

THE GREAT

EPISODE ONE

Love and Marriage, Horse and Carriage.

Written by

Tony McNamara

March 2 2018

A BLACK CARD.

THE GREAT

'Occasional historical facts enclosed'

EXT ROADWAY DAY

1710 A carriage thunders through a forest landscape.

INT CARRIAGE DAY

Catherine, a young woman in her twenties. Charismatic, smart, idealistic and asleep, surrounded by books.

EXT GARDEN DAY

Germany, 1710. A beautiful green garden. Flowers bloom, butterflies flutter by. Two girls of seventeen swing on a swing set. Catherine, wearing a beautiful blue silk dress and bare feet. Angeline, a dyspeptic, prim looking girl in a black silk dress and button up boots.

ANGELINE

I overheard my father talking last night. He said your father is a fool, that you have practically no money and that you will soon lose everything.

Catherine smiles, unperturbed.

CATHERINE

I don't think that is true. We had strawberries last night.

ANGELINE

So?

CATHERINE

They are an expensive fruit and I always equate them with optimism and happiness.

ANGELINE

You are a very naive girl. It is a constant embarrassment to me.

CATHERINE

I just see the good in things. You should try it. There is so much good, Angeline. This morning I found a bird in my pocket.

She takes a bird out of her pocket.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

I hadn't even noticed it climb in there. Just heard it chirping happily.

Catherine smiles broadly as the bird flies off.

ANGELINE

Oh my God, you are a child.

CATHERINE

Also not true. I am to be married.

INT CARRIAGE DAY

Catherine sits with a book in her lap.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Da. Nyet.

Books are stacked on the seat beside her, spilling down onto the floor of the carriage.

EXT GARDEN DAY

Angeline stares at her a beat.

ANGELINE

Who would marry you? Does this crazy man know your family's situation? That you have nothing!

CATHERINE

He cares not for such matters. Emperor Peter and I are about finer things.

Angeline's swing shudders to a halt as her boots hit the turf. She can barely bring herself to ask the question. Slowly she asks.

ANGELINE
Emperor Peter? Of Russia?

CATHERINE
Yip.
Russia. Just the word evokes
visions of wonder, of a kingdom the
likes of which no one has seen
before. I am to be Empress of
Russia, Angeline! Isn't that so...
completely right?!

ANGELINE
(stricken)
NO!

CATHERINE
(Joyfully)
Yes!

ANGELINE
No!

CATHERINE
Yes!

ANGELINE
No.

CATHERINE
Angeline, enough. It is too tiring
and I have a long trip ahead of me.
To Russia, where I am to be
Empress.

A bewildered Angeline shakes her head.

ANGELINE
How did this happen?

CATHERINE
He was sent my portrait and chose
me.

ANGELINE
Your portrait? He will be
disappointed when you arrive.

CATHERINE

He will love me and I him. He has sent me a beautiful letter. Why must you be cruel, Angeline? You are a plain girl and it would suit you better to have a sunny disposition.

INT CARRIAGE DAY

Catherine looks out the window.

CATHERINE

Driver?

DRIVER

Yes.

CATHERINE

Stop please.

Catherine steps down from the carriage. Looks around. A deep green forest reflected in a lake of crystal blue. The beauty is overwhelming.

Catherine drops to her knees. Kisses the ground.

EXT GARDEN DAY

Catherine swings, smiling. Angeline stares at her.

ANGELINE

You, Empress of Russia. I feel faint.

She sits on the ground.

CATHERINE

They have bears. I may get one. They look cute.

ANGELINE

Cute! How did he even know you existed?!

CATHERINE

He is my mother's second cousin.

ANGELINE

You are practically brother and sister. Your children will look like hamsters!

Catherine jumps from the swing, lands elegantly and turns to Angeline.

CATHERINE

Then they will remind me of you and I shall look fondly upon them. We will not meet again, dear Angeline but I shall carry the look on your face with me always. You have often been cruel to me, but I have felt your unhappiness and so I forgive you.

ANGELINE

I don't want you to fo-

CATHERINE

Too late, I already did it. I greet the world with love and it greets me the same. You spit in its eye and wonder why your face is wet. 'Peter the Great'. I guess that will make me 'Catherine the Great'.

INT CARRIAGE DAY

Catherine, asleep as the carriage rumbles on.

A crack of lightning and thunder sounds above her. Catherine wakes and looks out her window. Mist envelopes the forest, rain starts to drizzle down.

Soldiers suddenly appear from the forest, injured and wounded. They appear ghostly in the mist. The carriage carries on and they are lost again, as quickly as they came.

EXT WINTER PALACE DAY

The carriage pulls up outside the Winter Palace. An impressive, Petrine Baroque building overlooking the Neva river.

INT PALACE HALLWAY DAY

Catherine walks along behind a guard, her excitement growing. The hallway is long and dark, lit by candles and lined with stuffed animal heads: Stuffed elk and bear but also smaller animals like foxes and even squirrels. Catherine carries a small cutting of spruce in her hand.

Doors open and finally she stands alone in a receiving area furnished by a few chairs, one broken.

There is a sudden rumble of noise and talking coming from behind the doors in front of her.

The doors break open and Peter the Great enters. He's handsome, tall, with dark foppish hair and dressed in black with a natty red scarf. Catherine curtsseys.

CATHERINE

Emperor.

Peter comes to Catherine and walks around her, examining her carefully. Finally he stops in front of her.

PETER

You looked taller in your portrait.

CATHERINE

Oh... I... um...

PETER

(To the entourage)

Send her back. Get me a tall one!

He turns on his heel and heads toward the door, to the surprise of Catherine. Peter suddenly breaks down giggling, thrilled at his joke.

PETER (CONT'D)

See what I did then?

The others start with appreciative, though somewhat fake, laughter. Peter comes back to a still confused Catherine. He is filled with boyish charm and a childish brio.

PETER (CONT'D)

I'm kidding. Kidding.

Catherine breaks into a smile.

CATHERINE

Oh I see. Yes. Very amusing.
Emperor Peter I present this branch
of spruce. It is an evergreen and I
hope it will be a symbol of our
feelings for each other. That we
will be constant and caring all our
lives.

Peter takes the branch, bemused. Walks back to his entourage.

PETER

(To his entourage)
She gave me a twig? She's not a
retard is she?

ARCHBISHOP

It wasn't mentioned.

Catherine is shocked.

CATHERINE

I assure you I am of sound mind,
sir. I wanted to thank you for your
letter. Noble, poetic sentiments.
It warmed my heart. I too wish the
same as you, that our love will
grow from a small ember to a blaze
that will warm our whole kingdom.

Beat

PETER

(to entourage)
I wrote a letter?

ORLO

We threw a little something
together.

PETER

How 'bout that? Well, you liked it,
so that's grand.

He comes back to Catherine. Takes her hands.

