

The Mercurian



A Theatrical Translation Review
Volume 3, Number 3 (Spring 2011)

Editor: Adam Versényi
ISSN: 2160-3316



The Mercurian

Volume 3, Number 3

Table of Contents

Editor's Note	3
Seagull	5
by Anton Chekhov	
New Version by Libby Appel	
From a literal translation by Allison Horsley	
It's Not True	84
by Francisco Nieva	
Translated by Phyllis Zatlin	
<i>Humour and Humanity: Contemporary Plays from Finland.</i>	107
by S.E. Wilmer and Pirkko Koski	
Reviewed by Bethany Holmstrom	

Editor's Note:

This issue of *The Mercurian* begins with Libby Appel and Allison Horsley's new translation of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*, originally commissioned for performance at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. *Seagull* continues the publication of all of Appel and Horsley's translations of Chekhov's major plays in *The Mercurian*. The translations can also be accessed at the website for their Chekhov project, www.chekhovplays.com.

We then continue with Spanish playwright Francisco Nieva's "fast melodrama" *It's Not True*, translated by Phyllis Zatlin. As Zatlin points out in her brief introduction to the play, Nieva's focus on werewolves and vampires makes this wonderful short piece our contemporary.

The issue concludes with the publication of what we hope will become a periodic feature, book reviews of collections of plays and performance pieces translated into English. We inaugurate this feature with Bethany Holmstrom's review of S.E. Wilmer and Pirkko Koski's book, *Humour and Humanity: Contemporary Plays from Finland*. *The Mercurian* welcomes suggestions for future book reviews.

A couple of recent publications that may be of interest to readers of *The Mercurian*:

-Margherita Laera, "Theatre Translation as Collaboration: Aleks Sierz, Martin Crimp, Nathalie Abrahami, Colin Teevan, Zoë Svendsen and Michael Walton discuss Translation for the Stage," is a description and transcript of a panel discussion that took place at Queen Mary, University of London in March 2010 and is published in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 21:2, 213-225.

-The on-line journal *Asymptote*, a "new international journal dedicated to literary translation and bringing together in one place the best in contemporary writing" has added a new feature on "Drama" edited by *The Mercurian* Advisory Board member and past contributor Caridad Svich. The July 2011 issue contains translations of Elena Guiochins' *A Lover's Dilemma* by *The Mercurian* past contributor Andy Bragen, and of Mohamed Kacimi's *Holy Land* by Chantal Bilodeau.

Back issues of *The Mercurian* can now be found under "Related Links" on the website of the Department of Dramatic Art at the University of North Carolina, <http://drama.unc.edu/> where we will maintain a permanent web presence.

As the theatre is nothing without its audience, *The Mercurian* welcomes your comments, questions, complaints, and critiques. Deadline for submissions for consideration for Volume 3, No. 4 will be January 1, 2012.

--Adam Versényi

SPECIAL ISSUE: *The Mercurian* solicits material for a special issue on Contemporary Chinese Theatre (understood as anything created since the formation of the People's Republic of China). Co-Editors Janice Poon and Adam Versényi welcome translations of plays and performance pieces from the PRC, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, as well as theoretical articles, manifestos, rants, position papers, and production histories pertaining to the translation of Contemporary Chinese theatrical creation. Please send all submissions to both Janice Poon poonszewan@gmail.com, and Adam Versényi anversen@email.unc.edu, by January 1, 2012.

THEATRICAL TRANSLATION AS CREATIVE PROCESS: A CONFERENCE/FESTIVAL: From April 12-15, 2012 *The Mercurian* in conjunction with The Process Series of the Carolina Performing Arts Series, the Department of Dramatic Art at the University of North Carolina, and Theatre Studies at Duke University, will hold a conference/festival on theatrical translation as creative process. Staged readings of translated material with the translators in attendance will be presented, along with other events. More information to come at a later date, but put April on your calendar and let us know if you plan to attend! Adam Versényi: anversen@email.unc.edu.

Advisory Board

Neil Blackadder, Knox College

Catherine Coray, hotINK at the LARK/New York University

Richard Davis, George Mason University/Theater of the First Amendment

Jean Graham-Jones, The Graduate Center, The City University of New York

David Johnston, Queen's University, Belfast, N. Ireland

Kirsten Nigro, The University of Texas-El Paso

Caridad Svich, Playwright/Translator

Paul Walsh, Yale School of Drama

SEAGULL

A Comedy in Four Acts

By Anton Chekhov
New version by Libby Appel
From a literal translation by Allison Horsley

Commissioned by
The Oregon Shakespeare Festival
Artistic Director Bill Rauch
Executive Director Paul Nicholson

Required royalties must be paid every time this play is performed before any audience, whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. To purchase acting editions of this play, to obtain stock and amateur performance rights, and for all other inquiries, please contact:

Abrams Artists Agency,
275 Seventh Ave., 26th Floor,
New York, NY 10001,
attn: Morgan Jenness,
literary@abramsartny.com.

Characters

Irina Nikolayevna Arkadina, by marriage Treplyova, an actress.

Konstantin Gavrilovich Treplyov (Kostya), her son.

Pyotr Nikolayevich Sorin, her brother.

Nina Mikhailovna Zarechnaya, the daughter of a wealthy landowner.

Ilya Afanasyevich Shamrayev, a retired lieutenant, Sorin's manager.

Polina Andreyevna, his wife.

Marya Ilyinichna (Masha), his daughter.

Boris Alekseyevich Trigorin, a fiction writer.

Yevgenii Sergeevich Dorn, a doctor.

Semyon Semyonovich Medvedenko, a schoolteacher.

Yakov, a worker.

A Cook.

A Housemaid.

*The action takes place on Sorin's country estate.
Between the third and fourth acts two years pass.*

ACT 1

A grassy portion of SORIN's country home. A broad path, leading to a lake, with a stage hurriedly thrown up for an amateur performance, so the lake is not completely visible. To the left and right of the stage are shrubs. A few chairs, a little table. The sun has just set. On the stage behind the lowered curtain are YAKOV and other workers; a cough and a tapping are heard.

MASHA and MEDVEDENKO enter left, returning from a stroll.

MEDVEDENKO

Why are you always in black?

MASHA

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

MEDVEDENKO

Why? (*In thought.*) I don't understand... You're healthy, your father does well enough. Life is a lot harder for me than for you. I make a total of 23 rubles a month, not counting all the deductions, and I don't wear black. (*They sit.*)

MASHA

It's not about money. Even a poor man can be happy.

MEDVEDENKO

Oh sure, that's the theory, but here's how it really works: It's my mother, and my two sisters and my little brother, and me — all on 23 rubles. Do we need to eat and drink? Do we need tea and sugar? How about tobacco? There's no getting away from it.

MASHA (*Looking around at the stage.*)

It's about to start.

MEDVEDENKO

Yes. The play is written by Konstantin Gavrilovich, and Nina Mikhailovna will be acting. They are in love, and today their souls will merge in their desire to create a single artistic vision. But my soul and yours don't meet anywhere. I love you, I cannot sit still at home because I'm so upset. Every day I walk four miles here and four back and I meet with

nothing but indifference from you. I understand it. I have nothing to offer, my family is huge. Who would want to marry such a person?

MASHA

Stop it! *(She takes snuff.)* I'm touched by your love but I can't return it, that's all. *(She extends the snuff-box to him.)* Want some?

MEDVEDENKO

No thanks..

Pause.

MASHA

It's stifling. I bet there'll be a storm tonight. All you ever talk about is money. According to you, there's nothing worse than being poor, but in my opinion, it's a thousand times better to be a poor beggar than... Oh, you wouldn't understand ...

SORIN and TREPLYOV enter from the right.

SORIN

(Leaning on his walking-stick.) One is not oneself here in the country, my dear, and that's understandable — but I will never get used to it here. Yesterday I went to sleep at ten and woke up at nine this morning feeling like my brain was stuck to my skull — so strange. *(He laughs.)* And after lunch I fell asleep again, and now I am completely razbit. It's like constantly living in a nightmare, as it were ...

TREPLYOV

You really should live in town. *(Seeing MASHA and MEDVEDENKO.)* Ladies and gentlemen, we will let you know when we're starting, but right now you're not allowed to be here. Leave, please.

SORIN

(To Masha.) Marya Ilyinichna, be so kind as to ask your papa to unchain the dog, otherwise it will howl all night. My sister didn't sleep again last night.

MASHA

Talk to him yourself, I won't do it. Leave me alone, please. *(To MEDVEDENKO.)* Let's go!

MEDVEDENKO

(To TREPLYOV.) Don't forget to tell us when it's starting. *(Both exit.)*

SORIN

I can hear it now, the dog will howl all night long. In truth, I have never lived the way I wanted in the country. We used to come here for a month's vacation, to rest, as it were, but once we arrived, it was so intolerable, we wanted to leave after the very first day. *(He laughs.)* Leaving here was always the best part... Well ... now that I'm retired, there is no place else to go. One keeps living whether one wants to or not.

YAKOV

(To TREPLYOV) Konstantin Gavrilovich, we're going for a swim.

TREPLYOV

Fine, only be back and ready to go in ten minutes. *(He looks at his watch.)* It will start soon.

YAKOV

Sounds good. *(He exits.)*

TREPLYOV

(Casting a glance to the stage.) Now this is a theater! A curtain, downstage, upstage, and beyond that, total emptiness. No scenery of any kind. The scenery is the lake and the horizon. The curtain will go up at 8:30 sharp, when the moon is rising.

SORIN

Splendid.

TREPLYOV

If Nina doesn't get here soon, then, of course, the whole effect will be ruined. Oh God, she's already late. Her father and stepmother stand guard over her, and getting away from them is like escaping from prison. *(He adjusts his uncle's tie.)* Your hair and beard are such a mess. I think you need a haircut, or something...

SORIN

(Combing his beard.) The tragedy of my life. When I was young, I always looked like a drunkard, as it were. Women never liked me. *(Sitting.)* Why is my sister so depressed?

TREPLYOV

Why? She's bored. She's jealous. She hates me, hates my play, hates this show, because her famous author might take a liking to Nina. She doesn't even know my play, but already she hates it.

SORIN

(He laughs.) You're making that up...

TREPLYOV

No, she's already upset that it will be Nina's triumph on this little stage and not hers. *(Looking at his watch.)* Quite a character—my mother. Undoubtedly talented, intelligent, she'll collapse weeping over a book, she recites all of Nekrasov by heart, she nurses the sick like an angel; but try to praise Duse in front of her! Ohoho no! You can only praise her, you have to rave about her, cry in rapture over her astounding performance in “La dame aux camellias,” but here, in the country, she can't get any of that, so she's bored and edgy, and we are all her enemies, it's all our fault. And on top of that, she's superstitious, afraid of three candles, the number thirteen. She's a miser. She has seventy thousand in a bank in Odessa—I know that for a fact. But ask her for a loan, and she'll start to cry.

SORIN

You are imagining that your mother won't like your play, and you are already worried, as it were. Calm down, your mother adores you.

TREPLYOV

(Plucking petals from a flower.) She loves me – she loves me not, loves me –loves me not, loves me –loves me not. *(He laughs.)* See, my mother doesn't love me. So true! She wants to live, love, wear bright, beautiful clothes, but I'm twenty-five years old, and a continual reminder she's not young anymore. When I'm not around, she's only thirty-two, but when I am, she's forty-three, and for that she hates me. She also knows that I do not accept her theatre. She loves “the theatre”. She thinks she's dedicated to serving humanity, to her sacred art, but in my opinion, contemporary theatre—is banal, meaningless tripe. When the curtain goes up and artificial lights suddenly go on, in a room with three walls, these great talents, these priestesses of sacred art show us “reality”: how people eat, drink, make love, walk, sport their fashionable clothes. And from these vulgar, trivial scenes and dialogue they mightily endeavor to extort a moral—an important moral, something useful for living one's life – but in a thousand variations they always bring me the same old moral, the same trite idea — and then I run and run, like Maupassant ran from the Eiffel Tower, which crushed his brain with its vulgarity.

SORIN

Where would we be without the theater!

TREPLYOV

What we need are new forms. We need new forms and if we can't have them then give us nothing. *(He looks at his watch.)* I love my mother, love her very much; but she smokes, drinks, lives openly with that author of hers, her name is always in the newspapers – and I can't stand it anymore. I know it's probably my ego speaking now, but I hate that she's a famous actress, and I think if she were just an ordinary woman I would be much happier. Uncle, could the situation be any worse? She's always surrounded by celebrities, artists and writers and I'm the only nobody in the room — and these celebrities only talk to me because I am her son. Who am I? What am I? I was expelled from the university in my third year under the “most questionable of circumstances”. Here I am with no talent whatsoever, not a kopek to my name, and according to my passport I am forever classified as a “Kiev Provincial”. My father, as you know, also never escaped being a “Kiev Provincial”, even though he was a successful actor. And on the rare occasion when all the celebrities, the artists and writers in her living room condescend to turn their kind attention on me, I can feel them measuring my nothingness — I know what they are thinking and I feel humiliated.

SORIN

By the way, please tell me the gossip about this celebrated author of hers. He's hard to figure out. He's always so quiet.

TREPLYOV

Our celebrated author is actually intelligent, unpretentious, a little bit, you know, melancholy. He's very decent, really. He's not even forty, but he's already a star and he's as self-satisfied as a cat who swallowed the cream. These days he drinks a lot of beer and makes love to old women. As for his writing... what's there to say ... He's clever, talented ... but... after Tolstoy or Zola you don't want to read Trigorin.

SORIN

Ah, my boy, I love the literati. When I was young I passionately wanted two things: I wanted to marry and I wanted to become an author, but I didn't manage either one. Yes. I think it would be lovely to even be a minor author, as it were.

TREPLYOV

(Listening.) I hear someone... *(He embraces his uncle.)* I cannot live without her... Even the sound of her footsteps makes my heart tremble... I am desperately happy. *(Quickly he goes to meet NINA ZARECHNAYA, who enters.)* Enchantress, my dream...

NINA

(Agitatedly.) I'm not late... please tell me I'm not late...

TREPLYOV

(Kissing her hands.) No, no, no...

NINA

I've been worrying all day. I was afraid my father wouldn't let me go... But he just went out with my stepmother. The sky is red, the moon is starting to rise, and I rode like a madman to get here. *(She laughs.)* I'm so excited. *(She firmly presses Sorin's hand.)*

SORIN

(He laughs.) We haven't been crying, have we... No, no!

NINA

You're right ... I'm completely out of breath. I have to leave in half an hour. We've got to hurry. Please don't make me be late. My father doesn't know I'm here.

TREPLYOV

Actually, it's time to begin. I'd better go get everyone.

SORIN

I'll go. This minute, as it were. *(He goes to the right and sings.)* "To France two grenadiers..." *(He glances around.)* Once when I began to sing, a friend, a public prosecutor said to me: "Your Excellency, you have a strong voice"... Then he thought for a moment and added: "But... an unpleasant one." *(He laughs and exits.)*

NINA

My father and his wife don't want me to come here. They think this is "Bohemia"... they're afraid I'll become an actress... But I'm drawn here to this lake, like a seagull... My heart is so full of you. *(She glances around.)*

TREPLYOV

We are alone.

NINA

I think someone is coming...

TREPLYOV

No one.

They kiss.

NINA

What kind of tree is that?

TREPLYOV
Elm.

NINA
Why is it so dark?

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

NINA
Impossible.

TREPLYOV
What if I go to your house, Nina? I'll stand in the garden and look up at your window all night.

NINA
Impossible. The watchman will see you. And Trezor isn't used to you and he'll bark.

TREPLYOV
I love you.

NINA
Shh...

TREPLYOV
(Hearing steps.) Who's there? Is that you, Yakov?

YAKOV
(Behind the stage.) Yup.

TREPLYOV
Take your places. It's time. Is the moon rising?

YAKOV
Yup.

TREPLYOV

Have you got the methylated spirits? The sulphur? When the red eyes appear, it should smell like sulphur. *(To Nina.)* Go, everything is ready. Are you nervous?

NINA

Yes, very. Your mother – No, I'm not afraid of her but there's Trigorin... I'm embarrassed, terrified to act in front of him. He's such an important writer... Is he young?

TREPLYOV

Yes.

NINA

What miraculous stories he's written!

TREPLYOV

(Coldly.) I wouldn't know, I haven't read them.

NINA

It's hard to act in your play. There are no living characters in it.

TREPLYOV

Living characters! A playwright shouldn't present life in reality but only as it comes to us in dreams..

NINA

Nothing happens in your play, and there's nobody to talk to. I definitely think there should be a love story ...

They both exit behind the stage. Enter POLINA ANDREYEVNA and DORN.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

It is getting damp. Go back, put on your galoshes.

DORN

I am hot.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

You don't take care of yourself. It's just stubbornness. You – a doctor. You should know perfectly well that damp air is bad for you, but you want me to suffer; you purposely sat on the terrace all last night...

DORN

(He sings.) "Don't say, that my youth is ruined".

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

You were so carried away by your conversation with Irina Nikolayevna... you didn't even notice the cold. Admit it, you like her...

DORN

I'm 55 years old.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

Don't be silly, that's not old for a man. You still look wonderful and women like you.

DORN

What do you want from me?

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

You're always ready to kiss the ground that actress walks on!

DORN

(He sings.) "I am before you again..." If people treat artists differently than the rest of us, it's only natural. It's — hero worship.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

Women have always fallen in love with you. They wrap themselves around your little finger. Is that what you call hero worship?

DORN

(Shrugging his shoulders.) All right, I have always gotten on well with women. They loved me primarily because I was a very good doctor. Ten, fifteen years ago, if you remember, I was the only decent doctor who could deliver babies in the whole province. And besides, I've always been trustworthy.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

(She takes him by the hand.) My darling!

DORN

Quiet. They're coming.

*Enter ARKADINA on the arm of SORIN, TRIGORIN, SHAMRAYEV,
MEDVEDENKO and MASHA.*

SHAMRAYEV

In 1873 at the Poltava fair she was brilliant. An absolute delight! Marvelous! And what's become of the comic Chadin these days, Pavel Semyonich Chadin? When he played Rasplyuyev he was astonishing, better than Sadovsky, I swear to you, most respected one. Where is he now?

ARKADINA

You're always asking about prehistoric characters. How should I know? *(She sits down.)*

SHAMRAYEV

(Sighing.) Pashka Chadin! There's nobody like him these days. The theater has certainly declined, Irina Nikolayevna! Before there were mighty oaks, but now we only see stumps.

DORN

There aren't many bright stars today, that's true, but the general level of talent is much better.

SHAMRAYEV

I cannot agree with you. However, it is a question of taste. *De gustibus aut bene, aut nihil.*

TREPLYOV comes out from behind the stage.

ARKADINA

(To her son.) My darling son, when do we begin?

TREPLYOV

In a minute. Please be patient.

ARKADINA

(Reciting from Hamlet.)

"My son! Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grained spots,

As will not leave their tinct!”

TREPLYOV

(From Hamlet.)

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

Behind the stage a small horn is heard.

Ladies and gentlemen, we begin! Attention, please!

Pause.

I’m starting. *(He taps a stick and speaks loudly.)* O you, honorable ancient shadows, which drift
at evening’s fall on this lake, lull us to sleep, and let us dream of that which will come to be
in two hundred thousand years!

SORIN

In two hundred thousand years there will be nothing.

TREPLYOV

Then let them show us this nothing.

ARKADINA

Let them. We are asleep.

