

GALINA

by
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FADE IN:

EXT. PETROGRAD - UPSCALE AREA - MARCH 1917 - DUSK

MUSIC: "Mock Abduction" from "The Rite of Spring" by Stravinsky

Opens on an emotionally charged crowd smashing down the symbols and images of the former Tsar Nicholas II. Into the INFERNO are hurled the broken remains, along with the torn Tsarist flag. The FLAMES flare up, consuming everything in their way.

The nearby mob ruthlessly demolishes and loots window displays. Thrilled teenagers distribute leaflets.

Rejoicing the Tsar's abdication, the hyped-up crowd moves down the street, passing by the elegant buildings vandalized with graffiti.

Right beside the crowd, pushing their way through, are armored propaganda trucks. Inside the trucks sailors and soldiers are HOLLERING and HOOTING with frenzied excitement. Their banners read:

"No longer will "God save the Tsar!" "Down with Oppressors!"
"Long Live the Brotherhood of Soldiers and Sailors!"

EXT. PETROGRAD - ONE OF THE CITY SQUARES - DUSK

CLOSE ON the monument, once erected in honor of the Romanovs. The crowd maliciously dismantle it, hacking and spitting over the broken chunks. The passing by Cavalry watches without interference.

CROWD (V.O.)

Lynch those bourgeois parasites!
They have grown fat on our bones!
Peace and land! Bread and tobacco!

One of the SAILORS leaps onto the cracked head of the monument and YELLS into the uproar.

SAILOR

Brothers! We were stamped upon for long enough! Let us crush the old guard! Class war to the end! Whoever doesn't support us is doomed!

The crowd ROARS in solidarity. The sailor deliberately STOMPS on the dismantled head of the monument, causing a loose chunk to drop off. Wrathful LAUGHTER bursts in response.

INT. PETROGRAD - MANSION - LIBRARY - EVENING

MUSIC: "Elegia" from the "Concerto for orchestra" by Bartok

A sumptuous library enveloped by bookcases and objects of art. Dominating one of the walls is a massive FIREPLACE. It casts a bronze GLOW over the painting above it.

The painting is a vast canvas of a "Troika", a native Russian motif of a sleigh carriage drawn by three thrusting horses hurdling across the winter landscape.

Standing alone by the fireplace is a young girl. She gazes into the fire with a sense of wonder. She is GALINA NOVIKOVA, a delicate six-year-old, wearing a pretty dress with a matching hair ribbon. In her hands she holds a doll.

Nearby, watching over Galina, is a young, pleasant woman in her twenties. She is VALYA, one of Galina's nannies. Valya is neatly dressed with her hair pulled in a braid.

VALYA

I'll just pop into the kitchen to
get something. I'll be right back.

Galina, immersed in a realm of her own imagination, doesn't respond. We see Valya leaving through a side door.

INT. MANSION - RECEPTION ROOM - EVENING

It is a grand room, two stories high, Baroque in style and opulently furnished. Situated as the room's centerpiece is a grand piano. The room is flooded with a multitude of LIT candles and candelabrams. A stairway curves to a second-floor landing with an unobstructed view over the downstairs area.

An informal, family-type celebration is in progress. On top of the side table there are wrapped gifts. Sitting around a tea table are several adults, dressed in their finery. They indulge themselves in desserts, while CHATTING. A household servant dutifully serves them. Nearby, a handful of children are playing amongst themselves, bubbling with GIGGLES.

CLOSE ON a graceful lady with a regal bearing. She is in her sixties, immaculately dressed and her hair is elegantly styled. She stands apart from the rest of the company, busily selecting music books from an etager. The lady is the hostess of the evening, the COUNTESS HELENA NOVIKOVA. She is Galina's grandmother. Enhancing her impeccable appearance is an exquisite NECKLACE.

The chain of the necklace holds a delicate cluster of gems set in gold. At its base is a sparkling Firebird inlaid with rubies [Firebird is a mystical bird from Russian folklore].

Standing next to the Countess and TALKING to her discretely is her son, STANISLAV NOVIKOV. He is in his mid-thirties, a man of fine presence with an intelligent demeanor.

STANISLAV

(earnestly)

Mother, you should leave the country like most of our friends have, and take Galina with you. I will join you as soon as...

COUNTESS

(pulling out a music book)

I am going nowhere. This is my home. Here I shall live; here I shall die.

She flips through the pages of the music book.

STANISLAV

Mother, Russia is no longer the solid rock you should cling to.

COUNTESS

Russia is far too big to change rapidly; besides, I can't turn my back on my many obligations.

The Countess walks away from Stanislav. He follows her.

COUNTESS (CONT'D)

(on her way)

The world is not going to come to an end with the Tsar's abdication. He was useless in any event!

She sneers and flutters her hand in a dismissive gesture.

STANISLAV

Don't underestimate the situation, Mother. I have a plan...

The Countess cuts him off.

COUNTESS

Postpone your plans. You are expecting another child any day.

The Countess Novikova moves towards the guests. They are still sitting around the tea table, sipping on tea and puffing on cigars. On the table, GLEAMING under the chandelier, stands a silver samovar [Russian tea maker].

The Countess joins the guests.

COUNTESS (CONT'D)

It is dreadful how the Royal Court has fallen into such a shameful state of affairs, dragging us, aristocrats, along with it.

Agitated VOICES of guests immediately respond in kind.

VOICES (V.O.)

It's the Tsarina's fault! That damn German ramrod! She's brought nothing but shame and misfortune to the whole of Russia. And her hideous involvement with this "holy" drunkard Rasputin! Shocking!

MALE GUEST

The entire Imperial Palace was reduced to a brothel! Disgraceful! (his tone changes to concerned) I've heard that the Bolsheviks will strip us of our estates. Our livelihood is under threat.

COUNTESS

(foppishly)

Stop panicking! I am placing my full confidence on the Provisional Government. After all, what is Russia without its nobility!

A tray of chocolates is brought to the table by the servant. Guests look at it indifferently. An elderly lady, holding a fancy outfitted lap dog, samples it with delight and feeds one to her pet.

INT. PETROGRAD - NIGHT SHELTER - EVENING

MUSIC: Symphony #2, 2nd movement by A. Honegger

A makeshift shelter packed with abject misery and despair. Rows of bunk beds are filled with dehumanized outcasts.

Children, in rags, sleep on the filthy floor. Others, scavenge through garbage bins looking for scraps of food.

Women QUARREL over a stale piece of bread.

A cluster of drunks [some crippled] take gulps straight from their vodka bottles. They pass bottles around and throw away the empties on the floor. Wild SCREAMS follow in response.

INT. MANSION - RECEPTION ROOM - EVENING

STANISLAV

(to guests)

Dual power is an illusion! The self-appointed Provisional Government is not strong enough to prevail.

GALINA'S MOTHER, an elegant, visibly pregnant lady crosses her heart muttering a prayer.

STANISLAV (CONT'D)

The whole system might collapse. The hunger of the downtrodden is strong enough to break down the Royal House, let alone our estates.

EXT. PETROGRAD - CITY OUTSKIRTS - EVENING

A run-down neighborhood that includes a soup kitchen where volunteers feed a multitude of hungry people. Consumed with anger, they unleash their wrath with menacing gestures.

INT. PETROGRAD - MANSION - GRAND STAIRCASE - EVENING

The Countess moves up the stairs towards the library. On her way she bumps into Stanislav. As he walks down the stairs, he stops, looking at his Mother's necklace disapprovingly.

STANISLAV

You shouldn't be wearing it during this turbulent time, Mother!

COUNTESS

How dare you! Today is my and Galina's Birthday. I have decided to pass this necklace onto her. I will do so after the party.

She lovingly touches the necklace with her manicured fingers.

COUNTESS (CONT'D)

I am just about to surprise Galina with my decision.

She continues walking up the stairs and reaches the door of the library.

INT. PETROGRAD - MANSION - LIBRARY - EVENING

The Countess Novikova enters the library and moves towards Galina.

We see them CHATTING by the fireplace. Countess takes off the necklace from around her neck and shows Galina the monogram on the back. Pleasantly surprised, Galina CLAPS her hands with childish delight. The Countess gives her a kiss. Galina, then, helps her to put the necklace back on, fastening it from behind. They both exit the library.

EXT. PETROGRAD - UPSCALE RESIDENTIAL STREET - EVENING

A peaceful street ILLUMINATED by lamp posts. Bright LIGHT streams from the windows of the grand mansions. Passing by are occasional sleigh carriages drawn by horses.

In the distance, a disheveled group of the "RED GANG" of Bolsheviks are approaching the street. They wear shaggy Red Army overcoats and are armed with rifle bayonets. As they draw nearer, their VOICES become audible. One of them stops.

GANG MEMBER

Hang on, I have to take a leak.

The gang stops, while he runs off to the side. Meanwhile, they observe the palatial mansions lined across the street.

One of the mansions stands out with its imposing facade.

INT. MANSION - RECEPTION ROOM - EVENING

Surrounded by family and guests, Galina watches her father as he raises a glass of champagne.

STANISLAV

On this great day I wish to my dear Mother and my darling daughter a very Happy Birthday! May we always celebrate together wherever we may be! (he looks at the Countess)

COUNTESS

And where would we be, but here!

The clinking of glasses follows. Both cakes are cut and everyone takes a slice. CHEERS and smiles reflect the now joyous atmosphere. Galina nibbles on her slice and pushes it aside. She gives her grandmother a quick kiss and dashes upstairs towards the library. The Countess watches her with adoration.

COUNTESS (CONT'D)

She is my pride, my continuation.

The guests nod in acknowledgement.

EXT. PETROGRAD - STREET OUTSIDE THE MANSION - EVENING

CLOSE ON a scruffy man nicknamed SHORTY. He is the leader of the pack. We see him maliciously pointing towards the elegant mansion. It captures his cronies' attention.

SHORTY

Hey, let's visit this household. I
am hungry and my fists are itchy.

INT. MANSION - LIBRARY - EVENING

MUSIC: "Fireworks" by Stravinsky

Swept up in the excitement, Galina dances with the joy of an innocent child, swirling and leaping across the room.

EXT. PETROGRAD - STREET OUTSIDE THE MANSION - EVENING

Shorty PUNCHES his fist into his hand and grins. Menacing LAUGHTER follows and the "Red Gang" heads towards the mansion. The other gang member catches up with them.

We see two guards patrolling the gated courtyard of the mansion.

As the "Red Gang" draws nearer, Shorty gestures a throat being slit. The rest of the group GIGGLES in understanding and the guards are promptly dispatched.

INT. MANSION - KITCHEN - EVENING

A large, fully-equipped kitchen. The staff are hurrying about in preparation for dessert.

We see Valya with a young fellow chatting in the corner. He is MISHA, one of the kitchen staff and Valya's boyfriend.

A sudden NOISE coming from outside, alerts Valya. Her expression registers the NOISE. The rest of the staff carry on their duties without paying attention. Misha, distracted by Valya's loveliness, does not hear a thing.

INT. MANSION - RECEPTION ROOM - EVENING

The Countess Novikova cheerfully moves across the room, opens up the grand piano and starts PLAYING.

The guests are listening in delight.

Half-way into the piece, sudden angry VOICES are heard outside. Guests exchange glances. The Countess stops PLAYING.

A threatening silence envelops the room. A violent POUNDING on the door grabs everyone's attention.

The HOWLING "Red Gang" bursts into the room.

RED GANG (V.O.)
Down with the good-for-nothing
Bourgeois! They sucked us dry! Rip
their fucking throats!

MUSIC: "Glorification of the Chosen Victim" from "The Rite of Spring" by Stravinsky

The gang disperses around, intentionally increasing the panic by brandishing the blades of their bayonets in front of the petrified guests. The situation degenerates into mayhem.

Shorty leaps on top of the tea table, KICKING and CRUSHING the tableware to smithereens.

SHORTY
Shut up, you poodles! All of you
are but a pile of shit which we are
going to grow upon! Clear your
pockets and move your asses. Fast!

INT. MANSION - LIBRARY - EVENING

Galina, drawn by the commotion, takes a peek through a narrow split between the doors. It gives her a clear view over the downstairs area.

GALINA'S P.O.V.

Stanislav dashes towards the staircase, but he is stopped by a gang member who savagely rams the bayonet into his chest, giving it a twist as he pulls it out. Blood gushes through Stanislav's white shirt and he helplessly sinks to the floor.

Frozen with fear, Galina continues observing the massacre. The brutal assault spreads into a full-scale slaughter. One of the gang members kicks Stanislav's body and then strips it of his valuables.

SHORTY
Hey, don't forget to grab his fancy
boots! I bet they will fit me.

The Countess dashes towards Stanislav's body, shaking it in despair. Some of the guests, including children, cling to each other in terror. They are all ruthlessly killed. Galina's mother pleads with the gang.

GALINA'S MOTHER
Have mercy, I beg of you, please.

SHORTY

Just look at her squeal! I bet she was one of Rasputin's whores!

Galina's mother is kicked aside with deliberate cruelty, as the gang bursts into LAUGHTER. One of the cronies approaches the grand piano and SLAMS his fists on the keyboard with amusement. The Countess, meanwhile, heads toward the staircase. Shorty notices her.

SHORTY (CONT'D)

Hey, you brassy old bitch! Where you are trying to sneak off to?

Shorty draws upon the Countess, as she looks at him in utter contempt. Without hesitation, she picks up a silver fork laying on the floor and ferociously thrusts it into his face. Shorty HOWLS in pain. The blood gushes out of his cheek, splattering over the Countess's necklace.

COUNTESS

Damn you all to hell, you brutes!

SHORTY

Hack her to pieces!

Another crony comes along and thrust the blade of his bayonet into the Countess. She creases with pain and slides down. The crony tries to rip the necklace off her, but she stubbornly clings to it. Her blood permeates the necklace. With a last effort the Countess whispers.

COUNTESS

By God, your turn will come.

One of the cronies forcibly rips the blood drenched necklace from the Countess's neck and hides it in his pocket.

Shorty, murmuring a threat, wipes his face.

INT. MANSION - KITCHEN - EVENING

The kitchen staff is still hustling about. Valya, alarmed by the occasional echoing SHOUTS, leaves the kitchen in a hurry.

INT. MANSION - LIBRARY - EVENING

Petrified, Galina moves back to the fireplace, staring into the raging FLAMES. Involuntarily, her doll falls out of her hands and is consumed by the FIRE.

Valya enters the library through a side door and finds Galina standing numb, but unharmed. Valya rushes towards the front door of the library and sneaks a peek.

VALYA'S P.O.V.

She witnesses the massacre and two menacing figures heading upstairs. Their heavy STEPS approaching closer and nearer. Without a word, Valya dashes towards Galina, grabs her hand and, unnoticed, they slip out through a side door.

INT. MANSION - RECEPTION ROOM - EVENING

The gang grabs any valuables that are lying about. The crony with the stolen necklace greedily stuffs himself with the leftovers of desserts and grabs a liquor bottle on his way out. Shorty, wounded, stumbles over the bodies. One of the cronies SHOTS the chandelier and the gang runs away, leaving the blood bath behind.

MUSIC: Symphony #2, First movement by A. Honegger

A dark reception room. In the large gilded mirror we see a reflection of the massacre. The MOONLIGHT, streaming through the shattered windows, magnifies the horrifying scene.

EXT. MANSION - REAR - EVENING

Valya and Galina run towards their neighbors. Galina keeps turning her head towards the mansion, now a ghostly sight.

Finally, they reach the neighbor's quarters. Valya desperately KNOCKS on the door. A female servant OPENS the door. On the brink of collapse, Valya and Galina burst inside.

EXT. VILLAGE - SUMMER 1918 - LATE AFTERNOON

A countryside with a horse-drawn carriage approaches from a distance.

Misha, looking disheveled, drives the open carriage. Galina and Valya sit inside it.

Gradually the village draws closer. We see shabby houses and drab-looking villagers bustling about. Excited by the arrival of the carriage, barefooted children run toward it.

The carriage approaches a row of wooden houses. Valya points at a certain house and Misha stops. Valya hops off the carriage and gives him a friendly hug. Misha helps her with their bags and reaches for Galina to help her out.

GALINA
Thank you for the ride.

Misha nods and goes on his way. Valya and Galina approach the entrance of a wooden house with a horseshoe hanging on its door. Valya drops her bags on the threshold and, murmuring a prayer, KNOCKS on the door. Galina watches her closely.

INTERIOR/EXTERIOR. VILLAGE HOUSE - SUMMER - LATE AFTERNOON

A robust peasant man in his fifties OPENS the door. He is GAVRIL, Valya's father. A kind-looking peasant woman in her forties stands next to him. She is OLGA, Valya's mother. Valya greets her parents with a bow and hugs her younger sister MILA, a peasant girl in her late teens. Gavril looks at Valya with surprise.

GAVRIL
Look who is back! (giving Galina a glare) Who is the girl?

Olga, trying to diffuse the situation, interferes.

OLGA
(to Valya)
Welcome back, dear. Let's all come inside.

Gavril picks up Valya's bags and they go inside.

INT. VILLAGE HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

The rustic living quarters. An icon hangs in one of the corners. A flat-top stove dominates the room.

The family enters the room and Valya takes her father aside.

VALYA
(in a whisper)
Father, this is Galina, the girl I was looking after. Her family was very kind to me. She has lost everyone.

GAVRIL
No relatives left?

VALYA
All were killed even before the Revolution. Petrograd is nothing but a nightmare. I had to leave, but I couldn't let her become a street kid. For God's sake, father!

Galina looks at Gavril with the innocence of a desperate child. Olga and Mila exchange sympathetic glances. Reluctantly, Gavril nods in agreement.

GAVRIL
 (to Olga)
 Is the soup ready yet?

Galina, now less anxious, looks around with curiosity.

OLGA
 (to Galina)
 Go and freshen up, dear. Mila,
 bring her some water, will you.
 Valya, go and fill up the samovar.

The entire family sits together at the table. Olga places a big bowl of soup with wooden spoons. Mila brings a loaf of bread. Gavril folds his hands in prayer.

GAVRIL
 Of what we are rich in, we gladly
 share. Amen!

With "AMEN" in unison, everyone immediately dips into the common bowl of soup. Galina hesitates at first, but soon joins the rest. Olga gives her a welcoming smile. The family is enjoying their reunion and the meal.

EXT. VILLAGE - WINTER 1919 - MORNING

A winter scene. Preoccupied villagers bustle around, while children enjoy themselves with a snowball fight.

INT. VILLAGE HOUSE - MORNING

Various household activities are going on. Gavril starts a FIRE in the stove. Galina helps Valya with the laundry and, magnetized by the fire, keeps turning her head towards it.

GAVRIL
 (to Galina)
 You like the fire, don't you?

Galina nods, smiling mischievously.

GALINA
 Fire is my friend. It shows me
 pictures and takes me places. It
 keeps my secrets...

OLGA
 Mila, put some dried bread on top
 of the stove. Galina, come and help
 me with the fresh loaves.

