

NIGHTLANDS

A POST-SOVIET ARCTIC STORY IN TWO ACTS

Perhaps in centuries to come, man will go into the Arctic as in biblical times when he withdrew into the desert, in search of truth.

-Christiane Ritter, A Woman in the Polar Night

Notes for staging

I am of the personal belief that directors may choose to adapt a text in any way they wish and should act with as much autonomy as we would allow any other artist. That said, this text has been written with the topography of Pyramiden in mind. Specifically, the large prosaic space of the social house, the former cultural palace and one of the few Stalinist buildings in the settlement.

Nightlands is a site-sympathetic piece of theatre and could be staged outside traditional proscenium arch theatre spaces and instead using experimental spaces; black box theatres, ruined or near-ruined spaces.

This play was written during the Covid-19 pandemic, in the months between December 2019 and November 2020.

This version has been changed in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Character list

SLAVA - 24 years old, from Chelyabinsk, Russian Federation.

SASHA - 58 years old, from Tula, Russian Federation.

*Lines said by **SLAVA ACTOR** or **SASHA ACTOR** are to be delivered out of character*

ACT ONE

1.

A performance space, present day, with an audience (if such things are possible).

Enter ACTORS who start warming up and exchange a few words of encouragement before SLAVA ACTOR steps forward and, as if reciting a monologue for an audition, begins to speak in-character.

SLAVA: I was fifteen when the USSR collapsed. One of my memories of that time comes from watching the flag being lowered, seeing that on the television on Christmas Day, 1991. I'm sitting on the carpet. I can feel that texture on my hands. My mum is crying. The world I knew is gone. My country, the country of my mother, and her mother before, is gone.

My earliest memory is of my mum. She is sitting in the garden, folding clothes. I can feel that memory, even if it's not really true. One day, I'll be gone. No one will know my story, how I came from a little house in Chelyabinsk to the edge of the Arctic. But that's the thing isn't it? Nothing lasts forever.

SLAVA ACTOR breaks character and acknowledges the audience.

Line? Sorry, I forgot--

SASHA ACTOR: You were doing so well there, do you want to go back to the start?

SLAVA ACTOR: No, there's no point. Shall we just start?

SASHA ACTOR: Okay.

SLAVA: ACTOR (To audience): Can you think now about the earliest memory you have?

Pause.

Hold it in your mind. That's what the root of the story is tonight - memory. How do we perceive the same past? Do these memories even belong to us- does that make them less authentic?

SASHA ACTOR: Yes. But you have come to see theatre. We're actors, we don't tell you the truth, so that's fine. We tell you stories that might have some truth in them, but we're artists and we like to be...

SLAVA ACTOR: Artistic. Especially when it comes to truth.

SASHA ACTOR: And that's just something to remember. This isn't history, it's a story. We're both getting paid to do this.

SLAVA ACTOR: So tonight, I will be playing Slava, a woman from the Russian Federation, formerly the Russian Soviet Republic within the USSR, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

SASHA ACTOR: And I will be playing Sasha he's from... the same place.

SLAVA ACTOR: And while we may not be playing real people, we are talking about a real place, with a real history.

SASHA ACTOR: Which we encourage you to look at on the internet, after the show, and talk about it to your friends-

SLAVA ACTOR: The place is Pyramiden, Svalbard, beyond the Arctic Circle. A land that lies north of Norway, just before you reach the North Pole. The year is the dark and ancient past of... 1999, where two strangers are meeting for the first time.

2.

Social House, Pyramiden, sunset. October 1999

Enter SASHA, carrying large red banner, a rifle slung over his shoulder, he stops and dumps the banner in the middle of the space.

SLAVA: Thanks for that.

SASHA: Won't take long. I had meant to get this up in time to welcome you, but instead it can be a joint exercise.

The two begin to find the right spot to hang up the banner, inspecting the walls and windows.

SLAVA: How is the sun going down? It's barely gone three.

SASHA: It'll get earlier from now on and then the dark will be here to stay.

SLAVA: What do you do when you're not here?

SASHA: I'm a writer and part-time translator.

SLAVA: How many languages do you speak?

SASHA: Five.

SLAVA: Seems like too many.

SASHA: Some of them are more useful than the others. Of course my first is Russian, then Ukrainian, Latvian, Azeri. I also speak Norwegian, but that's for work.

SLAVA: Azeri?

SLAVA: They speak it in Azerbaijan.

SLAVA: Ah. I bet that's very handy in the Arctic. You could talk to the polar bears

SASHA: A funny one. The company sends me a funny one... Here. Put it up here.

SASHA goes to get a stepladder and sets it out. He motions for SLAVA to do the honours. She stands there, looking at it, then realises that it's a job for her. They work together to put the banner up.

SLAVA: Do I have my pick of rooms?

SASHA: I would pick from the second floor and higher, in case you get any wildlife trying to break in. As for your work; maps, specialist equipment, tools and such... That's all here.

They finish securing the banner across the back wall of the space.

SLAVA: What is it meant to say?

SASHA: Can't you read? It says "*Peace upon earth!*"

SLAVA: Yeah, I know, but why? What's it mean?

SASHA: I think they meant it in a more general sense, peace between us all, between you and me. It's heritage. We have to maintain it.

SLAVA: How many times have you had to use that thing?

SLAVA points to the rifle on the rack.

SASHA: A couple of times this year. A few close calls. Thankfully, the bears know what's good for them.

SLAVA: You think they're scared of you?

SASHA: Terrified.

SLAVA: So, if you don't mind me asking, where are we? Exactly?

They both seem confused.

SASHA: What?

SLAVA: I know, we're on Svalbard - that's Norway. And Pyramiden, where we are right now, it's Russian. Who owns the land?

SASHA: What do they teach you in training?

SLAVA: That the Arctic is complex, that it's changing, that it's dangerous. They didn't explain the treaty very well.

SASHA: We're in Norway. Svalbard belongs to Norway, this town is leased by the company, which is state owned by Russia. It's all because of the Svalbard Treaty.

Beat.

SLAVA: What? Sorry... Once more. It's just a bit strange, I feel like it shouldn't work.

SASHA: Let's imagine that you have an orchard, yes?

SLAVA: There's no trees on Svalbard. They don't grow here.

SASHA: But let's imagine there are trees. You have an orchard that grows fruit--

SLAVA: Apples, my orchard grows apples.

SASHA: Yes, okay, so you have your apple orchard. All your neighbours want apples - your American neighbour, your British neighbour, your Swedish neighbour and your Russian neighbour.

