

Vlasov
A Play by John Fisher

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Vlasov
A Play

Characters (In Order of Appearance):

The Students (Fifteen Year Olds)

JAKE SHELBY

TOM TALBOT

ANDREW SMITH

MATT MAKLIN

SIMON WISENTHAL

The Teacher (Early Middle-Aged)

STEVEN WETTER

Setting: A private high school for boys in Marin County, CA. The time is 2006, middle of the Spring semester.

A brisk pace in the dialogue sequences is crucial, especially when they take on the character of a trial, an argument. Each sequence should build, frantically, to a climax. Transitions should be quick, they can be marked by bursts of Shostakovich.

This play is performed without intermission. The course of the action is over five school days forming a week: Monday to Friday.

A lot of action is described in the war sequences. This action is all carried out in the room utilizing only what would be found in a typical high school classroom: tables, chairs, lights, etc. The designer and director should be creative in these sequences but never illogical in what could be found in such a space.

Day One

(A classroom. Black boards along the upstage wall, also a door. Two large tables with chairs around them face a teacher's desk with a chair with arms behind it. At rise JAKE, fifteen, sits at the table farthest from the teacher's desk. He is huge, muscled, but not stupid, never even acts stupid. He sits elegantly slumped, thinking. TOM, also fifteen – they all are - enters. He is an average student, average at everything, a little glum all the time. On his entrance we realize there is a school uniform: black shoes, khakis, black belt, white shirt, school neck-tie. Within those limitations there is a great variety of interpretation, reflecting character.)

TOM

Hey Jake.

JAKE

Hey Tommy.

TOM

(Doesn't like being called "Tommy") Fuck you.

JAKE

In your wettest, Nancy.

(JAKE should not be played as a bully. There is something ironic about his teasing, almost friendly. He really isn't insecure like a bully. He is definitely confident. TOM sits down on the opposite side of the room from JAKE. ANDREW enters. He is handsome, intelligent, incisive, but playful, a class vice-president type.)

ANDREW

Everyone do the reading?

TOM

Fuck no.

ANDREW

"Fuck no." Do you ever use a sentence without "fuck" in it?

TOM

(Pause.) Yes.

ANDREW (To JAKE)

Did you read it?

JAKE

Of course I read it. It's all about World War II. That's cool.

ANDREW (To TOM, as if answering for him)
You thought it was boring.

TOM
No. I just didn't read it. I got better things to do.

ANDREW
It's an honor's course, Tommy. All that means is you do the reading.

TOM
Unless you got better things to do. Which I have.

(JAKE makes wanking gesture to ANDREW. ANDREW doesn't laugh. JAKE continues the wanking gesture but adds a blow-job gesture, mouth in an "o" with head movement as if he was blowing someone as he beats off. ANDREW just smiles. JAKE adds to the above motions a movement that indicates he is being boffed in the ass, all three activities happening at once. Finally ANDREW laughs. And TOM laughs. But they are laughing because, unseen by JAKE, MATT has entered behind him and is watching. MATT's a nice, average kid – intelligent without brilliance, friendly without being charismatic.)

MATT (Responding to JAKE's antics)
You've been spying in the faculty lounge again.

(JAKE stops his antics and smiles. He is unfazed. He even wipes his mouth a little.)

MATT
Hey.

JAKE/ANDREW
Hey.

MATT (To JAKE)
Saw you play last night.

JAKE
Yeah, played good, didn't I? (To TOM) And I did my reading.

TOM
Good for you, Shelby.

JAKE
That's ok, Tommy. I'm comfortable. I'll kick you later.

ANDREW (To JAKE)
You played last night?

JAKE

Yep. Wiped up the field with Drake.

ANDREW (With mild contempt)

Public school boys.

MATT

No discipline.

TOM

No money.

JAKE (To MATT)

Why don't you play?

MATT

Don't want to sit on the bench.

ANDREW (To JAKE)

Drake has cheerleaders.

JAKE

They do indeed. With no team loyalty.

MATT (Excited)

You're kidding.

TOM

You're such a virgin, Shelby.

JAKE (Smug, he's known for being a stud)

You know that's not true.

TOM

Made it with one of those boy yell leaders?

JAKE

That's ok, faggot. I still don't want to cross the room. I'll get you later. Something to look forward to.

(SIMON enters. He is the definition of a nerd: small, quiet, obviously fiercely intelligent but socially awkward. He is not unattractive, but far too self-conscious to display any confidence in his looks or demeanor. Everyone watches silently as he enters, crosses to a seat as far away from the others as possible, sets down his bag, crosses his hands on his bag and stares straight ahead. When he is settled the conversation continues as if nothing happened.)

JAKE (To ANDREW)

You were probably at test prep [last night.]

ANDREW

Beats learning all this shit.

MATT

Bull shit, Andrew. You do all the reading *and* the test prep. You're the definition of over prepared.

JAKE

My dad said "test prep" is "life prep." "Cut corners." "Guess with impunity."

ANDREW

He's right.

JAKE

Nah, he's an asshole.

STEVEN (Entering at a stride)

Good morning, gentlemen.

(STEVEN is early middle aged, subtly gay, confident. He's taught these five for almost a year now, he feels comfortable with them or, until recently, he thought he did.)

STUDENTS (In mocking "good student" voices)

Good morning, Mr. Wetter.

STEVEN

Everyone still masturbating?

JAKE

You still gay?

STEVEN

Yes. As I told you on the first day of class.

TOM

Why do we have to listen to this shit? (STEVEN swats him on the head.) Ow. Why are you always hitting us?

STEVEN

You swore.

TOM

Third word out of your mouth was masturbating.

STEVEN

Masturbating's not a swear. It's a gerund.

TOM

What's your frickin' problem with swearing?

STEVEN

It's too easy. You see, you just used frickin' – a word I haven't heard since Jimmy Cagney died. That's interesting. Got my brain working. Besides, I don't hit you I swat you. Teachers aren't allowed to hit students.

TOM

It still hurts.

STEVEN

It's half affectionate.

TOM

It more than half hurts.

STEVEN

That's your interpretation. Can we start?

(They all mumble "yes.")

ANDREW

Wait a minute. We're supposed to stick to the proven facts in here. Not the interpreted meanings.

STEVEN

Yes.

ANDREW

So you feel that you're expressing half-affection by swatting us but that's not what we see, we see a swat.

MATT

Which looks like a hit.

TOM

And hurts.

STEVEN

But we don't know that it hurts. That's a feeling. Stick to the facts. Not the feelings, the facts. This isn't a Meg Ryan movie.

ANDREW

I think a third party, a primary source witness would say that you hit me.

STEVEN

The fact is I gave you a swat. I meant it as affectionate remonstrance, you took it as violence. Next time I'll hug you instead. Then a primary source witness would only see loving nurture.

TOM

No, please, swat me.

STEVEN

Fine. Shall we commence?

ALL BUT SIMON

Yes, teacher!

(The above dialogue is the first evidence of the class's dynamic – the students love the dialogue of the class and the energy it generates, as does STEVEN – it is a friendly, eager, young discourse.)

STEVEN (Pinning up a picture of Vlasov)

Lieutenant-General Andrey Vlasov. Now why on earth, when we have so little time to spend on World War II which is so much fun, did I waste a day having you read about Andrey Vlasov?

TOM

Good question.

ANDREW

He's interesting.

STEVEN

How so?

ANDREW

He was trapped between two wrongs – the Nazis and the Bolsheviks. He was forced to make a choice.

MATT

And he made the wrong one. He sided with the Nazis.

STEVEN
You sure it's the wrong choice?

SIMON
Of course it is.

STEVEN
Simon. I didn't know you were here.

(SIMON just stares at him.)

STEVEN
Vlasov was faced with a moral dilemma, a real one. He was truly challenged because there was no third choice, no safe haven from making a choice. How did Raul Hilberg break down the Holocaust? (Fishing for the answer) People were either...

ANDREW
"Victims, Perpetrators or Bystanders."

STEVEN
Could you really be a Bystander in World War II?

JAKE
Hilberg thought you could.

STEVEN
No. What was his point about the Bystanders?

ANDREW
That they were silently complicit, therefore perpetrators.

STEVEN
So you could only really be a Perpetrator or a Victim. Which would you choose?

JAKE
Perpetrator.

SIMON
Victim.

STEVEN
Why do you say victim?

SIMON
I'm Jewish. In the context of the Holocaust there was only one choice for me. Victim.

STEVEN

You could flee.

SIMON

They were all bystanders, therefore perpetrators. I refuse to be one of those.

STEVEN

So Vlasov. Soviet general who fights gloriously for Stalin, is captured by the Germans and then decides to fight for the Germans because he thinks Russia should shake off the yoke of Communism. Perpetrator?

ANDREW

Definitely.

STEVEN

I'd say he was a man facing a moral dilemma almost impossible to negotiate – one between Fascism and Communism - and he didn't want to be a perpetrator.

MATT

Impossible.

STEVEN

Aren't you all facing an impossible moral dilemma?

ANDREW

In what respect?

MATT (Where did he learn to talk like that?)

In what respect?

JAKE

I'm facing a moral dilemma.

STEVEN

What's that Jake?

JAKE

My step mom is majorly hitting on me. (Everyone groans in disbelief.) She *does*, every afternoon when I get home.

STEVEN

So what's your dilemma?

JAKE

She's hot. (Everyone makes raunchy noises.)

STEVEN

Ok, well, I'm talking about a universal moral dilemma.

MATT

You're fishing, Wetter.

TOM (Always the one who makes everything sound like *such* a burden)
Yeah, just tell us what our dilemma is so we can give you the answer quickly and get it over with.

STEVEN

Well, you're all conservative. I mean your parents are raising you conservative and yet you're faced with the daily embarrassment of this war. A war that the man you elected, twice, has started and won't let end. And you're all intelligent. I've made sure of that. So I know you know he's a fool.

ANDREW

How do you know we're conservative?

STEVEN

I've met your parents.

(Pause.)

ANDREW

You think Clinton was a better president?

STEVEN

No, actually I don't. But he didn't start a war.

MATT

Terrorists started the war.

STEVEN

The terrorists weren't Iraqi.

TOM

English is in the morning, aren't we supposed to be reading *Hamlet*?

STEVEN

We are. This is a reading of *Hamlet*. Hamlet faces a moral dilemma, a tough one. That's the action of the play. Sorting out the dilemma. You should be going through the same thing now.

ANDREW

That's so corny. Like we have any choice. It doesn't even affect us.

STEVEN

You mean there's no right answer.

TOM

Why are you doing this?

STEVEN

I'm not doing anything. I'm discussing. I'm confronting an abstraction. Which I would like to make literal.

JAKE

You're talkin' fancy again, Doc.

STEVEN

I want to put your moral dilemma into action. I want to combine the things we've been discussing – *Hamlet*, General Vlasov's dilemma, your own dilemma as I see it with this war and make it all manifest.

MATT

How?

STEVEN

By enacting a dilemma. By enacting the life of Vlasov. By reconstructing his choice.

JAKE

Like we did with General Custard.

STEVEN

Absolutely.

(They all look at one another.)

TOM

Didn't you say that game got you in trouble?

STEVEN

I said Dr. Thompson talked to me about it.

ANDREW

You said Dr. Thompson advised you to "interrogate your pedagogical paradigms."

STEVEN

Yes. And I did. I interrogated them. And found them sound.

(They all look at one another, SIMON remains detached.)

MATT

What's the point of discussing... I mean enacting the life of an obscure Russian general?

STEVEN

It will force you to live through his dilemma and the difficulty of his choice. Hopefully that will encourage you to make your own choice about this conflict, as opposed to passively accepting your... (He stops himself) the choice that has been made for you.

(Again, looks around the room. But they trust him. That is all but SIMON.)

ANDREW

Great. Let's do it.

STEVEN

Terrific. Let's assign roles. Who wants to play what?

MATT

Who are the characters?

STEVEN

You did the reading .You know who the characters are. (Silence. They all look around.)

TOM

Last time you assigned the roles.

STEVEN

This time it's more about you. You should pick the roles. (Silence. They don't know what it do.) How's about you, Simon?

SIMON

I don't want to be in it.

TOM (Mocking)

Siiiiimon.

MATT (Joining in)

Siiiiimon.

STEVEN

All right, enough. Why not?

SIMON

Because it's a loaded game.

STEVEN

How so?

SIMON

You already have an outcome. You know how you want it to end and you'll structure it so it ends that way or you'll tell us we ended it wrong if you don't get the result you want. It's bad science. It's not empirical. It's God ordained. It's bull blank.

