

CHASING FIREFLIES



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THE SONGS OF LAKE SONG

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TWO YEARS

POLINA [spoken: Everything you're looking at is history, shadows of things that already happened, people who walked around this very lake two years ago. Nothing exists as you see it now, except in our memories...]

Two short years have fled, are done;
Just twenty-four months of sand have run—
It trickles like lead when you're having fun.
Two long years have gone, have fled,
And some have parted and some have wed,
And some have done other things instead.

[spoken: But an unconscionable number of people have done absolutely nothing at all. Indolent as barnacles. And twice as thick.]

Time leaves a mark, and hardly a trace;
It goes so fast, but looking back, so much has taken place,
It must have been longer ago and farther away than it seems:
Two years in the flick of an eyelash;
Two years in the space of a dream.

Two short years have ambled by.
I used to look forward, my hopes were high;
But now I look backward and wonder why.
Two long years have had their day.
I woke one morning, my hair was grey—
It's hard to recall it the other way.

[spoken: It was the most glorious auburn once. The colors of autumn leaves at sunset. Or so they told me.]

Time leaves a mark, and hardly a trace;
It goes so fast, but looking back, so much has taken place,
It must have been longer ago and farther away than it seems:
Two years in the flick of an eyelash;
Two years in the space of a dream.

spoken: More of a nightmare, really. When you think about it. Which I don't. Well, not too often, that is.]

There used to be a wood here, where bungalows now stand;
They used to call me fetching, And now they call me "Gran;"
I used to have a lover, where now I have a chum.
It isn't a question of better or worse;
We must learn to adapt to the changes that come.

Two long years are fled, are gone.
No future remains to be dreamed upon.
I wonder how long I can carry on
Two short years are gone, are fled.
Some take to travel, and some to bed.
And some are since born, and some are since dead...

[spoken: But most of us are still here, just as you see us before you, walking around this lake:]

music starts for "Lake Song"

LAKE SONG

SORIN

Life may be hard and life may be long,
Days may be cloudy or blacker than night.
People are weak, and people are strong,
All of them go to the lake.

COMPANY

We go to the lake; and walk by the shore
And wait. And walk some more.
For the shore of a lake is an endless thing,
Perfect and round as a wedding ring.
There to reflect, and there to redeem:

And you look at the stars—and the sky is so vast;
And you look at the lake—and the water's like
glass;

SORIN

And you live for today, for there isn't a past,
There is no tomorrow, you live in the moment—
A moment as long as a life.

By the lake, where time stands still;
By the lake, forever and ever the same
As it was on the day that the world first began
In a moment as long as a life.

SHAMRAYEV

And here the world is not so big as it was when
you were small.

DORN

And here the world is not so cramped as it felt
when you grew tall.

POLINA

And here the world is just a place, the space in
which we live,

COMPANY

Except for those who choose to embrace the
alternative.

MASHA

Sometimes I feel that I struggle alone,
Nobody cares if I live or I die.
Thinking of filling my pockets with stone,
Wandering down to the lake.
I'd go to the lake; and walk by the shore
And wait. And walk some more

MEDVIEDENKO

For the shore of a lake is an endless thing,
Perfect and round and as wedding ring.
There to reflect, and there to redeem:

NINA

And you look at the sky—and the moon is so
cold;

ARKADINA

And you look in the lake—and your face is so old;

TRIGORIN

And you reach for your soul and remember it's
sold;

ARKADINA & TRIGORIN

You fight off tomorrow, and grab at the moment—
The moment that's left of your life.

COMPANY

By the lake, where time stands still;
By the lake, forever and ever unchanged:
In the blink of an eye passes all of a year,
And a moment holds all of a life.

BLACK

MASHA

[spoken: "I'm in mourning for my life"]

I'm in mourning for my life:
Never started, never ending—
Like those fever dreams you have.
Just a blank slate, like a black board.
Everything is black...

I

It's a statement, not a fashion!
Can't you see, I'm all in black?
Well now, when you look at that
Don't you think it has a meaning?
I am wailing; I am keening.
I'm in black.

Yes, I know it's attrac-
Tive. Black's my color,
Makes me pale and interesting;

But not interesting
To everyone, not to him!

This is useless. Foolish passion.
Won't he notice, I'm in black?
That I'm always wearing black?
It's enormously emphatic:
I'm defenseless; I'm dramatic.

I would think

That at least it's distinc-
Tive. Pink's insipid
White and blue, too usual

Maybe plaid would be
A better choice. What a joke!

I am weary of inaction,
Nearly.
Longing for obliteration,

MEDVIEDENKO

[spoken: I didn't mean, it's not that I don't like it]

It's a very nice dress,
Only just a little gloomy—
maybe

Masha, darling
Maybe if you wore

The ribbon mother gave you or
A flower in your hair...

Yes, a very nice dress
And your hair is very pretty.
Very.

Masha, darling
When you let it down,

The way it curls about your brow
Make such a pleasant sight...

It's a very clear night
And the stars are nearly showing.

If I weren't such a poor man
Would you hear my words of love?

