

The Socialist Book of Love

by

Michael Bettencourt

67 Highwood Terrace #2, Weehawken NJ 07086

201-770-0550 • 347-564-9998 • michaelbettencourt@outlook.com

<http://www.m-bettencourt.com>

Copyright © by Michael Bettencourt

Offered under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike License

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>

DESCRIPTION

Yury has refused to surrender to the capitalist onslaught of his small socialist country. But his building is now going condo and Yalena wants him out.

CHARACTERS

- Yalena Emmanovna Sayeski
- Yury Leninovich Andropov

NOTE: The characters are roughly the same age. YURY, under all his apparent craziness, is a handsome man, and YALENA, outside her no-nonsense exterior, has moments of beauty. The actors will use what passes for a Slavic accent—no attempt is being made here to be culturally authentic.

SETTING/TIME

An apartment somewhere in a small, formerly socialist country, now going capitalist. The director can set it as minimal or maximal as time and budget permit, but there should be a good amount of clutter and objects.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Bag for YALENA, with document and cell phone inside

* * * * *

YURY's apartment: cluttered, crowded, verging on implosion. YURY sitting there also looking like he is on the verge of implosion; after all, he's been in this apartment since 1989. YALENA enters carrying a briefcase; she is in the "hallway" of the building, looking around in disgust. She faces YURY's "door" and speaks in a low voice, as if delivering a curse.

YALENA

You pan-brained fossilized turd-smelling butt-end of a human joke, this time—this time I am really going to make you into history. This place—condos! This place—upscale! Capitalism wearing big goddamn hobnailed boots! Smashing into your face! Walking over your dead body! Start walking, boots!

Incantation over, YALENA settles herself and knocks on the door. YURY hears but says nothing. YALENA knocks again; YURY non-responds.

YALENA

Yury Leninovich Andropov, I know you are in there. I know you are in there.

YURY

How do you know that?

YALENA

How do I know that?

YURY

Yes.

YALENA

You just spoke to me, that's how I know that.

YURY

Physically, I spoke. Metaphysically—I'm ignoring you. Metaphysically—you're pfft! Far gone from me.

YALENA

This time, no. You got my letter?

YURY

(wiggles his little finger in his ear)

Just a bzzzzzz now.

YALENA

This time the cops—

YURY

(muttering)

Cops—

YALENA

—are coming. This time I have an order of the court.

YURY

(muttering)

Court order—

YALENA

This time your little pony-and-dog show—

YURY

Stop!

YALENA

What?

YURY

Dog-and-pony show!

YALENA

What?

YURY

Dog-and-pony show.

(mockingly)

If you're doing the Americanismo thing—big thing, now,
everybody's got Americans in their mouths—you gotta get the
right idiotisms through your teeth. Dog—

(pointing to himself, miming a dog)

—and pony—

(pointing to YALENA)

—that's you. Dog—

(barks)

—and pony—giddyup!—

(prances around the room)

—padadump, padadump, padadump—

YALENA

Whatever.

YURY

Ah, truly American now, you are!

YURY makes two "V's" with his two index and middle fingers and puts them together to make a "W" and wears them like a crown on his head.

YURY

The Americanski flip-offski at the end of any problem that can't be
solved immediately. Whatever, whatever, whatever, whatever.

Well, whatever, missy missy, I am not moving.

YALENA

You are going to be moved. I have the cops and the court order and no more with this crapola dog-and-pony show of being “the last living socialist.”

YURY

It’s been a good gig—gig, yes?

YALENA

Clown—

YURY

A good “gig.” Trading up on the nostalgia of the old guard—

YALENA

Codwallop—

YURY

Eh, you do what you can do to make do-do in the new world “ordure,” eh?

YALENA

Nincompoop—

YURY

They bring me cigarettes and food and their prayers—

YALENA

Parasite!

YURY

(suddenly stern)

Their prayers! They bring me their prayers! You remember prayers, don’t you? Because everything around them’s become jokes and shit, and the world they’d dreamed of—

YALENA

They’re lazy, just like you!

