

A Map of the Region

a new play

by Tim Luscombe

Draft 2a
November 2009

tim@timluscombe.com

© Tim Luscombe 2009

Representation:

Marc Berlin

agents@berlinassociates.com

The northern Eurasian plain, with its extreme temperatures, its ungenerous soil, its remoteness from the southerly trade routes, its lack of any ocean but the Arctic... And then the Russian state, with its compulsive and self protective expansion, its land empire of twenty nations, its continent-sized borders... All this demands a heavily authoritarian centre, a vast and vigilant bureaucracy – or else Russia flies apart.

(House of Meetings, Martin Amis, page 53)

We, on the other hand, are a tiny tract of land between vastly bigger powers. Our geography proclaims our unimportance. We're the crossroads, a buffer zone, the eastern littoral of a small sea.

(The character of Artur, in an earlier draft)

In a country where every other person is engaged in choral singing and the rest are dancing, where else would your heart yearn for?

(Estonian saying)

The main action of the play is set in a fictitious Soviet Republic from January to August 1989. Places, people and events are lifted largely, and eclectically, from the geography and the last quarter of a century of history of the three Baltic States, but the play shouldn't be thought to be specifically about any particular one. In fact, I hope it might resonate with the fragile state of play in many ex-Soviet territories along Russia's borders – South Ossetia, Chechnya, Belorussia etc. Indeed, what happens in this region is of vital importance to all Europeans. Though they'd resist admitting it, the fear of Russia's westward expansion is as atavistic in the minds of Europeans as the old Viennese fear of Turks or the Spanish fear of Moors. It's ancient yet raw, and refracted today through the prism of energy concerns.

Act One: France
Russian!
Plant
Long Walk Home
Office
Gun
Bar
Street
Morning After

Act Two: Dreams
Pride
Chain Reaction
The Chain
Dumplings
Party
After The Party
Harbour
Sweet Peas

With 8 actors: Piret
Ema
Tonü (young)
Tonü (older) / Voss / Butler / Waiter
Misha / Joachi
Jonas / Officer / David
Selma
Layni / Wallis / Clerk

Set: A two room Soviet apartment in 1989 – the kitchen on the left, the bedroom on the right. Everything else, including the first scene, happens in front of it.

Text: All the characters appear to be speaking English all the time. But, apart from in the Jonas/Tonü scenes, none of them ever are. The idea is that when a character speaks in his/her first language we hear no accent. When s/he speaks in a 2nd or 3rd language etc, we do.

A slash (/) marks the point of interruption in overlapping dialogue.

The symbol ‘–’ means the speaker is interrupted, while ‘...’ means the speaker runs out of words

I've written ‘Layni’ for the Baltic name ‘Leeni’ to help guide pronunciation. Jonas is pronounced ‘you-nass’ and Tonü is like ‘terner’ with a very light first ‘er’, almost an ‘oo’, like a northern ‘u’.

Act One

1. 1939

France

A sun-soaked terrace in summer

Wallis Simpson and the German Foreign Minister

Wallis: Ribbentrop! Murder!

He holds out a bunch of carnations

Joachi: Seventeen!

Wallis: Seventeen?! You're a pip.

Joachi: You look vonderful.

Wallis: And you're *très* doggie in your smart uniform. Like to take any of it off?

They sit

Joachi: How is he?

Wallis: A tremendous pill. Mopes about blotto with his maps. And now the tiles have started falling off the roof, if you get me. The leaves have clogged up the pool.

Joachi: Ze guttering pipe is broken?

Wallis: I warned him. Imagine. To give up all that – for this. Fucking married.

Joachi: I might have somezing for you.

Wallis: Intriguing. What's the lowdown?

Joachi: To ease zis tedium.

Wallis: You've absolutely blown my wig turning up like this.

Joachi: When you made ze tracks, ze idea of Union vos kaput.

Wallis: Without David on the throne it's a trip for biscuits.

Joachi: I told ze Leader to look for better friends. Vee build an alliance to destroy zat smug little island and its bloated empire.

Wallis: Whacky! The stupid b-b-b-brother and his awful cake-wife won't even discuss an HRH. We're hand to mouth. Cocktail? (*Rings for the Butler*) See the hypocrisy? The C of E gives me the high hat because I divorced a couple of joes. Same C of E that was invented for Henry VIII to divorce his twist. (*To the Butler*) Martinis.

Joachi: But now you are free.

Wallis: We're parasites, Joachi. We bore each other to buggery.

Joachi: I am on my way to Moscow.

