

ORPHANS FOR THE CZAR

by

GEORGE F WALKER

Suggested by

The Life of a Useless Man

By

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PERSONS

Vasley (early twenties)

Reyisha (late teens)

Yakov (late twenties)

\*Piotr (50ish)

\*Master( " )

Olga (20)

Maya (23)

Sasha (late 20s)

Makarov (40)

They can (should?) be doubled.

Intermission is optional

SCENE 1

1905. A small Russian village near St. Petersburg. Vasley (21) and Rayisha (17) sit on a makeshift bench. She is blind. He is unkempt. And he has an open book on his lap.

RAYISHA

Why did you stop? Is it getting too dark to read?

VASLEY

No I can still see.

RAYISHA

Well please keep going then.

VASLEY

So you were enjoying it?

RAYISHA

I was curious about what was going to happen next.

VASLEY

And you cared?

RAYISHA

Yes. Didn't you?

VASLEY

Not at all.

RAYISHA

You didn't find the people in the story interesting. They were so different from all of us here.

VASLEY

In what way?

RAYISHA

Well they had money.

VASLEY

Yes. But how were they different?

RAYISHA

The money made them different.

VASLEY

In what way?

RAYISHA  
Vasley. Stop. You always do this.

VASLEY  
I'm just asking questions.

RAYISHA  
Yes. But why? I mean your questions  
don't always seem to have a  
purpose.

VASLEY  
I'm sorry. I'll work on that.

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 all probably going  
to starve to death.

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

VASLEY  
Who would stop it?

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

VASLEY  
Not with me.

RAYISHA

That's true. 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

But does them all disliking you make you sad?

VASLEY

Many things make me sad. You for example.

RAYISHA

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

No.

(looks at her, thinks)

But that makes you lucky in a way. You'll never have to see how ugly the world really is.

RAYISHA

My mother told me the world is beautiful.

VASLEY

She was lying.

RAYISHA

Why would she do that?

VASLEY

She probably thought it would make you feel better. But it just made you feel worse, didn't it.

RAYISHA

Well it made me sad that I couldn't-

VASLEY

See it for yourself. Yes. Your mother was a heartless fool. But I'm going to tell you the truth about the world, and then you'll feel much better about not having to look at it. I'll start with the sky.

RAYISHA

Mother told me it's bright blue.

VASLEY

So what? You don't even know what blue is! Bright or otherwise. Not that it matters, because 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. And you're lucky you don't have to look at the people in this village either. They all have hollow empty eyes. Crooked noses. Dirty blistered faces.

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

Well...you're the exception. You're very beautiful. It's a miracle because your mother's ugliness is what's made her so bitter.

RAYISHA

She's not bitter. Her voice is sweet and full of love.

VASLEY

Sweet loving voices are all that mothers have to offer now.

(MORE)

VASLEY (CONT'D)

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. I'm telling you there's nothing but ugliness all around you. In the people, in the sky, even in the animals. All the animals who haven't already starved to death have sunken terrified eyes. Skin sagging from their bones. Trust me, Rayisha. You're very lucky that you can't see them. Or anything else.

RAYISHA

No. That can't be--

VASLEY

It's true! It is!

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 his 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 give her a good push though.

YAKOV

What did you do to her? You didn't hurt her? Or touch her in some way?

VASLEY

You mean in a way that you would have.

YAKOV

(advancing)

It's because you say things like that--

VASLEY

That you beat me so often?

YAKOV

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. If you let yesterday's bruises heal, imagine how much you'll enjoy giving me a few 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. So please just get on with it. My aunt will be waiting for me to clean up after their supper.

YAKOV

*Their* supper? Your uncle still can't convince her to let you 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

No. You've ruined the mood

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

Rayisha has enough to worry about without you making her listen to all the strange things that come out of your mouth.

Vasley leaves. Yakov just watches him go.

## SCENE 2

Vasley is dragged on by his Uncle Piotr holding his ear. Piotr is wearing a blacksmith's apron. And holding a poker.

PIOTR

Everyone's suspicious about what you did to upset that girl.

VASLEY

Yes. I might have gone too far.

PIOTR

You mean you touched her? For godsake. There's an agreement that men should never touch her.

VASLEY

Just because she's blind?

PIOTR

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

VASLEY

Wouldn't that depend on who was doing the touching?

PIOTR

So you did touch her!  
(grabs his crotch)  
I piss on your mother's grave!

VASLEY

What's she got to do with it?

PIOTR

I thought you were a decent boy. But you're just as disgusting as all the rest of them.

VASLEY

No they're much worse! And I didn't--

Piotr whips his a little with the apron's leather wrap

PIOTR

I should beat you to death right here! You wanna say a prayer first, or should I get right to it?!

VASLEY

(cowering)

No! Please! I didn't touch her.  
I...just described something to  
her!

PIOTR

You did what?

VASLEY

Not that! I described the world to  
her...in a way that would make her  
feel better about being blind. I  
made her believe it was ugly.

PIOTR

Ugly. The whole world?

VASLEY

Yes.

PIOTR

Well who the hell are you to be  
doing something like that.

VASLEY

I think it helped her.

PIOTR

Idiot. How could that help her. It  
probably made her feel worse about  
even being alive.

VASLEY

Good point. Sometimes I have these  
thoughts that I don't completely  
understand myself.

PIOTR

Then here's some advice. Stop  
thinking. Let other people do it  
for you.

VASLEY

All right. But maybe other people  
should also try to help Rayisha  
instead of just letting her bump  
into things. Or wander off and get  
lost in the woods.

PIOTR

She doesn't do that as much as she  
used to.

VASLEY

She did it this evening. That's where I found her.

PIOTR

Oh. All right. I can spread the word. Have the villagers keep more of an eye on her. But you made a mistake, telling her all that about the world. And I'm sure the general opinion will be that you should be beaten for it.

VASLEY

By who?

PIOTR

Anyone who wants to. I'd do it myself if I thought it would be of any use. But beatings don't help someone like you.

VASLEY

Is a beating supposed to help? Isn't causing pain the only point?

PIOTR

I'm too tired to continue this conversation. Talking to you is exhausting!

VASLEY

I've heard that mentioned.

PIOTR

Well here's another idea that will help you get through life more easily. Stop talking all together. If you find that too hard, do it gradually. And eventually just mostly listen. And watch more. Right now, in fact.

(leaving)

Just watch me hammer that horseshoe and try to learn something.

VASLEY

(following)

Who is it for?

PIOTR

(stopping)

Someone with a horse.

