Tchaikovsky's Requiem

by

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AUTHOR'S NOTE:

French idioms, curse words, drug references, and slanderous remarks about notable people are all drawn from Tchaikovsky's letters.

Tchaikovsky's love affairs and the mystery surrounding his tragic death are factual. All characters are real.

Wherever possible, dialog is drawn from Tchaikovsky's own words. This is - as far as history may divine - a true story.

"Talent is that which a man possesses. Genius is that which possesses a man."

– Isaac Stern

"Love, love, love – that is the soul of genius!"

– Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

TITLE CARD: THE FIRST MOVEMENT

AGAINST BLACK.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (V.O.)
(Whispered)
It begins pianissimo.

THE SYMPHONY PATHÉTIQUE - Tchaikovsky's masterpiece - opens the first haunting bassoon notes of the Adagio...

FADE IN:

INT. TCHAIKOVSKY HOUSE - BEDROOM DAY VOTKINSK, 1854

Young PYOTR ILLYICH TCHAIKOVSKY (13) huddles in bed with his dying MOTHER.

Her frail body WRACKED WITH FEVER CHILLS. Pyotr tightens the blankets around her with the frail grip of his hug.

Her body convulses, SHAKING THE ENTIRE BED. And then she lies still.

Pyotr's boyish face is frozen in a rictus of fear and grief.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (V.O.)
(Whispered)
Listen...

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. ST. PETERSBURG APARTMENT - DAY WINTER, 1893

Pyotr's aged face, now rigid in death.

A transparent shroud covers Tchaikovsky's corpse up to the neck. DR. LEV BERTENSON disinfects the body, dabbing the lips and nostrils with carbolic solution.

MOURNERS file through the apartment, paying respects.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK, the legendary conductor, cuts a striking figure in a black over-frock cloak. He speaks fervently to the young virtuoso, SERGEI RACHMANINOFF.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
How can this be?

RACHMANINOFF
Arsenic.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Rimski-Korsakov said cholera.

RACHMANINOFF
Rubbish. You'll excuse me, sir.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Why do you say arsenic?

RACHMANINOFF
The city edict - it's illegal to let a body with cholera lie in state. Yet look how his nephew Vladimir kisses his face.

Tchaikovsky's young nephew, VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (22), kneels beside the body. Vladimir tenderly kisses Tchaikovsky, lingering over his face.

Eduard Nápravník watches, shuddering.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Appalling.

Tchaikovsky's younger brother, MODÉST, pats Vladimir Davydov's arm, pulling the young man from the room.

RACHMANINOFF
This was not cholera. This was murder.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
(whispered)
Lower your voice.

Composer NICOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV and critic VLADIMIR STASOV shuffle past, nodding their heads respectfully. They cross themselves and join composers CÉSAR CUI and ALEXANDER SCRIABIN by the locked grand piano.

Eduard Nápravník continues in hushed tones.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Arsenic?

RACHMANINOFF
Doctor Bertenson admits the symptoms are indistinguishable from cholera.

Sergei Rachmaninoff stands six-and-a-half feet tall. At age twenty, he is already revered as one of the best pianists in the world.

RACHMANINOFF (CONT'D)
Nobody gets cholera and dies in two days.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
But a murder? Why would anyone do such a thing?

RACHMANINOFF
(fierce whisper)
You know damned well why! Every person in this room is relieved Tchaikovsky is dead. We have avoided a scandal.

Eduard Nápravník looks weak enough to faint.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
My God. What have we done?

RACHMANINOFF
We.

Rachmaninoff spits.

RACHMANINOFF (CONT'D)
Tchaikovsky is dead. Russia has lost its greatest voice.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (V.O.)
(Softly)
Listen...

CUT TO:

INT. HALL OF NOBLES - ST. PETERSBURG

Eduard Nápravník rehearses the ST. PETERSBURG PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA before an empty audience. He lowers his baton and the MELANCHOLY OPENING OF TCHAIKOVSKY'S *SYMPHONY PATHÉTIQUE* CEASES.

Musicians rest their instruments on their knees.

Lithe and dashing, Nápravník sports a trim mestophalian beard and wild tangles of hair.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Bassoons, play me the first two measures.

Alone, the BASSOONS purl the OPENING LAMENT.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
What do you hear?

The musicians eye Nápravník. Some with reverence, some with fear for the famous conductor.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Listen closer...

With a flick of the baton, the bassoons again SIGH THE OPENING MELODY. This time even softer.

And again, Nápravník eyes the orchestra expectantly.

Nervous musicians stare back in dumb silence. Nápravník sighs and strokes his chin.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Tchaikovsky finished the *Pathétique* days before his death. We are to premiere it as his memorial.

Nápravník is a foreigner from Bohemia. He has worked for years to mask his clipped Czech accent.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
To honor Tchaikovsky's work, we must plumb every measure for meaning until we unravel its deepest mysteries. Now tell me: what do you hear in the opening melody?

The FIRST VIOLINIST timidly raises his bow hand.

FIRST VIOLINIST
The "cross-motif."

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Bravo. The E to the G, the F-sharp to the A. Bach's crucifix.

Nápravník's finger connects the four opening notes on the score, TRACING A CRUCIFIX...

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Tchaikovsky used the cross-motif in *Romeo and Juliet*. It signifies star-crossed lovers. This symphony is about a tragic love.

Nápravník sets down his baton. From the height of his rostrum, he can speak softly and still be heard by all 80 musicians.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Tchaikovsky's greatest masterpieces tell of star-crossed lovers kept apart by the rules of society. In *Swan Lake*, a swan cannot fall in love with a hunter. In *Eugene Onegin*, Onegin cannot love a married woman. In *Romeo and Juliet*, a Capulet can not fall in love with a Montague. And in Tchaikovsky's life, a man can not fall in love with a...

Nápravník falls silent. His eyes flit to Tchaikovsky's dedication on the cover of the score. In Tchaikovsky's own hand:

"*FOR VLADIMIR DAVYDOV.*"

The FLAUTISTS below his dais shift uncomfortably in their wooden seats.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Play it once more. And this time, with your whole hearts, *listen*...

Nápravník lifts his hands in the air. The musicians raise their instruments.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
We start... From the beginning.

The bassoons take their prep breath.

Napravnik uses no baton, but simply gestures with his fingertips, beckoning music to spring forth into this world.

THE BASSOONS WHISPER THE ADAGIO. The violas swell in lamentation, fading away in a plaintive cry.

AND THE SYMPHONY BEGINS...

CUT TO:

EXT. TCHAIKOVSKY'S FUNERAL - KAZAN CATHEDRAL - DAY

Hundreds of roman columns, sprawling and immense, line the Basilica. TOLLING CATHEDRAL BELLS call St. Petersburg to mourn.

8,000 RUSSIANS crowd into the 6,000 capacity church. TEN TIMES THAT NUMBER clog the grey and rainy streets outside. A veritable sea of double-breasted wool blazers, wide cravats, and stove pipe top hats.

MUSIC CONTINUES:

INT. KAZAN CATHEDRAL - SAME

A BISHOP IN BLACK CASSOCKS with a silver *klobuk* chained around his neck, raises his ornate crosier to lead the benediction.

TSAR ALEXANDER III himself stands with his ROYAL FAMILY in the front pew of the nave. PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY LIES IN STATE, his open casket before the alter.

In a side pew, Eduard Nápravník carries on a whispered conversation with Rachmaninoff.

RACHMANINOFF
No tears?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I have not cried since I was fourteen.

RACHMANINOFF
Is it true there will be a fourth movement to the *Symphony Pathétique*?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
The saddest adagio. As if Pyotr was knowingly writing his own requiem.

RACHMANINOFF
(pointedly)
And how could Pyotr have known he was dying?

Eduard Nápravník shakes his head.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You are quite attached to this idea of murder. You've fallen in love with it and wish to marry it and raise a family together in the countryside.

Rachmaninoff gestures to a GROUP OF DISTINGUISHED MEN in a front pew.

RACHMANINOFF
Look at the Belyayev Circle. Stasov, Glazunov, Rimsky-Korsakov. Those are not the faces of mourners.

The "Belyayev Circle" rise to greet the composer CÉSAR CUI, smiling and shaking hands as they admit him into their pew. A fraternity of eminent Russian composers and critics.

RACHMANINOFF (CONT'D)
They are not burying a man, they are burying a scandal.

Rachmaninoff now gestures to a distant pew where Vladimir Davydov sits alone.

RACHMANINOFF (CONT'D)
And what of Tchaikovsky's nephew... Is that the face of a man with clear conscience?

Eduard carefully glances in Davydov's direction. The young man's face streaked with tears.

RACHMANINOFF (CONT'D)
They say he is a courtesan and a morphine addict. If there is a dark underbelly to our great composer, Davydov is its bellybutton.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Sergei, what is all this besides gossip?

Rachmaninoff slips a scrap of paper into Eduard's palm.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Are we now passing notes like school children?

RACHMANINOFF
This is the address for Tchaikovsky's physician, Lev Bertenson. See if he can look you in the eye and tell you it is not arsenic poisoning.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Why should I confront the man?

RACHMANINOFF
Because I am just a student, and you are the famous Nápravník!

Eduard shakes his head.

RACHMANINOFF (CONT'D)
Listen. They call you the "great detective" because you research a score for months before you conduct it. Now what is more important: solving a music score or a man's murder?

Eduard hands Rachmaninoff back the doctor's address.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I cannot believe Tchaikovsky was murdered.

RACHMANINOFF
Good.

Rachmaninoff stuffs the scrap of paper into Eduard's waist coat.

RACHMANINOFF (CONT'D)
Prove me wrong.

Eduard focusses on the somber mass, the choir in their black vestments suddenly OVERPOWERING WITH THEIR MOURNFUL KEEN.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. HALL OF NOBLES - DAY

The Russian Orthodox mass blends into the TROMBONE CHORAL OF TCHAIKOVSKY'S 6TH SYMPHONY. Eduard again silences the philharmonic orchestra with a FLICK OF HIS HANDS.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Does anyone recognize this melody?

Several hands go up. Nápravník nods to a red-headed TROMBONE PLAYER.

TROMBONE PLAYER
The Russian Orthodox Mass for the Dead.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
And what are the words sung to this melody?

TROMBONE PLAYER
“And may his soul rest with the souls of all the saints.”

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Excellent.

TROMBONE PLAYER
Maestro, is Tchaikovsky’s symphony a requiem?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I do not yet know. Mozart said that music is not in the notes, but in the silence between...

Eduard Nápravník shuts his eyes. And in that silence, the orchestra truly begins to listen.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT’D)
...I believe Tchaikovsky reveals his secrets through his music. And if we listen, truly listen, we will hear his very soul.

Eduard lifts his baton.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT’D)
We continue.

The trombones breath the doleful Mass for the Dead. Each plangent note as plaintive as a stifled sob.

CUT TO:

EXT. TCHAIKOVSKY’S FUNERAL - KAZAN CATHEDRAL - DAY

Vladimir Stasov, in a fur-lined cloak, gathers with the members of his Belyayev Circle shaking hands with NOBLEMEN as they exit the cathedral.

Stasov spots Eduard and Rachmaninoff. His unctuous smile instantly melds into a mask of concerned gravitas.

VLADIMIR STASOV
Monsieur Nápravník, my most sincere condolences. Such a tragic loss for Russian music.

Stasov's circle closes around Eduard. Stasov lowers his voice.

VLADIMIR STASOV (CONT'D)
We have decided. You shall premiere Tchaikovsky's final symphony in two days time.

Eduard blanches.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
That is quite impossible, monsieur. I spend months researching a score! Why, to do Tchaikovsky any possible justice -

Stasov takes Eduard by the shoulder. His icy hand marbled with veins.

VLADIMIR STASOV
The time is now, Monsieur Nápravník. The city thirsts for this premiere, awaiting the tap of your baton. I am confident you will find it quite within your powers.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
But why so soon?

Stasov gestures to the swarming crowd of mourners exiting the cathedral.

VLADIMIR STASOV
"There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood..."

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
But two days, Monsieur Stasov?

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov furrows his brows, his small mouth nearly undetectable in his tangle of beard.

NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV
All Russia tolls its bells for Tchaikovsky. This is the precise moment to promote national culture.

VLADIMIR STASOV
Is it not best we remember Pyotr through his music?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Two days...

Stasov spots Tchaikovsky's brother Modést hurrying from the cathedral. Stasov thrusts out his hand.

VLADIMIR STASOV
Such a tragic loss for Russian music.

Modést stares at the critic's outstretched hand and does not shake it.

MODÉST TCHAIKOVSKY
You spent your entire career attacking my brother's music. Now he is dead and you feign bereavement.

Stasov is shocked. Modést addresses Stasov's clique.

MODÉST TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
You are all hypocrites. His blood be on your hands.

Modést turns, leaving a row of shocked faces in his wake. Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov clasps his hands together beseechingly.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV
Modést is beside himself with grief. We must excuse him.

Vladimir Stasov's pointed grey beard reaches all the way to his belt. His cold eyes gleam behind webbed lids.

VLADIMIR STASOV
Neither Modést nor his more talented brother would ever join our circle.

Rachmaninoff smiles placidly.

RACHMANINOFF
And can you blame them? After all your scheming?

VLADIMIR STASOV
If you mean I've used the circle to influence my fellow critics or sway public opinion... Well, my young impresario, you flatter me to think me so powerful.

Eduard Nápravník diffuses Stasov with a conciliating smile.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Please forgive young Rachmaninoff. His hands can reach an octave-and-a-half. But his mouth can fit an entire piano.

Stasov's expression is dark. He surveys Rachmaninoff through grey, hooded eyes.

VLADIMIR STASOV
Everything I have done, I have done for the good of Russia.

With a sweep of his cloak, Stasov turns his back and greets several aged NOBLEMEN leaving the cathedral.

Eduard sighs with relief and ushers Rachmaninoff toward the front gates.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
All of the talent God gave you for music, he took from your talent for social grace.

RACHMANINOFF
Never mind all that. There goes our friend Davydov.

Rachmaninoff points out a young soldier hurrying across the street.

RACHMANINOFF (CONT'D)
He is certainly in a rush to leave his uncle's funeral...

CUT TO:

EXT. NEVSKY PROSPEKT ROAD - RACHMANINOFF

cuts through the carriage-packed traffic of Nevsky Street with no regard for personal safety.

RACHMANINOFF
(shouting)
Monsieur Davydov! A moment of your time!

Eduard Nápravník jogs after Rachmaninoff.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You are determined to embarrass me today.

RACHMANINOFF
It is the simple pleasures that make life worthwhile.

Rachmaninoff and Nápravník catch up to Vladimir Davydov on the small stone bridge over the Fontanka River. Vladimir turns to face his pursuers.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Monsieur Rachmaninoff. Maestro Nápravník.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
My condolences on your loss.

Vladimir Davydov bows curtly. He wears the uniform of the Preobrazhensky Regiment - THE TSAR'S GUARD. Navy blue frock with polished brass buttons, crossed by a white sash.

RACHMANINOFF
I am sorry to delay you. I believe you know something of the circumstances of Tchaikovsky's death.