Galina swiftly moves towards Olga, while keeping her eye on the burning FIRE.

GALINA
The stove is so useful.

OLGA
We wouldn't last without it, dear.
It warms us up, we cook on it, we
sleep on top of it.

GALINA
That's the best part!

INT. VILLAGE HOUSE - EVENING

Valya, Mila, and Galina are tearing up old clothes into strips, while Olga makes rags out of them. Gavril is busily sorting out horseshoes.

The RUMBLING of a truck is heard from outside. It STOPS abruptly. The STAMPING sound on the crunchy snow is approaching closer. A heavy POUNDING on the door follows. A mortal silence sets in. A threatening voice from outside BARKS.

VOICE (V.O.)
Open up! We are representatives
from Petrograd. The "Food Unit".

Reluctantly, Gavril UNBOLTS the door. A group of three men with a COMMISSAR, the leader, TUMBLE in. The Commissar flashes his badge and immediately starts bullying everyone.

COMMISSAR
We are collecting provisions.
Everyone must contribute!

Gavril stares at him with contempt. Olga pleads earnestly.

OLGA
Comrade Commissar, have pity on us.
We need to borrow just to survive
this winter.

COMMISSAR
You miserable liars! Do you take me
for a fool? (sniffs) I smell bread!

He heads for the back door. Gavril discreetly signals Mila with a gesture and she instantly leaps on top of the stove, closing the dividing sheet behind her.

COMMISSAR (CONT'D)
Where are you hoarding provisions?
Answer or I will split your skulls
right here!

Gavril, fuming with anger, stands protectively by his family. The women cling to each other in fear, while the henchmen raid the household, tossing everything aside. The family watches in horror until they find some bread and a cabbage.

COMMISSAR (CONT'D)

Is that all? (to henchmen) Go and look outside and move your asses! We have to be back in Petrograd!

He glances at his watch while the henchmen go outside.

CLOSE ON Mila. Petrified, she is lying on the stove, protecting the dried bread with blankets.

The henchmen return empty-handed. Infuriated, the Commissar lapses into a fit of rage and heads towards the stove, ripping open the dividing sheet and exposing Mila. Olga dashes forward to protect her.

Galina intensely watches the Commissar's every move. Her face shows her mind racing.

OLGA

(pointing at Mila)
Comrade Commissar, she is sick.
It's typhoid. She is contagious. We are all doomed here.

The Commissar steps back, savagely poking the blankets with the edge of his bayonet. Mila lets out a SHRIEK.

Suddenly, Galina slides down, helplessly lying on the floor. Valya, in a panic, lets out a CRY and reaches for her. Everyone's attention shifts to Galina.

VALYA

(hysterically)
Mama, get some water, quick!

The Commissar and his henchmen exchange glances.

COMMISSAR

Let's get out of this deathly dump.
(passing by Gavril) I will nail you next time, you cur! Along with your female maggots.

The henchmen grab the bread and all three leave in a hurry. Gavril SHUTS the door behind them. The RUMBLING of the truck's engine is heard outside.

GAVRIL

May those leeches choke on our bread! Next time he will nail me?!
Ha!

(MORE)

GAVRIL (cont'd)
 Next time (Gavril plunges his axe
 into the log) the bastard will get
 an axe from me!

OLGA
 Those devils have no fear of God!

GAVRIL
 If the Bolsheviks can't feed
 themselves, they might as well drop
 dead!

He OPENS the door, spits resentfully and bolts it SHUT.
 Galina, exhausted, gets back on her feet.

OLGA
 Are you feeling better, dear?

GALINA
 I am fine. I was scared they would
 kill Mila and would find our dry
 bread. I had to do something.

Valya embraces Galina with affection.

OLGA
 God bless you, child! You did the
 right thing. Gutsy girl.

Mila, shaken, hops off the stove. The family begins tidying
 up the mess.

INT. VILLAGE HOUSE - LATER - NIGHT

MUSIC: Adagio from the "Music for strings" by Bartok

A dark room. Galina, Valya, and Mila sleep on top of the
 stove. The sound of the HOWLING wind outside intensifies.
 Galina, tossing and turning, wakes up. Fearful, she shuts her
 eyes and drifts back to sleep. In her nightmare, the images
 of the massacre overlap with the latest encounter with the
 Bolsheviks.

FLASHBACK

COMMISSAR
 I will nail you next time, you cur!
 Along with your female maggots.

GAVRIL
Next time he will get an axe from
me!

SHORTY
Hey, you brassy old bitch! Hack her
to pieces!

OLGA
Have mercy on us. We need to borrow
just to survive this winter.

COUNTESS
Damn you all to hell, you brutes!

The fuzzy image of the necklace appears soaked in blood.
Galina lets out a frightful HOWL, waking everyone up.

VALYA
What... What happened?

GALINA
I had a nightmare. I'm scared.

VALYA
(comforting her)
Calm down. You are safe here.

EXT. VILLAGE - CHURCH - SPRING 1920 - EASTER NIGHT

A traditional old Church with an onion-shaped dome. It's
ILLUMINATED by the candles of worshippers waiting outside.

We see Galina and the rest of her adopted family joining the
awaiting crowd. Each carries a slender candle.

INT. CHURCH - EASTER NIGHT

Open on the poorly maintained church with a neglected altar.
The inside of the Church swells with worshippers. Galina
watches curiously as a Priest READS the Mass and the
congregation follows with quivering SINGING.

Galina CHANTS along with the others. The Mass is soon over.
The congregation LIGHTS their candles and pushes their way
outside, PRAISING on their way out.

VOICES (V.O.)
Christ has risen! Truly risen!

With the STRIKE of the Church bells, the emotional crowd
exchanges three-fold kisses. Galina receives blessings and
kisses from Valya and the rest of the family.

EXT. VILLAGE - CHURCH - EASTER MORNING

The Church bells swing, spreading their SOUND over the village. People walk in and out of the Church. Beggars plead, drunkards lie on the ground, SCOLDED by passersby.

Galina exchanges Easter eggs with village children. Gradually the crowd disperses and Galina walks away from the Church with Valya and Mila. On the way, one of the VILLAGE LADS approaches Valya.

VILLAGE LAD

Hey Valya, come to our farewell party tomorrow. We're off to the Red Army in a couple of days.

VALYA

Sure, I'll come with my sisters.

Everyone continues on their way.

GALINA

(eagerly)

Will you really take me with you?

INT. VILLAGE - COMMUNITY HOUSE - EVENING

A large, bare-walled room BUSTLES with youth. Couples are flirting while village lads are STRUMMING their balalaikas. Galina, squeezed between Valya and Mila, hardly contains her excitement. The mood picks up its momentum and young women begin to DANCE a traditional Russian ring-dance.

MUSIC: "The Russian Dance" from "Petrouchka" by Stravinsky

They swirl, gesturing with their hands and shoulders. More and more participants pour into the circle. They dance with raw vitality, just letting themselves go. Galina, watching from the side, imitates their every step.

We see Valya dancing, while keeping an eye on Galina. Without hesitation, she grabs Galina's hand and pulls her into the dance circle. The villagers CHEER and encourage Galina on. Galina picks up the rhythm and swirls faster and faster. The DANCE surges out of her spontaneously. Swept into the center, she blends with the dance carousel.

EXT. VILLAGE HOUSE - BACKYARD - SUMMER AFTERNOON

It is a bright summer day. Gavril is busy chopping firewood. Olga piles it up. Galina and Mila tend to the potato patch. Sweaty, with her hands soiled up to her elbows, Galina drops potatoes into a bucket.

GALINA

When is Valya coming back from
Petrograd?

MILA

Tomorrow, I heard.

INT. PETROGRAD - CHOREOGRAPHY SCHOOL - LOBBY - AFTERNOON

The formal looking lobby of the Choreography school (now Vaganova Ballet Academy). Pictures of ballet dancers loom from the crumbling walls. Valya, visibly anxious, TALKS to a slender, modestly dressed WOMAN.

VALYA

She loves dancing. She's a natural.
Picks up the steps easily.

WOMAN

Please understand that it isn't
only a child's love for dance that
counts. We have specific demands.
Children must have the right body
proportions, be very supple and
healthy. There are many other
requirements.

VALYA

Can you please take a look at her?
Just give her a chance.

WOMAN

(reluctantly)
Well, bring her in two weeks' time.

INT. VILLAGE HOUSE - NEXT DAY - EVENING

Valya in a discussion with her parents.

GAVRIL

She can stay here. She's earned it.

OLGA

Is this boarding school any good?

VALYA

She will be taken care of there and
will study dancing. She can't stay
here any longer. (Valya lowers her
head) We are struggling as it is.

GAVRIL

Dancing school! I say, it's nothing
but an orphanage! She will starve
to death.

OLGA
 (concerned)
 How are we going to tell her?

INT. PETROGRAD - CHOREOGRAPHY SCHOOL - SUMMER - DAY

The reception area BUSTLES with adults and children. Galina sits next to Valya and, drawn to the images of ballet dancers, keeps staring at them.

VALYA
 Just do your best, dear.

The door of the studio OPENS and a woman with a stern expression comes out. She CALLS several names and one by one the girls circle around her. Galina joins them and the group follows the woman into a studio.

INT. DANCING STUDIO - DAY

The spacious studio with a mirrored wall and stretch barre alongside it. A battered piano and a watering can are tucked in the corner. An illustrated poster on the wall reads:

"It's not sweat, it's glow"

A panel of adjudicators sits alongside the table. They check over the suppleness of each girl, examine their body proportions and make notes.

It's Galina's turn. She steps forward and the ballet mistress checks her over. Her well proportioned body looks delicate but strong. Galina stretches and jumps with ease.

BALLET MISTRESS
 Will you dance something for us?

GALINA
 I only know a folk dance.

BALLET MISTRESS
 That will do.

MUSIC: "The Russian Dance" from "Petrushka" by Stravinsky

Galina dances with spirit. The serious faces of the adjudicators soften.

The girls leave the studio and the panel congregates.

MALE ADJUDICATOR
 What marvelous material that last girl is! What is her name? Galina..

BALLET MISTRESS

Galina Novikova. I agree. A good physique and plenty of spark.

MALE ADJUDICATOR

Well, we have to narrow the list down. Out of hundreds we can only accept eighteen. Is she in or out?

The panel raises their hands in Galina's favor.

EXT. VILLAGE - LATE AUGUST 1920 - MORNING

The family is gathered outside the house to see off Galina and Valya. They embrace affectionately. Gavril loads their bags into the open carriage and settles on the driver's seat.

GALINA

I wish I didn't have to leave.
Thank you for everything you have done for me.

Galina and Valya hop inside. Gavril shakes the reins, urging the old horse, and the carriage moves away.

EXT. PETROGRAD - STREET - DAY

The street is lined with elegant buildings. Galina and Valya walk down the street. Valya carries a bag on her shoulder. Soon, they enter one of the buildings. A plaque above the front door reads:

"State Choreography School's Living Quarters"

INT. SCHOOL'S LIVING QUARTERS - RECEPTION AREA - AFTERNOON

The area BUZZES with activity. Valya approaches the Matron and talks to her. Galina, meanwhile, looks around, absorbing the atmosphere of the ballet school.

The Matron checks her registration book and escorts Valya with Galina to the dormitory.

INT. DORMITORY - AFTERNOON

A large room with rows of narrow beds and small chests of drawers between them. Each bed frame is tagged with a name. Some of the newly arrived girls are already settling in.

Galina, Valya, and the Matron enter the room. The girls glance at Galina with curiosity. The Matron points at Galina's bed. Galina looks at Valya with despair and runs out of the room.

Astonished, Valya drops the bag and runs after her. The girls exchange glances. Surprised by the turn of events, the Matron leaves.

INT. CORRIDOR

Valya catches up to Galina at the end of the corridor.

GALINA

I don't want to stay here! I thought... I'm staying with you...

VALYA

I'm afraid this will be your new home. You are lucky to be here.

GALINA

I'll be lonely here. You are the only family I have and love.

VALYA

Don't worry, I will be visiting you often. I found a job nearby and you... Well, you will make new friends here.

GALINA

I have friends in the village. I don't need new ones.

VALYA

Yes, you do need new friends! Besides, you are going to be dancing all day long. Isn't that something you love?

Galina flickers a smile. Valya firmly takes Galina's hand and walks her back to the dormitory. They enter the dorm.

INT. DORMITORY - AFTERNOON

The girls are busy CHATTING, playing tag and tossing pillows at one another. One of the girls tosses Galina a pillow. Galina catches it and joins in the fun.

INT. CHOREOGRAPHY SCHOOL - STUDIO - MORNING

A studio equipped with mirror and barre. An old grand piano with a pianist is in the corner. A group of young girls stand around the BALLET TEACHER. They are dressed in ill-fitted ballet uniforms, canvas slippers, and their hair worn in a bun.

The ballet teacher, poised and graceful, demonstrates basic ballet movements. The girls watch her closely.

Galina and the rest of the girls take their place along the barre. With the MUSIC in the background they begin executing the movements.

BALLET TEACHER
Girls, hold your heads up and
bodies straight. And one, and two,
and three... point your toes!

The ballet teacher walks from girl to girl, painstakingly correcting each one. Galina stumbles repeatedly.

BALLET TEACHER (CONT'D)
What is wrong with you? Come and
see me after class.

Galina lowers her head in embarrassment. The other girls GIGGLE. The group begins executing a "reverence".

BALLET TEACHER (CONT'D)
No, no, no! Girls, your hands look
like soggy leaves. Hands have a
language of their own.

The ballet teacher gestures to the pianist and executes a short demo. The girls repeat after her. Class is dismissed and Galina approaches the ballet teacher.

BALLET TEACHER (CONT'D)
You weren't paying attention at
all! What is the matter?

GALINA
I am... I am homesick and I don't..

BALLET TEACHER
Look, Galina, this is your new
home. We are all one family here.
You are fortunate to be a student
at this school and our expectations
of you are high. You are blessed
with born talent; use it!

Galina nods and leaves the studio. The ballet teacher watches her with a sympathetic expression.

INT. SCHOOL'S LIVING QUARTERS - DORMITORY - NIGHT

MUSIC: "Lullaby" from the "Firebird" by Stravinsky

A dark dormitory. The girls are sound asleep. Galina tosses and turns in her bed and, eventually, falls asleep.

In her dream she is flashed over by a brilliant LIGHT. It allures and beckons her. Overwhelmed, Galina tries to reach it, but is prevented by dark blotches.

With riotous energy she bursts forth and breaks through, fusing with the LIGHT into a single entity.

Galina shudders and wakes up.

INT. CHOREOGRAPHY SCHOOL - STUDIO - DAY

The ballet students execute exercises under the strict eye of the teacher. Galina, alert and attentive, executes her movements beautifully. The ballet teacher gives her an approving smile.

BALLET TEACHER

That's the way, Galina. Hold your center. Strain is necessary to achieve the ease. (addressing the group) Girls, don't dance to the music, dance the music.

The group concludes their exercise. The ballet teacher CLAPS her hands for attention.

BALLET TEACHER (CONT'D)

Galina, please demonstrate the arm movements. Girls, pay attention.

The teacher nods to the pianist. Galina collects herself and begins her demo. With MUSIC in the background, she executes a short sequence of the "port de bras".

The girls watch her closely. One of them watches Galina with hostility.

INT. CHOREOGRAPHY SCHOOL - CHANGE ROOM - DAY

The girls are changing and CHATTING amongst themselves. Suddenly, the HOSTILE GIRL turns to Galina, bellowing at her.

HOSTILE GIRL

Well, well... We have a new star here, you bourgeois show off!

A ripple of GIGGLES is heard. Flabbergasted, Galina looks back at her.

HOSTILE GIRL (CONT'D)

I heard you came from a family of those parasitic nobles. The class enemy...

The hostile girl approaches Galina ready to say more, when the MATRON walks into the change room without knocking.

MATRON

What is going on here?

Caught off guard, the girls quickly disperse.

MUSIC: "Vocalise" by Rachmaninov

Galina, bitterly hurt, is left completely alone.

INT. SCHOOL'S LIVING QUARTERS - DINING ROOM - EVENING

A gloomy room with long tables and benches on either sides. Students [girls and boys] of different ages eat their meager meals. Galina, preoccupied, hardly eats.

INT. DORMITORY - NEXT DAY - MORNING

The girls, dressed in their school uniforms, watch a fight between Galina and the hostile girl. Galina fights with ferocity. The face of the hostile girl shows her fear as she tries to fight back.

HOSTILE GIRL

Let go of me you, you...

Galina holds her tight, articulating each word.

GALINA

You dare harass me again! Get it?

Galina lets go of her and is CHEERED. The hostile girl tries to regain her composure.

HOSTILE GIRL

Oh, I am so scared! Go and do more of your stupid demos, flipping your ugly arms around. You, you...

INT. CHOREOGRAPHY SCHOOL - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - LATER

An ordinary office. The PRINCIPAL, a middle-aged man, sits at the desk, looking at Galina with a stern gaze.

PRINCIPAL

I understand you were fighting.

GALINA

In all fairness...

PRINCIPAL

Enough! Now, quickly make yourself presentable and join your class.

As Galina leaves the office, the SECRETARY walks in with a glass of tea and places it on the Principal's desk.

PRINCIPAL (CONT'D)
I bet no one will step on her
again!

SECRETARY
Life shapes her.

The Principal nods in agreement.

EXT. PETROGRAD - STREET - WINTER 1923 - DAY

A bright winter day. Streets and water canals are covered with a blanket of snow. We see bustling people and passing by carriages. Valya, wrapped in her winter coat, walks towards the Choreography School.

INT. CHOREOGRAPHY SCHOOL - REHEARSING STUDIO - DAY

MUSIC: Excerpt from "Nutcracker" by Tchaikovsky

We see the dress rehearsal in progress. Students, wearing their stage costumes, are busy dancing. Galina dances beautifully, attracting attention from the teachers and choreographers.

BALLET TEACHER
(watching Galina)
Some dancers are made, some are
born!

CHOREOGRAPHER
Extremely musical too. Looks like
she won't have to toil in the corps
de ballet.

The rehearsal is over. Galina, in an uplifted mood, CHATS with her friends and is about to leave with a group. On her way out, a MALE STUDENT approaches her.

MALE STUDENT
There is a woman at reception who
wants to see you.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Thrilled, Galina races through the maze of corridors, passing the rails filled with colorful costumes. Finally, she reaches the reception area.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - DAY

The area BUZZES with excitement. A Christmas tree sits in the corner. A banner above reads: "Happy New Year!"

We see Valya CHATTING with the on-duty Matron. Galina, spotting Valya, leaps upon her joyously.

GALINA
What a wonderful surprise!

Valya surveys Galina, still dressed in her stage costume. Galina pulls at her costume with a coy look on her face.

VALYA
Are you ready for your performance?

GALINA
I can't wait!

Galina approaches the Matron.

GALINA (CONT'D)
May I spend some time with Valya? I mean outside the school. Please!

