

MY CHEKHOV LIGHT

*A Play
By
FRANK GAGLIANO*

Contact

sandrico@aol.com

(www.gaglianoriff.com)

Characters Professor Peter Paradise

Martin (Off/not heard)

Carl (Off/Not heard)

Carla (Off/Not heard)

Time 1985

Place

Bodoni County Junior College

[Professor Peter Paradise
is focusing lights
in the black box theatre)

PETER PARADISE
(Speaking into mouthpiece/head set)

It's unfortunate, Martin, that the things we tend to remember —to dwell on, as we —what's the phrase?. . .ah!—"advance in years" —if not in wisdom. . .are the things of regret.

—I was just regretting —in fact, "dwelling on"—the recent loss of my wife and—. . .Well.

. . .—Oh, thank you, that's very kind; but don't waste your tears, she didn't die; she ran out on me. They all do—did, of course; but this one, I truly regret. Harriet. Harriet Callabro.

. . .—No! Harriet isn't a student. Like all of the others. Ha! —I'm laughing because I see you remember that. I suppose that was the talk when you were a student here; Professor Peter Paradise and his "Penchant" for students. —It's true, I always felt safer with students; more at home with them. . . .Well, grownups never do give one the adulation one demands, and this grownup, as you'll recall, Martin, always demanded adulation; but, as you'll also recall. . . and as I now understand. . . this grownup couldn't give any adulation back. —I can now, though, Martin; I can adulate a student, if he—slash she— has earned it. —Now!

. . .Students, yes. "Penchant," yes. The blonde young things, especially. With the plump buns. —At least I married them! . . .though I never gave them children. —No, Harriet isn't—a student. She's faculty. And a grownup. English department. A poet. Closer to my age.

. . .—Too close? . . .Too close.

. . .Dark haired. With no plumps. Sweet. And, with things in common. . . .Still, she runs out on me. Of course. . . .Well.

--What? . . . —No no, not yet!

I don't want you in here — yet! It wouldn't do.

—With all this mess, I mean.

The cables, all over the floor down there, like—what was it you used to call them?—back in the old days, Martin?

. . .Ah! Yesyesyes! Right! “Like eels! Ugh!.” You'd say! “Undulating and shifting under my feet, ugh!” You'd say.

—God, how you hated working backstage crew, *fastidious* Martin! — always the star, Martin! . . .even then.

But who knows? *IF* —over the years — and miracle of miracles— you've *de-fastidious-ed* yourself — and I *do* let you *in* to this space — *my space* — you might be moved to join me up here—help me, perhaps. And this filthy plank I'm standing on — between the filthy ladders — is downright “*filthy!*”—not to mention, *shaky!* —*And* I'll be bouncing up and down, adjusting, focusing lights. —And anyway, there's all the other—*stuff* to trip over — the *stuff* of —the *detritus of*—theatre-in-the-making. All over *this* space—Hm.

. . .“*The Theatre Of Detritus.*”

There! You see, Martin?! I've just coined a phrase for the Theatre of our time. And you're in on that coining. Lucky you.

—No! Until it's safe for me to allow you in— it's best you stay up there in that observation room, observing me.

. . .While I observe you.

—Well lit and clear, you are.

Am I well lit and clear to you?

. . .—Good! Then that's clear.

—Yes, this is best; the intercom, my headphones. I hear you perfectly. Do you hear me perfectly?

. . .—Good. Then that's perfect.

—And so are you —perfect—perfectly turned out. . . .Sleek and tailored. Very high style, I'm sure. . .

—as in that recent print ad you're in. With milk all over your upper lip.

—Which must have taken a lot of actor preparation, I shouldn't wonder.

—Hel-lo! I'll bet you bought your high-style look at one of those fancy stores on —what's the name of that place out there?—where those fancy clerks were held hostage and killed some years back?

. . . —Yes! Thank you. "Rodeo Drive." —Now, don't tell me it's off the rack at K Mart, that outfit!

. . .—No? Thank "*Whatever.*" If you've got it you should flaunt it—on your back! —The American way. Right? —What was I say . . .*ing?* . . .—"*Regrets!*" Yes. I regret, for example, that I did not instill in you a stronger obligation to your art. . . .—No no! "I do blame myself." I'm a teacher and a teacher's job —one of them— is to . . ."instill."

On the other hand, I instilled it in myself; art; once—and look what I've become. . .

—What?

. . . —OmeWhatever! I thought that's what you said: "*Noble profession?*" . . . "*The most noble?*" . . . "*Responsible for turning out future —?*"

—Martin, please! You mustn't make an *ass*—you'll forgive my French, as my mother used to say—*hole* of yourself. One, finally, must face facts, Martin: As a teacher I've turned out nothing—or *no one* of value —including —you'll forgive me — you! —And as for me, now —well, I'm tenured and I'm dead and tenured dead men have no nobility whatsoever. None.

