The Commissar’s Daughter

by

Zoe C. Broad
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INT. SHOW TRIAL - DAY

A LARGE CROWD is gathered in an enormous COURTROOM. The audience is restless, energetic. Eager. At first glance, it looks as if they might be waiting to see a show.

Facing the empty stage, we DOLLY through the crowd.

First, we pass whole families. They’re poor looking, dressed in tattered clothing. Some are barefoot. Men and women clutch their children protectively, grim-faced and perspiring heavily in the summer heat.

As we move closer to the front, the crowd shifts, turning into a sea of elegantly dressed men and women. They’re middle-aged, dignified looking. Dressed in neatly tailored suits and crisp dresses, despite the soaring temperatures.

We CUT to a CLOSE UP of JOSEPH STALIN, dressed in a white military uniform. He sits in a throne-like chair to the side of the stage, his beady eyes combing the crowd suspiciously.

We CUT back into the crowd, and the camera continues to TRACK slowly forward.

As we are almost up against the front of the stage, the camera STOPS, HOLDS on a splash of color. An elegant red sleeveless dress. The YOUNG WOMAN wearing the dress beams brightly up at the stage.

This is YULIYA MIKHAILOVNA VAZOV, 22, idealistic, strong-willed, heavily indoctrinated, but just beginning to ask questions about the communist system that she has grown up watching her family defend.

Her FATHER, MIKHAIL ALEXANDROVICH VAZOV, stands next to her, protectively close. He’s tall and dignified, coldly confident. He is a part of the communist elite, a branch of supposedly egalitarian society that denies its own privilege.

MIKHAIL
(to Yuliya)
You’ll learn a lot today.

Yuliya nods, smiles up at Mikhail eagerly.
Mikhail looks around at the enormous crowd behind him, then rubs his hands together enthusiastically.

MIKHAIL (CONT'D)
Excellent to see our comrades coming together.

YULIYA
(very earnest)
The power of communism.

Mikhail smiles, pleased.

Yuliya’s mother, IZOLDA, expensively dressed, heavily made up, and as paranoid as she is melodramatic, leans over to shush Yuliya.

IZOLDA
Yuliya. Pay attention.

Yuliya frowns but says nothing.

The TRIAL LEADER, an official-looking man dressed in a dark suit, crosses to the front of the room.

Two UNIFORMED GUARDS enter from a door to the outside. They drag a MAN WITH A BLACK CLOTH OVER HIS HEAD to the defense stand and present him to the trial leader.

The guards yank the cloth off of the man’s head. The man blinks, blinded by the light inside the room. The crowd gasps.

The man is skeletally thin. His hair is matted, and a bulbous purple-green bruise stands out against his pale left temple. He looks beaten down, barely clinging to the thinnest threads of his sanity. Too pathetic to be dangerous.

TRIAL LEADER
Grigory Zinoviev. Comrade Stalin and the people charge you with propagating anti-Party slander and falsely indoctrinating your supporters. How do you plead?

Zinoviev takes a small step forward. He tries to yell out to the crowd, but his voice comes out only as a grating whisper.

ZINOVIEV
I plead not guilty.

Stalin scowls. A grim murmur spreads across the crowd.
Yuliya looks up at her father, trying to gauge his reaction. He remains focused on the stage, a small, self-satisfied smile flickering about his thinly pursed lips.

The trial leader gestures to the guards.

TRIAL LEADER
Take him away.

The guards handcuff Zinoviev and drag him out of the courtroom.

ZINOVIEV
(calling out as he is removed)
I have done nothing wrong!

The crowd begins to cheer wildly as Zinoviev is taken off the stage. Mikhail and Izolda applaud vigorously.

Yuliya looks after Zinoviev, furrowing her brow in recognition. She turns to her father.

YULIYA
Father, I remember that man!

IZOLDA
(very paranoid)
Yuliya! Comrade Stalin is watching.

YULIYA
(to her father, ignoring her mother)
We used to see him at dinner parties! Why didn’t they allow our comrade a defense?

MIKHAIL
He’s an enemy of the people, not a comrade.

YULIYA
But shouldn’t he be allowed to defend himself?

MIKHAIL
(growing exasperated)
He’s an anti-Party criminal, Yuliya.

YULIYA
But --
MIKHAIL
(cutting her off)
That’s enough.

TRIAL LEADER
I now call forth Vladimir Lunarsky.

The crowd quiets down.

MIKHAIL
(whispering to Yuliya)
Every man on trial today deserves to be killed.

EXT. HOUSE ON THE EMBANKMENT - LATER

We HOLD on a tableau of the HOUSE ON THE EMBANKMENT, a massive apartment complex erected to provide luxury housing for Stalinist nobility.

Although, of course, there is no nobility under communism. Or so the elites insist.

The grey apartment complex is a block wide and eleven stories high. A cage full of riches, power and fear.

INT. YULIYA’S HOUSE ON THE EMBANKMENT APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Yuliya unpacks boxes in her apartment’s living room. The shades are drawn.

Izolda stands in Yuliya’s doorway, watching her unpack. Beads of moisture have formed on her forehead in the stifling heat, and she wipes them away theatrically.

IZOLDA
Sweetheart?

Yuliya looks up.

IZOLDA (CONT’D)
(trying to sound casual)
Are you interested in any of the men from University?

YULIYA
(uninterested)
It hasn’t even resumed.

IZOLDA
You could have spent the whole summer thinking about someone.
Yuliya turns away from her mother, goes back to unpacking.

YULIYA

I haven’t.

IZOLDA

Well why not? There must be some handsome men in your classes!

YULIYA

(getting irritated)

Can we talk about something else?

A beat, as Izolda searches for a new conversation topic.

IZOLDA

I’m happy you finally have your own apartment.

Yuliya turns around, smiles politely at Izolda.

YULIYA

Me too.

IZOLDA

And we’re just three floors below you if you need anything.

YULIYA

I’ll be fine.

Yuliya takes a few books out of a box, places them on a bookshelf. “Socialist Realism’s Best.” “The Complete Collection of Pushkin.” “Poetry for the Young Communist.”

An idea dawns on her. It’s her turn to act casual.

YULIYA (CONT’D)

Mother?

IZOLDA

Yes?

YULIYA

Do you know what any of those men actually did?

Izolda looks nervously at the molding on one of the far walls. Her eyes trace the wall for a moment before

IZOLDA

Your father already told you. They’re anti-Party criminals.
YULIYA
But they must have committed terrible crimes.

IZOLDA
Yuliya. Stop it.

She shoots Yuliya another fearful look and then begins to walk toward her. She’s careful to keep her voice natural as she travels.

IZOLDA (CONT’D)
They defied Comrade Stalin.

She looks up again at the far wall, then bends down and whispers into Yuliya’s ear.

IZOLDA (CONT’D)
You have to be more careful. You never know who’s listening.

YULIYA
(rolling her eyes, dismissive)
We’re exemplary communists.

IZOLDA
It doesn’t matter.

We HEAR A KNOCK ON THE DOOR. Izolda jumps, takes a moment to compose herself. She opens the door, and Mikhail steps inside. He’s still dressed in a suit and holding a briefcase.

MIKHAIL
All moved in?

Izolda takes note of the briefcase, disappointed.

IZOLDA
You’re leaving before dinner?

MIKHAIL
Comrade Stalin wants to discuss the trial. It wouldn’t be wise to keep him waiting.

IZOLDA
No.

MIKHAIL
Yuliya, we should talk about your poem for the Commissar’s Ball tomorrow.
Yuliya stops unpacking, looks up at her father. Her face brightens.

YULIYA
Okay.

MIKHAIL
Did you expand the brightest star passage like I suggested?

YULIYA
I did.

MIKHAIL
It’s much better now, isn’t it?

YULIYA
I think so.

MIKHAIL
And you’re titling it “The Luckiest”?

YULIYA
If you don’t think that’s too simple.

MIKHAIL
I think it aptly summarizes the poem’s central message.

Yuliya offers her father an enthusiastic nod.

YULIYA
I think so too.

Mikhail pats Yuliya fondly on the head.

MIKHAIL
It’s a lovely reflection of Comrade Stalin’s leadership.

YULIYA
(thrilled)
Thank you!

MIKHAIL
(smiling at her)
I believe in you. I wouldn’t have asked Comrade Stalin to let you read if I didn’t.

He turns to leave.
YULIYA
Father --

MIKHAIL
Yes?

YULIYA
I have a question about the trial today.

Mikhail sighs impatiently.

MIKHAIL
Yuliya, you have to stop with these questions.

YULIYA
I just --

MIKHAIL
(cutting her off)
-- They’re counterrevolutionaries.
That’s all you need to know.

He turns and exits the apartment, leaving Yuliya staring behind him, frustrated.

INT. COMMISSAR’S BALL - NIGHT

We FOCUS on an enormous portrait of Stalin mounted on one of the dance hall’s tall walls. Stalin sits regally, dressed in a neatly pressed white uniform, which stands out against the deep crimson backdrop.

The camera TILTS DOWN, and we see that the real Stalin is perched under the painting. He sits in another throne-like chair, dressed in a similar white uniform and smoking a pipe.

Stalin chats easily with Mikhail like old comrades. But, once again, his eyes never leave the crowd. A suspicious expression seems permanently etched in the low creases around his mouth and eyelids.

The camera begins to TRACK across the room, revealing Soviet society’s best gathered in an ornately decorated ballroom. Music plays in the background, and guests waltz across the expansive space.

Everyone is dressed to impress, and most are comfortably intoxicated. Guests not on the dance floor chatter amongst themselves, mingling merrily.
Yuliya chats with a group of women her father’s age. She’s comfortably included in the conversation, but her eyes wander around the room. She’s bored, restless.

WOMAN #3
Come on, show us!

WOMAN #1 pulls back the corner of her dress to show off her stockings. The women around her giggle ferociously.

WOMAN #2
You devil!

WOMAN #1
New from the factory today!

WOMAN #3
Comrade Stalin has accomplished so much.

The women all voice their agreement. One turns to Yuliya reverently.

WOMAN #3 (CONT’D)
You must be so proud of your father.

Yuliya nods, distracted.

YULIYA
Excuse me.

Yuliya begins to cross the room. People bow to her, kiss her hands as she walks.

A STOUT MAN blocks her path. He cups her hand in a firm handshake, then kisses it wetly.

OLEG
Comrade Yuliya.

Yuliya tries to mask her disgust.

YULIYA
Comrade Oleg.

Oleg continues to shake her hand.

OLEG
Yuliya, you’ll drop by my apartment soon, won’t you? You know my Pavel is twenty-four now.

He wags a finger at Yuliya, too close to her face.
OLEG (CONT’D)
Ready for marriage.

Yuliya smiles politely, tries to navigate around Oleg.

YULIYA
How wonderful!

Oleg continues to block Yuliya’s path. He winks at her, wags a finger in her face for a second time. She takes a small step backwards.

OLEG
The more healthy Soviet families, the better the fate of our glorious nation.

Yuliya forces another smile.

YULIYA
I’ll keep Pavel in mind.

A MAN makes his way to the podium at the front of the ballroom. He clears his throat importantly.

MAN
Excuse me!

The party guests stop speaking, turn to face the man.

MAN (CONT’D)
At this point in the evening, I’d like to invite a very special guest to the podium. Comrades, please join me in welcoming Yuliya Mikhaelovna Vazov, the talented daughter of our very own Commissar of Education, Mikhail Alexandrovich Vazov. She will be sharing with us what I have been told is a truly spectacular poem.

The man begins to applaud, and the crowd follows suit. Yuliya makes her way to the front of the room. She’s nervous, excited. She takes the podium and smiles broadly at her audience.

YULIYA
Thank you for having me. I’ll be reading a poem called “The Luckiest.”

Yuliya takes a moment at the podium. The crowd is silent, waiting for her to begin. Finally
YULIYA (CONT’D)
I am the luckiest girl in the world for I have not one father, but two.
My own father,
and Father Stalin,
my intellectual, spiritual and moral guide.
My brightest star,
who points me to do right,
my protector,
who shields me from harm’s beams,
My compass
who shows me who I want to be.
The only thing better than one father is two.
And so all of the girls in the Soviet Union are the luckiest girls in the world.

The crowd explodes into applause.

Stalin takes a long drag of his pipe, than twirls its stem around in his mustache. An expression of his pleasure.

Yuliya beams at the crowd, delighted.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
Thank you so much.

Yuliya steps down from the podium, drifts back into the crowd. The party guests have already returned to their prior conversations.

Mikhail joins Yuliya.

MIKHAIL
Comrade Stalin thought it was excellent.

YULIYA (elated)
Really?!

MIKHAIL
You were lovely.

YULIYA
You thought so?

VIKTOR (O.S.)
Excuse me.
Yuliya turns, sees VIKTOR GRIGORIEV CHIRKOFF, mid-50s, very showily dressed. Viktor extends a hand.

    VIKTOR (CONT’D)
    My name is Viktor Chirkoff.

Mikhail shakes Viktor’s hand before Yuliya can.

    MIKHAIL
    Mikhail Vazov. This is my daughter, Yuliya.