VASLEY

No one in this village owns a horse anymore.

PIOTR

Someone might pass through.

VASLEY

What was for supper?

PIOTR

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 if we don't get help. No one seems to know we even exist.  
(an idea)  
How about you doing something useful for once. Take yourself to Petersburg and spread our story.

VASLEY

You mean talk about it.

PIOTR

Yes. But nothing else, all right. And find someone to tell the Czar how hard up we are.

VASLEY

The whole county is hard up. Does the Czar care?

PIOTR

He says he does. But he's a disgusting liar. And I'd like to shove this poker up his ass. When you get there make a big fuss about our situation. Maybe we can shame him. Weep and tell everyone our crops have failed, most of the livestock have died, and the people are losing their will to live. Now go prepare to leave.

VASLEY

By doing what? I've never left anywhere before.

PIOTR

Oh for godsake.

VASLEY

Then there's the *getting* to somewhere. I've never done that either. Where am I going to stay? Winter is coming, and I'm not healthy enough to survive on the street.

PIOTR

I know someone who could put you up. He's my half brother, or so he says. The man isn't as easy going as me, so you might have to let him kick you around from time to time.

VASLEY

(leaving)

Of course.

PIOTR

(following)

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

VASLEY

(to himself)

Of course...

## 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

If he says so. So you're here then. 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

(head in the light)

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 into categories. I was in the process of doing it 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? I was told you could read.

VASLEY

Yes. I read well.

The Master starts down into the room but can't make it all the way and lets himself settle on a step. He looks like Piotr, but more decrepit. And he has several open sores on his face.

MASTER

(breathing a touch heavily)

That's nothing to brag about. They're teaching most people to read these days. Well not in the villages. That might be too dangerous. They read. They learn. They revolt. But in the cities they're hoping it will 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

Perhaps. Eventually. 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. You'll sleep on that 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. Or a thoughtless dictator. Later a woman will arrive and cook us supper. We'll eat up above because, as you saw, the stairs are difficult for me.

VASLEY  
(a chuckle)  
And that was just coming down.

MASTER  
(a look)  
Right. Now I have some questions for you. After you've answered them you can get to work. These are questions meant to determine if you'll be able to remain impartial about the material we sell here. Are you ready?

VASLEY  
Yes. No. No, yes.

MASTER  
Good God. What's wrong with you?

VASLEY  
Nothing. Not really. I sometimes have problems with questions like that.

MASTER  
I haven't asked a question yet.

VASLEY

You asked if I was ready. And right away I started thinking about all the ways I might not be, and then--

MASTER

Here's the first actual question. Do you have strong feelings? Opinions. Passionate opinions. About anything?

VASLEY

No.

MASTER

Well you answered that very quickly.

VASLEY

Well the fact that I have no strong feelings about anything is really the one thing I know for certain about myself.

MASTER

Are you sure? What about 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'm not sure.

MASTER

You aren't. Well then here's some news for you. They fucking are!! And now that you know that, do you care?

VASLEY

I'm not in a position to care about anyone except myself.

(MORE)

VASLEY (CONT'D)

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

Because...

VASLEY

Of how it makes me feel.

MASTER

Which is?

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 very tired. I'm sure you have that effect on most people. So just get to work and do your best for now.

The Master starts back up the stairs

VASLEY

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 don't think it's worth anything.

MASTER

Why would they want a book they didn't think was worth anything? Listen, let them take it no matter what they say about it. 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 for it, 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.

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

(stops and turns)

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 do the people back in your village think about you.

VASLEY

Oh. I'm pretty sure they think I'm just stupid.

MASTER

(heading all the way back  
to his room)

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. Sees her. Flops back down.

OLGA

Oh. Sorry. I didn't mean to wake you.

VASLEY

You laughed.

OLGA

Ah... Yes I did.

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 that 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

(straining to see)

It's in French. Do you read French?

OLGA

Of course.

(chuckling)

Or how could I have-- I'm sorry.

VASLEY

For what?

OLGA

For what I said. Or maybe how I said it. I could tell it bothered you.

VASLEY

If it bothered me, I would have said it bothered me. Which it did. But not enough to say it did.

OLGA

Do you mind if I give you a little advice?

VASLEY

(staring at her)

What? Oh. Yes. I mean no. 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 would that word be?

OLGA  
I'll appeal to his sense of fair  
play. I know he has one. 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.

OLGA  
You haven't seen him?

VASLEY  
Not clearly. He stays mostly in the  
darkness

OLGA

Well then you better prepare yourself. He's not actually disfigured yet. But there are some open sores on his face.

VASLEY

Open sores. I might not react well to that.

OLGA

That kind of thing offends you, does it?

VASLEY

No. But it sometimes amuses me.  
(off her look)  
I mean if I get caught off-guard my responses aren't always...correct.

OLGA

I see. Well anyway, now that you know, you can prepare myself...  
(hands him several coins)  
Here. For the book.

VASLEY

This is a lot of money. I mean for something that's not food or clothing.

OLGA

I hear it's worth it.

VASLEY

What's it about?

OLGA

It's about how to change the world.

VASLEY

All of it.

OLGA

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

She starts out.

VASLEY

Will you be coming back anytime soon?

OLGA

Probably

(stops)

And when I do, 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...

VASLEY

Annoying?

OLGA

No. Just a little...

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

VASLEY

A little what?

(towards the door)

A little what?!

## SCENE 5

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

## MAKAROV

I seem to have some time on my hands, so let me tell you a little 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 actually care that much about it at all. But the people in general, let's call them all 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. And not nearly enough power to get more food or land...or not enough knowledge to even understand what hope, power, and knowledge really are. And they know of course that eventually there will be some kind of war in which most of them will be callously sacrificed. So...they are now in the process of turning into not much more than vermin that sniff and scratch at the ground or wild beasts that howl pathetically in the darkness. Unthinking, unknowing, looking for any form of comfort, ready to be led by anyone who needs, for their own self gratification, to have a crowd following behind and applauding every idiotic utterance.

(MORE)

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

Anyone who knows a few rhetorical tricks that can hypnotize the ignorant and bend them to his will. Tricks and lies about faulty ideologies. And even on occasion their sexual prowess. These "anyones," these violence prone men and newly educated women, their heads full of romantic foreign ideas, have made themselves "leaders" of the coming insurrection. And it's them who need to be watched. Constantly. And very closely. Which is what I do. And do very well. That is, when I can find enough people with half a brain to help me out.

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.

