

The Test of Time

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Author's Note

The Russian characters in this play are historical and in life played the roles assigned them. Insofar as I know, the gathering described never took place, not least because the American characters are fictitious. It is a factual rumor that Paramount Studios once negotiated with Stalin's government to "rent" Dmitri Shostakovich.

Cast

Lev Konstantinovich Knipper (1898-1974)—A Soviet composer, best remembered for his march *Polyushko-polye*, in English usually known as “Meadowlands.” 59 at the time of the play.

Olga Leonardovna Knipper-Chekhova (1868-1959)—A famous Russian actress from the Moscow Art Theatre. 89 at the time of the play. Lev Knipper’s aunt.

Dmitri Dmitrievich Shostakovich (1906-1975)—The composer. 51 at the time of the play.

Olga Konstantinovna Chekhova (1897-1980)—The famous Russo-German movie star. Lev’s sister, Olga Leonardovna’s niece. 60.

Brandy Slade—Deputy music director at Paramount Pictures, Hollywood. About 30.

Nick Warren—A saxophonist. In his mid-late 30s.

The action takes place in a dacha outside Moscow in 1957. The set should provide for running supertitles to translate the Russian and German dialogue into English, and include a constructivist-futurist screen on which to project a nonstop audiovisual landscape. (The embedded links are not necessarily those to be used and are presented only for example.)

Part One

A snowy night in Ivanovo, a “creative retreat” outside Moscow. As the wind blows, the melancholy music of Georgi Sviridov’s *Little Triptych* ([first movement](#), until 0:50) is heard and the faint outline of ghosts of dead composers appear in the swirling air. The lights go up to reveal the interior of a dacha. The wallpaper is peeling, an old stove, sink and refrigerator stand in one corner near a kitchen table. A grand piano occupies part of the room. Several doors lead to back rooms and stairs. A few tennis rackets are lying on a shabby sofa or on old chairs, as well as alpine gear. A photo of LEV KNIPPER mountain climbing hangs on the wall and one of him with his aunt, OLGA LEONARDOVNA. OLGA L is making tea on the stove. She moves slowly with arthritis, shows signs of emphysema, is losing her eyesight and doesn’t hear too well.

An urgent knock on the door. OLGA L briefly looks up, ignores it. NICK and BRANDY are then heard from without over the wind. (This can be performed on or offstage. If possible, the shadow a monk, dressed in a black orthodox habit, detaches itself from the other ghosts and points the way to the door. The Black Monk, always just a shadow, is optional but can appear throughout the play in appropriate poses. A few are indicated. None of the characters see him.)

BRANDY (Shivering): I—I hope this is the place. It l—looks like it might be the place...

NICK: God might be a Republican...

BRANDY (Almost to herself, seriously): T—they forgot to t—tell me winter here b—begins in October.

NICK: Napoleon also regretted that oversight. (Pensively): But everything here, I think, begins, and ends, in October. There is...a beauty in it.

BRANDY: True, for reindeers...

NICK (Rubbing her shoulders): Brandy, fearless Amazon, if it's sun you're after, I'd put a few places on the vacation list higher than Russia. (Imitating [Frank Sinatra](#)): "'Twas on the isle of Capri that I found her, beneath the shade of an old walnut tree..."

BRANDY: I must find Shostakovich, I've told you, Nick.

NICK: You've been as tight lipped as a G-man about why.

BRANDY: For a kiss I shall part my lips and reveal...

(They kiss.)

...we won't find him on Capri under a walnut tree.

(As the famous march from Shostakovich's [seventh symphony](#) (around 6:25) fades in, BRANDY knocks again. This time OLGA L shuffles over to a window and peers out. It is not clear what she sees. The march continues to play quietly in the background.)

BRANDY (In bad but assertive Russian): *Скажите, здесь писает Дмитрий Шостакович?* [*Skazhíte, zdes' písaet Dmitri Shostakovich?*]

(Supertitle: *Tell us, does Dmitri Shostakovich piss here?*)

(OLGA L is puzzled and doesn't answer.)

BRANDY (Louder): *Шостакович, великий композитор.* [*Shostakovich velikiy kompozítor.*] (She begins to sing the march from the 7th symphony.) *Герой воина. Его музыка ест любовница мира.* [*Gerói vóina. Evó múzika est lyubóvnítza míra.*]

(Supertitle: *Shostakovich, the great composer. The hero of the warrior. His music eats the mistress of the world.*)

OLGA L (Abruptly): *Его здесь нет.* [*Evó zdyes'nyet.*] (She shrugs, turns from window.)

(Supertitle: *He doesn't live here.*)

(BRANDY quickly fall silent.)

NICK (Aside): It's more urgent to find the future than Shostakovich. (To

BRANDY): Who is it?

BRANDY: An old peasant woman, probably blind; certainly deaf. Do you think this house is haunted? It looks as if it might be haunted.

(The Black Monk laughs, nodding.)

(Aside, seriously): They forgot to tell me that too.

NICK: We'll try the next cottage. They all look equally ruined in the dark...

BRANDY: Nick, my love, we've been wandering around this village for hours.

NICK (Raising a finger, a little sententiously): In order to be found one must be lost. It's a law of nature...

BRANDY: Where there's kitchen, there's heat.

NICK: Ghosts rarely welcome visitors.

BRANDY (Shivering): Nick. Remember Napoleon.

(She abruptly knocks on the window again. Then, to OLGA L, shouting):

Пожалуйста, где живет Дмитрий Шостакович? [Pozháluysta, gdyé zhivýót Dmitri Shostakovich?]

(Supertitle: *Please, where does Dmitri Shostakovich live?*)

OLGA L: *Не знаю.* [*Nye znáiu.*]

(Supertitle: *I don't know.*)

(OLGA L turns away again.)

BRANDY (To NICK, whispering): She's undeniably suspicious of foreigners...

NICK: What do you expect, Brandy, a ghost haunting a forlorn hut in the middle of nowhere, the country having been locked up like a prison for thirty years?

(The Black Monk strangles himself and flies away.)

BRANDY (Knocking again on the window): *Пожалуйста, помощи, холодно.*

[*Pozháluysta, pomogí, xhólodno.*]

(Supertitle: *Please, help, it's cold. Remember Napoleon.*)

OLGA L (Cracking open the door, peering at them): *Кто вы? Откуда вы?* [*Kto vy?*

Otkúda vy?]

(Supertitle: *Who are you? Where are you from?*)

BRANDY (Flustered): *Мы...* [*Myi...*]

(Supertitle: *We...*)

OLGA L (After a puzzled pause, politely) : *Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*

(Supertitle: *Do you speak German?*)

BRANDY: *Да, нет, nein. Hmm, uh...Вы говорите по-французски? [Da, nyet, nein. Hmm, uh...Vyi govoríte po-franzúzski?]*

(Supertitle: *Yes, no, nein. Do you speak French?*)

OLGA L: *Bien sûr, je parle français. Vous êtes arrivés de Paris?*

(Supertitle: *Of course I speak French. Have you come from Paris?*)

BRANDY: *Paris? Je voudrais, umm, nous voudrions...savez-vous trouver maison de Shostakovich?*

(Supertitle: *Paris? I would like, umm, we would like...do you know to find Shostakovich's house?*)

OLGA L (After another perplexed pause): *Don't you speak English?*

BRANDY: { I don't think so—. Why, yes.

NICK: { No, of course not. That is—yes. I think...

(OLGA L cautiously opens the door a little wider. BRANDY, carrying a portfolio, takes a step in, followed by NICK, carrying a saxophone case. They are dressed too lightly

for the weather. The Black Monk sneaks in behind them. OLGA L speaks in accented and rusty but otherwise respectable British English, making occasional mistakes, especially with tenses.)

OLGA L (Suspiciously, wheezing): Who are you? What do you want of me? Why are you standing at my door with this wind howling like a beast?

(The Black Monk howls.)

NICK (Attempting to explain): The weather in Moscow this morning was clear, fine. We'd hardly stepped on the train when—

BRANDY: Excuse me Mrs...., I apologize for the intrusion, but we are in a great hurry—

OLGA L: Like all Americans. You do come from America, don't you, where people cannot distinguish time from money?

BRANDY: Yes, of course. How did you...? Now, Mrs...., if you'd be so kind as to direct us to Mr. Shostakovich's residence, we shall trouble you no further.

OLGA L: Is Dmitri Dmitrievich expecting you?

BRANDY (Hesitantly): N—not exactly, but Mr. Shostakovich will certainly want to see us when he learns our business.

OLGA L: What business would that be?

BRANDY: The most interesting business of all: none of yours. As Americans say.

NICK: Brandy—

OLGA L (Shaking her head): What can have been so urgent on such a night...devils whirling?

(The Black Monk demonstrates.)

It's all the same. For the last days Dmitri Dmitrievich has been working in one of the other dachas. I don't know which, I've already told you.

(Aside): *Wo sind wir hingekommen, mit solchen unverschämten Menschen?*

(Supertitle: *What has the world come to with such impudent people?*)

There is nothing for it. You'll have to wait. Sit down, whoever you are, Miss...?

BRANDY: Slade. Brandy Slade.

(As OLGA L indicates the divan, BRANDY extends her hand. OLGA L reluctantly takes it.)

OLGA L (To NICK): And Mr. Slade?

NICK: Uh, no. Warren, Nick Warren. (He extends his hand.)

OLGA L (Dubiously): Mr. Warren, I see. (She reluctantly takes his hand. A little sharply): Please take some slippers. I'm sorry we have none in glass.

(She indicates slippers by the door. NICK and BRANDY nervously hang their coats and change their shoes. Meanwhile, OLGA L turns away to the stove.)

BRANDY (Whispering): Nick, we need to be careful. She could be a Party member, an informer...

NICK: *Mon général*, why must someone with your radiant confidence be as suspicious as J. Edgar? The only party she'll be informing on is her own wake, and soon enough.

(They take a seat on the divan. NICK calls after OLGA L.)

Uh, excuse me, Mrs...? (More loudly): Mrs...? We don't know your name.

OLGA L: No need to shout. I am Olga Leonardovna. (Wheezes.)

NICK: Mrs. Leonardovna...

OLGA L: Just Olga Leonardovna. (Wheezes again.)

NICK: Olga Leonardovna, uh, you're kind to have allowed us in. (Pulling a pipe from his pocket): Is it all right? (To Audience, rising): By now, it may be

apparent that we have touched down in the 1950s. As in Hollywood films of that vanished epoch, musical references are commonplace and music provides an acceptable subject for plotlines. We refer to each other as “Mr.” and “Mrs.” and speak in full, wooden and frequently pompous sentences. Real men smoke pipes.

OLGA L (With little interest): Yes, yes, if you wish. (Coughs.)

NICK (Lighting up): Olga Leonardovna, if I may, where did you learn to speak English so well...and French...German? We didn't expect to find anyone out here in—. (To BRANDY): What is this place called again?

BRANDY: Ivánovo. It's an artistic retreat for Communist composers. Nick, we've been shadowed, I'm sure of it...

(With the Black Monk standing behind her, arms crossed, NICK reacts skeptically, with annoyance.)

OLGA L (Bringing tea): My parents came to Russia from Germany nearly one hundred years ago. One hundred years...It was not another century; it was another world. For a time my father, Leonard, ran a factory in the provinces. Fortunately I was raised in Moscow. The provinces are death

by *ennui*, you know. We often spoke German at home. Lev speaks it better than I, perfectly in fact.

NICK: Lev?

OLGA L (Sitting): My son—my nephew. I studied English and French...in the last century. Excuse my mistakes, I haven't got much practice in half a lifetime. I admit that in this country knowing three languages is a luxury. Not even a luxury, but a useless encumbrance, like a sixth finger. You two aren't married, I believe.

BRANDY: Not yet, no. We met two months ago, at the Youth Festival.

OLGA L: You were at the Youth Festival? (Putting on her glasses and peering at them): Umm, perhaps.

NICK: Oh believe me, far older youths failed to stay away. Did you attend?

OLGA L: I watched the crowds from my window on the boulevard, believe me, but I have little interest in such rubbish.

(A montage of images and videos from the 1957 Moscow Youth Festival is projected in the background, including [Kremlin night parties](#), belly dancing, fireworks (2:00-2:15, 2:30-3:05), maybe [opening ceremonies](#) (including American delegation at 1:45). All this

should be to the Festival theme song “Moscow Nights,” either a [contemporary rendition](#) or a [completely anachronistic one](#).)

NICK: I was absolutely unprepared.

BRANDY (Seriously, almost to herself): The West was unprepared, without a doubt.

NICK (Rising): The world was unprepared. Thirty thousand visitors from 130 countries, nonstop partying, dancing in the forbidden Kremlin! I’d braced myself for floods of Communist propaganda, but crowds at the train station showered us with roses...We played night and day on Gorky Street, on the squares.

OLGA L (Revealing a little interest): Are you a musician, Mr. Warren?

NICK: Saxophone.

OLGA L: Then I heard you from my window. Dear God, such a racket I’ve never experienced. It was impossible to read in peace, yet alone sleep. We left for the country...

NICK: Who would have thought Russians thirsted for Benny Goodman, died for Charlie Parker? Soviet and American bands jammed endlessly under the statue of that poet—

OLGA L: Pushkin.

NICK: I suppose. And the girls—wow! Capitalist tongues touching socialist lips—the Cold War sizzled! It was unimagined; it was...wonderful.

BRANDY (Bristling a bit): And just how many “Janes” and “Ivans” do you think will magically pop into the world nine months after that jam session?
Darling, don’t answer.

NICK: The audiences loved us so much that we extended our visas to play in a club for a few months. Imagine, Americans teaching Russians rock and roll and the boogie-woogie.

OLGA L: I do adore those negro dances.

(NICK grabs BRANDY and they begin dancing a furious boogie-woogie. BRANDY is a bit stiff, if determined, but NICK proves to be an outstanding dancer and goes orbital. Eventually, NICK cajoles OLGA L into joining. With great reluctance she gamely makes an attempt.)

BRANDY (As they end): The USSR will never be the same.

OLGA L (As they sit): That is unavoidable. Even if I could practice my English, I am certain I would fail to understand this modern world, so full of noise. I am no longer certain I want to...I’ve never understood much of the

world, if I am honest with myself. Miss Slade, did you come to that festival to join the commotion?

BRANDY: Yes, no. Yes, I am a musician, no I didn't come to play. I work for Paramount Pictures in Hollywood. Have you heard of Hollywood?

OLGA L: Yes I have, Paramount Pictures as well. Isn't *Ars Gratia Artis* their motto?

BRANDY: That's MGM: Art for Art's Sake.

OLGA L: Not that either has anything to do with art. Tell me, what are your duties at Paramount?

(NICK notices BRANDY'S hesitation.)

BRANDY: Uh, I'm deputy music director there. I audition the future Rita Hayworths, rehearse the orchestra, schmooze every lunch hour...My boss sent me to Moscow during the festival to find Mr. Shostakovich, but he was out of town—

OLGA L: —and you met your young man instead.

BRANDY: Strange. Jazz isn't usually my thing, but for some reason I went to the competition in the Kremlin anyway. I've heard a lot in my time, Olga Leonardovna, but I'd never heard anyone play that instrument with such abandon, exuberance...sadness. It...baffled me. Just when he walked on

stage, a crowd of kids dressed American style breaks through a police cordon into the hall.

(Images of *stilyagi* or clip from film [Stilyagi](#) [*Hipsters*].)

They go completely wild and Nick's band wins the contest hands down.

Despite myself, I found myself excited, unhinged. I go up to him afterwards; he smiles—

NICK: Life's an improvisation, isn't it? You trust your instincts. Here I am, staring down at a beautiful blonde surrounded by this crazy crowd. I hardly know what to make of my good fortune. But there she is, reserved yet commanding, out of her element yet open to adventure—

OLGA L: And the rest was magic.

BRANDY: How did you know? But the festival—Communism doesn't stand a chance against American jazz.

OLGA L: That may be, young lady, that may well be, but I've never been interested in the politics. Just "politics," without "the." Ah, these articles in English. Byron knew where to put them. You don't play jazz, as I understand.

BRANDY: I'm classically trained—piano, composition. It does give one standards—

OLGA L: I should hope so.

BRANDY: I do miss the concert world. Still, I sensed at once that Nick and I were two halves. With the insanity of Hollywood, the newspaper headlines, at times I...(She cringes.) Nick releases me from all that. I feel as if I've known him a long time, that I can tell him anything, without fear. Why I'm telling you all this, I have no idea...

(NICK is not paying undue attention. He is rather examining the photographs on the wall and the sporting equipment.)

OLGA L: There's no explaining love, is there? None of the great playwrights even try, not Shakespeare, not Chekhov. In your Hollywood, it always happens just like that (she tries to snap her arthritic fingers), doesn't it? I've seen the Tarzan movies, you know. My mother, God rest her, was an outstanding musician, but she and papa were not about to let their only daughter become a professional. That would have been one step above being an actress, which was hardly a step above being the prostitute. Still, when father died, mother and I was forced to give piano and singing lessons to support the family. I even had got an official music teacher's diploma. It did take us a long time to get used to not having servants.