    VIKTOR
    I’m compiling a collection of exemplary Socialist Realist poetry, and I wondered if you would be open to publishing your piece?

Yuliya turns to her father, her face glowing with excitement.

    YULIYA
    I --

    MIKHAIL
    (to Viktor, cutting her off)
    -- Absolutely. We’d love to.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY – LATER

Yuliya steps off her apartment’s elevator and into the hallway. She’s light on her toes, still giddy from the events of the evening.

She rounds the corner and sees a YOUNG MAN DRESSED IN A SOLDIER’S UNIFORM holding an enormous moving box and struggling to open his front door.

This is ALEXANDER PYOTERVICH DMITRIEV, 26, earnest, perceptive, idealistic, extremely handsome.

Alexander turns as he hears Yuliya’s footsteps. Their eyes meet briefly. Alexander tries to raise a hand to wave at her, but instead he drops his box onto the floor.

The cardboard box tears and breaks open, and papers spill everywhere.

Alexander stoops over immediately, struggles to gather all of the papers.

Yuliya laughs out loud, genuinely amused by the handsome stranger. She grins at him flirtatiously.
Alexander grins back sheepishly. Yuliya steps past him and walks to her apartment door. She takes out her keys, then turns back, allowing herself one last glance at Alexander.

Yuliya smiles, then turns the key and opens her front door.

INT. PROFESSOR PETROV’S CLASSROOM - DAY

Yuliya sits attentively at a small desk in the front row of her classroom.

Her professor is a small, wiry, eccentric looking man in his early 70s, with tiny spectacles and a strong will. This is PROFESSOR PETROV.

PETROV
Welcome to fourth-year poetry. My name is Professor Petrov.

Yuliya smiles to herself. Petrov begins to pass out small composition notebooks and packets of copied poetry.

PETROV (CONT’D)
The packets contain samples of successful Socialist Realist poems. I’ll expect you to study them and begin to understand their narrative and formal structures.

Petrov picks one of the small composition books up off a student’s desk, waves it in the air.

PETROV (CONT’D)
Now. In this class, I’ll be asking you to write. You are encouraged to emulate the style of the poetry in your packets. But

Petrov suddenly grins broadly, a toothy smile that overpowers his small face.

PETROV (CONT’D)
I’ll also encourage you to experiment with any other unique styles you might like to sample. And of course, whatever topics might interest you. I want you to write without restrictions.

As quickly as the mischievous smile appeared, it suddenly vanishes. Petrov sets the notebook back on the student’s desk, clasps his hands together. All business once again.
PETROV (CONT’D)
I’ll be collecting the notebooks weekly. So I suggest that you begin writing immediately.

INT. YULIYA’S BEDROOM - LATER

Yuliya sits on her bed, her back propped against her open window. She scribbles passionately in her new writers’ notebook.

Words flow from her easily, as warm rays of sunlight reflect off her skin.

Yuliya sets her pen down and takes a moment to review what she has written. She smiles, pleased with her work.

She closes the notebook and tucks it into her book bag.

INT. MIKHAIL’S OFFICE - LATER

Yuliya saunters down a long, official-looking corridor of an ornately decorated workplace. Heads turn to look at her. Office doors close as she passes.

One man shoots his COMPANION a paranoid look as Yuliya breezes by.

COMPANION
The Commissar’s daughter.

The man relaxes.

Yuliya reaches the end of the hallway. She knocks on an office door. Her father pulls it open.

MIKHAIL
Is everything okay?

Yuliya grins at him.

YULIYA
I wrote something really, really good. I think.

MIKHAIL
(irritated)
Yuliya, it’s the middle of the work day.
YULIYA
(sheepish)
I’m sorry. I got excited.

Mikhail smiles.

MIKHAIL
I have a few minutes. Come in and tell me about what you’re working on.

Yuliya steps inside Mikhail’s spacious office. He closes the door.

YULIYA
I can show you, if you want.

MIKHAIL
Go ahead.

Yuliya opens her book bag eagerly and takes out her poetry notebook. She flips to the proper page and passes it to her father with a grin.

YULIYA
Let me know what you think.

Yuliya crosses her hands in her lap and watches Mikhail as he reads, anxiously awaiting his response.

As he reads the poem, Mikhail’s face darkens.

Finally, he tears the poem violently out of the notebook. He stands, walks to his trash can, and rips the poem into a million little pieces.

Yuliya watches him in horror, not daring to break the silence.

Mikhail walks briskly back to his seat. He scoots his chair very close to Yuliya’s and shoves the poetry notebook back into her hands. He’s furious.

MIKHAIL
I told you to stop asking questions about the trial.

YULIYA
I’m trying to learn from it.

MIKHAIL
Do you know what you just wrote?

Yuliya shrugs.
YULIYA
A poem asking the questions that you wouldn’t answer.

MIKHAIL
That was anti-Party poetry, Yuliya. You brought it to my office.

YULIYA
How was it anti-Party?

MIKHAIL
You have to stop with these questions.

Yuliya glares at Mikhail, remains silent.

MIKHAIL (CONT’D)
Do you understand me?

Yuliya continues to glare at her father, shadows of rage flickering across her face. But she collects herself, nods. Yes.

INT. YULIYA’S APARTMENT LOBBY – LATER

Yuliya storms through the front doors of her regal apartment building and into its spacious lobby, full of furious energy.

The DOORMAN walks to the elevator, pushes a button.

YULIYA
(flat, barely polite)
Seventh floor, please.

The doorman looks up at her, surprised.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
I don’t live with my parents anymore.

Yuliya steps into the elevator.

The doors are about to close when Alexander, once again dressed in a soldier’s uniform, enters the lobby. He waves at Yuliya, holds up his empty hands. She brightens immediately.

ALEXANDER
No box this time.
(to the doorman)
Seven, please.

He steps onto the elevator. The door closes behind him.
Alexander turns, smiles at Yuliya.

ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
I didn’t catch your name last time.

YULIYA
(smiling back at him)
I’m Yuliya.

ALEXANDER
Yuliya. Pretty.

YULIYA
It means creative.

ALEXANDER
Are you?

YULIYA
(mostly joking)
It might be my only winning attribute.

Alexander laughs.

ALEXANDER
I’m Alexander.
(pretend overly important voice)
Protector of man.

YULIYA
(gesturing at his soldier’s uniform)
Fitting.

The elevator stops, and the door opens. Alexander motions for Yuliya to step out ahead of him.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
I should be glad you live next door.

She smiles at him, then walks down the hall to her own apartment.

EXT./INT. PROFESSOR PETROV’S CLASSROOM - DAY

Yuliya marches down the University hallway towards Professor Petrov’s classroom. She’s determined, focused.

Yuliya checks her watch, then stops in front of Petrov’s door. She knocks on it. Hard.
PETROV (O.S.)
Come in.

Yuliya opens the door to the classroom. Petrov sits at his desk reading a novel. He crosses his arms.

Yuliya approaches his desk.

PETROV (CONT’D)
(coolly)
You’re quite early for class, Comrade Vazov.

YULIYA
I have a question I hoped you could answer.

Petrov raises an eyebrow.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
I wondered if you could tell me about anti-Party poetry.

PETROV
Why would I know anything about it?

YULIYA
I just thought maybe, because you teach poetry --

PETROV
(cutting her off)
No.

YULIYA
(beat)
If this is because my father works for the Party, you should know that he doesn’t know I’m here.

Petrov continues to glare at Yuliya distrustfully.

Yuliya pauses, takes a deep breath. She looks around the room, then carefully examines Professor Petrov’s face, trying to decide whether to trust him.

Finally

YULIYA (CONT’D)
I’m asking about anti-Party poems because I think I wrote one.

Petrov closes his book but does not set it down.
YULIYA (CONT’D)
By accident! Please don’t tell anyone.
(more vulnerable)
I’m trusting you.

PETROV
(softening ever so slightly)
Where is the poem?

YULIYA
I don’t have it.

Petrov’s eyes narrow. Yuliya jumps to explain.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
My father destroyed it. I have to know why.

PETROV
Why?

YULIYA
Because I thought it was the best poem I’d ever written.

Petrov puts his book down on his desk.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
Please. I don’t know who else I can ask.

PETROV
(softening just a bit more)
I admire your curiosity, and I wish that I could help

YULIYA
But?

PETROV
Now isn’t a good time.

YULIYA
I could come back tomorrow.

PETROV
I’m afraid tomorrow won’t be any better.

YULIYA
Are you in trouble?
Petrov’s look says it all.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
Oh. I’m sorry.

PETROV
I’m sorry too. I wish that things could be different.

INT. YULIYA’S APARTMENT - LATER

Yuliya sits cross-legged on her bed, writing in her poetry notebook. The shades are drawn over her window, blocking out the sunlight.

Yuliya taps her pencil on the blank notebook page in front of her.

She HEARS a knock on her front door.

She stands and answers the door, still holding her composition notebook. She’s surprised to see Alexander.

ALEXANDER
Hello.

He takes note of her writers’ notebook, interested.

ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
What are you working on?

YULIYA
Just an assignment for poetry class.

ALEXANDER
You’re a writer?

YULIYA
Usually. I’m stuck right now.

She opens the door a bit wider.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
Come in.

Alexander steps inside. Yuliya leads the way to her sitting room.

ALEXANDER
What do you usually do when you’re stuck?
YULIYA
I don’t usually get stuck.

They sit across from each other.

ALEXANDER
So what’s the trouble today?

Beat. Yuliya decides not to tell him.

YULIYA
You didn’t drop by to hear me whine about writing.

ALEXANDER
No, um, I wanted to see if you’d like to spend some time together. We could go to this little park I like -- I could even bring a book, if you wanted to keep working.

Yuliya takes a moment to consider his offer. Alexander grins at her charmingly.

ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
Come on. It’s unbearably stuffy in here.

EXT. SMALL PARK - LATER

Alexander and Yuliya walk side by side through a small, abandoned park. The grass is long and unkempt, and a rusty statue of Stalin is the forlorn centerpiece of the garden.

Alexander stops in front of a bench, sits. Yuliya sits down next to him.

ALEXANDER
I’m embarrassed to tell you how much time I’ve been spending here.

Yuliya takes in her bleak surroundings.

YULIYA
(lying, badly)
It’s... charming?

She bursts into laughter at her own insincerity.

Alexander begins to laugh too.

ALEXANDER
You’re a terrible liar.
YULIYA
You have terrible taste in parks.

Alexander takes out his book from a leather bag he’s been carrying over his shoulder. The book is unbound. It looks more like a manuscript than a novel.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
What are you reading?

ALEXANDER
(beat)
You won’t tell?

YULIYA
Of course.

ALEXANDER
It’s unpublished.

He looks around, lowers his voice.

ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
Counterrevolutionary.

Yuliya’s smile twists downward, and she looks around the perimeter of the park.

YULIYA
You shouldn’t have that in public.

ALEXANDER
Are you going to turn me in?

YULIYA
You never know. You’re very trusting.

ALEXANDER
Only when I know I can be. I’m not actually anti-Party. I just appreciate the literature.

Yuliya sees a window of opportunity.

YULIYA
Alexander?

ALEXANDER
What?

YULIYA
What does anti-Party mean?
ALEXANDER
(like she’s an idiot)
Going against the Party’s goals.

YULIYA
Well, yes. But what does that mean?


ALEXANDER
Okay, like in Zoshchenko’s short stories.

He finds the passage he’s looking for, points to it.

ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
In this one, “The Crisis,” he’s using satire to comment on the proletariat housing shortages.

YULIYA
So it’s anti-Party because it’s pointing out flaws in the Soviet system?

ALEXANDER
Exactly.

YULIYA
But isn’t it important to point out our problems?

ALEXANDER
This author certainly thinks so.

YULIYA
We can’t improve Soviet Communism unless we consider its flaws and remedy them.

Alexander shrugs.

ALEXANDER
That’s one interpretation.

YULIYA
What’s yours?

ALEXANDER
Maybe we’re just adapting to fit the times.
YULIYA
But what if we adapt so far that our country isn’t communist at all?

ALEXANDER
Communism evolves.

A beat, as Yuliya considers the implications of Alexander’s explanation.

ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
(teasing)
I told you I’m not anti-Party. You can even check my file.

Alexander grins at Yuliya. He cups her chin in his hand, turning her face towards his.

ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
Hey.

Yuliya looks at him, still frowning.

ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
We don’t need to fix the system today.

Alexander leans in to kiss her.

Yuliya reciprocates the kiss for a moment. Then she breaks away as an idea dawns on her.

YULIYA
I’m so sorry. I have to go.

She stands, picks up her book bag, and leaves the park in a hurry.

IZOLDA’S APARTMENT – LATER

Yuliya knocks on the door to her parents’ apartment.

Izolda answers, flings her arms around Yuliya.

IZOLDA
Yuliya!

Yuliya forces herself to return the embrace. She pulls away, fakes a cheerful smile. Prepares to deliver a performance.
YULIYA
I just wanted to say hello!
(lying, badly)
I’ve missed you since my move.

IZOLDA
Yes, thank goodness you dropped by.
There’s something I’ve been meaning
to talk to you about --

YULIYA
(cutting her off)
-- Mother, may I use the bathroom?

