(SERAFIMA nods, she alters course.

They fly.)

SERAFIMA. How far will this take us out of the way?

VERA. Not much.

SERAFIMA. Good. We need to get back. They don't know … they don't know about the fighter.

(They fly.)

START

SCENE 6

(The airfield. ZOYA, POLINA, VALENTINA and MARTA are onstage.)

VALENTNIA. It's been ages! When will our plane be ready?

POLINA. Raisa is moving as fast as she can.

VALENTNIA. Do you know what the trouble is?

POLINA. She said it wasn't serious, that's all I know.

VALENTNIA. Oh, being stuck on the ground is agony. I wish we had flown first tonight.

(MARTA uses binoculars to scan the air.)

ZOYA. I needed someone who could handle the lull before flight.

VALENTNIA. If there is one thing I am not good at, it may be waiting.

ZOYA. All the more reason to give you practice now.

MARTA. Serafima and Vera are returning!

(MARTA hands the binoculars to ZOYA, who also checks.)

ZOYA. Excellent.

(POLINA checks the time.)

POLINA. That was much longer than expected.

ZOYA. Well, we will soon hear what slowed them down.

(ZOYA hands the binoculars back to MARTA.

RAISA enters.)

VALENTNIA. Raisa, will we be waiting until morning for our plane to be ready?

RAISA. The cart with your load is stuck in the mud. I have four girls now trying to ease it out.

VALENTNIA. Do you need an extra hand?

RAISA. I would appreciate that. Valentina, come.

(RAISA and VALENTINA exit.

MARTA uses the binoculars again to find the plane with VERA and SERAFIMA.)

MARTA. My first flight, my first combat flight, that is. I don't exactly remember all of it. It was frozen and loud. So very loud. Flashes of light. And it seemed as soon as we landed we were taking off again. All night. It was so cold that during one of the flights my hand stuck to a bomb as I tried to push it free. After all of it, just after dawn, I saw the smallest black dot in the snow as we were landing our last flight. It was, it was close to our airfield, and I couldn't make out what it could be. Back in the bunk the black spot wouldn't leave my mind and after tossing and turning, I went out to find whatever it could be. The sun was weak, but in the sky. It didn't take long to find it. Him. A boy. A skinny frozen-faced boy with the largest eyes I have ever

seen. I had my emergency sack with me, and planned to hand over all of my rations which wasn't much more than a bar of chocolate and sugared milk. I thought it would make him smile. But. But when I reached the boy he says, "Have you seen my father? Please. Mama's dying. If he comes, she'll be OK. I know she will. Please."

POLINA. Oh, Marta.

MARTA. I left the chocolate. The milk. I marched straight back to the airfield to find more, to find anything. To help. But there was nothing to do. Nothing more I could … I … we cannot truly help until the Germans are gone. And so each night, I climb into a plane and I fight. Mission after mission. And I won't stop. Not until I am dead or they are gone.

(RAISA enters with VALENTINA.)

RAISA. We freed the cart with Valentina's help!

VALENTNIA. I am strong like ox! Haha!

RAISA. The plane will be ready soon.

VALENTNIA. Let's get to it, Marta.

(As MARTA and VALENTINA move to exit toward the plane, SERAFIMA enters at a run with VERA right behind.)

POLINA. Serafima, that was a long flight. Did you take a glory lap, or—

SERAFIMA. No! Listen. The others—they won't—they were shot down. There's a fighter plane. He's patrolling all along the river. We only survived because we had to land which took away his surprise.

(VALENTINA sinks to her knees.

VERA sits; she is shaking. She rips off her boots and pulls out the pieces of embroidery given to her earlier. She searches for the owl from NINA.)

ZOYA. Mariya is about to take off!

SERAFIMA. Let me run! I will stop her!

ZOYA. GO!

(SERAFIMA exits at a run.)

ZOYA *(cont'd)*. Polina, quick! Let's get to the radio. We have to get that fighter shot down.

(POLINA and ZOYA exit together.

VERA has found the owl from NINA. She holds it to her body.)

VERA. I saw their planes. Our planes. Pieces of our planes. They littered the ground … *(She goes to the plane onstage.)*
Plywood.
Canvas fastened with screws. Bolts.
Propeller.
Wings.
Engine …

(MARTA puts a hand on VERA's shoulder. RAISA holds VERA's hand.)

VERA *(cont'd)*. I don't know … I don't know how I am alive.

RAISA. You make Russia proud.

MARTA *(singing)*.

WE WILL NOT LOSE THE GAINS OF OCTOBER
WE WILL DEFEND, WE WILL DEFEND
WE WILL NOT LOSE THE GAINS OF OCTOBER
WE WILL DEFEND OUR GLORIOUS MOTHERLAND

END