—CARL! CUE NUMBER TEN PLEASE!

—Oh! Carl, Martin, is one of my students. Lighting major and—Oh! Forgive me, Martin: For startling you that way—not warning you about this hand mike. The amplification. That must have hurt your ears! But it's necessary to make contact with Carl. He's so intense and focused, he often forgets to stay on earphones. And he's like a monkey. I never know where he might be climbing at any given moment in this space—which, *by the by*, we've

made into a veritable sound studio—so I often need to be heard over music and other sounds and — whoops!

—Prepare your ears, Martin: Another mike-message for Carl coming up!

—NOT A FADE IN, CARL; BUMP UP CUE TEN.

. . . —THANK YOU!

—Carl's a lighting genius, Martin, and I need. . .such genius now.

. . .I don't design lights much anymore —don't do much of anything anymore; just direct; student productions. The Classics, mostly.

—The tried and true, anyway.

So I depend on my lighting genius Carl. He's trustworthy. And a loner. As you were, Martin, back in the old days. And "other worldly" . . .as you were, Martin, back in the old days. And even a tenured dead man needs trustworthy, loner, "*other worldly*," allies for his little . . ."*other world*" secret campaigns —and *I have* such a secret "*other world*" campaign.

. . .—Oh my good "Whatever!" —I just remembered! *We* had a secret campaign, you and I, Martin, back in the old days! Remember? Yesyes! Let me see!

. . .— *YES*, it was after my last Off-Broadway production. I came back to the campus—cruuusssshhhhhed! —The New York Times had annihilated me. It was one of those, "tskltsk! He's lost his talent" obit reviews — mixed with "*that's what he gets for going all artsy and choosing language over-bloat plays to light and direct and losing the common touch blah blah*" and you—

. . .you, Martin, really felt for me. . .my pain. . .and cried. . . and tried to cheer me up. . .said. . .

"you're in the big leagues with the great ones, Peter . . . and they're in the minors and, therefore, they can't see it—see you."

. . .Hardly true. But you said that, you really did. Said "*and, therefore.*" And somehow it was that "*and therefore*" that stood out: That moved me then. . .and moves me now.

. . .—And then you suggested—as therapy—that we—yes—make an audio tape of all the great bits and pieces of great literature that I loved, that I felt kinship with. And every so often we would play that tape — that little loop of great model pieces in my tiny office —through the largest speakers we could find — and the room itself became a speaker — and we'd switch off the lights and only let the moonlight in — and were transported into an out-of-space experience — and seemed as if we were about to truly touch the great ones!

. . .—And can you remember the very first great piece that I recorded? . . .
—From Hamlet! Act III; Scene I. . . ."*What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven?*"

—Remarkable!

YOU, Martin, were responsible for starting—Well, you see, I've continued the recordings of the words of the great ones over the years!—and not only words; great music, too! —and great art!

—CARL! PLAY SOME OF THAT GREAT STUFF! THE WORDS-STUFF!
ON THAT LAST LOOP! THE LAST LOOP I RECORDED!

. . .—GOOD, CARL!

—Do you recognize any of it, Martin?— *That* one!
"Astride of a grave and a difficult birth—" Beckett, Carl. Beckett!

—AND THE "LACRIMOSA" CARL! PUT THAT ON, TOO.
. . .Good!

—the "Lacrimosa" Martin.
That means "tears."
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.
That's going to be an essential one if I'm ever to do—it.

—AND THE ART, CARL! FLASH THE PICTURES OF GREAT ART
AROUND THE ROOM AND ON THE STAGE FLOOR!

—YES! —YES! —YES!

—AND EVEN THE POP STUFF! THOSE GREAT FACES!
 —THE KIND THAT DON'T EXIST ANYMORE! . . .

O!O!O —CARL! FREEZE ON THE FLOOR THE FACE OF AVA GARDNER
 AND SUPERIMPOSE ON IT THE PICTURE CALLED "THE SCREAM"
 —BY EDVARD MUNCH!

. . .—YES! YES! CARL! MARVELOUS!

—A kaleidoscope! Like being inside a kaleidoscope of great stuff! Is it not,
 Martin?!

—WE'RE GETTING THERE, CARL! WE'RE ALMOST THERE, IN FACT!—
 NOW CUT IT, CARL! ART, MUSIC! CUT EVERYTHING! PLEASE!

. . .—GOOD!

—In fact, Martin, I may have to cut our meeting short because those tapes
 and art works — and you can see how necessary the mike is to be heard
 over all that and —oh, yes! I'm also expecting another ally—a student
 named Carla — genius, too, I think. And, like Carl, another focused
 monkey. In physics, though. Computers. She's been programming all that
 in this space — "*that*," being the slide and sound razzle-dazzle you just
 heard and saw — in this space! In my space!