MATRON
Not for too long.

EXT. PETROGRAD - STREET - DAY

Galina and Valya walk out of the building. Galina, in her shabby coat and clumsy boots, skips around Valya.

VALYA
(cheerfully)
Stop it! Misha is waiting. He will take us for a spin in the sleigh.

Galina, beside herself with excitement, continues jumping.

VALYA (CONT'D)
There is something I want to share with you.

GALINA
What is it? Tell me, tell me...

VALYA
Misha and I are getting married, and we are...

GALINA
That is wonderful news!

VALYA
Yes, Misha is a good man, but he has been transferred... It has to do with his job...

GALINA
Transferred? Where to?

VALYA
To the Ukraine. He is needed there.
It is so unfortunate...

Galina's face collapses.

GALINA
I see... I am happy for you. When
are you leaving?

VALYA
After New Year's.

A painful silence follows.

GALINA
Will you and Misha come to the show
to watch me?

VALYA
Of course! Come on! Let's enjoy
ourselves for now.

INT. CHOREOGRAPHY SCHOOL'S LIVING QUARTERS - CORRIDOR - EVE

Galina and Valya stand in a secluded part of the corridor and TALK quietly. Valya takes off from around her neck a delicate chain with a tiny cross attached to it and hands it to Galina

VALYA
This way we'll never be apart.

Galina, speechless, looks at her in disbelief. Valya gives Galina a hug and leaves without looking back.

Galina, numb with emotions, follows her with her eyes.

INT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

The girls are sound asleep, except for Galina. She lies in her bed, clutching the tiny cross. She kisses it and hides it under the pillow. Soon, she falls asleep.

CLOSE ON the hostile girl watching Galina discretely.

INT. CHOREOGRAPHY SCHOOL - CHANGE ROOM - DAY

The girls are changing and CHATTING. As Galina takes off her point shoes, the hostile girl addresses her with venom.

HOSTILE GIRL

Well, well... Tell us what's that
cross doing under your pillow, ha?
You will not get away with this...

INT. CHOREOGRAPHY SCHOOL - BOARDROOM - EVENING

A formal room. Members of the school board, along with the school's POLITICAL INSTRUCTOR, sit at the table and look at Galina. Galina stands across from them, wearing a solemn expression.

POLITICAL INSTRUCTOR

You know full well that worshipping
and religious amulets are strictly
forbidden! Disobedience will not be
tolerated here! Go for now; we have
a decision to make. Bring your
cross for confiscation!

PRINCIPAL

Come to my office immediately!

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - LATER

Galina stands across from the Principal with her head down.

PRINCIPAL

You were almost expelled! Your
talent is what saved you. What
pushed you to endanger yourself?

GALINA

It means that I am not alone...

PRINCIPAL

Go for now. I'll see what I can do.

MONTAGE:

INT. CHOREOGRAPHY SCHOOL - STUDIO - DAY

Galina with her classmates during the character dance class. The group DANCES to a quick rhythmical MUSIC. Galina stands out with her flair and intensity, setting the tone for the rest.

Later, we see Galina with her teacher working on her technique. Galina articulates every movement with care, giving it a deep meaning.

INT. LIBRARY/CAFETERIA - DAY

Galina studying in the library and, later, enjoying a break at the cafeteria with her classmates.

INT. CHOREOGRAPHY SCHOOL - WARDROBE STORAGE - DAY

A gallery filled with neatly arranged stage costumes. Galina, along with others, tries on a tutu.

INT. THEATRE - STAGE - DAY

Galina rehearses on the stage. Through the whirlwind of dancing images, Galina gradually transforms and emerges as a mature and graceful ballerina, now nineteen-years-old.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. LENINGRAD (FORMERLY PETROGRAD) - THEATRE - DRESSING ROOM - SUMMER 1930 - EVENING

A large shared dressing room BUZZES with nervous excitement. The young ballerinas prepare themselves for their graduation performance. Some are busy applying make up, others fluff up their skirts and dip their point shoes into rosin trays.

Galina, in a translucent white dress, is busy flexing her point shoes. Her expression shows her focus. In her hand she discretely clutches a tiny cross.

INT. THEATRE - STAGE - EVENING

MUSIC: Excerpts from various waltzes by Chopin

The stage is decorated with a misty picturesque background. The graduate students perform "Chopiniana". The "corps de ballet" moves together as a single body in a single breath.

Galina dances the lead part, floating and swirling across the stage with grace. The stage LIGHTS highlights her delicate movement. Watching from the wings are the teachers and choreographers. The rest of the dancers just sneak a peek.

INT. THEATRE - AUDITORIUM - EVENING

Valya and Mila are in the audience. Each holds a bouquet of flowers. Their faces show their pride for Galina. [By now Mila is a grown woman].

INT. THEATRE - DRESSING ROOM - EVENING

Cheerful students and teachers congratulate each other. Galina receives praise from those in attendance. With a graceful bow, she hands her flowers to her teachers in a gesture of appreciation.

INT. THEATRE - LOBBY - EVENING

Galina, Valya, and Mila, thrilled with happiness, exit the Theatre like loving sisters.

EXT. LENINGRAD - THEATRE SQUARE - SUMMER 1940 - EVENING

A floodlit Theatre showcases promotional billboards. The area swarms with people and fans. A continuous stream of audience members enter the Theatre. The less fortunate anxiously try to obtain tickets.

INT. THEATRE - BACKSTAGE - EVENING

The place is hectic. It vibrates with excitement. The stage crew checks the scenery. Dancers, in costumes and makeup, fuss with finishing touches. Some go over difficult steps. The PRINCIPAL CHOROGRAPHER is busy giving instructions.

INT. THEATRE - FOYER - EVENING

A promenade foyer populated with a browsing audience. The atmosphere is filled with anticipation.

A small group of distinguished-looking military officers passes through the audience. They are in their physical prime and wear sleek formal regalia.

CLOSE ON a bold poster, projecting the dynamic image of the Firebird. Beneath the image reads:

"Welcome to the closing night of the ballet festival. Tonight's show features first place winner, Galina Novikova, in the title role of the "Firebird" by Stravinsky."

The poster captures much attention from passersby. The same group of officers stop by the poster and look at it. A GONG STRIKES, announcing the beginning of the show. The Officers head towards the balcony, ascending the staircase along with the rest of the audience.

INT. THEATRE - MAIN HALL - EVENING

The sumptuous auditorium is packed. The HUM of the audience settling down reverberates through the air. The incoherent NOISE of the orchestra tuning up gradually fades away.

INT. THEATRE - STAGE - EVENING

The show is in progress. The elaborately decorated stage depicts a garden where Prince Ivan secreted himself in the shadows. Suddenly, the stage fills with a stream of LIGHT.

MUSIC: "Appearance of the Firebird" by Stravinsky

Galina, an exquisite Firebird, jets across the stage like a soaring flame. Smitten, Prince Ivan only succeeds to pluck a feather from her wing. The show continues.

INT. THEATRE - MAIN HALL - EVENING

The spellbound audience.

INT. THEATRE - BALCONY - EVENING

The group of Officers watch the show with interest. One of them is completely taken aback by it. His body is leaned forward and his eyes are riveted on Galina. He is ALEXANDER SOKOLOV, an eloquent looking Colonel in his mid-thirties, projecting much military charisma.

INT. THEATRE - STAGE - EVENING

The stage at the end of the performance. The dancers, the MUSIC, and the decor merge under the spectrum of LIGHTS. Flowers flying through the air.

Galina and the rest of the dancers take their bows. As the usherettes bring baskets of flowers up the stage, the OVATION intensifies with the BURSTS of "BRAVO".

INT. THEATRE - BALCONY - EVENING

CLOSE ON Alexander. He APPLAUDS vigorously, attracting his friends' attention.

INT. THEATRE - STAGE - EVENING

Galina appears for yet another curtain call. She gracefully takes a deep bow as the curtain draws.

INT. THEATRE - RECEPTION HALL - LATER

An elegant, brightly LIT hall BUZZES with celebration. The ballet dancers mingle with the guests. Usherettes circulate through the crowd with trays of refreshments.

We see the same group of officers among the guests.

CLOSE ON Alexander. As he CHATS with his friends, his eyes are searching the area. There is an attractive subtlety about his demeanor.

A fellow officer approaches Alexander. He is VLADIMIR, Alexander's friend. A cocky, sleek-looking Colonel in his mid-thirties. In his hands is a plate overflowing with hors d'oeuvres. He talks to Alexander while wolfing down the contents of his plate.

VLADIMIR

Are you looking for somebody?

ALEXANDER

(scanning the crowd)

Yes, I am.

Vladimir CHUCKLES and moves away. An usherette passes by him with a tray of drinks. Vladimir grabs a drink off the tray and gulps it down at once.

CLOSE ON Galina. With elegant simplicity and self-assurance, she manoeuvres down the hall, capturing the crowd's attention. Fans shower her with flowers as she passes by.

Alexander spots Galina and heads towards her, approaching her with subtle military grace.

ALEXANDER

What an extraordinary performance!
You were spectacular! May I
introduce myself...

Galina, holding an armful of flowers, gives Alexander a hasty glance and shifts her attention to a bouquet that has accidentally fallen to the floor. Alexander picks it up and hands it to Galina.

GALINA

(looking at the flowers)
Thanks. I'd like to put them in
water. Will you please help me
carry them.

ALEXANDER

Sure. It would be my pleasure.

Galina hands Alexander some of her bouquets and they move away towards the corridor.

INT. THEATRE - CORRIDOR - EVENING

Galina and Alexander walk down the corridor.

ALEXANDER

I am sure it takes many years to reach such a high performance level.

GALINA

It's not only a matter of time, it's a force from within, a passion, I guess.

ALEXANDER

In that case, you are a... very passionate ballerina.

Galina flickers a smile.

GALINA

Dancers say that grace and passion glide on blistered feet.

ALEXANDER

(kiddingly)

As long as one enjoys one's glide.

They both LAUGH. Finally, they reach Galina's dressing room. Galina OPENS the door and they enter.

INT. THEATRE - GALINA'S DRESSING ROOM - EVENING

The room is surrounded with flowers. A single large picture of Galina captured in a graceful pose reads:

"Dance is a poem"

Near the vast mirror, several tutus hang on the rail. The dresser is covered with makeup and accessories. Numerous point shoes are scattered on the floor.

Galina stuffs the remaining flowers into various vases. Alexander helps her.

GALINA

That will do for now. Let's go back. Sorry, I didn't catch your name.

Alexander smiles and extends his hand.

ALEXANDER

My apologies, Alexander Sokolov.

A prolonged eye contact registers their spontaneous attraction. They exchange a handshake and exit the room.

INT. THEATRE - RECEPTION HALL - EVENING

The celebration is in full swing. Galina and Alexander join the crowd.

ALEXANDER
Would you like to dance? This time
off the stage.

GALINA
(teasingly)
It depends on who is asking.

Galina accepts Alexander's arm and they waltz away, blending with the rest of the dancing couples.

ALEXANDER
Please don't judge me too harshly.
Dancing was never my strong suit.

Galina GIGGLES.

GALINA
We had better stop. I am quite
tired.

ALEXANDER
Sure, I understand.

They step off the dance floor. Out of the blue Vladimir emerges and joins them.

VLADIMIR
(to Alexander)
There you are, bud! I was looking
for you.

He shifts his eyes to Galina, giving her an appraising look.

ALEXANDER
(to Galina)
This is Vladimir, my old friend.
This is Galina Novikova, the
enchanted Firebird.

Vladimir winks to Alexander and extends his hand to Galina.

VLADIMIR
(with sly flattery)
Brava! You are a striking bullet,
lady! Such a privilege to meet you!

Galina extends her hand for a handshake. Vladimir kisses it, instead, and deliberately doesn't let go of it. An uneasy silence follows for a moment. Galina withdraws her hand. Her expression stiffens.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

I must admit your Firebird set me on fire!

GALINA

It's dangerous being on fire. One can get hurt.

Vladimir BURSTS out LAUGHING.

VLADIMIR

What a spunky Firebird!

ALEXANDER

Please forgive my friend. I guess he had a little too much to drink.

VLADIMIR

(to Galina in a macho way)
My blood is up now. Let's dance.
You must grant me a dance!

GALINA

Must I?

She glances at Alexander, then at Vladimir.

GALINA (CONT'D)

Please excuse me, Officers.

Galina turns around, leaving both men behind. She maneuvers through the crowd, heading towards her fellow dancers.

Alexander and Vladimir follow her with riveted eyes.

VLADIMIR

What a tease that Firebird is!
I wouldn't mind taking her for a cruise...

ALEXANDER

Save your goddamn comments for your one night stands!

VLADIMIR

Aha! It looks like my friend is under someone's spell.

ALEXANDER

Knock it off, will you!

VLADIMIR

Cheer up! I see the war with the Finns has made you edgy. Take it easy. This Diva is just another broad. I love her moxie, though.

Alexander leaves abruptly, as the celebration continues.

INT. LENINGRAD - ALEXANDER'S ROOM - SUMMER 1940 - EVENING

An austere bachelor-style room. A model of a frigate is notably displayed on the desk. Pinned on the wall is a map surrounded by bookshelves.

Alexander, casually dressed, sits at the desk and is busy moving pieces on a chess board. Occasionally, he glances at the telephone.

We see him reaching for the phone and dialing. A female voice responds.

GALINA (V.O.)

Galina speaking.

ALEXANDER

Good Evening, Galina. It's Alexander. I'm sorry to call so late.

GALINA (V.O.)

How did you get my number?

ALEXANDER

Well, I had to pull some strings... Hope you don't mind.

GALINA (V.O.)

Actually, I do.

ALEXANDER

Galina, I wanted to apologize for leaving the reception without saying goodbye.

GALINA (V.O.)

Well, apology accepted. Spare me the explanation. Good night.

ALEXANDER

Wait, there's something else... I would like to see you again.

There is a silence for a brief moment.

GALINA (V.O.)

I'm going to be on tour.

ALEXANDER
 (with subtle persistence)
 Whenever is convenient for you.
 I'd really look forward to it.

Alexander's expression shows a glimmer of hope.

EXT. LENINGRAD - NEVA RIVER EMBANKMENT - SUMMER - EVENING

The surroundings are drenched in the TWILIGHT. Boats glide through the water. People stroll along the waterfront.

Alexander, facing the river, glances at his watch. In his hand is a single rose.

We see Galina walking out of the Hermitage and heading towards an embankment. She approaches Alexander from the back and mischievously covers his eyes with her hands.

ALEXANDER
 (taken by surprise)
 Sorry, I didn't see you coming.

Alexander turns around and hands Galina the rose. She smiles.

GALINA
 Thank you. Sorry I'm a little late.
 I was at a poetry reading and it
 took longer, as usual.

ALEXANDER
 Who's your favorite poet?

GALINA
 Alexander Pushkin.

ALEXANDER
 Me too! This calls for a
 celebration.

GALINA
 Really?

ALEXANDER
 Only because I'm looking for one.

They both LAUGH and walk away.

EXT. LENINGRAD - RESTAURANT VERANDA - LATER

Galina and Alexander sit at the table. Their eyes are locked on each other. Alexander raises his glass slightly.

ALEXANDER
 To a wonderful ballerina!

MUSIC: The Love Theme

They each take a sip.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)
 Would you like to visit Peterhof?
 It's beautiful in the summer.

GALINA
 I haven't been there for ages. I
 would love to.

ALEXANDER
 It's settled then.

EXT. PETERHOF GROUNDS - SUMMER 1940 - DAY

It is a bright day. Spread around are the manicured grounds with the ornate Summer Palace and cascading fountains.

Galina and Alexander, both casually dressed, stroll among the visitors and are visibly enjoying themselves. Alexander carries on his shoulder a photo camera and a small rucksack.

We see them stopping on one of the terraces, viewing the scenery of the Gulf of Finland. They proceed towards the benches and sit down on one. Unexpectedly, they are showered by a trick fountain. They burst into LAUGHTER and jump aside, shaking the water off their clothes.

As they stroll along the elegant canals, they playfully turn each time to a different path. We see them enter an isolated pavilion where Alexander takes snapshots of Galina. Soon, they stop for a picnic.

CLOSE ON the sky with dark clouds approaching. Galina and Alexander quickly pack everything up and run towards the parking lot. It begins to rain. As they approach Alexander's car, he opens the door for Galina and she swiftly slips in. Alexander runs to the other side and gets in as well.

INT. CAR - AFTERNOON

GALINA
 (dabbing her face dry)
 Can you believe this weather!

The rain HITS the windscreen in sharp GUSTS.

ALEXANDER
 It will subside soon. What time do
 you have to be at the theater?

Galina glances at her watch.

GALINA

We still have time, but not much.

MUSIC: The Love Theme

Their eyes meet, reflecting a strong mutual attraction. The THUNDERSTORM rages outside, but Galina and Alexander ignore it. Alexander gently strokes Galina's hair as she runs her fingers over his face, tenderly touching his scar.

GALINA

Where did you get this scar?

ALEXANDER

It's a small "souvenir" from the recent war with the Finns.

GALINA

Alexander the warrior. (beat)
I have to make a call. My friend TANYA expects me to be at the theatre. It's her debut tonight.

EXT. PETERHOF GROUNDS - PARKING LOT - LATE AFTERNOON

The deserted parking lot. We see Alexander's car slowly pulling away and continuing down the road. It stops near a secluded Gothic style Cottage.

INT. CAR - LATE AFTERNOON

ALEXANDER

Please wait a minute, I will get the keys so you can make your call.

GALINA

How come you have access to this place?

ALEXANDER

(reluctantly)
The senior officers use it as a weekend retreat.

Alexander gets out of the car and runs towards the cottage.

INT. PETERHOF - GOTHIC COTTAGE - RECEPTION ROOM - LATER

The Gothic style reception area with its fine decor. Galina, agitated, dials the phone. As she TALKS, Alexander enters with two glasses of lemonade. He hands one to Galina. She nods in appreciation and continues TALKING.

GALINA

I am still in Peterhof. It's pouring over here. (she listens for a moment) Please wish Tanya good luck from me. I'll see you all later.

Galina hangs up.

ALEXANDER

No doubts your friend will do fine without you.

GALINA

She will, but I know it would mean a lot to her if I am there.

ALEXANDER

Why?

He takes a sip, looking at Galina with curiosity.

GALINA

Tanya and I have bonded not only professionally, but also through our misfortunes.

Alexander's cheerful expression changes to concern.

ALEXANDER

What do you mean?

GALINA

Tanya's father, a fine journalist, was arrested not too long ago and disappeared without a trace. Her mother was called in for questioning and also vanished. Tanya was thrown out onto the street without any explanation.

ALEXANDER

It's very sad what she has suffered. Some of my...

Galina snaps angrily.

GALINA

Sad? It is outrageous! Not only did she lose her parents, she almost lost her whole future. One evening she appeared on my doorstep devastated and frightened.

ALEXANDER

You helped her.