BRANDY: You are a musician, Olga Leonardovna?

OLGA L: I was, briefly. But that is in days long dead and vanished.

(Vasily Maximov's painting, "[All in the Past](#)," is projected.)

Tchaikovsky spent his life regretting the past and hoping for the future.

Piotr Ilyich, that's no way to live. Even so, you can be sure I am not presently holding out much hope for the future...So you met your young man and fell in love, though you failed to find Dmitri Dmitrievich?

BRANDY: My boss refuses to give up and sent me back a few days ago. Luckily, Nick was still here, sounding his horn.

OLGA L: So when all is said and done, you have known each other only a few weeks.

(BRANDY nods. NICK is still distracted.)

You two are baked from different dough, I can tell. Do you really love him?

BRANDY: That's extremely personal, Olga Leonardovna. Granted, we may not be the most likely couple, but we...complement each other; I've already said.

OLGA L: I understand. When you read a love story, watch a romance, it all seems old-fashioned, so obvious, you want to laugh, but when you fall in love yourself, you realize that nobody but you ever knew anything.

BRANDY: It does feel something like that, terrifying, an invasion against one's better...instincts, yet irresistible...

OLGA L: Careful—you can get used to anything. But you need more than love. Chekhov understood. To live and not know why cranes fly, why children are born, why stars shine...Love? You must find your own faith, to know what you are living for, or life is nonsense, nothing matters.

BRANDY: That *is* a bit presumptuous, Olga Leonardovna, I must say. When two people are in love, everything else is...potato skins; (not a question): you agree, don't you, Nick?

NICK (A little absently): Life does go on. If you ask me, Chekhov's a complete bore, a lot of people standing around complaining about life without lifting a finger to do anything about it. But maybe he had something; you need to know what you are living for.

OLGA L: Yes, the country boredom, the idleness and endless philosophizing. What is it you live for, Mr. Warren? Not every American saxophone player came to the festival. Why you, of those minions?

NICK: I was hardly alone; let's just say I believe in culture shock. It's good to be shaken up occasionally, to be made uncomfortable...(Aside): It was once.
(Aloud): You know, as a teenager I read a science fiction novel every day.

(BRANDY looks up at him, surprised.)

Sorry, darling, we haven't gotten around to it. I was fascinated by the future, I believed in the future.

OLGA L (With appreciation): You believed that in two or three hundred years life on earth will be more splendid and marvelous than we can imagine!

NICK: At the moment I'd say it's more likely that life on earth will end in an splendid nuclear holocaust. You can hardly breathe for the headlines...For myself, I rebel against living in fear, of polio, Communism, mutually assured destruction or fluoride toothpaste. I don't know whether the USSR holds any sort of future, but with the country finally cracking open its doors, desperate for jazz, I said, "What the hell?" and decided to take a look at the Red menace with my own eyes.

OLGA L: That sounds high-minded of you, even noble.

BRANDY: It sounds strictly naïve to me, after Hungary last year.

NICK: Hardly noble, likely naïve. I don't like other people thinking for me; that's the long and short of it. I'm also a great fan of Shostakovich.

BRANDY (Rising): Yes, Shostakovich. (Lower, tousling his hair): Nick, enough...

OLGA L: Mr. Warren, I think you think too much to be a musician, especially a jazz musician, who aren't known to think at all. I've tried to listen to modern music, often...Of course every generation of artists must create anew, but...(She shakes her head.)

NICK (Kissing BRANDY, but with a hint of suspicion, incomprehension):
Brandy, sometimes you remind me of that improved dishwasher-oven we saw at the exhibition. Maybe it's practical, yet I can't quite grasp the concept.

OLGA L: Fire and suds, a rare combination indeed.

BRANDY: Dishwasher-oven? Is that supposed to be a compliment? How is it that an hour after we've stumbled onto a random, broken-down cottage, we're blurting out the most intimate, delicate matters?

(Supertitle: *What else can one do, stuck in a country dacha on a snowy evening?*)

(The Black Monk puts his hand thoughtfully on his chin.)

NICK: It's like hitchhiking. To a stranger you reveal anything...everything.

(As the Black Monk warns him, he begins to have second thoughts.)

BRANDY: Didn't Mother ever warn you not to climb into foreign automobiles?

OLGA L: Miss Slade, this is not America, this is Russia. Here we talk about life, not automobiles, in particular since none of us own one. I'd also remind you, since your language abilities fall woefully short, that there is no word for "privacy" in Russian and no privacy in Russia.

NICK (Pensively): The word exists in English.

BRANDY: Olga Leonardovna, I'm frankly tiring of your...intrusions. As far as you're concerned, we've come to Ivanovo to find Mr. Shostakovich. That's everything you need to know. Come on, Nick, it's high time to leave.

(She abruptly puts down her tea and takes a step to the door. NICK accidentally trips over the piano stool and makes a loud noise on the piano.)

NICK: I'm terribly sorry. Please excuse me...

(Enter LEV KONSTANTINOVICH KNIPPER, 59, from a back room. He is movie-star handsome, rugged features, piercing eyes, in excellent physical condition for his age. He strides in with a cigarette as if he has stepped in from another world. He kisses OLGA L on the cheek, all the while staring intently at the strangers. He circles them

like a hawk, giving the impression of seething energy and inner turmoil. During the following, he doesn't take his eyes from BRANDY, who is frozen in his gaze.)

OLGA L: *Лева, милый, прости, что мы так шумели, беспокоили тебя.*

Иностранцы появились — американцы. [Lyóva, mílii, prostí, shtó myi tak shumélu, pobespokóili tebyá. Inostrántsii poyavílis' —amerikántzi.]

(Supertitle: *Lyova, dear, forgive us from making so much noise and disturbing you. These foreigners have appeared out of nowhere — Americans.*)

LEV: *Ничего, тетя, я не заметил. [Nichevó, tyótya, ya nye zamétíl.]*

(Supertitle: *It's nothing, Aunt, I didn't notice.*)

OLGA L: *Не говорят по русски, и даже по английски. Ищут Дмитрия*

Дмитриевича. [Nye govoryát po-rússki, i dázhe po-anglíski. Íshchut Dmítria Dmítrievicha.]

(Supertitle: *They don't speak Russian — not even English. They're looking for Dmitri Dmitrievich.*)

LEV (Still circling NICK AND BRANDY, sharply, suspiciously, in halting and accented English): You want Shostakovich?

(BRANDY nods stiffly, nervously.)

LEV: For what purpose?

BRANDY: It's business.

LEV: He won't see you. He doesn't receive strangers. You'd best be on your way.

OLGA L: *Paðu Boza [Ráði Bóga]*, Lyova, in this weather...

NICK: I apologize that we disturbed you just now.

LEV: Of no matter. I took no notice. Work absorbs everything. (To BRANDY):
Do you speak German?

(BRANDY shakes her head, intimidated in spite of herself.)

LEV (Waving his hand brusquely): *Schade*, German is easier for me.

OLGA L: Easier! He speaks it like a native.

BRANDY (To NICK and LEV): Forgive me, it really is past time for us to leave. We must find Shostakovich.

LEV: I'm sorry, I cannot help you.

NICK (Indicating photo on the wall): Is that you on the mountain?

LEV: After the War, yes.

NICK: You are a mountaineer?

LEV (More to BRANDY, intently): It is my passion. The summit of a mountain is unimportant. No. When you have forced a mountain to submit, you have conquered yourself. You have conquered your physical limitations. You have conquered the limitations of your soul.

BRANDY (Almost retreating, but attracted): I see...

NICK (Taking note of the interaction, picking up a racket): You play tennis as well?

LEV: Yes, I took up the game to overcome my illness. (With an affectionate glance at OLGA L): Aunt Olya gave me my first racket.

NICK: I play fairly well myself, if I may say.

LEV: I quickly became champion of Crimea. Let us say a match tomorrow, if the weather allows. But you will not be here.

NICK: No.

LEV (To BRANDY): And you, Miss...?

BRANDY (Slightly flustered, assertively): No. We're, uh, together.

LEV: Ah. Why disturb Dmitri Dmitrievich? There are other composers in Ivanovo, in the world.

BRANDY (Regaining composure) : There are? He is far and away the greatest, every music lover would admit it.

(Supertitle: *Prokofiev, being dead, cannot object.*)

LEV (Truthfully, but with evident envy): He is the greatest, of that there can be no doubt, *es besteht nicht der geringste Zweifel.*

BRANDY: In my business, you get what you pay for—and amateurs always cost more than professionals.

LEV (Severely, closing in): *Естественно [Estyéstoénno].* What is your business, Miss...?

BRANDY: I work at Paramount Pictures, Hollywood—I've...explained to your aunt.

NICK: Excuse me, we haven't introduced ourselves. (Extending his hand): Nick Warren...Brandy Slade.

LEV (Circling them): Lev Konstantinovich.

(LEV and BRANDY shake. He is staring; she lingers even as she recoils.)

NICK (To audience): There is no record that Lev Konstantinovich spoke English. However, given his family, we have taken the artistic license of assuming he did, at least to the extent necessary to avoid too many supertitles.

OLGA L: They met at the Youth Festival.

LEV: You did?

(A long reflective pause. With dark wonder, pacing, as the Black Monk flies to the ceiling.)

This past year has been the year of shocks, of earthquakes, of cracks in an iron sky. The Year Zero. Comrade Khrushchev set off the tremors with a hammer blow—his secret speech to the Twentieth Party Congress. Secret! Within hours the monstrous cynicism of Stalin's crimes became known to every Soviet citi—

OLGA L: *Lyova! Bist du böse? Nicht vor Fremden!*

(Supertitle: *Lyova! Are you mad? Not in front of strangers!*)

LEV: It was as if the Great War for the Fatherland had begun all over again, this time a war for...belief. When a typewritten copy of the speech fell into my hands, I first felt, I felt for the first time in years, decades that I could—(He

breathes deeply and struggles with himself.) *Vielleicht hast du recht, Tante Olya, und dies ist kein geeignetes Thema vor fremden Ohren.*

(Supertitle: *Perhaps you are right, Aunt Olya, this isn't a suitable conversation in front of strangers.*)

BRANDY (With sudden interest): You felt...?

LEV: I felt that Picasso was invading Moscow. Have you heard of Picasso?

(NICK laughs. The Black Monk paints a few strokes.)

BRANDY: Who do you take us for, Lev (struggling with his name, dismissively): K—
Konstantinovich? Picasso is merely the greatest artist of the twentieth
century!

(Supertitle: *Andy Warhol...?*)

(Images of the 1956 Picasso exhibit at the Pushkin Museum are projected, if available.)

LEV (Severely): Undoubtedly, Miss Slade, but what could he mean to a
bourgeois Hollywood philistine such as yourself? (In great agitation and
anger): There was a riot to get into the exhibit, to see this painter who had
been banned for thirty years. Factory workers arrive wearing sneakers,
moth-eaten sweaters. Debates, fistfights break out before strange,
angular women, do you hear? We understood nothing, *nichts!* We are

cavemen, straggling out into a light, or into an Elysium of shadows. Or into memory.

OLGA L: Lyova, there was nothing to understand. A five-year-old might have drawn better. Of what use is such art, modern art? It touches nothing, not the heart, not the soul. I have tried, but everything written in the past fifty years has become foreign to me.

LEV: Aunt Olya, you say that to me, to your Lev! (To BRANDY and NICK): I do not know which, but if Cubism did not signal the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union, the Youth Festival did, mark my words.

BRANDY (Seriously): Cubism, the End of Communism. What a thought, what a title!

NICK (Reflectively): If not the festival, certainly its theme song.

BRANDY: God yes, that saccharin-drenched ladle of molasses that gummed up our brains, turning each and every one of us into docile robots as they played it over and over and over and...

LEV: "Moscow Nights"?

BRANDY: That was it. (She sings the tune.) Who would have thought that Reds could be so sentimental?

(“Moscow Nights” to the fore.)

(Catching herself, staring at LEV): Excuse me, “Red” is, I believe, the correct term.

LEV: Only when rooting for our hockey team, Miss Slade. It hasn’t been the Red Army since the War. This Red tune, though, has become a world-wide hit.

BRANDY: No one in Hollywood ever got rich banking on good taste. Oh, I dislike wallowing in sentimentality. It feels...sticky. A person must live in the here, the now, accept life’s mission, confront enemies...You don’t strike me at all sentimental, Lev Konstantinovich, not at all...

(NICK briefly perks up with interest, suspicion.)

LEV: Thirty years ago, I was assigned to take a troupe of musicians down the Amúr river in Siberia, to instruct villagers, settlers along the way, to assist them in staging amateur productions. One evening, on the banks of the river there stood hundreds of people in their national costumes. Searchlights from all the boats crisscrossed the tower of our two-gun monitor. On the crude stage we’d erected in the middle of the ship, stood a skinny youth in a Red Army uniform—a violinist. There, on the

peaceful waves of the mighty Amur, lost in the wilderness of the taiga, that endless forest still untouched by human hands, sounded the chaconne of Johann Sebastian Bach.

(The [Bach chaconne](#) fades in.)

Filled with majestic greatness and strength, it lofted out from aboard the ship, to become part of the primeval magnificence of nature itself. Listening to that music were Mongols, Ukrainians, Nanai, Russians, illiterate peasants and the most highly educated. All had come to build a city—Komsomolsk-on-Amur. All of them came to listen to one of civilization's greatest geniuses, who carried the word of peace, love and beauty.

BRANDY (Surprised, skeptically): You are a musician?

LEV: A Red musician, (glancing at the ceiling): one who has been willing to die for it.

BRANDY: Conductor, band leader?

LEV: At times, assigned to far-flung provinces. No, a composer.

BRANDY: What is your name, Lev Konstantinovich, your last name? If I may.

LEV: Knipper, Lev Konstantinovich Knipper.

BRANDY (A little dismissively): Sorry, I've never heard of you.

LEV: I'm hardly surprised; Shostakovich is the single true composer.

BRANDY: One must confess: the best finds its way to the top. It is the genius of Capitalism, of the world.

NICK (Aside, ironically): A law of nature.

LEV: Bad taste rules the motion picture industry, yet the finest reaches your ears. Is that what you propose, Miss Slade?

(Supertitle: *The time has come for writers, especially those who are artists, to admit that in this world they cannot make anything out.*)

BRANDY: Well...(Catching herself, then assertively): Yes, Lev Konstantinovich, that is what I propose. What is worth preserving makes its way, despite every obstacle.

LEV: You may not recognize my name, but you have heard my music.

BRANDY: I seriously doubt it.

LEV: I guarantee it.

(He sits at the piano and begins playing the tune "*Polyushko-polye*," "*Meadowlands*," and singing it amateurishly. OLGA L also sings along, as well as the Black Monk. Both

NICK and BRANDY instantly recognize the melody and glance at each other. The music quickly segues into the [Red Army Chorus version1](#) as a video of the performance is projected on the screen. ([Red Army Chorus version2](#) may be better.)

BRANDY (Astonished): *You wrote that! "Meadowlands"!*

LEV: I did.

BRANDY: Stokowski himself called it the greatest march of the twentieth century!

(The [Stokowski performance](#) of Morton Gould's arrangement (from about 00:20) fades in with video of Stokowski conducting.)

LEV (Dryly): He did.

BRANDY: I always thought it was a Russian folksong.

LEV: Everyone thought it was a Russian folksong. It became so popular that the author vanished. It became the property of the world.

(The [Glenn Miller arrangement](#) comes on. Pick up initial announcement, "And now here's the biggest tune in the books, arrangement by Sergeant Jerry Gray, rendition by Major Glenn Miller's Overseas Orchestra. Russian patrol." Cut to 02:22. NICK is immediately into the music.)

BRANDY: God, I adore this tune. Hollywood adores this tune.

LEV: And being truly Communist, Hollywood refuses to pay for it.

(The Glenn Miller arrangement fades into the [trailer for *Mission to Moscow*](#) at 00:43, or snow troops at 48:30 of full movie, or May Day Parade at 1:25:58. *Mission to Moscow* is perhaps followed by *A Foreign Affair*, around 28:30, nightclub scene, as camera pans towards Jean Arthur. Then *The Russians Are Coming, The Russians are Coming* at 2:00:48, followed by *Cast Away* at 04:00 or 08:00. LEV, OLGA L, BRANDY and the Black Monk watch the movie clips.)

OLGA L: (During *Russians are Coming*): What a silly film.

BRANDY: Give it to them! No! Don't!

BRANDY (During *Cast Away*): Time is money.

LEV: Time marches and, marching, buries all.

(Meanwhile, NICK is unpacking his saxophone and makes ready to play. As the clips end, he improvises or syncs the [sax solo](#) at 01:40 from the Glenn Miller Orchestra's Moscow concert. As he finishes, the version from [Tetris Spectrum Holobyte](#) comes on and NICK and BRANDY dance to it. She hugs him, but abruptly breaks off and steps up very close to LEV.)

BRANDY: You have written something that will stand the test of time. You must be proud, Lev Konstantinovich. It is the rarest of achievements.

