"The Fall In Budapest"

Screenplay By

Anikó J. Bartos & Alan C. Baird

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Alan C. Baird
HotTip@Gmail.com
www.9TimeZones.com/scr

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FADE IN:

EXT. GELLÉRT HILL - AFTERNOON, LATE AUTUMN

The modern city formed by the ancient towns of Obuda, Buda and Pest basks in a riot of color - the leaves flaunt their gorgeous tints in the warm afternoon sunshine.

The majestic Danube flows through the midst of the glittering metropolis arrayed below, and its historic bridges link together millions of souls in this sophisticated "Paris of the East".

VITALY, a dynamic and distinguished-looking gentleman in his late 50's, PUFFS a tiny bit as he crests the top of a hiking path. He looks around, smiles wryly, and SPEAKS softly to himself, in a foreign language.

VITALY
(subtitled)
They finally got rid of that ugly Soviet statue!

He strolls over to another statue, absently caresses the marble, and gazes at the breathtaking view. The spirited children of some German tourists climb up onto the base of the stone, and one child accidentally falls backward, toward Vitaly. His powerful hands catch the child, but the momentum knocks him off-balance, and he tumbles, cradling the child protectively in his arms.

JARED and COLETTE, a foreign couple in their early 40's, notice the accident, and rush over, just behind the German parents. The Germans are very concerned about their child, but it's apparent that the youngster is just shaken up, and Jared turns toward Vitaly.

JARED
Well done! Are you all right?

Vitaly massages his right ankle, and grimaces slightly.

VITALY
It's nothing. You pronounce the language well - you are American?

Jared offers his hand, and Vitaly shakes it.

JARED
Yes, the name's Jared Wilson, and this is Colette Beaulieu. But what about your leg?

Colette takes two cameras off her neck, sitting cross-legged on the ground to gently probe Vitaly's ankle. At one of her touches, Vitaly's eyes widen.

COLETTE
It is necessary for you to visit a doctor.

VITALY
Colette - a splendid name for an exquisite woman, who also speaks beautifully. I am called Vitaly, and I believe I hear in your words the natural grace of une française!

He takes her hand and delicately raises it to his lips - she blushes slightly.

COLETTE
Merci, monsieur! (to Jared) Help him stand on his good leg.

Vitaly allows himself to be raised to his feet, and Colette retrieves her cameras. Supported on the shoulders of the younger couple, Vitaly limps toward their car.

VITALY
Are you a photographer?

COLETTE
A photo-journalist - I make pictures for magazines. And you?

VITALY
Ah, I'm just an old-style Russian who is trying to learn modern capitalist ways. I'm here in Budapest to set up a joint venture with some new partners.

Unseen by the other two, Jared's eyes narrow.

EXT. DANUBE, CIGARETTE BOAT - THAT SAME AFTERNOON

On a narrow ledge at the end of the speedboat lies an anchor, partly hanging over the edge. Attached to the anchor, by a twelve-foot chain, is an ankle encased in a bright orange hazmat isolation suit. From behind the suit's protective Plexiglas mask, a frightened FACE peers out, with eyes straining to look downward.

Below, a BURLY MAN's hand is poised on the plunger of a syringe leading into the suit's oxygen supply.

ISTVÁN (also known as PISTA) lounges negligently on a deck chair a few meters away, and ZOLTÁN stands beside him, uneasily pointing an automatic weapon at the hazmat suit.

ZOLTÁN
Isn't this is a little harsh, Pista?

PISTA
He betrayed the cause.

ZOLTÁN
I suppose it has nothing to do with him sleeping with Dagmar?

PISTA
Perhaps just a tiny bit.

ZOLTÁN
But he has been a good friend to us. I'm sure he is sorry.

The face behind the Plexiglas nods vigorously.

PISTA
He has been a good friend to you, Zoltán. Would you like to take his place?

ZOLTÁN
No.

PISTA
Then do it.

He nods, and the Burly Man pushes the plunger. A muted SCREAM comes out of the suit, and the face behind the mask looks down incredulously.

PISTA
(continuing)
Besides, we need to test the sample, to see if it's worth the money. They said to expect a few nerve spasms.

The hazmat suit starts to twitch uncontrollably. In a few moments, the suit is jerking ghoulishly across the small ledge. Delighted, Pista CLAPS his hands as if keeping time with a gypsy tune.

PISTA
(continuing)
Ho-pa! Clap with me!

The Burly Man starts to CLAP, but Zoltán turns away, disgusted. The hazmat suit falls off the ledge and SPLASHES into the river.

PISTA
(continuing)
The dance is over. Let's go.

The boat's DRIVER pushes the throttle forward. As the boat ZOOMS away, the twitching hazmat suit in the river drags the anchor off the back ledge, and the suit submerges almost instantly.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLINIC - 20 MINUTES LATER

Jared and Colette sit in the hospital waiting room, reading magazines and talking quietly.

COLETTE
He was very quick in catching that child. He seems like a good man.

JARED
(hesitates) Yeah. Should we offer him a lift home?

COLETTE
It could be our good deed for the day!

JARED
We've already done our... (pause) but I suppose we just can't get enough of this "good deed" stuff.

Jared sees that Colette is engrossed in her magazine, and shakes his head. A beautiful forty-ish nurse, ERZSÉBET (a/k/a ERZSIKE), approaches.

ERZSÉBET
You brought in the Russian with an injured leg, no?

COLETTE
Yes - is he going to be all right?

ERZSÉBET
It's just a bad sprain. (pause) He's quite a flirt!

COLETTE
Did he kiss your hand?!

JARED
Excuse me, ladies, but I can see you need some privacy to discuss his charms!

Jared gets up and walks down the hall to a telephone booth. Erzsébet looks briefly after him, and sits in his chair.

ERZSÉBET
Is he angry?

COLETTE
No, he's just trying to be funny. At least I hope he's trying to be... (pause) Do you think Vitaly's a good person?

ERZSÉBET
He has a generous heart - he's invited all of us to dinner as a thank-you for helping him.

COLETTE
That sounds like it would be fun! Will you go?

ERZSÉBET
I don't usually socialize with patients, but if you two...

COLETTE
Yes, we should all go! I'll convince Jared!

ANGLE ON JARED

At a distance down the hall, Jared speaks furtively into a telephone, his voice heavy with meaning.

JARED
I've made unplanned contact with the Bear.

He listens to a VOICE from the earpiece.

JARED
(continuing)
I hope to find out more soon. You'll be the first to know.

He listens again, looking astonished.

JARED
(continuing)
What do you mean, tie him up and tickle his ass with a feather?!

He listens yet again, SNORTING with derision.

JARED
(continuing)
Sure, the ol' hot-lead enema is bound to work! (pause) You're a master of subtlety, you know that?

He listens more, but he's quite impatient to hang up.

JARED
(continuing)
How did you ever pass the psych screening? You're out of your mind. You're bonkers! Look, I gotta go. (pause) Yes, I wuv you too, you freakin' pervert!

He SLAMS the phone down, but there's a smile on his face. He ambles back down the hall, to where Colette and Erzsébet are still chatting.

ERZSÉBET
In the morning, I will arrange for some time next week.

COLETTE
Shall we meet for lunch tomorrow to confirm it?

ERZSÉBET
We'll...

JARED
What did I miss?

COLETTE
Oh, Jared, please don't interrupt her.

ERZSÉBET
It's not a problem - we'll have lunch and finalize the arrangements.

COLETTE
Jared, Erzsébet says that Vitaly has asked us all out to dinner.

JARED
(pause) Hey, we all have to eat anyway, right?

COLETTE
I suppose it's possible that you could be a little <u>less</u> enthusiastic...

JARED
OK, OK, twist my arm... let's go!

Erzsébet looks from one of them to the other, doubtfully.

ERZSÉBET
Then I'll tell Vitaly that we accept his invitation. My shift is almost over, and he should be discharged soon. I will return in a few minutes.

Erzsébet walks away from them, down the hall. Colette glares at Jared.

JARED
What did I do?

INT. FISHERMEN'S BASTION RESTAURANT - TWO HOURS LATER

With its Neo-Romanesque towers, colonnades and embrasures built a century ago on medieval Castle Hill defense installations, this well-respected restaurant boasts a magnificent panorama over the city.

Vitaly is in fine form, regaling Jared, Colette, and especially Erzsébet with stories.

VITALY
...so I said if he wanted to close the deal, he had to bark like a schnauzer.

ERZSÉBET
And what did he do?!

Vitaly YIPS energetically, and the other three LAUGH until tears roll down their faces. Sitting next to Erzsébet, Vitaly moves the back of his hand to lightly caress her forearm, which is below the table, out of sight of the other two.

Erzsébet's LAUGH subsides somewhat, and she gazes at Vitaly thoughtfully, while the other two continue CHUCKLING, oblivious.

VITALY
Then I told him he had to crawl across the floor.

Three smiling faces look at him with anticipation.

VITALY
(continuing)
Hey, you can't expect me to demonstrate <u>that</u>!

He holds up his new cane. Everyone CHUCKLES some more, while Erzsébet gets up and crosses to Vitaly's other side, where his injured ankle is elevated on a fifth chair. She kneels down to check the swelling.

JARED
What exactly is the nature of your business?

VITALY
Oh, a little of this, a little of that. It's not very interesting.

Unseen by the other two, Vitaly starts to massage Erzsébet's neck. She tenses at first, and then continues to examine the bandages on his ankle.

JARED
I disagree. You've kept us spellbound all evening with stories about your exploits!

VITALY
Well, the people are sometimes colorful, but the business details are boring, even to me!

COLETTE
Perhaps he doesn't want to disclose trade secrets, Jared. Why don't you tell us about that feature story you're writing?

JARED
You should know how dull the magazine business is, Colette.

COLETTE
Right. Very dull. Shall we powder our noses, Erzsébet?

Erzsébet finishes checking Vitaly's bandages, and stands up. Her face is slightly flushed.

The two women leave for the restroom. Jared looks thoughtfully at Colette's back, as she walks away.

VITALY
You are a very lucky man, Jared.

JARED
Truly. I wonder how long my luck will hold?

INT. FISHERMEN'S BASTION RESTROOM - CONTINUOUS

Colette examines her own reflection in the mirror, while Erzsébet looks on with concern.

COLETTE
He doesn't pay attention to me anymore.

ERZSÉBET
Perhaps he's interested in learning about Vitaly - who <u>does</u> seem to be a fascinating man.

Colette stares briefly at Erzsébet.

COLETTE
It's not just tonight - lately, he's always distracted.

ERZSÉBET
It could be temporary - maybe he's concerned about the story he's working on.

COLETTE
That's not it - he's lost interest in his writing, too. (pause) Enough of my complaints - you and Vitaly are getting along well.

Erzsébet flashes a glance at Colette, and LAUGHS uncertainly. Colette's questioning look stops her, and Erzsébet becomes serious.

ERZSÉBET
I'm very attracted to him, and he is quite... attentive. But there are some difficulties. (pause) He's Russian.

COLETTE
Why should that be a problem?

ERZSÉBET
Don't you remember what the Soviets did to us in 1956?

COLETTE
Just because another government denied your freedom long ago, it doesn't mean that everyone from that country is a bad person.

ERZSÉBET
There are times when the memories are so...

Erzsébet slips into a reverie. [The following is a scene from 1956, perhaps in grainy, black-and-white film. The accompanying MUSIC for flashbacks like this might be "Litany" excerpts, or any spiritual composition by the Estonian mystic Arvo Pärt.]

EXT. CORVIN KÖZ - DAY (1956)

A SHOT rings out. A five-year-old GIRL looks down, without emotion, at the lifeless body of a small five-year-old BOY.

INT. FISHERMEN'S BASTION RESTROOM - CONTINUOUS

Returning to the present, Erzsébet's voice catches, as she finishes her thought.

ERZSÉBET
...the memories are so strong.

Erzsébet exerts an effort, and masters her feelings. Colette observes closely, with a certain respect.

COLETTE
Oh, Erzsébet... don't let the past keep you in chains.

Colette embraces Erzsébet, who returns the hug.

ERZSÉBET
That is good advice in theory, but perhaps slightly more difficult to practice.

The two women smile, squeeze each other's hand, and walk out of the restroom.

INT. FISHERMEN'S BASTION RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Vitaly and Jared sit at their table, talking, as the two women come into view.

JARED
There they are - Colette and I are going to meet some friends at a bar. Will you join us?

VITALY
I should probably go back to my hotel and keep this leg elevated.

The women sit down, overhearing Vitaly's statement.

ERZSÉBET
Yes, you should - tonight is especially important. Otherwise, it will take longer to heal.

JARED
Well, we have to get going, or our friends will wonder where we are.

COLETTE
And thank you for the lovely dinner, Vitaly.

JARED
Yes, of course, where are my manners? Thanks for a great evening. May we offer you two a lift somewhere?

VITALY
We can call a taxi, I think - I was going to suggest that the lovely lady join me for some brandy and cigars.

ERZSÉBET
(pause) Well, perhaps a little brandy, but I don't like cigars.

With a look of mock horror, Vitaly quickly puts away the cigar he had removed from his pocket. The other three LAUGH.

JARED
We'll leave you to your brandy. Have a pleasant evening.

GOODNIGHTS are exchanged all around, and Jared leaves with Colette.

VITALY
You were right. Tonight <u>is</u> especially important. I am happy you stayed.

He offers his hand to her. She hesitates, then puts her hand in his. Their fingers entwine.

ERZSÉBET
I'm happy, too.

