

ORPHANS FOR THE CZAR

by

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Suggested by

The Life of a Useless Man

By

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SCENE 1

1905. A Russian village near St. Petersburg. Vasley and Rayisha sit on a makeshift bench. He is unkempt. She is blind.

RAYISHA
The sun is almost down.

VASLEY
Almost, yes.

RAYISHA
Now comes the darkness.

VASLEY
Yes, but first there's dusk.

RAYISHA
The half light. Yes. What's it like?

VASLEY
Well it's the half light. So there's... half the light. Can you imagine that?

RAYISHA
How can I imagine half of something I've never seen. Maybe if you describe it.

VASLEY
I doubt that will help.

RAYISHA
Try. Please.

VASLEY
Well there's a kind of glow along the horizon.

RAYISHA
What's that look like?

VASLEY
The glow?

RAYISHA
Yes. And the horizon.

VASLEY

The horizon is the end of what can
be seen. And a glow is... it's...

Yakov walks past them with an animal carcass on his
shoulders. He thinks about stopping to say something, but
decides to keep walking.

RAYISHA

That was Yakov?

VASLEY

Yes.

RAYISHA

I smelled blood.

VASLEY

He killed a small deer.

RAYISHA

I've heard there aren't many deer
left.

VASLEY

It's true. We're probably all going
to starve to death.

RAYISHA

A whole village starving to death.
Who would allow that to happen?

VASLEY

Who would stop it?

She thinks about that. Then...

RAYISHA

Do you think Yakov will share the
meat from his kill?

VASLEY

Not with me.

RAYISHA

You're probably right. Why does he
dislike you so much?

VASLEY

He doesn't dislike me any more than
the other boys do. He just hits the
hardest.

RAYISHA

Vasley. Does it bother you that so many people don't like you?

VASLEY

Only when I'm hungry and there's no one around I can beg from.

RAYISHA

But doesn't it make you sad?

VASLEY

Many things make me sad. You for example.

RAYISHA

I make you sad because I'm blind?

VASLEY

Because you're blind *and* poor.

RAYISHA

I'm no poorer than you are.

VASLEY

But there's a small chance I might not always be poor. While you...

RAYISHA

Will never be able to see.

VASLEY

Yes. But in some way that makes you lucky.

RAYISHA

How?

VASLEY

Well you'll never be able to see how ugly the world really is.

RAYISHA

You mean some of it.

VASLEY

I mean all of it.

RAYISHA

That's not true. People have described some of its beauty to me.

VASLEY

They've been lying.

RAYISHA

Why would they do that?

VASLEY

Because they think it will make you feel better. But I know it just makes you feel worse. So I'm going to tell you the truth about the world, and that way you'll feel much better about not having to look at it. I'll start with the sky.

RAYISHA

They say it's bright blue.

VASLEY

And what does that mean to you?

RAYISHA

It sounds nice.

VASLEY

Without ever having seen anything blue?

RAYISHA

They sound happy when they say it.

VASLEY

They're happy because they feel good about themselves. They think they've helped the blind girl by lying to her. The sky is almost never bright blue. It's usually a dull dirty grey which after awhile makes people want to kill themselves. You're lucky you can't see it. Trust me. And you're lucky you don't have to look at the people who are lying to you as well. Because they're hideous.

RAYISHA

Hideous?

VASLEY

It means very ugly.

RAYISHA

I know that.

VASLEY

Well you were never in school much and you can't read, so I thought you didn't. Anyway they are. In spite of their good intentions they're just as ugly as the rest of us.

RAYISHA

All the people in our village are ugly?

VASLEY

Oh yes. Hollow empty eyes. Crooked noses. Dirty blistered faces. Every one of them.

RAYISHA

Including you?

VASLEY

Well I've never had the courage to look at myself in the mirror. But I assume so.

RAYISHA

And what about me?

VASLEY

You look like your mother. And she's one of the ugliest women around here.

RAYISHA

I don't believe you. My mother's voice is sweet and full of love.

VASLEY

So what? Sweet loving voices are all that mothers have to offer now. They can't feed us properly or save us when we're very ill. And they usually die early and leave us in horrible circumstances.

RAYISHA

Like yours did.

VASLEY

Yes. But at least I don't have to look at her anymore. Because she was almost as ugly as you and your mother.

RAYISHA

No... I don't think that's true. I don't feel ugly.

VASLEY

Well why should you be the exception. There's nothing but ugliness around you. In the people, in the sky, even in the animals. All the animals around here who haven't already starved look like demons. Sunken terrified eyes. Skin sagging from their bones. Trust me, you're very lucky that you can't see any of them. Or anything else.

RAYISHA

No...

VASLEY

It's true...

RAYISHA

(crying)

No. It's not. It can't be.

She starts off, stumbles and falls. Vasley tries to help her up.

RAYISHA (CONT'D)

No. Leave me alone.

(pushing him away)

Leave me!

She gets up. Rushes off, almost bumping into Yakov on the way in.

YAKOV

Whoa there.

He corrects her course, and pushes her gently off.

YAKOV (CONT'D)

If she stays steadily in that direction she should make it home okay.

VASLEY

Very generous of you.

YAKOV

What did you do to her?

VASLEY

Nothing.

YAKOV

You didn't hurt her? Or touch her in some way?

VASLEY

You mean in a way that you would have.

YAKOV

It's because you say things like that--

VASLEY

That you beat me so often?

YAKOV

I beat you to teach you. You have no one else to guide you.

VASLEY

I have my uncle.

YAKOV

An uncle who only talks very patiently and kindly to you. And what good does that do. You still cause trouble. What trouble did you just cause Rayisha?

VASLEY

She's sad about being blind. So I tried to make her feel better about it.

YAKOV

By upsetting her.

VASLEY

For now. But what I said could help her in the long run. Do you want to know what it was?

YAKOV

I think I'll have to beat you for whatever it was.

VASLEY

Okay. But wait a day or two. Let yesterday's bruises heal and then you can enjoy giving me some new ones.

YAKOV

How many times do I have to tell you. I don't beat you for enjoyment. I'm trying to knock some sense into you.

VASLEY

I think it's probably a little of both.

YAKOV

(advancing)
Defend yourself.

VASLEY

Why bother?

YAKOV

You should keep trying. You might get better at it.

VASLEY

No please just get on with it. My aunt will be waiting for me to clean up after their supper.

YAKOV

Their supper? You're not allowed to eat with them?

VASLEY

She says the sight of me turns her stomach.

YAKOV

Well maybe if you bathed occasionally, things would be better for you,

VASLEY

I'm an orphan. Things are exactly how they're supposed to be for me. So are you going to beat me or not?

YAKOV

I'm not in the mood anymore...

VASLEY

Then if you'll excuse me...
(a mocking bow)
I'll be on my way.

Vasley starts off.

YAKOV

Vasley.

VASLEY

(stopping)

Yes?

YAKOV

Leave Rayisha alone. She has enough
to worry about without having to
deal with all the strange things
that come out of your mouth.

Vasley leaves. Yakov just watches him go.

SCENE 2

Vasley watches as his Uncle Piotr pounds out a horse shoe on an anvil.

PIOTR

What did you do to upset that girl?
Everyone's talking about it.

VASLEY

I went too far, I guess.

PIOTR

You touched her? You had no right
to touch her. The agreement around
here is that no one touches her.

VASLEY

Because she's blind?

PIOTR

Well how would you like to be
touched if you were blind?

VASLEY

Wouldn't that depend who was
touching me?

PIOTR

So you did touch her.

VASLEY

No. I said things.

PIOTR

What things?

VASLEY

I described the world in a certain
way. I was trying to make her feel
better about being blind.

PIOTR

Who are you to be doing that?
You're no one.

VASLEY

I know that.

PIOTR

You've read some books, and we're all very impressed. But you're still no one.

VASLEY

You're right. It just came to me that I should try to make her satisfied with her lot in life.

PIOTR

Who says she isn't?

VASLEY

She's always bumping into things. Wandering off, getting lost.

PIOTR

Not as much as she used to.

VASLEY

Even so...

PIOTR

Be quiet. You made a mistake, and the opinion is that you should be beaten for it.

VASLEY

By whom?

PIOTR

Anyone who wants to.

VASLEY

Do you want to?

PIOTR

No. I'm too busy.

VASLEY

Well Yakov is always available.

PIOTR

That's true. But the truth is, beatings really don't help someone like you, do they. You can read books, but nothing practical ever sinks in with you.

VASLEY

Is it supposed to help anyone. A beating, I mean. Isn't inflicting pain the only point?

PIOTR
I'm too busy to continue this
conversation.

VASLEY
Who is that horseshoe for?

PIOTR
Someone with a horse.

VASLEY
No one in this village owns a horse
anymore.

PIOTR
Someone might pass through. Why are
you standing so far away.

VASLEY
I'm afraid of hot things.

PIOTR
Well at least you have that much
sense. Will you be upsetting that
girl again?

VASLEY
Not intentionally. How was supper.

PIOTR
Good. Root vegetables and chicken
fat. We saved you some.

VASLEY
You mean you did. Your wife doesn't
care if I ever eat again.

PIOTR
Well none of us will be eating for
much longer unless we get help
soon. No one seems to know we
exist.

VASLEY
Except us.

PIOTR
What?

VASLEY
Well we know we exist. So that's--

PIOTR

I meant no one besides us. And I'm sure you knew that. So what was the purpose of that ridiculous thing you just said.

VASLEY

I'm not sure there was a purpose. It was just something that-

PIOTR

Maybe you could help with that.
(off his look)
Letting the authorities know about out dire circumstances. Get yourself off to Petersburg and tell the Czar's people that there's a village not too far away where the crops have failed, most of the livestock has died of various diseases and the people are losing their will to live. Actually leave that last part out. It sounds too...

VASLEY

Poetic.

PIOTR

What?

VASLEY

It sounds insincere and a little clever. It might just annoy them. I can tell them the rest though. I'll go tomorrow.

PIOTR

Are you sure?

VASLEY

Yes. Maybe it will feel good to do something useful.

PIOTR

I know someone who could put you up. He's my half brother... or so he says. You might have to let him beat you from time to time though.

VASLEY

(leaving)
Of course.

Piotr yells after him.

PIOTR

I'm not sure about that. I'm just
saying be prepared!

SCENE 3

Bookshop. Sloppy piles of books and a cot in the corner.

Vasley enters, stands there and looks around.

VASLEY

Hello. Hello! Is anyone here?!

The Master is just a voice from upstairs.

MASTER

Yes! *I'm* here!

VASLEY

Oh. Well... hello!

MASTER

Yes yes, hello. Are you the boy my cousin sent?

VASLEY

You mean your half brother.

MASTER

Right, half brother. So you are then?

VASLEY

Yes. That's me.

MASTER

So you're here. You actually came.

