

Maksym Kurochkin's
FIGHTER CLASS "MEDEA"

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

(1994)

Translated by John J. Hanlon

© 2004

Both the play and the translation were revised in November 2004 during a Studio Retreat at the Lark Play Development Center in New York City.

For publication and production rights, contact Mr. Hanlon at

(203) 558-2636
john.hanlon@aya.yale.edu

Characters:

Uncle Kolya – a sergeant in the Ukrainian army

Sergei – a private in the Russian army, perhaps with a Russian accent

Peter – a private in the U.S. army

Woman – a fighter pilot

None of the people sitting in this hall existed before the events described here.

The remains of an anti-aircraft battery, just subjected to bombardment. The dust is settling. The only anti-aircraft gun remaining intact is turned over on its side. Amidst the chaos of exposed weaponry, ammo boxes, gravel, helmets, backpacks, dead bodies and other war debris stands a man in the dirty field uniform of a Ukrainian army sergeant, holding his ears.

Sergeant. What duh hell vas dat... What are you monsters doing?

The Sergeant weeps, and his weeping turns into coughing. From under a pile of broken brick and plaster comes Sergei. He spits out the dust caught in his mouth. He begins to cough. Sergei and the Sergeant cough simultaneously. The Sergeant walks up to Sergei and helps him get up. They stand embracing. After a while, the Sergeant sits on a box and lights up. Sergei unfastens the fingers of a hand protruding from under a pile of gravel and takes from it a can of Coca-Cola. He drinks. Suddenly the hand begins to grab at the air spasmodically. The Sergeant and Sergei rush to shovel away the pile of debris and drag Peter out from under it. Having greeted Peter with feeling, Sergei puts the open can of Coca-Cola in his hand and goes with the Sergeant to search for survivors. Peter drinks from the can, staring blankly at a fixed point.

Sergei (from behind the wreckage). These have had it.

Sergeant (returning and sitting next to Peter). Same over der. Lard for duh soup.

Sergei. They didn't even get a chance to pozhrat their grub.

Peter. "Pozhrat," is that to eat in Ukrainian?

Sergeant. "To eat, to eat...". Segeika!

Sergei. What?

Sergeant. Can we organize 150 milliliters?

Sergei. Easily. As long as it didn't get smashed.

Sergeant. How could it have been smashed? It's not egg after all, it's vodka.

Sergei. Not vodka, but gin.

Sergeant. So let it be gin. After such misfortune I would drink even motor oil. Take a look over der, behind crates.

Sergei brings over from behind the crates a bottle of gin. All three men take out knives and, picking up empty cans of Coca-Cola that are lying around everywhere, make little drinking glasses. Sergei pours gin into seven glasses. The Sergeant, having sliced some bread, puts a piece atop four of the seven glasses.

Sergeant. We should remember our dead. So that dey vill do same by us.

Peter. Will they remember us?

Sergei. Of course they'll remember. As you can see.

Sergeant. May earth be soft down for our lads...like feather-bed.

They drink, and take a bite of bread. They sit down. Sergei opens a large container of canned meat. They eat.

Sergeant. How did ve miss dem?

Sergei. It's not surprising. They fly at the lowest possible altitude. Could *you* have spotted them?

Sergeant. Then vhat are ve doing here, devil take it?

Peter. How can we possibly track them when none of the instruments work?

Sergeant. "How"? I tell you how! Vit eyes! Whose vatch vas it? Who vas conducting air surveillance?

Sergei. Him.

Peter. Me and Fat Boy. We were watching carefully, but it's impossible to spot anything. You can't wage war like this.

Sergeant (*springing up*). What duh – have you gone out of mind? Who do you tink you are, guy? Please you repeat what you said.

Peter. I merely wanted to suggest that without weapons it's extremely difficult to do battle with modern fighters of that class.

Sergeant. So you're a smart one, eh? Our veapons don't suit you. You are needing instruments. You vant to do battle from bunker? You vant to drink beer and make var? You vant only to push buttons?

Peter. I don't drink beer.

Sergeant. Vell then your sranaja Coca-Cola.

Peter. Why "sranaja"?

Sergei. Why "their"? Coca-Cola is a purely Russian invention.

Sergeant. Oh, I sneeze on your damn "Russian inventions"!

Peter (*agitated*). What is he saying? Coca-Cola was created in America. It's our national pride. It's older than the Constitution.

Sergei. And I suppose television was also invented in America? And the airplane?

Peter. Absolutely in America.

Sergei. Well I oughta –

Sergeant (*loudly*). Detachment, fall in! Straighten up.... Eyes right, attention! At ease. Men!... I'll tell you vhat. I'm going to say it very simply. "I've had enough of you!" You have worn me down. You've driven me to end of nerves. Today ve are going to "land of milk and honey." And you (*jabbing his finger into Peter's belly*), you had better hang yourself now.

Peter. Permission to appeal, sir!

Sergeant. Shut up and listen. From him, whose weapon is not satisfactory, from that soldier, as a missile from its skin. Can you tell a cork from a bagel?

Peter. Very well, sir!

Sergeant. How happy ver ve (*indicating Sergei*) to schlep our way here? To end up on dis lousy island –

Sergei. It's called Coney Island.

Sergeant. What?

Sergei. I said this place is called Coney Island.

Sergeant. Thank you for prompting.... But the Muscovites do not have permission to speak. Is that clear?

Sergei. Clear as day, Mister Ukrainian Sergeant-Major the Terrible.

Sergeant. I vill crush you.

Sergei. I won't say another word.

Peter. I was under the impression, sir, that we were allies.

Sergeant. Now you've said something correct. Allies. Praise be to Mister God ve're allies. So vat are you going to do about it? They've given you a gun – use it. You bring down a fighter plane – glory to you forever. You don't bring it down – at least you rattle deir nerves. And dat's goot. Do vhat is needed and do not vhone.

Peter. But I do everything for the good of the unit.

Sergeant. "For good of unit" you vould have had to show up earlier. While dey ver squeezing us you ver guzzling Coca-Cola oceans.

Sergei. That's his thing.

Peter. Why do you constantly attack me for drinking Coke?

Sergeant. I don't know. It's in my genes. Ven I saw how Fat Boy lapped it up, I wanted to shove a can down his throat. Oh, you... varriors! Vher are your goddamn commandos? Vher duh hell ver your supermen when dey ver squashing us? I'm asking vhere! Dey ver slurping Coca-Cola and making "humanitarian aid." Canned horsemeat. But ve ver destroyed. At that time, ve ver in concentration camp eating grass. Here, ask him (*indicating Sergei*). He vas der. Ask vhat dey did to him.!...

Sergei. Uncle Kolya, it's not necessary.

Sergeant. Hush, boy. He needs to know dat ve ver running, like rats, through sewers, vwhile dey ver here chatting about humanism. (*To Peter.*) And do you know how they trap rats? Exactly so ver dey doing to us...

Sergei. And those who they caught, they made their housewives.

Peter. Sir –

Sergeant. Silence. It's better already to be silent. At ease. Disperse.

