does that mean?

JEREMY
I don’t know. I was just winging it. Go on.

EDDIE
Last night… I saw Kate.

What?

JEREMY
In my apartment. She was as real as you sitting across from me now.
EDDIE
You’re fucking with me, right?

JEREMY
I know! I know! Call the men in white suits!

EDDIE
Now, now, now, hold on. I see two possibilities, here. The first is... you’re fucking Looney Tunes!

(Laughs, but then sees JEREMY’s enjoying the humor.)
Okay, okay. The other is... You had a... what do you call it. One of those extranormal, paranormal, whatever, episodes. You know!

JEREMY
You’re saying I had a psychic experience?

EDDIE
Fuckin’ ye-ah! Why not? You hear about those things all the time. People having visitations from their dead husbands and cats and shit. Science can’t explain it but it happens.

I don’t know...

JEREMY
Bro. Think about it. You suffered a big loss. And you’re about the most sensitive soul on the planet. So if there is any truth to this spirituality thing you’d be a fucking lightning rod for that shit.

JEREMY
Huh. Maybe that’s it. That must be it. I still feel like I’m losing it, though.

EDDIE
You should feel lucky. Reconnecting with a loved one through the spirit world? To have that kind of bond with someone. What I wouldn’t give to find a soul mate like that. What anyone in this fuckin’ place wouldn’t give. You were blessed, bro.

JEREMY
Yes... I was.

...(After a beat, to himself...) And still am.

EDDIE
Huh?

JEREMY
Eddie. There’s something I need to ask you. You know my novella?
EDDIE

What about it?

JEREMY

I think I finally came up with an ending. I want to run it by you.

EDDIE

Me? Really? Okay...

JEREMY

So you know how the boy has to take on all these monsters …

EDDIE

Oh right, like that wolf that can turn itself into fire. Love that.

Right. So anyway …

JEREMY

Question. A ball of fire? Or fire in the shape of a wolf?

What?

EDDIE

Like Johnny Storm, The Human Torch in The Fantastic Four? He’s still shaped like a man…but in Warcraft you turn yourself into a fireball …

JEREMY

It doesn’t matter! The point is, these demons are part of his own psyche. Until the end, when he faces his final foe. Another boy exactly like him.

EDDIE

So the last demon is himself.

JEREMY

Exactly. He has to kill himself to be with the girl he loves.

EDDIE

Man, that’s dark.

(He smiles.)

I like it!

JEREMY

Great. But here’s the problem. The boy has a brother. And these two brothers…they’re very close. So what do you think happens to the brother who lives? Does he forgive his brother for killing himself? Or does he become devastated and broken and hate him for the rest of his life?
EDDIE

Devastated and broken.

JEREMY

Really?

EDDIE

At first. But eventually, he’d forgive him.

JEREMY

Yeah?

EDDIE

Sure. Because he knows he did it for love. Everybody forgives people for that. 
(Beat)
You’re not trying to tell me something here, are you?

JEREMY

What do you mean?

EDDIE

Okay. I know why you’re asking me this.

JEREMY

You do?

EDDIE

You want me to make some connections for you. Introduce you to some publishers. Don’t worry, I’ll hook you up. Leave it to me.

JEREMY

Really? Well, thanks, Eddie. Huh. Maybe deep down you’re a closet romantic, after all.

(He sees EDDIE is watching the floor show in front of them.)

JEREMY (cont.)

Or not. 
(Following his gaze) Uchhh… That cage dancer… she’s shoving that thing up that guy’s …

EDDIE

It’s called a butt plug.

JEREMY

Man, that’s gotta hurt.

EDDIE

The first few times, yeah.
(JEREMY looks at EDDIE with a disturbed expression.)

(Lights fade to:)

Scene 2

Jeremy’s apartment, evening. JEREMY is nervously tidying up. He keeps checking the closet and outside the window for signs of KATE. After a while he starts to relax. He goes to the kitchen and comes back with a bottle of water and is about to place it on the coffee table when instead he decides to go and open the curtains, revealing KATE. She is wearing a latex dominatrix outfit replete with dog collar and riding crop. JEREMY screams as the bottle goes sprawling across the floor.

JEREMY

Kate! You’re… here!

KATE

In the flesh!

(She kisses him, then does a turn to show off her outfit.)

By the way. Love the new outfit. Let me guess. You’ve been hanging out with Eddie.

JEREMY

Kate, it’s great that you’re here but …

KATE

But?

JEREMY

Well, this is kind of hard to deal with, y’know? Showing up when I’m awake… You really freaked me out the other night.

KATE

Hey, I was just as surprised as you were. I must have really been on your mind. Guilty conscience, perhaps?

JEREMY

We were just rehearsing!

KATE

Oh, right. The Seagull. Funny. Looked more like Romeo and Juliet.
JEREMY

I …

KATE

Hey. It’s okay. I kinda like that you were feeling guilty. Though seeing you with her… Well, it does get a girl thinking. Oh, I know we agreed to wait a week, but it has been six days and… I can’t resist asking… if you made a decision yet?

JEREMY

A decision. Right. Well… it’s a big question, of course. To be or not to be, that is the question. Heh.

(Nervously, clears throat.)

Eh-hehmm. Well. Of course there’s a lot to be said for “being” – the miracle of… you know, sunsets or whatever. But then I’m thinking, what good is it “to be” if I’m just going to be alone? I mean, existentially speaking, if a man is alone in the forest is he really “being” at all? I mean, he might as well not “be.” And that’s it! That’s what I came to realize! That “not being” with you is a thousand times better than “being” without you! Of course there’s the whole cardinal sin thing but I’m not Catholic so who cares but I mean what was it Nietzsche said, you know? Right. You see my point. So…

(He gestures. “There you have it.”)