VASLEY

Yes. I came. I'm here.

MASTER

Good. So you can get right to work then.

VASLEY

Yes. Doing what?

MASTER

This is a bookshop.

VASLEY

Yes. I see.

MASTER

You see. And do you see if the books look ready to sell?

VASLEY

They're in piles. Are you selling them in piles?

MASTER

No of course not. They were being sorted.

VASLEY

Sorted.

MASTER

Separated. Into categories, for example.

VASLEY

I see.

MASTER

And do you see that the job wasn't finished?

VASLEY

If you say that, I see that.

MASTER

I was in the process of doing that when I fell ill. So that's your first task.

VASLEY

And that would be a useful thing for me to do?

MASTER

Well why else would I ask you to do it? Put them in order. I was told you could read.

VASLEY

Yes. I read well.

MASTER

That's nothing to brag about. They're teaching most people to read these days. They probably haven't recognized the danger in that yet. They just hoped it would make the wheels of commerce turn more quickly. Where was I?

VASLEY

You asked if I could read.

MASTER

Yes. And you can, so you should have no problem with the task then. Alphabetical order by title in groups of similar content. History. Agriculture. The Law. And so on.

VASLEY

Is there a wage?

MASTER

Eventually. Perhaps. But for now there's just room and board.

VASLEY

Okay. So... where is it?

MASTER

Where's what?

VASLEY

My room.

MASTER

That was just an expression actually. You'll sleep on the cot. Are you content with that?

VASLEY

If that's what it is, then that's what it is.

MASTER

Spoken like a true Russian peasant.

VASLEY

Thank you.

MASTER

Come on now. It wasn't a compliment. Later a woman will arrive and cook us supper. We'll eat up here because the stairs are difficult for me.

VASLEY

Do you want me to come up so you can take a look at me?

MASTER

Why? Is there something exceptional about your appearance?

VASLEY

I don't think so.

MASTER

Just stay where you are then. And after I've asked you some questions you can get to work. These are professional questions meant to determine if you'll be able to remain impartial about the material we sell here. Ready?

VASLEY

Yes. No. No, yes.

MASTER

Good God. What's wrong with you?

VASLEY

Nothing. Not really. Go ahead.

MASTER

All right. First off, do you have strong feelings?

VASLEY

Feelings?

MASTER

Opinions. Do you have passionate opinions about anything?

VASLEY

No...

MASTER

Are you sure? The overall condition of the population, for example.

VASLEY

You mean the poor?

MASTER

That's what I just said.

VASLEY

You said the population.

MASTER
And isn't the population by in
large poor?

VASLEY
I don't know.

MASTER
You don't?

VASLEY
Not for sure.

MASTER
Well then here's some news for you.
They are! And now that you know
that, do you care?

VASLEY
I don't think so. Well no more than
they care about me, which is not at
all. Besides, I'm not in a position
to care about anyone except myself.
Maybe I would if I had time and
sufficient comfort to consider all
the--

MASTER
But moving on. Do you have strong
opinions about the church.

VASLEY
No. But I like to sing hymns.

MASTER
In a choir.

VASLEY
Yes. I like how it makes me feel.

MASTER
And how is that.

VASLEY
Both very big and very small.

MASTER
At the same time?

VASLEY
Yes.

MASTER

Interesting. What about God. I ask that separately from the church question because they're not the same thing.

VASLEY

I don't know about God.

MASTER

Do you mean you don't believe in God?

VASLEY

No I mean I don't know anything about God including whether I believe in him or not.

MASTER

Talking to you is making me tired for some reason. So just get to work and do your best for now.

VASLEY

What about the customers?

MASTER

What about them?

VASLEY

I mean what about the prices. Are they written in the books.

MASTER

Of course not. That would be outrageously vulgar.

VASLEY

Oh. But when they want a book how am I to know what to charge them?

MASTER

You don't charge them anything. When they want a book they usually pay what they think it's worth.

VASLEY

Suppose they say they don't think it's worth anything. I should just let them take it anyway?

MASTER

Why would they want to take a book they didn't think was worth anything?

VASLEY

Suppose they're lying.

MASTER

Suppose they're lying because they're poor. Listen, let them take it no matter what they say, all right. Unless you want to get into a fist fight about it.

VASLEY

Suppose they pay for the book and after they've read it, they decide it's worth less than they paid or even worth nothing. Should I give them all or part of their money back?

MASTER

Well that would be carrying it a bit far, don't you think?

VASLEY

So no refunds then. But also no fist fights. I think I've got it.

MASTER

What's your name again?

VASLEY

Vasley. Vasley Klimkov.

MASTER

You're a puzzle, aren't you Vasley Klimkov. The impression you've given from this short conversation is that you're both somewhat intelligent and also in many ways very very stupid. What did the people back in your village think about you.

VASLEY

Oh. I'm pretty sure they thought I was just stupid.

MASTER

Well as long as you're here, try not to prove them right.

VASLEY

I will.

He starts to look through the piles of books.

SCENE 4

Book shop. Later. Vasley is asleep on the cot. Olga is browsing through the piles. Finds a book. Starts to look through it. Something in it makes her laugh. Vasley stirs. Sits up.

OLGA

Oh. Sorry. I didn't mean to--

VASLEY

What was it?

OLGA

Excuse me?

VASLEY

You laughed.

OLGA

Yes.

VASLEY

At me?

OLGA

No.

VASLEY

It's all right. I'm used to it.

OLGA

But I wasn't-- People laugh at you so much you've gotten used to it?

VASLEY

Well what other choice do I have?

OLGA

No I mean why do they-- Anyway I wasn't laughing at you. Something in this book reminded me of--

VASLEY

(looking over at it)

It's in French. You read French?

OLGA

Of course.

(chuckling)

Or how could I-- I'm sorry.

VASLEY

For what?

OLGA

Laughing.

VASLEY

Like I said, I'm used to it.

OLGA

No it bothered you. I could tell.
If you'd like some advice...

VASLEY

I'd be honoured to receive anything
from you. Advice or even severe
criticism.

OLGA

(an odd look)

Oh. Well I was just going to
suggest that if you thought a
little before you spoke then-- Look
you can go back to sleep if you
like. I'll just continue to browse.

VASLEY

No.

OLGA

I can't browse?

VASLEY

I can't sleep. I'm in charge of
these books.

OLGA

Since when?

VASLEY

Today. The Master has fallen ill.

OLGA

I know. I'm a regular customer. I
usually just come in, look around
and leave money for whatever I
take. You call him Master?

VASLEY

I shouldn't?

OLGA

He's your employer. Not your owner.

VASLEY

Well if he ever starts paying me
I'll start using his name.

OLGA

He doesn't pay you anything?

VASLEY

He says he might eventually.

OLGA

Do you want me to have a word with
him about that?

VASLEY

What word would that be?

OLGA

I'll just appeal to his sense of
fair play. I know he has one. Deep
down.

VASLEY

So you know him well.

OLGA

I've been coming here since I
started university.

VASLEY

Oh. University. They allow women?
(off her look)
I mean of course they do.

OLGA

I'm sure most of the professors
don't like it, but--

VASLEY

What's wrong with him? My...
employer. What illness does he
have?

OLGA

Syphilis...
(off his look)
The pox?

VASLEY

Oh. Is he horrible to look at then?

OLGA

You haven't seen him?

VASLEY

Not yet.

OLGA

Well you better prepare yourself.

VASLEY

It's that bad, is it?

OLGA

He's not actually disfigured yet. I suppose I was suggesting you ready yourself for what's to come.

VASLEY

Maybe I should just leave. I might not react well to that.

OLGA

That kind of thing offends you?

VASLEY

No but it sometimes amuses me.

(off her look)

I mean I get caught off guard and my responses aren't always... correct.

OLGA

I can understand that.

VASLEY

You can't...

(to himself)

Thank God...

OLGA

Anyway, it's going to happen gradually, so you'll have time to get used to it.

(hands him several coins)

Here. For the book.

VASLEY

This is a lot of money.

OLGA

Is it?

VASLEY

Well for something that's not food or clothing. So you think you'll like the book then?

OLGA

I've read it already. I lent my copy to a friend who never returned it.

VASLEY

Not much of a friend.

OLGA

I don't mind. It's helping him understand some important things.

VASLEY

What's it about? The book?

OLGA

It's about changing the world.

VASLEY

All of it.

OLGA

One place at a time. But yes, eventually the whole world.

She starts out.

VASLEY

Will you be coming back anytime soon?

OLGA

(stops)

Probably. And when I come back will you be looking at me the same way you are now?

VASLEY

I don't...

OLGA

You're very young. But even so, the way you look at me is... actually quite exciting.

She smiles. Leaves. He just watches her go. Eyes wide open.

VASLEY

Exciting...

SCENE 5

Makarov waits under a street light. He checks his watch. Looks at us. Thinks. Then...

MAKAROV

I seem to have some time on my hands, so let me tell you something about what's going on. It's 1905 and Russia has fallen into a pit of despair. The people, as usual, are hungry, angry, confused, vulnerable and deeply apprehensive. Not all of us of course. Some of us have sufficient resources to withstand most of the chaos and terror that's about to erupt and therefore don't care that much at all. But the people in general, let's call them peasants... because that best describes their unmatched ignorance about anything beyond their limited vision and also to some degree, their odour... The "peasants" have recently decided that they have definitely and even passionately had enough! Having been driven, ironically, to that conclusion by not having enough. Not enough food. Not enough land. Not enough hope. Not nearly enough power to get more food or land. And not enough knowledge to even understand what hope and power really are. So... they are now in the process of turning into filthy vermin that sniff and scratch at the ground and wild beasts that howl pathetically in the darkness. Unthinking, unknowing, looking for any form of comfort, ready to be led by anyone who needs to have a crowd following behind him. Anyone with knowledge of a certain kind. Born from a worthless education full of faulty foreign grown ideologies. These "anyones," these people, let's call them... shit disturbers, because that is literally what they are, have made themselves the "leaders" of the coming insurrection. And it's them who need to be watched.

(MORE)

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

Constantly. And very closely. Which is what *I* do. That is, when I can find enough people with half a brain to help me.

Sasha approaches.

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

Ah. Here comes half a brain now.

SASHA

Good evening, brother.

MAKAROV

You're late. And don't call me brother.

SASHA

I'm sorry. I can't help feeling a certain kinship with you.

MAKAROV

I'm your boss. There is no kinship. There are only my orders and your obedience. For example, when I tell you to be at a certain place at a certain time--

SASHA

I was on duty.

MAKAROV

You mean you were watching that doctor?

SASHA

Yes.

MAKAROV

So where was he?

SASHA

At home.

MAKAROV

And how long had he been there?

SASHA

Several hours.

MAKAROV

Did he have any visitors.

SASHA

No.

MAKAROV

Was the house still lit?

SASHA

No. All dark.