But no one disperses. Everyone simply sits at his place. The conversation moves into a different, calm and languid tempo. The Sergeant lights up. Sergei drinks a can of Coca-Cola. Peter also takes a can, but then he spitefully flings it away behind his back.

Sergeant. Do you know Ukraine?

Peter. What? I don't understand the question.

Sergeant. Ukraine, such a country, do you know it?

Peter. Ah, the country. Yes, I know it.

Sergeant. There aren't countries like dat anymore. Not in nature, not on a map. Now, everything der is... Ahhh (*he waves his hand*). And vhat they did to my Kiev? You don't know, you all don't know anyting. Ask Sergei den. You're from Moscow, Serozha. You describe for him vhat's left of Moscow.

Sergei. I will have my revenge. They took my... they... (*He weeps.*)

Sergeant. It's okay to cry. Ve vill return again. Celebrate. Ve vill celebrate goot again.

Peter. They also killed my father and brother. They didn't want to become housewives, so they killed them. My brother was thirteen. He didn't cry out; he prayed. They got him right in the eye. And my father... But he... But they... But then... (*He weeps.*)

Sergeant. Vell vhy are you acting like children? Don't cry.... Exactly like children. Don't cry, Cossacks. Ve vill get dem. There can't be such things that we won't return them. Ve vill return. Ve vill recall all of them, ve vill add up everything then. Don't cry, you. Save your strength. Ve still need it. They think that they have buried us, but ve are alive. Ve even have cannon. You better raise it – wonder whether it's still possible to shoot with her. (*He shoves Sergei.*) But why are you sitting around, like little girl... Get out of here.

Sergei rises, holding a can of Coca-Cola. The Sergeant tears it out of his hands and throws it away.

Sergeant. That's horse shit. Go on.

Peter and Sergei busy themselves with the overturned gun. The Sergeant pulls out a box of cardboard files from under the wreckage.

Sergeant. Here they are, cousins. I found them. We can still do battle. Do you hear? We are still unified force.

Peter and Sergei abandon the cannon and make their way over to the Sergeant. Sergei reaches for one of the files, and the Sergeant strikes his hand.

Sergeant. Don't touch.

Sergei. But that's Fat Boy. It's all the same to him now.

Sergeant. What's duh matter, you didn't understand me? It's forbidden.

Sergei. Why?

Sergeant. It's subject to be destroyed. You simply can't read it like that. He croaked, you understand? Now his personal dossier can be used to smash cockroaches. But it may not be read. Lest we become callous.

Sergei. And if he were alive?

Sergeant. That's a different matter. Then I would definitely have read it. When his turn came.

Sergei. Happy is he whose turn never comes.

Sergeant. You know who to envy.

Peter. His brains even splattered onto the gun-sight. I cleaned it just now.

Sergeant. How is our Bertha doing over there?

Peter. What Bertha? Bertha – that's a woman's name.

Sergeant. I know it's woman's. It's a big gun I'm talking about. A German one.

Sergei. I also read about her. Apparently, she's like our Czar-cannon.

Sergeant. But which would you choose right now, Serozha, if they asked you to choose one – Bertha or Czar-cannon?

Sergei. I'd take the Czar-cannon. She was the very biggest.

Peter. If I could choose, I'd also take the Czar-cannon. I don't like feminine names.

Sergeant. I don't know, though. I would look first at tactical and technical specifications. You know it may be that dis Czar-cannon is drevnjeje than our anti-aircraft gun.

Peter. "Drevnjeje," you mean older?

Sergeant. Older.

Peter. Nothing older than ours exists.

Sergei. I, of course, like them all, but still why do they foist such junk on us?

Sergeant. Ah, dat's a long story. You should be glad ve have even this one. Do you know how many anti-aircraft batteries around the city have vater-main pipes instead of guns? And that's just to scare enemy. I'd like to vatch you trying to vage var vit a pipe.

Peter. Better a pipe than this spittoon on wheels.

Sergeant. What, are you on that again? Let's cut out the chit chat. Report on condition of your overturned gun.

Peter. It's the pits! It's like a gosh darn Ford Pinto!

Sergeant. Hey – you curse in our language, in Esperanto. I can't understand your doggerel.

Peter. It's in a fi... fi... fi –

Sergeant. Vell, spit it out.

Peter. It's fudged up. The lifting mechanism gets stuck at seventy degrees. It won't go any higher. The sight, in my opinion, is worn out. Basically, it's a piece of...piece of...piece of –

Sergeant. Enough. I got it. Just tell me one ting – vill she fire?

Peter. It's entirely possible.

Sergeant. Vell that's good. But have you fired her?

Peter. Not yet, but I think I'll manage just fine.

Sergeant. This is correct. It is not angels who make fruit pies. You can do it. You must do it. Serozha. Give us another hundred milliliters.

Sergei. Yes, commander.

Peter. Let's turn her over first.

Sergeant. Good. Hold off on the vodka, Sergeika – let's get our hope in place.

Cheerfully swearing, they restore the anti-aircraft gun to its original position.

Sergeant. All set.

Sergei. Proceed with implementing the previous command?

Sergeant. Proceed, Serozhenka, proceed. Such commands are never revoked.

Sergei (*pouring a round*). What are we drinking to?

Sergeant. Lads, I'll tell you what. If you want to call a spade a spade, then in an hour ve're all going to bite it. In the best case, like Fat Boy did – instantly, just like dat. If not... ve von't die. And then, lads –

Peter. I don't want to not die.

Sergeant. Ve know what you don't want. I don't want dat either. But you know, anything can happen... And so all that remains for us is to pray. Do you know how to pray?

Sergei. Peter taught me.

Peter. My father had a Bible.

Sergeant. Then ve're all set. Pray that we die as men.

Sergei. It would be better to kill ourselves.

Sergeant. The primordial sea. Smell of fish. Fish and seaweed. Seagulls even. When I was just little boy, I thought that only ve had seagulls, that in America there weren't any. I was imbecile.

Sergei. Uncle Kolya. Promise that you'll shoot me.

Peter. And me too, if it's not too much trouble. Please.

Sergeant. No, lads, I cannot promise you such a thing. You know dat. Peter!

Peter. Yes, Sergeant.

Sergeant. Is there any way to see Statue of Liberty from here?

Peter. No, I'm afraid not. But tomorrow we could go to a place where you can see it.

Sergeant. If it's tomorrow, then ve von't see it. But listen, is it true what they say, that it's a zhinka, a voman?

Peter. Yes, it's true. It's a woman.

Sergeant. You see, and boys at home didn't believe me. I vagered a bottle on it. A zhinka. It would still be interesting to see.

Sergei. We'll see it, Uncle Kolya.

Sergeant. No, Serozha, ve von't see it. Ve von't see it. She is in us, Serozha, in our bodies. In order to look at it, ve would have to vidstupati. But to retreat, Serozha, is no longer possible for us. There is nowhere to go, vit New York behind us. (*The lights of skyscrapers blaze up on the horizon*). Vell, here's to your health. (*They drink.*)

Peter. Whoa! They turned on the electricity. How strange.

Sergei. It's beautiful, like Moscow... almost.

Sergeant. Beautiful. But I don't like this. Why have they turned on lights? Did something happen?