SLAVA: Does this mean I'm the Norwegian in this story?

SASHA: Unfortunately, yes. You know that you can't exactly say no to all your neighbours, who have lots of guns, so you decide that everyone can come and have apples... and study the apples--

SLAVA: If they leave all their guns outside.

SASHA: Exactly. That's how this place works. Demilitarised international treaty territory.

SLAVA: And everyone gets along?

SASHA: Sometimes. Most of the time. The people here lived in peace, and tried to build an ideal socialist society for the workers...

SLAVA: And now they're all gone.

SASHA: But I like it here. It's nice, isn't it?

SLAVA: What?

SASHA: The fact that we're alone.

SLAVA: I suppose. I don't know if I'll be good enough conversation to last the whole winter.

SASHA: I have been living here for a long time, people come and go, I'm mostly by myself. It'll be nice to have someone around for the polar night.

SLAVA: See when you're on the mainland?

SASHA: Yes?

SLAVA: Do you miss this place sometimes?

Beat.

SASHA: Always.

3.

SLAVA (*To audience*): I always knew that there was a whole world out there. A world that I would never get to see. It would exist on the television; shapes of lives I could not live, happy Americans, sunshine, and *Coca-Cola*. It was a dream world, a million miles from Chelyabinsk - the city I grew up in.

There is something beautiful about escape, isn't there? I have this dream sometimes; in it I can fly up and see the rise and fall of the Arctic. I can see a hundred-million years of it; this big white flower atop the globe; all blooming and collapsing, again and again, like the beating heart of the world. And I'm something more than just a person. It's nice to dream. To have dreams. Even if they can't be real.

4.

Social House, Pyramiden, sunset. October 1999

SLAVA and SASHA standing in front of a fading mosaic of polar dawn.

SASHA: Where did you say you were from again?

SLAVA: Chelyabinsk, the Urals.

SASHA: You're a long way from home. What brought you up to Svalbard?

SLAVA: Same as you, the money is good.

SASHA: It's more than just the money though, isn't it? I mean, look at this place! There's nowhere else like it, not anymore.

SLAVA: It's different.

SASHA: They didn't use money here. The housing, the food - free! They didn't know how good they had it.

SLAVA: If it was so good then why are we the only people here?

SASHA: It was all down to the company. The people who lived here didn't get a say. Too expensive to keep the town open. There was a meeting a couple years back then boom – everyone leaves. Most go back to the mainland. It was a different world by then. New flags, new borders.

They were *Stakhanovites*, heroes of labour, best miners in the Soviet Union. They brought their whole lives with them. Over a thousand people lived here. It had its own swimming centre, a cinema, its own sports team...

SLAVA: A sports team? Who did they play against?

SASHA: The Norwegians. It was part of the cultural exchange program. They would come up from Longyearbyen, or Tromsø, a long way to travel just to be beaten. I don't suppose you went to Longyearbyen on your way up?

SLAVA: No, it was from Murmansk, to Barentsburg, to here.

SASHA: And what did you think of our last colony? Sleepy old Barentsburg?

SLAVA: Strange town. They still have the sign up that says “Our goal - Communism!”.

SASHA: Ah, it’s a classic. They have the same statue of Lenin that we do.

SLAVA: I bought something there. Hold on, you’d like it.

SLAVA goes to a bag laying in the corner of the room and pulls out a red t-shirt with English writing on it. She shows it off.

SASHA: What does it say?

SLAVA: “Back in the USSR!” Like the song. It’s cute, isn’t it?

SASHA: Uh... yeah.

Beat.

SLAVA: They had this little church in the town. It’s very beautiful.

SASHA: Don’t tell me you’re religious?

SLAVA: No. Are you?

SASHA: No. Opium of the masses.

SLAVA: Right... My mother was, later in life.

SASHA: Where do you think that comes from?

SLAVA: Needing people. That’s what it was for her. She couldn’t be alone.

SASHA: But not you?

SLAVA: No.

SASHA retrieves a small set of photographs of varying sizes and decay, captured artefacts of memory left behind by the residents. He takes great pride in showing them to SLAVA, flipping through them each quickly.

SASHA: See these - the people that lived here. I wonder if they miss this place, what they had here was special. They believed in Pyramiden.

SLAVA tries to take them to look closer at the images. SASHA pulls them away. Pause. SASHA pours two glasses, offering one to SLAVA.

Let's drink. To the people of Pyramiden - wherever they are now.

SLAVA reluctantly takes a glass, joining the toast. They drink. Beat. SLAVA reacts with disgust, SASHA doesn't flinch.

SLAVA: Shall we talk about the job?

SASHA: It's quite simple, really. You patrol the settlement for wildlife, or scavengers, protect the company property, and so on. You need to record your observations in the daily logbook. It's around here somewhere...

SASHA gestures vaguely to a stack of books, it's somewhere in there, supposedly.

SLAVA: Doesn't seem like a job for two people. Doesn't even seem like a real job.

SASHA: A lot could happen out here, it's a dangerous place.

SLAVA doesn't seem to share the opinion, she seems unimpressed.

SLAVA: Nothing is going to happen.

SASHA: You know, there are no native people on Svalbard. There was no one before explorers turned up and started killing the animals and digging up the earth. No one lived here for millions of years. You and me, all this? We're just guests.

SLAVA: I've had the training, I know the rules. A job like this comes with hazards, but that's why I have this.

SLAVA stands, taking her own rifle from the table and examining it.

SASHA: First shot is the warning, fire into the air if it comes to that. It usually works. I wouldn't worry, Sasha will protect you. It's part of my job, looking after new blood.

SLAVA: Right.

SASHA: You want to say goodbye already?

SLAVA: There's nothing more to say.

Beat.

SASHA puts his hand out. SLAVA shakes it reluctantly.

SASHA: Peace upon earth, Slava. I am looking forward to getting to know the real you.

5.

SLAVA ACTOR: *The real you.* Oh, interesting.

SASHA ACTOR: Don't tell me you're stopping the show again?

SLAVA ACTOR: Why not?

SASHA ACTOR People haven't come here for any of that funny business. They want straightforward drama that follows the rules of basic storytelling, that asks no difficult questions, and that has an interval so they can get another drink, and a big finish so they know when to clap.

SLAVA ACTOR: Well, we need to set up the next scene anyway.

SASHA ACTOR: Yes, yes, I get it.

Beat.

Some place though, isn't it? The mad setting, all up there, in the Arctic. And it's a real place?

SLAVA ACTOR: Yep. A real place.

SASHA ACTOR: And you can go there?