GALINA
I was also helped once when my life
was shattered in an instant.

ALEXANDER
I am sorry I brought it all up.

Galina changes the subject.

GALINA
You seem to be right at home here.

ALEXANDER
I occasionally have the chance to
spend some time here. The library
is my favorite.

GALINA
(taking a look around)
I see. It's nice over here.

Galina starts browsing. She looks at the paintings and stops
next to one.

GALINA (CONT'D)
It reminds me of one I remember
vividly from my childhood.

ALEXANDER
I suppose childhood memories are
the deepest.

GALINA
True. Nothing has faded away. The
happy moments or the tragic ones.

ALEXANDER
(with boyish enthusiasm)
I remember playing naval war games
with my buddies and watching
sailors departing from the harbor.
How I envied them!

GALINA
I can sense that you are a sailor
at heart.

ALEXANDER
True! (beat) Well, sailor or not, I
am a soldier on the inside.

They exchange glances. Their body language reveals an
undercurrent sensual awareness. Alexander comes closer to
Galina and kisses her. Reluctantly, Galina draws away and
moves towards a window, looking out at the rain, now
subsided.

Alexander, attuned to her reluctance, backs off.

GALINA

It calmed down. We better start moving.

ALEXANDER

Let's go then!

Alexander takes the empty glasses away. Galina, meanwhile, arranges her hair. Alexander returns and they leave.

INT. LENINGRAD - THEATRE - STAGE - EVENING

MUSIC: Excerpt from the "Scheherazade" by Rimsky-Korsakov

The stage is ablaze with colors of the Orient. Tanya, in a silky harem-type costume and adorned with jewels, dances the role of Scheherazade. Her sensuality attracts the Prince.

INT. THEATRE - AUDITORIUM

We see Galina and Alexander among the audience, looking a little awkward in their casual attire.

INT. PRINCIPAL CHOREOGRAPHER'S APARTMENT - LATER

A theatrical style room is BUZZING with excitement. The dancers are enjoying an informal post-performance party. Galina and Alexander are among them. The host, Principal Choreographer, congratulates Tanya. The company CHEERS.

CLOSE ON a passing by male dancer. He is SERGEI, Galina's dancing partner. Noticing Galina, he heads towards her.

SERGEI

There you are! How come you, of all people, arrived late for the show?

Galina exchanges smiles with Alexander.

GALINA

Unpredictable circumstances.

SERGEI

(eyeing Alexander)
What happened?

GALINA

Never mind what happened. This man saved the situation. Please meet Alexander.

Alexander shakes hands with Sergei. Intrigued by Alexander's presence, Galina's friends look at him with curiosity. We see a young MALE DANCER approaching Galina.

YOUNG DANCER
(with a grain of sarcasm)
Looks like the reigning star is
about to be overshadowed by a
rising star.

GALINA
There is enough room for many stars
to shine but, sadly, some never
will, for they are too dull.

Ripples of GIGGLES follow from the nearby dancers. The embarrassed young dancer swiftly disappears into the crowd.

ALEXANDER
You don't budge an inch, do you?

GALINA
Dancers are a breed of their own.
We like to tease. It's a tough
world but equally rewarding.

As the party picks up its momentum, the sudden UPBEAT of a Polka grabs everyone's attention. The chorus of young dancers bursts into a "Kicking Polka". With each kick guests CLAP, cheering on the dancers. The fun continues into the night.

MONTAGE:

MUSIC: The Love Theme

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - LAKE - SUMMER 1940 - DAY

Galina and Alexander boating on the lake, teasing and flirting with each other. The boat accidentally turns over and they fall into the water LAUGHING and SPLASHING.

EXT. LENINGRAD - PARK - FALL - AFTERNOON

Galina and Alexander stroll along the alley.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - WINTER - DAY

Galina and Alexander take a sleigh ride on a "Troika". Later, we see them hurling in the snow, enjoying themselves.

INT. COUNTRYSIDE - CATHERINE PALACE - SPRING - AMBER ROOM

Galina and Alexander, among others, touring the Amber Room.

END OF MONTAGE

EXT. LENINGRAD - MILITARY ACADEMY - MARCH 1941 - AFTERNOON

An imposing building with an ornate facade. Military personnel and cadets enter and exit the building.

INT. MILITARY ACADEMY - LOBBY

A formal lobby BUSTLES with military staff. A vast painting on the wall depicts a fierce battle. A plaque reads:

"He who comes to us with the sword, shall perish by the sword!"

INT. MILITARY ACADEMY - ALEXANDER'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

A formal office with distinct military decor. The desk is surrounded by chairs. A small statue of Peter the Great on his horse dashing into the sky is prominently displayed.

Alexander, looking immaculate in his uniform, sits at the desk and is absorbed in documents. There is a KNOCK on the door, but it doesn't distract him.

The door OPENS and a young LIEUTENANT enters, saluting sharply. Alexander raises his head.

LIEUTENANT
Comrade Colonel, you have been
summoned to attend an emergency
meeting with the Dean.

ALEXANDER
Thank you. I will be there shortly.

The Lieutenant salutes and leaves.

INT. MILITARY ACADEMY - CORRIDOR - AFTERNOON

The Lieutenant CLOSES the door to Alexander's office and walks away. A brass plate affixed to the door reads:

"Assistant Dean Colonel Sokolov"

INT. MILITARY ACADEMY - DEAN'S OFFICE - LATER

A formal office decorated with assorted military trophies and portraits of military heroes.

The grey-haired DEAN of the Academy, an impressive General in both bearing and uniform, paces across the room. He looks preoccupied. Alexander, seated across the desk, listens to him intently.

DEAN

I have disturbing news. Our intelligence has informed us that German reconnaissance has photographed the frontiers of Leningrad and its strategic points.

ALEXANDER

Looks like the non-aggression pact with Hitler has gone down the drain.

DEAN

The so called "peace" with Hitler's Germany stunk rotten to me right from the start! We've been played for suckers, damn it!

ALEXANDER

Hitler's actions are self-evident. He was and still is deceiving us.

The Dean nods grimly in agreement.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

Europe is subdued. Geographically we are extremely vulnerable. We better start preparing defense strategies and re-equipping instead of dismantling.

DEAN

Damn right, but that will require approval from Moscow, as usual...

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - MARCH 1941 - EVENING

An upscale street with elegant apartment buildings stretching along. A car PULLS up in front of one of the buildings. Alexander, in an overcoat, comes out of the car and moves towards the entrance. In his hands he carries a bottle of champagne and a bouquet of flowers. On the way, he places a small object in his breast pocket.

INT. GALINA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

A simply furnished room has an inviting ambiance. A picture of the old St. Petersburg decorates the wall. CHATTER and LAUGHTER ripples around.

Galina, looking attractive, fusses with finishing touches. The doorbell RING. Galina heads for the door and OPENS it. Alexander walks in.

ALEXANDER
Happy Birthday!

He hands Galina the bouquet of fresh flowers and greets her with a kiss. Galina looks at the flowers in disbelief.

GALINA
Thank you. Where did you get fresh flowers at this time of year?

ALEXANDER
It makes no difference as long as they make you happy.

Alexander removes his coat. Tanya takes the flowers and bottle of champagne away. Galina and Alexander enter the room full of guests. The happy company takes their seats at the table. Galina sits at the head of the table with Alexander next to her. Tanya signals for attention and raises her glass.

TANYA
To Galina, our dear friend and a truly wonderful dancer. Happy Birthday!

ALEXANDER
And many more to come!

The joyous CLINGING of glasses follows. The celebration continues and reaches its peak when one of the guests grabs a guitar and starts PLAYING fiery gypsy tunes. The furniture is promptly moved aside and DANCING begins. Everyone takes part.

Galina is pushed into the center. She DANCES with unrestraint exuberance, igniting the rest of the guests. The DANCE becomes a spontaneous celebration of life.

Alexander CLAPS vigorously, watching Galina with delight.

The evening draws to a close. Galina and Alexander escort the guests to the front door.

TANYA
(teasingly)
We shouldn't expect you to show up to the morning class, should we?

Everyone LAUGHS, including Galina.

GALINA
Thank you all for coming.

The company leaves. Galina and Alexander return to the living room. It's in disarray. Galina sinks into the armchair, stretching herself, while Alexander pours champagne into two glasses and hands one to Galina.

MUSIC: The Love Theme

They both take a sip. Alexander pulls a small velvet case out of his breast pocket and opens it.

C.U. on a magnificent engagement ring.

Alexander brings the ring closer to Galina. She looks at the ring, then at Alexander, and slowly rises from the armchair. Alexander slips the ring on Galina's finger. They kiss.

Ignited, she resigns herself to him and the loveliest of all human dances follows.

INT. THEATRE - CHOREOGRAPHY STUDIO - NEXT MORNING

With the MUSIC in the background, we see a line of dancers executing exercises at the barre. Hardworking and glossy, they stretch themselves to the limit.

Galina quietly enters and joins the class. Her friends greet her with discrete smiles, while continuing their exercises.

CLOSE ON the Principal Choreographer as he glances at his watch and at Galina.

Galina is slightly out of step and distracted. The Principal Choreographer's expression turns to disdain. He approaches Galina closely.

PRINCIPAL CHOREOGRAPHER
You are totally off-center. Come
and see me later.

INT. PRINCIPAL CHOREOGRAPHER'S OFFICE - LATER

An untidy room with a multitude of ballet related objects. The Principal Choreographer angrily paces back and forth. Galina, in a leotard and with a towel over her neck, is listening to him.

PRINCIPAL CHOREOGRAPHER
Your class and rehearsal today was
simply pathetic! You better bounce
back and quick!

GALINA
I am just a little tired.

PRINCIPAL CHOREOGRAPHER
 A little tired? No! Romance! That's
 what's distracting you! It will
 ruin your career! The company is
 counting on you. Don't you dare
 disappoint us!

GALINA
 No one is going to be disappointed!

Galina storms out of the office. The Principal Choreographer follows her with a startled expression.

INT. MILITARY HEADQUARTERS (HQ) - FOYER - SPRING 1941 - EVE

A formal foyer with decor illustrating its military heritage. A door from one of the conference rooms swings OPEN and a group of high ranking Officers streams out.

Alexander, Vladimir, and ANOTHER OFFICER walk together in discussion, occasionally saluting the passing by superiors.

VLADIMIR
 Do you agree with the proposal to
 conduct emergency exercises?

ALEXANDER
 It's a necessity!

ANOTHER OFFICER
 That's right! The clock is ticking.
 Those freaking Germans swept
 through Europe like a plague! It
 means only one thing: a crisis is
 looming on the horizon.

ALEXANDER
 Our recent war with the Finns
 showed that we were tried and
 tested, and... we fizzled.

VLADIMIR
 Yet we won over the Fins!

ALEXANDER
 Get serious! A face-saving victory
 and at what human cost!

VLADIMIR
 Well, there is no glory without
 sacrifices. Hey, fellows, let's
 continue our discussion over
 dinner. Discussions are always
 better on a full stomach.

The company LAUGHS.

ALEXANDER

Sorry, I'm having dinner with my wife. It's her evening off.

VLADIMIR

Looks like your Firebird's got a tight grip on you, man. I bet she has her winning ways...

ANOTHER OFFICER

Knock it off, Vlad. Alex is a newly wed and happily married man.

Vladimir's face reflects jealousy.

Alexander shakes hands with his fellow Officers and leaves.

EXT. VILLAGE - COUNTRY HOUSE - BACKYARD - JUNE 1941 - DAY

A well-tended back yard. Clusters of drying fruits hang all over the veranda. Galina, catching the warmth of the sun, is busily placing a flower arrangement. Mila, [now in her late thirties] is pouring jam into jars. The SOUND of an approaching car draws their attention.

EXT. VILLAGE - COUNTRY HOUSE - FRONT - DAY

The car STOPS by the wooden house surrounded by a low fence. Alexander gets out of the car and walks through the gate. As he enters, Galina runs towards him. They embrace.

GALINA

What a pleasant surprise! Come in, try some freshly made jam.

ALEXANDER

Thanks, I'm sure its delicious, but I want a glass of water first.

Mila runs inside the house for the water. Galina and Alexander sit down on a bench.

GALINA

You look concerned. What's the matter?

ALEXANDER

I might be called away. It would be safer for you to be back in the city.

GALINA

You mean leave right away?

ALEXANDER

Not right away, but cut your time
out in the country a little short.

Mila comes back with a glass of water. Alexander gulps it
down, quenching his thirst.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

Thanks Mila. Please say 'Hi' for me
to your men. I bet they are busy
fishing from the early morning.

MILA

Have something to eat.

ALEXANDER

I would love to stay longer, but
duty calls. Good to see you.

For a moment Alexander savors the fresh country air, then
gives Galina a kiss and heads back to his car.

EXT. LENINGRAD - THEATRE SQUARE - JUNE 21, 1941 - EVENING

Galina and Tanya, along with some fellow dancers, exit the
Theatre. Fans surround them hoping to get an autograph. As
Galina reaches Alexander's car, Tanya questions her.

TANYA

Are you coming tomorrow to watch
the graduation performance?

GALINA

You bet! We have quite a vintage.

Alexander OPENS the car door for Galina and they DRIVE off.

INTERIOR/EXTERIOR. LENINGRAD - NEVSKY AVENUE - EVENING

Alexander drives along the Avenue. It's BUZZING with
strollers and happy graduates. Galina rolls down her window
and peers outside.

INT. CAR - EVENING

GALINA

Let's stop for ice cream!

The car SWERVES over to the curb and comes to an abrupt halt.

GALINA (CONT'D)

You are crazy!

ALEXANDER
 Yes I am! I'm crazy about you and
 ice cream.

They LAUGH and exit the car.

EXT. LENINGRAD - NEVSKY AVENUE - EVENING

Galina and Alexander step out of a cafe each holding an ice cream cone and enjoying them like kids. Alexander takes a bite from his scoop and, accidentally, it falls to the ground. Galina GIGGLES and extends her ice cream to share it with Alexander. He smiles and takes a bite.

We see them strolling along the promenade, joining the crowd.

INT. GALINA'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - JUNE 22, 1941 - NIGHT

The room is drenched in TWILIGHT. A gentle breeze flutters the curtains through the open windows. Galina and Alexander are asleep. A sudden telephone RING awakens them both. Alexander picks up the receiver and listens with a tense expression. Galina watches him with apprehension.

ALEXANDER
 I will be there right away.

He hangs up and dashes out of bed.

GALINA
 What's happened?

ALEXANDER
 I've been summoned to HQ
 immediately.

Alexander hastily puts his uniform on. Galina, alarmed, watches him in silence. Alexander gives her a quick kiss and leaves in a hurry.

INT. LENINGRAD - MILITARY HQ - MEETING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

A formal room with its shutters almost drawn. Numerous portraits loom down from the wall. A small group of Leningrad Party Officials and Senior Officers are seated at the table. The room is thick with nerve-wracking tension.

Presiding over the meeting is a DEPUTY PARTY CHIEF, a slim young man, exuding confidence. He lights up his cigarette and glances at the wall clock. It reads 4:45am.

A sudden KNOCK on the door sends a wave of nervous attention among the group. A duty Sergeant enters the room.

SERGEANT
 (saluting)
 Colonel Sokolov is here.

DEPUTY PARTY CHIEF
 Let him in and issue a special pass
 under his name.

The Sergeant salutes and leaves. Alexander enters and greets the group. He takes the seat motioned to him. As the Deputy about to address the group, the telephone RINGS. The Deputy picks it up and listens. Gradually his face changes to a cold mask. The group waits with anticipation. The Deputy hangs up. A moment of silence follows.

DEPUTY PARTY CHIEF (CONT'D)
 Comrades! The Germans have attacked
 our country and are bombing our
 cities as we speak. This message
 has been confirmed by Moscow.

The faces of everyone show fury but no surprise. The room ERUPTS with fiery comments.

The light of dawn breaks through the shutters. We see Alexander and the Deputy TALKING quietly by the window.

ALEXANDER
 What a blunder! We could've taken
 measures long before the attack.
 (beat) Where is our PARTY CHIEF?

DEPUTY PARTY CHIEF
 On vacation. He's been summoned
 back. Meanwhile, we have to deal
 with this blow as best we can.
 Damn! Damn! Damn!

EXT. GALINA'S APARTMENT - BALCONY - JUNE 22, 1941 - MORNING

Music: Vocalise By Rachmaninov

An upscale neighborhood laced with water canals. It's peaceful and tranquil. Galina, wrapped in her light gown, stands on the balcony enjoying the view.

INT. GALINA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Galina passes through the room and heads towards the open trunk stuffed with ballet practice clothes and point shoes. She tosses several pairs into a knapsack and moves away. The phone RINGS. Galina drops the knapsack and rushes towards it. As she listens, her demeanor turns cold.

GALINA
No, Vladimir, he is not at home.
Alex was called earlier.

VLADIMIR (V.O.)
Well, I have some electrifying
news, Firebird!

GALINA
What is it?

VLADIMIR (V.O.)
I don't feel like telling you. I
mean...

GALINA
Goodbye then and, please, stop
calling me Firebird.

Irritated, Galina hangs up.

INT. GALINA'S APARTMENT - CORRIDOR - MORNING

As Galina LOCKS the door to the apartment, the phone RINGS
again. She stops and hesitates for a moment.

INT. MILITARY HQ - OFFICE - MORNING

Alexander anxiously paces the floor, holding the telephone in
his hand. We hear the RING on the other side, but there is no
response.

INT. GALINA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - CORRIDOR - MORNING

Ignoring the RING, Galina continues on her way out.

INT. THEATRE - LOBBY - JUNE 22, 1941 - MID-DAY

VIEW ON the crowd gathered in the lobby. Gradually, more and
more people stream towards the lobby. Some dancers are still
in their costumes. Galina and her colleagues stand among the
crowd, anxiously awaiting the radio broadcast. Everyone
becomes increasingly agitated. A clock on the wall shows 12
o'clock noon. A VOICE over the radio announces:

VOICE (V.O.)
Attention! Attention! Today, at
four o'clock in the morning,
without any declaration of war,
German troops have attacked our
country...

The broadcast continues. The crowd is dumbfounded. Gradually, people begin to disperse. Galina, shaken by the news, rushes out of the building.

INT. GALINA'S APARTMENT - EARLY JULY 1941 - EVENING

The apartment is in disarray. Alexander hastily packs his military bag, while Galina folds his shirts.

ALEXANDER

The war is taking a turn for the worse. I arranged a place for you on a flight bound for the far away Eastern province.

GALINA

Our dance company is leaving next week for the interior.

ALEXANDER

Sounds safe enough. You'd better start packing too.

GALINA

I'm not leaving.

ALEXANDER

(stunned)
What do you mean?

GALINA

Exactly what I said.

EXT. LENINGRAD - TRAIN STATION - PLATFORM - JULY 1941 - DAY

The platform swarms with a chaotic crowd. People, bent under their luggage, push and SHOUT. Armed soldiers stand between the crowd and the trains, trying to establish order.

