

KHUSKA THE HUMBLE

by

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Registered WGAw

"KHUSKA THE HUMBLE"

FADE IN:

EXT. RUSSIAN COUNTRYSIDE (1762)--DAWN

Under the cathedral vault of the sky, across fields and forests that sweep to the horizon, the immensity of Russia dwarfs the cabin at the edge of a beet field.

INT. RUSSIAN SERF'S CABIN--EARLY MORNING

In that cramped log cabin shared with two dogs, a serf family--husband, wife, children--lie together on a straw mattress set atop the traditional Russian stone stove.

KHUSKA is awake. In his 30 plus years, this bearded, weathered serf has never left his village, sat in a classroom, or eaten off of silver plate. Yet there is a nobility to Khuska born of simplicity and faith. In his soul he carries a wisdom about man's follies and God's mysteries.

Khuska prods his sleeping wife ILLIANA. If he's the salt of the earth, she's its pepper.

KHUSKA

Wife and mother, arise. The cow
will be milking herself.

ILLIANA

(half-asleep)
Tell her to feed the chickens, too.

Lying with Khuska and Illiana on the mattress are their FIVE SLEEPING CHILDREN ages 6 to 15. These children are no cherubs--they've known hunger and hard labor. Over their heads hangs an icon of the Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus.

EXT. RUSSIAN SERF'S CABIN--5 MINUTES LATER

Hazy with sleep, Khuska and Illiana in their homespun nightshirts stumble out of their cabin.

KHUSKA

A stranger told me of a village where there are no men and magical animals do all the work. The cows feed the chickens and the pigs milk the cows. Dogs pull the beets and horses cut the firewood. This is truth, wife and mother.

ILLIANA

And the women, Khuska?

KHUSKA

The women do nothing but grow more beautiful every day.

ILLIANA

And you wish to visit this village where there are no men?

KHUSKA

Only to buy you the magical animals.

Khuska and Illiana disappear into a two-seater outhouse.

ILLIANA (O.S.)

Do you know why the women grow beautiful? Because there are no men to trouble them.

KHUSKA (O.S.)

I would be no trouble.

ILLIANA (O.S.)

Go. Leave today.

KHUSKA (O.S.)

Our master won't let me go to Treblinski.

Khuska and Illiana come out of the outhouse.

ILLIANA

But for that you'd chase across
Russia for a beautiful woman whose
ox cooks your supper.

KHUSKA

God's already given me the most
beautiful woman in the world.

ILLIANA

Now you speak in ignorance.

KHUSKA

The world would be mostly silent if
men did not speak in ignorance.

ILLIANA

You haven't seen the women of
Treblinski let alone the world.

KHUSKA

I'll not argue my fate. God wills
that I live and die and never pass
from the sight of Grandfather
Linkov.

(points to an ancient oak
tree)

ILLIANA

God wills that you marry Illiana
Vasilyevena, and who are you to
argue?

KHUSKA

When I die and--God's mercy--climb
to heaven, Saint Nicholas'll show
me my cottage with a porch where I
can fish all day. Do I ask, "What
else have you got?"

(kisses Illiana)

No, because my heart knows this is
what God gives me and what God
gives me is good.

ILLIANA

(touched)

The rooster of flattery should put
on his pants.

Illiana goes back inside the cabin leaving Khuska standing
outside in his nightshirt.

KHUSKA

(to God)

What else have you got?

Like all serfs, Khuska wears a small cross around his neck. His life animated by Christian devotion and pagan superstition, Khuska kisses the cross and looks up to heaven.

INT. VILLAGE ORTHODOX CHURCH--LATER THAT MORNING

Crude icons of Jesus and the saints, their eyes glowing in the candlelight, look down from the walls of the log church. As the religion is Russian Orthodox, there are no pews for the CONGREGATION OF SERFS wreathed in the smoke of incense.

In soiled robes, the bearded FATHER BORIS weeps as he holds up an ornate icon draped in black crepe of Tsarina Elizabeth.

FATHER BORIS

In God's Kingdom, Tsarina Elizabeth
walks with Jesus and Moses, the
disciples and the prophets, to
watch over us. Our holy devotion.

Crossing themselves, the congregation kneels and rises. Like the others, Khuska, Illiana and their children are grief stricken at the death of their monarch. Khuska's youngest daughter kisses the icon of Tsarina Elizabeth.

ILLIANA

(to Khuska)

We were as safe in her arms as in
the arms of the Virgin Mary.

KHUSKA

God in his fierce wisdom has taken
our Little Mother from us.

Father Boris holds up an ornate icon of Peter, the new Tsar.

FATHER BORIS

(to the congregation)

All blessings and reverences to our
new Holy Father, the hand of God,
and Tsar of all the Russias, Peter
the Third. Our holy devotion.

Crossing themselves, the congregation kneels and rises, awestruck. Khuska's youngest daughter kisses the icon of Tsar Peter.

ILLIANA

(to Khuska)

At last a man sits again on the
throne of Russia.

KHUSKA

Such is proper, wife and mother.

FATHER BORIS

(to congregation)

God strengthen Tsar Peter to lead
Holy Mother Russia in our war with
Prussia. Burn all barbarians who
refuse the true world of God. Our
h devotion.

Ready to burn a barbarian, the congregation kneels and rises.

ILLIANA

(to Khuska)

Prussians are blood drinkers.

KHUSKA

(threatening)

I would like to meet one.

Halfheartedly, Father Boris holds up a small, plain icon of
Peter's wife, Catherine.

FATHER BORIS

(pro forma)

All blessings and reverences to
Catherine, wife of our Tsar. Our
hold devotion.

The congregation doesn't kneel.

ILLIANA

(sneering to Khuska)

German.

KHUSKA

(also sneering)

Why hasn't she given the Tsar more
sons?

Khuska stops his youngest daughter from kissing the icon of
Tsarina Catherine.

EXT. VILLAGE ORTHODOX CHURCH--30 MINUTES LATER

As the happy congregation exits the church, Khuska talks with VLADIMIR about a betrothal. Khuska's 15-year-old SERGE and Vladimir's 15-year-old ELISAVETA listen nervously.

KHUSKA
 (to Vladimir about
 Elisaveta)
 Fatten her up. Look at my son.
 She'll need the padding for the
 wedding night.

All the serfs freeze. FIVE RUSSIAN IMPERIAL CAVALRYMEN grimly ride up to the church. Khuska, like the others, gathers his family to him. The soldiers never come to make life easier.

CAVALRYMAN #1
 (to the congregation)
 Did you pray for our new Tsar?

KHUSKA
 (to himself)
 I'm praying now.

EXT. VILLAGE ROAD--FOUR HOURS LATER

The Russian Imperial Cavalrymen lead Khuska and five other draftees out of the village. Khuska's family scurries to keep up. Time and their hearts are racing; no one knows when--or if--Khuska will ever return.

ILLIANA
 It's my fault. My talk of sending
 you away. I say I'm unhappy with
 what God gives me, so He punishes
 me.

KHUSKA
 God wouldn't--

ILLIANA
 You're willow not oak, poor wood to
 carve a soldier from.

KHUSKA
 I'm as much a man as any man.

ILLIANA

Who has to wring the chicken's neck? Don't think yourself a general--

KHUSKA

I promise not to be a general.

ILLIANA

Or a hero.

KHUSKA

I'm too humble for a hero.

ILLIANA

Prussians are blood drinkers.

KHUSKA

I would not like to meet one.

ILLIANA

Why does God--

(horrified)

The Devil! The Devil brews his wickedness from my words.

KHUSKA

You must keep faith with God.

SERGE

I go to war for you, papa.

KHUSKA

No, you protect the family. Swear it. Until I return, swear it.

SERGE

By the blood of Christ, I swear.

ILLIANA

(to Khuska)

Swear to me. I'll die without you.

KHUSKA

You can't die. Who'd set fire to our children's ears with her scolding?

(to his children)

Serve your mother well. God won't punish the true in spirit.

(to himself)

Although He likes to test us.

ILLIANA

Swear to me.

KHUSKA

I swear by the tears of the Virgin Mary. And when I return, you'll have a gift worthy of a tsarina.

ILLIANA

Just you. Bring me back you.

KHUSKA

A man goes on a small journey, he brings a gift back for his wife.

Prodded by one of the cavalrymen, Khuska must keep walking as he kisses each member of his family goodbye. When he lets go of Illiana, it's like they're saying goodbye forever.

ON THE ROAD

Marching along, Khuska looks back. The silhouettes of his family and his village grow smaller and smaller.

KHUSKA

(to God)

Was it You or the Devil?

Khuska looks up to heaven and it starts to rain.

KHUSKA

Not that I'm complaining.

EXT. ARMY TRAINING CAMP--DAY

SERGEANT BRESSLOV is a bull of a man in size and temper.

SERGEANT BRESSLOV

I'll dance you with the knout!
I'll ride you on the maiden's wheel
and feed the pigs on your puke!
You are the club I give my Tsar to
kill his enemies!

Orphans in the storm, Khuska and the other RAW RECRUITS stand shaved, barbered, fitted with ill-fitting uniforms, and armed with muskets. Next to Khuska is 18-year-old PAVEL who's like a puppy in his curiosity, optimism and relentless amazement.

Pavel points to something on the flintlock of Khuska's musket. When Khuska examines it--BANG--the gun fires.

SERGEANT BRESSLOV
Who fired?! Who fired?!

Khuska's resolutely silent and then a DUCK drops out of the sky. The recruits OOOH and AAAH.

 PAVEL
Khuska, such shooting!

 SERGEANT BRESSLOV
 (charges at Khuska)
Slayer of ducks!

 PAVEL
May I help eat the duck, Khuska?

 SERGEANT BRESSLOV
Silence, dung barrow!
 (to Khuska)
You kill men, not ducks!

 KHUSKA
Ducks taste better, honored
sergeant.

Veins throbbing, Sergeant Bresslov shoves Khuska across the field as the other recruits follow.

 RECRUIT #1
 (to Recruit #2)
Go get the duck.

 RECRUIT #2
You get the duck.

Sergeant Bresslov stops before a straw bayonet dummy.

 SERGEANT BRESSLOV
 (re: straw dummy)
Kill him!

 KHUSKA
What has he done to me, honored
sergeant?

 SERGEANT BRESSLOV
He rapes your wife and eats your
children!

 KHUSKA
My children are stringy. My wife'd
slice his manhood from him, honored
sergeant.

SERGEANT BRESSLOV

Kill him!

KHUSKA

(studies straw dummy)

Do I feed him to a mule?

SERGEANT BRESSLOV

The bayonet! Carve him until his
guts squirt into the dirt!

(off Khuska's look)

You're a cow chewing grass until
someone puts the whip to you.

KHUSKA

The honored sergeant is wise.

Sergeant Bresslov decides to make an example of Khuska.

SERGEANT BRESSLOV

Stick me with your bayonet. Charge
me, annihilator of ducks.

KHUSKA

(is he serious?)

I wish no harm to the honored--

SERGEANT BRESSLOV

When my blood wets your bayonet, I
make you a corporal.

KHUSKA

I'd rather keep the duck.

SERGEANT BRESSLOV

Stick me, little pisser.

Bowing to the inevitable, Khuska hands his musket to Pavel and kneels in prayer. Sergeant Bresslov laughs until Khuska stands up and throws a rock. Struck over the heart, Bresslov topples to sprawl in the dirt, butt waving in the air.

RECRUITS

Khuska! Khuska! Khuska!

20 YARDS AWAY

Sitting on a horse watching, PRINCE MICKLEMAS is intrigued by Khuska. About Khuska's age, the prince wears the mantle of nobility with easy grace. He finds wry amusement in most of life.

Prince Micklemas rides forward to where Khuska hears the encouragement...

RECRUITS
Khuska! Khuska! Khuska!

...but hesitates to act.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
(to the recruits)
A soldier of the Tsar never fears
to strike boldly...
(to Khuska)
...corporal.

Khuska shrugs, jabs and listens to Sergeant Bresslov howl.
Prince Micklemas is impressed.

EXT. ARMY FRONT LINE CAMP--DAY

Corporal stripes now decorate Khuska's sleeve.

Army life's a grim and weary business. Khuska and Pavel gnaw at mealy radishes. Around them soldiers move through a rough and muddy camp as distant cannons boom.

KHUSKA
You "volunteered." I
"volunteered."

PAVEL
(brightly)
No, it is truth. I volunteered!

KHUSKA
By Mary's sacred tears, why?

PAVEL
How else am I to leave my village?

KHUSKA
Is your village so foul?

PAVEL
My village is not Latisvastock.
(gestures to horizon)

KHUSKA
Latisvastock's on fire.

In the distance, the city of Latisvastock burns under the siege of the Russian army.

PAVEL

Yes, and I am here to see it!

KHUSKA

A stranger told me of a father who took his son into the cabbage patch and gave him a stick. The father says, "Hit a cabbage." "Which one?" asks the son. "Any cabbage." So the son strikes one cabbage a mighty blow "Why did you hit that cabbage, my son?" "Because it stuck up above the others."

PAVEL

Cabbages are like that, Khuska.

KHUSKA

This is truth, Pavel, and a lesson I teach you because you're only a dog's tooth older than my son. Because it stuck up above the others--whack! Do you understand, Pavel?

PAVEL

Yes, Khuska. You are wise, a father I would choose for myself were that a choice given us.

VOICE (O.S.)

Volunteers! The general needs two orderlies! Volunteers!

PAVEL

I volunteer! Me and Khuska!

INT. HEADQUARTERS TENT--THAT NIGHT

KHUSKA

(to himself)

And then the father took the stick and beat the son to death.

Spruced up to the point of presentable, Khuska and Pavel stand as part of the furniture in a tent well stocked with comfort. An ornate silver samovar dominates a buffet table laden with pastry, cheese, meat, wine, brandy and vodka.

At a map table, SEVEN OFFICERS argue over strategy. By bearing, attitude and grooming, each is plainly noble-born. All wear a uniform distinct in color, cut, braid and medals.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
 Attack! Attack! Attack! Squeeze
 the Prussian nut until it cracks!

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
 A nut. Cracked wide open.

High-born, handsome and about Khuska's age, COUNT RADISHCHEV hears destiny's trumpet and can't understand why the world doesn't march along. A jack-a-dandy, LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV, about 25, takes Count Radishchev as his role model.

OFFICER #1
 We are starved for reinforcements.

OFFICER #2
 Our German tsarina is hard at work.

Count Radishchev reacts--overreacts--instantly.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
 Do you accuse her majesty of
 treason Do you? Do you? What of
 our dithering tsar, loyal friend of
 King Frederick?

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
 The Tsar sends emissaries to
 Berlin.

OFFICER #1
 (pointedly to Radishchev)
 The Tsarina's friends--her lovers--
 eat like acid at the government.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
 (threatening a duel)
 Do you ask me for a "meeting"?

GENERAL SALTIKOV
 No! Let St. Petersburg fill its
 days with the bickering of the
 royal bed.

Outranking everyone is GENERAL SALTIKOV, about 60, who's fatter and slower than he once was, and easily underestimated.

Seconding the general is the gifted soldier and politician Prince Micklemas who last oversaw Khuska's promotion to corporal.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

We are soldiers with no more right
to play at politics than...

(recognizes Khuska;
smiles; points)

...our boldly striking corporal.

With an empty wine glass, Count Radishchev approaches Khuska.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

(to Saltikov; watches
Khuska)

Drown the Prussians in our blood.

(sees Khuska wince)

An ox making monkey faces.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

It is with his blood you intend to
drown the enemy, Count Radishchev.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

(to Khuska)

Who are you, serf?

KHUSKA

No one, honored sir.

(fills Radishchev's glass)

COUNT RADISHCHEV

He'll bleed as God and the Tsar
command, Prince Micklemas.

OFFICER #2

(to General Saltikov)

Shell the Prussians, starve them.

GENERAL SALTIKOV

Siege? Attack? How often we come
to crossroads without signposts.

Prince Micklemas is bored by the officers' continuing and
circular AD LIB ARGUMENTS.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

(approaches Khuska)

What say you, corporal?

KHUSKA

Me, noble sir? I'm too humble to
own opinions.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
Our brilliant General of the
Samovar. In what campaign did you
win your exalted rank?

PAVEL
Your worship, Khuska hit our
sergeant with a rock.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
I saw your friend outfox a Russian
sergeant. Perhaps he can outfox a
Prussian general.
(to Khuska)
Come, study the map.

With a shrug and a smile to Pavel, Khuska crosses to the
map...and it's an indecipherable scrawl of arrows.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
He can't even read his own name.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
Mark the whores on the map and
there he will attack.

Insulted, Khuska remembers a folk tale.

KHUSKA
A stranger told me he once saw a
bear who kept sticking his paw into
a badger hole. The badger, he kept
biting the paw until the bear went
away. Then a wolf comes along, but
not to have his paw bitten. He
lays a dead mouse in front of the
badger hole. When the badger comes
out to eat the mouse, the wolf eats
the badger. This is truth, honored
sirs.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
Badgers and dead mice.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
(to Khuska)
General of the Rats.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
(inspired by Khuska)
Yes, of course. Retreat.

Prince Micklemas whispers to General Saltikov who
enthusiastically nods his agreement.

Puzzled, Count Radishchev stares at the map as does Khuska.

GEENRAL SALTIKOV
 (to Khuska)
 Excellent plan...sergeant.

KHUSKA
 What? No, honored general. I am--
 believe me--unworthy.

GEENRAL SALTIKOV
 You must volunteer, sergeant, to
 lead our glorious...retreat.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
 Retreat? A rout! A rout to draw
 the Prussians into the open.

GENERAL SALTIKOV
 Where we grind them to cinders.

PAVEL
 (to Khuska)
 Volunteering to be a sergeant. You
 are very brave, Khuska.

EXT. RIVERBANK--THE NEXT DAY

Sergeant stripes now decorate Khuska's sleeve.

Khuska and Pavel run with the other Russian soldiers in a
 panic retreat along a riverbank. CANNONBALLS EXPLODE,
 filling the air with whizzing shrapnel and blinding smoke.

