

OURSELVES, OUR FOES

by
Jeff Schwamberger

HCR 2 Box 122A
9150 Alpine Road
La Honda, CA 94020
650.747.9682
jeff@jeffrois.com

Copyright © 1993 Jeffrey Alan Schwamberger
All rights reserved

You may print one copy of this script for the sole purpose of evaluating it for production. The printed copy must include the title page and this copyright page.

No part of this script may be reproduced or transmitted for any other purpose in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the playwright.

Thou hast no conscience—are we not revenged?
Is there one enemy left alive amongst those?
'Tis time to die when we are ourselves our foes.
The Revenger's Tragedy, V, iii, 117-119.

TIME

Spring, 1882 through December 17, 1916.

PLACE

Mainly St. Petersburg.

SET

The stage should be as bare as possible throughout.

CHARACTERS

The play is structured so that it can be played by eight actors (six men and two women).

FELIX YUSUPOV, the only surviving son of perhaps the wealthiest family in all of Tsarist Russia. A prince; later, through his marriage to one of the tsar's nieces, Irina Alexandrovna, a member of the imperial family. 30, male.

Note: The voices Yusupov hears throughout the play are a theatrical device: they represent his thoughts, memories, and—most important—the sort of cultural impressions and expectations that get implanted in our minds, then take on a life of their own. The voices aren't meant to suggest that Yusupov is schizophrenic or mentally unbalanced.

GRIGORII EFIMOVICH RASPUTIN, a self-styled holy man and healer. Contrary to popular myth, he wasn't a monk. 53, male.

DMITRI PAVLOVICH, one of Yusupov's closest friends from boyhood. A grand duke and cousin of the tsar. 27, male.

The Ensemble

Played by a young man

STEFAN, one of Yusupov's servants

JOHANN, Simanovich's son, cured by Rasputin

Male PROSTITUTE

Also DEVOTEE of Rasputin, MAN, SPEAKER

Played by a young woman

ECSTATIC WOMAN, a devotee of Rasputin

IRINA Alexandrovna, the tsar's niece and later Yusupov's wife

MARIA, a woman Rasputin seduces

Mme. GERARD, the tsarevich's tutor

Also MAID, SPEAKER

Played by an older man

INSPECTOR investigating Rasputin's disappearance

SIMANOVICH, Rasputin's secretary

EMCEE at the Aquarium

FEDOROV, the court surgeon

MAN in employ of Zinaida

Also DEVOTEE of Rasputin, MAN, SPEAKER

Played by an older woman

ZINAIDA, Yusupov's mother

ELIZAVETA, a woman Rasputin seduces

Also DEVOTEE of Rasputin, SPEAKER

Played by a portly man

PURISHKEVICH, a member of the Duma

Also DEVOTEE of Rasputin, PAPER SELLER, SPEAKER

Act I

In darkness.

RASPUTIN'S VOICE

The spirit of Grigorii Efimovich Rasputin.

Lights come up on RASPUTIN's body as it will appear at the end of the assassination scene.

I write and leave behind me this letter at St. Petersburg. I feel that I shall leave my life before January first. I wish to make known to the Russian people, to the tsar and the tsaritsa what they must understand. When you have heard the sound of the bell which will tell you that Grigorii has been killed, you must know this: If I am killed by my brothers the Russian peasants, you, Tsar of Russia, will have nothing to fear for your children, they will reign in Russia for hundreds of years. But if it is your relations who have brought about my death, none of your family, none of your children or relatives will remain alive for more than two years. When you have heard the sound of the bell, Tsar of the Russian land, think of your safety. I shall be killed. I am no longer among the living. Pray, pray—

Gunshot offstage. Abrupt change in lighting.

Scene 2

Slide: The Yusupov Palace, Petersburg. December 17, 1916.

Lights come up on a different area. YUSUPOV enters followed by STEFAN. YUSUPOV carries gun, his hand covered with blood; STEFAN carries towel.

STEFAN

The dog, sir . . . ?

YUSUPOV doesn't respond. Takes towel from STEFAN, hands him revolver.

Why shoot the dog?

YUSUPOV

There was blood in the snow this morning. You saw it.

STEFAN

Yes.

YUSUPOV

It was the dog's. You didn't see me shoot the dog just now. It was shot last night. The blood you saw in the snow this morning was the dog's.

STEFAN

Yes, sir. The blood was the dog's.

YUSUPOV

And it was the Grand Duke Dmitri who shot it.

STEFAN

The Grand— . . . ?

YUSUPOV

Yes, last night. If anyone asks.

STEFAN

Yes, sir.

STEFAN exits. Spot up on Alexandra's SPEAKER.

SPEAKER

The tsaritsa—

Slide of the tsaritsa appears.

—writing to the tsar at the front, December 17, 1916: "We are sitting here together—can you imagine our feelings, our thoughts?—our Friend has disappeared. Yesterday he said Felix had asked him to come in the night, a motorcar would fetch him. Last night a big scandal in Felix's house. The police heard shots. I can't and won't believe he has been killed. God have mercy."

Spot out on SPEAKER. Spot up on INSPECTOR.

INSPECTOR

"At 64 Medved Street, the residence of Grigorii Efimovich Rasputin, I questioned one Ekaterina Ivanovna Potymkina, kitchen maid. She reports being awakened sometime after midnight by the door bell. Shortly thereafter she heard voices in the kitchen. She

saw Rasputin talking with Prince Felix Yusupov, whom she recognized from earlier visits.”

Crosses to YUSUPOV.

May I ask you a question, Your Highness?

YUSUPOV

Of course, Inspector.

INSPECTOR

After the grand duke shot the dog, why did you bring it in the house?

YUSUPOV

The grand duke was upset when he realized what he’d done. We brought the dog in to try to save it. We’d been drinking.

INSPECTOR

Your domestics have done a commendable job cleaning up the blood. You had them scrub the floor twice, I understand.

YUSUPOV

That’s right.

INSPECTOR

“Who would have thought the little dog to have had so much blood in him?” To paraphrase Lady Macbeth.

Exits. Slight pause. YUSUPOV looks at towel.

Distant thunder. Spot up on the SPEAKERS. Two slides: one of Joan of Arc, the other of a 15th-century Dominican.

SPEAKER FOR THE DOMINICAN

“From the transcript of the trial of Joan, commonly called the Maid, before the Holy Office of the Inquisition, 1431.

QUESTION: These voices, when did they first speak to you?”

SPEAKER FOR JOAN

“When I was fifteen years old. The first time I was very fearful. Rarely do I hear the voice without a great light.”

Lightning.

Slide: Summer 1901

Lights up on YUSUPOV, age 15. Night. YUSUPOV is out of doors. A thunderstorm approaches.

SPEAKER FOR JOAN

“When I was fifteen years old.”

Spot out. Sides disappear. Pin spot on ZINAIDA.

ZINAIDA

Felix! I know you’re out there. Come in here this instant! Do you want to be struck by lightning? Oh!

Spot out.

Slide: Spring 1882

RASPUTIN, age 18, appears elsewhere on stage.

Between claps of thunder, another sound begins, almost inaudibly at first. Both RASPUTIN and YUSUPOV, in their separate times and places, notice it. Thunder and lightning grow. Flash of lightning seems to explode. They shield their eyes. Light dances around them. RASPUTIN falls to his knees; a tremendous clap of thunder, and YUSUPOV crumples involuntarily to his. The sound changes. An indistinct voice emerges. RASPUTIN crosses himself.

RASPUTIN

I hear you, Holy Mother—but I do not understand.

YUSUPOV is terrified. The sound changes.

What is it you want me to do, Holy Mother?

Sound of wind. YUSUPOV backs away.

YUSUPOV

I don’t understand—what do you want?

RASPUTIN

Whatever it is, I will obey your command. Open my ears, Holy Mother!

YUSUPOV
Covering his ears.

I don't understand!

Tremendous clap of thunder. YUSUPOV screams.

Abrupt shift: lights out except for spot on YUSUPOV.

SPEAKER FOR JOAN

"The first time I was very fearful."

Pin spot on ZINAIDA.

ZINAIDA

Felix! You make up the most preposterous stories. Last week it was a band of Gypsies trying to carry you off.

Disembodied laughter.

YUSUPOV

They were!

ZINAIDA

This week the Virgin appears to you.

Disembodied laughter.

YUSUPOV

All right, maybe I exaggerated about the Gypsies a little, but, Mother, it was the Virgin—I swear to you. She appeared to me as if I was . . . Joan of Arc! I have some destiny, some great mission.

ZINAIDA

It was St. Michael who appeared to Joan of Arc, Felix, not the Virgin, and *her* destiny was to be burned at the stake.

YUSUPOV

Oh.

ZINAIDA

You have such a fantastic imagination. Learn how to control it, or it's going to get you into trouble some day.

Abrupt shift in lighting.

Spot up on the SPEAKER. Slide of Theophanes.

SPEAKER FOR THEOPHANES

Theophanes, the head of the Academy of Theology, writing to the tsar:

“To this day our Holy Russia abounds in saints. This prophet and miracle worker from Siberia—Rasputin—is proof.”

Spot out. Slide disappears.

Slide: St. Petersburg, 1909.

Lights reveal RASPUTIN, AARON SIMANOVICH, and his son JOHANN, who is in his late teens. Entire side of JOHANN’s body is paralyzed; his hand trembles. Also present: three devotees, a YOUNG WOMAN, a MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN, and a PORTLY MAN.

SIMANOVICH

The doctors—they say it’s hopeless. Do you think you can—

RASPUTIN

Sh, sh. I can do nothing—it is God who will cure him, if it is His will.

JOHANN

We’re not Christians—we’re Jews.

RASPUTIN

You are God’s child, Johann Aaronovich.

RASPUTIN stares into JOHANN’s eyes.

YUSUPOV appears in a tight spot, separated from the others. He watches.

Business between RASPUTIN and JOHANN as RASPUTIN works the cure. JOHANN groans, then seems to faint. RASPUTIN slaps him.

Boy!

JOHANN stirs.

Go home!

JOHANN comes to, realizes he can move. SIMANOVICH takes him in his arms. They freeze.

Spot up on first SPEAKER. Slide of Theophanes.

SPEAKER FOR THEOPHANES

“To this day our Holy Russia abounds in saints—”

YUSUPOV

Saints! Simpletons and snake-oil salesmen—that’s what Holy Russia abounds in. “And this charlatan from Siberia—Rasputin—is proof.”

Lightning, thunder. Blackout except for spot on YUSUPOV. Spot up on second SPEAKER. Slide of Joan of Arc appears.

SPEAKER FOR JOAN

“The voice was sent to me by God, and by the grace of God *I have always understood it.*”

YUSUPOV

The voice of the Virgin was sent by God and — . . . Oh, hell with it.

Lights change abruptly; action continues without break.

DMITRI sits on the floor, studying a chessboard. Rainfall, occasional thunder. YUSUPOV wears a kimono. He has been drinking heavily.

YUSUPOV begins teasing DMITRI, and after a moment, has him supine.

DMITRI

Stop it, would you? What if your parents came in?

YUSUPOV

I told you they’re gone for the day.

DMITRI

What if they come back early?

YUSUPOV

You’ll be sent home, and I’ll be sent to bed without supper. Stop worrying and kiss me.

DMITRI

If you promise to get off me.

YUSUPOV

It’s a deal.

DMITRI kisses YUSUPOV. YUSUPOV doesn’t move.

DMITRI

Well?

YUSUPOV

I lied.

DMITRI

Get off me!

YUSUPOV

Nobody's going to see us!

DMITRI

Get off!

YUSUPOV

For Christsake—

YUSUPOV complies. He moves a piece on the board.

Your move, darling. That should take another day and a half.

Thunder.

God, this endless thunder is driving me mad! It reminds me of the time my mother locked me in the closet during a storm so she could hump the gardener.

DMITRI

Laughs.

She did not.

YUSUPOV

How would you know.

DMITRI

Your mother?

YUSUPOV

Just the type you have to watch out for. The truth is my mother the saint is a she-dragon—a pious, narrow-minded, self-righteous she-dragon. Whose business end one approaches—if you know what's good for you—with eyes averted and on bended knee. She actually breathes fire, you know. That's why the servants all look slightly toasted.

Drinks.

But I do my best to restore some sort of balance to nature. You know how people say the closest thing to a genius is a madman? I wonder if the closest thing to a saint is a sybarite.

DMITRI

A what?

YUSUPOV

Sybarite, darling—"one who is inordinately fond of pleasure and luxury." Sound like anybody you know?

DMITRI

I don't get the connection.

YUSUPOV

A sybarite gives himself over to excess at one end of the spectrum, a saint at the other. Maybe it's easier for a sybarite to become a saint—or vice versa—than it is for anybody in the middle—say, *you*, for example—to go to either extreme.

DMITRI

Doesn't get it.

Oh.

YUSUPOV

What's the matter—can't see me as a nun?

Thunder.

Leave me alone!

Drinks.

Ugh. I'm getting very drunk. And it's not doing one damn bit of good.

Thunder. Shouting.

Stop shouting at me!

DMITRI

Who are you talking to?

YUSUPOV

You wouldn't believe me if I told you.

Beat.

Once upon a time—long ago, when I was just a caterpillar—I had a vision.

DMITRI

You what?

YUSUPOV

Had a vision. As opposed to *was* a vision.

Strikes a pose.

DMITRI

You mean like a religious vision?

YUSUPOV

Very good.

DMITRI

Come on, Felix. I'm not *that* dumb.

YUSUPOV

Is it so hard to believe?

DMITRI

You!?

YUSUPOV

Yes, *me*. I'd've thought *you* at the very least— . . . Oh, forget it. I shouldn't have brought it up in the first place.

DMITRI

What kind of vision?

YUSUPOV

I said forget it.

DMITRI

It was probably just a dream or something.

YUSUPOV

It wasn't just a dream or something. It was the Virgin of Kazan. She spoke to me!

DMITRI

Spoke to you?

Thunder.

YUSUPOV

My head is killing me.

DMITRI

What did she say?

YUSUPOV

And if this bloody thunder goes on much longer I may start foaming at the mouth!

DMITRI

What did she say?

YUSUPOV

I couldn't understand her. All right? I couldn't understand a single bloody word she said.

DMITRI

You couldn't— . . . ?! Doesn't sound like any vision I've ever heard of.

YUSUPOV

I'm sorry—I didn't realize I was speaking with one of the world's experts on the subject. It's clearly too preposterous that the Virgin would appear to one so unworthy as me, while it's utterly reasonable that you, without benefit of any experience whatsoever, are competent to judge what qualifies as an authentic religious experience.

DMITRI

You're not kidding, are you?

YUSUPOV

Why does everybody think I'm making this up?

DMITRI

But how come you couldn't understand?

SPEAKER FOR JOAN

An echo.

“And by the grace of God I have always understood it.”

YUSUPOV

I don’t know!

SPEAKER FOR JOAN

An echo.

“By the grace of God—”

YUSUPOV

I don’t know!

DMITRI

But—

YUSUPOV

It doesn’t matter! I’ve been chosen! I AM CHOSEN! Or I’m just a fool, an ass, a buffoon!

An apocalyptic clap of thunder. YUSUPOV is knocked to his knees. Even DMITRI starts.

YUSUPOV (cont’d)

O God, my God, in what have I offended thee?

DMITRI

Felix!?

YUSUPOV

Where shall I go to hide myself from thee?

DMITRI

Felix!

YUSUPOV

Against you only have I sinned. I have done what is evil in your sight. Cast me not out from your presence.

As he continues in this fashion, DMITRI becomes alarmed.

