

SEAGULL

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS BY

ANTON CHEKHOV

TRANSLATED BY

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SEAGULL
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Dramatis Personae

MADAME IRINA ARKADINA, an actress

CONSTANTINE TREPLEV, her son

PETER SORIN, her brother

NINA ZARECHNAYA, daughter of a wealthy landowner

ILYA SHAMRAYEV, the manager of Sorin's estate

PAULINA SHAMRAYEV, his wife

MASHA, his daughter

BORIS TRIGORIN, a writer of fiction

YEVGENY DORN, a doctor

SEMYON MEDVEDENKO, a teacher

YAKOV, a servant

MAID

Setting

The action takes place on Sorin's estate.

Two years pass between the third and fourth acts.

SEAGULL

ACT ONE

A park on Sorin's estate. A small, temporary stage is built in the middle of the avenue, the kind that would be thrown together for amateur theatricals. The curtain is drawn and obscures the lake completely.

The sun has just set. Masha and Medvedenko enter.

MEDVEDENKO. Why are you always wearing black?

MASHA. This is mourning for my life. I'm unhappy.

MEDVEDENKO. Why? I don't understand... You're healthy, your father's not rich, but you have enough. My life is much harder than yours. I make twenty-three rubles a month, and they subtract some from that for the retirement fund, and I don't go around wearing mourning.

MASHA. Money isn't the point. Even a poor man can be happy.

MEDVEDENKO. Theoretically, yes. But in real life, it works out like this: me, and my mother, and my two sisters, and my little brother, all on my salary of twenty-three rubles a month. We need to eat and drink, right? What about tea and sugar? What about tobacco? It always comes back around to money.

MASHA. The play will begin soon.

MEDVEDENKO. Yes. Nina is playing the lead. In that piece that Constantine composed. They are in love, and today their souls will become united as they strive to realize their common artistic vision. My soul and your soul, however, have nothing in common. I love you, I can't sit at home, I long for you so much. Every day I walk four miles here and four miles back, and I'm confronted only by

your indifference each time. It's perfectly understandable. I have nothing but this large family... Who wants to marry someone who has nothing?

MASHA. Don't be ridiculous. (*Takes snuff.*) Your love is touching, but I can't return it, that's all. (*Offers snuff.*) Have some.

MEDVEDENKO. I don't want any.

Pause.

MASHA. So muggy, must be a storm on the way tonight. All you ever talk about is money. According to you, there's nothing worse than poverty. I think it's a thousand times easier to go around in nothing but rags, begging, than... What does it matter, you won't understand...

Enter Sorin and Treplev. Sorin walks with a cane.

SORIN. The country isn't for me, my boy, and the thing of it is, I can never get used to it. Last night I went to bed at ten, woke up this morning around nine, and I couldn't shake the feeling that my brain was glued to the inside of my skull from all that sleep. And after lunch, I fell asleep again. Now I'm just worn out, all kinds of bad dreams, and all...

TREPLEV. It's true, you're better off in town. (*Seeing Masha and Medvedenko.*) Please, we'll call you when we're ready, but you can't be here right now. Please leave.

SORIN. Masha, would you be so kind as to ask your father to see that the dog is let off her leash, or she'll just keep barking. Kept my sister up all night.

MASHA. Ask him yourself, I'm not going to. If you'll excuse us. (*To Medvedenko.*) Let's go!

MEDVEDENKO. (*To Treplev.*) Please send someone to tell us when it starts.

They exit.

SORIN. That means that dog is going to be barking all night again. Same old story, I can never live my life how I want to when I'm here. There was a time when I would have nearly a month off, and I would come here to rest and all. But no sooner would I arrive, and the same old crap would start up, and I'd want to get the hell out on

the very first day. (*Laughs.*) The greatest pleasure in coming here was leaving here. Of course, now I'm retired, there's nowhere to go really. Just keep on living, whether you feel like it or not...

Yakov enters.

YAKOV. We're going for a swim, Mr. Constantine.

TREPLEV. Just make sure you're back and at places in ten minutes. (*Looks at his watch.*) We'll begin soon.

YAKOV. Right.

Yakov exits.

TREPLEV. There's a real theater for you. A curtain, two wings, and an open playing space. No scenery. The whole thing opens right onto the lake and the horizon. The curtain goes up at exactly eighty-three, just as the moon is rising.

SORIN. Spectacular.

TREPLEV. If Nina is late, then, of course, the whole effect will be lost. She should have been here by now. Her father and stepmother watch her every move, it's harder for her to get out of her house than it is to escape from prison.

He fixes his uncle's tie.

Your hair and beard are a mess. We've got to get you a haircut.

SORIN. The tragedy of my life. Even when I was young I looked like this, like I was drunk and all. Women never took to me. Why is my sister so gloomy?

TREPLEV. Why? Bored. Jealous. She's already against me, against my play, because she's not acting in it, Nina is. She hasn't even read the play and she already hates it.