YURY

The paradise, goddam you—

YALENA

Paradise!

YURY

—the paradise they dreamed of—

YALENA

Let me tell you—

YURY

—the paradise where we could all maybe be better than sniveling real-estate stock-market condoizing junkies! C'mon, that was directly directed at you! You there?

YALENA

I don't have to do this with you. I don't. I, Yalena Emmanovna Sayeski, don't have to take your bull-and-cock anymore!

* * * * *

YURY suddenly marches to the door and opens it, which startles YALENA. There is a moment, as they look at each other, of both possible violence as well as undeniable attraction, unsure what they are seeing but also not expecting what they are seeing: be sure to let this moment linger. Finally, YURY speaks, and as much as possible through these lines, they maintain eye contact.

YURY

My bull and what?

YALENA

I don't have to say it.

YURY

My what?

YALENA

I do not have to say the word of what I know you do not have.

YURY

Bet you can't repeat that.

YALENA

Once said is enough said for ears like yours.

YURY

Yeah?

YALENA

Yeah.

YURY

Court order—let's see it. Let's see the court order from the judges anyone can buy.

YALENA

(taps her bag)

I told you in the letter I'd have one.

YURY

You could be petting a daschund's ass. Let me see it.

YALENA reaches into her bag and pulls out an official looking paper. She holds it up for him to read. YURY reaches for it, but she doesn't let him touch it.

YALENA

Nah-nah-nah.

YURY barely scans it; he know what it says. YALENA puts it away.

YURY

So where are your rent-a-cops?

YALENA

They're on tap.

(pats her bag again)

I tap the cell phone, and they come, and then they tap you out.

YURY

Why do you have them on wait?

YALENA

Because, believe it or not—

YURY

I won't, but forward—

YALENA

—I wanted to see if we could do all of this with some dignity.

YURY

I didn't see "maintain bourgeois niceties" in the court order.

YALENA

May I come in?

YURY

Why is the assassin always so pretty and so polite?

YALENA

May I come in? May I come in?

There is another pause. YALENA taps her bag. YURY picks up something from the apartment, something stupid, and lays it down as if it were a cloak over a mud puddle, and then moves away from the door, making a big bow. He keeps a confused eye on YALENA. YALENA feels equally confused but is also irritated at having to walk over whatever it is that YURY sets down.

YURY

You are not what I thought.

YALENA

What was that?

YURY

Normally—hah! whatever!—your office sends deep voices with no necks to my door.

YALENA

My door.

YURY makes the "whatever" symbol again.

YURY

Easy to confuse them—American cigarettes, and they lose the trail. But you—the boss man woman—that voice—and the you, there—

Gestures that the two do not match, then gestures as if to throw it away: he will not give in.

I am not moving. YURY

This place is— YALENA

A museum— YURY

—a sty. YALENA

A repository of memory. YURY

A pig sty. YALENA

A shrine. YURY

A. Pig. Sty. Just as I thought it would be. YALENA

You said with dignity. Eh? Eh? YURY

Yes. YALENA

So let's do some dignity then. YURY

Fine. YALENA

YURY
(moving around, pointing things out)
That, that—the old peasant who brought me that—used to be a
storyteller, an artist, someone important in his town.

YALENA
All right.

YURY
Just like that over there, that painter.

YALENA
Good.

YURY
They all had work in the world.

YALENA
We should all work.

YURY
But now their work has been ground into nothing.

YALENA
Not my fault.

YURY
And that person, over there—see that?

YALENA
Yury Leninovich—

YURY
What?

YALENA
Some things cannot be helped.

YURY
Some things—cannot be helped.
(makes the sign of the Orthodox cross)
Absolution, then!

YALENA
Different world now.

YURY

And so different that the only “work in the world” that means anything at all is condoizing, Yalena Emmanovna—condoizing? You make it sound in step, heroic, but really—illusions of “grand manure,” eh?

YALENA

And the “last living socialist” warns me about illusions?