KHUSKA
 (to God)
 I didn't volunteer, this You know.
 Don't steal the husband from my
 wife, the father from my children.

PAVEL
 (excited)
 Is this your plan, Khuska? It is
 very noisy!

Out of the smoke charges the PRUSSIAN CAVALRY like mythical
 beasts of terror.

With sabers slashing, the Prussian cavalry rides down one
 Russian soldier after another. Like bottles in a whirlpool,
 Khuska and Pavel bob, duck and spin nearly trampled, nearly
 beheaded.

Khuska runs into the woods and disappears. A step behind, a step slower, Pavel's knocked down by a horseman.

On his back Pavel looks up at the physically imposing, emotionally flamboyant BARON VON METZ. About Khuska's age, Baron von Metz carries a notable dueling scar.

PAVEL
(awestruck)
Are you a real Prussian?

BARON VON METZ
Not just a Prussian. A Junker!
(lifts saber)
A Junker to chop you!

PAVEL
Tell me your name, Junker, so that
I may tell Saint Nicholas.

BARON VON METZ
Baron Clemens Wenzel Nepomuk
Lothar--

A rock flies out of the trees to knock Baron von Metz unconscious from his horse.

Khuska runs from out of the trees to Pavel.

PAVEL
Khuska, a Junker nearly chopped me.

KHUSKA
Such an honor.

Not that far away, the Prussian cavalryman see their commander helpless on the ground.

PAVEL
Khuska, will they be mad that you
hit their Junker with a rock?

The Prussians charge as Khuska helps Pavel stand. But Pavel can't run on his twisted ankle.

PAVEL
Leave me, Khuska.

KHUSKA
God forgive my stupidity, I can't.

Arms around each other, Khuska and Pavel face fate and the charging Prussians.

A VOLLEY OF SHOTS explode out of the trees to sweep the Prussian cavalymen from their saddles. Waves of Russian soldiers follow in a counterattack that drives the Prussians into the river. As the BATTLE MOVES AWAY, Count Radishchev and Lieutenant Turnipov ride up.

Khuska and Pavel pull the groggy Baron von Metz to his feet.

PAVEL

Your exceedingcy, Khuska captured a Junker!

COUNT RADISHCHEV

Only one dueling scar. He must be a very poor Junker.

BARON VON METZ

Russian pig.

Lieutenant Turnipov whispers to Count Radishchev.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

But one, judging by his rank, with the Prussian battle map in his head. A map I shall have once a Prussian pig squeals.

(to Khuska & Pavel)

Take him to my tent.

Khuska's uneasy about that glint in Count Radishchev's eye, but he and Pavel lead Baron von Metz away. With his sword, Count Radishchev gestures heroically to the remaining soldiers.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

(to the soldiers)

Forward into the maw of the guns!
For our Holy Father, the Tsar!

The soldiers wait for Count Radishchev to actually lead them.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

Go on! Go on!

INT. COUNT RADISHCHEV'S TENT--THAT NIGHT

Tied to the center tent post is Baron von Metz. He and Khuska both recognize his plight. Pavel, oblivious, admires the silk and gold appointments of the tent.

PAVEL

(admiring the bed)

To be a noble and sleep on such a fine silk cloud.

KHUSKA

When a dog dreams he's a wolf, the wolves remind him he's a dog.

PAVEL

A dream hurts no one, Khuska. I dream I am a very brave hero.

KHUSKA

You are a hero, Pavel. We captured the Junker because he stopped to butcher you.

PAVEL

(to von Metz)

I owe all to you, Junker.

(off von Metz's glare)

He no longer talks, Khuska.

KHUSKA

He practices silence. He'll have need of it soon.

Count Radishchev enters in fine spirits.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

A glorious day stacked high with Prussian corpses.

Two soldiers carry in a brazier holding a charcoal fire and exit. Count Radishchev inserts an iron into the fire and merrily watches it heat cherry red.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

(to Khuska)

Cut off his shirt.

KHUSKA

Honored sir, the Prussian will lie.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

Sympathy for the enemy of Mother Russia? Cut off his shirt!

Reluctantly, Khuska cuts the shirt off von Metz with a knife.

BARON VON METZ

(to Khuska)

Troubled? Kill me.

Khuska hesitates...then sets the knife on a table.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
(to Khuska & Pavel)
Go blind yourself with vodka.

Khuska and Pavel go outside--

EXT. COUNT RADISHCHEV'S TENT--NIGHT--CONTINUOUS

--where they linger. Pavel's troubled because Khuska's troubled. And then Baron von Metz HOWLS inside the tent.

PAVEL
I do not like what I hear, Khuska.

KHUSKA
The tears of a stranger are water.

Baron von Metz HOWLS again inside the tent.

PAVEL
I do not like--

KHUSKA
The tears of a stranger are water.
Go. Walk until you can hear no
more.

Pavel walks away and Khuska follows.

Khuska reappears, torn between the obedience of the serf and the compassion of the human soul, and reenters the tent.

INT. COUNT RADISHCHEV'S TENT--CONTINUOUS

His back to the tent flap, Count Radishchev doesn't see Khuska enter. Neither does Baron von Metz whose naked chest is now blistered and black.

BARON VON METZ
I tell you everything, you still
don't stop.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
I must have Prussian blood in me.

BARON VON METZ
If your mother were Prussian, she
would have drowned you.

Count Radishchev jabs Baron von Metz with the hot iron. It HISSES, he HOWLS, and Khuska, without thinking, grabs a heavy walking stick to THUMP, knock Count Radishchev out.

Khuska and Baron von Metz look at each other in amazement.

BARON VON METZ

Who is more surprised. Me or you?

Khuska uses a knife to cut Baron von Metz free.

KHUSKA

This made sense a minute ago.
Go back to your people.

Returning the knife to the table, Khuska picks up Count Radishchev's cloak to give to Baron von Metz. Baron von Metz picks up the knife to point at Khuska.

BARON VON METZ

Why do you do this?

KHUSKA

Go.

BARON VON METZ

Me, you do not know.

KHUSKA

True. You I do not know. But him
I know--
(points to Radishchev)
--and him I do not like.

BARON VON METZ

I return to killing Russians.

KHUSKA

A stain on your soul, not mine.
Go.

BARON VON METZ

(points knife at
Radishchev)

I kill him.

Khuska grabs the hot iron from the hand of the fallen Count Radishchev.

KHUSKA

(defending Radishchev)
A Junker would not so murder a man.

BARON VON METZ
 Regret to be yours that I do not
 kill him.

KHUSKA
 Regret walks on two legs and
 follows me everywhere.

Baffled by Khuska, Baron von Metz slashes through rear of the tent and disappears into the night.

Groaning, Count Radishchev stirs as HORSES HOOVES sound outside the tent.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV (O.S.)
 (from outside the tent)
 Count Radishchev! General Saltikov
 approaches!

An escaped prisoner and a cold-cocked commander. What to do? Khuska kicks the charcoal brazier onto the bed which catches fire.

EXT. COUNT RADISHCHEV'S TENT--CONTINUOUS

Khuska drags the groggy Count Radishchev out of the tent where Lieutenant Turnipov and other soldiers are running up in AD LIB CONFUSION. The tent bursts into flame as General Saltikov and Prince Micklemas ride up on horseback.

KHUSKA
 The Prussians stole our prisoner!

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
 Alert the guards! Everyone to
 arms!

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
 Hold there! Don't bother.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
 Don't bother?

The blow to the head has left Count Radishchev befuddled.

BEFUDDLED COUNT RADISHCHEV
 Where is my tent?

KHUSKA
 There, honored sir, the one on
 fire.

Burning brightly, the tent casts a cheery glow.

BEFUDDLED COUNT RADISHCHEV
My tent is on fire?

KHUSKA
Yes, honored sir.

BEFUDDLED COUNT RADISHCHEV
That is not good.

GENERAL SALTIKOV
Enough with the tent! Report!

BEFUDDLED COUNT RADISHCHEV
General, I report my tent is on
fire.

GENERAL SALTIKOV
Not you!
(points at Khuska)
You!

KHUSKA
(gulp)
I hear noise. I enter tent...
(lets himself go)
...and three, three Prussians--the
Devil's bears, their stink still in
my nose--attack Count Radishchev.
He fights back with the rage of
wildfire but they strike him a
blow, a blow to kill an ox. But
his honored self laughs--ha! ha!--
and knocks them about like tiny
weasels--
(reins himself in)
--which starts the fire and they
run off with the prisoner.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
Count Radishchev is fortunate the
Prussians did not kill him.

KHUSKA
His is a great, thick head, noble
sir.

BEFUDDLED COUNT RADISHCHEV
I have a great, thick head.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
(pointedly to Khuska)
And you were there to save it.

Khuska shrugs--all in a day's work--and then worries as Prince Micklemas whispers to General Saltikov.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
General Saltikov, give us the order
to recapture the Prussian!

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
The war is over.

Stunned, the soldiers--but not the officers--break into an AD
LIB CELEBRATION.

GENERAL SALTIKOV
(bitter)
Peter inherited a crown and a war
from Tsarina Elizabeth. He should
not hold the first without winning
the second.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
An insult to the Russian soldier.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
The soldiers seem happy Tsar Peter
desires peace.

KHUSKA
Beg pardon, honored sir. The
battle, the prisoners, all now
unnecessary?

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
As of tomorrow, but only after God
decided to make you a hero.

Khuska looks to heaven as if to say, "Spare me these honors."

GENERAL SALTIKOV
(to Khuska)
Well done, lieutenant.

KHUSKA
(horrified)
Honored general, I am unworthy.
The general's horse is more the
soldier than me.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
(outraged; to Saltikov)
He is serf born and serf bred. He
would rank with me.

BEFUDDLED COUNT RADISHCHEV

(salutes Khuska)

Lieutenant, I report my tent
appears to be on fire!

GENERAL SALTIKOV

(to Khuska)

Lieutenant, I command, and
lieutenant you be. I have too many
popinjays for officers. Pick
yourself an orderly.

(off Khuska's look)

What serf doesn't want to own
serfs?

PAVEL (O.S.)

I volunteer!

Eager Pavel salutes Khuska as General Saltikov, Prince
Micklemas and Lieutenant Turnipov depart. Khuska, Pavel and
Count Radishchev are left to watch the tent burn to embers.

BEFUDDLED COUNT RADISHCHEV

Where is my tent?

EXT. RUSSIAN ARMY CAMP--A WEEK LATER--DAY

Lieutenant insignia now decorates Khuska's collar.

In a patched together officer's uniform, Khuska walks with
Pavel through the camp. The remorseless lottery of war has
ended and the troops happily pack their gear to go home.

KHUSKA

A stranger told me that the
villagers couldn't kill the witch.
So they tore out her eyes and fed
them to the hogs. "What harm can
she do without eyes?" This, as you
may imagine, did not please the
witch.

PAVEL

I would be angry and I am no witch.

KHUSKA

The witch could still smell them.
For eight hours of eight nights she
came as they slept, tore out their
eyes, and popped them into a bag.

(MORE)

KHUSKA (CONT'D)

Now when the witch wants to see,
she picks out two eyes and screws
them in. This is truth, my friend.

(teasing)

Maybe you meet her on your way
home.

PAVEL

(disappointed)

Do not talk to me about going home.
Your wife and children wait for
you.

KHUSKA

They are not so far away that I
can't still see them as I left
them, remembering me, waiting for
me.

Khuska takes out a small, carved wooden bear.

KHUSKA

(continuing)

See what I carved for my wife. Not
quite worthy of a tsarina....

(puts bear away)

Grab the ears of happiness, Pavel.
Think of the party they hold for
you.

PAVEL

Think of the father who waits for
me.

In loco parentis, Khuska slaps Pavel.

PAVEL

I'm sorry, Khuska.

KHUSKA

(softening)

Maybe when you meet the witch, she
gives you two new beet-red eyes.

PAVEL

I could take it easy and order
people about with my beet-red eyes.

THIRTY YARDS AHEAD

Wearing flowered robes, Count Radishchev and Lieutenant
Turnipov lounge outside idly tossing dice and sipping kvass.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
Prussia in our grasp and he sues
for peace? Who says a man sits
again on the throne.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
This is what happens when they make
serfs lieutenants. And what did
Saltikov mean about "popinjays"?

Lieutenant Turnipov flicks a crumb from his flowered robe.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
Pay attention.
(conspiratorially)
The truce with Prussia opens the
front in St. Petersburg.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
She has written you?

COUNT RADISHCHEV
I am always in her thoughts and she
begs my wisdom--

Leaving Pavel behind, Khuska marches up and salutes.

KHUSKA
Honored sir, I report the men ready
to be discharged.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
Tell them go, we feed them no more.

Khuska salutes and turns to leave.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
(continuing)
And find yourself a decent uniform.

KHUSKA
Honored sir?

COUNT RADISHCHEV
In St. Petersburg, officers dressed
like you are an embarrassment to
the Tsar.

KHUSKA
I leave for home today, honored
sir.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

That would be desertion, a crime
for the noose or the ax.

(to Lieutenant Turnipov)

How would you execute him?

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV

I think a beheading. I have seen
hangings but never a beheading.

KHUSKA

(to Count Radishchev)

Honored sir, the other men go home,
why not me?

COUNT RADISHCHEV

Dismissed.

KHUSKA

Honored sir--

COUNT RADISHCHEV

You wanted to be an officer.

KHUSKA

For how long, sir?

Ignoring Khuska, Count Radishchev and Lieutenant Turnipov
resume idly tossing dice and sipping kvass.

His world upended Khuska rejoins Pavel as they walk through
the camp.

PAVEL

What is wrong, Khuska?

KHUSKA

I go to St. Petersburg.

PAVEL

St Petersburg! Khuska, how I
prayed for God to tell my master to
send me to St. Petersburg.

KHUSKA

God must think your prayer came
from my lips.

PAVEL

But I always tell God it is me.
(realization)
The Devil! He twisted your prayer
with my prayer to make us sad.

KHUSKA

We understand the Devil's work so much easier than God's.

PAVEL

I will be sad to leave you, Khuska.
 (hugs Khuska)
 Make the rites each day and protect yourself from the Devil.
 (crosses self, spits)

KHUSKA

(off Pavel's sadness)
 Won't you volunteer to go with me?

PAVEL

My master would not--
 (brightens)
 But if an officer of the Tsar...a powerful man like you, Khuska....

Khuska never felt less powerful.

EXT. HILL OUTSIDE RUSSIAN CAMP--SUNSET

Khuska watches alone as his fellow serfs hike out of the camp. Freed from the army, the men SING A HYMN that echoes with both thanksgiving and that unmistakable Russian sadness.

KHUSKA

(to God)
 Tonight, when my wife offers up her prayers, give peace to her. Let her heart know that I am alive and thinking of her. The least you could do, all things considered.

Khuska looks up to heaven and it starts to rain.

KHUSKA

Not that I'm complaining.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ST. PETERSBURG--RAINING--DAY

Rain falls on St. Petersburg. Spires of palaces and cathedrals reach towards heaven, but nearer the ground it's no fairy tale kingdom.hovels and mud mark this city which Peter the Great willed out of a swamp 60 years before.

Slogging along the street comes Khuska wearing an ornately impressive new uniform. Trailing behind, Pavel in servant's garb struggles to keep an umbrella over Khuska's head.

KHUSKA

Ridiculous. A mockery. I'm a bull in boots. A hog in a hat. A goose with garters.

Khuska and Pavel pass through a--

SIDE GATE OF THE WINTER PALACE

--as the guards salute. Hundreds of candles in hundreds of windows light up the baroque green and white splendor of the Winter Palace.

At the front of the Winter Palace, guests dressed in opulent finery arrive by carriage to be greeted by a veritable army of servants.

PAVEL

It is a very nice uniform, Khuska. And it did not cost you a kopek.

KHUSKA

Everything costs something. The water you drink, you pay for in piss.

Khuska stops, intimidated by the sight of all those nobles of glittering rank and plumage.

PAVEL

You will see the Tsar, Khuska.

KHUSKA

The Tsar!

Khuska looks at the medal on his chest; it bears the portrait of the Tsar.

KHUSKA

To dress myself a noble under his roof. Sin and sacrilege. We return to the barracks.

As Khuska and Pavel retrace their steps to the side gate, they hear a CLATTER OF POTS.

BY AN OUTBUILDING

Khuska and Pavel find LUDMILLA crying in the rain with all manner of pots scattered at her feet. About Pavel's age, Ludmilla's a servant girl really trying her best.

KHUSKA

Don't cry, little sparrow.
(picks up pots)

LUDMILLA

No, honored sir, don't dirty your hands.

KHUSKA

My hands have been dirty longer than you've been alive.

PAVEL

(to Ludmilla)
Khuska is bull in boots, hog in hat, goose in garters...
(smitten by Ludmilla)
...little sparrow.

INT. WINTER PALACE HALLWAY--FIVE MINUTES LATER

Carrying the pots, Khuska and Pavel follow Ludmilla down a hallway. Khuska notices the peeling paint and fraying tapestries--this is no fairy tale palace. Pavel, on the other hand, has found himself a fairy tale princess.

PAVEL

(whispers to Khuska)
What is her name? Tatania? Olga?
I think she is an Olga.

KHUSKA

Ask her.

PAVEL

But if I ask her and she says no,
then I live the rest of my life
knowing that I'll never know.

Smitten by Pavel, Ludmilla stops to whispers in Khuska's ear.

KHUSKA

Ludmilla.

Pavel and Ludmilla exchange a shy, flirting glance.

INT. WINTER PALACE SALON--CONTINUOUS

Ludmilla leads Khuska and Pavel into a room of chipped furniture and threadbare carpets where a 33-year-old WOMAN waits impatiently. She's wearing a simple, loose fitting dress so Khuska assumes she's just another maid.

WOMAN
(appraising Khuska)
Admiral of the Pots.
(to Ludmilla & Pavel)
You two, go find more pots.

Pavel and Ludmilla exit.