And I'm tired of wearing black

I would think it's conspicuous;

Even you, it made you look.

My whole life is ridiculous

If he doesn't even look.

Would you love me if it weren't for
My mother or my sisters?

Do you despise the way I speak?

Or the way I earn my bread?

Is it my nature you find weak,

Or the angle of my head?

MASHA & MEDVIEDENKO (together)

Why do I go on fooling myself?
What will it take to prove to me
That s/he clearly doesn't notice me?
No s/he doesn't hear me screaming,
And s/he doesn't feel me quiver,
And s/he doesn't see me bleeding.
And though I would wait forever,
Nothing may come of waiting;
Nothing may ever
Change.

MEDVIEDENKO

All these people around...
Oh, I think the play is starting
Shortly...

MASHA

More's the pity, I'm a virgin.
Maybe it would be more apt
To wear white instead of black;
White's a banner of denial,
White's a shroud. No, white is bridal!
I'm in black

I'm in mourning for my life.
See I waited and I waited
And I plotted and I planned,
But it never took off
And there's nowhere for it to go.
I'm in mourning for my life,
I'm in mourning for my love.
Everything is black.

Black.

Masha, darling...

I think the play is starting

[spoken: "Would you like a pinch of snuff?"]

NOTHING

KOSTIA [spoken: There's a theatre for you! No artificial scenery. Only the purity of Nature. We'll raise the curtain at nine when the moon comes up]

Oysters produce their pearls out of nothing
But a minor irritation and compulsion to relieve it.
I can create a world out of nothing
But a moment's inspiration and the impulse to achieve it.
Why these Great Artists
Need their plaster and their limelight and their velvet and their paint,
When I need nothing but a blanket on a line across two trees,
A simple summer night, some grass, a lake, a lovely girl
To set my vision free.
How can that be?
How can I see what they don't see?
We need new words, new forms—
If they aren't available we might as well have nothing,
We'd be better off with nothing at all.

Am I the only one who knows art can only be as pure as artists?
Am I the only one who cares? Have I the only eyes to see what art is?
Nothing less than miracle;
Nothing more than total abnegation by the artist
In the service of a greater thing than we could ever be.
Art is all, and we...

Isn't it ironic,
How they're really looking backwards
When they think they're facing forward
In their rooms with three walls?
Artificial light, when they could have the moon.
God, I'd have to kill myself if that were all I knew.
But me, I stretch my sights to gaze far beyond the safe and well-accepted.
And me, I reach my hand to touch; knowing well that I may be rejected.
Still I strive for miracles,
Living ev'ry day with degradation; I'm an artist
In the service of a greater thing than we could ever be.
Art is all, and we...

Don't you think it's comic
When they act like they can't see me,
When they ought to want to be me?
If they knew what I know,
They'd have to admit that they've been blind and deaf.
If I should become like that, I'd bore myself to death.
But I'm the kind who has to bare every fiber of his deepest being.
Yes, I'm the kind who'll always dare, I'd rather lose than miss the chance of seizing
A sliver of a miracle.
Risking even full obliteration, I'm an artist
In the service of a greater thing than I could ever be.
Art is all, and I am nothing.

[spoken: I have a vision!]

SOMETHING

SORIN [spoken: You know, when I was young there were exactly two things I wanted passionately: to get married and to be a novelist. I never managed to pull off either one.]

I always had a dream,
And through the darkest hours—
Oh yes, a man like me,
We too have darkest hours—
I'd cut the shadows with a dream of making love or art;
But dreams just seem to fall apart,
And now I haven't got the heart to even wish for something.

From my soul I kept on giving
'Til there's nothing left, believing
If my life was worth the living
There'd be something I'd be leaving when I'd go.
Little could I ever hope to know:

I'd never have a wife;
I'd never write a story;
A small and lonely life,
Without a shred of glory.
I must have asked too much! And as I stand here looking back
Confronted by the things I lack,
I'd be a cuckold or a hack
If only I could feel I had been something.

[spoken: Yes, when all's said and done, even to be a minor writer must be rather nice.]

EVERYTHING

POLINA [spoken: Oh, for heaven's sake, go back and put on your galoshes... You shouldn't need me to tell you the damp air is bad for you. You're a doctor. Irina Nikolayevna has you so dazzled, you forget to take care of yourself.]

DORN [spoken: I'm 46. Too old to make a fool of myself.]

POLINA [spoken: A man's not old at that age. You're still very attractive to women]

Laughing, flirting—thought it was an endless lark.
Everything I based my life on—whistling in the dark.
Longing, hurting didn't seem to play a part.
Never dreamed I'd end at lonely gamb'ling on tomorrow,
Playing with my heart.

But everything works out for the best,
Or so they would ask us to believe.
Well, life has its mysteries I can't pretend to read.
Maybe I've everything—I just can't see.

Forward motion. Secret to a happy life;
Keeping busy every moment: busy mother, wife.
Fancy footwork, all the little things I do,
Everything I've had to juggle ever so discreetly
Making time for you.