Peter. Maybe the war has ended.

Sergeant. No, a war does not end like that. It cannot so simply... If it ends now, it means that we have lost. But that... no. Kotra godina?

Peter. What?

Sergeant. What time is it?

Sergei. 11:48.

Peter. 11:49.

Sergeant. In ten minutes we here will verify whether the war has ended or not. Listen up, eagles. The formation for receiving battle commands is at 24 hundred hours. We have ten minutes. Private Viseacre.

Peter. Aye!

Sergeant. Once again check readiness of weapon for battle and report.

Peter. Yes, sir! (*He runs off.*)

Sergeant. Sergeika!

Sergei. The mount?

Sergeant. The mount. Get it in order – maybe it is still working. If so – do something useful. Maybe hinges on anti-aircraft gun.

Sergei. Yes, sir!

Sergeant. Forward!

Peter tinkers with the anti-aircraft gun. Sergei drags out from the debris a structure reminiscent of a crucifix, with hoops for securing a pair of hands. The Sergeant unearths an apparatus that looks like a voltmeter. From the apparatus hang two wires with suction cups. The Sergeant taps the device – he tries to turn it on.

Sergeant. Peter, come here! (*Peter runs up. The Sergeant fastens the suction cups to Peter's temples.*) Attention!

Peter stands at attention. The Sergeant suddenly hits Peter in the solar plexus and looks at the apparatus. Apparently, the result does not please him.

Sergeant. Stand up! Attention! *(He hits Peter in the groin. Peter falls.)*

Peter. You fucking dickhead...

Sergeant *(joyfully)*. It vorks!. It vorks, lads. Ve vill do battle. Did you hear, Serozha, it vorks. Petja, stand up. Stand up, it's nothing. It vorks, can you believe it!

Peter. You motherfucker! What the fuck did you do that for?

Sergeant. Don't be angry. Stand up. Does it hurt? Where does it hurt, here? Take a seat. Go on, take a seat. *(Peter sits.)* Sergei, are you ready?

Sergei. Almost.

Sergeant. You still have two minutes.

Sergei. How two? There's five yet.

Sergeant. I said two, that means two. Faster, faster. *(To Peter.)* You're still here? Vell run to your post. Men, instruction vill begin in one minute... 45 seconds... 30 seconds... *(Peter and Sergei's movements increase in pace through the end of this.)* ...10 seconds. Battery, fall in! Eyes right! Attention! At ease. Get ready. Private Visacre!

Peter. I!

Sergeant. Report on conditions along front for 29 May.

Peter. For the first time in eight months, the advance of enemy forces has been stopped in every direction. Attempts to break through our defenses in the Buffalo area, Jersey City, and along the whole southern perimeter of the Great Lakes have been repulsed. Having met stubborn opposition, the enemy was forced to cease carrying out offensive operations, and in the Bronx its large-scale formations were thrown back one and a half kilometers. Over the past day we have not noted any instances of the use of nuclear or biological weapons. The isle of Manhattan was subjected to a massive chemical attack. The effectiveness of the enemy's air raids has recently dropped in connection with the improved organization of our anti-aircraft defenses. In the last 24 hours, two of the enemy's flying apparatuses have been brought down.

Sergeant. That's sufficient. Ve have one minute. Serozha, explain the battery's mission.

Sergei. The battery's mission entails the destruction of strategic fighter-bombers of the class "Medea." The battery's mission is realized by luring the fighters into the trap of an artificially generated emotional field and destroying them with the aid of available firepower.

Sergeant. Excellent. Any questions?

Sergei. No, sir! But what the hell is an artificially generated emotional field?

Sergeant. You can't figure it out?

Sergei. No, sir.

Sergeant. That's fine. It's very good that you can't figure it out. You will soon understand.

Battery, eyes right, attention! Battery, listen to your battle commands! (*He opens an envelope, and reads.*) "Warriors of the unified army! Brothers! In this terrible moment, when our unique form of thought and the very existence of our species is threatened, the High Command comes to you with a mission, the essence of which is best expressed by the words: Die, but do not give up the city!

Today, when the High Command can no longer present you with various assignments and give any sort of recommendations, we want simply to remind you that the city, the foundations of which were laid by Dutch settlers in 1669, has for many centuries been for all civilized people of this world a symbol of freedom, a symbol of limitless human daring, a symbol of the greatness of the man who believes in his own strength. More than sixty times in recent months New York has been subjected to massive air raids. In its ruins are buried a hundred thousand of our brothers – old men and children. Their blood cries out for retribution. So let the foundation of that retribution be laid today. May your steadfastness and your very death... Your very death... put a halt to this primordial dark power, which lurks in the heart of humanity. Today there is no more rear guard. Today the entire staff of the Unified High Command will, with weapons in hand, join the battle on the streets of the city. Today not one man will be hiding in basements, like rats. Tonight the enemy planes will see a city, in which a million windows will be illuminated with electric light – the light of our contempt for the enemy, on the night selected as the time for their blackest deeds. Today we have ceased to be afraid. Today we will die or we will win!" And that's all...

Sergei. We should bid our farewells.

Sergeant. We won't make it – it will soon begin.

Peter. We should bid our farewells, Sergeant.

Sergeant. Ah... Screw these bitches. It's our last time to live. Another round, Serozha.

Sergei (*having poured and downed his*). But all the same I don't understand what an artificially gener –

Sergeant (*rushing to Sergei*). Don't rush, Serozhenka, don't rush. You vill have time to understand. Let's bid our farevells, my little child. Little son of mine. Why are you rushing? Drink, lad, drink. Let me pour you some more. (*He pours Sergei a full glass of vodka.*)

Peter. What are you doing, Sergeant – he won't be able to work!

Sergeant. He vill, he vill – vhat do you know.

Sergei (*with thickening speech*). Uncle Kolya, he doesn't understand crap. Yesterday I told him an anecdote about Georgians, and he didn't even get (*gesturing*) this much. He doesn't understand. A dim-witted people.

Peter. Sergeant, why are you doing this? He will not be able to work. Take a look, he's already drunk. He won't make it.

Sergeant (*crying*). He vill. Drink, Serozha.

Sergei. Drink yourself. Petja, let's do one together, let's drink to our papa, [*starting to imitate the Sergeant's accent*] dat he may become officer. Mister officer, permit me to kiss vit you. (*He kisses with the Sergeant.*) Peter, come now, embrace me. Davai pjet. Let's sing. How about that...your old: "You are in the army now..." It's strange, you are Petja, but you don't pjet. Petja doesn't pjet. Sing, Petjenka, sing, sing – don't be silent.

Peter. Sergeant, we have, it seems, a problem. Private Klimov is undermining our readiness for battle.

Sergeant. Peter, you are goot guy. You... (*Because of his overflowing emotion, he is unable to speak and simply raises his hands in dismay.*) You are a man! I have begun to respect you. You know when I began to respect you? When I gave it to you in the groin. So I vill say to you... yes. You made meter go through roof. Drink vit me. So you von't hold bad feelings to me.

Peter. I don't have any bad feelings toward you. It was your duty. (*He drinks.*) I wanted to say (*he loses his breath*).