STEVEN

Bull blank?

SIMON

Bull blank. A phrase I can't say because I don't want to get a swat. It's bull blank.

JAKE (Helping)

Shit. (STEVEN swats him.) Ow.

SIMON (To JAKE)

Thank you.

JAKE

You're welcome.

SIMON (To STEVEN)

And thank you,

STEVEN

For what?

SIMON

Hitting him. He's a Neanderthal.

STEVEN

This isn't God ordained. I don't know where it will end up?

SIMON

Hitler has to be bad. That's a forgone conclusion.

STEVEN

Why?

SIMON

Please. For me, he has to be.

STEVEN

Why?

SIMON

I'm a Wisenthal. Think about it. You're a teacher at a school with a thirty percent Jewish student body. Keep thinking.

STEVEN

What if you play Hitler?

JAKE

I want to be Hitler.

STEVEN

Shut up.

SIMON

That wouldn't be right. It wouldn't feel right. Not to me. It feels false. "Disguise."

STEVEN

Disguise is exciting.

SIMON

It's too ironic. A Jew playing Hitler. Like drag queens. The irony is too overt.

TOM

What's he talking about?

MATT

Mr. Wetter knows about drag queens, doesn't he?

STEVEN (To MATT)

Give it a rest, Maklin.

SIMON

It's too loaded. I'd feel self-conscious. I don't like the game.

STEVEN

Why not?

SIMON

It's like this class. It's too impractical, too speculative in an undisciplined way. I'm with Talbot. (Indicating TOM.) Let's just read *Hamlet*. It's something I can use.

STEVEN

Where?

SIMON

At a cocktail party. And in college. It's unnecessary but its practical, something everyone should know. A buzz phrase: "Hamlet's moral dilemma." This game... This game is like beating off.

MATT

You know about that.

SIMON

When I think about your mother.

(MATT smiles and then suddenly lunges at SIMON. SIMON jumps, startled.)

STEVEN

All right, all right. Relax.

MATT

You flinched, pee wee. (He high fives JAKE. SIMON only shakes his head in disgust.)

STEVEN

Ok, something's decided. (To JAKE) You're Hitler.

TOM

Why's he Hitler?

STEVEN

Because he wants to be. And Hitler was charismatic.

JAKE (Pleased)

You saying I'm charismatic?

STEVEN

Yes.

MATT

Hitler had one testicle.

ANDREW

How do you know that?

MATT

It's in Wykapedia.

ANDREW
Sounds like Wykapedia.

SIMON
He's too stupid to play Hitler.

STEVEN
You think Hitler was smart?

SIMON
To a point.

STEVEN
Jake's smart to a point.

JAKE
Thanks, Teach.

STEVEN
It wasn't a compliment.

JAKE
I'll be a better Hitler than Hitler.

SIMON
Stupid.

JAKE
Dweeb, every time you call me stupid in here it's one more beating outside.

SIMON
I wasn't calling you stupid. The game... The game is stupid. I'm trying to establish that. You're stupidity was established long ago.

JAKE
That's more tan bark you're eating, Boyo.

STEVEN
Stop it.

JAKE
I'm threatening. Hitler threatened.

STEVEN (To JAKE)
I want you to come back with two ideas: that's all Hitler really had. What he wanted and what he hated. That's simple enough.

JAKE
Ok. I'll have it next week.

STEVEN
Tomorrow.

JAKE
Tomorrow!

STEVEN
Yes, this entire game will be prepared for and played this week. Next week... something different. Very different. Tonight, do the reading. Really do the reading. Tomorrow we assign roles and start. Now, *Hamlet*.

ANDREW
Um, before we move on...

STEVEN
Yes?

ANDREW
I'm Stalin. I just decided.

STEVEN
Good.

TOM
All the good shit's gone. (STEVEN swats him.) Ow.

STEVEN (Opening his book)
You can be Hamlet: You remember where we stopped?

(They all groan and open their copies of *Hamlet*.)

STEVEN
Please, it's the greatest play in the human language.

JAKE
Hamlet is so gay.

STEVEN
A radical interpretation. Entire academic careers have been founded on less. Read.

TOM (Begins reading, directing it towards STEVEN)
"Seems? I know not seems, Madame."

(Blackout. Everyone shifts position in the dark. Lights up. It is the next day. STEVEN enters immediately.)

Day Two

STEVEN (To JAKE, as he strides in)

I hope everyone had a nice lunch. (To JAKE) What are your two things?

JAKE

Huh?

STEVEN

What do you want, Hitler? What do you hate?

JAKE

I don't know.

STEVEN

Did you prepare?

JAKE

Yeah, I read his book *Mein Kampf*, well as much of it as I could stand.

STEVEN (Correcting him)

You read *your* book.

JAKE (Catching on)

Yeah, I read mein book *Mein Kampf*.

STEVEN

And you didn't find two things,...

JAKE

I found a thousand. I want everything and I hate everything.

STEVEN

Did you hate him? I mean, do you hate yourself?

JAKE

Based on *Mein Kampf*?

STEVEN

Yeah.

JAKE

No. Based on that book I seem, well, I seem like I want what's best for Germany.

STEVEN

So you don't hate yourself or Germany.

JAKE

That's true.

STEVEN

And didn't you discover the thing you hated?

JAKE

Well, only the obvious.

STEVEN

Great place to start.

JAKE

I hate Jews. And Bolsheviks.

STEVEN

That's two things.

JAKE

Ok, I hate the Jewish-Bolshevik Conspiracy.

(STEVEN smiles.)

STEVEN

Great. And what about what you want?

JAKE

To take over the world.

STEVEN

Great. A plus.

JAKE

That easy, huh?

STEVEN

Yeah, but get more specific. The world. You want to take over the world. What does that mean?

JAKE

I want to conquer.

STEVEN

Whom?

JAKE

Well, Russia. He... *I* keep talking about Russia.

STEVEN

Great. You're all set to play.

ANDREW (To JAKE)

Good luck.

JAKE

Luck's got nothing to do with it. Russia's a mess. Like Oakland or something... Worse. Richmond.

ANDREW

A hundred and ninety million people. You can't kill all of us.

JAKE

I don't need to. They all hate you anyway. Nobody likes Stalin. Least of all the Russians.

ANDREW

Russians never like their leader. They're used to it. People like what they're used to.

JAKE

You're a barbarian.

ANDREW

But I'm their barbarian.

JAKE

You're a murderer.

ANDREW

Keeps them on their toes. Alert. Like playing defense.

MATT (To ANDREW)

You killed off all your generals. How are you going to fight him?

STEVEN

Wait. We'll get there. Hold on.

MATT

Why? It's interesting.

STEVEN

We need a Vlasov.

TOM

Forget it. Don't look at me.

STEVEN

Who then will play Vlasov? (Silence.) Come on... he's the lead. You should all be chomping at the bit.

TOM

What?

JAKE

Chomping at the bitch? (STEVEN swats him but misses because JAKE ducks.)

STEVEN

Watch it! Come on guys.

TOM

He's a traitor. (Meaning "Who would want to play him?")

STEVEN

We don't know that yet.

TOM

Fuck if I'm playing a traitor. (STEVEN gives him a nurturing hug.) Ow.

STEVEN

Someone has to play him.

MATT (To STEVEN)

You play him.

STEVEN

Too easy – everyone hates the teacher.

(They all say "awww" and throw things at him.)

STEVEN

All right. (Pointing at the picture of Vlasov he put up in the last scene.) Start with his look. What was his look?

Bookish. ANDREW

Bookish? JAKE (Making fun of ANDREW)

He looked like a geek. ANDREW

An egg head. TOM

A dweeb! MATT

(They all look at SIMON.)

I don't want to be in it. SIMON

You have to be in it. JAKE

Why? SIMON

It's like Wetter said. There were no bystanders. Either get involved or die. ANDREW

I'll play a kulak then. SIMON

Kulak? TOM

What the hell's a kulak (STEVEN swats him.) Stop hitting me, fucker! (STEVEN swats him again.) JAKE

I think a kulak's like a dyke. MATT

Russian lesbo. TOM

SIMON

A kulak is an uncollectivized farmer.

JAKE (Who would know that?)

Ok.

STEVEN (Deciding)

You're Vlasov.

SIMON

I don't want to be.

STEVEN

Tough, Vlasov didn't want to be Vlasov.

SIMON

What does that mean?

STEVEN

Do you want to be Simon?

SIMON

What?

JAKE (Explaining)

Do you like your life, dweeb? Do you like your dweeb existence?

(Pause.)

SIMON

No.

ANDREW

Then you're perfect for Vlasov.

STEVEN

Discontent.

SIMON

I hate role-playing. (STEVEN swats him.) Ow. You hit everyone.

STEVEN

All dissidents.

SIMON

This is fascism.

STEVEN

No, fascism's arbitrary. You, on the other hand, know why you're going to be hit.

SIMON

I didn't swear.

STEVEN

You sassed. That's worse. So why do you hate communism?

SIMON

Why do I...

STEVEN

Vlasov, why do you hate communism?

SIMON

(SIMON thinks a moment.) Because it doesn't make sense.

JAKE

It doesn't?

SIMON

It's self-contradictory. A dictatorship of the people. But the people don't rule. Not in Soviet Style communism. The premiere rules. With the politburo. It's an oligarchy. An oligarchy of the ruthless, the bullies. (He looks around at his classmates. Pause. JAKE swats him.) Ow.

STEVEN

That's an international incident, Jake.

JAKE

He's my enemy.

STEVEN

Not yet. And Stalin would have protected him.

ANDREW

(ANDREW swats JAKE.) Play nice.

SIMON

Yeah. (ANDREW swats SIMON.)

ANDREW

Kulak lover.

Basta on the swatting.

STEVEN

What's basta?

MATT

It's Italian. It means enough.

STEVEN

Pasta is noodles.

TOM (Correcting him)

Can we move on?

ANDREW

Stalin doesn't make sense. Communism doesn't make sense. It's arbitrary, it's all about control. It's not even benevolently neglectful. It micromanages badly.

SIMON (Moving on)

Do you know he thinks this way?

STEVEN (To ANDREW)

Yes.

ANDREW

Why don't you do something?

STEVEN

They *all* think this way. All my generals. (Dismissing SIMON) He's a nobody. I *am* arbitrary. But I start at the top. (Points at TOM) With you.

ANDREW

Me?

TOM

Tuchachevsky.

ANDREW

Who is...? Tucha what?

TOM

Marshal Tuchachevsky. You know because you did your reading. (TOM obviously didn't.)

STEVEN

ANDREW

Head of the Russian army before World War II.

SIMON

Stalin's genius strategist.

TOM (Pleased)

I'm a genius?

STEVEN

Yes.

ANDREW

But you're too famous. Americans read your textbooks. Germans admire your tactics. You've got to go.

ALL

A trial!

STEVEN

Stage management!

(A courtroom is quickly assembled by the students. They've obviously done this before. A stack of tables forms the judge's bench. ANDREW climbs to the top. MATT throws TOM into a chair at the base of the tables. MATT throws a jacket over his head like a kerchief and starts crying like a woman.)

ANDREW (To MATT)

Who are you?

MATT (Pointing to TOM)

His widow. (As his widow) Oh, Vladimir. Vladimir.

TOM

I'm not dead yet.

ANDREW (To MATT, correcting)

His name was Mikhail.

MATT (More crying)

Oh. Oh, Micky. Micky.

(JAKE, also donning a jacket as kerchief, starts weeping beside MATT.)

MATT

Who are you?

JAKE

His mistress. (Crying) Oh, Mickala. Mickala.

TOM (Looking at MATT)

That is so depressing.

ANDREW

But she's already flirting with the Tuchachevsky's second in command. (JAKE starts blowing kisses to SIMON.)

SIMON

Smart girl.

TOM (Watching JAKE's flirtation)

Boy, I really am sunk.

MATT

You'll always have us, your family. Two hundred and fifty pound Natasha Milatoastavich and your thirteen children – one for every time we had sex.

STEVEN

Why don't you defend yourself?

TOM (Looking at his wife)

I'm not sure I want to live.

ANDREW

Defend yourself Mikhail Ivan Ivanovich Toastacoasty Tuchachevsky.

TOM

What am I accused of?

ANDREW

Internationalism. Fame. Individualism.

JAKE (As mistress)

Anal intercourse.

MATT

You're kidding?

JAKE (To TOM)

I had to tell them.

TOM (Explaining to the court)

Russian birth control.