LEV: I merely wrote it. One day some friends and I came back frozen after skiing twenty kilometers; they forced me to sit down at an out-of-tune piano and improvise. I don't even recall what they thought of it.

(We hear a bit of the [original version](#), 03:15, in the background.)

OLGA L: I've never forgotten the premiere. During the interval at the conservatoire people come up, praising Lyovushka as a master; the tremendous agitation of the work and artist staggered everyone. By the next day all Moscow is singing *Polyushko*.

LEV (Drawing OLGA L's head to him): True, *меня [tyótya]*. Overnight the song was being played on the radio, in concerts, all over the world. Only then did I learn I had uncovered a jewel...which never released me. (To NICK): You, Mr. Warren, you are a saxophonist of genius.

NICK (Seriously): It sometimes pays the rent.

LEV: I understand. (He abruptly turns and walks to the kitchen window.) Do you play for Miss Slade in Hollywood?

NICK: No, until a few years ago I lived in New York.

(LEV opens the window, takes a bottle of vodka from the ledge.)

LEV: Now?

NICK: London.

LEV: Not cheaper, I think.

(He returns with the vodka, opens it and pours three glasses, then raises a toast. Gravely): To having paid the rent.

(LEV downs the vodka. NICK and BRANDY follow suit with more difficulty.)

BRANDY: (To NICK, taking his hand): You did play that solo wonderfully, Nick, I should have said.

NICK: Not badly, I would say. Between the two of us, *mon général*, I'm beginning to suspect...these people are not exactly peasants.

BRANDY: How could we have stumbled onto the cottage of the man who wrote the most famous tune in the world...? Do you think Lev Konstantinovich is telling the truth? He frightens me, a little...

NICK: Not only, I'd say.

BRANDY: He is a strangely powerful man...(A little coldly): Nick, are you being jealous?

NICK (Pointedly): Of whom, darling?

LEV: *Тетя Оля, у нас есть огурцы, икра?* [Tyótya Olya, u nas est' ogortzi, ikra?]

(Supertitle: *Aunt Olya, do we have pickles, caviar?*)

OLGA L (Laughing): *Икра? Лапочка, я в последний раз видела икру пять лет назад в Ялте. Может быть, салатик. [Ikrá? Lápochka, ya v poslédnyi raz videla ikru pyat' let nazad v Yalte. Mozhet byt salatik.]*

(Supertitle: *Caviar? Lapochka, the last time I saw caviar was five years ago in Yalta. A little salad, perhaps.*)

(She gets up to look in the frig and puts food on the table, including a big bottle of pickles. During the remainder of Part One, the characters demonstrate *in vino veritas*. LEV, in particular, never becomes totally drunk. NICK holds his liquor better than BRANDY.)

NICK: Lev Konstantinovich, how is it that you and your aunt are so close?

OLGA L: Picasso has done his best to tearing us apart, but Lyova is as a son to me.

LEV (Downing another vodka, intensely): I owe Olga Leonardovna everything, not least my life! When I was three I fell ill with—how do you say?—tuberclose of the bone. The doctors in Tiflis put me in a plaster corset, forced me to lie motionless on the bed for weeks, months. “It is hopeless,” they warned my parents. “Expect the worst.” Under this death sentence mother and father brought me to Moscow.

OLGA L: I enjoyed sitting at his side, reading, telling Lyovushka stories about art, theatre, music, especially after my miscarriage. I knew even then that he would be something special.

LEV: Two years passed before learned to walk again, as if resurrected. On the day I was at last able to venture outdoors, Aunt Olya gave me my first pair of boxing gloves and a heavy ball to train my legs. The joy of that day has never left me, not in the most difficult times... (He falls briefly into thought.)

(Abruptly): It must have been within a year when my parents took me to a performance of Tchaikovsky's Pathétique Symphony. Even before the first movement had ended, I broke down sobbing. I became desperate to study music, desperate do you understand? A teacher came regularly to our home to give my sisters lessons, but I had to teach myself piano, hiding in the corner of some hotel, where I practiced and listened to gypsies. I often heard Aunt Olya sing, accompanying herself. She gave me my first musical scores, Beethoven sonatas, and football equipment. Nothing would stop me from becoming a composer! (He falls completely silent.)

(BRANDY and NICK shake their heads in puzzlement.)

BRANDY: Something happened?

OLGA L: October, 1917.

LEV: Revolution. Civil War. Five years of chaos, hunger, hardship.

(LEV pours more drinks. OLGA L picks up some cards and begins playing solitaire.)

OLGA L (To herself): Externally, life went on—rehearsals, performances, but on the streets—nothing but talk of flour, butter, bread. Everyone was gaunt—no—we were walking skeletons; by the day I grew grayer...

BRANDY (To LEV): Then you never became a composer? But I think you are a very determined man, Lev Konstantinovich...

LEV: And I think you speak of yourself, Miss Slade. Tell me, why are you here?

BRANDY: I've told you. We've come to find—

LEV: Why are you here? With this man you don't know?

OLGA L: When he appeared out of nowhere in 1922, Lyova had become fanatical about music. He was working so hard—

LEV: Eighteen hours a day; I had lost so much time.

OLGA L: Fourteen pounds he lost. The doctors forbade him all activity. Lyova—

LEV: —I ignored them. Olga Leonardovna asks a friend, who had started the best music school in Moscow, to admit me. I'm already too old but they make me superintendent of the building and—my childhood illness returns. Once again the doctors pronounce a death sentence. This time Aunt Olya took me to Berlin. Again she saved me.

OLGA L: What else could I have done?

LEV: She was the aunt who gave birth to a nephew.

(LEV and OLGA L embrace.)

BRANDY (With alcohol-familiarity): Lev Konstantinovich, I know you. You are hardly a man to let mere revolution, civil war, stand in your way of becoming a composer. Nooope, Hollywood would never permit it. It's the wrong ending, without a doubt the wrong ending.

NICK (Pensively): America once had a revolution. It was a long time ago.

LEV: Ours was not so long ago.

BRANDY: Truly, apart from "Meadowlands" you never wrote anything?

LEV: Nothing. *Polyushko* was the theme from my fourth symphony, "Poem of the Komsomol Fighter," a quarter of a century ago. Since then I have composed ten more symphonies, three operas, chamber music, several

ballets, concertos, suites, songs, collected innumerable songs on dozens of trips to Iran, Tajikistan, Mongolia, Kirgizia...but nothing after that march...or before.

NICK: Is it possible that a person who could write one good thing, could not write two?

BRANDY (Filling her glass): Not only possible, probable. Lev Konstantinovich, what time is it? When we knocked on this door, your name meant nothing to me, as much as I might have wished otherwise. Four or five clinks later, I can still honestly say I've ever heard of any of your other works, not one.

LEV (Close to her): Since they do not exist, you could not have heard of them. And since you have not have heard of them, they do not exist.

BRANDY (Retreating a step, halting, advancing, flirting): You can't intimidate me, Lev Konstantinovich. When you get down to it, masters and masterpieces are rarer than an honest lover. Radio networks understand. That's why they broadcast only Rachmaninoff. You wouldn't believe the number of pieces, Bing Crosbys I've heard in the practice rooms at The Curtis, in the studio. We must face facts. As far as music goes, it's been downhill since Brahms.

(LEV takes her arms and they begin to dance a [waltz](#).)

NICK: Brandy, I had no idea you were arbiter of all that is sublime. Why don't you declare yourself Tsar and ban the twentieth century altogether?

OLGA L: That might be a sensible idea.

BRANDY: You're an accomplished dancer, Lev Konstantinovich, a total Astaire.

LEV: The scent of your perfume is superb, Miss Slade, but not altogether that of a musician.

BRANDY: Nick, darling, one can't define it, but one does recognize quality when it hits you. The Bach Chaconne—

(The chaconne fades in again.)

LEV (Breaking off the waltz): —survives because it is great.

BRANDY: Precisely. Great art lives independently of mere externalities. *Ars Gratia Artis*, as MGM says.

(Supertitle: *Typical 1950s pomposity. We're missing only a reference to Freud.*)

Composers write pastoral symphonies carrying stretchers. Bach, Beethoven, Shostakovich have survived wars, dictators. If your other works haven't passed the test of time, my dear Lev Konstantinovich, well

forgive me, darling, it can only be because you deserve it; accept your fate as a one-hit wonder.

LEV: As you say in America.

BRANDY: Indubitably.

NICK: May I have this dance, Miss Slade?

(NICK begins to dance with BRANDY.)

At least you have had one hit, Lev Konstantinovich. "Meadowlands" is as recognizable as anything ever written. Once you've heard that tune, it never leaves you.

LEV: Thank you, Mr. Warren.

NICK: Your perfume *is* beguiling, darling. What scent is it?

BRANDY: Are you enjoying yourself?

NICK (Without irony): Perfectly.

BRANDY: Lev Konstantinovich, you called your symphony "Poem of the Komsomol Fighter." What does that mean, the Young Communist fighter?

LEV: Yes, why not?

BRANDY (Breaking off the dance): Confess, Mr. Lev Konstantinovich Knipper—
what a funny name—that title sounds like a typical poster for Communist
propaganda.

LEV (With sad recognition): Most of my symphonies have been posters for
Communist propaganda...

(The [opening](#) of Knipper's Fourth Symphony is heard against Communist propaganda
[posters](#), including the [Obama fakes](#).)

BRANDY: No Arts for Art Sake in your USSR.

LEV: It has never been so. Art for the People's Sake. Art is power...(Softly):
Art is a breath of stolen air, something Americans will never comprehend.

BRANDY: In America you'd never have had to write such pap, Lev Konstantinovich.
(To herself): You'd never get this drunk either.

(Supertitle: *Pap: drivel, nonsense, rubbish.*)

(LEV begins dancing with BRANDY again.)

LEV: Are you absolutely certain, Miss Slade? How can you say I wouldn't have
written the sort of American propaganda your Aaron Copland does?

BRANDY: Be serious, Lev Konstantinovich. No one forced him to write what he writes.

LEV: Perhaps “no one” did, but your market did, Capitalism did, the American desire to see itself as pure and uplifting did. Surely you, Miss Slade, you are aware that Copland’s early works were far more adventurous, more truthful, than the accomplished drivel he turns out merely to pay the rent, drivel that has made him famous.

(Some early Copland, e.g. [piano variations](#), maybe around 7:00.)

BRANDY (Breaking off): Lev Konstantinovich, if I lived here—

LEV: You don’t, Miss Slade, you don’t live here.

BRANDY: No one lives here—they all die standing in line.

NICK (Taking her glass): Brandy, enough—

BRANDY: I’d never compromise. Shostakovich doesn’t compromise. His music is strength incarnate...

LEV: Every artist pays the rent, Miss Slade. In Hollywood, prostitutes merely get paid in publicity instead of cheap dachas. Both countries tax the soul.

OLGA L (Looking up from her game): I can hardly imagine living in America. It would be worse than the provinces. The spirit dies in the provinces...

BRANDY (Recovering her glass): Olga Leonardovna, you and your nephew have experienced America only through a jammed Radio Free Europe. Would you confuse static for...Beethoven? If you could experience the real America, its sights, its sounds, its smells, its energy, you'd think twice about what you are saying.

NICK (To his glass): True, no one can understand America from abroad. On the other hand, no one can understand Mississippi from New York.

(Supertitle: *And vice versa.*)

OLGA L: Actually, Miss Slade, I experienced America for the better part of a year— why I don't know—New York, Boston, Chicago. I admit that was long ago...1923...after we took Lyova to Berlin. I shall never say that I understood or felt your New World. It is like some sort of great clockwork organism, gears spinning within gears, and you have the feeling—God help us if something breaks! Oh, that never-ending hustle and bustle, the noise...Everything jumps, flies, rushes, passes...every third building is a dance hall, a cinema, a restaurant. There are masses of concerts, theatres—and in the whole country not one drop of artistry. It is

a kingdom of impossible, infinite advertising: when the sun goes down you can hardly believe your eyes. On the greatest holidays in Moscow you would never see such illumination. From the sky above spring heads, birds, people, all constantly changing, flashing, dancing. Blue, red, green fountains gush everywhere, giant signs with messages moving from left to right, top to bottom...Women dressed in more amazing furs than you've ever seen in your life, walking about in the tiniest shoes and heels in the middle of winter. And here I was tramping about in my galoshes!

NICK: One doesn't have to sell one's soul to know where she's been.

BRANDY: To me it sounds perfectly wonderful! Progress, optimism, sizzle! (As a plea): Nick, let's sizzle, please!

OLGA L: Ah yes, everything is wonderful! On those faces you read nothing, nothing at all. Behind that everything-is-wonderful mask they walk the streets, do their errands, sit down to five-o'clock tea, dash to the theatre, rush to the dance hall. Oh, did I have ever enough of those dances! They watch the opera in their overcoats and manteaux. The women are practically naked—naked backs, naked shoulders, naked busts. Women well past their prime have no shame. You look around you and everything in sight is new. Everything must be new.

NICK: If not new, at least labeled that way.

BRANDY: Olga Leonardovna, it's simply impossible that you appreciated nothing at all. Wasn't there one thing, a single thing?

LEV: I put the same question to you, Miss Slade.

OLGA L: Of course, there were three ecstasies. The first was—grapefruits. Not a lemon, not an orange—what was this big, luscious, juicy...umm?! I ate them all morning. The second ecstasy was—hotel rooms with private baths. I bought a hose that I connected to the faucet and I could take a hot shower day or night. Oh, heavensent delight! The third was the negro theatre. We were in raptures. During the shows, you didn't have time to catch your breath, so quickly did each number crowd out the one before. We were stunned by the technical tricks, by the numbers of people on stage, by the extraordinary tempos. The whole stage was turned into a giant pool, unending rows of girls ran up and—right into the water, never to return. Like some provincial, I screamed in delight! Of course there was no content whatsoever—and none was required.

NICK: Olga Leonardovna, how did you come to America?

OLGA L: By boat.

NICK: But it must have been difficult, impossible to get out of Bolshevik Russia.

OLGA L: Hah. The civil war, the fighting...Our company split up. For five years we wandered, performing through Ukraine, Crimea, Georgia, the Balkans, cut off by the White Army from Moscow, from the rest of our family.

(Supertitle: *White Army: the anti-Bolshevik forces that fought in the Russian Civil War.*)

What do you do when the theatre you are about to perform in is commandeered for a typhoid hospital? When your performance runs past curfew and you are arrested? A hard-boiled egg became more dear than a Fabergé. We ate horse flesh and called it a delicacy; families sold their dogs. The Red Army provided escorts, willingly, but the chaos of the railways—that was what made travel impossible. Finally...destitution. We were left with nothing, nothing at all...(She falls into memory.) Konstantín Sergéyevich decided the only salvation was to take the company abroad, to Berlin, to America.

LEV (To himself, darkly): It proved not entirely a redemption.

BRANDY: Then you have been to America, Lev Konstantinovich?

LEV (Gravely): Never. Once I, the troupe managed to reach Moscow, Aunt Olya—

NICK: Where had you been?

(LEV slips into a long silence. NICK glances at the others, prods for an answer.)

LEV: In the south.

(NICK cocks his head, waits.)

LEV (After a long internal struggle): When the Civil War broke out I was trapped in Yalta with relatives and impressed into the White Army; you have heard of them, reactionary, bourgeois loyalists to the memory of the Tsar and all the cruelty he stood for. Finally, after five years, I deserted, made my way across the Balkans and met Aunt Olya with the troupe in Zagreb. (Without warning, he pounds his fist on the table or wall.)

BRANDY (Taking his arm): Lev Konstantinovich?

LEV (Pulling away): It is nothing.

BRANDY: Are you certain?

LEV: Nothing I say, *nichts*. They were difficult times; difficult to recollect, so much lost, so many mistakes. Surely you have known such times, Miss Slade?

BRANDY (Quietly): Yes.

NICK (To OLGA L, attempting to lighten the conversation): Konstantin S—
Sergeyevich brought you to our country?

OLGA L: Yes, perhaps you should have come with us, Lyova.

LEV: Perhaps. In Moscow, Aunt Olya signed me on with the troupe as
a...fictitious member. I remained in Berlin to see doctors and study
music. Aunt Olya paid for everything from America.

OLGA L: Lyova, to be honest, I've never understood the music you wrote on your
return. It was advanced, something significant, a force; I felt it but could
not fully grasp it. You, the Revolution had brought us into a new world.
The fairyland of Tchaikovsky had vanished, so be it; when I saw
Rachmaninoff and Chaliapin in New York, they also understood, but none
of us could cross into this new, brutal realm...

LEV: *Тетя, ты никогда не говорила.* [Tyótya, tyi nikogdá ne govoríla.]

(Supertitle: *Aunt, you never told me that.*)

OLGA L (Nodding): The old world had been swept away; what could this brave
new Red world want with an impoverished troupe of ghosts? What could
these ghosts do but mutely haunt the world. Even now, this moment, I
hear the anguish in Konstantin Sergey'ich's voice when he cried out

silently to Nemiróvich-Dánchenko: МХАТ [MKHAT] no longer existed!

(To herself, sighing): Anton Pavlovich would have known what to do.