Sergeant. Here – have a swig of Coca-Cola. To you it is like milk. Ekh, little cat of mine, my kitten.

Sergei. Meow. B-eh-eh...

Sergeant. Petja, where are you from?

Peter. New Hampshire.

Sergeant. What did you do der? You... I know, you... I read it. You have plump lips; you, probably, liked to kiss. A-hah? Did I guess? I can see I guessed it.

Peter. The war gives me a clean slate. I washed all that away with blood. I –

Sergeant. But do you still vork in bank too?

Sergei. Petja, you worked in a bank? And what was your in—terest rate there? . B-eh-eh... No, I'm serious, you really, worked in a bank? Did you have a Mercedes?

Peter. Yes, I worked, and what of it?

Sergeant. Vell simply dat. It's dat simple. Some (*indicating Sergei*) from childhood cleaned rotten potatoes in prison camps, vwhile others in banks at same time ver eating fricassee. This is all fine, there's nothing to make of it.

Sergei. Uncle Kolya, don't exaggerate. There are also cultured people doing time in prison camps. I even went to music school. I can play, I will right now.

Sergeant. Yes you did time, thank Got.

Sergei. No, I will go look for my violin right now. I shot them all down for a violin. It is mine alone. I found it, I hid it, and now I am going to hurt it...

Peter. Sergeant, are we going to begin today?

Sergeant. Vait a little, Petja. How about you – vwhat do you love?

Peter. Excuse me, I don't understand the question.

Sergeant. Vell, this one loves the violin, and you?

Explosions are heard in the distance. Sergei finds the violin and begins to tune it.

Peter. I love to lie and watch baseball. And I wish I could have two weeks when I could just lie and watch baseball. And that tomorrow I could still have two weeks.

Sergeant. Here you vill lie, vwhile Serozha vill play. You vill lay – lie. You know, they say those who don't climb up get pulled out of fire first. Don't be scared – ve are succeeding. Ve are everywhere succeeding.

Sergei plays the violin. In the midst of his playing we hear the wail of an airplane. The Sergeant and Peter spring up – they look at the sky. Their first impulse – to run to the anti-aircraft gun –

turns cold: it's too late. Slowly, noiselessly cursing, the Sergeant and Peter drop to their knees. The Sergeant puts his face in the dirt. Peter prays, remaining on his knees. Sergei plays. The shadow of a large plane covers the battery for a moment. Peter and the Sergeant await death, but it doesn't come. Sergei stops playing and falls into a pile of gravel. Silence.

Sergeant (*still on the ground*). Is he all set?

Peter. Absolutely. He's not going anywhere til morning. I told you we would botch the job.

Sergeant. But why do you think that we have botched duh job?

Peter. He won't respond to anything at all.

Sergeant. But we will manage even without him.

Peter (*exploding*). Ah, without him? I knew it, right when you started getting the boy drunk. You want to push me into this shit instead of him, yes? I saw right through you, through your Slavic mug. For him it's unacceptable, but for me it's okay. You've gone through the whole war with him, but what am I to you? Meat! You despise us. You despise all Americans, and the fact that I worked in a bank, that's like your bull's red flag. Absolutely! M-o-o! A little bull. That doesn't surprise me. Do you think I'll fall for this trick? Don't hold your breath. I man the anti-aircraft gun. That's right here, written in my documents. Weapon 086/U. I'm not allowed to abandon my post during battle. Let me die in peace. That's it!

Sergeant. Come here, help me. (*He attempts to fasten the straps of the crucifix to his own wrists.*) Come quickly, what are you standing for, like idiot. Help out.

Peter. Sergeant... I thought...

Sergeant. Yes fasten me for Got's sake. You mother.... Tighter.

Peter. Sergeant...

Sergeant. As you ver. Can you see a box with files?

Peter. Yes, I see it.

Sergeant. Mine is first from bottom. Bring it here. And grab the apparatus.

Peter (*bringing them over*). I'm uncomfortable, sir. And I don't know what to do with this.

Sergeant. To hang from ceiling is uncomfortable. Everything else is very comfortable indeed. You are literate one among us – figure it out. Didn't you go to college?

Peter. What do I have to do?

Sergeant. Have you found my file? You have. Now attach apparatus – the two vires are lying over der. Give me the tablets – they are in my chest pocket – and proceed.

Peter. But what's in the file?

Sergeant. My personal dossier. What dey call psychological portrait.

Peter. But have you read it?

Sergeant. Of course not. For me it's forbidden to read. It may be employed one time only. Don't you remember when I told you about secret veapon that shoots down first-class pilots? The veapon for selective striking?

Peter. Of course I remember: "The stricken ace falls emitting a vile gas." How could I forget? We've been waiting for that weapon for a year and a half.

Sergeant. Vell dis is it.

Peter. This is it? (*Laughing.*) I can't... It's this? This crumpled cardboard file? This is the secret weapon? Shit. I'm such an idiot. I believed them. I believed them, you understand. My God, how they tricked us.

Sergeant. Maybe they didn't trick us. Ve'll find out now. Our task – the instructions. They are der – inside. Read – everything is explained der. Attach the vires at once. This is emotional field indicator. It's set on hatred. When it reaches eighty, it means that dey vill be here in four minutes.

Peter. Who's they?

Sergeant. The fighters. In exactly four minutes. Give or take ten seconds. Right above us. But ve vill engage them here, as planned.

Peter. But how can that be? How can that possibly be?

Sergeant. They have these...ultra-sensitive instruments. They determine vhat for us are characteristic emotions. Our hatred you don't confuse vit anything. Hatred of a man – a soldier. They destroy most dangerous ones. Eighty points on scale means dis person is dangerous for them, very dangerous, that he could turn back history. And they don't spare anything that vould destroy their kind. Vhile der remains those who are able to hate strongly, there can be no end to var. Let's go, don't stall. The tablets. (*Peter gives the Sergeant the tablets.*) Give me something to drink. (*Peter gives him water.*) Go on and read. When it begins to act – I vill say. Read.

Peter reads.

Sergeant (*singing*). I look at the sky and I have a thought –
Why am I not falcon, why can't I fly,
Why, God, did you not give me wings?
I would leave de earth and fly into duh sky.

The Sergeant falls asleep on the cross. Peter reads in silence.

Peter. I'm ready. (*He notices that the Sergeant is sleeping. He approaches him and touches him on the shoulder.*) I'm ready.

Sergeant (*screaming, waking up*). A-a-a-a!

Peter. Did you fall asleep?

Sergeant. No, I vasn't sleeping.

Peter. You fell asleep at your battle station. You overslept, like a traitor. Like an abominable traitor.

Sergeant. Petja, vhat is dis? I'm not traitor. I am not a traitor. Vhat is this, Petja? Ve are vaging var here. I am your commander after all.

Peter. Forget all that. You have betrayed us. Now I am the commander. And now I'm going to hurt you. Are you ready?

Sergeant. Just don't hurt me, Petjenka. Not that. I'm scared. My skin is very tender. I'm sensitive, I can't stand it vhen people touch my face. I have tears. You don't vant me to cry after all. I vill have tears. Vhen I cry, it hurts me.

