

**From *The Seagull*
Act 1**

MASHA and MEDVEDENKO enter left, returning from a walk.

MEDVEDENKO. Why do you always wear black?

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

MEDVEDENKO. Why? (*Thinking it over.*) I don't understand it. You're in good health, your father might not be rich, but he's comfortably off. My life's much harder than yours. I earn a measly twenty-three roubles a month, and there's a superannuation to come off that, but you don't see me in mourning.

They sit down.

MASHA. It's not a question of money. Even a pauper can be happy.

MEDVEDENKO. Yes, in theory, but in practice it's a different story. I've got my mother, two sisters, and a younger brother to support, all on a salary of twenty-three roubles. And we need to eat and drink, don't we? We need tea and sugar, right? Tobacco? Things are tight, I don't mind telling you.

MASHA. They'll be starting the play soon.

MEDVEDENKO. Yes. Nina's going to be in it, and Kostya's written it. They're in love with one another, and tonight their souls will merge to create a single, unified work of art. But between your soul and mine there's no such point of contact. I love you, I can't sit at home because I miss you so much. I walk four miles here every day and four miles back, and I meet with nothing but indifference on your part. Well, that's understandable. I've no money, we have a large family. Who'd want to marry a man who can't even feed himself?

MASHA. Oh, that's rubbish. (*Takes a pinch of snuff.*) I'm really quite touched by your affection, I just can't return it, that's all. (*Offers him the snuff-box.*) Have some.

MEDVEDENKO. No, thanks.

A pause.

MASHA. It's very close, there's going to be thunder tonight. You're always droning on about something – either that or complaining about money. You think there's no greater unhappiness than poverty, but the way I see it, it's a thousand times better to go about in rags and beg for your living, than to . . . Oh, you wouldn't understand.