

CHERRY BLOSSOMS IN WINTER EPISODE 1

By John Halas, ScreenwritersForHire.Com

Based on the Novel Cherry Blossoms in Winter

By Ron Singerton

Fade In:

EXT. ST. PETERSBURG - DAY, ESTABLISHING

SUPER: Saint Petersburg, 1897

The cold months of winter has settled down on Russia's second largest city.

Snow falls on the buildings as streets as the bustling citizens walk and go about their business in thick coats and scarves.

The Naval Academy sits as a glorious structure in the city.

The gymnasium has its lights on and the sounds of swords at battle can be heard from its windows.

INT. GYMNASIUM - DAY

The air is filled with the sounds of clashing metal as the fencing competition rages, surrounded by a gossiping audience of RUSSIAN NOBLES.

In the center of the ring, facing each other are ALEXEI BRUSILOV and SERGEI VERSHININ, both dressed in proper safety gear and equipped with sabers.

Their sabers clash and strike at each other in a dangerous bladed dance.

Two JUDGES and the FENCING MASTER watch them from opposite sides of the ring, ready to call a point.

Off to the side, viewing the competition with veiled interest are ADMIRAL KOCHENKOV and CAPTAIN ISOROVSKY, both dressed in attire proper for their ranks in the Russian military.

SVETLANA, a teenage girl breaks off from her friends and runs up to the Admiral and throws her arms around him.

SVETLANA

Daddy, you're here.

ADMIRAL

Decorum, Svetlana, decorum.

SVETLANA

To hell with decorum. You look positively handsome!

Svetlana brushes away the comment and admires his uniform before waving to her friends.

SVETLANA (CONT'D)
Doesn't my admiral look
devastating?

The Admiral huffs but does not complain.

SVETLANA (CONT'D)
Boris has been doing well in the
competition! You have to see him.

ADMIRAL
Yes, but he may meet his match
today. And you know I do not
approve of your flirting with him.

SVETLANA
Oh, Daddy, he is a little pompous,
but he is a cadet, and he does like
me.

ADMIRAL
Be a good girl and rejoin your
friends. I must watch this
competition.

Svetlana scoffs but obeys.

The Captain chuckles under his breath. The Admiral shoots him a glare which shuts him up.

ADMIRAL (CONT'D)
Who are those two?

The Captain follows the Admiral's eyes to the two sparring.

CAPTAIN
The tall one is Cadet Sergei
Ivanovich Vershinin. The other is
Alexei Yevgenovich Brusilov.

The Admiral gives the Captain a surprised look.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
Alexei has already eliminated two
of our best. We are quite
interested to see how he does
against Sergei Ivanovich.

ADMIRAL

Ah, yes, the champion of the épée team. But saber is not his best weapon.

CAPTAIN

True, but I'm told that he taught Alexei saber. They're good friends despite the age difference.

(beat)

It's unfortunate that Alexei is only seventeen, a year too young for the Academy.

ADMIRAL

He'll be here soon enough. I'll speak to his father; I know him well.

After their clash, Sergei hops back, putting distance between him and Alexei.

They stare at each other, watching, waiting.

Alexei moves in and strikes at Sergei. Sergei blocks, taking a couple steps back.

Alexei moves in to keep the pressure but the blade's force loosens.

Sergei takes the opening, bringing his sword down.

Alexei parries, strikes.

JUDGE 1

JUDGE 2

Touché Alexei and Sergei back away from each other, removing their masks.

They salute each other.

SERGEI

Another damn welt. A little softer with the blade would be greatly appreciated, Alexei. This is demoralizing. Challenge me in épée and I'd cut you to pieces and regain my honor.

ALEXEI

And I'd spend the day sewing up holes. No, thank you, I'll stick to saber.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

But I'll whack you more gently next time. Just remember the words of Danton: 'de l'audace, encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace'.

SERGEI

Audacity, and more audacity, always audacity. Now you tell me.

The crowd laughs as the two of them step away from the ring.

They each take a drink of water from the refreshments table as a voice calls out to them.

BORIS (O.S.)

It's my turn.

Alexei and Sergei turn to see BORIS SOKOLOV, another academy student like Sergei.

The Fencing Master turns to them.

FENCING MASTER

Can't you wait a moment, Sokolov? Mssr. Brusilov has just finished three matches; I suspect he would like a moment to recover.

BORIS

I'm a cadet with responsibilities. I don't have time to wait, and I doubt that one so young would need recovery time.

Boris imperiously couches his saber in the crook of his left arm as he eyes Alexei.

ALEXEI

I'm fine. I would be honored to face him.

The Fencing Master looks them over then nods.

FENCING MASTER

In that case, you may both take your positions.

Alexei and Boris put on their helmets and step out into the ring. The judges and the Fencing Master take their positions.

FENCING MASTER (CONT'D)

The winner must score three touches.

FENCING MASTER

EN GARDE; BEGIN.

Alexei and Boris drop into combative stances and begin strafing, looking for weaknesses in their opponent.

Boris moves in, striking with his saber, Alexei parries and fires back with a riposte, forcing Boris back.

Alexei does not pursue and Boris moves in again.

Alexei moves his sword to the outside of Boris'.

With a quick swing, the blade is knocked off mark.

Then, with a flick of the wrist, he hits Boris' glove.

JUDGE 1

JUDGE 2

Touché. The two back off and salute. Touché.

Then they drop back into stance.

The two of them launch into a number of preliminary jabs and strikes with the blades.

Boris makes a feint for the mask and then a quick lunge for the torso.

However, Alexei parries the blade and strikes Boris' mask in turn.

JUDGE 1

JUDGE 2

Touché. Boris and Alexei quickly salute to each other and return to battle. All eyes were on the match and no one noticed the Admiral and the Captain making their way through the crowd. Touché.