Peter (*looking at the file*). But I want you to cry, because you're not a man. You are no longer a man. I spit in your face. (*He spits.*)

Sergeant. A-a-a-a. Just don't hit me.

Peter. I'll stuff a fly in your ear.

Sergeant. No—ooo, but not a fly. I'm scared. It vill zist in my head. A-a-a-a.

Peter (*He glances at the file, hits the Sergeant about the face.*) Enough, enough, you wretch.

Sergeant (*weeping*). A-a-a. For vhat?

Peter. Just because. So you'll shut your dirty mouth. It stinks like mice. You probably have a brood of mice in your stomach.

Sergeant. That cannot be. I checked myself. They did radio scope on me. Tell me you're joking. Do you hear, are you joking? I, I am scared.... Are they gray?

Peter. They are gray and dirty. They eat whatever you eat. And then they eat each other.

Sergeant. A-a. Release me. They are scratching der, inside. I need to feed them or dey vill again begin to go after each other. The veak mice must not perish. The strong ones must be fed.

Peter. I will not give you food.

Sergeant. I can wait. But the mice, the mice – the poor mice.

Peter. Poor mice? But have you thought about yourself?

Sergeant. A-a-a-a!

Peter. Their tails are sticking out of your mouth. (*The Sergeant quickly shuts his mouth and listens with horror to his bodily sensations.*) And do you remember how they got into your mouth? (*The Sergeant nods his head in the affirmative.*) You remember. You were living in the sewer system then. You weren't a traitor yet. (*The Sergeant mumbles.*) You were asleep and they dropped into your mouth. But why were you asleep? You were asleep because they had been chasing you through the sewers for three days straight. Only you had the strength to run that much. You left all the others behind. Even then you were a coward. You left behind all your own – they couldn't run that fast. And they were caught. They were made housewives or they were killed. And it's your fault. In your heart, you wanted this. You dreamed about it. You are a traitor.

Sergeant (*in hysterics*). I am not to blame.

Peter. Then who is to blame?

Sergeant. I don't know. I don't know. I am not to blame. I don't know.

Peter. But I know. They're the ones to blame. They hunted you guys in the sewers. They pounced on you while you were sleeping. I know that you like them. They have such big breasts. They smell so nice. You love them; you see, you are a traitor after all.

Sergeant. No! I do not love them. I am not able to love them – I am not traitor.

Peter. They have almost no hair on their legs. That's so nice. You've liked that ever since you were a boy. Remember how you went to the little girl's house for her birthday? Remember how nice it was when she touched you? You wanted to die.

Sergeant. I wanted to sit next to her my whole life. And I wanted to live forever. And for her to never wear any other dress. And for everyone else to sail away on giant fish, leaving only us.

Peter. Did you kill her?

Sergeant. She was good, but we cannot sleep peacefully while these spies live. They captured her, and I killed her. She was a spy.

Peter. That was nice for you.

Sergeant. No. She was good.

Peter. She didn't have big tits?

Sergeant. No. She was good, she didn't have any breasts at all.

Peter. And who made her a spy, who sent her out to kill? Do you know them?

Sergeant. It is them. I know them. They're the ones who tortured my Marinka, it's them.

Peter. The big ones, with the fat butts, the brutal, vindictive, treacherous ones. They live longer.

Sergeant. I hate them.

Peter. They have better memories. They don't forget anything. They remember everything, with all of us they –

Sergeant. The Beasts!!!

Peter. They're the ones who killed your Marinka, they hanged your Marinka themselves. (*He looks at the scale on the apparatus.*) Sixty.

Sergeant. What?

Peter. Nothing. They will kill you. They will stuff a fly in your ear. (*He looks at the scale on the apparatus.*) Oho, 75. They... Ah! They. They will rape Serozha before your eyes.

Sergeant (*with the full force of his lungs*). No!!! I won't let them! He is mine! I won't let them! I will kill! Kill! I HATE THEM!!!

Peter. Finally – 82. It's time.

Peter rushes to the anti-aircraft gun and aims it into the theater, where, from behind an imaginary horizon line, the fighter planes should appear.

Sergeant (*fading in volume*). I will kill, kill, kill. They won't do it to him. I will not give Serozha over to them. I won't let them. I will their heads bite off. I will their. I will their. Pe—

ter. Pete. Give me a rifle. I vill shoot dem all. I vill not give Serozha over to them. No. (*The reaction sets in. The Sergeant weeps.*) Pete... to drink.

Peter. Don't cry, Uncle Kolya, don't cry.

Sergeant. I vant to drink.

Peter. Hold on, it'll be just a little longer. Hold on for two more minutes.

Sergeant. Petrichkoo, my little friend, give me a little vater. I'm feeling sick. Petjenka. If only a swallow.

Peter. Later. I can't let them slip through.

Sergeant. You von't let them slip, you von't let them slip. The Lord vill reward you for giving me something to peet. You are Peter after all – you must let me peet. Peter, but you don't let me peet. (*The Sergeant notices a can of Coca-Cola on the ground and tries to reach it with his foot.*) Untie me. You vill succeed. Untie me, you, it's over. Vhat the hell are you doing vit me? Why do you not love me? Oooo, monsters, you confounded Muscovites!

Peter (*starting to sing*). America, America...

Sergeant. Dey're coming. Do you hear, Petja, dey're coming!

Peter. They're coming, motherf... They're coming, the bitches. Now I'm going to settle accounts with them.

Sergeant. Dey're coming, dey're coming. Lord, have pity on us!

Peter (*in a frenzy*). They're coming!!! America, America...

The wail of diving fighter planes is heard. Peter begins to shoot, yelling and rudely cursing. The Sergeant tries to tear himself off of the cross.

Sergeant. Release me, release. Lord! I am frightened! Mama, mamochka, mama-a-a!!!

Peter. Yes! I got it! I got it!!!

Sergeant. Mama!...

The wail of a stricken fighter plane, falling onto the battery.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

The dust is settling. Of the battery's anti-aircraft gun only a pile of debris remains. The tail of the fallen plane is visible. The Sergeant's decapitated body, with wet trousers, is still fastened to what remains standing of the crucifix. Peter's hand sticks out from a pile of bricks. Sergei's body is covered with lime dust. Onto the stage walks the Woman, parachute cords dragging behind her. She cuts these off and looks around. She rubs her sore spots. She tries to look at her backside (to see if her jumpsuit is torn). She approaches the remains of the anti-aircraft gun.

Woman. This is the spit pipe that brought me down? Ah, hell! *(She kicks a piece of steel.)*

The Woman finds a can of Coca-Cola, opens it and drinks. Peter's hand begins to twitch and grab at the air spasmodically. The Woman looks at the hand with dull interest and, turning away, continues to drink. The hand, having twitched a few more times, dies down. Sergei begins to stir. He rises. He approaches the Woman and touches her on the shoulder. With a cry of "Oh, mama," she jumps to the side. Sergei is obviously drunk. He can hardly hold himself up.

Sergei. An—d where am I?