Vladimir Davydov is ghastly pale, his eyes red-rimmed from sleeplessness and tears. He looks on the verge of fainting.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I was with him until the bitter end.

RACHMANINOFF
Can you tell us anything out of the ordinary about his death?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I beg your pardon.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Do you suspect foul play, Monsieur?

Vladimir takes a step backward. His eyes darting from Rachmaninoff to Nápravník.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
What are you accusing me of?

Eduard takes Vladimir gently by the elbow.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
My dear Davydov, we are not accusing you of anything -

Vladimir twists away from Eduard's grip and rests his hand on the gilded pommel of his saber.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I do not know what you mean nor what you intend.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
(astonished)
Are you threatening me?

VLADIMIR DRAWS HIS SWORD AN INCH FROM THE SCABBARD, showing tempered steel.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Are you?

Vladimir's piercing gaze searches Nápravník's face for any sign of aggression.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Tchaikovsky is not yet in the ground. This is neither the time nor the place.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Then if you will excuse me...

VLADIMIR SLAMS HIS SABER HOME INTO ITS SHEATH. He merges into the bustling traffic of Nevsky Prospekt.

Eduard watches him leave, amazed.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Well, you were right, Rachmaninoff...

Eduard shakes out his jacket and adjusts his sleeves, checking to make sure his cuff links still face outward.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
That was worthwhile.

Rachmaninoff stares after Vladimir Davydov, bemused.

RACHMANINOFF
I must return to class. Will you begin your research now, Maestro?

Eduard uncrumples Doctor Lev Bertenson's address from his coat pocket. His eyes now lit by a fire of curiosity.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I believe I shall, Rachmaninoff. Time is short and there is a symphony to conduct.

CUT TO:

EXT. DR. LEV BERTENSON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Eduard Nápravník finds the address scrawled on Rachmaninoff's scrap of paper. Eduard spots DOCTOR LEV BERTENSON, a short man with oiled hair and a paintbrush mustache, scurrying down his front steps.

Eduard doffs his top hat and announces himself with a bow.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Dr. Bertenson. I am Eduard Nápravník, conductor of the St. Petersburg Philharmonic. I wonder if I might abuse your time for just a moment.

Dr. Bertenson switches his black medical bag to his left hand while using his right to unlatch his front gate.

DOCTOR BERTENSON
I am hurrying to a house call. How may I help you, sir?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I have the honor of conducting Tchaikovsky's last symphony less than 48 hours from now. And I require your assistance for my research.

DOCTOR BERTENSON
You are not with any of the newspapers?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You do not know me by reputation?

DOCTOR BERTENSON
Of course I do. But journalists have circled me like vultures since this horrible business began.

Dr. Bertenson locks his front gate behind him.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
It is understandable the journalists have questions. Such a mysterious death...

Dr. Bertenson bustles down *Lomonosova Ploshchad*, trying to flag down a passing carriage. Eduard keeps pace.

DOCTOR BERTENSON
It was cholera.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Mais, bien sûr. Yet you told my friend Rachmaninoff that arsenic poisoning is nearly indistinguishable from cholera.

DOCTOR BERTENSON
I do not see how this line of questioning will help you with your symphony, Monsieur Nápravník.

Dr. Bertenson waves his arm frantically to flag down a coach, but none will stop. He tramps onward, Eduard dogging his heels.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Is it possible to test a body for arsenic?

DOCTOR BERTENSON
Of course.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
And did you?

DOCTOR BERTENSON
I was not requested to.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Can it still be done?

DOCTOR BERTENSON
Dear God, no.
(Crossing himself)
Tchaikovsky is in the grave!

A passing coach spots Dr. Bertenson and SQUEAKS TO A HALT, HORSES BRAYING.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Then why was Tchaikovsky rushed to burial without this test?

DOCTOR BERTENSON
The symptoms of cholera are very similar to arsenic. But Tchaikovsky showed none of the tells of poisoning - no leukonychia in the fingernails, no hair loss, no convulsions.

Dr. Bertenson swings opens the carriage door but Eduard stays him with a hand.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You have not answered my question, monsieur. Why was Tchaikovsky rushed to be buried?

DOCTOR BERTENSON
The man had cholera for God's sake - the body was a health risk!

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Yet he was left in an open casket? <u>During a cholera epidemic</u>?

Dr. Bertenson has no retort.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
I just watched a thousand healthy men wait in line to kiss his choleric hand!

Dr. Bertenson stares hard at the ground.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
A man of Tchaikovsky's personage - and no autopsy! No examination of his body?

DOCTOR BERTENSON
I must go.

Eduard Nápravník clutches the doctor's arm.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Tell me.

DOCTOR BERTENSON
Orders were handed down.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
From who!

DOCTOR BERTENSON
The Imperial Family.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Who, Konstantine? He is Tchaikovsky's most ardent supporter.

DOCTOR BERTENSON
From the royal house.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
The royal house loves Tchaikovsky!

DOCTOR BERTENSON
(thundering)
It was from the Tsar himself!

Eduard is stunned silent. He releases Dr. Bertenson's arm.

DOCTOR BERTENSON (CONT'D)
The Tsar wants no scandal over Tchaikovsky's death. I am a good doctor. Tchaikovsky's death is like cholera for my professional reputation!

Dr. Bertenson draws up his posture indignantly.

DOCTOR BERTENSON (CONT'D)
Now if you will excuse me, I cannot allow my reputation to erode any further by your idle speculations. The man is dead! We cannot change that!

Dr. Bertenson climbs into the waiting stagecoach and SLAMS THE DOOR. Eduard calls to him through the open window.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Dr. Bertenson! Do you believe Tchaikovsky was murdered?

Dr. Bertenson reads Eduard's earnest expression and softens.

DOCTOR BERTENSON
There is no way to know if it was arsenic. But I believe Tchaikovsky's death was most unnatural.

Dr. Bertenson RAPS ON THE ROOF OF THE CARRIAGE and it RATTLES AWAY WITH A CLATTER OF HOOVES.

Eduard tightens his cloak to ward off the cold. His keen eyes alive with thought...

CUT TO:

EXT. THE RED LIGHT DISTRICT - DUSK

MONTAGE

Eduard crosses the squalid slums of SENNAYA PLOSHCHAD, made famous by Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

His collar turned high, Eduard searches bordellos crowded with GYPSY PICK-POCKETS and KNIFE-SCARRED MORPHINE PEDDLERS.

Eduard scours alleyways where CHILD BEGGARS shiver in rags. ONE-LEGGED SOLDIERS wretch in the gutters, hanging drunkenly on SYPHILITIC WHORES.

END MONTAGE AS...

INT. TOCHKA OPIUM DEN - NIGHT

Eduard plunges through a beaded curtain doorway and into the smoke-filled lounge. A BLIND GYPSY strums a zither while two MEN IN RUMPLED SUITS dance a tango in a corner.

The brawny PROPRIETOR, with shaved head and handlebar mustache, muscles in on Eduard.

PROPRIETOR
If you're the police, I've already paid this month.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I am looking for a fair-haired soldier.

PROPRIETOR
There's a brothel next door, queer.

JUNKIES peek their heads from curtained alcoves. And in the darkness, Eduard spots his quarry... Vladimir Davydov - flopped on a mattress in a haze of opium.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Out of my way.

Eduard shoves his way past the Proprietor and grabs young Vladimir by the shirt collar - YANKING HIM TO HIS FEET.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
You have no business in a place like this.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Get off me.

Vladimir FLOUNDERS FOR HIS SWORD but finds his scabbard is empty.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
We must talk. I am getting you out of here. And you will tell me how Tchaikovsky died.

The Proprietor GRABS NÁPRAVNÍK AND HURLS HIM ACROSS A TABLE, SMASHING HIM INTO A WALL.

Indignant with rage, Nápravník pulls himself to his feet. He dusts himself off and unruffles his waistcoat.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
What in God's name was that for?

The Proprietor cocks a finger at Vladimir.

PROPRIETOR
That kid hasn't paid for his morphine. You don't yank my customers out of here until they're paid up.

Eduard Nápravník glares at Vladimir.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Well, pay the man!

Vladimir Davydov shrugs, stifling a grin.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I have not a kopek.

Scowling, Eduard opens his billfold, crumples up a ruble note, and throws it disdainfully on the sawdust-covered floor.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
We are leaving.

Eduard grabs Vladimir by the arm and attempts to PULL HIM OUT TO THE STREET.

VLADIMIR TUGS HIS ARM FREE. The Proprietor and his customers watch the spectacle.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I am not leaving with you.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You disgrace his memory here!

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Pyotr came to *Sennaya Ploshchad* more than I. Yet you revere him.

Eduard is incredulous.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Why would Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky set foot in this festering slum?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
(Smiling)
Male brothels.

EDUARD BACKHANDS VLADIMIR ACROSS THE FACE.

Men silently gather in the foyer, watching Eduard Nápravník in silent anger.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
You did not know? Tchaikovsky had dozens of men - from Petersburg to Klin.

Again, EDUARD SMACKS VLADIMIR, who only laughs drunkenly.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
He attended orgies. He slept with his own footman. Why, the great composer once took a negro man in Paris!

EDUARD SLAPS VLADIMIR A THIRD TIME. Vladimir makes no move to defend himself. Behind him, muscular men glower at Nápravník.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
You think you know Tchaikovsky, but you know nothing.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I know he is a genius! That is all I need know!

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Really?

Vladimir stares Eduard down contemptuously. High on morphine, his balance wavers and his eyes struggle to focus.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
So why come here? What questions have you to ask me? What answers will you listen to?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I am to conduct Tchaikovsky's *Symphony Pathétique*.

Vladimir's eyes flicker to alertness. He takes a step back before finding his balance.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Pyotr's requiem.

Eduard slowly nods.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
My work as a conductor is to research each piece to its very bones. If I am to serve Tchaikovsky, I must know all. And if it is his requiem, as you say, then I must know everything about the man, and about his death.

Vladimir looks Eduard in the eyes, taking his measure. At last he speaks.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Pay the Proprietor another five rubles. And follow me inside...

Eduard reluctantly plucks another ruble note from his wallet and follows Vladimir deeper into the den...

INT. TOCHKA OPIUM DEN - PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT

Vladimir sits cross-legged, crumbling BLACK TAR HEROIN onto the ceramic bowl of his water pipe. He heats the heroin with lit coals, watching the dark clumps liquify.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You have smoked all these hours since the funeral?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Since he died, really.

Fringed tapestries mask the mildewed walls. Canopies drape across bunk beds where broken men recline among satin pillows and dream.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Do you not work?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I am rich.

Eduard gestures to Vladimir's disheveled uniform.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You are a Preobrazhensky Guard.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I am retiring.

Vladimir clamps the hose grommet in his fist and draws air through the mouth tip. Languid smoke bubbles through the saddle, filling his lungs.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
If you are so rich, why am I paying for your morphine?

Vladimir lets two silver snakes of smoke escape his nostrils.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
My ship has not come in quite yet.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You are stoned out of your senses.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Tchaikovsky willed me everything. His estate. The royalties and copyrights for all his musical works. I am set for life.

Eduard's face contorts in shock. Vladimir spreads his arms out comfortably on the divan.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
It is my reward.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Reward for what?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
...For killing him.

Vladimir offers a sad smile. Eduard's mouth opens and closes in piscine amazement.

Vladimir drags again on his pipe, speaking around an elegant procession of smoke rings.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
You must promise me, Monsieur Nápravník, that you will conduct the symphony with every fiber of your being.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I do.

Vladimir draws again, filling his lungs, waving Eduard to sit amongst the cushions.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Come now. What do you wish to know?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
How did Tchaikovsky write the *Pathétique?* And how did you kill him?

Eduard Nápravník's eyes follow the spiraling purple smoke upwards.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I shall tell you. We start, from the beginning...

FADE IN:

The sounds of a PACKED AUDIENCE MURMURING WITH ANTICIPATION...

INT. CARNEGIE HALL, NEW YORK - BACKSTAGE MAY 5, 1891

STAGEHANDS batten the fly system to the spreader plates. TUXEDOED MUSICIANS thread their way among the tangles of hoisting cables...and file onto stage to ENTHUSIASTIC APPLAUSE.

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY stands in the wings. A sensitive face hiding behind a trim beard. His haunted eyes a window to his very soul.

Tchaikovsky is greeted by ANDREW CARNEGIE himself, an arm around his daughter MARGARET. Carnegie charms with a lilting Scottish brogue and bear paw handshake.

ANDREW CARNEGIE
Mr. Tchaikovsky, this is my daughter, Margaret Carnegie. She is most eager to meet you.

MARGARET CARNEGIE
(overwhelmed)
Is it really you?

Tchaikovsky is attentive and soft-spoken.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Am I really me?

The great composer considers the question carefully.

Behind him, the FIRST VIOLINIST finishes tuning to A440 and marches on stage to A FRESH WAVE OF APPLAUSE.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
Are you asking me if I am really myself?

MARGARET CARNEGIE
I suppose I am.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Yes. I think that I am me. Unless I am someone else mistaking me for myself. Which would be quite embarrassing. For me, if not for myself.

Margaret smiles uncertainly. She holds out Tchaikovsky's photo, clipped from the New York Herald, which he dutifully autographs.

From the stage, the First Violinist plays his A string, followed by the OPEN FIFTHS OF THE ORCHESTRA TUNING.

Andrew Carnegie sets a paw on Tchaikovsky's shoulder.

ANDREW CARNEGIE
My God, you are shaking.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Just a little trembling I get before performances.

MARGARET
Can we get you anything? A water perhaps?

TCHAIKOVSKY
Boiled water?

MARGARET
I'm not sure there's time.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - STAGE - SAME

FORMER PRESIDENT GROVER CLEVELAND addresses the packed concert hall.

GROVER CLEVELAND
Ladies and gentleman, here to conduct the inaugural concert of New York's brand new Carnegie Hall... Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - BACKSTAGE

Tchaikovsky hears his name announced to WILD APPLAUSE.

ANDREW CARNEGIE
Mr. Tchaikovsky, I believe you are needed on stage.

Tchaikovsky smooths his brow, taking short, unsteady breaths. His long, delicate fingers adjust his white bow tie and brush out the woolen tails of his tuxedo.

MARGARET
Don't you think you'd better go on stage, Mr. Tchaikovsky?

Tchaikovsky takes a deep breath.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Well, I don't see why not.

INT. CARNEGIE HALL - CONTINUOUS

THE AUDIENCE ERUPTS IN THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE as Tchaikovsky crosses the stage and steps lightly onto the conductor's rostrum. He performs an elegant bow as he takes up his baton.

Tchaikovsky turns his tails to the audience and faces the NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA. Yet still the AUDIENCE CHEERS AND WHISTLES WILDLY.

Tchaikovsky is obliged to turn and bow once more...

And then yet again.

Tchaikovsky turns to the First Violinist and shrugs.

TCHAIKOVSKY
I have not even done anything yet.

Tchaikovsky clutches the baton in his fist in his usual fashion. With a quick flick of his wrist, the Orchestra plunges into the opening chords of Tchaikovsky's famous *Festival Coronation March*.

Tchaikovsky's visage melts from fear to bliss. The TRIUMPHANT MUSIC CONTINUES AS...