*The curtain rises; a view opens onto the lake; the moon on the horizon, its reflection on the water;
NINA ZARECHNAYA sits on a large stone, all in white.*

NINA

People, lions, eagles and partridges, horned deer, geese, spiders, silent fishes dwelling in the
water, starfish and those that cannot be seen with our eyes, -- in a word, all lives, all lives, all
lives, having accomplished their doleful circle, died out... Already thousands of centuries
have passed since the earth has borne one living creature and in vain the poor moon shines
her light. No longer do the cranes awaken the meadow, no longer do the maybugs sing in
the linden groves. Cold, cold, cold. Empty, empty, empty. Horrible, horrible, most horrible.

Pause.

The bodies of living creatures have vanished into dust, and eternal matter has turned them
into stone, into water, into clouds, and their souls have fused into one. The common world

soul – it is I... I... In my soul is Alexander the Great, and Caesar, and Shakespeare, and Napoleon, and the lowliest of leeches. In my consciousness people have fused with instinctual beasts, and I remember everything, everything, everything, and every life that's in me I live again. The marsh fires appear.

ARKADINA

(Quietly.) I think this is supposed to be “High Art.”

TREPLYOV

(Imploring and with reproach.) Mama!

NINA

I am alone. Once in one hundred years I open my lips in order to speak, and my voice is heard in this cheerless emptiness, and no one listens... Even you, pale fires, do not hear me... Near morning the decayed marsh gives birth to you, and you roam until dawn, but without thoughts, without will, without the quivering of life. Fearing that in you, life will not arise, the father of eternal matter, the devil, every instant in you, as in stones and in water, carries out the exchange of atoms, and you are changing continuously. In the universe only the spirit remains constant and immutable.

Pause.

Like a captive, cast into a deep, hollow void, I do not know what waits for me. I see clearly, that in this stubborn, cruel struggle with the devil, the strongest force in this world, I am destined to conquer, and after that matter and soul will come together in beautiful harmony and the kingdom of world liberty will emerge. But that will only be, when little by little, over a long, long thousand-years, even the moon, and radiant Sirius, and the earth will revert to dust... But until that time, horror, horror...

Pause; in the background lake appear two red dots.

My powerful adversary, the devil comes closer. I see his terrible crimson eyes...

ARKADINA

It smells like sulphur. Is that necessary?

TREPLYOV

Yes.

ARKADINA

(She laughs.) Oh I see, it's a theatrical effect.

TREPLYOV

Mama!

NINA

He is bored without man...

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

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

ARKADINA

The doctor has tipped his hat to the devil, the father of eternal matter.

TREPLYOV

(Jumping up, loudly.) The play is finished! Enough! Curtain!

ARKADINA

Why are you angry?

TREPLYOV

Enough! Curtain! Bring down the curtain! *(Stamping his foot.)* Curtain!

The curtain lowers.

So sorry! I failed to realize that only a chosen few can write plays and act onstage. I violated the sacred law! To me... I... *(He tries to say something further, but waves his hand and exits left.)*

ARKADINA

What's the matter with him?

SORIN

Irina, you can't treat a young man's pride like that, as it were.

ARKADINA

What did I say to him?

SORIN

You wounded him.

ARKADINA

He told us before it began that it was a joke, and I treated it like a joke.

SORIN

But my dear...

ARKADINA

Now it appears he wrote a great work of art! Oh, please excuse me! Now I see that he created this performance and perfumed it with sulphur not as a joke, but as a demonstration... He wanted to give us a bit of instruction on how to write and how to act. Sorry, but it's just boring. These constant attacks against my work and his caustic personal remarks would make anyone crazy. Willful, egotistical boy.

SORIN

He wanted to please you.

ARKADINA

Indeed? Why then couldn't he choose some ordinary play? No, he had to compel us to listen to his ravings. For the sake of some fun I was ready to listen, even to ravings, but his pretentious claims to new forms, a new era in art, have gone far beyond a joke. In my opinion, there are no new forms here, only the evidence of a nasty disposition.

TRIGORIN

Everyone writes as he wants and as he can.

ARKADINA

Then let him write as he wants and as he can, only tell him to leave me in peace.

DORN

Mighty Jove, once grown angry...

ARKADINA

I am not Jove, I am a woman. (*Lighting up a cigarette.*) I am not angry, I'm disappointed, that a young man should spend his time so foolishly. I didn't want to hurt him.

MEDVEDENKO

There is no scientific evidence to separate spirit from matter, since the spirit is probably the sum total of material atoms. (*Lively, to TRIGORIN.*) But someone should really write a play about a schoolteacher and how he lives. His life is so hard, so hard.

ARKADINA

Very true, but let's not talk about plays or about material atoms. The evening is so glorious! Listen, everyone — music. (*She listens.*) Oh, it's so beautiful.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

It's across the lake.

Pause.

ARKADINA

(*To TRIGORIN.*) Sit by me. Ten, or fifteen years ago, here, on the lake, we listened to music and singing all night long, almost every night. There are six country houses along the shore. I remember laughter, lots of noise, fireworks,, and all the love affairs, so many love affairs... The jeune premier and romantic idol of all these six houses was none other than — (*She nods to introduce DORN*), Doctor Yevgenii Sergeyich Dorn. He's handsome now, but then he was irresistible. But my conscience is beginning to torment me. Why did I hurt my poor boy? I'm very upset. (*Loudly.*) Kostya! Darling! Kostya!

POLINA weeps quietly.

SHAMRAYEV

(*Reproachfully.*) Polina, Polina ...

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

It's nothing... Pardon me ... I just felt a little sad.

MASHA

I'll go look for him.

ARKADINA

Yes, please, dear girl.

MASHA

(*She goes to the left.*) Hello! Konstantin Gavrilovich!.. Hello! (*She exits.*)

NINA

(Peering out from behind the stage.) Is it over? Are we going on?

ARKADINA

The author has departed! Come out, dear girl, and join us.

NINA

Yes. Hello! *(She kisses ARKADINA and POLINA ANDREYEVNA.)*

SORIN

Bravo! Bravo!

ARKADINA

Brava! Brava! We all adored you. With such a face, with such a marvelous voice, it would be positively shameful for you to stay in the country. You have talent, believe me. You absolutely must go on the stage!

NINA

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

ARKADINA

Who knows? Here, allow me to introduce you to: Trigorin, Boris Alekseyevich.

NINA

Oh, I'm so thrilled... *(Embarrassed.)* I've read all your —

ARKADINA

(Seating her near.) Don't be shy, darling. He's a celebrity, but he has a simple soul! You see, he's shy too.

DORN

I think it would be good to raise the curtain — it's eerie like this.

SHAMRAYEV

(Loudly.) Yakov, get the curtain up — Now, Yakov, get it up!

The curtain raises.

NINA

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

TRIGORIN

I didn't understand a word of it. But, I must admit, I watched it with pleasure. You were so sincere. And the scenery was beautiful.

Pause.

Are there many fish in this lake?

NINA

Yes.

TRIGORIN

I love to fish. I can think of nothing more enjoyable than to sit on the bank on a beautiful evening with a fishing pole in my hand.

NINA

But anyone who has experienced the joy of creation, surely nothing else can compare ...

ARKADINA

(*Laughing.*) Don't talk to him that way. When people say nice things to him, he curls up inside himself.

SHAMRAYEV

I remember, in Moscow at the opera once, the celebrated Silva sang a low "C." But as luck would have it, a bass from our church choir was sitting in the gallery, and all of a sudden, to our complete amazement, we hear from the gallery: "Bravo, Silva!" a full octave lower... Like this (*with a low bass*): bravo, Silva... Everyone sat frozen in their seats.

Pause.

DORN

The angel of silence has just flown over.

NINA

It's time for me to go. Good night.

ARKADINA

Where are you going? Why so early? We will not let you go.

NINA

Papa is waiting for me.

ARKADINA

What kind of a person, really... *(They exchange kisses.)* Well, what can we do? It's a shame, just a shame to let you go.

NINA

If only you knew, how difficult it is for me to leave!

ARKADINA

Someone should take you home, darling girl.

NINA

(Frightened.) Oh, no, no!

SORIN

(To her, imploring.) Stay!

NINA

I cannot, Pyotr Nikolayevich.

SORIN

Stay for one hour, as it were. Really, do...

NINA

(Thinking for a moment, on the verge of tears.) Impossible! *(She shakes their hands and quickly exits.)*

ARKADINA

Such an unlucky girl. They say, her late mother left her husband all of her huge fortune, every last kopek, and now he's leaving everything to his second wife. That little girl has nothing. It's disgraceful.

DORN

Yes, to be frank, her father is a complete swine.

SORIN

(Rubbing his cold hands.) Shall we go in, ladies and gentlemen. It's getting damp. My legs are aching.

ARKADINA

Your poor legs are like stiff boards, they can hardly move. Well, let's go, you unlucky old man. *(She takes him under the arm.)*

SHAMRAYEV

(Offering his arm to his wife.) Madame?

SORIN

Oh, dear, the dog is howling again. *(To SHAMRAYEV.)* Be so kind, Ilya Afanasyevich, please unchain her.

SHAMRAYEV

Can't do that, Pyotr Nikolayevich. I'm afraid that thieves will get into the barn. My millet is there. *(To MEDVEDENKO, walking next to him.)* Yes, a whole octave lower: "Bravo, Silva!" And he wasn't a famous singer, just a church choir member.

MEDVEDENKO

And how much does a church choir singer make?

Everyone exits, except DORN.

DORN

(Alone.) I don't know, maybe I don't understand anything or I've lost my mind, but I liked the play. There was something about it. When that girl talked about loneliness and then, when the red eyes of the devil appeared, my hands were shaking. Fresh, innocent... Oh, here he comes. I want to say something nice to him.

TREPLYOV

(He enters.) No one's here?

DORN

I'm here.

TREPLYOV

Mashenka is looking for me everywhere. Intolerable creature.

DORN

Konstantin Gavrilovich, I liked your play very much. It's a bit strange, and I didn't hear the end, of course, but still it made a strong impression on me. You're a talented man, you need to continue.

TREPLYOV squeezes his hand and fitfully bugs him.

(Makes a disparaging noise.) You're so high strung! Tears in your eyes... What was I trying to say ... You took a subject from the realm of abstract ideas. That seems right to me because artistic creations certainly must express only great thoughts. To be beautiful, it must be serious. How pale you are!

TREPLYOV

What were you saying – don't stop.

DORN

Yes... You must write about something that is important and eternal. You know, I've had a pretty interesting life. I'm happy – but if I felt just the slightest artistic impulse to create, I think I would shed my worldly existence and disappear into the ether.

TREPLYOV

Sorry, where is Nina?

DORN

And what's more. In any work of art there must be a clear, definite purpose. You must be sure about what you're writing, otherwise, if you go on some picturesque road without a definite goal, you will surely lose your way and that will be your undoing.

TREPLYOV

(Impatiently.) Where is Nina?

DORN

She went home.

TREPLYOV

(In despair). What the hell should I do? I want to see her... I must see her... I'm going...

MASHA enters.

DORN

(To TREPLYOV.) Calm down, my friend.

TREPLYOV

I've got to go. I've got to get out of here.

MASHA

Come home, Konstantin Gavrilovich. Your mama is waiting for you. She's worried.

TREPLYOV

Tell her that I left. And please everyone, leave me in peace! Leave me alone! Don't come looking for me!

DORN

But, but, but my dear... You can't do this... It's not good.

TREPLYOV

(On the verge of tears.) Farewell, doctor. Thank you... *(He exits.)*

DORN

(Sighing.) Youth, youth!

MASHA

When people have nothing better to say, they say: youth, youth... *(She takes snuff.)*

DORN

(He takes the snuff-box from her and throws it into the bushes.) That is disgusting!

Pause.

I hear music from the house. Let's go in.

MASHA
Wait a minute.

DORN
What?

MASHA
I need to tell you something. I have to talk... (Agitated.) I don't love my own father... but I feel close to you. I can't explain it but I feel you understand me... Help me. Help me, or I'll do something stupid, something crazy... I just can't help it. Help me ...

DORN
What? Help you how?

MASHA
I'm suffering. No one, no one knows how much I'm suffering! (*She puts her head on his chest, quietly.*) I love Konstantin.

DORN
How nervous everyone is! How fragile! And so much love... Oh, magical lake! (*Tenderly.*) But what can I do, my child? What? What?

CURTAIN.

Act II

A croquet lawn. In the distance to the right is a house with a big terrace, to the left the lake is visible, with the glittering sun reflected. Flower beds. Midday. Hot. On one side, in the shadow of an old linden tree, ARKADINA, DORN and MASHA sit on a little bench. DORN has an open book on his lap.

ARKADINA

(*To MASHA.*) All right, let's stand up.

They both stand.

Come stand next to me. You are twenty-two years old, and I'm almost twice that. Yevgenii Sergeyevich, which of us looks younger?

DORN

You, of course.

ARKADINA

There, you see... And why? Because I work, I'm constantly doing something, I experience my life, but you sit still in one place, not really living... And I have a rule: never think about the future. I never think about old age, or death. What will come in life, will come.

MASHA

I feel like I was born hundreds of years ago. I drag my life around like an endless heavy train ... And most of the time I have no desire to live at all. (*She sits.*) Of course, this is all nonsense. I need to give myself a good shaking — cut out all this whining.

DORN

(*He sings quietly.*) "You tell her, my flowers..."

ARKADINA

And besides, I am as neat as any Englishman. I hold myself straight and tall and I'm always dressed with my hair *comme il faut*. Would I ever go outside, even here to the garden, in working clothes without my hair perfectly coiffed? Never. That is why I look so good at my age. I never let myself go, like some people... (*She places her hands on her hips, walks around the area.*) See, look at me, light as a feather. I could play a girl of fifteen.

DORN

Well ... well ... Nevertheless let me continue. (*He takes the book.*) We stopped at the grain merchant and the rats...

ARKADINA

And the rats. Yes. Continue. *(She sits.)* No, give it to me, I will read. My turn. *(She takes the book and looks for the place.)* And the rats... Here it is... *(She reads.)* “And, it should be understood that for women in society to indulge novelists and seduce them is as dangerous as when a grain merchant allows rats to get into his own barn. When a woman has selected a writer whom she desires to captivate, she besieges him with courtesies, compliments, with all of her charms, and he revels in these attentions.” Well, that may be true with the French, but Russian women do nothing of the kind. We fall head over heels in love. Just look at me and Trigorin, I certainly didn’t lay siege to him. When I met him I would just look at him, turn to putty, and start to cry. What kind of siege is that?

*Enter SORIN, leaning on a walking stick, and with NINA next to him;
MEDVEDENKO rolls an empty chair behind them.*

SORIN

(In a tone in which one comforts children.) Tell me. Are we happy? Are we having fun today? *(To his sister.)* We are happy! Father and stepmother have gone to Tver, and we’re now free for three whole days.

NINA

(She sits next to ARKADINA and embraces her.) I am happy! I completely belong to you.

SORIN

(He sits in his own chair.) Isn’t she adorable!

ARKADINA

Nicely dressed, interesting... you’re a clever girl. *(She kisses Nina.)* But we mustn’t praise her too much, or we’ll cast the evil eye on her. *(She spits over her shoulder three times.)* Where is Boris Alexseyevich?

NINA

He’s down by the swimming hole, fishing.

ARKADINA

He never seems to get tired of it! *(She wants to continue reading.)*

NINA

What are you reading?

ARKADINA

Maupassant's "Sur l'Eau," sweetheart. *(She reads a few lines to herself.)* Well, the rest is uninteresting and untrue. *(She closes the book.)* My soul is troubled. Tell me, what's wrong with my son? Why is he so depressed, so dark? He spends whole days down at the lake, and I never see him.

MASHA

He's hurting inside. Please, do some more from his play!

NINA

(Shrugging her shoulders.) Are you sure you want me to? It's so uninteresting!

MASHA

(Holding back her rapture.) When he himself reads, his eyes burn and his face becomes pale. He has a beautiful, sad voice, like a poet.

SORIN is heard snoring.

DORN

Pleasant dreams!

ARKADINA

Petrusha!

SORIN

Eh?

ARKADINA

Are you asleep?

SORIN

Not in the least.

Pause.

ARKADINA

Why aren't you seeing a doctor? I'm not happy about this, brother.

SORIN

I would be glad to see a doctor, but our doctor here doesn't want to see me.

DORN

At sixty, what's the use!

SORIN

Even at sixty one wants to live.

DORN

(Irritably, makes a disparaging sound.) Well, take valerian drops.

ARKADINA

I think it would be good for him to go for a water cure.

DORN

Fine. He can go. Or he can not go.

ARKADINA

And what does that mean!

DORN

It doesn't mean anything. Everything is clear.

Pause.

MEDVEDENKO

Pyotr Nikolayevich should give up smoking.

SORIN

Rubbish!

DORN

No, it's not rubbish. Wine and tobacco sap you of your individuality. After a cigar or glass of vodka you aren't Pyotr Nikolayevich anymore, but Pyotr Nikolayevich plus someone else — some stranger.

SORIN

(He laughs.) It is fine for you to talk this way. You've had plenty of fun in your day, but I? I worked in the Justice department for twenty-eight years, and I have never lived, never played, never experienced anything and it stands to reason that I would still want to live. It's easy for you, so jaded and tired of life, to be a philosopher, but I want to live and that is why I drink sherry after lunch and I smoke cigars, as it were. And that is that.

DORN

Oh, please, be serious. To ask for treatment at sixty years of age, to regret all the fun you missed out on in your youth, that, if you'll pardon me, is ridiculous. It's time to start contemplating eternity ...

MASHA

(She rises.) It must be time for lunch. *(She walks unsteadily.)* My foot fell asleep.... *(She exits.)*

DORN

She'll put away two glasses of vodka before lunch.

SORIN

Poor little thing, she's so unhappy.

DORN

(Makes a disparaging noise.) Your Excellency.

SORIN

You talk like a man who's done everything.

ARKADINA

Ah! Can you think of anything more tedious than this sweet country boredom. It's hot, it's quiet, no one does anything, everyone philosophizes... Good for you, friends, it's lovely to listen to you, but... to sit alone in my hotel room and learn my lines – much better!

NINA

(Enthusiastically.) Absolutely! I understand you.

SORIN

Of course, it's better in town. You sit in your own office, no one is let in unannounced, the telephone... cabs in the street, as it were...

DORN

(He sings.) "You tell her, my flowers..."

Enter SHAMRAYEV, behind him POLINA ANDREYEVNA.

SHAMRAYEV

Yes, here's everybody. Good afternoon! *(He kisses ARKADINA's hand, then NINA's.)* Very happy to see you in good health. *(To ARKADINA.)* My wife tells me that you intend to go into town today with her. Is this true?

ARKADINA

Yes.

SHAMRAYEV

Hm... That is splendid, but how will you go, most respected one? They are carting rye today, all of the workers are busy. And, permit me to ask you, on which horses?

ARKADINA

Which? How do I know – which!

SORIN

We have carriage horses.

SHAMRAYEV

(Agitated.) Carriage horses? And where will I get harnesses? Where will I get harnesses? This is marvelous! This is incomprehensible! Most honored ones! Pardon me, I am in awe of your talent, I am prepared to give you ten years of my life, but I cannot give you horses!

ARKADINA

And if I have to go? This is some business!

SHAMRAYEV

Most respected one! You don't seem to understand how to run a farm.

ARKADINA

(Flaring up.) Same old story! In that case I am going to Moscow today. I order you to hire horses for me in the village, or I will walk to the station on foot!

SHAMRAYEV

(Flaring up.) In that case I offer my resignation. Find yourself another manager! *(He exits.)*

ARKADINA

Every summer it's like this, every summer I am offended! I will never set foot here again!