Wallis: Moscow's your idea of better friends?

Joachi: David works with the British military mission here in France? Liaising viz England's allies, ja?

Wallis: You know where my allegiance lies.

Joachi: To your husband.

Wallis: To Hitler. Those stodgy Englishers didn't give us the kiss off 'cause I'm American or divorced, but because I'm with Hitler and not afraid to say so.

Joachi: Oh God, Vollis, how I missed you.

They kiss

The ex-King of England – Edward VIII, known as David – enters

David: Ribbentrop!

Joachi: Heil Hitler.

David: Foreign Minister I hear.

Joachi: Ze more radical ze solutions I offer, ze higher he promotes me.

David: You're not baking out here, togged to the bricks like that?

The butler brings a tray. Wallis mixes martinis

Joachi: Miss London?

David: Miss the jokes. Don't hear them much here. Loathed them at the time.

Joachi: Jokes?

David: You know. "Wallis gets into a taxi – says 'King's Cross'. Driver says 'Sorry to hear that, ma'am – Where to?'" Now they make me homesick. You'll

like this one. About me. "He started as Lord of the Admiralty – ended up on an American tramp."

Joachi: Come with me to Moscow, Vollis.

David: Moscow?

Wallis: His hard-boiled gumption still does me in, and no mistake.

David: Wallis?

Joachi: It is not decent. Zis outrageous allocation of physical gifts. Vot do you say, David? We could divide her. Share her out.

David: What?

Joachi: You did not object in London. You, me, four magnates and an oil tycoon.

Wallis: The famous Wallis Collection.

Joachi: Play up and shake ze leg. I bagsie ze lips.

David: Then I'll have the feet.

Joachi: I vont ze blinkers.

David: I get the pins.

Joachi: Ze paws.

David: Her vicious heels.

Joachi: Her vigorous *Brüste*.

David: I need her lap to be a dog in. Bully and belittle me, Wallis. Your only worm needs his Mummy-mistress with the nasty big shoes.

Wallis: You see? So depressing.

David: Don't go to Moscow with him.

She pushes them both off

Wallis: Why should I? What's there? Apart from a bunch of Nazi-bating commies.

Joachi: I make a pact. A pact of non-aggression.

Wallis: An alliance?

David: With the Bolshies?

Joachi: Zink of it as an overture.

Wallis: To?

Joachi: Vor! (*Kissing Wallis' lips*)...Vee shall have Poland. Zey can have... (*Running his hand down her leg*)...Finland. Vee shall have...(*Kissing her breasts*) Left *Brust?* Moldova. Right *Brust?* Romania. And zey can have...(putting his hand between her legs)...ze Baltics!

Wallis: Oh, not the Baltics!

David: Bit steep.

Wallis: Poor little things. They've only been free a minute or two.

Joachi: Vee have 'em – zey have 'em – someone will have 'em. Carve up ze place. Get rid of all ze Jews too. Sending zem to Madagascar.

David: Wasn't I King of Madagascar at one point?

Wallis: And you're telling us because...?

Joachi: You can have ze English crown.

Wallis: If...?

Joachi: David liaises viz me about English troop movements.

David: Pretty rich.

Joachi: Vee vin – you get back ze throne.

Wallis: David, darling, go and get that lovely map you showed me at breakfast.

David: You stay?

Wallis: Wasn't it the Allied plan for the defence of Belgium?

She winks at David, who exits

Joachi: Queen Vollis.

Joachi goes to kiss Wallis, but she holds him off

Wallis: First, we'll make sure that crown fits, Joachi. Then I'll treat you to...to number eighteen.

2. 1989

Piret's apartment

Most of the action happens here

It's a small, cramped, one-bedroom Soviet apartment

The bulk of the sparse pieces of furniture are well-maintained items from the 60s and 70s. Only a very few things evoke the 80s

We see two rooms: the bedroom and the kitchen

In the bedroom: two beds

In the kitchen: a frail old woman sleeps in a high-backed, uncomfortable-looking armchair

In the bedroom, Piret (a beautiful woman in her 30s) and Misha (a handsome, beefy but damaged man) are asleep in one bed. Tonü (a 12 year old boy) is asleep in the other

Piret wakes. She at once tenses and reaches out for her watch. She peers at it and, relieved, drops it. Out of a partly opened eye she spies a bottle. Alarmed, she sits up, and examines it (vodka, empty). Last night, or part of it, returns to her

Piret: Oh no. Oh God, oh God.