INT. TAVERNA BAR - 10 MINUTES LATER

This boisterous beer-drinking pub is a meeting place for foreign journalists. Jared and Colette enter, to a HAIL of greetings, from many MEN and WOMEN.

Colette talks with some friends, and watches casually as a short man, BERT (a/k/a ALBERTO), quickly grabs Jared's arm and drags him to a quiet booth. They both speak with lowered voices.

JARED
Bert, didn't they tell you at orientation that discretion is a big part of this gig?

BERT
It's common knowledge that I have a steamin' weenie for you.

JARED
Excuse me?!!

BERT
Jared, my love, you must come away with me, so that I can perform unspeakable acts upon your person.

JARED
And what about Colette?

Bert leans out of the booth, and waves to Colette. She flashes a private grin at him, in response to his.

BERT
Everyone knows that bitch is sucking the life out of you!

JARED
Smooth, Alberto. I'm sure she'd be glad to hear you say that.

BERT
Oh, we've chatted about it many times. She's very loyal to you. God knows why.

JARED
I still don't understand how you got a security clearance.

BERT
They've actually found that we're better suited to this work than you people are - shall I remind you about "don't ask, don't tell"?

Bert takes Jared's hand and starts to caress it. Jared quickly yanks it away.

JARED
OK, knock it off! Did you find out anything more about the Bear?

BERT
Just what you know already - he's in town to broker some unspecified contraband. You really love playing spy, don't you?

JARED
Less and less as time goes on.

BERT
Trouble?

JARED
(pause) No - it's just been a long day. I didn't get much from him tonight, but we're meeting again tomorrow. I think he's going to set the deal soon.

BERT
The pattern seems to be that any two-bit band of hoodlums with an axe to grind gets a sweet deal from this shyster.

JARED
Now you're starting to sound like an L.A. gumshoe.

Bert places the back of his hand against his forehead, à la Sarah Bernhardt.

BERT
At least they had a sense of style back in those days. Your lingo is straight outta the Ike and Mamie show, honeychile!

JARED
Don't you mean the Ike and Tina show?

BERT
Think back. Remember the Fifties? The Cold War? Sputnik? It's Ike and Mamie Eisenhower, you gorgeous empty-headed hunk, you! God, I love it when you play dumb.

JARED
Knock it off, buttface. The KGB trained their boy well. We've got to keep a close eye on this joker, or there'll be hell to pay.

BERT
Ooooo, it's sexy when you talk tough, big boy! You're so butch!

Bert rolls his eyes back in a paroxysm of ecstasy, and Jared's eyes roll up in exasperation. At this point, Colette walks over to them.

COLETTE
Working on another story, eh? I see you boys still have eyes for each other!

BERT
You keep your hands off him, missy. He's mine!

JARED
Colette, please take me away from this degenerate. I'm afraid he'll start making sense soon.

COLETTE
You made your bed - now you'll have to lie in it...

Jared glances at Bert, who ogles him with a fiendish grin.

BERT
Satin sheets, studmuffin!

Jared SHUDDERS. He stands, and holds Colette at arm's length.

JARED
You could have at least pretended to fight for me.

COLETTE
For you, or with you?

INT. ERZSÉBET'S APARTMENT - A HALF-HOUR LATER

Vitaly sits in an overstuffed chair, swirling a snifter of brandy. His leg rests on a pillow atop a footstool. Erzsébet kneels at the fireplace, lighting crumpled-up newspapers under a few logs.

VITALY
The taste of your brandy puts the restaurant's to shame.

She stands, satisfied that the fire will burn by itself, and watches as he picks up a framed picture from the small end table beside his chair.

ERZSÉBET
My husband was killed in a climbing accident, four years ago.

VITALY
I'm very sorry. He must have been quite a man, to have had the honor of living with you.

ERZSÉBET
Why do you say things in that way? We're alone, and it sounds so... I don't know... rehearsed.

VITALY
Erzsébet, I will not tell you anything that is false. I realize I am in the presence of a woman with a generous heart, and...

ERZSÉBET
You don't know anything about me!

VITALY
I know that you invited a strange man to your home. You trust me on some level.

ERZSÉBET
I would like to trust you. Besides, with that ankle, I don't think you're much of a threat!

Vitaly changes his position so quickly that it's difficult to see the individual moves. From lounging in the chair, he is suddenly standing in front of Erzsébet, with his hand around her waist. The other hand still holds the snifter. There's hardly a ripple in the brandy.

There is fear in Erzsébet's eyes. Vitaly sees this, and removes his encircling hand. He sits back down, and carefully raises his ankle to the footstool.

VITALY
You're right, it has slowed me down a notch or two.

He sips his brandy, jerks and COUGHS once, then places his snifter carefully on the end table. After covering his mouth, he gives in to the COUGHING FIT, slightly flopping over the side of the chair. Erzsébet's eyes widen, and she enters another reverie.

EXT. BUDAPEST STREET - DAY (1956)

A SHOT rings out. The same five-year-old girl watches, without emotion, as a tank rolls by, with a SOLDIER'S limp body jerking and flopping over the side of the turret like a rag doll.

INT. ERZSÉBET'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Erzsébet returns to the present, and notices that Vitaly is now watching her closely. She turns away.

ERZSÉBET
I think... perhaps you should go.

VITALY
What do you see?

ERZSÉBET
(pause) It's not important.

VITALY
That's not true.

ERZSÉBET
I see... a Russian soldier, who got what he deserved.

VITALY
Do you hate us that much?

ERZSÉBET
More than you know.

Vitaly stands, and collects his cane. He limps toward the door, but stops beside Erzsébet. He doesn't face her.

VITALY
I am very sorry. More than you know.

Vitaly continues to the door, and grasps the knob. When Erzsébet speaks, it is very soft, almost a sob.

ERZSÉBET
It's not you, it's...

VITALY
I understand.

ERZSÉBET
I want to see you as just one person.

VITALY
(pause) I only know how to be one person.

Erzsébet hesitates for a few moments.

ERZSÉBET
Please come and sit down.

VITALY
Are you sure?

ERZSÉBET
Of course I'm not sure!

They both LAUGH heartily, and Vitaly returns from the door. When he reaches Erzsébet, Vitaly pauses, moving the back of his hand to lightly caress her forearm. Erzsébet is very still, and after three heartbeats, Vitaly continues on, to sit down in the chair.

VITALY
Past, present, or future?

ERZSÉBET
The past is very real tonight.

Erzsébet enters another reverie.

EXT. BUDAPEST CEMETERY CHAPEL - SUNSET (1956)

A SHOT rings out. The disembodied face of the same five-year-old girl shows no emotion, as a MAN, running out the chapel door, pitches forward and lies still.

INT. ERZSÉBET'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Erzsébet returns to the present, and finds Vitaly waiting patiently. She sits at his feet, and checks his bandages.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
When I was little, my mother always warned me to watch my back.

VITALY
In the army, I had to depend on a friend to watch for me.

ERZSÉBET
How do you learn to trust that person?

VITALY
When the rest of the world is against you, it's easy.

ERZSÉBET
I'm so tired of watching my back.

She puts her head down on the pillow next to Vitaly's ankle, rests her hand lightly on the bandages, and slowly closes her eyes.

After a short interval, Vitaly removes a knitted Afghan shawl from the back of the chair, and places it gently around her shoulders. He settles in to watch the fire CRACKLE and burn lower.

INT. IMPERIAL BATHS - THE NEXT MORNING

This Turkish bathing establishment is one of the oldest in Budapest, dating from the rule of the Sultans during 1541-1686. The octagonal domed main room is full of rising steam and shadows. Jared is parboiling dreamily in a pool of mineral spring water as Vitaly enters, walking tentatively with his cane.

JARED
How's the ankle?

Vitaly gingerly lowers himself into the water.

VITALY
I think I may survive. This will certainly help things along. Budapest inherited something very civilized when the Turks left.

JARED
Towel. Bath. Border.

VITALY
What's that?

JARED
My first three words in Turkish. It's from an old comedy recording. My mind wanders in the steam.

VITALY
It's another world in here.

JARED
And we're other people.

VITALY
I wish.

JARED
If the steam would let you, what would you have done differently?

VITALY
I can't complain much - it's been an interesting life, but there are things from the army that I regret.

JARED
For instance?

VITALY
Shooting a man in the back.

Jared's distracted mood focuses instantly.

JARED
Why'd you do that?

VITALY
I was young and inexperienced. I thought it was him or me. When it came right down to it, though, I just shot him in cold blood.

JARED
But why tell me?

VITALY
You're not going to tell anyone, are you, Jared?

Vitaly CHUCKLES, and Jared examines him closely.

JARED
(pause) No.

VITALY
Maybe I need to confess - to cleanse my soul of sin. Isn't that what you Christians do?

JARED
Some of us, I guess.

VITALY
I've met an exceptional woman, and I wish my perceptions could be as direct and clear as hers.

Jared relaxes somewhat.

JARED
She's pure, and you are...

VITALY
A sinner! A heathen! A pillaging conqueror who can conquer no more. Compared to her, I'll burn in a Hell so deep that Dante would need a pickaxe to find me!

He LAUGHS uproariously. Jared CHUCKLES nervously.

JARED
And you want me to absolve you?

VITALY
I humbly beg your forgiveness.

JARED
I'm not sure forgiveness is mine to give, but if it means anything - "Ego te absolvo".

VITALY
Latin?

JARED
I think that's how they do it.

Vitaly shakes Jared's hand, with a serious and sincere look of gratitude.

VITALY
That was a nice touch, my friend. I hope it works.

JARED
I'm pretty sure they also advise you to go, and sin no more.

VITALY
This is tougher than I thought!

JARED
It's a dicey business... (pause) speaking of which, how is your partnership coming along?

VITALY
Ah, that's boring - compared to love, it's nothing.

JARED
There are those who would disagree with you.

VITALY
And they are fools. What about you and la petite française?

JARED
Things have been better.

VITALY
Why not make them good again? You don't receive many opportunities of this caliber.

JARED
I guess you're right. (pause) Sometimes my work comes between us.

VITALY
The work is nothing, Jared - you could sweep out the stables and be happy with that woman.

JARED
I could, eh?

VITALY
Of course! She is première qualité, comrade - the highest value. If you are lucky enough to have such a woman in your life, you should allow nothing to endanger it.

JARED
For a man of your background, you are what Colette would call very "evolved".

VITALY
I've made my share of mistakes, but if my behavior doesn't work, I find that I learn more when I try something new. Every now and then, a dim flash of enlightenment seeps into this thick Russian skull.

Vitaly KNOCKS on the side of his head, LAUGHING. Jared CHUCKLES with him, and looks down at his own hands.

JARED
I have prunes for fingers - I think I'm almost done.

VITALY
And my ankle has soaked up all the minerals it could possibly hold.

JARED
Good - I'll walk out with you.

INT. CAFÉ HUNGÁRIA - NOON, THAT SAME DAY

In the early 1900's, this model of Late Eclectic interior design was internationally famous as the Café New York, a magnet for gatherings of literary personalities.

A MAÎTRE D' leads Colette and Erzsébet to a table, holds their chairs, and places menus in front of them.

ERZSÉBET
I got the hospital's permission for you to do a photo shoot next week!

COLETTE
Perfect! And now you begin your vacation - do you have big plans?

ERZSÉBET
Well... Vitaly suggested that we go to Lake Balaton.

COLETTE
A romantic holiday - how wonderful!

ERZSÉBET
I'm not so sure it's romance. But I can't go.

COLETTE
Do you mistrust him?

ERZSÉBET
Last night, we spent a long time talking by the fire. I admit he's quite an amazing man, but he's too good to be true.

COLETTE
Because he's Russian?

ERZSÉBET
How can I love a man from that country?!

COLETTE
Maybe you should sleep with him, to get it out of your system.

ERZSÉBET
I could never do that! My husband was the only man to share my bed. I cannot dishonor his memory.

COLETTE
But you <u>are</u> attracted to Vitaly.

ERZSÉBET
I feel like a traitor if I say yes.

COLETTE
A personal relationship between two people is not a political act!

ERZSÉBET
It used to be.

COLETTE
But those days have passed. What do your feelings tell you?

ERZSÉBET
My heart has been very insistent. Luckily, it is my head that's in charge of this decision!

COLETTE
I think you should go - if only to honor your intuition. When you stop trusting that, it goes away.

ERZSÉBET
I'm afraid that spending time with him would be disastrous for me. Do you always believe in your feelings? What about Jared?

COLETTE
Jared was a different person, when I met him. Over the last month, he has changed.

ERZSÉBET
In what way?

COLETTE
He keeps too many secrets these days.

A WAITER approaches their table.

WAITER
Are you ready to order?

ERZSÉBET
Could you give us a few more minutes, please?

The waiter nods, and withdraws.

COLETTE
I think Jared has gotten involved with something illegal.

ERZSÉBET
What will you do?

COLETTE
If I could get him to talk, I would try to help him get out of it.

ERZSÉBET
He won't say anything?

COLETTE
He tries to divert my attention by picking fights.

ERZSÉBET
That sounds unpleasant.

COLETTE
Yes, but he needs my help, especially now.

ERZSÉBET
You seem very devoted to him.

COLETTE
We were once quite good for each other, and I'm convinced we'll return to that.

ERZSÉBET
How can you be so sure?

Colette places her hand over her heart.

COLETTE
I listen to this.

