

*Excerpt from the play*

# **ABOUT US, ROCK, SEX AND THE USSR**

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### Scene 3: There Is No Sex in the USSR

#### There Is No Sex in the USSR. Part I – Personal Space

ANDREJS        *(at the mike)* The hardest thing for me to live with was the total lack of personal space – there was no place where I could be alone. Grandma and I lived in a single room of a communal flat. I slept on a *raskladushka* – that’s a kind of a folding camp bed, it is loud and tends to collapse if you try to move around on it. My every move was heard not only by my grandmother, but also by the people living in the adjoining room. A Soviet citizen can have no secrets. Grandma had a sleeper armchair. I dreamt of having such a thing for myself... Furniture, for those who could afford it, was the same for everyone. If you mixed up the doors and entered the wrong flat, it could be a while before you realized your mistake. The layout would be the same, there would be the same tables, the same chairs, the same sofas with the same throws, the same bookcase in a light or dark finish... In effect, our communal flat was very much like a student dorm, except instead of students we had old people, wife-beating chronic drinkers, small children – in short, anything you can imagine. And all of this you could hear, smell and feel. A single WC served all nine rooms of the communal flat, so it was rarely available. Inside by the door there was a toilet paper holder, filled with newspaper cut into rectangular pieces. These were not meant to be read; their purpose was much more important. The little newspaper rectangles would be crumpled and worked for a while so the paper would acquire a softer, more pleasant texture and would not stop up the toilet, and... let’s just say people wiped their bottoms with death announcements, political manifests, various lists, and sometimes you’d even be lucky enough to wipe yourself with one of the Great Leaders.

*Andrejs takes the mike with its stand and goes to the ‘toilet’.*

ANDREJS        But that bloody loo was the only place where I could be alone.

*Voices and noises in the background. Andrejs tries to masturbate in the WC (uses the mike stand to simulate the movement). The chorus to “Sapumpurots zars” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUk7wU6-9WQ>) becomes louder once again. His efforts are unsuccessful: as if in a nightmare, familiar figures are appearing on all sides and peering in through the little windows.*

DZIDRA        *(in a red coat; in Russian)* Hey, who’s in there for so long?

IVO              *(in a rifleman’s greatcoat)* What’s going on in there? It’s been 20 minutes, when are you coming out?

MARIJA        *(the grandmother)* Andrejs, shame on you... God is watching! This is a sin... Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...

ANDREJS Oh no, not the Lord's Prayer...

MARIJA Thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.

ANDREJS Grandma, please go away.

*Vizma appears; it seems Andrejs might just make it, Vizma smiles at him, but then she suddenly shouts—*

VIZMA Yuck, guys are so disgusting!

MARIJA Lead Andrejs not into temptation; but deliver him from evil.

ANDREJS No, please...

*Andrejs is about to give up. Then Uģis appears with a copy of Playboy in hand. He shows Andrejs the pictures.*

UĢIS Come on, come on, come on... how many times a day can you do it?

VIZMA Every day?!

MARIJA Amen.

IVO Hey, the loo is for everyone!

*Everyone is watching him; one of the people is pointing at him.*

DZIDRA *(in her red coat, with a Russian accent)* Oy-oy-oy-oy.

ANDREJS *(gives up, takes the mike and stand back to the front of stage)* There was indeed no sex in the USSR...

### **There Is No Sex in the USSR. Part II – Arrival of the Red Army**

*Vizma marches onto the stage, followed by two Red Riflemen who take up positions on either side of Vizma and remain standing like they are her guard of honour.*

VIZMA *(at the mike)* There really was no sex in the USSR – not in conversation, or the school syllabus. People didn't speak of it openly. And not that much in secret, either. All my girlfriends and I knew was that it was some horrible, unpleasant thing that you had to endure so your husband would not be angry and aggressive. And that it could result in a baby. Women had to be careful not to

get knocked up, and if women were not careful, they got an abortion. Our system of education was based on other priorities. Knowing your body and discussing sexuality was most definitely not a priority. The enemy, war and communism, those were the priorities! However, for all the incessant preparation for war and the imminent attack of the enemy that we did at school, no-one told me I would be visited by the Red Army. It was very dramatic, and I experienced a very real fear of death.

*Vizma is practising with the mike stand, as if assembling an AK-47. She drops to the ground, takes cover from an air attack. Vizma is obviously trying to concentrate on what she is doing to avoid thinking of other things that worry her. Dzidra enters.*

DZIDRA        What are you doing, love?

VIZMA        *(military-style)* Preparing. We have a test in Basic Military Training tomorrow. I am going to be top of my class! We have to disassemble and reassemble an AK-47. *(To the audience)* An AK-47 is also called Kalashnikov, or machine gun, or assault rifle. And I – like all Soviet children, as we know – will be trained in its timed disassembly and assembly, at school. And we will also have to evacuate to a bomb shelter. I am training!

DZIDRA        Very good, love! You must show your dad, he'll be proud!

*Dzidra wants to approach Vizma to hug her.*

VIZMA        It's best you don't come close! In case it is contagious... *(Vizma is close to tears)* What's the use of knowing how to assemble and disassemble the rifle if I'll never get the chance to defend my country anyway...

DZIDRA        What are you talking about?

VIZMA        I left before the last lesson.

DZIDRA        Vizma!

