

FIRST CATHERINE

Written by

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Based on the life of Russia's first female monarch.

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INT. PEASANT CABIN, MARIENBURG, SWEDISH LIVONIA - EVENING

A child is born to a peasant couple in Marienburg, Swedish Livonia, in the year Sixteen eighty-four. They name her Marta. Her life, though harsh at first, will usher in a new dawn for neighboring Russia by becoming its first female monarch. To accomplish this, she must somehow cross paths with the most powerful man in all of Muscovy, Peter Alexeyevich Romanov, soon to be known as Peter the Great! Their story will be celebrated in the pages of history; two lives filled with passion, fidelity, and tears, against a torturing backdrop of conflict, intrigue, and wantonness. Together with her husband, this illiterate peasant girl will go on to complete his life's work, leading Russia out from behind its misty veil into the Modern World.

EXT. LAKE ALUKSNE, MARIENBURG, SWEDISH LIVONIA - AFTERNOON

Fryderyk and Marta are fishing by hand in the shallow waters of Lake Aluksne. The year is Sixteen eighty-nine. Older brother, Karol, soon appears on the embankment high above, summoning them home.

KAROL

Vater is suffering from fever and is very ill. *Muter* is worried and needs you home.

FRYDERYK

But our bucket is barely full! There won't be enough crayfish for supper tonight.

KAROL

Come along anyway, and be careful with your sister on this steep embankment.

FRYDERYK

The climb up is far less risky than the walk down, I can assure you!

KAROL

Never mind that!

Fryderyk reaches for little Marta and, with bucket in hand, begins their ascent, but not before Marta skips across a series of steppingstones and leaps back on shore.

FRYDERYK

Here we go, little girl...

Karol and his siblings soon return to the farm only to find their mother wandering the yard in a frantic state.

EXT. SKAVRONSKY CABIN, MARIENBURG, SWEDISH LIVONIA - THE NEXT DAY

A middle-aged woman appears on the porch of the Skavronsky cabin, located in a heavily wooded settlement just outside of Marienburg. Hearing her footsteps, eldest brother, Karol, opens the door.

KAROL

Aunt Marta?

AUNT MARTA

I came as soon as I heard. Saints protect us from this dreadful plague!

Moving closer to him.

Here's what's going to happen. Marta is coming with me. Your mother's sister, Matilde, will be here shortly to pick up baby Krystyna. You two boys will remain here on the farm, and your neighbor, Arturs, will be responsible for your care until other arrangements can be made.

Taking out a handkerchief and dabbing the corners of her eyes.

As for little Anna, Aunt Agnese from Grunau will be here later this afternoon to take custody of her.

KAROL

(subdued)

I understand...

AUNT MARTA

According to local regulations, your parents should be buried at once! Arturs and his older sons are around to assist you. You can have a good cry tomorrow when your mother and father are safely underground.

Blessing herself. Marta soon comes out on the porch holding her knapsack.

Come, child, come to Aunt Marta.

Lifted into an oxcart by her brother, she soon disappears into the dense forest with her namesake Aunt, but not before turning around one last time to level her soft blue eyes on the tiny cabin.

INT. GLUCK HOME, MARIENBURG, SWEDISH LIVONIA - MORNING

Early the next morning in the city of Marienburg, Marta and her Aunt enter the home of Johann Gluck. The Pastor immediately gets down on his knees to greet his tiny guest.

PASTOR GLUCK

You may set your bag down, little Marta. Frau Gluck will take your coat.

A leery Frau Gluck helps remove Marta's coat, folding it in her arms.

CHRISTINA GLUCK

Soll ich Marta mit ihren Aufgaben vertraut machen?

PASTOR GLUCK

I'm afraid she's a little young for that, *Mein Schatz*, but you're free to show her how their done for the time being...

Pastor Gluck stands up as Frau Gluck addresses Aunt Marta.

CHRISTINA GLUCK

Very well. Is there anything we should know about Marta's background? For example, is she Catholic?

AUNT MARTA

Background? Why, she's the daughter of peasants, common tillers of the land. Her parents both died of plague not three weeks ago, and all five of their children are either being placed with family or with generous individuals such as you.

CHRISTINA GLUCK

I see...

Glaring at her husband.

Go on.

AUNT MARTA

Ahem, alright. All I can tell you is my sister and her husband were humble people who brought humble bairns into this world, like little Marta here.

CHRISTINA GLUCK

Peasants!

AUNT MARTA

In a word, yes! Peasants. As for their faith, my sister and her husband were devout Catholics, as am I. So, if you're inclined to...

CHRISTINA GLUCK

Raise her as such? My dear woman, my husband is a man of strict Lutheran orthodoxy, as surely as I am...

PASTOR GLUCK

Now, dear.

Returning to Aunt Marta.

What my wife is trying to say is that, as Orthodox Lutherans, we'll do the best we can.

AUNT MARTA

I can't ask anything more of you. I'm far too old to raise Marta, so all I can hope for at this point is a roof over her head and a decent table.

PASTOR GLUCK

Be assured that she'll be in the best of hands, and you may visit her at any time! We would be more than happy to have you.

AUNT MARTA

You're very kind, both of you. May God bless you for your generosity.

CHRISTINA GLUCK

Vielen Dank, und gern geschehen.

The Pastor again crouches down in front of Marta, looking into her innocent blue eyes.

PASTOR GLUCK

You're welcome! Are you ready to see your new lodgings, little Marta?

MARTA

(wide-eyed)
Yes, Pastor Gluck...

AUNT MARTA

Goodbye, little one, I'll visit you when I'm able. God bless you, child! Now, run along.

MARTA

Yes, Aunt Marta.

Whispering farewell to her Aunt, she retrieves her knapsack and takes hold of Frau Gluck's hand.

INT. CONVENT OF THE INTERCESSION, SUZDAL, TSARDOM OF MOSCOW, RUSSIA - MORNING

With ceremonial shears in hand, Abbess Elizaveta snips the final tuft of hair from the head of Eudoxia Lopukhina before she takes her vows as Sister Elena, effectively ending her marriage to Tsar Peter Romanov forever.

ABBESS ELIZAVETA

It is done, Sister Elena. Consider yourself a bride of the Church.

Eudoxia removes her wedding band and hands it to the Abbess.

EUDOXIA

I reluctantly yield and embrace the life that has been thrust upon me here. Ten short months ago, I entered the doors of this monastery as Tsarina of Russia; how quickly the mighty fall! In a thousand years, I never could have imagined myself in a place such as this. Why, I'm a Lopukhina, one of the noblest families in all of Tsarist Russia. Yet, here I am, confined to a lowly cell in a distant convent, miles from Muscovy.

ABBESS ELIZAVETA

Fate has brought you here, Daughter Elena, and fate will see you home one day. One can only pray!

(MORE)

ABBESS ELIZAVETA (CONT'D)
I'll make it my personal intention
at prayers tonight.

EUDOXIA
May I return to my icons now?

ABBESS ELIZAVETA
Certainly.

EUDOXIA
Thank you, Abbess, and be assured
that when I regain power as
Empress, I'll visit no harm upon
your head.

Feeling her bare scalp before replacing her scufia.
You're only carrying out your
duties, as absurdly ordered by my
husband after his romp through
Europe. What a world!

Back in her cell, Sister Elena stares at a hillside of blush
chrysanthemums swaying outside her cell window.

INT. MONS MANSION, GERMAN QUARTER, BASMANNY DISTRICT, MOSCOW,
RUSSIA - LATER

A mock celebration of the Tsar's divorce is currently
underway inside the home of Anna Mons, Peter's longtime
mistress. Among the attendees are members of his inner
circle, aptly coined the Drunken Assembly. Living up to their
august reputation, they become thoroughly intoxicated as the
night moves on, as they're accustomed. As usual, Anna
actively participates in the revelry, along with other German
women, much to the Tsar's delight. He soon rises, all six-
foot-seven inches of him, to make a toast, while all the
guests scramble to their feet.

PETER
Permit me to say a few words about
my dear Mother, Natalya.

Clearing his throat.
Francois, I'm parched! Pour me
another drink, man!

His confidant quickly complies.

LEFORT
(laughing)
A tippie fit for a Tsar!

PETER

He speaks!

Drawing hardy laughter.

As I was saying, on this occasion, permit me to express a few words concerning my dearly departed Mother. While her intentions of saddling me with that bovine of a wife, Eudoxia, were genuine, the past nine years have been, I'll be kind here, utter torture! True, my wife produced an heir, but it came at a steep price.

Taking another pull on his tankard.

So, if you'll forgive me, Mother: Now that I'm a free man, I'm free to abide with the woman I love, I'm free to gather with my friends without wifely wrath, and I'm free to drink whenever, wherever, and however I please!

With that, the guests raise their glasses enthusiastically, Anna included. Soon after the tipsy Tsar returns to the table, she notices an oncoming seizure from across the room. No longer restricted by courtly etiquette, Anna rushes to his side as the company quietly departs the room. After twenty minutes, Tsar Peter suddenly regains consciousness.

ANNA

(hushed)

There now. Let me rub your temples. That always makes you feel better.

PETER

How long have I been senseless? And where did all my guests go?

ANNA

They left on their own. Nobody wants to see their Tsar indisposed. You should realize that by now...

PETER

(angrily)

When I was in Europe during the Great Embassy, every doctor who ever examined me after such an incident came up empty-handed as to the reason for these episodes.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

I can only surmise that my half-sister, Sophia, is somehow to blame while serving as my Regent!

ANNA

Now, Peter, let's not get ourselves overly excited!

Continuing to gently massage the sides of Peter's head for a few more minutes, Anna now gets him into a sitting position while softly appealing to him.

Come on, there, Master Romanov, time for bed.

With a candelabra in hand, she leads her weary Tsar up the back staircase.

INT. MONS MANSION, BASMANNY DISTRICT, MOSCOW, RUSSIA - THE NEXT DAY

Anna wakes up early the next morning. She soon leaves the bed without disturbing her slumbering companion. Snatching an ornate hat she purchased yesterday, Anna, dressed only in a light shift, poses in front of a floor-length mirror while adjusting the headpiece. Hearing her elegantly turn about, the young Tsar eventually opens his eyes.

ANNA

Sorry about the clatter. These wooden floors seem to echo the slightest sounds, even *Meine nackten Füße*.

PETER

What time is it? I have a meeting with Menshikov at ten o'clock.

Anna looks over at the bedchamber clock.

ANNA

It's half past eight. You've plenty of time for breakfast. I had Hannah bake you a blini pie. I can smell it cooking now.

Peter rolls onto his side.

PETER

With mushrooms, I hope!

ANNA

(annoyed)
Yes, with mushrooms!

(MORE)

ANNA (CONT'D)
 Uh, you haven't said a word about
 the *kokoshnik* I purchased
 yesterday. Like it?

Peter yawns.

Would you rather I wear a
Dreispitz?

PETER
 (laughing)
 I would prefer you wear nothing...

ANNA
 I wore nothing last night, and you
 were far too tired to care...

PETER
 I'm sorry, I did get a bit tipsy at
 the party. I can handle my kvass,
 but vodka is an entirely different
 matter.

Anna carefully places the expensive headpiece on the bureau
 and returns to bed. Lying on her pillow, she stares at the
 canopy above.

ANNA
 Peter?

PETER
 Hmm.

ANNA
 Will we ever marry?

PETER
 (sighing)
 I suppose it's inevitable, though I
 wouldn't recommend it now.

ANNA
 Why not? You said it last night, if
 I recall: I'm a free man, and I'm
 free to abide with the woman I
 love. Do you remember?

Peter shimmies over onto Anna's side of the mattress.

PETER
 I certainly do. I was serious,
 Anna! We're serious, and nothing's
 going to change that if I have
 anything to say about it.

ANNA

Then why the wait?

PETER

Milashka, Eudoxia took the veil only yesterday. The Metropolitan is rattled enough as it is without me marrying another woman, especially now!

ANNA

(teasing)

By the Metropolitan, you're referring to the skunk. Adrian is it?

Forcing Peter to sit up.

PETER

Anna, please! The walls have ears, even here. The Patriarchy despises me enough as it is.

ANNA

I'm sorry, but those bearded guys... Hey, I thought you banished beards!

PETER

I did, but the clergy is exempt, as are peasants, so long as they remain at home!

Staring sarcastically at his mistress. At once amused, she replies.

ANNA

You happen to be in bed with a peasant!

PETER

That's right.

Holding her tightly to his large frame, while flipping the bedcovers over them.

(muffled)

The most beautiful wine merchant's daughter in all of Europe!

ANNA

Don't forget your blini pie and your meeting with Menshikov...

PETER
 (growling)
 They can wait, this can't!

Nothing disturbs Peter now, not even the aroma of blini pie waiting in the oven downstairs.

INT. IMPERIAL RESIDENCE, VILLAGE OF PREOBRAZHENSKOYE, RUSSIA -
 AFTERNOON

Since Eudoxia's confinement, Peter's eight-year-old son, Alexei, has remained in the custody of his sister, Natalya, who resides at the Imperial Residence located in the Village of Preobrazhenskoye just outside Moscow. Like his father, Alexei has a fierce temper that will someday be his demise.

NATALYA
 I received another distressing report from your tutor. This marks the third time this week, Alexei! Master Vyazemsky is a patient man, but I'm afraid he'll have to suspend your studies if you continue with these tirades.

Alexei hangs his head before bolting to his bedroom upstairs.
 If this happens again, I'll be forced to involve your father. Do you understand?

ALEXEI
 I hate you! I want my mother! I want my mother...!

The flustered Tsarevna throws her hands up in despair.

FOUR YEARS LATER

INT. HEADQUARTERS OF FIELD MARSHAL SHEREMETEV, MARIENBURG,
 SWEDISH LIVONIA - EVENING

Inside the headquarters of Field Marshal Sherementev, staff are celebrating the capture of the Swedish fortress at Marienburg, after a twelve-day siege. A captain soon appears at the door carrying a naked peasant girl across his shoulders.

SHEREMENTEV
 What is it, Captain?

CAPTAIN IAGORZHINSKY
Sir, this girl was found hiding in
the fortress. When confronted by my
corporal, she tried to make a break
for the water.

SHEREMENTEV
Dressed like that?

Laughter is heard from the other men.

CAPTAIN IAGORZHINSKY
(abashed)
Well, sir. I...

SHEREMENTEV
And how did she come to be your
property?

More laughter.

CAPTAIN IAGORZHINSKY
As I said, Sir, a corporal under my
command found this girl hiding
inside the Marienburg barracks,
before escaping his grip and
running for the lake. After they
entered the camp together, he
surrendered her to me. You see, my
corporal is a vigorous man, to say
the least, so once she arrived at
this site, none of the other men
dared to lay a hand on her, let
alone sneak a peek.

Marta begins to shiver.

SHEREMENTEV
And you're bringing her to me, why?
Oh, never mind that... Will you put
her down!

More laughter breaks out while he sets her down in front of
his commanding general.

What's your name, girl?

MARTA
Marta...

SHEREMENTEV
Surely you have a last name, speak
up! Speak up!

MARTA
Skavronska.

SHEREMENTEV
I didn't catch that...

MARTA
Skavronska!

SHEREMENTEV
Then that would make you Marta
Skavronskaya, no?

Moving closer to her.

MARTA
Yes, it would...

SHEREMENTEV
Captain, there's a cloak hanging in
my bedroom. Bring it here at once
and cover her up. Is this any way
to treat a girl, Livonian or not?
Where's your dignity, man?

CAPTAIN IAGORZHINSKY
Yes, sir.

He leaves the room and returns with the cloak.

SHEREMENTEV
Well, just don't stand there
gawking, drape it over her!

Captain Iagorzhinsky proceeds to cover her.
It's alright, girl, adjust the
cloak as you see fit. You have no
enemies here.

MARTA
Thank you, sir.

SHEREMENTEV
Captain.

CAPTAIN IAGORZHINSKY
Sir?

SHEREMENTEV
Take this *poltina* and give it to
your corporal as payment.

Tossing the coin his way.

Should he insist on winning her back, reduce his rank to private. Otherwise, inform your corporal that his gift is greatly appreciated. And see that he's served an extra ration of vodka from my finest reserve.

CAPTAIN IAGORZHINSKY

Yes, sir.

SHEREMENTEV

That is all.

Captain Iagorzinsky departs the headquarters.
You there, Private Ivanov, show this young lady to my bedchamber.

SOLDIER

Yes, sir.

MARTA

Thank you, sir. You're most kind.

She leaves the room escorted by the leery Private.