CUT TO:

EXT. MANHATTAN - DAY

Tchaikovsky, terrified of crowds, is pressed among the tumult. He forces his way up Broadway, a wide avenue clogged with horse drawn carriages, railways, and trams.

Broadway is flanked with two, three, and even four story buildings.

Tchaikovsky's hotel soars all the way to nine stories. He marvels at it, jaw agape, as HANDLERS STEER HIM INSIDE.

INT. THE GRAND HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

The lobby is packed with AUTOGRAPH SEEKERS CLAMORING FOR TCHAIKOVSKY'S ATTENTION. The composer is ushered through the swarming crowd and pressed into the lift.

INT. THE GRAND HOTEL - LIFT - CONTINUOUS

Tchaikovsky's face blanches as the DEAFENING LIFT raises his body to the ninth floor, while leaving his stomach on the first.

A PORTER takes Tchaikovsky's luggage and leads him to his room.

INT. THE GRAND HOTEL - SUITE - CONTINUOUS

Tchaikovsky shuts his hotel room door, pressing his forehead to it. Alone at last. He claws the cravat from his throat and GASPS FOR AIR.

Tchaikovsky covers his face in his delicate hands and collapses into violent sobs. The composer sinks all the way down to the carpeted floor before spotting the polished shoes of the waiting porter.

The embarrassed porter holds out one gloved hand for a tip.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Forgive me! I thought I was alone.

PORTER
Is everything to your satisfaction, sir?

TCHAIKOVSKY
Yes, magnificent. Just...a touch of homesickness.

Tchaikovsky wipes his eyes and pulls himself together.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
Have you any candles for the room? I must get actual work done tonight.

PORTER
No candles here, sir. Gas and electrical lamps only.

The Porter SWITCHES ON A LAMP. Pyotr gapes at the innovation.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Marvelous. How about water - I must wash my hands. And I am dreadfully thirsty.

The Porter leads Tchaikovsky to the lavatory to show him the water tap. Tchaikovsky is even more amazed.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
Is it boiled?

PORTER
Cold on the left, hot on the right.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Yes, but is it boiled? For cleanliness?

PORTER
(confused)
Water comes out clean, sir. This is America.

Tchaikovsky smiles propitiatingly.

TCHAIKOVSKY
If you could send up a pot of boiled water, I should be extremely grateful.

PORTER
As you like it, sir.

Tchaikovsky gestures to a PILE OF BOXES ON THE ROLL-TOP DESK. They are bursting with thousands of envelopes and cut-out photos of Tchaikovsky.

TCHAIKOVSKY
And what is all this, I wonder?

PORTER
People wanting your autograph, sir.

TCHAIKOVSKY
But this will take me all night. I have pressing work...

PORTER
Price of being popular.
(Doffing his cap)
Just ring the front desk on the intercom if you need anything.

The Porter ducks out, shutting the door. Tchaikovsky stares after him bemused.

TCHAIKOVSKY
What the devil is an intercom?

-- Eduard Nápravník's voice cuts into the story --

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (V.O.)
Why are you telling me of New York?

CUT TO:

INT. TOCHKA OPIUM DEN - DUSK

Eduard watches Vladimir's wan face, stippled with the flickering shadows of the brazier's flame. Vladimir uses metal tongs to transfer fresh coals to the bowl of his water pipe.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
It was in New York the idea for the *Symphony Pathétique* hit him. To write something for himself. Without the murder there can be no *Pathétique* and without the *Pathétique* there can be no murder...

CUT TO:

INT. GRAND HOTEL - SUITE - NIGHT

Pen and ink blotter in hand, Tchaikovsky sips vodka and labors over a score. 15 spent cigarettes clog his ashtray.

Tchaikovsky clutches his head. At nightmare pitch, VIOLINS TURN TO DEVILISH SQUEALS, CELLOS GRATE LIKE SANDPAPER - his music turning to satanic madness in his mind.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (O.S.)
An honorary degree from Cambridge. A member of the *Académie des Beaux-Arts* in France...

Tchaikovsky TEARS UP HIS SCORE. In feverish torment, HE HURLS IT INTO THE TRASH CAN AND STOMPS ON IT WITH HIS FOOT.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Concerts in Prague, Munich, Paris, and London. Friendships with Grieg, Dvorak, Mahler, Saint-Saens, Sarasate...

The composer hefts up a box of autographs, hauls open a window, and HURTLES THE BOX INTO THE VOID.

Tchaikovsky watches hundreds of pictures of himself fluttering aimlessly in the wind.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (O.S.) (CONT'D)
This is what happens when you become a national treasure: you do nothing for yourself.

CUT TO:

INT. PARIS OPERA BALLET - DAY

Tchaikovsky stoops over the lid of a grand piano, jotting notes in a score. Legendary choreographer MARIUS PETIPA performs a *tendu* in the ballet mirrors.

MARIUS PETIPA
Common time, 120 beats per minute! Four measures so the Sugar Plum Fairy can cross to center stage *en pointe* without breaking her pretty neck. *Comprendre?*

Petipa has strong French accent. What he lacks in height he makes up for in volume.

MARIUS PETIPA (CONT'D)
Eight measures of melody and repeat to the bridge. *Comprendre?* Four measure bridge and recapitulate. Four measures of coda and repeat.

Tchaikovsky's pen struggles to keep pace with the prancing Frenchman.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Why twelve measures in the middle?

MARIUS PETIPA
I have the most marvelous idea for a *battement glissé et degage* to an *arabesque en plie* - and the whole thing is done *en pointe*! I must have 12 measures!

Petipa dances the choreography that plays in his mind. He spins and faces Tchaikovsky, beaming.

MARIUS PETIPA (CONT'D)
I am amazing.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Unbelievable, I agree. You are giving me the tempo and measures. Have you decided my instruments for me as well?

MARIUS PETIPA
The Sugar Plum Fairy is the sound of tiny droplets of water.

TCHAIKOVSKY
And what instrument is that?

MARIUS PETIPA
Droplets of water - as from a fountain!

TCHAIKOVSKY
A harpsichord?

MARIUS PETIPA
-No.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Piccolo?

MARIUS PETIPA
- God, no!

TCHAIKOVSKY
A harp?

MARIUS PETIPA
La vache! Absolutely not. The Sugar Plum Fairy - she is cascading drops of water from melting icicles into a rushing stream.

Tchaikovsky runs a tired hand through his hair.

TCHAIKOVSKY
A ballet about an enchanted Nutcracker? Are we quite insane?

MARIUS PETIPA
You may be insane, my friend. I, am a genius.

Petipa winks. Tchaikovsky notes his score...

TCHAIKOVSKY
“Tiny droplets of water.”

MARIUS PETIPA
We were brilliant in Sleeping Beauty. The audience will love your score - I know it! They will demand your orchestra play on the stage and the dancers perform in the pit! *Comprendre?*

--Eduard again cuts in --

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (O.S.)
Alright. Tchaikovsky was busy -

CUT TO:

INT. TOCHKA OPIUM DEN - NIGHT

Eduard is perched on the edge of an unmade bunk bed. Vladimir reclines on a divan, watching smoke gather and dissipate with the delicate drafts of the den.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
- he was touring, he was taking orders from Marius Petipa. When are you going to tell me of the symphony I am to conduct? When are you going to tell me of Tchaikovsky's death?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Patience is passion tempered, my dear Nápravník. I must set the table before you eat your meal.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
And I must get back to rehearsal. Nearly 24 hours before I am to conduct!

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Take some of this, first.

Vladimir casually offers Eduard the opium pipe.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You are mad.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
You wish to know Tchaikovsky. To know his music.

Eduard throws on his overcoat and top hat, moving for the door.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I trust you will still be here when I return.

Vladimir, pale with a sheen of sweat, sucks indolently on the stem of the pipe.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
The second movement of the *Pathétique* is joy.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Joy?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Joie de vivre. Tchaikovsky was drunk each and every night. Touring the world, alone, for years. And then I met him in Paris. And for a brief time in our lives, we knew true happiness.

Vladimir extends the opium pipe for Eduard.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
I want you to taste joy. So you may conduct with honesty.

Eduard looks at the palatinate smoke curling from the pipe. Half curious, half incredulous...

CUT TO:

TITLE CARD: THE SECOND MOVEMENT

INT. TCHAIKOVSKY HOUSE - DAY VOTKINSK 1854

MEN IN DARK SUITS drape a funeral shroud over Tchaikovsky's mother's face. Then maneuver her coffin through the doorway.

Thirteen-year-old Pyotr Tchaikovsky sits at his Wirth Brothers grand piano. Deliberately ignoring the workmen. Elbows resting on the fallboard, Tchaikovsky's quill fills a blank score with notes...

Music pouring out of his mind and onto the page.

FADE IN:

INT. HALL OF NOBLES - NIGHT

Eduard Nápravník RAPS HIS BATON for silence. Musicians' faces flicker in the candlelight of their music stands.

A FLAUTIST timidly raises his hand.

FLAUTIST
Maestro Nápravník, how are we to play an entire movement in 5/4 time? It is not possible!

Several musicians VOICE THEIR AGREEMENT.

FIRST VIOLIN
I have never seen 5/4 time before in my life! How on earth are we supposed to count it?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You think you've got problems. How on earth am I supposed to conduct it?

Eduard winks. The First Violin eyes him suspiciously. The great conductor seems oddly giddy.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Think of 5/4 as a triplet and a duplet.

Eduard counts them in and the strings launch into the CHARMING MELODY OF THE SECOND MOVEMENT. After eight measures, he silences them with a flat sweep of his hand.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Cellos, why do you think Tchaikovsky gave <u>you</u> the melody? Why not those *prima dona* violins, who get all the attention?

A timorous CELLIST raises his bow hand.

CELLIST
Tchaikovsky did not want a soprano voice. He wanted a tenor.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Precisely! The cello resembles a male voice. Cellos alone from the top.

The cellos start the movement over, but Nápravník again silences them after the eighth measure.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Cellos, what do you see in the eighth measure?

CELLIST
An octave *glissando* to ten *staccato* eighth notes.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Yes, but what does it signify? Does Tchaikovsky just have a vendetta against cellists?

The cellists are stumped. Eduard's balance is unsteady, but his eyes are brimming with humor.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
The eighth notes are a gale of laughter.

To demonstrate, Eduard Nápravník bursts into a FULL BELLY LAUGH. The cellos watch him, perplexed.

Eduard laughs again. This time breaking each concussion of laughter into a distinct eighth note.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Ha-ha-ha-ha, ha-ha-ha-ha....

The orchestra is astonished. Tchaikovsky's *glissando* mimics pure laughter.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Cellos from the *anacrusis* to measure eight.

The cellists now try the music Nápravník's way. And sure enough, the melody is now a male voice singing and exploding into laughter.

Eduard beams triumphantly.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
The second movement is joy. Play it with laughter in your hearts.

Eduard launches the orchestra from the top of the movement. THE JOYFUL MUSIC COMMENCES AS:

CUT TO:

PARIS - MUSIC MONTAGE

*Tchaikovsky greets Vladimir Davydov at the *Gare du Nord* in Paris. Vladimir leaps off the train, throws down his bags, and EMBRACES TCHAIKOVSKY.

*They glide through Paris in an open carriage. The cello laughter in the music timing with VLADIMIR'S PEELS OF LAUGHTER.

*They careen past the bustling street markets along the *Rue de Maubeuge*. Clattering through Belle Époque *Montmartre*, and past the *Moulin Rouge*.

*The carriage sails through the artist's quarter of the 18th *arrondissement*, with its winding alleys and view of the basilica. Arriving at *14 Rue Richepanse*.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL EDEN MONTMARTRE - DAY

Vladimir and Tchaikovsky unlock their hotel room and squeeze inside with their luggage. And - to their embarrassment - there are not two beds in the little room...only one.

The two men pause, uncertain where to plant their bags.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Are you sure you did not arrange this, Pyotr? I have heard of your reputation.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Excuse me?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Do not be so prudish. We are in Paris.

Pyotr swallows the wrong way and has a coughing fit. He rushes into the lavatory and draws a cup of boiled water from a teapot, drinking it as it steams.

Pyotr then sets to work scrubbing his hands raw.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
I had an extremely long journey. So I shall have the bed. And you may work at that desk.

Vladimir flops down on the feather mattress.

Tchaikovsky emerges from the *sale de bains* drying his hands on a towel.

TCHAIKOVSKY
And where shall I sleep?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
You must not sleep. You must write your ballet, *tout de suite*.

Vladimir and Tchaikovsky, like all upper class Russians since Catherine the Great, color their speech with French.

Tchaikovsky moans, his hand on his brow. He opens his valise and scatters staff paper out on the bed.

TCHAIKOVSKY
My powers decline. I repeat myself. If I can only serve *du réchauffé* at my musical banquets I must stop composing. Lest my listeners perish from malnutrition.

Vladimir sorts through Tchaikovsky's sheet music, examining the frantic scribblings.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
These aren't "reheated leftovers," they are succulent *friandises*.

TCHAIKOVSKY
The Nutcracker will be much worse than The Sleeping Beauty. How can I write? Every week I am sent off to another country to conduct another dozen concerts.

Vladimir stretches out on his back.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Yes, it must be a terrible burden to be worshipped by millions.

TCHAIKOVSKY
I shall tell you a maddening fact about commissions - they set the premiere date before I even write a note. As soon as I take their money I am left no choice but to write what they tell me!

Tchaikovsky paces the tiny room in agitation, working himself into a high dudgeon.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
And Marius Petipa with his "tiny water droplets" - that certified lunatic! Lecturing me on the distinction between *marcato* and *tenuto*, on the placement of each godforsaken accent! And the water droplets - good God - the water droplets!

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
You can write anything. You are Tchaikovsky.

Vladimir pats the bed for Pyotr to sit down. Tchaikovsky sits gingerly at the very edge of the bed.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
What are you laboring over right now?

TCHAIKOVSKY
I need a melody for the Nutcracker's *Grande Pas de Deux*...

Tchaikovsky reads from his notes, imitating Marius Petipa's exuberant accent.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
...It must be "*stately, heavenly, and transcendent!*"

Vladimir smiles mischievously.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I will wager you cannot write a "*transcendent*" melody off a G Major scale.

Tchaikovsky laughs.

TCHAIKOVSKY
All eight notes of a scale?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Yes. Just a plain, ordinary scale.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Going up or down?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Either.

Tchaikovsky considers.

TCHAIKOVSKY
And if I win the bet?

Vladimir, reclining on one elbow, cocks an eyebrow.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
If it pleases me, I may let you share my bed. Lest you hurt your old back sleeping on that couch.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Is the scale major or minor?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
(Shrugging)
Je m'en fiche.

Tchaikovsky's grin widens.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Then I shall do both. Major and minor. An entire *Pas de Deux*. All descending scales.

Vladimir scoops up a handful of fresh staff paper from the bed and thrusts the pages at Tchaikovsky.

VLADIMIR
Talk is cheap. Show me.

FADE IN:

MUSIC MONTAGE - THE GRAND PAS DE DEUX

Tchaikovsky's pen traces curving brush strokes on a score.

HEAVENLY ARPEGGIOS GLISSANDO ACROSS HARP STRINGS.