SASHA

Well yes maybe. Now that you-

MAKAROV

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. But mostly 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 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. 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

A very small feather. Nothing to brag about. But in the meantime there's a bookshop. People that we need to know more about often go there.

SASHA

Why?

MAKAROV

To get books.

SASHA

Of course. But for what other reason, is what I think 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

Yes. But first apply pressure.

SASHA  
You mean threats.

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

SASHA  
You mean a beating.

MAKAROV  
Yes. But not too severe. And after  
that...if there is still resistance  
we'll find 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 even spies.

SASHA  
Oh. So...you're a Jew.

MAKAROV  
Yes.

SASHA  
And have I offended you?

MAKAROV  
Yes.

SASHA  
And... will I be punished for that?

MAKAROV  
(as he leaves)  
Eventually.

Sasha tries to light a cigarette, but he is too nervous to bring the match to the cigarette and eventually gives up.

## SCENE 6

Bookshop. Olga and her slightly older sister Maya are browsing through the piles. Some of which are now spread on the floor. Maya has short cropped hair and wears trousers and boots. Vasley can't take his eyes off Olga who is piling the books she wants in his arms.

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 some of the Master's other needs.

MAYA

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

OLGA

(to Vasley)  
What other needs?

VASLEY

I'm sorry?

OLGA

What else do you have to do for him?

MAYA

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 Maya)  
I can tell...her.

OLGA  
Why her and not me?

VASLEY  
She looks more...

MAYA  
(to Vasley)  
Like a man?

OLGA  
Because... she's wearing pants?

VASLEY  
Well that and--

MAYA  
My hair.

VASLEY  
Yes. Your hair.

OLGA  
Oh Good God. You know, if you  
weren't so ignorant you'd know that  
many women in Western Europe are--

MAYA  
Olga. Shh.

OLGA  
What's wrong? He knows he's  
ignorant.  
(to Vasley)  
Don't you?

VASLEY  
Of course.

MAYA  
It doesn't mean you can rub it in.  
It's not his fault that he hasn't  
been able to travel.

OLGA  
You're right.  
(to Vasley)  
I'm sorry. I have a lot on my mind  
these days. We're planning... a  
large event.

Maya goes to Vasley. Leans in.

MAYA

Just whisper. What is it that you do for your "Master"?

Vasley whispers in her ear.

MAYA (CONT'D)

Right. That's what I thought.  
(taking Olga's pile from Vasley)  
He procures for him.

She puts the pile on a table. And points at it for Olga.

But Olga is already turning on Vasley

OLGA

So you're not only ignorant. You're sickening.

MAYA

Olga. If he wants to keep his job, maybe he doesn't have a choice.

OLGA

There's always a choice.  
(to Maya)  
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?

MAYA

What's that to you?

OLGA

(to Vasley)  
Is there?

VASLEY

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

OLGA

(to Maya)  
Because he doesn't want people to see her come in.  
(to Vasley)

(MORE)

OLGA (CONT'D)  
Are they actually women. Or are  
they more like girls?

VASLEY  
When is a woman a girl?

OLGA  
When she's under 18.

MAYA  
Sixteen.

OLGA  
No. Eighteen at least. Preferably  
20.  
(to Vasley )  
How old are they usually?

VASLEY  
(chuckles a little)  
Definitely not 20.

OLGA  
Sickening!  
(to Maya)  
Did you hear that, Maya? They're  
still children.

MAYA  
You just turned 20 yourself.

OLGA  
But I was a mature adult by the  
time I was 15. I'm going up there  
to talk to him.

She starts off.

MAYA  
Olga. Don't!

OLGA  
(to Maya)  
Don't? That's it? Don't!? The old  
degenerate. And with his condition.  
(to Vasley)  
Does he warn them?

VASLEY  
The ones I bring have it too. He  
has a list of them, and I--

OLGA  
You go fetch them.

VASLEY

Well sometimes they're brought. Or they just show up. But mostly 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.

MAYA

Does he beat you often?

VASLEY

Never. But I'm sure this would change that.

OLGA

(to Maya)

This is just so wrong.

MAYA

Yes. But very common.

OLGA

And that should stop us from doing something about it?

MAYA

Only if it's something rash that might cause us to receive... unwanted attention.

She points to Olga's pile.

MAYA (CONT'D)

(to Vasley)

We'll talk about this, and let you know how to proceed.

VASLEY

Do we really need to proceed? I might lose my job. Be thrown out on the street. Starve to death.

MAYA

(to Olga)

Is that what you want for him, Olga?

OLGA

No. But he's still...  
(she picks up her books,  
looks at Vasley)  
Very disappointing.

Maya hangs back.

VASLEY

Well at least now I'm just disappointing. I don't think I could stand being sickening. I mean not to her. I mean...

MAYA

(smiles)

I understand. She smiles. Men fall in love. She gets a bit harsh. They stay in love.

(she starts out, stops)

Just to warn you, your situation here might never change. We probably won't come up with a satisfactory solution. We haven't come up with one to anything else so far.

She 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 of books. Some of them spill off.

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! 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. Tell him.

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.

Sasha rushes up the stairs. Heads in.

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. A whimper

SASHA

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

Sasha hurries down the stairs.

SASHA (CONT'D)  
Now where were we?

Sasha approaches Vasley.

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  
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--

Sasha hits him again, and Vasley collapses.

SASHA  
(leaning over him)  
Ready to listen now?

## 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 to the owner.

MAKAROV

The owner, yes. He should be the one your boy reports on most regularly.

SASHA

Because?

MAKAROV

Of his profession. Books are a kind of lechery. 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. 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

Good. 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 once before about imagination. That it causes--

MAKAROV

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

SASHA

I'll remember that.

MAKAROV

Fine. As long as you don't try to explain it. And promise me you'll never read a book. Especially one of these new ones.

(to Audience)

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 already  
somewhat broken. Never do it again.

Vasley is at their table. He sits.

MAKAROV (CONT'D)  
So you were able to get away.

VASLEY  
My boss is busy right now.

MAKAROV  
With a customer?

VASLEY  
No. She might take a book with her... after they're done. But only to sell. I don't think she can read.

MAKAROV  
Done doing what?

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

MAKAROV  
Would you like me to tell you?

VASLEY  
No thank you.

SASHA  
You can tell me.

VASLEY  
Yes. Or later, I might actually show you.  
(to Vasley)  
Do you want something to drink?

VASLEY (CONT'D)  
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 I had to come or I'd get  
a lot more...  
(points to bruise)  
... of this

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 know he won't.  
(to Sasha)  
Wait outside.

