

Memoirs of a Forgotten Man

A new play by D.W. Gregory

Copyright 2018  
By D.W. Gregory  
All rights reserved

June 07, 2018  
CATF REHEARSAL DRAFT

Dwgregory2008@gmail.com  
202-550-6694

Contact:

Elaine Devlin,  
Elaine Devlin Literary Agency  
411 Lafayette Street  
6th Floor  
New York, NY 10003  
Tel: 212-842-9030  
Email: EDEVLINLIT@aol.com

**A Soviet journalist with the gift of total recall. A psychologist seeking to rehabilitate herself. A government censor with a secret past. Over two decades their fates become entwined as victims and collaborators in Stalin's campaign to rewrite public memory.**

**Long before 'fake news' was a trending topic, there was propaganda. And in the Soviet Union, circa 1938, it was the grease that kept Stalin's machinery of terror in motion. By taking us to this world, *Memoirs of a Forgotten Man* forces the audience to consider the fragility of democracy itself in an era when facts are fungible and history is whatever you say it is.**

#### **Cast of Characters**

Kreplev, a government investigator, mid to late 50s  
 Natalya Berezina, psychologist, mid 40s  
 Alexei S., a man with an incredible memory, early 30s  
 Vasily, his brother, late 30s  
 Sonia, their mother, 40 at first, later about 60  
 Markayevna, Alexei's childhood teacher  
 Utkin, Alexei's editor  
 Demidova, a displaced aristocrat, nearly 60  
 Azarov, a carnival performer, about 50 years old  
 An old peasant woman

**The action moves between an office in Moscow, circa 1957, and various locations in Leningrad in 1937-38.**

The play is written so that four actors can double into 10 parts, as follows:

Actor 1: Alexei/the Amazing Azarov  
 Actor 2: Kreplev/Vasily  
 Actor 3: Natalya/Madame Demidova  
 Actor 4: Peasant Woman/Miss Markayevna/Mother/Utkin

#### **THE PLAYING SPACE:**

I envision a space that can stand in for various locations -- the office of the investigator, Natalia's office at the psychological hospital, Mother's kitchen, a schoolroom and so forth. Through the use of lighting, projections and on-stage costume changes, the action is intended to move fluidly from place to place and back and forth through time.

MEMOIRS OF A FORGOTTEN MAN was first produced as a National New Play Network Rolling World Premiere by Contemporary American Theater Festival (WV), New Jersey Repertory Company (NJ), and Shadowland Stages (NY). For more information please visit [www.nnpn.org](http://www.nnpn.org).

Any production or presentation of the play must include this statement in program materials.

ACT ONE

In darkness, we see a projection:

"A Most Unusual Case."

As the projection fades, lights rise on a stark, stylized playing space that doubles for various locations. It is furnished with a table and two or three chairs, as well as some form of storage for props and costumes. Upstage, a large window--or the representation of one--and beyond it, an enormous image of Stalin, smiling benignly through the window. All we see of Stalin is an eternally staring eye, the tip of a smiling mouth, but the face is unmistakable.

This image fades as Azarov appears: Dressed in a tuxedo, like a magician, holding a blindfold in his hand. In the window we now see a display--about 30 random words in various hands, as if each word has been written on a blackboard by different individuals. An old peasant woman writes one final word as Azarov watches. She hands the chalk to Azarov and walks off. Azarov addresses an unseen audience with a showman's flair.

AZAROV

Thank you. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for your help in creating this list. I've asked you for words and dates that mean something to you. And since we've created this list just now--you know that I've never seen it before.

Azarov looks at the display for a brief moment, silently mouthing what he sees. He turns to the audience, smiles. A beat, then he repeats exactly the display behind him.

AZAROV (CONT'D)

Story, donut, Petrograd, apple, bottle, Palm Sunday, promotion, sunstroke, organ, June 16, jewelry, kiss, December, drama, railroad, meeting, lemons, handshake, pickles, orange grove, grandchildren, harvest, avenue, perfume, discharge, Feast of St. Stephen, dacha, May 1, tulip.

Applause. Azarov bows.

AZAROV (CONT'D)

Now ladies and gentlemen, shall we try a much longer list?

Lights fade on Azarov and rise full on Kreplev, in a drab government office, with a manuscript in his hands.

KREPLEV

Memory. Madness. How do these things work together? When nothing can be relied upon? Consider a man tormented by a memory he cannot shake. It tortures him. Because he cannot be sure whether he lived it. Or imagined it. On this point, perhaps we can all agree: He must be mad. But consider another man. One whose understanding of the world is shaped by memories of things he knows never happened. Is he mad? Or merely accommodating?

The image of Stalin's staring eye returns to the window.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

Perhaps a metaphor will help. Suppose we are married, you and I. And we agree to a shared understanding of our history. We tell the story often. How we met at the ballet. You, descending the grand stair on your lover's arm. I, at the bottom, bored, waiting for the crowd to clear. Suddenly our eyes meet. And we know at once. Within minutes, we're in the cloakroom, where we devour each other with a passion that has not abated to this day! (beat) Even though, in fact, you were alone that night. And though I saw you on the stair, it wasn't until weeks later, in a long queue to buy new boots, that I dared speak to you at all. And even then you were rude. (A smile.) We like the other story so much better. So that's the one we tell. Many a marriage relies on such accommodations. Should it not be the same for a nation?

Stalin's image in the window fades to a solid brick wall -- the unhappy view from Kreplev's office.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

When survival requires that we pull together for the common good. Who would refuse to make accommodation?

Natalya Berezina enters with a satchel. She locks eyes with Kreplev.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

But suppose you are a man with a peculiar kind of memory. One without limits.

Berezina clutches the satchel to her chest protectively.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

Capable of recalling every detail of everything he ever saw or experienced.

NATALYA

You ask his name. (a weak smile) I'm afraid I cannot tell you that, Comrade Kreplev.

KREPLEV

(to the audience)

How does such a man make accommodation?

NATALYA

His identity is ... uh, confidential.

KREPLEV

(to the audience)

It's a question that eats at me. I cannot sleep for want of the answer. (crossing to Natalya, with great courtesy) I'm sorry, Comrade Doctor. What do you mean by 'confidential?'

He smiles. A beat.

NATALYA

Uh. Well, for the purposes of my study -- any scientific study -- that is to say, no professional is authorized --

KREPLEV

Not authorized?

NATALYA

The ... that is, any ... in any *medical* study, Comrade Kreplev. ... In order to gain the cooperation of the subjects, you see--

KREPLEV

Ah, You must assure the patient of anonymity!

NATALYA

That's, yes. It's standard practice.

KREPLEV

I see. (with a smile). That does present a difficulty, though. If I'm to conduct a *thorough* review of your paper.

A beat. He regards her pleasantly.

NATALYA (CONT'D)

I do wish to cooperate, of course.

KREPLEV

Of course.

She digs into the satchel and produces a file thick with papers.

NATALYA

I brought my notes.

KREPLEV

(with great warmth)

Dr. Berezina. You are a woman of true integrity. Of course you cannot disclose unauthorized information. Nor would I expect you to. (beat) We can work around it.

Her relief is palpable, but she dare not move. He returns to the manuscript.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

Let's see ... Natalya Petrovna Berezina. You're a psychologist by training. A fellow at the Moscow Institute. (turning a page) It appears you were on a track towards a medical degree at one point?

NATALYA

Neurology.

KREPLEV

But you never completed that degree.

He smiles, waits for her explanation.

NATALYA

My health. (beat) I took a leave of absence.

KREPLEV

(sincerely)

What a pity.

NATALYA

I was ill for some time.

KREPLEV

Yes I see. There's quite a gap in your resume. All the more impressive, then, that the Institute took you on as a fellow.

NATALYA

There's a new director now.

KREPLEV

Yes. Quite a few new directors now.

He notices she is still standing, nervously.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

Oh, but where are my manners?

He retrieves a chair for her.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)  
(gesturing)

Please.

Natalya sits.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)  
Can I get you something, Comrade Doctor? Cup of tea, perhaps?

NATALYA  
Thank you, no.

KREPLEV  
I'd offer you something stronger, but it's a bit early for a nip. (inspired) You won't say 'no' to this, though.

He opens a small tin.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)  
Almond cookie? My mother's recipe.

NATALYA  
(as she takes one)  
Lovely.

Kreplev helps himself to a cookie and returns the tin to its resting place. Then he consults the manuscript:

KREPLEV  
Where was I? Oh yes. Your paper. What an honor, that it's been accepted for publication.

NATALYA  
Thank you.

KREPLEV  
This will surely open doors for you.

NATALYA  
I do hope so.

KREPLEV  
Don't be so modest, Comrade Doctor. It could be a complete turning point.

NATALYA  
It's very difficult to find a permanent position, these days - even with publication.

KREPLEV  
And impossible without it. (cheerfully) Or so I'm told.



NATALYA

Yes.

KREPLEV

Well! I'm delighted that it falls to me to review your work. So many of these scientific writings -- deadly dull business. But this! This is fascinating. Psychology is a personal interest of mine, and the workings of memory -- I confess, it's almost an obsession. (pleasantly) Which is why it pains me to say this, Comrade Doctor, but ... I do find some troubling gaps in your narrative.

NATALYA

In *my* narrative?

KREPLEV

You never explain how you came to treat this man.

NATALYA

It wasn't treatment so much as research.

KREPLEV

He was a guinea pig, then?

NATALYA

Not at all. (beat) I made a study of him. Not as an experiment. To understand how his mind worked. How his memory worked.

KREPLEV

And I for one am very glad you did. (indicating the folder of notes) May I?

NATALYA

Of course.

As he sifts through the file,

NATALAYA

It's all in there -- any questions you might have. I'm sure you'll find the answers there.

A beat.

KREPLEV

You call him Mr. S. Why is that?

NATALYA

I had to call him something.

KREPLEV

(with a laugh)

To be sure. And after your paper, what remains, Doctor? A book, perhaps?

NATALYA  
(a bit flattered)  
Hard to say.

KREPLEV  
It is much easier these days to get a book published.  
Fiction, non-fiction, poetry. Even Pasternak is back in  
style.

He waits for her response.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)  
Not a fan of Pasternak?

NATALYA  
Most of my reading is technical.

KREPLEV  
Naturally. You being a scientist. And Pasternak is a  
sentimentalist. I never cared for his stuff, myself. But  
there's no denying, it's much easier to publish now. With the  
new leadership in place.

Kreplev offers a pleasant smile as he  
waits for her response.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)  
We are free now to disagree with the old leadership.

He regards her with a steady but  
friendly gaze.

NATALYA  
(carefully)  
My paper has no political aspect.

KREPLEV  
You never know what might give comfort to our enemies, in  
these uncertain times. (at the notes again) Which is why  
every publication must undergo the most intense scrutiny.  
It's a matter of national security, as I'm sure you  
understand.

NATALYA  
Of course; absolutely. I do understand.

A silence.

NATALYA (CONT'D)  
It's just that. (a deep breath, a forced smile) I was told  
the procedure for review would be much different. (off  
Kreplev) Done by post?

KREPLEV

Ah. Yes, I see! You weren't expecting to be called in. (beat) You're correct, Doctor, this is not the usual procedure for review. (confidentially) I've taken a ... personal interest, you see. In your topic. And I found it ... quite truly, so exciting, that I felt I had to meet you. In order to do it justice.

NATALYA

I see.

KREPLEV

I hope you're not cold, Comrade Doctor? These drafty old buildings. They always turn the heat down on Sundays.

He bangs on a grate in the wall.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

Between you and me? I suspect there's a few (stage whisper) old Tsarists managing these properties. Thinking we're all off to St. Basil's for Sunday mass. Instead of putting the time to better use.

He tests the grate. A beat as he observes her.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

I met Comrade Stalin once. Shook his hand in fact. I was a young man then. And he was a fantastic hero to me. At the time.

He waits for her response.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

His passing. Came as quite a shock.

NATALYA

(steadily)

It was a shock to us all.

She holds his gaze. Then, abruptly:

KREPLEV

May I confide in you doctor?

NATALYA

(a bit thrown)

If you wish.

Kreplev pulls a chair close to Natalya.

KREPLEV

(urgently)

What does it mean to be dogged by an unshakable memory?

NATALYA

Depends on the memory.

KREPLEV

Not a memory that you summon, but a memory that intrudes upon you. Like Proust and his madeleines. (off Natalya) You're surprised I've read Proust?

NATALYA

Why should I be surprised? You've read Pasternak.

Kreplev laughs.

KREPLEV

Yes, to be sure.

He leans in, as if in a confessional.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

But to my point: When I was a child, Comrade Doctor, there was a boy in my neighborhood who had an annoying little dog. Yapped, yapped, yapped all day long. His father used to shout about it; the boy would cry; there was banging about. That sort of thing. Then one day the yapping stopped. No one said a word. But walking to school, I saw that boy sitting on his front stoop. With blood all over his hands. His face had an expression of absolute ... what is the word? Resignation? Despair? After that, I never saw the dog again. But every time I hear a high-pitched little bark, the image of that boy's bloody hands comes roaring back at me. As if to grab me by the neck. (urgently) What do you make of that?

NATALYA

Hard to say.

KREPLEV

(pressing)

Is it normal? To be tormented by such a memory?

A beat as he stares her down.

NATALYA

We all have memories we can't shake. It seems to be a function of the times.

