

Masha's seagull



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Many of Chekov's characters in *The Seagull* resolve to hopelessly love people who do not love them. This tendency presents a clear flaw that Chekov makes fun of, as these fixations inevitably lead to nothing. The hopeless romantics do not end up finding each other and rather remain as they were, or in Constantine's case, lost for good. How these characters got to their points of no return differs in a combination of upbringings and personal characteristics. Masha for instance, who is used for dark comic relief throughout the play, displays striking similarities in her faults to those of her mother. While her depressing cynicism can easily be taken for granted, there is an undeniable parallel between Polina's pining affection toward Dr. Dorn and Masha's more dramatic adoration for Constantine. Masha's unreciprocated love for Constantine and her inability to take in pleasures from life stem from an unconscious tendency to learn from her mother.

Polina's loveless marriage provides more than just an example for Masha to marry Simon; it spawns the idea of following false hope and leads Masha to absorb her life in someone who will give her nothing. It is important to understand that Chekov does not create a perfect parallel, giving each character an individual distinction as means of making them more human and therefore relatable. Masha's love for Constantine has become an obsession. Polina's feelings for Dr. Dorn, on the other hand, are displayed more as a want rather than a need. She longs to be with him of course, but understands that she has committed herself to Ilya. Nonetheless, Masha's decision to marry and remain lovesick for another man is a learned predisposition from her mother. Polina is embarrassed by her husband's actions and his firm control over the use of his horses, yet remains

committed to him as if her feelings of displeasure were not important in regards of their marriage. While Polina knows that she will stay with Ilya, she still makes advances toward Dr. Dorn who continually turns her down. Like any daughter, Masha looks to her mother for guidance and is likely to mimic her characteristics. As a result, Masha sees no wrong in entering a loveless marriage with Simon on her own accord while actively pursuing her actual heart's desires. Polina feels Masha's pain and must realize at some point the pointlessness of marrying out of spite instead of love, but brings up Masha to believe that it is the only way they can live life. Masha feels like she " knows not whence she comes or why she lives" because adoring Constantine has not given her the purpose of living that she thought she would find, but she does not need to feel this way. Her mother has taught her, whether consciously or unconsciously, to follow false hope.

Instead of admitting that her pursuance for Dr. Dorn is causing her to neglect her daughter's best interest, Polina incites Masha to follow Constantine, which introduces her to the idea of abandonment and instills her with a sense of emptiness. Polina watches her daughter make Constantine's bed and lay down her life for him. However, instead of helping Masha move on she turns to Constantine and asks him to at least glance at her daughter. She knows Constantine's feelings will never change but asks him to continue to lead her own daughter down an empty path. Her duty as a mother is to protect her child and provide her with her best chance at happiness. However, she abandons this role because it is easier to ignore it and chase after her own desires, namely Dr. Dorn, who does not seem to take any particular interest in her. Hypocritically, she remains committed to Ilya on

paper, but exhibits great jealousy when someone as harmless as Nina inadvertently hands Dr. Dorn flowers. Although she does not abandon her role as a wife during the play, she would have left or even started an affair had Dr. Dorn agreed to love her. Granted, Polina does not leave her husband, but she does influence Masha to leave Simon by pushing her towards a man who already loves someone else. Masha does not need to mimic her mother's flirtations with Dr. Dorn entirely because she displays her own distinction. She takes her love for Constantine a step further, and abandons her role as a mother and wife for days to simply exist in his presence. Her neglect may be caused by a poor mindset, but she continues to follow an empty idea, projected to her by her mother.

Polina's demeaning attitude toward Simon projects the idea that he does not need appreciation, which causes Masha's respect for Simon to fade throughout the play. Although Simon has sacrificed a lot for Masha, Polina still believes that Masha would be better off with Constantine, if only he would notice her. Although Ilya embarrasses her when he rejects Simon's request to use his horses, Polina makes no conscious effort to help Simon's case. Similarly, Masha becomes frustrated with Simon for even asking her father for horses when there are other options. Even Polina's seemingly insignificant reactions to Simon, such as her reluctance to allow Simon to kiss her hand, have been imprinted on Masha. Chekov introduces the play with Simon and Masha acting almost like old friends as they discuss recent events. However, Polina causes Masha's regard toward Simon to decline, as her casual discussions with him in the start of the play turn into almost hateful dialogues toward the end. It is one thing for Masha to tell a man

politely that she does not love him, and another to ignore his pleas of returning home to their child who has not seen his mother for four days. Thus, by accepting her mother's manners in regards to her husband, Masha finds herself not simply unable to return Simon's love, but even to regard him as a character.

Masha's false hope, sense of emptiness, and animosity towards Simon are primarily consequences of Polina's poor example as a parent. A mother nurtures and instinctively imposes her characteristics and habits onto her child. Regardless, it is the child's right to choose which conventions to take on and how drastically to follow them. Polina exhibits questionable behavior, which can add to the dark comic relief or also convey a specific theme. But her behavior remains within the lines of reason, and she remains loyal to her husband and does not use her marriage as an irrational hope for change. In this sense Masha becomes a more dramatic reflection of Polina, taking in her mother's advice and disposition a forlorn step further.