

Emperor of the Clouds

by

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## Synopsis

Tsar Paul I faces an inevitable overthrow and his friends, family and entourage must choose sides. A story of power, betrayal and the power of friendship.

### CHARACTERS

Count Peter Alexeivitch Pahlen: Male, 40s. Military Governor

Sapan: A castrati bodyguard of Tsar Paul. Female, 20s-mid 30s.

Paul I: Tsar of Russia. Male, 40s- 50s

Baroness Anna Ostermann: Female, mid 30s early 40s.

Count Panin: The Chamberlain. Male, mid 40s

Grand Duke Alexander: Heir to the throne. Any gender, 20s.

Prince Palatin: Reluctant member of Conspiracy. Male, 20s

Count Zulooff: Member of the military conspiracy. Male, 50s.

General Talyzin: Member of the military conspiracy. Male 40s

Ivan: A servant of the Tsar. Any gender, any age.

Film Geek: 25-40, any gender.

Ensemble of Soldiers and Servants: At least 5-6. Various ages, any gender.

Time and Place: 1801 St. Petersburg , the present and dreams.

Notes: It's all in the imagination. Keep it light in terms of the set: only the bed, hugging willow, dressing screen and desk should be on the whole time. There should be a sense of a building still under construction with the occasional sound of hammers. Costumes basic EXCEPT for the soldier's uniforms. Tsar Paul would approve.

**To Ann Turiano: For giving me an idea that turned into this and making me feel I had a voice.**

ACT 1

Scene 1

The audience is in the dark. Literally. No light at all. Then a projector starts up from the back of the theater, a screen slides down and a trailer for a silent film begins. We see various scenes of military marches, what appears to be a king or emperor inspecting the troops, and a couple kissing passionately and then embracing. It's just getting good and-screen goes blank? Is that IT? Then, just as suddenly as it ends, the film starts up again. The emperor is running pursued by soldiers. They chase him into a room. When the emperor looks back he sees only long shadows advancing toward him. He bolts through them, a wild, desperate look in his eye, falls on his knees to the camera and starts to beat against it- as if trying to break free from a prison. The shadows are on him and he screams: no sound. The camera zooms in for a closeup, film stops and ... darkness. Now the scream, a piercing howl of something dammed. It permeates the theater and our ears. Lights up RS!

COUNT PAHLEN and the BARONESS ANNA OSTERMANN are kissing while she attempts to remove his coat. They hear the howl, stop and ...

ANNA

(Putting his coat back on)

Go. I may be awake when you return.

PAHLEN

If I don't go ... see you soon.

Lights out. Lights up back of house. Steps grow louder as does the scream. And here comes the source now: Our hero? Not quite. The Tsar Paul I makes his entrance fleeing from some unknown. He wears a rather plain nightgown that has seen better days. Oh

shit! Here come the SOLDIERS in hot pursuit-THAT'S the reason he's screaming. Right??

TSAR PAUL  
AAAAAAGGHHHH! LEEEEETTTT MEEEEEEEEEE GOOOOOOOO!

SOLDIER 1  
Jesus! Worst one yet!

SOLDIER 2  
This is a great bore-chasing his Excellency EVERY night!

SOLDIER 3  
Boy, no one cares if you're bored! We have to catch him-ah he's heading back to his room.

SOLDIER 1  
Thank God! He runs fast for a fa-

SOLDIER 4  
SHHHH! Don't you dare-

SOLDIER 1  
Well ... a chub...

SOLDIER 2  
Highness! Excellency stop! Please!

At this line they reach the stage and lights go up. PAUL I whirls around. He's in his bedroom, furnished only with a bed and a small desk and screen. His nightgown, like the rest of his clothes-too big.

TSAR PAUL  
Stand back! You devils! Dark, faceless bastards!  
(Somewhere he finds a sword)  
Come on! You think I'm a feeble old man but I may surprise you!

SOLDIER 1  
That old thing-

SOLDIER 3  
Ceremonial sword.

SOLDIER 1  
-couldn't cut bread!

SOLDIER 2  
Where's Pahlen?! Where the hell is that damn-

*Speak of the devil and he shall arrive. That's not fair. PAHLEN is no devil, just a good man who has been forced to do some bad things. It wears on him, as the bags under the eyes of an otherwise handsome face suggest. He is all things to all people, and a lesser man would forget his true self. PAHLEN clings to it for dear life.*

PAHLEN  
Your Excellency seems perturbed.

TSAR PAUL  
What?? Who are you-wait, wait ... what did you call me?

PAHLEN  
Excellency. You are Tsar Paul Petrovich Romanov.

TSAR PAUL  
HMMM. I don't recall that mouthful.

PAHLEN  
Trust me my liege, it's true. I your humble servant, Military Governor Peter Pahlen; these men are your soldiers who protect the palace and your being.

SOLDIER 3

Yes, all true your Excellency, that's what we do all right.

PAHLEN  
SHHHHHHHH!

TSAR PAUL

Oh, so it's Excellency is it? Well why were you bastards chasing me?

SOLDIER 3

We were trying to catch you!

TSAR PAUL

Aaaaahhh I knew it-

PAHLEN

(to Soldier  
Shut up!!!

TSAR PAUL

God damn you all!! Now I see you plainly,  
but before you were shadows-

PAHLEN

A dream your Excellency! Just a bad dream.  
A nightmare that has taken its leave and left  
you among friends. Loyal subjects.

TSAR PAUL

YOU! I LIKE your voice ... and your face is familiar.

PAHLEN

Take a good look at it. My hair is graying with the  
care I take to serve you. My jaw firm with resolution  
to carry out your commands, my nose seeks the air to  
smell any trouble. Finally ... my eyes brimming with  
a love that surpasses that of any parent or lover.

(beat)

Do you see?

SOLDIER 1

(aside)

My god he's good.

SOLDIER 3

Just off those words, I want to marry him.

PAUL I squints at PAHLEN taking him all in. He walks up to his face and studies it intently:

TSAR PAUL

( smiles)

Pahlen. Little brother.

(bear hugs him)

OF COURSE I KNOW YOU!

(quickly points at soldiers)

These bastards still bother me!

PAHLEN

What can they do to assure you?

TSAR PAUL

How should I-well I AM their ruler so ...  
if indeed I am then they have to do as I command.  
Does that sound right? Makes sense right?

PAHLEN

You have but to ask.

TSAR PAUL

Good! Good! All right, let's see.

(points to SOLDIER 2)

You there! Bark like a dog!

SOLDIER 2

What?????

PAUL I

Was I not clear? Your Tsar commands you to ...  
bark like a dog.

PAUSE

PAHLEN

Please proceed.

SOLDIER 2 timidly steps forward.

SOLDIER 2

Woof, woof, woof!

Beat

TSAR PAUL  
WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT! I said BARK not WOOF!  
Woof, woof, woof, WOOF, WOOF!

PAHLEN  
Your Excellency was not satisfied?

TSAR PAUL  
Not by a fucking long shot! What kind of dog  
Goes woof, woof!

PAHLEN  
I believe some big dogs do.

TSAR PAUL  
GOD DAMN it, I want him to bark. This  
Is insolence! I remember! I am remembering!  
Bark like a dog!

Pause

SOLDIER 2  
( sweating it out)  
I am sorry. Here goes.

He looks at PAHLEN who mimes for the dog to be smaller.

SOLDIER 2  
Yip, yip, yip.

Beat

TSAR PAUL  
OH MY GOD!!! GUARDS! GUARDS! You men-  
Get this idiot out of my sight! This is a  
hiding for sure and then 30 days, at least,  
in solitary confinement-

SOLDIER 3  
(aside to SOLDIER 1)  
All because he yipped when he should've  
barked.

TSAR PAUL  
(to SOLDIER 3)  
Oh! OH! Got something to say! You may join him.  
(sneers in his face)  
Let's hear you bark.



PAHLEN  
If I may-

PAHLEN goes to whisper in SOLDIER 3's ear. PAUL I stops him.

TSAR PAUL  
No helping! Go ahead now!

SOLDIER 3  
(cool as a cucumber)  
Bark, bark. BARK!

PAUSE. You could hear a pin drop.

TSAR PAUL  
That will do. Not perfect by any stretch but acceptable. While your comrade is in shackles you will receive his salary.

SOLDIER 3  
YES! I mean, THANK YOU my Excellency!

PAHLEN  
(under breath)  
That will not happen.

SAPAN  
(offstage)  
There are people TRYING to sleep !

SAPAN bursts on stage in a glorious robe and sash. 6'2 in his stocking feet, with long, slender legs, narrow shoulders, and a head that belongs in a painting. Androgynously beautiful.

SAPAN  
Jesus Christ, was a parade scheduled and I was not notified!  
(glowers at everyone, eyes resting on Tsar)  
Ahaaaa ... you there, little King-EXPLAIN.

TSAR PAUL  
(Stunned)  
I beg your pardon?

SAPAN

You'll not get it. There I was in glorious slumber, being fed fruit by a lovely goddess-except strawberries, can't STAND strawberries, listening to someone else sing for a change and then as this rather heroic looking tenor goes for the high C ... I hear a god awful caterwhaul-not even the courtesy of being, even remotely, on key. I would try to duplicate it for you, but this throat could never perform such a sacrilege.

Soldier 1

(To Soldier 2)

He's not going to make us sing is he? )

PAHLEN )

Please be quiet. )

SOLDIER 3 )

He means the Tsar's yelling. )

SAPAN

SILENCE! Yes. I mean the Tsar's howls.  
AND was someone barking?

