**The Sea- Gull, by Anton Chekhov**

**ACT IV**

**Scene between Treplieff and Nina**

TREPLIEFF prepares to write. He runs his eye over what he has already written.

Treplieff.

I have talked a great deal about new forms of art, but I feel myself gradually slipping into the beaten track. [He reads] “The placard cried it from the wall — a pale face in a frame of dusky hair”— cried — frame — that is stupid. [He scratches out what he has written] I shall begin again from the place where my hero is wakened by the noise of the rain, but what follows must go. This description of a moonlight night is long and stilted. Trigorin has worked out a process of his own, and descriptions are easy for him. He writes that the neck of a broken bottle lying on the bank glittered in the moonlight, and that the shadows lay black under the mill-wheel. There you have a moonlight night before your eyes, but I speak of the shimmering light, the twinkling stars, the distant sounds of a piano melting into the still and scented air, and the result is abominable. [A pause] The conviction is gradually forcing itself upon me that good literature is not a question of forms new or old, but of ideas that must pour freely from the author’s heart, without his bothering his head about any forms whatsoever. [A knock is heard at the window nearest the table] What was that? [He looks out of the window] I can’t see anything. [He opens the glass door and looks out into the garden] I heard some one run down the steps. [He calls] Who is there? [He goes out, and is heard walking quickly along the terrace. In a few minutes he comes back with Nina ZARIETCHNAYA] Oh, Nina, Nina!

Nina lays her head on Treplieff’S breast and stifles her sobs.

Treplieff.

[Deeply moved] Nina, Nina! It is you — you! I felt you would come; all day my heart has been aching for you. [He takes off her hat and cloak] My darling, my beloved has come back to me! We mustn’t cry, we mustn’t cry.

Nina.

There is some one here.

Treplieff.

No one is here.

Nina.

Lock the door, some one might come.

Treplieff.

No one will come in.

Nina.

I know your mother is here. Lock the door.

Treplieff locks the door on the right and comes back to Nina.

Treplieff.

There is no lock on that one. I shall put a chair against it. [He puts an arm-chair against the door] Don’t be frightened, no one shall come in.

Nina.

[Gazing intently into his face] Let me look at you. [She looks about her] It is warm and comfortable in here. This used to be a sitting-room. Have I changed much?

Treplieff.

Yes, you have grown thinner, and your eyes are larger than they were. Nina, it seems so strange to see you! Why didn’t you let me go to you? Why didn’t you come sooner to me? You have been here nearly a week, I know. I have been several times each day to where you live, and have stood like a beggar beneath your window.

Nina.

I was afraid you might hate me. I dream every night that you look at me without recognising me. I have been wandering about on the shores of the lake ever since I came back. I have often been near your house, but I have never had the courage to come in. Let us sit down. [They sit down] Let us sit down and talk our hearts out. It is so quiet and warm in here. Do you hear the wind whistling outside? As Turgenieff says, “Happy is he who can sit at night under the roof of his home, who has a warm corner in which to take refuge.” I am a sea-gull — and yet — no. [She passes her hand across her forehead] What was I saying? Oh, yes, Turgenieff. He says, “and God help all houseless wanderers.” [She sobs.]

Treplieff.

Nina! You are crying again, Nina!

Nina.

It is all right. I shall feel better after this. I have not cried for two years. I went into the garden last night to see if our old theatre were still standing. I see it is. I wept there for the first time in two years, and my heart grew lighter, and my soul saw more clearly again. See, I am not crying now. [She takes his hand in hers] So you are an author now, and I am an actress. We have both been sucked into the whirlpool. My life used to be as happy as a child’s; I used to wake singing in the morning; I loved you and dreamt of fame, and what is the reality? To-morrow morning early I must start for Eltz by train in a third-class carriage, with a lot of peasants, and at Eltz the educated trades-people will pursue me with compliments. It is a rough life.

Treplieff.

Why are you going to Eltz?

Nina.

I have accepted an engagement there for the winter. It is time for me to go.

Treplieff.