—Incredibly impressive; *N'est pas, Martin? N'est pas!?*

—with a minor in music, has Carla, would you believe! —And Carla may
 have some very important news for me about those recordings. And other
 —music: One last piece we apparently need.

And, of course, we haven't solved the problem of the proper *snapping
 string yet*

—ha!ha!

—You don't know "*what the hell I'm talking about!*"

—How could you!

—But Carla may come in with a solution — one that may change—Ha!—
 my very—Ha!Ha!— "*existenceHAHA!*"

So be prepared, Martin: If Carla does come, I may have to boot you out of this theatre. —But to think! *You* started it all, the idea for the taping, and. . .

—Ah!
Good!
Beautiful!

—THANK YOU, CARL!

. . .Isn't this light beautiful, Martin?
. . .another reason why I can't let you enter yet: The light from that doorway would kill this light. . . . this light we're creating. . .this light we call: "*My Chekhov light!*"

. . .—And listen to that! Isn't that beautiful, Martin?

—YES, CARL, LEAVE THAT ONE ON. . . .— AND I DO THINK IT'S A BETTER RECORDING! DID CARLA SEND THAT OVER?
. . .— GOOD! THEN IT MUST HAVE THE PROPER PROPERTIES— DECIBELS—FREQUENCIES—WHATEVER.

LET IT PLAY AWHILE!

—That music cue that Carl just cued into the ether to homogenize with my emerging Chekhov light, Martin, is Lensky's aria. From Eugene Onegin. By Tchaikovsky.

. . .We needed to find just the just-right, elegant music cue that seems to epitomize the Chekhov world, and this music seemed to be it.

—LET IT PLAY UNDER AWHILE, CARL. BUT SOFT, SOFT. . . .

. . .—Do you remember your Chekhov, Martin?

. . .—Ah! Very good, Martin! That's right! You did play Trofimov in "The Cherry Orchard." Trofimov. One of Chekhov's perennial students. And I did direct you in it. And lighted the show. I wasn't sure you'd remember. —By that I mean that the silly shit-roles you're known for on television now, are light years away from a role like Trofimov, so I wasn't sure you'd want to remember that you once had to act real roles and— huh?. . . Oh, yes, "the real world!" —one of the constant motifs in your letters to me over the years:

"That's the way it is in the real world!"

"You've got to survive in 'The Real World'," you'd write.

As opposed, I suppose, to this *"fake"* university world!

--Bullplops, Martin!!!

—CARL, KILL THE MUSIC PLEASE! . . . —THANK YOU! WHILE I TELL
MARTIN ABOUT HIS SO-CALLED "REAL WORLD."

. . .Martin,

You have been married two times in ten years
in "the real world."

But I have been married three times in that time;
so what's new?

In this town some screw without blessing of clergy;
others stay married, but still fool around;
so what is the difference between your
"real world" and mine?

The people you deal with,
you wrote, are the slime
in your "real world;"
but some of the slimiest people I know own this town.

Of course they will sell out their mothers and fathers;
then show disgust for a world that's gone bad;
so what is the difference between your
"real world" and mine?

On the other hand
here there's a fine university leading the way, you'll say.
With a road going back to the Greeks
and a detour through Egypt and Rome;
and an exit for Cultures and Races and spiritual light that one certainly
mustn't dismiss;
but what is the use of all that
when those same roads lead to the abyss?

The work that you do
 is the work that you hate,
 in the "real world."
 But now all the plays I direct
 are just history to me.
 In your line they won't touch a new show that's risky;
 I won't touch plays unless footnotes are there;
 so is there a difference between your
 "real world" and mine?

—Hardly.

Sunshine will shine or will never shine
 — people will whine or will never whine
 — Car wheels align or will not align—

God will or will not reveal a sign—

Lovers will part or will intertwine
 — Sex lives are bound to go in decline

— NO!

There is no difference between your "real world"
 and MINE!

—What? —"Bitter?" Moi? "—Insulting?" Wherever did you get that?

—Of course I'm bitter! Of course I'm insulting! I had dreams for you, Martin. Hopes for you, Martin. You were one of those rare student actors — *with* talent and brains! And I knew you were going to make it and you knew you were going to make it and when you made it—*you said*—you'd pump the "*obscene TV bucks*"—your phrase, not mine—back into a theatre of substance and language and startling visions: Into what I used to call—and in a phrase you would love to hear —what I used to call, "*the entertainment that confronts*." And you also said—No! *Promised!*—that you would keep your stage talent sharp, even while making your "*obscene TV bucks*." And I believed you! Because I needed to believe you. Because I had stopped making "*entertainment that confronts*" — and so— and, oh, how I do understand the five-and-dime psychology of it all. . . I needed to believe it from the person I was living through. The son, perhaps? I was depending on, perhaps? To fill out what once had been my vision?

Perhaps.

Because I could feel that whatever vision—not to mention "*energy*" — I still had, was going, kept going . . . had gone . . .