INT. BEDCHAMBER OF FIELD MARSHAL SHEREMETEV, MARIENBURG,
SWEDISH LIVONIA - NIGHT

Later on in his bedchamber, Field Marshal Sheremetev rides young Marta like a broodmare for the entire night until she falls asleep from exhaustion, and he climbs down from her. So worked are her breasts, that their areolas appear as dark as mahogany.

INT. FIELD MARSHAL SHEREMENTEV'S SLEIGH, VELIKY NOVGOROD,
RUSSIA - MORNING

Weeks later, in a blinding snowstorm just outside Veliky Novgorod, Field Marshal Sheremetev and his mistress, Marta Skavronskaya, ride alone together inside a freezing horse-drawn sleigh on the way to Moscow. To keep warm, she is bundled under a generous supply of reindeer hides. As they approach yet another column of infantry, Marta recounts her tragic plight while in the company of the Russian Army.

MARTA

(voiceover)

I've been Boris's playmate ever since we crossed paths in Marienburg, and probably will be until we reach Moscow.

(MORE)

MARTA (CONT'D)

What he plans to do with me once we get there, I do not know. I certainly won't be welcomed in his home. It's said the wives of Russian generals are as demanding as their husbands. All I do know is the trade-off between entertaining Field Marshal Sheremetev each night and being thrown to the wolves out there among the infantry, who would likely tear me to pieces once they had their way with me, keeps me alive for now.

Such is the fate of peasant girls like me who are forced from the land. The pages of German folklore teach us that boys who leave their mothers before adulthood are easily doomed. Though not a boy, from the earliest age, I never had a choice...

Field Marshal Sheremetev turns and smiles at his mistress, who instead keeps her eyes on the horizon ahead.

EXT. COAST OF AEGNA ISLAND, BAY OF TALLINN, SWEDISH TERRITORY
- NIGHT

The passenger ship *Konigsberg*, heading for Archangel, has run aground on the Island of Aegna in Tallinn Bay. Swiftly shifting sandbars have forced the ship to list on its port side. Already taking on water, violent waves begin to pummel the keel, soon to tear the vessel apart. The frightened crew now appears on the deck, ready to help the passengers ashore. As for the luggage, that will be salvaged in the morning, if ever.

INT. TEMPORARY SHELTER, AEGNA ISLAND, TALLINN BAY, SWEDISH TERRITORY - THE NEXT DAY

Captain Gregory of the *Konigsberg* is busy making arrangements with the mainland to transport his stranded passengers to shore. As he dictates this important letter, a courier stands ready outside to deliver it to the harbormaster in Tallinn. Suddenly interrupted by the ship's First Mate, Captain Gregory looks up from his makeshift desk.

CAPTAIN GREGORY

Yes, what is it, Rolph?

ROLPH

Sir, they're bringing the luggage up from the hold.

CAPTAIN GREGORY

Thank God! That should come as a relief to the passengers.

ROLPH

Not everyone, I'm afraid.

CAPTAIN GREGORY

Oh?

The First Mate holds up a letter.

ROLPH

This letter should be of great interest to the Tsar!

CAPTAIN GREGORY

Go on...

ROLPH

Well, Sir, it's a love letter, sir.

CAPTAIN GREGORY

Have you lost your mind? I have far more pressing matters. See me later.

ROLPH

I would, sir, but I suggest that this letter be rushed to Tallinn at once.

CAPTAIN GREGORY

I'm afraid I don't understand...

ROLPH

You see, this letter was mistakenly discovered in the papers of a Saxony diplomat named Georg Keyserling from his sweetheart, Anna Mons.

A knock is heard at the door.

Yes, what is it?

SAILOR

Sir, the passengers are beginning to gather their effects.

(MORE)

SAILOR (CONT'D)

One of them is a diplomat demanding that his luggage be restored to him at once. He appears to be worried and is pacing the beach as we speak. He desires a word with you in private.

CAPTAIN GREGORY

Very well. Inform this gentleman that I'll be out momentarily.

SAILOR

Yes, sir.

The sailor exits the room.

CAPTAIN GREGORY

(frustrated)

Let me see this letter you're referring to, and why must we busy ourselves with smutty communique?

Taking the letter from the First Mate before reading the contents. Now finished, the Captain responds.

This is silly! Exactly who is this Anna Mons, and why is she so damned important as to cause a member of this ship to fool with a private missive?

ROLPH

Because, sir, she is the mistress of Tsar Peter Romanov!

Captain Gregory jumps up from the desk.

CAPTAIN GREGORY

Quick, get this letter to my courier, along with my dispatch to Tallinn. Tell him to classify the...missive as extra sensitive. I'll deal with the diplomat! If he has any sense at all, he'll flee Tallinn for the Orient immediately!

The First Mate secures Anna Mons' letter in his top pocket and, along with Captain Gregory's freshly-inked dispatch, brings the documents out to the awaiting courier.

EXT. TALLINN BAY, GULF OF FINLAND, BALTIC SEA - MOMENTS LATER

As ordered, Captain Gregory's personal currier, Erhard, is standing on the deck of a sloop heading for Tallinn Harbor.

The wind is modest, allowing the ship's jib sail to speed the craft to shore. While clinging to a grab line, Anna's secret missive to her Saxon lover is recited while the marble-gray Baltic passes mere inches below the gunwales.

ANNA

(voiceover)

Dearest Georg,
 I'm going mad here! Peter came by last night and slept over. He purchased this house for me so, what was I to do? His feelings for me have cooled of late; I can't put my finger on it exactly. Probably one of his premonitions! I simply can't imagine what he would do to me were he to find out about us, let alone you! Who knows what Peter's idea of diplomatic immunity is where love is concerned! What began as a plan to draw him closer to me by pretending to flirt with you has caused me to fall in love with you. It's not that I'm unhappy about our affair; on the contrary, I'm thrilled, but, after all, Peter's the Tsar! Look what he did to Eudoxia! I must go, I'm having dinner with Matrena later. I count the days until we're together again. My heart is no longer mine, *mein schatzen!* Why, were you here with me right now, I'd cancel my plans *und mit dir im Bett essen, während ich anfangen zu knurren!* Ha, ha!
 Your overly fond admirer,
 Anna M

At the letter's conclusion, the sloop dips into Tallinn Harbor.

INT. LIEBEOV MANSION, VICINITY OF LEFORTOVO, MOSCOW -
 AFTERNOON

The Tsar of Russia secretly enters the German Quarter in Moscow, a place he has frequented since his mid-teens while under the regency of his half-sister, Sophia. Arriving at his destination, he enters the front door of the Menshikov residence, a wooden structure in the vicinity of Lefortovo.

VALET

Welcome, Sire, my master will be present shortly. He asked that I seat you in the study. This way, please.

The valet guides Peter into the study and seats him in a chair made of finely tanned calf hides, before departing the room. Moments pass before Alexander Menshikov arrives.

MENSHIKOV

Sorry for the wait, I had to ready a member of my staff for your arrival.

PETER

What have you done to this place!

MENSHIKOV

Like it?

PETER

Why, it looks wonderful!

Slapping his knee.

(curious)

You've got a new maid!

MENSHIKOV

Well, sort of. Marta's a member of my staff, and sure-handed to say the least! Since she arrived here a few months ago, everything in this household burnishes. And clean! I tell you, Peter, her organizational skills are endless!

PETER

It sounds as if you've found yourself a mistress of merit.

MENSHIKOV

I have...! Still, I'm considering dismissing her from my service. Are you interested?

PETER

(chuckling)

Why? You said it yourself that she's resourceful. By the way, how old is she?

MENSHIKOV

(distracted)

She has so many talents, but I'm in search of a woman of breeding, befitting a duke.

He pauses to retrieve a wig from his desktop before putting it on.

The girl is nineteen, by the way. She's the daughter of Livonian peasants who was taken prisoner during the siege of Marienburg last year...

PETER

Who has undoubtedly made her way to Moscow! How providential, Alex.

MENSHIKOV

She had some help along the way.

PETER

I'll bet she did!

He gets up and walks over to a broad window.

MENSHIKOV

It was all Sherementev's doing. He brought her here to Moscow and parked her here, thinking he could visit her any time he pleased.

PETER

Has he?

MENSHIKOV

Oh, he tried! When Boris showed up here wanting to spend time with Marta, I informed him in no uncertain terms that this household wasn't a brothel and told him to piss off.

PETER

Did he do his stomp routine?

MENSHIKOV

He did, but I'm a respectable subject. If it got out that I have high-ranking officers using my establishment as a...shabby barracks, I'd have some explaining to do!

PETER

Hear, hear!

Menshikov hesitates.

MENSHIKOV

She's yours if you like...! I have no future with this girl, while you, you're the Tsar... Besides, you could use a new playmate now that Anna Mons is out of the picture.

PETER

Never mention her name again in my presence, Alex; she's caused me enough heartache to last a lifetime. After rereading the lines she wrote to Ambassador Keyserling, I don't know if I'll ever fall in love again! I tell you, Menshikov, Anna growling in German at the end of that poesy has me in pieces!

Driving his fist into the table.

MENSHIKOV

Knurren...?

PETER

Yes, *Knurren*. My Anna, growling like some kind of animal! With another man!

Dropping back into the armchair.

MENSHIKOV

All I'm saying is *meet* this clever girl, then decide! Like I said, she's yours for the taking...or not. Simple as that.

Peter remains skeptical.

Tell you what, let's discuss it over a drink! Tokay?

PETER

By all means!

Alex rings a tiny servant bell, and a beautiful young girl enters the study carrying a tray sporting a bottle of Tokay and a set of wine glasses.

MENSHIKOV

Ah, Marta...! It's alright. Don't be worried, the Tsar won't eat you...

(laughing)

Marta sets the tray down on Menshikov's desk and begins to pour out the wine, handing the first glass to Peter, then to her boss. Peter is dumbstruck by the girl's beauty.

Please, remain here with us.

Relax...

PETER

Come here, girl! It's alright, I won't hurt you.

Marta approaches the monarch only to feel him trace convex lines above her generous bosom. The young girl immediately leaps back from him, covering her breasts with both hands. Ashen and once again standing vulnerable before such a prominent figure, Marta begins to tremble and squirm. Peter immediately shifts to Menshikov, then back to this juvenile, to explain himself.

I meant you no harm, Miss. I thought you were another one of Alex's parlor wenches. Do forgive me!

MENSHIKOV

Tsar Peter, this is the talented young girl I discussed with you earlier. Why, she's not a...

PETER

I honestly didn't know, young lady. Here, have some Tokay. I command you. It's Hungarian!

Offering the wine to her and receiving Menchikov's blessing, she takes a sip. Marta now smiles at the Tsar with her faint blue eyes and striking blonde hair.

MENSHIKOV

So, what does Peter make of Marta, the lowly peasant girl...? Since her conversion to Orthodoxy last Spring, her name is actually *Katerina*. Catherine!

Peter strokes his black mustache.

PETER

Katerina, have your bags packed by morning! I'll send a member of the Kremlin Guard to retrieve you. And Alex...

MENSHIKOV

Yes?

PETER

Consider the rents you filched from me as...payment for *Katerina*.

MENSHIKOV

(delighted)

I had the very same idea in mind, Peter Alekseyevich!

Peter stands, removes the glass from Marta's hand, and finishes up the sweet Tokay before patting her affectionately on the back. This illiterate peasant girl now leaves the study, bound for greatness.

INT. CONVENT OF THE INTERCESSION, SUZDAL, RUSSIA - MORNING

Meanwhile, a vengeful Sister Elena makes good on her plans to regain dominion as Tsarina of Russia, and once and for all lay hold of her title as the true bride, not of the Orthodoxy, but of the sitting Tsar himself. Today, she has an influential visitor who will soon conspire with this Daughter of the Church to inch her plan along to its rightful conclusion.

ABBESS ELIZAVETA

Sister Elena, you have a visitor, Father Ambrose Podorin, Vicar of Rostov, who is waiting in the refectory.

EUDOXIA

He's early! Let him wait, I'm almost done reciting the Matins.

ABBESS ELIZAVETA

Very well, I'll return with him shortly.

She leaves the cell to inform Vicar Podorin that Eudoxia is finishing her morning prayers. Minutes later, Podorin is admitted into the former Tsarina's room.

PODORIN

Your Highness!

Genuflecting, before kissing her vacant hand.

EUDOXIA

Thank you for seeing me on such short notice.

Podorin bows in acknowledgment.

What's the news these days inside the Kremlin?

PODORIN

(stunned)

But I thought we were going to discuss your plan to take back the throne...

EUDOXIA

We'll get to that! Now, Vicar, pray tell, what's the latest inside the Kremlin? I insist!

Slouching back in her chair.

PODORIN

(submissively)

Very well, as you might have heard, the Tsar has dismissed his, if you'll forgive me, Tsarina, mistress.

EUDOXIA

Anna Mons...

PODORIN

Yes, Miss Mons. I won't get into the sordid details inside this sacred space.

EUDOXIA

Oh, tell, Vicar! What else does a gal have but to listen to a little gossip?

Podorin leans into his Sovereign.

PODORIN

A love letter from Anna to a Saxon diplomat named Georg Keyserling was accidentally found in the wreckage of a passenger ship stranded off the Baltic Coast. And, naturally, this sweet nothing made its way into the hands of the Tsar!

EUDOXIA

(blushing)

Oh, my!

PODORIN

What's more, Peter's threatening to sell off all of the properties he gave her, along with certain other valuables, after kicking her to the curb.

Eudoxia covers her mouth, suppressing any overt mirth. She begged for forgiveness, but he would not yield, saying she had cut him something awful, and as a result, Peter has taken up with a new mistress.

EUDOXIA

So soon?

PODORIN

Indeed. A castoff of Menshikov, who has apparently fallen madly in love with Darya Arseneeva, a maiden in your sister-in-law, Natalya's court.

EUDOXIA

I know of her family. Darya's father is a Siberian attaché.

PODORIN

That's right, Your Highness!

EUDOXIA

Go on. Hold it, how old is this new mistress?

The Vicar swallows hard before replying.

PODORIN

Nineteen.

EUDOXIA

(laughing)

Saints preserve us!

Blessing herself with the rosary cross.
I'll wager she's more refined than
that wine merchant's daughter!

PODORIN

I'm afraid she's even lowlier than
Anna Mons. She's an orphaned,
illiterate peasant girl from war-
torn Livonia, a foreigner, Great
Sovereign!

EUDOXIA

How utterly base of Peter.
Honestly! The man has to be
stopped! Why, the Russian Monarchy
is at stake!

PODORIN

Word is, she moved into Terem
Palace yesterday.

EUDOXIA

Likely into my suite, ignorant
peasant!

PODORIN

I'm told she's fair and blonde.

EUDOXIA

She had better be with that
pedigree. It never ends, Vicar.
(merrily)
Forgive me, Father, but you've made
this sorry cow very happy! May Our
Savior bless you.

PODORIN

You're too kind, Tsarina!

Taking her hand affectionately.

EUDOXIA

Now, let's get down to business,
shall we!

PODORIN

I'm ready, Your Highness.

The Vicar pulls a few sheets of linen paper from his satchel, set for business.

Forgive me, Your Highness, but can
I trouble you for a pen and an
ample supply of ink?

Outside the door, Abbess Elizaveta listens intently, quiet as a church mouse.

INT. TEREM PALACE, MOSCOW KREMLIN, RUSSIA - THE NEXT DAY

Shortly after arriving at Terem Palace, deep inside the vasty walls of the Kremlin, Marta Skavronskaya is admitted into the rear entrance by the Chamberlain, as Peter, no stranger to intrigue, looks down from an upper window. The Tsar's new love interest is led up a series of staircases to the fourth floor, home of Peter's residential quarters. Standing before the door, the Chamberlain addresses Marta before knocking.

CHAMBERLAIN

You're shaking, Miss!

MARTA

I know...

Letting out a deep sigh while an excited young sovereign opens the entranceway to greet her.

PETER

I've been expecting you. Come in.
I'm having my household staff bring
your bags up.

Marta sweeps into the reception room, marveling at its majesty.

MARTA

Well, I have very little luggage,
as you might imagine...

PETER

That won't be for long!

MARTA

Oh, be reasonable, I'm a peasant
girl at heart, used to living the
simple life, which is beautiful
enough, don't you think?

PETER

Well, I...

MARTA

A roof over my head suits me just fine, thank you. Walls adorned in gold, they're just walls to me!

Peter stands transfixed for a moment.

PETER

I couldn't agree more; it's tradition, something I'm keen on changing.

MARTA

So I've heard...

PETER

Won't you sit down? You look beautiful!