TSAR PAUL

Look here ...Sapan-

PAHLEN

(aside)

Him he remembers instantly.

TSAR PAUL

I was requesting ... no ... I gave an order  
For these men to bark-

SAPAN

WHY???

TSAR PAUL

Well, it seems to me-do I always explain  
Myself? That doesn't feel-

PAHLEN

His Excellency awoke in some distress and  
felt compelled to flee his bed, under the  
misapprehension that whatever pursued him in  
his dream was still giving chase. Or

perhaps it is better to say that he was  
unaware that the dream had ended.

SAPAN  
The barking? I heard woof, woof and  
woof.

SOLDIER 3  
That's what got us in trouble-what about  
MY barking?

SAPAN  
At that point I had become mercifully deaf.

TSAR PAUL  
I was just-

PAHLEN  
The Tsar appeared momentarily confused and  
requested the men to bark out of respect for his  
position. To confirm his identity and majesty, as  
it were. After a couple of unsatisfactory  
attempts, the barks were performed as his  
Excellency requested.

SOLDIER 3  
BY ME!

BEAT

PAHLEN  
(Dryly)  
Yes.

SAPAN  
(to Soldier 3)  
What do you want, a medal?

SOLDIER 3  
No, I'm already getting an extra month's salary.

TSAR PAUL  
I should go back to sleep. What if the dream comes  
again?

SAPAN  
Nightmares are the cowards of our imagination.  
(Matter of fact)

Come on, back to bed.

The Tsar crawls back into bed. Prince Palatin slowly enters, taking in the scene with a mixture of fear and disgust.

PAHLEN

(low voice)

You are up late. Here out of concern for the Tsar?

PALATIN

It's all over the city. The mad tsar running through the city with barely a stitch on. Ah-

TSAR PAUL

Stepan, before you go... would you mind? The Italian if you please.

PALATIN

-the royal IT ministers to him.

PAHLEN

Careful! That is your Tsar's body guard-

SAPAN

Which? My repertoire is vast-

TSAR PAUL

You know-my favorite.

SAPAN

Yes, yes, I am playing my little king.

(Sigh)

Very well. Close your eyes.

TSAR PAUL closes his eyes and lays back, almost giddy for what is to follow. SAPAN sings effortlessly in an agile, powerful, soprano voice. The soldiers are transfixed. They can't help themselves-it's beautiful.

SAPAN

*Ninna nanna, ninna oh*

*Questo bimbo a chi lo dò ?*

*Se lo dò alla Befana,*

*Se lo tiene una settimana.*

*Se lo dò all'uomo nero,  
Se lo tiene un anno intero.  
Ninna nanna, ninna oh,  
Questo bimbo me lo terrò!*

*Ninna nanna, ninna oh  
Questo bimbo a chi lo do?  
Se lo do alla befana  
Se lo tiene una settimana  
Se lo do al lupo nero  
Se lo tiene un anno intero  
Se lo do a lupo bianco  
Se lo tiene tanto tanto  
Ninna oh ninna oh  
A nessuno lo daro'!*

The following conversation takes place during the singing

PALATIN

(Fighting the beauty)

My God. Forgive me, Pahlen ... but my Italian is not very good. Is the mother thinking of giving away the baby?

PAHLEN

Yes.

PALATIN

How charming. And somehow fitting.

PAHLEN

I find it rather comforting. The mother, in a moment of doubt, wonders whether her baby would be better off cared for by someone else.

In the end, she resolves to keep the child;  
a mother's love and devotion turning away the  
fears.

PALATIN

And what if she is wrong?

The song ends. SAPAN stares intently at the Tsar, making sure  
that he's asleep. On SAPAN'S cue, everyone slowly backs away,  
almost tiptoeing. Lights dim.

End of Scene 1.

ACT 1 Scene 2

A few moments later. The soldiers are at the front of the stage  
in a state of relaxation and relief. PAHLEN and PALLATIN enter  
conversing.

PALATIN

-and I tell you this will not go-  
(sees soldiers)

Shouldn't one of you be by the Tsar's door?

SOLDIER 2

No, eh, excuse me but that's not our job-

SOLDIER 1

He means that the castra ... castro ...

SOLDIER 3

His bodyguard says no. Sapan says  
we are not necessary.

PALATIN

Really? What do you think,  
Pahlen? Seems rather-

SOLDIER 3

If you met his mother, you would not  
question-

PALATIN

His mother?!

SOLDIER 2

It can cut-

PALATIN

What are you-

PAHLEN

His razor. Barber's razor, I believe.

SOLDIER 1

Yes, sir. I've seen that thing cut meat, fruit-  
OH! Once I saw him slice off the wings of a fly that  
got too close to the Tsar's meal.

SOLDIER 2

That thing can cut anything-

PALATIN

But what of beard? Doesn't get to do that much  
I wager. Interesting. One ... something or another  
and a razor guards a legacy. Good night, Pahlen.

PAHLEN

Sleep well, Prince.

(watches Palatin exit)

So lads, a word and then I shall leave you to  
your duties. I'll make it quick: What do you  
think of your uniforms?

LONG PAUSE

PAHLEN

Is someone going to answer my question, or  
shall I construe my own meaning to your silence?

SOLDIER 3  
With respect, think what you will.

PAHLEN  
It won't go beyond me.

SOLDIER 2  
They're fine-

SOLDIER 1  
Yes, so stylish-

SOLDIER 3  
We've no complaints-

SOLDIER 4  
I hate mine!

Silence. Like someone swore in church. Then-

SOLDIER 3  
Ignore the baby!

SOLDIER 1  
Don't mind him, he's a little slow-)  
)

SOLDIER 4  
WHAT? )  
)

SOLDIER 3  
IGNORE HIM! )  
)

SOLDIER 2  
Don't have him shot- )  
)

SOLDIER 4  
WHAT? )  
)

SOLDIER 3  
Just a dumb kid who needs- )

PAHLEN  
SILENCE! You.  
(points to # 4)  
Walk with me a little.



They walk a few feet. PAHLEN turns around with the look of a father about to begin an inquisition of a naughty child. Then his face brightens.

PAHLEN

Thank you for your honesty. I mean no harm, I just-one hears talk. GRUMBLING. But when given a chance to be heard, everyone keeps their mouth shut. So, things stay the same. I admire your courage; let me ask again about the uniform.

SOLDIER 4

Well sir, to start off ... it's really itchy. And yes it's warm but that's not a good thing in the summer. Winter sure, fall is bearable but-and it's bulky. Should I go on?

*He nods.*

SOLDIER 4

You can't fight in this. This is a uniform for marching in front of a mirror ... or the Tsar. I am sorry.

PAHLEN

Why? I asked and you answered.

SOLDIER 4

I just feel so strange when I dress in the morning. Like I'm a decoration. Does that make any sense?

PAHLEN

It does. Your comrades feel the same way, they just hold their tongues and pray for moths.

SOLDIER 4

Huh?

PAHLEN

Go back to them. Thanks for the little chat.

Lights dim as Soldiers return to sentry as PAHLEN exits. End of scene 2.

ACT 1

Scene 3

Voice: Our final story tonight shows that treasure hunting is alive and well. The treasure, in this case, is a long forgotten and presumably lost silent film. Our Andrea Carson reports:

(Clip begins)

FILM NERD

Yeah, there I am, you know, looking through all this junk, about to pack it in and I notice this old film tin-

FEMALE VOICE

That's when the excitement began for Justin Madison, a self-confessed film nerd, who was rummaging through a storage sale-

FILM NERD

I mean I probably would've bought it anyway Even if it was empty, but I take the lid off And I'm like HOLY (BEEP)!

The trailer for the movie begins: the same as the Tsar's dream.

FEMALE VOICE

What Justin found was a piece of film history:  
The silent film epic, *Emperor of the Clouds*,  
notable for being directed by pioneering female  
director, Anna Petrovich, and for being the last  
film of silent age star, Damon Valentine.

FILM NERD

It's just amazing. To think-I dunno how long  
It had been sitting in this storage unit-how  
It even got there. Amazing.

FEMALE VOICE

The film's condition is currently being  
evaluated by the UCLA Film School and Archives.  
Andrea Carson, Channel 8 news.

Lights dim. End of scene.

Act 1

Scene 4

Lights up LS with one proviso: they flicker unsteadily, sometimes almost full, then going to near darkness. There is a scratchy quality to it, and our eyes struggle to adjust.

PAHLEN is stretched out on a chaise lounge with his head on ANNA's lap.

PAHLEN

Thank you for staying up.

ANNA

Equal parts worried and curious, I suppose. I think I understand the dangers even better than you.

PAHLEN

Possibly. I tell myself that the balls need only stay in the air a bit longer.

ANNA

Forgive me for saying this, but that's bullshit. You are not juggling rubber balls or china. The closest I have seen to your act is when the Baron and I had dinner with the Empress years ago. After some glorious confection left us all sleepy and sated, this short, muscular Cossack, as wide as he was long, began digesting and breathing fire. Just as the speculation dimmed as to the condition of his innards(or lack thereof), he

started to fling an assortment of knives to the ceiling, and as they hurtled down with the most evil intentions, he would flick them back up with an unconcerned hand or foot. You do the same, but people are weightier than knives, and once thrown, return with a vengeance.

(she pushes his head away with some irritation)  
Enough of that.

PAHLEN

I'm sorry if I upset you.

ANNA

Pet peeve that you should know. The lap is a place for a little dog to be fed, or A child after he has been bullied.

