

The Seagull

ACT ONE

A part of the park on SORIN's estate. A broad avenue leads away from the audience deep into the park toward the lake. The avenue is obstructed by a stage, hastily constructed for a home performance, and the lake is therefore not visible. To the left and right of the stage are shrubs. There are several chairs and a small table.

The sun has just set. On the stage, behind the lowered curtain, are YAKOV and the other WORKMEN; the sound of coughing and hammering is heard.

MASHA and MEDVEDENKO enter from the left, returning from a walk.

MEDVEDENKO: Why do you always go around wearing black?

MASHA: I am in mourning for my life. I'm unhappy.

MEDVEDENKO: But why? (*Deep in thought.*) I don't understand... You're in good health. Your father — all right, he may not be rich, but he's not poor either. I'm much worse off than you. I earn a total of twenty-three rubles a month, and that's before they deduct for the pension fund, and you don't see me walking around in mourning.

They sit.

MASHA: It's not a question of money. Even a poor man can be happy.

MEDVEDENKO: That's in theory, but in practice, it goes like this: There's me, plus my mother, plus two sisters and a little brother, all on a salary of twenty-three rubles. Now, we have to eat and drink, don't we? What about tea and sugar? What about tobacco? You see, it's goes on and on.

MASHA: (*Looking at the stage.*) The play will be starting soon.

MEDVEDENKO: Yes. Nina Zarechnaya is performing in a play written by Konstantin Gavrilovich. They're in love with one another, and tonight their souls will unite in a single sublime artistic expression. And your soul and mine? They will never even meet. I love you, I can't bear to stay home and long for you, so I walk over every day, four miles here and four miles back, just to watch you sit around 'in mourning.' Well, who can blame you? I don't have any money, I've got a big family... Who would want to marry a man who can't even support himself?

MASHA: Nonsense. (*Takes snuff.*) Your love is touching, really it is, but the feeling's not mutual, and that's that. (*Offers him the snuff box.*) Here, go on, have some.

MEDVEDENKO: No, I don't feel like it.

Pause.

MASHA: It's stifling out...there'll be a storm tonight for sure. You know, you spend all your time philosophizing, or whining about money. For you, there's no greater tragedy than poverty. But for me, it's a thousand times easier to go around in rags, begging, than to...Oh, what's the use, you wouldn't understand...

SORIN and TREPLEV enter from stage right.

SORIN: (*Leaning on a cane.*) There's something about the country, my friend, I don't know what it is, but I shall never get used to it, no doubt about it. Last night I went to bed at ten, and woke up at nine this morning from the deepest sleep, feeling as if my brain had been stuck to my skull, or something to that effect. (*Laughs.*) And after lunch, it seems I dropped off again, and now I feel like a total wreck. Really, it's a nightmare, in the end...

TREPLEV: It's true, you're better off living in town. (*Sees MASHA and MEDVEDENKO.*) Everyone, when it's time to start, we'll call you, but for now, you're not supposed to be here. Would you please go?

SORIN: (*To MASHA.*) Marya Ilyinichna, would you kindly ask your papa to have his dog untied, otherwise she howls. My sister was kept up again all night.

MASHA: You can ask my father yourself, I'm not going to. Spare me, please. (*To MEDVEDENKO.*) Let's get out of here!

MEDVEDENKO: (*To TREPLEV.*) Let us know when it's curtain time.

They both exit.

SORIN: That means the dog will howl again all night long. The fact is, I've never been able to live in the country, not the way I'd like to. Once upon a time, I'd take a month's vacation, just to come out for a rest, that's all, but here they plague you with so much nonsense that after one day I couldn't wait to leave. (*Laughs.*) Always, it was such a pleasure to leave... But, now that I'm retired, and so on, where else is there to go, in the end? So, here I live, whether I like it or not...

YAKOV: (*To TREPLEV.*) Konstantin Gavrilovich, sir, we're going for a swim.

TREPLEV: All right, but be back in ten minutes for places. (*Checks his watch.*) It's almost time to start.

YAKOV: Right-o, sir. (*Leaves.*)

TREPLEV: (*Looking at the stage.*) Now this is a theatre! The curtain, the wings, and beyond, nothing but empty space. No scenery of any kind. An open vista stretching clear to the lake and the horizon. The curtain goes up at exactly eight-thirty, just when the moon is rising.

SORIN: Magnificent.

TREPLEV: If Nina is late, then of course the whole effect is lost. She should have been here by now. Her father and stepmother are standing guard, for her to get out of the house is like escaping from prison. (*Straightens his uncle's tie.*) Your hair and beard are a mess. You need a haircut, or something...

SORIN: (*Combing his beard.*) It's the tragedy of my life. Even when I was young, I always looked as though I'd been out drinking, that's all. Women never seemed to fall in love with me. (*Sitting.*) So tell me, why is my sister in such a bad mood?

TREPLEV: Why? She's bored. (*Sits down next to him.*) She's jealous. She's against me and the performance and the play, and that's because Nina is in it and she isn't. She doesn't know a thing about my play, and already she hates it.

SORIN: (*Laughs.*) Oh come now, really...

TREPLEV: Already she's in a "state," because here upon this pathetic little stage it will be Nina's hour, not hers. (*Looks at his watch.*) A psychological wonder — that's my mother. Unquestionably talented, brilliant, capable of falling to pieces over a book she's reading, of rattling off all of Nekrasov by heart, of nursing the sick like an angel — but just try mentioning the name of Duse in her presence, and 'oh-ho'! No, we must sing her praise and hers alone — yes, sing it, write it, shout it — wild, ecstatic praise over her stunning performance in *La Dame Aux Camélias* or God only knows what play. But here, in the country, where you can't get that drug for her, she gets

bored and evil-tempered, and all of us — we are her enemies, everything's our fault. And she gets so superstitious — she's afraid of three candles burning or whether it's the thirteenth day of the month. And stingy? She has 70,000 rubles in the bank in Odessa, that I know for a fact. But ask her to lend you anything, and she bursts into tears.

SORIN: You've gotten it into that head of yours that your mother doesn't like your play, and you're all worked up in advance, that's all. Calm down, your mother adores you.

TREPLEV: (*Plucking 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. (*Laughs.*) You see, my mother doesn't love me. And why should she? She wants romance and adventure, a whole new life for herself, a gay, romantic life, and here I am, twenty-five years old, a constant reminder that she's not so young any more. When I'm not around, she's only thirty-two, and when I am, presto! — she's forty-three, and she hates me for it. She also knows I don't believe in the 'theatre,' such as it is. She adores the theatre — she thinks she's serving mankind and her sacred art, but if you ask me, our theatre of today is dull and narrow-minded. Every evening, when the curtain goes up, and there under the bright lights, in a room with three walls, those celebrated artists, those high priests of our sacred art, when they play it all out before us, how we mortals eat, and drink, and love, and go around wearing our clothes and leading our lives; when out of this vulgar scenario we are served up some kind of message or moral, however meagre, ready for our daily domestic consumption; when after its one thousandth incarnation all these plays seem to me to be the same, time after time after time the same, then I flee — I flee like Maupassant fled the Eiffel Tower, because it outraged him how enormously trite it was.

SORIN: Without the theatre, nothing is possible.

TREPLEV: We need new forms. We must have new forms, and if we don't we might as well have nothing at all. (*Looks at his watch.*) I love my mother, I love her very much, but she leads a chaotic life, forever carrying on with that novelist, her name all over the papers — and I've had it with her. Although sometimes I think it's my own mortal ego; I feel sorry for myself that I have a famous actress for a mother, and if only she were an ordinary woman, oh, how happy I would be. Uncle, can you imagine a more desperate and pathetic situation: Here she is, holding court in her own home, surrounded by all sorts of artists and writers, and there, in the midst of all these luminaries sits the only nobody — me, and why do they tolerate me, because I am her son. And who am I? What am I? I left the university in

my third year, due, as they say, to “circumstances beyond one’s control,” or whatever the phrase is — with no talent, no money, and a passport announcing, loud and clear, that I am a member of the Kiev bourgeoisie. Yes, indeed, my father was a true member of the Kiev bourgeoisie, although he also happened to have been a well-known actor. And thus, it came to pass, when in my mother’s living room, all these artists and writers bestowed upon me their benevolent attention, it dawned on me that what they really were doing was sizing me up in all my insignificance. I could read their minds, and how I suffered from the humiliation.

SORIN: By the way, tell me, please, what kind of a fellow is this novelist? I don’t have a sense of him. Never says a word.

TREPLEV: Oh, intelligent, straightforward, somewhat aloof, I suppose. And very respectable. You know, not quite forty, already famous, and full of himself... As for his writing, well...what can I tell you? It’s charming, it’s witty...but...after Tolstoy or Zola, who wants to read Trigorin?

SORIN: Ah, my dear boy, how I love the literati! Once upon a time I wanted two things passionately: to get married and to become a man of letters. And what do you know, I didn’t do either. Yes. And to have been a minor man of letters, now that would have been lovely, in the end.

TREPLEV: (*Listens.*) I hear footsteps... (*Embraces his uncle.*) I can’t live without her...Even the sound of her footsteps is beautiful...I’m out of my mind with happiness. (*Crosses quickly to meet NINA ZARECHNAYA as she enters.*) My darling, my dream...

NINA: (*Agitated.*) I’m not late...Tell me I’m not late...

TREPLEV: (*Kissing her hands.*) No, no, no...

NINA: All day long I’ve been so upset, it was terrifying! I was afraid my father wouldn’t let me come...But he just went out with my stepmother. The sky was red, the moon was rising, and I kept driving the horses, faster and faster. (*Laughs.*) But now I’m so happy. (*Presses SORIN’s hand warmly.*)

SORIN: (*Laughs.*) So, we’ve been crying! No, no, we can’t have that!

NINA: I can’t help it...Look, I can hardly catch my breath. And I have to leave in half an hour, we must hurry. For God’s sake, don’t make me late, please don’t! My father doesn’t even know I’m here.

TREPLEV: Anyway, it’s time to start. We’d better go call everyone.

SORIN: I’ll do it, that’s all. Right away. (*Goes off singing.*) “In France, two grenadiers!...” (*Looks around.*) You know, once when I started singing, just like this, one of the deputy prosecutors said to me: “Your Excellency, what a powerful voice you have...” Then, he thought for a moment and added: “Powerful...and awful.” (*Laughs and exits.*)

NINA: My father and his wife won't allow me to come here. They say it's too Bohemian... They're afraid I'll become an actress... But I'm drawn here, to the lake, just like a seagull. My heart is so full of you. *(She looks around.)*

TREPLEV: We're alone.

NINA: It feels as if there's someone there...

TREPLEV: No, no one.

They kiss.

NINA: What kind of tree is this?

TREPLEV: Elm.

NINA: Why is it so dark?

TREPLEV: It's evening, everything looks dark. Don't leave early, I beg of you.

NINA: I can't stay.

TREPLEV: What if I come to your house, Nina? I could stand in the garden all night and gaze at your window.

NINA: Don't. The guard will see you. And Trezor doesn't know you yet — he'll bark like mad.

TREPLEV: I love you.

NINA: Shhh...

TREPLEV: *(Hearing footsteps.)* Who's there? Is that you, Yakov?

YAKOV: *(From behind the stage.)* Yes it is, sir.

TREPLEV: Call places. It's time to start. Is the moon rising?

YAKOV: Yes it is, sir.

TREPLEV: Do you have the spirits ready? And the sulphur? When the red eyes appear, there has to be the smell of sulphur. *(To NINA.)* Go — everything's ready. Are you nervous?...

NINA: Yes, very. Your mother — never mind, I'm not afraid of her, but Trigorin's here... I'm absolutely terrified, I'm ashamed to perform in front of him... He's such a great writer... Is he young?

TREPLEV: Yes.

NINA: What wonderful stories he writes!

TREPLEV: *(Coldly.)* I wouldn't know... I haven't read them.

NINA: It's so hard to be in your play... There are no living characters in it.

TREPLEV: Living characters! The point is not to show life as it is, or as it should be, but as we dream it to be!

NINA: But there's so little action in your play, only speeches. And in a play, above all, there must be love...