STEVEN

Stay on subject.

TOM (To ANDREW)

Of course I'm an individual. I'm a military genius.

ANDREW

Yes, but we don't need you anymore. You wrote it all down. We have it all here. (He holds up a book as if it were Tuchachevsky's treatise on war.) You're just a husk, a shell.

TOM

But I could think up a new strategy. We have to stay ahead of the curve.

ANDREW

I don't want you too far ahead of the curve. You might out bend me.

TOM

Are you really that insecure?

ANDREW

Of course. How do you think I got here? Killing Trotsky and Bukharin. I know someday someone will kill me.

TOM

But you were an animal. I'm a nobody. I'm a thinker.

ANDREW

I was a thinker once. I became an animal. To survive.

TOM

Do you really see that in me?

ANDREW

You control the army.

TOM (Struggling through)

You've spread them out so far... from the Polish border to the Pacific... they would be of no use to me.

ANDREW

If you could just get control of the capital, of me, all would be lost. That's how we got Czar Nick.

TOM

I just don't understand how you can be so paranoid.

ANDREW

I have no problem with that word.

TOM

You don't believe in psychology?

ANDREW

I believe in paranoia. I just don't think it's a pathology. It's my life blood.

TOM

But there must be something between life and death. Can't you just exile me?

ANDREW

No. Exiles come back. Fired people plot. They come back into the office and go postal. No one will ever try to assassinate me. There will be no losers sitting around. Only winners.

STEVEN (To SIMON)

And you watched all this?

SIMON

Yes, of course. I mean, it was a lot more... subtle. And the anal stuff-

STEVEN

But you inferred this is what happened?

SIMON

Yes.

STEVEN

How did it affect you?

SIMON

What are you, my psychiatrist?

ANDREW

There is no therapy in the Soviet Union!

SIMON

Yeah, I saw it and I did nothing. I didn't save Tuchachevsky. That's all that's important.

MATT (To STEVEN)

Yeah, stick to facts, not interpretations.

JAKE (Joining in)

Primary sources. What do we know happened, not what do we think people felt.
Don't impose yourself on the time.

TOM (Ditto)

This isn't a Meg Ryan movie!

STEVEN

Why didn't you save him?

SIMON

Be real. How could I? I was a Major-General at the time.

ANDREW (Correcting him)

Colonel.

SIMON

Shit, I was a nobody. (STEVEN raises his hand.) And don't swat me! I'm in character.

TOM

In character?

SIMON

Acting term.

TOM

Wow. Cool.

STEVEN

So you survived the purges.

SIMON

Of course. They were purging lions, not kittens.

ANDREW

Was Tuchachevsky a genius?

SIMON

No, of course not. He was a traitor. He was plotting to assassinate you.

STEVEN

That's not true,

SIMON

But it's a good thing to say. Especially to Stalin.

TOM

So what happens to me?

ANDREW

Sign this confession. (To JAKE) Write on the black board, peasant.

JAKE (In the voice of Tuchachevsky's mistress)

I might be a ho but I'm no peasant.

ANDREW

Write! "I'm a traitor." (JAKE does so. ANDREW speaks to TOM) Now sign it.

TOM

No.

ANDREW

Sign it or I'll break your face.

(TOM signs it.)

ANDREW

He's a traitor. Break his face.

TOM (To STEVEN)

That's what happens?

ANDREW

Yes.

TOM

I'm killed?

ANDREW

Executed.

SIMON

Along with two thirds of the Russian general staff. For the same reason.

TOM

But I didn't do anything.

ANDREW

You're a traitor. Look at the black board.

TOM

That's sick.

JAKE (As the mistress)

And I take up with your side-kick.

MATT

And I remarry. (ANDREW shakes his head.) No? I stay single? (ANDREW shakes his head.) I'm killed also? (ANDREW nods.) That's fucked up. (To STEVEN) You didn't swat me.

STEVEN

You're dead.

JAKE (Removing the kerchief)

You see. Fascism is better. These Russians are helpless. And no one helps them. Not Vlasov, no one. This is why communism has to be stopped. (He is now speaking again as Hitler.)

SIMON

Fascism's awful.

JAKE

Better than communism. (To SIMON) You can't see that? I thought you were smart.

SIMON

I'm still alive.

JAKE

Barely. I know half the German General Staff think I'm an idiot. But I'll prove to them that I'm not. I'll conquer Poland, France, Norway, all of Europe and then they'll see. I don't have to kill my generals to show I'm in charge.

STEVEN

We have to stop.

ANDREW

Why?

STEVEN

End of class.

SIMON

And that's how class ends? With Hitler coming off better than Stalin?

STEVEN

At this point in the story.

SIMON

That's really sick.

STEVEN

The story's not over.

SIMON

This game is sick. It's messing with us. You're messing with us.

STEVEN

Tell your parents.

(Pause. They all look at him.)

SIMON

What's that supposed to mean?

STEVEN

I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. Read up on your characters. If you're dead, figure out who you're going to be next time.

TOM

Why, so I can die again?

STEVEN

Choose someone who doesn't die. Prepare. Anyone could win the argument. Look what happened today. (They are all staring at him.) That's it. Go. You're finished early.

(They begin to shuffle out.)

ANDREW (To JAKE)

Where you going? Home?

JAKE

To line up allies.

ANDREW

Allies?

JAKE

Yeah, tomorrow I invade your ass, Bolshevik. (And they are gone.)

Tom.

STEVEN

What?

TOM

That was good work today.

STEVEN

I didn't expect to end up dead.

TOM

Neither did Tuchachevsky. We take baby steps to death, digging our graves by spoonfuls.

(TOM doesn't understand. He just shakes his head, confused, and leaves. Only SIMON is left.)

Can I talk to you?

SIMON

Of course.

STEVEN

What was up with that crack about my parents?

SIMON

It was stupid of me. I was being sensitive.

STEVEN

What did you mean by that?

SIMON

I don't think anyone realizes how hard I try to make things interesting, how much I want to succeed as a teacher. And the only thing I can't abide is someone saying, "You're messing with us." If you fall asleep in class that's better, but making that dismissive judgment, it's just... Anyway, I lost it. Sorry.

STEVEN

Maybe, instead of making things interesting, you should try to teach us something.

SIMON

Make you better students?

STEVEN

SIMON

Yeah. Teaching's not a popularity contest.

STEVEN

You're right. That was my mistake.

SIMON

What are you talking about?

STEVEN

I should just focus on my job, right?

SIMON

Something like that.

STEVEN

Ok, you don't have to be Vlasov.

SIMON

No, I want to be.

STEVEN

I thought you thought it was sick.

SIMON

It is sick. Explaining Hitler like that. Disturbing. But at least it's not boring. Or stupid.

STEVEN

Everything's on the brink of stupid so long as nobody says its stupid, so long as no one calls you on it. Ever feel that way?

SIMON

No, I think everything's stupid and sometimes, but hardly ever... but sometimes things are cool. But it's unpredictable.

STEVEN

Act as if you have faith and faith may be given to you.

SIMON

Or just don't worry about faith. Maybe it's not our goal.

STEVEN

Then you're just surviving.

SIMON

Yeah. (Pause.) I don't belong here.

I know you think that.

STEVEN

I'm too smart for these guys.

SIMON

We've discussed this before.

STEVEN

You should've recommended me to the college program.

SIMON

You're not ready for it. Next year you will be. One year before college is enough.

STEVEN

What do you think you have to teach me?

SIMON

Contempt. How to get over it.

SIMON

Contempt's a feeling, Teach. They don't matter. Remember?

SIMON

Ok. The *fact* is you're good at something: Argument. Debate. Sometimes life's about doing things you might not want to do but are good at. And never letting on. Never showing your feelings. So we all know you're good at this, so just don't let on that you hate it. That's called grace, or good manners, or just plain smart. It's a test.

STEVEN

And if you let slip that you think something's stupid, something's wrong?

SIMON

Eat shit and apologize.

STEVEN

(SIMON just smiles and then walks out of the room. STEVEN begins to pack up his stuff. Blackout.)

Day Two

(Lights up on the five waiting. They are silent. There is a nervous anticipation. STEVEN strides in.)

STEVEN

Glad you're all back on time. Hope you had a nice break. Let's get started. With...

JAKE (Standing)

A battle...

STEVEN

What?

JAKE

The invasion of Russia. I've invaded. (JAKE grabs ANDREW and gives him a head burn.)

STEVEN

No, no, we do that later in the day.

JAKE

Fuck that. This is a surprise attack. (STEVEN runs to swat him and JAKE dodges about the room avoiding him.) Blitzkrieg. No one's going to swat Germany no more. You can't stop me! I do the swatting. I've attacked. No point in waiting all day to do it. I've attacked dammit! (During this he has run about the room and, as he avoids STEVEN, he knocks over people's bags, gives them arm twists, manages to annoy everyone.)

STEVEN

Ok, You've attacked.

JAKE

My invasion of Russia inflicts the worst military defeat in the history of warfare.

ANDREW (Facing off against him)

Not the worst.

JAKE (Standing chest to chest with ANDREW)

Yes, the worst. Stalin caught completely with his pants down. (And suddenly he pants ANDREW.)

MATT

But he has General Zhukov.

ANDREW (Pointing at MATT)

You're Zhukov.

MATT

Yes.

ANDREW

But not yet. This is early in the campaign. When all I have are cowards.

SIMON

And people like me.

ANDREW

Vlasov. The only successful general in the campaign.

STEVEN (To SIMON)

Why are you so successful?

ANDREW

Because I shoot generals who fail. Vlasov responds to that kind of stimulation.

SIMON (To STEVEN)

Survival.

ANDREW (Moving to the light switch)

Barely survival. He's completely cut off in Kiev. With three hundred thousand men.

(ANDREW throws the light switch. Complete blackness.)

JAKE

What the hell is that?

ANDREW

He's cut off. He's in the dark. He has to survive by his wiles.

TOM

Ow.

MATT

Ow.

JAKE

Who the fuck did that? Ow.

STEVEN

I did that. For swearing.

ANDREW

Ow. Who's hitting me?

TOM

Ow. Someone's hitting us.

It's Vlasov.

(Silence.)

Keep him from getting out the door.

If he gets out the door he's escaped.

I got him.

That's me, you queen.

Ow. Someone hit my foot.

Over here.

No.

Where the hell is that twerp?

Ow.

Ow.

Damn.

(The door opens and we see SIMON silhouetted in the doorway.)

The only Soviet General to escape encirclement with his army intact.

(He restores the lights.)

MATT

JAKE

TOM

MATT

ANDREW

JAKE

TOM

MATT

JAKE

ANDREW

STEVEN

TOM

SIMON

STEVEN
Amazing.

ANDREW
So I promote him.

SIMON
Thank you.

JAKE
Still. Most of the Russian generals fail miserably, allow their armies to be destroyed. In three months I conquer a million square miles of Russia.

MATT
To the gates of Moscow.

ANDREW
Which means Germany is responsible for fifty million Russian civilians and three million Russian prisoners of war.

JAKE
That's a lot.

ANDREW
How do you deal with it?

(JAKE shoves TOM and MATT into the center of the room. He lumps STEVEN with them for good measure.)

JAKE
I put the prisoners behind barbed wire. Can't let them roam around the countryside.

ANDREW
What do you feed them?

JAKE
Not my food. Need it for my men.

MATT
Peasants won't give us food. They're almost starving themselves.

JAKE
Besides I need their food for my army. (He grabs everyone's lunches.)

MATT (Leaving the circle in protest)
Hey.

JAKE (Shoving him back)

Stay there. You're penned up.

ANDREW

So what happens to them?

JAKE

Nothing I can do. Can't let them go free, can't feed them, peasants won't feed them.

ANDREW

Damn kulaks.

TOM

What happens to us?

ANDREW

You die. Slowly.

TOM

You don't machine gun us?

JAKE

Waste of bullets.

TOM

We just starve to death?

ANDREW

You're corralled in huge open-air spaces. Nothing but you, a barbed wire fence and the sky above you.

TOM

So what happens to us?

(Silence.)

TOM

I really didn't read what happens to us. I mean, aren't we protected?

ANDREW

By what?

TOM

I don't know, the Geneva Convention.

JAKE (Looking at ANDREW)

Russia didn't sign it.

ANDREW

Even if I did, you didn't bring enough food to feed three million prisoners.

JAKE

I couldn't imagine so many would surrender.

ANDREW

And you hate Bolsheviks.

MATT

Most of us aren't Bolsheviks, we're just slobs who got drafted.

