

VAVILOV'S GARDEN

**ANNA & PASHA**

A sleeping area. Lights are dim. Anna approaches with a lamp. Pasha sits on a cot. Anna is supposed to leave the next day, but she has unfinished business with Pasha.

**ANNA**

It's just me, Pasha.

I wanted to talk to you because ... because--

**PASHA**

You're leaving tomorrow.

**ANNA**

It looks that way. I didn't want to go without ... without trying to explain why I ... Sometimes Pasha, there are only bad choices. Do you understand what I'm saying? Only bad choices.

**PASHA**

And you still have to pick one.

**ANNA**

Yes.

**PASHA**

Even if--

**ANNA**

Even if it hurts people ... or a person. Someone you care about. Someone who doesn't deserve it.

I'm sorry I hurt you.

(he silently accepts her apology)

**PASHA**

Where I come from ... it's like that.

**ANNA**

You mean--

**PASHA**

Only bad choices.

**ANNA**

Do you ... is your memory coming back?

**PASHA**

At first I thought they were dreams. Bad dreams. But now ... now I think they must be real.

**ANNA**

Do you want to tell me?

**PASHA**

I don't--

**ANNA**

You don't have to--

**PASHA**

I don't want you to hate me.

**ANNA**

How could I ever hate you, Pasha?

What is it? You can tell me.

**PASHA**

Promise?

**ANNA**

Yes, I promise.

**PASHA**

I had a little girl.

**ANNA**

You had a--

**PASHA**

Katya. Her name was Katya. She was so beautiful. Just like her mother. Marina.

**ANNA**

Where did you--

**PASHA**

We worked on one of the farms. A k-kol ... kol--

**ANNA**

Kolkhoz? One of the big collective farms?

**PASHA**

That's right.

Marina and me. She got in trouble, you know? They said she shouldn't, but she had the baby anyway. Little Katya. Beautiful, beautiful Katya. Eyes like her mother. She was born right after the harvest.

(another long pause)

**ANNA**

But something happened.

**PASHA**

The farm couldn't grow enough. We were told to grow barley, but it's not a good place for barley. I knew that. Everyone knew that. And besides, the men came later and took most of it away. We were hungry. Everyone was so hungry all the time. Winter was the worst. Then ... Katya got sick. So sick. My little Katya. So small. So ...The angels came and took her in the Spring.

**ANNA**

Oh, god. I'm ... what did you do?

**PASHA**

I couldn't stay there. Not at the farm. How could I stay? I had to go away. Marina, she wouldn't go with me. So I ran.

I thought they'd catch me, but they never did. Maybe they didn't look for me. Maybe they didn't care. I kept running and running. I came to the big city. I tried to hide. I stole food. I slept in the graveyard. I don't remember how I got this ...(he points to the scar on his head) .. or how I fell in the river.

Only that you saved me.

Anyway.

That's what I remember.

**ANNA**

I didn't know.

**PASHA**

But you saved me.

## **DR. GRIVOV & ANNA**

A sleeping area with two simple cots, a chair, and a lantern. Dr. Grivov sits on one cot, reading a book, with Pasha asleep behind him on the other. Anna enters tentatively from the darkness.

### **DR. GRIVOV**

I never know when to sleep anymore. Is it day or night? I've lost all track of time down here in the dungeons.

### **ANNA**

Are we prisoners, then?

### **DR. GRIVOV**

For our sins, perhaps.

### **ANNA**

I do miss the sun on my face. You know?

### **DR. GRIVOV**

I miss so many things these days. Beyond counting.

### **ANNA**

My family.

### **DR. GRIVOV**

A good cigar.

### **ANNA**

Electricity.

### **DR. GRIVOV**

Yes!

### **ANNA**

Bicycle rides in the country.

### **DR. GRIVOV**

Sausages.

**ANNA**

Dancing at the Metropole.

**DR. GRIVOV**

You wouldn't think it, but the ladies were quite fond of my two-step. (off her amused reaction)  
Please don't laugh at an old man.

**ANNA**

No, no it's just ... I find it easy to talk to you.

**DR. GRIVOV**

As do I. Here, let me show you something.

(he slides an album from beneath the cot, opens it, hands her a PHOTO)

This is just after graduation at the Institute. 1910, I think. The handsome fellow in the middle is me. That's the Professor. And the one to the far left is Nikolai Vavilov.

**ANNA**

Vavilov. The Director?

**DR. GRIVOV**

Yes, the very same. He rose quickly after that. A brilliant man. Ambitious, too.

**ANNA**

They were friends, he and the Professor?