They both go behind the stage. Enter POLINA ANDREEVNA and DORN.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: It's getting damp out. Go back and put on your galoshes.

DORN: I'm hot.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: You don't take care of yourself! You're so pig-headed. And you're a doctor — you know very well that damp air is bad for you, but no, better I should suffer while you sit out on the terrace all last evening just to spite me...

DORN: *(Singing.)* "Don't say that our youth has been wasted..."

POLINA ANDREEVNA: You were so caught up in conversation with Irina Nikolaevna that you didn't even notice how cold it was. It's obvious you're infatuated with her...

DORN: Polina, I'm fifty-five years old.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: Nonsense, for a man that's not old. You're in excellent shape and still very attractive to women.

DORN: So what do you want me to do?

POLINA ANDREEVNA: You kiss the ground she walks on just because she's an actress! You and everyone else!

DORN: *(Sings.)* "Again, before you, I stand..." Look, just because the world loves artists, and treats them differently than, let's say, merchants — well, that's just the way of the world. Call it — idealism.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: Women are always falling for you and hanging around your neck. Is that idealism, too?

DORN: *(Shrugs.)* Well, I don't know. I've always gotten along with women. And what they like about me most is that I'm an excellent doctor. Ten, fifteen years ago, remember, I was the only decent obstetrician in the entire province. And then I've always been an honorable man.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: *(Takes his hand.)* My darling!

DORN: Shhh, They're coming.

Enter ARKADINA on SORIN's arm, with TRIGORIN, SHAMRAEV, MEDVEDENKO, and MASHA.

SHAMRAEV: At the Poltava Festival in '73 she gave an amazing performance! Pure delight! A marvelous performance! And whatever happened to the comedian Chadin, Pavel Semyonich Chadin? His Rasplyuyev was immortal, better even than Sadovsky's, I swear to you, my esteemed lady. Where is he now?

ARKADINA: You keep asking me about people from before Noah's Ark. How on earth should I know? *(Sits.)*

SHAMRAEV: *(Sighs.)* Pashka Chadin! They don't make them like that any more. The theatre is dead, Irina Nikolaevna! Once there were mighty oak trees, and now we see only stumps.

DORN: There isn't much brilliant talent around any more, it's true, but your average actor is a lot better than he used to be.

SHAMRAEV: I beg to disagree. But then again, it's always a matter of taste. "De gustibus aut bene, aut nihil."

TREPLEV appears from behind the stage.

ARKADINA: *(To her son.)* My darling son, when does it all begin?

TREPLEV: In a minute. Just be patient, please.

ARKADINA: *(Reciting 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:

"Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed
Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty..."

A horn sounds from behind the stage.

Ladies and gentlemen, your attention please.

Pause.

Let the play begin. *(Knocks his baton and speaks loudly.)* "O, you venerable, ancient shadows who nightly linger o'er this lake, lull us to sleep, and let us dream of what life will be in two hundred thousand years!"

SORIN: In two hundred thousand years, there will be nothing.

TREPLEV: Good, let them show us that "nothing."

ARKADINA: Yes, let them. We'll sleep.

The curtain rises; a view of the lake is unveiled; the moon is on the horizon, its

reflection in the water; NINA ZARECHNAYA sits on a large rock, dressed all in white.

NINA: "Men, lions, eagles, and partridges, horned stags, geese, spiders, the silent fish dwelling deep in the water, starfish, and those invisible to the naked eye — all life, all life, all life, its sad cycle ended, has died away... Thousands of centuries have passed since the earth has borne any living creature, and the poor moon in vain lights up her lantern. No longer do the waking cranes cry out in the meadow, and maybugs are silent in the lime groves. Cold, cold, cold. Empty, empty, empty. Terrible, terrible, terrible.

Pause.

All living creatures have disappeared into dust, eternity has cast them into stone, water, and cloud — but their souls have all melted into one. And I, I am the universal soul... In me lives the soul of Alexander the Great, and Caesar, and Shakespeare, and Napoleon, and the very lowest form of life. In me human consciousness and animal instinct are one, and I remember all, all, all, each and every life I relive again."

The marsh-lights appear.

ARKADINA: (*Whispers.*) Something from the Decadent School.

TREPLEV: (*Pleading, reproachful.*) Mama!

NINA: "I am alone. Once every one hundred years I open my lips to speak. My lonely voice echoes into the void, and no one hears me... And you, too, pale fires, you do not hear me... Born before dawn from the rotting swamp, you drift into daybreak, thoughtlessly, aimlessly, listlessly. Fearing that you will spring to life, the father of all matter, the devil, changes you, moment by moment, atom by atom, as if you were stone and water, and you change and change. One thing, and one alone in this universe, stays eternal, unchanging — and that is the eternal spirit.

Pause.

Like a captive, cast into a deep and empty well, I know not where I am and what awaits me. Only this I know — that in the cruel confrontation with the devil, master of all material matter, I am destined to triumph, and spirit

and matter will unite in glorious harmony. Thus begins the reign of the universal will. But this shall come slowly, after endless, endless multiples of millennia, while the moon, and bright Sirius, and the earth itself turn to dust...And until that time, what horror, what horror. . .

Pause; against the background of the lake, two red points of light appear.

My mighty opponent, the devil, approaches. I see his terrible, crimson eyes."
ARKADINA: It smells like sulphur. Is this really necessary?

TREPLEV: Yes.

ARKADINA: *(Laughs.)* Ah, yes, special effects!

TREPLEV: Mama!

NINA: "He longs for human company..."

POLINA: *(To DORN.)* You took off your hat. Put it on, or you'll catch cold.

ARKADINA: The Doctor's taken his hat off to the devil, the father of eternal matter.

TREPLEV: *(In a rage.)* The play's over! That's enough! Curtain!

ARKADINA: Why are you so angry?

TREPLEV: That's enough! Curtain! Can we have the curtain! *(Stamps his foot.)*
Curtain!

The curtain falls.

Forgive me! I've forgotten that writing plays and acting on the stage are only for the chosen few. I've trespassed on your territory! I... *(Wants to say more, but instead waves his hand and exits left.)*

ARKADINA: What's the matter with him?

SORIN: Irina, darling, that's not the way to treat a sensitive young man.

ARKADINA: Well, what in the world did I say to him?

SORIN: You offended him.

ARKADINA: He told us beforehand it was all in fun, so that's how I took it, for fun.

SORIN: But still...

ARKADINA: Now it appears that he's written a great masterpiece. I mean, really! Here he went and put on this show and sprayed us all with sulphur, not to entertain us, but to teach us a lesson on how to write plays and how to act on the stage. Really, it's too much. And these constant attacks against me, these diatribes, say whatever you like, I am sick and tired of them. He's a willful, egotistical little boy.

SORIN: He only wanted to please you.

ARKADINA: Is that so? Then why didn't he choose a real play, instead of making us sit through all this decadent delirium. I mean, for the sake of fun, I'll even put up with delirium, but all this pretentiousness about new forms, about a new era for the theatre...As far as I'm concerned, what we got tonight was bad form.

TRIGORIN: Each of us writes what he wants to and what he can.

ARKADINA: Fine, let him write whatever he feels like writing, only spare me, please.

DORN: Ah, Jupiter, thou art angered.

ARKADINA: I'm not Jupiter, I'm a woman. (*Lights up a cigarette.*) And I'm not angry, only it irritates me to see a young man waste his time like that. I didn't mean to hurt his feelings.

MEDVEDENKO: No one has any reason to separate the spirit from matter anyway, since for all we know, the spirit itself may be made up of nothing more than an aggregate of atoms. (*Quickly, to TRIGORIN.*) Now, you know, someone should write a play about the life of our friend the schoolmaster, and produce that. What a hard, hard life!

ARKADINA: Of course it is, but please, let's not talk about plays any more, or about atoms. What a glorious evening! Listen, everyone, is that singing? (*Listens.*) How lovely!

POLINA ANDREEVNA: It's on the other shore.

Pause.

ARKADINA: (*To TRIGORIN.*) Sit next to me. Ten, fifteen years ago, on this lake, you could hear music and singing almost every night, it never ceased. Here on this shore there are six country estates. I remember the laughter, the noise, the guns going off, and people falling in love, falling in love...And the leading man in all this, the idol of all six estates was, ladies and gentlemen, I give you (*nods to DORN*) Doctor Yevgeny Sergeich. I mean, he is charming now, but in those days he was irresistible. But now my conscience is starting to bother me. Why did I hurt my poor boy? I'm so upset. (*Loudly.*) Kostya! Son! Kostya!

MASHA: I'll go look for him.

ARKADINA: Please do, darling.

MASHA: (*Goes off left.*) A-oo! Konstantin Gavrilovich...A-oo! (*Exits.*)

NINA: (*Coming out from behind the stage.*) Well, it seems we're not going on

any further, so I can come out now. Good evening! (*Kisses ARKADINA and POLINA ANDREEVNA.*)

SORIN: Bravo! Bravo!

ARKADINA: Bravo! Bravo! We were all charmed. With those looks and that wonderful voice, it's a sin to be stuck out here in the country. You've got talent! Do you hear me? You absolutely must go on the stage!

NINA: Oh, that is my dream! (*Sighs.*) But it will never happen.

ARKADINA: Who knows? Now, let me introduce Trigorin, Boris Alekseevich.

NINA: Oh, I'm so delighted... (*Embarrassed.*) I always read your work...

ARKADINA: (*Sitting NINA down beside her.*) Don't be embarrassed, darling.

For a celebrity, he's just an ordinary fellow. You see, he's embarrassed, too.

DORN: They can lift the curtain now, can't they? It's eerie like that.

SHAMRAEV: (*In a loud voice.*) Yakov — raise the curtain, will you, fellow?

The curtain goes up.

NINA: (*To TRIGORIN.*) It is a strange play, isn't it?

TRIGORIN: I didn't understand a word of it. But I enjoyed watching it. Your acting is so truthful. And the set was beautiful.

Pause.

There must be a lot of fish in this lake.

NINA: Yes.

TRIGORIN: I love to fish. For me, there is no greater pleasure than to sit on the shore of the lake at day's end, and gaze at the float on the end of the line.

NINA: But I always thought that, for one who has experienced the joy of creativity, no other pleasures exist.

ARKADINA: (*Laughing.*) Don't talk like that. When you flatter him, he wishes he could simply disappear.

SHAMRAEV: I remember once in Moscow at the opera, when the famous Silva sang a low C. Now that night, it just so happened that one of the basses from our local church choir was sitting in the gallery. Imagine our utter amazement when all of a sudden we heard from the gallery: "Bravo, Silva," an entire octave lower... Just like this (*in a low voice*): "Bravo, Silva"... I mean, the entire theatre just froze.

Pause.

DORN: An angel of silence has flown over us.

NINA: Oh, I must go. Good-bye.

ARKADINA: Where are you going? Why so early? We won't let you.

NINA: Papa will be waiting up for me.

ARKADINA: He's something, your father, really...

They kiss.

Ah, well, what can we do. Such a pity to let you go.

NINA: If only you knew, how hard it is for me to leave!

ARKADINA: Someone should take you home, my sweet.

NINA: (*Frightened.*) Oh no, no!

SORIN: (*Imploring.*) Stay!

NINA: I can't, Pyotr Nikolaevich.

SORIN: Stay just one hour longer, that's all. Come now, what can it hurt...

NINA: (*After a moment, in tears.*) I can't. (*Shakes hands and quickly exits.*)

ARKADINA: Pathetic girl, really. They say her late mother left an enormous fortune to her husband, all of it, down to the last kopek, and now this poor girl is left with nothing, because her father promised it all to his second wife. It's shocking.

DORN: Let's do him justice, her dear papa is a first-class scoundrel.

SORIN: (*Rubbing his hands together.*) Come on, everyone, let's go in. It's getting damp out. My legs ache.

ARKADINA: Those legs of yours, they're as stiff as wood. You can hardly walk. Come, ill-fated old man. (*Takes his arm.*)

SHAMRAEV: (*Offers his hand to his wife.*) Madam?

SORIN: That damn dog is barking again, I can hear it. (*To SHAMRAEV.*) Ilya Afanasevich, be a good fellow, tell them to untie her.