Khuska and the Woman stare at each. PLINK. A drop of water falls on the Woman's head. Khuska looks up. PLINK. A drop of water falls on his face.

Ohhh, that's what the pots are for. Khuska and the Woman begin placing pots under the leaking ceiling. Each time the Woman moves, PLINK on the head. Each time Khuska looks up, PLINK in the face.

WOMAN
Over here, Admiral of the Pots.

KHUSKA
I am a lieutenant.

WOMAN
A grand uniform for a humble lieutenant.

KHUSKA
I am an officer of the Tsar. This is all you need to know.

WOMAN
Pardon me, Lieutenant of the Pots.

KHUSKA
Pardon me, Mistress of the Drips.

Khuska and this intriguing woman fall easily into bantering and maybe even flirting.

KHUSKA
I hear another country in your voice. I don't think you're Russian.

WOMAN
Is that important?

KHUSKA

Not to be born Russian is to be
born without eyes.

WOMAN

The Tsar was born of a German
father. You have lived more of
your life in Russian than he. You
should be Tsar.

KHUSKA

Don't make jokes. Only the Tsar
should be the Tsar.

(crosses himself)

Me being Tsar makes as much sense
as...you being Tsar.

WOMAN

Why so?

KHUSKA

God's spoken his fate for both of
us. I am born serf. You are born
a woman and a.... Are you a serf?

WOMAN

If you were Tsar, what would you
command.

(off Khuska's blank stare)

Are you so dull that 1,000 schemes
don't spring up like grass?

KHUSKA

I command the rain to stop. I
command me to return to my village.

WOMAN

You leave Mother Russia without a
hand on the tiller?

KHUSKA

I command you to be Tsar.
Unless.... Are you German?

WOMAN

I am more Russian than some.

Count Radishchev slips into the room and--not seeing Khuska--
rushes to the Woman and falls on his knees before her. As a
suitor, he has ardor and appeal.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

The agony of missing you. How I
burn for you, my nightingale.

WOMAN

I am adrift in this palace of storms, my hawk. I need you to guide me.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

Peter as Tsar is--

The Woman points to Khuska who salutes.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

(sees Khuska)

You! Explain yourself!

Water drips on Radishchev. PLINK. He looks up. PLINK.

WOMAN

Is my hawk jealous?

COUNT RADISHCHEV

I cut down any man who stands between me and you.

WOMAN

Any man?

That question silences Count Radishchev as Ludmilla slips into the room.

LUDMILLA

He comes!

Guiltily, the Woman pushes Count Radishchev out a side door.

KHUSKA

(dawning suspicion)

Who lives in these rooms?

WOMAN

The Mistress of the Drips.

The Woman and Ludmilla disappear through another door. Khuska's left alone, puzzled, holding a pot until--

TSAR PETER III enters Age 34, he appears exactly as a tsar should appear--noble and aloof. Such gifts he has as monarch are masked by a temperament that flares and chills with erratic speed. Coldly he considers Khuska.

Khuska looks from the medal of the Tsar on his chest to the Tsar standing before him and falls to his knees.

KHUSKA
 (crossing himself)
 Your very most holy-exalted-
 revered-honored-majesty sir.
 God bless you. God bless this day.

Peter moves about the room and somehow the dripping water keeps missing him. PLINK. PLINK. PLINK.

PETER
 (studies Khuska's uniform)
 St. Petersburg popinjay.

KHUSKA
 No-no-no--

PETER
 You've a knot for a tongue.

KHUSKA
 Your very most holy majesty. I am
 a soldier of the siege of
 Latisvastock.

PETER
 (skeptical)
 How close did you get to the enemy?

KHUSKA
 (eager to impress)
 He stood as near to me as I to you.
 His breath was the breath of the
 wolf. His eyes were the eyes of
 the Devil. The only thing sharper
 than his fangs was the bloody knife
 in his hand.

PETER
 And...?

KHUSKA
 I'll not see him again in this
 life, your very most holy majesty.

Attended by Ludmilla, the Woman emerges from the other room in a magnificent, loose-fitting gown crowned with jewels.

PETER
 (to Woman)
 There's always men in your rooms.

WOMAN
 He is my Admiral of the Pots. Fix
 the roof.

PETER

Buy one less dress and I'll buy one more roof.

WOMAN

(pulls off a petticoat)

Here. Hire a carpenter.

Khuska stares slack-jawed at the this woman who baits the Tsar.

KHUSKA

(to Woman)

You're no maid...

PETER & WOMAN

Maid?

Peter laughs and the Woman fumes.

KHUSKA

A senior maid...?

PETER

She is Tsarina Catherine. My wife.

CATHERINE

My husband.

PETER

They're waiting.

CATHERINE

They should wait. It reminds them who is Tsar, successor to the Caesar of Rome and the Emperor of Byzantine; whose history is Muscovy, Novgorod, Kazan, Yakuts and Livonia; whose faith is the Orthodox Church.

Khuska takes a second look at TSARINA CATHERINE. With a restless, relentless intellect, she also possesses a seductive, animal vitality. In her, charm and generosity weave between calculation and ruthlessness.

PETER

(bored by history)

Come, Lieutenant Pots. Tell me more funny war stories.

INT. WINTER PALACE HALLWAY--CONTINUOUS

Khuska follows Peter and Catherine into the hall where MOORS and MOGOLS in operatic costumes are part of the waiting parade of NOBLES and SERVANTS. But this is no fairy tale court. Khuska sees dingy uniforms, slipping wigs and drunks.

As the procession forms up, TSAREVITCH PAUL, the eight-year-old heir to the throne, approaches Khuska. Spoiled by his servants and ignored by his parents, the child reminds Khuska of the whims and perils of the Tsar's court.

TSAREVITCH PAUL

(to Khuska)

I can order the Cossacks to bite off your ears.

INT. WINTER PALACE BALLROOM--CONTINUOUS

The Tsar's ballroom has sufficient marble to pave the streets of Khuska's village, sufficient gilt to paint the huts of Khuska's village, and sufficient chandeliers to light Khuska's village through a moonless night.

A 24-man SERF ORCHESTRA PERFORMS. Each member blows a horn that can play only one note. Following the lead of their Serf Conductor, they are like the keys of a piano.

SERF MUSICIAN #1

(to Serf Musician #2)

He offered me F-sharp or B-flat. I said, "C-natural. I've earned it."

Among the many nobles of glittering rank and plumage are Prince Micklemas and General Saltikov.

GENERAL SALTIKOV

The war's over. Nothing left but intrigue.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

(indicating the party)

But served with champagne.

Lieutenant Turnipov joins them.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV

Was "Lieutenant" Khuska invited? His presence tonight would be an insult to the Tsar.

HERALD (O.S)

All attention, all reverence to His
Most Holy Imperial Majesty, Peter
the Third, Tsar of all the Russias!

In a whiplash double take, Lieutenant Turnipov realizes Peter's talking to Khuska as they enter the room.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

(to Turnipov about Khuska)
No doubt he's recommending your
promotion to the Tsar.

Count Radishchev joins Lieutenant Turnipov.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

(to Turnipov about Khuska)
Every time he's around, I get a
headache.

ONE HOUR LATER

The LADIES surround favored-by-the-Tsar Khuska, plying him with champagne, the first champagne he's ever tasted and it tickles the nose.

KHUSKA

The Tsar is the Tsar but the Tsar
is also a man. He stood as close
to me as I to you and we talked
like neighbors at the well.

Prince Micklemas pulls Khuska away from the giggling ladies.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

The Tsar smiles upon you. All of
St. Petersburg waits on your word--
(glances at ladies)
--or your bed.

KHUSKA

Noble sir, I am the married man!

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Who's in St. Petersburg. Here men
and women are...freer.

Khuska sees Catherine flirting with Count Radishchev, Lieutenant Turnipov and other officers at a pastry table.

KHUSKA

Noble sir, the Tsarina allowed
Count Radishchev to kiss her hand
in a most friendly way.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Have you heard the rumor that her
son is not the Tsar's son?

Khuska sees Tsarevitch Paul throwing biscuits at servants.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

After ten years of marriage and no
child, no heir, Catherine had cause
to worry. They might send her back
to that shrew of a mother in that
backwater of a German village.
Death to a woman like Catherine.

KHUSKA

I don't belong in St. Petersburg.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

God wants you in St. Petersburg.
(off Khuska's look)
God tested you, more than once, at
the siege of Latisvastock. If you
had failed any test, He would have
sent you home...

KHUSKA

God mentioned no tests to me, noble
sir.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

...or killed you. But here you
are, friend of the Tsar.
(points to smiling ladies)
Accept God's rewards as well as His
trials.

KHUSKA

Send me home, noble sir.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

After I told General Saltikov to
bring you to St. Petersburg?
(off Khuska's look)
St. Petersburg is more dangerous to
the Tsar than any battlefield. His
officers are decadent, inbred
nobles, whose loyalty is a tissue
covering their fear and greed.

(MORE)

PRINCE MICKLEMAS (CONT'D)

If the Tsar commanded, would you
give your life?

KHUSKA

I have no choice, noble sir.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Then God may test you again.

Prince Micklemas points out PRINCESS SOPHIA moving across the room. For this sweet-smiling coquette in her 20's, to flirt is to breathe.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

What do you think of her?

KHUSKA

(moralist)

Some women are the Devil's bait,
noble sir.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

The Princess Sophia is my sister.

KHUSKA

(whoops)

Her heart, I'm sure, holds
innocence, noble sir.

ACROSS THE ROOM

Princess Sophia joins Peter and General Saltikov. Her heart holds something besides innocence.

PRINCESS SOPHIA

What did the elephant say to the
naked man? "How can you breathe
through that tiny nose?"

An inebriated Peter roars with laughter and pokes a grimacing General Saltikov in the chest. Princess Sophia tickles Peter's fancy...and other parts.

WITH CATHERINE AND COUNT RADISHCHEV

Catherine and Count Radishchev glare at Peter and Princess Sophia.

BACK TO KHUSKA AND PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Khuska won't say a word against the Tsar, but his disapproval is easily read.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

The Tsar is the Tsar, but the Tsar is also a man.

(adjusts Khuska's uniform)

My tailor did well by you.

KHUSKA

The collar's tight, noble sir.

Depression settles over Khuska.

EXT. WINTER PALACE GROUNDS--LATER THAT NIGHT

The Tsar's Gala is over and the rain has stopped. Drinking from a champagne bottle, Khuska follows Pavel to the SERVANTS DORMITORY.

PAVEL

I want Ludmilla to be my wife. Is that love, Khuska?

KHUSKA

(tipsy, to himself)

A stranger told me how Baba Yaga asked Ivanuska, "Did you come here by your will or against your will?"

PAVEL

(taps at window)

Ludmilla?

A window opens and a stick whacks Pavel on the head.

PAVEL

You are not Ludmilla.

KHUSKA

(tipsy, to himself)

Baba Yaga showed Ivanuska two buckets--one, the water of strength, and one, the water of weakness.

(swigs champagne)

PAVEL

(taps another window)

Ludmilla?

A window opens and a stick whacks Pavel on the head.

PAVEL
You are not Ludmilla.

KHUSKA
(tipsy, to himself)
Baba Yaga told Ivanuska, "Wrestle
my goblin. I'll eat you when you
lose."

PAVEL
(taps another window)
Ludmilla?

A window opens and a stick whacks Pavel on the head.

PAVEL
Ludmilla!

LUDMILLA
(in the open window)
I'll be whipped! You're dumber
than the dumbest flea on the
dumbest dog!

PAVEL
But you like me just a little?

LUDMILLA
(softening)
Just a little.

KHUSKA
(tipsy, to himself)
Baba Yaga showed Ivanuska the
passing years. His village lay in
ruins, his family gone. This is
truth.

As Pavel and Ludmilla kiss, Khuska sees FOUR SINISTER FIGURES
slink out of the palace.

KHUSKA
Pavel, follow me.

PAVEL
My lips wish to stay, Khuska.

KHUSKA
Leave that foolishness. Who are
you to pick a wife?

IN THE FORMAL GARDEN

Khuska and Pavel trail behind the Four Sinister Figures who carry two human-sized bundles. The Sinister Figures turn a corner by the garden wall and...disappear.

PAVEL
 (crosses himself)
 Demons, Khuska. They will breathe
 in our souls. Are we dead already?

KHUSKA
 (crosses himself)
 Hold tight to your cross and bring
 the guards.

Nervous Khuska discovers a hidden door in the garden wall. Stepping through the door, he's--

EXT. WINTER PALACE--CONTINUOUS

--outside facing General Saltikov.

GENERAL SALTIKOV
 Why are you here?! Out of bounds,
 without permission, against orders!
 Go, I command it.

Khuska sees the Sinister Figures load the two human-sized bundles into a waiting horse-drawn carriage.

GENERAL SALTIKOV
 (continuing)
 I command it, go! This is trouble
 for you, a court-martial, a
 whipping.

One of the human-sized bundles moans.

GENERAL SALTIKOV
 Go! The Tsar is in no danger.

KHUSKA
 The Tsar?!

The carriage starts off. Khuska pushes General Saltikov aside and jumps onto the carriage door.

OUTSIDE THE SPEEDING CARRIAGE

Khuska hangs desperately onto the careening carriage. Atop the carriage, Sinister Figure #1 drives as Sinister Figure #2 whips the horses.

INSIDE THE SPEEDING CARRIAGE

Sinister Figures #3 and #4 see Khuska and draw their pistols. Sinister Figure #4 fires. BANG.

The door flies open and Khuska disappears from sight. Sinister Figure #4 leans out the open door.

OUTSIDE THE SPEEDING CARRIAGE

Khuska, hanging from the rear, yanks Sinister Figure #4 out of the carriage and sends him tumbling into the night.

On the carriage roof, sinister Figure #2 slashes at Khuska with a saber. From inside the carriage, Sinister Figure #3 aims a pistol at Khuska out the rear window.

Dodging the blade and grabbing the pistol, Khuska crashes through the rear window and back into the carriage.

INSIDE THE SPEEDING CARRIAGE

Khuska lands atop Sinister Figure #3 who tries to shoot him. As they wrestle, underneath them the human-sized bundles squirm and groan.

From the outside, Sinister Figure #2 stabs at Khuska through the windows as Sinister Figure #3 smashes Khuska's head up through the carriage roof.

OUTSIDE THE SPEEDING CARRIAGE

Poking through the roof of the carriage, Khuska's head sits like a pumpkin in the patch. As Sinister Figure #2 swings his saber, Khuska drops back down into the carriage.

INSIDE THE SPEEDING CARRIAGE

Sinister Figure #3 fires his pistol BANG and misses Khuska.

OUTSIDE THE SPEEDING CARRIAGE

But the bullet does hit Sinister Figure #1, the driver, who pitches off his seat.

The out of control carriage careens towards--

THE WINTER PALACE GATES

On a quiet evening TWO BORED GUARDS are only half-listening to incoherent Pavel's story.

PAVEL

"Bring the guards!" "To what?" you ask. Khuska did not say, yet Khuska is wise-- But Khuska says I am not to marry the girl I was kissing.

Pavel and the Bored Guards are unperturbed by the saber-swinging man atop the driverless carriage clattering by.

BORED GUARD #1

This girl you were kissing.
Pretty?

BACK OUTSIDE THE SPEEDING CARRIAGE

Horses running wild, the carriage weaves through city streets.

Sinister Figure #2 looks down through the hole in the carriage roof. He sees Khuska's broad backside, aims his saber and--

A tavern sign jutting from a building sweeps Sinister Figure #2 away.

INSIDE THE SPEEDING CARRIAGE

As Khuska and Sinister Figure #3 struggle, they fall on one of the human-sized bundles. Out pops the head of Peter. As he's bound-and-gagged, Peter can only groan his displeasure.

Khuska and Sinister Figure #3 fly apart and out both doors. Each clings half-inside and half-outside the carriage. Sinister Figure #3 draws another pistol, aims--

A hitching post sweeps Sinister figure #3 away. Khuska narrowly avoids a similar fate by pulling himself back into the carriage.

KHUSKA

Your very most holy majesty, God
deliver you. I humbly beg your
pardon.

Khuska steps on Peter and climbs up through the hole in the
roof. Peter cries a muffled scream.

OUTSIDE THE SPEEDING CARRIAGE

To stop the carriage, Khuska needs the reins, but the reins
have fallen free. He braces to leap onto the horses.

Ahead lies a RIVER. Seeing it, the horses dig in and stop on
a kopeck. Khuska's thrown into the river.

Rising out of the river sopped and sore, Khuska lifts his
eyes to heaven as if to ask, "Was this trip necessary?"

Staggering back to the carriage, Khuska frees Peter.

PETER

This damned and stupid country
doesn't deserve me!

KHUSKA

You're safe, your very most holy
majesty. Tsarina Catherine is
safe.

PETER

Don't--

Khuska unwraps the other human-sized bundle to find not
Catherine but Princess Sophia wearing a nightshirt just like
Peter.

PETER

(off Khuska's look)

I don't explain this to you! Who
are you before the Tsar?

KHUSKA

No one, your very most holy
majesty.

PRINCESS SOPHIA

(dazed & confused)

I like a rough hump now and again,
but that was ridiculous.

INT. CARRIAGE (MOVING)--THE NEXT DAY

The sun shines on the lush Russian countryside rolling past the carriage windows, but Peter's in a venomous mood. Bruised, he seethes even as Prince Micklemas soothes.

PETER

The Pasha of Persia would do it.
His executioners can keep a man
alive for a week as they strip off
the skin.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Yes, your majesty. One expects no
less from the Pasha of Persia.

PETER

Radishchev and the shrew, too.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

They were not part of the plot,
your majesty.

PETER

So you say.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Do you want to accuse them of the
other thing?

PETER

Tsarevitch Paul is my son.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Exactly. In the 35 years after
Peter the Great's death, who has
held the throne? His wife, his 12-
year-old grandson, his niece his
idiot half-brother's infant great-
grandson, Tsarina Elizabeth, and
now, at last, you. The Tsar must
rule, the Tsarina must be faithful,
the Tsarevitch must be the heir.
Russia is either a great European
monarchy or a comic Oriental opera.