Misha grunts, and turns over, still sleeping

Piret stands up, realises the extent of her headache, and throws some clothes on. She drops to her knees and races silently through her morning prayer

She returns to the bed

(Hissing) Wake up. You have to go.

Misha: Eh?

Piret: Shhh.

She signals the other bed, where Tonü's asleep

Misha: Morning, beautiful.

Piret: What?

Misha: What?

Piret: What?

They look blankly at each other, and then the full truth dawns

Misha: (*Pleased*) Oh yeah / I remember.

Piret: (*Horried*) Oh my God.

Misha: (*Pulling her back to bed*) Come / on.

Piret: Get off.

Misha: Oh. Ok.

He returns to sleep

Piret: No, don't – You've got to –

Tonü wakes up

Piret smartly covers Misha with a sheet

(*Breezily to Tonü*) Morning.

Tonü makes a wordless greeting and leaves the room. He heads for the bathroom (through the kitchen)

As soon as Tonü's gone:

Quick!

Misha: Come here!

Misha pulls Piret into bed with him

Piret: Get / off me.

Misha: What's the matter? You were a lot / friendlier last night.

Piret: (*Struggling*) Stop it, for / Christ's sake.

Misha: Come on, I love it hungover.

She pushes him out of bed

(*Landing naked on the floor*) What the fuck?

Misha has two or three large, sinister, blue-black patches on his torso and legs. Not exactly burns and not exactly bruises

Piret: What the hell have I done? Ruined it. Ruined everything.

Misha struggles to his feet, still naked, and starts to sing

Misha: *(Intimately) ...Dark eyes, passionate eyes
Burning and splendid eyes /
How I love you, how I fear you...*

Piret: Oh God, I remember that. Jesus, Piret, you don't think. Think before you pray for things.

He drags Piret to him and, still naked, dances with her. For a second, she's too weak to fight. Then she grabs Misha's clothes from the floor

Quickly.

She shoves the clothes at Misha

Here.

But they fall to the ground

For Christ's sake put them on. *(Miming)* You have to go. You understand? You. Go. Now.

Tonü returns

Tonü, go and make breakfast.

Tonü: Make breakfast? You mean actually go in the cupboard and –?

Piret: Tonü, please!

Tonü: Mum, who is this?

Misha: *(On his hands and knees)* Where's the pot?

Tonü: Why's he here? Is this about Dad?

Misha: Pot?

Piret: Go to the kitchen. Make sure Grandma's ok. I'm sorting this out.

Tonü: What's wrong with him? What are those blue marks on his –?

Misha stands up triumphantly with the pot in his hand

Misha: Aha! D'you know what? I'd love some coffee.

He pisses in the pot

Tonü: Mum!

Piret: Oh my God.

Tonü: Make him go to the bathroom!

Misha: (*Pissing*) Coffee?

Tonü: Mum? What's going on?

Piret: I've made a really bad mistake.

Tonü: You asked him to come?

Piret: I must have done.

Tonü: You asked him to come and sleep in your bed without any clothes on and piss in the pot?

Piret: Don't say piss.

Tonü: What would Dad / say?

Piret: Please, Tonü, don't you think I –? God.

Tonü: At least make him put some clothes on.

Piret: I'm so sorry.

Misha: Here. (*Proffers the pot to Tonü*)

Tonü: Mum!

Piret: Put it down.

Misha: I don't / understand you, woman.

Piret: Put. It. Down.

Misha: 'Poot eet darn'.

Piret takes the full pot from Misha and puts it down

(Going back to bed) Coffee? Any chance of a CO-FFEE?

The front door buzzes

Which wakes Ema

Piret: Oh no. Oh no. / What's the time? (*Grabs her watch*)

Ema: Piret! It's the door. Don't answer it!

Piret: This bloody watch.

Ema: It isn't me they want.

Piret: Stay here. Don't let him out.

Tonü: Don't leave me with him!

Misha: Coffee?

Piret goes into the kitchen, heading for the front door, but Ema bars her way

Ema: Don't open the door, Piret! Don't!

Piret: I have to, Mama.

Buzzer

Ema: (*Panicked*) No, because, then you'd open it and it would be a friend –

Piret: Listen to me –

Ema: Or a neighbour bringing a bunch of sweet peas on my name day –

Piret: It's ok, Mama, you're safe –

Ema: Now you don't answer –

Piret: Yes, I have to –

Ema: You do nothing. You stay in the forest. You don't go into town –

Buzzer

You'll only get into trouble –

Piret: This is important –!

