THE SEA-GUL
L by Anton Checkov A
Play In Four Acts CHARACT
ERS IRINA ABK
ADINA, an ac
tress CONS
TANTINE T
REPLIEFF,
her son PE TE R
SORIN, he r br othe r NINA Z
ARIETCH NAYA, a young girl,
the daug hter of a ric h la ndowner l LI
A SHAM RAEFF, t he m an age r
of SOR IN'S es tate PA
ULINA, hi s
wife M
ASH
er

A, their daught
BORIS TRIGORIN, an author EU
G ENE DORN, a doctor SIMON
MEDVIEDENKO, a schoolmas
ter JACOB, a workman A CO
MAIDSERVANT The sce ne is
OK A
la id on SORIN apse betwe e n
the thi rd and fourth acts. I The scene is laid i
n the park on SORIN'S estate trees leads away from t he au
dienc e toward a lake which lies l the park. The avenue is ob structed
b y a rough stage, temporarily e ormance of amateur theatric als, an
d which screens the lake from vie w. growth of bushes to the left a nd
right of the stage. A few chairs and a little t ont of the stage. The sun has jus t
set. JACOB and some other workmen are hear d hammering and cou ghing on the stage behind the lower
ed curtain. MASHA and M EDV IEDENKO com e in from the left, return ing from a walk. MEDVIEDENKO. Why
do you always wear mourning ? MASHA. I dress in black to match my lif e. I am unhappy. MEDVIEDENKO. Why sho
uld you be unhappy? [Thinking it ov er] I don't unde rstand it. You are healthy , and though your father is not rich, he has a go
od competency. My life is far harder than y ours. I only have twenty-three roubles a mo nth to live on, but I don't wear mourning. [They sit do
wn]. MASHA. Happiness does not depend on r iches; poor men ar e often happy. MEDVIEDENKO . In theory, yes, but not in reality. Take my case, for instan
ce; my mother, my two sisters, my little brother and I must all live somehow on my salary of twenty-three roubles a month. We have to eat and drink, I take it. You wouldn't have us go
without tea and sugar, wou ld you? Or tobacco? Answer me that, if you can. MASHA. [Looking in the direction of the stage] The play will soon begin. MEDVIEDENKO. Yes, Nina Zarietchnaya
is going to act in Treplieff's play. They love one another, and their two souls will unite to-night in the effort to interpret the same idea by different means. There is no ground on which your soul an
d mine can meet. I love you. Too re stless and sad to stay at home, I tramp here every day, six miles and back, to be met only by your indifference. I am poor, my family is larg e, you can have no ind
ucement to marry a man who cannot even find sufficient food for his own mouth. MASHA. It is not that. [She takes snuff] I am touched by your affection , bu t I cannot return it , that is all. [She offers
him the snuff-box] Will y ou take so me? MEDVIEDENKO. No, thank you. [A pause.] MASHA. The air is sultry; a storm is brewing for to-night. You do nothing but moralise or else talk about money. To you
, poverty is the greatest mis fortu ne that can befall a man , but I think it is a thousand times easier to go begging in rags than to--You wouldn't understand that, though. SORIN leaning on a cane, and TR
EPLIEFF come i n. SO RIN. For some reason, my boy, country life doesn't suit me, and I am sure I shall never get used to it. Last night I went to bed at ten and woke at n ine this morning, fee
ling as if, from oversleep, my brain ha stuck to my skull. [Laughing] And yet I accidentally dropped off to sleep again after dinner, and feel utterl y done up at this moment. It is
like a nigh tmare. TREPLIEFF. The re is no doubt that you should live in town. [He catches sight of MASHA and MEDVIEDENKO] You shall be called wh en the play begins,
my friends , but you must not stay here now. Go away, please. SORIN. Miss Masha, will you kindly ask your father to leave the d og unchaine d? It howle d so last night that
my sister was un able to sleep. MASHA. You must speak to my father yourself. Please excuse me; I can't do so. [To MEDVIEDEN KO] Come , let us go. MEDVIEDENKO.
