

ORPHANS FOR THE CZAR

by

GEORGE F WALKER

Suggested by

The Life of a Useless Man

By

Maxim Gorky

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Rena Zimmerman at Great North Artists
TORONTO, ONTARIO
CANADA**

416 925 2051

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 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 liked the story. I was curious about what was going to happen next.

VASLEY

And you cared?

RAYISHA

Yes. Didn't you?

VASLEY

Not at all.

RAYISHA

Well didn't you find the people in the story interesting.

VASLEY

No.

RAYISHA

But 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?

She thinks about that. Then...

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 it 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

Yes.

(looks at her, thinks)

But in a way that makes you lucky. 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 they do that?

VASLEY

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

RAYISHA

Well it made me feel sad that I couldn't--

VASLEY

See it for yourself. Yes. So 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.

RAYISHA

No. Stop.

VASLEY

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's not!

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 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

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.

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 mean 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

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

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 have 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

(raising the iron bar)
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 back to you. You made a mistake, telling her that about the world. And I'm sure the general opinion will be that you should be beaten for it.

VASLEY

By whom?

PIOTR

Anyone who wants to.

VASLEY

Do you want to?

PIOTR

I'd do it if I thought it would be of any use. But beatings don't help someone like you. Nothing practical ever sinks in.

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, you know that?

VASLEY

I've heard it mentioned.

PIOTR

Well here's another idea that will help you get through life more easily. Stop talking all together.

VASLEY

All together might be hard.

PIOTR

So do it gradually. And eventually just mostly listen. And watch more. Right now, in fact. Just watch me hammer this horseshoe and try to learn something.

Vasley watches. But gets quickly bored.

VASLEY
Who is it for?

PIOTR
Someone with a horse.

VASLEY
No one in this village owns a horse anymore.

PIOTR
Someone might pass through.

VASLEY
(nods)
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. 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. 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.

(MORE)

PIOTR (CONT'D)

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 beat you from time to time.

VASLEY

(leaving)
Of course.

Piotr yells after him.

PIOTR

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

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

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. 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 really, is 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 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

Why?

VASLEY

Because 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 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, 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

(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

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 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

(looking over at it)

It's in French. Do you read French?

OLGA

Of course.

(chuckling)

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

VASLEY

For what you just said, about what I said, yes. And you laughed again.

OLGA

Well it was more of a chuckle, but even so...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 word would that be?

OLGA

I'll 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.

OLGA

You haven't seen him?

VASLEY

Not clearly. He stays 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...

VASLEY

I can prepare myself...

OLGA

Yes.
(hands him several coins)
Here. For the book.

VASLEY

This is a lot of money.

OLGA

Is it?

VASLEY

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

OLGA

I already do. I've read it many times, but I lent it 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...

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. Thinks. Then...

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 odor. 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. 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. 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.

(MORE)

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

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. 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

Maybe a very small feather. 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'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

So...have I offended you?

MAKAROV

Yes.

SASHA

And...will I be punished for that?

MAKAROV

(to himself 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. Maya has short cropped hair and wears trousers and boots. 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 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 does Grisha require 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?

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...

OLGA
More what?

MAYA
(to Vasley)
Like a man?

OLGA
And she looks like a man because...
she's wearing pants?

VASLEY
Well that and--

MAYA
My hair.

VASLEY
Yes. Her 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.

(MORE)

OLGA (CONT'D)

(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.

MAYA

We're planning...a large event.

Maya goes to Vasley. Leans in.

MAYA (CONT'D)

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.
(to Olga)
He procures for him.

OLGA

(turns on Vasley)
So you're not only ignorant. You're
sickening.

MAYA

Olga.

OLGA

Doesn't he sicken you?

MAYA

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 them come in.
(to Vasley)
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
Definitely not 20.

OLGA
(to Maya)
Did you hear that? 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

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 they 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.

MAYA

Does he beat you often?

VASLEY

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

MAYA

(to Olga)

We need to think this through.