Boris advances on Alexei, forcing him to withdraw. Boris lunges, thrusting his sword at Alexei's midriff. Alexei deflects the blow, bends to one knee and strikes. The blow lands against Boris' chest. The match is decided.

JUDGE 1

JUDGE 2

Touché. Touché.

Boris, showing clear irritation throws his mask and weapon to the ground and begins walking away.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

Halt.

Boris stops.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

You will show sportsmanship and respect. You will recover your weapon and shake his hand in accordance with the requirements of the Academy. And you will do it now!

Boris looks at the Admiral and the Captain's stern glares, then turns on his heel to face Alexei.

BORIS

I am ordered to shake your hand.

ALEXEI

You don't have to.

BORIS

Of course I do. It was an order.

He extends his hand. Alexei accepts it.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

BORIS storms down the sidewalk with SVETLANA close behind.

BORIS

Humiliated, absolutely humiliated!

SVETLANA

I thought you fenced very well. That boy is very quick but hardly has your experience. You would certainly beat him in foil. Maybe you should challenge him.

BORIS

I will, but it won't be in foil. I'll get him, just like I did that Jewish kid.

Svetlana stops. Boris notices and turns to her.

SVETLANA

The one who was enrolled in the Academy.

BORIS

Yes, that one.

SVETLANA

No one ever found out about that, did they? I mean, the way he simply disappeared?

BORIS

Of course not. And you must never say a word. You promised.

SVETLANA

I will never say a thing. I adore you, Boris, and I know how to keep secrets.

Boris nods and continues his vengeful stride away from the gymnasium. Svetlana does not follow.

SVETLANA (CONT'D)

(whisper)

I have some of my own.

INT. ENGLISH CLUB - NIGHT

The ADMIRAL sits at a table amongst a crowd of finely-dressed nobles with the CAPTAIN.

The two of them are drinking wine from fine glasses with a nearby WAITER waiting to be beckoned.

CAPTAIN

I have never seen such a lack of sportsmanship. It was despicable. He should be dismissed from the Academy.

The Admiral drains his glass and signals the waiter to refill it.

ADMIRAL

Sokolov is a difficult young man, and I will not tolerate such conduct again, but perhaps he learned from the episode on the court. I believe in giving a second chance.

CAPTAIN

But is it a second chance? Or is it an umpteenth? The lads are wary of him; his uncle, you know.

ADMIRAL

His uncle doesn't concern me, but the honor of the Academy certainly does.

The waiter brings him a glass of Scotch.

CAPTAIN

And Svetlana? Were she my daughter...

Suddenly, COUNT BRUSILOV, a noble with a sickening appearance despite his fine clothing, pushes through the crowd.

COUNT

There you are! I thought you would be here.

The Admiral and Captain turn to the Count.

COUNT (CONT'D)

I am furious! I am absolutely beside myself! You can't imagine what those idiots have done.

ADMIRAL

Furious, Yevgeny? About what? I'm sure you heard that your son whipped every saber fencer on the team. I would be proud, not angry.

The Count waves a dismissive hand as he takes a seat at the table.

COUNT

No! I mean the Foreign Office and that toad, Witte.

CAPTAIN

Count Witte, the Minister of Treasury?

COUNT

Who else?

(beat)

I spent my entire life in the service of the Tsar!

COUNT (CONT'D)

Junior consul in every despicable country you can imagine, and just last week I was finally promoted. I was to be senior consul in Bavaria! It would have been an assignment worthy of all my efforts as an esteemed representative of Nicholas II.

The Admiral lights a cigar and leans back in his chair.

ADMIRAL

Indeed. So what happened?

COUNT

That damn Witte stuck his head in where it did not belong! Trod right into the foreign office and said, 'Oh no, that position is promised to Count Kiliovska. Brusilov should be sent to Japan!' Japan! Can you imagine? The Tsar hates those monkeys, and so do I. And the post is for three miserable years.

CAPTAIN

Were you in the foreign office to protest?

The Count motions to the waiter for a drink.

COUNT

No, I was detained.

ADMIRAL

Japan is an important posting, especially in today's political climate. Wilhelm is an ally; we have nothing to fear from Spain. But Japan...

COUNT

Am I supposed to eat rice and raw fish and sleep on a straw mat? And what about my own business? I will be too far away from the decision-making. I am on the board, you know. The timing is preposterous.

The waiter brings the drink which the Count hastily downs before signaling for another.

The Captain attempts to hide his disapproval.

CAPTAIN

You can telegraph from Japan, just as you would from Bavaria. The mill will continue to function. Lumber will be cut.

COUNT

From Berlin I can get back here in two days. By ship from Tokyo it will take weeks.

Another drink is brought before the Count and he takes more reasonable drinking.

ADMIRAL

Speaking of Mssr. Witte, I hear that he's proposed a trans-Siberian railroad to go from here to Vladisvostok.

COUNT

So? How does that involve us?

ADMIRAL

If the Tsar approves the project, we're talking about the greatest building enterprise in the history of Russia and the longest railroad in the world. I have a major share in the St. Petersburg steel mill, and a railroad needs tracks.

CAPTAIN

And railroad ties, bridges, telegraph poles, and train stations...

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Made of lumber.

COUNT

But if Witte is in charge...

ADMIRAL

(interrupts the Count) He's simply proposing the construction. I doubt he will be awarding contracts, Yevgeny. I do have influence at court, and the Romanovs enjoy the company of my wife. She could charm a cobra. This venture could prove extremely profitable. Worth millions.

The Count leans back in his chair and eyes his glass as he thinks.

COUNT

Very interesting. But I maintain that I am worthy of a higher office, and I'm sure the Tsar will agree. A little effort in the right direction could gain me an ambassadorship. Perhaps in Spain, a real plum.

CAPTAIN

The railroad will be a few years in the planning. Perhaps the less you criticize Witte the better.