Galina forces her way through and reaches her fellow dancers. Spotting Galina, Tanya leaps off the train.

TANYA

You are out of your mind to stay here. I beg of you to come with us.

GALINA

No. I hate the idea of leaving Alexander and the city...

We see Galina exchanging emotional good-byes with her colleagues. Sergei, noticing Galina, hops off the train.

SERGEI

We will dance together again once
this is all over. Take care.

Galina nods. The station bell RINGS and the SHRIEK of the whistle follows. People cling to the windows of the train. The farewell CRIES become one big chaotic MOAN.

The train gradually starts MOVING away. Tanya and Sergei leap aboard.

Galina, pushed from all sides, stands numb, watching the train disappear out of sight.

EXT. LENINGRAD - NEVSKY AVENUE - JULY 1941 - MORNING

The armored vehicles, military units and detachments of sailors move in a column along the Avenue. As they pass, civilians bid them farewell.

The nearby mobilization point swarms with volunteers, both men and women. An illustrated poster on the wall reads:

"The Motherland calls for a Holy War!"

Trucks, cramped with children, are about to depart. Devastated mothers desperately grasp their children's hands.

Galina walks along the sidewalk. She stops for a moment and watches a solemn procession. Glancing at her watch, she briskly walks away, continually looking back.

VIEW ON the Hermitage Museum. At its entrance, the bowed giant figures of the Atlantis shoulder their burdens. Galina enters the Hermitage.

INT. HERMITAGE - CHIEF CURATOR'S OFFICE - MORNING

The ornate office is in disarray. Wrapped artifacts and boxes are scattered around. The CHIEF CURATOR, a gracious elderly man, sits at his desk and TALKS on the phone.

CURATOR

Yes, I am expecting Galina
Sokolova. Please show her in.

He gets out of his chair, buttoning up his jacket on the way. Galina enters the office.

GALINA

Good Morning.

CURATOR
 (cordially)
 Hopefully a good one. What can I do
 for you, Galina-ballerina?

GALINA
 I'll get straight to the point. Our
 ballet company has been evacuated.
 For personal reasons, I decided to
 stay and would like to join the
 volunteers here at the Hermitage.
 I'll take on any task to help out.

INT. HERMITAGE - EXHIBITION HALL - LATER

The bare-walled exhibition hall is filled with crates, boxes,
 etc. With great synergy volunteers pack away the collection.

Galina, escorted by the Curator, enters the hall. The Curator
 introduces her to the team. Galina is instructed and given a
 lab coat.

CURATOR
 You may start right away. We are
 running against time. Our shifts
 are round-the-clock.

The Curator shakes hands with Galina and leaves.

We see Galina packing and cataloging the art collection along
 with the rest of the volunteers.

INT. LENINGRAD - MILITARY HQ - AUGUST 1941 - MORNING

The HQ premises BUZZES with frantic activities. The overall
 atmosphere is that of a pressure-cooker.

INT. MILITARY HQ - MAP ROOM - MORNING

Members of the Defense Council are circled around the map.
 The ARMY COMMANDER, a gloomy old guard in his sixties,
 addresses the group.

ARMY COMMANDER
 Comrades, the situation is grave
 and getting worse. We need more
 reinforcement. We have to mobilize
 more for the front.

SENIOR GENERAL
 (snaps angrily)
 We have hardly any defence force
 left and no ammunition.

The Army Commander clenches his fists in frustration.

ALEXANDER

It is not a matter of mobilization alone. How can we put on an effective defense when every useful tactic is turned down by Moscow!

Instantly, tension envelopes the room. The PARTY CHIEF, a stocky man in his mid-forties, interjects.

PARTY CHIEF

The Germans are rolling on us and time is against us yet, comrades, we have to salvage the situation at whatever cost!

ARMY COMMANDER

(with resignation)

I am going to call upon the "Red Marines". They are our last resource.

INT. GALINA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - AUGUST 1941 - NIGHT

A DIM, bare-walled room with taped windows. A colorful carpet is the only bright spot left. Galina, looking exhausted and wearing pajamas, TALKS to Alexander on the phone. The clock on the wall shows 2:30 am.

MUSIC: The Love Theme

ALEXANDER (V.O.)

We are sweating blood here. Between the front line and the HQ meetings there is not even a moment to breathe.

GALINA

Be safe wherever you are.

ALEXANDER (V.O.)

Your love and loyalty sustain me.

GALINA

I feel the same way.

ALEXANDER (V.O.)

Galina, you need to know... Germans are on the outskirts of the city. It would be better if you...

Galina interrupts.

GALINA

What about Mila? If the Germans are that close, she might be trapped.

ALEXANDER (V.O.)

I'll see what I can do. Don't lose your ration card. Love you.

Galina smiles and hangs up.

EXT. LENINGRAD - LATE AUGUST 1941 - DAY

The camouflaged city. Illustrated billboards proclaim:

"Save Our City!" and "Death for Death! Blood for Blood!"

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - GALINA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

An armored vehicle THUNDERS along at full-speed. It stops near Galina's apartment building. Alexander, looking worn out, gets out of the vehicle and helps Mila out. Mila, shaken and battered, is barely able to stand. Alexander escorts her to the building.

ALEXANDER

You will stay with Galina. Here is the key (hands his key to Mila).
Sorry, I have to run.

Alexander hops inside the vehicle and drives away.

EXT. STREET - NEAR THE BAKERY - DAY

Galina rides her bicycle on the sidewalk of the street. She reaches a long line outside the bakery and joins it.

CLOSE ON the clouds of smoke rising up in the sky. People begin to panic.

VOICES

What happened? What's that smell?

PASSER-BY

The bloody Germans bombed the food warehouse. It's gone up in smoke!

The SOUND of the air siren is heard and the SHELLING begins. The terrified crowd disperses, dashing for cover.

Galina drops her bike and runs to safety. An elderly woman trips over Galina's bike and falls over it. Noticing it, Galina quickly returns and helps her up, making the woman run alongside her.

EXT. STREET - OUTSIDE THE BAKERY - LATER

Galina, together with others, cleaning up the rubble. A layer of thick debris descends upon nearby trees, changing their appearance to deathly pale.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

Galina, covered with debris, heads towards her apartment building. As she reaches it, she lifts her head up.

On the balcony, gazing off into the distance, stands Mila.

Galina rushes inside the building, dragging her bike along.

INT. GALINA'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Galina and Mila embrace with urgency and relief.

GALINA

I was worried sick about you!

MILA

The Germans machine-gunned most of the villagers. The elderly and the children were dragged off to the hay barns and burned alive. Why such slaughter?

GALINA

I have no answer. I only know it is cruel. How did you escape?

MILA

I managed to hide. Later, I was running down the road towards the city when Alexander was driving by with a convoy. I called to him. He stopped. I wouldn't have made it otherwise.

GALINA

We'll survive together. I will take care of you. Any news from Valya? I've heard Ukraine is in shambles. I am dead worried about her.

EXT. LENINGRAD - OUTSKIRTS - FRONT LINE - DAY

The aerial battle. Under the hail of CROSSFIRE Germans and Russians fanatically mow each other down.

INT. MILITARY HQ - WAR ROOM - SEPTEMBER 1941 - DAY

The room is clouded in cigarette smoke. Members of the Defense Council are circled around a map in a stormy discussion. A telephone RINGS.

The gloomy Army Commander picks it up. As he listens, his face is stunned. He hangs up. Immediate tension sweeps the room.

ARMY COMMANDER

The Germans ripped through our defense belts. The last railway connecting us to the rest of the country is now cut off.

Mortal silence follows. All faces express the gravity of the situation.

SENIOR GENERAL

What a disaster! It could have been prevented!

ARMY COMMANDER

Could have! Should have!

ALEXANDER

Germans might have won the battle, but not the war. The war has only just begun.

PARTY CHIEF

Comrades, the fall of the city is unthinkable. It has enormous military and political importance. Something needs to be done urgently.

INT. MILITARY HQ - CONFERENCE ROOM - FEW DAYS LATER

Standing by the map and sweating out decisions are the members of the Defense Council and Political Officers. The door swings OPEN and a NEW ARMY COMMANDER, along with his adjutants walks in. His striking persona leaves no doubt as to who is in charge. He moves towards the presiding spot motioned to him by the Party Chief.

PARTY CHIEF

Comrades! We are honored to have a New Commander.

The group salutes in unison. The New Commander, a Marshal by rank, a robust man in his mid-forties, addresses the group.

NEW COMMANDER
 (dismissing formalities)
 I need the latest briefing of the
 current situation. Just the bare
 facts and no bogus numbers!

PARTY CHIEF
 The situation is critical. We are
 besieged, but the city itself is
 still in our hands. Citizens are
 ready for a street to street fight.

An anxious silence envelopes the room.

NEW COMMANDER
 I question not only the leadership,
 but the adequacy of the strategies.

SENIOR GENERAL
 We have sufficient strategies.
 However, we couldn't carry them out
 on heroism alone! Sending unarmed
 men to their slaughter will not
 bring us victory.

ALEXANDER
 We are desperate for ammunition.
 Also, we need to have permission to
 retaliate without orders from
 Moscow. Time is of the essence.

The New Commander cuts him off.

NEW COMMANDER
 You will talk when I tell you!

A Secret Police [NKVD] Officer stares at Alexander with a
 cynical gaze. The Senior General notices it.

PARTY CHIEF
 For the time being, we are just
 trying hard to "plug the holes".

NEW COMMANDER
 To salvage the city we need to do
 more than to "plug the holes!"

The New Commander presides over the meeting with great
 authority. From time to time he casts a glance at Alexander.

PARTY CHIEF
 As a last resort, the plan is to
 blow up everything in the city;
 including the Baltic Fleet.

NEW COMMANDER
I dismiss it! We will defend and
press on at whatever cost!

He STRIKES the table with his fist, causing objects to
RATTLE.

NEW COMMANDER (CONT'D)
No German thug will be parading
down the city Square! It's us or
them. Victory or extermination! Go
and do your duty! As for armaments,
I will make sure you get them soon.

The group rapidly disperses. The Senior General makes a
signal to Alexander to remain.

INT. HQ - SENIOR GENERAL'S OFFICE - LATER

The office is in disarray. The Senior General is seated at
his desk, jammed with maps. Alexander stands facing him.

SENIOR GENERAL
You are a skilful strategist and I
understand your direct mind, but I
would hate the NKVD inquisitor to
create a dossier on you. If you
want to keep your head - keep your
tongue in-check, damn it!

ALEXANDER
It's not about me, it's what I
stand for.

EXT. LENINGRAD - OUTSKIRTS - FRONTLINE - MORNING

The scorched ground with remains of military debris. Soldiers
bustle around tanks. Alexander, along with the field Officers
observes the situation. He projects authority without
domination. Gradually, soldiers cluster around him. Alexander
mounts a tank and addresses everyone.

ALEXANDER
My fellow soldiers, brothers! The
survival of our city and lift of
the siege rests on our shoulders
alone. We have to retake what we've
lost meter by bloody meter! The
lives we lost and the blood we shed
will only strengthen our will to
fight! Our war is just! We will
destroy the enemy for the
humiliation and torture they
inflicted upon us. Leningrad
belongs to us!

Inspired, the soldiers erupt with OUTBURSTS of patriotism.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - EARLY OCTOBER 1941 - DUSK

The street is heaped up with hastily built defense structures and littered with German "swastika" leaflets. A sudden brisk wind blows the leaflets into the canal's murky waters, where they sink. The distant SHELLING is audible.

Galina and Mila, carrying a makeshift stove, hurry towards their apartment building. Stumbling over the stove, they enter the building.

INT. GALINA'S APARTMENT - DUSK

The apartment is darkened by its covered windows. Galina and Mila BURST through the doorway. Placing the stove somehow, they quickly leave. The sound of SHELLING approaches closer.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - BASEMENT STAIRCASE - LATER

Shoved from all sides, Galina and Mila join the panic-stricken people. The crowd tumbles down the stairs in a desperate attempt to reach the safety of the basement.

INT. BASEMENT - EVENING

Poorly LIT basement. Galina and Mila stand among the cramped crowd. Mila compulsively crosses her heart in a prayer. Suddenly, a new ear-splitting NOISE overtakes the background.

EXT. SKY OVER THE CITY - EVENING

The WHISTLING "Katyusha" rockets stream across the dark sky, ripping it in a hail of FIRE.

INT. BASEMENT - EVENING

People, pressed to one another, embrace as the ground tremors under them. One of the WOMEN CRIES hysterically.

WOMAN

What is it now?! An earthquake! We
are bombed, starved, our husbands
and sons are killed! We are doomed!

No one reacts, being immersed in their own horror.

GALINA

Stop it! Pull yourself together!

All eyes are riveted on Galina.

MILA
 (in a whisper)
 God! Please do not let us succumb
 to the hell imposed on us! Let us
 remain human.

EXT. GALINA'S APARTMENT - BALCONY - NIGHT

The SOUND of the bombs gradually subsides. Galina and Mila stand on the balcony gazing at the GLOWING horizon in awe.

EXT. LENINGRAD - OUTSKIRTS - OBSERVATION POINT - NEXT MORNING

The battle's aftermath. The sky is obscured by smoke. The ground is a wasteland. Scattered around are the A-A (anti-aircraft) posts. A group of the Defense Council, eagerly looking through binoculars, scans over the occupied zone.

NEW COMMANDER
 Well, those German pricks are regrouping. Interesting...

PARTY CHIEF
 Look, some are moving their asses out, some are digging in.

ALEXANDER
 They are shifting. Looks like they are setting a mine field.

NEW COMMANDER
 It's a good time to step on their jugular all over again.

ALEXANDER
 Rest assured, the sweeping victory for them is over. From now on they will spit blood for every inch they want to grab.

NEW COMMANDER
 The enemy must not be given a moment's rest. We shall hammer them and wipe them out!

INT. MILITARY HQ - MAP ROOM - MID OCTOBER - EVENING

The panel of the Defense Council in discussion.

PARTY CHIEF
 I can see a tiny light at the end of the tunnel.

NEW COMMANDER

Don't get overexcited. We hold the city by the skin of our teeth. Nothing is accomplished until we've reached the bloody gates of Berlin!

New Commander moves to his desk and starts clearing it out.

NEW COMMANDER (CONT'D)

Well, comrades, I have been called to take over command of the Moscow defense. I am leaving tomorrow. My deputy will take over. As for now, the situation in Leningrad is stabilized. Your objective is to press on and on regardless of heavy losses.

The group stands at attention ready to salute. The Party Chief picks up the phone, smiling mischievously.

PARTY CHIEF

Nina, bring it now.

The door OPENS and a young female Officer enters the room. In front of her she pushes a trolley displaying a bottle of vodka and refreshments.

CLOSE ON on New Commander's mellowed face.

The female Officer pours vodka into the glasses right to their brims. Everyone takes a glass and raises it in a toast.

PARTY CHIEF (CONT'D)

To Leningrad, our Northern capital!

The CLINGING of glasses follows and the company empties them to their bottoms. Everyone helps themselves to refreshments, CHATTING along. Finally, the New Commander makes a round of handshakes. As he approaches Alexander he stops.

NEW COMMANDER

Well, Colonel Sokolov, I reviewed your defense strategies and have realized you are an inspiring leader. I have recommended you for a promotion.

CLOSE ON Alexander looking affirmed and proud.

NEW COMMANDER (CONT'D)

I respect a soldier who stands his ground. Wars, my friend, are won by strong leaders.

ALEXANDER

And by their brave soldiers!

New Commander gestures a "thumb up" and leaves the room.

EXT. LENINGRAD - STREET - DECEMBER 31, 1941 - DAY

The winter city covered with snow. The public transportation is frozen in place. People drag themselves up the street.

Galina and Mila, wrapped in winter coats, briskly walk along the street. Mila glances at her watch.

MILA

I mustn't be late for my shift.

GALINA

It's so unfortunate that it falls on New Year's Eve. We will make it up after the war.

They embrace and go their separate ways.

INT. GALINA'S APARTMENT - NEW YEAR'S EVE 1941/42

MUSIC: The Love Theme

A DIM living room with stripped walls and covered windows. A bottle of wine and couple of glasses are neatly set on the table. A single candle shades LIGHT over it.

Galina, wrapped in her winter jacket, sits next to the makeshift stove and listens to the radio.

The door OPENS and Alexander walks in. In his hand he carries a package. Galina runs toward him. They embrace with urgency.

GALINA

Just in time! I hated the thought of spending New Year's Eve without you.

ALEXANDER

Me either. I am off for an hour. How I've missed you!

On the radio the twelve STRIKES are heard. Alexander quickly fills two glasses with wine and unwraps the package, taking several cans out of it. They raise their glasses in a toast.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

Happy New Year! We'll make it happy! Where is Mila?

GALINA

She is working the night shift.

Galina and Alexander lose themselves to explosive passion.

INT. MILITARY HQ - ALEXANDER'S ROOM - WINTER 1942 - EVENING

An austere room furnished with basic necessities. On top of the desk is a photo of Galina. Alexander sits at the desk and is absorbed in charts. The telephone RING. Alexander answers.

VLADIMIR (V.O.)
(with bravado)
There you are, buddy!

ALEXANDER
Hey, Vlad! I haven't heard from you for a while. Where have you been?

VLADIMIR (V.O.)
I am back from a brief stay in Moscow. I shifted my career and...

ALEXANDER
(in disbelief)
You did what?

VLADIMIR (V.O.)
I've joined a Secret Police [NKVD] division. They needed to inject "new blood" into the city's security apparatus. I am right at the core of the action, finally.

ALEXANDER
I see. Where are you calling from?

VLADIMIR (V.O.)
Surprise, surprise... I am actually in the building. I guess we are summoned to the same meeting.

Alexander CHUCKLES and glances at his watch.

ALEXANDER
We still have more than an hour. Let's meet in the dining room.

VLADIMIR (V.O.)
Good idea. I'm starving!

INT. MILITARY HQ - DINING ROOM - EVENING

A large room protected from shelling and furnished with tables and chairs. Military personnel walk in and out.

Alexander and Vladimir [Vladimir in his new NKVD uniform] sit at the table. A young female Officer serves them tea with sandwiches. Vladimir gives her a predatory look.

VLADIMIR

A treat for the eyes, isn't she?

He gestures for the female Officer to come back. She returns.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

Missy, bring me some "elixir of life" (an expression for vodka).

ALEXANDER

Vlad, you shouldn't be drinking before the meeting.

Vladimir looks at Alexander's epaulets signifying a General.

VLADIMIR

What the hell! I am at my best after a couple of shots. (beat) So, I see you are moving up in rank. Well, you are not the only one...

The female Officer returns with two shots of vodka. Without a "thank you" Vladimir knocks it back and devours his sandwich. Alexander nods to the female officer in appreciation.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

How is your Firebird? Where about did you evacuate her to?

ALEXANDER

Galina never left Leningrad.