But you did not keep your talent sharp, and you held onto your "*obscene TV bucks.*"—Until now!

And I know why you've come back to Bodoni County, Martin Star: *Née Starovich!* — To your alma mater, Martin Star: *Née Starovich.*

You're here, Martin, to talk about giving the school a large check—a very large check, I'm told — to build a new theatre here—to tear down this space—this very space we're in—my space—*my space* where we've been programming my Chekhov-Kaleidoscope —tear it down to build a new space, a new theatre—to be called —What?—The Martin Star Theatre?

. . .— Oh! Cheap shot?! You don't have that kind of ego? Hm. We'll see. And if I'm wrong I'll apologize.

But understand! I don't want you to give your obscene bucks to this institution! So that my space can be torn down

—and I intend to stop you!!!

NO! don't come down "*to calm me down*"—not in here, I said—the door! — Don't open—! The light! THE LIGHT! Blinding! I'll slip! —Back in!—get back up there!

. . .yes. better. keep eyes closed. just for a second.

. . .yes.

Now I'm coming down!

—NO! Get back up there!

Stay up there! —I'll MANAGE ALONE!

. . .There.

You see? I'm doing fine.

I'm coming
 down fine.
 I can do it with
 out your help—
 with
 out
 any
 one's
 help.

—NO, CARL! YOU, TOO! YOU STAY UP THERE!

.

There.
 Feet on the stage

—*on my stage!* . . . Good.

. . .—Now, Martin, you stay put in that observation room. I don't want you down here with me in my emerging Chekhov light.

—*But don't leave this building!*

—*Don't you dare!* Now that I've been able to get it out in the open —this thing that's been eating at me all these years —*we've got to sort it out, you and I!*

—CARL! TAKE A SLOW COUNT OF—OH—SAY, TWELVE OR SO BETWEEN CUES AND I WANT YOU TO MOVE FROM CUE TEN THROUGH CUE TWENTY FIVE! THANK YOU!

—OH! AND PLEASE CALL OVER TO THE PHYSICS SOUND LAB! I'VE GOT TO KNOW IF CARLA IS COMING! —IT IS IMPERATIVE SHE GET HERE! AND GETS HERE NOW!

. . .while I sit on this stool

. . . sort this out. . .

. . .—yes! Pretend I'm on a Chekhov verandah somewhere on the estate . . . vaguely out of sorts, because of an aura of melancholy that hangs in the air. . .and where I will dissolve into an always-changing light that will take me to darkness and to . . .oblivion.

. . . Strange, isn't it. When you were a student here, Martin, you saved my life. You were the only confidante I had in those days. God knows I couldn't talk to any of my colleagues. What the hell could we talk about? But you — . . . I used to say that the gifted student Martin Starovich was twenty two, going on fifty. Full of common sense. Intuitive. Sensitive. And now, in a sense, you're my enemy.

. . .—Ah, but not so strange. Enemies do, often, sort things out quietly and despairingly together in a Chekhov light.

Until they go offstage and shoot each other to death; in a duel.

—By the way, Martin, does it do? this light I'm creating?—does it make a Chekhov world? Do you remember what that world was? the kinds of characters in that world?

. . . Always isolated. Each involved in his own soul—shutting out the other . . . Souls. . .each Soul knowing his days and his life and his world are numbered and each

—well, mostly, each
 —talking a blue streak to assure himself
 —while nobody in the room listens
 —that his days and his life and his world are not numbered
 —or at least not useless
 —even though he knows they are. . .and even,
 believe it or not . . . continues to assume a future . . .

And there are often professors!—teachers, anyway, in his light. Isn't that extraordinary! Chekhov actually thought professors and teachers were worthy of—first—having souls—and, secondly — being worth the time and effort to be made *dramatic* characters. Extraordinary!

—On the other hand, not so extraordinary. The Master was a master at dramatizing the petty and insignificant, after all, and we professors, it goes without saying, are the most petty and insignificant Souls of all. Or can be.

—Doctors, too; of course: Those petty souls, too, are in his plays, in his light. And I think I have captured—so far — we, so far, have captured, Carl and I — have been able to create that hue —intensity?—by that I mean, that "pettiness" —albeit a certain *genteel* —is that the right word?— "*pettiness*" that can, I do believe, exist in this light. His light.

—But there is also in his light — and this is where I fail, still, Martin . . .there is also. . . in the text of his light. . .the compassion. Compassion for — what? . . . The pain . . their pain. And I don't think I've got that yet: The rendering of that pain-compassion, in my Chekhov light.

—You know what I mean, don't you, Martin? when a Chekhov character — and they almost all do it—when a Chekhov "Soul," rather, says;

"But what is it you want me to do?"

Or,

"But what can I do?"

Meaning that no one is capable of doing anything, really. A real cry from a Soul, that. And there is never an answer to, "*But what can I do? "What is it you want me to do?"*

. . .And then there is the other refrain. Constant. Said by so many of his Souls:

"Oh, if you only knew!"