INT. JARED'S CAR - 10 MINUTES LATER

Jared intently weaves in and out of traffic, following a black car up ahead. He's not doing too well - the noon traffic is very heavy, and he has to run a red light in order to keep up.

JARED
Stand back, I'm comin' through!

INT. BLACK CAR - CONTINUOUS

Vitaly drives confidently and seems unconcerned with everything except the classical MUSIC on his radio. [This could be the "Accelerations" waltz, or the Hungarian polka "Eljen a Magyar!", by Johann Strauss.]

INT. JARED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Jared switches on the same MUSIC, and wipes some sweat from his upper lip. He frantically jabs his HORN.

JARED
Outta my way, you stupid tourists!

INT. BLACK CAR - CONTINUOUS

Vitaly is lost in the MUSIC, and almost seems to be timing his lane changes to coincide with the rhythm of the measures.

INT. JARED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Jared's movements are jerky, and woefully out of sync with the MUSIC. He snarls at the world in general.

JARED
One false move, and you're all roadkill!

INT. BLACK CAR - CONTINUOUS

Vitaly's driving is a wonder of grace and beauty - he's "in the zone", and his head makes small movements in time with the MUSIC.

INT. JARED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Jared drives with manic desperation, and the MUSIC is distracting him. He reaches for the radio's volume control, but, at the last second, he grabs the steering wheel with both hands to avert disaster.

INT. BLACK CAR - CONTINUOUS

Vitaly smoothly cuts in front of a large truck, and speeds down a side street. His fingers lightly BEAT TIME with the MUSIC on the steering wheel.

INT. JARED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Jared sees the black car disappear in front of the truck, and tries to squeeze between the truck and a parked car. His car CAROMS off the truck's rear tire, and SMASHES into the parked car.

JARED
Crappy tune.

There's a pause in the MUSIC, and Jared savagely PUNCHES the radio's off button with his closed fist.

INT. BLACK CAR - CONTINUOUS

After the short pause in the MUSIC, Vitaly's finger starts to play-direct the orchestra. He smiles, and his car disappears in traffic.

INT. JARED'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

The MUSIC FADES OUT in the background. Jared winces in pain and rubs his fist. The radio is dented inward. His cellular phone RINGS.

JARED
Perfect timing. No wonder they call it the "bunko phone".

He picks up the telephone from the floor, unfolds it, and CLICKS it on. He surveys the outside damage to his car, and sees that it's only minor crumpling. He speaks first, then periodically listens and responds to a voice at the other end of the line.

JARED
This better be good.

JARED
(continuing)
Yeah, yeah. I still wuv you, you nutjob. What's up?

JARED
(continuing)
At the bottom of the river?

JARED
(continuing)
In an orange isolation suit?! They camouflaged it well.

JARED
(continuing)
The cops found what?!! (pause) Oh, shit, this could be the Tokyo subway all over again. Do you think Vitaly's involved?

JARED
(continuing)
Nah, you're right - he's never dealt in chemical weapons.

JARED
(continuing)
I lost him in traffic. (pause) Yeah, I'll be right over.

JARED
(continuing)
No, I'm not going to say it again. (pause) Hey, watch your mouth. Did you ever stop to consider that maybe I <u>am</u> a bastard?

JARED
(continuing)
No, Alberto, you can't have a divorce.

Jared smiles faintly, folds up the phone, and checks for traffic. A CROWD has gathered next to the smashed parked car. Jared backs up, to a chorus of HORNS, and he SCREECHES his tires as he pulls a U-turn. The mob YELLS at him, and Jared mutters to himself.

JARED
(continuing)
Go tell it to the cops.

He accelerates off into traffic, while some members of the crowd run into the street, shaking their fists.

EXT. CASTLE VAJDAHUNYAD - A FEW MINUTES LATER

This building complex was patterned after the castle of the Turkish conqueror Hunyadi, and combines elements of Gothic, Romanesque, Renaissance and Baroque architecture.

Pista and Zoltán lounge near some trees outside the castle walls, as Vitaly walks over slowly with his cane to greet them.

VITALY
You have tested the sample?

PISTA
One of our comrades learned how to dance!

VITALY
He must have seriously displeased you.

PISTA
It was an unimportant matter.

VITALY
How did you dispose of the body?

PISTA
Why do you care?

Vitaly shrugs, and starts to limp away.

VITALY
I thought you wanted to do business with me.

PISTA
Wait! Wait. The body's safe. It's anchored at the bottom of the Danube. Heh, heh!

Pista elbows Zoltán in the ribs - but Zoltán looks away, while Pista LAUGHS. Vitaly turns and walks back, wanting to spit out a retort - at the last moment, he changes his mind and controls his temper, but his voice is steely.

VITALY
If you continue to blunder like this, you will also strike up an acquaintance with the fish in the river. Do I make myself clear?

PISTA
Are you threatening me, old man?

Vitaly steps closer.

VITALY
I said, do I make myself clear?

PISTA
Ha! A cripple will introduce me to these fish?

Faster than a hummingbird's wing, Vitaly's hand moves across Pista's chest. When the hand stops, there is a knife in it. Pista looks down incredulously at his newly-ventilated shirt. Vitaly puts the knife away.

VITALY
You are just scratched - the blood won't flow unless you touch it.

Of course, Pista must verify this information, so he roots around inside the slashed fabric. His finger emerges, marked with a thin line of blood. He is impressed, and tries to bluff past his fright.

PISTA
You're very talented with that pig-sticker. Would you like to work for me?

VITALY
The only issue on the table right now is whether you can keep a low profile until the transfer.

PISTA
I think perhaps we can manage, if it's that important to you.

VITALY
You have received the details of payment and delivery date, yes?

PISTA
Yes...

Vitaly places the tip of his cane precisely between Pista's shoes, and leans in, very close to Pista's face. His voice is filled with quiet menace.

VITALY
Then why are you still here?

Pista's eyes finally show his naked terror, mixed with hatred. He slowly saunters off, and Zoltán walks beside him, secretly smirking.

VITALY
(continuing)
You want a new crack in your ass, too?

Pista nervously glances back at Vitaly, then breaks into a trot. Vitaly limps away and smiles - eventually his shoulders move up and down in a LAUGH.

INT. JARED & COLETTE'S APARTMENT - TWO HOURS LATER

Afternoon shadows fill the room as Jared enters the front door. Colette emerges from a makeshift darkroom, staring at some damp contact sheets. She carefully places them on a table, to walk over and greet him.

COLETTE
How was your day?

Jared waves her away, and takes a bottle of beer out of the refrigerator.

JARED
Don't ask.

COLETTE
Weren't you supposed to meet Vitaly at the mineral baths?

JARED
Yup. We met. Don't wanna talk about it.

COLETTE
What is wrong with you?

JARED
Can't I just come home and relax, without getting the third degree?

COLETTE
I am trying to express some interest in your life. I hear that's what lovers do.

She starts to massage his neck. He shrugs her hands off disgustedly, and stalks across the room to sit down with a magazine. A long SILENCE descends on the pair. After awhile, Colette imitates Jared's deeper voice.

COLETTE
(continuing)
"Well, Colette, since I don't want to talk about my day, how was yours?"

More SILENCE.

COLETTE
(continuing)
"I heard you went to lunch with that pleasant nurse Erzsébet."

Still more SILENCE.

COLETTE
(continuing)
"She's a real hot chick, and I'd love to have a threesome as soon as you can set it up, Colette."

JARED
I'm not in the mood for this crap.

Shoulders slumped, Colette shuffles over to stand in front of Jared's chair. Her tone is resigned.

COLETTE
And what are you in the mood for, my grumpy one?

JARED
You think you're pretty damned funny, don't you?

COLETTE
I was simply trying to cheer you up.

JARED
Maybe I can't be cheered up.

COLETTE
I have to admit the prospects look quite bleak.

JARED
And maybe I don't want a self-righteous... frog waiting to ambush me when I come through the door.

COLETTE
Oh la la. Now my nationality is a negative thing?

JARED
Maybe it has been all along, and I just didn't want to say anything.

COLETTE
What else have you been holding back?

JARED
How much time do you have?

COLETTE
I should leave you alone, to cool off.

JARED
Maybe you should leave me alone, period.

COLETTE
You don't mean that, Jared. I'm going out for a few hours.

She hurriedly throws a coat over her shoulders, and heads for the door.

JARED
If you leave now, don't come back.

COLETTE
But I can't stay here, with you like this.

JARED
This is who I am now.

COLETTE
I'll be back at eight. I'll prepare dinner for us, then.

JARED
Don't bother returning. Just send me an address of where to ship your things. I'll have them boxed up by tomorrow.

Colette stares at Jared, and sees that he's deadly serious.

COLETTE
Who are you... what happened today?

JARED
It's nothing that hasn't been brewing for a long time. If there's anything you'd like to hand-carry, take it, before it gets packed away.

In shocked disbelief, Colette stumbles over to the table and picks up her contact sheets. She stares at them mutely. After a minute, she reaches for her cameras.

COLETTE
I can't live without these.

With one hand holding the contact sheets, and one hand clutching the straps of two cameras, she walks over to the door. Once there, she makes a visible effort to focus on slinging the cameras over her shoulder, before resting her hand on the doorknob. She speaks in a small voice.

COLETTE
(continuing)
Tu es sûr?

JARED
I'm very sure. (pause) Goodbye.

She opens the door, and wanders down the hallway. Jared strides over to the door, to close and lock it.

EXT. TIHANY PENINSULA - THAT SAME AFTERNOON

Looking out through an automobile window into the golden afternoon sunshine, there's a MONTAGE of typical views. This posh resort district on Lake Balaton combines luxurious hotels, holiday cottages, recreation areas and little harbors for sailing. It's a protected region, part of which has been set aside as an open-air ethnographical museum.

VITALY (O.S.)
I do believe we're here!

EXT. TIHANY HOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Vitaly, awkwardly fumbling with his cane, and Erzsébet, wearing a conservative jacket-and-skirt suit, both step out of the black automobile. Erzsébet walks to his side of the car, and they admire the scenery together.

ERZSÉBET
I <u>can't</u> believe we're here!

VITALY
Are you sorry you came?

Erzsébet turns to stare at him.

ERZSÉBET
No... no, I'm not.

He leans in, very close to her face, and lightly brushes the back of his hand against her cheek. She smiles radiantly up at him.

VITALY
You continue to surprise me.

ERZSÉBET
I surprise myself!

VITALY
What made you change your mind?

Erzsébet steps back, to consider this question.

ERZSÉBET
All my life, I've been the "good girl", and did what I was told. But this time, I decided to follow my instincts. (pause) Maybe I can break out of my rut in such an enchanting place. (pause) I'm so hungry - I think I'll starve if we don't eat soon!

VITALY
We don't want that - let's get you some food!

INT. TIHANY HOTEL RESTAURANT - TWO HOURS LATER

Vitaly and Erzsébet are enjoying some brandy. The room holds 6 or 8 tables, and is about half-full with early DINERS. The sun has recently set, and the twilight on the patio outside the huge glass windows is magical.

ERZSÉBET
That was a lovely dinner.

VITALY
I couldn't agree with you more. Shall we take a short walk?

ERZSÉBET
With your ankle, it will have to be <u>very</u> short.

VITALY
It's such a luxury to have a nurse watching out for my health. Especially this particular nurse.

He gets to his feet with the help of his cane, and limps over to her chair. She stands to take his proffered arm, and they walk to the patio door.

EXT. TIHANY HOTEL PATIO - CONTINUOUS

Vitaly holds the door open, and they walk out onto the grass. Erzsébet is very solicitous about his ankle, and supports him whenever she can. She turns up the collar of her jacket, and they slowly make their way over to a tree.

ERZSÉBET
Your shirt is very thin against this chill - are you sure you're not cold?

Vitaly stops under the tree, and turns her to face him. The atmosphere is electric, the twilight is enchanting, and the setting couldn't be more magnificent. He leans his cane against the tree, and drops his hands to his sides.

VITALY
I can think about nothing except that perhaps it is time for our first kiss.

Erzsébet looks back through the patio windows at the diners in the restaurant. Nobody is paying the slightest attention to them.

ERZSÉBET
But what about all those people - someone will be watching us!

VITALY
They won't care - we're a romantic couple in a picturesque setting. If they do notice, it will warm their hearts.

ERZSÉBET
I don't think this is such a good idea.

VITALY
I will take you in my arms, arch your back over my knee, and make you forget about the rest of the world.

ERZSÉBET
Everyone would laugh at such a scene!

VITALY
I'm willing to bet that if they see us, they will rise to their feet in applause!

ERZSÉBET
What a spectacle!

VITALY
If you don't seize this moment, you will have to live with the regret for the rest of your life...

Erzsébet SNORTS, and hugs herself against the cold. After a moment, she thinks of something, reaches for one of Vitaly's hands, and grasps it firmly.

ERZSÉBET
Ooooo, you're cold - you'll get sick! (pause) No, I won't <u>let</u> you get sick. Come on, let's go in.

Vitaly is bewildered, and quickly grabs his cane, to stumble comically after a striding, determined Erzsébet.

INT. TIHANY HOTEL RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Erzsébet holds the patio door open, and practically drags Vitaly inside the restaurant. Many diners look up. At the small restaurant bar, she stops and helps arrange Vitaly on a stool, treating him like a small boy.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
Bartender, two champagnes, please.

Vitaly is perplexed, but submits to her ministrations with good nature. The BARTENDER pours from a bottle into two champagne flutes, and places the glasses in front of them.

Vitaly starts to make a toast, but Erzsébet gulps her champagne down quickly. Vitaly thoughtfully sips from his glass.

