

# STUPID FUCKING BIRD

by Aaron Posner  
sort of adapted from THE SEAGULL  
by Anton Chekhov

draft A.5

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## ACT I

### 0. PROLOGUE

*[Right at curtain time the cast walks on stage. There is a primary playing area and other places to hang out further away with tables, chairs, food and drink-- including vodka and pie. Some go and pour themselves a drink or have a snack. MASH begins to tune, quietly to herself. She is nowhere near DEV.]*

*CON comes downstage with a large old wooden easel. On it are large cards. The first says STUPID FUCKING BIRD. He stands next to it and looks at it a bit. Then he reveals the next one. It says: CELL PHONES, BEEPERS, UNWRAP CANDY, BLAH BLAH BLAH... He looks at that one a moment. Waits while people do some of those things. He watches. He can say something if he wants to...*

*He turns over the next card. It says THE PLAY WILL BEGIN WHEN SOMEONE SAYS "START THE FUCKING PLAY." He stands next to it looking at the audience until someone in the audience does. The moment that someone does, music kicks in, lights shift, and DEV and MASH come forward and sit... MASH has her ukulele with her and maybe she is tuning it at times, or just holding it. Maybe playing...]*

CON *[From the side]* By the lake. In the fall. Late afternoon...

### 1. DISAPPOINTING

DEV Seriously. Why?

MASH Why do I...? *[She touches her black clothes somehow...]*

DEV Yes. Why?

MASH What do you think?

DEV I, ummm...

MASH I'm in *mourning*. For my *life*. I'm *unhappy*.

DEV Wow. Okay...

Are you *that* unhappy?

MASH You're an idiot.

DEV Yeah, maybe. But...

MASH What?

DEV Nothing.

MASH                    What??

DEV                     Nothing. But...

                              My life is worse than yours. I mean... *so much worse...* And you don't see me wearing black. [*He is dressed partially in black*] I mean, sometimes, but it's not, like, a *thing*... But, Jesus, my life is way worse than yours, you know?

MASH                    How is that even possible?

DEV                     I'm poor. I'm *poor*.

                              And I'm an orphan, so that's *unsettling*. I have flat feet... which hurt, you know... all the time. And I'm unhappy in love. [*Almost shouting...*] *I'm unhappy in love!* I mean, you know I love you ridiculously and you, you know, barely tolerate me...

                              But mostly, I'm really, really *poor*. And I'm sorry, but that's actually much harder than, you know, mourning your lost... lonely... broken... *whatever*.

MASH                    Ah.

DEV                     But I'm still... *whatever*. *Hopeful*. I still have hope. You know?

MASH                    Wow, "hope". [*Longer pause...*] You can be happy if you're poor.

DEV                     Yeah?

MASH                    Yes.

DEV                     Oh. Well... [*Considers. Then, mostly to himself, having reached a conclusion.*] No.

                              So when is this thing starting?

MASH                    Soon.

DEV                     And what is it, exactly?

MASH                    It's a "Site Specific Performance Event".

DEV                     What's a.....?

MASH                    It's kind of like a play but not so stupid.

DEV                     Stupid?

MASH                    No one's pretending to be someone else.

DEV                     Oh. [*Quick beat, working that out...*] Then what do they do?

MASH They... behave... they say things and do things, or whatever, but they're not pretending to be, you know, *Bob* and *Trudie*. Like fucking five year olds playing house. It's deeper than that. It's *art*...

DEV Oh. *[He looks around again...]* This is site specific?

MASH Yeah. The lake. The mist. The twilight. It's all a part of his *vision*.

DEV Gotchya. And Nina is in it right?

MASH *[Dark and small]* Yeah.

DEV That's nice. That they can connect that way. *[She sees where he is going with this from before the word go...]* That she can be part of his... *creation*... part of his *work*, you know? That they have that in common. That they can *connect* on a whole other level, while we--

MASH Please shut the fuck up. Okay? For a minute. Could you do that?

DEV Okay.

MASH Please?

DEV Okay.

MASH Please?

DEV I said okay.

MASH Thank you. *[Full beat. Big picture]* I'm sorry. I just... *can't*. Okay? I just *can't*.

DEV I know. *[Beat]* It sucks.

MASH Sorry.

DEV Yeah. *[DEV leaves.]* See you at the... *thing*.

MASH *[MASH sits there... Then she turns abruptly to us.]* I wrote this. It sucks, but...  
Don't judge.

YOU'RE BORN AND THEN YOU LIVE AND THEN YOU DIE  
YOU NEVER GET TO KNOW THE REASON WHY  
YOU BREATHE AND THEN YOU DON'T, YOU'VE JUST BEGUN  
YOU'RE HOT YOU ROT, AND THEN YOUR DONE,  
SO WHERE'S THE PART OF THIS THAT'S FUN?

LIFE IS A MUDDLE, LIFE IS A CHORE,  
LIFE IS A BURDEN, LIFE IS A BORE  
THIS APPLE IS ROTTEN RIGHT DOWN TO ITS CORE  
LIFE... IS DISAPPOINTING

YOU LOVE AND THEN YOU LOSE THAT MUCH IS SURE  
THAT'S JUST THE WAY IT IS, YOU MUST CONCUR  
YOU HOPE AND LIKE A DOPE YOU'RE WRONG AGAIN  
YOU TRY YOU DIE SO WHY BEGIN  
IT'S ALL A GAME YOU'LL NEVER WIN...

LIFE IS A MUDDLE, LIFE IS A CHORE,  
LIFE IS A BURDEN, LIFE IS A BORE  
THIS APPLE IS ROTTEN RIGHT DOWN TO ITS CORE  
LIFE... IS DISAPPOINTING

*[She stops. Breathes. Cries. To the silent audience:] Shut up.*

*[MASH leaves. CON enters from somewhere, hurried, waiting. Maybe he has some setting up to do... Or maybe he sets up upstage while MASH is singing...]*

SORN *[To us...]* By the lake. Near an ancient little outdoor stage. Approaching dusk...

*[NINA arrives, breathlessly...]*

## **2. THE STARK NAKED HEART**

NINA Hi hi hi...

CON Where the hell have you been?

NINA I'm so sorry--

CON How can you *always* be / late? You're like a genius of lateness, a fucking--

NINA *[All run together]* I know, I know / I'm sorry, I love you, I just couldn't--

CON Well -- *[Hearing her "I love you" in there...]*-- okay, good, all right.

NINA *[She starts changing clothes, donning make-up. She might be briefly semi-naked, or mostly naked, or naked enough to make CON shake a bit...]* Can I just...?

CON Sure.

NINA I ran most of the way. The light on the lake is so beautiful tonight...

CON *[Looking out, thinking about the effect for the play...]* Oh, good...

NINA Remember how we used to run down by the lake? All those ridiculous games...

CON Ridiculous...?

NINA And wonderful...! *[Over the 'radio']* "Red Leader, this is Red Wing One. Over."

CON "Rodger, Red Wing One. We're goin' in! Over."

NINA All that flying...! You were usually what, a falcon? Or a a a...

CON *A sparrow hawk.*

NINA Right.

CON *[Teasing her...]* And you were ummm... a... dodo?

NINA A seagull!

CON Oh, right...

NINA "The silver-tipped / mistress of the air"

CON *[Joining in...]* "...mistress of the air"

NIN *[Remembering]* Oh, God, in that white lace dress I stole from my mom...

CON How are you doing? Are you almost--

NINA *[Abruptly back on task]* I'm nervous!

CON You're great!

NINA I remember your mom performing down here when we were little. She was always so unbelievably good...

CON Yeah...

NINA Won't she kind of hate it that I'm performing here now...?

CON *[Terse]* She'll love it.

NINA And are they really coming? Both of them?

CON I think so. She said so. Though you never know / with my mother...

NINA What's he like?

CON Who, Trigorin?

NINA                    Of course.

CON                    Jesus, I don't know...

NINA                    Oh, c'mon. You've met a bazillion (*note: that means very many...*) famous people with your mom, but I never get to meet anyone, so / I'm *curious*.

CON                    He's fine. He's *quiet* and *humble* and and and *unassuming* in this very assuming little way that makes sure you can't help but notice how humble he is. But--

NINA                    I love his work.

CON                    You do? I didn't know you'd / read anything--

NINA                    Not that much, really, just THE LAUGHING DOG LAUGHED and his first book of short stories, THE STARK-NAKED HEART. But they're / *amazing*.

CON                    I've never read any. Are you almost ready? Do you / need to...?

NINA                    Really?

CON                    What?

NINA                    You've never read *anything*?

CON                    No. Why?

NINA                    Even since your mother and he have / been--?

CON                    Especially since then. I mean-- you know?

NINA                    No. Sometimes I don't think I understand you at all.

CON                    *Excellent*. And on that note--

NINA                    Or your play, for that matter.

CON                    Perfect.

NINA                    What if they won't talk when they're supposed to?

CON                    They will.

NINA                    But what if they won't?

CON                    Then they won't.

NINA                   What if they hate it?

CON                    Then I'll shoot myself in the head. *[Now reassuring her]* They won't hate it.

NINA                   What if they hate me?

CON                    They won't.

NINA                   It's just so... *unrealistic*.

CON                    Oh God... It's not *supposed* to be *realistic*! What's so great-- Any idiot can be *realistic*! *Life is realistic*. This is *art*. And art doesn't have to be *realistic*, just... *TRUE*. *[To the audience, self-aware...]* Yeah, I know, I know, blah blah blah, but..... *[Back to her]* It's going to be great. *You're* going to be great. And whatever happens *happens*. That's the whole point. Okay?

NINA                   I guess...

CON                    Good.

NINA                   I do love some of the crazy things I get to say... It's really smart. And poetic.

CON                    And you're wonderful in it. Perfect. Radiant. Ideal. They'll all fall completely in love with you. Trust me.

NINA                   I do.

CON                    Good. Are you ready?

NINA                   I think so.

CON                    Okay. *[An inside joke]* Break your face.

NINA                   Break *your* face! *[They kiss. A very nice kiss. Not long, but loving...]*

**3. \_\_\_\_\_ ART**

*[Folks enter to see the "showing". EMMA, his mother, TRIGORIN, her lover, a famous author, DR. SORN, EMMA's older brother, DEV, Con's best friend, and MASH, his mom's cook/neighbor/helper. As they arrive they set up chairs and all while CON finishes getting the stage ready and NINA readies herself...]*

SORN                   No, I do, I do, I *like* art. I find it... *comforting*.

EMMA                  Well, good...

DEV                    Me, too. I like art...

TRIG                   Ummm... you might want to refrain from sharing that with certain people...



SORN Who?

TRIG Artists, mostly.

SORN Artists don't like art?

TRIG Well...

EMMA No, actually, but that's a whole other thing. My point is most of them don't particularly strive to make art that's "comforting", big brother.

SORN Oh really?

EMMA The poorer, the more tortured the artist, the better the art. I believe that's the conventional wisdom.

DEV *[A throw away...]* Then I should be a genius...

EMMA Van Gogh and his like really fucked the goose on this one.

MASH You don't think it works that way?

EMMA I think it is self-flagellating horseshit.

TRIG *[Amazed, amused...]* Okay then...!

EMMA Certainly some great artists have suffered, of course they have, but I'm sorry, I don't think abject misery or a... weepy soul is the best measure of quality, no.

MASH Then what is?

EMMA *[An absolute, and, she knows, controversial conviction:]* Success.

DEV Oh. Well...

TRIG Fascinating.

SORN Truly?

EMMA It may sound crass, but it's true. If people *want* to see something-- want to pay their hard earned money to see it-- that *means something*. Something *tangible*.

MASH But you're not saying unpopular art is bad art, right?

EMMA No. But I'm sure as fuck not saying it's better art, either.

DEV Self-flatulating? What does that even mean?

SORN Flagellating.

DEV Oh...

CON *[Appearing from behind the stage...]* What isn't better art?

SORN The man of the hour!

EMMA And speaking of tortured artists... our playwright!

MASH Do you need any help?

CON *[To MASH]* No, thanks, I'm fine.

MASH How about Nina? Does she need anything?

CON *[Quickly]* I think she's fine, thanks. *[To Everyone]* Okay, is everyone here?

SORN I think so.

EMMA Of course.

TRIG Do you do these kinds of... "performance things", often?

EMMA It's a family tradition. My great-grandparents would try out their vaudeville routines out here at these lavish neighborhood potlucks. "Maisie & Mike". Ukulele's. Unicycles. The pictures look amazing...

DEV Maybe you'll sing later? I used to love it when you would sing...

EMMA Some other time, maybe. This is Connie's night. You haven't done any little shows back here since you were... what, 12 or 13?

CON *[Tense. Maybe the last one didn't go so well...]* I don't remember. Anyway...

TRIG *[To CON]* Well, thanks for letting me watch tonight...

CON Sure. Although you've made my leading lady kind of nervous, she--

EMMA Who, him? Nonsense, he's a pushover for a pretty girl. *[In the lightest, most joking and delightful way...]* It's me she should be worried about!

CON Perfect.

MASH You sure you don't need--

CON *[Snippy. She has asked before...]* I'm fine!

DEV Excellent. I was just saying to myself the other day, I could use a good "site-specific performance-event" to spice up the fall.

CON Shut up!

DEV Do we have to... wear masks or something?

CON Okay, soooo...Thank you all for coming. The name of this piece is... HERE. WE. ARE. It's a work in progress, and this is our first showing, so we / are really just...

EMMA We understand, darling. It's just a rehearsal...

CON No, not a rehearsal, a *showing*. It's / not that we haven't..

EMMA Okay. "A Showing", / sorry...

CON Anyway. Right. Okay, here we go...