OLGA

It's just so wrong.

MAYA

Yes. But very common.

OLGA

Should that stop us from doing something?

MAYA

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

She takes Olga's arm.

MAYA (CONT'D)

(to Vasley)

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

VASLEY

Do we really need to proceed?

OLGA

Definitely.

MAYA

So you want him to maybe lose his
job then. Be thrown out on the
street. Starve to death.

OLGA

No. But...he's still...
(she looks at Vasley)
Very disappointing.

She leaves. Maya hangs back.

VASLEY

Well at least I'm just
disappointing now. 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 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.

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 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 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

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 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. They'll only cause you harm.

(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
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 know what that is.

MAKAROV
You don't?

VASLEY
Not...exactly.

MAKAROV
I see. Do you want something to
drink?

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 I'd
get a lot more of this...
(MORE)

VASLEY (CONT'D)

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

SASHA

But suppose you say something I could maybe use later.

MAKAROV

You mean you'd like to be able to quote me.

SASHA

Quote you? No I--

MAKAROV

Leave.

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. But just when I get cold. Then 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 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?

(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, we, mean by that is it's good that 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

We eat very little, 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

He'd 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 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 I'll overcharge them for shoeing
their horse if they ever get
another one. That's how the system
works.

RAYISHA
There could be something wrong with
that system.

PIOTR
Well maybe 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

Well let's see how it turns out first.

SCENE 9

Tavern. Sasha has joined Vasley and Makarov at their table. Sasha 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

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

MAKAROV

It occurred to me that even if you can't clearly explain the reasons for our actions, you should at least be able to repeat the official jargon that goes along with them.

SASHA

So that I can tell our recruits.

MAKAROV

(to Audience)
Or the court he'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 our new colleague practical guidance.
(to Sasha)
Tell Vasley here what you believe 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)

That was just a joke.

MAKAROV

A stupid joke.

SASHA

Absolutely.

(to Vasley)

Forget it immediately.

MAKAROV

(to Vasley)

But even in a stupid joke there might be a grain of truth. We can never know when the swamp has been entirely cleared. So don't just keep dredging. Bring the suspects to the surface. To the clear 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 unlimited 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 your questions about what they're up to will only seem 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 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 she's also--

MAKAROV

And the other one?

VASLEY

Olga.

MAKAROV

What is she like?

VASLEY

I'm not sure.

MAKAROV

I'm sorry?

VASLEY

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 too.

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 was 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 sue that's it.

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
 you think might be 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
 What's that mean, the way he sits?

VASLEY
 He sits like he doesn't feel
 weakened by it. 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 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 in a park 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

I heard 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 (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 have found out the truth about what's been going on. They always uncover the corruption no matter what dark corner it's been 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 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" 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 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? I don't think they're just...objecting.

RAYISHA

He meant protesting.

YAKOV

Yes. Protesting. Are they protesting?

VASLEY

Yes. Probably.

RAYISHA

Protesting what?

VASLEY

Well I'm not--

YAKOV

Working conditions? Taxation levels? The food supply?

(to Rayisha)

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

RAYISHA

Is there a food shortage here, Vasley?

VASLEY

Yes. Maybe.

YEAKOV

What do you mean maybe? Is there enough food for the people or not.

VASLEY

Maybe. Or maybe not. 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. You're talking like more of an idiot than ever.

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 cousin?

VASLEY

No. Half brother. And he's...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. I can't be subjected to this in my condition. I provided them with those books on the very strict condition 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. 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 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...

(to Rayisha)

Well aren't you a sweet thing?

(to Vasley)

Yes. Make sure they're all blind from now on. They won't get so upset if I get too close. Send her up.

(starting up)

And that man there who brought her.

(MORE)

MASTER (CONT'D)

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, Vasley?

RAYISHA

(to Vasley)

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

YAKOV

Oh for God's sake. 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.

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

What's wrong with you. Stop blinking like that, and go make sure the door is locked!

