

Acting Edition

The Seagull/ Woodstock, NY

by Thomas Bradshaw

Adapted from Anton Chekhov

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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THE SEAGULL/WOODSTOCK, NY was originally produced in New York City by The New Group (Scott Elliott, Artistic Director; Adam Bernstein, Executive Director) in February 2023. The production was directed by Scott Elliott, with scenic design by Derek McLane, costume design by Qween Jean, lighting design by Cha See, and sound design by Rob Milburn and Michael Bodeen. The production stage manager was Valerie A. Peterson, and the assistant stage manager was Stephen Michael Varnado. The cast was as follows:

IRENE Parker Posey
KEVIN Nat Wolff
MARK Patrick Foley
SASHA Hari Nef
SAMUEL David Cale
NINA Aleyse Shannon
PAULINE Amy Stiller
DEAN Bill Sage
DARREN Daniel Oreskes
WILLIAM Ato Essandoh

CHARACTERS

IRENE – White, fifties, an actress.

KEVIN – White, twenties. A writer. Irene's son.

MARK – Thirties. A teacher.

SASHA – Twenties. Darren and Pauline's daughter.

SAMUEL – Fifties. Irene's best friend. Retired lawyer.

NINA – Bi-racial, early twenties.

PAULINE – Fifties. Irene's good friend.

DEAN – Fifties, a brain surgeon.

DARREN – Fifties. Pauline's husband.

WILLIAM – African American, forties. A well-known writer.

SETTING

Woodstock, NY.

TIME

The present.

ACT ONE

(SASHA and MARK are setting up chairs around a small, crude, makeshift stage. The only thing on the stage is a bathtub. There is tension in the air.)

MARK. Why do you always dress like that?

SASHA. Like what?

MARK. Like you're going to a funeral.

SASHA. At least I don't buy my clothes at Walmart.

MARK. Don't make fun of my poverty.

SASHA. Then mind your own business!

MARK. I wish there was something I could do to make you happy.

SASHA. Don't concern yourself with my happiness. Some of us were born to suffer.

MARK. I don't get why you're always so sullen. You have everything a person could want. And you don't have to work.

SASHA. Hey – I work!

MARK. Feeding the horses isn't work.

SASHA. You're so hurtful. I told you I'm painting again, and how difficult that is for me emotionally.

MARK. I support my mother and sisters on my measly salary and you don't hear me complaining. You're very lucky.

SASHA. You think you'd be happy if you were rich, but you wouldn't, because you'd still be the same pathetic, spineless tool of a human being.

MARK. I'm not a tool.

SASHA. Your mother's dying so OK I get it. But your fucking mooch sisters?

MARK. The economy's terrible. They're doing the best they can.

(SASHA steps onto the makeshift stage.)

SASHA. Look at this piece of shit. Kevin's a great writer, but clearly set design isn't his forte.

MARK. *(To get at her.)* He made this for Nina. And tonight their artistic souls will unite on this very stage.

SASHA. Yeah, but she still won't fuck him. I don't know why he puts up with it. If he were my man I'd fuck the shit out of him every chance I got.

(MARK is simultaneously aroused and enraged by this statement. It takes him a second to recover. He sits.)

MARK. Wow. Well. The fact that they aren't having sex somehow makes me feel better about my life.

SASHA. Why? Cause you're still a virgin?

(This really strikes a nerve with MARK.)

MARK. Fuck you. Ever since your DUI I drive you everywhere you want. Sometimes I spend my whole lunch hour ferrying you around. Can't you see how much I love you? Why don't you love me back?

SASHA. I can't change how I feel.

(MARK can't look at her.)

Kevin and I are connected. He's tortured – like all great artists – and I feel his pain. And could alleviate it if only he'd let me. But he wants to be with a girl who won't even give him a blow job.

MARK. Not even a blow job?

SASHA. Not even a hand job.

MARK. How do you know?

SASHA. He's clearly sexually frustrated.

MARK. Well, that's clearly all in your head.

SASHA. Whatever. And she's a climber, right? She's just using him to get to Irene.

(MARK gathers himself, looks in SASHA's eyes.)

MARK. He's never going to love you back, can't you see that? He's not even nice to you!

It's time for you to give up on that dream, and be with someone who's willing to cater to your every need, like me.

(SASHA nods her head with understanding. She takes out a cigarette, lights it, and takes a drag.)

SASHA. I can't change how I feel.

(She offers MARK a cigarette.)

MARK. Come on. You know I'm a Buddhist.

(She puts a cigarette in his mouth. He acquiesces. She lights it. He takes a drag, coughs. She cracks up.)

(SAMUEL and KEVIN enter. KEVIN, a man on a mission, is carrying a large piece of fabric. SAMUEL is pouring his heart out to KEVIN, who's a good listener.)