KATE

So… are you saying you’re ready to join me?

JEREMY

Yes. I… I think so.

KATE

You don’t seem very sure.

JEREMY

No, I’m sure. I … It’s just that I’m not used to you just, poof… you know. And I … Could we maybe talk about it later?

KATE

Why? What’s more important than this?

JEREMY

Nothing. It’s just that my scene partner ‘ll be here any minute and …

KATE

Your scene partner.

JEREMY

I told you there’s nothing going on with her.

KATE

No? Then you won’t mind my sticking around.
JEREMY

What? No!

KATE

What’s the problem? You’re the only one who can see me.

JEREMY

It’s not that it’s just that this is our last chance to work on this scene and I can’t concentrate if you’re here.

KATE

I’ll take that as a compliment.

JEREMY

Kate, I think it’s great that you’re jealous. But I swear, you have nothing to worry about. Last night Eddie said something…

KATE

Eddie? Now I am worried.

JEREMY

About how we’re connected in spirit. How most people never have what we have…

(Seeing she is still doubtful)

Here.

(He gets down on one knee and takes her hand.)

KATE

What are you doing?

JEREMY

Kate, I hereby commit myself to you – now, and for all eternity. I’m ready, Kate.

KATE

Are you saying what I think you’re saying?

JEREMY

If I must die, I will encounter darkness as a bride and hug it in mine arms.

KATE

Measure for Measure. Oh my god. You’re ready to set a date?

JEREMY

Whenever you say. This week. Tomorrow, if you like. I’m yours, Kate. Always will be.

KATE

I don’t know what to say! I’m speechless.
JEREMY

KATE
But what about your book?

JEREMY
I finished it yesterday. I’m free and clear.

KATE
Did you mean it when you said it could be tomorrow?

JEREMY
Sure. But… can we make it tomorrow evening? After my class? I know it sounds silly but I promised my partner I’d see it through.

KATE
All right. So tomorrow. After your class. You’ll join me then?

JEREMY
You have my word.

(KATE hugs him, letting out a squeal of joy.)

KATE
Oh! I heard about an excellent funeral home in Bronxville. I’ll hunt down the number for you so you can leave it for Eddie to find. I’ll also look into finding a good florist... Oh! And a caterer for the wake!

(She laughs, giddily.)
I have so much to plan!

JEREMY
You’re really getting into this.

KATE
Of course! We’re talking about the happiest day of my afterlife! All right, I’ll leave you to your acting (pronounced with flourish.) Kiss me goodbye?

(She kisses him hard. It is a Mafia-style kiss of death.)
Tomorrow, then.

JEREMY
And tomorrow… and tomorrow… and tomorrow.

(KATE blows him another kiss, then exits. A knock at the door. JEREMY answers it. CHRISSY enters.)

CHRISSY
Good evening, Mr. Trigorin!
JEREMY

Hi, Chrissy. Uh, Nina.

CHRISSY

(Curious, looking around.)
Were you talking to someone?

JEREMY

On the phone, yeah. Can I get you something to drink?

CHRISSY

Water would be…
(She sees the bottle of water still on floor.)
…fine.
(JEREMY quickly picks up the bottle then goes to get a glass from the bar.
CHRISSY follows him.)
Oh! Guess what! I had a dream about you last night!

JEREMY

Really?

CHRISSY

Yeah, I was caught in another earthquake and I was about to fall into the abyss again! Only this time I was alone. But then I looked up and saw you on the other side, and I somehow knew if I jumped you would catch me.
(She makes a little jump toward JEREMY, who involuntarily “catches” her.)
And you did!

(KATE enters.)

KATE

I changed my mind. I think I’ll stay.

(JEREMY quickly disengages from CHRISSY.)

CHRISSY

(In response to his reaction)
Oh. Sorry.

KATE

Or am I interrupting something?

JEREMY

No, no. It’s fine.
(JEREMY sneaks a fleeting glance at KATE, indicating that the line was intended for her as well as CHRISSY. This double-play will continue
throughout the next beat as JEREMY attempts to maintain two simultaneous conversations.)

CHRISSY
There I go throwing myself at you again.

KATE
What does she mean, “again?”

JEREMY
It’s nothing. Really.

CHRISSY
Anyway. Some dream, huh?

KATE
Does she throw herself at you often?

JEREMY
Boy, you know… that’s some imagination you have!

CHRISSY
So… you never have nightmares about falling?

KATE
How often has she thrown herself at you?

JEREMY
Just one time. But it was no big deal!

CHRISSY
Really? Happens to me a lot. Maybe I should see a shrink about it.

(JEREMY shoots KATE an exasperated look.)

KATE
What? I’m just observing.

JEREMY
I really don’t think that’s necessary.

CHRISSY
So, you think I’m normal?

KATE
You think I’m paranoid.
Yes!

CHRISSEY

But you know... it’s funny that I dreamed of you and not my boyfriend.

KATE

Yes. Funny, isn’t it?

JEREMY

What are you getting at?

CHRISSY

Well. You know...

KATE

You know perfectly well.

CHRISSY

Maybe it means I’m not supposed to marry Carl.

KATE

You’ve been putting ideas in her head.

CHRISSY

Maybe it means I’m supposed to marry you!

JEREMY & KATE

(In unison)

What?