**4. HERE WE ARE**

NINA *[Lights out. CON controls the lights and plays music. The music is haunting, lyrical, maybe. The lights come up on NINA. She looks wonderful and sexy and surprising. Perhaps something that billows like the curtain behind her. It should be beautiful. Perhaps as she speaks there is a simple movement vocabulary...]*

Here we are.  
Here We Are.  
**Here.**  
**We.**  
**Are.**

*[Music shifts, drives, under all of the following. She lands the words and rhymes with passion and a (seemingly) deep understanding of the ideas behind them....]*

This is real, this is true,  
This is new, this is now  
Not a lie  
Not some  
Time-Gone-By Fable  
Or Far-Fetched Fairy Tale  
Nothing stale  
Not a retread or a rehash  
Nothing tarnished or trashed  
By hacks or the hackneyed,  
By starlets or star-turns  
By has-beens who've crashed and burned...  
This is just This.  
This is just This.  
This is just what it IS,  
Not some bullshit show-biz,  
Not a reference to another place  
Or another time,

Not some Once Upon A Kingdom built on Rhyme  
And meter, but something sweeter,  
Not a fictional tract  
But a *fact*.  
Not just *art*,  
But a *start*.

*[Music abruptly ends, just as EMMA is caught saying...]*

EMMA *[Under her breath...]* Oh, Lord...

MASH Shhhhhh!

NINA *[Suddenly eye to eye with her audience...]* So. Here We Are. Aren't we? Aren't we here? *[Turning abruptly to SORN, who is caught off-guard]* You, sir. Are you here? *[Beat]* Are you here?

SORN Umm...

NINA Are you here? A simple question. Are you here with me, with *we*, now?

SORN Umm... I think so...

NINA Good.

NINA *[Turning to EMMA]* And you, ma'am. Are you here?

EMMA I'm afraid so...

NINA Oh.  
TRIG *[Gently]* Emma...

EMMA *[To Trigorin, and the assemblage...]* She asked the question...!

NINA But... but if we're all really here, then where are we really? What is this place, this sacred space where we've gathered for this one moment in time?

EMMA My backyard.

SORN Shhhh!  
TRIG Shhhh...  
EMMA Well, are we supposed to answer or aren't we? I'm just --

NINA *[CON might be about to answer or weigh in when NINA plows on and he has to get back to work with tech and music...]* Are we in some fictional fantasy world where people live in three-walled rooms and walk, talk, and wear clothes just like "real people"! Where they get into terrible predicaments, confide, confess, cry and get it all resolved into a tiny, palatable moral in 90 jam-packed minutes?

Or might we be someplace *different*...?

*[Music shifts. Lights do something... ]*

A new place.  
A liminal space,  
A place of grace  
And the boundless pursuit  
Of beauty  
A place where truth  
Might be told--  
Where streets  
Are not lined with gold,  
But just maybe with something better--  
Unfettered  
Possibility,  
Lively Maybe's  
And vital Why-The-Fuck-Not's  
Not people like robots,  
All piping the same tune,  
The tried and un-true  
The Nothing-Ever-Really-New...

No, my friends, no.  
Here we are.  
Here We Are,  
In a place and a moment  
So patently *un-true*  
It just *might* be new.  
So different in feel  
It might be realer than real.

*[Music out. Light shift...]*

So where are we now?

Are you still in the same place you were five minutes ago?

What is going on inside of you right now...?

EMMA

I don't think she really wants to know...

TRIG  
SORN

Shhhh...  
Please...

EMMA

Oh, come on, is this a joke? Connie, is this really your *play*?

CON Mother, for Christ's sake...!  
SORN Let her finish...!  
TRIG Emma!  
DEV I think this is it...

EMMA What? What? She's tromping around in my backyard on my fucking stage /  
TRIG Calm down now, sport...  
EMMA wearing my dress and telling me... what...? That the plays I do are--  
CON It's not about you!  
EMMA Oh really?!?  
CON All right. That's it. We're done here. Nina, get off the stage! *[She does, awkwardly, and with all possible alacrity, looking at the dress she had no idea was one of Arkadina's old ones...]*  
EMMA Ooooooh, is this a part of it, too?  
TRIG Emma, please...!  
SORN *[To EMMA]* Pumpkin, you really shouldn't...  
CON If you can't even-- I mean, if you can't even-- Fuck it!!! *[As he storms away, wounded and hurting...]* Fuck it fuck it fuck it!!!!

## **5. SHIELDS**

EMMA Now what the hell?  
MASH I'll go find him, okay?  
EMMA What was that all about?  
TRIG You offended him.  
EMMA He offended me!  
SORN He was trying to impress / you.  
MASH Should I? *[Go and find him, she means...]*  
EMMA With *that?* / Seriously?  
DEV I thought it was kind of great.  
EMMA Oh, for fuck's / sake...

DEV I was really feeling.... *here*.

MASH Ummm...

EMMA Yes, yes, go, go, tell him I want to talk to him, would you?

MASH Of course... *[She leaves quickly...]*

DEV She was really good....

TRIG *[With an inadvertent, telling tone...]* Yes, charming.

EMMA Oh, come on, that... *pretentious drive!* was an attack on me! He's trying to show me what he thinks of the plays I do by forcing us to-- He said it was a play, and--

DEV A "performance event."

EMMA What?

DEV You said "play", but I think...

SORN Where is she?

TRIG Why are you so upset?

SORN Is she still here? Nina?! Nina?!

NINA *[Coming out]* Hello?

SORN Brava! Well done! *[There is polite applause from everyone...]*

EMMA Lovely, my dear, well done. *[She walks away from the group a bit...]*

NINA Thank you so much.

TRIG Indeed. Lovely. *[Introducing himself]* I'm Doyle Trigorin.

NINA Oh, I know. I've read your books. Well, not all of them, but -- you know. A lot.

TRIG Thanks.

DEV That was great.

SORN You were ravishing, my dear. I'm only sorry it was so brief.

NINA Oh, there was a lot more.

SORN Oh, too bad...  
TRIG Well, maybe some other time.

NINA I should go and see if I can find Connie...

EMMA *[Thinking of Con...]* Oh, dear...

SORN What is it?

EMMA I guess I've really upset him. He's so sensitive. The smallest thing--

SORN Yes, well, he is a human being.

EMMA What is that supposed to mean?

SORN We're all sensitive. Much more than we let on, I think.

TRIG I think that's true.

SORN Thank you.

DEV Absolutely. Very... you know... *true*. *[Beat]*

TRIG I often imagine us all wearing armor. *[They all look at him]* That's funny, I've never said this out loud before. But I do. All kinds. Ancient. Futuristic. Plate, chain mail, leather. All periods, all styles. I often see it quite clearly in the middle of a conversation, I think "Oh, so that's the kind of armor she's chosen..." *[Beat]*

NINA That's so--

DEV Lots of video games have shields.

TRIG Oh?

DEV You're often some kind of ship or vessel and you're trying to, you know, get somewhere or do something and you get attacked a lot, because, well, because that's just what happens, but not only do you have weapons, you have *shields*. Invisible, resilient shields you can just... *raise*... when you need them. I've always thought how helpful that would be in life. You know? *[Beat]* Shields. *[Beat]*

TRIG That's very astute.

*[Beat]*

NINA Well, I should probably really get going...

EMMA *[Ending the conversation]* Don't let us keep you. Well done.



TRIG Wonderful work.

NINA Thank you, that means the world to me...

EMMA We need to get you into a real play some day. You know, with a plot, and characters, and words that mean things when you say them.

TRIG Emma...

NINA That's all I want. To be an actress. Like you.

EMMA Then I am sure that's what you'll do. Good-bye, then.

NINA Good-bye. Oh, and so sorry about the dress, I had no idea...

EMMA You keep it. You look wonderful in it. Doesn't she?

TRIG Certainly.

NINA *[To TRIG]* So nice meeting you. *[To the rest]* Good-bye everyone!

TRIG Take care...

SORN Great work!

DEV Nice job, Nina...

EMMA Come, my love, let's get you home, shall we? Are you all right?

TRIG Of course, why?

EMMA No reason...

SORN I'll be along presently.

EMMA *[leaving]* Suit yourself...

DEV *[To SORN, once they are gone...]* Well, I liked it.

SORN Yes. Me, too. Very much.

DEV "Here We Are."

SORN Indeed...

DEV Anyway... I'm gonna go see if Mash found Conrad. Or if I can find him. Or her. Or... Whatever. G'night.

SORN Good night.

**6. \_\_\_\_\_ SO MUCH FEELING...**

SORN *[To us]* Well... I liked it, too. The play. Or whatever it was.

I thought it had something.

I mean... where are we, most of the time? You know? *Where are we?*

You ever have that feeling where you were just somewhere and then suddenly you are some other place and you think... how the hell did I get here? And, I mean, that's bad enough when it's just when you're just, you know, driving to the store or something like that... but when it's sometimes years at a time... or a decade. Like, what the hell happened to my forties? I mean, I know I was there, I can show you my tax returns and whatnot, but... you know...

Where the hell was I? Was I really living my life? Day in, day out.

*Where was I?*

*[Launching into a story to illustrate his point...]* When I was maybe six or seven I had a turtle named Mr. Hardtacks. And one day there was this--

MASH *[Returning. She is way edgy, taunted.]* Did he come back?

SORN I'm sorry?

MASH Conrad. Did he come back?

SORN No.

MASH I couldn't find him.

SORN He'll be along when he's ready, I'd imagine.

MASH Yes. Right. *[She starts cleaning up, putting things away...]*

SORN Are you all right?

MASH I'm fine.

SORN All right. *[Quick beat]* You sure?

MASH I'm fine.

SORN Would you like a life-saver?

MASH What?

SORN A life-saver. *[Reading]* Tropical Fruits. *[Taking out the life saver, looking at it]* I think it might be coconut. Or guava. Not mango. Something white. *[Holding it out to her]* Would you like one?

MASH Would I like a *life-saver*?

SORN Yes.

MASH *[Bursting into tears]* I love him so much. I love him so much and he is never ever going to love me back. I hate my life. I hate it I hate it I hate it I hate it I hate it...

SORN *[He goes to her and puts out his arms, still holding the life saver, and she comes into them like a little girl. He hugs her...]* Shhh... there, there. There there. It'll be all right and all... Shhhhh... *[The lifesaver in his hand is getting awkward... While still hugging her he pops it in his own mouth...]* So much feeling...

TRIG *[From the side]* Later that same night. Down by the lake...

## **7. NEW FORMS!**

*[CON talks to SORN & DEV. Late. CON is restless, pacing, frustrating, confused... He holds a copy of his play which he is tearing up into small pieces as he says..]*

CON She loves me not *[rip]*, she loves me *[rip]*, she loves me not *[rip]*, she loves me *[rip]*, she loves me not *[rip]*, she loves me *[rip]* she loves me **NOT!**

SORN Oh, please... You *know* she loves you.

CON I don't know...

SORN You can see it.

CON *[A guttural grunt of denial... or something...]*

DEV I can see it.

CON I can't. Not anymore...

SORN She loves you...

CON She sure has a weird fucking way of showing it.

DEV But that doesn't mean she doesn't love you.

CON I don't know...

SORN But she's your *mother*.

CON So? You really think every mother loves her son? You don't think that deep down a lot of them kind of... you know..... *hate them?*

SORN Oh Connie...

CON All the sacrifices. All the energy. The money and time and poop and mess and stress / and stretch marks and *wrinkles*

SORN I don't know. I'm not exactly an expert on family matters...

CON Oh, come on, you know your little sister as well as anybody. You've had to deal with her since she was *born!* You know I'm right. She doesn't for one second want to think about the fact she has a grown kid. Dye and Botox can't make me go away. The math of me. I mean she had me at 19, not nine. So if I'm *this* old, then she has to be *that* old, and she just kinda hates me for that...

SORN I can see how you might think that...

CON And she knows I fucking hate the "art" she makes. Those awful, stupid movies and those ridiculous plays she does. "Mrs. Winthrop's Cat" or "Turn On A Sixpence" or whatever the fuck...

DEV That last one got great reviews...

CON Oh, please!

DEV You don't like plays, now? I thought you loved the theatre / more than

CON We need new kinds of theatre! *New forms!* I mean, fuck, do you have any idea what's passing itself off as theatre these days? Do you ever go?

SORN Umm...

CON No, no I know, you think you "should", but do you ever, of your own free will?

DEV Do you know how much / tickets cost--

CON I mean, this theatre, this one, where we're doing this show right now, this one is better than most, maybe (who knows anymore), but Christ what they're doing to Shakespeare these days to make him "*accessible*"... and the tiny, tepid, clever-y clever-y clever-y little plays that are being produced by terrified theatres just trying to keep ancient Jews and gay men and retired academics and a few random others who did plays in high school trickling in their doors...

Do you know that six people is now a big play? Seven or eight, like this one [*instantly out to the audience*] (yes, of course I know I'm in a play, I'm right here and you're right there, and since you can see and hear me let's just assume I can see and hear you, too, and when you pick up your playbill, like you did earlier,

sir, to see... I don't know... whether I've ever been in a a play at Studio or if Rick's ever been on Broadway or where to eat after the show, I saw you. We all see damn near everything you ever do out there, all of you, just so you-- I'm not blaming, we're glad you're here, were totally grateful, actually-- but just so... you know, you *know...*), yeah, a play like this one with seven actors is practically un-producible. If we weren't a ... whatever... a a a deconstruction... a rip off of a classic we probably wouldn't be here right now, you know? You know?

SORN

Ummm...

CON

But, no, I mean, seriously, Good Christ, we need new forms, new *passion*, new *work*, new *ideas*, new some-fucking-thing or other--

DEV

Like this?