SLAVA ACTOR: It's a time capsule tourist thing-my now. Like Chernobyl. It has a gift shop.

SASHA ACTOR: So, all of this stuff that's happening, that happened there then?

SLAVA ACTOR: Just come over here and help me with the telly.

They lift a large television into the space and set it down on the floor. SLAVA ACTOR looks at the screen and remarks:

She watched her country fall apart. They didn't even get a proper democracy.

SASHA ACTOR: You know that democracy doesn't just end overnight, right? It's incremental. In Russia today, they still act out the ritual of democracy, but the meaning, the accountability, it isn't there.

SLAVA ACTOR: There is something alluring about it, though. The trick autocrats play. They say it's trading freedom for security. As if it's that simple.

SASHA ACTOR: As if it's *ever* that simple.

6.

Pyramiden, polar night.

SLAVA is sitting by a cassette player listening to music, an old version of Moscow Nights, the tape worn with use. SASHA enters and listens too, standing at the edge of the room.

SLAVA notices him and stops the music.

SASHA: That was nice--

SLAVA: Thanks. It helps me think.

SASHA: That came out in 1955 - I can remember what that time was like.

SLAVA: Wow, you're old.

SASHA: Thanks very much. People think it's a sad song, but I think it's optimistic, it feels so much a part of De-Stalinization.

SLAVA (*Sarcastically*): Yeah, write a song, that'll show Stalin.

SASHA: Why do you like it then?

SLAVA: I like the melody. My mum used to sing it. It's not my sort of thing.

SASHA: Ah, you are a fan of the new stuff? The rock and roll?

SLAVA: Sure. "*The rock and roll.*"

Beat. SASHA sighs, frustrated with his colleague.

SLAVA lights the space up some more; candles and lamps illuminating the two figures from below.

I was thinking about what you said earlier. About how we are guests here.

SASHA: This place is an exception in history, it's unique.

SLAVA: An orchard.

SASHA: Sorry?

SLAVA: You called it an apple orchard before, when we were putting up the banner.

SASHA: Ah. Perhaps it's not a good thing to generalise a complex historical treaty like that. It misses out the details.

SLAVA: Like?

SASHA: Well, people have been living here for centuries before the treaty; fur trappers, whalers, then miners.

SLAVA: You know a lot about this place.

SASHA: I made my life here. How couldn't I? You see it and you're hooked. You see it and you're hooked. Amidst the rolling peaks of sunlit snow shaped through countless seasons. The glacial meeting place between the ageless and ancient, of man and nature. How could I not belong here? Can you give me your hand?

SLAVA seems hesitant, but reluctantly gives in, offering out her hand. He flattens her palm out.

Here, where your pulse is. That's home. Think of it like a map, like Europe. You travel up, and up, past the end of the land, the spine of the world, and further across the water, over the ice. Then you see it. The mountains shaped like arrows pointed at the throat of the sky. That's us right now. Top of the world.

SLAVA pulls away from him.

SLAVA: So it is home?

SASHA: Yes.

SLAVA: You could have just said that... Tell me about your real home. Where you're really from.

SASHA is suddenly defensive.

SASHA: Why do you want to know about that?

SLAVA: So far you've got to ask a lot of questions. It's only fair I do the same.

SASHA: I am from Tula. It's south of Moscow.

SLAVA: I know where Tula is. What's it like there?

SASHA: It has been a long time since I have been back. I don't know if I'd even recognise it. I suppose you must have heard all about it. A big industrial city like that.

A beat. He chooses his words carefully.

To my recollection, it was a beautiful place. We all had work, you see. It was a hard life, yes, but it meant something. Steel, coal, textiles and the like. Things you could stack, things could hold in your hands and measure in output. It could be quantified and quoted, and your manager would commend you for it if it went above a certain level. Maybe “beautiful” isn’t the word for it, but it felt safe. Ordered. In the summer, we would take trips to the Black Sea, it was the flat country, you know? The steppe and that. All along Crimea there were these beaches of pale sand and water as cold as hell. Yes, it was a beautiful life, in its own way. It was a tough place, but it had beauty. The laughter, good food, the fresh cool air at night. It was all there, it just needed to be seen.

Pause. SASHA leaves.

SASHA smirks, then nods. He takes his rifle and leaves. SLAVA is left alone. The telephone, tucked away at the side of the room, begins to ring. SLAVA is alarmed and first waits to see if SASHA will return to answer it. When he doesn’t re-appear, she answers it herself.

SLAVA: Hello?

VOICE: *Eta Barentsburg.*

SLAVA: Sorry?

VOICE: This is Barentsburg.

SLAVA: Oh -- This is Pyramiden. Slava speaking.

VOICE: Good evening Pyramiden. What is your situation?

SLAVA: It’s fine. We’re fine. Week one we had no sightings of wildlife. Week two we had reindeer. I think we’re now in week three?

VOICE: Week five.

SLAVA: Uh-- Right. Yeah. Week five. Sorry.

VOICE: Anything else?

SLAVA: Nothing to report otherwise.

VOICE: And you still don’t feel guilty?

SLAVA: What?

VOICE: For leaving.

SLAVA: I'm sorry--

VOICE: --I'll send a helicopter in a few weeks time to deliver more supplies. Don't expect it till after the New Year. Weather warning is in place. High winds, low visibility. We will contact you again when necessary.

SLAVA: Uh... Understood.

VOICE: Take care, Pyramiden.

The call ends. SASHA enters.

SLAVA: Do any of these work?

SLAVA nudges a wrecked TV with her foot, maybe long ago it worked but now it has been cannibalised for parts.

SASHA: The people that lived here were pretty smart. Nothing was wasted, everything could be recycled into something else.

SLAVA: So that's a no?

SASHA: When something breaks you can't just throw it away and buy another, you need to learn to fix it.

SLAVA rolls her eyes and goes to inspect the television.

SLAVA: Did you have a television?

SASHA: My family was far too poor for such things.

SLAVA: I did.

SASHA: Not much point in you having one, you didn't live through the highlights. Sputnik and Gagarin. Khrushchev. Great TV moments. The classics.

SLAVA: I caught the repeats. I can remember sitting on the carpet, the feeling of the fibres. You know the roughness, where you rub your hands till they get numb and you can feel the static?

She sits down, looking ahead, past SASHA, towards memory.

I watched three funerals on the television. Three dead leaders. Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko. One after the other, only a couple of years apart. You could see it in the faces of the men on the television; all the flowers of the revolution were wasting away.

SASHA: You know what it was like back then. When the leader is sick, the country is sick.