She exits left, supposedly where the swimming hole is; after a minute she passes through to the house; TRIGORIN walks behind her with fishing rods and a bucket.

SORIN

(Flaring up.) What impertinence! The devil only knows! I am sick to death of him, as it were and so forth. Bring all of the horses here now!

NINA

(To POLINA ANDREYEVNA.) To refuse Irina Nikolayevna, a famous actress! Shouldn't every desire, every whim of hers take precedence over your farm? It's simply incredible!

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

(In despair.) What can I do? Put yourself in my position, what can I do?

SORIN

(To NINA.) Let's go to my sister... We will all plead with her, not to go. Don't you think?
(Looking in the direction SHAMRAYEV went.) Unbearable man! Despot!

NINA

(Preventing him from standing.) Sit, sit... We'll take you...

She and MEDVEDENKO roll the chair.

Oh, how terrible it is!..

SORIN

Yes, yes, it is terrible... But he won't resign, I'll have a talk with him now.

They exit; only DORN and POLINA ANDREYEVNA remain.

DORN

People are so predictable. In truth, your husband ought to be thrown out on his ear, but you know how everything will end, that old baby Pyotr Nikoleyevich and his sister will wind up begging his forgiveness. You'll see!

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

He purposely sent the carriage horses into the field. He does what he wants. The third year we were here, he persuaded the old man to mortgage the estate. Why? Who needed that? He bought purebred pigs and turkeys and they died on him; he set up an expensive apiary and in the winter all the bees froze. He uses all the income from the estate on needless onstruction. He even takes the old man's pension and sends Irina Nikolayevna six hundred rubles a year from it, pretending it's part of the income from the farm. And she's happy with that arrangement, because she's such a miser. And every day there's all this fighting. If you new how this upsets me! I'm sick; you see, I'm trembling... I can't stand his coarseness. (*Pleading.*) Yevgenii, dear, beloved, help me... Let's run away together. We're running out of time, let's stop hiding, let's stop lying...

Pause.

DORN

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

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

I know you have plenty of other women — you can't run away with all of us. I understand. Pardon me, I must be getting on your nerves.

NINA appears near the house; she is picking flowers.

DORN

No, it's fine.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

I am tormented by jealousy. Of course, you're a doctor, it is impossible for you to avoid women. I understand... But can't you wait to look at them when I'm not around ...

DORN

I'll try... (*To NINA, who is approaching.*) What's happening?

NINA

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

DORN

(He stands.) I'll go give them both valerian drops.

NINA

(She gives him the flowers.) My compliments!

DORN

Merci bien. (He goes to the house.)

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

(Going with him.) What pretty flowers! *(Near the house, in a muffled voice.)* Give me those flowers! Give me those flowers! *(Having gotten the flowers, she tears them and throws them to the ground.)*

They both go into the house.

NINA

(Alone.) How funny to see a famous actress crying over something so silly! And isn't it funny that a famous writer, the darling of the public, written about in all the newspapers, his portrait for sale everywhere, his works translated into foreign languages, that he should spend every day fishing and then jumping for joy when he has caught two little perch. I thought famous people were supposed to be proud and distant. I thought they held their hordes of admirers in contempt — that the brilliance of their fame would make them even more glorious than royalty. But, no — they fish, play cards, laugh and get angry, like ordinary people.

TREPLYOV

(Enters without a hat, with a rifle and a dead seagull.) Are you alone?

NINA

Alone.

TREPLYOV places the seagull at her feet.

What is this supposed to mean?

TREPLYOV

I was cruel enough to kill this seagull today. I lay it at your feet.

NINA

What's the matter with you? *(She picks up the seagull and looks at it.)*

TREPLYOV

(After a pause.) I will kill myself in the same way soon.

NINA

I don't know you anymore.

TREPLYOV

Yes, ever since I stopped knowing you. You've changed toward me, you're cold, my very presence upsets you.

NINA

Lately you've become irritable, you speak incomprehensibly – in symbols. And I suppose this seagull here is also a symbol, but, forgive me, I don't understand... *(She puts the seagull on the bench.)* I'm too simple to understand you.

TREPLYOV

This began the night my play failed so completely. Women never forgive failure. I burned everything, every last shred. If you only knew how unhappy I am! Your coldness is horrible, unfathomable, it's as if I woke up and found the lake all dried up. You just said that you're too simple to understand me. Oh, what is there to understand? You didn't like the play, you despise my imagination, you see me as mediocre, insignificant, a nobody — like everyone else... *(Stamping his foot.)* Believe me, I understand, I understand it all too well! I feel like I have a spike in my brain that is damning me and damning my pride which sucks my blood, like a snake... *(Seeing TRIGORIN, who walks, reading a little book.)* Here comes the true genius; he walks like Hamlet, and see, he even has a little book in his hand. *(He teases.)* "Words, words, words..." His sun hasn't even shone on you, but you are already smiling, your very gaze is melted into his beams. I will not stand in your way. *(He exits quickly.)*

TRIGORIN

(Making a note in the little book.) She takes snuff and drinks vodka... Always in black. The schoolteacher loves her...

NINA

Hello, Boris Alekseyevich!

TRIGORIN

Hello. Everything seems to have changed, we're leaving today. We'll probably never see each other again. And that's a pity. I don't often meet interesting young women. I can't possibly remember what they're like at eighteen, nineteen years old, and that's why young women are usually false in my stories. I would just love to have one hour in your shoes, just to get to know how you think and what makes you tick.

NINA

And I would love to be in your shoes.

TRIGORIN

Why?

NINA

So that I could know how it feels to be a famous, talented writer. What does fame feel like? What does it mean to you to be famous?

TRIGORIN

Mean? Probably nothing. I never thought about it that way. (*Thinking a little.*) It's either one of two things: either you exaggerate my fame, or I don't have any real feelings about it.

NINA

But you must read about yourself in the newspapers?

TRIGORIN

When they praise me, it's nice, and when they attack me, I'm depressed for two days.

NINA

Incredible! How I envy you, if you only knew! People's destinies are so different. Some people can hardly drag themselves through their own boring, meaningless existences, everyone looking alike, everyone unhappy; but others, like you, for example— you are one in a million — your destiny in life turned out to be interesting, bright, completely meaningful... You are happy...

TRIGORIN

I? (*Shrugging his shoulders.*) Hm... You talk about fame, about good fortune, about some kind of bright, interesting life, but for me all of your nice words, forgive me, are like sweet marmalade, which I never eat. You are very young and very kind.

NINA

Your life is so beautiful!

TRIGORIN

What's so beautiful about it? (*He looks at his watch.*) I've got to go now and write. Excuse me, I don't have time... (*He laughs.*) Uh oh, you just hit a nerve, as they say. I'm starting to feel a bit agitated and even a little angry. Well, all right, let's talk. Let's talk about my bright, beautiful life... And so, where do I begin? (*Thinks a little.*) When a man thinks about one idea day and night, the moon, for example, he becomes obsessed by it. I have my own such moon. Day and night one obsessive thought overwhelms me: I must write, I must write, I must... I have barely finished a story, when I'm already drawn to write another, then a third, after the third a fourth... I write endlessly, without being able to stop. What's so bright and beautiful about that? It's such an impossible life! Here I am with you, I'm feeling excited and yet I can't stop thinking about the story I'm working on now. I look up at the sky, a cloud, hmmm, resembles a grand piano. I think: yes, I need to put that into a story somewhere, yes, a floating cloud looks like a grand piano. I smell a heliotrope. Immediately I make a mental note: sickly sweet smell, widow's color; mention it in a description of a summer evening. I angle for every word or phrase you say, then I snatch it up and lock it in with all the other phrases and words in my secret literary stash. Maybe it'll come in handy! When I finish work, I run to the theatre or go fishing; I try to relax, forget myself for a moment, but oh no, my brain is already churning with the next idea and I rush back to my desk, not breathing until I've written it down. It's always like this — there's never any peace for me and I feel as if I'm destroying my whole life. In order to strew some honeyed petals before my readers, I rip out my own flowers and leave the roots to rot. You must admit I'm crazy! My best friends think I'm crazy. "What are you writing?" "What gifts will you bestow upon us next?" Always the same, always the same, and it seems to me that all their fawning attention, the praise, the flattery — that it's all a lie, that they are deceiving me as if I were a sick old man. I'm scared sometimes that they are going to sneak in and snatch me up and take me to the loony bin — like Poprischin, the madman in Gogol's story. And in those first years, my best years, when I first started writing, it was endless torture for me. An unknown minor writer, especially when he's unlucky, feels he's clumsy, awkward, inconsequential, his nerves are in knots, strained to the breaking point. He hangs around literary stars and artists, a nobody, hoping to get noticed, acknowledged by someone, yet afraid to look anyone directly in the eye, just like a compulsive gambler who has run out of money. Even now, I don't know my reader but I see him as unfriendly and disdainful. I'm afraid of my public, they terrify me, and when my play was first produced, I imagined all the brunettes in the audience were hostile and the blondes were coldly indifferent. Oh it was agony! Utter torture!

NINA

Excuse me, but I can't believe the creative process, the sheer inspiration, doesn't give you sublime, happy moments?

TRIGORIN

Yes. When I write, it's pleasant. And I like correcting the proofs, but... before it has barely left the printer's, I see that it's not right, that it shouldn't have been written at all, that it's

one giant mistake and I become so upset and disappointed with myself, I feel like a worthless idiot. (*Laughing.*) And the public reads it: “Yes, nice, talented... Nice, but he’s no Tolstoy”, or: “Beautiful work, but Turgenev’s “Fathers and Sons” is so much better”. Until I die it will always be “nice and talented, nice and talented” – that’s it. And on my tombstone it will be engraved: “Here lies Trigorin. He was a nice writer, but he was no Turgenev.”

NINA

Forgive me, I just don’t accept that. You’re simply spoiled by your success.

TRIGORIN

What success? I never liked myself. I don’t think I’m a particularly good writer. Worst of all, when I’m obsessed with something, I don’t even understand what it is I’m writing ... I love this lake, the trees, the sky, I appreciate nature, it arouses passion in me, an irresistible desire to write. But the problem is, I’m not only a landscape painter, I see myself as a good citizen, I love Russia, I love the people and I feel, that if I’m a writer, then it’s my responsibility to talk about them, about their struggles, about their future, to talk about science, the rights of man, etcetera etcetera. And so I write about everything, all the issues chase me, drive me on, get me angry until I can’t run any longer. While life and science are always moving forward, I fall helplessly behind like a peasant running late for the train. And in the end, I feel I can only paint landscapes after all and in everything else I am false to the core.

NINA

You work too hard and you have neither the time nor the inclination to recognize your own importance. That’s all right, you can be dissatisfied with yourself, but the rest of us think you’re marvelous! If I were a writer like you, I would devote my whole life to the masses, and in return I would expect that it’s their good fortune, indeed their happiness, to raise me above them and carry me off in a chariot.

TRIGORIN

Well, in a chariot... am I Agamemnon?

Both smiling.

NINA

If I were lucky enough to be an artist I would put up with petty dislikes, deprivations, disappointments. I would live in a garret and only eat stale bread, yes, suffer from my own inadequacies, my own awareness of my imperfections, but in return I would demand fame... genuine, resounding fame... (*She covers her face with her hands.*) My head is spinning... Oof!

VOICE OF ARKADINA

(*From the house.*) “Boris Alekseyevich!”

TRIGORIN

They're calling me... Probably to pack up. But I don't want to leave. (*He glances back at the lake.*) Just look at that, isn't it amazing! Beautiful!

NINA

Do you see that house and garden across the lake?

TRIGORIN

Yes.

NINA

That was my mother's home. I was born there. I spent my whole life by this lake and I know every inch of it.

TRIGORIN

Yes, it's wonderful here! (*Seeing the seagull.*) And what's this?

NINA

A seagull. Konstantin Gavrilovich killed it.

TRIGORIN

Beautiful bird. I really don't want to leave. See if you can convince Irina Nikolayevna to stay. (*He makes a note in his little book.*)

NINA

What are you writing?

TRIGORIN

Just making a note... an idea... (*Putting away the little book.*) A subject for a short story: a young girl has lived on the shores of a lake all her life, like you; she loves the lake, like a seagull, and is happy, and free, as a seagull. But by chance a man comes along, sees her, and for no particular reason destroys her, just like this seagull here.

Pause. In the window appears ARKADINA.

ARKADINA

Boris Alekseyevich, where are you?

TRIGORIN

I'm coming! (*He walks and glances at NINA; to the window, to ARKADINA.*) What?

ARKADINA

We are staying.

TRIGORIN exits to the house.

NINA

(*She approaches the footlights; after a moment.*) It's a dream!

CURTAIN.

ACT III

The dining room in Sorin's house. To the right and left are doors. A buffet. A cupboard with medicines. In the middle of the room, a table. A suitcase and cardboard boxes; noticeable preparation for departure.

TRIGORIN *eats breakfast, MASHA stands by the table.*

MASHA

I'm telling you all this because you're a writer. You can use it if you want. I'll be honest with you: if he had seriously hurt himself, I couldn't have lived another minute. But I'm trying to be brave. I've made up my mind once and for all: I'll tear this love from my heart, I'll tear it out by the roots.

TRIGORIN

How? How will you do that?

MASHA

I'll get married. To Medvedenko.

TRIGORIN

To the schoolteacher?

MASHA

Yes.

TRIGORIN

I don't understand, why do you need to do that?

MASHA

To love without hope, always waiting for something to happen... But when I get married, I won't have love on my mind, I'll have new problems to worry about. And anyway, it'll be a change. Shall we have another?

TRIGORIN

Haven't you had enough?

MASHA

Well, here! *(She pours them each a shot of vodka.)* Don't look at me like that. Women drink more than you think. A few drink openly, like I do, but most do it in secret. Yes. And it's always vodka or cognac. *(She clinks glasses.)* *Na zdorovye.* You're a nice man, it's a shame you're leaving.

They drink.

TRIGORIN

To be honest, I don't want to leave.

MASHA

Then tell her to stay.

TRIGORIN

No, she won't stay. Her son is acting like a crazy man. First he shoots himself, and now he challenges me to a duel. And for what? He grumbles, he grouses, he preaches new forms... But there's plenty of room for all of us, the new and the old — what's the fight about?

MASHA

Well, it's jealousy too. But it's none of my business.

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

My schoolteacher isn't very smart, but he's a good person, humble, and he really loves me. I feel sorry for him. And I feel sorry for his poor old mother. Well, permit me to wish you all the best. Remember me kindly. *(She strongly shakes his hand.)* I'm very thankful to you for your interest. Do send me your books, and sign them please. Only don't write "Dear madam", but simply: "To Marya, ancestry unknown, reason for living unknown." Farewell! *(She exits.)*

NINA

(Extending her hand to TRIGORIN with something gripped in her fist.) Even or odd?

TRIGORIN

Even.

NINA

(Sighing.) No. There's only one pea. Should I be an actress or not? If only someone would

advise me.

TRIGORIN

I can't advise you.

Pause.

NINA

You'll leave and ... we'll probably never see each other again. Please take this little memento. I had your initials engraved on it... and on this side the title of your book "Days and Nights".

TRIGORIN

How lovely! *(He kisses the medallion.)* A delightful gift!

NINA

Remember me sometimes.

TRIGORIN

I will remember. I will remember you as you were on that clear day – do you remember? – a week ago, when you wore that light-colored dress... we were talking... the white seagull was lying on the bench between us.

NINA

(Pensively.) Yes, the seagull...

Pause.

Shhh, they're coming ... Before you leave, give me two minutes, I beg you... *(She exits to the left.)*

At the same time ARKADINA and SORIN enter from the right. SORIN is in a tailcoat with medals.

Then YAKOV enters, busy with packing.

ARKADINA

Oh please stay at home, my dear old man. Do you think you can go around paying visits to people with your rheumatism? *(To TRIGORIN.)* Who was it that just left? Nina?

TRIGORIN

Yes.

ARKADINA

Pardon, we interrupted... *(She sits.)* Yes, I packed everything. I'm worn out.

TRIGORIN

(He reads on the medallion.) "Days and Nights", page 121, lines 11 and 12.

YAKOV

(Clearing the table.) Should I pack the fishing rods?

TRIGORIN

Yes, I still need them. But give the books to someone.

YAKOV

Will do.

TRIGORIN

(To himself.) Page 121, lines 11 and 12. What are those lines? *(To ARKADINA.)* Do you have my books here in the house?

ARKADINA

My brother has them in his den, in the corner bookcase.

TRIGORIN

Page 121... *(He exits.)*

ARKADINA

Really, Petrusha, you should stay at home...

SORIN

You're leaving. I'll be so bored without you here.

ARKADINA

And what's so interesting in town?

SORIN

Nothing much, but all the same... *(He laughs.)* They're going to lay the cornerstone for the zemstvo building and that kind of thing. I would just like an hour or two to get away from here. I feel like an old fish from the lake. I've been lying around here too long like a smelly old fish. I ordered the horses for one o'clock. We'll both be going at the same time.

ARKADINA

(After a pause.) I wish you'd stay here. Stay here and try not to get bored. Don't catch a cold. Take care of my son. Look after him. Keep him sensible.

Pause.

Here I'm leaving, and I don't know why Konstantin shot himself. I have a feeling it was jealousy, and the sooner I take Trigorin from here, the better.

SORIN

How do I put this— There are other reasons. It is quite understandable, an intelligent young man lives in the country, in the backwoods really, without any money, without a position, without a future. He has nothing to do. He's ashamed and frightened of his own uselessness. I love him so much, and he is very attached to me, but in truth, he feels like he doesn't belong here, like a parasite, a hanger-on. It's understandable, his self esteem —

ARKADINA

Will I never be free of this! *(In thought.)* What if he got a desk job somewhere...

SORIN

(He whistles, then indecisively.) It seems to me, maybe, what if, if you were to... give him a little money. First of all, he needs to look like a human being. He's been wearing the same raggedy suit for three years. He doesn't even have an overcoat... *(He laughs.)* And would it be so terrible if he had the chance to have fun once in a while... to go abroad or something... It wouldn't be all that expensive.

ARKADINA

Well... maybe I can manage a suit, but to go abroad... No, right now I can't even do the suit. *(Decisively.)* I have no money!

SORIN laughs.

None!

SORIN

(He whistles.) Yes, madame. Forgive me, sweet, don't be angry. I believe you... You're a

wonderful, generous woman.

ARKADINA

(On the verge of tears.) I have no money!

SORIN

It's understandable — if I had any money, I would give it to him, but I have nothing, not a kopek. *(He laughs.)* Shamrayev takes my whole pension and he spends it on farming, cattle-breeding, and pfft, it's all gone – gone to waste. The bees freeze, the cows die, the horses are never available...

ARKADINA Yes, I have money, but you know I'm an actress; the costumes alone completely ruin me.

SORIN

You are so good, sweet... I respect you... Yes... But wait, something is... *(He staggers.)* My head is spinning. *(He holds onto the table.)* I feel faint, as it were.

ARKADINA

(Frightened.) Petrusha! *(Trying to support him.)* Petrusha, my dear... *(She shouts.)* Help me! Help!..

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

He's going to faint!

SORIN

It's nothing, nothing... *(He smiles and drinks water.)* It has already passed... as it were...

TREPLYOV

(To his mother.) Don't be scared, mama, it's not dangerous. This happens a lot with uncle these days. *(To his uncle.)* Uncle, dear, you need to lie down.