(Reciting, in Russian with supertitles, or in English):

<i>Часов однообразный бой,</i>	[<i>Chasóv odnoobráznyi boi,</i>]
<i>Томительная ночи повесть....</i>	[<i>Tomítel'naya nóchi póvost'....</i>]
<i>Нам мнится: мир осиротелый</i>	[<i>Nam mnítsya: mir osirotyélyi</i>]
<i>Неотразимый рок настиг.</i>	[<i>Neotrazímnyi rok nastig.</i>]
<i>И мы, в борьбе с природой целой</i>	[<i>I myi, v borbyé s priródoi tzéloi</i>]
<i>Покинуты на нас самих.</i>	[<i>Pokínuti na nas samíx.</i>]
<i>И наша жизнь стоит пред нами,</i>	[<i>I násha zhizn' stoít pred námi,</i>]
<i>Как призрак на краю земли,</i>	[<i>Kak prízrak na kraiu zemli,</i>]
<i>И с нашим веком и друзьями</i>	[<i>I s náshim vyékom i druzýami</i>]
<i>Бледнеет в сумрачной дали.</i>	[<i>Blednyéet v súmrachnoi dalí.</i>]

(Supertitle: *"The clock strikes with its monotonous voice,/The night's exhausting story./It seems that fate inexorable is overtaking the orphaned world./And we, in the battle with Nature/Are abandoned entirely to ourselves./ Our own life stands before us/Like a phantom at the edge of an abyss,/Fading away in the distant twilight/With our times and our friends."*)

(NICK wipes his eye.)

LEV: (To BRANDY): Art exists despite externalities, Miss Slade?

(BRANDY remains silent, staring into her glass. Eventually):

BRANDY: Lev Konstantinovich, Konstantin Sergeyevich, did they never discover short, Anglo-Saxon names?

NICK: Konstantin Sergeyevich was your father, Lev Konstantinovich?

(Supertitle: *Patronymics make it easy to tell who's who in Russian novels: "Olga Leonardovna" = "Olga, daughter of Leonard." "Konstantin Leonardovich" = "Konstantin, son of Leonard." Thus, Konstantin and Olga are brother and sister. With luck, only one Leonard will appear per novel.*)

LEV: No, my father Konstantin was one of Olga Leonardovna's brothers, Konstantin Leonardovich, a railway engineer. Her other brother, Vladimir Leonardovich, sang opera at the Bol'shoi.

OLGA L: Konstantin Sergeyevich Alekséyev founded our theatre with Vladímir Ivánovich Nemiróvich-Dánchenko. Despite the long names, an official escort met Alekseyev at the boat in New York and whisked him off to the hotel, sirens wailing...Yes, the tour proved our salvation, but *Cherry*

Orchard eight times a week, sleeping on a cot in the dressing room between the matinee and evening, playing sixteen performances with a high fever...*Góspodi*, it's a wonder they didn't bury me on Broadway.

(Clips from some of [Olga Knipper's films](#) may be shown in the background.)

BRANDY (Pouring herself another glass, to herself): It's true, vodka corrodes everything but the glasses. MXAT? Is that a Yiddish curse?

OLGA L: MXAT—in English you call it the Moscow Art Theatre.

BRANDY (Dropping her glass): You were a member of the Moscow Art Theatre? That was, is the most famous, the greatest theatre company in the world!

NICK: Peasants...

OLGA L: *The New York Times* thought so. The American Defense Society claimed we were Soviet spies, which made us deliriously happy since it increased ticket sales.

(Supertitle: *What do you want to see them for?/It's only a bunch of dirty Bolshevicky/That's tryin' to turn the country upside down/The way they done their own.*)

The *Times* surrendered and the tour became our greatest triumph, for Alekseyev, for all of us.

(Supertitle: *Just think of a bunch of low-down Bolshevicky/That can't talk even a word of English, makin'/ A hard-boiled egg like me cry like a kid.*)

Oh yes, Miss Slade, Paramount Studios—was it MGM?— visited to sign our company into making a big Russian epic. That never happened.

NICK: They were a little short one hundred thousand cowboys to play the Russian cavalry.

BRANDY: Three executives just wanted to say they had lunch with genuine Bolsheviks. This Alekseyev—?

OLGA L: On stage he went by the name Stanislavsky. He didn't want his rich family to know what he was doing.

BRANDY (Knocking over another glass): Stanislavsky revolutionized theatre all over the world. Method acting. To this day he's worshipped in Hollywood. You knew him.

(Mention of Stanislavsky from *All About Eve*, at about 20:25.)

OLGA L: For forty years. (She yawns.) It is getting late. If you don't want to wander around in the cold for the rest of the night, you'd better sleep here. Lyova, give them some blankets.

(LEV steps momentarily into a back room.)

NICK: You're kind. We apologize again for the trouble.

OLGA L: If it is not life and death, it is not trouble.

(LEV returns with some blankets, hands them to BRANDY.)

BRANDY: Thank you.

OLGA L: That's what we have. Open the oven if you need to. *Спокойной ночи.*

[*Spokóinoi nóchi.*]

(Supertitle: *Good night. Don't let the bugs bite.*)

(OLGA L exits into a back room.)

LEV: Mr. Warren, you have played but not spoken about jazz.

NICK: Talking about music is less enjoyable than talking about sex and even less productive. (To BRANDY, pointedly): Certainly less enjoyable than dancing.

LEV: Of course. Music begins where words leave off. Who are your current favorites?

NICK: Yardbird, without question.

LEV: A bird in the yard?

NICK: A prisoner. Charlie Parker. Benny Goodman, Monk, Coltrane.

LEV: Play something.

(NICK plays a little night music. LEV sits at piano and improvises briefly with him.

BRANDY leans provocatively on the piano. LEV talks mostly to her. The Black Monk also pretends to play.)

LEV: It is far from our conception. Nevertheless, one can perhaps imagine a jazz saxophone concerto.

NICK (Breaking off abruptly): One can.

LEV: I am not the one to write it. One can imagine it, but the hour is already late for me, as you see. Mr. Warren, tell me, is it not strange to be living in London when all your jazz heroes are American?

NICK: Europeans appreciate jazz more than Americans, and I don't speak French.

LEV: But to leave your fatherland has not been easy.

NICK: I didn't have much choice. A man needs to pay the rent. And — (He falls silent.)

(LEV and BRANDY wait for the remainder.)

NICK: As far as I know, there are no concentration camps in England.

BRANDY: Nick?

NICK: I mean that the US maintains abandoned World War II military bases as internment camps.

LEV: *Зачем?* [*Zachém?*]

(Supertitle: *For what purpose?*)

NICK: For the purpose of interning up to 15,000 hard-core Communists.

BRANDY: Nick, that sounds paranoid, crazy.

NICK: Not to a Communist.

BRANDY: Are you?

NICK: No, but it remains true. Congress approved them in the Emergency Detention Act of 1950, or hadn't you heard?

(BRANDY remains silent.)

LEV: Who would have thought, an American Gulag?

BRANDY: Don't even dare—

LEV: Of course not. One cannot imagine. (Pause.) But Miss Slade, do you still insist on pestering Mr. Shostakovich with futile requests?

BRANDY: My requests are not futile, nor shall I pester him.

LEV: Well, when the sun is up allow me to find him for you. Dmitri Dmitrievich and I have not spoken for many years and I welcome the opportunity. *Gute Nacht*, Mr. Warren, Miss Slade.

(LEV exits into a back room as they turn off the lights. The following is performed in low voices in the dark.)

BRANDY: What time is it?

NICK: I have no idea. Time means nothing here.

BRANDY: There are no hours, just one clink of the glass followed by another...

NICK: In a Hollywood movie of this period, there'd be two sofas.

BRANDY: Come to me, floor.

NICK: Peasants for a night.

(They lie down.)

BRANDY: Who is banging on my head? Vodka, let me sleep. You know this is a violation of the Geneva Conventions. (After they've settled): Nick, what was that about?

NICK: What?

BRANDY: Concentration camps. Are you crazy?

NICK: It's repugnant, isn't it? It's also true. Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, Florida...

BRANDY: Nick, I must say you've turned more pink than I suspected, decidedly more pink, rosy...

NICK: Admittedly, I'll become completely red, for the briefest instant, when the world incinerates itself.

BRANDY: That's vodka talking. (To herself): This place is haunted; I feel it.

NICK: No, it's Nick talking. I told you, I dislike living in fear, but day in, day out, you feel it, taste it, breathe it. We've become convinced that annihilation will begin at midnight, tomorrow if not today. Your muscles tense, your chest contracts...

BRANDY: Shh. I like chests, mmm. Don't exaggerate. I'm sure this house is haunted.

NICK: By what? If you believe our government, radio, television, there are Soviet agents lurking on every corner and an FBI agent behind every mailbox.

BRANDY: That might be advisable, these days.

NICK: It's a presumption of guilt and a declaration of war against a country's own citizenry.

BRANDY: Nick, it's too late—early—for philosophy, even in Russia. Give me your rosy lips. I do like you so much.

(They kiss.)

Is that why you left the States? You've never told me. Hollywood Commies went to London.

NICK: You know I've never set foot in Hollywood and I'll say it again: I'm not a Communist. I was stationed near London for part of the War.

BRANDY: Doing what?

(NICK doesn't respond.)

Come on, Gary Cooper, let me in. It won't hurt, I promise, mmm.

NICK: Army Signal Corps, fixing radios, OK? I find London...easier, that's all.

BRANDY: Radios?

(NICK doesn't respond.)

Nick, has something changed?

NICK: If nothing changed, it could only mean we're dead.

BRANDY: Please. This evening, you've become suspicious, jealous.

NICK: Jealousy is one thing, darling, suspicion another. I can be jealous without being suspicious, and suspicious without being jealous.

BRANDY: Stop. I want you to love me. I want you to trust me;

NICK: Even if I distrusted you, I could still like you.

BRANDY: You never make sense. How can you like somebody you don't trust?

NICK: Apart from the fact that you're beautiful and sexy, you're smart and fearless. Satisfied?

BRANDY: Men are stupid. They confuse being attracted to a woman with liking her. Liking a person you distrust must be like learning a concerto you hate.

NICK: I can't describe it; it's the strangest feeling I've ever had. Enjoying someone who may harm you. Exciting, nauseating...Maybe it's like drinking: pleasurable and perilous. Maybe I'm attracted to danger.

BRANDY: You admit it, then.

NICK: Admit what?

BRANDY: All right, darling, blow all the smoke you like but you can't hide the jealousy oozing from every pore. When do you intend to challenge Lev Konstantinovich to a duel?

NICK: I left my pistol in the prop room. To be honest, I rather like this Lev Knipper. He's...complicated.

BRANDY: Be honest. I hate him.

NICK (Suspiciously): Do you?

BRANDY: I don't trust him. Every word he says means something else.

NICK: He means only one thing, believe me.

BRANDY: His self-confidence is unbearable.

NICK: It's not confidence. Something weighs on him.

BRANDY: It's confidence. The world belongs to Lev K-Knipper...You're a nice guy, Nick, I've decided, but he is so handsome, so...chemical. I should speak to the studio head. I don't know what role he would play...(To herself):

Brandy, you have never been so drunk. (To NICK): Why can't you be more chemical? (Seriously): I do like chemical men. Oh, Nick, kiss me.

NICK (He kisses her.): Brandy, you've been acting as star-struck as everyone else in Hollywood. Olga Leonardovna was right when she said that we don't know each other well.

BRANDY: You think too much, has anyone ever told you?

NICK: Olga Leonardovna.

BRANDY: What's a girl got to do to get a drop out of you, Nick? Yes, Olga Leonardovna was right; we don't know each other very well, not at all. (She rolls over, sighs.)

NICK: I cannot clearly imagine her life.

BRANDY: You'll have to imagine the rest, darling, because we're leaving—now.

NICK: What?

BRANDY: It's our last chance to escape before...(lower): we discover ourselves.

NICK: We'll be wandering around again in the cold 'til dawn.

BRANDY: Dawn can't be far off. We'll put up with each other until then and say *adieu*. Kiss me. Mmm.

(They rise and dress in the dark.)

NICK (Aside): The night lasts a thousand years.

End Part I

Part Two

Part II may be played with or without a break after Part I. If with break, opening music may be Alexander Mosolov's String Quartet No. 1, [first movement](#) (at 0:20 or 8:05), or [third movement](#). The lights go up to reveal BRANDY and NICK in their coats, preparing to depart. They open the door to discover OLGA KONSTANTINOVNA about to knock. She is statuesque, still attractive at 60 and wears an expensive sable stole. She speaks English with a mostly German accent. After a slight, confused pause, she strides forthrightly in. NICK is struck. The Black Monk is yawning and stretching.

OLGA K: *Извиняюсь, что я так поздно...Погода задержала меня. Сейчас прояснело.*

Где Лева? (Looking around at the surroundings): Союз композиторов не может обеспечить своих композиторов приличными домами?

[Izvinyáyus', shto ya tak pózdno...Pogóda zaderzhála menya. Seychás proyasnyélo. Gdye Lyova? Soyúz Kompozítorov nye mózhet obespécht' svoikh kompozítorov prilíchnimi domámi?]

(Supertitle: *My apologies that I've arrived at such an hour...The weather held me up. It's cleared remarkably. Where is Lyova? Couldn't the Composers Union provide its composers with more suitable villas?)*

NICK: Sorry, Russian may be by decree the international language of drunkenness, but a bilateral compromise would be useful here. Do you speak English?

OLGA K: Of course.

(She shakes hands with BRANDY, who barely responds, extends her hand routinely to NICK to be kissed. He obliges.)

Olga Konstantinovna.

NICK: Lev Konstantinovich's sister, may I presume?

(Supertitle: *Patronymics are helpful.*)

OLGA K: You may. Where is he?

NICK: Asleep in the back, if not composing...climbing Everest.

BRANDY Please forgive us, we were just saying *до свидания* [*do svidánia*]. Nick.

OLGA K: Feel free to take the limousine if you need it.

NICK: I think not.

OLGA K: I'm famished. (She walks to table and helps herself to food and vodka. As she passes NICK, she absently strokes his cheek.) *Настоящий*

*мужчина. И молодой. Они до сих пор в таком дефиците. [Nastoyáshyi
muzhchína. I molodói. Oní do cikh por v takóm defitzíte.]*

(Supertitle: *A man. And a young one. They're still in such short supply.*)

Are you friends of Lyova?

NICK: Passing acquaintances. We passed by by accident and became
acquainted—

BRANDY (Tugging at NICK's sleeve): We'll borrow the car.

NICK: You'll borrow the car. Let's say *до свидания* [*do svidánia*] now, Brandy.
Your world is a steel cage, and I see no future in it.

(BRANDY angrily exits.)

Only a rusted and imprisoned past.

OLGA K (While eating, not too interested): Lovers' quarrel?

NICK: Strangers'. She's an accomplished woman, determined, at moments
irresistibly seductive. But hormones and trust have faded as politics and
suspicion have blossomed. When you get down to it we don't share
much. It is an improbable coincidence that we latched on to each other at
the festival.

OLGA K: Love affairs should have only beginnings. Could you please hang up my stole? (She undrapes herself.) Thank you. Apart from animal magnetism, what would you like to have in common with a woman?

NICK: You can't engineer those things. A belief in the possibility of the new, of experimentation: in life, in art, in politics. Nowadays the idea would land you before a Congressional hearing. I would like to meet a genius in life—

OLGA K: Who lives as Picasso paints?

NICK: Very good. I don't think one exists in America, unless he's locked up on Alcatraz.

OLGA K: You sound like Peter Pan, darling.

NICK (Sitting): Possibly. And you sound more German than Russian.

OLGA K: Quite likely. I escaped during the Civil War, already, oh, thirty-five years ago and have been living in Berlin ever since. Is my accent too strong? They loved it in America. Sorry, I didn't catch your name...

NICK: Nick. Nick Warren.

OLGA K: Charmed. (She holds out her hand again.)

NICK: What brings you to this...village, on this night? Have you come in from Berlin?

OLGA K (Nodding): I haven't seen Lyova since before the War. I want to surprise him.

NICK: If it's not classified, what do you do, Olga Konstantinovna?

OLGA K: That's right, the first question from an American. What do I do? I survive. A few years ago I started a cosmetics firm. A woman can look eternally young, if she works at it.

NICK: I'd testify you're living proof.

OLGA K: Thank you, *mon chevalier*. Remember, you can never give a woman too many compliments. You Americans can be surprisingly gallant when you want to. I was recently dating one of your energetic soldiers stationed in Germany. A real Romeo, Elvis, but unripened. My men need to be battle tested. The firm is doing extremely well, *danke*.

NICK: *Bitte*. Strange how we stumbled onto this place and everything in it...your brother, a well-known composer, your aunt a member of Stanislavsky's troupe.

OLGA K (With surprise, concern): Olga Leonardovna is here?

NICK: Very much so.

OLGA K (Nodding, with anticipation): I was with the company too, before I escaped. I can hardly believe my audacity, but I stuffed all my possessions into a carpet bag, tied a scarf over my head, and tramped across the border wearing an overcoat and felt boots, just like a peasant. I hid a diamond ring under my tongue and pretended I was mute. Finally I made it to Berlin and that was that. Well, I did seriously need to improve my German.