DMITRI
Grabbing him.

Felix, stop it.

Shakes him.

Stop it. Stop it.

YUSUPOV struggles. The violent movement begins to make him nauseated.

YUSUPOV
Simultaneously.

Let go. Let go. Would you—

He finally breaks free, and about to be sick, exits.

DMITRI
Following him.

Felix, wait! What's the matter? Oh.

After a moment, YUSUPOV reappears.

YUSUPOV
Never did like that carpet in the hallway.

DMITRI
Do you feel better now?

YUSUPOV
Yes. Then again, no. Jesus. I don't know why I let myself get so worked up. The Virgin ought to know by now what she can expect from me.

He laughs.

After the Virgin appeared to me, I set up a little shrine in my room. Many are called, it is said, but few make the right impression: I dedicated my shrine to Marie Antoinette.

DMITRI
Laughs.

You did not.

YUSUPOV
I did. I found it easier to identify with Marie.

DMITRI laughs.

Do you think that's the sort of thing the Virgin would hold against a person?

DMITRI

How would I know?

YUSUPOV

Would you do something for me? Tell me you love me.

DMITRI

Aw, Felix!

YUSUPOV

Please.

DMITRI

Felix, come on!

YUSUPOV

It doesn't have to be true. Just say it.

DMITRI

Felix.

YUSUPOV

All right—don't say it!

YUSUPOV embraces DMITRI, who stands woodenly.

Quietly, to himself—

I love you, Felix. I love you more than life itself. I couldn't live without you.

A pause, then DMITRI finally returns the embrace.

Dmitri?

DMITRI doesn't respond, but he's listening.

Promise you'll never leave me.

Rumble of thunder. Lights reveal the ECSTATIC WOMAN.

ECSTATIC WOMAN

In a trance-like whisper.

He is coming. But you know not the day nor the hour.

YUSUPOV

I don't know. Many *aren't* called.

ECSTATIC WOMAN

My soul pines for you, O Lord!

DMITRI crosses away.

YUSUPOV

What's the matter?

DMITRI

Nothing.

YUSUPOV

There is too. Tell me.

DMITRI

It's just that— . . . when you run off to become a monk, what happens to me?

Beat. Lightning, then thunder. YUSUPOV becomes aware of the ECSTATIC WOMAN. Lights on DMITRI fade.

ECSTATIC WOMAN

Exultant.

My soul pines, like the watchman for the dawn.

Spot up on the SPEAKER. Slide of Tsar Nicholas. YUSUPOV turns toward the slide.

SPEAKER FOR NICHOLAS

"He's just a good, religious, simple-minded Russian. When I'm troubled, I like to have a talk with him—and invariably feel at peace with myself afterwards."

YUSUPOV

And feel at peace with myself. At peace.

YUSUPOV exits. ECSTATIC WOMAN remains.

Lights reveal that the ECSTATIC WOMAN is in Rasputin's parlor. Three other devotees await Rasputin: a MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN, a PORTLY MAN, and a YOUNG MAN. RASPUTIN enters.

RASPUTIN drinks occasionally during the scene.

ECSTATIC WOMAN

Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet! Praise Him with lyre and harp! Praise Him, O my soul! Praise His holy Name! Etc.

RASPUTIN

Silence, woman. Simanovich!

At the same moment, SIMANOVICH appears unsummoned, with telegram.

SIMANOVICH

Yes, Father Grigorii?

RASPUTIN

Take this one away.

SIMANOVICH

Yes. A telegram has just arrived—from the tsaritsa.

RASPUTIN

Ah.

RASPUTIN takes telegram and exits. SIMANOVICH deals with ECSTATIC WOMAN. YUSUPOV makes—or attempts—a somewhat theatrical entrance.

YUSUPOV

To MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN.

No Father Grigorii?

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

He's just had a telegram—from Her Imperial Majesty! But we expect him back at any moment.

YUSUPOV

I see. And I went to such trouble to arrive late. *C'est la vie!*

SIMANOVICH prevails over ECSTATIC WOMAN and leads her off as RASPUTIN reenters and hands him telegram.

RASPUTIN

Send this.

SIMANOVICH takes telegram, exits. RASPUTIN and YUSUPOV find themselves face to face. YUSUPOV deflates like a punctured tire. Everyone freezes except for PORTLY MAN.

PORTLY MAN

Above all I noticed his eyes—his stare had an extraordinary effect.

Action resumes. Devotees hover around RASPUTIN.

RASPUTIN
To YUSUPOV.

My blessing on you, my son.

RASPUTIN kisses him three times.

What would you have me do for you?

YUSUPOV is momentarily struck dumb.

The rest of you, shoo! Go tell Simanovich what you want, he will write it down, and I will do it. Go, go. Thank you very much.

They exit. To YUSUPOV.

What is your name, little one?

YUSUPOV

Felix . . . Felix Yusupov.

Flicker of lightning, faint thunder.

RASPUTIN

Yes, many years ago—when I was probably not much older than you—I once had a vision of the Virgin of Kazan. But, you know, a vision is not something one should talk about to just anyone.

YUSUPOV

Yes, I know.

RASPUTIN

Oh? And who told you this?

YUSUPOV

Nobody. I found out for myself.

Beat. Distant thunder.

I had a vision . . . when I was fifteen. The Virgin of Kazan. I told my mother. She . . .

He is mesmerized by RASPUTIN's stare.

RASPUTIN

And?

YUSUPOV shakes his head to break the spell.

YUSUPOV

She didn't believe me. She said I was just trying to get attention. I told her if all I wanted was attention, I would have peed on the carpet.

RASPUTIN laughs.

RASPUTIN

Will you tell me about your vision?

YUSUPOV

There's not much to tell. I was hoping you could tell *me* something about it.

RASPUTIN

We will see.

YUSUPOV

It was during a thunderstorm.

Lightning, thunder.

YUSUPOV (cont'd)

I heard a sound, not thunder—something wrapped inside it . . . the beat of a thousand wings, a song like a heavenful of stars when the night is clear and the air is still. Then came a blinding flash of light, and out of it the Virgin appeared. She called out to me over and over. She wanted me to do something, but I couldn't— . . .

RASPUTIN

And it haunts you, this call you heard but could not understand.

YUSUPOV

Yes.

RASPUTIN

Yes.

Pause.

The soul speaks a language we all once knew from the time we were born. But now when we are born, our soul speaks a tongue our minds and hearts do not understand. And we cannot—not even within ourselves—ask, the mortal part of the eternal, “Why am I here? What do you want of me?” Do you want to learn this language?

YUSUPOV doesn't answer.

I cannot teach you. No man can. When the Virgin came to me, I did not understand her either. So I left my family behind, and wandered, a pilgrim with no goal but to learn the language of the soul. For three years I wandered. And then one morning as I washed my face in the clear water of a stream, I realized I had reached my goal. I had learned the language of the soul from the trees and the rivers and the snows of winter. I had learned it in the going from place to place, not in the arriving and staying. For that is all we are—pilgrims, wanderers from the womb to the grave.

Beat. Drinks.

You are a frightened little boy, Felix Yusupov, frightened by what you see inside you, frightened by the path that lays before you. You have a beautiful quality in your soul. Yes, it is there—

He takes hold of YUSUPOV's crotch. There's nothing sexual about the gesture: RASPUTIN is merely illustrating in his crude way what he means by "weakness and self-indulgence."

—but your weakness and self-indulgence are twisting it.

YUSUPOV

Pulling RASPUTIN's hand away.

What do you think—

RASPUTIN

Stop playing the spoiled child.

YUSUPOV knocks glass from RASPUTIN's hand. A beat.

YUSUPOV

It seems to me you have precious little room to accuse anyone of self-indulgence.

RASPUTIN

I see what it is given me to see.

YUSUPOV

Oh, really. And your great insight has led you to the conclusion that grubbing around in the woods like some tramp is the road to salvation? “Come, follow me, and I will give you fleas.” No, thank you.

RASPUTIN

It is a hard thing to be different from others. You are not ready for the journey.

YUSUPOV

I’m not in *need* of the journey.

RASPUTIN

Yes, go home, be comfortable. It is much easier. But one day you will come to me again.

YUSUPOV

Nothing on earth could persuade me.

Turns to go.

RASPUTIN

Beware, Felix Yusupov. Beware. Those angels who whisper now have voices of thunder and swords of fire—turn away from *them*, and they will become wild dogs to tear you apart.

YUSUPOV stops. Beat. Lights change abruptly. RASPUTIN exits.

YUSUPOV crosses stage. DMITRI enters in evening dress. YUSUPOV changes into drag (a turban-like hat instead of a wig, a caftan, elbow-length gloves, a long string of pearls).

DMITRI

Why are you undressing? I thought we were going out.

YUSUPOV

I’m changing. Have a drink.

DMITRI

No thanks.

YUSUPOV

Go ahead. I'm having one. In fact, I'm probably having two or three.

DMITRI

You're acting queer.

YUSUPOV gives him a look.

I mean strange.

YUSUPOV

Oh?

DMITRI

Well, what happened this afternoon? What was he like?

YUSUPOV

Who?

DMITRI

Rasputin.

YUSUPOV

Oh. Don't know. Didn't go. Changed my mind.

DMITRI

How come?

YUSUPOV holds up caftan.

YUSUPOV

What do you think?

DMITRI

What's that?

YUSUPOV

It's my dress.

DMITRI

Your— !? You're not going out in that?

YUSUPOV

I told you, it's a special evening. By the way, you look yummy.

DMITRI

What is it, a costume party?

YUSUPOV

For some of us. I mean, the man's a half-educated vagrant.

DMITRI

Who?

YUSUPOV

Rasputin. Why should I waste my time?

DMITRI

You thought it was a good idea yesterday.

YUSUPOV

Have you ever seen the people who hover around him? Half are a bunch of semi-demented women with dubious sexual fantasies, if you ask me. The other half—the men—God knows what their problem is.

DMITRI

Nicky thinks highly of him.

YUSUPOV

The tsar is a very sweet man, but he's not exactly Nietzsche.

DMITRI

Who?

YUSUPOV

Nietzsch—never mind.

Holding up pearls.

Look. From mummy—her very favorite string of pearls.

DMITRI

Your mother gave you her favorite string of pearls?

YUSUPOV

In a manner of speaking.

DMITRI

You stole your—

YUSUPOV

Borrowed.

DMITRI

Are you out of your mind?

YUSUPOV

It's only for one night. She'll never miss them.

DMITRI

What's gotten into you?

YUSUPOV

Not nearly enough, I can tell you that.

DMITRI

Maybe Rasputin would have done you some good.

YUSUPOV

Like what? Serve me up some of his murky mystical insights? Look into my eyes and tell me the secrets of my soul? No, thank you. I can manage very nicely on my own.

He has finished dressing.

There. What do you think?

DMITRI

Felix, I really don't think I want to—

YUSUPOV

Nope, nope, nope. It's too late for that! Our revels have begun. All we have to do now is figure out how to get out of the house.

Abrupt lighting change.

Slide: The Aquarium, a Fashionable Nightclub.

DMITRI

Why are we doing this?

YUSUPOV

For fun. Come on!

DMITRI

I feel ridiculous. I'm going home.

YUSUPOV

Come on—what's the matter—no sense of adventure?

Tight spot on RASPUTIN.

RASPUTIN

An echo.

You are frightened by the path that lays before you.

YUSUPOV

Turning toward RASPUTIN's voice.

What?

RASPUTIN

. . . Stop playing the spoiled child.

YUSUPOV laughs drunkenly.

DMITRI

What's the matter with you?

YUSUPOV

To RASPUTIN.

Stop? I haven't even started.

Fanfare.

EMCEE'S VOICE

Offstage

Ladies and gentlemen, mesdames et messieurs, the Aquarium presents direct from Paris—*La Pucelle*.

Lights change to indicate YUSUPOV is on stage. As he sings, he becomes increasingly unnerved by the echoes of Rasputin's words.

YUSUPOV

Sings.

When I was just a little miss,
My dear old granny told me this:
The world is full of charming things—
Hats, necklaces, and golden rings.
You'll meet young men with burning eyes,
Oh, but their hearts are full of lies.

Beware.

So learn to see
 what's wheat, what's chaff;
You must beware the Primrose
 Path.
Those words that granny said to me
I thought about them endlessly.
They gave me
 courage to decide
The kind of girl I'd be
 inside.
I took the Primrose Path
To sing and dance and laugh.
Could granny find it stranger?
I am
 a child of danger.

RASPUTIN

. . . what it is given me to see.

Frightened by the path . . .

. . . a frightened little boy.

. . . frightened by what you see inside . . .

You are not ready for the journey.

. . . a spoiled child.

YUSUPOV (cont'd)

Yes, yes, I love champagne.

I'm silly, vapid, vain.

But when I meet the angels

I'll teach them how—

RASPUTIN (cont'd)

Your weakness, your self-indulgence are
twisting it.

Those angels will become wild dogs . . .

. . . wild dogs to tear you apart.

YUSUPOV breaks string of pearls. Sound effect of pearls scattering.

YUSUPOV

Shit.

Lights change.

*ZINAIDA appears and confronts YUSUPOV with one of the pearls.
YUSUPOV undresses.*

ZINAIDA

Would you like to know how I came by this?

YUSUPOV

Oysters for dinner?

Cowed in spite of himself.

I retrieved as many as I could. I won't tell you what I had to do to get a couple of them
back. They should make a nice choker.

ZINAIDA

Just look at yourself.

YUSUPOV

I'm considered quite attractive by my gentlemen admirers.

ZINAIDA

Don't you have any shame? Do you have any idea what you're doing to our family
name. Doesn't that mean anything to you?

YUSUPOV

What do you want it to mean?

ZINAIDA

Do you have any idea what it's like for your father—having his fellow officers laughing at him behind his back because his only son—

YUSUPOV

His only son that's *left*! Is that what you mean by respecting your wishes—to do what Nicholas did? He followed in Father's foot steps.

ZINAIDA

He died defending the honor of his name.

YUSUPOV

He died because the lout who was sleeping with his mistress happened to be a better shot than he was.

ZINAIDA

Your father deserves your respect because he is your father.

YUSUPOV

Respect? What's that? I wouldn't know—all he's ever shown for me is contempt. Don't you think I envied Nicholas? Do you have any idea how happy it would make me if I could put on a uniform and feel my life had meaning?

ZINAIDA

You always want to have a special set of rules just for you. Because you're different.

YUSUPOV

I *am* different! I've been chosen—

ZINAIDA

Chosen? What could the Virgin possibly want with a chorus girl? Your father and I have decided that it's time for you to grow up.

YUSUPOV

What's that supposed to mean?

ZINAIDA

It means we're sending you away to school.

YUSUPOV

School? I'm twenty-three! It's absurd—

ZINAIDA

You leave on Saturday for Oxford.

YUSUPOV

England? I won't go!

ZINAIDA

Felix . . . your affair, relationship—whatever you want to call it—with Dmitri has to end. Up until this latest escapade, I was able to convince your father the two of you would grow

ZINAIDA (cont'd)

out of it. You two can't go on acting like naughty adolescents at an English boarding school. It isn't healthy.

YUSUPOV starts to protest.

The tsaritsa has forbidden Dmitri Pavlovich to see you. And unlike you, he'll obey.

She exits. Lights change.

YUSUPOV turns—and is outside Dmitri's house. DMITRI enters.

DMITRI

Felix?

YUSUPOV

Moving toward DMITRI to embrace him.

Over here.

DMITRI backs away.

What's the matter?