IZOLDA
Of course. I’ll just be waiting for
you in the sitting room. We can
have a nice long chat when you
return.

Izolda breezes into the sitting room and takes a seat on the
couch.

Yuliya walks down the hall, past the sitting room and then
past the bathroom.

She tiptoes down the rest of the hall, then silently turns
the handle to a door at the end of the hall.

Yuliya slips into her parents’ bedroom, cautious not to make
a sound. She tiptoes to Mikhail’s nightstand, distinguishable
by men’s cufflinks and cologne.

Carefully, Yuliya pulls open the nightstand drawer. She
fumbles around inside for a moment, then pulls out a set of
keys.

Yuliya closes the drawer shut and drops the keys into her
book bag.

She creeps out of the bedroom and closes the door silently
behind her.

Then she tiptoes into the bathroom and flushes the toilet.
She turns on the sink, allows the water to run for a moment.

Finished with her work, Yuliya returns to the sitting room.

She smiles brightly at her mother.

YULIYA
Thank you for letting me use the
bathroom!
IZOLDA

Anyway --

YULIYA

(cutting her off)

-- Anyway, I was just about to head upstairs. You wouldn’t believe the work I have for University. So glad I could drop by!

Yuliya kisses her mother on the head and leaves the sitting room.

Her mother looks after her, confused.

INT. MIKHAIL’S OFFICE - NIGHT

Yuliya tiptoes down the hallway of Mikhail’s office building.

The hall is empty and strangely eerie in the nighttime.

Yuliya reaches the door to her father’s office. She looks around nervously, then takes a deep breath. She pulls the keys she took from her father’s nightstand out of her book bag.

Yuliya turns the key in the door. It opens. Yuliya freezes, expecting the worst. But nothing happens. Yuliya quickly yanks the key out of the door and steps inside the room. She presses the door shut tightly behind her.

We TRACK across the office from Yuliya’s POV as she scans the room. A cherrywood desk piled high with papers, more tall stacks of paperwork on the floor. An enormous pile of book spines without pages. A massive painting of Stalin.

The camera HOLDs as Yuliya’s eyes land on a humongous file cabinet of thick metal drawers.

Yuliya approaches the cabinet. She examines the lock on the drawers, comparing it to the set of keys in her hand.

She tries one key. It does not fit.

Then another. Still no match.

Finally, Yuliya tries a third, much smaller key. It turns easily into the lock.

Yuliya pulls the set of drawers towards her and examines their contents.
They’re filled with hundreds, probably thousands of file folders.

Yuliya removes the first file, looks at the name on its tab. “Arent, Borya.”

She realizes that the files are arranged alphabetically. She flips deeper into the files, until she arrives at the letter “P.”

Yuliya looks through the “P” files until she finds a file labeled “Petrov.” She takes the file out of the cabinet.

The file is thick, practically bursting. Yuliya pulls a large stack of papers out of the file. She looks at a piece of paper on the top of the stack. It reads, “Investigation: Enemy of the People.”

Yuliya shoves the stack of papers into her book bag. She sets the file, now empty, back in the cabinet.

Yuliya straightens the files, then closes the cabinet shut. The cabinet RATTLES loudly. Yuliya cringes.

We HEAR the SLAM OF A DOOR from an office above Yuliya. Startled, Yuliya’s eyes dart up towards the sound.

In a panic, she drops the set of keys onto her father’s desk and dashes out of the room.

EXT./INT. PROFESSOR PETROV’S CLASSROOM – DAY

Yuliya approaches Professor Petrov’s classroom. She’s nervously excited. Eager, but poised.

She knocks on the door.

PETROV (O.S.)

Come in.

Yuliya enters. Petrov smiles faintly at her.

PETROV (CONT’D)

I’m growing accustomed to your little visits.

Yuliya looks around.

YULIYA

No one’s listening?

PETROV

I search the room almost daily.
Yuliya opens her book bag. She takes out the stack of papers that she took from her father’s office.

YULIYA
You were worried about the file the Party was keeping on you?

PETROV
What is that?

Yuliya sets the stack of papers on Petrov’s desk.

YULIYA
There’s nothing in your file anymore.

Petrov’s mouth falls open.

PETROV
You took it?

Yuliya nods.

PETROV (CONT’D)
Why?

YULIYA
I learned about anti-Party literature. I don’t understand why it’s forbidden.

PETROV
It criticizes the Party’s actions.

YULIYA
I don’t understand why that’s a problem.

PETROV
Really.

YULIYA
Why wouldn’t the government look for thoughts about how to purify their system?

She sighs deeply.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
I want to understand why I seem to be the only person who thinks that critical literature could be productive.
Petrov frowns. He takes out a pen, scribbles something on a piece of paper.

    PETROV
    Come here Wednesday after dark.

Yuliya examines the piece of paper.

    YULIYA
    What is it?

    PETROV
    A group I lead with one of my friends.

    YULIYA
    What kind of a group?

    PETROV
    (pointedly ignoring the question)
    You don’t have to attend, but I do think that we can answer some of your questions.

Yuliya slips the piece of paper into her book bag.

    PETROV (CONT’D)
    I’m trusting you not to mention this to anyone.

EXT. MOSCOW STREETS – NIGHT

It’s late, and the streets are empty.

Yuliya walks alone, her path illuminated only by a pale beam of moonlight.

She stops, takes the piece of paper that Petrov gave her out of her purse. She checks the address, then checks the address on the building in front of her. 1533, 1533.

The building appears to be a BAR. It’s small and grungy, and a “closed” sign hangs clearly on the door.

Yuliya pauses. After a split second of indecision, she walks up to the front door. Knocks.

A PLUMP MAN pulls the door open. This is VLAD, 50s, friendly, diplomatic, but very nervous. He ushers her inside hastily.

    VLAD
    Come in, come in. Quickly.
He leads her to a dimly lit room in the back of the bar. A group of about twenty WRITERS sits on an array of tattered couches. They’re tense, breathing shallowly. Nobody says a word.

Vlad closes the door. Petrov acknowledges Yuliya with a nod. He’s also nervous.

PETROV
Everyone, this is my student, Yuliya. Yuliya, this is my writers’ group.

Everyone nods, murmurs grimly. One WRITER turns to another and speaks in a mockingly important tone.

WRITER
The Commissar’s daughter.

Yuliya pretends not to hear the writer. She turns to Vlad, earnestly tries to engage him.

YULIYA
You must be Professor Petrov’s co-leader.

VLAD
That’s right.

YULIYA
What’s your name?

VLAD
Let’s not bother with names.

Yuliya’s face falls.

YULIYA
Okay.

VLAD
Would you like to read one of your pieces?

YULIYA
(growing uncomfortable)
I’m sorry, I didn’t bring my poetry notebook.

VLAD
Oh.

YULIYA
I didn’t realize I was supposed to.
VLAD
It would have been helpful.

Yuliya shifts her weight uneasily.

YULIYA
I did come with a question.

Vlad nods.

VLAD
Go on.

YULIYA
I don’t understand why anti-Party poetry is forbidden if it’s written in the spirit of improving our nation’s future.

Silence.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
That’s my question.

VLAD
Pardon my forwardness, but aren’t you publishing a pro-Party poem?

Yuliya blushes deeply. She nods. The writers whisper suspiciously amongst themselves.

WRITER #1
Why don’t you read us that poem?

YULIYA
I didn’t think it represented --

WRITER #1
(cutting her off)
What about another pro-Party poem?

WRITER #2
How many pro-Party poems have you written?

ANOTHER WRITER
What troubles you about the persecution of anti-Party writers?

YULIYA
(tentatively)
Well, I’m interested in anti-Party ideas --
The writers’ chatter grows louder, more hostile. Writers begin to throw questions rapidly at Yuliya.

**WRITER #1**
(cutting her off)
What does it mean to you to be anti-Party --

**WRITER #3**
(cutting him off)
-- How do you know your anti-Party phase will --

**WRITER #1**
(cutting him off)
What about the fact that you’re a published pro --

**WRITER #2**
(cutting him off)
-- How do we know you won’t go straight home and tell your father -

**WRITER #4**
(cutting her off)
-- How do we know you aren’t a spy in the first place?

Yuliya grows increasingly overwhelmed as the writers fire questions at her.

**PETROV**
Writers --

**WRITER #5**
(cutting him off)
-- What were the orders your father gave you?

**WRITER #6**
Don’t you think we can identify a Party spy?

**WRITER #7**
Does incriminating us help you sleep at night?

The questions roll out rapidly, cutting each other off. Suddenly, Yuliya can’t take it anymore. Her eyes brimming with tears, she takes a step backward, picks up her book bag.

**YULIYA**
-- I shouldn’t have come here.
She turns and runs from the room.

EXT. MOSCOW STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

Yuliya hurries down the street. Her breathing is ragged, emotional, and her face is red.

PETROV (O.S.)

Yuliya!

Yuliya stops, turns. Sees Petrov. He jogs up to her.

YULIYA
Why would you do that to me?

PETROV
You’re just like them, Yuliya.

YULIYA
How can you say that? They were horrible.

PETROV
They were terrified of you.

YULIYA
So why did you invite me in the first place?

PETROV
Because you have the power to create change.

YULIYA
Because my father works for the Party?

PETROV
Do you understand your father’s role in Comrade Stalin’s cabinet?

YULIYA
He promotes pro-Party education and literature.

Petrov smiles bitterly.

PETROV
He promotes censorship.

YULIYA
That isn’t true. He only censors counterrevolutionary writers.
PETROV
Have you thought about what counterrevolutionary means?

YULIYA
(indignant)
I know what counterrevolutionary means.

PETROV
It means anti-Party.

That stops Yuliya in her tracks.

YULIYA
What?

PETROV
Writers like you.

Yuliya stares at Petrov, horrified.

YULIYA
Why would he do that?

PETROV
Your father’s job is to protect the Party administration by insuring that all written evaluations of the Party are positive. His chosen form of protection is censorship.

A beat.

PETROV (CONT’D)
People know who you are. If you choose to engage in anti-Party writing, people will consider the implications of your statements.

YULIYA
Against my father.

PETROV
On behalf of your own beliefs.

Yuliya stands frozen, almost in shock.

PETROV (CONT’D)
It’s your decision. You don’t have to do anything.

He regards Yuliya warmly.
PETROV (CONT’D)
But you’re asking the right questions.

INT. MIKHAIL AND IZOLDA’S APARTMENT – EVENING

Yuliya knocks on her parents’ door. Her mother answers, throws her arms around Yuliya.

Yuliya pulls away from the embrace.

IZOLDA
Dinner’s on the table.

Izolda leads Yuliya into the dining room, where Mikhail already is seated. He smiles at her.

MIKHAIL
Excellent to see you, Yuliya.

Izolda and Yuliya sit.

YULIYA
(with a note of apprehension)
Nice to see you too, Father.

A SERVANT GIRL sets a steaming plate of meat in the center of the table, then scurries out of the room.

Izolda clasps her hands together.

IZOLDA
Yuliya, we need to talk about something very important.

YULIYA
Yes?

IZOLDA
You’re nearly graduated, and you’re developing into a beautiful, talented young woman. And I just keep thinking that if you had one more little thing, I would be the happiest mother in the world.

Yuliya stacks a pile of meat onto her plate. Izolda peers at her intently, trying to catch her interest.

IZOLDA (CONT’D)
Do you know what that one thing could be?
Yuliya stares at her mother blankly.

IZOLDA (CONT’D)
You’re missing a man, sweetheart!
Every successful Soviet woman needs
a husband!

YULIYA
(unconcealed disgust)
Is that why you invited me to
dinner?

IZOLDA
I wanted to discuss suitable
matches! I was thinking of Boris
Grigoriev --

YULIYA
(cutting her off)
-- Father, how was work today?

MIKHAIL
Don’t disrespect your mother.

YULIYA
(insistent)
I want to hear about it. What did
you do?

MIKHAIL
Yuliya stop it.

YULIYA
I don’t know anything about what
you do. Doesn’t that strike you as
odd, that you’re always rushing off
to be with Stalin but you never
tell us about what you do for him?

MIKHAIL
Comrade Stalin.

IZOLDA
What’s gotten into you?

YULIYA
I just want to know how my father’s
been censoring writers for the past
seven years, but I haven’t heard a
thing about it.

MIKHAIL
(now furious)
Behave yourself.
YULIYA
I’m being engaging! Go on, Father. Tell me your favorite part of your job!

MIKHAIL
Yuliya, why did I find my extra set of keys on my office desk?

YULIYA
I don’t know what you’re talking about.

MIKHAIL
You know exactly what I’m talking about. What I’d like to know is who you’ve been talking to.

YULIYA
I haven’t been talking to anyone.

MIKHAIL
You’re a terrible liar.

YULIYA
I’m not lying.

MIKHAIL
That’s enough.

Yuliya pushes out her chair and stands. She turns and leaves her parents’ apartment.

EXT./INT. - YULIYA’S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Yuliya storms into her apartment and slams the door closed. She stomps into her bedroom and flings herself onto her bed, furious.

She snatches her book bag from the floor and pulls out her poetry notebook and a pen.

