

ALIK

a play

by Julio Vera

CHARACTERS
(in order of appearance)

MARINA A striking, sensual beauty. Alert, cynical and melancholic all at once. 20.

ALIK (*Aw-leek*) Soldierly handsome. Thin and refined but muscular - tightly wound. Early 20s.

PAVEL Boyish good looks with an open, friendly face and a crop of curly hair. Mid-20s.

LARISSA Pleasantly unadorned. Carries herself with poise and has a sharp, piercing look. Early 20s.

ROBERT Warm, open-hearted, with a soft yet manly voice that expresses honesty. Late 20s.

MARGUERITE Short but bullish. Gray hair pulled into a perfect bun, pointed spectacles. 50s.

EVELYN Observant and caring, she exudes warmth. Dresses for comfort. Early 30s.

RIMMA Pretty and enthusiastic bureaucrat who dresses expensively, though simply. Mid 20s.

(Note: the parts of PAVEL and ROBERT and of EVELYN and RIMMA may be doubled.)

PLACE

An apartment in Minsk, and the recesses of Alik's memories.

TIME

The years 1961-1962, and earlier.

ABOUT THE SET

Most of the action takes place in ALIK's two-room apartment on the fourth floor of an enormous, concrete building in Minsk in the old Soviet Union. But at times the set breaks apart, defragmenting into darkness and shadows, places that harbor ALIK's memories and inner turmoil.

The flat is divided into a living room, STAGE RIGHT, and a kitchen, STAGE LEFT. The living room, which doubles as a bedroom, has French doors opening to a balcony, where a small empty flower box hangs on its balustrade. At rise of curtain the place is sparsely furnished with a couch/bed, some odd chairs and a Soviet-style sideboard (servant). Other pieces materialize over the course of the action. Hanging down from the ceiling is a modern light fixture made of three colored glass cylinders, casting the room in a dim amber light. The kitchen consists of a worn out stove, a tiny white sink, a small Soviet refrigerator and a shabby wood cabinet, on top of which there is an old cardboard suitcase and some odd boxes. DOWNSTAGE, a rickety kitchen table with one chair creates a dining area. Yellowing wallpaper of abstract pink flowers peels off the walls. Several electric wires converge into one wall socket high on the wall. UPSTAGE CENTER there is an entry hallway that divides the two rooms. It has a heavy front door and a smaller door next to it leading to a dark bathroom. From there, a dividing scrim-wall angles DOWNSTAGE, rendering the two rooms invisible to each other. DOWNSTAGE CENTER RIGHT, close to the edge of the stage, a tiny table and chair face the audience.

Smack in the center of the living room wall - and dominating the whole scene - is a large wood-barreled rifle, hanging on a nail and pointed straight at the apartment entry. An oily stain has formed on the plaster surface behind it, taking on an amorphous, amoeba shape.

Vague sounds of the city drift in through the balcony; sporadic autos, streetcar bells, the rustling of trees, a bird or two, the ripples of a river park below. Occasionally, a far off street accordion infuses the air with nostalgia.

Scene 1

AN APARTMENT IN MINSK
A SPRING EVENING

Out of darkness music from a record player: the Liza-Pauline duet from Tchaikovsky's Pique Dame, a soft, lilting ode to the approaching night.

DUET

<i>Uzh vecher...Oblkov pomerknuli kraya, Posledni luch zari na bashnyakh umiraet . . .</i>	<i>(Tis evening... the cloudy spaces darken, the last ray of sunset fades on the towers . . .)</i>
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MARINA, in a red dress and white shoes, is on the balcony looking at the view. ALIK, in gray sweater and slacks, watches her intensely from inside the French doors.

MARINA

You were right, I can see the Palace of Culture. One minute you're there, now it seems so far away... The whole river park is yours. You have it all.

ALIK

I don't have you.

MARINA

Sasha and Anatoly are still waiting at the corner.

ALIK

I don't want them near you.

MARINA

That accent of yours, sounds Latvian.

ALIK

I'll make you some tea.

MARINA

No, let's wait for Larissa and Pavel.

ALIK

They'll be a while. I've got you all to myself.

MARINA

Excuse me, but you don't own me.

ALIK

There's a chance, I know it.

MARINA

For the right boy. But you won't reveal your background.

ALIK

It doesn't matter, I know you feel it too.

Marina nears Alik's writing table, her hand brushes over a journal. Alik rushes to it, hides it in a drawer. Marina pretends not to notice.

MARINA

This apartment is very big. How many others?

ALIK

I am alone, and very lonely.

MARINA

Apparently. Where is it you work?

ALIK

Gorizont Radio Factory. Technician.

MARINA

Technicians get flats like these?

ALIK

I must touch your lips, Marina.

MARINA

No. The others might . . .

ALIK

It'll drive me crazy if I don't.

