Anton Chekhov
The Seagull

in a version by
CHRISTOPHER HAMPTON

ff
faber and faber
Act One

Part of the gardens of Sorin’s estate. A wide avenue, leading away from the audience down through the gardens to the lake, is blocked by a stage, hurriedly thrown together for a private performance, so that the lake is no longer visible. Bushes to right and left of the stage. A few chairs and a small table.

The sun has just gone down. Yakov and other workmen are busy on the stage behind the curtain; sounds of coughing and hammering. Masha and Medvedenko enter left, coming back from a walk.

Medvedenko  Why do you always wear black?
Masha  I’m in mourning for my life. I’m unhappy.

Medvedenko  Why? (Thoughtfully.) I don’t understand... Your health is good, your father may not be rich, but he has all he needs. My life’s far harder than yours. I make twenty-three roubles a month, that’s all, not counting pension deductions, and I don’t go round wearing black.

They sit down.

Masha  It’s nothing to do with money. You can be poor and happy.

Medvedenko  You can in theory; but what happens in practice is this: there’s me, there’s my mother, my two sisters and my little brother, and my salary is twenty-three roubles. We have to eat and drink, don’t we? We need tea and sugar, don’t we? I need my tobacco. So there’s not a lot of elbow room.
Masha (looking over at the stage) The play's starting soon.

Medvedenko Yes. Miss Zarechnaya's acting in it, and Konstantin Gavrilovich has written it. They're in love with one another and today their souls will unite in an effort to achieve a single artistic goal. Whereas my soul and your soul have no common point of connection. I love you, I'm so obsessed with you I can't stay at home, so every day I walk four miles here and four miles back and all I get from you is utter indifference. I quite understand. I have no money and a large family to support... Who'd want to marry a man who can hardly feed himself?

Masha Don't be ridiculous!

She takes a pinch of snuff.

I'm touched by your love, I just can't return it, that's all.

She offers him the snuff-box.

Help yourself.

Medvedenko Don't feel like it.

Pause.

Masha It's so humid; I expect there'll be a storm in the night. If you're not theorising, you're talking about money. You claim there's nothing worse than poverty, but in my opinion it'd be infinitely simpler to be a beggar wearing rags than to... Not that you'd ever understand...

Sorin (to Treplev) Marya Ilyinichna, would you be so kind as to ask your papa to tell them to untie the dog so it doesn't howl? It kept my sister awake all night again.

Masha Speak to my father yourself, I'm not going to. Please don't ask me. (To Medvedenko.) Come on!

Medvedenko (to Treplev) You'll be sure and send someone for us in good time?

They both leave.

Sorin That means the dog's going to howl all night again. It's nonsense really, I've never been able to live in the country the way I wanted to. In the old days I used to get a month off and come down here for a rest, you know what I mean, but there'd be so many idiotic little problems to be dealt with, you wouldn't be here a day before you'd be desperate to escape again. (He laughs.) I've always been delighted to get away from this place... But now I'm retired, there's nowhere else for me to go, when it comes down to it. So on we go, like it or not...

Yakov (to Treplev) Konstantin Gavrilovich, we're going for a swim.

Treplev Fine, as long as you're back in your places in ten minutes. (He looks at his watch.) It'll be starting soon.

Yakov Yes, sir.
He goes off. Treplev looks at the stage.

Treplev Here it is, our theatre. A curtain, one wing, the other, and beyond that, empty space. No set of any kind. Open view on to the lake and the horizon. We'll raise the curtain at exactly half-past eight, as the moon is rising.

Sorin Wonderful.

Treplev Of course, if Nina's late, the whole effect will be ruined. She should be here by now. Her father and stepmother keep a close watch on her, and, for her, getting out of the house is like a prison-break.

He straightens his uncle's tie.

Your hair and beard are a bit of a shambles. Could do with a trim or something . . .

Sorin (combing his beard) Yes, it's the tragedy of my life. I was just the same when I was young, always looked as if I'd been on the bottle, you know what I mean? Women never took to me.

He sits down.

Why's my sister in such a bad mood?

Treplev Why? Because she's bored.

He sits down next to him.

And she's jealous. She's anti me, anti the performance and anti my play, because she's not in it and Nina is. She hasn't read my play but she already hates it.

Sorin (laughing) You're imagining it, honestly . . .

Treplev She's angry that even on this tiny little stage, it'll be Nina's triumph and not hers. (He looks at his watch.) My mother's a real psychological curiosity. Undoubtedly talented, intelligent, capable of crying her eyes out over a book, she can rattle off the whole of Nekrasov by heart or look after the sick like an angel; but just try praising Duse in front of her. Hah! She's the only one you can praise, she's the only one you can write about, you have to foam at the mouth about her, you have to rave about her astonishing performance in La Dame aux Camelias or The Ecstasy of Life, but since there's no supply of this particular drug our here in the country, she gets bored and irritable, and we're all her enemies, it's all our fault. Added to which, she's superstitious, she's terrified of three candles or the number thirteen. And she's stingy. She has seventy thousand in the bank in Odessa – I know that for a fact. But try asking her for a loan and she'll burst into tears.

Sorin You've decided your mother doesn't like your play, but it's all in your head, you're just working yourself up into a lather for no reason. Calm down, your mother adores you.

Treplev (pulling the petals off a flower) She loves me, she loves me not; she loves me, she loves me not; she loves me, she loves me not. (He laughs.) You see, my mother doesn't love me. How could she? She wants to live and love and wear vivid blouses, but here I am, twenty-five years old, and a constant reminder that she's not young any more. When I'm not around she can be thirty-two, but when I am, she's forty-three, and she hates me for it. She also knows I have no respect for the theatre. She loves the theatre, she seems to think she's a servant of humanity or the sacred cause of art, whereas, as far as I'm concerned, the modern theatre's in a blind alley, a fenced-off blind alley. When the curtain goes up and those great geniuses, those priests of sacred art, artificially lie, in a room with three walls, reproduce the way people eat, drink, love, move about and put their jackets on; when they try to concoct some moral out of their crass scenes and dreary lines – some petty, over-simplified moral,
some one-size-fits-all moral for handy domestic use; when
I'm offered a thousand varieties of the same thing, over
and over and over again -- then I run for it, run away,
like Maupassant ran away from the Eiffel Tower, because
its crass vulgarity was pulverising his brain.

Sorin You couldn't do without the theatre,

Treplev New forms. We need new forms and if they're
none to be had, we'd be better off with nothing at all.
(He looks at his watch.) I love my mother; I love her very
much; but her life is futile, she smokes and drinks and
spends all her time fretting over that writer she lives with.
Her name is never out of the papers -- and I'm fed up
with it. Sometimes I feel, you know, just an ordinary
selfish impulse, and sometimes I'm sorry my mother is a
famous actress and think if she were an ordinary woman,
I could be happier. Uncle, could anything be more
hopeless and stupid than my situation? I'll be round at
her place sometimes in a room jam full of celebrities,
actors and writers, and I'll be the only one of the lot of
them who's a nobody and the only reason they put up
with me is that I'm her son. Who am I? What am I? I left
university in my final year; due to causes for which, as
they say, the editor accepts no responsibility; I have no
qualifications, no money, not one kopeck and according
to my passport, I'm a petit-bourgeois from Kiev. Well, my
father was a petit-bourgeois from Kiev, although he was
also a well-known actor. And when those actors and
writers in her drawing room would turn their kind
attention to me, it always seemed to me from their
expressions that they were just gauging my insignificance
-- I could guess what they were thinking, it was painfully
humiliating . . .

Sorin By the way, that writer, would you mind telling me
what sort of a person he is? I can't make him out at all.
He never opens his mouth.

Treplev He's an intelligent man, unpretentious, a bit, you
know, melancholy. Pretty decent. He's still nowhere near
forty, but he's already famous, his cup runneth over . . .
As for his work, well . . . what can I say? It's clever and
charming, but . . . if you've read Tolstoy or Zola, you
wouldn't want to read Trigorin.

Sorin Well, my boy, I love writers. Once upon a time,
I had two passionate desires: I wanted to get married
and I wanted to be a writer; didn't satisfy either of them.
Yes. Would have been nice even to have been a minor
writer, you know what I mean?

Treplev (listening) Someone's coming . . . (He embraces
his uncle.) I can't live without her . . . Even the sound of
her footsteps is beautiful . . . I'm deliriously happy.

He hurries to meet Nina Zarechnaya, as she appears.

My spellbinder, my dream . . .

Nina (agitated) I'm not late, am I? . . . I know I'm not
late . . .

Treplev (kissing her hands) No, no, no . . .

Nina I've been in a state all day, I've been so terrified! I
was afraid my father wouldn't let me come . . . He's only
just gone out with my stepmother. The sky's red, the moon
is starting to rise and I spurred the horse on, I spurred it
on. (She laughs.) But I'm happy.

She shakes Sorin's hand warmly.

Sorin (laughing) Your eyes, you look as if you've been
crying . . . Ha, ha! Not so good!

Nina It's nothing . . . Look how out of breath I am. I have
to leave in half an hour, we'd better hurry. I can't stay any
longer, you mustn't keep me, for God's sake! My father
doesn't know I'm here.
Treplev In fact, we should be starting right away. We need to fetch everyone.

Sorin You know what, I'll go. Toot suite. (He moves off to the right, singing.) 'Home to France marched two grenadiers ...' (He looks back.) I once piped up singing like this and one of the prosecutors, colleague of mine, said to me: 'I must say, Your Excellency, you have a powerful voice ...' Then he thought for a minute and went on: 'Powerful, but hideous.'

He laughs and goes off.

Nina My father and his wife won't let me come here. They say it's too Bohemian ... they're afraid I'll be infected and want to be an actress ... But I'm as drawn to this lake as if I were a seagull ... My heart is full of you all.

Treplev We're alone.

Nina I think there's someone coming ...

Treplev No one's coming.

They kiss.

Nina What kind of tree is that?

Treplev An elm.

Nina Why is it so dark?

Treplev It's evening, everything's turning dark. Don't go away so soon, please, I beg you.

Nina I have to, I'm not allowed to stay.

Treplev Suppose I come to your house, Nina? I'll stand in the garden all night, just gazing up at your window.

Nina You mustn't, the watchman'll catch you. And Treasure isn't used to you, he'll bark.

Treplev I love you.

Nina Ssh ...

Treplev (hearing footsteps) Who's that? Is that you, Yakov?

Yakov (behind the stage) It is, sir.

Treplev All right, places. It's time. Is the moon rising?

Yakov It is, sir.

Treplev Do you have the meths? And the sulphur? When the red eyes light up, there has to be a smell of sulphur. (To Nina.) Off you go, everything's prepared. Are you nervous?

Nina Very. I don't mind your mother, I'm not afraid of her, but Trigorin is here ... acting in front of him makes me feel frightened, mortified ... a famous writer ... Is he young?

Treplev Yes.

Nina His stories are so wonderful!

Treplev (coldly) I wouldn't know. I've never read them.

Nina Your play's difficult to act in. There aren't any living characters.

Treplev Living characters! You have to show life not as it is, not even as it ought to be, but as you see it in your dreams.

Nina Yes, but there's not much action, is there, it's just a lot of speeches. And I think you always have to have love in a play ...

They go behind the stage. Polina Andreyevna and Dora appear.

Polina It's getting damp. Go back in and put on your galoshes.
Dorn I'm hot.