She begins to scribble aggressively, her fury etching itself onto the pages of her notebook.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. - YULIYA’S APARTMENT - LATER

Yuliya lies on her bed, still writing in her notebook. She’s calmer now, less livid.
Yuliya closes the notebook. She stands and sighs deeply, allowing the evening’s tension to melt off her shoulders.

She puts on her shoes and leaves the apartment.

Yuliya walks down the hall to Alexander’s apartment. She knocks on his door. Once softly, then twice hard.

Alexander opens the door. He’s surprised and delighted to see Yuliya.

YULIYA
I wondered if I could borrow one of your unpublished books.

Alexander grins, beckons for Yuliya to come in.

Yuliya follows Alexander into his apartment. It looks like hers, but decorated to fit a young man.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
How did you get such an amazing apartment?

ALEXANDER
Yours is exactly the same.

YULIYA
But I know how I got mine.

Alexander laughs.

ALEXANDER
I just finished commanding on the Soviet-Japanese border. Comrade Stalin offered me the apartment instead of a metal of bravery.

YULIYA
What did you do to deserve it?

ALEXANDER
That’s a long story for another time.

Yuliya nods, somewhat disappointed.

She looks around the apartment and notices a framed photograph of a much younger Alexander, a little girl, and an older couple. They’re dressed in rags, but smiling happily.

Yuliya walks over to the photograph, picks it up.
YULIYA
Your family?

Alexander nods.

ALEXANDER
I’d do anything for them.

YULIYA
Is that why you’re a soldier?

ALEXANDER
It gives me money to send home.

YULIYA
And you’re educated.

ALEXANDER
Even farmers can get an education. It’s one of the most beautiful things about the Soviet Union.

YULIYA
That’s true.

ALEXANDER
You of all people must know that.

Yuliya casts her eyes down.

YULIYA
You know about my father.

ALEXANDER
I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to offend you.

He smiles apologetically.

ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
It’s common knowledge.

YULIYA
I know.

Beat.

ALEXANDER
What type of literature were you looking for?

YULIYA
Do you have anything about censorship?
ALEXANDER
Follow me.

Alexander leads the way to his bedroom. He opens a dresser drawer and digs through a layer of clothes to reveal an impressive collection of manuscripts.

He looks around for a moment, then picks one up. He hands it to Yuliya.

ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
Here.

He sits down on his bed. Yuliya sits next to him. She’s very close, her body nearly touching his.

ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
Why censorship?

YULIYA
You said you knew about my father.

Alexander nods.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
I just want to know what’s going on around me. I hate feeling so... Protected.

Alexander takes her hand in his.

ALEXANDER
I like that about you. You’re engaged.

He leans in slowly, brushes his lips against Yuliya’s.

ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
Does this make you uncomfortable?

Yuliya leans in closer to him.

YULIYA
No.

They kiss passionately.

INT. YULIYA’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Yuliya sits on her bed, deeply engrossed in her unpublished novel.
She looks out at the clear evening sky through her uncovered window pane, then scoots off her bed.

She bundles up her manuscript and carefully tucks it under the corner of her mattress. She picks up her book bag and leaves the house.

EXT./INT. - WRITERS’ BAR - NIGHT

Yuliya knocks hesitantly on the door of the writers’ bar.

Vlad opens the door. He offers Yuliya a small smile.

Vlad
Go on. Come inside.

Yuliya steps inside. Vlad closes the door behind her.

Vlad (CONT’D)
Follow me.

He leads her back into the group of writers. This time, the group is chatting animatedly. They stop talking immediately when they see Yuliya. Petrov breaks the silence.

Petrov
We hoped you’d be back. You brought a poem this time?

Yuliya
I did.

Vlad
Go on, then. Up at the podium.

He points to a mildewing old podium at the front of the small room and nods encouragingly.

Vlad (CONT’D)
It’s important to practice in front of an audience.

Yuliya nods at Vlad.

Yuliya
Okay.

She walks to the podium and takes her poetry notebook out of her book bag.

Yuliya (CONT’D)
Untitled.
She clears her throat.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
Since I was five, he’s told me to write.
To promote our beliefs, our ideals, the future of our great nation.
And when I wrote, he smiled.
But then “our” became “my,”
and “my” became dangerous,
and the smile was gone.
Replaced by disappointed whispers
and punishing glances
and stern conversations.
His pride replaced by disappointment,
replaced by my own determination.
I have to hope that I know
what I want.

Yuliya takes a deep breath, looks out at the audience. Many of the writers still glare at her distrustfully, but a handful of them are smiling. Petrov is one of them.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
Thank you.

Yuliya takes a step down from the podium, picks up her book bag.

A YOUNG WOMAN in the audience begins to applaud. This is ALINA, very kind, very enthusiastic.

A few writers look at Alina in astonishment.

ALINA
I thought that was wonderful!

Alina turns to Yuliya.

ALINA (CONT’D)
Yuliya, you really had something to say here!
(to the rest of the writers)
She clearly isn’t pro-Party.

Yuliya offers Alina an appreciative smile.

WRITER WOMAN
I found the piece distractingly self-centered.
Some of the points were interesting, but a different angle might have been beneficial.

Yuliya shifts her weight, growing uncomfortable. Petrov notices.

PETROV
Have a seat, Yuliya.

Yuliya offers him a small smile of relief. She takes a seat on one of the couches.

PETROV (CONT’D)
It’s evident that you are exploring a vein of poetry that does shed light on our society.

YULIYA
Thank you.

PETROV
Using yourself as an entry point is a valuable device. But you need to use it as a platform for additional commentary.

Yuliya nods.

Petrov turns to Vlad.

PETROV (CONT’D)
What do you think?

VLAD
First of all, I’d like to properly introduce myself.

Vlad extends his hand to Yuliya. She shakes it.

VLAD (CONT’D)
I’m Vladimir. You can call me Vlad.

YULIYA
Nice to meet you.

VLAD
Now. What exactly do you want from our writers’ group?
YULIYA
(trying to make sense of the question)
What do I want?

VLAD
You’re writing anti-Party poetry because it feels meaningful to you, correct?

YULIYA
Yes.

VLAD
And you’ve made the decision that you want to write it -- you need to write it -- because it’s meaningful to you.

YULIYA
Yes.

VLAD
But now you need to decide what you want as a writer operating illegally.

YULIYA
(trying to keep up)
What are my options?

VLAD
Practically endless. Do you want to write secretly so that your poems are found when you die? Do you want to perform your poetry publicly and use your position to avoid death? Do you want to perform your poetry privately and convert useful disciples? Do you want to die to make a statement?

YULIYA
I --

VLAD
(cutting her off)
-- Don’t answer now. This is a conclusion that takes years to sort out. There are endless variables to consider.
Petrov
Your relationship with your father being one of them.

INT. YULIYA’S BEDROOM – NIGHT

Yuliya sits on her bed, writing furiously in her small notebook. Her window is open, and the soft glow of the Moscow twilight radiates into her room.

Someone KNOCKS on her door.

Yuliya leaps up, stuffs her poetry notebook under her mattress next to her unpublished manuscript.

She dashes to her door, opens it. Sees her father.

Mikhail
I wanted to check in on you.

He steps past Yuliya and into her apartment.

Mikhail (CONT’D)
How are you? Are you writing?

He takes a seat on her living room couch. Yuliya sits across from him.

Yuliya
Are we going to talk about last week?

Mikhail
I’m willing to forgive your misbehavior, yes. Do you have pages to show me?

Yuliya
(shutting herself off)
Not really.

Mikhail
That’s unlike you.

Yuliya
I’ve been busy.

Mikhail
You have some ideas, I presume.

Yuliya
Some.
Mikhail darkens, grows suspicious.

MIKHAIL
Does this have to do with the poem you showed me?

YULIYA
(lying, badly)
What poem?

MIKHAIL
Don’t speak to me like I’m an imbecile.

YULIYA
(covering)
I’ve been conceptualizing a poem about the Commissar’s Ball.

MIKHAIL
That could be appropriate. What aspects of the ball would you focus on?

Yuliya checks her watch in an overly exaggerated motion. She leaps off of the couch.

YULIYA
(fabricating wildly)
I completely forgot. I’m meeting some girls in my poetry class to work on an assignment in a few minutes.

Mikhail stands stiffly.

MIKHAIL
I’ll leave you.

He makes his way to the door. Before he leaves, he turns back to Yuliya.

MIKHAIL (CONT’D)
I’d like to see a draft of that poem soon.

He leaves, closes the door behind him.

Yuliya waits for a moment until she hears the sound of the elevator doors closing. Then she steps out of the apartment herself.

She walks down the hallway to Alexander’s apartment. She knocks.
Alexander pulls open the door. He grins when he sees Yuliya.

YULIYA
Want to go for a walk?

EXT. MOSCOW STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

Yuliya and Alexander wander through the streets of Moscow. It’s dark, and the streets are empty.

ALEXANDER
Are you enjoying the novel?

YULIYA
It’s excellent. Has the author written anything else?

ALEXANDER
I doubt it. He’s been exiled for the past four years. You have to be careful these days.

Yuliya nods. They walk silently for a moment, then

YULIYA
Have you ever resented your parents?

ALEXANDER
Maybe for being farmers. I had to work twice as hard as the other students in school to be taken seriously.

YULIYA
You must have been very determined.

ALEXANDER
I’m lucky to have made it through school at all.

Beat.

YULIYA
Have you ever thought about doing something that would go against everything your family’s ever taught you?

Alexander smiles.

ALEXANDER
What are you thinking of doing?
Yuliya’s eyes dart quickly around the empty street, scanning it for any potential danger.

YULIYA
I’m writing anti-Party poetry.

ALEXANDER
I suspected as much.

YULIYA
I’d like to take it a step further.

ALEXANDER
But you’re worried about your safety?

Yuliya shakes her head.

YULIYA
I’m worried about my father. I’d be fighting against the system that he created.

ALEXANDER
Do you believe in his system?

YULIYA
No.

Beat.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
Do you ever feel like you don’t know what you want, only what you don’t want?

Alexander frowns.

ALEXANDER
You don’t feel that way.

YULIYA
What do you mean?

ALEXANDER
You know exactly what you want. You just have to come to terms with it.

YULIYA
Maybe.

Yuliya takes Alexander’s hand. Smiles at him. They continue walking.
INT. YULIYA’S APARTMENT - LATER

Yuliya returns home to her apartment, ebullient after her evening with Alexander.

She walks into her bedroom, stops. Frowns. Her bedspread is rumpled, and her book bag is tipped onto its side. Her writers’ notebook is out, clearly visible in the center of the bed.

Frantic, Yuliya lifts the corner of her mattress, searching for her unpublished novel. It is gone.

Yuliya gasps in fury. She snatches her notebook, then runs out of the apartment.

EXT./INT. - MIKHAIL AND IZOLDA’S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Yuliya knocks on the door of her parents’ apartment. Mikhail answers wearing a bedtime robe and slippers.

Yuliya puts out her hand.

YULIYA
I’d like your key to my apartment.

MIKHAIL
Why?

YULIYA
I know you were up there tonight. I’d like to have some privacy in my own space.

Mikhail regards her icily.

MIKHAIL
I see.

YULIYA
Your key, please.

MIKHAIL
We need to talk.

He leads Yuliya into the sitting room. He sits. Yuliya follows suit.

MIKHAIL (CONT’D)
I found your poetry to be very disturbing. Not to mention your reading materials.
YULIYA
You weren’t supposed to --

MIKHAIL
(cutting her off)
-- Nonetheless, my discovery warrants a discussion.

Yuliya glares at her father.

MIKHAIL (CONT’D)
Who gave you the novel?

YULIYA
Nobody.

MIKHAIL
A man?

Yuliya says nothing, but her face gives her away.

MIKHAIL (CONT’D)
You aren’t to see him again. Do I make myself clear?

Yuliya glowers at him, remains silent.

MIKHAIL (CONT’D)
(very condescending)
Now. You are intelligent enough to know that you have been writing anti-Party poetry.

YULIYA
I’m writing what I’m thinking about.

Mikhail smiles coolly, terrifyingly.

MIKHAIL
Then your thoughts are anti-Party.

He glares meaningfully at Yuliya.

MIKHAIL (CONT’D)
You understand that Comrade Stalin and I work very closely together, correct?

YULIYA
Yes.
MIKHAIL
Maybe what you don’t understand is that my relationship with Comrade Stalin makes me -- makes us -- very vulnerable.

(now more grim than patronizing)
Comrade Stalin watches our every move. He will know the moment we are disloyal.

Yuliya shrugs, remains silent.

MIKHAIL (CONT’D)
You are a direct reflection of my ideology.

YULIYA
I have different beliefs than you.

MIKHAIL
Then you keep that to yourself. Or else you will die, and I will die and your mother will die.

Beat.

MIKHAIL (CONT’D)
Do you understand me?

Yuliya nods.

MIKHAIL (CONT’D)
I’m counting on you to act in the best interest of this family.

(moment of vulnerability)
Please.

INT. YULIYA’S BEDROOM - DAY

Yuliya sits cross-legged on her bed, her writers’ notebook balanced on her thighs.