You will le t us know when the play begins? MASHA and MEDVIEDENKO go out. SORIN. I foresee that that dog is going to h owl all nigh t again. It is alway
s this w ay in t he country ; I have never been able to live as I like here. I come down for a month's holiday, to rest and all, and a m pla gued so by their n
on sense that I lon g to escape after the first day. [Laughing] I have always been glad to get away from this pla ce, but I have been
r eti red n ow, and this was the only place I had to come to. Willy-nilly, one must live somewhere. JAC OB. [To TREPLIE
F F] We are going to take a swim, Mr. Constantine. TREPLIEFF. Very well, but you must be back i n te n minute
s. JACOB . We will, sir. TREPLIEFF. [Looking at the stage] Just like a real the atre! See, the re we have
the cu rtain, the foreground, the background, and all. No artifici al scener y is needed. Th e eye tr
avels direct to the lake, and rests on the horizon. The curtain will be ra ised as the moon rises
at half-past eight. SORIN. Splendid! TREPLIEFF. Of co urse th e wh ole effe ct will
be ruined i f Nina is late. She should be here by now, but he r fa th
e r and stepmother watch her so closely th a
h er from a prison to get her away from hom
Your h air and beard are all on end. Oughtn't yo
moothin g his beard] They are the tragedy of my e xistence. Ev en wh en I
dr un k, and all. Women have never like d me. [Si tting down] Why is my sist
s he is jealous and bored. [Sittin g do wn besid e SORIN] She is not acti
et herself against me, and agai nst th e perform ance of th e play, and against the play i
read it. S ORIN. [Laughing] Doe s she, really? T REPLIEFF. Y es, she is furious because Nin
stage. [Looking at h is watc h] My m other is a p syc hological curiosity. Wit hout doubt brilliant and
l, of r eciting all N ekrasof f's poetr y by heart, a nd of nursing the sick like an ang el of he aven, you shoul
sing Duse to her ! She alone must be praised and written about, raved over, her marvellous acting in "La Da
es. A s sh e cann ot get all that rubbish in the count ry, she g rows pee vish and cross, and thinks we are
s supe rstitio us, too. She dreads b urning three ca ndles, an d fears the thirteenth day of the month . Th
has s event y thous and roubles in a b ank at Odessa, but she is re ady to burst into tear
N. Y ou h ave take n it into your he ad that your m other dislikes your play , and the th
m; y our mother adores y ou. TREPLIEFF. [P ulling a flower to pieces] She
not! [Laug hing] You see, she doesn't love m e, and why should s he? She likes life a nd love and gay clothes, a
sufficient reminder to her that she is no longer young. When I am away she is only thirty-two, in my presence she is forty-three, and she hates me for it. She knows, t oo, that I despise the modern stage. She adore
g on it for the benefit of humanity and her sacred art, but to me the theatre is merely the vehicle of convention and prejudice. When the curtain rises on that little thr ee-walled room, when those m ighty ge niuse
in the act of eating, drinking, loving, walking, and wearing their coats, and attempt to extract a moral from their insipid talk; when playwrights give us under a thousa nd different guise s the same, s ame, same old
s Maupassant ran from the Eiffel To wer that w as abo ut t o crush him by its vulgarity . SORIN. But we can'
. No, but we must have it under a new form . If we ca n't do t hat, let us rather not hav e it at all. [Looking a
love her devot edly, but I thin k she leads a stupid lif e. She alwa ys has this man of letters of he rs
e always frigh tening h er to death, an d I am tired of it. P lain , human egoism s ometimes s