NICK: Lev speaks it perfectly.

OLGA K: He's the talented one.

(Enter BRANDY, still drunk. The others ignore her.)

To be honest, I only studied with Stanislavsky. He was a fanatic, you know. To work with him was joy, torture—mostly torture. I truly loved him, feared him, hated him. He instilled in all of us the feelings we must carry across the theatre's threshold, so that all the pettiness of daily life was abandoned beyond the walls—

BRANDY: To be chauffeured requires a destination...

(Enter LEV, wide awake.)

OLGA K (Rising): Lyova!

LEV (With great surprise, puzzlement and trepidation): Olya!

(As they tentatively embrace, with some severity): *Was machst du hier?*

(Supertitle: *What are you doing here?)*

OLGA K: *Man hat mir in Moskau gesagt, dass du in Ivanova bist und ich wollte meinen lieben Bruder nach so vielen Jahren wiedersehen.*

(Supertitle: *In Moscow they told me that you were at Ivanovo and I wanted to see my dear brother after so many years.)*

LEV: *Dein Deutsch ist jetzt fast perfekt. (Suspiciously): Warum bist du in Moskau? Ich dachte, wir haetten jetzt alles hinter uns.*

(Supertitle: *Your German is almost perfect now. Why are you in Moscow?)*

OLGA K: *Eine Verabredung. Ich habe Neuigkeiten...Lyova, wie geht es deiner Frau?*

(Supertitle: *The usual. I do have news...Lyova, how is your wife?)*

LEV: *Ich habe Keine.*

(Supertitle: *I have no wife.)*

Ich sehe, du hast unsere amerikanischen kennengelernt. Die sprechen keine Sprache.

(Supertitle: *Let's go upstairs. There is an extra bed there if you want it.*)

OLGA K: *Der junge Mann wird es tun.*

(Supertitle: *The young man isn't bad, you know.*)

LEV (Taking BRANDY aside): You appear to be standing on your eyebrows, Miss Slade. Be assured, when the sun is higher I shall lasso Dmitri Dmitrievich.

(While LEV is speaking to BRANDY, with their backs to the door, OLGA L enters in a dressing gown. OLGA K gazes at her from across the room. As recognition sets in, OLGA L collapses. Everyone rushes to her. The Black Monk nods.)

OLGA K: *Боже мой! [Bózhe moi!]*

(They place her on the sofa and revive her.)

LEV: *Тетя Оля, все хорошо? Скажи, что тебе лучше. [Tyótya Olya, vsyó khoroshó? Skazhí, shto tebyé lúchshe.]*

(Supertitle: *Aunt Olya, are you all right? Say something!*)

OLGA L (Coming to): *Да, ничего, все хорошо, я так удивилась...* [*Da, nichevó, vsyó khoroshó, ya tak udivílas'...*]

(Supertitle: *Yes, it's nothing. I was so shocked...*)

OLGA K: *Тетя Оля, ты так и упала в обморок в последний раз, когда я тебя видела, прямо на сцене.* [*Tyótya Olya, tyi tak i upála v óbmorok, v poslyédnyi raz, kogdá ya tebyá vídela, priyáma na stzéne.*]

(Supertitle: *Aunt Olya, you did this last time I saw you, right on stage. Is this a performance?*)

(OLGA L gradually gets up and moves toward the kitchen. They all sit around the table. BRANDY, in particular, remains noticeably hung over.)

OLGA L: *Да, вспомнила. Когда ты упала с ясного неба в середине Войны прямо как последний занавес в Вишневом Саду. Как ты тогда пробралась в Москву?* [*Da, vspomíla. Kogdá tyi upála s yasnóvo nyéba v seredínye Voiní pryáto kak poslyédnyi zánaves v Vishevyevom Sadú. Kak tyi togda probralás' v Moskvú?*]

(Supertitle: *Yes, I recall. When you appeared out of nowhere in the middle of the War as the curtain fell on Cherry Orchard. How could you have gotten through the Front?*)

OLGA K: *Нет, ты перепутала. Это было после Войны.* [*Nyet, myi perepútala. Éto býlo pósle voiní.*]

(Supertitle: *No, you're confused. It was after the War.*)

OLGA L: *Может быть, ты права. Моя память уже не такая, как была. [Mózhnet byt tyi pravá. Moyá pámyat' uzhé ne takáya, kak bylá.]*

(Supertitle: *Perhaps you're right. My memory isn't what it was.*)

(To NICK and BRANDY): Let me make you pancakes.

NICK: Please, Olga Leonardovna, don't trouble yourself.

OLGA L: It's not life or death. (She begins cooking.)

Olya, I don't understand anything. We've heard nothing from you for a century and suddenly you appear on our doorstep like a ghost. What's happened?

OLGA K: I needed to speak to some people in Moscow about my cosmetics firm.

OLGA L: Cosmetics firm?

OLGA K: *Da*, I'll be flying back to Berlin tomorrow, but wanted to see you. This may be our last opportunity.

OLGA L: Yes, may it be.

OLGA K: Olga Leonardovna! *Что ты этим хочешь сказать? [Shto ty etím khochesh' skazat'?)*

(Supertitle: *What do you mean by that?*)

OLGA L: How do you think we've felt all these years with you living with the Nazis? People say our family has a traitor among us. The security organs...I burned your letters.

OLGA K: You burned my letters?

OLGA L: All.

LEV (Forcefully): *Tyótya Olya, please.*

OLGA K: *Tante*, do you think life in Germany has been easy for me? Germans spat in my face, saying I am a traitor to Germany; Russians spat in my face saying I am a traitor to Russia.

OLGA L: You shouldn't be here—

LEV: *Genug! Was vorbei ist ist noch Gegenwart!*

(Supertitle: *Enough! What's past is past!*)

(BRANDY suddenly becomes ill and retches into the sink.)

BRANDY: I'm in mourning for my life.

OLGA L: Yes, Masha. I played Arkadina, the actress-bitch, though I was too young.

BRANDY: Don't ask me where it's from.

OLGA L: [

OLGA K: (Flatly): *Seagull*.

LEV:]

BRANDY: I apologize. I'm utterly mortified.

OLGA L: Think nothing of it.

NICK: It's too early in the morning to be mourning one's life.

(LEV pours some pickle brine into a glass and pours himself a beer.)

BRANDY: Nick, forgive me. We've had a mis—I didn't mean some of the things I said. You mean a lot to me. Let's try again, please...

(NICK considers.)

LEV (Before NICK can answer): Have some pickle brine, Miss Slade. It will help revive you. You'll need to be revived. Beer also helps.

(BRANDY drinks a glass and grimaces. She pours herself a beer.)

OLGA L: Very well, Olya, pâce. I got a letter from your daughter, Ada, saying that she is dating a young American soldier named Elvis. She wasn't certain what would become of it.

(NICK stares perplexedly at OLGA K.)

OLGA K: Who knows, Aunt Olya? They're too young to see tomorrow. I also wanted to tell you, if you hadn't heard, that Misha has died.

OLGA L: Mikhail Aleksandrovich? (She crosses herself in the orthodox manner.) It wasn't yet his time.

OLGA K (To NICK): My first husband. A drunken, suicidal madman.

LEV: His second wife did sober him up, Olya.

OLGA L: Mad? Suicidal? How dare you speak that way, Olya! He was Konstantin Sergey'ich's most brilliant student. He gave us our greatest Hamlet!

OLGA K: He kept a loaded Browning in his drawer, ready to use it. You beat him to within an inch of his death yourself, Tante Olya, when you learned we'd married...And what a hovel he lived in! How can a man debase himself so disgracefully! (More to NICK): I finally became so fed up with his drinking and so frightened by his lunatic ravings that I ran away—in the

midst of the Bolshevik Revolution. If Chaliapin hadn't given us milk from his cow, little Ada would have perished.

LEV (Displeased): You eloped with a Hungarian army officer.

NICK: Why did you marry a raving lunatic?

OLGA K: *Mein Liebe*, he was so completely captivated by my Ophelia that after the curtain he rushed up and kissed me passionately. Being at that tender age entirely innocent of the facts of life, I thought I'd become pregnant—so we married the next day, or the day after.

OLGA L: Do you enjoy making up such nonsense, Olya, or is it a sickness? You never played Ophelia. You painted sets. I've never seen such impudence, comparing yourself to Misha! (To BRANDY): Mikhail Aleksandrovich left for Hollywood, you know. I received a letter from him a few years ago. He said that he taught many students and made several movies. Wait a moment, I might have it.

(She exits into back room to retrieve the letter. In the meantime, we see clips of Michael Chekhov in [Spellbound](#) and [Song of Russia](#) (31:30 or, better, sequence beginning at 36:15). The entire cast watches.)

LEV (During *Spellbound*): Didn't Misha win an Oscar for this?

OLGA K: He was nominated. Ingrid Bergman should have remained a milkmaid.

OLGA L (Returning during *Song of Russia*, catching sight of screen): Misha!

LEV: Stop this movie.

(Film freezes.)

Miss Slade, have you become yourself again?

BRANDY (Truthfully): That will undoubtedly never happen in my lifetime, but go on.

LEV: Is this film familiar to you?

BRANDY (After peering at the screen): Yes. It was very popular. *Song of Russia*, from the war years.

LEV: Exactly, 1943. Taking up our theme from last night, it is not only absolute rubbish, complete with singing peasants, but absolute propaganda— American pro-Soviet propaganda.

BRANDY: I remember. It is also absolutely disgusting. The writers should be hauled before the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

LEV: They were, Miss Slade. Your star, Robert Walker, fingered them as Communists and their careers were ruined.

BRANDY: How do you know?

LEV: We read newspapers.

NICK: Hauling them before the House Committee retroactively? During the War Russia was America's ally.

LEV: I doff my hat to you, Mr. Warren. Logic does not seem to be a strong suit of your Congress. Let us put that aside. Dear Miss Slade, you maintain that this symphony or that is typical Soviet bombast, propaganda, as you call it. How does *Song of Russia* differ, other than in music by Tchaikovsky? Or this one?

(Clip from *Mission to Moscow*, again, around 01:39:15).

Stalin, such a pleasant chap, isn't he?

OLGA L: *Ljowa, nein!*

OLGA K: What is going on here?

LEV: *Tyótya Olya, tovarishch* Khrushchev has spoken! Somehow this *Mission to Moscow*, made by the world's greatest lovers of freedom and justice, you understand, justifies the show trials of Stalin's enemies. The mass executions go unmentioned. Of course, Miss Slade, you of all people must

be aware that the art of propaganda lies in sins of omission, not of commission. Is that not a fundamental truth?

BRANDY (Ignoring the question): *Mission to Moscow* was the most blatantly pro-Communist film ever made in America—

LEV: —under supervision of the United States Office of War Information, with your Roosevelt's approval. Should I feel irony or honor, Miss Slade, that my Communist propaganda march was used in an American propaganda film, which also came under the hammer of your Committee on Un-American Activities. But let us not forget:

(He waves on a montage of credits and/or opening scene for [The North Star](#), with music by Aaron Copland.)

More blissful peasants. There is no end to them in Hollywood's Russia!
Tell me, were your beloved Aaron Copland and Ira Gershwin
Communists, or were they merely paying the rent?

OLGA L: Calm down, Lyova, what is coming over you?

OLGA K: I'd forgotten Lyova's fervor. If he's not careful, he'll incinerate himself.

(He takes a deep breath and downs a vodka.)

OLGA L: Here, I found Misha's letter. (More to BRANDY): He writes that "some of my students have proven, if not always the most talented, at least the most bankable, which is what is important in America." Let's see. Perhaps you can tell me who these people are. (She puts on her glasses, reading with difficulty): Marilyn Monroe, Gregory Peck, Marlon Brando, Ingrid Bergman, Gary Cooper, Anthony Quinn, Yul Brenner, Clint Eastwood...

BRANDY: Misha. (Eyeing her glass): It's coming: Disperse alcoholic haze...! You're talking about Michael Chekhov.

OLGA L: Yes, of course, Anton Pavlovich's nephew.

BRANDY: America's greatest acting coach. He brought Stanislavsky's method to Hollywood. Marilyn said he was the equal of Abraham Lincoln. I met him once at a reception. A little man, intense...

OLGA L: [

LEV: (Seriously): *Mup mesen.* [*Mir tyésen.*]

OLGA K:]

(Supertitle: *Small world.*)

OLGA L: Misha didn't always see eye to eye with Stanislavsky; indeed never since his eyes only reached the middle of Konstantin Sergey'ich's chest. When Misha made Stanislavsky' secrets public, they nearly fell out forever.

LEV: Who can be surprised?

OLGA L: Konstantin Sergey'ich was truly a fanatic. To work with him was a joy and torture, more often torture when you didn't know what beckoned him. It's hard to believe that for half a century I loved him, I feared him, I hated him. He demanded a complete cleansing of baggage, you know, of vanity, of the smallest emotions foreign to an actor's substance, so that he left all the pettiness of daily life beyond the walls, bringing with him only what was truthful, what was given to him by nature —

NICK: Wait. Olga Konstantinovna, you said the same thing to me.

OLGA K: It's true, darling. Stanislavsky was a fanatic.

NICK: The same words, the exact words.

OLGA L (Severely): Olga Konstantinovna, what have you been doing, gnawing at my memoirs? Next you'll be telling him that you played our first *Seagull* in 1898, when you were one year old.

(OLGA K abruptly rises, lights a cigarette, moves toward the front door, where she stands aloof.)

BRANDY (Drinking another vodka): I remember. Even in Tinsel Town they speak of the Moscow Art Theatre's production of Chekhov's *Seagull* as one of the great events in the history of theatre.

OLGA L: Such things only become clear with the passage of time, don't they? By the time we put it on, it looked bad, terrible. It had already flopped in Peter.

(Supertitle: *"I have such rotten luck with the theatre, that if I were to marry an actress, I'd no doubt father an orang-outang or a porcupine."* —A. P. Chekhov.)

LEV: Utterly, the first pancake.

OLGA L: Anton Pavlovich was so sick that Stanislavsky said that if it failed, we would have killed the author by our own hands. To be honest, we really didn't act well on opening night. I fainted on stage. We'd spent eighty hours rehearsing, something unheard of, and still Konstantin Sergeyevich threatened to walk out.

BRANDY: They say the world had never seen such an ensemble.

OLGA L: I don't know. When the mad standing ovation began we were just relieved that we had saved our fledgling theatre and hadn't killed Anton Pavlovich. How often we needed to save that little theatre! How little it seems now...Anton Pavlovich died only a few years later, in 1904, our collaboration ended and in 1905 with all the strikes we were forced to close the season. Life stopped absolutely: no trams, no electricity, no stores, no milk, no water. I still see it. During the evenings, shadows always flickering. The coachmen are so angry that they charge at each other and me alone has to drive them away. Tverskaya Street—boarded up like a coffin, everything deathly quiet, dark. The air is full of uncertainty; any rumor is accepted as fact. They've emptied the school of anything the crowds might use. Next to Levinson Printing, Cossacks are always standing around, stirring up trouble. After sunset, people are afraid to show themselves on the street, terrified of those Black Hundreds.

NICK: What did Goethe say?

LEV: *"Nur der verdient sich Freiheit wie das Leben/ Der täglich sie erobern muß."*

"He alone is worthy of life and freedom, who each day does battle for them anew."

NICK: Indeed. (After a pause, to OLGA L): You are fond of Chekhov.

OLGA L: More than of Ibsen, Shakespeare even. You, I understand, find him a bore.

NICK: Honestly, yes. There's no drama in his plays.

LEV: There is a risk in attempting to portray boredom on stage.

OLGA L: Anton Pavlovich might agree with you. After our first reading of *Three Sisters* we sat in stunned silence. "It's unactable, no real characters," someone said. "It's not a play, merely a sketch." But after a few years it became our favorite.

NICK: Truly?

OLGA L: Anton Pavlovich *did* write it for us. Indeed, he wrote the role of Masha for me. I should say he merely put me into the play. I was feistier then, and just a little thinner.

LEV: Miss Slade, I shall fetch Dmitri Dmitrievich now, but I warn you: don't get your hopes up.

(A timid knock on the door.)

OLGA L: Excuse me, I must get dressed.

(OLGA L exits to the back.)

BRANDY: Nick, I haven't been myself. Please, I need to know you'll forgive me.

NICK (A little hesitantly): That much I can do, don't worry.

(OLGA K answers door with the Black Monk, who then vanishes. Enter DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH with a cigarette and an empty vodka bottle. He is 51, bespectacled, extremely reserved, nervous and fidgety, speaks rapidly, stammers, chain smokes, constantly adjusts his spectacles, stares, chews his nails, often drums his fingers on his arms, his cheek or the nearest table.)