PETER

You're so wise, why'd you let them
kidnap me?

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

My man rescued your majesty. He is
God's gift to you.

PETER

What I need is a serf who can wring
a chicken's neck.

(looks out window)

He wasn't very grateful when I
promoted him captain.

OUTSIDE THE MOVING CARRIAGE

Captain insignia now decorates Khuska's collar.

Disgruntled, Khuska rides on horseback with the rest of the
Tsar's military escort. Ahead of them lies--

SCHLUSSELBURG FORTRESS is a forbidding stone fort set in a
barren landscape.

INT. CELL SCHLUSSELBURG FORTRESS--ONE HOUR LATER

Head tilted, eyes closed, PRISONER NUMBER ONE, 22-years-old,
stands unmoving in a circle of sunshine. His plain wool
shift is the same color as his unnaturally white skin.

A skylight high overhead lights the large, circular stone
cell. One bed, one chair, one table, one chamber pot.

TWO WARDENS, cold, emotionally stunted men, enter. They're
followed by Peter, Prince Micklemas and Khuska.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

As you see, majesty, Prisoner
Number One still safely tucked
away.

BOTH WARDENS

(bowing to Peter)

Here he lives until he dies, your
majesty.

Prisoner Number One remains frozen. Concerned for the man,
Khuska touches him on the shoulder and Prisoner Number One
rejoins reality. He is not quite right in the head.

PRISONER NUMBER ONE

(pleasant to Khuska)

Collect antique coins and never be
without friends.

(hugs Khuska)

Peter--as well as Khuska--is unnerved by Prisoner Number One.

PETER
 (to Khuska)
 Come away.
 (as Khuska approaches)
 Are you obedient? Incorruptible?
 Are you God's gift to me?

KHUSKA
 (kneels)
 By the wrath of God and the mercy
 of Jesus, I swear loyalty to my
 Tsar. I hear and I obey your very
 most holy majesty.

PETER
 Show me your hands.

Khuska hears and obeys. Peter approves of Khuska's scarred
 and calloused fingers.

PETER
 (to Prince Micklemas)
 These are the hands to wring the
 neck of a royal hen.

PRISONER NUMBER ONE
 (approaching Peter)
 Beet juice for the nerves. My
 personal physician recommends it.

Spooked, Peter backs away...

PETER
 (to Prince Micklemas)
 Search everything. Look for
 letters, weapons, tunnels. Trained
 mice carry messages.

...and flees the cell with the Wardens close behind.

Sitting on the bed, Prince Micklemas looks under the pillow
 and considers the search concluded.

Prisoner Number One takes Khuska by the arm and walks him
 around the cell as if on a garden tour.

PRISONER NUMBER ONE
 (to Khuska)
 Name any tune. The most talented
 serfs make up my orchestra.

KHUSKA
 (to Prince Micklemas)
 Noble sir...?

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

You walk with a ghost, Khuska. The ghost of the Infant Ivan.

KHUSKA

(chilled)

The Infant Ivan?

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Prisoner Number One. Proclaimed Tsar before his first birthday, unproclaimed Tsar before his second. A useful figurehead if General Saltikov wished to rule Russia. Peter is most afraid of figureheads.

KHUSKA

(tactfully)

Noble sir, when the Tsar spoke of strangling....

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Execute Prisoner Number One? No, no, no. Bad form. Bad precedent. Would live a stain. The Tsar has different duties for you.

KHUSKA

Another promotion?

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

A small one. Aide Militaire Extraordinaire to her most imperial majesty, the Tsarina Catherine. Captain Khuska is to report all that he sees and hears to Prince Micklemas.

KHUSKA

Is that all, noble sir?

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Catherine is rumored to be most persuasive in her sexual pursuits, but you are not to sleep with her. The Tsar was most emphatic about that, married man.

KHUSKA

Is that all, noble sir?

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

It scarcely bears mentioning, but should the Tsarina prove herself disloyal, the Tsar may ask you to strangle her. Seemingly you have the hands for it.

KHUSKA

I couldn't--

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Is something wrong with your hands?

KHUSKA

No, but to kill--

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Answering the Tsar's will, you fired your musket to kill on the battlefield. Executing Catherine would be no different except for the weapon and the distance.

PRISONER NUMBER ONE

(to Khuska)

I hear dogs at night but I do not think they are my dogs.

Taking Khuska's other arm, Prince Micklemas joins him and Prisoner Number One in walking around the cell as if on a garden tour.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

(to Khuska)

The Tsar carries the weight of Mother Russia. While negotiating a new understanding with Prussia, he is kidnapped from his bed. He trusts no one and he trusts you. The rest we leave in God's hands. Is there anything wrong with God's hands?

KHUSKA

No, noble sir.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Now we must go and reassure the Tsar that we found no trained mice.

Prince Micklemas exits leaving Khuska to close the cell door on Prisoner Number One.

PRISONER NUMBER ONE

(to Khuska)

I see angels when I'm lonely.

Prisoner Number One returns to the circle of sunlight, cocks his head, closes his eyes and exits from reality.

KHUSKA

(to himself)

God creates more madmen that cells
to hold them.

EXT. FIELD AND FOREST--DAY

The Tsar's Royal Quail Hunt is underway. Across the field beaters move through the brush provoking the quail to take flight. In the center of a line of nobles firing shotguns is Peter blasting away to the applause of ladies and the mockery of the quail.

The one lady dressed for hunting is Catherine wearing a loose fitting leather jerkin. Standing at a distance from Peter, she's waiting for Khuska to load a shotgun. Pavel and Ludmilla are also present.

PAVEL

(to Catherine)

Little Mother, I gave tobacco to the domovoi who lives in my house to chase away the spirit choking our fields and the village was happy and I was promised a small cake but I never saw it.

CATHERINE

I asked what insects threaten the harvest.

PAVEL

Wizards who choke the fields are worse than bugs, Little Mother.

CATHERINE

Does your domovoi chase away wizards?

PAVEL

It is very simple to chase away a wizard, Little Mother.

(hmmm)

What do we do, Khuska?

CATHERINE

(off Khuska's hesitation)
Tell me, "Aide Militaire
Extraordinaire."

KHUSKA

The virgins and the widows must
plow a circle around the village at
midnight, your majesty.

CATHERINE

That appears unscientific and
complicated.

KHUSKA

Having nothing to eat, that is
complicated, your majesty.

CATHERINE

And should the crops continue to
fail?

KHUSKA

If the Devil has cursed the land,
your majesty, there is nothing to
do but burn and abandon the
village.

CATHERINE

What does your priest say to these
superstitions?

KHUSKA

Pray to God, but don't anger the
Devil.

PAVEL

Tell Little Mother about the one-
eared horse.

(to Ludmilla)

Khuska knows many interesting
facts.

CATHERINE

(off Khuska's hesitation)
Entertain me, "Aide Nuisance
Extraordinaire."

KHUSKA

A stranger told me of a priest who
laughed at the Devil.

(MORE)

KHUSKA (CONT'D)

One night a boy driving a silver carriage with five gray horses offers the priest a ride. Into the black they race and the road turns into sulfur fire. The horses turn into men who killed themselves. The boy turns into the Devil and bites off the priest's ear. After the rooster's crow, they find the priest wandering, barking, his hair white. Within a month--suicide. Now the boy drives a silver carriage with six grey horses and one's missing an ear. This is truth, your majesty.

PAVEL

(to Ludmilla)

Never trust a one-eared horse.

Count Radishchev, carrying a dead quail and accompanied by Lieutenant Turnipov, approaches.

KHUSKA

(to Catherine)

The Devil comes in many disguises, your majesty.

Catherine snatches the loaded shotgun from Khuska.

PAVEL

(to Catherine)

Little Mother, ask Khuska for help. Khuska shoots ducks with his eyes closed.

CATHERINE

(to Khuska)

You must be very lucky.

KHUSKA

Luck walks on two legs and runs from me, your majesty.

Count Radishchev stops a few yards away.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

Catherine! Come see this magnificent bird I've killed!

Riding a pony that he's thumping on its head, Tsarevitch Paul approaches.

KHUSKA

Perhaps your majesty would wish to
see to your son...?

Catherine swings the shotgun past Khuska's head and fires. A
quail drops from the sky.

CATHERINE

(hands shotgun to Khuska)
Reload.

Catherine walks off with Count Radishchev.

Before Khuska can follow, Lieutenant Turnipov blocks his
path.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV

(sees Khuska's captain
insignia)
Captain! Who would make you
captain?

KHUSKA

(not trying to be cruel)
The Tsar, in his wisdom. Does the
lieutenant wish to be a captain?

WITH CATHERINE AND COUNT RADISHCHEV

Catherine and Count Radishchev pretend to examine the dead
quail.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

We have not been alone--

CATHERINE

Be strong for both of us.
(points to Khuska)
He is one of Peter's spies.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

And easily disposed of.

CATHERINE

Do not harm him, my hawk.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

Why not, my nightingale?

CATHERINE

(dissembling)
We dare not alarm Peter.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
I would show Peter what it means to
be Tsar. I would show you.

CATHERINE
A woman is a weak creature of
impulse. You must be our calm and
steady anchor.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
This is truth.

BACK WITH KHUSKA

Tsarevitch Paul rides up to Khuska.

TSAEVITCH PAUL
(to Khuska)
I can order the Cossacks to burn
out your eyes and snip off your
toes.

INT. WINTER PALACE HALLWAY--MORNING

Khuska sits on a chair staring at his hands.

He's oblivious to the passing parade of court gentlemen,
court ladies and court servants who move leisurely through
the hall until they hear BARKING DOGS.

Gentlemen, ladies and servants flee leaving a perplexed
Khuska alone.

Peter and a pack of Russian wolfhounds arrive considerably
angry at Khuska. The dogs growl at Khuska.

PETER
(to Khuska)
This is the day of my most
Momentous Military Review and where
is the Tsarina?!

KHUSKA
Your majesty, her majesty sleeps.

PETER
Wake her!

KHUSKA
Your majesty, her majesty's maids
are--

PETER

You! Now!

Khuska hears and obeys. Reluctantly.

INT. CATHERINE'S BEDCHAMBERS--CONTINUOUS

Tentatively, Khuska enters the dimly lit bedchambers of a tsarina. With the drapes drawn, he can only make out the vague outline of a massive four-poster bed.

Approaching the bed, Khuska sees Catherine's face, angelic in the silken light...until she snores.

Khuska shuffles his feet, clears his throat, coughs...but she's not waking.

KHUSKA

The Tsarina is to open her eyes!

CATHERINE

(bolts awake)

Who is that?! Out! Out!

KHUSKA

Gladly. Quickly. Do I tell his majesty that your majesty--

CATHERINE

The affront! The indignity! What does Peter want?

KHUSKA

The Tsar commands the Tsarina--

CATHERINE

Commands?!

KHUSKA

Did I say "commands"? I wish to say his majesty invites--

CATHERINE

Why are your eyes shut?

KHUSKA

So I do not see what I do not wish to see.

CATHERINE

Open the drapes and see what I do not care you see.

Sunlight floods the bedchambers of a tsarina when Khuska opens the drapes. Catherine sits up in bed and pulls the covers up to--but not quite over--her bare shoulders.

KHUSKA

His majesty invites your majesty to his Most Momentous Military Review.

CATHERINE

I wearied of Peter playing with toy soldiers years ago.

KHUSKA

Your majesty, his majesty was most strong in his polite invitation.

(please)

I am of the opinion his majesty would be of great happiness with the company of your majesty.

CATHERINE

Are those the words of my husband?

KHUSKA

I am forgetting his majesty's exact words.

(pretty please)

Your majesty, he waits in the hall.

CATHERINE

From whence he sends you, a vile insult, into my bedchamber. Go. Tell my husband I am indisposed.

Khuska hears and obeys. Reluctantly.

INT. WINTER PALACE HALLWAY--CONTINUOUS

Khuska returns to the hall and an impatient Peter with his impatient pack of Russian wolfhounds.

KHUSKA

Your majesty, her majesty announces she is indisposed.

PETER

What do you mean, "indisposed"?

KHUSKA

I think it is a woman's riddle no man is to solve, your majesty.

PETER

Drag her.

KHUSKA

Drag her majesty, your majesty?

PETER

First, show her hands. Then drag her. Drag her out of bed. Drag her down the hall. Drag her across the parade grounds! I am Tsar!

Khuska hears and obeys. Reluctantly.

INT. CATHERINE'S BEDCHAMBERS--CONTINUOUS

When Khuska returns, Catherine is out of bed struggling into a loose fitting dressing gown.

CATHERINE

(weary at the sight of
Khuska)

Why does he insist?

KHUSKA

It is a mystery to me, your majesty.

CATHERINE

I still refuse.

KHUSKA

Your majesty, his majesty commands me to show you my hands.
(shows hands)

CATHERINE

Why?

KHUSKA

Your majesty, his majesty commands me to drag her majesty.

CATHERINE

Drag?

(staggers)

Are those the hands of a man who would drag me?

KHUSKA

(hides hands)

It is a mystery to me, your
majesty.

CATHERINE

You are surrounded by mystery.

Catherine sags against the bedpost and Khuska instinctively reaches out to help.

CATHERINE

Put your hands away. I cannot have
you drag me.

(holds herself erect)

I shall dress and you may escort me
to the Tsar's "Most Momentous
Military Review." If "Aide
Militaire Extraordinaire" Khuska
wishes to brag to the Tsar that he
dragged the Tsarina, I will not
contradict you.

With slow but measured steps, Catherine exits through a side door.

KHUSKA

(to himself)

Mystery walks on two legs and tells
me the same joke every day.

EXT. TSAR'S PARADE GROUNDS--LATER THAT DAY

It is a festive holiday for the people of St. Petersburg. With bugles and drums and cannon shots, the army noisily maneuvers up and down the open field.

Along one side of the parade grounds common folk festively gather behind a rope fence. Hawkers hawk food and drink.

On the other side of the parade grounds noble folk festively fill the reviewing stands. Servants serve food and drink.

At the center of the reviewing stands, Peter sits on the Tsar Throne drinking champagne with Princess Sophia who sits on the Tsarina Throne.

PETER

Alright, what did Adam first say to
Eve in the Garden of Eden?

PRINCESS SOPHIA

"Stand back, I don't know how big
this thing gets!"

Their squawking laughter dies when Catherine arrives escorted by Khuska. She wears a loose-fitting cloak whose black fur frames the pallor of her face.

Princess Sophia withers under Catherine's glare and vacates the Tsarina Throne to sit with her brother Prince Micklemas.

PETER

Did he show you his hands?

CATHERINE

Why was I to look at his hands?
His face is punishment enough.

PETER

Such magnificent serf hands, don't
you think?

CATHERINE

They should be cut off and placed
in a museum. Alongside his head.

Standing behind the Tsarina throne, Khuska flinches.

ON THE PARADE GROUNDS

From the east end of the field, Count Radishchev on horseback leads out a brigade of Russian troops in green uniforms. Most keep in step and only a few are missing their hats.

The common folk cheer their Russian army.

From the west end of the field, a mysterious officer on horseback leads out a brigade of mysterious troops in blue uniforms. They march with precision and no one is missing a hat.

The common folk murmur their confusion.

ON THE REVIEWING STANDS

The noble folk are also puzzled by the mysterious troops in blue uniforms and AD LIB MURMUR their confusion.

PRINCESS SOPHIA

Who are they?

CATHERINE
They are Prussian soldiers.

The noble folk AD LIB MUTTER their surprise.

PETER
(beaming)
My Most Momentous Military Review!

CATHERINE
Your Most Momentous Military Review
is about to arrive at two hundred
soldiers trampling each other.

Peter finally recognizes that the Russian and Prussian troops
are marching towards a head-on collision.

PETER
(aghast)
My Most Momentous Military Review!
(shouting to soldiers)
Halt! Halt! The Tsar commands it!

Only yards apart, the soldiers halt in front of the reviewing
stands.

The mysterious Prussian officer on horseback is Baron von
Metz last seen escaping, thanks to Khuska, from Count
Radishchev's tent.

BARON VON METZ
(recognizing Khuska)
You!

PETER
(points to Khuska)
Him?

KHUSKA
(points to himself)
Me?

Count Radishchev rides up attended by Lt. Turnipov.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
(recognizing von Metz)
You!

BARON VON METZ
(recognizing Radishchev)
You!

PETER

How is it everybody knows each other?

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Captain Khuska rescued the great, thick head of Count Radishchev from the Prussian hordes.

CATHERINE

(to Khuska)

You rescued Count Radishchev?

Khuska shrugs.

Both Baron von Metz and Count Radishchev dismount to confront each other.

BARON VON METZ

I had an ally in the Russian camp.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

A traitor?! I knew it! Who?!
Who?!

Fearing the worst, Khuska takes a deep breath...

BARON VON METZ

My ally was your stupidity.

...and sighs in relief.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

Such an insult can only be answered by blood!

(flings glove on ground)

BARON VON METZ

(flings glove on ground)

Great happiness a duel gives me!

PETER

I stake fifty rubles on the Prussian.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

(to Count Radishchev)

Baron von Metz is Envoy Plenipotentiary from the Court of King Frederick.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

I don't care if he's Frederick's chambermaid.

PETER

One hundred rubles on the Prussian.

CATHERINE

(to Count Radishchev)

A duel between the King's envoy and the Tsar's cousin would be idiocy.

PETER

You're always spoiling things.

CATHERINE

(to Prince Micklemas)

Why do Prussian soldiers accompany a Prussian diplomat?

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Baron von Metz also commands the Tsar's new Prussian Guard which is to replace Count Radishchev's Ismailovsky Guard as the Tsar's personal bodyguard.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

(flings glove on ground)

This insult can only be answered by blood.

BARON VON METZ

(flings glove on ground)

Stand I do for the Tsar!