SHAMRAEV: I can't, Pyotr Nikolaevich, so sorry. I'm afraid thieves might get into the barn. I've got millet in there. (*Walking alongside of MEDVEDENKO.*) Yes, a whole octave lower: "Bravo, Silva." And not even a soloist, just a lowly member of the church choir.

MEDVEDENKO: And how much salary does a church choir member get paid?

They all exit, except DORN.

DORN: (*Alone.*) I don't know. Maybe I don't understand anything, or maybe I'm crazy, but I really liked that play. There's something about it. When that little girl talked about loneliness, and then, when the red devil eyes

appeared, I was so excited, my hands shook. So fresh, so innocent... Here comes the man himself. I want to be complimentary.

TREPLEV: (*Enters.*) No one's here.

DORN: I am.

TREPLEV: Masha's been looking for me all over the grounds. Unbearable creature.

DORN: Konstantin Gavrilovich, I liked your play enormously. Yes, it was a bit strange, and of course I haven't heard the ending yet, but nevertheless it had a tremendous impact on me. You're a talented fellow — you must keep on writing.

TREPLEV squeezes his hand tightly and embraces him impetuously.

Whoa, how sensitive you are. You've got tears in your eyes... What was I saying? Oh, yes. You picked a topic from the realm of abstract ideas. That was right — a work of art must always express some great thought. It's only worthwhile if it's profound. How pale you are!

TREPLEV: Then you're saying I should keep on writing?

DORN: Of course... But write only about what is meaningful, what is eternal. You know, I've lived a very full life, I've lived it well, I'm content, but if ever I had the chance to feel that surge, that inspiration an artist feels when he's creating, why then I would shed my material cloak, with all its earthly trappings, and I'd take to the air, I'd soar.

TREPLEV: Forgive me, but where is Nina?

DORN: And another thing. Work with clarity, with purpose. Know why you're writing, otherwise you'll go down the aesthetic road with no destination, you'll lose your way, and your talent will be your downfall.

TREPLEV: (*Impatiently.*) Where's Nina?

DORN: She went home.

TREPLEV: (*In despair.*) What am I going to do? I want to see her... I must see her... I'm going...

MASHA enters.

DORN: (*To TREPLEV.*) Calm down, my friend.

TREPLEV: No, really, I'm going. I must go.

MASHA: Go home, Konstantin Gavrilovich. Your mama is waiting for you. She's worried.

TREPLEV: Tell her I left. And please, all of you, leave me alone, I beg of you. Leave me alone! Stop following me around!

DORN: Now, now, now, my dear fellow...don't be like that...it's not good for you.

TREPLEV: *(In tears.)* Good-bye, Doctor. Thank you...*(He exits.)*

DORN: *(Sighing.)* Ah, youth, youth!

MASHA: That's what they all say, when there's nothing else left: "Ah, youth, youth..." *(Takes snuff.)*

DORN: *(Grabs the snuff box and flings it into the bushes.)* That's disgusting!

Pause.

I think they've started playing cards up at the house. We'd better go in.

MASHA: Wait!

DORN: What?

MASHA: I want to say something to you. I feel like talking for a minute.

(Upset.) I don't like my father...but there's a special place in my heart for you. For some reason, I've always felt deep down inside that you're close to me...Help me, please. Help me, or else I'll do something foolish, make a mockery of my life, ruin it...I can't go on...

DORN: What? Help with what?

MASHA: How I'm suffering. No one, no one knows my suffering! *(Lays her head on his chest, quietly.)* I love Konstantin.

DORN: How neurotic you all are! So neurotic! And all this love...Oh, the spells this lake casts! *(Tenderly.)* So, what can I do, my child, tell me? What? What?

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

A lawn for playing croquet. Far upstage right is the house, with a large terrace. Upstage left, the lake is visible, with the sparkling reflection of the sun. Flower gardens. Noontime. It is hot. To the side of the lawn, in the shadow of an old linden tree, ARKADINA, DORN, and MASHA sit on a bench. A book lays open on DORN's knees.

ARKADINA: *(To MASHA.)* Come on, let's stand up.

Both stand.

Side by side. All right, here we are. You're twenty-two, and I'm almost twice your age. Yevgeny Sergeich, which one of us looks younger?

DORN: You, of course.

ARKADINA: You see...and why? Because I'm always working, feeling, I'm in constant motion, always, while you're stuck in once place and never move, you're not alive. And I live by a golden rule — never look into the future. I never think about old age, or death. What will be, will be. You can't escape it.

MASHA: And I feel as if I were born centuries ago. I drag my life around behind me, like a dress with an endless train...And often I don't even feel like living any more. *(Sits.)* Of course, this is all nonsense. Cheer up, snap out of it.

DORN: *(Singing softly.)* "Tell her, my flowers..."

ARKADINA: Then again, my dear, I can be as proper as the English. I'm very well-behaved, as they say, always dressed up and done up 'comme il faut.' And I wouldn't be caught dead going out of the house, even into my own garden, in a housecoat or without my hair done. Ever. No, I've kept in good shape, I've never gotten frumpy, never let myself go, like some women...*(With hands on her hips, walks up and down the lawn.)* Look, light as a bird. I could play a fifteen year old.

DORN: Hmmm, yes. In the meantime, however, why don't I continue. *(Picks up the book.)* We had stopped at the part about the corn dealer and the rats.

ARKADINA: Right, the rats. Go on. *(Sits down.)* Wait a minute, hand it over, I'll read. It's my turn. *(Takes the book and looks for her place.)* And the rats...Here it is...*(Reads.)* "And so, it stands to reason, for society people to nurture novelists and invite them into their homes is as dangerous as it is for a corn merchant to breed rats in his barn. And yet they love to do it. So, when a woman picks a writer whom she wants to captivate, she

besieges him with compliments, little kindnesses, indulgences..." Well, maybe that's the way the French do it, but that's certainly not our style, we have no such custom. Here, a woman is usually head over heels in love with her writer first, before she tries to capture him, if you please. You don't have to go far for an example. Take me and Trigorin...

Enter SORIN, leaning on a cane, and beside him, NINA; MEDVEDENKO pushes an empty wheelchair behind them.

SORIN: *(In a gentle tone meant for children.)* So? Are we all happy? Happy at last? *(To his sister.)* Yes, today we are ecstatic! Our father and stepmother have gone off to Tver, and we're free for three whole days!

NINA: *(Sits next to ARKADINA and embraces her.)* I'm so happy! Now I'm all yours!

SORIN: *(Sits in his wheelchair.)* Doesn't she look radiant today!

ARKADINA: She looks lovely, stunning...What a clever girl she is! *(Kisses NINA.)* Let's not praise her too much, it will bring bad luck. Where is Boris Alekseevich?

NINA: He's down by the bathhouse, fishing.

ARKADINA: You'd think he'd get sick of it! *(She goes to read some more.)*

NINA: What are you reading?

ARKADINA: Maupassant. "On the Water," darling. *(She reads a few lines to herself.)* Oh, well, the next part is dull and inaccurate, anyway. *(Closes the book.)* I'm so anxious. Tell me, what's the matter with my son? Why is he so moody and depressed? He spends the entire day by the lake, and I hardly ever lay eyes on him.

MASHA: He's sick at heart. *(To NINA, shyly.)* Please, recite something from his play!

NINA: *(Shrugs her shoulders.)* Do you really want me to? It's so uninteresting.

MASHA: *(Restraining her delight.)* When he reads from his own work, his eyes shine and his face grows pale. He has such a wonderful, mournful voice, and the ways of a poet.

SORIN's snoring can be heard.

DORN: Pleasant dreams.

ARKADINA: Petrusha!

SORIN: Hah?

ARKADINA: Were you asleep?

SORIN: Just a little.

Pause.

ARKADINA: You're not taking any medicine, that's not good, brother dear.

SORIN: I'd be happy to, but my doctor doesn't want to prescribe it.

DORN: Prescriptions, at sixty years of age!

SORIN: Even at sixty, you still want to go on living.

DORN: (*Annoyed.*) So, take some valerian drops.

ARKADINA: I think it's best if he went to a spa somewhere.

DORN: What? Fine. He can go, or he can not go. Whatever.

ARKADINA: And what is that supposed to mean.

DORN: Nothing in particular. It's all very clear, really.

(Pause.)

MEDVEDENKO: Pyotr Nikolaevich should give up smoking.

SORIN: Nonsense.

DORN: No, it's not. Liquor and tobacco deprive you of your 'self.' Smoke a cigar or drink vodka and you're no longer Pyotr Nikolaevich, you're Pyotr Nikolaevich plus someone else; your true 'self' fades away, and you start seeing yourself in the third person.

SORIN: (*Laughs.*) It's easy for you to say. You've lived your life, but what about me? I've spent twenty-eight years in the department of justice, and still haven't lived, when all's said and done, still haven't really experienced anything, and how I long to live, no doubt about it. You have it all, so what do you care, you can afford to be philosophical, but now it's my turn, I want to live, so I have a sherry and a cigar after dinner, that's all. And that's all.

DORN: You must take life seriously; seeking medical treatment at sixty for a case of self-pity and lost youth, sorry, but that's simply indulgent.

MASHA: (*Stands up.*) It must be time for lunch. (*She walks slowly, limping.*) My leg fell asleep... (*Exits.*)

DORN: She'll go and put away two drinks before lunch.

SORIN: That poor girl has no happiness in life.

DORN: Oh, come on, Your Excellency.

SORIN: You talk like a man who's had everything.

ARKADINA: God, what can be more deadly than this sweet country boredom?

It's hot, it's quiet, nobody doing anything, everyone sitting around philosophizing... Good to see you, my friends, nice to hear you talk, but... frankly, I'd much rather be sitting in my hotel room learning a new part!

NINA: (*Thrilled.*) Oh, yes! I know what you mean.

SORIN: Of course it's much better living in town. You sit in your own study, no one gets past the doorman, you have a telephone, plenty of cabs out in the street, that's all...

DORN: (*Singing.*) "Tell her, my flowers..."

SHAMRAEV enters, followed by POLINA ANDREEVNA.

SHAMRAEV: Here they are! And good day to you all! (*Kisses ARKADINA's hand, then NINA's.*) What a pleasure it is to see you in good health. (*To ARKADINA.*) My wife says you're planning to go into town together today, is that right?

ARKADINA: Yes, we are.

SHAMRAEV: Hmm... Well, that's wonderful, yes, but how are you planning to go, my dear lady? We're hauling rye today, and all our workmen are tied up. And what horses were you thinking of using, may I ask?

ARKADINA: What horses? How on earth should I know?

SORIN: We've got the carriage horses, don't we?

SHAMRAEV: (*Agitated.*) Carriage horses? And where am I going to find a yoke for them? Hm? Where? Tell me? This is unbelievable! Incredible! My esteemed lady! Please, forgive me, I worship your talent, I'd give you ten years of my life, but horses I cannot give you.

ARKADINA: But what if I absolutely must go? Oh, this is extraordinary!

SHAMRAEV: My esteemed lady! You don't understand what's involved in farming!

ARKADINA: (*In a rage.*) It's the same old story. In that case, I'm going to Moscow today. Hire horses for me in the village, or else I'll walk to the station.

SHAMRAEV: (*In a rage.*) In that case, I resign. Go find yourself another manager. (*Exits.*)

ARKADINA: Every summer it's the same thing, every summer I am insulted. I'll never set foot in this place again. (*Exits left, in the direction of the bath-house; in a minute, she is seen crossing to the house, followed by TRIGORIN with a fishing rod and bucket.*)

SORIN: (*In a rage.*) What insolence! God only knows what is going on here! I am sick of it. Order all the horses immediately!

NINA: (*To POLINA ANDREEVNA.*) Saying no to Irina Nikolaevna, the famous actress! Isn't any wish of hers, even a whim, more important than your farming? It's simply incredible!

POLINA ANDREEVNA: (*In despair.*) But what can I do? Put yourself in my place: What can I do?

SORIN: (*To NINA.*) Let's go after my sister... We'll all beg her to stay. All right? (*Looks in the direction in which SHAMRAEV exited.*) Unbearable man! Tyrant!

