

*Seagulls*  
by McFeely Sam Goodman

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PART ONE: Play-Within-a-Play

*KONSTANTIN tears away the sheet/curtain.*

*NINA stands behind the sheet in a white dress  
holding a postcard of a lake and a dead bird.*

NINA

I've got a story for you.

A girl lives by this lake  
all her life  
she grows up by the lake  
and  
she comes to love the lake  
the way  
a seagull does,  
you know.

One day a boy comes  
and the boy falls in love with the girl and so  
he shoots a seagull and gives her the dead seagull  
carcass  
as a sort of courtship present  
(there might be something wrong with the boy  
emotionally, but anyway)

and  
for the rest of her life  
the girl  
has this feeling  
that she can never shake  
that nothing  
will ever  
come to any good.  
and she never really lets on  
that she has this feeling  
she still smiles  
she is still a very beautiful girl  
and  
when she grows up  
people  
say that she is a very beautiful woman  
and she has many suitors  
though she never marries.

but inside  
this girl cannot shake the conviction that  
nothing will ever be beautiful  
any more  
that  
whatever it is  
that makes beauty  
in the world  
is dead.

*When NINA has finished speaking she begins to  
turn very slowly in place in a circle.*

*When NINA turns, KONSTANTIN plays movie music on  
a melodica.*

*The two ketchupbots roll on and spray NINA with  
different color ketchup (do they still make  
different colors of ketchup?). When they are  
done, KONSTANTIN reaches with his toe to start a  
boom-box recording of applause. NINA continues  
to turn very slowly.*

*When the applause dies down KONSTANTIN collects  
his melodica and his boom-box and the curtain and  
exits. He looks back to see if NINA will follow  
him but she has stopped turning and stands,  
staring into space, in a world of her own.  
A moment after KONSTANTIN goes off there is the  
sound of a gunshot.*

*The echo fades and NINA begins to speak.*

NINA

And my relationship with them shifted at that moment  
because I started to lose control over my own  
experience, and,  
and they were taking over. So they  
began to spray and paint and  
create this  
futuristic design on this  
very  
simple  
dress. And when they were finished,  
they sort of receded and

I walked,  
almost staggered,  
up to the audience  
and splayed myself in front of them  
with  
complete abandon and  
and surrender.  
It almost became this like aggressive sexual  
experience in some way. And  
I think that this moment really  
encapsulates, in a way,  
how Alexander  
related to—  
at least at this particular moment—related to  
creation.  
Is that all of creation? Is that  
the act of a human being  
being  
created, the sexual act? Is it the act of,  
you know,  
the Big Bang,  
if you will, is  
that violence and that chaos and that surrender that  
takes place?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Harlow, Shalom. In conversation with Andrew Bolton. [http://  
blog.metmuseum.org/alexandermcqueen/tag/no-13/](http://blog.metmuseum.org/alexandermcqueen/tag/no-13/)

Part Two: Funeral for The Seagull

*The dead seagull from Part One is in a little open casket.*

*Everyone else is also a seagull now, but they are human-sized.*

*Next to the casket sits Nina, the seagull's widow, who is not the same as the Nina in Part One.*

SONYA

Here's one for you. I was in the city, late one night. It was a very cold night. I was riding the subway and the doors opened and an angel got on, a fallen angel, supported between a very tall smurf and a very short Cleveland Cavalier.

And as the angel sat on the bench across from me, her eyes seized me.

I felt my whole evil history, from the first shoplifting to my adulterous flirtations with the bartender that evening, rush over me as this angel beheld my sins, gazing on me as I imagine the Almighty must have looked upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

I was so transfixed I was scarcely aware that the smurf and the Cavalier had exited the train and the angel and I were alone in the car. I felt as though death were very near.

The angel and I stared into each other's eyes until I could take it no longer and I cried out,

"Oh, beautiful angel, angel forgive me. Forgive me my sins. I am sorry. I will reform."

The angel gave no response.

"Please, angel," I said and I got down on my hands and knees and crawled across the sticky, linoleum floor.