KREPLEV

The times are changing. Khrushchev is going to China. Did you ever imagine such a thing? The old order is coming to an end.

NATALYA

So I've read.

KREPLEV

You don't believe it?

NATALYA

Must I believe it? For my paper to be approved?

KREPLEV

(amused)

Good point, doctor. Very good point: I've gotten off track.  
(back to the file) Now then: How did you come to make a  
study of Mr. S?

NATALYA

He was referred to me. I say so right at the beginning.

KREPLEV

But you don't say *why* he was referred to you. And you don't  
say when.

NATALYA

Does it matter when?

KREPLEV

Of course it matters. These things don't happen in a vacuum.

NATALYA

Our first meeting was early in 1937.

KREPLEV

(genuinely surprised)

1937? So long ago?

He looks to the notes.

KREPLEV

Why did you wait until now to write about it?

NATALYA

I didn't. (off Kreplev) I've waited until now to publish.

He regards her as the light shifts. The  
image in the window fades to a  
cityscape -- the view from Natalya's  
old office.

NATALYA

Mr. S. came to me for an evaluation. Trouble on the job.

Kreplev makes a note as Alexei enters,  
a bit breathless, in a rumpled suit,  
under an overcoat that is years out of  
fashion for the 1930s. Natalya regards  
him fondly.

ALEXEI

My best memory, you say?

NATALYA

Not what I expected at all.

KREPLEV

What were you expecting?

NATALYA

Memory is usually a problem for the elderly. Or the infirm.  
But this man was young and healthy.

ALEXEI

By best, I assume you mean ... one that makes me feel good?

Natalya shifts to a clinical mode; now  
she is in control.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

Or do you mean the one that I am best at remembering?

NATALYA

Your strongest, most vivid memory, Mr. S. (to Kreplev)  
For the purpose of my story, we'll call him Alexei.

KREPLEV

Alexei. (beat) Good.

Kreplev steps away to observe as:

ALEXEI

All my memories are vivid, doctor.

NATALYA

All right then: Your favorite.

ALEXEI

Ah. That's easy. It's a warm morning in spring, before the  
troubles. (stops himself) I don't mean to say troubles, but  
... before things changed. The order of things. I'm walking  
to school with my brother, Vasily. I have to hurry to keep  
up.

Kreplev joins the scene as Vasily.

VASILY

Alexei! Come on!

ALEXEI

As usual, I am late. So many things to think about! The air  
is warming as the sun rises over the rye fields. My breath  
rings before me like a tin bell -- and the air smells of  
cloves and peaches. Blackbirds wing across the sky as it  
shifts from purple to a milky pink ... and the clouds are  
wispy and chirp like crickets.

He enjoys the sight of the sky.

NATALYA

How's that again?

ALEXEI

The clouds. They sound like crickets. And the yellow clay road rolls ahead of us. Wet from the night's rain. So muddy our boots squeak as we walk: The squeak is the flavor of apricots! Vasily barks at me.

VASILY

Fool! Stop dawdling!

ALEXEI

Oh, it is true. I always dawdle.

The Teacher enters.

TEACHER

Alexei S.!

ALEXEI

A new teacher.

Projection: A blackboard. With the inscription: 'Poetry Competition.' And the office becomes a school room. Natalya moves aside to observe.

TEACHER

Which one of you is Alexei S.?

ALEXEI

I can hardly make sense of what she says. Because the chalk on the blackboard is humming.

VASILY

(after a beat)

You blockhead! Answer her.

Alexei shyly raises his hand.

TEACHER

Come forward.

ALEXEI

Forward. That ought to be a happy word. But from her lips --

TEACHER

FORWARD!!

ALEXEI  
It's dark and sour -- like dung.

TEACHER  
To the front of the room.

ALEXEI  
And her voice is the color of coal dust.

TEACHER  
Are you listening?

ALEXEI  
Ma'am?

TEACHER  
You are to recite your poem.

ALEXEI  
My poem?

Sound of children's laughter.

A beat, Alexei recovers from his  
embarrassment, then recites as a child  
might:

ALEXEI (CONT'D)  
Forward.  
All of Russia will move forward!  
Always forward!  
Into the bright and certain future  
Into the glory of a new day,  
Mother Russia.  
Father Tsar.  
We march along together.

A beat; he waits, hopeful.

TEACHER  
(without conviction)  
Excellent.

Sound of students' applause

TEACHER (CONT'D)  
A fine poem. This is for you.

She produces a blue ribbon.



ALEXEI

First prize!

TEACHER (CONT'D)

It is the decision of the committee.

ALEXEI

And out of her mouth, her words fall like copper coins. Ping, ping, ping --

Sound of coins falling - only Alexei hears it.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

You would think words of praise would be softer - like clouds. Or sugary, like fondant. And float away.

NATALYA walks into the memory.

NATALYA

You have a strange way of describing things.

ALEXEI

But she is harsh, is she not?

NATALYA regards the TEACHER. She makes a notation.

TEACHER

Write it on the board, boy. Write your poem. It will stay there through the week.

Teacher hands a bit of chalk to Alexei and moves away.

NATALYA

That must have been a proud moment.

ALEXEI

And even better things to come. Because after school --

Vasily moves to the table. The schoolroom becomes a parlor. Teacher transforms to Mother.

ALEXEI,  
After school, we join Mama in the parlor. We had a parlor then.

MOTHER  
(embracing him)  
Lyosha! My sweetest one!

ALEXEI  
(aside)  
Most everyone had a parlor then.

MOTHER  
What a day, what a blue ribbon day this has been!

ALEXEI  
Thank you, Mama. (aside) Even though we were in the provinces --our parlor was beautifully furnished -- with lush red carpet and gold icons in the corner.

MOTHER  
I will put your blue ribbon right here, in the family album.

ALEXEI  
(to Natalya)  
Pressed between photographs of Papa and Vasily, in his school uniform.

A beat.

MOTHER  
And there sits your brother, saying nothing.

Vasily's nose is in a communist newspaper.

VASILY  
(at the newspaper)  
Ha! Look at this: a strike in St. Petersburg, the infantry is called in, but they defy orders to shoot! I tell you -- the tide is turning.

MOTHER  
Will you stop reading such things at table? It's rude.

VASILY  
The future, Mama. This is the future of Russia, right here.

MOTHER

Then the future is nonsense. And your manners are as well.  
(pulling his hat off his head) Say something nice to your brother.

VASILY

You do know why they picked his poem, don't you?

MOTHER

Because it's beautiful.

VASILY

Because it praises the Tsar.

MOTHER

Stop trying to make everything political. (confidentially)  
Vasya. This is your brother's special day. Invite him to sit by the fire, won't you? Offer him a sweet?

VASILY

All right.

As she moves away,

VASILY

Come here, Lyosha. Come sit with me.

Alexei does. He waits as Vasily rolls a cigarette.

VASILY

(leaning in)

You have to understand, Lyosha: The world is changing. The old order--the Tsar, the nobles, the landowners and capitalists--all of that is going away.

ALEXEI

Where's it going?

VASILY

Into dust! And in its place, a new world will rise. Where the poorest man is the equal of kings. No more hunger! No more greed! Only justice!

Alexei turns to Natalya

ALEXEI

Vasily often spoke that way. I couldn't focus on his words, because they were such a circus -- the verbs and nouns dancing around his head. Purple and red and orange. It was impossible to concentrate.

VASILY

You don't get it do you? How could you? You're just a kid.  
But one day, Lyosha. One day, you *will* understand. Mama never  
can.

Vasily lights the cigarette.

VASILY

It's not her fault, she's old school. Which is why, when the  
new world comes, we must look after her, you and I.

ALEXEI

Of course.

VASILY

(pleased)

Have a fag.

ALEXEI

Ah.

He reaches for the cigarette as Mother  
returns.

MOTHER

Vasya! What are you doing?

VASILY

You said offer him a sweet. It's all I had.

MOTHER

(grabbing the cigarette)

And so you'll corrupt him?

VASILY

It's time he grew up, Mama. Learned there are no fairy tales.

MOTHER

What fairy tales?

VASILY

(topping her)

No saints in heaven!

MOTHER

Vasya!

VASILY

(blowing past her)

No magic Father Tsar to save us from the Krauts.

MOTHER

You wouldn't talk that way. If you'd gone to the army, like your father.

VASILY

Pfah!

MOTHER

If you had to sacrifice, as he has done.

VASILY

Sacrifice! What do you call this---the third round for the same ball of tea?

ALEXEI

Please!

VASILY

Holes in my boots?

ALEXEI

Don't fight!

VASILY

We all sacrifice to that fool's bloody wars!

ALEXEI

Uncle Nikolai is coming.

MOTHER

No, you're right. We mustn't argue, not today. (apologetic)  
We have blinis.

VASILY

Blinis. That will fix it all. Three hundred years of waste and oppression, erased by a single blini!

ALEXEI

I was 11 years old. Vasily was 16. And I had no idea what he was talking about. But I soon learned. Because that night, when my uncle Nikolai came, he brought a telegram.

A light shift. Now Mother has a telegram, folded and refolded. She clutches it to her breaking heart.

MOTHER

Oh my dear. My dearest --

She sinks down at the table.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

I didn't understand much, but I understood this: I would never see my father again.

(MORE)

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

And because of it, Vasily could not go back to school. Though he seemed not to mind. And in a strange way, it made my Mother happy. With Father gone, it meant Vasily would not be conscripted.

A light shift. Outside, the sound of breaking glass. Mother and Vasily move towards the window.

MOTHER

Vasya -- come away.

VASILY

It's begun. It has started, Mama --

MOTHER

Come away, Vasya. Please, sweetest -- Vasya -- please.

Vasily pulls away from Mother.

VASILY

The new world is coming!

ALEXEI

Vasily was not conscripted. Instead, he joined the Bolsheviks.

A beat. Mother goes out, and Vasily transforms to Kreplev.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

I suppose that's two memories - but they are both very vivid.

Alexei sits, pleased with himself.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

Is that what you wanted?

An excited Kreplev moves into the scene to observe more closely.

KREPLEV

This is fantastic! The teacher whose words were the color of smoke ...

NATALYA

As he perceived // it, yes.

KREPLEV  
(over her on //)  
... the texture of copper coins --

ALEXEI  
Your words are much sweeter, I must say. A bit like overripe strawberries.

Natalya is charmed by this description.

NATALYA  
Strawberries.

KREPLEV  
In all of Russia there can be only one man capable of such descriptions!

NATALYA  
I've never encountered another.

KREPLEV  
Apricot boots!

NATALYA  
The confusion of his senses was fascinating. (back to Alexei)  
You said something about apricot boots?

ALEXEI  
Apricot boots? Oh yes. Walking through the mud that morning.  
Yes. My boots stuck in the mud -- when I pulled them out:  
Phloop! The flavor of apricots.

NATALYA  
Mr. S. -- This way of ... perceiving things. Has this been  
with you always?

ALEXEI  
What way of perceiving things?

NATALYA  
Tasting sounds. Hearing colors. Your senses are a jumble.

ALEXEI  
That's what Vasily says. But is that bad?

NATALYA  
Does it get in the way of your work?

ALEXEI  
I don't think so.

KREPLEV  
It most certainly did! It got him into trouble on the job.

NATALYA

(a look to Kreplev)

Of course. (back to Alexei) It was your editor who referred you, was it not?

ALEXEI

Yes, Utkin. (a bit embarrassed) I annoy him.

NATALYA

Dear me. Exactly how?

ALEXEI

(cheerfully resigned)

Like fingernails on the chalkboard, he says.

NATALYA

(patiently)

What have you done that offends him?

ALEXEI

It's what I haven't done. No notes.

NATALYA

No notes?

ALEXEI

Such a strange thing--he asked to see my notes and of course I didn't have any. Why would I?

NATALYA

Most people do take notes. I still have mine from university.

ALEXEI

I never went to university. I started at art college. Meant to be a draftsman. But it was so noisy---with all the colors. Magenta especially. It's like the roar of a train. Just saying it gives me a headache. Words are easier than colors---they come in pastels, usually. Except when Vasily talks -- then the words are --- phew -- they almost glow! I notice that is true of other men of conviction. Like electric signs!

Natalya ponders how to deal with him.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

You haven't noticed that?

NATALYA

I can't say I have.

ALEXEI

Comrade Kirov especially. His words had a green kind of glow. Like a watch dial. Sad what happened to him.



KREPLEV  
(this is a discovery)  
Kirov! (pacing) He covered Kirov!

NATALYA  
Among other things.

Kreplev studies the file.

ALEXEI  
At any rate, I never take notes. But I never forget anything, either. Yet Utkin took offense! Said he'd never met such a lazy reporter. Now was that necessary? To insult me so? My old editor never minded. Of course, my old editor was drunk most of the time. (a beat) Are you going to test my memory?

Natalya considers.

NATALYA  
I'll tell you what. I will write a series of numbers on a note card - at random. (she begins to write rapidly) And you will look at the card--for 20 seconds, say?

ALEXEI  
(eagerly)  
A game?

NATALYA  
Of a sort.

ALEXEI  
I love games.

NATALYA  
After which you will tell me what you recall of the list.  
No need to be nervous. Here you go.

ALEXEI looks at the index card as  
NATALYA starts to time him. He hands  
the card back before the time is up.

NATALYA (CONT'D)  
You have more time.