CON

What?

DEV

This play we're in right now. Is this the kind of new work you mean? New forms?

CON

No no no. Fuck no! Better than *this*! Amazing! Brilliant! New forms of theatre that can actually make you feel like living *better* or *fuller* or or or... *MORE*. New forms that open up new possibilities, new ways of being in the world. We need bigger hearts! We need wider minds and better ideas and we need them *now*. [*Yelling*] *We need them now!* I mean, don't you feel that? Don't you? [*Turning to audience*] Don't you? Don't answer that. That's rhetorical!

SORN

How about--

CON

Don't you dare say fucking Cirque Du Soleil fucking Feruzbrutza whatever the fuck to me, big-ass spectacle, because that is not what I am talking about, I am not talking about eye-candy and diversion.

SORN

No, no, I was--

CON

Sorry. Sorry, what were you going to say?

SORN

[*Trying to come up with a lie...*] I was... I... No, you're right I was going to say Cirque Du Soleil. (*CON laughs, not ungenerously, but still ironically...*) No, I just saw them once, and I thought it was kind of...

CON

What?!?

SORN

Wonderful. I thought it was kind of wonderful.

CON

Yeah, me, too.

SORN

Oh. But then--

CON But nothing *changed*. Nothing in *me*. Nothing in the *world*. **NOTHING!**

It's like the hand-job of the theatre. Sure, nice, fine, there's some pleasure involved, sure, but nothing real has actually happened, nothing worthwhile has been exchanged or has transpired. Nothing real. Nothing *real*. You know?

SORN But why do you--

CON What?

SORN Why does it need to change things? Why do you want to change things?

CON Are you kidding me? Are you kidding me? *Why do I want to change the world?*

Is that what you are actually asking me?

SORN Yes. I mean... yes.

CON Have you seen the world lately? I mean actually, actually *seen* it?

DEV [*Under his breath...*] Here he goes...

CON Stupidity. Greed. Corporate dominance. Selfishness and neediness achieving new heights never before even imagined. Old forms. Old forms of everything, always being *called* New, but never actually *being* new. And new technologies and media onslaughts and and and *breakfast cereals* appealing with assassin-like accuracy to every worst impulse human beings have been subterraneously cultivating for the past ten thousand years.

Why do I want to change the world? BECAUSE IT NEEDS CHANGING!

And once upon a time, somewhere, maybe in Eastern Europe-- at least in the Eastern Europe of my imagination-- "The Theatre" was something that could maybe be some tiny, tiny, tiny part of that... and it has got to find its way to be that again or it should go the way of the dodo and the bell bottom and the newspaper and just GO AWAY!

SORN Wow.

CON Yeah. Wow. [*He abruptly walks away, or storms out, or...*]

**8. NEED ANYTHING?**

[*EMMA and MASH enter from different places. MASH is just doing her job...*]

MASH Do you need anything?

EMMA Perseverance, perhaps. Why?

MASH                    *[Tiny beat]* From the market, I meant.

EMMA                    Gin, I think. A quantity of gin. Several limes. Strawberries.

                             Perhaps a cattle prod or bullwhip of some kind...

MASH                    All right. *[She starts to go...]*

EMMA                    Oh, Mash?

MASH                    Yes?

EMMA                    Do you... Oh, nevermind.

MASH                    Do I...?

EMMA                    Do you... do you *understand* my son?

MASH                    No.

EMMA                    But you...

MASH                    Yes?

EMMA                    You.... *feel things...* for him.

MASH                    Yes.

EMMA                    And, umm... why, exactly?

MASH                    Seriously?

EMMA                    Deadly.

MASH                    Jesus.

EMMA                    I want to know.

MASH                    I, ummm... Do you remember that duck my mom rescued when we first moved here? I was eight or nine maybe. Eight, I think. And that ridiculous duck just followed her around the kitchen all day for a couple of months. Followed her around all damn day, just kind of staring up at her...

EMMA                    Umm... no. But I get the image.

MASH                    Well, it's like that I think.

EMMA Ah.

MASH Yeah. *[Quick Beat.]*

EMMA Which of us is the duck? *[Beat.]*

MASH So. Gin. Limes. Strawberries...

EMMA And a tiny bucket of perseverance...

MASH *[Smiling. A nice moment between them?]* No cattle prod?

EMMA Not as of yet, thank you...

MASH Right. Okay.

*[She goes... EMMA turns to us. By way of explanation...]*

## **9. PERFECT PARENTING...**

EMMA When he was little I used to make my hand die.

He'd be... screaming or whatever.... and if he wouldn't stop, I'd tell him he was hurting me. I'd tell him... I'd tell him he was killing me, actually, that's what I said, I said "You don't want to kill mommy, do you?" and then I'd... make my hand die. Like this... *[She makes one hand slowly, sadly, whither and die...]* And he'd get this little look on his face... and he'd stop. It was very *effective*.

I can't help but think now that that was not, perhaps, perfect parenting. But it worked... And I needed things-- *anything*-- that worked...

I was 18 when I got married. Eighteen fucking years old. Hardly out of diapers. To my first famous leading man. Dixon. Dixon McCready, remember him? No, me neither... Jesus, the way he said his own named should have tipped me off... "Dixon." "Dixon McCready. Rhymes with seedy." Oy... "Sexual harassment that just worked out" we called it. I thought that was so funny and charming at the time. Like we'd beat the system. What did all those "adults" who thought they knew better, that told us to wait, that told me I was too young, what did they know? I *knew*. It was true love! It was perfect. "What could possibly go wrong?" I asked my mother during one of our stupid, endless fights.

"What could possibly go wrong?"

Well, as it turned out... *things*. *Many things* could go wrong... And did. Wonderfully, impossibly wrong, and at 22 I had my first hit movie, my first tabloid scandal and I was a divorced mother of a two year old son.

And the universe said... "Well, good luck with that..."



So, yes, that's right, my point is, indeed, don't judge. Don't you dare judge me.

You've done it all perfectly, have you? Love. Life. Career. Family. Fidelity. Passion. All right then, all you... socially responsible, deeply fulfilled, vegan, charitable, millionaires... who work out and have sex three times a week... *you* can judge. The rest of you... *shut up*. I'm doing the best I can...

I don't hate him. How could I? I don't hate him.

But he does... *bother me*.

MASH *[To us]* Two nights later. Drinking. And eating pie. Pie that *I* fucking made...

**10. AWKWARD**

CON She's killing me!

DEV You need to calm--

CON She's literally driving me insane!

DEV Literally?

CON All right, *figuratively*. *[Tiny beat]* No, *literally*.

DEV Really?

CON Don't tell me you don't see it.

DEV See...? *[Confused between subjects...]*

CON Her. Him. *Them*.

DEV Well, it's not that / I don't--

CON I can't believe her!

DEV Listen, Nina loves you. She's just--

CON We we're doing fine. I mean... fine-ish. Good. And then along comes that... swarthy, talentless fuck-headed pirate... and suddenly it's like I'm--

I can't catch my breath, like I'm drowning or something, like I'm, like I'm...

DEV In space?

CON No, like I'm... like I'm fucking drowning! I need another beer. You want one?

DEV I'm fine. [CON walks off]

DEV [Turning to us, while CON is gone...] Yeah, so, I don't think this is good. Trigorin's a really great writer and all, but I'm afraid he's maybe just... *kind of an asshole*. I mean, he's a visitor here. Emma's *guest*. And her *lover*. And the way he's flirting with Nina is just not right. It's almost as bad as the way she's flirting with him...

Not that anyone seems to be noticing. Except Con... who's freaking out like someone just fucked his cat or something. And me. That's the advantage of everyone thinking you're kind of a boob... they don't tend to think I notice things, but I do. Everything, pretty much. (Which is why I love Mash so much. Isn't she amazing? Underneath...?) [CON has re-entered and interrupts him...]

CON How can I win her back? How can I get her to love me the way I need her to?

DEV Oh, biscuits...

CON How can I get her to love me the way I love her?

DEV You are SO asking the wrong person.

CON It must be possible.

DEV Bullpucky!

CON It must be!

DEV Why?

CON Because Nina is my life. *My whole life*. I've loved her since since since... Look, I know what love *is* because of her. And now I'm screwed, because Love has... *attached* itself to her. And while this might be the hokiest thing ever said anywhere by anyone, ever... she IS love to me.

DEV Yeah, well, that is a little--

CON Fuck you. You just don't understand how UNFAIR love can be, or you wouldn't--

DEV I don't understand? I don't...--??? Listen, the woman I love-- the woman I'm, you know, *burning for* every day-- is ridiculously, stupidly in love with *you*. And has been for *years*! Years!!! Now what exactly is it that I don't understand?

CON [Micro beat] That's not true.

DEV Of course it is. We all know it. We all know it. We pretend we don't, but we do.

CON Ummm...

DEV So, waddaya say?!? You think I can get her to fall in love with me instead? You think love is logical? That is makes sense? That it obeys some laws??? My love for Mash hurts me. Do you understand that? I long for her. I feel it in my *thighs*.

Who ever heard of a love so powerful your *thighs* ache???

CON Your *thighs*?

DEV Yes. My *thighs*. It's ridiculous...

*[Long Beat. There is just nothing-- or too much-- to say about this. So going on...]*

CON I wish I didn't know Nina so well. Then I could lie to myself better. But I know every look, every pause, every... cloud of an idea that crosses her face. You should see her looking at him. And then looking at me to make sure I didn't see her looking at him that way. Then looking away from me after she knows I've seen her looking at him, and then trying to look at me kinda the same way she was looking at him so I won't feel SO BAD, and then FAILING epically at at at at *replicating* the look when I am the focus... I mean not even *close*.

I can't fucking believe this is actually, actually happening.

DEV Maybe it's actually, actually not.

CON But it is. It IS! I can't sleep, I can't eat (except pie, somehow pie is exempt...) but I can't fucking *function*. How is that good? How is love fun? How can I-- *[Turning to the audience]* How can I get her to love me again? You've seen her, you've seen us, how can I get her to love ME more? *[Beat]* I'm really asking. *[Beat]* I'm actually, actually asking. Does anyone have any ideas...???

DEV They're not going to talk.

CON They might.

DEV They know you're fictional.

CON So what? Half the things about most of the people they know are at least twice as fictional as I am, and more than half are only about twice as interesting or half as real, or really only half as fictional. But I bet that doesn't stop them from giving *them* advice. *[Back to the audience]* Seriously, how can I get her to truly see me for who I am and to love me fully and entirely for that? Anyone??? Seriously. I'm actually, actually asking for your help...

*[He engages the audience in a discussion about what he might do to get NINA to love him. He tries to actually, actually gets them to talk. He listens to their ideas intently, asks further questions when appropriate, tries to get them to give him helpful, practical advice. Hopefully, someone says something about a gift, or*

*about let her know who you are, or show her, or do something, or something that helps to move him towards a new idea. An idea that requires immediate action. An action he sets out at that moment to undertake...]*

CON Right. Right. Good. Thank you. That's very helpful. Thanks. *[He leaves...]*

DEV The next day. Down by the lake. Con sent Nina a note. *[DEV somehow has a copy of it. He reads it to us]* 'Meet me. Noon 30. The Place. Con.'

## **11. HOPE DANCE**

*[NINA is waiting by the lake It's just about 12:30. She wait. There could be a song or some music here. Then, almost by default, she talks to us...]*

NINA So, there's this story of his called THE TINY SACRED-- it's in his first collection, from when he was even younger than Conrad is now, I think-- and there's this little orphan girl in it. Her name is Annabelle, but they call her The Thimble. Isn't that great? And she has... consumption, or something, so she lives mostly in her tiny little room, mostly in bed, and she creates these imaginary worlds within worlds in the swirls on her bedspread and things like that...

But when things are particularly bleak... she does The Hope Dance. On her bed. All alone. At night. The Hope Dance. Don't you love that?

So when I was maybe 10 or 11, after one particularly terrible day-- you know, evil step-father, drunken rage, poor me, blah blah blah-- one night I just got up on my bed in the middle of the night and... I did it. I did The Hope Dance. And I instantly felt better. *He* gave that to me. He gave me that *gift*.

And now he's right here. And... and he seems *to like me*. Me! When I was talking to him last night I got weak in the knees. That's a thing that actually happened. My knees got *weak*... I mean... What am I supposed with that?

*[MASH appears...]*

## **12. CAN I HELP YOU?**

MASH Oh.

NINA Hi. Were you--

MASH What?

NINA Looking for Connie?

MASH Why?

NINA You weren't?

MASH No, I-- whatever.

NINA You were?

MASH Yes. What about it?

NINA Nothing, I just... I haven't seen him. He should be here soon, though. He asked me to meet him here.

MASH Of course. Okay... [*She goes to leave...*]

NINA Mash?

MASH How can I help you?

NINA How can you--? Umm...

MASH Don't stress it. I was being *ironical*.

NINA I know. I'm not stupid.

MASH I never said / you were...

NINA I didn't say you / did.

MASH I know you're not stupid.

NINA And I know you're not.

MASH Okay. We're neither of us stupid.

So what do you want?

NINA I just wanted... I just wanted to say... I'm *sorry*.

MASH For?

NINA You know... "All The Things".

MASH You're sorry?

NINA Yes.

MASH For "All The Things"?

NINA I am.

*[Beat. Beat.]*

MASH *[Accepting it as her due]* Good.

See you later.

NINA Good luck.

MASH Fuck you.

NINA Okay. *[MASH walks away again.]* Mash?

MASH Yes???

NINA Can I just say... fuck you and your little black cloud! I didn't do anything to you ever. Not ever. You can star in your own little lovelorn tragedy until the end of time and wear, you know, sack cloth and ashes on your soul, but / the universe

MASH What the hell does...?