SORIN

Yes, lie down... But I'm still going to town. I will lie down and I will go... yes, it's understandable... *(He goes, supporting himself on the walking stick.)*

MEDVEDENKO

(He takes him by the hand.) There's a riddle: in the morning what goes on four legs, at noon on two, in the evening on three —

SORIN

(He laughs.) Exactly. And at night flat on the back. Yes, thank you, I can walk myself...

MEDVEDENKO

Don't stand on ceremony with me!

He and SORIN exit.

ARKADINA

He frightened me to death!

TREPLYOV

It's not healthy for him to live in the country. He's depressed. Mama, if you were to feel a little generous and loan him one-and-a-half or two thousand rubles, he could live in town the whole year.

ARKADINA

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

Pause.

TREPLYOV

Mama, please change my bandage. You do it so well.

ARKADINA

(She takes iodine from the medicine cabinet with some dressings.) The doctor's late.

TREPLYOV

He promised to be here at ten, but it's already noon.

ARKADINA

Here, sit. *(She takes the bandage from his head.)* You look like you're wearing a turban. Yesterday a visitor in the kitchen asked what nationality you were. Oh, it's almost completely healed. Just a little scar remains. *(She kisses him on the head.)* And when I'm gone you won't go bang-bang again?

TREPLYOV

No, mama. That was a moment of utter despair, I wasn't able to control myself. It'll never happen again (*He kisses her hand.*) You have such golden hands. I remember, very long ago, when you were still working at the State theater – I was little then – there was a fight in the courtyard of our building. Someone was violently beating up a woman. Do you remember? They picked her up unconscious... you went right to her, brought her medicine, washed her children in the washtub. Don't you remember?

ARKADINA

No. (*She applies a new bandage.*)

TREPLYOV

There were two ballerinas living in the same building... They used to come to our place and drink coffee...

ARKADINA

I remember them.

TREPLYOV

They were so religious.

Pause.

These past few days, I have loved you as tenderly and completely as when I was a child. I have no one except you. Only why, why do you let that man come between us?

ARKADINA

You don't understand him, Konstantin. He's a noble person...

TREPLYOV

Oh, yes, noble, but when they told him I was going to challenge him to a duel, I notice his nobility didn't keep him from playing the coward. He is leaving. He's making a gutless retreat!

ARKADINA

Don't be silly! I'm the one taking him away from here. I understand that you are uncomfortable with our relationship, but you're intelligent and sophisticated, and I must demand that you respect my freedom.

TREPLYOV

I respect your freedom, but you must allow me the freedom to think of him any way I want to. A noble person! Here we are almost fighting over him, and he is somewhere in the living room or in the garden laughing at both of us, “cultivating” Nina, trying to convince her once and for all, that he is a genius.

ARKADINA

I think you truly enjoy hurting me. I respect that man and I am asking you to speak well of him in my presence.

TREPLYOV

But I don’t respect him. You’d like me to consider him a genius, but, forgive me, I cannot lie, his writing makes me sick.

ARKADINA

That’s just envy. With pretentious, untalented people, all that’s left is to speak ill of the genuinely gifted. That must be some consolation!

TREPLYOV

(Ironically.) The genuinely gifted! *(Angrily.)* I am more gifted than all of you put together! *(He tears the bandage from his head.)* You old fashioned hacks only believe in your own work and when the truly innovative, young, talented artists come along, you try to suffocate them! I do not acknowledge any of you! I do not acknowledge you or him!

ARKADINA

You arrogant —

TREPLYOV

Go back to your darling theater and act in your pathetic, third-rate plays!

ARKADINA

I have never acted in third-rate plays. How dare you! You couldn’t even write a pathetic vaudeville sketch. Kiev Provincial parasite!

TREPLYOV

Miser!

ARKADINA

Beggar!

TREPLYOV *sits and quietly cries.*

Nobody! You are a nobody! (*Becoming agitated.*) Don't cry. You mustn't cry... (*She cries.*) Don't cry... (*She kisses him on the forehead, on the cheeks, on the head.*) My sweet baby, forgive me... Forgive your sinful mother. Forgive your wretched mother.

TREPLYOV

(*He embraces her.*) If you only knew! I've lost everything. She doesn't love me, I can't write anymore... everything I hoped for is gone...

ARKADINA

Don't despair. It'll all turn out. I'm taking him away from here, she'll fall in love with you again. (*She dries his tears.*) There, there. We're good again, yes?

TREPLYOV

(*He kisses her hands.*) Yes, mama.

ARKADINA

(*Tenderly.*) Make up with him, too. It's not necessary to fight a duel, now is it?

TREPLYOV

Fine.... Only, mama, don't let me see him again, please. It's more than I can bear... (*Enter TRIGORIN.*) Uh oh, here he comes... I'm leaving... (*Quickly he puts the medicine in the cabinet.*) Don't worry, the doctor will put the bandage on later...

TRIGORIN

(*He searches in the little book.*) Page 121... lines 11 and 12... Here... (*He reads.*) "If you ever need my life, come and take it".

TREPLYOV *picks up the bandage from the floor and exits.*

ARKADINA

(*Glances at her watch.*) They'll be bringing the horses in a minute.

TRIGORIN

(*To himself.*) If you ever need my life, come and take it.

ARKADINA

I hope you're all packed?

TRIGORIN

(Impatiently.) Yes, yes... *(In thought.)* Why does this appeal from such a pure soul touch me so deeply? If you ever need my life, come and take it. *(To ARKADINA.)* Let's stay one more day!

ARKADINA shakes her head "no".

Let's just stay!

ARKADINA Darling, I know, I know why you want to stay. But get control of yourself. You're a little drunk, sober up.

TRIGORIN

You be sober too, be reasonable. Be a good friend to me... *(He presses her hand.)* I know you're capable of sacrifice... Be my friend, let me go...

ARKADINA

(In strong agitation.) Are you so far gone?

TRIGORIN

I'm entranced by her! Maybe this is just what I need.

ARKADINA

The love of a farm girl? Oh, how little you know yourself!

TRIGORIN

Sometimes people walk and talk in their sleep and that's how I feel – I'm talking to you, but I'm dreaming of her. And these sweet, marvelous dreams are taking hold of me... Let me go...

ARKADINA

(Trembling.) No, no... I'm an ordinary woman, you're not allowed to talk to me like that... Don't torment me, Boris... I'm terrified...

TRIGORIN

You can be extraordinary if you want. Love is young, delightful, poetic, and once again it's filling me with hope and dreams— I just know that only she can bring me happiness, she can be my good luck charm. I've never experienced anything like it ... When I was young, there was no time, I was so busy chasing after editors, wrestling with poverty. Now, finally, here she is, my love has come, she's calling me ... How can I run away from her?

ARKADINA

(With fury.) Have you lost your mind!

TRIGORIN

Maybe.

ARKADINA

Everyone has conspired to torment me today! *(She cries.)*

TRIGORIN

(He holds his head.) She doesn't understand! She doesn't want to understand!

ARKADINA

Am I so old and ugly that you can talk to me this way about another woman? *(She embraces and kisses him.)* Oh, you have lost your mind! My beautiful, amazing... You are the last chapter of my life! *(She kneels.)* My joy, my pride, my happiness... *(She embraces his knees.)* If you abandon me, even for one hour, then I will not survive, I will lose my mind, my astounding, extraordinary lover, my king...

TRIGORIN

Someone'll come in. *(He helps her to stand.)*

ARKADINA

Let them, I'm not ashamed of my love for you. *(She kisses his hands.)* My treasure, my desperate darling, you want to behave like a raving maniac, but I won't let you... *(She laughs.)* You are mine... you are mine... Yes, this forehead is mine, and these eyes are mine, and this beautiful silky hair is mine... You are all mine. You are so talented, so intelligent, the best of all our contemporary writers, you are the only hope of Russia... You are so sincere, simple, fresh, clever, funny... With one stroke you create the poetry of a landscape, your characters are so alive. Oh, to read you is to be in rapture! Do you think this is flattery? Am I flattering you? Well, look me in the eye... look... Do I look like a liar? Look at me, I'm the only one who appreciates you, the only one who'll tell you the truth, my sweet, magnificent magician... Can you go? Really? Will you leave me?

TRIGORIN

I have no will of my own... I have never had a will... I'm a dishrag, limp, always submissive – how can that possibly be attractive to women? All right, take me, take me away, but don't let me out of your sight for a moment...

ARKADINA

(To herself.) Now he's mine. *(Freely and easily, like nothing took place.)* Darling, if you really want, you can stay. I'll leave today and you can come later, in a week. What's the hurry?

TRIGORIN

No, let's go together.

ARKADINA

As you wish. Together, yes, together...

Pause. TRIGORIN makes a note in his little book.

What are you writing?

TRIGORIN

This morning I heard something good: "virgin forest"... I can use it one day... *(He stretches himself.)* All right then, travel... the carriages, the stations, refreshment buffets, railroad food, conversations... words, words, words ...

SHAMRAYEV

(Enters.) I have the honor to announce, with great regret, that the horses are ready. It is time, most respected one, to go to the station; the train will arrive at five minutes past two. And will you, Irina Nikolayevna, be so kind as to find out where the actor Suzdaltsev is now? Still alive? Healthy? We had a drink together once... He was brilliant in "The Mail Robbery" in Yelizavetgrad. In the same play, I also remember the tragedian, Izmailov, who was just as excellent... Don't hurry, most respected one, we still have five minutes. In a melodrama I once saw, they played conspirators, and when they were caught, one of them was supposed to say: "We are caught in a trap", but Izmailov said – "We are traught in a clap"... *(He chuckles.)* In a clap...

While he speaks, YAKOV busies himself around the suitcases, a HOUSEMAID carries ARKADINA's hat, coat, umbrella and gloves; everyone helps ARKADINA to dress. From the left door a COOK peeps out, and then enters tentatively. Enter POLINA ANDREYEVNA, then SORIN and MEDVEDENKO.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

(With a small basket.) Here are some plums for you for the journey... Very sweet. I hope you'll treat yourself...

ARKADINA

You are very kind, Polina Andreyevna.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

Farewell, my dear! If everything wasn't just so, please forgive us. *(She cries.)*

ARKADINA

(She embraces her.) Everything was fine, just fine. You mustn't cry.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

Time's running out...

ARKADINA

What can we do!

SORIN

(In an overcoat with a cape, in a hat, with a cane, enters from the left door; crossing the room.) It's time, sister, we can't be late. I'm going to take my seat. *(He exits.)*

MEDVEDENKO

And I'll walk to the station... to see you off. I'll be there in no time. *(He exits.)*

ARKADINA

Bye bye, my dears... If we're alive and healthy, in the summer we'll see each other again...

The HOUSEMAID, YAKOV and COOK kiss her hand.

Don't forget me. *(She gives the COOK a ruble.)* Here is a ruble — for the three of you.

COOK

We humbly thank you, madam. Happy days to you!

MAID

Do Svidaniya.

YAKOV
Good luck!

SHAMRAYEV
Farewell, Boris Alekseyevich! Be sure to write.

ARKADINA
Where is Konstantin? Tell him I'm leaving. I need to say goodbye. Well, remember me fondly. *(To YAKOV.)* I gave the cook a ruble. It's for the three of you.

Everyone exits to the right. The stage is empty. Offstage we hear the noise of people being seen off. The HOUSEMAID returns, in order to take the little basket with plums, and again exits.

TRIGORIN
(Returning.) I forgot my walking-stick. Oh, I think it's on the terrace.

He goes and by the left door meets NINA, who enters.

You! We're leaving...

NINA
I just had a feeling I'd see you again. *(Excitedly.)* Boris Alekseyevich, I have finally decided, the die is cast, I'm going on the stage. I'll be gone by tomorrow, I'll leave my father, leave everyone and start my new life... So I'm going to Moscow ... like you. Maybe we can meet sometime?

TRIGORIN
(Glancing back.) Stay at the Hotel Slavyanskii Bazaar... Let me hear from you immediately... Grokholskii house, Molchanovka Street... I've got to go...

Pause.

NINA
Just one more minute ...

TRIGORIN
(Quietly.) You are so beautiful... I'm so happy that I'll see you again.

She puts her head on his chest.

I'll see these lovely eyes, this inexpressibly beautiful, tender smile... this angelic face... My darling....

A prolonged kiss.

CURTAIN.

Act IV

Between the third and fourth acts two years pass.

One of the sitting-rooms in SORIN's home, converted by KONSTANTIN TREPLYOV into a working office. To the right and left are doors, leading to interior rooms. Directly up center is the glass door to the terrace. Aside from the usual sitting-room furniture, in the right corner is a writing desk, near the left door a Turkish sofa, a cupboard with books, books on the windowsills, on the chairs. – Evening. A single lamp burns under a shade. Semi-darkness. The trees stirring and the wind is howling in the chimneys. The watchman taps. MEDVEDENKO and MASHA enter.

MASHA

(Calls.) Konstantin Gavrilovich! Konstantin Gavrilovich! *(Looking around.)* He's not in here. The old man is constantly asking, where's Kostya, where's Kostya... He cannot live without him...

MEDVEDENKO

He's afraid of being alone. *(Listening.)* What terrible weather! It's been like this two days in a row.

MASHA

(She turns up the lamp.) There are waves on the lake. Huge ones.

MEDVEDENKO

It's dark in the garden. We should tell them to tear down that stage. It's just standing there, bare and abandoned, and the curtain flaps in the wind. When I went past it last night I thought I heard someone crying.

MASHA

Hmmm...

Pause.

MEDVEDENKO

Masha, let's go home!

MASHA

(She shakes her head.) No, I'll spend the night here.

MEDVEDENKO

(Pleading.) Masha, let's go! Our baby must be hungry.

MASHA

Never mind. Matryona will feed him.

Pause.

MEDVEDENKO

It's really a shame. Three nights already without his mother.

MASHA

You're so boring lately. In the old days at least you would philosophize a little, but now it's always baby, home, baby, home — it's all you can talk about.

MEDVEDENKO

Let's go, Masha!

MASHA

Go yourself.

MEDVEDENKO

Your father won't give me horses.

MASHA

Yes he will. Ask him and he'll do it.

MEDVEDENKO

Maybe. I'll ask him. So, will you come tomorrow?

MASHA

(She takes snuff.) Yes, yes, tomorrow. You're driving me crazy.

Enter TREPLYOV and POLINA ANDREYEVNA; TREPLYOV carries pillows and a blanket, and POLINA ANDREYEVNA bed clothes; they put them on the Turkish sofa, then TREPLYOV walks to his desk and sits.

MASHA

What's this for, Mama?

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

Pyotr Nikolayevich asked to make his bed here near Kostya.

MASHA

Let me... *(She makes the bed.)*

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

(Sighing.) Old people are like little children. *(She goes to the writing table, and, leaning her elbows on it, looks at the manuscript.)*

Pause.

MEDVEDENKO

So I'm going. Farewell, Masha. *(He kisses his wife's hand.)* Farewell, mamasha. *(He tries to kiss his mother-in-law's hand.)*

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

(Annoyed.) Well! Go with God.

MEDVEDENKO

Farewell, Konstantin Gavrilovich.

TREPLYOV silently offers his hand; MEDVEDENKO exits.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

(Glancing at the manuscript.) No one ever guessed you'd turn out to be a real writer, Kostya. And look at you, thank God. You've even started to receive money from journals. *(She passes her hand over his hair.)* And you've become so handsome... Sweet Kostya, be a little more affectionate with my Mashenka!..

MASHA

(Making the bed.) Leave him alone, mama.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA
(*To TREPLYOV.*) She's a lovely girl.

Pause.

A woman doesn't need much, Kostya, just a tender look now and then. Believe me, I know.

TREPLYOV stands from the desk and silently exits.

MASHA
Now you've made him angry. Did you have to bother him?

POLINA ANDREYEVNA
I pity you, Mashenka.

MASHA
Just what I need!

POLINA ANDREYEVNA
My heart is sick for you. You know I see everything, I understand everything.

MASHA
It's all ridiculous. Unrequited love—that's only in novels. Never mind. You can't sit around always hoping that something will happen... If you start to feel love in your heart, you've got to get rid of it. Listen, they promised to transfer Semyon to another school district. Once we move there – I will forget everything... I will tear this love from my heart by the roots.

Two rooms away a melancholy waltz is heard.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA
Kostya is playing. Hmm, he must be depressed.

MASHA
(*She noiselessly does two-three turns of a waltz.*) The main thing for me, mama, is not to see him. If only Semyon's transfer comes through, then believe me, in one month I'll completely forget him. It doesn't mean a thing.

The left door opens, DORN and MEDVEDENKO roll SORIN in a wheelchair.

MEDVEDENKO

There are six in the house now. And flour is five kopeks a pound.

DORN

That's the way it goes, I'm afraid.

MEDVEDENKO

It's easy for you to laugh. You're rolling in money.

DORN

Money? From thirty years of practice, a difficult practice, mind you, when I didn't have a moment to myself night or day, I managed to save just two thousand, and I spent it all on a trip abroad. I have nothing.

MASHA

(To her husband.) You haven't left yet?

MEDVEDENKO

(Guilty.) Oh, sure, when no one will give me any horses.

MASHA

(With bitter vexation, under her breath.) I wish I had never laid eyes on you!

SORIN's chair comes to a stop in the left side of the room; POLINA ANDREYEVNA, MASHA and DORN sit nearby; MEDVEDENKO, doleful, withdraws to the side.

DORN

My god, this room has changed! It used to be a drawing-room, now it's an office.

MASHA

Konstantin Gavrilovich is more comfortable here. He can go out to the garden to think whenever he likes.

The watchman taps.

SORIN

Where's my sister?

DORN

She went to the station to meet Trigorin. She'll be right back.

SORIN

If you needed to bring my sister down here, I must be very ill. (*He goes silent for a while.*) Here's a good one for you, I am dangerously ill, and in the meantime, no one will give me any medication.

DORN

What do you want? Valerian drops? Sodium carbonate? Quinine?

SORIN

Ah yes, now comes the philosophy — leave me out of this! (*Nodding his head toward the sofa.*) Is that fixed up for me?

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

For you, Pyotr Nikolayevich.

SORIN

Thank you kindly.

DORN

(*He sings.*) "The moon floats along the night sky..."

SORIN

Listen, I want to give Kostya a subject for a story. It must be called: "The Man Who Wanted". "L'homme qui a voulu". In my youth I wanted to become a writer, a man of letters – I didn't; I wanted to speak beautifully – and instead I speak abominably (*he mocks himself*): "as it were and so on and so forth, this that and the other, etcetera..." I babble on and on until I run out of words; I wanted to marry – and I never did; I always wanted to live in town – and here I am ending my life in the country, as it were.

DORN

You wanted to become a State Councilor – and you became one.

SORIN

(He laughs.) I never wanted that. That just happened to me.

DORN

To be filled with regrets at sixty-two, you have to admit — that's pretty useless.

SORIN

How ungenerous you are. One wants to live, can't you understand that!

DORN

That's just ridiculous. Everyone must die — it's the law of nature.

SORIN

You talk like a fat cat. You are just so satisfied with your life, that you don't understand anyone else's unhappiness. But believe me, when the time comes, even you will be afraid to die.

DORN

Fear of death — is an animal response... You've got to get a hold of it and suppress it. It's just those religious types who are afraid, facing eternity with their sins on their heads. In the first place, you're a non-believer. In the second place — what sins have you committed? You worked in the justice department for twenty-five years — that's the whole story.

TREPLYOV enters and sits on a little stool by SORIN's feet. MASHA does not take her eyes off of him the entire time.

DORN

We are keeping Konstantin Gavrilovich from working.

TREPLYOV

No, that's fine.