CHRISSY

I was joking. I didn’t really mean...

JEREMY

Right No, of course not. You were joking. I knew that!

(He looks at KATE with an expression that says, “See?”)

CHRISSY

What are you looking at?

JEREMY

Nothing. Crick in my neck.

CHRISSY

Oh. You want me to give you another massage?

KATE

Another massage?
CHRIS

Here, turn around...

(As she reaches to touch JEREMY’s neck, KATE swats JEREMY’s backside with the riding crop, forcing him to scream out and jump like a spaz.)

JEREMY

Aaaa!

What’s wrong?

CHRIS

Nothing. My phone just vibrated.  

(He pulls his phone out of his pocket.)

It’s got a really powerful vibrator... thing.

KATE

Oh no, nothing’s wrong! She’s throwing herself at you and giving you massages!

JEREMY

Uh...I’ve got to take this. It’ll just take a sec. You don’t mind?

CHRIS

Oh, no. Go right ahead.

(JEREMY drags KATE away from CHRIS. He pretends to talk on the phone while talking to KATE.)

KATE

Hey! Now’s not a good time. Can we talk later?

JEREMY

You want me out of the way, is that it?

KATE

No, of course not!

JEREMY

Darling, I may be dead but I’m not blind. You’re obviously still attracted to her. And why shouldn’t you be? She’s sweet. She’s charming. She’s alive.

JEREMY

Look, we’ll have all the time in the world to talk about this after tomorrow. Now. Is there anything else you need from me right now?

KATE

Tell her.
What?

Tell her you’re committed to someone else.

(JEREMY doesn’t respond.)

What’s wrong? I mean if you really don’t care about her …

Alright, alright! Yes! I’ll do it!

Really? You promise?

I promise! But I really do have to go.

Alright. I’ll see you tomorrow night, then.

Right. Tomorrow night. I’ll bring the dip.

Oh. But before I go…

Yesss?

Call me darling.

Of course, darling. Anything else?

(KATE looks to be sure CHRISSY heard this.)

That’s it.

Bye!

(He shuts the phone. KATE kisses him on the cheek.)

Break a leg!

(She exits. JEREMY returns to CHRISSY.)
Sorry.

JEREMY

No problem.

CHRISSY

(Pause)

So. “Darling.”

JEREMY

Yeah.

(Clears throat.)

This woman I’ve been seeing.

JEREMY

Someone new?

CHRISSY

Noooo. Known her for years. It’s been sort of… on again, off again. But now things are getting more…

CHRISSY

Serious?

JEREMY

Exactly.

CHRISSY

That’s wonderful. I’m happy for you.

JEREMY

Thanks. Well. Guess we should get to work, huh?

CHRISSY

Right.

(They take up their stage positions for the scene. CHRISSY extends her hand in a quaint, Victorian manner.)

Good morning, Mr. Trigorin!

(JEREMY takes her hand.)

JEREMY

Good morning. A most unexpected turn of events. I think we’ll be leaving today. So I don’t suppose we’ll see each other again. That’s a pity …

(CHRISSY removes her hand.)
CHRISSY
Excuse me, but… why didn’t you tell me about your girlfriend before?

JEREMY
What?

CHRISSY
Well, I just think it’s strange. All this time we’ve spent together and you never once brought her up. I mean, not that you have any obligation to tell me about her, I just think it’s funny.

JEREMY
I’m sorry. Is there some reason…?

CHRISSY
No, no, no… I was just curious. Never mind. Shall we?
(She extends her hand once again. He takes it.)
Good Morning, Mr. Trigorin!

JEREMY
Good morning. A most unexpected turn of events. I …

(CHRISSY removes her hand.)

CHRISSY
It’s just that… all this time I’ve been rambling on about my boyfriend but you never tell me about the women in your life.

JEREMY
There’s only one woman…

CHRISSY
Right, only one. Which makes her that much more special. But hey, no worries. I mean just because I confide in you there’s no rule that says you have to confide in me. I know that. You know what, you know what? Let’s just drop the whole thing, okay? Really.
(She extends her hand again, still upset.)
Good Morning, Mr. Trigorin!

JEREMY
Good morning. A most unexpected turn of events.
(This time JEREMY drops her hand and breaks character.)
Chrissy, the reason I didn’t say anything is because… well, it’s complicated. I guess I didn’t want to burden you with all the details.

CHRISSY
I burden you with my details…
JEREMY
I guess I didn’t realize how much you cared.

CHRISSY
Of course I care. Would I be so curious about your personal life if I didn’t care?
(She reaches into a pocket and hands him a business card.)
Would I track down the name of a good exterminator to help you with your bats and mice if I didn’t care? Would I burst out laughing in the library three times today thinking about that time you kept calling me an airhead? Or would I keep wondering what you’d say if you knew that last night Carl asked to set a date if I didn’t fucking care?
(Pause)

JEREMY
You said fucking.

CHRISSY
I know.

JEREMY
What did you tell him?

CHRISSY
That I’d give him an answer tomorrow.

JEREMY
Why the delay?

CHRISSY
I met another guy. But silly me. Turns out he already has a girlfriend.

JEREMY
What if he didn’t?

CHRISSY
You already said you did.

JEREMY
Hypothetically, then. What if I were single?

CHRISSY
Well, in that case, I’d be curious about who that hypothetical person was on the phone just now.

JEREMY
What if I were to tell you she only used to be my girlfriend?

CHRISSY
So she’s your ex.
Exactly.