PAHLEN

Where should a man's head rest?

ANNA

On my body there are only 3 places:  
At my shoulder-or mine on his, he is my friend, a stalwart companion as we face the Torrents together; perhaps an old husband leaning his bones as we come through the fatigue of another day. On my breast, he is my lover, and as I feel his cool breath caress my skin, my own draws up to meet and we perform a dance of all rhythm and no steps, inching our way to a dream while still awake. At my feet-

PAHLEN

Ah, a devout worshiper-

ANNA

A vanquished foe never to rise again,  
unless I choose to remake his dust.  
You don't want to be at my feet.

PAHLEN

I should say not. I'll stick to the first two if you don't mind.

ANNA

(Kissing and pulling him to her)  
Let's see which you choose.

The light get very dim. As they continue to kiss it grows very bright ... then darkness.

Beat

Beat

The lights flicker up. Pahlen is now crossing the stage while Anna paces back and forth. He stops and looks back. Her gaze finds his. Their eyes lock for a few moments as something passes between them. He breaks free and exits. Light dim as Anna continues to gaze his way. Blackout. End of scene.

ACT 1  
Scene 5

Early morning of the next chilly day in a clearing of a ghost forest: the trees are all shadows, with the exception of one ancient willow that bends in sorrow and grief. The fog and the clouds are getting in a game of tag while the sun sleeps in.

TSAR PAUL's Voice

One, two, one, two, one, two -STOP! Must  
I clap it out! AGAIN!

Marching. Marching. Even before we see them there is a sense of fatigue. How long have they been doing this? 1, 2, 1, 2, the Tsar's voice rings out like an angry metronome.

SOLDIER 1

Well, this IS a test of loyalty-

SOLDIER 3

SSSSHHH! Pay attention!

SOLDIER 4

( softly)

Trouble...

Trouble, trouble, trouble, trouble

Trouble been doggin my soul since the day I  
was born.

Worry-

SOLDIER 3  
What the hell are you singing?

SOLDIER 4  
I dunno, it just popped in my head-

SOLDIER 2  
Get it out of there!

TSAR PAUL  
(entering)  
SILENCE! GUARD- LINE UP! ATTENTION!

The soldiers do the best they can.

TSAR PAUL  
DISCIPLINE! DISCIPLINE AND PRIDE! I see NEITHER!  
You... represent ME! At all times.

He looks them up and down.

TSAR PAUL  
(pointing to Soldier 2)  
You-come forward. Why... WHY do you look away?

SOLDIER 2  
I'm not looking away your excellency.

TSAR PAUL  
Look me in the eyes.

SOLDIER 2  
Yes, your excellency.

TSAR PAUL  
HOLD MY GAZE. Let me see, let me see-ah  
Very good! A steady gaze means loyalty.  
LEFT LEG UP!

Soldier 2 lifts his leg.

TSAR PAUL  
UP! UP! Let me see the sole of your boot.  
Just as I thought-dirty! Have you-

*A sharp creak from an embittered branch.*



He stops and listens intently. His face softens with guilt.

TSAR PAUL  
(addressing soldiers)  
Well, that will be all.

Beat

TSAR PAUL  
LEAVE ME!

They march out slowly until the Tsar turns away to the willow, then as quickly as they can, almost hopping.

TSAR PAUL  
So madam, it's not enough to haunt and badger me with your laments, now you presume to instruct on how I should treat my men? You seem to forget that a soldier, like a country, requires a firm, male hand.  
(more gently)  
I am like a father who must become iron, breaking and sharpening the wills of boys. The love of women is light. A man's, by necessity, must be heavy.  
(to the shadow trees)  
Not speaking to me, eh? Go ahead, turn your backs.

*They do?*

TSAR PAUL  
That's so rude. You are lucky I can't cut you down twice.  
( a little boy)  
You don't seem to understand. Was I not deserving? Why shouldn't I have a palace? I had my own while... the EMPRESS was alive- Mother, I mean. And when it's finished, when it's finally done, you will see your sacrifice, you'll be so proud..

He falls into a distracted silence, staring into space, looking for words that don't exist to express feelings that do.

TSAR PAUL  
(sitting on boulder)

Madam, please make them understand.

He pulls the branches of the willow over him. Pahlen enters drinking coffee.

PAHLEN

Your excellency. Good morning.

BEAT

Your excellency?

BEAT

My TSAR?

BEAT

Peek a boo, I see you

TSAR PAUL

The trees are angry with me.

PAHLEN

The trees?

TSAR PAUL

They do not like the palace.

PAHLEN

And what are their objections?

TSAR PAUL

That I had them fucking cut down, what else?

Beat

Oh, you were humoring me

PAHLEN

Failing obviously.

TSAR PAUL

Look how they behave toward me.

PAHLEN

I do not have your eyes. I see nothing.

TSAR PAUL

Go away. And what have I told you about coffee?

PAHLEN

That it is a disgusting drink and that I should go back

to tea. You see no benefit in coffee and I see no trees sitting in judgement. What do you remember of last night?

TSAR PAUL

What? What happened?

PAHLEN

I need your recollection first, then I may fill in the gaps.

TSAR PAUL

I've no interest in games. Tell me what happened or Leave.

PAHLEN

Your majesty, on a spring night still cowed by Winter, ran in a tattered nightgown, pursued by some monsters of fancy, a guilty conscience and your loyal if exasperated guard, through the city. Like a homing pigeon, you Returned to the safety of your room, and with the help of Sapan and an unsettling lullaby, went Back to sleep.

Beat

TSAR PAUL

Again?

PAHLEN

Yes, your Excellency.

TSAR PAUL

I thought it was all a dream.

Beat

I remember your voice. Sapan. What's going on?

PAHLEN

I don't know.

TSAR PAUL

REALLY? I thought... you always... had the answers.  
(tiny smile)

That is what I pay you for. Am I mad?

PAHLEN

No.

TSAR PAUL  
Am I going mad?

PAHLEN  
I'm not a doctor.

SILENCE. Their manner changes even further from subject and ruler, boss and employee to: Friends.

TSAR PAUL  
My God. This is a First. I must be in a bad state.

PAHLEN  
The last year has been damaging. The nobles are angry-

TSAR PAUL  
Fuck them!

PAHLEN  
Yes, they are feeling that way. Meanwhile our shifting alliances have left us distrusted by nearly everyone.

TSAR PAUL  
That is policy. Never let anyone feel comfortable. A country has no friends. Neither does a ruler. You bestow and they serve.

PAHLEN  
And what of your family?

TSAR PAUL  
Strangers. Heirs.

PAHLEN  
Me.

TSAR PAUL  
You are my brother who I trust about as far as I can throw.

PAHLEN  
Good for you. And Sapan?

TSAR PAUL  
He's a gift, certainly better  
than a cheap watch.

Pahlen sits in silence drinking his coffee. Lights go up in the  
TSAR's bedroom

PAHLEN  
Five years. Seems like a lifetime.

The following is all silent film style. We turn our attention to  
an old servant IVAN as he trudges into the TSAR's room. He looks  
around nervously, sees a few letters on the small desk and  
waddles over. He pulls an envelope from his pocket and throws it  
on the desk. Then he leaves... right? Oh c'mon! They just let you  
wander in here-wtf! Wouldn't you want a look around? So he does.  
Kind of boring. Ah, but those letters. HMMMMMM. And that  
envelope, maybe it just ACCIDENTALLY gets opened. Yep, curiosity  
did in the cat and it's about to claim poor IVAN. SAPAN enters  
quick as any predator, grabs IVAN, and holds "mother" to his  
throat. That thing looks sharp. Lights flicker and go out. JESUS  
CHRIST! MEANWHILE BACK AT THE FOREST WITH NO TREES:

PAHLEN  
I'm no doctor-as I said. I cannot speak  
to shadows or dreams that chase. But as to trust,  
You do yourself no favors to give it away.

TSAR PAUL  
That sounds fairly sincere.  
(taking Pahlen in)  
A melancholy with the mystery?

PAHLEN  
Nothing. It will pass.

TSAR PAUL  
I never think of you as having troubles...

BEAT

Sit with me.

He does. They will continue this conversation while-hey, lights  
restored on SAPAN, alone now, as he reads two letters. When he  
finishes he puts one in each pocket. His face, the face that has  
broken a thousand hearts his voice repairs, lost in thought.

PAHLEN

The first is personal and I'd rather not talk about it-

TSAR PAUL

UNACCEPTABLE! As your TSAR I command you.

BEAT

Please. It will get my mind off my own and Who knows-I may be able to help. I always come to you. With everything. Let me have one thing, one task.

PAHLEN

It is not something your Excellency can help with, unless you can move hearts.

TSAR PAUL

Whose?

BEAT

The Baroness? Anna?

PAHLEN nods

TSAR PAUL

What happened?

PAHLEN

An old wound somehow got reopened and the rancor Flowed, renewed, driving me north of her affections 'till I could see them no more.

TSAR PAUL

The Baron?

PAHLEN

Yes.

TSAR PAUL

Shit.

PAHLEN

Indeed.

PAUSE

TSAR PAUL

(distractedly)

What else? You said there was something else.

PAHLEN

In your left pocket is a letter you always  
Keep with you, concerning the Empress  
Catherine's desires as to who should succeed.

TSAR PAUL

Yes. You well know it.

PAHLEN

Then I must tell you of a conspiracy to fulfill  
those desires with her chosen heir.

TSAR PAUL

SON OF A BITCH-

PAHLEN

You may well think so. For you see, I am the  
leader of this conspiracy-

BLACKOUT

End of scene

END OF ACT 1.

