

Ostern

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Abstract

Ostern came from a desire to explore the subjects of loss, relentlessness and the delusional pursuit of lost cause.

The piece chronicles the journey of Piotr; whose actions and lack of actions uproot him and his loved ones from their lives in Moscow City and exiles them to a Siberian penal colony.

Set on the backdrop of the latter days of Imperial Russia the character of Piotr suffers one ordeal after another. He stands as a testament to how far the human spirit can drive someone to finish a journey; one that is known by all but themselves to be an impossible task.

Taking inspiration from David Lean's Doctor Zhivago and classical Russian Literature this story aims to strike a balance between a sweeping epic and a thoughtful character study.

Embarking on an odyssey to be reunited with his family after a daring prison escape, Piotr becomes entangled with Maria, a widow who is struggling to run her late husband's wheat farm as well as keep at bay the desires of a member of a local crime family.

After saving Maria from the advances of her connected attacker the two become unlikely companions.

The characters: burying their heads in the sand about their situation, form a bond as they try to sell Maria's farm. This is until the hopelessness of their situation becomes too hard to suppress.

Ultimately the characters desires for closure are defeated by their harsh reality; being on the run from the law, and the unlawful, on the cold plains of Siberia.

The two characters, unsuccessful in their pursuits, set off on the next step of their journey. They step into the unknown of the future together. Their wounds are closed. Not healed, but cauterised by the violent finale.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Name (printed): Jack Clewer

Date: 30/01/2023

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jack Clewer', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

FADE IN:

EXT. SIBERIAN PLAIN - DAY

SUPER: "Siberia, 1913"

The cold serene silence that covers a vast icy Plain is punctured by the sounds of frantic gasping. The sea of snow crunches beneath scrambling feet and hands.

Engulfed by a thick but gentle snow, PIOTR ZIMA, late 30's, scruffy hair and beard, dressed in rags barely suitable for the harsh conditions of Siberia, scrambles across an endless white landscape towards the safety of the trees that loom in the distance.

Hooves persistently and rhythmically crunch into the snow as the sight of a single shot rifle tracks along the horizon. It stops on the barely visible silhouette of the fleeing figure.

The rifle bobs up and down before stabilizing.

BANG!

Piotr instantly drops to the ground.

The still body of Piotr Zima lays face down in the snow.

One by one, in what feels like an eternity, hooves smash into the ground as the horses close in on their prey, snorting in fear as they get near.

PRE-LAP: Sounds of busy streets and nightlife.

EXT. MOSCOW - NIGHT

Restaurants and tavernas light up the darkness of downtown Moscow. The streets are littered with bustling aristocrats wrapped up warm in their winter wear.

Horse and carriages compete with the new kid on the block, the automobile. All of them vying to take the patrons of the city to and from their homes.

TITLE: "Ostern"

SUPER: "Moscow City, 1912"

A small restaurant, DIMITRI'S, stands out on the corner of a side street which turns off the main road.

INT. DIMITRI'S - NIGHT -

The cramped establishment, adorned with faux ancient Greek décor, is filled to the brim. Groups of various sizes populate the tables. The alcohol is flowing thus spirits are high.

With precision, cutlery is placed onto a small EMPTY TABLE by a clean shaven Piotr. Like a magician using sleight of hand the waiter folds napkins into decorative shapes and populates the table with them.

An outcry of commotion grabs his attention.

On the other side of the restaurant a waitress, ANNA ZIMA, 30's, slight build with an unassuming disposition, tries to take the frantic drunken orders being barked at her by the LARGEST TABLE in the restaurant. The elderly and inebriated gentlemen are growing impatient as Anna struggles with their demands.

GENTLEMAN

Chop, chop. Don't leave any of us
waiting young lady!

EXT. MOSCOW CITY - NIGHT

Frozen cobblestones are battered by several black boots.

INT. DIMITRI'S - NIGHT

Piotr sits a YOUNG COUPLE down at his freshly made table.

PIOTR

Could I start you off with some
drinks?

In the corner of his eye he sees Anna struggling to balance a large order of drinks on one tray.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

A delivery of Retsina has arrived
straight from the island of
Cephalonia, just this morning in
fact.

The young man looks to his companion for approval then nods to Piotr who swiftly turns away from the table.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

Coming right up sir.

In a whirlwind Piotr removes the tray from Anna's hand without spilling a drop and in one swift motion heads in the direction of the large table.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
A bottle of Retsina to table four.

EXT. MOSCOW CITY - NIGHT

Clad in expensive fur coats, designed equally for posturing as much as practicality, a group of ARISTOCRATS casually stroll down the cold street. Suddenly they disperse, allowing several POLICEMEN to run past them unimpeded.

INT. DIMITRI'S - NIGHT

Piotr, with speed and finesse, distributes drinks around the large table.

GENTLEMAN
That's more like it.

The old man pulls a packet of cigarettes from his pocket and points one in the direction of Piotr.

PIOTR
As much as I would love to sir, my wife swears she would never lay her lips on mine again.

Piotr watches Anna carry a bottle of Retsina to table four.

EXT. MOSCOW CITY - NIGHT

The hurrying police turn off the main street and head down an alley situated between two buildings. As they turn the corner they begin to sprint and yell.

The commotion startles nearby pedestrians.

EXT. DIMITRI'S - LATER

Piotr and Anna step out of the dark empty restaurant entrance. Startled by the cold the pair pull their jackets tight around themselves.

Piotr locks the doors while Anna looks down the street with curiosity.

Piotr steps behind Anna and links her arm. The couple set off down the street.

EXT. MOSCOW CITY - NIGHT

Anna and Piotr stumble across a large gathering of people who are all fixated on a commotion down a side street.

A group of POLICEMEN come out onto the main road, dragging several YOUNG MEN along with them. The crowd parts granting them access to a PRISONER WAGON that has just pulled up.

A couple of the arrested men struggle, but fail, to break free of the strong arm of the law.

Piotr drags Anna away from the scene.

INT. PIOTR'S HALLWAY - NIGHT

The front door to the small one floor house swings open. A cold breeze comes rushing in alongside Piotr and Anna.

A young boy, VIKTOR, 10 years old, comes running to greet them. He heads straight into his Father's embrace. With a large strain Piotr lifts the boy up.

PIOTR

One of us is getting too old for this.

Anna smiles.

ANNA

What happened to this being the favourite part of your day?

The frail and diminutive mother of Anna, SOFIA, in her 70's, slowly follows behind the young Viktor. A RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CROSS dangles from her neck. The matriarch of the house mutters to herself in a temper as she comes to greet Piotr and Anna.

SOFIA

That rotten bratva of yours. I won't hear such blasphemies uttered in my house.

Piotr drops Viktor at Anna's knees.

PIOTR

Don't pay any attention to him Sofia.

(MORE)

PIOTR (CONT'D)

(to Anna)

Can you put Viktor to bed while I deal with Sergei?

Anna nods in agreement.

ANNA

Come along Viktor, let's give the brothers space.

Anna leads Viktor out of the hallway.

INT. PIOTR'S SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Piotr walks into his sitting room and finds his brother, SERGEI ZIMA; a man in his 30's with a determined look in his eyes, sitting in an armchair. The absence of any superficiality combined with a strong demeanour creates an intense aura around the man.

SERGEI

That stubborn old hag of a has it in for me Piotr. I thought you were going to put in a good word for me?

Piotr walks over to his FIREPLACE and starts prodding the burning tinder. Sergei, brimming with a nervous energy, fidgets in his seat.

PIOTR

My mother in law probably isn't fond of being called a stubborn old hag.

SERGEI

You should try softening her up. I should be able to visit my brother without getting an earful from that zealot.

PIOTR

At her age? I can't imagine change being on the horizon.

Piotr's gaze turns away from the fireplace and looks to his brother. A coy smile breaks out across his face.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

You do know how to get a rise out of her.

Sergei briefly chuckles before a look of seriousness clouds his features. He picks at the fabric on the arm rest of his chair which doesn't go unnoticed by its owner.

Sergei abruptly jumps to his feet.

After barging past Piotr, Sergei pushes the door, making sure it's closed. Piotr slides into the now empty arm chair.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
What have you got yourself into
now?

Sergei starts pacing around the room.

SERGEI
I didn't start anything.

PIOTR
Don't drag my family into the chaos
you love inviting into your life
brother.

Sergei stops his pacing. His eyes glare intensely at Piotr.

SERGEI
Am I not family?

Piotr begins to pick at the same thread of fabric Sergei was unravelling, before quickly stopping himself. He attempts, in vain, to press it back down.

PIOTR
You're being unfair.

SERGEI
Have you spoken to father recently?

Piotr's teeth clench as he suppresses his venom.

PIOTR
He made his bed, and mine. Now we
both have to lie in them.

Piotr tilts forward in his chair.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
Don't turn up unannounced at my
door and start-

SERGEI
-Have you spoken to mother?

A lump develops in Piotr's throat. He recoils back into his chair.

Sergei grabs a wooden chair from under a table and plonks it down right in front of his brother. He lowers himself onto it in reverse, leaning on its back.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

I came for your advice, not to fight. This city... it's closing in around me.

PIOTR

Sergei, I can't say this any clearer.

Piotr's voice becomes quieter, with a vicious edge. He points out of the room.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

Don't bring any trouble to my door. The Okhrana are heavy handed, you know this. If they get a sniff of anything... *radical*, they scoop up anyone and everyone.

Sergei's fist clenches around the top of his chair.

SERGEI

You say that word as though it's an insult. *I* wear it with pride. Not all of us are content with being ignorant towards reality.

Piotr rolls his eyes.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

They are organised for *their* betterment.

Sergei waves dramatically at the great beyond.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

They just don't give it a name. When people like us organise, why then is it suddenly *radical*?

PIOTR

I'm not having this debate again.

SERGEI

You don't like the truth brother?

PIOTR

The truth? The truth is I have a family and they make me happy. I don't need to bring the system to its knees. Coming home from work and knowing Viktor is fed and safe is all me and Anna need.

SERGEI

What about all the other little Viktors in the world?

Piotr hesitates.

Sergei rises to his feet and walks towards a cabinet in the corner and pulls out a bottle of vodka. Making himself at home he pours a glass. He gestures towards his brother who raises his hand to decline.

PIOTR

I like my life Sergei. I love my family, my job is good.

SERGEI

That job is exactly my point! You and Anna are the backbone of Dimitri's. It's your sweat that brings in the money. Not Dimitri.

Sergei leans forward and peers into the depth of his glass.

PIOTR

You've always had it in for him. Dimitri gives me a job and respect. What do you give me? All you offer is a sermon and anarchy.

SERGEI

Respect? The fool changes the spelling of his name, forsakes his Russian heritage, just to appear exotic and sell *culture* to fat cats.

PIOTR

You fixate on the wrong things in life brother.

Sergei mulls over Piotr's comment for a moment.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

That business tonight at the soap works... are you involved?

Silence.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
I need to know.

Sergei looks up to his brother. He opens his mouth to speak but nothing comes out.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
Sergei?

Still nothing.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
- Leave.

A rage builds up in Sergei. He raises his hand to throw his glass across the room. Piotr jolts forward to stop him but Sergei calms himself.

He sets off towards the door placing the glass on the table on the way out.

Before going through the door he hesitates and turns to his brother once again.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
Just leave brother.

Sergei exits the room, slamming the door behind him, causing Piotr to recoil.

INT. PIOTR'S HALLWAY - NIGHT

As Sergei makes his way towards the front door an angry voice behind him grabs his attention.

SOFIA
Disrespectful heretic. Nothing but
trouble.

Sergei turns and sees Sofia lurking in the dark at the opposite end of the hallway.

SERGEI
Be quiet you old fool. I haven't
got time for your superstitious
nonsense.

Sofia, in shock, grabs the cross that dangles from her neck.

SOFIA

Get out!

SERGEI

My pleasure!

Sergei dramatically slams the door behind him.

INT. DIMITRI'S - DAY

Piotr and Anna are setting up tables in the restaurant before opening time. DIMITRI, a balding portly male in his 50's, walks into the room.

DIMITRI

Piotr, can you help the kitchen staff unload today's deliveries? They're a man down.

Piotr nods.

DIMITRI (CONT'D)

I have some errands to run. I'm hoping to be back just after opening.

Piotr watches Dimitri he walks out of the front door. As Dimitri goes past the front window Piotr notices several POLICEMEN loitering on the other side of the road.

He saunters over to the window to inspect.

After a moment Anna walks up behind her husband to see what's caught his attention.

ANNA

What are they up to?

PIOTR

Good question.

INT. DIMITRI'S - NIGHT

Once again the restaurant is packed.

Piotr is picking up used plates and cutlery off a table and notices a couple of policemen are stood in the foyer scanning the restaurant.

Next to them Dimitri is locked in conversation with two men in their 50's, GEORGY and FELIX, early 50's. The two well dressed men are calmly asking the owner questions.

Whatever they're asking, it's making Dimitri uncomfortable.

Anna comes out of the backroom into the restaurant. Upon seeing the police presence she darts out of the back.

Her husband, uncomfortable at the public display of vulnerability, sheepishly follows after her.

EXT. BEHIND DIMITRI'S - NIGHT

Leaning against a wall in the alley, Anna tries to wipe away her tears. Her husband is trying his best to comfort her.

ANNA

They are here for Sergei aren't they? It was only a matter of time! The Okhrana will throw us all away just for knowing him.

PIOTR

We can't think like that. We've no idea why they're here.

Piotr pulls Anna closer to him.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

I will speak to Dimitri.

Anna slightly shakes her head in disbelief and turns away from her husband.

INT. DIMITRI'S - NIGHT

Anna and Piotr return to work, composing themselves as they enter. After noticing the police have left Piotr wanders over to Dimitri, who is behind the bar writing in a notebook.

PIOTR

Dimitri. What were-

DIMITRI

-Look, Piotr. I don't want to get involved. Your business is your business. But make sure that it stays *your* business.

PIOTR

Me and Anna have nothing-

Dimitri raises his hand to stop Piotr.

DIMITRI
Honestly... I don't want to know.
I'm not having this conversation.

PIOTR
It's important-

Dimitri slams the notebook shut.

DIMITRI
- What's important is that you understand that even though I like you and Anna, I don't like you enough to ruin my business. So whatever is going on with you and your brother... deal with it.

Dimitri's anger is starting to boil and he stomps away.

Piotr's face drops in defeat.

Dimitri, feeling sorry for Piotr, comes back over. He calms himself before leaning in close.

DIMITRI (CONT'D)
As I said, I care about you and Anna. Those gentlemen asked some unnerving questions about you and your brother. Don't worry, I covered for you.

The owner places his hand on Piotr's shoulder.

DIMITRI (CONT'D)
I played dumb... but it doesn't mean I am. I hear things in the city, things about your brother and his friends. But this is the last conversation we will have about it. I enjoy having plausible deniability.

Dimitri's hand falls from Piotr's shoulder.

DIMITRI (CONT'D)
I need you to close up again tonight.

Piotr nods in agreement.

INT. PIOTR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Piotr sits at a small desk that is situated beneath the sole tiny window that lights up his room. Surrounding him are various pieces of paper.

Anna lies on the bed behind him. She watches on as her husband is lost in deep thought.

ANNA

You haven't written anything in a long time.

Piotr returns from his daydream.

PIOTR

Sorry, I was... elsewhere.

ANNA

Anywhere nice?

Piotr ignores the jovial nature of his wife's question.

PIOTR

Sergei said yesterday that the city is closing in around him.

ANNA

What do you think?

PIOTR

It was only a matter of time. He's too deep into that radical world he's fallen into.

ANNA

And too loud.

PIOTR

We'll be fine.

Piotr's fingers slightly crush the paper that is in his hand.

ANNA

Come to bed. There's nothing you can do now, tomorrow is a new day Piotr.

Piotr pushes his paper away and turns towards his bed.

INT. DIMITRI'S - NIGHT

Operating without his usual vigour Piotr, lost in his thoughts, slowly makes up a table for two in the corner of the restaurant. Several pieces of cutlery clang as they drop onto the table. The waiter scrambles to pick them up and place them correctly.

YURIY, the elderly concierge, signals Piotr.

INT. DIMITRI'S FOYER - NIGHT

Piotr walks towards the podium that Yuriy situates himself behind.

YURIY

Please can you seat these two gentlemen?

Piotr turns to the two guests in the entrance. Piotr freezes for a moment as he is shocked to see the two men from yesterday, Georgy and Felix, waiting to be seated.

PIOTR

(through a lump in his throat)

Please, follow me.

INT. DIMITRI'S - NIGHT

Georgy neatens up the cutlery on the table while Felix flicks through the drinks menu.

PIOTR

Can I start you off with anything to drink?

FELIX

A couple of glasses of the house red should do.

Felix closes the menu and passes it back to Piotr. Georgy fixes his gaze on the Piotr.

GEORGY

You look familiar lad. Are you local?

PIOTR

Born and raised sir. I will be right back with your wine.

The waiter turns away but Georgy reaches out and grabs him by the wrist.

GEORGY

Do you have family here? A brother?
You have the look of someone I
know.

Piotr tries to wipe the nervous sweat from his brow without drawing attention.

PIOTR

Hm. Yes I do. We don't look alike
though.

GEORGY

Very well.

Georgy nonchalantly returns his attention to his compatriot.

GEORGY (CONT'D)

Felix what are we eating?

FELIX

I'm not really hungry.

Georgy looks up at Piotr with an unnerving stare, before return his attention back to the table.

GEORGY

Just something to nibble on with
the wine.

Piotr stutters.

PIOTR

So a bottle of wine and-

FELIX

We said a glass each. Not a bottle.

PIOTR

Sorry, glass of wine.

GEORGY

Each.

Piotr starts to panic, the menu shakes in his hand.

PIOTR

Yes, each... Anything else?

Georgy looks to his fellow interrogator.

GEORGY

I think we have everything we need.
Don't you agree Felix?

Felix sizes Piotr up and down before nodding at Georgy.