Instead of answering, the Woman uses two precise blows to return Sergei to a horizontal position. She takes out a pistol and puts the muzzle up to Sergei's eye. But instead of shooting, she starts to scrutinize the decked man. She looks around to see if there aren't any other survivors, lifts the can of Coca-Cola and pours its contents onto Sergei's face. Sergei lifts himself a little, runs a finger over his face, and licks it.

Sergei. Coca-Colka.

Woman. Coca-Colka.

Sergei. What is this? *(He holds up his head.)* What have you done to me? *(He drops. He groans.)* Where am I? Why are we not fighting? Ah, why are we not fighting? To tell you the truth, I'm feeling very, very sick.

Woman *(kicking Sergei with her foot).* Get up!

Sergei. What is this "get up"? Oi, oi. What have I done to deserve this? Who is this brilliant commander?

Woman (*kicking Sergei again*). Stand up, you drunken brute.

Sergei. Oh, so now I'm someone who –

He stands up and, seeing the Woman pointing a pistol at him, shrieks, stumbles, and falls.

Woman. I'm listening to you carefully, young man.

Sergei. Eh-eh-eh...

Woman. Shut your trap, puppy. If you have nothing to say for yourself, you will answer my questions. Got it?

Sergei. Eh-eh-eh...

Woman. Answer properly. Got it?

Sergei. Yes, eh-eh-eh...

Woman. Ma'am.

Sergei. Yes, ma'am.

Woman. (*tenderly touching Sergei's chin with the pistol's muzzle*). What the hell is your name, mistake of nature.

Sergei. Serozha.

Woman. Serozha. Strange name. Are you Russian or something?

Sergei. A Russian. I'm a Muscovite.

Woman. How do you stand, how do you converse with a woman? Submissively. How many men were in your battery?

Sergei. Three. But seven at first.

Woman. Does that mean you're the last one?

Sergei. Why the last one? What about the Sergeant, and Peter?

Woman. The Sergeant – you mean that? (*She points toward the mount.*)

Sergei turns around and sees the crucified, decapitated corpse of the Sergeant. With a scream of "Kolya!" Sergei rushes to the body and embraces it. He weeps. The Woman watches this scene with an expression of disgust.

Woman. How disgusting. And I didn't believe them. All right, enough.

Sergei. Kolya, Kolenka, Kolya.

Woman. Enough, I said.

Sergei. But when? When did they do it?

Woman. Do what?

Sergei. Well, I was supposed to be in his place.

Woman. And you got drunk?

Sergei. I don't remember. I don't remember anything. But are you from there?

Woman (*hitting Sergei about the face*). How do you converse with me? Have you lost your will to live? (*She calms down.*) Yes, I'm from there.

Sergei. They nailed you?

Woman. You nailed me. Only how you managed to do it I don't understand. This thing couldn't even take out a hot-air balloon.

Sergei. Nailed, nailed, nailed!

Woman. Why are you getting excited, you fool. This is probably the last downed airplane in the whole war. We're already in the city. Your staff has already been arrested.

Sergei. You're lying. And we nailed you. "The stricken ace falls emitting a vile gas." Nailed, nailed.

Woman. On your knees. You're going to shut up now. (*She puts the pistol's muzzle up to Sergei's eye.*) Even if I am lying, that's not going to make it any easier on you. Are you going to pray? (*Sergei nods in the affirmative.*) You are? You're kidding, you know how? (*Sergei nods again.*) You know how? Honestly? (*Sergei nods.*) I've never seen this before. Well, pray. Just do it quickly. (*With strong emotion.*) Pray. Your end has come, you depraved man.

Sergei. Our dear good God! This is Private Sergei of the 086/U battery addressing you. A Russian. A Muscovite. Everything's going fine for me – they're going to kill me now and I will die as a man. I hope to meet Kolya and Peter again, and all my old friends. Last time, I asked you to let Kolya die as a man, and to let him be killed before me. Thank you so much for granting this small request. I hope that we will see each other very soon, and that you will present me with something good. May you be healthy and also die as a man. Sincerely yours, Private Serozha of anti-aircraft battery 086/U. Amen.

Woman. You make it sound beautiful. Where did you learn to pray?

Sergei. Peter taught me. He was our third.

Woman. Ah, I know. (*She looks in the direction of the hand that's sticking out.*) I found him too. It's a pity, he could have taught me as well. How does it go: "Dear...papa..."

Sergei. You killed him?

Woman. No... not really.

Sergei. I can teach you how to pray. If you're not in a hurry, of course.

Woman (*after some consideration*). Well what the hell, let's give it a try. Just understand that if you're planning to use this to stall for time or you're hoping I'll take pity on you, you'll be very disappointed.

Sergei. Oh, come on. I'm hurt. That hadn't even crossed my mind.

Woman. Well go on then, teach me.

Sergei. Always remember that before you pray, you must lubricate first.

Woman. Forgive me for interrupting, but what does it mean to lubricate?

Sergei. To lubricate is to prime the pump, by slamming 100 or 150 milliliters, or.... In a word, not to get royally drunk but to take it into your bosom properly.

Woman. Take it into my bosom? What are you implying?

Sergei. Ah? No, no, I'm not talking about that at all. It's not *that* bosom.

Woman. What, you don't like my bosom?

Sergei. I like it. I'd even say I like it a lot. It's such a nice little bosom. The very thing.

Woman (*in a threatening tone*). What...thing?

Sergei. I mean that your bosom was perfectly created for prayer.

Woman (*calming down*). Oh, I see. I didn't understand all the words. Don't let me distract you.

Sergei. They used to pray standing up. It was thought that this put them closer to God. God was a large woman then, with beautiful yellow teeth and fish scales on her thighs. Then along came a different god and they started a competition – who could drink more. The new god drank more and became the ruler.

Woman. He took more into his bosom?

Sergei. Yes, he took more into his bosom.

Woman. Now I see why there are such imperfect people among you. The new god was a man?

Sergei. Yes, but I didn't want to say that.

Woman. Tell me exactly how it was, don't hide anything.

Sergei. Ever since then people have prayed on their knees.

Woman. But why?

Sergei. What do you mean, I just told you.

Woman. But you didn't say why you have to pray to the new god on your knees.

Sergei. What do you mean. The old god was prayed to standing up, and the new –

Woman. This is what I'm asking – why? Why, understand? – why do you have to pray to the new god on your knees?

Sergei. I don't know, Peter didn't say. I think it's somehow related to female psychology.

Woman. What does female psychology have to do with it?

Sergei. It was women who invented God.

Woman. Here we go, it's always the women! Women invented the atomic bomb, women invented war, women invented God.

Sergei. Well, God's not half-bad for a female invention.

Woman. You are strange. You even look human. Do you seriously think that God wasn't a bad invention?

Sergei. Well, at least this invention gave me great comfort when you were holding the pistol up to my eye.

Woman. But is that scary, when there's a pistol in your eye? No one's ever done that to me.

Sergei. And have you done it yourself many times?

Woman. No, this was my first time. But I've seen it in the movies a lot.

Sergei. You know, for some reason I decided that after 30 seconds you'd calm down and you wouldn't shoot. That's a long time, you know – 30 seconds. Then you began to breathe differently, and I wasn't afraid at all.