ACT 2  
SCENE 1

Whispers. We hear that first, then the voices get louder. Grumbling. Arguing. Lights up with 4 chairs surrounding 1. Four men surrounding an heir. GENERAL TALYZIN, PRINCE PALATTIN, COUNT PANIN and COUNT ZULOFF talking at each other :

TALYZIN  
(smoking a pipe)  
Hmmm. Bitter this a is getting bitter-

PALATTIN  
It smells bad too-

TALYZIN  
I was talking-

PANIN  
My prince, please listen-

TALYZIN  
about the conversation. How-

PALATTIN  
Can you take that-

PANIN



Gentlemen, please-

PALATIN  
-outside. My sinuses are killing-

ZULOFF  
(to Prince)  
Turn around and talk to us you big baby!

ZULOFF is the kind of man who is always the hero in his own mind, if nowhere else. PRINCE ALEXANDER, the last bit of teenager straggling off, leaving a very uncertain man, turns:

ZULOFF  
Face us puppy. Time to grow up and rule.

ALEXANDER  
Count ... I know my granny held you in some  
Regard, which is the only reason I agreed to  
Meet. That being said, you all can show  
Yourselves out. What you ask of me is impossible.

Blackout. BACK TO THE FOREST OF NO TREES:

TSAR PAUL

Wait! Wait! Alexander said that? The prin-  
ah... rather my so ..s... s..

PAHLEN  
Son-

TSAR PAUL  
Alexaaannnnder said that?

PAHLEN  
Yes.

TSAR PAUL  
WELL, that's a surprise, I must say. You're  
Sure-

*BACK TO THE CONSPIRACY*

ZULOFF  
Good god! What has happened to the Romanov men?  
As unnatural a thing as it was to have a woman

Rule, she was worth 10 of you, your brother and father-and grandfather!

PANIN

Voice down please. Zuloff, you are talking to the heir to the throne-

ALEXANDER

No! I don't want it!

PALATIN

And there you have it. Forgive me gentlemen, But I'm choking from these fumes-

TALYZIN

It's not that bad!

ZULOFF

SIT DOWN!

PANIN

EVERYONE QUIET!

Panin is normally pretty mild mannered.

PANIN

My prince I understand your reluctance. I do. But what do you expect from us? It has been five years of Glory receding into chaos. From cutting a wide swath, to confusion and retreat. Your father labors under a Fantasy that we should all be like knights of a Roundtable, devoted to a king and his divine will. No. I will follow, I followed the Empress, but a ruler must lead. Not by a desire to undo, to erase the lifetime of a parent for whom he held a grudge; not to avenge an assumption never to be proven and to blot out an enlightenment that shines harshly on his ...majesty. We look to you. I will follow the one the Empress herself chose.

PALATIN

Look, speaking for the nobles, I can tell you there's no satisfaction. He demeans us, orders us how we should work our own land, people. But, for all that... you better be damn sure he has no one left in his corner before attempting-

ALEXANDER  
Attempting what?

ZULOFF  
Getting a madman off the thrown!

Beat

I said it.

TALYZIN  
Look, if all this is about that damn march  
to India, maybe the Cossacks will get lost-

ZULOFF  
THEY'RE COSSACKS-THEY DON'T GET LOST!

PANIN  
PAHLEN! Anything to add?

BACK TO THE FOREST. LIGHTS STAY ON CONSPIRACY: EVERYONE FREEZES.

TSAR PAUL  
Wait, wait, so ... you were there?

PAHLEN  
Of course. That's what I'm telling you.

TSAR PAUL  
At a meeting of conspirators?

Beat

What did you say?

PAHLEN  
Let me continue.

He walks over from the forest and steps into the scene. The Tsar follows, watching intently from just outside.

PANIN  
Pahlen? Anything?

ZULOFF  
Enough of the talking. Time to break a few  
Eggs-

PAHLEN

And make a what? An omelet? A mess? Before you break something Zuloff, you must know what you are creating in its place. A void will not do.

(to Alexander)

I love your father. He has done for me far more than My own could or wanted to-

ALEXANDER

And you repay him with an insurrection-

PAHLEN

I repay him by taking away a burden he no longer Wants or is capable of carrying.

Pause. A sadness comes. Our governor is a very good actor but we get the sense of a man leaving the stage and showing us ... ?

PAHLEN

Words. I am so good with them. They more than Anyone or anything have always been my friends. Until I was summoned by your father. I was so Nervous, my career flashing before my eyes, and Then he offers me this position, to be his right Hand. My vocabulary packed its bags and left-I Barely blurted out thanks and off we went on a journey that has led me to this moment. I have No persuasion tucked away in my pocket young man to Induce you. How am I supposed to do that? I offer ... what? Hope? That if a change is made our country can Regain its standing? A sense of duty. That no matter Who it is, one person cannot destroy our home; our parent of all parents from who we came kicking and screaming and to whom we shall return as dust to sleep. I offer my loyalty and a pledge to do everything-

TSAR PAUL

I CAN TO BETRAY the TSAR!

ACTION FREEZES EXCEPT FOR PAHLEN.

PAHLEN

That is not what I said.

The TSAR enters the scene, looking into the faces of the various men.

TSAR PAUL

Bastards. Each and EVERY one.

(to Pahlen)

How do I know, friend? My memories are fading,  
Maybe yours never were. At least those fucking  
Trees, shadows they may be, once existed. I'm  
thinking perhaps you and I never did.

PAHLEN

We do. Trust me.

TSAR PAUL

By God. You think I have no choice.

PAHLEN

Shall I continue?

TSAR PAUL

Play the scene by yourself.

TSAR PAUL leaves going toward his room. Lights slowly fade as  
Pahlen goes back to the scene. Whispers as we fade to black.

END OF SCENE

ACT 2  
SCENE 2

*TSAR PAUL arrives in his room. The look on his face betrays total confusion. He notices a letter on his desk neatly folded? What's this? It seems to be scented, perfumed, -whose perfume? Slowly he opens and reads the letter ... then:*

## *SAPAN!*

*Blackout. Lights up CS as SAPAN and the soldiers march toward RS. They carry 2 chairs, a tiny table, flowers and fruit. They blow right by ANNA and began inspecting her room. Upon Sapan's satisfaction, they then turn their attentions to the Baroness herself: frisking (much to her consternation) and then lifting her up. Sapan whips out "mother" and adroitly passes it under her skirt. Nope, nobody hiding under there, no concealed weapons. WE'RE GOOD! All clear! The soldiers place their items in the room and leave while Sapan inspects the fruit:*

ANNA

So, I take it the Tsar is on his way?

SAPAN

He's getting dressed, which of course means I may have to redress him when he arrives.

(Nibbling fruit)

Ah the south has been kind us-these berries are so hard to find-

ANNA

Should you be eating so many?

SAPAN

Part of the perks that come along with the job.

ANNA

I have some fruit-

SAPAN

Not necessary, the Tsar prefers his own. I'd have to sample it anyway.

(spies the Tsar crossing the stage)

Excuse me-

(coming to the TSAR)

Jesus DOMINE! Did you dress in the dark?

TSAR PAUL

I hate this fucking cape! It never sits right.

SAPAN

Well, you might get one that fits. Cape OFF!

(removes it

You are always so hard on the men-

TSAR PAUL

That's different\_

SAPAN

Not reaalllyyyy. YOU must set an Example. Breath?

(sniffs)

Nice. Mints. All right off you go. I'll be right here.

*The Tsar trudges uncertainly to Anna. His manner is mixture of fatherly, teen on first date and one approaching a mine field.*

Anna

Your Excellency. How nice.

Beat

It's been a while.

Beat

Would you like to sit ... in your chairs?

*Long Pause. Finally:*

TSAR PAUL

Oh ... NO! Will you sit, Baroness-

ANNA

Why not call me Anna?

TSAR PAUL  
All right. Anna, will you sit? That's right isn't  
it-to ask you first?

ANNA  
They are your chairs.

TSAR PAUL  
Then ... let us sit. Now.  
(looks around)  
I don't remember the ceilings being so high

BEAT

OOHH fruit! Do you mind?

ANNA  
(Suppressing a giggle)  
Of course not. It's your fruit. I do have some  
more, in case your Excellency intends to honor me  
with an extended visit-

TSAR PAUL  
(nervously nibbling)  
No, no, that shouldn't-dammit Sapan-there was  
More fruit here, I KNOW that-did he eat some?-

ANNA  
I believe he did eat some-that is his job, if  
I'm not-

TSAR PAUL  
Oh he takes advantage. Doesn't think I know  
how much he loves fruit. I should just pay him  
in berries-except strawberries, he can't stand them  
for some reason-

ANNA  
So only you eat the strawberries?

TSAR PAUL  
When I can get them. Pahlen procures them for  
me, God knows from where.

Awkward Beat

ANNA  
Yes. He has ... procured some for me on occasion  
as well.



TSAR PAUL

Which leads me to ... Pahlen. I saw him this morning-

ANNA

I saw him last night. He is well ...no?

TSAR PAUL

He seemed to be his normal self-

ANNA

Well, that's good-

TSAR PAUL

Yes, except that he-well in the course of our conversation, I managed to drag out ... and he didn't want to talk-

ANNA

Really? Our or rather your-

TSAR PAUL

-he was very reluctant. And he means more than I think-I was concerned. He never has appeared troubled to me before.