Polina You won't look after yourself. It's sheer pig-headedness. You're a doctor, you know perfectly well damp air is bad for you, you just want to make me miserable; yesterday you deliberately spent all evening sitting on the terrace...

Dorn (singing) ‘Where is my youth...?’

Polina You were so engrossed in your conversation with Irina Nikolayevna...you didn't notice the cold. Tell the truth...you find her attractive.

Dorn I'm fifty-five.

Polina That's nothing, that's no age for a man. You're extremely well-preserved and you're still attractive to women.

Dorn You'd rather I wasn't?

Polina You're all dying to bow down and worship an actress. All you men!

Dorn (singing) ‘Here I am at your feet...’ If people love actors and treat them differently from, say, businessmen, that's just the way things are. It's called idealism.

Polina Women were always falling in love with you and clinging round your neck. Was that idealism as well?

Dorn (shrugging his shoulders) What's it matter? There's a lot to be said for the way women felt about me. What they liked most about me was that I was an excellent doctor. Ten or fifteen years ago, if you remember, I was the only decent obstetrician in this whole area. Also, I've always been honest.

Polina (seizing his hand) Darling!

Dorn Quiet. They're coming.

Arkadina comes in, arm in arm with Sorin, followed by Trigorin, Shamrayev, Medvedenko and Masha.

Shamrayev In 1873 at the Poltava festival, she gave the most amazing performance. Pure pleasure! Wonderful performance! And the comic actor, Chadim, I don't suppose you know what's become of him? He was incredible in Krechinsky's Wedding, even better than Sadovsky, take my word for it, dear lady. But where is he now?

Arkadina You keep throwing these prehistoric names at me. How should I know?

She sits down.

Shamrayev (sighing) Pashka Chadim! There's no one out there to touch him. The theatre's on its last legs, Irina Nikolayevna! Once upon a time, there were mighty oaks, now all you see is tree stumps.

Dorn It's true there may be fewer genuinely brilliant individuals these days; but the general standard of acting is far higher.

Shamrayev I can't agree with you. Although, of course, it's a matter of taste. De gustibus aut bene, aut nihil.

Treplev emerges from behind the stage.

Arkadina (to her son) Ah, my son; when's it starting, dear?

Treplev In a minute. Just be patient, please.

Arkadina (quoting from Hamlet) ‘O Hamlet, speak no more: Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul, And there I see such black and grained spots As will not leave their tinct.’
Treplev (from Hamlet)
Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an ensembed bed,
Strewed in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty . . .

A horn sounds from behind the stage.

Ladies and gentlemen, we're ready to begin. Your
attention, please!

Pause.

I begin. (He taps a stick on the stage and speaks in a loud
voice.) Oh, you honoured ancient shades, floating above
the surface of the night lake, lull us to sleep and let us
dream of what will come to pass two hundred thousand
years from now!

Sorin Two hundred thousand years from now, there'll be
nothing.

Treplev Then let them show us this nothing.

Arkadina Yes, let them. We've been told to go to sleep.

The curtain rises, revealing a view of the lake; the
moon is above the horizon, its reflection in the water;
Nina Zarechnaya, all in white, is seated on a large
rock.

Nina Human beings, lions, eagles and partridges,
antlered deer, geese, spiders, fish, silent beneath the
waters, starfish and invisible microscopic creatures—all
living things, all living things, all living things, their tragic
cycle finally complete, are now extinct.

For thousands of centuries, no living species has moved
across the face of the earth and this poor moon has shone
her lamp in vain. The cranes no longer wake whooping in
the meadow and in the lime groves the May beetles are
silent.

Cold, cold, cold.

Bleak, bleak, bleak.

Petrifying, petrifying, petrifying.

Pause.

The bodies of all living creatures have crumbled into
dust, and the eternal laws of matter have transformed
them into rock, into water, into clouds, and their souls
have melted into one soul. And I . . . I am that universal
soul. The souls of Alexander the Great, of Caesar,
Shakespeare and Napoleon and of the lowliest leech are
all within me. Human consciousness and animal instinct
are combined in me and I know everything, everything,
everything.

I live each life anew within myself.

Will-o'-the-wisps appear.

Arkadina It's one of those decadent things.

Treplev (imploringly and reproachfully) Mother!

Nina I'm alone. Once in every hundred years, I raise my
voice to speak and the sound echoes melancholy through
the void and no one hears . . . Not even you hear me,
pale fires . . . The stagnant marsh pushes you out into
the darkness and you wander until dawn, unthinking,
unconsenting, lacking the vital spark. And for fear that
life might quicken within you, the devil, the father of
eternal matter, shuffles your atoms in continuous flux and
reflux, as he does in rock and water, so that your fate is
never-ending change. Through the whole universe
everything changes, everything mutates but the spirit.

Pause.

Like a prisoner thrown into a deep, empty well, I don't
know where I am or why I'm waiting. Everything is
hidden from me but the knowledge that in my stubborn, brutal struggle with the devil, the origin of all material forces, I am destined to conquer, and when I do, matter and spirit will merge in glorious harmony and the kingdom of universal freedom will be born. But this can only come to pass inch by inch, through many long millennia, after the moon and brilliant Sirius and the earth itself have come to dust . . . until then, the horror, oh, the horror . . .

Pause; two red spots appear against the lake.

See, my mighty adversary, the devil, draws near. I see his fearsome crimson eyes . . .

Arkadina There's a smell of sulphur. Is that intentional?

Treplov Yes.

Arkadina (laughing) I see, it's an effect.

Treplov Mother!

Nina Without man, he is lonely . . .

Polina (to Dorn) You've taken your hat off. Put it on, you'll catch cold.

Arkadina The Doctor's taken his hat off to pay his respects to the devil, the father of eternal matter.

Treplov (flaring up, loudly) That's it! The play's over! Curtain!

Arkadina Why are you getting so exercised?

Treplov That's it! Curtain! Lower the curtain! (Stamping his foot.) Curtain!

The curtain falls.

I apologise! I forgot that writing plays and acting in them is reserved for the elite. I've broken the monopoly! I . . . I . . .

He wants to say more, but instead goes out left with a dismissive wave of his hand.

Arkadina Whatever's the matter with him?

Sorin Irina, my dear, a young man's pride, you must be a little more careful.

Arkadina Why, what did I say?

Sorin You hurt his feelings.

Arkadina But earlier on he told us his play was a joke, so I treated it like a joke.

Sorin All the same . . .

Arkadina Now it turns out he's written a masterpiece! Really! And he's put this exhibition and burned us with sulphur, not as a joke, but as some kind of provocation . . . He wants to teach us how to write and what to act. I'm bored by all this. These continual sneers at my expense, these constant pinpricks, say what you like, they're enough to try anyone's patience. He's a moody, arrogant boy.

Sorin He was trying to please you.

Arkadina Is that right? Then why didn't he choose an ordinary sort of play, rather than making us sit through this decadent gibberish. Not that I mind listening to a bit of gibberish if it's a joke, but no, what we have here is pretending to be a new form, a new era in art. If you ask me, far from being a new form, it's just bad manners.

Irigorina Everyone chooses his own subject and writes to the best of his ability.

Arkadina Let him choose his own subject and write to the best of his ability; and then let him leave me out of it.

Dorn Ah, the wrath of Jupiter . . .
Arkadina I'm not Jupiter, I'm a woman. *(She lights a cigarette.)* And I'm not angry; I'm just irritated that a young man chooses to pass his time in such an uninteresting way. I didn't mean to hurt his feelings.

Medvedenko It's not justifiable to separate matter and spirit, because spirit may itself be a combination of material atoms. *(Animatedly, to Trigorin.)* But, you know, someone ought to write a play about teachers' lives and put that on in the theatre. Our life is hard, very hard.

Arkadina I'm sure, but let's not talk about plays or atoms. It's such a gorgeous evening! Can you hear that? The singing? *(She listens.)* Beautiful!

Polina It's from the other side of the lake.

*Pause.*

Arkadina *(to Trigorin)* Sit next to me. Ten or fifteen years ago, you'd hear music and singing here by the lake almost every night. There are six country houses spread out along the shore here. I can remember laughter, noise, shooting parties and love affairs, endless love affairs . . . And the *jeune premier* and object of worship for all six of those households was none other than — *(She indicates Dorn with her head.) —* the Doctor, Yevgeny Sergeevich. He's still charming, but in those days he was irresistible. My conscience is beginning to trouble me. What made me hurt my poor boy's feelings? It's worrying me. *(Loudly,)* Kostya! Son! Kostya!

Masha I'll go and look for him.

Arkadina Thank you, dear.

Masha *(moving off left)* Yoo-hoo! Konstantin Gavrilovich! . . . Yoo-hoo!

*She exits. Nina emerges from behind the stage.*

Nina We're obviously not going on, so I suppose I can come out now. Hello!

*She exchanges kisses with Arkadina and Polina.*

Sorin Bravo! Bravo!

Arkadina Yes, bravo! We did admire you. You can't stay out in the country with your looks and such a marvellous voice, it'd be a sin. I'm sure you must be talented. Listen to what I'm saying: it's your duty to go on the stage.

Nina That's my dream! *(Sighing.)* But it'll never happen.

Arkadina Who knows? Now, let me introduce Boris Alexeyevich Trigorin.

Nina Oh, I'm so pleased to . . . *(She's overcome with embarrassment.)* I read everything you . . .

Arkadina makes her sit down next to them.

Arkadina No need to be shy, dear. He may be famous, but at heart he's a very simple man. You see, he's shy as well.

Dorn We can open the curtain now, can't we? It's a bit spooky.

Shamrayev *(loudly)* Yakov, be a good chap and open the curtain, will you?

*The curtain goes up.*

Nina *(to Trigorin)* It's a strange play, isn't it?

Trigorin I didn't know what was going on. But I enjoyed it. Your acting was very truthful. And the setting's beautiful.

*Pause.*

That lake must be full of fish.
Igorov: I love fishing. For me, there's no greater pleasure in life than to sit on the bank at twilight watching my floot.

Nina: But I'd have thought for someone who knew the art of creativity, no other pleasures would exist.

Arkadina: (laughing) You mustn't speak to him like that. He doesn't know how to deal with people saying nice things to him.

Shamrayev: I remember a performance at the Moscow Opera House, when the famous Silva hit lower C. It so happened that one of the basses from our church choir was sitting up in the gallery and suddenly, you can imagine our complete astonishment, we heard from the gallery: 'Bravo, Silva!' — but a whole octave lower . . . Like this! (Deep bass voice:) 'Bravo, Silva!' . . . The whole theatre was transfixed.

Pause.

Dorn: The angel of silence has flown overhead.

Nina: I have to fly too. Goodbye.

Arkadina: Where are you going? It's so early. We're not going to let you go.

Nina: My father's expecting me!

Arkadina: Honestly, what a man . . .

They kiss.

Well, if it can't be helped. I'm sorry; I hate to let you go.

Nina: If you knew how much I hate leaving you!

Arkadina: Someone should see you home, darling.

Nina: alarmed: Oh, no, no!

Sorin: (to her, beseechingly): Do stay!

Nina: I can't, Pyotr Nikolaevich.

Sorin: Just another hour, no more. I mean, you know what I mean . . .

Nina: (after a moment's thought, tearfully): No, I can't!

She shakes hands and goes off quickly.