Ema: You trust no one, you hear me? You don't know whether they're a real criminal or just an ordinary person –

Tonü: Mama, please. Let me –

Emä: Some of them are murderers. They shout in the night. You all roll over, all at once, or they hit you...

In the bedroom Misha has begun to cough. It's a terrible cough

(*Re the coughing*) Piret?

Emä's moving to the bedroom

Piret: Mama, no! Stop! Don't go in there!

Emä: Who is that...?

Piret: Mama. Don't.

Emä: There's someone in the –

Emä goes into the bedroom and confronts the naked stranger

Misha: (*To Emä*) Ah, some service at last. I'd like some coffee please.

Emä screams

She hobbles back to the kitchen. Misha follows her, and Tonü follows him

Tonü: Do you know what I'm gonna be?

Misha: If I told you I was dying, would it make any difference? / Think of it as a last request.

Emä: Piret! Piret! It's a naked Russian!

Tonü: I'm going to be a diver – a deep-sea diver.

The doorbell buzzes again

3. Two weeks earlier

Industrial hum

Workers' resting area in a nuclear power plant

Piret sits by Voss (a blokey workmate). Selma (an austere woman) sits apart

All three wear protective plastic overalls, boots and caps

Voss: Tähtvere can't run. He's never been able to run. What I'm asking you is why would they put him in?

Piret: I don't know. He's a waste of space.

Voss: You wouldn't have put him in?

Piret: Well, he can't run, can he?

Voss: This we understand. So why –?

Piret: I've no idea. I don't care. Let me look at the weather.

Voss: Have it.

She doesn't read it

(Sotto) You alright?

(Normal) He exploits Kantri's crosses. Receives it. Whacks it in the back of the net. Which thankfully he can do more or less standing still. But then Kantri gets battered by some Turkmen lout. So now they've got a man who can't run and can't do *anything else either*. Six-one. What a fucking nightmare. Great fat dumpling lumbering about the middle of the field. Embarrassment.

(Sotto) You've heard something?

Selma: *(Quietly)* I heard there's a new plant going up.

Voss: *(After a silence)* What's that, comrade?

Selma: *(Still quietly)* Oil shale refinery. Going to be a demonstration against it on Saturday in Hilvepark.

Voss: Don't think we know you, comrade, do we?

Selma: Maybe they don't think the coast's polluted enough.

Voss: Think it'd be best if you shut the fuck up.

Selma: When was the cyanide spill / at Kurssaare?

Voss: You don't work here, so –

Piret: It's not worth making a scene.

Voss: I'm not the one making the scene.

Selma: Hundreds of tons of heavy metals. They've closed the beaches / in Jümala.

Voss: You should get back to your own area.

Selma: I can sit here.

Voss: Move!

Piret: / Sshh!

Selma: / We can't swim in our own sea.

Voss: Who the fuck do you think you are?

Piret: Voss, come on...

Selma: The fish are full of lead. Kids think they're picking up amber – they're picking up phosphorous.

Piret: You're making more noise than she is.

Selma: They've build us a nice new reactor here – an RBMK no less – same type as you know where –

Piret: (To Voss) Your break's over, / right?

Selma: And now an / oil shale plant.

Voss: (To Piret) What? You're staying to / listen to this?

Selma: So you're gonna be there on Saturday?

Voss: You need more problems?

Voss exits

Selma: Noon? Hilvepark? Going to be big.

Piret: You like trouble?

Piret goes to follow Voss

Selma: You're not on his rotation.

You gotta take sides. Else they win.

Piret: I've got better things to do on Saturday than get shot in the park.

Selma: You don't take sides, you give up your humanity.

Piret: I can live with that.

Piret makes to go again

Selma: Point is, it gets better with time.

Piret halts

Not better. But you learn to manage it.

Piret: What are you talking about? (*Looking at her watch*) I've... (Confused)
What do you make the time?

Selma: Twenty-three minutes past.

Piret: It must have... Dammit. It's stopped. It's stopped!

Selma: 'S alright. You can get another one.

Piret: No. I can't, I –!

Selma: They took him to Pagari Street, right?

Piret: It's stuck at quarter past. It means something, doesn't it? Doesn't it?

Selma: It's cheap Russian shit / is what it means.

Piret: It's not. It's years old. My husband / gave it to me when–

Selma: Shhh. Piret.

Piret: You know my –?

Selma: I've been watching you –

Piret: What?

Selma: We've been watching –

Piret: You've been –?

Selma: Stay clam. We know about you –

Piret: But, there's nothing to – What the hell...? Who are you?