MAKAROV

So you were watching a man asleep in his own bed then. And you were so intent on that task that you forgot you had a place to be. Someone to meet. Or did you fall asleep yourself, leaning against a fence perhaps?

SASHA

You saw?

MAKAROV

No.

SASHA

You were told then.

MAKAROV

No. I neither saw nor was told.

SASHA

Then it was just a lucky guess. Good for you. But that's never gonna happen again, Boss.

MAKAROV

Meaning what? That you won't fall asleep on the job or that you won't let me trick you into admitting it?

SASHA

Both. I mean either one. I mean *neither* one. I mean the first one. No more sleeping. I mean when I shouldn't be. But here's the thing, I was very tired and--

MAKAROV

Shh. I'm going to tell you something, and now that you're refreshed from your nap, I'm hoping you'll be able to take in all I say and remember it very very clearly.

SASHA

Absolutely.

MAKAROV

I need you to be better. Things are happening very quickly, and we need more information if we want to be prepared for all that's coming.

SASHA

I couldn't agree more.

MAKAROV

Your agreement is another example of something I don't require. Just pay attention to what I'm saying. You need more sources. Many more. And much better ones.

SASHA

Yes. All right. And how should I find them?

MAKAROV

You're not expected to find them. We'll find them. You'll manage them.

SASHA

Sure. All right. But suppose I find one myself.

MAKAROV

Well if by some miracle you pull that off then--

SASHA

That will be a feather in my cap?

MAKAROV

Probably a small feather. But in the meantime there's a bookshop. People that we need to know more about go there.

SASHA

Why?

MAKAROV

To get books.

SASHA

Of course. But for what other reason, is what I'm asking.

MAKAROV

There is no other reason, Sasha. Everything these people need to know about - and what to think about what they know about - is in those books. They are full of dangerous subversive thinking and we, the Czar's agents, need to know more about them.

SASHA

The books?

MAKAROV

The people.

SASHA

And the books.

MAKAROV

No! Just the people! We need to know who buys these books that recommend upsetting the established order. And that means you need to make contact, and recruit the owner of this shop. Can you do that?

SASHA

Is there money in the budget for a healthy bribe?

MAKAROV

You don't think you can recruit him just by appealing to his loyalty to our great leader. That was a joke by the way. So?

SASHA

So... what did I think about the joke?

MAKAROV

No. Are you sure you'll need money to bribe the owner.

SASHA

Only in case the joke fails.

MAKAROV

Hmm. Try that approach first. If that doesn't work apply pressure.

SASHA

You mean threats.

MAKAROV

Clearly. And if those don't work
use force.

SASHA

You mean a beating.

MAKAROV

Or two. And after that... if there
is still resistance we'll find the
money to give him.

SASHA

Good. Because some of these
merchants only respond to money.

MAKAROV

He's not a Jew if that's what
you're implying.

SASHA

I was. And he's not?

MAKAROV

No. Not all merchants are Jews. Not
all Jews are merchants. Not
everyone who likes money is a Jew.

SASHA

Oh...

MAKAROV

Many of us have other concerns.
Some of us are spies.

SASHA

So... you're a Jew. Okay. I didn't
know that. Have I offended you?

MAKAROV

Yes.

SASHA

Will I be punished at some point
for that.

MAKAROV

(leaving)
Perhaps.

Sasha tries to light a cigarette but is too nervous.

SCENE 6

Bookshop. Olga and her brother Zimin are browsing through the piles. Vasley can't take his eyes off Olga.

OLGA

Do you think you'll ever manage to get these organized?

VASLEY

Our cook quit. I've been busy taking care of the meals and all of his other needs.

ZIMIN

It doesn't matter. I kind of enjoy the randomness of it all.

OLGA

(to Vasley)

What other needs?

VASLEY

What?

OLGA

What else does Grisha need you to do?

VASLEY

That's the Master's name? Grisha? I don't like it. But don't tell him, okay.

OLGA

Do you have to clean as well as cook.

VASLEY

No. Well not yet.

OLGA

So what else then?

ZIMIN

Stop pestering him.

OLGA

I want to know.

(to Vasley)

So?

VASLEY
I can't tell you.

OLGA
Is it a secret?

VASLEY
I don't know. But I can't tell you
no matter what.
(gestures to Zimin)
I can tell *him*.

OLGA
Why him and not me?

VASLEY
Because of the way things are?

OLGA
What are you talking about?

ZIMIN
Olga. You're making him very
uncomfortable.

OLGA
I'm sorry. But I think it's stupid
that he can tell you something but
not--

ZIMIN
Shh...

OLGA
Don't tell me to shh.

ZIMIN
Please. Just let me...

He goes to Vasley. Leans in.

ZIMIN (CONT'D)
Go ahead. What is it that you do
for your "Master"?

Vasley whispers in his ear.

ZIMIN (CONT'D)
Right. That's what I thought.
(to Olga)
He procures for him.

OLGA
(To Vasley)
You disappoint me.

VASLEY
I do?

ZIMIN
Maybe he doesn't have a choice.

VASLEY
He's right.

OLGA
There's always a choice.

ZIMIN
Not if you want to keep your job.

VASLEY
He's right again.

OLGA
How often?
(off his look)
How often do you bring these poor
women to him?

VASLEY
Every Monday.

OLGA
Today's Monday. Is there someone up
there with him now?

ZIMIN
What's that to you?

OLGA
(to Vasley)
Is there?

VASLEY
Not yet. I'll go for her when it
gets dark.

OLGA
Why? Doesn't he want people to see
them come in. Are they actually
women.

ZIMIN
Instead of what? Men in disguise?

OLGA

Idiot.

(to Vasley)

Are they more like... girls?

VASLEY

When is a woman a girl.

OLGA

When she's under 18.

ZIMIN

Sixteen.

OLGA

No. Eighteen at least. Preferably
20.

(to Vasley)

How old are they usually?

VASLEY

Definitely not 20.

OLGA

(to Zimin)

Did you hear that? They're still
children. I'm going up there to
talk to him.

She starts off.

ZIMIN

Olga.

OLGA

(stopping)

What!?

ZIMIN

Don't!

OLGA

(to Zimin)

Don't. That's it? Don't!? ... The
old degenerate. And with his
...condition.

(to Vasley)

Does he warn them?

VASLEY

They all have it too. He has a list
of them and I--

OLGA
You go fetch them.

VASLEY
Well sometimes they're brought. Or just show up. But most times I go get them while the stew is simmering. Please, if you go up there he'll know I told you. And he'll beat me.

ZIMIN
Does he beat you often?

VASLEY
Never. But I'm pretty sure this would change that,.

ZIMIN
(to Olga)
We need to think this through.

OLGA
It's so wrong.

ZIMIN
Yes. But very common.

OLGA
Should that stop us from doing something?

ZIMIN
Only something rash.

He takes Olga's arm.

ZIMIN (CONT'D)
(to Vasley)
We'll talk about this, and let you know how to proceed.

VASLEY
Do we actually need to proceed?

OLGA
Definitely.
(shakes her head at him)
Very very disappointing.

She leaves. Zimin hangs back.

ZIMIN

(quietly to Vasley)
 Just to warn you, we probably won't
 come up with a solution. Nothing
 satisfactory anyway. Truth is, we
 haven't actually come up with a
 satisfactory solution to anything
 so far.

He leaves just as Sasha is entering.

SASHA

Who were they?

VASLEY

Who are you?

Sasha hits him in the face. He falls back into a pile off
 books.

SASHA

Your new boss.

MASTER

(from above)
 What the hell is going on down
 there!

SASHA

Tell him it's nothing.

VASLEY

(yelling up)
 Nothing. Everything is fine.

MASTER

(from above)
 I'm getting hungry!

Vasley just shrugs at Sasha.

MASTER (CONT'D)

Did you hear me?!

SASHA

Tell him yes.

VASLEY

Yes. I heard you. I'll start supper
 soon.

SASHA

But first you need to do something.

VASLEY
(to Master)
I have to do something first!

MASTER
What?!

VASLEY
(to Sasha)
What?

SASHA
You need to listen. I'm going to tell you what I want you to do and where I want you to go. And you need to listen to me very closely, okay.

MASTER
So what is it then. What do you need to do?! Answer me, dammit!

SASHA
Okay that's enough of this. That old man needs a good slap.

Sasha heads up stairs.

MASTER
What is this? Who are you?!

SASHA
No more questions!!

A slap. A groan.

MASTER
All right.
(whimpers)
But... who are you?

Another slap. Another groan.

SASHA
I said no more questions! Now be quiet, and let me finish my discussion with your clerk!

Sound of Sasha starting down the stairs. He enters.

SASHA (CONT'D)
Now where were we?

Sasha approaches Vasley.

Vasley stands.

VASLEY
(takes a step)
I was here.
(points)
And you were over there.

Sasha looks at him, puzzled. Gets closer, looks at him more closely.

SASHA
Are you being clever with me?

VASLEY
No, sir.

SASHA
No? Okay. So I'll ask you again.
Where were we?

VASLEY
Well I was definitely just here.
But you might have been closer to
the--

Sasah hits him again, and Vasley collapses.

SCENE 7

Makarov waits at a table in a tavern.

Sasha enters.

MAKAROV

Where is he?

SASHA

He's coming. He had to make excuses.

MAKAROV

To the owner?

SASHA

Yes.

MAKAROV

The owner should be the one he reports on most regularly.

SASHA

Because?

MAKAROV

Of his profession. Books are lechery, the children of prostituted minds. They excite imagination. Create useless agitation. That's our official position on the subject, by the way.

SASHA

Our position on... books.

MAKAROV

Yes.

Sasha takes out a pad.

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

What's that for?

SASHA

I think I should be writing this down.

MAKAROV

Why?

SASHA

These things you tell me could prove to be useful.

MAKAROV

Even though you don't actually understand them.

SASHA

I meant useful for me to say to other recruits. To keep them from...

MAKAROV

From what?

SASHA

Reading?

MAKAROV

All right then. Write this down as well. Books used to be valuable when they were about history. But new books inspire hostility towards life. Imagination destroys faith.

SASHA

And causes agitation.

(off his look)

That's what you said before. They cause--

MAKAROV

So you have a half decent memory. A good memory can compensate for low intelligence.

SASHA

I think so too.

MAKAROV

No you don't. You have no idea what it even means. Promise me you'll never read a book. Especially one of these new ones. It could only cause harm.

SASHA

To me?

MAKAROV

To everyone.

(to Audience)

(MORE)

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

Only old people should be allowed to read these new books because after a certain age the experience you have protects you from the discord and violence they propose. No one over fifty wants to live through more upheaval.

SASHA

Is that why they hurry up and die?

MAKAROV

I'm over fifty. Do I seem impatient to meet my end?

SASHA

You're different.

MAKAROV

Yes. Because I dream constantly about a better life.

