

STANISLAVSKI'S METHODS

by

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CHARACTERS

EVGENY Stanislavski, 40s, ne'er do well theatrical scion of the Stanislavski family.

GRUSHA Agrafenova, 40s, his star actress.

ELENA, 20s, his theatrical assistant and bookkeeper.

SASHA, 40s, Evgeny's shady friend.

Kevin David FLYNN, 30s-40s, a well known American actor with a reputation as a hell raiser and reprobate.

LENA, 20s, Flynn's American assistant, twin to Elena.

SETTING

A rundown theater in Moscow.

TIME

The present.

ACT I**Scene One**

(Lights up on a bare stage, with an unlit ghost light center. The trash and other detritus from past seasons lay strewn upon it. GRUSHA and EVGENY enter through the audience and will eventually climb to the stage.)

GRUSHA

Ah, Evgeny, look! Is there anything more beautiful than a bare stage in an empty theater!

EVGENY

Bah. I've seen too many empty theaters to notice any more. Here - help me clean up.

GRUSHA

But the potential of it! The bare nothingness of it! A blank canvas, ready to be filled with stories, with characters - heroes and miscreants, the good and the evil, the beautiful and the wicked!

EVGENY

And another new company of actors. Actors. How I hate them.

GRUSHA

You should try paying them. Perhaps they wouldn't leave every season if you did. You should talk to Elena. I'm sure she could squeeze a little of out last year's take to pay them what we owe.

EVGENY

Pay them? Pay them with what? The wrong end of ticket stubs? The wrappers from the candy we give to the audience so they won't cough during the show? Then they throw the wrappers on the floor! *Audiences* - how I hate them.

GRUSHA

But without the audience, what are we? What if there were no audience?

EVGENY

That's why I like Beckett. You're usually assured the audience will outnumber the cast. But no - you like your sainted Chekhov. If *The Three Sisters* only had just the three sisters! All the relatives, merchants, and other hangers-on. No thought for the poor producer. *Writers* - how I hate them. Even the dead ones.

GRUSHA

At least you don't have to pay them. How are you coming with the season? I assume there will be a few meaty parts for me. You know, I'm trying my hand at writing a play. How hard could it be? It's just people talking.

EVGENY

Or if you're doing Pinter, not talking. I like that--it saves on printing scripts.

GRUSHA

What about *Comedy of Errors*? Elena and I could play the *Dromios*.

EVGENY

Yes, and lose in overtime. Could we do it with one set of twins? Or a quick change artist! Yes! You can do that. My budget, you know. I must talk to Elena.

(GRUSHA climbs on stage from the audience and goes through the old props littering the stage. EVGENY follows her.)

GRUSHA

Look at this candelabra! Last year's *Cherry Orchard*, wasn't it? Everyone said my *Ranyevskaya* was radiant. And Maxim's dagger from his Scottish play. He is a joy to work with. Such a professional.

EVGENY

Yes, so professional I haven't seen him in five years.

GRUSHA

Alexi's torch from his *Caliban*. We've done so much wonderful work here, Evgeny, you and me. When will you direct me again, my love?

EVGENY

I'm strictly management now.

GRUSHA

Evgeny Stanislavski, not direct? What would your uncle say?

EVGENY

Great granduncle. On my mother's side. Twice removed. We think.

GRUSHA

Still, a man of the theater like you, descended from the greatest director this country has ever produced? Evgeny Stanislavski, only a producer, a money man, a bean counter? Oh, my Genya, we made art together you and I. You guided me, I took your commands and I made them live.

EVGENY

I've evolved. What does a director do anyway? Make sure actors don't bump into each other, don't topple the scenery, and they can be seen even from the cheap seats.

GRUSHA

Perhaps, but a great director like your uncle...

EVGENY

Great granduncle!

GRUSHA

A great director adds passion, adds a special vision, and transforms a mediocre work into a masterpiece! You've done that before. With me. Oh, Genya, you put the quack in my Wild Duck.

EVGENY

(dismissively)

Ibsen.

GRUSHA

Yes. Magnificent.

EVGENY

Have you ever tried to take a humorless bunch of depressed Norwegians and make them interesting for three hours? To an even more depressed audience? In this country, No Exit seems like a comfortable existence. Face it, Grusha - we might as well be six characters in search of a ruble.

GRUSHA

Look around you. Look at all this.

EVGENY

I see nothing but understuffed seats underfilled with underwhelmed patrons performed to by underpaid actors and an underfinanced producer in an underground theater. And I'm undermedicated.

GRUSHA

Consider all we've done here. Good years and bad.

EVGENY

Mostly bad.

GRUSHA

We were good together, you know, my Evgeny, my leading man.

EVGENY

Perhaps. Yes. Too good. Too good to last. You were my muse. My muse of fire.

(HE straightens.)

O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!

(HE holds for a moment, remembering his great past and the past of his extraordinary family. But soon, HE looks around his decrepit old theater, picks up an old prop that's laying around, throws it down and deflates.)

GRUSHA

You were my leader, Genya, my impresario! You knew what I wanted before even I did. You could have followed in your uncle's footsteps!

EVGENY

But you forget. Paris. London. New York.

GRUSHA

I did what I had to.

EVGENY

You left me to deal with those...those barbarians. Those know-nothings! They wouldn't know Uncle Vanya from Auntie Mame!

GRUSHA

You could have followed me. I met many people in New York. Powerful, important people.

EVGENY

Everything I had was here. You went there to do what? Commercials, television comedies.

GRUSHA

My next-door neighbor on Life With Harriet was widely praised in the media.

EVGENY

I carried on in the theater! Our theater! It was a dangerous time here, Grusha. A bad review could mean a one-way ticket to Siberia. You remember Kosya, and his musical Merchant? One night, he was taken away. That's right - and he was dragged through the streets by the Bol-sheviks!

GRUSHA

I had my life.

EVGENY

You abandoned me!

(Pause.)

Oh, Grusha. I am sorry. Forget I said that. It's ancient history to me now. It's just...I don't know. I don't know if we can go on. No money, no actors, no audience. Why even clean up here? Between the taxes we owe, the bribes we haven't paid, the debts, we may not have a season.

GRUSHA

But we must, Genya. We must. I will not allow you to be the first Stanislavski to close a theater! And you must produce my play. It's different for actresses--we must make a transition at some point. You start your career playing Juliet, you end it

playing the Nurse.

EVGENY

And what is this play?

GRUSHA

Here.

(SHE hands him a few sheets of paper.)

I'm still working on it.

EVGENY

(reading)

"A *Cold Wind in August*." Hmm. "Scene - a farmhouse in the country. Maria removes her coat. 'A cold wind blows, Rumshinski, and yet it is only August.'" Well, you get to the point quickly. I will consider it, my Grusha, once it's...more developed.

GRUSHA

But it shows promise!

EVGENY

Of course, much promise. A cold wind, a farmhouse, a coat...it's all coming together magnificently.

GRUSHA

Perhaps a small production downstairs!

EVGENY

We don't have a downstairs anymore. Don't you remember the avant garde production we did of the Ten Commandments?

GRUSHA

Oh yes. Whose idea was it to part the Red Sea through the orchestra?

EVGENY

It would have worked if we had better drainage.

GRUSHA

There must be something we can do. I want to be a writer. I don't want to play the Nurse, Genya! Not ever!

EVGENY

Well, there is one thing. I don't put much credence in it. It sounds too good to be true.

GRUSHA

I could reprise my Blanche! And you could be my Stanley!

EVGENY

I thought you were transitioning. Besides, I'm no Stanley any more, you're no Blanche. I didn't tell you, but I received a very interesting proposal from Sasha a few days ago.

GRUSHA

That liar! I thought he was still in California.

EVGENY

He gets around. He called me twice. From Los Angeles, and New York.

GRUSHA

How much did he ask for this time?

EVGENY

He has a proposition. For the season. For our season.

(GRUSHA stops dead in her tracks.)

GRUSHA

Sasha has a proposition for our season from America.

EVGENY

He says he met someone who we could help who could help us.

GRUSHA

With the season?

EVGENY

With money for the season. And seasons after this. Many seasons after this.

GRUSHA

From America.

EVGENY

And it's not illegal!

GRUSHA

He says.

EVGENY

He assured me it wasn't.

GRUSHA

He also assured you we could do *One Gentleman of Verona* and no one would notice.

EVGENY

Critics – how I hate them.

GRUSHA

Ah, there's Elena. Elena, come give your Aunt Grusha a hug.

(ELENA enters, harried, with a clipboard, a ledger book, and at least four or five pens and pencils.)

ELENA

Good morning, Madame Grusha.

EVGENY

Elena, how are you? More importantly, how am I? Am I a rich producer today or a poor one?

(Pause, as she looks at him.)

No need to answer, eh? I'll be checking the balcony for stray coins next.

ELENA

Still a poor one, I'm afraid. Where is everyone? Didn't you call a company meeting?

EVGENY

Did you get my last note? I postponed our meeting until next week. Sasha may have...

ELENA

He owes you a thousand, you know.

GRUSHA

A thousand? From what?

ELENA

Your investment. The chickens died.

GRUSHA

Chickens?

ELENA

An egg farm in the Urals. To finance a new season. No chickens, no eggs.