DS: *Извините, беспокоит Дмитрий Шостакович. Может быть, Вы можете помочь, так сказать, у нас кончилась...как видите. У Вас случайно нет лишней, которую мы могли бы, так сказать, позаимствовать? [Izviníte, bespokóit Dmitri Shostakovich. Mózhnet byt, Vyi mózhete pomóch', tak skazat', u nas kónchilas', kak vídete. U Vas sluhcháino líshnei, kotóruyu myi mogli byi, tak skazát', pozáimstvovat'?)]*

(Supertitle: *Excuse me, Dmitri Shostakovich is pestering you. Perhaps you could help, that is to say, we've run out...as you see. Would you happen to have an extra we might, so to speak, borrow?)*

(Catching sight of LEV): *Ах, Лев Константинович, я не знал, что Вы сейчас в Иванове, так близко, так сказать, на соседной даче. Извиняюсь,*

что побеспокоил Вас. [Ah, Lev Konstantin'ich, ya ne znal, shto Vyi v Ivánovye, tak blízko, tak skazat', na sosyednoi dache. Izvinyáus', shto pobespokóil Vas.]

(Turns to leave.)

(Supertitle: *Ah, Lev Konstantin'ich, I didn't know you were at Ivanovo. I had no idea that you were so close, that is to say, next door. I'm sorry to have disturbed you.*)

LEV: *Нет, проходите Дмитрий Дмитриевич. Мы много лет не виделись и должны много обсудить. [Nyet, prokhoditye, Dmitri Dmitrievich. Myi mnógo let ne vídilis' I dolzhni mnógo obsudit'.]*

(Supertitle: *No, come in, Dmitri Dmitri'ich. It has been many years and there is much between us.*)

(They very hesitantly, suspiciously shake hands.)

Позвольте мне представить Бранди Слэйд из Америки. Она давно ищет Вас. [Pozvól'te mnye predstávit' Brandy Slade iz Amérika. Oná davno íshchet Vas.]

(Supertitle: *Allow me to introduce Brandy Slade from America. She has been searching the entire world for you.*)

BRANDY (Pulling herself together): Mr. Shostakovich, at last, this is indeed, uh, fortuitous. It is a pleasure and a greater honor to meet you.

(She extends her hand. DS, puzzled, responds suspiciously. LEV watches closely.)

I am what remains of Brandy Slade from Paramount Pictures in
Hollywood. Have you been informed of my arrival? (Pause.) Excuse me,
Mr. Shostakovich, do you speak English? By now I had assumed...

DS: *У Вас нет бутылочки водки? [U Vas nyet butýlochki vódki?]*

(Supertitle: *Very little, that is to say, no.*)

NICK (To audience): And here the incident becomes befogged and no one
except Paramount understands how the translation is to proceed.

BRANDY: Mr. Shostakovich, if you'll permit me, what brings you out at such an
ungodly hour?

DS: Vodka is godly at any hour.

(LEV turns to fetch a bottle.)

BRANDY (Aside): Its aftereffects have nothing to do with God. Lev
Konstantinovich, may I request some privacy? (Too severely): Nick?

DS: What does that word mean?

LEV (Suspiciously): Very well, Miss Slade.

(NICK shrugs, puzzled, and exits with OLGA K. LEV exits to back. BRANDY leads DS to the sofa.)

BRANDY: Please. (In a low voice): As creator of dozens of outstanding cinema scores, Mr. Shostakovich, you are aware that the USSR lags far behind the West in film technology. My studio, Paramount, is prepared to lend Mosfilm studios one dozen sound technicians and the world's most advanced recording equipment, all in exchange for the loan of—you.

DS (Lighting another cigarette, glancing at the walls): I don't understand, that is to say, what does any of this have to do with me?

BRANDY (Surprised): Everything, Mr. Shostakovich. Paramount intends to contract you to write music for six films...

DS: Excuse me, do you have a bottle?

(She goes for a bottle and glasses from the kitchen table. In the meantime, NICK and OLGA K are speaking outside.)

NICK: Do you have anything else to say that you don't want me to believe?

OLGA K: You don't trust me, *mon cher*?

NICK: We're living in the Cold War. One side's truth has as much to do with the other's as...honesty and the ability to amass a fortune.

OLGA K: You believe Olga Leonardovna? You've seen she does not entirely approve of me.

NICK: I've heard nothing but anecdotes, rumor, propaganda, commentary. I prefer an occasional fact, or when facts prove too costly, evidence.

OLGA K: How uncreative and disappointing you are, young man, and I was about to invite you to Berlin.

NICK: You remain welcome to invite me.

(BRANDY returns to sofa with vodka and glasses. She and DS toast.)

BRANDY: Mr. Shostakovich, I assure you, you will work in Hollywood under no restrictions, apart from the usual totalitarian studio servitude, paid top dollar...

DS (Drumming his fingers on his cheek): Servitude, yes, yes. I sued Twentieth Century Fox, that is to say, for stealing my Fifth Symphony —

(Clip from [The Iron Curtain](#) at around 19:30 or 57:00. 24:30 may be better with overwritten soundtrack.)

BRANDY: Really?

DS: I wrote it ten years before. New York court said anybody can steal Soviet music for anti-Soviet film.

BRANDY: I—I wasn't aware—

DS (Dismissing her): If the Ministry of Foreign Affairs wants me to write music for an American film, speak to them, so to speak.

BRANDY: Mr. Shostakovich, trust me—

DS: Like a twentieth-century fox?

BRANDY (Frustrated, almost pleading): I am not a fox. Believe me, Paramount *is* engaged in confidential negotiations with the Soviet government, but as principal party you must sign first.

DS (Pouring himself, downing a glass): Why do you say that? I sign anything they tell me to sign.

BRANDY (Aside, exasperated): If I can remember where I put the contract...(She begins to look for her portfolio.)

(Outside):

OLGA K: Where are you living now?

NICK: London.

OLGA K: How dreary. You'd certainly prefer Berlin.

NICK: I've never visited.

OLGA K: Then you must. The rubble was cleared some time ago and food does get through. My villa is yours. You'll find it quite comfortable.

NICK: Olga Konstantinovna, tell me, do Knippers always get what they want?

OLGA K: Usually. Life sometimes resists.

NICK: You share your brother's ambition.

OLGA K: Darling, his have never approached mine.

(Inside):

BRANDY (To DS): Wouldn't you prefer to come to America, Mr. Shostakovich?

DS: I have been to America. I bought a carton of Marlboros. Please excuse me, this has been inconvenient. I want to watch the football match. I shouldn't have, *так сказать* [*tak skazát'*], disturbed you—

BRANDY: Mr. Shostakovich, don't go, please.

DS: I really must, that is to say, *до свидания* [*do svidánia*].

(As he rises, BRANDY sighs in frustration, pours herself another, steadies herself. Enter

LEV. He pushes DS back onto the sofa.)

LEV: *Нет, Дмитрий Дмитриевич, не уходите. Нам нужно много обсудить. Вам будет интересно. [Nyet, Dmitri Dmitrievich, nye ukhodíte. Nam núzhno mnogo obsúdit'. Vam búdyet interyésno.]*

(Supertitle: *No, Dmitri Dmitrievich, please stay. We have much to discuss. It will be pleasant for you.*)

LEV: So, Miss Slade, you wish to recruit Dmitri Dmitri'ich.

BRANDY: You heard?

LEV: Walls have ears. (He traps her against the wall).

BRANDY: Lev Konstantinovich, not with Dmitri Dmitrievich present.

LEV: He won't understand a word. In any case, by now you have learned there is no privacy in Russia.

BRANDY: Lev Konstantinovich, you are an attractive man, but...you intend to conquer the summit...only because...you can.

LEV: Miss Fox, do you expect anyone to believe you are here to contract Dmitri Dmitri'ich for your film studio?

BRANDY: I do not intend to contract you, Lev Konstantinovich, if that's what you are asking. (Hesitantly but positively): Please...

LEV (Stroking her cheek): You hardly strike me as a Hollywood type. You are much too...let us say, classical.

BRANDY: What do you mean? All the great Hollywood composers are classical: Dmitri Tiomkin, straight out of your own St. Petersburg conservatory, Max Steiner, Erich Korngold, all totally classical...

LEV: Perhaps you are right, but if your superiors had the slightest knowledge of our Soviet system, they would know you cannot sign Shostakovich without approval from the highest authorities, the *highest*. Dmitri Dmitri'ich is quite correct about that. Further, why would our highest authorities allow the most prized Soviet composer to escape to the West?

BRANDY: Lend-lease for the latest sound technology. You government, I should say, contacted us.

LEV (Skeptically): Indeed. And they didn't merely buy this equipment? Why? If American law forbids its export to the Soviet Union, why would trading Shostakovich for a tape recorder be more legal?

BRANDY: How would you know all that, Lev Konstantinovich?

(LEV nearly kisses her on the lips. She responds but he abruptly turns away. Outside):

OLGA K: For a time I wanted to work in Hollywood but Marlene and Greta had cornered the Valkyrie market. So I returned to Germany. To be blunt, my memories of America are hardly the fondest.

NICK: I've already heard that story from your aunt. No embellishments required. I take it, despite Olga Leonardovna, you are also an actress.

OLGA K: You haven't heard of me?

NICK: Olga Knipper? Forgive me, not until last night, this morning.

OLGA K: I kept Misha's name after my divorce. Olga Chekhova.

(We see clips from some of Olga Tschechowa's many films, perhaps interspersed with publicity stills. Obligatory: fainting scene in [The Italian Straw Hat](#) (*Un Chapeau de paille d'Italie*; 1928) beginning around 17:35 and [Bel Ami](#) (1939) around 20:20, sequences beginning 21:50 or (best) 33:40. Also, original [Moulin rouge](#) (1928) at 6:40, 21:40, 39:35; Hitchcock's [Mary](#) (1931) around 52:30; [Der Choral von Leuthen](#) (1933), beginning at 5:45.)

NICK: Chekhov. Ingenious branding.

OLGA K: Pardon?

NICK: I'm sorry, I still don't recognize your name.

OLGA K: What has this world come to?

NICK (Pointing to *Bel Ami*): Now that you mention it, I did see that movie once.

You're very regal, a genuine Valkyrie. (Pointing to *Italian Straw Hat*):

That's terrifically funny. Honestly, you're very good, a real star.

OLGA K: Better, *mon chevalier*, I forgive you. After all, you are young, and American. Yes, twenty years ago, I was Germany's brightest star.

NICK: I had no idea. What could you possibly want with me?

OLGA K: Isn't that obvious?

(She takes his arm and they enter the dacha.)

LEV (To DS): *Дмитрий Дмитриевич, я рад, что Вы пришли. Поехали. [Dmitri Dmitri'ich, ya rad shto Vyi prishli. Poyéxali.]*

(Supertitle: *Dmitri Dmitrievich, I'm genuinely glad you're here. Let's begin.*)

(They clink glasses, DS nervously.)

Tell me, what occupies you at Ivanovo?

DS: An opera based on Chekhov's story, "The Black Monk."

(A black shadow ripples over the set, or the Black Monk looks surprised.)

LEV: The image of the monk passing higher and higher into the sky, above all countries, finally wandering throughout the universe, until after one thousand years he must reappear to haunt Man, is a powerful one. I believe he is due back today or tomorrow, October...

DS: Yes, certainly, any time now.

LEV: Unfortunately his appearance proves fatal to those who actually see him...Nevertheless...You have always been attracted to the surreal and the supernatural, Dmitri Dmitri'ich. It should go well with your *Nose*.

DS: Yes, yes, you are right; Chekhov is closer to me than any writer after Gogol, but I have never understood how his wife could publish all the intimate details of their life together. She should be ashamed of herself. Chekhov was right in calling her the *aktrissula*.

(Supertitle: "*Little Actress.*")

(Enter OLGA L.)

What these actresses won't do to please the public! And the public! It's not content to be fed on bread alone; it wants to know whether the goings on in famous people's bedrooms are the same as in everybody else's, that is to say, whether they get up to something more inventive.

OLGA L: In fact, Anton Pavlovich usually called me “Doggie.” Have you quite finished, Dmitri Dmitrievich?

DS: Olga Leonardovna, I—I didn’t know you were here, so to speak.

OLGA L: Apparently not.

DS: I apologize; it had slipped my mind that Lev Konstantin’ich was your nephew...I should, as they say, leave.

NICK (Aside): I feel a certain inevitability here...

OLGA L: Dmitri Dmitrievich, do you think I had no life before Anton Pavlovich? Nemirovich-Danchenko called me his “little vaulting horse.” Does that shock you?

DS: Please—

OLGA L: Did you expect me to commit suicide after Anton Pavlovich died?

DS: No, no, of course not.

OLGA L: I mourned him bitterly for two months, writing my heart out to his ghost, reproaching myself for being separated from him so often while I worked in Moscow and he sat exiled by the doctors in Yalta. But life goes on, doesn’t it?

DS: Yes, yes life goes on. Still, there was no need at all to publish those letters. They are so private, that is to say.

OLGA L: What is shameful about a drawer-full of love letters? In my whole life, which is now at an end, there have been only two things: Anton Pavlovich and the theatre. After he was gone, there was only the theatre. Those letters contained my entire world and I have given them to the world. Let the world read them or forget them. I am no thinker and have not understood much in our times. I have had nothing else to give, Dmitri Dmitrievich, and I have nothing to apologize for.

DS: I am glad. Thank you for the bottle. (Turns to leave.)

(The Black Monk materializes and bars DS's exit.)

LEV: Stay, Dmitri Dmitrievich. We have other matters that require your approval. Miss Slade has been arguing that great art exists without regard to war or history or politics. That those works are destined to pass the test of time despite thickets, the highest castle walls and —. Have I correctly summarized your position, Miss Slade?

BRANDY: I'll accept the approximation.

DS (Glancing at the ceiling): I—I refuse to talk about this. (Rises.)

LEV (Pushing him back into the chair): Don't worry, Dmitri Dmitri'ich, nowadays old acquaintances may speak...freely. Miss Slade insists that your music is uncompromising strength itself, while mine is mere propaganda. Of course she fails to understand that in Russian "propaganda" carries positive meaning. But tell her about your *Song of the Forests*, with Stalin playing the "great gardener." Or about your twelfth symphony, which you will write in few years, which is such a propaganda poster that one hardly listen to it without vomiting. What's more, it will be written at a time when Comrade Khrushchev has made it unnecessary to kowtow, but you will have joined the Party.

DS: Y—you know I needed to write *Song of the Forests* to restore my reputation, that is to say, after the decree.

LEV: And of course you won a Stalin Prize for it.

DS: I don't give a damn about that. They can do what they want with their prizes.

BRANDY: I am sure Dmitri Dmitrievich had the best of reasons. Music lovers the world over know the indignities and dangers he has suffered at the hands of the Soviet regime. He's to be admired for his strength of character and determination to produce great works. One judges an artist by his best,

not his worst, and we must forgive him if from time to time he has been forced to...do what has been required.

LEV: And when the rest of us do what is required? Everything in the universe has a cause, but God is an exception. Miss Slade, what you cannot conceive is that Soviet artists and composers embraced the Revolution with a fervor equaling that of the workers. The murderous Tsar had been deposed. Please, spare me ignorant nostalgia. The slate had been washed clean. The Bolsheviks intended to create a new world and we intended to create it with them. I intended to create it with them. You cannot imagine the ferment of those years. We required new themes, new forms. Everything was demanded, anything was possible. The avant-garde was possible. When Nemirovich-Danchenko hired me as music director at the Art Theatre my opportunity had arrived. I created the first Soviet opera, *The North Wind*. Did you see it, Dmitri Dmitri'ich?

(A scene from *The North Wind* comes on. This opera has only been performed only once since 1929, in Magdeburg, and no video or sound recording exists. It will have to be reconstructed. The author has a copy of the piano score, which is also available from [Peters Editions](#).)

DS (Not wanting to argue): Yes, yes, an extremely daring opera. No arias, duets or quartets, just words merged organically with music. It was the first and most successful opera on Soviet themes, that is to say, better than my *Nose*. They appeared the same year, isn't that right?

LEV: In 1929, the *перелом* [*perelóm*]

NICK: *Perelóm?*

OLGA K: The turning point. I am glad I left.

DS: The break—

LEV: Call it a fracture. Comrade Stalin and his proletarian musicians tightened his grip and—that was the end. The *North Wind* vanished. Volodya Déshevov's *Ice and Steel* vanished.

(A clip from [Ice and Steel1](#) or [Ice and Steel2](#) begins.)

When is the last time you've pronounced his name, Dmitri Dmitri'ich?

DS (After a pause, nodding): Volodya Deshevov. (Stifling a sob): Yes, yes, he was a complete genius, one must admit, extremely original; putting chains, paper into his piano, all back in 1926. Not that I had much patience with parlor tricks.

NICK: What happened to him?

(Before anyone answers, the opening of [Popov's first symphony](#) is suddenly heard. The cast recoils as if a bomb has exploded. The music continues softly (can be from 08:30.))

LEV: Have you recovered, Miss Slade?

BRANDY: What was that?

DS (Morosely): My good friend Gavriil Popov's first symphony.

LEV: There was a composer with talent. Most of us believed it equaled your own, would you not say so, Dmitri Dmitri'ich?

DS (Angrily): Why do you insist on unburying the dead, Lev Konstantin'ich?