**DR. GRIVOV**

Friends. Rivals. You know how young men can be. But together they built this department. I suppose I helped in my own small way.

**ANNA**

So the stories I've heard - are they true?

**DR. GRIVOV**

Which stories? I tell so many I get confused.

**ANNA**

About your expedition with the Director.

**DR. GRIVOV**

Oh, the one to Peru and Mexico? That one is true. (brightening)

I don't know how, but Nikolai convinced me to join him. Oh, my wife was livid! I thought she might leave me, she was so angry. But how could I refuse?

**ANNA**

The Professor went with you, didn't he?

**DR. GRIVOV**

Later. He met up with us in the Sierra Madre, I think it was. We drove from Mexico to Arizona to gather specimens from the local tribes. Then to California to meet with Thomas Hunt Morgan and some old acquaintances. Wait, I have a photograph.

(he swaps photos with her)

That was taken in Pasadena. There's Morgan. We're the ones sweating in the wool suits and ties.

**ANNA**

California! Is it really like they say?

**DR. GRIVOV**

Hot! Blissfully hot. Groves of oranges and lemons as far as you can see.

**ANNA**

Sounds wonderful.

**DR. GRIVOV**

One could easily be seduced. Many were.

**ANNA**

And this other man?

**DR. GRIVOV**

Karpechenko. Yuri Karpechenko. Another colleague from the Institute. He was the first to hybridize a radish with a cabbage. Spent years in America, working with Morgan and his group. (his expression darkens) Until the Director persuaded him to come home. Appealed to his sense of patriotism. No doubt you've heard the rest of the story.

**ANNA**

Dr. Mishkina was there when he was arrested. She's still shaken by it.

**DR. GRIVOV**

Tragic. A good man. An excellent scientist. The whole sorry incident makes no sense to me. (a forced change in mood) You know, you're right. This is what happens when we dwell too much in the past. Looking forward, that's the cure. Progress! Tomorrow is the antidote for yesterday, and so forth.

(as a rallying cry)

One hundred years!

**ANNA**

I've heard the Professor say that. What does he mean?

**DR. GRIVOV**

You see, we have this illusion of control, with all of our schedules. This season. That harvest. The next five-year plan. But Nature ... Nature has its own timetable. And the evolutionary scale is a long one. The Director always said we should plan for the next hundred years, nothing less. He sent report after report to that effect.

**ANNA**

What happened?

**DR. GRIVOV**

They didn't listen. Why would they, with a world full of famine and war? Life is short, and even their *children* will be dead in a hundred years. So why should they listen?

(he places the photo back in the album)

*One hundred years.* Now it's just an empty prayer spoken in dark rooms like this.

## SONYA & PROFESSOR

Major Tikhvin has arrived for an impromptu inspection. As Elena takes him on a tour of the facility, Anna and an increasingly brittle and paranoid Sonya enter.

### SONYA

This is trouble, I know it. What does he want?

### PROFESSOR

Don't worry. One bureaucrat is the same as another. We'll just tell him what he wants to hear.

### SONYA

And what *is* that?

### PROFESSOR

Whatever helps him keep his position, I suspect.

### SONYA

I was there last year when they took Karpechenko. I saw the black vans. The secret police. I watched them drag that poor man down the hallway. The sound of their boots. *Clack, clack, clack* ... like gunshots. And the look on his face! I'll never forget--

### PROFESSOR

You mustn't dwell on it.

### SONYA

He had the look of someone lost, someone who--

### PROFESSOR

There's no use obsessing--

### SONYA

Without this position, there is no ration card. And without a card ... it's worse than Karpechenko.

### PROFESSOR

No one is being dragged out of here, I promise you. This Major Tikhvin doesn't have the power. And why would he care? Why would anyone up there give a damn about what we're doing down here?

### SONYA

You make insignificance seem oddly comforting ... but still--

(Anna pulls a lab coat from a drawer, as Pasha enters, proudly holding a LARGE DEAD RAT by the tail)

**PROFESSOR**

We have a visitor, Pasha! You know what that means? Oh, do get rid of it. Just sit at a desk. Over there. Keep quiet, and read a book.

**SONYA**

This is madness! You can't pass him off as one of us.

**PROFESSOR**

He's not supposed to be here. They'd send him straight to the front. He wouldn't last a day.

**SONYA**

I told you when Anna brought him here off the street ... like some kind of stray. I said he'd be trouble.

(Pasha jokes with Anna as she hands him a book; he dons the lab coat, finds a pair of glasses and tries them on)

**PROFESSOR**

The boy would be dead if we hadn't. Look at him.