ANNA

(thoughtfully)

He carries many worlds with him that I imagine sometimes get heavy. I feel a question in the air-is there something you wish to ask?

BEAT

TSAR PAUL

Well... you and ...Pahlen ...

ANNA

Yes ...

TSAR PAUL

WOULD YOU HAVE DINNER WITH ME?

ANNA

Will your Excellency be bringing dinner here?

TSAR PAUL

OH! No, I think we can have it at the palace?

ANNA

Will the Empress be joining us?

*It's like she hit a button.*

TSAR PAUL

My mother and I rarely dine together. I haven't seen her in quite some time. Spending time with Her advisors-

ANNA

I meant your wife.

TSAR PAUL

Oh no. No, she usually dines with the children- My wife? Yes, she is the Empress ... uh, no she will not be joining us.

He stares at her blankly for a second:

So ... would you do me the honor?

ANNA

I would be delighted. What time should I arrive?

TSAR PAUL

Thank you! I'll send a carriage.

ANNA

What time?

TSAR PAUL

Seven?

ANNA

Seven.

PAUSE

TSAR PAUL

Well then. See you then. Madam? Baroness? Anna?! He is a good man. You do him ... it hurts me to think of you two apart. The Baron is a good man.

ANNA

The ... Yes, he is.

TSAR PAUL  
We will talk. See you this evening.

*He leaves and the soldiers appear taking the props with them.  
Sapan walks toward the Tsar:*

TSAR PAUL  
That went well? It wasn't quite how  
I imagined-

SAPAN  
It never is.

*They walk off together, the soldiers trailing behind. Light fade  
on all except Anna, who watches them leave the stage. Fade on  
her.*

Blackout.

End of scene

ACT 2

SCENE 3

Soldier 4 guarding the stage. Sentry duty. He looks a little bored and lonely. Gradually, when he's sure the coast is clear, he starts to sing and ...GOD DAMMIT! Where's the sound? He seems really into it. WISH WE COULD HEAR IT! SAPAN enters quietly. He is totally absorbed by this kid singing. Like hearing the beginning of something. Wait ... Wait, here comes the sound:

SOLDIER 4

Hushaby, hushaby,

Don't lie on the edge of your bed

Otherwise a grey wolf will-

Sound off again. The kid has a nice voice. A beautiful voice. Maybe the sound doesn't matter, if you never heard any of it, you'd still know: Sapan is crying.

Gentle fade.

END OF SCENE

ACT 2

SCENE 4

Static from a radio. Then a little music, maybe Glenn Miller or Billie Holliday interrupted by a smooth male voice:  
"From Los Angeles: it has been reported that former film star, Damon Valentine, has been found slain in his hotel room from multiple stab wounds. Valentine, whose last appearance in film was eight years ago, had been working as a security guard for a local department store. We will have more information as it becomes available ..." The song comes back and continues to the finish.

Lights slowly up. The soldiers are marching, circling the stage. As they come center, PALATIN crosses to SOLDIER 1 and whispers in his ear. SOLDIER 1 nods and PALATIN quickly guides him off stage. The others keep marching: What do they know?

END OF SCENE 4

ACT 2

SCENE 5

Lights up on the TSAR signing a document with a flourish. PAHLEN folds it and puts it in his pocket.

PAHLEN  
You're sure?

TSAR  
Oh! Yes, absolutely. A weight was being lifted  
As I signed. Should've done this when mother died.

PAHLEN  
I think that would have been premature-

TSAR  
Weelllll, one less thing for you to handle. Oh, you  
Can continue digging into that little conspiracy,  
Play your game if you wish, but I have it all  
Solved.

PAHLEN  
I am glad. May I ask how?

TSAR  
You must wear two faces, two hats, talk from  
two sides of your mouth, but I only need one.  
I am Tsar and once I give the order for the army  
to join the Cossacks, to march with Napoleon, no  
one will have time for plotting.

BEAT

TSAR  
Even YOU.

SILENCE

TSAR  
I'm just joking. That was a joke.

PAHLEN

I have explained myself.

TSAR

Yes you have. Well, this will be fun. I intend to have a little dinner with your Comrades and declare my plans. Can't you just see Zulloff's face when I tell I'm appointing him to a regiment.

PAHLEN

He may be pleased. The count fancies himself a bit of hero-

TSAR

So maybe he dies one. Wouldn't be the first time an old fool dies in service of his country.

PAUSE

PAHLEN

No.

TSAR

Divide and conquer. Then of course there are the families left alone while their men are away-

PAHLEN

Understood.

TSAR

Is it? Thank you. Let me know of Alexander.

Lights dim as Pahlen leaves and walks toward the Forest of No Trees. ALEXANDER waits for him at the boulder. This is weird; The shadows of the trees are gone. Only the old willow remains.

ALEXANDER

(Reading the document)

So, the family tradition continues.

PAHLEN

Please understand, I have no intention of enforcing this in the strictest sense-I will not make you a prisoner.

ALEXANDER

In exchange for ...

PAHLEN

Your agreement to succeed your father.

ALEXANDER

I want to run far from here. Take a horse and ride him to exhaustion, then walk until ... until my feet are bloody stumps. Then maybe I'll be far enough away.

PAHLEN

Fate would still find you and carry you back.

ALEXANDER

Or you would.

BEAT

I guess old Peter was right. Not my granny's husband-the first one. He used to be just a painting, But then one night, when visiting, I saw him. Just Walking around like he was lost. I hadn't learned how to be afraid yet, so I followed him.

PAHLEN

Your family has eyes for visions.

ALEXANDER

I think we became friends. A boy who couldn't sleep and a tall, silly looking shade, whose hands were cold and face kept moving like it was having an argument. I laughed at him, which wasn't nice, but he didn't seem to mind. Then one night he slapped me. Hard, like a rock. I fell on the floor and he stood over me, twitching in an unpleasant way, and said "he will come for you." His eyes spun so fast they fell out of their sockets, rolling on the floor like crazy marbles. I never saw him again.

PAHLEN

And his eyes?

ALEXANDER

I still have them.

BEAT

I will not harm him. I don't want his blood on my hands. As your last official duty, you



Must promise me that.

PAHLEN

I promise that before his blood is shed  
Mine will be.

ALEXANDER

I'm not by nature cruel. I can't, for the life of  
me, understand what she saw that made her think I  
Can be Tsar.

PAHLEN

Nothing about you reminded her of your  
Grandfather. She saw her own reflection.

ALEXANDER

Well, I will rule.

They sit side by side in silence. Lights fade.

END OF SCENE

ACT 2  
SCENE 6

Lights are dim as ALEXANDER walks with SOLDIER 3. SOLDIER 2 joins them with a stricken look. He impulsively hugs ALEXANDER . Shocked, the young prince doesn't seem to know what to do; gradually, he gently pushes him away while whispering something. SOLDIER 3 starts to try to get them walking again, then stops and shyly offers his hand. The prince clasps it:

Lights out here and up on SAPAN lounging in a bathtub, SOLDIER 4 getting dressed. SAPAN languidly reaches out a long, long, limb and tries to caress the boy.

SOLDIER 4  
Please don't do that.

SAPAN  
Why?

SOLDIER 4  
I feel like I want to vomit.

SAPAN  
That is often the reaction when trying something new.

SOLDIER 4  
I'm sick.

SAPAN  
Only because your body is not used to it.

SOLDIER 4  
What?

SAPAN  
Joy!

SOLDIER 4  
I don't want it!

SAPAN

It is an acquired taste-joy.

*Rises out of tub.*

SOLDIER 4  
NO! NO!

SAPAN  
Women are so much easier. They immediately  
Recognize me for what I am.

SOLDIER 4  
A ... A thing-

SAPAN  
A gift.

SOLDIER 4  
How could you LET someone DO THAT-

SAPAN  
You were writhing in my arms a short time ago.  
Moaning, capitulating, going to somewhere that  
You will never see again.  
(grabs mother)  
Show us some gratitude.

BEAT

SAPAN  
Like I did when I heard your voice.  
I had no choice, little boy. Thank god,  
Otherwise I would be like you and the thousands  
Of You that have come before. Plain, the  
pimples may go away ..

PAUSE

I will not be mean. It was a moment of beauty,  
pleasure, which I will never forget. The voice-  
untrained of course-but that is what makes it so ...  
so... sad. My heart broke. Your gift required nothing  
from you. So, it will become tarnished. Tossed aside.

SOLDIER 4  
I would not switch places.

SAPAN  
I emerged from a litter. Plucked out by a priest

who heard me singing to a rat(they can be like kittens you know) and promised my parents an audience with God. The barber was so kind. After it was done, he placed the blade in my hand and told me to thank it for giving me life. I do. Every day. I have been traded to a merchant, sold to an Empress, who gave me to one who couldn't sleep unless drunk. Until he heard my voice. Normally I would be insulted, but with him, it is endearing.

BEAT

YES. You would trade places.

BEAT

Look at me.

*SOLDIER 4: Do you?*

**I am missing nothing.**

Soldier 4 finishes dressing. SAPAN, defiantly, steps out of the tub and walks toward him. They kiss. Lights dim.

BLACKOUT.

END OF SCENE.

ACT 2  
SCENE 7

The servants prepare a table and ANNA and TSAR PAUL sit. Oh, look IVAN is ok after all. He gives final orders to the crew and then leaves with some invitations. The servants push various dining carts throughout this scene. Serving courses, taking dishes, they are perpetual, quiet motion.

The TSAR pours the wine himself.

TSAR PAUL

You must try this: a gift from Bonaparte Himself.