PETER (CONT'D)

Welcome.

CATHERINE
I hope I make you happy.

PETER
You're perfect.

She blushes.

PETER (CONT'D)
I need an Empress who's from
aristocracy, but not from a family
that is powerful or a player. Your
family, apparently, are fucked.

Catherine is startled. Peter, meanwhile, is suddenly wistful.

PETER (CONT'D)
I wish mother were here.

CATHERINE
She has passed?

PETER
I miss her.

CATHERINE
That's sweet.

Beat.

His nose wrinkles.

PETER
You smell funny. Is that usual?

CATHERINE
I... have been travelling.

PETER
Let's hope that's it. Wedding's at
seven. Archbishop Samsa will now
give you instructions. Whoah you're
cute. I have to go back to my
whores... horses. Horses. Going
riding.

He exits with a giggle, leaving Catherine a bit disconcerted.

INT HALLWAY

Catherine walks along the hallway, trying to keep up with the lugubrious, cunning, heavily bearded Archbishop.

CATHERINE

He seems lovely. Obviously some cultural issues may be at play, but I will soon get used to that and we will be as one.

ARCHBISHOP

Aren't you gorgeously optimistic?

CATHERINE

It has been said, and I believe there is no other way to be.

ARCHBISHOP

Indeed. And how is your relationship to the Lord our God?

CATHERINE

We've had no trouble as yet.

ARCHBISHOP

You must allow me to be a spiritual mentor to you, a guide touched by God.

CATHERINE

Of course. Thank you.

INT CATHERINE'S QUARTERS

The Archbishop leads her into a large apartment. A servant woman stands as they enter. She curtsies.

ARCHIE

This is Marial. She will be your girl.

Marial is in her early twenties, with red hair and a quick dry wit.

MARIAL

Empress.

Catherine smiles and nods. The Archbishop turns to Catherine.

ARCHIE

I now need to find out if you are intact.

CATHERINE

I'm sorry?

ARCHIE

Whether your interior wall has been breached.

He pulls his gloves off, holds up two fingers, and spits on them. Catherine stares at him.

CATHERINE

What wall are we talking about?

Marial whispers to her.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

My -

MARIAL

(apologetically)

It is the way of things. A tradition for royalty.

ARCHBISHOP

Lay down.

Marial reluctantly leads Catherine over to the bed. Catherine lies down. Stares up at the ceiling. Winces.

INT PETER'S APARTMENTS

Peter is dressing in a shirt, pulling on pants. Servants help him.

Madam Putin, thirties, cool, elegant, hard to read lies naked on the bed, draped in a sheet.

Gregor, Peter's best friend, thirty, kind looking, loyal comes in with a knock.

Peter looks up at him.

PETER

How do I look? Marvelous or bloody marvelous.

Gregor crosses to Peter, a quick flick of his eyes to Putin in bed. He takes Peter in.

GREGOR
Mostly marvelous. You have a hair
that has escaped the blade.

PETER
I do?

GREGOR
I will pluck it.

PETER
No, your wife can do it.

Madam Putin stirs on the bed. She gets up. Walks to them.

Pecks her husband on the cheek and faces Peter. Pulls the hair.

PETER (CONT'D)
Fuck. Ouch. She has her brutal
side.

PUTIN
It is part of my charm.

GREGOR
How true.

Peter checks himself in the mirror.

PETER
Mother liked me to look perfect.
And on a day like today...

GREGOR
She would be proud.

Peter turns to them.

PETER
You are my dearest friends. Embrace
me!

The three of them hug awkwardly.

INT THE BANQUET ROOM NIGHT

The wedding feast. A long dining table, with Peter and Catherine in the centre. Music plays. Catherine notices the women wear wigs but they're worn kind of like hats, sitting strangely on their heads. One of the women notices her noticing.

WOMAN

Empress, it is the latest from
Paris. You recognise it no doubt?

Catherine nods with a weak smile.

CATHERINE

I do not but I recognize it as...
special.

The woman smiles.

General Velementov, a fat, boozy looking General in his fifties sits alongside Orlo, a bookish, neurotic guy, glasses, in his thirties. The General stares at Catherine.

ORLO

General, stop staring at the
Empress. You will attract his
attention. Is that what you wish?

VELEMENTOV

She is a vision of radiance. I must
make my introduction.

ORLO

A bad idea.

Peter and Catherine eat.

PETER

This fucking duck is delicious! Do
you not find?

CATHERINE

Indeed.

Peter catches the Archbishop's eye and yells across the table.

PETER

Ever eaten duck as good as this
Archie?

ARCHBISHOP

I have not.

PETER

Ever eaten pussy?!

ARCHBISHOP

I have not.

PETER

God is a cruel master!

General Velementov, who has made his way over to them, bows.

PETER (CONT'D)

Empress this is Velementov, my
General in charge of our war on the
infidel.

Velementov kisses Catherine's hand and makes a slight moaning
sound as his lips touch her skin.

CATHERINE

I saw soldiers on the road on my
trip.

PETER

Oh, did they look happy?

CATHERINE

They seemed scattered and badly
wounded.

PETER

Shit. Maybe we lost. Velementov,
you horse's bitch!

VELEMENTOV

Sir, I have had no definitive
reports from the front, however a
rider is expected immi-

Peter, annoyed, lifts his leg and boots him hard in the
chest. Velementov topples over.

CATHERINE

Dear sir.

She goes to help him.

VELEMENTOV

I am fine. It is a jape is all.

CATHERINE

Oh. You seemed hurt.

VELEMENTOV

There is much fat to cushion me.
How radiant you are.

CATHERINE

Thank you.

Peter throws a glass at the wall, others follow. He stands and addresses the crowd.

PETER

I miss my mother today. How she
would've loved this.

Catherine is touched by his emotion.

PETER (CONT'D)

She was the last Empress of Russia.

CROWD

Huzzah!

PETER

A toast to my new wife, the new
Empress of Russia!

CROWD

Huzzah!

They all hurl glasses at the walls. Some miss and hit people.
Catherine goes to stand and speak.

PETER

You don't talk my love.

CATHERINE

Oh. Of course.

She sits back down.

PETER
 So, a wedding gift for my new wife
 seems in order!

They all applaud. Catherine excitedly. He leans over, kisses her cheek.

PETER (CONT'D)
 I hope you like it.

The doors open and a brown bear is led in. Catherine's eyes pop open with joy. She squeals and runs to the bear fearlessly.

With Orlo and Velementov.

ORLO
 They have de-clawed this one?

VELEMENTOV
 Must you be scared of everything
 Orlo?

ORLO
 It is called wisdom and
 discernment.

Velementov roars at Orlo. He startles. Everyone around him laughs. He blushes.

Catherine pats the bear happily. Runs to Peter, hugs him.

CATHERINE
 Thank you.

PETER
 Huzzah!

