

NADIA. I didn't hear anything.

Laughter. He swings her onto his shoulders and puts his arm around MAROUSSIA's waist.

The band strikes up the same tune again, softly.

MOKHOVA. Breakfast! Breakfast is ready!

KOTOV *stands to attention and salutes KOLYA and ANDRUSHYA. So does NADIA, from on high. So does MAROUSSIA, smiling warmly at them.*

KOTOV. What's your name?

KOLYA. KotoV. Kolya.

KOTOV. Kolya. Go and do your duty for our beloved motherland. A soldier must always carry out his orders. But remember, Kolya, who it is that puts the food in our mouths... Yes? Dismiss.

They nod. A lesson learnt. They salute once more, turn on their heels and march off.

The MUSICIANS are leaving, playing as they go. NADIA is waving to them.

NADIA. See you later at the celebrations for Comrade Stalin's airships and balloons!

They wave to her and are nearly gone, the tune lingering a while. The planes roar past, overhead, leaving as they came.

KOTOV. There they go. Beautiful...

MAROUSSIA *puts her hand on his face, tenderly.*

MAROUSSIA. I'm not ready for breakfast. Let's go to the steam hut.

NADIA. Hurrah! The steam hut!

KOTOV kisses MAROUSSIA. They leave, going around the house, as the others are pouring tea and settling at the breakfast table.

Scene Two

Later. VSEVOLOD is draining the dregs of the tea and reading yesterday's Pravda.

MOKHOVA has lost something important and is searching the verandah and garden for it, without wanting to attract attention. VSEVOLOD watches her any time she bends over. He makes her squeeze past him. He pinches her bottom.

OLGA is still in her dressing gown, but is now drying her hair in a towel. LIDIA is sipping tea in her dressing gown.

OLGA. Why do they have to go to that little steam hut, eh? Can anybody tell me?

VSEVOLOD. Mm...?

He's secretly watching MOKHOVA, who is on her hands and knees in the garden, bottom in the air.

OLGA. Vsevolod? I'm asking...

VSEVOLOD. Mm...?

OLGA. What are you looking at?

VSEVOLOD. Yesterday's Pravda.

ELENA enters in a dressing gown and unfinished fur coat.

LIDIA. Ah!

LIDIA applauds ELENA quietly as she does a twirl to show off the coat.

ELENA. It's not finished.

OLGA. What I'm saying is: why does Serguei Petrovich have to take his wife to a barbaric little steam hut when we have a nice bathroom here...? Does anybody know? Elena, you're wearing a fur coat.

ELENA. Ask Nadia. Only little Nadia knows all the Soviet celebrations.

MOKHOVA. Someone has taken all my pills, all my powders, and all my herbs.

MAROUSSIA. Mokhova, are you all right – are you sure you've looked...?

VSEVOLOD. She won't be all right until she gets the full treatment. Listen, Serguei Petrovich, in yesterday's *Pravda* it says... 'Confession is the source of all justice. And –'

OLGA. Vsevolod, ssh, please, none of us wants to hear all this.

VSEVOLOD. I'm just asking Serguei. Serguei? 'Confession is the source of all justice...?' That's what they're saying at these hearings in Moscow. The State Prosecutor himself. What do they mean by that?

Silence. MOKHOVA starts to cry.

KOTOV (*getting irritated*). You're the one who teaches law. Mokhova, stop crying and tell Nadia to come down for breakfast.

MOKHOVA *leaves*.

MAROUSSIA. What's happened to her pills?

VSEVOLOD. I thought evidence was the source of all justice. Or is that an old-fashioned idea nowadays? We still teach it at the university at any rate. I'll have to be careful.

MAROUSSIA (*to the GRANNIES*). Have you hidden them again? Grandmother, have you hidden –?

VSEVOLOD. I was trying to say something important, Maroussia. There have been more purges at the law faculty. They've dismissed a lot of professors.

KOTOV. But not you, Vsevolod. For you, life sails serenely on...

MAROUSSIA. Where are her pills?

KOTOV *holds up his hand for silence. They hear MOKHOVA howling in her bedroom.*

KOTOV. Now Mokhova is howling.

VSEVOLOD. Well, I thought it was an important question, Serguei. A question a man like you might know the answer to.

KOTOV. Why should I know the answer? Why don't we wait for the evidence –?

VSEVOLOD. My point. If Kamenev and Zimoviev have confessed, will we ever hear any evidence? Don't you ever feel like asking yourself what's happening these days?