And the melody - in all its glorious simplicity - is a descending G Major scale. Transcendent beauty.

As evening falls, all Paris glitters outside the hotel window like rubies, sapphires, and diamonds.

Slanted yellow light catches glowing bits of dust in the air - lighting up like stars.

Tchaikovsky finishes his score and lies down on the bed with Vladimir. He timidly stretches out his hand and Vladimir takes it.

Pyotr settles his head onto Vladimir's neck. Vladimir's arm wrapped around his shoulder. Pyotr closes his eyes. The music intoxicating. Pyotr lifts his lips to be kissed --

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (V.O.)
-- Did you come to Paris to seduce Pyotr? --

CUT TO:

INT. TOCHKA OPIUM DEN - NIGHT

Vladimir reclines on his side, snapped from his reverie. He unscrews the mouth tip from the water pipe and boils more low grade heroin on the lid of a samovar.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Pyotr was my uncle. I'd known him since I was born. Are you quite disgusted?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I find the whole affair an abomination. Utter depravity.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Our kind are freaks, helplessly compelled to a sinful act. It is a vice all of us wish to be cured of.

Vladimir sucks the heroin vapors through the mouth tip.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
Do you believe in reincarnation, Eduard?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Certainly not.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I thought as much.

Vladimir tilts the samovar lid in a circle, "chasing the dragon" as the golden liquid boils off the foil.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
I read that our souls choose who to inhabit in each lifetime. So that we meet each other over the generations. Growing and learning together. I believe that Pyotr and I were lovers, in various forms, for a thousand years...

Eduard looks at Vladimir with a mixture of fascination and disgust.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
The problem is that in this life, we both came back as male.

Eduard's expression shifts from disdain to pity.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Je te vois venir avec tes gros sabots. Now tell me about his Symphony.

But Vladimir is nodding off from his high. Eduard rises to his feet.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Shall I take you home?

Vladimir shakes his head.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I cannot go back there. Not since that night...

Eduard nods. Vladimir's eyes slide shut. The pipe slips from his hands, but he keeps speaking.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
You loved Tchaikovsky.

Eduard scoffs, pulling on his cloak.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I possess profound respect for the man.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
You loved him. It is alright. We all loved him.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREETS OF ST. PETERSBURG - NIGHT

Eduard strides purposefully through the Admiraltesky District, his head swimming with thought. A snow flurry renders the city lights majestic. The Neva River freezing over a few weeks early this year.

Eduard huffs past the Music Conservatory with students filling the raucous taverns along *Teyatralnaya Ploshchad*.

Rachmaninoff hails Eduard, jogging across the street to join him.

RACHMANINOFF
Maestro Nápravník, you are later than I expected. Any progress?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
The nephew Davydov claims to be responsible for Tchaikovsky's death, although I do not yet see how.

Rachmaninoff falls into step with Eduard.

RACHMANINOFF
Does he have motive, means, and opportunity?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
A motive like no other. He claims to be the sole heir to Tchaikovsky's estate. A small fortune.

Rachmaninoff whistles.

RACHMANINOFF
We can check on that, easy enough. I know Tchaikovsky's lawyer, Monsieur Lev Kupernik.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You certainly are well connected.

RACHMANINOFF
I went to the academy with Kupernik's young wife. Tchaikovsky was our harmony teacher.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Can we visit Monsieur Kupernik at this hour?

RACHMANINOFF
Of course, he is always haunting Prokhodimets where I earn my spending money. Lawyers are like vampires - they don't require sleep.

CUT TO:

INT. PROKHODIMETS - NIGHT

LEV KUPERNIK removes his stick pin and loosens his ascot. He gleefully SMACKS A RHYTHM on the lid of the upright piano.

BAR PATRONS in the cramped tavern laugh and drink as Rachmaninoff and Nápravník pound out a duet - the 2ND LIZST HUNGARIAN RHAPSODY.

Kupernik wipes tears from his eyes as Rachmaninoff and Nápravník HAM IT UP... Making elaborate octave crosses over and around each other, deliberately getting their arms tangled up.

RACHMANINOFF
Monsieur Kupernik, is Vladimir Davydov really set to inherit Tchaikovsky's entire estate?

Kupernik swigs from his beer stein.

LEV KUPERNIK
I cannot break a client's confidence - even for you two distinguished lunatics. But I will tell you Vladimir is not the sole recipient.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Really?

LEV KUPERNIK
Tchaikovsky's wife, for instance, is going to make out considerably.

Eduard and Rachmaninoff exchange an incredulous look.

RACHMANINOFF
Tchaikovsky has a wife?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I have known Pyotr our entire adult lives. He never once mentioned a wife!

LEV KUPERNIK
They married in secret. Pyotr gave her the bare minimum while he was alive. But she will benefit enormously now that he is dead.

Eduard Nápravník leans forward eagerly on his piano bench. A new suspect.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Monsieur Kupernik, where can I find this woman? You must have an address in your files?

LEV KUPERNIK
I've already said far more than is prudent.

Rachmaninoff stands up. So tall he must stoop to avoid the heavy oak crossbeams of the low tavern ceiling.

RACHMANINOFF
Monsieur Kupernik, have you read the newspapers? There is foul play in Pyotr's death.

LEV KUPERNIK
I do not believe in conspiracies.

RACHMANINOFF
Name me the last time a member of the upper class died of cholera! It is unheard of these days!

Kupernik considers the truth of this.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
We must learn of anyone who stood to benefit from Tchaikovsky's death. Please, Monsieur Kupernik, it is important we honor Tchaikovsky.

Lev Kupernik gulps down his beer and jots an address on a scrap of paper.

LEV KUPERNIK
I am going to the lavatory for exactly three minutes.

Kupernik places the scrap of paper on the lid of the piano.

LEV KUPERNIK (CONT'D)
I hope not to set eyes on you two troglodytes for a long time.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
(bowing his head)
Thank you, Monsieur.

Lev Kupernik shakes his head, chuckling. Inebriated, he snakes his way on wobbly legs toward the lavatory.

Rachmaninoff snatches up the scrap of paper.

RACHMANINOFF
Tchaikovsky's wife is "Antonina Ivanovna Milyukova."

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
She sounds lovely. Is there an address?

RACHMANINOFF
The Charitable Home at Udel'naia.
(considering)
Have you ever heard of it?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Yes, in fact, I have.

Eduard rises to his feet, his expression bemused.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
It is an insane asylum.

CUT TO:

INT. UDEL'NAIA HOME FOR THE MENTALLY DISTURBED - DAY

Eduard Nápravník and Sergei Rachmaninoff sit uncomfortably in two wooden chairs, dandling teacups. LUNATICS SCREAM AND RAGE from the distant corners of the asylum.

ANTONINA IVANOVNA MILYUKOVA holds court in her tastefully decorated room. She wears a high-necked afternoon dress with puffed elbow-length sleeves and a faded linen sash.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Can you describe your marriage to Tchaikovsky, Mademoiselle Milyukova?

Antonina's posture is rigid and imperious.

ANTONINA MILYUKOVA
Sometimes I think he married just to please his acquaintances. He proposed on our second meeting and we married in front of a single witness. By the time we reached Moscow for our honeymoon, Pyotr could not stop crying. He drank incessantly and took Valeriana so that he slept all the time.
(MORE)

ANTONINA MILYUKOVA (CONT'D)
After a few weeks, Pyotr had a nervous breakdown and his brother Modést took him back to St. Petersburg. And that was it.

Antonina leans forward conspiratorially. In her arms, she cradles a porcelain doll, swaddled in baby clothes.

ANTONINA MILYUKOVA (CONT'D)
(whispered)
If you ask me, he was a little crazy.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Did Pyotr ever speak to you of his...affliction?

ANTONINA MILYUKOVA
You mean the men?

Eduard nods, his cheeks flushed.

ANTONINA MILYUKOVA (CONT'D)
Pyotr told me before we married he could only offer me "brotherly love." Of course I had no idea what that meant. But, I soon saw what Pyotr's idea of brotherly love was...

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Can you think of anyone who might harbor ill-will toward Pyotr? Anyone who might profit by his passing?

Antonina sighs and shakes her head.

ANTONINA MILYUKOVA
His affliction ran deep. There were many lovers.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Was Pyotr - forgive me - was he ever with another woman?

ANTONINA MILYUKOVA
He was never even with me. And I was his wife.

Eduard has flushed red again. He takes a long sip from his teacup.

ANTONINA MILYUKOVA (CONT'D)
You must talk to his brother Modést. He shares Pyotr's affliction. Can you imagine? Two in one family. Three if you count the nephew.

Eduard's glance roves to Antonina's collection of porcelain baby dolls, lining the shelves on lace doilies. Dozens of glass eyes staring blankly.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Just one more question, Mademoiselle Milyukova. Forgive me, but your hospital file says you've birthed children by three other men. All given to orphanages. Surely, this was grounds for Tchaikovsky to divorce you?

Antonina Milyukova's hand flutters to her chest. She fumbles absently with the tarnished beads of her necklace.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
(gently)
Why do you suppose Tchaikovsky never divorced you? Why was he so generous to you in his will? Was it because he was afraid of what you might reveal about him?

ANTONINA MILYUKOVA
I know what you are thinking. He did not want to be haunted by a scandal, "*avoir des casseroles au cul*," he used to say.

Antonina is not well-educated. Her French accent is clunky and affected.

She tightens her shawl, her chin thrust upward in pride.

ANTONINA MILYUKOVA (CONT'D)
But the truth is, Pyotr still loves me. The greatest composer in all Russia...loves only me.

Antonina's tear-filled eyes turn to gaze out the window. She clutches tightly at the porcelain baby.

CUT TO:

EXT. UDEL'NAIA HOME FOR THE MENTALLY DISTURBED - DAY

Nápravník and Rachmaninoff stride across the manicured grounds of the asylum.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
The asylum guards insist Antonina has not left the grounds in years. She is profiting from Tchaikovsky's death. But I do not see her as a murderer.

Rachmaninoff leafs through the *PETERSBURG GAZETTE.*

RACHMANINOFF
The Gazette claims Tchaikovsky died of cholera. Drank a glass of unboiled water at Restaurant Leiner.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Now I have heard everything! The most exclusive restaurant in Russia serving unboiled water during a cholera scare?

RACHMANINOFF
Don't yell at me, I am on <u>your</u> side.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Every time I saw Tchaikovsky he was either washing his hands or wishing he was washing his hands. It was a wonder he had any time to compose.

Rachmaninoff reads from a second paper, *SON OF THE FATHERLAND*.

RACHMANINOFF
"If Restaurant Leiner served unboiled water, they violated the city-wide decree. Their entire business can be shut down."

Eduard takes the paper from Rachmaninoff.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
The Fatherland does not buy it any more than we do.

RACHMANINOFF
Are you going to talk to Modést?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Modést is the last person who wants to see me. First I must return to Vladimir, our confessed murderer.

CUT TO:

INT. TOCHKA OPIUM DEN - DAY

Eduard lays packages of food out on Vladimir's divan. Vladimir wakes, stretches, and greets Eduard with a smile.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
My confessor has arrived! And he has brought me *kasha* and *blinchiki* with sour cream and sugar!

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
And eggs for your strength. And tea to clear your head.

Vladimir brings food to his lips, but with morphine in his system, discovers he has little appetite.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Will you not share my breakfast?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Breakfast for you, lunch for me.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Never mind that. This may be your one opportunity to break bread with a murderer.

Eduard eyes Vladimir seriously.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I conduct the symphony this very night. If you have something to tell me, tell me now.

Vladimir nibbles a bit of kasha, but the food has no flavor for him.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
The second movement - you rehearsed it joyfully?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You opened my eyes.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Joy, I am afraid, was all I had to teach Pyotr. In Paris we were free. Free to stop caring what others think and to be ourselves...

CUT TO:

EXT. PARIS - DAY

Tchaikovsky and Vladimir stroll past PAINTERS and STREET MUSICIANS along the cobbled promenades of the *Quais de la Seine*.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Petipa can take his Mouse King and his Waltzing Flowers and his "tinkling water droplets" and stick them in his ear.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
If this is your mood on vacation, I'd hate to see you at work.

TCHAIKOVSKY
I am on vacation from the Nutcracker. If I want to toil at superficial crap I will work on my own symphony.

Vladimir tosses bits of bread for the ducks and admires *les bateaux mouche* drifting lazily along the great river. He points to the nearest bridge.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Le Rue de Bruxelles - the home of Émile Zola. Shall we have a look?

Tchaikovsky clucks his tongue.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Zola is just Gaboriau, spiced with obscenities.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
You are in a fine temper.

Tchaikovsky clutches a hand on his heart, thickens his voice with gravitas, and parodies Zola.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Il mangeait toujours...Puis l'estomac bourré, la face écarlate, l'oeil hagard, il se leva et sortit...

Tchaikovsky bows with a flourish.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
I have just described my breakfast.

Vladimir tosses the remainder of his bread crumbs at Tchaikovsky.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
Truth is, my symphony is just as meaningless as The Nutcracker. I want to be a great chef but all I cook are pancakes.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
You have something great in you yet.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Vladimir, I am washed up.

Vladimir spots an inviting storefront and pulls Tchaikovsky into...

INT. MUSTEL PIANO SHOWROOM - DAY

The floor is chockablock with pianos, all sizes and shapes. AUGUST MUSTEL approaches, wearing an apron caked in sawdust.

AUGUST MUSTEL
Bienvenue, je suis Monsieur Mustel! Et qui dois-je le plaisir de rencontrer?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I am Vladimir. And this is Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

Mustel turns white, as if seeing an angel. Tchaikovsky is mortally embarrassed.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Thank you, Vladimir.

AUGUST MUSTEL
GOD IN HEAVEN - IT IS AN HONOR! Please, Monsieur Tchaikovsky, would you like to try my pianos? Any at all?

Tchaikovsky shyly begs off, with a sweep of his hands.

TCHAIKOVSKY
I always scrub my hands before I touch a piano.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Come, Pyotr. Go crazy.

MUSTEL BUZZES AROUND HIS SHOP IN A FRENZY, sweeping the dust covers off the pianos, revealing his prized merchandise.

AUGUST MUSTEL
Try my Harmoniums - I build the best in Europe!

Mustel's pianos are first rate. Tchaikovsky cannot resist.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Ah. The Bösendorfer...

Tchaikovsky sits down at the world class BÖSENDORFER GRAND PIANO. Mustel raises the lid and props the lock bar.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
...Bright tone. Perfect for Mozart.

Tchaikovsky launches into the *Mozart Piano Concerto in D minor*. Then embellishes, STRIKING ACCIDENTALS ALL OVER THE KEYBOARD to Vladimir's delight.

Outside on the street, a CROWD GATHERS.

In childlike delight, Tchaikovsky leaps to another priceless piano.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
But you have been holding out on me, Monsieur Mustel. For here is a Bluthner! Touch it and you hear Chopin singing -

Pyotr plays a lick of the *Revolutionary Étude* - with its brilliant left hand runs -

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
- you hear Schumann laughing -

He fires off the dazzling arpeggios of the *Schumann Papillons* -

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
- Or hear Brahms farting through his fingertips.

Tchaikovsky crinkles up his face like a brute and plays the ponderous eight finger chords of the *Brahms' F minor Piano Sonata*.