INT CATHERINE'S QUARTERS NIGHT

A line of Catherine's trunks. Marial, opens up trunk after trunk of books. Catherine, in a nightgown, lies on the bed.

MARIAL
 Madam, where are the rest of your
 clothes?

CATHERINE
 They're somewhere I'm sure.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)
Me, a married woman. How I dreamed
of this.

MARIAL
Congratulations.

CATHERINE
And did I tell you about the bear?

MARIAL
You did, but I am happy to hear of
it again.

CATHERINE
I once dreamed of... No, had a
vision of a bear and the bear
embraced me and my heart was
afame. From that moment I always
knew I would have a great love.

MARIAL
I see.

CATHERINE
I am sorry to... I am just...
excited.

MARIAL
Madam, if I may speak... You do
know... Um, are you ready for
tonight? You do know what to
expect?

CATHERINE
You suppose me more naive than I
am. My mother has explained
everything.

MARIAL
She has?

CATHERINE
Yes. The man caresses you softly,
pressing his lips to yours. Your
breasts and skin awaken and shiver
with palpitating joy. Between your
legs quivers and moistens with
longing. He enters you and you
become one.

(MORE)

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Your bodies meld, your souls mesh.
 As the sensation takes hold of you,
 you fall into a black sky filled
 with the shiniest of stars. You
 float for a time in ecstasy before
 waves of pleasure push and pull you
 back into your body. Your body
 ushers forth yelps and sometimes
 song, before he and you explode
 within, collapsing together spent
 and unified. Then you lay together,
 laughing softly, weeping
 occasionally with ecstatic joy and
 finally he wraps his arms around
 you, whispers poetry softly into
 your ear and you fall into a
 delicious sleep.

Marial stares at her. A beat.

MARIAL

Yep. That's pretty much it.

Voices are heard approaching.

CATHERINE

It is him.

MARIAL

Good... luck.

She exits, leaving Catherine alone. Catherine arranges herself in what she imagines is a sensual pose on the bed.

INT HALLWAY NIGHT

Peter walks with Gregor. Gregor has a duck Kazoo in his hand. Blows it.

PETER

He was saying it will bring the
 ducks to you, instead of you having
 to find them.

Peter gets to the door of Catherine's room and enters, leaving the door open for Gregor.

INT CATHERINE'S ROOM

Catherine lies on the bed.

CATHERINE

My dear Peter.

Peter resumes his conversation with Gregor, out of sight but at the door.

PETER

But then he does it, he blows this caller...

I don't believe it and then...

(to Catherine)

Empress.

She leans towards him for a kiss. He kisses her for a moment, then rolls her onto her stomach, unbuttoning his pants.

He enters her. She gives a sharp cry. He starts fucking her.

PETER (CONT'D)

And fucking ducks come from...

Oh... everywhere. But not like four or five, like fifty.

GREGOR OS

It is hilarious.

PETER

Oo. It was. Truly comical. Fucking ducks everywhere. We all just... Ah ah... started running for cover. Firing like crazy. Ducks are dropping, people are... screaming.

GREGOR OS

I would love to see it.

PETER

Ah ah... I will get him to do it again. But this time we will... Aaah!...

He stops, breathes heavily.

PETER (CONT'D)

... watch from the balcony. No danger to us.

He starts buttoning his pants up.

PETER (CONT'D)

Whew. Marvelous. Let us hope my seed has found purchase. Have a pleasant evening Empress.

He heads out toward the door.

PETER (CONT'D)

So Gregor, shall we crack that new vodka from Kiev?

He exits, leaving a stunned Catherine still lying on her stomach on the bed. A pensive, disconcerted look on her face.

INT BEDROOM DAY

Catherine lies awake as the new day breaks.

An idea. A determined look on her face.

She goes to her side table and takes a sheet of paper and a pen and writes the words.

1. Love Peter
2. Make him love me.
3. Find culture and education here.

Marial enters with a breakfast tray..

MARIAL

Are you alright Empress?

CATHERINE

Quite fabulous.

MARIAL

(surprised)

Last night was... alright? As you'd ...imagined?

CATHERINE

Well, to be honest with you it was... brief. And... somewhat abrupt.

MARIAL

Brief is often a relief.

CATHERINE

And it was not much as I had
imagined.

MARIAL

I'm sorry. I had thought of warning
you.

CATHERINE

It is possible I had an overly
romantic view of its unfolding. I
do that.

MARIAL

You would not be the first.

CATHERINE

The truth is we do not know each
other, our love is an ember, a mere
spark, and I must blow on it with
the full force of my lungs so that
it bursts into passionate flames.

Marial isn't sure how to respond to Catherine's bright eyed
fire.

MARIAL

Right.
Shall you breakfast here or in the
garden?

CATHERINE

I will breakfast with my husband.
Where is that?

INT DINING ROOM

A dark, sparsely decorated dining room with a long table.
Peter is hungover, in pants, bare torsoed.

He sits alone throwing bits of bread and cheese to his dogs.

PETER

Zeus tear my head off will you?

He hears the doors creak open.

PETER (CONT'D)

I am not to be disturbed! I will cut your throat.

CATHERINE

I would rather you kiss it dear husband.

He looks up, sees Catherine.

PETER

Oh, hello.
What do you want?

CATHERINE

You look unwell. I recognise it. My father looked this way often.
Maid!

A maid scurries in.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Bring the Emperor two raw eggs, tomato juice, salt, pepper and a jigger of vodka. Shake it and pour it into a glass.

The maid exits.

PETER

I like to be alone in the-

CATHERINE

I'm sure you did, but now we shall greet the day together, with sunny dispositions and fearless hearts.

Peter stares at her. Baffled. Catherine looks at the dog.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Hello dog.

Peter is about to throw her out but the drink arrives with the maid.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

My father liked to imbibe heavily, this was his solution to the morning troubles.

Peter looks at it.

PETER
It has vodka in it?

The maid nods. Peter shrugs, throws it back. Shudders a little.

PETER (CONT'D)
Huzzah!

He throws his glass at the wall. It shatters.

PETER (CONT'D)
I like it. Yes. That's better. You are a witch.

CATHERINE
You must break a lot of glasses.

PETER
... I suppose we do.

He looks at her.

PETER (CONT'D)
Come.

Catherine smiles. Happy.

INT HALLWAY

Peter walks along the hallway. Catherine follows a step behind, trying to keep up.

CATHERINE
Shall we perhaps picnic today?

PETER
This is mother.

He stops in front of a mummified body in a glass case.

PETER (CONT'D)
I would not bury her. I could not bear the thought of never seeing her.

CATHERINE
She is stuffed?

PETER

Oh mother...

He starts sobbing. Then beats at the glass. Catherine tries to embrace him. He shakes her off. Straightens himself up. Walks to the window.

PETER (CONT'D)

Apologies. Ridiculous. I might have the flu.
Mother, this is Catherine.