CATHERINE

(to von Metz)

Noble envoy, would King Frederick ask Russians to defend his person and his throne?

PETER

I'm safe with them. You don't know what it is to be kidnapped from your bed.

CATHERINE

(to Princess Sophia)

What is it like to be kidnapped from the Tsar's bed?

Provoked beyond endurance, Peter flings his gloves to the ground.

PRINCESS SOPHIA
 (takes Peter's arm;
 whispers seductive)
 She's not the only one who can
 squirt out sons for you.

PETER
 (raging; to Khuska)
 What does a serf do with a wife who
 has a whip for a tongue?

KHUSKA
 (embarrassed to answer)
 A serf cuts a stick no thicker than
 his thickest finger, your holy
 majesty.

PETER
 Ha! A stick to beat the devil out
 of a wife!
 (wags finger at Catherine)
 One of these days I am the serf and
 you are the serf wife. Ha!

Because the Tsar laughs at the Tsarina, all the nobles laugh
 at the Tsarina.

With as much dignity as she can muster, Catherine withdraws.

BEHIND THE REVIEWING STANDS

Out of sight of Peter and the others, Catherine reluctantly
 leans on Khuska for support.

CATHERINE
 Do you beat your wife with sticks?

KHUSKA
 (shading the truth)
 As my wife obeys me, there is no
 need of sticks, your majesty.

CATHERINE
 You would have me obey "my
 husband"?
 (off his silence)
 You give serf advice to a tsar.
 "Beat her." Give me your serf
 advice.

KHUSKA

Serf wives sometimes pretend, your
majesty. Was there ever a marriage
that didn't need a little pretend?

CATHERINE

I had no choice in my marriage.

KHUSKA

Neither did I, your majesty.

Pavel and Ludmilla are waiting at Catherine's carriage.

As Ludmilla helps her into the carriage, Catherine urgently
whispers something.

INT. CARRIAGE (MOVING)--30 MINUTES LATER

The shades are drawn. As the carriage bounces along,
Catherine is markedly uncomfortable but resolutely silent.

The carriage hits a pothole and Catherine cries in pain.

KHUSKA

(concerned)

Your majesty--

CATHERINE

(gritting her teeth)

Never mind, never mind.

KHUSKA

(opening a shade)

We must be near the palace--

Khuska looks out at the passing countryside and concern turns
to suspicion. Catherine won't meet his gaze.

CATHERINE

I wish to travel and see the lives
of the common folk.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE--CONTINUOUS

Khuska leans out of the window to see Pavel driving the
carriage with Ludmilla sitting next to him giving directions.

KHUSKA

Pavel! Where is the driver?

PAVEL

I am the driver! Never has
Ludmilla never seen such happy
horses!

KHUSKA

Does Pavel the Driver know where we
are going? Or do I ask the happy
horses?

PAVEL

(looks about)

I do not think it is to the palace.

LUDMILLA

Stop here.

The carriage stops beside a goat path which leads past goat pens to a RAMSHACKLE GOAT COTTAGE.

Climbing from the carriage, Catherine whispers to Ludmilla who then runs up the path to the cottage.

KHUSKA

Please, your majesty, return to the
carriage.

CATHERINE

Wait here. Or go get drunk. I
don't care which.

KHUSKA

Pardon my opinion, your majesty,
but you are ill.

CATHERINE

You are not my doctor.

KHUSKA

Your doctor waits for you at the
Winter Palace, your majesty.

Ignoring Khuska, Catherine walks in discomfort up the goat path.

KHUSKA

(to Pavel)

What do I do? Knock her down?

PAVEL

Little Mother would hurt you,
Khuska.

Khuska runs ahead of Catherine.

CATHERINE

(to Khuska)

Who sent you to torment me, God or the Devil?

KHUSKA

I act as my tsar commands, your majesty.

CATHERINE

Are you no more than a tool in the Tsar's hands?

KHUSKA

As the Tsar commands, God commands, your majesty.

CATHERINE

Then God brings us together to this moment in this place for a reason. Khuska, you are not the tool of the Tsar. You are your own man. A good man. Return to the carriage and keep your silence. I can be generous with my gifts.

Catherine tenderly, desperately takes hold of Khuska's hands.

KHUSKA

(jerks hands away)

Prince Micklemas was right! You are the Devil's temptation. Or God's test. One or the other.

CATHERINE

What do you blather about?

KHUSKA

You wish.... You wish to take.... You wish to take me to your bed...your majesty.

CATHERINE

(laughs through the pain)

I am great with child and the child is coming, you fool.

KHUSKA

Impossible!

Catherine places Khuska's hands on her stomach inside her loose cloak.

KHUSKA

The child kicks! Such a kick.
Surely a boy! Your majesty,
immediately we return to the Winter
Palace.

CATHERINE

It would be my ruin. The Tsar
would destroy me.

KHUSKA

You give the Tsar another son.
(off Catherine's look)
The truth kicks me like a donkey.
The Tsar is not the father.

CATHERINE

It will be the nunnery or worse for
me.

KHUSKA

Beg for the Tsar's mercy.

CATHERINE

The midwife waits. The baby will
not.

Desperate, Catherine turns towards the cottage.

Equally desperate, Khuska picks up Catherine and turns toward
the carriage.

CATHERINE

This is monstrous! Put me down!

KHUSKA

I will not break my sacred vow
because you break your sacred vow.
Excuse my opinion, but you are
wicked...your majesty.

CATHERINE

Peter will hate the child.

KHUSKA

The Tsar loves all children.

CATHERINE

Peter will fear the child. A
General Saltikov might claim the
child and not Peter belongs on the
throne. What would Peter do to
keep that day from coming?

Khuska stops.

CATHERINE
I must be very heavy.

KHUSKA
The child is heavy. I see him in a
dungeon without friends, only
guards who wait to be his
executioners.

CATHERINE
Prisoner Number Two.

KHUSKA
The truth kicks me like a donkey
again and yet I grow no wiser.

CATHERINE
The midwife waits. The baby will
not.

KHUSKA
If babies were wise, they'd not be
so eager to enter this world.

INT. RAMSHACKLE GOAT COTTAGE--CONTINUOUS

Catherine is in agony as Khuska carries her into the one room
cottage, dimly lit by the fireplace. Besides two goats, no
one is there.

CATHERINE
Find Ludmilla. Find the midwife.

Khuska tenderly lays Catherine on a crude bed that is not a
tsarina's bed.

Carrying a bucket of water, the BLIND MIDWIFE enters through
the back door. With ashen skin, ashen hair and eyes crusted
shut, she might easily be suspected of being a witch.

Catherine moans.

BLIND MIDWIFE
Who has come?

KHUSKA
Over here.

BLIND MIDWIFE

(approaches Khuska)

You are the father?

(feels Khuska's uniform)

A rich man.

(whispers)

The child is unwanted? What would you pay to have the child die?

KHUSKA

(seizes Midwife's wrists)

Witch! You want the unbaptized baby for the Devil. If that happens, not even the Devil will stand between me and you.

BLIND MIDWIFE

No, no, honored sir! Do not curse me. I am the Christian. The child lives, the child lives.

KHUSKA

And the mother.

The Blind Midwife pours a cup a tea which Khuska helps Catherine drink.

KHUSKA

To give birth here...with this midwife....

CATHERINE

I endure hardship. As soon as Paul was born, Empress Elizabeth took him to her bedchamber to be cooed over by her friends. Peter and his friends were somewhere drunk. I, forbidden friends, was left alone--alone--on the cot where I had given birth, too weak to even stand and close the window.

KHUSKA

No comfort for the mother?

CATHERINE

They were desperate for an heir and they had their heir.

By touch alone, the Blind Midwife examines Catherine and finds a wide strip of cloth strapped around Catherine's belly.

BLIND MIDWIFE

You hide the baby but the baby
hides no more.

KHUSKA

(to Catherine)

I find Ludmilla for you.

CATHERINE

(weakly)

Don't leave me alone, Admiral of
the Pots.

Catherine grabs Khuska's hand.

BLIND MIDWIFE

I smell blood. Too much blood.

CATHERINE

(racked by pain)

Mother Mary, in our need, you are
our comfort. In our peril, you
are our lamp. Mother Mary, take my
pain.

KHUSKA

I am here, Mistress of the Drips.

TWO HOURS LATER

Ludmilla swaddles the CRYING NEW-BORN BABY as Khuska cradles
Catherine as she drinks another cup of tea.

BLIND MIDWIFE

(to Khuska)

The boy will live and grow strong
but only as a stranger to his
mother. The mother will live and
grow powerful, known to all except
her boy.

CATHERINE

You are a fortune teller?

BLIND MIDWIFE

I see what I see.
(shrugs; turns away)

KHUSKA

(to Catherine; happy)

Hear the shout of your son. He
will drown out the priest at the
baptism.

CATHERINE

Ludmilla will see to the baptism.

KHUSKA

(unhappy)

The mother calls to the father and the father calls to the priest and together they see to the baptism.

CATHERINE

Ludmilla will see to the baptism.

KHUSKA

Pardon my opinion again. Are you...uncertain who the father is?

CATHERINE

Radishchev rode to war ignorant and ignorant he shall remain. To do otherwise is to light the quickmatch.

KHUSKA

Pardon my opinion again, but Radishchev?

CATHERINE

(defensive)

He is accomplished at seduction and I was...lonely.

KHUSKA

I have no love for Radishchev but I will tell him he has a son to baptize.

CATHERINE

Ludmilla! Inform the priest that Khuska has named my son "Prisoner Number Two."

LUDMILLA

Is it a family name, Khuska?

KHUSKA

(to Catherine)

Because I must not hurt the boy I hurt the husband who is not the father and the father who is not the husband. I am guilty of something.

CATHERINE
 (tries to rise)
 We return to the palace before they
 send the Cossacks to find me.
 (falls back)
 You must carry me.

KHUSKA
 I believe you called that
 monstrous.

With all the imperious steel Catherine can muster, she glares at Khuska. Any sense of intimacy between the two of them is gone.

CATHERINE
 You presume to forget to whom you
 speak?

KHUSKA
 No...your majesty.

EXT. WINTER PALACE COURTYARD--ONE HOUR LATER

Catherine's carriage driven by Pavel returns to the Winter Palace. Waiting are Prince Micklemas, grooms, maids and Cossacks.

Prince Micklemas leans into the carriage to see Catherine and Khuska.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
 (polite concern)
 We were gravely worried, your
 majesty. We sent out the Cossacks.

CATHERINE
 (polite indifference)
 You may recall your Cossacks.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
 Was your majesty lost or was your
 majesty visiting friends?

CATHERINE
 Ask your Captain Khuska, Aide
 Militaire Extraordinaire and Spy,
 Defender of the Realm and Protector
 of the Innocent Child.

As Khuska exits the carriage, Prince Micklemas--and the grooms, maids and Cossacks--await Khuska's report. Catherine wonders what will Khuska say.

KHUSKA

Noble sir, after the events of the Tsar's Most Momentous Military Review, her majesty Tsarina Catherine did not care to return to the Winter Palace.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Understandable. Did she visit with friends?

KHUSKA

Feeling sick, her majesty Tsarina Catherine stopped only once. An old woman gave her tea.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Is that all?

KHUSKA

The old woman told her majesty Tsarina Catherine's fortune, noble sir.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

What does the future hold for Catherine?

Hiding her weakness, Catherine exits the carriage.

CATHERINE

Greatness and despair in vague measures. She was not particularly encouraging which is poor practice for a fortune teller.

(re: maids)

Who are they?

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

The Tsar, in his love for the Tsarina, has decreed you should have new maids.

CATHERINE

More spies.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

And new ladies-in-waiting who can offer guidance in troubled times.

Gathering her strength, Catherine enters the Winter Palace trailed by the maids.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
No Count Radishchev or any of his
circle?

KHUSKA
No, noble sir.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
(to Pavel)
What did you see?

Khuska wonders what Pavel will say.

PAVEL
Goats and goats are not so friendly
which is maybe why Khuska carried
Little Mother past the goats into
the cottage...

Pavel AD LIB rambles on about goats.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
(to Khuska)
Carried...? Did you take her to
bed?

KHUSKA
(offended)
Noble sir!

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
Yes. Of course. Forgive me.

PAVEL
(still rambling on)
...a goat once butted me in the
head but I butted him first--

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
Enough with the goats!
(to Khuska)
Come, food and drink after your
most momentous day.

KHUSKA
It was that, noble sir.

INT. REGIMENTAL DINING ROOM--MINUTES LATER

Atop a very long banquet table, two Prussian officers drunkenly duel with walking sticks. Cheering them on from one end of the table are Peter, Baron von Metz and assorted Prussian officers in distinctive blue uniforms. Glaring at them from the other end are Count Radishchev, Lieutenant Turnipov and assorted Russian officers in distinctive green uniforms.

Kitchen maids bring out more food and drink as Prince Micklemas and Khuska enter the room.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Do not mention the carriage ride to the Tsar.

KHUSKA

I will pretend it never happened, noble sir.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

And remember to smile.

KHUSKA

Smile, noble sir?

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Another promotion. It must be tiresome, but it delights the Tsar.

A drunken Peter embraces Khuska who is awestruck.

PETER

(to Russian officers)

Here is Khuska, my one, true officer. Braver than all of you. He drags the tigress from her bed. Captain Khuska, no more. Major Khuska!

The Prussian officers cheer. The Russian officers sulk. Khuska tries to smile.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

You reward the serf that insults the Tsarina?!

PETER

(provoked)

Furthermore, I entitle Major Khuska, Chevalier of St. Basil!

More cheering. More sulking. A little less of a smile.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
 You besmirch that Holy Orthodox
 order!

Gleefully, Peter unpins the St. Basil medal from Count Radishchev's chest to pin on Khuska's chest.

Peter kisses Khuska on the cheeks which leaves Khuska even more awestruck.

Humiliated, Count Radishchev retreats as Baron von Metz advances.

BARON VON METZ
 (shakes Khuska's hand)
 Major and chevalier all in a hurry.
 This day you do not forget so soon.

KHUSKA
 You speak truth, honored sir.

BARON VON METZ
 (to Prince Micklemas)
 I wish taking Chevalier Khuska to
 Potsdam for the entertaining of my
 King Frederick.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
 Surrender Khuska? Never. You risk
 war to even suggest it.

Prince Micklemas and Baron von Metz move to a side table to discuss matters of state. Khuska finds himself a side table where a KITCHEN MAID serves him a bowl of stew and a stein of beer.

Khuska wishes only to eat and leave. But Count Radishchev is plotting with Lieutenant Turnipov.

Lieutenant Turnipov and FOUR JUNIOR OFFICERS approach Khuska.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
 Congratulations, Major Serf. We
 present you the gift of champagne.
 (holds champagne bottle)

KHUSKA
 No, thank you, Honored Lieutenant.
 Strange things happen when I drink
 champagne.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
 More beer then?

The Junior Officers bring back the Kitchen Maid who refills Khuska's beer stein. And then she straddles Khuska's lap.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
 (re: Kitchen Maid)
 And some pastry. A gift from the officers. Enjoy her at your leisure, Chevalier Serf.

The Kitchen Maid is not only young, she's willing. But Khuska has no desire to find out how young and willing.

KHUSKA
 (to Kitchen Maid)
 God knows our sins. Pray for forgiveness, little sister.

A repentant Kitchen Maid scurries back to the kitchen as the Junior Officers hoot.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
 (to Junior Officers)
 Here is a serf who prefers men. Or is he a lover of barn animals?

The Junior Officers hoot at Khuska.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
 (continuing; to Khuska)
 Which is it? Men or barn animals?

All the restraint of a serf that has held Khuska in check vanishes.

KHUSKA
 I don't desire you, so it can't be barn animals.

The Junior Officers hoot at Lieutenant Turnipov.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
 (outraged)
 I'll teach you--

KHUSKA
 Teach me what, canary? Sin with a girl a year older than my daughter? Smile at a man before I punch him? Hate a man who has one tiny thing I don't? What you know is as much use to me as my nipples...
lieutenant.

The Junior Officers fall quiet.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
 (to Lieutenant Turnipov)
 He insults you!

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
 I know that!

COUNT RADISHCHEV
 Then challenge him to the duel!

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
 (to Khuska)
 You are no gentleman so we dispense
 with formalities. Stand and choose
 your weapon.

Khuska looks but no one will speak for him. Not the Tsar,
 not Baron von Metz, not Prince Micklemas. No one.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
 (to all)
 I wager the serf cannot even draw
 one drop of blood from Lieutenant
 Turnipov.
 (holds up purse)

Khuska looks but no one will bet on him.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
 (to Peter)
 Where's your sporting spirit,
 cousin? A single drop of blood.
 Ten kopecks?

Provoked again, Peter snatches Count Radishchev's purse and
 pours the gold roubles onto the table.

PETER
 (re: gold rubles)
 Double and double again.

That unleashes all manner of AD LIB BETTING between the
 Russian and Prussian officers.

ACROSS THE ROOM

BARON VON METZ
 I think we see the finish of your
 Khuska.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
 I think we see another of God's
 tests.

BACK WITH KHUSKA AND LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV

Lieutenant Turnipov slashes his sword over Khuska's head.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
(impatient)
Blade or pistol?

When Khuska continues to drink his beer, Lieutenant Turnipov steps from chair to table top and places the tip of his sword under Khuska's chin.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
I said, choose your weapon.

KHUSKA
Beer stein.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
Beer stein?

Khuska slams his beer stein onto the left foot of Lieutenant Turnipov who howls in pain and hops on his right foot until Khuska slams it with the beer stein.

Lieutenant Turnipov flops and snaps his head on the table.

In a devil's rage, Khuska grabs the sword. Helpless and horrified, Lieutenant Turnipov sees murder in Khuska's eyes...

JUNIOR OFFICERS
(looking for blood)
Khuska! Khuska! Khuska!

...and then it fades. Khuska snaps the sword over his knee.

JUNIOR OFFICERS
(seeing no blood)
Khuska. Khuska. Khuska.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV
(to Khuska)
That was my father's sword!