MARTA

Alex purchased it for Darya, but it didn't suit her, or something to that effect... So, you like it?

PETER

Why, yes, I like it a lot!

Rapping the top of an overstuffed chair beside him.

MARTA

(sighing)

Yet another hand-me-down... But I like it too!

Smiling at her host, as a knock on the door is heard.

PETER

What is it?

VALET

Sir, the lady's bags have arrived on the third floor.

Peter stands up.

PETER

Very good! Shall I accompany you to your residence?

MARTA

Residence? Why, I thought I'd be living here with you!

PETER

Someone as beautiful as you are
deserves a floor of her own in the
palace. Are you ready, Marta?

MARTA

(in disbelief)
Lead the way...

They depart Peter's residence by way of a back stairwell. Hearing their footsteps, Andrei, who is already inside the suite, opens the door to the most splendid sight that Marta has ever laid her eyes on. Gilded rooms of various colors met by brightly polished floors awash in dappled patterns of aquarelle light, courtesy of the stained-glass windows above, appear as many freshly painted frescoes. Making their way into the suite proper, the glittering walls inside shine like diamonds in an endless sea of gold leaf. This is a side of Russia that Marta has never seen before, like the foreigner she is, venturing into an alien world.

PETER

Like it?

MARTA

(bewildered)
Why, yes, but...

Speechless at such opulence.

PETER

This is your private suite. The ladies of the court will be arriving soon, along with maids who will dote on your every need. I'll leave you alone for the time being so you may familiarize yourself with the place. I've made sure that your bedroom, wardrobe, closets, and *retiradnik* are stocked with everything you need. I'll be just upstairs. Oh, and for now, use the back staircase.

MARTA

(distracted)
Alright. Thank you...

Peter departs the suite, while Marta, like a child in a playroom they've never known before, moves in and out of every lavishly-furnished room in wonder.

INT. TEREM PALACE, MOSCOW KREMLIN, RUSSIA - LATER

Introduced to the Ladies of the Court, fed a generous dinner, and tucked into bed by bustling chambermaids, Marta drifts to sleep after a day she'll not soon forget. Later that night, Peter enters her bedroom dressed in a single nightshirt, only to find her fast asleep. Gliding across the open floor without waking her, he strips off his garment and attempts to climb into bed with her. But watching this woman sleep so serenely, with all he's heard tell of her calamitous past, Peter stops himself and decides instead to gently kiss her rosy cheeks and study this new palace-mate of his uninterrupted, ultimately settling for this tranquil moment. After a considerable amount of time, he picks up his gown, tosses it over his shoulder, and strides through Marta's apartments before calmly scaling the rear staircase.

INT. TEREM PALACE, MOSCOW KREMLIN, RUSSIA - MORNING

Peter awakens early the next morning and soon decides to check in on Marta before beginning his administrative duties today. Knocking on her door at the bottom of the stairwell, he enters her suite.

MARTA

Good morning...

PETER

Whatever are you doing?

MARTA

Why, I'm washing my clothes.

PETER

But Marta, we have an entire staff for that!

MARTA

(smiling broadly)

I know...

Wiping the suds from her cheek.

PETER

Then why on earth are you washing your own clothes?

MARTA

Because I like to. It gives me a great deal of satisfaction. Besides, I'm far too fussy to allow someone else to do it.

PETER

But, they're already clean...

MARTA

I know!

Laughing so vivaciously, she captures Peter's ear.

PETER

Have you eaten?

MARTA

Uh huh. I made myself breakfast and some tea. You're right, my rooms are stocked with everything I need.

Peter sets his hands firmly on his hips.

PETER

I thank you, but the maids are supposed to make you breakfast! What do you think I pay them for?

MARTA

That's a good question! I guess I'm so used to it that I naturally fend for myself. And I'm good at it! I make the very best meals, just ask Alex, he'll vouch for me.

Returning to her washtub.

PETER

He already has, bountifully.

MARTA

Well, there you go!
(haltingly)
Where are you going?

PETER

I have some business to attend to across town. I shouldn't be long, an hour or two is all. You're free to explore the rest of the palace if you like. Otherwise, I'll return shortly, as I said...

Marta looks up at her tall housemate and smiles as she continues to scrub away in front of the bewildered Tsar.
Well, I'm off. I'll see you later.

MARTA

Guten Tag!

Peter returns upstairs before traveling across town to conduct some rather sensitive personal business.

INT. HOME OF GEORG KEYSERLING, GERMAN QUARTER, BASMANNY DISTRICT, MOSCOW, RUSSIA - MOMENTS LATER

Peter steps out of his carriage on a busy Stakovskaya Street directly in front of the home of Georg Keyserling, Ambassador of Saxony and intimate of his former mistress, Anna Mons, who eagerly greets him at the door.

ANNA

Come in...

PETER

Good morning, Anna. I hope my call finds you in good spirits. You look good...!

ANNA

(frowning)

As do you. Please sit down.

Smoothing out the pleats of her dress.

PETER

I'm afraid you'll have to...

ANNA

Oh, forgive me! The parlor's in here.

They enter a small room, and each takes a seat.

(dryly)

Now, what's on that determined mind of yours? I'm not going to get another tongue lashing, am I?

PETER

No... I need to know why you stepped out on me, then we can get down to business.

ANNA

Why, isn't it obvious, Peter? I waited twelve whole years, hoping you'd do the right thing by leaving Eudoxia and taking me as your bride to sit at your side on the throne. Was that too much to ask?

Standing up to pace in front of him.

We talked about this...!

(MORE)

ANNA (CONT'D)

Don't you remember me trying on my *kokoshnik*? Admit it, Peter, Pasha wasn't the woman for you! Your mother arranged that sham union to keep you on the straight and narrow! A lot of good that did!
(cackling)

PETER

But how was I to know you felt that way! It was all fun and games with us. Please sit down, I happen to be your Tsar!

ANNA

I'm sorry, forgive me.

Rolling her eyes while dropping into a chair.

PETER

We were drunk most of the time, Anna! I never really thought of you in a serious light. Nor did you, me, or so I thought... I gave you everything: a mansion to live in, country properties, lavish clothes to wear, and all the jewels a woman could ever want! But it's too late, you betrayed our relationship.

ANNA

I see...
(soberly)
But I already explained that I was merely trying to make you jealous!

PETER

Well, you did a cracking good job of it.

ANNA

It was never my intention to...

Suddenly quieter.

Fall in love with Georg.

PETER

I'm sorry, I didn't catch that.

ANNA

I went too far with him!

PETER

You certainly did. I saw your letter...

ANNA

(beseeching)

Oh, Peter, I must have been intoxicated when I wrote those things. I hadn't seen you in a while, that's all... Ich war verwirrt und Ängstlich.

Peter gets up from his chair.

PETER

What, afraid of me? Why, that's not possible! I've never been anything but gentle with you.

ANNA

(fondly)

You have... You mistook my German; I was scared of losing my chance of becoming Tsarina. When you returned from your Great Embassy tour, you placed Eudoxia in the convent, so naturally, I thought...

PETER

(fiery)

You thought we'd marry and you'd become Tsarina, or Consort, or whatever!

ANNA

How quickly men forget the things they say in bed. My bed! Your precise words to me on the morning I was half-dressed, trying on my *kokoshnik* were, Where serious, and nothing's going to change that, ever! Remember?

PETER

(tenderly)

I do...I do.

(defiantly)

But you jumped the gun!

ANNA

(scolding)

And you were as slow as sap in January, Peter Alekseyevich!

(MORE)

ANNA (CONT'D)

But, if I recall correctly, it wasn't so much you, but that skunk of a Metropolitan!

PETER

Adrian?

ANNA

Yes, him! You and your Orthodox Church were never going to approve of me, a foreigner, and a German no less! What was a woman like me supposed to do but to latch onto any dignitary I could get my hands on, an Ambassador who happens to love me? Me, me! A hopeless mistress who's spent half her lifetime with a man and nothing to show for it. Only to be replaced by a younger model!

Getting up to make some tea in the kitchen.
I hear she's nineteen...!

PETER

(grumbling)
You heard right.

ANNA

Who will bear you children, no doubt!

PETER

She's capable, I'll grant you that.
To be frank, she's never borne one.

Anna arches her eyebrows.

ANNA

Just perfect, give her time, Mother Russia will eat it up! Now, what's the business you came here to discuss with me? Do I get to keep my properties, or what?

Peter mulls over his options in the other room.

PETER

I must admit, there've been times since reading your love letter when I was fully committed to stripping you of them!

ANNA
Peter, that's not like you, and you
know it!

PETER
I know, I know...

ANNA
(intuitively)
But you've changed your mind?

Reentering the parlor with a tea kettle, followed seconds
later by a salver holding cups, saucers, and a diminutive
sugar bowl.

PETER
I have...

ANNA
Go on.

Pouring a cup for Peter, who prefers to take his tea black.

PETER
You may retain your house in this
District.

ANNA
Thank you, and its contents?

PETER
Yours... As for the hunting lodges.

ANNA
Yes?

PETER
(vengefully)
They're mine now.

ANNA
Oh, I loved those woodland estates,
so cozy and warm.

PETER
Who could forget!

ANNA
Remember the week we spent together
under half a dozen reindeer hides?
My feet were cold, but, as for my
upper regions, well...

PETER
 (dreamy)
 Hmmmm.

ANNA
 I'll miss those lodges. So
 practical, so entirely right...

Peter takes another pull on his tea before getting up.

PETER
 Uh, Miss Mons, you wouldn't be
 trying to get me back in your
 arms...

ANNA
 (pouting)
 Oh, Peter, my affair with George
 was one itty-bitty indiscretion.
 Why can't we make amends?

PETER
 Why? Because everybody who's
 anybody in Moscow, and perhaps
 beyond, knows about your itty-bitty
 indiscretion! I have a reputation
 to keep for the Church as well as
 Mother Russia. Whereas you, you can
 go on your merry way...oh, you pick
 the word!

ANNA
 Unscathed! We would have been fine
 together, and you know it!

PETER
 Perhaps, but you fooled around
 behind my back, and everybody knows
 it, so we must part.

Standing up to stretch.

I now have a new love interest that
 I must attend to presently.

ANNA
 What's her name?

PETER
 Marta Skavronskaya, a Livonian
 girl.

Nearing the end of her tea.

ANNA
A peasant like me, I suppose!

PETER
Yes, it appears she is.

ANNA
Just like you prefer them, dumb and simple, never imperiling that superior *schadel* of yours!

PETER
Something like that, though this one appears to be different. Marta can neither read nor write, but is talented in so many other ways. She washes her own clothes and cooks her own food.

Anna delivers a parting shot.

ANNA
Well, if you marry this one, I suggest you find someone to taste your food for you first before putting it in your mouth! Goodbye, Peter. You may show yourself out, Tsar or no Tsar!

PETER
As you wish...

ANNA
(irately)
No, as you wish!

Spilling the contents of her teacup.

INT. IMPERIAL RESIDENCE, VILLAGE OF PREOBRAZHENSKOYE, RUSSIA -
AFTERNOON

Natalya meets Master Vyazemsky outside the library in the Imperial Residence at Preobrazhenskoye after her nephew, Alexei, has finished his studies for the day.

NATALYA
How was Alexei's demeanor today?

MASTER VYAZEMSKY
He was fair and not as harsh as he usually is.

NATALYA

He knows his visitation date is nearing...

MASTER VYAZEMSKY

Forgive me, Tsarevna, I'm afraid I don't understand.

NATALYA

Alexei is to see his Mother next week and has been told by me in no uncertain terms that if he continues with his rants in your presence, he can forget about having an audience with her!

MASTER VYAZEMSKY

(laughing)

Oh, I see... Very clever of you!

NATALYA

I'm a mother too, I'll have you know! Keep up the good work, Master, and report any nonsense back to me.

MASTER VYAZEMSKY

As you wish, Tsarevna.

The sage tutor returns to the library where he draws up tomorrow's lesson plan.

INT. TEREM PALACE, TOP FLOOR, MOSCOW KREMLIN, RUSSIA - SAME TIME

Arriving back at the Terem Palace, Peter takes Marta to the top floor to provide her with a bird's-eye view of Moscow. Given no opportunity to change out of her work clothes, Marta appears in an ordinary provincial garment. Just before they enter the enormous room, Peter addresses Andrei.

PETER

See that we're not disturbed. And keep the door bolted.

VALET

Yes, Sire. Do you want me to bring up any refreshments?

PETER

That won't be necessary.

VALET
Very well. Enjoy the view, Miss.

MARTA
I shall, Andrei.

As the valet departs, she immediately runs to the row of windows, marveling at the spectacle below while tightly clinging to the sills.

Why, Peter, I've never been this high before!

PETER
I'll bet you haven't. Now you know how birds feel.

MARTA
Indeed. Oh, Peter, this is wonderful...! I can't believe my eyes, it's as if I'm flying.

PETER
Fall out of this window, and you'd find out!

Seizing her shoulders from behind and shaking her playfully.

MARTA
(shrieking)
Peter, what are you doing? Ha ha ha. Woo!

PETER
Sorry about that!

MARTA
My heart is beating so...

PETER
Mine, too.

Wheeling her around and attempting to kiss her.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACKS OF MARTA APPEARING NAKED ON CAPTAIN IAGORZHINSKY'S SHOULDERS INSIDE FIELD MARSHAL SHEREMENTEV'S MARIENBURG HEADQUARTERS, AND THE AFTERMATH.

FADE OUT.

MARTA

You mustn't do that. Oh, Menshikov tried, but I pushed him away, which is probably why he sent me to you. Excuse me, Peter, you're very kind, but I've yet to get over being paraded around like some sort of... battle trophy in Marienburg, then being mauled every night by Field Marshal Sherementev. I appreciated him saving me from the insatiable infantry and told him so, but still...

Peter returns her to the window.

PETER

It must have been so traumatic for you. I'm sorry...

(whispering)

I'll never be anything but gentle with you, Marta, and if, and only if, you're ready.

MARTA

I appreciate that.

PETER

I had a traumatic experience of my own that I've dealt with most of my life.

MARTA

Oh? Tell me more. Maybe we can compare stories.

Facing him once more, Peter delivers his personal account of a nearly executed boy Tsar.

PETER

My Mother, Natalya, was a member of the Naryshkin Family, who had many enemies, particularly among a rival family known as the Miloslavskys. Anyway, when I was ten years old, the Streltsy Guard stormed the staircase outside the Palace of Facets, over there.

Pointing to the ceremonial palace adjacent to them.

They then demanded that certain members of my Mother's family and influential boyars be handed over to them, or they would enforce their demands by sword.

Beads of sweat begin to form on Peter's brow.

MARTA

But why? For what reason?

PETER

The Streltsy Guard and others somehow convinced themselves that my predecessor, Tsar Feodor, and my half-brother, Ivan, were either poisoned or strangled and needed proof, at least, that my stepbrother was still alive. I remember my Mother nervously taking Ivan and me to the top of the Red Staircase and parading their dear, favored Ivan in front of them!

Taking time to collect his thoughts.

Witnessing the sight of my half-brother and me in the living flesh seemed to placate the Streltsy, so they calmly broke up their assembly and proceeded to go home. Mother then returned my stepbrother and me to the ballroom upstairs to keep us safe. Suddenly, there was a frightening clamor outside. Apparently, a hardline boyar seeking to bring order to the ranks caused the Streltsy Guards to turn on their heels, lay hold of him, and throw this boyar, I believe his name was Prince Dolgoruky, over the balustrade into a sea of razor-sharp pikes.

Marta proceeds to hold both hands over her mouth.

MARTA

And you witnessed all of this as a young boy?

PETER

Marta, I was inches away from their gleaming hilts.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

I can still see those shaggy
soldiers in their fur-trimmed
Shapkas. Inches, mere inches
away...

Marta soon notices that the left side of Peter's face is beginning to quiver like an Aspen, before traveling down his arm, then leg. He now leans heavily against his new houseguest and tumbles to the floor.

INT. TEREM PALACE, TOP FLOOR, MOSCOW KREMLIN, RUSSIA - NIGHT

Over the next seven perilous hours, Marta cradles Peter's head in her lap while stroking his hair to soothe him. In and out of consciousness, he is barely able to discern the German lullaby she gently sings to him on this cold and lonely night.

MARTA

Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf,
Der Vater hüt die Schaf,
Die Mutter schüttelts Bäumelein,
Da fällt herab ein Träumelein,
Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf.

Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf,
Am Himmel ziehn die Schaf,
Die Sternlein sind die Lammerlein,
Der Mond der ist das Schaferlein,
Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf.