SASHA

But suppose you say something I  
could maybe use later.

MAKAROV

You mean you might want to quote  
me.

SASHA

Not without your permission.

MAKAROV

Outside.

Makarov just looks at him. Sasha nods, leaves.

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

So you only came here to avoid a  
beating.

VASLEY

Yes. Unless I had another reason  
I'm not sure of right now.

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 about a better job for yourself. A more important job.

VASLEY

You mean a job where I'd be useful in some way?

MAKAROV

You'd be helping your country.

VASLEY

Why would I want to do that?

MAKAROV

Don't you love your country?

VASLEY

No. Why would I?

MAKAROV

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

VASLEY

From who?

MAKAROV

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 about things like that.

MAKAROV

What do you think about?

VASLEY

Well for the last couple of years,  
food mostly. And also heat. When I  
get cold I think a lot about heat  
because I can never get enough of  
it

MAKAROV

And the same with food? You don't  
get enough of that either?

VASLEY

Who does?

MAKAROV

I do. Would you like to have a job  
that assures that 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)

Do you want something to eat?

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? It's been so long  
since I've had 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 mourning scarf.

PIOTR

It came on her suddenly, didn't it.

RAYISHA

So many people are saying that to me.

PIOTR

They just mean that 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. You could be in for some 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 how will you live?

RAYISHA

The priest suggested a convent.

PIOTR

That's all he could come up with, eh.

RAYISHA

Yes. And I hate that idea. I'd rather walk into the forest and let the wolves tear off my flesh.

PIOTR

Better you take whatever little the church has to offer.

RAYISHA

Can I stay with you and your wife?

PIOTR

My wife's been driven insane by the heartache of five still births.

RAYISHA

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

PIOTR

There's very little to eat, so that won't help your case. And even if she let you stay, eventually she'd do something really awful to you.

RAYISHA

Worse than the wolves?

PIOTR

I'd rather not find out. I think we should get you to Petersburg.

RAYISHA

Petersburg. No. I can't survive there.

PIOTR

Not on your own. But 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

You're worried he might do something 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 is an orphan. A child left to his own devices becomes a man without an anchor. Nobody knows why he thinks or does anything. Including himself probably.

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  
resent me.

YAKOV  
(near now)  
I got the coal. But I think they'll  
be overcharging you for it.

PIOTR  
So if they ever get another horse  
I'll overcharge them for shoeing  
it. That's how the system works.

RAYISHA  
There could be something wrong with  
that system.

PIOTR  
Well when you get to Petersburg  
you'll find someone who knows of a  
better one.

YAKOV  
How is she getting to Petersburg?

PIOTR  
You're taking her there. And I  
don't want to see you back here  
until you've found a safe situation  
for her.

YAKOV  
And if I can't?

PIOTR  
Then still don't bother coming  
back. Because you won't have a job  
waiting for you.

RAYISHA  
(to Yakov)  
He doesn't mean that.

YAKOV  
I don't care if he does. I don't  
think I'll come back anyway.

(MORE)

YAKOV (CONT'D)

I'll get you into a good circumstance, and then I'll find one for myself. If worse comes to worst, we can join the thousands of starving people banging on the gates of the Czar's palace and wait for our dear leader to have his army gun us all down.

PIOTR

That's the spirit. Look on the bright side.

YAKOV

(touches Rayisha's shoulder)

We'll leave tomorrow. Pack lightly. It's a long walk.

RAYISHA

We're going to walk?

PIOTR

No I can give you the train fare.

RAYISHA

Oh that's so generous. Thank you, Piotr.

YAKOV

Yes. Thank you, Piotr.

PIOTR

You're paying your own way.

YAKOV

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

Yakov laughs and leaves. Rayisha hugs Piotr.

RAYISHA

I owe you my life.

PIOTR

(helping her leave)

Well let's see how it turns out first.

RAYISHA

No no. I do

PIOTR

Please stop.

RAYISHA  
But I do...

PIOTR  
Please... It's too much...

RAYISHA  
But...

PIOTR  
Shh...

~

~

## SCENE 9

Tavern. Sasha has joined Vasley and Makarov at their table. Sasha slowly, arduously takes notes while Makarov talks. And Vasley devours some kind of stew.

MAKAROV

Our targets are all very much alike. They read the same books. Think and do the same things. They're the most predictably annoying generation we have ever had. They preach liberty without ever considering its dangers. And they have never been able to recognize one undeniable truth. That submission to the law is essential to the survival of man.  
(to Sasha)  
Did you get all that?

SASHA

Sort of. And thank you for allowing me to rejoin you.

MAKAROV

Well even if you can't clearly explain the reasons for our actions, you should at least be able to repeat the official jargon.

SASHA

So that I can tell our recruits.

MAKAROV

Or the court where you'll have to defend your actions if things don't go our way. But let's not dwell on that. Tell Vasley here 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)  
That was just a joke.

MAKAROV

A stupid joke.

SASHA  
Absolutely.  
(to Vasley)  
Forget it immediately.

MAKAROV  
(to Vasley)  
But even in that stupid joke  
there's a grain of truth. We won't  
know when the swamp has been  
completely drained. So instead of  
dredging forever, bring the  
suspects quickly to the surface and  
into the light of everyday life.

VASLEY  
How?

MAKAROV  
(to Sasha)  
Tell him.

SASHA  
I could. But it'd be a lot better  
coming from you.

Makarov smiles. Pats Sasha on the head.

MAKAROV  
(to Vasley)  
Offer your support. We'll provide  
you with money to give them. Not  
too much or they'll become  
suspicious. And always show  
enthusiasm for their beliefs. That  
way when you question what they've  
been up to, it will seem only that  
you're keen 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

(to Vasley)

He was a criminal. Part of the Streina Boys gang. Every one of them a killer or a thief. 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

And that's why he worked so hard to get house broken.

VASLEY

You mean like a dog.

MAKAROV

Exactly like a dog. Anyway the objective is to keep information flowing. For the time being you should stay in the bookshop, and get close to the regular customers. That man and woman who were leaving when Sasha showed up...

VASLEY

They're both women. Sisters.

MAKAROV

(to Yakov)

You told me they were--

SASHA

I was sure they were--

VASLEY

One of them wears pants.

MAKAROV

Why?

VASLEY

She's been to Europe.

MAKAROV

Well...besides all that, what did you make of them? Are they just followers? Or are they types that people could be drawn to? Possible leaders.

VASLEY  
Maya might be.

SASHA  
I bet she's the one in the pants.

VASLEY  
Yes. But I don't think it's because  
of the pants.