Sunlight pours in through Yuliya’s window, reflecting off her long hair.

She allows herself to close her eyes for a moment. She sighs contentedly. Then she pries her eyes open and pulls the shade down over her window. The light disappears.

Yuliya crosses her legs again and begins to write in her notebook. She’s expressionless, and her eyes are blank.
She writes slowly, tracing her pen across the paper. It becomes evident that she isn’t lifting her wrist at all.

We finally SEE the paper from YULIYA’s POV. It’s a giant abstraction of meaningless criss-crossing lines.

Yuliya sighs in frustration. She tears the paper out of her notebook crumples it into a ball. She hurls the paper across her bedroom.

INT. YULIYA’S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Yuliya once again struggles to write in her writers’ notebook. She writes slowly, frowning at the page.

Someone knocks on her door. Yuliya stuffs the notebook under her mattress, runs to the door and pulls it open.

Alexander grins at her.

ALEXANDER
Would you like some company?

Yuliya tries to decide how to let him down gently.

YULIYA
I’m sorry. Not right now.

ALEXANDER
Are you working? I could bring a book over.

YULIYA
Not now.

ALEXANDER
Is something wrong?

YULIYA
I’m fine.

A meaningful beat. Alexander studies Yuliya’s face, searching her.

Yuliya takes in Alexander’s earnest concern, decides she will have to hurt him to carry out her father’s orders.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
You’re a fool if you ever thought this would last, Alexander.

ALEXANDER
What? I --
YULIYA
Did you really think I would settle for a peasant?

Alexander recoils, stunned.

ALEXANDER
I thought --

YULIYA
(cutting him off)
-- It’s been fun. But I have more important things to do with my time.

She smiles politely at Alexander, who looks back at her, crushed.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
If you’ll excuse me.

She closes the door in Alexander’s face, locks it behind him.

Then she presses her back to the door and covers her face with her hands. Silent tears stream through her fingers, rocking her entire body.

INT. PROFESSOR PETROV’S CLASSROOM – DAY

Professor Petrov hands back the students’ poetry notebooks. The students stand, stretch, begin to leave the classroom.

Petrov passes Yuliya’s notebook back last. Yuliya starts to stand.

PETROV
Stay a moment.

YULIYA
Okay.

PETROV
Have a seat.

Yuliya sits back down. Petrov takes a seat at the desk next to her.

PETROV (CONT’D)
You missed this week’s meeting.

YULIYA
I know.
PETROV
A lot of us thought you had potential.

YULIYA
I’m sorry.

Beat.

PETROV
I was surprised by your writing this week.

Yuliya remains silent.

PETROV (CONT’D)
What did you think of your work?

YULIYA
(lying)
I liked it.

PETROV
What in particular did you like?

YULIYA
The poem about the summer day was pretty.

PETROV
If you want me to help you, I need you to engage with me truthfully. What happened this week?

YULIYA
Nothing.

PETROV
Did our last meeting frighten you?

Yuliya stands, gathers her book bag.

YULIYA
Look. I appreciate your time, but I have to be home. I promised my father I’d help with dinner.

Petrov smiles a small, sad smile. He gets it.

PETROV
As long as it makes you happy.

YULIYA
This isn’t about happiness.
She begins to make her way towards the door.

PETROV

Yuliya.

Yuliya stops, walks back towards him.

Petrov picks up a pen and paper, writes something down. He passes it to Yuliya.

PETROV (CONT’D)

This is my home address. Visit me any time if you change your mind.

INT. YULIYA’S APARTMENT - LATER

Yuliya is cooking dinner for herself, chopping vegetables slowly. Her movement is lethargic, unmotivated.

Someone knocks on the door. Yuliya opens it, finds Mikhail waiting for her. He’s cheerful, in an excellent mood. He steps right into Yuliya’s entryway, leads the way into the sitting room.

MIKHAIL

Thank you for letting me read your newest poems.

YULIYA

You asked me to leave them for you.

MIKHAIL

I had the opportunity to sit down with a few of them yesterday, and I’m very, very impressed. Your poem about industrialization was particularly striking.

YULIYA

It wasn’t about anything.

MIKHAIL

I thought it was excellent. You’re beginning to explore your writers’ voice in a meaningful way.

Beat.

MIKHAIL (CONT’D)

I have great news for you.
YULIYA
(uninterested)
What?

MIKHAIL
I liked the poem so much that I signed you up to read at another Commissar’s event tomorrow.

YULIYA
(barely feigning excitement)
Wow. I can’t wait.

INT. COMMISSAR’S PARTY - EVENING

The Commissar’s Party is much like the first Commissar’s Ball -- lavish, merry, very festive.

Yuliya approaches the party’s fully stocked bar.

BARTENDER
What can I get you?

YULIYA
Vodka, please. Double.

The bartender pours the drink. Yuliya takes it from him, just as a hand falls on her shoulder. She turns around, sees Stalin himself.

STALIN
Yuliya, is it?

He smiles thinly at Yuliya. She shivers in spite of herself.

YULIYA
A pleasure to meet you, Comrade Stalin.

STALIN
I’m looking forward to hearing you read.

YULIYA
Thank you.

STALIN
I have high hopes that you will become one of the great Soviet poets.

Yuliya forces a smile.
YULIYA
It would be an honor.

Stalin pats Yuliya’s shoulder once more, then is off.

Yuliya takes a couple of steps towards the center of the room.

Viktor Chirkoff intercepts her.

VIKTOR
Yuliya Mikhailovna Vazov.

He raises his own glass of vodka into the air.

VIKTOR (CONT’D)
We’re toasting to you tonight.

Yuliya raises her glass of vodka up to meet his. She clinks it against his lightly.

Viktor takes out a book that he’s been carrying under his arm. He passes his glass of vodka to Yuliya.

VIKTOR (CONT’D)
Hold this a moment, would you.

Yuliya takes the glass. Viktor flips through the book for a moment. Then

VIKTOR (CONT’D)
Here!

Yuliya looks down at the book. We see it from her POV. In bold, curly letters, it reads: “The Luckiest.” Yuliya’s poem.

Viktor beams at her.

VIKTOR (CONT’D)
Look at that. And --

He closes the book, shows her the cover. Again from her POV, we see the title. “Soviet Greats: The Best of Soviet Poetry.”

VIKTOR (CONT’D)
-- this. I told you I’d have you among the greats!

YULIYA
(horrified)
Wow. Thank you.
Viktor tucks the book under his arm. He takes back his glass of vodka, kisses Yuliya on the top of her head, then clinks glasses with her once more.

VIKTOR
Cheers to a long, successful writer-editor partnership.

He grins, raises his glass once again, then is off.

Izolda swoops in, throwing her arms around Yuliya in an overwhelming embrace.

IZOLDA
I have wonderful news for you. Boris is here! I just spoke with his mother -- they’ve been watching you from across the room, and they think you’re just charming!

Izolda puts an arm around Yuliya’s waist, guiding her away from the bar.

IZOLDA (CONT’D)
Let’s go speak with the family together, shall we?

Suddenly, Mikhail clears his throat loudly at the podium at the front of the room. The crowd quiets down. Izolda stops walking, although her arm remains around Yuliya.

MIKHAIL
Good evening! Many of you might remember my very talented daughter, Yuliya. She enjoyed reading for you all so much a few weeks ago that she’s prepared another poem, specially for this party. I’d like to welcome her with a warm round of applause.

The party guests applaud wildly. Yuliya approaches the podium. She takes the poem out of her purse.

YULIYA
Thank you for having me. I’m going to share a poem that I call “The Soviet Machine.”

She looks into the audience. Scanning the crowd, she sees Viktor, red-faced and beaming.

Yuliya focuses on another point in the crowd, sees Stalin, now seated. He smokes his pipe, smiles thinly.
Yuliya tears her eyes away from Stalin, picks another point in the crowd. She sees her father, his lips drawn into a thin, nervous line. He nods at her, urging her onward.

Suddenly, Yuliya can’t take it anymore. She picks her poem up off the podium, crumples it in the palm of her hand.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
(fabricating wildly)
I am so sorry! I just remembered that I have an enormous exam that starts in ten minutes.

She throws her bag over her shoulder. The crowd begins to mutter amongst themselves, confused.

Stalin takes a short, suspicious puff of his pipe.

Yuliya steps down from the podium and runs out of the room.

EXT. MOSCOW STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

Yuliya scurries down the street, her book bag slung over her shoulder. Her breathing is labored, and she’s very upset.

Still half-running, she fumbles around in her bag, pulls out the piece of paper that Petrov gave her with his home address. She looks at it for a moment, then shoves it back into the bag.

She takes out her writers’ notebook and a pen, then keeps running.

She writes as she runs, bumping into other pedestrians, who glare and yell after her. She ignores them, keeps pushing forward.

EXT./INT. PROFESSOR PETROV’S HOUSE - LATER

Yuliya arrives at Professor Petrov’s tiny apartment. It’s run-down, in a poor looking neighborhood.

She knocks on the door, not stopping to consider her decision.

Petrov pulls the door open.

PETROV
Yuliya! Come in.

He leads Yuliya into his one-room apartment, gestures for her to sit.
PETROV (CONT’D)
What’s wrong?

YULIYA
I can’t do it. I just --

She begins to cry softly. Petrov offers her a handkerchief.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
-- I can’t be the perfect little Soviet poet he wants me to be. I don’t believe in writing poetry that represents a false ideal, and I don’t believe in the Party’s program.

PETROV
Your father is a member of that party.

YULIYA
I don’t believe he’s any better than the rest of them.

PETROV
What do you believe in?

YULIYA
I guess... During the Revolution, when I was little, my parents taught me that communism was an ideal we had to fight for so that everyone could be equal. That was what I believed in.

PETROV
Believed?

Yuliya falters for a moment.

YULIYA
Still believe. I can’t see where government corruption and literary censorship sprang up from that sense of idealism. We’re moving backwards.

Petrov nods.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
How can I write poems touting government accomplishments when I don’t believe we’ve accomplished anything?
PETROV
Have you considered your role in all of this?

YULIYA
I can’t just sit idly by and write that horrible poetry.

PETROV
So you want to promote change.

YULIYA
Yes.

PETROV
How?

YULIYA
I think there’s only one logical option.

EXT./INT. - WRITERS’ BAR - LATER

Petrov stops at the door to the writers’ bar, scans the empty street. Satisfied with the surrounding security, Petrov opens the door with a key.

He steps inside. Yuliya follows. Petrov closes the door behind him and walks to the back room. Yuliya is close on his heels.

Petrov opens the door to the back room. The writers are inside, discussing a piece. They all stop speaking, whirl around nervously when they hear the door open.

Seeing Petrov and Yuliya, they relax slightly.

VLAD
Oh thank goodness. You had me worried.

PETROV
I apologize for our tardiness. We come bearing good news.

VLAD
What?

YULIYA
I want to speak out publicly against my father’s censorship policies.
VLAD
(smiling at her)
You take after your professor.

YULIYA
It’s the only way I can make a difference.

VLAD
Have you given any thought to a venue or event?

YULIYA
I had hoped the group could offer suggestions.

WRITER #1
Well, the larger the better.

WRITER #2
Diversity might be more important than size. You want to reach a broad audience.

WRITER MAN
One of Comrade Stalin’s parties might be ideal.

WRITER #1
I think we could go even larger than that. If there were another show trial --

WRITER WOMAN
(cutting him off)
-- Safety also is a concern. She isn’t just going to step onto the stage of a trial. She’ll be removed before she can recite her piece.

VLAD
I think the thing to do is for Yuliya to write up a list of as many of her father’s events as she can think of. Yuliya, do you think you could bring that to me next week?

YULIYA
Of course.
VLAD
We can discuss them amongst ourselves and decide which would be most appropriate.

PETROV
Public and diverse are valuable suggestions.

VLAD
And safe.

PETROV
And safe.

Vlad turns back to Yuliya.

VLAD
I’m glad you decided to come back.

EXT./INT. - YULIYA’S APARTMENT - LATER

Yuliya turns the key in the front door of her apartment.

She steps inside, registers that the lights are on. She looks up, surprised. She takes a few steps towards the living room.

MIKHAIL (O.S.)
Where did you go tonight?

Yuliya starts. She takes a couple of steps deeper into her house, sees her father seated on her couch. His hands are clasped grimly. He’s been waiting for a long time.

YULIYA
I didn’t believe in my poem.

MIKHAIL
And?

YULIYA
Reading it aloud would have been disingenuous to you and Comrade Stalin and the rest of the room.

MIKHAIL
Do you understand the weight of your decision?

Yuliya says nothing.
MIKHAIL (CONT’D)
Comrade Stalin was there, Yuliya!
Do you think he believed your
flimsy excuse for a second?

YULIYA
Probably not.

MIKHAIL
(screaming now)
Do you want Comrade Stalin to think
that I’m undermining him? Do you
want the NKVD to come for us in the
middle of the night just so that
you can feel genuine???

YULIYA
I don’t think the NKVD should come
for those who are genuine at all.
That’s why I’m questioning the
state in the first place.