regret th at my mother i s a famo us actress . I f s he were an ordina ry wo ma n I think I should be
could be more in tolerable an d f o olish than my p osition, Uncle, w hen I fin d myself t he only none n tity among a crow
celebrat ed author s a nd art i st s? I feel that they only endure me because I am her son. Person all y l a m nothi ng , n obody. I pulled through
college by the ski n o f my teeth, as they say. I have neither money nor brains, an d o n my p assport you may r ead that I am simp
ly a citizen o f Kiev. So was m y f ather, b ut he was a well-known actor. When the celebri ties tha t f requent my mot her's draw ing-room deign to no
tice me at al l, I know they only look at me to measure my insignificance ; I read their thought s, and suffer from hu miliation. S
ORIN. Tell me , by the w ay , what is Trigorin like ? I can't understand him, he i s always so si lent. TREPL
IEFF. Trigorin is clev er, simple, well-m ann ered, and a little, I migh t say, melanc holic in
disposition. Though still un d er forty, he is surfeited with prai se. As for his sto ries, they are--h ow
shall I put it ?--pleasin g, full of tal ent, but if you have read Tolstoi or Z ola you some how don't enjoy Trigorin. SORIN
ary men. I on ce passi onately de sired two things: to marry, and to become an autho r. I have succee ded in neither. It must be pleasant to be even an insignificant author. TREPLI
EFF. [Listening] I hear footsteps! [He embraces his uncle] I cannot live without her; even the soun d of her footste ps is music to me. I am madly happy. [He goes quickly to meet NINA, who co mes
in at that moment] My enchan tress! My girl of dreams! NINA. [Excitedly] It can't be that I am late? No, I am not late. TREPL IEFF. [Kissing her hands] No, no, no! NINA. I have been in a fe ver all day, I wa s so afra
id my father would preve nt my coming, but he and my stepmother have just gone driving. The sky is clear, the moon is risin g. How I hurried to get here! How I urged my horse to go faster an d fast er! [Laughing] I am so gla d to
see you! [She shakes hands with SORIN.] SORIN. Oho! Your eyes look as if you had been crying. You mustn't do tha t. NINA. It is nothing, nothing. Do let us hurry. I must go in half an ho ur. No, no, for heaven's sake do
not urge me to sta y. My father doesn't know I am here. TREPLIEFF. As a matter of fact, it is time to begin now. I m ust call the audience. SORIN. Let me call them--and all--I am going this minute. [He goes toward the
right, begins to sing "The Two Grenadiers," then stops.] I was singing that once when a fellow-lawyer s aid to me: "You h ave a powerful voice, sir." Then he thought a moment and added, "But it is a disagreea ble one!" [He goe
s out laughin g.] NINA. My father and his wife never will let me come here; they call this place Bohemia and a re afraid I shall beco me an actress. But this lake attracts me as it does the gulls. My heart is full of you. [She glances a bout her.] T
REPLIEFF. We are alone. NINA. Isn't that some one over there? TREPLIEFF. No. [They kiss one another.] NINA. What is that tree? TR EPLIEFF. An elm. NINA. Wh y does it look so dark? TREPLIEFF. It is evening; everything looks dark no w. Don't g
o away early, I implore you. NINA. I must. TREPLIEFF. What if I were to follow you, Nina? I shall stand in your garden all night with my e yes on your window. NI NA. That would be impossible; the watchman would see you, and Treasure is no t used
to you yet, and would bark. TREPLIEFF. I love you. NINA. Hush! TREPLIEFF. [Listening to approaching footsteps] Who is that? Is it you, J acob? J ACOB. [O n the stage] Yes, sir. TREPLIEFF. To your places then. The moon is rising; the play mu st co