SASHA  
Explain.

MAKAROV  
(to Vasley)  
Don't bother. What about the other  
one?

VASLEY  
Olga. I'm not sure about her. When  
I see her or try talking to her, I  
get dizzy.

SASHA  
Dizzy? What are you, a child?  
(to Makarov)  
Dizzy...

VASLEY  
(to Makarov)  
She's...appealing. But so is Maya.  
And strong. They're both very  
strong.

MAKAROV  
But you're smitten with Olga. Has  
she shown any interest in you?

VASLEY  
She finds me annoying.

SASHA  
Everyone probably finds you  
annoying.

VASLEY  
That's true. But her reason is  
something I'd rather not talk  
about.

SASHA  
What is it?

MAKAROV

He said 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. I'm sure that's it.

MAKAROV

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

(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 you think might be important.

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

What's that mean? The way he sits?

VASLEY

He sits like he doesn't feel weakened by it. I feel at risk whenever 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 more hungry.

Vasley continues to eat his stew.

Sasha watches him, then checks his notes.

## SCENE 10

Yakov and Rayisha arrive in Petersburg during the Bloody Sunday riot. They are huddled under a tree 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 those explosions!

YAKOV

Bombs. At least two of them. Something has gone very wrong.

RAYISHA

You think we could be killed?

YAKOV

Who knows. Nice welcome, eh!

RAYISHA

What should we do?

YAKOV

Stay here and wait for it to stop, I guess.

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 is much louder.

YAKOV (CONT'D)

You shouldn't scream like that. It'll bring attention.

RAYISHA

You screamed too.

YAKOV

I did?

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!!

Yakov puts her on his bac. They rush off

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.

## 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 have found out about all the corruption that's been going on.

(stepping on to the landing)

They always uncover it eventually no matter what dark corner it's hidden in. 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 wasn't that long ago. Well do you remember or not?!

A knock on the door. Vasley ignores it.

VASLEY

I remember something like that.

MASTER

"Something like that" Mother of Christ! 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 damn 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 loud knock on the door. And another. Vasley leaves.

MASTER

What's going on down there now?!

Vasley comes back. A very angry Yakov with Rayisha still on his back follows on.

YAKOV

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

VASLEY

Yes but I was scared. You could have been anyone.

YAKOV

Some other human beings looking for shelter, you mean! So you're still a pathetic weakling!

VASLEY

Well under the circumstances... Are you all right, Rayisha?

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. Trying to warn them.

RAYISHA

Warn them about what?

VASLEY

That...they need to stop what they're doing.

YAKOV

And what's so bad about what they're doing? Are they objecting to something?

VASLEY

Objecting? Do you mean protesting?

YAKOV

Yes. Yes. Protesting. Are they protesting?

VASLEY

Yes. Probably.

RAYISHA

Protesting what?

YAKOV

Working conditions. Taxation levels. The food supply. I bet it was the food supply. That always gets people going.

RAYISHA

Is there a food shortage here, Vasley?

VASLEY

Yes. Maybe.

YAKOV

What do you mean maybe? Is there enough food for the people or not. Is this a legitimate protest, or is it just a bunch of people getting together to make noise and cause trouble?

VASLEY

Look, let's none of us ask or answer any more questions, all right. 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?

RAYISHA

People might be getting killed out there.

VASLEY

Well maybe that's better.

YAKOV

Better than what?

VASLEY

Better than having to deal with the pressure some of us are under. Having to deal with making decisions that are just too difficult to make... even under... normal...

The Master is approaching the landing.

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  
cousin?

He puts Rayisha down

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

The Master enters in a soiled night gown. He looks even more  
sickly.

MASTER  
This was not supposed to happen  
until I was long dead!  
(takes a few steps down)  
I can't be subjected to all this in  
my condition. I provided them with  
those books on the understanding  
that nothing too drastic would  
happen in the near future. 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.  
(stops)  
Weren't they aware of the rumours  
about the positive things the Czar  
has enacted. Even my female  
companions have heard them. The  
latest one in particular should  
have been encouraging. It's about  
a new law that grants people the  
right to *not believe in God*. If  
that's not progress, then what the  
fuck 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!  
(notices Rayisha)  
Well aren't you a sweet young  
thing?

He starts back up into his room

MASTER (CONT'D)

(to Vasley)

Yes. Make sure they're all blind from now on. They won't get so upset when I get too close. Give me a minute or two then send her up. And that man there who brought her. Give him a coin and send him on his way.

He is gone.

VASLEY

You have to leave. There's no sanctuary here.

YAKOV

Well not for her, there isn't. What have you got yourself into here, Vasley?

RAYISHA

(to Vasley)

Why does he want me to up there? Does he need some cleaning done?

YAKOV

Oh for Godsake. You're in the city now, girl. You can't ask stupid questions like that.

(to Vasley)

Even though she has every right to.

Olga comes in supporting a wounded Maya who almost immediately collapses on to the floor

VASLEY

How'd you get in?

OLGA

The door was unlocked.

MAYA

You better go see to that.

VASLEY

What?

Vasley is trying to bring Olga into focus.

OLGA

Vasley! What are you doing? Stop blinking at me like that, and go make sure the door is locked!

VASLEY

Yes. I can do that!

He runs off.

MAYA

(to Yakov)

Quite a night, eh.

OLGA

Were you in the rear of the crowd?

YAKOV

No. We just arrived.

OLGA

Too late though.

MAYA

(trying to breath)

The starting time was clearly marked in the pamphlet we provided.

RAYISHA

He meant we just arrived in the city.

MAYA

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

She is trying to steady her breaths.

YAKOV

(to Olga)

Why is he having trouble breathing?

MAYA

Her. I'm a...her.

OLGA

And she's been shot.

MAYA

Somewhere near my...shoulder. It's not too bad. I think I might be in shock though.

Olga is looking at Rayisha more closely. Vasley returns.

OLGA

She's blind?

YAKOV

Yeah.

OLGA

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

YAKOV

Don't call her that.

MAYA

He's right. It sounds harsh.

OLGA

It'll be a lot harsher if she finds herself in the middle of that insanity out there.

VASLEY

Good point. But...it actually does sound better out there now. So you can probably leave.

OLGA

Who?

VASLEY

(trying not to look at her)

All of you. Yes. Even you. I mean I need you all to leave. Because these are complex issues. The issues out there. And I need time...to think about them.

OLGA

What's there to think about? The army and the police are attacking people.

VASLEY

Unless they were provoked.

OLGA

They weren't.

