

SCENE ONE

A morgue. The small windows are dark, and the wall clock reads 3:04 A.M. It should be an analog clock, with an audible tick. The door is swinging – someone has just left the room.

One morgue drawer is pulled out, containing ALDERIDGE'S BODY. He is (was) a well-dressed man in his early 40s, with a narrow face. He has been arranged neatly, his tie straightened, etc., but still looks unkempt, not least because one side of his face is livid and the other white. He has been shot in the chest.

An open briefcase sits on a table next to him. It contains his papers and effects, although one sheet of paper has been removed. Also on the table are an ashtray and a padded bag containing a prototype ectoplasmic disruptor.

GEORGE RUSSELL re-enters, dragging a folding chair. RUSSELL, hereafter 'RUS,' is also in his early 40s, also wearing a suit. He is an intelligence officer, but in the last few years has become accustomed to regular hours and his own bed, and he is suffering from being shaken out of a deep sleep. In his inner jacket pocket is ALDERIDGE's annotated list of British agents in Berlin.

RUS looks at the chair, but does not sit.

RUS

Alderidge, are you there?

The lights flicker, or RUS blinks.

ALDERIDGE

Yes, I'm here.

ROBERT ALDERIDGE, as a shade, is still pale and bloody, but has an animating spark of charisma which makes him look quite different from the body. ALDERIDGE, hereafter 'AL,' does not look at his own corpse. He looks solid, but does not interact with any objects in the room.

RUS

Alright. (pauses) Now, usually, is when I would explain your situation to you, but I assume you understand.

AL smiles.

AL

Perfectly clear, yes.

RUS

Then you understand that there are things you need to tell me.

AL

That depends on what I want, doesn't it?

Beat. *close eyes - exasperated/
despairing*

Smug here, but playing for time.

RUS

What do you want?

Not playing for time v. effectively.

AL

(pauses) I suppose I won't get very far without telling you, will I?

AL leans against the wall of morgue drawers, his hands in his pockets. He takes a moment to consider what to say; RUS watches him, sidelong.

AL

I just think maybe you'll listen to me more if I don't come right out and say it. It's... I mean, you don't have questions?

RUS

Sure. Why don't I tell you what I want? I need you to tell me where your files are. All your operations, everything you've ever told the Soviets. I need to know.

*all business.
not engaging.*

AL

Yes, yes.

AL looks at the table and the bag.

AL

I need you to give me that disruptor.

RUS is taken aback.

AL

Not **give it** to me. I need you to give it to the Russians.

RUS

The Russians.

AL

Yes.

RUS

I don't know what makes you think you have that kind of leverage over me. You're dead, Alderidge.

AL

Mhm. And as dead people go, unusually qualified to accomplish things, I think.

RUS

flat.

Start smaller.

AL

Alright. ... I'd like to talk to you. I know our time is limited.

RUS

What do you want to talk about, Alderidge?

EVEN MORE FLAT.

AL

I admit, I'm a little disappointed that you're not asking me any questions! We all know the very obvious, bare-bones 'you're a ghost, what do you need to move on' things. I expected curiosity, or disappointment, or *something*.

Being arch - NOT winning him any points, but he's got to try.

RUS

I usually try to start with business. But you're right, I am curious. I want to know why. Why did you do this?

AL

I mean, it's really very simple! I believe it's the right thing to do.

RUS

(incredulous) The right thing to do?

AL

Yes.

RUS

Alderidge, people died because of you!

*R. tries to interrupt,
A. talks over him*

AL

Yes. And people die every day to feed the machine. And people would have died if those fascists got into power in Germany - (laughs) not the fascists we already had, the ones our people wanted instead.

You understand how the game is played. I, having recently died myself - I'm fairly pissed off at the people who put me here, but I leveraged my whole life to get things done. That's what our profession *is*.

RUS

So does loyalty mean nothing to you? To our country? To me?

AL

Ha! ... To you, yes. I - I truly - I regret lying to you. But I've been lying to you since I was eighteen -

RUS

Since you were eighteen?! This whole time?

alarmed. has an expectation that Al. was turned more recently? until this conv + all the Right Thing To Do Stuff. or - it's just worse if EVERYTHING since they met back up was for Mother Russia.