TOM

So what happened to us?

MATT

We ate mice and worms... lice.

JAKE

And then each other.

MATT

And then we died.

TOM

How many?

MATT

No one knows.

ANDREW

Makes Auschwitz look like mercy.

JAKE

Starvation is how Russians die. In the twenties you starved a million Ukrainians, half a million Khazaks.

SIMON

Because they wouldn't collectivize.

JAKE (Throwing ANDREW's words back at him)

Your people are used to starvation. People like what's familiar.

STEVEN (to SIMON)

And you knew all this.

SIMON

I was behind enemy lines. I knew everything.

STEVEN

Did you discuss it with Stalin?

SIMON (Looking at ANDREW)

He said they shouldn't have been captured. As far as he was concerned they were dead when they surrendered.

STEVEN

He said that to you?

ANDREW

Of course I did. They're traitors. They betrayed me by failing. This isn't a world war, it's a *race* war. Aryans versus Slavs. Different species. It's the animal kingdom. How dumb can you get, letting yourself be captured. Lions don't capture lambs and then feed them.

TOM (To JAKE)

Can I have my lunch back?

JAKE

You're dead. Again. (He throws him his lunch.)

STEVEN (To SIMON)

Where did this conversation take place?

ANDREW

In the Kremlin.

SIMON

In the bowels of the Kremlin. Way under ground.

ANDREW

The Luftwaffe was bombing Moscow, day and night.

(TOM dims the lights, there is only a center light left on – a ghostly circle on the teacher's desk and the chair behind it.)

JAKE

I was softening them up. My panzers were only forty miles away.

(The light is occasionally flickered by TOM to simulate the effects of the bombing on the Kremlin's electrics. MATT makes rumbling noises sporadically throughout the following scene.)

SIMON (Standing before the desk)

Stalin called me. Two AM. I had to stand and wait. For three hours.

ANDREW (Not moving towards the desk)

I had generals waiting all over the complex – I would move from office to office, trying to find the answer I needed, someone I could trust.

STEVEN

Why didn't you have a group meeting?

ANDREW

I wanted them to face me. Each. Individually.

SIMON

He wanted us to be afraid.

ANDREW

Why not? I was afraid. My country was invaded and I was responsible. Everyone should be afraid. (He crosses behind the desk and sits. During the following ANDREW and SIMON will speak to one another although they are obviously speaking as narration.)

SIMON

When he came in he looked like he hadn't slept in a month.

ANDREW

I hadn't.

SIMON

Rumor was he'd had a complete mental breakdown for a month after the Germans invaded. The whole time the Russian army was falling apart and half the country was being overrun he was locked in his bedroom.

ANDREW

Of course I was. I felt responsible. I didn't know what to do.

SIMON

And when he emerged he started ordering the execution of generals who failed.

ANDREW

I needed to set examples.

SIMON

That was his recovery from a breakdown – more executions.

ANDREW (As STALIN)

You think I'm going to have you shot.

SIMON (As VLASOV)

I don't know.

ANDREW

Should you be shot?

SIMON

I lost Kiev.

ANDREW

You did.

SIMON

But I saved my army and killed a hundred thousand Germans.

ANDREW

Fifty thousand.

SIMON

A hundred.

ANDREW

You lost Kiev.

SIMON

Yes.

ANDREW

You lost the Ukraine.

SIMON

Yes.

ANDREW

You were behind German lines.

SIMON

Yes.

ANDREW (Truly curious)
What is it like?

SIMON (Sighing with envy)
Amazing.

ANDREW
Really?

SIMON
Yes. A completely mechanized army: tanks and personnel carriers and trucks and thousands of jeeps. They move quickly and efficiently. The soldiers are well trained and well disciplined (With a glance to JAKE) and very well fed. (Back to ANDREW) It's a dream of a modern army.

ANDREW
Not like ours.

SIMON
Our soldiers are pigs. We have no tanks. A horse is a miracle of transport.

ANDREW
How were you able to hold on so long?

SIMON
They can only kill us so fast. I lost two hundred thousand men killing a hundred thousand of theirs.

ANDREW
Fifty.

SIMON
We stripped their dead, used their weapons, ate their food. We hung on.

(Pause.)

ANDREW
I'm giving you command of the Twentieth Army outside Moscow,

SIMON
Yes.

ANDREW
I want you to get these fuckers off my back.

Yes. SIMON

No retreat this time. ANDREW

No. SIMON

And no suicide if you fail. ANDREW

No. SIMON

Die with a rifle in your hand. ANDREW

Yes. SIMON

And a German bullet in your forehead. ANDREW

Yes. SIMON

If you retreat, if you fall back, you'll be tortured. ANDREW

Yes. SIMON

Your wife molested and killed. ANDREW

Yes. SIMON

Your children- ANDREW

I don't have any. SIMON

ANDREW
You understand.

SIMON
Yes.

(ANDREW starts to leave.)

SIMON
What do I get?

ANDREW
Like I said, the Twentieth Army.

SIMON
What does it consist of?

(ANDREW smiles and walks away from the desk to another part of the room.)

SIMON (Realizing the job he's been given)
Fuuuuck.

(TOM turns the lights back on. STEVEN looks at SIMON, who he's close to. SIMON looks at him. STEVEN suddenly swats SIMON.)

SIMON
Ow.

(And before he realizes what's happening ANDREW gets a swat also.)

ANDREW
Why are you always swatting us?

STEVEN
Because you're always swearing. It pisses me off. You know you're not supposed to do it.

TOM
But you want us excited. You want us enthusiastic. You want the juices to flow. This is a sign they're flowing.

JAKE
Yeah, we swear when we're excited.

ANDREW
It's a sign of respect. Of energy.

SIMON

You want the energy but not the vocabulary. You encourage the enthusiasm but not the fall out. It's like Soviet style communism. It's abusive.

MATT

It's just a way of tricking us into getting ourselves in trouble.

TOM

It's what got Tuchechevsky killed. (They all look at him.) It's why I'm dead. Too clever.

STEVEN

Fuuuuuck. Give me a guilt trip.

(They all, except SIMON, swat him. They enjoy this moment of release. Except SIMON, who only watches.)

SIMON

I'm sorry to interrupt this male bonding or homosociality or latent homosexuality or blatant homosexuality or whatever it is but I have a war to fight.

ANDREW

What's up your rectum?

SIMON

I'll tell you. I get to the front, to the Twentieth Army as you so glamorously called it, and what do I find? Five trucks and fifteen tanks.

ANDREW (Lamely)

It was the best I could do.

SIMON

Fifteen?

ANDREW (Even more lamely)

They all run.

SIMON

For the most important assignment in the entire war?

ANDREW

With full tanks of gas.

SIMON

To stop Guderian's panzers – hundreds of them?

ANDREW

Guderian doesn't have coolant. Diesel fuel turns to ice chunks in this weather.

SIMON

You can't know that.

ANDREW

Yes, but it sounds good.

JAKE (Shoving TOM forward to play Guderian)

Guderian is the man who wrote the book on tanks.

TOM

And I bet he ends up dead at the end of this battle.

JAKE

He doesn't actually.

TOM

Amazing.

JAKE

He actually turns out to be the first German commander to openly defy me.

ANDREW

Why?

(Everyone looks at TOM, who obviously doesn't know the answer.)

TOM (To JAKE, guessing)

Because you're stupid?

(STEVEN looks frustrated at TOM's lack of preparation.)

SIMON

Because I use my fifteen tanks and all the fuel I can scrounge to make it look like I have a thousand tanks.

ANDREW

All Guderian has to do is get through the suburbs of Moscow, to get to me.

(ANDREW stands at one side of the room. JAKE pushes TOM to the other side.)

JAKE

He's only twenty miles from the Kremlin at one point. (Now JAKE gives TOM a nudge towards ANDREW.)

ANDREW (Shoving MATT forward)
 But one million women and children, under Zhukov's direction, build tank traps in his path. (MATT slides chairs towards TOM's feet, which trip him up.)

TOM

Ow, Shit man.

MATT

And the Russian winter, worse this year than it has been in decades, overwhelms his men and his vehicles. (MATT, making wind noises, jumps on TOM'S back and ANDREW continues to slide chairs in his direction. TOM is now struggling towards ANDREW with MATT on his back and having to climb over the chairs and tables that ANDREW shoves and stacks in his way.)

SIMON (Wielding a protractor he pulls from his bag)

And as he struggles towards Moscow I use my tanks, my pin-prick tank corps, and needle him. (As TOM struggles towards Moscow, SIMON comes at him from different sides and pokes him. TOM yelps, more with surprise than pain.)

TOM

Shit! Damn. (To STEVEN, indulging himself) Shit, goddam, fuck, fuck, fucky, fuck!

STEVEN (Looking nervously towards the door)

All right, at least keep your voice down.

(Finally, with so many impediments, TOM can't make it past the room's half way mark.)

TOM

Get off my back, faggot.

MATT (Bouncing on TOM's back to make it even more difficult)

You give up?

TOM

I... I... Guderian said, "I can't make it. It can't be done."

JAKE

That's what he told me.

TOM

I can't make it to Moscow,

JAKE

And he fell back.

(TOM moves back towards JAKE.)

SIMON

And I chased him across a hundred and twenty miles of Steppe.

ANDREW

And it was the first time a Soviet Army had advanced in the entire conflict.

MATT

And I took all the credit.

ANDREW

Most of it. Vlasov got an Order of the Red Banner.

SIMON

And another shitty assignment,

TOM

And I got... I got... I didn't get shit. I got fired. The first German general to get fired for retreating. (Pause.) Right?

JAKE

Right.

ANDREW (To SIMON)

I want you to go to Leningrad. I want you to save Leningrad.

SIMON

Like I saved Moscow.

ANDREW

Zhukov saved Moscow. You leant valuable support.

SIMON

My men saved Moscow.

ANDREW

The weather saved Moscow.

SIMON

I thought Zhukov saved Moscow.

ANDREW

Zhukov arranged the weather. That's why he's a genius and you're just an excellent general.

SIMON (To everyone)

He actually said shit like that. He actually believed it. He was insane.

ANDREW

Insane, but your boss. (Looking at STEVEN) The privilege of authority, right?

STEVEN

Up to a point.

SIMON

Leningrad was worse. And the weather was better so the Germans were more persistent.

ANDREW

But you have to attack. The best defense is a good offense.

SIMON

Where did you read that?

ANDREW

In an American newspaper. You told that to an American journalist.

SIMON

I thought you wanted me to speak to her?

ANDREW

I did, but I didn't want you to say anything.

SIMON

You read it, you can see I didn't say anything.

ANDREW

Yes, I didn't read anything important but I don't know what you said.

SIMON

Is that why you had my wife questioned? And intimidated?

ANDREW

She told you that, huh? She was supposed to.

SIMON

Who did you send?

(ANDREW shoves JAKE to the center of the room to play the Communist functionary)

ANDREW

Some low level apparatchik.

SIMON

Thanks. My wife was horrified. She looked a lot like Tuchachevsky's wife. (He shoves TOM to the center of the room play his wife.)

JAKE

Has your husband ever said anything against the government?

TOM

No.

JAKE

Has he ever said anything about the government?

TOM

Only good things.

JAKE

Impossible. Even speaking about the government implies criticism.

SIMON (To ANDREW)

He sounds like you.

ANDREW

It's true. When do people ever sit around praising a government? (To JAKE) Be tough. Scare her.

JAKE (To TOM)

What if I strangled you? Would you tell me what he said?

TOM

Of course.

JAKE

What if I broke your arm, would you tell me anything I wanted to hear?

TOM

Probably.

JAKE

Remember that. And tell him we came to see you.

SIMON

Which she did.

JAKE (To ANDREW)

What's the point of scaring his family? Don't you trust your generals?

ANDREW

Of course not. You should know now you can't trust generals.

SIMON

And then my army, if you can call it that, advanced.

ANDREW (With wonder)

It was amazing.

(SIMON runs to the lights and blacks them out. In the dark he moves to the stage left side of the room.)

SIMON (In the black)

Give me lights, just this end of the room.

(MATT will control the lights for this sequence. The stage left end of the room is lit.)

SIMON

I pushed through the German lines, at night, without warning. Always before an advance we'd bombarded the enemy.

MATT

Not this time – it only tells them you're coming.

SIMON

The Russian army was learning how to surprise the enemy. We just slipped through their lines at night. Silently.

ANDREW

And, in the morning, they were behind the Germans.

SIMON

And panic spread through the German front.