ALEXEI  
19, 68, 23, 99, 17, 47, 36, 84, 32, 44, 71, 25, 16, 10, 22,  
11, 87, 38, 5, 63.

NATALYA  
That's -

ALEXEI  
You want it backwards?

NATALYA

The—

ALEXEI

63, 5, 38, 87, 11, 22, 10, 16, 25, 71, 44, 32, 84, 36, 47,  
17, 99, 23, 68, 19. Good?

A beat.

NATALYA

Yes. Thank you.

He waits as Natalya chews her thumb and  
ponders the next step.

ALEXEI

Shall we do another?

NATALYA

Not right now.

ALEXEI

Is the examination over, then?

NATALYA

For now, yes. Thank you.

ALEXEI

(after a beat)

Will there be a report?

NATALYA

A report?

ALEXEI

For my editor.

NATALYA

I can tell him there is no pathology in your history.  
Nothing here to treat. I could conduct more tests, I suppose--  
-but to what purpose, I'm not sure. You seem to function  
perfectly well as you are.

ALEXEI

I still annoy Utkin.

NATALYA

Then perhaps you should take a few notes. For the sake of  
getting on, you see.

ALEXEI

Whether I need to or not, you mean?

NATALYA

Exactly.

ALEXEI

I had not thought of that. What an excellent suggestion, Doctor!

He bows to her formally.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

I shall apply your advice. (pumping her hand) Thank you, Doctor. Thank you so very much!

NATALYA

Not at all, Mr. S. Not at all.

Alexei bows and leaves. Kreplev returns as the scene transforms to his office.

KREPLEV

These are significant details you left out of your paper, Comrade Doctor. Where he worked. Where he grew up. His brother's political activities ...

NATALYA

They had no relevance to my studies.

KREPLEV

They have relevance to the state. A man with such a gift -- in a position of influence--

NATALYA

Influence?

KREPLEV

The state press is a very powerful influence. A shaper of opinion and understanding.

NATALYA

He wrote about parades and flower shows.

KREPLEV

He had a connection to Kirov!

NATALYA

He covered some of Kirov's speeches. I don't think he knew the man personally.

KREPLEV

The leader of the Communist Party in Leningrad. And he never once approached the man?

NATALYA

I don't know, perhaps he did. But what has this to do with my paper?

KREPLEV

Kirov's murder is where it all began! We can agree to that, can we not?

NATALYA

Where what began?

KREPLEV

Mass arrests. Deportations. Executions!

NATALYA

(panicked)

I don't know anything about that.

A beat.

KREPLEV

(recovering)

Forgive me, Comrade Doctor. But in matters such as these, nothing is immaterial. Whether it ends up in your paper or not ... I must have every detail. (back to business) Now: Who else knew about this?

NATALYA

My director, of course.

KREPLEV

Director of the Hospital?

NATALYA

Director of my unit. Dr. Freundlich.

KREPLEV

Dr. Freundlich. Of course.

He looks at her manuscript.

KREPLEV

What happened after that? You say that you sent him away, finding -- how did you put it? No pathology in his history?

NATALYA

That's correct.

KREPLEV  
Yet you called him back again.

NATALYA  
About a month later.

KREPLEV  
Why?

NATALYA  
It would have been foolish not to.

A light shift and Alexei bursts into  
Natalya's office.

ALEXEI  
Doctor! It was such excitement to receive your note.

NATALYA  
I hope it's not an inconvenience, Mr. S.

ALEXEI  
Not at all! I'm very pleased to have another test.

NATALYA  
It may turn out to be a series of tests. I have hopes of  
working with you over a period of time. I think Dr.  
Freundlich explained that?

ALEXEI  
Oh yes! (almost laughing) And why not? It's not like I've got  
anything better to do.

NATALYA  
Have a seat.

He does so happily. Natalya hands him  
an index card. He studies it briefly as  
Kreplev circles the scene to observe.

NATALYA  
(to Kreplev)  
As before -- we began with a sequence of lists.

Alexei focuses on the card.

NATALYA (CONT'D)  
Each time, he repeats the material exactly as it has been  
presented to him. I increase the number of elements--

She hands him more cards.

NATALYA (CONT'D)

Thirty, fifty, seventy, a hundred, five hundred -- words, phrases, numbers. It's always the same:

Alexei closes his eyes, moves his lips, and then, in a rush:

ALEXEI

Door, egg, knob, bottle, pea, carton, cantelope, horse, clock, handle, chair, river, // (softly, underneath) flea, apple, hat, snake, tile, tree, symptom, element, porridge, sandal, basket, ottoman, buffalo, seedling, wine bottle, pencil, floor lamp, pickle, samovar, seagull ....

NATALYA

(over him on //)

It doesn't matter whether the words are gibberish or not -- whether I read the list to him -- or he reads it to himself. All he needs is a moment's pause between each element-- and he gives it back exactly as I'd given it to him. His memory seems literally to have no limits.

ALEXEI

(completing the list)

... leaflet, termite. Good?

NATALYA

Fine.

ALEXEI

Shall I give you the original, Doctor?

NATALYA

The original?

ALEXEI

19, 68, 23, 99, 17, 47, 36, 84, 32, 44, 71, 25, 16, 10, 22, 11, 87, 38, 5, 63.

He beams at her.

NATALYA

That was weeks ago.

ALEXEI

I recall it vividly -- you were sitting right there -- holding your clipboard and chewing your thumb.

NATALYA

My thumb?

ALEXEI

You chew your thumb when you concentrate.

NATALYA

I do?

ALEXEI

And it gives off the smell of ripe melons. You were wearing a light grey suit - like the one you have on now -- except it had a different cut to the skirt. Quieter than this one -- this particular grey is a little squeaky. But very flattering to your figure. The other one sighed. Softly. And tasted of .. Mmm ... brown sugar.

NATALYA

(to Kreplev)

It wasn't just that he could remember with great precision--

ALEXEI

(proudly, tapping his forehead)

Once it's in there, it stays.

NATALYA

(to Kreplev)

It was that his senses were engaged all at once. So the smells, the sounds, the textures. All of that together made the moment -- indelible.

ALEXEI

Shall we do another?

Natalya crosses to picks up a book.

NATALYA

So I gave him a dictionary.

She hands Alexei the book.

NATALYA

Start with letter A.

Eagerly, Alexei dives into the book. He moves out of the scene.

NATALYA

Is this ... the kind of detail you need, Comrade Kreplev?

Another beat.

KREPLEV

(walking into the scene)

Dr. Berezina. Please understand. I'm not the only reviewer in this bureau. I need to ask these questions so that I can defend your work. Any discrepancy could raise suspicions.

NATALYA

What suspicions?

KREPLEV

It's a rather fantastic tale, you must admit. Someone might think you invented it from whole cloth.

NATALYA

Comrade Kreplev, I assure you --

KREPLEV

And without the ability to sit down with this man myself --

NATALYA

Comrade--

KREPLEV

It's extremely difficult for me to verify any of this.

A beat.

KREPLEV

And if I cannot verify it --

NATALYA

That's -- that's why I've brought my notes. And a timeline of our sessions. If I may?

She takes the file and produces another document that she sets before Kreplev.

NATALYA (CONT'D)

As you can see ... here -- I've laid it all out.

Kreplev studies the document with interest.

NATALYA (CONT'D)

Every meeting -- what took place, what was said.

KREPLEV

You had quite a few meetings together.

NATALYA

Every Wednesday. For more than a year.

KREPLEV

Until the 9th of March. 1938.

NATALYA

Yes.

KREPLEV

And then?



NATALYA  
He went away to the provinces.

KREPLEV  
Where in the provinces?

NATALYA  
I don't know. We lost touch.

KREPLEV  
He left without a word? After working with you for a solid year -- no warning, no goodbye?

NATALYA  
I was taken ill.

KREPLEV  
Right. (beat) What was it that laid you up again?

He waits for the answer.

NATALYA  
(avoiding his eyes)  
It was -- it was dreadful--I--

KREPLEV  
Not tuberculosis?

NATALYA  
Well--

KREPLEV  
Terrible disease. (making a note) So you were in confinement, then?

He waits for the answer.

NATALYA  
For two years.

KREPLEV  
Such a shame. (beat) But I'm confused by one point, Comrade Doctor. If you lost touch with Mr. S. -- how do you know he went to the provinces?

A long beat.

NATALYA  
I don't understand these questions, Comrade Kreplev. You've asked nothing of my methods -- nothing of the science. I'm not sure you even care about the science.

KREPLEV

Truthfully, no. The science is rarely my concern. My task is to ensure that your paper contains no material that could compromise the state.

NATALYA

How could it possibly?

KREPLEV

You describe a man who could be a great asset to the people. Or a great liability.

NATALYA

Liability?

KREPLEV

A potential subversive.

NATALYA

(fighting a laugh)

Alexei?

KREPLEV

A man with a precise memory. In an important position--but unhappy in his job.

NATALYA

I'm sorry--

KREPLEV

With no political convictions --

NATALYA

He'd be of little use--

KREPLEV

Such a man could be easily turned.

NATALYA

He could barely get across the street! Said honking horns smelled like fried onions. And every horn kicked out a different color -- he stopped to count one day. Nearly got run over. If he's a liability -- it's only to himself.

KREPLEV

That is not how my supervisors will see it.

A beat.

NATALYA

I see. You think memory is like a camera. Taking pictures to be stored away. Well, it's not a camera.

KREPLEV

(amused)

More of a canvas, then?

NATALYA

Yes, more like a canvas. Our minds ... paint impressions upon it.

KREPLEV

Fuzzy, in other words?

NATALYA

Imprecise. But over time, the impressions change. Because we change.

KREPLEV

(a shift in tone)

As we grow up, you mean? A man sees things much differently than he did as a boy.

NATALYA

Exactly. The function of memory is not to document experience, Comrade Kreplev. It's to tell us what it means.

KREPLEV

And what about a man whose memories *never* change?

NATALYA

It's not the gift you think it is.

A light shift and Alexei enters again with urgency.

ALEXEI

Doctor! I am so glad to see you.

NATALYA

Alexei. (with a cough) Do come in.

ALEXEI

It's been such a week!

She coughs again, for the benefit of Kreplev.

ALEXEI

Chest cold?

NATALYA

Keeps hanging on.

ALEXEI

Nothing serious, I hope.

NATALYA

I'm sure I'll shake it soon enough. What about you? How was your week?

He paces.

ALEXEI

Awful. It was awful.

NATALYA

You do seem a bit ... agitated.

ALEXEI

It's Utkin.

NATALYA

Still having difficulties at work?

ALEXEI

Oh so many. Just yesterday --

Light shift -- the office transforms to the newspaper office. Alexei picks up a manuscript and begins to mark it up with an assignment. Natalya steps back to observe the story.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

I was at the office, wrapping up an assignment. When Utkin came barreling in.

The actress who plays Mother enters as Utkin.

UTKIN

Where's the story?

Alexei hands him the manuscript.

ALEXEI

(to Natalya)

An advance on the International Workers' Day Celebration. Parades, carnivals--greasy food---speeches, speeches, speeches! Every year, the same thing. You could run the exact same story, no one would care.

As Utkin picks up a pen.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

Recalling your advice, I said: (to Utkin) Do you want my notes?

UTKIN

Your notes?

ALEXEI

I took notes. Just as you wanted. Here they are.

UTKIN

I don't need your notes, Alexei Ivanovich. I need the art for this story.

ALEXEI

This is what the librarian gave me.

He produces a photo. He watches as Utkin examines the picture.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

But there is something wrong with it.

UTKIN

This is fine. The crowd is huge; the day is sunny.

ALEXEI

But someone's missing from the picture.

UTKIN

Who's missing?

ALEXEI

Comrade Bukharin. He spoke at the celebration last year.

UTKIN

You're confused, Comrade.

ALEXEI

Oh no. He was definitely seated. Waiting his turn. And he was a bit bored, I think, or nervous perhaps, 'cause he kept looking down, rubbing his hands together. Gave off the smell of turpentine. And that was odd--because he didn't do that the other times I'd heard him speak.

A beat.

UTKIN

Are you daft?

ALEXEI

I was there. (to Natalya) And Bukharin's words -- my God - they don't just glow like a watch dial, they spin across the room.

UTKIN

Comrade. How is it you do not understand me? This is the approved photograph. It came from the Central News Bureau.

ALEXEI

That's so strange. Why would the Central News Bureau approve a mistake?

UTKIN

It is not a mistake! This is the photo we are to use. Use it!

Utkin goes off, with the photo.

ALEXEI

(to Natalya)

He can be difficult that way. So sharp -- his words smell like vinegar. And fall out of his mouth like little bits of flint. (beat) My theory? He needs a sweetheart. Vasily would put it more crudely, but you get what I mean.

Utkin returns

UTKIN

Comrade. This business about Bukharin? He did not speak last year.

ALEXEI

But I wrote it up--I quoted him extensively--

UTKIN

He did not speak last year.

ALEXEI

Shall I find it for you in the archives?

UTKIN

The archives are being re-organized. New directives are on the way. Bukharin did NOT speak last year. He did not speak here -- and you did not cover his speech. Take all that business out of the story and have it on my desk by 5 o'clock.

Utkin starts to go, stops.

UTKIN (CONT'D)

It's for the good of the people.

ALEXEI

(unsure)

All right.

Utkin goes out.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

(to Natalya)

Though I can't see how. But I didn't think I should argue with him -- not when he's in that kind of mood.