Outside, THE CROWD OF ONLOOKERS GROWS LARGER. TCHAIKOVSKY IS A VIRTUOSO.

AUGUSTE MUSTEL
- My new Harmonium is built like a glockenspiel, with steel resonators and a single sustain -

But Tchaikovsky, with the flair of a matador, SWEEPS THE DUST COVER OFF ANOTHER PIANO.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Vladimir, you must accompany me. They have a Steinway "Model C" from America.

Vladimir sits down at a Bechstein and rolls out the triumphant chords of *Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto*.

Reverently, Tchaikovsky opens the fall board on the 9'2" Steinway Concert Grand, his fingers poised for attack. And then - to the growing crowd's delight - HE WHIPS OUT AN ELECTRIFYING CADENZA.

Tchaikovsky's eyes meet Vladimir's, sparkling with pleasure. GAPING TOURISTS NOW LINE THE PROMENADE.

AUGUSTE MUSTEL
Monsieur Tchaikovsky, I have built a new Harmonium - a new instrument. It is called the *Celesta*.

TCHAIKOVSKY
The "*Celesta*?" And is it truly "heavenly?"

AUGUSTE MUSTEL
Heavenly? Monsieur, it is like tinkling droplets of water!

TCHAIKOVSKY
"*Tinkling droplets of water?*"

Tchaikovsky stops playing immediately. His eyes burn with intensity.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
Show me at once.

Mustel gleefully leads Tchaikovsky through the clutter of instruments to his little wooden harmonium.

Tchaikovsky loosens his shirt cuffs and tries a simple cadence on the upper register. EACH ETHEREAL NOTE OF THE CELESTA IS LIKE MUSIC FROM A FAIRY TALE.

Tchaikovsky is enchanted.

Outside, the crowd bends forward, listening.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
Vladimir, it is a gift from heaven...

Vladimir watches intently.

And very quietly, Tchaikovsky begins singing *pizzicato* bass notes to himself, IMITATING A PLUCKED CONTRABASS...

His fingers LIGHTLY KISS THE KEYS OF THE CELESTA, conjuring a tune, ever haunting, familiar, and enchanting...

...*Like tinkling droplets of water*.

The crowd listens in hushed awe. Tchaikovsky's eyes sparkle in delight.

Tchaikovsky has finally solved THE DANCE OF THE SUGAR PLUM FAIRY.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. MARIINSKY THEATRE - ST. PETERSBURG - NIGHT

Italian Grand Dame ANTOINETTA DELL'ERA dances The Sugar Plum Fairy, twirling *en pointe*. In white tights and pink tutu, Dell'Era floats weightlessly from toe to toe.

THE PACKED CROWD IS RAPT WITH ATTENTION - in the palm of Dell'Era's hand. She is supported by the IMPERIAL RUSSIAN BALLET - the best ballet company in the world.

INT. MARIINSKY THEATRE - TSAR'S BOX

Every inch of TSAR ALEXANDER III's balcony box is gilded in ornately carved gold, framed with plush red velvet curtains. The Tsar and his SIX CHILDREN watch the ballet, mesmerized...

Below them, the *crème de la crème* of RUSSIAN SOCIETY fill the orchestra seats; ladies with silk fans, peacock feather hats, and mink fur coats...

INT. MARIISNKY THEATRE - BALCONY

Tchaikovsky sits in an opposite balcony with Vladimir Davydov.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
(whispered)
It is a masterpiece.

In the darkness, Vladimir takes Tchaikovsky's hand and squeezes. Overwhelmed with happiness, Tchaikovsky turns and KISSES VLADIMIR.

Vladimir is astonished but smiles radiantly. More happy than he will ever be again...

INT. MARIINSKY THEATRE - ORCHESTRA SEATS

The cold, pale eyes of Vladimir Stasov emerge from behind opera glasses. His mouth twisted in a scowl behind his pointed grey beard.

Stasov nudges Alexander Glazunov and together they stare contemptuously upward at Tchaikovsky and Vladimir.

ALEXANDER GLAZUNOV
(whispered)
Tchaikovsky is parading his deviance before all St. Petersburg. He thinks he is untouchable.

VLADIMIR STASOV
He has become untameable. Russia cannot afford another scandal.

INT. MARIINSKY THEATRE - CAPTIVATED AUDIENCE

As the Sugar Plum Fairy sticks the finish of her final *Fouetté en tournant*, the CROWD ERUPTS IN FRENZIED APPLAUSE.

Only Stasov, Glazunov, and the members of the Belyayev circle do not clap.

CUT TO:

INT. TOCHKA OPIUM DEN - DAY

Vladimir's eyes flicker in the hazy gloom of the opium den. In his black cloak, Eduard is almost invisible.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Can you feel Tchaikovsky's joy?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I hear it in your voice.

Vladimir Davydov moves closer to Eduard, peering intently into his eyes.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
But can you feel it - really feel it! Pyotr said these are the "finest adornments in an artist's life." The moments that make it worth "living and laboring." To be loved and understood!

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I understand all that.

VLADIMIR GRABS EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK BY THE SHOULDERS.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
But I need you to feel everything Pyotr felt! How can you express emotion on the stage when you never express it in real life?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Unhand me!

Vladimir releases Eduard. Vladimir plops down on the floor and busies himself with packing a new pipe.

He unwraps a clump of black heroin from its foil package.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Pyotr told me you are an orphan.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
He told you *what?*

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
It is nothing to be ashamed of. Pyotr's mother died when he was 13. His father nearly died the same month. From then on, Pyotr lived in a boarding school.

Vladimir sucks on the stem of the pipe to get the smoke BUBBLING THROUGH THE WATER BOWL.

Eduard watches him; his jaw muscles clenching and unclenching. Finally, he speaks.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I was orphaned at fourteen.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Do you see why Pyotr felt you could understand him? Why you alone could conduct his work?

Eduard Nápravník nods. Vladimir releases a plume of violaceous smoke and relaxes into the cushions.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
Do you know how Pyotr feels when a work is rejected by critics?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Yes, believe me. I conducted many of his works that fell flat on their faces.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Well the audience loved The Nutcracker. Antonietta Dell'Era took five curtain calls.

Vladimir watches the diaphanous smoke undulate on unseen eddies of air.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
But the critics excoriated Tchaikovsky. They buried the Nutcracker so that it will be forgotten by history and never played again...

CUT TO:

INT. TCHAIKOVSKY APARTMENT - ST. PETERSBURG - NIGHT

Modést Tchaikovsky helps Vladimir Davydov carry his luggage to the front door. Vladimir is dressed in the formal regalia of his Army Regiment.

MODÉST
Write us letters incessantly. I expect updates every minute you are away.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I promise.

Tchaikovsky tosses a copy of the *PETERSBURG GAZETTE* onto the table, pours himself a fresh vodka from a tumbler, and raves.

TCHAIKOVSKY
The critics accept the works I don't care about and destroy the works I love! The 1812 overture is nothing but bombastic noise and it is my biggest success.

Vodka swishes out of Tchaikovsky's glass and onto the Oriental rug.

MODÉST
(to Vladimir)
It is lucky you are leaving. He does this every time he premieres a new work.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Meanwhile the *Queen of Spades* - which I composed in a 44 day fit of passion - is all but forgotten.

MODÉST
Here we go...

Tchaikovsky is already refilling his vodka, spilling more before it gets to his mouth.

TCHAIKOVSKY
I dedicated my First Violin Concerto to that virtuosic coward, Leopold Auer. And he refused to play it! It took four years to be performed! And then "legendary critic" Eduard Hanslick utterly shat upon it.

MODÉST
Pyotr, wouldn't you like to bid goodbye to Vladimir, before he rejoins his regiment?

Tchaikovsky does not hear, but begins a recitation of Eduard Hanslick's review...

TCHAIKOVSKY
"The violin is no longer played. It is yanked about, torn asunder, and beaten black and blue..."

Vladimir turns to Modést with concern in his voice.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
What is he doing?

MODÉST
Pyotr commits all of his bad reviews to memory. He has a real genius for self-pity.

Tchaikovsky spreads his arms and addresses the walls, the ceiling, the fireplace...

TCHAIKOVSKY
"...the soloist martyrs himself as well as his listeners. The finale is odorously Russian. We see wild and vulgar faces, we hear curses, we smell bad brandy. Friedrich Vischer once asserted there are paintings that 'stink to the eye.' Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto brings us the horrid realization there is music that stinks to the ear."

Modést goads Tchaikovsky.

MODÉST
Johannes Brahms told you to your face the Violin Concerto stunk.

Modést has hit the mark. Tchaikovsky's face contorts in anger.

TCHAIKOVSKY
That scoundrel Brahms. What a giftless swine! How is this conceited mediocrity regarded as a genius? Compared to him, Raff is a giant, not to mention Rubinstein.
(MORE)

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
Brahms is a chaotic and utterly empty wasteland.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I think his Rhapsodies are divine.

Tchaikovsky flops down on the sofa. He exhales a plume of cigarette smoke through his nostrils and crosses his legs urbanely.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Brahms is a shit.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Bach lived and died in obscurity and now is revered like a saint. You never know, Pyotr. Someday, your First Violin Concerto may become the most popular violin concerto in the world.

TCHAIKOVSKY
They have buried it. Along with The Nutcracker. And they will bury my Symphony as well.

In a sudden fury, Tchaikovsky rushes to his roll top desk, picks up the score of the *Symphony Pathétique*, and RACES FOR THE FIREPLACE.

Modést and Vladimir move to stop him, but TCHAIKOVSKY OVERPOWERS THEM, TOSSING HIS SYMPHONY INTO THE FLAMES.

Vladimir cries out in anguish, reaching for the score with bare hands. But Tchaikovsky DASHES HIS VODKA INTO THE BLAZE.

THE 6TH SYMPHONY EXPLODES IN FLAMES.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
You maniac! You fool!

Tchaikovsky hands Vladimir his empty vodka glass.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Get me another drink.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
No!

TCHAIKOVSKY
À boire ou je tue le chien!

Vladimir takes the glass and HURLS IT INTO THE FIREPLACE.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
You raving idiot! You worked for months on that!

TCHAIKOVSKY
It is mine to destroy.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Not in a moment of asinine drunkenness.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Why don't you go on and leave already! Go and join your foolish army regiment!

Tchaikovsky sees the pain in Vladimir's eyes and cools off. He sets a hand on the mantelpiece and stares into the fire.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
The symphony had no heart. I was writing for the sake of writing. Like the weaker children of Sparta it must be thrown off a cliff.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
It was probably as much a work of genius as the first five.

TCHAIKOVSKY
It was drops of ink on paper.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
So rewrite it - don't burn it in a fire. Honestly, you are the stupidest genius I have ever known.

TCHAIKOVSKY
I am dried up. I ought not to write symphonic music anymore.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
What <u>do</u> you want to write?

TCHAIKOVSKY
I want to write something unimpeachably great. Something from my soul!

Tchaikovsky's eyes search Vladimir's, imploringly.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
I want to write something honest.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Then write about us.

Vladimir and Modést pick up their coats and luggage and leave the apartment.

Tchaikovsky ponders Vladimir's words, thunderstruck.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Write about us...

Tchaikovsky's eyes widen in wonder. An epiphany slowly spreading from his heart to his mind.

And he is lit by a new fire...

...REVELATION.

CUT TO:

INT. TCHAIKOVSKY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Tchaikovsky is composing - PEN FLYING ACROSS THE PAGE. His face transfigured with passion and fury. A MAN POSSESSED.

TCHAIKOVSKY (V.O.)
"My dear Vladimir, the idea of a new symphony came to me. It is completely saturated with myself. The progress is going so intensely, the first movement is ready in less than four days..."

Tchaikovsky's pen races from his score to a fresh sheet of paper where he writes LETTER AFTER LETTER TO VLADIMIR.

TCHAIKOVSKY (V.O.)
"My emotions rise in crescendo. You cannot imagine my feelings of bliss now that I am convinced the time is not gone forever; that I can still work!"

Tchaikovsky pounds chords on his 82 key grand piano. He wets his pen and makes adjustments to his score.

TCHAIKOVSKY (V.O.)
"I am writing to you with a voluptuous pleasure. The thought that this paper is going to be in your hands fills me with joy and brings tears to my eyes..."

Tchaikovsky sits rigid at his desk, fingers pressed to his temples, listening to the MUSIC FLOODING HIS MIND. TEARS ROLL DOWN HIS CHEEKS.

TCHAIKOVSKY (V.O.)
"The anguish and distress which cannot be expressed in words, I can express in my symphony! I shall not feel depression any more..."

Tchaikovsky wrings his cramped and ink-stained hands, soaking them in a bowl of hot water.

TCHAIKOVSKY (V.O.) (CONT'D)
"I see you in my dreams looking sad. This adds a feeling of compassion to my love for you and makes me love you even more. Oh God! How I want to see you this very minute..."

Tchaikovsky watches the growing red light of dawn. His hands shake with nervous exhaustion.

HUNDREDS OF PAGES OF HANDWRITTEN SYMPHONIC MUSIC LIE SCATTERED ABOUT HIS APARTMENT.

TCHAIKOVSKY (Overlapping V.O.)
"- I embrace you my idol!"
"- I embrace you to suffocation!"
"- I embrace you with mad tenderness."

Tchaikovsky signs the cover of the *Symphony Pathétique*...

"*...For Vladimir Davydov.*"

Guttered candle light dances in Tchaikovsky's eyes.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
You have freed me.

CUT TO:

EXT. ST. PETERSBURG - MOSKOVSKY VOKZAL RAILROAD STATION - DAY

In uniform, Vladimir Davydov deboards the train. He is surprised to find Tchaikovsky waiting there in his jacket, waistcoat, and umbrella.

Tchaikovsky moves to embrace him, but Vladimir is stiff and cold. Vladimir's ARMY COMRADES, released on furlough, clap him on the back as they exit the train.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Not here, you old fool.

Tchaikovsky takes Vladimir's arm and steers him into the BUSTLING CROWDS of Nevsky Prospect road.

TCHAIKOVSKY
What do you have to say for yourself?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Me?

TCHAIKOVSKY
You don't answer a single one of my letters. God forgive me - all I wanted was a few words from you.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I don't suppose you've ever served in the army, but they tend to keep you well occupied.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Don't you know how I worry about you? How I think about you?

Vladimir gestures at Tchaikovsky to keep his voice down.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
If you do not want to write, at least spit on a piece of paper, put it in an envelope, and send it to me!

PASSERSBY eye Tchaikovsky oddly. He has no idea he is shouting.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I thought you only cared for your symphony.

TCHAIKOVSKY
<u>Our</u> symphony! It consumes me. I've already finished two movements.

Tchaikovsky's eyes burn feverishly. His skin is pale from working around the clock.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
It is the best thing I have ever written or ever shall write.
(MORE)

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
I love it as I have never loved any of my musical children.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
That is good. Very good.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Oh Vladimir, if you can not kiss me in public at least hold me.

TCHAIKOVSKY GRIPS VLADIMIR INTO A HUG THAT VLADIMIR RETURNS. Tchaikovsky's fingers run through Vladimir's close-cropped scalp. They press their foreheads tightly together.