Woman. But I really wanted you to fight. I would've had to shoot you then. I would have put a ring in my ear.

Sergei. Why a ring?

Woman. It's a sort of sign. When you wing your first one, you're supposed to put a ring in your ear.

Sergei. Why?

Woman. So that it won't be your last.

Sergei. Have you been in the war a long time?

Woman. Two months already. I've had 40 flights.

Sergei. Then you should already have lots of rings.

Woman. You're stupid, like all men. It's not like that at all. Those don't count. The real high is when it's right in the eye.

Sergei. You know, I've wanted to ask for a long time, why does it have to be in the eye?

Woman. Well, your eyes are evil. They say that they're greasy.

Sergei. They're what?

Woman. Greasy.

Sergei. And that's why it has to be in the eye?

Woman. It's nothing to gawk at. There, gawk at that (*she points to the Sergeant*). At your Adonis. But not at us.

Sergei (*looking at the Sergeant*). It is you who killed them all.

Woman. They have only themselves to blame. Two days before the end of the war, and they're still fighting. What's the point of these senseless sacrifices? They could still be living.

Sergei. You call that "living"? Are sleepwalking babydolls, who do nothing but housework, in your view, living?

Woman. In my view, it's better to be a housewife than to rot in a sewer or get stuck here without your head on. What does this get you anyway? What's the difference? They let you eat, they let you sleep, they let you read, go to the movies twice a week, the work is simple. Do the dishes three times a day and then plenty of R and R. What else do you need?

Sergei. You want me to do the dishes? No way.

Woman. But you aren't being threatened with that, my little ring. I gave you a deferment so you'd teach me how to pray, and instead you talk my ear off.

Sergei. On your knees.

The Woman and, a bit later, Sergei get on their knees.

Woman. I really want to learn how to pray well.

Sergei. First you have to confess.

Woman. You're stalling again.

Sergei. Honestly, you have to confess. Ask anyone.

Woman. Hold on, I'll go run and ask. What is it, to confess?

Sergei. To remember all the bad things that you've done.

Woman. What's the point of that?

Sergei. In order to ask forgiveness. Isn't it obvious?

Woman. God has strange customs. Bad things? It's bad that I switched to auto-pilot. I should have kept it on manual. Then you wouldn't have nailed me like that. I was weak – I wanted to play tic-tac-toe.

Sergei. You had someone else with you in the plane?

Woman. No, I was playing it on the computer. I had just won a match.

Sergei. Well, and...?

Woman. Just as I said, I won a match.

Sergei. This is not sin. Auto-pilot is not a sin. A win is not a sin. Keep going.

Woman. When I was a kid, I stole bullets from my mom and played dolls with them.

Sergei. This isn't a sin either. Everyone did this. I stole as well.

Woman. I know a sin. Once, just a little – of course, just a very little... I loved a man.

Sergei. What? You?

Woman. Just a tiny little bit. Not for long at all. He had run into our house. A big, handsome, beefy one. He asked me very politely not to call my mom. He spoke very well, not like you do.

Sergei. Did you call your mom?

Woman. Of course. I was so frightened. I screamed, "Man in the house!" The whole block came running.

Sergei. And what did he do?

Woman. Surprisingly, he looked at me in an odd way, as if he knew something I didn't know, and it was like he pitied me. Can you imagine, I spilled boiling water on him out of fear. Later they made him into a housewife, and he even worked in our building. But of course it was completely different then. They gave me a badge. You know, I sometimes think you all aren't entirely the beasts they say you are.

Sergei. Well, let's try to confess. To get some practice. Say, "Lord, I am a sinner!"

Woman. Lord, I am a sinner.

Sergei. I loved a man.

Woman. Well, it's not that I loved him.

Sergei. What are you doing? That spoils it. Now we have to start over. What difference does it make if you loved him or didn't love him. We're just practicing. For the real thing you'll be on your own, with your little ring.

Woman. Well, why you say these things out loud anyway...

Sergei. Begin. "Lord, I am a sinner. I loved a man."

Woman. Lord, I am a sinner. I loved a man.

Sergei. Because of this I spilled boiling water on him.

Woman. Because of this I spilled boiling water on him.

Sergei. They castrated him, because I betrayed him.

Woman. He frightened me, and they turned him into a housewife.

Sergei. He was deeply hurt. He suffered. He was very lonely and sad.

Woman. He got all upset over nothing. He only worked for us for two months, and then he hanged himself.

Sergei. Lord, I have killed people.

Woman. Lord, I have killed men.

Sergei. I have killed old men and children. I bombed a defenseless city. A city which for many centuries was a symbol of freedom for all civilized people of this world, a symbol of limitless human daring, a symbol of the greatness of the man who believes in his own strength.

Woman. Not so much at once. I can't remember it all. I bombed a defenseless.... Not entirely defenseless. Bombed a defenseless symbol of the daring believers in their own strength of old men and children.

Sergei. I killed Kolya and Peter.

Woman. That was their own fault.

Sergei. Their own fault? But who attacked us? Who struck first? At night, when everyone was asleep. Without a declaration of war.

Woman. And who provoked us? You didn't have to taunt us. If you had done your own dishes, none of this would have happened.

Sergei. That's your propaganda. I read that before the start of the war they already had dishwashing machines.

Woman. Not true. Our scientists invented them just a little while ago.

Sergei. I know for certain, I even saw one – it had the date of manufacture on it. It was wa—
aay before the war started.

Woman. A forgery. A falsification.

Sergei. No, it's the truth. You didn't attack because of that. You are evil. You smell bad. You have big fat tits.

Woman (*she tears open her jumpsuit*). Where did you see big fat tits? Where, show me. Show me.

Sergei. Well what's that?

Woman. This? Ha-ha-ha. Do you hear, he thinks that these are big tits. Fool. Have you even once seen a live woman?

Sergei. My god, I've seen plenty. One warden, she was like this. O-o! (*He demonstrates.*)
Horrible!

Woman. So you did time. You did time in prison. No wonder you hate us so much. And here I was trying to converse with you. Come on, teach me how to pray, and let's finish this affair.

Sergei. Pray yourself.

Woman. What's that, by myself? You agreed to teach me, now teach.

Sergei. Well I can't ask God for what you want. I don't know what that is. Get on your knees and ask him yourself.

Woman. About what?

Sergei. About whatever you want. What do I care.

Woman (*kneeling*). Well, okay, I'll ask him. I'll make do without you. How do you address him?

Sergei. Most holy Lord God. Or something of that sort.

Woman. Well, Most holy – that's you exaggerating. Dear God. Is that all right? Dear God. This is my first time praying, and I'm not sure that you're listening to me. But if you are listening, make it so that... Make it... (*She begins to cry.*) Make it how it was before the war.
(*She weeps.*)

Sergei. Amen.

Woman (*through tears*). Amen.

The woman rises from her knees and, having wiped the tears from her cheeks, pulls out her pistol and with a gesture commands Sergei to get on his knees. Sergei kneels. Sobbing, the woman puts the pistol up to Sergei's eye. Sergei, still on his knees, slowly raises his hands and places them on the woman's hips.