ADMIRAL

I presume that you are going to Japan in the next few weeks, so let's settle this now: I want your son in my Academy. He would be invaluable on the saber team—you know how intense the competition is between the Navy and Army—and I can waive the matter of his age. He will be looked after, of that I can assure you. I assume he is staying in St. Petersburg with his mother?

The Count glares at the Admiral, then, once again, drains his glass.

COUNT

I have no intention of taking him with me, if indeed I must go. He would only get in trouble there. I don't need an embarrassment.

ADMIRAL

I hardly see how he would be an embarrassment.

COUNT

I don't want him to get any ideas about Japanese girls. God forbid! No, he stays here, and that concern will be off my shoulder.

The Count stands, gives a quick salute to the two military officers, then leaves as quickly as he barged in.

The Captain sighs as the Admiral continues to drink with disinterest.

CAPTAIN

He doesn't care much for his son,
does he?

ADMIRAL

Unfortunately, no.

CAPTAIN

The lad is a good boy. Any father
would be proud to have such a son.
So I would like to ask, since I may
be one of his instructors, is there
a problem I should know about?

ADMIRAL

There is a problem, but not one
that should adversely effect the
boy's progress at the Academy
Brusilov's anger with his son is
misdirected. It's a rather
complicated family problem.

CAPTAIN

Involving his wife?

The Captain lights a cheroot and shoots the Admiral a
quizzical look.

The Admiral hesitates to answer, and flicks some ash from his
cigar.

ADMIRAL

Something along those lines.

CAPTAIN

And these are things that you know?

ADMIRAL

Yes, Isorovsky, there are things I
know that he does not.

CAPTAIN

And you are not about to inform
him, are you?

ADMIRAL

No, I will not 'inform' him, nor
will I inform Alexei. Not that he
doesn't deserve to know, but it
will be for him to find out.

CAPTAIN

I did not appreciate how complex you are, or should I say, how devious, Admiral. There are state secrets and family secrets, and both are magnificently intriguing.

The Admiral blows a puff of smoke into the air.

It swirls and diminishes into the crowd.

ADMIRAL

Indeed. And both must be guarded.

EXT. DINGY CITY DISTRICT - DAY

ALEXEI and SERGEI, dressed in thick coats, walk down the street as WORKERS, WOMEN, and CHILDREN, dressed in thick coats head to their destinations.

Horses with ratty fur pull carts along the road.

SERGEI

I'm surprised that your father didn't come to the fencing competition. He would have enjoyed seeing you win.

ALEXEI

The competition was in the morning, and he's rarely sober before noon. Do you think we can get in?

Sergei gives Alexei a stern look.

SERGEI

You're not going anywhere near the door! It's too damn dangerous. If your father found out he'd kill both of us.

ALEXEI

But Tatiana will be inside. Won't it be dangerous for her?

SERGEI

She lives for danger and for the revolution. It's in her blood. But you must not be seen.

ALEXEI

But you mustn't, either. If you're caught you'd be expelled, or worse.

SERGEI

I'll only be inside for a few minutes. I promised her.

ALEXEI

You're in the same cell as she, aren't you?

SERGEI

DON'T TALK ABOUT IT.

(beat)

The Okhrana has spies everywhere. Any opposition to the regime is dangerous.

The two of them slip through the workers and walk into...

EXT. WAREHOUSE ALCOVE - CONTINUOUS

SERGEI walks over to the door with ALEXEI close behind.

WOMEN and children are hard at work, dressed in thick, ragged coats that barely defend them from the cold.

A child blows on her hands in an attempt to warm them up.

SERGEI

She's in there.

ALEXEI

Why did she choose that one?

SERGEI

She didn't. Her cell did. A delegation learned of our efforts to help workers. This was after they went to the owners and asked for a raise and better lighting around the machines; it's quite dark inside, and people get hurt.

ALEXEI

Did they get the raise or the lighting?

SERGEI

They got fired. So a second group of workers came and said that they need coordination and an agitator, because many of the women and children are afraid to protest working conditions.

ALEXEI

And that's when your girlfriend was sent?

A group of WOMEN in coats and shawls furtively glance up and down the street.

Alexei watches them.

Sergei ignores them.

SERGEI

We'll wait here.

INT. SEWING FACTORY - DAY

The sewing machines rattle away, creating considerable noise.

WOMEN move around the factory, working solemnly.

TATIANA, dressed in thick clothing and hiding her face with a scarf, brings a bundle of cloth to a shearing table.

An elderly BABUSHKA, a somewhat scrawny lady, watches her with suspicion.

BABUSHKA

Nyet, nyet. I know what you do—and what follows. The police, the bully gangs, or the Okhrana will come. They will beat us. See my granddaughter over there? She is only six; she may be hurt. I will not help you.

TATIANA

I am here to help you. Your granddaughter should not even be here. She has rickets, doesn't she? There's no sunlight here. We can change that.

The Babushka shakes her head and glances at the INSPECTOR, who is checking the uniforms.

Tatiana pulls the scarf closer and leans in to whisper to the Babushka.

TATIANA (CONT'D)

(whisper)

Tomorrow at eleven.

She gives some reams of cloth to the old woman and walks over to a MAN and WOMAN trying to disentangle thread from a faulty machine.

MAN

It will be too dangerous for the children. They should stay home.

TATIANA

It's the children that the foreign journalists will photograph and write about! The demonstration must be peaceful, but the capitalists will only comply with our demands if condemned by the foreign press. English and French journalists have been told about the protest. They will be here.

MAN

The owners won't care about European papers, and I think the journalists will alert the bosses.

TATIANA

The reporters want a story. They won't tell.

MAN

They want blood, and they'll get it. You'll see. The owners are only concerned about profits. I think the demonstration will be meaningless. The only thing that will change the system is revolution, and that must come from inside Russia itself.

The man turns to Tatiana with eyes that bore into her like drills.