MAYA

Their mere presence was a provocation to the protesters though.

VASLEY

I see. Yes. Well if the army provoked the protesters and they in turn provoked the army to shoot at them. Then, of course, that would be something else. Unless, I mean even so...some of us need to eat. And a place to sleep. And too much unrest might mean--

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 Maya)

But she's injure!

YAKOV

And we have nowhere else to go.

MAYA

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 mean I really just meant that... I have tasks to perform. And a meal to prepare.

MAYA

Of course. And it does seem quieter out there, so...

(to Olga)

We can probably make it home.

OLGA

All right. But...

(off Rayisha)

We're taking her with us.

MAYA

Definitely. We can't leave her to that decrepit bastard upstairs.

OLGA

(to Yakov)

You disgust us.

YAKOV  
 Why? Oh. No, she's not... I'm  
 not...

OLGA  
 (to Yakov)  
 How many more like her do you have  
 working for you?

YAKOV  
 Working for me? No--

OLGA  
 (to Vasley)  
 And are they all going to be blind  
 or maimed from now on?

VASLEY  
 No I'll put my foot down about  
 that.

She starts off, leading Rayisha.

RAYISHA  
 Yakov?

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

MAYA  
 (to Yakov)  
 You can come too if you want.

OLGA  
 Maya. Please. He's a pimp.

MAYA  
 (to Olga)  
 So can't pimps be reformed?  
 (to Yakov)  
 Please. Come along.

Olga helps Maya out.

YAKOV  
 Okay. Sure. But let's get something  
 straight. I'm not a--

But they are gone.

YAKOV (CONT'D)  
(to Vasley)  
Who are they anyway? How do you  
know them?

VASLEY  
I'm not prepared to answer those  
questions because of the possible  
consequences.

YAKOV  
Who from?

VASLEY  
Everyone. Now just leave before  
they get too far ahead, and you  
lose them. They're your only chance  
of sleeping indoors tonight

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. Or not even think  
about doing... Then there are the  
questions. Not just other people's  
questions but my own.  
(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. Or for not  
thinking and still doing it  
(sits again)  
Yes. Right. Good... I mean good  
enough. For now. I hope.

## SCENE 12

Olga, Maya, and Rayisha hurry on, but pause to give Maya a rest. But Yakov is right behind them.

YAKOV  
No don't stop!

MAYA  
(collapses on the ground)  
Just a few minutes.

OLGA  
I need to look her wound.

RAYISHA  
Look to see if the bullet went all  
the way through.

OLGA  
Yes... Right.  
(looking)  
It did.

Olga takes off her scarf to staunch the flow of Maya's blood.

RAYISHA  
Good. Then there's less chance it  
will fester.

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

RAYISHA  
When the idiot village boys  
accidentally shot each other while  
hunting.  
(to Yakov)  
You wounded two of your friends,  
didn't you.

YAKOV  
Just trying to get them before they  
got me.

Yakov and Maya both laugh.

OLGA  
Oh for godsake.

MAYA

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 that monster.

YAKOV

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

RAYISHA

He's who Piotr told us to go to for help.

MAYA

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

RAYISHA

A slaughter. It was that bad?

MAYA

It started out well enough. We were trying to warn the government what would happen--

OLGA

If they didn't make changes.

MAYA

We thought if they saw how much support we had it might bring them to their senses. But as usual--

OLGA

They proved how ignorant and selfish they are to care. They're going to need a very strong taste of what they've been dishing out.

MAYA

The march was led by one of the few priests who's not owned by the government. He was arrested almost immediately.

OLGA

He'll be tortured then murdered. And there are a lot of us who will want revenge.

MAYA  
She means justice.

OLGA  
But first revenge.

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

MAYA  
She means people who care about  
people like you.

YAKOV  
When you say "people like you..."

RAYISHA  
She means people who don't have  
very much. They want to help us.

YAKOV  
Good. What I need help with most is  
finding a job.

RAYISHA  
And I'm afraid of starving to death  
on the street.

OLGA  
Of course you are. We can help you  
both.

An explosion

MAYA  
She means we can try.

More rifle shots

Maya starts off. Supported by Olga.

MAYA (CONT'D)  
But right now I need to get to our  
house, and lie down in my bed.

Yakov and Rayisha follow.

YAKOV  
She has a bed. A real bed.

Sounds of people approaching quickly. More loud shots.

MAYA

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

They start running. 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, right.

MAYA

In theory.

They are all off.

## SCENE 12A

Piotr comes on holding a letter

PIOTR

(with excitement)

A letter from someone in Petersburg who thinks he's my brother. I've had to gather you together to hear it because most of you were too goddamn lazy to learn how to read.

(reading)

There has been an uprising. Our side lost. Something I knew would happen if desperation caused people to move too recklessly. But there the idiots were. Marching down the street yelling out their stupid slogans when the Czar's mounted soldiers tore into the crowd without mercy. Mercy. That's a word which will be meaningless in our country forever. Hundreds killed. Many more injured. And I'm sure there's more to come from both sides. As for Vasley, he still can't decide if he should let his brain or his asshole do his thinking for him. But even he must be worried that the future will be very bleak and dangerous.

(to the assembled)

And so should all of us!

HE LEAVES

## SCENE 13

Tavern. Vasley in new 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

Good for you.

(sitting )

It's been some time, eh. I see we both have new clothing.

VASLEY

Yes. I have a paying job now.

YAKOV

A job which requires you to look presentable.

VASLEY

And you found work in a munitions factory.

YAKOV

You knew that?

VASLEY

I saw you entering the factory.

YAKOV

Because you just happened to be there.

They just look at each other.

VASLEY

I was watching. I'm with the Department of Safety.

YAKOV

You're a spy?

VASLEY

No I'm just someone who watches and reports to actual spies.

YAKOV

And now you're reporting on the factory?

VASLEY

I'm looking for signs that there could be more of what happened that bloody Sunday.

YAKOV

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

VASLEY

More of the things that brought that on. Bad feelings about the Czar. Have you noticed any of that in the factory?

YAKOV

I've noticed plenty of that. Is that why we're meeting? Do you want names?

VASLEY

Are you willing to provide them?

YAKOV

Do you pay for information like that? Because I'll need the money in advance.

VASLEY

You mean right now? I only have so much on me.

YAKOV

Well whatever you have, I'll take.

Vasley produces some money. Hands it over.

VASLEY

Also, those sisters you met at the book shop, I believe you're still in touch with them.

YAKOV

So you've been watching them too.

VASLEY

But only from a healthy distance.