Hmmm, hmm-hmm, hmmm,
Hmmm, hmmm, hmmm, hmmm, hmmm, hmmm,
Hmmm, hmmm, hmmm, hmmm, hmmm, hmmm,
hmmm, hmmm,
Hmmm, hmm-hmm, hmmm...

Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf,
So schenk ich dir ein Schaf
Mit einer goldnen Schelle fein,
Das soll dein Spielgeselle sein,
Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf.

Shortly after sunrise, a knock is heard at the door.

VALET

It's Andrei, Sire. I'm here with
your breakfast. I noticed you
weren't in bed, so...

MARTA

Thank Heavens, Andrei! Get the doctor, Peter has fallen ill!

VALET

Unbolt the door! Quickly now!

Marta runs to the door and unlocks it.

Thank goodness you were here with him. I just assumed you two retired to your bedroom, I...

MARTA

We were standing at the window over there, and Peter was describing to me his encounter with the Streltsy Guards when he was a boy. He started perspiring and soon began to tremble before falling to the floor. I've been up the entire night trying to soothe him. He's been in and out of consciousness, but breathing all the while! It's entirely my fault. Oh, Andrei...!

Returning to Peter's prone body.

VALET

But how is it your fault, Miss?

MARTA

(sobbing)

I told him about my frightful experience with Sherementev's army when Marienburg was sacked. Peter then said he too witnessed tragedy when he was a child. So, I asked him to share the experience with me, not thinking that it could, oh, Andrei...!

VALET

Now, Missy, I'll fetch the doctor and be back up here in no time. Everything's going to be alright, you'll see. For now, you are to remain here with the Tsar! Understood?

MARTA

I shall. Thank you.

Andrei leaves the room while Marta returns to the floor next to Peter.

This time, she places a pillow she has just located under his head. He abruptly wakes up, finding Marta by his side, singing softly. He slowly mouths the words to her song while regaining consciousness.

PETER

(faintly)

Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf,
So schenk ich dir ein Schaf

(haltingly)

Mit einer goldnen Schelle fein,
Das soll dein Spielgeselle sein,
Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf...

Rubbing his forehead.

Have I been out the entire night?

MARTA

Shush now, Andrei and the doctor
will be here any moment.

PETER

How long was I senseless?

MARTA

You were in and out, but mostly
unconscious...

PETER

And you stayed with me, intoning
that song?

Attempting to sit up.

MARTA

Now, now, there, let's wait for the
doctor to look you over first.

Patting him on the shoulder.

PETER

You must go; I don't want you to
see me like this.

MARTA

But Peter, we were alone together
the entire night...

PETER

That's right, how silly of me. Can
you hum that lullaby to me while I
close my eyes? But you must go when
the doctor arrives. My condition is
a bit of a state secret.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)
 (chuckling)
 We wouldn't want the enemy to know.

MARTA
 Very well, but you must promise me
 you'll rest.

PETER
 I promise. Now sing, Marta...

MARTA
 (quietly)
 Hmm, hmm-hmm, hmm,
 Hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm,
 Hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm,
 hmm, hmm,
 Hmm, hmm-hmm, hmmm...

Peter goes back to sleep, this time with a smile on his face instead of a grimace. Footsteps soon echo outside the door; it's the doctor, accompanied by Andrei. Marta crosses paths with them and heads for the exit. Exhausted both physically and emotionally, she takes one last look at Peter Alexievich, believing in her heart's heart that she'll never return to Terem Palace again.

INT. TEREM PALACE, MOSCOW KREMLIN, RUSSIA - MOMENTS LATER

Returning to her suite, Marta dismisses the thought of sleep and instead begins to pack her bags, leaving every gift she received from Peter on the bed. She soon bounds down the main staircase and slips out the entranceway as a stoic Sentry looks on.

INT. TEREM PALACE, MOSCOW KREMLIN, RUSSIA - LATER

A member of the Kremlin Guard appears in the Chamberlain's Office located on the first floor of Terem Palace.

SOLDIER
 Sir, I caught a young lady trying
 to sneak out of the *Kolymazhnye*
Vorota.

CHAMBERLAIN
 Very well, who is she? What's her
 name?

SOLDIER
 She says her name is Marta
 Skavronskaya. She's the Tsar's,
 forgive me...

CHAMBERLAIN

Go on, go on!

SOLDIER

Well, sir, she's the Tsar's
female...companion.

Getting up from his desk.

CHAMBERLAIN

Show her in. You've performed an
invaluable service to the Palace!

Marta is brought into the Chamberlain's office, just as the
excited soldier returns to his station.

You may sit down, Miss
Skavronskaya.

(shouting)

Oh, Alisa, Alisa...!

A cleaning maid soon appears.

ALISA

Yes, sir. What is it?

CHAMBERLAIN

Can you go upstairs and inform
Andrei that I need to have a word
with him?

ALISA

Alright, I'm just finishing up the
hallway...

CHAMBERLAIN

Now, if you please!

ALISA

I'm on it, sir.

Looking over at Marta before departing the office. Moments
later, Andrei appears at the door.

CHAMBERLAIN

Ah, Andrei, there you are! This
young lady tried to slip out the
Kolymazhnye Vorota unnoticed.

Andrei steps into the office and immediately notices the
guilty party.

VALET

Marta, where were you going and
why?

MARTA

This Palace isn't right for me,
Andrei. I want to return to Liebeov
Mansion with Herr Menshikov!

VALET

But, why?
(appealingly)
I'll handle this, Leonid. Come,
Marta, I'll take your bags.

They depart the office just as Alisa finishes mopping the hallway.

INT. OUTSIDE MARTA'S SUITE, TEREM PALACE, MOSCOW KREMLIN,
RUSSIA - MOMENTS LATER

After slowly climbing the main staircase with Andrei, Marta braces herself before reentering her suite. Outside the door, she and Peter's trusted Valet finish their discussion.

VALET

(whispering)
As I said, give it another night.
On our walk back to his quarters
earlier, Peter said that your
staying by his side last evening
likely saved his life. He's most
grateful and wants to show his
appreciation in an extraordinary
way. He's sleeping now, doctor's
orders. But he wants me here to
witness your expression when you
see it.

MARTA

(regretfully)
Please, no more gifts! I don't
deserve them...!

VALET

Alright, but try going along this
one last time. I'll be candid with
you, Miss, I've never heard him
talk about any woman in that
manner, not even Anna Mons...

MARTA

Hmm. I don't know what to say.
Peter's convulsion last night was
just the tip of the iceberg,
Andrei.

(MORE)

MARTA (CONT'D)

Besides, I'm in over my head...I'm only a peasant, far less deserving than the likes of Anna Mons. She deserves the crown, should it come to that, not me. To put it simply, I am not worthy.

VALET

You need to trust Peter. He told me...he's falling in love with you. I tell you, he's never said that word before, not around me, anyway, and I'm the only valet he's ever had!

Marta rolls her eyes as she opens the door. Inside, on every available surface, in every room of her suite, she finds hundreds, possibly thousands of roses. Red, red roses. When she returns to the foyer, this peasant girl treats the Tsar's Valet to the most gratifying smile he has ever seen.

INT. CHURCH OF ST. CATHERINE, TEREM PALACE, MOSCOW KREMLIN, RUSSIA - DAWN

Nine months later, in the Fall of Seventeen Hundred and Four, incense of frankincense and myrrh drift swiftly toward the cupola inside the Church of St. Catherine, located on the uppermost floor of Terem Palace. The tinkling of tiny bells hanging from a *ketsya* meanders throughout the cavernous site, signifying the Twelve Apostles. As the Tsar looks on, his son, Peter Petrovitch Romanov, born three short days ago, is stripped of his swaddling garments and submerged three times in a font of holy water drawn from the shores of the Moskva River. During this private ceremony, the child's unmarried mother, Marta, sits quietly behind a veil, hidden from sight.

Marta smiles broadly as she listens to the final verse of Psalm Ninety.

PODORIN

May the favor of the Lord our God
be ours. Prosper the work of our
hands! Prosper the work of our
hands!

The couple soon makes their way back to the residence, with Marta holding the ice-cold infant to her breast. As they walk through the wooden passageway, no celebratory bells strike in Cathedral Square! The only proclamation ringing in Marta's ears is excerpts from the final Psalm.

(in voiceover)

Shout joyfully to the LORD, all you
lands.

(MORE)

PODORIN (CONT'D)

Come before him with joyful song.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
his courts with praise. Give thanks
to him, bless his name. Good indeed
is the LORD, His mercy endures
forever, his faithfulness through
every generation.

Coming to the end of the passageway, Tsar Peter Alexievich
opens the door for his mistress and son.

EXT. CONVENT OF THE INTERCESSION, SUZDAL, RUSSIA - THE NEXT
DAY

Eudoxia and Vicar Podorin stroll the leaf-blown courtyard of
the Convent of the Intercession in Suzdal. Finally entrusted
to walk the grounds on her own, she continues with the
prelate.

EUDOXIA

How did she look?

PODORIN

Fine, I guess; she was seated
behind a veil, off to the side.

EUDOXIA

I figured that, being unmarried.
(panicking)
They're still unmarried, right?

PODORIN

Yes, yes...

EUDOXIA

(jovially)
When I had Alexei, I couldn't get
out of bed for a week!

Kicking the leaves around.

Ha! Typical peasant! Why, I hear in
most places they give birth in a
furrow by morning and are back in
the fields by noon! Glory be... I'm
told she's well endowed, so I'm
thinking she won't be needing the
services of a wet nurse!

Slapping the beads at her side, while Podorin blushes.

PODORIN

Poor baby, he was so cold when I
drenched him in the baptismal font.

(MORE)

PODORIN (CONT'D)

I was relieved to finally pull him out the third and final time!

EUDOXIA

Poor baby, nothing! He'll get by, you'll see. But he won't be challenging my Alexei for the throne. I'll see to that! With your help, of course...

PODORIN

Hmm. I'm making inroads, to be sure, but it's yet to be determined how to raise your wifely claim with Metropolitan Adrian. As for this issue by Marta Skavronskaya, you have nothing to fear from this child. He's Peter Petrovich, not Peter Petrovich, Tsarevich of Russia! In other words, he's no prince...

Eudoxia heads for the convent door.

EUDOXIA

You're right, Vicar Podorin, and thank Heavens for that! I'm due back inside now; the prayer bell should be summoning us sisters soon.

PODORIN

Goodbye, my child. I'll keep you posted.

EUDOXIA

Thank you, Vicar.

She envelops into the confines of the aptly-named Convent of the Intercession.

INT. HOME OF GEORG KAYSERLING, GERMAN QUARTER, BASMANNY DISTRICT, MOSCOW, RUSSIA - SAME TIME

Georg Kayserling is back in Moscow, entering the city in a shuttered *kolyмага* that drops him off a few streets from his house. Fearful of reprisals from Peter, he enters the kitchen door after crossing through his backyard. Anna is reading in the parlor.

ANNA

(cautiously)

Is that you, Georg?

GEORG

Indeed, it's me! Quickly now, draw the drapes.

ANNA

I've made something for your arrival. It's cooling in the oven.

Entering the kitchen and embracing him.

How was your trip?

GEORG

Cold and blustery...!

ANNA

I'll put on some tea. Take off your things and relax in the parlor.

GEORG

I will, but I must stay on my feet for a while. My back is killing me.

ANNA

Go ahead, I'll plate your meal and bring in some tea.

Georg wanders into the parlor.

(louder)

I'm so glad you're home. Willem is stopping by after school. I want you to speak to him about joining the Tsar's Dragoons. I was outside the Petrovsky Theater recently and saw a most impressive portrait of Peter leading a cavalry charge.

GEORG

He's a bit young for that, don't you think?

Setting down some papers.

ANNA

That's where you come in, Georg! You have connections, surely...

GEORG

Very well, I'll look up some of my old friends at the War College, and if young Willem is agreeable...

ANNA

You leave that to me!

Carefully peeking through a lone drape, Anna spots Willem coming up the walk and runs to the front door to greet him.
How's the best looking young man in Moscow?

WILLEM

(bashfully)

You never cease to remind me,
Sister.

ANNA

Come in, come in. Georg arrived home half an hour ago, and we're eager to run something by you. Are you hungry?

Willem enters the parlor, sets his books down on the bureau, and turns to shake Ambassador Keyserling's hand.

EXT. LOG SETTLEMENT, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - DAWN

Over a five-day period, Marta and her young child travel from Moscow to St. Petersburg in a *kibitka* on a route recently blazed by her husband.

At last, they arrive in the new capital, where mounted sentries guide them to a tiny cabin. This dwelling, among the first to be built in St. Petersburg, was recently constructed by soldiers of the Semyonovskiy Regiment and Peter himself. Hearing the bells on the wagon, Peter arrives on the porch to greet his young family.

PETER

Ahoy there!

COACHMAN

I'll get your bags, Miss.

MARTA

Thank you, Stepan!

Addressing her husband.
How are you?

PETER

I'm well. Stepan, stow her bags in the vestibule. We're on our way to Zayachy Island. Soldiers are laying the timbers today for the Sovereign's Bastion in my honor.

MARTA

Island? I'm afraid little Peter is tuckered out after such a long journey, as is his mother...

PETER

Nonsense! We leave shortly. It's a beautiful day!

Marta retrieves her swaddled son from the wagon.

MARTA

Very well, but first I must get Peter out of his *Tragetasche*. It has to be stifling in there.

PETER

He'll get plenty of fresh air on the island. The Baltic breezes can be most invigorating.

Marta follows Stepan onto the porch before embracing the Tsar, allowing him to catch a peek of his son.

My, how he's grown, Marta!

MARTA

Yes. I must say, young Peter is a hearty eater. My body can no longer keep up with his voracious appetite; he's thriving so...

PETER

(smiling)

Your body looks fine to me!

MARTA

Never mind that, Peter!

PETER

Thriving, that's good, isn't it?

MARTA

For him, yes. As for me, like most women, I'll just have to bear it!

PETER

That's the spirit...! Now, come along, I've packed some *yabloki* for the ride.

MARTA

(fatigued)

Oh, Peter, you're already tiring me out, and I've only been here a few minutes!

PETER

You can sleep on the way to the fortress. Let's go, we're already late. I'm meeting Menshikov there.

Marta enters the awaiting carriage with their son while setting off on yet another trip, this time to Zayachy Island on the windswept Baltic Sea.

INT. LOG SETTLEMENT, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - EVENING

With her baby sound asleep, Marta enters the cabin's only bedroom. It's windy tonight, causing the shutters out front to clatter away. Peter, eager to be alone at last with his mistress, soon learns that Marta is far more interested in prattling on about Menshikov than rekindling their romance headlong.

MARTA

I saw you studying Alex when he kept staring at me this morning. It must have been my blond hair blowing in strands, and he isn't even Russian! Maybe I'll dye my hair black. That'll really drive him mad!

Peter turns onto his side.

PETER

What exactly do you mean? And don't even think about toying with my closest advisor, woman!

(growling)

MARTA

(sprightly)

Ha, ha, he deserves it! You know, I often think that the only reason he put us two together was to keep an eye on you through me.

PETER

Marta, please...

Becoming restless.

MARTA

No, really! When you were helping the men arrange those...huge bastion timbers today, I thought for sure Alex would grill me about your activities, but no, all he did was stand there and gawk at me. I wonder why...?

The shutters begin to clack again.

PETER

(laughing)
Seller's remorse!

MARTA

Shush! You'll wake up Peter.

Listening for any sound from the boy's crib before speaking.

(whispering)

No, he's quite happy with Darya Arsenyeva. He loves her too much to jeopardize their relationship! That's not it. I guess time will tell.

PETER

Yes... Then again, perhaps never. Alex is a complicated man, capable of many things. I wouldn't want him for an enemy. That's one reason I keep him so close.

MARTA

I see...

PETER

(razzing)
What else is going on inside that blond head of yours?

MARTA

You give me too much credit.

Rolling onto her side.

PETER

(blithely)
Oh, no. I know wisdom when I see it. That's why I keep you so close.

Enjoying his turn of words.

Now, I believe it's time we get...

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)
 reacquainted. After all, it's been
 three whole months!

MARTA
 And well after my purification
 period...

PETER
 Leviticus!

His mistress, in a higher, softer voice, replies.

MARTA
Du hast deine Mutter also vermisst?

PETER
 Um, hmmm.

MARTA
 And her *WarmweiÙe Hautt?*

Peter begins to hover over her as she returns to a supine position.

PETER
 Hmm, hmmm...

MARTA
 And these?