MIKHAIL
Your idealism has made you
unbearably selfish.

YULIYA
I’m selfish? You’re the one asking
me to lie to the entire country on
your behalf.

MIKHAIL
(dripping with sarcasm)
Forgive me for protecting our lives
over your idealism.

Yuliya says nothing. Mikhail straightens his spine.

MIKHAIL (CONT’D)
I’ll ask you once more. Are you
willing to reform?

YULIYA
I’m not willing to publicly tout
the virtues of a system I don’t
believe in. No.

Mikhail stands, turns to leave.

MIKHAIL
I can make you regret this.

Yuliya remains silent.
Mikhail leaves the sitting room. Yuliya stares after him, stricken, as he slams the front door behind him.

EXT./INT. ALEXANDER’S APARTMENT - LATER

Yuliya knocks on Alexander’s door. She’s strikingly composed, her face almost expressionless.

Alexander pulls the door open. He regards Yuliya coolly.

    ALEXANDER
    I thought you had more important things to do with your time.

    YULIYA
    Alexander --

    ALEXANDER
    (cutting her off, hostile)
    -- I’m sorry, did I misunderstand? I’m only a peasant, after all.

    YULIYA
    Alexander, please.

    ALEXANDER
    What?

    YULIYA
    I’m sorry.

Alexander pauses for a moment, takes in Yuliya’s expression. It’s hardened, glassed over, but she looks as if she might break any moment.

    ALEXANDER
    What happened to you?

    YULIYA
    Nothing.

Her voice cracks. Alexander looks at her lovingly, pityingly.

    ALEXANDER
    You’re not okay. Come inside.

    YULIYA
    You don’t have to --

Alexander wraps his arms around her and kisses her deeply.

    ALEXANDER
    Come inside.
He waves Yuliya into his apartment, closes the door behind her. Instead of going to the sitting room, he leads the way to the bedroom.

Alexander sits on his bed. Yuliya sits too. She curls herself around him, regret pulsing through her entire body.

YULIYA
I’m so sorry.

ALEXANDER
I know.

YULIYA
I never wanted to hurt you.

ALEXANDER
I know.

Beat.

YULIYA
How did you know I was upset?

ALEXANDER
You’re easy to read.

He leans in, kisses Yuliya deeply on the lips. The kiss is natural, easy. Yuliya tucks her legs under her, leans into the kiss. Alexander embraces her, and they fall onto his bed, still kissing.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ALEXANDER’S BEDROOM - LATER

Alexander and Yuliya lie together. They’re naked, half under the covers.

Alexander rolls over, kisses Yuliya.

Yuliya kisses Alexander back.

INT. PROFESSOR PETROV’S CLASSROOM - MORNING

Yuliya walks into the classroom, her book bag over her shoulder. She slides into a seat at the front of the room.

The rest of the class files in and takes their seats. Professor Petrov has not yet arrived.
An UNFAMILIAR MAN stands at the front of the room. As the students take their seats, he clears his throat.

    UNFAMILIAR MAN
    Good morning.

Everyone quiets down. The class eyes the man, confused.

    UNFAMILIAR MAN (CONT’D)
    My name is Professor Brobov, and I’ll be teaching this class starting today. I’d like to spend a couple of sessions talking about what makes an exemplary piece of Socialist Realist poetry.

Brobov passes out stacks of paper.

    PROFESSOR BROBOV
    These are a few of today’s greatest works.

Yuliya raises her hand. Brobov points at her.

    YULIYA
    Where’s Professor Petrov?

    PROFESSOR BROBOV
    I couldn’t say.

    YULIYA
    Is he in trouble?

    PROFESSOR BROBOV
    Let’s try to forget about Professor Petrov.

Yuliya’s face falls. She stands, picks up her book bag and leaves the room.

EXT. MOSCOW STREETS – MOMENTS LATER

Yuliya walks briskly, seething. She turns a corner onto Professor Petrov’s street. Yuliya walks up the steps to Petrov’s house. She knocks on the door.

    YULIYA
    Professor Petrov?

Nothing. She bangs again, harder.
YULIYA (CONT’D)
Professor Petrov!

Still nothing. Yuliya looks at the front window, which is covered by lacy curtains. She notices a small break at the bottom of the curtains. Yuliya crouches down and peers through the gap to look into the apartment. She gasps softly.

We SEE the apartment from YULIYA’S POV. It’s been completely ransacked. Books thrown off the shelves, clothes strewn about the room. Furniture turned onto its sides. Pages of poetry thrown everywhere.

Yuliya’s eyes fill with tears. She bangs her fists against the door.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
Professor Petrov!

Her voice catches in her throat and she begins to cry, big hiccuping sobs of rage and despair.

INT. YULIYA’S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Yuliya writes in her notebook. She’s composed now, but still furious.

She HEARS a KNOCK on her door.

She leaps off of her bed, searches frantically around her room for a place to hide her writers’ notebook. She stuffs it into a dresser drawer, buries it under a thick pile of clothing.

She runs to the door, pulls it open to find Alexander. He takes one look at Yuliya, processes her fragility.

ALEXANDER
What happened?

Yuliya ushers Alexander inside, closes the door.

YULIYA
Someone I’m close with disappeared.

ALEXANDER
Are you sure?

Yuliya nods.

YULIYA
(grimly, matter of fact)
The state took him. He’s dead.
Alexander embraces Yuliya.

ALEXANDER
I’m so sorry.

YULIYA
My father was behind it.

ALEXANDER
How can you be sure?

YULIYA
He was my poetry professor.

ALEXANDER
(agreeing)
Oh.

Yuliya pulls away from the embrace.

YULIYA
I have to go in a minute.

ALEXANDER
Where?

YULIYA
My writers’ group. I wrote a poem for him.

ALEXANDER
You’re meeting tonight?

Yuliya nods.

ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
Yuliya. Don’t be stupid.

YULIYA
What do you mean?

ALEXANDER
They took your professor today and you’re going to an illegal meeting this evening?

YULIYA
I have to.

ALEXANDER
It’s not safe.

YULIYA
It’s never safe.
ALEXANDER
If they took one person today, they’re probably still looking for others. It’s dangerous to be out there.

YULIYA
It’s not a crime to be outside at night.

ALEXANDER
It’s a crime to be caught with Anti-Party poetry.

He’s right. Yuliya considers the implications of his statement momentarily. Then, decidedly

YULIYA
It’s a risk I have to take.

ALEXANDER
You could wait a week.

Yuliya shakes her head.

YULIYA
I have to be with the other writers. We have to plan our counterattack.

ALEXANDER
Your counterattack?

YULIYA
We have to do something to show that we won’t just sit back passively as more writers are taken.

ALEXANDER
Like what? Assassinate Comrade Stalin?

YULIYA
No! Like... speaking out publicly for what I think is right. You must understand my perspective.

ALEXANDER
I do, I just wish you could wait.

YULIYA
I can’t.
Yuliya kisses Alexander.

    YULIYA (CONT’D)
    I’ll be fine.

She turns to leave.

    ALEXANDER
    Wait. Yuliya?

Yuliya turns back to face Alexander. Alexander swallows hard, his face suddenly flushed.

    ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
    I love you.

Yuliya’s eyes widen. She kisses Alexander deeply for a long moment. Then she pulls herself away from him.

    YULIYA
    I’ll see you soon.

INT. WRITERS’ BAR - LATER

The atmosphere is somber as Yuliya walks into the writers’ bar. The writers sit silently, their heads down.

Yuliya quietly takes a seat on one of the couches.

    VLAD
    (to the group)
    Good. And when you’re ready, you can begin to come back to the group.
    (to Yuliya)
    We’re taking a moment of silence.

He tries to decide how to break the news to Yuliya gently.

    VLAD (CONT’D)
    Have you heard --

    YULIYA
    -- I went to his apartment.

She takes a folded piece of paper out of her bag, passes it to Vlad.

    YULIYA (CONT’D)
    I made a list of all of my father’s events that I could remember.

Vlad takes the list from her.
VLAD
Thank you. I’ll look it over.

YULIYA
I’ll speak at any of them. Even more than one, if I can.

VLAD
Let’s not get carried away. We have to act rationally, no matter how angry or upset we are. Today is a time to allow ourselves to feel sad.

YULIYA
I wrote a poem about him. It felt like what he would want me to do.

The writers look up at her. Some interested, some surprised.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
I could read it, if you wanted.

VLAD
Go ahead.

Yuliya takes her writers’ notebook out of her bag. She opens it on her lap.

YULIYA
Are you a king, or are you a coward?
Your throne says king, your power indisputable, inconcealable intolerable.
But your whine says coward.
Pushing away any object any group any human
to get what you think you need.
But passion builds nations, not power, and passion flowed through him, not you.
He who you scoffed at, pushed aside and finally murdered
to maintain the illusion of your prim little throne.
He who taught, inspired and thought.
He who others admired instead of you.
But if he teaches advocacy, then his legacy leaves advocates,
(MORE)
YULIYA (CONT'D)
ready to speak out for our hopes
and beliefs and our long lost
voices.
You only teach silence.
He is the king.
You are the coward.

Yuliya closes her writers notebook. The group is silent for a
moment, then

WRITER WOMAN
Wow.

VLAD
I’d like to ask you to put this in
our writers’ book. For Petrov.

YULIYA
Writers’ book?

Vlad stands up, removes the cushion of the chair he typically
occupies. Underneath is a small, bound notebook. Vlad picks
up the notebook, then puts the cushion back on the chair.

He passes the notebook to Yuliya, then sits.

VLAD
We compile our best poetry, with
the thought that our writing may
transcend our own mortality.

YULIYA
What do I do?

Vlad sits up straight, suddenly all business.

VLAD
You put the book in your bag, and
you head home immediately. Leaving
before the group disperses makes
you less conspicuous.

YULIYA
Okay.

VLAD
Write your poem into it, but don’t
put your name on it. Bring the book
back next week. You’ll need to be
just as careful when you’re getting
here.

YULIYA
I will be.
VLAD
Do you live with your father?

YULIYA
No.

VLAD
Alone?

YULIYA
Yes.

VLAD
Do you ever have visitors?

YULIYA
Sometimes.

VLAD
Hide the notebook somewhere that nobody would expect. Be very careful about your hiding place. You cannot be caught with this book.

YULIYA
I’ll be careful.

VLAD
I’ll look into your list of events in the meantime.

YULIYA
Okay.

Beat.

VLAD
Are you sure you want to go through with this?

YULIYA
I’m sure.

VLAD
Pass me your book bag.

Yuliya passes the bag to Vlad.

Vlad examines it, then takes a small knife out of his back pocket. He cuts a slit in the lining of the bag, just large enough to fit the writers’ notebook. He tucks the notebook inside of the lining, then passes the bag back to Yuliya.
VLAD (CONT’D)

There.

YULIYA

Thank you.

Yuliya stands, waves goodbye to the group. She begins to walk towards the door.

VLAD

Be careful, Yuliya.

EXT. MOSCOW STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

Yuliya walks out of the writers’ bar and onto the street, her bag tucked tightly under her arm. She looks around nervously.

The street is empty. Yuliya begins to walk. First slowly, apprehensively, then more hurriedly, quickening her pace as she takes in the deserted streets around her.

As she walks, she begins to relax. She takes a deep breath in, then a long breath out.

She rounds a corner and allows herself another deep exhale.

Suddenly, two large men leap out of a parked car. They race over to Yuliya and stand in front of her, blocking her path. Yuliya stops dead.

Both men whip out badges.

NKVD #1

NKVD.

NKVD #2

NKVD.

NKVD #1

What’s your name?

YULIYA

(petrified)

Yuliya Mikhaelovna Vazov.

NKVD #1

(to the other officer)

Search her.

The second NKVD officer seizes Yuliya’s bag. Yuliya panics, tries to grab it back from him.
YULIYA
Please don’t look through that.
There’s nothing in it --

The officer dumps the entire contents of the bag onto the sidewalk. Pens and papers fall to the ground, but the notebook remains firmly lodged in the bag’s lining.

The second officer gives the bag one more shake. Something inside of it makes a soft THUMPING noise.

NKVD #1
Something’s in there.

Yuliya holds her breath, not daring to move.

The second officer puts his hand inside the bag. He feels around for a moment.

NKVD #2
Got it.

He tears out the bag’s lining, and the notebook falls onto the ground.

The first officer picks up the notebook. He flips through it for a moment.

NKVD #1
(to the other officer)
Put her in the car.

The second officer takes out a set of handcuffs.

YULIYA
What are you doing?!

The officer cuffs Yuliya’s wrists. The second officer opens the door of the car. Yuliya struggles, tries to kick the officer.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
Let me go!

The officer clubs Yuliya violently on the head. She collapses into a pile on the ground. The officer picks her up, shoves her inside the car. He closes the door with a SLAM.

INT. PRISON CELL – LATER

Yuliya opens her eyes. She blinks. We see the room from her POV. It’s dark, illuminated only by a pale beam of light creeping in from a small window near the ceiling.
Yuliya shivers, realizes that she is lying on the floor. It’s cold, dirty.

The prison is silent, save for the sounds of sporadic moans and a sprinkling of coughs coming from surrounding cells.

