

ACT ONESCENE ONE

The dimly lit stage is dominated by a laboratory table and several work desks, one of which is covered with a white cloth. A heavy metal door is stage right. A squat wood stove casts a flickering light. A simple samovar or teapot is on the stove. Floor-to-ceiling banks of specimen drawers dominate the background. Two large framed photographs hang prominently. The first is a slightly bemused JOSEF STALIN. The second is TROFIM LYSENKO, who looks down with a stern, almost demonic stare.

ANNA, a young research assistant, enters carrying a lamp. She sets it on the desk with the white cloth, and the stage brightens. Her clothes hang loosely. Yawning, she tightens her belt another notch. She slips on a lab coat, then a heavy jacket over it. She takes a book from one of the desks.

ANNA

Here we are:

(reading)

"Plants have developed various adaptations to survive the harsh Arctic climate. Some freeze solid and later thaw. Some grow low to the ground to avoid the icy winds."

(crosses to the stove, pours a cup from the samovar)

"Some plants cluster together to protect one another. Those that flower do so quickly and spectacularly in the short growing season."

And all the varieties that could not adapt ... are they lost to us forever?

(the PROFESSOR enters briskly, carrying a metal specimen box)

Oh! Good morning, Professor.

PROFESSOR

Anna.

PROFESSOR (Cont)

(sets the box on the table)

So you're on watch. They haven't returned?

ANNA

No, not yet. I'm afraid I overslept.

PROFESSOR

Don't make it a habit. You're not a student anymore.

ANNA

I won't.

(a beat)

I was reading about life on the tundra. Fascinating.

(Professor checks the book cover)

PROFESSOR

Andreyev. A good choice. Volkov is better.
Is there tea?

ANNA

Whatever it is, it's warm.

PROFESSOR

That's something at least.

(he gets a cup)

Damn that boy! The fire's running low.

ANNA

Shall I go out and--

PROFESSOR

No, I told him to scavenge in the upper galleries. We'll see what he finds.

(Anna points to the metal box)

ANNA

I don't recognize this lot number. What are you working on today?

PROFESSOR

I found it in Vault 3. Some dear old friends.

(removes jars full of seeds)

Yes. Excellent. Ah ... these are particularly interesting.
Eragrostis tef. Have you heard of it?

ANNA

No, I don't think I have.

PROFESSOR

Teff. It's one of the original cultivated grasses. Tiny black seeds like grains of sand. We collected this sample in Abyssinia in ...

(lowers his glasses to read the label)

January, 1927. You know, I accompanied the Director on that expedition.

ANNA

The Director ... yes. Dr. Grivov told me some of the stories he'd heard.

PROFESSOR

Grivov has a way of ... embellishing.

ANNA

So tell me, what was it really like?

PROFESSOR

Oh, where to begin.

(increasingly animated as the memories
rush in)

It was my first time out of the country. We sailed through Suez to the Red Sea and on to Djibouti. Then by train across the dry savanna and into the mountains. I'd never seen the Director so happy. Like a child, leading the pack animals, up and up, until we reached the grassy plateau overlooking the Great Rift Valley. New discoveries at every turn ... it was his Garden of Eden. He spoke a dozen languages by then. Oh yes! And he learned a smattering of Amharic so he could converse with the local farmers. To find out their secrets. He said ...

(an imitation of the Director's voice)

"There are thousands of years of knowledge in these farmers' heads, Dmitri. They are the true scientists. We're just catching up."

(Anna laughs to see this playful side of
the Professor)

ANNA

Does he really sound like that?

PROFESSOR

We were strangers to them. Outsiders. But we never had a problem ... because the Director listened and gave them his respect. That's the kind of man he is.

(pauses, smiles as a memory returns)

I remember a meeting with one of the village chiefs. A huge spread was laid on. Roasted goat, root vegetables, stacks of warm enjera bread made from this very grain. And a thick, yeasty beer.

ANNA

Oh, just the thought of it.

PROFESSOR

It was everything they could offer. More than they could afford.