Piotr nervously forces a nod of respect and turns away from the table and makes towards the bar. The sounds of the restaurant disappears as Piotr turns pale in fear.

INT. DIMITRI'S BAR - NIGHT

A bottle of red wine trembles as Piotr empties it into two glasses.

INT. DIMITRI'S - NIGHT

Balancing the two glasses of red wine on a tray Piotr walks over to the table to discover Felix and Georgy have vanished.

Piotr rapidly looks around the restaurant but they are nowhere to be seen.

INT. DIMITRI'S - NIGHT

Piotr and Anna are alone after hours.

They are both in the process of laying down fresh tablecloths. A cold silent atmosphere fills the restaurant.

ANNA

You haven't spoken a word to me all day.

Ring!-Ring!

The bell on the entrance door rings out.

PIOTR

Sorry we're-

Piotr sees who has walked in.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

Sergei!

He races towards his brother in a rage.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
How dare you show up here! I told
you to stay away. We don't want
dragging into your world.

Piotr grips Sergei by the edges of his jacket.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
They came sniffing around here
today!

Anna comes racing up behind Piotr.

ANNA
Who came here today? Why didn't you
say anything?

Piotr looks down at Sergei's hands.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Piotr?!

Piotr shows Anna Sergei's hands. They're covered in blood.

Sergei begins to collapse but his brother props him up and
guides him to a chair.

PIOTR
What happened?

Sergei overwhelmed with pain, struggles to speak.

SERGEI
They... It just happened so fast.

PIOTR
Anna, close the blinds.

Anna jumps to the task while Piotr runs to the front door and
locks it.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
Who did this? The Okhrana?

Piotr goes up to the window, raises one of the slats then
peers through the blinds.

SERGEI
Of course.

Sergei holds his clothes tight against himself in an attempt
to stop the blood loss.

His brother comes rushing over.

PIOTR
Did they follow you? Were you followed?

ANNA
He needs a doctor.

SERGEI
No doctors. I just need some tools.
This isn't the first bullet I've had to remove from myself.

Piotr rapidly alternates his gaze between his wife and his brother, hoping for an answer.

Anna pushes past her husband and leans closer to Sergei.

ANNA
What do you need?

Sergei tries to sit up in the chair and winces as he does.

SERGEI
Check the kitchen. Anything that resembles surgical utensils. We can worry about sewing me up after.

Anna sets off towards the kitchen.

PIOTR
Sergei, answer me. What happened?

Sergei strains himself to lean around his brother.

SERGEI
And bring something to numb the pain!

INT. DIMITRI'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Anna rips apart the kitchen. Objects fling in all directions as she rummages through every drawer and cupboard.

She finds a large pair of METAL TWEEZERS, holds them up in front of her face and pinches the levers together a couple of times.

As Anna heads towards the door a BOTTLE OF VODKA catches her eye. She grabs it by the neck.

INT. DIMITRI'S - NIGHT (SERIES OF SHOTS)

-- The amount of spirit in the upside down bottle of vodka lowers with pace as Sergei downs copious amounts.

-- A pair of tweezers brutally delve into the wound on Sergei's stomach.

-- Piotr and Anna wince in disgust at the amateur surgery.

-- Copious amounts of sweat drip down Sergei's face as his teeth clench into a piece of wood.

-- Fragments of shrapnel drop with a clank into a blood filled bowl.

INT. DIMITRI'S - NIGHT

Piotr, Anna and Sergei sit in silence, scattered about the restaurant.

Sergei slowly cleans blood off himself while downing the vodka. Piotr, in shock, stares into oblivion.

Anna's nerves get the better of her and she jumps to her feet.

ANNA

We need to start cleaning up.

Sergei plonks the nearly empty bottle of vodka onto the table.

SERGEI

Why? We have more pressing matters to attend to.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

The Okhrana won't rest.

The injured Sergei winces as he lifts the cloth from his bullet wound and inspects it.

ANNA

We haven't done anything.

SERGEI

They don't care.

ANNA

They've already been to the restaurant. But it's fine. Dimitri covered for us.

SERGEI

Dimitri.

Sergei sniggers with derision, before screaming in agony.

ANNA

He's done more for us than you ever did! He told them the truth, that we have nothing to do with this...

Anna gestures at the blood that is splatted around Sergei.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Mess that you have, once again, brought on yourself.

Piotr slowly comes out of his shock induced trance.

PIOTR

They came back today. They, the Okhrana... whatever Dimitri said... it wasn't enough.

ANNA

What are we going to do about Viktor?

Piotr opens his mouth but nothing comes out.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Piotr, we need to find a safe place to keep Viktor until this blows over. And my mother.

Sergei sniggers once again, hurting himself in the process.

SERGEI

That old hag wouldn't move for anything. The Okhrana will back down before she does.

ANNA

Don't speak about my mother like that.

Piotr gets up once again and peers through the blinds.

SERGEI

Go see father. See if he will offer the boy protection.

PIOTR

He won't speak to me.

SERGEI

Your issues with our father seem rather trivial right now. We need all the allies we can get. He is family after all.

Piotr turns away from the blind and looks to Anna for guidance.

ANNA

He's right.

Piotr, in a defeated fashion, sighs and nods in agreement.

PIOTR

Wait here. Once I've seen father we... well, we will go from there.

EXT. DIMITRI'S - NIGHT

Piotr locks the front door to Dimitri's and scans up and down the street. In a pitiful attempt at anonymity he turns up his collar before hurrying away.

EXT. MOSCOW AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTE - NIGHT

Piotr, trying to not look guilty, Piotr can't help but keep checking over his shoulder as he makes his way through the grounds of the university.

He passes an empty bench right outside the front door.

INT. FYODOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The stuffy and dimly lit office of Piotr's father is littered with books and scraps of paper. In the centre a wooden desk, too large for the office, is unoccupied.

In the corner next to a small fireplace FYODOR ZIMA, a frail old man in his 60's, sits in an arm chair that's positioned with its back to the door.

Fyodor sits in silence chewing on an unlit pipe.

His deep thought is broken by the sound of his son entering the office.

FYODOR

Who in God's name is-

Fyodor strains himself to peer around the corner of his chair only to be disappointed to find his son.

FYODOR (CONT'D)

Oh.

The old man recoils to a comfortable position.

PIOTR

Nice to see you too Fyodor.

FYODOR

You can't even stomach calling me father? I'm not playing these games Piotr, not tonight. I think it's best you leave. You won't find what you seek... not from me anyway.

Piotr squeezes himself around the large desk to come into his Father's eyeline. His hand grips the corner of the chair.

PIOTR

You know? Don't you?

FYODOR

Of course I know. You think those goons haven't been sniffing around here. You've caused me nothing but trouble Piotr! Nothing but trouble.

PIOTR

All I've done is love my wife and son.

The wooden stumps of Fyodor's chair screech across the floor as Piotr turns the chair so his father has to face him. His father grips the arm armrests and spills the ash from his pipe all over himself.

FYODOR

Look what you've gone and done!

PIOTR

What I've done? What have you done?

Piotr leans in close, grabs his father by the jaw and forces his eyes to look into his own.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

What did you tell them?!

Fyodor slaps his son's hand away from him.

FYODOR

Don't act important with me son. I know you, you've not got the stomach for such brutality.

Piotr retreats to an upright position.

FYODOR (CONT'D)

As I thought. You brought this on yourself Piotr. It's on you to fix it.

PIOTR

This was Sergei's doing.

FYODOR

And he wouldn't have got lost in all that radical nonsense if you hadn't fractured the family. Now leave me be. You've always been nothing but trouble.

Piotr composes himself.

PIOTR

Please. I am begging you. Take Viktor until we clear this up. He will be safe with you.

FYODOR

I've used up all my liberties with the Okhrana, I can't offer them anything else.

Piotr's face turns dark with a venomous rage.

PIOTR

What did you tell them?

Fyodor shuffles his seat back towards the fireplace.

FYODOR

I did what I had to do. To protect your mother, nobody else in our god forsaken family does. She wouldn't survive the trip along The Vladimirka.

Piotr grips the corner of the chair and tilts his father backwards.

FYODOR (CONT'D)

Put me down!

PIOTR
You sold us out?

FYODOR
Let go of me!

He release his Father's chair and it ungracefully clonks back to the ground.

PIOTR
Your own flesh and blood.

FYODOR
It's too late for that nonsense
Piotr. And I never sold you out. I
just brokered a deal to not get
lumped in with my ungrateful sons.

Piotr simmers with rage. His fist clenches and starts to raise until, with the greatest agony, he suppresses his anger.

FYODOR (CONT'D)
I've given them a few names from
the University and it seems to have
kept them satisfied for now.

Fyodor looks up to his son.

FYODOR (CONT'D)
You made a decision about who is
important to you, I suggest you go
spend what time you have left with
them. Now please, leave me.

Piotr once again charges past the desk, this time with less grace. Fyodor winces as objects fall from his desk and the shelves that his son brushes past.

EXT. MOSCOW AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTE - NIGHT

In a rage Piotr comes stomping out of the entrance of his father's building. His dramatic exit halts as he's shocked to find a mysterious MAN, dressed in a plain black suit, sitting on the bench that was empty just moments ago.

Piotr composes himself and walks by, pretending not to be unnerved by his presence. The strange man calmly watches Piotr leave.

INT. DIMITRI'S - NIGHT

Piotr enters the restaurant. Nobody is there. The remains of the amateur operation are still lying around. Piotr rushes straight back out of the door.

EXT. DIMITRI'S - NIGHT

The key to Dimitri's turns, locking it shut. Piotr turns and notices the same man from earlier loitering on the street corner; making no attempt to hide as he watches on.

Piotr turns away down the next side street.

The moment he's out of sight Piotr sets off running.

EXT. BACKSTREETS - NIGHT

Cowering between various BOXES, Piotr keeps himself as close as he can to the side of a building. He sneaks a look down the next street before setting off down it.

INT. PIOTR'S HALLWAY - NIGHT

The front door to the Zima household opens slowly. The cold light of the night sky fills the shadowy hallway.

Piotr takes a step in. At first glance there is nobody home. He takes a couple more cautious steps into his home. Piotr freezes as he notices a hint of light coming through the doorway that leads to his sitting room.

Piotr places his hand onto the door.

INT. PIOTR'S SITTING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The door to the sitting room slowly opens, revealing Georgy sat in Piotr's armchair with Felix stood by his side.

In one corner Sergei struggles on the floor as three POLICEMEN hold him down. One of them muffles his mouth. In the other, Anna holds a cowering Viktor close to her.

GEORGY

It's good of you to join us.

Piotr steps into the room, leaving his hand on the door to keep his route of exit open.

GEORGY (CONT'D)
You do realise that aiding and
abetting an enemy of the state is a
crime, Mister Zima?

Piotr's hand drops from the door. It slowly closes behind him until a hand reaches round to stop it.

The mysterious man from earlier steps into the doorway, cutting off any chance of escape.

PRE-LAP: The sound of howling wind creeps in.

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. THE VLADIMIRKA - DAY

The snowfall from a blizzard that has descended upon the vast open landscape of Siberia races in all directions.

Cutting through the endless snowy plain is a long dirt road, THE VLADIMIRKA.

As far as the eye can see shackled PRISONERS, battered by the elements and drained from their lack of rest, are being marched into exile by various MOUNTED COSSACKS. The constant threat of being tramped under hoof and their captors rifles always in sight keeps them in a perpetual state of despair.

In the midst of this eternal madness Piotr, Sergei, Viktor and Anna work together to keep themselves going.

Struggling to see past the snow, Anna panics as she notices her mother has fallen to her knees.

ANNA
Mother!

In the distance a mounted guard turns towards Sofia.

ANNA (CONT'D)
Piotr! My mother.

Piotr turns, trying to wipe the snow from his eyes. He sees his brother Sergei come behind Sofia and lift her to her feet.

Once she's back on her feet, the old matriarch looks up and sees who helped her. She quickly scurries away in disgust to catch up with her daughter.

EXT. RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

The shackled Piotr, Anna, Sergei, Viktor and Sofia stand by the roadside along The Vladimírka; watching on as a few dozen prisoners hammer away at the cold hard ground.

SERGEI
The Trans-Siberian railway.

As a sign of respect Sergei takes off his hat and puts it to his chest.

SERGEI (CONT'D)
A few comrades of mine have been sent to extend it.

VIKTOR
How long is it?

SERGEI
Thousands of miles.

Sergei looks up and down the line in a moment of reflection.

SERGEI (CONT'D)
Opening up the vast Siberia to Rus'. They send us grain and in return we send our undesirables.

The old sentimental comrade looks down at his inquisitive nephew.

SERGEI (CONT'D)
Like us.

He places his hand on the young boy's head and ruffles his hair, knocking snowflakes in all directions.

A mounted GUARD comes up behind the family and interrupts their brief respite.

GUARD
Move along.

The family step back onto the road and resume their journey. Sergei comes up to the side of his brother.

SERGEI
We have to do something.

PIOTR
What can we possibly-

ANNA

-Mother!

The two spin around and see Sofia collapsing into the ground grasping at her chest. Her daughter is frantically trying to keep her upright.

Piotr rushes to Anna's side and tries to pull her away.

PIOTR

Sergei, get her off the road.

EXT. THE VLADIMIRIKA ROADSIDE - DAY

Piotr holds his distraught wife close to his chest, muffling her screams. He shields his son from the sight of Sergei placing a white sheet over Sofia.

A GUARD on horseback comes near.

GUARD

Holy men regularly travel these roads. They perform services.

The guard looks down at Sofia's covered body.

GUARD (CONT'D)

And attend to the lost.

SERGEI

We are all lost here, comrade.

The guard veers his horse closer to Sergei but at the sight of the distraught Anna holds his tongue and turns away.

EXT. SIBERIAN PLAIN - DAY

Piotr, Anna, Sergei, Viktor stand slightly away from The Vladimirka in a silent vigil next to a freshly made grave. A small wooden cross is mounted above it.

A HOLY MAN performs Russian Orthodox burial rites.

Anna leans onto her husband for comfort. They both vacantly stare into the horizon. In the distance is the faint image of a small ABANDONED HUT next to a LONE TREE. Both are situated just outside a thick FOREST.

Sergei tries to hide his discomfort with the religious ceremony but his displeasure is clear for all to see.

EXT. THE KATORGA ENTRANCE - DAY

Piotr, Anna, Sergei, Viktor arrive at the ENTRANCE to a large and remote penal colony. On their way into the bleak compound they pass various barbed wire fences. Armed guards dotted around the large wooden walls look down on them.

EXT. THE KATORGA COURTYARD - DAY

Alongside a group of 30 prisoners, Piotr, Anna, Sergei, Viktor are marched into a large courtyard which is surrounded by various wooden buildings. The plain concrete floor has an overwhelming absence of personality and humanity.

Around the edges of the courtyard, in all shapes and sizes, sit the silent faces of the damned. The emotional convicts look on as the new arrivals take in their new home.

The Zimas halt in the centre of the courtyard. In front of them a group of INMATES are huddled together in silence.

A depressing chorus of huffs and puffs sweeps across the group before they turn away and disperse. Their parting reveals the lone wooden TABLE of the courtyard. Two men sit opposite a chess board.

The sullen crowd dissipates in all directions, like the living dead they walk past the Zimas without acknowledging their existence. Anna's hand tightly grasps her son's.

INT. KATORGA - DAY

An amber hue flickers across Piotr's sweaty wincing face. Piotr screams and writhes in agony as a GUARD wielding a HOT IRON brands his back with the letters "CK".

Piotr, trembling in pain, turns around to see his wife Anna with her eyes closed shut as she clings to a topless Viktor.

The hot iron closes in on Viktor's back.

Tears form at the corners of Anna's eyes as her son breaks out into a deafening scream.

EXT. SIBERIAN FOREST - DAY

Viktor's horrifying scream slowly fades out as Piotr and Sergei, along with several other male inmates, are toiling away at an icy cold timber site. Armed guards pace around as they hack away at fallen trees.

Piotr watches Sergei skulk over to an inmate in an attempt to start a conversation. His advances are brushed off.

EXT. THE KATORGA COURTYARD - DAY

The entire cohort of exiles stand in silence watching one of their compatriots being lashed on their back while strung up against a birch-rod.

Piotr, Anna, Sergei, Viktor react in shock but the veteran prisoners look on at a familiar sight.

Anna shields the eyes of Viktor but a passing guard aggressively removes her hand. *An example will be set.*

EXT. SIBERIAN FOREST - DAY

Piotr is lost in a trance induced by the repetitive rhythm of chopping wood.

He stops for a moment to catch his breath and realises he is isolated.

He scans the timber site and spots an animated Sergei, failing to be discreet, bothering a few inmates. None of whom seem interested in what he has to say.

A guard walks over and waves his rifle in their direction. They return to their work without protest.

INT. FEMALE BARRACKS - NIGHT

The cramped female quarters are full to the brim. The male inmates are trying to get a slither of quality time with their loved ones before lights out.

In a corner, surrounded by people with the same intent, Anna and her husband try to have a private conversation.

PIOTR

He lies! It's all lies. Every last word. And he used mother as an excuse to justify his betrayal! Lies, the lot of it.

ANNA

You know your father. This is hardly out of character.

Piotr, not looking in Anna's eyes, talks out loud to himself.

PIOTR

He doesn't even see mother! Father
hides away in his office all day
and night to keep away from her.
Sergei said so. You heard him,
didn't you?

Anna puts her hand on her husband's knee to comfort him but
it goes unnoticed.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

Protect her!?

ANNA

Piotr!

Piotr snaps out of his diatribe and looks to his wife.

ANNA (CONT'D)

We are worlds apart now. Dwelling
on those thoughts will bring us
nothing but anger.

A commotion behind them gets the couple's attention. Several
guards are walking in.

GUARD #02

Right! Clear out, back to your
quarters.

GUARD #03

Lights out!

The guards work through the room ushering the men out.

PIOTR

I'm sorry... tomorrow I'll make
better use of this time. I promise.