MAN (CONT'D)

Tell your Mensheviks or Social Democrats or whoever you're with to stockpile guns. That's how things will change.

TATIANA

Not war, not yet. The proletariat must be organized, and there must be leadership. We will only get support if a revolution starts without violence on our part.

TATIANA (CONT'D)

Just help me spread the word about tomorrow.

The man gives her a cynical grin.

MAN

Would you like me to tell the Tsar? Invite him perhaps? Yes, yes, I'll help, but nothing goes according to plan. I hope you have lots of bandages and stretchers.

WOMAN

You will be with us, won't you?

TATIANA

Of course I will. I intend to lead the demonstration. We will begin here and march past the steel mill, the ammunition factory, and onto the Admiralty building. There should be thousands.

MAN

It should start earlier, before the factories open.

TATIANA

No, it will have greater impact if workers put down their tools and simply walk out. A strike, even for a day, will get the attention we need.

BABUSHKA

I just hope it stays peaceful. Not everybody is willing to be beaten without hitting back.

EXT. CITY STREETS - MORNING

The street is lively with the chanting of PEOPLE, WORKERS, WOMEN and CHILDREN, demanding social change.

ALEXEI, SERGEI, and TATIANA watch from the sidelines among the BYSTANDERS.

SERGEI

It's not even ten yet. They started early, and without you.

ALEXEI

Then who's leading? Journalists?

Alexei looks over to the PHOTOGRAPHERS on the other side of the street.

Sergei shrugs.

SERGEI

Perhaps, or Okhrana.

The three of them turn their faces away from the photographers to avoid having their picture taken as they walk down the street.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

It's harder to break up a large demonstration that is attracting a lot of attention than a small one just starting. If the Okhrana was tipped off...

Sergei is cut off when he sees a crowd of MEN with truncheons followed by a squad of CAVALRY.

A PRIEST steps out from the crowd of protestors.

PRIEST

Brothers, servants of the Lord, we appeal to—

The rasping scrape of swords being drawn from their scabbards echoed from the soldiers.

Everything went silent.

The bystanders stir nervously.

Alexei, Sergei, and Tatiana stand at a distance from the scene.

SERGEI

Don't go any further.

Sergei grabs Tatiana's hand and pulls her away. Alexei follows as the soldiers charge.

The streets are filled with cries and terror. A gunshot goes off as the protestors are trampled by the horses.

The men with truncheons beat the people amongst the crowd, none are spared the ferocity of the Tsar's military.

EXT. BACK STREET - CONTINUOUS

ALEXEI, SERGEI, and TATIANA tear down the alley until they were finally out of any sight and possible followers.

They each bend over, breathing hard.

SERGEI

It's over. It's finished.

Alexei looks back towards the scene.

ALEXEI

Do you think we were photographed?

SERGEI

I doubt it. Anybody moving is a blur, but somebody from the factory might have recognized me or Tatiana.

Sergei turns to Tatiana.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

You'd better get out of St. Petersburg for a few months. Go to Sweden; that's where the cell has a meeting house. You'll be safe there.

TATIANA

Will you come with me?

Sergei shakes his head.

SERGEI

I mustn't. I can only help if I remain useful, and anonymous. If I am accused, I will insist that one young man looks very like another, that I wasn't at the protest. If I leave the Academy now, Okhrana will know I was involved, and that could implicate Alexei.

TATIANA

You should not have brought him.

ALEXEI

It was my decision.

Tatiana and Sergei turn to Alexei.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

I saw the condition of the workers and I was embarrassed about the way we live compared to them. No one that I know has to work. They all have servants. I wanted to do something, but I didn't think it was going to be like this.

Tatiana glares at him.

TATIANA

Well, now you know how one hundred and ten million people in this country are being treated by a few thousand aristocrats and capitalists. The Okhrana must have an informer in the factory. We were betrayed, but this is just beginning.

EXT. NEVA RIVER - DAY

ALEXEI and SERGEI sit at a bench overlooking the river.

The mood is solemn as PEOPLE pass by them, showing no indication of interest to what happened before.

ALEXEI

You are a cadet and will be a naval officer. I wonder how you can be a defender of the Tsar and the state, and a revolutionary at the same time.

SERGEI

I never started out to be a revolutionary, and I'm not as extreme as Tatiana. I don't think my sympathies conflict with my allegiance to the Tsar. I love the sea and I love fencing, and the Academy is the only place I can go to have both. And yes, I want to be an officer in the Russian Navy.

ALEXEI

But there had to be something that made you become involved.

SERGEI

You ask a lot of difficult questions.

Sergei lapses into silence. They watch as SKATERS dance along the frozen river.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

Both my father and Tatiana's are minor nobles, hardly important enough to be invited to the Winter Palace or ever have an audience with the Tsar. I met Tatiana at church when we lived beside the Don River. She had two brothers, both older than she. The elder was Eugene. He was smart and funny, and the three of us used to go skating and ride her father's horses. Then he got involved in a labor strike. He was falsely accused of shooting at a policeman, and he was hanged on the spot.

Alexei looks at Sergei with surprise.

ALEXEI

Wasn't there a trial?

Sergei gives a shrug of weary resignation.

SERGEI

Of a sort. The defense lawyer was told what to say, and it was over in an hour. Tatiana virtually disintegrated. She spoke to no except me for over a year. When at last she emerged from her grief, she and I had become very close.

ALEXEI

Lovers?

SERGEI

Yes, lovers. And she became a determined and bitter revolutionary. She's courageous and motivated, and she throws herself into any movement that will bring down the tyrants. So does her other brother, Vassily. She may speak of gradualism, but her final goal is the destruction of the Romanov dynasty and all it condones.

ALEXEI

And you feel the same?