DMITRI

Nothing, it's . . . I need to get back inside. I, uh . . . I think it would be better if we stopped seeing each other.

YUSUPOV

What?

DMITRI

I don't want to see you anymore. I— That's all.

Starts to go.

I better . . .

YUSUPOV

No! Who— . . . ? What—what's going on?

DMITRI

Nothing. I— It's just not right, Felix.

YUSUPOV

What isn't?

DMITRI

You know.

YUSUPOV

Why not? Since when?

DMITRI

Because it isn't.

YUSUPOV

Tommyrot! Damn it, Dmitri, haven't you figured out yet that about ninety percent of what you think you think is really Ma and Pa, and the Church, and anybody in authority wagging their finger in your face every time you do something you think they won't like? You've got a mind of your own, don't you—a conscience? Use it!

DMITRI

What am I supposed to do? Defy my parents, the tsaritsa, the Church?

YUSUPOV

That wouldn't hurt, for starters. Damn it, Dmitri—

DMITRI

Stop yelling at me! All everybody does is yell at me! I just want to be left alone. I just think . . . it would be better if we stopped seeing each other. Everything would be a lot simpler.

YUSUPOV

Simpler!? Simpler!? What's that supposed to mean?

DMITRI

It means I can't take this! . . . All my mother does is cry. My father screamed at me for four solid hours last night. He said things to me— . . . He said we— . . .

Today—he acts like I'm not even there.

His voice has grown husky.

I just want it to stop. I want it to go away and forget it ever happened. I— . . . That's all I have to say.

YUSUPOV

My parents are sending me to England.

DMITRI

I know.

YUSUPOV

Can I tell you something?

DMITRI shrugs, nods.

YUSUPOV (cont'd)

I love you, Dmitri. I— . . . As far as human beings go, I'm hardly the pick of the litter—selfish, immature, self-indulgent— . . . you know the whole litany. I don't know if I could die for somebody or suffer pain—probably not—but if anyone could make me want to

try . . . I just wanted you to know that. Remember me.

Turns to go.

DMITRI

Felix—

They embrace.

I'm so confused.

Lights fade.

Spot up on SPEAKER. Slide of Ilidor.

SPEAKER

Iliodor, monk, writing to Theophanes:

“Rasputin is a man of God, a prophet, a miracle worker, who is free of passion—”

Spot out.

Slide: St. Petersburg, 1911.

RASPUTIN's parlor. Four people await him: PORTLY MAN, YOUNG MAN, MIDDLE-AGED MAN, and ELIZAVETA, a well-to-do woman. RASPUTIN enters, blesses them, locks on ELIZAVETA. MIDDLE-AGED MAN kneels to kiss hem of RASPUTIN's gown. RASPUTIN steps toward ELIZAVETA.

PORTLY MAN

Blocking his path.

Father Grigorii, you have no idea how—

RASPUTIN

Yes, yes. Come again tomorrow. It will be more convenient then.

YOUNG MAN tries to say something, but RASPUTIN steps past him. To ELIZAVETA.

God's blessings on you, my sister.

He kisses her three times on the lips.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN

Father Grigorii—

RASPUTIN

Without turning.

Yes, yes, whatever it is I will grant it. Go into the other room and tell Aaron Simanovich, and he will write it down.

No one moves. A beat.

Are you still here looking at me with those sheep's eyes? Shoo, shoo! Into the other room. Aaron Simanovich will take care of you.

They exit. To ELIZAVETA.

RASPUTIN (cont'd)

What is your name, dear sister?

ELIZAVETA

Elizaveta Sergeievna Martynova.

RASPUTIN intuits why she has come.

RASPUTIN

Your husband.

ELIZAVETA

Startled.

My husband— . . .

RASPUTIN

Trust in the Holy Mother. There is no sorrow too deep for her, no sin too great. She will lift you up. Her hands are strong but soft as milk.

ELIZAVETA

My husband— . . .

RASPUTIN

Was unfaithful to you.

ELIZAVETA

A touch of wonder.

Yes . . .

RASPUTIN

Yes. And when he died—

Her wonder changes to awe.

—you could not forgive yourself—because in spite of everything, you loved him. And you cannot forgive yourself because he died not knowing of your love.

A pause.

But why can you not forgive yourself? You have forgiven him.

ELIZAVETA

I know. Perhaps because it wasn't until after he died that I realized how much I loved him.

RASPUTIN

And why do you think that is so? It is because hate is of man, but love is of God. It is because hate dies, but love lives forever. Love alone lives—your love for him and his love for you. And what you feel—no, no, no, it should not make you sad, it should not make you lose hope. It is the voice of him calling you from eternity.

ELIZAVETA

I— . . .

Weeps.

RASPUTIN

Yes, what can we do but weep when we feel what has been taken from us by the sin of Adam. But we must not weep only. No, no, no. We must also rejoice. For the Lord Christ, he has washed away the sin of Adam.

ELIZAVETA

Father Grigorii, I can never thank you enough—I can never repay you.

RASPUTIN

Dear lady, you have nothing to thank me for.

Pours wine.

Drink this.

ELIZAVETA

I've taken up far too much of your time.

RASPUTIN

No, no, no! Please sit.

Drinks. Pause.

You know, many women tell me I am a very good lover.

ELIZAVETA rises.

ELIZAVETA

I couldn't possibly take up any more of your time, Father Grigorii.

RASPUTIN

Dear Elizaveta Sergeievna, I would not want you to run off before—

ELIZAVETA

Over.

There are so many others who need your help now more than I—

RASPUTIN

Continuing.

—I was certain all your burdens had been lifted.

ELIZAVETA

Simultaneously.

—I couldn't think of keeping you from your work another moment. Good-bye, Father Grigorii, and God bless you.

RASPUTIN

God bless you, Elizaveta Sergeievna.

She is gone. RASPUTIN makes a rude noise. Lights change.

A train station. DMITRI paces, waiting for Irina. Others wait for trains, arrive, depart. Among them is a male PROSTITUTE. Sound of a train whistle, then a train pulling into the station.

DMITRI

Oh, God.

IRINA enters.

IRINA

Dmitri!

DMITRI

Irina, you're late.

IRINA

How nice to see you, too.

DMITRI

Sorry.

Kisses her.

Felix' train just pulled in. I thought you weren't going to make it.

IRINA

I can't stay, sweetheart. I have a cab waiting.

DMITRI

You promised!

IRINA

Don't be such a baby.

Kisses him.

You can tell me all about it later.

DMITRI

Wait. I can't welcome him home all alone.

IRINA

I'm hardly a brass band. You'll do fine.

DMITRI

But you promised!

IRINA

What is the matter with you? He's your best friend. You're acting like you're meeting the Grand Inquisitor. I have to run. Give him my best.

Turns to go. YUSUPOV enters from opposite direction.

YUSUPOV

Dmitri!

DMITRI

To IRINA.

Wait.

She stops. As YUSUPOV crosses to DMITRI, he collides with male PROSTITUTE, who is crossing in opposite direction. PROSTITUTE grabs YUSUPOV to keep him from falling.

PROSTITUTE

Sorry.

YUSUPOV

No harm done.

PROSTITUTE smiles at YUSUPOV then exits. To DMITRI.

God, I've missed you.

DMITRI

Extending his hand.

Felix.

YUSUPOV embraces DMITRI, kisses him. DMITRI frees himself, takes IRINA's hand.

DMITRI

Uh, Irina, this is, uh—

IRINA

Yes, we've met. Felix Felixovich.

YUSUPOV

Irina Alexandrovna. What a delightful surprise to see you after so many years.

IRINA

Thank you. It's good to have you back home. I hope we'll be seeing a lot of you. You'll have to excuse me, but I've got to run. See you later, darling.

DMITRI

Irina!

She exits. A beat.

YUSUPOV

Well . . . what have we been up to while Felix was at Oxford?

Abrupt shift in lighting. Dmitri's flat.

DMITRI

I wrote you.

YUSUPOV

Yes, but not everything.

DMITRI

What do you mean?

YUSUPOV

Irina Alexandrovna. Name ring a bell?

DMITRI

What about her?

YUSUPOV

Are you sleeping with her?

DMITRI

No!

YUSUPOV

Have you been seeing any other women?

DMITRI

Yes.

YUSUPOV

Slept with any of them?

DMITRI

What is this?

YUSUPOV

Answer the question.

DMITRI

No.

YUSUPOV

How much longer are you going to carry on this experiment?

DMITRI

It's not an experiment. I grew out of that other stuff.

YUSUPOV takes DMITRI's hand.

YUSUPOV

So it shouldn't make any difference to you, should it? It's perfectly harmless. Let's try an experiment.

Kisses DMITRI.

DMITRI

Cut it out!

YUSUPOV

It's just an experiment. I'm not going to bite you.

Kisses DMITRI.

There, that wasn't so bad was it? Did you like it?

A beat.

DMITRI

Don't do this to me, Felix.

YUSUPOV

All I'm trying to do is to stop you from making a terrible mistake with your life. It's not something you can decide on like whether you want to be a pirate when you grow up. It's a fact of your existence.

DMITRI

Your existence, not mine.

YUSUPOV

Ah!

Begins teasing DMITRI, nibbling his neck, so on. DMITRI's only defense is to pretend to be unaffected.

And when did you realize that?

DMITRI

When? I don't know . . . exactly.

YUSUPOV

Approximately.

DMITRI
Completely passive.

Felix, please stop.

YUSUPOV

No.

DMITRI

Don't . . . don't.

YUSUPOV

I missed you. God, I missed you.

DMITRI

I don't want this.

YUSUPOV

Do, please.

DMITRI

No . . .

YUSUPOV

Everything will be different. Better. I promise.

DMITRI

Please . . .

YUSUPOV

I love you.

DMITRI

Don't.

YUSUPOV

With all my heart.

DMITRI

Felix.

YUSUPOV

With all my soul. . . I love you.

DMITRI succumbs.

Rasputin's parlor.

MARIA

Wiping her eyes.

Father Grigorii, I can never thank you enough—I can never repay you.

RASPUTIN

Dear Maria Egorovna, you have nothing to thank me for.

Pours wine.

Drink this.

MARIA

I've taken up far too much of your time.

RASPUTIN

No, no, no! Please sit.

Drinks. Pause.

You know, many women tell me I am a very good lover.

MARIA starts to rise.

MARIA

I—

RASPUTIN

Dear lady, I would not want you to run off before I was certain all your burdens had been lifted. I feel that there's something in your heart that you have not dared to tell anyone, not even your confessor. Not even your brother Grisha.

MARIA

No, Father Grigorii, I— . . . I haven't kept anything back.

RASPUTIN

Ah, then perhaps there is something your soul knows that your heart and mind do not.

MARIA

I don't think I understand.

RASPUTIN

There is sometimes a thing we keep in our hearts, a thing we set much store by, a thing we think our greatest virtue—but that is in truth our greatest sin. It is the source of deadly pride because it makes us think that we, in spite of all else, are worthy of God's grace. And sometimes our soul knows of our sin though our eyes refuse to see.

MARIA

And you think I may be guilty of such a sin?

RASPUTIN

Let me ask you this question . . . as your spiritual brother. Since your husband died, since you left him, have you had . . . relations with another man?

MARIA

No. I— No.

RASPUTIN

Ah! Do you find it difficult?

MARIA

Sometimes.

RASPUTIN

Ah! Why did the Lord Christ die on the cross?

MARIA

To redeem us from our sins.

RASPUTIN

And so you think it is your duty to remain chaste because if you do, you relieve in some small part the sufferings of the Lord Christ. Is that not pride? Can anyone take from the Son of God what He has freely given? For has he not already suffered—and can you, his lowly creature, undo what God has done? Is it virtue then to remain chaste when it makes the suffering and death of the Lord Christ a cruel joke? No, it is blasphemy.

MARIA

What would you have me do?

RASPUTIN

Come, follow me. I will give you rest.

Kisses her, starts to unbutton her dress.

MARIA

No, please!

RASPUTIN

Only the little mind of man says this cannot be right. To God it is an act of faith. For without sin there can be no repentance, and only through sin can you reach salvation. Fair and high are the mountains, but my love is higher and fairer still, because love is God.

Lights come up on YUSUPOV and DMITRI.

MARIA

No, please—I—

DMITRI

Don't do this to me, Felix, please.

RASPUTIN

Why do you resist?

YUSUPOV

It's just an experiment. I'm not going to bite you.

MARIA tries to pull her dress closed.

RASPUTIN

Do you think— . . . Do you think I am trying to degrade you?

YUSUPOV

All I'm trying to do is to stop you from making a terrible mistake with your life.

RASPUTIN

I am not. I am trying to purify you.

Spot up on SPEAKER. Slide of Purishkevich (i.e., the actor who portrays him).

SPEAKER FOR PURISHKEVICH

“He uses a variety of techniques to get what he wants.”

RASPUTIN

Will you refuse me? Will you blacken your immortal soul with yet another sin of pride?
Your immortal soul is all that matters to God—

DMITRI

I don’t want this.

RASPUTIN

—and our path, like that of the Lord Christ, must pass through the desert of humiliation.

SPEAKER FOR PURISHKEVICH

“A variety of techniques.”

MARIA

But how—how can this bring redemption?

YUSUPOV

Everything will change. Just wait and see.

RASPUTIN

What you do with me can be no sin for you. Because I take all the guilt upon myself—

YUSUPOV

I promise.

RASPUTIN

—and I transform it into an offering to the Lord Christ.

YUSUPOV

With all my soul.

RASPUTIN

I offer it as the very sacrifice of our lives to the Father—

MARIA

Please.

RASPUTIN

—and through me—

DMITRI

Don't.

RASPUTIN

—through my body—

YUSUPOV

I love you.

RASPUTIN

—He pours His everlasting grace into your soul.

Abrupt change in lighting.

ZINAIDA enters with PURISHKEVICH, who carries a sheaf of papers. PROSTITUTE stands just outside area they occupy. Spots come up on two SPEAKERS. (YUSUPOV is the focus of the scene: what's important is the impression that things people say make on him.)

ZINAIDA

Rasputin, Rasputin, Rasputin—it's like a refrain! Everywhere one goes, all one hears is Rasputin!

Slide of an ordinary person of the period.

SPEAKER 1

Almost overlapping ZINAIDA.

“Rasputin—that peasant has the stare of a wild animal—a repulsive, insolent beast.”

A slide.

SPEAKER 2

“Rasputin—a compulsive womanizer, a drunkard, a false prophet.”

A slide.

SPEAKER 1

“Rasputin—he should be shining the devil’s boots in hell.”

YUSUPOV enters, crosses toward ZINAIDA and PURISHKEVICH. Notices PROSTITUTE and stops. PROSTITUTE smiles at him, exits. A beat. YUSUPOV completes cross.

ZINAIDA

Holding out hand for papers.

Purishkevich.

PURISHKEVICH hands them to her. She hands them to YUSUPOV.

Read this!

PURISHKEVICH

Pleased with himself.

From the Secret Police. Don’t ask how I came by it.

ZINAIDA gestures to YUSUPOV to read. She stares at him as if each of Rasputin’s indiscretions is an indictment against him.

YUSUPOV

“November 8. Rasputin came home in a motor-car with the prosti— . . . the prostitute Gregubova.”

ZINAIDA

Disgraceful.

YUSUPOV

“He was blind drunk, kissed Gregubova passionately and stroked her cheeks. She did not emerge until the following morning.”

ZINAIDA

Intolerable.

YUSUPOV

“November 11. At 10:15 AM Rasputin was seen on Petrov Street and followed to No. 8 Pushkin street, home of the prostitute Rennikova.”