VLADIMIR

You are kidding! Staying in this savage killing field?! Doing what? Leaping on the empty stage to a non-existent audience?

ALEXANDER

Galina is doing her part dutifully. Hurry up, we mustn't be late.

VLADIMIR

You go, I'll catch up. The scent of this bitch whetted my appetite...

INT. MILITARY HQ - MAP ROOM - LATER

The room is charged with tension. Members of the Defence Council are in an argument.

PARTY CHIEF

The city is paranoid. People are dying by the thousands from hunger and cold. We are on borrowed time, damn it!

SENIOR GENERAL

Our priority is warfare, and then welfare. I have a report that the ice is steel-solid, strong enough to bear the tanks and troops.

VLADIMIR

The winter has always been our most faithful ally. Just ask Napoleon.

A ripple of LAUGHTER follows.

ALEXANDER

Good point, however, proper coordination is essential for a favorable outcome of the upcoming battle.

Vladimir interrupts in an authoritarian manner.

VLADIMIR

To secure a favorable outcome I will enforce full orders on my penal detachment. There will be no mercy to wimps and turncoats in our own backyard. My tough guys will gun them all. Fear is a weapon!

INT. MILITARY HQ - CORRIDOR - EVENING

Alexander and Vladimir walk alongside the busy corridor, CHATTING on their way.

ALEXANDER

Looks like you have been through tough schooling in your honorable NKVD organization.

Vladimir puts his arm around Alexander's shoulder.

VLADIMIR

I sure have. He who knows which move to make at the right time will call the shots. As a chess player you know that well.

ALEXANDER

Shrewd, but don't get carried away.

VLADIMIR

Listen, you do your duty, I do mine. We must look to the rear no less than we look to the front. Patriotism is not going to win this war. Ruthlessness will!

(MORE)

VLADIMIR (cont'd)

We must be more ruthless than our
enemy. Beat your own and others
will fear you!

EXT. LENINGRAD - NEVSKY AVENUE - SUMMER 1942 - DAY

A bright summer day. People stroll along shattered streets. Groups of sailors pass by a ruined playground.

Trams, jammed with passengers, cross back and forth. On the side of the trams a banner reads:

"Happy Navy Day!" and "Baltic sailors forward to Victory!"

Galina, Alexander and Mila walk out of the bustling book store and head towards a wooden structure visible in the distance. The rest of the people are heading in the same direction.

EXT. NEVSKY AVENUE - IMPROVISED CEREMONIAL SPOT - LATER

VIEW ON a fortified Admiralty (Naval HQ). A hastily built structure, crudely decorated, serves as an improvised ceremonial spot. The banners read:

"Stand to the last!" and "Long live our Baltic Fleet!"

Standing around and listening to the Navy Commander are the Navy and Military Officers and ordinary citizens. Alexander, Galina and Mila are among them. At the end of the speech the crowd APPLAUDS and parts, clinging to the outside of the sidewalks. People become edgy with anticipation.

A humble horde of German prisoners approaches in the distance. Led by armed guards, they shuffle down the road, approaching the spectators.

People, consumed with vengeance, gesture at them with hatred. A group of crippled veterans, positioned at the front, HOWLS at the Germans maliciously.

The pathetic procession passes by Galina, Alexander and Mila. They stare at the Germans with open resentment. One of the passing by prisoners gives Galina a prolonged gaze. Provoked, she dashes forth and spits on his face.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - MORNING

Galina walks out of her apartment building into the scorched street. Nearby, a group of starving people are butchering a dead horse and devouring it raw. Galina continues on her way, passing by women lugging pails of water on their sleighs. Soon, she reaches a line outside the bakery and joins it.

INT. BAKERY - MORNING

The female volunteer behind the counter cuts tiny slices from the loaves of bread and weighs them with great precision. It Galina's turn. She hands Galina her meager ration. Galina accepts it and hungrily eats it on her way out.

INT. HERMITAGE - EXHIBITION HALL - DAY

A bare-walled exhibition hall BUSTLES with people. The sound of SHELLING is audible, but people are too excited to hear it. The Chief Curator welcomes the citizens.

CURATOR

Dear friends! Thank you all for coming despite this dreadful time. No bombs will stop our poetry meetings. We will not let culture die! Our walls are broken but our spirit is not!

People listen to Galina as she recites a verse by Pushkin.

GALINA

"I love the city of Peter's making,
I love thy harmonious austere. And
Neva's sovereign waters breaking
Along her banks of granite sheer."

Uplifted, the audience asks for more.

GALINA (CONT'D)

"Show your colors, city of Peter
Stand steadfast like..."

A sudden EXPLOSION is heard right outside. It SHATTERS the windows and shakes the premises. The disoriented crowd plunges into panic. We see Galina lying motionless on the floor.

INT. HOSPITAL - LATE EVENING

The premises, of what was formerly a Church, converted into a hospital. The medical personnel, in hospital white, look under pressure.

Mila and a NURSE carry a wounded soldier lying on a stretcher. As they walk along the corridor, they pass by a pile of covered bodies set aside as "Dead".

C.U. on Galina's lifeless hand sticking out from beneath the cover, exposing her engagement ring and wedding band.

Mila, looking at Galina's hand, recognizes it.

MILA
 (to the nurse)
 Stop for a second. I don't believe
 it! It couldn't be...

The nurse and Mila stop, placing the stretcher on the floor. Mila swiftly moves towards the pile of bodies and uncovers Galina. Shocked, she desperately shakes her.

NURSE
 (checking Galina's pulse)
 She is not dead. Who is she?

MILA
 She is my family... My sister.

INT. HOSPITAL - INTENSIVE CARE - DAYS LATER

The ward is packed with wounded. An on-duty nurse walks from cot to cot checking on medical reports. Mila, while tending to one of the wounded, watches the nurse closely.

CLOSE ON Galina. She is in coma and her hand is attached to an I.V. The nurse stops by Galina's cot and reads her medical report. Her expression turns grim. The nurse leaves the ward, carrying Galina's medical report with her.

INT. HOSPITAL - FRONT DESK - DAY

We see the nurse talking to the desk clerk, pointing at Galina's report. The clerk dials the phone.

INT. HOSPITAL - INTENSIVE CARE - DAYS LATER - EVENING

Mila, tending to others, keeps an eye on Galina. Suddenly, Galina makes a feeble SOUND as if in a state of regaining consciousness. Instantly, Mila runs out of the ward.

The door swings OPEN and a DOCTOR rushes through towards Galina. Mila follows him.

DOCTOR
 (checking Galina's pulse)
 Easy, easy...

Galina is delirious.

MILA
 Wake up, I know you can hear me.
 Open your eyes...

INT. HOSPITAL - CORRIDOR - EVENING

Alexander, drained and exhausted, hastily moves alongside the corridor. He reaches the front desk and talks to the clerk. The clerk shows him the way to the intensive care.

INT. HOSPITAL - INTENSIVE CARE

MUSIC: The Love Theme

Alexander and the doctor stand next to Galina's cot, TALKING quietly. Alexander carefully sits down beside Galina, clasping her hand in his.

DOCTOR

It's a miracle she is alive. We almost lost her...

As Galina struggles to open her eyes, Alexander gently kisses her hands.

ALEXANDER

Open your eyes. It's me...

Galina responds with a tiny smile and slowly opens her eyes.

DOCTOR

Looks like she is going to make it.

INT. GALINA'S APARTMENT - WINTER 1943 - EVENING

A half-dark room. A candle casts a warm LIGHT over it. Galina and Mila, sharing one potato, are glued to the radio.

VOICE (V.O.)

Attention, attention! The troops of our joint fronts have broken the siege of Leningrad.

Over the radio the SOUND of a pounding heartbeat plays loudly, a reminder that the city is alive. Galina and Mila embrace with joy.

EXT. ANTI-AIRCRAFT (AA) STATION - SPRING, 1943 - DUSK

The AA emplacement with poster on the wall. It reads:

"Stand to the last!"

Galina, outfitted for combat, is on shift along with her comrades-in-arms and on-duty OFFICER.

We see the sky with a formation of German aircraft THUNDERING towards the city. Alarmed, everyone takes their position. The Officer CALLS.

OFFICER
Ready! Fire!

Galina is focused on the target. She FIRES zealously and with purpose. The rest of the group also SHOOTS mercilessly. Several German aircraft are hit and spin down. One of the MALE VOLUNTEERS watches Galina in action.

MALE VOLUNTEER
(to on-duty Officer)
Look at this one! (pointing at Galina) She is an axe on the block!

OFFICER
(looking at Galina)
She is new. Just completed a training crash course, but the woman has nerve!

MALE VOLUNTEER
I wouldn't want to be her enemy!

INT. GALINA'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - SPRING 1943 - EVENING

A DIM bedroom with clothes strewn on the floor. Galina and Alexander lying in bed. Alexander gently pulls Galina closer.

ALEXANDER
You are endangering yourself too much. Being an AA gunner is not...

GALINA
Aren't you staring death in the face every day of your life?

ALEXANDER
Don't compare.

GALINA
Ever since my childhood I've learned that fate rules a person's life, not circumstance. Life is full of risks, but some are worth taking.

They kiss, losing themselves to passion.

INT. GALINA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Galina is busy practicing her routine exercises.

GALINA
Dance or die, die or dance!

EXT. LENINGRAD - OPERETTA THEATRE - DAY

The crowd of military and civilians flock inside the Operetta Theatre. Galina and Alexander enter with the rest.

INT. OPERETTA THEATRE - AUDITORIUM - DAY

The auditorium, cramped with people, BUZZES with excitement. The sound of an artillery BARRAGE is audible in the distance, but no one pays attention. Faces reflect anticipation.

INT. OPERETTA THEATRE - STAGE - DAY

The bare stage poorly LIT with no background decor. We see the violinist concluding his SOLO and receiving generous APPLAUSE.

INT. OPERETTA THEATRE - BACKSTAGE - DRESSING ROOM - DAY

A large room BUSTLES with performers. They are hastily dressed in ill-fitted costumes, but are excited. One of the performers suddenly faints and is immediately helped off.

Galina is ready to take her turn. Suddenly, she pulls her bright costume off and covers herself with drab pieces of fabric lying nearby, changing her appearance to a shadow of a person. Fellow performers look at her in disbelief.

INT. OPERETTA THEATRE - STAGE - DAY

Breaking away from the classical style, Galina improvises her own choreography, giving herself up to her inspiration.

Her DANCE symbolizes a spirit of a Phoenix; burned but rising from the ashes. Galina ends her dance in exaltation of life over death.

INT. OPERETTA THEATRE - AUDITORIUM - DAY

VIEW ON gripped audience. A silence erupts with APPLAUSE.

Alexander, looking proud of Galina, APPLAUDS with the rest.

INT. GALINA'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - SUMMER 1943 - DAY

A spotlessly clean room flooded with sunlight. Galina and Mila are making finishing touches as they spread a colorful carpet on the floor.

MILA

Great! We are not going to live like caged animals any longer.

Galina surveys the room with her eyes.

GALINA

Something is missing. Flowers, of course! I will quickly go get some.

Galina leaves, grabbing her bicycle on the way.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

A shell-gouged garden is ablaze with flowers. Galina gets off her bicycle and picks some flowers, pausing to enjoy their fragrance. As she reaches out for yet another flower, a heavy BLAST is heard. A SIREN follows. Galina hops on her bike and speeds away, carrying her flowers with her.

EXT. STREET - DAY

In a bedlam of NOISE, a stream of people flee in panic. Galina races against the crowd, colliding with a WOMAN.

WOMAN

Don't go in that direction. There was an explosion... Don't...

Ignoring the warning, Galina races ahead.

EXT. OUTSIDE GALINA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - AFTERNOON

The ripped open building with one row of rooms grotesquely exposed. Fire fighters run around, trying to free survivors. No one cries. Faces reflect exhaustion in the sight of collective misery.

Galina drops her bike and thrusts herself towards the hill of rubble, losing her flowers on the way. One of the rescuers tries to stop her, but she continues to climb up.

EXT. GALINA'S FORMER APARTMENT

The household is a wreck. Galina pushes through the rubble. As she grabs the curtain, Mila's lifeless body emerges.

C.U. on Galina's collapsed face. In anguish, she lets out an agonizing HOWL. A VOICE through the loud speaker announces:

VOICE (V.O.)
Attention! Attention! For safety
reasons all rescuers and survivors
must clear out at once!

With a quick farewell kiss, Galina pulls away from Mila's body and descends down. As she reaches the ground, she takes a painful look at the ruins, grabs her bike, and speeds away.

The FIRE spreads over the ruins, engulfing it entirely.

EXT. MILITARY HQ - LATER - EARLY EVENING

A camouflaged compound of the Military HQ.

Galina, almost unrecognizable, approaches the main entrance and gets off her bike. The armed GUARDS block her way.

GUARD
Who are you? You need a pass to get
through.

GALINA
(blank expression)
I don't have a pass. I am here to
see my husband, General Sokolov.

One of the guards instantly rushes inside the building. The other one keeps observing Galina with a puzzled expression. Soon, the previous guard emerges out of the building and approaches Galina with urgency.

GUARD
General Sokolov has been informed.
He will be back shortly. Follow me.

Galina, escorted by the guard, enters the building. The other guard quickly removes her bike out of the way.

INT. MILITARY HQ - ALEXANDER'S ROOM - EVENING

Galina, washed and wrapped in Alexander's shirt, lies down on the tucked bed with her eyes closed. The SOUND of an opening door alerts her. She quickly leaps off the bed. Alexander rushes towards her. They embrace.

GALINA
Mila was killed in an explosion. I
was out to get some flowers. Our
home is gone. (beat) The sight of
it, the sound of it... The stench
of death is everywhere.

ALEXANDER

Calm down. Thank God you are alive
and we still have each other.
(beat) We did our best for Mila.

GALINA

It seems as if my survival is paved
by the death of others. It's
horrible.

EXT. LENINGRAD - ST.ISAAC'S CATHEDRAL - SUMMER - EVENING

The deserted area near the grand facade of the Cathedral.
Galina passes the colonnade and enters the Cathedral.

INT. ST.ISAAC'S CATHEDRAL - EVENING

The interiors of the Cathedral are ILLUMINATED by countless
memorial candles. Dispersed around are some worshipers.
Galina joins them in prayer and proceeds towards the altar.

CLOSE ON the main altar with it's stained glass image of a
Resurrected Christ.

Near the altar we see a black-robed bearded PRIEST murmuring
a prayer.

Galina kneels with an outpouring of emotion.

The Priest observes Galina with solemnity and approaches her.

PRIEST

Cry, my child, cry! Grief is
purified by tears. The only whole
heart is a broken one.

Galina lifts her head, looking at the Priest with reverence.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Your suffering will be paid for
with coins of joy. God will provide
a way to be sure of righteousness.

GALINA

Thank you, Father.

PRIEST

We have our cross to bear, but we
shall rise again. Through prayer we
endure, with prayer we conquer.

Galina steps aside and LIGHTS up a memorial candle, placing
it among countless others.

We see a flood of GLEAMING candles vibrating as one living body of LIGHT.

EXT. LENINGRAD - BRIDGE - JANUARY 1944 - DAY

Galina stands on the bridge of the Neva river, waving her hands towards the sky. With each SOUND of the Soviet airplanes she rejoices, sweeping the snow off the balustrade. Nearby, a military truck CRUNCHES through the snow. Passing by Galina, the driver opens the window, YELLING at her.

DRIVER

Are you out of your mind, woman?
Get to the shelter at once!

GALINA

I waited for this day far too long
to spend it inside a shelter. This
is the moment to live!

DRIVER

Get in the car if you want to see
the happy ending of it all!

Reluctantly, Galina hops into the truck and they DRIVE away.

INTERIOR/EXTERIOR. MILITARY TRUCK - DAY

Galina sits among the SOLDIERS, eagerly absorbing every word.

SOLDIERS (V.O.)

Those Krauts landed on their asses!
Hitler is "kaput!". The hunter has
been captured by the prey!

Wholehearted LAUGHTER follows.

EXT. LENINGRAD - JANUARY 1944 - DAYS LATER - EVENING

The sky is ABLAZE with FIREWORKS. Victory is in the air!

The joyous VOICE over the loud speaker proclaims:

VOICE (V.O.)

Leningrad is free and alive!

Overwhelmed with joy, Galina and Alexander join the emotional crowd under the statue of Peter the Great.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - NOVEMBER 1944 - DAY

A street with ruined buildings dusted by snow. Some repairs are under way.

Galina and Alexander walk along the street and stop by the remains of their old apartment building. They look at it with sadness, clinging on to each other.

ALEXANDER

It's all going to be rebuilt soon.
One has to believe that.

He turns to Galina, brushing off the snowflakes from her face.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)

You look beautiful.

GALINA

I feel beautiful. I am expecting.

Thrilled, Alexander embraces Galina into his arms.

ALEXANDER

A baby!? When?

GALINA

I guess sometime in July.

INT. MILITARY HQ - CONFERENCE ROOM - MAY 1945 - DAY

A darkened room is throbbing with excitement. High ranking Military and Navy Officers are anxiously waiting for the latest footage from Germany. All eyes are riveted on the screen.

CLOSE ON the screen. We see the meeting of Russian and US combat troops at the river Elbe. Following images depict various concentration camps being liberated by the Red Army and American Army. Shocked silence grips the room.

The footage culminates in the crushing fall of the "swastika" and hoisting of the Red flag over the Reichstag. The allies flags are shown hoisted over Western Berlin. With every projection, comments ERUPT.

VOICES (V.O.)

What a final knock-out blow! Bitter
or sweet - Victory at last!

ALEXANDER

Playing "Russian roulette" with
Russians was a bad gamble to start
with.

Everyone LAUGHS. Emotions run high.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

The same room, now BUSTLING with improvised celebration. In a surge of joy comrades exchange mighty hugs. Alexander and Vladimir embrace and raise their glasses in a toast.

VLADIMIR

Glory to the victors, axes to the losers! The blood-debt is settled!

ALEXANDER

To a new beginning!

The company drinks to their glasses' bottoms.

We see a duty Sergeant running towards Alexander, approaching him with urgency.

SERGEANT

Comrade General, your wife...

ALEXANDER

What is it? What happened?

SERGEANT

She was taken to the hospital.

Alexander rushes out of the room along with the Sergeant.

INT. HOSPITAL - EVENING

The premises BUSTLES with recovering soldiers.

Alexander anxiously moves towards the reception desk and talks to the NURSE. She looks at the registration and smiles.

NURSE

You have a baby boy.

ALEXANDER

I have a son! Is my wife alright?

INT. MILITARY HQ - ALEXANDER'S ROOM - MAY 1945 - DAY

The room is filled with friends. Galina and Alexander celebrate their son's birthday. Alexander, overjoyed, cautiously takes his baby boy from Galina's hands.

ALEXANDER

Since my son rushed out to be born on Victory day, Galina and I decided to name him Victor!

The disturbed baby gives out a healthy CRY.

