

A synopsis of *The Seagull* by Anton Chekov

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Hello and welcome to the Sopris Theatre Company's production of *The Nina Variations*. In it, you will see 43 variations on one of the final scenes of Anton Chekov's *The Seagull*. While it is not necessary to know *The Seagull* in order to enjoy *The Nina Variations*, Chekov's classic is heavily referenced. So, we have decided to provide a bit of context for the show you are about to see. So, without further ado, we give you *The Seagull* in three minutes.

The Seagull takes place at the lakeside estate of **Pyotr Nikolayevich Sorin** (It's czarist Russia and everyone uses at least three names). Sorin lives with his nephew Treplev (**Konstantin Gavrilovich Treplev**), a struggling young writer obsessed with developing new forms of theatre and writing. Also staying on the estate are Treplev's mother, the famed actress Arkadina (**Irina Nikolayevna Arkadina**), and her lover, the esteemed writer Trigorin (**Boris Alexeyevich Trigorin**). Also present are Ilya (**Ilya Afanasyevich Shamrayev**), the estate's manager, his wife Polina, their daughter Masha and Masha's tutor Semyon. They are visited often by the local doctor Dorn (**Yevgeny Sergeyeovich Dorn**) and the young woman from the neighboring estate, Nina (**Nina Mikhailovna Zarechniy**).

Now, this wouldn't be Chekov if everybody was in love with the right person, so hold onto your hats. Dorn is having an affair with Ilya's wife Polina. While Semyon, the tutor is in love with Masha, who in turn is in love with Treplev. Treplev, however, loves Nina and has cast her in his new play. Nina seemingly loves Treplev back but soon falls in love with the famous writer Trigorin. Treplev is convinced his failings as a writer have made Nina stop loving him. He kills a seagull over the lake and lays it Nina's feet, claiming he will soon suffer the same fate. Later Trigorin sees the seagull and tells Nina it has inspired him to write a story. Enraged with jealousy, Treplev challenges Trigorin to a duel. Trigorin refuses and Treplev instead tries to shoot himself, but misses and only grazes his head. The act ends with Treplev's mother, Arkadina, and Trigorin returning to the city, but not before Nina kisses Trigorin and vows to find him in the city where she will become a famous actress herself.

Cut to two years later. Nina has had a tumultuous affair with Trigorin who has left and then come back to Arkadina. Nina and Trigorin's affair has produced a child who subsequently becomes ill and dies while Nina is on stage. Nina's career is a disastrous string of bad roles and bad reviews. Treplev, meanwhile, has had some minor successes as a writer, but continues to struggle with finding a voice. He has seemingly moved on from the past, having destroyed Nina's letters and photographs and made peace with Trigorin. However, this evaporates when Nina suddenly returns to Treplev one night. The scene that follows is the subject of Dietz's variations. Treplev declares his unending love and a distracted and despondent Nina brushes this aside, herself still in love with Trigorin. Nina disappears as quickly as she came and Treplev proceeds to destroy his collected writings. The remainder of the household, while playing cards, are shocked to hear a bang. Dorn exits and returns, reassuring Arkadina that one of his medical bottles has exploded, but then pulls Trigorin aside and informs him that Treplev has, in fact, shot himself...

There you have it. A terribly tragic, highly condensed version of Anton Chekov's *The Seagull*. Believe it or not, Chekov complained that performers and audiences alike often failed to appreciate the comedy in his plays. Hopefully, this gives you some helpful context for *The Nina Variations*. In it, Steven Dietz explores Nina and Treplev's final encounter and gives them 43 opportunities to say everything left unsaid. We hope you enjoy *The Nina Variations*.