ZINAIDA

Unforgivable.

YUSUPOV

“November 12. Rasputin and an unknown prostitute went to a house on Razinskaya Street. At 4:30 in the morning he came back with six drunken men and a guitar.”

ZINAIDA

And such a person is received, is on intimate terms with the tsar—even gives him advice.

YUSUPOV

“They remained till six, singing and dancing.”

Spot up on RASPUTIN.

RASPUTIN

One prays to God as well in dancing as in a monastery. David danced before the Ark of the Lord.

Slide of another person from the period.

SPEAKER 2

“I find it more and more difficult to reconcile his behavior with holiness.”

ZINAIDA

Difficult?

PURISHKEVICH

Impossible! The peasant has seduced a number of the tsaritsa’s servants, and one of them is pregnant.

RASPUTIN

Half the tales are lies, of course, but as for the rest, we are all human.

A slide.

SPEAKER 1

“Hundreds of people call on him every day—”

SPEAKER 2

“Society women and senior officials, political intriguers and school girls, soldiers’ parents and officers’ wives.”

SPEAKER 1

“He behaves in the most scandalous manner toward the women.”

RASPUTIN

They bow down before me and kiss my feet. And I cannot resist kissing the younger and prettier ones.

ZINAIDA

How can they be so blind?

PURISHKEVICH

He’s an artful peasant, and he has a variety of techniques to get what he wants—techniques from exorcism to rape.

Lights change.

Slide: Poland, 1912. The Tsar’s Estate.

Lights up on MLLE. GERARD, the Swiss tutor of the tsar’s children, and FEDOROV, the tsar’s chief surgeon.

FEDOROV

Tell me exactly what happened, mademoiselle.

GERARD

The tsarevich tripped jumping into a boat down at the lake—he hit his leg against one of the oarlocks. He seemed fine, Dr. Fedorov. Then yesterday, he and the tsaritsa went for a ride. The road was rough, and suddenly he was screaming in pain.

FEDOROV

A tumor has formed in the groin—there’s nothing I can do for him.

GERARD

Nothing?

FEDOROV

For a normal patient, the answer is surgery. For a child with hemophilia—he would bleed to death in minutes. The boy will be dead by this time tomorrow—probably sooner.

GERARD

Only a miracle can save him, then.

FEDOROV

A miracle. The last thing we need is that Siberian fakir skulking around.

GERARD

The tsaritsa, after the boy dies— . . . I may be only a schoolteacher, Dr. Fedorov, but there are signs even I can see.

FEDOROV

Yes.

GERARD

She refuses to believe that God will let it happen. Even the tsar has given up trying to reason with her.

FEDOROV

Her reason is too fragile for reality now. She'll never recover. For the want of the boy, the mother was lost; for the want of the mother . . . what will become of the tsar then? What will become of all of us?

GERARD

Takes telegram from pocket.

She asked me to send this telegram.

Hands it to FEDOROV.

FEDOROV

Before looking at it.

Rasputin.

GERARD

Yes.

FEDOROV

As he reads.

At least she doesn't ask him to come here.

GERARD

No, even she realizes there's too little time for that.

Crossfade. Lights up on YUSUPOV and PROSTITUTE. PROSTITUTE, dressed only in trousers, is counting money. He has a tattoo of a rooster on his arm.

YUSUPOV

Damn it.

PROSTITUTE

This isn't enough.

YUSUPOV

You broke my lip.

PROSTITUTE

You want it rough, you pay the price.

Spot up on RASPUTIN engaged in intense prayer, on the point of collapse.

YUSUPOV

I pay the price so I get what I want. I'm not paying for a split lip. Damn it—it won't stop bleeding.

PROSTITUTE grabs him.

PROSTITUTE

You little shit—I'll break more than your lip if you don't pay up.

Reaches down and feels YUSUPOV's crotch.

You like that kind of talk, don't you?

YUSUPOV pushes him away, gives him money. Starts to exit, then stops.

YUSUPOV

What's your name?

PROSTITUTE shows him tattoo of rooster.

PROSTITUTE

Just ask for The Cock.

Smiles. RASPUTIN stands. YUSUPOV exits.

RASPUTIN

God has seen your tears, little mother.

Crossfade. FEDOROV alone. GERARD enters.

GERARD

Good morning, doctor. How's he coming along?

FEDOROV

Better. Better and Better. If it weren't for the fact that he should be dead, I'd say he was out of danger. I can't explain it, Mlle. Gerard. Since yesterday evening— . . . Medically it couldn't have happened.

GERARD

O we of little faith.

Hands FEDOROV telegram.

It arrived for the tsaritsa this morning.

FEDOROV

Reading.

"God has seen your tears. The little one will not die. Do not let the doctors bother him too much." Delivered this morning, you say?

GERARD

Yes—but apparently the telegraph office here doesn't deliver after dark—even to the tsaritsa.

Points to telegram.

Look here. Look at the time it was sent it.

FEDOROV

Six twenty-three—PM.

GERARD

Yes—yesterday evening, just about the time the tsarevich started to improve.

FEDOROV

For the want of the boy, the mother was lost; for the want of the mother Heaven help us, mademoiselle.

Indicating the telegram.

We're all in his hands now.

Lights change abruptly.

ZINAIDA enters with PURISHKEVICH and YUSUPOV. Spots up on three SPEAKERS. The focus, once again, is on YUSUPOV.

ZINAIDA

It's not the tsar, but that scoundrel who governs Russia.

Spot up on RASPUTIN.

RASPUTIN

The tsar is a sad man. He lacks guts. He cannot breathe without me.

A slide.

SPEAKER 1

"Everyone is shocked by Rasputin's insolence, but he has the strong support of the tsaritsa."

A slide of Alexandra.

SPEAKER FOR ALEXANDRA (2)

"If we let our Friend be persecuted, we and our country shall suffer for it. Such people are fit only to be hanged!"

A slide.

SPEAKER 3

"The tsaritsa declares that it is thanks only to Rasputin's prayers that the tsar and their son are alive and well."

PURISHKEVICH

Rasputin states openly that the tsar needs him more than the tsaritsa does.

RASPUTIN

The tsar can change his mind from one minute to the next. He understands nothing and cannot cope. I can get him to do anything I want.

A slide.

SPEAKER 1

“The tsar has lost all respect.”

A slide of Nicholas.

SPEAKER FOR NICHOLAS (3)

“The tsaritsa’s reliance on Rasputin is a matter for the family, and I will allow no one to meddle in my family affairs.

PURISHKEVICH

The tsar is a saint and an angel, but he doesn’t know how to deal with her.

A slide of Alexandra.

SPEAKER FOR ALEXANDRA (2)

“Be the tsar, be Peter the Great, Ivan the Terrible, crush them all under you!”

A slide of Nicholas.

SPEAKER FOR NICHOLAS (3)

“Better one Rasputin than ten fits of hysterics a day.”

PURISHKEVICH

Everything he touches, he poisons.

Abrupt change in lighting. A spot remains on PURISHKEVICH.

DMITRI with glass and bottle; very drunk. YUSUPOV enters.

PURISHKEVICH

Everything he touches, he poisons.

Spot out on PURISHKEVICH. YUSUPOV crosses to DMITRI, takes bottle.

DMITRI

Hey! What’re you doing?

YUSUPOV

What does it look like?

Puts cork in bottle.

A better question is what are you doing?

DMITRI

What does it look like?

YUSUPOV

You really want to know?

DMITRI

Just give me the bottle and stop playing Florence Nightingale. I'm not in the mood to have my soul saved today. La Pucelle. Find another crusade.

YUSUPOV

Why do you sit around here all day?—

DMITRI
Over.

Give me the damn bottle!

YUSUPOV

—Why don't you get out of the house, go somewhere?

DMITRI

And do what?

YUSUPOV

I don't know. Anything. Visit your friends.

DMITRI

I don't have any.

YUSUPOV

Of course you do.

DMITRI

Not any more.

YUSUPOV

I just saw Irina today. She asked after you.

DMITRI

She's your friend, not mine.

YUSUPOV

Dmitri— . . . nobody's judging you. They don't care what you and I are doing. What they care about is you. Wherever I go, everybody asks after you.

DMITRI

Sure. And if they found out I'd fallen off the nearest bridge, they wouldn't bat an eye.

Takes bottle.

YUSUPOV

What do you intend to do? Drink yourself into an early grave?

DMITRI

Why not?

YUSUPOV

It's ironic, don't you think, that you've become a pariah because of what we "do", when in fact we don't "do" anything. If you'd lay off the alcohol, maybe you could get it up once in a while.

DMITRI stands unsteadily, crosses to YUSUPOV.

DMITRI

So you think that's all I'm good for, is it?

YUSUPOV

I didn't say that.

DMITRI

Grabs YUSUPOV.

You want sex? We'll have sex.

Throws YUSUPOV to floor.

YUSUPOV

What the hell do you think you're doing?

DMITRI

We're going to have sex.

YUSUPOV

Get off me—let me up! I said let me up!

DMITRI

And I said we're going to have sex.

Tries to kiss YUSUPOV, but YUSUPOV prevents him.

Now, Felix, you've always found ways to make me cooperative when you wanted me to be—and I have ways to make you cooperative.

Tries to kiss YUSUPOV, slaps him.

Kiss me!

Tries to kiss YUSUPOV.

I said kiss me!

Slaps YUSUPOV.

Christ! You're enjoying this, aren't you?

Drags YUSUPOV to his feet.

God damn you, Felix!

Punches YUSUPOV.

O Jesus! I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

YUSUPOV

No . . . no . . . just— . . . no.

He exits.

DMITRI

Felix, I— . . . I— . . . Christ, what's the use.

Picks up bottle, drinks, sinks to floor weeping. Blackout.

Spot up on SPEAKERS. Slides of Joan of Arc, Dominican.

SPEAKER FOR THE DOMINICAN (2)

From the transcript of the trial of Joan, the Maid, et cetera:

“QUESTION: If the voices had told you what was to happen, would you have gone willingly?”

SPEAKER FOR JOAN (1)

“I would have done their commandment, and what was to happen to me would happen.”

Spot out. Slides disappear.

Rain, occasional thunder. YUSUPOV enters, reading. Lights up on RASPUTIN, as he was when he seduced the woman in scene 12, but in her place is DMITRI. YUSUPOV watches.

RASPUTIN

Fair and high are the mountains, but my love is higher and fairer still, because love is God.

DMITRI

Don't do this to me, Felix.

RASPUTIN

Why do you resist?

YUSUPOV

Involuntarily repeating his own words.

"It's just an experiment—"

RASPUTIN

"—I am not going to bite you."

YUSUPOV

No.

RASPUTIN

Do you think I am trying to degrade you? I am not.

YUSUPOV

Stop it.

DMITRI

Please stop.

YUSUPOV

All I was trying to do—

RASPUTIN

Over.

"All I am trying to do is to stop you from making a terrible mistake with your life."

Spot up on SPEAKER. Slide of Purishkevich.

SPEAKER FOR PURISHKEVICH (2)

“He uses a variety of techniques to get what he wants.”

YUSUPOV

It’s not true.

DMITRI

I don’t want this.

RASPUTIN

What you do with me can be no sin.

YUSUPOV

I’m not like him in the least.

RASPUTIN

Will you refuse me?

YUSUPOV

I love Dmitri.

DMITRI

I don’t want this, Felix.

YUSUPOV

I love—

Lights change, revealing IRINA.

IRINA

How’s my boy?

YUSUPOV

What?

IRINA

Felix?

YUSUPOV

After a beat.

As well as can be expected under the circumstances.

Slips book into pocket.

IRINA

I stopped at the hospital to see Dmitri. They weren't allowing any visitors.

YUSUPOV

I spent most of the night there.

IRINA

How is he?

YUSUPOV

Out of danger. Just nicked himself really. A couple of days and he'll be right as—

Thunder.

Rain. It's all my fault.

IRINA

Felix, it's not—

YUSUPOV

It is! It is.

Takes letter from pocket.

"Dear Felix, I love you." Look at his handwriting—he writes like he's ten years old.

"Believe me—"

Spot up on DMITRI.

DMITRI

—please. But I can't take this anymore. I want to be what you want me to be, but I can't. I tried. I'm sorry. Felix, help me. Save me.

Gun shot. YUSUPOV flinches.

YUSUPOV

What makes this so absurd is that Dmitri is the only good thing that's ever happened to me—the only . . . *good* thing in a life of waste and— . . . He was an angel who'd been

sent to be my guide and companion. From the start I knew he was my better self, and what did I do? I seduced him.

A slide.

SPEAKER 3

“He has seduced a number of the tsaritsa’s servants.”

YUSUPOV

I didn’t. I did. I seduced him. We were just kids then—he was sixteen. Instead of climbing the path to his goodness, I dragged him down into the muck with the rest of us.

A slide.

SPEAKER 2

“I find it difficult to reconcile his behavior with holiness.”

YUSUPOV

Jesus! If I had any guts, I’d blow *my* brains out.

IRINA

Felix— . . .

YUSUPOV

Dear Irina. Don’t worry. It happens to be true. I don’t have the guts. I’ve been a lot closer to the edge than I am now. I just don’t have the guts. When I was at Oxford, I spent most of my time seducing undergraduates. Hoping against hope I’d find another Dmitri. But all I found was— . . .

Beat. Takes book from pocket and reads opening lines of Francis Thompson’s “The Hound of Heaven.” Lights fade on IRINA.

YUSUPOV (cont'd)

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;

I fled Him, down the arches of the years;

I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways

Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears

I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

Closes book.

What an idiot I am. All this time, I've convinced myself I couldn't understand the Virgin.

Spot on RASPUTIN.

RASPUTIN

An echo.

It is not an easy thing to be different from the others.

YUSUPOV

The truth is I refused to listen. I knew from the very beginning what it would mean.

Slide of Joan; spot up on SPEAKER 1.

SPEAKER FOR JOAN (1)

"Even had I known, I would have done their commandment in the end."

Thunder.

YUSUPOV

Without looking at the book.

That Voice is round me like a bursting sea—

"Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest Me!

Strange, piteous, futile thing,

Wherefore should any set thee love apart?

How little worthy of any love thou art!

Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee

Save Me—"

A pause metrically equal to "Whom wilt thou find."

"—save only Me?"

Holy Mother, I beg you—ask anything of me—anything else. But don't make me give up Dmitri.

Spot up on DMITRI.

DMITRI
An echo.

Felix, help me. Save me.

Gun shot; spot out.

YUSUPOV

I'm sorry. God, I'm sorry.

Slide of Purishkevich.

SPEAKER FOR PURISHKEVICH (2)

"Everything he touches, he poisons."

YUSUPOV

It's not true. Give me another chance.

SPEAKER FOR JOAN (1)

"I would have done their commandment whatever was to happen to me."

YUSUPOV

Please, Holy Mother, anything else.

RASPUTIN
An echo.

You have a beautiful quality, Felix Yusupov. But your weakness and self-indulgence—

YUSUPOV

Shut up!

Appropriate slides.

SPEAKER 3

"In her was found no evil—"

SPEAKER 2

"He has seduced a number—"

RASPUTIN

Your weakness and self-indulgence—

SPEAKER 3

“—she was good, devout, chaste—”

SPEAKER 2

“Chaste!”

SPEAKER 1

“Chaste!”

YUSUPOV

As if a sentence of death.

Chaste.

Blinding light knocks YUSUPOV to his knees.

Ah!

Spot up on DMITRI on one side of YUSUPOV; IRINA appears on the other side. YUSUPOV turns away from light reflexively, in DMITRI's direction.