Pause.

MEDVEDENKO

Permit me to ask, doctor, how much does a ream of paper cost abroad nowadays?

DORN

How should I know? I never bought any.

MEDVEDENKO

And which city did you like most in your travels?

DORN

Genoa.

TREPLYOV

Why Genoa?

DORN

In Genoa the crowds are marvelous. When you leave your hotel in the evening, the street suddenly fills up with people. Then you move with the crowd without any specific destination, here and there, in and out, you become part of a living organism, merging with it psychically and you start to believe that indeed a single world soul is possible — just as Nina Mikhailovna spoke of in your play. By the way, where is Nina now? Where is she and how is she doing?

TREPLYOV

Probably, fine.

DORNI

hear she's supposed to be living some kind of peculiar life. What's going on?

TREPLYOV

That's a long story, doctor.

DORN

Make it a short one.

Pause.

TREPLYOV

She ran away from home and took up with Trigorin. Had you heard this?

DORN

Yes.

TREPLYOV

She had a child. The child died. Trigorin stopped loving her and returned to his “previous attachment” — no surprise to anyone. In truth he never really left his “previous attachment” and he somehow devised a plan to go back and forth between both of them. The way I understand it, Nina’s personal life was a disaster.

DORN

And on the stage?

TREPLYOV

Worse still. She debuted in a theatre outside Moscow, then left for a tour to the provinces. At the time I kept right up with her — wherever she went, I went too. She took on all of the big roles, but she acted coarsely, tastelessly, with lots of shrieking and ugly gestures. There were moments when you could see her talent — when she was crying or dying — but those were few and far between.

DORN

So when all is said and done, is there any talent?

TREPLYOV

It’s hard to know. Probably. I went to see her, but she didn’t want to see me, and her maid wouldn’t let me into her hotel room. I understood what she was going through and I didn’t insist.

Pause.

What else can I tell you? I got some letters from her when I returned home. The letters were intelligent, warm, interesting; she didn’t complain, but I could feel that she was deeply unhappy — every line was forced. And her mind seemed a little confused. She signed her name “Seagull”. Just like in Pushkin’s *Rusalka* when the miller calls himself a crow, she always says she’s a seagull. Now she’s here.

DORN

What do you mean, here?

TREPLYOV

In town, at the local hotel. She’s been here for five days already. I tried to see her, and Marya Ilyinishna went too, but she wouldn’t let anyone in. Semyon Semyonovich is pretty sure he saw her after lunch yesterday walking in a field not far from here.

MEDVEDENKO

Yes, I saw her. She was walking toward the town. I bowed, asked if she'd come visit us. She said she would.

TREPLYOV

She won't come.

Pause.

Her father and stepmother don't even want to know her. They've hired watchmen all over their estate to keep her off. (*He walks with the doctor to the desk.*) It's a lot easier, doctor, to be a philosopher on paper than it is in real life!

SORIN

The girl was lovely.

DORN

Pardon?

SORIN

Lovely, I say, the girl was lovely. Even State Councilor Sorin was in love with her for a time.

DORN

You old Romeo!

SHAMRAYEV's laugh is heard.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

I think they've arrived from the station...

TREPLYOV

Yes, I hear mama.

Enter ARKADINA, TRIGORIN, behind them SHAMRAYEV.

SHAMRAYEV

(Entering.) We're all growing old, we're all weather-beaten and worn down, but you, most respected one, are always young... A bright-colored blouse, liveliness...gracefulness...

ARKADINA

You're trying to jinx me again! *(She spits over her left shoulder three times.)*

TRIGORIN

(To SORIN.) Hello, Pyotr Nikolayevich! What's this about you being ill. That's not good!
(Seeing MASHA, joyfully.) Marya Ilyinichna!

MASHA

You recognized me? *(She presses his hand.)*

TRIGORIN

Married?

MASHA

Long ago.

TRIGORIN

Happy? *(He exchanges bows with DORN and MEDVEDENKO, then tentatively approaches TREPLYOV.)* Irina Nikolayevna said, you're ready to let bygones be bygones.

TREPLYOV extends a hand to him.

ARKADINA

(To her son.) Look, Boris Alekseyevich has brought the journal with your new story.

TREPLYOV

(Taking the book, to TRIGORIN.) Many thanks. You are very kind.

They sit.

TRIGORIN

Your admirers send their regards... In Petersburg and Moscow there's a lot of talk about you, and everyone asks me about you. Lots of: what's he like, how old, dark or light. For

some reason people don't realize you're so young and since you publish under a pen name, nobody knows who you are. You're an enigma, like The Man in the Iron Mask.

TREPLYOV

Are you staying long?

TRIGORIN

No, tomorrow I'll head back to Moscow. I've got to. I'm rushing to finish a story and after that I promised to contribute something to an anthology. In other words – it's the same old story.

While they talk, ARKADINA and POLINA ANDREYEVNA open a card table in the middle of the room; SHAMRAYEV lights candles, places chairs. They take a lotto game from the cupboard.

The weather seems to be against me. That wind is brutal. Tomorrow morning, if it calms down, I'll try to do some fishing in the lake. By the way, I really need to take a look at the garden and that place where – remember? – you did your play. I've got a good idea for a story and I just need to refresh my memory.

MASHA

(To her father.) Papa, give my husband a horse! He's got to go home.

SHAMRAYEV

(He mimics.) Horse... go home... *(Severely.)* You saw for yourself, the horses just came back from the station. They can't go out again.

MASHA

For heaven's sake, there are other horses... *(Seeing that her father is quiet, waves with her hand.)* Oh, what's the point...

MEDVEDENKO

Masha, I'll walk. It's fine.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

(Sighing.) Walk, in this weather... *(She takes a seat at the card table.)* Please, ladies and gentlemen.

MEDVEDENKO

It's only four miles... Farewell... *(He kisses his wife's hand.)* Farewell, mamasha.

His mother-in-law reluctantly extends her hand to him to kiss.

I don't want to be any trouble, it's just the baby... *(He bows to everyone.)* Farewell... *(He exits; his gait is apologetic.)*

SHAMRAYEV

He'll get there. He's not a general, you know.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

(She taps on the table.) Please, ladies and gentlemen. Let's not waste any time before they call us to dinner.

SHAMRAYEV, MASHA and DORN take a seat at the table.

ARKADINA

(To TRIGORIN.) When the long autumn nights set in, we always play lotto here at this table. Take a look: this is the same lotto set our dear mother used to play with us when we were children. Do you want to join us 'til dinner? *(She sits with TRIGORIN at the table.)* It's a boring old game, but it's fun when you get used to it. *(She deals everyone three cards.)*

TREPLYOV

(Leafing through the journal.) He's read his own story, but he hasn't even cut the pages of mine. *(He puts the journal on the desk, then makes for the left door; passing by his mother, he kisses her on the head.)*

ARKADINA

Kostya?

TREPLYOV

Sorry, I just don't feel like it... I'll take a walk. *(He exits.)*

ARKADINA

The ante is: one ten-kopek piece. Would you put it in for me, doctor.

DORN

At your service, madame.

MASHA

Everyone in? I'm starting... Twenty-two!

ARKADINA
Got it.

MASHA
Three!

DORN
Indeed!

MASHA
Did you get three? Eight! Eighty-one! Ten!

SHAMRAYEV
Slow down.

ARKADINA
What a triumph I had in Kharkov, my dear old friend — my head is still spinning.

MASHA
Thirty-four!

Offstage, a melancholy waltz is heard.

ARKADINA
The students arranged a marvelous reception... Three baskets, two wreaths, and look at this... *(She takes from her chest a brooch and flings it on the table.)*

SHAMRAYEV
Yes, that is something...

MASHA
Fifty!..

DORN

Just fifty?

ARKADINA

I looked gorgeous. You have to admit, I know how to dress.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

Kostya's playing. He's depressed, poor boy.

SHAMRAYEV

The reviewers are saying awful things about him in the papers.

MASHA

Seventy-seven!

ARKADINA

Who cares what they say!

TRIGORIN

He's unlucky. He can't seem to find his own voice. One moment it's strange, vague and then it becomes gibberish – pure ravings. Not one living character.

MASHA

Eleven!

ARKADINA

(Looking over at SORIN.) Petrusha, are you bored?

Pause.

He's asleep.

DORN

State Councilor Sorin is asleep.

MASHA

Seven! Ninety!

TRIGORIN

If I lived here, by the lake, would I be able to write? I think I'd be too obsessed with fishing all the time.

MASHA

Twenty-eight!

TRIGORIN

To catch a perch – Bliss!

DORN

I don't know, I believe in Konstantin Gavrilovich. He's got something! Something! He thinks in vivid, colorful images, and they really touch me. Only it's a crime his stories seem so aimless. He creates an atmosphere, nothing more, and let's face it, you can't go too far with just atmosphere. Irina Nikolayevna, are you glad your son is a writer?

ARKADINA

Imagine, I still haven't read him. There never seems to be any time.

MASHA

Twenty-six!

TREPLYOV quietly enters and goes to his own desk.

SHAMRAYEV

(To TRIGORIN.) We still have that thing you left with us, Boris Alekseyevich.

TRIGORIN

What thing?

SHAMRAYEV

That seagull Konstantin Gavrilovich shot. You asked me to have it stuffed.

TRIGORIN

I don't remember. *(Thinking.)* I don't remember!

MASHA

Sixty-six! One!

TREPLYOV

(He flings open the window, he listens.) It's so dark! I don't know why I feel so nervous.

ARKADINA

Kostya, close the window, it's drafty in here.

TREPLYOV closes the window.

MASHA

Eighty-eight!

TRIGORIN

I win, ladies and gentlemen.

ARKADINA

(Happily.) Bravo! bravo!

SHAMRAYEV

Bravo!

ARKADINA

This man is always lucky. *(She stands.)* And now let's get something to eat. Our celebrity hasn't eaten all day. We'll come back to the game after dinner. *(To her son.)* Kostya, leave your writing and come join us.

TREPLYOV

I don't want to, mama, I'm not hungry.

ARKADINA

Whatever you want... *(Waking SORIN.)* Petrusha, dinner! *(She takes SHAMRAYEV under the arm.)* I must tell you more about my reception in Kharkov...

POLINA ANDREYEVNA puts out the candles on the table, then she and DORN wheel the chair. Everyone exits through the left door except TREPLYOV, who remains alone at the desk.

TREPLYOV

(He starts to write; he skims through what he has already written.) I've talked so much about new forms, but the truth is I'm just as much a hack as everyone else. *(He reads.)* "The poster on the fence proclaimed... A pale face, framed by dark hair..." Proclaimed, framed by... Ekh, this is such garbage. *(He strikes it out.)* I'll begin when the hero wakes up to the sound of the rain, and everything else must go. The description of the moonlit night is so clichéd. It's easy for Trigorin, he's got his style down perfectly... With him the neck of a bottle glitters on the dam and the mill wheel creates a dark shadow and voila, he's got his moonlit night — but I have to have a flickering light and quiet twinkling stars and the distant sound of a piano, dying out in the fragrant night air... Oh, God, it's agonizing.

Pause.

Yes, I see the truth of it now, it's not a question of old or new forms that matter, but what comes from a man's soul.

Someone raps at the window nearest the desk.

What's that? *(He looks at the window.)* I don't see anybody... *(He opens the glass door and looks in the garden.)* Someone ran down the steps. *(He calls.)* Who's there?

He exits; we can hear him move quickly on the terrace; after half a minute he returns with NINA.

Nina! Nina!

NINA puts her head to his chest and sobs.

(Moved.) Nina! Nina! It's you... you... I just had a feeling all day long — it's been awful. *(He takes her hat and cloak from her.)* Oh, my dear, my darling, she's come! Don't cry, we mustn't cry.

NINA

Someone is here.

TREPLYOV

No one.

NINA

Lock the doors, they'll come in.

TREPLYOV

No one will come in.

NINA

I know, Irina Nikolayevna is here. Lock the doors...

TREPLYOV

(He locks the right door with a key, he approaches the left.) This one doesn't have a lock. I'll block it with a chair. *(He stands the chair by the door.)* Don't be frightened, no one will come in.

NINA

(Intently gazing at his face.) Let me look at you. *(Looking around.)* It's warm, good... This was the drawing-room. Have I changed very much?

TREPLYOV

Yes... You're thinner, and your eyes are bigger. Nina, it is so strange to see you. Why wouldn't you let me visit you? Why did you wait 'til now to come here? I know, you've been staying here almost a week... Several times a day I went to see you. I stood under your window, like a poor beggar.

NINA

I was afraid that you hated me. Every night I dream that you see me and don't recognize me. If you only knew! I've been coming here every day since the moment I arrived... to the lake. I've been at your door so many times but I couldn't bring myself to come in. Let's sit.

They sit.

We'll sit and we'll talk, talk. It's nice here, warm, cozy... Listen – the wind? Turgenev has a passage: "Happy is he who has a roof over his head and a warm corner to rest on such nights." I – seagull... No, that's not right. What did I start to say? Yes... Turgenev... "And may the Lord help all homeless wanderers"... It's nothing. *(She sobs.)*

TREPLYOV

Nina, please don't cry... Nina!

NINA

It's nothing, I need to do this... I haven't cried for two years. Yesterday late in the evening I went to the garden, to see if our theatre was still there. And it was! I started crying for the first time in two years, and suddenly I felt more clear. You see, I'm not crying anymore. *(She takes him by the hand.)* So, you've become a writer... You're a writer, I – an actress... We're both right in the middle of it... I was so happy as a child – I used to wake up each morning and sing; I loved you, I dreamed about glory, and now? Tomorrow morning early I have to go to Yelets, third class... with the peasants, and in Yelets disgusting merchants who proclaim their love of art will paw me with compliments. Horrible!

TREPLYOV
Why Yelets?

NINA
I've got an engagement for the whole winter. It's time to go.

TREPLYOV
Nina, I cursed you, hated you, tore up your letters and photographs, but I've always known that my soul is bound to yours forever. I don't have the strength to stop loving you, Nina. Ever since I lost you, my life has been unbearable — I'm suffering... My youth seems to have vanished. I feel like I'm ninety years old. I call your name, I kiss the ground you walk on; I see your face everywhere, I see that tender smile, which used to shine on me in the best years of my life...

NINA
(Confusedly.) Why do you talk to me like this? Why?

TREPLYOV
I'm so lonely, I don't feel close to anybody. I'm so cold, it's like I live in a cave, and everything I write is so cold and stale — dead. Stay here, Nina, I beg you, or at least let me go with you!

NINA quickly puts on her hat and cloak.

Nina, why? For God's sake, Nina... *(He watches, as she gets dressed.)*

Pause.

NINA
My carriage is waiting at the gate. Don't see me off, I'll go by myself... *(On the verge of tears.)*
Give me some water...

TREPLYOV
(He gives her something to drink.) Where are you going now?

NINA
To town.

Pause.

Is Irina Nikolayevna here?

TREPLYOV

Yes... On Thursday my uncle got worse, we telegraphed her to come.

NINA

Why did you say that you kiss the ground I walk on? I ought to be killed. *(She bends down on the table.)* I'm so tired! I need to rest... to rest! *(She raises her head.)* I – seagull... no, that's not right — actress. Oh, yes! *(Hearing the laughter of ARKADINA and TRIGORIN, she listens, then runs to the left door and looks through the key-hole.)* And he is here... *(Returning to TREPLYOV.)* Yes, yes... No, it's nothing... Yes... He didn't believe in the theatre, he always laughed at my dreams, and little by little I stopped believing in them too, I lost heart... And then came the miseries of love, jealousy and the constant fear for the baby's life... I became so petty, worthless really, my acting was so amateurish... I didn't know what to do with my hands, I didn't know how to stand on the stage, I wasn't in control of my voice. You have no idea how awful it is when you know you're acting badly. I – seagull... No, that's not right. Do you remember, you shot a seagull? Once upon a time a man comes along and for no reason at all kills it... A subject for a short story... That's not it... *(She rubs her forehead.)* What was I saying?.. Yes, I was talking about the theater. But now it's different — now I'm the real thing — an actress. I act with delight, with rapture. It's as if I'm intoxicated on the stage, and I feel so beautiful. And since I've been here, I've been walking back and forth, back and forth and I've begun to feel my strength coming back. I know now, I understand, Kostya, that in our business — it doesn't matter if it's acting or writing — the most important thing is not fame, or brilliance, or those things I always dreamed about, it's the ability to endure, to have patience. We have to be able to bear our own cross and believe. I believe and to me it's not so painful, and when I think about my own calling, then I'm not afraid anymore.

TREPLYOV

(Mournfully.) You're on a journey — you know where you're going, but I'm still wandering around in a chaos of daydreams and images. I don't know where I am going or why. I don't know what my calling is.

NINA

(Listening.) Ssh... I'm going. Farewell. When I become an important actress, be sure to come and see me. Do you promise? But now... *(She squeezes his hand.)* It's late. I can barely stand on my feet... I'm so hungry. I need to eat...

TREPLYOV

Stay, I'll get you some supper...

NINA

No, no... Don't see me off, I'll go by myself... My carriage is nearby... So, she brought him with her? Yes, it makes no difference. When you see Trigorin, don't say anything... I love him. I love him more than ever, more than before... A subject for a short story... I love, I love passionately, I love desperately. It was so nice, Kostya! Remember? How warm, joyful, pure life felt – like gentle, graceful flowers... Remember? *(She recites.)* “People, lions, eagles and partridges, horned deer, geese, spiders, silent fishes dwelling in the water, starfish and those that cannot be seen with our eyes, — in a word, all lives, all lives, all lives, having accomplished their doleful circle, died out... Already thousands of centuries have passed since the earth has borne one living creature and in vain the poor moon shines her light. No longer do the cranes awaken the meadow, no longer do the maybugs sing in the linden groves...” *(She fitfully embraces TREPLYOV and runs out through the glass door.)*

TREPLYOV

(After a pause.) I hope nobody sees her in the garden. That would upset mama...

For two minutes he rips up all of his manuscripts and throws them under the desk, then opens the right door and exits.

DORN

(Trying to open the left door.) That's odd. Door seems to be locked... *(He enters and places the chair in place.)* Obstacle course.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

(Entering behind him.) You were looking at her the whole time. I am requesting, I am begging you by everything that is sacred to you, do not torment me. Do not look at her, do not talk with her.

DORN

All right, I'll try...

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

(Presses his hand to her breast.) I know I'm too jealous. I'm so ashamed... You must be sick of me.

DORN

No, it's nothing. If you must keep talking, do...

Enter ARKADINA, MASHA and YAKOV with bottles, then SHAMRAYEV and TRIGORIN.

ARKADINA

Put the wine and the beer over here for Boris Alekseyevich. We'll play and drink. Let's take a seat, ladies and gentlemen.

POLINA ANDREYEVNA

(To YAKOV.) Bring the tea now. *(She lights candles, sits at the card table.)*

SHAMRAYEV

(He leads TRIGORIN to the cupboard.) Here's the thing I was telling you about before... *(He takes the stuffed seagull from the cupboard.)* Just what you ordered.

TRIGORIN

(Looking at the seagull.) I don't remember! *(Pondering.)* I don't remember!

Offstage a shot is heard; everyone shudders.

ARKADINA

(Frightened.) What's that?

DORN

Nothing. It's probably something in my medicine bag, something must have burst. Don't worry. *(He exits through the right door, after a half minute he returns.)* Yes, that was it. A bottle of ether exploded. *(He sings.)* "I am before you again charmed..."

ARKADINA

(Sitting at the table.) Phew, that scared me. It reminded me, how... *(She covers her face with her hands.)* Everything went black...