Vasley is entering. There is a large bruise on his face. Makarov looks at Sasha.

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

Is that him?

SASHA

Yes.

MAKAROV

What a pathetic creature.

SASHA

Too pathetic to be of use?

MAKAROV

Absolutely not. You looked much the same when I found you.

SASHA

I'm pretty sure I didn't slouch so much.

(to Vasley)

Well come sit down. Why are you just standing there?

Makarov gestures to Vasley in a friendly manner. Vasley still hesitates a little.

MAKAROV

What happened to his face?

SASHA

I hit him.

MAKAROV

Why?

SASHA

To establish my authority. Just like you did to me.

MAKAROV

You were insolent. And full of yourself. This man is clearly somewhat broken already. Never do it again.

SASHA

Okay.

Vasley is at their table. He sits.

MAKAROV

I see you were able to get away.

VASLEY

He's busy now.

MAKAROV

He means his employer.

VASLEY

Yes. He's with someone.

MAKAROV

A customer?

VASLEY

She might take a book with her after they're done, I guess. But only to sell it. I don't think she can read.

MAKAROV

Done doing what?

VASLEY

What they do. Or what he does to her. I don't know what that is exactly.

MAKAROV

You don't?

VASLEY
Not in any...

MAKAROV
Detail?

VASLEY
Yes. I mean no.

MAKAROV
I see. Well do you want something
to drink?

VASLEY
No.

MAKAROV
Eat?

VASLEY
No...

SASHA
Thank you.

VASLEY
For what?

SASHA
Don't just say no to him. Say no
thank you.

MAKAROV
That's not necessary.
(to Vasley)
Do you know why you're here?

VASLEY
He told me to come. He told me
there'd be a lot more of this
(points to bruise)
...coming my way if I didn't.

MAKAROV
He was wrong. I assure you he'll
never say or do anything like that
to you again.

SASHA
Unless he deserves it. Like I did.

MAKAROV
Which I'm sure he won't.
(to Sasha)
You can go now.

SASHA
I can?

MAKAROV
Yes. Go wait outside. We'll talk
later.

SASHA
You don't think I should stay?

MAKAROV
No I think you should go.

SASHA
Suppose you say something I could
use later. I'd like to hear it.

MAKAROV
I'd like you to go. And it would
better for you to do that
immediately.

Makarov just looks at him. Sasha nods, leaves.

MAKAROV (CONT'D)
So you only came here to avoid a
beating.

VASLEY
Yes. Unless there was another
reason as well.

MAKAROV
I'm sorry?

VASLEY
I sometimes do things for reasons
that only become clear to me much
later. Why did you want me here?

MAKAROV
To talk to you about a job.

VASLEY
I already have a job.

MAKAROV
This is a better job. A more
important job.

VASLEY
So I'd be useful in some way?

MAKAROV
You'd be helping your country. Do you love your country?

VASLEY
No.

MAKAROV
You don't?

VASLEY
Why would I?

MAKAROV
Because it's part of your life. It protects you.

VASLEY
From who?

MAKAROV
Everyone who isn't here. People from other countries. Who want to come here and steal our valuable resources. The Germans. The English. Do you know anything about those peoples?

VASLEY
I know that the Germans speak German. And the English speak English.

MAKAROV
And imagining that they invade us one day soon, do you have any desire to speak either of those languages?

VASLEY
I don't think so.

MAKAROV
You don't think so?

VASLEY
I mean I don't... think about those things.

MAKAROV
What do you think about?

VASLEY
Food mostly. And heat.

MAKAROV
What about heat.

VASLEY
Cold. I'm afraid of the cold so I think a lot about heat.

MAKAROV
And food? You don't get enough of that?

VASLEY
Who does?

MAKAROV
I do. Would you like to have a job that would make sure you never have to worry about getting enough food or heat ever again.

VASLEY
Is that the kind of job you're offering me?

MAKAROV
I'm not offering anything. We're just talking. I'm telling you things. You're listening. I'll eventually ask you questions. You'll try to answer them. I'll guide you if you're having difficulty.
(to Audience)
We'll proceed in that manner and eventually I'll come to a decision about his suitability. You'll find out how it went soon enough. In the meantime...
(to Vasley)
Still don't want anything to eat or drink?

VASLEY
Do they serve anything here with meat in it.

MAKAROV
Everything here has meat in it.

VASLEY
Then I'll have some, yes.

MAKAROV

You'll have what exactly? The beef?
The mutton? The pork?

VASLEY

I have to choose?
(off his look)
It's been so long since I've had
very much of any of those things.

MAKAROV

Of course. I understand. You poor
fellow.

Makarov raises his hand for service,

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

(to Audience)
Pathetic? Yes. But he'll work out
just fine.

SCENE 8

The Village. Piotr in his blacksmith apron sits on the bench beside Rayisha who wears a a mourning scarf.

PIOTR

It came on her suddenly, didn't it.

RAYISHA

So many people are saying that to me.

PIOTR

Well what they... what we mean by that is it's good she didn't suffer.

RAYISHA

Except that she did.

PIOTR

But not for long. Some people suffer their entire lives, Rayisha. You, for example.

RAYISHA

I'm not in pain.

PIOTR

No no. But there are many types of suffering. You could be in for some very difficult times now. Did your mother make arrangements for your care?

RAYISHA

She never had time to do anything except keep us both alive.

PIOTR

So what will you do. How will you live?

RAYISHA

I probably won't for long.

PIOTR

You shouldn't give up just yet.

RAYISHA

No? So you'll let me know when I should then?

PIOTR

Of course. There's no point kidding ourselves when a situation has become hopeless. Has anyone offered assistance? Or advice?

RAYISHA

The priest suggested a convent.

PIOTR

Will you do that?

RAYISHA

No. I hate the church. Now that my poor mother is dead I can say that openly. She held onto her faith right to the end.

PIOTR

Well that's what some of us do.

RAYISHA

If it comes to relying on the church, I'd rather walk into the forest and let the wolves tear my flesh off.

PIOTR

You've been talking to Yakov.

RAYISHA

I've been listening to him. He understands more than he lets on.

PIOTR

You mean about the church.

RAYISHA

He thinks it offers us only false comfort.

PIOTR

True. But that's it's job.

RAYISHA

And he condemns it for asking us to accept all the ways we're mistreated by the higher ups who only serve the Czar.

PIOTR

But does he know how it feels to have your flesh torn off by a pack of wolves.

(MORE)

PIOTR (CONT'D)

I think you should take whatever little the church has to offer.

RAYISHA

Can I stay with you and your wife?

PIOTR

You'd be better off with the wolves. My wife has been driven insane by the heartache of several still births.

RAYISHA

I won't be any bother. I'll stay out of her way. And I can cook.

PIOTR

We eat very little, so that won't make your case. And even if it did, eventually she'd do something awful to you. I think we should get you to Petersburg.

RAYISHA

I can't survive there. How could I?

PIOTR

You probably can't. But there's a government apparatus there. There are officials in that apparatus. Maybe a few of them have even been directed to help people in need. And then there are the citizens. It would only take one of them to care enough to keep a blind person from dying on the street.

RAYISHA

So if I'm lucky then, and someone takes pity on me--

PIOTR

We'll try to get you set up somewhere. I'll send Yakov with you. He knows where Vasley is, and maybe between the two of them...

RAYISHA

Vasley scares me.

PIOTR

He would never do anything to harm you.

RAYISHA

It's not what he might do. It's how he *thinks*.

PIOTR

Yes that's a mystery for sure. Vasley was and always will be an orphan. A child left to his own devices becomes a man without an anchor. Nobody knows how or why he thinks or does anything. Including him.

Yakov is approaching from the distance, carrying a bag of coal.

RAYISHA

Is that Yakov approaching?

PIOTR

Yes.

RAYISHA

Don't force him to do this. He'll just resent me.

YAKOV

(near now)

I got the coal. But I think they'll be overcharging you for it.

PIOTR

Yes. So I'll be overcharging them for shoeing their horse if they ever get another one. That's how the system works.

YAKOV

Well then there's something wrong with the system, isn't there. People will eventually overcharge each other into the poorhouse.

PIOTR

You've been reading again, haven't you.

YAKOV

Yes. Vasley left a lot books behind. I don't know how he got them.

PIOTR

He got them from me. I have a source. And I thought the least I could do was help continue his education.

YAKOV

I'm not sure he read any of them.

RAYISHA

Or what he made of them if he did. They have a lot of very interesting things in them.

YAKOV

(to Piotr)

I've been reading some of them to her.

PIOTR

You should stop. Where you're both going... reading is still frowned upon by some people.

YAKOV

Where are we going?

PIOTR

To Petersburg. You're going to take her there and not come back until you've found a safe situation for her.

YAKOV

And if I can't?

PIOTR

Then don't bother coming back because you won't have a job here.

RAYISHA

(to Yakov)

He doesn't mean that.

YAKOV

I don't care if he does. I might not come back anyway. I'll get you into a good circumstance no matter how long it takes, and then maybe I'll try to find one for myself. You hear that, old man? I'm not going to help her because I *have* to, but because I *want* to.

PIOTR
Well good for you then.

YAKOV
Yes. Good for me.
(touches Rayisha's
shoulder)
We'll leave tomorrow. Pack lightly.
It's a long walk.

RAYISHA
We're going to walk?

PIOTR
I'll give you train fare.

RAYISHA
Thank you, Piotr.

YAKOV
Yes. Thank you, Piotr.

PIOTR
You can pay your own way.

YAKOV
Of course. I don't know what got
into me.

Yakov laughs and leaves. Rayisha hugs Piotr.

RAYISHA
I owe you my life.

PIOTR
Well let's just see how it turns
out.

SCENE 9

Tavern. Sasha has joined Vasley and Makarov at their table. Sasha takes notes while Makarov talks.

MAKAROV

They're all alike. They read the same things. Think and do the same things. They're the most predictably annoying generation ever. And there are so many of them. They preach liberty without ever considering its dangers. And they have never recognized this one undeniable truth: Submission to the law is essential to the survival of man.

(to Sasha)

Did you get all that?

SASHA

Yes. And thank you for allowing me to rejoin you.

MAKAROV

It occurred to me that it might be useful, like you said, to have someone who can clearly explain the logic of our actions. And be able to repeat the official jargon that goes along with it.

SASHA

So that I can tell the recruits.

MAKAROV

Or the court you'll be hauled in front of if things don't go our way. But we won't dwell on that. We need to concentrate on giving your new colleague practical guidance. Sasha, what to you is the most important thing you've learned about being an agent for the Department of Safety.

SASHA

Well for one thing, we can't arrest all the subversives, or we'll be out of a job.

(he laughs)

(MORE)

SASHA (CONT'D)

But that's really just a joke we share amongst ourselves.

MAKAROV

You've never shared it with me.