ANDREW

Which quickly collapsed.

(JAKE hurriedly shoves a pile of chairs in the way of SIMON's advance across the room. The chairs are at the stage right side of the lit area – just in the dark center stage.)

SIMON

Soon we were racing for the Volkhov River.

MATT

Which he crossed on the second night of the advance.

JAKE

General Lindemann blew the bridges.

SIMON

My men swam the river at night. We didn't have any vehicles anyway.

(SIMON carefully crawls over the pile of chairs. MATT adds the center stage lights to those of stage left.)

MATT

It was amazing. I was actually jealous.

ANDREW

I was proud.

MATT

A Russian general who fought like a German.

SIMON

And then real panic hit. The Germans fell back in droves. It was a stampede.

ANDREW

And the Germans were fleeing so quickly it was an open field.

SIMON

Except that it was a thick forest.

ANDREW

But they moved anyway.

SIMON

But we didn't have any vehicles. So we had to advance on foot.

ANDREW

Still, forty miles in two days.

MATT

They were like foot cavalry.

ANDREW

For the first time ever I had something to brag about to Churchill. As the Americans and British were getting creamed in North Africa and the Pacific, I could brag my ass off about my hero general.

SIMON

If I'm such a success why didn't you reinforce me?

ANDREW

I had nothing to give you.

SIMON

You reinforced Zhukov.

ANDREW

He was more famous than you.

SIMON

But still we advance – to a depth of fifty miles, as far as my men could advance with no food, no ammunition, no vehicles and fighting all the way, through the forest.

(MATT adds the stage rights lights – the whole room is finally lit. SIMON has reached the stage right wall.)

SIMON

I defeated the most sophisticated twentieth century army on the planet with the equivalent of an eighteenth century army minus the food, the horses, the artillery-

ANDREW (Cutting him off)

The whole world knew of Vlasov's advance.

MATT

Everyone thought Leningrad, the longest besieged city of the war, would soon be relieved.

SIMON

But whereas we had defeated everything in front of us, Zhukov allowed the Germans to close in behind us.

MATT

There was nothing I could do. I had sent the best of my forces into Leningrad to fight their way out, to meet you coming in.

SIMON

Which they never succeeded in doing.

MATT

What could I do?

SIMON

And you were jealous.

JAKE

General Lindemann pushed his troops to the limit. First they moved in behind Vlasov and created a thin crust between him and Zhukov's army.

(MATT blacks out the lights stage left.)

MATT

Then the crust grew thicker and Vlasov was trapped deep behind German lines.

(MATT blacks out the center lights. Only Vlasov is left lit by the stage right wall.)

MATT

I tried to advance to relieve him.

ANDREW

He got close.

(ANDREW takes over the light control and turns them up on MATT at the stage left wall. Still there is darkness center stage between SIMON and MATT.)

SIMON

Not anywhere near.

ANDREW

I ordered you to leave, fly out.

SIMON

I refused. They would have surrendered without me. Then you would have killed me.

ANDREW

That's true.

SIMON

Soon, even Zhukov was pushed back.

(ANDREW blacks out lights on MATT stage left.)

JAKE

And then we began to reduce the Vlasov pocket.

SIMON

I begged for an order to fight my way out of the pocket.

ANDREW

I refused. You were world famous now. How could I let you retreat?

SIMON

So my army just melted away.

(ANDREW dims the light on SIMON. It is completely black.)

SIMON

(In the darkness)

Some of my men made it back, individually to Zhukov. Most were killed by the Germans or starved to death as fugitives or were stoned by the peasants when they caught them stealing, or just died, somehow, no one will ever know how exactly. And I was alone in the wilderness. Wandering about, without an army, without food, barely alive, but thinking, thinking the whole time.

JAKE

And suddenly there was the possibility we could capture one of the most famous people on the planet – and not a loser, but a winner, a famous winner.

SIMON

And the manhunt began. To find Vlasov.

STEVEN (Restoring the lights)

And we'll stop there. With Vlasov's defeat. How long did you stay in the woods?

SIMON

A month. I was afraid to surrender. (Looking at ANDREW) Afraid of what they'd do to my family back home.

STEVEN

And what did you do in the woods?

SIMON

Wander about, thought about things.

STEVEN

What did you decide?

SIMON

Let me wander about. Give me till tomorrow morning, It's three now anyway.

STEVEN

Ok, fine. Good. Good work, guys. Good preparation, good work. (To SIMON) How many books have you read on this?

SIMON

Three. There are only three about Vlasov in English.

STEVEN

Where did you get them?

SIMON

University. I crash the stacks.

STEVEN (To ANDREW)

And you?

ANDREW

Just one.

JAKE

I'm the internet. Libraries and books are dead. And that's three. (He grabs his stuff and rushes out the door. ANDREW and MATT follow quickly. SIMON grabs his stuff and leaves slower, but with a rakish confidence. TOM is just a little bit behind him.)

STEVEN (To TOM)

What's up with not reading?

TOM (Stopping)

What?

STEVEN

You haven't read anything for this course. You're smart. Why don't you do the reading?

TOM

I...

STEVEN

What?

TOM

I don't know.

STEVEN

You're in an advanced placement course. All year long you make comments, you catch on, you always resist the material at first but then you end up seeming to enjoy it and participating intelligently.

TOM

I do enjoy it.

STEVEN

So what's up with not reading? (Pause.) You can tell me.

TOM (Defensive)

I read.

STEVEN

You ever read a book? Cover to cover?

TOM

Yes. (He obviously hasn't. STEVEN just stares at him. TOM sits, sets his pack down.)

I...

STEVEN

What? You can tell me.

TOM

I just can't... I don't know... I just can't focus... It always seems to be so much reading and I just can't get started. It's hard to remember things, to keep the train of thought, I get lost, confused.

STEVEN

You only have to understand it one paragraph at a time. Then move on,.. Keep reading. If you don't understand, don't worry about it. You will. A writer has one or two important points to make and he restates them in many different ways. If you read an entire chapter you might not understand every word of it but you'll understand the point. Just keep reading.

TOM

Ok.

STEVEN

And you don't have to read it in a sitting. Read until you're tired of it then do something else. But come back to it as soon as you feel ready. Let it be your priority for an evening, but not the only thing you're going to do.

TOM

Ok.

STEVEN

Let's read. Right now.

TOM

Now?

STEVEN

Yes. (He picks up a copy of Hart's *History of the Second World War*.) This is by Liddell Hart, one of the greatest writers of all time and certainly the best writer about the Second World War. You finish a chapter of this and believe me, you'll want to finish the book.

TOM

Read it now?

STEVEN

Yes.

TOM

In front of you?

STEVEN

Yes,

TOM

Don't you have something better to do?

STEVEN

Don't worry about what I have to do. Read it. Read a paragraph and then stop. (TOM does. STEVEN just watches him. It will take a while, a full minute. When TOM's finished the paragraph he lifts his head.) Are you finished?

TOM

Yes.

STEVEN

What was the point of the paragraph?

TOM

The Germans, in spite of their losses at Stalingrad, had made a full recovery by the Spring of 1942 and were ready to launch another offensive against the Russian army in June.

STEVEN

Exactly.

TOM

But I read it so slowly.

STEVEN

Doesn't matter.

TOM

It's embarrassing.

STEVEN

Who gives a shit? Read a book a week. Even if it takes you fifty hours. A book a week.

TOM

But I have fifty books a week to read. For all these classes.

STEVEN

Fuck 'em, Fuck 'em. It's like AA, kid. Ya gotta take it one book at a time. Don't think about the fifty books or the next book or even the next chapter, think of this paragraph, right in front of you. And enjoy the fucker. You know how fat people get fat? They take it one Oreo at a time. And they enjoy every single creamy center. Enjoy it. It wants to be enjoyed. In a year you go off to college. You'll be reading much faster than this. But you gotta be reading. You go off to college not reading, they'll eat you alive. Then you'll know embarrassment. Then you'll drop out of college and you know what's left?

TOM

What?

STEVEN

7-11 or prostitution. It ain't pretty. (TOM smiles.)

TOM

You're weird man.

STEVEN

Am I?

TOM

Why are you into this stuff? This war stuff?

STEVEN

What do you mean?

TOM

I assume... Well, you seem to be a peace nik, a pacifist.

STEVEN

I am. That doesn't prevent me from loving a great story. (Holding up Hart) This, this book: better than *Hamlet*, better than *Harry Potter* or the *Sopranos*. The greatest story ever told, because it's real, it's truly tragic, and, just like *Hamlet* and *The Sopranos*, entirely open to interpretation. When you get through this book you'll want to hear other versions of the story. You'll want to read Keegan and A. J. P. Taylor and Churchill and Irving and Trevor-Roper and Feist and Van der Vat. You'll be thrilled at all the possible

readings of a great conflict. You go home and read that Hilberg I assigned last week and you'll want to read Levi and Weisel and Davidowitz. There's only one *Hamlet*, one. There are a thousand World War II's. (TOM just stares at him.) What? I'm gay so I'm just supposed to love Madonna and old Bette Davis movies?

TOM

Who's Bette Davis?

STEVEN

Young man, bite your tongue.

TOM (Not understanding the expression)

What?

STEVEN

Keep reading. We'll finish a chapter. If you need to go to the bathroom, do it. If you want to make a phone call, do it. But let's finish a chapter. Even if it takes all night. Ok?

TOM

Yeah.

(TOM opens Hart and reads. STEVEN pulls an apple and his cell phone from his bag, sits and starts eating the apple as he fiddles with the phone. The lights blackout. Lights up as soon as possible on the class in mid-conversation.)

Day Three

SIMON

What I don't get is what I've never gotten, not really?

STEVEN

What?

SIMON

Why we're doing this, what it's teaching us?

MATT (To STEVEN)

He's interrogating your pedagogical paradigms.

JAKE (Answering the question)

It's interesting, to assume a role and to argue about shit. (He shoots STEVEN a look. STEVEN doesn't move to swat him. He's too interested in letting them sort out their own dilemma.)

SIMON

But are you learning how to make a moral choice?

JAKE

I'm learning how to defend a freak like Hitler.

MATT

Yeah, Jake's learning that you really can think you're right even when you're defending a morally disgusting position.

ANDREW

Yeah, but he does that every day with his own life.

JAKE (To ANDREW)

I'll tell you what's easy about it. Having someone so gross as an enemy.

ANDREW

Nothing gross about me. I find my position easy to defend. Given the circumstances.

JAKE

Yeah, it's all in the circumstances.

SIMON

And that's what's dangerous about this project. It encourages us to defend morally reprehensible people.

MATT

No, it encourages us to understand how something happened.

ANDREW

Yeah, when we dismiss people Like Hitler and Stalin as monsters and weirdos, we're letting them off the hook.

MATT

Like our president.

SIMON

I don't agree with that assertion.

MATT

You don't think our president's a freak?

SIMON

How do you think we're here at this school doing this thing you think is so cool? How do you think this school can afford to pay a PhD (indicating STEVEN) to teach five of us, *five of us*, how to defend morally disgusting positions? It's a structure based on money and privilege and we're a part of it. Who the hell are we to question it?

ANDREW

It's our job to question it, Simon. A structure is only as strong as its most self-conscious link.

JAKE

Who said that?

ANDREW

I did.

SIMON

You know what got us in trouble with Custer?

ANDREW

Oh, drop it.

SIMON

No, do you?

ANDREW

Let it go, Wisey. It's obnoxious.

STEVEN

No, tell us. What did you hear?

SIMON

I didn't *hear* anything, I asked Dr. Thompson, myself. I was curious. It was because we ended up blaming the Indians for the massacre. We actually defended Custer's policy. We reenacted the whole thing and found that Custer was correct – his position was defensible.

ANDREW

It was, *in that instance*.

SIMON

No it wasn't.

MATT

Because you were Sitting Bull.

SIMON

No, because he was a genocidal racist.

ANDREW

That's not what we concluded. You even agreed.

SIMON

So how is this going to end up? Hitler was *misunderstood*?

JAKE

We're not talking about Hitler.

SIMON

He's a major character.

MATT

Maybe we should do a trial of Hitler.

SIMON

It's been done. By George Steiner. *The Portage to San Cristobel of A.H.* Steiner has Hitler defend himself. Hitler says there wouldn't be a state of Israel without him, that the Jews needed to be militarized, politicized, and he did it. He got them off their butts. (Pause.) It's the classic self-loathing Jewish stance. It's disgusting. I might not like myself, I can cop to that, most intelligent people don't like themselves, but fuck you if you try to get me to say it's because I'm a Jew. That's bullshit. It always has been and it always will be.