DORN

(Leafing through the journal, to TRIGORIN.) I saw this article a couple of months ago... a letter from America, and I wanted to ask you... *(he takes TRIGORIN by the arm and leads him downstage.)* I'm very interested in this question... *(In a lower tone.)* Take Irina Nikolayevna away from here quickly. Konstantin Gavrilovich has shot himself...

CURTAIN.

Allison Horsley has served as a dramaturg and/or literary manager for La Jolla Playhouse, Denver Center Theatre Company, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Kitchen Dog Theater, Yale Repertory Theatre, Baltimore's Centerstage, and Dallas Theater Center. Since its La Jolla premiere in 2004, she has been the dramaturg for the Tony-winning musical *Jersey Boys* (Broadway, London, Toronto, Las Vegas, national tours). Allison is currently under commission from Oregon Shakespeare Festival to create new literal translations of Chekhov's major plays for adaptation by Libby Appel, and together they have completed versions of *The Cherry Orchard*, *Seagull*, *Uncle Vanya*, and *Three Sisters*, with *Ivanov* coming next year. She holds an MFA from the Yale School of Drama and is an assistant professor of dramatic literature at her undergraduate alma mater, University of Denver.

Libby Appel is currently Artistic Director Emerita of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. She served as Artistic Director of the festival from 1995 to 2007. Prior to that she was the Artistic Director of Indiana Repertory Theatre from 1992 to 1996. She was the Dean of the Theatre School at California Institute of the Arts from 1981 to 1989 and head of the acting program at California State University Long Beach from 1976 to 1981. She holds a BA from the University of Michigan and an MA from Northwestern University as well as three honorary doctorates from Southern Oregon University, the University of Portland and Willamette University. Ms. Appel was the 2010 recipient of the Stephen and Christine Schwarzman Legacy Award for Lifetime Achievement and Excellence in Theater which she received this April at the Kennedy Center in D.C.

Introduction:
Francisco Nieva and *It's Not True*

In 1987, the distinguished playwright, director and designer, Francisco Nieva, who taught for many years at Madrid's Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático (Royal School of Theatre Arts) published three dramatic exercises for young actors. Appropriately, he titled the book, *Fantasy, Humor and Terror. It's Not True (No es verdad)* first appeared in this collection of fanciful short plays that draw on the melodramatic codes of classic Hollywood movies.

Nieva labels *It's Not True* as a "fast melodrama." The action is set in the nineteenth century. Two young men, Eric and Elin, and a young woman, Blanche, have been left to fend for themselves in their dilapidated family castles somewhere in rural France. To take their minds off being hungry and cold, they entertain themselves with stories of how Eric has become leader of a wolf pack. When Blanche wishes to mate with the wolf-man and join the pack, her cousin Elin attempts to intervene. Wolves attack Elin and the housekeeper, whom Blanche detests. Elin survives but the housekeeper is killed. The reader or spectator is left with the question of whether Blanche has gone crazy or if she truly believes Eric's tale. It is also not clear if Eric really controls the wolves, but he is incarcerated and dies while locked away. Eventually Blanche decides to take revenge on Elin, whom she holds responsible for Eric's death.

The little drama may be considered a spoof of stories of vampires and werewolves like those that have once again gained international interest. The macabre in Nieva plays is always underpinned with humor, while death and monsters are never devoid of eroticism.

The relatively small cast (three men and two women) and the single set (interior of a chateau) facilitate staging by amateur or student companies. The play received its Spanish premiere in 1988 in Madrid, when it was paired with *Foxy, I Love You (Te quiero, zorra)* and directed by Juanjo Grande. In translation to French, it was successfully performed at the Avignon Festival in 1994 and in 1995 at the Colline National Theatre in Paris, under the direction of Agathe Alexis. The French production also included *Red Riding Hood, Part II (Caperucita y el otro)*.

Nieva, who is also a novelist and journalist, was elected to the Spanish Royal Academy in 1986. He has been awarded numerous major prizes in Spain, including the National Theatre Prize and the Prince of Asturias Prize for Literature. Among published plays in English translation are *Coronada and the Bull* (Trans. Emil Signes, in *Drama Contemporary* : Spain, 1985) and *Red Riding Hood, Part II* (Trans. Phyllis Zatlin, in *CTReview*, 28.2, Fall 2006).

--Phyllis Zatlin

IT'S NOT TRUE

(No es verdad)

By Francisco Nieva

Translated from the Spanish by Phyllis Zatlin

[It's Not True is fully protected under international copyright laws. Contact translator at pzatlin@hotmail.com or author, through SGAE, at acarrion@sgae.es]

CAST

Blanche de Bressac

Elin de Saint Clarc

Eric de Villemont

Prudence

A police inspector

(Through the windows we can see that it is snowing heavily. Nineteen-year old BLANCHE is huddled in a Louis XIV armchair, reading a book. She is wearing gloves and shivering from the cold; her teeth are chattering. The living room of the small chateau is freezing cold and somber. PRUDENCE, the old governess, is a tall, thin woman with an unattractive face; she is knitting. For a time PRUDENCE observes her trembling young mistress; then she sets her work aside, takes from her skirts a piece of flint or a lighter and a burlap ball and carefully lights the candles of a candelabra. All the while she looks at Blanche with a gesture of pity and misgiving.)

PRUDENCE: At least you can warm your hands for a quarter of an hour. I'll mark the time with the hourglass so that we won't misjudge. Do you agree? *(She crosses to a piece of furniture on which is placed an old sand filled hourglass and turns the hourglass over.)* These candles have to last us five days. We can't count on having any more before then.

BLANCHE: I don't want them. You use them, Prudence.

PRUDENCE: I don't want to be tempted by such luxuries. The Count would reproach me. He'd say, "You're getting old, Prudence." No, no, not that!

BLANCHE: What a hypocrite! Who's going to tell him? For the amount of time he spends in this house, he doesn't see you even twice a year.

PRUDENCE: So let him enjoy himself with those hot women, in Paris, in the flames of Hell.

BLANCHE: This is the first time I've heard you insult my father.

PRUDENCE: I, Mademoiselle? The master is always right! God will reward him for giving us this castle and for making us follow such a narrow and virtuous path. (*BLANCHE goes back to her reading and ignores Prudence. PRUDENCE wrings her hands while looking at her young mistress, who disdains the warmth of the candelabra.*) Do you care that Eric de Villemont, that cursed redhead, prowls around the house like a wolf after every visit? He does, doesn't he? Is that the kind of marriage you want to make? (*Hearing a deep sigh.*) He's poor. Poorer than church mice. From his father he's inherited a ramshackle old castle that's falling apart, and instead of attending to his land, he's only interested in those silly wolves. Do you think that's a way for us to ever get out of here? (*BLANCHE remains silent.*) And your cousin Elin, although he's a more proper gentleman, he's poorer yet. And you don't know anybody else. You have no social contacts. In the parish, they complain about you. This isn't what they expected of Mademoiselle de Bressac. And here, nothing changes. Someday you're going to have to make a decision. (*BLANCHE obstinately refuses to speak.*) May God bless your serene and cold resolve. (*Humiliated, she puts out the candles and goes back to her knitting. Suddenly she starts to cry. BLANCHE looks at her coldly.*) Mademoiselle...my dear little Blanche. You're feeling desperate, I know it.

BLANCHE: Desperate? I don't feel desperation at all. I've been cold my whole life. I'm noble. I'm vigorous and upright. (*She gives a strange laugh, and then goes on.*) Isn't it true, Prudence, that from time to time you heat your room with a brazier? It's not easy to hide such a stench.

PRUDENCE: Mademoiselle Blanche, I... (*Suddenly she throws herself at the young woman's feet and kisses her hands.*) Mademoiselle Blanche, let's get out of here. Let's go look for the master. We'll tell him that you're becoming disillusioned, that you are bored to death by those two idlers, that your youth is wasting away.

BLANCHE: Poor Prudence! You've spent nineteen years raising me so rigidly and now you undo your own authority by asking me for help. Help from me! All right. At least you haven't forgotten that now I'm your mistress. I don't love you. I've never loved you. So, get back to the kitchen. Go warm yourself in secret, burning the wood that should have been for both of us. Thief! I'll know how to treat you from now on. At last you admit that you can't take it anymore. Old age has made you give in. You couldn't resist any longer, but I can. And I think I can resist even a great deal more, that I can go beyond any other woman, approaching wild animals and their proud self-sufficiency. I want to provide myself with freedom and adventure. Leave me alone, and before you go, open that window wide open. I need fresh air. *(Taking off her gloves and partially unbuttoning her bodice.)* I need to expose my breast to the snows in order to harden my heart and excite my desires. Go away!

PRUDENCE *(Stunned)*: Mademoiselle, for God's sake. You've gone mad. We'll die that way. *(Trembling, she opens the window).*

BLANCHE: Poppycock. If Count Bressac's unfortunate daughter has not yet died of malnutrition and cold, it's because she has become stronger and colder than all of the Bressacs together. Am I desperate? I feel that the forests and the beasts are calling to me with a lover's voice. Their howls at night tell me clearly what hunger, death and love really are. You can't understand them.

PRUDENCE: Oh, Mademoiselle, they frighten me. Why do they howl and come so near now? Is it true what you and the young masters say when the three of you gather and talk? Is it true that the wolves follow Monsieur Villemont? Isn't it just another game, like the ones you three used to play for weeks on end when you were little? What's happening now, is it true? I ought to inform your father, or call the doctor, or something. Lord, help me in this hour of peril. Oh, dear God! *(As she exits, she crosses herself and looks back into the room.)*

BLANCHE *(Throwing the book down)*: I'm through with dreaming. Now I want to know. I want to know if it's true.

(Snowflakes swirl through the open window. In the distance is heard the howl of a wolf.)

* * *

(The same setting. The window is closed. BLANCHE is holding a frame and embroidering. After a while, she sets the embroidery frame down and pulls out of her skirts a bloody handkerchief and furtively puts it up to her mouth, trying to tear off a chunk of raw meat that is wrapped in the cloth. Footsteps are heard. BLANCHE puts the handkerchief away and goes back to her embroidery.)

Her cousin ELIN DE SAINT CLARC enters. He is pale and thin and is wearing a heavy, tattered overcoat.)

ELIN: Prudence came to tell me that you've gone mad.

BLANCHE: That's alright. Let her say what she pleases.

ELIN: She says that you've given up even the most basic comforts.

BLANCHE (*Laughing*): Warming one's hands at candles, owning two out of style dresses and a goatskin cape, and eating cabbage soup with a touch of bacon are doubtless comforts that I can easily forego.

ELIN: Blanche! What are you going to do? It seems you haven't eaten for three days.

BLANCHE: Who told you that? Prudence? How do you know if I've eaten or not? I'm strong, I can eat other things that might seem less edible but that nourish me far more. Dear cousin, I am practicing austerity, I'm testing myself. With the education I've had, we'll see how far I can go. Wild animals are austere. They are content with far less than people are, but they demand higher quality.

ELIN: Blanche, what are you saying? Prudence has been talking throughout the village. The priest wants to come see you. And to me you certainly seem very odd. In your face I see some strange resolve. What were you doing? You were embroidering. (*Picking up the frame.*) What are these marks? They're...like animal tracks. (*Suddenly catching on.*) So that's it!

BLANCHE (*Agitated*): You felt him approaching, too? I can smell him from here. Yes, I sensed his arrival. I've discovered that I have this new power.

ELIN: What? Who?

BLANCHE: Eric, of course. He's out there, right under the window.

ELIN: How could you tell? I didn't hear anything.

(At the window, BLANCHE waves a greeting.)

BLANCHE: I've told him to knock at the door.

ELIN: That madman! He's going to drive you out of your mind with his stories. It's alright for us to play his game to pass the time, but everything he says is a lie. You've agreed with me on that a thousand times. His appearance, the airs he gives himself, they all show that at heart he's just trying to forget that he's an impoverished gentleman. His escape is to turn himself into a savage. It's obvious that you find his wild actions, his eccentricity attractive. Oh, you women! Don't you believe that his whole business is pure fantasy, the rambling of his extravagant character?

BLANCHE: That remains to be seen.

ELIN: Why did you call him? Very well, if his visit is of a personal nature, I'll leave.

BLANCHE: How absurd. You can stay. Perhaps you'll find it interesting.

(ERIC DE VILLEMONT enters. He is a handsome, red haired young man. He immediately tosses down the fur cape he was wearing. He is lightly clad; an unbuttoned shirt reveals his chest. He laughs.)

ERIC: Old Prudence ran away when she saw me. What happened to her, Blanche? Could you please explain?

ELIN: Eric, I warn you to leave her alone. Not Prudence, but Blanche. I tell you that she's not well. She's over excited, tired, weak.

BLANCHE: Who's weak?

ELIN: And you know what's wrong with her? She's starting to lose her grip on reality because of your stories. Let's not play the same game all the time. We have to stop it, don't you think? As for myself, I must tell you that I've never believed it.

ERIC: You surprise me. Or, I should say, that your lack of curiosity surprises me. Several times I've invited you to come with me. Now you claim that you don't believe in something you've never tried. *(To Blanche.)* You have. Right, Blanche? You've never thought for a moment that I was telling lies. *(Pause.)* Have you?

BLANCHE: That's why I called you. I want to see the wolves, really see them. I want you to show me once and for all the control you have over those wild animals. Here I am, Eric. Take me with you.

ERIC (*Very surprised*): But, Blanche! I thought that you... It's too late today.

ELIN: That's true. It doesn't seem like the appropriate time. Come on, Eric, sit down. You don't have to look for excuses. You see, Blanche? We're three unfortunate members of the provincial nobility, each with a chateau in ruins, and we console ourselves by telling fantastical tales. To escape our impoverished lives, we dream of revenge and glory. Let's be honest with one another. I'm not a deep philosopher and artist. Blanche is not the mistress of a castle who awaits the arrival of a modern hero. And you're not the leader of a wolf pack. You disappear and go to the forest for hours on end and then...who knows what you do there? Kill time, wander around. (*Pause.*) That's what you do.

ERIC: Nothing of the sort. I round up my troops and I inspect them, because I know their snouts and their coats; I rule over them, to put it clearly. As the pack leader, I can calm them down and, what is most intoxicating, my dear Elin, is that I can sic them onto a possible prey. Right now they're hungry, you know. Hungrier than I. But often what they hunt down they give to me. They share their prey with me. You can imagine how I felt the first few times. But I see that you doubt me. Blanche, you've called me so that you can test me here before this false philosopher and artist, Elin de Saint Clar.

BLANCHE: No, I didn't. I believe you and I've always believed you, Eric.

ELIN: That's enough. I'm going. I can't be bored any more with an old story that gets less and less interesting all the time. (*Under Eric's gaze, as he is about to leave, ELIN turns around, furrows his brow, and says:*) Because...let's see: today, suddenly, you refuse to show it to my cousin. Why don't you take her? Maybe it's still early enough. (*Taking out his watch.*) It's four o'clock.

ERIC: It's cold in the forest. We're going to have another storm. I know how to move about the forest well enough, I'm not in any danger because I know every inch of it, but...

BLANCHE: You think that I'm not prepared, that poor Mademoiselle de Bressac, who seems never to have set foot outside the four walls of her castle in ruins, doesn't have the courage or the agility to follow you without twisting her ankle. Isn't that it? Well it's not true. We three have had a number of tough contests and I've won more than a few times. (*Almost leaning against Eric's chest.*) I forgive you for failing to respect my ability, and I'll prove that you're wrong. I've made up my mind. Eric, I believe you. How could I not believe you? You smell like wild game, the hair on your arms brings me the touch of forest dew and of blood.

(Touching him, caressing him.) You're strong because you eat what they eat. I know it. Oh, Eric, take me with you. But take me with you forever; get me out of here for good.

ELIN: It's scandalous! Just like that you shed all modesty and insult me. *(Pause.)* How has he poisoned you like this?

BLANCHE *(To Eric)*: And you refuse to take me away with you forever. Why?

ERIC: What are you saying, Blanche? That's not possible. *(Staring at her.)* Or is it? My God! I never dared dream...

ELIN: You faker! And you want to go on hoodwinking this poor unfortunate girl.

BLANCHE *(Angrily)*: Look me in the eyes, Elin de Saint Clair. Don't you see a terrible truth in them? Go away. You don't need anything else.

ELIN: You frighten me, Blanche. How can one explain... He tells you a story, a full blown lie, and you fall for it like a fly into honey. And you fall, compromising your senses in a ... depraved, obscene way. Bah...! Go ahead and mate like savages, have the courage to live your abominable reality, but don't go surrounding it with myths or people will think you're demented, absolutely crazy. My God! Maybe all three of us are crazy?

ERIC: Why don't you calm down? You're a simpleton, my dear fellow. You're wrapped up in yourself in a bizarre way. You have such a narrow, banal, prudish idea of life and man's experience of life that (despite the assurances of zoologists) you cannot, for a moment, conceive that I could be the leader of a wolf pack. You think that, in order to impress you and Blanche, I've had the patience to classify my correspondence with several foreign universities, correspondence that you've reviewed to your satisfaction and about which you've congratulated me. It's true, my good Elin; what you consider an elaborate and even nefarious lie is absolutely true. I can howl in all the tones that encode different feelings and my friendship with that little band of beasts, the influence that I can exert over them, should be understood as power. *(Pause.)* Nevertheless, what perplexes me (and I say this in all sincerity) is this sudden change in Blanche. Yes, Blanche, that, too, is true. Tell me, what's happening to you? Something doesn't seem natural. You said that you can smell blood and the forest on my arms. I've been to the forest and to my house. In the forest I killed a deer that my wolves had captured, and at the house I left a quarter of the game for me to eat. It's very strange. On the other hand, Blanche is proposing something that represents a leap forward in my own plans, perhaps an unforeseen solution. That's why I'm disturbed. To live even closer to them, almost renouncing our condition, attempting an experiment that no one before has lived... It's not a bad idea. But I'd need a mate. My animal mate. Do you

understand? I never expected to find her in Blanche. But now I have her. She's Blanche!
(ERIC and BLANCHE embrace.)

BLANCHE: Eric, at last! You'll take me with you?

ERIC: Of course. But this is so sudden... I think I still have to prepare you.

ELIN: This is outrageous, unbearable. Eric, you and I have to settle this by ourselves. Both of you are going to pay for this. It's disgraceful the way you're making fun of me. (ERIC and BLANCHE pay no attention to him.)

BLANCHE: Eric, Eric... Have you tried eating raw meat?

ERIC: You surprise me. How you surprise me! I tried it long ago, but to no avail. A man's teeth just aren't the same as a wolf's. And the stomach isn't either. I could only handle the soft parts and that was so wasteful. I'm not saying I won't try again. And if from now on I have you at my side...

ELIN (*Laughing bitterly*): Go off with your wolves, with your bushy tailed friends, and your devilish games, and leave the rest of us in peace. I'll write to Count de Bressac and I'll let him know that his lovely daughter has turned into a beast who talks of eating raw meat when she doesn't have enough money to buy it cooked. I shall not fail to reproach him for his harshness and his miserliness. We'll make him feel as guilty as he deserves for his shameful conduct as a father.

BLANCHE: You're stupid! So now you think you're going to avenge me? At the least you think I'm going crazy from hunger. That's enough. Eric, here's what I want. Take me to the forest for my initiation, start teaching me all those secrets. Then we'll come back here and we'll calmly make our decision.

ERIC: Yes, of course! Now I know I can trust you. Let's go. Dress warmly. We'll be back before nightfall. (BLANCHE gets ready to leave.)