Catherine curtsies.

CATHERINE

It is my honour.

Catherine is moved. Looks at Peter, still faced away.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

You loved her so.

PETER

She was a Goddess. Extraordinary, powerful. No one like her. Strangely I felt paralysed when she was around. Someone should work out what goes on between a chap and his mother. There'd be money in that. Alright. That's done.

He steps into the hall. Catherine follows.

CATHERINE

Where shall we go now?

PETER

I have mens things.

Peter sees Madame Putin walking toward them.

PETER (CONT'D)

Madame Putin.

PUTIN

Emperor.

PETER

Take the Empress to the other ladies and speak of hats.

PUTIN

Of course.

CATHERINE

Oh. I will see you later?

PETER

Indeed.

It may indeed be pleasant to have a wife.

She smiles. He grabs her tits suddenly, quickly.

PETER (CONT'D)

Yes, it is pleasant!

Laughs. Heads off. Sees Velementov walking further down the hall.

PETER (CONT'D)

Velementov! Come here you fat fuck!

Velementov runs. Peter starts chasing him. Catherine is disconcerted. Putin takes her arm and leads her off the other way.

PUTIN

Let us walk.

INT HALLWAY

Catherine walks with Madame Putin.

CATHERINE

He is a mercurial fellow. Deep of heart I feel. And a curious jester.

Putin looks at her.

PUTIN

How sweet you are. I could put you in my mouth and you would dissolve.

CATHERINE

Then do not, for I am too happy.

PUTIN

I will be your dearest friend and confidante. You will need one.

(MORE)

PUTIN (CONT'D)

Most of the women have tongues in
the shape of a cat o nine tails.

Putin pushes open a door and it opens into.

INT SALON

A room of well groomed, heavily made up ladies. They all
applaud and curtsy. Surround Catherine with embraces and
welcoming smiles. Catherine is overwhelmed, happy.

They lead her to a chair.

Hat boxes abound.

PUTIN

Hats have just arrived from Paris.
You must know all the latest
gossip.

CATHERINE

On... hats? No, I have never been
much interested in hats. However
have any of you read the latest
Montesquieu? I have a copy if you
would like.

A silence.

PUTIN

A delightful jest. Bravo.

They all applaud. Catherine doesn't get it, so continues.

CATHERINE

We could all read it and then
discuss it together over tea and
cake. I would often do this with my
friends and sisters.

The women all look at Catherine. They see she's serious.

PUTIN

We cannot read.

CATHERINE

None of you?

PUTIN

It is... not done.

WOMAN 2
And seems dull.

WOMAN 1
And time consuming.

Putin changes tack.

PUTIN
Anyways, more interestingly,
Captain Dostovey is seeing Lenka.

CATHERINE
(unsure)
Oh. That is nice.

WOMAN 2
It is unless you're his wife!

The women all burst out laughing.

PUTIN
There is champagne being set
outside. Shall we roll balls on the
lawn?

EXT LAWN

Catherine stands watching as the women all roll colored balls
down a small incline. Servants collect them at the bottom.

CATHERINE
What happens now?

PUTIN
Well, they bring them back up and
we do it all again.

Catherine finds this ridiculous. Marial who holds a tray of
drinks near her, catches her look.

MARIAL
Empress, you seem tired. Might I
escort you to your apartments?

CATHERINE
Indeed I am a-

A lady interrupts.

LADY SVENSKY

Marial, you speak out of turn. You must wait for the Empress or one of the Ladies of court to address you. You cannot just speak.

MARIAL

You may rip my tongue from my foolish body dear Lady Svensky, or try to, and we will see what develops from there.

A beat. Some titter. Svensky blushes. Putin allows herself a small smile.

PUTIN

Remember your place Marial.

MARIAL

My apologies ladies. I sometimes forget who I am.

LADY SVENSKY

Of course we are within our rights to whip you to remind you if needs be.

MARIAL

Bit-

PUTIN

Marial has apologized and we are all reminded of where we stand. In time she will adjust. Empress, would you like Marial to escort you to your apartments?

CATHERINE

Indeed. Perhaps I shall see you later.

PUTIN

That is the beautiful thing my dear. You will see us every day now.

Catherine takes this in. Nods.

INT HALLWAY

DAY

Catherine and Marial walk the gloomy hallway.

CATHERINE

Do you wish to explain the exchange
on the lawn?

MARIAL

Not particularly.

CATHERINE

Do it anyway.

MARIAL

I was once one of them, a lady of
the court. My family had some
business dealings with the Emperor
and my father foolishly stuck to
his point of view. And so, he made
us servants.

CATHERINE

To humiliate you.

MARIAL

Father cleans the stables, my
sister is in the kitchens. It is
oddly clever of him. He could not
kill us as father is popular, but
to humiliate us is a standing
warning to all the court.

CATHERINE

That is sad. You best be careful
then.

MARIAL

It unfortunately is not part of my
nature.

CATHERINE

If you are a servant your nature is
not relevant and your insolence
will get you beaten.

Marial looks at her.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

That is the truth of it and it scares me that you would be beaten so I say it plain so you will see it.

MARIAL

It is well put. I shall try.

CATHERINE

You I like, very much.

MARIAL

And I you.

CATHERINE

They do not read. Do you?

MARIAL

A few words.

CATHERINE

Well no wonder they are cruel and vapid like four year olds in ridiculous hats. We must feel for them.

MARIAL

It is impossible.

CATHERINE

We must try.

They walk on.

INT CATHERINE'S APARTMENT NIGHT

Catherine is in a sheer night gown. Her hair is being brushed by Marial.

MARIAL

You are stunning.

CATHERINE

I aim to be that.

INT HALLWAY

Marial leads Catherine by candlelight, down the hallway. They get to Peter's doors. The guards look confused.

MARIAL
The Empress would like entry you
oafs.

CATHERINE
If you please.

INT PETER'S BEDROOM

Peter lies in bed under the sheets. His face in shadow of candlelight. Catherine creeps into the room, a mischievous smile on her face.

CATHERINE
Husband.

Peter's eyes flip open.

PETER
Wife?!

Catherine drops her gown.

PETER (CONT'D)
Huzzah!

She moves toward him.

PETER (CONT'D)
Move over.

The covers beside him suddenly shift. Madame Putin pops her head up from where she has been blowing him. Catherine reels.

PETER (CONT'D)
Come Empress.

CATHERINE
I-

PETER
Join us. It will be romping good
fun.

Catherine stops. Stunned. Hurt.

CATHERINE

I-

PETER

Oh for fuck's sake! Do not be boring and have a peasant's morality. And do not look at me as mother would. Disdainful and hurt. I will not fucking stand for it. (He suddenly changes tack, is pleasant)
I want you in this bed. Please. Please. Make your husband happy. Is that not what you came here to do?