MARINA

Go crazy then. I'm not a loose girl. And if I scream Sasha will break your door down. He's big enough.

ALIK

No one would miss me. No family.

MARINA

I'm so sorry. Not even a . . . ?

ALIK

All dead. I'm an orphan.

MARINA

My own father died. Vanished, at any rate. I was raised by my grandmother, Tatyana, in Archangel.

ALIK

But you had a mother.

MARINA

She worked in another city. Then she died. Then Tatyana. So I came to Minsk, to live with an uncle.

ALIK

We're very much alike.

MARINA

Sorry I mocked you. I see a sadness in your eyes now.

ALIK

They please you.

MARINA

They're as blue as ice.

ALIK

See, you do like me.

MARINA

I want to smoke a cigarette. Do you have one, Alik? That is your name, Alik - something?

ALIK

Pavel has those. I don't like it.

MARINA

Perhaps when he gets here . . .

Alik grabs her in his arms and kisses her. Marina savors it, then gently backs off.

MARINA

Satisfied?

ALIK

Never. One chance to make love to you.

MARINA

I told you my story; now your turn. Where you from?

ALIK

(Hesitantly.)

New Orleans.

MARINA

Where the jazz comes from? America?

ALIK

Russian music's better. Classical. Tchaikovsky. I have all his music. This opera's my favorite.

MARINA

Pique Dame. Very dark. Doesn't he kill himself?

ALIK

He's willing to die for love.

MARINA

How odd, an American boy with a favorite Russian opera, in Minsk. Never met one. You Americans are good kissers.

ALIK

It won't get in the way?

MARINA

The kissing?

ALIK

My being an American.

MARINA

Makes no sense.

ALIK

Perfect sense; it's destiny.

MARINA

I think you're a spy.

ALIK

(Laughs heartily.)

Yes, a double agent!

MARINA

That would explain the pistol.

ALIK

That's a rifle. For hunting. Marina, I've never known this feeling before.

MARINA

OK, Mr. American, then tell me about your jazz - Louis Armstrong. Ella Fitzgerald. And my favorite, Eartha Kitt.

ALIK

Please let me kiss you again.

MARINA

If you ask, I have to say no.

He takes her in his arms, kisses her, now slowly, sweetly. She melts into it.

ALIK

You are as certain as I am.

DOOR KNOCKS. They reluctantly pull apart. Alik opens it to PAVEL, dressed expensively and LARISSA, in a simple print dress.

PAVEL

Hope we gave you enough time, my friend.

ALIK

Did you manage the . . . ?

PAVEL

Best wine from Georgia. If your father was a Hero of the Soviet Union, it counts for something.

LARISSA

The rest of us are not so accustomed to your *blat* - connections, friends in high places, "Kremlin Rations."

PAVEL

So you do not want my *blat*-tainted wine?

LARISSA

Be quick about the glasses.

All laugh. Alik and Pavel cross to the kitchen.

MARINA

Where are the others? I saw Anatoly and Sasha . . .

LARISSA

All your admirers have gone off to cry into their vodkas, ever since this Alik fetched you up here. Some place.

MARINA

All for him.

LARISSA

Government job. Like your uncle Ilya.

MARINA

No. Technician.

LARISSA

So polite, so good looking. I wouldn't let this one slip through my fingers. Here, unbutton your top, let him see your full potential.

MARINA

One's enough, I think he's got the message. I'd like to think I have more to offer.

LARISSA

Your pumpkin's ticking, Cinderella.

MARINA

You seem more anxious than I am. Wait, did Valentin say something about the cot? I'll move it further back.

LARISSA

Never mind. Pavel says this one's American. Just what you're missing from your collection.

MARINA

Minsk is full of handsome boys.

LARISSA

Marushka, this is Larissa Petrusevich you're talking to.

MARINA

I enjoyed his close dancing. But nothing more.

LARISSA

He didn't let any other boy near you, like he owns you already. And I thought this boyish Pavel was a catch.

MARINA

Mr. Fashion plate? He's bit above your class.

LARISSA

Nonsense, comrade, this is a classless society!

(They laugh.)

Get a load of that view!

They step into the balcony. Alik and Pavel work on wine and glasses in the kitchen.

ALIK

I could tell from the moment she looked at me.

PAVEL

Where is that corkscrew I gave you? All I see is wire conduits from the factory in here.

ALIK

I only borrowed them. I'll take them back. Don't tell them, please . . .

PAVEL

Relax, my friend. Everyone pilfers. That's the least of your problems.

ALIK

I have no problems now. I've found the girl of my dreams.

PAVEL

I'm talking about the hole in your living room. No microphone yet, but soon enough. Careful what you say in there. Kitchen's still safe.

ALIK

Fine, now they can hear me fart.

PAVEL

They only wait for you to make a mistake.

ALIK

I don't care. This is the happiest night of my life.