NATALYA

That sounds wise.

ALEXEI

Still, it bothers me. Of course I recall Bukharin's speech: "My fellow citizens--friends and comrades. On this day, the anniversary of a great sacrifice by working men and women ..." (off Natalya) I won't repeat it all, but he goes on to talk about how wonderful things will be. One day. When the Revolution is realized ... The usual stuff. I don't see why you would want to wipe that out of the record.

Kreplev, now circling the edge of the scene, catches her eye.

NATALYA

Perhaps it is as your editor suggested. For the good of the people. And we ought not to question.

A beat as he considers.

ALEXEI

Perhaps you're right.

NATALYA

After all.

(directed to Kreplev)

So much good has come of the Revolution.

ALEXEI

Till next time, Doctor?

NATALYA

Next time.

She extends her hand to shake his, but Alexei takes her hand and kisses the back of it instead.

ALEXEI

See you then.

This throws her a bit; he withdraws.

NATALYA

(covering her embarrassment)

Old world manners. I found it charming.

Kreplev crosses into the scene with the folder of notes.

KREPLEV

And once again: Your paper says nothing of this exchange. You say only that he had conflicts at work.

NATALYA

Which he did.

KREPLEV

Did you report this incident to your director?

NATALYA

He wasn't interested in those kinds of details.

KREPLEV

Someone was. There's an item about it in your file.

She pales.

NATALYA

My file?

KREPLEV

Yes, your file, Comrade Doctor. We all have files. As I'm sure you know.

Kreplev retrieves a different folder.  
He opens it and reads:

KREPLEV:

"Berezina's patient load includes a reporter for the State News Service. Known to be uncooperative." The reporter, not you. (back to the file) "This relationship bears close watching as there may be improprieties involved."

He closes the folder.

KREPLEV

You're surprised?

Another beat.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

Sadly, your file does not explain what the improprieties were.

Another beat.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

Perhaps you'll shed some light on it?

NATALYA

I don't know what you're talking about.

KREPLEV

Do you want to tell me again why your studies were interrupted?



NATALYA

You know why, if you've seen my file.

KREPLEV

Indeed. Sorry mess, that was. But you were lucky, Comrade Doctor. Only two years in a labor camp? Most people in your shoes got ten.

A beat.

NATALYA

Am I under arrest?

KREPLEV

Goodness, no, Comrade Doctor! Nothing of the kind--

NATALYA

Then I'd like to go, please.

KREPLEV

But we've more to talk about.

She prepares to leave.

NATALYA

I have nothing more to say. If my paper is not ready for publication--

KREPLEV

My dear doctor--

NATALYA

I shall withdraw it.

KREPLEV

Please do not mistake me. I called you in this morning so that we could speak freely. (confidentially) So that we could help each other.

NATALYA

Help each other? How?

KREPLEV

Comrade Doctor: I know you paid dearly for sins committed by others.

He watches for her reaction.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

If you had to make a few *moral* compromises in order to get by ... Who could blame you?

She turns away.

KREPLEV

You weren't the first prisoner to curry favor with the camp's commandant.

Natalya begins to weep.

NATALYA

I did what I could to survive.

KREPLEV

As anyone would.

NATALYA

And these favors you speak of, they were not volunteered.

KREPLEV

Of course they were not. (beat) How you begin to rebuild your life after that, I cannot imagine.

NATALYA

It took me 10 years -- more than ten years -- just to get back to where I'd begun. Do you know what I did in the meantime?

KREPLEV

I understand you're an excellent typist.

Natalya weeps anew.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

Dr. Berezina, I tell you these things not to frighten you, but because I'm in a position to help you. But it's essential that you be truthful with me. So that we can trust each other.

NATALYA

I've told you what I know.

KREPLEV

You met with Alexei every week. Your sessions, surely, were not confined just to the study of his memory.

NATALYA

Of course we spoke of other things. (off Kreplev) Nothing political. Family matters, mostly.

KREPLEV

Family matters? What did he say about it?

NATALYA

After his fight with Utkin, things took an ugly turn.

KREPLEV

Ugly in what way?

NATALYA

Something to do with his brother.

A light shift -- the image of Stalin's eye returns to the window. Natalya observes as the scene transforms to Alexei's room in a communal house in St. Petersburg. Enter Alexei. Kreplev transforms to Vasily as Natalya moves off to observe. Stalin's eye dissolves into a milky sky.

VASILY

What possessed you to shoot off your big mouth?

ALEXEI

I thought there'd been a mistake.

VASILY

It's Bukharin. You do know what's happened to Bukharin don't you?

ALEXEI

Got into some kind of trouble, didn't he?

VASILY

Some kind of trouble? He's a traitor. A saboteur. Because of him, we've got production break-downs all over the country. We have a backlog of orders down at the paper mill -- orders I can't fill because we can't get the pulp -- we can't get the pulp because someone up the line has been paid off. Why would anyone want to see his picture anyway?

ALEXEI

What's Bukharin got to do with the paper industry?

VASILY

For someone who makes a living writing news reports, you are incredibly ignorant of current affairs.

ALEXEI

I don't pay that much attention to politics.

VASILY

You work for the state press! How can you not pay attention to politics?

ALEXEI

Have you ever heard a politician speak? The words are like rubber balls. Bouncing around, bouncing and glowing and throbbing and shaking -- I can't make sense of it.

VASILY

Oh my head.

ALEXEI

I'll get you an aspirin.

Alexei retrieves an aspirin and a glass of water for Vasily, who downs them both quickly.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

Are you staying to supper?

VASILY

How did you leave it with Utkin? Are you in trouble again?

ALEXEI

He gets mad, then he gets over it.

VASILY

(quietly)

Listen to me. Things are heating up. You understand?

ALEXEI

Heating up. Let me think: Heat. That word tastes sour, but it's awfully bright-colored.

VASILY

Let's have a little music, shall we? Radio?

ALEXEI

Oh surely if you like!

Alexei crosses to the cupboard. He turns on the radio. An orchestra plays -- a Tchaikovsky concerto. Alexei listens -- and looks above him. He's seeing colors all around and finding them delightful. Vasily is used to this routine. He puts his arm around Alexei and leads him to the center of the room.

VASILY

Heating up. (softly) It's a metaphor, Lyosha. You turn up the gas under a pot -- the pot gets hot. Turn it up some more, the pot boils away. You understand?

ALEXEI

The pot boils. Surely.

VASILY

If I don't get the pulp I need -- I can't meet my orders. Someone might think I want it that way. You see?

ALEXEI

Who would think that?

VASILY

No one should. But if word got around that my own brother has been booted out of the News Bureau because he's corrupting the coverage --

ALEXEI

Who's corrupting? I just asked a question.

VASILY

Stop asking questions. When they tell you to do something, just do it.

At the door, Mother enters with a shopping basket. Hearing the music,

MOTHER

Ah. The Philharmonic!

Alexei takes the basket from her and carries it to the table.

ALEXEI

Vasily wanted music.

VASILY

(with a kiss on the cheek)

Mama. If you don't mind.

MOTHER

It's lovely. Just a bit loud.

She turns down the volume.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

What luck I had at the market today. The saints smiled upon us.

VASILY

Did the saints send cigarettes?

ALEXEI

His head is bad again.

MOTHER

Then I will make you some tea. Look.

ALEXEI

(at the basket)

Fresh beets!

MOTHER

The last of them -- and rather tatty. But they'll do for soup.

ALEXEI  
(finding a brown paper package)

What's this?

MOTHER  
That's for you. From your Uncle Nikolai.

ALEXEI  
For me? What a delight!

Alexei unwraps the package, revealing a commemorative book about his home town.

MOTHER  
He's had it for years. Thought you might like to have it.

VASILY  
Uncle Nikolai isn't usually so generous with his collectibles.

MOTHER  
It was published to commemorate the new church in Pochinok.

ALEXEI  
St. Anselm's.

MOTHER  
You were baptized there.

ALEXEI  
Who could forget?

VASILY  
There he goes again.

ALEXEI  
It was terrifying -- pushed into the water that way.

MOTHER  
Your great-grandfather built the original St. Anselm's -- and your father and uncle helped build the new one.

ALEXEI  
That man there. Looks a bit like the Tsar.

MOTHER  
It's his brother, the Grand Duke. He came to dedicate the church -- that's how influential your family was at the time.

ALEXEI  
And there's Papa. With Nikolai!

MOTHER

They were both on the church council. That photograph with the Grand Duke was taken right before your uncle left for St. Petersburg.

VASILY

What are you doing with that Mama? Truly? Nikolai should know better.

MOTHER

It's just a memory book. And Lyosha will enrich those memories for us. Won't you my dear?

ALEXEI

What do you want to know, Mama?

MOTHER

Take me there. Take me back to Pochinok. Make it come alive again. Make me see it and smell it the way you did -- you describe things so wonderfully.

ALEXEI

The bookseller and the bakery next door -- words dancing off the page -- and the color of bread in the air -- you could taste the crowds on a Saturday morning -- salty and sweet at the same time. And everyone in a rush and yet -- everyone had plenty of time.

MOTHER

We all had time in those days. It's true.

ALEXEI

And Nikolai on a Saturday morning would come round to collect us. Take us fishing -- though Vasya never liked it much.

MOTHER

Because he could never get any fish.

VASILY

Mama. Nostalgia is a dangerous indulgence.

MOTHER

Later then -- when your brother is not here to be offended by pleasant memories.

VASILY

I'm serious, Mama. Don't let anyone see this. Wrap it up and hide it under the mattress.

MOTHER

Nonsense. We'll keep it on the book shelf where it belongs.

VASILY

Mama. Not everyone in this book is in favor right now. And the cause it celebrates is certainly not in favor. If Nikolai gave it to you -- it's because he didn't want to be caught with it himself.

MOTHER

Such talk, Vasya.

ALEXEI

I think Vasya is upset because things aren't going well at the mill.

MOTHER

No?

VASILY

Did I ask you to tell her that?

ALEXEI

She worries about you.

VASILY

There's nothing to worry about. Things are fine at the mill. It's all under control.

Natalya transforms to their neighbor Demidova.

DEMIDOVA

Sonia Mikhailovna!

She crosses off to knock on the door to their rooms.

VASILY

Demidova. That old hag.

DEMIDOVA

(off)

Sonia Mikhailovna?

VASILY

Don't let her in.

MOTHER

I have to let her in, Vasya. She does us favors all the time.

ALEXEI

Blueberry preserves last week.

DEMIDOVA

Sonia? I know you're in there.



Vasily puts the picture book on a chair  
and sits on it.

VASILY  
She's a miserable gossip.

ALEXEI  
They were lovely preserves.

Vasily pulls a small paperback out of  
his jacket as Mother opens the door.

MOTHER  
Maria Stepanovna. Good evening to you.

DEMIDOVA  
Sonia, my dear, we need to speak -- oh, hello Alexei.

ALEXEI  
Good evening, Madame Demidova.

DEMIDOVA  
Vasily. Good evening.

Vasily grunts, does not look up.

Demidova unfolds a towel to reveal a  
handful of dried fruits.

DEMIDOVA (CONT'D)  
Too many for me. Thought I'd share.

MOTHER  
Currants! Goodness!

DEMIDOVA  
And this.

She presents a lemon.

MOTHER  
How delightful! But what's the occasion?

DEMIDOVA  
The Nagorskys moved out last night. Left everything.

ALEXEI  
They've gone?

Vasily perks up.

VASILY  
What do you mean, left everything?

DEMIDOVA

Everything. Furniture, clothing--the food in the cupboard.

MOTHER

They never said a word to us.

DEMIDOVA

And you were so friendly with them, too. Though just between you and me, Sonia? I thought they were a bit off.

MOTHER

Mister Nagorsky was a lovely gentleman.

ALEXEI

He lent us books.

MOTHER

Just the other day--

VASILY

But you returned them.

DEMIDOVA

He was lovely, it's true. But I did not much care for Madame Nagorsky. She talks too much.

VASILY snorts

DEMIDOVA

And she always left the kitchen a mess.

MOTHER

I never noticed that.

DEMIDOVA

Goodness! She slopped all over the place. Especially when she made that dreadful goulash -- oh, the odor lingered for days. A supreme lack of consideration. That was her problem.

DEMIDOVA (CONT'D)

You don't think so, Vasily?

VASILY

What do I know? They aren't my neighbors.

DEMIDOVA

Yes, what do you know, Vasily?

VASILY

Only what I need to know. I think that's the best policy, don't you?

DEMIDOVA

So polite that one.

MOTHER

His head. It's bad tonight.

DEMIDOVA

Reading will only make it worse. (a beat) What's that you have there, Vasily? Poetry?

ALEXEI

Looks like Gorky.

DEMIDOVA

Gorky! Ah Gorky! Did I tell you? I saw the Lower Depths when it first played the Art Theatre. And do you know? Chekhov was in the audience that night! Did I tell you Sonia--did I tell you Alexei? How I flirted with Chekhov at the interval? I must have told that story 100 times.

VASILY

A hundred and fifty.

MOTHER

Do tell it again. I so like hearing it.

DEMIDOVA

Such a man. Not just a great artist--of course I did not know--none of us knew--how ill he was, but still. When he walked across the room toward me--I could barely breathe. Such regal bearing, such a gentlemanly manner--such intelligence in those wonderful, warm eyes. He kissed my hand! And I felt the blood rushing to my cheeks.