SLAVA: And what if the leader is dead? don't have to be a genius to work that one out.

SASHA: I like to think this place goes beyond the mainland, beyond the politics of the Party, and the men who lead it. Here was something more hopeful, true to Lenin. What I wouldn't do for this place to be filled with life again... So many things could still be done. What is still needed is that spirit to fix things.

SLAVA: That's what I believe in, that things can still be fixed, that democracy, that Russia, can be put back together.

Something about SLAVA's words irritates SASHA.

SASHA: And how has that been going so far?

SLAVA: Hm?

SASHA: Your project, that dream: democracy. How is that going?

SLAVA: I mean, you know...

SASHA: Know what?

SLAVA: You know what it's like. I don't need to talk about it.

SASHA: Maybe you do.

SLAVA: What are you getting out of this? Hm?

SASHA: I just want to hear about it.

SLAVA: I saw most of it on the television. I saw the tanks in Moscow, President Yeltsin at war with his own parliament, and still no one could afford anything...

SASHA: That was in 1993?

SLAVA: Yes. There was no work. If you worked for the government, like a lot of people, they sometimes didn't pay you for months. What we earned was earned at the markets; people selling everything, from wedding rings to furniture, only we sometimes we didn't make enough money. There were hungry nights where we wouldn't eat. It was hard then, hard to imagine a future.

SASHA: You were young.

SLAVA: I was.

SASHA: You could have got married to someone rich!

SLAVA scoffs at the comment.

SLAVA: I was 17, I thought I knew what the world was like, but I didn't have a clue. At night we would sometimes light fires outside, on the wasteland belonging to an old tyre factory, and my friends and I would burn our red scarves, and our red badges, and our little Lenins, all into the fire. We all seemed to think that we didn't have to be defined by where we had come from, that we had broken away from the past. We were proud of ourselves for it.

SASHA doesn't take the bait. He judges her in silence.

It felt like we were dancing in the ruins of the world. Dancing and dancing and not caring. It felt like it was all ours.

SASHA: Strange... Sounds like you had nothing.

SLAVA: Yes, but it felt like we would soon have everything. Perhaps you had to be there at that time. Oh, how we cursed it all, our history, our leaders. Thank you *Perestroika!* Thank you *Glasnost!* For all the pain you gave us.

SASHA: And your friends, what happened to them?

SLAVA: My friend Dima would join the army. He ended up dead, killed in Chechnya. Masha, my best friend, she's now in Estonia, works in a hotel and sends money back when she can. The others stayed and waited for the money to come in - but it never came. We got *Exxon*, we got *Adidas*, but we didn't get rich. The money was always somewhere else. I'd be stupid not to feel betrayed. There we all were... dancing together. I still get angry just thinking about it.

Beat. SASHA moves towards the bottle.

SASHA: Drink?

SLAVA: No.

SASHA: Rude.

SLAVA: It isn't, I'm just saying no.

SASHA: Would you have me drink alone, like some kind of alcoholic? Come. Let me get you one.

SLAVA: I'd really rather not, at least not right now.

SASHA: Why?

SLAVA: It's not the sort of thing that needs a justification. I just don't.

SASHA: Okay, but now I am interested. What did I do? Have I upset you? You wanted to talk about this.

SLAVA: No—it's not... You've been perfectly good company--

SASHA: --Thanks very much.

SLAVA: I just think it's a mistake sometimes to depend on it. We drink too much.

SASHA: Do we?

SLAVA: As a culture-- not you and me specifically.

SASHA: If it bothers you that much then we don't have to.

SLAVA: No, it's not-- It's like, we spend so much of our adult lives pissed. There's a lot to be said about that. Why do we do that?

SASHA: Fun?

SLAVA: Are you having fun when you drink?

SASHA: Escape then. Gives you time away from the rest of the world. Polar night inside your head, just yourself, and the warm feeling. Yes. Escape. That's it.

Beat. SLAVA sighs. SASHA pours himself a glass.

SLAVA: It was a terrible life. Back home. We had no one but each other. I miss them still. I loved them.

Pause. There is understanding between them. SASHA brings a glass to her.

SASHA: Here.

SLAVA slowly takes it. She wipes something from her eyes, ashamed by it.

SLAVA: I'm sorry.

SASHA: Why?

SLAVA: I've never told anyone that. How it felt to grow up there, how it felt to leave.

SASHA: I'm glad you told me.

SASHA holds SLAVA's shoulder.

SLAVA: Do you want to dance?

SASHA (*Embarrassed*): No...

SLAVA: I can't dance alone.

SASHA: It wouldn't be appropriate.

SLAVA: Come on.

SASHA: No.

SLAVA: You can't make me dance alone.

Reluctantly, SASHA joins SLAVA and they dance together until the music suddenly stops.

ACT TWO

7.

ACTORS break apart and there is an indication that they have left character.

SLAVA ACTOR: Sorry. I know I need to stop doing this but there's something I need to say. We know how this ends, right? What these feelings accomplish, and how they are used to make something unforgivable.

SASHA ACTOR: It's like what he said. People need a story. Even if it's not true. Even if it's a lie.

SLAVA ACTOR: Ugh, enough of this post-truth shit. I'm sick of it. The truth exists. Not everything is some story. There are real events, things that happen-- and cannot be dismissed.

SASHA ACTOR: It's feelings that shape the world. Memories and feelings. And you're right. We do know how this ends.

SLAVA ACTOR: Someone came along in 1999 to "sort it all out". You know who he is. He's who you think of when you think of Russia today. I don't even need to say his name. You know who I'm talking about.

8.

Pyramiden, polar night. Sometime later.

SLAVA sits by the dead television. She's writing in the company ledger. She hears footsteps and looks up, seeing SASHA enters, carrying a flask of mystery liquid.

SASHA: Can't sleep either?

SLAVA: I guess I haven't adjusted to it yet. Not sure how I should feel. I did dream, but it was strange... I was in a garden. I can't remember it clearly. Just this feeling.

SASHA: Sounds like a memory.

SLAVA: It felt so real.

SASHA: Well dreams are the realest parts of us. None of the pollution of reality.

Beat. He offers her the flask. She refuses with a wave.

SLAVA: Sasha...

SASHA: What?

SLAVA: Don't you feel lonely here?

SASHA: Sometimes. Back home I am just a person in a crowd, one of millions. You lose yourself living like that. Here, I know myself.

Beat.

Worry not, comrade. Some coffee will set you right. Chase these thoughts away.

SASHA leaves and returns with a larger, more suitable flask. This one does contain coffee. He pours her a cup and hands it over.