(ELENA, another scientist, enters
quietly and busies herself behind them,
listening discretely)

We filled our bellies, and afterwards, the Director made a great show of thanking the chief with gifts of fine cloth and a bone-handled dagger. The chief introduced his youngest daughter ... beautiful girl ... and the Director expressed his gratitude in their own language, as best he could. What he didn't know was that the Amharic word for *introduce* is very close to the word for *promise* or *betrothal*. Needless to say, he wasn't expecting a bride. It took all his considerable powers of persuasion to leave the girl behind.

(in a professorial tone)

So then ... what is the lesson?

ANNA

It's ... I don't--

PROFESSOR

Syntax is everything!

ANNA

Of course! What an adventure! It must be amazing to travel the world.

PROFESSOR

If it weren't for the Director, I never would have had the chance.

ANNA

Comrade Vavilov. I do want to meet him someday.

PROFESSOR

When this is over, I'll introduce you--

(a sudden series of LOUD CONCUSSIONS; a
fine dust falls from above; he looks
up)

Our morning reminder. Do you have to be so damned punctual! Now, where was I?

ELENA

Getting the girl in trouble.

PROFESSOR

But it's a true story. True enough.

ELENA

True or not, some stories are best not told. They could put us all in danger.

(more concussions and dust)

PROFESSOR

Compared to that?

ELENA

You know what I mean.

PROFESSOR

I do. But unless you think these walls have ears--

ELENA

Oh dear! How could I ever believe such a thing?

(Anna senses the tension between them)

ANNA

I'll go check on the barley section, shall I? Yes.

(she collects her book and exits)

ELENA

You know I have the greatest respect for the Director's work. But there are some ...

(motions to the portraits on the wall)

who have a different opinion. She's a bright girl, with a bright future. Would you risk it with your adventure stories?

PROFESSOR

If I didn't know better, Elena, I'd call those motherly instincts.

ELENA

Sisterly, maybe.

PROFESSOR

Should I hide the truth from her?

ELENA

We have the same goal, you and I. If that means guarding the truth ... saying the right things to the right people, then so be it. The Director would want that, wouldn't he?

PROFESSOR

I wish I could ask him.

(Elena turns away; a groggy, disheveled
DR. GRIVOV enters)

Dr. Grivov. Filip! Are you awake?

DR. GRIVOV

Is this the restaurant at the Hotel Astoria?

PROFESSOR

No, my friend.

DR. GRIVOV

Then I'm definitely awake. Have they arrived with the ration? The shelling has begun.

ELENA

They are late.

PROFESSOR

Let's give them a few minutes.

(approaches Dr. Grivov)

Tell me, what were they serving at the Astoria?

DR. GRIVOV

Oh, my! Solyanka. The tenderest veal you can imagine. Tomatoes. Baked Camembert. Cherries, red and ripe. And bread ... real bread. Imagine it! The waiters were so attentive, and my plate was piled so wonderfully high.

(a long pause as he relishes the image,
interrupted by a sudden KNOCKING on the
metal door)

Thank God, they're here!

(Elena opens a slit in the door at eye
level)

ELENA

It's about time. Password?

PASHA (O.S.)

Turd!

SONYA (O.S.)

Epi ... Pasha, don't. It's
epiphyte.

(Elena unlocks the door. PASHA and SONYA
enter, frozen to the bone. Elena closes
and locks the door behind them. Pasha
crosses to the stove with a shuffling,
awkward gait carrying an armful of scrap
wood. Sonya, brittle and pale as fine
china, reveals a cloth bag she's been
hiding beneath her coat. As Pasha feeds
wood into the stove and Sonya
distributes parcels and returns ration
cards to each person ...)

DR. GRIVOV

Food! You are an angel, sweet lady. How is it out there?

PASHA

C-cold!

SONYA

Let's see ... the streetcars are still frozen in place. No news from the east, but maybe that's good news. The daily ration is down again, I'm afraid. To 125 grams, if you can believe it! And there's no butter to be had anywhere, except on the black market.

(a beat)

Oh, and I saw a curious thing on the Nevsky ... a child pulling a sled with the corpse of a smaller child lashed to it.

PASHA

(solemn)

Wrapped in a blanket. Poor little thing.

SONYA

But one of the stewards upstairs did give me this jar of linseed oil.

