Acting Edition

DONBAS

by Olga Braga

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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NOTE

This edition reflects a rehearsal draft of the script and may differ from the final production.

DONBAS was first produced by Theatre503, Good Chance and 45North in association with Seventh Productions and premiered at Theatre503, London, on the 5th of February 2026. The cast and creative team were as follows:

SASHKO & ALEXEI . . . . . Jack Bandeira
NADYA . . . . . Ksenia Devriendt
VERA . . . . . Liz Kettle
SERYOGA & DMITRY . . . . . Philippe Spall
MARIANCA . . . . . Sasha Syzonenko
IVAN . . . . . Steve Watts

Writer . . . . . Olga Braga
Director . . . . . Anthony Simpson-Pike
Designer . . . . . Niall McKeever
Lighting Designer . . . . . Christopher Nairne
Sound Designer . . . . . Xana
Movement Director . . . . . Nevena Stojkov
Casting Director . . . . . Chandra Ruegg
Costume Supervisor . . . . . Hannah Danson
Fight Director . . . . . Joseph Reed
Voice and Dialect Coach . . . . . Mary Howland
Assistant Director . . . . . Antonia Maria Ilieş
Costume Assistant . . . . . Natalka Trofimova
Production Manager . . . . . Laurel Marks
Stage Manager . . . . . Lavinia Serban
Cover Stage Manager . . . . . Marianna Koniushenko

CHARACTERS

SERYOGA – (Sergey or Serhiy) a Ukrainian man (50s)
SASHKO – (Oleksandr, Sasha, Sash') Seryoga's son (20s)
MARIANCA – a Moldovan woman (30s)
IVAN – an elderly Russian man (50s/60s)
VERA – an elderly Ukrainian woman, Nadya's grandmother (60s)
NADYA – Ukrainian teen/young woman (15)
DMITRY – Russian, doubles with **SERYOGA** (50s)
ALEXEI – of mixed former-USSR heritage,doubles with **SASHKO** (20s)

The play is performed by a company of six actors. All performers are adults. All characters share the same accent (as chosen by the director); Marianca's accent is distinct.

SETTING

Donbas, Ukraine.
The play is set across two places in Donbas:
an abandoned house and Seryoga's place.

TIME

February, 2022.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

A forward slash (/) indicates overlapping or interrupted dialogue. Ellipses (…) mark unfinished thoughts or trailing off. If a line contains no punctuation, the intention is that it be spoken in one continuous rush, without pauses.

Prologue

(Donbas. Abandoned house. A faint radio hiss under the silence. Static comes and goes. **DMITRY** *turns a dial. The static sharpens. He clicks it off.* **DMITRY** *joins* **ALEXEI** *in re-assembling and cleaning guns.)*

DMITRY. I thought you served?

ALEXEI. I'm used to real guns not this /

DMITRY. Kalash?

ALEXEI. Yep.

DMITRY. Those are easier to put together, a monkey could do it. Nobody's gonna let you use them here.

ALEXEI. Why?

DMITRY. Looks bad on camera. This ain't Afghanistan.

ALEXEI. It was more fun back then?

DMITRY. It's all the same.

ALEXEI. Were you a sniper then too?

*(***DMITRY** *quickly dismantles Alexei's gun and puts it together. He points the gun at* **ALEXEI**.*)*

DMITRY. Pow!

ALEXEI. Hey!

*(***DMITRY** *points the gun at himself and shoots an empty.)*

DMITRY. Relax squirt, it's unloaded.

ALEXEI. Did you ever fire at people?

(**DMITRY** *laughs.)*

What's your number?

DMITRY. *(Handing him the assembled gun.)* Here.

ALEXEI. How many did you do?

DMITRY. *(Mockingly.)* "How many did I do, how many did I do, what's my number." What am I your girlfriend?

ALEXEI. I just wanted to know how it felt.

DMITRY. What?

ALEXEI. When you, you know powwwwwww!

(**ALEXEI** *holds his finger against his temple and simulates shooting himself, drops dead.)*

DMITRY. Look Chuck Norris, we've established you don't know how to use a gun, do you know what this is?

(**DMITRY** *holds up the binoculars.* **ALEXEI** *grabs them and looks through them.)*

ALEXEI. They don't work.

DMITRY. You don't work!

ALEXEI. It's blurry.

DMITRY. Move the bit on the side.

ALEXEI. Wow. It's so sharp. I can see the blood vessels in your eyes – check your blood pressure mate.

DMITRY. Are you funny in the *(Points to head.)*?

ALEXEI. What?

DMITRY. Funny in the head?

ALEXEI. I'm not funny anywhere.