mmence. NINA. Yes, sir. TREPLIEFF. Is the alcohol ready? Is the sulphur ready? There must be fumes of sulphur in the air w hen the red eyes shine out. [To N INA] Go, now, everything is ready. Are you nervous? NINA. Yes, very. I am not s o
much afraid of your mother as I am of Trigorin. I am terrified and ashamed to act before him; he is so famous. Is he young? TREP LIEFF. Yes. NIN A. What beautiful stories he writes! TREPLIEFF. [Coldly] I have never read any of them, so I ca
n't say. NINA. Your play is very hard to act; there are no living characters in it. TREPLIEFF. Living characters! Life must be represen te d no t as it i s, but as it ought to be; as it appears in dreams. NINA. There is so little action; it seems more like a
recitation. I think love should always come into every play. NINA and TREPLIEFF go up onto the littl e stage; PAULINA and DORN co me in . PAULINA. I t is getting damp. Go back and put on your goloshes. DORN. I am quite warm
. PAULINA. You never will take care of yourself; you are quite obstinate about it, and yet you are a d octor, and know quite well that dam p air is bad for you. You like to see me suffer, that's what it is. You sat out on
the terrace all yesterday evening on purpose. DORN. [Sings] "Oh, tell me not that youth is wasted ." PAULINA. You were so e nchanted by the conversation of Madame Arkadina that you did not even notice t
he cold. Confess that you admire her. DORN. I am fifty-five years old. PAULINA. A trifle. That is n ot old for a man. You hav e kept your looks magnificently, and women still like you. DORN. What are you trying
to tell me? PAULINA. You men are all ready to go down on your knees to an actress, all of you . D ORN. [Sings] "Once mo re i stand before thee." It is only right that artists should be made much of by society and t
reated differently from, let us say, merchants. It is a kind of idealism. PAULINA. When women have loved you and thrown th emselves at your head, has that been idealism? DORN. [Shrugging his shoulders] I can't say. There
has been a great deal that was admirable in my relations with women. In me they liked, above all, the superior docto r. Ten years ago, you remember, I was the only decent doctor they had in this part of the country--and then, I have alway
s acted like a man of honour. PAULINA. [Seizes his hand] Dearest! DORN. Be quiet! Here they come. ARKADIN A com es in on SORIN'S arm; also TRIGO RIN, SHAMRAEFF, MEDVIEDENKO, and MASHA. SHAM RAEFF. She acted
most beautifully at the Poltava Fair in 1873; she was really magnificent. But tell me, too, where Tchadin the co median is now? He was inimit able as Rasplueff, better than Sadofski. Where is he n ow? ARKADINA. D
on't ask me where all those antediluvians are! I know nothing about them. [She sits down.] SHAMR AEFF. [Sighing] Pashka Tchadin! There are none left like him. The stage is not what it was i n his time. There w
ere sturdy oak s growing on it then, where now but stumps remai n. DORN. It is true that we hav e few dazzling geniuses these days, but, on the other hand, the average of acting is much higher. SHAM
RAEFF. I canno t agree with you; however, that is a matter o f taste, de gustibus . Ent er TREPLIEFF from behind the stage. ARKADINA. When will the play begin, my dear boy? TREPLIEFF. In a mo
ment. I must ask y ou to have patience. ARKADIN A. [Quoting from Ham let] My son, "Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul; And there I see such black grained spots A
s will not leave their tinct. " [A horn is blown behind the stage.] TREP LIEFF. Attention, ladies and gentlemen! The play is about to begi n . [A pause] I shall co