(delighted, she pulls a jar from her coat pocket)

If only we had something to fry with it.

PROFESSOR

I'll add it to the larder, shall I?

(accepts the jar from Sonya; stores it in a locked drawer. Anna enters and Sonya gives her the last parcel. Then a moment approaching reverence as each person unwraps their meager ration. Some eat fast, some slow, as the distant "all clear" sirens wail.)

DR. GRIVOV

Interesting. I detect a note of pine needles today, and ... could that be a hint of wood shavings? How very rustic!

ELENA

What vintage goes best with pine needles?

DR. GRIVOV

Oh, a fine Greek retsina, without a doubt. Would that we had a bottle.

(Sonya pulls a knife from her pocket)

SONYA

I like to divide mine into thirds so I can have three proper meals during the day.

(Pasha approaches Anna; hands her what appears to be a piece of blue glass)

PASHA

I got this for you. It's c-candy. You can eat it. It's sweet.

ANNA

You're sweet. Where did you get it?

DR. GRIVOV

The sugar warehouse burnt down ... they dig it up from the basement. A bit smoky they say, but otherwise perfectly fine.

(gives a look of encouragement to Pasha)

PASHA

Yes, the man told me it was good.

(he gently takes Anna's hand, lifts it to the light)

Look. If you turn it this way, it looks like a heart. A blue heart.

ANNA

I see it. Thank you, Pasha.

PROFESSOR

Now that everyone is here, we can talk about today's assignments. Anna, I want you to work with Dr. Ivanova on the Peruvian subsection. I'll expect a complete review by the end of the week. Dr. Mishkina, you will continue your reclassification in Vault 2. Grivov ... I think we'll give your eyes a rest today and put you on general duties.

DR. GRIVOV

I shall be at full strength tomorrow.

PROFESSOR

Oh, and Pasha, I don't want to see another hungry rodent like I did yesterday in Vault 3. Since all the cats have gone missing ... we'll have to rely on you. Do you understand?

PASHA

Yes, Professor. K-kill the rats.

PROFESSOR

Good lad. Well ... ?

(Pasha slowly understands and exits)

ELENA

Can we re-visit the question of evacuation.

(audible grumbling from the others)

Yes, I know. If ... if we don't start making preparations now--

PROFESSOR

We've spoken about this. The decision was made to wait for further instructions.

ELENA

I'm sorry, but I disagree! Lake Ladoga is frozen. They're building a road across it as we speak to break the blockade. If there's an opening, a breakthrough, even for few days, we should be ready to move some of the collection out of the city.

PROFESSOR

We're safe here, as I've said--

ELENA

Safe? Our safety is just an illusion! We could be overrun any day now, and then what? I have a husband and son waiting for me in the East. And it's only December. I'm sorry, but how many of us will even be around to see the Spring?

SONYA

She has a point. One hears stories of people being killed for their ration cards. If they knew what we had stored down here, I shudder to think--

PROFESSOR

Enough! We have our work to do. And until I'm given orders to the contrary, we won't be breaking up the collection. Is that clear?

(a general, grudging assent)

So go on then ... to your tasks.

(Sonya and Anna exit; Dr. Grivov
crosses to the stove)

Elena, could you ...

(she stays behind, reluctantly)

I'm aware of the risks, but now is not the time for this. If conditions change ...

ELENA

Dmitri. You can't always--

PROFESSOR

Until then, can I rely on you?

ELENA

And when the time comes, will we all have a say in the matter? Or will you decide for us?

(she exits; Dr. Grivov having witnessed the exchange)

PROFESSOR

How can I ... she will not back down.

DR. GRIVOV

My wife, bless her gypsy soul, was never one to hold her tongue.

PROFESSOR

How could I forget. Her passing was such a--

DR. GRIVOV

Yes ...

(after a moment to collect himself)

She had a low opinion of you at first, do you remember that? Well of course you do, she couldn't hide her true feelings. She warned me back then to stay away from you and your lot.

PROFESSOR

Our lot?

DR. GRIVOV

Idealists. Men of principle. They made her uncomfortable. Who knows, maybe that's why she married me. It's my nature to be cautious. It's probably why I'm still here.

