AERIAL PANORAMA - DAY TO NIGHT

A slow, steady, downward view. The camera seemingly floats as the curve of the globe passes beneath. Beginning in the green jungles of Sikkim in Northern India it crosses the Himalayas, down into Tibet and beyond to China - the zigzag line of the Great Wall clearly visible. Then the Gobi desert is flowing beneath, and as the light begins to fade, Mongolia gives way to the Russian Steppe, and as dusk turns to night we are over Siberia - gliding North over Lake Baikal, and onward across forested hills and valleys. A sense of utter remoteness in this silent landscape. Then a tiny shaved patch within the primeval forest - a bald rectangle of ground, crisscrossed by faint probing lights. The camera slows, and hovers.

EXT. SOVIET LABOR CAMP 105, SIBERIA - NIGHT

Out of the blackness, the momentary glimpse of a barbed wire fence, lit by the combing fingers of a searchlight. Another angle, and the silhouette of distant timber buildings is briefly etched, before the light passes and all is again in darkness. Closer, on a canvas-sided barrack building - ghostly shadows projected on the wall.

SUPER: 'SOVIET LABOR CAMP 105, SIBERIA, 1940'.

INT. BARRACKS, CAMP 105, SIBERIA - NIGHT

A long rectangular building, the walls lined with two tiered bunks of rough-hewn logs. In the centre - a metal stove with a chimney stretching out through the roof. A dim central bulb illuminates some 150 men, aged from 16 to 60, most sitting or lying on their bunks. Some wear scraps of army uniform, or civilian clothing, others in prison issued padded jackets. Some, from the Asian territories, still wear something of their national costume. Included among them are groups of foreigners from recently occupied countries and a Babel of languages drifts through the fetid air. It's a wide ranging mix of types, of race, of class. They're miserable, starving and ill. There is no camp camaraderie and they eye each other with indifference or suspicion. Most of these men are political prisoners, known as 'Politicals' or '58ers', after the section of the Soviet Penal Code that has put them here.

Near the stove, and contrasted with the 'Politicals', a group are gathered about a card game on a lower bunk. These men look healthier, and are further distinguished by their tattoos.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

These are the URKI, some dozen of them, regular criminals, and from their manner the undisputed masters of the block.


[All DIALOGUE IN THE CAMP IS IN RUSSIAN, SUB-TITLED, EXCEPT WHERE INDICATED THAT INMATES SPEAK ENGLISH].

BOHDAN
(In Russian)
What’ve you got? **

VALKA removes his coat, passes it to BOHDAN who examines it briefly.

BOHDAN (CONT’D)
Think I want your stinking lice farm?

VALKA
Polish tailor.

He shows the label.

VALKA (CONT’D)
See? From Krakov. Good as new.

BOHDAN nods to his minder who opens a battered wooden suitcase – a glimpse of hoarded food. The minder puts his hand on a lump of bread lying beside a length of sausage. BOHDAN nods. The bread is placed beside the coat.

VALKA (CONT’D)
And the sausage.

BOHDAN stares at him, shakes his head, ‘no’.

VALKA (CONT’D)
Bohdan, you’re a dog’s prick, I swear. I hope you die with an axe in your skull, and your balls ripped out.

The swearing is more or less a ritual and provokes no reaction.

VALKA (CONT’D)
OK. For the bread.

(CONTINUED)
BOHDAN shuffles and deals. He separates his cards with the long fingernail of his little finger. In a few rapid plays, VALKA is left coat-less.

Apart from the half-dozen thugs surrounding the players, the game is watched by two ‘Politicals’, who have just entered with a load of wood for the stove. The elder, SMITH, a hard-face man in his late forties, the other ANDREI, early twenties. VALKA signals to YURI who takes three ‘tailor-made’ cigarettes from his pocket, passes them carefully to VALKA who lays them before BOHDAN.

BOHDAN

For the bread.

VALKA

For the bread, and the sausage, bastard!

BOHDAN enjoying himself.

BOHDAN

Throw in that crappy shirt you’re wearing and I might be tempted.

Smiles from the gang. VALKA knows he’s being mocked but he’s desperate. His eyes flick down to the sausage. Then he takes off his shirt. He sits bare-chested, a tattooed portrait of LENIN on his left breast looking across at STALIN on his right. BOHDAN deals, and again VALKA loses.

VALKA’s mate YURI places a padded prison jacket over his bony shoulders, which he shrugs off irritably, then offers to BOHDAN.

BOHDAN (CONT’D)

I don’t play for regulation issue crap.

VALKA lights a cigarette.

BOHDAN (CONT’D)

All done, Valka?

VALKA tries to conceal his mounting tension behind a veil of cool.

VALKA

I go on credit.

BOHDAN

‘Credit’?

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (3)

VALKA nervously fingers an aluminium crucifix hanging by a cord from his neck. Etched on the cross a naked woman.

BOHDAN (CONT’D)

You’re already in debt.

VALKA’s anxious eyes. They settle on SMITH by the stove. He speaks in carefully articulated English.

VALKA

Come here.

SMITH returns the stare, then slowly approaches.

VALKA (CONT’D)

Take off your ... coat.

A silence, the criminal gang sensing a showdown. There’s something about SMITH, something steely, unpredictable. The fire crackles loudly. SMITH all the while holding VALKA’s stare.

---

[THE DIALOGUE RETURNS TO RUSSIAN.]

VALKA (CONT’D)

Worth shit!

He looks at SMITH’s companion.

VALKA (CONT’D)

You.

ANDREI goes pale, removes his coat to reveal a decent-looking patterned wool sweater. He offers the coat.

VALKA (CONT’D)

Let’s have the sweater.

ANDREI

Take the coat.

VALKA

I want the sweater.

ANDREI doesn’t move.

VALKA (CONT’D.) (CONT’D)

Your babushka make it for you? Come on, hand it over.

ANDREI is visibly shaking.

---
CONTINUED: (4)

ANDREI
You have no authority, here.

VALKA gets up, moves slowly to ANDREI, a smile on his lips. Then he casually reaches down as if to tuck his trousers deeper into his boots, reaches for something, and in one slow balletic movement, swings up and stretches out his hand to ANDREI, and ANDREI sobs and leans to one side.

BOHDAN
Was that really necessary?

In the dim light ANDREI’s face is grey as he sags to the floor. None of the other prisoners move to help him, nor do they show any sign of concern, as VALKA places the knife back in his boot and returns to the game. YURI steps forward and strips the sweater from the dead man, handing it on to VALKA, who passes it to BOHDAN. BOHDAN examines it professionally, wipes a little blood off his hands.

BOHDAN (CONT’D)
OK. For the sausage.

The game resumes.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE UP ON:

EXT. GRAVEYARD, FOREST NEAR CAMP 105, SIBERIA – NIGHT

Freshly dug graves. Close on one of these, stones piled in a mound over the grave. Hands into frame moving aside the stones. Wider to see two PRISONERS, breath steaming from their mouths, as they work quickly and quietly to uncover the grave. The older of the two is KHABAROV, late thirties, the other, LAZAR, late twenties. Furtive looks over their shoulders as an occasional blade of light from the watchtower throws them into silhouette.

KHABAROV
Here he is.

He reaches out to touch a human toe poking out of the rocks.

As they work –

Close on the face of ANDREI, as they continue to uncover his body.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

KHABAROV (CONT’D)
He’s not frozen yet, that’s lucky.

The remaining stones are removed to find the corpse dressed in nothing but underwear.

LAZAR
Damn! Picked clean! Bloody thieves.

KHABAROV
Keep your voice down, be grateful there’s anything left.

They reach into the grave to retrieve the underwear.

A5
OMITTED

AB5
INT WASH-HOUSE - NIGHT

LAZAR’s hands in water, some kind of tin sink, water running red as the underwear is rinsed clean of blood.

EXT. BARRACKS, CAMP 105 - DAWN

A Soviet guard beats a hammer against a hanging length of iron.

INT. BARRACK BUILDING - SAME TIME - DAWN

Close on the barrack stove, the underwear drying, KHABAROV’s hands into the frame.

As the prisoners rise, follow a hand to hand exchange of the set of underwear for a hank of tobacco. KHABAROV having done the deal splits the tobacco with LAZAR. Moving quickly to complete a second deal, KHABAROV swaps half his share of the tobacco with another prisoner for two slices of bread. He waits until the last of the men leave then he carefully breaks off a corner from one piece of bread, concealing the rest in a hiding place in the dirt at the base of his bunk - a glimpse of a cache of hoarded food and other items.
CONTINUED:

The saved morsel he places on his tongue, and closes his eyes. He doesn't chew, just lets it dissolve like the Eucharist. Then it’s gone in a slow swallow and he opens his eyes. He can hear a guard shouting outside, but he hesitates, carefully licking his fingers. He stares at his hand. Close on a spot between his fingers – there’s a crumb there. Into frame, the tip of his tongue as it slowly and carefully retrieves the tiny speck of bread.

EXT. LABOR CAMP 105, SIBERIA - DAWN

The camp seen in a distant view – surrounded by double wire, a collection of weathered timber buildings with watchtowers placed at regular intervals along the perimeter. In the distance, dense forest.

Entering frame a column of close to a hundred men march toward the camp. Following behind is a lorry, carrying six guards, supplies for their recent journey, and a camp stove.

EXT. CAMP GATES - DAWN

As they approach one of the prisoners looks up to an arch stretching across the gates – a hand-painted sign in Russian subtitled: ‘LABOR IS HONOR, GLORY, NOBILITY, AND HEROISM’.

The prisoner is JANUSZ, early twenties and he exchanges a look with the man beside him, TOMASZ, about the same age.

ANOTHER ANGLE shows a line of prisoners, five abreast, marching toward them on their way to work. They have their attendant guards and dogs and as the two columns pass each other the contrast between the half-starved, ill looking ‘old’ prisoners and the comparative health of the ‘new’, could not be more apparent – ‘is this what we are to become?’ on the faces of the ‘new’. We glimpse some of those already established – they include BOHDAN, and VALKA, and further back – SMITH and KHAHAROV. As they pass they look across to JANUSZ and TOMASZ, both Polish, and behind them to VOSS, a tall young Latvian with a mop of white-blonde hair. Behind VOSS – ZORAN, a blanket over his three-piece suit. Beside him, another Pole – KAZIK, at seventeen, the youngest in the group.

EXT. 'THE ZONE', CAMP 105 - DAY

The newly arrived prisoners assemble between the various buildings – an area known as the ‘ZONE’.
CONTINUED:

The camp is being expanded, and everywhere are piles of
cut timber, coils of wire, and work going on replacing
old canvas-sided barracks with new timber ones. ***

The Spring thaw has turned recently melted snow into
slush, and duck-boards are hastily laid to allow the
Commandant to cross to the assembled prisoners. He walks
with his subordinate and LAZAR who is FOREMAN of the new ***
camp construction. LAZAR carries a sheaf of plans, and ***
the COMMANDANT stops, studies a drawing, then impatiently
issues an order dismissing him. ***

The COMMANDANT mounts a box, accepting a folder of
documents from his subordinate, who has in turn received
them from the escorting guard. The COMMANDANT surveys
the prisoners before him. He’s a man in his fifties with
a bland but not unintelligent cast to his features.

He looks up from the collection of documents in his hand.

COMMANDANT
Enemies of the People! Look about
you...and understand...it is not
our guns, or our dogs, or our
wire, that forms your prison.
Siberia is your prison. All four
million square miles of it. Here
in Camp 105, you will work hard.
Work and you eat. Eat and you
live.

Close on JANUSZ and his friends.
Later, the newly arrived prisoners exit the wash-house, heads and beards shaved. In the background a glimpse of others waiting their turn. To one side of the wash-house, a pile of their luggage. A couple of guards sort through their belongings, pocketing the odd item. ** JANUSZ, VOSS and KAZIK, heads shaved, exit the hut. ** JANUSZ' attention is caught by the men working on replacing the old stockade wall with a new double barbed-wire fence. The overseer, LAZAR, gives a signal and a section of the old wall falls to the ground. **

The prisoners move in a line toward an open window in the side of the kitchen building. Here, under the watchful eye of the cook - one of BODHAN's men - a single serve of thin soup is slopped into their metal bowls. One has no bowl, so he uses his hat.

JANUSZ and his friends shuffle toward the window. Their attention is caught by a group of blind prisoners feeling their way along the side of the kitchen hut, a hand on the shoulder of the man in front.

VOSS (TO JANUSZ)
(In English)
Night blindness. Saw it in the transit camp...vitamin deficiency.

SMITH, a couple of places ahead in the line, turns on hearing English spoken.

As JANUSZ moves forward he watches several wild-eyed men scrambling about in a pile of kitchen slops thrown into the mud by the kitchen door. They find here the odd scrap of food, or simply soak their fingers in the slime, then lick them clean.
SMITH, having been served, moves away, retrieving a hoarded slice of bread from within his jacket. He dips it into the soup, raises it to his mouth when a corner of the bread drops to the ground. One of the garbage-eaters, dives for it, but SMITH is too quick for him, placing a boot over the scrap of bread. JANUSZ watches as SMITH picks up the bread, cleans off the dirt and eats it, his every move watched by the starving man at his feet. JANUSZ offers the remainder of his soup to the man who greedily drinks it. SMITH and JANUSZ stare at each other.

SMITH
(In English)
Planning to survive on half rations, son?

JANUSZ surprised by the American accented English.

JANUSZ
(In English)
He’s an old man.

SMITH
I’m an old man. But I’ll be alive in the morning. He won’t.

He goes to move away, hesitates, turns back to JANUSZ.

SMITH (CONT’D)
‘Kindness’. That can kill you here. You’ll learn that.

He places the last morsel of bread in his mouth, and chewing slowly, turns and walks away.

KHAHAROV (V.O.)
(In English)
American.

JANUSZ turns to find KHAHAROV beside him looking at SMITH’s retreating back.

JANUSZ
American?

He looks back to SMITH walking away toward the barracks.

KHAHAROV
Stalin doesn’t like foreigners. That includes Poles. You are Polish aren’t you?

JANUSZ still staring after SMITH.

(continues)
JANUSZ nods.

JANUSZ
Yes, I am.

Khabarov
I love you Poles, your burning sense of injustice, your yearning for freedom.

(He offers his hand).

Khabarov (cont’d)
Khabarov. Andrei Timofeyevich.

JANUSZ looks at him – he wears a distinctive coat, trimmed with fur - something refined about him, ‘aristocratic’ even. He offers his hand, and they shake.

JANUSZ
Weiszczek, Janusz.

Khabarov
And your ‘prayer’, may I ask?

JANUSZ
58.10

Khabarov
58.10 ... A spy?

JANUSZ
That’s what they told me.

Khabarov
Ten years?

JANUSZ
Twenty.

Khabarov indicates himself.

Khabarov

They begin walking toward the distant barrack buildings.

Khabarov (cont’d)
And you were in the cavalry?

JANUSZ’s suspicions aroused.
JANUSZ

(Sharply)

How could you know that?

Khabarov

Oh there’s that Polish spirit! I observe things – your demeanor, your, may I say, certain ‘swagger’. ‘Cavalryman’, that’s how I’d cast you.

He leans forward, whispers.

Khabarov (cont’d)

We’ve been waiting for you...Poor Poland, Hitler invades from the West...World War...days later, Stalin from the East.

JANUSZ relaxes, smiles.

JANUSZ

How could we know Russia would stab us in the back?

Khabarov

And you were on the Soviet side of the line, and they arrest you, and thousands like you. Accuse you of spying...And they torture you? You signed a...‘confession’?

JANUSZ

I wouldn’t sign, so they tortured someone else.

Khabarov

Usual tactics – they torture a close friend who names you as a spy – a neighbor? Your old school teacher? A friend?
Khabarov looks into Janusz’s eyes – a pain beyond speaking. Khabarov tactfully changes the subject.

Khabarov (cont’d)
I was an actor – moving pictures. In my last picture I played an aristocrat. They arrested me after the film’s release.

Janusz
Why?

Khabarov
It was claimed I was elevating the status of the old nobility.

Janusz
You got ten years for a performance in a film?

Khabarov
I’ve had better notices.

And they enter their hut.

INT. BARRACKS – NIGHT

The men sitting or lying on their bunks, a little conversation here and there but most have withdrawn into themselves, just glad to have survived another day. Janusz looks about him, Khabarov still by his side. Janusz’s attention is caught by the tattooed group playing cards by the stove. Valka is playing Bohdan again, his losing streak continuing. Khabarov speaks just above a whisper.

Khabarov
The ‘Urki’.

Janusz
Who are they?

Khabarov
Professional criminals, your ordinary run of the mill murderers and thieves, don’t stare at them. The guards let them run things in here. They are to be feared.

Janusz
Why would they let them ‘run things’?
Khabarov
They are considered the by-product of bourgeois society and therefore 'Friends of the People'. We political prisoners are 'Enemies of the People'. Russia has become one vast prison - slave labor. You see even this camp is expanding to take in another thousand prisoners.

Janusz looks over to a group of Asiatic prisoners.