mmence. [He taps the d oor with a stick, and speak s in a lo ud voice] O, ye time-honoured, ancient mists that drive a t night across the su
rface of this lake, blind yo u our eyes with sleep, an d show us in our dreams that which will b e in twi ce ten thousand years
! SORIN. There won't be any thing in twice ten thousa nd years. TREPLIEFF. Then let them now show us that nothingness. A
RKADINA. Yes, let them--w e are aslee p. Th e curtain rises. A vista open s ac ross the lake. The moon
hangs low above the horizo n and is r eflecte d in the water. NINA, dres
sed in white, is seen seated on a grea t roc k. NINA. All men and beasts,
lions, eagles, and quails, horned sta gs, geese, spiders, silent fish t
hat inhabit the waves, starfish from the sea, and creatures invisible to
the eye--in one word, life--all, all life, c ompleting the drea ry round imposed u
pon it, has died out at last. A thousand y ears have passed since the earth last bore
a living creature on her b reast, and the unhapp y moon now lights her lamp in vain. No longer a
re the cries of storks heard in the meadows, or th groves of limes. Al l is cold, cold. All i s voi
d, void, void. All is terrible, ter rible --[A pause] The bo e drone of beetles in the dies of all living c reature s ha ve dropped to dus t, and eternal matt er
has transformed th em into stones an d wa ter and cloud s; but their spirits have flo wed toge ther into one , and that great world-s oul am I! In me is
he spirit of the great Al exander, the spirit of N apoleon, of Cae sar, of Shakespea re, and of the tin iest leech th at sw ims. In me the co nsci ousness
of man has joined hand s wit h the instinct of th e ani mal; I unders tand all, all, all, and e ach life l ives again in me. [The will-o-the-wi sps f li
cker out a long the lake sho re.] ARKA DINA. [Whisp ers] What dec aden t rubbi s h is thi s? TREPLIEF F. [Imploringly] Mo ther ! NINA. I am alone. On
ce in a hundr ed y ears my lips are ope ned, my voic e ec hoes m ournfu lly a cros s t he d esert e ar th, a nd no one he ars. And you, poor lig hts o f the marsh,
yo u do not hear me. You are eng ende red at sunset in the putrid mud, and flit wavering a bout the lake ti ll dawn, unco nsci ous, unreasoning , un warmed by th e bre ath of life.
Sata n, fa ther of eterna l m atter, trembli ng l est the spark of l ife should glow in you , has ordered an unceasing move men t of the atom s th at c o mpo se y ou, and so you sh ift a nd c hang e f or ev er. I, the spir it of the u
niverse, I al one am imm ut able and eternal. [A pause] Like a ca ptive in a dungeo n de ep a nd void , I k now n ot where I am , nor what a waits me . One thing o nly i s not hidden fro m m e: in my f ierc e and obstin ate
battle with Sata n, th e sourc e of t he f orces of mat ter, I am destined to be vi ctor ious in the e nd. Matter and s pirit will then be on e at last in glorio us h armony, and the reig n of freedom will begin on ea rth. But this can on
ly c ome to pass by s low degrees , wh en a fter cou ntle ss e ons the moo n an d ea rth and shin ing Sirius himse lf shal l fall to dus t. U ntil that hou r, oh , ho rror! horror! horr or! [A pause . Tw o gl owing red po ints are seen s
hin ing across the l ake] Sa tan, my mig hty foe, advanc es; I see his dre ad a nd l urid eyes. A RKA DIN A. I sme ll s ulphur. Is th at d one on pur pos e? T REPLIEFF. Y es. ARK ADINA. Oh, I see ; that is part of the effe
ct . TR EPL IEF F. Moth er! NIN A. He longs f or m an-- PAUL INA . [T o DORN] Yo u ha ve t aken of f yo ur hat a gain ! Pu t it on, you wil l catch cold . ARKADINA . Th e do ctor has tak en o ff hi s hat to Sat an f a