ALEXANDER (CONT'D)
I guess we can take that as
confirmation from him.

Vladimir discretely looks at Galina with covetous eyes. He
POPS off a bottle of champagne, pouring it around, and raises
his glass in toast.

VLADIMIR
To Victory and the newly born
Victor!

The company empties their glasses and Galina and Alexander
are showered with congratulations.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - WINTER 1949 - DAY

Snow covered countryside. It BUSTLES with kids and adults
having fun building snowmen. The "Troikas" glide back and
forth with joyful passengers.

Galina, Alexander and Victor sleighing down the hill,
bubbling with LAUGHTER [by now, Victor is a healthy bouncing
boy, almost five-years-old].

INT. LENINGRAD - NEW APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NEW YEARS EVE
1949/50

The bedroom furnished with laconic chic. Alexander is getting
dressed in his ceremonial regalia. Galina tries on an evening
gown, looking herself over in the mirror. She reaches out as
if to zip it up from the back, but can not. Alexander,
noticing it, comes to her aid. As he slowly zips it, he
nibbles on Galina's neck.

GALINA
(teasingly)
We are running late already...

ALEXANDER
You drive me insane... Never stop
doing it...

INT. BALLROOM - NEW YEAR'S EVE 1949/50

The ballroom is lavishly decorated and brightly LIT. A
Christmas tree is situated as the room's centerpiece. Santa
Claus along with a Snow Maiden circulate among the guests,
showering them with confetti.

Galina and Alexander, looking attractive, walk across the
ballroom towards a cluster of friends. Out of nowhere,
appears Vladimir, greeting them both with hugs.

VLADIMIR

Happy New Year! (to Galina) You look lovely beyond words. (to Alexander, kiddingly) May I steal her for a while? (to Galina) The war didn't affect you at all, Firebird.

GALINA

Inner wounds are invisible.

VLADIMIR

I wish my wife would have a fraction of your wit.

ALEXANDER

Where is Masha?

Vladimir looks around and shrugs his shoulders.

VLADIMIR

(to Galina)

I got married recently.

GALINA

Congratulations.

VLADIMIR

I never thought I would commit myself to be "caged", but it happened.

An undercurrent of scorn runs over Galina's face.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

(searching the crowd)

And how is my little friend Victor? Ready for his conquests?

We see Vladimir groping the backside of a young buxom blond in a revealing dress. She GIGGLES vulgarly. Draped around her neck is a dazzling necklace.

The chain of the necklace holds a delicate cluster of gems set in gold. At its base is a sparkling Firebird.

CLOSE ON on Galina's startled expression as she looks at the necklace.

Alexander greets Masha and Vladimir introduces her to Galina. They exchange a limp handshake. Abruptly, Galina excuses herself and steps aside. Puzzled, Alexander follows her.

ALEXANDER

What's the matter?

GALINA
I can not tell... I have to...

Galina buries her face in her hands as memories come flooding back to her.

FLASHBACK

INT. PETROGRAD - MANSION - LIBRARY - MARCH 1917 - EVENING

Fuzzy image of the Countess and Galina (six years of age) as they stand by the fireplace. The Countess takes off from around her neck the very same necklace and shows Galina the monogram on the back. Galina CLAPS her hands with delight and helps her grandmother to put the necklace back on, fastening it from behind.

INT. LENINGRAD - BALLROOM - NEW YEAR'S EVE 1949/50

Galina uncovers her face and looks at the necklace again, now worn by Masha.

Alexander, still baffled, embraces Galina and they waltz away from Vladimir and Masha.

GALINA
I want to go home and be alone.
You can stay if you want to.

ALEXANDER
What's the matter with you?
Sometimes you are so capricious!

We see Galina and Alexander stepping off the dance floor and leaving in the middle of the festivities.

INT. NEW APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The room is LIT by tiny Christmas tree LIGHTS. Galina and Alexander enter the apartment. Galina angrily tosses her coat and kicks her shoes off. Alexander snaps.

ALEXANDER
What happened? You are still an enigma to me.

GALINA
It's the necklace... The necklace that Masha wore... Unbelievable... It's the same one... yes, the same one that my grandmother wore ... How come... I don't understand...

ALEXANDER
Come on! You are probably mistaken.
We can stay for the celebration.

GALINA
You could, I couldn't!

Infuriated, Galina paces back and forth.

GALINA (CONT'D)
I couldn't tolerate looking at the
necklace being worn by that bimbo!
It made my skin crawl! How did it
land on her neck? And this friend
of yours! Always on the prowl,
always searching with his greedy
eyes. I can't stand him!

ALEXANDER
Don't exaggerate.

GALINA
Exaggerate?! You are blind! Vlad is
a vulture! He...

ALEXANDER
Calm down. You will wake Victor.
I will get us some champagne.

Alexander moves toward the kitchen.

GALINA
I don't care for champagne. Pour me
some vodka, please. A double shot!

Alexander returns with two shots of vodka and lemon slices.

ALEXANDER
Happy New year! Hopefully.

Galina downs her drink and helps herself to a lemon slice.

GALINA
I want to be alone, please.

Irritated, Alexander leaves the room. Galina lies down on the
sofa and closes her eyes. Her mind drifts away.

MUSIC: "Elegia" from the "Concerto for Orchestra" by Bartok

The image of the Firebird necklace drenched in blood overlaps
with the image of the Countess.

COUNTESS (V.O)
(distant VOICE)
It's your family dignity which is
soaked in my blood.
(MORE)

COUNTESS (V.O) (cont'd)
 The necklace is rightfully yours.
 Remember who you are. Justice will
 take its course.

Galina shudders and wakes up. She heads towards the bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Galina awakes Alexander. Half-asleep, he looks at her with a startled expression.

GALINA
 There is a monogram on the back of
 the necklace with my name on. I
 remember it. It was a Birthday
 present from my grandmother...

ALEKSANDR
 Calm down, it's all right,

GALINA
 Sorry I gave you a hard time.

ALEKSANDR
 I wouldn't want to have you any
 other way.

INT. MILITARY ACADEMY - ALEXANDER'S OFFICE - WINTER `50 - EVE

The office has a military decor. Alexander sits at his desk, talking to three cadets sitting across from him. The door flings OPEN and Vladimir tumbles in, creating a big fuss over his arrival. The cadets rise and salute.

VLADIMIR
 You wanted to see me, Commander!
 Here I am, your loyal friend and
 guardian!

He tosses his overcoat aside and flops into the chair. The cadets leave. Alexander greets Vladimir with a handshake.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)
 What's up? Time for a drink. We
 haven't had one for a while.

ALEXANDER
 I am still on duty and you, Vlad,
 are already loaded.

VLADIMIR
 In my organization all things are
 permitted to the leader. You are
 the Dean, damn it!

ALEXANDER

I am not part of your organization.
I have my own rules. Want some tea?

VLADIMIR

Get serious! (he downs a few gulps
from his breast-pocket container).
What is it you wanted to see me
about? To plea for yet another
General of yours?

ALEXANDER

Honestly, I am concerned with this
new spin of treason-mania. Some of
my colleagues were arrested and
bluntly proclaimed as enemies.

VLADIMIR

I am sure those bastards tried to
sabotage our party line or worse...
We'll hammer them all.

ALEXANDER

(defending zealously)
They are outstanding and loyal
Officers! We fought the war
together! I know them well!

VLADIMIR

Do you? Look, bud, we are in post-
war political vigilance. There is a
threat blowing from the West.
Disloyalty and enemies from within
must be eliminated.

ALEXANDER

What enemies! Just another meat-
grinder, wholesale massacre! No
morals, no rules, no law...

VLADIMIR

Cut the crap! There is only one law
- might is right! We all serve but
one master! Orders come from Moscow
and we are to obey them. (beat) Is
there anything else?

Alexander, visibly disturbed, maintains his composure.

ALEXANDER

Yes, Galina's Birthday is coming up
soon. I would like to get her
something special. Maybe a...

Vladimir's hostile demeanor instantly changes to cheerful.

VLADIMIR

I bet your ballerina is very deserving. I have contacts, you know... I can help you get anything for her.

ALEXANDER

I was thinking of jewelry. Perhaps a necklace like your Masha wore at the New Year's party. It's beautiful! Where did you get it?

Alexander looks at Vladimir intently. Vladimir, loosened by vodka, SLURS.

VLADIMIR

That glittery thing? My old man gave it to Masha when we got married. He used to call it a "souvenir" from pre-Revolutionary days.

Alexander, alarmed, tries to keep calm.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

Him and his buddies loved "paying visits" to those stinking rich aristocrats. "Redistribution of wealth" they called it. The best part, according to my old man, was that the brassy old bitch didn't want to depart with her necklace. She had the nerve to fight back! But they sorted her out...

Alexander, shocked but maintaining his calm demeanor, walks towards the window and stops, looking out of a window.

ALEXANDER

So, your father was stashing the necklace all these years?

VLADIMIR

(with amusement)

The old man was a shrewd bastard. He never handed over any of the "souvenirs".

Alexander returns to his desk and briskly tidies it up.

ALEXANDER

Let's go for a drink. I need a very strong one.

VLADIMIR

Now you are talking, man!

INT. NEW APARTMENT - VICTOR'S ROOM - EVENING

A DIM room with toys scattered around. Victor lies in bed, clinging to his teddy. Galina covers him with his blanket. The SOUND of the front door being OPENED alerts her. Galina gives Victor a good-night kiss and quietly leaves the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Alexander, agitated, walks in and takes off his overcoat.

ALEXANDER

Sorry, I couldn't make it to the dinner. I've had a nerve-wracking day. Yet another friend of mine was arrested last night.

GALINA

Looks like we are on a death road again. We have survived Hitler, whether we will survive our own is questionable.

Alexander doesn't respond. Galina changes the subject.

GALINA (CONT'D)

Can I make you something to eat?

ALEXANDER

Just tea, please.

Galina goes to the kitchen. Alexander heads to Victor's room and enters it quietly.

INT. VICTOR'S ROOM - EVENING

Victor, uncovered, sleeps peacefully. Alexander covers him with his blanket, gives him a kiss and leaves the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Galina returns with two glasses of tea and biscuits.

GALINA

Are you coming next week to watch me? It's a new program. I love having you in my audience.

Alexander's tense expression softens.

ALEXANDER

I will try my best. (beat) There is something I would like to share with you, something you ought to know. I spoke to Vlad. Well... Unfortunately...

GALINA

(flares up, spilling tea)
Unfortunately what?

ALEXANDER

Unwittingly, Vlad blurted out to me the facts about the necklace. They fit your description.

GALINA

I could feel it in my bones.

ALEXANDER

Don't start rubbing salt in old wounds. Drop it!

GALINA

Drop it?! To drop it would mean to betray my family dignity and my own memory, which is the ultimate betrayal!

ALEXANDER

The "hotheads" were angry and hungry. You have to understand...

GALINA

Understand?! I've been taught some ugly lessons in life! I understand it was my misfortune to be born to an aristocratic family. I understand Russia had to change. But I found the bloody slaughter of my family - unbearable!

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alexander is asleep. Galina tosses from side to side and wakes up in a cold sweat, letting out a HOWL. Woken up, Alexander comforts her.

INT. NEW APARTMENT - DAYS LATER - EVENING

Alexander and Vladimir having a casual drink. Victor BUSTLES around them, busy tossing paper airplanes. Vladimir looks at Victor with envy. He grabs him and starts throwing him up in the air. Delighted, Victor bubbles with GIGGLES.

ALEKSANDER
 (to Victor)
 Hey, Captain, it's your bedtime.

VICTOR
 I will wait for Mama to tuck me in.

Vladimir lets Victor back on the ground, shuffling his hair.

VLADIMIR
 (to Victor)
 No sweat kiddo, we'll do it again.
 (to Alexander) I better be going, I
 am up to my ass in papers. Much
 work to be done.

ALEXANDER
 (escorts Vlad to the door)
 I want to ask you for a favor. As
 my old friend, I hope you'll
 understand. It concerns Galina or
 rather a necklace... You see...

VLADIMIR
 Spit it out!

ALEXANDER
 Well, the necklace, possibly,
 belonged to Galina's family. Galina
 recognized it when she saw Masha
 wearing it on New Year's Eve. It's
 incredible, but...

Vladimir is infuriated and his expression shows it.

VLADIMIR
 I don't want to hear anymore of
 this bullshit.

ALEXANDER
 There is a monogram on the back.
 Please take a look... Maybe...

Vladimir leaves SLAMMING the door behind him.

INT. MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS [MVD] - VLADIMIR'S OFFICE -
 WINTER 1950 - EVENING

A large, gloomy office saturated with dread. The paneled walls bear two portraits: Stalin and Dzerzhinsky. The large desk is cluttered with papers and an overflowing ashtray. An exquisite cigarette case with the MVD's emblem GLEAMS under the desk lamp. On the floor, the carpet is covered with a bloodied rubber spread. A truncheon lies on top of it.

Vladimir, oozing with power, sits at the desk, busy TALKING on the phone. His fingers fumble with the jewelry box.

VLADIMIR

It's a deliberate provocation. They must be silenced permanently and, more importantly, immediately! Add Alexander Sokolov to this list.

Vladimir listens for a moment and ERUPTS with fury.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

Absence of evidence! I have sensitive material on him. Do I have to repeat myself?

He hangs up and opens the jewelry box.

C.U. on the Firebird necklace GLOWING under the lamp.

Using a magnifying glass, Vladimir looks at the monogram on the back of it. It reads:

"To my granddaughter Galina N. St. Petersburg 1917"

Vladimir angrily SHUTS the box and pushes it away. He reaches for his breast-pocket container and anxiously takes a gulp.

A KNOCK on the door is heard and three MVD Officers enter. Two of them remove the bloodied rubber spread with the truncheon. A splendid oriental carpet is revealed underneath it. The third henchman hands Vladimir a folder.

Vladimir makes a dismissive gesture and all three disappear.

We see Vladimir scanning the newly brought folder with anticipation. It reads:

"The following individuals are to be arrested on charges of conspiracy with deliberate intention of seizing power with the aid of foreign imperialists."

A countless list of names follows the charges.

CLOSE ON "Alexander Sokolov" among the names. Vladimir's eyes freeze for a moment. He, then, grabs a pen and signs the document. The telephone RING. Vladimir answers it.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

Yes, tonight and keep it quiet. Don't arrest him at his home. I will sort things out here.

INT. NEW APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Galina and Alexander are asleep. The stillness is disrupted by the outside SOUND of an approaching car. It grows LOUDER. Awakened by the sound, Galina gets up and takes a peak through the window.

GALINA'S P.O.V.

An official MVD vehicle (dubbed a "Black Raven") stops by the entrance to their building and three uniformed men get out of it. They enter the building. Alerted, Galina rushes towards Alexander and wakes him up.

ALEKSANDER

What's the matter?

GALINA

The "Black Raven". It just stopped in front of our building. Why would they be here at this hour of the...

A sudden demanding RINGING at the door interrupts her. Alexander heads to the front door, turning on the LIGHT on his way. Galina follows him, nervously slipping on a nightgown. The RINGING becomes more persistent.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Alexander opens the door. Three stone-faced MVD Officers walk inside, immediately asserting their power.

OFFICER

General Sokolov, you are summoned to MVD HQ for an emergency meeting.

Alexander moves towards the telephone, but is promptly stopped. Tensions rapidly increase.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

There is no time. Hurry up.

ALEXANDER

It had better be important!

Alexander heads back to the bedroom and returns dressed in his uniform, buttoning his tunic on his way. One of the Officers gives Galina a cynical look. Galina notices it.

GALINA

(nervously)

Call me from there.

ALEXANDER

I will. Go back to sleep.

Alexander grabs his overcoat and leaves, escorted by the MVD Officers. The door SLAMS behind them.

Galina runs towards the window and carefully peers through.

GALINA'S P.O.V.

Alexander and the MVD Officers get into the "Black Raven" and the car takes off.

INT. MVD HQ - INTERROGATING CENTER - BASEMENT - NIGHT

A menacing subterranean quarters with a squalid atmosphere about it. The sudden CLING of the cell-doors splits the air. Occasional SHRIEKS escape from the cells.

Staggering down the corridor is the somber figure of an elderly male cleaner. A metal ring with keys dangles from the side of his belt. His rubber apron is stained with blood. In his hands he carries a mop and a bucket with water. As he moves along, the mop leaves behind a trail of diluted blood.

INT. MVD - VLADIMIR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Office LIT by a desk lamp. Standing guard are two uniformed HENCHMEN. Alexander sits on one of the chairs, waiting anxiously. The door flings OPEN and Vladimir struts in, carrying a folder in his hand. As he approaches Alexander, he gestures to his henchmen to leave. They immediately leave.

ALEXANDER
What's the emergency?

VLADIMIR
It's about your charges! I recommend that you admit to them. You took a grave risk by involving yourself in such a plot!

ALEXANDER
Are you drunk? What plot? What are you talking about?

VLADIMIR
Admit and name your co-conspirators or... go down the drain.

C.U. on Alexander's jolted expression.

ALEXANDER
This is insane! The Country is in post-war shambles, but your, so called "Elite Organization", is busy digging for more culprits!

VLADIMIR

Shut up! There are political charges hanging over your head and you know what that means.

ALEXANDER

A pack of lies! This is a damn frame up and you know that!

VLADIMIR

I only know what is written here! (he points at the paper) Confess! That is my loyal advice. I am trying to help you. This way you might avoid an extreme penalty.

Alexander's expression changes to rage. He grabs Vladimir by the collar in a strangle hold.

ALEXANDER

There is nothing to confess to, except that the peace we live in is more brutal than the war we just fought. Your hideous organization is nothing but a gang of blood thirsty butchers, and you are one of them!

Alexander releases his grip with a nasty push.

VLADIMIR

You will repent every word you said! You are a virtuous fool who just lost his ultimate chess game! You are officially under arrest!

Vladimir leaves his office, SLAMMING the door behind. Instantly, three henchmen BURST into the office and savagely pitch into Alexander, tearing off the insignia, confiscating his documents, and handcuffing him.

INT. NEW APARTMENT - BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Galina, in turmoil, dials a number.

GALINA

Good Morning. This is Galina Sokolova. May I please speak to the Deputy Chief, comrade Vladimir Chernov.

She waits with nervous anticipation.

GALINA (CONT'D)

Thanks, I'll expect his call.

Galina hangs up and nervously paces back and forth. The telephone RING. Galina grabs the receiver.

GALINA (CONT'D)
 Thanks for calling back, Vlad. I am sorry to bother you. It's about Alex. He was summoned last night for an emergency meeting by your officers and hasn't returned yet.

VLADIMIR (V.O)
 Well, I need some time to find out the whereabouts of your husband. I am too busy right now. I'll be in touch later in the evening.

C.U. on Galina's alarmed expression as she listens.

GALINA
 Any other time? Sorry, I have an evening performance.

VLADIMIR (V.O)
 (seductively)
 What are you dancing tonight?