Arkadina: She's a most unfortunate girl, really. Apparently, her mother's will left her entire enormous fortune to the husband, every last penny, and nothing at all to the poor girl, and her father's already made a will, leaving everything to the second wife. It's outrageous!

Dorn: Yes, you have to give him credit, her father's an out-and-out villain.

Sorin: (rubbing his cold hands) Let's go in as well, shall we? It's getting damp. My legs ache.

Arkadina: They're so stiff, your legs, they're like wooden legs, you can hardly walk. Let's be off then, you poor old thing.

She takes his arm. Shamrayev offers his arm to his wife.

Shamrayev: Madame?

Sorin: I can hear that dog barking again. (To Shamrayev.) Would you be kind enough to tell them to let it off its chain?

Shamrayev: I can't do that, Pyotr Nikolaevich; I don't want thieves breaking into the barn. All my hulks are in there. (To Medvedenko, who is walking beside him.) That's right, a whole octave lower: 'Bravo, Silva!' And, you know, he wasn't even a singer, just an ordinary member of the church choir.

Medvedenko: Any idea how much a member of the choir would earn?
They all go off, except for Dorn.

Dorn (alone) I don't know, maybe I'm just ignorant or completely off my head, but I liked that play. There's something about it. When that little girl talked about being alone and then the devil's red eyes appeared, I was so moved, my hands started shaking. It was original, naïve... I think that's him coming now. I want to say something really nice to him.

Treplev (entering) They've all gone in already.

Dorn I'm here.

Treplev Maslenka's been chasing me all over the gardens. Unbearable creature.

Dorn Konstantin Gavrilovich, I really liked your play enormously. It's a curious piece and I didn't see the end, but even so it made a powerful impression on me. You're very talented; you have to go on with this.

Treplev shakes his hand warmly and impulsively embraces him.

My word, your nerves really are raw. There are tears in your eyes... What am I trying to say? You've taken a subject from the realm of abstract ideas. That's as it should be, because it's essential for a work of art to express some big idea. Something can only be beautiful if it's serious. You're so pale!

Treplev So are you saying I should keep going?

Dorn Yes. But only write about what's important and eternal. I've had a varied and fascinating life, you know, fulfilling, but if I'd been given the opportunity to scale the spiritual heights that an artist achieves at the moment of creativity, I think I'd have had nothing but contempt for my physical existence and everything it entails and I'd have soared into the stratosphere and left the earth as far below as possible.

Treplev Excuse me, where's Nina?

Dorn And another thing. A work of art has to have some clear governing idea. You have to know why you're writing it, because if you just ramble down some picturesque byway without a definite aim in mind, you'll lose your way and your talent may destroy you.

Treplev (impatiently) Where's Nina?

Dorn She's gone home.

Treplev (despairingly) What am I going to do? I want to see her... I have to see her... I'm going over there.

Masha comes in.

Dorn (to Treplev) Now, calm down.

Treplev I don't care, I'm going. I have to go.

Masha Come indoors, Konstantin Gavrilovich. Your mother's looking for you. She's worried about you.

Treplev Tell her I've gone away. And, please, all of you, just leave me alone! Leave me alone! Stop following me around!

Dorn Now, now, my dear boy... don't be like that... it isn't fair.

Treplev (in tears) Goodbye, Doctor. Thank you.

He goes off.

Dorn (sighing) Ah, youth, youth!

Masha When people can't think of anything better to say, they say: 'Youth, youth...'
Dorn Filthy habit!

Pause.

I expect they've started playing indoors. We'd better go in.

Masha Just a minute.

Dorn What?

Masha I've told you before, but I want to say it again. I really want to talk! (Agitated) I don't love my father... but I've always had a feeling for you. You're somehow close to me. I feel it with all my heart... Please help me. Help me or I'll do something stupid, I'll ruin my life or make a mockery of it... I can't go on like this...

Dorn What is it? How can I help you?

Masha I'm unhappy. Nobody has any idea how unhappy I am. (Laying her head on his chest, quietly) I'm in love with Konstantin.

Dorn How neurotic everyone is! So neurotic! And all this love... it must be the magic of the lake! (Vivaciously) What can I do about it, my child? What? What?

Curtain.

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Act Two

The croquet lawn. In the background, on the right, the house with its large terrace; on the left, the lake, its surface sparkling in the sun.


Arkadina (to Masha) Stand up, would you?

They both stand up.

Stand next to me. You're twenty-two and I'm almost twice that. Yevgeny Sergeyevich, which of us looks younger?

Dorn Well, you, of course.

Arkadina There you are... And why should that be? Because I won't, I'm sensitive, I'm always busy, whereas you're stuck in one place, you have no life... And I make it a rule never to look into the future. What will be, will be.

Masha I feel as if I were born a long, long age ago; my life has dragged along behind me, it's as if I'm wearing a dress with an interminable train. And as often as not I have no desire to go on living. (She sits down) Of course, all that's absurd. I need to give myself a good shake and snap out of it.

Dorn (bouncing)

'Carry my love to her,
And be the spur,
Blooms that flowers at her side...'
Arkadina. Also, I’m as punctilious as an Englishman. I make sure I’m perfectly turned out, as they say, and my clothes and my hair, my dear, are always comme il faut. Do I ever allow myself to leave the house, even to step into the garden, in a housecoat or without doing my hair? Never. That’s how I’ve kept my looks. I’ve never let myself get frumpy, I’ve never let myself go, the way some women do... (She strolls around the croquet lawn, hands on hips.) See what I mean, light as a feather. I could play a girl of fifteen.

Dorn. Be that as it may, I shall go on reading. (He picks up the book.) We’d got as far as the flour merchant and the rats...

Arkadina. Ah, yes, the rats. Read on. (She sits down.) Or rather, let me have it, I’ll read. It’s my turn. (She takes the book and looks down the page.) So, the rats... Here we are... (She reads.) ‘Of course, it’s as dangerous for a society hostess to indulge and try to attract a novelist, as it would be for a flour merchant to breed rats in his granary. And yet they see nothing wrong with it. And so, once a woman has set her sights on the writer she means to adopt, she besieges him with compliments, favours and flattery...’ Well, that may be true of the French, but there’s nothing like that here, no ulterior motives. In this country, before a woman sets out to entrap a writer, she’s generally already head over heels in love, if you can imagine. To take an obvious example, just look at me and Trigorin... 

Sorin arrives, leaning on his stick, accompanied by Nina. Behind them, Medvedenko pushes an empty wheelchair.

Sorin (affectionately, as if to a child) Yes? We’re happy, aren’t we? Finally happy today? (To his sister.) See, we’re happy! Our father and stepmother have gone off to Tver, and we have three whole days of freedom.

Nina sits down next to Arkadina and embraces her.

Nina: Yes, I am happy! I’m all yours.

Sorin (sitting in his wheelchair) Look how pretty she is today.

Arkadina: All dressed up, nice-looking... Aren’t you a clever girl? (She kisses Nina.) Still, we mustn’t be too complimentary, we don’t want to jinx her. Where’s Boris Alexeyevich?

Nina: He’s down by the bathing place, fishing.

Arkadina: I’m surprised he’s not sick of it!

She makes to go on reading.

Nina: What’s that?

Arkadina: Maupassant’s Sur l’eau, darling. (She reads a few lines to herself.) Well, the rest of it’s neither interesting nor true. (She closes the book.) I feel on edge. Tell me, what’s the matter with my son? Why is he so gloomy and bad-tempered? He spends days on end down by the lake, I hardly ever see him.

Masha: He’s unhappy. (To Nina, shyly.) Please, could you give us a speech from his play?

Nina (shrugging her shoulders) Do you really want me to? It’s so boring.

Masha (trying to suppress her enthusiasm) When he reads it himself, his eyes light up and his face goes pale. He has a lovely sad voice, and the look of a poet.

Sorin is snoring.

Dorn: Night night!

Arkadina: Petrusha!

Sorin: Mm?
Arkadina: Are you asleep?
Sorin: Course not.

Pettres.

Arkadina: You're not taking any medicine, Petrusha, that's not very clever.
Sorin: I'd be happy to, but the Doctor won't give me any.
Dorn: Medicine? At sixty!
Sorin: Even at sixty, you still want to stay alive.
Dorn (irritably): Oh, all right, then, take some valerian drops.

Arkadina: I think it'd do him good to go to a spa, take the waters.
Dorn: Well, he might do that. Or he might not.
Arkadina: What are you talking about? I don't understand.
Dorn: Nothing to understand. I've said what I've said.

Pettres.

Medvedenko: Pyotr Nikolayevich ought to give up smoking.
Sorin: Rubbish.
Dorn: No, it's not rubbish. Wine and tobacco erode your personality. You smoke a cigar or drink a glass of vodka and you're no longer Pyotr Nikolayevich, you're Pyotr Nikolayevich plus; your ego disintegrates and you start thinking of yourself in the third person.
Sorin (laughing): All very well for you to talk! You've had a good life, but what about me? Twenty-eight years' service in the Justice Department, but I still haven't had a life, I've experienced nothing, if you know what I mean, and, needless to say, what I want is a life. You've had your share and you don't care any more and that's what's made you so philosophical, but I want a life, so that's why I drink sherry at dinner and smoke cigars and all that sort of thing. Simple as that.

Dorn: I'm all for taking life seriously, but to start swallowing medicine at sixty and feeling sorry for yourself because you didn't make the best of your youth, it's pretty fatuous, if you don't mind my saying so.

Masha (standing up): Must be lunchtime. (She wanders off, dragging one foot.) My leg's gone to sleep.

She leaves.

Dorn: She's off to have a couple of drinks before lunch.
Sorin: Poor girl's had no happiness in her life.
Dorn: Meaningless words, Your Excellency.
Sorin: You talk like a man who's had everything he wants.
Arkadina: Oh, is there anything more boring than this pure country boredom? It's hot, it's sleepy, no one's doing anything, everyone's sounding off their pet theories . . .
It's nice to be with you, my friends, I enjoy listening to you, but . . . to be sitting in a hotel room and learning my lines — what could be better?

Nina (enthusiastically): Oh yes! I know exactly what you mean.

Sorin: Of course you're better off in town. You sit in your study, the footman lets no one in unannounced, you have your telephone . . . there are cabs in the street, all that sort of thing . . .

Dorn (humming)
"'Blooms that flowers at her side."
'Tell her she'll be my bride . . ."
Shamrayev appears, followed by Polina.

Shamrayev Here they are. Good afternoon!

He kisses Arkadina's hand and then Nina's.

Delighted to see you looking so well. (To Arkadina.) My wife tells me you're planning to go into town with her today. Is that right?

Arkadina Yes, it is.

Shamrayev Min... That's all very well, but how are you expecting to get there, dear lady? We're carrying the eye today, all our workmen are busy. Which horses were you intending to use, if you don't mind my asking?

Arkadina Which horses? How should I know which horses?

Sorin We do have carriage horses.

Shamrayev (getting agitated) Carriage horses? And where am I supposed to get them harnessed? Where can I get them harnessed? Extraordinary! Inexplicable! My dear, honoured lady! I'm sorry, I'm in awe of your talent, I'd willingly sacrifice ten years of my life for you, but don't ask me for horses!

Arkadina But suppose I had to go? This is just bizarre!

Shamrayev My dear, honoured lady! You don't understand the meaning of farming!

Arkadina (flaring up) Don't start that again! If that's the way of it, I'm leaving for Moscow today. Order horses to be hired for me from the village, or else I'll walk to the station.