NINA: (*Restrains him from getting up.*) Sit, sit... We'll take you in...

She and MEDVEDENKO push the wheelchair.

Oh, how terrible this is!...

SORIN: Yes, yes, it is terrible... But he won't leave, I'll talk to him right away.

They leave; only DORN and POLINA ANDREEVNA remain.

DORN: People are so boring. The truth is, your husband should have been thrown out by his neck, but in the end, you know, that silly old sissy Pyotr Nikolaevich and his sister will offer him an apology! You'll see!

POLINA ANDREEVNA: He sent the carriage horses into the field. And every day there's a misunderstanding like this. If only you knew how it upsets me. It makes me ill; look, I'm trembling...I can't bear his crudeness. *(Imploring.)* Yevgeny, dearest, darling, take me away with you...Our time is running out, we're not young any more. If only at the end of our lives we could stop hiding, stop lying...

Pause.

DORN: I'm fifty-five years old, it's already too late to change my life.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: I know why you're rejecting me, I know there are other women. Just remember, you can't have them all. I understand. I'm sorry I've bothered you, you're tired of me.

NINA appears by the house; she is picking flowers.

DORN: No, I'm not.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: I'm tormented with jealousy. Of course, you're a doctor, you can't avoid women. I understand...

DORN: *(To NINA, who is approaching.)* What's going on?

NINA: Irina Nikolaevna is weeping, and Pyotr Nikolaevich is having an asthma attack.

DORN: *(Stands.)* I'm going to give them both some valerian drops...

NINA: *(Gives him flowers.)* Here you are!

DORN: "Merci bien." *(Goes toward the house.)*

POLINA ANDREEVNA: *(Going with him.)* What lovely flowers! *(Near the house, in a low voice.)* Give me those flowers! Give them to me! *(Takes them, tears them up, and throws them on the ground.)*

Both go into the house.

NINA: *(Alone.)* How strange it is, to see a famous actress cry, and for such a silly reason! And isn't it strange, a celebrated writer, adored by the public, his name in all the papers, his picture sold everywhere, his work translated into foreign languages, — and he spends all day fishing and is thrilled that he's caught two chubb! I always thought that famous people were proud,

unapproachable, that they hated crowds, that they used their fame and brilliance to seek vengeance on a world that holds birth and money above all. But no, here they cry, they fish, play cards, laugh, and get angry, like everyone else...

TREPLEV: (*Enters without a hat, with a gun and a seagull he has killed.*) Are you alone here?

NINA: Yes.

TREPLEV places the seagull at her feet.

What does this mean?

TREPLEV: Today I have done something despicable — I have killed this seagull. I lay it at your feet.

NINA: What's the matter with you? (*Picks up the seagull and looks at it.*)

TREPLEV: (*After a pause.*) Soon, in the same way, I shall kill myself.

NINA: I don't know you any more.

TREPLEV: Yes, right, ever since I stopped knowing you. You've changed toward me, your eyes are cold, you're embarrassed by my presence.

NINA: You've become so irritable lately, and I can't understand what you're saying, you talk in symbols. And now this seagull, it must be some kind of symbol too, only, forgive me, I don't understand it. (*Places seagull on the bench.*) I'm too simple to understand you.

TREPLEV: It all started that night, when my play failed so miserably. Women don't forgive failure. I burned it all, all of it, down to the last page. If only you knew, how unhappy I am. You're cold to me, and it's so terrible, so incredible, it's as if I woke up and saw that the lake had suddenly dried up, or drained into the earth. You just said you were too simple to understand me. Oh, what is there to understand?! They hated my play, you despise my inspiration, you already think of me as mediocre, insignificant, like so many others... (*Stamps his foot.*) How well I understand it all, how well! It's like a nail boring into my brain, and curse it — and curse my pride too, it's sucking my life away, sucking it away like a viper... (*Sees TRIGORIN, walking and reading a book.*) Here comes the true literary genius, walking like Hamlet, and with a book, too. (*Mocks him.*) "Words, words, words..." This sun has scarcely shone upon you yet, and already you're smiling, your eyes are melting in his rays. I won't stand in your way. (*Exits quickly.*)

TRIGORIN: (*Writing in a book.*) Takes snuff and drinks vodka... Always wears black. Loved by the schoolmaster...

NINA: Hello, Boris Alekseevich!

TRIGORIN: Hello. Unforeseen circumstances have arisen, and it seems we're

leaving today. That means we probably won't see each other again. And what a pity. I don't often get the chance to meet young women, so young and so attractive, and I've completely forgotten, can't even imagine, what it feels like to be eighteen-nineteen years old — that's why all the young girls in my stories don't ring true. I'd give anything to be in your place, just for one hour, to know how you think and what kind of creature you are.

NINA: And I'd love to be in your place.

TRIGORIN: Why?

NINA: To know what it's like to be a famous, gifted writer. What does fame really feel like? And what does that feeling do to you?

TRIGORIN: What does it feel like? Nothing special, really. I've never thought about it. (*After a moment.*) Either you have an exaggerated view of my fame, or else I'm not feeling it, one or the other.

NINA: And when you read about yourself in the papers?

TRIGORIN: When they praise you, it's very pleasant, and when they call you names, then you feel badly for a few days.

NINA: What a wonderful world! If only you knew, how much I envied you! People have different destinies. Some just drag out their dull, dreary existence, all of them the same, all unhappy; others, like you, for example — you're one in a million — you've been given a fascinating, brilliant life, a meaningful life...you're happy...

TRIGORIN: Me? (*Shrugs.*) Hmm...here you are, talking about fame, happiness, about some kind of brilliant, fascinating life, but for me they are just pretty words, forgive me, like candy, which I never indulge in. You're so young and naive.

NINA: But you have a wonderful life!

TRIGORIN: What's so good about it? (*Looks at his watch.*) I have to go and write now. I'm so sorry, I don't have any time... (*Laughs.*) You...how shall I put it...you've stepped on my toes, as they say, and frankly it's gotten to me and I'm a little annoyed. All right, so let's talk about it. Let's talk about my wonderful, brilliant life...Where shall we begin? (*After a moment's thought.*) Let's talk about obsession, when, for example, a man will think night and day about nothing else except the moon. Well, I have had my own moon. Day and night, one persistent thought will overpower me; and I have to write, I have to write, I *have* to...And no sooner do I finish one story, then for some reason I have to write another, and then a third, and after that a fourth...I'll write constantly, as if I'm in a relay race, I can't stop. What's so wonderful and brilliant about that, I ask you? Oh, what a cruel life! Here I am with you, all excited and yet the whole time, I am

thinking about the unfinished story that's waiting for me. I'll see that cloud up there, the one that looks like a piano. And I'll think: I've got to put that in a story somewhere, how a cloud was sailing by, a cloud that looked like a grand piano. The smell of heliotrope. Right away I'll make a note of it: sweetish scent, pinkish purple, use it when describing a summer's evening. Every phrase, every word you and I are saying right now, I'll snatch them up as fast as I can and lock them away in my literary closet: Perhaps I'll use them one day! And when I'm through working, I'll run off to the theatre, or go fishing, to rest, to lose myself, — but no, there it is, already casting around in my head like an iron cannonball, a new plot, and already it's pulling me back to my desk, and again I'm racing to write it down, to write, and write. And that's the way it always is, always, I have no peace from myself, and I feel that I'm devouring my own life, that in order to get that sweet honey I give to my nameless, faceless public, I'm gathering the pollen from my own best flowers, then tearing these flowers up, and trampling their roots. Now, really, am I not crazy? Do my nearest and dearest treat me as if I were a sane man, really? "What are you writing now? What new gift will you bestow upon us next?" And so on, and so on, always the same thing over and over again, and I begin to think that all this attention my friends give to me, the praise, the admiration — that it's all a lie, that they're deceiving me, like they would a sick man, and sometimes I'm terrified that what they're really going to do is creep up behind me, grab me, and carry me off to the madhouse, like that poor fellow in Gogol's story. And even in the early years, the best years, when I was starting out, my writing was one continuous torture. A young writer, especially when he hasn't had any luck yet, feels clumsy, awkward, out of place, he's tense, on edge; he's constantly hanging around other writers and artists, unrecognized, unnoticed, afraid to look anyone straight in the eye, like a compulsive gambler who has no money. I could not see my reader, but somehow I imagined him as unfriendly, mistrustful. And I was afraid of my audience, they terrified me, — every time my newest play would open, there they were before me, and I would imagine that everyone with dark hair was hostile, and everyone with fair hair was cold and indifferent. Oh, how terrible! What torture!

NINA: Forgive me, but inspiration and the creative process, don't they give you the moments of greatest happiness?

TRIGORIN: Yes. When I'm writing, it's fine. And when I'm reading the proofs, it's fine...but...it hasn't even come off the press, and already I can't stand it, it's all wrong, it's a mistake, I never should have written it, and I'm irritable, I feel terrible... (*Laughs.*) Meanwhile, the public is reading: "Yes,

it's charming, it's witty, but Tolstoy it's not," or "Wonderful, but Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* is better." And so, to my dying day, it will always be "charming and witty," "charming and witty" — and never anything more, and when I'm dead and gone, all my friends will say, as they file past my grave: "Here lies Trigorin. He was a good writer, but not as good as Turgenev."

NINA: Forgive me, but I can't understand you. You're just spoiled by success.

TRIGORIN: What success? I've never liked myself, and I don't like my own work. Worst of all, I live in some kind of daze and often don't even understand what I'm writing...Look — I love this lake, the trees, the sky, I feel nature, it arouses a great passion in me, an uncontrollable urge to write. But I'm not just a landscape painter, am I, I'm a Russian, I love my native land, the people, I feel that since I am a writer, I am obliged to write about the people, about their suffering, about their future, to address the issues of science, the rights of man, and so on and so on, and so I write about all of it, urgently, and they drive me on and on, angrily, they come at me from all sides, and back and forth I chase, like a fox with the hounds at my heels, and all the while life and science advance onward, ever onward, while I fall behind, far behind, like a peasant chasing after the train he's missed, and in the end I feel that all I know how to write is landscape, and with everything else I am a fraud, a fraud down to the marrow of my bones.

NINA: You're lost in your work, you've neither the time nor the desire to recognize your own importance. Yes, you may be dissatisfied with yourself, but to others you're a great and wonderful man! If I were a writer like you, I would give my entire life to the multitude, knowing that their happiness lay only in reaching my heights, so that then they could draw me in my chariot.

TRIGORIN: Well now, a chariot...Who am I, Agamemnon?

Both smile.

NINA: For the happiness of being a writer or an actress, I would endure rejection of my loved ones, poverty and disillusionment, I'd live in a garret, and eat only black bread, I'd suffer discontent and disappointment in myself, but in return for all this, I shall have fame...real, resounding fame...
(Covers her face with her hands.) My head is spinning...Oh!...

Voice of ARKADINA from outside the house: "Boris Alekseevich!"

TRIGORIN: I'm being summoned...It must be time to pack. But I don't feel like going. (*Looks around the lake.*) Look! What a paradise this is!...How wonderful!

NINA: Do you see the house and garden on the other shore?

TRIGORIN: Yes.

NINA: That was my late mother's country estate. I was born there. I've spent my whole life on this lake. I know every little island.

TRIGORIN: It's so wonderful here! (*Sees the seagull.*) What's this?

NINA: A seagull. Konstantin Gavrilovich shot it.

TRIGORIN: It's a beautiful bird. Oh, how I don't want to leave. Try to convince Irina Nikolaevna to stay. (*Makes a note in his notebook.*)

NINA: What are you writing?

TRIGORIN: Just making a note...An idea came to me...(*Hides the notebook.*)

An idea for a short story: Once upon a time there lived a young girl, on the shore of a lake, a young girl like you; she loved the lake, like a seagull, and she was happy and free, like a seagull. But one day by chance there came a man, who saw her, and, for lack of anything better to do, destroyed her, just like this seagull.

Pause. ARKADINA appears in the window.

ARKADINA: Boris Alekseevich, where are you?