And you’ve started seeing her again.

Right. I’m “seeing” her, but I’m not really with her. If you know what I mean.

No. I don’t. I feel like there’s something you’re not telling me.

No, I just... No.

So let me ask you one question. But please... the truth.

Of course.

Is this woman still in your life, or not?

In my life. Well...

It’s a simple question.

No. She’s not. (Beat) Not now. (Off CHRISSY’s look.)

What I mean is...

Stop! Please. Don’t say another word. You know what? Thank you. You’ve helped me remember why I need to be with someone like Carl. (She grabs her coat and begins to leave.)

Chrissy, please. Don’t go! We still have to work on our scene!

Good night, Mr. Trigorin! (CHRISSY exits, slamming door behind her.)

(Lights fade to:)
Scene 3

Acting class. There is a backstage area and the stage area. JEREMY is backstage, pacing. CHRISSY enters nearby without looking at him. Both are wearing pieces of clothing suggestive of the period.

CHRISSY
Are we on yet?

JEREMY
In a minute. Jeanne’s still critiquing the last scene.

CHRISSY
Could you hook me in the back?

JEREMY
Sure.

(He does so.)

I like the dress.

CHRISSY
Thanks. I made sure not to wear black.

JEREMY
Chrissy, listen, I’m sorry about last night.

CHRISSY
It’s okay.

JEREMY
No, it’s not okay. Listen, it’s too complicated to go into now, but the reason I wasn’t being straight with you last night was …

CHRISSY
You don’t have to tell me.

JEREMY
I want to tell you.

CHRISSY
But I don’t want you to tell me. Jeremy, look. Maybe you’re about to tell me the truth, maybe not. But if you’re not I don’t want to find out the hard way. So let’s just get through this scene together and part as friends, okay?

(The stage area suddenly brightens.)

JEREMY
But…
CHRISSY
This is it. We’re on.
(She takes her place in the stage area. JEREMY follows a moment later. She offers her hand, as before.)

CHRISSY
Good Morning, Mr. Trigorin!

(JEREMY takes her hand and kisses it in a polite, Victorian manner.)

JEREMY
(Stiffly, with heightened, affected accent)
Good Morning! A most unexpected turn of events. I think we’ll be leaving today. So I don’t expect …
(Suddenly, the affectation is gone and speaks sincerely.)
I don’t expect we’ll see each other again. That’s a pity. I don’t often get the chance to meet young girls. Interesting young girls, that is. I’ve forgotten what it feels like to be so young. I wouldn’t mind changing places with you, just to feel what it’s like again.

CHRISSY
And I wouldn’t mind changing places with you. To see what it feels like being a famous, talented writer. Most people, they just drag out their existence in total obscurity. But you – you’re one in a million. You have such imagination. And you lead such a fascinating life!

JEREMY
You want to hear about my fascinating life? All right, then. Where shall I begin?
(He escorts CHRISSY to a bench. They both sit.)
You know, some people have what’s called an idée fixe -- for example, when a person thinks about nothing but the moon, day and night.
(Perhaps he rises, here, pacing as he talks.)
Day and night this idée fixe – this moon – controls me. Consumes me. Here I am with you, I feel excited and happy, yet I can’t get it out of my mind that I have an unfinished novel waiting for me – and it’s dragging me back. I’m chained to it, like a heavy iron ball. Yes! It’s like having a heavy iron ball in my head! It’s like that all the time, I give myself no peace. I feel like I’m devouring my own life.

CHRISSY
I’m sorry. I can’t accept that. You’ve simply been spoiled by success.

(KATE enters within JEREMY’s line of sight.)

KATE
Trigorin!

JEREMY
They’re calling me. To pack my things, no doubt. I don’t want to leave, you know.
KATE

Trigorin! Where are you?

JEREMY

I’m coming!
   (He moves toward KATE a few steps).
What is it?

KATE

We’re staying.
   (She turns and begins to exit, but stops for a moment to be sure JEREMY is
   following. JEREMY and CHRISSY look at each other for a moment, then
   he turns and follows KATE offstage.)

CHRISSY

It must be a dream!

   (Lights fade to:)

Scene 4

A city street in the vicinity of the acting school. Late afternoon. CHRISSY enters
and crosses at a brisk pace. A moment later JEREMY enters, chasing her.

JEREMY

Chrissy!

   (CHRISSY stops and turns.)
You took off so fast... I was hoping we could talk.

CHRISSY

I’m sorry, I have to go...

JEREMY

I just wanted to know... what you thought.

CHRISSY

Thought?

JEREMY

About the scene.

CHRISSY

It was... amazing. I... I’m sorry, I have to see Carl.
JEREMY
Right. Carl. Of course. I just— I just wondered if...
(He suddenly kisses her. For a moment there is unmistakable passion, but after a moment CHRISSY pulls away, overwhelmed and confused. KATE, still dressed as Arkadina, enters just in time to see this.)

CHRISSY
I have to go...
(She turns quickly and exits. JEREMY looks up and sees KATE, watching.)

KATE
Please. Don’t. You never were a good liar, poor thing. Now me, oh – I’m an expert! Especially when I’m lying to myself. All this time, I convinced myself it was just an infatuation. But when I saw how you looked at her... the way you used to look at me...
(She steps away. JEREMY moves toward her.)

JEREMY
Kate, no! Please! Oh my god, I’m so sorry. I never meant to hurt you...

KATE
It’s all right. I won’t stand in your way, anymore.

JEREMY
No... We can still be together ...