SASHA

I meant ourselves... lower down. Our lower down selves.

MAKAROV

Well whatever. It's a stupid joke.

SASHA

Absolutely, it is.
(to Vasley)
Forget it immediately.

MAKAROV

Except even in a stupid joke there might be some grain of accidental truth.

SASHA

I thought that too. That's why I--

MAKAROV

(to Vasley)
We can never know when the swamp has been entirely cleared. And you won't find out as much as you need to if you just keep dredging. You have to bring them to the surface. To the clear light of everyday life.

VASLEY

How?

MAKAROV

(to Sasha)
Tell him.

SASHA

Sure. But it'd be a lot better coming from you.

Makarov smiles. Pats Sasha on the head.

MAKAROV

(to Vasley)
Offer them unlimited support. We'll provide you with money to pass on to them.

(MORE)

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

Not too much or they'll become suspicious. And it's very important to always show enthusiasm for their beliefs. That way your questions about what they're up to will seem like you only want to know more about their cause.

SASHA

That's what I do.

MAKAROV

You mean since you stopped beating and murdering them.

SASHA

I've never mur--

(to Vasley)

Well once or twice but that's when I was new at it. And my habits from the past were hard to shake.

MAKAROV

He was a criminal. Part of the Streina Boys gang. Have you heard of them?

VASLEY

No.

MAKAROV

Killers and thieves. We recruited quite a few of them. The more uncivilized ones we eventually had to send off to the camps.

SASHA

And I sure didn't want that happening to me.

MAKAROV

So he worked hard to get house broken... Anyway the objective is to keep information flowing. For the time being you should stay in the bookshop, and get close to its regular customers. That couple who was leaving when Sasha here showed up...

VASLEY

They're brother and sister.

MAKAROV

All right. And what did you make of them?

VASLEY

I'm sorry. I don't--

MAKAROV

Are they the types that people would be drawn to?

VASLEY

I still don't--

MAKAROV

Are they just followers? Or could they be leaders?

VASLEY

She might be.

MAKAROV

Not him?

VASLEY

Well he'd follow *her*, I guess. But who wouldn't. She's very... very...

MAKAROV

Pretty? Sasha said she's pretty.

VASLEY

Yes. I think she is.

MAKAROV

You're not sure.

VASLEY

Well since I first met her I've been... I mean I don't have a clear picture of how she looks because when I see her I become a little dizzy and my eyesight gets--

SASHA

Dizzy? What are you, a child?

(to Makarov)

Dizzy...

VASLEY

(to Makarov)

Yes. She's pretty. And strong. Very strong too.

MAKAROV

(nodding)

Has she shown any interest in you,

VASLEY

She said she liked the way I looked at her. But then later she got annoyed with me.

MAKAROV

Because of how you were looking at her?

VASLEY

No because of something I'd rather not talk about.

SASHA

What was it?

MAKAROV

He doesn't want to talk about it.

SASHA

He's allowed to do that? There's nothing I won't talk about.

MAKAROV

You might consider reviewing that policy. I've heard more than enough about your digestive problems, for example.

(to Vasley)

Continue.

VASLEY

Well just when I was starting to be convinced she didn't want anymore to do with me, she brought me a new pair of socks. And a few days ago she made me soup.

SASHA

Sound like she pities you.

MAKAROV

Does she?

VASLEY

Yes. Probably.

MAKAROV

Well pity is better than nothing. Use it. Bring her closer to you.

(MORE)

MAKAROV (CONT'D)
(standing)
Sasha will be your handler.

VASLEY
What's that?

SASHA
Your boss.

MAKAROV
(to Vasley)
Your connection to me. When he
contacts you, just report anything
important to him.

VASLEY
And by important you mean...
useful.

MAKAROV
Exactly.
(extends a hand)
Welcome to our fraternity.

They shake.

Makarov leaves.

SASHA
An impressive man, isn't he?

VASLEY
He has a good voice. And I like the
way he sits.

SASHA
The way he sits?

VASLEY
Like he doesn't feel weakened by
it.

SASHA
Why should he feel weakened by
sitting?

VASLEY
I do. I feel at risk when I'm not
on my feet. Don't you?

SASHA
No. Well maybe. A little... Anyway
what did you make of everything he
told you?

VASLEY
(thinks)
It made me hungry.

Vasley stands and leaves.

Sasha watches him, then checks his notes.

SCENE 10

Yakov and Rayisha arrive during Bloody Sunday. They are trapped in a doorway with mayhem all around them. Shouting, screaming, gunfire, horses on the run. Rayisha has her head on his chest, cowering.

RAYISHA

What's going on?! What do you see?!

YAKOV

Horses trampling people. Soldiers shooting in all directions.

RAYISHA

And bombs going off, right.

YAKOV

Yeah at least two of them. Something has gone very wrong.

RAYISHA

We could be killed maybe. You think that could happen?

YAKOV

Who knows. Nice welcome eh.

RAYISHA

What should we do?

YAKOV

I don't know. Stay here and wait, I guess.

RAYISHA

For what?

YAKOV

For it to stop.

RAYISHA

Suppose it doesn't. Suppose it gets worse. What do we do then?

YAKOV

I don't know.

An explosion.

They both scream.

YAKOV (CONT'D)
You shouldn't scream like that.
It'll bring attention.

RAYISHA
You screamed too.

YAKOV
I did? Oh...

Another explosion. Yakov grabs her and they both fall to their knees. Cowering.

RAYISHA
This is horrible! What is this!?

YAKOV
I'm not sure! A riot? A strike? An uprising.

Another explosion very near them! Rayisha screams again.

RAYISHA
You didn't scream that time.

YAKOV
I wanted to.

More gunshots. Other people screaming.

RAYISHA
It sounds like the end of the world!!

Smoke. Lots of it.

FADE OUT ON THIS.

A LIGHT UP ON:

VASLEY SITTING ON HIS COT. HIS HANDS OVER HIS EARS. ROCKING SLOWLY BACK AND FORTH.

INTERMISSION

SCENE 11

The Bookshop. Vasley sweeps while the streets erupt in violence, and the Master yells at him from above.

MASTER

This is it! I told you this was coming. The people will find the truth no matter what dark corner it has been driven into. Do you remember me saying that.

VASLEY

No...

MASTER

What!?

VASLEY

No! I don't!!

MASTER

Well do you remember this? The masses will revolt from fear of starvation. The Czar's army will murder them from fear of what they'll do if they're *left* to starve. That was a prediction. Do you remember me making it. It was just last month I think. Well do you remember or not?!

A knock on the door. Vasley ignores it.

VASLEY

I remember something like that.

MASTER

"Something like that." Where's my supper?

VASLEY

It's too early,

MASTER

Says who. It's not too early if I'm hungry, is it. What are you doing down there anyway?

Another knock.

VASLEY
Sweeping the floor.

MASTER
Oh dear God. The streets are on
fire, and you're sweeping the
floor. You might be too stupid to
live through these times.

VASLEY
I was thinking that myself.

MASTER
What?!

VASLEY
You might be right!!

Another very very loud knock on the door. And another. Vasley
leaves.

MASTER
What's going on down there now?!

Vasley comes back leading a terrified Rayisha and a very
angry Yakov.

YAKOV
What the hell, man. Didn't you hear
us knocking?

VASLEY
That was you?

YAKOV
Who else would it be?

VASLEY
Anyone looking for shelter, I
suppose. Is she all right?

YAKOV
Does she look all right? She's
scared half to death.

RAYISHA
Please tell us what's going on out
there?

VASLEY
It's hard to know exactly.

YAKOV
The soldiers are shooting people.

VASLEY

Are you sure? Maybe they're just shooting in their general direction. Just trying to warn them.

RAYISHA

Warn them about what?

VASLEY

That... they need to stop what... they were doing.

YAKOV

And what was so bad about what they were doing? Are they on strike? Were they objecting to something?

VASLEY

Objecting... yes objecting. That's right.

RAYISHA

To what?

VASLEY

To what? Well--

RAYISHA

To working conditions?

YAKOV

To taxation levels? To the food supply?

(to Rayisha)

I bet it was the food supply. That always gets people going.

RAYISHA

Was it the food supply, Vasley.

VASLEY

Yes. Maybe. These have now become too many questions for me to answer. Let's just hope it all stops and we can get back to... whatever we were doing.

YAKOV

You mean sweeping the floor? What's wrong with you. You're talking like an idiot.

VASLEY

You don't know the pressure I'm under. It's hard to think straight under that kind of pressure.

YAKOV

People are being killed out there.

VASLEY

Well maybe that's better.

RAYISHA

Better than what?

VASLEY

Having to deal with things, decisions that are... too difficult to...

The Master is approaching from upstairs.

RAYISHA

Who's that coming?

VASLEY

You should leave.

YAKOV

Why?

VASLEY

Just leave.

YAKOV

And go where? We were told you could help us and we--

VASLEY

It's the Master.

YAKOV

The Master? You mean Piotr's uncle?

VASLEY

No. Half brother. And he's... he'll see her and think she's...

The Master enters in a soiled night gown. He is a very sickly version of Piotr.

MASTER

This was not supposed to happen until I was long dead. I can't be subjected to this in my condition.

(MORE)

MASTER (CONT'D)

I provided them with those books on the very strict condition that nothing would happen in the near future. Nothing like all that's going on outside at least. A few meetings. The exchange of information. The continued education of the oppressed. And eventually even the army. That would have been enough for now. Weren't they aware of the rumours about the positive things that are happening. That should have been enough for them to hold their horses. They're out there. Those rumours. Even my female companions have heard them. This one in particular should have been encouraging. It's about a cabal of ministers who might seize power from the Czar, and grant people the right to not believe in God. If that's not progress, what is. But oh no, there wasn't enough patience. Not enough faith in the ability to transform blind obedience into organized resistance. And this is what we get!

(to Vasley)

Give me a minute or two then...

(off Rayisha)

...send her up.

(starting up)

And that man who brought her. Give him a half ruble and send him on his way.

He is gone.

VASLEY

You have to leave. There's no sanctuary here

RAYISHA

Why does he want you to send me up to him?

YAKOV

Okay. You're in the city now. You can't ask stupid questions like that. Even though you have every right to.

Olga comes in supporting a wounded Zimin.

VASLEY
How'd you get in?

OLGA
The door was unlocked.

ZIMIN
You better go take care of that.

VASLEY
Yes... I will...

Vasley is trying to bring Olga into focus.

OLGA
Why are you blinking at me like that? Is there something wrong with your eyes?

VASLEY
No...

OLGA
So just stop it! And go make sure the door is locked!

VASLEY
Yes! I will!

OLGA
Right now!

He runs off.

ZIMIN
(to Yakov)
Quite a night, eh.

OLGA
Were you in the rear of the crowd?

YAKOV
No. We just arrived.