Selma: Where is he? Rēzekne? Lubyanka?

Piret: What? I don't know!

Selma: Kolyma?

Piret: How can I know?

Selma: (*Gesturing quiet*) You haven't had a letter?

Piret: What are you / saying?

Selma: There's a system. You go to Moriksala Street.

Piret: And do what? You think they gave me a receipt for him?

Selma: Once he's been sentenced, they'll send you a number –

Piret: / Oh God –

Selma: The location code. They'll tell you what it means. They should. Depends who you get. I was lucky.

Piret: You? Your –?

Selma: Yes. She got eight years.

Piret: She?

Selma: Three-timer. Late for Executive Committee meetings three times. Rēzekne. Last I knew. Your man's political. He could get –

Piret: No, he's not political.

Selma: Then why did they take him?

Piret: Why do they take anyone? Forty years ago they took my mother. They wanted her neighbour but she wasn't in.

Selma: He could get the quarter.

Piret: They don't give the quarter these days. Is this a trap? I say something incriminating –

Selma: He was communicating with Sweden.

Piret: He was...? With what? Pigeons?

Selma: He was important. Is important.

Piret: Mihkel? He's –

Selma: Shhh.

Piret: You're wrong.

Selma: Four of you in a one bedroom flat? Never been upgraded? You think he's not political? They've known about him for / years.

Piret: How the hell –?

Selma: You never wondered why?

Piret: Why? You think there's logic?

What do you want?

I, I should have been back at my –

Selma: You've still got four minutes.

Piret looks at her watch, puts her hand on it

Take mine.

Piret: No, I don't want yours.

Selma: It's Polish.

Piret: No.

Selma: I know someone gets them cheap.

Piret: No.

Selma: Have it.

Piret: Why?

Selma: Borrow it till you get a new one.

Saturday. After the demo. The café on Hariduse Street.

Pause

Lights

4. *Piret's apartment*

Ema's asleep in her chair

Tonü stands on the kitchen table in battered diving goggles. The table's littered with drawing stuff, books, a sea chart, a chessboard

Tonü: Captain Tonü's about to dive. He leads his team into the freezing waters, where fifty years ago, Soviet warships sank an entire Nazi fleet.

He pulls on flippers

The wrecks lie unclaimed – their lethal cargo corroded by salt water. Forty thousand canisters of chemical poison will devastate the entire region – a disaster waiting to happen – unless Captain Tonü can make the world safe again. And here he goes!

He faces flipper issues and clammers down

Twenty, thirty, eight thousand metres.

He swims to the cupboard, retrieves a tin and eats cake from it

(Mouth full of cake) What makes Captain Tonü so altogether extremely valiant?

Ema is waking up. Tonü quickly closes the cake tin and replaces it

Nice sleep?

Ema: There were shouts.

Tonü: Really? Who was shouting, Grandma?

Ema: Who do you think?

Tonü: Dunno. You tell me.

Ema: Out there, people in the forest of course.

Tonü: It's alright, Grandma, no one's there. Can you do this?

He makes farting noises by squishing his hand in his armpit

Can you? Try now.

Ema: You were in the cupboard.

Tonü: You'll have to take your jumper off at least.

Ema: Out of bounds.

Tonü: It was an emergency. The team needed a refuel. Grandma, are there really canisters of Nazi chemicals at the bottom of the sea? Dad said.

Ema: Mum'll be home soon – then we'll eat.

Tonü: Is no one gonna make them safe? If it seeps out we'll all be for it. Dad said. Why doesn't anyone?

Ema painfully levers herself out of her chair and goes to the sink for water

Egilis Vigners said the zeks in Kolyma have a life expectancy of one winter.

Ema: I don't know how Egilis Vigners knows that.

Tonü: Is he going to die?

Ema: Not if he's canny.

Tonü: Is he canny?

Ema: And lucky.

Tonü: Because he promised to take me diving. He said he would.

He might not be lucky. Supposing if he isn't. Can't we do something – see someone – explain that he hasn't done anything wrong?

Tonü sits under the table

Ema: He's got you, love. He won't forget –

Tonü: How do you know?

Ema: You think he's forgotten about your diving lesson? I bet that's all he's thinking about.

Tonü: Did you really eat your shoes, Grandma?

How did you make it?

Ema: Not now, Tonü.

Tonü goes to the cupboard, reaches for the cake tin, challenging Ema

I was younger. Stronger. I had my resources.

Tonü: What's your resources?

Ema: You have to trust your Dad.