TRIGORIN: Coming! (*As he goes, he looks back at NINA. At the window, to ARKADINA.*) What?

ARKADINA: We're staying.

TRIGORIN goes into the house.

NINA: (*Comes downstage; reflects for a moment.*) A dream!

CURTAIN

ACT THREE

The dining room in SORIN's house. Doors to the right and left. A sideboard. A medicine cabinet. A table in the middle of the room. A trunk and hatboxes; signs of preparation for a departure. TRIGORIN is having lunch. MASHA stands by the table.

MASHA: I'm telling you all this because you're a writer. Use it, if you want. I swear to you: If he had been seriously wounded, I couldn't bear to live one minute longer. But I have courage, you know. I pulled myself together and decided: All right, I'm going to tear this love out of my heart, tear it out by the roots.

TRIGORIN: How?

MASHA: I'm going to get married. To Medvedenko.

TRIGORIN: To the schoolmaster?

MASHA: Yes.

TRIGORIN: I don't see the necessity.

MASHA: To be hopelessly in love, to wait year after year for something is...what...But once I get married, there won't be any time for love, I'll have a whole new set of troubles to drown all the old ones. And anyway, it's a change. Have another one?

TRIGORIN: Won't that be a bit too much?

MASHA: Oh, come on! *(Pours a glass each.)* And stop looking at me like that. Women drink more often than you think. A few drink openly, like I do, but the majority do it in secret. Yes, indeed. And always vodka or brandy. *(Clinks glasses.)* Cheers! You're a nice man, sorry you're leaving. *(Drinks.)*

TRIGORIN: I don't feel much like going.

MASHA: So ask her to stay.

TRIGORIN: No, she won't, not now. Her son has behaved in extremely bad taste. First, he tried to shoot himself, and now, they say, he wants to challenge me to a duel. I mean, what's the point? He sulks, he mocks, he carries on about new forms...But really, there's plenty of room for old forms and new ones — why push each other around?

MASHA: Try jealousy. Sorry, none of my business.

Pause. YAKOV crosses left to right with a suitcase; NINA enters and stops by the window.

My schoolmaster isn't that smart, but he's a good fellow, he's poor, and he's

crazy about me. I feel sorry for him. And for his old mother, too. Oh well, let me wish you all the best. Remember me kindly. (*Shakes his hand firmly.*) And thank you for caring about me. Send me your books — oh, and be sure to autograph them. Only don't write: "To Masha, etcetera," just put: "To Marya, who doesn't know where she comes from or why she's living on this earth." Good-bye! (*Exits.*)

NINA: (*Holding out a clenched hand to TRIGORIN.*) Odd or even?

TRIGORIN: Even.

NINA: (*Sighs.*) No, only one pea in this hand. The question is: Will I become an actress or not? If only someone would tell me.

TRIGORIN: No one can.

Pause.

NINA: We're saying good-bye and...perhaps we'll never see each other again. Please, take this momento from me — it's a little medallion. I had your initials engraved on it...and look, on this side, there's the title of your book: *Days and Nights.*

TRIGORIN: How lovely! (*Kisses the medallion.*) What a charming gift!

NINA: Think about me sometimes.

TRIGORIN: I shall. I shall remember how you were on that clear day — do you recall? — a week ago, when you were dressed all in white...We talked...and there on a bench lay a white seagull.

NINA: (*Pensively.*) Yes, a seagull...

Pause.

We can't talk any longer, people are coming...Before you go, give me two minutes more, I beg of you...(*Exits left.*)

At the same time, ARKADINA enters from the right with SORIN, who is wearing a dress coat with a decoration, and then YAKOV, who is preoccupied with the luggage.

ARKADINA: Stay home, you old fool. Are you going to go running around visiting people with that rheumatism of yours? (*To TRIGORIN.*) Who just left? Nina?

TRIGORIN: Yes.

ARKADINA: "Pardon," we've disturbed you. (*Sits.*) Well, we're packed. I'm all worn out.

TRIGORIN: (*Reading the medallion.*) "Days and Nights, page 121, lines eleven and twelve."

YAKOV: (*Clearing the table.*) Should I pack up all the fishing rods?

TRIGORIN: Yes, I still need them. But you can give the books away.

YAKOV: Right-o, sir.

TRIGORIN: (*To himself.*) Page 121, lines eleven and twelve. What are those lines? (*To ARKADINA.*) Are any of my notebooks here in the house?

ARKADINA: In my brother's study, in the corner bookcase.

TRIGORIN: Page 121... (*Exits.*)

ARKADINA: So, Petrusha, better stay at home...

SORIN: You're going, and it will be so boring around the house.

ARKADINA: What's going on in town?

SORIN: Nothing in particular, the usual. (*Laughs.*) There'll be a groundbreaking ceremony for the district council building, that sort of thing... I've got to get out for an hour or two, stop laying around, I'm getting stale as an old cigar. I've ordered the horses for one o'clock, we'll go together.

ARKADINA: (*After a pause.*) So, live here, then, but don't get too bored, and don't catch a cold. And keep an eye on my son for me. Take good care of him. Straighten him out.

Pause.

Here I am, going away, and I'll never know why Konstantin tried to shoot himself. Jealousy, that was the main reason, it seems, and the sooner I take Trigorin away from here, the better.

SORIN: How shall I put it — there are other reasons, too, no doubt about it. You have a young, intelligent man, living in the country, in the middle of nowhere, with no money, no position, no future. He has no occupation whatsoever. He's idle — and he's ashamed of it, afraid of it. I'm devoted to him, and he's attached to me, but in the end, he feels out of place, like a boarder, a parasite. It's a question of pride, no doubt about it.

ARKADINA: What grief he gives me! (*Deep in thought.*) You know, maybe he should get a job or something, what do you think...

SORIN: (*Whistles, then, tentatively.*) Maybe the best thing would be for you... to give him a little money. First, he needs to dress decently, that's all. Look at him, he's been wearing the same jacket for three years now, he goes around

without an overcoat... (*Laughs.*) And it wouldn't hurt him to get out a little and see the world... Go abroad, whatever... That wouldn't cost much, really.

ARKADINA: Well... Look, a new suit I could manage, but a trip abroad... No, I can't even afford a suit right now. (*Decisively.*) I don't have any money!

SORIN *laughs.*

No!

SORIN: (*Whistles.*) So, there we are. Forgive me, my dear, don't be angry! I believe you, you're a noble and generous woman.

ARKADINA: (*In tears.*) I don't have any money!

SORIN: If I had it, I'd give it to him, no doubt about it, but I don't, I have nothing, not a kopek. (*Laughs.*) My business manager takes my entire pension and spends it all on farming, cattle raising, beekeeping, and my money seems to disappear into thin air. The bees die, the cattle die, they never give me any horses...

ARKADINA: Well, yes, I do have some money, but, after all, I'm an actress — my wardrobe alone has ruined me.

SORIN: You're so good, my dear... I have the greatest respect for you... Yes... There's something wrong with me again... (*Staggers.*) My head is spinning. (*Holds onto the table.*) I feel faint, that's all.

ARKADINA: (*Frightened.*) Petrusha! (*Tries to hold him up.*) Petrusha, darling... (*Calls out.*) Help me! Help!...

Enter TREPLEV with a bandage on his head, and MEDVEDENKO.

He's going to faint!

SORIN: It's nothing, it's nothing... (*Smiles and drinks water.*) Now it's passed... that's all...

TREPLEV: (*To his mother.*) Don't be frightened, Mama, it's nothing serious. This happens to him all the time. (*To his uncle.*) Uncle, you've got to lie down.

SORIN: All right, just for a bit... But I'm going into town no matter what... First I'll lie down and then I'll go into town... no doubt about it... (*Starts to exit, leaning on a cane.*)

MEDVEDENKO: (*Takes him by the arm.*) Here's a riddle: What walks on all fours in the morning, on two feet at midday, and on three feet in the evening...

SORIN: (*Laughing.*) Right. And at night on his back. Thanks very much, I'll manage by myself...

MEDVEDENKO: Why stand on ceremony!...

He and SORIN exit.

ARKADINA: How he frightened me!

TREPLEV: It's not good for him to live in the country. He's miserable. If only you'd show a sudden burst of generosity, Mama, and lend him a thousand rubles or two, then he could live in town all year round.

ARKADINA: I don't have any money. I'm an actress, not a banker.

Pause.

TREPLEV: Mama, change my bandage. You do it so well.

ARKADINA: (*Gets first aid kit and materials from the medicine cabinet.*) The doctor's late.

TREPLEV: He promised to be here at ten, and it's noon already.

ARKADINA: Sit. (*Takes the bandage off his head.*) It looks like a turban on you. Yesterday, a passerby asked at the kitchen door what nationality you were. Now it's almost all healed. Only a tiny bit left to go. (*Kisses his head.*) You're not going to do anything foolish again, when I'm gone?

TREPLEV: No, Mama. It was a moment of insane despair, and I lost control. It won't happen again. (*Kisses her hand.*) You have magic in your hands. Do you remember, a long time ago, you were still working in the state theatre — I was just a little boy, — there was a fight in our courtyard, and a laundress was severely beaten? Do you remember? They found her unconscious... You took care of her, gave her medicine, bathed her children. You really don't remember?

ARKADINA: No. (*Puts on a new bandage.*)

TREPLEV: Two ballerinas lived in the same house we did... They used to come and have coffee with you...

ARKADINA: That I remember.

TREPLEV: They were very devout.

Pause.

These last few days, I've loved you as tenderly and as completely as I did

when I was a child. Without you, I have no one. Only why, why do you let this man control you?

ARKADINA: You don't understand him, Konstantin. He's a man of the highest integrity...

TREPLEV: Yes, and when it was announced that I intended to challenge him to a duel, his integrity didn't stop him from playing the coward. He's leaving... better yet, fleeing. It's disgraceful.

ARKADINA: What nonsense! I asked him to leave myself.

TREPLEV: Yes, a man of the highest integrity. Here we are almost quarrelling about him, and meanwhile, he's somewhere in the drawing room or the garden, laughing at us... tutoring Nina, trying to talk her into thinking he's a genius.

ARKADINA: You delight in saying things to upset me. I respect this man and I ask you not to speak ill of him in my presence.

TREPLEV: And I don't respect him. You want me to consider him a genius, too, but forgive me, I can't lie to you, his work makes me sick.

ARKADINA: That's jealousy. People who have no talent, only pretensions, have nothing better to do than put down people who have *real* talent. It must be a consolation for them.

TREPLEV: (*Ironically.*) Talent! (*Angrily.*) I am more talented than the whole lot of you, as far as that goes! (*Rips the bandage from his head.*) You and your little 'élite' have taken possession of art — you ordain that the only real art is what you create yourselves, and the rest you suppress and suffocate. I renounce you all! You and him!

ARKADINA: Decadent!...

TREPLEV: Go back to your precious theatre, and perform in your mediocre, pathetic little plays!

ARKADINA: I have never appeared in a mediocre play! Leave me alone! You couldn't even write one miserable little comic skit! You Kiev bourgeois! Parasite!

TREPLEV: Miser!

ARKADINA: Beggar!

TREPLEV sits and cries softly.

Nonentity! (*Pacing in agitation.*) Don't cry. You mustn't cry... (*She weeps.*) Please don't... (*Kisses him on the forehead, cheeks, head.*) My darling child, forgive me... Forgive your wretched mother. Forgive your unhappy mother.

TREPLEV: (*Embraces her.*) If only you knew! I've lost everything. She doesn't love me, I can't write any more...all my hopes are gone...

ARKADINA: Don't despair...Everything will be all right. He's leaving now, she'll love you again, she will. (*Wipes away his tears.*) Enough. We've already made up.

TREPLEV: (*Kisses her hands.*) Yes, Mama.

ARKADINA: (*Tenderly.*) Now make up with him, too. You don't need a duel...do you?

TREPLEV: All right...Only Mama, I beg of you, don't let me see him. It's more than I could bear...

Enter TRIGORIN.

So...I'm leaving...(*Quickly puts medicine away in the cabinet.*) The doctor can fix the bandage later...

TRIGORIN: (*Looks in the notebook.*) Page 121...lines eleven and twelve...Here it is...(*Reads.*) "If ever you have need of my life, then come and take it."