And they never tell you what it is they know.

But I think that at that moment they do know—or, at least glimpse. . . the pain. They know it is "*the pain*" that they know, and that they can't face *the pain*, and so they get off it

—*the pain*—

and go about their petty, silly, absurd business

—and it is all *that* that I still need to get into my Chekhov light.

—With the music! Don't forget the music. I became aware of the music—

. . .Ah! . . .THANK YOU, CARL. I DID WANT TO HEAR THAT SOUND CUE! MARVELOUS IMPROVEMENT! MUCH MORE EERIE! I COULD HAVE SWORN THAT WAS IT. BUT CARLA SAYS NO; THE FREQUENCIES, THE DECIBELS

—WHATEVER— ALL WRONG!

. . .AH! GOOD!

—Did you hear, Martin, Carl says Carla called — is sure she's found the right cue— will bring the new cue *right over*, Martin, and—

. . . That sound cue?

Why, that's the sound of the string breaking.

You don't remember. From “The Cherry Orchard.” Act 2. Suddenly everyone hears this sound in the sky. Like a string breaking, like a taut cable snapping in a mine. Reverberates. Fills the air.

No one — none of the characters — can define it. Though they try.

Seems to symbolize the breaking up of one social order in the play — the breaking up of something.

—Anyway, Carla is trying to create that sound. Must create it. We're convinced that that sound is the triggering mechanism — along with the Chekhov light —and music, of course —The music!

Wasn't I talking about the music?

—I became aware of the music—the first time I ever did a Chekhov play. Off Broadway. I remember I did all the usual things—I lighted *and* directed then, of course: Soft poetic light coming through the cherry orchard into the Nursery. Act I.

Poetic lyrical dusk light. Act 2.

Hot, frantic light, Act 3, for the frenzied party scene with the Jewish orchestra.

A settled, solid, very-real, comfortable light for the final act when everyone prepares to leave.

And back to poetic lighting in those last moments when the old servant, locked in. . .forgotten . . .

just lays down and goes quiet. And we hear the sound of the cherry trees in the cherry orchard, being chopped down. . . bang. . . bang. . .bang.

—But, later, as I kept rereading the text I began to see that it was all structured in a musical way and characters, ideas, events dropped in like musical themes and those musical themes would recur and swell and build and fade and reappear again — but there was no music of that sort anywhere in that production, and no music at all in my light then nor in any of my lighting designs afterward — and that, too, the music, I need to get into my Chekhov light.

—AND I NEED MORE TIME FOR THAT, MARTIN! TO ACHIEVE THAT!

I'm sorry I had to go on mike for that last remark, Martin, but I wanted it to sink in—into your eardrums—your sinuses; to resonate in the bones of your skull. Because I need to achieve what I need to achieve in this theatre

—in this space— my space —with all the other elements we've kaleidoscoped in—and for—this space — my space — you want to destroy —and which I cannot let you destroy—because all I need is *"the Chekhov light compassion"*

—and the music

—and the triggering snapping string—

which will come, of course, when Carla comes, I have full faith in her.

—But "the compassion" and the music are not yet fully in me, and so I cannot render them into my design, into my Chekhov light.

. . .And is it any wonder? How can compassion blossom in a soul that is as bitter as my soul is?

I was the poet of light

—Yes, that's what they called me. *"The poet of light!"* But that is not all. I did it all. Directed, wrote, designed —*And!* I did it in the professional theatre! —when there was one in this country.

And then I taugth it all and lost it all or it all went astray and there was my arrogance

and my losing sight of the poetry
 and there were the young blonde plumps who adored the poet in me, even
 as the poet in me . . .went!

. . .—But the poetry went —everywhere. Didn't it?
 When did that happen, Martin? How did that happen?
 What's the difference? Like every other artist of my generation, I abdicated,
 allowed the shit to take over and somehow —how!? how!? —somehow I
 wound up in Bodoni County at this College—trying to do both: Make the
 poetry and teach the poetry, but, somehow, over time, I discarded the
 poetry—the poetry in me—and the blonde-plump student-wives. . .and
 even my beloved Harriet—discarded me, while I discarded bits and pieces
 of my fragile soul . . .which rendered me. . . quite literally

. . .impotent.

. . .Oh, Martin, where has it all gone? My life, my youth, my loves, my
 artistry . . .*my joy*—
 . . .Well. . .