NINA is not out to get you and no one here has DONE anything to you (especially me), and I think you know that, and if I were you I would / get my head

MASH I can't believe...

NINA out of my ass and take a good look around / and...

MASH Jesus...

NINA you know... *make some fresh choices.*

MASH Gosh, thanks for the *relationship advice!* You're really the person I look to --

NINA Just because I'm me doesn't mean I'm wrong.

And just because you're meaner than me doesn't mean you're right.

MASH Wow.

NINA I'm just sayin'...

MASH I--

You have no--

Okay. Okay...

*[She walks away...]*

**13. STUPID FUCKING BIRD**

---

*[CON comes on carrying a bloody sack. NINA stands there, holding her cup of coffee. He lays it down at her feet, ceremoniously, creepily...]*

NINA What's that?

CON A bird.

NINA A bird?

CON I shot it.

NINA Shot it? You shot it? You shot a *bird*?

CON Yep.

NINA Why? *Why?*

CON Hard to say.

NINA What kind of bird?

CON I don't know.

NINA Is it a seagull?

CON Why?

NINA I don't know.

CON Yeah, it's a seagull.

NINA Really?

CON I don't know.

NINA What kind of bird is it, then?

CON Some Stupid Fucking Bird, how should I know, just some Stupid Fucking Bird!!!

NINA Did you really shoot a bird? Is there really a dead bird in that bag?

CON Yes.

NINA Is it a seagull?

CON Yes!

NINA And you shot it???

CON Yes!!! It was fun. I'll be next.

NINA What?

CON *[Wildly]* Chances are!!!

NINA What does that *mean*?

CON I'm losing it! I'M LOSING IT!

NINA Connie, what's happening / to you?

CON I SEE YOU TALKING TO HIM, I SEE YOUR EYES, I SEE!!!

*[Music]* What happened? Where did you go?

*Are you mad at me?*

Am I a bad person? What did I do to you? Did I do something to you? Have I upset you? Am I not sexy in quite the right way? A bad kisser? Do I have bad breathe? Is there something about that you can't quite name but just don't like?

*Are you mad at me?*

Do you hate my jokes? Do you want someone who is better at things? Someone taller? Richer? Smarter? Happier? Funnier? Nicer? More talented???

*Are you mad at me?*

Do you just kind of hate the way I am when you don't know a word or haven't read a book and I'm kind of careful and jokey but also condescending and you can tell that I kind of hate that you haven't read that book or know that word?

*Is that why you're mad at me?*

Are you upset or pissed or angry or hurt that somehow or other, every time either of us is upset or angry or we fight about anything, any stupid little nothing thing, I somehow somehow somehow manage to make it all about *me*?

*Is that why you're mad at me?*

Is that why you don't look at me like you used to, with your whole self?



Or, are you yearning for an impossible romantic ideal, a a a a a storybook kind of romance you're never going to find with me and so you've fucking fucking fucking *ensnared*, of all people, *my mother's BOYFRIEND*, the famous fucking rich fucking charming fucking fucking *author* whose very presence on the earth diminishes me and makes me feel like one of those broken little limp dead mice your stupid fucking cat used to bring into the house and drop in front of you when we were young and happy and kind and free???

*[Music out. Lights shift. Pause...]* Why don't you love me any more?

NINA Oh, Connie...

CON Oh, look. Here comes Trigorin.

NINA Where? *[She is instantly distracted by TRIGORIN's encroaching presence...]*

CON Oh. Okay, Great, excellent, gotta go, take it slow, see ya later. *[He leaves]*

NINA Wait, what are-- Con. Con! *[She watches him go, wants to say something more, but there is nothing to say, so... she just... doesn't. Then TRIGORIN appears...]*

**14. OH, NINA...**

TRIG Hello, Nina.

NINA Hello, Mr. Trigorin.

TRIG Please, Doyle.

NINA Excuse me?

TRIG Doyle. It's my name. Please/ call me Doyle.

NINA Oh, I know I know that.

TRIG I thought I'd just come and say good-bye. I saw you down here.

NINA Oh...

TRIG Well, I should go pack. We're leaving today. Suddenly. A whim, it seems.

NINA Yours?

TRIG What?

NINA Your whim? Or...?

TRIG No, no, not my whim.

NINA Oh. *[Beat]* I'm sorry.

TRIG For what?

NINA That you're going.

TRIG So am I. *[Quick beat. Maybe he turns to go...]*

NINA May I... ummm...

TRIG Yes?

NINA Ask you a question. May I ask you a question?

TRIG Of course.

NINA Well. I've just been wondering... I just really want to know -- oh, it's stupid.

TRIG No, go on.

NINA What does it feel like? To be *famous*. What does that *feel like*?

TRIG Ah...

NINA And a genius, too! What does it feel like to be a famous genius?

TRIG *[He smiles. Just smiles...]* Oh, Nina...

NINA Why are you laughing at me?

TRIG I'm not. It's just that... it's... It's not something you *feel*...

NINA That can't be true. You *matter*. People write about you and think about what you say. *You have the ear and eye of the world*. That must feel like *something*.

TRIG I know why you think that, but it's not true. Fame isn't actually real.

NINA But to *write* great works of literature. The act of *creating*. That's real, isn't it?

TRIG Can be. At moments. But this need to create is... *absurd*, really. I mean... *why*? Aren't there enough *things* already? Do we really need more? And yet on we go. More books. More plays. More painful poetry poured out in the small hours. And the songs! My God, the songs alone...! Sometimes I think there should be a moratorium on the creation of Art for 100 years. Let's just take a good look at everything we already have and then maybe decide what else we might need.

NINA But isn't it wonderful to know you matter? I think living in the hot spotlight of the world's attention-- would be *wonderful*.

TRIG Oh dear...

NINA But why am I wrong? What do you mean you can't feel it?

TRIG Allright... what does it feel like to be beautiful?

NINA Oh, I'm not--

TRIG Let's not lie. All right? We're having a serious talk. Let's not lie.

NINA Okay.

TRIG You Are Beautiful. Period. So...what does it feel like? What does it feel like to radiate loveliness like... *sunlight*? What does it feel like to have perfect breasts? *[She turns away. He gets flustered]* I'm sorry, I'm just-- I I I was trying to make a point. I didn't mean to say that. I I I was just--

NINA *[Turning back]* Then you *don't* think they're perfect?

TRIG *[Beat. Taking in her surprising cheekiness...]* No, no, they are. it's just-- Well, it's like that, then. It's like that. You can't spend all day just thinking about what perfect breasts you have, can you? I mean, *I* might be able to, but *you* can't. They're just a fact of you. Literally a part of you. Well, fame is like that. But not as good. Fame isn't even real. It's not something you can hold in your hand.

NINA Unlike my breasts.

TRIG I'm sorry?

NINA *[Quite surprisingly boldly. Though timidly/boldly...]* You heard me.

TRIG Yes. Yes, I did...

NINA Don't you want to?

TRIG Hold...um...

NINA Yes.

TRIG *[Answering her]* Yes.

NINA Why don't you then?

TRIG Right. Well. Right... *[She approaches him. Quite close...]* Here you are.

NINA Here I am.

TRIG Yes.

NINA Here we are. [*Maybe he reaches for her. Maybe not... Then, abruptly, she turns to us and the world shifts. Lights. Music. Everyone enters...*]

**15. I JUST WANT**

NINA I just want to be loved.

CON I just want to be loved.

DEV I just want to be loved.

SORN I just want to *love*.

MASH I just want to *be* loved.

EMMA I just want to be loved *madly, dangerously, FULLY...*

TRIG I want something... *superlative*. Something *fresh*. Something...

SORN I just want a hug, really. A hug that lasts *a month*.

MASH I just want to hurt less...

CON I just want to be loved *more*.

DEV I just want to be *In Life*. You know? Right in the middle of it. Not on the outskirts, the the the suburbs, the the the periphery of my *own damn life...*

NINA I just want to shine! I want to ignite the world for a one, hot, shining moment like a flame or a shooting star or a a a *meteor!* I just want to be a *meteor!*

EMMA I'd really just rather not be hated any more. I've been hated for one thing and another since I was a little girl and I would just like... a fucking break from that.

DEV I want a bottomless bowl of ice cream. A bowl the size of a a a *bushel basket*. And I want it to be brimming full of wonderful ice cream and it's all mine... but I can share it if I choose. And I have a little pouch with a variety of... *esoterically twisted long-handled metal spoons...* and I can let whoever I want use one of these marvelous spoons, and the ice cream is like... pear cardamom or or or or or or or cranberry & clove, or whatever weird-ass flavor I want it to be.

SORN I just want us all to be kinder. Or at least try to be.

TRIG I want sweet first kisses. Inconceivable softness. *Discovery...*

CON I just want things to be like I always imagined they could be.

MASH I just want him to *look at me*.

SORN I want to be 27 again. I think I'm ready to do my late 20's really well now...

MASH I want him to look at me and see me so he has some fucking clue about who I "actually, actually, actually, actually" *am!*

TRIG I want a lot, really. As much as possible of what life has to offer. I mean, I'm sorry, but I do. Not Either/Or. *Yes/And*. I want as much of everything wonderful I can possibly get because this is life, this is all there is, so why the hell not?

EMMA I just want to be the center of attention. I mean, fuck it, if we're being honest, that's what I want. All eyes riveted on me because I am a sacred vessel for art and I've worked my ass off and I fucking deserve it. I want Adoration and Respect from Everyone, Always and Forever. There, I said it.

NINA I just want love to be wonderful and fame to be what I've imagined and to be bathed in rose petals, cool rain and endless applause. I want that!

CON I just want it ALL TO FUCKING STOP!!!

*[Blackout. Gunshot. Music...]*

**END OF ACT I**

## ACT II

*[A kitchen. A lovely, rustic, fully functioning, realistic kitchen with running water in a kitchen sink (!), a refrigerator, food, drink, etc. Music starts in the dark. Lights up on TRIGORIN and MASH. They have been drinking. It is late evening the day after the day on which CON shot himself in the head... and mostly missed...]*

### 20. WHAT COULD BE...

MASH

I WANDER THROUGH LIFE IN A HAZE  
EACH DAY AN UNMAPABLE MAZE  
MY HEART ISN'T BROKEN, MY HEART HASN'T BURST  
IT SOMEHOW KEEPS BEATING, EXPECTING THE WORST...

NO TWO DAYS ARE QUITE THE SAME  
BUT EVERY ONE OF THEM IS AN UNWINABLE GAME  
THEY START IN PAIN AND END FAR WORSE THAN WHEN THEY CAME  
WHAT COULD BE HARDER THAN LIFE?, OH YEAH,  
WHAT COULD BE HARDER THAN...?

YOUR SADNESS HAS SWALLOWED THE AIR  
I GOT NOTHING TO BREATHE BUT DESPAIR  
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND IT, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND  
MY BEATING HEART JUST LIES THERE LIKE A BIRD IN YOUR HAND...

NO TWO DAYS ARE QUITE THE SAME  
BUT EVERY ONE OF THEM IS AN UNWINABLE GAME  
THEY START IN PAIN AND END FAR WORSE THAN WHEN THEY CAME  
WHAT COULD BE HARDER THAN LIFE?, OH YEAH,  
WHAT COULD BE HARDER THAN...?

### 21. WHAT KIND OF GOD?

TRIG

You wrote that?

MASH

Last night.

TRIG

Even with / everything...?

MASH

What do you want me to do? Weep? Wail? Keen?

TRIG

Fair enough... But you're not... I mean, he's not your... I mean--

MASH

No. Never. But if he'd succeeded in his ridiculous... if Conrad had succeeded in killing himself I would've-- Don't smile at me, you arrogant prick, he's my person. I could save him. I *could*. Even if he can't see that....

But whatever. Doesn't matter.

TRIG                   Doesn't matter?

MASH                   Maybe I'll marry Dev, and then the worst of it will be over.

TRIG                   Wait, you'll what? Marry Dev? Conrad's... odd little friend?

MASH                   Yes.

TRIG                   Ummm... *why*?

MASH                   He means well. He loves me. And...

TRIG                   You'll still get to be around the man you actually love...?

MASH                   Maybe. Something like that. I don't believe in storybook romance. This is real life. *[She looks at the audience, doesn't say anything...]* Maybe in the circles of... Famous Rich Fuckers where you orbit everyone believes in perfect love... but down here in the real world where the rest of us live we may pretend not to but we believe in things like "making the best of it" and "settling" and and and...

TRIG                   Moving past the open windows?

MASH                   *[She considers this a moment...]* Exactly. Yours?

TRIG                   *[A small admission...]* John Irving. I think...

MASH                   That's good. *[Suddenly bottom line]* To love with all your heart and know that it will never, ever be returned. *[In equal, painful balance...]* And to be loved by someone else whose love you cannot possibly return, even if he were the last man standing. *[Quick beat]* What kind of a God needs a laugh that bad?

TRIG                   It does seem... ironic.

MASH                   You think? *[Beat]* Fucker.

TRIG                   Who, me?

MASH                   God.

TRIG                   Ah.

MASH                   What a fucker, you know? Things are so massively *fucked* down here, and he just seems to be kickin' back, laughing his ass off. I swear I can hear him sometimes, just chortling away at all the pain and suffering, munching away on some... celestial buttered popcorn or something, watching us bounce around our pain-laced little lives as the world slips towards the cosmic crapper...

TRIG                               Wow. You really think it's all that... dire?

MASH                               Don't you? Oh, c'mon, look me in the eye and tell me you don't feel the exact same fucking way. (Late at night. All alone. If you're ever alone...)

