

"Natasha"

By

Glenn Campbell

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702-812-0400

For Kimmi

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FADE IN:

EXT. SOVIET INDUSTRIAL WASTELAND, CIRCA 1970s

In a montage, we see a vast and forbidding industrial area in Russia during the late Soviet era. It is an environmental disaster zone. Factories belch ugly smoke into the sky. Streams are clogged with oil drums and seeping with toxic waste. The weather is perpetually grey, and the sun shines only weakly through the polluted haze. The landscape of warehouses, rusted power plants and derelict equipment yards seems to stretch on forever. Everything we see is gray, boxy and utilitarian. There is no style here, no joy, no real hope for the future.

On the ground, we see a wide, nearly empty street separating the factories. A few OLD WOMEN wearing head scarves and drab peasant clothing sweep the street with straw brooms.

Then we hear a sound. It's only a buzz at first, but it quickly turns into a roar. The OLD WOMEN look up from their work. They focus down the road to see a tiny speck in the distance, rapidly growing larger. It's a MOTORCYCLE, coming toward them fast.

The MOTORCYCLE screams by at enormous speed, kicking up clouds of dust and airborne debris in its wake. The OLD WOMEN drop their brooms and throw up their hands in dismay. Hours of work has just been spoiled!

We follow the MOTORCYCLE as it tears across the industrial landscape. It is the only element of style in this drab Soviet universe. The MOTORCYCLE and its rider are almost a single streamlined unit. The rider, of unknown gender, is wearing black leather and a sleek black helmet with a reflective visor. We can imagine that this is a foreign spy trying to flee the Soviet authorities.

The MOTORCYCLE screams past a stylized billboard of V.I. Lenin exhorting the workers to ever greater production.

The MOTORCYCLE approaches a heavily fortified military checkpoint where a gate blocks the road. A CROSSING GUARD in a military uniform raises his hand to direct

the MOTORCYCLE to stop. The MOTORCYCLE comes to a halt beside the guard. Without removing their helmet, the rider produces identity papers, which the CROSSING GUARD examines.

The CROSSING GUARD returns the papers to the rider and waves the MOTORCYCLE through. The gate opens, and the MOTORCYCLE passes.

CUT TO:

EXT. SOVIET ATOMIC WEAPONS PLANT - MORNING

At the worker's entrance of a factory, the MOTORCYCLE stops. The rider turns off the engine, puts down the kickstand and dismounts. Then the rider removes their helmet to reveal...

NATASHA!

She is a young woman in her mid-20s. She is beautiful in a dark and brooding way. Her hair is black and straight and her build is graceful and athletic.

NATASHA squats down beside her MOTORCYCLE to make some performance adjustments.

CUT TO:

INT. LOCKER ROOM - SOVIET ATOMIC WEAPONS PLANT

We are in the worker's locker room of a high-tech factory. At one end of the locker room, a group of matronly women are clustered together, gossiping. They are all dressed in clean-room outfits: white smocks reaching to their ankles and white bonnets covering their hair. There is no hint of individuality between them. We hear them whispering to each other conspiratorially.

NATASHA enters the locker room at the other end. All of the woman look up at her.

MATRON #1
(whispering in Russian)

There she is.

(NOTE: All of the following dialog is spoken in Russian -- until English is explicitly specified. Subtitles are unnecessary, because the content of the Russian dialog should be clear from the context. English is provided here mainly as guide to character motivation.)

MATRON #2
(in Russian)

It's a shame. She's such a pretty girl, but so... weird.

NATASHA opens her locker, puts her helmet inside and takes off her leather jacket.

MATRON #3

She's loves that motorcycle like she should love a man.

MATRON #2

All the men want her, but she's too crazy.

NATASHA slams her locker shut.

CUT TO:

INT. FACTORY FLOOR

We find ourselves inside a high-tech factory where electronic components for atomic weapons are assembled. This is an antiseptic clean-room where all workers are wearing white smocks and white bonnets like the ladies in the locker room, as well as white masks over their mouth and nose. The outfit is almost like a burka, and is hard to tell even the gender of any worker. The factory is sterile and well-lit, and there is no hint of human individuality. It is almost as inhuman and forbidding as the landscape outside.