PAVEL

Hurry up and catch her then, but don't say I didn't warn you.

ALIK

Look, I'm the best defector they ever had, ex Marine. Of course they're curious - I worked a radar station.

PAVEL

That's not it.

ALIK

Suddenly you seem to know a lot about them.

PAVEL

They're not so sure about you, that's all.

ALIK

What can they do, ship me back?

PAVEL

Not to America; the other place.

ALIK

I thought we were friends. Don't ever bring that up again.

(He clutches his stomach.)

PAVEL

Something wrong?

ALIK

Cramp from dancing. Jesus, this was supposed to be a worker's paradise.

Larissa and Marina cross back in.

LARISSA

I'd marry this one blindfolded.

MARINA

Please, this is not a bazaar.

LARISSA

Better. He might be - dare I say it - a ticket to America? Honestly, you're spoiled by your own good looks.

MARINA

On the contrary, that's brought me nothing but troubles.

LARISSA

Nothing but choices. You have Sasha totally hooked.

MARINA

He has good qualities.

LARISSA

Four rooms and adoring parents who want you to marry their only son - and future doctor. There's a problem?

MARINA

I don't love him.

LARISSA

Ah, love. Well, you love Anatoly enough.

MARINA

No place of his own.

LARISSA

He finishes school in less than a year and he already asked. I remind you, Marushka, you barely make enough for kasha, your uncle threw you out and you sleep on a cot in the back of my - Valentin's - commission shop.

MARINA

I'm sorry. Forgive me. I do appreciate your kindness.

LARISSA

It can't last forever.

MARINA

He is angry, isn't he?

LARISSA

Just tell me, what's your plan for this one?

Alik and Pavel return with glasses.

MARINA

It took a long time to get four glasses.

PAVEL

A toast. To *Komsomol*, the Communist Youth League, and a joyous night at the Palace of Culture.

ALL

Za Vas!

ALIK

To Marina Prusakova, for giving me hope in love at last.

PAVEL

I think maybe Larissa and I should leave.

MARINA

Don't be foolish, Pavel.

LARISSA

You are blushing. And, since Marina is like a sister, I need to know Alik's intentions.

PAVEL

You've nothing to fear. He's a true gentleman.

LARISSA

Maybe. But that full moon, her pretty eyes: dangerous.

MARINA

Drink your wine, "sister." Drown all this foolishness.

ALIK

She's right, I myself am afraid of what I might do.

MARINA

Then it's time to go.

ALIK

No. Sorry, bad joke. It's early yet. Let's listen to music. I have many records.

MARINA

(Looking out the balcony.)

Larissa, Valentin's across street with others from the Institute. We can walk with them, if we hurry.

ALIK

No! I'll walk you home.

MARINA

No. Thank you.

Alik SLAPS his desk angrily.

PAVEL

Forgive my friend. We argued politics in the kitchen. Quite the intellectual.

LARISSA

Another one of your exotic friends, Pavel. With a quick temper. A sign of passion, I hope.

MARINA

(Calls out.)

Valentin! Valentin, up here! Wait for me and Larissa.

LARISSA

We go, I see. Thank you, Pavel, for your wine, even more tasty because of your *blat*.

PAVEL

Who knows where else my connections might lead?

LARISSA

Maybe we should stay a little longer, Marina.

MARINA

I'll tell Valentin you've been detained.

LARISSA

Fine, sister says we go.

ALIK

(To Marina.)

You must promise to see me again.

MARINA

You have the pharmacy number.

ALIK

Tomorrow, after work.

MARINA

I am busy then.

ALIK

The next day. And the day after that. You must say yes.

MARINA

Right now I can only say maybe. Good night, Alik.

She kisses him on the cheek and EXITS.

LARISSA

Marina's right; always leave them wanting more.

She EXITS.

PAVEL

You've made your conquest.

ALIK

I can't bear the thought of anyone else touching her.

PAVEL

Men crowd around her like moths to a candle.

Alik crosses to the balcony, watches for the women to exit, waves to them.

ALIK

Goodnight ladies! Goodnight, Marina.

Alik returns, halts when he sees Pavel studying the walls and overhead lights.

PAVEL

See the microphone in the lights? It's how they do things.

ALIK

And you are used to it, all this spying everywhere in your country. How do you really feel about that?

PAVEL

I'm a patriotic son of a Soviet Hero. But if I'd been born in America - I'd never come here.

ALIK

Thanks for your honesty.

PAVEL

Congratulations, my friend. It is not every day a man falls in head - how do you say it - head above . . ?

ALIK

Over heels. Head over heels.

PAVEL

Heels, yes. My English teacher is the best.

Pavel EXITS. Alik turns to the balcony, remembering Marina. Only moonlight is left. He walks to his writing table but suddenly halts, clutches his stomach again. The apartment lights dim, the