                                          That we're completely and irrevocably fucked.

                                          That our leaders-- even the "good ones" we're supposed to like-- are still wildly self-serving pricks drunk with power and money and wielding sway with an arrogance and hypocrisy that is practically inconceivable.

                                          That the course towards destruction has been set (like that self-destruct sequence on the Enterprise, and the the the red lights are flashing and the sirens are blaring...), but we don't know how long we have, so we do our best to just... ignore all the *signs*, and we all go prancing along, blithely clocking in and having kids and paying our bills and getting all *caught up* in things, and saying things like "This is just a crazy time" or "Things will calm down a lot after the 1st..." and meanwhile the economic downturn blah blah blah, and the peace process blah blah blah, and terrorist blah blah blah, and fiscal blah blah blah and the war on blah and the war on blah and the war on blah blah blah are daily bringing us daily closer to the brink of utter total chaos or annihilation...

                                          And yet... And yet... all most of us really care about, deep down, is if we get to snuggle up to someone late at night who will just maybe, just *maybe* help us to us forget everything *we actually know*.

                                          You know what I mean. I know you know...

TRIG                               *[An admission]* I do...

MASH                               Thought so. I can see it. You're as lost as me. Lost in life. And dismally disappointed that this. is. it.

TRIG                               *[Jotting it down..]* Dismally disappointed. That's good...

MASH                               Eugchh. Artists.

DEV                                 *[Knocking. From outside...]* Mash?

MASH                               *[Under her breath]* Oh, God...

DEV                                 Hello?

MASH                               Come in!

DEV                                 Hi. *[He comes in. He wears an absurd coat and hat of some kind. Seeing TRIG]* Oh, hi. *[To MASH]* I got you those pecans you wanted. For the pie.



MASH Oh, right. Thanks. I'll take 'em.

DEV Great. *[He hands her a bag of pecans].* Do you... need anything else?

MASH No, thanks... Thanks.

DEV Okay. I'm heading out. *[He starts to go. Then... Kind of to both of them...]* Oh, hey, I saw a whole family of geese on the way home. Just walking in a little straight line, right out in the middle of the road. Right out there in the world, you know? It was so odd. And sweet, kind of... It took my breath away, a little...

MASH And?

DEV Nothing. I just... Never mind. See you tomorrow. *[He leaves. Beat...]*

TRIG *[Getting up to go. It's late...]* Well, good luck with that, then...

MASH Go fuck yourself.

TRIG Good-night.

MASH *[Watching him leave...]* Gosh, you take everything I say so literally... *[Maybe TRIGORIN laughs as he leaves, or from offstage... MASH sits a moment. Maybe she laughs a moment. Or cries a moment. Then she picks up her ukulele again...]*

NO TWO DAYS ARE QUITE THE SAME  
BUT EVERY ONE OF THEM IS AN UNWINABLE GAME  
THEY START IN PAIN AND END FAR WORSE THAN WHEN THEY CAME  
WHAT COULD BE --

*[CON enters. His head is bandaged and he's carrying first aid things. He enters, maybe looking for someone. But not MASH, who is there. They see each other. Neither can imagine what to say to the other, so they just... don't. They stand there a moment... and then he goes and starts to make himself a smoothie. She watches him a while. She probably considers all the possible course of behavior. Then... leaves. There can be no music during this. The hum of the refrigerator? He breathes easier once she is gone. And goes on making his smoothie...]*

## **22. THE BANDAGE**

*[EMMA enters the kitchen and sees her son. It's about 11pm or so.]*

EMMA Oh.

CON Hi.

EMMA You're... eating...

CON                    Yeah, well...

EMMA                 Oh, Connie, Connie, / what am I going to do with you?

CON                    Please, mother, don't...

EMMA                 Why? Why, Connie, why / did you do this--

CON                    Don't. Please. Anything but that.

EMMA                 All right.

CON                    Please?

EMMA                 I said all right...

                          Are you going to do it again?

CON                    Of course not.

EMMA                 Good.

                          Is there anything I can-

CON                    No. Can we just... *not*.

EMMA                 Fine.

CON                    *[To us]* The only thing worse than trying to kill yourself and failing is having to talk to your mom after trying to kill yourself and failing-- particularly when she knows deep down somewhere it's at least partially her fault, but her mouth and brain have never actually formed the phrase "I'm sorry" in her entire life, so here you are, with nothing but a berry smoothie between you, and... and...

EMMA                 Nina's here.

CON                    Still?

EMMA                 She's worried about you.

CON                    Yeah, sure...

EMMA                 She is. She said she might sleep on the couch...

CON                    Oh, God, really...? She brought me soup. Like she was my grandmother... *[Almost a throw away...]* Like a fucking consolation prize...

EMMA                 *[Quick beat...doing the math...]* Consolation for what?

CON Never mind. *[To her, gently, lovingly...]* Mother, would you change my bandage?  
*[There is the briefest of hesitations...]* Never mind.

EMMA No no no, of course, if you want me to...

CON I do. I have all the things right here. *[She starts...]* I remember you were always  
so good at this. I almost liked getting hurt because -- never mind.

*[EMMA fixes his bandage. MASH plays ukulele during this. During the bandage  
changing process, EMMA should feel free to interject any time with "How's  
that?" or "Is that too tight?" and he should answer.]*

EMMA Oh, Conrad, what am I going to do with you?

CON ...

EMMA Thank God you missed. I would have felt just terrible if--

CON ...

EMMA Well, thank God you missed.

CON That feels wonderful. Like when I was 8 years old and I got my foot caught that  
time in the spokes of that boyfriend of yours' bike. You took such good care of  
me. *[Quick beat]* Do you really love him?

EMMA Of course.

CON And you trust him?

EMMA I do. Why?

CON Can't you see... what he's like?

EMMA I trust him to be *who he is*. You don't understand I love him ridiculously, and I  
wouldn't want him any other way. *[Beat]* What do you mean "what he's like?"

CON He's a condescending, self-centered--

EMMA That's enough!

CON He thinks he's some kind of genius, but / he's just a third rate--

EMMA You don't understand him! He *is* a genius! A truly great artist! You can't begin to  
understand / who he is and how he

CON No! Of course not! How could I understand a great genius?

EMMA Oh, please!

CON How can a failure like me possibly understand / Trigorin's *greatness*?!?

EMMA Oh, grow up, Connie, grow up / for Christ's sake!

CON He's probably out there right now, smarming all over Nina, convincing her / how brilliant he is--

EMMA Oh, don't be ridiculous!

CON Then don't be blind! He can't take his fucking eyes off her!

EMMA How dare you?!?

CON How can you not see it???

EMMA You're insane!

CON And you're an idiot!

EMMA And you're fucking impossible!!!

CON AND YOU ARE THE WORST MOTHER IN THE WORLD!!!!

EMMA That's better! Very mature!

CON I can't stand you and all your men and your acting / and your--

EMMA And I can't stand to see how pathetic you've become!

CON You bitch!

EMMA Failure!

CON Whore!

EMMA How dare you?!?!  
  
You have no idea what I gave up for you! What I / had to sacrifice--

CON She doesn't love me any more!!! Don't you understand that, she DOESN'T LOVE ME ANYMORE! She is everything to me and all she can see is HIM and his fucking genius and his fucking fame and his fucking moustache and / his fucking clever talk and his fucking rich successful...

EMMA Oh, Connie, Connie, Connie, I'm so, so sorry for you...

CON Oh, God, mama, I am so unhappy. I am so, so, so unhappy all the time...

EMMA Oh my poor boy...

CON *[Breaking down]* She sees what you see now: A loser. A fucking loser...

EMMA Oh, you're not a loser. You aren't. And she doesn't hate you.

CON She does...

EMMA You can be wonderful.

CON ...

EMMA You are *my son*, and you will do great things. You just need...

CON What?

EMMA We'll leave tomorrow. I'll take him away, and she'll love you again. Perhaps she's just... *dazzled*. He has a way of just... getting in there.

CON Oh, God, I have to go... *[He begins to try to leave...]*

EMMA We'll go. We'll leave, and then she'll love you again...

CON I can't... I'm... I'm going... I'm going for a walk. *[He bolts.]*

EMMA *[As he leaves...]* Oh, my poor boy. Oh, my poor darling...

### **23. IRONIC**

*[A moment or two passes. SORN enters the kitchen. CON has just passed him in the hall. He and EMMA look at each other a long moment...]*

SORN How is he? Is he okay?

EMMA Oh, how should I know? Sad, I guess... How's his head?

SORN Fine. It's a scratch, really. A few stitches. He might have thought he wanted to do it, but something in him knew better.

EMMA Yes. *[Beat]* Well, I'm going to bed. Have you seen Doyle?

SORN No. Not for a while. He was writing on the porch earlier...

EMMA Ah. And Nina's still here?

SORN Bedding down on the old red couch with Franny...

EMMA Ah. That cats such a whore...

SORN She does... spread it around. Any warm body in a storm...

EMMA Right. And you're okay?

SORN Of course. You know me...

EMMA All right. Good-night then.

SORN Good-night. *[She goes. He unlocks a cupboard and makes a delicious and unique cocktail during this to take to his room... After a moment, he speaks to us:]*

I'm a doctor. My job is to help people feel better.

Ironic. When I feel so entirely shitty myself most of the time.

Not that they know that. Not my sister. Not my poor nephew... Not my patients or my friends or my ex-wives or... you know... anyone, really.

I smile a great deal. I'm calm and reassuring and good at my job. And I'm a good listener, so people quite like me. Although I think they are often fonder of me than I am. *[Quick beat]* If you take my meaning...

There is a lot of love in this house. Or what passes for love. "If only she..." or "Why won't he..." or "What can I do..." and the like. It matters so much to them. And I get that. It mattered to me, once, too. I had my dreams. Some came true, even. But they don't know that. They never ask. I have some memories, though. Some doozies. Remember-- if you take nothing else away from this... "play", or whatever it is, remember this-- when you see an old guy... *You Never Know*. Where he might have been. Or what he might have done. Or with whom.

Or with *whoms*...

You never know... *[Perhaps he takes sip of his concoction here...]*

Poor Connie. He's *in it* now. Right in the thick of it... Can't see the edge of the forest in any direction. I remember the feeling. Awful. And *wonderful*...

*[He starts cleaning up, maybe...]* But here's the thing. I get up most mornings around dawn or so. It's still dark, and often still cold. And I'm alone. And I shave and shower and get dressed, and the last thing I do before I leave the house is brush my teeth. And three mornings out of five, I wonder-- while I'm brushing my teeth, for some reason, always right then, in the midst of this most mundane of morning ablutions-- I wonder... Why go on? Why walk out the door and into the day and do... all the things I do. And you know why I do it?

Do you?

Do you?

Nor do I, my friends. Nor do I...

*[He leaves. Lights shift. Perhaps, if the radio is on, it shifts to another tune, another tone. It is now clearly later, the middle of the night. Maybe 3am?]*

**24. UNDONE**

*[TRIGORIN enters singing to himself and starts making a sandwich or something. After a few moments, he turns to us...]*

TRIG People ask all the time... what's my secret? How do I know them so well? How can I tell their stories when I've never even met them, and the like... And I think the truth is really quite simple... I love them.

I just kind of... *love them*. All of them. And by 'them', I mean, of course, you. All of you. You're all so wonderfully fucked up in such endlessly fascinating ways that I can't help but love you. Me, too. We. "Here We Are", right? (By the way, for what it's worth, I thought Conrad's play was kind of great... I mean, not the writing, the writing was the worst kind of over-wrought juvenilia, but the idea was sound. Being aware of presence. Communion through art. Anyway...)

I simply love people, and I want to *know* them, '*get*' them, get *inside* them... as it were. You're all so... endlessly, impossibly... *human*. I get caught awkwardly staring all the time. And not just at breasts or beautiful women, though it might tip somewhat that way... but women, men, gorgeous, hideous, ancient, infantile, tiny, immense, you name it, I'm in. I'm fascinated. I'm... *in love*.

*[NINA appears in the doorway in fairly scanty sleeping attire...]*

And, to be sure, that... omnivorous kind of love has led me down some... *paths*, in the past. *Dacey* paths... Down garden paths. Long and winding roads. Into cul-de-sacs. Off beaten tracks. And of course into quite a variety of Dead Ends...

But I wouldn't trade any of them.

The thing about paths is, the more twisty / they are--

NINA Hello.

TRIG Hello...

NINA Hi.

TRIG Pajamas.

NINA I couldn't sleep.

TRIG Neither could I.

NINA Oh. Why couldn't you sleep?

TRIG Oh I don't sleep that much, really. Four, five hours a night, if I'm lucky. I'm... quintessentially restless. Why couldn't *you* sleep?

NIN *[Somehow flirtatiously...]* Oh...

TRIG Insomnia?

NINA No.

TRIG Bad dreams?

NINA No.

TRIG A pea?

NINA Umm, no, I didn't have to--

TRIG No no no... a pea *[Showing the shape and size of the object...]*

NIN *[Getting it...]* Ah, got it. No, not a pea.

TRIG An unsettling nocturnal desire, then, to, ummm... to "end the heartache and the thousand natural shocks the flesh is heir to"?

NINA Not so much. *[Quick beat. Finding this in the moment. A sudden inspiration, as it were, a way in...]* It was more the next line, I think.

TRIG The next...?

NINA Yes.

TRIG *[He mumbles through the speech "And by a sleep to say"... "flesh is heir to..." to find the next time. Gets it.]* A consummation devoutly to be wished?

NINA That's the one.

TRIG *[Hearing that first word...]* Oh.

NINA That's why I couldn't sleep.



TRIG Because...

NINA & TRIG *[Bold, slow & direct]* Because of a consummation devoutly to be wished.