KATE
Don’t! I don’t want you as a consolation prize! I’m better than that. We both are. If I’m going to be alone for eternity it’s important that I like myself. So allow me this one last noble gesture, hm? Goodbye, Jeremy.

JEREMY
Kate, don’t leave me, please! There must be something I can do...

KATE
There is. Forgive me.

(Jighting change. KATE disappears behind a scrim.)

JEREMY
No!!! Kate!

(He looks for her but she is gone. The familiar “dreamscape” effect is heard, reminiscent of the moonlight scene from Act I.)
(NOTE: From this point on the tech elements should gradually become darker and more ominous, not only to suggest a rapid passing of time but also to reflect JEREMY’s deteriorating state of mind.)

JEREMY (cont.)
This isn’t happening. This can’t be happening... Of course! It’s a dream! It’s got to be a dream! It must be!
(He pinches himself, then begins to hit himself violently, desperately hoping to wake up.)
It must be a dream! It must be a dream!
(He falls to his knees, defeated. Lighting change. Time has passed. He is now back at his apartment.)
I’ve lost her. How did I let this happen? Everything was fine...
(He pulls the play from his pocket and hurls it away.)
It’s this fucking play! It messes with your head! Kate! Come back! I forgive you. Forgive me!
(To himself)
I’ll find her again. She’ll be at the lake. I need to sleep...
(He quickly goes to the bathroom and returns with a bottle of pills. He opens them.)
Kate, if you can hear me, I’m coming to the lake! I’ll join you there. I’ll ...
(He looks at the bottle. A decision. I’ll join you. He goes to bar and pours himself a whiskey.)
See you on the other side, Kate.
(He pours out a handful of pills and swallows them, then washes them down with the whiskey.)
Ah. But wait. Can’t have a respectable suicide without a note...
(He goes to his desk for a pen and paper, then notices the manuscript.)
Or better yet... a story.
(He turns to the last page of the manuscript and reads aloud. As he does so he continues to swallow pills with a swig of whiskey.)
And our young hero looked at the boy standing before him, as if into a mirror. “Who are you that looks so much like me?” he asked. “I am your very self,” the other replied. “I am all that stands between you and your beloved.” “But if I kill you,” the boy began, “Yes,” his double responded, “then you shall kill yourself.” The boy thought for a long moment, then took up his dagger. “Then die with me,” he said. “And let love live on.”

(JEREMY swallows the last of the pills as he begins scribbling on the manuscript. As he does so, KATE appears on the balcony. She enters the apartment. Her look is sad, stricken.)

Eddie... Please forgive me. I did it for love. Jeremy.

KATE
Your ending needs work.

(JEREMY registers her presence but does not turn around.)
I think it’s fine.

KATE
It’s ambiguous. There’s no sense of closure.

JEREMY
Nor should there be. The hero dies without knowing if he gets the girl.

KATE
(Stricken, tearful)
Of course he does!

(JEREMY turns and looks at her. He rushes to her. They embrace.)

JEREMY
Kate...

KATE
Jeremy, what have you done? You’re throwing everything away…

JEREMY
For something much better.

KATE
Not very smart of you. You know what a diva I can be. I’ll probably make your afterlife a living hell.

JEREMY
“It is the unassailable right of every man to go to Hell however he wants.” Walt Whitman.

(She smiles. He escorts her to the couch.)

JEREMY
Here. Lie next to me. I want to fall asleep in your arms one last time.

(JEREMY lies down with his head in her lap.)

You’re not disappointed in me, are you?

KATE
How could I be disappointed? You’re rescuing me.

JEREMY
Other way around.

(She kisses him tenderly as he closes his eyes and drifts off. A long pause as sleep overtakes him.)
Robert Frost.

What?

It was Robert Frost, not Walt Whitman. And it’s “inalienable rights.” Not “unassailable.”

So this is how it’s going to be?

(KATE gives a tearful chuckle. JEREMY’s head slumps against hear shoulder as the empty bottle of pills falls out of his hand onto the floor. Lights slowly fade to black. Transition to:)

Scene 5

Darkness. We hear the “dreamscape” effect return, it’s tone now wondrous and mystical as we transition to the death state. We see JEREMY in silhouette against a blue backdrop as he rolls off the couch in a slow, graceful fashion while KATE gets up and exits, watching him as she leaves. The lights begin to brighten. JEREMY continues to roll, tuck then comes to a kneeling position as he surveys his mysterious new world. He slowly rises, taking in his new surroundings for a moment. A white spotlight comes up revealing KATE who has reappeared, now wearing a white gossamer-like cloak. JEREMY moves toward the light, and KATE. They embrace, and begin to settle into a sitting position. The sound of a cold, winter wind starts to fade up as we hear a woman’s voiceover speaking. It is CHRISSY’s voice, but heavily saturated with reverb and/or delay giving it a dreamlike quality.

CHRISSY (O.S.)
The boy shivered and trembled...
But she bundled him and kept him warm...
And she said to him, I shan’t kiss you anymore, or I shall kiss you to death... kiss you to death...
(Echo and wind effect crescendos, then suddenly goes silent. Lights up full to reveal a new setting. A lake in winter. JEREMY is lying asleep, his head against KATE’s shoulder. JEREMY’s eyes open wide as he awakens suddenly.)

JEREMY

Whoa.
KATE
That’s one way to put it.

JEREMY
So I really did it.

KATE
You certainly did. A couple of times there I thought you were going to hurl but you hung in there like a trooper. How do you feel?

JEREMY
Kind of dizzy.