The bartender offers to refill Erzsébet's champagne, and she nods at him.

VITALY
Perhaps you should slow down a little - this stuff can go to your head!

Erzsébet has turned slightly red, and she fans herself with her hand.

ERZSÉBET
It's hot in here, compared to outdoors. I've got to take off my jacket.

She stands, and removes her jacket - the blouse underneath is revealed to be a flimsy triangular piece of silk, with no covering for her back and shoulders. Her appearance has gone from conservative to unbearably sexy in two seconds flat.

Many of the diners, including some NEW DINERS who are just being seated, watch from the corners of their eyes. From the other end of the bar, the bartender tries not to stare, but some beer he is pouring overflows the mug. He mops it up, hastily.

Vitaly grins at Erzsébet, and CLAPS once or twice. She looks at him deeply, and her face flushes even further. Her eyes shine brightly.

VITALY
I'm sorry - I couldn't speak. You took my breath away.

Erzsébet starts to smoulder with a sensual look. She smiles seductively at Vitaly, and puts the jacket back on. By now, all eyes in the restaurant are riveted to her every move, but Erzsébet only has eyes for Vitaly.

ERZSÉBET
If you liked it the first time, I hope you'll like it even better the second time.

Erzsébet now does a demure striptease with the jacket, and when she finally gets it off, she casually throws it across Vitaly's lap.

There is a stunned SILENCE in the restaurant, and then someone starts to CLAP. Quickly, everyone is APPLAUDING, and some of the men even stand up during the ovation. Erzsébet suddenly realizes that the restaurant is full of people, and her mouth forms a small "O". Her eyes appeal to Vitaly for help.

Vitaly chivalrously drapes the jacket back around her shoulders, and puts his arm around her. He hands her his cane, picks up both champagne flutes with one hand, and whispers in her ear.

VITALY
Should we take these up to the room?

Erzsébet nods, and she helps him limp out of the restaurant, while APPLAUSE still rings in their ears. As they leave the restaurant, Vitaly smiles down at her with an exquisite look of love. She gamely smiles back.

INT. TIHANY HOTEL ROOM - TWO HOURS LATER

The two champagne glasses sit on a small table, still nearly full. The infamous jacket is crumpled on the floor, along with various other items of clothing.

Erzsébet lies against Vitaly's chest, with an absent-minded smile. He gently caresses her hair, but he's worried.

INT. TAVERNA BAR - THAT SAME NIGHT

Several empty shot glasses make a pyramid in front of a bleary-eyed Jared - Bert sits contentedly in the booth seat across the table from him.

JARED
I gotta be the stupidest sumbitch on the face of the earth.

BERT
You have your moments, sweetie.

JARED
D'you think I'll ever be happy?

BERT
Not unless you start swingin' with me, sugar!

JARED
Alberto, you know tha's not what I need ri' now.

BERT
Snot is exactly what you need right now. But a girl's gotta try, don't she?

JARED
I do 'preciate you being 'round.

BERT
Don't start quoting Beatles' songs at me, or I'll get up on the table and belt out "Eleanor Rigby" in my trademark piercing falsetto.

JARED
Huh?

BERT
Oh, Jared, Jared. (sigh) I always fall for the cute dumb ones.

JARED
I'm not that dumb!

BERT
And who was it that kicked Colette out into the street tonight?

JARED
OK, so I'm a li'l dumb.

BERT
Honey, you've pulled one of the colossal bonehead moves of the twentieth century. And don't argue with me - you know how I get.

JARED
S'right. Know how you get. Bonehead move. Dumb. Yerright.

A WAITRESS passes the booth, and Bert flags her down.

BERT
Can we get a cup of coffee for the cute dumb one, here? Thanks. (to Jared) So, how are you going to apologize?

JARED
'Pologize? Who said anything about 'pologizing?

BERT
You do want her back, don't you?

JARED
Not if I hafta 'pologize.

BERT
Look, you can pull your macho crap, which got you in this mess to begin with, or you can beg for her forgiveness.

JARED
A man's got his pride.

BERT
And not much else, from where I sit.

The waitress delivers the coffee, and Bert stirs some cream and sugar into it. He pushes the cup over in front of Jared, who takes a sip and grimaces.

JARED
I jus' can't take the way she judges me. S'like she knows what I'm up to.

BERT
Have you told her anything?

JARED
'Course not. She doesn't really know, but she's got piercin' eyes, or sumpin'.

BERT
It sounds like it may be time for you to think about getting out.

JARED
You sayin' I can't do my job?

BERT
Look, don't get into a pissing contest with me, Jared. I'm telling you this as a friend.

JARED
I know, I know. And you're a good fren', Alberto. Good fren'.

Jared pats Bert on the hand.

BERT
If it's any consolation, we had another team following this hoodlum named Pista, and they got pictures of a meeting with Vitaly.

The coffee starts to kick in. Jared straightens up.

JARED
What does that mean?

BERT
It was one of Pista's boys, in that orange suit they dredged up.

JARED
Great. Vitaly, chemical weapons, and a local bad guy. Anybody wanna play "Name That Tune"?

BERT
We're gonna have our hands full with this situation.

JARED
Why not let the local cops handle... what's his name? Pisser?

BERT
Pista. It's Vitaly we're after, remember?

JARED
Oh, yeah. Right.

BERT
Look, I'll track down Colette and have a chat.

JARED
You would do that?

BERT
Somebody's love life should go smoothly. I just wish it were mine.

JARED
You're gonna make a great wife, for some lucky boy.

BERT
Let's just hope I find him before I lose my girlish figure...

EXT. TIHANY LAVENDER FIELD - THE NEXT AFTERNOON

Vitaly, with his cane, and Erzsébet stroll through a sunny field filled with late-blooming lavender. The spikes of pale violet flowers wave gently in the warm breeze, and some butterflies flit among the blossoms.

VITALY
Getting to know you is like peeling an onion.

ERZSÉBET
Am I that smelly?!

They both LAUGH.

VITALY
Compared to this field, I think we're both smelly... but with you, there are so many layers, so many different Erzsébets to know.

ERZSÉBET
Couldn't you compare me to an artichoke, instead?

They CHUCKLE again.

VITALY
I'm a crude, crude man!

Erzsébet caresses his face, and kisses his cheek. After a pause, she strolls a few steps, thoughtfully.

ERZSÉBET
Despite what you think, I am only one person... just as I'm beginning to see that you're only one person.

Vitaly glances up at her.

VITALY
Sometimes I feel ashamed for my country. People in groups can be led to do things that they wouldn't even consider, individually.

ERZSÉBET
So you see yourself as an independent agent?

Vitaly looks at her sharply, before he is satisfied with the innocence of her remark.

VITALY
We are all independent agents, at heart. Sometimes we don't realize that until it's too late.

ERZSÉBET
Is it too late?

VITALY
Not for us, no. Many people live their lives in chains, and never even know they have the key.

ERZSÉBET
That's very poetic.

VITALY
I can't take the credit - I think it's from an American pop song.

They LAUGH heartily.

ERZSÉBET
Leave it to those Yanks...

VITALY
Freedom is a dream. Two people can dream it for each other.

ERZSÉBET
Freedom from what?

VITALY
Not <u>from</u> - <u>to</u>. Freedom to become what you were always meant to be...

ERZSÉBET
...freedom to leave the mistakes of the past behind?

VITALY
(pause) Yes, that too.

ERZSÉBET
I'm sorry, I was thoughtless.

She kisses him on the lips. He pulls away just a heartbeat too soon.

VITALY
It's nothing. I'm babbling away, like I know what I'm talking about.

ERZSÉBET
But perhaps you do! Tell me more.

VITALY
You're humoring me.

ERZSÉBET
No, I think maybe you are speaking to something deep inside!

Erzsébet puts her hand over her heart. Vitaly places his hand over her hand, and considers the difference in size.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
Please go on. This is important. Tell me about the dreaming.

VITALY
I think if enough people dream the same dream, sometimes there is a small space in time where reality feels like a dream.

ERZSÉBET
Yes. Yes.

Her eyes lose focus.

VITALY
What is it?

ERZSÉBET
I can almost remember such a time.

EXT. CORVIN KÖZ - DAY (1956)

A CROWD has gathered in this narrow Budapest square to listen to the verse of the great lyric poet Sándor Petőfi (1823-1849). The READER is a strapping, bearded man in his mid-twenties.

READER
Rise, Magyar! For this, thy land calls to thee - the hour's at hand!

ANGLE ON SIDE STREET

An adolescent boy, JÓZSEF (a/k/a JÓZSI), walks into the square, holding the hands of two five-year-olds: a BOY and a girl. This young girl is a familiar face from earlier flashbacks.

They are all smiling at a funny story the little boy is telling, complete with exuberant arm gestures and a rubber face.

READER (O.S.)
(continuing)
Are we slaves or are we free?

At the edge of the crowd, the three young people pause in their enjoyment of the boy's joke, and they crane their necks to see the reader.

READER (O.S.)
(continuing)
This to ask - the choice to thee!

The young boy starts PESTERING József. The little one is insistent, even though József tries to SHUSH him. Finally, with a shrug, József hoists the boy up onto his shoulders.

The boy smiles at his small victory, and playfully covers the eyes of his benefactor with his tiny hands. József gently and patiently holds back the hands, and helps balance the boy on his perch.

READER (O.S.)
(continuing)
By the God of the Magyar do we swear...

The little girl, deprived of the security of an older hand, tightly grips the outer seam of József's trousers.

READER (O.S.)
(continuing)
...do we swear, chains no longer will we wear!

SHOTS are heard, and the crowd ERUPTS into turmoil. The pushing and shoving adults unknowingly rip the little girl away from her anchor, and she is terrified. Her mouth is so dry, she can only croak out a rasping whisper.

GIRL
Józsi?

The movements of the running people carry her a short distance, before the mob thins out. The youngster struggles to regain her composure, and her voice gradually returns.

GIRL
(continuing)
Józsi? (pause) Józsiiii!

Finally, the people are nearly cleared away, and she spots her friends a short distance across the square. As she runs breathlessly over to them, she notices that József is crouched over the younger one, who is flat on the cobblestones.

GIRL
(continuing)
Józsi, what happened? Why is he lying on the ground?

As she reaches the two, she cannot comprehend what she sees. She looks down, without emotion, at the lifeless body of the little boy. A bullet has torn through his narrow chest.

József's eyes are filled with tears. He gently gathers up his small burden, and blindly walks out toward the side street. The little girl hurries to keep up with his longer strides.

GIRL
(continuing)
Józsi, why doesn't he walk by himself? He's a big boy! Józsi?

EXT. TIHANY LAVENDER FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Erzsébet returns to the present, with tears running down her cheeks. Vitaly dries her eyes, and speaks quietly.

VITALY
They shot a little one?

Erzsébet pulls away from him, and bares her teeth.

ERZSÉBET
You barbarians killed a child! A child who didn't know or do anything!

VITALY
But...

ERZSÉBET
He was my only friend!

She stalks away, cutting a wide swath through the lavender. After a short distance, she stops, puts her hands to her face, and SOBS uncontrollably.

Vitaly is troubled. He starts to limp toward Erzsébet, and stops, undecided. A cloud passes over the sun, and the field's warm color is muted.

After a minute, he shrugs, and continues ahead with his cane, to stop just in back of her.

VITALY
Erzsike... my dear Erzsike. Please believe me - I wasn't even near Corvin köz.

After a moment, she reaches behind, to grasp his hand.

ERZSÉBET
Yes, I know... and it's a very good thing you weren't.

EXT. BUDAPEST STREET - A SHORT TIME LATER (1956)

Through the open front door of a row house, the five-year-old girl, young Erzsébet, watches József kneel to arrange the younger boy's body on a couch.

YOUNG ERZSÉBET
Józsi, why doesn't he stand up? (pause) What happened? Józsiiii?!

On the street, a tank RUMBLES by, tearing small holes in the pavement. Young Erzsébet turns to look at the unusual spectacle, and József walks over to peer out the front window. A Russian SOLDIER stands in the top of the tank, with the lower half of his body concealed by the turret.

József turns around, walks quickly into the back of the house, and disappears from view. Young Erzsébet looks over at the dead little boy.

INT. ROW HOUSE - CONTINUOUS (1956)

Young Erzsébet is irresistibly drawn to the body of her small companion. She speaks in a sing-song voice, at first.

YOUNG ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
You can get up, now!

She reaches out to put a finger on the body's hand and GIGGLES. When there's no response, she reaches for the hand again, and grasps it firmly.

YOUNG ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
Ooooo, you're cold - you'll get sick! (pause) Don't be scared, I'll help you - I won't let you get sick.

She rubs the hand back and forth awkwardly, trying to warm it - she's obviously mimicking something she's seen an adult do. She reaches up to pinch both cheeks.

YOUNG ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
Let's put some color in your cheeks!

The pinches don't bring back any color, and she's confused. After a minute, she places the back of her hand against the forehead. But then, she can't think of anything else to do, and she gets anxious.

YOUNG ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
Why don't you open your eyes? (pause) Please, I'll let you play with my toys! You can ask for anything you want. (pause) This isn't a good game - I don't wanna play this gaaaame!

József returns to the living room, carrying a rifle and a box of shells. He doesn't seem to notice the little girl, and he carefully moves the open front door so that it's almost closed. He peers through the crack, and puts one shell into the gun.

YOUNG ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
Józsi, he won't talk to me! (pause) Why won't he plaaaay with me?