AL

(startled laugh) No, Lord, not about this. I just mean that you know me better than probably anyone else in the world, and you still don't know me very well.

RUS

Clearly.

Al looks away.

*Pat jacket pocket, looking for cigarette.
Got blood on hand notice blood, make face.
Stage blood should be wet for this.*

AL

I don't feel any particular loyalty to queen and country, or the institutions we came up in. I care about people, people's suffering - (off Rus' skeptical look) You remember that battlefield we visited?

Rus.: Rich of you to talk abt caring abt people!

RUS

Rostov-on-don?

AL

Yes.

RUS

I remember, yeah. It was terrible. They were all terrible.

AL

Yes! And none of those spirits, realistically, will ever be laid to rest. And they're aware, suffering ... *(aside)* I'm quite aware, at least, although I believe I don't have long before I start losing pieces?

(off Rus' short nod) Right. Right.

Well. I didn't think Her Majesty's government still had the capacity to surprise me, but keeping the disruptor to ourselves... in terms of human suffering, it's potentially more of a crime than anything anyone has ever had the scope to do before. *(laughs)* I'm sorry if that sounds self-important.

*Rus. actually surprised.
has felt bad for individual tortured spirits → has not
generalized.
(typical.)*

RUS

I don't believe that's all the Soviets want.

deflects instead of thinking too hard abt. it.

AL

They don't even know about it, Russ. They don't want it. This is me.

RUS

Why should I believe you?

Because you're my friend?

Because you've been lying to me this whole time, because you made me complicit?

AL

I am very grateful for your help.

*KNOWS this will not help, but compelled to say it.
"Aren't I a cad?" he says, to pre-empt
R.'s reaction.*

RUS

I went to bat for you.

AL

You're a good man. But there are things you won't let yourself see.

RUS

If you believed this so strongly, why didn't you tell me earlier?

AL

How much earlier? When I was at university, and everyone wrote my politics off as youthful silliness? Would you have listened?

RUS

I would have talked you out of it!

RAISE VOICE
for first time

AL

(laughing) Of course you would have.

RUS

You wouldn't be here right now!

AL's eyes flick down to the body and away.

RUS

Robert...

NOT dealing with any of that right now.

AL

(claps his hands together) Let's talk. I want... Well, we can start small. I want my reputation to remain intact. I don't want this publicized. I'm sure there are plenty in the government who wouldn't want that either.

RUS

That's ... possible.

AL

Well, I'm asking you very nicely.

Al. brought up his reputation first;
Rus. still doesn't like using this.
beat is hesitation.

RUS

And I'm asking where your files are. *(beat)* Do you really want Jean to know about this?

AL

No! No, I do not. But I also don't want more of my people hurt.

RUS

Then you shouldn't have gotten shot.

AL

You're telling me. Do you know what happened? / I mean, I got shot, obviously.

RUS

You met with a man from the KGB. The West German police showed up. There was a commotion. Then you and the KGB officer were dead, and they came to me.

AL

I'm sorry. I'm sure it wasn't pleasant to be woken in the middle of the night.

*no response from Rus. Al. baiting him; takes an effort
My attempt at connection is getting stonewalled!
I'm disappointed!*

Beat.

*"connection" via baiting, sure ♡
Literally, yes.*

It would be selfish of me, to prioritize my relationship with my wife and children over this grand philosophical point I've just made, when I'm telling you that you should betray – as you would see it, at least – that you should betray queen and country for this greater good.

RUS

You don't want to betray your ideals. I can't betray mine. You're right: if I leave you here, you'll go to that battlefield and you'll stay there and you'll lose yourself. Let me help you. I can give you – something else. What do you need to go anywhere else?

*A. notices the won't/can't here,
even if R. doesn't.*

AL

I suppose it doesn't have to be the battlefield. I could come home, and disintegrate into a shrieking terror there.

I mean, God. The disintegration of the essential self! Becoming something unrecognizable ... who hasn't done that already?

(unconvincingly) That's nothing.

RUS

(unimpressed) And how did it feel?