TREPLEV picks up the bandage from the floor and exits.

ARKADINA: (*Looking at her watch.*) The horses will be arriving soon.

TRIGORIN: (*To himself.*) "If ever you have need of my life, then come and take it."

ARKADINA: You're all packed, I hope?

TRIGORIN: (*Impatiently.*) Yes, yes...(*Deep in thought.*) A cry from a pure heart: Why does it touch me, why does it wring my own heart so... "If ever you have need of my life, then come and take it." (*To ARKADINA.*) Let's stay for just one more day!

ARKADINA shakes her head "no."

Let us stay!

ARKADINA: Darling, I know what's keeping you here. But get a hold of yourself. You're a little intoxicated, sober up.

TRIGORIN: And you, too, be sober, be sensitive and reasonable, I beg of you, look upon all this like a true friend...(*Squeezes her hand.*) You who are capable of sacrifice...Be my friend, set me free...

ARKADINA: (*Tremendously agitated.*) So you're that enamored?

TRIGORIN: I am drawn to her! Perhaps this is just what I need.

ARKADINA: The love of a little provincial girl? Oh, how little you know yourself!

TRIGORIN: Sometimes, you know, you fall under a spell, like I am now, I'm talking to you, and at the same time I'm sleeping and dreaming, dreaming of her...Such sweet, marvelous dreams have taken hold of me...Set me free...

ARKADINA: (*Trembling.*) No, no...I'm just an ordinary woman, you can't talk to me like that...Don't torture me, Boris...I'm terrified...

TRIGORIN: Yes, but if you wanted, you could be an extraordinary woman. A young love, a charming, poetic love, transporting me into a world of dreams, it alone can bring me happiness on this earth. Such a love I've never felt before...I never had time for it when I was young, always haunting publishers' doors, struggling with poverty...Now here it is, this love, it has come at last, and it beckons me...What sense is there to run from it?

ARKADINA: (*With great anger.*) You're out of your mind!

TRIGORIN: So be it.

ARKADINA: You've all conspired to torture me today! (*Weeps.*)

TRIGORIN: (*Holds his head in his hands.*) She doesn't understand! She doesn't want to understand!

ARKADINA: Am I really so old and ugly that you can talk about other women in front of me without any shame? (*Embraces and kisses him.*) Oh, you really have gone mad! My glorious, marvelous man...You are the last page of my life! (*Gets on her knees.*) My joy, my pride, my ecstasy... (*Embraces his knees.*) Leave me, even for one hour, and I won't survive, I'll go out of my mind, my wonderful, magnificent man, my master...

TRIGORIN: Someone might come in. (*Helps her to her feet.*)

ARKADINA: Let them, I'm not ashamed of my love for you. (*Kisses his hand.*)

My treasure, my desperate one, so you want to behave like a madman, but I won't let you, I won't... (*Laughs.*) You're mine...You're mine...This forehead is mine, and these eyes are mine, and this wonderful, silky hair is mine, too...You're all mine. You're so talented, so brilliant, the best of all living writers, you're the one hope of Russia...And what sincerity you have, what simplicity, freshness, humor...In one stroke, you can conjure up a character or an entire landscape, your people are so alive. Oh, what a delight it is to read you! You think I'm showering praise on you, flattering you? Go on, look me in the eye...look at me...Do I look like a liar? There, you see, I'm the only one who can truly appreciate you; I'm the only one who tells you the truth, my darling, wonderful man...You'll go with me? Yes? You won't desert me?

TRIGORIN: I have no will of my own...I've never had a will of my own...I'm

weak, fragile, always submissive...how could any woman want me? Go on, take me away, kidnap me, do it, but never let me leave your side, not even one step...

ARKADINA: *(To herself.)* Now he's mine. *(Casually, as if nothing has happened.)* Anyway, if you want to, you can stay. I'm going, and you can follow in a week or so. Really, what's the hurry?

TRIGORIN: No, we'll go together.

ARKADINA: Whatever you want. If it's together, then it's together...

Pause. TRIGORIN makes a note in his notebook.

What are you doing?

TRIGORIN: Heard a great expression this morning, "the virgin forest" ...Might be useful somewhere. *(Stretches.)* So, we're going? Once again, it's the coaches and the stations, the station restaurants, cutlets and conversations...

SHAMRAEV: *(Enters.)* It is with great regret that I inform you that the horses are ready. It is time, esteemed lady, to go to the station. The train will be arriving at five minutes past two. And, if you will be so kind, Irina Nikolaevna, don't forget to ask: where is the actor Suzdaltsev? Is he alive and well? We used to go out drinking in the old days...His performance in *The Great Mail Robbery* was incomparable...At the time, I remember, he was also appearing in the town of Yelisavetgrad together with the tragedian Izmailov, another famous actor...What's the hurry, esteemed lady, we still have five minutes. Once they were playing conspirators in a melodrama, and when suddenly they were discovered, Izmailov's line was: "We've been caught in a trap," but instead, he said: "We've been caught on a trip"...*(Shouts with laughter.)* A trip!...

While he is speaking, YAKOV is busy with the luggage, a MAID brings ARKADINA her hat, cloak, parasol, gloves; they are all helping ARKADINA to dress. The COOK peeks out from the door stage left, and after waiting a moment, he enters with hesitation. Enter POLINA ANDREEVNA, then SORIN and MEDVEDENKO.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: *(With a basket.)* Here are some plums for your journey...They're nice and sweet. Perhaps you'll feel like a treat...

ARKADINA: You're so kind, Polina Andreevna.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: Good-bye, my dearest. If everything wasn't as it should have been, forgive me. *(Weeps.)*

ARKADINA: (*Embraces her.*) Everything was fine, just fine. There's nothing to cry about, really.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: Our time is running out!

ARKADINA: And what can we do about it!

SORIN: (*Enters from the door stage left, wearing a coat with a cape, a hat, and a cane; he crosses the room.*) Come, my dear sister, it's time to go, let's not be late, after all. I'll wait in the carriage (*Exits.*)

MEDVEDENKO: And I'll walk to the station...to see you off. I'd better get going...(*Exits.*)

ARKADINA: Good-bye, my dear ones...If we're alive and well, we'll see each other again next summer...

The MAID, YAKOV, and the COOK kiss her hand.

Don't forget me. (*Gives the COOK a ruble.*) Here's a ruble, it's for the three of you.

COOK: We humbly thank you, madam. Have a pleasant journey. We're very grateful!

YAKOV: God bless you!

SHAMRAEV: Drop us a line — we'd be delighted! Good-bye, Boris Alekseevich!

ARKADINA: Where's Konstantin? Tell him I'm leaving. I must say good-bye to him. Well, remember me kindly. (*To YAKOV.*) I gave a ruble to the cook. It's for the three of you.

All exit stage right. The stage is empty. Backstage there is a general noise of farewell. The MAID returns to get the basket of plums from the table, and exits again.

TRIGORIN: (*Returning.*) I forgot my walking stick. It's out there on the terrace, somewhere. (*Crosses, and meets NINA as she enters from the door stage left.*) It's you! We were just leaving...

NINA: I had the feeling we'd see each other again. (*Excitedly.*) Boris Alekseevich, I've finally decided, the die is cast, I'm going on the stage. By tomorrow, I'll be gone, I'm leaving my father, forsaking everything, I'm starting a new life...I'm going away, like you...to Moscow. We shall see each other there.

TRIGORIN: (*Looking around.*) Stay at the Slaviansky Bazaar...Let me know as

soon as you get there...Grokholsky's house on Molchanovka Street...I must hurry...

Pause.

NINA: One minute more...

TRIGORIN: *(In a low voice.)* You are so beautiful...Oh, what happiness, to think we'll see each other again so soon!

She leans against his chest.

I'm going to see these wonderful eyes again, and this beautiful, tender smile, beautiful beyond words...these gentle features, the image of angelic purity...My darling...

A prolonged kiss.

CURTAIN

Between Acts III and IV, two years have passed.

ACT FOUR

One of the drawing rooms in SORIN's house, which TREPLEV has converted into a study. To the right and left are doors leading to interior rooms. A glass door, upstage center, opens onto the terrace. In addition to the usual drawing room furniture, there is a writing table in the right corner, a Turkish divan by the left door, bookcases filled with books, and books on the window sills and chairs. It is evening. A single shaded lamp is burning. Semidarkness. The wind is heard whistling through the trees and howling in the chimneys. There is the sound of the night watchman passing by.

MEDVEDENKO and MASHA enter.

MASHA: *(Calling out.)* Konstantin Gavrilovich! Konstantin Gavrilovich!
(Looks around.) No one's here. Every other minute the old man's asking, where's Kostya, where's Kostya... Can't live without him...

MEDVEDENKO: He's afraid of being alone. *(Listens.)* What terrible weather! It's been like this now for almost two whole days.

MASHA: *(Turns up the lamp.)* There are waves on the lake. Huge ones.

MEDVEDENKO: It's dark in the garden. Someone really should have that theatre torn down. It's standing out there, bare and ugly, like a skeleton, the curtain's flapping in the wind. Last night, when I was passing by, I thought I heard someone crying...

MASHA: Really...

Pause.

MEDVEDENKO: Come on, Masha, let's go home!

MASHA: *(Shakes her head "no.")* I'm spending the night here.

MEDVEDENKO: *(Pleading.)* Masha, let's go! The baby must be hungry by now.

MASHA: Nonsense. Matryona will feed him.

Pause.

MEDVEDENKO: It's pitiful. The third night without his mother.

MASHA: How boring you've become. Before, at least, you would philosophize, now it's baby, house, baby, house — that's all I ever hear from you.

MEDVEDENKO: Masha, come on, let's go.

MASHA: Go yourself.

MEDVEDENKO: Your father won't give me any horses.

MASHA: Yes, he will. Ask him, he'll give them to you.

MEDVEDENKO: All right, I will. So that means you'll come home tomorrow, then?

MASHA: *(Takes snuff.)* Yes, yes, tomorrow. You're bothering me...

Enter TREPLEV and POLINA ANDREEVNA. TREPLEV carries pillows and a quilt, and POLINA ANDREEVNA carries the bed linen; they put it on the divan, and then TREPLEV goes to his writing table and sits down.

What's all this for, Mama?

POLINA ANDREEVNA: Pyotr Nikolaevich asked to have a bed made up for him in Kostya's room.

MASHA: Let me do it... *(Makes up the bed.)*

POLINA ANDREEVNA: *(Sighing.)* Old people are such children... *(Goes to the writing table, and, leaning on her elbows, looks at a manuscript.)*

Pause.

MEDVEDENKO: So, I'm leaving. Good-bye, Masha. *(Kisses his wife's hand.)*

Good-bye, Mama dear. *(Goes to kiss his mother-in-law's hand.)*

POLINA ANDREEVNA: *(Irritated.)* All right! Go, already. Travel safely.

MEDVEDENKO: Good-bye, Konstantin Gavrilovich.

Silently, TREPLEV gives him his hand; MEDVEDENKO exits.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: *(Looking at the manuscript.)* Who would have believed it, who would have thought that you'd become a real writer, Kostya. And now, thank God, the journals are sending you money. *(Runs her hand through his hair.)* How handsome you've become... Darling Kostya, my dear boy, why don't you be a little kinder to my Mashenka!...

MASHA: *(Making the bed.)* Leave him alone, Mama.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: *(To TREPLEV.)* She's such a sweet girl.

Pause.

All women need, Kostya, is a little tenderness. This I know from experience.

TREPLEV gets up from the writing table and exits silently.

MASHA: You see — he's angry. You had to go and bother him.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: I feel so sorry for you, Mashenka.

MASHA: That helps!

POLINA ANDREEVNA: My heart aches for you. Believe me, I see everything, I understand everything.

MASHA: Oh, it's all ridiculous. Unrequited love — that's only in novels. It's nonsense. You can't just let yourself go, and sit by the seashore, waiting for something, waiting for the weather to change... If you've fallen in love, why then you'll just have to fall out of it. They've promised to transfer my husband to another district. So as soon as we move there, — I'll forget everything... I'll rip it out of my heart by the roots.