YURY

(as he prances around the room)

Condoizing, condoizing, condoizing, condoizing—

YALENA

“The kingdom of heaven on earth”—now, that was a gasbag of words!

YURY

Say “con-do-i-zing” enough, it becomes—white noise.

YALENA

“King-dumb of heaven”—

YURY

No, no—a hornet, in your ear, that can sting you deaf.

YALENA

And this junk—buzz-buzz in my ear—this junk is all you got. All. You. Got.

YURY

Except my peace.

Pause as YURY notes YALENA’s reaction to the word.

YURY

My peace with my life. And the peace I give them when their souls are troubled. You get any of that with your condoized life, Yalena Emmanovna? Have you anyone in your life that can help you remember? I am not going.

YALENA

The last living socialist—you are already so gone. I feel sorry for you.

YURY

(moves close to her)

There was a time—and you do remember it, Yalena! I know you do!

YALENA

And now you're out of time. What a great scam!

YURY

Not a scam.

YALENA

The last living socialist, the true believer. The crowds have loved you, brought you food, drink, cigarettes, fame! But you squat here like—like one of those Russian monks from Lev Tolstoy, keeping the flame alive in the snow! Well, friend, the flame is out!

YALENA reaches into her bag for the cell phone.

YURY

Dignity's over, apparently—

Turns on the phone but doesn't dial.

YALENA

There was a time—but now it's time to call the cops. As a good socialist, Yury, you should learn to bow to historical inevitability.

YURY

What was that?

YALENA

You know, dustbin of history.

YURY

Ah! And—

YALENA

And—

YURY

And as a good capitalist—As a good capitalist, Yalena, you should want to grind me under your stiletto heel.

YALENA

What?

YURY makes a studied grinding motion with his heel.

YURY

Eh?

YALENA

Would you like that, you historical loser?

YURY

Would you like that, you dominant global power? It's what the defeated can offer.

Beat.

YALENA

Yes.

YURY

You would.

YALENA

Yes.

YURY

Sex and power.

YALENA

And winning—yes.

YURY

Then put away the phone.

YURY mimes grinding with his heel in a very studied manner. YALENA in a very studied manner puts away the phone.

YURY

Ah!

YALENA

Isn't that at the heart of all of it, anyways?

YURY

It's at the heart of your heart.

YALENA

And yours.

YURY

You think?

YALENA

Oh, yes.

YURY

Oh no.

YALENA

Liar.

YURY

You don't know my heart yet.

YALENA

But I know your kind. You play dreamer, you play dancer, but underneath—you want power, too.

YURY

Your kind.

YALENA

"What is to be done?" you say in your Vladimir-Ilich-Lenin-chop-off-the-dead-hand-of-history voice, but you already know the answer.

YURY

Tell me, tell me, Yalena-goddess.

YALENA

You want flesh, you want perks, you want “on top” just like everybody else. Nobody believed that “last living socialist” crap—not even you.

YURY

I didn't?

YALENA

No. Not even them that gave to you.

YURY

(mock pain)

Ooh. They had me convinced—the wailing of their teeth, the [two syllables] g-nashing of their arthritic thumbs—

YALENA

All theatre—

YURY

So—each according to his needs—?

YALENA

No one believed that one!

YURY

From each according to his ability—?

YALENA

Theft with the right hand and then the left. Let everybody earn what they can get from anyone else and get to keep it all.

YURY

The new world order—like you.

YALENA

Like me.

YURY

Hmmm. Wage slave.

YALENA

Oohh! Idealist.

YURY

Ouch! Corporate drone.

YALENA

Gut shot! Trotskyite.

YURY

Yeeesss! Nothing to lose but your chains.

YALENA

My chains are gold; my market shares rise.

YURY

The market—an open bed where whores—

YALENA

Lev me, Tolstoy!

YURY

—trade the disease of greed.

YALENA

Oh, that is good, good! Good!

YURY

This monk has his charms.

YALENA

This monk smells.

YURY

Of the earth.

YALENA

Of the dirt.

YURY

Do you want dog? Or do you want pony?

YALENA

Each according to his needs in my bed.