Pulling down the covers and giving up her body to the Tsar of Russia.

PETER
 (growling)
 Uh, I bite...

MARTA
 (gently)
 Yes, you do. Now, Peter, remember
 what I said about mauling me.

Marta laughs.
 Wooo! Oh, Peter!

PETER
 I'll try to be gentler this time...

Like sentries at attention, the shutters promptly cease their clattering on the face of this tiny, remote cabin in the soon-to-be City of St. Petersburg.

THREE YEARS LATER

EXT. BATTLEFIELD OUTSIDE POLTAVA, UKRAINE - DAY

The foursome of Peter, Catherine, Alexander, and Darya arrives in the garrison town of Poltava in Ukraine. Swedish cannons sound for miles, followed by volleys belching from the heavy guns of Tsarist Dragoons, hurling their discharges into enemy lines. Peter and Alexander's senses quicken, while Catherine and Darya shudder. They soon pull into the encampment, which includes lodging for officers and their spouses. The ladies are soon helped down from the carriage by awaiting Infantry. While stepping out of the coach, the garniture on Darya's gown gets caught on the rig's trim, causing her dress to tear.

DARYA
(terrified)
Somebody help me, I'm caught!

CATHERINE
Here, let me help you...

Preventing Darya from moving any further.

DARYA
Oh, this is awful, and all the soldiers are looking on...

CATHERINE
(firmly)
Alright, you men, turn around. I'll let you know when you can look.

The men turn around, as does the footman.
Hold still, Darya. Oh, I don't know how this material got so tightly wound around this nail. You must have twisted so. Wait a minute, I've got this...

PETER
What's the matter? They're making preparations for our lodging, and I need you there to supervise!

CATHERINE
Turn your head!

PETER
What?

CATHERINE
You heard me, turn away!

PETER

But...

CATHERINE

I'm afraid this rend in her dress may reveal more than Darya is comfortable with. In public, no less. Now turn around. Scoot, scoot, scoot!

PETER

Oh, very well...

The Tsar complies with his wife's order.

CATHERINE

Alright, Darya, once more now... I got it! There you go! Quickly now, go with my husband, and I'll be right there.

(louder)

I'll be along in a minute, Peter, oh, sorry, Your Imperial Highness!

Peter heads to the lodgings with Darya.

INT. HEADQUARTERS, POLTAVA BATTLEFIELD, UKRAINE, RUSSIA - THE NEXT DAY

Catherine and Darya visit Peter's field headquarters early the next morning. A soldier greets them at the entrance.

SOLDIER

The Tsar is expecting you. Right this way!

The Dragoon leads them through a maze of departments before arriving at Peter's post.

Your Highness, the ladies have arrived.

PETER

Show them in!

The women enter the office.

Welcome! Come in, come in...

CATHERINE

You have quite the operation going on here, Peter.

PETER

(smiling)

Indeed. You may take a seat over here.

Pointing to the divan across the room. Ribbons of attendants stream in and out of the map-strewn office. As mere observers to this swirl of activity, the ladies sit quietly while military personnel hover about the Tsar.

CAPTAIN KUZNETSOV

Sir, the Swedes have taken up a new position along a tree line, here.

Pointing to a map spread out across Peter's desk.

PETER

Send young Willem in here at once.

CAPTAIN KUZNETSOV

Yes, sir!

Leaving the room. A dashing young lieutenant soon appears before Peter's desk as two large explosions are heard nearby.

WILLEM

Yes, sir. You wanted to see me?

PETER

Take this message and deliver it to Field Marshal Sherementev posthaste!

WILLEM

Yes, sir!

Performing a flawless about-face in front of the Tsar while setting his eyes on Catherine.

PETER

Gentlemen, we're changing tactics. Our cannons will now be firing grapeshot, sweeping the field until further orders! We must drive these stubborn Swedish gun crews from the area!

Catherine wonders to herself who this young Dragoon might be before getting up, nodding to the Tsar, and showing Darya out of the field headquarters, amidst the jingles of her *chatelaine*.

EXT. HEADQUARTERS, POLTAVA BATTLEFIELD, UKRAINE, RUSSIA -
MOMENTS LATER

Crossing the parade ground on their way back to the lodge,
Catherine inquires aloud who that gallant young lieutenant
was back at headquarters.

CATHERINE

Did you happen to notice that young
Dragoon standing in front of
Peter's desk back there?

DARYA

There were many!

CATHERINE

I mean the handsome lieutenant who
looked my way...

DARYA

You mean Willem?

CATHERINE

(wide eyed)
Wait a minute, you know him?

DARYA

Of course I do!

CATHERINE

Well, go on. Who is he?

DARYA

You seem interested in him! Why,
he's just a boy...

CATHERINE

I don't know why, exactly. So, who
is this boy?

DARYA

His name is Willem Mons. He's Anna
Mons' little brother. She
encouraged him to join the
Dragoons, and now he's attached to
the Tsar. Somebody's got pull...
(sarcastically)

CATHERINE

I'll say, and how quickly he's
risen through the ranks! I noticed
he's a lieutenant.

DARYA

I see Anna's hand in this, or possibly her fiancé, Georgi.

Entering a courtyard just outside their lodgings, they sit down on a pine bench.

CATHERINE

Who?

DARYA

Georg Keyserling, Ambassador of Saxony. Anna's fiancé!

CATHERINE

Oh... Hold on, her fiancé?

DARYA

You didn't know? She and Georgi made it official this past Spring, but they need the Tsar's approval before setting a wedding date.

Pausing for some soldiers to pass diagonally through the courtyard before responding.

CATHERINE

What? But why?

DARYA

It's a long, sad story, *Katya*. As you know, Peter and Anna were together for twelve years before meeting you. She had high hopes of becoming Tsarina, particularly after Peter returned from his European tour, only to confine his wife in a convent and force her to take the veil.

CATHERINE

Eudoxia?

DARYA

Now known as Sister Elena...

CATHERINE

(amusingly)

Forgive me? Sister Elena...?

DARYA

Don't be surprised if you, too, are similarly situated someday.

CATHERINE

Oh, don't be silly, Darya!

DARYA

Alright, have it your way. Anyway, Anna began to panic that Peter was somehow losing interest in her, so she began flirting with the Ambassador to lure the Tsar back into her arms. But...

CATHERINE

But, what...? What!

DARYA

Anna was beginning to fall in love with Georgi and told him so in a letter that was intercepted outside Tallinn, which was soon handed over to Peter.

CATHERINE

No!

Moving to the very edge of the bench.

DARYA

Uh, hmm. And the language she used to describe their relationship was very, what's the word, revealing!

CATHERINE

I was familiar with certain aspects of the account, but not this...

DARYA

What's more, Peter threatened to jail Anna along with the Ambassador before relenting and permitting her to keep her house in the German Quarter, but not her country estates.

CATHERINE

Estates?

Standing up and beginning to pace the courtyard.
And jewelry, I suppose!

DARYA

Oh, yes! She got Peter to agree to that, along with her elaborate furniture, expensive gifts, and hundreds of gowns from among the finest shops in Europe.

CATHERINE

I, I never knew, nor needed to know, the full extent of their breakup. Why should I? Those things aren't important to me! Nor to Peter, so I thought...

DARYA

You're different, and so very perfect for him, with a more than equal chance of becoming Tsarina in my estimation.

Catherine returns to the bench, deep in thought.
I wouldn't worry if I were you, dear. What's done is done. But know this, there are four women in Peter's life: his deceased mother, Natalya, Eudoxia, Anna Mons, and you. And that's about it!

CATHERINE

What's so unusual about that?

DARYA

Oh, nothing, just that, but for a single misstep, Anna could have been Tsarina in a few short years. Peter's a one-woman man, Katya, and that woman is you! I notice the way he behaves in your presence.

(bantering)

Believe you me, you'll be Tsarina one day, and soon.

CATHERINE

(confused)

Stop it...! I'm only a...

DARYA

Only a beautiful woman, that he's mad about. It's obvious he prefers you over other women out there.

CATHERINE

Me?

DARYA
 You bore him four children, for
 goodness sake!

Catherine drops her head, clutching the bench tightly with
 both hands.

CATHERINE
 And only one of them survived.

DARYA
 Anna.

CATHERINE
 (sobbing)
 Anna... What kind of mother am I?

Looking skyward, bleary-eyed.

DARYA
 (consolingly)
 A good mother, if I have anything
 to say about it!
 (reluctantly)
 I'm about to bear a child, too.

CATHERINE
 And you risked traveling over that
 rugged terrain back there?

DARYA
 (giggling)
 Uh, hmm...

Catherine slides down the bench next to Darya before taking
 her hand.

CATHERINE
 (more hopeful)
 Then, let's make this the happiest
 time of our lives!

DARYA
 Alright! Alex doesn't know yet;
 it's a secret. I'm waiting for the
 right time to break the news to
 him.

CATHERINE
 I understand completely!
 (haltingly)
 I'm carrying a secret of my own, as
 well...

DARYA

You are?

Squeezing Catherine's hand.

CATHERINE

Peter and I were married a few years ago by Metropolitan Adrian at his insistence after our two boys died. Giving us a fresh start, if you will.

DARYA

So, Anna is...

CATHERINE

Legitimate and worthy of the title Tsarevna.

DARYA

A Princess of Russia.

CATHERINE

Come to think of it, yeah...

Yeah...! A Princess!

(dreamily)

Come on, let's get you inside and out of the elements, *kleine Mutter*...

DARYA

(giggling)

Mama, dorogaya.

These soon-to-be best friends now move indoors to the sound of distant cannon fire.

INT. CONVENT OF THE INTERCESSION, SUZDAL, RUSSIA - DAY

Fresh from his wedding in Torgau, Saxony, Alexei visits his mother at the Convent of the Intercession in Suzdal. Since she took the veil, he has called on her numerous times. She now welcomes him in the nunnery's parlor.

ALEXEI

Mother.

EUDOXIA

Tell me all about the wedding, Alexei. I was heartbroken that your father denied my attending the ceremony.

ALEXEI

Well, it was in Torgau, as you know. Charlotte was subdued, as you might understand.

EUDOXIA

I heard you weren't married in an Orthodox Church. Such a pity.

Alexei moves to a chair closer to his mother.

ALEXEI

No, Charlotte's family insisted on a Lutheran Service in the castle church at *Schloss Hartenfels* in Saxony.

EUDOXIA

Oh, Alexei, do speak Russian!

ALEXEI

Forgive me, Mother, Hartenfels Castle. Austere, to be exact, it's not called Hard Rock Castle for nothing.

EUDOXIA

And Lutheran, how dreadful. Really, Alexei, how could you?

Reaching for her beads.

ALEXEI

I had no say in the matter! Father conceded to the Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel's demands, all to deepen ties with the royal houses of Europe.

EUDOXIA

Political, in other words...

ALEXEI

Yes, political. Father deems it necessary for Russia to move forward and make inroads in the broader world, and my wedding in Torgau was only the beginning.

EUDOXIA

Yes, a man of the world, your Father is... Were there any concessions made on the part of Charlotte's family?

Alexei gets up and goes over to a large window.

ALEXEI

Yes. Any children Charlotte and I have will be raised in the Orthodox faith.

EUDOXIA

Thank Heavens for that. Please God, you are the heir to the Russian Crown, and as such, your offspring. Now, regarding my plans to ensure your succession, I'm handing you a letter from Vicar Podorin of Rostov, containing information I dare not speak within these walls.

Giving the letter to her son.

ALEXEI

Thank you, Mother, and be assured Father Podorin's letter will be properly safeguarded. Now, I must return to St. Petersburg to attend to administrative affairs.

EUDOXIA

(sarcastically)

I understand. Your Father has seen to it that Holy Moscow play second cousin to St. Petersburg. That putrid swamp...!

ALEXEI

I can assure you, Mother, that St. Petersburg is fast becoming the Venice of the North...

EUDOXIA

I'll bet it is, if your Father has anything to do with it.

ALEXEI

Or Catherine...

EUDOXIA

(grumbling)

Yes, that German peasant! One reason I'm sitting in this...nunnery right now.

ALEXEI

Mother, when I'm Tsar someday, my very first decree will be to free you.

Getting up from her chair and standing at the window next to her son.

EUDOXIA

It had better be. Such is my fervent prayer. Then the splendor of Old Muscovy will at once be restored, and these incessant Western ways favored by your Father will be cast aside, restoring Russia to its normal self. But to achieve these noble goals, we'll need people of influence and strength. Possibly someone in the Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel family, eh, Alexei?

Having herself a good laugh.

Now that would be just deserts for your conniving Father...!

ALEXEI

Yes, Mother. Goodbye. See you next time.

He bows to his mother and departs the convent, letter in hand.

INT. ST. ISAAC'S CATHEDRAL, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - MORNING

On a cold February morning, the Metropolitan of St. Petersburg recites a litany of nuptial prayers inside St. Isaac's Cathedral, near the waters of the Neva River.

METROPOLITAN

The servant of God, Peter Alexeyevich Romanov, is crowned for the handmaiden of God, Catherine Alekseyevna Skavronskaya, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...

During the *Venchanie*, Peter and Catherine, each holding a burning candle, exchange ceremonial crowns three times, but not before she removes her elaborate *kokoshnik*. After the Lord's Prayer, the couple drinks from a single chalice of consecrated wine. Holding the Gospel Book, the Metropolitan now leads the couple around the analogion three times.

At the conclusion of the exhausting ceremony, wherein the couple, by tradition, stand the entire time, the presider removes the crowns from their heads, saying.

Accept their crowns in Your kingdom
unsoiled and undefiled, and
preserve them without offense to
the ages of ages.

At the conclusion of the three-hour service, the Metropolitan addresses the newlyweds for the final time.

Go forth in peace.

In a ceremony steeped in tradition, Peter and Catherine emerge from the Cathedral as a publicly recognized couple, legitimizing in the process their remaining children, Anna and Elizabeth, and making their devoted mother, Tsarina Consort. They soon join a great banquet held in their honor inside the Stone Winter Palace. After arriving back at their private quarters, Catherine discovers a six-branch ivory and ebony candelabrum, made by Peter himself, hanging over the dining room table.

In aeternum ut vivant!

INTERMISSION

INT. CATHERINE'S SUITE, STONE WINTER PALACE, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - DAY

Matrena von Balk knocks on the door to Catherine's suite inside the Stone Winter Palace. A chamberlain smartly dressed in a green and red uniform, with gold piping, opens the door to greet her.

METRENA

It's vital that I speak with the
Tsarina.

CHAMBERLAIN

Come in. I'll see if she's
available, *Generalsha*.

METRENA

I'll wait, thank you.

Catherine soon enters the reception room followed by her two young girls.

CATHERINE

Now, you two sit quietly on the
settee over there. Yes, Metrena,
what is it?

METRENA

I'm told you're unhappy with my behavior. Far be it from me to cause anyone distress, let alone you, Tsarina.

CATHERINE

Very well, I didn't want to bring it up, but now that you're here...

METRENA

Yes?

CATHERINE

Let's talk in the Sitting Room.

They enter a nook just off the hallway.
Metrena, this rather...delicate matter concerns comments you've made regarding the style of dresses worn in my suite.

METRENA

(defensively)

I just don't want visitors to get the wrong impression of what goes on in here, that's all!

CATHERINE

I see. Well, as you may have noticed, I'm no prude. In fact, I tend to welcome the latest in European fashion, since I'm married to a man committed to virtually everything Western.

METRENA

And, with the sincerest of respect, Tsarina, I would never call out our women without proper cause. I'm much older than you, so you must...understand.

CATHERINE

That you are... I appreciate your candor, truly I do.

Taking hold of Matrena's hand.
Tell you what! Allow me to make some modesties for the women of the Court.

(MORE)

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

I'll fashion them out of chiffon to create a sheer, if you will, to be pinned to the underside of their dresses, covering, though not entirely hiding, their décolletage. Would that suffice?

METRENA

(appreciative)

Why, yes, yes it would! That's more than...suitable, Tsarina.

CATHERINE

Please, call me by my Orthodox name.

METRENA

Very well... Catherine.

CATHERINE

That's better! To be honest with you, I've grown accustomed to these sleeveless, low-cut gowns. Why, your sister, Anna, is seen in them all the time! While growing up in the peasant class, where women and girls were forced to wear work-dresses with collars up to our necks and sleeves down to our wrists, on the most torrid of days, you can understand my...hesitation regarding your request.

METRENA

(humiliated)

I had forgotten entirely.

She sits speechless.

CATHERINE

Pay no mind, I understand. How is Anna anyway?