OK. OK. It's over now, Martin. This quiet interlude in this light has
 sweetened a bit my bitter soul, has helped me to sort things out, and I ask
 your forgiveness. For shouting at you before. Blaming you.
 But when I heard that you had come and what you had come for, I —
 And of course you were right, in your “Real World,” to dive into the shit, be
 part of the shit. The world of shit is the world as it is and it's healthier, I
 know, to breast stroke through that shit and, anyway, when I tried to "instill"
 —to "instill" the poetry I thought was there, the poetry, as I said before, had
 all but gone from me,
 and you, sensitive student that your were
 —saw that,
 felt that,
 intuited that,
 so that you knew I had become a phony.
 And now you want to pay something back; perhaps try to help build a
 different kind of "Real World" here that is not shit; an oasis where every
 student-soul in here can sip the pure waters of true art and craft; isolated;
 "instilled;"
 and go out with all that truth

and change the world of shit out there.
You couldn't; maybe they can.

Oh, Martin, if you only knew. I know. I know that I did, then, instill something in you—something pure, something ideal—something that died in me, of course, but still stays alive in you.

But now that "something" threatens me; don't you see?

And what can I do? What is there to do?

It's too late. There is no oasis with the pure waters of art.

it's all polluted, full of chemicals, *full of shit!*

I said it before and I'll say it again:

Yours, mine, this—it's all the "Real World" and the real world is shit!

—GOOD, CARL! YES. BETTER!

—You see, Martin, what's happened? Some light has been taken away.

That's when you know you have light, in fact—when you take some away!

So now there are shadows beginning to trail off.

. . .and it is a shadow, I know, that will lead me to where I need to go. . .

—NOW, CARL, START THE NEXT CUES—SLOWLY—UNTIL YOU COME TO THE END OF YOUR LIGHTING PLOT! AND CUE IN THE MUSIC WHEN I CUE YOU. AND BY THEN, PERHAPS, CARLA WILL HAVE ARRIVED.

So, Martin, you're wasting your time. Take back your megabucks consideration and go back to that other world of shit.

Sort it all out and paddle around in it—in peace.

And if you agree to that. . .

I'll let you in— embrace you again — make you part of — my Chekhov light.

. . .You're speechless, Martin! What's the problem, Martin?

You can't quite believe this —this piece of detritus—this wreck that once

was your adored teacher?—is that it?—This wreck about to go under,

before your unbelieving eyes? Well, believe it, Martin, believe it, accept my

terms, and — get the hell away from my whirlpool or you, too, will be

sucked down! Please. . .

. . .what?

—WHAT?!

—CARL, DID YOU HEAR THAT? MARTIN HAS FINALLY FOUND HIS TONGUE AND HE SAYS THEY'RE COMING HERE!

NOW!

IT'S NOT AN ONGOING PROCESS! IT'S ALREADY BEEN DECIDED! THEY'RE ON THEIR WAY! A CEREMONY HAS BEEN ARRANGED! HERE!

IN FIFTEEN MINUTES IN MY SPACE!
THE PRESIDENT, THE PROVOST! THE CHAIRMAN! MY COLLEAGUES! PHOTOGRAPHERS! A PRESENTATION OF THE CHECK THAT REPRESENTS THE OBSCENE TV BUCKS.
PRESENTED TO THEM HERE IN MY CHEKHOV LIGHT!
CARL, WE MUST GET CARLA HERE! CALL HER, CARL! GET HER HERE!

—How dare you, Martin!? How could you, Martin? I thought this would all take time, lots of time—that your trip here was preliminary—that I'd have the time to. . .

—What? —*"that I'd be pleased!" "—happily surprised?"*

—Asshole!

—Listen, Martin; this is what it's all about:

I am already an embarrassment to the administration. And to my colleagues. Didn't they tell you that?—Of course not! Because *you* have given them a possible solution to *"the crazy Peter Paradise problem."*

Which is:

that I refuse to leave this theatre—this space!

That's right! I have set up house in it—

in this space!

in my space!

I teach in it. Use the dressing room backstage, the toilet and showers there. And sleep on the cot —that cot — that cot there in the shadows

—I often wheel it in—sleep here—in this space, nice and cozy in this space.

And I refuse to attend Faculty meetings unless they hold them here.
In this space,
in my space.

Which outrages my colleagues: Why should that smug nut, Paradise, dictate to them? They do their work; follow the rules; backbite and bad mouth each other; trash to the world each other's visions and aspirations; ruin students' minds and talents the way they're supposed to!

—O! That's not fair! —Well, in a way it is! —Ah, who cares!

—And I get my allies, my trusted students to do my laundry in the costume shop and to run down the corridor and get my food from the shit machines and cook that shit for me in the community microwave oven in the hallway.

But I'm tenured so it's hard for them to boot me out and they were stymied — hoped it would just go away, *"the crazy Peter Paradise problem."* And now—because of asshole you! they think it will go away, *"the crazy Peter Paradise problem!"*

You give them this obscene check and they get to work immediately, razing this space,
my space,
and raze me, too, right the hell out of here to—what—to start from scratch elsewhere?

—But where?! How? . . .

—But don't think my students will allow it! Many of them love me— isn't that something?—As crazy and as bitter and as has-been as I've become, they love me.—And they don't question me

— isn't that something? . . .