NATASHA, now wearing a smock, bonnet and mask like the others, takes her position at the assembly line. We can tell it is her from her graceful movements and her intelligent eyes.

NATASHA begins the repetitive motions that she will continue all day: placing four dots of glue on a never-ending series of silicon discs about 3 inches in diameter. The shape of the dots is reminiscent of a human face: Two dots of glue go near the top of the disc, like eyes; one dot in the middle, like a nose, then one dot at the bottom like a mouth. After she is done, the disc is automatically whisked away to the next workstation, where another worker places another 3-inch disk containing electronic components on top of the first one, with the glue sandwiched between.

Over and over, the conveyor system places blank discs in front of NATASHA and she dutifully puts the glue dots where she is supposed to. It is boring, monotonous work. We see NATASHA's eyes begin to glaze over, then they suddenly brighten up. She has an idea!

When the next disc comes before her, she puts the eyes and nose where they are supposed to be, but when she gets to the mouth, she "slips" and puts a curved line. The disc has become a frowning face!

With each successive disc, NATASHA tries different variations: smiling face, a perplexed face, a winking face, a face wearing glasses. Time speeds up and the succession of faces blends into a single face that talks, winks and expresses a wide range of active emotions, just like a real person.

Suddenly a supervisor walks past, just behind NATASHA. Her eyes show panic, and she quickly goes back to putting the four dots where they are supposed to be.

Downstream at the next workstation, a FELLOW WORKER suppresses a laugh. NATASHA looks up to lock eyes with the FELLOW WORKER, who appears to be a middle aged woman. Although the FELLOW WORKER's mouth is covered by the mask, we can see that her eyes are laughing. She is the worker who has been receiving all of NATASHA's faces, and she was amused by the whole incident.

NATASHA shrugs, and her eyes look a little embarrassed. In a small way, these two workers have made a human connection.

We hear the sound of a bell ringing.

5.

CUT TO:

EXT. SOVIET ATOMIC WEAPONS PLANT - LATE AFTERNOON

It is closing time, and an army of factory workers stream out of the plant. NATASHA is among them, wearing her leather jacket. She puts on her helmet, starts her MOTORCYCLE, and rides off.

CUT TO:

EXT. SOVIET APARTMENT COMPLEX - LATE AFTERNOON

From afar and then at close range, we see a big, sterile Soviet apartment complex. It is composed of a dozen identical gray apartment towers about 20 stories high. Each apartment has a balcony, but there is nothing on display on the balconies to make any apartment seem unique. Clearly, this complex is little more than a warehouse for workers.

NATASHA arrives at the apartment complex on her MOTORCYCLE. She parks her bike beside one of the apartment buildings. With a heavy chain she secures the frame and back wheel of the MOTORCYCLE to a pillar of the building.

CUT TO:

INT. FAMILY APARTMENT

NATASHA enters the door of her family's cramped and dimly-lit apartment. A black-and-white television is showing the evening news report, and we hear the monotonous voice of the news anchor reciting statistics on industrial production.

From a bedroom, the STEP-MOTHER calls out...

STEP-MOTHER (V.O.)
(in Russian)

Natali, is that you?

NATASHA
(reluctantly)

Da.

STEP-MOTHER (V.O.)

That nice Shevchenko boy called for you again. I really think you should talk to him. His parents are party members, you know.

NATASHA doesn't answer.

NATASHA goes to her small bedroom. We see that the walls of her bedroom are completely covered with posters and images of sexy-looking motorcycles. She puts away her helmet and leather jacket then goes into the kitchen.

In the kitchen, a TODDLER is sitting in a high-chair, messily eating his dinner. NATASHA catches the TODDLER's eye, and they both smile. NATASHA plays with the TODDLER. They communicate with each other with their eyes and gestures without either of them saying a word.

STEP-MOTHER (V.O.)

Dinner is almost ready. I don't know where your father is. I think we'll start without him.