GRUSHA

No brain, no money. Oh, not you darling.

EVGENY

The only man who owes me money can't even keep a chicken alive. My grandmother from Minsk had chickens all over her yard. Perfectly healthy and quite delicious, I might add.

GRUSHA

Perhaps your grandmother would like to run a theater.

ELENA

Are we keeping the season we settled on? Tartuffe, Pygmalion, Ghosts, and Hamlet?

EVGENY

One word titles save on printing!

GRUSHA

Moliere, Shaw, Ibsen, and Shakespeare! Moliere, Shaw, Ibsen, and Shakespeare! Again! How imaginative, Evgeny. No wonder you have no investors and no audience!

EVGENY

We have an audience! We have subscribers! Season subscribers! Elena, don't we have season subscribers?

ELENA

Yes, seven hundred nine, exactly.

EVGENY

See? We have subscribers! We have an audience!

GRUSHA

Elena, my sweet, how many of those are paying subscribers?

EVGENY

(nervously)

Uh, run along now, Elena.

ELENA

(fumbling through books)

Take away the city councilmen, the party members, the former party members, their wives, their ex-wives, your creditors, the banks, the newspapers – fifty-two.

EVGENY

Fifty-two?

ELENA

And half of those are discounted.

(Pause.)

EVGENY

I'm screwed. I must talk to Sasha. Elena, do you know when he's coming back?

ELENA

The ticket you bought him was for today.

EVGENY

The ticket I bought him???

ELENA

He said to thank you.

GRUSHA

I'm sure he did.

EVGENY

If this all works out, we'll thank him. We'll all thank him. When does his flight land? I'll pick him up.

ELENA

The limousine left two hours ago. He should be back any minute.

EVGENY

The *limousine*? Elena, get my pills.

ELENA

The blue ones or the red ones?

EVGENY

The green ones.

ELENA

The *green* ones? Are you sure?

EVGENY

And a drink. Anything. My career is on the line here.

ELENA

Yes, Evgeny Maximovich. By the way, could there possibly be a part for me in the season? You know I ask every year.

EVGENY

Elena, how long have you been with us?

ELENA

Seven years. Since I left the orphanage and joined Madame Grusha's academy for young actors.

EVGENY

Yes, a mere seven years.

ELENA

But I've been studying, Evgeny Maximovich. Your granduncle's great theories.

GRUSHA

(correcting)

Great uncle's grand theories.

EVGENY

My great grand uncle's theories! They've been plaguing me my whole life.

ELENA

I'm not asking much, Evgeny Maximovich. I'm not asking for Regan, or the lead in Joan of Arc. Just a small part. And then, next year, perhaps Juliet. Yes! And Madame Grusha could play the Nurse!

GRUSHA

I am not playing the Nurse to anyone, let alone you!

EVGENY

Perhaps you could be in Grusha's new play.

ELENA

A writer, too! My, what a long and productive career you've had!

GRUSHA

I will not be spoken to like that. Genya, say something to her!

EVGENY

Elena, I could possibly find a place for you this season. You realize acting is a very poorly paid profession, of course.

ELENA

Poorly paid or no, I've committed my life to the stage. Why, I'd even act for nothing.

EVGENY

For nothing, you say? Well then, welcome to our company!

ELENA

Oh - that man. He came around again.

EVGENY

Again? What did he want? The usual? A hundred?

ELENA

No. He left this. I'm sorry. And after you welcomed me to the company!

(SHE hands him a thick envelope. HE opens it and reads the material inside.)

(ELENA holds back tears and exits running.)

GRUSHA

Are you alright, darling?

EVGENY

Twenty thousand in unpaid...*taxes*, they call them now. Thirty days. If not, they take the theater. Maybe Sasha can help.

GRUSHA

I don't want to see that charlatan's face. You can meet with him, but until he proves me wrong, I wouldn't trust him. Just be careful. You know how many people here rely on you here to do the right thing.

EVGENY

And I've never let them down before.

GRUSHA

There was that production of *The Imaginary Invalid* where you didn't cast the title role.

EVGENY

Why cast an imaginary character, I thought. Writers and their tricks! How I hate them.

GRUSHA

Just don't make a fool of yourself.

(SASHA enters, direct from the limousine from the airport.)

SASHA

Evgeny, my friend! So good to see you! Greetings from America!

(He hands EVGENY a business card.)

EVGENY

What's this?

SASHA

My card.

EVGENY

(looks it over)

But it's blank.

SASHA

Business is bad.

(HE sees GRUSHA.)

And Grusha Agrafenova! A pleasure to see you looking so well.

GRUSHA

Thank you.

SASHA

The rumors I heard were untrue, then.

GRUSHA

Rumors? What rumors?

SASHA

Oh, you know. The usual. For a woman. Of your age.

GRUSHA

Of my age? Of all the...

EVGENY

Now Grusha, please, I'm sure he means no harm.

SASHA

Just passing along some information.

GRUSHA

I'll pass you along, you...you...

(As she leaves:)

I must check on the state of my dressing room. Evgeny, my advice to you - watch your wallet. I'll be back.

(SHE exits off stage.)

EVGENY

So Sasha, how was America? Tell me about California.

SASHA

How is California ever? The weather is magnificent, the wine flows like the Don, and the women get more beautiful every year. And New York - the streets, the food, the opportunities. And taxi drivers who talk like us! Here, I brought you a present.

(SASHA gives EVGENY a bottle, very plainly a bottle of vodka.)

A friend from New York gave it to me. Well, not exactly a friend. An acquaintance. A business acquaintance. Who I met at

the airport. Well, not exactly at the airport. At the entrance to the airport. Near the entrance. He said it was a special shipment. You know. As the Americans say - "top notch."

EVGENY

(handles it gingerly and puts it aside)

Thank you, Sasha. It was very thoughtful of you.

SASHA

My dear Evgeny, this small trifle will pale before what I am about to tell you, the gift I am about to lay in your lap. Evgeny, you will thank me and thank me and thank me. The first-class ticket you so kindly purchased for me will seem like nothing, an investment, a down payment on this theater's future, your future, your retirement. Evgeny, I am about to make you a very rich man. A very rich man.

EVGENY

What do you mean?

SASHA

What if I told you...ah, you wouldn't believe me.

EVGENY

Would it save the theater?

SASHA

Yes. Undoubtedly yes.

EVGENY

Then I'd believe you.

SASHA

Taxes again?

EVGENY

Taxes. And salaries. This year's salaries. Last year's salaries.

SASHA

And, shall we say, *payments*? Payments to certain people?

EVGENY

If you mean bribes, yes. You can help me?

SASHA

Have I ever led you astray?

EVGENY

Constantly. But continue.

SASHA

My friend, what would you say if I told you that in ten minutes, the greatest American movie star living today will be walking into this theater - your theater! - walking right up that aisle and offer you his services for a one-night only fundraiser to finance your season!

(Pause. With great emphasis:)

For free. Gratis. Not a penny to change hands. In fact, he would make a generous contribution to your renowned establishment. One hundred thousand dollars. In cash.

(Pause. EVGENY doesn't react.)

Evgeny Maximovich, did you hear what I said?

EVGENY

What's the catch?

SASHA

No catch.

EVGENY

There has to be a catch.

SASHA

Not today.

EVGENY

So, Sasha. who is it? Who are you promising me? That crazy comedian, Dirk Stanstead? Or Bobby DiPaulo, the gangster?

SASHA

Bigger.

EVGENY

Frank Newcastle? I saw his last picture - a good actor but a stinker of a film. Or that Max Angelo, with the bald head and the guns?

SASHA

Bigger.

EVGENY

Bigger than that? Call me a skeptic, Sasha. Who do you know and how can you get me a Hollywood star of such magnitude? Who is it?

SASHA

Kevin...David...Flynn.

(EVGENY laughs.)

EVGENY

And why would a movie star like Kevin David Flynn come to a flea-bitten shell of a theater like this one?

SASHA

He's had some, shall we say, setbacks in his career.

EVGENY

Obviously, if he wants to come here.

SASHA

Well, there was the arrest. You heard about the arrest?

EVGENY

Of course. Drunk driving on the Pacific Coast Highway. And he beat up a policeman.

SASHA

What a country. In America, you can beat up a policeman. Here in Russia...

EVGENY

You know, I still don't believe you. It's the Smirnoff talking.

SASHA

This is absolutely, one hundred percent true.

EVGENY

And then he beat up his wife, cursed at his mother, and moved in with two women young enough to be his daughters.

SASHA

No one said he was a family man.

EVGENY

Why would Kevin David Flynn - who is not exactly John Barrymore, mind you - why would he want to come here? In the winter?

SASHA

He needs some, as they say in America, down time.

EVGENY

Down time?

SASHA

He'll commit to one week. Enough time to rehearse and perform in a fundraiser. He'll do three scenes - one with Grusha, and one on his own, and a Shakespearean monologue. He'd fill your theater. And remember, he's bringing money.

(EVGENY looks up.)

EVGENY

Whose money?

SASHA

That's none of your concern. But it's enough to end your problems once and for all. As I said, a contribution of one hundred thousand dollars in legal U.S. currency. Cash. Hundred dollar bills. Legal tender. Unmarked.