And all the while the angel stared straight ahead.

"Angel," I cried, "can you not see how very sorry I am, how I debase myself before you? Please, angel. I never knew how sorry I was until I saw you."

And I kissed her sandaled foot.

It was cold, my friend, I tell you it was cold as ice.

In a moment I saw clearly.

The smurf, the Cleveland Cavalier, the angel.

Costumes.

Scraps of cloth from Ricky's or Modell's or Duane Reade.

I had forgotten completely that it was Halloween.

The figure before me was no angel, but a mortal woman. Dead. Abandoned by her friends (or had they been her killers?).

I had been right to feel that death was with me in that L train car that evening, but I was wrong about whose.

MARYA

This happened to you?

SONYA

My cousin.

My cousin used to be married to a guy.

His sister told her the story.

MARYA

Still, a marvelous story.

If I were a writer,

when I was a girl I wanted so badly to be a writer, you know, if I were a writer, that is the sort of story I would write. A story like that chills your bones.

Not like the nonsense they write today.

SONYA

And why shouldn't you be a writer?

MARYA

For two reasons, chiefly.

First, I lacked the courage and second, the talent.

SONYA

Nonsense, nonsense.

As to the first, that is a thing that can be changed. All you do is wake up one morning and say, now I am a writer and there you are.

And as for talent, bah, who needs it? Weren't you just saying that most of the stories written today are garbage? And it's true.

MARYA

Yes, but I'd never be a truly great writer, like Trigorin.

SONYA

No, no one could be like Trigorin.

MARYA

Poor Trigorin. What will we do without you?

SONYA

Well, he will live on in his work.

MARYA

Of course. Of course.

SONYA

It's poor Nina I really pity.  
How sad she looks.

MARYA

Ah, but she's young still.

She will find a new husband.

The fact that she was married to Trigorin, the great writer, will only add to her sad beauty in the eyes of the young men.

I know my Kostya pines for her.

SONYA

Look at Kostya, moping by himself in the corner.

Kostya, come here.

I have a story to tell you.

KONSTANTIN

I've heard it.

SONYA

But you don't know what I'm doing to say.

KONSTANTIN

You're going to tell me about the dead girl Masha's cousin saw on the subway.

SONYA

The story I'm talking about happened to Kasimir Ilyovich's sister.

KONSTANTIN

With the angel?

SONYA

Yes.

KONSTANTIN

I've heard it.

*SONYA storms off.*

MARYA

Kostya, you must learn some manners.

What would have been the harm in letting Sonya tell you that story?

KONSTANTIN

I've heard it.

MARYA

Yes, but you might have pretended.

KONSTANTIN

Mother, how can you talk of manners to me now, when I'm so miserable.

Look at Nina. She's so beautiful, even in mourning. And yet she doesn't look at me. She doesn't talk to me. She doesn't smile at me. It's as though I don't exist for her at all.

MARYA

Perhaps she has other things on her mind. After all, Trigorin just died.

KONSTANTIN

Ah, that name. Don't say that name to me. All day all I hear is that name! Trigorin! Trigorin! The great writer, Trigorin! What shall we do without him?

How come no one ever says, What shall we do without Konstantin?

MARYA

Well you're not dead, dear.

KONSTANTIN

I might be. One of these days I just might be, mother.

MARYA

Sweetheart, why do you say such things?

KONSTANTIN

I'm sorry mother. I don't mean to scare you. I just don't see why just because Trigorin's dead we have to fawn over him and compliment his work. It makes me sick.

MARYA

But, Kostya, I don't say he was a great writer just because he's dead. He was a great writer. Perhaps the greatest writer of our time.

KONTANTIN

My own mother!

*KONSTANTIN storms off.*

*SONYA returns.*

SONYA

What happened?

MARYA

I think I insulted him.  
He's such a delicate boy.

SONYA

All boys are like that.  
He'll grow out of it.  
He just needs a thicker skin.

*There is a shot from offstage.*

MARYA

What was that?