ANNA

Are you sure you want to drink it with me?

TSAR PAUL

Oh, yes, yes, of course. I have been tempted Since it arrived ... but it really should be shared.

ANNA

All this food is for us?

TSAR PAUL

I never know what I want, so the cook just makes enough to let me choose. Sapan also encourages me to give him a variety to sample. He tastes it all first.

ANNA

Do you ... always eat alone?

TSAR PAUL

I prefer it that way.

Lights dim and dishes are taken and replaced. One bottle of wine is empty now.

TSAR PAUL

... so there he is riding backward in the saddle. I ride up to him" Baron are you all right?" "Of Course your Excellency, I'm perfectly fine. Today I prefer to see where I've been rather than Where I'm going."

ANNA

(Laughs)

He was an unfortunate sight on horseback.

TSAR PAUL

Yes, but a very good dancer. I always envied him.

ANNA

He knew how to lead.

Beat

I was a shy girl when this colossus stepped off a pedestal and offered his hand. He was so Patient as I scuffed his boots while he taught me how to move with him-

TSAR PAUL

Ah, you see but he taught you well. You are an excellent dancer! That is how the world Runs- a ruler, a father teaches and guides and his Subjects learn and obey.

ANNA

What of women? Have they nothing to teach?

TSAR PAUL

I'm not sure. What I learned from women they Didn't- ... it is a man's place to rule.

ANNA

Your mother-

TSAR PAUL

Took something that didn't belong.

BEAT

I wish this wine wasn't so good. Damn French.

*Ivan now begins his rounds as the conspirators go to all corners of the stage*

ANNA

Forgive me for saying this, and I only notice because I too once had a new home-But do I smell Plaster? And there is a whiff of paint-

TSAR PAUL  
Goddamm architect! Keeps pushing deadlines  
Farther and farther away! He told me we'd be  
Done weeks ago!

ANNA  
Is it nearly finished?

TSAR PAUL  
Supposedly!

*Conspirators walk toward each other, surrounding the dinner  
scene:*

TSAR PAUL  
FUCKING GRAFT! That's what it is. Lining  
His pockets with MY money. A home befitting  
A Tsar should not be so flimsy-the walls are  
Paper thin, that clumsy Ivan-

PAUSE

More wine?

ANNA  
Please.

*ANNA and TSAR freeze:*

ZULOFF  
The idiot invites us to his own execution.

PALATIN  
I'm really not comfortable-

PANIN  
Please Zuloff, it does not need to come to that!

ZULOFF  
And what do you propose? That we have 2 TSARS?

PANIN  
He will sign the abdication that Pahlen has drawn up-

ZULOFF  
He is done whether he signs it or not-

PALATIN

Alexander will never approve-

ZULOFF

He won't have a choice. Be practical gentlemen.  
A revolution is not for the squeamish.  
There must be a body.

TALYZIN

At least one.

PALLATIN

I'm not backing a massacre-

TALYZIN

Who's talking a massacre? A dead Tsar, a few slain  
Loyalists ... that's not bad at all. Something to  
show the people who's in charge-

PANIN

Pahlen will never agree-

ZULOFF

Then perhaps ... well there won't be much-

PALATIN

I don't like where this is going.

ZULOFF

Talyzin! How soon before your regiment  
arrives?

TSAR and ANNA unfreeze. He's drunk but not sloppy. She obviously  
has a hollow leg. Both sides of the scene speak at once

TSAR PAUL

I am enjoying this immensely, but ...

ANNA

I am enjoying it as well.

TALYZIN

They'll be here tomorrow, just in time for dinner.

PALLATIN

And then-



TSAR PAUL

I have something to ask you-

TALYZIN

Then they will surround the palace. Not in an ostentatious way of course, but to be there as needed.

ANNA

Ah, this is about the letter.

TSAR PAUL

So ...

PANIN

They will not attack though-

TSAR PAUL

So you admit you wrote it. Why?

TALYZIN

Just a show of force-

ZULOFF

If needed.

ANNA

I am a little embarrassed but not sorry. I felt compelled and guilty at the same time.

PANIN

Pahlen has taken care of the rest, I believe.

TSAR PAUL

Do you really believe him capable?

PALATIN

God bless the man. He holds the Tsar in some Affection-

ANNA

He is very capable-and that is why I'm not sure if You should, or I-

ZULOFF

Which in my mind means we-

ANNA  
-can trust him.

ZULOFF  
can't trust him!

Lights out. When they come back up it's that scratchy, faded quality again. Or is it just fog? PAHLEN appears, looking weary, and starts crossing the stage. He stops and looks about warily. Expectantly. One step. Two steps. He listens. FOR WHAT? Out of the shadows, like a panther, SAPAN attacks. He knocks PAHLEN to the ground and straddles him. In an instant "mother" is out and caressing the military governor's cheek. His THROAT. Sapan raises the blade high and:

BLACKOUT  
END OF SCENE

END OF ACT 2

Act 3

Scene 1

*So, hope everyone is back in their seats. Any stragglers? Better check because you don't want audience members trying to find their seats in the dark, tripping and cursing in the middle of a SILENT SCENE. Hey, if that happens, just have SAPAN and PAHLEN escort folks to their seats, then resume where they were. Which was-apologies to fight choreographers everywhere:*

*SAPAN, holding "mother" to PAHLEN'S throat and then raising it to strike. Here we GO. PAHLEN catches SAPAN'S arm and, with a great effort, pushes him off. Remember: he does have military training. He rolls away as fast as he can while his lithe opponent springs to his feet and begins to slash. PAHLEN is rolling, lunging out of the way, but he's not running. SAPAN reconsiders his attack and starts to slowly circle. Maybe that's a mistake? PAHLEN whips off his jacket and dangles it like a matador. A matador facing a shark. SAPAN starts to slash and again his opponent is forced backwards. Oh, here comes SOLDIERS 2 and 3. Surely, the military governor will scream for help. Nope. WTF?!!! The 2 combatants instantly stop and wait for the slightly curious soldiers to pass. NOTHING TO SEE HERE BOYS-MOVE ON. They do and-RESUME COMBAT! Man, that coat is getting shredded. PAHLEN heaves it at SAPAN who easily dodges, only to now be confronted by a belt. Our bodyguard seems almost impressed by the resourcefulness when along comes IVAN. JESUS CHRIST! GO TO BED! Nope. He's gonna have a smoke. Once again, all action stops. IVAN smiles at the men which they return reluctantly. Dum, dum, dum. Waiting. Waiting. Ok, this may take a while. Finally, SAPAN gives the unwary smoker a flash of the razor; IVAN'S eyes widen, message received, and off he goes. Let's finish this, shall we? Preternatural vs the Everyday. Skill vs Ingenuity. PAHLEN snaps the belt and knocks the razor out of SAPAN'S hand. Now they grapple, struggle, the older man getting the better of it, maneuvering behind the slender one as he puts him in a choke hold. SAPAN looks like he's going down when, with one huge effort, he flips the governor on his back, retrieves the razor and holds it to his throat. Game over. For the first time we hear sound: breathing, very heavy, heavy breathing. SAPAN snaps the razor shut and walks away. As he is about to exit, he turns and gives a little bow. PAHLEN, still on the ground, returns a nod. SAPAN exits and a spotlight slowly fades on PAHLEN until darkness. We still hear the breathing as ...*

END OF SCENE.



ACT 3  
SCENE 2

Moonlight. Once again the screen slides down and the projector turns on. The film shows a shy moonlight peaking through a window at ANNA in a fitful sleep. Slowly, very slowly, in true Nosferatu style, the TSAR creeps up to her bed. The look on his face is an exaggerated mixture of love, lust and bad intentions. Lightly, with a feather touch, he slides down the sheet. His eyes widen as a gnarled hand reaches toward her face and:

BLACKOUT.

Light up as ANNA awakes with a scream. She catches her breath, composes herself, and is about to try and go back to sleep-

TSAR PAUL  
Did I wake you?

ANNA  
(Suppressing another scream)  
Your Excellency???

BEAT

My GOD! What does this mean?

TSAR PAUL  
I wish to be Paul.

ANNA  
What?

TSAR PAUL  
For just a few minutes, I wish to be Paul.

ANNA  
Well ... Paul. You must leave.

TSAR PAUL  
You are very beautiful-

ANNA  
YOU should not be surprised how very  
Little that compliment means-and IS THAT  
MY CHAIR!

TSAR PAUL  
Yes. It's not very comfortable.

ANNA  
I'm very glad.

BEAT

Paul? Paul, you must leave.

TSAR PAUL  
It is a terrible thing to covet. To want  
what another man has. I have coveted you for  
a long time.

ANNA  
No, you cannot-

TSAR PAUL  
Not you precisely. I could have ordered it  
Somehow, to possess you physically, but ...  
You are beautiful and I ask myself: why, why, why  
Can't I have that? I rule a fucking country but  
Never have had a heart of my own.

ANNA  
(Therapist? Friend? )  
Hearts can only be given.

TSAR PAUL  
Yes, I have learned that. I've married  
two that didn't want me. They've done their  
best. Done what wives do.

*He brings his face close to her. She does not flinch.*

TSAR PAUL  
No light for me in those eyes. Just a trace of  
Fear, which in a man I would enjoy-but ... I'm  
sorry. I just came to look at you. To stare and  
Dream what it would have been like to sleep  
beside one who held THAT LIGHT ... for just me.