EVGENY

One hundred thousand dollars.

SASHA

One hundred thousand dollars.

EVGENY

One hundred thousand dollars.

(Pause.)

Why?

SASHA

Let's just say he does okay on the deal as well.

EVGENY

So let me get this straight. You were in America, and you meet the most notorious actor in the world in some odd manner. You persuade him to fly halfway around the world to perform three ten-minute scenes in a rundown theater, and pay one hundred thousand dollars to do it?

SASHA

Exactly.

EVGENY

For no compensation except to drop out of the headlines for a while.

SASHA

Precisely. Well, he is being compensated in some manner, but it's nothing to concern yourself with.

EVGENY

Will I end up directing Stalin on Ice in the Kamchatka?

SASHA

It is all perfectly legal. From your point of view.

EVGENY

And what is your end of this?

SASHA

Don't worry about me. I always land on my feet.

EVGENY

Yes, but in my shoes.

SASHA

He's on his way now. Should I tell him to turn around and take his hundred thousand dollars back to America? Or will you welcome him with open arms as your uncle would do to any actor willing to work?

EVGENY

Three scenes?

SASHA

And of course you will direct. Two of them.

EVGENY

Direct? Me, direct Kevin David Flynn? Direct Grusha? I don't direct anymore, Sasha. Not for Flynn. And definitely not for Grusha.

SASHA

For one hundred thousand dollars in unmarked hundred dollar bills?

EVGENY

And this is legal?

SASHA

As legal as possible. Perhaps he could put a good word in with his friends in Hollywood. You'd like that, Evgeny, wouldn't you? Have you ever been to California, Evgeny? Do you know what they have there? Something you could never get here.

EVGENY

(mocking)

What? Money? Women? Mansions?

SASHA

The sun. The warm sun. Yes, money, women, mansions, but the sun, Evgeny! What you call warm they call cold! And remember, this isn't New York, this is Hollywood - you'd instantly be the most cultured person in town!

EVGENY

(mulling it over)

He *could* do a scene with Grusha--she's writing a play, did I tell you.

SASHA

And the Shakespeare as a crowd pleaser at the end. But before he must do a monologue, one he has prepared.

EVGENY

Not any of this "to be or not to be" garbage, I hope. I've seen his movies. He'd put a love scene in King Lear.

SASHA

No, from a scene from The Three Brothers.

EVGENY

You mean The Three Sisters.

SASHA

It's an adaptation. Trust me, Evgeny. Have I ever led you astray?

EVGENY

About ten minutes ago when you came here.

SASHA

I think I hear the limousine outside. It's him. Get Grusha here.

EVGENY

(calling offstage)

Grusha! Our guest is arriving.

(FLYNN enters through the audience, up an aisle. HE wears a large coat, and enters almost apologetically. HE looks around and surveys the devastation.

(GRUSHA enters from backstage as well.)

FLYNN

Does anyone here speak English?

EVGENY

Are you Flynn?

FLYNN

Yes I am.

EVGENY

We speak English.

FLYNN

(looking around)

Uh, I hope I'm in the wrong place.

SASHA

Let me get your coat.

(HE takes FLYNN's coat.)

GRUSHA

(shocked, with a mixture of dread and regret)

You!

FLYNN

(not understanding)

Me?

GRUSHA

You! I thought I would never see you again!

FLYNN

Have we met?

GRUSHA

You don't remember?

FLYNN

(pulls out a crumpled paper)

Is this 47 Leninsky Prospekt?

GRUSHA

New York. The third of May. The moon was blue, and so was I. Oh, it was years ago. We shared...we shared...a moment.

SASHA

Grusha, you must be mistaken. Yes, my friend. This is it, the famous Stanislavski Art Theater. Once the most important and legendary theater in all Russia. And now you too are part of its grand history. Come up and meet everyone.

FLYNN

How? I don't do my own stunts.

SASHA

There are stairs.

FLYNN

Of course. I haven't worked in the theater for a long time.

GRUSHA

(under her breath)

Lout. Have you ever *been* in a theater?

EVGENY

Mr. Kevin David Flynn! I cannot believe that we are so honored to have on our stage the star of Grand Ticket and Explosion Master!

FLYNN

That's Big Ticket and Mister Explosion.

SASHA

We see them in translation.

EVGENY

You may be mainstream in America, but here you are a foreign film star.

FLYNN

Hmm. I never thought of it like that.

EVGENY

Mister Flynn, we have never been graced by an actor of your...your...

SASHA

Generosity?

GRUSHA

Notoriety?

SASHA

Theatricality?

GRUSHA

Infamy?

EVGENY

...your, well...your charisma. How did you become a big Hollywood movie star?

FLYNN

You want my story? How I reached the heights of stardom? Hard work, training, exercise, and careful management.

GRUSHA

Notice, nothing about acting.

FLYNN

I was the starting quarterback on my high school football team, and like everyone in L.A., I was working on a screenplay. Next thing I knew it, Paramount was producing it and I was in it. It was called The Starting Quarterback. My purest work. Did you see it?

GRUSHA

I could eat alphabet soup and pass a better script than that.

FLYNN

I wanted to give the people what they want. And that seemed to be me.

EVGENY

You know, sometimes you have to give the people what they may like, but they don't know it. Here, we give them Shakespeare and Chekhov, the Brussels sprouts of the theatrical menu. They may like chocolate cake, but we give them Brussels sprouts. But sometimes, they grow to like Brussels sprouts.

FLYNN

And that's why I've got a fifty thousand square foot beachfront mansion in Bel Air, and you're in this decrepit hellhole of a theater!

(composes himself)

I'm sorry. You may have heard I've had some troubles recently. Sometimes I go off.

EVGENY

That's understandable. You must be awfully tired. Can I get you some coffee?

FLYNN

Yes, thank you very much. Dry 150-degree skim, a touch of vanilla, and a half teaspoon of unrefined brown sugar. If it's not too much trouble.

EVGENY

Of course not.

FLYNN

My assistant will be here in a moment with my things. She was so excited to come here. She was born here, and adopted by a producer in California.

EVGENY

Lucky girl.

SASHA

A very lucky girl.

FLYNN

Not really. I've outgrossed him several times.

GRUSHA

No doubt.

SASHA

Perhaps I can see my dressing room?

EVGENY

You mean *the* dressing room.

SASHA

(takes him by the elbow off stage)

I will show him.

(THEY exit.)

EVGENY

What have I gotten myself into?

(calling to her offstage)

Elena, can you get Mr. Flynn some coffee? He said something about some crazy coffee. Just make it black, two sugars.

(LENA enters through the audience with FLYNN's black shoulder bag, and a small bag of her own. SHE walks to the stage.)

EVGENY

(before LENA can speak; mistaking her for ELENA)

Do you have Mr. Flynn's coffee?

LENA

I didn't know he wanted coffee.

EVGENY

I called to you a minute ago.

LENA

(confused)

Oh. Okay. I'll go find some. Wait right here.

(SHE drops the bags and leaves the way she came in, through the audience.)

EVGENY

Odd. Oh well. Grusha, can you believe this? Kevin David Flynn in our theater! We are in the money. I think.

GRUSHA

I worked with him, you know.

EVGENY

I gathered. You shared something.

GRUSHA

On Mister Explosion 3: Explosions in Miami. Which we shot in New York. The magic of the movies.

EVGENY

You never told me. Did he try anything with you? He's tried something with every actress in Hollywood, so I read.

GRUSHA

Unfortunately, no.

(ELENA enters from offstage with coffee.)

ELENA

Here is Mr. Flynn's coffee.

EVGENY

How did you... You were there... In a coat.

ELENA

I was here. I went there. I got coffee. Black, two sugars, just as you asked.

EVGENY

The excitement is getting to me.

ELENA

Do you need anything else?

EVGENY

Not right now.

ELENA

I'd like to meet him, if that's possible.

EVGENY

Of course.

(FLYNN enters with SASHA.)

ELENA

Your coffee, Mr. Flynn.

(FLYNN looks at her.)

FLYNN

Where's my bags?

(FLYNN sips his coffee, and spits it out.)

Where's my latte? This is dishwater!

ELENA

He told me....

FLYNN

I know you've only been with me a few years, but every day at 11 a.m. - dry 150-degree skim, a touch of vanilla, and a half teaspoon of unrefined brown sugar. Is that so hard? Well? Is it? *Is it?*

ELENA

Er, Mister Flynn...I...

FLYNN

And my bags? Where are they?

ELENA

Er...at your hotel?

FLYNN

What! You're supposed to be responsible for these things!

ELENA

I'm sorry... Wait right here.

(SHE turns to exit.)

EVGENY

Don't get cross with her. See - they're right there.

(EVGENY points to the bags LENA left in the aisle.)

(Pause.)

FLYNN

Thank God.

(to ELENA)

Please keep track of things. I know it's a different language here, but still.

ELENA

(not comprehending what just happened)

Of...course...

(SHE exits off stage.)

(LENA enters through the audience, panting, and climbs up on stage with two cups of coffee and FLYNN's bag.)

LENA

I searched all over, and finally found a coffee shop. Here - dry 150-degree skim, a touch of vanilla, and a half teaspoon of unrefined brown sugar. But I see you have one already! And one for you, Sasha. And here's your bag.