Two rooms away, someone plays a melancholy waltz.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: Kostya's playing. That means he's sad.

MASHA: (*Dances a few steps of the waltz, noiselessly.*) Out of sight, out of mind, Mama, that's the main thing. Just let them transfer my Semyon, and then, I swear, in one month I'll have forgotten him. It's all nonsense.

The door stage left opens, DORN and MEDVEDENKO enter, pushing SORIN in a wheelchair.

MEDVEDENKO: I've got six at home now. And with flour at seven kopeks a pound.

DORN: It goes on and on.

MEDVEDENKO: Go ahead, laugh, it's easy for you. You're rolling in money.

DORN: Money? I've practiced medicine for thirty years, my friend, thirty hard years, gave up my life day and night for it, saved up a miserable two thousand, and then spent it all when I went abroad. I don't have a thing left.

MASHA: (*To her husband.*) You mean you haven't gone yet?

MEDVEDENKO: (*Guiltily.*) How can I? When they won't give me any horses!

MASHA: (*With bitter irritation, in a low voice.*) I wish I'd never laid eyes on you!

The wheelchair is placed stage left; POLINA ANDREEVNA, MASHA, and DORN sit alongside it; MEDVEDENKO, dejected, moves aside.

DORN: So much has changed here, though! You've turned the drawing room into a study.

MASHA: Konstantin Gavrilovich is more comfortable working here. He can go out into the garden and think whenever he wants.

Sound of the night watchman passing.

SORIN: Where's my sister?

DORN: She went to the station to meet Trigorin. She'll be back soon.

SORIN: If you thought it necessary to send for my sister, I must be seriously ill. *(After a moment's silence.)* And so it goes, I am seriously ill, and they won't give me any medicine.

DORN: So what would you like? Some valerian drops? Soda? Quinine water?

SORIN: And let the philosophizing begin! Oh, what punishment! *(Nodding toward the divan.)* That's been made up for me?

POLINA ANDREEVNA: Just for you, Pyotr Nikolaevich.

SORIN: Bless you.

DORN: *(Hums.)* "The moon floats through the night sky..."

SORIN: Now, let me give Kostya an idea for a story. The title: *The Man Who Wanted To. 'L'homme qui a voulu.* Once upon a time, when I was young, I wanted to become a man of letters — and I never did; I wanted to speak beautifully, and I have always spoken abominably *(imitates himself)*: "That's all, and so on, and blah blah blah," my summaries would go on and on till I worked myself into a sweat; I wanted to get married — and I never got married; I always wanted to live in town — and here I am ending my life in the country, that's all.

DORN: You wanted to become a state councillor — and you did.

SORIN: *(Laughs.)* I didn't want that. It happened all by itself.

DORN: Complaining like that after sixty-two good years of living, that's not in very good taste, now is it?

SORIN: What a stubborn man you are! Don't you understand, I want to live!

DORN: That's indulgent. According to the laws of nature, every life must come to an end.

SORIN: Talk all you want, what do you care? You're the man who's had it all, so what difference does it make? But you too will be afraid to die, you'll see.

DORN: Fear of death — that's a natural fear...we must learn to overcome it. Only the religious fear death, and that's because they believe in life eternal and they're afraid for their sins. But first of all, you're not religious, and second of all — what are your sins? Only that you've served in the department of justice for twenty-five years — that's about all.

SORIN: *(Laughs.)* Twenty-eight...

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TREPLEV enters and sits on a small stool at SORIN's feet. MASHA doesn't take her eyes off him the entire time.

DORN: We're keeping Konstantin Gavrilovich from his work.

TREPLEV: No, it doesn't matter.

Pause.

MEDVEDENKO: May I ask, Doctor, what is your favorite foreign city?

DORN: Genoa.

TREPLEV: Why Genoa?

DORN: Because of the crowds in the street. They're wonderful. In the evening, when you walk out of your hotel, the streets are teeming with people. You drift through the crowd with no destination, aimlessly, randomly, here and there, you live with it, merge with it in spirit, and soon you begin to believe that a universal soul indeed is possible, like the one Nina Zarechnaya played so long ago in your play. By the way, where is Nina now? Where is she and how is she?

TREPLEV: Fine, as far as I know.

DORN: I heard she was leading a very strange life. What happened?

TREPLEV: That, Doctor, is a long story.

DORN: Give us the short version.

Pause.

TREPLEV: She ran away from home and met up with Trigorin. Did you know that?

DORN: Yes, I knew.

TREPLEV: They had a child. The child died. Trigorin fell out of love with her and returned to his former liaison, as was expected. Not that he ever really left it, no, in his own weak fashion, he somehow contrived to keep both. As far as I can tell, Nina's personal life hasn't been a complete success.

DORN: And her career?

TREPLEV: Worse, I'm afraid. She made her debut at a summer theatre outside Moscow, and then she went away to the provinces. At the time I wouldn't let her out of my sight, and for a while, wherever she went, I would follow her. She played all the big roles, but she overacted badly, gesticulating, ranting and raving. There were moments when she showed some talent —

she played hysteria and the death scenes well — but those were only moments.

DORN: Still, she had talent, didn't she?

TREPLEV: Difficult to say. Probably. I could see her, but she wouldn't see me, her maid wouldn't let me into her hotel room. I understood how she felt and didn't insist.

Pause.

What else can I tell you? When I returned home, I would get letters from her. Warm, intelligent, interesting letters. She didn't complain, but I could tell how deeply unhappy she was; you could feel the pain and anxiety in every line. And her mind was distracted. She would sign her name 'Seagull.' You know, the way the miller said he was a raven in Pushkin's *Rusalka* — so she kept saying in her letters, that she was a seagull. And now she's here.

DORN: What do you mean, here?

TREPLEV: Here in town, she's staying at the inn. She's been here five days now, she's taken a room. I tried to visit her, and so did Marya Ilyinichna, but she won't see anyone. Semyon Semyonovich is convinced that yesterday evening, after dinner, he saw her in the field, about a mile from here.

MEDVEDENKO: Yes, I did. She was walking toward town. I gave her my greetings, and asked her why she hadn't come to visit us. She said she would.

TREPLEV: She won't.

Pause.

Her father and stepmother have disowned her. They have watchmen stationed everywhere so she can't even get near to the estate. (*Goes to the writing table with the doctor.*) How easy it is to be a philosopher on paper, doctor, and how hard in real life!

SORIN: She was a charming girl.

DORN: What did you say?

SORIN: I said, what a charming girl she was. Even state councillor Sorin was a bit in love with her for a little while.

DORN: You old so-and-so.

SHAMRAEV's laughter is heard.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: It sounds as if they've come back from the station.

TREPLEV: Yes, I hear Mama.

Enter ARKADINA and TRIGORIN; behind them, SHAMRAEV.

SHAMRAEV: (*Entering.*) We're all getting older, the elements are aging us, but you, my dear lady, you get younger and younger...so colorful, so full of life...and grace...

ARKADINA: Are you trying to put the evil eye on me again, you tiresome man!

TRIGORIN: (*To SORIN.*) Hello, Pyotr Nikolaevich! What, you're still ill? We can't have that! (*Sees MASHA, delighted.*) Marya Ilyinichna!

MASHA: You recognized me! (*Shakes his hand.*)

TRIGORIN: Are you married?

MASHA: Long ago.

TRIGORIN: Are you happy? (*Greets DORN and MEDVEDENKO, then goes to TREPLEV with uncertainty.*) Irina Nikolaevna said that you've buried the past, and you're no longer angry with me.

TREPLEV holds out his hand.

ARKADINA: (*To her son.*) Boris Alekseevich brought you the journal with your new story.

TREPLEV: (*Taking the book, to TRIGORIN.*) Thank you. That's very kind of you.

They sit.

TRIGORIN: Your admirers send you their regards... There's a lot of talk about you in Petersburg and Moscow, everyone asks about you. They want to know: What's he like, how old is he, does he have dark hair, or light? For some reason, they all think you're an old man. And nobody knows your real name, you're published under a pseudonym. You're as mysterious as the 'Man in the Iron Mask.'

TREPLEV: Are you here for long?

TRIGORIN: No, tomorrow I'm leaving for Moscow. I must. I'm in a rush to finish a piece, and then I've promised something for a collection. You know, it's the same old story.

While they are speaking, ARKADINA and POLINA ANDREEVNA place a

card table in the middle of the room and open it. SHAMRAEV lights the candles, and puts the chairs in place. The lotto set is brought from the cupboard.

The weather didn't give me a very warm welcome. There's a cruel wind. Tomorrow morning, if it dies down, I'm going to go fishing on the lake. Oh, and I want to take a look around the garden and that place — do you remember — where your play was performed? I've been thinking about an idea for a story, and I only need to see the setting to refresh my memory.

MASHA: *(To her father.)* Papa, let my husband take a horse! He needs to go home.

SHAMRAEV: *(Imitates her.)* Horse...home...*(Severely.)* They've just come back from the station, you can see for yourself. I can't send them running out again.

MASHA: But surely you've got others...*(Sees that her father is silent, waves her hand.)* I give up...

MEDVEDENKO: Masha, I'll walk home. Really...

POLINA ANDREEVNA: *(Sighing.)* Walking, in such weather...*(Sits at the card table.)* Come on, everyone.

MEDVEDENKO: Really, it's only four miles...Good-bye...*(Kisses his wife's hand.)* Good-bye, Mama dear.

His mother-in-law reluctantly extends her hand to be kissed.

I didn't want to bother anyone, but the baby, you know...*(Bows to everyone.)* Good-bye...*(Exits with a guilty walk.)*

SHAMRAEV: Don't worry, he can walk. He's not a general.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: *(Knocks on the table.)* Everyone, please. Let's not waste time, they'll be calling us to supper soon.

SHAMRAEV, MASHA, and DORN sit at the table.

ARKADINA: *(To TRIGORIN.)* When the long autumn evenings descend upon us, here's where we sit and play lotto. Look, it's the same old lotto set mother used to play with us when we were children. Won't you join us in a hand before supper? *(Sits with TRIGORIN at the table.)* It's a boring game, but once you get used to it, it's not so bad. *(Gives everyone three cards each.)*

TREPLEV: *(Looking through the journal.)* He's read his own story, and hasn't even cut the pages of mine. *(Puts the journal on the writing table, and then goes to the left door; as he passes his mother, he kisses her on the top of her head.)*

ARKADINA: What about you, Kostya?

TREPLEV: Sorry, no thanks, I don't feel like it. I'm going for a walk. *(Exits.)*

ARKADINA: The ante is ten kopeks. Put in for me, Doctor.

DORN: Yes, madam.

MASHA: Everyone anted up? I'll start...Twenty-two!

ARKADINA: Yes.

MASHA: Three!

DORN: Right!

MASHA: Did you cover three? Eight! Twenty-one! Ten!

SHAMRAEV: Not so fast.

ARKADINA: How they loved me in Kharkov, my darlings, my head is still spinning from it!

MASHA: Thirty-four!

Offstage a melancholy waltz is played.

ARKADINA: The students gave me a standing ovation...Three bouquets, two garlands, and this...*(Takes off her brooch and throws it on the table.)*

SHAMRAEV: How about that...

MASHA: Fifty!...

DORN: Fifty what?

ARKADINA: I wore an amazing outfit...Whatever they may say about me, I know how to dress.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: Kostya's playing. He's sad, poor fellow.

SHAMRAEV: They've been hard on him in the newspapers.

MASHA: Seventy-seven!

ARKADINA: Why pay attention.

TRIGORIN: He hasn't had any luck. Somehow he still hasn't found his own voice. There's something strange and vague about his writing, at times it's almost delirious. And not one single living character.

MASHA: Eleven!

ARKADINA: *(Glancing at SORIN.)* Petrusha, are you bored?

Pause.

He's asleep.

DORN: Our esteemed state councillor's asleep.

MASHA: Seven! Ninety!

TRIGORIN: If I lived on an estate like this, by a lake, I wonder if I'd ever have been a writer. I'd give up this obsession, and do nothing but fish.

MASHA: Twenty-eight!

TRIGORIN: I'd catch ruff or perch — what bliss!