—So do something, Martin!

You were a student once and you, after all, loved me, too!

Stop that gang from coming here!

Because I'm so close. Lately I've begun to feel something about and for people, and the thing I feel may be, for all I know. . . compassion—the compassion I need for my Chekhov light

. . .for my students, anyway.

. . .For they break my heart, if they only knew.

Revved up! Revved up!

Always the rev up, always there in them.

And what breaks my heart is that the rev-up will get harder to rev, if they only knew.

—But the energy of that rev-up now will help me ! You'll see!

— WHAT'S THAT, CARL? —AH! CARLA'S COME!

—CARLA, TELL ME! —DID YOU RE-WORK THE SOUND CUE FOR THE TRIGGERING SNAPPING STRING?—GOOD! —AND DO YOU THINK THIS ONE'S THE ONE? THE ONE THAT WILL TRIGGER IT ALL?

—OH, GOD, I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT!

AND DID YOU FIND THE PROPER MUSIC? THE FINAL PIECE FOR THE

— . . .

—YOU DID!? WONDERFUL! AND WHAT IS IT?! . . . AH! HA, HA!
SUPERB

—Martin, did you hear that? It's a song by Frank Sinatra.

—WHAT IS IT CALLED, CARLA? . . . "Winners."

Ha!

There's an irony for you. *N'est Pas*, Martin? *N'est Pas*?

—CARLA! CAN YOU WORK IT IN? ON THE THREE TAPE DECKS UP THERE? —I MEAN IMMEDIATELY!

NOW!

I'M THREATENED. THIS SPACE IS THREATENED. NOW! MARTIN STARR'S BEING HERE WITH HIS CORRUPT BUCKS AND THE GANG ON ITS WAY HERE, LEAVES ME LITTLE TIME. NO TIME!

. . .YOU CAN! GOOD!

—NO, CARLA! THERE'S NO TIME LEFT TO HEAR THE NEW BROKEN STRING CUE — WE'LL HAVE TO TRUST IT! GET THE ONEGIN READY!

—AND CARL! YOU LOCK ALL THE DOORS! NO! WAIT!

—Martin, get out of this building before I lock the doors.

. . .No? You're not going to leave me?

—You're "worried" about your old--sick--mentor?

—That's really sweet and commendable in your nature, Martin—I mean it; your saying that. . .breaks my heart, in fact; and--

is that it?

is that what compassion is?

—the breaking of one's heart over other people's pain?

. . .—And does that mean my heart has not been broken until now?

—CARL, MARTIN WILL STAY. LOCK THE DOORS!

. . . BANG! . . .BANG! . . .BANG! BANG!

GOOD!

. . . AND, YES, THAT'S IT! THE MUSIC--Lensky's Air. —TWO POINTS LOWER, CARL!

—Listen, Martin; this is what it's all about:

Now that you're here, and that gang is on its way, we have to move fast — even though nothing's been tested. We'll just have to take the chance it's all going to work. I trust Carl and Carla and they've both put their genius to work on the problem and the problem is this:

That I find a way — a doorway, you might say— from here to there; that is, from this world to another world--and I don't mean suicide. . . could never really contemplate that for some reason, needed to stay whole, for some reason — but not to stay whole here, in all this bitterness and pettiness and mindlessness and shallow creativity that now is my existence, needed to get there—out there--where all the great souls are; or at least where their great works—the models—exist. For great works—great models— I'm convinced, rise and stay out there, somewhere, forever!

The shit sinks,

but the great stuff rises and remains!

Out There!

—Yes! Carl and Carla worked with frequencies and things on their computers and instruments and sent my tape—the tape with all the great

pieces that you?

—yes, you put me onto?

—and followed and tracked those great pieces that seemed to want to join
up with other great pieces
and scanned the ether
and homed in on what *appears to be* a galaxy,

a cluster of stars or star stuff

that is really the stuff made up of the greatest words and music and colors
that ever were and that live forever in the ether.

And,

navigating through the detritus of the universe,
my taped great words did find them! Joined up with them!

then set to work, did Carl and Carla, to find the trigger that would let me join
my soul with that star stuff and settled on —Chekhov. Yes, that's the truth.
Of all the great ones, Carl and Carla and their computers found that
Chekhov was the doorway out. For me!

For me, in this time!

In this place—Yes!

And if, at one and the same moment, in this time, one could find the right
Chekhov light with the right Chekhov music and mix in all the great art that
ever was and the
snapping trigger string

— well, that would be the stuff needed to catapult me out

— No!

—Beam me up! Yes! Like in Star Trek?

—Fragment first, then beam up! —to that star-stuff galaxy of the greatest
works that ever were!

And we did, find the light—we think—this light —we'll have to trust that this
is it — *AND* the music—this music — Lensky's Air from Eugene Onegin.