Trying to rise, Lieutenant Turnipov slips, falls and breaks his nose. Blood spurts.

JUNIOR OFFICERS
Khuska! Khuska! Khuska!

Peter sweeps Count Radishchev's gold rubles into a hat.

PETER
(to Count Radishchev)
Do you have a headache, cousin?

Peter embraces Khuska and kisses his cheeks again which leaves Khuska not quite so awestruck.

PETER
(to Khuska)
Such good sport. Better than
greyhounds.

KHUSKA
I live to serve the Tsar.

Peter pours gold rubles into Khuska's hands and then returns to his brandy bottle.

Khuska bows and backs away hoping to escape only to find his way blocked by Count Radishchev.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
I promise you a reckoning.

KHUSKA
Will you send another canary to
peck at my eyes?

Count Radishchev raises his hand to slap Khuska but stops when Khuska raises his fist.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
I own 5,000 serfs. I would whip
every one of them for such
insolence.

KHUSKA
Yes, a whipping on this day of days
when I have done you a service all
your serfs could never repay.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
What service could you possibly do
for me? You are worth less than
the teaspoon on my table. God,
whom you so devoutly love, decrees
it.

EXT. ST. PETERSBURG ALLEY--LATER THAT NIGHT

It's a cold night for the poor wrapped in rags and huddling in the alley. Desolate, Khuska moves from beggar to beggar handing them Count Radishchev's gold rubles. Trailing behind is Pavel who greedily eyes those gold rubles.

KHUSKA

(gives coin)

Praise God, grandfather.

(moves on; gives coin)

Praise God, grandmother.

PAVEL

Khuska, such money God gives you
and you throw it away.

KHUSKA

Riches aren't God's reward, they're
His test.

PAVEL

Khuska, all those coins could help
a friend win a bride.

KHUSKA

A stranger told me of a beggar who
asked the richest man in the
village for a crust of bread. "Go
away," said the richest man. The
beggar asked the poorest man in the
village for a crust of bread.
"Share mine," said the poorest man.
When the richest man and the
poorest man died on the same day,
they met the beggar again. He was
Jesus Christ. "I asked for your
help once," said Jesus. "Who asks
for my help now?" This is truth,
Pavel.

PAVEL

Khuska, if I had gold rubles to
marry Ludmilla and Jesus wished to
eat the wedding breakfast, I would
let Him.

Giving away the last gold ruble, Khuska lifts his empty hands
to heaven.

KHUSKA

(to God)

I carried the load You placed on my back. I listened to the words You spoke in my ear. I kept holy Your days with fast and prayer. I gave gold to your children. Send me home to my children who grow up without me. Send me home to my wife who grows old without me.

(waits)

Give me an answer besides Your rain in my face.

Snow begins to fall.

KHUSKA

As You wish, as You decide, as You command, as You--

Furious, Khuska walks out of the alley.

PAVEL

Khuska, where are you going?

KHUSKA

I'm going home, Pavel.

PAVEL

Khuska, it is not allowed.

(no response)

When the cow runs away, we tie a rope to its neck and lead it home. When we run away, they tie a rope to our necks and hang us.

(still no response)

Khuska, the morning is wiser than the evening.

(still no response)

Birth to death, we live on a circle. The farther we walk from something, the closer we come to it.

KHUSKA

(brought up short)

Such wise things to say, Pavel.

PAVEL

Where did it come from? Wisdom and I stand on opposite sides of the river.

(thinks it over)

That was clever, too.

KHUSKA

I will remember you always as a
wise man, Pavel.

Khuska hugs Pavel and resumes walking home.

PAVEL

Khuska, the barracks are this way.

Out of words and desperate, Pavel picks up a rock and knocks
Khuska unconscious.

PAVEL

(tries lifting Khuska)

Khuska, you did not look so heavy
standing up.

The snow falls harder.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ST. PETERSBURG--SNOWING--DAY

The snow continues to fall, gusting and swirling around the
palaces and hovels of St. Petersburg.

INT. TSAR'S CHAPEL--DAY

The exquisite gold icons of the Tsar's Chapel, their eyes
aglow in the candlelight, stare down at METROPOLITAN
STOLYPIN. Essentially the bishop of St. Petersburg, he is
about 60 and elegant in beard and robes.

METROPOLITAN STOLYPIN

God gives not the sword without
giving the arm to wield it. Serve
the Tsar and serve God. God gives
not the journey without giving the
legs to carry it. Serve the
Tsar...

Peter, Catherine and Tsarevitch Paul sit in chairs with the
nobles of the court standing behind them wreathed in the
smoke of incense. While Catherine is devout in prayer, Peter
whispers over his shoulder to Princess Sophia and Prince
Micklemas. Nearby Count Radishchev attended by Lieutenant
Turnipov tries to catch Catherine's eye.

Ignored by all, Tsarevitch Paul wanders to the...

REAR OF THE TSAR'S CHAPEL

...where Khuska stands alone in an impressive new major's uniform. He is lost in thought but not prayer. A grim resignation has taken hold of Khuska.

TSAREVITCH PAUL

I can order the Cossacks to pull
off your fingers and send you to
Siberia.

Khuska grabs the boy's hand and squeezes.

KHUSKA

You turn your back on God to play
games in His house? When God pulls
the fingers from your hand, who
will hear your scream, who will
wipe your tears? Turn and pray and
fear God.

The fear of God--or Khuska--fills Tsarevitch Paul who kneels
in prayer. Khuska does not join him.

BACK TO METROPOLITAN STOLYPIN

METROPOLITAN STOLYPIN

...and serve God. God gives not
the stone without giving the back
to lift it. Serve the Tsar and
serve God. God does not give the
lake--

Princess Sophia makes a face at Peter who laughs which shocks
Metropolitan Stolypin into silence.

PETER

Go on, go on. No, enough of that.
(hands Stolypin a paper)
I wrote a prayer. Read it. Snap
to. Serve the Tsar and serve God.

METROPOLITAN STOLYPIN

(reluctantly reading)
"God give favor and blessing on the
holy alliance of Russia and
Prussia. Favor and blessing on the
cruise...crucifix..."
(squints at paper)

PETER

Crusade.

METROPOLITAN STOLYPIN
 "Crusade of war against..against..."

PETER
 Denmark!

METROPOLITAN STOLYPIN
 "Denmark to give back the Duchy
 of...of..."

PETER
 Schleswig!
 (snatches back paper)
 Give back Schleswig to its rightful
 ruler. This we humbly ask. Amen.

The picture of piety, Catherine continues to pray while
 everyone else mills about in AD LIB CONSTERNATION.

PETER
 (smugly pleased)
 Now that we've asked for God's
 blessing, it's official.

ADMIRAL JUKOVA, one eye covered with an eyepatch, is about 60
 and medal bedecked. Among the senior officers, he's the one
 who dares venture an objection.

ADMIRAL JUKOVA
 Your majesty, will the fleet--

PETER
Denmark. There's no attacking
 Denmark without a navy.

ADMIRAL JUKOVA
 Tsarina Elizabeth stripped the
 fleet to war with Prussia--

PETER
 Want to lose the other eye, half-
 blind quibbler?
 (to all)
 Who else wants to offer opinions?

The other officers are cowed into silence. Except for Count
 Radishchev.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
 (to Lieutenant Turnipov)
 This is genius, making war on
 Denmark for the benefit of Prussia.

PETER

(pouncing)

Talking treason, are you? You are forthwith and hereto exiled from St. Petersburg. Sooner than immediately.

(pointing)

Exile! Exile! Exile!

COUNT RADISHCHEV

You cannot--

PETER

Who orders me not to? You? The Tsarina? Go on, ask her.

(to Catherine)

Make an order, keep Radishchev by your side.

CATHERINE

(not a trace of sarcasm)

To hear the Tsar is to obey the Tsar, your majesty.

Catherine's subservience stuns both Peter and Count Radishchev. Peter recovers first.

PETER

(testing Catherine)

It's the Pretikov Nunnery for you.

CATHERINE

I shall go as my Tsar commands. Only allow me to finish my prayers.

PETER

What do you pray for? My grave in a potato patch?

CATHERINE

I pray that God's favor and blessing shine upon the Tsar.

PETER

Something's different about you.

CATHERINE

Your Khuska has instructed me that I am wife and mother and should practice humility, your majesty.

WITH PRINCE MICKLEMAS AND PRINCESS SOPHIA

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
(suspicion)
There is something different about
her.

PRINCESS SOPHIA
She's lost weight.

BACK WITH PETER AND CATHERINE

CATHERINE
(continuing to Peter)
Khuska is God's messenger.

PETER
God's Messenger? Bring me God's
Messenger!

Everyone watches as Khuska makes his uncertain way from the
back of the chapel.

BACK WITH PRINCE MICKLEMAS AND PRINCESS SOPHIA

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
(re: Khuska)
There is something different about
him.

PRINCESS SOPHIA
You gave him yet another new
uniform.

BACK WITH PETER, CATHERINE AND KHUSKA

PETER
(to Khuska)
What message does God's Messenger
bring us today?

KHUSKA
I beg pardon, your majesty. God
does not speak to me this morning.

PETER
If you have reformed the Tsarina,
you are not God's Messenger. You
are God's Miracle. What else did
you tell the Tsarina?

CATHERINE

(before Khuska can answer)
Would the Tsar permit me to serve
tea to him and the Tsarevitch?

PETER

Why? To argue about Denmark?

CATHERINE

Your majesty, my place is not to
discuss war and diplomacy. It is
to see our son learns from you the
wisdom and courage of a good and
mighty Tsar.

PETER

(still wary of Catherine)
What say you, God's Messenger?

KHUSKA

If your majesty is thirsty, a cup
of tea is no burden.

PETER

Fetch the boy.

The doors of the Tsar's Chapel open and Baron von Metz with
six Prussian soldiers march in to form the Tsar's escort.

Peter offers his arm to Catherine who demurely accepts.

Khuska has only to glance at Tsarevitch Paul and the boy runs
to take the hand of Catherine.

Everyone in the chapel bows as Tsar and company exit, and
then they break into AD LIB GROUSING.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

(to Count Radishchev)
Exile. Exile. Exile.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

(to Lieutenant Turnipov)
Come. We are tired of St.
Petersburg.

LIEUTENANT TURNIPOV

(to Prince Micklemas)
Did the Tsar exile me?

COUNT RADISHCHEV

(pointing at Turnipov)
Exile! Exile! Exile!

AT THE FRONT OF THE CHAPEL

With the Tsar's departure, the service is abruptly over. To his dismay, Metropolitan Stolypin finds his congregation quickly reduced to Khuska.

KHUSKA
Does your holiness hear
confessions?

METROPOLITAN STOLYPIN
(muttering to himself)
"God's Messenger?" Who's God's
Messenger? Apparently not me.
(exits)

The exquisite gold icons of the Tsar's Chapel, their eyes aglow in the candlelight, stare down at Khuska left alone in the Tsar's Chapel,

BEGIN MONTAGE

Scenes of Catherine playing cards with men of various military, government and religious ranks are interspersed with scenes of Khuska playing with Tsarevitch Paul. Man and boy have grown fond of each other.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS (V.O.)
What is the conversation at the
card tables? War? Diplomacy?
Monarchical privilege?

KHUSKA (V.O.)
Pardon me for saying so, noble sir,
but I only hear men gossiping like
the women of my village.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS (V.O.)
I am told by the servants I have
given her that the Tsarina wins
more than she loses.

KHUSKA (V.O.)
Mostly more, honored sir.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS (V.O.)
But when the Tsar plays, she mostly
loses. What do you make of that?

KHUSKA (V.O.)
The Tsar is a mighty card player,
noble sir.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS (V.O.)
And Catherine is playing her cards
most excellently, including the
trump card of her son.

END MONTAGE

INT. WINTER PALACE HALLWAY--DAY

Khuska escorts Catherine to her next encounter with Peter.

CATHERINE
A cottage and a porch from which
you may fish away eternity? No
more?

KHUSKA
This is heaven, no more is needed,
your majesty.

CATHERINE
Would you not want to speak with
the great men of history. Da
Vinci? Galileo? Machiavelli?

KHUSKA
Are they fishermen?

CATHERINE
Will I be allowed on this porch to
fish?
(off Khuska's look)
You think heaven is already closed
to me.

KHUSKA
It's not so certain I'm going to
heaven. I won't tell God who to
keep out.

CATHERINE
I am like you. I live as I believe
God intends me to.

KHUSKA
May we both fish off that porch,
your majesty.

Khuska and Catherine reach the doors to the Tsar's Suite.
Four Prussians guards stand watch.

INT. TSAR'S SUITE--CONTINUOUS

Catherine and Khuska enter the spacious suite, elegant in its gilt and tapestries.

Peter and Tsarevitch Paul stand on footstools as six tailors finish the fitting of matching blue uniforms. Baron von Metz helps with the detailing.

PETER

(re: uniforms)

Not too Prussian for you...?

CATHERINE

(meekly submissive)

The Tsar and the Tsarevitch are men of great military bearing.

PETER

(to Khuska)

Our son tells me you tell him Bible stories that are not in the Bible.

KHUSKA

They are cabbage leaves, your majesty.

TSAEVITCH PAUL

No, Dedushka Khuska, they are truth.

PETER

(to Khuska)

Archangel Michael and the goat...? Speak.

KHUSKA

(if you insist)

A stranger told me that when God took the rib from Adam, He gave it to the Archangel Michael to guard. Now the Devil has as many faces as the night has stars. The Devil turned into a goat, snapped up the rib, and ate it. Archangel Michael, he catches the goat, but the rib is gone. What is Archangel Michael to do?

TSAREVITCH PAUL

Send the goat to Siberia!

KHUSKA

Ashamed to tell God the truth,
Archangel Michael tears off the
goat's tail. This is the bone he
gives God when God asks for Adam's
rib, the same "rib" God turns into
Eve. The Devil's goat tail.

TSAREVITCH PAUL

This is truth, Dedushka Khuska?

KHUSKA

Remember it when you wonder at the
mystery of women, honored child.

Peter roars with laughter and pokes Catherine in the ribs.

PETER

(to Catherine)

Women, a mystery no longer. Goat's
tail!

CATHERINE

(perfectly serene)

I am pleased the Tsar is pleased.

(hesitates)

I have come to beg the Tsar's
permission....

PETER

(suspicious)

What? What?

CATHERINE

...to leave the palace for a
wedding.

PETER

Whose wedding?

CATHERINE

A servant's.

PETER

Am I invited?

CATHERINE

It would be a blessing if the
Tsar--

PETER

I don't go to servants' weddings.
How do I know this is not a
rendezvous with-- How do I know?

CATHERINE

If I betray your majesty's trust,
instruct Khuska to beat me with a
stick.

PETER

(brightens; to Khuska)

Yes! Carry a stick and beat the
Tsarina if there's a rendezvous.

BARON VON METZ

Your majesty, the parade of hussars
await.

PETER

(to Catherine)

Join us. The Baron and I will
demonstrate to Russian generals the
superiority of Prussian soldiers.

Gleeful, Peter hops off the footstool, offers his arm to Catherine, and without debate or dissension they exit with Baron von Metz.

TSAREVITCH PAUL

(to Khuska)

Dedushka Khuska, will you really
beat mother with a stick?

KHUSKA

Honored child, to hear the Tsar is
to obey the Tsar.

(whispers)

Do you know what a "rendezvous" is?

EXT. SERF CHURCH--DAY

Catherine and Khuska walk up the snow-covered path to a church much like the church Khuska left behind in his village. Out of the church steps Ludmilla in her new peasant finery. She beams with the beauty of a bride on her wedding day.

CATHERINE

Ludmilla is far from her village
and her parents. So I give her the
permission and the blessing to
marry.

LUDMILLA

Thank you, Little Mother.
 (bows to Khuska)
 Honored sir.

KHUSKA

God's blessing, little sparrow.

CATHERINE

The tsar of Ludmilla's heart is
 also far from his village and his
 parents.

KHUSKA

Such is his misfortune, your
 majesty.

Out of the church steps Pavel carrying Catherine's baby. In
 his new peasant finery, he sheepishly approaches Khuska.

PAVEL

Hello, Khuska.
 (holds up baby)
 The baby was baptized.

KHUSKA

I see no baby.

CATHERINE

(to Khuska)
 If only an officer of the Tsar
 would hear his plea. An officer
 whose heart leads him to
 generosity.

LUDMILLA

(to Khuska)
 Pavel went straight to the priest
 to confess his sin of hitting you
 with a rock.

Before the plaintive faces of Pavel and Ludmilla, Khuska
 surrenders.

KHUSKA

(to Pavel and Ludmilla)
 Foolish children. Trouble sleeps so
 little and you wake him up.
 (grandly)
 My permission and my blessing.

Pavel glows with the glory of a groom on his wedding day.

PAVEL
 (hugging Khuska)
 Father who is not my father, you
 bless me and forgive me.

KHUSKA
 Blessing yes, forgiving no.

PAVEL
 Then beat me, Khuska.

KHUSKA
 Today you marry. Look to your wife
 for beatings.

Ludmilla kisses Khuska's cheek. As does Catherine.

INT. TAVERN--THAT NIGHT

The WEDDING FEAST is well underway. Tables and chairs have been pushed to the walls to provide a dance floor. WEDDING GUESTS dance to a SERF POLKA performed on balalaikas and flutes. At their center is the joyously married couple-- Pavel and Ludmilla.

Their feet tapping to the music, Catherine and Khuska watch. It's Khuska who holds Catherine's baby.

KHUSKA
 (to baby)
 Schush, boy-child and I teach you
 to fish for I am the fisherman
 favored before all fishermen. The
 fish see me put my hook into the
 water and they jump into my bucket.

CATHERINE
 You have children?

KHUSKA
 Five living. Three are with Jesus.
 God's will.

CATHERINE
 God's will. I lost a daughter.
 (off Khuska's look)
 Before Radishchev.
 (off Khuska's look)
 The Tsar's child.
 (continuing)
 Do you remember their faces?