Khabarov (cont'd)
From the far reaches of the Soviet Empire - all scooped up in the net like so many minnows, poor creatures.

Janusz
And do any ever wriggle out of the net?

Khabarov considers a moment, then leads him away from the surrounding prisoners. He lowers his voice to a whisper.

Khabarov
You should be more careful. Stalin has eyes and ears everywhere, even in here.

He leans closer to Janusz.

Khabarov (cont'd)
In a camp like this you'll be dead in a year. If not literally then in spirit.

Janusz
And how long have you been here?
CONTINUED: (2)

KHABAROV
Eleven months and twenty-nine days.

KHABAROV offers his hand.

KHABAROV (CONT’D)
Good night, friend.

OMITTED

EXT. THE ZONE, CAMP 105 – DAWN

In bone-chilling cold the prisoners form up in their brigades as a guard begins counting them. JANUSZ looks toward a barrack building where the bodies of several men who died overnight are being carried out and laid on the ground – among them the ‘garbage-eater’ from the night before. JANUSZ glances over toward SMITH who stares impassively ahead. GUARD NO. 1 is visible, checking paper work at the camp gates. ***

EXT. EDGE OF FOREST, ABOVE MINE – DAY

Follow a bird as it hops from branch to branch, pausing every now and then to listen to the sounds of axes and saws drifting from the forest floor.

JANUSZ and his friends – VOSS, TOMASZ, KAŻIK and ZORAN – work at trimming felled trees of branches, and then sawing them into lengths.

SMITH and his gang work nearby. He watches JANUSZ peeling strips of bark from a pine-tree and stuffing them in his pocket.

KHABAROV, too, works here with a third gang, cutting and trimming the trees.

MINE SITE – DAY

On the valley floor, below towering cliffs, some 150 men haul rocks in wooden wheelbarrows from the mine entrance across a maze of tracks to waiting trucks.

A fire blazes in a 44 gallon drum set up in an open-sided wooden shelter. Here BOHDAN and his criminal associates supervise the work. VALKA has fallen on a slippery slope within the Urka hierarchy following his losses and growing debt.

(CONTINUED)
BOHDAN amuses himself by throwing stones at VALKA, warning him away from the fire like a stray dog.

Guards placed at vantage points, stamp their feet to keep warm, occasionally shouting at the exhausted prisoners to work harder or move faster. Death is casual here. A man falls. If found to be dead he is left where he fell, bodies to be collected and counted at the end of the day.

EXT. MINE ENTRANCE - DAY

JANUSZ and his group dump a load of trimmed logs in a bay by the mine entrance. He hesitates as the others move away, staring into the black hole leading into the mountain. Eerie sounds drift up from deep below. A look of utter dread on his face.

EXT. EDGE OF FOREST, ABOVE MINE - DUSK

The prisoners work hard to fill their quotas - VOSS swings his axe like a demon, but even with his contribution the cut pile of logs is a long way from the mark showing at the top of the storage bay.

BOHDAN, the overseer, moves amongst the various working gangs, measuring their completed piles of logs. JANUSZ's group are still only half way to a full quota. KHABAROV leaves his gang and approaches JANUSZ.

KHABAROV
(In English)
Quickly now, half-quota means half-rations. Quota is Law here.

JANUSZ
No-one could meet that quota even if they were fed and rested.

KHABAROV calls for them to follow him. He leads them at a jog deeper into the trees - pointing out various shapes buried in fallen leaves and drifts of snow. He clears away the leaves and snow to reveal a pile of old grey cut timber.

KHABAROV
Cut last year and never collected!
Quickly hide them inside your fresh cut timber!

BOHDAN moving closer. It becomes a race to transport all the old logs to their pile and to conceal them inside the fresh cut logs.
CONTINUED:

They just make it, but BOHDAN notices the end of an old grey log poking out from the center of the stack. He stops his measuring of their quota. A tense moment, then he nods and leaves. KHABAROV crosses from his gang to join them.

JANUSZ

He knows.

KHABAROV shrugs.

KHABAROV

He knows, but he doesn’t care, as long as his arse is protected. This is ‘Tufta’. Bull-shit.

JANUSZ nods his thanks.

OMITTED

EXT. A DIRT ROAD THROUGH A FOREST - DUSK

The long march back to camp. JANUSZ peers left and right toward the beckoning forest. Beside him ZORAN senses his friend might just take off then and there. He places a restraining hand on his arm, as a guard’s voice drifts through the still air:

GUARD NO. 1

A step to the left, a step to the right, and I shoot!

INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

VOSS and KAZIK are by the stove unwinding their long foot-cloths that most wear in place of socks. KAZIK hangs the damp cloths on the stove to dry and sets out to examine his toes, which are in poor shape, suffering the early stages of frostbite. TOMASZ sits nearby sketching the scene on a sheet of birch-bark, using a piece of charcoal.

WIDER to see VALKA, looking on in admiration. TOMASZ is uneasy despite the implied compliment. VALKA hands him a sheet of paper, and the stub of a pencil.

VALKA

(In English)

You do for me.
CONTINUED:

TOMASZ
You want me to make a sketch of you? **

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (2)

VALKA
No. Not me.

TOMASZ puzzled.

24

A BUNK NEAR THE STOVE - SAME TIME

BOHDAN lies on his bunk, surrounded by several of his
tattooed henchmen listening to a story. The storyteller,
looking rather uncomfortable, is ZORAN. His Russian is
good but for a moment his memory fails him as he
desperately tries to recall the next beat in the story.

BOHDAN
Keep going and you'll get some
bread - so how does this 'Long
John Silver' find the treasure?

YURI
I knew a type like that. Remember
Igor? He had one leg.

BOHDAN
Shut up.
(Then to ZORAN)
Go on.

The story resumes, ZORAN giving it all he's got, when
VALKA appears a sketch in his hand. He passes it to
BOHDAN. CLOSE on the sketch - a lusty naked woman.
VALKA makes a gesture implying masturbation. BOHDAN
examines the drawing before licking the back of it,
lifting his shirt, sticking it to his chest, then
lowering his shirt again. He waves VALKA away.

25

JANUSZ'S BUNK - SAME TIME

CLOSE on a shirt.

The shirt lies on JANUSZ's bunk and it's moving. A tiny ***
subtle movement, but just perceptible, the movement
caused by hundreds of lice.

WIDER,
to see this is JANUSZ's view, KHABAROV there too,
watching over his shoulder.

KHABAROV
For the lice I have an old folk remedy.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

He picks up the shirt and walks toward the door of the barrack, indicating JANUSZ should follow. As he passes his bunk he scoops up his own shirt.

EXT. CAMP PERIMETER - NIGHT

KHABAROV leads him toward the wire. From somewhere deep in the bowels of the earth, a low sinister rumbling, the very ground itself shaking momentarily. JANUSZ stops, while KHABAROV keeps walking.

KHABAROV

The mines. They blast at night.

He pauses to let JANUSZ catch up, then looking furtively about him, he crouches by a drift of snow.

KHABAROV (CONT’D)

Shirt.

JANUSZ hands him his shirt. He scrapes a hole in the snow, buries the shirt, leaving only the tip showing. He does the same with his own shirt.

JANUSZ

We’re going to leave them here overnight? Why?

KHABAROV

You’ll see.

JANUSZ stares up at the wire, then to a distant watchtower, its searchlight briefly illuminating him. KHABAROV follows his eye-line.

KHABAROV (CONT’D)

It can be done.

JANUSZ holding his breath.
KHABAROV (CONT’D)
There is a way through the wire.

JANUSZ stares at him.

KHABAROV (CONT’D)
Lazar, you’ve seen him, my
associate, overseer of
construction.

He nods toward an area where stockade wall is being replaced with double wire.

KHABAROV (CONT’D)
Few ever escape the camps. I’ve waited for someone like you, someone with the strength and will to see it through.

JANUSZ (Excited)
Can’t go West – apart from the Soviets, there’s the Germans. East? All Soviet right to the Pacific...it would have to be South?

KHABAROV nods, beams at him like a teacher with a very bright pupil.

JANUSZ (CONT’D)
They marched as due North from the railway, I glimpsed a lake, but I have no idea where we are.

KHABAROV squats down, JANUSZ joins him, and smoothing out a drift of snow KHABAROV sketches a map of a lake and indicates the location of the camp.

KHABAROV
We believe about 500 kilometers north of Lake Baikal.

JANUSZ
We could follow the edge of the Lake, it runs due South.

KHABAROV (Nodding)
Then on to the Trans-Siberian Railway. Cross that and you’re close to the Mongolian border. And freedom.

(Continued)
JANUSZ’s eyes burn with excitement. KHABAROV takes his arm, as if drawing energy from the younger man.

KHABAROV (CONT’D)
Spring is already upon us. It would have to be next autumn.

JANUSZ
Why wait?

KHABAROV
It’s 1000 kilometers to the border, maybe more. We need careful planning, stock-pile food. I’ve already begun - trading, dealing. You could do the same. In the Autumn the weather is predictable. We need the early snows to cover our tracks.

JANUSZ nods.

JANUSZ
What about my friends?

KHABAROV
If you trust them. But they won’t all survive.

JANUSZ
But they’d die free men.

KHABAROV offers his hand, and they shake.

INT. BARRACK - NIGHT

KHABAROV and JANUSZ enter, having buried the shirt in the snow. KHABAROV indicates LAZAR, sitting on a bunk, and whispers.

KHABAROV
That’s Lazar. He was architect. In Kiev. Now he is grave robber - me too. (Whispers) We sneak out at night. Through the wire.

He moves away.

EXT. CAMP - DAWN

To the echoing clang of the hammer and iron, JANUSZ and KHABAROV hurry to where they buried their clothing.
CLOSE on the tips of the cloth showing above the snow—a teeming mound of lice on each.

WIDER, as they shake their clothing free of the lice, and hurry over to join the assembly of prisoners at the kitchen servery window for their meagre breakfast ration. At the same time the morning ritual of carrying out the bodies of those who have died overnight is underway. The corpses are stacked like cords of wood for burial. JANUSZ pauses, a muttered prayer on his lips. Then he’s passing the hospital barracks—the usual crowd of desperately ill prisoners hoping to be admitted, to be excused another day of the killing work, the majority turned away. He joins the line at the kitchen. The days’ bread ration is being weighed and issued. If not exactly 500 grams a little is added or subtracted, the cook keeping trimmed slices, placing them in a tin.
EXT. THE ZONE/CAMP EXTERIOR - DAWN

Having been counted once, inside the camp, the brigade of prisoners is marched outside the gates where the armed guards who will escort them to work are waiting. GUARD NO. 1 begins counting them again. It’s much colder than usual, prisoners beating their arms to keep warm, a high wind blowing. Khabarov stands with JANUSZ.

Khabarov
Temperature is dropping. Below 60 they’re not supposed to send us out. Know how to tell the temperature? You see frosty fog — it’s 40 below. If you exhale easily but in a rasping fashion? 50 below. When your spit freezes? More than 60 below.

He hoiks and spits. Close on the ball of spit mid-air. Freeze-frame. It’s a solid glittering crystal of ice.

OMITTED

EXT. ROAD THROUGH FOREST - DAY

The freezing wind has picked up considerably, driving sleet against the column of prisoners, forcing them to a halt in an open snow-covered area. The column halts, the guards anxiously confer — ‘to go back or continue on’? The prisoners shiver in the biting cold, some collapse, their fellow prisoners unwilling or unable to help them. JANUSZ and his friends find themselves near SMITH and watch as he hails a GUARD.

Smith
(Shouts in Russian)
We need to make shelter.

Guard No. 1
Who asked you?

Smith
We’ll freeze to death in less than an hour.

Guard No. 1
I couldn’t give a fuck if you drop dead right now.
SMITH
Yes, but lose 200 men and you’ll
have some forms to fill out.
Could go badly for you.

The GUARD dimly considers this. The prisoners begin to
stir, some shouting out that they should turn back. The
GUARD alarmed, orders the prisoners to the ground – other
guards level their rifles as the mass of men lay down on
the freezing ground. All but SMITH.

SMITH (CONT’D)
We could move into the forest,
find shelter!

GUARD NO. 1
Lie down!

The GUARD is about to leave when to his astonishment, and
that of the other prisoners, SMITH begins to walk toward
the forest edging the road. The GUARD draws his pistol.
On the ground ZORAN lies beside JANUSZ, as they watch the ***
unfolding drama.

GUARD NO. 1 shouts for SMITH to return, others raise ***
their rifles, waiting for his order to fire. He is
conflicted, and after a tense moment gestures for them to
lower their weapons.

GUARD NO. 1 (CONT’D) ***
Let the prisoners take shelter in
the trees! Shoot anyone who makes
a run for it!

JANUSZ stares after SMITH, admiring of his reckless ***
courage.

FOREST, LATER - DAY AB30

The men work frantically collecting fallen timber. SMITH
watches as VOSS picks up a massive log, places it on his
shoulder and carries it to where JANUSZ is supervising
the building of their shelter. Most of the other
prisoners have just piled snow up around bundles of
sticks to make windbreaks, but JANUSZ is building
something more elaborate. SMITH’s eyes miss nothing as
he notes JANUSZ’s skill and the way the others work as a
team under his direction.

(CONTINUED)
Some distance away VALKA huddles alone against the trunk of a tree. He too, is watching JANUSZ organize shelter for the group.

LATER STILL.

JANUSZ calls KHABAROV to join them, but he declines politely. He moves on to find SMITH - invites him back to their improvised shelter. As SMITH sits, ZORAN offers his hand.

ZORAN
You are brave man - Dragan Zoran, Yugoslav ... this is Janusz Wieszczek ... the youngster is Kazik, both Polish.
(They nod to SMITH)

VOSS
Andrejs Voss, Latvian.

ZORAN
(It's a League of Nations.) English our common language!

SMITH nods.

JANUSZ
And you're ...?

SMITH
Smith.

JANUSZ
Your first name?

SMITH
Mister.

JANUSZ
Mister Smith?

SMITH
That's right.

As the blizzard grows in intensity, JANUSZ reaches into his pocket for strips of pine-bark collected earlier. He hands them out to his companions. They watch as he chews on the bark. The others follow his example.

Watching from a short distance away is GUARD NO. 1. He takes note of the group as future troublemakers.
INT. BARRACKS - DAWN

The men are stirring, struggling up to face another day, when the door opens, and in a flurry of snow, GUARD NO. 1 enters with another soldier. He orders SMITH, JANUSZ and his group to fall out. As he passes SMITH -

GUARD NO. 1
(In Russian)
You don't like being out in the cold, do you Cowboy?

And as he moves away SMITH mutters to JANUSZ.

SMITH
Might as well have shot us yesterday.

JANUSZ and the others look at him.

SMITH (CONT'D)
We're for the mine.

INT. MINE - DAY

A labyrinth of twisting tunnels leading down into the frozen earth. Dim lights silhouette ghostly figures working with pick and shovel. Occasionally the muffled sound of a distant explosion as a gallery is blasted yet deeper. Mingling with these eerie sounds something more sinister - the hacking coughs of those who've done the most time in this frozen hell.

The man working beside JANUSZ wields a pick, JANUSZ shovelling out the rock as it breaks up. The man pauses to light a smoke. His fingers have moulded themselves into the shape of his pick-handle - they are like hooks, the man unable to straighten his fingers. He holds the cigarette with the tips of his fingers, as if his hand was an artificial limb. JANUSZ looks around desperately, fighting off an overwhelming feeling of claustrophobia. Despite the cold, sweat beads on his forehead.

INT. DEEPER IN THE MINE - DAY

KAZIK and a man known as 'THE PROF', drag a cart laden with rock up a steep incline. They wear horse collars attached to the cart by leather harnesses.
THE PROF's wasted frame and sallow complexion are in contrast to his lively intelligent eyes. He says something to KAZIK in Russian. He shakes his head. He doesn't speak Russian. THE PROF tries German, then English.

KAZIK
English, yes.

They share a smile.

PROF
I was only saying, these collars - the same used by ancient Egyptian people.

KAZIK
Yes, but on their horses probably.

PROF
No. Same. On people.

KAZIK
How do you know that?

PROF
I was professor of Egyptology.
Leningrad University.

KAZIK manages a look at his companion, before putting even more effort into dragging the load.

INT. ANOTHER PART OF THE MINE - DAY

A man, enveloped in clouds of white steam, points a long pipe at the frozen rock and gravel - the heat making it easier for the pick and shovel men to dig. This is the 'POINT-MAN', and he opens and shuts valves on the pipe-stem which regulates the hot steam that travels along pipes leading back to a primitive boiler. Men try to warm themselves by working near the POINT-MAN, and when the guards are not around they clutch the pipes in their hands gaining a few moments of precious warmth.

SMITH knows how to work the system and has found a spot here working beside the POINT-MAN. He looks across to see JANUSZ staggering up the slope toward the distant mine entrance, where a guard can be seen silhouetted against the light. He watches a moment, something not right about JANUSZ. He lays his shovel aside and hurries after him.
33 INT./EXT. TUNNEL - DAY

JANUSZ scrambling toward the surface. He stumbles, falls to his knees. He looks down, sees something on the ground.