VIZMA        I couldn't risk the others dying because of me.

DZIDRA        *(terrified)* What's wrong?

VIZMA        But it might be too late already... Mum, you know I love you very much... I have some sort of down-there consumption or something, my knickers are all bloody.

*The Red Riflemen cover their ears in unison.*

VIZMA            It's best you don't come any closer, I don't want to infect you. Maybe it's cancer, I don't know. Just please don't cry. I think I don't have much time left.

DZIDRA            Good heavens, Vizma, did you tell anyone?

VIZMA            No, I thought about it for a while, maybe I should try to get my hands on that rifle tomorrow and just shoot myself to avoid the suffering...

DZIDRA            Vizma, stop this nonsense!

VIZMA            Nonsense?

DZIDRA            Don't make a tragedy out of such a simple thing. Tomorrow you will tell your teacher that... you were visited by... the Red Army, and that's why you skipped class.

VIZMA            Visited by the Red Army?

DZIDRA            Sure. Why are you so shocked? It will pass in a couple of days. I will give you some cottonwool. Just show your father how you're training to hide from an air attack and assemble an assault rifle.

VIZMA            Should I tell him about the Red Army as well?

DZIDRA            No, these things don't concern him, men don't need to know women's business.

VIZMA            *(at the mike)* Three days later the Red Army was gone, all battle action, pain and bloodshed in the most intimate places of my body had stopped, and I could happily return to my peacetime life. No-one thought to tell me the Red Army would go into battle every month, that this would be an endless war, filled with fear and horror. I had to accept the idea that I was not actually dying – it was all just pretend, just for a little bit. And each time I thought: but what if this is the last time, what if the Red Army loses the fight, what if the bleeding does not stop and I slowly bleed to death? I always think of war when I bleed.

*Vizma shudders, leaves; Uģis watches her and then approaches the mike.*

### **There Is No Sex in the USSR. Part III – Hookers**

UĢIS            *(at the mike)* Yes there was sex in the USSR, and lots of it, and I knew all about it since I lived with my brother Ivo in a single-room flat – or the Lair, as we called it. Vizma never came to the Lair because the neighbours would

immediately pronounce her a prostitute. She didn't really fancy that. My brother somehow managed to get the flat upon returning from mandatory military service. I only realised the extent to which the army had changed Ivo when I arrived from the countryside, armed with a suitcase filled with smoked meats and sausages, to study at the Riga Industrial Polytechnic.

UĢIS Ivo, your girlfriend dropped by. Was surprised to see you were out. She wanted to give you something, I told her to just leave it here, but she refused.

IVO Are you crazy? That's not my girlfriend.

UĢIS Why not? She's beautiful...

IVO I don't mix work with pleasure, a woman like that will fuck with your head, wrap you around her finger and milk you for all you're worth.

UĢIS A woman like what?

IVO Uģis, are you a man or a sissy?

UĢIS What?

*Ivo backs Uģis into a corner.*

IVO I'm asking you – are you a man or a sissy?

UĢIS A man!

IVO So listen to me. That bird is a common prostitute. She sleeps with sailors and migrant workers. They pay her in foreign currency and various imported goods. The hookers take all currency and gold to more serious fences, but those people don't really want to fuff around with the other things those women get, like clothes, lipsticks, tights, sometimes there are some shoes... occasionally some things for men as well.

UĢIS And these things they bring to you?

IVO Sure, that's why she came. I just mixed up my days, it's stupid, really.

UĢIS They don't have a use for those things?

IVO They do, but there's an enormous amount of this stuff, you know? How much perfume does a working girl need? 5 bottles, maybe 6? Some to give her mother. So what should they do with the rest of it? Drink it? It's wiser to get some money, for food and other things they actually need.

- UGIS           And what do you do with the perfume?
- IVO            What do you think? That I use it myself? Ha-ha. Of course not. I take those things to the factory girls. They snap it all up, and they'll pay a fortune for it. I earn a lot more with this than I do by loading trains – but I do need a front, you know, or I'll get some unwanted attention.
- UGIS           I see...
- IVO            Yeah, you know, one day I realized I'm beginning to know the difference between crimplene and jersey, I can tell you if that shade of lipstick is a salmon or a pink. You know, I'm turning into a bird. That's why I need those freight wagons, to balance things out, ha-ha... What's this long face? You going to judge me now?
- UGIS           No, not at all. I'm just wondering what our parents would say...
- IVO            They'd have a stroke for sure, you can't tell them. You'd better watch it, don't go telling people. No-one, not even your friends! This is why I didn't want you here.
- UGIS           I can try to get a room at the dorm.
- IVO            Don't be silly, pipsqueak. We'll be best friends, like we used to be. I'll teach you all you need to know in life.
- UGIS           *(At the mike)* And that's exactly what happened. Ivo told me about all the bits that women have, and what to do with them. One time I even saw a little bit by pretending to be asleep; he had brought home one of those factory girls. And... well, you know... *(Uses gestures and looks to imply what took place)* Ivo also let me use his most prized possession – an imported tape player. He's often away at night, I am by myself in that room, listening... just being alone with my thoughts...

*The chorus to 'Sapumpurots zars' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUk7wU6-9WQ>) begins to play once again. An etude of the two young men watching Vizma, seeing her dance, then joining in.*