The STEP-MOTHER comes into the kitchen. She is a middle-aged Russian woman, unremarkable in appearance and with no special bond with NATASHA. Both she and NATASHA go about getting dinner on the table. They are just sitting down to eat when the apartment door opens and the FATHER steps in. He is carrying a box under his arm, about a foot long.

FATHER
(cheerfully)

Hello there!

NATASHA

Hi, papa.

STEP-MOTHER

You're late.

FATHER

I had an errand to run. Just some equipment to pick up.

The FATHER is wearing greasy overalls and apparently works as a mechanic of some kind. Without embarrassment, he strips down to his underwear in the living room and puts on some clean clothes that are folded beside the door.

NATASHA looks morose and withdrawn. She is rearranging the food on her plate but not eating any.

The TODDLER needs something, so the STEP-MOTHER gets up from the table and leaves the kitchen to get it.

STEP-MOTHER (V.O.)

I hope it's not something for that motorcycle. I don't think you should be encouraging Natali. That's a dangerous machine.

The FATHER makes sure that the coast is clear, then he hands the box to NATASHA. He face brightens up like a child on Christmas.

She opens the box quickly, and it's a...

A motorcycle part! It is hard to say what it is exactly, but NATASHA is clearly thrilled.

FATHER
(whispering)

Don't ask me how I got it.

The STEP-MOTHER comes back into the room, and NATASHA quickly stashes the box under the dinner table. When the STEP-MOTHER sits down at the table again, both NATASHA and her FATHER have smirks on their faces. They exchange knowing glances. They clearly have a language with each other that the STEP-MOTHER doesn't understand.

STEP-MOTHER

I was telling Natali that the Shevchenko boy called. I don't see anything wrong with him, and his parents are very well connected.

NATASHA abruptly gets up from the table.

NATASHA

Got to go.

STEP-MOTHER

But you haven't even eaten anything!

NATASHA gives her father a kiss on the cheek, as she races out of the room with the box.

STEP-MOTHER

I don't know what's wrong with that girl.

CUT TO:

EXT. AN EMPTY ROAD

We're on an empty road on the outskirts of this Soviet industrial city. There are no cars or people visible apart from NATASHA working on her MOTORCYCLE on the side of the road. With enormous care and concentration, she attaches the new part to the outside of her bike's engine. It isn't clear what the part is supposed to do, but NATASHA is very focused on making it work.

She finishes her work, puts on her helmet and kick-starts the bike. It roars to life, even louder than before. She cautiously rides the bike back and forth few yards, testing the part.

She looks down the road, notes that it is empty, and decides to see what her bike can do. She guns the engine and the MOTORCYCLE takes off at enormous speed -- so fast that the front wheel lifts off the ground and does an extended wheelie.

A quarter mile down the road, NATASHA brings the bike to a stop, her adrenaline pumping. Wow! Whatever the new part is supposed to be, it makes her bike go FAST!

NATASHA notices that beside the road is an earthen levee, apparently to prevent flooding from the stream just beyond. The levee forms a natural jump ramp. NATASHA decides to give it a shot.

NATASHA guns the engine and the MOTORCYCLE takes off. It hits the ramp just right, and the bike sails over the stream. It's a breathtaking jump -- almost at the limit of credibility. The MOTORCYCLE cleanly hits the opposite embankment with no loss of control.

NATASHA stops the bike, takes off her helmet and looks back at the stream, marveling at what she has just done.

FADE OUT

FADE IN TO:

EXT. SOVIET APARTMENT COMPLEX - MORNING

It is early morning outside the anonymous apartment building where NATASHA lives. The door of the building opens and NATASHA comes out. She goes to where her MOTORCYCLE is parked only to find...

The front wheel is missing!

The frame and back wheel of the MOTORCYCLE had been attached to a pillar of the building with a heavy chain, but NATASHA had evidently failed to loop the chain through the front wheel.

NATASHA is pissed! She kicks a wall in anger. She backs away from the bike and looks around the area for any signs of her front wheel.