JANUSZ’S VISION - DAY

Something buried in the dirt and rubble - paving stones. He clears away the debris to reveal a stone path. Looking up he sees the path leads to a gate framed by a hedge. His P.O.V. as he moves up the path to the gate. His unseen hand opens the gate. Now the view is of the path as he walks forward - a series of worn flagstones, then the camera tilts up to see a closed front door. A pan to the left of the door - to see a loose brick in the wall.

34 INT./EXT. TUNNEL - DAY

CLOSE on JANUSZ, as SMITH is suddenly beside him, grabbing his arm and swinging him into the darkness of an adjoining tunnel.

SMITH
Are you crazy? They’ll shoot you.

JANUSZ
Got to get out!

SMITH stares at him. He’s delirious and begins to shake with cold. SMITH grabs his shoulder and drags him back to where the POINT-MAN works, thrusting JANUSZ’s hands around the pipe. The POINT-MAN waves them away but SMITH bribes him with a slice of bread. SMITH turns back to JANUSZ - the warmth of the pipe beginning to have its effect.

JANUSZ (CONT’D)
It can be done.

SMITH
What can be done?

JANUSZ
He knows a way through the wire.

SMITH slaps a hand over his mouth, glancing at the Point-Man, before dragging JANUSZ further away.

(CONTINUED)
JANUSZ (CONT'D)
(a whisper)
He has a plan.

SMITH
Who?

JANUSZ
His name is Khabarov.

Now SMITH understands.

SMITH
The actor.

JANUSZ
You know him?

SMITH
He has no intention of escaping.

JANUSZ
What?

SMITH
He's a liar. Been here for years - seeks out new arrivals, me when I first came here. He just likes to talk about escape. I've known others like him.

JANUSZ
Why should I believe you?

SMITH
(shakes his head)
Nothing is for nothing in the camps. From you he gets your energy, your spirit. You feed his 'dream' of escape. You help keep him alive. He's no more than a leech.

JANUSZ
You're a cold bastard, Mister.

SMITH
(shrugs)
I'm still alive, that's all I know. But I won't be in six months. And neither will you. Not in the mines. So, if you're serious about making a run for it - I'm in.

(continued)
CONTINUED: (2)

JANUSZ
I thought you were a loner?

SMITH
Can’t be done alone. Besides you have a weakness that could be useful to me.

JANUSZ
And what’s that?

SMITH
Compassion. If anything happens to me, I’m counting on you carrying me.

JANUSZ knows he’s not joking.

EXT. CAMP KITCHEN, SAME TIME - NIGHT

It is snowing heavily, and after swallowing their soup, JANUSZ and his friends walk back to the barracks. KAZIK stumbles, and is helped to his feet by VOSS. He limps on to the barrack a hand resting for support on VOSS’ shoulder. JANUSZ is preoccupied and he hesitates at the door, turns, and looks back. After a moment staring at the ground he hurries inside.

INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

JANUSZ has a puzzled KHABAROV by the arm, guiding him back to the door.

EXT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

He points to the ground - CLOSE on footprints as they rapidly disappear under the heavy snowfall.

JANUSZ
Tonight.

KHABAROV looks from the footprints to JANUSZ, a horrified look on his face.

KHABAROV
It’s a passing storm!

JANUSZ
It’ll do, it’ll cover our tracks.

(CONTINUED)
KHABAROV
Impossible! We need preparation, detailed plans, maps ...

JANUSZ
(overlap)
The timing will never be perfect, they won’t expect it now!

KHABAROV
But the distances! And food! What about food?

JANUSZ
We’ve been trading, the American is with us. He has food, you have food.

KHABAROV
How long will that last?

JANUSZ
I’ve spent half my life in the woods and mountains. We’ll live off the land.

KHABAROV
It can’t be done!

JANUSZ shocked at the change in his friends’ demeanor, the appalling realization that SMITH was right about him. He seizes his arm.

JANUSZ
How do we get through the wire?

KHABAROV
I don’t know what you’re talking about.

JANUSZ
Your friend, Lazar, he knows doesn’t he?

A look of fear crosses KHABAROV’s face. Someone behind JANUSZ. JANUSZ turns. VALKA, a few paces away watching them. KHABAROV scuttles back inside the barracks. JANUSZ hesitates a moment, then follows.
INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

In the last minutes before lights out the would-be escapees make discreet preparations. Clothing and other items are traded for food and tobacco. The COOK and BOHDAN are at the center of the camp black-market and most of the trading is done with them. TOMASZ trades more pornographic sketches with BOHDAN while KAZIK tries to trade his scarf for a pair of boots - his own being in poor shape. VOSS sits beside him, and notices that KAZIK does not look directly at his shoes or the scarf, but is doing everything by feel. As they move away VOSS whispers to him.

VOSS
You can’t see, can you?

A look of panic crosses the boy’s face.

KAZIK
(Whispers)
Don’t leave me behind!

VOSS conflicted.

KAZIK (CONT’D)
Promise me, Andrejs! I could keep a hand on your shoulder by night, and in the day I can see just fine. I won’t hold you up. Please don’t tell them. I’ll die here.

JANUSZ and SMITH sit in a darkened corner working on LAZAR. They want to know how to get through the wire. He is reluctant until SMITH produces a wristwatch from his boot. The strapless watch, of good make, settles the deal, just as the light flickets and goes out plunging the barracks into darkness.

EXT. THE CAMP - NIGHT

Several shots of the wind driven snow whipping about the buildings.
INT. BARRACKS - LATER THAT NIGHT

The wooden building creaks and heaves like a ship at sea as the storm builds into a fully fledged blizzard. The sounds of the sleeping men, the usual cries and groans, hacking coughs, all mix into the howl of the storm. CLOSE on the conspirators lying awake - SMITH, VOSS, KAZIK, TOMASZ and ZORAN. SMITH looks across to JANUSZ, catches his eye. A signal from JANUSZ, 'not yet'. KHABAROV too, is awake. He jumps at any unexpected sound, checks his horde of food in the hiding place at the base of his bunk, as if expecting at any moment to be attacked and robbed. He sees a shadow. Someone moving about near him, a look of terror on his face.

LATER,

JANUSZ lies on his back listening to the storm. A movement beside him, then a knife pressed against his throat. It's VALKA. He grins, steel-capped teeth, his cross dangling from his neck. JANUSZ goes still.

VALKA
There are no secrets here.

JANUSZ
What do you want?

VALKA
The game goes against me. Small debt - lose fingers. Big debt, they take head. Me, big debt. But one thing I never gamble is my Wolf.

He removes the knife from JANUSZ's throat, tilts the blade to show a wolf's head incised into the blade.

VALKA (CONT'D)
In forest you need knife to survive. Without? A miracle.

He leans in close to JANUSZ's ear.

VALKA (CONT'D)
You need a knife, and I need miracle to get me out of here.

With a conjurer's ease he spins the knife in his fingers and arches his eyebrows - 'Deal'?
EXT. CAMP PERIMETER - DAWN

Heavy snow still falling as shadowy figures run toward the wire. Shouted commands and the beam of a searchlight isolates them - not the fugitives, but a group of guards. They've found a gap in the wire. A great yelping and baying as the dog-handlers join them, releasing the dogs into the gap, then following them toward the distant forest.

EXT. FOREST, SIBERIA - DAWN

Then seven fugitives, now including VALKA, weave in and out of the trees at a fast jog. Snow whirls about them, as, gasping for breath, they attempt to keep up with JANUSZ. In the rear KAZIK holds onto VOSS' rope belt, occasionally stumbling, but VOSS has him up and on his feet fast enough to keep up with the others.

JANUSZ pauses briefly every now and then to study the moss growing on the North side of tree-trunks, before plunging on Southward.

FURTHER ALONG ...

They top a rise to a clearing and pause to catch their breath. The snow continues to fall but JANUSZ will allow no rest and moves off without a backward glance.

FURTHER STILL ...

JANUSZ is out in front when SMITH stops, resting his hands on his knees, gulping for air. The others stop too, VALKA dropping to his knees. JANUSZ runs back to VALKA, drags him to his feet.

JANUSZ
Get up. Or we die right now. You know how fast dogs travel.

He turns to the others.

JANUSZ (CONT'D)
Run, damn you! Run!

He moves to SMITH.

JANUSZ (CONT'D)
Is it time for me to carry you?

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

SMITH waves him away, gets up and continues.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE FOREST - DAY

A feeble light penetrates the forest as day begins. The snow still falling heavily as the men stumble into a deep depression, and facing a steep climb find they can go no further. KAZIK turns his face to the light. His sight is returning with the day and he nods gratefully to VOSS.

In the deep stillness the sound of distant voices. They look about them. Hard to tell the direction of the sound. JANUSZ is on his feet - there's plenty of fallen timber but no obvious place to hide. He draws a circle in the snow, mimes digging to the others, then turns to VALKA, whispers.

JANUSZ

Knife.

VALKA has never taken an order from a 'Political' in his short life.

VALKA

What?

JANUSZ

Your knife.

With a glance to the others he reluctantly draws his knife from his boot and passes it to JANUSZ.

While the group furiously dig, JANUSZ collects and trims fallen timber. As the hole deepens, JANUSZ begins to make a trellis roof. The voices change direction. They go still. Are they surrounded? They resume their digging with greater intensity, the hole now more than a meter at its deepest, JANUSZ placing the branches to cover their hide.
44-46 OMITTED

A47 EXT. FOREST - DAY

Several angles on the forest. Utter stillness. Light snow falling.

AB47 EXT. THE HIDE, FOREST - DAY

Camera moves slowly toward their hide, wisps of vapor rise from below the surface. The Russian voices are closer now.

AC47 INT. THE HIDE - DAY

It's like an Indian sweat-lodge as the fugitives sit shoulder to shoulder in a tight circle, ears straining, sweat running down their faces. The voices closer still. A tense moment, and then they are passing, the voices fading into silence.

47 EXT. COUNTRYSIDE, SIBERIA - NIGHT

The strong wind drives snow and sleet horizontally, and as they push forward they cover their faces to keep the snow from throat and lungs. VALKA, his arm wrapped defensively across his eyes, staggers and falls to his knees. JANUSZ turns back, drags him to his feet. KAZIK hangs onto the back of VOSS' coat, VOSS at times literally dragging him along.
EXT. A TREE, FOREST - NIGHT

With VALKA's knife JANUSZ cuts a square of bark, pulls it from the tree, cuts two triangular holes some centimeters apart, then rams the base of the bark piece into VALKA'S collar. It's a crude mask.

EXT. THE PROCESSION, FOREST - NIGHT

The group, all now wearing the improvised snow-masks, push forward against the wind, looking like a tribe from some distant age dressed in ceremonial masks.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE FOREST - NIGHT.

JANUSZ in the lead, some fifty paces ahead, but he's stopped, thigh-deep in the snow, as still as a statue. The others catch up, puzzled. SMITH calls to him, lifts his mask. He's asleep. SMITH shakes him back to consciousness, all the while the storm continues at full force.

SMITH
We've got to make fire!

JANUSZ
No! You saw how close they were!

KAZIK sinks to the snow, then ZORAN.

SMITH
We die either way, might as well die warm.

EXT. FOREST, LATER - NIGHT

A hole scraped out of the snow and a wind-break of fallen timber, is all they can manage in their exhausted state. Down in the hole JANUSZ is striking a spark from a flint. Some are fading fast, KAZIK keeps falling asleep, to be shaken awake by TOMASZ. MR. SMITH is splitting wood into ever finer shavings, ready to feed a nascent fire. Still the damp kindling will not catch.

They draw closer together for warmth, draping their arms over each other's shoulders. ZORAN's head drops to his chest. TOMASZ shakes him.

TOMASZ
Sleep and you die. Tell us a story.

(CONTINUED)
The other look to ZORAN, and fighting the desire to sleep, he begins. VALKA loves a good story, and despite their desperate situation he listens with the attention and concentration of a small child.

ZORAN
Once upon a time, in the days of wooden ships, there was a great storm in far away seas. A merchant ship hurried toward big rocks, lightening in the sky, the waves as high as house-tops. Very, very cold, brrrr! The ship smashed onto the rocks, the sailors cried in fear, called out to God, but they all drowned. All but one, Mr. Robinson Crusoe. He woke to find himself all alone on a desert island. For many years he lived without any human companions, until one day he saw something shocking! What was it? A human footprint. He was no longer alone. But was the stranger friend or foe? Another ship wrecked sailor? Or, a cannibal?

All turn as a flicker of flame begins at the base of the kindling. While JANUSZ blows at the flame, MR. SMITH feeds in small shavings. The group watch with the awe and wonder usually reserved for child-birth. Then everyone is making a contribution – adding a few leaves, or tiny twigs, like offerings, as the fire grows and spreads.

EXT. FOREST, CAMPFIRE - DAWN
A comfortable blaze, the group, minus JANUSZ, sleep or drowse in the life-giving warmth, when a pile of snow lands on the fire. The others react. It’s JANUSZ. He heaps on more snow and the fire sputters out.

By the time the others are on their feet JANUSZ is almost out of sight and they hurry to catch up, fearful of being left behind.

EXT./INT. SHELTER, FOREST - DAY
Ruins, deep in the forest. From the overgrown rubble they build a shelter, discovering as they do, evidence that this was once a small, remote, Soviet gulag.
LATER, the fugitives sit shoulder to shoulder in a tight circle. They shiver in their padded jackets, rub frozen limbs. VALKA looks up to find SMITH staring at him.

VALKA
You stare at me like the snake at the rabbit ... or is it the other way 'round?

VALKA turns to the others with a silver-toothed smile, indicates SMITH.

VALKA (CONT'D)
He teach me English. Speak good, huh? Bread for words, wasn't it cowboy?

SMITH holds his gaze a moment before being distracted by a thumping sound outside. The group go very still. A second thump, overhead this time. VALKA draws his knife. A trickle of snow falls through the vent in the roof.

JANUSZ
Snow, falling from trees.

They relax a little.

KAZIK
When can we travel by day?

JANUSZ
When I say.
KAZIK glances at VOSS.

TOMASZ
How far have we come?

JANUSZ
Twenty, thirty kilometers.  **

ZORAN
Is that all?

VALKA
Less, if we’ve been going in circles, like the chicken without its head.

TOMASZ
(to JANUSZ)  **
How can you tell we’re heading South?

ZORAN
He reads the trees, don’t you?

JANUSZ
Something like that.

He spreads out a piece of cloth on the snow at his feet.

JANUSZ (CONT’D)
Alright, let’s see what you’ve got.

No one moves. JANUSZ reaches into his own pockets, emptying the contents onto the cloth – several slices of bread, half a kilo of buckwheat, some dried meat, a swatch of tobacco. SMITH goes next with a larger store of bread and a little salt. VOSS has a collection of small fish-heads which he adds to the store. TOMASZ, KAZIK and ZORAN make their contributions. They stare grimly at their limited food supply. Various other items are added – a razor blade, a length of cord, a piece of barbed-wire, etc. SMITH picks up the barbed wire, examines it.

JANUSZ (CONT’D)
Valka?

VALKA reluctantly reaches into his coat – something familiar about it with its distinctive fur-lined collar.

JANUSZ (CONT’D)
That’s Khabarov’s coat.
CONTINUED: (3)

He smiles at JANUSZ as he produces a bulging sack from inside his coat.

VALKA (CONT’D.)

Yes...and...

** From the sack he produces KHABAROV’s hoarded supply of food and other items. Off JANUSZ’s reaction - **

VALKA (CONT’D)

He was going to inform. Don’t worry. I talk to him. Everything o.k.

He puts the goods back in the sack and goes to place it inside his coat. **

JANUSZ

We share.

JANUSZ reaches out for the sack of food. VALKA glances at the others, then passes it to him. TOMASZ has already begun to organize seven slices of bread laying one of VOSS’s fish heads on each one. He hands them out. They eat in silence, savoring every bite. ZORAN removes the fish-head, passing it back to TOMASZ. Then he places a thin layer of snow on the bread like a canape. He eats daintily, his little finger extended like a dowager at a tea party, raising a smile from his exhausted companions.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT.

The wind is rising, whipping flurries of snow through the trees. SMITH and JANUSZ are in the lead. SMITH refers back to VALKA.

SMITH

You’ve made a bargain with the Devil.

JANUSZ

(terse)

Have you got a knife?

They move on in silence, JANUSZ not liking his bargain any more than SMITH.

LATER, THAT NIGHT

SMITH finds himself walking beside VALKA.
CONTINUED:

VALKA
For direction he looks at grass
and mosses, what's that? I swear
to God he better know what he's
doing.

SMITH
You should be grateful you're here
at all.

VALKA
Gratitude is for dogs.

He moves away from SMITH, his eyes fixed on JANUSZ, who
is again studying moss on the side of a tree.