Anna responds with a sorrowful smile as a guard comes up
behind Piotr and probes him to get moving.

EXT. THE KATORGA COURTYARD - DAY

Anna, Piotr and Viktor are huddled together. Piotr rations a
small lump of stale bread between them.

Viktor wolfs down his piece and looks at his father with
puppy dog eyes.

Piotr snaps his slither of bread in half.

PIOTR
Savour it.

Piotr nibbles on the corner of his bread and scans the area.
In the corner an animated Sergei is locked in debate with a group of inmates. Anna clocks this is as well.

ANNA
What is he up to?

Piotr's eyes squint as he tries to determine what his brother is saying.

PIOTR
Good question.

EXT - KATORGA COURTYARD - DAY

A tired and slovenly Piotr steps out from one of the several dirty outhouses that are reserved for the inmates.

The sounds of a large commotion snaps him back to attention.

Piotr looks around but sees nothing but a cold empty courtyard.

The shouting progressively louder and louder.

An male prisoner comes running out into the courtyard from a gap between two buildings. The prisoner stops and turns to face where he came from.

MALE PRISONER
QUICKLY! Forget them, just run!

A female prisoner accompanied by a young girl come running out from the same alley.

MALE PRISONER (CONT'D)
No, no, no, NO!

BANG!

The female prisoner drops to the ground.

The male prisoner shouts and runs towards the young girl.

BANG!

Time slows as the male prisoner stretches his arms out to take hold of the young girl but she falls to the ground before his hands make contact.

The male prisoner drops to his knees and pulls the dead child close to him.

Several guards come storming out into the courtyard with their guns raised, fixed on the kneeling, sobbing prisoner.

BANG!

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. SIBERIAN FOREST - DAY

Piotr's axe smashed through a log of wood.

Locked in a trance he hacks away at the stump in front of him. His swings progressively become less confident.

The axe lands on piece of wood and doesn't go through. A weakened Piotr recoils from the axe's hilt and succumbs to a coughing fit. This doesn't go unnoticed by his brother.

SERGEI

How long can we keep doing this?

Piotr settles his cough and starts wagging the axe out of the wood.

PIOTR

I'll be fine.

SERGEI

We need to talk brother, about this... about everything.

As the axe dislodges from the wooden block Piotr stumbles backwards.

PIOTR

There is no nothing to discuss Sergei.

SERGEI

Why have you given up so easily?

PIOTR

Given up? Not all of us are so enticed by the prospect of causing an uprising. You couldn't just let things be back in Moscow and we ended up here. I think this is the last stop brother. I pray to God you've learnt your lesson.

SERGEI

So you just want to spend the next ten years living here? Viktor will come of age in this hellhole, are you fine with that?

PIOTR

If this is our fate so be it! I saw first hand what happens when people try to escape!

Piotr's outburst draws the attention of a guard who begins to move towards them.

After noticing the incoming guard Piotr calms himself and resumes his labour.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

I can't think about anything that will put my family in danger.

Sergei watches his brother with concern before he notices the guard looming over him.

He reluctantly returns to his toil.

EXT. KATORGA COURTYARD - DAY

A solemn mood is in the air as the prison's inhabitants shuffle about during their allotted "recreation" time.

Piotr and Sergei stand side by side in the miserable courtyard.

SERGEI

We must act soon. I've been asking around, trying to gauge everyone's appetite.

Sergei mistrustfully scans the nearest inmates.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Time is of the essence. Trust is in short supply out here Piotr, it won't be long until the guards are alerted. If they aren't already.

The restless Sergei examines the surrounding walls and then the main entrance.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

I've got a sense of their patterns.

Sergei's eyes squint as he watches the guards change over.

SERGEI (CONT'D)
I'm beginning to see a window of
opportunity.

Turning his attention towards the rest of the inmates Sergei
steps away from his brother and starts sizing them up.

SERGEI (CONT'D)
This hell is vulnerable. It's fear
that keeps them all in line.

PIOTR
Please Sergei, quiet yourself.
Anna, Viktor... I refuse to put
them in harm's way. They've
experienced more suffering than any
innocent deserves. I can't subject
them to any more.

Sergei aggressively spits on the ground then looks his
brother dead in the eyes.

SERGEI
I swear, I will free them.

PIOTR
The risk is too great.

SERGEI
So that's it? You're done?

PIOTR
I'm being realistic. It took us a
week to march here and the road is
guarded. We can't return to Moscow
as fugitives. Where would we even
go? We've already lost so much, I
can't risk my family losing
anymore.

Sergei's finger smashes into the centre of his chest.

SERGEI
It is my fault they are here.

Sergei's confession catches Piotr off guard, humbling him.

SERGEI (CONT'D)
I, and I alone, will take the risk.

The wayward younger brother steps towards Piotr and places
his hand upon his shoulder.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

I promise brother. With or without me, your family will walk free.

PIOTR

It's just not-

SERGEI

-No Piotr. We can do this. We might not have friends in here but I know people. Once we get to safety I will contact them, they will get us safe passage out of Rus'.

PIOTR

And why would they help?

A mischievous smirk spreads across Sergei's face.

INT. FEMALE BARRACKS - NIGHT

Once again during their brief window of time together Piotr and Anna try to have something that resembles a private conversation in the sea of cramped bodies.

Holding his wife's hands in his, Piotr pleads to Anna.

ANNA

I know what you're going to ask, and I can't.

PIOTR

Think of Viktor.

ANNA

I *only* think of Viktor.

Piotr leans in even closer to his wife.

PIOTR

Just meet with me. I can't sit by and let my family rot in here.

Anna hand's pull away from Piotr, leaving him and his request hanging in the air. Nervously she looks around to check nobody was listening.

Piotr's eyes beg for his wife to consider his offer.

Against her better judgement, Anna nods with a reluctant agreement to her husband.

EXT. BEHIND THE BARRACKS - NIGHT

Under the cover of darkness at the far end of a narrow gap between two buildings the silhouettes of Piotr and Anna debate in impassioned whispers.

PIOTR

Sergei swore to take the risk. The man feels indebted to us. He says he has acquired... *things* to help our escape.

ANNA

We're only here because of your faith in your brother's word. I love him too, but why can't you see what happens when you trust his judgement?

PIOTR

He's my brother. I know him... He will do as he says. We will be free and then we can start anew.

ANNA

I don't want a new life. I want to go home, the only way we can do that is serving our time... no matter how long it takes.

PIOTR

Our old life is never returning Anna. You know that as clear as I do.

A cold silence befalls the couple. The sound of wind is punctuated by the closing of a door nearby. Piotr's head jolts like a startled deer and freezes.

The sound of two guards in casual chatter fades away.

ANNA

And you think Viktor getting caught up in Sergei's radical plots in a foreign land is a good life?

PIOTR

It's a means to an end. Once we are out of the country we can go our own way... I've made my decision.

Piotr stands in silence waiting for a response from his wife.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
Anna... are you with me?

ANNA
If I agree. *If* I agree. What do I
need to do?

Anna fearfully looks at her husband.

INT. MALE BARRACKS - NIGHT

Piotr lays motionless on his bed.

A grey blanket wrapped around a solid object appears on his chest.

Piotr looks up to see his brother.

Sergei's eyes are lit up with determination. He nods at Piotr and walks away.

Piotr holds the blanket for a moment before sliding it down the side of his bed.

INT. GUARD QUARTERS - DAY

As the sun rises several guards are relaxing in their private quarters. A couple of them lay on their beds reading while three, KURBAT, DEMID and YAKOV, slovenly sit at a table playing cards.

Void of any excitement the guards sit in silence. With little energy Kurbat takes a uninterested peek at his hand as Yakov plays another card.

DING!-DING!-DING!-DING!-DING!-DING!-DING!-DING!-DING!

The guards look to each other for confirmation before springing to life in response to the camp's alarm bell.

The speeding guards limp on their way to the door as they put on their boots and grab their rifles.

Yakov, the last to leave, clumsily juggles his rifle as he pulls an USHANKA HAT over his head.

EXT. KATORGA - CONTINUOUS

The guards fan out as they exit the door of their quarters. A thick but gentle snow falls all round them.

Yakov, the last to come through the door, struggles with his rifle as he tries to check if it's loaded and primed.

Kurbat closes in on a few nearby inmates, scanning the barrel of his rifle across them all.

KURBAT
Back inside! Slowly!

BANG!

A shot rings out. The guards look around and notice one of their compatriots fall from the top of the walls. They rush in his direction.

Several guards run down the gap between the male and female quarters. Demid follows after them. Kurbat looks to Yakov and nods in the same direction.

KURBAT (CONT'D)
Go!

Yakov sets off towards the private quarters.

Further up the path Yakov sees a fearful group of women and children being held in place by Demid's rifle.

DEMID
Don't move!

Demid's sight stays fixed on the inmates. Amongst the sea of frightened faces the determined glare of Anna goes unnoticed by the frantic guard.

DEMID (CONT'D)
One by one return to your quarters.

In unison the panicked rabble make for their quarters. Yakov closes in on the commotion and aims his rifle at the group.

DEMID (CONT'D)
Single file!

Demid's posture shifts and he grips his gun with more intent, steadying his aim.

DEMID (CONT'D)
SLOWLY!

The crowd panics. Commotion from around the corner draws Yakov's attention away from the group. He scurries down the rest of the path towards the open courtyard.

As Yakov steps out from between the two barracks an inmate scarpers past him at breakneck speed.

Yakov starts to raise his rifle.

BANG!

Before Yakov has chance to aim the inmate falls to the cold hard ground.

Several guards run past Yakov towards the inmate.

Screeching in agony the prisoner rolls over. *It's Sergei.*

Leaving a trail of blood behind him the wounded comrade drags himself away from the guards.

The guards cautiously move in on Sergei. Grunting in pain and coughing up blood Sergei slowly raises a revolver. His arm wavers as he struggles to keep his aim steady.

BANG!

A shot fires directly into Sergei. *Silence.*

Sergei lays still on the cold ground.

Yakov follows behind as the guards carefully move in to check on Sergei. His lifeless face puts them at ease.

The guards take a moment of respite. Yakov respectfully closes Sergei's eyelids.

BANG!

The group of guards jump back into a state of awareness. They race off in the direction of the noise.

EXT. KATORGA - DAY

Just inside the entrance to the compound, several guards stand around the BODY of their fellow warden.

Yakov crouches down and checks his pulse.

He looks up to his compatriots and shakes his head.

Kurbat, with brisk determination, arrives on the scene. The sight of the dead guard stops his momentum.

Yakov stares out of the entrance. Once his eyes focus he sees the shape of a fleeing man hidden behind a veil of snow.

EXT. THE KATORGA ENTRANCE - DAY

Trying to minimize their size as much as possible, Anna and Viktor cling to each other on the floor, burrowing themselves against the external walls of the Katorga.

Three mounted Cossacks come galloping out of the entrance behind them.

Anna closes her eyes and braces herself for the worst but the riders, fixated on Piotr, pass them by.

EXT. SIBERIAN PLAIN - DAY

The three Cossacks ride across the snowy plains. Their eyes, piercing through the snow that batters their faces, focus on Piotr.

One guard grabs his rifle from his back and takes aim while trying to maintain balance on his speeding mount.

The guard closes one eye as his other fixates on the sight.

BANG!

Happy with his shot the marksman confidently nods to his fellow Cossacks and pulls his rifle over his shoulder.

The riders kick the sides of their steeds and pick up speed.

EXT. SIBERIAN PLAIN - DAY

Piotr lays face down in the snow.

Moving at a glacial pace, bordering on the ethereal, three mounted COSSACKS cautiously circle Piotr's body.

The closest Cossack dismounts. He settles his nervous steed then moves towards Piotr as the others pace around his lifeless form.

He prods his rifle into Piotr's back but elicits no response. The soldier grabs one of Piotr's shoulders and begins to roll him over to see his face.

Piotr rolls faster and easier than expected.

The soldier notices a metallic object in Piotr's hand. His gaze flicks to Piotr's eyes. He's fully conscious.

BANG!

The gunshot sets the nearby horses into panic mode.

Piotr jumps to his feet and positions the fallen Cossack's horse between himself and his two mounted foes.

A Cossack, with his rifle cocked and ready, attempts to manoeuvre around the organic shield to get a clear shot.

Piotr presses the muzzle of his revolver directly into the horse he's using for cover.

BANG!

A volcano of blood erupts out the side of the unmanned steed.

Piotr fells two horses with one shot.

The Cossack screams as his legs are crushed beneath the weight of his mount.

BANG!

With no hesitation Piotr fires a shot straight into the remaining Cossack who falls backwards off his horse.

The startled beast flees the scene and stains the snow as it drags its lifeless rider.

Piotr, traumatised by the carnage, is frozen. His revolver still hangs in the air.

The screams of the crushed Cossack brings the escaped convict back down to earth.

Not allowing himself any moment of respite Piotr walks over to his fallen enemy.

BANG!

The gun shot instantly ends the screams and brings about a deafening silence.

Piotr's adrenaline fades. He becomes aware of the wound on the side of his stomach.

He leans over the body of the deceased Cossack and rips the soldier's jacket from his corpse, wincing in the process.

Cradling his wound in a futile attempt to stop his bleeding Piotr limps towards the trees.

EXT. SIBERIAN FOREST - DAY

Piotr limps past the forest edge with as much haste as his wounded body allows. Once under the cover of the trees his urgency relents and he allows himself a moment.

As the volume of blood pouring from his wound is increasing, Piotr falls backwards against the trunk of the nearest tree.

His legs give way and he slumps to a seated position.

The colour is fading from Piotr's face as his frosted fingertips desperately struggles to rip apart the jacket he claimed to use as a bandage.

Commotion in the distance gets Piotr's attention. He peers around the tree and sees a large platoon of COSSACKS are at the scene of his earlier battle.

Piotr tries to sit up but the pain from his bullet hole keeps him rooted to the ground.

The Cossack platoon notice the track of blood made by Piotr. A renewed rush of energy comes across them as they set off in his direction.

With no other choice Piotr wills himself to his feet and starts limping into the thick of the forest.

EXT. SIBERIAN FOREST - NIGHT

The storm has faded but Piotr, pale as a ghost, limps aimlessly between the trees. The sounds of Cossacks hunting their prey gets louder. Piotr hides behind a tree.

Piotr, struggling to stay conscious, waits for the sounds of the hunting party to subside before setting off.

EXT. PAVEL'S CABIN - NIGHT

Piotr steps out into a clearing. The clear night sky lights up the area around him.

Once Piotr's tired eyes adjust to the brightness he sees before him a CABIN, clearly owned by a Woodsman.

Drawn by the orange light of a fire which glows through the cracks of the door and around the edges of the curtains, Piotr heads towards the cabin.

Startled by the chorus of alarmed dogs Piotr freezes just in front of the cabin.

The door swings open, the bright orange glow beams out of the doorway.

PAVEL; a balding man in his 50's dressed in long johns and boots, stands in the doorway with a SHOTGUN pointed at Piotr.

CLICK!-CLICK!

PAVEL
State your business!

Piotr crashes to the ground face first.

INT. ABANDONED HUT - DAY

In the doorway of the abandoned cabin the Zimas spotted on their journey up The Vladimírka, Anna holds Viktor close.

INT. PAVEL'S CABIN - DAY

Piotr is woken by the bright light of the sun that beams through a nearby window.

He peacefully comes to his senses before realising he is in a stranger's bed. Panic sets in.

Piotr rushes to sit up but gasps in pain as the wound in his side halts any urgency.

A voice from outside reacts.

PAVEL
Take it easy boy. You're not going
anywhere in a hurry.

Piotr takes in his surroundings.

Piles of wood and animal furs litter the floor. Stood against the corner are several tools. A comprehensive collection of all things needed to live out in the wilderness.

EXT. PAVEL'S CABIN - DAY

Piotr steps out of the doorway. The first breath of the cold air stings his wound, making him wince.

Pavel, who is sat tending to a broth atop a fire, rolls his eyes at Piotr's whimper. Two dogs which lay on the porch perk up and glare at the stranger.

Pavel grabs a stool that is next to him and plonks it near the fire at a suitable distance for a conversation.

Piotr cautiously lowers himself down next to Pavel.

PIOTR

I'd say I owe you thanks.

Piotr gestures to the BANDAGING around his wound.

Pavel picks up a bowl and spoon from the floor next to him, scoops up some broth and passes it to Piotr.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

I presume I'd be a goner without your interventions.

Pavel picks up another bowl and fills it up for himself.

PAVEL

It's preferable for you to leave by your own means rather than having to dispose of you myself.

Piotr is taken back by Pavel's bluntness before chuckling to himself.

PIOTR

Altruism for selfish reasons is altruism all the same.

Pavel's icy demeanour pays no heed to Piotr's light hearted comment.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

I'm thankful all the same.

Piotr takes a cautious taste of the broth, before being pleasantly surprised.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

If there's any way I can re-

PAVEL

-You haven't got anything to offer.

Piotr sheepishly stirs his spoon in the broth.

PAVEL (CONT'D)

Don't fuss about it, boy just eat up. You need your strength. We can discuss repayment if you still feel indebted after.

The two men sit in silence and eat their breakfast.

EXT. PAVEL'S CABIN - DAY

Pavel grabs Piotr's empty bowl and begins to potter around the fire tidying up. Piotr strains himself while trying to sit up and offer help but Pavel grumbles a dismissive noise.

Pavel paces past Piotr and picks up a metal POKER that lays next to him.

The wounded Piotr looks up and for a split second the stern man towers above him holding a potential weapon.

Pavel turns and crouches down next the fire and begins to poke the ash.

PAVEL

So where are you headed?

The nervous convict starts to fidget.

PIOTR

I don't - haven't. I'm not sure.

Pavel looks at Piotr from the corner of his eye, a coy smirk breaks out across his face for moment before his attention returns to the fire.

PAVEL

Well... I'd say the more pertinent question is from where you came?

Piotr freezes.

Pavel fumbles into his pocket. He pulls out the blood soaked rag of a Cossack's uniform and watches his guest squirm.