Is this the first time they've explicitly talked about A. 'remaking' himself ~~at college~~ in uni?

AL

Very good!

I mean, the ghost thing won't.

But I've stopped being myself several times already. I got a lot more done when people started liking me... other than you.

RUS

I noticed that, yeah.

AL

I always appreciated your company.

RUS

Thanks.

AL

All I'm saying is - I know how to leverage myself to a goal. I'm willing to do it again.

RUS

I can see that.

take a few tries.
it's a morgue (cold) + his fingers are shaking

↓
He pulls out his own packet of cigarettes and lights one.

RUS

Your kids really look up to you.

AL

Mm.

Trying not to sound invested in this at all,
no weak spots here...

RUS

I can tell them you died a hero. I can tell them you were stopping very bad people, to serve your country. Or I can tell them that you betrayed us, and you weren't the man they thought you were.

AL

I wish you wouldn't!

RUS looks at him.

Struggling.

AL

For everything about me that isn't real, I swear my - my love for them, it is. (stammering) If that means anything to you. Truly. I've been - the best father I could to them, and I have - thought about

this. I mean, I've made the choice, and I've made the choice over and over again. I knew it could happen. And it would be a bit awkward, with Dora, maybe?

(wincing at RUS' expression) Maybe?

RUS

You think it won't be awkward to lie to her?

AL

(scoffing) How much does she know about your work?

RUS

She knows that I work for MI6. She doesn't know the details.

AL

She doesn't know that you talk to ghosts?

RUS

(surprised) She knows that. Of course she knows that. She's known since the day we met.

AL

Oh.

(sighs) I'm sure it would be terrible for you, to have to lie to them. I'm sure it would be terrible for you to have to tell them the truth. And either way, I don't think I'll be in a state to care very much about it.

RUS

So I lose either way, is that it?

AL

Yeah.

RUS

Yeah, I already lost.

Asking me to keep it from Jean, that means keeping it from Dora. I can't promise that. That's asking me to put a part of myself away, and to never talk about it with my wife. I already do that with so much.

AL

(half-seriously) What's one more thing?

That's a miss.
or: a hit that makes Rus. angry
+ therefore stubborn.
A: "Ah, I've fucked it." Really the
issue is not committing to
the threat.

"Ah, I've fucked it now!!"
Another big miss. He doesn't think about D. that much.

RUS

Is that what you told yourself, every time?

AL

(in the same tone) What's one more thing, weighed against the greater good? It sounds cliché, but it really is, in some ways, liberating to believe in something.

Saying things he means, but sarcastically.

RUS

I believed in being the kind of person that you showed me I could be. In being kind. Tending the garden that was given to me. You're not changing the world. You didn't change anything!

AL

I changed plenty!

The lights flicker.

AL

I'm sorry. I don't mean to get angry with you.

The garden's all rotten, Russ. There's — thorns and bitter fruit, or whatever biblical metaphor you like. People can eke out little bits of goodness, but they can't truly be good.

Those people, the Catholic Underground. Without me, after the war... you never wondered what happened to them?

RUS

(angrily) Of course I wondered. Now I know it's because you gave them up.

AL

Yes.

Yes. And I'm sure many of them were killed in unpleasant ways.

RUS

I gave you the names.

AL

Yes.

I'm very sorry.

RUS shakes his head.

AL

I'm sorry for lying to you. For making you complicit. I think it was worth it, not to have a bunch of insane royalists in charge just because our people don't want to give the Russkies a toehold!

You're good at seeing the good in things. But can't you see it's all rotten?

RUS

Of course it's broken, but you don't unbreak it by sweeping all the pieces off the board. People don't have that kind of power. You don't. We're not at school, this isn't some prank that you're playing.

^ Come in here.

AL

(interrupting with a laugh, a little hysterical) No, we are! You think we can make little choices, and make things better? The way we made little choices, and made things better there?

RUS

We did make it better!

AL

Not better enough.

RUS

It could have been torture there, and it was good. I m- *(he cuts himself off and starts again)* I met you. That was good.

AL

(overlapping) That **was** good.

RUS

(overlapping) For a while.