SERGEI

I do not, and she tolerates that. Tatiana assumes that someday I will be just as determined as she. But I won't risk my career, unless the regime does something completely intolerable, something absolutely requiring revolution.

Alexei looks away from Sergei. His hands clasp together as he stares out, deep in thought.

ALEXEI

I think changes are needed, but I won't support the overthrow of the Tsar. I think you're right. You don't just overthrow six hundred years of rule. Some of them, like Peter the Great and Catherine, were innovators who made Russia a great power.

Sergei nods.

SERGEI

True, but that doesn't excuse the excesses, the brutal repression and a frozen class system. But change will not come easy. I hope to work quietly within the system.

(beat)

But you, Alexei, must let matters take their course; stay out of it. It's damn dangerous, and despite your lineage the authorities would not be kind to you.

ALEXEI

Are you afraid?

SERGEI

Of course I am.

Sergei looks his friend straight in the eye, unblinking, not fazing for a second.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

It's all very frightening, Alexei. Now I think you should go home. You have seen enough. Now you know.

INT. COUNT'S ESTATE PARLOR - DAY

A cloud of cigar smoke wafts to the ceiling as the COUNT sits in his chair, brooding.

COUNT

I expect that I shall still have some money and this house when I get back.

His wife OLGA stands by the window watching the snow. She turns to her husband.

OLGA

What are you talking about?

COUNT

I thought I already told you. The bastards in the Foreign Office are sending me off to Japan! I'll be gone for three years, so you and Alexei will have all the time you want to fool around, doing whatever it is you do.

Olga turns to him in shock.

OLGA

Three years?!

COUNT

Yes. I will have the admiral check on you while I'm gone. Now, where's my drink?

He waits but after seeing her still staring at him, he turns to her.

COUNT (CONT'D)

What? Why are you just standing there? Surely you must be happy about my impending departure.

Olga frowns.

OLGA

You're announcing this with less concern for me or Alexei than you would have for one of your race horses.

The Count shrugs.

COUNT

I'm being sent away, that's all there is to it. And it wasn't my choice. They decided without me.

Olga gives a bitter look.

OLGA

Maybe because you were too drunk to intercede.

The Count glares at her.

COUNT

You do not judge me.

The Count scoffs and opens the paper.

ALEXEI sits silently in the corner of the room, reading a book about the history of Japan.

The Count reads briefly before stopping at a particular article.

COUNT (CONT'D)

What the hell? Look at this! The bastards should be shot!

OLGA

Whatever are you shouting about?

The Count shows her the paper.

COUNT

This right here! Another strike. Peasants! Ignorant scum! Listen to this article.

Alexei closes his book and Olga looks to her husband as he reads aloud.

COUNT (CONT'D)

Number Four Goronska Clothing Factory. A motley rabble threw down their tools and deserted their machines to illegally protest wages and working conditions yesterday. Numerous journalists, including those of the foreign press, reported that many workers were armed and numerous shots were fired, wounding those who valiantly stood up to the rampaging mob.

COUNT (CONT'D)

Fortunately a squadron of the Tsar's Imperial Hussars stood in the way of any destruction. The owner of the St. Petersburg Clothing Factory, a Mr. Grigory Glavokov, said that wages at the factory were higher than anything the workers could have earned in their squalid villages and they should be happy to have work at all. In addition, extensive improvements have been made to ensure the comfort and safety of everyone in the work place.

The Count turns to them to make sure they are still listening.

COUNT (CONT'D)

The factory produces uniforms for our military, and the government deplores the disruption of work by a few disgruntled and violent workers. All efforts are being made to locate and prosecute organizers of yesterday's unpatriotic act. Photographers were on the scene and the police have been provided with photos. Nevertheless, the public is requested to offer whatever information may lead to the arrest of those involved. Fortunately the injured officers are reported to have survived their wounds.

ALEXEI

The officers were not wounded, and the only shot was fired into the air. It was the workers who were trampled and maimed.

COUNT

What? You were there? What in God's name were you doing with that damned rabble?

The Count throws the paper to the ground stands from his chair.

ALEXEI

I wasn't in any protest.

COUNT

But you were there! How else would you know about the shot?

COUNT (CONT'D)

What the hell were you doing in that district anyway? Were you there alone, or with those revolutionary thugs you hang out with.

ALEXEI

My friends are not thugs, and we took a short cut and ran into the demonstration, that is all.

COUNT

I don't believe you. In fact, I don't believe anything you say.

OLGA

I'm sure he didn't know that there would be a strike.

The Count rips the paper from the floor and shoves it in his son's face, pointing at some pictures.

COUNT

Look here, photographs. These three, who are they? You and your accomplices?

Olga takes the paper and looks at the pictures.

OLGA

They're so grainy they could be anybody.

COUNT

No.

(beat)

This is you; you are lying. Admiral Kochenkov told me that he wants you in the Naval Academy, but you will never be allowed in. You are unworthy of a naval commission! I have done everything for you, I have given you everything. You live in this mansion, you have private tutors and expensive clothes, and you embarrass me like this? You betray and disgrace your family? I am terrified of what trouble you will get into when I'm gone.

OLGA

Then take him with you.

The Count shoots her a vengful look.

COUNT

That would be worse.

(beat)

No, he will stay here under the thumb of Kochenkov.

OLGA

I am appalled at how little you think of Alexei. What has he ever done to sully your name? You could not ask for a better son. Why are you acting this way?

COUNT

You damn well know why.

The Count rushes over and grabs Olga by the cuff.

Alexei's expression darkens as we flashback to...

INT. COUNT'S ESTATE HALLWAY - NIGHT, FLASHBACK

OLGA sits with a young ALEXEI, leaning against the wall. Olga is battered and bruised. Her eyes are wet with tears.

ALEXEI

I will not let it happen again. I will not let him hit you.

Olga shakes her head.

OLGA

What can you possibly do to stop him? He will beat you, too. You are still small, Lyosha.