EXT. FOREST - DAWN

The group in the shelter of the trees. The sky is
overcast but at least it's not too cold. Everywhere
about is deep snow from the recent storm. TOMASZ
prepares a meal from their dry rations, small portions
for men who have expended so much energy. KAZIK examines
his swollen blistered feet. VALKA has his boots off,
shaking them.

VALKA (TO KAZIK)
Clean inside boots, foot-cloths.

KAZIK copies him.

VALKA (CONT'D)
Man on run - one tiny piece of
sand can make cripple, I swear to
God.

The others are listening, and some do likewise.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

With lengths of wood as 'ski-poles', the group begin to
make up lost time. VOSS has lashed his rope-belt to
KAZIK who walks behind him. SMITH wonders about this,
but says nothing. They pause at the top of a rise
amongst the trees, on hearing the sound of dogs howling
from behind.

JANUSZ
Wolves ... it's only wolves.
CONTINUED:

Relieved, they continue forward.

ZORAN
'Only wolves', great.

THE SUN

From behind clouds, the sun appears, shafting light toward the earth.

EXT. RIDGE, MOUNTAIN TOP, SIBERIA - DAY

The upturned faces of the fugitives. Sun worshipers all. JANUSZ a short distance away. He plants his 'ski-pole' in the snow, marking the tip of its shadow with a pine-cone. They watch as he draws a line in the snow from the second marker — about a foot in length. Then he stands, and with the toe of his left foot at the first pine-cone and the toe of his right foot at the end of the line in the snow, he points, calling to them.

JANUSZ
South! To Lake Baikal!

Cheers from the watching group.

JANUSZ (CONT'D)
Now we travel by day.

They move off down toward a distant valley, ZORAN the last to leave, doubt on his face as he studies the series of seemingly endless forested hills stretching before them.

OMITTED

LATER STILL - DAY

The group push on with renewed energy. VALKA hurries to keep up with JANUSZ.

VALKA
You are the 'Pakhan'.

JANUSZ
What's 'Pakhan'?
VALKA
Boss of criminals.

JANUSZ
We’re not criminals, we’re escaping from criminals.

VALKA
I swear to God you win my respect with your sticks and pine-cones. I’ll stand between you and death.

JANUSZ
You want to be my bodyguard?

VALKA
It’s the Urka way. You have me ... and you have the Wolf.

He touches the knife in its bark sheath at his belt. JANUSZ increases the pace, VALKA pushing himself to keep up with his ‘Pakhan’.

EXT. LATER, FIRESIDE - DUSK

The fugitives settle for the coming night. As TOMASZ unpacks their meagre food supply JANUSZ sketches a map on a piece of birch-bark. The other sit exhausted, some close to sleep, except SMITH who is working the piece of barbed wire from KHABAROV’s stash.

JANUSZ (V.O.)
I have us here somewhere.

Above Lake Baikal their former camp is marked. South of the lake, the Trans-Siberian Railway, a little further South the Russo/Mongolian border. With a twig he points to a spot seemingly not far from the prison camp.

WIDER to see the disappointed faces of the group – the distance yet to cover overwhelming.

JANUSZ (CONT’D)
(to VALKA)
Are you going all the way?

VALKA
To Mongolia? No. I go further. To America.

The first SMITH has heard of this. TOMASZ turns from examining their store of food.

(CONTINUED)
TOMASZ
We have food for another week.

VALKA
We need meat.

VOSS
I can make traps.

JANUSZ
We'll be moving too fast to wait for traps.

VALKA
We find farms, villages, get food there.

JANUSZ
There's a bounty on our heads.

VALKA
We steal it. At night. They never know.

VOSS
We're not thieves.

VALKA
(laughs)
Then I'll steal it, and I'll eat. You can watch.

SMITH is working the length of barbed-wire someone added earlier to their communal store. His fingers are bleeding as he struggles to separate the strands of wire.

ZORAN (TO SMITH)
What's that?

SMITH
Barbed-wire.

ZORAN puzzled, but TOMASZ gets it.

TOMASZ
He's making a fish-hook.

JANUSZ smiles at SMITH's ingenuity.

JANUSZ
It's how we'll survive isn't it, Mister?

ZORAN
Fish? I don't eat fish.
SMITH
Then you’ll die.

KAZIK has a far-away look in his sight-less eyes. He speaks in Polish to JANUSZ.

VOSS
What does he say?

TOMASZ
He asked Janusz if he believes in God’s forgiveness.

This has come from seemingly nowhere.

SMITH
Save your philosophy. Concentrate on keeping up with us instead.

He gets up and goes in search of more wood, the others surprised at his cold tone.

The rest of the group also begin to prepare their camp. Most gather wood while TOMASZ, the ‘quartermaster’, makes their meal, and JANUSZ the fire. VOSS keeps an eye on KAZIK who, demonstrating his independence while it’s still light, and his desire to contribute, returns with a load of wood, turning back into the forest for more. Others gather wood, and as the light fades, begin to take up positions by the growing fire, roll cigarettes, etc.

VOSS looks anxiously for KAZIK. He has not returned.

OMITTED

EXT. FOREST – DUSK

KAZIK lost. He moves along a right to left trajectory, i.e. North, heading away for the campsite, his sight beginning to fade with the light.

EXT. CAMPSITE – NIGHT

The group range out from the fire calling KAZIK’s name. VOSS turns to JANUSZ.

VOSS
He has night-blindness.
EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

KAZIK stumbling through the whiteout. He stops. Did he hear his name? He moves on, pleased to find by his side the Professor from the mine.
CONTINUED:

KAZIK
I thought I was alone!

PROF.
I've been walking with you for some time.

KAZIK
I'll just sit for a minute.

The PROF. sits beside him.

PROF.
Not far to go.

He points, and KAZIK sees - the Pyramids of Giza, deep inside the fog.

KAZIK
We made it. We really made it.
Isn't that something.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAWN

They find KAZIK not a hundred yards from where they camped. The weather has broken, the fog gone. He sits looking toward them, his bare feet stretched out before him, his eyes wide open. On his lips a frozen smile.

EXT. A CAIRN OF STONES - DAY

They stand by his grave.

JANUSZ
A free man died here today.

Amens are muttered. The group remain by the grave reluctant to leave. All but VALKA who looks about restlessly.

VALKA
Young always die first.

The others look at him.

VALKA (CONT'D)
In the camps.

He looks at their somber faces.
CONTINUED:

VALKA (CONT'D)

Still, one less mouth to feed ...
what? You're all thinking the
same thing.

He wanders away toward the embers of their fire.

A STREAM, FOREST - DAY

SMITH hauling in fish, hand over hand. The others
watching in fascination.

TOMASZ

Where did you learn to fish like
that?

SMITH

Lived in the woods a while.

VALKA

In America.

SMITH

In America.

ZORAN

And how did you come to be in
Russia?

SMITH

I made a mistake.

EXT. SIBERIAN WILDERNESS - TIMELAPSE - DAY/DUSK/DAWN

High, wide, panoramas, the tiny figures of the fugitives
threading their way through the trees heading steadily
Southward.

EXT. SIBERIAN WILDERNESS - DAY

Close on Nature naturing — birds calling from high
branches, bees buzzing, a grub crawling along a leaf.
And a large animal grazing. Or what appears at first to
be an animal.

It's VALKA, on all fours, picking up and eating bugs.
Others are there grazing too. The weeks have taken their
toll and they look thin and starving. We see in detail
their search for anything edible: hands digging out
roots and berries of various kinds which are tasted with
a tentative nibble and sometimes spat out if too bitter;
CONTINUED:

VOSS has made a small trap – a noose rigged on a branch and just beyond it a nut. A squirrel watches.

Not all food is shared in this extreme situation and some, with a furtive look about them, eat what they find. **

EXT. CAVE – SAME TIME – DAY

They are camped at the mouth of a cathedral like cave, and here TOMASZ amuses himself by sketching on the cave wall using charcoal from the fire. Among portraits of the group are scenes from life in Camp 105. On the fire a stew of water and pine-needles bubbles away.

ZORAN watches idly from where he lies near the cave entrance.

ZORAN
They’ll find our bones and your drawings a hundred years from now, and say – ‘a fine example of Early Gulag Man’.
CONTINUED:

TOMASZ
Shut up with your jokes! Go and find food like the others.

ZORAN
You do the shutting up! Drawing like you’re on holiday. I’m sick.

TOMASZ
I cook. They find food. What do you ever do? Nothing!

ZORAN
I make them laugh.

TOMASZ
Not any more.

ZORAN turns away from him, curling up into a foetal position.

EXT./INT. CAVE - DUSK

SMITH walking through the vast cave, his attention caught by two massive holes in the roof. He walks on toward their camp outside an opening at the far end.

EXT. CAVE - DUSK

TOMASZ has water boiling on the fire. He calls to the others –

TOMASZ
What do you have? Come on, no holding back.

SMITH approaches from the cave, hands over two small fish, his day’s catch. VOSS steps forward with a dead squirrel. VALKA has nothing. TOMASZ reaches for their cooking pot cooling by the fire. He passes a cup to JANUSZ.

TOMASZ (CONT’D)

Pine-needle tea.
CONTINUED:

JANUSZ sips, reacts to the bitterness of the brew, then passes it on.

EXT./INT. CAVE - NIGHT

Sleeping figures by the fire. TOMASZ tosses and turns, muttering in his sleep. JANUSZ is awake as is VALKA who sits close beside him. A whispered conversation -

VALKA
Who will be first?

JANUSZ looks at him.

JANUSZ
You mean the first to die?

VALKA nods, indicates TOMASZ.

VALKA
I think that sucker, the artist. But better if it was him.

He nods toward ZORAN.

JANUSZ
It might be you.

VALKA shrugs.

JANUSZ (CONT’D)
Why ‘better’ if it’s Zoran?

VALKA squeezes the flesh of his upper arms.

VALKA

JANUSZ shakes his head, ‘no’.

VALKA (CONT’D)
Mister only gets little fish now. We must have meat, or we die. You’re the Pakhan, you’ve thought of it. We all have. That’s why you brought extra people isn’t it? For food? An old Urka escape trick. I swear to God you were an Urka in another life.

JANUSZ
We’ll get food when we get to Lake Baikal, plenty of fish there.

(CONTINUED)
VALKA
You said we should have seen Lake a week ago. We’re lost, Pakhan.

JANUSZ stares into the fire as VALKA lays down to sleep.

LATER, NIGHT

It is ZORAN’s turn on watch and he stands near the entrance to the cave, his blanket about his shoulders, looking out into the still night. Behind him a low growling sound, coming from deep in the cave. He turns, a look of terror on his face. He can see nothing but a dim light deep in the cave where moonlight penetrates through two large holes in the cave roof. He wakes JANUSZ, alerting him to the sound. JANUSZ in turn wakes VALKA, and after taking burning sticks from the fire they walk back inside the vast cave toward the source of the sound, VALKA drawing his knife.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

The dim light shows a wolf-pack growling as they pick at a carcass on the cave floor. They drop their bones and face the intruders, baring their fangs, all now growling. On a signal from JANUSZ they rush the wolves, who run back toward another exit from the cave. MR. SMITH, TOMASZ and VOSS come hurrying to join them, woken by all the barking and shouting.

VALKA falls on part of the carcass, cutting off chunks of raw meat. The others do likewise. Wider on the group, down on all fours chewing on the remains of the kill, only JANUSZ stands back, watching them.

EXT./INT. CAVE - EARLY MORNING

Some sleep on, others stir, their movements slow and listless. They are near the end. This has been JANUSZ’s point of view as he packs a few scraps of food into his pockets and picks up his staff. Those awake stare at him.

JANUSZ
I’ll be back in a week - if I find the lake. If not, you’re on your own.

VALKA
I come too.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

JANUSZ
(shakes his head)
I’ll travel faster alone. Mr. Smith will be the Pakhan while I’m gone.

JANUSZ turns and with a nod of the head ‘follow me’, to SMITH, he moves off.

EXT. SOME DISTANCE FROM CAMP - DAWN

Now out of earshot, JANUSZ turns to SMITH. SMITH knows what it’s about.

SMITH
I know. Valka.

JANUSZ
Don’t let him out of your sight.

SMITH
Good luck.

As JANUSZ heads off into the forest.

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY, SIBERIA - DAY

A magnificent vista – a broad plain sweeping toward a distant line of hills. It’s a beautiful clear day and the lone figure of JANUSZ, dwarfed by the landscape, walks steadily Southward.

EXT. ROCKY HILLSIDE - DUSK

Sheltering from the wind on the leeside of a hill, he takes pine-cones from his pocket, breaks them open and eats the seeds. Then he’s up and off again, leaning heavily on his staff.

EXT. A BARREN PLAIN - DAY

The weather changes from a clear Spring morning to cold and overcast as gusts of wind whip down from distant slopes. JANUSZ bends into the wind, his pace slowing. He stumbles, sinks to the ground, fighting the desire to let go, to give himself to sleep, and the swift death that will surely follow. His eyes begin to close. Then he sees it. Just ahead of him. The gate. The gate from his vision in the mine. He struggles to his feet, staggers on –
CONTINUED:

JANUSZ’S VISION: A repeat of his earlier hallucination - the click of the gate latch, the flagstones at his feet as he moves down the path. (All the while the accompanying sound is of JANUSZ’s laboured breathing in the present ‘reality’). He’s at the front door, camera pans to the loose brick in the wall beside the door.

EXT. CAMPSITE, FOREST - DUSK

JANUSZ staggers back into camp, half dead and shivering with cold. VALKA is quickly beside him with SMITH and VOSS.

JANUSZ
Three days from here. South by West.

He collapses. VOSS shouts for the fire to be built up, hot water to be boiled. He feels his pulse, checks his eyes.

VOSS
Stones! Gather stones! Heat them in the fire!

EXT. CAMPSITE, STILL LATER - NIGHT

Throughout the night they take turns replacing the hot stones surrounding his body and massaging his feet and hands. On one such occasion SMITH finds himself at JANUSZ’s side. JANUSZ opens his eyes.

SMITH
What’s the ‘brick’?

JANUSZ
What did I say?

SMITH
Something about a loose brick.

JANUSZ nods, offers no explanation.

SMITH (CONT’D)
You know if you don’t pull through soon we’ll have to leave you.

JANUSZ
I expect nothing less.
CONTINUED:

SMITH
So you better get better quick if you want to see home again.

JANUSZ
We could've used you in the Polish army. Fired you out of a cannon.

He closes his eyes, lapses back into a deep sleep.

OMITTED

EXT. HILLSIDE, SIBERIA - DUSK

It's a beautiful evening as the file of travellers climb toward the crest of the hill.

EXT. MOUNTAIN, SIBERIA - DUSK

From the crest, a panorama of Lake Baikal - a massive body of water stretching to the horizon.

The fugitives rest, and consider the next stage of their journey.

SMITH
(to JANUSZ)
We're going to have to follow the Western shore.

ZORAN
But look, it bends like that - won't it take us longer?

JANUSZ
See all those settlements on the other side? We'd never get through.

VALKA
I swear to God, those mother-fuckers would cut off our heads, take them to secret police. Get more for us than they would for their fish.

JANUSZ, impatient to move on, is already on his feet. ZORAN rolls onto his back with a groan.

OMITTED
EXT. A TRACK, LAKESIDE - DAY

SMITH and VOSS are last in line as they move cautiously along a dirt track. SMITH keeps looking back over his shoulder.

VOSS

What is it?
CONTINUED:

SMITH signals JANUSZ to stop, while holding a finger to his lips for silence. JANUSZ joins him, followed by the others.

SMITH
We’re being followed.

JANUSZ
Followed? Where?

SMITH
Fifty yards back. A man on his own. May have seen us – crossed into the trees beside the track.

A silence as they consider their options. VALKA draws his knife.

VOSS
No killing.

VALKA
(to VOSS)
No? I think you’ve killed before.
You say too many prayers for an innocent man.

VOSS looks uneasy.

SMITH
He gives us away, the soldiers will be on us in no time.

JANUSZ
Valka, go back on the other side of the track, then come up behind, in case he makes a run for it.

VALKA moves off, gliding through the trees on the left of the track. The others wait a beat, then move into the trees on the right side of the track picking up fallen timber as weapons.

JANUSZ is in the lead when in a clearing not fifty paces ahead, a figure steps out from behind a tree. JANUSZ stops, holding up a hand for the others to stay where they are. He stares at the small figure - a young woman. There’s a glimpse of a dirty skirt under her coat, a scarf tied loosely about her neck. Wisps of chestnut hair stray out from under a moth-eaten fur hood. She looks frightened and desperate.
From her waif like appearance, it's hard to tell her age - an old thirteen or a young sixteen?

The men discreetly drop their improvised weapons. She looks ready to make a run for it on seeing VALKA with his drawn knife. JANUSZ gestures for the others to fall back, as he cautiously approaches, uttering reassuring words.

EXT. PATHWAY, WOODS - LATER - DAY

The others sit smoking by the pathway, watching as JANUSZ crosses back from the GIRL to join them.

He says something to TOMASZ in Polish. A rapid exchange between them.

SMITH
What? What is it?

JANUSZ
She's Polish. Been following us for several days.