KHUSKA

I remember one clinging to my
finger as she was baptized.

CATHERINE

My child was baptized.

KHUSKA

Done and proper, your majesty.
What is the boy's name?

CATHERINE

I did not ask. Ludmilla and Pavel
will raise the child as their own
far from St. Petersburg.

KHUSKA

(upset; stands)

I will toast Pavel and maybe hit
him with a stone.

Khuska passes the baby to Ludmilla who sits with Catherine.

Over Catherine's and Ludmilla's head is a balcony with doors
leading to bedrooms. One of the bedroom doors opens and out
comes Count Radishchev and Lieutenant Turnipov. They're
ridiculously disguised as peasants--Igor and Ivan.

ON THE BALCONY

COUNT "IGOR" RADISHCHEV

(scanning the tavern)

Where is she, Ivan?

Lieutenant Turnipov spies Khuska at the bar with Pavel.

LIEUTENANT "IVAN" TURNIPOV

(jealous of Khuska's
uniform)

Who is his tailor?

DRUNKEN DRUZILLA, a widow woman who could stun a horse with
her fist, takes a shine to Lieutenant Turnipov.

DRUNKEN DRUZILLA

Drink or you hex the wedding night!

Drunken Druzilla forces a bottle of vodka on Lieutenant
Turnipov who drinks and chokes on the raw liquor.

DRUNKEN DRUZILLA

And again!

As Lieutenant Turnipov chokes down another shot of vodka, Count Radishchev sees Pavel join Ludmilla and the baby.

COUNT "IGOR" RADISHCHEV
 (re: baby and bride)
 The stork was faster than the priest.

DRUNKEN DRUZILLA
 (smacks Count Radishchev's chest)
 If Ludmilla's not a virgin, then I am.

COUNT "IGOR" RADISHCHEV
 Then whose baby is...?

As Pavel and Ludmilla return to dancing, Catherine reluctantly takes the baby.

COUNT "IGOR" RADISHCHEV
 (counting the months)
 One...two...three....
 (lights up)
 God decrees my destiny. By making me the father, he makes me the Tsar!

DRUNKEN DRUZILLA
 Who is Tsar?

COUNT "IGOR" RADISHCHEV
 Not me, I am Igor.

Count Radishchev heads for the stairs. When Lieutenant Turnipov tries to follow--

DRUNKEN DRUZILLA
 (grabs Lieutenant Turnipov)
 Dance with me, handsome devil!

LIEUTENANT "IVAN" TURNIPOV
 Help me, Igor!

BACK WITH CATHERINE AND THE BABY

With mixed emotions, Catherine rocks the baby.

COUNT RADISHCHEV (O.S.)
 I should be quite upset with you, but I am magnanimously not.

CATHERINE
(horrified)
God's mercy!

COUNT RADISHCHEV
(to baby)
Oozie, oozie, oou.
(to Catherine)
My spies told me you'd be here.

CATHERINE
Your spies are the spies of Prince
Micklemas.

COUNT RADISHCHEV
(to baby)
Gonka, gonka, pooh.

CATHERINE
The Tsar exiled you from St.
Petersburg. Leave me! Go!

COUNT RADISHCHEV
The new Tsar will lift my exile.
(to baby)
Boup, boup, boup.

CATHERINE
Because you claim the bastard child
of the unfaithful wife of the
cuckolded tsar, Russia proclaims
you her sultan?

COUNT RADISHCHEV
The Ismailovsky Guard is loyal to
me. We declare Peter the Prussian
pawn and traitor. He abdicates in
favor of you. The church annuls
the marriage. Until we marry,
nobody knows I'm Tsar. With our
Tsarevitch in the cradle, who could
deny us?

CATHERINE
The rest of the army? The navy?
The clergy? The aristocracy? All
who swore before God loyalty to
Tsar Peter? Did you think of them?

COUNT RADISHCHEV
(to baby)
Details, details, details.

ACROSS THE TAVERN

Khuska sees Count Radishchev and realizes--

KHUSKA
Rendezvous!

BACK WITH CATHERINE AND COUNT RADISHCHEV

COUNT RADISHCHEV
I haven't forgiven you for keeping
the secret of my son from me.

CATHERINE
The Tsar is no grocer to bop on the
head and steal his potatoes.

KHUSKA (O.S.)
No, your heart must be as poisoned
as the heart of Judas.

CATHERINE
Khuska! Pray believe me, I--

COUNT RADISHCHEV
Why do you beg him for anything?
His shall be the first beheading I
order. We leave with our child.

Khuska grabs the sputtering Count Radishchev by the arms and
forces him to sit. Nobody is going anywhere.

COSSACKS burst into the tavern.

The wedding guests panic and scream.

Count Radishchev bolts.

Ludmilla takes the baby from Catherine.

CATHERINE
(to Ludmilla)
Hide my child. Protect him.
(kisses baby)

Ludmilla and Pavel flee with the baby.

Khuska seizes Catherine by the wrist.

CATHERINE
(to Khuska)
Radishchev betrayed me.

KHUSKA
Betrayal walks on two legs and
wears your face.

Prince Micklemas enters as calm is restored.

KHUSKA
(saluting Prince
Micklemas)
Noble sir, I report a rendezvous
between her majesty Catherine and
Count Radishchev.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
(teasing)
How could Major Khuska, Chevalier
of St. Basil, let this happen?

CATHERINE
Major Khuska knew nothing of--

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
I know, I know. I trust Major
Khuska, but you.... Dutiful wife.
Dutiful mother. I see now the
purpose of the card games with the
generals and the admirals and the
clergy and the government
ministers.

Two Cossacks drag a bruised Lieutenant Turnipov forward.

COSSACK
Count Radishchev escaped but we
found this one--
(shakes Lieutenant
Turnipov)
--in a bedroom.

Drunken Druzilla waves from the balcony.

DRUNKEN DRUZILLA
Come back, handsome devil!

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
(to Lieutenant Turnipov)
Such fun, overthrowing a tsar.
(to Cossack)
Do you believe he will in good
conscience answer my questions?

Grinning, the Cossack raps his knuckles on terrified
Lieutenant Turnipov's head.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

(to Khuska; continuing)

Escort Tsarina Catherine back to the palace. Confine her to her chambers. We bring her before the Tsar in the morning.

KHUSKA

Noble sir, will the Tsar order me to beat the Tsarina with a stick?

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

We are past a stick and a beating.

INT. WINTER PALACE HALLWAY--ONE HOUR LATER

Both severe in their silence, Khuska escorts Catherine down the hall.

Baron von Metz intercepts them.

BARON VON METZ

The Tsar demands presence of the Tsarina most immediate.

INT. TSAR'S SUITE--MINUTES LATER

Catherine and Khuska enter the spacious suite, elegant in its gilt and tapestries.

In a floor-length brocade dressing gown, Peter sits at a desk cleared of everything except a brandy bottle, a chewed-up toy soldier, and a miniature gallows.

PETER

Bring forth the prisoner!

But Peter's ignoring Catherine and Khuska.

Peter's command is for SIX DWARFS, splendidly uniformed and disciplined, who march across the room pulling a toy wagon. Inside the wagon is a cage holding a rat.

PETER

(shows the rat the chewed-up toy soldier)

You have been judged guilty of the murder of a soldier of the Tsar.

(to dwarfs)

Hang the prisoner!

Two of the dwarfs wearing gloves take the rat from the cage and hang it from the miniature gallows on Peter's desk. One dwarf beats a drum. The rat squeals and dies.

PETER
 (to dwarfs)
 Smartly done. Commendations all.
 Dismissed.

The dwarves exit the room.

Drinking from the brandy bottle, Peter pokes at the dead rat swinging on the miniature gallows.

PETER
 (to Catherine)
 Shall I call the priest to hear
 your confession? No, you'd seduce
 him. Sin oozes from your black
 soul.

CATHERINE
 (meek and mild)
 Your majesty, call the priest. I
 am a helpless, confused woman. My
 Tsar must guide me.

PETER
 You are so easy to believe.
 (to Khuska)
 You believe her, don't you?

Khuska would rather be on a battlefield than witness this domestic dispute.

PETER
 (continuing)
 I believed she had changed. I
 wanted her back, like it once was.
 I wanted to believe the Tsarevitch
 is...is...
 (to Catherine)
 You climbed into Radishchev's bed.
 He'd bury me in a potato patch.

CATHERINE
 He seduced me, your majesty. When
 you shut me from your heart--

PETER
 My bed was crowded with your
 lovers.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

(to Khuska)

She's not like other women. She throbs with the appetites of men.

CATHERINE

(to Khuska)

I was a girl carried to a strange land of strange language and strange religion. They did not let my father come, they sent my mother home.

PETER

(to Khuska)

I was the orphan. Torn from Prussia. Told to be Tsarevitch. Given a bride who wanted a puppet not a husband.

CATHERINE

(kneels; takes Peter's hand)

Peter, we were lost children together. Remember our plans for Russia?

PETER

Stop it!

(tearing away; poor me)

God didn't ask, he put me on this throne. I slave for Russia but who's grateful? I don't sleep at night for the mutterings of my enemies. Now the Devil sends my own wife against me.

Catherine can no longer keep up the pretense. The mask of submission and humility drops as she rises.

CATHERINE

Ask for pity and pity you get. God bestows upon you crown and scepter, and how do you treat the monarchy? Like some masquerade farce. Your will is the will of a child. You cannot see past tomorrow and grow your enemies like wheat. Gladly I go to the Pretikov Nunnery.

(to Khuska)

The Tsarevitch is his son. No other father could sire that beady little face.

Catherine turns for the door.

PETER
 (to Khuska)
 Stop her! Drag her!

Reluctantly Khuska takes hold of Catherine's arm and leads her back to Peter. He's at his desk poking at the dead rat swinging on the miniature gallows.

PETER
 (to Catherine)
 I don't hold trials in nunneries.

With a flourish, Peter signs a document.

PETER
 I don't even have to leave this chair.
 (holds up document)
 An order of execution.

CATHERINE
 Monster!

PETER
 (to Khuska)
 You can hang her now.

KHUSKA
 Hang...?

PETER
Strangle. Strangle her now.

KHUSKA
 Your very most holy majesty....

Peter circles Khuska and Catherine. As she watches with growing fear, Khuska nods his agreement every time Peter asks "Yes?"

PETER
 (to Khuska)
 She is a traitor. Yes? An unfaithful wife. Yes? I am Tsar. Yes? You swore to God you would. Yes? Wring her neck! Snap it like a chicken's!

KHUSKA
 The nunnery...prison...lock her--

PETER

Why do you hesitate? I command,
you obey. It is my will, it is
God's will.

As if in a dream, Khuska watches himself close his calloused hands around Catherine's soft neck. For her part, Catherine summons bravery and will not struggle. Their eyes meet, their strange journey together has come to this.

KHUSKA

(releases Catherine)

I can't. I beg your very most holy
majesty to show her mercy.

PETER

(mad with rage)

I knew it! You slept with her!
Get out! Get out! Get out!

Peter swigs from the brandy bottle and smashes it to the floor.

As Khuska exits, he hears--

PETER (O.S.)

I'll do it myself!

INT. WINTER PALACE HALLWAY--CONTINUOUS

With SIX PRUSSIAN GUARDS, Baron von Metz is waiting outside the Tsar's Suite as Khuska closes the door behind him.

Khuska and Baron von Metz hear a SCREAM and a CRASH from inside the Tsar's Suite and recognize the past repeating itself.

INT. TSAR'S SUITE--CONTINUOUS

Peter knocks over the desk and seizes Catherine by the neck. She's fighting but losing.

Neither of them see Khuska enter the room, grab a cane, come up behind Peter, lift the cane...and Khuska just can't hit the Tsar.

Peter turns, startled to see Khuska. He releases Catherine who falls choking to the floor.

PETER
 (re: the cane)
 You would hit your Tsar?

Khuska sees Catherine helpless on the floor, gasping for air.

KHUSKA
 Not happily.

Khuska clubs Peter who drops unconscious to the floor.

Catherine and Khuska are equally shocked by what he has done.

KHUSKA
 (to himself)
 I raised my hand against my Tsar.
 The world is too small to hide in.

Struggling to her feet, Catherine takes the cane from Khuska and pulls a knife from the handle. She lunges at the prostrate Peter to gut him and when Khuska stops her, nearly guts him before the blood vengeance drains from her.

KHUSKA
 (re: murder of Peter)
 You'd damn both our souls.

CATHERINE
 Mine will be a simple execution.
 You, he'll torture.

KHUSKA
 We act as is right and trust to
 God.

CATHERINE
 Your damned virtue.

KHUSKA
 Virtue walks on two legs but never
 so fast that I can't catch it.

CATHERINE
 (reluctantly yielding)
 Do we wait for him to wake up?

Catherine and Peter start for the door. Then Khuska returns.

KHUSKA
 (to unconscious Peter)
 Forgive me, your very most holy
 majesty.

Catherine also returns--

CATHERINE
 (to unconscious Peter)
 Forgive me, your very most holy
 majesty.

--to drop a vase on Peter's head.

INT. WINTER PALACE HALLWAY--CONTINUOUS

Two of the Prussian Guards stare at the door to the Tsar's
 suite.

PRUSSIAN GUARD #1
 (in German; subtitled)
 Theirs is a noisy marriage.

PRUSSIAN GUARD #2
 (in German; subtitled)
 You want noisy? Come home drunk to
 my wife.

The door opens and a stern Khuska escorts a chastised
 Catherine.

KHUSKA
 (to Baron von Metz)
 The Tsar orders the Tsarina to the
 Pretikov Nunnery. All husbands
 should have such power.

CATHERINE
 (to Baron von Metz)
 The Devil whispered sin to me and I
 listened with a woman's weakness.

KHUSKA
 (to Baron von Metz)
 The Tsar mourns. The Tsar orders
 you to guard the door. Let no one
 in. The Tsar wishes to pray alone.

BARON VON METZ
 (suspicious)
 Myself I ask the Tsar.
 (reaches for doorknob)

Catherine repeats something she once asked Baron von Metz.

CATHERINE
 "Noble envoy, would King Frederick
 ask Russians to defend his person
 and his throne?"

Baron von Metz knows that Khuska knows that he knows. Ready to order the arrest of Catherine and Khuska, Baron von Metz hesitates and then paraphrases Khuska.

BARON VON METZ
 It is true I do not know her...
 (indicates Catherine)
 ...but I know him...
 (indicates Peter)
 ...and him I do not like.

Baron von Metz signals the Prussian Guards to line up.

BARON VON METZ
 (salutes Catherine)
 Prussian Guards return to the
 barracks.
 (saying good-bye to
 Khuska)
 I think it safer for King Frederick
 you never visit Prussia.

Baron von Metz marches the Prussian Guard in one direction while Catherine and Khuska hurry in the other.

Princess Sophia passes Catherine and Khuska in the hall. Why are they rushing?

Princess Sophia finds no one guarding Peter's suite. Where are the guards?

PRINCESS SOPHIA
 (opening door)
 Peter? Peter?

Running now, Catherine and Khuska turn the corner as they hear--

PRINCESS SOPHIA (O.S.)
 (distant shouting)
 Guards! Servants! Doctors!
 Villains! Traitors! Thieves!

EXT. WINTER PALACE ENTRANCE--NIGHT--MINUTES LATER

Prince Micklemas rides up the snow-covered drive in a troika, an open sleigh drawn by three horses. The DRIVER stops the troika at the palace entryway where FOUR FOOTMEN wait.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
 Seal the palace, traitors threaten
 the Tsar.

HEAD FOOTMAN
Sad news, excellency.

The driver follows Prince Micklemas into the palace.

Out of the palace comes Khuska and Catherine.

KHUSKA
Open the palace, the crisis is
over.

HEAD FOOTMAN
Good news, excellency.

Khuska takes up the reins from the front seat as Catherine sits down on the rear seat. They drive off as Prince Micklemas' driver returns.

DRIVER
Where is the Prince's troika?

HEAD FOOTMAN
(oops; to other footmen)
We're on report again.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD--NIGHT--20 MINUTES LATER

Under a full moon, the horses pull the troika with its sleigh bells jingling along a country road at a relaxed trot.

Exhilarated by their escape, breathing deep of the winter wind, Khuska and Catherine look at each other and can't help but laugh.

KHUSKA
(catching himself)
It is wrong to laugh.

CATHERINE
(looking back)
They are not laughing.

Closing quick behind them are two soldier-filled troikas.

The pursuing troikas draw inexorably closer. On the left, DRIVER #1's troika carries SOLDIERS #1 and #2. On the right, DRIVER #2'S troika carries SOLDIERS #3 and #4.

CATHERINE
I would remind you that my capture
means your death.

KHUSKA

I wasn't thinking of stopping.
(whips horses)

The three troikas plunge into the forest where the road dips and bends, widens and narrows, crosses frozen streams and splits around clumps of trees. Khuska fights to control his racing horses--anything might flip the troika or run it smash into a tree.

Lunging forward and falling back, the pursuers sideswipe Khuska's troika as the soldiers swing sabers at Khuska's reins and head.

Soldier #1 draws a pistol and takes aim at Khuska.

Catherine defiantly shields Khuska with her body.

SOLDIER #2

(stopping Soldier #1)

We capture the Tsarina alive!

Soldiers #3 and #4 leap from their troika and land atop Khuska. The reins slip from his hands as the horses gallop on in blind panic.

Catherine claws at Soldier #4 who turns to bat her away. The troika hits a rut and they both flip off the back.

CATHERINE

Khuska!

Her desperate voice panics Khuska. He pitches Soldier #3 out of the troika.

Catherine and Soldier #4 hang onto the rear of the careening troika, their feet dragging in the snow.

Khuska stomps Soldier #4 who tumbles away.

Pulling Catherine to safety, Khuska grabs the reins and snakes the troika through a wicked curve.

As the road widens and the three troikas run side-by-side, Catherine takes up the whip and lashes at the soldiers.

The whip slices open the cheek of Soldier #2. Raging, he draws his pistol.