DMITRI

Felix, help me. Save—

YUSUPOV

Turning in opposite direction—

Stop!

—where IRINA stands. With the wounded child's reflexive response to the maternal form, he wraps his arms around her and holds on for dear life. Beat. He looks up into her face; she smiles.

Marry me, Irina.

IRINA

No.

YUSUPOV

Marry me, please!

IRINA

But, Felix . . .

YUSUPOV

You must!

Thunder.

It's what the Virgin wants. Please, please, please! You must.

Church bells peal joyously.

SPEAKER 3

"The Petersburg Gazette. February 14, 1914. Today in a magnificent ceremony Prince Felix Yusupov married Irina Alexandrovna, the tsar's niece, at the Annichkov Palace.

YUSUPOV and IRINA begin to cross stage.

The bride, in a lace veil that once belonged to Marie Antoinette and a tiara of rock crystal and diamonds, drove up in a coach with four white horses to be given away by the tsar himself. . . ."

PROSTITUTE appears at the opposite side, behind them. YUSUPOV stops, turns. RASPUTIN appears behind PROSTITUTE.

PROSTITUTE

Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest me.

RASPUTIN

One day you will come to me again.

Lights out. End of Act.

Act Two

Slide: World War I.

Spot on RASPUTIN.

RASPUTIN

You are the tsar, the father of your people. I go down on my knees before you! The war must be stopped. Think of all the unfortunates who will never come back, and tell yourself that each one of them leaves behind him five, six, ten people who weep! And those who come back from the war—crippled, maimed, blind! Too many killed, too many wounded, too many widows, too many orphans, too many tears! It must be stopped, or it will be the finish of all things.

Blackout.

Slide: St. Petersburg. 1916.

Lights up on YUSUPOV and PROSTITUTE. PROSTITUTE counts money; YUSUPOV is finishing dressing. Spots up on RASPUTIN and two SPEAKERS.

RASPUTIN

You have a beautiful quality in your soul, but your weakness and self-indul—

SPEAKER 1

Overlapping.

“It is difficult to reconcile his behavior with holiness—”

SPEAKER 2

Overlapping.

“He’s a compulsive—”

YUSUPOV

Stop it, stop it!

Blackout on RASPUTIN and SPEAKERS.

PROSTITUTE

What’s the matter?

YUSUPOV

Nothing.

Starts to go.

PROSTITUTE
Grabbing him.

Hold on! When you coming back?

YUSUPOV
Over. Struggling.

Let go. I'm not.

Breaks free.

PROSTITUTE

Sure you are. You'll break my heart.

YUSUPOV

This has to stop.

PROSTITUTE

Why, all of a sudden?

YUSUPOV

Because it's time.

PROSTITUTE puts his hands on YUSUPOV's shoulders, works them up to YUSUPOV's neck.

PROSTITUTE

I keep telling you, if the wifey was—

YUSUPOV

Don't call her that.

PROSTITUTE

If she was going to find out after, what, two years—

YUSUPOV

Shut up.

PROSTITUTE

—it would have happened by—

YUSUPOV

What am I wasting my time here for?

PROSTITUTE

Now, now, now. Don't run off in a—

Caress turns into strangle hold.

YUSUPOV

Stop. You're—

PROSTITUTE kisses him. YUSUPOV chokes, struggles, finally pulls away.

PROSTITUTE

Just wanted to leave you something to remember me by.

*Reaches down to feel YUSUPOV's crotch, but YUSUPOV stops him.
YUSUPOV begins to exit.*

PROSTITUTE (cont'd)

You'll starve if you stay away.

Blackout on PROSTITUTE.

YUSUPOV

Christ, make it stop!

Spot up on SPEAKER. Slide of Nicholas. YUSUPOV listens.

SPEAKER FOR NICHOLAS

“He's just a good, simple-minded Russian who by some strange power can relieve the sufferings of my son.”

Spot up on RASPUTIN.

RASPUTIN

One day you will come to me again.

YUSUPOV

Why? Why should I? You're worse than I am.

Abrupt change in lighting.

ZINAIDA enters with PURISHKEVICH. YUSUPOV crosses to them. Spots up on three SPEAKERS. Appropriate slides. (YUSUPOV is the focus of the scene.)

ZINAIDA

How can we have allowed this dark parvenu to make a mockery of Russia for so long?

PURISHKEVICH

Brandishing a sheaf of papers.

Now when he is drunk—which he is almost every night—he even boasts he is the tsaritsa’s lover!

SPEAKER 1

“What keeps the heavens from destroying him with fire and brimstone?”

SPEAKER 2

“The filthy gossip about the tsar’s family has become the property of the street.”

SPEAKER 3

“An effort has been made to silence the press, and much of what is reported abroad is exaggerated.”

ZINAIDA

What is there to exaggerate when the naked truth is worse than any lie?

PURISHKEVICH

The word revolution is spoken more openly and more often every day. Soon it will be heard everywhere.

SPEAKER 1

“How can someone so common throw so vast a shadow?”

SPEAKER 2

“What keeps the earth from swallowing him up?”

SPEAKER 3

It’s inexplicable.

SPEAKER 1

Maddening.

SPEAKER 2

Beyond belief!

ZINAIDA

Of all the shame and disgrace, Rasputin is the ultimate disgrace of our age.

YUSUPOV

And yet he's been given the power to cure the tsar's son.

ZINAIDA

How could God have been so blind?

PURISHKEVICH

Know I am willing to rot in prison, but that I shall not reconcile myself to the further desecration of the tsar's person.

ZINAIDA

The time has come for him to mend his ways—

PURISHKEVICH

Or suffer the consequences.

Actors freeze. Spot up on RASPUTIN.

RASPUTIN

Holy Mother, I do not know sometimes what it is I do. I dance a dance I cannot stop. It is the drink. What I do with women, it is not wrong. I do it to heal them. But not all of them, I confess. Do not turn your ear from me, Holy Mother. Let me hear your voice again. The wolf howls at the door, and I am alone.

Lights change; PURISHKEVICH exits. Action continues—

ZINAIDA hands YUSUPOV a sheaf of papers.

ZINAIDA

Read this.

YUSUPOV

“November 17. Yusupov was observed—”

Scans page in consternation. A beat.

ZINAIDA

Well?

YUSUPOV

Lies.

ZINAIDA

The secret police don’t lie, Felix. What possible motive could they have?

YUSUPOV

Anyone can be bribed.

ZINAIDA doesn’t respond.

They’ve got me confused with someone else, then.

ZINAIDA

Felix.

YUSUPOV

I can’t believe you asked to have me followed.

ZINAIDA

I didn’t. I merely asked that if you were being followed, I would like to see the reports.

YUSUPOV

Why should I be followed?

ZINAIDA

There’s a war going on. You’re married to the tsar’s niece. Everyone is followed.

YUSUPOV

You surely don’t believe any of this.

ZINAIDA

You’ve been known to visit such establishments before.

YUSUPOV

That's right—before. Before—

ZINAIDA

A leopard can't change its spots, Felix.

YUSUPOV

Is that really what you think of me?

ZINAIDA

Until you prove different.

YUSUPOV

I see.

Referring to papers.

Is this going to continue?

ZINAIDA

I don't know. Is it?

YUSUPOV

Mother, you know I made a vow when I got married, not only to my wife but to the Virgin—

ZINAIDA

Marriage doesn't make you a saint—although it would help us all if it did—and I've told you countless times before, I'm not interested in your religious delusions. All I'm concerned with is how you behave.

YUSUPOV

I'm not six years old.

ZINAIDA

Don't interrupt me! It's time for you to mend your ways. This is the last warning I intend to give you before I take matters into my own hand. Is that clear?

YUSUPOV

Yes, mother.

Exits. MAN appears, crosses to ZINAIDA. She, with the slightest movement of her eyes, sends him on his way. He follows YUSUPOV off.

Lights up on IRINA. YUSUPOV crosses to her, sits at her feet.

YUSUPOV

I miss Dmitri, Irina.

IRINA

He always asks why you never write.

A beat.

He's back from the front, you know. On leave. I ran into him at tea at Aunt Militsa's Tuesday.

A beat.

Maybe we could have him over for—

YUSUPOV

No.

IRINA

Why not?

YUSUPOV

I'm afraid.

IRINA

Of Dmitri?

YUSUPOV

Of myself.

Pause.

How is he?

IRINA

Changed . . . changed. It must be ghastly at the front. I watched his eyes while we were talking—it was like watching the newsreels. No matter what we were talking about, no matter how trivial—in the background, the newsreels went on flickering. The dead, the maimed, the bloody stumps.

YUSUPOV

God.

IRINA

No one comes back the same, I guess. What a price.

Pause.

YUSUPOV

I have a confession to make.

Slight pause.

I don't know how to say this.

IRINA

You used to be able to tell me anything.

Kisses him on the head.

YUSUPOV

God, Irina, what's wrong with me? Why can't I change?

Pin spot on RASPUTIN.

RASPUTIN

I do not know sometimes what it is I do.

Spot out.

IRINA

You've been to see your mother.

YUSUPOV

Yes.

IRINA

I guess I've got a confession to make too. She came by this afternoon.

YUSUPOV

Oh?

IRINA

Yes. To show me the "evidence."

YUSUPOV

Oh. Can you forgive me?

IRINA

It's perfectly understandable.

YUSUPOV

Understandable?

IRINA

I knew what you were like when I married you, Felix. I've known it all along. I knew you had needs I couldn't provide for.

YUSUPOV

That's not true—and even if it were, it's no excuse.

IRINA

No excuse! You sound like your mother. Who said you needed an excuse?

YUSUPOV

I do! I need more than an excuse. What I've done is unforgivable.

IRINA

Felix, I've told you again and again, I didn't expect you—

YUSUPOV

Didn't expect me to change. Now *you* sound like my mother. Let me tell you something. I made a promise—

IRINA

And I asked you not to.

YUSUPOV

Not just to you.

IRINA

No, to the Virgin! The Virgin! The Virgin! I'm sick to death of hearing about the Virgin. Why isn't my understanding enough? Do you think it's so easy? What I can't for the life of me figure out is how a man who's so obsessed with the Virgin can be so obsessed with sex.

YUSUPOV

Those are malicious exaggerations.

IRINA

Exaggerations. Felix. Do you think I needed your mother to bring me reports from the secret police to know what's going on? Do you? I've accepted the fact that you'd rather sleep with men—

YUSUPOV

I don't.

IRINA

You do—you are!

YUSUPOV

I'll stop.

IRINA

You won't! You'll just torture yourself. And me too. Felix, I can't stand seeing you making yourself ridiculous.

YUSUPOV

Ridiculous?

IRINA

My friends laugh at you! Do you know what it's like having to listen to the jokes, the ridicule, the— Felix, please believe me. It doesn't matter to me what you do. Just stop pretending.

YUSUPOV

I'm not.

IRINA

Then you're lying to yourself.

YUSUPOV

I made a promise.

IRINA

Felix.

YUSUPOV

I made a promise.

IRINA

Maybe it's not such a good promise if it's just going to make you miserable. Maybe the Virgin would understand—

YUSUPOV

Her too, eh? Understand! You don't understand me in the least.

IRINA

I wonder if you understand yourself.

YUSUPOV

You really are just like my mother. Always doubting me.

IRINA

I don't doubt you. I just don't want to see you torture yourself about something you can't change.

YUSUPOV

Why do you insist on treating me like a child?

IRINA

I'm just trying to tell you that I love you for what you are, not for what you think you ought to be.

YUSUPOV

I'll be anything I choose to be, damn it. I'll show you that when I make up my mind, I can make the Red Sea part.

IRINA exits.

Lights up on PROSTITUTE. YUSUPOV crosses to him.

PROSTITUTE

You're early.

YUSUPOV doesn't respond.

Now what?

YUSUPOV

I've made up my mind.

PROSTITUTE

What about?

YUSUPOV

This. I'm through with it. I'm not coming back.

PROSTITUTE

I know. That's what you said last time. Come all the way back just to tell me again?

YUSUPOV

I came back— . . . I don't have to explain to you.

PROSTITUTE

No.

YUSUPOV

I came back because I don't want you thinking— . . . I came back because— . . .

PROSTITUTE

Had a little talk with wifey, have we?

YUSUPOV

Leave my wife out of this.

PROSTITUTE

Sorry.

YUSUPOV

She has nothing to do with this. For your information, she— . . . You don't have the faintest idea what you're talking about. I made up my mind. That's it. Period.

PROSTITUTE

I'm convinced.

Pause.

Well? Door's open. Thank you for your patronage. Next!

YUSUPOV

Don't mock me.

PROSTITUTE

Look, you've had your say. If you're looking for a confessional, there's a church three blocks down on the right. Good-bye.

YUSUPOV turns to exit.

See you next week.

YUSUPOV

What?

PROSTITUTE

You'll be back.

Pin spot on RASPUTIN.

RASPUTIN

One day you will come to me again.

PROSTITUTE

Funny thing about my line of work. People think all you use is your body. Just the opposite. You got to know how to read minds. The dark corners, the locked rooms. I know the part of you you've hidden so deep, you'd like to forget it's there. Let me tell you something: you can fool yourself—you can fool your wife, your friends, your priest. You can't fool your whore.

YUSUPOV

I'm not trying to fool anybody.

PROSTITUTE

Nope. Course not. My mistake.

YUSUPOV

I made up my mind!

PROSTITUTE

So you keep saying. So, let me ask you just one question. What happens next time?

YUSUPOV

Next time?

PROSTITUTE

Yeah, next time the old urge comes back.

Crosses toward YUSUPOV, who backs away.

I'm not going to touch you. I just want you to look me in the eye and tell me what you're going to do when that happens.

YUSUPOV

It won't.

PROSTITUTE

No?

YUSUPOV

I'm not like the rest of the people who come here.

PROSTITUTE

Oh, for Chrissake.

YUSUPOV

I'm not!

Pin spot on RASPUTIN.

RASPUTIN

It is not an easy thing to be different.

PROSTITUTE

Your type is a dime a dozen.

RASPUTIN

You are not ready for the journey.

YUSUPOV

Just watch if you don't believe me.

PROSTITUTE

Save your breath. I've heard it all—

YUSUPOV

Listen to me!

PROSTITUTE

Just get out—

YUSUPOV
Grabbing him.

Listen to me!

PROSTITUTE
Laughs.

Why, you little—

YUSUPOV

Don't laugh at me! If you had the minutest crumb of the insight you claim, you'd be on your knees to me, you'd be kissing the hem of my robe. I'm capable of things you can't even imagine.

PROSTITUTE

Finished?

Breaks YUSUPOV's grip.

Let me tell you something. I don't think you're capable of wiping your own snotty nose or your shitty ass. I don't think you're capable of taking a piss without peeing down your leg.

YUSUPOV
Turning to go.

I don't have to listen to this.

PROSTITUTE
Grabbing him.

But you're gonna. I see some sad cases in here, but you're pathetic. You got this head here full of big plans and big talk and God knows what, and it's nothing but bloody,

PROSTITUTE (cont'd)

goddamn bilge. Change? You can't change something you don't know anything about. You got to know where you are before you can get yourself somewhere else. You—

you're just some kid sitting in the dark with his dick in his hand jacking off. You're pathetic.

Shoves him toward exit.

Now get out. Go save the world.

YUSUPOV

You—!

YUSUPOV lunges for him. PROSTITUTE grabs his wrists and easily overpowers him.

PROSTITUTE

Jeez! You're worse than a week-old boil.

YUSUPOV
Still struggling.

Nobody talks to me like that.

