

Red Crucible

A True Story Written by Ira Altman

Based on the autobiography: ***Memoirs of a Stormy Life***

By Harry Altman

Registered, WGA # 1236818

144 Highland Drive
Monroe, CT 06468
203-813-2313
Ialtman9669@hotmail.Com

FADE IN:

HERSHL ALTMAN (V.O.)

No one can escape the fate pre-ordained for him from birth till final breath. This conviction has compelled me to describe my life story.

CUT TO:

FLASH FORWARD

EXT. USSR (WHITE RUSSIA) - MINSK - A BRIGHT AND SUNNY WINTER DAY (1940)

HERSHL, his wife, HANELE, HAYIM, Hershl's brother-in-law, BELLA, Hayim's wife, UZIEK, Hershl's friend, HELLA, Uziek's wife, late twenties, and crowds of REFUGEES who look like rag-tag beggars, move through the cold streets of Minsk along the trolley lines, with determination.

[Mix with visuals from the time period]

More "vagabonds" come together from side streets. A huge mass of demonstrators stop before the wide steps of an immense government building on Kirov Street and, with a loud roar that reaches a deafening crescendo, they shout:

CROWD

(we want to go home!)

Mi hotshym domoi! Mi hotshym domoi!

Crowds of Soviet PASSERSBY stop with mouths agape, stunned at the daring spectacle. Uniformed POLICEMEN chase them away.

POLICEMAN

Come on now, move on. There'll be no loitering here.

PASSERBY #1

Who are these people?

PASSERBY #2

Troublemakers - dirty Jews. Hitler chased them from Poland and now they've come here to stir up trouble.

PASSERBY #1

Look what they're doing now.

A trolley comes up from a distance. As it speeds closer Hershl, Hayim, Uziek and other refugees rush to lie down on the trolley car tracks causing the trolley to come to a complete stop.

[Mix with visuals from the time period]

A few GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS come out of their offices, including Morozov, the head of the Regional Superior Soviet. He appears stunned by the boldness of it all.

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL #1
(comrade refugees)
Tovarishtshi bieszentsi, come gather
at the steps. Comrade MOROZOV wishes
to speak to you!

With some initial hesitation, the refugees get up off the trolley tracks and approach the steps of the municipal administration building. Morozov shouts through a megaphone.

MOROZOV
Comrade refugees, why this uncalled
for demonstration? If you wish,
you'll be granted free passage to
the western territories. I've ordered
a registration commission to issue
your required permits. Go to the
Clubhouse of Deaf Mutes. When you
get there, file up in line and, if
you wish, you'll be given permission
to go to the west.

The crowd begins to push forward with everyone vying to be first to reach the Clubhouse: an immense government building, drab and looming over the crowd, an ominous presence. Hershl turns to Hayim and Uziek indicating fear that a trap is being set.

HERSHL
Why don't we go in first? These
Soviet officials can't be trusted.
If, everything's on the up and up,
we can call the women in later.

UZIEK
You're right. It could be a trap. I
wouldn't put it past them.

Hershl, Hayim, and Uziek are the last to walk into the Clubhouse. Their steps echoing against the walls and vaulted ceilings of the dark entry hall as their long shadows lead the way.

INT. CLUBHOUSE - DAY

Hershl, Hayim, and Uziek are surrounded by ARMED POLICE who won't allow anyone in or out. CLERKS, who are seated at various tables in the lobby, begin a process of registration. Hershl cautiously approaches a REGISTRATION CLERK. Hayim and Uziek are escorted to other CLERKS.

REGISTRATION CLERK

Your name, occupation, place and date of birth, and previous employment in the USSR.

HERSHL

Hershl Altman, milliner, Warsaw Poland, Eighth of August 1912. I worked as a box maker in Vitebsk.

REGISTRATION CLERK

Will you be going back to the factory or returning to the West?

HERSHL

West.

The Registration Clerk motions for an officer to direct Hershl into a room where others had answered as he had.

EXT. CLUBHOUSE - HOURS LATER - NIGHT

Hershl and the others are led out through a back door. They are herded into a large yard where huge black trucks ("black crows") are waiting. The trucks are windowless except for a small, iron-barred pane on the back door. On each side of the door there is an ARMED GUARD.

HERSHL

Where are you taking us?

ARMED GUARD

Where do you think, Jew? Where we take all criminals, to jail.

They are crowded into the trucks; doors are locked shut, the engines are started and they are carted off to prison as the darkness of night begins to close them from view.

FLASH FORWARD ENDS

FLASHBACK

EXT. WARSAW, POLAND - 1915 - THE JEWISH QUARTER-EARLY MORNING

Snow is falling heavily. Frozen cobblestone streets lead to an old four-story building. A tenant exits from an adjacent water closet, bundled up and leaning against a furious wind.

INT. AN IMPOVERISHED TWO-ROOM FLAT - PRE-DAWN

HENDL sleeps in a small bed with both her sons, BEN-TSION, 5, and HERSHL, 3. LEV, an elderly orthodox Jew, 70's, FEYGIE, his wife, 70's, and UNCLE SIMKHE, 30's, are fast asleep. Lev awakens, adjusts his skullcap and prepares for Morning Prayer. He takes his quilt and places it over Hendl and her children and kisses Hershl on the forehead.

HERSHL(ADULT V.O.)

It was dreadfully cold that winter,
and we hadn't any money for buying
wood or coal. I remember lying in
bed crying day after day for I
experienced nearly unbearable hunger
pangs and suffered extremely painful
chilblains from my frostbitten feet.

GRANDFATHER LEV SILBERMINTZ

Shh, Shh, don't cry. Papa will come
home and bring you bread and shoes.
Soon it'll be warm and you'll play
out in the yard with the other
children.

CUT TO:

Lev stands by the window and reads out loud from a newspaper.
World War I is in full swing and everyone, including Hershl,
who is still in bed, listens attentively as grandfather reads
the names of soldiers killed in battle.

HERSHL (V.O.)

We all held our breath afraid we
might hear Uncle Simkhe's name listed
among the dead. As I listened, I
fell asleep until mother returned
from peddling candy in the street.

Hershl's mother, Hendl, arrives home. She takes out a small
loaf of bread and a few measly potatoes and prepares a thin,
watery potato soup. She then awakens everyone.

HENDL

Come on, get up. Get up, lazy bones.
Lunch is ready.

They all sit down to share their poor little meal.

FLASHBACK - FIVE YEARS EARLIER

INT. TEXTILE FACTORY - LEV'S OFFICE - DAY

Lev sits at his desk. AVROM SHOLEM ALTMAN, 20's, sits across
from Lev; he's looking for employment.

LEV

Have you experience working a bobbin
machine?

AVROM SHOLEM

No. But I'm willing to learn. My
parents sent me to Warsaw - to further
my religious education...

LEV

Then, why are you here? Shouldn't you be pursuing Talmudic studies and honoring your parents' wishes?

AVROM

I want to be self-supporting. Religious studies won't do it for me. It isn't the future I desire.

LEV

So, what kind of future do you desire?

AVROM

Social and economic justice. When the oppressed rise up and establish a more equitable state...

LEV

What is this thing you're preaching? Socialism? Communism?

AVROM

Zionism. We'll establish a new state in Palestine.

LEV

(skeptical silence -
beat)

I like better the first thing you said. With that I can help. You should think to do something practical with your life.

Lev begins to teach Avrom how to operate a bobbin machine in which thread is prepared for use on textile weavers.

MONTAGE: AVROM DEDICATES HIMSELF TO ORGANIZING HIS CO-WORKERS

1)Avrom hands out notices for after-work meetings to discuss working conditions.

2)Avrom draws a crowd of CO-WORKERS as he gives speeches devoted to the socialist class struggle.

3)Avrom and fellow co-workers draft a list of demands.

INT. TEXTILE FACTORY - LEV'S OFFICE - DAY

Avrom and his co-worker's are seated and standing around Lev's desk, presenting demands for new working conditions.

LEV

I don't see what's to negotiate. If you're unhappy, go home. Who's stopping you?

AVROM

You give us no choice but to strike.

LEV

Hendl, pay them their wages, please.
Kindly take yourselves out of here
and never set foot in my factory
again.

Lev angrily storms into the factory area and stands up on a wooden box.

LEV (CONT'D)

I've just dismissed your
representatives. If you think you're
not being paid enough, say so. I'll
consider any request that's justified
or, if you so choose, resign. One
thing I'll not tolerate is
insubordination - not now, not ever!

Dead silence reigns. The workers return to their respective tasks with bowed heads.

INT. TEXTILE FACTORY - LEV'S OFFICE - DAY

Lev is doing paperwork. Hendl enters his office with a look of concern in her eyes.

HENDL

Tata?

LEV

Yes, dear?

HENDL

Please let Avrom come back to work.
You should see what he looks like.
He's so emaciated, I'm afraid he'll
die.

Lev stops what he's working on and glares sternly at Hendl.

LEV

I'll never let that rabble-rouser,
that instigator set foot in this
establishment again.

HENDL

Tatush, you're not as hard-hearted
as you pretend. Please do it for me,
for my sake, if not for his.

Lev's bitter look softens as he listens to his daughter's plea. He sighs.

LEV

Hendl, dear, how can I refuse you?
He can come back, but no more strike
threats. No more demands or he's
back on the streets.

Hendl hugs her father with joy.