...I understand a little of what you're feeling. It's nostalgia. I feel it too. Memory hurts the most because it's impossible to go back. You must live despite it.

Pause. They sit together for a moment.

SLAVA: It's hard to live sometimes, isn't it?

Beat. SASHA thinks of what to say.

I dreamt that this place was different. That nature was changing... All the tundra was covered with trees, and it felt like home. All the ice was gone and I lived here. And I was happy.

SASHA is amused by the idea of it.

SASHA: That's quite the imagination you have. It's one of the things I like about you.

SLAVA: Thanks.

SASHA: A vivid imagination is the key to greatness - like Tolstoy, Ilya Repin... Stalin!

SLAVA: Stalin? Come on. Stop that. Don't say things like that.

SASHA: Like what?

SLAVA: Thought you weren't a fan--

SASHA: He's a complex man, he won the war--

SLAVA: He killed millions--

SASHA: --You take the bad with the good. He built all this! Only he had the vision to see it. He was strong and that's what we need now.

SLAVA: And what? That's going to sort everything out?

SASHA: We need someone who doesn't play by the rules.

SLAVA: Oh, well why even bother with laws, why bother with rules or human rights?

SASHA: I'm not going to get political, let's just calm down. No politics. That's a new rule.

SLAVA: You started it. You brought it up. Come on, tell me more.

SASHA: I-- Well... These ideas you're talking about are borne from the west, the antithesis of our place in the world. All they do is slow us down, get in the way. We should not scrape to kiss the feet of some weak-willed Europeans

SLAVA: *We're European.*

SASHA: Yeah, but not like that! Not like *them*. A strong nation has a right to defend its interests.

SLAVA: So what's the plan?

SASHA: What?

SLAVA: What's the big plan? To make Russia strong again? Let me know.

SASHA: Come now, let's not argue--

SLAVA: --Because you're ready to fight for it, aren't you? What with your dodgy leg, and your love of drink?

SASHA: The people - the people will fight.

SLAVA: Ah, right, the people.

SASHA: Our Russian world.

SLAVA: Hm.

SASHA: Those who have been separated from us by the dissolution and suffered under the capitalist reforms! We must return the lands that were taken from us. Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova---

SLAVA: --Speaking as someone who has done all that suffering, I don't think invading Moldova is going to fix anything--

SASHA: These breakaway provinces will soon realise their mistake.

SLAVA: You don't care about the people, do you? Not really. Only if it suits you.

SASHA: In the future, the world will not be divided as it was. Capitalist and communist. No. Things will be different.

SLAVA: Like what? Since you have all the answers? Man versus machine?

SASHA: Liberal capitalist democracies fighting capitalist dictatorships. Only the strong survive in such a world.

Silence. They sigh, breaking apart from the confrontation. SASHA takes out a cigarette and begins to smoke.

Ah, now I have upset you.

SLAVA: You haven't.

SASHA: I have. Stupid. Should not have said those things. Never talk about politics. That's the rule.

Beat.

I blame Gorbachev. Him and his cabal ruined the country. *And Yeltsin*, the drunk. Puppets of the west, all of them.

Sasha pauses. He thinks of something that makes him laugh dryly.

It's funny... I used to live in fear all the time. I grew up scared, afraid of the world ending. A nuclear war with the Americans. Mutually assured destruction.

SLAVA: It didn't happen.

SASHA: No, it didn't. But my whole world still ended, just not in the way I thought it would. Now I'm without a country.

Beat.

I belong to Svalbard now, here in Pyramiden.

SLAVA: It must be nice then. To have that feeling, to belong somewhere. Even here.

SASHA retrieves glasses.

Are you back to drinking from glasses now?

SASHA: What can I say? I'm bringing civilisation back to this wasteland. It's what we're good at.

Beat. SASHA pours out two drinks and hands one over to SLAVA. The two stand together.

SLAVA: What shall we drink to?

Beat. SASHA thinks.

SASHA: To the future of Pyramiden. To the Russian people.

SLAVA: --And to never coming back here again.

Beat. They drink. SLAVA is starting to grow numb to it. SASHA looks at her, his courage now up, his words now a little slurred.

SASHA: You know... You are very beautiful...

SLAVA: Fuck off.

9.

The characters leave, the actors stay. There is an indication that the action has taken a pause again. SASHA ACTOR takes a wedding ring out of his pocket and puts it on in preparation for the next scene.

SASHA ACTOR: ...Everyone wants to talk about him. To sympathise with his *unique Russian-Soviet soul*, his batshit essays on European history. How many times have we heard that we must seek to understand him, listen to his *legitimate concerns*. What about the concerns of the people who live in fear every single day because of him?

SLAVA ACTOR: You know, he's a singer?

SASHA ACTOR: Sorry?

SLAVA ACTOR: He sings.

SASHA ACTOR: That's got to be a joke.

SLAVA ACTOR: It's not. I've got a video of it.

SASHA ACTOR: Show me the clip.

SLAVA ACTOR: Alright.

SLAVA ACTOR takes out their phone and searches for the video they are discussing. A video of Vladimir Putin singing 'Blueberry Hill' at a charity event in 2010.

There he is.

SASHA ACTOR: His voice is so high. "*Blueberryji heel...*"

SLAVA ACTOR: But he was what people thought they needed. When we did notice him, it was as a joke this internet celebrity president who rides horses shirtless and fights bears with karate. In comparison to our leaders, he looked strong and exciting.

The music begins to distort itself wildly. The sound of bombings in Chechnya, tanks in Georgia, the invasion of Crimea and jets over Syria. The rising sound of a resurgent power.

No one stopped him after the war in Chechnya, the invasion of Georgia, the annexation of Crimea, the waves of political assassinations, or the war in Donbas. Just like that, an unknown KGB officer became one of the most powerful men in the world, destabilising countries at will and in control of the world's largest arsenal of nuclear weapons - and no one really cared until it was too late to stop him.

The music, the bombs, the jets, it all builds to a crescendo - then silence, followed by the sound of the wind

Pyramiden, Polar night.

The night of the storm fills the town. Battering the buildings, hammering the windows, encasing the settlement in steep snowdrifts. It is clear that time has passed, but it isn't clear how much. SASHA is crouched in the corner, clearly working on something out of sight. SLAVA enters from patrol, carrying her rifle. She sees him.

SLAVA: Sasha... What are you doing?

SASHA reacts poorly and immediately covers his work, taking his own rifle in hand and standing up.

SASHA: Nothing.

SLAVA: You were doing something just there.

