

DOCTOR ZHIVAGO: SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE

In pre-revolutionary Moscow, **Two Worlds** exist side by side: the elite and the impoverished, the established and the revolutionary. Yurii Zhivago, an orphaned boy of a once mighty family, is left alone in the world at the funeral of his profligate, philandering father. Yurii is adopted by well-off family friends, Alex and Anna Gromeko, at the suggestion of Viktor Komarovsky, a powerful attorney. The young daughter of his new family, Tonia, befriends the boy. On the other side of the economic spectrum is Lara Guishar, who works in her widowed mother's dress shop. She grows up to become a beauty and catches the eye of the ubiquitous Komarovsky, who seduces her after he tires of her mother. Lara keeps their illicit affair secret from her intended, Pasha Antipov, an idealistic student fighting for a new Russia. When Komarovsky threatens to expose his affair with Lara, she determines to break his hold on her – with a gun Pasha has left with her for safekeeping.

Yurii is by now a medical school graduate and a budding poet, gratefully and dutifully engaged to his 'dear friend' Tonia. They marry in the shadow of the coming war between Tsarist Russia and Germany. At the wedding party in the Gromeko townhouse, **Komarovsky's Toast** to the newlyweds is interrupted when Lara suddenly arrives, shoots at him and misses, hitting a magistrate. As Yurii bandages the wounded man, he wonders, instantly fascinated, about this uniquely fearless and beguiling woman who acts purely on her passions: **Who Is She?**

Weeks later, at another celebration in a tavern, students drink to their leader, Pasha Antipov. Pasha has enlisted in the Tsar's army – not to fight Germans but the true tyrant, the Tsar, and spread Bolshevism among the ranks. **It's a Godsend**, he declares about his parting gifts, yet the true Godsend is Lara herself, whom he reveals he married earlier that day. Alone later that night, after Pasha admits his virginity, Lara confesses to her affair with her seducer, Komarovsky, **When the Music Played**. His illusions crushed, Pasha flees into the night, pursued by Lara. Instead of Pasha, she finds Yurii waiting in the rain to speak with her. He has been unable to erase her from his mind. But Lara rebuffs him, and he leaves.

Before boarding the train for the German-Russian front, Yurii and Tonia promise each other to set aside a special time each night to **Watch the Moon** and think of each other. But once he is on the battlefield serving as an army doctor, the moon only illuminates the pointlessness of war, and his own unknown reason for existence.

Soldiers in the trenches pray before they are ordered to **Forward March** by their unit commander, Gints. Pasha Antipov resurfaces among the ranks, spreading seeds of rebellion to a naïve young soldier, Yanko, the first of the regiment to be injured under enemy fire.

While tending the wounded, Doctor Zhivago is shocked to learn that his new volunteer nurse is none other than Lara, who is seeking her missing husband. Their emotionally charged reunion – wherein Yuri discovers that one of his poems has found a large audience, and Lara discovers that the poem is about her - is interrupted by the wounded Yanko, who staggers into the medical tent and collapses. They save his life, forming an unspoken bond which grows over the months. Finally, news arrives that the troops are rebelling against the Tsar's pointless war, refusing to fight. The war is coming to a close. Singing a folk-song, the nurses recall their loved ones, **Home Where the Lilacs Grow**. An impromptu dance draws Yurii and Lara together before they quickly separate.

As soldiers jockey for places on the train, Lara and Yurii learn that Yanko has been fatally wounded. After he dies in their arms, Lara discovers an unmailed letter in his uniform to his undeclared sweetheart, Katerina. Though Yanko never spoke his heart, Yurii and Lara do at last, **Now**, only to separate moments later. She is heading home to her Ural Mountains village, Yuriatin, and he, back to his wife and family in Moscow.

In the chaos of the Russian army's retreat, Commander Gints is shot dead by Pasha. No more **Blood on the Snow** will be spilt for a pointless war, he vows. From now on, he and the soldiers he has recruited will fight for the rights of the common man.

When Yurii arrives home from war, the Revolution has taken over Moscow, now described as **A Perfect World**. Yurii's family is relegated to the attic of their once sumptuous mansion. His young son, Sasha, born while Yurii was on the front, rejects him as a stranger. Yurii's poetry is called into question by the Communist writer's committee as being insufficiently laudatory of the new government. He narrowly averts being executed as a traitor due to the intercession of Komarovsky, now working for the Party but missing his bourgeois past. **Komarovsky's Lament**.

As a former aristocrat and free-thinking poet, Moscow has become unsafe for Yurii -- and his family as well. Yurii's ailing mother-in-law, Anna, recalls her family's Kruger mansion in the countryside, now fallen into disuse. It seems to Yurii like a refuge for escape -- until he realizes the property is near the village Yuriatin, where Lara has gone to live. Yurii is loathe to set eyes upon her, for fear he will break his marriage vows as faithlessly as his own father did. **Yurii's Decision** is to silence the beating of his heart for the sake of his family's survival. (*End of Act One, 1st ending*)

(*End of Act One, 2nd ending – optional additional scene*) Anna dies. As the others depart for the train, Tonia and Alex and Yurii recall their life **In This House**, joined by other fleeing families. The train departs as Pasha leads his followers in the new Communist anthem, **Blood on the Snow** (Reprise).