Ab in: I get it, I ruined everything

AL

(raising his hands in acknowledgement of the point) It was good, but it wasn't enough. It didn't stop us becoming bullies ourselves. It didn't change anything after we left. We were a little nicer to a few little idiots - but the next class of idiots comes in, and the same thing happens, they grow up, they become monsters, and - you can't fix it a little bit by a little bit.

RUS

So what should we have done, burned the school building down?

AL

(irritated) No. I don't know. But the Soviets, they're doing something. And they are fucking it up, God knows, in plenty of ways. But they're doing something, and they're making people believe in it.

I don't have high hopes of convincing you, or I would have told you ages ago.

RUS

I shouldn't have gone on that fucking mission with you.

AL

No comment.

RUS stubs out his cigarette.

RUS

How about this? If you give me your files, it'll be up to my discretion who sees them. I don't have to give them everything.

AL

Oh, it'll be up to your discretion? And when they say, oh, George, this is everything he gave you, you'll lie to them?

RUS

Why not? I'm a different man than I was yesterday.

AL

I'm very much the same so far, aside from the bullet wound. *(feeling it gingerly)* That's unpleasant.

RUS

Not fun.

STIFF UPPER LIP, MATE

AL

Oh, not for you either?

RUS

They brought me your body. Obviously, that's... *(off AL's laugh, does not think this is funny)* that's where I am now. You've looked better.

AL

So have you, friend. For what it's worth.

RUS

I've had better days.

AL

I appreciate the olive branch. I believe you - I really do believe you. But I can't give you the names without anything in return.

RUS

I won't tell your wife anything. I won't tell MI6 anything.

AL

(pauses) That is something.

It won't make me move on.

RUS

Giving the disruptor to the Russians, that's the only thing..?

AL

You understand perfectly.

Does it upset you..

RUS

(interrupting) What?

AL

(continuing as if he was not interrupted) ... to think of that happening to me?

RUS

Of course it does. It upsets me to think of you dead.

AL

Obviously, I'm very charming.

RUS rolls his eyes.

He does! Doesn't really consider R. might lie to get what he wants. Personally, I can't see R. lying, but I can see him getting cold feet - believed it in the moment, convinced himself later he was wrong.

After this? you think he can convince himself to trust his own judgement?

AL

You'd prefer to avoid the rest, though. The part where I stop talking to you about our nice school memories and..

RUS

Where you become a screaming thing that doesn't know anything but..

AL

(irritated) Yes, I'm not looking forward to it either, thank you. But that's why it's important. The disruptor.

Ride of you to bring up my impending doom. I may be manipulating you with my impending doom, but that doesn't mean I want to think about it.

RUS

I can't - I can't. (*struggling*) I can't give it to them. But I - if you want me to - if you want me to use it on you, I can give you that.

AL

(*breezily*) No, that would be terribly hypocritical of you.

RUS

You're my friend. You were my friend.

Yes, it would be hypocritical of me.

You told lies, you betrayed people. Apparently, I'm only the man I am today because I met you. And, apparently, I'm no better than that.

AL

Oh, I'm terribly flattered that I've dragged you down this path of villainy with me! You're missing the point. I didn't do those things for you, much as I love you. I didn't do those things to keep my friend from suffering. I did them on principle, as ridiculous as it sounds! Because there are things that I care about, things that matter to me, and I try to live my life in a way that's consistent with them.

He paces back and forth in the small space.

And I know that may be hard to understand, because of the lying and the betrayal and all the other dreadful things, which I will freely admit to - now, at the end of all things, when I can actually speak to you about them, I will admit to whatever you ask me.

But it wasn't for you, and I wouldn't ask you to do that for me.

Cracks starting to show...!

Alderidge: Your whole life, you've seen almost everything clearly. But you always saw it just a little bit brighter than it is. Because you're a man who doesn't live in the mud and the muck. And I always admired that about you.

Russell: (incredulous) I don't live in the mud, Alderidge? I don't live in the muck?

Alderidge: Not quite.

Russell: So the grave doesn't count.

Alderidge: (amused) The mud and the muck before the grave.

RUS

You're not asking

I don't want to let you become that.