PROFESSOR

Am I doing the right thing, Filip?

DR. GRIVOV

A cautious man doesn't give advice ... or ask for it. He does what he's told. He does what he has to ... if he wants to live to see the Spring.

PROFESSOR

We will ... and then we'll raise a glass to her memory.

DR. GRIVOV

She'd like that. Now, if you don't need me, I'll be having my dessert at the Astoria.

(Dr. Grivov yawns and exits, leaving the Professor alone. He picks up the jar of seeds; to the audience)

PROFESSOR

Idealists. Is that what we were, Nikolai? I was content to stay in the laboratory, lost in my own work. But you had bigger ideas, didn't you? A whole world to explore. Secrets to unlock. And we were young. Too young to be cautious.

(More)

PROFESSOR (Cont)

(a beat; a sudden KNOCK on the metal door startles the Professor; another knock; he crosses and warily opens the slit)

Password?

MAJOR TIKHVIN (O.S.)

Major Gregor Gregorivich Tikhvin. Representing the People's Commissar for Agriculture.

PROFESSOR

That's not the password. Who are those men with you?

MAJOR TIKHVIN (O.S.)

Here are my orders. Open the door.

(a sheet of paper pushes through the slit; the Professor reads it)

PROFESSOR

I'm usually told of any inspections.

MAJOR TIKHVIN (O.S.)

Or I *could* come back with more soldiers ... and your replacement.

(a beat, and the Professor unlocks and opens the door; MAJOR TIKHVIN dismisses unseen guards and enters, wearing a military uniform, greatcoat, and a vulpine expression)

MAJOR TIKHVIN

Don't worry, Professor, this isn't an official inspection. Your facility has fallen under my command and I wanted to have a look.

(surveys the scene as the Professor locks the door)

Yes, I see. Are there other sections?

PROFESSOR

Four storage vaults and two smaller sleeping rooms. If you'd like, I can arrange a tour and try to explain what we do here.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

That won't be necessary. I have a science background. It's some sort of botanical museum, correct?

PROFESSOR

Museum ... no. We have more than 200,000 varieties of seeds and root stock gathered from every corner of the planet. It's the largest collection of its kind in the world. Unique. And that doesn't begin to describe the knowledge contained in our archives.

(More)

PROFESSOR (Cont)

(skeptically)

Where exactly did you get your science background?

(Major Tikhvin ignores him and consults his notes)

MAJOR TIKHVIN

And you have a staff of eight?

PROFESSOR

There are five of us now.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

These are people you trust?

PROFESSOR

They have *earned* my trust, yes.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

Good. To answer your question, I didn't study in Leningrad ... or Moscow, as you did. I spent two years at a provincial college. Before the nation called me to a higher purpose.

(the Professor is unimpressed)

PROFESSOR

Two years.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

I may not have your credentials, but I understand the importance of seeds and dirt like any good son of Russia. The sickle is just as important as the hammer.

PROFESSOR

Then you know how vital it is to preserve this collection.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

My job is to observe and make the proper recommendations.

PROFESSOR

To whom?

MAJOR TIKHVIN

My superiors. From there, well ... information rises, step by step. Who can say how far?

PROFESSOR

And after your recommendations?

MAJOR TIKHVIN

I wait for my orders.

PROFESSOR

Like any good son of Russia.

(the Major shivers)

MAJOR TIKHVIN

Do you keep it this cold to preserve the seeds?

PROFESSOR

That's what we tell ourselves.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

Yes, they warned me about you. About your ... manner.

PROFESSOR

And what manner is that, exactly?

(Anna enters, carrying a specimen vial)

ANNA

Professor, I have a question about the ... oh, I'm sorry.

PROFESSOR

Anna, this is Major, uh--

MAJOR TIKHVIN

Tikhvin.

PROFESSOR

Yes. Anna is, was, one of my students at the Institute. Comrade Tikhvin and I were just discussing the virtue of getting one's hands dirty.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

And the importance of trust.

(approaches Anna)

A student? So many interesting things being taught these days. So much to learn. It can be confusing, I imagine.