DMITRY. At school, did they tell you that you're /

*(**ALEXEI** looks out of the window with the binoculars.)*

ALEXEI. I never really went to school.

DMITRY. Ain't you a soldier's wet dream?

ALEXEI. That's why I joined. The pay ain't bad and you get a gun. You can make a real good career in this type of business. How about you, why did you join?

(No answer.)

Was it hard to get here? From Kursk, was it? Straight drive?

DMITRY. Why don't you tell me what you see outta that window? Maybe your eyesight is better than your technical skills.

ALEXEI. I see trees I see sky I see grass I see a dog I see Seryoga's house I see Ivan's house I see /

DMITRY. You should write a book, you're so good describing things.

ALEXEI. Sometimes I don't know if you're serious or joking. But yes I *have* thought about writing a book, I even have a really good first sentence. Oh look there's Ivan, he's walking somewhere. He's carrying a bag with food, he's got a box in his other hand.

DMITRY. A box?

ALEXEI. Yep a box.

DMITRY. What kind of box? Can you read the writing? Is it bullets?

ALEXEI. Nope.

DMITRY. Gunpowder?

ALEXEI. Nope.

DMITRY. What is it?

ALEXEI. Superior Blonde.

DMITRY. What?

ALEXEI. L'Oreal – Superior Blonde.

DMITRY. L'Oreal – Superior Blonde?

ALEXEI. And there's a picture of Claudia Schiffer on it.

DMITRY. Give me that.

*(***DMITRY** *looks out of the window using the binoculars.)*

That's not Claudia Schiffer – *(Intense moment.)* that's Kate Moss! He's heading for that house – with the blue door – end of the street.

(He gives the binoculars back to **ALEXEI***.)*

ALEXEI. That's Seryoga's place. You think Sash' is back yet? You know why they put him away?

DMITRY. Who, Sashko?

ALEXEI. Yeh, it's 'cause he was lifting scrap.

DMITRY. Is that what you think now, Sherlock?

ALEXEI. That's what they say, what else are you gonna do when there's no work. Not everyone can get a job like us.

DMITRY. Just 'cause you used to lift metal, doesn't mean everyone else is doing it.

ALEXEI. Of course they are.

DMITRY. Stripping dead factories? Nothing left to strip.

ALEXEI. There's always something to sell, Dmitry. Copper, pipes – whatever's left.

DMITRY. Throwing rocks at our guys from across the border – that's what they put him away for. As if he'd ever reach Moscow. Done for before he'd even seen the front, his big partisan plans.

ALEXEI. You reckon?

DMITRY. I don't *reckon* Alexei, that's what the command told me, that's what IT IS!

ALEXEI. Christ, Dmitry I'm just making conversation here, trying to be friendly… there's no talking to ya!

DMITRY. Not on the subject of convicted felons, no.

ALEXEI. Not on the subject of Claudia Schiffer either.

DMITRY. It was KATE MOSS! And all I'm saying is Sashko got put away for a real specific reason. When we're… when we're in a *situation* like /

ALEXEI. Like a warrrr /

DMITRY. Like a *special* operation, there's always casualties, always someone who falls through the cracks. It's unavoidable if you want to reach the end objective.

ALEXEI. What is the end objective?

DMITRY. Who the fuck knows?

Scene One

*(**SERYOGA**'s place. Food on the table.* Gone with the Wind *on TV.* **VERA** *practices sexy poses.* **MARIANCA** *has her back to her, she's at the kitchen area of the open-plan living room.)*

VERA. *(At the audience.)* Oh no really stop it! Oh I just wake up like this, really! Stop it! You devil, Rhett Butler! After all, tomorrow is another day!

MARIANCA. What'd you say?

VERA. What?

MARIANCA. Thought you said something.

VERA. No no, not at all.

*(**MARIANCA** enters with more food, humming a song perfectly.)*

Do you need any help?

MARIANCA. No, is okay.

VERA. You're such a life saver.

MARIANCA. It's no bother at all. Nadya helped me cook, didn't you Nadya?

VERA. You're so good with her, you're just like Lyuda, always humming along, she couldn't peel a potato without a song, that one. You'll meet her soon enough. Only she doesn't have your voice, it's all right though, good singers are so boring. When she sings, windows break and dogs begin to howl. That's what I like – the ones who can't do it but still give it a go!

MARIANCA. Well, she is definitely her mother's daughter.

VERA. *(Doesn't get the insult.)* Thank you.

MARIANCA. Can't wait to meet her when she's back.

VERA. Yes, and in the meantime, no need for the little one to grow up faster than she has to. Let her stay a kid a bit longer, 'til Lyuda's back.