And I don't want to betray my country. It wouldn't be just this one thing, anyway. I would just become... their replacement for you.

AL is silent for a long beat.

AL

You know, that doesn't horrify me as much as it should. I mean, it feels wrong. It feels incorrect, as if *(he laughs bitterly)* that sort of thing shouldn't happen to you.

(maybe even a little teary) But what's so special about you?

He takes a deep breath.

You know, I -

He glances at RUS, and changes his mind about whatever he was about to say.

AL

(playing it off) Frequently, I discover little inconsistencies like this, in the way I think about the world, and I do try to think about them, and think through them, which it seems to me that not very many people do.

RUS

Think?

AL

Ha! Yes. No, I don't know how you get through life operating on just... a vague feeling, telling you the right thing to do.

RUS

What else are we supposed to do?

AL

Put your mind to it, man! Be consistent!

I love you? I loved you? I resent you? - (for being so simple & true & righteous) - This hasn't changed my mind at all? All my morals were formed watching you be good & that goodness not matter a whit, god self-righteous prick? &c.

i don't think anyone at M16 is simple + true + righteous.

A is not objective.

RUS

(exasperated, almost fond sigh) You said I see the good in people, but you're the idealist. People are people. We're all just muddling along. Even you, as smart as you are, you don't know everything.

AL

Of course I don't.

RUS

You don't know all the consequences of your actions -

AL

Of course I don't!

RUS

Or you wouldn't be dead.

AL laughs.

AL

Low blow. Really a low blow.

He sighs.

Dramatically, playing it up again.

AL

Saying you'll use that thing on me pretty effectively shoots in the foot my ability to leverage my own screaming madness against you, it's true.

I could follow you home, I think, if I put my mind to it.

RUS rubs his temple.

AL

I understand that the things I'm saying are terribly cruel. Maybe that surprises you - it shouldn't at this point.

It would be nice, in a way, to be with you.

Self-loathing again! He means it, but is saying it to hurt R. & himself.

RUS

For a little while. It wouldn't be nice forever.

AL

No. (beat) Worse for you than for me, I think. (beat) Maybe it's a toss-up.

RUS

It's not that I don't understand your point. I want to trust you, Robert. I want to believe that you know what the right thing to do is.

If you had asked me yesterday, maybe you could have convinced me then.

AL

I don't believe you.

*Immediate-unconscious-God response.
If he doubted this at all, ~~it~~ it might have gone differently.
He might be wrong?*

RUS

We'll never know, will we.

The Soviets might invent the disruptor themselves. They don't need our help.

Looking for an easier solution.

AL

You know perfectly well they're not a hundredth as good as you are.

RUS

(overlapping) Flattery's not going to get you this.

AL

(overlapping) And of course, the rest at the OUC are - fine - what?

*Trying to course-correct from complimenting only R. (Sincere but too vulnerable.)
Knocked off-balance by flattery accusation.*

RUS

You think flattery's the way to go now?

AL

and
(offended ~~or~~ mock-offended) No, it's honesty! You know you're revolutionized the place.

RUS

They put me in charge because I'm the one who could've joined MI6 in any case. (beat) It's not that I don't understand what you're saying about the way the world works.

Maybe if you were...

boiling-over moment.
~~hit wall?~~
hit DRAWER/SLAB,
forgetting body is there

You can't leave me with this!

You can't leave me and tell me to do these things for you, when I'd have to lie, and betray, and you wouldn't even be here. There won't be anyone I can talk to.

I'm sorry.

(Long beat.)

I can't, Robert. I will give you your reputation. I can give you that! And if I can't give you peace, I can give you oblivion. But there are just some things that can't be done.

You can't do everything. You can't win everything. You can't save the whole world. You need to get what you can get. That's what you can get.

AL

What a beautifully elegant way to put it. (beat) You know, I'm aware that I sound pompous and absurd when I say things like this, which is why, excepting unusual circumstances, I don't say them. But if more people tried to save the world, as you put it, even though it meant doing things they thought were unsavory - upsetting their wives - we might be in a better place.

RUS nods.

RUS

You think the world could be saved by people being willing to upset their wives?

Jean doesn't -

Do you love her?