Catherine nods. Raises a smile. Walks towards the bed.

INT PETER'S APARTMENTS DAY

Dawn. Catherine awakens in the bed. Putin and Peter asleep.

She wraps herself in as sheet, steps quietly from the bed. Sees Gregor sitting in a chair beside the door, head in hands staring at the floor. He looks up.

They stare at each other an awkward beat.

GREGOR

I am sorry. I am... I... Gregor, we met at the wedding.

CATHERINE

She is your wife.

GREGOR

Yes. And he is my Emperor and I love him so... that is... that and this is this.

CATHERINE

I see. Is it not hard though... to share?

GREGOR

Marriage is a struggle on a number of levels.

CATHERINE

I am beginning to see that.

They smile wryly at each other.

GREGOR

I try to love... just that.

She nods.

EXT FOREST

DAY

Peter and Catherine walk together along a forest path.

PETER

If you spy a rabbit, point but do not yell.

CATHERINE

It must be an enormous responsibility and honor to lead a country of such import.

PETER

It's actually not that hard.

CATHERINE

Really? The decisions must weigh heavy.

PETER

No. Not really.
I was born to rule. Rabbit.

A rabbit in the brush. Peter pulls a pistol and shoots at it. The rabbit hops away.

PETER (CONT'D)

Damn!

CATHERINE

I would like to be useful to Russia. To help it's greatness.

PETER

You will bear my heirs. There is no higher use. You are blessed.

CATHERINE

I am indeed.

PETER

Are you with child yet?

CATHERINE

I am not.

PETER

I must empty myself into you again soon. Rabbit.

She flinches as he shoots.

PETER (CONT'D)

DAMN!

CATHERINE

I thought perhaps I could help in education. There is an explosion of ideas in France.

PETER

And an explosion of syphilis in Kiev!

CATHERINE

What?

PETER

It is a joke. You are slow of mind and wit. Gents! I said there is an explosion of syphilis in Kiev!

He turns back. We realize they are being followed at ten yards by Velementov, Gregor and others. They roar with laughter. He resumes with Catherine.

PETER (CONT'D)

Did you roll colored balls with the ladies?

CATHERINE

Briefly.

PETER

It is a lark. What fun.

CATHERINE

Yes. My question is, can I fund a small school?

PETER

Will it stop you talking about dull things? And I jest of course. Sort of.

CATHERINE

It will.

PETER

If it makes you happy. You may do it. Talk to Bettina for funds.

CATHERINE

Thank you. Thank you.

She hugs him. He turns back to his men.

PETER

Let us drink.

They all get flasks out. Catherine watches as Peter skols a drink.

PETER (CONT'D)

Now let us fight.

He walks up to Velementov and punches in his face. Laughs.

PETER (CONT'D)

Fight back fatso. Hit me.

Velementov takes a purposefully lame swing and misses. Peter kicks him in the balls. He goes down.

Angry for a second, Velementov runs at Peter, who athletically pivots. He misses him.

PETER (CONT'D)

Finally some fight in the military.
About fucking time.

Peter goes toward Velementov who swings and hits Peter in the mouth. Peter punches him hard and fast a few times in the face. Velementov drops to his knees.

Blood flecks spray from his mouth onto Catherine's dress. The others laugh.

PETER (CONT'D)

Rich! RICH!

Peter grabs Velementov's hand to pull him up and then sees.

PETER (CONT'D)

Rabbits!

They turn and see three rabbits looking at them. The rabbits run. Peter runs into the brush after them, his posse following behind.

Gunshots are heard.

EXT PALACE GROUNDS

In the palace grounds, a small cottage stands amidst a cluster of outbuildings.

INT COTTAGE

Marial and Catherine look at it.

CATHERINE

We will paint it. Brighten it up.
Some chairs will be brought over
from the palace.

MARIAL

May I... learn?

CATHERINE

You must.

EXT PALACE GROUNDS

Catherine and Marial walk across a courtyard.

CATHERINE

Where is the library?

MARIAL

The what?

CATHERINE

Books. We must have books. Simple
to start. And perhaps we can have
talks on ideas.

They turn the corner and see a group of people crowding around a tree, staring upwards. They walk over and look.

An executioner stands on a branch, holding a man with a noose around his neck. Before Catherine can speak, the executioner pushes the man off the branch.

Catherine stands there breathing hard, trying to suck air into her body.

MARIAL

Actually, I think I know where the books are.

INT LIBRARY

Catherine pushes open the door. It coughs up some dust as it swings back. There are broken chairs. Crates of wine bottles on the floor. She turns to Marial.

CATHERINE

Thankyou. I'll be fine.

Catherine moves over to a cobwebbed row of books. Rests her head against the shelf. Takes a moment. She runs her fingers along the spines the books, covered in dust. She looks down the end of the row and sees Orlo. He is reading and is caught up in it, unaware of her. A tear trickles down his face as he reads, a smile creases his lips. He looks up as he wipes the tear away. Sees Catherine. Is startled.

ORLO

Empress.

He gets up fast, kicking the tea cup beside him across the room. He scrambles after it.

It stops at her feet. He is on his knees in front of her.

CATHERINE

What were you reading?

ORLO

A book by a fellow, a brilliant fellow called Rene Descartes.

CATHERINE

And you were moved?

ORLO

I'm sorry. It is embarrassing and unmanly.

(MORE)

ORLO (CONT'D)
(to himself)
I'm such a dickhead. Fuck.

CATHERINE
His ideas light the mind. I told
him so.

ORLO
(surprised)
You know him?

CATHERINE
I only met him the once. He seemed
sweet and smelt of cheese but what
a mind.

ORLO
I am Count Orlo.

CATHERINE
Orlo. A pleasure. I am seeking some
books to put in my school.

ORLO
Your school?

CATHERINE
The Emperor has ordained I should
have a school. I will teach women
to read and hopefully talk much on
Descartes. You are welcome to help
me.

ORLO
I would be... stunned and elated.

INT BOARDROOM

Peter is rolling a marble along the table, Gregor rolls it
back. Velementov, Orlo and the Archbishop stand waiting.

PETER
So talk Velementov.

VELEMENTOV
The battle did not go as hoped.

PETER

Fuck. Again!
Why are we losing!? Anyone!?

VELEMENTOV

I believe I called for a halt and a regroup before we set forth into that valley. My opinion was-

PETER

Blame. Blame. I would've won if what...? The rest of us had not had an opinion?

ARCHBISHOP

It seems a good summation of Velementov's rather churlish attitude Emperor.

ORLO

And yet possibly true. His plans are often twisted by the group's opinions when in fact he is a brilliant strategist.

VELEMENTOV

Thank you sir.

ARCHBISHOP

I believe Orlo will now talk of suing for peace, as he revels in our losses.

PETER

Is that true Orlo? You revel in our losses?

ORLO

No, sir I...