PAVEL (CONT'D)

This isn't a time for keeping secrets boy.

A hint of anger comes across Pavel.

PAVEL (CONT'D)

You better not be bringing any trouble to my doorstep.

PIOTR

I'm not.

Pavel stands and turns towards the other stool while muttering to himself.

PAVEL
Bullet wound?

Pavel fingers the rag.

PAVEL (CONT'D)
I guess this uniform didn't belong
to you.

Pavel looks at Piotr with piercing eyes as he brings his
quick interrogation to a climax.

PAVEL (CONT'D)
But the biggest clue is that
branding on your back.

Pavel looks into the distance.

PAVEL (CONT'D)
The Katorga is a couple miles north
of here. It's mighty impressive you
got this far, if you ask me.

He throws the rag onto the fire.

PIOTR
What do you want?

Pavel feigns offence.

PAVEL
Apologies! I just wanted to know if
I'm getting caught up in anything.
You know, for saving your life...
and feeding you.

Piotr, simmering with rage after being overtly coerced, bites
his tongue.

PIOTR
Why do you need me to say it?

That underhanded smirk comes back.

PAVEL
Honesty. That's all I ask for.
Trust can go a long way out here.

Silence.

PAVEL (CONT'D)
Ah, forget it.

Pavel stands and walks towards his cabin. Muttering to himself about his ungrateful guest.

Piotr sits and stares at the glowing ash of the fire.

EXT. PAVEL'S CABIN - DAY

Pavel comes out of the cabin, dressed in a coat and carrying a large bag which he plonks down next to the fire.

PAVEL

Look boy. I don't know how obvious it is to you, but out here we don't have any time for games.

Pavel sits back down on his stool.

PAVEL (CONT'D)

You don't look like you can provide any use as a lodger... and, to be honest, I'm not the company type. So what are we doing here?

PIOTR

I... I don't know where to begin.

PAVEL

How about we keep it simple. Where are you heading?

Piotr doesn't respond.

PAVEL.

The quicker you talk, the quicker we get you on your way. You clearly are not from round here, so there's no point in pretending you have things under control. City boy I guess? Are you a student?

PIOTR

Once upon a time.

PAVEL

What did you study?

PIOTR

Botany.

Piotr's gaze becomes distant.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
My father was the lecturer at the
Moscow Agriculture Institute. He
pushed me towards it. Not that any
of that is of much use around here.

Pavel chuckles.

PAVEL
You would be surprised by what
grows out here.

Pavel's face lights up with curiosity.

PAVEL (CONT'D)
So how does the son of a botanist
end up in the Katorga?

Piotr, uncomfortable with the issue, squirms.

PIOTR
My brother, Sergei. Due to one
reason or another fell in with some
radical circles.

PAVEL
Ah! A revolutionary scholar... So
it was a Narodnik who turned up at
my door all covered in blood!

PIOTR
No, far from it. Such matters have
never interested me, but the
Okhrana are heavy handed. They
rounded up my whole family... My
wife, my son... my brother.

PAVEL
And is it to them that your journey
is taking you?

Piotr nods.

PAVEL (CONT'D)
Quite the predicament you find
yourself in. I can't imagine you
will be allowed back to the city.

PIOTR
I imagine not.

PAVEL
And where are your family now? Are
they still at the Katorga?

PIOTR

My escape created a diversion. They made their escape during the commotion.

PAVEL

It was that easy?

Piotr looks down at his bullet wound.

PIOTR

It was far from easy.

PAVEL

I meant for your wife and son.

Pavel rummages through his bag and pulls out a cigarette tin. He gestures one to Piotr who silently declines.

PAVEL (CONT'D)

I imagine your escape left quite a sting on the Cossacks pride. I can't imagine them giving up their pursuit.

Pavel's cold hands fumble with a match to light his cigarette.

PAVEL (CONT'D)

Where are you family? Do you know for sure they escaped?

Piotr's demeanour snaps into an aggressive assertiveness.

PIOTR

I'm not entertaining that they didn't.

Pavel recoils from pushing the question.

Pavel ponders for a second. Before standing up and grabbing his things.

PAVEL

I have to visit the local trader. When I return we shall get you where you need to be.

PIOTR

After all that you're just leaving?

PAVEL

I got what I needed.

PIOTR

Which is?

Pavel looks at Piotr with a mischievous grin.

PAVEL

Honesty.

Pavel walks away leaving Piotr on his own.

INT. PAVEL'S CABIN - DAY (SERIES OF SHOTS)

-- Piotr paces around Pavel's cabin as much as his wounded body allows

-- Piotr stares out of the window looking for signs of Pavel

-- Piotr roots through and examines some of Pavel's tools.

-- Piotr stands in the middle room inspecting his wound. After hearing a noise he rushes to the door and opens it wide open. He finds nothing there except a chilling breeze.

INT. PAVEL'S CABIN - NIGHT

Leaning against the window frame, Piotr struggles to stay awake and maintain his silent vigil.

The convict looks over at the enticing bed. He sluggishly waddles over and slides onto it.

LATER

Piotr winces as he tosses and turns in his sleep.

EXT. PAVEL'S CABIN - NIGHT

The orange glow of torchlight fills the area outside of Pavel's cabin. The sounds of boots crunching on the ground slowly increases in intensity.

INT. PAVEL'S CABIN - NIGHT

The muzzle of a RIFLE slowly creeps up in front of the feverish face of the slumbering Piotr.

CLICK!

Piotr wakes instantly into a frantic state of alertness.

Standing in the cabin are three Cossacks aiming their rifles in Piotr's direction.

Behind them stands the tall and upright captain of the Cossack battalion, ALEXEY.

EXT. PAVEL'S CABIN - NIGHT

Piotr is marched at gunpoint out of Pavel's cabin. He is greeted by several Cossacks and their horses who are scattered about the area.

The silence of the soldiers and the harsh shadows that fall across their face from the torchlight creates an eerie atmosphere as Piotr is chained and set off marching away from the cabin.

He walks past a smirking Pavel who is being handed a bag of coins.

EXT. ABANDONED HUT - DAY

In the distance, behind a wall of falling snow, Piotr's wife and child sit tending to a fire in the doorway of their cabin.

In the distance several Cossack's on horseback close in on the abandoned hut.

EXT. COSSACKS CAMP - DAY

A beaten and bruised Piotr wakes from an uneasy sleep. He is propped up against, and bound to, a tree.

Two Cossacks nonchalantly walk over to him. One of them unchains him.

COSSACK

Stand.

As Piotr rises the soldier smashes him in the stomach with the butt of his rifle, sending him back to the ground.

COSSACK (CONT'D)

Stand.

The other guard laughs and kicks Piotr in the rear.

As Piotr gets to his feet a rifle is pressed into his back.

EXT. MEDICAL TENT - DAY

Piotr is walked up to the camp medical tent which is being guarded by two soldiers. One of which opens the doorway to the tent, allowing the Piotr to be pushed inside.

INT. MEDICAL TENT - DAY

Piotr is brought into the centre of the tent. One of the soldiers violently grabs Piotr by the shoulder and forces him onto a lone chair.

Bumblng about the tent is OLEG, an old eccentric medic. He is fussing at his son MIKHAIL, a thin 14 year old boy with a nervous disposition, who is currently employed as his apprentice.

They bring over some equipment and place it on a small table next to Piotr. Oleg grabs some MEDICAL INSTRUMENTS.

OLEG

Clean the blood from his wounds
Mikhail.

Mikhail grabs a bowl of water and a rag and dabs Piotr's wound before his father pushes him out of the way.

Oleg inspects Piotr's bullet hole with a METAL PROBE.

OLEG (CONT'D)

Is that painful? I expected tougher
from the stories I have heard about
you. Mikhail! Bring me some
Laudanum.

Alexey comes bounding into the tent.

ALEXEY

I don't think pain relief is
necessary for this patient.

OLEG

Have you seen the state of him?
Treating him without sedative will
be an ordeal, not just for him but
for-

Alexey silences Oleg with a stare before pacing about the tent.

ALEXEY

I'm sure I don't have to stress the importance of keeping Mr Zima alive do I?

OLEG

I see that importance in all my patients.

Alexey begins to circle closer around Piotr, who's heavy head hangs downwards.

ALEXEY

It is seen fit that this revolutionary will stand trial.

PIOTR

I'm not a-

Oleg flinches when Alexey suddenly grabs Piotr by his hair and pulls his face upwards.

ALEXEY

That's the last we will hear from you.

Alexey releases Piotr's head and reaches over to grab the metal probe from Oleg's hand.

Alexey crouches down in Oleg's place without allowing time for Oleg to move. Oleg stumbles away from the captain.

ALEXEY (CONT'D)

Understand me clearly Oleg, this man *will* be kept alive to stand trial... an example is to be made.

Alexey carelessly applies pressure to Piotr's wound with a metal probe.

ALEXEY (CONT'D)

The story of his escape has caused enough commotion. The news of his trial will let the public know of his treasonous crimes... then he is to be executed.

Piotr tries not to vocalise his pain.

ALEXEY (CONT'D)

But it doesn't matter what state he is in as long as he's alive. So don't waste any valuable supplies on this degenerate.

Alexey applies harder pressure to Piotr's bullet wound while staring into his face.

ALEXEY (CONT'D)

My men are closing in around your wife and child as we speak. You will hang knowing that your idiocy doomed your family.

Once again Alexey presses down onto Piotr's wound.

EXT. MEDICAL TENT - DAY

The two guards on duty both flinch as Piotr starts to scream.

INT. MEDICAL TENT - DAY

Oleg panics about the state of his patient but reframes himself at the last minute from physically stopping Alexey.

Alexey drops the metal probe back into Oleg's hands and stands up. The viciousness leaves Alexey and he returns to the relaxed and orderly demeanour he entered the room with.

ALEXEY

Just as I expected. He will crack in no time. Yenvo!

YENVO, a large bald overweight man in his 40's wearing a large black apron, enters the tent. His intense stare unnerves Oleg and the medic looks to the ground.

Alexey grabs Piotr by the jaw.

ALEXEY (CONT'D)

See if he knows anything of interest. Not that I'm expecting much.

Alexey leaves.

Piotr looks up at the grinning Yenvo with fear.

EXT. MEDICAL TENT - DAY

The two guards who have begun to slack off jump up to attention as Alexey comes walking out. Alexey shakes his head in disappointment and then walks off.

INT. MEDICAL TENT - DAY

Blooded rags and surgical utensils are dropped onto a table as others are picked up by blood soaked hands.

The deafening sounds of Piotr can be heard in the background.

INT. MEDICAL TENT - NIGHT

Blurred shadows and flickers of light float on the roof of the tent as Piotr tries to focus his vision whilst lying on an operating table.

The sounds of frantic shuffling can be heard from behind the veil of Piotr's delirium.

OLEG

Mikhail, hand me that rag. Yes, that one. Everything is covered in blood, just hand it to me son.

PIOTR

Let me die.

Suddenly the sounds stop.

OLEG

Mr Zima, you must try to stay calm.

PIOTR

My family..

OLEG

Mr Zima, I cannot stress the importance of you staying as-

PIOTR

-Let me join them.

OLEG

And where exactly would that be Piotr?

PIOTR

The captain... He said-

OLEG

- Pay him no heed. The man would say anything to torment you. Rest Piotr.

The blurred roof of the tent slowly fades as Piotr drifts out of consciousness.

EXT. MEDICAL TENT - NIGHT

The screams have subsided and a quiet calm evening has fallen across the camp. The two guards are sat sharing a cigarette.

Mikhail comes walking past them carrying some fresh water into the tent.

INT. MEDICAL TENT - NIGHT

A virtually lifeless Piotr lays across a table, bound to it by two WRIST STRAPS. The young boy comes in and starts to clean his blood.

Mikhail tries to clean a large wound but Piotr's arm is in the way. He looks at Piotr's unresponsive face and carelessly unfastens one of the wrist straps to get access.

Piotr's eyes flicker.

Mikhail turns away for a moment to wash the cloth in the water he brought in.

Like the dead itself being brought back to life Piotr dives upwards and reaches out with one grasping hand to grab the young lad, pulling him towards him. Before he can scream Piotr covers his mouth and starts to whisper into his ear with a stern and demanding tone.

PIOTR

Undo the other strap.

Mikhail, stricken with fear, doesn't do anything. Piotr lowers his arm to Mikhail's neck and tightens his grip. The young boy starts to choke. Mikhail reaches across the table and releases Piotr's other arm.

Oleg comes into the tent.

OLEG

Mikhail have you seen-

Oleg freezes.

OLEG (CONT'D)

Look, this isn't going to-

Piotr grabs a SCALPEL from the table next to him and raises it to Mikhail's neck.

PIOTR

You're going to do exactly what I say.

OLEG

No good can come from this. Please,
let my son go. There's nothing I
can do for you, we are surrounded
by soldiers. Please.

Piotr pushes the scalpel closer into Mikhail's neck causing
the skin to dint due to the pressure.

Oleg panics.

OLEG (CONT'D)

Surely you won't-

PIOTR

Don't spend the rest of your life
regretting that you underestimated
what I will do for my family.

Tears fall down Mikhail's face as Piotr applies more pressure
to his neck.

Oleg sighs.

OLEG

Tell me what to do.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST OUTSIDE COSSACKS CAMP - NIGHT

The sounds of wind begin to blow. The light of the nearby
campfire illuminates the heavy snowflakes that are beginning
to fall between the trees.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. MEDICAL TENT - NIGHT

The sounds of a fierce storm outside can be heard beating
against the tent. Piotr still clings onto Mikhail.

Oleg walks in with a couple of bags of supplies and some
clothes. He looks at Piotr to see if the convict has softened
his resolve but the fire still burns in his eyes.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

The howling wind sends the falling snow in all directions as Oleg, carrying a torch, leads the way up a hill into the forest.

Behind him walks Piotr who is now fully dressed, armed with a revolver and carrying supplies. He still clings to his hostage.

In the distance the sounds of the Cossacks breaking into a state of alarm grabs Oleg's attention. He stop in his tracks and looks back down onto the camp.

Oleg looks towards Piotr and his sad eyes silently plead with him to end this trauma.

Piotr releases Mikhail, pushing him towards his father. The boy runs into his fathers arms who embraces him. Piotr walks past them as the cling to each other in relief.

Oleg looks down at the camp as the sounds of the Cossacks are getting louder.

OLEG
What will you do?

Oleg receives no reply and turns around to see that Piotr has disappeared into the night.

He looks down at his son. The Cossack's hounds begin to howl.

OLEG (CONT'D)
And what of us?

Oleg clutches at his son tightly as several COSSACKS surround him and point their rifles at him and his son in the process.

OLEG (CONT'D)
What I did, I did for my son.

Oleg turns his son's gaze into his chest and away from the rifles.

EXT. THICK OF FOREST - NIGHT

Dragging his body as fast as it can Piotr bounces between the trees that he can hardly see.

EXT. EDGE OF FOREST - NIGHT

Piotr comes barging out of the thick of the forest and steps out into a clearing. He manages to stop himself before he falls face first into a stream.

He shuffles along the forest edge before coming across a hollowed out tree. Piotr slides inside and tries his best to shield himself from the elements.

He opens one of his bags and pulls out some food that Oleg had stolen for him and wolfs it down.

Piotr closes his eyes as the storm rages on around him.

EXT. ABANDONED HUT - DAY

Anna and Viktor stand in the doorway of the hut they are hiding out in.

Several mounted Cossacks slowly descend around them, fanning out as they approach from all angles.

The closet Cossack looks down at Anna with a cold and emotionless stare.

EXT. EDGE OF FOREST - DAY

Piotr wakes on a quiet and frosty morning. The storm has settled and for the first time in days Piotr is surrounded by tranquillity. The snow has just begun to fade and the uncolourful flora of Siberia is beginning to show.

Piotr wanders over to the near by stream. He fills his TANKARD with water and downs it. As he drinks he notices a gathering of people in the distance.

On top of a nearby hill a funeral, attended by a handful of people, is taking place. Piotr drops backwards into a seated position and watches on with curiosity.

LATER

The attendees of the funeral disperse in different directions.

EXT. FUNERAL SITE - DAY

Piotr stands at the funeral site. A freshly dug grave lies next to a simple WOODEN CROSS. Piotr pays his respects.

Using the hilltop as a vantage point Piotr assess the situation. In the distance in one direction is the small hamlet LOSCHINKA. Adjacent to it is a lone FARM HOUSE which is situated a lot closer.

Piotr looks into his bag of supplies and is disappointed with what he finds.

Piotr sets off towards the farmhouse.

EXT. MARIA'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

Piotr sneaks up to the side of the farmhouse. As he gets close enough he scuttles against the wall to stay hidden.

He sneaks along the side of the house, trying to get closer to a couple of CRATES that are just in front of him. He freezes at the sounds of voices nearby.

IVAN (O.S)
Why have you got to look at me with
those sad eyes?

Piotr attempts to reach over to the nearby crates but they're just out of range.

IVAN (CONT'D)
There's that fire that I like!

A couple of voices break into laughter.

MARIA
Just leave.

IVAN, a scruffy looking thug in his late 20's, steps towards the farmhouse doorway. A petrified MARIA, a widow in her early 30's, stands defiantly.

Her eyes undo the hard work that her confident stance is trying to exude.

IVAN
Leave? Now that's not very
hospitable. A fine young widow such
as yourself needs to mind her tone
if she doesn't want to end up an
old spinster.

Two DELINQUENTS standing behind Ivan intermittently chuckle like ignorant hyenas as Piotr leans over and rummages through the nearby crates.

MARIA
Don't ever speak of-

Ivan steps swiftly forward getting right into Maria's personal space. She recoils backwards.

Ivan's hushed and spiteful tone silences the two goons in the background.

IVAN
I think you best watch your manners.

Ivan raises his hand to move Maria's hair behind her ear. Her head begins to recoil but, stunned with fear, she is unable to move.

Ivan's hand lingers next to her face.