Tonü: Tell me.

Emā: I don't want to talk about –

Tonü: You never want to talk about it.

Emā: Your Dad'll find his own way.

Tonü: But if he can't get out, how's he going to –?

Emā: I can't tell you how. How can I?

Tonü holds cake in front of his mouth

Put it back, Tonü.

Tonü: Tell me how you did it.

Emā: I'm telling you, young man. He'll carry you, like I carried your Mum.

Tonü returns the cake

Those days, they thought: you made it out, you wouldn't survive for long alone in the snow.

Tonü: But you did.

Emā: Well, we're better than them in the snow. It's true. We're better than them.

Tonü: Are all Russians bad?

Emā: They were as scared as me. Their people were being taken too. They tried to help when they saw I wasn't alone.

Her concentration is fading

Tonü: Grandma?

Tonü stokes her hands

Emā: One old guy let me sleep under a blanket in his sleigh. Sometimes I found a hay shed. I covered my tracks and I listened to the birds. The oriole tells you if there's anyone near. And I'd keep my eye on the treetops for movement. If I couldn't find shelter I'd go by night – sleep in the day. When I found an oak I knew I'd be alright. Under the trees, where the spirits keep you safe.

Tonü: But it's thousands of miles. Thousands and thousands.

Emā: There are thousands of songs. To Perkunas, to Laima, to Ausra. The God of sunrise. I sang to the stars and the moon and the sun. And when it was cold, I sang to the God of fire to keep us warm. I walked. Like God did, when he walked across the land and made the world with our songs. We walked across the land singing our songs. About the sun and the moon, and –

The sounds of a key in the door. Emā jumps. Tonū goes to the table, sits, opens a book

Piret enters, juggling hat, coat, umbrella, shopping bag

Tonū watches her

Help your mother with the bag.

Tonū takes the bag to the table

Piret: Horrible. Snow's wet.

Piret tries to light the stove, but fails.

This damned...

Tries again, fails again

I need the table cleared, Tonū.

Trying a trick, Tonū presents his fist with thumb uppermost to Piret

Tonū: Lift my thumb.

Piret: What?

Tonū: Go on, lift up my thumb.

Piret: Not now.

Tonū: Go on. Please.

Piret: The table. This instant.

Piret successfully lights the stove, puts a pan with oil on to heat

Tonū: (*Investigating the food packages*) Sprats. Bit of eel – yuck. Cabbage – boring. Potato and eggs. Potato Pancakes? Yay!

Tonū does a brief American Indian celebration

Piret: Tonū, for God's sake.

Tonü: Something's happened?

Piret: No.

Tonü: You found out something?

Piret: Nothing.

My watch stopped.

How was your day?

Tonü: Grandma told me more about Siberia.

Piret: Really? Mum?

Tonü: The camp at Vorkuta, and when you were born in the forest.

Ema is silent

She was fine for ages.

Ema: I'm fine now.

Piret: And school?

Tonü: You seen my picture? You like it?

Piret: What is it?

Tonü: It's obvious. Look.

Piret: People swimming.

Tonü: Diving! That's a snorkel. Me and Dad. See? That's him.

Piret: There he is. Yes, I see. It's lovely.

Piret fights back tears

Tonü hugs her

Tonü: Don't be sad. He'll come back soon.

Tonü goes to break away, but Piret won't let go

She hangs on

Something's burning?

Piret: Oh God.

The pan's smoking

Piret takes it off the heat

Damn! I need the kitchen!

Tonü smartly clears the table and goes into the bedroom

He listens at the door, practising armpit farts

Piret starts again to prepare the meal

By accident, she drops a plate into the sink

She grabs the rim of the sink

For a moment there's silence

Ema: He needs to know. If his father's –

Piret: Mum. A woman – talked to me.

Tonü stops doing armpit farts, listens intently

She said Mihkel's political. That he'll get the quarter.

Ema: How did she –? Who was this?

Piret: She works at the plant.

Ema: A Party woman?

Piret: She just works there.

Ema: You didn't say anything –? She's probably a spy. How did she know? She said the quarter? He's not political.

Piret: She knew about us.

Ema: You think Mihkel was working for –?

Piret: Of course not. But she knew things. She wants to meet me.

Ema: You're not – You wouldn't risk...

Piret sits

Piret: I don't know how you did it, Mama.

Ema: Did what?

Piret: With Dad gone all the time.

Ema: He had to go. It was his duty to go. Your father... Your father was a good man. He fought –

Piret: I know.