AL is silent.

AL

I'm very fond of her.

RUS nods again, not surprised.

Hates this. Playing for time again -
would be cleaning glasses if he wore them.
Clean any blood off of nails using hem of jacket?
Take a minute.
although more focused on the marriage being
a sham (traitor) than the marriage being a sham (gay),
which i don't think he is consciously
aware of.
STILL ???
what did you expect.

AL

We get along well. I think we've raised our children well.

RUS

Why did you marry her?

AL

It was the thing to do. *(repeating)* We get along well. She liked me. I liked her. I do like her!

RUS

Doesn't she ever seem lonely to you?

THE turning point - A. blindsided by this, has basically lost.

AL

I suppose I thought she was happy.

RUS

press the advantage

If you can give her peace, in your death, I think that would be the kind thing to do.

AL

If **I** can give her peace?

RUS

If you can help me give her peace. Give me a reason! I don't want to use her this way. It's unsavory. But I don't have much.

AL

I'll trade you the names for my reputation. But only if you swear you won't use that thing on me.

RUS

You'd rather go with the screaming masses?

AL

Well, it would be egotistical to set myself apart.

RUS shakes his head.

RUS

I don't want that for you.

AL

Neither do I, Russell! But here we are.

RUS

I promise. I won't use it - I'll let you choose your own hell if you want. That is the least I can do. Give me the names.

AL

They're in the basement cupboard in the green house on Boscobel street.

RUS

(sighs) Thank you.

I won't make promises that I can't keep. But I can tell them this was an awful accident. And I can tell that to Jean too. I'll tell her whatever you want - I'll tell Dora whatever you want. Is there anything... *(he finds himself smiling incredulously)* Any last words you'd like?

AL laughs, surprised.

RUS

I'm already lying. Might as well add some flair.

AL

I can't think of anything.

RUS

You do have some time, and then... You have some time, and then it will be up. We'll see each other again, but we won't be able to talk like this.

AL

I understand.

I don't suppose that, many years in the future... when you've got a grandbaby on each knee, the war is over, the Russians have been brought back into the capitalistic fold, and so on ... you might try to lift the veil of secrecy a bit. Around the disruptor.

RUS

I don't think I can make promises like that. I don't know the future. I can't see five feet into the future, apparently. I'll do my best. If there are civilian applications... I try my best to do good.

AL

(fondly) I know. I do have greater-than-average faith in your vague moral intuitions.

RUS

I appreciate that. *Falls back on politeness*

(beat)

Would you have just gone on like this forever?

has been holding this back for a while.

AL

I imagine eventually I'd have had to retire.

RUS

It comes for us all. Much like the other thing.

A laughs
bit of awkward silence after laugh. Rus. willing to wait for real answer.

AL

I am... sorry. Inasmuch as one can be sorry, when one wouldn't have done very much differently. I regret it - can the definition of regret contain that? I didn't like hurting you, or lining up future hurt for you.

RUS

Thank you.

more actual feeling than his automatic dry thanks earlier, but Al. is busy saying...

AL

If that means anything to you.

RUS

I sat for a while, with (does not look at body) you, before I made this contact. I wanted to know what you had to say for yourself, but I was worried that it was all - that you were only ever using me -

AL

(interrupting) Oh, God, no, George.

RUS

I believe you. I shouldn't, probably.

AL

I've failed unutterably at human connection - I've prioritized other things fairly highly, as you can no doubt tell - but you, you are the best friend I've ever had. I was happy, whenever they sent us out together. Selfishly; even though I knew it would mean lying to you.

RUS

On the front I used to think - this isn't so bad. What a horrible thing to think. I wouldn't tell Dora that.

It wasn't so bad. You were there. We were doing good work. I'm glad that... Well. I wouldn't change it either. Even knowing the things that you've done, I'm glad.

AL

I wish you hadn't said that, because it does make me wonder. I've never had good luck with honesty. And, as much faith as I habitually extend to you, I couldn't extend you quite enough faith to be honest. But - mmm, I don't like to think about it. I'm envious of the version of me who told you... if it all worked out.

RUS

It's hard to imagine, but.