ANNA  
I'm not a work of art. I've never been hung  
on a wall or put on a table.  
(grabs him impulsively)  
Look at me. The fear you see is a leftover  
from some midnight visitation or maybe the  
wine. I'm not frightened of you at all. YOU?

TSAR PAUL  
Am I ugly?

ANNA  
Ugly and beauty are hard to achieve. Most  
Fall somewhere in the middle.

BEAT

You are not handsome.

TSAR PAUL  
Nor was my father. I have his fate it  
seems. I often wonder how it would have  
been to be good looking, not even handsome,  
just decent. Pleasing in some way. The  
Baron was a god, hell even I couldn't  
Begrudge him his favors-and Pahlen! His  
looks are pleasing, soothing-

ANNA  
Yet with neither did I feel in the  
presence of anything but a man. They were flesh  
And blood. I loved the way the Baron smelled.  
Fresh from a ride in the forest, his scent  
mixed, shared with the horse he couldn't  
ride and tobacco. I buried myself in his neck  
for days. And when my light, as you call it,  
shined brightest was when he trusted me enough  
to lean. There is nothing so intoxicating as  
trust. I earned it and he gave, letting me see  
his age creep up, knowing I understood. Dogs  
and men; sometimes I think both are never more  
wonderful than when gracefully old.

TSAR PAUL  
And Pahlen?

ANNA  
Ah, again with our mutual friend. Why?  
What do you seek to know?

TSAR PAUL  
We both love him. Perhaps, we are the only  
ones who do.

ANNA  
I think we may flatter ourselves if we think  
That.

TSAR PAUL

I love him like my brother. He is my, well  
I'm presuming, only friend. We share a  
loneliness. He by choice .. I think.

ANNA

Everyone enjoys a good mystery, until they don't.  
Pahlen is like a library whose every book I cannot  
Hope to read. Probably, that is how he finds me.

*Very faintly we hear music. It's not from this era. 1920s-30's.  
A band is playing "The Eyes of the World are Upon You".*

TSAR PAUL

Do you hear music?

ANNA

No! Your ... Paul, you are tired. Go home.

TSAR PAUL

I will. Well, maybe I won't, but I am sorry to  
have troubled you. There is something I must tell.  
If you no longer love my friend-well nothing can  
Be done. He'll have to content himself, like most,  
to a good satisfying pain. But if you still care  
but do not trust-I can tell you a story:  
There once was an old fool who married a much  
Younger woman. He adored her and she seemed to  
return it despite all the whispers. He was always  
the picture of health, then one day he came to  
his powerful friend and said " I am dying, please  
send me away. I am shriveling inside and out, and  
will soon be useless." "What of Anna" the powerful  
friend said. " I cannot let her watch me turn to  
WASTE! She weeps at the death of a pet. Let me take  
a bullet with soldiers, leave on my own terms."  
So, I did. I sent the Baron away with my blessing  
knowing he would never return. Away from you  
because he wished. Pahlen had nothing to do with  
it. I wouldn't allow him to rescind the order.

BEAT

A man should get to choose his death, I guess.  
I am horribly selfish, as I would have preferred  
to die in your arms.

SILENCE



*The music swells and now, faintly, we hear marching.*

TSAR PAUL  
What is that sound?

ANNA  
I do not hear anything.

TSAR PAUL  
You are not angry with me are you? No, I can hear  
it plainly-

*The music starts to fade and the marching becomes louder.*

TSAR PAUL  
I have not ordered any marches-

ANNA  
Your Excellency, Paul-

TSAR PAUL  
Are you-

ANNA  
I do not mistrust Pahlen as you think-

TSAR PAUL  
Where is it coming from? The north? The south?  
Who marches ..on me? WHO MARCHES ON ME!!!!!!

*He bolts from the room. Anna watches, hesitates and then  
follows. Fade to black.*

*END OF SCENE*

ACT 3

SCENE 3

Darkness as crows gossip, only to be interrupted by a rooster announcing the encroaching morning. They exchange calls and we hear the crows fly away in search of a bit more night. The mist and the fog wave goodbye, then turn their attention to one approaching. ANNA enters, barely visible. Their fingers beckon her to a faint cry, which seems to get louder with every step, coming from the Forest of No Trees. It sounds like a child. Slowly, she finds the forest and sees the TSAR sobbing over the stump of the old willow, staring in horror as the shadows of the trees part and the old willow joins them. As if following a command, she walks over to the TSAR, kneels and gently embraces him. Slow fade as the fog envelopes them.

END OF SCENE

ACT 3

SCENE 4

Lights slowly up on dinner. Wow, we can almost smell it. Not the food that has been served, nor the wine that has flowed, nor even TALYZIN's pipe, which he insists on smoking. What we smell is tension. Something primal is in the air. The TSAR sits at the head of the table with ANNA on one side and PAHLEN on the other. At the other end is ZULOFF with TALYZIN, PANIN and PALATIN on the sides. SAPAN stands in the background, quietly observing as IVAN and other servants collect dishes or pour more drink.

TSAR PAUL

So Zuloff, are you pleased with your appointment?

ZULOFF

Quite. Rather surprising, I must say, as was the invitation to dine.

(Indicating Talyzin)

I welcome the chance to be reunited with my old friend in a campaign. I only hope Excellency doesn't change his mind.

TSAR PAUL

Why would I do that?

ZULOFF

It seems to be your way.

TSAR PAUL

The sign of an agile mind-

ZULOFF

Or a weak one. Depending on your point of View.

TSAR PAUL

WHAT-

PANIN

-I am so glad to see you loosening the  
restriction on foreign imports-

TSAR PAUL

What makes you say that?

PANIN

The wine is French, is it not?

ZULOFF

Drink it fast, as when we fall out with Napoleon  
It will be back to vodka.

TALYZIN

I am happy with vodka and a good smoke

TSAR PAUL

I feel a kinship with Napoleon. There  
Will be no falling out.

TALYZIN

To be honest I don't care who we're at war with-

PANIN

No one said anything about-

TALYZIN

It's all the same to a soldier. You're told who to  
Kill and you do.

ZULOFF

Right. As long as there's some logic to it. Damn,  
should've kept my coat on. This palace of yours is  
letting in the cold. Must burn a lot of wood to try  
and keep it warm.

PAUSE

TSAR PAUL

It. Is. Nearly finished.

PALATIN

I'm sure the people are grateful for the work  
it provided.

ZULOFF

I'm sure the architect is. Tell me my Tsar,

what were the objections to living in the old palace? Too many shadows?

TSAR PAUL

I am not in the habit of-

ZULOFF

The old place felt comfortable as grand as it is-

PALATIN

I'm sure given time-

ZULOFF

-and of course I was always welcomed by the Empress. We spent many hours together.

TSAR PAUL

May those memories serve you well while marching-

TALYZIN

Oh, he'll be riding by my side, if it comes to that.

TSAR PAUL

You both keep suggesting-

ZULOFF

(laughing)

Wouldn't it be embarrassing to start off toward India -

TALYZIN

-and then have to turn around. Oh well, we wouldn't get lost-

ZULOFF

-just follow the trail of discarded uniforms!

They both laugh with a decided edge.

TSAR PAUL

The uniforms? They are a symbol of pride ... Of order-

TALYZIN

My regiment never -

ZULOFF

With all due respect. Those uniforms are for candy soldiers. Your men look like they should be unwrapped and eaten by a baby girl.

PAHLEN

Gentlemen! May I suggest that the food and wine Have found your tongues?

TSAR PAUL

Let them talk.

TALYZIN

I don't mean to offend anyone. It's all about comfort. You march all day the only thing you worry about is your belly and your feet. The rest is all vanity.

ZULOFF

True. I always admired that the Empress could Understand the necessity of a practical uniform. Being a woman I would have thought SHE would have been Obsessed with how they looked-

ANNA

-and why is that?

ZULOFF

Madam, a soldier can't be concerned with how he appears in the morning. That is a vanity men reserve for your sex -

ANNA

How kind-

ZULOFF

-our glories are in battle, the only thing smeared on our face is an enemy's blood.

ANNA

What of the medals on your chest? You've taken great care to display them-

A servant brings an assortment of pastries.

PALATIN

Ah, I see dessert is arriving

ANNA

I don't think I could eat anything more.

ZULOFF

I can!

ANNA

Proceed with caution. Your jacket seems a bit tight

ZULOFF

Do you insult me, madam? Pahlen, is this how she behaves with you?

PAHLEN

I would not presume -

ANNA

I behave as fitting the company.

TSAR PAUL

Let's see what we have- is there no fruit?

SAPAN finally stirs.

SAPAN

What little we had I felt needed sampling.

TSAR PAUL

Well, that is ... disappointing. As is the conversation-

PAHLEN

I may be able to brighten things a bit.

(directs a servant to bring in a tray)

There's this farmer that produces these in a greenhouse-he has them even in winter.

Servant takes lid off to reveal a dozen strawberries.

TSAR PAUL

Those look amazing!

PAHLEN

(offering tray to TSAR)

Your Excellency?

The TSAR is about to grab several.

ANNA

Excuse me for asking, but has Sapan sampled these?

PAHLEN

What?

ANNA

That is his job. To taste everything before the Tsar-

TSAR PAUL

He hates strawberries. I told you that.

SAPAN

True, true, none for me.

ANNA

IF I may.

(to SAPAN)

Is every task you perform subject to whether You find it agreeable?

TSAR PAUL

It's fine Anna! They look delicious!

ANNA

Appearances can be deceiving.

TALYZIN

You can have the fruit, I'll take an éclair.

PALATIN

(to SAPAN)

Just do your job.