DORN: Now I believe in Konstantin Gavrilovich. There's something there!

Something there! He thinks in images, his stories are vivid, striking, and they move me deeply. It's a pity, though, that he doesn't have a clear message.

He makes an impression, that's all, and you can't go far on impression alone. Irina Nikolaevna, are you pleased you have a writer for a son?

ARKADINA: Can you imagine, I haven't read any of his work yet. There just isn't enough time.

MASHA: Twenty-six!

TREPLEV enters quietly and goes to his writing table.

SHAMRAEV: *(To TRIGORIN.)* We still have something of yours here, Boris Alekseevich.

TRIGORIN: What's that?

SHAMRAEV: You remember once, Konstantin Gavrilovich shot a seagull, and you told me to have it mounted.

TRIGORIN: I don't remember. *(Thinks for a moment.)* I don't remember.

MASHA: Sixty-six! One!

TREPLEV: *(Flings open the window, listens.)* How dark it is! I don't know why I feel so uneasy.

ARKADINA: Kostya, shut the window, there's a draft.

TREPLEV shuts the window.

MASHA: Eighty-eight!

TRIGORIN: Ladies and gentlemen, game!

ARKADINA: *(Joyfully.)* Bravo! Bravo!

SHAMRAEV: Bravo!

ARKADINA: This man has all the luck, always. *(Gets up.)* Now let's go have a bite to eat. Our celebrity hasn't had his supper yet. We'll continue playing afterwards. *(To her son.)* Kostya, leave your manuscripts, come and eat.

TREPLEV: I don't feel like it, Mama, I'm not hungry.

ARKADINA: Suit yourself. *(Wakens SORIN.)* Petrusha, time for supper! *(Takes SORIN by the hand.)* I'll tell you all about the fuss they made over me in Kharkhov...

POLINA ANDREEVNA puts out the candles on the table, then she and

DORN push the wheelchair. They all exit by the door stage left; TREPLEV is left alone on stage at the writing table.

TREPLEV: *(Preparing to write, reviews what he has already written.)* Forms. For so long I've been going on and on about the need for new forms. And now, little by little, I'm falling into the same old rut myself. *(Reads.)* "The poster on the fence proclaimed it...a pale face, framed by dark hair"... "proclaimed," "framed"...It's so trite. *(Crosses it out.)* I'll start with the part where the hero is awakened by the sound of the rain, and strike all the rest. All this about a moonlit night is drawn-out and pretentious. Now Trigorin has technique, it's easy for him...He's got a "broken bottle neck gleaming on the bank," a "mill wheel casting a somber shadow" — and presto — there's his moonlit night right there. And what do I have — "the shimmering light," and "the soft twinkling of the stars," and "the distant sounds of the piano receding into the quiet, fragrant air"...I mean, it's unbearable!

Pause.

Yes, more and more I've come to see...it's not about forms — old forms, new forms — it's about writing, not bound by any forms at all, just writing, freely, from the soul.

Someone raps on the window near the writing table.

What's that? *(Looks out the window.)* I can't see anything...*(Opens the glass door and looks out into the garden.)* Someone's running down the steps. *(Calls out.)* Who's there? *(Exits; he can be heard walking rapidly along the terrace; a moment later, he returns with NINA.)* Nina! Nina!

Nina lays her head on his chest and sobs with restraint.

(Deeply moved.) Nina! Nina! It's you...it's you...I knew it — all day long my soul has been in anguish. *(Takes off her hat and cape.)* Oh, my darling, my beloved — she's come! Let's not cry, please, let's not!

NINA: Someone's here.

TREPLEV: No, no one.

NINA: Lock the doors, someone will come in.

TREPLEV: No one will come in.

NINA: Irina Nikolaevna is here, I know it. Please lock the doors...

TREPLEV: (*Locks the right door with a key, and then crosses to the left.*) There's no lock on this one. I'll put a chair against it. (*Puts armchair against the door.*) Don't worry, no one will come in.

NINA: (*Gazes at him intently.*) Let me look at you. (*Looks around.*) It's so warm in here, so lovely... This used to be the living room. Have I changed a lot?

TREPLEV: Yes... You're thinner, and your eyes are bigger, much bigger. Nina, it's so strange to be seeing you. Why didn't you ever let me visit you? Why didn't you come sooner? I know you've been here almost a week already... Every day I've been coming over, time and time again, I stand outside your window like a beggar.

NINA: I was afraid you'd hate me. Every night I have the same dream — you look at me and you don't recognize me. If only you knew! From the moment I arrived I've been coming here... to walk by the lake. I've gone past your house so many times, but I couldn't bring myself to come in. Come, let's sit down.

They sit.

Let's just sit and talk, and talk. It's so lovely here, isn't it, so warm, so safe... Oh! Do you hear it? The wind? There's a line in Turgenev that goes: "Lucky is he who, on nights like these, has a roof over his head, a warm place to sit." I'm a seagull... No, that's not it. (*Rubs her forehead.*) What was I saying? Oh, yes... Turgenev... "And God watches over all homeless wanderers..." Never mind. (*Sobs.*)

TREPLEV: Nina, not again... Nina!

NINA: Never mind, really, it feels much better, it does... I haven't cried in two years. Late last night, I went out in the garden, to see if our theatre were still there. And it is — it's there, it's been there all this time! I burst out crying for the first time in two years, and a weight, such a weight lifted from my soul. You see, I'm not crying any more! (*Takes his hand.*) So, you've become a writer after all... You're a writer, and I'm an actress... We're drawn into the vortex, both of us... I used to be so happy, blissful, like a child — I'd wake up every morning and burst out singing. I loved you, I dreamed of fame... and now? Tomorrow morning early it's off to Yelets, third class... with the peasants, and then in Yelets, it's the businessmen, with their little "invitations." What a miserable life!

TREPLEV: Why Yelets?

NINA: I've taken an engagement there for the winter season. It's time for me to go.

TREPLEV: Nina. I've cursed you, hated you, torn your letters and photographs

to pieces, but every minute I knew my soul was bound to you forever. To stop loving you is not within my power, Nina. From the moment I lost you, and after that, even when my work started to be published, my life has been unbearable — I suffer so much...It's as if my youth had suddenly been stripped away from me, and I feel I've been living endless years upon this earth. I call out your name, I kiss the ground you walk on — wherever I look, I see your face before me, your tender smile, that smile which illuminated the most precious years of my life...

NINA: (*Dismayed.*) Why are you talking like this, why?

TREPLEV: I'm alone, with no love to warm me, I'm cold, it's like living in a grave, and no matter what I write, no matter what, it's flat, stale, lifeless. Stay here, Nina, I beg of you, or else let me go away with you.

NINA quickly puts on her hat and cape.

Nina, why? For God's sake, Nina... (*Watches her put her things on.*)

Pause.

NINA: My horses are waiting at the gate. Don't bother to come out, I can find my own way... (*In tears.*) Give me some water.

TREPLEV: (*Gives her water.*) Where are you going now?

NINA: Into town.

Pause.

Is Irina Nikolaevna here?

TREPLEV: Yes... Thursday, my uncle took ill. We cabled her to come.

NINA: Why do you say you kiss the ground I walk on? I ought to be killed. (*Leans against the table.*) I'm so exhausted. If only I could rest, just rest. (*Lifts her head.*) I'm a seagull!... No, that's not it. I'm an actress. Yes, that's right! (*She hears ARKADINA and TRIGORIN's laughter, listens, then runs to the left door and looks through the keyhole.*) So, he is here, too... (*Turns to TREPLEV.*) Ah well... what does it matter... Yes... He never believed in the theatre, you know, he always laughed at my dreams, and little by little I stopped believing and lost faith, too... And then there were the pressures of love, the jealousy, the constant worry over my little one... I became — I don't know — mediocre, pitiful, my acting made no sense any more... I didn't know what to do with my hands, how to stand on stage, how to control

my own voice. You have no idea how it feels, to know you're acting badly. I'm a seagull. No that's not it...Do you remember, when you shot that seagull? "One day, by chance, there came a man who saw her and, for lack of anything better to do, destroyed her"...An idea for a short story...No, that's not it...*(Rubs her forehead.)* What was I saying?... Oh yes, I was talking about the stage. No, I'm not like that any more...I'm a true actress now, and I perform with joy, with ecstasy, I'm intoxicated on the stage, and I feel beautiful. And now, while I've been staying here, I've been walking, walking and thinking, thinking and feeling, how my spirit is growing stronger every day...And now I know, I understand, Kostya, that in our work — it's all the same, whether we perform or we write — the main thing is not the glory, not the glitter, no, not any of those things I dreamed of, it's having the strength to endure. The strength to bear your cross, to have faith. I have faith, and it's not so painful for me any more, and when I think about my calling, I'm not so afraid of life. I'm not.

TREPLEV: *(Sadly.)* You've found your way, you know where you're going, while I'm still floundering in a sea of dreams and images, not knowing what or whom they are for. I don't believe in anything, and I don't know what my calling is.

NINA: *(Listening.)* Shh...I'm going. Good-bye. When I become a famous actress, come and see me. Promise? But now...*(Squeezes his hand.)* It's late — I can hardly stand...I'm so exhausted, so hungry...

TREPLEV: Stay, let me give you some supper...

NINA: No, no...don't bother, I'll find my way out...My horses are near...So, she brought him with her. Well, what does it matter. When you see Trigorin, tell him nothing...I love him. I love him even more than ever...An idea for a short story...I love him, I love him passionately, I love him to distraction. How glorious it was then, wasn't it, Kostya! Do you remember? What a life! A clear, warm, joyful, pure life, and what feelings — feelings like delicate, lovely flowers...Do you remember?...*(Recites.)* "Men, lions, eagles and partridges, horned stags, geese, spiders, the silent fish dwelling deep in the waters, starfish, and creatures invisible to the naked eye — all life, all life, all life, its sad cycle ended, has died away. Thousands of centuries have passed since the earth has borne any living creature, and the poor moon in vain lights up her lantern. No longer do the waking cranes cry out in the meadow, and maybugs are silent in the lime groves."

Embraces TREPLEV impetuously and runs out through the glass door.

TREPLEV: *(After a pause.)* I hope no one sees her in the garden and tells Mama. It might upset Mama... *(For the next two minutes, in silence, he tears up all his manuscripts and throws them under the writing table; then he unlocks the right door and exits.)*

DORN: *(Trying to open the door stage left.)* That's strange... The door's locked, somehow... *(Enters and puts the armchair in its place.)* It's like an obstacle course in here.

Enter ARKADINA, POLINA ANDREEVNA, behind them, YAKOV carrying bottles, and MASHA, then SHAMRAEV and TRIGORIN.

ARKADINA: Put the red wine and the beer for Boris Alekseevich here on the table. We'll have something to drink while we're playing. Let's be seated, everyone.

POLINA ANDREEVNA: *(To YAKOV.)* And bring the tea in, right away. *(Lights the candles, sits at the card table.)*

SHAMRAEV: *(Takes TRIGORIN over to the cupboard.)* Here's the thing I was talking about just now... *(Takes a mounted seagull out of the cupboard.)* As requested.

TRIGORIN: *(Looks at the seagull.)* I don't remember! *(Thinks for a moment.)* I don't remember!

To the right, offstage, a shot; all are startled.

ARKADINA: *(Frightened.)* What was that?

DORN: Nothing, something exploded in my medicine bag, most likely. Don't worry. *(He exits through the door stage right, and after a few moments, returns.)* That was it. A bottle of ether exploded. *(Hums.)* "Again, before you I stand, enchanted..."

ARKADINA: *(Sitting at the table.)* Oh, I was so frightened. It reminded me of the time... *(Covers her face with her hands.)* For a moment, everything went dark...

DORN: *(Looking through a magazine, to TRIGORIN.)* Two months ago an article was published here... a letter from America, and I wanted to ask you, by the way... *(puts an arm around TRIGORIN and leads him downstage)* since I was so interested in this issue... *(In a low voice, under his breath.)* Get Irina Nikolaevna out of here. The fact is, Konstantin Gavrilovich has just shot himself...

CURTAIN

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October 17, 1896