SONYA

I'll go check.  
I'm sure it was nothing.  
Katya's twins must have gotten into the firecrackers  
Soren bought for the picnic last summer.

MARYA

It sounded like a gun.

SONYA

Heaven forbid.

*SONYA exits leaving MARYA alone.*

PART THREE: The Talkback

Q1

Would you agree with Hemingway that Chekhov was essentially an amateur writer?

ACTOR 1

Well, first of all, I think Hemmingway was talking about Chekhov's short stories and *The Seagull* is a play and this is a play that Sam wrote about *The Seagull*, but I would say that, no, personally, I don't agree.

ACTOR 2

Well, you know amateur means originally, "one who loves," so if you're asking did he love to write, the answer is, we don't know, but I think we love to read what he wrote.

Q2

You mentioned that *The Seagull* is a play, but I don't know if you know that Chekhov actually has been very influential in the work of Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi, especially in his film *This is Not a Film*. The screenplay that Panahi, who stars in the film himself, has been prohibited from making in the film is based on Chekhov's story, *The Notebook of a Young Girl*. Panahi was living under house arrest, having been banned by the Iranian government from making films for 20 years. As a result, he shot most of the film on his iPhone and had it smuggled out of the country in a flash drive hidden in a birthday cake in order to be entered into Cannes. <sup>2</sup>

ACTOR 3

That's very interesting.  
I didn't know that.

Q3

My question is for Wolfgang.

*The cast tries to remember which one of them is Wolfgang. It's ACTOR 4.*

What was the most challenging part of this process for you?

*A4 answers in Korean. ACTOR 2 translates.*

ACTOR 2

Definitely, the most challenging part was playing the part of Nina, the beautiful young seagull widow.

I wanted to really get into the mind of a seagull.

I wanted to think the way a beautiful young seagull widow thinks.

So I said to myself, what is it that a seagull does that makes it a seagull?

It flies.

So, I knew I had to fly, if I was really going to get into the mindset of this character.

But, of course, I don't have wings, so what I did was I took this enormous white curtain out of the window of my room at the Four Points Sheraton where I was staying and I would put my arms through the loops for the curtain rod and I would go out to Whitecrest Beach in Wellfleet where we were rehearsing, because that beach had the biggest dunes and I would jump off of the dunes and flap.

And I would shit on people as I fell, because I realized that's what seagulls do, too, in my experience, is they shit on people.

And I had done this two or three times and I think that Benita was tired of bailing me out of jail and paying my fines, but the thing was, something was still not right and it was driving me crazy.

And then one day, I was bicycling to the hardware store and a seagull shit on me and I knew what I had been missing.

My shit had been the complete wrong consistency for a seagull. I had been eating all the wrong foods.

So I went to the Business Center at the Four Points Sheraton, because there was no wifi in my room and I

went on Wikipedia and I learned that a seagull eats "fish and marine and freshwater invertebrates, both alive and already dead, terrestrial arthropods and invertebrates such as insects and earthworms, rodents, eggs, carrion, offal, reptiles, amphibians, plant items such as seeds and fruit, human refuse, and... other birds"<sup>3</sup> and so that's what I ate. For a month I ate fish and marine and freshwater invertebrates, both alive and dead, terrestrial arthropods and invertebrates such as insects and earthworms, rodents, eggs, carrion, offal, reptiles, amphibians, plant items such as seeds and fruit, human refuse, and other birds and I went back to the beach with the curtain from the Four Points Sheraton on my arms and I leapt off the dunes and there was this beet-red man lying face down on his towel sunbathing and I shat a beautiful white seagull shit right on his back and I knew I could play Nina, the beautiful young seagull widow.

DRAMATURG

Ok, I think we have time for one more question.

Q4

I came in late. Can you tell me what I missed?

*Blackout.*

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2011/10/cinema-this-is-not-a-film-the-camera-stays-on-1.html>

<sup>3</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gull#Diet\\_and\\_feeding](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gull#Diet_and_feeding)