But everything works out for the best
Or so they would ask us to believe.
Well, life has its mysteries I can't pretend to read.
Maybe I've everything—I just can't see

No regretting: that would be a waste of time.
Everything I did or thought of, want to claim as mine.
Sense the end now, heading for the final years.
Wish that you would see what I see: you and I together;
Everything is here.

POLINA [spoken: Admit it, she fascinates you. You're all the same. You meet an actress and you treat her like the Queen of Sheba.]

DORN [spoken: Artists are rare creatures. It's natural to treat them differently. It's a kind of idealism.]

ANYTHING

DORN

Anything I said, well they already knew it.
Anything I did, well anyone could do it.
Never did I ever think I was unique or that
It would be hard to fill my place,
Or I did more than take up space.
But this does not disturb the comfort of my days.

Yes, I'm lacking that odd passion
Other people have for life.
Or maybe that strange longing
That makes others sure they are alive.
But no specific concrete thing,
No dream I could devise
Is/was strong enough to make me feel . . .
Not anything.

Anything I got, too easily I'd surfeit.
Anything I lost, too comfortably was forfeit
Never was there anything I felt was so important
That I'd work that hard to get it
Or I'd miss it if I lacked it
Or I'd think about with more than mild regret.

Except maybe that odd passion
Other people have for life.
Or maybe that strange longing
That makes others sure they are alive.
But no specific concrete thing,
No dream I could devise
Is/was strong enough to make me feel . . .
Not anything.

MOSCOW

ARKADINA

Moscow,
And the air is clean here —not like Moscow.
But my lungs are only free
When they breathe the air my eyes can see,
And never do they breathe as easily
As when they breathe the air of Moscow.

I can hear the birds call as they glide low;
Most of them are seagulls, and they croak so.
I am fond of wildlife
After it has met the butcher's knife.
When I said I'd "play The Country Wife"
I meant on stage, in Moscow.

When it comes to exercise,
I like to hobble on the cobbles of the city streets.
How I miss the civilized
Routine of window shopping, stopping
somewhere for my tea—
Somewhere that clover doesn't grow.

I should be so thankful, let my cares go.
Here it is so tranquil; days are so slow
Every hour feels like five
Lingering about the countryside.
You'll wonder at the years you stay alive
In one brief holiday from Moscow.

When we're playing cards in the gazebo
I look out on a garden and a meadow,
But the flowers don't amaze—
Not until they're plucked and well arranged,
Or thrown down as a curtain call bouquet
By the swooning fans in Moscow.

Turning to the amorous,
I find it disconcerting flirting in Arcadia;
Surely not as glamorous,
But quite exotic and hypnotic as Arabia
And twice as foreign to my soul.

Days are sweet and balmy—not like Moscow;
Starlit nights disarm me. Still I don't know:
What the good's a moonlit lake
When I'm too damned bored to stay awake?
I rise at dawn and yawn and long to take
The first train back to Moscow!

REPRISE

COMPANY

Days are blue and blazing with the sun's glow.
If it should be raining, there's a rainbow.
But she has a sharper gaze
When she sees the world in shades of grey

ARKADINA

Colors only cause my eyes to glaze
I miss the soothing haze of Moscow.

Nestled in my cozy flat,
I know the city's humming, thrumming with
activity.
How I love the feel of that!
I only need to lace my boots to chase le dernier
cri

DORN

And now your nerves are shot to hell!

COMPANY

Here the eggs are fresher, and the milk flows
And the simple pleasures make your skin glow

DORN

I prescribe a country scene
As part of any worthy health regime
For actresses who want to look eighteen
When they return to Moscow

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS

NINA *[spoken: Ladies and gentlemen, the performance is about to begin. Your attention, if you please. I'm going to start. [knocks with a stick]*

(recitative: You honored ancient shades that hover above the lake in the hours of night, make our eyes grow heavy, and let us dream of what will be in two hundred thousand years from now!)

Men and lions, partridges and larks,
Ev'ry worm that wriggles, ev'ry dog that barks;
Ant'lered stags, and hawks and bees and others;
Th'unforthcoming fish that dwelt beneath the
waters:
All are gone, gone, gone.
Life is done, done, done.
On the empty Earth
Is a fearful dearth.
In the wake of death
All is cold, cold, cold, cold, cold.

ARKADINA *[spoken: have you seen my wrap? I feel a chill...]*

POLINA *[chuckles]*

SORIN *[spoken: Hush! Listen to the child.]*

NINA *[spoken: Thousands of centuries have passed since any living creature walked the earth Their bodies have fallen into dust and turned into stones, into water, into clouds. Their souls have merged into one universal soul, and this is Me. In Me are the souls of Alexander the Great, of Shakespeare, of Napoleon, and of the very least of leeches. All, all, all do I remember, and every life I live again in my own self.]*

I am quite alo-o-one
And I walk the earth from pole to pole
Withered all to bo-o-one
Holding up my lamp to mock Old Sol,
Who has long guttered out.

Oh, the light I shine is weak
As if the very flames are cold with fear.
When I part my lips to speak,
There is no one here ... to hear!