STEVEN

No one's trying to get you to say that.

SIMON

That's what it feels like. In here.

TOM

I think we're trying to contextualize Hitler, show that whatever kind of a monster he was Stalin was no less so. It was something going on in the world, not just in Germany.

STEVEN

Did Vlasov hate Jews?

SIMON

I don't know. It doesn't say anywhere. Everyone else did – like Tom says – it was something going on in the world: Germans, Russians, fucking Franklin Delano Roosevelt, everyone.

STEVEN

What about Vlasov's writings?

SIMON

He doesn't mention it. Usually, that means yes.

STEVEN

So you don't know.

SIMON

I can assume. Otherwise, he'd be the one man in Europe who didn't.

ANDREW

That's not true.

SIMON

Let's start.

STEVEN

I thought you wanted-

SIMON

Yeah, ok, so I talked about it. Let's just go, let's get it over with-

STEVEN (Annoyed)

Please don't-

SIMON

No... Look, I'm sorry I brought it up. Let's just start. Ok? This game's stupid. Let's start.

(STEVEN stares at him – the anger is almost palpable, everyone senses it. MATT rises and crosses to the lights. He blacks them out.)

MATT

We left you in the dark.

SIMON

I was in the forest for a month. I saw many things. Piles of bodies.

(We hear scrambling about. When it gets quiet SIMON turns on the lights dimly – we see all the students in a pile on the floor. He turns the lights out.)

SIMON

I saw women being raped. Children, boys and girls, being raped. And cannibals. Many, many cannibals. (He turns on the light – TOM and MATT are crouched over JAKE and ANDREW. When the lights come up they scamper away guiltily, as if they were cannibalizing MATT. SIMON turns the lights out.) I saw the human body reduced to a product. A product of waste, of food, of sex, but always of violence. Stalin's twenty-year reign had so brutalized the Russians that when deprivation came they turned to each other for sustenance. The Germans were not only perpetrators but facilitators.

TOM (In the dark)

He was captured by my men.

SIMON

Peasants turned me in, I woke up one morning with a Luger in my ear.

TOM

And I questioned him.

(JAKE turns up only the center light revealing SIMON in a chair facing TOM in another)

JAKE (Referring to TOM)

Lindemann. A competent general.

TOM (To SIMON)

You are quite a capture.

SIMON

Are you going to make me march through Berlin at the front of a long line of prisoners?

TOM

A formality.

SIMON

Before you shoot them and lock me up in some castle.

TOM

Oh, no, we'll shoot you also. (Pause.) I'm joking. (Pause.)

SIMON

You *will* shoot them, won't you? Or work them to death.

TOM

There's nothing we can do. If they go back to Germany they can at least work for food. We can feed them there. Something.

(In this scene TOM is oily and confident – he has obviously prepared. He exudes the “banal self-righteousness of evil.” He sits with his legs crossed, “sips tea,” a German gentleman even in the midst of the horror.)

SIMON

I saw piles of bodies in the woods – Jews, peasants, whatever, all of them with bullets in the back of the head.

TOM

Everyone hates us. We have whole villages rise up in revolt. Partisans. Your air force drops them ammunition.

SIMON

Impossible. My air force wouldn't drop me ammunition.

TOM

If your air force did they would shoot us. We are punishing the will to resist if not the fact.

SIMON

They're peaceful. It's just that they're starving to death. They-

TOM

They should starve quietly.

SIMON

Isn't there something I can do... At least for the prisoners?

TOM

An activist... It could get you shot.

SIMON

You wouldn't shoot me.

TOM

I didn't say I would.

SIMON

What can I do for the prisoners? They should be fed. They didn't want to fight for Stalin. Most of them are conscripts, hardly even your enemy.

TOM

They could fight for us. I'm joking of course.

SIMON

Why not?

TOM

What?

SIMON

If you'll feed them

TOM

My dear Vlasov, the Fuhrer would never go for that.

SIMON

The lion eats the lamb because the lamb can't change sides. Humans can do that, they actually can. Barely. But they can if both species can get their brains around it.

TOM (Amused)

Untermensch fighting for ubermensch?

SIMON

Or Russians fighting for a free Russia.

TOM

Oh, the Fuhrer would never go for that.

SIMON

Depends on how desperate he gets.

TOM

He'd never get that desperate.

SIMON

You're so fucking complacent!

TOM (Very calmly)

My dear Vlasov, don't scream at me.

SIMON

I'm sorry.

TOM

I wish I could say, "That's ok." You people fought like boars, now you'll die like pigs.

ANDREW (Cutting in)

I can't believe what you're doing.

SIMON (To ANDREW)

I'm trying to get three million Russians fed.

ANDREW

You're fucking up this entire war.

SIMON

You never fed them.

ANDREW

You're going to have Russians kill Russians.

SIMON

I'm not responsible for your Russians. I'm responsible for mine.

ANDREW

I'll kill your wife.

SIMON

She's one person, I'll feed three million.

ANDREW

And your son. (Silence.) You do have one.

STEVEN

You do?

ANDREW

He does. I found out. He was lying before.

STEVEN (To SIMON)

You knew?

SIMON (Lying)

I don't care about my son.

ANDREW

How can you not care about a five year old?

SIMON

You'd kill him anyway.

ANDREW

You can't hate him. He's too young to hate.

SIMON

There's nothing I can do.

ANDREW

Parents don't hate their kids until they're teenagers.

SIMON (An outburst)

That's not true, they hate the existence of them. They hate what they represent. From birth.

ANDREW

Don't play games with me. You know what I'll do to him, how long it will take. I have experts in this-

STEVEN (Not liking this tangent)

Ok, ok. Let's not...

ANDREW

What?

STEVEN

Just... Move on, ok? (Awkward pause.) We're getting off subject. Ok?

SIMON (To TOM)

I want to discuss what I'm going to do here.

TOM

What exactly do you mean?

SIMON

I mean, how I can contribute? I'm used to contributing. (Pause.) I don't think you meant what you said about "dying like animals." You're a reasonable man. Germans are known for reason.

TOM

Yes.

SIMON

Germany must need allies.

TOM

There are Russians who have volunteered to fight in our units.

SIMON

I'm not talking about that.

TOM

Then I think you need to talk to someone else.

SIMON

So they sent me a man named Strikfeldt.

MATT (Volunteering)

I'll-

TOM (Standing)

I'm Strikfeldt. (To SIMON) You wanted to talk to someone else. (TOM is clearly asserting himself here, trying to prove himself – he is very much prepared.)

SIMON

Yes. Hitler must be interested in helping me form an army to liberate Russia. Liberate it from Stalin.

TOM

Maybe not Hitler. But there are those of us who are interested in such a thing.

ANDREW (To SIMON)

You're insane.

SIMON (To ANDREW)

Listen to these people. (Indicating TOM) They'll actually talk to me. They'd actually consider such a thing.

JAKE

I wouldn't.

SIMON (To ANDREW)

Then we'll do it without Hitler. Such a thing is actually possible in Germany.

TOM

The thing is to get it far enough along. Present the Fuhrer with a, with a... (he is searching for the word.)

STEVEN

Fait accompli.

TOM

One of those.

SIMON (To ANDREW)

Can you imagine such a thing in Russia?

TOM

When it's all set Hitler will accept it.

SIMON (To ANDREW)

You'd have us all shot.

TOM

We need the help.

SIMON (To ANDREW)

It's unimaginable under you.

TOM

And there are those of us who don't like the way the Russian prisoners are handled.

SIMON (To ANDREW)

Can you imagine? Germans more concerned about the way Russians are handled than you are.

ANDREW

Yes, and they show it by invading.

SIMON (To TOM)

I propose a million-man army to fight as allies of the German army.

ANDREW

They love Russia so much they kill twenty million of our people expressing it.

SIMON (Now always to TOM)

And when the war is finished we will rule Russia as a permanent ally of Germany.

ANDREW

I tried that. Being an ally of Germany. It doesn't work.

SIMON (To TOM)

Allied but autonomous.

ANDREW

Russia might be fucked up but that's not anyone else's business.

SIMON (To TOM)

What do you think?

ANDREW

The Germans are after one thing, raw materials.

SIMON (To TOM)

There are three million Russian POWs in Germany.

ANDREW

Oil, Bauxite. Coal.

SIMON (To TOM)

We'll make an army as big as the one you're fighting.

ANDREW

Wheat. Men! Now you'll harvest our men.

SIMON (To TOM)

All you have to do is arm it.

JAKE

No fucking way. (Pause.) Arm a bunch of Slavs? They'll just stab me in the back.

SIMON

That's not what Hitler said.

JAKE

It is.

TOM

He took some persuading.

ANDREW

Stalingrad persuaded him.

MATT

A huge victory for Zhukov.

ANDREW

Hitler only agreed when he started to lose.

SIMON (To ANDREW)

But he agreed.

ANDREW

Yes. He agreed to let you join a losing side.

SIMON (To ANDREW)

And you're so mature – you killed my wife.

STEVEN (To SIMON)

Did Vlasov make the right choice?

SIMON (As himself)

No, there's no siding with Hitler.

TOM

He chose the lesser of two evils.

SIMON

Hitler is not the lesser. He's the greater.

TOM

Why?

SIMON

Because he directly facilitated the Holocaust. (To ANDREW, as Vlasov) You should have offered a trade. For me. To get me back.

ANDREW

For what? They wanted to trade you for Von Paulus.

SIMON

And?

ANDREW

He's a Field Marshall. You're only a General.

SIMON

And look what Von Paulus did for you.

ANDREW

Not nearly as much as you did for the Nazis.

(SIMON hops up on top of a table and announces the following.)

SIMON

First there was my "Smolensk Proclamation."

TOM

Calling for all Russian POWs to fight against Stalin.

ANDREW

Fight with the Germans.

STEVEN

Does it mention Jews?

TOM

No, it doesn't.

SIMON

Then my open letter to all Russians interested in freedom. (To STEVEN) And no, it didn't mention Jews.

STEVEN (To TOM)

And was there pressure on him to include persecution of the Jews in his proclamations?

TOM

I... I don't know actually.

STEVEN (To SIMON)

Was there?

SIMON

I don't know.

STEVEN

Well someone should find out.

SIMON

It's ridiculous. Every other ally of Hitler's persecuted Jews. Many worse than he did. Hungarians, Roumanians, Italians, my God the Croats were worse Jew haters than the Nazis. Why would Vlasov be any different?

STEVEN

You should find out.

SIMON

I feel like I'm arguing with myself. Playing this role.

ANDREW

You should. You're making the wrong choice. You saw how Hitler starved prisoners.

SIMON (To ANDREW)

I'm trying to save them.

ANDREW

You know he executes Jews by the thousands.

TOM (To SIMON)

But do you get involved in that? No.

SIMON

I'm a bystander.

TOM

But not a perpetrator. You're trying to make a better Russia.

ANDREW

You're trying to save your own neck.

SIMON (To ANDREW)

I don't need to do this. The Germans would feed me. I'm a general.

ANDREW

How can you hate Russia so much?

SIMON

I don't. I hate you.

ANDREW

I am Russia.

SIMON

You're what's wrong with Russia. You're why I'm here. You drove me to Hitler. Literally.

ANDREW (Indicating TOM)

He's a fucking Nazi.

SIMON

I can... I guess I feel I can carve out a little place for myself. A little place of goodness. Even in this hell.

ANDREW

You remarried.

SIMON

After you killed my wife.

ANDREW

You married a German.

SIMON

And my kid. You killed my kid.

ANDREW

I didn't.

SIMON

Well, who else would?

ANDREW

I seriously... I don't remember killing him.

STEVEN

Does anyone know what happened to him?

SIMON

There's nothing to know. He disappeared. (To ANDREW) In Russia, you take the blame.

ANDREW

That's bullshit.

SIMON (An outburst)

This whole exercise is bullshit! I'm not Vlasov! I don't understand him! I don't understand his choice!

MATT

Why not?

SIMON

He helped the Nazis.

TOM

He helped the Russians. That's how he saw it.

SIMON

He helped the Nazis, which means he helped kill Jews.

TOM

That's too simple.

MATT

Did he hate Jews himself?

STEVEN

Who are you?

MATT

I'm Matt. Fuck who I am,.. Did he?

SIMON

I don't know.

MATT

Did he condone Hitler's treatment of the Jews?

SIMON

I don't know.

TOM
Is that what he wanted for his Russia?