VALKA
What does she want?

JANUSZ
Food? Protection? She's been too afraid to approach us until she was sure we weren't Russians.

SMITH
She wants to travel with us?

JANUSZ
She's on the run, like us. Escaped from a Russian collective farm.

VALKA
I swear to God I know this type - street gypsies, there are thousands like that, less use than a dog!

JANUSZ looks back to the GIRL who watches them from the clearing.

VALKA (CONT'D)
Pakhan. Don't do this.

JANUSZ
She's starving.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

SMITH
We can't feed ourselves.

JANUSZ
Zoran?

ZORAN
Maybe it's kinder to leave her.

VOSS
She's been sent to us. We can't leave her.

SMITH
We have no choice.

JANUSZ knows this is true.

EXT. THE CLEARING, WOODS — DAY

The GIRL watches as JANUSZ approaches. From the way he doesn't look at her she knows their answer. JANUSZ stands before her a moment. They speak in Polish (sub-titled).

JANUSZ
I'm sorry.

He reaches into his bag, passes her a fish and some nuts and berries. It's all she can do to refrain from eating it right away.

JANUSZ (CONT'D)

What will you do?

THE GIRL

Go back.

He guesses at what this might mean.

JANUSZ
If we had enough food ...

She stares at him, nods, then walks back toward the path, returning in the direction from which she came.

EXT. PATHWAY, WOODS — DAY

The group walk in silence, the encounter with the girl and their subsequent decision weighing heavily on some. VOSS keeps looking back over his shoulder.
LATER, the group walking out in the open by the lake when their attention is caught by the sight of a flock of ravens circling and diving on something up ahead – just out of sight around a bend in the lake.

SMITH is the first to see it – a full grown reindeer bogged to the shoulders in the soft mud by the lake’s edge. As they approach the ravens rise in a great flapping of wings. The group circle the wild-eyed beast, pathetic in it’s attempts to pull itself out of the bog, faced now with this new and more deadly threat. VALKA draws his knife.

TOMASZ already has a fire going when the rest of the party appear dragging the carcass of the reindeer on an improvised sled made of driftwood. VOSS watches a moment as preparations are made to butcher the animal, then he turns and hurries back in the direction from which they came. JANUSZ watches him. He knows where he’s going.

VOSS moving fast beside the lake, then onto the track, running now, retracing their steps.

TOMASZ butchers more meat from the reindeer using VALKA’s knife, while SMITH sets up a wooden rotisserie on the fire assisted by ZORAN. JANUSZ and VALKA are part way through skinning the beast when they pause on hearing footsteps. Around the point comes VOSS, followed by the girl. As they approach, an expectant silence.

VOSS
Her name is, Irena.

They eat in silence, savoring every mouthful. We hear the sounds of eating – bones sucked to the marrow; fingers licked; bones crunching.
IRENA is like a half-starved animal, eating with absorbed concentration, the others sneaking looks in her direction as they savor the fresh killed meat.

EXT. CAMP SITE, LAKESIDE - DAWN

JANUSZ has been on the last watch of the night, and as dawn breaks he approaches his sleeping companions. He stares down at IRENA, sleeping like a child by the fire. Slowly the others stir, all moving slowly and quietly, not wanting to disturb her sleep.

EXT. LAKESIDE, CAMP SITE - DAY

ZORAN has set himself up as camp barber - trimming hair and shaving heads using the razor-blade inserted in the end of a stick, and for shaving cream, a chunk of fat from the reindeer. JANUSZ has just been shaved and trimmed, the last but for VALKA. While the others wash themselves and their clothes, ZORAN calls for VALKA, who approaches reluctantly and sits on the rock before the barber.

VALKA
Why do we do this?

ZORAN
So we don’t look like thieves and robbers.

ZORAN approaches him, blade in hand.

ZORAN (CONT’D)
Very still, please.

He tilts VALKA’s neck, seemingly the better to shave him. In fact, he enjoys teasing VALKA and his movements are slow and ominous, VALKA clearly nervous.

EXT. MONTAGE, CAMP SITE - DAY/NIGHT

Various scenes of maintenance, repairs and the breaking down of the reindeer into anything of use during their journey. Two fires burn - their regular cooking fire and one for the smoking of meat.

VOSS; Cleaning bones of shreds of meat then beginning the construction of a bone frame for a backpack. He later gets part of the skin to form the bag attached to the frame. Still later he collects nearby vines, rolling them up for future use.

(CONTINUED)
TOMASZ; In between sketching scenes of his friends at work he skims fat from the pot filled with boiling bones, and lays out strips of meat given to him by VALKA to dry in the sun, part of the jerked meat they will carry as a long term food supply.

VALKA; With the 'Wolf' he separates sinews and tendons from the beast, to form much needed bindings for their journey. He also cuts meat for their jerked supply, or to be smoked.

SMITH; Makes firstly a large bone needle, then later makes repairs in his clothes.

ZORAN; After cleaning his teeth with a twig, hangs his suit on a driftwood hanger and is seen brushing it with a branch from a pine tree. TOMASZ teases him and suggests he do something useful. Later this leads to him sorting the boiled bones into various sizes, a sort of accountant of the 'bone-bank'. 'Customers' come to him looking for bones or teeth for various uses.

JANUSZ; Works on the reindeer skin. With SMITH's help he stretches it to dry on a driftwood frame. Later, he cuts a piece off and gives it to VOSS for the back-pack. He also works scraping the skin of strands of unwanted meat and fat.

IRENA; Sleeps and eats. It is only at dusk one day she seems to come to life and moving to the lakeside washes her clothes and hair. The men try not to stare, and whether their thoughts are carnal or not, whether she reminds them of family or girlfriend, they are all affected by her transformation from boy/urchin, into a young woman when she returns washed, and wearing the dress she has carried rolled-up on her back.
SMITH and JANUSZ some distance from the campsite collecting wood. By the fire ZORAN leads the ‘Survivors Band’. He has them drumming on logs, tapping sticks, harmonizing, amid much laughter. JANUSZ watches IRENA. Then he turns to SMITH.

JANUSZ
She’s educated. Speaks good English. And French.

SMITH
That right.

JANUSZ
You don’t like her, do you?

SMITH
Speak to Valka about her. He doesn’t even think she’s Polish.

JANUSZ
I did speak to him. And the others. They agree she comes with us.

SMITH
It’s decided then?

JANUSZ
You disagree.

SMITH
Apart from food she’ll slow us down. There’s no room for sentimentality. You know that.
And he turns, moving back to the fire with his load of wood.

EXT. PATHWAY, WOODS — DAY

Refreshed and revived and laden with their supplies from the deer, they make their way along a narrow dirt track by the lake. IRENA is aware that the main opposition to her joining with them comes from VALKA and SMITH. SMITH she knows is the more important, and she tries to keep up with him. Occasionally catching his eye, she tries to charm him with a coquettish smile beyond her years.

EXT. RIVER/LAKE — DAY

A river flowing into the lake presents an obstacle. They walk along the edge to where the river begins to narrow, but here it’s still frozen, and a quick test with JANUSZ’s staff shows it to be too thin to take their weight. They look upstream—a distant figure of a man, a hunter possibly, a shotgun over his shoulder, on their side of the bank. There’s clearly no choice but to swim for it. They make hasty preparations, removing outer clothing, except shirts and trousers, tying their boots about their necks. IRENA watches.

SMITH
Can you swim?

IRENA
Yes, Mister.

SMITH
You wouldn’t lie to me?

IRENA
I’m not lying, Comrade.

That was a slip of the tongue, and SMITH is made uneasy by it.

SMITH
And don’t call me, ‘comrade’.

With a shout the group plunge into the icy water, swimming one-handed, their packs held above water level in the other. It’s only when they reach the other side they realize IRENA is still on the opposite bank. The others urge her to swim across. She hesitates a moment then runs upstream to where the river is frozen.

(CONTINUED)
They watch in astonishment as in a series of leaps and bounds she’s out on the ice heading for the opposite bank. Ice cracks beneath her feet and a couple of times it seems she’ll fall in, but with a last great leap over a section of free-flowing water she makes it to the other side, hurrying down to join the others a broad smile on her face. She looks defiantly at SMITH. JANUSZ is worried about the man having seen them, and urges them to follow him into the tree-line.

They scramble up a steep, forested slope, with occasional backward glances to see if the hunter is following. There’s no sign of him.

Some time later the group, still a little damp, walk by the lake. IRENA walks beside SMITH whose long strides force her to jog occasionally to keep up. They swat at mosquitoes as they walk.

SMITH
Janusz tells me your family were Kulaks?

IRENA
Yes. Just a cow and some pigs.

SMITH
Were your parents arrested with you?

IRENA
They’re dead.

She swats at a few mosquitoes hovering around her face.

IRENA (CONT’D)
We lived on a farm outside Warsaw. When the Russians came they said we were ‘kulaks’, and exploiting the peasants. My parents were afraid and hid me in the barn.

The mosquitoes are getting worse and SMITH grabs swatches of leaves, passing one to IRENA as they walk on, swinging away at the annoying insects.
IRENA (CONT’D)
I found them later. Face down in the mud. They’d been bashed and strangled with barbed wire.

She looks up at SMITH, her eyes filling with tears.
IRENA (CONT’D)
Later, the Russians caught me, and
sent me to a collective farm.
They were cruel to me. I ran
away. I had no food. Then I saw
you.

They walk in silence a few paces, and she dries her tears
with the corner of her sleeve.

SMITH
You can’t swim can you?

She looks up at him.

IRENA
What?

SMITH
You’ve never been in the water in
your life.

She laughs coquettishly.

IRENA
But I got across, didn’t I?

SMITH
And, you said you lived on a farm
near Warsaw?

IRENA puzzled.

IRENA
Yes.

SMITH
The Soviets didn’t get that far.
That was German territory.

She nervously swats the mosquitos.

SMITH (CONT’D)
Your parents weren’t murdered were
they? You made it all up.

She won’t look at him, her face looks thin and pinched,
she seems older.

SMITH (CONT’D)
We’ve all done terrible things to
survive. But don’t ever lie to me
again. We’ve had enough of lies.

(CONTINUED)
She sneaks a glance back over her shoulder at the others, then up at SMITH. She nods.

OMITTED

EXT. ROAD, OUTSIDE A SMALL TOWN, LAKE BAIKAL - LATE AFTERNOON

A fishing village by the lake. Timber houses straggling back up into the surrounding hills. From cover, they consider the obstacle.

JANUSZ
We'll have to go 'round it.

VALKA
Quicker through it.

JANUSZ
They'll have dogs. Raise the alarm. We wouldn't stand a chance

VALKA
We need food again, Pakhan.
CONTINUED:

JANUSZ
I know we need food, but we’re not going into that town, risk everything.

SMITH gets up.

SMITH
We’re wasting time.

He strikes off up a slope toward the hills behind the town.

EXT. HILLS BEHIND VILLAGE - DUSK

The group make their way uphill and around the town.

EXT. TOWN, LAKESIDE - NIGHT

Their P.O.V. down to the few lights of the town and the lake glimmering in the moonlight. From the direction of the town - the sound of a dog barking in an agitated fashion.

EXT. HILLS BEHIND VILLAGE, SAME TIME - NIGHT

SMITH joins JANUSZ. Off his expression:

SMITH
(to JANUSZ)
What is it? What’s wrong?

JANUSZ
Where’s Valka?

SMITH
He was behind Zoran.

JANUSZ
(to ZORAN)
 Didn’t you watch Valka?

ZORAN
I’m not his keeper.

JANUSZ
Damn him!

He looks back down to the town.
A dim light through a side window - the glimpse of a woman crossing through frame, followed shortly after by the weathered face of a fisherman. He's heard something. He crosses to the window, peers out into the darkness. The moment he turns away the camera moves on around the side to the rear of the building, past a rabbit in a cage. VALKA's shoulder comes into frame as he edges his way toward the back door, passing the sightless skull of a dried fish swinging from a cord under the eaves. He reaches for the door-handle, opens it, and slips silently inside.

A view along a road to the town. (P.O.V. now on the opposite side of town to that seen earlier.)

The above P.O.V. is that of the group waiting for VALKA. They sit by the roadside looking toward the town. They swat at a cloud of mosquitoes.

SMITH
He could turn us in for the bounty.

JANUSZ
And risk arrest?

SMITH
He'd bribe his way out of it.

JANUSZ
(to IRENA)
Would he do that?

IRENA
He might.

ZORAN
It's an opportunity. We're rid of him.

TOMASZ
We don't need his knife. We can make one from deer bone.

ZORAN
Come on! Let's go!

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

A movement behind them, they turn as VALKA steps out from behind a tree. He stares back at them a crooked grin on his face.

VALKA

So.

SMITH moves swiftly, grabs him by his collar and spins him into the tree.

VALKA (CONT’D)

Hey, easy cowboy!

SMITH

Could have got us all killed.

VALKA

You tear my coat ...

SMITH

Fool!

He releases him and VALKA staggers back, reaching down to a bulging sack. He tips out the contents – various foodstuffs including a freshly killed rabbit and a bottle of vodka.

VALKA

‘Fool’ is it?

It’s then they notice blood splashed over his trousers.

VALKA (CONT’D)


(He laughs)

Don’t believe me? So don’t eat. But you will won’t you? Because you want survival. I know about survival! All my life.

He holds up the bottles of vodka, one half empty.

VALKA (CONT’D)

And it’s my birthday!

With a wild look in his eyes, he passes a bottle to JANUSZ, then flicks the side of his neck with his middle finger.

VALKA (CONT’D)

In Russia that means we drink!
EXT. CAMPFIRE - LATER - NIGHT

TOMASZ tends the rabbit roasting on the fire, while the vodka bottle is passed hand to hand. When not drinking, the group are swatting at the persistent mosquitoes, ZORAN now badly bitten. VALKA doesn’t seem bothered by the mosquitoes, perhaps tatoos keep them away, anyway he’s feeling generally pleased with himself and is very talkative.

VALKA
You know ... when they put the children of the political prisoners in the orphanage, they change their names, so later, the parents can never find them.

ZORAN
Is that what happened to you?

VALKA
(shakes his head)
I didn’t have parents. But that’s what happened to her.

He passes IRENA the bottle. She glares back at him.

VALKA (CONT’D)
Isn’t it? You told me that.

She glances at the puzzled faces of the others, finally looking at SMITH. He holds her gaze. Then she takes a slug of the vodka.

IRENA
They called me ‘Rykov’, but I remembered our Polish name – ‘Zulinski’. I used to say it every night before I went to sleep.

JANUSZ
The story you told us ...

IRENA (OVERLAP)
I thought that story would be more sad, and you wouldn’t leave me behind.

Again she looks at SMITH. She made a promise to him.

(CONTINUED)
IRENA (CONT’D)
My parents were Polish communists.
They took us to live in Soviet
Union – to Moscow. They want to
work for the Revolution.
(MORE)
IRENA (CONT’D)
We lived in the Hotel Luxe with lots of foreign communists. But they arrested them. In 1937. Said they were spies. The police put me in the orphanage. And my brother. He died. I was ten years old.

JANUSZ
And you ran away.

She nods. VALKA grinning proudly at her.

VALKA
She lived in the streets, like me!

He breaks into one of his Urki songs. IRENA translates.

IRENA
It’s about a mother complaining to her son that he’s a thief, just like his father...it goes on and says, ‘but if you are strong enough to fight ‘til death - you will conquer fate’.

She joins VALKA in the chorus.

EXT. LAKESIDE - DAY

The mosquitos continue to plague them, swirling in clouds about their heads, crawling into ears, eyes and mouths.
They have improvised headgear - coats, swatches of leaves, improvised masks. Many are badly bitten, faces swollen, bites infected. SMITH walks beside JANUSZ.

SMITH
What can we do? Steal a boat?

No.

SMITH
People are going to get ill.

I know.

SMITH
After all we’ve faced, how strange, these tiny insects might defeat us.
The group collect potatoes in a ploughed field by the lake. ZORAN can no longer take the mosquitoes, and to the astonishment of the others, he runs toward the water, shedding his coat as he goes, eventually diving into the water and submerging himself.

From a concealed position in the trees they watch as half a dozen peasants walk by the lake. ZORAN studies them intently.

ZORAN
(a whisper)
No mosquitoes.

The others unsure of his meaning.

ZORAN (CONT’D)
They have no mosquitoes!
EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS, LAKESIDE - DAY/DUSK

The group have by now a walking routine which they rarely vary, always occupying the same positions in extended line. JANUSZ as navigator in the lead, SMITH generally bringing up the rear. IRENA is the exception - varying her place, now with one, now with another. They don’t talk much to each other as they walk but they do talk with her. She has the knack of getting anyone to talk. No doubt a skill learnt in her life on the streets.

EXT. FOREST NEAR THE ROAD - DAY

A small fire burns as TOMASZ cooks a fish stolen by VALKA. The smoke from the fire is not enough to alleviate the mosquito problem and the group swat in miserable silence. Suddenly SMITH throws dirt on the fire, suffocating it with his jacket. He points to the road.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

From their point of view a fisherman in his fifties, a basket in a sling on his back, walks abreast of them on the track.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

As he passes, ZORAN speaks in a whisper to JANUSZ.