TRIGORIN *[spoken: Here to hear?]*

SORIN *[spoken: Shhh!]*

NINA

In the watches of the night I observe you born
from rotting swamp:
Formless lifeless forms of life witnessed by the
flicker of my lamp.

POLINA *[spoken: I was wondering how he'd get out of that one.]*

NINA *(getting angry at the "audience")*

In a constant state of flux!
Somehow all this sludge and mire will evolve,
developing until,
With a soul that I inspire, you achieve a Universal
Will!

[spoken: The Father of Eternal Matter, He who is the Devil, influences you, as he does stones and water, shaping you by a constant replacement of the atoms. He challenges me to fight for your freedom!]

All I am allowed to know is that victory will be my
fate.
That can only come about after eons of a vigilant
wait!

ARKADINA *[spoken: Seems like eons already.]*

NINA

Let matter and spirit merge in wondrous
Harmony!

[spoken, threateningly: Here comes my mighty adversary, the Devil, now. I see his fearful crimson eyes...He pines for human company!]

FAMOUS PEOPLE

NINA [spoken: It's all so strange. To see a famous actress crying her eyes out, over nothing really. And a famous writer, whose name is in the papers all the time, spends the whole day fishing and is thrilled to catch a few gudgeon!]

Famous people are a mystery to me.
To be famous, what a magic thing to be!
How can life be small or bland
When the moon is in your hand,
And you're looking down on clouds and trees?
Your world has no more boundaries.
You're loved by everyone you meet—Oh, my!

Famous people are surrounded by a glow,
Famous people; knowing all there is to know

KOSTIA

But they cry and sulk and bleed
Just the same as you and me.
And they stuff their maws like hungry hogs,
They fornicate like rutting dogs,
They're commoner than dirt because— don't sigh!

Just believe me when I tell you we are made of finer stuff.
You and I, we rise above them. Fame disguises worthless fluff.
Would you rather be a rhinestone or a diamond in the rough?

NINA

Kostia, all I hear is jealousy—Enough!

Famous people drown in orchids and champagne.
Famous people keep their feet dry in the rain

KOSTIA

Lay yourself down at those feet,
Make your sacrifice—how sweet!
But I know that clay is friable,
Those idols unreliable.
The glamour's undeniable, but I...

I resist that trifling power by refusing to play ball;
I won't disappear or cower when they need me to be small.
Famous people, see them crumble, see them stumble, see them fall
Famous people are just people, after all.

AS I AM

ARKADINA

Something crept into my room...
Must have been while I was sleeping.
Something stole away the bloom from my cheeks
And the twinkle from my eyes
And a thousand other things
That made me what I am. Was.
Now everything is upside-down because
When I look in the mirror, a strange woman looks at me
I can't imagine who she is, or who I'm now supposed to be.
All the things you've had in life, everything you were
Stolen in the dead of night, leaving you with...her.

As I am. When the applause disappears,
I feel the silence start to paralyze. Why must I face my fears?
I've been happy with illusion—or at least I've been content;
And if every day I have to fight,
I've always felt so full of life,
The life I'm leading as I am.

Must I stand upon the brink of old age
With my book already over? I don't want to turn the page.
There's no fairy tale conclusion in the chapter dead ahead.
Like Scheherazade, I must delay
And fight to live another day,
The life I'm leading as I am.

Life is suddenly so fragile. A simple breath could crumble it to dust;
And every day a burden too heavy to be shouldered, yet I must.
Time to face the music, time to beat the band,
Time to make a reckoning as I am.

I refuse to be alone and afraid!
When all the monsters are familiar and there's always a parade
Of the people who adore me and the people who I pay:
Just a big unhappy family
That suits me satisfactorily;
The life I'm leading as I am.

I could fall into a ravening rage!
But there is gold anesthetizing me, and precious masquerade;
And as long as there are lovers, there are always games to play.
Though it may not be a paradise
It's fine compared to other lives,
The life I'm leading as I am.

Living in the moment—no memory of the past, memories pain.
Heedless of the future—tomorrow might not come, hope is vain.
Smash apart the hourglass, grab each grain of sand.
Time! There still is time to be as I am.

As I am! I am unique and I'm brave!
I made my life myself: I cut the cloth, from cradle to the grave;
For there never was a pattern that resembled what I dreamed.
So I took the chance, I paid the price.
I seize the most I can from life—
The life I'm leading as I am!

A SUBJECT FOR A SHORT STORY

TRIGORIN

When you're a writer there's no way of shirking
That hearing and seeing and being is working,
And if you're not working, you don't make a living.
Your life is a luxury if it's not giving you work.

A writer's a clerk:

I'm always filing away what I've done or seen or heard;
Life is merely whiling away, 'til you put it down in words.

A subject for a short story: an image;
Something to trap on a page, imprison with words,
Frozen forever; time suspended in ink,
Shackled by grammar—less than you think.=
A fragment of a novella, a glimmer
Of an exciting new world. Everyone craves
Somebody else's life, protected by prose,
Thrills at a distance—safer to know.