LEV: The dead? He was your friend, Dmitri Dmitri'ich. Don't worry, no one will knock on the door, not at this hour at any rate. The sun is up.

DS: Perhaps you are right. No...(Rising): Yes, his talent unquestionably exceeded my own. There, you have it. We all learned from Gavriil Nikolai'ich.

LEV: Does the name Popov mean anything to you, Miss Slade?

(BRANDY shakes her head, shrugs.)

OLGA K: I have never heard of him either.

LEV: How could it be otherwise? The day after its premiere this symphony, far more accomplished than Shostakovich's own first, was banned.

DS: Gavriil! We appealed the ban, successfully one might say, but when they attacked my *Lady Macbeth* in 1936, his symphony was banned again. It has never been heard since the first night, a monumental work.

LEV: You have noticed Russians drink, Miss Slade. This is nothing compared to what has consumed Popov. Yes, he writes to this day—he wrote the music for Stalin's favorite film—and he occasionally writes with brilliance, but he has never recovered the nerve, the sheer audacity he displayed as a youth. Listening to his recent compositions, you can never be certain whether they are the product of genius or delirium. Vodka will kill him.
(He downs a glass, the Black Monk a bottle.)

BRANDY: Then there is the difference, Lev Konstantinovich. Dmitri Dmitrievich continues to display fortitude, courage despite the infamous reprimand he received for his opera *Lady Macbeth*, despite the disgusting decree of 1948, accusing him of "anti-people's music," and for which he has paid dearly. You lost your job at the conservatory, didn't you, Dmitri Dmitrievich?

(DS nods nervously. The opening of Mosolov's [Zavod](#) ("The Iron Foundry") comes on.

This can be done to images from, of course, [Metropolis](#) (after 12:00) or [Berlin](#) (at 02:50

in clip). Similar images are to be found throughout [Man With a Movie Camera](#), e.g. around 15:30.)

LEV: Popov's name was also on that decree but you don't remember.

(BRANDY shakes her head.)

(After a long pause, reflectively): My name did not figure.

NICK: Why is that?

BRANDY: Don't you see, Nick? Because Lev Knipper threw in the towel, wrote nothing but official pap. (Noticing "The Iron Foundry"): But I've heard this piece. It was famous, once.

LEV (Ignoring her personal remark): After the Revolution we were creating a world of steel, of machines. No one did that better than Sasha Mosolov with his "Iron Foundry." Even before he graduated the Conservatoire, Mosolov was leading the avant-garde. His *Four Newspaper Advertisements*—who would have thought to write music based on newspaper ads!

(Zavod can be briefly interrupted by the first of [Four Newspaper Advertisements](#).)

DS (A little wearily, resigned): Yes, he was an adventurer. His piano music, string quartets—extremely progressive, so to speak.

LEV: And a true Bolshevik! Wounded twice fighting the Whites!

DS: Too progressive...

OLGA L (Listening to *Zavod*): At the Art Theatre we stayed with the classics. We were ghosts, dinosaurs, but people came. And why should anyone want to listen to this music Lyova? It is an aberration in the history of art.

BRANDY: I agree.

LEV: Prokofiev listened to it. He completely condemned it—and stole every bar.

(“[The Factory](#)” from Prokofiev’s ballet *Pas d’Acier*.)

Of course Prokofiev, living in Paris and being the world’s greatest bastard, got away with it. Still, Mosolov’s version was so superior that it became a worldwide sensation—the very banner of Bolshevik music. Red music, machine music, the music of our times, the music of the future! Zaderatsky was not so lucky.

DS: Vsevolod Zaderatsky, yes, an extremely talented man.

LEV: Not as lucky as he was talented. Zaderatsky’s unforgivable sin was to be music tutor of the tsarevich and to have fought for the Whites. A

dangerous thing to have fought for the Whites...I knew him in the south before I escaped.

DS: He has completely disappeared. (Waving off LEV): No, I don't want to know...

LEV: Disappeared. (He laughs sardonically.) After the Revolution he was arrested once, again in '26. Every note he wrote before the age of 33 was utterly destroyed. In '37 he was arrested a third time, thrown into a forced labor camp. In the camps he wrote music on telegraph blanks. To this day it is forbidden to perform his works.

DS: F-Forgive us, Vsevolod, for surviving.

LEV: Zaderatsky also pilfered Mosolov's *Zavod*.

(Zaderatsky's [Zavod](#).)

DS: How do you know this, Lev Konstantin'ich? No one is knows this.

LEV: As for Mosolov himself, you remember what happened after 1929, Dmitri Dmitrievich, after the rupture.

(DS fidgets nervously.)

Sasha Mosolov began putting the good half of his works into a suitcase—including five operas, seven symphonies...One day the suitcase is stolen from his apartment. It has never been found.

DS: I hadn't heard...

LEV: Do you keep your perfect ears stopped with wax, or do unpleasant sounds just evaporate into the air? Mosolov began to write the most innocent trifles.

(One of Mosolov's later works fades in, perhaps [Soldier's songs No. 2](#) (at 03:50), or *Front Roads*, No 1.)

BRANDY: It's beautiful.

LEV: Not beautiful enough to spare him. He was arrested, sent to the camps. You know this, Dmitri Dmitri'ich. Only Myaskovsky's intervention rescued him, after a year—

DS: A decent man Nikolai Myaskovsky, the conscience of Russian music.

LEV: True. But unlike Stravinsky or Prokofiev, Mosolov was forbidden to emigrate. To this day he wanders the streets of Moscow, but Aleksandr Mosolov died a long time ago...

(The phone rings. OLGA L answers.)

OLGA L (To LEV): Lyova, for you. One deceased Mosolov is calling.

(LEV goes to the phone and nods a few times, then hangs up. The Black Monk helps him lay down the receiver, laughing hysterically. BRANDY shivers, looking for ghosts.)

LEV: You must remember the tenth anniversary of the Revolution.

(DS nods heavily.)

An extraordinary concert! I can never forget it. Your second symphony, Mosolov's ballet *Steel*, from which only *Zavod* survived the suitcase, and *October* by Nikolai Róslavets.

(A complete, absolute silence descends. Eventually, DS rises to his feet as the third movement of the Roslavets [violin concerto](#) begins. DS points nervously at LEV.)

DS: What did you expect me to do, what could anyone have done? You, Lev Konstantin'ich, denounced me at the Composers Union meeting in 1933. I remember perfectly: "We are not here to hammer the last nail into Shostakovich's coffin." You have never disguised your envy of my success.

LEV: I meant exactly what I said: we were not there to bury you. I raised my voice in your defense. How many times, Dmitri Dmitri'ich, have you publicly, viciously attacked me for my methods? Are yours any different?

DS: They're better.

LEV (Slipping): You know, things might have gone worse for you in '36 and '48.

(DS freezes, cocks his head for an explanation.)

(To BRANDY): Nikolai Roslavets was the greatest Soviet composer of the twentieth century.

BRANDY (Dismissively): Please. Greater than Shostakovich? Stravinsky?

OLGA K (To NICK): You see what this system produced, what I escaped? Then to go through everything again in Germany...

NICK: Perhaps you should have stayed in America.

LEV: Hollywood bosses decided she was overweight and American audiences couldn't understand her accent. (To BRANDY): Stravinsky was fortunate. He escaped to the comforts of Paris and you, decadent Westerners, know of him. It was also Stravinsky who named Roslavets the greatest Soviet composer. This violin concerto—

BRANDY: He's copying Berg's concerto or Bartok's.

LEV: He wrote it ten years before either. Of course the score has completely vanished and will not be discovered in our lifetimes. From the one side, this is hardly surprising. Many of Roslavets' scores have vanished, as he has. From the other side, it is more surprising; his first wife was an NKVD agent.

(Supertitle: NKVD = KGB.)

(DS recoils at LEV.)

One can only surmise that she protected him...until she didn't. In any case, Nikolai Roslavets was the very tip of our avant-garde. Like Arnold Schoenberg, he created a new system of writing music, of using all the notes. Roslavets did attempt to conform, when required. At the tenth anniversary of the Revolution concert, his *October* eclipsed Dmitri Dmitri'ich's Second Symphony.

(Roslavets' [Komsomoliya](#) from *October*, opening or maybe at 0:45 or 1:55.)

DS: Yes, it was a masterpiece. What do you want of me?

LEV: Nothing of you, Dmitri Dmitri'ich. Perhaps the Black Monk will require more.

(BRANDY shivers again.)

DS: My mother-in-law, my brother-in-law, friends, patrons. All shot, imprisoned.

LEV: You have been terrified. We have been terrified.

DS: When I look back on my life, all I see is a mountain of corpses.

(Toned-down [Vereshchagin](#) with the Black Monk sitting on top of it.)

LEV: Be thankful you were not one of them. As I am. Roslavets, Miss Slade, was exiled to Tashkent, returned without work to die in poverty. Mention of him has been expunged from every Soviet book.

BRANDY: Why?

DS: His music is the enemy of the people.

NICK: What an absurd concept.

OLGA L: We do not utter such words here.

NICK: I find it remarkable that any government can be so...thorough.

LEV: Remarkable? This is the only country in the world where it is impossible to forecast the past. Nikolai Roslavets has been so completely erased that no trace will remain of him 'til long after the empire collapses.

BRANDY: When his corpse comes to light, still no one will listen to any of this music.

(LEV throws an inquiring glance at her.)

It is too difficult, too unfriendly; it can never be popular.

LEV: Are you equating popularity with quality, Miss Slade? Are you saying that Dmitri Dmitri'ich is popular because he is easy? Do you agree that Roslavets' music is "anti-people"?

DS: I never had much in common with the avant-gardists.

LEV: Until we were all crushed together. So Shostakovich's music survives because it looks backwards, because it could have been written by Mahler in the last century? Is that what you propose, Miss Slade? Or is it simply an accident that he has survived while the rest of us have been interred?

BRANDY: I am saying that despite all the horrors of the Soviet regime, perhaps in the end history took its natural course.

NICK: Stalin and Hitler were history's greatest, most successful tastemakers.

BRANDY: What an evil thought, Mr. Warren!

DS (Aside): Comrade Stalin was of course the greatest genius who ever lived.

NICK: No, what you are saying is evil. Stalin and Hitler decide the course of art, and you, and the world, accepts their decision. It is, as you say, natural history.

BRANDY: Ugh! You disgust me!

NICK: My apologies, Miss Slade, I err. The Capitalist marketplace, eliminating all but the most popular brands, pureeing our minds into Pablum, is after all a worse censor than Stalin...Ah, let's not quibble between dictators and markets. The public buys what is available. Brainwashed subjects such as yourself refuse to ask what is unavailable. The ocean remains unexplored, lost, and you would ensure it remains so.

OLGA K: Hitler and Stalin are hardly the most pleasant topics of conversation. Is there any possibility of leavening this assembly?

NICK: Lev Konstantin'ich, the art world reveres Kandinsky, Malévich, Tatlín, those futurists who changed the course of art. Tell me, are musicians exceptional reactionaries?

(Images of [Kandinsky](#) and [Malevich's](#) works, [Tatlin's tower](#).)

LEV (Shrugging): Kandinsky escaped to the West, Malevich visited, at least. His works were later confiscated and banned. Tatlin got his start before the Bolsheviks. He too fell silent, became a ghost, survived.

NICK: Fall silent, survive. Natural history. One must inevitably conclude that our orchestras have become sepulchers for music's ashes. They seal in the old ashes, and allow no new ashes to rest. Only jazz will survive, for a time.

OLGA K: Don't be so gloomy, darling. Cheer up.

(She takes his hand and they dance the first half of the [galop](#) by Aleksandr Kenel.)

NICK (As they finish): That is without a doubt the greatest piece of music ever written!

LEV (To BRANDY, especially): You'd never guess its author spent three years at the Solovetsky camp for being a member of a masonic order. Aleksandr Kenel, he wrote microtonal music, for a time.

DS: Kenel was a classmate of mine in Leningrad. Solovetsky...the worst place in the entire world. Is he alive?

LEV: Somewhere, where he can do no harm...

NICK: Can you imagine the future course of music if those men had survived?

LEV If we the deceased had survived, you wish to say? (Gaining enthusiasm):
 Perhaps the electronic age would have begun sooner.

(We hear an imagined reconstruction of the course of twentieth-century music,
beginning with some electronic or electro-acoustic take-off on Mosolov.)

NICK: It could have become more and more daring, incorporating jazz.

(The reconstruction becomes farther out, with a sax solo for NICK to play, maybe
resembling Varese.)

LEV: Perhaps tonality would disintegrate altogether.

(We go even farther out to a shattering climax, perhaps resembling Penderecki. The
Black Monk covers his ears.)

DS: No, there must be a place for melody.

OLGA L: I agree, Dmitri Dmitri'ich. Surely there must. Emotion is the essential
 element.

NICK (To Audience): Let us visit another time! Let us tear music apart! Let us
 tear our lives apart and become someone else! Let us start afresh!

LEV: I would be anyone else.

DS: I as well.

(DS sits at the piano, forcing the reconstruction to become more melodic, if sad. NICK reluctantly improvises along with him.)

OLGA L: That hardly goes far enough, in my opinion. One must always remember the essential poetry of music, the harmony in the clash of elements.

(The reconstruction becomes more conservative, despite NICK's attempts to force it otherwise.)

OLGA L: There, that I can comprehend. Lyova, there is much to be said for music that people can listen to. Dmitri Dmitri'ich, for all his prudishness, never forgets the audience.

(The reconstruction ends up more or less with Shostakovich, or where we are today: ambient music. DS and OLGA L make appreciative, if hesitant, gestures. The Black Monk nods approval.)

NICK: That's disappointing. Puny earthlings.

BRANDY: Olga Leonardovna is correct: In your lunatic ravings you have forgotten that no one can enjoy this machine music, or whatever you call it. It was an aberration, a dead end.

NICK: The purpose of art is not to be enjoyable; the purpose of art is to uncover truth. A dead end? Stalin was right? If it was a dead end, it was a dead

end of the human mind, which appears incapable of rising beyond a certain level of complexity, in music or in mathematics.

(Supertitle: *Old men have always been prone to see the end of the world. To hell with the philosophy of the great of the world.*)

OLGA K: Russia has infected you, darling. Too much vodka produces too much philosophy. Wouldn't you prefer another dance?

OLGA L: Anton Pavlovich always did say that vodka and money turn people into eccentrics.

NICK (To Audience): Refuse to accept this end! Refuse to accept the sea of cowardice that surrounds us, and surrounding that the dead past! Refuse to accept that the future has died! Sing of motion and electricity!

DS (Ironically, bitterly): We know: Communism Equals Soviet Power Plus Electrification of the Whole Country.

(Supertitle: *Therefore Electrification of the Whole Country = Communism Minus Soviet Power.*)

Utopian dreams. We have all become cowards here. Lev Konstantin'ich, h—how did you know that things could have gone worse for me in '36 and '48? I might have been shot?

LEV (Turning to BRANDY): Miss Fox, again, why are you in Moscow?

BRANDY: I have wearied of this topic.

LEV: Mr. Warren, do you truly believe your meeting at the Youth Festival was a happy coincidence? That Brandy Slade, who had not come for the festivities, who doesn't particularly care for jazz, simply fell into your lap like a bluebird from a clear sky?

BRANDY: Lev Konstantinovich! You are suggesting exactly what?

NICK: We were an unlikely pair, we've said it before, but life is full of improbabilities.

LEV: Mr. Warren, why did you leave America?

NICK: To play jazz. This *has* become tedious, Lev Konstantinovich.

LEV: No. You are an exceptionally gifted saxophonist, but your soul is not that of a jazzman.

(NICK refuses to answer.)

DS: I like jazz, so to speak.

(A selection from one of Shostakovich's Jazz Suites is heard, either repeat of [waltz](#) or [foxtrot](#). OLGA K attempts to dance with NICK. After a few steps, NICK breaks off.)

NICK: That hardly counts as jazz.

DS: Yes, you are right. Jazz was the rage here in the twenties, so to speak, but after the *perelóm*, we were robbed of that too. We are brutes. I cannot imagine a future for jazz in this country.

(To music of [Ganelin Trio](#)):

NICK (With admiration): Now that's something. No one in the West will be ever be so advanced.

LEV: Art is a breath of stolen air.

OLGA L: I have lived a day too long.

(NICK takes up his sax to improvise with the recording. After a short while he stops, mystified.)

NICK: My imagination has run its course.

LEV: Then the truth now, Mr. Warren, without evasions. Why did you leave America?

NICK: Truth? Lev Konstantinovich, since our arrival you have hinted, insinuated, you have used words to wall off crevasses. Truth? Last night you froze completely when you told of deserting the White Army. Why,

because it was too painful to recollect, or because no one would believe a soldier serving against his will waits five years to desert?

(LEV makes no response.)

What are your sins of omission? I know you have waited a lifetime to speak.