HENDL

Thank you, tata. I'll tell him right
now.

Lev has a strange feeling about Avrom; he warns Hendl.

LEV

Stay away from that boy. He's no
good for you.

Hendl hurries out of the office. Lev is unsure of his
decision.

INT. THE FACTORY - DAY

The factory is humming with beehive efficiency. Avrom is at
his work station with fellow workers as Hendl passes by
distributing the worker's weekly wages.

AVROM

Good day, Hendl, you're looking most
attractive, as usual.

HENDL

Good day, Avrom, aren't you the bold
one?

AVROM

You're the kindest, most generous
person I've ever had the pleasure to
know.

HENDL

Well, thank you, Avrom, but you're
much too extravagant.

AVROM

Not at all. If it wasn't for you, I
don't know what would've become of
me. How can I ever thank you?

HENDL

(extends her hand to
give Avrom his pay)
You can start by not embarrassing me
in public.

AVROM

Please, forgive me. I didn't mean to
offend you.

They both blush.

AVROM (CONT'D)

Can I call on you Saturday afternoon
and take you for a walk?

His forwardness takes Hendl unaware. She is unable to recover her composure sufficiently to answer.

AVROM (CONT'D)

It's settled then. I'll wait for you
at the gate of your home at two
o'clock.

INT. LEV'S HOME - DAY - SIX MONTHS LATER

Lev frantically paces back and forth as Hendl and Avrom stand before him. Feygie and Uncle Simkhe look on in silence.

LEV

How could you disappoint me so -
take up with this fellow that you
know I would never approve of? If
you don't break off with this
instigator, this rebel, not only
will I dismiss him but I'll see to
it that he never finds employment
again.

AVROM

We came only for your blessing. We
want to marry as soon as possible.

HENDL

I'll leave home. We'll marry without
your consent.

LEV

Marry? Never! Not while I'm still
alive!

HENDL

Please, *tata*, don't turn us away.

AVROM

Come, Hendl. You see, it's no use.
Anyway, we don't need his consent.

Tears roll down Hendl's eyes. Avrom takes Hendl by the hand and escorts her out of the house. He slams the door behind them as they storm out.

MONTAGE - CONDITIONS BECOME UNTENABLE FOR HENDL

1) Hendl gives birth to BEN TSION at the end of the first year of marriage.

2) Two years later, HERSHL comes into the world.

- 3) Avrom spends his days and half his nights organizing worker cells dedicated to socialist ideals.
- 4) He rises in the ranks of the Left Poale Party of the Zionist movement.
- 5) Quarrels break out between Avrom and Hendl as the children cry.
- 6) Avrom storms out of the house.
- 7) Hendl sits on the bed watching her two sons sleep. She weeps uncontrollably.

INT. LEV HOME - DAY

HERSHL (V.O.)

Grandmother begged grandfather to make his peace with mother. They took us to their home where we lived happily for many months. When the Germans eventually occupied Poland, they declared Russian currency to be worthless and so grandfather's entire fortune came to ruin.

INT. LEV HOME - NIGHT

Feygie lies in bed; she's very sick and dying.

EXT. THE JEWISH CEMETERY - DAY

Lev, Hendl, Uncle Simkhe, Ben-Tsion, Hershl, and other MOURNERS gather around the cemetery plot in grief and tears. Grandfather is seen staring into the distance seeking some reason for the dreadful calamity that has befallen him. He cries like a child over his great loss.

END FLASHBACK

INT. LEV'S APARTMENT - DAY - A FEW MONTHS LATER

Lev hurries into the apartment, obviously excited. Hendl, Uncle Simkhe, Ben-Tsion, and Hershl are briefly startled.

LEV

You'll not believe who I ran into today.

HENDL

Take it easy *tata*. What's all the excitement about?

LEV

Do you remember Yosef Greenbaum, the supervisor of my factory?

HENDL

Of course, how could I forget?

LEV

He just opened a factory of his own, on Bonifraten Street, and he wants me to be supervisor of his factory. He promises to pay me a handsome compensation for my work.

Hendl hugs Lev.

HENDL

That's wonderful papa, what good news.

LEV

Good news? A gift from heaven. Now, you can give up peddling and devote yourself to taking care of the house and children. And Simche, there's work for you too.

MONTAGE

After grandfather works for several weeks, their lives take a noticeable change for the better.

- 1) Ben Tsion and Hershl Are enrolled in a Jewish school at 6 Nowolipje Street.
- 2) Mother takes them to a tailor and orders them new suits of clothes, and then takes them for new shoes.
- 3) They're living the good life, like "God in Odessa."

INT. LEV'S APARTMENT - FRIDAY EVENING, THE SABBATH

Grandfather sits at the head of the table. He is dressed in his brand new satin gabardine, which is tied with a heavy girdle around his hips. He raises a full *Kiddush* cup, stands up, and pronounces the ritual blessing and, in a strong voice sings the traditional Sabbath melody.

The rest of the family listens with respect and attention. Grandfather sips some of the *Kiddush* wine and makes sure to give everyone a taste. Hendl brings the fish, the Sabbath loaf, and the soup with so many globules of fat floating on top that the light from the Sabbath candles plays and dances upon them.

Someone knocks at the door. Mother goes to open it. It's the POSTMAN delivering a red-lacquer sealed envelope. She opens it and pulls out a letter and some American dollars. She begins to read the letter to herself.

LEV

Hendl, who's it from?

HENDL

It's from Avrom. He's in America. He says he's extremely sorry for his mistreatment of us. He asks forgiveness for the sins he's committed and promises that things will be different from now on.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

A TEACHER sits at her desk as STUDENTS quietly work on an assignment. Hershl, a little older, sits at his desk. His attention is drawn to the classroom door opening.

MAN'S VOICE (AVROM)(O.S.)

Is there a boy here by the name of Hershl Altman?

TEACHER

Yes sir. Hershl, step to the front of the class, please.

Hershl rises from his seat and advances tentatively; The stranger steps into the room; it's his father. Avrom runs toward him and, before Hershl realizes what's happening, he's scooped up into the young man's arms as he fiercely presses Hershl to himself and covers his face with kisses.

AVROM

(in a whisper)

It's me your father, dear child.

HERSHL (V.O.)

For the first time in my life, I felt what it meant to have a father.

MONTAGE - A NEW WAY OF LIFE, A DEVOTED FAMILY

- 1) They visit the section of town known as *Lashenkes* where they picnic at a number of magnificent parks.
- 2) They visit with relatives and friends and attend literary readings and political lectures.
- 3) Hershl falls asleep in his mother's lap from boredom.
- 4) Avrom and Hendl make love.
- 5) Hendl is pregnant again and is about to give birth.
- 6) Hershl and Ben-Tsion are taken to stay at grandfather's house.

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM - 9 MONTHS LATER - DAY

Avrom and Lev sit in the waiting room of the hospital. A DOCTOR greets them with concern on his face and in his voice. Avrom and Lev look at one another in anticipation.

DOCTOR

It's a little girl, but I'm afraid I
have bad news.

Avrom and Lev's faces quickly change from joy to despair.

LEV

Bad news?

DOCTOR

Mrs. Altman has contracted blood
poisoning and has expired.

AVROM

Expired?

DOCTOR

I'm sorry for your loss.

LEV

Oh my God, no. Please, not my Hendl.

Avrom embraces Lev in an attempt to console him, but Lev
shoves Avrom away. He angrily grabs Avrom by the collar and
slams him against the wall.

LEV (CONT'D)

This is all your fault, you bastard.

Lev releases Avrom and storms out of the room. Avrom is left
alone feeling disbelief and shock.

INT. HOSPITAL - HENDL'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Lev stands over his daughter's body lying lifeless on the
bed. He cries hysterically.

INT. LEV'S APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Hershl sits at the table poring over his lessons, as mournful
weeping rises to his ears from the stairs below and increases
in volume and grows more heartrending as Lev climbs up the
stairs. He rushes to the door. As he opens it, grandfather's
wailing grows even more piteous.

HERSHL (V.O.)

There wasn't need to tell me I was
orphaned and that I would never see
mother again.

INT. LEV'S APARTMENT - A FEW DAYS LATER

Avrom brings Hershl's newborn sister, FEYGELE, to
grandfather's house. He shows Ben-Tsion and Hershl their
newborn sister.

AVROM

Her name's Feygele, after your grandmother.

STEP-GRANDMOTHER

You've no notion of leaving her here do you? It's enough you've dumped Hershl and Ben Tsion on us.

Ben Tsion rolls his eyes as if to say, "Here we go again."

AVROM

Not to worry. I've arranged to have her brought up by a wet-nurse from my home town. But Ben Tsion and Hershl will have to stay with you for the time being, for I've disposed of our apartment and rented a room for myself with another family.

Step-grandmother storms out of the apartment in a fury; she is unhappy taking care of Hershl and Ben Tsion.

INT. LEV'S APARTMENT - EARLY MORNING

Hershl runs away. He doesn't want to live with his wicked step-grandmother. He wanders across the Praga Bridge.

EXT. WISLA RIVER - LATE NIGHT

Hershl rests on the bank of the Wisla River until late at night. A POLICE OFFICER notices him and takes him to police headquarters.

INT. POLICE HEADQUARTERS - LATE NIGHT

POLICE OFFICER

Where do you live?

HERSHL

(with tears in his eyes, he lies)

I live with my father at Nowolipje.