(Anna looks for help from the Professor)

ANNA

I had excellent teachers.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

You know what they say: education is a weapon. It depends who holds it ... and where it's aimed.

ANNA

I suppose so.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

Oh, it's true. You're a soldier. We're all soldiers now. Your teachers should've taught you that.

ANNA

We do what we can. For the nation.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

Well trained, this one.

(he looks to an increasingly annoyed
Professor)

And what else have they taught you? What are your thoughts on, oh, let's say ... the process of vernalization? No? You must have some opinion on Commissar Lysenko's work?

(Anna is visibly flustered)

ANNA

Vernalization? I ... I think it can be a useful technique ... if applied in the proper manner ... I mean--

PROFESSOR

Thank you, Anna. That will be all. Would you tell Dr. Ivanova I'd like to see her? Please.

(Anna exits)

Have you come here to observe or interrogate us?

MAJOR TIKHVIN

There are questions ... lines of inquiry need to be followed. That's all. The Commissar wants to be sure the people working for him are of a like mind. We're in a war, and the enemy thrives on chaos.

PROFESSOR

I prefer people who have minds of their own.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

The prisons are full of such people. I think you might know some of them.

(beat)

But let's not get off on the wrong foot, Professor. May I call you Professor?

PROFESSOR

If you're here to learn. Shall I call you Comrade?

MAJOR TIKHVIN

Major will do.

(More)

MAJOR TIKHVIN (Cont)

(examines contents of the lab table)

Most of the professors, at least men of your reputation, had an opportunity to leave before the blockade. I understand you have no family ... why are you still here?

PROFESSOR

There is work to be done. Why are you still in the city?

MAJOR TIKHVIN

I admire your devotion. But isn't this ... all this, really just a monument to one man's vanity?

PROFESSOR

If you are here to learn, I could teach you about the Director and his work.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

The Director? Your friend Vavilov no longer has that title.

PROFESSOR

Officially.

(eyes the Major warily; after a beat)

You must know the term *true-to-type*? No? It's a common botanical term.

(no response from the Major)

Seeds that are true-to-type produce the same plants, year by year, generation by generation. Unchanged. The plant's offspring remain true. Do you understand? Giving the plant a new name won't change that fact. And giving its name to an inferior variety won't make the other plant stronger.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

That may be true for seeds, but we live in a world of men. Men change, or they get plowed under.

PROFESSOR

A world red in tooth and claw.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

A world under attack at the moment, or haven't you noticed? Titles and personalities are meaningless in any case. The only thing that really matters is keeping the nation alive. Today. Tomorrow. Next year.

PROFESSOR

One hundred years.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

How's that?

(Elena enters)

PROFESSOR

Dr. Ivanova, this is Major Tikhvin. He's here to evaluate us for the Commissar.

(Elena offers an enthusiastic handshake)

ELENA

It's a pleasure, Major. What have you heard from Moscow? We get so little news these days. How is Comrade Lysenko and the rest of the leadership? Safe, I hope.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

From all reports.

ELENA

Good. Good. They are constantly in our thoughts. Isn't that right, Professor?

(a cold response from the Professor)

We've met before. No, I'm certain of it. Was it ... was it at the Smolny, perhaps?

MAJOR TIKHVIN

No, I would have remembered.

ELENA

I'm sure you're right. Still, there is something familiar about you.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

I've only been in Leningrad a few months.

ELENA

So you came here *after* the blockade. That was a very brave decision.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

You assume it was my decision.

ELENA

Well, brave nonetheless.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

If you insist.

(an uncomfortable silence)

ELENA

So, Major, how can we help in your evaluation?

MAJOR TIKHVIN

You could give me a brief tour ... if I could take you away from your work. The Professor wouldn't mind. Would you?

PROFESSOR

Not at all. I'm sure you'll find Dr. Ivanova to be most helpful.

(as Elena and the Major begin to exit)

Remember, we have no secrets when it comes to the People's Commissar for Agriculture.

(Elena and the Professor trade glances)

ELENA

You must tell me all about the Commissar and his latest discoveries ...

(Elena and the Major exit; Anna and Sonya enter cautiously)

SONYA

This is trouble, I know it. What does he want?