Shamrayev (flaring up) In that case I resign! Find someone else to manage your estate!

He leaves.

Arkadina It's the same thing every summer, every summer I come here and they insult me. I'm never going to set foot in this place again!

She goes off left, in the direction of the bathing place; a moment later, she can be seen disappearing into the house, followed by Trigorin, who's carrying his fishing rods and a bucket.

Sorin (flaring up) The effrontery! What is going on here? I'm absolutely sick and tired of it, you know what I mean? I want every single horse brought here immediately!

Nina (to Polina) Refusing Foma Nikolayevich like that, she's a famous actress! Surely any wish of hers, even if it's the merest whim, is far more important than anything to do with farming. This is incredible!

Polina (in despair) What am I supposed to do? Put yourself in my position: what am I supposed to do?

Sorin (to Nina) Let's go and see my sister... and we'll all plead with her not to leave. All right? (He looks in the direction in which Shamrayev has left.) Unbearable man! Tyrant!

Nina (preventing him from getting up) Don't get up, don't get up... We'll push you...

She and Medvedenko push the wheelchair.

This is terrible!...

Sorin Yes, yes, it's terrible... But he won't resign, I'll have a word with him in a minute.

They go out; only Dorn and Polina are left.

Dorn Aren't people boring? By rights, your husband should be thrown out on his ear, but all that'll happen is that Pyotr Nikolayevich, old woman that he is, and his sister will end up apologising to him. You'll see!
Polina. It's because he's sent the carriage horses out into the fields as well. Every day there are these upheavals. If you only knew how much they upset me! They're making me ill; look, I'm shaking all over... I can't bear him being so rude. (Pleadingly.) Yevgeny, darling, my love, let me come and live with you... Time's passing, we're not young any more, and if we could just, at the end of our lives, stop having to hide and tell lies...

Pause.

Dorn I'm fifty-five years old, it's too late to go changing my life.

Polina I know why you're refusing me, because of all the other women you're close to. You can't invite them all to come and live with you. I can see that. I'm sorry, I'm boring you.

Nina appears, not far from the house; she's picking flowers.

Polina Have you been with Irina Nikolayevna all morning?

Dorn I have to be somewhere.

Polina I'm tormented by jealousy. You must be sick of me.

Dorn Not at all.

Polina Of course, you're a doctor; you can't avoid women. I know that. But I wish you understood how awful it makes me feel. If you have to spend time with other women, can't you at least keep it out of my sight?

Dorn I'll do my best. (to Nina, as she comes up to them)

How's everything in there?

Nina Irina Nikolayevna is crying and Pyotr Nikolayevich is having an asthma attack.

Dorn (getting up) I'd better go and give them both some valerian chops.

Nina (giving him the flowers) These are for you.

Dorn Merci bien.

He sets off towards the house; Polina accompanies him.

Polina Gorgeous flowers! (Near the house, her voice only just audible.) Give me those flowers! Give me those flowers!

When she gets hold of them, she tears them to pieces and throws them away; they go into the house.

Nina (alone) How strange to see a famous actress crying, especially about something so trivial! And something else strange: a famous writer, idolised by the public, written about in all the papers, his portrait on sale everywhere, his books translated into foreign languages, and he spends all day fishing and is thrilled to have caught two perch. I always thought famous people were arrogant and unapproachable, that they despised ordinary people for fawning on the upper classes and the rich and used their celebrity and the glamour of their name to get even with them. But here they are, crying and fishing, playing cards, laughing and losing their temper, just like anyone else...

Treplev appears, bare-headed, carrying a gun and a dead seagull.

Treplev You on your own?

Nina Yes.

Treplev lays the seagull at her feet.

What's that meant to mean?

Treplev I was cruel enough to kill this seagull today. Now I'm laying it at your feet.
Nina. What's wrong with you?

She picks up the seagull and looks at it.

Treplev (after a pause) I'm going to kill myself soon, same method.

Nina. I don't recognise you any more.

Treplev. Yes, that's since the day I stopped recognising you. You've changed towards me, your eyes are cold, I make you uncomfortable.

Nina. You've got so testy lately, the things you say are less and less intelligible, perhaps they're meant to be symbolic. And I imagine this seagull is meant as some sort of symbol, but, I'm sorry, not one I understand...

She lays the seagull on the bench.

I'm too simple to be able to understand you.

Treplev. It all started that evening when my play was such a stupid disaster. Women never forgive failures. I've burnt the whole thing, every last page of it. If you only knew how unhappy I am! Your turning cold on me is terrible, I can't believe it, it's as if I'd woken up and found the lake had suddenly dried up or drained away into the ground. You just said you're too simple to be able to understand me. What's there to understand? People didn't like the play, you found what inspires me contemptible, you now think I'm mediocre and worthless, just like everybody else does... (He stamps his foot.) I completely understand it, completely! It's like a nail in my brain, damn it, and damn my bloodsucking pride, sucking away at me like a snake...

He catches sight of Trigorin walking along reading a book.

Oh, here comes the real genius, walking and reading like Hamlet. (Parodying him.) 'Words, words, words...' The sun hasn't even reached you and you're smiling already, you're melting in its rays. I shan't get in your way.

He goes off quickly.

Trigorin (putting something in his notebook) Takes snuff, drinks vodka... Always wears black. Teacher in love with her...

Nina. Good afternoon, Boris Alexeyevich!

Trigorin. Good afternoon. Things have taken an unexpected turn, apparently we're leaving today. I don't suppose we'll meet again. Pity, I don't often get the chance to meet young girls, interesting young girls, that is, I can't remember what it feels like to be eighteen or nineteen, can't get a clear picture of it, and the result is, the young girls in my stories usually turn out unconvincing. I'd like to swap places with you, just for an hour, find out how you think, what sort of a character you are.

Nina. And I'd like to swap places with you.

Trigorin. Why?

Nina. To find out what it feels like to be a famous, talented writer. What's it like to be famous? How does being famous affect you?

Trigorin. How! Not at all, I don't think. It's never crossed my mind. (He gives it some thought.) There's too possibilities; either you're exaggerating my fame, or it doesn't affect me at all.

Nina. What about when you read about yourself in the newspapers?

Trigorin. If they praise you, it cheers you up, and if they attack you, it depresses you for a couple of days.

Nina. What a marvellous existence! If you only knew how much I envy you! People's destinies are so different
Some people can scarcely plod through their dull, obscure lives, they're all alike, all unhappy, and others, like you, for example – you're one in a million – fate deals them a really fascinating life, a glittering life, full of meaning... You're so lucky...

Trigorin Aww! (He shrugs his shoulders, fms... You talk about fame and luck, about some glittering and fascinating life, but all these fine words, forgive me, they're just like so many sugarplums, which I never eat. You're very young and very sweet.

Nina But your life is wonderful!!

Trigorin I don't see what's so special about it. (He looks at his watch.) It's time for me to go and write. I'm sorry, I can't stay... (He laughs.) It's what they call a sore point, you've stepped on my pet button, and I'm starting to feel steamed up, even a bit angry. All right, then, let's talk. Let's talk about my wonderful, glittering life... So, where shall we start? (He thinks for a moment.) There's such a thing as obsession, when for example a man thinks all day and night about nothing but the moon, and I have my own moon. All day and night, I'm haunted by a single obsessive thought: I have to write, I have to write... No sooner have I finished one story, when for some reason or another, I have to write a second story, that a third, and, after the third, a fourth... I write non-stop, at breakneck speed, and I can't seem to do it any other way. Now, what's so wonderful and glittering about that, may I ask? Ach, it's a preposterous life! I'm here with you, getting steamed up, but at the same time, I can't forget for a moment that there's an unfinished story waiting for me. There's a cloud, see, which looks like a grand piano. I think to myself: must fit in to my story somewhere that a cloud floated by, looking like a grand piano. I can smell heliotrope. I immediately make a mental note: sickly scent, flower for a widow, refer to it when describing a summer's evening. I keep fixing on every phrase, on every word you or I utter, and I can't wait to add all these phrases and words as soon as I can to my literary stockpile: never know when they might come in handy! When I've finished working, I run out to the theatre or go fishing; perhaps I can have a rest and forget about it all; but... no, there's some new subject tumbling around inside my head like a heavy iron ball – and it's already started drawing me towards my desk, and I have to rush back to start again, writing and writing. And it's like that all the time, all the time, I can't get away from myself, and I feel I'm swallowing up my own life, and that to make the honey I'm giving to someone out there in the void, I'm taking the pollen from my own best flowers, in fact I'm ripping out the flowers and trampling on their roots. I must be insane, don't you think? And my friends and relatives, you think they treat me as if I were quite sane? 'What are you writing? What are you going to treat us to next?' It's always the same thing, always, and it seems to me this scrutiny from my friends, this praise, this enthusiasm – it's all a pretence, they're all humoring me as they would an invalid, and sometimes I'm afraid that any minute now they'll creep up on me, grab me and carry me off to the asylum like Gogol's madman. When I was young, through my best years, back when I was starting, writing was unmilitated torture. A minor writer, especially before he's had any success, thinks of himself as clumsy, bungling and unnecessary, his nerves are on edge, he's unhung; he can't stop himself lusting around people in the arts and literature, unnoticed and unrecognized, afraid to look anyone directly in the eye, like a compulsive gambler with no money. I never came across my reader, but for some reason I always thought of him as hostile and suspicious. I found the whole idea of the public terrifying, and whenever I put on a new play, I always felt everyone
in the audience with dark hair was my enemy and everyone with fair hair was just cold and uninterested. It's all so dreadful! Agony!

**Nina** But surely your inspiration and the creative process itself, they must give you moments of elation and pleasure?

**Trigorin** Yes. While I'm actually writing, it's enjoyable. And I like reading the proofs, but . . . the minute it's published, I can't stand it. I can see right away it's not what I ought to be, it's a mistake, it should never have been written in the first place, and I'm disappointed, I feel useless . . . *(He laughs.)* And then the public reads it and says: 'Yes, charming, clever . . . Charming, but it's hardly Tolstoy,' or 'It's very good, but Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* is better.' And it'll be charming and clever till the day I die, charming and clever — and that's it, and once I'm dead, my friends, whenever they pass my grave, will say: 'Here lies Trigorin. He was a good writer, but not as good as Turgenev.'

**Nina** I'm sorry, I refuse to understand you. You're just spoiled by success.

**Trigorin** What success? I've never liked myself, I've never liked myself as a writer. The worst thing is, I live in some sort of a stupor and I frequently don't understand what it is I'm writing . . . I love this stretch of water here, the trees, the sky, I respond to nature, I feel passionate about it, it gives me an irresistible desire to write. But I'm not only a landscape painter, I'm also a citizen, you know, I love my country, I love its people; I feel if I'm a writer, it's my duty to talk about the people and their sufferings and their future and talk about science and human rights, etcetera, etcetera, and I do talk about all these things, at great speed, and people pester me constantly and then they get angry with me and I tear all over the place like a fox hunted by a pack of hounds. I see life and science speeding farther and farther ahead, leaving me behind, so I'm there, left like a peasant who's missed his train, and in the end I feel all I can do is describe landscapes and in every other respect I'm a fraud, and a fraud right down to the marrow of my bones.