ZORAN

There it is! Again!

JANUSZ mystified.

ZORAN (CONT’D)

Look at him.

JANUSZ stares again at the man.

ZORAN (CONT’D)

No mosquitos!

ZORAN is up and off before anyone can stop him. They watch in appalled silence as he approaches and speaks to the man, who regards this stranger appearing from the forest with some suspicion. ZORAN does a kind of crazy dance, talking all the while.

(CONTINUED)
Soon the man is laughing, and putting down his bag and gun he takes something from around his neck and places it on ZORAN’s neck. A few more words, and more laughter, then with a handshake ZORAN heads back into the forest, the man continuing on his way. ZORAN rejoins them, holding up the gift from the old man – strands of intertwined bark.

ZORAN (CONT’D)

Mosquito repellent! And I have the formula!

EXT. ROAD - DAY

LATER. They all wear necklaces of the entwined bark and are mosquito free. ZORAN is the hero of the hour.

TOMASZ

But what did you say to him?

ZORAN

That I was an escaped convict who was being plagued by mosquitoes.

As they round a bend and disappear from sight, TOMASZ’s voice drifts back.

TOMASZ (V.O.)

Very funny. But what did you really say?

LAKE’S END, SIBERIA - DAY

JANUSZ scoops up a handful of water where it laps a beach. It’s a symbolic end to their lake trek, and they turn and walk on, the lake behind them.

EXT. A FIELD, SIBERIA - DAY

In the far distance a large town dominated by a collection of smoke stacks, belching out columns of smoke into the sky, as the group hurry across open ground to the shelter of the forest.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

A rustic cart passes by. After it has gone the fugitives emerge from concealment and resume their journey.
AB121 EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

VOSS, ZORAN and TOMASZ talk of their pre-Gulag days with IRENA.

VOSS
...A small stone church in a little village. Very peaceful. I grew up in that village.

Then,

ZORAN
...I went on business. Once a year - government clients of course!

Then,

TOMASZ
...layers of very fine pastry, so when you bite there is a lightness, a delicacy - it should almost melt in the mouth.

121 EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - DAY

The group move at a brisk pace. IRENA walks beside SMITH.
IRENA (V.O.)
And Tomasz is a pastry chef but
wants to be an artist?

SMITH
Is that right?

IRENA
And Zoran was on business in
Moscow, arrested in Red Square, he
said he was just taking a photo of
the Kremlin! He’s an accountant.

SMITH
Well, I’ll be damned. Never knew
a funny accountant.

IRENA
Don’t you talk to each other?

SMITH
In the camps you learn to say as
little as possible.

They walk on in silence, IRENA sneaking a look up at him.

OMITTED

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE, LATER - DAY
IRENA now walking with JANUSZ.

JANUSZ
Mr. Smith? An American? Working
on the Moscow metro?

IRENA
(nods)
He’s an engineer. His father was
Finnish. Grew up in America, but
he could speak Russian.

JANUSZ
Why did he come to Russia for
God’s sake?

IRENA
The Depression. His son came with
him.
Continued:

Janusz
What happened to his son?

Irena
They shot him. He was seventeen.

EXT. A STREAM - DUSK

The group fords a shallow stream when Irena sees Smith limp to a rock where he sits and inspects his blistered, bleeding feet. ... Irena kneels before him, dries his feet with her dress. The others watch silently as she tears strips from her petticoat and binds up the raw spots between his toes.

EXT. A RIDGE ABOVE THE TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILWAY - DAY

The group look down to see the railway track lined with villagers every few miles, making a crossing especially hazardous.

Janusz
The Mongolian border is on the other side of those tracks.

Two armed soldiers can be seen walking along the tracks.

Tomasz
Can't we go around this?

Janusz
This is the main line. It's going to be like this everywhere.

Smith
We don't have a choice.

Janusz
We cross at night.

Their attention is caught by the passing of a long freight train, horn sounding over the bucolic scene.

EXT. A RIDGE ABOVE THE RAILWAY-LINE - DAY

A visible tension in the group as they wait. Valka whittles a piece of deer-bone.

Tomasz
What's that you're making?
VALKA
A cross for your tombstone.
TOMASZ surprised at his tone.

VALKA (CONT'D)
Why should you care what I'm making?

The evening is hot and VALKA has his shirt open, the tattooed portraits of Lenin and Stalin on his chest appear and disappear in the folds of his shirt. This amuses ZORAN.

ZORAN

Valka?

VALKA

What?

ZORAN

Why do you have arseholes tattooed on your chest?

VALKA stops. Stares back.

ZORAN (CONT'D)

Shouldn't they be on your arse so you sit on them every time you take a shit?

VALKA

You think it's funny? They are great men.

ZORAN laughs.

VALKA (CONT'D)

Watch your eyes, crowbait!

He makes a 'V' with his fingers followed by a short stabbing motion. ZORAN reels back.

VALKA (CONT'D)

Don't you know what 'Stalin' means funny man? Man-of-Steel. He takes from rich and gives to poor.

ZORAN

Sure he does. Then he puts both of them in a camp for twenty-five years.

VALKA goes back to his carving.
A127  EXT. RAILWAY TRACKS - NIGHT

JANUSZ stands on the tracks looking down the line to a cutting where the track disappears around a bend. The sound of an approaching train, a dim light already reflected on the side of the cutting. He turns and looks toward the trees where the others are approaching down a wooded hillside. He hurries toward them, urging them to take cover in the bracken beside the track. SMITH points out a glowing red light further down the track from the approaching train.

AB127 EXT. RAILWAY TRACK - NIGHT

The train thunders into the cutting with a squeal of breaks as the driver sights the red light on the track ahead, and the train slows to a stop.

127  EXT. BESIDE THE TRACK - NIGHT

Close on the faces of the escapees as they look up to the carriages stopped in front of them. They are cattle cars, but its soon apparent their cargo is human. From the high windows, hands can be seen clutching the bars. From inside a communal groaning and sighing. Voices, female voices, cry out for water, and on the agonized faces of the fugitives a mixture of pain and empathy. Then the train seems to sigh, like a great beast, and from beneath the carriages flow streams of blood and urine. As the distant light turns green the train slowly moves forward, and as it does so, letters and notes drop to the tracks from the barred windows.

After it is gone they scramble over the tracks into the woods on the other side, all but VOSS. He is picking up as many of the notes and letters as he can.

JANUSZ (V.O.)
Andrejs, for God’s sake!

VOSS slowly crosses the tracks, and disappears into the brush.

128  EXT. BRUSH, TRACKSIDE - NIGHT

VOSS, overwhelmed with emotion sits down, examining the letters and notes in his hand. JANUSZ hurries back for him.

(CONTINUED)
Continued:

Janusz
(whispers)
Come on!

But VOSS doesn’t move. JANUSZ sits beside him, and VOSS passes him a sample of the prisoners’ pathetic messages—some scrawled on the back of photographs. They are mostly names and addresses, pleas for someone to mail or inform relatives of what happened to them—some have even clipped a few bank-notes to pay for postage.

Omitted

Ext. Russo-Mongolian Border, Countryside—Dawn

Tall striped posts at intervals, strung with rusted wire—beyond, a dirt road and distant fields. From a concealed position in the nearby trees they carefully watch for signs of a patrol. JANUSZ goes first, passing easily through the sagging fence. ZORAN calls to him.

Zoran
(shouts)
What’s it like in Mongolia?

JANUSZ holds up a hand—’Keep your voice down’. ZORAN crawls through the wire followed by the others.

Zoran (cont’d)
I love Mongolia.

Smith
Love it later. We need to get as far from this border as possible.

ZORAN faces Russia and as if bowing at the end of a performance.

Zoran
Thank you Mother Russia for your hospitality! I definitely will not be coming back!

It’s only then that we notice that VALKA has not crossed through. He stands staring at them from the Soviet side. It’s clear he’s going no further. JANUSZ crosses back to him, and they talk through the wire.

(Continued)
CONTINUED:

JANUSZ
They’ll catch you if you stay, you know that.

VALKA
(shrugs)
Prison is o.k. Debt is bad. But there are many prisons. They don’t find me.

They stand a moment, watching the others moving toward a line of trees.

JANUSZ
No, America?

VALKA
It’s not for me – ‘Freedom’. Wouldn’t know what to do with it, I swear to God.

He places his hand on the wooden hilt of his knife, sticking out of his waistband.

VALKA (CONT’D)
So we must say goodbye, my Wolf and me.

JANUSZ glances at the knife.

VALKA (CONT’D)
You don’t need him any more.

JANUSZ
Good luck, Valka.

VALKA
Good luck, Pakhan.

And he turns and walks away. JANUSZ walks toward the distant group and by the time he looks back, VALKA is gone.

EXT. MONGOLIAN STEPPE – DAY

A vast plain stretches to distant snow-capped peaks. Dotted on the hills the Gers - circular tent-like structures, home to the nomadic Mongolians. In the distance walk the band of survivors, strung out in a line abreast. Their voices drift back - snatches of conversation, and laughter.
EXT. ROAD - DAY

The travellers striding confidently down the dirt road. Around a bend, a decorative archway over the road, a town visible a few miles further on. They stop in their tracks. On one side of the timber structure a portrait of Josef Stalin. On the other the local Mongolian leader, a red star on his military cap. In the centre, the hammer and sickle over a painting of a brown hand shaking a white one. Small flags of both nations flap ominously.

CLOSE on the stunned faces of the fugitives.

VOSS

It’s here too.

SMITH

This changes everything.

IRENA looks at the grassy plains all about them.

IRENA

Nowhere to hide.

EXT. MONGOLIAN STEPPE, LATER - DAY

The group walk toward a distant line of hills, feeling very exposed to any watching eyes.

ZORAN

How far is China?

JANUSZ

Five, six hundred kilometers.

ZORAN groans.

IRENA

Is China free?

SMITH

There’s a war on with the Japanese, I know that much.

VOSS


(CONTINUED)
JANUSZ
But isn’t Tibet closed to foreigners? I remember reading that.

VOSS
Their religion would compel them to shelter us. We could go to Lhasa, the capital.

ZORAN
We break out of one ‘closed country’ and now we plan to break into another? I like ‘open’ countries.

TOMASZ and JANUSZ exchange a few excited words in Polish. IRENA translates.

IRENA
They say we could go beyond Tibet. Over the mountains. To India.

ZORAN
What mountains?

SMITH
(shakes his head)
The Himalayas.

TOMASZ
We could join the British Army. First fight Nazis then Russians!

ZORAN
Go over the Himalayas? How? On a magic carpet?

A silence as they contemplate the massive distances stretching ahead of them.

EXT. ABANDONED STONE BUILDING, MONGOLIA - DAWN
In the middle of an empty plain a small circular stone ruin.
INT. RUIN - DAWN

Sleeping figures. A gentle tip-tapping sound. VOSS opens his eyes. Staring back at him from the doorway, half a dozen sheep. He nudges TOMASZ who wakes sleepily, takes his eye-line. Carefully, slowly, they rise, VOSS drawing his deer-bone knife. Then they move. The sheep retreat, bumping into each other, and outside the chase is on. TOMASZ tackles a ewe and VOSS approaches with a knife, but JANUSZ is behind him, grabs his arm.

JANUSZ
No! Andrejs, no!

VOSS tries to free his arm.

JANUSZ (CONT’D)
Don’t kill it!

TOMASZ
Why not? We’re hungry!

JANUSZ
You want the locals after us too?

They break into Polish, a blazing argument, months of pent up frustration. VOSS picks up the sheep and carries it inside the ruin.

INT. RUIN, LATER - DAY

Milk squirting into their aluminium bowl as VOSS expertly milks the ewe, IRENA and ZORAN holding it steady.

EXT. STEPPE - DAY

The sun is blazing as they cross through a sea of grass, hills rising in the distance like islands.

TOMASZ and ZORAN play a long distance walker’s game - each in turn kicking a rock out ahead, continually passing it from one to the other.

JANUSZ and SMITH look to the hills surrounding them as they walk.

JANUSZ
You feel it?

SMITH
Yes.

(CONTINUED)
IRENA
Feel what?

JANUSZ
We’re being watched.

IRENA uneasy, squints in the direction of the hills. And you can feel it. Like a John Ford western there’s a sense of being in Indian territory, of their every move watched by unseen eyes.

A139
EXT. BUDDHIST TEMPLE - DAY

A distant view of a temple complex at the base of low hills.

AB139
EXT. STEPPE - DAY

The above has been pointed out by VOSS to the group, and they decide to make their way to the temple, in the hope of getting food.

139
EXT. ABANDONED TEMPLE COMPLEX, STEPPE – DAY

Within a walled compound they wander between a series of recently abandoned Buddhist temples and out-buildings. By the size of the compound, several hundred monks may have lived here. Everywhere are signs of violence – doors hang from hinges, and a large statue of Buddha lies smashed in a courtyard. JANUSZ points to a line of bullet impacts, stitched across a wall.

140
INT. TEMPLE - DAY

There are bloodstains on the floor, and the wind howling about the building makes a haunting accompaniment. IRENA and VOSS are alone inside.

IRENA
What happened here?

VOSS
The same as happened in Russia. Churches closed, priests shot or taken to camps, religion banned. They came to my church, in Latvia. Destroyed everything, declared it a ‘museum’. Later that night, there was a lone guard. A boy. (MORE)

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

VOSS (CONT'D)
I strangled him until his eyes popped right out of his head. Valka knew somehow. Knew I'd killed in cold blood.

He bows his head. IRENA looks up at him, and they stand together in silence, but for the moaning wind.

EXT. MONGOLIAN STEPPE - DAY

As they head South, each is lost in their own thoughts when seemingly out of nowhere a half-dozen Mongolian horsemen are galloping toward them. The horsemen circle them, far from friendly looks on their faces. They wear the traditional costume of Steppe nomads and range in age from a man in his seventies down to a six-year-old boy. The OLD MAN pulls up his horse in front of SMITH, figuring as he's the oldest he'll also be the leader. The groups stare at each other. The OLD MAN speaks in Russian, a rough guttural accent.

[THE FOLLOWING DIALOGUE IS IN RUSSIAN.]

OLD MAN

Russki?

A glance between SMITH and JANUSZ. Much may hang on his answer.

SMITH

No. American.

The OLD MAN maybe doesn't get the 'American' part, but he gets that they are not Russian. He seems pleased about that.

OLD MAN

Lhasa?

SMITH nods.

Lhasa. Yes. Tibet.

JANUSZ points South.

OLD MAN

Pilgrim?

SMITH

Yes.

OLD MAN

No horses?

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

SMITH
We are too poor to have horses.

The OLD MAN points at IRENA.

OLD MAN
Wife?

SMITH looks at IRENA.

SMITH
Daughter.

IRENA moves closer to him. SMITH puts a protective arm about her shoulder. The OLD MAN considers the situation for a moment longer before abruptly turning, and followed by his band, galloping off toward the distant hills.

Looks between the group, not exactly of relief, as there's a feeling it may not be the last they see of the riders. IRENA looks up at SMITH, smiles at him. Something about him calling her his daughter has touched some hidden place. SMITH, a little embarrassed, smiles back.

EXT. RIVER'S EDGE, MONGOLIA - DAY

While SMITH fishes in the river, others tend to their battered feet. VOSS passes around deer fat in his improvised deer skull container. This they rub over raw patches, and between their toes where deep cracks have developed. JANUSZ repairs their footwear, while TOMASZ sits by the fire sketching IRENA. ZORAN, the camp barber, trims hairs and beards **

143 EXT. CAMPsite - DAWN

TOMASZ is smoking fish over the fire as the group stir. He gives ZORAN a kick.

ZORAN
What did you do that for? I was in the middle of this beautiful dream - just about to eat some salt, I could already taste it. I want to go back to that dream.

144 EXT. STEPPES, MONGOLIA, LATER - DAY

The figures seen walking away in the distance. Floating back the voice of TOMASZ giving a recipe of a favorite Polish dish to ZORAN.

(CONTINUED)
TOMASZ
Then add two sprigs of rosemary
and a pinch of nutmeg.

ZORAN
Nutmeg? What about the salt?

TOMASZ
We’ll get to that. Now, add the
oil and leave it to marinate,
while you prepare the chicken.
That’s where the salt comes in...

ZORAN
Good.

TOMASZ
Rub it into the skin of the
chicken with a little of the
paprika.

ZORAN
Double the salt.

TOMASZ
I can’t just double the salt!
It’ll be too salty.

ZORAN
I don’t care, just do it.

TOMASZ
I’m not going to ruin it.

EXT. A CHANGING LANDSCAPE, MONGOLIA - DAY

A primaeval and austerely beautiful landscape stretches
before them. Tufty knolls of dry grass are the only
detail that break up the flat immensity.