ANNA

He caught me off guard with those questions. *Vernalization*. I'm sorry, Professor.

PROFESSOR

Don't worry. One bureaucrat is the same as another. We'll tell him what he wants to hear.

SONYA

And what *is* that?

PROFESSOR

Whatever helps him keep his position, I suspect.

SONYA

I was there last year when they took Karpechenko away. I saw the black vans. The secret police. I watched them drag that poor man down the hallway. The sound of their boots. The look on his face! I'll never forget--

PROFESSOR

You mustn't dwell on it.

SONYA

He had the look of someone lost, someone who--

PROFESSOR

You cannot--

ANNA

Pasha! Pasha's in Vault 3.

SONYA

That's right!

PROFESSOR

Oh, Christ, I forgot!

ANNA

Should I tell him to hide like the last time?

PROFESSOR

No ... no, I can't put him through that again. Christ!

ANNA

He could leave until the Major's gone.

PROFESSOR

There's an escort waiting outside. Too many questions to answer.

(he weighs options; to Anna, quietly)

Quick! Get me one of the spare lab coats, then go find him.
Hurry!

(Anna lifts the sheet from one of the
desks, searches drawers)

SONYA

Without this job, there is no ration card. And with no card ...
it's worse than Karpechenko.

PROFESSOR

No one is being dragged out of here, I promise you. This Major
Tikhvin doesn't have the power. And why would he care? Why would
anyone up there give a damn about what we're doing down here?

SONYA

You make insignificance seem oddly comforting ... but still--

(Anna pulls a lab coat from a drawer)

ANNA

I found one.

(as Pasha enters, proudly holding a
LARGE DEAD RAT by the tail)

PASHA

I got one! I'm Pasha the C-cat!

(he makes a snarling cat sound)

PROFESSOR

Now is not the time. We have a visitor. Listen to me, Pasha! Do
you know what that means? Oh, do get rid of it.

(Pasha looks around, carries the rat to
the wood stove)

Not in the stove!

(Pasha looks in several drawers and deposits the rat in one of them)

ANNA

Here, take this.

(she hands Pasha the lab coat)

PASHA

I don't have to hide in the cabinet? It was dark and I couldn't breathe.

PROFESSOR

Just sit at a desk. Over there. Keep quiet, and read a book.

PASHA

But I can't read ... not so good.

ANNA

Pretend. Don't worry, I'll be right here.

PROFESSOR

If he asks you a question ... I don't know, cough. Pretend to be ill. There's enough of it going around.

(Pasha coughs in an exaggerated fashion)

SONYA

This is madness! You can't pass him off as one of us.

PROFESSOR

What choice do I have? He's not supposed to be here. They'd send him straight to the front. He wouldn't last a day.

SONYA

We never should have taken him in. I told you when Anna brought him here off the street ... like some kind of stray. I said he'd be trouble.

PROFESSOR

The boy would be dead if we hadn't. Look at him.

(Pasha clowns around with Anna as she hands him a book; he dons the lab coat, finds a pair of glasses in the pocket and tries them on)

Pasha, what did I say?

(Pasha coughs again, then makes a zipping motion across his lips)

SONYA

Madness!

ANNA

(to Pasha, out of earshot of the others)
 The glasses make you look very ... well, here, push them down so
 you can see over the top.

PASHA

You'll sit next to me ... right here?

ANNA

Yes, don't be afraid. The Major probably won't even notice you.

PASHA

What book am I reading.

(Anna glances at the book's title)

ANNA

It's called "The Biological Myths of Mendel and Morgan".

PASHA

Sounds important.

ANNA

If you don't care about the truth.

(beat)

Oh, but don't say that to the Major. Don't say anything.

PASHA

Did you try the candy I gave you?

ANNA

I'm saving it for later.

PASHA

For luck?

ANNA

Yes, for luck. Now pay attention.

SONYA

Karpechenko wasn't the only one they arrested. Three of his
 colleagues disappeared the next day. Just like that. Gone.

PROFESSOR

I know what happened.

SONYA

Because they worked with him. Because they were tainted by him.

PROFESSOR

This will only work if we keep our nerve. All of us.

(Sonya glares at Pasha)

SONYA

From the street. Like a stray cat.