TRIG *[Getting it in no uncertain terms...]* Oh, my...

NINA *[Moving forward, pushing past what she has just put in the room. But both are more than acutely aware that that energy is now absolutely in the room...]*

Have you ever wondered if he was asking the right question?

TRIG Who?

NINA Hamlet.

TRIG Which question?

NINA To be or not to be. I don't think that's really The Question at all.

TRIG Oh no? Then what's the question?

NINA To act or not to act. To do, or leave undone. And speaking of undone... *[She begins to advance towards him, slowly, gently undone-ing herself...]*

TRIG *[Amazed and delighted and aghast...]* Who are you?

NINA *[Shrugging off her pajama top or t-shirt slowly, easily. She stands there, smiling at him...]* I'm the one with the perfect breasts, remember.

TRIG Oh, yes, yes...

NINA If you want them, they're yours. If you want me, I'm yours. If you want my life, now or ever, it's yours and yours and always, only yours...

TRIG Oh, Nina... *[He moves towards her... EMMA suddenly appears from somewhere.]*

## **25. TERRIBLE TO BEHOLD**

EMMA *[Smiling, grand and terrifying all at once... She is not surprised. You have the sense she has seen or sensed or something...]* Well hello there, darling.

NINA Oh, God.

EMMA Oh, no, not *God*, child, but still... full of wrath and terrible to behold.

TRIG Emma--

EMMA Shut up, my love. Nina...?

NINA Yes?

EMMA Leave.

NINA What?

EMMA Leave. *Now*.

NINA Oh.

EMMA And not just the room, you traitor, the house. The hemisphere, if possible.

NINA All right. *[She starts out]*

EMMA And Nina? *[She turns]* Don't ever come near me or any of my men ever again, or I will quite simply kill you until you are utterly and entirely dead. Okay? Okay. *[NINA turns to go. EMMA calls, pseudo-friendly]* Good night...

NINA *[Turning sharply to Trigorin before she goes]* Remember what I said.

EMMA Go!

**26. LET ME GO**

*[Nina is gone. Emma and Trigorin stand there for several moments, transfixed. They stare at each other neither one quite willing or able to speak first, to begin. Who will speak first? What will they possibly say? After quite some time...]*

TRIG Let me go.

EMMA *[Amazed]* What?

TRIG Let me go.

EMMA No.

*[Beat]*

TRIG Let me go.

EMMA Never.

TRIG Let me go.

EMMA Am I so *old*, so *ugly* that you can stand there speak to me like that?

TRIG Let me go.

EMMA I won't! I won't let you throw yourself away!! I won't let you destroy your happiness and mine and hers, too, (the little bitch), and all for nothing. She's a girl! A stupid, stupid, stupid girl. She has nothing for you!

TRIG Let me go.

EMMA Over my dead body. *[Beat]*

TRIG Let me go.

EMMA No.

You're an amazing man, a great artist, your best work is still ahead of you and I can't bear to see you throw it all away. We both know what will happen. Think! Use your fucking head for one moment instead of your aging dick. *[She slaps him hard]* Think! Imagine. You will run after her. Burning. Blazing with need. Like a jackel. Like a hyena! Like a forest fire! Like a *man!*

The chase! The adventure! The triumph! The conquering hero!

Good for you, look what you can do: You can astonish a girl with a daddy complex!!! Well done, you! And now you have her. And it is wonderful. Luscious. Delicious. *Uncomplicated. For hours and hours and hours...*

Maybe days. And then??? And then what?

Play it out to the end, my love. It's a dead end. Unreal. Empty. Not something you can live in, not really. It's an illusion of something-- an imitation of something you wanted when you were 18 and could never have then because you were odd and pimply and unpopular so you desperately want it now.

But wake up! Think! Let ordinary everyday men be run by their fears and their pricks and their desperate attempts to stave off mortality... but not a Great Artist like you. Not you! Not an Actual Man. Escape is not for you. Or for me. We are artists, for fuck sake, and we need to be right in the middle of *life*, of *living*, of *raw reality*. *[He is teetering... She goes to him as she speaks and undoes his robe, letting it fall to the floor. He is naked underneath. He stands there...]*

I see you. I know you. ALL of you. No one will ever know you like I do and you know it. You know it in your bones. Look at me. I am here. I am real. *[She drops her robe as well. She stands there, naked before him]* Do you hear me? I LOVE YOU FOR WHO YOU ARE. *For everything you truly are in the world.* And I am REAL. A *real* mirror. A complicated mirror! Not the fun house mirror of youth and wishing. And I will love you forever and ever without end...

Now Come Back to My Bed. And never leave it again. *[He does not answer. He goes to her. Takes her in his arms. Kisses her...]*

**27. SEPTET**

*[Suddenly CONRAD and DEV, NINA and MASH enter. SORN also enters and he watches all that transpires. TRIGORIN and EMMA, oblivious, continue to make love in some manner...]*

CON & DEV                      It's impossible!

NINA & MASH                      It's unfair!

CON & DEV & NINA & MASH                      Love is IMPOSSIBLE!!!

CON & DEV                      The thing is, the thing is this, the thing is...

NINA & MASH                      ...it's not my *fault*, it's *not*,  
It's not my *choice*...!

CON  
DEV                                      She hates me in this one particular way:  
I love her in this one very particular way:

NINA & MASH                      The heart just..... *does things*!  
It just DOES thing, it just does.....

CON  
DEV                                      I DISAPPOINT HER!  
I WORSHIP HER!

NINA & MASH                      ..... all these *things*...!

CON & DEV                      It's that simple!

NINA                                      I didn't choose this heart.

MASH                                      I didn't choose these eyes.

MASH & NINA                      I didn't choose this tiny daily torture!

CON  
DEV                                      She doesn't hate me, I know, I know that, I do...  
She doesn't love me, I know, I know that, I do...

NINA & MASH                      I have these dreams,  
These *relentless, raging* dreams,  
These Stupid Fucking Dreams  
Of Perfect Love!

CON & DEV                      I get it, I do, I really do, she doesn't *hate* me...

MASH & NINA                      No no no, not *perfect*, not not not...

CON DEV	But I sure do DISAPPOINT her! But I sure do BOTHER her!
MASH & NINA	It's just...
CON & DEV	I see it in her eyes...
MASH & NINA	It's just...
CON & DEV	I read it on her lips
MASH & NINA	It's just...
CON & DEV	I feel it in my balls...
MASH & NINA CON & DEV	I want something that is JUST NOT HIM! She wants something that is JUST NOT ME!
MASH & NINA	I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm so, so, so, so, so, so sorry...
CON & DEV	Love is AWFUL.
NINA & MASH	Love is ABSURD.
NINA & MASH & CON & DEV	Love is SO FUCKING UNFAIR!!!
CON	The thing is...
MASH	What sucks is...
DEV	What's tricky...
NINA	What's hard is...
MASH	<i>[Simultaneously]</i> I don't know if I should just live in endless, stupid clueless <i>hope</i> and <i>anger</i> and <i>pain and sadness</i> , or if I should tear this love out by the roots, just rip it out by the fucking roots and hope that something else, something new will grow in the twisted, ripped-up hole in my chest where this love used grow...
NINA	<i>[Simultaneously]</i> Even if this is real, even if, even if all that I've ever ever ever dreamed of lies arrayed before me like candy on a a a carpet or feast for my longing, hopeful heart, can I really build a new love on the ruins of an old, comfortable, kind, childish, child-like love which is all I've ever really known...

CON *[Simultaneously]* Who hates me? Who up there, somewhere hates me so fucking much that I have all this HUGE, HARD, RIDICULOUS STUFF running around inside of me, all these fierce fucking *feelings* and *needs* and *insights* and I don't have the fucking talent to express them or the power or or or or whatever to do what needs to be done!

DEV *[Simultaneously]* I'm a good person, a kind person, I'm trying my hardest, I'm trying to do the right thing all the time, pretty much, all the time, and I think I have a lot to give-- and *get*, I'm not a saint-- but I somehow I feel like I should get a chance to just... give what I've got to give!

CON & DEV & NINA & MASH  
I am FLAWED!  
I have NEEDS!!  
I WANT MORE!!!

MASH My heart just does things  
DEV It just does things...  
NINA It just does things...  
CON It just does things...  
CON & DEV & MASH & NINA It just All These Things WITHOUT ME!

CON It's not / my fault  
DEV It's not / my fault  
NINA It's not / my fault  
CON It's not / my fault  
CON & DEV & MASH & NINA IT'S NOT MY FUCKING FAULT!!!

*[In rapid succession, not simultaneously...]*

CON And yet...  
MASH And yet...  
DEV And yet...  
NINA And yet...

*[Lights begin to fade...]*

MASH And yet...  
DEV And yet...  
NINA And yet...  
CON And yet...

SORN So much feeling...

**END OF ACT II**

**ACT III**

**30. ON & ON**

*[Lights. The stage is much as it was for the first act, but different. Decorations are up for a party. MASH & DEV are on stage. CON is, too, but very far back in the background. Lounging? Smoking? Drinking for sure. MASH & DEV hold ukuleles. Maybe they wear party hats? They're both dressed up. MASH may not be entirely in black...They look at us a moment. Smile. Then they start to play...]*

DEV We wrote this song. Together.

MASH *[Not unkindly]* If we're going to sing it, let's just sing it, okay?

DEV Okay. *[To us]* It's about... life. *[Making a big inclusive gesture to include All of Life, maybe...]* About life, you know?

MASH C'mon. They'll get it or they won't. Play...

DEV Okay. *[They start to play... Gently, to us, teasing MASH...]* Don't judge...

MASH *[To DEV. Not without affection...]* Shut up.

WHEN YOU'RE JUST COOKIN'  
WHEN YOU'RE NOT LOOKIN' FOR A CHANGE,  
IT'S STRANGE,  
HOW HEARTS AND MINDS CAN REARRANGE  
SUCH AN ODD EXCHANGE....  
WHEN LIFE HAPPENS

WHEN YOU'RE NOT TRYIN'  
WHEN YOU'RE JUST CRYIN' ON THE STAIR  
IT'S NOT FAIR  
THE WAY THE ACT OF SIMPLY BREATHING AIR  
CAN BE HARD TO BEAR  
BUT THEN LIFE HAPPENS...

MASH & DEV AND ON AND ON AND ON WE GO  
AND ON AND ON AND ON DAYS FLOW  
LONELY, LOVELY, RICH AND ROUGH  
ALL TOO MUCH... AND NEVER ENOUGH, ON & ON

DEV WHILE YOUR CHILD'S SLEEPIN'  
WHILE THE WILLOW'S WEEPIN' IN THE YARD  
IT'S HARD  
TO MAKE IT THROUGH A SINGLE DAY UNMARRED  
OR UNSCARRED...  
BUT LIFE JUST HAPPENS

DEV & MASH            NOW THAT YOU'VE STARTED,  
THOUGH YOU'VE BEEN THWARTED, TRY AGAIN  
TO BEGIN  
EVERY SINGLE DAY AS THOUGH YOU'RE GONNA WIN  
YOU HOPE AGAIN...  
BUT THEN LIFE HAPPENS...

MASH & DEV            AND ON AND ON AND ON WE GO  
AND ON AND ON AND ON DAYS FLOW  
LONELY, LOVELY, RICH AND ROUGH  
ALL TOO MUCH... AND NEVER ENOUGH, ON & ON  
ALL TOO MUCH... AND NEVER ENOUGH, ON & ON  
ALL TOO MUCH... AND NEVER ENOUGH, ON & ON

MASH                    I'm gonna check on the cake.

*[MASH gets up, kisses DEV quite sweetly, and heads off...]*

DEV                      Great. *[She leaves. He watches her walk off, loving her...]*

### **31. THWARTED**

DEV                      *[DEV turns suddenly to us...]* It's four years later. *[Being very clear...]* Everything that happened in the first two acts... happened four years ago now.

CON                      *[From the background. He does not listen to DEV for most of the following He is in a weird fucking mood. Rambling, a bit... Referring to the line in the song...]*  
"You've been thwarted", huh?

DEV                      How's that?

CON                      Thwarted. I like that word. Thwarted.

DEV                      Let me catch you up...

CON                      "Drats, thwarted again".

DEV                      *[To us]* Trigorin left here with Emma-- you know, back then-- but then Nina just disappeared a few days later. And the next thing we knew... they were together. An "item", or whatever.

CON                      Thwart. Thwart.

DEV                      Conrad took it all pretty hard, as you can imagine.

CON                      *[Trying it out, almost under his breath...]* "I will thwart you."



DEV Nina's kind of a famous actress now. Some stage. Movies. Or *a* movie. Mostly TV. Crime shows, I'm told. Testifying about bad things bad men have done to her. Breaking down in tears a lot. She's... you know... [*Whispering, so CON won't hear*] not so good. Not terrible, just...

CON "Why are you thwarting me?" [*A toss-away...*] "And here in public..."

DEV Trigorin "opened doors" for her, I guess.

CON Thwart.

DEV He wrote the movie, I think. Or maybe it was another movie he wrote she was almost in. Or something. I have a hard time... *caring*, I guess.

Then after about a year they had a baby, and then lost it after just a few weeks. So awful. I mean I honestly can't imagine anything worse... If we lost one of our kids I can't-- oh, right. "Our kids". Yeah, well, Mash and I are married now.

Yeah, I know. I was surprised as you are. If you're totally shocked, that is. She finally... gave in, I guess. Not quite the romantic ideal of one's foolish youth, but still... I'm genuinely grateful. Usually. You know. Life is still life, right? Even when you amazingly *get* the girl, there are still... *things*. Don't you find? Anyway...