PETER

I will stuff this marble deep in your ass if it is. Fuck! What do we do?

ORLO

The Archbishop started this war when God sent him a vision.

(MORE)

ORLO (CONT'D)

Perhaps he could revisit this vision and provide more details on how to win it.

ARCHBISHOP

God has called us to it. We must win it.

ORLO

God is all care and no responsibility at times.

ARCHBISHOP

I do not doubt the Russian fighting man and it is treasonous to do so.

VELEMENTOV

We lost some eighteen hundred men.

PETER

God Damn it! How's that look? Bad is how, in case any one was wondering. My father won battles, expanded the kingdom. I also do not like all the limbless soldiers in the halls. It casts a pall over the fun of a ball when so many can't dance.

VELEMENTOV

Let me come back with a new strategy.

PETER

Do that.

VELEMENTOV

I can win this for us.

PETER

So do.

ORLO

On another matter may I commend the Emperor on his decision to allow the Empress a school.

PETER

I make women happy Orlo. Sometimes they yelp like newborn puppies.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

It is a lovely thing. You should try it if your cock ever finds its way out of your hand into a woman.

ORLO

Indeed...

PETER

Blushing. God you're a faggot.

ARCHBISHOP

I would like to approve the texts she wishes to teach. She may bring some new ideas from the west. The French are affecting Europe's thinking in a distressing way.

ORLO

In an astounding way that blows light into our age. The fact that women will be part of this is I believe a stunning achievement for our nation. And will be celebrated across Europe.

They all stop.

ARCHBISHOP

Women?

PETER

What?

EXT SCHOOL HOUSE

The cottage is being painted and finished. Workmen bring books in barrows. Catherine stands happily watching her school take shape. A crowd of men arrive. They light Molotov cocktails and hurl them through the windows. Start punching the men and burning the books.

CATHERINE

No... No...

Guards pick her up and carry her away.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Let me go!!!

INT DINING ROOM

Peter is gathered with his cronies. A cock fight is taking place on the floor of the dining room. Bets are being placed. Men stand grooming their birds, drinking. Catherine enters.

CATHERINE

They have burnt my school down! You must... seek justice, wreak... havoc upon them.

PETER

You did not say this school was for girls.

CATHERINE

I... did I not? Yes. Women here cannot read.

PETER

And they shall not! Women are for seeding not reading. Ha. Pithy. Gents! I said, women are for seeding not reading.

The men laugh.

CATHERINE

You? You burnt my school down!?

PETER

I did. You may go! I forgive you of course as I am of gentle heart, and massive cock. Gentleman! I said I am of gentle heart and massive cock!

ALL

HUZZAH!

CATHERINE

I-

PETER

Do not lie to me again!

He throws a glass at her. She ducks and it smashes above her head.

PETER (CONT'D)
 You are admirably quick. Huzzah!

She exits.

INT HALLWAY

Marial walks down an empty hallway. At the other end Lady Svensky appears.

Two guards appear with her. Marial slows somewhat.

MARIAL
 Gabriel I have apologized. We were
 friends once.

SVENSKY
 Guards.

The guards move toward her. Marial eyes her.

MARIAL
 You are doing this then?

SVENSKY
 It will help you adjust to your
 place. Think of it as an act of
 friendship.

Marial nods. The guards come toward her, one of them has a piece of rod. Marial seems to acquiesce then suddenly sprints through the gap between them, and is on Svensky, slamming her into the wall. Marial bites her ear.

MARIAL
 Let us make it worth it then.

The guards pull Marial off. One of them rips open her dress at the back. A cane lands heavily. A dazed Svensky, bleeding from her ear, watches on as the guards lay into Marial.

INT CATHERINE'S BEDROOM DAY

Marial comes in, stiff and sore. Catherine stares at the ceiling.

MARIAL (CONT'D)
 Morning Empress. Will you breakfast
 in here or with him?

CATHERINE
I... Are you alright?

MARIAL
I slept badly.

She nods.

MARIAL (CONT'D)
Breakfast?

INT. BREAKFAST

Catherine eats silently, reading. Peter sits, throwing bread to his dog. He watches Catherine for a moment.

PETER
Did you see Gregor carrying two
baby ducks everywhere yesterday?
Hilarious. Nipping at vodka in his
pocket they were.

Nothing.

PETER (CONT'D)
We do not have to breakfast
together.

CATHERINE
I wish it to bring us closer.

PETER
And how is it working?

CATHERINE
May I share this passage from
Diderot? Orlo found it for me.

PETER
Orlo is a faggot. A smart one, and
handy for the thinking part of
running the country, and I do not
care who fucks who as long as one
fucks. Though I suspect he does not
even do that. What sort of life is
that?

Beat.

PETER (CONT'D)
Just musing.

CATHERINE
So I shall read. 'Man will never be
free until the last king has been
strangled with the entrails of the
last priest'.

Beat. She meets his gaze. He smiles.

PETER
Love it.
Bye.
Zeus.

The dog is up. They head for the door.

He stops suddenly.

PETER (CONT'D)
Are you pregnant?

CATHERINE
No.

PETER
Annoying.

He exits. Catherine sits. Puts the book down on the table.

CATHERINE
(quietly)
I hate you.

INT HALLWAY

Catherine walks out into the hallway.

Men are bare chested, wrestling, throwing tomatoes at each
other, drunk.

Catherine sighs.

She exits through a door onto.

EXT A COURTYARD

The quiet of the green lawn.

Sunshine. The beauty of nature takes hold. She calms.

Lies on the grass. Sun on her face. Closes her eyes.

A beat.

A shadow falls over her.

Catherine opens her eyes. The fat figure of General Velementov is standing, staring at her.

VELEMENTOV

Empress.

CATHERINE

General.

VELEMENTOV

I was... I saw you in the sun and I worried for your alabaster skin. I felt if I positioned myself at ninety degrees my torso would provide shade cover. I trust my interruption is forgivable.

CATHERINE

I... am happy in the sun. I imagine myself floating in the sky far from here, but I appreciate your thoughtfulness. How goes the war?

VELEMENTOV

Ups and downs. Some conjecture on the best road forward. I fear paralysis but we trust in the Emperor's wisdom.

CATHERINE

Is that wise?

VELEMENTOV

I...

CATHERINE

My father was in the military and said that to some war is merely a chess game and to others a horror of responsibility for the blood of men. Where do you fall on this?

VELEMENTOV

You win the chess game, you win
people's lives. That is how I see
it. Good day. You... look lovely...
again.

He wanders away, dabbing at his sweating forehead.

Marial comes out.

MARIAL

Empress. The party.

Catherine nods.

EXT THE GARDEN

The rolling lawns of the palace grounds. Trays with shooters
of Borscht, vodka and legs of roast duck line the linen
covered tables. Peter and the court eat and drink.

About thirty yards away across the lawn, Catherine's bear, on
a long chain, wanders around.