YAKOV

What's that mean? A healthy distance.

VASLEY

Well there are...certain feelings that I need to keep under control. I can't tell you what they are.

YAKOV

I think I can guess. You're a sad little creature, aren't you?

VASLEY

Yes. I suppose I am. But anyway, I'll need you to keep me informed about their activities?

YAKOV

Whatever you say. So I'll be a spy too. Two orphans helping out the Czar. Who would have thought?

VASLEY

*They* did. The Czar's people target orphans to work for them because we don't have the support that allows us to say no.

YAKOV

Hmm. Vasley Klimkov has an intelligent thought. And he expresses clearly. So do you enjoy the same things the people you work for do. Do you enjoy the opera, for example?

VASLEY

The opera?

YAKOV

Yes. That large fancy place where people sing loudly in a foreign language.

VASLEY

Things like that are for everyone, Yakov.

YAKOV

The hell they are!! What about fresh fruit? You must get plenty of that. Or do the Czar, and his good for nothing family, keep most of it for themselves?

VASLEY

Well I don't eat very much, so--

YAKOV

That's not the point. Do you want me to tell you what my point is?

VASLEY

Well now that you're receiving government money from me you shouldn't actually have a point. Unless it's the *same* as the government's.

YAKOV

Not even about fresh fruit, or the opera?

VASLEY

Well even then I'd have to decide if that point was one the government would agree with.

YAKOV

And if you decided that it wouldn't, you'd have to report the people who *made* the point. Whatever it was.

VASLEY

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

YAKOV

For the moment at least. So you're a coward who's just doing your job out of fear.

VASLEY

Well what else could I be, or do, when I have no defenses.

YAKOV

You could do nothing! Just hide from your superiors. Offer them no assistance.

VASLEY

Can someone you do that with the...  
other side?

YAKOV

The people, Vasley. The other side  
are the people that you spy on.

VASLEY

So with that point of view I take  
it that you're not actually willing  
to join me. So that was all a game  
for you?

YAKOV

A game. A test. The money was a  
little bonus. Yes I'm fully  
committed to the rebellion. Always  
have been, I think. Even before I  
knew there was one.

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 have missed it. 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'm sorry. I can't let that happen.  
Just the thought of it is making me  
ill. So...

(taking out a pistol)

I'll have to rely on this. They  
insisted I carry one.

Yakov looks at him.

YAKOV

You might have to pay for what  
you're doing to our world. Your  
bosses won't survive.

VASLEY

I think that's possible, yes.

YAKOV

Well whatever happens... Good luck  
to us both.

VASLEY

How's Rayisha doing?

YAKOV

She's being taken care of. I'll  
pass on your regards.

VASLEY

My regards. Yes. Do that.

Yakov shakes his head, smiles sadly. Picks up his jacket.  
Leaves.

Vasley looks at his gun.

## SCENE 14

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

Sasha enters. Makarov continues to read without acknowledging his presence. Sasha clears his throat. Again. Same result.

SASHA

Sir...

(no response)

Sir... I'm here, sir.

MAKAROV

(looking up)

Yes you are. 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. There are 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. Tonight's raids will be a major challenge.

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 be fooled by the fact that he  
appears to be in a constant stupor.  
He has qualities he keeps hidden.  
As for changing sides, he's too  
cautious to expose himself to the  
dangers those desperate people are  
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?

VASLEY

Sixty-three. That includes the  
dozen that are usually at the  
meetings Olga and Maya have every  
night.

(to Sasha)

(MORE)

VASLEY (CONT'D)

They're the sister graduate students.

SASHA

I know who they are. I shot one of them.

MAKAROV

For no good reason.

SASHA

She was yelling obscenities about the Czar.

MAKAROV

Everyone in Russia has at one time yelled an obscenity about the Czar.

(to Vasley)

And your friend at the factory?

SASHA

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

VASLEY

You're sure about that?

SASHA

(to Makarov)

He think he's the only one who's been watching.

MAKAROV

We've had a half dozen men on it. That factory has too many people coming and going when it should just be closed because of the strike. They're making something.

SASHA

I suspect bombs.

MAKAROV

Based on what?

VASLEY

He always suspects bombs.

MAKAROV

And why not rifles, Sasha? Or even pistols.

SASHA  
 (scoffing)  
 Pistols...  
 (immediately regretful)  
 Sorry...

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

MAKAROV  
 Good for you. All right...  
 (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 very hard to replace. But if we fail and they 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. You're fighting to maintain the status quo. And therefore, your actual survival. Sasha, you can go.

Sasha hesitates. Looks at each of them.

MAKAROV (CONT'D)  
 I said 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 Czar.

VASLEY

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

MAKAROV

And do you agree with them?

VASLEY

Do you?

MAKAROV

Of course. All you have to do is listen to what he says. It's a miracle he's lasted this long. Anyway...

(to Audience)

I'm off to the Argentine. I think I'll feel safer there win or lose in the short term. Fresh air. A moderate climate. A good place to relax and just fade away. The people could very well prevail eventually. They possess a desperate bravery.

(Vasley)

Make plans for yourself, just in case...

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.

(MORE)

## MAKAROV (CONT'D)

I was always having to tell people he was much smarter than they gave him credit for. Sometimes the dog proved me right. Other times he just begged for food. But at least he did it with a certain amount of dignity.

## LIGHTS CHANGE

Sasha and Vasley, both in a hurry, come face to face on the streets.

## 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

(grabs Vasley's ear)  
Hey, don't fool around. Your position is not as secure as you think.

## VASLEY

Neither is yours.

## SASHA

(pulls the ear harder)  
I told you not to fool around! You should have brought those sisters in a long time ago. If I see you trying to help them escape I'll put a bullet in your head.

## VASLEY

(breaking away)  
Thank you for the warning.

Sasha watches him go.

## SASHA

(yelling after him)  
It wasn't a warning! It was a threat!!

He starts off in the other direction. Stops. Thinks. And runs off to follow Vasley

## SCENE 15

Darkness. Vasley and Yakov are on the run, but Vasley keeps stumbling. Several men are after them. Lots of shouting and instructions in the near distance.

YAKOV

For godsake. Try to stay on your feet.

VASLEY

Sorry. I was never taught how to run properly.

YAKOV

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. A crowd of invisible 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 shoot us all if we didn't keep working.

VASLEY

They couldn't do that without authorization.

YAKOV

Well they seemed authorized to me. And your spy bosses don't know that's why the factory is still open?

VASLEY

No. The army must have plans to attack the bureaucracy as well.