ZIMIN
(trying to breath)
Didn't you get... the pamphlet? The start time... was clearly marked.

RAYISHA
He meant we just arrived in the city.

ZIMIN

Oh well then... welcome. Hope you enjoy your stay. It's... usually not so noisy, but--

RAYISHA

(Yakov)

Why is he having trouble breathing?

YAKOV

He's been injured.

ZIMIN

Shot in the leg. It's... not too bad. I think I'm in shock though.

Olga is looking at Rayisha more closely. Vasley returns.

OLGA

She's blind.

YAKOV

Yeah. She is. So?

OLGA

(to Yakov)

So this is no place for someone who's ... defective.

YAKOV

Don't call her that.

ZIMIN

He's right. It sounds harsh.

OLGA

It'll be a lot harsher if she gets herself in the middle of all that's going on out there.

VASLEY

Good point. But it's much better out there now. So you can probably leave.

OLGA

Who?

VASLEY

(trying not to look at her)

All of you. Yes. I need you to leave.

OLGA

Why?

VASLEY

Well these are complex issue, and I need time to think about them.

OLGA

Don't be stupid.

YAKOV

(to Vasley)

The army and the police are shooting people. What's there to think about? You believe they should be doing that?

VASLEY

Not unless they were provoked.

OLGA

They weren't.

VASLEY

Okay that's good. But still... maybe they were. Then that would be something else, wouldn't it. And some of us need to eat well and then sleep on how to deal with... whatever it is.

YAKOV

What are you talking about?

VASLEY

I'll need time to find an answer to that. Right now you all have to leave.

OLGA

(off Zimin)

But he's injured.

YAKOV

And we have nowhere else to go to.

ZIMIN

No he's right. We'll compromise him if we're found here.

VASLEY

What's that mean? Compromise me with who? About what? I just meant... I really meant that...

(MORE)

VASLEY (CONT'D)

I have tasks to perform. A meal to prepare.

ZIMIN

Of course. And it does seem to have gone silent. So...

(to Olga)

Come on. We can probably make it home.

OLGA

All right. But we're taking her with us.

ZIMIN

Why?

OLGA

You know why? You think I'm going to leave her to that bastard upstairs.

(to Yakov)

You disgust me. How many more like her do you have access to?

YAKOV

What?

OLGA

And are they all going to be blind or maimed from now on?

She starts out with Rayisha.

RAYISHA

Yakov?

YAKOV

Go with them. You heard. They have a home to go to. That's not something to turn your back on.

Zimin starts off after them.

ZIMIN

(to Yakov)

You can come too if you want.

OLGA

Zimin. Please. He's a pimp.

YAKOV

A what?

ZIMIN

(to Olga)

So? Can't pimps be reformed?

(to Yakov)

Please. Come along.

YAKOV

Okay. Sure... But why does she think I'm a--

But they are gone.

YAKOV (CONT'D)

What was she talking about? Who are they?

VASLEY

I don't want to answer either of those questions! Just leave before they get too far ahead, and you lose them.

Yakov hesitates.

VASLEY (CONT'D)

Leave!

Yakov hurries off.

VASLEY (CONT'D)

(sits on his cot)

I need time to think. About what to do. Or not do. Not even think about doing... Why?

(stands)

Why do I need to know who was provoked or not provoked, who reads these books, or who follows what these books say to do. I've already been told what to think and do about all that. And by someone who's willing to pay me for thinking and doing it.

(sits again)

Yes. Right. Good... I mean good enough.

SCENE 12

Olga, Zimin, and Rayisha. A quiet park on the edge of the city where they are stopping to give Zimin a rest. A bench. And maybe a tree.

ZIMIN
Just a few minutes.

OLGA
Let me look.

Olga is wrapping Zimin's leg with her scarf when Yakov catches up

RAYISHA
(to Yakov)
What's she doing?

YAKOV
She's bandaging his leg.

RAYISHA
(to Olga)
Look to see if the bullet went all the way through. There'll be a wound on the other side if it did.

OLGA
Yes... Right.
(looking)
Yes. There is.

RAYISHA
Good. Then that means less chance it'll fester.

YAKOV
(Olga)
She and her mother helped with these things back home.

RAYISHA
He means whenever the idiots in the village accidentally shot each other.

YAKOV
(to Olga)
While we were hunting deer.

RAYISHA

He wounded two of his friends
himself.

YAKOV

(yo Zimin)

I figured it was better to get them
before they got me.

Yakov and Zimin both laugh. Olga just looks at them.

ZIMIN

Come on. That was funny,

OLGA

(to Yakov)

So you're from the same village. Is
that where you get most of the
girls for Grisha.

YAKOV

There you go again. You've got that
all wrong.

RAYISHA

We're were there because we know
his half brother Piotr. And he told
us to go to him for help.

YAKOV

I'm on a mission of mercy. This
girl's mother recently died and--

ZIMIN

It's okay. We get it.

(to Rayisha)

You came here for shelter, and you
found yourself in the middle of a
slaughter.

RAYISHA

A slaughter? It was that bad?

ZIMIN

It started out well enough. We were
trying to warn the government what
would happen if they didn't make
changes. We thought if we showed
them how much support we had it
might bring them to their senses.

OLGA

But as usual they proved themselves
too ignorant and selfish to care.

(MORE)

OLGA (CONT'D)

I think they'll soon need a very strong taste of what they've been dishing out.

ZIMIN

The march was even led by a priest.

OLGA

Not the usual kind of priest.

ZIMIN

She means not one totally owned and supported by the government.

OLGA

But still a priest. And they couldn't even bring themselves to show him a little respect. He's a brave man.

ZIMIN

Who was arrested almost immediately.

OLGA

He'll be tortured then murdered. There will be real hell to pay for it too. There are a lot of us, and we'll want revenge.

ZIMIN

She means justice.

OLGA

But first revenge.

YAKOV

(to Zimin)

When you say "a lot of us..."

ZIMIN

A lot of us who care about people like you.

YAKOV

When you say "people like you..."

RAYISHA

He means people who don't have much. They want to help us.

YAKOV

Sure. Good. But first, the thing I need help with the most is finding a job.

RAYISHA

And I'd like to avoid starving to death on the street.

ZIMIN

Yes. Of course. We can help you both.

He starts off. Supported by Olga.

ZIMIN (CONT'D)

But right now... I need to get to our house, lie down in my bed and sleep.

Yakov and Rayisha follow.

YAKOV

He has a bed.

RAYISHA

I heard.

Sounds of people approaching quickly.

ZIMIN

We better hurry. They're probably trying to round up stragglers.

They start to rush off. Gunshots over their heads.

YAKOV

(ducking)

That one went just by my ear.

(turning)

Bastards!!

(running with the rest)

They're soldiers. They should be protecting us. Not trying to kill us.

(to Zimin)

That's right, isn't it?

ZIMIN

In theory.

They are all off.

SCENE 13

Tavern. Vasley in a new jacket, pants and shirt, waits alone. Just staring at the drink in front of him.

A loud exchange of voices from somewhere in the tavern. It's over fast, but it has put Vasley on edge.

Yakov enters in a factory worker's jacket.

YAKOV

There you are. Your Master gave you my note then.

VASLEY

No he threw it out. I found it in the trash.

YAKOV

Well you're here so...
(sitting)
It's been some time, eh.

VASLEY

Has it? Too long, do you think?

YAKOV

What's that mean? Why do you take the simplest question as some kind of trick. You've always done that.

VASLEY

Have I? That's good to know.

YAKOV

If you say so. I see we both have new clothing.

VASLEY

Yes. I have a paying job.

YAKOV

A job which requires you to look presentable.

VASLEY

And you found work in a factory.

YAKOV

You knew that?

VASLEY

Yes. I heard.

YAKOV

From who?

VASLEY

No one. I meant to say... I saw you enter the factory and assumed--

YAKOV

You saw me.

VASLEY

Yes.

YAKOV

You just happened to be there.

VASLEY

I was working.

YAKOV

In the factory?

VASLEY

Outside.

They just look at each other.

VASLEY (CONT'D)

I was watching.

YAKOV

Watching. For what?

VASLEY

Anything really. It's part of my job.

(off Yakov's blank stare)

I'm with the Department of Safety.

YAKOV

So you're watching for *unsafe* working conditions?

VASLEY

No we don't care about that. Well some of us might. I do. I mean when it occurs to me I do, but--

YAKOV

Vasley. Please.

VASLEY

I'm a spy. At least that's what they call me,

YAKOV

Who are "they"?

VASLEY

The people who I spy for. And... the people I spy on as well, I assume. They all call me a spy, but I'm really just someone who watches and then reports to actual spies. So I suppose I might be a spy too, all things considered. Yes. All right. I'm a spy.

YAKOV

Okay. And now you're.... spying on the factory?

VASLEY

Yes. Not every day though.

YAKOV

Not every day because you have other places to spy on as well?

VASLEY

Yes.

YAKOV

So what are you... looking for?

VASLEY

At the factory specifically?

YAKOV

Yes.

VASLEY

Well you remember what happened that day they call Bloody Sunday.

YAKOV

It only happened a few weeks ago, and I could have easily gotten killed... so yes I do.

VASLEY

Well signs, indications that there will be more of that.

YAKOV

More of the army shooting people
and trampling them with their
horses.

VASLEY

No. More of the things that brought
that on. More bad feelings about
the Czar and his people. Have you
noticed any of that going on in the
factory?

YAKOV

I've noticed plenty of it. Do you
want names?

VASLEY

Are you willing to provide them?

YAKOV

If you pay me.

VASLEY

Are you being serious.

YAKOV

Why do you ask? Don't you usually
pay people for information?

VASLEY

Yes.

YAKOV

Okay. So what do you want to know
about my colleagues at the factory?

VASLEY

Well first I'd like to enquire
about those people you met at the
bookshop, the brother and sister...
Are you still in touch with them?

YAKOV

I think you probably know that I
am.

VASLEY

Yes. I do. And are you willing to
keep me informed about their
activities?

YAKOV

Again, if the money is right.

VASLEY

I have a fairly large budget for such things. But leave her out of it. Just concentrate on the brother.

YAKOV

Got a soft spot for her, have you?

VASLEY

No. I just think he's the more dangerous one.

YAKOV

Really. It's just the opposite, if you ask me. But if that's what you want...

(a long look at him)

So I'll be a spy too. We'll both be on the side of the existing government. Two orphans helping out the Czar. Who would have thought?

VASLEY

They did. That's why they target us to work for them. People without families. Because we don't have the support that allows us to say no.

YAKOV

Or maybe we don't *think* we do.

VASLEY

Which amounts to the same thing.

YAKOV

Hmm. Vasley Klimkov has an intelligent thought. And expresses it clearly. I'm impressed.

VASLEY

I don't care.

YAKOV

Of course you don't. But have you ever. I mean cared about what people think of you.