PROSTITUTE

Maybe it's time somebody did.

YUSUPOV

I'd like to kill you.

PROSTITUTE

For what? The truth?

YUSUPOV

Let go of me.

PROSTITUTE

Not until you calm down.

YUSUPOV
Struggling.

I'm perfectly calm. Take your hands off me.

PROSTITUTE

God, you're dumber than shit.

YUSUPOV

Shut up—and take your hands off me.

PROSTITUTE twists YUSUPOV's arms behind his back so he's holding him to his chest.

PROSTITUTE

All right. Go ahead and struggle if that's what you want.

YUSUPOV

Let go.

PROSTITUTE

It's not going to do you any good. Struggle all you want. I'm stronger than you are.

YUSUPOV

Let go of me.

PROSTITUTE

And what if I don't? Just what are you going to do about it?

YUSUPOV

That hurts, damn it.

PROSTITUTE

Yeah, well, the more you struggle, the tighter I'm gonna hold, so figure it out for yourself.

YUSUPOV

Stop it.

PROSTITUTE

You stop. You're in control. You want to struggle, struggle—but I'm not about to let you go.

Releases YUSUPOV.

Get out.

YUSUPOV doesn't move.

I said—

Slight pause.

I told you there'd be a next time.

YUSUPOV takes step toward exit.

Won't do you any good.

PROSTITUTE crosses to YUSUPOV and stands very close to him.

PROSTITUTE (cont'd)

You can run away from me, but you can't run away from yourself. I'm just the mirror on the wall.

YUSUPOV
Frozen.

It isn't fair.

Pin spot on RASPUTIN.

RASPUTIN

It is not any easy thing.

PROSTITUTE

No, but it's the truth. Face it.

Pin spot on ZINAIDA.

ZINAIDA

This is the last warning I intend to give you. Is that clear?

YUSUPOV

This isn't what I want, goddamn it.

PROSTITUTE

Nobody's forcing you.

RASPUTIN

You are not ready for the journey.

YUSUPOV

Somebody help me.

PROSTITUTE

I'm right here behind you.

YUSUPOV

Somebody, please.

PROSTITUTE

Right here behind you.

Pause.

YUSUPOV

Damn it.

PROSTITUTE embraces him.

RASPUTIN

One day you will come to me again.

Blackout on YUSUPOV, PROSTITUTE, RASPUTIN. Lights up on ZINAIDA and MAN.

ZINAIDA

He was there again this evening?

MAN

Yes, ma'am.

ZINAIDA

So be it then. I'm through with warning him. Do something about that person.

MAN

Something, ma'am?

ZINAIDA

Yes. I'll deal with Felix.

MAN

Yes, ma'am.

They exit. Lights change.

Lights up on RASPUTIN, who appears to have been roused from bed. He reads a sheaf of papers.

RASPUTIN

"November 25, Varvarova, the actress, slept at Rasputin's." Yes, so?

As he scans pages.

So? So? For years they have spied on me. Years! What is it they want? To be rid of the Lord's anointed! This—it is the devil's doing. God has sent me to save our dear tsar and holy Russia. But for me, the boy would be dead. Fools! Do they not know that the tsar thinks I am Christ incarnate, that the tsar and tsaritsa bow down to me, kneel to me, kiss my hand? Do they not know the tsaritsa has sworn that if all turn their backs on Grisha she will not waver and still be his friend?

Throws papers in air.

They think I am a scandal. I will show them what a scandal I can be, and still the tsaritsa needs me.

Drinks.

This must not reach the tsaritsa. It must not. If she found out, if she turned against me . . . If she closed her ears to me like the Holy Mother . . . There is much wickedness in you, Grigorii Efimovich.

Someone knocks.

Go away, go away. Come again tomorrow.

Knocking.

It is too late. Go away until tomorrow.

Knocking stops. MAID enters, followed by YUSUPOV. MAID exits.

Go away. Can I have no rest from— . . .

Recognizes YUSUPOV.

YUSUPOV

You said I'd come back someday.

RASPUTIN

You—yes—you have a beautiful quality in your soul, but—

YUSUPOV

Over.

Don't say it.

RASPUTIN

—you dance a dance you cannot stop.

YUSUPOV

It's too much for me.

RASPUTIN

What would you have me do?

YUSUPOV

Help me.

RASPUTIN

I begin to break under the sins of others when my own are enough to bear.

YUSUPOV

Heal me.

RASPUTIN

Do you think I am Christ himself? There are some things it is not given me to do, some deformities even I cannot make whole.

YUSUPOV

Save me.

RASPUTIN

Go home. I can do nothing for you.

YUSUPOV

You healed the tsarevich.

RASPUTIN

God healed the tsarevich. Do you think you can have a miracle because you want one?

YUSUPOV

I'm not just— . . . I had a vision. The Virgin spoke to me.

RASPUTIN

Yes, the Holy Mother spoke, but you could not understand. Go home. It is late, and I am weary.

YUSUPOV

Listen to me—

RASPUTIN

It is too late, I say. The journey is long and hard, and if you have not yet found the path, you will not find it now.

YUSUPOV

I will find it. I'm ready. Just heal me.

RASPUTIN

Gathering papers.

Our lives are like a book in which each day our deeds are written. The ink bleeds through, for blood is life and flows through all. What can we do but turn the page and retrace what we have already done? We are what we have been.

YUSUPOV

We are what we are meant to be. Others have been transformed—Paul on the road to Damascus, Joan of Arc.

RASPUTIN

When the need is great, but man is not, God works his miracles.

YUSUPOV

The need is great or why would the Virgin have called me? One small miracle—that's all I'm asking. Is it too much?

RASPUTIN

Tonight, Little One, the spirit is weak. And also, the flesh is unwilling. Be a good boy, go home now.

YUSUPOV

I will not go home. I will not be a good boy.

RASPUTIN

Do you not think we all wish a miracle? Do you not think we all have the wound that will not heal? Do you not? You are behaving like a spoiled child.

YUSUPOV

I'm behaving like— . . . What I'm behaving like is a bloody fool. How could I possibly have imagined you could help me? You're everything I've known from the very beginning. A fraud. A sham.

Spot up on DMITRI. Each of YUSUPOV's lines becomes a more desperate attempt to suppress the echo of the thought that precedes it.

DMITRI

An echo.

Doesn't sound like any vision I've ever heard of.

YUSUPOV

A side-show huckster.

RASPUTIN

This may be so.

Spot up on ZINAIDA.

ZINAIDA

An echo.

Look at yourself.

YUSUPOV

Look at yourself.

DMITRI

An echo.

You're acting queer.

YUSUPOV

A common drunk.

RASPUTIN

This too may be so.

YUSUPOV

A degenerate—

Spot up on PROSTITUTE.

PROSTITUTE

An echo.

You want it rough—

YUSUPOV

A reprobate with a reputation for nothing but whoring, seduction—

DMITRI

An echo.

I don't want this, Felix.

YUSUPOV

Holy man? Miracle Worker?

ZINAIDA

An echo.

I'm not interested in your religious delusions, Felix.

YUSUPOV

Prophet, saint—

ZINAIDA

An echo.

What could the Virgin possibly want with a chorus girl?

YUSUPOV

What could the Virgin possibly want with a—a—a—

RASPUTIN

A cry of terror and abandonment.

Do you not know that I shall die in terrible pain? Beware, little one. Beware the darkness. The devil is a roaring lion that goes about seeking someone to devour.

Drinks.

I drink too much. Do you know why that is so? Despite my terrible sins, I have been chosen to die. To save the dear tsar and holy Russia. I sleep with many women, yes. To some, I give comfort. Others give comfort to me. The darkness of the night is too much for me like the other darkness. The heavy curtain one cannot draw away. The passage without end one must walk alone and in silence. I fear the path that lies before me.

YUSUPOV

You accused me of that once.

RASPUTIN

Even Christ Himself begged the Father to let the cup pass. I have been chosen, but because of my sins, the Holy Mother refuses me a word of comfort.

Pause.

Watch with me tonight. I do not wish to be alone.

YUSUPOV sits.

They spy upon me, my enemies.

YUSUPOV

Mine, too.

ZINAIDA

An echo.

It's time for you to mend your ways.

RASPUTIN

We are all human.

YUSUPOV

But the devil is a roaring lion.

ZINAIDA

An echo.

This is the last warning I intend to give you.

YUSUPOV

I can't fail one more time.

RASPUTIN

We must trust in the Holy Mother, little one.

YUSUPOV

I don't think she cares anymore. I'm not sure I care either.

RASPUTIN

When we think we can do no more, we must remember her Son. You must. And I.

YUSUPOV

Giving up would be so easy. So inviting.

RASPUTIN

Yes. The devil roars like the lion, and he purrs like the whore. We must remember her Son.

YUSUPOV

Grigorii Efimovich. For my sake, remember her Son.

RASPUTIN sighs.

For the sake of my soul, remember her Son.

A beat.

RASPUTIN

Come.

Lights change. RASPUTIN freezes. Action continues.

The lights up on PROSTITUTE. YUSUPOV crosses to him. A bed.

PROSTITUTE

Christ. Now what?

YUSUPOV

He took me into a bedroom and told me to lie on the bed.

PROSTITUTE

Who did? What are you—

YUSUPOV

The bed was a mess, still warm, still sweet with the scent of a woman.

RASPUTIN crosses to YUSUPOV and lowers him onto bed.

I sank into the softness of their lovemaking, and the dark waters closed over me.

Whatever my intention was for going there, it left me—smothered, drown. He looked into my eyes. He prayed.

RASPUTIN prays. He stands over YUSUPOV throughout the story.

And while he prayed, all I could think of was his making love. To me. I felt him kiss me with a longing I longed for with my very soul. O my soul . . .

PROSTITUTE

Kissed you? I thought you said he was praying?

YUSUPOV

He was! But me—I was lost, slipping into a fantasy beyond redemption. By the time I caught myself, it was too late. I tried to get up, but I couldn't. He was on me, too heavy,

weighing me down, no matter how hard I struggled. I was naked. His hands were on my skin, his tongue in my mouth. All I could see were his eyes, shining, penetrating, consuming, overpowering—

PROSTITUTE

Wait, wait, wait—you're not making any sense. Was this guy praying or—?

YUSUPOV

Praying, you idiot, praying, praying!

PROSTITUTE

Laying on top of you?

YUSUPOV

That was just in my mind. He stood over me and prayed. But I—I—God, my soul is so befouled, my contemptible, mewling, infantile will so enfeebled—I craved and I craved and I craved until I felt him. I felt him enter me—Oh, Christ, I felt him—and I came. Like some incontinent child, I came. On myself, on my clothes.

Jumps up from bed.

Can't you smell it?

RASPUTIN

What is the matter?

YUSUPOV crosses away.

Why do you run away?

Crosses past YUSUPOV as if the latter had exited.

Where are you going?

A beat. Exits.

PROSTITUTE

So, you had a wet dream. What do you want me to do about it?

YUSUPOV

Save me.

PROSTITUTE

What?

YUSUPOV

Make it stop.

PROSTITUTE

I don't know what you're talking about.

YUSUPOV

I'll pay you whatever you want.

Takes PROSTITUTE's hands and puts them around his throat.

YUSUPOV (cont'd)

Make it stop. For the last time.

PROSTITUTE

What are you, crazy? Get out of here.

YUSUPOV

Please.

PROSTITUTE

What do you think I am?

Shoves YUSUPOV out. YUSUPOV collapses in a heap.

Get out of here. And don't come back. Crazy, fucking . . .

MAN appears, pretending to be a customer.

MAN

They told me I could find you here.

PROSTITUTE

Looks like they were right. What's your pleasure?

MAN walks around him as if appraising him, then puts wire around PROSTITUTE's neck and begins to garrote him. Abrupt change in lighting. The actors freeze.

YUSUPOV lies in a heap in a pool of light. ZINAIDA steps into light and stands over him. (The staging should make clear that the action depicts a psychological reality, not a literal one. The Zinaida who appears in this scene, for example, is not the real Zinaida, but Yusupov's image of his mother. The only "real" incident is Yusupov's exchange with the paper seller.)

ZINAIDA

Get up, Felix, and stop making a spectacle of yourself. Lying in the middle of the street.

YUSUPOV

I've failed so utterly and miserably.

ZINAIDA

Don't over-dramatize.

YUSUPOV

I'm broken, Mother. I don't think I can go on.

ZINAIDA

Of course you can. Now get up.

YUSUPOV

I can't. I can't.

ZINAIDA

You'll catch your death of cold.

YUSUPOV

If I only would. If I could only fall asleep and never wake up.

Light on ZINAIDA fades. Pause. YUSUPOV wakes.

Mother—? I'm so tired.

He stands. Thunder. Addressing it.

Leave me in peace!

PAPER SELLER appears.

PAPER SELLER

Paper, sir? Looks like we're in for a beautiful morning.

Lightning; thunder.

YUSUPOV

Oh, Christ, no.

PAPER SELLER exits. Spot up on SPEAKER.

SPEAKER 1

Petersburg Gazette. “The body of a murder victim was pulled from the waters of the Neva early this morning. The man, a notorious denizen of the lower quarters, was identified by a tattoo of a rooster on his right fore—”

YUSUPOV

What was that?

SPEAKER 1

“The body of a murder—”

YUSUPOV

No, the tattoo.

SPEAKER 1

“A tattoo of a rooster on his—”

Spot up on ZINAIDA.

ZINAIDA

An echo.

This is the last warning you get before I take matters into my own hands. Is that clear?

Lights on MAN and PROSTITUTE brighten. The MAN garrottes the PROSTITUTE. It's ghastly and protracted.

YUSUPOV

Mother! No!

ZINAIDA

Crossing toward him.

A gnat, Felix. A flea.

YUSUPOV

Oh, Christ. Stop him.

ZINAIDA

I gave you fair warning.

YUSUPOV

No. Not again.

Spot up on DMITRI.

DMITRI

I tried, Felix. I'm sorry.

Gun shot. Spot out.

ZINAIDA

It's for your own good.

YUSUPOV

Stop him, Mother. Oh, Christ, no. Oh, Christ, Mother.

ZINAIDA

I will not have you disobey me.

YUSUPOV

Please stop him. Oh, Christ, stop him! Stop him! Stop him!

ZINAIDA

Felix, control yourself.

YUSUPOV

Oh, Christ, have mercy, Mother. Oh, Christ.

ZINAIDA

Felix! It's for your own good.

YUSUPOV

Oh Christ, oh Christ, oh Christ, oh Christ, oh Christ.

ZINAIDA

Stop that this instant.

PROSTITUTE finally dies.

YUSUPOV

No!

ZINAIDA

I warned you. You have no one to blame but yourself.

YUSUPOV

No. Not me. I'm not the cause. I'm not the cause. . . .

Becomes completely hysterical, repeating "I'm not the cause" until ZINAIDA calms him.

ZINAIDA
Stern.

Felix!

And frightened.

Felix!

IRINA appears.

IRINA

Felix.

ZINAIDA

Don't come near him!

ZINAIDA kneels beside YUSUPOV, wraps her arms around him. He struggles.

Felix. Felix. Felix.

He finally calms down, begins to sob.

My baby. My poor, poor baby.

YUSUPOV shivers. To Irina.

Get a blanket. Hurry!

IRINA exits. Lightning; thunder. YUSUPOV huddles close to ZINAIDA.

My poor baby.

IRINA returns with blanket. ZINAIDA wraps it around YUSUPOV. He huddles closer.

My darling.

She begins to sing softly. Spot up on RASPUTIN. It gutters like an untrimmed candle. He is unintelligible.