(Pause, as SHE looks around.)

What?

FLYNN

I... you... there... here... black, two sugars...

SASHA

(sips his coffee)

Yes - dry 150-degree skim, a touch of vanilla, and a half teaspoon of unrefined brown sugar. I drink what he drinks.

LENA

Anything else?

FLYNN and EVGENY

(simultaneous)

No.

(THEY look at each other.)

LENA

Then I'll go. I've got a lot to do.

(SHE exits through the audience.)

FLYNN

I think I need a rest.

EVGENY

Of course. It was a long flight. We'll leave you two here. Sasha, make sure Mister Flynn is comfortable. Why don't we all get together tomorrow morning to discuss the program. Come, Grusha. Let me buy you a blini or two. We'll make a night of it.

GRUSHA

Genya! How thoughtful.

EVGENY

We have much to celebrate. I think. Sasha, make sure Elena locks the theater when she leaves.

(GRUSHA and EVGENY exit through the audience.)

(FLYNN is conspicuously quiet until GRUSHA and EVGENY complete their exit.)

FLYNN

What the hell am I doing here?

SASHA

Look, you had troubles. I fixed them. This is the end of your troubles.

FLYNN

Why here?

SASHA

You make deals with certain people, you have to make amends to those people when the deals fall through.

FLYNN

All right. Let's go through it again.

SASHA

It's simple. During your monologue, you will have two suitcases of prop clothing. At least, you should have two suitcases of prop clothing. Except, they will not be props.

FLYNN

What will be in them?

SASHA

You really don't want to know.

FLYNN

Really?

SASHA

Really. At some point, during the monologue, you will give the password. The password is "harmless."

FLYNN

OK. What is it?

SASHA

Harmless.

FLYNN

I get that. But what's the password?

SASHA

(exasperated)

Harmless. It's an adjective.

FLYNN

It's a harmless adjective? Look, You've got the other suitcases, right? Can't I just go home?

SASHA

I don't have them yet. They will be given to me before your performance. And you are the manner in which those cases are transferred to their rightful owners. We need you to perform. Since you're an actor. Get it?

FLYNN

No.

SASHA

Now, the password, the word you will say during the monologue, is *harmless*.

FLYNN

I get that.

SASHA

No you don't. The word is *harmless*. The actual word you say is "harmless." H-A-R-M-L-E-double S, *harmless*.

FLYNN

Why didn't you say that in the first place?

SASHA

When you say the word "harmless," the lights will go off.

FLYNN

Who turns them off?

SASHA

That's none of your concern.

FLYNN

But I have to stay in character. I must convey a sense of truth. You know, I've been practicing sitting convincingly.

SASHA

If it makes you happy, imagine me turning the lights off.

FLYNN

That's good.

SASHA

They will remain off for three seconds. During that time, the suitcases will be switched.

FLYNN

For each other?

SASHA

No. For two other suitcases. They are your fee. You will carry them offstage when you are done. One is a small contribution of one hundred thousand dollars you are making to this theatre and to Evgeny, who knows nothing. The other holds the remainder of your fee, which you can keep, and a first class ticket back to Hollywood under an assumed name.

So, you will rehearse with the two suitcases of prop clothing, but you will perform with the two suitcases I give you. They will be switched during the performance, and you will leave with only one of the suitcases. And I will never see you again. Do you understand? You have to keep track of six suitcases. Do you think you can do that?

FLYNN

So I have to rehearse?

SASHA

You have to make this look as convincing as possible.

FLYNN

Oh, I get it! Like I was playing crazy after I was shot in the second reel of Mister Explosion 5 - Blown Up in Berlin! But I really wasn't. Crazy.

SASHA

Yes.

FLYNN

I think I've got it.

(ELENA enters.)

ELENA
Will you two be long? I should lock up.

FLYNN
I thought you were exploring.

ELENA
What do you mean?

FLYNN
Take me to the hotel, Sasha. I feel ill.

SASHA
Certainly.

(SASHA and FLYNN exit through the audience.)

I'll get your bag.

(HE picks it up.)

That's seven.

(Looks back at ELENA oddly, and then looks at FLYNN.)

I'm dead.

(BLACKOUT.)

ACT ONE

Scene Two

(Lights up on EVGENY on stage, snoozing in an overstuffed chair, obviously a prop. Other props and furniture are strewn around the stage.)

(GRUSHA enters through the audience.)

GRUSHA

(softly)

Genya?

(louder)

Genya!

(HE startles awake.)

EVGENY

Oh, Grusha! I had this horrible dream that I was the director of a third-rate theater and totally in debt, and Sasha came with this American actor...

(HE looks around.)

Damn. Grusha, what am I to do? If we did *Phantom of the Opera*, the chandelier would fall...into the orchestra. Our last production was so bad, we should have given out copies of *An Audience Prepares*.

GRUSHA

Did I wake you?

EVGENY

Uh no. No. Not at all.

(Pause.)

Yes.

GRUSHA

And can you tell me why that might be?

EVGENY

Perhaps because I was tired?

GRUSHA

So tired that you fell asleep on my sofa?

EVGENY

Did I?

GRUSHA

That I had to drag you out of that dive you took me to... The Kafka Cafe? And such a long wait. It's always empty, but you can never get a table.

EVGENY

It was the same cafe we always went to. Before you left.

GRUSHA

I thought you cared for me, Genya.

EVGENY

I do. You are my leading lady. My muse.

GRUSHA

But I thought there was more.

EVGENY

There was. Before you left.

GRUSHA

And now?

EVGENY

Now? I come here. I go to the cafe. I drink. I go home. I read. Perhaps the radio. I go to bed. I dream of ways to dodge my creditors. Then I come here again. I've made my choices. Or had them made for me. I'm content. Are you?

GRUSHA

No. I'm not content. Not without you.

EVGENY

Ah, Grusha, one cannot put the toothpaste back in the tube. Nor, apparently, people in these seats and kopecks in the coffer.

GRUSHA

Shouldn't Flynn help with that? And once you produce my play--that will put them in the seats! I'm hard at work, Genya. You'd be proud of me. Two characters, no set, and minimal lighting. Or we could do it in complete darkness and save on electricity!

EVGENY

I must talk to Elena about the ticket sales. And keep Flynn happy. And keep Sasha out of jail.

GRUSHA

You might think of avoiding jail yourself.

EVGENY

Thank you for your wise and happy counsel, my dear.

(FLYNN interrupts them, and enters through the audience, followed by LENA, who is reading something aloud to him, perhaps a scene from Shakespeare. HE looks haggard, and cuts her off.)

FLYNN

(to EVGENY & GRUSHA on stage)

You're back? Tell me you went home at some point.

(to LENA)

My coffee. That's all I ask of you.

LENA

Yes, Kevin. Wait right here.

(Perturbed, SHE exits through the audience.)

EVGENY

Oh, Mister Flynn! So good to see you. I trust you had a good night.

FLYNN

No, I did not. I most definitely did not. I...

(ELENA enters from off stage with paperwork.)

ELENA

Evgeny Maximovich, I...

(FLYNN looks at her angrily from the audience.)

FLYNN

How did... I don't know what secret passages you've found here when you went "exploring," but...coffee. Now!

ELENA

Certainly. Wait right here.

(SHE runs back off stage.)

FLYNN

(as he climbs onto the stage)

I had a horrible night. Just horrible. I dreamt...

(LENA enters, running at breakneck speed through the audience, halfway down the aisle.)

LENA

The place I got you coffee yesterday, it was closed, but I'll keep on looking! Wait right here.

(And SHE exits running, the same way SHE entered.)

(A long pause.)

FLYNN

Not a wink until two. But when I did, I dreamt I was being attacked by...by suitcases. First one, then two...no, they were in pairs! Pairs of suitcases, all brown with straps, marching two by two! A battalion of suitcases, an army, marching closer, closer...closer! Oh, it was horrible.

(GRUSHA laughs.)

GRUSHA

Suitcases? What can a suitcase do? They're harmless.

(FLYNN shrieks.)

(ELENA enters from off stage, innocently carrying a styrofoam cup of coffee. SHE walks carefully with it, and places it in front of FLYNN.)

ELENA

Now, I know this isn't exactly what you wanted, and it's not up to your Hollywood standards, but really, it's the best I could do with such short notice. And it's American - Maxwell House.

(SHE puts on a deep fake Russian accent for him.)

Iz good to last drop, no?

(A good long pause, while everyone looks at her, at the aisle where LENA entered and exited, back again, and at each other.)

What?

(This all proves too much for ELENA, who runs off stage quietly sobbing.)

(FLYNN flops into the chair we found EVGENY in at the beginning of the scene.)

FLYNN

Can I get some water? Not coffee - never coffee here again - just...just some water. Plain, cool, clear, water. Not spring, not bottled, just...water.

(LENA runs in through the audience with bottles of water.)

LENA

Look what I found! Your favorite water, from a spring in the wild forests of Finland. Who would think they'd have that here!

(And again, they look at her, they look off stage, they look amongst themselves, and back to LENA, who places the bottles on the apron of the stage.)

(to FLYNN)

Let me get myself settled, and we can run your lines again. I'll be back in a few minutes. Wait right here.