ALEXEI

I have a rapier mother. It is very sharp.

Olga looks at her son with surprise, then grabs his wrist.

OLGA

No never. You would kill him and that would be murder.

ALEXEI

It will be self-defense. They will do nothing.

OLGA

No. You will have to run away and I will never see you again.

OLGA (CONT'D)

Alexei, there is adversity in the world and I will put up with it. But it is kind of you to come to my side on these terrible days.

ALEXEI

I will not let him hurt you again.

Olga dries her tears and walks away from Alexei.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

Never again.

INT. COUNT'S ESTATE - DAY, PRESENT

ALEXEI watches as the COUNT grabs his wife and throws her to the ground.

COUNT

How dare you accuse me of ineptness. They set their minds against me. The bastards would have done it whether I was there or not. Japan! The Antarctic would be more desirable. But you gloat! Yes! You will get rid of me; that's what you want, isn't it? I can see it in your eyes. You are despicable! And who are you? A peasant, a whore who tricked me to get my money and my name. I am royalty! You knew that.

Alexei stands and walks to the exit of the room.

ALEXEI

It will not happen again.

INT. ALEXEI'S ROOM - DAY

The door to the room swings open and ALEXEI storms in. He grabs his sword from the wrack and rushes out.

BACK TO COUNT'S ESTATE

ALEXEI returns to the room to find his MOTHER forced to the wall by the COUNT.

Blind with rage, Alexei charges, his weapon beared to strike.

The Count turns and freezes in face of the weapon.

Olga shouts for her son.

OLGA

NO.

Alexei hesitates, and the Count strikes him in the face.

The weapon spins away as blood spurts from Alexei's nose.

The Count picks up the weapon and walks over to Alexei.

COUNT

Damn you, I will thrash him.

Olga runs over and covers her son.

OLGA

No! He is my son, Yevgeny, no.

COUNT

But he is not my son.

Alexei's eyes freeze at the ground, all anger gone in an instant.

He looks up at his "father" in confusion and dumfounded surprise.

VALET (O.S.)

Excellency, you must stop.

The Count stops his advance and looks towards the VALET standing off to the side of the room.

VALET (CONT'D)

I will inform the police. I swear it.

The Count glares at the Valet as two WOMEN from the Estate's staff walk in.

VALET (CONT'D)

There was no need to strike the boy.

COUNT

He was going to kill me. You have no right to interfere. This is not your business.

The Valet does not budge. The Count grits his teeth then sighs. He throws the rapier to the ground.

COUNT (CONT'D)

Bastards.

INT. OLGA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

ALEXEI and OLGA sit together on the bed.

Olga is tending to Alexei's nose, but Alexei holds no warmth in his gaze.

ALEXEI

He said that I'm not his son.

Olga stops and closes the first aid.

OLGA

You're not. Not his real son, I mean. But you are my son, Lyosha.

ALEXEI

What?

Olga does not answer. Alexei frowns.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

So who is my real father.

OLGA

I will tell you all about it someday.

ALEXEI

You don't think my real father would want me to know?

Olga stands and dismisses the servants.

Then she walks around and lights the candles on the furniture, despite the fact that there is a light bulb illuminating the room.

OLGA

Not now, Lyosha. Not when things are so complicated.

ALEXEI

Are there more secrets, mother?

Olga does not face him, only looking at the flickering flame of the candle.

OLGA

There are always more secrets, Alexei. Now I think I will go to bed.

INT. ALEXEI'S ROOM - DAY

ALEXEI sits in his bed, reading a note. The note details a challenge for Alexei from Boris.

It tells him to meet at the copse of trees by the Naval Academy and to not bring a second. He is free to take any weapon.

Alexei sighs and looks up at the ceiling.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

ALEXEI and SERGEI walk together down the streets.

Sergei is readin the note then hands it back to Alexei.

SERGEI

The Admiral or his staff should know of this. The whole thing is sheer nonsense. I can have Captain Isorovsky end it right now. He might even give Boris demerits for this stupidity.

ALEXEI

No, don't tell anybody yet. I have to decide what I'm going to do, and I don't want the captain to deal with my problem. Promise me that.

Sergei looks at Alexei with discontent, then sighs.

SERGEI

Fine, but I don't know why he doesn't want a second. In the old days there was always a second in case the primary was wounded or killed.

Alexei looks ahead with a look of a man walking on thin ice.

ALEXEI

Because he expects to kill me. He doesn't think he'll need a second.

INT. ALEXEI'S ROOM - DAY

ALEXEI lies on his bed, deep in thought. He looks over to his sword.

It sits there, calling to him, begging him to action.

With no hesitation, he sits up, takes his blade and exits the room.

EXT. COUNT'S ESTATE - DAY

ALEXEI closes the door behind him as he leaves the estate. He walks down the steps and onto the open sidewalk.

EXT. COPSE OF TREES - DAY

BORIS and a FRIEND from the Academy stand in dumbfounded shock.

In front of them is SERGEI, equipped with his rapier.

BORIS

My duel is not with you.

SERGEI

I'm afraid it is. My friend will be here momentarily, but I won't allow him to engage in a duel. He's far too young, and his father will prosecute if you continue your harassment. But since you insist on a duel, I will gladly stand in for him. Are you ready?

ALEXEI (O.S.)

It is I whom he challenged.

Boris and his friend look to Alexei. Sergei does not budge.

SERGEI

I will not permit it. You stand aside.

Alexei takes some steps forward, but Sergei blocks him with his arm.

SERGEI (CONT'D)

That is not a request. You have shown courage by simply appearing. That is good enough;

SERGEI (CONT'D)

I insist upon accepting the challenge in your stead. So I repeat, Mssr. Sokolov, as a fellow cadet, are you ready to face the consequences of your challenge?

Boris' friend steps forward, acting as an intermediary.