...AND VLADIMIR STASOV INTERRUPTS THEM.

VLADIMIR STASOV
Monsieur Tchaikovsky, I thought that was you.

Stasov glares with sharp eyes over his hooked nose. His woolen grey beard dipping all the way to his belt.

Tchaikovsky breaks apart from Davydov with a start.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Monsieur Stasov, I was just helping my dear nephew.

VLADIMIR STASOV
Helping him how?

TCHAIKOVSKY
(lamely)
Helping...welcome him back to St. Petersburg.

VLADIMIR STASOV
Well, if you give all visitors to St. Petersburg such a warm welcome, it may help our tourism.

Tchaikovsky and Davydov smile uncomfortably. Stasov takes Tchaikovsky by the elbow.

VLADIMIR STASOV (CONT'D)
Monsieur Davydov, you will not mind if I share a quick word with Pyotr?

Davydov bows low.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Mais, bien sûr.

Stasov pulls Tchaikovsky to one side and hisses at him through clenched teeth.

VLADIMIR STASOV
What nonsense are you playing at, Tchaikovsky? Don't you know the eyes of the world watch you? You do not belong to him, you belong to Russia!

TCHAIKOVSKY
My personal life should not concern you -

VLADIMIR STASOV
Russian culture is finally claiming its rightful place. And you would throw it all away for your infantile vices! You must quit this insanity or I shall write a letter to the Tsar and take care of your vices once and for all.

TCHAIKOVSKY
You would imprison me?

VLADIMIR STASOV
Exile. Somewhere your sordid scandals cannot tarnish our national image. You are lucky it was I, who spotted you. And not a member of the Imperial Family.

Stasov releases Tchaikovsky's arm from his grip.

VLADIMIR STASOV (CONT'D)
Pull yourself together. You are a man, Tchaikovsky. Act like it.

Stasov turns and merges into the crowd. Pyotr looks after him, defeated.

Davydov joins Pyotr at his side, placing a tentative hand on his shoulder. Pyotr shakes him off.

TCHAIKOVSKY
I must go home and write.

CUT TO:

TITLE CARD: THE THIRD MOVEMENT

INT. TCHAIKOVSKY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Tchaikovsky unbuttons his sleeves and scrubs his hands all the way up to his elbows. He scours the skin until it shines red.

In complete silence Pytor sits at his immaculate oak top desk. He places a clean sheet of staff paper - just so. Arranges his ink well - just so.

Tchaikovsky dips the pen's nib in his ink well and rolls it in blotting paper.

Everything is ready.

The composer takes a deep breath and closes his eyes...

THE THIRD MOVEMENT EXPLODES INTO LIFE --

Frenetic triplets set a blistering pace for the *Allegro Molto Vivace*;

Pizzicatos hot-potato across the string section;

CLARINETS announce a melody and are answered by the HORNS.

Beneath Tchaikovsky's hand, the SCORE TAKES SHAPE.

BEAUTIFUL SYMMETRIES EMERGE:

Black smudges of 32nd-notes scatter throughout the woodwinds;

interlocking brackets of triplets splinter throughout the horns...

Tchaikovsky is gripped with intense concentration; his face a mask of revelatory ecstasy -

INT. EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK'S STUDY - SAME

Eduard Nápravník studies the score of the third movement, juggling the instruments in his mind, STRUGGLING TO BALANCE THE CLASHING PARTS -

INT. HALL OF NOBLES - SAME

Eduard rehearses the PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA.

FORTY BOW ARMS ROW IN SYNCH --

FORTY WOODWINDS AND HORNS BLAST THE THEME --

Eduard Nápravník WHIPS HIS BATON, building the Fortissimo-issimo-issimo climax of syncopated triplets. THE HORNS DELIBERATELY OFF BEAT FROM THE STRINGS.

Eduard urges them mercilessly faster until the orchestra runs in synch like the interlocking gears of a Swiss watch -

INT. TCHAIKOVSKY'S APARTMENT - SAME

The composer's mind a blur with mathematics, his hand struggling to keep pace with the DAZZLING SPEED OF HIS THOUGHTS -

INTERCUT WITH ORCHESTRA

- SWEATING MUSICIANS labor over their instruments:

- TRUMPETERS' CHEEKS BULGING, veins standing out in their necks -

- BRASS PLAYERS chests heaving in and out -

- The titanic CRASH OF THE CYMBALS -

Everyone hitting the SHATTERING CLIMAX OF THE THIRD MOVEMENT and GASPING FOR BREATH.

- Tchaikovsky slumps in his chair, exhilarated and exhausted.

- The orchestra, quivering bows in the air, let the final note REVERBERATE ACROSS THE PANELLED OAK WALLS OF THE CONCERT HALL.

Eduard Nápravník's shirt cuffs are billowed out of his trousers. He leans on his music stand, panting. Hair matted to his forehead.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Good.

Eduard flips through his score, back to the beginning of the movement. Then TAPS HIS BATON on his music stand.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Now, again.

CUT TO:

INT. MARIINSKY THEATER - ST. PETERSBURG - NIGHT

The cast of Tchaikovsky's *IOLANTHE* take their curtain calls to ENTHUSIASTIC APPLAUSE. Tchaikovsky and Vladimir Davydov quietly attempt an early exit from the opera.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
(Whispered)
We should not even be here. Stasov, Rimsky-Korsakov, Glazunov, the whole Belyayev Circle will see us. You should not parade me around in public like this.

TCHAIKOVSKY
We are almost out of the theater. No one will ever know we were here.

Darting up an exit aisle, they are halted by an armed COURIER OF THE TSAR.

TSAR'S COURIER
Monsieur Tchaikovsky. The Tsar requests your presence in his royal box.

Tchaikovsky hesitates.

TSAR'S COURIER (CONT'D)
...At once.

Sweat blooms on Tchaikovsky's brow. Vladimir turns white. They follow the courier up a flight of steps. Vladimir surreptitiously gripping Tchaikovsky's hand.

Tchaikovsky straightens his bow tie and smooths the lapels of his evening coat.

INT. THE TSAR'S BOX - MARIINSKY THEATER - CONTINUOUS

Tchaikovsky and Vladimir enter the Tsar's opulent private box and bow low. All of Russian Society watches from the orchestra seats to see who the Tsar has favored with his attention.

TSAR ALEXANDER III is a barrel-chested man over six feet tall. Bald as a cue ball and sporting a thick tangled beard.

TSAR ALEXANDER III
Monsieur Tchaikovsky.
Congratulations on your opera,
Iolanthe.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Thank you, your excellency.

A sebaceous cyst dominates the left side of the Tsar's nose, drawing attention away from his stony, unflinching eyes.

TSAR ALEXANDER III
Who is this man that accompanies
you everywhere?

Tchaikovsky bows to acknowledge the other members of the royal family.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Your Excellency, allow me to
introduce my dear nephew, Vladimir
Davydov.

TSAR ALEXANDER III
You...

Tsar Alexander stares hard at Davydov, his jaw clenched.

TSAR ALEXANDER III (CONT'D)
It is *unforgivable*...

The Tsar's expression grows dark. He raises a finger to point at Davydov and jabs it repeatedly in the air.

Tchaikovsky is ashen with fear.

TSAR ALEXANDER III (CONT'D)
It is a sin against the state!

Tsar Alexander GRIPS VLADIMIR'S SHOULDERS and shakes him affectionately.

TSAR ALEXANDER III (CONT'D)
...For a member of my own royal
guard to appear at the opera out of
uniform!

Tsar Alexander laughs heartily. VLADIMIR DAVYDOV CLICKS HIS HEELS AND BOWS LOW.

TSAR ALEXANDER III (CONT'D)
Why aren't you wearing the dress
uniform of your regiment?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I wanted to preserve my incognito, your Excellency.

The Tsar throws back his head and roars with laughter, clapping Davydov hard on the back.

Over the balcony, Tchaikovsky notices Vladimir Stasov and Rimsky-Korsakov glaring up at him from the orchestra seats.

TSAR ALEXANDER III
It is hard to keep your incognito when standing next to a great Russian composer.

The Tsar CLAPS HIS HAND HARD onto Tchaikovsky's shoulder.

TSAR ALEXANDER III (CONT'D)
I brought you up here because I wished you to meet my issue.

The Tsar gestures broadly to his six children.

TSAR ALEXANDER III (CONT'D)
Children, here stands the greatest living composer. Of course, besides Johannes Brahms.

Tchaikovsky stiffens, about to riposte, but Vladimir deftly checks him with a severe look.

Tchaikovsky forces a smile and bows once more.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (V.O.)
-- I am running out of time, Vladimir --

CUT TO:

INT. TOCHKA OPIUM DEN - DAY

Vladimir's eyes are aglow with his memories. Eduard stands up to anxiously pace the room.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
The symphony premiere is this evening. So let us cut to the chase. You must tell me of Pyotr's death!

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Were you bullied in the orphanage?

Eduard is so stunned he stops pacing to stare at Vladimir.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
What does that have to do with anything?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
You bury your emotions deep down. Protecting yourself. The only feelings you express are impatience and anger.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I am not interested in getting a condescending lecture from a morphine addict.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Are you a conformist, Eduard? Are you afraid of people deviating from your idea of normal? Do you strive to fit in? When the school kids bullied you, did you tell them you were not an orphan?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
(quietly)
That is enough, Davydov.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Are you so terrified of being different, you've practiced your Russian accent so people don't even know you are a Czech?

Eduard snaps.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Enough! You say you killed Tchaikovsky. So tell me once and for all... How did you do it!

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Very well.

For once, Vladimir lowers the morphine pipe to the ground.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
If you can stomach it, it happens in an intimate moment. Pyotr and I were lying on the verge of sleep. I know you are squeamish with emotions. Will you indulge me?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Do continue.

CUT TO:

EXT. RUSSIAN SKY - NIGHT

Ten thousand stars twinkle in the firmament.

TCHAIKOVSKY (V.O.)
You are not at all like an empty suitcase. There is so much in you that is good.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (V.O.)
I have lived my whole life being someone other than myself.

TCHAIKOVSKY (V.O.)
There are worse fates.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (V.O.)
Name one.

TCHAIKOVSKY (V.O.)
Vladimir, you believe in things I have given up on. I am the empty suitcase. And you are filling me up again.

REVEAL:

EXT. ROOFTOP - TCHAIKOVSKY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Tchaikovsky and Vladimir lie on a blanket on the slanted slate roof of their St. Petersburg apartment building. An empty bottle of wine at their side.

Together, they are alone in the middle of the city. They share a kiss. Vladimir gazing up at the stars.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
In *Queen of Spades*, Herman and Liza both commit suicide.

Tchaikovsky absently twirls a lock of Vladimir’s hair around his pinkie finger.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT’D)
In *Romeo and Juliet*, they commit suicide.
(MORE)

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
In *Swan Lake*, the two lovers dive into the lake and drown.

Tchaikovsky says nothing.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
All your greatest works. Why must the lovers always die?

Tchaikovsky smiles at Vladimir, his eyes brimming with affection and great sadness.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Is it not, somehow, more beautiful that way?

Vladimir takes Pyotr's hand.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I will not leave you, Pyotr.

TCHAIKOVSKY
I know.

Tchaikovsky kisses Vladimir on the forehead.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
(Again)
I know.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I love you. And the lovers need not always die.

Tchaikovsky says nothing. But only smiles sadly.

CUT TO:

INT. TOCHKA OPIUM DEN - DAY

Vladimir's pale face lies still against the cushions.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
...And this is how I killed him. By making him believe we could be together. Giving us this ridiculous hope. Cavorting around St. Petersburg like the world could not stop us. Surely, no one could topple the greatest composer in the world? But I did. Just me.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I do not understand you.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Pyotr killed himself, you idiot.
It was a suicide.

Eduard looks at the spent water pipe, the crumbs of morphine. And the addicts dreaming in their adjacent bunks.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You have lost your mind on morphine. The doctors do not believe Pyotr died from arsenic poisoning. He was seen drinking unboiled water at Restaurant Leiner.

Eduard rises to his feet, growing angry.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
And even if he did kill himself - you have not given me any motive. Why would Pyotr do such a thing? It is a sin against God!

Vladimir fumbles with his handkerchief, dabbing his eyes.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Does my crying make you uncomfortable?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Nothing you have said makes any sense to me!

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
It is my crying that makes you angry. All emotion makes you uncomfortable. That is why you need music - so your feelings can find safe expression.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I've wasted enough time in this morass.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Full of morphine and I can still cry like a baby.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You are not at all a killer, Vladimir. You are as gentle a soul as I have ever known.

Eduard snatches his pocket watch from his waistcoat, checking the hour.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
But you have wasted my bloody time.

Eduard sweeps out of the room, SLAMMING THE DOOR SHUT BEHIND.

CUT TO:

INT. HERMITAGE THEATRE - DAY

The beautiful century-old theater is built in the classical style. From the rear of the auditorium, Modést Tchaikovsky watches a rehearsal of his play "The Prejudices."

Eduard Nápravník and Sergei Rachmaninoff sit down in the row behind Modést.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
So the great librettist has written a play. It must be liberating to write a libretto unencumbered by a score.

MODÉST
They say the best writer is a good editor. So I am not even going to favor you with a retort.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Do you have time for a break, Modést?

Modést says nothing, but continues to watch his play.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
I am holding my last rehearsal for the 6th Symphony before the premiere tonight. I want you to hear it. It is important.

After a moment, Modést reluctantly nods.

CUT TO:

INT. STAGECOACH - MOMENTS LATER

Modést, Eduard, and Rachmaninoff rock gently back and forth as the hired cab rumbles over cobblestone.

MODÉST
That you should conduct the *Pathétique*!

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
It was Tchaikovsky's dying wish.

MODÉST
You of all people!

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I conducted his First Piano Concerto after Rubinstein called it unplayable. I premiered his 1812 Overture! I premiered five of his operas. No one is a greater champion of Pyotr's music than I!

MODÉST
You championed Pyotr's music. But you never championed Pyotr.

Modést glares at Eduard until Eduard breaks his gaze, throwing his hands in the air and shaking his head.

MODÉST
What is it you need from me?

Rachmaninoff comes straight to the point.

RACHMANINOFF
We suspect Pyotr's death was not natural. We want you to help us arrive at the truth.

Modést slowly nods.

RACHMANINOFF (CONT'D)
You shared an apartment with Pyotr and Vladimir in the final days. Did you notice anything unusual in Pyotr's behavior?

MODÉST TCHAIKOVSKY
Everything was always unusual in Pyotr's behavior.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Antonina Ivanovna Milyukova said you know all Tchaikovsky's secrets. Is there anything you know that can help us.

MODÉST TCHAIKOVSKY
Do you want to know who killed him?

Eduard and Rachmaninoff exchange glances.

RACHMANINOFF
Can you tell us that?

MODÉST TCHAIKOVSKY
That one is easy. You should know. You were both there.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
What are you talking about?

MODÉST TCHAIKOVSKY
The Belyayev Circle. Two weeks ago. That was when Pyotr was killed.

Eduard's brow creases.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
The court of honor?

Modést nods his head wearily.

MODÉST TCHAIKOVSKY
Of course, you fools. What else?