Pasha, what did I say?

(Pasha coughs again, then makes a zipping motion across his lips)

**SONYA**

Madness!

Karpechenko wasn't the only one they arrested. Three of his colleagues disappeared the next day. Just like that. Gone.

**PROFESSOR**

I know what happened.

**SONYA**

Because they worked with him. Because they were tainted by him.

**PROFESSOR**

This will only work if we keep our nerve. All of us.

(Sonya glares at Pasha)

**SONYA**

From the street. Like a stray cat.

## ELENA & PROFESSOR

Elena enters, having just attended to an ailing Sonya.

**PROFESSOR**

How is she?

**ELENA**

Resting. She needs food. We all do.

**PROFESSOR**

Man cannot live by bread alone. Certainly not 125 grams of it.

**ELENA**

And here we are ... surrounded by the bounty of the world.

**PROFESSOR**

The irony is not lost.

**ELENA**

No, we're the ones who are lost.

(picks up a pack of seeds, and another)

Shall we have corn soup today? Or peas with potatoes.

**PROFESSOR**

Elena--

**ELENA**

Maybe a barley and mushroom stew.

**PROFESSOR**

I know you don't mean that.

**ELENA**

Then you know me better than I do.

(moves closer)

I wouldn't say it around the others, but are we really expected to make this choice?

**PROFESSOR**

What choice do you mean?

**ELENA**

Please. Don't pretend you haven't thought about it. I know *you* better than that.

**PROFESSOR**

I've thought about little else these past few months.

**ELENA**

We have to be practical.

**PROFESSOR**

How is that?

**ELENA**

Parts of the collection can easily be replaced.

**PROFESSOR**

Elena, don't.

**ELENA**

There's no other way. Not for the next few months.

**PROFESSOR**

I won't have this discussion with you.

**ELENA**

I'm only asking--

**PROFESSOR**

I WON'T! If we start down that road, where would it end?

**ELENA**

We would be alive.

**PROFESSOR**

Do you think I want to die?

**ELENA**

What about the rest of us? We're your responsibility.

**PROFESSOR**

I never asked for this.

**ELENA**

You *know* why he sent you here? To distance himself from you. To make you less of a target. To protect you.

**PROFESSOR**

I realize that now. It doesn't make it easier.

**ELENA**

He didn't send you here to be a martyr.

**PROFESSOR**

Only a fool would choose to be a martyr.

**ELENA**

Exactly. Life is short. There's no need to make it any shorter.

**PROFESSOR**

But the future is long.

**ELENA**

(Elena points to Anna and Pasha) Are *they* not entitled to a future? Look at them.

**PROFESSOR**

You expect too much from me.

**ELENA**

Give me one good reason. Just one, and I'll stop asking.

**PROFESSOR**

I don't know if I can give you a reason. The arguments in my head are abstract.

**ELENA**

Then be prepared. Hunger is not an abstract concept.

**PROFESSOR**

And life is short.

**ELENA**

Getting shorter by the moment.

## **MAJOR TIKHVIN, PROFESSOR, ANNA**

The Major has returned to the underground compound as he promised. He speaks to the assembled group, eager to reassert his authority.

### **MAJOR TIKHVIN**

Moscow reminds me ... again ... that we are in a war. Well, that shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone, should it? And yet they insist on reminding me.

I don't always understand what the Commissar does.

(beat)

Just last winter, he shipped pairs of rabbits to thousands of government offices. Imagine that, thousands of officials opening crates and finding two hungry rabbits and a few simple instructions. The idea was that breeding them might ease the shortage of meat.

Not that there was a shortage of meat, mind you. (a sly smile)

Some people thought it was a bad idea, but it's not my job to question whether the Commissar--

### **ANNA**

The rabbits ... what happened to the rabbits?

### **MAJOR TIKHVIN**

Fair question. Rabbits need a place to live. And greens to eat, which are hard to find in the winter. I suspect many found their way into a nice stew.

### **MAJOR TIKHVIN**

Anna the student. I asked you a question when we last met, but you didn't have a chance to answer. Do you remember?

### **ANNA**

About the process of vernalization?

### **MAJOR TIKHVIN**

That's it. Vernalization. So how *would* you describe the Commissar's groundbreaking work?

Pretend I was a man on the street. A common man. With little education. (he sees Anna look to the Professor) In your own words.

### **ANNA**

Well ... In the North, wheat can only be planted once. In the Spring. The Commissar wanted to find a way to have a second planting. To create a new variety that could survive the winter. By exposing seeds to cold temperatures, he tried to change their genetic make-up. To change Spring wheat into Autumn wheat.