Underneath the eaves of a neighboring apartment building, a NEIGHBOR WOMAN sees NATASHA's distress and discreetly motions her over. When NATASHA reaches the NEIGHBOR WOMAN, the neighbor beckons her even closer.

NEIGHBOR WOMAN
(whispering)

It was the Kimberli brothers. I saw them. Don't tell anyone I told you.

The two of them look up at a third apartment building across the way. The Kimberli brothers apparently live on about the 7th floor of this building.

Seething with anger, NATASHA marches toward this building. Nobody messes with her bike!

She reaches the front door, tries to open it, but it is locked. She bangs the door with her fist. Then she calms down, backs up and looks straight up the front of the building. She sees a series of balconies leading up the side of the building.

Studying the side of building, NATASHA does some mental calculations. Then she stands still and composes herself.

Then she jumps!

She grabs the floor of the lowest balcony, then swings herself up to the railing. Her motions are fluid and seem almost effortless. She must have done this sort of thing before!

Perfectly balanced on the railing of the first balcony, she reaches for the floor of the second. After a series of elegant and perfectly timed motions, she is now balanced like a cat on the railing of the second balcony.

Across the courtyard, the NEIGHBOR WOMAN can see what she is doing.

NATASHA climbs higher and higher. Although she is repeating the same disciplined motions for each balcony, the act seems more and more death-defying the higher she goes. There is no room for error here, and NATASHA makes none.

She reaches the 7th floor and hops down from the railing to the balcony floor. She squats low and peers

through the sliding glass window, which is partly open.

She sees exactly what she is looking for: her front wheel. It is propped against a wall inside the apartment. Beside the wheel is a closed door. The sounds and shadows coming from under the door suggest it is probably a bathroom with someone inside. On the other side of the closed door, we see a black-and-white television set sitting on a shelf. It is turned on and is playing some sort of daytime drama.

After a moment of analysis, NATASHA slips silently through the sliding door and into the apartment.

CUT TO:

INT. KIMBERLI APARTMENT

Once inside the apartment, NATASHA wastes no motions. She doesn't go directly to the wheel but instead goes to the television. She fishes for the power cord behind the set, and draws it gently out, without disconnecting the television. The cord is longer than necessary, so NATASHA has some space to work with. She wraps the cord several times around the doorknob.

Then she grabs the wheel and moves out silently to the balcony again.

CUT TO:

EXT. BALCONY

NATASHA flings the wheel over the edge of the balcony. It is spinning, so it remains vertical as it falls. It seems to take forever to reach the ground. When it gets there it bounces a couple of times then comes to a soft landing in some bushes.

As effortlessly a cat, NATASHA hops up to the top of the balcony's railing. She stands there for a moment, perfectly balanced.

Then she steps to one side and drops!

She cleanly catches the railing of the next-lower balcony and uses her momentum to propel herself to a

neighboring balcony on the same level, then she pushes off from that balcony to another balcony one floor below. This sequence of maneuvers is performed the same for each floor. The moves are perfectly choreographed, with no wasted energy and no margin for error.

In a matter of seconds, NATASHA jumps down the ground, then she goes to the bushes to retrieve her wheel.

CUT TO:

INT. KIMBERLI APARTMENT

We are looking at the closed bathroom door as NATASHA left it. Where the front tire was, there is now only a blank wall. On the other side of the doorway, the television is still playing, and its power cord is still wrapped around the door knob.

We hear a toilet flush.

We hear a faucet running as the person inside washes their hands.

Then the door opens. The electrical cord is pulled taught, and the television starts to move off the shelf.

CUT TO:

INT. COURTYARD OF SOVIET APARTMENT COMPLEX

At ground level, NATASHA has retrieved her front wheel and is walking with it back to her crippled bike.

A sudden "CRASH" can be heard from the 7th floor of the apartment building behind her. It is followed by an anguished scream.

RESIDENT OF KIMBERLI APARTMENT
(V.O.)

Agggggh!

Without looking back, NATASHA smiles quietly to herself with the satisfaction of justice served.