IVAN (CONT'D)
Are you not inviting me inside?

Maria stays silent but her lips start to tremble. Ivan tightens his grip on her hair.

Piotr pulls out a small BAG of some food and begins to put it into his rucksack. Piotr freezes when he hears Maria's screams and the sounds of a struggle.

He closes his eyes, trying to ignore what is happening.

The two goons divert their gaze away from Ivan as he pushes Maria to the ground.

BANG!-BANG!

Ivan falls to the floor next to the screaming Maria.

Piotr races out from the side of the house.

BANG!-BANG!

The two goons fall to the ground.

Piotr breathes harshly as he stands in the middle of the carnage.

Maria stands up and stares at Piotr in shock.

They both say nothing.

A sadness comes over Maria and she turns into the house, leaving the door wide open behind her.

INT. MARIA'S HALLWAY - DAY

Piotr enters the house and stops immediately. Maria can be heard in the next room.

INT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Piotr, like a cautious deer, slowly steps into the kitchen.

Maria sits with her elbows on the table and her head in her hands. A burning CIGARETTE clings between two fingers.

As Piotr comes closer Maria sits back and slumps into her chair.

Her unladylike posture and her overt defiant ignorance fails to mask the nervous shaking of her hands as she places the cigarette to her lips.

Maria looks towards the window, purposefully ignoring the stranger in her house.

Piotr examines his surroundings.

PIOTR

Do you live here alone?

Maria bites her lip before taking a hard drag of her cigarette.

MARIA

(while inhaling)

Yep.

Piotr puts his hand on a chair and gestures towards it. Maria shrugs her shoulders with indifference before blowing smoke into the air.

Piotr slowly slides the chair towards him. The slow scraping on the ground pierces through the uncomfortable tension.

Piotr sits down at the table opposite Maria who maintains her gaze towards the window.

PIOTR

Are we going to do anything about...

Piotr gulps and flicks his head in the direction of the doorway. Maria turns her attention directly to Piotr.

MARIA
 What? The bodies you've left
 rotting on my doorstep?

PIOTR
 I was just trying to help.

Maria sniggers sarcastically.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
 Well?

MARIA
 Well what? What do you even want?
 Who are you?

Piotr stutters.

MARIA (CONT'D)
 What can you possibly do to help me
 that I can't deal with myself?

Maria begins to wave her lit cigarette in Piotr's face.

MARIA (CONT'D)
 I'm not some damsel in distress who
 needs saving.

PIOTR
 I never said that, what I was
 trying to say is-

MARIA
 What's to be said? Eh?!

Maria forcefully stubs her cigarette into an ash tray. Slowly
 twisting it to put it out.

MARIA (CONT'D)
 There's nothing to be said...

Maria's anger fades, she turns away to hide her tears.

MARIA (CONT'D)
 You leave this earth the way you
 come in... alone.

PIOTR
 Look, I'm sorry. But regardless of
 anything else we *need* to clean up
 this mess. Either we do this now,
 or... I'm sorry I will have to be
 on my way -

Maria begins to open her mouth in outrage but is cut off.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
 We don't have time. You need to
 acknowledge the urgency of this...
 And, well... we are just going to
 have to trust each other.

Maria looks at Piotr with a childlike fear.

MARIA
 Trust each other? Who are you? Why
 are you here?

PIOTR
 My fam-

Piotr's stutter is noticed by Maria.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
 There are people I need to meet.
 But I need a place to lay low. If
 that's a problem I can move on.

Maria mulls over Piotr's words for a second.

MARIA
 It seems I'm unable to escape
 trouble. But... I need all the help
 I can get. So I guess you can stay.
 But you will have to earn your
 keep.

Piotr nods in agreement.

EXT. MARIA'S FARMHOUSE - DAY (SERIES OF SHOTS)

-- Maria lays out some sheets just outside her doorstep.

-- The lifeless body of Ivan is lifted onto a sheet.

-- Piotr and Maria struggle to carry the wrapped up bodies
 into the house

INT. MARIA'S HALLWAY - DAY

A TABLE and a LARGE CHEST OF DRAWERS have been displaced into
 the centre of the hallway as Piotr raises the floorboards
 beneath the stairs. Maria drags a body across the floor.

INT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Covered with sweat, Maria and Piotr walk into the kitchen.

Piotr sits down at the table while Maria goes and rummages in a cupboard.

PIOTR

What's the next move? I can't
imagine you want them as a
permanent fixture of the house.

Maria slams a full bottle of VODKA and two glasses onto the table as she lowers herself onto a chair.

MARIA

That's tomorrow's problem.

Maria jovially throws a cloth at Piotr.

MARIA (CONT'D)

For the sweat.

Piotr begins to dry himself off.

PIOTR

I don't understand how I got like
this. It wasn't that physically
demanding.

MARIA

Mania.

Piotr is stunned by Maria's bluntness.

After a second Maria blurts out a laugh and begins to pour herself and Piotr a drink.

MARIA (CONT'D)

We never introduced ourselves.

They both pick up their glasses, Maria with more enthusiasm than Piotr.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Maria.

Maria raises her glass into the air. Piotr quickly goes silent.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Surely we're past the point of
being shy with one another?

Piotr raises his glass.

PIOTR

Piotr.

The two glasses clink together.

MARIA

What brings you to my door, Piotr?

HARD CUT TO:

INT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - DAY

The last few drops of vodka remain in the horizontal bottle which is situated on the table next to Piotr's sleeping face.

The jarring sounds of wood scraping on wood in the next room jolts Piotr awake. The startled Piotr takes a second to adjust to the sunlight.

INT. MARIA'S HALLWAY - DAY

The sluggish Piotr walks into the hallway and finds it in disarray. The furniture has been moved and the floorboards are once again ripped off.

In the centre of it all a stressed Maria is finishing up lifting a poorly mummified corpse from underneath her house.

PIOTR

What are you doing?

Maria clambers out of the gap in her floor and awkwardly stomps past the furniture which is in her way.

MARIA

I want them out of my house.

Maria races right past the hungover Piotr and straight through the front door.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I want them out of my house.

EXT. MARIA'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

The weary Piotr saunters out of the house. Maria is walking across her property in the direction of her storehouse.

PIOTR

Maria!

Maria keeps walking and doesn't acknowledge Piotr's calls.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

Maria! We need to think this through.

Maria, still ignoring her guest, starts to open the doors to her storehouse.

Piotr, finding the situation tiresome, sighs and sets off across the farm.

INT. MARIA'S STOREHOUSE - DAY

Piotr enters the cluttered storehouse. Scattered around are various bundles of hay and piles of farm equipment. In the middle is a small one horse WAGON which Maria is setting up.

Piotr attempts to gently come between Maria and the wagon but she brushes past him.

With great strain Maria lifts the tongue of the cart. Using her body as leverage she pulls the wagon towards the door.

PIOTR

Where's this franticness come from?

The wagon jolts and Maria embarrassingly tumbles to the ground.

MARIA

I just want them out of my house. I don't really care about anything else right now. Are you helping me or not?

PIOTR

I will help, but we need to think very carefully about our next steps.

Maria stands to her feet and returns to yanking on the wagon's tongue.

MARIA

Look, if you don't want to help then fine. I'll deal with this on my own.

Piotr looks on with pity as Maria struggles to manoeuvre the heavy wagon past the awkwardness of the doors.

Against his better judgement he helps her push the wagon outside.

EXT. MARIA'S HOUSE - DAY

Maria and Piotr park the wagon outside of Maria's doorway. Maria instantly heads for the entrance.

PIOTR

Wait.

Maria reluctantly stops and makes the frustration with doing so evidently clear.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

I know...*them*.

Piotr uncomfortably gestures towards the house.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

Being in your house isn't ideal.

MARIA

Ideal!?

PIOTR

Stop picking apart my poor choices of words. There's no guide for any of this. That's why every step we take, we must do so meticulously and with careful consideration.

MARIA

Like the *careful consideration* you used when you-

She doesn't need to finish her sentence. The point is made and Piotr's ego is visibly hurt.

Maria wants to twist the knife but she doesn't have it in her.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Come on then, let's get this over with.

Maria enters her house.

INT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Maria is clambering on the kitchen surface. With no patience she moves her hand about trying to find something that's out of sight atop the cupboards. She drops back down holding a CIGARETTE TIN.

Maria sits at the table and gestures a cigarette towards Piotr.

PIOTR
I don't partake.

Maria rolls her eyes at the pious Piotr.

MARIA
I'm sure you'll need one before
this mess is over with.

Maria lights one for herself. Piotr joins her at the table and examines the case.

PIOTR
Interesting.

Piotr places the tin back on the table.

MARIA
Turkish. Ilya's Father fought in
Crimea. I can't count the amount of
times he told the same story about
*a moment of humanity between
enemies.*

Maria takes a long drag of her cigarette.

MARIA (CONT'D)
(while holding in smoke)
It's probably easier to remember it
that way.

Maria brazenly blows out a large cloud of smoke and picks up the tin.

MARIA (CONT'D)
I'm sure some Turkish family is
missing its Father... and their
tin.

Maria casually throws the tin back onto the table which lands with an awkward clang.

PIOTR
A rather bleak analysis.

MARIA

Haven't you realised yet? Bleak is
the only analysis out here...
You're not in Moscow anymore.

Piotr mulls over what Maria said.

INT. MARIA'S HALLWAY - DAY

Maria and Piotr stand shoulder to shoulder looking down at
the three corpses that ungracefully lay lumped together in
the soil beneath the open floor.

PIOTR

How long until a search party comes
knocking at your door?

MARIA

I doubt anyone suspects a lonely
widow.

PIOTR

So you have no connection to them?

Maria, nervous from the question, turns around and starts to
walk away. Piotr grabs her by the arm.

Maria's face turns sour but Piotr's stern glare silences any
protest to the manhandling.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

Do you have any connection to them?

Maria yanks her hand away from Piotr like a child snatching
back a confiscated toy.

MARIA

Can't you tell I don't want to talk
about this? Why are you ignoring
that and forcing me to talk?

PIOTR

I didn't want to talk about my
family.

Maria, not wanting to acknowledge her hypocrisy, stomps out
of the front door.

EXT. MARIA'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

Piotr steps out of the front door to find Maria hunched on a small box next to the house. She turns her face to hide her tears.

PIOTR
Cruelty isn't my intent. I'm just trying to be thorough.

MARIA
I-

Maria, crippled by her refusal to acknowledge her pain, waves her hands to forcibly usher the words that she is struggling to release.

MARIA (CONT'D)
I don't know how to... there's never been a reason to say it out loud before. I've not had a meaningful conversation since... Well, since Ilya passed.

PIOTR
No family?

Maria shakes her head.

MARIA
We lived in our own little world. And this farm was it.

Maria looks over her kingdom.

MARIA (CONT'D)
The Golovins, Ivan's family, are nothing more than a thuggish cartel. Rotten... the lot of them. But they hold a lot of sway out here. They've have had their sights on this farm for sometime.

PIOTR
Ivan had his sights on a lot more.

Maria flicks her head in the direction of the bodies behind her.

MARIA
He's just a brute. But the other Golovin boys have a dash of cunning to match their vile disposition.

Piotr squints as he tries to get his tired head around the reality of the situation then crouches down next to Maria.

MARIA (CONT'D)

The only solace I can take, and it is a minor one at that, is at least Ilya is no longer subjected to their relentless hounding.

Piotr, in deep thought, glares into the distance.

PIOTR

What happened to Ilya?

MARIA

I don't know on what level, but my gut tells me the Golovins are to blame.

Piotr's thousand yard stare is broken by disbelief.

PIOTR

How are you not sure?!

MARIA

Life doesn't always work the way it *should* out here Piotr. When it benefits those with power the rules are strict... Don't hold your breath waiting for the same.

Maria stands up and brushes specks of dust from her dress before wiping away the residual tears from her cheek.

MARIA (CONT'D)

There is no glasnost in Siberia. But that's a conversation for another day.

PIOTR

Surely-

MARIA

-I'm not seeking closure Piotr, or understanding... there is none.

Maria walks away leaving Piotr sitting alone.

EXT. MARIA'S FARM - DAY

A solemn Maria closes up the doors to her storehouse. Piotr, still perched on the doorstep, watches on.

EXT. MARIA'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

Maria returns and stands in front of Piotr. Both have lost their appetite for passionate debate. They both linger and wait for the other to break the ice.

Without looking Maria in the eyes Piotr ends the silence.

PIOTR

I'm not going to just leave. It wouldn't be right for me to let you deal with this mess that I helped create. But let us make a decision about what we are going to do and then do it.

For the first time since they met a genuine smile can be seen on Maria's face.

MARIA

Thank you.

The tender moment rattles the nerves of Piotr.

PIOTR

Whatever we decide, we must remember, I need to get to my family.

MARIA

Have you heard from them since you escaped?

PIOTR

They are going straight to the meeting point.

Maria notices then sidesteps the unsaid no.

MARIA

I know a place to bury the bodies. If we just get them on the wagon we can ride out and bury them. I know a place nobody will look, but I won't forget.

PIOTR

Are you planning on unearthing them.

MARIA

You can never predict when you might need leverage.

(MORE)

MARIA (CONT'D)

People will do a lot to be reunited
with a family member, even if they
are no longer of the living.

Piotr, shocked by her dark edge, finally looks directly at
Maria.

PIOTR

Then we leave?

INT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Maria frantically stomps around her kitchen while Piotr
hounds her demanding answers.

PIOTR

Haste, Maria. That's the key. We
are on borrowed time here. The
Golovin's will come looking.

MARIA

I'm selling the harvest. It won't
take long to prep. The buyer I have
lined up won't pay what it's worth
but this will help tide me over
until I find my feet. *If I find my
feet.*

Piotr picks up Maria's cigarette tin and flicks it between
his fingers.

PIOTR

It's already too messy.

MARIA

If I have to leave then it's on my
terms. Those bastards took
everything. *Everything.* They won't
take this from me.

Piotr carefully places the tin back onto the table. He tuts
under his breath an inaudible agreement.

Knock!-Knock!

Piotr and Maria freeze.

INT. MARIA'S HALLWAY - DAY

ANTON, a naïve and skinny 18 year old, stands in the open
doorway curiously peering into the house. Under his arm is a
BOOK.

A panicked Maria walks into the hallway.

ANTON

Hello!

INT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Piotr is silently pressed up against the wall. His revolver is drawn and fixed on the doorway next to him.

INT. MARIA'S HALLWAY - DAY

MARIA

Anton! Why are you-

Anton peers around Maria.

ANTON

-What's going on?

Maria steps in front of Anton's line of sight and forcefully gestures him towards the kitchen.

MARIA

Oh don't worry about that, come, sit down.

INT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - DAY

A overtly cheery and upbeat Maria enters the kitchen.

MARIA

It's just Anton.

Piotr puts away his revolver just as Anton enters the room.

MARIA (CONT'D)

He's here to... why are you here again?

Anton stalls when Piotr, irritated by the interruption, grumpily crosses his personal space.

The intimidated Anton sheepishly steps backwards.

ANTON

What? Oh me? No reason, I've never had a reason before. What's going on in there? Who is this?

MARIA

Oh, it's nothing. I'm having some work done in the hallway.

Piotr, ignoring Anton, pulls the chair out from under the table right in front of him. He sits at the table with his back to the young lad.

Anton tries to talk to Maria but is struggling to comprehend why Maria has a guest that he doesn't know.

ANTON

Why didn't you say you were getting work done? This is the first I've heard about it.

Maria looks at Anton, like a mother embarrassed for their son.

MARIA

I don't have to tell you everything Anton.

Anton still can't hide his irritation about being out of the loop.

ANTON

I know, it's just peculiar is all. I was only here yesterday morning and you never mentioned-

MARIA

-It's not important really, what are you up to anyway? What are you reading at the moment?

Piotr rolls his eyes at Maria's attempts to make conversation.

Anton walks further into the centre of the room, moving cautiously around Piotr.

He places the book upright on the table and rests his hand on top. Piotr glances at the cover. *Crime and Punishment*.

ANTON

I've just started it. It follows an ex-student who violently kills for the first time. It's a fascinating insight into the guilt that consumes a man after he commits a murder.

Maria's faux chipper interest in Anton wains and she looks over at Piotr who is diving into a pit of grief.

Anton, noticing the slight, pauses for a second.

ANTON (CONT'D)
At times the story veers into-

INT. MARIA'S HALLWAY - DAY

A cold and eerie quietness surrounds the wrapped up bodies that lay underneath the house. The faint sound of Anton wittering away can be heard in the background.

INT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Anton, Maria and Piotr sit around the table as Anton sits chirps away, ignoring the obviously distressed Maria and Piotr.

ANTON
Mother doesn't really take much interesting in reading anymore. I tell her about all the-

MARIA
-I think it best we get back to work.

Maria stands up. Anton, uncomfortable with being cut off mid rant, struggles to process what he is supposed to do next.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Sorry. Time is pressing.

Piotr gives Maria a knowing look.

ANTON
No matter, I won't be in the way. Same as normal.

MARIA
Honestly, I can't be much of a host today, there's too much going on.

Maria stands in front of Anton, forcefully but politely guiding him to the door.

He reluctantly stands, hoping that he isn't being shooed away. Anton looks to Piotr who maintains his gaze away from the young lad.

A childish pride comes over Anton.

ANTON
Well... Good bye then.

Anton, with assertiveness that is comedically unconvincing, marches out of the kitchen.

EXT. MARIA'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

Anton marches out of the house. After a few paces his momentum comes to a near stop. He slowly turns his head around and sees Maria stood in the doorway, blocking the way back.

Anton tries to act casual and looks around the farm.

ANTON
I think today's a good day for some outdoor reading.

Maria silently smiles.

Anton, not getting the response he was searching for, sets off away from the house.

Maria waits at the door and once Anton gets far enough away she returns inside.

INT. MARIA HALLWAY - DAY

Maria enters the kitchen and finds Piotr at the window watching the young Anton leave.

Maria joins him at the window.