(as Elena and Major Tikhvin enter,
engaged in cordial conversation)

ELENA

I suppose it *is* like a library, Major. I never thought of it in quite that way.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

You could lend out seeds to the people. What do you think of the idea, Professor?

PROFESSOR

This is not a lending library. The Great Library of Alexandria did not lend out its collection to the people.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

And it was burnt to the ground, if I remember my history.

(notices Sonya and Pasha)

I see you've gathered everyone. Just as well. I'd like to begin with--

(as Dr. Grivov enters, a bit ruffled;
surprised at Pasha in a lab coat and
glasses)

DR. GRIVOV

A thousand pardons, comrades. Oh! Have I missed something?

PROFESSOR

Major, you haven't met Dr. Grivov, Dr. Mishkina, and Dr. ... Pashkov.

(Elena gives the Professor a confused
look)

MAJOR TIKHVIN

You said there were five of you. I count six.

(Pasha coughs loudly)

PROFESSOR

Five staff members and myself. I thought that was clear.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

I know what I heard, Professor.

PROFESSOR

Nevertheless. The group is assembled for you. Please.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

Very well. As I've told the Professor, I am Major Tikhvin, representing Comrade-Director Lysenko and the People's Commissar for Agriculture. I will report to Moscow on all activities related to the Department and its operation within the Leningrad District. You'll see me here from time to time. All reports and questions for the Commissar will pass through me. Am I clear?

SONYA

When will our rations be increased?

MAJOR TIKHVIN

I have no control over rations, Doctor, but I will ask. Even under the current extraordinary conditions, we expect you to do your jobs. In fact, we may ask you to do more than you believe is possible.

SONYA

More! Did he say *more*?

MAJOR TIKHVIN

The Commissar has expressed an interest in this collection of yours. Why? I can't say. He must have his reasons. I will be his eyes and ears, and I'll make certain his orders are followed.

PROFESSOR

We're at your disposal, Major. Whatever you need.

(rising)

Now, I'm sure you'll want to get back before the next wave. The Germans are nothing if not precise.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

We have time.

(approaches Pasha)

Pashkov, is it?

PROFESSOR

If I could just have a moment to discuss--

MAJOR TIKHVIN

You seem rather young to have a doctorate ... Dr. Pashkov?

(Pasha coughs; everyone else freezes;
the Professor searches for a plausible
response)

PROFESSOR

Dr. Pashkov comes to us from ... from--

ANNA

He's from--

DR. GRIVOV

He's not *really* a doctor, not in the formal sense. No, now Professor, we don't wish to mislead the Major. I found the young man on my last trip to the Urals. He's the son of a farmer with very little formal education, I'm afraid. But he shows a rare insight into the workings of nature. Taught me a few things about the prevention of root fungus, I can tell you. A botanical savant, if you will.

(approaches Pasha, who assumes a dignified air)

He's a perfect example of, what are they calling them ... the *barefoot scientists*.

PASHA

A perfect example.

(a long silence; will the deception hold?)

MAJOR TIKHVIN

The Commissar welcomes those who are, like himself, not tainted by bourgeois theory.

ELENA

There's no chance of that.

(another baleful look to the Professor; Pasha coughs again)

MAJOR TIKHVIN

I'm surprised you'd have such a person on your staff.

PROFESSOR

As I said, all points of view are welcome here.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

Are they?

(turns to Pasha)

Dr. Pashkov, what is your current project?

(Pasha coughs again, violently this time)

PROFESSOR

I'm afraid our colleague has a bad case of bronchitis. Or worse.

(to Pasha)

Maybe you should go and rest, Doctor.

(the Major backs away slightly)

MAJOR TIKHVIN

Still, I'd like to hear his story. Your current project? You must be working on something.

(Pasha is frightened, he looks to Anna;
after a very long pause)

PASHA

Uhh, rats ... and m-mice.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

I don't understand.

PASHA

I'm ... I'm ... Uhh--

ANNA

He's developing a strain of wheat that is less attractive to rodents. Twenty-five percent of the crop is lost that way, you know.

DR. GRIVOV

Yes! Breakthrough research. Little devils can't stand the taste. Genius, really.