SAMUEL. I think I should sell this place and move back to the city. The country is aging me. I can't differentiate between dreams and reality anymore, because I sleep half the day away.

(SASHA and MARK are now listening.)

Last night I dreamt I was on a Harley in the desert with a hot guy. We pulled over and he offered himself to me. He kissed me, unbuttoned my shirt, sucked on my nipple, and we made sweet love in the moonlight. Just as we reached the point of no return, I woke up.

SASHA. That sucks.

SAMUEL. I was so pissed to be back in this reality again. I want the reality where the hot guy is sucking on my nipple!

(Everyone laughs, and SAMUEL loves getting a laugh.)

People think desire evaporates with age – but it doesn't. I pretty much want to fuck every guy I see, but I can barely get it up anymore.

SASHA. Have you tried Viagra?

SAMUEL. No, because, you know, I don't have anybody. I'm all alone.

SASHA. Try it. I guarantee you'll find the motivation to go out and fuck some ass.

KEVIN. *(Changing the subject.)* ANYWAY – please go inside.

SASHA. Why?

KEVIN. I want you to be surprised.

SASHA. Really? You want to surprise me?

KEVIN. I think you'll be impressed.

SASHA. *(A rare smile.)* I can't wait.

(MARK is annoyed. SASHA and MARK start to go...)

SAMUEL. Sasha, can you ask your father to take the dog in tonight? It barked so much that Irene couldn't sleep.

SASHA. Ask him yourself. I'm not your fucking maid.

(They go.)

SAMUEL. That dog better watch it. Your mother's out for its head.

(KEVIN admires the stage he built, its aching spareness. He moves about the space, an artist deep in thought.)

KEVIN. Look at this stage, Uncle. Isn't it evocative? Just a bathtub and the horizon. Nina will speak the first line at the exact moment the moon rises. Eight twenty-three.

SAMUEL. Man, you're a real poet.

(KEVIN looks SAMUEL up and down.)

KEVIN. You need a haircut. You look homeless.

SAMUEL. Funny you say that. Last week I was outside Starbucks and a lady dropped some change into my cup! Totally ruined my fucking coffee.

(They laugh.)

KEVIN. At least you'll be a successful beggar if your 401k runs out.

(They laugh harder. Suddenly SAMUEL starts gasping for air. He can't breathe. KEVIN, having done this many times before, helps him into a chair, gets him a water and rubs his back until the attack subsides. IRENE yells from the house...)

IRENE. (*Offstage.*) WHERE'S THE FUCKING SOY MILK?

(**SAMUEL** and **KEVIN** share a knowing look and a cringe.)

SAMUEL??! I'M GONNA KILL YOU!

SAMUEL. I forgot to buy soy milk. She is going to kill me.

KEVIN. It's not about the soy milk. She's pissed I asked Nina to be in my play and not her. Now she hates my play without having even read it.

SAMUEL. That's in your head, man.

KEVIN. Really? She just told me she has tickets to a late show at The Jazz Barn, so she might "have to excuse herself" a little early. She better not leave in the middle of her only son's play.

(**KEVIN** fumes. He brings a ladder to his stage and climbs it.)

Who the fuck listens to jazz anymore? Old white men, maybe.

SAMUEL. And your mother.

KEVIN. That's exactly why she hates my work. She has old white man taste.

(*He hangs a wire across the stage. It's not easy.*)

My work freaks her out because it's real. It forces her to confront the darkness behind that façade of hers.

SAMUEL. That sounds like Theater of Cruelty for real!

KEVIN. Exactly. Artuad wanted to startle our hearts and minds, and that's precisely what I'm after.

(*He drops the wire and has to retrieve it.*)

You see, I'm developing a new type of theater. A theater that'll be of interest to people under eighty. Mother wants everything neat and pretty. That's not who I am.

SAMUEL. I don't know. We saw that play where the actors asked white audience members to donate one thousand dollars to atone for their contributions to societal racism. She was so moved that she gave two grand – and you know how cheap she is. She loved it so much that she bawled for an hour afterwards.

KEVIN. That gets her off. Realism with an occasional breaking of the fourth wall to explain motivations.

(The wire is finally hung. He climbs down the ladder.)

Well, in homage to her, I've incorporated a bit of that style into the show tonight. She's going to get a little fourth wall breaking, motivation explaining.

SAMUEL. Shakespeare does it all the time.

KEVIN. He's allowed. His characters are full of contradictions. It's why everyone wants to play Hamlet. He's the original complex character.

(He gets the fabric, climbs back up the ladder.)

The American theatre only wants to see people sitting around a dining room table, slowly revealing secrets from the past. It's so artificial!

SAMUEL. Calm down, buddy!

(He hangs the fabric over the wire forming a curtain.)