SORIN. (*Laughs.*) You're making that up...

TREPLEV. She's annoyed that on this little stage, it's Nina that will be the star, not her. She's a psychological curiosity, my mother. She's unquestionably talented, she's smart, she's so empathetic that she'll bawl her eyes out over a novel, she can recite love poems by heart and tends to you like an angel when you're sick. But just try to say one kind word about Eleonora Duse in her presence. Oh-ho-ho! You can only sing her praises, write about her, cry about her, go into ecstasy about her performance in *Camille* or in *The Fumes of*

Life. Here, in the country, there's none of that to feed her habit, so she gets bored and nasty, and we're all her enemies, we're all to blame. On top of that, she's superstitious, afraid of three candles on the table, of the number thirteen. And she's cheap. She has seventy thousand in the bank in Odessa, I know that for a fact! But just ask her for a loan and she'll burst into tears.

SORIN. You've decided that she doesn't like your play, so you're getting all worked up. Your mother adores you.

TREPLEV. (*Pulling the petals off of a flower.*) She loves me, she loves me not, she loves me, she loves me not, she loves me, she loves me not. (*Laughs.*) See, she doesn't love me. What's more, she wants to live, to love, to wear fancy clothes, but here I am, twenty-five years old and a constant reminder that she is no longer young. When I'm not around, she's thirty-two. When I am, she's forty-three, so she hates me for that. She also knows that I don't accept her kind of theater. She loves the Theater, she thinks she is serving humanity with her sacred art! All I see is that the contemporary theater is nothing but the same old thing, the same old conventions. The curtain goes up, those bright lights come on, and you have a room with three walls! And those great talents, the high priests of that sacred art will demonstrate for you how people eat, drink, love, walk, and wear their coats! From those sad little pictures and words, they try to squeeze a moral—of course, only palatable, little morals, please, something we can all agree upon as wrong, or scandalous, something safe that we can take home with us and trot back out over supper! When they've smothered me for the thousandth time with the same thing over and over and over, then I run and I run. Like Maupassant ran from the Eiffel Tower, its ugliness crushing his brain.

SORIN. We can't do without the theater.

TREPLEV. But we need new forms! New forms are necessary, otherwise it's better to have nothing at all. (*Looks at his watch.*) I love my mother, I love her so much, but the kind of life she leads, carrying on with that writer of hers, her name in all of the papers. It makes me sick. I know that's just me being selfish, but sometimes I hate that my mother is a famous actress! I guess I would be happier if she was just an ordinary woman. Uncle Peter, do you know that I constantly find myself in a room with her and all of these famous

people, actors, writers, artists? And the only one who is a nobody... is me. Can you imagine anything more awful, more stupid? Tolerated just because I'm her son. Who am I? What do I do? Left university in my third year, due to circumstances beyond our control, as they say. No talent, no money, passport says I'm not even Russian, no, just a middle-class nobody from Kiev. Thanks to my father—Kiev, middle class. Of course, *he* was a famous actor. So here we are, at these parties and all of those writers and artists turn in my direction, with such kind interest and attention. I can feel them measuring me with their eyes, realizing that I am nothing. I know what they're thinking. I just feel so small...

SORIN. Speaking of writers, tell me about that one of hers. What sort of fellow is he? I don't get him. He's so quiet.

TREPLEV. He's smart, simple, a little melancholy, you know. Very proper. He's turning forty soon, but he's already famous and very well-fed. As for his writing, what can I say? It's nice, there's talent there, but after Tolstoy or Zola, you wouldn't want to read Trigorin.

SORIN. I love literary men, my boy. Two things I wanted once upon a time, more than anything else: to get married and to become a literary man. Neither one worked out. Yes. Even if you aren't all that successful, it would be nice.

TREPLEV. (*Listening.*) I hear footsteps... I can't live without her, even the sound of her footsteps is beautiful. I'm insanely happy.

He goes to meet Nina as she enters.

My enchantress, my dream...

NINA. (*Out of breath.*) I'm not late... Tell me I'm not late.

TREPLEV. No, no, no...

NINA. All day, I was so upset, I was so frightened! I was afraid that my father wouldn't let me out of the house. But he just left with my stepmother. The sky was turning red, the moon was already rising, but I drove my horse, just drove him. (*Laughs.*) Now I'm happy.

SORIN. (*Laughs.*) Your little eyes look like they were crying... that's not good!

NINA. It's just... I'm still catching my breath. I have to leave in a half an hour, we'd better hurry. You mustn't, mustn't keep me any



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When a famous actress and her entourage, consisting of family, staff, and admirers, take up residence at her lakeside summer estate, everyone finds themselves in pursuit of attention and unconditional love. Capturing the power of art, romance, and family, Chekhov's witty and soul-stirring masterpiece is a map of the human heart.

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