SASHA: I wasn't. Go away.

SLAVA: What's your problem?

SASHA: Sorry. You scared me.

SLAVA: What, you thought I was a bear?

SASHA: Yeah.

SLAVA: A talking bear that knows your name and has my voice.

SASHA: Piss off.

SLAVA: I'm sorry I interrupted your alone time.

SASHA: Just tell me how the patrol went - talk about something else.

SLAVA: Not good. No visibility in the storm. No sense in going back out till it breaks. The generator is broken.

SASHA: Yes I noticed. It's bad news, storms like this. Could be days before it breaks. Weeks.

SLAVA: Weeks?

SASHA: Best get comfortable.

SASHA sits down at one of the chairs and pats the one opposite, inviting her to join him. There is a moment of reluctance. SLAVA relents and comes over. They sit and, without speaking, they decide it is time to drink again.

SLAVA: Are you going to tell me what you were doing?

SASHA: Looking over notes. I'm writing a book.

SLAVA: What's your book about?

SASHA: My life. It's about memories.

SLAVA: Who is the ring for?

SLAVA points to SASHA's hand - a silver band on his ring finger.

SASHA: Let's not discuss that.

SLAVA: You didn't wear it before.

SASHA: I know. Reacts badly to the cold.

SLAVA: Why didn't you tell me you were married?

SASHA: I'm not anymore. She died. Cancer.

Beat.

SLAVA: I'm sorry.

SASHA: She was a natural scientist. She would have liked it here.

SLAVA: I can imagine.

SASHA: Have you ever seen death? I mean... up close?

SLAVA says nothing.

A long time ago, I saw someone die on the ice. I found him after a storm, like this one. The polar bears had got to him. Took his legs. He took an hour to die. Maybe he didn't see the warning signs - the eyes, you can see their shimmer. You don't look for white fur in a blizzard, look for the eyes. You can see two dark marbles looking back at you. In those shapes there is death; a howling, terrible death. No meaning, not good or bad. A simple instinct to kill you. And then once you see that... the meaning of death changes. It's the end, yes, but it's a neutral thing now. At

some point, as that fool lay bleeding in the snow, he crossed into that, the invisible border. That is death to me. Just another land, a place we've not yet been to yet.

SLAVA doesn't know what to say.

The telephone rings again. SASHA doesn't react. SLAVA goes to answer it. SASHA leaves.

SLAVA: *Privyet?*

VOICE: This is Barentsburg. Report your situation, Pyramiden.

SLAVA: There's a storm. I'm sure you know that-- Will it affect the supply run?

VOICE: Most likely if it holds.

SLAVA: If you could send someone else too, Sasha is starting to act strange. I think he needs a break.

VOICE: Someone else? Who did you say was with you?

SLAVA: Sasha. The one who met me when I arrived.

VOICE: You are on a solo contract. *He met you when you arrived?*

SLAVA: You don't know him?

VOICE: We don't.

SLAVA: But how can that be - what is he doing here? Is he a scavenger?

VOICE: Must be the case.

SLAVA: No, he's not like that at all, he knows the place, he isn't a tourist--

VOICE: -- You'll need to detain him. We'll send a team to come and collect him.

SLAVA: When will that be?

VOICE: Hard to say. The governor's office has issued a no fly order and the icebreakers are mothballed.

SLAVA: What the fuck am I supposed to do?

VOICE: Your duties are stipulated in your contract-

SLAVA: What will happen to him?

VOICE: That is a matter for the police. I suspect he'll be deported back to the mainland. Goodbye, Pyramiden. I know you'll make the right choice.

The call is terminated, SLAVA slams the phone down repeatedly, tense and angry. The space is lit with electric bulbs, bright and yellow. SASHA walks up slowly, carrying a small box of tools.

SASHA: That should be the generator all sorted again. You alright?

SLAVA turns, surprised, wary of SASHA.

SLAVA: I'm fine. It's fine.

Beat.

SASHA: I was thinking we could play another game, or something. Just while we're stuck in here together.

SLAVA pulls her rifle from her shoulder and takes aim at him.

SLAVA: Drop your weapon, right now.

SASHA is confused, thinking it's a joke.

SASHA: Slava--

SLAVA: Listen to me. Do what I say. The rifle, on the ground, right now.

Slowly, with great hesitation, SASHA places the rifle on the ground.

SASHA: Tell me what this is about...

SLAVA: You're going to have to start giving me some answers.

The ACTORS reconfigure the space once more. Again, there is an indication of more time passing.

SASHA ACTOR: So, answer me this then. In the end, was all this inevitable?

SLAVA ACTOR: It's hard to say. You can't deal with a man like him. Don't play his game. He wants to be treated like a statesman, when he isn't. He's a killer. A right horrible bastard.

SASHA ACTOR: What he's done. What he's doing... What can you say about a man who orders a genocide?

SLAVA ACTOR: What's clear is that, when you push past everything, all the politics, you get to what's in here. It's about memory, a perception of Russia, and where it ought to be. It is what lives inside *his* mind, it's intensely personal and it doesn't begin with NATO or America. There's much more to it than that.

It's *Maskirovka*. The art of creating chaos to mislead your enemies. There is genius in it really. The soft power of nations, the money, the influence, is so much more effective than tanks and planes. In reality, this war, Vladimir Putin's War, has been going on for decades. That is what became of Russia. A country that took the parts of the past that were useful and threw away all the useless ideology. After all these years, the truth is clear.

SASHA ACTOR: And that is?

SLAVA ACTOR: That a country can be turned into a weapon. Because it's never a trade of freedom for security. That's just what they say to make it sound reasonable. There is no security in a dictatorship. There is only terror.

Pyramiden, Polar night.

SASHA is resting against a wall. SLAVA is sitting at the opposite wall and has her rifle pointed at him, alert and waiting. SASHA's rifle is placed to the side, far out of his reach.

SLAVA: You're going to stay right there. If you move then I'll shoot you.

SASHA: What's this about?

SLAVA: You tell me, "Sasha".

SASHA: Did you hit me? You can't do that. Did you actually hit me?

SASHA staggers to his feet, clutching his head.

SLAVA: Stop talking! You've done nothing but lie to me this whole time. You don't work for the company, do you?

SASHA: Slava...

SLAVA: You're a freeloader, a parasite, living here on company property, pretending to be one of us but you're not.

SASHA: I was here long before you were. This is my home. I don't need permission to live in my home.

Beat.

SLAVA: So that's it then.

SASHA: That's it.

SASHA: So, what happens next?

SLAVA: The company is sending someone to collect you.