KATE
Mm. Thought you might. Why don’t you rest a bit?

JEREMY
No, I’m fine. So where are we? Looks like some kind of winter wonderland.

KATE
Yes, lovely, isn’t it?

JEREMY
Look! The ice on the lake – it looks like a mirror! And those icicles hanging from the trees! They look like chandeliers! It’s unworldly! And yet…

KATE
Yes?

JEREMY
I was going to say familiar. But that’s impossible. I couldn’t have been here before.

KATE
Mm. Déjà vu. Part of your right of passage, I’m afraid. Dizziness, flashbacks… voices from your past… Yeah, right? Death comes with a hangover. Who knew?

JEREMY
Yeah, I did hear a voice. Just before I woke up just now. Couldn’t make out whose it was.

KATE
Probably your nanny from when you were three. Don’t worry, you’ll be fine. You just need to sleep it off. Here. Lie back. Tell you what, you get some rest, and when you wake up we’ll go exploring. Or we can go haunt the living, that’s always fun.

(Laughs.)
JEREMY
Yeah? Actually, I’d like to look in on Eddie, see how he’s doing. Is that possible?

KATE
Of course. Anything’s possible now.

(They smile and kiss.)

JEREMY
Hm. I’m gettin’ to like this whole death thing.

KATE
But first, sleep. Now. Close your eyes…
   (Soothing, hypnotic.)
Let your thoughts drift… You’re eyes are getting heavier… and heavier… like a heavy…

JEREMY
Iron ball.

What?

KATE

(CHEKHOV enters.)

CHEKHOV
There you are! I might have known! Lying around like a turd in a swimming pool! Let’s go, we’ve got work to do!
   (Noticing KATE)
Ah! But then, I can see how difficult it would be to pull yourself away from the arms of such a lovely woman as this.
   (To KATE, very debonair)
Hello.

KATE
Jeremy --?

JEREMY
I’m sorry. Kate, this is Anton Chekhov. You know, the writer.

KATE
Pleasure. I’m sorry, Mr. Chekhov, but I’m afraid you’ve come at a bad time. Jeremy was just about to …

CHEKHOV
Pardon me, but… you look familiar. Have we met before?
KATE
I’m sure we haven’t. Now if you would please …

CHEKHOV (to JEREMY)
Oh! Before I forget, allow me to congratulate you on your performance in my scene! Excellent job! Well. For a first-time student. Now I can finally die in peace.
(Off JEREMY’s look)
Ironic.
(To KATE)
Now, my dear. You were saying?
(Before she can respond)
Ah! I remember, now! You played Madame Arkadina! May I say, my dear, you were the very essence of my grande dame.

KATE
Look, I’m sorry but …
(Suddenly stops, flattered.)
Really?

CHEKHOV
Your jealously of Nina! Magnificent. Your competitiveness was almost palpable!

KATE
Oh! Well! Thank you. I realize I only had a couple of lines but I did try to immerse myself into the character.

CHEKHOV (to JEREMY)
Now! As for you!
(He thwacks JEREMY with his cane.)
Enough lollygagging! Up! Up! Up! Let’s go! Time for your lesson!

JEREMY
Sorry, old man, you’re too late. The book’s finished.

CHEKHOV
Like hell it is! You promised you wouldn’t end it with a suicide! And achh! Your dialogue! Everyone saying exactly what they mean.
(With gravity)
No one ever says what they mean!

KATE
Mr. Chekhov! Perhaps I didn’t make myself clear. Jeremy isn’t feeling well and needs to catch up on his sleep. This is no time to be discussing Jeremy’s novelette!

CHEKHOV & JEREMY
Novella.
KATE
WHATSOEVER! LOOK! I WILL NOT ASK YOU AGAIN! WILL YOU PLEASE JUST LEAVE US ALONE!

CHEKHOV
(To JEREMY, looking at KATE)
Ah! You see there? The way her anger lashed out just now? A bit more than what might be deemed appropriate for the circumstances, don’t you agree? Almost makes you think she has... what is that phrase... Ah. A hidden agenda, yes? Now that’s the kind of subtext your writing is missing!

JEREMY
(Looking at KATE)
Right...

KATE
Mr. Chekhov, forgive me if I was a little on edge. As I’m sure Jeremy can tell you we’ve both been through a rather trying time lately. But Jeremy does need to get some rest. So if you could please come some other time we’d both appreciate it.

CHEKHOV
Ah! Ah! Ah! You see? Again! This time more restrained, but you can feel her tension, can’t you! And how carefully she chose her words! Like a hunter who steps carefully around the traps they’ve set. How curious! How fascinating! Oh yes, this is much better than that crap you wrote!
(His excitement finally abating)
But I don’t want to be an intrusion... So. I shall bid you both...Do svidanya.
(He clicks his heels, turns and exits.)

KATE
Really, Jeremy. I don’t know why you pay any attention to him. Of all people.

JEREMY
Mr. Chekhov.

(CHEKHOV stops and turns.)
If you wouldn’t mind, I’d like to finish my lesson.

If you wish.

CHEKHOV

KATE
Do you have to get into this now?

JEREMY
Humor me.
(To CHEKHOV)
Mr. Chekhov. You said, “no one ever says what they mean.” So how do we know? What they really mean?
CHEKHOV
Ah. Well. There are always clues. It begins with a feeling that something isn’t quite right.

JEREMY
In that case, let me walk you through a story… just to see if I understand.

KATE
What are you doing?

JEREMY
Learning.