PIOTR
Interesting fellow.

MARIA
He's harmless.

PIOTR
The boy seems smitten with you. Is the feeling mutual?

MARIA
Don't be ridiculous.

Maria playfully smacks Piotr on the arm.

MARIA (CONT'D)
He's barely a man.

Piotr's eyebrows raise as he smirks.

MARIA (CONT'D)
I've not a clue what that lad wants
with me. Mother, sister.. -

PIOTR
-Lover?

Maria balks at Piotr's joke and walks out of the kitchen.

MARIA
We've got work to do.

EXT. MARIA'S FARMHOUSE - DAY (SERIES OF SHOTS)

--Piotr and Maria come shuffling out of the house carrying a burdensome body.

-- With one big heave they throw the corpse onto the back of Maria's wagon.

-- In the distance, sat in the shade under a lone tree, Anton sits reading.

-- Two bodies lay lumped together on the back of a wagon. With a thud another lands on top.

-- The sight of Piotr and Maria walking around outside the house piques Anton's interest. He forcefully buries his mind back into his book.

-- Maria stands shouting instructions at Piotr as he pulls a cover over her wagon.

-- An irritated Anton closes his book with a snap.

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. MARIA'S FARMHOUSE - DAY

Piotr crouches by the side of the wagon fastening the cover onto it as a troubled Maria stands by its side.

The sound of incoming footsteps gets her attention. Her conflicted look turns to one of mild annoyance.

An enthusiastic Anton comes walking up to the cart.

ANTON

How's the work coming along? What exactly is it you're doing again?

MARIA

What do you want Anton?

An unimpressed Piotr stands up from behind the wagon. His presence rocks Anton's confidence.

ANTON

Well, I was... I remembered what I originally came for. But when we talked about my book I-

Piotr steps out from behind the side of the wagon, bringing himself closer to Anton, but his attention stays fixed on checking the wagon coverings.

PIOTR

-I thought the lady asked you to leave?

Anton freezes. Maria springs into action to defuse the tension.

MARIA

(to Piotr)

Anton's my friend.

(to Anton)

He doesn't mean any harm... But why are you here Anton? As you can see we're rather busy.

Anton rummages into his pocket and pulls out a small WRAPPED ITEM. He presents it to Maria.

MARIA (CONT'D)

What is this?

ANTON

A sweet, your favourite if I recall. I was in the shop the other day picking up some things for mother and spotted this and thought of you.

Maria blushes and gracefully takes the gift from Anton.

Piotr rolls his eyes at the uncomfortable display and walks inside.

ANTON (CONT'D)

Are you sure about him Maria?

Maria's silence does nothing to subdue Anton's curiosity.

ANTON (CONT'D)

There's something rather off about the man. Where do you know him from?

MARIA

He's just a friend Anton. A friend lending a hand.

Maria sets off back into her house leaving Anton unsure if he should follow or not.

INT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - DAY

An anxious Piotr is slowly pacing about the kitchen. Maria enters the room.

PIOTR

We should wait until dark to leave... Unless visibility will be a problem?

Anton walks into the kitchen. His presence being unwanted is written across Maria and Piotr's faces. Anton freezes momentarily before continuing on.

ANTON

What's happening to the hallway?

Maria, with her patience nearly waned, gasps a sigh of defeat. She grabs her cigarette tin off the side and ungracefully drops onto a chair at the table.

MARIA

Grab the deck of cards from the drawer Anton and come sit. Let's give Piotr some space to finish his work.

Maria looks to Piotr and offers him a silent apology. Piotr bites his tongue and walks towards the doorway.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Piotr.

Piotr stops in the doorway, but doesn't look backwards.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I have a portable lantern.

A confused look comes across Piotr's face.

MARIA (CONT'D)
So visibility won't be a problem.

PIOTR
Fair enough.

Piotr exits the kitchen.

ANTON
What did that mean?

Maria begins to open her cigarette tin.

MARIA
Just deal the cards Anton.

INT. MARIA'S HALLWAY - DAY

The glum Piotr sits amongst the wreckage in the hallway. His thoughts are elsewhere as he ignores the sound of Anton's idiosyncratic blabbering.

Piotr lazily pulls one of the floorboards closer to him, scraping it along the floor in the process.

EXT. MARIA'S FARM - NIGHT

As the sun is beginning to set a small family of deer cautiously graze and play amongst themselves on the outskirts of Maria's farm.

INT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

A tired Piotr walks into the kitchen and finds an anxious Maria sat in silence as Anton reads.

The nervous Maria looks towards Piotr. Both of them filled with the dread of their impending task.

Piotr's presence pulls Anton out of his book. Trying to gauge the mood, the young Anton looks between them both. Maria has a light bulb moment.

MARIA
Right!

Maria jumps up from her seat. Her two guests, each for a very different reason, eagerly await her next words.

MARIA (CONT'D)
A lift to town Anton?

ANTON

A lift? Why? What's to do in town at this time? You never go to the Traktir.

MARIA

I'm taking Piotr. After all the help he's been I can't possibly expect him to walk back.

Anton, still puzzled by the unusual offer, looks between them both for answers.

EXT. MARIA'S FARM - NIGHT

Anton stands idly next to Maria's wagon as Piotr harnesses a horse to it. In the background Maria locks her front door.

Maria joins them both at the wagon.

Anton eagerly climbs onto the wagon leaving Piotr and Maria to silently ruminate on the dark deed they are about to undertake.

The two join Anton on the wagon. His chipper face a contrast to the depressive expressions sat either side of him.

MARIA

Idti!

Maria whips the horse and the three set off.

ANTON

Are you local? I've never seen you around? You should visit Polina's Traktir.

Silence.

ANTON (CONT'D)

Mother always said if you're looking for anyone or anything, Polina's is where to start.

Piotr and Maria don't acknowledge Anton's ramblings. The three ride off into the darkness ahead.

EXT. ROAD TO TOWN - NIGHT

The three unlikely companions erratically rock side to side as they travel across uneven ground. The light of a single torch illuminates the sorrowful faces of Piotr and Maria.

In between them the upbeat Anton is a stark contrast to the tone of the evening.

ANTON
 (to Piotr)
 Where actually are you staying?
 (to Maria)
 Is it easier for us to drop him off
 and then we can-

MARIA
 We're just heading into town.

Maria doesn't take her eyes off the road ahead and Anton recoils into himself after failing to start a conversation.

EXT. EDGE OF LOSHCHINKA - NIGHT

The horse and cart pulls up to the edge of the small town. Ahead of them the wooden buildings of shopkeepers and residents line up in different shapes and sizes along the main street.

Piotr jumps out of the wagon and waits silently for Anton to follow his lead. Anton, not wanting to part Maria, looks to her for answers. She gestures for Anton to get out.

The boy slides off the wagon, grumping like a child as he does, then Piotr jumps back on.

ANTON
 Wait. What?

The cart slowly turns around to face away from town, circling Anton in the process.

MARIA
 Idti!

Maria pulls on reins of her steed and propels them into the darkness leaving a stumped Anton alone. He kicks the ground before sulking into Loshchinka.

EXT. SIBERIAN FOREST - NIGHT

The light of a single lantern punctuates the thick blackness that surrounds the land. In the centre of small clearing in the forest stands a lone tree. Next to it Piotr and Maria silently dig a grave.

EXT. ROAD TO MARIA'S FARM - NIGHT

Maria and Piotr, covered in mud and sweat bob side to side in a mournful silence as the cart takes them back to the farm.

EXT. MARIA'S FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Maria's cart pulls up to the house. They both dismount and unharness the horse. Neither of them utters a word.

INT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Maria and Piotr enter the kitchen. A quiet and sombre mood is in the air.

Piotr lingers at the doorway as Maria potters about cleaning up her kitchen. Maria lets out a large and ungraceful yawn.

MARIA
(through the yawn)
I guess that's me for the day.

Maria notices Piotr hesitating at the door.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Oh, are you staying here?

A slight blush unexpectedly befalls Maria.

PIOTR
I wasn't expecting anything. I'm
sure I can find lodgings somewhere.

MARIA
And how do you expect to pay for
that? No, don't be silly.

Maria walks with intent towards the kitchen door, trying to take Piotr with her. She stops in her tracks when Piotr doesn't respond to her forcefulness with haste.

MARIA (CONT'D)
I can't let you do that. Not
after...everything.

Maria still gets uncomfortable acknowledging the recent grim events.

MARIA (CONT'D)
I haven't made up the spare room,
its been forever since we... I,
have had guests.

PIOTR
I'm sure it's fine.

INT. MARIA'S HALLWAY - NIGHT

Maria, holding a CANDLE, leads the way up her staircase. When she reaches the top, Maria uses the candle to light the wall mounted OIL LAMP.

Piotr follows closely behind her.

INT. MARIA'S SPARE ROOM - NIGHT

A door in the corner of the dark room swings open. Light from the landing reveals a sparsely populated room containing basic furnishings; a single BED with no linen and a couple of DRESSERS. One of which has a large mirror on top.

Piotr steps into the room before turning to face Maria who lingers at the door.

MARIA
I know this isn't much. The bed's not even made. I had to sell the linen.

PIOTR
It's fine.

Maria goes silent while Piotr inspects his lodgings.

MARIA
I can't leave you to stay in an unmade bed, you might as well be in the barn!

Piotr walks back towards the door, coming face to face with Maria.

MARIA (CONT'D)
I'm sure you could stay in my bed, I presume... that would be fine.

Maria and Piotr's eyes lock as they try to figure out how to get past this awkward moment.

PIOTR
Goodnight Maria.

Piotr closes the door.

INT. MARIA'S LANDING - NIGHT

Maria hovers at the door to her spare room. Her hand nervously shakes as she goes to open it. She pulls her hand away from the door and turns away.

EXT. ABANDONED HUT - DAY

The black boot of a Cossack drops onto the snowy ground with a crunch.

Anna, kneeling on the ground, clings onto her son in a pitiful attempt to shield him from harm as three Cossacks slowly encircle them.

The Cossack directly in front of them slowly steps forward. With a face void of any emotion he silently reaches out to grasp at the vulnerable mother and son.

Anna unleashes a deathly scream.

HARD CUT TO:

INT. MARIA'S SPARE ROOM - NIGHT

A feverish Piotr jolts up from a violent nightmare. His eyes adjust to a light in the room that emanates from a candle.

Maria stands in the doorway. A disoriented Piotr tries to start a conversation.

PIOTR

They, I... it was.

Maria walks over to the bed and sits on the edge. She eases her guest and gently directs him to lie back down.

Piotr tries to fight going back to his dream.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

I'm fine, it was just. I saw them... You don't have to... you should sleep.

MARIA.

Don't worry Piotr, I can't sleep either.

Maria gently places her hand onto Piotr.

PIOTR

I'm sorry.

MARIA
Sleep Piotr.

Maria blows out the candle, leaving them both in darkness.

EXT. MARIA'S FARM - NIGHT

A small hare rustles the few remaining bits of frost from some grass and begins to chew. It freezes after sensing danger. The light of the moon reflects in its black eyes.

INT. MARIA'S SPARE ROOM - DAY

The yellow hue of sunlight creeps around the curtains. Piotr slowly wakes from his slumber and sits up, perching on the edge of the bed.

He tilts his head, trying to close in on the sounds of the hustle and bustle coming from downstairs.

Piotr stares intently at the bedroom door, waiting for the moment he can muster the strength to face the day.

INT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Piotr enters the kitchen and is greeted by the sight of a bubbling Maria. Breakfast is laid out on the table as Maria, a stark contrast to the day before, tends to some washing while joyfully humming to herself.

Maria notices Piotr has entered.

MARIA
Breakfast?

Piotr nods.

PIOTR
Thank you.

Piotr goes and sits down. Maria smoothly juggles between keeping the momentum of washing up going while bringing Piotr a drink. Piotr is shocked by the graceful coordination of this picturesque housewife.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
We have lots of work ahead of us.

Maria puts down the glass she is currently cleaning and dries her hands on a cloth.

MARIA
 Today will bring what today brings.

Maria walks over to the table and sits opposite Piotr.

MARIA (CONT'D)
 But for now let us enjoy this
 breakfast.

The two begin to eat.

EXT. MARIA'S FARMLAND - DAY

A few blades of desaturated vegetation, sprinkled with the
 drops of the remaining frost, flicker in the breeze.

INT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Piotr finishes a mouthful of water and drops the glass onto
 the table next to several empty plates.

Maria sits back in her chair and stares out of the window.

PIOTR
 Are you ready?

MARIA
 The snow has nearly cleared.

Maria keeps her gaze out of the window as Piotr fixates on
 her, probing for any signs of agency.

PIOTR
 Will that make it easier?

MARIA
 Life is always easier without snow.

PIOTR
 What's the plan?

Maria snaps out of her day-dream and turns her head to
 discover an impatient Piotr waiting for answers.

EXT. MARIA'S FARM - DAY

Maria and Piotr gaze at a large field of wheat. The crop
 rises above a small wooden fence, that has seen better days,
 which separates Maria and Piotr from their ocean of toil.

A bundle of RUSTY TOOLS is laid on the floor next to them.

PIOTR

Have we got time to work through
all of this?

MARIA

We will... but we need to work
fast. You never know when the
weather will change.

Piotr, squinting due to the light of the unseen sun, examines
the overcast sky.

PIOTR

Seems like it might hold out.

MARIA

Don't hold your breath.

Maria clumsily climbs onto the fence, nearly slipping on the
lower of the two jagged rails.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Out here underestimating the
weather is usually peoples'
downfall.

Maria, struggling to keep her balance on the fence, lifts one
arm off the top and points to the adjacent side of the field.

MARIA (CONT'D)

If we start on that side and work
our way back, we can bundle it up
and leave it in the Labaz.

Maria drops off the fence while nodding in the direction of a
crooked raised GRANARY that sits upon four stilts. An
unstable looking LADDER leads up towards the wooden
storehouse.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Or maybe we shouldn't bother. I was
stupid to risk waiting. The snow
has probably ruined the harvest.

Piotr drops down onto one knee and claws at the ground. He
inspects a lump of soil, rubbing it between his fingers.

PIOTR

The moisture isn't too bad. It's
probably suitable for harvest.

Piotr flicks the soil from his fingers before looking up to
find a puzzled Maria staring down at him.

MARIA
A farmer in a previous life?

Piotr chuckles to himself.

PIOTR
Not quite.... a botany student.

MARIA
Theory then.

Maria laughs as she picks up the tools next to her and thrusts a SCYTHE in Piotr's direction.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Which is all very useful until one
has some *actual* work to do.

Maria smirks at the kneeling convict. Piotr returns to his feet and confidently grabs the scythe from her.

INT. MARIA'S FIELD - DAY

Maria instructs Piotr on how to thresh wheat. After a couple of dry swings she ushers Piotr to try. His scythe gets lodged into the crop. Piotr loses his balance while trying to untangle it.

Maria bursts into laughter.

HARVESTING MONTAGE:

-- Piotr and Maria are working their way across the field, slicing through wheat with their scythes.

-- Piotr uses a rake to pull the chopped wheat together and Maria follows behind him, binding them into bundles.

-- A grain of wheat runs through Piotr's hands before being banged against the side of a BUCKET. Wheatberries begin to pile up inside it.

-- Working their way further across the field, Piotr slices through some grain before turning around to find Maria leaning on her scythe smugly watching him toil away.

-- Piotr's hands run through more grain. The wheatberries in the bucket begin to rise.

-- A smoky haze fills Maria's kitchen as Piotr and Maria play cards and drink vodka by candlelight. Maria offers Piotr a cigarette but once again he declines.

-- About three quarters of the way across the field, Maria is chopping down wheat with her scythe. She turns around to see Piotr nonchalantly leaning on his, mimicking her earlier rest. He playfully yawns. Maria raises her scythe to threaten Piotr who comically rushes back to work.

-- The bucket of wheatberries reaches the brim. Piotr stumbles as a couple of chickens run around under his feet trying to scoop up any spillage.

-- Maria and Piotr's game of cards continues. Piotr turns over a facedown card with anticipation. The result sends Maria into outrage and she bangs on the table, spilling some of the vodka. Piotr breaks out into a fit of laughter as Maria drunkenly tries to soak up the spilled drink.

-- With poise Maria winnows the grain. The wheatberries gracefully bounce up and down on the WINNOWING BASKET.

-- Wheat is poured into a sack which is then tied shut.

-- Maria stands by Piotr's side, guiding him through the motion of winnowing. His first go on his own leads to the wheatberries falling overboard.

-- Piotr rakes up chopped grain into bundles. He pauses for a minute to wipe some sweat from his brow. He spots Anton sat under a tree with his book in hand. The young lad's attention isn't in his literature as he is looking down at the convict with a jealous curiosity.

-- Light rushes into the granary as Maria opens the hatch on the front. Her head peers in before leaning down to grab something.

-- One sack of wheat drops inside the granary.

-- Piotr deals out another card game as Maria empties the bottle of vodka into their glasses.

-- A sack of wheat is tied shut.

-- Grains of wheat bounce up and down like they're on a trampoline as Piotr masters the art of winnowing.

-- Another sack of wheat drops down in the granary next to several others

-- Piotr takes a massive swill of vodka and smashes the glass back down onto the table then confidently flips a playing card over.

-- A final sack of wheat drops down into the full granary.

END MONTAGE

EXT. MARIA'S FARM - DAY

An exhausted Maria and Piotr lay in an empty field next to each other. Maria leans over and pulls out some wheat that had been resting in Piotr's collar. He quickly snatches it out of her hand and swallows it.

They giggle amongst themselves but their brief laughter fades into a contemplative silence.

Piotr surveys the empty field.

PIOTR
I guess it's time.

Not hearing a response, Piotr looks over to Maria. The farmer anxiously stares at her home.

EXT. MARIA'S STOREHOUSE - DAY

Maria and Piotr solemnly stack bundles of wheat onto Maria's wagon.

As Piotr bends over to pick up the next bundle a jovial Anton comes wandering over. The moment Maria's eyes lock with Anton's a spring comes into his step.