Nina, I have cursed you, and hated you, and torn up your photograph, and yet I have known every minute of my life that my heart and soul were yours for ever. To cease from loving you is beyond my power. I have suffered continually from the time I lost you and began to write, and my life has been almost unendurable. My youth was suddenly plucked from me then, and I seem now to have lived in this world for ninety years. I have called out to you, I have kissed the ground you walked on, wherever I looked I have seen your face before my eyes, and the smile that had illumined for me the best years of my life.

Nina.

[Despairingly] Why, why does he talk to me like this?

Treplieff.

I am quite alone, unwarmed by any attachment. I am as cold as if I were living in a cave. Whatever I write is dry and gloomy and harsh. Stay here, Nina, I beseech you, or else let me go away with you.

Nina quickly puts on her coat and hat.

Treplieff.

Nina, why do you do that? For God’s sake, Nina! [He watches her as she dresses. A pause.]

Nina.

My carriage is at the gate. Do not come out to see me off. I shall find the way alone. [Weeping] Let me have some water.

Treplieff hands her a glass of water.

Treplieff.

Where are you going?

Nina.

Back to the village. Is your mother here?

Treplieff.

Yes, my uncle fell ill on Thursday, and we telegraphed for her to come.

Nina.

Why do you say that you have kissed the ground I walked on? You should kill me rather. [She bends over the table] I am so tired. If I could only rest — rest. [She raises her head] I am a sea-gull — no — no, I am an actress. [She hears Arkadina and Trigorin laughing in the distance, runs to the door on the left and looks through the keyhole] He is there too. [She goes back to Treplieff] Ah, well — no matter. He does not believe in the theatre; he used to laugh at my dreams, so that little by little I became down-hearted and ceased to believe in it too. Then came all the cares of love, the continual anxiety about my little one, so that I soon grew trivial and spiritless, and played my parts without meaning. I never knew what to do with my hands, and I could not walk properly or control my voice. You cannot imagine the state of mind of one who knows as he goes through a play how terribly badly he is acting. I am a sea-gull — no — no, that is not what I meant to say. Do you remember how you shot a seagull once? A man chanced to pass that way and destroyed it out of idleness. That is an idea for a short story, but it is not what I meant to say. [She passes her hand across her forehead] What was I saying? Oh, yes, the stage. I have changed now. Now I am a real actress. I act with joy, with exaltation, I am intoxicated by it, and feel that I am superb. I have been walking and walking, and thinking and thinking, ever since I have been here, and I feel the strength of my spirit growing in me every day. I know now, I understand at last, Constantine, that for us, whether we write or act, it is not the honour and glory of which I have dreamt that is important, it is the strength to endure. One must know how to bear one’s cross, and one must have faith. I believe, and so do not suffer so much, and when I think of my calling I do not fear life.

Treplieff.

[Sadly] You have found your way, you know where you are going, but I am still groping in a chaos of phantoms and dreams, not knowing whom and what end I am serving by it all. I do not believe in anything, and I do not know what my calling is.

Nina.

[Listening] Hush! I must go. Good-bye. When I have become a famous actress you must come and see me. Will you promise to come? But now — [She takes his hand] it is late. I can hardly stand. I am fainting. I am hungry.

Treplieff.

Stay, and let me bring you some supper.

Nina.

No, no — and don’t come out, I can find the way alone. My carriage is not far away. So she brought him back with her? However, what difference can that make to me? Don’t tell Trigorin anything when you see him. I love him — I love him even more than I used to. It is an idea for a short story. I love him — I love him passionately — I love him to despair. Have you forgotten, Constantine, how pleasant the old times were? What a gay, bright, gentle, pure life we led? How a feeling as sweet and tender as a flower blossomed in our hearts? Do you remember, [She recites] “All men and beasts, lions, eagles, and quails, horned stags, geese, spiders, silent fish that inhabit the waves, starfish from the sea, and creatures invisible to the eye — in one word, life — all, all life, completing the dreary round set before it, has died out at last. A thousand years have passed since the earth last bore a living creature on its breast, and the unhappy moon now lights her lamp in vain. No longer are the cries of storks heard in the meadows, or the drone of beetles in the groves of limes ——”

She embraces Treplieff impetuously and runs out onto the terrace.

Treplieff.

[After a pause] It would be a pity if she were seen in the garden. My mother would be distressed.

He stands for several minutes tearing up his manuscripts and throwing them under the table, then unlocks the door on the right and goes out.