(SHE marches back up the aisle triumphantly, and exits.)

GRUSHA

We should go over our scene...Kevin.

FLYNN

Yes. Yes of course.

EVGENY

I'll leave you two artistes alone. I need to talk to Elena.

FLYNN

She just left.

EVGENY

Thank you.

(EVGENY begins to exit off-stage.)

FLYNN

Um, why do you need to talk to her?

EVGENY

I want to check on the ticket sales.

FLYNN

What would my assistant know about your ticket sales?

EVGENY

Your assistant? Just because she brings you coffee? She's my assistant!

FLYNN

She's *my* assistant.

EVGENY

Mister Flynn, I know you're used to having things your way, and I appreciate what you're doing here, but you can't just take over my...oh, I can't get involved in this now.

(EVGENY exits off stage.)

FLYNN

(calling to EVGENY; pointing down the aisle)

She went that way!

(to GRUSHA)

Are all you people insane? Is it the vodka? The borscht? What?

GRUSHA

Now, the scene.

FLYNN

Oh yes. What were you thinking? Something not too demanding. A crowd pleaser.

GRUSHA

Well, there is something I've been working on. I'm working to invite a few critics--it's a new phase in my career.

FLYNN

An original? Oh, I don't know. Can't we, you know, "Is this a dagger I see before me," "What light through yonder window breaks," that sort of thing?

GRUSHA

Those are monologues.

FLYNN

Yes. Of course. So. I'll trust you for this. Not a lot of dialogue for me, I hope.

GRUSHA

No. Very little, in fact.

FLYNN

Good. That's very good. Because I'm not very good at that. Dialogue. The words. That sort of thing.

GRUSHA

Not your...milieu? Your métier?

FLYNN

Uh yeah. Right. You see, I make my living with my face. Like...like in my movie, Big Ticket 7: Tickets in Rio? Feed me a line.

GRUSHA

Feed you a line?

FLYNN

Sure. Anything.

GRUSHA

Anything?

FLYNN

Um, you didn't see it? Say, uh, "Matt, he's over there!" I was Matt in that. "Matt, he's over there!"

GRUSHA

(flatly)

Matt, he's over there.

FLYNN

Give it something, like "Matt! He's over there!"

GRUSHA

Who's over there?

FLYNN

Just feed me the line. "Matt! He's over there!"

GRUSHA

With something.

FLYNN

Now you've got it. "Matt! He's over there!"

GRUSHA

(emoting strongly)

"Matt! He's over there!"

(FLYNN jumps.)

FLYNN

Holy crap! Oh. I see. Could you, er, give me a little...less?

GRUSHA

"Matt! He's over there!"

FLYNN

(giving his catchphrase, mugging for the camera)

"Oh no. Look out, me!" That was my catchphrase. "Oh no. Look out, me!"

GRUSHA

Look out, you?

FLYNN

My catchphrase. You're not familiar with it? Weren't you in Big Ticket 4: Ticket to Ride?

GRUSHA

No. I was in Mister Explosion 3.

FLYNN

The Miami picture we shot in New York.

GRUSHA

You remembered.

FLYNN

Well, I remember we worked together.

GRUSHA

Oh, it was just a small part. Was I really that memorable?

FLYNN

You told me yesterday.

GRUSHA

Of course. No matter.

FLYNN

But if I had remembered, I'm sure it would have been because you gave a memorable performance.

GRUSHA

Thank you. I think.

FLYNN

No. Thank *you*.

GRUSHA

(flattered and somewhat confused)

Well, we should look over the script.

(GRUSHA gives a copy of her unfinished play to FLYNN.)

FLYNN

"A Cold Wind in August." Don't you need a copy?

GRUSHA

No - I've committed it to memory. Just as I did our work together in New York. As a professional should.

FLYNN

Yes. Yes of course.

(HE flips through the script.)

Not many lines for me here, are there?

GRUSHA

It does tend to emphasize the female lead, once it gets going.

FLYNN

That's fine. But, I'm used to being the lead in all my pictures.

GRUSHA

Theater is a collaborative effort.

FLYNN

So I've heard.

GRUSHA

I will begin.

(Pause, as SHE gets into character. SHE mimes entering and taking off her coat.)

"A cold wind blows, Rumshinski, and yet it is only August. Dimitri Andreyivitch will arrive on the train from Moscow tonight. Who knows what tales he will bring from the city."

(Pause, as she awaits FLYNN's line.)

FLYNN

I'm Rumshinski, right?

GRUSHA

(breaks character)

Yes. I must begin again.

(Pause, as she again gets into character. SHE mimes entering and taking off her coat.)

"A cold wind blows, Rumshinski, and yet it is only August. Dimitri Andreyivitch will arrive on the train from Moscow tonight. Who knows what tales he will bring from the city."

(Pause, as she awaits FLYNN's line.)

FLYNN

And you're Maria?

GRUSHA

(exasperated, breaks character)

Yes.

FLYNN

I think I've got it now.

(Making a joke:)

Take three.

(Pause, as SHE once again gets into character. SHE mimes entering and taking off her coat.)

GRUSHA

"A cold wind blows, Rumshinski, and yet it is only August. Dimitri Andreyivitch will arrive on the train from Moscow tonight. Who knows what tales he will bring from the city."

(Pause, as she awaits FLYNN's line.)

FLYNN

"Maria?"

GRUSHA

"Yes, Alexi?"

FLYNN

"Perhaps Dimitri Andreyivitch will bring news from Konstantin Pavelovitch and Svetlana Vladimirovna." What is this - the Moscow phone directory?

GRUSHA

It is my new play.

FLYNN

These names. They can't be right. Can't we just call them, oh, Dan, Steve, and Jill?

GRUSHA

We cannot call them Dan, Steve and Jill. This is a Russian play. These are typical Russian names.

FLYNN

I'll have to practice. "Perhaps Dimitri Andreyivitch will bring news from Konstantin Pavelovitch and Svetlana Vladimirovna." "Perhaps Dimitri Andreyivitch will bring news from Konstantin Pavelovitch and Svetlana Vladimirovna." See, this is exactly why I don't do live theater.

GRUSHA

Just...just work on that. You won't have much more to do.

FLYNN

Thank goodness. Look, I don't want to embarrass myself here. And I know how much this means to you. If you can help me out here, I can put in a good word for you back in Hollywood, if you know what I mean.

GRUSHA

I've tried America. There's no place for an actress like me.

FLYNN

Not as an actress. A screenwriter.

GRUSHA

A screenwriter...?

FLYNN

You're obviously talented. You can keep all those names in your head--that's something.

GRUSHA

Perhaps an an adaptation of Gogol. The Overcoat.

FLYNN

Oh, you won't need a coat in Hollywood. I know--you could do a new Anna Karenina! They seem to do one every year. But this time, you could set it in Russia! And it has a train in it, too!

Oh, please, Grusha. I'd do anything...for an old colleague like you.

GRUSHA

Stay on book for the time being. Your assistant can run lines with you later.

FLYNN

She's out looking for where she grew up. Leaving here to go to California? Can you imagine it?

GRUSHA

I can. Do you need something to drink? Some coffee?

FLYNN

No coffee. I've got my own.

(FLYNN takes out a flask.)

I came here to give this up. But I think I need it. Especially here.

GRUSHA

You came to Russia to stop drinking?

(FLYNN takes a good long gulp from the flask.)

You've had quite an interesting past few months.

FLYNN

Yes, but I don't need this kind of "interesting."

GRUSHA

You've been a bad boy, Kevin.

FLYNN

It started when I was making Mister Explosion 6: Banged-Up in Brooklyn. The title turned out to be prophetic. I was doing an exterior shot down by the docks - just running down the street, really - and a hot dog vendor off the set yells at me, "Hey, Mister Flynn!" Caught me totally off guard. I tripped over something and went flying. Landed flat on my face. You see me in these movies running, jumping, landing on my feet and ready to

get the bad guys, but you know, that's not real. That's only the movies.

GRUSHA

So I've been told.

FLYNN

I woke up in the hospital two days later, a few broken bones and IVs in my arms. They needed me back on the set so they pounded me full of painkillers and God knows what else.

GRUSHA

And that's when you married the nurse after divorcing the babysitter?

FLYNN

Well, there was some overlap. I'm not proud of it.

GRUSHA

Especially since you still were married to your first wife.

FLYNN

Second wife. But she had an easy supply of what they had been pumping into me, so I got back on the set. I was a different person. Manic, crazy. They had to rewrite the script. More action, laughing one minute, crying the next. I was a mess. But the film made more than any of the other Mister Explosions. So I decided to stay that way. Then we went back to California, and she couldn't get me what I needed anymore. But I found someone who could. Two someones. Sometimes three.

GRUSHA

And then the car crashes, and the police, and the arrests.

FLYNN

The work dried up, and I sold what I could. One day, I realized I couldn't pay my gardener. Can you believe that? Me. I was pulling up weeds, sweating, dirty. It was like when I was 15, working in my father's yard, before everything happened. A simpler time.

GRUSHA

Sounds good for the soul.

FLYNN

Are you kidding? I live in California. No one does their own gardening unless their therapist suggests it. And that's why I'm here. To repay a few debts. So to speak. To get off the radar for a while.