A beat.

KOTOV. Have faith.

Silence.

VSEVOLOD. Faith. Of course. I can't... Yes, life is serene, of course... in this madhouse.

Silence. He doesn't just mean the dacha. They look at KOTOV, who stares and goes back to his letters.

MAROUSSIA. Mother? Where are her pills?

VSEVOLOD. Oh, for heaven's sake, Maroussia: Elena and Lidia threw her pills into the river!

KOTOV (*quietly*). Vsevolod? Don't raise your voice to Maroussia.

MAROUSSIA *leaves quickly, exasperated, as KIRIK rides into the garden on his bicycle, saluting and ringing his bell.*

KIRIK. Hurrah! Happy holidays, Comrades!

He parks his bike and runs onto the verandah, where he kisses OLGA's hand flirtatiously. Then ELENA, on the cheek. He puts a paper bag on the table: a gift.

Biscuits! Olga. Not dressed...? Hello, Mother. Why is Mokhova howling again?

He helps himself to coffee.

VSEVOLOD. Why do you think, Kirik? We all know what she needs.

KIRIK. Yes! Music!

He takes a disc from his shoulder bag and goes inside. Soon we hear an elegant opera duet playing indoors.

KIRIK *comes back and stands with his coffee. He senses the silence around the table.*

KOTOV. Drinking coffee, Kirik?

KIRIK. Of course.

KOTOV. What – too early in the day for vodka?

ELENA. Serguei, you know Kirik doesn't drink alcohol any more. Never a drop.

Nobody else believes this.

KOTOV. Uh-huh?

ELENA. He made his mother a promise. A solemn promise.

KIRIK *blows her a long kiss. They all listen to the music. Some humming under their breath.*

KIRIK. Serguei Petrovich, you really shouldn't think of drinking as a vice anyway.

KOTOV. No?

KIRIK. No... it's the... what is it...?

He looks to OLGA for help.

The balm of the...?

OLGA. The balm of the tormented soul.

KIRIK. 'Tormented soul.' Exactly, my love!

VSEVOLOD. Tormented soul, eh? Mm. How exactly is your soul being tormented? Existential loneliness?

KIRIK. Vsevolod Konstantinovich, you remind me of Trofimov in Chekhov.

VSEVOLOD. Ah. *Cherry Orchard.*

KIRIK. You and all your friends at the university. Eternal students.

VSEVOLOD. Oh, no. They aren't my friends.

He glances at KOTOV, who looks at him.

'My friends...' as Pushkin says, 'My friends are no more or far away...' And which of us can truly say any different...?

The music has ended. They sit in silence. MAROUSSIA comes in and sits with coffee.

MAROUSSIA. I've calmed her down. I've promised her she can come with us to the zoo.

LIDIA. The zoo. Again.

MAROUSSIA. Nadia loves the zoo.

OLGA. Maroussia. When I was your age we never bothered with zoos and the like; we had the opera twice a week. Do you remember? Twice a week we saw great ballets and wonderful concerts. Remember, Maroussia?

MAROUSSIA. I was little, Mother.

OLGA (*important to her*). But you can remember...?

MAROUSSIA *doesn't reply. She sips her coffee.*

LIDIA. Ah, what days...

VSEVOLOD. What nights. Life was... full.

ELENA. And sweet... The chamber music we used to hear in this very house... before...

She glances nervously at KOTOV who appears to be reading letters.

them with a flourish and a bow. General rejoicing at the return of a much-loved old friend.

OLGA. It's Mitia! Mitia!

KIRIK. It's Mitia! Of course it's Mitia! I recognised him straight away!

ELENA. Mitia! He's come back to us!

MITIA is being hugged and having his hand shaken and his back slapped by all except MAROUSSIA, KOTOV and NADIA.

LIDIA. My God, Maroussia... he's come back...

OLGA. I should've guessed, Vsevolod, because you know what he said? What Maroussia's father used to say to me when she was just a tiny girl: 'Lather will make Maroussia's skin so soft...'

VSEVOLOD (*wagging a finger at him*). Dmitri Andreevich, I must say to you... this is no way to arrive –

But MAROUSSIA stops his mouth and stands smiling at

MITIA. She's got over the shock and is pleased to see him.

But there's trepidation too.

MITIA. Vsevolod Konstantinovich. I completely agree with you. As always. This was no way to arrive... home.

He and MAROUSSIA are facing one another again.

MAROUSSIA. Well. Hello. Mitia.