ther of et ern al m atter-- TRE PLI EFF . [Loudl y a nd angrily] Enou gh of t his! Th ere' s a n e nd to the p erfo rma nce. Down w ith the c urta in! ARK ADINA. Why, wh at a re you so a ngr y about? TR EPL
IEF F. [Sta mpi ng his foot] Th e c urta in; d ow n w ith it! [The c urta in f alls] E xcu se m e, I for got tha t o nly a chosen fe w m igh t write pla ys o r ac t them. I ha ve i nfringe d th e m ono poly. I--
I- -- H e would lik e to sa y more , bu t wa ves his ha nd i nstead, an d g oes out to the l eft . A RK ADI NA. What is the ma tter wi th h im? SO RIN. Yo u sh oul d not h and le y out hful eg ois m s o rou
ghl y, s iste r. ARK ADI NA. W hat did I s ay to him ? S ORI N. You hurt his fe elin gs. AR KA DINA. But he tol d m e h ims elf that th is was all in fun, so I tre ate d h is p lay as i f it wer e a com edy . S ORI N. N ev
ert hel ess --- ARKA DIN A. N ow it a p pea rs that he ha s p roduc ed a m ast erpi ece , if you pl eas e! I sup po se i t w as not m ea nt t o a mu se us at a ll, b ut that he ar ran ge d t he per for ma nce an
d fu mig ate d u s w ith sul phu r to de mo nst r ate to us ho w p lay s s hou ld be writ ten , a nd w hat is wo rth ac tin g. I a m ti red of hi m. No one c oul d st and hi s co nst ant th rus ts
an d s all ies . H e is a wil ful, e got isti c b oy . S OR IN. H e ha d h op ed to gi ve y ou ple asu re. A RK AD IN A. Is tha t s o? I not ice , th ou gh , th at h e d id no t c ho os e a
n ord in ary pl ay, b ut f or c ed his de ca d ent tra sh on us . I a m will in g t o li ste n t o an y r av in g, s o lo ng a s i t is n o t m ean t s eri ou sly , b ut i
n s ho win g u s t his , h e p ret en ded to b e i ntr od uci ng us to a ne w fo rm of ar t, a nd in au gu rat in g a ne w era . In m y o pin i
o n, th ere w as not hin g ne w a bo ut i t, i t wa s si mp ly an e xhi biti on o f b ad te mp er. T R IG OR IN. Eve ryb od y mu st wr it e a
s h e f ee ls, a n d as be st he m ay . A RK AD IN A. Let hi m w rite as h e f eel s a nd c an, b u t l et him s pa re me h is n on se n se . D OR N. T
ho u art an gr y, O J ov e! A RK AD IN A . I a m a w o ma n, no t Jo ve. [S he lig hts a cig are tte] A nd I a m no t a ng r y, I am o
nl y s or ry t o s ee a y o un g m an fo oli sh ly wa s ti ng hi s t im e. I di d n ot me an t o h urt h i m. M ED V IE DE NK O. N o o ne
h as a ny g ro un d f or s e pa rat in g lif e f r om m att er , a s t he s pir it m ay w ell c on si st of th e u nio
n o f ma ter ia l ato ms . [Ex cit e dly , t o TR IG OR I N] S om e da y y ou s h ou ld wr it e a pl ay , a nd p ut o n t he s
ta ge t he lif e of a s ch oo lm as ter . I t i s a h ar d, ha r d l ife . A R KA DI N A. I ag r ee w it h yo u, b ut d o
n ot le t u s t al k ab ou t pl ay s o r a to m s no w. Th is is su ch a lo ve ly ev e ni ng . Li ste n t o th e si n gi ng
, fri en d s, h ow s we et it s ou n ds . P A U LI NA . Y es , t h ey a re s in gi ng a cr o ss th e w at er . [A
p a us e.] AR K A DI NA . [To T R I G O RI N] Si t do w n b esi d e m e h er e. Te n or fi ft ee n y ea
rs a go w e ha d m us ic a n d s in g in g o n th i s la ke a lm o s t all ni gh t. Th er
e ar e six h ou se s o n i ts s h o r es . A ll w a s n oi s e a nd l a u gh te r an d r om an
ce t h en , s uc h ro m a n c e! T h e y o u n g s ta r an d id ol o f t h e m
a ll in t h o s e d ay s w as t hi s m a n h e re , [N o d s to w a rd D O
R N] D o ct o r E u g e n e D o rn . H e i s f a s ci n at in
g n o w , b ut h e w a s i rr e s is ti b l e t h e n
. B u t m y c o n s c i
e n c e i s b e g i n n i n g t o
p r i