ANNA

Genius.

(the Major he writes in his notepad;
after another perilous silence)

MAJOR TIKHVIN

You see, *that's* the kind of work we need. Practical work for practical uses. Immediate results, not all this ... theory. The future of Soviet agriculture depends on young men and women like these two.

(another long cough from Pasha)

Get that seen to, Pashkov, because when I return we will have a conversation. The Commissar will want a full report of your findings, I have no doubt.

(this pleases Pasha)

PASHA

Yes, we can talk.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

Dr. Mishkina, is it? We'll talk as well. And I'll pass along your question about the rations.

SONYA

Thank you, Major.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

Professor, I'm beginning to understand why I was given this particular assignment. It's already been a learning experience. You can expect me again soon with many more questions.

PROFESSOR

We won't be going anywhere.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

What are your security arrangements?

PROFESSOR

At least two staff members are here with the door locked at all times. No one gets in without the day's password. Except for you, of course.

MAJOR TIKHVIN

Keep it that way. And I'll have a guard posted at the entrance upstairs.

(the Professor tries to mask his alarm)

PROFESSOR

I don't think ... wouldn't that draw undue attention? We haven't had a problem so far--

MAJOR TIKHVIN

The guard stays. We'll meet again soon.

(turns to Elena)

Thank you for the tour, Doctor. Very enlightening indeed.

(Elena nods, opens the door and the Major exits, to collective relief)

DR. GRIVOV

Charming fellow.

ELENA

Unexpected.

PROFESSOR

The two of you seemed friendly. Anything we should know about the Major?

ELENA

I wouldn't use the word *friendly*. And whose ridiculous idea was it to dress up Pasha?!

SONYA

The Major saw right through your little masquerade. You could see it in his eyes!

DR. GRIVOV

That story about the Urals ... I don't know what came over me.

PROFESSOR

So much for your cautious nature, Filip. No, I'll take responsibility for Pasha.

PASHA

He asked me ... I couldn't lie. I was afraid to lie.

SONYA

We're all complicit now. Rat-resistant wheat! What were you thinking!

ANNA

I ... I didn't--

PROFESSOR

Before the Major returns, we'll come up with a plan. Pasha, you can take off the coat, but keep it close by, just in case.

PASHA

So, am I still a doctor?

PROFESSOR

The new guard will be a problem. He'll note our comings and goings, so we can't have you fetching all the firewood and water. It would look suspicious.

ANNA

I can help.

SONYA

I can barely find the strength to walk here in the morning. Let alone carry water.

PROFESSOR

We'll all pitch in as best we can. For now, please return to your assignments.

(Anna, Pasha, and a dubious Sonya exit)

DR. GRIVOV

Let me see what I can find in the archives on mouse-resistant wheat. You never know what the barefoot boys will believe.

(he exits, leaving only the Professor and Elena)

PROFESSOR

Lysenko and his barefoot scientists. And why barefoot? Have they rejected the concept of wearing shoes, or can the Party not

(More)

PROFESSOR (Cont)

afford to supply them? Tell me, why must we answer to these simpletons?

ELENA

You know why, Dmitri. Because the Commissar values doctrine over learning.

PROFESSOR

At what point did scientific ignorance become a virtue?

ELENA

What about your simple Abyssinian farmers? Didn't the Director call *them* the "true scientists"?

PROFESSOR

There's a difference between a thousand years of traditional knowledge and ... magical thinking. Commissar Lysenko is a charlatan. And a very dangerous man.

ELENA

And if you truly believe that ...

PROFESSOR

Yes, yes. I'll have to tread carefully with this Major.

(muffled sounds of sirens, followed by more concussions and dust)

SCENE TWO

A sleeping area with two simple cots, a chair, and a lantern. Dr. Grivov sits on one cot, reading a book, with Pasha asleep behind him on the other. Anna enters tentatively from the darkness.

DR. GRIVOV

Anna! Come in.

ANNA

I don't want to wake him.

DR. GRIVOV

Pasha? The boy doesn't sleep, he hibernates. The bloody Luftwaffe can't wake him. You can speak freely.

ANNA

I'm keeping you up.