RASPUTIN
An echo.

. . . lion and . . . like the . . .

YUSUPOV stirs. Spot fades. ZINAIDA continues to sing. Spot up on RASPUTIN again. It gutters. He is still unintelligible.

. . . roars . . . and he . . . whore.

YUSUPOV stirs again. Spot fades. ZINAIDA continues to sing. Spot up on RASPUTIN a third time. It gutters, then grows in strength.

The devil roars like the lion, and he purrs like the whore.

A beat. Then YUSUPOV's eyes are wide open. He pulls away from ZINAIDA.

YUSUPOV

No. Stop it!

She moves toward him.

Stay away from me. No wonder I act like a child. The devil roars like a lion, and he purrs like a whore. He sings a mother's lullaby—

Spot up on SPEAKER. Slide of Purishkevich.

SPEAKER 1 (PURISHKEVICH)

Almost overlapping.

“He uses a variety of techniques to get what he wants.

A beat. Lightning; thunder.

Techniques from exorcism to—”

YUSUPOV

Rape. He raped me. It wasn't my fault. He raped me.

Spot up on second and third SPEAKERS. The SPEAKERS speak in whispers.

SPEAKER 2

“His power is tremendous.”

SPEAKER 3

“Hundreds of people call on him every day.”

SPEAKER 2

“How can they be so blind?”

YUSUPOV

How could I be so blind?

SPEAKER 2

“Above all I noticed his eyes—”

SPEAKER 3

“—his stare had an extraordinary effect.”

YUSUPOV

He told me to lie on the bed. He looked in
my eyes. He prayed.

SPEAKER 1

“His words are like poison.”

YUSUPOV

I tried to get up, but I couldn't.

Each of PROSTITUTE's lines is an echo.

PROSTITUTE

Wait, wait, wait. Was he praying or—

YUSUPOV

Praying? Praying? All I could think about was him making love to me. Him—a
loathsome peasant. What could have possessed me?

PROSTITUTE

So you had a wet dream.

YUSUPOV

No.

Indicating his head.

He forced himself inside me. No matter how hard I struggled.

PROSTITUTE

You want it rough, you pay the price.

YUSUPOV

He raped me.

PROSTITUTE

He's just the mirror on the wall.

YUSUPOV

He raped me.

PROSTITUTE

So you had a wet—

YUSUPOV

He raped me!

Beat.

ZINAIDA

Felix. You have the most preposterous ideas. What possible motive could he have?

YUSUPOV

What possible motive? How should I know? He—

Thunder. Side of Joan of Arc.

SPEAKER 2

Simultaneously.

“It was in the midst of calamity that Joan came from God and was sent to raise up the king.”

YUSUPOV

Because I'm chosen. That's why.

SPEAKER 1

“He is positively evil.”

YUSUPOV

He promised to heal me. And all the time,
he was trying to destroy me.

SPEAKER 3

“What keeps the earth from swallowing
him up?”

YUSUPOV

To make me think I was unworthy. To
drive me to despair.

SPEAKER 1

“Recognize him for what he is—”

YUSUPOV

Because of what I am.

SPEAKER 2

“—a true disciple of the devil.”

YUSUPOV

Because of what he pretends to be.

Thunder.

SPEAKER 3

Simultaneously.

“And he was lead away into the wilderness, to be tempted there by the devil.”

YUSUPOV

I haven’t been the cause of anything. Not my weakness, not my self-indulgence. I could
have given in long ago. I didn’t. I fought. Because I have a mission.

ZINAIDA

What mission?

YUSUPOV

The voice that used to be lost in thunder is crystal clear. It says, “Fear not. All things are possible with God.”

ZINAIDA

What mission?

YUSUPOV

You said it yourself, Mother. The time has come for him to mend his ways—

Slide of Purishkevich.

SPEAKER 1 (PURISHKEVICH)

“—or suffer the consequences.”

YUSUPOV

“At that time there was in the kingdom such calamity that those true to their allegiance to the king were in despair.”

ZINAIDA

And what do you imagine you can do about it?

YUSUPOV

I’m Joan of Arc, Mother. “I am come and am sent by God to bring succor to you and your kingdom.”

ZINAIDA

Do you have any idea how ridiculous you sound?

YUSUPOV

Someday you’re going to recognize me for what I am, Mother.

ZINAIDA

Yes, someday I suppose I will.

YUSUPOV

Someday soon. I’m not some giddy schoolgirl. You crushed a flea. Well, I’ll put an end to the whole bloody plague. “At God’s commandment, the voices said to me, ‘Take up the standard in the Name of the King of Heaven!’” I’ll bring a light to the world so blinding bright, no one—no one—will ever be seduced again.

Lightning; thunder—abruptly cut off by lighting change. Action continues.

DMITRI is in uniform, PURISHKEVICH wears the baldric of a deputy of the Duma. YUSUPOV crosses into the scene.

DMITRI

But why does he have to die, Felix?

YUSUPOV

The wages of sin are death.

DMITRI

Maybe, but who made us the paymaster?

YUSUPOV

God, fate, chance—what does it matter?

PURISHKEVICH

To DMITRI.

Highness, these past nights I haven't been able to sleep, I give you my word of honor. I lie awake imagining the endless notes and telegrams this illiterate peasant writes to one minister after another demanding— . . . God knows what. What we see at work, what will destroy us if we fail to act is not stupidity or even simple treason, but evil, a dark force that has insinuated itself into the very heart and soul of all we hold sacred. And that dark force has one name: it is—

DMITRI

What has the man ever done to you?

PURISHKEVICH

Me?

YUSUPOV

It's not what he's done to him or me or you. It's what he's doing to Mother Russia.

PURISHKEVICH

He's a mockery, a disgrace—a holy man with the morals of an alley cat, an ignorant peasant with the political insight of a school boy—

DMITRI

None of that makes a good enough reason to kill him.

YUSUPOV

Dmitri, something glorious is about to happen—something as glorious as the day Joan of Arc delivered Orleans. Evil is sometimes allowed to flourish so the glory of God can be manifested. And the greater the evil, the greater the glory. One life for the tsar and Mother Russia. It's the will of God.

DMITRI

I have to go.

YUSUPOV

There's no point in running, Dmitri. I know what's to come. Your fate is bound to mine. You're the pure of heart, the true son of Mother Russia, the strength of the Russian soil—

DMITRI

Stop it, Felix. For the past year I've been watching the Russian soil and the Russian snow and the Russian rain and the Russian mud turn red with Russian blood. Joan of Arc was a soldier. There's nothing glorious about it.

Turns to go.

I wish I could wish you good luck.

YUSUPOV

Listen to your own heart if you won't listen to me. Doesn't it tell you the tsar and Mother Russia are at stake? Doesn't it tell you our only hope is in God?

PURISHKEVICH

Handing paper to DMITRI.

I think you should read this, Highness. The information is from a report by the secret police—and shouldn't be in my possession, but it is. Last Thursday at the bathhouse, Rasputin openly suggested that the tsar was too weak to rule and that Alexandra should become regent and reign as a second Catherine the Great.

DMITRI

Deputy, do you believe with all your heart and with God as your witness that only Rasputin's death will save the tsar?

PURISHKEVICH

Both heart and soul and with both God and the Holy Mother as my witness.

YUSUPOV

Dmitri, do you know the old word “podvig”?

DMITRI

Podvig?

YUSUPOV

Yes. A glorious action on behalf of Mother Russia—

DMITRI

Felix.

YUSUPOV

—undertaken even if it means martyrdom. Has there ever been a time Mother Russia needed an act of heroism more? That’s why the Virgin appeared to me, Dmitri.

DMITRI starts to exit.

PURISHKEVICH

Highness, listen to him.

YUSUPOV

If we don’t save the tsar, who will?

A beat.

Nicholas is your cousin, the closest thing you have to a brother. If we don’t save him, who will?

A beat.

DMITRI

The numbness—that’s what I hate most about being a soldier. Every time, it gets easier. Every time you do something you loathe because it has to be done.

A beat.

If we don’t save the tsar, who will?

Lights change.

Spot up on RASPUTIN.

RASPUTIN
Drunk.

They are certainly going to kill me, Holy Mother. And they will kill Papa and Mama as well. The river will flow red with blood.

A cry.

I am not the Lord Christ! I am not worthy to die for the sins of others. My own are too great.

Falls to knees.

Holy Mother, I take this vow: I will continue in public life only five more years—five only. By that time the tsarevich will be cured. I will leave this place. I will devote the rest of my life to wandering, to saving my soul. Listen to me, Holy Mother!

Pause. There is no response.

I must have wine.

Spot out.

Slide: Petersburg. December 17, 1916.

Two simultaneous acting areas: PARLOR furnished with chairs, table, chest of drawers. On chest of drawers is large crucifix. ADJOINING ROOM with gramophone and chairs.

Spot up on SPEAKER. Slide of Trotsky.

SPEAKER

“It was carried out in the manner of a scenario for people of bad taste.” Leon Trotsky.

Spot out. Slide disappears. DMITRI and PURISHKEVICH enter. DMITRI carries wine and four glasses (two each of two different designs); PURISHKEVICH carries parcel and plate with cakes.

DMITRI
Referring to parcel.

Is that the poison?

PURISHKEVICH

Yes.

Unwraps parcel, which contains surgical gloves, envelope, and bottle.

The envelope is potassium cyanide, the bottle liquid cyanide. My acquaintance assured me it was enough to kill someone many times over.

Hands gloves to DMITRI.

He told me to tell you particularly to wear the gloves when you're working with the poison.

DMITRI

When I'm— . . . !?

DMITRI gives in, puts gloves on. Takes top off cakes, sprinkles powder on them.

PURISHKEVICH

Do you think he'll be able to taste it?

DMITRI

I suppose if he does, by then it'll be too late.

PURISHKEVICH

Do you think you should poison them all? Won't he get suspicious that Felix Felixovich isn't eating?

DMITRI

I think the premise is that Rasputin isn't expecting to be poisoned when he comes here. We're relying on the element of surprise. If he were expecting to be poisoned, we'd have chosen another method—like emptying a revolver into his chest. Which would be a damn sight simpler if you ask me. But . . .

*Exasperation. Picks up glass and is about to pour liquid in it.
PURISHKEVICH stops him.*

PURISHKEVICH

Are you sure those are the ones we're supposed to poison?

DMITRI

Yes.

PURISHKEVICH

Picking up glasses of the other design.

I distinctly remember Felix Felixovich saying that we should be sure to poison these two glasses because he'd be drinking from one of those.

DMITRI puts down glass he's holding, takes glass from PURISHKEVICH. As he's about to pour poison into it.

I think.

DMITRI hands PURISHKEVICH bottle of poison. PURISHKEVICH reacts, hands it back to him. DMITRI picks up glass he originally had, pours poison into it.

DMITRI

What time have you got?

PURISHKEVICH

Ten minutes after midnight.

DMITRI

They should be here any minute. There's a gramophone in the other room. Put a record on and crank it up. Felix wants Rasputin to think Irina's entertaining so he has an excuse to keep him in here for a while.

PURISHKEVICH

Yes, highness.

PURISHKEVICH goes to adjoining room, cranks up gramophone. Sounds of Yusupov and Rasputin arriving.

It's them! Holy Mother of God!

PURISHKEVICH crosses himself. Gramophone begins to play. DMITRI crosses to adjoining room. YUSUPOV and RASPUTIN enter parlor.

YUSUPOV

It sounds like my wife's guests are still here. She didn't say when they were leaving. Ah, she's set out some refreshments for us while we wait. Would you care for anything?

RASPUTIN sighs.

You seem preoccupied, Grigorii Efimovich.

RASPUTIN

Yes. A strange thing happened this morning. A woman came to my flat.

YUSUPOV

Doesn't sound so strange to me.

RASPUTIN

No, little one, not that kind of woman. This one had her brains in her head, not between her legs—like the others. I knew like that—

Snaps his fingers.

—that she was different. The others were clucking around me like hens. I went straight to her and asked her what she wanted.

YUSUPOV

What did she say?

RASPUTIN

She asked me if I knew how much damage I was doing. She asked me if I knew anything about the history of Russia. She asked me if I loved the tsar. She asked me why the women treated me like they did, kissing my hand, calling me father.

YUSUPOV

What did you say?

RASPUTIN

I told her to ask the fools herself. If they want to take me for a saint and pay me to pray for them, I will not stop them. My soul is heavy, little one. The woman was right to question me—what do I know about history? I am an ignorant peasant. Simanovich tells me he has a dog that reads faster than I do. And my handwriting is so bad, half the time I cannot read it myself. But I do love the tsar. I am guilty—guilty for all the things I have done to them—the tsar, the tsaritsa, the children. Not that I meant to. Not that that makes any difference. The woman would not stay although I begged her. I felt good with her. Afraid, too. Then a second strange thing happened. A phone call came. He would not give his name. He said he called me to warn me. Someone will try to murder me. He is right, of course. They want me dead.

YUSUPOV

Who does?

RASPUTIN

You should know. They are probably in the other room right now—with Irina Alexandrovna. The aristocracy.

Spits.

Not a hard cock among them. They will kill me, and the throne will not last three months. And whose fault will it be?

YUSUPOV

Unnerved.

Would you like some wine? Ah, my wife is trying to flatter you. Pinot Gris. From my estate in the Crimea. Quite possibly the best wine in all of Russia.

RASPUTIN

Yes. Wine. Let us drink.

YUSUPOV reaches for poisoned glasses, hesitates, then takes unpoisoned one, fills it for RASPUTIN, then fills other unpoisoned one for himself. RASPUTIN drinks, belches, holds out glass for refill. YUSUPOV refills it. RASPUTIN drinks, takes bottle, refills glass again.

YUSUPOV

Would you care for a cake?

RASPUTIN

No, no. I have just eaten. And I do not care for cake—too sweet.

YUSUPOV

Ah.

Pause. RASPUTIN sighs again.

RASPUTIN

I am a stupid ass. Forgive me. I did not mean what I said about the aristocracy. I did not mean to insult your friends, or your wife—and especially not you, little one. I like you very much. Because you are not like the others. You invite me to your house, you give me your best wine, and good things to eat. Them—what do I get from them? Nothing. The peasant from Siberia is not good enough for them. Nothing—but plots against my life. Is this wine expensive?

YUSUPOV

If you could buy it, I suppose it would be.

RASPUTIN

I thought so.

YUSUPOV

Do you like it?

RASPUTIN

Not particularly. Forgive me. Maybe they are right. I act like a peasant because that is what I am. What right do I have rubbing shoulders with the likes of you? To tell you the truth, I would rather have a glass of Madeira—if it wouldn't be too much trouble.

YUSUPOV

Madeira?

RASPUTIN

Yes. Nothing special. Whatever you keep on hand for the servants. In the taverns, they say I like the stuff that does not look like much, but can fell an elephant. And to make it up to you, I will have one of those cakes.

YUSUPOV

Of course.

Offers cakes to RASPUTIN, who takes one. YUSUPOV watches. RASPUTIN eats.

RASPUTIN

With his mouth full.

Mmm! Not so sweet after all.

YUSUPOV watches. A beat.

Very good! But I need some Madeira to wash it down.

YUSUPOV

Yes. Of course.

YUSUPOV crosses to adjoining room.

DMITRI

Felix, what happened—?

PURISHKEVICH
Simultaneously.

Is he dead—?

YUSUPOV shushes them.

YUSUPOV

He ate the cake. Nothing happened!

DMITRI

Nothing happened?

YUSUPOV

Nothing.

PURISHKEVICH crosses himself.