YURY

From each according to her ability in mine.

YALENA

So—which bed? The bed of commerce?

YURY

Or the bed of art?

They take steps towards each other, with some earthy Slavic music underneath—and then, abruptly, the cell phone rings. They look at her bag, then each other. YALENA is undecided; YURY does not want to lose the advantage here. YALENA decides: she answers it.

YURY

(quietly)

Damn!

YALENA

Yes, yes—no, no, drink, eat—I am not in need at the moment for you to shake your security apparatus all around! But don't go far away.

YALENA clicks off the cell phone. YURY takes a few steps toward YALENA.

YURY

I don't suppose—

YALENA

No—

YURY

Ah, well.

(coily grinding his heel)

Still—

YALENA

Yeah, well.

YALENA pauses, then, with a half-glance at YURY, she slowly grinds her heel into the floor. YURY smiles; YALENA smiles.

YURY

Okay, okay—so the world has moved on and over—I am not one with too pig-headed a head not to see that. But, Yalena Emmanovna Sayeski, and you know this from your old socialist bones, the world always moves more than just two ways.

YALENA turns away from him.

YURY
(sensing the hesitation)

Yeeesss—

YALENA

You mean—

YURY

Yes, mean it I do.

YALENA

Third—

YURY

Third—

YALENA

Way—

YURY

Way—yes. Third way. Between—
(harshly grinding his heel)
—and—

YURY indicates the room.

YALENA

You got a pitch?

YURY takes up the stance of a baseball pitcher.

YALENA

What pitch can the smelly Tolstoy monk with no das capital make to the Slavic goddess who owns every screw in this property?

YURY winds up slowly, then pitches in slow motion, saying the word as he throws.

Coöperative. Eh? YURY

Did you just say— YALENA

Yes, I did. YURY

Again. YALENA

YURY changes position and become a batter; he takes a slow swing at the pitch as he speaks.

Coöperative. Not a word you've heard in a while, eh? YURY

No. YALENA

But you do remember, though, don't you? YURY

Yes. YALENA

You remember that word. YURY

Yes. YALENA

Coöperative. Co-operate. Co-llaborate. Co-habitate. Co-activate. YURY

YALENA stands still as YURY speaks. His tone should be sensual but never sexual. YURY can sculpt the air around YALENA's body, but he never touches her.

YURY

There was a time, Yalena, before all this bargaining. When the eyes looked higher, the heart unfolded petal by petal by petal into a horizon hot with rising light. The hot—rising—light—of a much better world.

YALENA

“You have nothing to lose but your chains”—

YURY

(with sharp breath)

Das Kapital along your dialectical thighs.

YALENA

“What is to be done?”—

YURY

(with sharp breath)

Lenin’s goatee traces your materialist spine.

YALENA

“There is only one commandment, to love”—

YURY

The son of Galilee walks on the water of your eyes.

Suddenly YALENA turns to YURY and stops him.

YALENA

Justice.

YURY goes to respond, but YALENA puts a finger to his lips, though she does not actually touch him.

YALENA

Justice. Brotherhood. Love.

YURY

Yes.

Makes the “whatever” sign: first a “V” with index and middle finger of the right hand.

YALENA

Yury.

(then a “V” with the left hand)

Yalena.

YALENA brings the two together to form the “W.”

YURY puts his hand on either side of the “W,” as if he’s measuring something, and slowly brings his hands closer together. This causes YALENA to pivot her fingers so that the tips of the index fingers and middle fingers touch. He does this as he says the line, and he should not physically touch YALENA’s hands.

YURY

Adam. Eve. You need a building manager?

YALENA

Yes.

YURY

I need a building. My—fans—the people—need a museum.

YALENA

Negotiable.

YURY

And—

YALENA

Yes?

YURY

And—we need each other to keep these new global wolves away.

YALENA

And to keep that horizon hot and rising.

YURY

Sounds good. Possible?

YALENA very slowly begins grinding her heel back and forth. YURY does the same as old rock and roll music comes up and together they do the Twist as the lights come down.