. . .There is a Chekhov essence in it, I'm sure by now you'll agree. And the
frequencies, the decibels, apparently are compatible with the light that's
been worked on.

—But that wasn't enough, we found.

Other ingredients were needed—great art works

—the proper pigments, composition, content

—and more music; a piece beyond the Lensky Air — something that transcends —that represents the greatest music that ever was—that even transcends Chekhov, and Carla found that piece to be a Mozart piece: The Lacrimosa section of his last Mass—

MIX IN THE LACRIMOSA, CARLA!

. . .YES! GOOD! GLORIOUS!—and Lacrimosa, Martin, means tears—did I mention that before?— and that seems right, n'est pas?

And the decibels and frequencies are right, too.

But there was something missing—something else was needed and Carla has been working on it and she says—and you heard her — she says she found it — and just in the nick!

—SO PUT IT ON, CARLA! MIX SINATRA WITH THE LENSKY AND THE MOZART LACRIMOSA, TOO!

. . .—THERE! . . . —THERE'S OLD BLUE EYES IN THE MIX!

—NOW, CARL, BUILD THE LIGHT CUES TO THE CUE WE THINK WILL BE THE LIGHT TRIGGER

—THERE! GOOD!

—NOW FLASH ON ALL THE ART WORKS AND THE BEAUTIFUL POP FACES OF ALL THE FACES NOT EXISTING ANYMORE. . .

AND WHEN WE REACH THAT LIGHT POINT,
BRING IN THE SNAPPING STRING!

AND LET THE MUSIC MIX AND BUILD AND BRING UP THE VOLUME A POINT. . .

LOUDER. . .ANOTHER POINT

LOUDER. . .AND ANOTHER POINT

. . . NOW! NOW! NOW! IT'S ALL ABOUT TO COME TOGETHER

AND NOW I'LL FRAGMENT OUT.

—BEAM ME UP CARL! BEAM ME UP, CARLA!

AND THEN YOU TWO JOIN ME

—AND YOU, TOO, MARTIN. WHEN IT BECOMES INTOLERABLE HERE FOR YOU—AND IT WILL— JOIN ME

—ALL OF YOU, JOIN ME!

—AND GET HARRIET, TOO

—AND ALL THE OTHER, OTHER-WORLDLY PEOPLE THAT YOU KNOW, AND WE'LL FLOAT TOGETHER WEIGHTLESSLY IN ALL THAT GREAT STAR STUFF, AWAY FROM THE BOTTOM-LINE SHIT DOWN HERE!

—YES, THAT'S IT! THAT'S THE LIGHT CUE TRIGGER!

NOOOOOOOOOOOW! BRING THE SNAPPING STRING CUE IN . . .

—THERE! THE FINAL TRIGGER!

TWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAANNNNNNNNNNGGGGGG!

.....

. . . It didn't happen. Why do you suppose it didn't happen, Martin?

. . .Not quite enough pain?

I must say, I really don't see how much more painful things can get.

—DON'T CRY, CARLA; DON'T CRY, CARL. WE'LL TRY AGAIN. WE'RE CLOSE.

—And you, Martin, you of all people mustn't cry.

—In fact, I feel like laughing! In fact, I think I will —I can't help myself! --

Hahahahahahahahahahaha!—Oh—ah ha!

—Maybe that's what's missing? The humor! Of course! The characters in a Chekhov play are hilarious! Silly! Grotesque! That's what's missing! —Well, CARL, CARLA,

I'M GROTESQUE! SILLY! WE'LL WORK ON THE GROTESQUE ANGLE!

—What's that banging?

Is it the Cherry Orchard being chopped down? HAHA.

—oh. right. It's them! Banging on the doors.

bang. bang. bang. bang.

—Ah! Martin! This is what we'll do—what you'll do for me! I need to—to—

recharge—first. . .for just a bit.

. . .I'll get my cot—wheel it in. . .—like so. Lay down on it. . . .Like so. Close my eyes and take deep breaths. . . .Like so.

And you come in—

. . .and yes, you now have my permission to come in
—and don't worry. . . .The strong light . . .that will spill in
. . .from the doorway. . . won't matter now. . .

so you come in. . .

and you stand by me—by this cot. . .

defiant—very very defiant. . .

and when they get in,

you'll tell them. . .

decisively. . .firmly. . .defiantly. . .

with lots of star attitude. . .

that you regret

—and you can tell them how unfortunate the things of regret are— that you regret, that you cannot—now

—give them the obscene bucks you promised.

If they raise any questions—and they will— you can always say:

"But what is there to do?"

"What can I do?"

And you will see;

they will not be able to respond in the face of that. Because

—and here Chekhov was quite right. . .

when you have said;

"But what is there to do?" "What can I do?"

. . .you

will. . .

have. . .

said it. . .

all.

(A strong shaft of light streams in
and floods Peter Paradise,
on the cot, with light.
Pounding again. Off. Then,
silence)