A group of women surround Catherine, all wearing their wigs
in a hat-like fashion.

SVENSKY

I would like to have a mink that is
colored puce.

They all nod in agreement. Catherine is bored to tears.

PUTIN

Marvellous idea.

Catherine can't bear it. Suddenly lashes out.

CATHERINE

Your wig Madame Svensky! It's not
supposed to be like that.
They are meant to be fitted to your
heads. They are not hats!

There's a silence. The women are mortified.

A sudden burst of action from near them.

ARISTOCRAT

Fool!

A drunk aristocrat pushes a male servant to the ground and boots him in the face repeatedly.

Catherine is stunned. It is over as fast as it happened.

The crowd turn back to their drinks and resume chattering like nothing happened. The servant, bloody faced, lies on the ground. Orlo goes and helps him up. Other servants come and help him away.

Orlo sees the look on Catherine's face.

ORLO
Shall we walk, Empress?

Catherine stares at him. Her eyes on his. She nods. They walk down towards the bear.

Over with the men, Peter has a rifle. He is surrounded by a group of guys. One in particular is pointing to something on the gun.

PETER
So, explain it to me.

GUY
It is called a sight. Your eye falls between the two marks, and your target lines up with it.

PETER
I have perfect aim though.

GUY
But for our soldiers, or less perfect hunters than your royal self. And accurate up to fifty yards.

PETER
No! I don't believe you.

Down by the bear. Catherine feeds her bear an apple with Orlo.

ORLO
I just read Voltaire's pamphlet on the universal freedom of men.

CATHERINE

Oh my God! You must let me read it
and we shall discuss.

A gunshot rings out. The bear drops dead beside them.

From the assembled group above them on the lawn there is much
hilarity and applause.

Orlo and Catherine stare at the bear in horror.

ORLO

Oh God.

Catherine strides up the hill toward the laughing crowd.

Peter sees her coming.

PETER

Oh dear, someone's cross.

The crowd titters. Catherine heads through the crowd toward
him, eyes blazing.

PETER (CONT'D)

Good shot, huh?

Catherine doesn't stop. She just slaps him hard as she can
across the face, pushes past him and away. Leaving everyone
stunned.

She walks on.

Peter is ashamed and embarrassed.

Two things he doesn't like to be.

INT HALLWAY

Catherine walks along the hallway, her face set and blank.
She enters

INT LIBRARY

The library. Among the empty racks Catherine finds a nook,
begins crying. Sits. Her back against the wall.

The door opens and she sees Peter's boots through the space in the racks. Peter walks over, sits in a chair on the opposite wall. Slumps down.

They stare at each other a beat.

PETER

We've got problems, haven't we?

Catherine does not respond.

PETER (CONT'D)

You are the only person who has not loved me. It is inconceivable to me and says nothing good about you.

CATHERINE

If you had treated me with an ounce of kindness I was ready with a heart full of love.

PETER

Um... You look really pretty.

CATHERINE

My heart is breaking. I miss home. I am lonely for family, friends, fun ideas, strawberries.

PETER

And I need my cock sucked.

CATHERINE

What?

PETER

Well, we're sharing, right? Our needs.

CATHERINE

Let me go home, please.

PETER

Not going to happen. Strawberries I'll work on. Friends, the women at court.

CATHERINE

Gossiping morons obsessed with the next affair or dalliance.

PETER

You're so judgemental. You might want to look at that. You know your problem? You have no idea how lucky you are. There are soldiers dying.

CATHERINE

Because of you.

PETER

Serfs beaten daily.

CATHERINE

You could stop that!

She gets up and goes to him.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

If you would just read these books with me. These ideas that are sweeping Europe! Justice, humanity, every man a valued soul. We could rule Russia in a different manner-

PETER

I rule! You serve!
Is it that difficult to understand?! What happened to that happy little girl who gave me a twig?

CATHERINE

She died.

PETER

Seems overly dramatic.
I am mostly kind to you. Do I beat you?

CATHERINE

I suffer the blows of your disdain daily.

PETER

But it's not the same as actual blows is it?

CATHERINE

I -

PETER

Don't know?

He stands and hits her hard in the stomach.

PETER (CONT'D)

Compare and get back to me.

Catherine drops to the floor and sucks in breath.

Peter goes and stands by the fireplace. He stares up at the portrait of his parents standing with eighteen dogs.

PETER (CONT'D)

Mother and father never acted like this. My mother was a saint. I'm glad she's not alive to see this. Not that I'm glad she's dead. I'm not. Never. Sometimes... Once.

Catherine, recovered, is still on the ground. She stares at him with sheer hate.

PETER (CONT'D)

Don't look at me like that. You're a disappointment to me too. Still, there must be pleasure between a man and wife.

He starts to unbutton his pants.

CATHERINE

No.

PETER

I don't need a wife with a poisonous mouth and a dry cunny. I will shut you up at my pleasure and you will be happy. You will die here in content old age having given me hours of pleasure and service and many heirs. Boys preferable.

Beat. Catherine makes no moves.

PETER (CONT'D)

You will come here or I will come there.

I do have a temper and some rage.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)

You cannot cross me, especially not in front of others, or you will pay. Endlessly. And you will never win. You will just be in pain.

He strides toward her. She closes her eyes.

INT CATHERINE'S ORCHARD

Two long black boots dangle below a branch, belonging to Catherine who sits in a tree staring out at the sky beyond the walled garden.

Marial stands below her.

MARIAL

Are you alright Empress?

CATHERINE

I would be better if I had wings.

MARIAL

Might I suggest Vodka instead.

Catherine drops to the ground.

CATHERINE

I am a fool Marial. A great love. I looked at myself in the mirror and laughed in my own stupid face this morning.

She takes a shot and drinks.

CATHERINE (CONT'D)

Do you want one?

MARIAL

I have resolved to know my place.

CATHERINE

I have resolved not to. I need you to help me leave this place.

MARIAL

I would be signing my own death warrant. I'm sorry.

CATHERINE

A carriage is all I need.

MARIAL

I cannot. I'm sorry.

Marial takes her tray and leaves.

EXT HALLWAY

Marial walks. The Archbishop is suddenly walking beside her.

ARCHBISHOP

Sorry to startle you.

MARIAL

You didn't. You reek of innocence,
I smelt you five minutes ago.

He smiles.

ARCHBISHOP

How is she?

MARIAL

Unhappy.

ARCHBISHOP

Hmmm.

MARIAL

She wants to leave.

He nods.

He eyes the edge of a scar that is visible on her back.

ARCHBISHOP

And how are you?

He lifts her ponytail up to reveal more.

MARIAL

Learning my place.

ARCHBISHOP

I doubt that will ever happen.

INT CATHERINE'S APARTMENT

A trunk. 'Austria' written on it. Marial stands and nods to two men, who pick it up and carry it out.