MATRENA

(sighing)

Oh, she's happy, Ma'am, now that your husband has relented and permitted her to marry.

(reflectively)

Such a dreadful position we were all caught up in back then!

CATHERINE

Hmm. I'm sorry, my husband has a short fuse, something I'm trying very hard to extinguish! I heard you were under house arrest, along with your sister and mother. That must have been frightening!

MATRENA

It was... But all's well that ends well, as they say...

CATHERINE

Yes...

Preparing to leave.

MATRENA

About the modesties, what if the women reject them?

CATHERINE

(confidently)

Oh, they won't!

Matrena looks sideways at her Tsarina.

MATRENA

But how can you be so sure?

CATHERINE

Because I shall sport the very first one, set the standard, if you will. At least until the evening hours...

Winking at her Lady-in-Waiting.

MATRENA

(chortling)

Clever! I'm no prude either, I'll have you know. How do you think I landed a general?

CATHERINE

(warmly)

I know! Now, how about joining me for dinner? We can talk more then. It's just the girls and me. Peter is spending the night in the fortress.

MATRENA

I'd be honored, Catherine.

CATHERINE

I honestly don't know what the kitchen is preparing tonight. In the Tsar's absence, they're likely to serve up practically anything.

METRENA

I'm sure it'll be wonderful!
(sincerely)
Thank you.

Catherine leaves the Sitting Room to collect her daughters, followed by Matrena, who's thrilled to spend quality time with the Tsarina.

INT. SOVEREIGN'S BASTION, FORTRESS OF PETER AND PAUL, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - LATER

Inside the Sovereign's Bastion, the Tsar beds down in the circular tower with his personal confidant, Alexander Menshikov, and his former tutor and close friend, sixty-eight-year-old Nikita Zotov.

COUNT

Thanks for surrendering your rack to me, Peter.

PETER

My pleasure, Count, though you may want to strike that long board and lie directly on the straps.

COUNT

Great idea, Good Sovereign!
(laughing)
Hey, a good sovereign in the Sovereign's Bastion...

PETER

(whimsically)
Clever! By the way, you would've waited all night for Alex to give up his rack!

Laughter is heard from the trio.

MENSHIKOV

Indeed! I treasure my sleep.

PETER

Indeed, you do! The Azov Campaigns certainly bore that out!

More jeering is heard.

MENSHIKOV

Yes, though, come to think of it,
I'm astonished I got any sleep at
all with your incessant snoring!
Good Lord, Peter, how does
Catherine put up with it?

Peter throws a boot at Menshikov in reply.

COUNT

Ha ha ha! I must say, Peter, these
delights your wife prepared for us
are simply divine.

MENSHIKOV

Hey, pass some of those over to me.

PETER

Patience, Alex. Besides, you had
your fill of Catherine's cooking
while in your employment.

MENSHIKOV

(considering)
Hmm, it's been a while...

PETER

(chuckling)
Here you go!

Playfully tossing a bag of pistachios over to him.

MENSHIKOV

Uh, ever the resourceful one,
Catherine is. You're a fortunate
man, Peter, and you owe it all to
me! Moreover, you have two
beautiful daughters to account for
it.

COUNT

Hear, hear!

PETER

(sullenly)
With another baby on the way!

COUNT

You don't say! Why, that's
wonderful, Peter.

MENSHIKOV

Yes!

Picking his way through the nuts.
How long has it been?

PETER

Hmm?

MENSHIKOV

How long has it been since
Catherine was last with child?

COUNT

Well, little Elizabeth is what,
three years old?

PETER

(smiling)

Yes... Such a cheerful child and
finally big enough to leap into my
arms!

Laughing jovially.

MENSHIKOV

Oh, how grand it'll be to have my
little Maria do that!

PETER

You'll have to wait a couple of
years, Alex, she's only one! How
about you, my Good Pope?

COUNT

Me? Oh, ha, my breeding days are
long over, I'm afraid, though I'd
consider marrying again if the
right woman came along.

MENSHIKOV

You mean girl!

COUNT

Ha ha! No, she must be over twenty.
That's my limit. Say, how old was
Catherine when you first met her,
Sire?

Rolling over to face Peter.

PETER

Nineteen.

COUNT

Hmm.

(grinning)

And she doesn't look a day over
twenty if you don't mind me saying.

PETER

I'm sure she'd enjoy hearing that
in person, Count...

Beginning to light his pipe while his old friend blushes.
I've been thinking about honoring
Catherine with some sort of award
for her bravery during the Pruth
Campaign. We barely got out of
there alive!

MENSHIKOV

I remember. Crazy Turks...

PETER

She saved the day with all the
jewelry she had on hand.

MENSHIKOV

Darya, as well...

PETER

I don't know, the manner in which
my wife courageously handled
herself-

MENSHIKOV

Is entitled to some kind of award.
(playfully)
I agree! What took you so long,
man!

Fielding Peter's other boot.

PETER

You there, Count! Are you still
awake?

COUNT

Hmm?

PETER

You're the scholar between us. What
do you suggest?

COUNT

Well, what I believe you're looking for is some class of medal or insignia to be given to women who've demonstrated great courage in defense of the Fatherland.

PETER

Quite, quite good!

COUNT

(meditatively)

Named after a Saint, who would become the patron of an...order.

PETER

(musing)

I'm beginning to like the idea...! Catherine would appreciate it far better than flowers. I've already exhausted that option many times over.

Count Nikita sits up before slapping his thigh.

COUNT

By God, I've got it! Alright, Peter, close your eyes now. How about the...Order of Saint Catherine?

PETER

Which Catherine?

COUNT

Why, Catherine of Alexandria, of course!

PETER

That's a great idea! What was she known for anyway...?

COUNT

She was martyred, I believe, in the Fourth Century at the hands of Emperor, Emperor...Maxentius.

Laying back down.

And a virgin!

MENSHIKOV

Aren't they all?

Amused, the men share a good laugh.

PETER

I like the idea. The order, that is...! Learned Pope, would you look into this for me?

COUNT

Certainly! I'll consult Metropolitan Adrian at once. It would be a splendid honor for her, Sire, especially being its inaugural recipient!

PETER

My sincere thanks, Count!

MENSHIKOV

Yes...

PETER

(wearily)

Now, I suggest we all turn in for the night. We must be up early.

MENSHIKOV

(snidely)

All the more reason to abstain from snoring tonight, Peter Alexievich!

PETER

I'll try...

Peter plumps his straw pillow before lying back down and sailing off to sleep to the sound of waves slapping against the Admiralty.

INT. CATHERINE'S SUITE, STONE WINTER PALACE, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - EVENING

Back from the Fortress of Peter and Paul, the Tsar knocks on the rear entryway to Catherine's suite. Having warned her household staff of his impending arrival, she appears at the door dressed in a low-cut, floor-length *rubakha*.

CATHERINE

(whispering)

Who is it?

PETER

(growling)

It's the wolf!

Catherine opens the door while giggling softly.

CATHERINE

Come in, Mr. Wolf...I'll bet you're hungry!

PETER

Indeed, I am. Lead the way, and I'll extinguish the *Svechi* one by one as I pass them.

CATHERINE

(wantonly)

I'll be waiting...

Peter snuffs the final candle outside Catherine's boudoir before advancing into her room. He now drops his nightshirt at the side of the bed, as Catherine holds her covers up, welcoming his entry.

I warmed the bed up for you. And no biting.

PETER

(snarling)

It can't be helped, I'm a wolf...

Catherine and Peter continue their playful back and forth throughout tonight's encounter. Time passes until she begins to stroke his hair.

CATHERINE

Do you remember the sight I beheld in my suite on the day I nearly fled the Kremlin?

PETER

Hmm?

CATHERINE

(flustered)

On the day I almost left you! After spending the night on the floor guarding your life!

Drawing her knees up under the sheets and resting against the headboard.

Well, I do! Andrei was trying to talk me into staying in the Palace one more night. Do you remember, husband?

PETER

(raspily)

I wasn't there.

CATHERINE

But I was. When I finally opened
the door to my suite, what should I
find...?

PETER

Grr!

CATHERINE

(grinning)

Hmm...?

PETER

(subtly)

Grr...

Turning onto his side.

FLASH BACK

CATHERINE

Roses... An endless amount of them!
Everywhere, in every room, on every
surface. Red, red roses...

Peter grumbles, only to spoon his peasant wife and drift to
sleep.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. STONE WINTER PALACE, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - MORNING

Best of friends for the past two months, Catherine and
Matrena meet in a courtyard on the palace grounds. Today,
Matrena has brought her brother along while a lone sentry
looks on.

MATRENA

Catherine, this is my brother,
Willem.

CATHERINE

Good morning.

Willem gives her a respectable nod.

WILLEM

Good morning, Tsarina.

CATHERINE

You may dispense with the
formalities. Call me by my first
name, but only in private.

WILLEM
Very well, Catherine.

Looking wearily at his sister.

MATRENA
It's alright, Willem, you're among
friends.

WILLEM
(relieved)
In that case, it's wonderful to
meet you...

CATHERINE
Likewise. I saw you at my husband's
headquarters during the Poltava
Campaign. You were a lieutenant
then, if I recall correctly, and
young. How old were you?

WILLEM
Sixteen, Ma'am, uh...Catherine.

CATHERINE
Thank you. Tell me, are you still a
member of the Dragoons?

WILLEM
No, I officially separated from
them when I turned twenty-one.

Catherine approaches a marble bench and sits down. Matrena
follows suit.

MATRENA
You may sit down; it's all right.

Patting the bench before her brother complies.

CATHERINE
Tell me, Willem, who are you
working for these days?

WILLEM
I'm a personal adjutant to the
Tsar...

CATHERINE
(surprised)
Really? Doing what exactly?

Willem begins to turn on the charm.

WILLEM

My duties mostly involve personal services, administration, and the logistical needs of his traveling court. I hope to advance up the palace chain someday. I stand in good graces with your husband and plan to keep it that way...

CATHERINE

Funny, but I've never seen you around the palace...

WILLEM

Forgive me, Catherine, but I have seen you. Many times, in fact!

CATHERINE

I had no idea...
(bewildered)
So, you're a trusted aide of my husband?

WILLEM

(smiling)
In effect, yes!

MATRENA

My family is quite proud of him, Catherine!

CATHERINE

They should be! And how is your sister?

WILLEM

Anna is well and happy to be married to a statesman...

CATHERINE

(gracefully)
The Tsar was only happy to comply. Tell me, where are they living these days?

WILLEM

In Anna's home in the *Nemetskaya Sloboda*.

MATRENA

Deutsches Viertel! After their wedding.

CATHERINE

I see...

Slapping her knees.

Well, you appear to be an enterprising young man with a bright future ahead of you. I shall mention your name to my husband, and appreciate your coming by.

Catching Matrena's eye, who takes the cue.

MATRENA

Well, we really must be going. I'll see you later at Court.

CATHERINE

Very well, catch you then. Goodbye, Willem! It was nice seeing you...again.

WILLEM

The pleasure was entirely mine. Good day.

He doffs his tricorne hat and departs the courtyard with his sister, while Catherine remains seated on the bench, dazed and confused.

INT. TEREM PALACE, MOSCOW KREMLIN, RUSSIA - DAY

Dawn breaks over Terem Palace to the joyous sound of the Godunov Bell in nearby Cathedral Square. All to mark the birth of the latest Tsarevich, Peter Petrovich. This new prince lies peacefully in his lace-draped *kolybel*, while his father, kneeling beside his wife's bed, pins to her nightgown a diamond spray removed from the sash of the Order of St. Catherine, bestowed upon her a year ago.

ONE YEAR LATER.

EXT. SOLOVJOV MANSION, AMSTERDAM, HOLLAND - MORNING

Catherine strolls the grounds of the Solovjov Mansion on the outskirts of Amsterdam. As she wanders the property, she is drawn to a distinctive glass structure in the center of the garden. Approaching the site, she opens the door to the most exhilarating, aromatic place she has ever experienced. The owner, Osip Solovjov, soon discovers that the door to the orangerie is open. He now ventures outside to close it.

SOLOVJOV
Catherine, is that you in there?

CATHERINE
Yes, it's me! What an amazing
place...

SOLOVJOV
Are you enjoying it?

CATHERINE
(gleefully)
Why, I love it! How do you manage
to keep these exotic plants alive
in this climate? And the
oranges...how simply wonderful!

Moving closer to an orange tree.

SOLOVJOV
Queen Elizabeth of England took a
liking to oranges and had
conservatories like this one built
on her royal estates. All you
really need is daylight and glass.

CATHERINE
I see... May I?

SOLOVJOV
Help yourself, they're fresh.

CATHERINE
Thank you, but I only mean to
squeeze them.

SOLOVJOV
(laughing)
Oh, ha ha ha! Well, take one for
breakfast tomorrow, go ahead. It's
my pleasure...

CATHERINE
I shall.

Smelling the rind.

SOLOVJOV
(sympathetically)
Tell me, how are you feeling?

CATHERINE

I'm much better today, thank you. I believe the outdoor air has somehow revived me, and now these beautiful orange blossoms...

SOLOVJOV

The Queen savored the strong bouquet of oranges and the health benefits they provide. It's said that the Romans introduced oranges to Britain.

CATHERINE

You don't say? My husband would enjoy hearing about Roman Britain! He studied all of Cesar's conquests as a boy. I know them all by heart...

SOLOVJOV

Getting back to these structures.

CATHERINE

Yes...

SOLOVJOV

Orangeries must always face south to better absorb the Sun. And the north side should consist of a wall of sorts to block the wintry winds.

CATHERINE

Like in Russia.

SOLOVJOV

(smiling)

Like in Russia! When you return to Saint Petersburg, you should consider erecting one. Did you know that oranges originated in China?

CATHERINE

Our neighbors to the East.

SOLOVJOV

Yes...

CATHERINE

You're very knowledgeable...

SOLOVJOV

(blushing)

Thank you, Tsarina...

CATHERINE

My husband is building us a new house on the Neva, and I'll recommend that we have an orangerie erected in the gardens.

Catherine proceeds to sit herself on a wrought-iron bench. I thought I'd take a ride into Amsterdam this afternoon.

SOLOVJOV

I'll provide you with my diplomatic gig.

CATHERINE

Thank you. I have to do some shopping... I'd much prefer Paris, but hey!

SOLOVJOV

I wondered why Peter left you here with us. It's not that we're displeased; we aren't, but...

Catherine leans forward.

CATHERINE

(defiantly)

But why did my husband deposit me here? Ha! I'll tell you why. French snobbery, plain and simple! My husband is a wise man, Osip, and can detect trouble miles away.

SOLOVJOV

I'm afraid I don't understand...

He draws a chair up closer to her.

CATHERINE

You see, Peter is a very good judge of character, not only of individuals but of those within their own social classes, particularly the highly privileged.

SOLOVJOV

Go on, *Katerina*...

CATHERINE

Well, my husband got wind of the French Royal Family's opinion regarding a certain peasant woman. *Moi!* Need I say more?

SOLOVJOV

Hmm...

CATHERINE

My husband loves me very much and would be crushed if he overheard any Royal, let alone courtesan voices in Versailles, speak anything untoward about me, let alone in my presence. At the same time, he would likely retaliate at once, often to the point of violence, which would be damaging for Russian relations within the royal houses of Europe. Anyway, that's the Tsar's rationale and why I'm remaining here with you! You've been on the other end of his heated rhetoric, have you not?

SOLOVJOV

Indeed, I have, Ma'am!

CATHERINE

(impassioned)

But what do I care what others say? I know who I am, where I came from, and who loves me in this world!

SOLOVJOV

Three truisms, if ever there were! Now, let's go inside and see what Nell's cooked up. Like your husband, you wouldn't want to be me when I'm late. 'Dinner's getting cold, dear!'

Catherine covers her mouth.

CATHERINE

(snickering)

Oh, my!

SOLOVJOV

Right this way, Catherine, and I'll have my coach ready for you after dinner.

CATHERINE

Very good.

(humorously)

Maybe I'll pick up some wooden shoes!

Osip lets out a deafening laugh.

SOLOVJOV
Now, that's the spirit!

Catherine departs the orangerie arm-in-arm with Commissar Solovjov, in lieu of the haughty French.

INT. CONVENT OF THE INTERCESSION, SUZDAL, TSARDOM OF MOSCOW,
RUSSIA - MORNING

One year later, just before dawn, a knock is heard on Eudoxia's door. Before she can reply, a government official enters her room in search of treasonous material.

PYOTR TOLSTOY
I have an order signed by the Tsar last night, directing me as Chief of the Secret Chancellery to search your room.