The Police Officer escorts Hershl to a hard, wooden bench.

POLICE OFFICER

Take a seat.

The police officer walks away. Hershl, exhausted, lies down and closes his eyes.

INT. POLICE HEADQUARTERS - EARLY MORNING

Hershl spends the night on the bench of the police station. Avrom arrives at the station. He's led to Hershl sleeping on the bench.

AVROM

Hershl, Wake up son.

Hershl opens his eyes and hugs Avrom tightly.

HERSHL

Please, don't send me back to my step-grandmother.

AVROM

All right Hershl, I'll see whether, if I pay them for their trouble, the family with which I'm boarding will take you and your brother.

INT. ANOTHER FLAT - DAY

HERSHL (V.O.)

And so my brother and I went to yet another home. The family that took us in consisted of a brother, YANUSH, 30's, and a sister, ERELA, about father's age, 20's. After we lived in this place several weeks, my father returned from work with an entirely new plan for me.

AVROM

We'll go to Kali, to an orphanage in Lodz. There you'll have a nice warm home and live among children your own age.

EXT. THE ORPHANAGE - DAY

A handsome new red brick building three stories high, with verandas on three sides in the middle of a cherry orchard. The wide main entrance has two beautiful glass doors. A broad path leads to endless thick green woods. To the right of the forest is a large lake. The landscape is breathtaking.

INT. THE ORPHANAGE - CLASSROOM - DAY

Avrom escorts Hershl down the spotless hallway to MR. KRUEZLER's, 50's, has a thick beard. The classroom is full of ORPHANED BOYS; they don't look too pleased to be there.

HERSHL (V.O.)

One of the two pedagogues was Mr. Kreuzler. He taught us Jewish history and literature. He also instructed us in the natural sciences and German as a third language. *Volksdeutsche* lived in the village and we needed some command of German to communicate with them.

INT. ORPHANAGE - MISS HERSHKOVITS' CLASSROOM - DAY

Miss Hershkovits, 20's, plays a piano while the orphaned boys sing.

HERSHL (V.O.)

Our other teacher was a woman named Hershkovits who taught us Polish, arithmetic, geography and folk songs. She also instructed us in exercise and sports.

INT. ORPHANAGE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Hershl and some of the orphans help in the kitchen. They tirelessly scrub the pots, pans and dishes.

INT. AN UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - MORNING

Beds with mattresses of straw are lined up against the walls. Hershl and his fellow orphans sleep peacefully. A heavy bell begins to ring loudly. The children rise promptly, make their beds, wash up quickly, and run out into the yard.

EXT. THE OUTDOOR YARD - MORNING

Hershl and the orphans line up, size-places, as Miss Hershkovits puts them through their daily exercises; all the children look exhausted.

INT. THE ORPHANAGE - BEDROOM - WINTER NIGHT

The orphanage is poorly heated and freezing cold. Hershl shivers, his teeth chattering under the thin quilt of his little bed. His feet are frostbitten with chilblains. Unable to endure the itching, he scratches until sores develop on his toes. Tears flow uncontrollably from his eyes.

HERSHL (V.O.)

Night after night, I asked myself what had become of my family since mother died. I had endless conversations with my absent loved ones and I relived every step of the last few years, tormented by nightmares and visions.

MONTAGE - HERSHL REMEMBERS

- 1) Hershl with his mother and Ben Tsion shopping.
- 2) Hershl sitting at the Passover meal with Grandfather Lev and family.
- 3) Hershl opening the door and listening to Grandfather's mournful cries.

HERSHL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

A painful longing for mother began to gnaw inside of me, as well as for grandfather and Ben Tsion. And a perceptible hatred for father began to develop in me.

INT. THE ORPHANAGE - HALLWAY - TWO YEARS LATER - DAY

Hershl strolls through a corridor of the orphanage alone not paying attention to his surroundings. He glances up and notices the silhouette of a man at the end of the hallway. The man steps toward Hershl; it's his father.

Hershl feels a choking sensation in his throat and through his tear-filled eyes, all the world about him looks foggy, including his father.

AVROM

Shh, shh, don't cry.

Avrom attempts to calm Hershl, lifting him from the ground and pressing him hard to his chest. Hershl still can't utter a word and repeatedly attempts to free himself from his father's arms. At last he's put down.

AVROM (CONT'D)

Aren't you pleased to see me after all these years?

HERSHL

Take me home! Take me home! I don't want to be here!

Avrom puts an arm around Hershl's shoulders and leads him to a bench; they sit.

AVROM

Why?

HERSHL

I don't want to be all alone among strangers. Why'd you trick me into coming here and not let me hear from you for more than two years?

A long period of silence falls over them as Avrom looks at Hershl with sadness and compassion in his eyes. Finally, he begins to speak quietly and deliberately.

AVROM

You're a ten-year old boy now. Surely, you understand-

(beat)

You have no home. I too am forced to live among strangers and, ever since mother died, I felt this would be

(MORE)

AVROM (CONT'D)

best for you. Until such time as I
can care for you myself, this will
have to do.

Hershl pushes Avrom's arm off his shoulder, stands up and
begins to walk away.

AVROM (CONT'D)

Hershl, son, where are you going?

Hershl ignores his father and continues down the hall.

AVROM (CONT'D)

I demand you come back here.

Hershl turns the corner and disappears. Avrom is alone; he
knows he's a bad father.

HERSHL (V.O.)

After his visit, I felt even more
forlorn. Two years after father came
to see me, the orphanage was obliged
to close, for it had fallen on bad
times.

INT. LEV'S NEW FLAT - LATE EVENING

A light knock is heard at the door. Everyone seems surprised
and curious as to who it is. Lev makes his way to the door
and opens it.

Hershl stands at the door looking exhausted and hungry.
Grandfather and Ben Tsion are excited to see Hershl; Step-
grandmother is not thrilled to see Hershl.

LEV

Hershl, my God. I've missed you so
much. How are you?

BEN TSION

I thought I would never see you again.
Didn't father place you in an
orphanage?

HERSHL

He did, but it closed and I have
nowhere else to go.

LEV

You're home now son.

STEP-GRANDMOTHER

(visibly upset at
Lev's response)

Why don't you take him to his
grandfather's in Grodzisk?

(MORE)

STEP-GRANDMOTHER (CONT'D)

The six of us are crowded in this one room. There's really nowhere to put him.

Hershl's eyes fill with tears. Lev strikes the table with his fist and turns to his wife.

LEV

You had better be quiet. Put up the teakettle and serve something to eat. You see how exhausted he is. We'll do whatever has to be done. He **is** my grandchild, after all.

INT. LEV'S APARTMENT - LATER THAT NIGHT

Hershl, Ben-Tsion and Lev share a bed. The brothers' heads lay in the same direction staring at Lev's feet. Lev and Ben Tsion are fast asleep. Hershl is awake and a smile grows on his face as he stares at his brother.

INT. THE SABBATH - EVENING

Candles flicker while Lev recites the *Kiddush*. Hershl and the others, spontaneously sing along.

HERSHL (V.O.)

Grandfather recited the *Kiddush* in that same strong voice of my childhood years. I enjoyed the homemade *gefilte fish*, the Sabbath soup with all those fat globules like so many stars, reminding me of the meals mother used to serve.

EXT. LEV'S APARTMENT - BED - LATER THAT NIGHT

The brothers, in the same position as the night before, whisper in the dark.

HERSHL

I missed you all very much.

BEN TSION

We missed you too. There wasn't a night grandfather and I didn't pray for you to return to us.

HERSHL

I prayed every night too.

BEN TSION

Tomorrow, let me take you to the movies.

HERSHL

Oh yes, please - I've never been to the movies before.

BEN TSION

Good. Let's get some sleep for now. Good night Hershl.

HERSHL

Good night, Ben Tsion. Thank you.

INT. MOVIE THEATRE - NEXT DAY

A movie plays. Hershl gazes at the action on the screen; he doesn't blink. Ben Tsion glances over and puts his arm around his little brother; he's happy Hershl's happy.

EXT. STREET - LATER THAT NIGHT

On the way home, Ben Tsion tells Hershl how he wound up at grandfather Lev's apartment.

BEN TSION

Father already had a plan as to what to do with us after he took you to the orphanage. One day he told me he was planning on marrying the young woman with whose family we were boarding. Later, I noticed father and his new wife constantly whispering behind my back.

FLASHBACK BEGINS

INT. BOARDING HOUSE APT. - DAY

AVROM

(in a whisper)

Look, I've already lessened your burdens by placing Hershl in the orphanage. What more do you want?

STEPMOTHER

I'll be damned if I'm going to raise your former wife's brats. You have to dispose of Ben-Tzion also.

AVROM

You want me to abandon him?

STEPMOTHER

Send him to one of his grandfathers. They're his blood relatives too.

AVROM

That won't be easy. Let me think about it.

EXT. AVROM'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LATE AFTERNOON

Upon returning from school, Ben Tsion finds the house door locked. He stands waiting at the gate. After waiting several hours, until nightfall, Ben Tsion becomes very anxious. He goes tearfully to Uncle Simche's house.

INT. UNCLE SIMCHE'S HOUSE - HOURS LATER

Uncle Simche reassures him and sees to it that he has his evening meal. Later that night, they go back to see whether anyone has returned.

