

REALISM

PAUL GALLOWAY



CURRENCY PRESS

MTC MELBOURNE
THEATRE
COMPANY

CHARACTERS

GLEMOV, footballer, male, 20s

MOKHOVA, stage manager, female, late 20s

NADIA, actor, female, elderly

KLIMENKO, actor, male, 30s

KAMEV, actor, male, 50s

DINSKY, actor, male, 40s

BABELEV, playwright, male, 30s

YAKONOVA, actor, female, early 20s

TRIFINOV, director, male, late 30s

SETTING

A theatre in Moscow in 1939.

ACT ONE

The stage of a small, rundown theatre in Moscow.

The stage is set for a play called Precision Milled. The flats and/or flies are mismatched, skewed with large gaps between them, an indication that the scene shifters began to prepare for the next performance but had stopped halfway.

To the right and upstage is the refectory of a Soviet factory with a double-swing glass panelled door upstage centre. A long refectory table, surrounded by a number of incongruous 'prop' chairs from various productions, is set for the day's rehearsal. Also a stage manager's lectern with prompt book.

The left stage flat belongs to the factory itself—brickwork, pipes, work benches, etcetera. High on the wall, a prominent portrait of Stalin and a Stalinist slogan in big red letters: 'LIFE HAS BECOME BETTER. LIFE HAS BECOME MORE CHEERFUL'.

There is a door downstage left. Also downstage left is a metalworker's lathe, hooked up to a chain, with a block and tackle, disappearing into the fly space.

It is the morning of Saturday the fifteenth of July 1939, a warm summer's day.

The play begins. A face appears in the glass panelling of the rear doors, looking around tentatively. The doors are pushed open. It is GLEB EGOROVICH GLEMOV, thirty, tall, strong, clean-shaven, a plaster cast on his left wrist, carrying a playscript.

GLEMOV: Hello?

No reply. He wanders the stage looking around.

Hello?

He examines the lathe and gives it a hearty slap. It sounds hollow. Perplexed, he gives it a push and it rocks easily—plywood and paint. But as he rocks it, the hook, chain and tackle swing loose

across the stage. He chases it, has some difficulty catching it, before swinging it back to attach to the lathe. But now it won't attach. Eventually, in a mild panic, he hooks it onto the front edge of the set and walks as far away from it as possible.

Now at the edge of the stage, he looks out into the darkness.

Hello? Anyone there? [Pause.] Anyone? [He likes the echo.] I see. I understand. [Pause.] I must be audible to the back of the stalls. I project my voice. The voice is my most valuable, val-u-a-ble, in-strum-ment. Are you copper bottoming 'em, my man? No, I'm aluminimim—no I'm alumimimiming—No, I'm alu-min-ium-ing 'em, ma'am. Are you copper bomming—Are you cobber potting. Are you—?

He hears something. He creeps upstage listening. He looks through the door into the darkness.

Anyone there? [Pause.] Hello?

No reply. He returns downstage and pulls out a prop pipe. As he speaks, SOPHIA LEONIDOVNA MOKHOVA, the stage manager, severe, late twenties, appears at the rear carrying a jug of water and a stack of glasses. She stops for a second and takes him in. She places the jug and glasses on the table.

[In a more actorly style with a bad accent, imitating Stalin] You know who I am, don't you? Look at this moustache. Look at this pipe. Listen to this fine Georgian accent that is now projecting to the back of the stalls. All Soviet peoples must project to the back of the stalls. Comrades! In my big Georgian hand I carry the latest five-year plan, a blueprint, no, a red print for the future. We will carry out this five-year plan no matter how long it takes. For we are building a radiant Soviet Union...

He stops, listens. MOKHOVA exits. GLEMOV turns.

Hello?

Nobody; so he continues. During the following speech MOKHOVA re-enters carrying a tall stool. She places it by the lectern and sits, folding her arms to glumly watch the performance.

For we are building a radiant Soviet Union, a great and glorious and radiant and luscious and really nice Union of Soviet peoples in which we are all brothers in arms, sisters in suffering, mothers of invention and Jacks of all trades. Now to celebrate this glorious and radiant five-year plan I will whistle an old Georgian tune while doing that funny thing with my knees.

He starts whistling and passing his swinging knees from hand to hand, Charleston style. As he does so, he senses MOKHOVA's presence and, while still doing the dance, turns to look upstage. Seeing nothing, he turns back.

MOKHOVA: [*clapping her hands officiously*] Comrade!

GLEMOV: [*jumping out of his skin*] Oh, God!

MOKHOVA: What are you doing?

GLEMOV: The funny knee thing.

MOKHOVA: No today, Comrade. You have not been called for today.

GLEMOV: Yes—

MOKHOVA: We're not starting your scenes until Wednesday.

GLEMOV: Yes, I know—

MOKHOVA: You must keep to the schedule, Comrade.

GLEMOV: Yes, but the woman in the flat below me cooks cabbage and, you see, when—

MOKHOVA: That sounds like the beginning of a brilliant explanation, Comrade, but you must leave. They are the rules.

GLEMOV: Sophia Leonidovna.

MOKHOVA gives him a withering glare.

Sorry... Comrade. I'm new to the theatre, as you know, and I would just like to sit in, if I may.

MOKHOVA: You may not.

GLEMOV: Just to see what's involved.

MOKHOVA: It's not complicated. Actors do it. Now, please—

GLEMOV: [*pointing to the stalls*] I could watch from that seat there...

Her expression is not encouraging.

Or one even further back, way back, in the dark...

MOKHOVA: Comrade, you are trying my patience.

GLEMOV: Listen, no, listen. I'll square it with Comrade Trifinov—

MOKHOVA: [*coming down hard, clapping her hands*] No. Comrade Glemov, get one thing straight and get it straight now, because otherwise your career in the theatre is going to be very short. I am stage manager—

GLEMOV: I know—

MOKHOVA: Shut up. Everyone sticks to my schedule.

GLEMOV: But Comrade Trifinov—

MOKHOVA: Comrade Trifinov is only the director. He has his name on the poster and gets to call himself an artist. But everyone in the theatre calls themselves an artist, artists are fifty to the kopek. But, Comrade, there is only one stage manager, and everyone, including Comrade Trifinov, follows my schedule. Do I make myself clear?

Enter YURI KLIMENKO, thirty-ish, a breezy, smart-arse manner, a Ukrainian actor.

KLIMENKO: Be careful how you answer, chum.

MOKHOVA: Comrade, you are five minutes late.

KLIMENKO: Oh, I'm sorry! Is everybody waiting for me?

MOKHOVA: No, in fact you are the first—

KLIMENKO: Then what is the problem? You know how everyone straggles in after an opening night. [*To GLEMOV*] And you are?

GLEMOV: Gleb Glemov. I am playing Stalin.

A long pause.

KLIMENKO: Creative casting. Klimenko, young Soviet hero cum romantic lead.

MOKHOVA: Comrade Glemov, you are leaving.

GLEMOV: Yes I am.

KLIMENKO: By the way, saw Babelev just now heading up to the typists. Says he's got script changes.

MOKHOVA: He can't have. Who authorised them?

KLIMENKO: I sincerely wish I could care, Comrade.

MOKHOVA: This will go in my report. [*Exiting, to GLEMOV*] Comrade, I don't expect to see you when I get back.