MITIA. Hello. Maroussia.

He holds out a hand, palm up. She puts hers onto it. They play the childhood game of making a tower of hands. Then he kisses her hands. It's a physical shock to her. Silence.

KIRIK (*to KOTOV*). Serguei. Mitia has come back.

KOTOV. Yes.

MITIA kisses MAROUSSIA on both cheeks. She's uncertain how she feels about this.

MAROUSSIA. This is Serguei. My husband. This is the famous Mitia. The one my father was so fond of.

LIDIA. His best student.

KOTOV. Kotov.

MITIA. Delighted.

KOTOV. Same here.

They shake hands.

MITIA. Though we've already met, of course.

KOTOV. Yes.

MAROUSSIA. You have? When?

MITIA. Very briefly. A long time ago. And this is...?

MAROUSSIA. Our daughter, Nadia.

MITIA. Nadia. Call me Uncle Mitia, will you?

He kisses her hand.

NADIA. Hello, Uncle Mitia.

OLGA (*beaming*). 'Uncle Mitia'...

VSEVOLOD. Kirik...

KIRIK (*staring at MAROUSSIA*). Mm?

VSEVOLOD. Your mouth is hanging open again. Most unattractive!

MITIA spots MOKHOVA at the back.

MITIA. Mokhova... Mokhova...

She comes forward, bashfully.

MOKHOVA. Dmitri Andreevich...

MITIA. My immaculate Mokhova. Tell me. You are still immaculate, aren't you?

Much laughter. She's embarrassed but not hurt. She's charmed, like everybody except KOTOV. He climbs onto the piano stool.

MITTA. Yes. I play the piano for a living.

A beat.

VSEVOLOD. So...? Where have you - ?

MITTA. Marousse, could you give me a glass of water, please?

MAROUSSIA *pours a glass of water.*

VSEVOLOD. What I mean is... all these years, Dmitri Andreevich... Why did you never...?

OLGA. Vsevolod. Sssh. Coffee? Where's the coffee?

MITTA. What? Why did I never... what?

MAROUSSIA *absent-mindedly drinks the water herself.*

VSEVOLOD. Nothing.

Silence. Enter NADIA.

NADIA. Uncle Mita. Tea with jam? Or coffee with milk?

MITTA. Coffee with jam.

NADIA. You cannot have coffee with jam! Coffee and jam don't go together.

OLGA. Nadia...

MITTA. Who says they don't?

NADIA. Ha!

MITTA. Ha! How old are you, Nadia?

NADIA. Nearly ten.

A beat. He looks at MAROUSSIA.

MITTA. Nearly ten. Fancy that.

MAROUSSIA *starts drumming her fingers on the glass.*

Nearly ten years old. Olga Nikolaevna.

OLGA. Yes, Mita...?

MITTA. One day, when Maroussia was nearly ten... and I was... seventeen, the Bolshoi was performing *Lakmé* and her father Boris Konstantinovich was conducting. During the overture she said to me, 'I want to pee.' I said, 'Marousse, it's only just started.' She said, 'I want to pee.'

KOTOV *arrives and stands quietly to one side, observing and listening.*

People all around are shushing us up. Do you remember, Maroussia?

She is in reverie, still tapping her nails on the glass.

MAROUSSIA. No... I can't remember...

MITTA. Of course you do. So I took her out. She says, 'I can't go alone.' Now what do I do? I can't go in the ladies' without starting a riot. So. I take her in the men's room. Who is there, just getting ready to leave...?

They are enjoying the story. MITTA picks up his trumpet and starts playing some Rachmaninoff.

KIRIK. Tchaikovsky!

MITTA. Rachmaninoff! He says to me, 'Who is the father of this beautiful boy?' And I say, 'Boris Konstantinovich.' And he says, 'Then tell Boris Konstantinovich to buy him some trousers.'

Laughter, not least from KOTOV. MITTA drops into the rocking chair, near to MAROUSSIA.

NADIA. That's Pappa's chair!

KOTOV. Nadia, shame on you. He's a guest.

NADIA. You never let Kirik sit there.

MOKHOVA *brings in coffee.*

KOTOV. Nadia?

She looks at him. He puts his finger to his lips. NADIA sits at the table and eats a cake. The GRANNIES also eat cake with their coffee. VSEVOLOD has the newspaper again.

VSEVOLOD. Dmitri...?

MITTA. Mm...?

VSEVOLOD. In yesterday's *Pravda*... they're talking about this trial and they say 'Confession is the source of all -'

LIDIA. Vsevolod.