VASILY

You don't say.

DEMIDOVA

I'll have you know I kept him very entertained for a full 15 minutes -- a few minutes more and I'm convinced he'd have written a part just for me. Instead of that bitch, Olga Knipper. But then the lights dimmed, he went back to his seat and that was that.

MOTHER

Fate turns on such slight moments, doesn't it.

DEMIDOVA

Indeed. I swear if it had been a different circumstance -- I might be the widow of a great playwright now. Instead of a lighting man.

VASILY

You'd still be living in a communal apartment.

MOTHER

Vasya.

DEMIDOVA

Really, Sonia. I don't know what to say. I'll come back another time, when your son is feeling better.

MOTHER

Please don't take offense, Maria. He's always been unmannerly - I have tried with him, believe me. But he's a grown man, so what can I do?

DEMIDOVA

I am sorry for you, then. I'll see you another day, my dear.

MOTHER

Thank you again for the fruit.

Exit Demidova. Mother shuts the door.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

What's to be gained by this display?

VASILY

Why do you indulge that woman?

MOTHER

She just likes to talk.

VASILY

How did she get into the Nagorsky's rooms?

MOTHER

I'm sure she spoke to the manager.

VASILY

And I suppose he stood watch, too, while she helped herself to more than currants and lemons.

MOTHER

Vasya. Such an accusation!

VASILY

You shouldn't accept gifts from her, Mama.

MOTHER

(softening)

How is your head, Vasya? Still hurting?

VASILY

Still attached to my neck.

MOTHER

I'll put some water on. A cup of tea and you'll feel better. You're staying to supper?

VASILY

If I may.

MOTHER

Of course you may. Sweetheart. You're always welcome.

VASILY

Next time, I come. (brighter) I'll bring sausages.

MOTHER

That would be lovely.

She takes a kettle and goes out. Vasily goes to the door, makes sure it is closed.

VASILY

(quietly)

What did you hear last night? Anything?

ALEXEI

Some noise in the hall. But I didn't think much of it. Some of the other tenants often come in drunk.

VASILY

Did you see anything?

ALEXEI

No. But when I left for work this morning, I had a strange, terrible feeling as I passed their rooms. The door wasn't open, but there was a hollow sound coming from inside -- and the light around the door -- it was all wrong. It wasn't until I got to work that I realized -- the curtains were still drawn! (beat) Mr. Nagorsky was ever so pleasant. Maybe it's a mistake, Vasya -- maybe they've just gone on holiday. Should we return the fruit?

VASILY

(pulling him aside)

Listen to me. The Nagorskys are not on holiday; you know they're not on holiday. And they didn't go on their own.

Vasily turns up the radio. He draws Alexei back to the center of the room.

VASILY (CONT'D)

(quietly) I can't get Mama to understand this -- but if either of you has an opinion about the Nagorskys, you must keep it to yourselves. And keep your head down from now on.

ALEXEI

My head down.

Alexei ponders the phrase.

VASILY

Don't call attention to yourself. If people say things that aren't exactly as you remember -- just look past it.

ALEXEI

(trying to understand)

Look past it.

VASILY

Forget it ever happened, Lyosha.

ALEXEI

All right, yes. I see. Yes.

Vasily turns down the radio and picks up the lemon.

VASILY

A little lemon in the tea is a pleasant thing. Might as well use it, I suppose. Like a cup?

ALEXEI

Yes, thank you.

Vasily leaves the room.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

Just look past it.

Alexei gestures the action. The movement generates a wash of color across the room and Alexei is delighted.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

Ah. Tangerine.

A light shift; Stalin's staring eye returns to the window. The image of Stalin fades away to the view from Kreplev's office, as Alexei leaves and Kreplev and Natalya return to the scene.

KREPLEV

(moved by the story)

That's a very detailed account, Doctor Berezina. I appreciate your willingness to be so forthcoming.

NATALYA  
What else can I tell you?

KREPLEV  
You can tell me where he is.

NATALYA  
As I said--

KREPLEV  
No harm will come to him. I promise you. And no one will know you told me. That I can guarantee.

NATALYA  
How?

KREPLEV  
No one knows you're here today. After you go, there will be no record of this interview.

NATALYA  
(after a beat)  
I see.

KREPLEV  
Help me with this, Comrade Doctor, and I can help you. In ways you had never dreamed.

NATALYA  
By approving my paper?

KREPLEV  
By purging your record.

NATALYA  
Purging my ... ?

She starts to laugh.

NATALYA  
Comrade Kreplev, please.

KREPLEV  
Oh, paperwork goes missing all the time in a bureaucracy. You'd be surprised at the number of people who've dropped from sight. Kulaks and dissidents who've reinvented themselves as party loyalists. Party loyalists who've vanished into the woodwork. You think they don't exist?

A silence.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)  
It was once much easier, it's true, to reinvent yourself. In those chaotic times. But even now, one can make arrangements.

Another beat

NATALYA

Why should you do that for me? And put yourself at risk?

KREPLEV

There's risk in everything.

NATALYA

(sharply)

And what would you get out of it?

KREPLEV

Peace of mind.

NATALYA

Peace of mind?

KREPLEV

I told you: I'm plagued by a traumatic memory.

NATALYA

The boy with bloody hands.

KREPLEV

Exactly so. It disturbs my sleep, Doctor. It intrudes upon my waking thoughts -- it weighs upon my soul.

NATALYA

I'm sorry for that. If it's true. But what has Alexei to do with any of it?

KREPLEV

I'll tell you: It's a rather fantastic tale. (braced for it) But I knew a boy long ago. In a village far to the north. A strange boy with a strange way of seeing things. He smelled colors and saw sounds. And his memory was legendary. He had an older brother who was in my class at school. When I came across your paper I was ecstatic -- I was certain this boy and your Mr. S. were one and the same. The name is Sobolevsky. Not Alexei -- but Aleksandr -- Aleksandr Ivanovich Sobolevsky.

Natalya looks away.

NATALYA

And you think somehow, he can help you resolve this trauma?

KREPLEV

If anyone can.

NATALYA

Really? How? Did he witness it?



KREPLEV

I don't know.

NATALYA

Then how could he help you?

KREPLEV

He would know who the boy was. And he would remember other details -- the street he lived on, the people next door. All of that could jog my own memory. So much of it is buried, you see. Blocked.

NATALYA

Then perhaps you should leave it that way.

KREPLEV

But that's not what your profession teaches. The only way to escape the past is to confront it. Isn't that so?

NATALYA

But it's the patient who must do the work. Not someone else.

KREPLEV

(simmering)

You don't believe me.

NATALYA

As you say, it's a rather fantastic tale.

KREPLEV

You want proof of the connection? Is that it?

He grabs the file and violently shoves it at her.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

The teacher's name. Did he tell you? Is it in there? Find it!

Natalya sifts through the notes.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

I can tell you without looking. Markayevna. Ludmilla Markayevna. She was there for two years.

NATALYA

Yes, Markayevna.

KREPLEV

Proof enough?

NATALYA

I'm not sure it's proof of anything. You could have gotten that from his records.

KREPLEV

After she left teaching, she helped to organize the deportation of kulaks from our village.

Beat as he studies her.

KREPLEV

Perhaps he mentioned something about that?

NATALYA

(it sounds familiar)

Perhaps he did--

KREPLEV

(jumping on it)

So we agree then? This boy and your Mr. S. are one and the same!

NATALYA

(after a beat)

It's possible.

Triumphant, Kreplev takes the file of notes from her hand.

KREPLEV

(with a smile)

Well, then. Now we're getting somewhere.

Another beat.

NATALYA

But even if you could find him, Comrade Kreplev: I'm not sure he would be of much help to you.

KREPLEV

And why is that?

NATALYA

(carefully)

Because ... as time went on ... our work together took a markedly different turn.

KREPLEV

What turn?

NATALYA

One evening, early in 1938, he came for his usual session.

A light shift as enter Alexei.

ALEXEI

(with a bow)

Dr. Berezina.

NATALYA

But he had a peculiar request.

ALEXEI

All my life, Doctor, I've taken such pride in my great memory. But now ... I am tasked with learning how to forget.

NATALYA

Learning how to forget?

ALEXEI

I must erase my memories.

Alexei makes the same gesture of release that he made earlier, but this time, the color of resignation does not delight him. Natalya looks to a stunned Kreplev. A beat, then a tableau -- fade to silhouette as the image of Stalin returns to the window. Then darkness.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Lights rise on Kreplev, Natalya, and Alexei. Scene takes up exactly where it broke at the end of Act One.

NATALYA

You want to learn how to forget?

ALEXEI

Not everything. Just certain things.

NATALYA

I hardly to know where to begin.

ALEXEI

Surely you have some ideas, Doctor.

KREPLEV

(intruding)

You expect me to believe this? That someone with a vast memory like his would want to destroy it?

NATALYA

Not destroy it. Control it.

KREPLEV

I am astonished, Doctor, that you would entertain such a request.

NATALYA

I could hardly refuse. It presented such an exciting opportunity.

KREPLEV

Exciting? It ought to be an affront.

NATALYA

Comrade Kreplev. The study of memory is not just about what you retain. It is also about what you let go of.

She motions for Alexei to take a seat.  
Kreplev steps aside.

NATALYA

This was a chance to take the work to an entirely new place.

ALEXEI

Surely you have some ideas, Doctor.

NATALYA

Are you struggling with intrusive memories?

ALEXEI

Intrusive ... No I don't think so.

NATALYA

So you're not troubled by them?

ALEXEI

Troubled?

NATALYA

If the memories are uninvited. They break into your ordinary thoughts and arouse anxiety ... or anger.

ALEXEI

Nothing like that.

NATALYA

What is it you need to forget?

ALEXEI

Bukharin.

NATALYA

Comrade Bukharin?

ALEXEI

Now that his trial has started.

NATALYA

You're not the only one who'd like to forget about that.

ALEXEI

It's terrible. I saw it on the newsreel: His hands shook when he spoke. And the color of his words ... I suppose I should forget his speeches, too.

NATALYA

You've memorized his speeches?

ALEXEI

Not intentionally.

NATALYA

Of course not.

ALEXEI

And I should like to forget the way he rubbed his hands together. The dreadful smell it gave off. Like turpentine.

A beat.

NATALYA (CONT'D)

Alexei. When memories are troublesome -- it's often because of blocked emotions.

ALEXEI

Oh?

NATALYA

Some buried trauma. Something terrible we've hidden from ourselves, because it's too painful to face. (beat) Does Bukharin have some meaning to you? Some ... personal connection?

ALEXEI

Personal? Oh well, you know -- Bukharin. He's -- he was once the editor of *Izvestia*. So, being in the news business ... in a kind of remote way ... I suppose he might be considered a colleague.

NATALYA

And how do you feel about the fact -- now that it's come out that he's ...

ALEXEI

Oh, a saboteur you mean? (pondering it) I don't know. It's sad. Yes. A sad thing. I'm sorry for him.

NATALYA

Not angry?

ALEXEI

Should I be angry?

NATALYA

That he's caused such trouble for everyone.

ALEXEI

Yes, it is trouble, isn't it? It's frightening. Vasily says I need to wipe Bukharin out of my memory -- and I think he's right.

NATALYA

Erase him from your mind. Like a figure on a blackboard?

ALEXEI

Yes, exactly like that!

Kreplev bursts into the scene

KREPLEV

What nonsense!

NATALYA

Comrade --

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

It's not necessary to erase anyone. Just don't talk about them. (calmer) That's ... that surely is what the brother meant. Learn a little discretion?

NATALYA

That's what I advised at first. His response was so completely in character:

Back to Alexei

ALEXEI

(blankly)

You mean I should *lie* to people?

NATALYA

Not at all. But it's not necessary to point out the contradiction, is it?

ALEXEI

I was trying to be helpful.

NATALYA

Not everyone appreciates that kind of help.

ALEXEI

I should simply keep quiet, then?

NATALYA

That would be best.

ALEXEI

But if I can't keep quiet, it would be better to forget, wouldn't it?

NATALYA

Do you have trouble keeping quiet?

ALEXEI

Vasily says I do.

NATALYA

What you present is not a problem of memory, but self-control. Perhaps we can work on that.

KREPLEV

(returning to the scene)

This does not sound like research to me, Comrade Doctor.

NATALYA

He asked me for help. I tried to help.

KREPLEV

Your charge was to study him, not transform him.

NATALYA

He was not a happy man.

KREPLEV

His happiness was not your concern.

NATALYA

It became my concern.

KREPLEV

Obviously. Because by now you had developed a friendship.

NATALYA

I would not go that far.

KREPLEV

But you were fond of him, were you not? Found him likeable. Even attractive in his own, odd way?

NATALYA

Our dealings were strictly professional.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

Did he know he was under a microscope?

NATALYA

Of course he knew. I never hid my intentions.

KREPLEV

But that's not why he kept coming back, week after week.

NATALYA

He came because he trusted me.

KREPLEV

So you were his confidante? A keeper of secrets?

NATALYA

He had to have someone to talk to.

ALEXEI

Doctor Berezina -- It's taken me a while to understand this -- but not everyone remembers things the way I do. Like Vasily. He can't remember the day he was born.

NATALYA

Most people can't.

ALEXEI

But I do. Very clearly. (sadly) I suppose that makes me a bit of a freak.

NATALYA

Not a freak. A little unusual.