ACT TWO

Halfway across the Russian continent in the farmlands of the Urals, **Women and Little Children** keep the fields growing. All the men have been conscripted to either the Red or White Army in the Russian Civil War. One woman, Yelenka, is distraught that her husband has been dragged off by one of the armies, possibly never to return. She is comforted by Lara, who assures her that **He's There** in her thoughts, even as Lara's own thoughts drift to Yurii.

Yurii has arrived in the vicinity with his family, only to be kidnapped the moment he steps foot off the train. He is brought to the railcar headquarters of Strelnikov, a Red Army rebel commander – who is none other than Pasha with a new identity. He feels **No Mercy** for his captive Yurii. He equates him with all privileged men of the former ruling class whom he blames for corrupting the virtue of Lara. Deciding to bide his time, Pasha/Strelnikov frees Yurii and assuages his anger by shooting a prisoner.

With the family under surveillance, the countryside is not the safe haven Tonia hoped it would be. Her father Alex points out the once grand mansion to grandson Sasha. They no longer may live **In This House** (Reprise), either, and instead reside in the tiny caretaker's cottage. Family tensions impel Tonia to send Yurii into town to the library to write his poetry. Lara now works in the library, and the moment she and Yurii are reunited, they must acknowledge their attraction at last. Lara is fearful, knowing that her husband, Pasha/Strelnikov, is having them watched, but Yurii absolves them both of fear and guilt. Komarovsky is now a party official. Both he and Pasha/Strelnikov continue to pine over Lara. Tonia realizes Yurii has strayed. The three men are all in love with one woman, Lara, and the two women with one man, Yurii. When **Love Finds You**, one can do nothing but obey.

Betraying his vows becomes too much for Yurii to bear. He and Lara agree to separate, but by now, Pasha/Strelnikov's jealousy has grown so great that he orders Yurii be taken hostage to serve as a doctor in a red army outpost in Siberia. The band of murderous partisans is led by the opium-addicted Liberius. For Yurii, there is no **Nowhere to Run**.

His absence sends the worried Tonia to the town library to seek information from Lara, but Lara has no information to give her. At the first and only meeting of the wife and the mistress, **It Comes as No Surprise** to each of them that the other is loved by Yurii.

The horrific war crimes committed at the partisan camp force Yurii to overcome his cowardice and face the problems at home. In a desperate flight, with a weakened heart, Yurii escapes Siberia, a wasteland of **Ashes and Tears**, pursued by his relentless captors. He awakes from a fevered state in the abandoned Kruger mansion, now covered in ice, to find he is being nursed back to health by Lara.

Yurii is heartbroken to learn that Tonia and Sasha have had to flee Russia to save their lives from the chaos overtaking Russia. He will never see his wife and son again. Lara comforts him with the thought that for whatever days they have left before the Red Army comes for them, they can exist together the way they always were meant to, as husband and wife, **On The Edge of Time**.

Lara's onetime seducer, Komarovsky, has never stopped loving her. He arrives, announcing that Lara's previous protector, Pasha/Strelnikov, has been executed by the Party, which no longer needs his brand of extremism. He has brought Lara and Yurii false passports to escape Russia with him. But Yurii knows that if he is discovered with them, all will be put to death. He sees that Lara's only hope is to go with Komarovsky alone, and leave Yurii behind. To save Lara's life, Yurii decides to lie to her that he will join them – and their unborn child. Trusting Yurii, Lara begrudgingly agrees to go with Komorovsky. **Now** (Reprise), Lara must soar on her own. In the desolation of loneliness, Yurii recreates Lara's presence in a poem, and then sinks into a stupor of despair. He awakes to find Pasha/Strelnikov, alive after all, reading his poem. He and Yurii debate the value of love, life, and revolution. Pasha is moved by Yurii's poem, and, unable to live without Lara or the revolution he fought to avenge her honor, commits suicide. Drab bureaucrats herald the new age. **Blood On the Snow** (Reprise).

Years later, in a Moscow cemetery, Lara has covertly returned to Stalinist Russia from Paris, where she has been living with Yurii's and her daughter, Katerina, named after the sweetheart in Yanko's letter. They are the only mourners present at Yurii's funeral. Though his poetry is now world-known, it is banned in Russia. Katerina reads the poem he wrote about Lara aloud, **On the Edge of Time** (Reprise). She and Lara are joined by Russian mourners entering one by one, each surreptitiously holding a volume of Yurii's poetry in defiance of the government. The spirit of Yurii lives on in them... and in Lara.