VASLEY

Yes. I'll do that!

OLGA

Right now!

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.

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 breathing.

YAKOV
(to Olga)
Why is he having trouble breathing?

MAYA
Her. I'm a...her.

YAKOV
Oh. Sorry.

OLGA
She's been shot.

MAYA
Somewhere near my...shoulder.

OLGA
In her chest.

MAYA
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.

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.

YAKOV
(to Vasley)
And you need to think about if it's
okay for them to do that.

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 injured.

YAKOV

And we have nowhere else to go to.

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 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, right.

MAYA

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

OLGA

(to Yakov)

You disgust us.

YAKOV

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

OLGA

(to Yakov)

How many more like her do you have working for you?

(to Vasley)

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

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. A park where they are stopping to give Maya a rest.

MAYA
(sitting on the ground)
This is good. Just a few minutes.

OLGA
Let me look.

Olga is wrapping Maya's wound with her scarf when Yakov catches up

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

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

RAYISHA
Good. Then there's less chance it's going to fester.

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

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

YAKOV
When we were hunting.

RAYISHA
He wounded two of his friends himself.

YAKOV
(to Maya)
I figured it was better to get them before they got me.

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

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 Grisha.

YAKOV

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

RAYISHA

We were there because his half brother Piotr told us to go to him for help.

YAKOV

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

MAYA

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?

MAYA

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

MAYA

The march was even led by a priest.

OLGA

Not the usual kind of priest.

MAYA

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

OLGA

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

MAYA

He was arrested almost immediately. He'll be tortured then murdered.

OLGA

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

MAYA

She means justice.

OLGA

But first revenge.

YAKOV

(to Maya)

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

MAYA

A lot of us 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. Help would be good. What I need help with most is finding a job.

RAYISHA

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

MAYA

Of course you are.

OLGA

We can help you both.

MAYA

She means we can try.

Maya starts off. Supported by Olga.

MAYA (CONT'D)

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

Yakov and Rayisha follow.

YAKOV

She has a bed.

RAYISHA

I heard.

YAKOV

A real bed.

Sounds of people approaching quickly.

MAYA

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.

(helping Maya)

That's right, isn't it?

MAYA

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...good for you.
(sitting)
It's been some time, eh.

VASLEY

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 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. It's part of my job.

(off Yakov's blank stare)

I'm with the Department of Safety.

YAKOV

You're a spy?

VASLEY

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. But I'm really just someone who watches and then reports to actual spies.

YAKOV

Okay. And now you're...reporting on the factory. About what?

VASLEY

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

YAKOV

It only happened a few weeks ago, and I almost got killed... So yes I do.

VASLEY

Well I'm looking for signs that there will be more of that.

YAKOV

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

VASLEY

No. Or maybe. But really more of the things that brought that on. More bad feelings about the Czar.

YAKOV

You mean things like calling him a pig and a fool.

VASLEY

Yes. Have you noticed any of that going on in the factory?

YAKOV

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

VASLEY

Are you willing to provide them?

YAKOV

Do you pay people 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 paper money. Hands it over.

VASLEY

Also, I'd like to enquire about the sisters you met at the book shop. I believe that you're still in touch with them.

YAKOV

Because you've been watching them as well.

VASLEY

Sometimes. But only from a healthy distance.

YAKOV

What's that mean? A healthy distance.

VASLEY

Well I have...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, are you willing to keep me informed about their activities?

YAKOV

Just their political activities?

VASLEY

They have other ones?

YAKOV

Well they're young women so--

VASLEY

Oh. Yes. Well then just concentrate on the political... And only for Maya. She's the one...

YAKOV

Who wears pants.

VASLEY

Yes. And leave the younger one...

YAKOV

Olga.

VASLEY

(swallows)

Olga. Yes. Leave her out of it.

YAKOV

Because of those...feelings you have...

VASLEY

I just think the one in pants is more dangerous.

YAKOV

Whatever you say. So I'll be a spy too. We'll both be on the side of the existing government.