EXT. AVROM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

When Ben Tsion and Uncle Simche arrive, the house door is open. Ben Tsion's stepmother is inside. Uncle Simche enters the apartment with Ben Tsion.

UNCLE SIMCHE

Where's Avrom?

STEPMOTHER

(hemming and hawing)

He moved out.

(with an incongruous
but nervous smile)

I don't know where he is.

Uncle Simche becomes more irate and more insistent; he seizes hold of her arms.

UNCLE SIMCHE

If you don't tell me where he is,
you'll not escape my hands alive.

STEPMOTHER

(stammering fearfully)

He left for Argentina. I went to the
train station to see him off. That's
why I'm so late.

UNCLE SIMCHE

What about the children?

STEPMOTHER

(coldly and uncaring)

That's not for me to decide. They're
not my children.

(triumphantly)

It's not my responsibility to care
for them.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. LEV'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

BEN TSION

Uncle Simche had no choice, but to bring me to grandfather's house.

HERSHL

We're blessed to have grandfather. What would we do without him?

BEN TSION

I don't know Hershl.

HERSHL (V.O.)

My step-grandmother wouldn't quit her nagging. She said grandfather wasn't obliged to keep both his grandchildren so long as there was another grandfather who could share in the burden.

INT. GRANDFATHER YITZHAK ALTMAN'S APARTMENT - GRODZISK - POLAND - EVENING

The apartment is very spacious. AUNT ETHEL'S two daughters, MANYA, 15, and RACHEL, 8, GRANDFATHER YITZHAK, 70's, Lev, Uncle Simche, and aunt Ethel, 30's, are seated around a large parlor table negotiating Hershl's care.

GRANDFATHER YITZHAK

True, I'm obligated to take care of my grandchild. The trouble is, I haven't a wife and I live with my oldest daughter, her husband and two children. It's more than she can do to manage a household as large as ours. Besides, there's simply no place to put him.

LEV

If you find it difficult to accommodate five people in as comfortable a home as this, you should appreciate how hard it has to be for me. With Hershl included, we'd have seven people in one crowded room. Honestly, for whom would you think it easier?

AUNT ETHEL

Father, I have two children. Let's assume I have three. He's still a child and he is my brother's flesh and blood. He shouldn't be left all alone to God's mercy.

HERSHL (V.O.)

And so it was that I was taken to my
new home in Grodzisk.

INT. THE HOUSE OF STUDY - DAY

Grandfather Yitzhak, who is in charge of the *Talmud Torah*, enrolls Hershl. He introduces him to the RABBI, 60's, an elderly man with a long gray beard dressed in the traditional black garb.

INT. A CLASSROOM - A FEW WEEKS LATER - DAY

Hershl is seen praying competently from the *siddur*. He progresses quickly to studying the *Pentateuch* and Rashi's commentary. Before he has had time to complete his first *Pentateuch* book, he is invited to join a group of students working on the *Gemara*.

HERSHL

Rabbi, could you please explain how it is possible for Cain to have taken a wife when Adam and Eve and their children were the only people in existence?

RABBI

Get on with your studies you rascal, and don't ask so many questions.

HERSHL

Rabbi, these things don't make any sense. There are many things I'd like an answer to, but you never give me an answer I can understand. Here's something I've been wondering about.

The Rabbi stares curiously at Hershl; he knows nothing good will come from his young, twisted tongue.

HERSHL (CONT'D)

Did Adam have a navel?

The Rabbi removes his thick strap and lashes out at Hershl.

HERSHL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

In no way was I going to remain seated on that hard bench. The more I studied, the stronger the revolt in me grew until I decided I would study no more.

EXT. FROG POND - MORNING

Instead of going to *heder*, Hershl meets some FRIENDS at an overgrown frog pond; they swim and have fun splashing each other.

EXT. APPLE ORCHARD - TWILIGHT

Hershl and his friends climb apple trees. They pick apples and eat as many as they could. Engrossed in fun, they take no notice of nightfall.

INT. GRANDFATHER YITZHAK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Hershl rushes through the front door out of breath. The entire family is present and the evening meal is over; Yitzhak stares at Hershl with fire in his eyes. Aunt Ethel and the girls look worried. Yitzhak explodes at Hershl. Aunt Ethel and the girls jump with fright.

YITZHAK

Why weren't you at *heder* today?

HERSHL

I don't want to go to *heder*.

Yitzhak slips off his belt and begins to strike Hershl with it. Hershl pushes past him and out of the house.

INT. GRANDFATHER YITZHAK'S APARTMENT - ATTIC - LATE NIGHT

The next few hours are spent wandering around town till past midnight. Hershl climbs secretly up through the attic window wraps himself in an old blanket and falls asleep.

EXT. GRANDFATHER'S YITZHAK'S APARTMENT - DAYBREAK

Hershl slips down from the attic and wanders out to the streets of Grodzisk. After lingering for several hours, he notices Aunt Ethel approaching. He pretends not to see her, but makes certain he would be seen. Several seconds later, Aunt Ethel's hands grip Hershl's arm; she holds him firmly so that he can't break free.

AUNT ETHEL

Where are you trying to run to and why did you run away?

HERSHL

(with tears in his eyes)

I didn't want to go to *heder* and for that grandpa beat me.

Aunt Ethel releases Hershl's arm and gently puts her arm around his shoulders.

AUNT ETHEL

Listen to me, Hershl, grandpa is at the house of study for evening prayers. You can come home, wash up and have something to eat. I assure you, no one's going to strike you

(MORE)

AUNT ETHEL (CONT'D)

again. In just a few days you'll be thirteen, a grown man. No one can then force you to go to *heder* or do anything you don't want to do. Now, come on home.

Hershl obliges. Aunt Ethel keeps her arm around him as they head home.

INT. GRANDFATHER YITZHAK'S APARTMENT - DINNER TIME

Grandfather Yitzhak, Aunt Ethel, Manya, Rachel, Hershl, AUNT GENENDL, 20's, (Aunt Ethel's younger sister) and her husband UNCLE MOISHE, 30's, are sitting at the table discussing what to do with Hershl in view of the fact that he refuses to go to *heder*. Yitzhak is extremely disgusted.

YITZHAK

If he doesn't attend *heder*, I won't stay under the same roof with him. I cannot bear to see a *goy* grow up in my house. My disappointment's all the greater because he has a good head on his shoulders, and could grow up to be a rabbi. He's wasting a golden opportunity.

UNCLE MOISHE

He can come live with us. We can teach him to be a tailor in our shop. We can use an extra hand. In time, Hershl can begin to earn his keep and become independent.

YITZHAK

So be it, seeing as how I can't convince him to do what is in his own best interest.

INT. UNCLE MOISHE'S APARTMENT - TAILOR SHOP - DAY

The largest room is their tailor shop; it's full of a variety of garments. They have two children and aunt Genendl is pregnant with a third.

UNCLE MOISHE

Hershl, would you be kind enough to fetch several pails of water from the well?

Uncle Moishe hands him two large pails and Hershl goes outside and struggles to carry them into the apartment as Uncle Moishe motions to where he wants him to put them. Indicating that just two are insufficient, he has Hershl repeat the process several times.

UNCLE MOISHE (CONT'D)

Good. Now, I want you to keep an eye out on the supply and whenever you see that we're running low, you'll replenish it. Okay? Also, here is the slop pail, go and spill its contents on the very far side of the field next to the house. This'll also be part of your regular duties. Understand?

Hershl shows confusion over what household functions he is being prepared for.

HERSHL

(with suspicion in his voice)

Yes.

MONTAGE

- 1) Hershl rises early in the morning.
- 2) He goes to the bakery and purchases the day's supply of fresh bread.
- 3) After breakfast, Aunt Genendl provides him with a list of things to buy at the grocer's.
- 4) He goes there on his way from delivering their OLDER CHILD, a little girl barely six years old, to school.
- 5) The YOUNGER GIRL is dressed waiting for Hershl to take her for an airing. He keeps her out until the noonday meal.
- 6) The little girl is barely two years old and lacks the strength to walk, so Hershl has to carry her in his arms most of the time.
- 7) After the midday meal, Uncle Moishe sends him into town to deliver garments to his customers.
- 8) On the way back, he buys items for the tailor shop: buttons, tapes, threads of various colors and other supplies.
- 9) By the time he returns the journeymen tailors conclude their day's work and prepare to go home, but Hershl has yet more work to do.
- 10) He cleans up the shop, and then works on turning the collars of the garments in to save on the cost of new material.

HERSHL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I found it all very difficult but I didn't have the boldness to complain. My situation worsened appreciably
(MORE)

HERSHL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 when Aunt Genendl gave birth to her
 third child.

AUNT GENENDL
 Hershl, we'd like you to watch the
 baby on Saturday when we go out.
 Alright?

HERSHL
 Saturday's my only day off.

UNCLE MOISHE
 Hershl, we'll decide if you're to
 have any time off.

INT. GRANDFATHER ITZHAK'S HOUSE - HERSHL AND AUNT ETHEL IN
 ANIMATED DISCUSSION - DAY

HERSHL
 I just can't suffer the injustice of
 it. They were supposed to teach me
 the tailor's trade and instead have
 turned me into a house servant and
 errand boy.

AUNT ETHEL
 Oh, my poor child.

Aunt Ethel takes Hershl around as she steers him to the door
 and marches off with him to her sister's.

HERSHL
 I don't want to be there when you
 have words with Aunt Genendl.