**Nina** You're overworked, so you don't have the time or the inclination to appreciate how important you are. You may not be happy with yourself, but to other people you're great, you're wonderful! If I were a writer like you, I'd dedicate my whole life to the people, but I'd always be aware that their true happiness would only lie in trying to rise to my level and harnessing themselves to my chariot.

**Trigorin** My chariot! What am I, Agamemnon?

*They both smile.*

**Nina** For that kind of happiness, I mean the happiness of being a writer or an actress, I'd be prepared to suffer the resentment of my family, poverty, disappointments, I'd live in a garret and eat nothing but black bread, and endure not being satisfied with my work and being aware of my own imperfections, but in return I'd ask for fame . . . real, spectacular fame . . . *(She covers her face with her hands.)* My head's spinning . . . Ooh!

**Arkadina's voice, from the house.**

**Arkadina** Boris Alexeyevich!

**Trigorin** I'm being called . . . Probably to pack. But I don't feel like leaving! *(He looks round at the lake.)* It's paradise here! Wonderful!

**Nina** See that house and garden on the far side?

**Trigorin** Yes.
Nina: That's my mother's estate. I was born there. I've spent my whole life here beside this lake and I know every little island on it.

Trigorin: It's a really lovely spot! (He sees the seagull.) What's this?

Nina: A seagull. Konstantin Gavrilovich killed it.

Trigorin: Beautiful bird. I really don't want to leave. Can't you persuade Irina Nikolayevna to stay?

He jots something down in his notebook.

Nina: What are you writing?

Trigorin: Just making a note... Flash of an idea. (He puts the notebook away.) An idea for a short story: a young girl, like you, spends her whole life by a lake; she loves the lake, like a seagull. And she's as happy and free as a seagull. But a man happens to come by, sees her, and for want of anything better to do, he destroys her just like this seagull here.

Pause. Arkadina appears at a window.

Arkadina: Boris Alexeyevich, where are you?

Trigorin: Coming.

(He walks off, looking back at Nina.)

(To Arkadina at the window.) What?

Arkadina: We're staying.

Trigorin: Goes into the house. Nina comes forward to the edge of the stage.

Nina: (after a few moments of contemplation) I'm dreaming!

Curtain.

Act Three

The dining room in Norn's house. Doors to right and left. A sideboard. A medicine cabinet. A table in the middle of the room. A suitcase and some cartoons: signs of preparation for departure. Trigorin is having his lunch; Masha is standing by the table.

Masha: I'm telling you all this because you're a writer. You might be able to make use of it. I'm telling you the honest truth: if he'd seriously injured himself, I wouldn't have been able to go on living another minute. All the same, I do have some courage. I've just decided: I'm going to rip this love out of my heart. I'm going to rip it out by the roots.

Trigorin: How?

Masha: By getting married. To Medvedenko.

Trigorin: You mean the teacher?

Masha: Yes.

Trigorin: I don't understand why you need to do that.

Masha: Loving without any hope, waiting for something for years on end... But once I'm married, there'll be no time left for love, all the old troubles will be blown out by new ones. At least, you know, it'll be a change. What about a refill?

Trigorin: Wouldn't that be overdryng it?

Masha: Here we are!

She pours a glass of wine.
Don't look at me like that, Women drink more often than you might think. Only a minority drink in public the way I do, most of them drink in secret. Oh, yes. And always vodka or brandy.

They clink glasses.

Good luck! You're an honest man, I'm sorry to see you go.

They drink.

Trigorin Personally, I don't want to go.

Masha Then go and ask her to stay.

Trigorin No, she won't stay now. Her son is being extremely tactless. First he had a go at shooting himself, and now, I'm told, he's planning to challenge me to a duel. Why? He sulks and sneers and proselytises for new forms... But there's plenty of room for everyone, isn't there, new and old - why make such a fuss?

Masha Well, he's also jealous. Not that it's any of my business.

Pause. Yakov crosses from right to left, carrying a suitcase. Nina comes in and stands by the window.

He's not too bright, my teacher; but he's a kind man, and he's poor and he loves me very much. I'm sorry for him. And I'm sorry for his old mother. Well, let me wish you all the best. Don't think badly of me.

She gives him a firm handshake.

Thank you very much for your sympathy. Send me your books and make sure you write a dedication in them. Only don't say: 'Respects and best wishes,' just say: 'To Marya, who doesn't know where she belongs or what she's doing on this earth.' Goodbye!

She leaves the room, from stage left. Rose towards Trigorin, her hand clenched in a fist.

Nina Odd or even?

Trigorin I'm not.

Nina (sighing) No, I only have one pea in my hand. I was trying to solve a puzzle: should I or should I not become an actress? I wish there was someone who could give me some advice.

Trigorin You can't give advice about something like that.

Pause.

Nina We're parting and... we may never see one another again. Please, won't you take this little medallion to remember me by? I've had your initials engraved on one side... and on the other, the title of your book Days and Nights.

Trigorin It's beautiful! (He kisses the medallion.) What a lovely present!

Nina Think about me sometimes.

Trigorin I will think about you. I'll think about you as if you were on that sunny day last week - do you remember? - in your light dress... we had a conversation... and there was a white seagull lying on the bench.

Nina (promptly) A seagull, yes... 

Pause.

We'd better stop talking, someone's coming... Before you go, let me have a couple of minutes with you, will you, please?

She goes out, left, as Arkadina, Sorin, in a frock coat sporting the star of some order, followed by Yakov, dealing with the luggage, enters from the right.
Arkadina: Stay here at home, old thing. What's the point of traipsing about with your rheumatism? (To Trigorin.) Who was that just went out? Nina?

Trigorin: Yes.

Arkadina: Pardon. Didn't mean to interrupt... (She sits down.) That's everything packed, I think. I'm exhausted.

Trigorin: (reading the inscription on the medallion) Days and Nights, page 121, lines 11 and 12.

Yakov: (clearing the table) Should I pack your fishing rods as well?

Trigorin: Yes, I may need them. But you can give the books away.

Yakov: Yes, sir.

Trigorin: (to himself) Page 121, lines 11 and 12. What are those lines? (To Arkadina.) Are there any of my books in the house?

Arkadina: Yes, in my brother's study, corner bookcase.

Trigorin: Page 121...

He leaves the room.

Arkadina: Really, Petrusha, you'd be better off staying at home.

Sorin: You're going away; it'll be depressing here without you.

Arkadina: But what's there to do in the town?

Sorin: Nothing much, you know... (He laughs.) They're laying the foundation stone for the District Council building, all that sort of thing... I just want to wake up, if only for an hour or two, from my torpid existence. I've been lying about, like some old cigarette holder, and I've gone stale. I've ordered the books... and... will leave together.

Arkadina: (after a pause) So, go on living here, my not to get bored and don't catch cold. I look after my son. Care for him. Get him to do some work.

Pause.

I'm going away and I'll never know why Konstantin shot himself. I think jealousy was the main reason, so the sooner I get Trigorin away from here, the better.

Sorin: How can I put this? There were other reasons. It's not difficult to understand, he's young, he's intelligent, he lives in the country, in the back end of nowhere, with no money, no status and no future. Nothing. What to do ever do. He's ashamed of his illness and it frightens him. He loves him very much and he's fond of me, but even so, he feels useless here, like a parasite, a sponge. It's not difficult to understand, it's a question of self-esteem...

Arkadina: He's such a worry! (She considers.) Perhaps he ought to get a job...

Sorin: (suspects a bit, then, indifferently) I think by far the best solution would be... to let him have a bit of money. In the first place, he needs to be able to dress like a human being, you know what I mean? You just need to look at him, he's been wearing the same jacket for three years now, and he doesn't even have an overcoat... (He laughs.) It wouldn't hurt him to enjoy himself a bit... go abroad or something... Wouldn't have to cost much.

Arkadina: Yes, but... I could probably manage the suit, but as for going abroad... No, just at the moment, I don't see how I could even manage the suit. (Decisively.) I have no money!
Sorin laughs.

I don't!

Sorin (starting to whistle) Of course, I'm sorry, my dear, don't be angry, I believe you ... You're a generous, magnanimous woman.

Arkadina (through her tears) I have no money!

Sorin Naturally, if I had money, I'd give him some myself, but I have nothing, not a kopeck. (He laughs.) My estate manager takes my entire pension and spends the lot on the farm and the cattle and the bees and it's all wasted money. The bees die, the cows die, they never let me have any horses . . .

Arkadina I mean, I do have some money, but I'm an actress, you know; my costume bills alone are enough to ruin me.

Sorin You're good and kind ... I respect you ... Yes ... I'm not feeling so good ... (He sways.) I feel dizzy. (He holds on to the table.) I'm not feeling well, you know what I mean?

Arkadina (alarmed) Petrusha! (She tries to support him.) Petrusha, darling ... (She calls out.) Help! Help! . . .

Treplev comes in, his head bandaged, with Medvedenko.

He's feeling dizzy!

Sorin It's all right, it's all right ... (He smiles and drinks some water.) The moment's passed ... you know what I mean? . . .

Treplev Don't worry, Mother, it's not serious. Nowadays, Uncle often has these turns. (To his uncle.) You need to lie down, Uncle.

Sorin Yes, just for a minute ... But I'm still going into town ... I'll lie down for a while and then I'm going . . . Take my word for it . . .

He sets off, leaning on his stick. Medvedenko takes his arm.

Medvedenko Here's a riddle for you: on all fours in the morning, on two legs at noon and on three legs in the evening . . .

Sorin (laughing) I know that one. And flat on your back at night. Thanks, I can manage on my own . . .

Medvedenko No, come on, don't stand on ceremony! . . .

He leaves the room with Sorin.

Arkadina He gave me such a fright!

Treplev It doesn't do him any good living in the country. He gets depressed. If you could only be generous for once, Mother, and lend him fifteen hundred or two thousand, he'd be able to live in town for a whole year.

Arkadina I have no money. I'm an actress, not a banker.

Pause.

Treplev Mother, change my bandage for me. You're so good at it.

Arkadina fetches some iodoform and a box of bandages from the medicine cabinet.

Arkadina The Doctor's late . . .

Treplev He promised he'd be here by ten and it's already noon.

Arkadina Sit down.

She unwinds the bandage from his head.
You look as if you're wearing a turban. There was someone in the kitchen yesterday asking what nationality you were. It's almost completely healed up. Hardly anything there at all. *(She kisses his head.)* You won't play any more silly games with guns while I'm away, will you?

Treplev: No, Mother. It was just an insane moment of despair. I couldn't control myself. It won't happen again.

*(He kisses her hand.)* You have magic fingers. I remember, ages ago, when I was a little boy and you were still working at the State Theatre, there was a fight in the courtyard and a washerwoman who lived in our block was badly beaten up. Do you remember? She was unconscious by the time they got to her... you used to go and see her, you brought her medicine, you bathed her children in the tub. You must remember.

Arkadina: No.

*She puts on a fresh bandage.*

Treplev: There were two ballerinas living in our same block... They used to come for coffee with you.

Arkadina: That I do remember.

Treplev: They were very religious.

Arkadina: Fate.

Fate. Just recently, these last few days, I love you as tenderly and devotedly as I did when I was a child. You're all I have left now. Why is it, why do you let yourself be influenced by that man?

Arkadina: You don't understand him, Konstantin. He's a very honourable man... All the same, when he heard I was planning to challenge him to a duel, his honour didn't stop him panicking. He's getting out of here. Ignominiously running away!

Arkadina: Don't be ridiculous! I'm the one who's begging him to leave; you're an intelligent man, why won't you respect my freedom?