(MORE)

YAKOV (CONT'D)

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 expresses it clearly. So do you enjoy the same things they do?

VASLEY

Who?

YAKOV

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

VASLEY

The opera?

YAKOV

Yes. You know, that large fancy place where people sing loudly in a foreign language.

VASLEY

Things like that are for everyone.

YAKOV

The hell they are. What about fresh fruit? You must get plenty of that. Or does 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 actually is?

VASLEY

Well now that you're receiving money from me, that is, the government, 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 or the point I've heard made by government types is the one I'd have to agree with.

YAKOV

And that would be stressful.

VASLEY

For a while. But then--

YAKOV

You'd have to agree with government.

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 and offer them 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 money to afford a half decent place to live.

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'm not really proud of it. Truth is, I'm not sure how I feel about it.

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, I think. Even before I knew there was one.

VASLEY

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

YAKOV

But just about everyone could have guessed 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'm sorry. I can't let that happen. Just the thought of it is making me ill.

YAKOV

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

VASLEY

That's not likely to happen. So...
(taking out a pistol)
I'll have to rely on this..
I didn't want it. But they insisted
I have one.

Yakov looks at him.

YAKOV

You might have to pay for what
you're doing to your fellow
commoners. It's possible your
bosses won't survive.

VASLEY

Yes it is.

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. 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 slowly)

Good for you. 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 fairly 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.

MAKAROV

For what? The bathroom?

SASHA

Well...yes. But also for a promotion.

MAKAROV

In theory perhaps. But in your case 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 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 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)

(MORE)

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

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)

They're the sister graduate
students.

SASHA

I know who they are.

(to Makarov)

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?

VASLEY

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

MAKAROV

That factory is still running, is
it. Must be making something
important for them not to go on
strike like all the others.

SASHA

I suspect bombs.

MAKAROV

Based on what?

VASLEY

He always suspects bombs.

SASHA

And sometimes I'm right.

MAKAROV

Yes but this time, Sasha, why not rifles? 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 stay active, 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. 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.

MAKAROV

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

VASLEY

That's also true.

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 here 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.

(MORE)

MAKAROV (CONT'D)

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.
Other times it just ate my socks
and shit 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 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

(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 after 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 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 but very 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, take her and Rayisha both back to the village. Piotr sent a letter to tell me that his wife killed herself.

YAKOV

Finally.

VASLEY

Yes. So he'll be able to take Rayisha into his house 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 and took me prisoner. Doesn't look like he's got it in him, does he.

SASHA

No. It doesn't!

YAKOV
Well in that case...

Yakov lunges for Sasha. Sasha shoots him. Yakov falls to his knees. Reaches for Vasley.

YAKOV (CONT'D)
(in pain)
Oh... That was...a mistake. Well
live...and learn.
(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 falls. Dead.

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

VASLEY (CONT'D)
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? As in she "escaped her earthly bonds"?

(off her look)

She got clean 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.

MAYA

And you won't get any help from me in finding her either. 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 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 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. 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 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 about 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

So 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

Grisha (aka The 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 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.

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

The people you betrayed will probably hang you, you know.

VASLEY

I betrayed everyone.

GRISHA

Well that's an accomplishment. But I'm talking about the people you spied on. 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 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 first showed up, so what did you expect.

VASLEY

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)

(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.

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

Olga takes her in. Smiles sadly in the Russian way.

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. 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

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

OLGA

I don't require luxury. 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.

(MORE)

PIOTR (CONT'D)

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

What do you think?

RAYISHA

I think you can make them 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 sister...

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 she was offered a job in the Czar's secret police. And not just any job. The rumour is that she was actually in charge until it was discovered who she really is. 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 no harm in the two weeks she was in command. At least none that they are aware of. There's another rumour that she was able to find and destroy many incriminating files on you and your friends during her time there. I myself think that's just wishful thinking. Anyway she is probably on her way there 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?

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

THE END