GALINA
 "The Swan".

VLADIMIR (V.O)
 Oh, "The Dying Swan"?

GALINA
 If you prefer to call it by it's full title.

An awkward silence follows and Galina hangs up. Her tension turns into fury.

GALINA (CONT'D)
 I hate it! I hate it! I hate it!

INT. MVD HQ - BASEMENT - INTERROGATING CELL - MORNING

A dingy cell infested with cockroaches. A crude table and a couple of chairs are placed in the middle. A single bright LAMP hangs over one of the chairs.

Alexander, handcuffed and in a half-torn uniform, sits under the LIGHT and reads from the sheet of paper pushed to him. As he reads, he stubbornly shakes his head. The INTERROGATOR, an embodiment of evil, along with two henchmen stares at Alexander with hostility.

INTERROGATOR

Don't piss me off! Admit and sign
or we will not spend a fucking
bullet on you and string you up
with your own guts.

ALEXANDER

My charges are a rotten lie! Where
is all this dirt coming from?

INTERROGATOR

Shut up! We ask the questions here.

The interrogator nods to the henchmen. Numerous blows follow.

INTERROGATOR (CONT'D)

Sign, you fucking prick!

Alexander stubbornly shakes his head. The interrogator shoots
a sadistic look at Alexander.

INTERROGATOR (CONT'D)

Just wait, you big shot! We will
beat the necessary testimony out of
you or will rip you to chunks.

Alexander ferociously KICKS the interrogator's chair,
knocking the interrogator to the ground. Blow after blow
follow, as the henchmen beat Alexander into unconsciousness.
The interrogator staggers back to his feet.

INT. THEATRE - STAGE - EVENING

The LIGHTS dim almost to blackness and the curtain rises.

MUSIC: "The Swan" by Saint-Saens

Galina, as a white swan, is flashed into view. The LIGHT beam
follows her every move. Immersed in her dance, Galina
breathing it, pulsing with it, losing herself in it.

INT. THEATRE - AUDITORIUM - EVENING

The mesmerized audience.

We see Vladimir watching Galina eagerly through binoculars.

INT. THEATRE - CORRIDOR - LATER

Galina and Tanya walk down the busy corridor. Galina, visibly
distracted, is silent. Tanya, sensing her mood, tries to
cheer her up.

TANYA
You look unhappy. Let's go for a..

GALINA
Happy, unhappy... What is happiness
anyway? See you tomorrow, Tanya.

Galina exits through the back door.

EXT. THEATRE SQUARE - EVENING

Fans wait eagerly at the entrance to the theatre. We see Galina slipping out through the back door, unnoticed. Slung over her shoulder is a knapsack.

An unmarked MVD limo waits on the side of the road.

As Galina walks away from the Theatre, she is approached by the MVD Officer, IVAN. They talk briefly and, reluctantly, Galina follows him to the limo. Ivan promptly opens the door for Galina and she slips into the rear seat. Ivan runs to the other side and gets to the driver's seat.

INTERIOR/EXTERIOR. MVD LIMO - EVENING

The pitch dark interior of the limo. Galina rests her knapsack off and looks through the window. Sensing somebody's presence, she abruptly turns her head.

C.U. on Vladimir's gleaming eyes staring at her in the darkness. He greets her with a nod and a chilling smile. Alarmed, Galina pulls away from him.

VLADIMIR
Surprise, surprise...

An icy silence follows for a moment.

GALINA
I thought you were busy.

VLADIMIR
As busy as I am, I couldn't
possibly miss "The Swan".

Vladimir taps Ivan on the shoulder and the car takes off.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)
Congratulations on your beautiful
performance. What a swan!

GALINA
Thank you. (anxiously) Any news
about Alexander?

VLADIMIR

It wouldn't be wise to discuss it here. I must admit, it was very daring of you to call me at work.

GALINA

You are Alexander's lifelong friend, aren't you? He was summoned by your Officers and hasn't returned yet. I thought you were the right person to call.

Vladimir reaches for his pocket container and takes a slug.

INT. MVD PRIVATE LODGE - RECEPTION AREA - EVENING - LATER

It has a fine decor with the sense of an uninhabited place. Vladimir pours drinks into glasses. Galina, on the edge of her nerves, confronts him point-blank.

GALINA

You are holding something back from me. Where is Alexander?

VLADIMIR

I found out that your husband was arrested on very serious charges. He made a fateful mistake... He is accused of conspiracy and treason.

C.U. on Galina's collapsed face. Crushed, she sinks into the sofa. Vladimir offers her a drink. She refuses.

GALINA

Not Alexander! He is the most faithful officer to his country.

VLADIMIR

(with hostility)

Listen, you asked me for a favor and I did it for you. Sorry, you don't appreciate it.

GALINA

Can I see him? Where is he?

VLADIMIR

You can't see him, he is under investigation. I saw him and, as an old friend, I made sure he is treated well.

INT. MVD HQ - INTERROGATING CELL - EVENING

A grim cell claustrophobic with terror. Alexander sits opposite the interrogator. His face is beaten, his shirt and tunic are soaked in blood.

CLOSE ON the interrogator toying with the buckle of a belt.

INTERROGATOR
(deceivingly calm)
Well, taking a tough stand is not
going to work, comrade Sokolov.

Alexander, drained and withdrawn, doesn't respond.

INTERROGATOR (CONT'D)
(in a volatile SHOUT)
You want to play hard ball with me?
Now you'll taste hell!

One of the henchmen forcibly drags Alexander's hands onto the table and interrogator sadistically SLAMS them with the metal buckle of the belt, pounding over and over again.

INTERROGATOR (CONT'D)
(to henchman)
There is an order to send him to
the "conveyor" (a non-stop
torture). Make sure he enjoys every
bit of it. I want every bone of his
fucking body to be broken!

INT. PRIVATE LODGE - EVENING

Vladimir gives Galina a lustful gaze and changes his demeanor to being caring.

VLADIMIR
I'll try my best to help your
husband, but I expect cooperation
on your part. You know what I mean.

Galina shoots a startled look at him and heads towards the door. Vladimir grabs her roughly.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)
Where do you think you are going?

GALINA
There is nothing more to discuss.

VLADIMIR
You are going nowhere, unless I
will let you.

Galina freezes.

GALINA

Am I under arrest too? Or are you going to set me on fire? Literally.

VLADIMIR

You have a nerve! One day your sharp tongue might slit your neck, accidentally... Don't walk a tight rope without a safety net. From now on I am your safety net. Get it? We are tied up in a knot, you and I.

GALINA

Leave me alone! Let me out of here!

VLADIMIR

Oh, how much I love when your blood starts bubbling! Intoxicating!

Galina thrusts herself forward for her knapsack. Vladimir grabs her tighter, his demeanor now threatening.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

Ivan will take you home, but keep in mind, one careless step and you are ruined along with your husband. Your artistic success will not save you, you clever Firebird.

He roughly pushes Galina away. Galina storms out of the room.

Vladimir's eyes follow her with a malicious grin.

INT. NEW APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAYS LATER - EVENING

It's brightly LIT with toys scattered around. Victor, dressed in a sailor suit, hustling with the chairs, pretending he is a captain of a ship. Galina and Tanya are busy TALKING. Galina looks at her watch and claps her hands to Victor.

GALINA

It's past your bed time, Captain.

She hugs Victor and gives him a kiss.

VICTOR

Mama, can I sleep in your room while Dad is away? You promised me.

Galina nods with a bittersweet smile. Delighted, Victor runs to her bedroom.

GALINA
 (to Tanya)
 Victor keeps asking when Alexander
 is going to be back. It breaks my
 heart.

She looks at the photo, depicting Galina, Alexander,
 and Victor in a happy moment together.

GALINA (CONT'D)
 Tanya, there is something I want to
 ask you for.

TANYA
 Anything. You know.

GALINA
 If something will happen to me,
 please take care of Victor.

Galina and Tanya look at each other with mutual
 understanding. In desperation, Galina reaches for a little
 cross around her neck, trying to unfasten it.

GALINA (CONT'D)
 Take it and keep it for Victor.
 Just in case...

Tanya forcibly prevents her from taking it off.

TANYA
 Don't! It's yours. You mustn't
 depart with it.

GALINA
 (hesitantly)
 Maybe you are right.

Galina escorts Tanya to the front door. They embrace and
 Tanya leaves. Galina returns and begins collecting the
 scattered toys. A sudden RING at the door frights her. Galina
 glances at the clock. It reads 11pm. She drops the toys and
 moves towards the door.

GALINA (CONT'D)
 Who is there?

MALE VOICE (V.O.)
 It's Ivan, the driver. Open up!

Galina opens the door. Ivan with another MVD Officer walk in.

IVAN
 We have an order to bring you in
 for questioning.

Galina desperately appeals to both.

GALINA
My little boy is asleep, I can't
leave him alone. Please...

IVAN
We have to obey orders!

In a panic, Galina runs to the telephone, but is stopped by the other Officer. Devastated, she pulls her sweater over and reaches for her coat. A childish CRY suddenly comes from the bedroom. Galina rushes toward it. Ivan, looking at Galina with sympathy, lets her inside the bedroom.

IVAN (CONT'D)
Just calm the kid down. Be quick.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Almost dark room. The WAILING sound of the wind frightens Victor. Galina enters and rushes towards him, embracing him.

GALINA
It's alright, my boy. Mama is here.

VICTOR
Is Dad back yet?

GALINA
Not yet, but soon. Go back to
sleep.

Victor calms down and falls asleep. Galina swiftly reaches for a nearby chest of drawers and quietly OPENS one of the drawers. She searches with her hand and discretely pulls out a handgun, concealing it under her sweater.

GALINA (CONT'D)
(in a whisper)
Be that as it may.

She quietly tiptoes out of the bedroom.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATE EVENING

Galina re-enters the living room. She throws the coat over her sweater and leaves the apartment, escorted by both men.

INT. MVD PRIVATE LODGE - RECEPTION AREA - LATE EVENING

Vladimir, casually dressed, lounges in an armchair and leafs through a folder. Galina enters, escorted by Ivan. Vladimir makes a dismissive gesture and Ivan leaves.

VLADIMIR
 (excessively polite)
 How nice to see you again.

Vladimir gallantly helps Galina with the coat.

INT. MVD PRIVATE LODGE - WAITING ROOM - LATE EVENING

A small room crudely furnished. Ivan with his fellow henchman are sharing a late-night meal. The henchman looks at his watch, takes some leftovers and leaves. Ivan, exhausted, grabs a nap.

INT. MVD PRIVATE LODGE - RECEPTION AREA - LATE EVENING

Galina shoots a scrutinizing looks around the premises.

GALINA
 Is this where you conduct
 questioning?

VLADIMIR
 Would you prefer a dungeon in the
 MVD basement? I bet you would never
 dance again afterwards.

He CHUCKLES and offers Galina a drink. She refuses. He raises his glass and downs his drink. As he grabs a folder, his demeanor changes to intimidating.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)
 I have a dossier on you, Firebird.
 Little did I know, but there is
 plenty of evidence against you too.
 You are classified as an unreliable
 and even anti-Soviet element! Fond
 as I am of you, the fact that you
 are a bourgeois offspring proves
 only one thing: however well you
 are feeding the wolf, it still
 hankers in the forest.

GALINA
 This is absurd!

VLADIMIR
 You can take that any way you wish,
 but don't swim against the tide
 like your husband did, if you want
 to avoid the "tender mercy" of my
 interrogators.

A telephone RING is audible from nearby. Vladimir reluctantly leaves the room, CLOSING the door behind.

INT. MVD PRIVATE LODGE - STUDY - LATE EVENING

A somber study with a cluttered desk. Vladimir picks up the phone. He listens for a brief moment and responds calmly.

VLADIMIR
Finish him off.

INT. MVD PRIVATE LODGE - RECEPTION AREA - LATE EVENING

We see Vladimir returning through a different door, quietly approaching Galina from the back. He gently touches her neck. Frightened, Galina turns around, facing him with disdain.

INT. MVD HQ - INTERROGATING CELL - LATE EVENING

A cell saturated with death. The cement floor gradually slopes towards a drain. Water hoses hang on one of the walls.

Alexander, blindfolded and strikingly changed in appearance, stands against the wall. The henchmen, nearby, wait for orders.

INTERROGATOR
You have one last chance to admit
and sign, or be shot like a dog!

ALEXANDER
Today it's me, tomorrow it's you.

INTERROGATOR
That's the final nail in your
coffin, smart-ass! I waisted a
shitload of time on you. You are
not even a number any more!

He nods to his killing squad. Several SHOTS follow. Alexander's lifeless body falls to the cement floor. His blood streams down the drain.

The interrogator pierces Alexander's death-warrant with a dagger and SHOUTS.

INTERROGATOR (CONT'D)
Next one!

INT. MVD LODGE - RECEPTION AREA - NIGHT

Vladimir relishes himself by toying with Galina.

VLADIMIR
What a neck! The neck of a swan!

GALINA
 (demanding)
 Where is Alexander?!

VLADIMIR
 Your husband is taken care of.

Galina lashes out at Vladimir. He grabs her arm and twists it. Galina freezes.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)
 Don't play with dynamite! Or you will be bundled on to a cattle truck bound for Siberia faster than you think. You won't be needing your ballet slippers there, because you'll rot in a labor camp. Your adorable son will be an orphan. Appealing, isn't it? You are trapped, my spunky Firebird!

GALINA
 You will stop at nothing!

VLADIMIR
 Yes, at nothing! You've crept under my skin, into my blood, my guts, my entire being. You haunted me for years! Now you are mine, I have power over you and, hell, I am going to use it!

Vladimir grips Galina in a violent grab and plunges her mouth with a deep kiss. Galina breaks out from him.

GALINA
 It's you who ditched Alexander.
 Your lifetime friend!

VLADIMIR
 Friend? I dropped the meaning of friendship long ago. Come, I want to show you something special.

INT. MVD PRIVATE LODGE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

A DIM room with heavy curtains covering the windows. On the nearby armchair, carelessly thrown, is a uniform with MVD insignia. A handgun, attached to the belt, rests on the bedstand.

We see Vladimir moving towards the bedstand. Galina keeps distancing herself from him.

Vladimir opens the drawer of the bedstand and pulls out a jewelry box. He opens it, watching Galina's reaction.

C.U. on the sparkling necklace.

Galina is longing to touch it.

VLADIMIR

I was told it belonged to your family. Sure enough, your name is engraved on the back of it. As befitting a lady of your pedigree, you can wear it again. Honestly!

GALINA

I don't trust the honesty of dishonest people.

VLADIMIR

I've had enough of this, you stubborn bitch! I was shooting fucking whores like you by the hundreds when we were liberating Europe.

Consumed with fury, Galina slaps Vladimir across his face.

GALINA

You can play liberator and conqueror all you want. Executioner - that is what you are! Your father's brutality rubbed off on you well. You even outstripped him!

C.U. on Vladimir's jolted expression.

In a blinding rage, Vladimir SLAMS the necklace against the wall, grabs Galina and tosses her on top of the bed.

VLADIMIR

I will rip you apart, you fucking Firebird, Swan, or whatever partridge! Your Swan song is sung!

Vladimir swiftly undoes his breeches. Using the moment, Galina promptly gives him a nasty kick in the groin. Vladimir moves his hands to his crotch and, GROANING with pain, collapses on the bed.

VLADIMIR (CONT'D)

You will pay for this, bitch. You will die a horrible death.

In an instant, Galina retrieves the concealed handgun from underneath her sweater.

GALINA

By God, I will get you even if it's the last thing I do!

Vladimir looks at Galina in disbelief. In a stroke, he reaches out to his gun, trying to free it from the belt.

CLOSE ON Galina. Her eyes fixed, gun jutted forward. As Vladimir grips his handgun, Galina pulls the trigger and FIRES. The bullet rips through his chest and his body slumps against the bed board. A blood stain appears.

Galina, frozen, looks at Vladimir's motionless body. Suddenly he opens his eyes wide and a horrible choking SOUND comes from him. Without hesitation, Galina FIRES again.

GALINA (CONT'D)

One for my grandmother, one for
Alexander, one for me!

Silence. Galina looks at Vladimir's dead body sprawled on the bed. His gun is tightly locked in his hand. His face frozen in a ghoulish grimace. Blood drools out of his mouth.

Galina closes her eyes. A stillness envelopes the space. Galina opens her eyes.

GALINA (CONT'D)

Justice at last!

Galina secures her handgun under her half-ripped clothes and stops by the necklace spread on the floor. With the utmost care she replaces it back in the box. Giving it a last glance, Galina kisses it and leaves it behind.

INT. MVD PRIVATE LODGE - CORRIDOR - LATER

Neatly wrapped in her coat, Galina passes down the corridor and reaches the waiting room. She KNOCKS on the door. Ivan, sleepy and disheveled, OPENS the door.

IVAN

Sorry, I had a nap. I didn't sleep
for two nights...

GALINA

I understand. Please take me home.

IVAN

I need confirmation from my
superior. Did he...

GALINA

He is fast asleep.

We see Ivan dialing. The resonance from the RING on the other side is audible, but there is no response.

IVAN

As usual, he doesn't bother...

Ivan and Galina leave the premises.

EXT. COURTYARD OUTSIDE MVD LODGE - EARLY MORNING

The limo takes off into the darkness of the early morning.

INT. NEW APARTMENT - BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Galina quietly enters the room and rushes towards Victor who is peacefully asleep. She kisses him and moves to the chest of drawers, carefully replacing the handgun. Looking at Alexander's photo she whispers.

GALINA

Your gun did its duty. I did mine.

EXT. LENINGRAD - DOCK OF NAVAL ACADEMY - SUMMER 1965 - DAY

A bright summer day. The fleet of Naval battleships awaits their departure. The embankment BUSTLES with people. Galina, among others, attends the ceremony. Soon, excited cadets exchange good-byes with their families.

Galina lovingly embraces Victor [at this point Galina is in her mid-fifties, immaculate and graceful, only her hair streaked with grey. Victor, a handsome young man, dressed in a Naval uniform, is twenty years old].

GALINA

Safe journey, Captain. Your father would be very proud of you.

Victor nods with a bittersweet smile. A ship bell STRIKES, announcing the departure. Victor gives Galina a hasty kiss and rushes aboard, joining his fellow shipmates.

We see the battle ships departing from the dock.

Galina, looking proud, bids bon voyage to Victor.

EXT. CHOREOGRAPHY SCHOOL - MAIN ENTRANCE - SUMMER 1965 - DAY

Dancers enter and exit the main entrance. Galina, greeted by a group of students, enters the building.

INT. CHOREOGRAPHY SCHOOL - REHEARSING STUDIO - DAY

A large studio. Galina coaches a young ballerina for the role of the Firebird, encouraging her on.

MUSIC: "Appearance of the Firebird" by Stravinsky

A young ballerina jets across the studio with fiery vigor.

GALINA

That's the way! Dance is life! Give
it all you've got!

Camera fades out...

THE END