Anton's smile wanes as Piotr's head rises up above the side of the wagon and dumps several bundles of wheat onto it. He notices Anton but doesn't react and leans over again to pick up more of their harvest.

ANTON
What?.. Why is he still here?

Maria's attention remains on the wheat she is arranging on the wagon.

MARIA
Seeing as I've fallen behind this season Piotr has kindly offered to stay on and help.

A shocked Anton moves close up to the wagon and stops right next to Maria.

Once again the sight of Piotr's face rising up above the side of the wagon makes the young lad uncomfortable. He leans closer and talks directly to Maria.

ANTON

Why didn't you ask me? You don't need any outside help.

Piotr circles around Maria and aggressively pushes a few bundles of wheat into the arms of the love sick boy, the force of which makes Anton wobble backwards.

Maria tries to hide a smirk as Anton fails to keep his composure when he fumbles the wheat onto the wagon. He scrambles to catch the stray grains that fall to the ground.

Anton brushes the dust off his hands.

ANTON (CONT'D)

See... that wasn't so hard.

PIOTR

I guess we can leave you to handle the rest then.

Anton's face turns pale and Maria bursts out laughing.

MARIA

Don't worry yourself Anton. We're rather busy though. What did you come for?

INT. MARIA'S STOREHOUSE - DAY

Maria enters the storehouse with Anton eagerly pursuing behind her. Piotr comes sauntering after them.

ANTON

It's all been happening in town. Ivan, one of the Golovin boys, has been missing for days - maybe even weeks. Nobody is sure. The family and their cronies are going from door to door asking questions.

Piotr and Maria silently look at each other with discomfort.

ANTON (CONT'D)

I've been hearing all kinds of rumours. Some are saying it could of been one of the other the brothers.

Maria gets more uncomfortable. She bends down and picks up a bag of wheat.

ANTON (CONT'D)
 Some people are saying it's another
 family making moves. A couple of
 Ivan's friends went missing as-

MARIA
 Anton! Enough.

Like a scolded school boy Anton freezes.

ANTON
 What? Sorry... I forgot he used to
 come round and visit a lot didn't
 he? Ivan made himself rather
 friendly around here.

Anton judgingly looks Piotr up and down.

MARIA
 There was nothing friendly about
 Ivan's *visits* here. That's enough
 now Anton. Times are stressful
 enough as they are without adding
 your gossiping into the mix.

ANTON
 Yeah, you're probably right. I
 guess it would be best to get
 cracking on. You wouldn't want to
 get caught in that incoming storm.

Maria's eyes shut in agony.

ANTON (CONT'D)
 The town's in a right state.
 Everyone is either flapping about
 missing people or the weather.

Piotr clocks the stress building up in Maria.

PIOTR
 I think it's best you clear off
 now.

A cold stern look sends shivers down Anton's spine.

ANTON
 What's your problem?

Piotr starts to walk towards Anton.

PIOTR
 You best mind your tone before-

MARIA

-Piotr!

Piotr stops in his tracks and stares right into Anton's eyes. Like an angered bull a powerful exhale sends air out his nostrils.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Anton... Please... give us some space to get things sorted.

Anton nods in agreement and turns away. On his way out he stops to see if he really has to go but the silent duo give nothing away. Anton closes the door behind him leaving Maria and Piotr alone.

PIOTR

What are we going to do now?

Maria abruptly drops the sack of wheat that was in her hand and races out of the storehouse.

INT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Maria's hand frantically claws around on the top of her cupboard trying to grasp at her father's cigarette tin.

She drops back off the kitchen work surface and plonks herself down at the table. After flicking open the lid to her metal case Piotr quietly walks in.

MARIA

Just spit it out.

PIOTR

What now? How does this manhunt change things?

Maria waves Piotr away and starts to roll a cigarette.

MARIA

Oh... that was always going to be a thing.

Piotr slowly pulls out a chair from under the table. Maria winces as it scrapes along the ground.

PIOTR

I think...

MARIA

Go on, what do yo think?

Maria looks up intensely from her tobacco and patronisingly awaits Piotr's next words.

PIOTR
We should cut our losses and leave
now.

Maria applies the finishing touches to her cigarette.

MARIA
That's not possible. I need the
money. Anyway, it will bring us too
much attention if we rush out now.

PIOTR
It's now or never.

Maria strikes a match and puts the flame to the end of the fresh cigarette.

MARIA
And how do you know that? Eh?

Piotr stays silent.

MARIA (CONT'D)
I thought not... so... do you want
to know what I think? I think that
I won't concede another fucking
thing to that family. They've taken
enough.

Maria blows a cloud of smoke in Piotr's direction.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Besides, running will only condemn
us and they don't seem like the
kind of people to let things slide.

INT. MARIA'S STOREHOUSE - DAY

The light of the day is beginning to fade. Maria and Piotr cover up the wagon with a large SHEET.

MARIA
If the storm passes quickly, I will
take this lot to town in the
morning.

PIOTR

Why not now? We could show our faces in town to alleviate suspicion, make some money and then be gone.

Maria finishes tying the sheet to the wagon.

MARIA

I'm not leaving until we have sold *everything!*

EXT. MARIA'S FARM - NIGHT

The sun is creeping down behind the horizon and darkness is closing in around the farm. Piotr stands alone taking in the last moments of calm.

The slow and repetitive creek of a WEATHER VANE above Piotr catches his attention.

INT. MARIA'S SPARE ROOM - NIGHT

Piotr sits on the spare bed listening to the sound of wind hitting against the house. He leans over the candle next to his bed and blows it out.

INT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

An anxious Maria sits in her usual spot at the kitchen table, picking away at the corner of it with her nails.

EXT. MARIA'S FARM - NIGHT

The lone weather vane frantically rattles side to side as the silhouettes of tree branches dance behind it.

INT. MARIA'S SPARE ROOM - NIGHT

Piotr lays in the dark with his eyes wide open listening to the storm battering against the side of the house.

Strange noises from downstairs grab his attention.

EXT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

As soon as he enters the kitchen Piotr spots a packed BAG situated on the table.

A thick FUR COAT is folded next to it with an USHANKA hat placed on top. In a pile in the corner are several BOXES.

Piotr inspects the Ushanka.

MARIA

They belonged to Ilya. You could use them on your journey.

He places the hat respectfully back on the table.

PIOTR

I can't.

MARIA

Don't be ridiculous. They're just collecting dust.

Maria walks over to her cupboard and opens it. She pulls out an empty bottle of vodka.

PIOTR

Why are you doing this?

She tilts the bottle and peers closely at the few drops at the bottom before leaving it on the side.

MARIA

Tomorrow I'm going. Weather permitting I'm going to sell the farm. We'll need to get supplies for your travels as well.

PIOTR

Are you sure?

Maria drops down to her favourite chair before looking around her kitchen and taking it in.

MARIA

No.

Once again Piotr sees that scared young girl again that he encountered when he first entered this kitchen.

MARIA (CONT'D)

But it's time. The wolves won't stay at bay forever.

Piotr pulls out the chair opposite Maria and sits down.

PIOTR

Sooner the better for me, I've
delayed enough. My family will be
struggling without me.

A lump forms in Maria's throat and her eyes sheepishly divert
from Piotr.

EXT. MARIA'S FARM - NIGHT

The sounds of the creaking wind vane rattling accompanies the
crunch of a BLACK BOOT stomping on the frozen earth.

INT. MARIA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

The end of Maria's cigarette burns away while balanced
precariously on the edge of an ash tray. Several playing
cards are scattered across the table. Piotr tries to
concentrate on his hand.

PIOTR

Will they come looking here?

MARIA

Eventually I guess. A lonely widow
surely wouldn't have the gumption
to kill a Golovin. I'll know by
tomorrow if they suspect me.

Piotr's eyes twitch and look up from his hand.

PIOTR

And why is that?

MARIA

I'm selling them the farm.

Piotr throws his cards onto the table.

PIOTR

Are you out of your mind?! When
were you going to tell me?

MARIA

The Golovins are the only ones in
town with enough money to buy.
They've had their eyes on the farm
for years anyway.

PIOTR
 We just buried one of their family
 members... and now you want to
 stroll right into-

CREAK!

A floorboard from the hallway being stepped on stops Piotr mid sentence. Like a hawk Piotr tilts his head and focuses his hearing.

Piotr sprints towards the hallway, knocking his chair to the ground on the way.

MARIA
 Piotr!

Maria jumps up and heads towards the sounds of scuffling that is emanating from her hallway.

INT. MARIA'S HALLWAY - NIGHT

Maria steps into her hallway to find Anton, with Piotr's hands around his neck, being held up against the wall.

PIOTR
 What are you doing you little
 sneak?! What did you hear?!

Maria tries to pry Piotr's arms from Anton but his grip doesn't wane.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
 You pathetic little rodent creeping
 around. Why are you here?! What do
 you want?!

Anton attempts to answer Piotr's barrage of questions but all he can do is gasp.

MARIA
 Piotr! Let go, now!

Piotr's hands unfurl from Anton's neck. He takes a step back, panting with rage.

MARIA (CONT'D)
 What do you think you're doing
 Anton?

Anton straightens his clothes.

ANTON

What are you doing more like? Is it true? Are you selling the farm? Where are you going? Why haven't you spoken to me about it?

MARIA

I don't have to run anything by you Anton.

ANTON

Why are you doing this? Is this because of *him*?

Anton looks at Piotr with disgust.

PIOTR

Watch your tongue you little snake.

MARIA

Piotr, you're not helping.

Piotr's eyes burn with rage, fixating on Anton.

ANTON

Why Maria? Is it because of him? This... *murderer*?

The fire burning inside Piotr fades, humbled by Anton's accurate epithet.

Maria calms herself.

MARIA

That's not what happened Anton. I can explain.

ANTON

No, I don't want to hear it. You don't have to go, just because this... *murderer* condemned you.

MARIA

Anton, please.

Anton makes for the door.

ANTON

I won't let him get away with it.

EXT. MARIA'S FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Fighting against the elements, Anton powers through the storm at full speed. The door to the farmhouse swings back and forth in the wind before Maria holds it open.

MARIA

Anton! Anton!

Maria's energy to fight the storm fades and she steps back into the house closing the door behind her.

INT. MARIA'S HALLWAY - NIGHT

The door to Maria's house closes, muffling ever so slightly the storm that rages on outside.

Piotr, fists clenched, stares intensely at the ground, unable to hide his anger. As Maria slowly turns away from the door to look at Piotr he diverts his eyes in shame.

Attempting to break the awkward silence Piotr opens his mouth to speak, but closes it before uttering a word.

Maria lingers on Piotr for a second, waiting for some semblance of an explanation about his outburst.

Getting none, Maria dramatically exits the house.

EXT. MARIA'S FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Like Anton before Maria races across her farm battling the storm.

The door behind her opens and Piotr follows in pursuit.

PIOTR

Maria! What are you doing?! Maria!

INT. MARIA'S STOREHOUSE - NIGHT

The sheet that covers the back of Maria's cart is ripped off by its owner. The unlocked doors to the storehouse are swinging in the gale.

A tired and angry Piotr enters through them.

PIOTR

Maria!

Maria starts ripping the wheat from the back of the cart, scattering it all around her.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
For God's sake woman what are you doing?

Piotr grabs hold of Maria but she frantically shakes him off.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
Calm down! What's gotten into you?!

MARIA
I'm done. I'm going. It's over.

Maria leverages herself using her stomach on the edge of the cart to grab the remaining bags of wheat.

PIOTR
This is ridiculous, what about the harvest?.

Maria marches round to the front of the cart and raises up the pulling bar and starts to heave it in the direction of the doors.

MARIA
I don't care Piotr. I'm going, it's all fucked.

Piotr runs over and grabs hold of the bar, stopping Maria from going anywhere.

PIOTR
This isn't the time for foolish and rash decisions.

MARIA
Rash? You don't want me to be rash? What happened to me instantly dropping all that remains of mine and Ilya's life together being the smart thing to do? Eh?!

Piotr's grip on the pulling bar loosens and Maria seizes the opportunity to start pulling.

MARIA (CONT'D)
I thought so.

PIOTR
I'm just trying to bring some thought into equation.

(MORE)

PIOTR (CONT'D)

It's clear now you haven't been completely honest with me. God knows what else you have failed to mention. You need to think-

The convict stops himself mid sentence and rethinks his choice of words.

PIOTR (CONT'D)

-We need to think clearly.

THUD!

Maria drops the pull bar to the ground and steps over it, giving Piotr her full attention.

Maria

We? What's this we? This is my life, not yours. You've made it perfectly clear how eager you are to get on your way. There is no we.

PIOTR

Of course I am! I've got a family that needs me, a family that I'm putting at risk to help you.

Maria takes a step right up to Piotr and starts poking at his chest with her finger.

MARIA

Help me? You condemned me! You only came to this farm because you were scrounging, and you couldn't do that without fucking up my entire life.

Piotr swipes Maria's vengeful finger out of the way.

PIOTR

I'm done with this. I'm done with you and your fantasies about the reality of the situation. You're delusional. I've no idea why I'm still here... I'm going... good luck.

MARIA

After everything you're just going to leave? Shows what kind of man you really are. Go on...

(MORE)

MARIA (CONT'D)

run off to your family, I'm sure they're still sat around waiting for you after all this time. Don't talk to me about *delusion*.

Piotr raises his hand in anger but reigns himself in.

The sounds of the raging storm and frantic breathing intertwine as Maria and Piotr lock into a fiery stare down.

Piotr silently takes a step away from Maria, walks around her and leaves.

Maria is left alone surrounded by bags of wheat.

INT. MARIA'S SPARE ROOM - NIGHT

Piotr rushes around the spare room pulling together all of his belongings and dumping them in a sack.

He walks past the window and notices Maria, fighting against the wind, pulling her cart towards the front of the house.

Piotr hesitates for a moment before returning to packing.

EXT. MARIA'S FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Dressed for the next stage of his quest, Piotr confidently exits the front of Maria's house with his bags thrown over his shoulders.

In front of him Maria struggles to pile boxes of her belongings onto her cart.

Piotr's determination fades for a moment as Maria painfully lifts one of the boxes. Embarrassed by her struggle Maria looks away from Piotr and goes about her business as though he isn't there.

Piotr lingers for a second before pulling Ilya's Ushanka firmly into place then heads off into the night.

EXT. MARIA'S FARMLAND - NIGHT

Piotr is unwavering as he marches in the dead of night across Maria's farmland while being continually bombarded by the storm. In the distance looms the wavering black outline of a forest shaking in the wind.

EXT. MARIA'S FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Maria calms her horse that has been unsettled by the weather then attaches it to the cart.

Anxiously she looks over her home one final time. Tears that have formed at the corners of her eyes take flight in the wind.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Wobbling side to side and being hammered by the elements a heartbroken Maria travels through the darkness.

EXT. SIBERIAN FOREST - NIGHT

In near complete darkness Piotr stumbles aimlessly between the trees of the forest. Trying to hide from the wind and icy snowflakes that are hammering his face, Piotr takes refuge behind a large pine tree and takes stock of his situation.

His confidence wanes and he closes his eyes.

EXT. EDGE OF LOSCHINKA - DAY

The storm has finally settled and day is beginning to break.

Maria rolls into Loschinka as a calm blanket of snow falls around her.

The town is still quiet as most of its citizens have yet to rise.

EXT. LOSCHINKA MAIN STREET - DAY

Whilst trying her best to hide her nerves Maria's silently rolls up the main street. Fresh frost covers the walls and roofs of the buildings. The repetitive plodding of her horses' hoofs are the only noise to break the eerie silence.

A lone figure steps out onto the porch and stands still, waiting for Maria to approach.

This is NIKOLAI GOLOVIN; a male in his 30's dressed in a long fur coat and smoking a cigarette. His dishevelled appearance betrays a cunning mind that is evident in his eyes.

Maria slows her horse to a standstill as she closes in on Nikolai. Behind him, hanging his head low and escorted by two Golovin GOONS, Anton sheepishly steps out into the road.

After flicking his cigarette onto the street Nikolai casually walks over to Maria's wagon and climbs up onto it next to her, taking the reins in the process.

Nikolai steers the horse and cart around and heads in the direction it came. The goons jump onto two nearby horses and follow.

A tearful Anton is left alone.

EXT. FOREST EDGE - DAY

Piotr steps out the trees onto a field of icy grass. Snow silently falls around him as he looks around to find his bearings.

In the distance stands the lone tree and abandoned hut he seeks.

EXT. SIBERIAN PLAIN - DAY

Rushing full pace across the frosty plain with air visibly spewing from his mouth Piotr closes in on his familys rendezvous point.

Piotr's pace begins to fade and eventually he comes to a standstill.

Disbelief is written across his face. After wiping away the snow from his eyes the disbelief turns to worry.

CRUNCH!

Piotr's knees hit the hard icy ground. His lips begin to tremble. The hardened convict starts panicking and mutters nonsensical statements of despair.

Hanging from the tree in front of him the lifeless bodies of his wife and son slowly twist in the wind.

EXT. ABANDONED HUT - DAY

Trembling in utter despair Piotr aimlessly tries to cling to his wife and son's bodies at the same time.

Pitifully, the broken man drops to his knees and clings to the legs of his son and holds them tight.

MOMENTS LATER

The distraught Piotr with icy tears falling down his face frantically looks around in all directions. He notices a SHOVEL lodged into the ground next to the foot of the tree.

Piotr's bloodshot eyes fill with an undying rage. Spurred on by the final taunt of the Cossacks Piotr rises to his feet and begins to cut down his family.

EXT. ROAD OUT OF TOWN - DAY

A defeated Maria sits in silence as she is escorted out of town.

EXT. ABANDONED HUT - DAY

Piotr sits by the side of two freshly made graves. He places the bag Maria packed for him onto his lap and starts to rummage inside. His tearful face smiles as he stumbles across Maria's Father-in-law's cigarette tin.

His hand grips it tightly.