MITTA. Who is talking...?

VSEVOLOD. The State Prosecutor, of course.

ELENA. Vsevolod...

VSEVOLOD. I was only going to ask Dmitri Andreevich his opinion...

OLGA. Mita? Coffee?

MITTA. No. Thank you. I asked for water.

He looks at MAROUSSIA. They all do. Her tapping continues.

OLGA. Maroussia? Is there something you want?

MAROUSSIA. Me? No.

OLGA. What's that then?

MAROUSSIA. This? It's a glass.

She places it on the table. Silence, except for NADIA and her cake. Eventually:

KOTOV. It's time for our swim!

NADIA. Hurrah! A swim!

KOTOV. Why don't we all go? Nadia! Costume! Kirik!

KIRIK. Yes, General?!?

KOTOV. Swim!

KIRIK (*saluting*). Yes, General!

NADIA, KIRIK and KOTOV leave.

VSEVOLOD unfolds the paper and reads. *Silence.*

MITTA. So. I can see that everything is just as it used to be.

Silence.

ELENA. Everything changed, Mita.

Silence.

LIDIA. The house... used to be ours. Now... we are allowed...

Silence.

MITTA. Maroussia.

She looks at him.

MAROUSSIA. Mm?

MITTA. May I have a glass of water, please?

She stares at him. She leaves abruptly.

End of Act One.

ACT TWO

Scene One

On the riverbank. The lights reveal – on a big blanket – MAROUSSIA in a bathing costume, lying on her front, reading a book.

MITIA is sitting nearby, smoking, barefoot.

NADIA's dolls are near to MAROUSSIA.

KOTOV is standing, looking offstage towards the river.

MOKHOVA is sitting on her own blanket, with crayons and paper. She is drawing the hand that was kissed.

LIDIA, ELENA and OLGA are dozing/reading in deckchairs, with parasols to protect them from the strong sun.

MITIA takes an interest in MOKHOVA's drawing.

MITIA. Mokhova, why are you drawing your hand?

She smiles shyly.

MOKHOVA. A man... kissed it.

MITIA. Ah. You have a lover? No hope for me now...

MOKHOVA. No. Just the stranger who arrived just before you, Dmitri Andreevich.

MITIA is a little suspicious.

MITIA. What stranger was this, Mokhova?

MOKHOVA. He said he'd lost his way. He asked who lived in the dacha.

MITIA. I see. Did he give his name?

MOKHOVA (*wisfully*). No.

MITIA. What did he look like?

MOKHOVA. I don't know. Handsome. He wore a cap.

Silence. All is peaceful, until:

TANNOY (*deafening*). Today at 5 pm in The Storming of the Bastille Park, there will be a performance of works by Communist composer Miniaev –

It's so loud it wakes the GRANNNIES up with a jolt. They are disoriented for a while.

– in honour of the sixth anniversary of the construction of Comrade Stalin's balloons and airships. Admission free. Happy holiday, dear Comrades!

MITIA. Happy holiday!

MAROUSSIA. Serguei...? Can you see her?

KOTOV. Yes.

MAROUSSIA. The sun, Serguei...

KOTOV. I'll take her bonnet to her in a minute.

MAROUSSIA. The sun's too strong, Serguei...

KOTOV. Let her watch the Pioneers. She's happy. She can't wait to grow up.

MAROUSSIA. Mokhova...?

KOTOV. I'll do it, Marousse. Just be patient.

He stoops to pick up the bonnet. He's near MITIA now.

Mitia.

MITIA. Serguei.

Silence.

KOTOV. You're a very good singer. I'd heard it mentioned before. What was that you were singing?

MITIA (*wasn't it obvious?*). Puccini.

DRIVER. 'Undesirable guests. Over the last two weeks there have been, in the Moscow area, several sightings of fireballs. These undesirable guests disappear as fast as they arrive – but only after damaging the property and the physical bodies of the workers.' Think. The physical bodies. That means these fireballs have been crashing into people, burning them to ashes. 'These –'

He can't read the next word. He offers the paper to her, pointing.

MOKHOVA. 'Phenomena.'

DRIVER. 'Phenomena'?

MOKHOVA. Mm.

DRIVER. 'These – phenomena – are caused by a well-organised diversionary programme on behalf of imperialist terrorists.' Think.

He stares at her. She stares at him, wondering what next. Silence. Suddenly, tears well in his eyes.

What's your name?

MOKHOVA. Mokhova.