A telltale RUMBLE announces the approach of another tank, and József aims the rifle through the crack in the door. Young Erzsébet is nonplussed.

When the tank comes into view, József tracks it with the gun. He's obviously been taught how to shoot, and he waits for just the right moment.

CRACK! The gun's report is deafening in the small living room. The little girl CLAPS her hands over her ears, still not understanding.

YOUNG ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
Józsi, what's going onnnn?!

Through the front window, the little girl watches, without emotion, as the tank continues to ROLL by, with a SOLDIER'S limp body jerking and flopping over the side of the turret like a rag doll.

Still holding the rifle, József looks through the front window at his deadly handiwork. He turns slowly to look at the body of the little boy. He glances at the uncomprehending face of the little girl.

All at once, he's aware of what's happened, and he's horrified at what he has done. He drops the gun as if it had burned his hand.

EXT. TIHANY LAVENDER FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Returning to the present, Erzsébet turns to face Vitaly, and he opens his arms. She hugs him with the desperation of a drowning woman. The afternoon sun weakens almost imperceptibly, and Erzsébet's words are muffled in Vitaly's jacket.

ERZSÉBET
I'm glad you weren't in that tank.

He lays his cheek on her head. After a few moments, they walk away, with Vitaly leaning on her shoulder.

EXT. VÁRPALOTA FUNICULAR RAILWAY - THAT EVENING

Jared and Bert sit on a bench in front of the entrance to this tourist attraction, which runs up a steep hill to the Castle Palace of Buda.

There are very few passers-by, and the area is fairly quiet. The black iron bars of the gate behind them loom tall in the evening shadows. It's almost closing time.

JARED
Why does he want to meet us here?

BERT
Who knows? When you're ratting out your boss, maybe a toy train lends an elegant touch of dignity?!

JARED
Ah, hell, it'll be fun. Have you talked to Colette?

BERT
We're meeting for dinner in an hour, a few blocks over that way.

Bert points to the right. Jared's alarmed.

JARED
She might see us!

BERT
Relax. She's doing a big photo shoot, and she said it'll run late. This'll only take a few minutes, assuming the guy shows up.

ANGLE ON NEWSSTAND

A few hundred meters from the funicular, Colette casually looks at a magazine, with her cameras draped over her shoulder. She's down the street, and partially hidden from the bench. Absorbed in their conversation, Jared and Bert don't see her.

After a few moments, Colette glances up, and notices the two men on the bench. She hesitates, not knowing what to do.

ANGLE ON BENCH

A silhouetted figure approaches. As he walks by, the streetlight reveals a glimpse into the face of Zoltán. He's frightened, and he whispers urgently to the two seated men.

ZOLTÁN
Count to thirty, then meet me in the last railway car.

Bert and Jared look at each other, and Bert starts to count.

BERT
One-hippopotamus, two-hippopotamus, three...

JARED
What the hell are you doing?

BERT
Counting. Four-hippopotamus...

JARED
Whatever happened to
one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two?

BERT
You count the way you want,
studmuffin, and I'll count the
Nancy-Boy Way. Six-hippopotamus...

JARED
The Nancy-Boy Way?! What is the
Nancy-Boy Way?!! Is there some
sort of manual that lays these
things out for you guys?!

BERT
Absolutely. You should get a load
of our secret handshake!

He back-handedly whips his arm up in the air, and SNAPS his fingers at the top of the arc.

BERT
(continuing)
Oh, foo. You've made me lose my
count. Well, that was about a
half-page of dialogue, let's go
meet Mr. Personality.

As they get up from the bench, Jared's puzzled.

JARED
A half-page of dialogue?

BERT
I'm writing a screenplay on the
side. Isn't everybody? They tell
me it's roughly a page a minute.

Jared forms an "O" with his mouth, while Bert buys two tickets from the CASHIER.

JARED
So a half-page would be...

Bert stops, puts his hands on his hips, and aims a stern look at Jared.

JARED
(continuing)
...thirty seconds. I knew that...
I was just pullin' your leg!

Bert flounces over to the train, pretending to be in a huff.

BERT
And Siegfried is "just good friends" with Roy.

Zoltán is carefully checking the surrounding buildings and streets, when the two men board the otherwise-empty train car. Bert sashays right up to him.

BERT
Got a late date?

ZOLTÁN
What?

BERT
Sorry. I'm Bert, Queen of the Danube, this is Cute Dumb Boy, and you must be Miscellaneous Bad Guy Number One.

Bert offers his hand, palm down. Zoltán stares at him suspiciously.

ZOLTÁN
Are you loco?

Bert brushes his hair out of his eyes, and SNIFFS.

BERT
Some people call me "colorful". But I can tell when my act's not gonna fly. Jared, you talk to him.

ANGLE ON COLETTE

She's just outside the big iron gate, and she notices a tiny flash of reflected light in the darkness. It's slightly above the small railway car that holds the three men, and she peers through the viewfinder of one of her cameras.

CAMERA'S POV

The three men jerk in and out of sight, as the train STARTS to ascend the hill. Up above the railway car, an indistinct glint twitches across the field of view.

Suddenly, a long, narrow flame leaps out, and the quick BARK of a gun interrupts the evening's calm.

ANGLE ON COLETTE

Shaken, she hides behind a building, but she peeks up the hill to see that all three men have dropped out of sight behind the wood side panels of the railway car.

Suddenly, Zoltán jumps and SMASHES through the back window - he hits the ground and rolls. Bullets STITCH the ground around and above him, as he ducks and dodges down the hill inside the recessed train track.

In a state of fear, Colette quickly flattens herself against the building. After Zoltán runs away down the street opposite her, the FIRING stops. She closely examines the counter on her camera, with a puzzled expression.

She glances back in the direction of the train, and she's obviously torn, but something else is more important. She hefts the camera and sprints around a corner away from the action, looking over her shoulder once or twice.

ANGLE ON BERT

Lying on the floor of the moving railway car, Bert is COUGHING up blood. Jared holds his head tenderly, and wipes his mouth clear.

JARED
Hold on, buddy.

BERT
That's the sweetest thing you've ever said to me. Clichéd, but sweet.

JARED
We'll be at the top soon.

BERT
At least I'm starting my long trip headed in the right direction.

JARED
What do you mean?

Bert weakly points upward, and raises his eyebrows once or twice.

BERT
You know, pearly gates, feathered accessories, fartin' ambrosia? (pause) I always wanted to write one of those hokey Shakespeare death scenes. Up, down, dead, not dead...

JARED
You're not gonna die.

BERT
Promise?

He closes his eyes.

JARED
Bert!

Bert opens his eyes, with a fading twinkle.

BERT
Gotcha! (pause) I don't think I've got another one left in me, though.

His eyes glaze over, and close.

JARED
Bert, stop foolin' around.

Jared shakes him, and fears the worst.

JARED
(continuing)
All right, dammit - wink at me, and I'll kiss you.

No response. Jared's head slowly turns from side to side, while his face contorts. He hugs the body close, and tenderly kisses his friend's forehead. His voice catches, but he speaks fiercely.

JARED
(continuing)
Alberto, if you tell anybody, I'll never speak to you again.

Jared enfolds the body to his chest.

INT. TIHANY ABBEY CHURCH - THE NEXT MORNING

This Benedictine abbey was originally built in 1055 by King Andrew I, and includes a beautiful Baroque church. Vitaly still limps, but he's now walking without a cane beside Erzsébet.

ERZSÉBET
Here, let's sit down in one of the pews.

VITALY
But my ankle feels all right.

ERZSÉBET
We don't want it to swell. Sit!

Vitaly obediently sits, almost too quickly. They both GIGGLE, then cover their mouths, when they realize where they are. She sits beside him in the dim light of the stained glass, and they speak in undertones.

VITALY
You are the best nurse I've ever had.

ERZSÉBET
Thank you. I think.

VITALY
Oh? (gets the double meaning) Ohhhh!

They both LAUGH again, SHUSHING each other. Erzsébet takes a long look at him.

ERZSÉBET
I think perhaps you missed your calling when you became a warrior.

VITALY
What do you mean?

ERZSÉBET
I used to think that emotional sorrows from the past were like unhealed scars from physical injuries - if you pressed on them, they would bleed again.

Vitaly stares in the direction of her hair, then passes his hand over his closed eyes, to pinch the bridge of his nose.

VITALY
And now?

ERZSÉBET
I feel like I've been bleeding all over - drenching you with the blood of my old grief. (pause) But you don't perceive me as wounded.

Vitaly again seems to be having trouble with his eyes, but Erzsébet doesn't notice.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
I can almost see that vision of myself when I look in your eyes.

They regard each other for a moment, before Vitaly looks away and mumbles.

VITALY
You have a very strong sense of yourself.

ERZSÉBET
No, that's just what I'm trying to say - this is a precious gift you have given to me!

Vitaly seems nervous, cornered.

VITALY
What gift?

ERZSÉBET
When you look at me, you see a human being who's whole and unblemished.

VITALY
But you are - you always have been!

ERZSÉBET
Not always.

She shivers, and Vitaly puts his arm around her.

ERZSÉBET
The last time I remember feeling like this was before my father put me in the air-raid shelter.

EXT./INT. AIR-RAID SHELTER - DAY (1956)

Five-year-old Erzsébet is hurried down into an underground cellar by her FATHER (who looks vaguely familiar from an earlier flashback). He rushes back out, SLAMMING the door. Light enters only through some small cracks.

YOUNG ERZSÉBET
Papa! Don't leave me in here alone! It's daaaark!

She shivers, and looks around. She finds a blanket, and bundles it around herself and her stuffed teddy bear, being careful to leave its face outside the swaddling. She mumbles to herself.

YOUNG ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
It's cold, too. We used to have fun playing in here during the summer, didn't we, Mr. Bear?

The door BURSTS open, and the light partially blinds the little girl, as she looks upward.

YOUNG ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
Papa?

Three SOLDIERS, rifles at the ready, CLOMP down into the shelter. After checking under the girl's blanket, they ignore her. They efficiently search the small enclosure, pulling items off the shelves, and generally ransacking the place. Erzsébet shrinks into a corner.

YOUNG ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
Who are you? Where's my Papa?

The soldiers take a long look at the girl, and SPEAK among themselves in a foreign tongue. Finally, one of them LAUGHS, and picks up a carton of cigarettes which had been thrown to the floor in the search.

SOLDIER
Cigarette, liddle gurl?

As he offers the carton, Erzsébet shrinks back even further, and tightly hugs her teddy bear. The soldiers CHUCKLE, rip open the carton and light up cigarettes. They half-heartedly approve of the taste, and each man pockets one pack. They toss the remainder of the carton carelessly into a corner.

They CHAT for awhile in their own language, and seem to be telling jokes - periodically, they all LAUGH loudly. At a particularly funny punch line, one soldier leans backward momentarily, lost in the hilarity, and accidentally steps on, then off, Erzsébet's tiny leg.

Although it hurts terribly, Erzsébet doesn't make a sound, because she is so frightened. None of the soldiers notice her pain.

After a few moments, they finally leave, and close the door on the little girl. By the faint light coming through the cracks, Erzsébet tearfully looks at the imprint which the soldier's boot has left on her skin.

EXT. TIHANY FERRY - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

Back in the present, Vitaly and Erzsébet lean on the railing of the ferry sailing back to Tihany from Szántod. Their hair blows in the WIND.

ERZSÉBET
The mark of that young soldier's boot eventually disappeared - from my leg.

Vitaly offers his arms, and Erzsébet gratefully hugs him. Vitaly is privately guilt-stricken, but gradually regains his composure.

VITALY
You know, in the darkness of the church this morning, I thought I saw a... light... around you.

Erzsébet pulls back slightly from his embrace, to peer up at him. Vitaly passes his hand over his eyes again.

VITALY
(continuing)
There must be something wrong with my eyes.

ERZSÉBET
Do you think so?

Vitaly turns to lean on the railing.

VITALY
I don't know what to think.

Erzsébet leans on the rail beside him, and gazes out over the huge lake.

ERZSÉBET
It was probably nothing. (pause) But you always see the best in me. I'm very grateful for that.

VITALY
I admire you - those kind of feelings are very difficult to overcome. (pause) I have a Danish friend who detests Germans.

ERZSÉBET
Why?

VITALY
In the war, a German soldier killed his mother's best friend. From his first breath, he was taught to despise Germans, even though he had never met one.

Vitaly stops talking, and carefully considers his next words. Erzsébet waits patiently.

VITALY
(continuing)
I suppose his hate could be justified. (pause) But he's a good-hearted man, and he's working hard to keep his prejudice from infecting his young daughter.

Vitaly stares blindly at the beautiful scenery.

VITALY
(continuing)
But after your experiences, I don't understand how you could allow someone like me into your heart. (pause) And the sad part is - of all the Russians you could have picked, I am probably the worst choice.

ERZSÉBET
You might have been wrong for some women, but for me, you are perfect. I am the daughter of fortune.

Vitaly hugs her.

VITALY
That is such a wonderful thing to say, Erzsike. But I fear your emotions may be blinding you.

Erzsébet pulls away, surprised - and her first words are a mild rebuke.

ERZSÉBET
Vitaly, please don't be condescending! I'm not a silly schoolgirl with an infatuation!

Vitaly is startled, but Erzsébet touches his arm, and goes on to explain.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
Look - I have been carrying around these horrible feelings for forty years. But you listened - you stood there and allowed me to re-live my past, you permitted me to feel my rage. And you are a Russian, you are the enemy!