AUNT ETHEL
 You're right, wait down here till I
 come back.

Hershl waits impatiently as the sisters are heard trying to
 shout each other. Aunt Ethel hurries down the stairs. She
 is furious. She puts an arm across Hershl's shoulder and
 rushes him along beside her, continuing her momentum. Half
 running and half stepping briskly, she begins talking. As
 she speaks she grows calmer.

AUNT ETHEL (CONT'D)
 From this day forward you'll not
 have to be their servant and you
 won't have to be nursemaid to their
 children.

INT. GRANDFATHER YITZHAK'S HOUSE - DAY

YITZHAK

If you're to stay here, you'll have to adhere strictly to Jewish law. That means praying three times a day and accompanying me to the house of prayer on the Sabbath. Would that be too difficult for you?

HERSHL

No, Grandpa.

YITZHAK

I also expect you to stay home on Saturday afternoons and study the *Ethics of the Fathers*. What do you say?

HERSHL

I promise, Grandpa, Whatever you say.

YITZHAK

Good. Now as for your future, I'm turning you over to UNCLE SHIMON, 30's. He'll teach you to spin lisle thread on the knitting machines of his stocking factory.

INT. DAY - UNCLE SHIMON'S - APARTMENT FACTORY - DAY

Hershl sits all day long on a low stool, turning a large wooden wheel with his right hand while, with the left, he guides the thread as it winds from a pulley holding a skein of yarn onto a large wooden spool.

INT. EARLY MORNING - GRANDFATHER YITZHAK'S APARTMENT

Hershl's awakened before anyone else. He has to say his morning prayers at the top of his lungs so that grandfather could hear that he didn't skip a single word. When grandfather goes into another room, Hershl hurriedly takes off his phylacteries. Grandfather suddenly appears from the other room.

YITZHAK

I see you only put your *tefillin* on to measure whether your head has swelled any!

INT. UNCLE SHIMON'S APT. FACTORY - DAY

UNCLE SHIMON

Things are really getting bad. I'm going to try and get a loan from the Jewish Free Loan Society and buy two
(MORE)

UNCLE SHIMON (CONT'D)
 more machines. Hopefully, we'll avoid
 bankruptcy. I don't know what else
 to do.

HERSHL
 But Uncle, this will mean that instead
 of working twelve hours a day, I'll
 have to work sixteen.

UNCLE SHIMON
 Hershl, Aunt Ethel and I will have
 to put in the same extra hours as
 you.

Uncle Shimon goes to Warsaw to sell the finished hosiery.
 Instead of disposing of his goods, he returns with the bundles
 unsold. Grandfather takes ill and becomes weaker day by day.
 He's bedridden for two years until he quietly passes away.
 All the Jews in town escort him to his final resting-place.

INT. APARTMENT - EARLY MORNING

Family is sitting at the table.

HERSHL
 I'm going to Warsaw to seek
 employment.

AUNT ETHEL
 (with tears in her
 eyes)
 Please don't. You'll not survive
 all by yourself.

HERSHL
 Don't worry, I'll manage. You'll be
 better off without me.

Aunt Ethel takes out their last morsel of bread.

AUNT ETHEL
 You'll need something to eat on your
 way.

HERSHL
 No, no, put it aside for yourself
 and the children.

Hershl is seen walking down a road, away from Grodzisk.

INT. WARSAW - GRANDFATHER LEV'S APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT

Grandfather Lev and Ben-Tsion are sitting at the table reading
 a Yiddish newspaper by the light of a large kerosene lamp
 hanging from the ceiling directly over the table.

Hershl appears in the doorway and is greeted with looks of astonishment. His step-grandmother immediately voices an uneasy reproof.

STEP-GRANDMOTHER

So you've run away again, have you?

HERSHL

No! I didn't run away. I left Grodzisk for good reason. I have no right to burden my aunt's family, especially when they have nothing to eat themselves. I ask nothing more than that you allow me to sleep here until I find work and am able to care for my own needs. I haven't anyone else to whom I can turn.

Ben-Tsion runs up to him, puts his arms around him, his eyes filling with tears. Grandfather's eyes, too, are moist with tears as he approaches Hershl and kisses him.

GRANDFATHER LEV

God forbid, no one's going to turn you out!

(he addresses his wife)

Look, I support your children don't I? You can't stop me from taking care of another one of my own grandchildren.

STEP-GRANDMOTHER

(she still isn't assured, but her tone is milder)

Where do you propose to put him - on your head?

GRANDFATHER LEV

He'll sleep with me and Ben-Tsion.

Hershl is invited to wash up. Ben-Tsion hands him one of his shirts. Hershl lies down at the feet of his grandfather with his brother to spend the night.

INT. GRANDFATHER LEV'S APT. EARLY MORNING

Ben-Tsion is boiling tea. He spreads some jam on bread, and he and Hershl share his breakfast.

BEN-TSION

So long as we don't touch anything of hers, things will be more or less peaceful.

Hershl nods his head in agreement. Before leaving for work, Ben Tsion hands Hershl several zloty.

BEN-TSION (CONT'D)

This is to buy food for the evening meal. If possible, try and cook something. There's no reason for you to feel ill at ease in her kitchen. She can have no complaints for I pay for everything I use.

Ben-Tsion leaves for work. Grandfather walks toward Hershl as he too prepares to leave for work, and, furtively, so his wife doesn't see, places several zloty in Hershl's hand and whispers in his ear.

GRANDFATHER LEV

Buy whatever you think you need.

EXT. STREETS OF WARSAW - DAY

Hershl buys a newspaper, and turns to the advertisement pages to see if he could find work. He sees a notice for a boy seeking to learn the tailor's trade at a shop at Number 47 Mila Street. He runs over to that address. The TAILOR, 40's, measures Hershl with his eyes.

TAILOR

How old are you?

HERSHL

Fourteen.

TAILOR

Where do you live?

HERSHL

At Niska Number 5.

TAILOR

Do you have parents?

HERSHL

No. I live with my grandfather.

TAILOR

Good, let's see what you can do. Take the trash down to the waste bin in the yard. On the way back buy two dozen buttons this size.

He gives Hershl some money and a sample button. Hershl carries the rubbish down and brings him the buttons he wanted.

TAILOR (CONT'D)

What took you so long?

HERSHL

Sorry, I'll run faster next time. How much am I to be paid for a week's work?

TAILOR

See here, he's asking about money,
even before I know what he can do.

From the other room comes the sound of a woman's voice and the hubbub of small children. The woman yells out to her husband.

TAILOR'S WIFE (O.S.)

Feliks, fetch the chamber pot. It's
full!

The tailor rushes into the bedroom, brings out a full night pot and tries to hand it to Hershl.

TAILOR

Take this down to the water closet
in the yard.

The stench from the potty assails Hershl's nose and has him about to vomit. He rushes from the room slamming the door behind him. The tailor is baffled.

INT. MEETING OF THE *HEKHOLUTS* (PALESTINE PIONEER MOVEMENT) -
DAY

Ben-Tsion is an active member of the Palestine pioneer movement and takes Hershl along with him Saturdays to their meetings. Hershl joins in singing Hebrew songs and dancing the *Hora*. As they leave the social gathering, Hershl implores Ben-Tsion to tell him what had become of their little sister.

HERSHL

Whatever happened to our little sister
after father sent her away? Tell me
the truth, now.

Ben-Tsion's eyes cloud over as he looks at Hershl. He obviously finds the subject too painful to discuss. After a long silence, he coughs lightly, as if to clear his throat, and begins to tell Hershl the story in a trembling voice.

BEN TSION

When father left us, he stopped paying
the wet-nurse in Grodzisk. Feygele
became ill of malnourishment and was
sent to a Catholic hospital in Warsaw.
A letter came stating the child
died and that since she has no
parents, they took care of the burial
themselves. We're convinced the nuns
stole her and had her converted. She
is lost to us forever - another
instance of our father's merciless
conduct toward the three of us.

MONTAGE - THE ECONOMIC CONDITION IN POLAND WORSENS DAILY.

- 1) Hershl wanders from street to street looking for employment.
- 2) Hershl spends some of his time at the home of a friend, YOSL, 17, the son of a wealthy businessman.
- 3) They play cards and other games in Yosl's parents' luxurious apartment.
- 4) Sometimes Hershl shares meals with Yosl's family.
- 5) Hershl goes hungry for days at a time.
- 6) Ashamed to reveal his dire circumstances, he curtails his visits.
- 7) Grandfather is suddenly ill.
- 8) Half unconscious he's taken to hospital.

INT. HOSPITAL IN WARSAW - DAY

Hershl goes to the hospital to see his grandfather. He isn't allowed to enter his room. He can only stand in an anteroom and look in through a wide glass door. Grandfather is in great pain. He notices Hershl and calls out his name several times.

GRANDFATHER LEV

Hershl! Hershl!

Hershl tears from the spot and is about to run to his grandfather when a NURSE stops him and pushes him out of the room.

GRANDFATHER LEV (CONT'D)

My poor little orphan! My poor little orphan!

NURSE

Your grandfather must be operated upon immediately. It's time for you to leave.

EXT. CEMETERY, FUNERAL FOR GRANDFATHER LEV - NEXT DAY

Hershl is hungry, despondent, and homeless.