SASHA: And then?

SLAVA: They'll probably want a word. Trespassing, property damage, illegal settlement.

SASHA: I live here, I've always lived here.

SLAVA: Not legally. The law is the law.

SASHA: I built my whole life here. I can't go back to... To what?

SLAVA: It's not my concern. Keep still.

SASHA: You plan to keep me here till they arrive? Like this?

SLAVA: I could shoot you in the leg but we've just been over what happens then.

SASHA: Trust the company to hire such a vicious creature. You're a cruel and vindictive woman.

SLAVA: You're so full of assumptions, like you know me.

SASHA: Oh, I know you.

SLAVA: You don't know the first thing about me.

SASHA: I know you. I've always known you.

SLAVA: Tell me why you stayed.

SASHA: Grief. It can imprison you if you let it fill your world.

SLAVA: Always the poet. You've been here... For years? How long?

SASHA: You know, I can't even remember exactly.

SLAVA: Yes, you can. Tell me.

SASHA: What difference will that make? I might as well have been here forever.

SLAVA: And what did you do? Miner? You don't look like a miner.

SASHA: Miners are loyal to coal, you idiot. They go where the coal is. Pyramiden isn't special in that. The economics, the mine, that's the cover story. What was being built here was utopia - a whole new way of organising society.

SLAVA: So, you're what? A Communist Party official?

SASHA: I have been very honest about my beliefs.

SLAVA: Less so about other things--

SASHA: You weren't exactly honest either. You should have told me I was dealing with a psychopath.

SLAVA: You had no right to ask me for anything.

SASHA waves to the bottle on the table.

SASHA: Can I have a drink?

SLAVA: What did I just say?

SASHA: The truth is you are a bully at heart. Maybe you might appear weak, might even say you're kind, cosmopolitan, *modern*, but under all that there's a cold, cold heart.

SLAVA: I can find something to cover your mouth, you know?

SASHA: It's comforting, in a way. To know that your generation have the strength for violence. May you use it to rebuild our country.

SLAVA: Do you really believe this nonsense you're saying?

SASHA: Oh yes. You must believe in something. If you believe in nothing then you end up like...

SASHA gestures vaguely in SLAVA's direction.

I choose to believe in our destiny. Even now, even today.

SLAVA: It's gone, it's not coming back.

SASHA: Thank you for reminding me that our country fell apart and plunged millions into poverty. Need to look on the bright side, at least we have jeans now.

SLAVA: Listen to yourself, it's just made-up nonsense. You have to let this go. None of it is real.

SASHA: My father fought and died in the Great Patriotic War. I was 4 years old. That's real. That happened. The people who built this place, they lived and died for something bigger than themselves.

SLAVA: So what?

SASHA: *So what?* Is that it then? The world only belongs to those who live in it?

SLAVA: Yes, obviously.

SASHA: I suppose we owe nothing to anyone then? What about the people who fought for our way of life?

SLAVA: They're dead. Why does that matter?

SASHA: It's easy for you to shrug off sacrifice when you believe in nothing!

SLAVA: You've never once actually asked me, or even listened to what I've had to say. There are other alternatives, you know? We need to engage, be open to the world.

SASHA: We don't need the world.

SLAVA: Look at Svalbard, it's an example of how things could be, of how we could all learn to live together. One day all the ice will be gone. What will this place look like then? There will be; these waist-high forests of little conifers. There's something really beautiful about this place... about what it means for the world. It reminds me that peace is possible.

Beat, broken by SASHA laughing. SLAVA glowers at him.

SASHA: You're funny.

SLAVA: Can you keep it to yourself for once? Stop trying to explain the world to me, you've been away from it too long. I actually know what's been going on out there, I've lived it.

SASHA: Are you excited to go home?

Beat.

Thought not.

SLAVA: I'll be glad to be shot of you, for a start.

SASHA: Think about this, what do you have left to go back to? Some horrible job at a toxic chemical factory? Chelyabinsk has loads to pick from.

SLAVA: I will find a way; things will get better.

SASHA: Stay.

SLAVA: What?

SASHA: You don't *have* to go anywhere. You can stay here with me.

SLAVA: And do what?

SASHA: Live here. Outside their world - here in Pyramiden. How do you think I've been living here? I have a place, it's not on the layout. It was built by state security for their officers to monitor the settlement. It's a series of hidden rooms.

SLAVA: State security? Like, what? Like the KGB?

SASHA: Yes. *Like the KGB.*

SLAVA: Nice try.

SASHA: It's true. Do you think they would build a settlement so close to the west - inside the territory of a NATO member - and not have a security interest? This place has always been for political and military purposes. The state does not care about coal, or culture, or peace - it was to project strength. This was a model village, Slava, do you think that security was not part of that model?

SLAVA: How do we get to this place?

SASHA: I can't tell you. Not until we sort this out and you let me go, maybe give me my rifle back. Then we can talk about it.

SLAVA: I can't just walk away from...

SASHA: From what? No one cares if you live or die. You came here because you know there is nothing left for you back home.

SLAVA: You don't know that.

SASHA: There's a type of person that is drawn to Pyramiden. You are that type, same as me. We don't fit into the world out there, we hate what it does to us.

SLAVA: I can't just exit society. You want me to live here... to live with you?

Beat. SLAVA lifts her rifle.

What happened to your wife? She's not dead, is she?

SASHA: She's dead to me.

SLAVA: Oh! That's not the same thing! Sit!

SASHA is forced into a seat at gunpoint.

SASHA: She's gone. She lives in the west. A new partner. A new life. She left me.

SLAVA: Can't imagine why. You seem like such a nice guy. Well-adjusted.

SASHA: Yes, but it shouldn't matter between us.

SLAVA: *Us? What?* There is me, there is you, and there's all the problems that you've caused. Why would I want to live with you? I hate you. And I'm not about to turn my back on freedom.

SASHA: The freedom to do what? To fill in a little box once every few years, vote for your favourite millionaire.

SLAVA: What is your alternative? Sit in some hidden room with you, living in denial, eating tins of cold fish and drinking boat fuel?

SLAVA: It's giving up.

SASHA shrugs, questioning her.

SASHA: Giving up on what? *The Russian Federation? Oh no! How will we go on?*

SLAVA: It's a democracy

SASHA: It's an *oligarchy*.

SLAVA: Because of your generation, who grew up with the one-party state!

SASHA: Our country has been made *weak*. Weak and pathetic. What is your solution, you personally, what will you do to change it?

SLAVA: I can emigrate.

SASHA coils with laughter.