ALEXEI

And when I ask Vasily what he remembers -- about Pochinok. It changes all the time.

NATALYA

How so?

ALEXEI

When he's in a good mood, he recalls the bakery. The sweets in the window. Ballgames in the park. A girl he had a crush on. But when he's worried or annoyed, he talks about our father. What a tyrant he was -- and how brutal to our mother.

NATALYA

And that troubles you?

ALEXEI

Papa never raised a hand to Mama. And the girl Vasya had a crush on? She did not like him back. When I remind him of that, he gets angry.

NATALYA

Perhaps we should talk about why you feel such a strong need to be right all the time.

ALEXEI

But I *am* right all the time.

NATALYA

It's not making you many friends.

ALEXEI

I suppose not. But there's another reason why I must learn to forget, Doctor. (beat) I have this terrible sensation that my brain is filling up.

NATALYA

I'm sorry?

ALEXEI

I'm not very old. If I live only as long as my mother -- I won't have room up there to remember anything new. I should like to forget a few things. So shouldn't I start with Bukharin?

NATALYA

Suppose we try an experiment. Close your eyes and think of Bukharin at the May Day celebration. At the exact moment when you first noticed him. What do you see?

ALEXEI

Walking up to the stage. In his fine grey suit.

NATALYA

And he takes his seat.

ALEXEI

He takes his seat. Among all the other dignitaries. And a man tests the microphone. Bukharin is looking at some papers. It's his speech.

NATALYA

Let's imagine a cloth moving across that image, wiping away the papers in his hand.

ALEXEI

Just the papers?

NATALYA

Just the papers. (a beat) Now open your eyes. Most people, you see, don't forget that important public figures existed. What they forget are the details.

ALEXEI

What they had in their hands?

NATALYA

Exactly. They might recall that they heard Bukharin speak-- but they won't remember where. Or exactly what he said.

ALEXEI

They don't recall the speeches.

NATALYA

Generally not. Or if they do, they recall only a sentence or two.

ALEXEI

(closing his eyes)

Bukharin is still on the stage. But now--I can't see his hands. There's some kind of cloud over them. Like a beetle has crawled over the picture. (opening his eyes) But his speech is still in my head. I need to empty my mind of his words, too. What do you advise, Doctor? How should I go about it? Erase the words, one by one? With a cloth?

NATALYA

I hardly know what to advise.

Alexei observes as she make a notation.

ALEXEI

Doctor. When you write things down. Is it to help you remember? Or allow you to forget?

NATALYA

Allow me to forget. That's an interesting way to phrase it.

ALEXEI

If you don't have to keep things in your head.

NATALYA

It jogs the memory to be sure. But I suppose it does save it as well.

ALEXEI

So if I wrote things down, would it save me from having to remember them?

NATALYA

Now there's a thought.

She takes a piece of paper from her clipboard and puts it on the table.

NATALYA

Why don't we try it?

She hands him a pen.

ALEXEI

Shall I write out Bukharin's speeches?

NATALYA

Just one to start with. The May Day speech.

Alexei sits and begins to write eagerly as Kreplev crosses into the scene.

KREPLEV

This, I presume, was the first of many such exercises?

NATALYA

First of a few. But he took it a step further. After he'd written out the speech:

ALEXEI

(eagerly, to Natalya)

I should burn it.

Alexei crumples the paper and exits with happy determination.

KREPLEV

What a story. Tossing the words into the fire -- to erase them from his mind.

NATALYA

Why should I make that up?

KREPLEV

To throw me off. Persuade me he can no longer remember anything -- and it's no use pursuing him.

NATALYA

I'm not that calculating.

KREPLEV

No? Why then, does your paper say nothing about this?

NATALYA

It's not material to my paper.

KREPLEV

And no mention of it in your notes, either. Why is that?

NATALYA

Because I knew better! It would have been dangerous to write that down.

He can't argue with her logic.

KREPLEV

So these sessions in forgetting ... they were all ...

NATALYA

Not part of the record.

Another beat. Kreplev returns to the notes, weighing his next move. This is not going his way. Natalya observes him.

NATALYA

Why don't you tell me the real reason you called me in?

Kreplev turns a page.

NATALYA

On a Sunday morning when no one else is here?

Kreplev turns a page.

NATALYA

You don't really have the authority, do you?

Now she has his attention.

NATALYA

I could walk out of here right now ... you couldn't do a thing about it.

KREPLEV

I can keep you from publishing. And I don't need a reason.

Another beat. She sits.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

Curious thing, these notes of yours. (beat) How is it that you have these at all? Why were they not seized when you were arrested?

NATALYA

I was arrested at home.

KREPLEV

The 2 a.m. knock. Did no one think to search your office?

NATALYA

I don't know what they searched. When I returned from... When I could finally get back...I discovered them in the archives.

KREPLEV

The archives?

NATALYA

That's all I know.

KREPLEV

Of the Leningrad Hospital?

NATALYA

Yes, Leningrad.

KREPLEV

How did they come to be there? One of your loyal colleagues saved them for you?

NATALYA

I suppose.

KREPLEV

You suppose? You don't know?

NATALYA

I didn't ask. You find that incredible? I was just grateful that my work had been preserved.

KREPLEV

What I find incredible is that you fished these notes out of archives that don't exist.

NATALYA

I--

KREPLEV

Bombed to pieces during the siege. Hospital burned to the ground. Like much of the city.

Another beat as he studies her.

NATALYA

That's true, but ... obviously ... some of the records survived. (warming to it) They must have been transferred to safe storage. Before the invasion.

KREPLEV

(with a smile)

Perhaps.

NATALYA

That must be what happened.

KREPLEV

Very possible. Except for one thing.

Another page. Another beat.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

And this is a truly curious thing, Doctor. Your notes are typed so neatly. And though the paper is yellowed with age -- the ink seems hardly faded at all.

He looks to her for an answer.

KREPLEV

How do you account for that?

A beat.

NATALYA

It's dim in here. You might have a different impression in daylight.

Kreplev considers his next move.

KREPLEV

Believe me, Doctor. I would certainly understand if you had a need to reconstruct the record. Even to embellish the record.

NATALYA

I'm sorry, Comrade, if you don't find my notes helpful. But I don't know what else to tell you.

KREPLEV

Tell me his name.

NATALYA

You already know his name.

KREPLEV

The name he uses now.

NATALYA

I don't follow.

KREPLEV

He's using a different name now. Not Sobolevsky. Something else.

NATALYA

I don't know about that.

KREPLEV

It has to be. Because he's disappeared, you see. Not a trace of him, not one, in a vast store of personal records, to which I have *almost* unlimited access. Not. One. Trace. In nearly 20 years. So he's either dead -- or he's reinvented himself. And I believe you know which.

NATALYA

How could I know? I haven't spoken to him since the night of my arrest.

KREPLEV

(a bit thrown)

You saw him the night you were taken?

NATALYA

Isn't that in my file?

KREPLEV

No.

A beat as he regroups. Natalya calculates.

NATALYA

The 10th of March. A Thursday evening. He came to my apartment.

KREPLEV

Your apartment?

NATALYA

We often met there. It was more convenient -- closer to his work place.

KREPLEV

(at the notes)

It's not on your timeline.

NATALYA

It wasn't scheduled.

KREPLEV

A surprise visit? Why?

NATALYA

He was in an agitated state. Another fight with his brother.

KREPLEV

And what did you advise?

NATALYA

That's a confidential matter.

KREPLEV

Confidential. There's that word again.

NATALYA

I promised him: Whatever he told me would not leave the room. He was frightened.

KREPLEV

It was you he should have feared.

NATALYA

Me?

KREPLEV

You were the keeper of his secrets.

NATALYA

I've never betrayed a patient.

KREPLEV

Just your colleagues, I suppose? And only those who were already compromised?

NATALYA

You would have done the same, if you had a boot to your neck.

KREPLEV

I'm sure I would. We all have our breaking points.

NATALYA

I did what I could to help him. Up to the very end.

KREPLEV

Let me tell you something about that 'help.'

Kreplev grabs a different file.

KREPLEV

Aleksandr Ivanovich did as you advised. Writing voluminously in that notebook.

Scene transforms to the communal apartment -- Alexei enters, with a tablet. He sits and writes out Bukharin's speech.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

But it didn't provide relief. Instead, it set a trap for him.



Natalya moves aside as Kreplev tells the story. Alexei returns to the table, writing in his notebook.

ALEXEI

(as he writes)

"My fellow citizens--friends and comrades. Among the working class and within our party we find comrades whose attitude towards the peasantry resembles narrow craft unionism:

A beat

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

Unionism. That tastes like a turnip. Oh but the texture is -- is that burlap?

Kreplev moves out of the scene as:

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

(back to the speech)

What, they ask, has the countryside to do with us?

A knock off.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

This way of thinking must be abandoned ...

A more urgent knock. He gets up and opens the door. Demidova sweeps in with a basket.

DEMIDOVA

Ah, Alexei! So sorry to disturb.

ALEXEI

Madame. Good evening. Mama is not home yet.

DEMIDOVA

I'm sorry for that.

An awkward silence. She puts the basket down.

DEMIDOVA (CONT'D)

I've brought you some potatoes.

ALEXEI

How very kind. Mama will be so pleased.

Alexei retrieves a pot and puts the potatoes in them. He returns the pot to a shelf. Then he sits down and goes back to his task. Demidova waits.

DEMIDOVA (CONT'D)

You won't mind if I wait for her?

ALEXEI

I am sure *she* would not mind.

A beat.

DEMIDOVA

May I sit then?

ALEXEI

Certainly.

He goes round to pull out a chair for her.

DEMIDOVA

Thank you.

She sits. A beat. They regard each other politely.

DEMIDOVA

When is your mother expected?

ALEXEI

I don't know.

A beat.

DEMIDOVA

What's that you're doing there?

ALEXEI

Clearing my mind.

DEMIDOVA

A journal? I used to keep a journal, when I was a young girl. I would rush home from a party to record every wonderful detail: What every girl was wearing, what every boy had to say.

Alexei turns a page, keeps writing.

DEMIDOVA (CONT'D)

What possessed you to start a journal, Alexei?

ALEXEI

It's an assignment from my psychologist.

DEMIDOVA

Your psychologist? Truly? (another beat) What is his name? Is he prominent?

ALEXEI

Dr. Berezina. A lady.

DEMIDOVA

I don't believe I know of her.

ALEXEI

She works at the Leningrad Hospital.

All the while, Alexei is steadily  
writing, intently.

DEMIDOVA

And what, may I inquire, caused you to consult with her?

Alexei stops writing.

ALEXEI

I don't take notes.

DEMIDOVA

Oh?

ALEXEI

My editor doesn't like it.

DEMIDOVA

And for this you need a psychologist?

ALEXEI

(as he resumes his work)

He thought so.

Another beat.

DEMIDOVA

I don't suppose you have any tea?

Alexei puts down his pen.

ALEXEI

You want tea, Madame?

DEMIDOVA

I shouldn't mind.

ALEXEI

I shouldn't mind either.

Alexei crosses to the cupboard to find  
some tea. Demidova glances discreetly  
at the notebook.

DEMIDOVA

Where is your brother this evening? Has he gone out?

ALEXEI

Vasya doesn't live with us.

DEMIDOVA

One would get the opposite impression. One might think he had moved in. As often as he's here.

ALEXEI

It's just Mama and me.

He sets out some teacups.

DEMIDOVA

I'm glad to hear it. Because there are rules. Did you know that on the ground floor, that fellow in the back room--with the dirty overcoat--what was his name?

ALEXEI

Monsieur Tatarov.

DEMIDOVA

Tatarov, yes. Tatarov. He had someone sharing who wasn't on the books! Six months he had that boy there. How he did that I can't imagine. But that was under the old manager--and I suspect there was some money changing hands.

ALEXEI

Money changing hands.

He puzzles over the phrase, studies his hands.

DEMIDOVA

So tell your brother: If he has any ideas about moving in, there's a protocol. Seniority, first of all.

ALEXEI

Vasya has a room near the mill.

DEMIDOVA

Oh yes, the mill. He's foreman now. Isn't that so? And how is he getting on down there? With so many shortages?

Alexei draws a breath.

DEMIDOVA (CONT'D)

Doesn't talk about work?

ALEXEI

He prefers that I not talk about it.

DEMIDOVA  
He's certainly the secretive one.

ALEXEI  
How do you take your tea?

DEMIDOVA  
A little sugar would be nice.

ALEXEI  
Sugar.

As he searches for sugar,  
DEMIDOVA (CONT'D)  
He must be missing his quotas. I imagine if he were meeting  
them, he'd be over here bragging about it.

ALEXEI  
Vasya doesn't brag.

DEMIDOVA  
Oh, I've heard him once or twice. Talking about how he's  
rising in the party--how he's becoming a real influence at  
the council.

ALEXEI  
I never heard him say that.

DEMIDOVA  
You weren't here at the time.

ALEXEI  
Now that's very odd, Madame. Just now your words have taken  
on a stale odor. Like a dirty old sock.

DEMIDOVA  
What a thing to say.

ALEXEI  
'Influence.' It's a rather dusty word. Kind of chalky.

Demidova's hand goes to her mouth.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)  
Like in the newsreels.

DEMIDOVA  
Whatever are you talking about Alexei?