Yuliya stands up, shivers again. She touches her hand to her head and feels dried blood. She looks down at her arm, realizes that she is dressed in a prisoner’s uniform.

She looks around once again, and the events of the day come flooding back to her. Yuliya retches, then is violently sick in the corner of her cell.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. - PRISON CELL - LATER

Yuliya lies curled up in a ball on the floor of her cell.

Two GUARDS throw open her cell door. They each grab her by an arm and drag her out of the cell. A THIRD GUARD slams the cell door behind them.

YULIYA
Where are you taking me?

Her voice comes out only as a hoarse whisper. The guards do not reply.

They drag her down a dark hallway, too dark for her to see her surroundings.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
(more forceful)
Where are you taking me?

Still nothing. Suddenly, the guards stop. They open a door and push Yuliya inside of a room.

The room is lit by a harsh fluorescent lamp. Yuliya squints, blinded by its beam. The guards leave.

As Yuliya’s eyes adjust, she makes out two INTERROGATORS seated at a table.

INTERROGATOR #1
Sit.

Yuliya sits.

INTERROGATOR #1 (CONT’D)
Tell us why you are here.
YULIYA
I don’t know.

INTERROGATOR #1
Don’t lie to us.

YULIYA
You found my poetry.

INTERROGATOR #2
You are here on the counts of creating and distributing slanderous materials against the Party.

YULIYA
What does distributing mean?

INTERROGATOR #1
Don’t interrupt.

INTERROGATOR #2
You also are here on the counts of running anti-Party groups and conspiring against the life of Number One.

INTERROGATOR #1
Your punishment will be more lenient if you confess to committing these crimes.

YULIYA
(incredulous)
You’re saying I conspired to kill Comrade Stalin?

INTERROGATOR #1
Number One. You’re not to utter his name.

INTERROGATOR #2
You are charged on conspiracy against the life of Number One. Yes.

YULIYA
On what grounds?

INTERROGATOR #1
The grounds are irrelevant.
YULIYA
But these charges aren’t true! I never ran an anti-Party group, and I haven’t distributed Anti-Stalinist materials, and I certainly haven’t made any plans to kill Comrade Stalin!

INTERROGATOR #2
(pointed)
Number One.

INTERROGATOR #1
Are you going to confess to your crimes?

YULIYA
I won’t confess to crimes I didn’t commit.

INT. PRISON HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER
Guards drag Yuliya back through the dark, winding hallway. They unlock the door to Yuliya’s cell, push her back inside.

YULIYA
I need to speak with somebody about these false charges.

One of the guards laughs. He locks the door of the cell behind Yuliya, and the guards leave.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
(calling after them, more pitifully)
Please?

The guards disappear into the darkness. Yuliya inhales, looks down at the filthy floor. Exhausted, she sits. She takes another deep breath, then begins to cry. First softly, then loud, deep sobs.

PYOTER (O.S.)
Don’t bother.

The voice comes from the cell next to Yuliya’s. She sniffs, wipes her eyes.

PYOTER (O.S.) (CONT’D)
They won’t hear you, and if they do they won’t care.

Yuliya wipes her eyes again.
PYOTER (O.S.) (CONT’D)
What’s your name?

YULIYA
How can I trust you?

PYOTER (O.S.)
You can’t. I can’t trust you either.

He laughs sharply, bitterly.

PYOTER (O.S.) (CONT’D)
Not that it matters. We’re already behind bars.

Beat. Yuliya sniffles again.

PYOTER (O.S.) (CONT’D)
I’m Pyoter. Charged on violent resistance of dekulakization peasantry policies.

YULIYA
I’m Yuliya. Charged on lots of things I didn’t do.

PYOTER (O.S.)
Like trying to kill Number One?

YULIYA
How did you know?

PYOTER (O.S.)
Everyone’s charged with trying to kill Number One.

YULIYA
How do I get it removed?

Pyoter laughs his sharp, grating laugh.

PYOTER (O.S.)
You don’t get anything removed. You confess to all of the crimes they say you committed.

YULIYA
Why?
PYOTER (O.S.)
On the off-chance they’ll keep you alive.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM – LATER

Yuliya sits in the same interrogation room as before. The fluorescent light is even more blinding this time.

Nobody speaks. Finally

INTERROGATOR #1
Will you confess?

YULIYA
I’ll confess to the crimes I’ve committed.

INTERROGATOR #1
Go ahead.

The interrogators fold their arms in front of their chests.

YULIYA
I confess to writing anti-Party materials.

The interrogators say nothing. Continue to wait. Yuliya is finished speaking. Finally

INTERROGATOR #1
And the other crimes?

YULIYA
That’s the only crime I’ve committed.

INT. PRISON HALLWAY – MOMENTS LATER

Guards drag Yuliya back to her cell. They push her inside, lock the door behind her.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PRISON CELL – LATER

Yuliya lies on her cell floor, unable to sleep. Her eyes have adjusted to the dark, and she can make out the silhouettes of the objects around her.
Suddenly, hands begin to hit the prison floor in unison. They reverberate across the prison, pounding into the ground.

A terrible scream ricochets across the prison hallway.

    PRISONER
    HELP ME!

Then the sound of wood repeatedly splintering against flesh. Another penetrating scream. More sounds of a struggle.

Yuliya crawls to the bars on the front of her cell. She looks outside.

Guards are dragging a prisoner down the long, dark hallway. The prisoner is putting up a fight, flailing and kicking and trying to bite the guards.

    PRISONER (CONT’D)
    LET ME GO.

One of the guards takes his club, administers a blow to the prisoner’s skull. The prisoner twitches, then slumps onto the ground.

The first guard throws the prisoner over his shoulder, and the two guards disappear into the depths of the hallway.

The pounding on the ground stops, replaced by whispers that float through the darkness.

Yuliya, still on all fours, crawls over to the side wall of her cell. She knocks on the wall softly.

    YULIYA
    Pyoter.

    PYOTER (O.S.)
    Were you watching?

    YULIYA
    What happened?

    PYOTER (O.S.)
    Non-conformist behavior.

    YULIYA
    What about it?

    PYOTER (O.S.)
    (imitating a guard)
    “Non-conformist prisoners are to be removed for behavioral modification.”
YULIYA
To be killed?

Pyoter laughs sharply.

PYOTER (O.S.)
(sarcastic)
For a picnic.

YULIYA
What qualifies as non-conformist behavior?

PYOTER (O.S.)
Oh, let’s see. Refusing to confess to your crimes, for example.
(pointed)
All of them.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - LATER

Yuliya sits in front of the same two interrogators. Their arms are folded.

INTERROGATOR #1
You want to amend your confession.

Yuliya nods.

INTERROGATOR #2
Go ahead.

Yuliya braces herself.

YULIYA
I confess to writing and distributing anti-Party materials --

INTERROGATOR #1
Go on.

YULIYA
-- and to running an anti-Party group.

She takes a deep breath, swallows hard.

YULIYA (CONT’D)
I also confess to conspiring against the life of Number One.

83.
The first interrogator unfolds his arms.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PRISON CELL - LATER

Guards throw open the door to Yuliya’s cell. They grab her by the arms, drag her into an interrogation room.

Yuliya’s two interrogators await her.

Yuliya sits.

INTERROGATOR #1
Tell us about your writers’ group.

YULIYA
What?

INTERROGATOR #1
Tell us where you meet.

Yuliya is startled, upset.

YULIYA
I already gave you a confession.

The second interrogator laughs.

INTERROGATOR #1
This is the next step.

INTERROGATOR #2
After you confess, you repent.

INTERROGATOR #1
Sharing information with us is an important part of repentance.

YULIYA
You didn’t tell me I would have to repent.

INTERROGATOR #2
We’re telling you now.

INTERROGATOR #1
Where does your writers’ group meet?
YULIYA
I was willing to confess to my own crimes, but I won’t incriminate others.

INT. PRISON CELL - LATER

Yuliya sleeps on her cell floor. Guards throw open the door to her cell.

GUARD
Get up.

Yuliya scrambles to her feet. The guards each grab one of her arms and pull her out of the cell. They begin to walk her down the long, dark hallway.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The guards open the door to the interrogation room. Yuliya steps inside. The door closes behind her.

Yuliya looks at her interrogators. The first interrogator is back. But the second interrogator has been replaced with a NEW INTERROGATOR.

Yuliya eyes him uneasily. She sits.

INTERROGATOR #1
We need you to give us the names of the other writers in your group.

YULIYA
I told you I can’t.

INTERROGATOR #1
Can’t?

YULIYA
Won’t.

INTERROGATOR #1
You are not repentant if you refuse to help us.

YULIYA
I never agreed to repent.

The interrogator’s lips curl up into a sneer.
INTERROGATOR #1
We don’t appreciate non-conformist behavior.

Yuliya says nothing.

INTERROGATOR #1 (CONT’D)
You won’t speak?

YULIYA
No.

The first interrogator turns to the new interrogator. He smiles grimly.

INTERROGATOR #1
Go ahead.

The new interrogator stands. He picks Yuliya up, throws her over his shoulder. Yuliya screams and kicks, but the new interrogator is too strong for her. He proceeds down the dark hallway.

INT. TORTURE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The new interrogator opens the door to a small room containing only a bathtub filled with ice water. He drops Yuliya into the tub.

Yuliya yelps, shivers.

NEW INTERROGATOR
Enjoy your swim.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TORTURE ROOM - LATER

Yuliya huddles in the bathtub, shivering. Her skin has wrinkled, and blue veins pop out against her now pale complexion.

She picks up a piece of ice, examines it. Then sets it back in the tub.

An idea dawns on her. She feels around on the bottom of the bathtub, finds what she’s looking for. The drain.

She pulls on it, first lightly, then harder, finally yanking it out of the tub.
Yuliya looks at the drain in her shivering hand. She smiles to herself and tucks the drain into the lining of her sopping prison uniform.

A guard bursts into the room.

GUARD
Get out.

Yuliya steps out of the tub, shivering violently.

GUARD (CONT’D)
Follow me.

INT. PRISON CELL – LATER

Still damp and shivering, Yuliya peers through the bars on her cell and scans the area around the cell block. Nobody is around.

She stands very still, listening. Nothing.

Finally, Yuliya takes the bathtub drain out of the lining of her uniform. She looks around once more, then approaches the far wall of her cell.

She takes the drain, begins to use its sharp end to carve poetry into the wall.

INT. PRISON CELL – LATER

Yuliya is finishing her poem. A small ray of light creeps in through the window atop Yuliya’s cell, drying Yuliya’s uniform and warming her skin. Just barely.

Yuliya reads the poem aloud under her breath.

YULIYA
Father always told me,
“don’t give up on your dreams.”
I wonder if he imagined me here
bony
shivering
covered in dirt.
I wonder if he knew
I could be this free.
She smiles.

INT. PRISON CELL - LATER

Yuliya sits on the ground of her prison cell, tracing words into the ground with her index finger.

Two guards approach. One carries a bowl of watery soup.

   GUARD #1
   Are you willing to discuss your writers’ group?

Yuliya shakes her head.

   GUARD #1 (CONT’D)
   (gently)
   I’m not allowed to give this to you unless you cooperate.

Suddenly, the second guard elbows the first guard. He points to the poem on the back wall.

   GUARD #2
   Yosif, look at that.

The first guard sees the poem, reads it quickly.

   GUARD #1
   Shit.

   GUARD #2
   Come on.

The two guards leave.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - LATER

Yuliya sits in front of her two interrogators.

   INTERROGATOR #1
   So.

Silence.

   INTERROGATOR #1 (CONT’D)
   You have continued to write.
Yuliya says nothing.

INTERROGATOR #1 (CONT’D)
I told you we don’t tolerate non-conformist prisoners.

Still nothing.

INTERROGATOR #1 (CONT’D)
We need your word that you will stop writing, as well as a list of the other writers in your group.

YULIYA
I’m sorry, I can’t fulfill your requests.

INTERROGATOR #1
Are you sure?

The new interrogator sets a chopping knife onto the table.

NEW INTERROGATOR
Perhaps you would cooperate if we cut off a finger.

Yuliya says nothing.

NEW INTERROGATOR (CONT’D)
Your index finger.

Yuliya remains silent.

The new interrogator picks up the knife.

NEW INTERROGATOR (CONT’D)
Set your hand on the table.

Yuliya sets her hand on the table.

NEW INTERROGATOR (CONT’D)
Spread out your fingers.

Yuliya spreads out her fingers.

The new interrogator begins to trace the knife over Yuliya’s knuckles. The corners of his lips turn up ever so slightly in a grim half-smile.

Yuliya sits very still, tries not to shudder.

NEW INTERROGATOR (CONT’D)
Will you cooperate now?
Yuliya shakes her head no.

The new interrogator takes the knife, pins it against Yuliya’s neck.

NEW INTERROGATOR (CONT’D)

How about now?

Yuliya again shakes her head.

In a single swift motion, the new interrogator grabs Yuliya’s wrist, holds it onto the table, and smashes the knife into Yuliya’s finger.

We HOLD on THE INTERROGATOR’S FACE as the knife pierces Yuliya’s flesh and bone. His mouth twists upward into a grin.