SIMON
I don't know.

STEVEN
Your inability to understand this man hinges on his attitude towards the Jews.

SIMON
No, it doesn't. He helped Hitler. That's bad enough.

TOM
What choice did he have?

SIMON
Anything but help Hitler.

STEVEN
Be a bystander?

JAKE
Bystander's don't exist.

SIMON
I won't be a perpetrator.

STEVEN
Did he hate Jews?

SIMON
Yes, he helped Hitler.

TOM
It's not that simple.

SIMON
It is.

TOM
Many Germans hate Hitler.

SIMON
They're impotent.

STEVEN

The “Smolensk Proclamation.”

SIMON

I don’t want to go through it again.

TOM

There was no way of using Hitler to free his country and thereby make it a safe place for Jews?

ANDREW

I’ve already made Russia a safe place for Jews.

SIMON

Russia is a safe place for nobody.

STEVEN

Tom, what does Strikfeldt say?

TOM

I don’t know. I read his book but not the whole thing.

STEVEN

Jake?

JAKE

Hitler didn’t trust Vlasov. Till the end. That’s all I know.

STEVEN

Andrew?

ANDREW

My emphasis is Stalin’s relationship to Vlasov. I’ve read plenty. I can’t know every detail.

SIMON

It’s not a detail. It’s the lasting legacy of the twentieth Century: The Holocaust.

ANDREW

I don’t know that part of the story.

STEVEN

Matt?

MATT

Zhukov had no problem with Jews. The Russian Army was polyglot – Zhukov may have been part Jewish.

SIMON

That doesn't help.

STEVEN

Jake?

JAKE

Man, I'm telling you, he didn't trust Vlasov. He never gave his consent. Strikfelt slipped Vlasov in under my radar.

STEVEN

Why didn't you want his help?

JAKE

He was Russian. I told you the first day, I hate everyone.

STEVEN

But you were desperate.

JAKE

I hated him.

STEVEN

Why?

SIMON

Because I didn't hate Jews.

STEVEN

What?

SIMON

I know the answer.

(Pause.)

SIMON

I've known the answer from the start. Himmler put a ton of pressure on Vlasov to add persecution of Jews to all his proclamations, He refused down the line. He... I would never do it. I refused categorically. It slowed things down. Hitler never gave his consent. For that reason. Himmler... Himmler of all people got desperate. He pushed it through. He lied to Hitler. Said I'd declared myself an anti-Semite. I didn't know. Himmler lied to

me. Said Hitler signed off on my program for a free Russia, free from Hitler, free from Stalin, free for Jews. If I could conquer it that's what it would be. I waited long enough, they got desperate enough, and then they gave me what I wanted. Ok, so I did everyone else's research. You're all shitty students.

STEVEN

So...

SIMON

So, yes. I carved out a little place for myself. As sort of a half-perpetrator. Maybe a good guy.

MATT

Like the Americans.

SIMON

Please.

STEVEN

Why didn't you tell us?

SIMON

I've... I've really struggled with this... this whole thing... It's been very confusing. I finally decided it was demeaning me... Having to struggle so hard... Why should I? I'm talented. I'm smart. I might be the only fully engaged person involved. Why do I have to... Fight so hard. Why do I have to solve the world's moral dilemma?

STEVEN

Who are you talking as?

(SIMON smiles. He deliberately confused them.)

SIMON (Sitting down, smugly)

Vlasov was stupid. He was duped. The Germans might have given him the green light but they never had any intention of giving Russia freedom.

MATT

You don't know that.

SIMON

Hitler was adamant.

TOM

But there were Germans who supported-

SIMON (To TOM, with bitter contempt)

What are we talking about here? This is moronic, a person who can't read lecturing me about the subtleties of German popular opinion during Second World War. You're talking about Hitler and Himmler. You're talking about Germany. When you get around to reading your second book, read Goldhagen, read Browning. Or just read the fucking title of Goldhagen's book: *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. *WILLING!* They wanted it. The Germans, *every* German, wanted to kill. They were eager, Hitler just came along, he made it all right. He didn't create Jew hating. He liberated it. Get a fucking clue.

ANDREW

Like I liberated fascist communism.

SIMON

Ok, so be it. It's what Russia wanted.

STEVEN

And America wants a money grubbing, divisive culture that acts like Big Brother to the rest of the world.

SIMON

Yes, Dammit! Yes! (Pause.) My parents LOVE the President. They do. And they pay the bills. They pay your salary.

STEVEN

I know.

SIMON

It's way past three. We should stop.

ANDREW

So it's that simple. They pay the bills, they pay his salary, we should shut up.

SIMON (Incredulous)

What has this lesson, what has this exercise taught you?

ANDREW

Complexity. The complexity of participation in any situation. As Stalin it's taught me that ruthlessness and cynicism are completely effective means of survival. But Vlasov struggled for more than survival. It's taught me, you've taught me that belief in something doesn't have to preclude personal dignity or sacrifice of humanity. Vlasov fought with the Germans, but on his terms, not as a Jew hater, but as a Russia lover.

SIMON

Hitler gave him his Russian army, his army of prisoners, in January 1945. The war was over in May. He helped the Germans for exactly four months. What did he achieve? Nothing. What did he prolong? The Holocaust. The Germans killed, *exterminated* more

Jews in those five months than they had in the five months previous. And Vlasov created that time for them.

TOM

He didn't see it that way.

SIMON (To STEVEN, lecturing him)

He should have. Persons of responsibility in this world have to be very careful. They have to think a lot. Constantly. He made a moral choice, as he saw it, but he made a stupid one. He gained nothing for his people, nothing. And he got a lot of innocent people killed.

STEVEN

How are we "thinking a lot" now? As a culture?

SIMON

Yes. We are.

STEVEN

How?

SIMON

It's simple. 9/11: terrorist attacks. Why? Eight years of complete neglect of international policy by Clinton. How many terrorist attacks since 9/11? None. People fear us.

TOM

So fear is the only solution?

SIMON

For us, yes. Israel figured that out long ago, now we've figured it out. And we're supposed to feel bad about that?

ANDREW

The terrorist attacks continue even as we speak.

SIMON

Yeah, but not on our soil. And against military personnel, that's their job. Not against office workers.

MATT

So all we've done is out-sourced the misery. That wasn't an option for Vlasov or anyone in Europe.

SIMON

No, but it's always been an option for us. Roosevelt did it. He outsourced the Second World War. He got the Russians to defeat the Nazis, and he just paid for it, with money.

Hitler tried to outsource, by getting a dude like Vlasov to do his fighting. Get Russians to kill Russians in the cause of fascism – it’s clever beyond belief. (Pause.) I know the conclusion you wanted, I knew it from the start. It’s foregone. In here. With you. But it’s wrong. And it doesn’t teach us anything.

(Blackout. Lights up. STEVEN is alone, packing his bag. TOM enters.)

Day Four

STEVEN

You forget something?

TOM

Why am I in here?

STEVEN

What do you mean?

TOM

I listen to someone like Simon... Although I don’t agree with him... I listen to him and I know I don’t belong here.

STEVEN

You’re finding your voice. He’s found his. That’s the only difference.

TOM

You knew I didn’t do the reading. Mrs. Clancy must have told you that. She was always on my case last year. So how did I end up on the list for your class? I’m not an honors student.

(STEVEN sighs. He has just enough energy for this conversation.)

STEVEN

You are an honors student. You’re in this class, you’re an honors student. And now you’re reading.

TOM (Realizing)

You put me on the list.

STEVEN

Yes.

TOM

Why?

(STEVEN shrugs.)

Do you like me? TOM

What does that mean? STEVEN

Do you think I'm cute? TOM

You think that's what's going on here? STEVEN

Then why? TOM

I spend my life *teaching* honors students, maybe I wanted to *make* one. Or maybe I wanted someone's first book to be my favorite book. I don't know. What would Tolstoy say? STEVEN

I don't know. (STEVEN smiles. He starts to leave. He stops.) TOM

Oh, uh- STEVEN

What? TOM

You're cute. You must know that. STEVEN

I... TOM

No one's ever said that to you? STEVEN

My mother. TOM

She's right. (He smiles and starts to exit.) STEVEN

TOM

That's totally inappropriate.

STEVEN (Stops)

No, it's a statement. It's not a come on. It's a statement of fact. I think I'm aloud to state a fact.

(STEVEN exits. TOM looks after him. Lights fade. Lights up on STEVEN at his desk unpacking his bag. ANDREW enters.)

Day Five

STEVEN

Good morning.

ANDREW

Good morning.

(ANDREW saunters to his seat and throws himself into his chair.)

ANDREW

Tell me something. While we're waiting.

STEVEN

What's that?

ANDREW

Why do you bother with a kid like Tom Talbot?

STEVEN

Why do you?

MIKIE

I'm just being polite. That's how my parents raised me. He obviously doesn't belong here. Everyone knows that.

STEVEN

Ok?

ANDREW

You think that's good for him?

STEVEN

Do you guys resent him?

ANDREW

No, we feel sorry for him.

STEVEN

And yet he's here. My life is full of people like that. They're not exactly my kind of people, people who should be my friends, but they're my friends. So they get the full friend treatment.

ANDREW

I think he's pathetic. I hate being around him.

STEVEN

You don't show it.

ANDREW

I still can't stand him. And I think he's a dick. That's a horrible combination. Stupid and a dick.

STEVEN

I think you misunderstood my story – I'm the Tom in my life. Here on the sufferance of people smarter than me. I'm not stupid, but I'm not quick. Not as quick as you. Let me put it this way, you won't be teaching high school when you're my age. This is one of the few ways I can hang out with winners.

ANDREW

That's kind of pathetic.

STEVEN

I have no problem with pathos. My dignity isn't wrapped up in what a bunch of fifteen year olds think of me.

ANDREW

You just said it was. Basically.

STEVEN

Ok. So it is. I like being liked by you. Anyway, I think you're the only one who's noticed. The others won't figure out I'm pathetic until they're in college. So they won't come back and visit me on alumni day. Well, I won't be here either.

ANDREW

You go every year. I've seen you.

STEVEN

Not this year.

(The others all enter and sit. They regard one another. The energy is different, suspicious because of the way the last class ended.)

STEVEN

Well, let's begin. (Silence.) I think we've reached our conclusion.

MATT

We reached it yesterday. Conclusion: there's an alternative to taking sides.

SIMON

So what's our alternative? Vlasov carved an incredibly small corner of the world out for himself, and it was partly based on stupidity and blind faith. How does that help us?

STEVEN

So what happened to him?

SIMON

What do you mean?

STEVEN

Exactly what I said. What happened to you?

ANDREW

I had him arrested.

SIMON

It wasn't that simple.

MATT

No, he surrendered to me.

STEVEN

Who are you?

(MATT looks a round smiling, waiting for someone other than himself to answer.)

TOM (Explaining who MATT is)

General Patch. Commander of the American 5th Army.

(STEVEN looks at ANDREW and smiles.)

ANDREW (Correcting)

The American 7th Army.

SIMON

I surrendered along with eighty thousand of my men.

MATT (As PATCH, to SIMON)

You're seeking asylum?

SIMON (To MATT)

Well, in a way no. We're not Communists. We are co-belligerents of the Germans. We should be taken into custody as prisoners of war.

MATT

But, like Germans, you will eventually be returned to your country.

SIMON

Our country, as we define it, does not exist. We do not belong in Russia.

ANDREW

He was trying to escape the firing squad.

SIMON (To ANDREW)

What right do you have to shoot me?

ANDREW

You're a traitor.

SIMON

To whom?

ANDREW

To Russia.

SIMON

Absurd. You abandoned me behind enemy lines.

ANDREW (Getting angry)

And you raised one hundred thousand men, Russian men, to fight my army. You pitted Russians against Russians. (To JAKE) Was he your ally?

JAKE

Never.

ANDREW

Why not?

JAKE

No ally of mine would have surrendered. I died fighting, in a bunker, a bullet in my head that I put there myself.

ANDREW (To SIMON)

You see, even Hitler didn't consider you a German ally, why should the Americans?

MATT (To ANDREW, indicating SIMON)

I'm entitled to talk to him.

ANDREW

Not really. (To MATT) I've already gotten your president to agree to turn over all Russian nationals to me at the end of the war. What I do with them is my business.

SIMON

So I was hunted down and eventually hung.

ANDREW

As were forty thousand other Russian traitors.

JAKE

Ok.

STEVEN

So?

SIMON (Dismissively)

So I died for a cause.

TOM

Is that what you're recommending?