A subject for a short story:

That one shining thread something drops at your feet;
But the wind starts to toss it the moment you see;
And you run, like the wind, 'cause you have to grab it now
Or it's blown away forever on the air.
And you need to have that thread so you can weave it into cloth.
But then it looks a little bare,
So you must pad it out and fill it in with silk imagination.
And you fringe the edge and wrap it up, an artful little package.

And you hope that no one notices, when all is done and read—
That there's really nothing there beyond that single honest thread
That somehow flashed before your eyes;
Or, like an insect hair, it rubbed behind your ears to make you hear:
A filament that planted in your brain and became
A subject for a short story.

IF EVER YOU NEED MY LIFE

NINA

If ever you need my life take it—it's yours.
I never had a life to give until you came along
and made me live,
And if you wanted, I would die for you; I could.

If ever you need a love, here is my heart.
I never had a heart to lose or break. And now if
you should only choose
To take it, that would make it real. I feel it would.

And if you needed a haven from the world, I'd
gather you in my arms.
Comforting you with understanding, soothing you,
keeping you calm.
How I would adore you!
And you would be free.
I'd be there forever—if ever you need.

TRIGORIN

If ever I needed hope, this is the day.
When someone offers you a candle do you curse
the feeble glow or fan
The flame to see the visions candlelight
provides?

If ever I needed change, this is a chance.
If what I need is innocence, she's clear as
mountain water, pure as rain-
Drops, near as yesterday, as rare as truth or
bliss.
And if I needed a mem'ry of the time when all that
I felt was new,
Taking her hand would take me back, would let
me recapture my youth,
What she would surrender
I use to breathe.
She waits to be wanted if ever I need

NINA/TRIGORIN

If ever I dreamed of love, what did I know?

NINA

I thought that love was teasing glances. Now I
know it's boldly seizing chances

TRIGORIN

So we seize the day together If we dare.

If ever I'd stop to think, it should be now.
You offer me your dearest treasure; not to
mention many hours of plea-
sure. Am I cruel enough to take it? Do I care?

NINA

And if you needed a rocket to the moon, I'd carry
you on my wings

TRIGORIN

Together we'd soar beyond the stars. I'd show
you some wondrous things.

For only an hour,
And then I would leave.

NINA

An hour is a lifetime; if ever you need

ACT 2 REPRISÉ:

NINA

If ever I dreamed of love, what did I know?
I thought it was a fairytale and I the princess. But
I was the sacrifice.
And now I hear your voice; I die again.

Whenever you needed salt, there were my tears.
And when you needed sustenance, you took my
very blood. My body was
Your youth. My fantasies, my soul became your
books.

When you needed a rocket to the moon, I carried
you on my wings.
Born by the winds of innocence, I never imagined
you'd wring
Me of every last heartbeat,
And then you would leave.
And still I am waiting—if ever you need.

BANDAGING THE ROOM

KOSTIA

Place the bandage on me gently, softly
Careful not to hurt too much.
Kiss the wound and make it better quicker
Mother has a healing touch.

With your arms around my shoulder
How the room is getting colder,
When it should be getting warmer;
When I should be feeling closer
Than I've felt since the days in the womb
As you sit by my side, with your hands on my temples
Bandaging the wound.

Mother's hands, cool and light wrap the gauze about me now
Where her lips in the night used to brush against my brow
Placing a kiss I scarcely could feel,
Leaving a scar nothing will heal.

Curtains have been drawn against the daylight
Making us a secret place.
Lavender and lemon in the water
Dabbed across my fevered face.

If I'd only known you'd choose me
When it looked as if you'd lose me
I'd have never tried to win you—
All those sad attempts to please you!
Now you cling when I'm flirting with doom
And you sit by my side, with your hands on my temples,
Bandaging the wound.

Mother's hands, cool and light wrap the gauze about me now
Where her lips in the night used to brush against my brow
Placing a kiss I scarcely could feel,
Leaving a scar nothing will heal.

I sought to hear angels singing me to rest.
But all I hear is the beating of my heart
And the whisper of her breath.
And there's not another sound
As the bandage is unwound
In the silence of the room
As we're bandaging the wound.

KISS KISS

ARKADINA

Kiss, kiss, my love.
Ah, such a cozy little tryst, my love.
Now you're recalling what you've missed, my
love—
Such bliss, my love.
Admit it, the passion isn't dead.

Hold tight, my love,
The way you used to do at night, my love.
I know a sure way to excite my love...

TRIGORIN

Don't bite, my love.
A migraine is pounding in my head

ARKADINA

No, that's your heart accelerating;
I feel it beating next to mine.
And as your pulse begins to rise
I see a swooning in your eyes.

TRIGORIN

I think...another glass of wine.

ARKADINA

Restraint is so intoxicating;
Release is twice as much divine.

TRIGORIN

You've caught my thigh between your thighs,
And now I'm breathing in your sighs,
It would be pointless to decline.

ARKADINA

Kiss, kiss, my love.
The room around us seems to list, my love...

TRIGORIN

I think we're getting rather pissed my love.

ARKADINA

My fist, my love.
God damn it—you're ruining the mood!