VASLEY

Not much, I guess

YAKOV

So... you must enjoy the same things that they do.

VASLEY

Who?

YAKOV

The people you work for. Enjoy them. And want to preserve them. The opera, for example. Do you enjoy the opera?

VASLEY

The opera?

YAKOV

Yes. You know, that large fancy place where where people sing loudly.

VASLEY

Things like that are for everyone, aren't they?

YAKOV

The hell they are. Although now that I can afford to at least sit in the upper balcony, they will be for me. What about fresh fruit? You must get plenty of that.

VASLEY

From the market. Like everyone else.

YAKOV

But plenty of it? No. For most people just a taste now and then. But you must be able to get your fill of it.

VASLEY

Well I don't eat very much if you remember.

YAKOV

I do. But that's not the point, is it. Do you want me to tell you exactly what my point is?

VASLEY

No.

YAKOV

Oh. Why not, old friend?

VASLEY

Well your point would probably just be a point that a person in your factory has made to you about what's going on right now. And then I'd have to decide if that point or the point I've heard made about that same thing by government types was the one I'd have to agree with. And that would almost certainly have to be--

YAKOV

The government's.

VASLEY

Well they pay me. And they're much more organized.

YAKOV

And stronger.

VASLEY

For the moment at least.

YAKOV

So you do all this because of fear.

VASLEY

Of course.

YAKOV

Then you're a coward.

VASLEY

What else could I be when I have no defenses.

YAKOV

You could do nothing. Just hide from your superiors and offer no assistance.

VASLEY

Can someone do that with the other side?

YAKOV

Probably. It's a voluntary movement.

VASLEY

That will change. It will eventually become more efficient and more disciplined. And then everyone will have to comply.

YAKOV

You believe that? The part about everyone having to comply eventually?

VASLEY

It made sense when it was explained to me.

YAKOV

So there'd be no point in you changing sides then. Because you have enough to eat... And enough to afford a half decent place to live if you want.

VASLEY

I'm looking for one now.

YAKOV

Planning to leave that degenerate then...

VASLEY

He served his purpose. Working the shop allowed me to meet people.

YAKOV

That you now spy on.

VASLEY

I don't think I'm proud of it, The truth is, I'm not sure how I feel.

YAKOV

Like always.

VASLEY

Yes. And I take it from your questions that you're not actually willing to join us and do the same thing. That was all some game for you?

YAKOV

(shrugs)
A game. A test.
(MORE)

YAKOV (CONT'D)

Yes I'm fully committed to the rebellion. Always have been, really.

VASLEY

Well given your brutish selfish past, no one would have guessed that.

YAKOV

They wouldn't have had to guess. They could have just asked. Or just observed how generous I was with the deer I killed.

VASLEY

Not to me.

YAKOV

No. Not to you.

VASLEY

Why not?

YAKOV

Maybe because I always suspected you'd turn out to be a coward and a traitor to your own kind.

Yakov stands, takes off his jacket, rolls up his sleeves.

YAKOV (CONT'D)

Where do you want this to happen?

VASLEY

You're planning to beat me?

YAKOV

It's been quite awhile. I'm sure you must miss it, you little worm. So right here? Or outside?

VASLEY

It won't change my mind.

YAKOV

I'm not interested in changing your mind. I want to break your back.

VASLEY

I understand. But I can't let that happen. Just the thought of it is making me ill.

YAKOV

Well maybe you'll get lucky and get
in one good punch.

VASLEY

Did that ever happen?

YAKOV

No.

VASLEY

No. So...

(taking out a pistol)

I'll have to rely on this then.

YAKOV

Well now. Here's a new Vasley
Klimkov.

VASLEY

I didn't want it. But they insisted
I have one. Go. Go now please.

Yakov looks at him.

YAKOV

You might have to pay for this, you
know. For what you're doing to your
fellow commoners. There's always a
possibility your bosses won't
survive.

VASLEY

I know. But here I am...

YAKOV

Yes. So... whatever happens then...
good luck to you.

VASLEY

And to you.

Yakov leaves.

Vasley looks at his gun.

SCENE 14

Makarov is behind his desk at the Department of Safety. There is a portrait of the Czar suspended in the air.

Sasha enters.

MAKAROV

Good. You're here. Have you compiled your list?

SASHA

Yes, sir. Thirty-eight names with addresses. Twice as many as any of my colleagues.

MAKAROV

It's not a competition, Sasha.

SASHA

No disrespect, sir, but I'm pretty sure it is.

MAKAROV

Then let's just say that it's not a competition you're favoured to win.

SASHA

I think people who do the best work should be first in line for a promotion.

MAKAROV

In theory. But there are other factors which don't you help your case. Your mental instability, for example.

SASHA

That's a product of my abandonment and the harshness of my childhood, as you know. And I'm working on it.

MAKAROV

Well don't work too hard. It might not be something you can overcome. We'll see though. Tonight's raids will be a major test.

SASHA

So I'll be in charge then,

MAKAROV

As much as you ever are, yes.
Where's Klimkov?

SASHA

I don't know. Maybe he's run away.
So many of us have. Run off. Or
switched to the other side. And
Klimkov isn't the most reliable
person.

MAKAROV

Don't let the fact that he appears
to be in a constant stupor fool
you. He has qualities he keeps
hidden. As for changing sides, he's
too cautious to expose himself to
the danger those people are putting
themselves in.

Vasley enters.

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

And there he is now.

VASLEY

Sir?

MAKAROV

We were wondering if you'd deserted
us to join the rabble.

VASLEY

I thought about it, but I wasn't
sure how to make the approach.

MAKAROV

A joke. Good for you.
(to Sasha)
Be careful with this one. He's
feeling his oats.

Vasley hands Makarov a few pieces of paper.

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

How many of them do you have there?

VASLEY

Sixty or so. That includes the
dozen that are usually at the
meetings Olga and Zimin have every
night.

(to Sasha)

(MORE)

VASLEY (CONT'D)

They're the brother and sister graduate students.

SASHA

I know who they are.

(to Makarov)

He's one of the ones I shot.

MAKAROV

For no good reason.

SASHA

He was yelling obscenities about the Czar.

MAKAROV

Everyone in Russia has at one time or another yelled an obscenity about the Czar. It's in our nature for godsake.

(to Vasley)

And your friend at the factory?

VASLEY

We can grab him tonight. He works the night shift.

MAKAROV

That factory is still running?

VASLEY

Yes.

MAKAROV

Must be making something important for them not to go on strike like all the others.

SASHA

I suspect bombs.

MAKAROV

Based on what?

SASHA

I always suspect bombs.

MAKAROV

Yes, but why not rifles? Or even pistols.

SASHA

(scoffing)

Pistols...

(MORE)

SASHA (CONT'D)
 (immediately regretful)
 Sorry...

VASLEY
 (to Makarov)
 It's rifles. I got a look inside.

MAKAROV
 Good for you. Okay...
 (standing)
 Here's the situation. Tonight, if this roundup is handled well, we could set their movement back on its heels. Many of the people we're arresting will be missed and very hard to replace. But if we fail and they stay active and get a foothold on power or even find themselves in a position to make some demands, very soon after that there will be a constitution. And that constitution will guarantee that sweeping reforms occur. Those reforms, I guarantee you, will not be good for feeble-minded fools...
 (to Sasha)
 ...like you.
 (to both)
 You will be put away in a prison or...
 (to Sasha)
 ...in an asylum...
 (to both)
 ...and never be heard from again. So get the job done. Fight for your survival and to maintain the status quo. Sasha, you can go.

Sasha hesitates. Looks at each of them.

MAKAROV (CONT'D)
 It's all right. Just go. Get your people prepared.

Sasha leaves.

MAKAROV (CONT'D)
 (standing)
 Vasley. Have you made plans?

VASLEY
 Sir?

MAKAROV

For what you'll do if things don't go our way. Not all the people love our Great Leader.

VASLEY

That's true.

MAKAROV

Many of them think he's an idiot and a criminal.

VASLEY

That's also true.

MAKAROV

And do you agree?

VASLEY

Do you?

MAKAROV

Of course.

VASLEY

Then so do I.

MAKAROV

All you have to do is listen to what he says. It's a miracle he's lasted this long. Anyway, I'm off to the Argentine. I think I'll go there win or lose in the short term. Fresh air. A moderate climate. A good place to relax and just fade away. The people here could very well prevail eventually. They possess a desperate bravery.

(smiles sadly)

Make plans for yourself just in case that turns out to actually mean something.

Vasley nods and starts out.

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

Oh. And keep a close eye on Sasha tonight. I'd like most of the people we arrest to arrive at the jail alive.

Vasley nods and leaves.

Makarov watches him go.

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

(to Audience)

I have a weak spot for the young fellow. I'm not sure why. I had a dog once. I was always having to tell people it was much smarter than they gave it credit for. Sometimes the dog proved me right. Sometimes it crapped all over the house.

LIGHTS CHANGE

Sasha has been waiting in the hallway. Vasley approaches.

SASHA

You better watch yourself tonight, pal. I've got instructions to keep an eye on you.

VASLEY

I've got instructions to keep an eye *you*.

SASHA

(cuffs the back of his head)

Hey, don't fool around. Your position is not as secure as you think.

VASLEY

Neither is yours.

SASHA

(cuffs him again)

I told you not to fool around! You should have brought that brother and sister in a long time ago. If I see you trying to help them escape I'll put a bullet in your head.

VASLEY

(leaving)

Thank you for the warning.

Sasha watches him go.

SASHA

(yelling after him)

It wasn't a warning! It was a threat!!

He leaves. Mumbling to himself.

SCENE 15

Darkness. Vasley and Yakov are on the run, but Vasley keeps stumbling. A group of men is following them... Lots of shouting and instructions in the near distance.

YAKOV

For godsake. Try to stay on your feet. What's wrong with you?

VASLEY

I was never taught how to run.

YAKOV

Good God. It's not something you need to be--

(picking him up again)

Okay this won't work. We have to hide. Quickly under this bridge.

They duck down. The invisible but noisy men pass by.

YAKOV (CONT'D)

All that just for me? What did you tell them?

VASLEY

That you were smart.

YAKOV

And that's a crime now, is it?

VASLEY

Well a lot of men ran from that factory, so they're after them too.

YAKOV

They ran because they were scared.

VASLEY

They ran because they were making rifles.

YAKOV

Yes. For the army.

VASLEY

For the army? Not for the rebellion. Is that why you're not on strike?

YAKOV

Yes. Three officers showed up and threatened to line us all up and shoot us if we didn't agree to work for them.

VASLEY

They couldn't do that without authorization.

YAKOV

I don't think they knew that. And your bosses don't know that's why the factory is still open?

VASLEY

No. The army must have plans to strike the bureaucracy. I'm told that in the new environment many different factions will be vying for power. It's already dangerous for people like me.