ELIN: You really plan to take her? But why? For what purpose? Your wild ravings have come to this? Prudence! Where are you? Your mistress has gone completely berserk. Prudence! Where can that woman be?

BLANCHE: She won't come. She's afraid of me. And with reason. She's a simple woman who perceived the truth immediately.

ERIC: Where's your cape? Take mine; I won't need it. *(ERIC puts the cape over BLANCHE's shoulders.)* Let's go.

BLANCHE *(Caressing the fold of the cape)*: Thank you, Eric. You'll see. I'll show them that I'm the mate for you.

ERIC: Although it sounds rash, I think they'll accept it. We mustn't lose any more time. We can't stay out there at night.

ELIN: Ha! I can just imagine it. Oh, Blanche, my poor Blanche... Well then...! Have a nice outing. You've finally aroused my curiosity. If you don't mind, I'll wait for you here, smoking my pipe. It would be a delightful surprise to see you come back turned into werewolves. We can always research the witchcraft we'll need to cure you of that ailment.

BLANCHE: I feel sorry for you. It's curious how some things can be believed without seeing them, believed not out of knowledge but from intuition. I'm pleased to think of the surprise you're going to have.

ERIC: Elin, for me the biggest surprise is that you could have doubts. You agreed with everything. You asked questions and reacted quite naturally. Of course you never wanted to go with me and I certainly reproached you for that. And all the while you thought I was lying. Blanche, do you realize that he still thinks we're lying?

ELIN: And you'll go on lying for the rest of your lives. Go ahead. Don't you think it's getting late?

ERIC: You're right. Come on, Blanche. He'll find out.

(ERIC and BLANCHE exit. ELIN, thoughtful and troubled, begins to fill his pipe and sits down.)

* * *

(ELIN DE SAINT CLARC and old PRUDENCE, bathed in shadow, sit waiting. They are set apart by the flickering circle of light from the candelabra. The wind whistles continuously.)

PRUDENCE: Let me repeat what I've been saying, Monsieur Elin. Lately the presence of wolves has been more and more apparent around here. If Eric says he is able to communicate with those wild creatures, I believe him. Wasn't he raised like one? Hasn't he spent most of his life in the forest? Since his grandfather died, with no family, no responsibilities, he's shown no consideration for others, no consideration for his obligations. He's snuck out the window like a thief. If you could hear what they say about him in town... I'm afraid. I'm very afraid.

ELIN: It's all absurd, Prudence, absurd and preposterous. But beyond such suppositions, something unexpected and strange has happened. Your mistress. She must have lost her mind. *(Pause.)* And therefore...

PRUDENCE: And therefore...Monsieur Elin?

ELIN: Our friend Eric's stories. I never believed them, but Blanche did. They had a ring of truth to them, of course. He brought certain evidence. And then, he spoke with such conviction...

PRUDENCE: But until now you never suspected that it could all be true? Oh, Monsieur, I have this feeling that it's all so. The wolves, those wolves, howl at night. And I swear to you that they come down and surround Monsieur Eric's chateau.

ELIN: Are you sure?

PRUDENCE: Dear Lord! He commands them. My young mistress has believed him because it's true, all true. But what you're saying is truer still: my little Blanche is no longer the same person. She has become evil. From one day to the next she changed as if God's lightning had struck her. *(Startled.)* What a gust of wind! Did you hear it? I thought I left the front door closed tight, so that they would knock when they returned.

ELIN: You locked it?

PRUDENCE: Yes, as a precaution.

ELIN: I, too, begin to doubt. So, there is a rational and scientific way of becoming leader of a pack of wolves, of becoming the alpha male. A remarkable feat. That's one thing. The other, of course, is the sudden change in Blanche, her feverish excitement, her obscene behavior. The two of them have offended me deeply, Prudence. (*PRUDENCE looks at him with curiosity and an expression of increasing terror.*) Her eyes... If Eric's stories are real, she, however, is motivated by some mysterious design that can lead her to something worse. Something guilty and out of control. I saw how surprised he was by her decision. At first I thought both of them were putting on an act, but then...

PRUDENCE: But then, Monsieur? (*Changing in tone.*) A noise! I heard steps. No, not steps. Not a person's steps. Something worse. They're in the house, they're coming here!

ELIN: What a bother. You have a keen ear, Prudence. All we need is for me to catch your fear. We'll lock this door.

PRUDENCE: Don't touch it! No, no!

ELIN: Why?

PRUDENCE: They're behind the door, waiting for you to get up close.

ELIN: That's enough, Prudence!

PRUDENCE: She's the one who sent them to get us, she's the one! With her evil womanly wiles. Believe me. With her tricks of a female in heat she has bewitched that crazy Eric and sent them to get us. They know that no one can accuse them of anything. Not either of them.

ELIN: That's impossible. That's a demented supposition.

PRUDENCE: She's crazy. It comes from deprivation. Being abandoned by her father and all the rest. Now she hates me with all her soul because she thinks that I carry out the Count's orders. And how am I to blame? I'm just a slave.

ELIN: Why me?

PRUDENCE: You have the same family traits. She hates you because as the years pass you could become a man just like her father. She loved him so much when she was little! And now she... Monsieur, I feel my death approaching.

ELIN (*Terrified*): No! How do you think they got in? Damn it, Prudence, why didn't you lock everything up securely?

PRUDENCE: It's fate, Monsieur, fate. Forgive me. Now it's too late. They're back they're spying on us, ready to pounce...

ELIN: The impossible can be true. Now it all makes sense to me because reality has changed. Yes, they are both crazy, two genuine beasts. (*Trying to regain his composure.*) We must make sure, not become irrational. Look for a way out, of course. We'll carry the candelabra, in order to see and to defend ourselves. Fire should scare them away. We have to go out, inform the town, call in the police.

PRUDENCE: We can't go out that door.

ELIN: It's the only one, Prudence. Don't get me upset. We have to get to the gun cabinet. We have to find the hunting rifles. Follow me.

PRUDENCE: May God be with us.

(ELIN and PRUDENCE exit to the next room, carrying the candelabra.)

* * *

(The same setting. It's daytime. BLANCHE, ERIC and ELIN, with his bandaged arm in a sling. A POLICE INSPECTOR, who is saying goodbye to Blanche, kisses her hand.)

INSPECTOR: Your humble servant, Mademoiselle Blanche. I must leave now. I understand the grief you must feel at the painful loss of your faithful servant and friend. As for you, Monsieur de Saint Clare, I congratulate you on having escaped with such minor injuries. Your wounds will heal within a few days.

BLANCHE: That's just what the doctor said. But Inspector, I don't know how I was able to give him first aid in my agitated state, seeing poor Prudence torn to pieces and being all alone, for Monsieur de Villemont had run to get help.

INSPECTOR: Dreadful, just dreadful. Well, I really must be going...

ELIN: I believe that by fainting from pain and fear I avoided having them attack me the way they attacked old Prudence. I'm distraught, that's for sure; I find it hard to believe that I'm up and about. For the past four days I haven't been able to sleep.

INSPECTOR: Dreadful, just dreadful, but I must... *(Coughing.)* I trust that you'll get over it. *(Nodding to Eric.)* Monsieur de Villemont.

ERIC: At your service, Inspector. *(Bowing slightly.)*

(The INSPECTOR is about to exit, but just before he reaches the door, he is stopped by ELIN's voice.)

ELIN: Stop, Inspector! *(The INSPECTOR turns around in bewilderment.)* Is that all? Don't you plan to do anything else?

INSPECTOR: What else is there to do? Tomorrow, at dawn, a group of eighty volunteers will go out and scour the forest and attempt to do away with the wolves in this area.

ERIC: Why bother the inspector any more? They've been keeping me informed, Elin.

ELIN: Now you tell me. And have they received your advice? You're not hiding your knowledge, are you? You should know, Inspector, that Monsieur de Villemont is a specialist, a real expert. Or am I mistaken, Eric?

ERIC: This tragedy has dampened my interest forever.

INSPECTOR *(Returning)*: Any good advice is welcome. *(Staring at Eric.)* Have you been hiding this knowledge out of modesty, Villemont?

ERIC: Not exactly. What can I say? My theoretical knowledge pales before this inexplicable reality. It's true that they're hungry, that they made their approach according to some strategy, synonymous with their instinct for preserving the species. It's also true...

INSPECTOR: That's interesting. But we haven't heard of any attacks on the farmers' herds; not an animal, large or small, has been killed. As for what happened here, can't you add something else?

ERIC: Very little. Their attacking human beings inside a house has not been considered within the realm of probability for a long time. This kind of aggression isn't likely because they're afraid of man. That's all.

INSPECTOR (*As if shrugging off a passing concern*): Thank you, Monsieur. Mademoiselle de Bressac, your humble servant. (*Nodding goodbye.*) Gentlemen.

ELIN: Nevertheless, I believe that Monsieur de Villemont could help you more than that. Let's see. This band of volunteers... Come on, Eric. I understand that you know the forest like the back of your hand. Not only that, but that you've discovered the exact location of these beasts' dens, their habits and their schedules.

INSPECTOR: Is that so?

ERIC: Not exactly. Elin, there's some misunderstanding. I've tried to follow their tracks, and there aren't very many of those, in order to locate their hiding places, but in the end I failed.

ELIN: Very well, Eric. (*Resolutely.*) I must face the shame of appearing to be a madman, Inspector, but I swear to you that Monsieur de Villemont has been claiming for years now that he is the leader of a wolf pack. That's right. He said that he understood them because he learned their language and that, for that very reason, he had the power to sic them on specific prey. (*The INSPECTOR, ERIC, and BLANCHE look at one another.*)

BLANCHE: Is that possible, Eric? I regret that your interest in zoology has been taken too seriously by my cousin Elin.

INSPECTOR: What does all this mean? I wish to state clearly that what you have just suggested at this last moment seems to me a most distasteful joke. Your deep knowledge of wolves, Monsieur de Villemont, is it as effective as Monsieur de Saint Clarc affirms? To such an extent that you have power over them? If you want to pass yourself off as an expert in witchcraft, the fanatic townspeople ought to make you think better of it. There's no joking with such a matter. Explain yourself.

BLANCHE: You must excuse us, Inspector. The truth is that Eric...that is to say, Monsieur de Villemont and I have often amused ourselves by acting out little comedies. For a time

now our favorite subject has been wolves. You can see what an unfortunate coincidence that is. We said that we'd rather live like them, as enemies of this hypocritical society. Our silliness. Elin, admit that you never really believed it. In the end, all three of us would end up laughing. That drama has affected you more than these wounds, that you know will soon heal. Elin, get hold of yourself. Do you want to keep on confusing the Inspector? Dear cousin, you can't make me more unhappy still with this sudden madness. I don't think I can bear it.

ERIC: Let it be, Blanche, let him calm down and get some rest. We'll call the doctor again.

INSPECTOR: I recommend it. *(In a bad humor, he turns his back on them but then stops and slowly turns around.)* It is more than a bit macabre that you have wasted your time on such childish nonsense and then this unfortunate event has transpired.

BLANCHE: Don't you think that we feel worse about it than you? You surely don't think that it's God's punishment for our fantasies. How can an honest maiden and two gentlemen *(all three orphans and friends since childhood)* while away the long winter afternoons?

ELIN: By giving free rein to their imagination. On the very afternoon of the episode you proposed to visit their den. Isn't that so, dear Blanche?

BLANCHE: Don't remind me. Who would have thought...! You know, Inspector? Eric was going to introduce me to his pack, and I was going to shake each wolf's paw as a sign of peace, and then I would be accepted as their queen.

INSPECTOR: Forgive me, but that's quite ridiculous.

ERIC: What right do you have, Inspector?

INSPECTOR: It seems to me that you young nobles are curiously disturbed. Maybe it's because of what's happened; I don't know. Anyone else, who was not a grateful subject of your father, the Count of Bressac, would have to give real thought to this grotesque matter.

BLANCHE: Thank you for coming, Inspector. We regret leaving you with such a bad impression.

INSPECTOR: Bah...!

ERIC: At your service, Inspector.

(The INSPECTOR exits without saying goodbye.)

BLANCHE: What must he have thought of us? What a disgrace! Elin, you're crazy.

ELIN: Let me alone. I'm afraid of you and of myself. What am I? What am I doing here? I mean, you were playing out this long comedy, for whom? You chose me as your spectator, isn't that so? Hours, entire days spent in this cold room, telling absolutely fantastic things, but enjoying them as if they were real. For what purpose? To make a fool of me?

ERIC: Elin, calm down. No one has been making fun of you. You have to take responsibility for what you say, for what you affirm. All these years you've always said, you said it the very day of the tragedy, that you didn't believe anything, that they were nothing but lies. You always avoided going with me to the forest.

ELIN: Now I regret that lack of interest. Maybe everything would have turned out differently. At least, I would know. I would know something that eludes me, that leaves me disturbed. And if we had gone to the forest, then what? What would have happened?

ERIC: Well...nothing. You would have been disillusioned, or we would have gone on making things up, killing time as always.

ELIN: Oh, really?

BLANCHE: Oh, stop it. I felt so ridiculous in front of that man. And in the end, he was upset.

ELIN *(Turning suddenly toward Blanche)*: You didn't love Prudence.

BLANCHE: What makes you say that?

ELIN: For several days you deceived her, pretending you were mad. She started telling everyone about it. She came to see me in distress. And the priest, too. Isn't that an unwise way of carrying the game to extremes? Prudence was afraid of you, she fled from you making the sign of the cross. On that fateful night she started ranting. She believed that your

madness had pushed Eric to the brink, that the two of you, working together, had sent the wolves to get us.

BLANCHE: To get you? But why?

ELIN: Poor Prudence. Your cruelty towards her was reprehensible. Your fantasies tormented her right up to her horrible death. I didn't tell the Inspector anything about that.

BLANCHE: Wouldn't that have been something! You would have complicated our situation needlessly. Elin, for God's sake, you know they were fantasies. It's true that I was inconsiderate of her, out of frivolity or boredom. But I loved my good Prudence. How could I have faked all the tears I have shed for her since? Elin, please don't torment me.

ERIC: We're not going to solve anything this way. We can only regret having unintentionally provoked such madness. You're disturbed. I understand that. The dramatic denouement explains it, and perhaps it will take time for you to rid yourself of this obsession. It could obsess me, too, but I prefer not to think any more about it. I don't want to create unnecessary remorse for myself.

BLANCHE: Go back to your castle, Elin. Rest and meditate. Don't worry about me. Eric will keep me company.

ELIN (*Calmed down*): That's a good idea, cousin. Give me a kiss. (*He faces her without kissing her.*) I can still see what I saw that day in your eyes when you asked me to look in them and discover the truth. Do you remember?

BLANCHE (*Lowering her eyes*): Yes. What nonsense! Forgive me. (*Almost crying.*) Oh, please forgive me.

ELIN (*Grabbing her violently by the throat*): You're a good actress, dear cousin. You do know how to pretend. (*Letting her go.*) You know how to pretend, too, Eric. You're both accomplished actors. Thank you for your performance. If the story weren't so improbable, I'd think that you were pretending now, too.

BLANCHE: It's so exasperating! He means that his suspicions will go on forever.

ERIC: Why don't you wait a few days, my good friend? After all, you know how time...reveals everything. On the other hand, we have to be grateful to you for turning your cousin and me into romantic heroes, possessed by a demonic force and a destructive passion. You could write a novel like that. Yes, why don't you dedicate yourself to writing?

ELIN (*Somberly*): Eric, I must tell you one thing: if between the two options, the truth turns out to be the more incredible, I swear that I will do everything possible to pursue you as a dangerous madman. As for Blanche, under my authority as her nearest of kin in the absence of the Count de Bressac, I would be obligated to commit her to a convent as a precautionary measure.

BLANCHE: I am grateful that, even if I'm a witch or a murderess, you still worry about my future. You may go, Elin. Take care. (*Without saying another word, ELIN exits. BLANCHE and ERIC remain facing the door, with their backs to the audience. Gradually they turn around. Then, in a different tone of voice:*) Before dawn, Eric. Your beasts...

ERIC: I know. We'll have to wait for dark so that no one will see me enter the forest. I am deeply moved, lost in a thousand conjectures. Should I achieve my goal, if I succeed in communicating the alarm to them so that they stealthily flee, I'll write a scholarly paper for the Sorbonne with irrefutable data. I'll be famous.

BLANCHE: Don't forget that they could guillotine you instead.

ERIC: Blanche, what are you saying?

BLANCHE: Wake up, Eric. What we need now is courage. Before university scholars anywhere reach an opinion, the townspeople can have lynched us. You'd better keep that in mind.

ERIC: My mate, my she-wolf... How you've driven me crazy.

BLANCHE: Weren't you crazy enough already?

ERIC: But I never expected things to turn out as they did. Not your sudden surrender, nor being able to command the wolves to attack, nor the night of love that followed amid the blood and gore. Prudence's torn cadaver. You opened for me an intoxicating inferno, you launched me into infinite pleasure and terror.

BLANCHE (*Embracing him*): My wolf king, your brow is covered with sweat. Do you feel ill?
ERIC: No. I feel as if I'm sailing in . . . in an ocean of unknown happiness. And I see our escapade as unique. Don't you agree?

BLANCHE: Perhaps. But we need to think how we'll survive with impunity. Let's hope that my cousin's suspicions don't catch fire among the farm folk or Prudence's family. And our beasts, now in danger, can't attack him. Understand that there he is, believing that it's all true.

ERIC: I know, I know.

BLANCHE: I'm exhausted. Carry me to my bed. (*ERIC impetuously picks BLANCHE up in his arms.*) To enjoy a few moments of eternity. Yes, Eric, let us make long, proud, wild love. Until nightfall.

ERIC: Like beasts, smelling of fur and blood, rolling in the moist earth.

BLANCHE: Take me, stain me. I want you to make love to me covered with mud, my wolf and master.

* * *

(A small room in Elin de Saint Clarc's castle, eight years later. ELIN has grown old. He has a gray beard and wears glasses. He sits at his desk writing by the light of an oil lamp. After a time, he stops writing and reads aloud.)

ELIN: "My madness led me to discover theirs. I believed as firmly as they in their fantasies. I spied on them, I besieged them more and more until I made them confess deeds they had never committed. I fanned the flames of fanaticism among the country people until they wanted to burn them. We three youths, socially isolated and virtually deprived of wealth and family, had invented a singularly tragic and fantastic world, like a complex melodrama that we lived in reality. They locked all three of us up in a sanatorium. There I gave ever more convincing evidence of my sound judgment. Rapidly I accepted the one and only truth. A good doctor proved that my reason had not been affected by the madness of the other two, and I was allowed to go back to my daily life. Eric died ranting ever more. But Blanche, my poor Blanche, disappeared after three years without a trace. Thank you, Lord, because at last I can die in my sound mind, without remorse. If all that had been true, if they had been the murderers of old Prudence, I, too, would have been a murderer, ferociously and angrily pursuing them until the three of us fell." (*He stops reading and becomes tragically pensive.*) Lord! (*There is a noise outside. ELIN lifts his head and becomes petrified. BLANCHE, grown humble and old, appears in the door frame.*) Oh, my God! Blanche...! What is that shadow behind you? Am I still mad? Can nothing cure me? Oh how unfortunate we three have been. (*Pointing to the papers.*) You see? Look, Blanche. You see? I write incessantly about us, about you. I write the mad story of our lives, lost in the same storm. Blanche, is that you? Will the

nightmare never end? Is everything going to be turned upside down again? How did you get in?