Ema: And now he's lying out there in the earth below a spruce tree.

Piret: Mama...

Ema: You do nothing, Piret. You say – nothing.

Piret: Things have changed.

Ema: He died because, thousands of them died, tens of thousands, holed up, stuck out there, waiting and waiting. For what? For nothing. No one came for us then – no one's going to come for us now.

You keep a faith alive inside. Inside you know who you are.

In the bedroom, Tonü sinks down the door to the floor

Piret: She looked straight into me, Mama. Straight into me. Like she really...

Ema: She said the quarter? How could she know? He was working with them? You'd have known.

Piret: But I didn't know. Maybe he was... She said he was important.

Twenty-five years... I feel helpless. Stupid and. Useless and –

Ema: You're not useless.

Piret: Rolling around in that empty bed, waiting for –

Ema: You've got a job to do. Here. And it's late.

Piret looks at her watch – takes it off in frustration

Piret: Not knowing. Not doing anything. Shut up in here...

Ema: You live with it, Piret. Make the loneliness your friend.

Piret: I'm not brave like you were. I miss a pair of arms round me too much.

Ema: Oh, now...

Piret: The fumbling, the mess, the stupid, entangled... Even the boredom, even the compromises –

Ena: Make the dinner, love.

Piret moves back to the sink. She picks up a pan and starts work again

Piret: Why didn't I take her watch? I could at least have taken her watch.

5. *An Office*

The Officer has a Russian accent when he speaks to Piret

He's middle-aged, attractive, bespectacled and thin

Officer: Name?

Piret: Saaliste.

Officer: First name.

Piret: Mine?

Officer: His.

Piret: Mihkel.

Officer: *(Into an intercom on the desk)* Saaliste, Mihkel.

Intercom: Yes, sir.

Officer: *(To Piret)* You see? Effortless.

He smiles at Piret

Workplace?

Piret: His?

Officer: Yours.

Piret: Ignalia.

Officer: The nuclear plant?

A Clerk enters

The Officer has no accent when he speaks to the Clerk

Officer: How many more of these squalid petitioners must I suffer?

Clerk: She's the last.

Officer: This one? Hip hoorah.

The clerk leaves a sheet of paper on the desk and exits

Piret: That's the information? Comrade officer?

Officer: (*Accented again*) Yes. This is the intelligence. The crime, the sentence, which work centre –

Piret: Which prison camp.

The Officer smiles, colder this time

I want to know what you've done with him.

Officer: Comrade officer.

Piret: Comrade officer.

Officer: You are sure you would rather not be offered the protection of ignorance?

Piret: What do you mean?

Officer: Well, you see, to me your request is misguided.

Piret: Look –

Officer: Because if I told you he is off to Norilsk, for example, then you would conjure a picture – would you not? – in which he is... Well, what would he be doing? What are his crimes?

Piret: I don't know. / *You know.*

Officer: You do not know? You do not know why your husband was arrested?

Piret: Comrade Officer, I...

Officer: Well then, let us say he is in Norilsk. In what way is that helpful? Imagining him breaking rocks in thirty degrees of frost with only the occasional lenten meal to punctuate the monotony. It seems strange to want to imagine that. Or maybe he is not so far away. Still in Pagari Street. Just around the corner. Have you been there? Despite the malarial rumours, it is a wonderful

place. Staffed by men of inexhaustible patience. I shall tell you my favourite room – it is quite particular. They ask the prisoner to stand infinitely still. Amazing! The confessions! A blizzard of recalcitrance. It is the ice, you understand. The block of ice. It burns your feet. And given his crimes, it is much more likely that he is here in Pagari Street. Being processed. So, I ask you again: are you sure you want to know?

Piret: I would – I have a right to know.

His hands prompt her

Comrade officer.

He goes over to the window

Officer: Do you not love this time of day? It makes me melancholic. Or it excites me. The vespertine lucidity never fails to provoke something. A darkening sky sliding over the roofs. The silhouetted stubble of aials bristling against the dying day. The killing night. It protects us – does it not? – makes everything cosy. Everyone hurrying home, where it is safe. Well, not everyone. Do you miss him very much? Some wives, I believe, are glad to see the back of theirs. Do you miss him? I'm asking you a question.

It is a one-way street, this, is it? I give you facts. You give me nothing.