*(***MARIANCA** *heads to the kitchen. A knock.* **VERA***, channelling Scarlett O'Hara, sashays to the door.* **IVAN** *enters, bags of food, a small box tucked under his arm. Cheerful, Santa energy.)*

Oh do come in, Ivan Vladimirovich. Hello, come in!

IVAN. Sorry – uh – excuse me.

VERA. What?

IVAN. I didn't know if you were talking to me or /

VERA. Who else would I be talking to?

IVAN. I wasn't sure, so. Hi Hello Hi Vera. Vassilievna.

*(***MARIANCA** *brings out a gingerbread house.* **NADYA** *joins her.)*

MARIANCA. That's it, all done! *(At* **NADYA***.)* Wait, wait, you've got flour on your nose.

(She wipes **NADYA***'s face with her thumb.)*

VERA. Aw you made little windows too!

IVAN. What is it?

VERA. It's a gingerbread house, Ivan Vladimirovich.

IVAN. Oh.

VERA. Basically it's like a house made of gingerbread. And you can eat it.

IVAN. I see. Yes.

MARIANCA. It was gonna be just a regular cake but we made it into a house, didn't we Nadya?

*(**NADYA** looks unimpressed. **VERA** comforts her, tucks a loose strand of hair behind her ear.)*

VERA. *(To **NADYA**.)* You did such a lovely job, love.

MARIANCA. We made a roof and a chimney, and a fence here.

VERA. It's like a palace!

MARIANCA. It's Versailles!

VERA. Let's eat it!

*(**MARIANCA** starts dismantling the house and putting it on plates. **NADYA** is disinterested.)*

IVAN. That's a bit cannibalistic, isn't it, eating little people.

*(**VERA** gives him a look.)*

But I'll do it, I'll eat them. I want the chimney too.

VERA. You're thinking of going blonde then, Ivan Vladimirovich?

IVAN. Huh?

VERA. *(Points at L'Oreal.)* Like Claudia Schiffer?

IVAN. Oh! *(Nervous, no pauses.)* This is for you because last Thursday at 4.50 p.m. when I saw you, you said you wanted to be blonde but you couldn't find the right hair colour here so I got you this. This is for you. Here.

VERA. Ivan!

IVAN. Oh and this is food.

(He finally releases the bags of food he was still holding in the other hand.)

VERA. I am speechless.

*(**IVAN** gives **MARIANCA** the bags of food.)*

MARIANCA. Thank you.

VERA. I'll look just like Claudia Schiffer now.

IVAN. I think you look beautiful the way you are but if you want to colour your /

VERA. *(Like she rehearsed before.)* Oh stop! You devil!

IVAN. Well I… Vera Vasilievna, really /

VERA. There's no cigarettes in that bag of yours, is there, Ivan Vladimirovich?

IVAN. No, those went a long time ago. Haven't seen any in months. But look what I got here *(Pulls out a 'Korovka'/'Little Cow' chocolate bar.)* Korovka for you and for you!

*(He moos like a cow, offering **NADYA** the chocolate. **VERA** and **MARIANCA** join in. **SASHKO** enters, stunning everyone but **NADYA**. **NADYA** clocks him and deliberately looks away, turning her body from him the second she sees him. She dozes off on the floor before the scene ends.)*

SASHKO. Shouldn't leave the door open.

*(**SASHKO** sets down his bag and a large sketch pad.)*

VERA. Right you are son!

IVAN. Hi, Sash', been a while.

SASHKO. Yeah. Long time.

IVAN. What's going on?

SASHKO. Nothing, you know.

VERA. Turn around!

*(**SASHKO** looks at **MARIANCA** with unsettling curiosity.)*

VERA. Look at the size of you.

IVAN. Someone's been doing press-ups.

SASHKO. *(At **MARIANCA**.)* Who are you?

MARIANCA. *(Nervous.)* What?

SASHKO. What's your name?

MARIANCA. Uhm… Marianca.

SASHKO. What are you, a foreigner?

MARIANCA. No.

SASHKO. You're not Russian, are you?

MARIANCA. I'm not, I'm nothing at all.

SASHKO. *(Eyes still on **MARIANCA**.)* Where's Seryoga?

VERA. Pouring concrete somewhere.

MARIANCA. *(Still nervous.)* Sergey is at work.

IVAN. Night shift.

VERA. He'll be home later. Sashko would you have a cigarette?

SASHKO. Nothing on me.

VERA. Been craving one all night.

IVAN. Have a seat Sash', must be shattered. We organised a little welcome home party for you.

SASHKO. *(At the half eaten food and empty bottles.)* That's real nice of you Ivan.

*(**MARIANCA** gives **SASHKO** a plate. He takes it, doesn't eat, continues to stare at her.)*

How long are you staying here?

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