YAKOV

People like you meaning useless and expendable people?

VASLEY

Obviously.

YAKOV

Vasley, I need to know. Why'd you put yourself at risk to come save me.

VASLEY

It wasn't really for you. Is it safe to move now?

YAKOV

I think so.

They stand and move out.

VASLEY

It was for Rayisha. I got to thinking that if Olga and her brother are arrested tonight, Rayisha will need somebody to take care of her.

YAKOV

If you knew they could be arrested, why didn't you warn them?

VASLEY

I couldn't. They're being watched.

They look around and proceed cautiously.

YAKOOV

So they'll be thrown in prison, and that's it for them, eh.

VASLEY

I might be able to save Olga. If I can do that, take them both back to the village. Piotr sent a letter to tell me that his wife killed herself.

YAKOOV

Finally.

VASLEY

Yes. So he'll be able to take Rayisha in now.

YAKOV

And what will Olga do?

VASLEY

Olga is a dream that must stay alive.

YAKOV

What?

VASLEY

Can you do this or not?

YAKOV

Yes. I can.

Sasha steps out of the darkness ahead of them. Gun out and pointed at them

SASHA

I told you I'd be keeping an eye on you. So you *have* gone over to the rabble.

VASLEY

No. I captured him.

YAKOV

It's true. He beat me unconscious. and took me prisoner. Doesn't look like he's got it in him, does he.

(MORE)

YAKOV (CONT'D)

I tell ya, I was surprised as hell
when he--

SASHA

Shut up. You think I believe that,
you fool?

YAKOV

I guess not. But in that case...

He lunges for Sasha. Sasha shoots him. He falls. Vasley
kneels over the body.

VASLEY

He's dead. The boss told us he
wanted people taken alive. He isn't
going to like this.

SASHA

He's not going to find out about
it.

(approaches Vasley)

I'm going to enjoy this next part
very much.

VASLEY

Maybe not.

Very quickly he lifts the gun that he has managed to take out
a moment earlier without being seen and shoots Sasha. Sasha
falls. Dead.

Vasley stands. Looks down at both bodies. Lingerling over
Yakov.

VASLEY (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

He runs off.

SCENE 16

Makarov's office. Makarov behind his desk. Zimin, in restraints, stands in front of him.

ZIMIN

Why aren't I in jail with my sister?

MAKAROV

Your sister's not in jail. She escaped.

ZIMIN

So you had her killed then?

MAKAROV

Is that what the word "escaped" means to you? She "escaped her earthly bonds"?

(off his look)

She got away. It was our friend Vasley's doing. He took her into his personal custody and "somehow" she managed to escape from him. You never know when your heart is going to get the best of you, right. Anyway, we don't know where she is.

ZIMIN

And you won't get any help from me in finding her. Olga or anyone else. The people you've rounded up tonight are all you're going to get. The rest will go underground. And keep planning to overthrow all of you. So go ahead. Torture me. You'll get nothing out of me!

MAKAROV

I believe you. No need to pound your chest about it. I'm just curious about a couple of things... What exactly did you want from the people you were trying to influence.

ZIMIN

Want?

MAKAROV

You must have expected something from them. Or were just satisfied with having an adoring audience?

ZIMIN

We expected them to foment revolution, like I just told you.

MAKAROV

Yes yes. Revolution. Kill the Czar, and all that. But in the meantime. On a more personal... even emotional level, what did you want?

ZIMIN

(looks at him)

We "wanted" them to bind themselves to each other. And to believe in a future where life is better for everyone who needs and deserves one.

MAKAROV

Deserves... is an odd word.

ZIMIN

Only if you don't believe that all human beings deserve basic respect.

MAKAROV

(smiles)

Well what sane person could argue with that. I'm just saying that certain words often get thrown around too freely... I've been told that at your meetings you handed out books. Very long books.

ZIMIN

Books of instruction and comfort.

MAKAROV

Comfort.

ZIMIN

Knowledge is comfort. Or is that the wrong word to describe how knowing things can make you feel less uncertain about your life.

MAKAROV

No. It's a good point. But why did the books have to be so long?

(MORE)

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

Wouldn't a pamphlet have sufficed. One that clearly outlined your beliefs and objectives. I assume these people only had so much time on their hands. They had jobs, didn't they? Or were they all from well off families like you?

He stands, turns to us.

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

Although I might just be thinking about those great novels of ours. So very long. By the time I was in the middle of one I'd forgotten the beginning. And by the end I'd forgotten both the beginning *and* the middle. And all that was left was the sentiment. And...

(turning back to Zimin)

... in our great Russian novels the sentiment is usually unbearable.

ZIMIN

That's because those novels carry in them the centuries old burden of the peasants and the crimes of the aristocracy.

MAKAROV

I never got that. I just got depressed.

ZIMIN

Perhaps because you stopped thinking for yourself when you swore blind allegiance to the Czar.

MAKAROV

If only that were true. Anyway it's been good chatting. And as for throwing you in jail... the way things are going, you'd probably be out in no time. So...

ZIMIN

So what does that mean? I can leave?

MAKAROV

Yes.

(unlocking the restraints)

Or you can stay.

(gestures)

(MORE)

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

Sit.

(of his look)

Sit in my chair. Take my desk. Take my position. I'm leaving, so you do the job. See if you can reconcile the state's desire to maintain public order with the overwhelming needs of the people. It might prove harder than you think. Especially now that the people are "binding" themselves together.

(he starts off)

I'm off to the Argentine. But I wish you luck.

Makarov leaves. Zimin watches him go then turns his attention to the desk. Makes the slightest movement towards it.

SCENE 17

Grisha (aka Master) is searching for a book in the much neater piles. He looks worse than ever and can barely move.

GRISHA

They're more organized for sure. But when you don't know what you're looking for that doesn't really matter, does it. Just something special for my last read. Wish I'd taken in more erotica. I'd like to have one more glorious erection before passing. I also wish... No don't start with all that... "if only" and "what could have been garbage..." Just stick to what is real. To have changed a life I would have had to *have* a life.

Vasley enters. Dirty and worn out.

GRISHA (CONT'D)

You're back.

VASLEY

Yes.

GRISHA

Why?

VASLEY

Nowhere else to go.

GRISHA

Your career as a spy is over I take it.

VASLEY

I'm sure it is, yes.

GRISHA

They'll probably hang you, you know. The people you betrayed.

VASLEY

I betrayed everyone.

GRISHA

Well that's an accomplishment. But I'm talking about the people you spied on.

(MORE)

GRISHA (CONT'D)

They'll string you up for sure. Not right away. When they eventually take control, they'll be busy hanging people much more important than you are. But they'll get to it eventually. Try to accept your fate and get on with whatever is left of your worthless life. It's not all your fault. You didn't get much guidance along the way. Not from me, anyway.

VASLEY

That's true.

GRISHA

Well I was already on my last legs when you first showed up, so what did you expect.

VASLEY

Nothing. I expected nothing.

GRISHA

Well then you're probably not too disappointed.

(starting off)

Oh. That blind girl. I heard from Piotr that she made it home all right. So there's that...

(stops)

In case you've been worried about her.

(no response)

Well anyway...

He starts off again.

Vasley watches him go then sits on the cot and lowers himself to go to sleep.

The Master's voice as he ascends the stairs:

MASTER

You better start thinking about what you'll make for supper. I'm not dead yet! Did you hear me?!

VASLEY

Yes...

MASTER

What!?

VASLEY

Yes.

He stands slowly, looks around. Sits again. Suddenly stands.

VASLEY (CONT'D)

(after Master)

What about Olga!?

MASTER

(off)

Who the hell is she?!

Vasley sits again.

SCENE 18

The village. Olga and Rayisha on a bench.

OLGA
Will you be safe in this place?

RAYISHA
Piotr will take care of me.

OLGA
And when he dies?

RAYISHA
Well if there's no one else,
there's always the forest.

OLGA
You'll live in the forest? How will
that be possible?

RAYISHA
It won't.

OLGA
I don't understand.

RAYISHA
Don't concern yourself with me.

OLGA
The uprising probably failed. I
can't go back to the city until I
hear it's safe. And if I don't
concern myself with your well
being, I won't have much of a
purpose in life, will I?

RAYISHA
There are many people in the world
who could use your help.

OLGA
But why not start with you?

Piotr comes on with a letter in his hand.

PIOTR
A letter from Vasley...
(to Rayisha)
Bad news. Yakov is dead.

Rayisha lowers her head.

OLGA

How?

PIOTR

The police. He got caught in the same roundup Vasley saved you from. He resisted and...

OLGA

They murdered him... Any word about my brother?

PIOTR

Yes he goes on about that for awhile.

(hands her the letter)

Here... And thank you for bringing her back here.

OLGA

(taking her own drink)

She's my friend.

PIOTR

Is that so?

RAYISHA

Yes... And we should let her stay with us for awhile.

PIOTR

Of course. But we can't--

RAYISHA

We shouldn't let her go back yet. They're looking for her.

PIOTR

I was just going to say that we can't offer her much in the way of accommodation.

RAYISHA

She doesn't need much. We've been sleeping in ditches and fields all the way here.

OLGA

I don't require luxury. I just need time to get my thoughts in order. In the meantime I can help out in any way you need.

RAYISHA

Not in the house. That would be waste. She can teach people in the village how to read.

PIOTR

I've tried to do that myself since the school closed. Tried to give the young *and* the old a little knowledge about the world out there. They don't care about those things though.

Piotr leaves.

Olga turns to Rayisha

OLGA

Maybe I can make them care.

RAYISHA

Yes. That's what you do, isn't it. Try to make people care.

Olga takes her hand, then begins to read the letter to herself. Turns to Rayisha.

OLGA

Do you want to hear?

RAYISHA

Please.

OLGA

(reading)

Tell Olga, if she is still there, that there is interesting, even startling news, about her brother.

FADE OUT HERE.

AND A LIGHT ON....

EPILOGUE

Vasley is on his cot, surrounded by books, composing a letter in a note pad.

OLGA

(just her voice)

Apparently he was offered a job in the Czar's secret police. And not just any job. The rumour is that he was actually in charge until it was discovered who he really is. People think that's bizarre, but I think it's just a normal bureaucratic mistake. He was arrested, but let out almost immediately because of having done no harm in the two weeks he was in command. At least none that they are aware of. There's another rumour that he was able to find and destroy many incriminating files on you and your friends during his time there. I myself think that's just wishful thinking. Anyway he is probably on his way there now, so tell Olga. Give her my kind regards and also my best thoughts to Rayisha as well. As for me...

Master calls from upstairs.

MASTER

Where's... my... supper!? You hear me, you worthless piece of shit!? I'm hungry! And I want my supper!

VASLEY

Is that man never going to die?

He picks a tray of food up and starts up stairs.

THE END