Piret: I owe you nothing. I've come here three days. Waited in the corridor –

Officer: Sh, sh, sh, sh, sh. I assume he misses you, because you are luscious. *Do you miss him? Is it worse in the night? Can you live with it? How do you negotiate it? Do you draw a map of your loneliness? No. Can you delineate a vacuum? How does it cleave you? I would like to hear. Is it an emotional lacunae or is it substantially carnal?*

Piret remains silent

I understand your plight. You are a young woman. I am an attractive man.

He comes round the desk and puts his foot between her feet. He'll slowly move his knee towards her groin

Are you impressed with me? Might you want to quell the longing you feel with – quench your thirst with – me? Did you dare imagine the man in this ordinary office would be as supremely urbane? “Someone who will understand, who will put his finger on my pain, who will allow me to open up to him?” Bookish and ruthless – a winning combination, is it not? Most of the women who come in here are sad little heaps. Shapeless importunate troglodytes. But not you. You're lovely. Poets would kill. So comrade, would you like to ameliorate your pain?

She rises

Care to scratch the itch?

She approaches him, kissably close, leans on the desk beyond him for support

Piret: Where?

Officer: Well... On the desk. Why not? Would you prefer the floor?

Piret: You want to fuck me here in your office?

Officer: Would that be nice?

Piret: How would you? What would you do? Comrade officer.

Officer: Well, I think I would start by kissing your neck. Then I would remove your shirt, and –

Sniggering from the intercom

Piret: Oh, did I lean on the...?

He strikes her face with the back of his hand. She drops to the floor

Officer: You have a son.

Piret: What?

Officer: You are incredibly stupid, or –?

Piret: You wouldn't –

Officer: What would I not do? What could I not do? You have no idea what I would not enjoy doing to you. Or would you rather join your husband? I am asking you!!

Piret: No.

He goes to kick her

No, comrade officer!

Officer: You peasants. You think you own the world. You want information? Beg me. At least it is pretty when you people beg. Pitiful, yokelish eyes. Turns me on. Go on. Beg.

Pause

Piret looks up at the Officer

6. *Piret's apartment*

Emā is in her chair as usual. She's drifting in and out of sleep

Tonü wears his snorkel and mask while playing solo chess

Frustrated, he kicks the table and goes to the cupboards

Emā: Think about what she'd say.

Tonü: I'm hungrier than an anaconda. I'm allowed something. I've got to be / allowed something.

Emā: Get down, Tonü.

Tonü grabs a box he finds high up and at the back

Put that back.

Tonü clammers down with it

Tonü: It's Dad's, right? If it's Dad's and he's not here then it's mine.

He goes to open the box

Emā: Don't.

Tonü opens the box anyway

Emā effortfully gets up and takes it from him

Think you're clever. You don't know anything.

Tonü: Then tell me.

She returns to her chair

Tonü zips his mouth and turns his ears on

Emā: A brother brought it to me. A mark of respect.

Tonü: It's Granddad's?

Emā: How brave he was, that the man risked being seen in town...

Emā takes a gun out of the box

Walther PP.

Tonü: Does it still work?

Ema: They don't rust.

Tonü: Can I try it?

Ema: Self-cocking.

Tonü: It's loaded?

Ema: He used to say the spring's tight. Sometimes it jams.

Tonü: Don't point it!

Ema: But it's better than a Nagant or a Five Point Star.

Tonü: Grandma!

Ema: Doesn't work underwater though, so not much good to you.

Tonü: Please put it back, Grandma!

She's pointing it around the room

Put it back in its box!

Tonü's terrified

Ema: You want me to put it back now?

She's enjoys her power

They'd gone fishing up at Valgejoe. Come back through the snow. Sleeping probably. The Russians must have followed them. Threw grenades into the bunker. Most of his brothers were ripped to shreds as they slept.

They knew how to fight. They knew how to fight and they knew how to die. They sacrificed themselves to protect us. And you can't wait a couple of hours to eat. Think how much your Mum does for you.

She replaces the gun and gives the box to Tonü

Tonü, contrite, replaces it in the cupboard

Tonü: He got away?

Ema: He got hit. A brother grabbed his gun and ran. We went back together. I'd never known the forest so silent. The Russians had made a fire, thrown the

bodies onto it. Maybe to destroy the evidence. Perhaps to celebrate. Ülo's back was burned, but his hands were up, covering his face like he'd... His feet were tied. He must have tried to crawl away, but they'd pulled him back and thrown him on... Burned him alive.

Stupid. Stupid. He'd have been some use to them living.

IF YOU'D LIKE TO READ THE REST OF THIS PLAY PLEASE CONTACT
THE WRITER'S AGENT: Marc Berlin agents@berlinassociates.com