Just cling, my love,
And I'll forget that little fling, my love.
Oops no! I didn't say a thing my love

TRIGORIN

No slings, my love
It isn't attractive to be rude

Besides, you lead me to remember
The reasons why I left your bed:
The nights of petulance and pouts;
The tears that forced me to a route;
The poisons better left unsaid.

When April's flower meets November's
The sweeter blossom shrinks in dread.

ARKADINA

To think you're wasting all that wit
To court a moony little chit.

TRIGORIN

Have you heard anything I've said?

ARKADINA

Kiss, kiss, my kiss, my love.
Or, as the French would say 'bis bis', my love

TRIGORIN

Don't get your knickers in a twist, my love.

ARKADINA

No risk, my love:
No knickers, no corset and no shame!

TRIGORIN

Low hit, my love!

ARKADINA

I see you've finally got the drift, my love.

TRIGORIN

You're too enticing to resist my love
I lift, my love!
Upstairs my love?

ARKADINA

You dare to love?

TRIGORIN

But wait, my love!

ARKADINA

Too late my love.
Kiss this!
Kiss off, my love!

THE HORSES ARE WAITING / NEW LIFE

SHAMRAYEV

The horses are waiting at the gate.
They really hate to wait.
I hear them pawing, pawing at the ground.

TRIGORIN

Waiting would be more fascinating
If they were skating.
In the winter. Just a thought.
I'm a writer...

SHAMRAYEV

On the ice. Now I see!

MASHA

But that would grate
Like nails across a slate.
My nerves would percolate!

ARKADINA

It's getting late!

COMPANY

Hurry, hurry up! The horses are waiting!
Giddy giddy yup! But she's still debating
What to be leaving and what to be taking?
Whose breast is heaving? And whose heart is breaking?
There's no mistaking—at the center of it all
Is an actress getting ready for a smashing curtain call

NINA

There's a new life beckoning to me
Telling me to drop my dolls,
Scale the walls and run like the breezes.
Run to the ends of the earth,
Go as far as my dreams can lead
To that new life that's beckoning to me.

POLINA

The horses are waiting at the gate.
I have to celebrate!
I'm tired of fawning, fawning like a hound.

SORIN

Waiting. I find it agitating
And enervating.

DORN

You should lie down.

SORIN

When she's gone...

DORN

I'm your doctor!

KOSTIA

He'll be fine. Wait and see.
It will abate,
His pulse decelerate.
Our lives recalibrate...

ARKADINA

It's getting late!

COMPANY

Hurry, hurry up! The horses are waiting!
Giddy giddy yup! But she's still debating
What to be leaving and what to be taking?
Whose breast is heaving? And whose heart is breaking?
There's no mistaking—at the center of it all
Is an actress getting ready for a smashing curtain call

NINA

There's a new life beckoning to me
Calling me to leave the nest,
Break my jesses, fly away free and
Soar, with my wings spread wide,
Just as far as my heart can see
To that new life that's beckoning to me.

THE SCHOOLMASTER AND HIS WIFE

MEDVIEDENKO

Like doves in a cote, like peas in a pod,
Like oars in a boat, like coals in a hod,
Like horses and oats,

MASHA

Like Satan and God:

MEDVIEDENKO

The schoolmaster and his wife.

Like bumps on a log,

MASHA

Like rot in the walls,

MEDVIEDENKO

Like ships in a fog,

MASHA

Like drunks in a brawl,

MEDVIEDENKO

Like princes and frogs,

MASHA

Like nothing at all:

The schoolmaster and his wife.

MEDVIEDENKO

Happily...

MASHA

Un-

MEDVIEDENKO

Happily,
We rub along from day to day
Gratefully

MASHA

Disgracefully

MEDVIEDENKO

In harness together,

MASHA

We pull our own ways.

Like water and oil,

MEDVIEDENKO

Like berries and cream,

MASHA

I drink and he toils.

MEDVIEDENKO

We follow our dreams.
And nothing can spoil that wonderful team—
The schoolmaster and his wife!

MASHA

The schoolmaster...

MEDVIEDENKO

...and his wife.

A WOMAN LOVES

POLINIA [*spoken: Give a woman a kind glance sometimes, Kostia, and she won't ask for more. I know that....I feel so sorry for you, Mashenka, my heart aches for you. I see it all, you know—I understand it...*]

I see it all, you know, my love; I understand.
You're not the only girl who ever built her castles
out of sand.
I have walked this road before you, as did others
before I.
Listen to the lessons of our sisterhood. Don't cry.
It isn't time that dulls the pain or stops the
screams.
No life will ever grow if all you choose to nurse
are broken dreams.
There's a gift in keeping busy, in avoiding empty
time.
Listen to the wisdom of your mother, love. Just
try.

A woman thinks;
A woman keeps her nose in books
And still she tries to keep her looks.

MASHA

A woman thinks;
And if her thoughts lead her astray
A woman tries to melt away.

POLINA/MASHA

A woman does the best she can;
It's not as though she were a man.

MASHA

Imagine the freedom, the luxury of choice!

POLINA

You must hold yourself together,
Keep a firm grip on your hopes.