RIDGE-TOP - DAY

Up ahead of them on the edge of a ridge a lone Mongolian
horseman watches them approach. He’s the young boy from
the group of horseman who originally approached them.
They pause before him. He looks at them a moment then
tosses a goatskin bag at their feet before galloping off
in the direction from which they came. VOSS picks up the
skin bag, gives it a shake. Water.

They continue on to the edge of the ridge and a view of a
vast desert plain is revealed.

(CONTINUED)
They look back to the disappearing horseman before scrambling down the rocky slope.

EXT. GOBI DESERT - DAY
The group crossing into the heart of the Gobi.

EXT. GOBI DESERT, LATER - DAY
VOSS is the first to see it - a vast glittering lake. They hurry toward it.

LATER,
The lake leads them on, but appears no closer.

LATER STILL,
JANUSZ has taken a reading of the sun, using his stick method. He points out their direction - it is away from the beckoning lake.

VOSS
Janusz!

JANUSZ hesitates, looks at VOSS who holds up their waterbag.

VOSS (CONT'D.) (CONT'D)
We should go to the lake. Water is getting low.

JANUSZ
What lake? It's a mirage.

He plods on, away from the shimmering vision. There's little the others can do but trust JANUSZ, and slowly they follow.

EXT. THE GOBI - MIDDAY/DUSK
The sun is directly above, the land shimmering with heat... The group have stuck their sticks in the ground and draped their jackets over them, making a sunshade they SHELTER under.
LATER,

The sun has dropped, casting shadows. JANUSZ rises from the shelter and calls for the others to continue.

EXT. THE GOBI - ANOTHER DAY

The figures, tiny in the surrounding desert, walk on, JANUSZ in the lead needing to constantly slow down to allow the others to catch up.

EXT. THE GOBI - SAME DAY

The group hesitate on hearing a distant roaring sound up ahead. Nothing on the horizon. Then they are hit by a fierce wind, as toward them rolls a vast cloud of sand. They drop to the ground instinctively, and huddled together throw blankets around their shoulders and over their heads, as they are engulfed in the choking sand.

LATER, they emerge from their own 'dune', and shaking themselves down they resume their journey southward.

EXT. THE GOBI - NIGHT

The temperature has dropped to freezing and they huddle by a fire, picking sand out of their small ration of food.

ZORAN
I’m too tired to sleep.

TOMASZ
Why not keep walking?

ZORAN
I’m for that, if we can wake Andrejs.

They look to where VOSS sleeps.

ZORAN (CONT’D)
He can sleep anywhere, any time. How does he do it?

SMITH
(to JANUSZ)
Can you plot your way by the stars?

(CONTINUED)
JANUSZ
(Nods.)
Yes, but haven’t you noticed?
He points upward to the low clouds obscuring the stars.

SMITH
What about water?

JANUSZ
What about it?
I don’t see any. I’m trying to remember my school geography but I seem to recall the Gobi Desert somewhere in Southern Mongolia.

JANUSZ begins scooping out a hole in the pebbly ground. It’s funnel-shaped, narrow at the base. The others watch as he lines the sides with dried deerskin, placing their cooking pot in the base.

JANUSZ
We may pick up a little morning dew.

Glad of something practical to do they all set about digging and lining holes with anything to hand.

As they wake, they harvest the precious droplets of water caught overnight, trickling the contents into their pot, barely a quarter cupful.

No-one has slept much and they walk like zombies, strung out in a line, no-one speaking, all just dully concentrating on placing one foot after the other. ZORAN notices VOSS, walking behind him is actually asleep. He has swung his backpack onto his chest and with his head resting on it he is actually sleep-walking. ZORAN tests his theory by walking away from the group, in a small circle. VOSS follows, guided by the sound of ZORAN’s footsteps. He wakes him, VOSS looking around with a start.

ZORAN
You were asleep!

VOSS
No I wasn’t.

ZORAN
You were following the sound of my footsteps - sleep-walking.

The others have stopped. ZORAN takes the backpack from VOSS, and places it on the exhausted IRENA.
ZORAN (CONT’D)
Just follow the sound of my footsteps.

She nods, not fully understanding.

ZORAN (CONT’D)
Put all else out of your mind, and sleep. I’ll wake you in Calcutta.

She smiles, nods, already half asleep.

EXT. GOBI, LATER - DAY

ZORAN looks over his shoulder, smiles proudly as he sees IRENA is sleep-walking, trusting to the steady sound of his footsteps.

EXT. GOBI MID-DAY

The group rest under the meagre shade provided by their coats. SMITH walks away from them, and crests a slight rise. From here he has a clear view to the horizon. Off in the distance a dark patch against the light sand. Through the dancing mid-day light he sees shapes. Trees? He staggers back to the group.

SMITH
Janusz?

JANUSZ follows him to the rise. SMITH points to his discovery. JANUSZ squints against the light.

JANUSZ
It’s another mirage.

SMITH shakes his head ‘no’.

SMITH
We have no more water. I see trees. Where there’s trees there’s water.

JANUSZ
It’s East. We must head South.

The others have joined them, staring toward the distant shape.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

SMITH
I’ve never doubted you, Janusz.
Not once. But we must give it a try.

JANUSZ
No. We must keep going South!
You’ll kill us all!

SMITH
Damn it, we’re already dying.

JANUSZ goes to move on, SMITH grabs his shirt sleeve, a short pathetic struggle sees them fall to their knees, VOSS and TOMASZ move to separate them. SMITH is the first to stand, brushing sand and dirt from his clothes. He turns to the others.

SMITH (CONT’D)
You have a choice.

He looks at IRENA, then turns and goes back for his staff and jacket. The others watch as he turns East toward his discovery.

JANUSZ
It’s a mirage. Just a mirage.

SMITH keeps walking away - a strange echo of the incident in Siberia when he walked away from the guards. Perhaps it is this memory that causes the others to turn silently, and collecting their few possessions, to follow him. JANUSZ watches a while, then slowly follows.

EXT. THE GOBI - DAY

Close on SMITH as he squints against the glare. His point of view:

OASIS OR MIRAGE? THE DISTANT OUTLINE OF TREES SEEMS TO DISAPPEAR IN THE SHIMMERING WAVES OF LIQUID HEAT.

BRIEF TIME LAPSE:

Close on TOMASZ as he stares ahead of him. His point of view:

CLOSER NOW, BUT STILL IT WEAVES, APPEARING AND REAPPEARING IN THE HEAT-SHIMMERS.
BRIEF TIME LAPSE:

Close on ZORAN. His point of view:

CLOSER AGAIN. A BIRD RISES INTO THE SKY FROM THE NOW MORE SOLID TREES.

Back on ZORAN.

ZORAN
Mirages don’t have birds!

Wider, and they’re running, running with the last of their precious energy.

EXT. WELL - DAY

A clump of straggly tortured trees surround a desert well - a low square of ancient stones. They sprawl by the well, SMITH reaching down inside with their bowl to bring up a scoop of crystal clear water. It’s passed around rapidly.

SMITH
Just a little. Don’t fill yourselves.

More scoops follow in quick succession, enough to splash hands and faces.

VOSS calls from a few yards away.

VOSS
Fire. Coals are still warm.

SMITH and JANUSZ join him, examining the ground about the fire.

SMITH
Lots of tracks. Nomads?

VOSS
Maybe others will come?

TOMASZ
Over here! The remains of a meal! There’s still meat on the bones!

He points to the cooked remains of some animal. Using VOSS’s deer-bone knife he scrapes meat from the bones, others just attacking any bone they find.
161 CONTINUED:

JANUSZ
Don’t eat it all!

He manages to save at least half of the meat, wrapping it in a cloth, and putting it in VOSS’s backpack.

162 EXT. WELL, LATER - DAY

They lie stretched out under the shade of the trees dozing, and every now and then going back to the well to drink or just to lay their hands in the cool water.

163 EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

IRENA sleeps while the men discuss their situation in hushed tones.

TOMASZ
At least we have water here.

JANUSZ
But no food.

VOSS
Other nomads will come. Water their flocks.

JANUSZ
When? Next week? Next month?

ZORAN
We could wait a few days, at least.*

JANUSZ
Without food, we’ll only get weaker. Maybe too weak to travel.

TOMASZ
These last days - I don’t know that I could go through that again.

VOSS
(looks at the water)
It was a miracle finding this. Can we count on another?

TOMASZ
I say we stay.

(CONTINUED)
They look to SMITH. He looks up to find them watching him.

SMITH
What are you looking at me for?
Ask Janusz. He's already made up his mind for us, haven't you, Janusz?

JANUSZ says nothing.

EXT. WELL - DAWN

They all take a last drink from the well, then pour water over their faces and clothes. VOSS fills the skin water-bag, then ZORAN fills their cooking bowl to the brim.

Steam is rising from their damp clothing when they set off. ZORAN walking on tip-toe, anxious not to spill a drop from the bowl in his outstretched hand.

EXT. GOBI DESERT - DAY

Close on TOMASZ as he looks back over his shoulder to see:

THE WELL, STILL NOT MORE THAN 500 YARDS BEHIND.

BRIEF TIME LAPSE:

Close on ZORAN as he too turns for a last look at:

THE WELL, NOW UP TO HALF A MILE BEHIND AND LOOKING LESS REAL IN THE SHIMMERING HEAT.

BRIEF TIME LAPSE:

Close on VOSS, he shades his eyes to see:

THE WELL IS BELOW THE HORIZON NOW, AND ALL THAT CAN BE SEEN IS THE ENDLESS FLATNESS, THE SAME EMPTINESS THAT STRETCHES OUT BEFORE THEM.

EXT. GOBI, DESERT - TIMELAPSE - DAY

They walk in a desert void. There are no features, no distant hills, no growth of any kind. It is an emptiness, the only sound that of their footsteps and their labored breathing.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

All the while their water supply is dwindling – water from ZORAN’s bowl long gone, the goat-skin water-bag no longer sloshes, but has to be squeezed to get out even a mouthful.

EXT. GOBI – DUSK

JANUSZ hands out small portions of the scavenged meat from the waterhole.

All of them are subject to cramps, the result of the lack of water, and from time to time they are seen reacting to a sudden bolt of pain, attempting to stretch against it, or massage the limb out of its paralysis.

LATER, SAME CAMPSITE – NIGHT

SMITH and JANUSZ collect more dried camel dung for the fire. SMITH looks to where the others sit.

   SMITH
   We’re in trouble.

   JANUSZ
   I know that, but they mustn’t.

   SMITH
   They know.

   JANUSZ
   You can survive a month or more without food, but water?

   SMITH
   Days?

   JANUSZ
   Maybe two days, maybe less in this heat.

   SMITH
   What about what we’re getting from condensation?

   JANUSZ
   It’s the only thing keeping us alive. But for how long?

   SMITH
   Can you get us back to the waterhole?

(CONTINUED)
EXT. GOBI - LATER - DAY

As they walk VOSS picks up a pebble, holds it up to show ZORAN who walks behind him.

VOSS
When we worked the fields, during the hot summers, we used to suck on small stones like these. Don’t know why but it made us feel less thirsty.

ZORAN picks up a pebble.

ZORAN
We’ve eaten just about everything else.

VOSS
You don’t eat it, just suck on it.

At this moment IRENA falls again, her knees buckling and her face pitching into the sand in almost one movement. They turn her over again, wiping the sand from her nose and mouth. SMITH makes a shelter over her with their sticks and jackets. She lies with her eyes closed, her breathing coming in harsh gasps. Both legs are now swollen to the knees. He touches the swelling and the marks his fingers make remain for some seconds.

VOSS (CONT’D)
Sunstroke?

IRENA wakes.

IRENA
I’m becoming a nuisance.

She looks down at her legs.

JANUSZ
Do they hurt you?

IRENA
No, not at all. They must be swelling because I’ve walked so far. Don’t you think, Mister?

SMITH nods reassuringly then quickly turns away, a look of deep anguish passing across his face.
EXT. GOBI - NIGHT

The others keep watch over her as she sleeps. SMITH passes around a splash of water in the cup. They all refuse it.

ZORAN

Save it for Irena. We've got our pebbles.

And he pops one in his mouth, makes out it's delicious and soothing.

In the now familiar ritual they scoop out holes in the sand, lining them with their jackets, hopeful of collecting a little moisture overnight.

EXT. GOBI - DAWN

They walk on, ZORAN carefully carrying the partly filled bowl of water. IRENA seems refreshed, but JANUSZ and SMITH walk beside her, watching her every step.

IRENA

I can walk alright if I can lean a little on you.

They each lightly lay a hand on her elbow.

EXT. GOBI - LATER - DAY

IRENA starts to fall forward, they steady her, and she walks on for a bit before slumping forward, and falling to her knees. SMITH too falls with exhaustion. VOSS hurries back to them.

JANUSZ

Can you go on?

IRENA

I think so. But what about Mr. Smith?

SMITH struggling for breath is back on his feet, waving them on. VOSS and JANUSZ each put an arm about her and half-carrying, half-dragging her, they set off again but it's no use, she's lost all her strength.

VOSS

I'm going to carry her.
178  EXT. GOBI DESERT - DAY

A lizard, in close up, listens to an approaching sound. As the volume builds he runs for his life. A beetle too, has heard it and burrows into the sand as a foot in a battered moccasin looms large in frame. We follow the foot a few staggering steps, then a blur, as a body falls through frame, ending in a close-up of TOMASZ, his breath coming in short gasps.

179  EXT. WIDER, GOBI DESERT - DAY

The five figures, small in frame, TOMASZ the last in line, down on his knees. He raises a hand, hasn’t the strength to call out. Then one of the figures sees him, calls to the others.

CLOSE on TOMASZ.

He pulls the leg of his trousers up with difficulty - the tell-tale swelling of the ankles, just as with IRENA. As JANUSZ approaches he quickly covers his legs and staggers to his feet. JANUSZ steadies him, and taking his arm they continue.

180  EXT. DUNES, GOBI DESERT - DAY

As they walk the landscape changes from the endless scrubby plain to sweeping sand dunes. The nature of the terrain makes the going slower and they move forward on the edge of exhaustion. In a curious freak of Nature the wind whips across the top of the dunes creating an eerie singing sound. Ahead, and across their path a massive dune - no way forward but over it. TOMASZ looks up, staring in horror -

TOMASZ’S HALLUCINATION:

The dune is moving, rising up, higher and higher, like a massive sand wave.

Back on TOMASZ. He collapses, unconscious.

181  EXT. BASE OF THE GREAT DUNE, GOBI - TWILIGHT

An eerie, ghostly twilight, the group all sitting together in a rough circle around TOMASZ. He seems to revive as he passes around sketches he’s made during their imprisonment and escape.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

It's an almost cheerful scene, like a traveller showing happy snaps taken on holiday.

VOSS
I like this one. When did you do that?

He holds up a sketch of KAZIK, showing him examining one of his battered shoes.

TOMASZ
On the train. Poor Kazik, always the trouble with his feet.

ZORAN holds up a drawing of himself.

ZORAN
Who's this?

TOMASZ
You.

ZORAN looks at it again genuinely shocked.

ZORAN
My father maybe, but ... is that how I look now?

A chuckle from the others.

SMITH stares at a sketch of IRENA.

SMITH
You caught her smile.

SMITH passes the sketch to JANUSZ as TOMASZ lays back down, a smile on his face. He looks up at the stars. He knows he's dying and has accepted the fact. This in turn has given strength to his friends, and between them all is a feeling of love and a kind of peace.

EXT. BASE OF THE GREAT DUNE, GOBI - DAWN

They've tied his pencil to a length of hide, and hung it from the top of the cross over his grave. A faint breath of morning breeze sets it swinging like a pendulum, the others long gone.

EXT. DUNES - DAY

As they stagger on JANUSZ has moved well out in front, when he stumbles and falls. Then he sees it, just out ahead, and he begins crawling toward it.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

JANUSZ’S MIRAGE - DAY:

It’s the hedge and gate from his vision. Behind the hedge the hint of a roof. Through the gate can be seen the path to the front door.

EXT. DUNES - DAY

JANUSZ crawling faster now, when ZORAN appears beside him.

JANUSZ
Do you see it?

ZORAN
Come on, Jan.

JANUSZ
But do you see it?

ZORAN
No.

He helps him to his feet and they continue on.

EXT. DUNES, GOBI DESERT - DAY

In the glare of the noon-day sun they shelter under their coats propped on their walking staffs. No-one speaks.

EXT. DUNES, GOBI DESERT - DAY

SMITH and JANUSZ support each other as they stagger on. SMITH’s eyes are on the ground, following the dancing shadows before him. JANUSZ nudges him, points — above them two magnificent eagles, the source of the shadows.

JANUSZ
Eagles live in mountains.

SMITH looks at the featureless landscape ahead.

SMITH
They also fly long distances.

EXT. LANDSCAPE, MONGOLIA - DAY

The dunes are more intermittent here, the ground more stony and undulating.

(Continued)
CONTINUED:

VOSS hears it first, and with his remaining strength moves out of the circle of firelight into the desert. He pauses, listens again.

A scraping sound. Then he sees them coming out of the gloom - JANUSZ dragging an unconscious SMITH by his shoulders. VOSS hurries to them. A look from JANUSZ - 'water'? VOSS shakes his head, 'No'.