CON Thwart thwart thwart thwart thwart.

DEV We have three kids already. Coralie is 22 months today, and the twins, Malachi and Merlin, are just 11 weeks. They look almost exactly like me. I don't think she can quite believe it. But life life life, right?

CON After a while the word makes no sense.

DEV Conrad still lives here at home.

CON Thwart. Thwart. Thwart.

DEV Writing. And drinking. In tandem, as it were. The tortured artist blah blah blah...

Which brings us, perhaps, to today. Which is shaping up to be a doozy. Dr. Sorn turns 60 today, and Emma and Trigorin-- oh, yeah, they're back to together, for maybe a year now-- are in town for the party. And, you know, just as icing for the proverbial cake, Nina is back in town, too, this week. Not for the party. Staying with her fucked up folks and resting. You know... "resting."

CON [*A bit more loudly now...*] It sounds like really bad art.

DEV Mash ran into her and said she does not look good. Kinda crazy, she said, though Mash never much liked her. I think probably because of--

CON "How was the show?"  
"It thwarted. It fucking thwarted..."

DEV *[Finally forced to engage with him...]* Are you being thwarted?

CON What?

DEV You feeling thwarted? Someone thwarting you?

CON The fuck are you talking about?

DEV You do this / sometimes...

CON Do what?

DEV Go off on some word, some weird... tangential *word* or image that seems weird and irrelevant or... non-sequitery... but then later I / realize it's totally tied in--

CON Really? Like what?

DEV Inconceivable. Disappointed! Mercurial.

CON *[Remembering]* Right...

DEV That gross thing about taking a pint of pus out of a tender young girl.

CON Fascinating...

DEV So are you?

CON What?

DEV Feeling thwarted.

CON By?

DEV How should I know? Love. Life. Your mom. Art.

CON Don't *you*?

DEV What?

CON Feel thwarted.

DEV By?

CON All of it! The total... *tonnage* of it all. The weight of all the bullshit stifling all possibility of forward movement. Power, politics, sewage, academia, art... it's all the same and it's all fucked. Yeah, I feel thwarted. Good and thwarted!

DEV By...?

CON THEM! OLD PEOPLE! Old, rich, successful, selfish, wealthy white people. Who do you think? Even the lovely, well-meaning ones! They got here first, found a feast, ate it, and left us scraps... or not even scraps, mostly. They just fucking ate the feast. They ate it. And now they're leaving us the bill.

DEV Wow, you *really* hate him don't you?

CON Who?

DEV Trigorin.

CON I'm not talking about him!

DEV Yes you are. You always are. When you're mad about anything, it's really just him. When you hate "rich, white, successful people", you can tell yourself anything you want, but you're just talking about him.

CON Bullshit.

DEV Okay. But...

CON What?

DEV Nothing.

CON No, what?

DEV Well... I mean... I'm sorry, but he just stole your girlfriend, you know? I mean, that totally sucks, but that was years ago now, and--

CON It's not just him! It's all of them! They've stolen our future! Can't you see that?

DEV Not really, no. Wait! Newsflash... This just in... *[As if listening to a newsflash coming in over the wire...]* Human Beings Take As Much As They Can Get. Con, this is fascinating. It seems that human being are motivated by something called "greed" and "a desire for comfort" and therefore they sometimes take more than they need. This is amazing...!

CON You honestly don't think they've mortgaged our future?

DEV How the hell should I know? I get up each morning, put on my pants, and try to get through my day. That about what I got in me these days.

CON *[Dark and twisty...]* Yeah, I don't even get that far half the time...

DEV Have a small gaggle of kids. That'll get you going in the morning...

CON Yeah, there's an idea. I'd be a great dad, don't you think???

DEV Yeah, no, you'd suck, but... they're amazing teachers.

CON Teachers? Seriously?

DEV Seriously.

CON You call them The Poop-A-Matics. Mash calls them The Insatiabes. You've both given your children terrible band names, but somehow--

DEV Come babysit Cora sometime. Watch her sleep. Listen to her snotty breathing through those impossibly tiny nostrils ... or let her wrap her whole hand around your finger... Maybe she'll figure it all out, you know? Or one of the twins. Save the world. Invent a... helpful thing.

CON Yeah, well, that sounds great and all, but--

DEV *[Bottom-line]* Try loving something more than yourself. *[This pulls CON up short...]* I'm just sayin'. It does something to you. Something worthwhile.

CON Oh, for fuck's sake, Dev, are you kidding me? I love almost everything better than myself. *[This pulls DEV up short. That was not the way that was supposed to go...]* Why won't Nina even see me?

DEV Oh, Connie...

CON And what the fuck are they doing here? Is she trying to torture me?

DEV She's here because--

DEV I know why she's here! But from whence does he get the fucking nerve?

DEV Well, yeah, that. That does make me want to just kick him in the balls.

CON Good. I'm glad. Don't hold back on my account...

## **32. THE PARTY**

*[The party pours onstage. They've been drinking. SORN is in a high rare mood, pushing buttons, instigating... CON steps to the edge and does his best to stay there. TRIGORIN is aware of the dicey complexity of the situation and is trying to be... careful. EMMA is doing her best to make it all seem fine and normal...]*

EMMA                    *[Mid funny story...] ... but she couldn't-- I swear to God-- she couldn't walk like a human being. We were all aghast. I mean, there we are, trying to act with this... blonde southern kewpie doll... and... I mean, with tits like those I'm not saying she needs to be Daniel Day-Lewis, or even even even...*

DEV                     Julianne Moore?

EMMA                    *[She hears him. But going on...] Good. Or even good. But still... The arms swing opposite from the legs when human beings walk. I have found. And I swear, as God is my witness, she could. not. do it. She was all... [She walks with left leg and arm and right leg and are in tandem, moving forward and back at the same time...] I had to beg the director to put her out of our misery.*

MASH                    You had her fired?

EMMA                    What? Oh, yes, I had to, sweetie, she was ruining the movie...

DEV                     Wow.

TRIG                     Movie's are tricky.

SORN                    Are they?

TRIG                    / think so.

SORN                    What do you think, Conrad? Are you finding that *plays's* are tricky?

CON                     I don't know.

TRIG                    Oh, right, of course, they're / doing your--

CON                     It's not a big deal.

TRIG                    But it's happening?

CON                     Yeah.

TRIG                    When?

CON                     Now.

TRIG                    That's wonderful... Why aren't you there?

CON                     I was. For a while...

DEV                     *[Keeping it light...] Like three days... [CON shrugs or walks away, or...]*

MASH He doesn't want to get caught up in "the bullshit".

TRIG Sorry?

MASH The bullshit. Of "The Theatre".

TRIG Ah.

EMMA Which bullshit is that?

CON I'm sorry?

EMMA I'm just curious... in your experience... what is it that you are calling "bullshit"?

CON Please don't...

SORN Emma...

CON No, it's fine.

The ego, mostly. The Parade of Ego. That's what I am calling "bullshit".

EMMA But darling, you/ can't let...

CON One of the actresses' nickname was "What About Me?" That was her *nickname*. She answered to that. "Where's 'What About Me'?" "Oh, sorry, I was reading my own press..." It made me kinda sick...

EMMA Yes, well we can't / all be...

SORN Well, I think it is great that it's happening and I'm looking forward to seeing it.

TRIG Absolutely. Is it a nice theatre?

CON It's all right.

TRIG Well, you have to start somewhere, right, Emma?

EMMA Absolutely.

SORN It's a wonderful script, I think. Funny and sad... and very *true*... [*Checking in with CON...*] It's almost a new *form* of theatre, really...

CON [*From a distance, referencing his uncle, ironically...*] My agent.

TRIG What's it called again? I saw your mother had the script but I can't / quite recall-

MASH STUPID FUCKING BIRD.

TRIG                   Excuse me?

DEV                    It's called STUPID FUCKING BIRD.

TRIG                   Ah. Right. *[Directly to CON]* Good title.

CON                    Thanks.

DEV                    That'll sell some tickets.

SORN                   Don't you think it's a wonderful script, Emma?

EMMA                  You know, it's ridiculous, but I just haven't had the chance to read it yet. I've been so crazy, but things will calm down a bit after the 1st and I'll--

MASH                  Too bad. It's great. And there's a perfect role for you in it.

EMMA                  Is there?

MASH                  Yeah.

EMMA                  *[Beat]* Well, now I'm terrified...

CON                    Don't be. You're unrecognizable.

EMMA                  Oh?

CON                    She's a blonde...

EMMA                  Ah, well then...

TRIG                  But you feel good about the script?

CON                    Sure.

SORN                  Is there a role for me? Maybe I can start a last minute career...

CON                    Absolutely. You can play the bird.

SORN                  Excellent. I always wanted to do something artistic.

TRIG                  Did you?

EMMA                  Really?

SORN                  I always wanted to do just about anything other than being a fucking doctor. *[Note: He never usually swears]* All those sick people. Uggghh!

EMMA                  You've never said that before.

SORN I've never been turning 60 before. I've never been dying before.

CON Uncle...

EMMA Now you promised...

MASH Don't talk like that...

DEV What's that?

SORN I've never told the truth about damn near anything before, if you want to know the truth / so just...

EMMA [*Calmingly, lovingly...*] Okay, have you maybe had a bit much?

SORN ...let me talk! I never-- Let me talk.

CON Okay...

EMMA Of course.

TRIG Certainly, certainly...

SORN This is my party right?

EMMA Absolutely.

SORN I've been thinking things over. You find yourself in these... circumstances... and you think about things. And I want to ask everyone a serious question.

CON All right...

SORN Here are the people I love most in the world, for one little moment in this one little room, and I want to ask a serious question. Okay?

EMMA Okay.

TRIG Absolutely.

MASH What is it?

SORN Do you all... feel all the feelings you say you feel?

Do you... [*a nod to CON*] *actually, actually* feel those things?

That's my question.

TRIG I'm not sure I know what you mean.

MASH I do. I feel *everything*. More than I'd like to.

DEV Me, too. Especially since the kids. I'm a total crybaby now [*catching a look from MASH*] okay, even MORE of a crybaby. Stupid movies. Greeting cards. Shampoo commercials, you name it, I'm crying like a--



EMMA                    Why do you ask?

SORN                    It's just that I... well, I don't always feel... *authentic*.

TRIG                    Authentic?

SORN                    I feel *make-believe*.

DEV                    *[He takes in the audience. Maybe others do too...]* I think we all do...

MASH                    Back in a minute... *[MASH slips out to go get the cake...]*

SORN                    No, seriously. Most days I feel like I'm... well, like I'm *performing*. Like I'm playing a role in my own life. The role of "me."

EMMA                    Funny. I never feel like I'm performing, even when I am...

DEV                    *[Mostly to himself]* I can't imagine performing...

TRIG                    Perhaps you'd like to switch. Want to try the role of me? I've always want to know what it was like to be a real doctor...

CON                    Ooo! Can I?

TRIG                    Sorry?

CON                    Can I switch with you?

TRIG                    Ummm...

CON                    Just for a day, maybe? Or even an hour? Cuz I gotta tell you, I can't help but be curious about what it'd feel like to be inside that... *fascinating* head of yours because it passes my total fucking understanding / how you can manage to--

EMMA                    All right, that's enough, I'm warning you--

CON                    You're warning *me*? *[Beat. Then he walks away... Awkward moment...]*

DEV                    *[A pretend-casual thing to say to indicate an awkward silence...]* Du duh do...

EMMA                    *[Not unkindly...]* Oh, shut up.

*[Beat]*

DEV                    Well, I think we're all kind of performing every day, aren't we? In our own ways?

SORN                    Are we? That's what I'm asking.

DEV                               What do you mean, exactly?

SORN                              I know what's expected of me. I have a sense of how I'm supposed to act given my age and job and so on, so I say the right things, or at least have the right expression on my face, mostly. But *I just don't feel all the things I pretend to feel*. I say words and make faces and even talk about feelings, sometimes.

                                      But I don't have them. I fool people. *All the people*, I think. I think you all think I feel things. But I don't feel those things. And I never have. *I never have*.

*I just act like I do.*

EMMA                             Then maybe you should have won all those awards, not me.

                                      Because you sure fooled the fuck out of me...

SORN                             But my question is this... my question is: Is this just me? Is this just me?

*Or is this what everybody does? [Beat. MASH enters with a birthday cake with lit candles and she starts singing. Everyone eventually joins in... Or not.]*

MASH                             HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU  
HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU  
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DEAR EUGENE...  
HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!

*[The party disperses...]*

**33. A HACK'S HACK**

*[CON is agitated, restless, pacing, maybe. Still drinking, too...]*

CON                              You know what fucking sucks about a little success? It just feels like a set up for a new kind of failure. A more painful kind. Because now instead of just my family, I'll get to have, you know... perfect strangers judging and pitying me, too.

                                      Life life life, right? What could be harder than life? Do you like Mash's songs? There's the real fucking artist... ridiculous...

                                      My fucking play. Not an original thought in it. It's practically a fucking love story, for fuck's sake, full of people just angsting and whining and going on and on endlessly about whatever the fuck I was thinking of at--

                                      I mean, new forms? Why? *Why?* Why new forms? How about this for an idea: Just do the old forms BETTER! Who am I to change them? I mean, aren't there reasons that protagonists and antagonists and rising action and climaxes and dénouements have been around for thousands of years?

Trigorin's stories are sharp. Clean. Smart. Efficient. *[Turning to us with violence, on one breath...]* Yes, I've read them, I've read everything the motherfucker's ever written pretty much, before he met my mother and after, I was lying when I told Nina I hadn't, of course I was, what do you think, my mother is fucking shackled up with a great fucking writer, maybe one of the great writer's of our time and I'm just not going to read his books and stories, are you crazy?