LEV: (After a long hesitation): I was not impressed into the White Army; I volunteered and became an officer. I did not desert—

OLGA L: Lyova! Never in these long decades—

LEV (With a reproachful gaze at his aunt): Aunt Olya. Fighting for the Whites was a perilous undertaking, Mr. Warren, as the unfortunate Zaderatsky discovered. At the end, what remained of our army was trapped by the Bolsheviks in Crimea. The British and French evacuated those spectres to Gallipoli and billeted them at an old military camp. (Pause.) Without money escape is impossible; myself—I have only holes in my pockets. When I discover Aunt Olya's troupe is that very moment touring the Balkans, I write, desperately. Miraculously the letter gets through and she sends enough money that I buy myself out.

OLGA L: I didn't know you were—

LEV: Stop, Aunt Olya. Enough! Ours was a bourgeois family and Bolsheviks had long memories. In Moscow they remembered.

DS (With some horror): I—I heard rumors. They were true. You are with the security organs.

LEV: No, Dmitri Dmitri'ich, I am not...They left me no choice.

(DS recoils, bolts for the door. LEV grabs him.)

Believe me, I never informed on anyone.

DS: I—I refuse to believe a word from your deceitful mouth.

LEV: In '36 and '48 I spoke on your behalf—

DS (DS shaking himself loose): You disgust me, Lev Konstantin'ich! Remove your hand!

LEV: —to people who mattered. I never had anything to do with internal security.

(DS spits on the floor.)

LEV: They assigned me to...external affairs.

NICK: You speak perfect German. Berlin.

LEV: Yes, Berlin. Aunt Olya, when you signed me on for the tour do you think a mere request from the famous Olga Knipper-Chekhova was enough to get me permission to travel abroad? (Laughs soberly.) I saw doctors and studied music, fanatically.

(BRANDY motions him on.)

What the Kremlin wanted to know was whether German Communists could be counted on to start a revolution.

OLGA K (Nervously): *Lev Konstantinowitsch, wage es nicht einen Schritt weiter gehen!*

LEV: *Ich habe genug von dieser Geheimnistuerei. Ich kann nicht mehr damit leben.*

OLGA K: *Aber mein Ruf!*

LEV: *Dein Ruf ist mir egal.*

(Supertitle: *This information is classified and unavailable to the public.*)

(OLGA K waves her hand in disgust.)

DS: Today I finally understand why I have never trusted you, Lev Konstantinovich. I'll hear no more of these matters; you have no right to prevent my leaving.

(The Black Monk bars DS's exit as the march from the [seventh symphony](#) fades in again (from about 11:00). It continues to play in the background for the remainder of the scene.)

LEV: In 1941, when I heard your seventh symphony premiered in Kuybyshev, did I not rush to congratulate you? Didn't I tell you what a tremendous impression it had made on me? (Aside): It may be your most famous work, but now I realize it is nothing but tedious bombast, like my own. (To DS): Dmitri Dmitri'ich, why do you call me "enemy"? What harm have I done you?

DS: People such as you harm everyone.

LEV: Did anyone knock on your door at four o'clock in the morning?

(Everyone moves away from LEV except OLGA L. OLGA K remains particularly nervous.)

LEV: Very well. Do you recollect October '41? You, Aunt Olya, had already been sent south and (to DS) you were flown out of besieged Leningrad.

DS: Yes, yes, of course I remember. How can anyone forget?

LEV: You've forgotten how nervous, no, terrified you were. No, this was not terror. You'd lost your equilibrium. You were torn to shreds, as if the

fulcrum of your very existence had vanished, the fulcrum that supported your entire world. Who convinced you to go onward from Moscow, to the east, to save yourself, that you could make it?

DS (Reluctantly): You did, Lev Konstantinovich.

LEV: Yes, because it would have been much worse for you in Moscow.

DS: It would have...

OLGA L: I was desperate with worry.

LEV: For good reason. The Nazi advance has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. The enemy stands at the gate. Electricity is scarce, heat scarcer, mobs are looting abandoned stores. The Germans are bombing the city; Muscovites sleep in the metro. It can't be long now. "Down with Soviet power! Long live Hitler!" Yes, that's what the workers shout. People are fleeing. Stalin has ordered that the city be destroyed. Moscow do you understand? Moscow! It is complete, utter panic.

OLGA L: I know. Before I left, I was teaching the young actors how to dispose of German incendiary bombs. Thank God, I have finally heard from you, Lyovushka. But what you tell me!

LEV: It's cold in Moscow this October, snowy. I am feeling odd, like a bird on a branch, knowing that at any second I might have to take wing. That's all right. At last I realize I am Russian, Russian to the marrow of my bones. I love my absurd, uncultured, filthy Motherland, and when I think of how those grey-eyed bastards have violated her big, beautiful body, you cannot imagine...You cannot imagine the hatred, the bloodthirsty rage that surges through my entire being. All my cultured skin has fallen away. I have become an unthinking brute. An excellently trained brute. I've never been so calm, so sure of myself. I have never felt so charged, as at this moment. I know why I am fighting and what, if necessary, I will die for.

God! What I would have given twenty-four years ago to have taken a different path. It was inescapable—the consequences have been inescapable. It's only now, too late, that I have begun to understand many things. I might die with the curtains to my soul still shut, enshrouding it in twilight, all while there's so much sun around, so much of that most important thing that justifies life and which I have never had—love. Some people weep from happiness. I weep for happiness. It will never come my way. I know now this is my own fault...Don't worry about me. I have no intention of selling my life cheaply.

OLGA L: You have always had my love, Lyova, you must know that, but why do you remain in Moscow?

LEV: When the Germans take the city, they'll find...ghosts. Most of the population has been evacuated, the factories have been mined. Me, I feel excellent, like a coiled spring, ready to set into action everything I've learned in life: mind, energy, will—cruelty. My orders are to remain behind. You see, Father, what comes from speaking perfect German? When Hitler arrives, I'll make my way to him using my sister's name and—murder him.

OLGA K: Using my name!

LEV: Your name. (Makes ready as if to exit): Hitler has failed to take Moscow—just.

OLGA L: Lyova, you have disappeared completely. Vladimir Leonardovich at the Bol'shoi has no idea of how you come and go.

LEV: I come and go. The plan has changed. My wife and I are to make our way to Germany via Georgia, Iran, Turkey. The cities we pass are like the stations of the cross. Who can forget the walls plastered with notices—a mother looking for her children, a brother looking for his sister, a wife—

her husband. It is a river of misery and tears, yet no one complains or
despairs. In weeks, people denied sleep have rebuilt factories on
wastelands, having literally snatched them from the claws of the Beast. In
Kuybyshev — (He extends his hand to DS). You are a genius, Dmitri
Dmitrievich. Your new symphony has made a tremendous impression on
me.

(DS takes his hand nervously.)

It has lifted the moral of everyone who has heard it. It has inspired me to
continue my own work.

Tbilisi, at last.

OLGA L: Lyova, what are you doing here! Who is this beautiful woman beside
you?

LEV: Meet my wife.

OLGA L: Your wife! You didn't tell me you had remarried!

LEV: I'm sorry, Aunt Olya, it was rather suddenly arranged. We must be off.

OLGA L: Where are you going?

LEV: Tashkent, Teheran.

OLGA L: I don't understand.

LEV: I've been assigned to research Iranian folk music, make cultural contacts.

Good-bye, Aunt Olya...(To the Black Monk): Here we are, stuck in Teheran. (The phone rings. He answers and after a moment puts down the receiver.) Comrade Stalin has canceled the mission.

OLGA L: What mission, Lyova?

LEV: Maybe I'll tell you someday. (Long pause.) We have been pretending to defect to Germany, as persecuted German artists, and were to contact my sister. She would introduce us to Hitler and we would die in the attempt to kill him.

(OLGA L begins to cry.)

OLGA K (In great alarm): Lyova, I never knew any of this! Why for the love of God would you involve me?

LEV: *Du kanntest die Kontakteute in den anderen Gruppen. Aber noch wichtiger, du kanntest das Ziel.*

(Supertitle: *xxxx xxxxxxxxxxx, Olya, xxx knew xxxx xxxx was xxxx xx xxxxxx you.*)

After all, you were Hitler's favorite actress.

([Images1](#) and [Images2](#) of Olga Chekhova with Hitler are shown.)

OLGA K: I met him only at official functions. What makes you think I could have been of any use whatsoever?

LEV: Why did Stalin think Goebbels's "charming lady" might be of use? Why did SMERSH think you might have been of use when they flew you to Moscow within days after the war ended?

(Supertitle: *SMERSH = Death to Spies. Soviet Military Intelligence.*)

OLGA K: Lyova, don't be foolish. After Berlin fell they interviewed anyone who might have information. All these rumors about me being intimate with Hitler—they're meant for a novel. I can only laugh. My conscience is clean. Time will show whether I am speaking the truth.

LEV: *Was fuer ein bequemes Gedaechnis du entwickelt hast, Schwester. Du hast sowjetische Emigranten bespitzelt, als wir zusammen 1922 zusammen in Berlin waren.*

OLGA K: *Ich habe nie jemanden bespitzelt, das weisst du genau.*

LEV: *Wie sollte ich das wissen? Wir haben uns seit Jahrzehnten nicht gesehen. Und damals...*

OLGA K (Angrily): You didn't leave me a choice back then. I had to get Ada out of Russia.

NICK (Raising his hand): When you escaped with the diamond ring hidden under your tongue, you left your daughter behind?

OLGA K: *Ich konnte sie nicht mitnehmen. Ich habe sie bei Mutter und Tante Olya gelassen.*

(Supertitle: *Why do you believe what anyone says?*)

LEV: You moved so easily from the Soviet sector of Berlin to the Western sector. Who has financed that villa of yours and your cosmetics firm? Why have you now traveled to Moscow?

OLGA K: Brother, you've become insufferable. We haven't seen each other for decades—you don't know any more about me than anyone else. (She lights a cigarette.) Next you'll be saying that German reunification rested on my shoulders.

(Supertitle: *Beria = Head of NKVD.*)

LEV: If Khrushchev hadn't arrested Beria, you might have accomplished your task to inform German high officials that our government would allow

reunification. It might have taken place and you might have become a heroine.

(OLGA K dismisses him. By this time OLGA L is sobbing and near collapse. LEV turns to her.)

LEV: Aunt Olya, please stop crying.

OLGA L: Lyova, to learn all this in my last years. How am I to look you in the face?

LEV: Stop pretending, Aunt. When I supplied your brother Vladimir's family with food during that terrible October, did you never ask? When actors at the Art Theatre were denouncing each other, accusing you, Aunt Olya, of selling favors, who raised his hand? In 1937, when the disappearances started, who protected you?

OLGA L (Still sobbing): From this moment, Lyova, I can never trust you. You became a Bolshevik!

LEV: I have always loved you, Aunt Olya. (Harder): I also needed to love the regime, despite its mistakes—

OLGA L: Despite its millions of mistakes.

LEV: —to rid myself of all the negative values I learned as a youth.

OLGA L: Negative values! which you learned from your family? From me? How can you possibly expect me to respect a person who believes such things?

LEV: Never forget that I have loved you, that I love you.

(Still crying, OLGA L recoils.)

NICK (Interrupting): I read science fiction as a youth.

(Everyone turns toward him. OLGA L attempts to dry her tears.)

For many years I corresponded with another fan, a friend. We talked about science, the future of Man, of hackneyed fiction. That was our favorite word—hackneyed. We lived in a world of endless promise. His promise was as a Red Diaper baby—his parents were Communists—and some time after we stopped corresponding, he joined the Party himself. Many years later, when I applied for security clearance—

BRANDY: You, Nick, clearance? Why?

NICK: I had intended to become a nuclear physicist.

(LEV nods.)

I got my degree, but as I learned, the FBI had been intercepting the correspondence between those two kids—fishing letters about science

fiction out of post boxes and trash cans. I was denied clearance.

Hollywood be damned! Movie stars make the loudest noises about blacklists, but there are far more of the rest who never shared the limelight—scientists, professors, teachers. I was unable to get work, anywhere, so I left. I'd always been a good saxophonist...

OLGA K: Do you miss America, Mr. Warren?

NICK: It is difficult to miss a country that has rejected you. I wasn't thrown into the Gulag, but I sympathize with your Mosolov. Governments much resemble those giant alien robots that trample lives underfoot without recognizing they are real lives of real people.

LEV: I believe you know all this, Miss Slade.

(BRANDY returns a look of defiance, skepticism.)

The Youth Festival was entirely penetrated by agents, informers and provocateurs, you among them.

(She turns to leave. OLGA K stops her. The Black Monk is laughing.)

I have no doubt you wish for Dmitri Dmitrievich to write movie music—a better front couldn't be asked for. But with Mr. Warren's background,

your FBI has been worried that he may be a spy and assigned you—how can I say it delicately?—to keep an eye on him.

(NICK eyes BRANDY with suspicion.)

BRANDY: You cannot prove such an absurdity.

LEV: You should not have so easily revealed that you work for Paramount Studios. Paramount has long been a fertile nest for Soviet agents. Your boss is a Soviet agent.

(BRANDY recoils.)

Please, Miss Slade. That *is* why the FBI placed you at Paramount. What more convenient channel to open talks about Dmitri Dmitrievich and procure advanced sound technology? Of course, what our government really desires is atomic technology. A network of Soviet agents operating in America and Berlin is currently attempting to steal such secrets. A person like Mr. Warren might be extremely useful to them. The FBI knows this, hence Miss Slade.

NICK (Concerned, doubtfully): No one has contacted me, attempted to recruit me.

LEV: I would not be so certain, Mr. Warren.

BRANDY: Do not believe him, Nick. I care for you, really.

(She extends her hand. He withdraws.)

You mustn't believe him. Trust me.

(NICK cocks his head doubtfully.)

If you ever cared for me...

NICK: I did care for you. I do care for you. I do not trust you.

(BRANDY turns partially away, hurt. NICK tentatively extends his hand, withdraws.)

OLGA K: Why don't you come with me to Berlin, darling?

(NICK regards her with suspicion, doesn't answer, retreats a step.)

OLGA L (To LEV): *Молчи, скрывайся и таи, и чувства и мечты свои...* [*Molchí, skryváisya i taí, i chúvstva I mechtí svoí...*]

(Supertitle: *Speak not, lie hidden, and conceal your dreams, the things you feel...*)

I understand, Lyova, you did what you had to do. I am sure you acted according to your conscience. It's all right. We'll forget everything that's happened here since last night and life will continue just as it always has.

(She and LEV uncomfortably embrace. He turns to DS, who backs away, then backs away from OLGA K and BRANDY. The Black Monk laughs.)

NICK (To LEV): What will you do now?

LEV: I have begun an opera based on *The Little Prince*. But thirty years—gone. Would I recapture the spirit of my youth. (Sighing): It is too late, for me...for everyone. I shall disappear, forever.

(We hear the opening of Knipper's [concerto-monologue](#) for cello and orchestra (maybe from 0:31.))

NICK: That's quite interesting. Keep at it.

(LEV has already exited sadly to the back, followed by a laughing Black Monk. The phone rings. OLGA L answers.)

OLGA L (To everyone): The deceased Mosolov is calling. He says we've just launched something called sputnik, which is orbiting earth. (Looking into receiver, puzzled) : It's October and a new age has dawned.

(The cast goes outside or looks up trying to see the satellite as we watch the Spotnicks' "[Rocket Man](#)." The Black Monk sits on the screen, zooming around.)

NICK (Soberly): One thing may survive this night.

(NICK and DS nod to each other and move to the piano where they play the passacaglia (prelude) from Shostakovich's [Gadfly](#) (perhaps from sax solo at 4:00).)

Curtain

Alternative for pages 124-125

LEV: Very well. Do you recollect October '41? You, Aunt Olya, had already been sent south and—(to DS, extending his hand) Dmitri Dmitrievich, welcome. I am relieved they flew you out of Leningrad.

DS: It is beyond imagination...(He rapidly becomes uncontrollable and begins weeping.) This is the end of the world...We won't survive...I w—won't— It is impossible...

LEV (Grabbing DS by the shoulders): Dmitri Dmitrievich, pull yourself together. You must travel on, eastward.

DS: I won't leave my comrades. I can't—I can't go without them.

LEV: You can and you must.

DS: Where will we go? What will we eat? I—I'll never make it alone.

LEV Take yourself in hand, Dmitri Dmitrievich! (Aside): The man is torn to shreds, terrified. No, he's completely lost his equilibrium. The fulcrum of his world has vanished. (To DS): Dmitri Dmitrievich, it will be worse for you in Moscow, believe me. We'll send Khachaturian with you. (Aside): That one's also shitting in his pants. I'm ashamed to look at them.

DS: Thank you, Lev Konstantinovich, I'm...I'll never forget your kindness.

OLGA L: Lyova, please write. I am desperate with worry.

LEV Indeed. Hundreds of thousands are already dead. Electricity is scarce, heat scarcer, mobs are looting abandoned stores. The Germans are bombing the city; Muscovites sleep in the metro. It can't be long now. "Down with Soviet power! Long live Hitler!" Yes, that's what the workers shout. People are fleeing. Stalin has ordered that the city be destroyed. Moscow do you understand? Moscow! It is complete, utter panic.

OLGA L: Yes. Before I left, I was teaching the young actors how to dispose of German incendiary bombs. Thank God, I have finally heard from you. But what you tell me!