Treplev: I do respect your freedom, but then don't take away any freedom to think what I like about him. A very honourable man! Here we are virtually quarrelling over him, while he's in the drawing room or the garden having a good laugh at our expense... working on Nina, trying to convince her he's a genius.

Arkadina: You enjoy saying these horrible things to me. I admire that man and I must ask you not to insult him in front of me.

Treplev: Well, I don't admire him. You also want me to think he's a genius; well, I'm sorry, I can't lie about it, his books make me want to throw up.

Arkadina: Envy, people who have pretensions, but no talent, have no recourse but to put down real talent. It's their only consolation!

Treplev: *Ironically* Real talent! *(Angrily)* I have more talent than all the rest of you put together, if you want to know the truth! *(He rips the bandage off his head.)* You're all a rat, all of you, you've snatched top spot in the art world, and you think only the kind of stuff you do is bona fide and legitimate, and you suppress and silence everyone else! I don't believe in any of you! I don't believe in you or him! All he can do is drink beer and make love to other women!

Arkadina: Degenerate!...

Treplev: Go back to your beloved theatre and keep on acting in your pathetic, trivial plays!
Arkadina I have never acted in a play of that description. Just leave me alone! You couldn't even write the most abject pantomime. You're a petit-bourgeois from Kiev! Parasite!

Treplev Miser!

Arkadina Beggar!

Treplev sits down and bursts into silent tears.地中海! (She paces up and down, upset.) Don't cry. You mustn't cry... (She weeps.) Don't...

She kisses his forehead, his cheeks, the top of his head.

My dear son, forgive me... Forgive your wicked mother. Forgive your miserable mother.

Treplev (embracing her) If you only knew! I've lost everything. She doesn't love me, I can't write any more... I've lost all hope...

Arkadina Don't give in to despair... Everything will be all right. I'll take him away and she'll start loving you again.

She wipes away his tears.

That's enough. We're friends now.

Treplev (kissing her hands) Yes, Mother.

Arkadina Be friends with him as well. There's no need for a duel. Now is there?

Treplev All right... Just, Mother, don't make me see him again. It's too difficult for me... unbearable...

Trigorin comes in.

Right... I'm going...

*He hurriedly puts the medicine away in the cabinet.*

The Doctor can do the bandage later...

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Trigorin (looking through a book) Page 124, lines 11 and 12... Here we are... (He reads.) 'If my life could ever be of any use to you, come and take it.'

Treplev picks the bandage up from the floor and leaves the room. Arkadina looks at her watch.

Arkadina They'll be bringing the horses round soon.

Trigorin (to himself) If my life could ever be of any use to you, come and take it.

Arkadina Hope you're all packed?

Trigorin (impatiently) Yes, yes... (Pensively.) Why do I sense so much sadness in this appeal from a pure spirit and why does it squeeze my heart so painfully?... 'If my life could ever be of any use to you, come and take it.' (To Arkadina.) Let's stay one more day!

Arkadina shakes her head.

Come on, let's stay!

Arkadina Dearest, I know what's keeping you here. Try to control yourself. You're slightly intoxicated, try to sober up.

Trigorin You sober up as well, be sensible, be reasonable, I'm begging you, think of it all the way a real friend would...

*He squeezes her hand.*

You know how to make sacrifices... Be my friend, let me go free... 

Arkadina (extremely agitated) Are you completely infatuated?

Trigorin I'm attracted to her! Maybe she's exactly what I need.

Arkadina The love of some little provincial? Oh, you really don't know yourself at all!
Trigorin. People sometimes walk in their sleep. I'm talking to you, but I'm asleep and seeing her in my dreams... I'm enchanted by strange and pleasurable dreams... Let me go free.

Arkadina (trembling) No, no... I'm just an ordinary woman, you can't talk to me like that... You mustn't torture me, Boris... It frightens me...

Trigorin: If you wanted to, you could be extraordinary. Love—youthful, seductive, poetic, wafting you off into a dream world—it's the only thing in this world that can make you happy! I've never experienced a love like this... I never had time when I was young, I was harming the publishers, struggling with poverty... And now here it is, love, finally here, drawing me in... What's the point of running away from it?

Arkadina (angrily) You've taken leave of your senses!

Trigorin: What's wrong with that?

Arkadina: You're all tormenting me today, it's a conspiracy!

She weeps.

Trigorin: (clutching his head) She doesn't understand! She refuses to understand!

Arkadina: Am I so odious and ugly already that you can talk to me about other women with no shame?

She puts her arms around him and kisses him.

Oh, you're out of your mind! You gorgeous wonderful man... You're the last page of my life! (She falls to her knees.) My happiness, my pride, my joy... (She embraces his knees.) If you abandon me, even for an hour, I won't survive it. I'll go insane, my wonderful, magnificent man, my master...

Trigorin: Somebody might come in.

He helps her to her feet.

Arkadina: Let them, I'm not ashamed that I love you. (She kisses his hands.) My darling boodle, you want to descend into madness, but I won't let you, I'm not going to let you go free... (She laughs.) You're mine... you're mine... This forehead is mine, these eyes are mine, and this beautiful dark hair is mine as well...

All of you is mine. You're so talented, so intelligent; you're the best writer in Russia, you're this country's only hope... You have all this truthfulness and simplicity and originality and down-to-earth humour... You can convey the essence of an individual or a landscape with a single stroke, your characters come alive. Oh, no one can read you and not be smitten! You think I'm exaggerating? That I'm flattering you? Just look into my eyes... Look... Do you think I'm a liar? There, you see, I'm the only one who knows how to appreciate you; the only one who tells you the truth, my beloved, marvellous man... You are going to come away with me? Yes? You're not going to abandon me?...

Trigorin: I have no will of my own... I've never had a will of my own... Passive, feeble, always giving in—how can a woman possibly find that attractive? Take me, carry me off. And don't let me out of your sight for one second...

Arkadina: (to herself) Got him. (Relaxed, as if nothing has happened.) I mean, do stay, if you like. I'll leave on my own, and you can join me later, in a week or so. After all, there's no need for you to rush off.

Trigorin: No, let's leave together.

Arkadina: Whatever you like. We'll go together, if that's what you want...

Pause. Trigorin writes something in his notebook.

What are you doing?
Trigorin I heard a nice phrase this morning: 'the forest of
maidens'... Might come in handy. (He stretches.)
So, are we off, then? More railway carriages, stations,
buffets, lamb chops, conversations...

Shamrayev (entering) I have the honour to announce and
I'm sorry to say the horses are ready. Time to leave for
the station, dear lady; the train's due at 2.05. Would you
do me a favour, Irina Nikolayevna, could you remember
to find out what's happened to the actor Suzdal'tsev?
What's he doing? Is he alive? Is he well? Once upon a
time we used to go out drinking together... What he
did in The Mail Robbery, no one could touch him...
I remember Izmailov, another amazing character, always
acted in tragedies, was working with him at that time, in
Elisavetgrad... No rush, dear lady, you've got a good
five minutes. They once played co-conspirators in some
mellodrama, and when they were suddenly surrounded,
Izmailov was supposed to say: 'We're copped, it's a trap,'
but instead he said: 'We're stopped, it's a crap.' (He laughs
heartily.) 'It's a crap'...

While he's talking, Yakov is busy with the luggage, the
Maid brings Arkadina her hat, fur coat, umbrella and
gloves and everyone helps Arkadina put her things on.
The Cook peeps in from the left-hand door; after a
while, hesitantly, he comes into the room. Polina
comes in, followed by Sorin and Medvedenko.

Polina (carrying a basket) There are some plums here for
the journey... They're really sweet. You might be glad
of them...

Arkadina That's so kind of you, Polina.

Polina Goodbye, darling! If there was anything that
upset you, please forgive us.

She weeps.

Arkadina (embracing her) Everything was wonderful, it
was all wonderful. You mustn't cry.

Polina Time passes so quickly!

Arkadina What can you do?

Sorin enters from the left-hand door, wearing an
overcoat with a cape, his hat on and his stick in his
hand, and crosses the room.

Sorin Time we left, or you'll miss the train and all that
sort of thing. I'm getting in the carriage.

He leaves.

Medvedenko I'll walk over to the station... and see you
off. I'd better get a move on.

He leaves.

Arkadina Goodbye, my dears... If we're alive and well,
we'll all see each other again next summer.

The Maid, the Cook and Yakov all kiss her hand.

Don't forget me.

She gives the Cook a rouble.

Here's a rouble, split it between the three of you.

Cook Thank you, my lady, most respectfully. Have a
good trip! We're very grateful to you.

Yakov God be with you!

Shamrayev The odd letter would be really welcome!
Goodbye, Boris Alexeyevich!

Arkadina Where's Konstantin? Would you tell him I'm
leaving? I must say goodbye to him. Well, think of us
kindly. (To Yakov.) I've given Cook a rouble. It's for the
three of you to share.
Medvedenko Let's go home, Masha.

Masha (shaking her head) I'm staying here tonight.

Medvedenko (imploringly) Masha, please let's go! Our baby will be hungry.

Masha Nonsense. Matryona will feed him.

Pause.

Medvedenko It's not right. This'll be his third night without his mother.

Masha You've got it. There was a time you used to air your theories occasionally, now it's just baby, home, baby, home - and that's all I ever hear from you.

Medvedenko Let's go, Masha!

Masha You go.

Medvedenko Your father won't let me have a horse.

Masha Yes, he will. You ask him, he will.

Medvedenko All right, I'll ask him. You'll come back tomorrow?

Masha (taking a pinch of snuff) Yes, yes, tomorrow. Stop nagging.

Treplev and Polina come in; Treplev carrying a pillow and a blanket, Polina sheets and pillowcases; they put them on the divan, then Treplev crosses to his desk and sits down.

What's this about, Mother?

Polina Pyotr Nikolayevich wanted a bed made up in Kostya's room.

Masha I'll do it.

She starts making the bed.

Polina (sighing) Old people are like children...

She moves over to the desk, leans on her elbows and looks at a manuscript. Pause.

Medvedenko Well, I'll be going. Goodbye, Masha.

He kisses her hand.

Goodbye, Mother.

He tries to kiss Polina's hand.

Polina (irritably) Oh, go on, go if you're going.

Medvedenko Goodbye, Konstantin Gavrilovich.

Treplev shakes hands with him, says nothing.

Medvedenko leaves.

Polina (looking at the manuscript) Who could ever have guessed or imagined you'd finish up a proper writer, Kostya? And now, thank the Lord, here you are getting paid by the magazines.

She runs her hand through his hair.

And you've turned out quite handsome... Dear Kostya, you're so kind, can't you show a little bit more affection to my Mashenka?...

Masha (making the bed) I leave him alone, Mother.

Polina (to Treplev) She's a good girl.

Pause.

A woman doesn't need much, Kostya, just a kind look.

I know from personal experience.

Treplev gets up from his desk and leaves the room without speaking.

Masha Now you've made him angry. Why do you have to annoy him?
Polina. I feel sorry for you, Nastenka.

Masha. What use is that?

Polina. My heart aches for you. I see everything, I understand everything.

Masha. Don’t be ridiculous. Unrequited love is something that only happens in novels. It doesn’t mean a damn. All you have to do is get a grip on yourself and expect nothing, stop waiting for the tide to turn. Once love has dug its way into your heart, you just have to gouge it out again. They’ve promised to transfer my husband to another district. As soon as we move—I’ll forget everything. . . I’ll rip it out by the roots.