EXT. STREETS OF WARSAW - DAY

Hershl is walking along dejected and close to desperation. He encounters his close friend, Yosl, who happens to be strolling along with two friends, SHMAYE and LEYZER.

YOSL

Where in the world have you been?
(MORE)

YOSL (CONT'D)

Everyone's asking for you. No one knows what's become of you. I don't know what to tell people when they ask after you.

(beat; Hershl's eyes overflow with tears)

Are you crying?

HERSHL

Yes, I'm crying, I've just lost my grandfather.

Yosl knows that can't be the whole story. He immediately takes leave of his friends and leads Hershl into a coffee shop, where he orders buttered rolls, some cheese, and coffee. After eating, Hershl feels somewhat strengthened.

HERSHL (CONT'D)

Thank you, Yosl, if it weren't for you, I might've died of starvation.

Hershl is seen in long discussion with his friend, spilling his heart out and relating all that has happened to him. Yosl has a revelation of his own.

YOSL

Hershl, those friends I just took leave of, they're members of the Pioneers, the Communist youth party. So am I. We're fighting for a just society in Poland. When that day comes, you'll never lose your job, nor have to suffer hunger as you're doing now. Why don't you join us?

EXT.THE STREETS OF WARSAW - NIGHT

Hershl meets with the Pioneers every night under the clock on Gensza Street at the corner of Zamenhof. Hershl applies a poster to a kiosk when suddenly a uniformed officer positions himself behind them. Hershl shoves the pail full of paste into the policeman's face and he and Yosl run off, never looking back.

HERSHL (V.O.)

I wasn't always so lucky.

EXT. MILA STREET CROWDED WITH COMMUNIST DEMONSTRATORS - DAY

Suddenly hundreds of policemen appear and fire into the crowds. Hershl runs into the nearest building and up the stairs. He tears into the attic and hides behind the door.

The police break it down and use their rifle butts to hit Hershl and others over the head as they drive them down the stairs onto the streets.

HERSHL (V.O.)

We were detained for forty-eight hours, interrogated and freed only after all charges were filed and a date for trial set. The trial was held several months later in a courtroom on Miadowa Street. I and two of my comrades, who were only eighteen years old, were sentenced to a term of one year but the sentence was suspended for three years. If, during that time, our conduct was deemed satisfactory, the new sentence would be lifted. If not, we would face a new trial and be obliged to serve the one-year sentence.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY TO NIGHT

HERSHL (V.O.)

Ben-Tsion made arrangements for journeying to Palestine. I received his announcement with mixed feelings. I wondered if I would ever again see my brother with whom I shared so much pain and suffering.

Hundreds of *halutzim* are gathered to bid farewell to the thirty or so fortunate enough to have been granted certificates for emigration.

They sing Hebrew songs, link arms and shoulders and dance the traditional *hora*, celebrating the final minutes of the departure of their comrades.

HERSHL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I didn't participate in the dancing and singing. How could I have cared when I was seeing my brother for the last time? I couldn't take my eyes off him.

When, shortly before departure, people begin saying their goodbyes, Hersh1 clings to his brother with all his might.

The crowd sings the Hatikva, but Hersh1 stands motionless. Ben-Tsion pauses on the step of his car, and looks to Hersh1 with pity in his eyes.

The train commences to move. Hersh1 runs alongside. Ben-Tsion has one hand on the railing and keeps waving with the other until the train develops speed and disappears into the darkness of night.

INT. BOX MAKING FACTORY-DAY

Hershl is seen working with a number of young men. They're singing and having fun while working. At noon, they gather around a great stove furnace while eating their meals.

They maintain a jolly mood by joshing and bantering with one another and engage in idle boasting that they've received the promise of a date from ANDZIA, the pretty niece of the owner.

HERSHL

Give me till Saturday and I'll set up a rendezvous with the pretty Miss Andzia.

Everyone laughs loudly and makes fun of Hershl.

WORKERS

Make a bet, don't just brag.

HERSHL

Very well.

WORKERS

A week's wages.

HERSHL

Too much, but I'll risk a day's pay.

Hershl goes to the Passage Theater on Senatorska Street and purchases two advance tickets for the Saturday performance of "I'm in Heaven," with Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire.

INT. THE OFFICE WHERE MISS ANDZIA WORKS - DAY

Hershl enters the office and shows Andzia the two tickets of admission.

HERSHL

Would you go with me to see this show next Saturday afternoon?

Andzia shows some hesitation.

HERSHL (CONT'D)

If you refuse,
(anticipating rejection)
I'll be out the price of a ticket.
It would be a shame to waste the
ticket to such a wonderful movie.

ANDZIA

Unh, unh. I've never been out with a boy before and I have no good reason to go out with you either.

HERSHL

I understand, but there's a first time for everything. So why not with me? I'm only asking so I don't lose my wager. I assure you, you won't come to harm. I'll call for you at home and take you right back after the performance.

ANDZIA

(softening)

I would have to get my mother's permission first.

HERSHL

Very well, ask your parents. Let them know with whom you're going and where I'll be taking you.

INT. BOX FACTORY - DAY

Andzia comes up to Hershl standing at his work bench. Blushingly, she whispers in his ear.

ANDZIA

Saturday at two o'clock, I'll be at the gate of my house. If you arrive promptly, I'll go out with you.

Hershl's fellow workers see the exchange.

WORKERS

Hey, what was that about? - All that whispering and secrecy! Will you be dating her?

HERSHL

No, no, it's nothing.
(trying to divert
them from the accuracy
of their guess)
I didn't ask her yet.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE THEATER, AFTER THE SHOW - DAY

Hershl and Andzia are taking a long walk home. The spectacular singing and dancing has them enthused and talking about the film all along the way. They arrive before the gate of Andzia's house.

HERSHL

Would you
(beat)
go out with me again?

ANDZIA

(smiling)
Yes.

Hershl attempts to kiss her. She blushes and eludes his arms. She turns away quickly and rushes up the flight of stairs.

MONTAGE

- 1) Hershl and Andzia take walks together
- 2) Hershl visits her at home and meets her parents, DORA, 36, GERSHON, 40 and her two sisters: BELLA, 16, and HALINKA, 12.
- 3) Hershl tells Andzia, he'll call her HANELE, his pet name for her from now on.
- 4) They make love.

INT. ANDZIA'S PARENT'S APARTMENT - DAY

HERSHL

I'll be leaving for Bruxelles in a couple of days. My father acquired a millinery shop, when he and his wife moved to Belgium, and he promises to teach me the trade and arrange for us to be settled there.

HANELE

You trust him after all he's done to you and your brother?

HERSHL

I haven't much of a choice do I? We have to do something for our future. There's not much hope for us here in Poland.

HANELE

I'm afraid...we can manage here too. You don't really believe things will work out for the better in Belgium, do you?

HERSHL

Perhaps not, but we must take the chance.

INT. TAXI ON THE WAY TO THE RAILROAD STATION - DAY

Hershl and Hanele are sitting close together holding one another in the back of the taxi. Hanele's eyes are moist and brimming with tears. She's trying to hold them back so as to keep Hershl from breaking down. Hershl too is drenched in tears as he tries to console her.

EXT. RAILROAD STATION, TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

Hershl puts his arm around Hanele and kisses her before boarding. She clings to him and begins to sob.

HANELE

Please, don't go. I can't bear to see you go...I love you.

HERSHL

Oh, God I don't want to. But you know I have to. It will all work out. You'll see.

(beat)

It's because I love you that I'm doing this.

When the train begins to move, Hershl tears himself away and boards. Hanele runs alongside, crying and calling out his name. Her voice keeps echoing in Hershl's ears as he rides away.

EXT. BRUXELLES, BELGIUM - TRAIN STATION - DAY

Hershl sees his father, with his wife, Erela and daughter, BRACHA through the train window. They greet one another. Hershl's baggage is loaded on a taxi, and they're driven to his father's residence at Number 18 Rue Grisar.

EXT. AVROM'S HOUSE AND HAT FACTORY - DAY

Just opposite the house stands his father's hat factory. On the first floor, there are machines for sewing straw, for stitching felt hats, and a machine for attaching rims.

On the second floor there's a massive long table. WOMEN sit along both sides of it shaping the toques and trimming the blocked hats.

INT. HAT FACTORY - DAY

Hershl is standing at the heated molds and being taught by his father to be a stretcher. Avrom goes through the motions as he speaks.

AVROM

Take the felts down from the kettle, one at a time. Using both hands, pass them to the stretcher up front. Then the two of you pull hard and position it on the hot form...

When the felt is in place, the front stretcher quickly pulls the top part of the steam press down on it and, using a foot pedal, makes sure the two parts fit tightly together. They repeat this process until all eight machines are filled. At that point, they hurry back to the first press and remove the dried hat before the extreme heat burns it.

MORPH TO:

After removing all eight felts, Hershl begins the process anew. While pulling the wet felts onto the hot forms, Hershl scalds his fingers. Every muscle aches.

INT. 18 RUE GRISSAR - NIGHT

After work, Hershl writes very long, detailed letters to Hanele late into the night and collapses from weariness.

INT. AVROM SHOLEM'S KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

Hershl stumbles into the kitchen.

STEPMOTHER ERELA

Avrom, look how worn out Hershl is from writing all night long. How is he going to keep up with work at the factory? Tell him he should quit writing to this girl.

AVROM

Hershl, she has a point. Who is this girl anyway? There are plenty of fish in the sea, you know.