SOLDIER #2

(aiming at Catherine)

Damn the orders!

SOLIDER #1

No! Shoot the horses!

Soldiers #1 and #2 take aim at the horses pulling Khuska's troika--

CATHERINE

Khuska!

--and fire into the neck of the nearest horse.

KHUSKA

Jump!

Khuska and Catherine jump from their troika into the one which now carries only Driver #2.

The wounded horse falls dead and drags the other two horses down. The empty troika flips, rolls and bursts apart.

Khuska and Driver #2 fight as Catherine picks up the reins.

The other troika pulls alongside. But before Soldiers #1 and #2 can jump over, Catherine rams their troika with her troika as Khuska heaves Driver #2 at Driver #1.

The soldiers' troika careens off the road and runs headlong into an oak.

It takes both Khuska and Catherine pulling on the reins to slow their troika and avoid the same fate.

EXT. FROZEN LAKE--NIGHT--40 MINUTES LATER

The moon has set leaving the cloudless night sky filled with a billion stars.

Khuska and Catherine sit side-by-side as their troika glides across a vast frozen lake. It's as if this white world were the whole world and no one else lived in it.

Catherine is tenderly--seductively?--wrapping a bandage around Khuska's torn and bleeding hand.

CATHERINE

You have very nice hands...when they're not about my throat.

Khuska takes back his bandaged hand from Catherine.

CATHERINE

If we could keep riding forever and never come to the shore, never come to springtime, would you wish it?

KHUSKA

To be swallowed in a winter dream? I would be happy with just a nap. The road always comes to where we must choose.

CATHERINE

One road leads to the frontier and...Berlin...Paris...London...?

KHUSKA

Does no road lead to my village?

CATHERINE

One road leads to Count Radishchev. Would you carry me there?

KHUSKA

If such is your wish.

CATHERINE

He claims I would make him Tsar. Would you make him Tsar?

KHUSKA

You would not make him Tsar.

CATHERINE

Elizabeth, Empress and Autocrat of all the Russias, wore a man's uniform and rode at the head of the Preobrazhensky Regiment to claim her throne.

KHUSKA

And you believe in tradition.

CATHERINE

How is it that from where you were born and from where I was born we are together riding across a frozen lake on this night of nights?

KHUSKA

God is entitled to His sense of humor.

CATHERINE

Upon our first meeting, you
anointed me Tsar. I have a destiny
to save Russia from Peter. From
Count Radishchev and his kind as
far as that goes.

KHUSKA

Catherine, Empress and Autocrat of
all the Russias?

CATHERINE

You have a destiny. It is you and
only you I can rely on.

KHUSKA

Do not ask for my oath. I once
made an oath to Tsar Peter.

CATHERINE

It is God's will.

KHUSKA

If God changes His mind, He will
let us know.

The troika, very small as seen against the vast Russian
winter landscape, veers from one path onto another.

EXT. ISMAILOVSKY BARRACKS PARADE GROUND--DAWN

As the sun rises, soldiers dressed in new blue uniforms mill
about in muttering confusion.

Dressed in a man's white uniform, Catherine emerges from the
barracks followed by Count Radishchev.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

(panicked)

They arrested Turnipov, a gossip
even before you put his fingers in
a vise.

CATHERINE

(resolute)

Razumovsky and Menshikov won't
leave their barracks.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

What if they do? Paris! We would
shine in--

CATHERINE

(strokes his cheek)

The moment is upon us. There will be no other.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

You told me we couldn't steal the Tsar's potatoes.

CATHERINE

This is the gamble we play because of your recklessness.

Waiting for Catherine is Khuska who holds the reins to her horse.

COUNT RADISHCHEV

What's he doing here?!

CATHERINE

Are you unaware, Khuska is God's messenger.

(to Khuska)

Do you have a message for Count Radishchev?

KHUSKA

I am forgetting. Is he the hawk or the parakeet?

His manhood challenged, Count Radishchev draws his saber but not daring to strike Khuska....

COUNT RADISHCHEV

(waves saber; to soldiers)

Assemble! Assemble!

Khuska boosts Catherine into the saddle.

CATHERINE

(to soldiers)

Who dresses you in Prussian blue uniforms?! Peter!

(off soldiers' boos)

Who enlists you in King Frederick's wars?! Peter!

(off soldiers' boos)

I am your defender! I am Mother Russia's defender!

(off soldiers' cheers)

You are Mother Russia's defenders!

(off soldiers' cheers)

We march to St. Petersburg!

(MORE)

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
 (off soldiers' cheers)
 But first cast off those silly blue
 uniforms!

SOLDIERS
 HUZDAH! HUZDAH! HUZDAH!

From the barracks' second story windows, soldiers throw green uniforms down to the soldiers below who are tearing off their hated blue uniforms.

A HANDSOME SOLDIER offers Catherine a sword-knot for her uniform.

CATHERINE
 Now I am properly equipped. What
 is your name, sergeant?

HANDSOME SOLDIER
 Grigory Potemkin, your majesty.

CATHERINE
 Grigory Potemkin. I shall remember
 your name, sergeant.

Khuska and Count Radishchev both eye Grigory Potemkin with suspicion.

EXT. COURTYARD, WINTER PALACE--ONE HOUR LATER

In her man's white uniform, Catherine rides at the head of the Ismailovsky Regiment. She is flanked by Khuska and Count Radishchev.

INT. TSAR'S SUITE--AT THAT MOMENT

Prince Micklemas sits at the desk calmly writing out a document.

Princess Sophia tries to calm both herself and an agitated Peter who paces the room buckling and unbuckling his sword.

PRINCESS SOPHIA
 On their wedding night, the duke
 said to the duchess, "I offer you
 my honor."

PETER

(to Prince Micklemas)
Did Zukov come back? Vorontzov?

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

Sending envoys to Catherine does no good. They end by joining her.

PRINCESS SOPHIA

(to Peter; false cheerfulness)
The duchess says to the duke, "I honor your offer."

PETER

(to Prince Micklemas)
Then I fight.
(buckles on sword)

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

By all means. Troops are garrisoned all across Russia. Go and rally them.

PETER

What if they don't rally? What if they hunt me like a boar? With spears!
(unbuckles sword)
Once Catherine sees me, the Tsar, her husband, I demand she come to her senses. I should do that, yes?

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

If Catherine were here and you were there, she would know what to do.

PRINCESS SOPHIA

(to Peter; fading cheerfulness)
The duke again says, "I offer you my honor," and the duchess again says, "I honor your offer."

PETER

(draws sword)
Then I fight! I fight alone. I fight to the death! For Russia! For....

APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS, DRUMMING and CHEERS echo in the hall. Peter and Princess Sophia stare frozen at the closed door. Prince Micklemas keeps writing the document.

PRINCESS SOPHIA

(weakly to herself)

That's the way it was all wedding-
night long, on-her, off-her, on-
her, off-her.

The door swings open and in walks Catherine. Behind her are Khuska, Count Radishchev and a hallway full of soldiers.

Confronted by Catherine, Peter drops his sword.

Signaled by Catherine, Khuska pushes Count Radishchev out of the room and closes the door on the soldiers in the hallway.

CATHERINE

(to Peter)

I will spare you the honor of being
Prisoner Number Two. You will have
your estate, you will have your
dogs, you will have time to
practice the violin. After you
abdicate.

PETER

(shaky courage)

And if I don't? If I demand as
Tsar and husband--

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

(holds up document)

I've prepare the articles of
abdication.

(off Catherine's & Peter's
looks)

I expected someone to abdicate
today. It only requires a name.

PRINCESS SOPHIA

Oh, Peter....

(give up)

All resistance crushed, Peter signs his abdication.

PETER

(to Khuska)

I blame you.

Catherine takes the abdication. Now that it's done, the moment is more melancholy than triumphant.

CATHERINE

(to Peter)

You will be treated kindly. I
still remember our happier days.

PETER
 (plaintive to Catherine)
 May Princess Sophia be allowed to
 accompany me?

CATHERINE
 I so order it.
 (insincere to Princess
 Sophia)
 I wish you all happiness in exile.

Not at all pleased, Princess Sophia can only give Peter a wan
 smile.

CATHERINE
 (to Prince Micklemas)
 For someone loyal to Peter, you
 have been most helpful.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
 I am loyal to Russia, not to any
 one Tsar. Today I am loyal to you
 for today you are Russia.

CATHERINE
 My gratitude and regard. Do you
 wish to be spared exile with Peter?

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
 My gratitude and regard. And may I
 ask that your imperial majesty
 release my love-fool sister from
 exile with Peter?

CATHERINE
 For your gratitude and regard, yes.

Hugely relieved, Princess Sophia can only give a what-can-I-
 do shrug to Peter.

Holding Peter's abdication, Catherine exits to the hall where
 the O.S. CHEERING of the soldiers greet her.

Peter collapses in a chair, a broken man. Princess Sophia
 scurries about collecting her jewelry and anything else of
 value.

Which leaves Khuska and Prince Micklemas facing each other.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
 (to Khuska; bemused)
 Your final report, Aide Militaire
 Extraordinaire?

KHUSKA

Noble sir, I am a condemned man, if
not in this life, then the next.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS

I'm not so sure. I believed God
had given you to me for my
purposes. Now it appears, God
wanted me to serve you.

EXT. COURTYARD, WINTER PALACE--DAY

A V.O. MALE CHOIR sings a joyous TE DEUM.

Outside the Winter Palace, all of St. Petersburg jams the
courtyard, electric with anticipation waiting for--

ON THE BALCONY

In her coronation gown and wearing the crown, Catherine steps
onto the balcony. The crowd cheers and their adoration
intoxicates her.

CATHERINE

Join me, Colonel Khuska.

In his heavily tasseled and medaled new uniform, Khuska steps
onto the balcony. The crowd cheers and the adoration
intoxicates him.

KHUSKA

(not so humble)

A colonel is a fine man to be.

BACK IN THE CROWD

Happy as on the day of their wedding, Pavel and Ludmilla, who
holds Catherine's baby, wave at Khuska and Catherine.

PAVEL

There's Khuska!

LUDMILLA

Did he ever thank you for hitting
him on the head with a rock?

BACK ON THE BALCONY

KHUSKA

Do you see all of St. Petersburg
here to cheer you?

CATHERINE

From this balcony I see all of
Mother Russia. From the Baltic to
the Pacific, half of Europe and
half of Asia, 19 million souls that
I rule.

KHUSKA

Tsarina, Empress, Little Mother.

CATHERINE

Has your hand healed?
(takes Khuska's hand)
With all of Russia to explore,
where would should we begin?

KHUSKA

(withdraws his hand)
Your majesty would grow tired of
me.

CATHERINE

They say I am like a man that way.
(gestures to crowd)
If Peter stood here tomorrow, they
would cheer as loud. I speak of
this to you and no one else--19
million souls and who have I to
trust? Him? Him?

Catherine points to Prince Micklemas and Count Radishchev
waiting inside the Winter Palace.

KHUSKA

Trust me, your most holy imperial
majesty.

The V.O. MALE CHOIR'S JOYOUS TE DEUM swells to fill the
soundtrack. Catherine speaks to Khuska and he turns starkly
somber.

THE JOYOUS TE DEUM SHIFTS INTO A MINOR KEY and continues to
play over the next M.O.S. SCENES.

INT. ENCLOSED SLEIGH (MOVING)--DAY

A week ago no one could deny Peter his will. Now he's an unshaven prisoner in a stained uniform. Hallowed out, Peter accuses and accuses Khuska who can only pretend not to hear.

EXT. BEKBULA MANOR--CONTINUOUS

Out of the sleigh steps Khuska and Peter. Here the deposed Tsar begins his life imprisonment. Servants collect the luggage.

INT. BEKBULA MANOR--CONTINUOUS

It's a musty, rather sad manor hardly worthy of a minor noble. Khuska leads Peter to the dining room where a meal has been set for Peter.

Khuska then directs the servants carrying the luggage up the staircase.

Behind Khuska's back, Count Radishchev and Lieutenant Turnipov slip into the dining room.

Noises in the dining room alarm Khuska and he runs back.

Count Radishchev and Lieutenant Turnipov each jerk on an end of the rope looped around Peter's neck. Peter thrashes like an animal dragged to the slaughter.

Khuska knocks Count Radishchev and Lieutenant Turnipov aside, but it's too late. While they escape, Khuska cradles the dying Peter.

As the V.O. HYMN OF THE MALE CHOIR fades to silence, Peter dies, his eyes accusing Khuska. In the doorway, the servants crowd together, their eyes accusing Khuska, too.

INT. ANTEROOM--DAY

Catherine wears the black gown and veil of the mourning widow but acts like the methodical executive. Sitting at a desk, she signs the state papers handed her by Prince Micklemas.

CATHERINE

(lightly)

Absurd. Who would wish to leave
St. Petersburg?

KHUSKA (O.S.)
I make St. Petersburg a memory on
the road behind me.

CATHERINE
(in earnest)
Leave St. Petersburg and I will
have you hanged.

Khuska is dressed in a simple black suit devoid of rank. He will not be turned by threats.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
(to Khuska)
Peter died of the colic.
Radishchev is now ambassador to
Portugal. If he returns before
called, he too will die of the
colic.

CATHERINE
(to Khuska)
Does that ease your conscience?

KHUSKA
You ordered it.

CATHERINE
Radishchev came to me bragging of
it, offering it as his engagement
ring.

KHUSKA
He knew what you wanted.

PRINCE MICKLEMAS
Bad form. Bad precedent. Leaves a
stain.

Catherine takes Khuska by the arm and leads him into--

INT. TSAR'S CHAPEL--CONTINUOUS

Under the gaze of those exquisite gold icons, a chapel full of mourners part and bow before Catherine and Khuska. The mourners accuse Catherine with their eyes.

CATHERINE
(re: mourners)
They think I ordered Peter's death.
For all of history, I am condemned
as thief and murderess.

Peter's corpse lies in an open casket. Catherine forces Khuska to kneel with her and then lifts the cloth that covers Peter's nearly black face.

CATHERINE

If I am guilty, you are guilty.

KHUSKA

We are guilty together.

CATHERINE

And never to sit on your porch to
fish and talk with great men?

Their anger at each other replaced by their sorrow for Peter, Khuska and Catherine rise, cross themselves, and sit on chairs. The mourners resume their procession around Peter's casket.

CATHERINE

Who will protect me from the Devil
and remind me of God?

KHUSKA

Your majesty will keep her vows to
Mother Russia. I will keep my vows
to my wife and children.

CATHERINE

You regret choosing me over Peter.

KHUSKA

A stranger told me of a wizard--

CATHERINE

Why did you choose me over Peter?

KHUSKA

--with eyes to see the future.

CATHERINE

Because I would not war on Denmark?
Because I was kind to Pavel?

KHUSKA

With his eyes to see the future, he
saw Catherine giving glory to
Russia where Peter could not.

CATHERINE

Where is this wizard?

KHUSKA

The Devil--or was it God?--blinded
him. Now he wanders like the rest
of us from crossroads to
crossroads, praying for guidance,
guessing at consequences.

Catherine recognizes that her journey with Khuska is near its
end.

CATHERINE

(saying good-bye)
Admiral of the Pots....

KHUSKA

(rising & bowing)
Mistress of the Drips....

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

INT. RUSSIAN SERF'S CABIN--EARLY MORNING

Beneath the icon of the Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus,
Khuska's wife Illiana stirs in her sleep.

KHUSKA (O.S.)

Wife and mother arise. The cow
will be milking herself.

ILLIANA

(half-asleep)
Tell her to feed the chickens, too.
(bolts awake)
Khuska!

She believed him dead and here he stands wearing the suit of
a middling merchant. Illiana seizes Khuska in a fierce
embrace.

A baby cries and Khuska sees an infant lying next to Illiana.
Has Illiana been unfaithful?

ILLIANA

(off Khuska's look)
Travel's made you no wiser. Serge
married Elisaveta, as you decided.
Hold your grandson.

Awestruck, Khuska picks up his grandson. Across the cabin
Serge and Elisaveta wake up to see Granddad Khuska. Then all
of Khuska's children come away and JOYOUSLY AD LIB mob him.

ILLIANA

You kept your promise. You came back to me.

Khuska shrugs. A promise is a promise.

KHUSKA

I promised not to be a general so the Tsarina made me an admiral. With a pension.

ILLIANA

Khuska, your tongue still wags without ever tasting truth.

KHUSKA

Truth walks on two legs and we share every meal. Did I promise you a gift worthy of a tsarina?

Khuska takes out one of Catherine's jewel-encrusted broaches.

ILLIANA

(horrified)

Khuska, you stole this!

KHUSKA

Paid for once, twice, yet again. Yours for a kiss, wife and mother.

ILLIANA

Don't kiss me with lies on your lips. Arrested. Prison. This time God won't return you to me.

Knowing he'll never convince her by words, Khuska pulls Illiana from the cabin.

EXT. RUSSIAN SERF'S COTTAGE--CONTINUOUS

Carrying his grandson, Khuska exits his cabin followed by Illiana and their children. Spring has returned to the land.

There sits Catherine in her royal carriage attended by her Cossack guard. Illiana's stunned into silence.

KHUSKA

Her most holy imperial majesty wishes to travel and see the lives of the common folk.

ILLIANA
(bows to Catherine)
She's very grand.

KHUSKA
Already some call her Catherine the
Great. I've not made up my mind.

ILLIANA
Russia does not know what to think
until you think it.

KHUSKA
For some reason she wanted to see
you first thing in the morning.

Illiana realizes she's a disheveled sight in a nightshirt and runs back inside the cabin. Her children cautiously move forward to inspect the carriage, the Cossacks and Catherine.

KHUSKA
(to God)
I suppose I thank You for all this?

Khuska looks up to heaven...the sky darkens...and then the sun bursts through the clouds in a cascade of light shining upon the humble serf.

Under the cathedral vault of the sky, across fields and forests that sweep to the horizon, the immensity of Russia dwarfs the tiny figures of the serf, his family and the Tsarina.

FADE OUT.

THE END