EUDOXIA
(flustered)
What's the meaning of this?

PYOTR TOLSTOY
We're searching this room for evidence of treason!

EUDOXIA
What! I'm taking this up with the Abbess. Touch nothing!

Getting out of bed.

PYOTR TOLSTOY
You needn't bother, the Abbess already has a copy of the warrant.

EUDOXIA
This is an outrage! I'm sending for Vicar Podorin this very instant.

PYOTR TOLSTOY
He's already been sentenced to the mines in Irkutsk

EUDOXIA
(shaken)
Irkutsk! Heavens why?

PYOTR TOLSTOY

It's in the warrant, read it for yourself.

EUDOXIA

I shall, but not before I issue an appeal to the Metropolitan for this abhorrent game!

PYOTR TOLSTOY

He's already been briefed on the matter. Step aside, Sister!

EUDOXIA

You will address me as *Vash Suveren!*

PYOTR TOLSTOY

Not anymore. Remove her at once!

Eudoxia is forcibly removed from her cell and escorted to the vestibule, while Count Tolstoy and his men vigorously search her room. As she walks down the hallway, she recalls an incriminating letter she received from Alexei shortly after he arrived in Austria. This communiqué, hidden away with other sensitive documents, has been committed to memory.

EUDOXIA

(in voiceover)

Ehrenburg Fortress

January 7, 1717

Merry Christmas, Sovereign Mother!

As you so wisely suggested, I am safely put up here by my brother-in-law, Charles VI, who proves every day to be my strongest ally, guardian, and friend. I don't know how long I'll remain here in Coburg, but my letters will continue to reach you through the proper channels. The weather here is cold as I write you, with strong gusty winds. However, there's already talk about moving me south, *Pozhaluysta, Bozhe!* How soon that will happen, I honestly do not know... Until then, I remain under the protection of the Holy Roman Empire.

Tolstoy and his men finally depart Eudoxia's room, leaving it strewn with documents.

EXT. PETER AND PAUL FORTRESS, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA -
AFTERNOON

A crowd gathers under an open window to listen to the trial of Tsarevich Alexei Romanov. Two men closest to the fortress relay sworn testimony to the others gathered around.

IVAN

Hold on...alright, Chancellor
Tolstoy is reading a letter from
Alexei to his mother.

PYOTR TOLSTOY

(forcefully)

Plans for my triumphant return are
already taking shape, with an ample
force of men, foreign though they
be, to remove Father from his *Tron*
in St. Petersburg and rightly
restore it to Holy Moscow, where I,
myself, will be crowned and seated
as Tsar Alexei II.

Rapping the letter with his hand.

CUT TO:

ROWS OF AUSTRIAN IMPERIAL FORCES, MOUNTED ON LIPIZZAN
STALLIONS, APPEAR OUTSIDE HOFBURG PALACE IN VIENNA.

FADE OUT.

My first decree, of course, will be
for your safe release, so continue
your Matins to that end. Once
reunited with you, *Dorogaya mama*,
we will return Russia to its former
glory and once and for all,
zadushit' Father's relentless
changes! I will keep you in my
prayers and call for you when it's
time. Until my next letter,
I Remain Your Devoted,
Alexei

SOLDIER

(humorously)

What else did Alexei say to his
mamochka...?

Laughter is heard from the crowd.

YEVGENY

You had better not let the Tsar
hear of that remark, Soldier!

IVAN

Wait a minute, Alexei is speaking!
Quiet, I can't hear him...!

YEVGENY

(loudly)
Shush! Please!

IVAN

He's addressing his father, the
Tsar!

Cupping his hands behind his ears while repeating aloud what
he hears.

'The whole country is on my side!
It is obvious to me now that you
desire my death.'

Yevgeny nudges him to the side.

YEVGENY

I've got this. 'Well, I will gladly
die! Beware of, beware of what will
happen to you afterwards.' Whatever
that means...

IVAN

I believe he's done. I have to say
this tirade won't be received well
by his father!

Laughter erupts from the crowd.

Hold on, the Tsar is addressing the
judges, urging them to render their
decision... He's now polling them
one by one.

YEVGENY

This could take a while. I saw the
judges file into the fortress
earlier today. They numbered over
one hundred.

IVAN

In that case, I'll only report
judges voting not guilty.

YEVGENY

And who among them would dare defy
the Tsar by rendering anything
other than guilty as charged!

IVAN

(caustically)

Hmm...

More laughter occurs. Time passes, and finally, the last
judge is polled.

Nare a single not guilty vote!

YEVGENY

Exactly as I predicted...!

IVAN

They're moving on to the sentencing
stage. The man who's speaking right
now must be one of the lead judges.
He's driveling on and on and on...

Grumbling ripples through the multitude as the moment drags
on.

(breathless)

Alright, he's through! Here it
comes... DEATH!

The crowd goes silent upon hearing the penalty.

YEVGENY

(reflectively)

The Tsar's very own son...! Just
like Ivan the Terrible did to his
son, Ivan Ivanovich, causing the
dimwitted Feodor to inherit the
throne, leaving our ancestors to
endure the Time of Troubles.

SOLDIER

What did he say? I didn't catch the
end of that!

IVAN

Smutnoye vremya...

The crowd slouches off feeling somewhat debased. Ten months
later, a bell tolls to mourn the death of Peter's heir
apparent, young Peter Petrovich, leaving no one, save
Catherine, to succeed her husband. The little Tsarevich is
soon entombed inside Peter and Paul Cathedral along with
other deceased siblings.

EXT. ASSUMPTION CONVENT, OLD LADOGA, NOVGOROD LAND, RUSSIA -
DAWN

Eudoxia is moved from the Convent of the Intercession in Suzdal to the more restrictive Assumption Convent in Old Ladoga. Along the wet, bumpy road, she wonders which papers taken from her room were used to condemn her only child.

EXT. FORTRESS OF MARIENBURG, SWEDISH LIVONIA - EVENING

News of the Treaty of Nystad is brought to shore by every sloop and cutter crossing the Baltic. Soon, the residents of Marienburg hear, in no uncertain terms, that the Great Northern War is over after twenty years of fighting. As a result, Catherine's homeland of Livonia now falls under the newly constituted Russian Empire, along with its neighbors, in effect crowning Peter Emperor of All Russia and his Livonian peasant wife, Empress Consort.

The site of Catherine's capture outside the Swedish Fortress in Marienburg, where she was hoisted naked on the shoulders of Captain Iagorzhinsky, was reduced to ashes after being scuttled by Swedish forces in hopes of preventing it from falling into Russian hands. The Island of Aluksne, where the fortress once stood, today lies desolate.

INT. VON BALK APARTMENT, STONE WINTER PALACE, ST. PETERSBURG,
RUSSIA - EVENING

Two wine merchants approach the Stone Winter Palace and are admitted inside by the Chamberlain.

CHAMBERLAIN

Yes?

ALBRECHT

We have an appointment with, uh,
General von Balk.

CHAMBERLAIN

Your names?

ALBRECHT

Albrecht Kohl.

CHAMBERLAIN

And you, sir?

WERMER

Wermer Gast.

CHAMBERLAIN

I'll see if the general is in.

He soon returns and escorts the men to the Balk apartment. Knocking on the door, they are admitted inside by Catherine's Lady-in-Waiting, Matrena von Balk.

MATRENA

Thank you, Aleksei. Come in, gentlemen. I'm told you wanted to see me.

ALBRECHT

Yes.

Clearing his throat.

I am the proprietor of Kohl Wine Producers in the Mosel town of Brückenst. Mr. Gast, here, is my vinzer.

MATRENA

Pleased to meet you both.

ALBRECHT

Ma'am, we're wondering if you'd be interested in recommending our line of wines to the palace's purchasing agent.

MATRENA

That would be Empress Catherine.

ALBRECHT

I see...

MATRENA

You may sit down, gentlemen. Go on...

All sit, as Wermer's bag hits the floor with a thud.

ALBRECHT

It would go a long way for us, Ma'am, if you would tout our line of wines to the Tsarina. We stand ready to deliver an initial supply to sample. We'd like to state in our advertisements back home that our wines grace the finest tables in Europe, the Tsar of Russia included.

MATRENA

Well, I can't see denying your...complimentary offer if that's what you're driving at. But as for future orders, well...

ALBRECHT

(discretely)

I can assure you, Madam, you'll be handsomely compensated.

Wermer opens his satchel filled with gold *chervonets*.

MATRENA

(stunned)

I see... Catherine is Livonian, I'll bet you didn't know that?

ALBRECHT

Marienburg, to be exact.

MATRENA

(astonished)

You're most astute, *Herr Kohl*. I shall bring the matter up with Catherine, though I can't promise you anything. I don't think it will be a problem; the Tsar will do practically anything these days to promote Western culture, particularly where his wife is concerned.

She now gets up to show the men out.

I'll keep you in mind. Come back next week. Until then, I'll...lean on the Empress. But again, I can't guarantee anything.

ALBRECHT

We're grateful for the effort, Madam von Balk.

The owner and his vinzer politely bow and leave the apartment, dragging the heavy bag behind them.

INT. STONE WINTER PALACE, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - DUSK

Peter and Catherine sit at opposite ends of a sizable banquet table inside the Stone Winter Palace's formal dining room. At center rests a goblet of succulent oranges along with two bottles of wine, courtesy of Kohl Wine Producers of Brückenst.

CATHERINE
Care to pour?

PETER
Of course!

Getting up to pour from one of the bottles left uncorked by the dining room staff.

Riesling or...what's this say?
Elbing.

CATHERINE
Riesling, please...

Half-filling her glass before sitting back down.

PETER
Then, I shall try the Elbing!

Sampling the bottle.

My, that's wonderful and deliciously crisp! So different from the overly sweet Tokay that's usually served here! It's somehow drier, like Sekt.

CATHERINE
(amused)
You sound like one of those wine connoisseurs, similar to the frogs you met in Versailles...

PETER
Oh, no, not me!

Enjoying another slug and slowly running the wine over his tongue.

CATHERINE
Tell me, husband, did you find the women at Versailles attractive?

PETER
(thundering)
Attractive? Those flat-chested twigs?

CATHERINE
(grinning)
That's my Peter! Call them like you see them.

PETER

This is fine wine, I think I'll
pour another glass. You?

CATHERINE

Not yet, but I'll catch up. You'll
see...

PETER

I believe you, Marta.

Holding up the glass and admiring its contents.
Wherever did you find this wine?

CATHERINE

Matrena suggested it to me weeks
ago. It finally arrived yesterday,
compliments of a wine company in
Trier.

Peter examines the bottle.

PETER

Kohl Wine Producers, Mosel Valley.
That's along the Rhine River, next
to France.

CATHERINE

Home of the flat-chested twigs!

PETER

(slightly inebriated)
Ha! Very good! That's why I keep
you around.

CATHERINE

That's not the only reason.

Catherine's eyebrows ascend along with her glass.

PETER

Well put...

CATHERINE

When I initially approached the
dining staff about this brand of
wine, they became very resentful.
Particularly Franz.

PETER

I'll have his hide!

Pounding the table.

CATHERINE
(whispering)
Shush, he could be listening...

PETER
(loudly)
Good! I hope he is!

CATHERINE
Getting back to the wine.

PETER
Yes?

CATHERINE
Matrena has been helpful in so many
other ways...take palace decor, as
an example.

PETER
Are you ready for another glass?

CATHERINE
Sure.

Grabbing the bottle of Riesling before venturing down to his
wife's end of the table.

PETER
There you are...

CATHERINE
Thank you. This is quite good. You
should try it.

PETER
I'll get to it. Have you ever known
me to leave a bottle half drunk,
Muter?

CATHERINE
Certainly not!
(sighing)
As I was saying, Matrena has been
most useful to me where household
acquisitions are concerned.

PETER
Good! I encourage it. You have the
good sense, use it!

CATHERINE
I'm glad you said that, husband,
because I have!

PETER

What?

CATHERINE

The glass you're holding in your hand, for example.

PETER

What about it?

CATHERINE

Matrena recently suggested this line of stemware to me. So, I told her to order a generous supply of settings.

PETER

(apprehensively)

What else has she suggested?

CATHERINE

Now, don't get overly fiscal with me! Oh, the *L'entrée* is coming out.

They wait for the server to deliver the appetizer and depart the room.

Let's see... Well, the fine uniforms the palace staff is wearing. Particularly, the members of our respective Courts.

PETER

Go on...

Waiting for more itemized expenses.

CATHERINE

Damask.

PETER

Damask?

CATHERINE

Yes, Damask! Italian Damask, to be exact. With inlaid brocade.

PETER

Inlaid what?

CATHERINE

(laughing)

Inlaid brocade! In fact, you're wearing Damask right now, along with the entire palace staff...

Peter stops to inspect both sleeves and the intricate embroidery running down the front of his jacket.

PETER

Huh?

CATHERINE

Do you like it?

PETER

Well, I...

CATHERINE

Matrena also had a hand in purchasing the palace's new drapes, chandeliers, fine China, in fact, an entire inventory of luxury items. Oh, and Arctic seafood!

(nobly)

You wanted me to showcase European finery. Well, these acquisitions are the result of contracts made with influential merchants inside the German Quarter.

PETE

Of course, but...

CATHERINE

Well, *voilà!* Like I said, my Lady-in-Waiting has been most resourceful! Eat your appetizer, dear, it's getting cold.

Peter begins to devour his blini.

PETER

(delighted)

With mushrooms, no less...!

Franz enters the dining room.

FRANZ

I heard commotion. Is everything alright, Sire?

PETER

We're fine, Franz. Everything is fine.

Earning a wide grin from his wife, seated at the far end of the splendid Karelian Birch table.

INT. STONE WINTER PALACE, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - LATER

Retiring for the evening, Catherine and Peter continue their discussion, but not before dismissing Andrei.

PETER
That will be all, Andrei.

VALET
Very good, Sire.

Departing the bedchamber.

CATHERINE
(pondering)
Andrei approached me today and said that since I've been made Empress Consort, I should have a chamberlain. How long has he been your valet?

PETER
(yawning)
Oh, thirty years, give or take. Since I was nine.

CATHERINE
I mentioned it to Matrena, and she suggested her brother.

Brushing her away.

PETER
Willem? I can't spare him. He's far too valuable to me.

CATHERINE
(displeased)
So he's capable...?

PETER
Very! Besides, I see the way he looks at you...

CATHERINE
(embarrassed)
Me? Well, I don't look back!

PETER
You don't find him handsome?

CATHERINE
I do. But I'm a one-man woman, you should realize that by now.

PETER
 (teasingly)
 But you're almost the same age...

CATHERINE
 (directly)
 I'm not in the market for a *beau*.
 The one in my bed is enough for me,
 thank you!

PETER
 Well, in that case, you may have
 young Willem!

Catherine sits up, gathering her knees to her chest.

CATHERINE
 But you just told me he's
 indispensable!

PETER
 (sniggering)
 I was simply waiting for you to
 turn Willem down romantically,
 which you so gallantly did!

CATHERINE
 Why, thank you, husband. So, he *is*
 capable, yes?

PETER
 You'll be amazed! I'd start him
 managing your estates right away.

CATHERINE
 I'd like that! Though I must say,
 I'm rather good at it...

Peter turns onto his side.

PETER
 Like washing your own *trusiki*?

CATHERINE
 (shocked)
 You, sir, should have your mouth
 washed out with soap!

PETER
 (growling)
 Later, Katerina...!

Tossing the covers high over their heads, as Catherine lets
 out her trademark shriek.

EXT. GERMAN QUARTER, BASMANNY DISTRICT, MOSCOW, RUSSIA -
MORNING

Willem shakes hands with a German Quarter financier who congratulates him on the purchase of his new home. Dressed in the grandest style, the young owner approaches his estate, unlocks the front door, and enters the freshly-built edifice. Suave beyond words, this dandy was recently named Catherine's Private Secretary.

INT. CATHERINE'S SUITE, STONE WINTER PALACE, ST. PETERSBURG,
RUSSIA - THE NEXT DAY

Catherine searches for Willem inside her apartments on the second floor of the Stone Winter Palace. She finds him in the Cabinet Room.

CATHERINE

There you are! I'd like to get away for a few days to Sarskaya Manor. See that you make the necessary arrangements.

WILLEM

Certainly, Catherine. How many people will be traveling with you?

CATHERINE

Just Matrena and me. I'm excited to see if the mill is working.

WILLEM

I checked on that the other day, and the miller sent me a note saying the restoration is nearly complete. He should be grinding barley as we speak!

CATHERINE

How great. I simply love that sluice nearby.