We HEAR Yuliya SCREAM in agony as her finger is severed.

INT. PRISON HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Guards escort Yuliya down the prison hallway. She presses the fabric of her uniform against her profusely bleeding hand, winces in pain.

GUARD #1

You’ll cause less trouble in solitary confinement.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SOLITARY CONFINEMENT CELL - LATER

Yuliya sits on the floor of an even smaller cell. Her right hand is wrapped in the folds of her uniform, which is covered in the deep crimson stains of her own blood.

Yuliya unwraps her hand from the uniform and looks down at it in horror.

Half of her index finger is missing. The tip has begun to crust over, but it still drips a slow, steady stream of blood. Yuliya swallows hard. She rips off a long piece of her uniform using her left hand.

She picks up the piece of fabric and begins to crochet it, gingerly avoiding using her index finger.

Once she has about a pen’s length of her crochet chain, Yuliya stops. She picks up the chain and attempts to hold it in her right hand.
She winces in pain, drops the crochet chain onto the filthy floor.

Yuliya looks down at the chain, then picks it up with her left hand. She works to hold it like a pencil.

Once her hand is in the proper position, she begins to trace the alphabet on the floor, using the crochet chain to guide her left hand along the ground. Teaching herself to write all over again.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SOLITARY CONFINEMENT CELL - LATER

Yuliya sleeps, curled up into a ball on the ground of her tiny cell. The air around her is silent.

Guards burst into the cell, interrupting her slumber.

GUARD

Get up.

Yuliya stands. The guards shine a harsh light on her, and she squints under its beam.

One guard grabs each of Yuliya’s shoulders. They push her out of her cell, slamming the door behind her. They begin to drag her down the hall.

EXT./INT. - INTERROGATION ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The guards unlock a door to an interrogation room large enough only for two people. They push Yuliya inside and close the door behind her.

Yuliya blinks, adjusting to the harsh light. When her eyes finally focus, she gasps softly.

Alexander sits across from her, on the interrogator’s side of the table.

ALEXANDER

Please sit.

Yuliya sits.

YULIYA

(concerned)

Did they find your books?
ALEXANDER
I work here, Yuliya.

YULIYA
What do you mean?

ALEXANDER
I work for Comrade Stalin.

He’s matter of fact, but his face betrays his anguish.

Yuliya’s eyes widen in disbelief.

YULIYA
But you’re not even completely Pro-Party. Your books --

ALEXANDER
(cutting her off)
-- they were a part of an act.

YULIYA
What are you talking about?

ALEXANDER
Comrade Stalin commissioned me to seduce you to gather information about your father.

Yuliya’s face crumples. She swallows hard, looks up at Alexander.

YULIYA
(horrified)
Oh.

ALEXANDER
It’s not uncommon for Comrade Stalin to place spies to assess cabinet members’ loyalties.

YULIYA
No one is more loyal to the Party than my father.

ALEXANDER
Yes. Ironically, the only blemish on his record is you.

YULIYA
Where is he now?

ALEXANDER
Prison.
YULIYA
And my mother?

ALEXANDER
Exiled to Siberia.

Yuliya swallows hard.

YULIYA
And everything between us was
staged to incriminate them.

ALEXANDER
No.

A beat, as Alexander struggles to decide how to continue.

ALEXANDER (CONT’D)
Comrade Stalin instructed me to
seduce you, to show you unpublished
literature, to keep a journal of my
findings, and to share that journal
with him once weekly. He did not
instruct me to fall in love with
you. But I did.

YULIYA
You put me in prison.

ALEXANDER
I had no choice, Yuliya.

YULIYA
You could have told Comrade Stalin
I was clean.

ALEXANDER
Your writing was growing too
conspicuous. Someone else would
have denounced you and Comrade
Stalin would have realized I was
shielding you.

YULIYA
So you turned me in to protect
yourself.

ALEXANDER
I can save you now. It isn’t too
late for us.

YULIYA
(softening slightly)
How?
ALEXANDER
If you confess to your crimes and cooperate with the interrogators, I can have you released in a few weeks.

YULIYA
I can’t cooperate.

ALEXANDER
Why not?

YULIYA
They want me to turn in the other writers in my group.

ALEXANDER
I know.

YULIYA
I can’t.

ALEXANDER
Yuliya. Think of our future. You could move into my apartment, and we could start a life for ourselves. We could be married and enjoy the best of the Soviet Union together. Wouldn’t that make you happy?

YULIYA
(sickened)
You think I should give up the writers in my group so that I can be happy?

ALEXANDER
I’m not saying you would feel good about it, but imagine what our future could be.

YULIYA
I wouldn’t want a future with you.

ALEXANDER
I know you’re upset --

YULIYA
(cutting him off)
-- I thought you were fresh and funny and idealistic, and you’re none of those things at all.

(MORE)
If I turned in the people fighting for the things I believe in, who would I be?

ALEXANDER
Yuliya, please. Think of how much I love you. Doesn’t that make you feel anything?

Yuliya half-smiles sadly at him.

YULIYA
Not anymore.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM – LATER

Yuliya sits in front of her two interrogators.

The first interrogator smiles nastily.

INTERROGATOR #1
Did you enjoy your conversation with Alexander?

Yuliya holds her head high, says nothing.

INTERROGATOR #1 (CONT’D)
Are you ready to cooperate?

YULIYA
How?

The new interrogator sets a piece of paper and a pencil on the table in front of Yuliya.

INTERROGATOR #1
Write down the names of the other writers in your group.

Yuliya looks down at the paper. She frowns.

YULIYA
Okay.

Yuliya picks up the pencil with her left hand. She begins to write on the piece of paper.

For a moment, it looks like Yuliya might be following the interrogators’ orders. But it quickly becomes evident that she isn’t just writing down names.
The first interrogator snatches the piece of paper out of Yuliya’s hands. He looks at it, snarls.

INTERROGATOR #1
(reading the poem)
If violence and threats are the riches of a man,
then the man has no riches at all.
If violence and threats are the riches of a state --

The interrogator sets the poem down, glares at Yuliya.

INTERROGATOR #1 (CONT’D)
Do you find yourself clever?

YULIYA
I find myself honest.

INTERROGATOR #1
Will you write down the names?

YULIYA
I will write.

INTERROGATOR #1
(more forceful)
Will you write down the names?

YULIYA
I won’t.

NEW INTERROGATOR
You understand that your life is on the line.

YULIYA
I won’t write down the names.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SOLITARY CONFINEMENT CELL - LATER

Yuliya awakes to the sound of her door opening. She looks up, sees a pair of guards at her door.

GUARD #2
Get up.

Yuliya stands. The first guard throws a black cloth over her head.
Yuliya lets out a yell, begins to struggle. The guards ignore her, drag her down the hall.

INT. PRISON HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Guards lead Yuliya, still blindfolded, down the hallway.

The hallway winds and turns, seemingly never-ending.

Suddenly, the guards stop. One takes the black cloth off Yuliya’s head, while the other unlocks a door to a room. It doesn’t look like any of the other rooms that Yuliya has seen before.

But the guards shove Yuliya inside before she has a moment to consider the differences.

GUARD #1
Three minutes.

GUARD #2
Make yourself look presentable.
You’ll be in front of a crowd.

Yuliya’s eyes widen. We HOLD on HER EYES as

ZINOVIEV (V.O.)
(Yuliya’s auditory recollection)
I have done nothing wrong.

The guards shut the door.

Yuliya finds herself in a dimly lit bathroom.

She takes a deep, shaky breath. Then another. Then finally a third, calmer breath.

She presses her eyes shut, then opens them. Blinks.

Finally, Yuliya looks at herself in a mirror that hangs crookedly over the bathroom’s filthy sink.

Even through the layers of dirt that cake the mirror’s surface, Yuliya is startled to see her own reflection.

She’s skeletally thin, and her complexion is yellow tinted. Her uniform is stained a deep crimson with dried blood.

Yuliya turns on the faucet and splashes water onto her face.

She takes her left hand and combs it through her matted hair.
Yuliya straightens her uniform, then takes another hard look at herself in the mirror. She takes a deep breath.

The guards throw open the door.

    GUARD #2
    Ready?

Yuliya looks the guard in the eye.

    YULIYA
    Ready.

The guards throw the cloth over Yuliya’s head once again. They begin to drag her down more winding hallways.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SOMEWHERE - MOMENTS LATER

The tunnels have opened up to an outside area -- Yuliya can tell because a blinding light pours in through the cloth over her head. The guards continue walking.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SOMEWHERE - MOMENTS LATER

The light spilling in through the cloth over Yuliya’s head dims, transitioning into the muted light of an indoor room. The guards stop suddenly.

A MAN yanks the blindfold off Yuliya’s eyes. Yuliya blinks slowly, takes in her surroundings.

She is in a courtroom, on a stage overlooking an ENORMOUS CROWD. Members of the crowd chant aggressively. Yuliya realizes that their jeering and shouting is directed at her.

Yuliya’s eyes travel to the throne-like chair on the side of the stage. Stalin smokes his pipe, his beady eyes traveling over the crowd. His eyes momentarily meet Yuliya’s, and he scowls deeply.

Yuliya looks away from Stalin, and her gaze falls on the only man in front of her on the stage. He looks haggard, spent. A skeleton draped in human flesh.

She takes a step forward, peers at the man’s face. Then she gasps. The man in front of her is her father.
Mikhail turns, the small movement taxing him greatly. He takes note of Yuliya, and his eyes bulge in the same horrified recognition.

MIKHAIL
Look what you did to us.

Before Yuliya can respond, the TRIAL LEADER takes center stage.

TRIAL LEADER
I now call Mikhail Alexandrovich Vazov to step forward.

Mikhail takes a few small steps forward. His head is hung low, his former dignity markedly absent.

TRIAL LEADER (CONT’D)
I will read through your list of crimes. If you confess, your punishment will be more lenient.

Mikhail nods, whimpers.

TRIAL LEADER (CONT’D)
We charge you with sabotaging the production of educational classroom materials, corrupting the University hiring process, repeated verbal slander of Party policies, writing anti-Party poetry, sabotaging industrial shipments, and conspiracy against the life of Number One. How do you plead?

Tears now run down Mikhail’s face. He drops to both knees at the trial leader’s feet, clasping his white knuckles together.

MIKHAIL
I plead guilty. Please allow me to repent and demonstrate my capacity to reform. I beg of you!

Mikhail now sobs freely.

MIKHAIL (CONT’D)
Please!

The trial leader smirks at Mikhail, contempt etched across his face.
TRIAL LEADER
(to the guards)
Take him back to prison.

Two GUARDS pluck Mikhail up off the ground and pull him off the stage.

Mikhail sobs even more heavily. He turns once more to the trial leader.

MIKHAIL
You won’t regret this.

Yuliya turns away from her father as the guards escort him off the stage. She shivers.

TRIAL LEADER
I now call forth Yuliya Mikhailovna Vazov.

Yuliya steps forward. She inhales, then exhales shakily.

TRIAL LEADER (CONT’D)
I will read through your crimes. If you admit to your guilt, we will be more lenient with your punishment.

Yuliya nods.

TRIAL LEADER (CONT’D)
We charge you on possession of banned books, writing anti-Party poetry, running an anti-Party group, repeated verbal slander of Party policy, and conspiring against the life of Number one. How do you plead?

Yuliya takes another shaky breath.

YULIYA
My father didn’t commit any of the crimes he confessed to, and I didn’t commit the majority of the crimes you’re accusing me of committing.

The crowd gasps. The trial leader eyes Yuliya coldly.

TRIAL LEADER
Do you have anything else to say for yourself?

Yuliya looks out into the audience.
Toward the front of the crowd, Yuliya picks out Alexander, 
now dressed in a Party uniform. His face is pale and nervous. 
His blue eyes are wide, begging Yuliya to back down.

Yuliya spots Vlad further back in the crowd. Vlad looks up at 
Yuliya, nods ever so slightly.

Then, in the center of the crowd, Yuliya spots A LITTLE GIRL 
IN A RED DRESS. She’s no older than ten, and she clutches her 
father’s hand tightly.

Her FATHER is dressed in a dark suit, clearly identifiable as 
a government man.

The little girl looks up at Yuliya, and their eyes meet for a 
brief moment. The girl smiles at her.

Yuliya straightens her posture. She stands dignified, tall. 
Suddenly unafraid.

YULIYA
Life is only worthwhile 
if it is worthwhile. 
Death is only worthwhile 
if it is worthwhile. 
If Party censorship colors my life 
worthless, 
choking the questions out of my 
words, 
choking the power out of my life 
Then my only aspiration 
is to die worthwhile.

TRIAL LEADER
Take her away.

Two guards pull Yuliya off the stage by her handcuffs. She 
follows them willingly, disappearing out of sight.

We HOLD on THE LITTLE GIRL AND HER FATHER as we HEAR the 
SOUND OF A GUNSHOT.

The little girl’s eyes widen, and she pulls on her father’s 
arm.

We TRACK IN closer on the LITTLE GIRL’S FACE as she looks up 
at her father. She frowns.

FADE TO BLACK.