Piotr stands to his feet and once again fixates on the tin.

He looks around all directions then turns to his family's graves to pay his final respects.

INT. LOSCHINKA'S TRAKTIR - DAY

Dust particles float in the air of the deadly silent dim saloon. Sulking in the corner on a table by himself Anton drowns his sorrows with a bottle of vodka.

The doors to the traktir open and Piotr steps into the sparsely populated dive and spots Anton failing to stomach the taste of hard liquor.

Piotr closes in on Anton's table and towers above him.

ANTON

I didn't mean to. I'm sorry... I just didn't want to lose her.

INT. LOSCHINKA'S TRAKTIR - DAY

The doors to the traktir come flying open and Piotr steps out and scans up and down the main street. Anton comes stumbling behind him.

Piotr leans backwards and grabs the young lad.

PIOTR
Pull yourself together!

The young lad screams as his head is plunged into a bucket of water situated next to the doorway. The refreshed Anton is dragged back to his feet.

Anton looks into Piotr's eyes and turns pale. His face twitches. He leans to the side and vomits all over the floor.

Piotr flicks some droplets of sick from his hand before turning away from Anton.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
That should do it.

Once again he scans up and down the street.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
We're going to need horses.

EXT. EDGE OF LOSCHINKA - DAY

Piotr and Anton haggle with a MAN for his two horses. Piotr gestures at Anton to pay the man.

EXT. ROAD OUT OF TOWN - DAY

Hoofs smash against the cold dirt road as Piotr and Anton race out of town.

EXT. SIBERIAN FOREST - DAY

Piotr and Anton are riding through the forest on horseback. Stray branches break against them as they power through.

The youngest of the two surprising comrades suddenly halts his steed. Piotr continues riding for a few steps before he notices that his guide has stopped.

PIOTR
What is it?

ANTON
We're here.

EXT. SIBERIAN FOREST - MOMENTS LATER

CRUNCH!

The boots of Anton and Piotr thud onto the frosty ground.

PIOTR
We need a plan.

Piotr scans around the forest trying to find any signs of his destination before grabbing his bag from the horse and rummaging through it.

ANTON
What are we going to do? They will outnumber us.

Piotr's hands freeze for a split second before revealing some ROPE. His face looks up to Anton.

PIOTR
Can I trust you?

Anton nods.

Piotr draws his revolver from its holster and holds in Anton's direction.

The young lad clumsily takes the gun and nervously inspects it, handling it as though it might hurt him.

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. EDGE OF THE GOLOVIN'S LAND - DAY

At a glacial pace, a mounted Anton, brandishing a revolver, marches a bound Piotr along a small dirt track that cuts through the forest.

Piotr steps out into a clearing. His eyes light up. *He's been here before.*

EXT. PAVEL'S CABIN - DAY

Two scruffy ruffians are lounging around on the doorstep of Pavel's cabin. As the young SIMEON GOLOVIN, a small blonde man in his early 20's, paces about between them.

The two goons spring to their feet.

Simeon confused as to what has got their attention turns around. His eyes squint as they focus into the distance.

EXT. EDGE OF THE GOLOVIN'S LAND - DAY

Panic sets in as three men come running towards Piotr. He looks up at Anton to try and get his attention but the young lad is fixated on the incoming Golovins.

PIOTR

Anton!

Piotr is grabbed by the two Golovin goons. Simeon paces around him, sizing him up like a piece of meat.

SIMEON

Is this the one?

Anton nods in confirmation.

ANTON

Do we have a deal?

Simeon looks into Piotr's eyes before slapping him to the ground.

EXT. PAVEL'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Cackles of venomous laughter come from the two Golovin goons as Simeon rains insults and threats at the bound Piotr who is crawling towards the cabin.

SIMEON

You worthless worm. Scum.

The three Golovins take turns at kicking the helpless convict up the path.

SIMEON (CONT'D)

This is going to be long and painful.

Piotr's face and hands land with a heavy thud onto the small wooden step that leads onto the porch of Pavel's cabin, the door to which comes flying open.

PAVEL

What is all this racket?!

The elderly Pavel steps out and sees his youngest son and his two cronies surrounding the body of a man who is knelt down before him.

SIMEON

We've got him father.

Pavel's eyes light up with a sinister rage and he lunges towards the helpless man in front of him, gripping him by the hair.

PAVEL
Lets take a look at you... you
filthy maggot!

Violently yanked by his hair Piotr's face is pulled upwards to stare right into the eyes of his new captor.

PAVEL (CONT'D)
You!?

Pavel trembles with rage as his eyes pierce Piotr's soul.

Behind the old man, Maria steps out of the cabin door and gasps at the sight of Piotr.

Pavel frantically looks between the two and sees that Maria recognises his new prize.

With a vengeful force Pavel releases his grip from Piotr's hair by throwing his head back towards the ground and then jumps to his feet.

PAVEL (CONT'D)
Boys! Tie this scum up.

Pavel walks over to Maria and grabs her by the arm and drags her into the house.

Piotr props himself up onto his knees.

CRACK!

Simeon's fist connects with the helpless jaw of Piotr, knocking him out cold.

EXT. ABANDONED HUT - DAY

A blinding wall of snow, racing in all directions, blurs the silhouette of Anna kicking and screaming as two Cossacks tear her away from her son.

Another Cossack closes in on the young Viktor.

The frost covered face of an emotionless Cossack stares down at Viktor.

Unfazed by the piercing shriek of the young boy's mother the Cossack raises a ROPE in front of the young boy.

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. PAVEL'S CABIN - NIGHT

Piotr's eyes jolt open. Battered and bruised with a blood soaked rag lodged in his mouth he tries to wriggle free from the wooden beam on Pavel's porch that he is bound to.

NIKOLAI

Quite the dream you were having.

Piotr turns his head and notices the rough looking Nikolai Golovin leaning against the side of the cabin. His dirty face is illuminated by the cherry of a cigarette.

Piotr, not gracing the Golovin with his attention, returns to a comfortable position.

A lit cigarette comes racing past Piotr's face, scattering tiny embers all around him.

Nikolai paces around in front of Piotr and crouches in front of him, flapping his long coat over his thighs in the process.

NIKOLAI (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

So I finally get to meet the Piotr Zima whom turned up on my father's doorstep in the middle of my night.

Nikolai reaches over and dislodges the rag from Piotr's mouth.

PIOTR

Your father's a rat! My family didn't deserve-

Nikolai swiftly raises a finger in front of Piotr's face. The intensity of his eyes lets Piotr know he's not in the mood to be tested.

NIKOLAI

My name is Nikolai. I believe you also met my younger brother.

Piotr doesn't respond.

NIKOLAI (CONT'D)
This is messy. *Really* messy. But...
My father has set his eyes on that
farm and now it's in his grasp.

Refusing to dignify Nikolai with a reaction Piotr looks
towards the ground.

NIKOLAI (CONT'D)
Tomorrow morning, he's handing you
both over to the Cossacks. Then he
will cut a deal for the farm.

Nikolai reaches into his pocket.

NIKOLAI (CONT'D)
He's not normally one to take
advice, but I've floated a
different proposal.

Piotr's eyes are still fixated on the ground. The sound of a
metal tin being popped brings his attention to Nikolai's
hands.

The bound Piotr's chest begins to fluctuate as his breathing
races. Nikolai is holding Maria's cigarette tin.

NIKOLAI (CONT'D)
But, the old man is toying with...

Nikolai places a cigarette onto his lips then points the tin
in Piotr's direction, offering him one. He doesn't respond.

Nikolai closes the lid shut and places it back into his
pocket.

NIKOLAI (CONT'D)
He's thinking of wedding myself and
Maria.

Piotr's eyes squint with disdain.

NIKOLAI (CONT'D)
Father still intends to hand you
over, presuming there's still a
reward for you. If not, well... I'm
sure you can guess.

Nikolai pulls a box of matches out from the inside of his
jacket, strikes one then raises the flame to his mouth.

NIKOLAI (CONT'D)
Once he's set his mind to
something, well that's what happens
round here. I, on the other hand...

Nikolai shakes his match, extinguishing the flame before
flicking it into the distance.

NIKOLAI (CONT'D)
I believe having the Cossacks in
our business is problematic.

The Golovin boy stands to his feet and turns his back on
Piotr. He takes a long drag of Maria's cigarette and scans
the night sky.

NIKOLAI (CONT'D)
I'm a reasonable man Piotr,
especially compared to my family.
If myself and Maria are to be wed,
so be it... But I'd rather not
spend the rest of my days married
to a woman who is fighting me at
every turn.

Nikolai turns his head to look down at Piotr.

NIKOLAI (CONT'D)
If you were to speak to her, smooth
things over. Make her see the
silver linings. Then I will see to
it that my father lets you go.

Piotr refuses to speak.

After receiving the silent treatment, Nikolai turns around
and crouches down in front of him again.

NIKOLAI (CONT'D)
This is the best outcome for us
all.

Piotr spits in Nikolai's face.

PIOTR
You, your father, your entire
family will face the same fate as
mine!

Nikolai doesn't react. He slowly wipes Piotr's spit from his
face and stands.

NIKOLAI
Simeon! Get out here.

After a brief moment the door to the cabin swings open and the youngest Golovin steps out.

NIKOLAI (CONT'D)
Ride out to the camp. Fetch the
Cossacks. Tell them we have
something they'll want.

Nikolai steps towards Piotr and boots him in the stomach.

Crouching down once again, Nikolai grabs Piotr by the scruff of his hair and spits in his face before pulling the rag back over his mouth.

The Golovin ungracefully releases his grip and walks away.

Piotr watches as a horse with Simeon on its back rides away from the house. The hapless Piotr writhes from side to side as he tries to break free.

His muffled screams are heard by no-one.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. ABANDONED HUT - NIGHT

The sky is clear, the grass is green and not a single snowflake can be seen.

Piotr, Anna and Viktor sit together around a fireplace cooking some sausages.

The head of the family pulls a sausage from the fire and passes it to his son.

Coming straight from the fire and being too hot to handle the young Viktor, to his father's amusement, drops his sausage.

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. PAVEL'S CABIN - DAY

Piotr awakens to find the forgotten Anton shushing him whilst trying to break his bonds. Once Piotr's hands are free he removes the gag from his mouth.

PIOTR
Thank you.

Anton passes two revolvers to Piotr.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
Keep one. You'll need it.

A lump forms in Anton's throat.

The two unlikely allies stand. Piotr inspects his revolver.

ANTON
What's the plan?

PIOTR
Good question.

Piotr swiftly surveys the area.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
Run to the edge of the grounds and
keep an eye out. If anyone comes,
sound the alarm.

Anton nods then turns and runs away from the cabin.

Piotr checks his pockets and scans the floor around him.

BANG!

The sprinting Anton goes flying into the air.

Piotr freezes. Time slows for him as he watches his companion come crashing to the ground.

Spinning around he sees a single shot rifle being aimed by Nikolai. His father standing by his side.

A screaming Maria comes out of the cabin door and runs around Pavel to reach Anton, who is writhing in pain on the floor. Anton's hands press against a bullet that is lodged in his stomach.

Already Anton's shirt is soaked with blood and tears run down his face.

PAVEL
Put him out of his misery.

Nikolai passes the rifle to his father and sets off towards Anton and Maria.

Nikolai draws his revolver and points it at the young lad.

PAVEL (CONT'D)

What are you waiting for boy? We don't need this whimpering mess laying here when the Cossacks arrive.

Nikolai steps slightly to the side to reveal Anton's revolver, that is fixed on him, resting in Maria's hand.

Pavel storms back into the house and quickly returns with a shotgun, cocking it in the process.

PAVEL (CONT'D)

Enough fucking about!

Pavel takes one step off his porch.

BANG!

Accompanied by a spray of blood emanating from his hands, Pavel's shotgun flies from his grip. The old man falls to the ground, screaming in pain.

Piotr's revolver hangs in the air, pointing at Pavel.

A panicked Nikolai swings around and points his revolver at Piotr as he starts to close in Pavel.

BANG!

With a bullet sized hole in his forehead, Nikolai drops to his knees before falling flat on his face.

The revolver in Maria's hand falls to the ground as she recoils in disgust.

Pavel failing to stop the blood emptying from his hands, lunges for the shotgun that lays next to him.

Just before his bleeding hand claws at its hilt a boot comes crashing down on it.

Standing over Pavel, as he wails in agony, Piotr stares down at the pitiful old man with vengeance in his eyes.

Pavel, relinquishes his claim to the shotgun and tugs on his arm as he tries to roll away.

Piotr snaps up the rifle and aims it at the man he holds responsible for all his suffering.

The old man, clinging to his hand, closes his eyes and cowers away from the tip of the barrel.

PIOTR
You pathetic rotten old *fuck*.

Piotr rams the end of the shotgun right into Pavel's face.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
Do you have any idea?!

CLICK-CLICK!

PIOTR (CONT'D)
Any idea what you've done?!

MARIA
Piotr, please. Anton needs us.

PIOTR
What happened old man? Lost your
nerve? Open your eyes! OPEN THEM!

Piotr rams the hard metallic barrel into Pavel's temple.

PIOTR (CONT'D)
I want to see your eyes as-

MARIA
-Piotr! Stop! We need you.

Pavel trembles in silence as he awaits his fate.

His eyes close with a sigh of relief as Piotr pulls the gun
away and turns to Maria.

MARIA (CONT'D)
Please... we've had enough death.

Piotr looks down from the porch at Maria, who's holding a
bleeding Anton in her arms. In front of her is the lifeless
body of Nikolai.

The anger in Piotr subsides and he limply points the gun in
Pavel's direction.

PIOTR
Eye for an eye. Enjoy spending the
rest of your days mourning your
family.

Piotr chucks the shotgun to the ground and walks to Maria and
Anton, dropping to his knees beside them.

EXT. PAVEL'S CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Silence has befallen the clearing outside Pavel's cabin.

With his head resting on Maria's knees, the colour from Anton's face is all but gone. Maria wipes away the blood that is creeping out the sides of his mouth.

The sounds of several horses in the distance grab Piotr's attention. He jumps to his feet.

PAVEL

You thought you could get away.

Piotr looks to the porch and sees the wounded old man struggling to prop himself up on a WOODEN STUMP situated just outside his door.

PAVEL (CONT'D)

I should've put a bullet in you the moment you turned up at my door. Ah well, you'll get what's coming.

Pavel winces as he chuckles at his own remarks.

MARIA

I don't know what to do.

PIOTR

We need to move.

MARIA

I can't leave him.

PIOTR

Anton, it's now or never. Can you stand?

Anton closes his eyes. His lashes collect the tears that escape from his closed lids. He shakes his head side to side.

Maria looks up at Piotr with teary eyes.

MARIA

I can't.

Piotr freezes with indecision. The sounds of the incoming Cossacks get louder.

ANTON

Just go.

MARIA

No.

ANTON

Please. Let me do this.

MARIA

I'm not leaving you.

Anton, with all his might, begins to sit up. Just before his own strength gives out, Piotr grabs his wrist and yanks him to his feet.

Anton hooks his arm over Piotr's shoulder and uses his other to point at the steps on Pavel's porch.

ANTON

There. Sit me there.

MARIA

What are you doing?

PIOTR

Let him have this Maria. He's his own man.

Barely standing of his own volition and with his arms hooked over his friend's shoulders Anton wobbles towards the cabin.

ANTON

Here.

Piotr lowers Anton to the porch.

ANTON (CONT'D)

Pass me the gun.

Maria watches on as Piotr places the shotgun into Anton's hands. The young wounded boy slowly repositions himself, trying his best not to fumble the gun in the process.

Once again Pavel lets out a demeaning cackle.

PAVEL

Don't hurt yourself boy.

Piotr shakes his head in disgust and turns to Maria.

PIOTR

It's time.

PAVEL

You'll be seeing your family soon Piotr. You hear me? I'll come and visit you when you're hanging from a tree just like-

BANG!

Piotr spins around to find Anton pointing the shotgun in the direction of the blood splattered remains of Pavel's head which have been plastered up the wall.

Maria looks to Anton Sadly.

FADE TO BLACK.

PRE-LAP: THE SOUNDS OF HOOFS HITTING THE GROUND CREEP IN.

EXT. PAVEL'S CABIN - DAY

The sun is fully up.

Sat on the porch outside Pavel's cabin, a barely conscious Anton cradles the shotgun between his legs and arms as he leans on the shoulder of Maria.

Carrying several bags of spoils Piotr steps out of Pavel's cabin.

ANTON
Go...

MARIA
But-

ANTON
-Now!

Anton uses what little life he has left to shrug Maria away.

She stands and looks down at Anton, still indecisive about leaving. Piotr comes and stands by her side and nods at her. *It's time to go.*

Maria leans over and kisses Anton gently on his head before turning to walk away.

Piotr bends down next to Nikolai's body and reclaims Maria's cigarette tin.

After pulling an Ushanka over his head Piotr nods at Anton before chasing after Maria who's in the process of mounting a horse.

EXT. SIBERIAN FOREST - DAY

Riding on horseback Piotr and Maria race through the forest.

Maria stops her horse when she hears a loud commotion in the distance.

An eager Piotr reluctantly steadies his horse and impatiently waits for Maria to resume her flight.

BANG!-BANG!...BANG!-BANG!

Piotr sighs when his sympathy for Maria overcomes his urge to press on.

EXT. SIBERIAN FOREST - NIGHT

Piotr sits by a fire in silence as Maria lays next to him staring into the sky.

EXT. SIBERIAN PLAIN - DAY

In the distance the small village of MARKOVINOT stands out from the vast empty plain that surrounds it.

Looking down on it from a vantage point Piotr Zima sizes up the area.

Maria walks behind him, pulling two horses by their reins.

She comes and stands by Piotr's side and passes something into his hand.

Piotr's eyes squint and a wavy amber hue surrounds them as he takes a long hard drag of a cigarette.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF MARKOVINOT - DAY

Side by side, Maria and Piotr slowly trot towards the main street of Markovinot.

FADE OUT.

THE END.