GRUSHA

You certainly couldn't have picked a better place for that. Do you really not remember our scene together?

FLYNN

I'm sorry. A lot of the last five years is a haze for me.

(GRUSHA approaches him.)

GRUSHA

It was a very romantic scene. We were walking through Central Park, arm in arm, a summer's day. I was in a short wispy dress, very Audrey Hepburn, Breakfast at Tiffany's. You were so elegant, in a light linen jacket. And you leaned in, to kiss me. But I was shot before we could. You reached down and held my lifeless body. Then you ran off. Perhaps now...

(SHE leans into kiss him, but HE withdraws.)

FLYNN

Please! I've reformed.

(HE takes a swig from his flask.)

I can't. I should join a monastery. I'm so confused.

GRUSHA

You know there's a love scene on page four.

FLYNN

A love scene? In a Russian play? I thought all you people wrote about was misery and waiting for trains.

GRUSHA

Perhaps we'll fake it.

FLYNN

Thank you.

GRUSHA

My pleasure.

(SASHA enters from the audience.)

SASHA

Ah - so good to find you both here. My lovely Grusha, are you teaching our guest the ins-and-outs of the stage?

FLYNN

She was trying to!

SASHA

Was he that bad a student?

GRUSHA

He'd give Julius Caesar an upbeat ending. But oh, there's so much I could teach him. *So much.*

SASHA

I've come to bring him back to the hotel. He needs his rest, don't you?

FLYNN

Do I ever.

GRUSHA

Before you leave, let me get you a copy of my play for your assistant. Two copies. Perhaps you could give one to your screenwriter friends in Hollywood. Wait right here.

(SHE exits.)

FLYNN

Whenever someone says that, I get chills.

SASHA

(quietly, conspiratorially)

We should go through the scene for tomorrow.

FLYNN

Not the suitcases!

SASHA

Just remember, you bring in two suitcases, they'll be switched when you say "harmless" and the lights go off, you leave one of

the suitcases for them and take another for yourself. Got it?

FLYNN

Got it.

SASHA

You give me the suitcase. I'll...protect it. Then you return for your Shakespeare scene, you walk out of the theater, get in your limousine for the airport with all of your bags - including the one with your fee - get on a plane for California and you're home free.

FLYNN

What was that about Shakespeare?

SASHA

That's what they're expecting. You want to meet their expectations as if nothing out of the ordinary is happening.

FLYNN

Of course.

SASHA

Not, of course, that anything is.

FLYNN

But what should I do? I don't know Shakespeare.

SASHA

I don't know. Find something. Can't you learn a three page monologue in a day? Aren't you an actor?

FLYNN

I'm good at getting blown up. Not this.

SASHA

Just do it. There's too much at stake for you to screw up. Remember what he said to you that night. Don't screw up. Things could happen that are...beyond my control.

(GRUSHA enters with a script, which she gives to SASHA.)

GRUSHA

Here. I trust you. I can't believe I said that. Will you make

sure he runs lines tonight?

SASHA

I'll make sure of it. Come, Kevin, let's get you something to settle your nerves. Perhaps some coffee?

FLYNN

(As THEY exit through the audience)

I've given up coffee!

(EVGENY enters through the audience and meets them halfway down the aisle.)

EVGENY

Ah, Mr. Flynn! How is my hundred thousand dollar star? Has Grusha taught you well?

SASHA

Perhaps a bit too well.

(THEY exit.)

EVGENY

Is he all right?

GRUSHA

As all right as he's going to be.

EVGENY

Can he remember his lines?

GRUSHA

Genya, my back aches - from carrying him.

EVGENY

That bad?

GRUSHA

He's a beautiful specimen of a man. But he'd put a car chase in Krapp's Last Tape.

EVGENY

I was afraid of that. But that doesn't matter. I have wonderful news. Simply wonderful, marvelous news. I was talking to Elena before. You should hear what she told me. Elena? Come out here.

(ELENA enters from the wings.)

Elenochka, tell your Aunt Grusha what you just told me.

ELENA

We're sold out.

EVGENY

Did you hear that, Grusha! Sold out. *Sold out!* And for money this time - no comps, no hangers on, no party members, just a few critics, as you asked - a real cash paying audience! That will cover some of our debt. And when he's done, and gives his donation, we're in the clear for the first time in years. You must tend to him. Build him up, his confidence. I'm relying on you, Grusha. Your scene with him, his scene, then his Shakespeare. You owe this to me.

GRUSHA

I owe you nothing.

EVGENY

You owe this to me, to Elena, to our company, to this theater - yes, to my great granduncle. And remember your new career as a writer. I know many people, Grusha. I could get your new play a tryout in the Crimea.

(Pause.)

GRUSHA

I'll see what I can do.

EVGENY

Now, let's go over tomorrow's running order. First act, we have Maxim - thank God for Maxim. He told me he can handle three scenes. His Scottish monologue, Konstantin in *Seagull*, Caliban in *Tempest*.

GRUSHA

It's theatrical whiplash.

EVGENY

Yes, but it eats up time and I trust him. Then intermission. Elena, you help Grusha and Mister Flynn with props. Get him the

two suitcases in the back. The ones we used for Death of a Salesman. Too long a title if you ask me. And Alexi's accent! Whenever he mentioned Biff Loman, I got hungry for Chinese food. After intermission is over and they've had their overpriced candy and watered-down wine, we do the scene from Grusha's play with Flynn, then Flynn's monologue - which I know nothing about - then he does some Shakespeare craziness, I get my money, he leaves for California, and I can pay my bills and never see the sight of him or Sasha again.

ELENA

Evgeny Maximovich, is there something in the program for me? I can do Shakespeare! Listen -

(SHE takes up a heroic pose.)

"This day is called the feast of Crispian!"

EVGENY

(dismissive)

Not now, Elena, I'm too busy counting my money.

(HE exits.)

GRUSHA

(comforting)

Not bad, my Elenochka. Not bad at all. Perhaps with some training, we'll make an actress out of you yet. For next season. I'll write you something. I'm halfway to being a critical success, you know.

ELENA

Thank you, Madame Grusha. I'll go back to my figures now.

(SHE exits off stage. GRUSHA wanders absently on the stage, imagining her triumph of tomorrow.

(LENA enters through the audience.)

LENA

I understand you have a script for me.

(GRUSHA looks uncomprehending at her.)

GRUSHA

I said next season.

LENA

Next season? I don't understand.

GRUSHA

That was a lovely beginning - nice tone, good inflection, I liked the way you stood with conviction - but it takes time.

LENA

But the script for tomorrow...

GRUSHA

What concern is that of yours?

LENA

Mister Flynn needs it to run lines.

GRUSHA

Don't you worry about that. It's all taken care of. Sasha has the script.

LENA

Why didn't you say that?

(LENA turns to leave.)

You know, this is such a beautiful theater. I feel as if I've been here before.

GRUSHA

You've been with me for seven years!

LENA

No I haven't!

GRUSHA

Are you all right? Go home and have a lie down. Get ready for tomorrow.

LENA

You know, I always wanted to act. I've studied Shakespeare, Chekhov, Moliere, Ibsen. Just because I come from California doesn't mean I not cultured, that I don't have ambitions for the stage. But if it means working with crazy theater people like

you, well, forget it!

(As LENA exits through the audience, ELENA enters from the wings--they are very briefly in the play together, and GRUSHA notices them both.)

ELENA

I'm leaving. Is there anything I can get you, Madame Grusha?

(GRUSHA shrieks and falls into the chair we first found EVGENY in as the scene began.)

GRUSHA

I'm too old for this. Maybe it's time to play the Nurse after all.

(BLACKOUT.)

ACT II

(Lights up on the offstage wings on one half of the stage. EVGENY, GRUSHA, and ELENA are gathered around, during the end of the first act of the performance.)

(GRUSHA is in peasant costume for her scene, and is pacing nervously.)

(We hear the muffled voice of an actor declaiming to the audience onstage.)

(EVGENY listens to Maxim onstage.)

EVGENY

I think he's almost done.

GRUSHA

(distracted)

How can you tell?

EVGENY

He's getting quiet.

(The muffled offstage voice quiets.)

Now he'll take a pause.

(A silent pause.)

And now he'll thunder to the hills!

(The muffled voice gets loud, and soon ends,
followed by muffled applause.)

This is why I love the stage. Tried and true, dependable Maxim.
You can set your watch by his Hamlet.

Elena, get out the old brown suitcases for Mister Flynn's scene,
the ones from Salesman. They're in the prop room in the back.
Next to the two dozen bags of dirt from Happy Days. Only two
actors, but what a mess.

ELENA

Yes, Evgeny Maximovich.

(SHE exits.)

GRUSHA

A good production, though. Your Willie was well matched to my
Winnie.

EVGENY

But never again. I've had it up to my neck with Beckett. Grusha,
I've never seen you like this. You, nervous? After thirty years
on the stage?

GRUSHA

It's not me. It's him. That...that so-called actor. He can't
learn lines, he can't learn blocking, he can't take direction.
And it's my debut as a playwright!

EVGENY

You tried with him, Grusha. It's just a short scene.