(reminiscing)

It brings me back to my girlhood in Marienburg. Every German loves a *Mühlenhaus*...

WILLEM

Dann bringen wir das Mädchen zum Mühlenhaus! Consider your trip arranged.

Catherine leaves the Cabinet Room as Willem begins to scheme.

INT. BALK APARTMENT, STONE WINTER PALACE, ST. PETERSBURG,
RUSSIA - NIGHT

Willem enters his sister's apartment, and the two quickly
seat themselves.

MATRENA

I received your note this
afternoon. What is it?

WILLEM

With all the money coming in, we're
going to need some insurance in the
event our gambit is discovered by
the Tsarina.

MATRENA

Go on...

WILLEM

Catherine wants to travel to
Sarskoye Selo this weekend and has
asked me to make the necessary
arrangements. She intends to take
you along.

MATRENA

As is my role...

Her brother stands up and walks around the parlor.

WILLEM

I need you to suggest my coming
along too.

MATRENA

All right...

WILLEM

But on the way, you fall ill and
have to return home, leaving me
alone with Catherine for the entire
weekend.

MATRENA

For what?

WILLEM

(repulsively)
What do you think?

MATRENA

Oh, she'd never welcome your
advances!

WILLEM
You leave that to me.

MATRENA
(shaky)
I don't know what to say...

Willem sits down, this time closer to his sibling.

WILLEM
Were we ever to be caught by the
Tsarina and accused of malfeasance,
we'd have to find a way to prevent
her from running to the Tsar.

Matrena suddenly catches on.

MATRENA
And a juicy story about you two
spending a weekend together,
unchaperoned, would stop her from
tattling on us! Yeah... It's either
turn us in or-

WILLEM
Or, be accused of infidelity by way
of witnesses, testimony, and
evidence such as...

MATRENA
Yes...?

Willem leans into his sister, only to whisper.

WILLEM
Me identifying a part of her body
that few men have ever seen up
close, intimately.

Matrena ponders the plan, while her brother grins,
contemplating the unique opportunity awaiting him.

EXT. STONE WINTER PALACE, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - AFTERNOON

Days later, inside the dense, manicured hedgerows of the
palace garden, a young woman, fresh from Catherine's Court,
is in the arms of Willem Mons.

TATIANA
I saw you flirting with Catherine
today. You can't tell me she does
anything for you.

WILLEM

She doesn't. My sister and I have a plan...

TATIANA

(surprised)

Matrena...? Really?

WILLEM

(whispering)

Uh hmm. I'll tell you about it sometime...

TATIANA

You're an eccentric one, Willem.

WILLEM

I try...

(wryly)

We had better return to the palace.

By design, they leave the hedgerow and enter the palace using separate terraces.

INT. CATHERINE'S SUITE, STONE WINTER PALACE, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - THE NEXT DAY

Catherine is doing laundry in the kitchen, which has been a daily routine of hers since living with the Glucks. Matrena presently joins her.

MATRENA

Fast at work again, I see.

CATHERINE

Yes, I'm never one to dally.

MATRENA

Like the rest of the Royal Houses of Europe?

CATHERINE

Not...

MATRENA

Why do you do it? Your clothes have already been washed!

CATHERINE

It's a habit, I guess...

Wiping her hands with a dishtowel.

I've been doing it ever since I was taken in by the Gluck Family. Frau Gluck was a taskmaster, but kind. She taught me many things. I lived with that family for fifteen years!

MATRENA

That's a lot of housekeeping!

CATHERINE

Don't I know it. I have the hands to prove it.

MATRENA

What are you talking about? You have lovely hands. It's one of your dominant characteristics...

CATHERINE

(dryly)

Aside from my generous bustline.

MATRENA

(blushing)

Oh, that too...

They share a good laugh.

CATHERINE

What I'm trying to say is I have the hands to prove it, meaning they're strong.

(smugly)

Strong enough to choke my husband from time to time.

Done hanging up the laundry.

There, that ought to do it!

MATRENA

Catherine?

CATHERINE

Yes?

MATRENA

Would you mind if Willem accompanied us to the farmhouse this weekend?

CATHERINE

Not at all.

MATRENA

He said he wants to check on the mill personally.

CATHERINE

Happy to have him...!

With that, it's on to her next chore.

INT. WILLEM MONS MANSION, GERMAN QUARTER, BASSMANNY DISTRICT, MOSCOW, RUSSIA - EVENING

A merchant leaves Willem Mons' Mansion sporting a wide grin. Inside, Willem sits in front of a pile of gold *chervonets* before gathering them up and visiting his vault, safely hidden between floors.

INT. IMPERIAL COACH, OUTSIDE ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - MORNING

Soon after leaving St. Petersburg for *Sarskoye Selo*, Matrena becomes ill. Unable to continue on the journey, Catherine orders the coachmen to stop the next carriage heading into town to return her feeble Lady to the palace.

CATHERINE

Yuri, Matrena is ill! Flag down the next coach heading into town.

YURI

Yes, Good Sovereign.

A passing landau is soon alerted.

CATHERINE

We shall return home in a few days. Feel better, dear. Yuri will get your bags.

MATRENA

Thank you, *Katerina*!

Carefully assisted out of the coach, Catherine and Willem venture on to the farmhouse alone.

I/E. SARSKOYE SELO, INGERMANLAND, RUSSIA - AFTERNOON

Arriving at *Sarskoye Selo*, the coach turns onto a road leading to the farmhouse. Once outside, Catherine and Willem pause to admire the rolling countryside until finally entering the wooden structure. After unpacking their bags and enjoying a noontime meal, they walk down to the mill pond.

There, the Empress Consort sits on a bench, while Willem skips stones on the glimmering surface, sending rings scurrying for shore. It isn't long before they finally enter the mill.

Inside, they observe a series of complex wheels powered by the millstream outside. Various gears and shafts from hoist to bedstone soon come into view, shaking the timbers above them and creating a rhythmic pulsation all its own. Fascinated by the sight, the two sit and watch for the better part of an hour until the hopper is empty and the miller vacates the structure. Alone at last, Willem takes Catherine's hand, which she quickly withdraws. He then turns her by the shoulders, like the pinions above, to kiss her until she pushes him away and escapes outside. Leaning against the door to prevent Willem from snatching her again, Catherine's heaving chest now gasps for air.

INT. IMPERIAL COACH, OUTSIDE SARSKOYE SELO, RUSSIA

Days later, Catherine and Willem leave *Sarskoye Selo* and travel back to St. Petersburg. On the way, they speak to each other for the first time since the millhouse incident.

CATHERINE

(gibing)

I can't imagine your stay in the workers' quarters appealed to you.

WILLEM

(defiantly)

With the peasants, no!

CATHERINE

Hey, you're sitting across from one, remember? And if you ever lay your hands on me again, I'll have you knouted!

Turning away to view the countryside.

I was abused by your *kind* a long time ago, and I promised myself I'd never let it happen again!

(cutting)

You know...maybe I'll tell my husband.

WILLEM

(panicking)

No! Oh, no, Ma'am, please don't do that!

CATHERINE

Why, I have reason enough?

WILLEM

(horrified)

To be sure, but you saw what the Tsar did to Eudoxia's beau; imagine what he would do to me! Ugh, I shudder to think...

CATHERINE

You should have thought about that before you tried to seduce me.

WILLEM

But I thought you found me appealing.

CATHERINE

Well, you thought wrong!

WILLEM

But you regularly flirt with me, so naturally I thought...

CATHERINE

Thought what?

Willem runs his hand over the dimples of the upholstered bench.

WILLEM

I thought, since we were alone at last, fifteen or so miles away from the Palace, that we could, well, you know, spend the weekend together...

Catherine pivots sharply, close to tears.

CATHERINE

How could you fathom such a thing? I'll have you know that *Sarskoye Selo* was a gift from my husband on my twenty-fifth birthday! In a thousand years, and not even then, would I ever soil our bed with another man. No, that was never going to happen, Willem!

The young man proceeds to slouch on the bench in front of her.

WILLEM

Well, in that case, if I promise never to do it again, will you keep this...misstep from the Tsar?

CATHERINE

(sighing)

I'll take it under consideration...and render my decision before we reach St. Petersburg.

Making him sweat, they ride in silence until they descend Pulkovo Heights overlooking the city. Catherine suddenly leans forward on her plush settee and delivers her decision.

Your back will be spared the knout this time, but if you ever manhandle me again, so help me God, I'll...

Shaking her fist.

WILLEM

Consider these hands to be in service to you alone, Catherine, but strictly in a professional sense.

With arms folded until they arrive home, the wheels of the coach eventually grind to a halt, and an impatient Peter greets his wife while sensing tension between her and her Private Secretary.

As for Willem, he sprints out back and falls into the arms of Tatiana Medvedev, who is waiting for him among the hedgerows.

EXT. STONE WINTER PALACE, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - MOMENTS LATER

Fresh from his encounter with Tatiana, Willem meets his sister near the side entrance of the palace.

MATRENA

(hushed)

Tuck in your shirttail! Honestly, Willem! How did it go?

WILLEM

You mean with Catherine?

MATRENA

(perturbed)

Of course I mean with Catherine!

Stomping the pavement under her feet.

WILLEM
(gloomily)
It was doomed from the start!

MATRENA
What!

Willem lowers his voice and peers about.

WILLEM
Once we were alone, I approached
her, and she pushed me away,
strenuously, I might add!

MATRENA
(surprised)
Hmm. Then what?

WILLEM
Well, we were in the millhouse, and
she, she ran away from me, then
refused to let me out by leaning
heavily against the door. After
finally allowing me to leave, I was
banished from the manor and
confined to the workers' quarters,
eating and sleeping with those
beastly peasants for three whole
days and nights...

MATRENA
Hmm. I didn't see this coming.

Thinking out loud and beginning to pace.

Well, you *did* go away with her for
three whole days and nights without
a third party present.

(quieter)
I'm told the Tsar is still miffed
about that! And you, you...both
returned to the Palace in a highly
flustered state for all to see. But
even though nothing happened
between you two, there's more than
enough...innuendo to work with to
light the fuse to a rumor
concerning your secret getaway!

Stopping in her tracks.

Yes, yes, that's it!

WILLEM

A rumor?

MATRENA

Yes, a rumor serves our purposes as perfectly as any steamy rendezvous.

WILLEM

Let me take another stab at it.
I'll figure out something...

MATRENA

Never mind! You already flubbed your part of the plan. I'll take it from here. We'd best get inside.

WILLEM

(resigned)
Alright.

They now enter the palace together.

I/E. GREATER ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - CONTINUOUS

Rumors of Catherine's tryst with her Chamberlain begin to swirl around St. Petersburg, and soon Moscow, Pskov, Astrakhan, and as far north as Siberia. Not believing them, Peter carries on with Catherine, seemingly unaffected.

INT. SUMMER PALACE, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - MORNING

Catherine summons Willem to meet her in the Cabinet Room. He soon reports to her. Their relationship, still cool since that fateful time in *Sarskoye Selo*, has caused the Empress to request the services of a new amanuensis.

CATHERINE

How are you today, Willem?

WILLEM

I am well, Tsarina.

CATHERINE

I require the services of a new amanuensis, preferably a female. Can you locate such a person in the palace and ask her to report to me?

WILLEM

But I'm your secretary...

CATHERINE

While I'm keeping you in my employ,
I can no longer allow you to handle
my private correspondence.

WILLEM

(annoyed)
Very well, Ma'am.

Bowing and heading off on the errand.

CATHERINE

Oh, Willem.

WILLEM

Yes...?

CATHERINE

You're fully aware of the rules
against fraternizing with a member
of my Court. As such, I've sent
Tatiana to join my household staff
in *Sarskoye Selo*, beside the
peasant class.

WILLEM

As you wish, Ma'am.

Turning on his heels, he exits the room.

EXT. SUMMER PALACE, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - LATER

Alone in her newly built orangerie, Catherine recalls the letter she dictated to her surrogate amanuensis moments ago. Under the petals of blossoming citrus trees, she repeats the lines conveyed to her husband.

CATHERINE

(voiceover)
Dearest Peter,
Why have you stayed away from my
bedchamber so long? I've been
racking my brain trying to figure
out the reason. Ever since we began
our journey together, we've enjoyed
a splendid life in the *boudoir*!
Where are you? What have I done to
offend you so? If you're
displeased, write back soon;
Matrena will recite your letter to
me.

(MORE)

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

If it has anything whatever to do with infidelity, please know that, but for Sheremetev, I've been nothing but virgin to you where other men are concerned! Even Menshikov! And if he has told you otherwise, why, he's lying, which wouldn't be the first time! Come back to me, Vater, I implore you! My kisses await your soft caress. Visit me soon, I beg of you. There, I will open my *plat'ye*, so you may feast on my blinis, that you're always in need of. I await your reply. Until then, I remain your faithful, *Muter*

Catherine brushes the blossoms from her dress and slowly returns to the Palace.

INT. SUMMER PALACE, ST. PETERSBURG, RUSSIA - NIGHT

It's late, and Catherine is once again alone in bed. Suddenly tired, she falls asleep and dreams of better days, lying in her husband's arms and the many children she gave him along the way. Her dream soon turns to tragedy as she remembers the day her two young boys were removed from the family vault inside the Cathedral of the Archangel Michael in Moscow, to be transported on the long, lonely road to St. Petersburg for reinterment. This nightmare now shifts to the grisly Battle of the Pruth, where, in exchange for the Russian Army's freedom, she surrendered trunks of precious keepsakes to the Ottoman horde. As a parting blow, this Traum places her back in Marienburg and the unremitting debauchery she endured there. Toward the end of this delirious state, she frantically reaches for Peter's pillow, only to find her husband lying peacefully by her side.

I/E. ASSUMPTION CATHEDRAL, CATHEDRAL SQUARE, MOSCOW KREMLIN, RUSSIA - MORNING

Three years later, on a sunny Thursday morning, before an overflow crowd spilling out into Cathedral Square, the Coronation of Catherine I as Empress of All Russia takes place in Assumption Cathedral. There to greet the Imperial Couple at the enormous copper-gilded doors stand legions of prelates, including Moscow Metropolitan Feofan Prokopovich, as well as Metropolitans from St. Petersburg, Pskov, Astrakhan, and Siberia.

Once inside the cathedral, the couple processes down the center aisle in the direction of two pearl-spangled thrones set beneath a sumptuous velvet canopy, complete with hand-sewn Double Eagles.

METROPOLITAN

(in voiceover)

First, Catherine will proceed down the aisle, followed by the Tsar.

After seating themselves on their dual thrones, and a series of prayers and supplications are read by the Metropolitan of Moscow, Catherine Alexeyevna Skavronskaya Romanova, for all to see, lives to claim her day as Empress in the assembly of the people. The Tsar now rises and proclaims in a deep voice.

PETER

Our best beloved Spouse, Consort, and Empress Catherine has been a great support to us, not only in this, but also in many military operations, putting aside womanly weakness, of her own will, she has been present with us and has helped in every way possible. For these and other labors, we have decided by virtue of the supreme power given us by God, that she shall this day be coronated.

Be it now for all to hear, it is our intention to crown fair Catherine, Empress Consort, to reign coequally with me over the Empire.

Now kneeling, Catherine, with tears streaming down her face, attempts to kiss her husband's right hand, which he quickly withdraws. Desperately trying to raise her up, she instead throws her arms around Peter's knees, wailing heavily. After a salient moment, she rises, is crowned, and receives the Imperial Orb from her husband, adding to her full Regalia, while he himself retains the Scepter.

After the ceremony concludes, Peter retires to the palace while Catherine, in brilliant sunshine, still bearing the Imperial Crown, leads a procession across the square to the Cathedral of the Archangel Michael, to kneel at the tombs of the tsars, according to custom.

EPILOGUE

Anna Mons died childless in 1714 at the age of 42.

For profiting off the Empire, Willem Mons was publicly executed in 1724, while his sister, Matrena Balk, was flogged and exiled to Siberia.

Months later, Tsar Peter Alexeyevich Romanov died from complications due to kidney stones. He was 52.

On the day of his death, daughter, Natalia Petrovna Romanova, age 6, died and was laid to rest inches from her *Papa*.

Catherine Elena Alexeyevna Skavronskaya Romanova became Empress of All the Russias in 1725, becoming its first female monarch.

Reigning in her own right for 2 years, Catherine died from hemorrhaging of the lungs in 1727. She was 42.

Freed from confinement after Catherine's death, Eudoxia, the last ethnically-Russian wife of a Tsar, died in Moscow at age 61, outliving her rivals.

THE END

Екатерина