SASHA: There it is! *Oh, there it is!* No responsibility, something is broken then it is not your problem! You're shameless.

SLAVA: This is bullshit. You've been tricked. Our nature is to be seen as cheap. Our clothes, our buildings, our lives. Cheap and disposable. I'm sick of it. I'm alive, I deserve the same wealth and the same freedom as anyone else.

SASHA: No, of course, you're a twenty-first century person, with no culture or community or identity, all you want is money.

SASHA springs from his seat, advancing on her. SLAVA hesitates.

You're too weak to stand up for yourself. Too weak to take back our power. You gave it all away. All that freedom... You can't eat freedom, you can't pay your rent with it. Democracy isn't Russia, it isn't who we are.

SLAVA: Get away from me! STAND BACK!

SLAVA takes her rifle and slams the end of it against SASHA's stomach, he collapses, sprawling on the floor in agony.

Pause. SASHA lies on his back, gasping, working his way through the pain. SLAVA goes to the table and pours herself a glass. She drinks and waits.

Silence punctured by SASHA taking ragged breaths on the floor.

SASHA: You're so full of hate. You're like me. Look at you... How did you work it out? Who I am - what did you see?

SLAVA: They told me. I said your name and they told me you didn't work for the company.

SASHA: They told you?

SLAVA: The company. On the phone.

SASHA: The phone?

SLAVA: Yeah - the one to Barentsburg.

SASHA: You're serious? Slava, that phone is broken. It's been broken for years.

SLAVA: What?

SASHA tries to laugh. It hurts too much.

SASHA: You've cracked, you've completely cracked.

SLAVA: This what you do, isn't it? You get inside people's heads? You wind them up and make them lose it?

SASHA: Look-- Just look at the wire.

SLAVA follows the wire from the back of the phone. It's been cut.

SLAVA: You did that!

SASHA: Been like that for years.

SLAVA: But I heard it ring, I've been speaking to them.

SASHA: Who is *them*?

SLAVA: I don't know, the man, the voice on the other end-- Barentsburg.

SASHA: There's not been a working line to Barentsburg since they abandoned Pyramiden.

SLAVA: I'm going to fix it.

SASHA: Oh, this is brilliant.

SLAVA starts to throw on more layers, as if she is about to leave.

SLAVA: I'm going to *fix it*. Call for help.

SASHA: And say what? "*Oh help! I've attacked my colleague and one of the phones is broken*"... There's no one coming, Slava.

SLAVA: There's a phone outside, down at the pipeline, I'll get to it and try that one.

SASHA: In this weather? Are you mad?

SLAVA: Well I'm not staying here-- someone from the company will come-- I'm going now.

SASHA: You don't want to be out there right now. You don't know what's out there.

SLAVA: I need to talk to someone.

SASHA: We're talking.

SLAVA: I want to talk to *someone else*.

SASHA: There is no one else!

SLAVA: I don't even know who you are!

SASHA calls out after her, crouched low on the ground.

SASHA: You know already! You know me because you feel the same way. That grief in your heart. Everything I had here, everything that they took away from me, they took it away from you too.

A wave of realisation passes over SLAVA.

SLAVA: ...You're right.

SLAVA walks over to him, her rifle slipping to the floor.

You've been right this whole time. We're the same.

SASHA: Yes! It's true. That's what I've been trying to say. The same blood, our blood! You wouldn't kill your countryman would you, you wouldn't kill your brother?

SLAVA: No. We're the same.

SASHA: That's what I've been saying—

SLAVA: No, no. We're the same. The same blood, the same mind... the same person. Which means that...

SASHA: What?

SLAVA: You're not really here.

SASHA: *Ah.* Ahhh... Took you long enough to figure that one out.

SLAVA: Oh God. *Oh no-no-no-no-no*— This is insane.

SASHA: You're jumping to insanity because you can't imagine the alternative. That the world is controlled by invisible destiny, that the soul of our people calls us to take it all back—

SASHA leans forward, gripping her close.

You have to kill the dream inside you-- You cannot reform a system that seeks to control your mind! You cannot even begin to articulate another world because it cannot exist in your head -- *WHY?* Russian capitalism is identical to American capitalism. The West has occupied your mind with its products and people and markets, and you are its prisoner. And here we have a chance to leave it!

SLAVA: I need to think-- stop talking!

SASHA pulls her up, they rise together.

SASHA: *It's in your blood! You are a daughter of the Great October!*

SLAVA: I don't care about the Great October—

Strike. Throw. SASHA is knocked to the ground, SLAVA races over and slams her boot into his stomach.

I don't care about Pyramiden! I don't care about the fucking Soviet Union, or any of it! *It's not my life!*

SLAVA reaches up and tears down the peace banner, she throws it at SASHA.

They are just words-- and they mean nothing to me. We could have made something better than this. But you *can't*, you couldn't let go.

SASHA looks at the banner, then at the empty room around them.

SASHA: You think I wanted to live in this ruin!?

He grabs the banner.

What has replaced it? The shadows of strange new flags, and poverty. The home we've lost!
Our Russian World. Hurts to even speak.

SASHA rises slowly, his stance uncertain. They both catch sight of SLAVA's rifle on the floor. Both move to take it – SLAVA is quicker, she backs off, weapon pointed.

Give me the gun! Now!

SLAVA remains fixed

SLAVA: No.

SASHA: Give me it. I need this. What else can I do with all this pain? There is nothing else-- don't you see? We built something so beautiful here...

He presses a hand to his face, flushed with shame and sadness. Then an anger rises up within him, all full of passion.

It's like I'm still there. I can see it. I can see lines of all these red banners running along the streets, and our people are all living here, like nothing has changed. I want to go to them. It's warm. The sun is full against the sky and I'm sitting by that statue of Lenin outside, reading something, waiting for someone and come meet me--

SLAVA: I'm leaving. I can't stay. You can remain here, in the past – and die alone. But I'm going. There's a whole world out there, Sasha.

SASHA: Not for me! NOT FOR ME! You can't leave. I am a part of you. You and I together, two parts of something beautiful, a Russian-Soviet soul. Please. There is still time.

SLAVA lifts her rifle towards SASHA, ready to kill him. A flicker of doubt in her eyes.

Go on then. Do it. Please. I don't blame you. I would do the same thing.

SLAVA is shaking. She lowers the gun.

SLAVA: I am not a part of this. Not anymore.

SLAVA turns and walks away. SASHA tenses at her defiance.

SASHA: *Come back! Please!*

...

YOU NEED ME!

Choral music.

Blackout.

END