Two rooms away, someone is playing a melancholy waltz.

Polina. That’s Kosya playing. Means he’s depressed.

Masha. (silently dances a few waltz steps) The main thing, Mother, is not to have to lay eyes on him. If they’ll only give my Semyon his transfer, trust me, I’ll have forgotten him in a month. It’s all so ridiculous.

The left-hand door opens. Dorn and Medvedenko wheel in Sorin in his wheelchair.

Medvedenko. Six months to feed at home now. And hora’s gone up to two kopecks a pound.

Dorn. Keeps you on your toes.

Medvedenko. All very well for you to laugh, Money doesn’t keep you awake.

Dorn. Money? After thirty years of practice, my friend, practice so relentless I couldn’t call my soul my own. day or night, I managed to save no more than two thousand, all of which I spent on my recent trip abroad. I’m cleared out.

Masha. (to her husband) Have you still not gone?

Medvedenko. (guiltily) How can I? They won’t let me have a horse.

Masha. (bitterly annoyed, under her breath) I wish I’d never set eyes on you!

The wheelchair stays on the left-hand side of the room; Polina, Nastenka and Dorn sit down around it. Medvedenko, miserable, moves to one side.

Dorn. You’ve made so many changes! Turned the drawing room into a study.

Masha. It’s better for Konstantin Gavrilovich’s work. He can step out into the garden whenever he feels like it and think out there.

The Watchman taps.

Sorin. Where’s my sister?

Dorn. She’s gone to the station to meet Trigorin. She’ll be back soon.

Sorin. If you thought you needed to send for my sister, I must be seriously ill. (He’s silent for a while.) Funny thing, I’m seriously ill and they won’t give me any medicine.

Dorn. What do you fancy? Valerian drops? Soda? Quinine?

Sorin. Ah, here we go with the moralising. This is torture! (He indicates the door with his hand.) That for me?

Polina. For you, Pyotr Nikolayevich.

Sorin. Thank you.

Dorn. (jumping.) ‘Beneath the pale beams
Of the shrouded moon . . .”
Sorin I want to give Kosya a subject for a story. It's to be called: 'The Man Who Wanted To'. 'L'homme qu'a voulu'. Back in my youth, I wanted to be a writer - but I never did; I wanted to be a good speaker - and I was hopeless - (He mimics himself) 'and all that sort of thing, or something, er, um, you know what I mean?' And I used to take so long summing up, even I'd break out into a sweat; I wanted to get married - and I never did. I always wanted to live in the city - and here I am ending my days in the country and all that sort of thing.

Dorn Wanted to be a District Councillor - and succeeded.

Sorin (laughing) I didn't want that. It just happened.

Dorn Complaining about life when you're sixty-two, you must admit it's not very gracious.

Sorin You don't give an inch! Can't you understand, I want to live!

Dorn That's just foolish. Every life must come to an end, it's a law of nature.

Sorin That's the argument of a fulfilled man. Because you're satisfied, you don't care about life, nothing makes any difference to you. But even you'll be frightened when it's your turn to die.

Dorn Fear of death is purely animal. You have to overcome it. Being afraid of dying only makes sense for people who believe in eternal life and are worried about their sins. But, one, you're not a believer and two, what sins have you committed? You've served twenty-five years in the Justice Department - and that's it.

Sorin (laughing) Twenty-eight . . .

Treplev comes in; he sits on a stool at Sorin's feet. Masha never takes her eyes off him.

Dorn We're keeping Konstantin Gabrilovich from his work.

Treplev No, that's all right.

Pause.

Medvedenko Do you mind if I ask you, Doctor, when you were abroad, what was your favourite town?

Dorn Genoa.

Treplev Why Genoa?

Dorn Wonderful street life. You step out of your hotel in the evening, and the entire street is scorching with people. Then you drift with the crowd, quite aimlessly, up and down, to and fro, you integrate with it, blend with it psychologically, and you start to believe that a single universal soul, like the one Nina Zarechnaya portrayed in your play, is actually possible. By the way, where is Nina now? Where is she and how is she?

Treplev Well, as far as I know.

Dorn I heard she was leading a rather peculiar sort of life. How did that come about?

Treplev It's a long story, Doctor.

Dorn Give us the short version.

Pause.

Treplev She ran away from home and went to live with Trigorin. You know that much?

Dorn I do.

Treplev She had a baby. The baby died. Trigorin lost interest in her and returned to his former arrangements, as might have been expected. Not that he'd ever let them lapse, but somehow, cunningly and spitelessly, managed to keep everything going at once. As far as I can understand,
from what I’ve been told, Nina’s private life has been a complete catastrophe.

Dorn What about the theatre?

Treplev Even worse, apparently. She made her debut at some holiday resort outside Moscow, then left on a provincial tour. Throughout that period I never lost sight of her, and, for a while, I followed her wherever she went. She always took leading roles, but she played them cruelly, tastelessly, shouting her head off and waving her arms around. Occasionally, you could see some talent behind the shouting or in the way she died, but only very occasionally.

Dorn So she does have some talent?

Treplev Hard to tell. I’d say so. I saw her, but she wouldn’t see me, the servants wouldn’t let me in her hotel room. I understood the way she felt, I didn’t insist on seeing her.

Pause.

What else can I tell you? Later, after I came back home, I started getting letters from her. Warm, intelligent, interesting letters; she never complained, but I sensed she was profoundly unhappy; her sick, overwrought nerves showed in every line. Her mind was somewhat disturbed. She signed herself ‘The Seagull’. In Rusalka, the miller says he’s a raven, and in the same way she kept repeating in her letters that she was the seagull. She’s here, now.

Dorn What do you mean, here?

Treplev In town, staying at the inn. She’s been there about five days. I was going to go and see her, Masha has been, haven’t you, but she won’t see anyone. Semyon Semyonovich assures us he saw her out in the fields last night after dinner just over a mile from here.

Medvedenko That’s right, I did see her. She was walking away from here, back towards the town. I bowed to her and asked her why she hadn’t been to see us. She said she’d come.

Treplev She won’t come.

Pause.

Her father and stepmother have disowned her. They’ve put watchmen everywhere, so she can’t even get near the house.

He walks with Dorn over to the writing desk.

How easy it is, Doctor, to be philosophical on paper and how difficult it is in life!

Sorin She was a lovely girl.

Dorn What?

Sorin Lovely girl she was, I said. District Councillor Sorin was actually in love with her for a while.

Dorn You old Casanova.

Shamrayev laughs, offstage.

Polina Sounds as if they’re back from the station . . .

Treplev Yes, I can hear Mother.

Arkadina and Trigorin appear, followed by Shamrayev.

Shamrayev (as he comes in) We’re all getting old, battered by the elements, but you’re still young, dear lady . . . your light blouse, your liveliness . . . your grace . . .

Arkadina You’re just trying to jinx me, you boring man!

Trigorin (to Sorin) Hello, Pyotr Nikolayevich. Not ill again, are you? That’s not very good! (He sees Masha. Joyfully) Marya Ilyinichna!

Masha You recognised me.

She shakes his hand.
Trigorin  You married?
Masha   Ages ago.
Trigorin  Happy!

He bodes to Dorn and Medvedenko, before tentatively
approaching Treplev.

Irina Nikolayevna tells me you've forgotten the past and
you're not angry any more.

Treplev  holds out his hand.

Arkadina  [to her son] Boris Alekseyevich has brought the
magazine with your new story.

Treplev  (taking the magazine, to Trigorin)  Thanks.
You're very kind.

They sit down.

Trigorin  Greetings from all your admirers... Everyone
in Petersburg and Moscow is very interested in you, they
keep asking me about you. They want to know what
you're like, how old you are, are you dark, are you fair?
For some reason, everyone thinks you're no longer young.
And, of course, as you publish under a pseudonym,
no one's even old your real name. You're as mysterious as
the Man in the Iron Mask.

Treplev  Are you staying long?

Trigorin  No, I think I may go to Moscow tomorrow.
I have to. I'm in a rush to get a story finished, and I've
promised something for an anthology. Usual old story.

As they talk, Arkadina and Polina set up a card table
in the middle of the room and open it out. Shamilayev
lights the candles and arranges the chairs. A game of
Lotto is fetched out of the cupboard.

Weather's not very welcoming. The wind is vicious. If
it ches down tomorrow morning, I'll take myself down
to the lake for a spot of fishing. Which reminds me, I
must have a look at the garden and that place - you
remember? - where your play was performed. I've got
a new idea for a story. I just need to have a look at the
setting, refresh my memory.

Masha  (to her father)  Father, let my husband have a
horse! He needs to get home.

Shamilayev  (imitating her)  I have a horse... needs to
get home..."  (Severely)  See for yourself: they've just
been to the station and back. They can't be sent out
again.

Masha  There must be other horses...

She sees her father is taking no notice, waves a hand.

Trying to reason with you...

Medvedenko  I'll walk, Masha. Really...

Polina  (sighing)  Walk, in this weather...  (She sits down
at the card table.)  Oh, we go.

Medvedenko  I mean, it's only four miles... Goodbye.

He kisses his wife's hand.

Goodbye, Mother.

Polina  reluctantly holds out her hand, so he can kiss it.

I don't want to bother anyone, it's just the baby...  (He
bows to everyone.)  Goodbye....

He leaves, moving apologetically.

Shamilayev  He's all right to walk. He's not a general.

Polina  (knocking on the table)  Oh, we go. Don't let's
waste time, they'll be calling us to supper in a minute.

Shamilayev, Masha and Dorn sit at the table.
Arkadin (to Trigorin) When the long autumn evenings draw in, we always play Lotto. Have a look, it's the same old Lotto set we had when our mother used to play with us, when we were children. Wouldn't you like to join us in a game before supper?

She sits at the table with Trigorin.

It's a boring game, but it's not so bad once you get used to it.

She hands three cards to everyone. Treplev is leafing through the magazine.

Treplev He's read his own story, but he hasn't even cut the pages of mine.

He puts the magazine on the desk, then heads for the left-hand door, as he passes his mother, he kisses her on the head.

Arkadin What about you, Kostya?

Treplev I'm sorry, I don't really feel like it . . . I'm going for a walk.

He leaves the room.

Arkadin The stake is ten kopecks a game. Put mine in for me, will you, Doctor?

Dorn Done.

Masha Everyone's stakes in? Here we go . . . Twenty-two!

Arkadin I have it.

Masha Three! . . .

Dorn Yes.

Masha Three, did you put it down? Right! Eighty-one! Ten!

Shamrayev Not so fast.

Arkadin I was so well received in Kharkov, my goodness, my head's still spinning!

Masha Thirty-four!

A melancholy waltz starts up, offstage.

Arkadin Those students gave me such an ovation . . . Three baskets of flowers, two bouquets and this . . .

She unfastens a brooch from her lapel and throws it on to the table.

Shamrayev That is something . . .

Masha Fifty! . . .

Dorn Five-o? Round fifty?

Arkadin I had this astonishing outfit . . . Whatever else you might say about me, I do know how to dress.

Polina Kostya's playing. The poor boy's depressed.

Shamrayev He doesn't get very good reviews.

Masha Seventy-seven!

Arkadin What difference does that make?

Trigorin It's never quite worked for him . . . He's still searching for his own voice. There's something weird and impressionate about his work, sometimes it's almost hallucinatory. Not one single living character.