Vitaly listens intently, with respect.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
All of this should be too dangerous for you to handle, but you don't even try to bottle up my hostility. You are fearless, in the best kind of way. You say my feelings are natural - so where can my fury go? There is nothing to contain the raging river of my anger. So the fierce water of the rapids slows down, to be absorbed by the fertile land at river's end.

She embraces him.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
Where there once was scorched earth, you are now cultivating a garden.

Out of her sight, Vitaly stares fixedly over her shoulder.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
You know, after those hard times in my childhood, all the adults kept insisting that nothing had happened. But I always wondered about something...

EXT. BUDAPEST STREETS - DAY (1956)

There's a MONTAGE of five-year-old Erzsébet walking down various streets, looking curiously at many things, and holding the hand of an unseen ADULT.

They pass by a splintered round puncture in the side of a row house, a chipped and shattered brick in the middle of a wall, and the perforated marble cornerstone of a downtown bank.

Meanwhile, the voice of present-day Erzsébet continues to speak from the ferry.

ERZSÉBET (V.O.)
(continuing)
If nothing had happened, what were all those tiny new holes in the buildings?

EXT. SZÉPMŰVÉSZETI MÚZEUM - THAT SAME AFTERNOON

Back in present-day Budapest, Colette listens at a pay phone. She holds a shadowy photo containing an indistinct image of a man firing a gun. The impressive façade of the fine arts museum, inspired by the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, looms above - its massive Corinthian columns dwarf her.

JARED (S.O.T.)
...leave a message at the tone.

She hangs up before the answering machine gets a chance to beep. She hoists her camera and starts to walk away, but then changes her mind, and returns to dial the phone.

JARED (S.O.T.)
Hi, this is Jared. I can't come to the phone right now, so leave a message at the tone.

Colette keys in some numbers.

ANSWERING MACHINE (S.O.T.)
You have one message.

The machine BEEPS, and plays back the message.

VOICE (S.O.T.)
I'll be at the Anonymous Memorial in Városliget at four.

Colette hangs up uncertainly, then makes a decision. She flags down a taxi.

EXT. VÁROSLIGET PARK - 20 MINUTES LATER

Jared, looking rather hung-over, approaches Zoltán, who is nervously lurking near Ligeti's monument to the unknown composer of the first Hungarian chronicle. They sit in the shade covering the sculpture's base.

JARED
Doesn't this all seem pointless to you?

ZOLTÁN
Your friend died, I take it. I'm sorry - the bullet was aimed at me.

JARED
He thought it was going to be so easy - just get your information, then have some dinner, and try to make peace with my ex-girlfriend.

ZOLTÁN
Look, I can't stay long...

JARED
Now he's dead. (sigh) And it looks like my ex-girlfriend will stay my <u>ex</u>-girlfriend.

ZOLTÁN
It's not safe here...

JARED
It's just a fuckin' game, buddy. We stir up our little pockets of trouble, we eat a little, we drink a little... or maybe even drink a lot...

ZOLTÁN
I...

JARED
...and then we die. Just like Bert. (pause) I hope I can die with some dignity, like he did.

ZOLTÁN
Look, I don't want to die at all. Listen to me...

ANGLE ON COLETTE

She has hidden herself at an inaudible distance from the two men, and is taking pictures through a long lens. She stops to change film, and mumbles to herself.

COLETTE
Zut alors! I should have re-loaded in the taxi.

When she finishes with the camera and turns back, she notices a FIGURE in the bushes to the side of the monument. She raises the viewfinder to her eye.

CAMERA'S POV

The two men sitting on the monument jerk in and out of the frame, then the figure in the bushes comes into focus.

It's a man, but he's hidden himself fairly well.

However, the silencer-equipped rifle sticking out of the bushes is quite clear.

It's aimed in the direction of the monument.

ANGLE ON COLETTE

She drops the camera on its strap, and stands up, trying to decide whether to wave her arm, or call out to the men.

ANGLE ON MONUMENT

Jared hands some money to Zoltán, and they walk off in opposite directions. Neither one observes Colette, nor her indecision.

ANGLE ON RIFLE

With a sound like a SNEEZE, the rifle in the bushes recoils.

ANGLE ON MONUMENT

Jared has rounded the corner of a building, and is out of range. In his muddle-headed condition, he hasn't noticed a thing.

Zoltán's not quite so lucky. The bullet hits him, and he collapses like a sack of yams.

ANGLE ON COLETTE

Her hand flies to her mouth. Then, she spins on her heel, and bolts.

EXT. AQUINCUM ROMAN RUINS - THE NEXT MORNING

Erzsébet and Vitaly wander around the outdoor archaeological remains of this Roman town, founded in the first century A.D., on the west bank of the Danube. Vitaly is barely limping now, and he runs his hand carefully over a crudely-carved figure.

VITALY
It's like traveling in time.

ERZSÉBET
What do you mean?

VITALY
Put yourself in the sandals of the Roman who sculpted this, two thousand years ago.

He guides one of her hands across the undulating surface, and it stops at a chipped flaw.

ERZSÉBET
I wonder if this was knocked off afterward, or whether he made a mistake that day.

Vitaly closes his eyes.

VITALY
It was warm and sunny, like today, and there was a light sweat between his shoulders.

Erzsébet closes her eyes, and places her other hand on Vitaly's back.

ERZSÉBET
His mallet slipped...

VITALY
...and his chisel knocked this off. He was thinking, distracted...

ERZSÉBET
It was something very important.

VITALY
His best friend broke the law - it was a serious offense. (pause) He could save his friend's life by saying nothing.

ERZSÉBET
But he was torn, because he saw himself as an honest man.

They both open their eyes simultaneously. Erzsébet examines the stone carving closely, while Vitaly looks at her with a mixture of admiration and trepidation. Finally, he strolls a few steps away, and takes a small paperback-sized device from his jacket pocket.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
I could feel his spirit, coming through the stone!

Vitaly's absorbed in manipulating a stylus on the upper surface of his device. It emits a momentary CHIRPING sound, then is quiet. He replies in a distracted way.

VITALY
It's called the Stendhal Syndrome.

ERZSÉBET
Is it a sickness?

She ambles over to his side, to see what he's doing. As he reads something on his device, his voice still sounds preoccupied.

VITALY
No, it's a reaction of sensitive minds, when they are confronted with very old artifacts.

Vitaly finishes reading, scribbles, and TAPS twice on the device with his stylus.

ERZSÉBET
What on earth are you doing?

VITALY
Answering my eMail. I have a shipment arriving tomorrow night, and I had to confirm that I will be there to receive it.

He offers her the device, and she examines it, astonished.

ERZSÉBET
How do you get eMail on this tiny thing?

VITALY
It's a computer with a built-in cellular phone - the phone connects to the 'net, which links me to the rest of the world.

ERZSÉBET
But didn't you say that you sent a reply, too? Where's the keyboard?

He hands her the stylus.

VITALY
It will convert your handwriting into typewriting, as long as you print.

She tries printing a few letters, and GASPS. Vitaly looks around, at the Roman ruins.

VITALY
(continuing)
You know, the Romans were very influenced by auguries - at a time like this, they might examine the entrails of a chicken.

Erzsébet wrinkles her nose, and they both LAUGH.

VITALY
(continuing)
But I don't see any spare poultry around, so let's browse the Web.

He points at a spot on the screen, and she presses the stylus on it.

ERZSÉBET
Oh, you do this a lot - here's a list of the Runes, the Tarot, the I Ching and... a Ouija Board?!

They both CHUCKLE.

VITALY
Some people spend their time publishing strange things out in cyberspace. Try the I Ching.

She TAPS the device with the stylus, waits a few seconds, and then reads.

ERZSÉBET
Let's see - we have to compose a question for the oracle to answer.

VITALY
What's on your mind?

ERZSÉBET
How about "what does the future hold for us?"

VITALY
Write it in, and touch that.

She prints furiously, TAPS, and they wait for a few seconds.

VITALY
(continuing)
This is a remarkable example of time travel - we're standing in a two-thousand-year-old place, consulting material that's between three and four thousand years old, and waiting for the auspices on a piece of technology that was made almost yesterday.

Erzsébet reads the results off the screen.

ERZSÉBET
"The Arousing - Shock, Thunder". What does that mean?

Vitaly frowns momentarily.

VITALY
It's an indication of a powerful change in energy. If I remember correctly, the end is not achieved without fear and trembling.

EXT. MARGARET ISLAND - NOON, THE SAME DAY

Colette and an unconventionally beautiful YOUNG WOMAN walk together along a well-tended path across the southern part of the island. Colette carries a camera bag, and she speaks casually - after a moment, she spots the large fountain.

COLETTE
So, the police say they have found the sniper. (pause) It's been a long morning - do you feel like splashing your toes in the water with me?

YOUNG WOMAN
It looks heavenly, but I've got to change and rush off to another shoot. Why don't you go and have some fun? You've earned it!

COLETTE
I think - yes, I shall! If you come by tomorrow, you can look at the proofs.

YOUNG WOMAN
Great! Ciao!

As Colette saunters past the Union Monument, a touristy-looking, slightly OLDER WOMAN takes a small camera out of her purse, and offers it to Colette.

OLDER WOMAN
You look like you know how to handle one of these - would you mind taking a picture of me and my husband?

COLETTE
Not at all. Is that your husband?

Colette points behind the monument, and the older woman nods. A MAN is curiously inspecting the far side of the metal sculpture - it's in the form of a flower, and the inside surfaces of the leaves contain symbols depicting the modern history of Budapest.

OLDER WOMAN
C'mon, sweetheart - this nice woman is gonna take our picture.

The man hurries around to join the woman, and Colette raises their camera to her face.

CAMERA'S POV

The woman smiles at the camera, and the man walks into the frame. Colette has never seen him, but he's a very familiar face.

It's Pista.

As the shutter CLICKS, the scene suddenly tilts, and goes topsy-turvy.

ANGLE ON COLETTE

She's passed out on the ground, still holding the older woman's camera. Pista takes a deep BREATH, walks over, and calmly removes the camera from her hands. He takes a plastic bag from his pocket, wraps the camera inside it, and RELEASES his breath.

PISTA
Come on, we've only got a few minutes.

He drops the plastic bag into the older woman's purse, and she helps him to pull Colette's limp body upright. They each get under a shoulder, and quickly walk/drag Colette toward the shore, where the Burly Man waits at the controls of the cigarette boat.

A YOUNG MAN watches them curiously from the grass.

OLDER WOMAN
It's a river party - I guess she can't hold her beer!

The young man smiles, and nods knowingly, as they load Colette into the boat.

EXT. VISEGRÁD CITADEL - THAT AFTERNOON

The mighty ruin of this 750-year-old stronghold stands high above the Danube. Originally the site of a Roman fortification, the present structure was built in response to an attack by the Tartars.

Vitaly and Erzsébet gaze down over a scenic loop in the river.

VITALY
That's what made this place so valuable, strategically.

Erzsébet smiles at him.

ERZSÉBET
I was admiring a graceful curve in a winding river. Your military background lets you see things in a different way.

VITALY
Ah, sorry.

ERZSÉBET
No, it's fascinating to me - what else do you see?

Vitaly approaches a stone wall, and places his outstretched hand against it.

VITALY
History was made here... the heritage of this country would be quite different without military actions.

ERZSÉBET
We've been ruled by many conquerors.

He regards her for a long moment.

VITALY
Erzsike, I...

She walks over and embraces him.

ERZSÉBET
I know.

VITALY
I may have thought, once...

ERZSÉBET
But not any more. I can tell how you are, now.

Vitaly pulls away, and pretends to be interested in a stone a little further down the wall.

VITALY
Maybe it's just who I want to be.

ERZSÉBET
Then you want it very much - enough so that the wanting and the being are becoming one and the same.

VITALY
You seem more convinced about me than I am.

ERZSÉBET
I can only judge from how you are with me - you've never pressured me into anything.

VITALY
That's just trial and error - my business convinced me that force doesn't really work with anyone, in the long term.

ERZSÉBET
So, you've learned something from all your negotiating. (impishly) Am I a profitable deal?!

Vitaly keeps a straight face, and deadpans:

VITALY
With a little work, you might turn out to be a worthwhile investment.

She LAUGHS, and playfully BEATS him on the chest.

ERZSÉBET
I should try to conquer you!

Vitaly drops to one knee, and crosses his fist above his heart.

VITALY
My liege, I am your loyal subject. I voluntarily surrender my heart.

Erzsébet solemnly places her index finger on his left shoulder, then his right.

ERZSÉBET
Rise, Sir Vitaly. You shall be my champion, and search for the Grail.

Vitaly stands, and stares at her lustfully.

VITALY
What do I get if I find it?

She playfully turns away, crossing her arms.

ERZSÉBET
I am your Queen. You can't look at me that way.

Vitaly rushes up behind her, encircles her waist, and she lets out a small YELP of pleasure.

INT. MATTHIAS CHURCH - THAT NIGHT

Jared stumbles through the door at the Coronation Church of Hungarian kings. As he enters, a black-veiled PARISHIONER leaves, and though it might seem strange, the huge church is empty. In the ebb and flow of spiritual crises, it's low tide.

He staggers slightly, as he blearily inspects the glorious stained glass windows, some of which illustrate the legends of the Arpad tribe's saints.

JARED
Who the hell are all these people?

He wanders over to the next window.

JARED
(continuing)
Nice fuckin' halo.

He gesticulates in a roundish sort of way.

JARED
(continuing)
Christ, I haven't been in a church for years. Why'd I come here?