YAKOV

As well as who else?

VASLEY

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

So why'd you put yourself at risk to come save me?

VASLEY

It wasn't really for you. It might be safe to move now.

They stand and move out.

VASLEY (CONT'D)

It was for Rayisha. If Olga and her sister are arrested tonight, Rayisha will need someone 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.

YAKOV

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

VASLEY

Well Maya will probably lead any insurrection, but I might be able to save Olga. If I can do that, I'll take her and Rayisha both back to the village. Piotr sent a letter to tell me that his wife killed herself.

YAKOV/VASLEY

Finally!

VASLEY

Yes. So he'll be able to take Rayisha into his house now.

YAKOV

And what will Olga do?

VASLEY

(looking out and up)  
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

Yes he beat me and took me prisoner. Doesn't look like he's got it in him, does he.

Vasley look at him.

SASHA  
No. It doesn't!

YAKOV  
Well in that case...

Yakov put his hand up and appears to be surrendering when he suddenly lunges for Sasha. Sasha shoots him. Yakov falls to his knees. Reaches for Vasley.

YAKOV (CONT'D)  
(in pain)  
Oh... That was a mistake.  
(reaches for Vasley)  
Help me up... will you.

Vasley extends his hand, but Yakov falls all the way over. Dead. Vasley kneels beside 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 Vasley lifts the gun that he managed to take out a bit earlier without being seen and shoots Sasha. Sasha staggers back a bit, clutching his chest...

SASHA  
God I hate you... so much.

He falls. Dead.

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

VASLEY  
I'm sorry.

He runs off.

## SCENE 16

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

MAYA

Why aren't I in jail with my sister?

MAKAROV

Your sister's not in jail. She escaped.

MAYA

So you had her killed then?

MAKAROV

Is that what the word "escaped" means to you?

(off her look)

She got clean away. It was our friend Vasley's doing. He took her into his personal custody and she never appeared that night again. You never know when your heart is going to get the best of you, right. Anyway, we don't know where she is.

MAYA

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 you all. So go ahead. Torture me. You'll get nothing from me!

He stands.

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 with all your knowledge and opinions.

MAYA

Want from them?

MAKAROV

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

MAYA

We expected them to foment revolution.

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*?

MAYA

(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 to use. Just curious, do you think people deserve to be rewarded just for existing?

MAYA

For just existing? No. For enduring? Yes. Absolutely.

MAKAROV

All right. I acknowledge the difference.

(smiles)

Well... I'm glad we cleared that up. This is not the time for misunderstandings of any kind.

He undoes her restraints. She seems uncertain about why.

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

(sitting again)

I've been told that at your meetings you handed out books. Very long books.

MAYA

Books of instruction and comfort.

MAKAROV

Comfort.

MAYA

Knowledge is comfort. Knowing how things work and what they *mean*, can make you feel less uncertain about your life.

MAKAROV

Yes. But why did the books have to be so long? 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 partially to the Audience.

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

(to both Maya and at times  
the Audience)

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.

(turning back to Maya)

In our great Russian novels the sentiment is almost unbearable.

MAYA

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

MAKAROV

I never got that. I just got depressed.

MAYA

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

He picks up a briefcase from the floor next to his chair.

MAKAROV

(casually approaching her)  
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...

MAYA

What does that mean? I can leave?

MAKAROV

Yes. Or you can stay.

(gestures)

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. Maya watches him go then turns her attention  
to the desk. Makes a slight movement towards it. Hesitates.  
Then sits in the chair. Thinks.

## SCENE 17

The Master is searching for a book in the much messier piles now on floor from being spilled at various times. He looks worse than ever and can barely move.

GRISHA

What a fucking mess. But when you don't know what you're looking for that doesn't really matter, does it. Just need 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 bilge..." 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.

MASTER

You're back. Why?

VASLEY

Nowhere else to go.

MASTER

Your career as a spy is over I take it. The people you betrayed will probably hang you, you know.

VASLEY

I betrayed everyone.

MASTER

(starting up the stairs)

Well that's an accomplishment. But I'm talking specifically about the people you spied on. They'll string you up for sure. Not right away. They'll be busy hanging people much more important than you are. But they'll get to you 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 showed up, so what did you expect.

VASLEY

I expected nothing.

GRISHA

Yes, That was very apparent.

(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 up again.

The Master's voice as he makes it to the landing and starts into the darkness

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)

(to himself)

What about Olga?

(after Master)

Did you hear if Olga is all right!?

MASTER

(off)

Who the hell is she?!

Vasley sits again. Head in Hands.

## SCENE 18

The village. Rayisha on a bench. Olga looking around.

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?  
(joining her)  
How will that be possible?

RAYISHA  
It won't. But don't concern  
yourself with me. No one expected  
me to live this long.

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?

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 sister?

PIOTR

Yes he goes on about that for awhile.

(hands her the letter)

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

OLGA

She's my friend.

PIOTR

Is that so?

RAYISHA

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

PIOTR

Of course. For as long as she needs. We can't offer her much in the way of accommodation.

RAYISHA

We've been sleeping in ditches and fields all the way here.

OLGA

I don't require luxury of any kind. I just want 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 a 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.

(leaving)

It's so fucking depressing.

Olga turns to Rayisha

OLGA  
What do you think?

RAYISHA  
I think you can make them care.

Olga takes her hand.

OLGA  
Do you want to hear Vasley's  
letter?

RAYISHA  
Please.

OLGA  
(reading)  
Tell Olga, if she is still there,  
that there is interesting, even  
startling news, about her sister.  
Apparently...

Lights here slowly fade

AND A LIGHT ON....

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

OLGA/VASLEY  
She was offered a job in the Czar's  
secret police.

Olga and Rayisha stand and start off. Olga is still reading,  
but now she her voice is fading.

VASLEY  
(as he writes)  
And not just any job. The rumour is  
that she was actually in charge  
until it was discovered who she  
really was. People think that's  
bizarre, but I think it's just a  
normal bureaucratic mistake. After  
the truth about her was discovered  
she was arrested, but let out  
almost immediately because of  
having done such a fine and humane  
job in the two weeks she was in  
command. There's another rumour  
that she was able to find and  
destroy many incriminating files on  
you and your friends during her  
time there.

(MORE)

VASLEY (CONT'D)

I myself thing that's just wishful thinking. Anyway she is probably on her way there to you now, so tell Olga that. 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?

MASTER

I want my supper!

VASLEY

(looks up)  
Make it yourself!!

He smiles very slightly.

THE END