Masha Legs eleven!

Arkadin (glancing at Sorin) Perusha, are we boring you?

Pause.

He's fast asleep.

Dorn The District Commissioner sleeps.
Masha Seven! Ninety!

Trigorin If I'd lived on an estate like this, beside a lake, d'you imagine I'd ever have become a writer? I'd have subdued this passion and I'd never do a thing but fish.

Masha Twenty-eight!

Trigorin Catching a ruff or a perch - heaven!

Dorn Well, I believe in Konstantin Gavrilovich. He's got something! He's got something! He thinks in images, his stories are vivid and colourful, and they really move me. It's just a pity he has no definite objective. He creates an impression, that's all, and you won't get far on nothing but impressionism. Irina Nikolayevna, are you pleased your son is a writer?

Arkadina Can you imagine, I've still never read a word he's written. I can never find the time.

Masha Twenty-six!

Treplev comes in quietly and crosses to his desk.

Shamrayev (to Trigorin) By the way, Boris Alexeyevich, we still have that thing of yours.

Trigorin What thing?

Shamrayev That seagull Konstantin Gavrilovich shot, you asked me to have it stuffed.

Trigorin I don't remember that. (He thinks for a moment.) I don't remember!

Masha Clickety-click, sixty-six! On its own, number one!

Treplev (throws open a window and listens) It's so dark! I don't understand why I'm feeling so jumpy.

Arkadina Shut the window, Kostya, there's a draught.

Treplev closes the window.

Masha Eighty-eight!

Trigorin Full house! I win, ladies and gentlemen.

Arkadina (delighted) Bravo! Bravo!

Shamrayev Bravo!

Arkadina That man has all the luck, whatever he does. (She gets up.) Let's go and have something to eat, shall we? The great man didn't have any lunch today. We'll play some more after supper. (To her son.) Kostya, leave your old manuscripts, come and join us.

Treplev I don't want anything, Mother, I'm not hungry.

Arkadina Please yourself.

She wakes up Sorin.

Supper time, Petrusha!

She takes Shamrayev's arm.

I must tell you about the way they received me in Kharkov...

Polina snuffs out the candles on the table; then she and Dorn push the wheelchair. They all leave through the left-hand door; Treplev remains alone on stage, sitting at his desk. He's getting ready to write by reviewing what he's already written.

Treplev I've said so much about new forms, but now I feel as if, gradually, I'm turning conventional myself. (He reads.) 'The poster on the wall trumpeted ... Her pale face, framed in dark hair ...' 'Trumpeted', 'framed' ... Clichés. (He crosses the sentence out.) I'll start from where he's woken up by the sound of the rain and cut all the rest. The description of the moonlit evening is long and far too elaborate. Trigorin's worked out his own
Trepley. No one's going to come in.

Nina. I know Irina Nikolaevna's here. Lock the door.

Trepley. Locks the right-hand door and crosses to the left-hand door.

Trepley. There's no lock on this door. I'll put a chair in front of it. (She moves an armchair against the door.) Don't be afraid, no one's going to come in.

Nina. (gazing intently at his face.) Let me look at you. (She looks around.) So warm and nice... Before, this used to be the drawing room. Have I changed much?

Trepley. Yes... You've lost weight and your eyes are bigger, Nina, it's so strange that you're here in front of me. Why didn't you let me see you? Why didn't you come sooner? I know you've been in the area almost a week now... I've been to visit you every day, several times, I've been standing beneath your window like a beggar.

Nina. I was afraid you'd hate me. Every night I dream you look straight at me and don't recognise me. If you only knew! From the minute I arrived, I've spent all my time walking up and down... beside the lake. I've come close to your house so many times and I couldn't ever bring myself to cross the threshold. Can we sit down?

They sit down.

Let's sit and talk for a while, just talk. It's so nice here, warm and comfortable... Can you hear the wind? There's a line in Turgenev: 'On a night like this... happy the man with a roof over his head and a warm corner to rest in.' I'm the seagull... No, that's not right. (She rubs at her forehead.) What was I saying? Oh, yes... Turgenev... And may God help every homeless wanderer... It doesn't matter.

She starts sobbing.

Nina. Is it easy to him now... He gives you the back of a broken bottle glittering by the weir and the shadow of the mill-wheel—and there's your ready-made moonlit night, whereas I have the trembling light, the shimmering silence of the stars and the faraway sounds of the grand piano, dying away in the still, sweet-smelling air... Excruciating.

Trep.
Nina: It's nothing, it's good for me... It's been two years since I've been able to cry. I went into the garden last night to see if our stage was still in one piece. And it is, it's still standing. I cried for the first time in two years, and it did me good, it eased my spirit. See, I've stopped crying.

_She takes him by the hand._

So, you're a writer now... You're a writer and I'm an actress... You and I, we're both caught in the whirlpool... I used to be as joyful as a child - every morning I'd wake up singing! I loved you and dreamed of fame - and now? First thing tomorrow, I'm travelling third class to Yelets... with the peasants; and in Yelets the culture-loving tradesmen will harass me with their attentions.

Life is ugly!

_Treplev._ Why Yelets?

Nina: I've signed up for the winter season. It's time to go.

_Treplev._ Nina, I cursed you. I hated you, I tore up all your letters and photographs, but I never stopped knowing that my son was tied to yours through eternity. I don't have the strength to stop loving you, Nina. Ever since I lost you and my work started to be published, my life has been unbearable - I'm in torment... In some way my youth has been torn away from me, and I feel as if I've already been alive on this earth for ninety years. I call to you, I kiss the ground you walk on everywhere I look. I see your face, your tender smile, which lit up the best years of my life...

Nina (disgusted): Why is he saying all this, why is he saving all this?

_Treplev._ I'm so lonely, there's no warmth or affection in my life, I'm as cold as if I lived in a dungeon, and everything I write is dry, flat and dreary. Stay here, Nina, please, I'm begging you, or let me come away with you!

_Nina hurriedly puts on her hat and cape._

Nina: Why? For God's sake, Nina...

_He watches her putting on her things._

_Nina._ The horses are waiting by the garden gate. Don't see me off, I'd rather go on my own... (Through her tears.) Can I have some water...?

_Treplev._ Take your water! Where are you going now?

_Nina._ Back into town.

_Pause._

Is Innna Nikolayevna here?

_Treplev._ Yes... My uncle was taken ill on Thursday and we sent her a telegram asking her to come.

_Nina._ Why did you have to say you kiss the ground I walk on? I deserve to be killed. (She leans across the desk.) I'm so exhausted! If only I could get some rest... rest! (She lifts her head.) I'm the squalid... No, that's not right. I'm an actress. Ah, well!

_She hears Arkadina and Trigorin laughing, listens closely for a moment, then runs over to the left-hand door and looks through the keyhole._

So he's here as well... (She turns back to Treplev.) Ah, well... It doesn't matter... Yes... He never believed in the theatre, he laughed at my dreams, and gradually I stopped believing as well and lost heart... And then there were the stresses of love and jealousy and the constant anxieties about my little boy... I became petty and trivial. I started acting badly... I couldn't work out what to do with my arms, I forgot how to stand on stage, I lost control of my voice. You've no idea what it's like...
to know you're acting appallingly. I'm the seagull. No, that's not right . . . Do you remember shooting a seagull? A man happens to come by, sees her, and for want of
anything better to do, he destroys her . . . an idea for a
short story. That's not right. (She rubs her forehead.)
What was I saying? . . . I was talking about acting. I'm
not like that any more . . . I'm a proper actress now; I
enjoy acting, I love it, I find being on stage intoxicating.
It makes me feel beautiful. And now, down here, I've
been walking and walking, thinking as I walk, thinking
and feeling the way my spiritual strength is growing, day
by day . . . I know now, Kostya, I understand that in our
work—doesn't matter whether it's acting or writing—
what's important isn't fame or glamour. None of the
things I used to dream about, it's the ability to endure.
To be able to bear your cross and keep the faith. I do
have faith, and it's not so painful any more, and when
I think about my vocation, I'm not afraid of life.

Treplev (saldly) You've found your way and you know
where you're going, but I'm still drifting through a maze
of dreams and images, with no idea what use it might be.
I have no faith and I don't know what my vocation is.

Nina (listening) Shh . . . I must go. Goodbye. When I
become a great actress, come and have a look. Do you
promise? But now . . .

She shakes his hand.

It's getting late. I can hardly stand up . . . I'm exhausted,
I'm hungry . . .

Treplev Wait, I'll get you some supper . . .

Nina No, no . . . Don't see me off, I'll go on my own . . .
The horses aren't far . . . So, she brought him with her?
Well, what difference does it make? When you see
Trigorin, don't say anything to him . . . I love him. I love
him even more than I did . . . An idea for a short story . . .
I love him, I love him passionately. I love him desperately.
Wasn't it good here in the old days, Kostya, do you
remember? What a lovely, warm, joyful, pure life it was,
and what feelings we had—feelings like fragile, exquisite
flowers . . . Do you remember? . . . (She recites) "Human
beings, lions, eagles and partridges, startled deer, geese,
spiders, fish, silent beneath the waters, startish and
invisible microscopic creatures—all living things, all
living things, all living things, their tragic cycle finally
complete, are now extinct . . . For thousands of centuries,
no living species has moved across the face of the earth,
and this poor man has slain her lamp in vain. The
cranes no longer wake whooping in the meadow and in
the lime groves the May beetles are silent . . ."

She impulsively embraces Treplev and runs out by the
glass door. Rate.

Treplev I hope no one runs into her in the garden and
tells Mother. She'd be upset . . .

For the next two minutes, he silently rips up all his
manuscripts and throws them under the desk; then
unlocks the right-hand door and leaves.

Dorn (struggling to open the left-hand door) Strange.
The door seems to be locked . . .

He comes in and puts the armchair back in its proper
place.

Obstacle course.

Arkudina and Polina come in, followed by Yakov,
carrying bottles, and Muskat, then Shammuyer and
Trigorin.

Arkudina Put the water and Boris Alexeyev's beer on
the table. We'll play as we drink. Sit down, everyone.
Polina (to Yakov) And let's have the tea as well.

She lights the candle and sits at the card table;  
Shamrayev is taking Trigorin over to the bookcase.

Shamrayev Here's what I was talking about just now . . .  
(He takes the stuffed seagull out of the bookcase.) This is  
what you ordered.

Trigorin (looking at the seagull) I don't remember that.  
(He thinks for a moment.) I don't remember!

A shot is heard, offstage right; everyone reacts.

Arkadina (frightened) What's that?

Dom Nothing. Probably something exploding in my  
medicine bag. Not to worry.

He goes out of the right-hand door, returns half a  
minute later.

As I said. A bottle of ether burst. (He bums.) 'Here I am  
at your feet . . .'

Arkadina (sitting at the table) Oof, that gave me a fright.  
It reminded me of . . . (She covers her face with her  
hands.) For a moment, everything went black . . .

Dom (leafing through a magazine, to Trigorin) There  
was an article in this about two months ago . . . a report  
from America, and I wanted to ask you about it . . .

He's leading Trigorin downstage, an arm round his  
waist.

Because I've always been fascinated as to why . . . (In an  
utertone, lowering his voice.) Get Irina Nikolayevna  
out of here, any way you like. The fact is, Konstantin  
Gavrilovich has shot himself . . .

Curtain.