POLINA/MASHA

Love must never shake your purpose.
If it sneaks in, you must

POLINA

Hide it.

MASHA

Chuck it out.

POLINA

A woman winks;
A woman putters in the yard
And plays a wicked game of cards.

MASHA

A woman drinks;
And if the vodka doesn't numb,
She can resort to laudanum.

POLINA/MASHA

A woman does the best she can;
It's not as though she were a man

MASHA

Imagine the freedom, the luxury of choice!

POLINA

You must hold yourself together,
Keep a firm grip on your hopes.

POLINA/MASHA

Love must never shake your purpose.
If it sneaks in, you must

POLINA

Hide it.

MASHA

Chuck it out.

MASHA (*spoken: If only I didn't have him
constantly in front of me. Just let them give my
Semion his transfer and you'll see how quickly
I forget all this nonsense.*)

FOUR MILES

MEDVIEDENKO

Only four miles
Between here and my own little home.
I don't need to see the way
Because I walk it every day.
And the walking gives me pleasure!
God has given me so much, I can't complain:
An honest way to earn my bread,
The girl I love to share my bed.
I know I should be grateful;
I must cherish what I have, not ask for more.
I'm a humble schoolmaster.
I must strive to be better.
I must strive to be good.
My resolution strengthens me,
And walking through the woods.

Only four miles,
Which I travel every day;
Travel twice, but that's okay.
It's the borderland between two separate worlds:
From my humble family cottage
To exalted realms where I pay homage.
Do I rule or do I beg?
I live between the two extremes.

These four miles;
This small journey that I make,
From where I give to where I take.
Is the only place I have where life is calm.
At point A, my son, elated;
At point B, my wife—more complicated.
So much pressure, so much scorn!
And all I have to balance this

Are only four miles,
Through the woods, where I tramp on my own.
Soaked by rain, blue with sleet,
I don't need to feel my feet,

Because Masha doesn't love me!
And the others cling so close it drains me dry.
But mile by mile and pace by pace
I try to find a way to grace.
I know I should be grateful;
I must cherish what I have, not ask for more.
I'm a humble schoolmaster.
I must strive to be better.
I must strive to be good.
My resolution strengthens me
And walking through the woods.

Only four miles:
All the time I have to be,
Nothing more than merely me.
It's the only life I have that's really mine.
At point A, I'm someone's hero,
At point B, I'm something less than zero.
But within the space between
There's no one makes demands of me

For four miles.
There is sanctuary there,
My every step becomes a prayer,
As I walk this road, my burdens are released.
At point A, I'm suffocated;
At point B, I'm barely tolerated.
While I walk, I can forget
And find my way to harmony

Four miles!
Which I travel every day;
Travel twice, but that's okay.
I would travel so much farther if I dared.
What kind of man would dream of walking away
forever?
Before I can think such a thing,
It's only four miles and I'm there

THE MAN WHO WISHED

KOSTIA

The man who wished,
He wished for heaven right here on earth—
Or maybe peace; why not peace?
The man who wished
Dreamed of perfection, a peaceful heart—
Or maybe love; why not love?

The man who wished,
He wished to love and be alive,
To greet each day with open arms and open eyes.
The man who wished
Wished for too little and too much—
He wished for happiness

What am I to write at the bottom of the page
Just before I write 'finis'? What am I supposed to say
To have the last word?

Is it thought? Is it action? Or maybe conversation?
What would be the right—or should I say appropriate—sensation
To hold them, their attention;
Or release them, loose the tension?
What to give them as my very final moment?
The last word...

That's the story of my life. That's the story of my art.

Do I think? Or do I act? Or will they talk about me?

BEZIQUE!

POLINA

Bezique!

DORN

A friendly game would be a treat:

TRIGORIN

A soothing balm, my dear.

[to the others] She hasn't slept in days.

ARKADINA

My nerves are all a-fray.

POLINA

We know how sensitive you are.

ARKADINA

The mattress in that sleeping car...!

DORN

Your deal.

KOSTIA

Now that they're here, it all seems real.

I cannot bear it, how they gossip and they play

While Sorin fades away

[he exits, followed by *Masha*]

ARKADINA

Where are you going? Oh, he drives me mad!

DORN

He's overcome, forgive him.

ARKADINA

Not his manners; it's his beard—

How can he be this old?!

TRIGORIN

I have a dix!

ALL

Bezique!

DORN

Carte Blanche!

ARKADINA

Is Dorn developing a paunch?

I can't help noticing his waistcoat pulls a bit.

POLINA

His tailor botched the fit.

ARKADINA

I hope that he refused to pay.

POLINA

Trigorin's getting rather grey.

TRIGORIN

A brisque!

ARKADINA

Do you still find it worth the risk?

It's quite remarkable to last so many years.

POLINA

My love and your career—

There's something to be said for hanging on.

We have a common marriage...

ARKADINA

You have nothing of the sort

POLINA

Not us, the cards we hold.

We call the trick.

POLINA and DORN

Bezique!

ARKADINA

Declare!

TRIGORIN

It was a trifling affair.

DORN

They always are with you. A different girl each
night.

When do you ever write?