KEVIN. And how about her age thing last night? I wanted to hide under the table. I mean, I'm twenty-six. I'm her son. People can do the math.

SAMUEL. All actresses lie about their age.

KEVIN. Yeah, but not all actresses are narcissists.

SAMUEL. That's not my experience.

(Reluctant.) But I did see Ellen roll her eyes.

(**KEVIN** struggles with the curtain. **SAMUEL** watches a hyper **KEVIN** with growing concern.)

KEVIN. Then Liz was gushing about *The Crucible* and Mom was like, “Arthur and I this, Arthur and I that.” *The Crucible* was ten years ago. Arthur Miller was already dead!

(*With derision.*) Arthur Miller. He wrote two good plays and *The Crucible* isn’t one of them. Fuck him and his plays!

SAMUEL. Have some respect, Kev. You know his daughter is still a very close friend of your mother’s.

KEVIN. Fuck her friends. Tonight they’ll see I deserve some respect, too.

SAMUEL. Who did she invite?

KEVIN. No one. So I did.

SAMUEL. Who’s coming?

KEVIN. I haven’t heard back from anyone, but I’m not worried. They’d tolerate anything to be in her presence. Even her son’s shitty play.

(**KEVIN** steps down the ladder. **SAMUEL** looks at him with concern.)

SAMUEL. It’s okay, buddy. Your mother’s gonna love your play. She loves everything about you.

(**KEVIN** can’t speak because he’s overwhelmed with emotion.)

Everyone’s gonna love your play.

(*He still can’t speak.*)

And you’re extra lucky. Know why?

(**KEVIN** still can’t speak so he shrugs.)

Because Nina loves you. And love is all that matters.

(KEVIN manages a little smile.)

You're the envy of every playwright. You and your leading lady are in love.

(KEVIN finds a little joy in that. Then NINA enters and he immediately shifts into happy boyfriend/director mode. It's painful for SAMUEL to watch KEVIN's unstable emotional state.)

NINA. Hi!

KEVIN. My queen!

(They embrace.)

NINA. I'm so excited! Have you been crying?

KEVIN. No, it's just my allergies.

(They kiss. NINA sits with SAMUEL.)

NINA. Sorry I'm late. I had to wait until they left. My father threatened to cut off my cashflow.

SAMUEL. Why?

NINA. He hates that you guys encourage my artistic impulses.

SAMUEL. What does he want you to do?

NINA. Be a banker, like him.

SAMUEL. Woodstock nurtures the artistic soul. Bob Dylan and Van Morrison wrote some of their best music here. He should have bought a place in the Hamptons if he wanted you to be a banker.

NINA. He's way too cheap.

SAMUEL. I hate cheap, rich people.

KEVIN. How much time do you have?

NINA. An hour. Maybe a little more.

(A panicked expression comes over KEVIN's face.)

KEVIN. But the play's over two hours, not including the intermission!

(NINA and SAMUEL notice and exchange glances.)

NINA. *(Gentle.)* Can we just do act one tonight? And do act two tomorrow?

KEVIN. You're not taking this seriously.

NINA. Come on, you know I am. I can't help that my father's a fucking lunatic. I love working with you.

(That calms KEVIN. He kisses her eyes, forehead, lips.)

KEVIN. The only time I'm happy is when I'm with you.

NINA. You sound like a stalker.

(They kiss again.)

KEVIN. Remember, breathe and enunciate.

NINA. I'm pretty nervous.

KEVIN. Don't worry, my mother's gonna love you.

NINA. I'm excited for her to see my work, but it's her boyfriend who unnerves me. His writing shakes me to my core. His new book made me rethink what good writing is – have you read it?

KEVIN. *(Lying.)* I haven't.

NINA. I can't remember the last time a female protagonist got so under my skin – but that's what good writing does. Can I give you a little note?

(**KEVIN** stops what he's doing. He's a little hurt/jealous. **NINA** makes a decision to level with him.)

I love your play. I love it so so much, but my character doesn't feel like a real person.

KEVIN. She's based on you.

NINA. Yes, but, I think my character would feel more authentic if we knew more of her backstory. Right now the play feels abrupt.

KEVIN. It is abrupt. That's the point. We're subverting typical American Theater. We're getting right to the heart of the matter instead of making our audience suffer through an hour of incredibly dull backstory.

NINA. But it's based on me – you think my life is dull?

KEVIN. That's not what I –

NINA. Plus, there's no love story. Every play needs a love story.

KEVIN. She loves herself.

NINA. Just take a look at William's book.

KEVIN. My play isn't a love story. It's not even really a play. It's a burst of fire.

NINA. I'm not really sure what that means. But, in *Days and Nights* William makes us feel what Denise feels. That chapter with no punctuation where Denise describes the complicated love that she feels for Andre –

KEVIN. Your character is in love with herself. That's the love story.