MATT

Is that the point of the story?

SIMON

If it is it's nonsense because I don't believe we shouldn't be fighting in Iraq. So it's a useless story for me.

(Pause.)

ANDREW

So what's the point?

STEVEN

No point. Just a test.

ANDREW

What?

The story was a test.

STEVEN

What?

JAKE

You passed it.

STEVEN

What the hell does that mean?

JAKE

All right, easy on the swearing.

STEVEN

What does it mean?

JAKE

How did this week start?

STEVEN

With this game – your announcement.

JAKE

No it started with that crack about our parents.

ANDREW

Elaborate.

STEVEN

About how we should “Tell our parents,” like we would whine to them.

ANDREW

Yes, I said that.

STEVEN

That’s fucked up man. Why would you think something like that?

ANDREW

I said easy on the swearing.

STEVEN (Standing up to him)

Fuck that. Why would you think that?

ANDREW (Not backing down)

STEVEN

I don't *think* it. Obviously somebody complained. Earlier in the term.

MATT

Did you get dragged down on the mat?

STEVEN

I guess you could say that.

(They all look at one another, SIMON remains aloof.)

MATT

I never said... I've never said anything bad about you. I just, shit I quote you all the time and talk about this course endlessly. I can't stop talking about it.

ANDREW

Me too.

MATT

My father has an expression, a name for you, it's "Wetter Says." That's what he calls you: "Wetter Says."

STEVEN

Why's that?

MATT

Because every time we get in an argument, every time he's up my butt about something I defend myself by saying "Wetter Says this" or "Wetter says that." He...

STEVEN

What?

MATT

Nothing.

STEVEN

He what?

MATT

He hates it.

(Silence. They look around. They all realize what's happened.)

TOM

My mother said she was tired of hearing your name.

JAKE

My dad, I know is jealous of you-

STEVEN

Ok, stop. Just stop. Let's just forget I ever mentioned it. I... I thought something else was going on.

ANDREW

Dr. Thompson actually chewed you out 'cause someone complained?

STEVEN

You know what? This is inappropriate. I shouldn't have said anything. Really.

ANDREW

We're supposed to be making moral choices. We can only do that with information.

MATT

You're not giving us the information.

JAKE

What happened?

STEVEN

A teacher is supposed to be discreet.

JAKE

You're afraid I'm going to hate my parents more than I already do. Not possible.

SIMON

I'm with Dr. Wetter. Let's drop it.

ANDREW

Why?

SIMON

It's none of our business. He brought it up, now he's dropping it. He can do that. He's the teacher. (Looking at STEVEN) I want to finish the game. I want you to explain the point.

STEVEN (To SIMON)

Class is over. We're finished.

SIMON

We can go over.

STEVEN

Don't you guys have something better to do?

TOM

Don't worry about what we have to do. A man's life is at stake.

(STEVEN looks at his watch.)

STEVEN (To ANDREW)

Ok. What happened? Quickly.

(ANDREW gets up, crosses to SIMON, grabs him by the neck and drags him to the corner of the room.)

ANDREW

I had him dragged back to Russia. I tried him.

(ANDREW throws SIMON in the corner of the room.)

STEVEN

Did he relent?

TOM

Relent?

STEVEN

Did he apologize? Did he take it all back? Did he say he was wrong and eat shit?

SIMON

No, I didn't.

STEVEN

Did you respect that?

ANDREW (Looking at SIMON)

No, he's a loser. I don't respect losers.

STEVEN

Then what?

ANDREW (Looking at SIMON)

I killed him. Had him killed. (ANDREW turns off the lights. The following is in darkness.)

SIMON

I was tortured, for months. To no purpose.

ANDREW

There was a purpose.

SIMON

What?

ANDREW

To make you feel pain.

SIMON

They kept me alive so they could keep torturing me. It was horrifying. I knew when they left me alone they were just letting me recover, recover my health, so they could torture me more.

ANDREW

When he was on the verge of death we cleaned him up enough to finally have a trial.

MATT

They filmed it.

SIMON

And then edited the film so I would look stupid.

MATT

He looked like a dumbass who had been led along by the Nazis.

ANDREW

And then we hung him.

MATT

With piano wire.

ANDREW

It cuts into the neck. Rather than strangulation, it's basically beheading that kills you.

TOM

He was brain dead before that. You drove a hook into the back of his skull.

(ANDREW turns the lights back on and stares at TOM.)

ANDREW

Where did you read that?

TOM

I read it.

ANDREW

On-line?

TOM

No. In the Andreyev book. If you penetrate the cerebrum with a spike you destroy the brain's ability to think, but not to feel pain. It's an old trick. You never thought up anything new, just brought back old shit and gave it a different name. That's the way with bullies, physical and intellectual. (He sits.)

STEVEN

Why such a brutal execution?

ANDREW (To STEVEN)

That's what governments do. To people they don't like.

SIMON

You mean to traitors?

ANDREW

Same thing.

STEVEN

Thank you. You've made my point.

(Silence.)

TOM

I'm sorry, I still don't get it. (Silence.) I don't. I'm not afraid to admit it. I missed something.

(Nobody gets it. There is silence.)

SIMON

It wasn't some parental conspiracy. Someone actually complained. About him, about this... class. A student. Me.

TOM

Why?

SIMON

I'm here to get an education. Not feel better about myself. I'm the smartest person in this class. I know it. Yet everyday I'm dragged through this "soul searching" in here, this "self-exploration," this "interrogation of my assumptions." An education is fact, not feelings. It's not a Meg Ryan movie. I got sick of it. Sick of it because I enjoy it. Education isn't pleasure, it's education. We go somewhere else for pleasure or to feel good about ourselves. They're separate feelings.

JAKE

Man, that is so twisted.

SIMON

Where do you go for a good time? Some babe's house? Your step-mother's bedroom?

JAKE

None of your business, asshole.

SIMON

It's not? Seems to me you make it my business, whether or not I want to hear it. The point is I complained to Dr. Thompson because I got sick of the encouragement, the buck-up-and-live-life-and-feel-good-about-yourself bullshit of this class. The challenge. (To STEVEN) Who the hell are you to treat us that way? To condescend with your moral superiority? You're not smarter than us – you're a high school teacher. You're not better than our parents – you're a high school teacher. You're not more clever than Dr. Thompson. He holds this fucked up school together. He balances parents and students and teachers like you. He's a fucking genius in my book. You can't even hold this class together or hold onto your job.

STEVEN

Is that what this is? A test?

(SIMON just stares at him.)

STEVEN

You were testing me?

SIMON

Life's a test. That's the lesson. If you're not pretty or rich or lucky you have to figure it out.

STEVEN

Like you have.

SIMON

Why should you be any different? You think because you don't make any money you deserve a free ride.

JAKE

I don't get it. I mean, what are you two talking about?

MATT

Yeah, sorry, I'm lost. I mean... I get that Simon's a prick and all. I got that, but...

(Silence. JAKE and MATT look confused. The others seem to understand.)

JAKE

Well?

ANDREW

Well what?

JAKE

What did he do?

ANDREW

He knew the parents had been whining about Wetter at PTA meetings and teacher nights and cocktail parties and Christ knows where else. Not anything bad, just comments like “That Wetter’s kind of a smart ass, isn’t he?” and ”You got a live one in that Honors teacher, don’t you?” That kind of thing, right?

(STEVEN and SIMON are silent. ANDREW takes this as assent and continues.)

ANDREW

But Thompson wouldn’t do anything because so long as the students are happy and the parents aren’t really complaining, it’s all good. (To TOM) That’s part of his genius balancing act, right? (Silence.) But there was kindling there. Some... some parental disquiet. A little fuel for the fire. Always dangerous. So Thompson was just waiting for one of us to complain. Something to spark the kindling. And Simon knew that. So he sparked it. He went in there and told him all about Custer or whatever. He made it sound like we were being messed with. Intellectually. Tricked into arriving at non-pc conclusions.

MATT

But why? I still don’t get it.

TOM

It was a test. Simon got sick of being tested so he set up a test for Wetter. Could he hang onto to his job? Or would he lose his cool and blow it?

MATT

But that’s just... that’s just cruel.

STEVEN

No. Cruelty’s extraordinary. It’s... It’s just typical.

ANDREW

And there was only one solution, right?

JAKE

Eat shit and apologize to everyone on the planet.

TOM

Which you didn't do.

SIMON

You still can. (STEVEN just looks at him.) Dignity is no part of intelligence.

JAKE

Wait a minute. I still don't get what happened.

STEVEN (To SIMON)

Tell 'em.

SIMON

He's out of a job.

STEVEN

As of twenty minutes ago.

SIMON

You should have kept your mouth shut. You can't carve out a little place for yourself in a bilateral system. You're either in or you're out and if you're out, you're dead.

MATT

That's the point?

JAKE (Stating to get the point)

You should have kept your mouth shut?

ANDREW

Wait a minute. The point of all this is that Vlasov was stupid because he got himself killed?

SIMON (Referring to STEVEN)

He's an openly gay man who had a good job at a swank private school. He should have kept his mouth shut.

TOM

Like Hamlet.

SIMON

Who also ended up dead.

TOM

There's no carving out a corner for yourself in a world of perpetrators.

SIMON

You can't be a bystander so you have to agree, play along.

TOM

Or end up dead.

SIMON (To STEVEN)

You can get another job, ya know.

TOM

Not as good as this one.

JAKE

Why is this such a good job?

MATT

Yeah, I fuckin' hate this place.

SIMON (Referring to STEVEN)

He doesn't. He loves it. He loves everything about it.

STEVEN

We live in an open society that seems to offer choices but it's just as nasty and cruel as fascism and communism. Don't be deceived. Watch your step.

JAKE

Man, you really made a big mistake. That's how you feel.

STEVEN (Trying to end it)

It has been my sincere pleasure teaching you gentlemen. I wish you success and happiness with your new teacher. Enjoy the golden days of your youth, they tarnish fast, dear traveler, they tarnish fast.

ANDREW

And yet they carry the glow of inspiration to light our way.

STEVEN

A way to dusty death.

TOM

All because you wouldn't apologize?

SIMON (Challenging him)

You still can. (STEVEN just looks at him.) Dignity is no part of intelligence.

STEVEN

It's not dignity. I needed a nudge. Every five years I need a nudge. To move on. I think I must have been asking for this.

SIMON

Why you took me in this course?

STEVEN

Yes.

SIMON

Instead of recommending me for the college program.

STEVEN

Yes.

ANDREW (To SIMON)

So this is revenge?

SIMON

No. I wanted to come here. (Sarcastic) I wanted to experience the "magic" of his class. I'd heard so much about it.

JAKE (To SIMON)

Man, if you're the smartest person in this class I'm proud to call myself stupid. Put me as far away from you as possible.

SIMON

There *have* to be bystanders.

STEVEN

Otherwise it forces people to be perpetrators or victims. Is that your point?

SIMON

It's drilled into us, every day, that we cannot be victims.

STEVEN

You're fifteen, you're right. I think you're entitled to be a bystander. I've learned that.

JAKE (Referring to SIMON)

We see what happens when he's a perp.

STEVEN (Lightening the mood)

All right, enough drama. You have another two months together. You should love each other. These are the halcyon days of your youth.

TOM

Where are you going to be?

STEVEN

Thompson... Principal Thompson said I could finish out the week. That, at least, I did beg for.

JAKE

Why?

STEVEN

Because I love you guys.

MATT

Oh, please.

STEVEN

I do. (He hugs MATT. MATT shrugs him off. STEVEN is amused. Then he grabs SIMON and squeezes him.) Even the rascals. (SIMON lets this happen.)

TOM

What will you do?

STEVEN (Welling up a bit)

Oh, God, now this does feel like a Meg Ryan movie. (Looking at this watch) I finished out the week – twenty-five minutes ago. (He starts to pack up his bag. They watch him in silence.)

MATT

Shouldn't we stand on the desks or something like in that Robin Williams movie?

JAKE

Or we could let him suck us off like in that play.

ANDREW

What's your problem?

JAKE

What?

ANDREW

That is so you... that comment.

SIMON

No, you're just going to fade away... Like MacArthur, right?

STEVEN (All packed up)

That's right, I think MacArthur's an appropriate paradigm.

TOM

Van Der Vat hates MacArthur.

(STEVEN smiles and walks out.)

JAKE (To SIMON)

You are one fucked up runt.

MATT

Give it a rest, Jake.

ANDREW

Who the hell is Van Der Vat?

(Blackout.)

End of Play