EXT. CAMPSITE - SAME - DAWN

A black snake, thick as your wrist, slides over ZORAN'S leg. He stares, too close to death to feel fear. He's not even entirely sure it's real. He watches its progress as it slithers up the rocky hillside. Then he gets it, and he's up, running on pure adrenaline, following after the snake, leaving his sleeping companions by the fire.

EXT. HILLSIDE - BRIEF MONTAGE - DAY

ZORAN tracking the snake. He mutters to himself in a kind of delirium. He is crawling after the snake, scraping skin from knees and elbows. The snake disappears down into a rocky defile, followed by ZORAN.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAY

SMITH in a death-like sleep. A distance away VOSS and JANUSZ stand, staring upward at the waging figure some fifty metres up the hill. A native? Black mud obscures his face. It's ZORAN. He waves, dances about, then in a cracked voice, a single word drifts down to them.

ZORAN

Water!

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR - DAY

ZORAN, JANUSZ, VOSS - lie flat out like lizards, their faces in damp, black mud. Sucking sounds. They slurp at small pools of water, split lips, puffed and bleeding. At first, just to swallow is painful, but it is life. After each mouthful there is a moment they must wait as the seepage re-fills the little hollows.
EXT. MUD-POOLS - LATER - DAY

They've carried SMITH to the water and JANUSZ supports him in a sitting position while VOSS and ZORAN, in turn, soak their shirts in the mud, dripping the life-giving liquid into SMITH'S mouth. He coughs, splutters, as he sucks at the moisture.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE VALLEY - DAY

A black snake protruding about a foot out of a hole in the sandy soil. ZORAN points, and is joined by JANUSZ and VOSS. JANUSZ holds his hand up for them to go very still. He speaks in a whisper.

    JANUSZ
    Knife.
    VOSS passes him the deer-bone knife. With it, he splits the end of his staff, to make a fork out of the end.
    ZORAN
    What if it's poisonous?
    JANUSZ
    You can still eat it. Just cut off its head.

He passes the knife to VOSS, then creeps toward the creature, and striking quickly he attempts to trap the snake in the fork. Too slow. The snake disappears into its hole.

EXT. VALLEY - LATER - DAY

Like snake-fishermen, they sit waiting by the snake-hole - ZORAN too, has a snake-catching stick. Then they see a second snake, slithering across the rocks. At a signal they strike, ZORAN deftly trapping the snake's head in the cleft stick.

EXT. CAMPSITE, VALLEY - DAY

Chunks of whitish snake meat are cooking on a thin flat stone over a fire of twigs and grass. The men grab pieces of the snake and eat, nodding approval.

    JANUSZ
    It's not bad.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

JANUSZ helps SMITH sit up, feeding him a small piece of meat. SMITH waves him away, sinking back to the ground too tired to eat.

VOSS
Kind of like chicken.

ZORAN
Yeah, a long black poisonous chicken with no legs.

JANUSZ
You know Valka talked of eating each other? In Siberia?

ZORAN
He did? Would you have eaten me?

JANUSZ
Probably.

ZORAN
I would never have eaten you – too stringy and bitter, I’d rather eat snake.

VOSS nearly chokes on something, reaches into his mouth, pulls out a tooth.

JANUSZ
Scurvy.

OMITTED

EXT. CAMPSITE – NIGHT

The fire burns low, VOSS and ZORAN sleep. SMITH wakes from time to time and JANUSZ forces him to eat and drink. SMITH is deathly pale, his life ebbing away. He speaks in short, croaky stabs, every breath an effort.

SMITH
It can kill you, remember?

JANUSZ puzzled.

SMITH (CONT’D)

‘Kindness’.

JANUSZ tries to force more water on him but SMITH waives him away.
SMITH (CONT’D)
How long can you survive on snakes
and mud? You should leave me, but
you can’t can you? You’re a fool.
I’d leave you.

He lays back down. JANUSZ studies his face, pain and
suffering etched in sharp lines.

JANUSZ
Mister?

SMITH
What?

JANUSZ
I mightn’t know your first name,
but I know your son’s name.

SMITH stares at him.

SMITH
Irena told you.

JANUSZ nods.

JANUSZ
Can I say his name?

Nothing from SMITH.

JANUSZ (CONT’D)
‘David’.

SMITH
Saying his name won’t bring him
back.

He struggles onto his elbow, staring intently at JANUSZ,
an ironic smile on his lips.

SMITH (CONT’D)
You trying to give me the will to
live? That it? Stop me giving
up?

JANUSZ
Are you giving up?

SMITH
In the camps, some saw death as
‘freedom’.

(CONTINUED)
JANUSZ
So why didn’t you kill yourself?

SMITH
Survival was a kind of protest.

JANUSZ makes him take a little water.

SMITH (CONT’D)
Now being alive is my punishment.

JANUSZ
Punishment for what?

SMITH
I brought David to Russia didn’t I?

JANUSZ
And no-one can forgive you? And you can’t forgive yourself?

SMITH
Be easier if I had religion, or a home to go back to, like you.

JANUSZ
For us, the old life is gone.

They sit in silence for a while.

SMITH
Irena told me they tortured your wife and she informed on you.

JANUSZ
Yes.

SMITH
They did that to my boy.

JANUSZ
(nods)
My wife was released, that much I know. She lived, but like you she won’t be able to forgive herself. Only I can do that.

He leans closer to SMITH, speaks just above a whisper, his voice intense, his eyes burning.

JANUSZ (CONT’D)
She’ll torture herself for what she did. Just like you. That’s why I have to get back!

(Continued)
This last, has impressed SMITH, and despite his death-wish a flicker of life surges through his bones.

Next morning, and the figures of the four men are seen in wide-shot sleeping by the embers of their fire. One figure gets up, picks up his staff, and begins to walk slowly South, toward the distant mountains. It’s SMITH. The others stir, their attention caught by the sight of SMITH staggering onward. JANUSZ knows what the effort to walk is costing him, and he knows this is SMITH’s gift to him. They hurriedly pack up, VOSS cramming the back-pack with roasted snake-meat, ZORAN collecting a last bowl of water, which he pours carefully into their goatskin water-bag.

JANUSZ catches up with SMITH, giving him his arm in support, and together they slowly continue their journey Southward.

They leave the desert behind as they climb gently rising ground.

The survivors each seen alone as they experience the life-giving water: one simply lets water run though his fingers; another submerges himself entirely; one drinks, savoring every mouthful as if it were the finest vintage wine. SMITH fishes. Beside him several of his catch gleam silver in the light.

Walking abreast they head toward a pass between two massive mountains - in the distance gleaming snow-capped peaks rise even higher.
206  EXT. CAMPSITE, MOUNTAINS - DAWN

They sleep, huddled together amongst the stony rubble. It is snowing. VOSS is the first to rise. He looks about him in disbelief, shakes the others awake, pointing. Just beyond where they’ve slept a high wall towers above them. In this extreme Western section it’s in poor shape - not built of stone, but of ancient mud bricks, tumbled down in many places, but to the East the outline is distinct as it straggles over ridges to the horizon - the Great Wall of China.

207  EXT. THE GREAT WALL, CHINA - DAY

They enter through a keyhole-like opening formed by collapsed masonry, now dressed in their cold weather clothing.

208  EXT. SKY - DAY

From high above a series of aerial shots take us over a massive snow covered mountain range.

209  EXT. SNOWY LANDSCAPE, TIBET - DAY

The men climb steadily up snow-covered hills, pausing at a cairn of stones covered with tiny flags.

               SMITH

Tibetan?

They move on with renewed energy.

210  EXT. COUNTRYSIDE, TIBET - DAY

CLOSE on the deeply lined face of a SHEPHERD. He wears Tibetan costume and squints his eyes as he stares into the distance.

From his P.O.V., four distant figures walking across the snowy plain toward him. The sound of dogs barking.

211  EXT. A RIDGE NEAR THE SHEPHERD’S HUT - DUSK

Far below in a valley lies the legendary Lhasa - the stepped palace and surrounding town burnished by the last of the golden light. A sprinkling of lights come on as the shadows lengthen.

(CONTINUED)
Above and beyond, like a massive wall, rise the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas. This has been the view stretching out before the four fugitives and their tour-guide, the old shepherd. As if pointing out the choice confronting them, he labels each of these spectacular features.

SHEPHERD
(pointing down)
Lhasa ... LHA-SA!

Then, indicating 'over' the mountains -

SHEPHERD (CONT’D)
IN-DI-A!

In dumb-show, he mime's that the mountains would be very cold.

EXT. SHEPHERD’S HUT - NIGHT

Three horses arrive at the door of the lonely hut and its associated outbuildings. THE SHEPHERD dismounts and with much bowing opens the door for two other Tibetans who follow. One is a LAMA, the other a local OFFICIAL. They stoop as they enter - a glimpse inside to where the four survivors sit at a table, surrounded by bowls and plates of food.

INT. SHEPHERD’S HUT - NIGHT

The LAMA and the OFFICIAL sit opposite the group. Tea is served. The official speaks English with difficulty, and as in Mongolia, he addresses the elder of the group - MR. SMITH.

OFFICIAL
India? Yes. There is the track to Sikkim, over the mountains. Many people go there.

SMITH
And food?

OFFICIAL
Small villages there. They give food. Wood for fire. Yes, but you don't go now.

CLOSE on JANUSZ, intensely following the conversation.
JANUSZ
Why can’t we go now?

OFFICIAL
If big snow come – very difficult. You wait here until Spring. This family keep you.

He confers with the LAMA.

JANUSZ
(to SMITH)
That’s three months.

OFFICIAL
(indicates the LAMA)
He go to Lhasa. Get permission for to stay. Only to Spring. Not possible foreigners stay Tibet.

SMITH bows his head, mutters thanks, all of the group doing likewise.

INT. STABLES, SHEPHERD’S HUT - NIGHT

THE SHEPHERD has seen JANUSZ, ZORAN and VOSS to their quarters. He passes VOSS a battered oil-lamp and retires with much bowing. They settle on the straw covered floor, laying out their heavy wool fleeces and blankets given to them by the shepherd’s wife.

ZORAN
Well, we can’t cross in Winter.

JANUSZ
He said it was ‘difficult’.

SMITH comes in, and they make room for him in the cramped space.

ZORAN
I’m going to sleep ‘till Spring. Like a bear in a cave. What about you, Mister?

SMITH settles with his back to the wall, draws up his sheepskin.

SMITH
I’m going to Lhasa.

The others are stunned by this.

(Continued)
SMITH (CONT’D)
The Lama has a contact – maybe get me out through China. There’s a U.S. military mission there.

They don’t like it. A feeling he’s deserting them, breaking up the team.

ZORAN
‘Looking after number one.’ Isn’t that what Americans say?

SMITH
Zoran?

ZORAN eventually looks at him.

SMITH (CONT’D)
We escaped. We made it.

VOSS blows out the lamp. Silvery moonlight from a small window.

ZORAN
He’s right. I just realized it.

VOSS
Realized what?

ZORAN
Apart from a few mountains, we’re there. We made it.

VOSS
Not all of us.

ZORAN
No. Not all of us.

Their thoughts drift back to their lost companions.

ZORAN (CONT’D)
What will you do, Mister? When you get home.

SMITH
‘Home’?

ZORAN
Build metros?

SMITH
Might drift for a while.

(CONTINUED)
ZORAN
(laughs)
Haven’t you had enough of that?

CLOSE on JANUSZ, hardly listening, his thoughts elsewhere. Their late-night conversation drifts over him.

VOSS
I will fight. First Germans, then Russians.

ZORAN
Then re-build your church?

VOSS
I will die fighting.

This statement has an oddly prophetic sound. JANUSZ looks across at him.

ZORAN
I’m going to get Tomasz’s pictures to a newspaper, or get them published somehow. Then I’m going to cook his chicken - but with extra salt just to annoy him.

Chuckles from the group.

SMITH
And you, Janusz?

VOSS (TO SMITH)
As long as the Communists are in Poland, he can’t go back.

ZORAN
They’d shoot you wouldn’t they, Janusz?

They settle down to sleep, outside the wind is picking up.

JANUSZ
I’ll just keep on going. Until it’s over. Keep on walking.

SMITH looks through the gloom to where JANUSZ sits - moonlight slashes the side of his face, but he can’t quite see his eyes.

CLOSE on JANUSZ. He’s wide awake. No thought of sleep.
215 - OMIT

216 INT. STABLES - DAWN

ZORAN and VOSS agitated at the discovery that JANUSZ has gone. Much coming and going in and out of the hut, checking that he isn't somewhere close by. Only SMITH remains undisturbed as he sits with his back against the wall, the ghost of a smile on his lips. He expected nothing less.

217 EXT. HIMALAYAS - DAY

Up ahead a figure, JANUSZ, dwarfed by the mountain chain, struggles on, climbing toward the snow-capped passes.

218 EXT. HIGHER PASS DAY

As he climbs he hears a cry, mingling with that of the wind - a voice echoing about the mountains. He ignores it for a few paces, before he looks back far below two figures waving and calling - VOSS and ZORAN.

219 EXT. MOUNTAIN SLOPE/VALLEY, TIBET/INDIA - DAWN

The change from the barren mountains of Tibet, to the lush green of Sikkim is abrupt and startling - from rocky upper reaches the slope to the valley becomes rich in scrubby birch-woods, rhododendrons, and deciduous forest, until finally it becomes dense rain forest. It is with a backdrop of this luxuriant green that Indian faces look up toward the slopes. Here they watch three wild looking bearded men descending toward them. The additional cost of this final leg of their journey is plainly visible on their faces, and in their slow stumbling movements. They walk like automatons, only their senses fully alive. Shouts from the locals produce a village ELDER, then a POLICEMAN. Older children squeal with delight, while some of the very young cry out in fear, one even bursting into tears - are these the dreaded Yeti their grandfathers told them lived up in the mountain peaks?

220 EXT. VALLEY PATH, INDIA - DAY

Close on JANUSZ, VOSS, and ZORAN as the beaming POLICEMAN escorts them past dozens of smiling faces.

(CONTINUED)
This being India, a small crowd of the curious rapidly swells, until the path is lined two and three deep on either side, like a welcoming crowd at the end of a marathon. Small children are held up for a better look, while hands reach out patting their backs and shoulders — it’s as if they know these men have achieved something remarkable.

Close on JANUSZ, as amongst the sound of the gathering crowd other voices join in, cheering voices, hundreds of them, rising in volume until the cheering changes into that of a chant, now seemingly swelled by thousands of voices. Still CLOSE on JANUSZ walking as behind him the Indian scene dissolves into a series of black and white images. (Throughout, the image of JANUSZ walking is from this scene in India).

— VICTORY IN EUROPE. CROWDS CELEBRATE IN TRAFALGAR SQUARE...SUPER, ‘V.E. DAY, 1945’

JANUSZ walking.

— FIGHTING IN BUDAPEST, THE UPRISING AGAINST THE COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT...SUPER, ‘HUNGARIAN UPRISING, 1956’

JANUSZ walking.

— THE BERLIN WALL BEING BUILT, SOME ATTEMPT ESCAPE. A MAN IS SHOT AS HE CLIMBS THE WALL...SUPER, ‘BERLIN WALL, 1961’

JANUSZ walking.

— RUSSIAN TANKS IN PRAGUE, CONFRONT DEMONSTRATORS...SUPER, ‘PRAGUE UPRISING, 1968’

JANUSZ walking.

— LECH WALESA ADDRESSES STRIKING MINERS AT GDAŃSK SHIPYARDS, POLAND...SUPER ‘SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT, POLAND, 1980’

JANUSZ walking.

— THE BERLIN WALL COMING DOWN. SHOUTS AND CHEERS FROM THE ECSTATIC CROWD ON BOTH SIDES...SUPER ‘BERLIN WALL COMES DOWN, 1989’

JANUSZ walking.

— CROWDS IN WARSAW CELEBRATE THEIR FREEDOM...SUPER, ‘POLAND FREE, 1989’

JANUSZ walking.
EXT. A HOUSE, POLAND - DAY

The camera moves toward a gate in a hedge. The click of the latch as it opens. A downward view of the flagstones. The front door, the camera pans left. The loose brick. A hand into frame removes a key from behind the brick. Into the lock of the door, the door pushed open.

INT. HOUSE, POLAND - DAY

A WOMAN sitting by a window. She’s in her early seventies, and she looks up expectantly on hearing the door closing in the hallway. At the entrance to the room appears a young man in Polish cavalry uniform - YOUNG JANUSZ, as he was just before the war. He smiles at his wife. Cut back to the seat by the window to see his pretty YOUNG WIFE, as she was back in 1939. YOUNG JANUSZ, smiling broadly, crosses toward her. Cut back to his WIFE of 1989 - on her face there are lines of suffering which fade as she smiles up at him. She’s waited a long time for him to come home. On JANUSZ now as he sits opposite her, and for the first time we see him as he is in 1989 - also in his early seventies. Without a word he reaches across the table and takes her hand in his.

FADE TO BLACK.