ALEXEI  
The other night I went to the pictures with Mama. The  
newsreel came on -- and there he was -- Comrade Bukharin!  
Confessing. To the most awful things. His words were exactly  
the color of yours just now.

DEMIDOVA

I'm afraid I don't understand.

ALEXEI

Comrade Bukharin. When he made his confession. His words lost all their color. I've noticed that before. When Vasily doesn't want to be bothered explaining something to me, he'll toss something off and it'll be the color of wet chalk. And I'll know he just made something up.

DEMIDOVA

Are you saying that Bukharin has made a false confession?

ALEXEI

I just noticed his words changed color as he spoke. Dustier and dustier. The way yours did just now. When you said you heard Vasily bragging. Come to think of it, Madame, your words take on that same dusty color every time you tell that story about Chekhov.

Demidova stirs in discomfort.

DEMIDOVA

I see. Well! (tightly) Now I understand why you've consulted a psychiatrist.

ALEXEI

Psychologist. (with a smile) I'll put the kettle on.

As he moves to the door.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

Will you have milk in your tea?

DEMIDOVA

If you don't mind.

ALEXEI

I think I do mind, because we're short of milk.

Alexei goes out. A beat. Demidova gets up and walks around the table. Another beat as she flips opens his notebook and reads.

DEMIDOVA

What on earth?

She flips another page, not sure what she is seeing, but realizes it's not good. She considers what to do. She carefully removes a page from the notebook, then folds the page into her pocket.

She looks back at the notebook again as Vasily enters -- and she moves quickly away.

DEMIDOVA (CONT'D)

Vasily.

VASILY

Madame Demidova. (sourly) What a pleasant surprise.

DEMIDOVA

I was here to see your dear mother. But she's gone out.

VASILY

Frighten her away?

DEMIDOVA

How funny you are, Vasily, no. She was already gone. Your brother is here, though. He's in the kitchen just now.

A beat. She edges toward the door. He blocks her way.

VASILY (CONT'D)

And how are you enjoying your new rooms?

DEMIDOVA

Whatever do you mean?

VASILY

The Nagorskys. You've got the whole space now.

DEMIDOVA

I have seniority.

VASILY

Did you inherit any furnishings as well? They had a few nice pieces, last I saw.

DEMIDOVA

Such manners.

VASILY

And all those books.

She again tries again to leave; he blocks her again.

VASILY (CONT'D)

Strange that it should go to you. When they have family in Leningrad.

She moves away.

DEMIDOVA

And how are things down at the mill? Meeting your quotas?

VASILY

Fine.

DEMIDOVA

I hear differently.

VASILY

Do you?

DEMIDOVA

Just now. Alexei and I were chatting. He said -- he implied -- you're under tremendous pressure.

VASILY

That's interesting.

DEMIDOVA

And I said, Alexei! You shouldn't gossip about your poor brother. I'm sure he's doing the best he can.

VASILY

What else did he tell you?

DEMIDOVA

He spoke in confidence. I can't betray a confidence.

Vasily moves in.

VASILY

You'd betray your best friend for a bar of chocolate.

DEMIDOVA

Really, Vasily. I should speak to your mother about you.

VASILY

All right, I'll find out from him what he really said. And unlike you -- Alexei won't lie.

He opens the door.

VASILY (CONT'D)

Kind of you to stop by.

Offended, Demidova makes her exit.  
Vasily slams the door behind her. He  
tosses his cap onto the table and sits  
down, exhausted.

VASILY (CONT'D)

That bitch.



Then he notices the notebook open in front of him. A beat as he studies it. Alexei enters with the tea kettle.

ALEXEI

Vasya. Where's Mama?

VASILY

(weary)

I couldn't find her. (beat) Lyosha, what's this?

ALEXEI

Homework. For Dr. Berezina.

VASILY

(patiently)

Lyosha, how many times do I have to tell you? When people come by, put your writings away.

ALEXEI

It was only Demidova.

VASILY

Her especially. Will you please be more careful?

ALEXEI

I'm sorry, Vasya. I've made tea. Like some?

VASILY

(rubbing his temples)

You've read my mind.

Scene freezes as Natalya crosses into the scene.

NATALYA

Where did you get that story, Comrade Kreplev?

KREPLEV

From the record.

NATALYA

Really?

KREPLEV

Every building in St. Petersburg had a witch like her -- trading confidences for favors.

NATALYA

That is not the story that Alexei told me.

KREPLEV

He didn't have the whole picture. He didn't understand what had happened in his own home.

He retrieves a file and produces the missing page from Alexei's notebook.

KREPLEV

Thanks to you.

Natalya takes it in.

NATALYA

He understood very well. He was terrified of his brother.

KREPLEV

That's a lie.

NATALYA

It's true. Vasily was brutal -- ambitious -- not to be trusted.

Light shift. Now Natalya tells the story.

NATALYA

When he found the notebook ...

Kreplev transforms to Vasily and returns to find the open notebook.

VASILY

What's this?

ALEXEI

Homework. For Dr. Berezina.

VASILY

No, what is *this*? This writing -- here?

ALEXEI

Oh. It's Bukharin.

VASILY

Bukharin?

ALEXEI

I'm erasing him. Just as you asked. You see, I write his speeches down--

VASILY

His speeches?

Vasily grabs the notebook.

VASILY

Are you out of your mind?

ALEXEI  
Give me that.

Vasya pushes Alexei away, Alexei  
responds with surprising force, shoving  
Vasily into the wall, as

VASILY  
Get off me, you freak!

ALEXEI  
I'm not a freak Vasya!

VASILY  
Get off!

This time Vasya punches him and he  
reels back, losing his balance.

VASILY  
You keep shit like this around and we'll all be on a train to  
the East. Understand?

ALEXEI  
I'm not a freak.

Mother enters to find Vasya standing  
over Alexei.

MOTHER  
Vasya? Lyosha? What is this?

VASILY  
Just a joke.

MOTHER  
Then why is he bleeding?

VASILY  
We were fooling around. Got out of hand.

MOTHER  
(to Alexei)  
What happened?

ALEXEI

He took my notebook.

MOTHER

That's nothing to fight about. Vasya.

Reluctantly, Vasily hands the notebook  
back to Alexei.

VASILY

(to Alexei)

Remember what I said.

MOTHER

Lyosha. You need a compress for that eye.

ALEXEI

I'm all right.

VASILY

Where've you been?

MOTHER

I went to see Nikolai. (avoiding his eyes) He's been taken.

ALEXEI

Nikolai?

VASILY

When?

MOTHER

A few hours; I don't know.

VASILY

What happened?

MOTHER

I went to his apartment. You know he's been ill.  
They were there when I arrived. Three men. In dark coats.

VASILY

Did they take your name?

MOTHER

(looking away)

I wasn't raised to be rude, Vasya.

VASILY

Your address too, I suppose.

MOTHER

They barked all these questions--

VASILY  
What else did you tell them?

MOTHER  
I don't remember.

VASILY  
Mother.

(grabbing her)  
What else did you tell them?

ALEXEI  
(jumping up to block him)  
Stop badgering her.

VASILY  
Stop interfering.

MOTHER  
Vasya! (indicating the walls) The others.

VASILY  
The others. (moving away) Now you think about the others!

MOTHER  
They asked me a few questions. I don't know what I said. I was frightened.

ALEXEI  
It's all right, Mama.

MOTHER  
Nikolai said they wouldn't be long. So I started cleaning. Sorting. But they never came back.

ALEXEI  
Don't worry, Mama. We'll get it straightened out. We'll go to the police--

VASILY  
No! No police.

ALEXEI  
We have to--

VASILY  
You want to get us all shot?

Vasya grabs a valise and starts to put clothes into it.

ALEXEI  
What are you doing, Vasya?

VASILY

You can't stay here.

ALEXEI

Why are your hands shaking?

MOTHER

Boys. Can't you be kinder to each other? I worry about you.

VASILY

Mama, listen to me.

MOTHER

Both of you need to find nice girls. And settle down.

VASILY

It isn't safe here.

ALEXEI

It's some kind of mistake, Vasya. What could Nikolai have done?

VASILY

It doesn't matter if it was a mistake. They took him, they'll come for us. You have to pack.

MOTHER

Not another move. No. It was hard enough when we came here.

VASILY

A few clothes, that's all. I'll be back in an hour.

MOTHER

Where are you going?

VASILY

To see a friend.

MOTHER

Apologize to your brother before you go.

VASILY

(aside to Alexei) Don't let anyone in -- and don't let her go out.

Vasily slams out.

ALEXEI

We better start packing.

MOTHER

(grabbing his hand)  
No, you sit with me.

(MORE)

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Sit with me -- and tell me one of your memories. Easters in Pochinok, the beautifully colored eggs. Bring it back for me.

ALEXEI

Not now, Mama.

MOTHER

When your grandmother was alive -- and organized the whole meal. Wasn't it wonderful?

ALEXEI

No, Mama. Vasily is right -- it is not good to think about the past. You must put it out of your mind.

MOTHER

Lyosha.

ALEXEI

I have to go out for a while. Please start packing.

MOTHER

Get some ice for that eye.

He grabs his notebook and goes out, leaving Mother alone. A beat. She stands and begins to pack. A light shift; the scene fades to darkness as Stalin's eye peers through the window. Mother exits; Kreplev and Natalya return.

NATALYA

And that's when he came to me.

NATALYA

He was shaking from the cold -- or so I thought. Then he came into the light -- and I saw his face.

Kreplev crosses away as the space transforms to Natalya's apartment. Alexei enters and sits as she applies an ice pack to his eye.

ALEXEI

I don't know what happened. He's never done that before.

NATALYA

Hold still.

ALEXEI

I've never done that before.

NATALYA

*Keep it still.*

ALEXEI

He was so scared -- it scared me.

NATALYA

Does he know you're here?

ALEXEI

Vasya? I don't think so.

NATALYA

You didn't tell him you were coming here?

ALEXEI

I didn't tell anyone. Not even Mama.

NATALYA

Good. That's good.

A beat.

ALEXEI

Strange things are on going on. No one speaks and yet, the silence is so very dark...

NATALYA

Everyone is on edge these days.

ALEXEI

I think it's more important than ever that I learn to forget.

He takes the notebook out of his coat.

ALEXEI

I filled 40 pages tonight. Bukharin's address to the Agricultural Bureau. And here --

Now he notices a page is missing.

NATALYA

What is it?

ALEXEI

There's a page missing.

Natalya examines the notebook.

NATALYA

What was on it?

ALEXEI

Start of a speech --about the New Economic Policy ...

NATALYA

Could it have fallen out?



ALEXEI  
It's been torn.

A beat.

NATALYA  
Who had your notebook last?

ALEXEI  
Vasily...

A moment.

ALEXEI  
I don't want it to be possible. But perhaps ... when I was making the tea ...

NATALYA  
We must burn this. All of it. Right now.

Kreplev charges into the scene.

KREPLEV  
No! He couldn't believe that. Not of his own brother.

NATALYA  
Who else but the party loyalist?

ALEXEI  
Dr. Berezina. (a beat) I think ... I think I should not go home tonight.

NATALYA  
Stay here.

ALEXEI  
Here?

NATALYA  
Just for a few hours. I have a friend who may be able to help.

KREPLEV  
You are the one.

Alexei presses her hand.

ALEXEI  
I have to get word to Mama.

KREPLEV  
You are the one who taught him to be afraid.

NATALYA

He came to that on his own.

ALEXEI

She'll be frantic.

NATALYA

When you are safe. Then I will get word to her.

Alexei bows and leaves.

KREPLEV

Vasily was impatient with him, it's true. But he was devoted to his family.

NATALYA

I only know what Alexei told me. He was afraid to go home.

KREPLEV

Did he stay with you that night?

NATALYA

I sent him to a friend.

KREPLEV

What friend?

NATALYA

Dr. Freundlich. I don't know what became of him after that.

A beat.

KREPLEV

Perhaps we are telling the same story after all, Comrade Doctor. (beat) Alexei did not go home that night. His mother was indeed frantic: Vasily went out to look for him. The newspaper office, the movie houses, Nikolai's apartment -- up and down the canal path, even, against his better judgment, the police station.

A light shift and Mother appears as if in the communal apartment, with the memory book of Pochinok. She has an ink pen and is blacking out an image in the book.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

And when he returns, to tell his mother that he cannot find Alexei anywhere, he finds her with Nikolai's gift in her lap.

NATALYA

The memory book of Pochinok.

MOTHER

Vasya. Any word?

KREPLEV

One by one she blacks out the faces of the disgraced. First her husband's --

MOTHER

Did you find Lyosha?

KREPLEV

Then her brother-in-law's--Nikolai--

MOTHER

Where did you go?

KREPLEV

And finally her infant son's ... As if by blotting out their faces, she could exonerate herself.

Kreplev transforms to Vasily

VASILY

I've been everywhere, Mama.

MOTHER

Go back to the newspaper office. See if he's come in yet.

VASILY

I've been there twice.

MOTHER

I'll tell you what I think. I think he's met a girl. Yes, I do.

VASILY

Mama.

MOTHER

Boys do silly things sometimes when they have a sweetheart.

VASILY

Mama: We have to prepare ourselves for the worst --

MOTHER

Vasya. Patience. He'll come walking in any minute.

VASILY

I don't think we can wait much longer.

MOTHER

The idea. We can't go without your brother.

A beat.

VASILY

No. Of course you're right. (beat) I'm going out again.