(*To SAMUEL.*) This is why I direct my own plays.

(*To NINA.*) When the audience sees the lengths you go to for your art, you'll start to feed off of their energy. And that's the ideal place to be as an actress.

(**NINA** looks around the stage. **KEVIN** nervously waits for a reaction. There is none.)

NINA. Speaking of, where is everyone? You said Alec Baldwin was coming.

KEVIN. He'll be here any moment.

(**PAULINE** and **DEAN** come in, arm in arm.)

PAULINE. Hi guys.

NINA. Hey.

(She whispers to **KEVIN**.)

That's not Alec Baldwin.

(**KEVIN** ignores that. He takes **NINA** through her blocking.)

PAULINE. (Concerned.) Oh my god!! Your Prada sneakers, they're all muddy.

DEAN. They'll be fine.

PAULINE. Did you bring a sweatshirt?

DEAN. I don't need one.

SAMUEL. Dean is hot blooded!

PAULINE. Well, he's certainly got the hots for Irene.

(To **DEAN**.) The way you were staring at her last night –

(To everyone.) I thought the buttons on his jeans were gonna pop right open!

DEAN. Pauline...

PAULINE. (Loudly to reach **KEVIN**.) Kevin, Dean's dying to have sex with your mother.

KEVIN. Go for it.

DEAN. Not true.

PAULINE. (*To KEVIN.*) She'd be lucky. Women throw themselves at him.

DEAN. I'm the only brain surgeon up here, so everyone's extra nice to me.

(*Enter IRENE, WILLIAM, DARREN, MARK, and SASHA.*)

DARREN. I saw you in that show three times. And you were brilliant every time.

IRENE. Stop! I was not!

SASHA. She's brilliant in everything.

IRENE. Come to think of it, and you know I never brag, but a certain person close to the production told me I was definitive in that role. Even though I replaced you know who. Can a replacement be definitive?

SASHA. I saw her. You were much better.

IRENE. I'm pretty sure Tracy agrees.

DARREN. Well, you made me cry every time.

(*IRENE's audience of friends hinge on her every word.*)

IRENE. That's because I understood her. Deeply. And you felt that.

(*She takes DARREN's hands.*)

And I didn't make you cry. It was the words of Tracy Letts. I am my playwright's vessel.

DEAN. I thought it was a comedy.

SASHA. It's a dramedy, actually. Overrated. But a dramedy.

PAULINE. Sasha – that's rude!

DEAN. Irene, you look the same as you did in *How I Learned to Drive*. How long ago was that? Your body is still so –

IRENE. That's very "me too" of you, Dean. But thank you.
I have good genes.

KEVIN. And a good plastic surgeon.

(IRENE looks at KEVIN: why are you trying to humiliate me?)

IRENE. Why would you say such a thing?

KEVIN. You gotta learn how to take a joke.

(Pause.)

(IRENE bursts out laughing.)

IRENE. Just Kidding! I'm proud of my enhancements.
They cost a fortune.

*(She winks at everyone, then hugs KEVIN.
They laugh together.)*

Shall we start? I have –

KEVIN. I know. You're going to The Jazz Barn. Who's playing?

IRENE. The Wailers. They're still good. Even without Bob Marley.

(KEVIN nods, trying to hide how insulted he is that she would choose The Wailers over him. IRENE subtly takes the stage.)

Bob Marley holds a special place in my heart. We met at a concert when I was fifteen. It was magical. He kissed my cheek and said I had beautiful eyes. Bob Marley!

(IRENE has everyone rapt. Except KEVIN, who doubts her story.)

KEVIN. Okay, everyone. Let's begin. Everybody take your seats.

(KEVIN checks the stage and behind the curtain.)

IRENE. I'm nervous and I'm not even in it.

SAMUEL. You're a showbiz mom.

IRENE. I am. I really am. It's hard when your kid wants to be in the biz. Especially when you're, well, me.

(WILLIAM squeezes her leg. KEVIN takes a seat behind IRENE.)

KEVIN. Okay, so we're going to hold the curtain for a few minutes because we're expecting a bigger crowd.

IRENE. OK, Donald Trump. It's not the size, it's the quality. And this is quite a group.

KEVIN. I hope you don't mind, I invited a few of your friends who are up here – ones I know. They're probably running a little –

IRENE. I told them they should wait.

(KEVIN looks down, disappointed.)

I'm acting as your agent, sweetie. Everyone will see it when it's fully workshopped and ready to go. Before that would be premature.

(KEVIN closes his eyes to reset himself. He stands, and addresses the small crowd.)

KEVIN. Hi everyone. The play is about to begin. The running time is two hours.

(IRENE looks at WILLIAM's watch. KEVIN glares at her.)

But only act one will be performed tonight, due to a scheduling issue.

(IRENE is relieved.)

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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