BLANCHE: Calm down. Don't ask me now. Sit down. You'd have to use all of your imagination to understand how difficult it has been for me to hide all these years, to constantly elude my identity as the mad Mademoiselle de Bressac. Let me sit down, too. I don't know how to prove to you that I'm not crazy and that Eric de Villemont wasn't either.

ELIN: Then...you did send the wolves to attack me?

BLANCHE: And Prudence. We were blinded, Elin, by lust and power. You have to understand that. But you will never get me to repent for those moments of glory, of an infinite and untamed pleasure. Don't think that I've come to ask forgiveness. I said that I didn't know how to prove that Eric and I weren't crazy, but I've brought a cruel proof with me.

ELIN: Isn't your presence enough? I can believe that you're not a nightmare, Blanche. Your appearance shows me that you are alive and that you can wander the streets with impunity. Now what do you intend to do? What must I acknowledge? That Eric was leader of the pack, the king of the wolves? Alright, I'll agree to that. You were blinded by him, he was blinded by you, and everything was true. I'll agree to that, too. Now you must have come to reproach me for betraying you, saying that Eric died because of me. That's the only reason for your return.

BLANCHE: That's right. I've come for my revenge, Elin. That's why I survived. I have nothing else to lose; it's worth taking one more risk. As I said, I've had to expend untold cleverness and bravery to hide from people and yet stay in the area, and to find in the depths of the forest some remnants of the pack that Eric controlled. Day and night, living in bramble patches, dangerously seeking contact with them, using as my only defense the signs and sounds that he used to transmit, even when we were confined. Don't you remember? They allowed us to let it all out because they were curious, even fascinated by our supposed madness. So Eric could continue teaching me, giving me hints, information, advice; tracing maps and routes with his finger. Eric died and I thought that living without victory was meaningless. I felt myself to be the repository of endless energy, I concentrated all my faculties, all my instinct for self-preservation, and I escaped. Finally I achieved something that borders on the impossible. But I don't plan to send a scholarly paper to any university; I only intend to use my efforts and gifts to take revenge on you. After your life was spared, you could have left us in peace. But no, you had to be your own downfall. Now you may be sure that I (for who knows how long) will be the only survivor.

ELIN: The inferno has returned. The inferno is true and I am trapped within it. Well, hurry up. Come, tell me right away how you plan to take this revenge.

BLANCHE (*Looking toward the entrance door*): Oh, it's very easy. Her name is "Ixion." Don't you sense her heart beating in the shadows, a breath of fire warming her fangs? She's my faithful servant, following me everywhere. A she-wolf who submits to my will, bonded to me by the smell of my menstrual blood. She will avenge me.

ELIN: You're mad. Oh, no...! Help! Who's out there? It's the shadow I saw before, a ball of dust that followed you and then disappeared. I thought it was part of my hallucination. It's not possible! How could you come here like this? Take it away, Blanche; take it away!

BLANCHE: We came here quite easily. With the beast at my side, and my humble appearance, dressed like a beggar, why she seems more like a mongrel dog. (*Pause.*) Elin, there's only one way to enter or leave this room. It's very late and I know there aren't many people around. It will be very easy for me to escape without being seen and "Ixion" can wait for you in the next room as long as it takes. And that's it. I'm leaving. What more can I say? Do you still doubt? Well sharpen your ears. Can't you hear her sniffing and stirring?

ELIN (*Pause*): I believe you. It's there! Blanche, have pity on me! Why have me die like that? Oh, God; how can there be such inexplicable evil! I don't want to believe it, I can't believe it...

BLANCHE: Just because you deny it doesn't mean it isn't true.

ELIN: You still hate me. Why? Why? I don't hate you, Blanche. I loved you but my love was corrupted by your deeds, by how you affronted me. I can still help you to remain in hiding. There's no explanation for your hatred. No, it doesn't make any sense.

BLANCHE: Yes it does. The same as it did at the beginning. Goodbye.

(BLANCHE exits. Behind the door, frighteningly open to the shadows, an animal growl is heard. ELIN pulls back, noisily knocking objects off the desk; he trips again and then huddles in the corner.)

ELIN: It's not true! It's not true...!

CURTAIN

Phyllis Zatlin is Professor Emerita at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, here she coordinated the masters in Spanish program in translator and interpreter training. Primarily in the field of contemporary theatre, she is author of numerous editions, articles, and books. Her most recent scholarly book, *Theatrical Translation and Film Adaptation*, has been translated to Korean and reprinted in Shanghai. She is a member of The Dramatists Guild, the American Translators Association, and the American Literary Translators Association. Among her play translations from Spanish and French that have been performed are works by J.L. Alonso de Santos, Jean-Paul Daumas, Eduardo Manet, Itziar Pascual, and Paloma Pedrero. Translations that have previously been published in *The Mercurian* are Jean Bouchaud's *Is That How It Was?* (1.1, 2007) and Carlos Semprun-Maura's *Brandy Blues* (2.3, 2010).

Book Review

Bethany Holmstrom

Humour and Humanity: Contemporary Plays from Finland. Edited by S.E. Wilmer and Pirkko Koski. Helsinki: Like Press, 2006; pp. 442.

For a country that has a rich tradition of funding, supporting, and attending theatre, there is a surprising dearth of Finnish plays in English translation. While playwrights from the neighboring Nordic countries have received attention reaching back to the late nineteenth century in Europe and the US, Finland has received no such widespread theatrical recognition—perhaps due in part to Finland’s linguistic alienation and political past. As part of the sparsely populated Finno-Ugrian language branch that falls outside the realm of Indo-European languages, Finland does not share linguistic roots with the nearby Scandinavian countries and is often characterized as a deeply difficult language by non-native speakers. As the Russian Katja, a character in Kari Hotakainen’s play *Border Crossing* in this volume, declares: “I wanted very much to come to Finland. So not even the grammar put me off” (58). Pair this with Finland’s incessant struggle for political control and autonomy against Sweden, Russia, and Nazi Germany over the past couple centuries, and Finland’s reasons for a belated entry into global dramatic literature becomes a bit clearer. It is only relatively recently (the 1990s) that instrumental figures in the nineteenth-century development of a Finnish dramatic literature—Aleksis Kivi and Minna Canth, for example—have been translated.

S.E. Wilmer and Pirkko Koski have been fruitfully addressing this deficit—both alone and via collaboration—for quite some time, publishing materials on Finnish theatre as well as translations of Finnish plays. Wilmer edited a collection of early twentieth-century Finnish women playwrights (which included a translation of Minna Canth’s *Anna-Liisa* by Austin and Aili Flint) in 1997, and Koski, as Professor Emerita of theatre at the University of Helsinki, has made major contributions to the field of Finnish theatre. In previous collaborations, Koski and Wilmer have edited a collection of post-war Finnish plays and co-written an introductory text on Finnish theatre.¹ This particular volume offers an exciting anthology of contemporary dramatic texts, covering a range of styles, concerns, and performance possibilities.

Five plays are in the volume—Kari Hotakainen’s *Border Crossing* (2006, trans. Marja Wilmer and Steve Wilmerk), Juha Jokela’s *Mobile Horror* (2003, trans. David Hackston), Reko Lundán’s *Can You hear the Howling?* (trans. David Hackston), Mika Myllyaho’s *Panic* (trans. Sarka Hantula), and Laura Ruohonen’s *Queen C* (also translated by David Hackston). In the introduction, the editors highlight the “social, political, and economic changes at the beginning of the twenty-first century” (9) that all the plays share, as well the search for the “meaning of life” that drives the major characters on an individual level. The editors also stress the accessibility of these plays, the “international appeal” and the treatment of social

¹ To this end, the editors also include a short but helpful reference for further readings on Finnish plays and theatre on the very last page of this collection.

problems with “humour and humanity,” along with the “somewhat conventional European dramaturgy” (11). Each play is introduced by an image from a Finnish production, a headshot of the playwright, a brief professional biography of the dramatist (with attention paid to the major themes in the writer’s oeuvre), and notes listing any awards or acclaims the play received.

The first play in the volume directly speaks to twentieth-century Finnish history and national identity. *Border Crossing* features the dismantling of a black-market Russian icon trade amongst two Finnish brothers and their Russian half-sister, whom they introduce into their already tumultuous family lives. Pekka and his wife, Elina, are attempting to adopt a child amidst Pekka’s awakening religious fervor. This newfound spirituality forces him to extricate himself from illegal activities and induces him to invite his sickly Russian half-sister and literal partner in crime Katja (a secret “love child” of his philandering father) into his home, jeopardizing the adoption, the livelihood of his brother Seppo, and the siblings’ relationship with their mother. There are references to “Finnishness” sprinkled throughout the text—“That’s the Finnish pattern. Quiet for the first forty years, and then you let out of your mouth everything possible” (94). Seppo likewise affirms his national exceptionalism: “I look like a Finn. I have a Stoic expression. If they found the biggest oil wells in Finland or if Finland won the Eurovision song contest, everybody would still have this same expression on their faces... This expression cannot be found anywhere else in the world”(49). There is a critique of Finnish exploitation of the Soviet economic system as well, and constant (and sometimes not-so-subtle) references to the Russian/Finnish characterization of the sibling combatants: Pekka accuses his brother of “mixing up our father with the collapse of the Soviet Union” (55), and Seppo goes so far as to state that “Katja and I are like Russia and Finland” (80) in his inability to fully unite with her (in this case, his mother is also pushing for an amorous relationship, not realizing that such a venture would be incestuous). After a blowout in the church where Pekka admits that he has withheld Katja’s inheritance, he returns to the border between the two nations, seeking another religious vision. Eventually, the play seems to promise, the turmoil between nations and domiciles can be reconciled: Pekka suggests that “there is and there isn’t” a God, that “He gave us uncertainty as our home. He gave us a choice in our everyday lives” (106) — and then launches into comparing God with various Soviet leaders. Along with the dated and nationally/historically-specific references that would make this play less likely to be staged in a non-Finnish venue, the theological, existential, political, and familial endings are somewhat predictable, much in the vein of “conventional dramaturgy” that the editors mentioned. This is not due to the translation (which reads very smoothly), but rather to the play’s willingness to bury problems in a rather predictable ending—the promise of a newly adopted child to Pekka and Elina, while the couple examines the new child’s bed built by Seppo (who has stumbled upon his occupation) while Katja looks on. The disharmony of a family and two nations—wherein various members were exploited—is subsumed by a future generation which brings all the parties together: an unsettlingly “neat” ending. It is a more severe brand of the optimism which pervades all the plays in this volume — presumably part of the “humour and humanity” that the editors chose as the collection’s title.

Equally concerned with domestic familial strife and sharing a somewhat optimistic ending is Lundán’s *Can You Hear the Howling?*, which explores the childhood of siblings Liisa and Aki. In the barracks of a small Finnish town, their officer father Risto struggles to raise his children and maintain romantic relationships. When Jutta becomes their father’s new

wife, the children have to negotiate the treacherous ground of adolescence and the increasingly paranoid and unstable Jutta — who, they come to find out, is an ex-drug addict and suffers from a range of other psychological issues — forcing Liisa and Aki to become adults at an accelerated rate. In many ways the small town Finnish life is painted as stifling, peopled by smothering and nasty characters: the drunken village “cripple”, Jutta’s overbearing mother, or Risto’s bitter ex-lover. Jutta devolves and Risto’s disappearances grow more frequent over the years; Jutta eventually must be hospitalized after a violent outburst. Towards the end of the play, it is revealed that the teenaged Aki eventually attacks Jutta, literally throwing her on the floor and kicking her until she’s bleeding from the head. The children escape the small-town life as quickly as possible, only returning at the very close (in the “present day” of 2001) to visit Jutta and Risto, who now function in relative (if somewhat distant) domestic tranquility. Throughout, the play does not seem to fully address the complexities of Jutta’s character: Jutta does indeed psychologically abuse the children, but she is also a deeply sick woman whose family is incapable of realizing the extent of her illness, failing to offer her any comfort or aid. When Aki asks for Liisa’s thoughts about Jutta in 2001, she answers, “Nothing much...it’s not as if we’re even family” (207); though it is clear that they have battled with and hurt one another in the ways only family can. In some ways, the callous natures of the children and father contribute to Jutta’s decline. The result is a play, though written in a stage-able language, that doesn’t seem to fully grapple with the complications of mental illness and its effects on a family. There are no direct mentions of any medical malpractice or institutional deficits, so this is not a political critique on the treatment of mental illnesses either. There is a gaping dramaturgical hole between Aki’s attack on Jutta in 1987 and the present-day visit in 2001, with little explanation as to how this wounded family came to terms with its issues. Just when one believes the playwright is about to fully explore the abuse, confusion, and pain that accompanies a broken family and mental illness, one feels that he beats a bit of a retreat, presenting the semblance of relative domestic peace at the end. In the flicker of the TV at the piece’s close, as the family settles onto the couch together, it seems that the relative quiet was achieved at an unclear cost, and we are given little insight into the character’s current lives. These things aside, however, both *Border Crossing* and *Can You Hear the Howling?* are fascinating plays that give an intimate look into Finnish families in urban and small-town settings.

Mika Myllyaho’s *Panic* in some ways bridges these familial domestic plays with an alternative living arrangement that speaks to a more geographically diverse audience: three male friends nearing middle age go through a series of life crises, each one attempting to offer advice to another before being overwhelmed by his own anxieties. Max, a graphic designer who works from home, allows his friend Leo to “crash” while figuring out his relationship. Max’s brother Joni, a ladies’ man TV journalist hosting a program of questionable quality, makes frequent appearances. Leo asks Max to become his therapist, but the roles switch at various times throughout the play: it is revealed that Max is still depressed from his breakup a year ago and hasn’t left his apartment in three months since a panic attack on the train. Their fraternal relationships take an ugly turn when the men are increasingly frank with one another, attacking each others’ weaknesses and core beliefs. Max’s apartment-bound alienation, Leo’s inability to communicate and grow within relationship, and the sudden cancellation of Joni’s show lead to a series of confrontations. Individual characters’ neuroses crop up humorously, often in the form of witty banter that can change from jovial to sniping in a matter of seconds. The banter ranges from debating workout routines, to questioning whether or not a deep understanding of relationship can be

derived from *Talk to Her* (and, within this argument, a debate on whether or not Pedro Almodóvar is a pervert), to a discussion as to Max's claim that "without Moms there wouldn't be any therapy" (373). There is no question that this is a "boys' camp" — particularly as there are no female characters in the play — and that these men are in the sort of crisis (with all its inanity) that only contemporary urban men seem to suffer, which the play embraces and mocks simultaneously. It is not simply their jobs, their love lives, and their masculinity that these men question, but the very core of what they are supposed to do with themselves. The "panic" of the title is the panic of middle-aged urban men, confronted with the realization, as the absent Mari demands of Leo, that they all must "prioritise" (333) and be "sure about things" (340) in a completely insensible world.

Mobile Horror by Juha Jokela shares some thematic overlap with *Panic*: an inability to reconcile idealistic values with the realities of living, the search for self knowledge, and the pressures placed upon professionals to succeed. By confining the action of the play to the work place, *Mobile Horror* flirts with a full-on condemnation of capitalism, but allows a beleaguered mobile start-up to continue existing in the world of the play without pursuing the critique full-throttle. Nokia is perceived as the enemy to co-workers Seppo, Terhi, and Mikke at Dacutec, who are told they must develop new products to avoid an imminent merger. Terhi, the leader of this group, has recently suffered a nervous breakdown and has found solace in Gandhi, while Seppo jostles for power and the sole position in an impending merger with another company. The group realizes that while trying to battle the corporate monster they have, in many ways, become it. This is made abundantly clear when Terhi attempts to align her new-found new-age values with Mikke's plans for a choose-your-own-mobile-adventure series, one iteration based on horror (feeding into Mikke's obsession with crime books) and the other on romance (which seems at moments to be likely to devolve into porn). As the group begins to test the boundaries of their working and professional relationships, the tension and in-fighting intensifies when the merger is seemingly already underway. With the chairman of the board MIA and unable to address their escalating panic, it is only through the felicitously ironic dropping of a cell phone in an outhouse that allows Dacutec to remain intact: a technological *deus ex machina*. "Everyone's got to do something for a living. Fuck it, you've got to have something to bide the time," Seppo tells Terhi, who's trying to cope with the deceit embedded in the corporate system. "All we do is move data from one place to another. Is that the worst thing someone can do? Or do you think we should all go and join the Red Cross just so we can pamper our self-esteem? Mop up after floods and step on mines, eh?" (196). Terhi seems to reconcile her values with the realities of life, leaving a more devastating critique of corporate capitalism untouched; but it seems that, in production, some of this latent criticism could be drawn out a bit more. Regardless, the sentiment of corporate unrest and the inability to reconcile humanitarian values with commercial success are present, if not fully explored. The four character cast, rapid pace, and clearly relevant topic do suggest that this play would also be easily staged, though some of the cell phone technology explored in the piece is already outdated.

While the first four plays explore domestic or work spaces in mostly contemporary settings (with *Can You Hear the Howling?* looping back to explore the family's troubled past), *Queen C* offers a divergent model of dramaturgy and content. Ruohonen's intriguing play, translated in this highly stageable version, presents an episodic glimpse into the life of Queen Christina of Sweden, the seventeenth-century masculine monarch who abandoned the

throne and all the expectations the state placed upon a female heir. Rejecting her royal duties in favor of debates with Descartes (who dies as her guest), eel-fishing with her smitten cousin Gustav, and pursuing leisure with her friend/lover (simply called “Friend”), Christina must eventually leave Sweden to find herself at the Pope’s table in Italy. The mad Queen Mother, who revisits her husband’s decaying corpse (both in the world of the play and in historical reality) is eventually estranged from Christina. The Queen Mother, though later calling her daughter a traitor, perhaps also gives Christina the justification that will lead to her abdication: “the sorrow and suffering of one person, when you wholly and fully embrace it, can be greater and more horrific than the combined suffering of entire nations and wars” (405). This Christina is stubborn, hungry for knowledge and power—but, unwilling to conform to the preexisting codes of gender and power, she’d rather strike out on her own. She is ultimately a compelling character, and the play’s thematic focus on the sex-changing eel and the reproductive cycles of aquatic creatures is symbolically bound up in other questions of identity (sexual and otherwise). This ostensibly odd juxtaposition works quite well, speaking to the playwright’s past studies as a biologist, Christina’s own love of knowledge, and the almost clinical nature of reproductive expectations placed upon royalty. When abdicating, Christina does not see it as a sacrifice; “you don’t understand, I’m not giving up anything. I will celebrate my departure with a great masked ball; I will be a naked goddess with snakes around my neck and throw diamonds over your heads as if I were sprinkling you with water” (439). Though the other characters foreshadow her death in Rome, the play closes with a short monologue by the ex-regent describing her dinner with the pope: “the former Queen eats and swallows the Pope’s meal...the flesh of the eel becomes her flesh, unites with her flesh, turns into her hair and her skin and her thoughts, never to leave her again” (440). The translator has maintained both the linguistic poetics and the jaunty and intelligent repartee that Christina participates in throughout, while also making sure the fragmentary nature of the dialogue and narrative is still wieldy. Of the plays in this volume, *Queen C* in many ways transcends time and space: a play that would be quite stageable in a variety of languages and contexts because of its historical setting and larger questions of identity, choice, and fate.

Overall, Wilmer and Koski have chosen five disparate but enlightening plays, which give the reader an excellent sense of the plays that appeared on the early twenty-first-century Finnish stage, as well as revealing the possibilities for performing these dramas on other global stages.

--Bethany Holmstrom, CUNY Graduate Center