AL

Yes, as you put it, we'll never know now.

RUS

They wouldn't have been able to stop us together. (overlapping) It's for the best.

AL

(overlapping) Goodness, no. I definitely wouldn't have gotten shot. Not an attempt to guilt you!

RUS laughs, AL sighs. They are both aware of the clock; they've got a little over ten minutes.

*timing this is going to be a pain ♡
can we cheat the clock?*

RUS

Listen, we don't have an enormous amount of time. It would not be a burden to have you with me, but there is something beyond this. I don't pretend to know what it is, and - I know you've told me what you need to get there, but I can't give it to you, and if there's anything else - if there's anything you want, I can - (pauses) It's a rather

pathetic offer, isn't it? Anything but the one thing you've asked me for.

AL

I suppose you could try becoming a die-hard Communist, and we could see if it worked.

RUS is not expecting this at all, and laughs.

would do a spit-take if i could get away with it.

RUS

I will miss you at parties.

AL

Ha! I don't know if I've given you the impression that I was terribly unhappy the whole time, with all that stuff about lying to everyone, but - I enjoyed being good at it. Not the lying. I enjoyed - who doesn't enjoy people liking them?

I think he did in fact enjoy being good at lying ... to most people.

RUS

The first time I saw you after university, I was proud of you... and I was afraid that you wouldn't need me anymore.

AL

Well, at the time I thought I was getting on perfectly well without you, I will be honest, but when we saw each other again, I was...

Long pause.

AL

Goodness, man, you're wasting the time we've got! Don't you want to know what I was going to get you for Christmas next year?

RUS

What were you going to get me for Christmas next year?

AL

I've no idea.

RUS

Your presents were always late, anyway.

AL

Mm.

RUS

(sighs) There were things that I wanted – not for Christmas, out of this conversation. And I've gotten what I could get. But I did also want to say goodbye.

It's not much of a goodbye, if you're going to follow me home.

AL

Well, you know when you're at a party, and you say goodbye to someone, and then you both find yourself walking down the same street into a maddening abyss, et cetera, et cetera.

RUS

I know it's foolish to ask you not to joke about that.

AL

It is, but I can hold off if you'd really like. Mm. Like being honest, it does not come naturally to me!

RUS

If it's your last few conscious minutes on Earth, then I suppose it would be rude. Like making the rules when you're hosting me.

AL

Daringly.
I don't know. Ask me anything you want.

RUS

That battlefield, in Rostov-on-don, was that just the first place you noticed it? All the screaming?

AL

I could feel it a little, in other places. Just the way everyone does, not the way you do. But there was nothing there *except* the screaming... just that, magnified forever.

RUS

(shakes head) In my memory, it's just another place. Perhaps that doesn't speak well of me. But it was another battlefield, where we did the best we could. I've always wondered – well, so many of my colleagues, they can't take it, day after day. They have to go on leave. It's never been a problem for me.

I don't think I'm **better**. I didn't do very well in school, so perhaps this is my one talent. Or maybe it doesn't touch me as much. I was impressed with the way you could feel things that others felt.

AL

It's what led us here, I suppose.

I don't think you're defective, Russ. Most people don't ... react the way I did.

RUS

Yes, you were always unique.

AL

You know better than anyone.

Even if you don't understand, even if you don't feel the same way, it is a weight off of me to know that you know.

RUS

I don't know if I can say that I'm glad. Goodness, what if you'd simply been killed in action, the way any of us might, and you hadn't had anything incriminating...

AL

Very sloppy, I know. I'm very embarrassed.

RUS

We'd be having a very different final conversation.

Speaking of envying yourself. I'm a little envious of that man, who is being lied to during your final moments. Maybe that's not fair. Maybe you would have told me the truth. But I don't...

AL

No, I think we can admit that it's unlikely.

Bitter. Thinks he would be right to lie! But doesn't like saying it.

RUS

Yes.

AL

You don't have to spare my feelings, in that regard.

*TWO MINUTES HERE
(two minutes thanks)*

AL

I care for you very much. And I'll try not to forget that.

RUS

Goodbye.

AL

Goodbye -

And lights.

Now you see me, now you- ~~see me~~