Vasily kisses her on the cheek.

VASILY

If he comes in, you tell him to stay put.

Vasily transforms to Kreplev. Mother continues her task.

KREPLEV

Sonia Mikhailovna was alone in that room for only a few hours more.

Sound of the 2 a.m. knock -- a cold pounding.

MOTHER

Lyosha?

More pounding -- violent, terrifying.

MOTHER

Lyosha is that you?

She stares at the door. A beat. The door flies open on its own. Shadows of the secret police fill the hallway. Mother retreats.

She vanishes in the dark. Stalin's staring eye returns to the window. The image in the window fades to the view from Kreplev's office. Mother is gone.

KREPLEV

When Vasily comes back to the apartment, the door is hanging off its hinges -- and the contents of every drawer scattered across the room. His heart breaks at the sight: What else is there for him to do, but flee?

NATALYA

What else could he do?

KREPLEV

That's the question that eats at me. What else could he have done?

NATALYA

Had he stayed, he would have been arrested himself.

KREPLEV

We can agree then? The brother is not to blame? If he was brutal -- at times -- it's because he was frightened. We can agree on that?

A beat.

NATALYA

Comrade Kreplev. You spoke to me earlier of a childhood trauma. A memory that intrudes on you.

KREPLEV

The boy with bloody hands.

NATALYA

A boy you knew in Pochinok. Where you grew up. With your younger brother. Aleksandr.

A long beat.

KREPLEV

So, Comrade Doctor. Now we know each other's secrets.

NATALYA

Do we? Do we know them all?

KREPLEV

Doctor Berezina, I beg you: I have nothing else. No other stories to tell. If Aleksandr is still alive, I want to find him. Is that so hard to understand?

A beat.

NATALYA

Vasily. If that is really your name. I so wish to believe you.

A light shift and the image of Stalin appears again in the frame of the window. Lights tight on Kreplev.

KREPLEV

(to the audience)

Of course you must ask how a man who disappeared from the streets of Leningrad in 1938 could resurface years later as a petty bureaucrat in a city 400 miles away. How it is possible to remake yourself so completely? In an age when every movement is tracked? You need not wonder. The cult of personality is notoriously inefficient.

Light shift and Stalin's image fades to the view from Kreplev's window.

KREPLEV

Do you need more proof? Something only a brother would know?

NATALYA

Tell me.

KREPLEV

He was afraid of lightning.

NATALYA

Yes, I recall. He jumped away from the windows.

KREPLEV

He was left-handed.

NATALYA

True.

KREPLEV

His handwriting was a fine, delicate kind of script.

NATALYA

Almost feminine.

KREPLEV

He hated boiled eggs. And he sometimes forgot to tie his shoes.

NATALYA

Nearly tripped a few times.

KREPLEV

Did he ever speak of me?

NATALYA

With great admiration. And affection.

KREPLEV

That's how he spoke of you.

A beat.

Kreplev crosses to his desk and sits down. He takes a form from a drawer and begins to fill it out.

KREPLEV

I'm approving your paper, Comrade Doctor. You should be hearing from the editor soon.

He clips the form to Berezina's manuscript and sets the manuscript aside.

NATALYA

Thank you.

KREPLEV

And may I commend you for your efforts. It's very good work.

NATALYA

That's ... that's very kind. (a beat) Am I free to go?

KREPLEV

You were always free to go.

She picks up her coat and puts it on.

NATALYA

You are right, Comrade Kreplev. My notes are indeed reconstructions. The originals were lost long ago.

KREPLEV

Then I am very impressed, Doctor Berezina. These are very convincing forgeries.

NATALYA

I had some help.

Beat.

KREPLEV

Aleksandr did not go to the provinces after all?

NATALYA

Oh he went. Long ago. And I lost track of him, exactly as I said.

KREPLEV

How did you find him?

NATALYA

He found me. A few years ago ... when a traveling carnival came through town.

KREPLEV

A carnival?

NATALYA

He finally found an occupation that suited him.

KREPLEV

Dr. Berezina. My earlier offer still stands.

NATALYA

That is very kind. But I would prefer to work through official channels.

KREPLEV

Where is he?

NATALYA

Right now? I don't know. But ... I can tell you where he is likely to be. Next week--when the curtain rises.

Lights shift, then fades to a pinspot on Kreplev and the sound of a train on the tracks.

KREPLEV

(to the audience)

I leave Kiyevsky station before dawn. A twelve-hour journey through villages and towns, fields of green rye under a sun so pure it's impossible not to think of Pochinok. I have this strange sense that I am moving backwards in time, the years falling away and the boy emerging: the idealist who once believed that a revolution was possible, that human nature could be remade, and all selfish impulses pounded out of us. Then, finally, would Russia be the nation it was destined to be. What did it matter if one face or another disappeared from the history books? If it meant that this bright future could come into being?

Light shift and lights rises on the impression of a carnival tent.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

I arrive near dusk. The kind of small-time circus that makes a yearly circuit through the provinces. Acrobats and aerialists -- horses leaping through hoops of flame.

Lights up on Alexei, now known as Azarov, in his circus uniform -- tuxedo, top hat, white gloves and blindfold. In the window we see the same display we saw at the beginning. About 30 random words in various hands, as if each word is written on a blackboard by different people. Kreplev watches as if from the wings.

KREPLEV

Here, the Amazing Azarov is the star.

Azarov takes a bow to enthusiastic applause.



AZAROV

Thank you. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen!

KREPLEV

(to the audience)

I knew that such a reunion required great care.

Azarov removes his blindfold; more  
applause.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

(audience)

So I gave no hint of my true mission, but presented myself as  
Pavel Kreplev, a low-level bureaucrat.

Azarov crosses to Kreplev as if he is  
in his caravan after the show. He  
removes his gloves.

KREPLEV

Certain that he would recognize me immediately.

AZAROV

Pochinok you say?

KREPLEV

Yes, Pochinok. (beat) I went to school with your brother.

AZAROV

My brother?

Kreplev hands an envelope to Azarov.

KREPLEV

I have a letter of introduction.

AZAROV

(amused)

From my brother?

KREPLEV

From Dr. Berezina.

A beat as Azarov examines the letter.

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

As the letter explains, I'm charged with reviewing her paper.

AZAROV

She's going to publish. How nice.

KREPLEV

I want to assure you of complete confidentiality. But given the circumstances -- and the fact that we come from the same village ... I thought it prudent to meet with you. And ... to see you in performance.

Azarov folds the letter away.

AZAROV

How did you like the show?

KREPLEV

Very entertaining.

AZAROV

I've gotten much better at it over the years. Used to be quite nervous. Stage fright.

KREPLEV

I can imagine.

AZAROV

But now it works very well, I think. (beat) So you're from Pochinok too.

KREPLEV

Yes. Perhaps I look familiar to you?

Azarov studies him.

AZAROV

I'm not very good with faces.

KREPLEV

I can hardly believe that.

AZAROV

Oh, it's true. I have an amazing memory for useless details -- as you have seen. But when it comes to faces, I'm hopeless.

KREPLEV

Is that by design?

AZAROV

(laughing)

Perhaps. I've had to train myself to let go of an awful lot over the years.

KREPLEV

Otherwise your head fills up?

AZAROV

Exactly! Five shows a day, six days a week -- pfuh! No room for anything more. In fact -- that's the next thing I've got to do. Erase the lists from tonight's show.

KREPLEV

How will you do that?

AZAROV

Oh it's a little exercise I've worked out. Trade secret.

KREPLEV

And what exercise do you use to erase faces?

AZAROV

Do you need this for the paper?

KREPLEV

You truly don't recognize me?

AZAROV

(after a moment)

Should I?

KREPLEV

We were quite close as children.

AZAROV

We were?

KREPLEV

Played together. Sometimes fought.

AZAROV

(puzzling)

I'm sorry. It's been a long time.

KREPLEV

Wouldn't you recognize your own brother if you saw him?

AZAROV

My own brother? It's so funny that you keep talking about my brother. I haven't got a brother.

KREPLEV

Vasily Ivanovich.

AZAROV

I'm an only child. You must have me confused with someone else from the village.

KREPLEV

Your brother was Vasily, your mother Sonia--

AZAROV

My mother was Sonia, but I have no brother. I'm sorry, what is all this about?

KREPLEV

(grasping)

Do you recall a family with a nasty little dog?

AZAROV

There were quite a few of those.

KREPLEV

Little yellow thing. They lived next door to you. The dog was so awful -- it yapped all the day long. We had to shut the windows even in the warmest weather.

AZAROV

We had a dog like that.

KREPLEV

(a revelation)

You had such a dog?

AZAROV

Yes, but not for long. Father made us get rid of it.

KREPLEV

How?

AZAROV

Gave it away I suppose. Well, now let me think.

KREPLEV

There was a boy with bloody hands.

AZAROV

Boy with--oh, wait. Yes.

KREPLEV

Sitting on the stoop.

AZAROV

Oh yes. I do recall that. Sitting on our front stoop and crying.

KREPLEV

Your front stoop?

AZAROV

Because his father had forced him to kill the dog. He told the boy -- get rid of it, or live in the street. So the boy grabbed a carving knife and cut the dog's throat -- just for spite.

KREPLEV

(it comes together)

Who was he, this boy?

AZAROV

Oh. Well -- it's funny, I don't know. I recall the way he wept. His cries were the color of blood oranges. But his face is a blur.

KREPLEV

I am that boy!

AZAROV

You?

KREPLEV

It has to be! You were too little -- it had to be me. I'm the one who did it.

AZAROV

Mr. Kreplev.

KREPLEV

I'm the boy with the bloody hands!

A beat.

AZAROV

Mr. Kreplev--

KREPLEV

My name is Vasily. I'm your brother. Vasily Ivanovich.

A beat as they lock eyes.

KREPLEV

Surely you know me!

AZAROV

Vasily Ivanovich. I'm sorry -- I can't place you at all.

Exit Azarov. Lights fade to a pinspot on Kreplev.

KREPLEV

This is how a man makes accommodation. By rewriting his own history. (studying his hands) And so a boy who bent to his father's cruel impulse -- invents a different boy to take the blame. Is this madness? Or is it what memory is meant to do? To shape us and relieve us of the impossible past? But what if those memories are immutable and still -- pasted indelibly into the mind like snapshots in an album. How does that man make accommodation? If his mind is just a catalog? (a beat) Or perhaps he really did remember.

(MORE)

KREPLEV (CONT'D)

Perhaps Aleksandr Ivanovich had not erased me at all. No, what he had learned to do -- finally agreed to do -- after all these years ... was lie. (liking the idea.) Surely that is it! When survival depends on that kind of accommodation. (with a smile) I like that story so much better. So that is the one I will tell.

Lights fade on Kreplev.

END PLAY

NOTES ON THE PLAY:

Memory is not merely a collection of images or facts, but the construction of a narrative. It is a way of creating ourselves. Over time, memories change. They evolve as we evolve and continue to create ourselves, to create meaning in our lives. But if you cannot tell stories to yourself, then the memories do not change - and we cannot create our own story. So perhaps the gift of total recall is no gift at all - because it means we never gain any understanding of ourselves.

A personal story. It's how to stay sane. When our agreed upon narrative is disrupted -- so that I deny your suffering, your sacrifice. Deny your very existence -- we lose our bearings. We lose our way. Our very sanity. It becomes a form of national madness. It played out in Stalin's Great Purge, and it plays out on the American political stage when argument gives way to propaganda. How do we find our way back to the sane center?

## A BRIEF GUIDE TO PRONUNCIATION

To the American ear, the proper Russian pronunciation is difficult to understand. Therefore, I would opt for using the more familiar Anglicized versions here. With many thanks to Steven Carpenter for the research:

MAMA, PAPA and MADAME should be pronounced with the stress on the second (final) syllable. This reflects the French influence that permeated Russian during the Tsarist days and that hung on afterward: i.e., Muh-MA, Puh-PAH, Mah-DAHM.

Other names:

ALEXEI IVANOVICH - uh LEK say ih VAH nuh vich  
ALEXSANDR IVANOVICH - ah lek SAHN dur ih VAHN uh vich  
AZAROV - AZ uh rawf  
BEREZINA - buh REHZ in uh  
BUKHARIN - boo KAHR in  
DACHA - DAH chuh  
DEMIDOVA - duh MID uh vuh  
FREUNDLICH - FROYND lik  
IZVESTIA - iz VES tee uh  
KIROV - KEER awf  
KIYEVSKY STATION - kee YEV skee  
KREPLEV - KREP lev  
KRUSHCHEV - KROOSH chef (the stress and pronunciation most commonly used in English)  
LUDMILLA MARKAYEVNA - lood MIL uh mahr KAY ev nuh  
LYOSHA - lee OH shuh  
MARIA STEPANOVNA - muh REE uh steh PAHN uhv nuh  
NATALYA PETROVNA - nuh TAHL yuh pi TRAWV nuh  
NAGORSKY - nuh GORE skee  
NIKOLAI - NIK uh ligh  
POCHINOK - puh CHEE nuhk  
SOBELEVSKY - soh buh LEF skee  
SONIA MIKHAILOVNA - SOHN yuh mih KIGH luhv nuh  
TATAROV - tuh TAHR uhf  
UTKIN - OOT kin  
VASILY IVANOVICH - vuh SEEL ee ih VAH nuh vich  
VASYA - VAHS yuh