(To CHEKHOV)
So. In this story, there are two lovers who, after years of separation are finally reunited. But the place where they meet is a frozen, barren lake. Not exactly what you’d call Paradise. Is that the kind of clue you mean?

CHEKHOV
Exactly. It’s like the first piece to a puzzle. It’s what we call the inciting incident.

KATE
I’m sorry, I thought it was beautiful!

CHEKHOV
From that point on, the man in your story should begin making other discoveries.

JEREMY
For instance, if this place – as strange as it was – somehow seemed familiar.

CHEKHOV
Yes! That would be an excellent example.

KATE
What are you saying? That you’ve been here before? Look at this place! You said yourself it’s unworldly. What else could it be but your mind playing tricks? Now do you see why I want you to rest?

JEREMY
Yes, you’re right, that would explain it.

(A beat. KATE gives a “there you are” gesture.)

JEREMY (cont.)
Except for the urgency.

KATE
I’m sorry?
You don’t just want me to sleep. You want me asleep right now! That’s what I don’t get. We have all the time in the world. What’s the rush?

CHEKHOV
Excellent! Notice how each discovery becomes more disturbing than the last. We call this progression the rising action.

JEREMY
(Looking out)
And why is it I feel like I know this place? A lake that looks like a mirror...

CHEKHOV
Suddenly, like a rapid turning to a waterfall, the story shifts to the next phase...

JEREMY
(As if finally recognizing his surroundings)
Oh my god.

CHEKHOV
The crisis.

JEREMY
Where are we, Kate?

KATE
What do you mean? We’re at a lake. A frozen lake.

JEREMY
Oh no. It’s not just a lake. It’s a very specific lake. You see, I know exactly where we are. The trouble is, you don’t.

CHEKHOV
Now the pieces come together!

CHRISY (V.O.)
(With reverb/echo effect.)
How cold it is here... How empty and cold...

That voice! That’s Chrissy’s voice!

KATE
Huh! I might have known you’d still be thinking about her!
JEREMY
I wasn’t. Until just now I didn’t know whose voice that was. But you did, didn’t you?

CHEKHOV
Finally, the veil begins to lift!

JEREMY
That’s why you were in such a hurry to get me to sleep!

CHEKHOV
Hidden agendas are revealed…

JEREMY
You didn’t want me to hear her voice!

CHEKHOV
Resulting in a single moment of clarity!

JEREMY
What else have you lied about, I wonder?

KATE
I only told you what you needed to hear. (JEREMY begins to back away from her)

(JEREMY begins to back away from her)

JEREMY
Jeremy!

CHEKHOV
The Greeks called this moment the *peripiteia*.

JEREMY
It’s over, Kate.

CHEKHOV
The turning point.

KATE
What are you saying? Over? Because of her?

JEREMY
Because of you! Oh, you played me well. The blood pact. Very clever how you got me to come up with that. The skinny dipping… letting it slip how tortured you were when I didn’t think of you. Everything you’ve said and done was to get me to join you – and make me think it was my idea!
KATE
All right! So I pulled a few strings to get you here! But who was it that put those strings in my hand? Have you forgotten? The pain you were going through. Those terrible nights... That's why you reached out to me. Because you knew I could bring you peace. Everlasting peace. Oh I know, you couldn't be responsible. The guilt would tear you apart. But that's why we're so good together. Because I'm not just Kate to you, anymore, am I? I'm every sweet, boyish fantasy... every dark, lustful urge you've ever had. I'm the best of you, and the worst. I... am you.

(JEREMY steps back, in shock.)
So you see, it wasn't me who deceived you, or seduced you or wanted you to die. It was you. So please...Forgive me. And forgive yourself.
(She approaches him. They kiss. It appears to be a kiss of forgiveness as well as resignation. But when JEREMY breaks free from her embrace and steps back, we see that for him it was a farewell kiss.)

JEREMY
I'm sorry, Kate.
(He steps back and away from KATE.)

CHEKHOV
Here endeth the lesson.

KATE
Jeremy!
(She moves away from JEREMY as if being pulled back by an invisible force. CHEKHOV, already at the extreme edge of the stage, steps back and exits as well. The lights change to the near-dark effect seen at the top of the scene. A dim spotlight illuminates CHRISSY's face in the darkness for a moment. She looks at JEREMY, smiling warmly, her arms extended, as we continue to hear her voiceover with echo effect.)

CHRISSY (V.O.)
And when he saw her crying his frozen heart began to melt... bringing him back to life. Back to life... Back to life...

JEREMY
Chrissy? Is that you? Chrissy?
(He reaches out toward CHRISSY. The light on CHRISSY dims.
Transition to:)
Scene 6

Lights up. A hospital room, morning. JEREMY is in bed, flanked by EDDIE and CHRISSEY who have both nodded off. JEREMY is starting to come out of a long slumber. His arm reaches out as if still reaching toward CHRISSEY but instead gropes and finds EDDIE’s arm instead. Feeling JEREMY touch his hand, EDDIE wakes up.

(Grossed out)
Dude! What’re you doing?

EDDIE

JEREMY

Eddie?

EDDIE

Son of a bitch. He’s awake.

CHRISSEY

Oh, thank god.

JEREMY

(Looking around)
What’s going on?

EDDIE

What’s it look like? We’re having a slumber party. Good thing you woke up. We were getting ready to dump you off at the nearest vegetable stand.

CHRISSEY

How do you feel?

JEREMY

I’m… fine…

(Beat, as he takes everything in)
Yeah. I’m fine. Ha, I’m alive!