STEPMOTHER

The next world's fair is going to be held in America, and your father, with his connections, can easily obtain a tourist visa for you at that time.

AVROM

Yes, once there, you could find a way to become a legal resident. Life is better and pleasanter in America than in Belgium.

HERSHL

Instead of offering me advice I could never accept, why don't you pay me for my work? Then I could start saving some money and bring my girl here and perhaps, the two of us could settle down and begin to lead a normal life.

Stepmother winces at the thought.

AVROM

(sensing a blow up)

Alright, Hershl, you'll begin getting wages at the start of the "straw season." The felt season is ending in a couple of weeks and I'll teach you how to sew straw in the meanwhile.

INT. AVROM SHOLEM'S PARLOR - LATE EVENING

Avrom and stepmother return home from an evening out.

STEPMOTHER

Hershl, several of our friends have daughters your age some of them absolute beauties. We've just seen one tonight. It wouldn't hurt for a young man like you taking one out for a walk or to a movie. We could set you up. Or, since your father is a celebrated Zionist leader, he can get you tickets of admission to the Zionist dances that are held every once in a while.

AVROM

Yes, that wouldn't be a problem. There's a dance being held there next week.

HERSHL

You needn't bother. I've seen some of these girls. They don't interest me. I've saved enough money to send for my girl. As you know, I'll need a statement from you that you're in need of a hat designer. That way, Hanele can obtain a visa to Belgium.

STEPMOTHER

I knew it. Once his girl arrives, they'll want to take over the factory. I won't let this girl join him. I also have a child. She should have some say in this matter! I knew this is how things would be. Once he brings her here, he'll want to take over and make fools of us all!

HERSHL

(barely in control of himself)

Can't you see how laughable your complaints are? All I'm asking for is a piece of paper that makes it possible for her to enter the country legally. When Hanele arrives we'll marry, and I'll move out. I'll stop working for you. If you'll not do this one thing for me, I'll be obliged to go elsewhere to have it done.

STEPMOTHER

Since you're threatening to go to strangers, you may as well take your things and get out of here now.

Hershl rushes to pack his suitcase.

AVROM

You had better give some thought to what you're doing.

HERSHL

I didn't come here for you to step all over my feelings. If after all these years you really meant to compensate me for all the pain and suffering you caused me but now refuse a mere trifle which would help me be united with my girl, I shouldn't spend another minute under your roof.

Hershl walks out of the house, slamming the door behind him.

INT. ZIONIST ALLIANCE HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Hershl introduces himself to Avrom's closest comrades. They look at him in astonishment.

COMRADE 1

You're his son? We know his daughter. We never heard of a son.

HERSHL

One of his sons. He has two, both abandoned.

HERSHL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I told them of our many years of abandonment and all my father had done to me since my arrival in Belgium.

Avrom's comrades listen in disbelief that their leader, Avrom Sholem Altman, could have had the heart to do such things to his own children.

HERSHL (CONT'D)

You don't have to believe anything I told you, though it isn't even a tenth of what he's done. I ask you to summon him before a tribunal wherein you may become acquainted with every detail of what I've said. Please do it before I leave for Warsaw.

As Hershl is speaking, Avrom suddenly appears.

AVROM

(bewildered)

What are you doing here?

HERSHL

I want us to go before a tribunal. A tribunal of your comrades, so that the verdict may be as favorable to you as possible

AVROM

(perplexed and
disconcerted)

Let me,

(beat)

at least, choose the makeup of this court.

HERSHL

Okay.

INT. ZIONIST ALLIANCE - MAKESHIFT COURT

Avrom's selected comrades hold court. After a brief review of what he already told them, Hershl presents his complaint. He cites Avrom's refusal to sign Hanele's immigration papers and of Hershl's threat to make the request of strangers. He adds that for those few words his stepmother drove him from their house.

HERSHL

I am now unemployed and living in a furnished room with strangers.

Avrom listens calmly, never once interrupting. When Hershl is done speaking, Avrom speaks up to prevent Hershl from continuing.

AVROM

There must be something you want of me or you wouldn't have come here to see me tried. Why don't you just go ahead and say what it is you want?

HERSHL

Since there can be no peace for me in my stepmother's house, I will return to Poland. I believe that to be my father's and certainly my stepmother's desire. But since my father is well off, it's no more than right that he pay me enough to establish a small business of my own. I shouldn't have to go hungry, as I did before coming to Belgium.

AVROM

So, how much do you want?

HERSHL

I don't know how much you're in a position to pay. Let your friends determine the amount. Whatever they think sufficient will be acceptable to me.

COMRADE 2

Hershl, please leave the room so that we can discuss specific amounts with your father.

INT. ZIONIST ALLIANCE - CORRIDOR

Hershl leaves the room and is seen waiting in the corridor for quite a while. The door opens and he is beckoned in.

COMRADE 2

We've reached a unanimous decision. The amount agreed to is four thousand zloty, to be paid in two installments. You'll have half the amount in three days, and the other half at the end of the "straw" season.

AVROM'S APARTMENT - THREE DAYS LATER

Hershl meets with his father. The atmosphere is ice cold. Avrom hands Hershl a package of money. Hershl and Avrom take leave of one another without a word.

HANELE'S PARENTS' APARTMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Hershl arrives at Hanele's home. Her parents and her two sisters are there. Hanele is still at work. Hanele's parents are surprised to see him. They greet him warmly. The doorbell rings. Hershl runs to open it and catches Hanele in his arms. He covers her with kisses.

HANELE

(pleasantly surprised)

Oh my God, is it really you? I didn't expect you back this soon. What a wonderful surprise!

HERSHL

You were right. I couldn't depend on my father after all.

EXT. STREETS OF WARSAW - DAY

Newspaper headlines: GERMAN TROOPS MASS ON POLISH BORDER. A stampede begins. People are buying up whatever is to be found especially if it is edible.

[Mix with visuals from the time period]

Hershl and Hanele's family purchase products that could be stored long term without spoiling. They buy staples: flour, potatoes, rice, beans, onions, sugar, and jars of pickles.

EXT. WARSAW - SEPTEMBER 1, 1939. 8 A.M.

Sirens sound throughout the city of Warsaw. Bella is a volunteer assigned to guiding tenants into building shelters. The family rushes to the window from which they could watch the 'war games.' They see anti-aircraft ordinance exploding in their vicinity but none of the salvos hit the aircraft.

[Mix with visuals from the time period]

They admire the clever imitation of war they are witnessing with Polish planes playing enemy and shooting in a manner deliberately designed to miss. Bella rushes up the stairs.

BELLA

(fear in her eyes)

It's war! Those are German scout craft on reconnaissance.

HANELE

For real? Those aren't Polish planes?

HERSHL

I'm sure they are. I think what Bella heard is just part of a governmental scheme to persuade people to take their warnings seriously.

Hershl hurries down into the yard to ascertain how much of what Bella said is true. Radios are blaring throughout the city announcing the start of war.

HERSHL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

My blood froze over when I heard that what Bella said was true. My military classification was "C," so I wasn't being called up for the time being. Bella's fiance', Hayim, was classified "A." He was mobilized right away and sent directly to the front.

German bombers fly over the rooftops of Warsaw. With a dreadful groan, house after house falls apart like a deck of cards. Hundreds of people are buried alive under the ruins. Radios report German troops advancing on Poland and approaching the gates of Warsaw.

[Mix with visuals from the time period]

All men aged seventeen to fifty-five, Hershl included, are commanded to obtain shovels and gather in their yards. At dawn, they're led outside the city to dig protective ditches for its defense.

EXT. WOLA SUBURB - DAY

As Hershl and others dig ditches in the suburb of Wola, a number of German planes appear. They swoop low and begin firing with machine guns. Everyone throws himself into the trenches.

The Germans fly lower still, and continue to sow death. Not having anything to defend with, the ditch diggers make themselves as small as they can and press their bodies up against the earthen walls. They try to shield their heads from the flying bullets with the scoops of their shovels.

The ordinance from one of the planes sprays bullets through the body of a co-worker adjacent to Hershl, ripping him to shreds and spraying his blood all over Hershl.

Hayim's older brother, IGNAC, 30's, who is in one of the trenches with Hershl, escapes certain death when one of the bullets strikes the shovel covering his face with a resounding ping and bounces off again, falling on the ground beside them.

Many are wounded and killed. When the hail of bullets cease, they slowly and cautiously emerge from the trenches. Those who survive the massacre gather up the bodies of the fallen and lay them out for burial. They then trudge back toward home - weary, dazed and "shell shocked."

EXT. WARSAW, AT THE GATE OF THEIR HOME - EARLY EVENING

When they return home they find Hanele and her parents, her sisters, and Hayim's (and Ignac's) parents waiting for them at the gate.

HANELE

(with tears of relief
in her eyes)

Oh thank God, you're alive! I was so
afraid you were among those killed
in the air raid.

She runs into his arms.

BELLA

The radio reported a massacre of
defenseless trench diggers in Wola.
We spent all day fearing for your
lives.

They all embrace. They weep with joy to have Hershl and Ignac back alive.

EXT. WARSAW - DAY TO NIGHT

The Germans encircle all of Warsaw. Trolley cars are overturned while streets are barricaded and cut off to prevent troops from getting through.