### **MAJOR TIKHVIN**

*Tried?* You said he tried.

The Commissar's reputation was *built* on the success of that idea. Soviet agriculture is based on ideas like it. You sound skeptical. Commissar Lysenko believes that living things can be re-engineered. Change the environment and you can change the organism. Plants. Animals. Even people. Placed under the right conditions, the right *pressure* ... they will change. And they will pass on that change to the next generation.

(his eyes fixed on the Professor)

We will soon have the power to control Nature. And men. Is that simple enough for you?

**PROFESSOR**

Genes change through random mutation and time. They can't be engineered by force. And if they could, I'm not sure it would be proper.

**MAJOR TIKHVIN**

That sounds like religion to me, Professor. You think that God should have control, but not us?

**PROFESSOR**

I think Science should have humility. Not before God, but before Nature. Without humility, we risk everything. Or, we can operate on blind faith, evidence be damned. That's the very definition of religion.

**MAJOR TIKHVIN**

God won't be an issue after a few more generations. Or so I've been told. And if not ...

(mocking, he crosses himself) I appreciate your honesty, Professor. I do. It's a dangerous kind of honesty, to be sure. (turns to Anna)

You should be proud of him. A teacher willing to speak his mind, no matter the cost. A man dedicated to the truth, even if it contradicts the Party.

(a beat; he approaches her)

This is where you make a passionate defense of your--

**PROFESSOR**

Can we not do this--

**ANNA**

No, I don't mind answering. I don't agree with everything the Professor says. He goes too far sometimes. And sometimes he doesn't go far enough. He can be stubborn. He doesn't always listen to me, especially when I disagree with his opinions. But I *am* proud to be his student. You talk about honesty being dangerous, and I guess it can be. But without honesty, there is no Science.

**MAJOR TIKHVIN**

Well said. Then we can all agree that honesty and the search for truth are important. Good!

## PROFESSOR & ANNA

A warm day in June. Anna and the Professor are in a vast vegetable garden in the city. The Major has just exited, having delivered some disturbing news.

**ANNA**

Uhh! I want to strangle that man!

**PROFESSOR**

Try not to make an enemy of the Major. (gentle amusement) ... I used to imagine the sort of woman you'd become. I don't need to imagine anymore. Forgive me.

**ANNA**

For what?

**PROFESSOR**

For underestimating you.

**ANNA**

Never.

**PROFESSOR**

Then for Sonya ... and Dr. Grivov.

**ANNA**

I was thinking about him the other day. I planted some of his potatoes ... you know, the blue ones from Peru. Our little secret.

**PROFESSOR**

Those potatoes are his legacy.

**ANNA**

He found them in a farmer's market outside Cuzco, I think. He loved to tell me about that trip!

**PROFESSOR**

Did he? He may not have told you everything.

**ANNA**

What do you mean?

**PROFESSOR**

It's ... well, he's gone. Does the truth really matter?

**ANNA**

You taught me the truth always matters.

**PROFESSOR**

I was surprised when they asked Grivov to join that expedition. So was he. (he squirms uncomfortably) When I was asked at the last minute, the reasons became clear.

**ANNA**

Reasons? I don't--

**PROFESSOR**

They were worried about what the Director might do ... who he might see. He had friends all over the world.

**ANNA**

The Commissar was worried about Vavilov?

**PROFESSOR**

The Commissar couldn't control him. Not back then. I was asked to monitor his activities. They asked me to spy on my friend. (a derisive snort) Asked? No, I was *ordered*. There was no discussion.

**ANNA**

And Dr. Grivov?

**PROFESSOR**

I believe he had the same orders. Maybe they wanted to compare our reports. I don't know. He and I never spoke about it.

**ANNA**

What did you tell them?

**PROFESSOR**

Nothing they didn't already know. Nikolai kept no secrets. Yes, he met with the Americans. He met with ex-patriots like Karpechenko. So what? He loves his country ... and his work. That's what I told them.

**ANNA**

So you did nothing wrong.

**PROFESSOR**

Don't you see? I was part of their plan. They spent years building a case.

**ANNA**

*You didn't inform on him.*

**PROFESSOR**

You don't know.

**ANNA**

I know you.

**PROFESSOR**

They expected me to betray him. Can you imagine how that feels?

**ANNA**

Did you ever tell him?

**PROFESSOR**

I was ashamed. Then we had a falling-out, and it was too late.

**ANNA**

We've all had to make compromises.

**PROFESSOR**

Yes. Compromises.