Woman. What are you doing?

Instead of answering, Sergei draws the woman toward him. He embraces her.

Woman. What are you doing, you lunatic.

Sergei. You smell good. You smell very good.

Woman. This isn't necessary, Serozha. It's not necessary. Don't be scared, my little one, it doesn't hurt. I will do it all very quickly.

Sergei. I'm not scared. I simply want to stand next to you and for everyone else to sail away on a giant fish, leaving only us.

Woman. My sweet one. Why on earth do they send such children to war? Can this really be possible. Can it be possible?

Sergei rises from his knees. He embraces the woman. He kisses her. A long, long kiss. The woman pushes Sergei away.

Woman. Don't do so much. It's terrifying. (*She puts her head on Sergei's shoulder.*) What will become of us?

Sergei. Don't be afraid. I won't hand you over to anyone. We will go somewhere away from all this. We will hide.

Woman (*recoiling from Sergei*). In the sewers. We won't hide anywhere. If those dirty man-things find us, you know what they'll do? They've got only one thing on their mind.

Sergei. They have far from only one thing on their mind. You simply don't know them so you're afraid.

Woman. Don't know them? Did you hear what he said – I don't know men.

Sergei. Well how many men have you seen in your life?

Woman. Lots. Whole crowds. Do you know how many male war films I've reviewed?

Sergei. And live ones?

Woman. You're the second. Or third (*she looks at Peter's hand*). But that doesn't mean anything.

Sergei. Of course, that doesn't mean anything. You simply don't know men. (*He walks up to the crucified body of the Sergeant.*) If you had known Uncle Kolya. You would have fallen in love with him. And Peter? He had such eyes, such a smile, such hands – he could pray so beautifully.

Woman (*pointing to the violin*). Is that violin yours?

Sergei. It's mine. I remember that I began to play, but I don't remember anything after that.

Woman. It's strange, we don't have anyone who plays the violin.

Sergei. You have no reason to play violins. You're simpler. You do everything for someone else, but now, when you have no men, you will stop doing this. Look. You're thinking, why are we losing the war. Because you are focused solely on men. You gave up everything in order to destroy us. You don't work on anything besides how to make weapons. Lots and lots of new weapons. You fight, fight – everything for the war. Whereas men – they are children. They understand it all – yes, there's a war, yes, they have to join the battle, but nevertheless they continue to write poetry, drink vodka, play soccer. War for them is just another game. They think they'll lose and start a new one. But now there won't be a new one. However, I'm not sad for us. I'm sad for you. You see, if you slaughter us all, you will have to invent new men, that's certain. It's always been that way. Otherwise you won't have anyone to do your hair for, to build airplanes, to invent new weapons. And one fine day you will all walk out into the street without make-up on, with rollers hanging in your hair. And this will be your end.

Woman. Play.

Sergei plays. The woman walks behind Sergei's back and, putting her arms around him, begins to unfasten the buttons on his soldier's shirt. Sergei lowers his hands and lets the violin fall. The woman fully unbuttons the shirt and opens it wide. Sergei's small girlish chest is visible. The woman touches it with her hands and stands paralyzed in bewilderment.

Woman. Oi, what is this?

Sergei turns to face the woman.

Woman (*recoiling*). Ai, what a dirty trick!

Sergei. What's wrong with you?

Woman. Who are you?

Sergei. But I told you, I'm Serozha. A Russian. A Muscovite.

Woman. You are not Serozha. You are deceiving me. You have deceived me. You're a chick in disguise.

Sergei. I am a man. I've always felt like a man. When I was young I played male games, and I've always been attracted to women.

Woman. But where are the real men?

Sergei. Which? The real ones? I'm real.

Woman. But these, with these (*she makes penis gesture*).

Sergei (*imitating gesture*). With these? Jesus, do you really not know? What are you, a little girl? That was a long time ago. Did you just fall off the moon?

Woman. And there, in the city, who's there?

Sergei. There are men there.

Woman. Just like you?

Sergei. Just like me, real men.

Woman. But what is this? We were debriefed about what it was like, we were told how they are different from women.

Sergei. If you're talking about the ancient men, they were all slaughtered back at the very beginning of the war. I never even saw them.

Woman. So who have we been fighting all this time? Ourselves.

Sergei. You've been fighting with men. With those who feel themselves to be men and act like men. The ancient ones couldn't cope. They were weak. Now we are the men.

Woman. And this one?

The woman runs over to the body of the Sergeant and tears open his soldier's shirt. The Sergeant's black bra is visible.

Sergei. And Kolya.

Woman. And them?

Sergei. And them. I can't even imagine that you didn't know this.

Woman. What is all this for then? The war, these corpses? They said to us – fight to win. When we win, we'll destroy the very worst of them. Only those who don't want to do the dishes and wash the socks. And then we will begin to really live – better than before. We would live harmoniously, we would visit one another.... A-a-a, I don't want to live! I don't want to – kill me. How could they deceive us like this, how could they do it? What is there to live for? Who is there to kill? Who is there to love?

Sergei. What about me?

Woman. Go away.

Sergei. Men have not died. Men are still around. Close your eyes. I smell of male sweat and tobacco. I can curse like a sailor. Really, I can curse like a sailor. There's no way I'm going to start doing my own dishes after lunch; I'll crash on the couch and bury my face in the newspaper. If I get good and drunk, I'll be able to fulfill my conjugal duties. Once each year I'm a real sexual giant.

Woman. Is that true?

Sergei. It's true. I would rather remove the socks from my dead enemy than wash them. I will pick my teeth over lunch. I will chase after every skirt. I will hide my earnings from you. I will never notice your new dress, your new hairstyle. Never.

Woman. Is that true?

Sergei. My word of honor!

Woman. Will we have children?

Sergei. Yes, we'll have children. Two beautiful boys.

Woman. No, two little girls.

Sergei. Fine, let it be two beautiful little girls. We'll name them Kolya and Peter. I'll have absolutely nothing to do with raising them.

Woman. I can't believe this. It's a fairy tale. There's no place like that. You're trying to trick me.

Sergei. No, what do you mean? I love you. When the war ends we will be happy.

Woman. It's a pity the war hasn't ended yet.

Sergei. It's a great pity. But for what it's worth, we got lucky. We met each other. We outfoxed this war. We tricked it.

Woman. Serozha, where is my gun?

Sergei. Over there, it fell behind the bricks.

Woman. Thank you.

The woman finds the pistol and raises it.

Sergei. So what if we lose? I will know that you exist somewhere. And I will come running to find you. I won't let them make me a housewife. I will find you and we will be happy.

Woman. You taught me how to pray.

Sergei. I will teach you still more.

Woman. Sergei, the war isn't over.

Sergei. What?

Woman. As long as there are men alive, we won't feel at ease.

Sergei. What are you talking about?

Woman. Serozha, I'm talking about the fact that you have just thirty seconds.

Silence. Sergei slowly gets down on his knees.

CURTAIN

Please note that this revised version of the text includes a number of alterations approved by Mr. Kurochkin during the Studio Retreat at the Lark Play Development Center. - JJH