(Off EDDIE’s look)
Oh god, Eddie. Eddie, I am so sorry…

EDDIE

Oh don’t be. This coma watch has been a blast. Really.

JEREMY

Eddie… I swear, I’ll make it up to you…

EDDIE

Oh! You’ll make it up to me! Good!
JEREMY
Look, I know you hate me now …

EDDIE
Because I don’t know what’s worse. You trying to kill yourself…

JEREMY
But I swear, I’ll never do anything like this again.

EDDIE
Or tricking me into giving you my blessing to do it!

JEREMY
I love you too much to …

EDDIE
Shut up! Fuck you, you love me! The only reason your ass is still alive is cause you fucked up and left your door open again. If Chrissy hadn’t come by when she did…

JEREMY
Wait, what?
(He looks at CHRISSY.)

CHRISSY
I wanted to tell you my news. But then I saw you… and the pills… At first I thought maybe it was…

JEREMY
Oh, no, no, it wasn’t you! It was… This sounds so crazy… I wanted to…

CHRISSY
You wanted to be reunited with your fiancée. I know.

EDDIE
We figured it out from your sappy assed note. Jesus, who the fuck does shit like that?

CHRISSY
Someone very much in love.

JEREMY
God, I’m so sorry…

CHRISSY
We’re just glad you pulled through.
EDDIE
Yeah, cause if I had to listen to that story one more time I would have committed hari kari myself.

(JEREMY inspects the book CHRISSY is holding.)

JEREMY
The Snow Queen.
(To himself)
The one book Kate never read.

EDDIE
Okay, I don’t get it. Reading a story to a guy in a coma… about a boy who’s frozen to death? Okay!

JEREMY (to CHRISSY)
Perfect choice.

CHRISSY
Actually… I really liked your story.

JEREMY
You – you read my novella?

CHRISSY
Yeah, no, it was good… I loved the duel with the Silver Hawk.

EDDIE
Silver Condor.
(To JEREMY, begrudgingly)
I might have read a couple of pages.

CHRISSY
He read it cover to cover. I couldn’t get it away from him.

EDDIE
It was that or Martha Fucking Stewart’s Better Homes and Gazebos and shit! You know, it really is too bad you didn’t die. Suicidal authors sell better.

JEREMY
But it wasn’t ready… I mean, I thought I was done, but that ending… The boy can’t die. He’s gotta… And the dialogue, I don’t know, I’ll fix it.
(Looking at CHRISSY then EDDIE)
I’m going to fix a lot of things.

EDDIE
Whatever. You’re still an asshole.
(He steps away.)
JEREMY
Chrissy, I’m so sorry… not just for this, but for lying to you… I don’t have any bats.

(CHRISSY utters a soft laugh, indicating it’s okay.)

JEREMY
I so wanted to be Trigorin for you but instead I was like freakin’ Kostya
(Pointing finger to his head like a gun)
I’ve been so messed up these last few years… my whole life has been like… like that moment when you’re waking up from a dream and you can’t tell which is the dream and which is reality… But now I’m awake! And I know my feelings for you are real…

CHRISSY
Jeremy, I …

JEREMY
I know, I know, you’re engaged and you probably think I’m a wack job, and you’re right, I am. You deserve someone honest and stable so I’m just glad you’re happy. I just hope that maybe, if it’s not too weird for you, we can be friends…

CHRISSY
You’re wrong.

JEREMY
(Back-peddling)
On Facebook. We’ll just write on each other’s wall…

CHRISSY
I mean I’m not engaged. That’s what I came to tell you that night. The reason I had to go see Carl was to break things off.

What?

CHRISSY
The way you looked at me in that scene… even if you were just playing a role I knew that that was the kind of passion I needed in my life.

JEREMY
Chrissy, I wasn’t just playing a role.

CHRISSY
I know. You’re not that good an actor.
(Beat)
EDDIE
Right! And who cares if he just tried to off himself or if you’re on the rebound? Just go for it!

(Both mortified, CHRISSY and JEREMY separate.)
Well, my work here is done. I’m gonna grab some breakfast. The liquor store should be open about now.

CHRISSY

EDDIE

Huh?

(CHRISSY gives him a look.)

What?

(Puzzled, but then remembers.)

Oh. Oh no. No. No! No! No! No! No! No!!!! SON OF A BITCH!!!

(EDDIE has a full blown conniption fit. He looks at JEREMY, seething.)
If I didn’t know better I’d swear you planned this whole thing just to ruin my life!

(EDDIE exits in a huff.)

JEREMY

What was that all about?

CHRISSY

He made like this... resolution... that if you pulled through he would give up booze, drugs and sex clubs forever.

EDDIE (O.S.)

SON OF A BITCH!!!!

(JEREMY and CHRISSY laugh. A beat. JEREMY looks at CHRISSY with a knowing smile.)

CHRISSY
He’s right, you know.

JEREMY

Yeah, I know.

CHRISSY
Good. Cause I don’t want to get your hopes up.

JEREMY
Well, I don’t want to date a girl who’s on the rebound anyway.
CHRIS
Well, fine, because I do think you’re a wack job.

JEREMY
You don’t mean that.

CHRIS
Yeah? What makes you so sure?

JEREMY
No one ever says what they mean.

(A beat. CHRIS looks at him thoughtfully.)

CHRIS
Good morning, Mr. Trigorin.

JEREMY
Good morning.

(Reflecting)
A most unexpected turn of events.

(Lights fade)

END OF PLAY