DRIVER. Mokhova. I'm lost, Mokhova. I don't know where to go any more. Do you think anybody can help me?

A siren shatters the air.

TANNNOY. Gas warning! We are under attack!

The riverbank fills with the PIONEERS and their adult OFFICERS, wearing gas masks and carrying stretchers.

Civil Defence and Pioneers will protect you from the Imperialist foe! Happy holiday!

OLGA, ELENA and LIDIA come back in a hurry as martial music plays through the Tannoy system. They are having gas masks foisted on them and PIONEERS are trying to get them to lie on the stretchers so they can practise. The GRANNIES push them away.

LIDIA. Get off me!

OLGA. Leave us alone!

They're trying to dry themselves.

ELENA. Mokhova! Don't let them put you on a stretcher! Did you see Mitya? He jumped into the river beside Maroussia! Fully clothed! Who is your man friend?

The DRIVER is completely terrified. He runs away.

MOKHOVA. He's not my man friend! I'm a maiden.

OLGA. The whole district knows that, Mokhova. Get off me! What gas?! How can there be gas out here?

MOKHOVA comes face to face with two PIONEERS wearing gas masks. They are hideous and frightening, like zombies with elephant trunks. She screams and runs away.

MAROUSSIA runs on, wet through.

MAROUSSIA. Hey! I'm injured!

OFFICER. You're injured?

MAROUSSIA. Yep.

OFFICER. Bad?

MAROUSSIA. Yep.

OFFICER. Get on this stretcher.

MAROUSSIA. Yep.

She grabs her novel and lies on the stretcher. They put a gas mask on her. She throws her novel down as they carry her away.

MITIA arrives, fully clothed and dripping wet.

OLGA, ELENA and LIDIA are leaving with their things.

MITIA. Take me! I'm a dead body.

OFFICER. Are you hurt?

MITIA. Quite badly.

But – in the house of Sirob the Magician... no more laughter, no more sunny days... and all the rest. It all ended.

MAROUSSIA. Why?

MITTA. Because war came to the land.

MAROUSSIA. How could that be helped?

MITTA. That doesn't matter. The thing is, that Iatim left home and went to war. And all that time, in the trenches, in the hospital, all that time in all the land he crossed while the war was being won and lost, every day, every single day, he thought about the big house, the garden, the verandah, the river... everything. That's all he could think about.

NADIA is asleep. The others are listening intently as the tone of the story has changed. MITTA stands abruptly.

Want some vodka, Kirik?

KIRIK. Ern...

ELENA. He doesn't drink.

KIRIK. Well... special occasions.

MITTA. Special occasions. Just so. Why don't you open us a bottle?

KIRIK does so. And pours two glasses.

And so. For five years, Iatim was a soldier. He roamed far and wide in his benighted country. Far and wide. Good health.

He downs his drink in one. KIRIK does likewise and pours them a second. He offers one to KOTOV, who shakes his head.

And all the while he thought of that house where he had been so happy. Good health.

He drinks. KIRIK drinks then goes to pour another for MITTA who covers his glass with his hand. KIRIK hesitates, then pours himself another. ELENA is glaring at him. He

shrugs at her as if saying, 'What else was I supposed to do?' MITTA lights a cigarette.

Then one day – after five years – he came back. Five years. His parents had died during the war. The war that couldn't be helped. So he had nowhere to go – except to the kind magician's house. He went. It was winter, and apart from the snow, he recognised nothing of this world he had been so happy in as a boy. It had changed completely. Only the big house was there like before. All of a tremble, he tapped on the door.

He drums his fingers on his glass, like MAROUSSIA did earlier.

A young girl answered. Iatim had never seen anybody so beautiful.

He stands the dolls so they face each other.

Ever. Even though he had travelled a lot. 'Who are you?' asked Iatim. 'Yassouram,' answered the beautiful girl. 'Good Lord, not the same Yassouram who slept on her father's knee when he was teaching me music?' 'Yes, I am she. Come in. We've been waiting for you for a long, long time, even though Pappa is very ill now.'

He knocks one doll down.

Iatim was astounded. He couldn't say a word. Not a word.

MAROUSSIA pours some vodka for herself with a shaking hand. She knocks it back.

They fell in love. Of course.

KIRIK. Of course.

ELENA (shutting him up). Kirik.

Silence.

MAROUSSIA. But how did the story end? All good stories should have a happy ending, shouldn't they?

MITTA. Well. No. Actually. Sometimes they can't.