GRUSHA

But it's my scene! All he has to do is say "yes" or "no" a few
times, and recite a few names. Is that so hard? No command of
the language, no skills, and no refinement.

EVGENY

You realize, in the process, that theater is not for everyone.

GRUSHA

He probably thinks *The Three Sisters* is an erotic novel.

EVGENY

Just try to get through your scene. Are you happy with your script? I know it's your first.

GRUSHA

Constant revisions, Genya, constant. So many different colored pages. I finally know why Strindberg was tortured.

EVGENY

Any old thing will keep these boors out there happy.

GRUSHA

My play will suffer.

EVGENY

(mutters)

Not half as much as the audience.

GRUSHA

Genya!

EVGENY

I'm sorry, my sweet, I'm distracted. I just need this to go perfectly smooth, or I'll be directing *The Mousetrap* in Irkutsk.

(ELENA enters with two suitcases, obviously light.)

ELENA

Here, Evgeny Maximovich. I've filled them with old rags for realism.

EVGENY

Very good job, Elena, thank you. Have you seen Mister Flynn? Is he in costume?

ELENA

I haven't seen him at all.

EVGENY

Do we know if he's even here? They'll riot. They'll riot! I don't do well in theater riots, Elena.

ELENA

I'll go look for him. Wait right here.

(SHE exits off stage.)

GRUSHA

You know, it's strange being a playwright. I've only worked with two living writers. I tried to kill one and seduce the other.

EVGENY

That's why I prefer my writers dead. They don't ask to come to rehearsal.

(FLYNN enters with LENA, preoccupied and mumbling lines to himself. SHE carried a script and suitcases similar to the prop ones Elena brought in, but is struggling under their weight. They are obviously heavier than the ones already on stage.)

EVGENY

You found him! Thank you, oh, thank you!

(LENA looks strangely at EVGENY. SHE lets the suitcases down, and they slam on the stage. FLYNN notices the sound, looks at the suitcases LENA just put down, and then notices the suitcases ELENA brought in.)

FLYNN

I thought there were two.

LENA

Those were already there.

EVGENY

Of course - you brought them in.

LENA

I did no such thing.

GRUSHA

You filled them with rags.

LENA

I was with Kevin the whole afternoon, after I searched for the hospital I was born in.

GRUSHA

The hospital you were born in? Oh, my darling, that's ancient history best not looked into.

(SASHA enters.)

SASHA

It won't be long now. Kevin, you can...

(HE spots the four similar suitcases.)

I thought there were only two.

LENA

There are.

SASHA

But I see four.

EVGENY

She brought them in! Twice!

LENA

I did not.

GRUSHA

This is all taking away from my debut as a playwright. I must take a moment to center myself.

(As SHE exits, GRUSHA looks back.)

Is he off book?

(SHE sees the script in LENA's hands.)

Oh, just read it.

(SHE exits.)

EVGENY

(to SASHA)

Is he ready?

SASHA

He'll do fine.

EVGENY

I'll go out there and give a three-minute speech. See if I can get any more gold out of their pockets. History of the theater, life of Chekhov, my sainted family. Elena, please go and tell your Aunt Grusha she goes on in three minutes.

LENA

Eh-lena? I'm Lena.

EVGENY

This is no time to quibble over nicknames. Just do as I ask.

(HE crosses to the darkened section of the stage, which represents the performance area. We will see him speaking to the theater's audience, and hear his muffled speech during the rest of the scene.)

SASHA

(takes FLYNN aside)

Are you settled?

FLYNN

As much as I'll ever be.

SASHA

Just get through this, then do your scene. And have you prepared a Shakespearean monologue?

FLYNN

No, but there's this great piece from a Jack Benny movie my assistant gave me to prepare for this. He'd get up in this frilly costume and say - I can remember this like it was yesterday - "To be, or not to be, that is the question." It's a comedic piece, but it might work.

SASHA

You'll only have a minute or so after this scene. So remember, you say "harmless," the lights go off, the suitcases are switched...

FLYNN

By who?

SASHA

I've told you, don't worry about that. They're switched, you end the scene, you take the suitcases, monologue, and out. Got it?

FLYNN

Got it.

LENA

Sasha, why did he call me Elena?

SASHA

It's your name, Lena.

LENA

But he seemed to think he knew me.

SASHA

Well, he does have a long time assistant named Elena. I'm sure it's the stress.

(HE takes a closer look at her.)

Although you are about the same age. And you look vaguely alike. Here, let me take these other suitcases off stage, so no one gets confused. Come with me.

(to FLYNN)

I'll see you later, in your limousine back to the airport. And don't make me kill you.

(SASHA and LENA exit, with SASHA carrying the light suitcases, leaving FLYNN alone. FLYNN thumbs through the script.)

FLYNN

"Dimitri Andreyivitch...Konstantin Pavelovitch...Svetlana

Vladimirovna." "Dimitri Andreyivitch...Konstantin Pavelovitch...Svetlana Vladimirovna." No wonder we won the Cold War.

(While FLYNN is reading the script, ELENA enters with the light suitcases.)

ELENA

Someone brought these back.

(SHE sees the other cases.)

Those are the cases from Our Town.

(SHE puts the light cases down, and tries to pick the others up, but struggles.)

Mister Flynn, someone put these out, but I'll take care of it.

FLYNN

Thank you, Lena.

ELENA

Eh-lena.

FLYNN

Okay, Eh-Lena!

(ELENA takes the heavy cases offstage.)

(WE hear applause from the darkened section of the stage, indicating EVGENY's speech is over. The lights on that section go down. HE crosses to backstage and finds Flynn.)

EVGENY

I've warmed them up for you. Now, show them what theater is all about.

(GRUSHA enters, regal and stately, although she is wearing a peasant costume.)

GRUSHA

That screenwriting offer still is good, correct?

FLYNN

I'll do anything.

GRUSHA

Then, come, Kevin, let's make magic!

(SHE takes him by the hand and leads him to the stage. SHE tosses his script aside.)

You won't need this. Just follow my lead, and remember your line. Your one line.

(THEY cross into the darkness, onto the stage.)

(Pause. Lights go down on backstage, and up on the performance side. We see the suggestion of a shabby peasant farmhouse - tables, chairs, etc. GRUSHA enters, and hesitates a second to acknowledge the audience as a star would. SHE is closely followed by FLYNN, who is carrying suitcases.)

GRUSHA

"A cold wind blows, Rumshinski, and yet it is only August. Dimitri Andreyivitch will arrive on the train from Moscow tonight. Who knows what tales he will bring from the city."

(FLYNN noisily puts the suitcases down.)

GRUSHA

(stage whisper)

Those are for the next scene.

FLYNN

(stage whisper)

What?

GRUSHA

(stage whisper)

The cases. Next scene. Not this one.

FLYNN

(stage whisper)

Just work with it.

GRUSHA
(stage whisper)

Work with it?

(SHE composes herself.)

"I see you have brought Dimitri's cases. What a good man you are, Rumshinski."

(Pause.)

FLYNN
Oh. "Maria?"

GRUSHA
"Yes, Rumshinski?"

FLYNN
(very haltingly)
"Perhaps Andrei...Sergeivitch will bring news from... Yuri...Gagarin and...and...and Nikita Khrushchev."

GRUSHA
(stage whisper)
Nikita Khrushchev? Why, you son of a bitch, I'll wring your bloody neck and hang your corpse from the H in the Hollywood sign!

(SHE composes herself.)

"Oh, to be in Moscow. Such joy. Discussing literature and philosophy into the night. Such wisdom to absorb. But then to return here, to this desolate wasteland, where nothing but weeds and resentment grow. Don't you agree, Rumshinski?"

(Pause, as GRUSHA gives him subtle signals to answer. SHE eventually mouths his next line - "Yes, Maria.")

FLYNN
"Yes, Maria."

(SHE nods to give him encouragement.)

GRUSHA

"Such a good man you are, Rumshinski, a strong man, a silent man. A man who only speaks when he has something to say. I meet few men like you, here on the steppes, where horses outnumber men and the..."

(And SHE dries, as panic fills her eyes. SHE looks around at FLYNN, at the audience, at the critics, at backstage, in total terror.)

"...and the...and the corn is as high as an elephant's eye."

(SHE scans the stage, and finds the script she tossed away earlier. SHE picks it up and tries to find her place.)

"Ah look, the morning papers! Thank God for the papers. What would we do without the morning papers! News of men, of great leaders and greater villains..."

(SHE finds her place, reads it silently for a few seconds, flips a few pages, recovers, and gets back to business.)

"You are still a young man, a man wise and yet not wise. You are not wise in the ways of learning, but I'm sure you are wise in the ways of the world. Is that not true?"

(Pause, as SHE subtly signals him again.)

FLYNN

"Yes, Maria."

(GRUSHA draws closer to him.)

GRUSHA

"Dimitri will be here soon, no doubt, fresh from the city with his stories of life well lived. But *we!*, we Rumshinski, we can make our own stories before he arrives! Let us not waste time - the train may well have already arrived, and our chance will soon be lost! Come, Rumshinski, kiss me! Kiss me like they do in Paris!"

FLYNN

(stage whisper)

That's not in the script!

GRUSHA

(stage whisper)

I told you, page four! You told me you loved me in New York!