He gazes up into the vaulting, which is covered with geometrical designs and plant ornamentation.

JARED
(continuing)
Looks like a damn mosh... moss... mosque.

He slumps down into a pew, rubs his nose, and SNEEZES.

JARED
(continuing)
People like me shouldn't be in places like this. (pause) It smells like the Virgin Mary was just in here, dustin' out the dump.

His head lolls back on the hard wood.

JARED
(continuing)
Sooooo... God...

He slowly sits upright, and steeples his fingers.

JARED
(continuing)
...why the fuck did Bert have to take that bullet? (pause) Why wasn't it me, for Chrissake?

His legs slowly melt down onto the kneeler, and he entwines his fingers in front of his face, in a gesture of supplication.

JARED
(continuing)
I'm the shithead, I'm the goddam sinner. Why didn't you take me?!

He pauses, and his voice breaks.

JARED
(continuing)
I didn't even have the sense to try to keep Colette in my life - and she was willin' to put up with all of my stupid crap.

He SOBS for a few moments, then all is quiet. He suddenly straightens up.

JARED
(continuing)
Friggin' self-pity again.

He runs his hands roughly across his eyes, and under his nose.

JARED
(continuing)
OK, I'm the asshole - I know I don't deserve much.

He turns to look back at the main door.

JARED
(continuing)
I can't even do a decent job out there.

He stares up into the lacy structure of the buttresses.

JARED
(continuing)
I thought I was a hot shit - secret agent man, (English accent) "shaken, not stirred". (pause) All I am is a buttface who drives away the people closest to him.

He shakes his head in sorrow.

JARED
(continuing)
Time for a change, Mr. Slick - time for a change.

He gets up, and stumbles toward the main door.

JARED
(continuing)
But most important of all, it's time for another drinkie-poo.

He leans heavily against the door, and exits.

EXT. BALATONGYÖRÖK GROTTO - THE NEXT MORNING

Vitaly and Erzsébet stroll hand-in-hand, deep in conversation. Vitaly has no trouble walking. On their way toward the grotto's entrance, they blindly pass by several ELECTRICAL WORKERS, who are elbow-deep in wires, and puzzling over some power-related problem inside a junction box.

INT. BALATONGYÖRÖK GROTTO - 20 MINUTES LATER

Trailing at the back of a small GROUP of tourists, Vitaly and Erzsébet are amazed at the assortment of colorful stalactites and stalagmites.

From somewhere up ahead, the VOICE of a GUIDE drones away on a portable loudspeaker - the SOUND is getting weaker. Erzsébet whispers.

ERZSÉBET
I can't believe I finally got up the courage to come in here!

Her white knuckles, tightly wrapped around Vitaly's hand, betray the bravado in her voice. Vitaly whispers back.

VITALY
Are you sure you've never milked cows for a living?

Startled, she releases his hand with a GIGGLE, and he CHUCKLES as he examines the red marks left on his fingers. As they gaze in astonishment at the unearthly sights illuminated by several floodlights, her hand slowly steals back into his. He looks down and smiles.

ERZSÉBET
How could all this beauty exist just a few meters below our feet?

Suddenly, the lights go out, and a background HUMMING sound cranks up. A few small red emergency bulbs fade on, uncertainly, and there are some short SCREAMS from up ahead. Vitaly's VOICE reassures Erzsébet in the near-darkness.

VITALY
There's nothing to be worried about - I can see one of the red bulbs just behind us. Do you want to go stand beside it?

From the murkiness beside him, Erzsébet's VOICE is small and quavering.

ERZSÉBET
Yes, please.

FOOTSTEPS shuffle along the path, and gradually, their faces become illuminated in the eerie red glow of the bulb. Vitaly turns to hug Erzsébet.

VITALY
They'll get the lights on, soon. Don't worry.

ERZSÉBET
Now I remember why I never came down here.

VITALY
After we leave, you'll tell this story with fondness for the rest of your life!

ERZSÉBET
You're not afraid?

VITALY
Perhaps a little. I think a healthy fear of the dark is instinctive for humans.

Vitaly's voice is soothing, but Erzsébet's trembles.

ERZSÉBET
Well, my instincts are telling me that I'm very healthy right now. How do you stay so calm?

VITALY
I was quite lucky - my father persuaded me to accompany him on nighttime walks through the woods.

ERZSÉBET
Did you resist?

VITALY
At first. But he let me bring along a trusted buddy, my dog Bark.

ERZSÉBET
You named your dog Bark?!

VITALY
I didn't name him - when I introduced myself, he politely told me his name.

Erzsébet gets a good LAUGH out of this.

ERZSÉBET
Tell me more about your walks with your father.

VITALY
Although we followed paths which I ran along every day, they always seemed more menacing after dark. (pause) But he kept talking, and I anchored myself to the sound of his voice.

ERZSÉBET
Your voice is the center of my whole world right now.

VITALY
He never tried to scare me, and he explained every sound we heard. For instance, do you hear that humming?

ERZSÉBET
Yes.

VITALY
That's a gas-powered generator. It started up automatically when the lights went out. Pretty soon, if they can't get the lights back on, a couple of guys will come down here with boxes of flashlights.

ERZSÉBET
How do you know that?

VITALY
I looked in some crates while we were waiting in line. It appears that they've had trouble with the electricity before.

ERZSÉBET
You don't miss anything, do you?

VITALY
I try to notice my surroundings - it helps me feel more in touch with the world. It's another one of my father's legacies. That, and his stories.

ERZSÉBET
My mother always told the stories in my house. I didn't really know my father very well.

VITALY
What happened to him?

ERZSÉBET
(pause) I'm not sure you really want to know.

VITALY
If it's too painful for you...

Erzsébet pulls slightly away, deep in thought.

ERZSÉBET
I don't know... I don't know...

She makes an abrupt decision.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
Maybe I'll try. (pause) This is the story my mother told me, just before she died.

EXT. BUDAPEST CEMETERY - NEAR SUNSET (1956)

In a few minutes, the sun will "sleep under the mountain". The long rays flare over the colors of many brown, yellow, and red leaves. Everything is silent and peaceful.

One green leaf falls slowly, circling lazily and spinning, until it falls against a dark boot.

Bálint, Erzsébet's father, is a brown-haired man in his late twenties. He stands among the tombstones, holding a rifle loosely. Six or seven other armed MEN listen for sounds in the quiet evening.

BÁLINT
We're alone. Nothing's here.

MAN #1
Only silence and death.

BÁLINT
Why are you so gloomy?!

MAN #1
Bálint, it's a cemetery. This is the house of death.

The grave markers cast long shadows in the deep golden sunshine.

MAN #1
(continuing)
"One thought torments me: that I will lie upon a featherbed 'til I die. Slowly wither, slowly waste away; flower-like, the furtive earthworm's prey."

MAN #2
Hey, those are Petőfi's words, not yours!

MAN #1
Can't this dull engineer aspire to be cultured?!

All the men smile, and begin walking slowly, alertly. One of the men, PÉTER, makes taunts about the engineer.

PÉTER
I hear he still writes verses for his wife! Married five years, and they're just like newlyweds!

BÁLINT
Do you envy him, Péter? Is the grape bitter for you? If you knew my wife and daughter, you wouldn't think his words are so strange. (pause) When we live again in freedom, I will give the toast at your wedding.

MAN #1
Petőfi said Freedom and Love go hand-in-hand.

The group reaches a small chapel. Bálint raises his finger to his lips, and everyone stops dead still, listening to his whisper.

BÁLINT
I'm going inside to say a quick prayer for Péter's future family.

Péter LAUGHS, and the others CHUCKLE.

PÉTER
Don't strain yourself! Here, I'll hold your gun.

Bálint hands his rifle to Péter, and steps inside the door of the small chapel.

INT. CEMETERY CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS (1956)

The last rays of sunshine dimly show through the colorful leaded glass windows. Bálint kneels, lowers his head, and crosses himself. He hears a SCRAPING noise from across the chapel, and looks up.

BÁLINT
Is someone here?

A SHAPE moves in the fading light.

BÁLINT
(continuing)
Hello, my brother - don't be afraid! I have no weapon.

He lifts his hands horizontally up from his sides.

BÁLINT
(continuing)
See? No gun! There's a group outside - come and join us... it's our land now!

As Bálint's eyes adjust to the darkness, he spots the uniform of an adolescent Soviet soldier, who holds a gun with shaking hands.

BÁLINT
(continuing)
Oh my God - how did you get separated from your unit, young one?

The Soviet man-child points his gun at Bálint, and weakly trembles some WORDS in another language.

Bálint briefly stares at him in dismay, then turns and sprints toward the entrance. A SHOT rings out, and Bálint falls forward, pushing the door open as he drops. He lies still, face-down in the doorway.

PÉTER (O.S.)
Bálint! Bálint!!

The men outside scramble over to the door. While some of them check their fallen companion, one looks inside, only to see an open window near the altar.

INT. BALATONGYÖRÖK GROTTO - CONTINUOUS

Back in the present, Vitaly silently hugs Erzsébet. Unseen by her, he winces, closes his eyes, and bows his head in the blood-red light.

INT. SZENTENDRE ISLAND SHACK - THAT SAME MORNING

A thick-fingered hand holds a shadowy photo containing the indistinct image of a man firing a gun.

BURLY MAN
This ain't a very good picture of you, boss.

The Burly Man turns to look at Pista, who's fiddling intently with a Polaroid camera.

PISTA
But I think we can get a better picture of her! Hold that newspaper up.

The Burly Man holds up a current issue of "Le Monde" in front of Colette, being careful not to cover her face.

Pista CLICKS off a flash photo, and catches the print which emerges from the front of the camera. He carefully places the camera and the print on a table.

Colette shifts uncomfortably in her fetters - she's seated on a wooden box, and her wrists are bound behind her back. Her ankles are also tied together. Trees are visible through the open door of the shack, and the far-away BUZZ of a powerboat on the river floats through the leaves.

COLETTE
Look, I keep trying to tell you idiots that he doesn't care about me anymore.

Pista SLAPS her across the face - it's a stunning blow - and he LAUGHS raucously.

PISTA
When you already know how I react to that, I find it funny that you keep trying to tell us. (pause) Tell us again. Please?!

COLETTE
You sadist.

Pista caresses her face, and she flinches, expecting him to strike again.

PISTA
Poor, poor Colette. You have a pathetic estimation of your own worth. What do the Americans call it? Low self-esteem?

COLETTE
Leave me alone.

PISTA
My men report that Jared drowns his sorrows about you, every night, in a bar called... Taverna? If he knows you're in jeopardy, he will get his buddies to leave us alone, for just the day or two we need.

Pista checks the Polaroid print, folds it up in a piece of paper, and places everything inside an envelope.

PISTA
(continuing)
So it's our solemn duty to make sure you stay in jeopardy, sweet thing!

He makes a disgusting display out of licking the flap on the envelope. Colette turns her head away, and he LAUGHS.

Suddenly, Pista has an idea, and searches through her camera bag. He finds a lipstick case, twists the cylinder outward, and smears his lips with red. He plants a big KISS on the envelope, and shows her the resulting red marks.

PISTA
(continuing)
That's a nice touch, don't you think? Is our boy Jared a romantic?

As he erupts into HILARITY, his garishly-painted face presents a grotesque sight.

INT. JARED & COLETTE'S APARTMENT - TWO HOURS LATER

Jared's a mess - he's unshaven and disheveled. In the living room where he broke up with Colette, he blearily removes the lipstick-smeared envelope from a standard courier package. He checks closely inside the package, then drops it on the table, and opens the envelope.

The Polaroid photo falls out, and he picks it up off the floor. As he recognizes Colette, his vision focuses, and his forehead creases in worry.

JARED
Oh, shit.

He reads the enclosed piece of paper, and walks over to the couch. While he's reading, he picks up the telephone and dials a number.

JARED
(continuing)
We've got a hostage situation.

EXT. HÉVIZ HEALTH RESORT - EARLY THAT AFTERNOON

Just west of Lake Balaton, this place has become popular for its thermal lake, which was probably formed during the last Ice Age. Holding each others' hand, Vitaly and Erzsébet are wading waist-deep in the water.

ERZSÉBET
You know, they say the mud on the bottom is slightly radioactive.

Vitaly turns around, and pretends to wade quickly toward the shore. Erzsébet yanks on his hand, and he falls backward, SPLASHING into the water.

Erzsébet LAUGHS, while Vitaly wipes water out of his eyes, and makes a wry face. He lifts one leg out of the lake, and there's some mud clinging to his foot.

VITALY
Will I grow extra toes?

Erzsébet CHUCKLES, and Vitaly pretends to scold her.

VITALY
(continuing)
What if I start to glow at night?

Erzsébet lifts him upright, and puts her arms around him. He returns the embrace.

ERZSÉBET
Then I will be less afraid of the dark.

Vitaly gazes somberly over her shoulder.

VITALY
I think your fears are cured.

ERZSÉBET
You have made me feel very secure. I've never been able to talk about my childhood before.

Vitaly stares hopelessly off into the distance, but his voice sounds heartened.

VITALY
I guess I should be flattered.

ERZSÉBET
You're my protector.

Erzsébet hugs him even tighter.

VITALY
I just listen, and tell you my stupid little stories.

ERZSÉBET
When you do, the purity of your spirit emerges from here.

She releases half of her embrace, to place her hand over his solar plexus.

VITALY
What's that?

ERZSÉBET
Some people say it's the home of the glowing cord which binds us all together.