CUT TO:

INT. ST. PETERSBURG CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC - DAY

Eduard Nápravník, Alexander Glazunov, and the prominent members of the Belyayev Circle gather in Vladimir Stasov's private study. Rimsky-Korsakov gestures for everyone to sit.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV
Vladimir Stasov composed a letter to the Tsar complaining of Pyotr Tchaikovsky's...tendencies.

Stasov nods gravely, stroking his wiry beard. Modést Tchaikovsky and Sergei Rachmaninoff listen with rigid attention.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (CONT'D)
I was able to convince Monsieur Stasov not to send the letter yet, but to convene all of you first. Tchaikovsky will be here any moment. And we will have the chance to confront him ourselves... Regarding his assignations.

RACHMANINOFF
His what?

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV
His dalliances.

Stasov dominates the room from his imposing oak desk, like a judge overseeing a trial from his bench.

VLADIMIR STASOV
Our noble Tsar conferred the Order of St. Vladimir on Tchaikovsky, granting him hereditary nobility and an annual pension of 3,000 rubles. This makes Tchaikovsky the first full time composer in Russian history. And therefore a symbol.

Stasov rises to his feet.

VLADIMIR STASOV (CONT'D)
And yet he cavorts with his concubine in the streets, and flaunts his deviance to the Tsar's face!

Alexander Glazunov grumbles his agreement.

ALEXANDER GLAZUNOV
Tchaikovsky has become a clown. And will disgrace Russian music if word of his indulgences continues to spread. The newspapers of Europe would love nothing more than to discredit the greatest of Russian composers.

VLADIMIR STASOV
He is being a fool.

RACHMANINOFF
You once said Mussorgsky was kind of an idiot. Are there any Russian composers you don't think are fools?

VLADIMIR STASOV
I never said Modést Mussorgsky was "kind of an idiot." I said he was a complete idiot.

Rachmaninoff smiles. A vein pulses in his temple, but he maintains his composure.

RACHMANINOFF
Both Beethoven and Handel had prison records by the time they were Tchaikovsky's age. Bach was a pugilist. Schumann tried to drown himself in the Rhine. Von Weber was literally thrown out of Germany and banned for life! Compared to most great composers, Tchaikovsky is a saint. Who cares what he does behind closed doors?

VLADIMIR STASOV
Tchaikovsky is not doing it behind closed doors - that is exactly my point!

RACHMANINOFF
Prince Alexey Vasilyevich shares Tchaikovsky's deviance. He openly lives with another man.

VLADIMIR STASOV
Yes, and he is royalty!

RACHMANINOFF
What of Julius Caesar? What of Socrates and Plato? Are they deviants?

VLADIMIR STASOV
I do not care what those perverts did to Greek boys 2,000 years ago. I care about Russian honor as we claim our place at the center of European culture!

THE DOOR BURSTS OPEN and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky steps into the room. He looks around at his colleagues, bewildered.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Gentlemen. What is this?

VLADIMIR STASOV
Your court of honor.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Rimsky-Korsakov, why have you summoned me here?

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV
Pyotr, please, calm yourself. Take a seat.

Tchaikovsky reluctantly sits next to his brother Modést, who pats his knee.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV (CONT'D)
We are gathered today as your friends, Pyotr. To say your relationship with Vladimir Davydov must end.

Tchaikovsky's mouth moves, but it takes a moment for him to find his voice.

TCHAIKOVSKY
You have decided this?

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV
It is what is best. All of us devote our lives promoting the dignity of Russian music. And you have brought Russian music to the world. These great achievements must not be undermined by frivolous scandal.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Frivolous scandal?

VLADIMIR STASOV
He is your nephew, for God's sake!

TCHAIKOVSKY
Are you worried about incest? Is that what alarms you? Are you worried my nephew and I will somehow mate and produce a deformed baby?

VLADIMIR STASOV
He is young, Pyotr! Impressionable!

TCHAIKOVSKY
He is older than your wife, when you married her.

Eduard Nápravník speaks up for the first time.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
It is scandalous, Pyotr. Surely, you can see that. Why should your tabloid life become your legacy, rather than your music!

VLADIMIR STASOV
Tchaikovsky, you must break it off with your nephew immediately. And have no more indecent relations. Forever.

MODÉST
And if Pyotr does not comply?

VLADIMIR STASOV
You know the official sentence for this crime.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Siberia?

ALEXANDER GLAZUNOV
Many have been sent who would not reform their deviance. Siberia's prisons are filled with perverts. You should feel quite at home.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV
Pyotr, you are very lucky it was we who confronted you, rather than the Tsar.

VLADIMIR STASOV
You travel abroad more than any Moscow diplomat. You are Russia's true ambassador - our most famous citizen. Russia's national honor is at stake.

TCHAIKOVSKY
I never chose to be this way. And I never asked to be a symbol. I did not even choose to make music. Music chose me!

VLADIMIR STASOV
This was never about your music! This is about Russia claiming its throne before the world. Tolstoy, Doestoyevsky, Gogol, Chekov, Turgenev, Pushkin - we have authors to rival Europe. Our ballet is world class!
(MORE)

VLADIMIR STASOV (CONT'D)
Our composers lead the progress of music - Scriabin, Mossorgsky, Glinka, Borodin, and Tchaikovsky!

Stasov lets the echo of his final words die away.

VLADIMIR STASOV (CONT'D)
We have a duty to our homeland.

TCHAIKOVSKY
I did not choose to love Vladimir Davydov.

VLADIMIR STASOV
But you may choose to end it.

Tchaikovsky sits silently, hands clasping his knees.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV
We will take it to a vote. Those who feel Monsieur Tchaikovsky must end all deviant behavior, particularly with his nephew, lest he be faced with exile in Siberia, please indicate your vote by raising your hand...

CUT TO:

TITLE CARD: THE FOURTH MOVEMENT

EXT. MOSCOW RIVER - NIGHT 1877

A young Pyotr Tchaikovsky, newly married, sprints out of his cottage. His wife, Antonina, SHOUTS AFTER HIM.

Young Pyotr dashes into the freezing river. PLUNGING ALL THE WAY UP TO HIS NECK.

His body CONVULSING WITH THE FRIGID WATER - HIS LUNGS SEIZING. His mouth twisted, STRUGGLING TO SCREAM.

FADE IN:

INT. HALL OF NOBLES - DAY

Eduard Nápravník stands quietly before the orchestra. His face pale and worn.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
The final movement.

Modést and Rachmaninoff watch the final rehearsal from the audience.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Adagio Lamentoso, a slow lament. Everything will come together now.

The violinists rest their instruments upright on their knees, hands gently cradling the fragile necks.

A cellist scores his resin with a knife and strokes the hardened sap across his bow.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
You will hear the return of the trombone Mass for the Dead. You will hear the return of the theme of the star-crossed lovers. And you will hear the very last notes written by the greatest composer in Russian history.

Eduard lifts his hands and the musicians raise their instruments.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Let us begin the end.

VIOLINS WAIL IN LAMENTATION. The lowest strings tremble with ominous portent.

And the final movement begins...

CUT TO:

INT. TCHAIKOVSKY APARTMENT - DAY

Tchaikovsky works feverishly at his desk, sipping vodka from a half-empty bottle. Ashtray clogged with spent cigarettes.

Vladimir Davydov enters, cheeks rosy from the cold, and shrugs off his wool overcoat. He looks to Modést who sips whiskey, legs folded on the sofa.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Pyotr is still working?

MODÉST
He has not spoken a word for hours... It's been bliss.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
But we must conceive a plan. We cannot allow Pyotr to be shipped off to Siberia!

MODÉST
Pyotr refuses to discuss it. He wants only to work.

Vladimir crosses to Pyotr at his desk. He sets a hand on the composer's shoulder.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
What are you writing, Pyotr?

TCHAIKOVSKY
The final movement of my symphony.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
But you already have all three movements.

TCHAIKOVSKY
This symphony will have a fourth.

Tchaikovsky takes a swallow of vodka and smiles.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
This is the best and most sincere of all my works. You will see.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I looked at your crazy symphony.

Vladimir picks up the score of the first movement.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
Here, at the *Adagio Mosso*, you have a bassoon *decrescendo* to *PPP*. And then *PPPP*, and then *PPPPP* and then *PPPPPP*.

Vladimir counts all six P's out on his fingers.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
Tell me, great composer, how is a bassoon supposed to play *pianissimo-issimo-issimo-issimo-issimo*?

TCHAIKOVSKY
(smiling)
With a bass clarinet.

Modést pipes up from the sofa.

MODÉST
Pyotr, you are a madman.

TCHAIKOVSKY
If enough people call me a madman, a few will mistake me for a genius.

Tchaikovsky winks, eyes twinkling with good humor.

He lifts up his score and waves it in the air, letting the ink dry.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Pyotr, we must leave this city. Or contrive a plan.

TCHAIKOVSKY
On my word of honor, I have never felt such happiness as in knowing I am really the creator of this work.

Vladimir takes Tchaikovsky in his arms, trying to hold him.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Pyotr, you must listen to reason -

TCHAIKOVSKY
What am I to do! If I am sent to Siberia I will be apart from you. If I stay here, I must be apart from you. If I go abroad, my reputation will track me to the ends of the earth!

Tchaikovsky shakes himself free.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
I choose to be with you right now. If only for these moments!

There is a fire in Tchaikovsky's eyes.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
Nothing they can do to me is important. All that matters is my music!

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
(plaintively)
They will ruin you.

TCHAIKOVSKY
I say they can do nothing to me! They cannot hurt me. They cannot disparage me. They cannot kill me. For my symphony is written...

Tchaikovsky downs the remainder of his vodka.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
And now I am immortal.

Tchaikovsky's eyes sparkle with something verging on madness.

CUT TO:

INT. HALL OF NOBLES - DAY

Eduard sits with Modést and Rachmaninoff in the front row of the empty audience. His orchestra on break.

MODÉST
You must play it softer! The fourth movement is but one decrescendo.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Signifying what?

MODÉST
A good man dying.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You say the Belyayev circle killed Pyotr. Do you mean he was driven to suicide?

Both men are out of their chairs.

MODÉST
(growling)
Must I spell out everything for you?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Yes! Contracting Asiatic Cholera from a glass of water - how is that a suicide?

MODÉST
Our mother died when Pyotr was 13! Her lungs failed. Pyotr sat with her in bed. He lost his voice shouting, begging her to breath. She died in his arms.

Modést continues, his voice shaking.

MODÉST
Tchaikovsky had an eidetic memory! He recalled that moment in every detail, every day for the rest of his life.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Why do you tell us this?

MODÉST
Because that was the day Pyotr became a composer.

Modést steadies himself against the back of a chair.

MODÉST
Pyotr showed no great talent until that moment. And the day she passed away, he wrote his first composition. A waltz, in her honor. Grief unlocked Pyotr's genius.

UNIFORMED USHERS enter the hall and begin lighting the wall sconces for the evening premiere.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Modést, how did your and Pyotr's mother die?

MODÉST
You do not know?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
No.

MODÉST
Asiatic Cholera.

Eduard and Rachmaninoff are stunned.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
The same disease that killed Pyotr?

MODÉST
(nodding)
It is no coincidence. She drank a glass of unboiled water. The same as Pyotr.

Modést chuckles bitterly.

MODÉST
Pyotr had a poet's heart. He would choose a poet's death.

Eduard is speechless. Rachmaninoff shakes his head.

RACHMANINOFF
...Explains why Pyotr spent his life scrubbing his hands and boiling his water.

MODÉST
Our mother's death was the formative moment of his life... And also of his death.

Eduard runs his hands through his hair, thoughts racing.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
My God, I understand now. I understand Vladimir Davydov's guilt. It was a suicide.

Eduard paces in a circle.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Oh Vladimir, poor Vladimir.

Modést is suddenly alarmed.

MODÉST
Why, where is Vladimir?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Festering in some opium den.

Modést grabs Eduard's shoulders.

MODÉST
What? You can not leave the boy there! He is intent on killing himself - to return to Pyotr!

Modést is already flinging on his coat.

MODÉST (CONT'D)
I feared he might try something. Where is this opium den?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I do not know a name or an address. I can only find it by feel.

MODÉST
Take me there at once.

RACHMANINOFF
But Monsieur Nápravník's premiere is tonight!

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Sergei, we must. The boy could be dying.

RACHMANINOFF
Then I come with you.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREETS OF ST. PETERSBURG - NIGHT

The trio perch in a GALLOPING TROIKA, SKITTERING THROUGH THE CROWDED STREETS. Pedestrians leap out of the way of the SPEEDING CARRIAGE.

INT. TROIKA - MOVING

Modést clutches his top hat to prevent it blowing off.

MODÉST
How can I repay you for helping me?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Write us your best librettos.

Modést looks from Eduard Nápravník to Sergei Rachmaninoff.

MODÉST
Write librettos... For both of you?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Yes.

MODÉST
And I shall. With pleasure.

BELLS JINGLE ON THE HARNESSES OF THE GALLOPING BLACK COURSERS. Their steaming breath shimmering in the wintery Russian night.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOCHKA OPIUM DEN - NIGHT

Eduard, Modést, and Rachmaninoff LEAP FROM THE CARRIAGE BEFORE IT GRINDS TO A HALT.

The three men leave the horses frothing and stamping on the cobbled street.

INT. TOCHKA OPIUM DEN - CONTINUOUS

STONED MEN WITH BLOODSHOT EYES FILL THE MAIN ROOM, CROWDING AROUND A BODY.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Where is Vladimir! Let us through at once!

Eduard, Modést, and Rachmaninoff shove their way through the crowd to reach the unconscious body on the ground. And sure enough, it is Vladimir.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Vladimir, what have you done?

Eduard rolls up his sleeves, lifting young Vladimir's head off the ground. The eyes show only their whites. Froth congealing on the blueing lips.

Eduard turns to the shaved-headed Proprietor.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Have you given him an emetic?

PROPRIETOR
He's done plenty of vomiting already if that's what you mean.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Coffee, please. We need to keep him awake.

PROPRIETOR
I'm not his bloody doctor and this is no bleedin' hospital. I got a business to run. Pay me his debts and get him outta here.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You will sell him enough dope to kill himself, so long as you can collect a profit.

The Proprietor grabs Eduard by the collar, hauling him to his feet.

PROPRIETOR
I'm a tavern keeper - this is my business.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You are not a tavern keeper, you are an undertaker!

Eduard Nápravník shoves the proprietor off of him. The Proprietor hauls off and DECKS EDUARD ON THE CHIN, sending the conductor sprawling across the filth-strewn floor.

PROPRIETOR
I didn't pay for his dope. <u>You did</u>!

Before Eduard can pick himself up, Rachmaninoff enters the fray. Unusually tall and with massive fists, RACHMANINOFF ROUNDHOUSES THE PROPRIETOR.

Every drug-addled man in the opium den SETS ON RACHMANINOFF LIKE A PACK OF WILD DOGS. RACHMANINOFF TRADES PUNCHES WITH HALF A DOZEN MEN.

MODÉST GRABS EDUARD AND TOGETHER THEY DRAG VLADIMIR'S LIMP BODY FROM THE OPIUM DEN.