PURISHKEVICH

Holy Mother of God!

YUSUPOV

He said it was very good. You poisoned the cakes, didn't you?

DMITRI

Yes.

YUSUPOV

All of them?

DMITRI

Yes.

YUSUPOV

Then why isn't he dead? Why isn't he dead?

PURISHKEVICH

The powers of darkness are marshaled against us.

DMITRI

What about the liquid? Didn't it work either?

YUSUPOV

I—I didn't try it.

Spot up on PROSTITUTE.

PROSTITUTE

An echo.

I see some sad cases.

YUSUPOV

I lost my nerve and gave him one of the glasses that wasn't poisoned.

PROSTITUTE

You're pathetic.

YUSUPOV

He should be dead, damn it.

DMITRI

Get back in there and get it down him any way you can.

YUSUPOV

No! I can't. I— . . .

PROSTITUTE

Pathetic.

YUSUPOV

Why isn't he dead?

DMITRI

Felix, just get him to drink the poison.

YUSUPOV

He wants Madeira. I need to get a bottle.

YUSUPOV exits.

PURISHKEVICH

What are we going to do?

DMITRI

Do you still have your revolver?

PURISHKEVICH

Yes, but what good will that do? If the man is protected by the devil—

DMITRI

The devil has nothing to do with it. We're going to telephone your "acquaintance" and try to find out what's wrong. Come on.

DMITRI and PURISHKEVICH exit. YUSUPOV reenters parlor.

YUSUPOV

Madeira—the worst we've got.

RASPUTIN takes bottle.

RASPUTIN

Ah, Madeira!

RASPUTIN kisses bottle.

YUSUPOV

Oh, allow me.

Takes bottle and glass.

Let me get you a fresh glass.

RASPUTIN

For cheap wine? No need to bother. Peasants are not so finicky.

YUSUPOV

No, I insist.

Fills poisoned glass.

You know the saying: Drinking two wines from the same glass is like sleeping with two women in the same bed.

RASPUTIN

This is a bad thing?

YUSUPOV hands glass to RASPUTIN.

Your hand is shaking, little one.

YUSUPOV

No.

RASPUTIN

A little Madeira to warm you up—eh?

YUSUPOV picks up his own glass.

Oh, not in the same glass!

YUSUPOV realizes only remaining glass is poisoned.

YUSUPOV

Imitating RASPUTIN's tone earlier.

For cheap wine? No need to bother. Peasants are not so finicky.

RASPUTIN laughs.

RASPUTIN

Your health.

YUSUPOV

Your health.

They drink.

RASPUTIN

Ah!

Extends glass for refill. YUSUPOV refills it. Spot up on PROSTITUTE.

PROSTITUTE

An echo.

You can't take a piss without peeing down your leg.

RASPUTIN drinks, extends glass for refill.

YUSUPOV

Tsk. This glass is chipped. Let me get you another one.

YUSUPOV fills remaining poisoned glass.

RASPUTIN

Three glasses for one man! In my village three people must sometimes eat from one bowl.

YUSUPOV

Your health.

RASPUTIN

Your health.

RASPUTIN drinks.

This wine is going to my head. It is very, very good.

PROSTITUTE

An echo.

You can't wipe your own shitty ass.

RASPUTIN extends glass for refill.

YUSUPOV

More?

RASPUTIN

More! Yes!

YUSUPOV

In that case, you have to eat another—no, two more cakes.

RASPUTIN

Ah. Well, it's a small enough price to pay.

Takes cake, gestures to YUSUPOV to refill glass.

RASPUTIN (cont'd)

More!

YUSUPOV

Not until I see you eat both cakes. As an aristocrat, I don't know much, but I do know never to trust a peasant's promise.

RASPUTIN eats. YUSUPOV watches.

RASPUTIN

There. Done.

YUSUPOV

Done.

RASPUTIN

Now the wine.

DMITRI and PURISHKEVICH reenter adjoining room. DMITRI carries two revolvers. PURISHKEVICH has a large crucifix.

DMITRI

Would you stop being such an old woman. He's just a man like you or me. A bullet through his heart will kill him.

PURISHKEVICH

And what if it doesn't?

DMITRI

What if the sky falls? What if the tsaritsa gives birth to a cabbage? What if, what if, what if.

RASPUTIN

What's that?

DMITRI

It's not possible. A man with a bullet in his heart dies.

YUSUPOV

It must be my wife's guests leaving. Excuse me. I'll see.

Crosses to adjoining room.

PURISHKEVICH

A man with a fatal dose of cyanide in his stomach should be dead, too, but he isn't.

DMITRI

We didn't test it. Maybe it wasn't any good—

YUSUPOV

Lower your voices. He won't die. He won't die. Wine. Cake. Both glasses. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. I'm trying to kill a man who won't die!

DMITRI

Felix, get a hold of yourself.

YUSUPOV

What am I supposed to do? What am I supposed to do?

DMITRI

Calm down. We'll have to shoot him. We have no choice. Your Browning.

Hands YUSUPOV revolver.

I have the deputy's. We have no choice.

YUSUPOV starts to cross toward parlor. DMITRI and PURISHKEVICH fall in step. At the door, he stops.

YUSUPOV

It won't work. He'll get suspicious if we all go trouping in there like a firing squad. I'll have to do it myself.

DMITRI

I'll be right here. All you have to do is call.

YUSUPOV crosses into parlor.

YUSUPOV

They've left. Irina will be here in a moment.

Crosses to chest of drawers, stares at crucifix on it. A beat.

Do you believe in the power of the cross to exorcise evil?

RASPUTIN

Little one, what is it that troubles you tonight?

YUSUPOV

This crucifix was made in the seventeenth century.

RASPUTIN

Yes, it is very beautiful, but the chest is much more useful.

YUSUPOV

Grigorii Efimovich, you would do better to look at the crucifix and say a prayer.

A beat, then RASPUTIN makes sign of the cross. YUSUPOV fires. RASPUTIN falls. DMITRI and PURISHKEVICH, still carrying crucifix, cross to parlor. DMITRI checks body.

DMITRI

He's dead.

He and PURISHKEVICH cross themselves.

It's over. Long live the tsar!

PURISHKEVICH

Long live the tsar!

PURISHKEVICH puts crucifix he's carrying on RASPUTIN's chest.

DMITRI

Long live Felix Felixovich Yusupov.

Embraces YUSUPOV and kisses him on both cheeks.

The greatest man of our age. Jack the giant killer.

To PURISHKEVICH.

Come on—we've still got work to do. Go to bed, Felix. We can manage.

DMITRI and PURISHKEVICH exit. YUSUPOV crosses to RASPUTIN's body, takes crucifix off RASPUTIN's chest. Spot up on PROSTITUTE.

PROSTITUTE

An echo.

So you had a wet dream. What do you want me to do about it?

YUSUPOV

Damn you.

Grabs RASPUTIN's shirt, shakes him.

PROSTITUTE

So you had a wet dream.

YUSUPOV

Damn you.

PROSTITUTE

Was this guy praying?

YUSUPOV

Damn you.

PROSTITUTE

Was he praying?

YUSUPOV

Damn you.

PROSTITUTE

Praying?

YUSUPOV

Damn—

RASPUTIN groans. YUSUPOV freezes. A beat.

RASPUTIN

Regaining consciousness.

Felix. Felix!

YUSUPOV tries to flee. RASPUTIN catches him, tries to strangle him. DMITRI and PURISHKEVICH reenter adjoining room carrying chains and canvas, unaware of what's going on. YUSUPOV breaks free, stumbles into adjoining room. RASPUTIN pursues, repeating ad lib:

Felix, I'll tell the tsaritsa!

YUSUPOV

Ad lib.

Help me! Help me! He'll kill me!

To DMITRI.

Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!

DMITRI fires at RASPUTIN. RASPUTIN recoils, recovers, and staggers forward. DMITRI fires. RASPUTIN recoils, recovers, and staggers forward. DMITRI fires a third time. RASPUTIN recoils, recovers, hovers a moment out of balance, then falls. DMITRI checks the body and is satisfied RASPUTIN is dead. PURISHKEVICH starts kicking the body.

DMITRI
To PURISHKEVICH.

Stop it.

YUSUPOV gags, exits. To PURISHKEVICH.

Stop it! Stop it!

DMITRI pulls PURISHKEVICH away.

Come on. Let's get this over with.

*He and PURISHKEVICH draw canvas over the body. YUSUPOV reenters.
DMITRI hands chains to PURISHKEVICH.*

Take these. I'll bring the car around.

PURISHKEVICH exits. A beat.

YUSUPOV

Outside vomiting in the snow, something occurred to me. Absurd, isn't it, how enlightenment comes at the most improbable moments. If you would understand the mysteries of life, forget ye contemplation and prayer—try puking your guts out in the snow.

DMITRI

Felix, what are you talking about?

YUSUPOV

I don't know. Nothing.

DMITRI

Go to bed.

YUSUPOV doesn't respond.

DMITRI (cont'd)

Felix?

YUSUPOV nods. DMITRI exits. YUSUPOV pulls canvas back, takes out revolver.

YUSUPOV

Firing after each line.

I am not the cause! I am not the cause! I am not— . . . I am not—

Puts gun to his head.

DMITRI
Running in.

Felix! Stop!

DMITRI wrestles YUSUPOV to floor.

YUSUPOV

No! Kill me! Kill me! Shoot me!

DMITRI wrests gun from YUSUPOV. YUSUPOV curls up, covers his face, moans in agony.

I'll never be holy, or cure a child, or— . . . I'm nothing. Nothing.

DMITRI

Come on, let's get you to bed.

He picks YUSUPOV up, carries him off. Lights fade.

In darkness. A bell tolls.

RASPUTIN'S VOICE

When you have heard the sound of the bell which will tell you that Grigorii has been killed, you must know this: If I am killed by my brothers the Russian peasants, you, Tsar of Russia, will have nothing to fear—neither you nor your children. But if it is your relations who have brought about my death, their hands will remain soiled with my blood. When you have heard the sound of the bell, Tsar of the Russian land, think of your safety. I shall be killed. I am no longer among the living. Pray, pray.

Slide: The Yusupov Palace. Petersburg. Evening, December 17, 1916.

The scene picks up where scene 2 left off. Lights up on YUSUPOV, still holding bloody towel. Night has fallen.

Spot up on SPEAKER.

SPEAKER

“If you bring forth what is in you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.” The Gospel of Thomas.

Spot out. DMITRI enters.

DMITRI

Felix? . . . Felix?

YUSUPOV

Distantly.

Yes?

DMITRI

Is something wrong?

YUSUPOV

What? Oh, Dmitri. No. I was . . . —I didn't notice it get dark.

DMITRI

Not angry.

Did you have to shoot the dog? Wasn't there enough blood last night?

Lights up elsewhere on stage as two MEN drag RASPUTIN's body on, having just pulled it from river. They cover body with canvas, exit.

YUSUPOV

How could I have been so blind? Not to see what I was. Not to see what I am.

DMITRI

It had to be done, Felix.

YUSUPOV

No, it didn't. What happened last night had nothing to do with the tsar—it had nothing to do with Rasputin. He died for my sins. He died because I saw in him everything I could never face in myself. He was nothing but the mirror on the wall.

Crosses to RASPUTIN's body, pulls back canvas.

Oh, Jesus.

Cradles RASPUTIN's body.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. O Felix, what have you done? Poor man. Poor man. Poor Felix.

Side of Rasputin. Spot up on SPEAKER.

SPEAKER

“Do you want to learn the language of the soul?”

YUSUPOV

Yes. Oh, yes.

SPEAKER

“I cannot teach you. No man can.”

YUSUPOV

Please.

MEN reenter to get body, look at YUSUPOV then at DMITRI.

DMITRI

Felix—

Tries to disentangle YUSUPOV from body.

YUSUPOV

No. No.

DMITRI

They have to take him.

YUSUPOV

No. We belong together. The saint and the sybarite. The sybarite and the saint.

SPEAKER

“For that is all we are—pilgrims, wanderers from the womb to the grave.”

DMITRI looks at MEN, shakes his head. They step back. Lights on them fade.

YUSUPOV

You had a beautiful quality in your soul, Grigorii Efimovich. He had a beautiful quality, Dmitri. If only his weakness and self-indulgence hadn't twisted it.

Kisses RASPUTIN. Lights fade. End of play.

Notes

The play has a lot of characters, but it doesn't need a lot of actors—eight are enough. I wouldn't suggest using more for the same reason I recommend a stage as bare as possible: the story ranges over so much time and space and involves so many characters that a certain leanness in the production serves to focus the action.

Only three actors are limited to single roles—those playing Yusupov, Dmitri, and Rasputin. The other five actors play all the remaining parts. Following these notes is a chart that suggests which actor to use for which role in which scene.

The Speakers are a special group of roles that can probably best be described as documentary characters. They're all based on real people, and their function is to provide the historical and cultural context for the action (they're a kind of Brechtian device). Speakers present rather than represent: they communicate the sense and emotion of the words they're speaking, but make no attempt to impersonate the figure they're speaking for. It's perfectly all right—in fact, it's a good idea—to have the actors appear in whatever costume they happen to be wearing, for the men to present women and the women men, and for the audience to see them drop one role and assume another.

A final note: Yusupov and Rasputin—the real ones—were physically not just different, but antithetical. Yusupov was fair, Rasputin was dark. Yusupov was slight and had delicate features; Rasputin was coarse and imposing. (Contrary to the image most people have of him, he was of only average height—about 5 feet 10 inches—but he was powerfully built.) Yusupov was elegant and sophisticated, while Rasputin was crude and unkempt (he rarely cut his hair, beard, or nails, although he did take to using a comb regularly once he moved to Petersburg; on the other hand, throughout his life he used his beard as a napkin). Physical contrasts such as those, like Richard III's supposed deformity, are too good to pass up.

Breakdown of doubling by scene:

Scene	Young Man	Young Woman	Older Man	Older Woman	Portly Man
1	...	...	...	...	...
2	Stefan	...	Inspector	Speaker	...
3	...	Speaker	...	Zinaida	Speaker
4	Johann	Speaker, devotee	Simanovich	devotee	Speaker, devotee
5	...	Speaker, Ecstatic	...	...	Speaker
6	devotee	Ecstatic	Simanovich	devotee	devotee
7	...	...	Emcee	...	...
8	...	...	...	Zinaida	...
9	...	...	...	...	...
10	devotee	Speaker	devotee	Elizaveta	devotee
11	Prostitute	Irina	...	...	...
12	...	Maria	Speaker	...	...
13	Prostitute	Speaker	Speaker	Zinaida	Purishkevich
14	Prostitute	Gerard	Fedorov	...	...
15	Speaker	Speaker	Speaker	Zinaida	Purishkevich
16	...	...	...	...	Purishkevich
17	Prostitute	Irina	Speaker	Speaker	Speaker
18	...	...	...	...	...
19	Prostitute	Speaker	Speaker	Speaker	...
20	Speaker	Speaker	Speaker	Zinaida	Purishkevich
21	...	...	Man	Zinaida	...
22	...	Irina	...	...	...
23	Prostitute	...	Man	Zinaida	...
24	...	Maid	...	Zinaida	...
25	Prostitute	...	Man	...	...
26	Prostitute	Speaker 1, Irina	Man, Speaker 3	Zinaida	Paper Seller, Speaker 2
27	...	...	...	...	Purishkevich
28	...	...	...	...	...
29	Prostitute	Speaker	Speaker	Zinaida	Purishkevich
30	...	...	...	...	...
31	Man	Speaker	Man	...	...