Vitaly contemplates his stomach closely.

VITALY
It should glow even brighter, in all this radioactivity.

Erzsébet GIGGLES at his grave demeanor.

ERZSÉBET
Silly!

VITALY
If normal insurance agents sell "whole life" insurance, I'll bet the agents around here sell "half-life" insurance.

ERZSÉBET
(pause) Half-life? Ah, because of the way radiation breaks down. (pause) That's pretty funny!

She LAUGHS, but Vitaly still doesn't crack a smile.

VITALY
It's a leftover Chernobyl joke.

ERZSÉBET
But why the long face?

Vitaly moves away, and submerges himself up to his neck. Erzsébet follows suit.

VITALY
I was just thinking about my business deal tonight.

ERZSÉBET
Are you worried?

Vitaly ponders for a moment.

VITALY
No, not really. But there is an ethical question on my mind.

ERZSÉBET
Maybe I can help - what is it?

Vitaly deliberates for another short interval.

VITALY
How do I tell a person... my business partner... that some of my past deals weren't... very well thought out?

ERZSÉBET
Does he have to know?

Vitaly SIGHS.

VITALY
Sooner or later.

ERZSÉBET
Are you communicating honestly with him now?

VITALY
Oh, yeah. I've become very close to... him.

ERZSÉBET
He might forgive your past sins.

Vitaly looks at her sharply, but she's watching the vortex which her swirling hand is making in the water.

VITALY
What if I hurt someone... he held dear, many years ago?

Erzsébet still watches her small hand-whirlpool.

ERZSÉBET
You will never know, unless you try to say something.

INT. JARED'S CAR - LATE THAT AFTERNOON

Jared, clean-shaven and freshly washed, is again driving frantically through the heart of Budapest. He's on the cellular phone.

JARED
We've gotta intercept him, before he receives the shipment.

A puzzled look crosses his face, as he listens.

JARED
(continuing)
What do you mean, we can't?

He becomes more incredulous, at the answer.

JARED
(continuing)
If we wait until the exchange with Pista, it might be too late!

Frustration starts creeping in.

JARED
(continuing)
I know we need to stop that crazy sonovabitch, but Col... the hostage... is in danger.

He SMASHES his hand against the steering wheel, and nearly runs off the road.

JARED
(continuing)
One life against millions of lives... I guess you're right.

He can't believe what he's hearing, but he tries to sound normal.

JARED
(continuing)
Okay, I'll meet the rest of the team at the station.

He hangs up the phone, and pulls over to the side of the road. His outrage knows no bounds, but he finally bows his head against the top of the steering wheel.

JARED
(continuing)
Look, God, I know I made an ass of myself in your church... (pause) and when I had a choice between Colette and the job, I blew it.

Jared winces at the enormity of his blunder.

JARED
(continuing)
But if you can just get Colette out alive, I'll quit this goddam job. (pause) And I'll never swear again.

INT. SZENTENDRE ISLAND SHACK - THAT SAME AFTERNOON

Colette is alone in the shack. She's heavily bound and gagged, she's looking across the room, and she appears to be quite agitated.

Maybe it's because there's a ticking bomb just a few meters away.

INT. MATTHIAS CHURCH - THAT SAME AFTERNOON

Vitaly enters the door, carrying a briefcase, while a familiar-looking black-veiled parishioner leaves. Once again, the huge church is empty - it's another spiritual low tide.

Vitaly is uncomfortable, and awkward in his movements, but he seems genuinely awed by the architecture, the stained glass, the statuary.

VITALY
It's... magnificent!

He places the briefcase in a pew, and sits down to absorb the details of the church.

VITALY
(continuing)
Did she wonder why I didn't take my suitcase up to her apartment?

He thinks back.

VITALY
(continuing)
She didn't even question where I was going!

He marvels at the woman he's left behind.

VITALY
(continuing)
She trusted me! The man who killed her father - and she trusted me!

Introspectively, he dismisses his chances.

VITALY
(continuing)
I certainly didn't deserve such a woman.

He shrugs.

VITALY
(continuing)
She'll forget me after awhile.

He smiles ruefully, and glances up.

VITALY
(continuing)
Ah, who am I kidding - when she finds out I've left, she'll forget me immediately!

He nods absently, and lowers his head.

VITALY
(continuing)
But I will never forget her. (pause) Erzsike!

Momentarily, he SOBS, putting his hand over his eyes. He's quickly ashamed of his outburst, and rubs his eyes roughly.

VITALY
(continuing)
Enough of this self-pity - time to do the deal, and get out of town.

He opens the briefcase beside him, takes out a train ticket, and transfers it to his jacket pocket. Inside the briefcase are several canisters, all marked "Sarin". Vitaly shakes his head, and smiles.

VITALY
(continuing)
Pista! I wonder why he wants to kill so many?

Vitaly looks around at the empty church, and slowly slides down to the kneeler.

VITALY
(continuing)
God, please forgive me for what I am about to do.

He puts his hands together, and experiments with steepling and entwining them. Baffled, he gives up and just places them flat on the back of the pew in front of him.

VITALY
(continuing)
I'm just a man - I'm not the saint she thought I was.

He peers around, with a lost look.

VITALY
(continuing)
Why is it so <u>hard</u> to do the right thing?

His eyes search heavenward.

VITALY
(continuing)
The last time I was in one of your churches, I shot a man. (pause) Will I ever stop paying for that mistake?

INT. WEST TRAIN STATION - NEAR SUNSET

The soaring gossamer canopy of this landmark station was erected in the 1870's by the Parisian firm of Eiffel. A surreal orange glow from the setting sun is only slightly offset by internal lighting.

Vitaly enters, carrying the briefcase and a small suitcase. He strides toward some self-service lockers, and puts the briefcase inside one. After inserting a few coins, he closes the locker door, secures it, and removes the key.

He continues walking toward a waiting train, and suddenly, another locker key is dropped in front of his shoes. He bends to pick it up with the fingers of the same hand which holds his own key, and stands, to return the key to its rightful owner.

Pista holds out his palm, with a nasty smirk on his face.

PISTA
Thank you, kind sir!

Vitaly struggles with his conscience, and finally drops his own key out of the bottom of his fist into Pista's waiting hand.

VITALY
Don't mention it.

Vitaly continues walking, and sneaks a look into his hand at the number of the key which Pista dropped. He finds the appropriate locker, inserts the key, and withdraws a duffel bag.

He looks back at his own locker, where Pista is withdrawing the briefcase. Pista checks the contents of the briefcase, and Vitaly counts the money in the duffel bag. Each closes his new baggage.

Pista starts to walk off, when he is intercepted by Jared and several other MEN, who are all holding guns.

Another MAN simultaneously shoves a gun into Vitaly's ribs, and forces Vitaly to raise his hands.

JARED
Give me the briefcase, Pista.

PISTA
I don't think that will be necessary. Your girlfriend will go "boom" in...

He checks his watch.

PISTA
(continuing)
...twenty minutes, if my men don't transmit the disarm code.

A muscle twitches in Jared's jaw. One of the men on Jared's team speaks to him in a low, warning tone.

MAN #3
We can't let him walk out of here. Millions will die.

Jared slowly turns to speak over his shoulder, answering the warning.

JARED
I've got another plan. Holster your weapons.

All of the men on his team are confused, but they put their guns away, following Jared's example.

Pista pulls out a knife, and SLASHES Jared's chest.

PISTA
That's for being a bumbling idiot, and trying to interfere.

Jared's men all go for their guns, but Jared waves them off, while checking his wound.

JARED
It's not serious. Put 'em away.

He's bleeding like a stuck pig. Pista brushes past, and spits at him.

PISTA
Yankee running dog!

Jared struggles with his anger, but he and his team watch Pista walk away. As Pista starts to mount a small set of stairs near the entrance, a large group of uniformed and plainclothes Hungarian POLICEMEN walk in, with their guns drawn.

In front of them, they herd a downcast group of handcuffed people, including the Burly Man and the older woman from Margaret Island. Colette peeks out from behind the police.

Pista reaches inside his jacket, and the policemen's guns immediately, and NOISILY, perforate him to the consistency of Swiss cheese. He's dead before he hits the floor.

The plainclothes INSPECTOR who leads the Hungarian team slowly descends the steps to extricate the briefcase from Pista's lifeless hand. The Inspector examines the case, and turns around to address his sharpshooters.

INSPECTOR
Just like in the gangster movies. Very, very good work!

Several of the policemen beam with pride. The Inspector turns, and calls out to Vitaly.

INSPECTOR
(continuing)
Nice work by you, too, comrade!

The man who formerly had a gun in Vitaly's ribs looks very confused, as Vitaly strolls over to the Inspector, and hands him the duffel bag.

VITALY
Don't <u>ever</u> call me comrade, you old revisionist! But my compliments to your men.

INSPECTOR
Your fee will be wired into the account tomorrow morning.

Vitaly heads back toward the train, and snaps a retort over his shoulder.

VITALY
Fat chance! I know your bureaucracy - I had to wait for a month, the last time!

Colette has rushed down the stairs, and she presses her jacket against Jared's wound. He's feeling weak, and she sits him down on a bench. Colette turns to the Inspector.

COLETTE
Can we get an ambulance in here?

INSPECTOR
There's one on the way.

Man #3 is curious, and asks Jared a question.

MAN #3
What was your new plan?

JARED
I didn't have any plan. I just couldn't let this fine woman die.

MAN #3
You're in hot water, big time.

JARED
Not a problem. I quit.

COLETTE
Jared, I could see what you tried to do for me. I think you and I should talk.

The paramedics have arrived, and they've put a compress on Jared's chest. He's loaded onto a gurney, and as he rolls past Pista's body, Jared reacts strongly.

JARED
That son of a...

Abruptly, Jared gazes heavenward, and then looks at Colette with shining eyes. He struggles with his new emotions.

JARED
(continuing)
Talk? (pause) You want to talk with <u>me</u>? (pause) I'd love to talk. Talking's good. I... owe you the world's biggest apology.

They tentatively smile at each other.

INT. VITALY'S RAILWAY CAR - CONTINUOUS

The signs say it's a special train, traveling overnight to Venice. As it moves ponderously out of the station, Vitaly walks down the inside hallway with his suitcase, checking compartment numbers against his ticket.

He enters a couchette, and notices a shadowy figure sitting inside. He's confused, and leans back out, to re-check the number.

VITALY
I'm sorry, I thought I booked a private compartment.

Erzsébet turns on the light.

ERZSÉBET
I checked with the porter, and it was originally reserved for two.

Vitaly is flabbergasted.

VITALY
Erzsike! You're the last person I expected to see here!

ERZSÉBET
You were careless - you left out a scrap of paper in our hotel room, with the railway phone number, and your confirmation code.

Vitaly smiles bitterly, and sits uneasily next to her.

VITALY
I'm quite the efficient undercover operative, no?!

ERZSÉBET
I saw what you did, back at the station. I was very impressed.

VITALY
That was my last job.

ERZSÉBET
Someone named Erzsébet was to accompany you. Have you found another one named like me?

Vitaly's shoulders droop in resignation.

VITALY
No. It was supposed to be you. I wanted to ask you to go with me to Venice.

ERZSÉBET
But something changed?

VITALY
In the grotto, yes.

ERZSÉBET
You shot my father in 1956.

Vitaly's head snaps up, and his eyes search hers.

VITALY
How did you know?

ERZSÉBET
When I told you that story, I could feel your anguish, from here.

She places a hand on his solar plexus.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
We were connected, then - poof - there was nothing.

VITALY
I knew you would hate me - I couldn't bear to tell you.

ERZSÉBET
You tried, in the radioactive mud. But you ran away instead, just like you ran away forty years ago.

Vitaly hangs his head, and his eyes remain lowered through all of her remaining words. Erzsébet stands - her first words are torn directly out of her heart, and her voice nearly breaks.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
My father was a <u>lion</u> of a man. (pause) His companions told my mother his dying words - he knew he had been shot by a cornered, frightened child, and he didn't blame you for reacting like that.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
Do you hear that? With his last breath, he <u>forgave</u> you.

If anything, this news disheartens Vitaly even more. He holds his head in his hands.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
Forty years later, the strange forces of destiny brought you into my life. Down in the grotto, when I realized who I was holding, I was filled with a kind of painful joy. (pause) You took my father from me, but at least I could present you with the gift of his compassion.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
And because I knew that you were a good man, a good man who had made a mistake, I wanted to deliver my father's forgiveness. The only thing you had to do was ask for it.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
I followed you here, because I thought you might want to hear all of this.

Vitaly is in great pain. When he doesn't answer, she pulls a small suitcase from the overhead rack.

ERZSÉBET
(continuing)
But I won't force myself on you. I am taking my luggage down to the dining car, and if I don't see you before the next stop, I will leave this train and return to Budapest.

She leaves, walking down the hallway to the right. Vitaly holds his head, rocking back and forth, after she goes.

But after several moments, something sinks in, and he sits bolt upright, with a look of wonder in his eyes. He SMACKS his forehead.

Then, for good measure, he KNOCKS on the side of his head. His goofy look is priceless.

VITALY
"Ego te absolvo." This incredible woman forgives you, you blockheaded idiot! Go, and accept her absolution!

He fumbles frantically with the compartment door latch, and rushes comically down the hallway to his right.

[In the same way that there are no Venice-bound trains leaving the West station at sunset, there are likewise no tunnels this close to the city - however, it might be fitting to have a shot of the train entering a tunnel right about here...]

THE END