EXT. TOCHKA OPIUM DEN - CONTINUOUS

Modést and Eduard hoist Vladimir into the waiting Troika. Eduard Nápravník barks at the bewildered Troika driver.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
To the Hall of Honor with all haste. I have a symphony to conduct!

Rachmaninoff backs out of the melee, fists flying, and LEAPS ONTO THE TROIKA AS IT TAKES FLIGHT.

INT. TROIKA - MOVING

Eduard cradles Vladimir's lolling head in his hands.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Wake up, Vladimir.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
(murmuring)
I can't... I can't...

EDUARD SHAKES HIM VIOLENTLY.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You must attend the concert. Pyotr would have wanted you there.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Let me sleep...

Eduard Nápravník SLAPS VLADIMIR'S FACE, keeping him awake.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV (CONT'D)
Every time you see me, you feel compelled to smack me...

But Vladimir cannot keep his eyes open. The whites of his eyes roll back in his head.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
You disgraced him in life, now you disgrace him in death!

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
It is my fault he died. He died for me!

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Get up, you fool. You are not doing him any favors by killing yourself.

Vladimir's eyes flutter open at last. He looks at Eduard with infinite sadness in his eyes.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Pyotr's really gone. We will never see him again.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
It is not your fault, Vladimir! It was his choice, not yours.

Eduard softens, comforting Vladimir with the gentle pressure of his hands.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
You are the only one of us who made him truly happy. How can that ever be wrong?

CUT TO:

EXT. HALL OF HONOR - NIGHT

A MASSIVE CROWD queues up at the front box office, waiting for the main doors to open.

INT. HALL OF HONOR - SAME

Eduard Nápravník and Sergei Rachmaninoff BURST THROUGH THE SIDE DOORS, supporting Vladimir between them. Modést Tchaikovsky hurries along beside them.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
We will take him to my dressing room.

USHERS IN ROYAL LIVERY prop open the main doors to the concert hall. GAFFERS light the colossal crystal chandeliers with extendable gaffing poles.

In the side corridors, ORCHESTRAL MUSICIANS nervously adjust their tuxedoes and tune their instruments. They stare in shock as Eduard Nápravník strides past... his face bruised and Vladimir's vomit staining his lapels.

FIRST VIOLINIST
(a respectful nod)
Maestro.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Ten minutes to curtain. Break a bow string.

CUT TO:

INT. GREEN ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Modést feeds Vladimir a cup of coffee, walking him around the room in circles.

Rachmaninoff helps Eduard into his tail suit.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
It was a suicide. And I believe I know what drove him to it.

Eduard rapidly threads his collar studs, shirt studs, and a pair of gold-mounted opal cuff links.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
Vladimir and Modést. You must tell me everything that happened from the moment Pyotr left the court of honor... To the moment Tchaikovsky departed this world.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT LEINER - DAY

Tchaikovsky stares across the white tablecloth at Modést and Vladimir. Tears welling in his eyes.

MODÉST
You are not eating anything.

TCHAIKOVSY
Not hungry.

Stasov and Glasunov saw into their steaks at a nearby table. Tchaikovsky catches them glaring.

MODÉST
You always get depressed when you finish a great work. You are just tired.

Tchaikovsky does not answer. He stares back at Stasov, who looks away in disgust. Finally, Tchaikovsky sighs.

TCHAIKOVSKY
This will never end.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
What will never end?

TCHAIKOVSKY
I have travelled three continents. There is no place in this world for us.

Tchaikovsky stands up abruptly and leaves the table. He turns and walks into...

INT. RESTAURANT LEINER - KITCHEN - SAME

Tchaikovsky strides past CHEFS and DISHWASHERS. He finds himself a fresh glass by a sink, and DRAWS WATER FROM THE TAP.

Tchaikovsky stares at the glass of water. Bubbles fizzing to the surface to greet the air.

PYOTR TURNS THE GLASS TO HIS LIPS AND GUZZLES THE WATER LIKE HE IS DYING OF THIRST.

Pyotr finishes the glass and draws another.

SEVERAL COOKS STARE AT TCHAIKOVSKY, STUNNED. A CHEF rushes for Tchaikovsky, BABBLING IN FRENCH, WRESTLING THE GLASS FROM HIS GRIP.

Tchaikovsky leans against a counter and LAUGHS, his chin dripping with water. He wipes his lips with the back of his hand.

Pyotr cannot stop laughing.

CUT TO:

INT. TCHAIKOVSKY APARTMENT - NIGHT

THE SOMBER TONES OF THE SYMPHONY'S FINAL ADAGIO BUILD IN INTENSITY.

Modést and Vladimir hover anxiously by Tchaikovsky's bedside. Dr. Lev Bertenson checks Tchaikovsky's icy wrists and the swelling in his throat.

TCHAIKOVSKY SHIVERS VIOLENTLY, his head and extremities turning dark blue.

TCHAIKOVSKY
I believe this is death.

LEV BERTENSON
His temperature is plummeting.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
You must inject him with musk, camphor...

LEV BERTENSON
I have tried all that.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Leave us now, Doctor. You can do no good. I shall never recover.

Dr. Bertenson leads Modést and Vladimir to the hallway. He shakes his head and speaks in low tones.

LEV BERTENSON
Asiatic cholera in its algid stage. His kidneys are already failing. All we can do is keep him comfortable.

CUT TO:

INT. TCHAIKOVSKY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Tchaikovsky appears more relaxed now. Vladimir pats sweat from Pyotr's forehead.

Eduard Nápravník sits uncomfortably on a wooden chair by Tchaikovsky's bedside.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Have you reviewed the new symphony I sent you?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I studied it all day.

TCHAIKOVSKY
And what do you think?

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
It is not Russian enough for the Belyayev Circle; it is not European enough for the French. It is an enigma. Unlike anything I am aware of.

Tchaikovsky's eyes twinkle.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Eduard, I want you to conduct the *Symphony Pathétique*.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Pyotr, why do you choose me to conduct all your works?

TCHAIKOVSKY
Because you are not Russian. Because you are an outsider, like me.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
The symphony has a program to it, that I do not yet understand.

Tchaikovsky reads the hesitation in Eduard's face.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Understand the *Pathétique*, and you will understand me at last. Conduct it with all your heart, Eduard.

Tchaikovsky reaches out to clutch Eduard's hand with surprising strength.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
Upon our friendship. Promise me.

Eduard swallows his doubts. He nods his assent.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I promise.

CUT TO:

INT. TCHAIKOVSKY APARTMENT - NIGHT

TCHAIKOVSKY'S REQUIEM SWELLS LOUDER - THE STRINGS AN ANGUISHED *CRI DE COEUR.*

Vladimir kneels by Tchaikovsky's bedside. The two men whisper intensely, their faces almost touching.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Why did you do it, Pyotr? We could have gone away together.

TCHAIKOVSKY
Where? Where on this earth can I go and be ignored?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Why this, Pyotr?

TCHAIKOVSKY
Listen, Vladimir. I have planned our escape. We will have the last laugh!

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
I do not understand.

TCHAIKOVSKY
I have written us into my symphony. I have told our story, for all who care to listen.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
You are feverish -

TCHAIKOVSKY
I wanted to make great music and I wanted a great love, but you cannot have both in one life. There is not enough space for that much joy - this world will not allow it. So I wrote you into my music.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
You are not making any sense -

TCHAIKOVSKY
People die, Vladimir. But music lives forever. And this is the only immortality you and I may share.

Tchaikovsky's head sinks back into the pillows.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
If you ever miss me my dear, listen to my symphony, for it is my very soul.

CUT TO:

INT. HALL OF HONOR - GREEN ROOM - NIGHT

Eduard tightens his white bow tie and slips on his tailcoat.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
There is one last piece missing...

Through the walls leak the sound of HUNDREDS OF GUESTS FILLING THE GREAT CONCERT HALL.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
I understand Pyotr deliberately drank bad water. He was an artist and wanted a poet's death. The same cholera that killed his mother.

Eduard turns to face Modést and Vladimir.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
But what does he achieve by it? There is no honor in it! No pattern of behavior. Pyotr has never attempted suicide before!

Vladimir answers quietly.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Actually, that is not true.

MODÉST
Pyotr has tried to take his life before.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
Tell me, I beg you. Quickly now, our time draws near.

MODÉST
On his honeymoon...

CUT TO:

EXT. MOSCOW RIVER - NIGHT 1877

Pyotr Tchaikovsky, handsome and youthful, runs out of his cottage. His new wife, Antonina, shouts into the night. SHE IS RAVING, YELLING AT THE TOP OF HER LUNGS.

MODÉST (V.O.)
When Pyotr realized his marriage was a spectacular mistake, he wanted an honorable escape.

In the dark of night, Tchaikovsky strips off his shirt and casts it aside. Tears running down his cheeks, HE WALKS STRAIGHT INTO THE FREEZING MOSCOW RIVER.

Pyotr splashes cold water onto his chest. He drinks the water. He rubs it into his hair. He walks deeper and deeper into the current.

TCHAIKOVSKY'S BODY CONVULSES WITH THE FREEZING COLD. He stares up at the impassive curtain of night, HIS FACE CLENCHED IN A MASK OF MISERY.

A silent scream.

CUT TO:

INT. HALL OF HONOR - GREEN ROOM - NIGHT

Eduard folds his starched white handkerchief into a pocket square. Then eases it into his breast pocket and spruces the corners.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
To drown himself?

MODÉST
No. To kill himself with pneumonia.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
What on earth for?

MODÉST
So he will appear to die from sickness, Eduard. To spare our family's honor. So we are not tainted with the sin of divorce or suicide.

Eduard turns to Vladimir in astonishment.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
This is what he has done? Killed himself, using cholera? To spare his honor?

MODÉST
To spare our honor. To spare your honor. To spare us all from knowing he killed himself.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Pyotr must have known he would not fool Modést. Or me. But he thought he could fool all of you.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
But why?

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
Because Pyotr and I could not be together. Because you voted in your court of honor. Because we could never be ourselves.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
I did not know, my God I did not know. I did not understand...

Eduard's breathing comes in fast and thick. The dam that holds back his emotions finally begins to rupture and burst.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
That he would choose death, rather than be apart from you.

THE ADAGIO STRENGTHENS AND BUILDS. THE THEME OF THE STAR-CROSSED LOVERS RETURNS, BUT IN A HEART-RENDING MINOR KEY.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. ST. PETERSBURG CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC - DAY

Tchaikovsky's friends, the Belyayev Circle, vote in the court of honor.

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV
We will take it to a vote. Those who feel Monsieur Tchaikovsky must end all deviant behavior, particularly with his nephew, lest he be faced with exile in Siberia, please indicate your vote by raising your hand...

Terrified, Tchaikovsky watches as Vladimir Stasov raises his hand...

Followed by Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov...

And then Alexander Glazunov...

Rachmaninoff does not raise his hand. Nor does Modést. The vote falls to Eduard Nápravník.

And...

Eduard raises his hand.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
For your music, Pyotr. For your legacy. And for Russia.

The vote has turned against Tchaikovsky. The composer is doomed...

Eduard sees the devastation in Tchaikovsky's eyes...

EDUARD HAS KILLED HIM.

CROSS FADE TO:

INT. HALL OF HONOR - GREEN ROOM - NIGHT

THE TROMBONES CALL BACK THE MASS FOR THE DEAD.

Eduard wrings his hands, covering his head in despair. His Czech accent now emerging to curl the tips of his words...

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK
God help me! I thought it was just some perversion, some thoughtless vice. I did not know two men can love that deeply. So much they would die for each other.

The strength goes out of Eduard's legs. He drops to his knees before Vladimir Davydov.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
You and Pyotr! I did not know, God forgive me, I did not know.

Eduard clasps Vladimir's boots, the cuffs of his pant legs.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
It was I!

Eduard looks up into Vladimir's eyes.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
I broke his heart. I broke your heart, too.

Vladimir Davydov's eyes fill with tears.

EDUARD NÁPRAVNÍK (CONT'D)
I killed Tchaikovsky.

Vladimir and Modést pull Eduard gently to his feet, steadying him, straightening the white bow tie of Eduard's tuxedo.

Vladimir holds Eduard's shoulders. Gently he guides Eduard out of the green room and toward the stage.

VLADIMIR DAVYDOV
And tonight, you shall make Tchaikovsky live forever.

CUT TO:

INT. TCHAIKOVSY APARTMENT - NIGHT 1893

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky lies on his deathbed. Vladimir and Modést at his side, holding his hands.

THE RHYTHMIC BASS STRINGS OF THE DYING ADAGIO match the slowing beat of the composer's heart.

A look of peace illuminates Tchaikovsky's face.

CUT TO:

INT. MOSCOW COTTAGE - NIGHT 1877

A younger Tchaikovsky shivers violently, rescued from the Moscow river. Modést wraps Pyotr in towels and throws more wood on the fire.

MODÉST
You wanted to marry to avoid a scandal, and now your marriage is the scandal.

Tchaikovsky smiles weakly and Modést shakes his head.

MODÉST (CONT'D)
Pyotr, you are a wonder of nature.

TCHAIKOVSKY
I did make a mess of things.

Modést sits down and presses a warm cup of tea into Tchaikovsky's hands.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
Only now, after the disaster of my marriage, do I finally begin to see. There is nothing more fruitless than trying to be something you are not.

Pyotr sips his tea and smiles up at his brother.

TCHAIKOVSKY (CONT'D)
<u>This is who I am</u>.

CUT TO:

INT. TCHAIKOVSKY APARTMENT - NIGHT

The great composer lies still on his deathbed. Beautification written across his features.

For a moment, a look of AWESOME REALIZATION LIGHTS UP HIS FACE.

TCHAIKOVSKY'S FINGERS TIGHTEN AROUND VLADIMIR'S FINGERS. And the soul departs Tchaikovsky's body.

Pyotr's eyes remain open and peaceful. And he is still.

CUT TO:

INT. HALL OF NOBLES - NIGHT 1893

Eduard Napravnik conducts the final movement of *Tchaikovsky's Symphony Pathétique*. THE PACKED AUDIENCE IS TRANSFIXED.

Familiar faces fill the crowd. Vladimir Stasov. Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Sergei Rachmaninoff, sitting between Modést Tchaikovsky and Vladimir Davydov.

The basses pluck the syncopated beat on the lowest string, A DYING HEARTBEAT. Each tenor note of the cellos is successively lower, quieter, SIGHING LIKE A DYING MAN'S LAST BREATH.

The few remaining strings *decrescendo* to the faintest whisper...

Soon it is just down to basses and cellos, dying away in *smorzando*...

Now only three basses remain. *Pianissimo-issimo*...

One last pluck of the second basses.

A final heartbeat.

And then silence.

Eduard Nápravník lowers the baton, hands at his sides. He stands motionless. Head bowed.

The audience is STUNNED SILENT. Overpowered, they do not clap.

Eduard shuts his eyes tight.

He is crying.

TITLE CARD: Vladimir Davydov struggled with drug addiction and committed suicide at 34.

TITLE CARD: For generations, Soviet censorship suppressed Tchaikovsky's letters referencing his homosexuality and his love affair with Vladimir.

TITLE CARD: Today, the *Symphony Pathétique* is considered among Tchaikovsky's greatest works.

THE END