And the arrogant motherfucker's stories are *good*. So good. So SIMPLE.

He just... says things. Just... *says them*, you know? I have to *shock* and *astound*... throw in a quirky phrase or odd detail or snappy trick to keep the audience fucking awake and blissfully unaware that I have nothing new to say and no new way to say it! I'm a hacks hack whose only possible saving grace is my certain knowledge that I'm a hack and my profound disappointment with myself!

*[Finally getting to the subtext that has been there all along, from the beginning of the act, really, all he can actually, actually think about...]* She's been here for a fucking week! A week. I went to see her. She wouldn't see me. I haven't seen her in... a long time. I tried before. Followed her. What a fucking idiot. But I couldn't... not. I *couldn't NOT*. You know what I mean?

Haven't you ever *not been able to NOT*... something?

It sucks. And it's dangerous. Anyway...

So I showed up at stage doors and outside studios and... God. Some bad scenes. But she clearly didn't want me around so eventually I just stopped and came home and started writing all the time and now people are actually interested in the shit I'm writing and I don't know if that makes it better or worse... *[Beat]*

And Trigorin. Smug, self-satisfied prick.

Maybe I should just let it go. Forgive and forget. I mean, he just stole my girlfriend, right? He just ruined my life, that's not his fault. Maybe we can all... play *Pictionary* or something. Let bygones be bygones. Or maybe I'll just sneak into their room while they are sleeping and shoot them both through the face.

*[Reassuring us]* I won't. I won't. I'm not that... *whatever*. *[Then... a knock...]*

**34. THAT'S NOT IT**

CON	Whose there?
NINA	Hello?
CON	Nina?!?

NINA Hello?!

CON Nina! Oh, God in Heaven. One second... *[He lets her in. NINA looks like a different person. Older. Broken. Crazy. She has only the thinnest, weakest hold on reality. She slips in and out of lucidity and is given to poetry and fantasy...]*

NINA Hello Connie.

CON Hi. Hi.

NINA Hi. Look at you. It's you. It's... it's nice to see your face.

CON Yours, too. Are you okay?

NINA Sure, of course. Flying high...

CON Do you need something to drink, or...?

NINA I'm fine. Maybe some water?

CON Sure. *[He gets her water]*

NINA Do you have any of those cookies? With the jelly in the middle? That your Grandbop used to give to us if we... polished things, or whatever...

CON No. No, sorry. I haven't thought of those in--

NINA It's okay. No / cookies, then...

CON I am so glad you're here. I knew you were in town. I came to see you, but... I guess you / know that, right?

NINA I'm sorry, I couldn't quite... you know...

CON Yeah, I know. I get it.

NINA You don't...

CON What?

NINA You know..... hate me for it?

CON Don't...? Wow. Okay. You don't quite get it, do you?

NINA Get what?

CON I love you. Period. I love you always and forever, no matter what. I always have and I always will. You're a part of me... *structurally*. I could never see you again, ever, *ever*, and I'd still love you on the day I die.

NINA Oh, God, what are you saying...?

CON Don't get me wrong I am not saying this is a good thing. It might just kill me within the hour, but I'm just telling you the truth. I'm just--

NINA How do you not hate me? I left you. I ran away to your mother's lover. I broke everything that was ever good in the world for my own selfish--

CON Stop it, for fuck's sake stop it, I know what you did, I don't need a litany of sins. You're human. You're a human being. A flawed human being like the rest --

NINA I don't think I am.

CON Oh, you're flawed, believe me, I mean, I love you and / always will, but--

NINA No, I'm flawed, I am, of course I am, but I don't think I'm... what you said.

CON What did I--?

NINA The other thing you said.

CON *[Thinking, not a likely answer]* What..... a human being?

NINA Yes. I don't think I'm that.

CON Then what are you?

NINA A seagull. A seagull. I think I'm a seagull. Don't you?

CON Nina...?

NINA I'm not an actress. I'm not. I thought I was but... did you ever see me?

CON Of course.

NINA Have you ever seen anything so awful in your life?

CON I--

NINA DON'T LIE TO ME! Don't you dare lie to me, Conrad. I was there. I was right up there on that stage and I know: I am the worst actress ever. I can't say words. I don't know how to stand or use my hands. I don't... mean anything! I can't tell the truth for one second on stage or in front of a camera. I can't... *act*.

You know the last time I was any good?

CON When?

NINA In your play.

"Here We Are. Right here. Somewhere. Nowhere..." No, that's not it. I'm a seagull, I think. Did I tell you that? I think I am. I was meant to fly, to be free and floating above it all, not to... No, that's not it... I was good in that. I had... *enthusiasm*. I had *integrity*. I was... *myself*.

CON Oh, God, Nina, you're losing it.

NINA Oh, it's lost, Connie, it's lost. Am I a seagull?

CON No.

NINA Then why did you shoot a seagull? Wasn't that me?

CON No. I mean, yes, kind of...

NINA So I am a seagull?

CON No. It's a...

NINA What?

CON A metaphor. A... symbol. I thought... Oh, God, it sounds so fucking stupid.

NINA You thought I was like a seagull?

CON Yes.

NINA So you shot me? Why did you shoot me, if you love me? I have thought about that a thousand times. Lying in bed. Some bed. Somewhere. And suddenly I would think: "Why did he shoot me?"

CON I didn't... I mean... I love you, Nina, and I was just... just...

NINA Yes?

CON I don't know! I have no fucking idea. It was *art*, or something. I was trying to let you know how much I loved you and how much you meant to me.

NINA Then you shouldn't have shot me. You shouldn't shoot the things you love.

That should be on a t-shirt: You Shouldn't Shoot the Things You Love.

CON Nina. Just look at me.

NINA I'd rather not.

CON I love you. You need a rest. Let me take care of you.

NINA I leave tomorrow. A new play. A perfect little play.

Maybe this will be the one. Maybe this time I'll be wonderful. Radiant. Ideal. Maybe my soul and the soul of the character will finally take flight together and the audience will be transported... *enraptured... amazed* by the impossible magic of new worlds being wrought right before their eyes. Maybe, when I'm on stage this time the world will make sense and and and... patterns of hope and meaning will open before me. Perhaps it will be what I've always dreamed of.

CON Listen...

NINA More likely I'll be awful. Wretched. Unwatchable...

CON Please, just let me--

NINA *[Going right on, ignoring him...]* You know why?

CON Nina--

NINA You know why?!?

CON Why?

NINA I'm a seagull. And seagulls can't act.

That should be on a t-shirt, too: Seagulls Can't Act.

You know why?

CON Look, Nina--

NINA You know why?!?

CON Why?

NINA *[Breaking down, maybe, for the first time, and really looking at her old friend and first love, really for the first time...]* Because they have no lips. They have no little lips to kiss you with. And they have tiny, tiny little birdlike hearts-- only little tiny hearts that can't hold all the love you deserve. Seagulls can't act because they fly up above all the things that matter on this earth... all the things that are real, all those who love them and would take care of them and all their tiny babies and they are selfish and selfish and selfish and selfish and selfish...

*[She breaks down crying and can't go on...]*

CON *[Going to her, embracing her...]* Oh, Nina, Nina I am so sorry for everything...

NINA *[She may or may not let him hold her a moment while she cries. Or not. If she does, then not for very long...]* I have to go.

CON No, you can't. Stay here, please...

NINA *[Pulling herself together]* I must. It is all too absurd.

CON Wait, please--

NINA Good bye, Connie. Thank you. Thank you for loving me. Thank you for shooting me. I think you love me better and more than anyone ever has or ever will and I don't understand you and I never will but thank you for everything.

Good-bye. *[She leaves, abruptly]*

**35. WHAT NOW?**

CON Fuck.

Fuck.

*[He is pretty much at a total loss...]*

I guess--

I mean--

That's it, then...

*[Gearing up internally to face the hard realities ahead and take action.]*

*This is my life! This is my life!!! I tried. I tried and I failed. So I tried more! And I failed more. It's like I'm fucking hard wired! The fix is in, the story of my life has been written, and the cliff notes version is: YOU SUCK!*

*[Finding this ironic, ridiculous, and absurd]* Which I guess I've always known...!

Thanks, mom!!!

So what now? What's the point of going on?? What's the motherfucking point?!?! *[Hard, fast and, directly to us]* It's all a disaster. I'm a disaster. Love is a ship wreck. My art has about as much chance of changing the world as as as as fucking Congress, and living another day requires me to weave a web of lies so intricate and labyrinthine that even I have no idea what I believe anymore.

*[Looks at the audience. The following descriptors could or should change nightly]*



*and come off the behavior of actual people in the audience.]* What? Bored? Enthralled? Confused? Annoyed? Asleep? Can't remember THE SEAGULL well enough to know what happens next? *[Does he goes into the audience?]* Well, for those of you who aren't theatre freaks or English majors or Russian or whatever, this is where, in THE SEAGULL, I die. Where I shoot myself and *don't* miss.

Anguished tears. Burn my manuscripts. Despair despair despair... Gun shot!

And then you cry. You *cry*. For the senseless waste of human life. Or because I remind you of your cousin Andre. Or...

This is where the play ends, you stand up, check in with whoever you're here with for a quick thumbs up or thumbs down, a not-so-subtle roll of the eyes or non-committal shrug... and then whip out your phone to check your missed calls and texts before you've even sidled to the end of your fucking row!

This is where the play ends and no one's life is changed!

*[Almost losing it here, but not...]* But... But but but... What if this was a real story? *[Dropping in, twisting it...]* Some stories are real, you know. Some things actually happen. And keep on happening... So what if this story was *real*?

What if you knew the author did this "adaptation" because something very much like this-- obsessive love, artistic failure, betrayal blah blah blah -- had happened to him. Or to someone he loved. Would it go deeper then?

If it were "true"?

Or what if you learned tomorrow that I, the actor playing this role, me, Brad Koed, distraught and unbalanced by problems of my own-- problems that maybe I've tapped into to be so convincing up here-- and muddled by being mixed up in this odd and intense intersection of life and art, had gone home after tonight's performance and shot myself?

Would the play mean something else for you then?

Has this Stupid Fucking Play done anything for you? What can you take away other than: Seagulls Can't Act. And: You Shouldn't Shoot the Things You Love.

I'm *actually, actually* asking... Has anything real really happened here?

*[CON waits stock still for someone to speak. It might take a while. The other actors may have been around the edges by now, or they may come on stage now to see all this will play out. Perhaps folks speak and CON listens, quietly, intently, patiently to anything they have to say. Or perhaps the moment someone speaks a clearly discernable syllable, CON interrupts harshly--]*

You know what? I don't care.

I don't fucking care what you have to say because it will all just be words. 'Words words words' as whatshisfuck said... And you will say them like they *matter*. Like they *mean* something. Like words ever helped anyone in need. *[Seeing their disappointed or angry or confused faces]* Oh, is this unsatisfying? Is this is this is this... *dramatically unappealing*, or something? Have I broken your tiny safe little Aristotelian expectations?! Where's the catharsis? Has anyone seen the fucking catharsis around here? We didn't forget to bring it did we?

CAN A FELLA GET A LITTLE FUCKING CATHARSIS AROUND HERE OR NOT?!?!

**36. A LITTLE CAP**

DEV Ummm... hey.

CON Yeah?

DEV You okay?

CON Yeah.

DEV You sure?

CON No.

DEV Oh?

CON Yeah.

DEV Okay. Okay...

CON Ummm...

DEV Yeah?

CON She's never going to love me, is she?

DEV No.

CON Not *ever*, right?

DEV Right.

CON And my... "art"?

DEV Your art?

CON Yeah. Is it.....?

DEV How the hell should I know?

CON Right. Right... So that's it? That's all there is? No hope? Just disappointment stepped in disappointment stepped in disappointment forever?

DEV I don't think so. But I don't really *know*...

CON Oh, God, I'm so fucked... *[To the audience. Small. Honest. But still wound tight, not backing down or relaxing, just retreating a moment...]* Sorry. Sorry.

DEV Okay. Shall we wrap it up here? Put a little cap on it? *[He turns to the other cast members who mumble or nod consent, never quiet stopping keeping tabs on CON and where he is and how he is doing...]* Okay, then. Great. Okay, so... So, thank you all for coming here tonight. Here is what happens to each of the characters after the play ends. In case you're curious...

For me, life just... goes, you know, *on*... We have some really nice moments, actually. Surprisingly lovely, even. Two of my kids do great, the other... less so.

MASH We do fine. Good, I guess. Life life life, right? I die at 61 when a drunk driver hits me out of the fucking blue when I'm walking home from the farmer's market. Which, somehow, seems just about right.

DEV I live till I'm 81. My last years, with my grandkids, are the best years.

SORN I die in nine months. Uneventfully. Confused. Content.

EMMA I do fine. I never get much happier-- although I often have a wonderful time. Many people continue to just kind of hate me... though more quietly. I become an aging actress, with all that that brings. I die, exhausted, on my 90th birthday.

TRIG I would have to say... more of the same. Little dramas. Lots of writing. Boring. Fascinating. Mundane. A good life. I die quite happy. Sorry.

NINA *[Stepping forward]* I don't know. I'm not sure. I can't say...

CON *[Pulling out a gun]* I shoot myself. *[He puts the gun to his head. Leaves it there a beat. Poised to pull the trigger. Tense silence. Then he suddenly aims it at a light on stage, fires, the light explodes. The cast is freaked, screams, maybe.]* I fucking shoot myself! *[The stage is tense...]* Or not. *[Quick beat]* Or...

*[No one moves. They are bracing for a shot. Beat. Beat. Beat... BLACKOUT]*

**END OF PLAY**