FLYNN

(stage whisper)

I was acting!

GRUSHA

(stage whisper)

Very badly!

(SHE chases after him, but trips on the suitcases. HE picks her up, and carries her off stage.)

(FLYNN sees the spotlight on him, and tries to end the scene.)

FLYNN

(to audience:)

"Oh no. Look out, me!"

(Lights out on the performance side as they cross off stage to EVGENY.)

GRUSHA

(as FLYNN puts her down)

Thank you.

(And then SHE attacks him.)

I'm going to kill you! And don't think I won't. Killing people is half our economy.

EVGENY

Calm down, everyone. It's the magic of live theater.

GRUSHA

I'll give you the magic of live theater! Come on, Movie Boy - I'll play Hamlet, you play Polonius.

EVGENY

Grusha, he's got to go back on stage soon!

(calling off stage)

Elena, get the suitcases from the stage and give them to Mister Flynn.

GRUSHA

(to FLYNN)

I'll do Yorick--with your skull! My writing career is over before it began--all because of you!

(ELENA enters through off stage, and crosses to the performance area, where the lights are low. SHE reaches for two suitcases in the dark.)

ELENA

These are the cases from Our Town again.

(SHE struggles with the cases, and takes them off stage to put away, but does not see LENA, who is visible to the audience, also on stage, taking the other cases.)

(ELENA rushes past everyone off stage, straining with the heavy cases.)

Wrong cases. Our Town. I'll explain later. Wait right here.

LENA

(to SASHA, who has come to the apron of the stage)

What now?

SASHA

Put them directly into Kevin's hands, no one else's. Are they too heavy for you?

LENA

Light as a feather. Those pilates classes really pay off!

(SHE crosses off stage, and hands them to FLYNN.)

Here are your cases.

FLYNN

But...

EVGENY

There's no time! Get out there!

FLYNN

But...these are Russians! I don't know Russian!

EVGENY

Fake it!

(EVGENY pushes FLYNN on stage.)

EVGENY

Go!

(Lights up on the performance area. FLYNN enters carrying the two cases, and puts them down. HE surveys the stage, the audience, taking his time, thinking of what to say.)

FLYNN

(wearily)

I have finally returned from my travels. And these, these are my suitcases. They feel strange in my grip. It is good to be home. Yet, I feel far away. I am home, yet I am not truly home. Odd, isn't it?

The house is as I remembered it, all those long years ago. This table, where Dimitri and I would argue politics long into the night, smoking our balalaikas, as our mother knitted blini by the fireplace. Where Masha and I would discuss our future, eating our freshly baked babushkas. And before that, where I would wait for papa to come in from the kopecks after a long day of...of...of doing whatever he did out there. He was a very secretive man.

And my brothers. Yes, I have brothers. Two brothers. We were the *three* brothers. Ah, I remember the days of our youth. We would ride our rubles down the cobbled road, and all the poor gulags would say, "See! The Three Brothers approach!"

(HE slowly becomes more confident as he performs his improvisational monologue, and is enjoying himself on stage for the first time in his life.)

And three brothers we were! There was...was...Caviar, big strapping Caviar, with arms like sputniks! And...and Russ! Russ, who was named after our great country. He was the intellectual of the three brothers. Oh, what he could tell you about culture, about the arts. He was quite the samovar.

And I, the youngest of the brothers. The wayward brother. Oh, how I disappointed mama. I was truly the kremlin of the family.

But how time has played its evil tricks upon us. Once we were young, carefree molotovs. Now we are aged cosmonauts, looking helplessly into the borscht of our days.

(HE looks down, notices the suitcases, and remembers what he's there for. HE nudges them to the very edge of the stage with his foot.)

Ah yes. My cases are as heavy as my heart.

(HE picks them up with the force needed as if they are heavy, but they jerk up in his grip. HE becomes a bit nervous.)

Memories...memories are all we have. Without them, we are harmless.

(Pause. Nothing happens.)

Without th - ...

(The cue missed, the lights go out for two or three seconds a little late. When they come up, there are no cases. HE senses something wrong, so he tries again.)

Memories are all we have. Without them, we are harmless.

(Lights out, and after three seconds, they

come up. Now there are four cases.)

(with increasing nervousness)

Memories are all we have. Without them, we are harmless.

(Lights out, and after three seconds, they come up. Now there are two cases. HE picks up the cases to go, and sees one is light, the other heavy. HE glances off stage.)

Memories are all we have. Without them, we are harmless!

(Lights out, and after three seconds, they come up. Now there are six cases.

(And FLYNN panics, grabs the first two cases he can, and runs through the audience for the theater doors.)

FLYNN

Facing the Russian mob can't be any worse than acting on the stage! Get me out of here!

(HE exits the theater as lights dim on the performance side, leaving four suitcases.

(EVGENY, GRUSHA, and SASHA emerge from off stage. EVGENY collapses into one of the prop chairs.)

EVGENY

They'll want their money back. They'll all want their money back. I'm ruined. I'll be directing Titus Andronicus and using my own blood!

GRUSHA

We still have to do the Shakespeare scene. We'll persevere. We'll go on. We must go on.

EVGENY

Don't start quoting Godot at me. What can we do? We have three minutes to get something on stage or they'll hang me.

(calls backstage)

Will someone get these suitcases out of here!

(At which point ELENA comes from one side of the stage, and LENA comes from the other, not noticing each other until they both reach down for the suitcases. As they pick them up, they come together face to face for the first time.)

(THEY look at each other, and slowly put the cases down. They circle each other, and then reach out to touch each other's face.)

ELENA

What wondrous encounter is this? Have not I seen your likeness aforetime?

LENA

No, nor I yours, but each morning when I rise.

ELENA

Methinks you are my glass, and not my sister.

LENA

And I see by you I am a sweet-faced youth.

ELENA

Comedy of Errors.

LENA

Act five.

ELENA

Scene one.

(Pause.)

LENA

Orphanage Number 12.

ELENA

23 Moldovska Street.

ELENA and LENA

November seventh!

ELENA

I remember snow.

LENA

I love snow!

ELENA

Because you live in California. I hate snow.

LENA

Because you don't.

ELENA

I am Elena, from Moscow.

LENA

And I am Lena, from Los Angeles...by way of Moscow.

ELENA

I had heard, but I dared not believe it so.

LENA

Nor I.

ELENA and LENA

Sister!

(THEY hug.)

(EVGENY and GRUSHA look at each other.)

GRUSHA

Well, that explains...something...

EVGENY

The cases!

(ELENA and LENA open two of the cases.)

My money! All of it! My money - and his money, too!

(SASHA reaches in and grabs some.)

SASHA

My fee.

EVGENY

And those? The props?

(No one wants to touch the other suitcases.
Eventually, SASHA peeks inside one.)

SASHA

Uh, I'll take those. And return them. To their rightful owners.
Wait right here.

(SASHA grabs the suitcases, and runs out of
the theater up the aisle. But before he
does:)

Grusha, a gentlemen passed this note to me in the audience for
you.

(HE hands her a note, and runs out.)

EVGENY

But my Shakespeare!

ELENA

I've been practicing.

LENA

So have I.

ELENA

Henry Five?

LENA

Band of brothers?

ELENA

Of sisters. Crispin and Crispian were twins.

LENA

Yes.

(Pause.)

Our mother?

ELENA

Grusha is truly the only mother I know.

LENA

You have a place?

ELENA

For you? Sister, always.

EVGENY

My scene!

ELENA

Act four.

LENA

Scene three.

ELENA

I'll start. From "This story." Bring up the lights!

(GRUSHA opens the note and glances at it.)

GRUSHA

(after reading the note)

Genya! Look!

(SHE hands him the note.)

The critic from Izvestia says my play is promising! He'll give me a good notice tomorrow! No more Nurses for me! Except for you, my Genya.

EVGENY

Hollywood is out of the question?

GRUSHA

Oh Genya, it really always was. My place is here, with you.

(GRUSHA and EVGENY cross back as lights fully up on the performance area, ELENA and LENA face the audience.)

(NOTE: As ELENA and LENA perform the speech,

they notice points in the text that can apply to their situation - sisters separated at birth, now united. As they perform, they become one acting entity, perfectly in sync as if they had rehearsed, without having to explicitly communicate to each other.)

ELENA

This story shall the good woman teach her child;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remember'd;

LENA

We few, we happy few, we band of sisters;
For she to-day that sheds her blood with me
Shall be my sister; be she ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle her condition:

ELENA

And ladies in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their humanity cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon...

ELENA and LENA

Saint Crispin's day!

(GRUSHA and EVGENY applaud as the lights go down on the performance area and LENA and ELENA join them offstage.)

GRUSHA

My Bernhardts! My Ellen Terrys! Evgeny, you are now a rich producer with the foundation of a new theater! And I will be your writer in residence! Come, my darlings - Aunt Grusha will teach you about the theater!

(GRUSHA leads them off stage.)

ELENA

(to LENA)

We came into the world in the foulest of weather.

LENA

(to ELENA)

Now let's go hand in hand, and seek our fortunes together.

(THEY exit, hand in hand, leaving EVGENY
sitting alone in the prop chair.)

EVGENY

Happy endings. How I hate them.

(BLACKOUT.)