TSAR PAUL

I can't make him do that-

PAHLEN

There is nothing wrong-



SAPAN

I will try a couple. For you little king,  
and to put the baroness' mind at ease.

PAHLEN

But you will not like them-

ANNA

(grabs tray)

Here Sapan.

SAPAN eats two with a great deal of difficulty and disgust.

PALATIN

Well?

BEAT

BEAT

SAPAN

They are ... fine.

ZULOFF

All that fuss over fruit?

PAHLEN

I really must ask, Anna what was-

ANNA

Baroness. You may call me Baroness Ostermann.

PAUSE

PAHLEN

My apologies.

TSAR PAUL

No, Anna-the baroness should apologize. My dear  
I know there is some difficulty between you two-

ANNA

This is not the time-

TSAR PAUL

-BUT I must insist you make amends. You  
Have embarrassed-

ANNA

I was only considering your welfare-

PAHLEN

By inferring that-

TSAR PAUL

You have embarrassed my-

SAPAN starts to wretch violently.

PANIN

What's going on?

SAPAN

Ahhh ... I .. I ..

*He falls to the floor knocking dishes off the table.*

TSAR PAUL

SAPAN! SAPAN!

PAHLEN

What is wrong!?

SAPAN rolls in obvious pain and begins to gasp. Pahlen goes to him while the other guest back away.

ANNA

It's the strawberries!

TSAR PAUL

(going to Sapan)

You are turning red! Guards!

PANIN

My Tsar please withdraw!

TSAR PAUL

I will not! SAPAN!

PALATIN

Where are the guards?

*Soldiers 1 and 4 enter with IVAN*

PAHLEN  
Let's try and get him up-

TSAR PAUL  
Get away from him you bastard!

*The TSAR flings himself at PAHLEN beating him with fists. PANIN attempts to grab the TSAR but is pushed away. Pahlen covers himself from the blows but does not strike back. Finally, the soldiers pull him away.*

ZULOFF  
JESUS CHRIST!

TALYZIN  
I must insist you remove yourself  
From danger.

ANNA  
Please come with me.

IVAN and Soldier 1 carry a seemingly unconscious Sapan.

TSAR PAUL  
Take him to his room and get the doctor!

*They leave*

( pointing to Pahlen)  
Get this man out of my sight! I will kill  
You myself if Sapan dies. DO YOU HEAR-

TALAYZIN  
(to soldier 4)  
Take him away until we can sort-

TSAR PAUL  
COWARD! She was right about you-

ANNA  
Please ... Paul

Beat

There is danger here. Do as the general asks.

*She starts to lead him away. Soldier 4 pushes PAHLEN roughly as they exit.*

TSAR PAUL

Sapan?

ANNA

Someone will let us know. I promise.  
(gently grabs his waist)

TSAR PAUL

I won't be able to sleep-

ANNA

Goodnight gentlemen.  
(firmly to Tsar)  
Come on now.

They start to exit, the Tsar almost sobbing, stumbles and falls.  
With surprising strength, Anna picks him up and leads him off.  
Those remaining look about as the lights fade.  
END OF SCENE

ACT 3  
SCENE 5

*A few minutes later. Soldiers 2 and 3 guard the door to the Tsar's bedroom. Zuloff paces up and down, like a tiger in a cage, while the rest of the conspirators prepare for ...*

ZULOFF

Who the HELL does he think he is? What right-

PALATIN

My God, what are you complaining about-

ZULOFF

We should have been included-

TALYZIN

Chain of command-

PALATIN

It's his plan! It's been his all along-

ZULOFF

I don't take orders-

PALATIN

It worked!

TALYZIN

We should have been informed.

PANIN

(voice of calm and logic)

Gentlemen, bruised egos aside, everything is on schedule. Pahlen, whether by exact design or happy Accident has removed the last impediment. The Tsar will have no one to protect him.

*Soldiers 2 and 3 leave their post.*

PANIN

There you have it. Zuloff? Are you  
Absolutely sure?

*Zuloff removes his sword and slices a remaining bit of leftover  
meat. From another part of the stage a coin tossed into the air;  
we never see it land.*

PALATIN

What of Baroness Ostermann? We can't just-

ZULOFF

The last rung of her climb. She chose poorly.

PALATIN

Panin ... I will not see a woman, one of the  
Aristocracy-

TALYZIN

Then you protect her. I'll warn you though:  
A conscience can get you -

PANIN

Let's get this done. You both are soldiers,  
used to the horrors. I'm a bean counter, an abacus.  
I've no stomach for intrigue and the sight of  
Blood makes me sick. Let's make this brief.

*SOLDIER 1 joins them. Zuloff raises his sword:*

ZULOFF

On my count:

ONE!

TWO!

BEAT

THREE!

*They rush the bedroom. As if by lightning, we see the struggle  
take place much like the Tsar's dream. A figure on his knees  
wildly beats the air while being strangled. Stomped. This is  
savage. A flash of a sword being raised and: lights out.*

*Nothing. Silence.*

BEAT

BEAT

*Lights up as if someone lit a candle. ZULOFF, breathing heavily, stands over the battered body.*

ZULOFF  
Wait! Let me see ...

PALATIN  
That's not-

ZULOFF  
LET ME SEE!

PALATIN  
YOU IDIOT!  
(Laughing)  
The Tsar-

ZULOFF turns the body over: it is SAPAN.

ZULOFF  
FUCKING HELL!

*Like a bull in a china shop he pushes his fellow conspirators aside and notices the dressing screen. He throws it aside, revealing a large hole in the wall. ANNA and the TSAR are nowhere to be seen. Conspirators freeze:*

*At the front of the stage PAHLEN enters and waits. Soon he is joined by the click clack of heels. He turns and waits: the sound of her steps. ANNA solemnly joins him and puts her head on his shoulder. The sound of boots and SOLDIER 4 enters and the two men salute. But what of ... Be patient. All 3 look in the direction of the labored, steady steps of IVAN carrying the unconscious TSAR. He leads them out of the theater and:*

ZULOFF  
I'll kill them all with my-

PANIN  
No, you have your body!

ZULOFF  
The Tsar is still alive!

ALEXANDER enters with SOLDIERS 2 and 3

PALATIN  
Your Excellency.

ALEXANDER  
No, Zuloff. My father is dead. Let the world  
Know of the passing of Tsar Paul Petrovich Romanov,  
And the succession to throne of Alexander Pavlovich.

PAUSE

ALEXANDER  
(looking at body)  
He will be buried with full honors. Do  
your best with the public viewing.

ZULOFF  
I will not rest until-

ALEXANDER  
You have your body, now do as you're told.

*SOLDIERS 1, 2 and 3 raise their weapons,*

ALEXANDER  
UNDERSTOOD?

*The men all slowly kneel. Lights fade.*

*END OF SCENE*



ACT 3

SCENE 6

*The screen slides down and the film, perhaps now fully restored, begins with its end. Scenes of a funeral with the casket partially closed; the guards moving the throngs that come to pay their respects or confirm their celebrations. Quickly following are scenes of the coronation of Alexander the 1<sup>st</sup>. These slowly fade, like old photos exposed to light.*

Voice: In our final story tonight, Andrea Carson revisits a young man who discovered a piece of film history while browsing the contents of a storage unit Our Andrea Carson reports:

(Clip begins)

FILM NERD

So, I sign for this package, which I can't remember ordering anything, and the first thing I notice is the packaging looks really old!

FEMALE VOICE

We first met Justin Madison 6 months ago, when he discovered an old film tin, that to his surprise, contained a badly damaged copy of the silent film, *Emperor of the Clouds*. Until that moment, no copies in any condition were thought to have survived.

FILM NERD

I notice like there's no postmark, or at least nothing I can see, and I'm like "what's up with that?!"

FEMALE VOICE

But there was an even bigger surprise in store for Justin.

FILM NERD

I opened it up and there's this inside.

*Camera zooms in close on an old framed photo of a group of people in late 1920s dress. It is signed in fairly bold black ink: " to my darling Justin- thank you for you support. Love and kisses, Anna.*

FEMALE VOICE

The postal service has no comment at this time.  
Andrea Carson, Channel 8 news.

A new scene emerges. An old monastery with a small courtyard and bench. TSAR PAUL is on the ground, hand painting the boots of a fine-looking model soldier dressed in the Prussian fashion. Two are already done and a fourth has yet to be painted. In silent film style, we see the action then intertitle.

**ACTION:**

ANNA and PAHLEN enter and observe the TSAR lost in his work. PAHLEN says-

**INTERTITLE:**

*HELLO, PAUL. MY, THAT'S A FINE LOOKING GUARD YOU HAVE THERE.*

**ACTION:**

The TSAR at first appears to take no notice, then motions PAHLEN to help him paint the boot of the soldier. He does and the TSAR stares intently, making sure he's doing it right, nodding with approval. PAHLEN then asks-

**INTERTITLE:**

*I SEE YOU HAVE ONE LEFT-MAY I?*

**ACTION:**

The TSAR looks wary but then relents with a smile. A look of uncertainty crosses his face as he looks at ANNA-

**INTERTITLE:**

*EXCUSE ME FOR ASKING BUT DO I KNOW YOU BOTH?*

**ACTION:**

Anna (now sitting on the bench) smile and says:

ANNA

(spoken, rewriting the history of film)

***Of course. We are your friends.***

*The TSAR beams and sits on the bench with her.  
They both watch PAHLEN as he paints the last soldier until:*

*BLACKOUT  
END OF SCENE*

*THE END*