BORIS' FRIEND

This is not an arrangement Mssr. Sokolov is required to accept.

Sergei's eyes narrow.

SERGEI

He was never 'required' to issue the ultimatum in the first place. But now his honor is at stake, as is mine. Should I assume that he wishes to extricate himself from a very dangerous situation.

Boris' friend frowns and looks to Boris. Boris' expression is stone cold.

His friend turns back to Sergei.

BORIS' FRIEND

I think we will terminate these proceedings.

SERGEI

Then for the affront there must be an apology. Refusal will result in my challenge, here and now. And there will be blood.

Boris' friend turns to him, demanding he act.

BORIS

I may have acted hastily. I retract my challenge.

ALEXEI

I accept.

Sergei places his hand on his weapon's hilt.

SERGEI

That is not an apology.

Boris grimaces, then looks at Alexei.

His expression is one of hurt pride.

Eventually he grits his teeth and takes a deep breath, taking the most respectful position he can.

BORIS

I apologize, but on the condition that nothing further be said about this.

Sergei relaxes and removes his hand from his weapon.

SERGEI

On that you have my assurance.

INT. ADMIRAL'S OFFICE - DAY

The ADMIRAL sits at his desk with the COUNT in a nearby chair.

The two of them are relaxed and enjoying a bottle of cognac.

The Count blows a puff of smoke from his cigar.

COUNT

How did you hear about it?

ADMIRAL

From Svetlana. She rarely confides in me, but she was quite worried. Almost frantic, I would say.

The Count scoffs.

COUNT

Frantic? That doesn't sound like her.

ADMIRAL

She was afraid Boris Sokolov might be killed in the duel, and she is quite attached to him.

The Count dismisses it as unbelievable and continues smoking.

COUNT

Unlikely that Boris would be killed.

The Admiral smiles.

ADMIRAL

I wouldn't be so sure. If Alexei would not kill him, Cadet Ivanovich would have.

ADMIRAL (CONT'D)

(beat)

Regardless, it remains a dangerous situation, even though I told Boris that he must never do anything so egregious again.

He puts out his cigar in the ash tray and takes a sip from his drink.

COUNT

So it's settled, and there's nothing more to be concerned about.

The Admiral swirls his drink.

ADMIRAL

I don't think it's settled at all. I know this Sokolov type, and it's only a matter of time before it blows up. If he had drawn that rapier I would have had him expelled.

COUNT

Indeed, but let's put that aside for now. Have you heard from Count Witte about the Trans-Siberian railroad?

The Admiral extends his hand, signaling his companion to wait.

ADMIRAL

Wait a moment, Yevgeny. I must tell you, I cannot accept Alexei in the Academy at this time. Of course I want him in when he's older, say in two or three years.

COUNT

But you said—

ADMIRAL

(interrupts the Count)

Yes, but matters are different now.

(MORE)

ADMIRAL (CONT'D)

In fact, I think it's imperative that you take him to Japan with you.

The Count shoots up from his chair, glaring at the Admiral.

COUNT

That's hardly what I had in mind!

The Admiral bears the hostility emanating from the Count no mind and simply continues.

ADMIRAL

Think about it. He will gain enormous experience, which may be of great value in years to come. Intimate knowledge of Asia will be invaluable, in conjunction with a commission from the Naval Academy. You should think of his future. However, there are physical requirements for the Academy he cannot yet meet. And then there is the matter of Boris, who will be gone from the Academy by the time Alexei returns.

The Count clenches his fist.

COUNT

And you are afraid for Alexei if he enrolls now.

ADMIRAL

It is all too predictable. Where there is bad blood there is eventually spilt blood. I do not want that in my academy. Take him, Yevgeny. It's time to play the part of a father. Whether you had it in mind or not.

COUNT

That sounds like a requirement. The railroad deal is connected to this?

The Admiral interlaces his fingers.

ADMIRAL

It may be.

The Count frowns. It is clear he does not like the idea, but he relents.

COUNT

Very well, if it must be. Now that you've beaten me over the head you can at least tell me about the railroad deal.

The Admiral smiles and motions to the bottle.

ADMIRAL

Another glass of port or vodka?

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - DAY

The COUNT sits in a chair as EKATERINA, a woman the age of the Admiral struts into the room.

The Count smiles at her and reaches to hug her, but she takes a step back.

Her expression is solemn.

COUNT

I thought you wanted to see me. I received your note and came as quickly as I could.

Ekaterina nods, but turns away from the Count.

EKATERINA

Yes, I did send for you, Yevgeny, but not for what you think. I am terribly distressed.

The Count looks at her with confusion.

COUNT

I had the furnishings completely changed, just as you wanted.

Ekaterina shakes her head.

EKATERINA

That's not what distresses me. I spoke with Olga after you-

COUNT

(interrupts Ekaterina)

What happens between me and my wife is hardly your concern. And my actions were justified. Moreover, I was attacked.

EKATERINA

Not by her.

Ekaterina's expression is stern, but at the same time elegant.

When the Count responds with silence, she begins pacing the room.

EKATERINA (CONT'D)

She was hit very hard and her wrist was sprained terribly. I adore you, but I cannot...

(beat)

Will not, tolerate that sort of behavior toward my friend. It is a sign of a brutal man. Are you a brutal man, Yevgeny?

The Count walks towards her and tries to comfort her.

COUNT

Never toward you. I love you and always have.

EKATERINA

I know that you love my body. It is a narcotic to you, just like your vodka and Scotch. But you disappoint me. In fact, sometimes you repel me.

The Count stops. He stands still and looks at her, no longer loving and flirtatious.

COUNT

I will be leaving soon for Japan.

EKATERINA

She told me. You will be taking your son.

COUNT

Yes, he will come with me. It's part of an arrangement.

EKATERINA

But you're not taking Olga.