INT TRUNK

Curled inside, Catherine, with bread, cheese and water. She tries to remain steady as they carry it.

EXT CARRIAGE

The trunk is loaded onto the carriage.

It drives out of the courtyard and down a path.

INT TRUNK

Catherine smiles.

Then feels the carriage stop. A clanking sound.

Then a splashing noise.

EXT THE LAKE

Peter and some of his men stand looking at the trunk as it bobs in the middle of the lake.

INT THE TRUNK

Catherine, alarmed as water starts pouring into the trunk. She starts to panic, trying to kick the trunk open.

EXT THE LAKE

Peter watches as the trunk disappears below the surface of the water.

He nods to two men who start to pull on a chain lying on the grass. It is attached to the trunk, which is pulled up and out of the water and up and onto the grass.

INT THE TRUNK

A drenched, spluttering Catherine blinks into the light as the lid lifts. Sees Peter and his men.

PETER
Escort the Empress back.

INT PETER'S APARTMENTS

Peter and Gregor play handball against a wall inside. The Archbishop enters.

PETER
What the fuck's going on Archie?
You said she was the one! You said
you'd seen it. You said she would
make me happy!

ARCHBISHOP
I-

PETER
Do I look happy?!

ARCHBISHOP
I-

PETER
Gregor! My face.

GREGOR
Discontented at the minimum.

PETER
At the fucking minimum! Remind me
of this vision?

GREGOR
He saw her name drawn in the sand
on a beach where Jesus was walking.

ARCHBISHOP
All marriages take time to-

PETER
My parents didn't! And mine should
not! You need to fix her! I will
not be...

GREGOR
Ugly with discontent.

PETER
Exactly!

INT CHAPEL

Archbishop Samsa sits in a front pew, staring at the bling on the altar. Catherine walks slowly up the aisle, taking it in.

She sits at the end of the pew.

ARCHBISHOP

Ah my dear child. Is it not beautiful?

CATHERINE

Yes.

ARCHBISHOP

I'll tell you a secret. If you look closely that icon is rusting, that one is bent at the side. Nothing of course is perfect. This is the human lot, we do nothing but strive for perfection and fall short.

CATHERINE

You refer metaphorically to the marriage.

He looks at her.

ARCHBISHOP

I liked you the moment I-

CATHERINE

Put your fingers inside me?

ARCHBISHOP

As distressing for me as it was you.

CATHERINE

I doubt that.

ARCHBISHOP

There is a way of things here, and a way of things with Peter.

CATHERINE

I have tried.

ARCHBISHOP

We think our hearts are spent, but
God refills them if we can but find
the...

CATHERINE

Ladle?

ARCHBISHOP

Indeed.

CATHERINE

You would like me to try.

ARCHBISHOP

I would like you to accept the
limitations.

CATHERINE

Why?

ARCHBISHOP

An unhappy Emperor makes rash
decisions that affect millions.
This is bigger than you and your
happiness. Your father has already
run through his initial payment
from us and been back for more. We
have furnished him with this, but
that tap can be turned off.

He snaps his fingers.

ARCHBISHOP (CONT'D)

So your unhappiness is a ripple,
hurting many.

CATHERINE

I cannot be happy here.

ARCHBISHOP

I am not asking you that. I am
asking you to pretend. Lest he
drown you in the lake on a drunken
whim.

She looks at him. He takes his hand and puts it over the
candling burning at the end of the pew.

ARCHBISHOP (CONT'D)
People underestimate the joy in
suffering. Walk through the pain
and on the other side...

She stares as his flesh burns. He smiles.

 ARCHBISHOP (CONT'D)
Joy and a purity.
And I do love the smell.

He closes his eyes and inhales deeply.

INT CATHERINE'S QUARTERS

A large, silver knife lies on the dressing table. Catherine slowly unbuttons her cuffs and slides her sleeves up to reveal blue veins in her translucent wrists.

She picks up the knife and holds it against her wrist, her eyes filled with pain.

Marial and the boy, Vlad, enter and see her. The boy stops, startled. Marial puts a book on the table.

 MARIAL
From Count Orlo.

She starts arranging cushions.

 MARIAL (CONT'D)
Would you like cake with your
knife, Empress?

 CATHERINE
You know my mind, Marial. Do not
try to stop me. Just leave me be.

 MARIAL
I would not presume to speak, for
the Empress is so smart and book
readingly that I am sure her
judgement is sound.

 CATHERINE
I am resolved.

 MARIAL
Vlad will get a bucket for the
blood.

Vlad nods and exits at a clip, leaving Catherine paused.

CATHERINE

There is no other way. I am a
prisoner here.

MARIAL

Indeed.

CATHERINE

Married to an idiot.

MARIAL

It has never happened to a woman
before.

CATHERINE

Yes, but to an Emperor! A madman!

MARIAL

He is one of a kind it is true.

CATHERINE

I am doomed.

Vlad brings the bucket back in, goes to Catherine and
disconcertingly positions it under her wrist.

MARIAL

Towels too Vlad. There may be some
overflow.

He nods and runs out.

CATHERINE

What am I to do? Live at someone
else's whim?!

MARIAL

God forbid, Empress.

CATHERINE

Ever since I was a child I felt
like greatness was in store for me.
A great life, I felt. Like God
himself had spat me forth to land
on this earth and in some way
transform it. That I was here for a
reason, a purpose.

MARIAL

Why did he make you a woman then?

CATHERINE

For comedy, I guess.
That idea now feels like some
delusion, when I am trapped here.
And yet I felt it Marial, in my
being. Deep in my bones.

Vlad comes back in with towels and starts arranging them
around Catherine's feet.

Catherine stares at the towels surrounding her feet and the
bucket.

MARIAL

It is not a lineage.

CATHERINE

What?

MARIAL

Russia. It does not go to an heir
if there is not one. If the Emperor
dies, it goes to the Empress.

CATHERINE

What do you mean?

MARIAL

Just giving you a lesson in how
things work here. You are also not
the only one unhappy. There are men
here, unhappy, looking for a
leader.

CATHERINE

Is there one?

MARIAL

I hope I am looking at her.

CATHERINE

Me, I am... a foolish child.

MARIAL

What if you are not? What if your vision of the bear and a great love, your heart filled and glowing... What if that great love was Russia itself, not Peter?

CATHERINE

You just want revenge for what has befallen your family.

MARIAL

I ascribe no purity to my motivations.
I will get coins to place on your eyes.

Marial goes.

Catherine, still holding the knife, closes her eyes.

F/back

EXT FOREST

The moment Catherine stepped from the carriage in Russia. The beauty and enormity of the forest, the lake, kissing the ground. A bolt of recognition.

CUT BACK

Catherine's eyes open. Marial enters the room. Catherine looks at her. Smiles.

Catherine drops the knife in the bucket.

THE END