TRIGORIN

It's all a part of making art:

A chain of girls and broken hearts

POLINA

Revoke!

DORN

I sense you think that I misspoke

About poor Sorin's state

TRIGORIN

It's clear as day to me.

Irina won't agree;

She's found that willful blindness serves her well

ARKADINA

It's not the cards you're dealt; it's
How you play them when they come.

TRIGORIN

I've crossed the Rubicon.

POLINA

Another round?

ALL

Bezique?

[*They shuffle and deal; Masha returns*]

MASHA

There's nothing here for me to do now Kostia's
door is barred.
I've done as much for Sorin as I'm able.
I can't just sit here watching other people playing
cards.
If only we could make another table.

MEDVIEDENKO

I'd happily be "dummy"

SHAMREYEV

Never understood this game;
Sometimes I think that's why they all suggest it.

MEDVIEDENKO

The time! I must be setting out. I don't mean to
complain...

MASHA

Then don't. Good night. You won't hear me
protest it.

DORN

Four Jacks.

TRIGORIN

He's always thought I was a hack

And now that he has some success...you saw
the sneer...

POLINA

Ridiculous, my dear.
It isn't that you're widely read,
But that you share his mother's bed

DORN

A meld!

TRIGORIN

You win again! I've always held
One shouldn't bet against
A doctor....

POLINA

In the end
We're all gamblers, my friend

ARKADINA

Why do we even play this silly game?

DORN

We could play whist or belote...

MASHA

Rotate partners for piquet?

SHAMREYEV

A six-hand game of cribbage?

POLINA

I could fancy écarté

ARKADINA

My head won't hold a sequence

TRIGORIN

Someone pour another round.
My friends, it's been a charming evening

ALL

Bezique!

HEAVEN HELP THE HOMELESS WAYFARERS

NINA

I am the wind,
I am the seagull on the wind,
I am the feather on the seagull,
I am nothing, I am all:

I beat my wings against the winter,
Stretch my breast across the sky
As I soar through endless cloudbanks
'Til my wings and heart are weary—
I am lonely, I am free.

And I yearn to lay my bones down,
But I sacrifice to wander
And there is no home for me:
There is a haven for the sailor,
But no haven for the bird who sails the breeze over the seas.

Heaven help the homeless wayfarer.
Heaven help the dreamer and the seeker.
Heaven help the blistered feet, the aching heart, the ravaged soul.
Heaven speed the constant search, and blunt the constant woe.
Heaven help the homeless wayfarer.
Heaven help the dreamer and the seeker.
Heaven bless and Heaven keep,
And Heaven grant a quiet corner now and then in which to sleep.

KOSTIA

I am the lake,
I am the willow on the lake,
I am the quiver in the willow,
I am nothing, I am all:

I bare my chest against the winter,
Stretch my fingers to the sky,
And I push through earth and gravel
Til my roots are deep and weary—
I am timeless, I am new.

I am lonely in forever,
And I yearn to slake my thirst
With something sweeter than the dew:
There is a lover for the swallow,
But no lover for the willow in whose crest she builds a nest.

Heaven help the homeless wayfarer.
Heaven help the dreamer and the seeker.
Heaven help the throbbing head, the aching heart, the ravaged soul.
Heaven speed the constant search and blunt the constant woe.

KOSTIA & NINA

Heaven help the homeless wayfarer.
Heaven help the dreamer and the seeker.
Heaven bless and Heaven keep.
And Heaven grant a quiet corner now and then in which to sleep.

FIREFLIES

Fireflies in a garden
Making magic of everyday things,
Phosphorescence on gossamer wings
In the violet air, see them glisten.

Baby stars in the twilight,
Tiny lanterns for fairies at play;
Morning sunlight will burn them away;
If you blink while they're there, you will miss them.

And knowing that they have to disappear,
You try to capture glory in a jar,
For you yearn to hoard your pleasure;
Then you look upon your treasure
And you're holding but the cinder of a star.

Fairy rings in the forest;
Step inside them, the world disappears.
When the spell breaks, you tremble with tears,
And you yearn to return where it started.

But the splendor has vanished;
Spells once broken can never resume.
Might as well try to lasso the moon—
You are certain to end broken-hearted.

For everything you felt was but a dream
And dreams can never bear the light of day.
The thing about illusion
It is doesn't last forever
And it cannot come again.
Everything is possible if only for a moment.
Wonder is too frail a thing to tether to a chain.
Anything too wonderful will only last a moment;
Holding it forever
Is something you will have to wish in vain.

Fantasy has its moments,
Just like fireflies or flickering flames.
You imagine it's calling your name—
Such a dangerous trap! Just resist it.

When you wake to the sunlight
Mourning over the marvels you left,
Wisest course is to try to forget:
Let them fade into shadows and whispers.

There isn't any substance in the charm.
Pretend you never heard it call your name.
There's temptation to surrender
To a radiant delusion
When life is full of pain:
But everything is possible only for a moment.
Wonder is too frail a thing to tether to a chain.
Anything too wonderful will only last a moment;
Holding it forever

Is something you will always wish in vain.