COUNT

No, I don't think she'd be comfortable in Japan. It would not be easy for a Russian woman.

(MORE)

COUNT (CONT'D)

She wouldn't know anyone and doesn't speak the language. There are places men can go for entertainment and socializing that are not available to women.

Ekaterina smiles. The Count's expression is grim.

EKATERINA

Entertainment for men, yes. And I suspect that you will find another mistress there. What do they call them, geishas?

COUNT

I doubt that I will have time or interest in Japanese women. I detest the Japanese.

EKATERINA

Of course. You detest just about everyone, Yevgeny. And if you are going for three years, and if my husband and I don't reconcile, I suppose I shall have to find a new lover.

The Count shoots her a bitter look.

COUNT

I imagine you will find someone rather quickly. Would you like me to leave, or shall I escort you to your carriage?

Ekaterina looks a bit disappointed, but shrugs.

EKATERINA

Neither, really.

COUNT

By that you mean?

Ekaterina smiles and rubs up against him.

EKATERINA

Believe it or not, I am quite famished. My husband, the Admiral doesn't satisfy, you know.

She walks away from him and drops her coat off of her shoulders.

EKATERINA (CONT'D)

Are you coming, Yevgeny, or are you going to pout all night?

The Count looks on her with disgust, but begins to untie his belt.

Ekaterina smiles and the two walk to the bedroom door, their clothes fall to the ground as they go.

INT. COUNT'S ESTATE ROOM WITH MANY PAINTINGS - DAY

ALEXEI stares at the paintings with a look of apathy as OLGA enters the room.

Alexei does not turn to her to acknowledge her presence.

OLGA

I had a long talk with your father, and he wants to speak with you.

ALEXEI

My real father?

OLGA

No, I mean Count Brusilov. I will continue to speak of him as your father, since he's the only one you know.

ALEXEI

He said that I'm not his son, so I won't call him father any more.

OLGA

What will you call him?

ALEXEI

I am not sure yet, but I don't want to talk to him.

OLGA

You must, Alexei. It's very important and involves your future. He's in the smoking room, and he wants me to come with you.

ALEXEI

Oh, another one of those 'family councils' where he assumes an official role.

Olga gives him a stern, piercing glare. It does not faze Alexei, who merely smirks and starts down the hall.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

Fine, I can't wait to hear what he has to say.

INT. COUNT'S ESTATE SMOKING ROOM - DAY

The COUNT sits in his chair at the end of the room with a table between him and the door and another pair of seats.

Like always, he is smoking.

ALEXEI and OLGA enter and the Count puts out his cigar.

He motions towards the seat.

ALEXEI

I'd rather stand, Count Brusilov.

COUNT

'Count Brusilov'? How interesting. Not 'Excellency' or perhaps 'Father'?

ALEXEI

You're not my father; you said so. I will call you Excellency, if you wish, or Count Brusilov.

The Count shrugs, showing no interest.

COUNT

Very well. You may call me Count Brusilov, except when we are in the company of others. Questions might be raised, which I do not care to answer.

ALEXEI

Yes, Count Brusilov. But I don't want to be with you in the company of others.

COUNT

That is not a matter of choice. There are obligations of state for which you will be required to accompany me. In fact, I may even require your assistance at times.

OLGA

Yes, that would be nice. There is something Yevgeny wishes to tell you; something we thought best for you.

COUNT

"Yes, it was something we agreed upon.

Alexei shoots Olga a quizzical look which she does not answer.

COUNT (CONT'D)

I have been informed of troubling developments in which you were obliquely involved. That is not to say that you instigated the event or were guilty in any way. I refer to the almost-duel. It was an amazingly stupid thing for a naval cadet to orchestrate. This individual, I've been informed, is pernicious and vindictive, so this may not be over. I have also been told that you were willing to engage this person in combat; very brave, considering the differences in age.

Alexei does not respond to the comments and simply waits for the Count to finish.

COUNT (CONT'D)

But the danger persists; therefore you will accompany me to my next posting. We are going to Japan.

Alexei winces at that.

ALEXEI

Japan? I don't want to go to Japan with you.

COUNT

I will not have you stay here and become a problem for me or your mother. I cannot run back for a family emergency. It's as simple as that. However, I have arranged for you to be enrolled in the Naval Academy when we return. You said that you want to be a naval officer, and with that I concur.

(MORE)

COUNT (CONT'D)

In fact, I have already given my approval to the superintendent of the school, Admiral Kochenkov.

Alexei turns to his mother, shocked and dejected.

ALEXEI

You agreed to this?

Olga nods, clearly trying to act strong and loving to her son who is showing some small levels of contempt.

OLGA

I will miss you terribly, but it is for the best. You will have many new experiences, and when you come back you will be a grown man and will wear the uniform of a naval cadet.

COUNT

True. I will find you an accommodation of your own, a room in what the Japanese call a ryokan. And you shall have an allowance as well.

Alexei reluctantly turns away from Olga and returns his attention to the Count.

ALEXEI

Is Japan an assignment for which you asked?

COUNT

No, but I am a servant of the Tsar and I go where required.

(beat)

I do not particularly favor the Japanese, and I do not expect you to emulate their values. You are Russian; I expect you to remain that way.

Alexei stiffens, but nods before taking a polite bow, like one does a superior, not their father.

ALEXEI

Yes, Count Brusilov.

The Count nods, and Alexei hastily leaves the room.

INT. COUNT'S ESTATE HALLWAY - DAY

ALEXEI steps out from the smoking room door, closing it behind him.

He takes a deep breath and sighs.

The VALET sees him and walks over.

VALET

Is there something you need young master?

Alexei turns.

He gives the Valet a smile.

ALEXEI

No, not at all.

The Valet gives him a small bow and starts walking off.

Out of earshot, Alexei mutters under his breath.

ALEXEI (CONT'D)

Just that I am going to become as Japanese as possible.