[Mix with visuals from the time period]

Every courtyard is filled with armed soldiers fleeing from the front. Long queues form. People stand in line all night to obtain a loaf of bread. Everyone in Hanele's household takes up a spot at different stores.

EXT. WARSAW - NIGHT - THEN DAY

The Germans set up emplacements of heavy artillery and aim their guns at the heart of Warsaw. German planes drop incendiary bombs on buildings. Hershl and other tenants mobilize and carry pails of sand up to the roofs and the moment a flame bomb hits, they dash sand on it to extinguish it.

[Mix with visuals from the time period]

The Polish soldiers stationed in the courtyards make the situation worse. When enemy aircraft fly overhead, they shoot up at the planes. The Germans, noticing the source, turn back and destroy the building along with the soldiers.

INT. HANELE'S HOME - DAY

HERSHL

We can't stay here. If a bomb falls on the roof, we'll never get out in time.

BELLA

We can go down to the synagogue on the ground level.

HANELE

It'll give us a chance to escape. We'll only be a few steps from the street.

They each take a small valise filled with provisions and a quilt and carry them to the synagogue.

INT. SYNAGOGUE - NIGHT

The synagogue fills up with people. The cannonade of the big guns continues all night. Hanele clings to her mother and sisters and shudders at the sound of exploding bombs and collapsing buildings.

They hear a horrible crash. The impact throws Hershl from off his bench. Everyone screams with fright.

HERSHL

I'm okay. I'm okay but it's not safe here either we should go down lower, to the basement.

BELLA

Sleep's out of the question anyway.

The bombardment never ceases. They remain in the cellar until morning when it becomes suddenly quiet. They hear some movement in the yard.

A bomb strikes and injures military horses stationed there. People stampede out to cut large pieces of horseflesh to be eaten.

HERSHL

We need water. Who'll come with me to the river to fetch some?

HANELE

I will.

BELLA

Me too.

Hershl removes his *tsitsit*, fringed garment, from beneath his shirt and dons a cap popular among Polish gentiles.

HANELE

What are you doing?

HERSHL

We can't let the Germans recognize us as Jews.

HANELE

Oh, you needn't worry. You don't look Jewish.

HERSHL

Even so, we can't be too careful.

Hershl, Hanele and Bella set out on the long walk to the river. On the return journey, they see their first Nazis: several OFFICERS smartly attired. As they step down out of their stylish convertibles, they call out.

NAZI OFFICER

Where's the city council building?

HERSHL

You're right near there. Just make a right turn from here.

NAZI OFFICER

Danke Shoen, Thank you.

EXT. WARSAW - DAY

Jews are rounded up to clean streets and to fight fires at the gas works. They're forced to labor twelve hours a day without interruption and under the worst conditions. When

bakeries finally re-open, people form long lines. There's a commotion in the back of a line Hanele is standing on

POLISH THUG ONE

Hey, you're a damn Jew aren't you?

JEW

What of it?

POLISH THUG TWO

It's on account of you Jews we lost the war!

POLISH THUG ONE

For that, you mustn't have any Polish bread!

The thugs pull him out of line and begin to pummel him, and as he's pulled down to the ground they proceed to kick him mercilessly. An SS OFFICER notices the commotion.

SS OFFICER

What's going on here?

POLISH THUG

(pointing,
triumphantly, at the
not easily
recognizable secular
Jew)

Jude!

S.S. OFFICER

Are you sure? He doesn't look Jewish.

POLISH THUG

Of course, we know who our Jewish neighbors are.

With barbarous fierceness, the SS officer strikes the downed Jew with the butt of his rifle until he's bloodied. Hanele rushes from the scene with fear in her eyes.

INT. HANELE'S HOME - DAY.

HERSHL

Look, we're going to starve here.
I'm going to Grodzisk to buy
provisions from some farmers I know.

HANELE

No, Hershl please don't. Jews are forbidden to travel without permission. If they catch you, they'll kill you. Whatever will I do then?

HERSHL

Don't worry, I'll dress like the gentiles. They won't catch me. Besides, what's the difference whether we die by bullets or by starvation?

Hershl places a knapsack on his shoulders and puts on a cap, such as the gentiles wear, and takes a train to Grodzisk. From peasants that he's acquainted with, he buys some chickens, ducks and geese. They're slaughtered and stuffed into his knapsack. Hershl takes them back to Warsaw.

EXT. STREETS OF WARSAW - DAY

A dozen or so SS officers, armed with rifles suddenly appear and seize every recognizable Jewish male passerby. Those taken are lined up in a row on the cobblestone streets and led away to clean streets or clear away the ruins of bombed buildings.

[MIX WITH HISTORICAL FOOTAGE]

Hershl sees SS approaching; he quickly rushes through the nearest gate while Hanele remains on the street until the danger passes. Hershl goes up several flights in the building when a MAN opens his door.

MAN

What's going on?

HERSHL

There's a seizure. Don't go out. Can I stay here till it's over?

MAN

Sure.

Hershl enters the apartment. They both stand behind the curtains at a window and observe the SS beating Jews and forcing them into a group that's led away to do "convict labor".

When they gather their quota, they march away with them. Hershl goes back into the street and finds Hanele waiting for him.

HERSHL

We can't go on living like this, like scared mice.

HANELE

What else can we do?

HERSHL

We must get away. The sooner we leave Poland, the more certain we'll be to stay alive.

INT. HANELE'S HOME - EVENING

Hershl, Hanele, Bella, Dora, Halinka, Ignac, Uziek and his wife, Hella, are seated at a table.

BELLA

(excitedly)

I heard Hayim's alive and in Byalistok on the Russian side of the Bug River. I must go there.

HERSHL

Hanele and I also think we ought to leave Poland. Perhaps we can go together.

HANELE

Not before we marry, Hershl. Remember?

HERSHL

Yes, of course.

DORA

Children, please stop. You're all in a panic. This isn't the first war we've had to live through and it won't be the last. It'll all pass. You'll see.

HALINKA

Ma, it's different this time. If you read *Mein Kampf* you'll see. Hitler says he'll exterminate all Jews and make every country *Judenrein*.

IGNAC

Hershl's right, Dora. Even if it's not as bad as Halinka says, it's bad enough. We should try to escape. It's our only chance.

BELLA

And I won't take the chance of losing Hayim.

DORA

Since you're all so determined to go, you go first. Halinka and I will stay behind until we get our household affairs in order. Later, wherever you settle, you'll send for us and we'll meet you there. Hanele and Hershl, promise me that when Bella finds Hayim, they too will be married before they travel and live together.

HERSHL

Yes, I promise.

HANELE
 (looking to Bella)
 We'll see to it.

BELLA
 I would never say no to that.

INT. RABBI'S APT. IN BLDG. ACROSS THE STREET - NIGHT

A small wedding ceremony is performed for Hanele and Hershl. There's no electricity and the darkness is broken by the light of a few small tallow candles.

EXT. STREETS OF WARSAW - FIVE IN THE MORNING

The group of six is set to make the one hundred fifty kilometer journey on foot and across the Bug River to the Russian side. The morning is dreary, with a light rain falling. Halinka, walks along with them.

BELLA
 Halinka, what are you doing here?
 You weren't to join us till later.

HALINKA
 I'll accompany you to the outskirts
 of the city. Who knows when we'll
 see each other again?

They approach the great synagogue of Warsaw at Number 3 Tlomacka Street. The immense lion sculptures at the entrance to the synagogue are severely damaged.

The two lions are still upright in the ruins, but they're decapitated and their shattered heads lay mixed with the other debris.

HANELE
 Oh my, I forgot my snow boots. I'll
 need them for the Russian winter.

HALINKA
 If you wait for me, I'll fetch them
 for you.

They wait for their little sister. She runs back with the boots. She's out of breath. They bid farewell and Halinka starts to weep bitterly. As she vanishes from sight, everyone's affected with a dismal mood.

HERSHL (V.O.)
 That was the last time we saw her
 alive. Along with her mother, she
 was murdered in the Majdanek
 concentration camp.

EXT. RAILWAY - DAY

Ignac offers to carry Hanele's satchel. They come upon a train loaded with GERMAN SOLDIERS and NAZI OFFICERS. When the soldiers notice them, they greet them politely and help them on board. The soldiers observe the new arrivals carefully.

NAZI OFFICER

Who are you?

HERSHL

(boldly in German)

Refugees from the other side of the Bug. We're returning home to our parents.

NAZI OFFICER

(pointing to Bella
and Hanele)

And who are you?

HERSHL

These two girls are my sisters.

NAZI OFFICER

And the rest of you?

HERSHL

All going home, like us.

NAZI OFFICER

(addressing Ignac
directly)

Du bist ein Jude ja? You're a Jew,
yes?

Ignac turns deathly pale and is unable to answer.

GERMAN SOLDIERS (SIMULT.)

Jude raus! (get out, Jew!) *Jude raus!*

Trembling, Ignac leaps from the train with Hanele's valise still in tow. Everyone in the group is horrified but Ignac lands on his feet. The Germans laugh loudly, amused at the sight of the "fainthearted" Jew.

The train stops in the town of Malkin, which lies along the Bug. They roam the town looking for Ignac.

EXT. - LATE AFTERNOON - NEXT DAY

Ignac appears. He's exhausted and disheveled and badly bruised.

HERSHL

Ignac, thank God, you made it.

HANELE

What happened to you? Are you alright?

IGNAC

As I approached town, some Germans saw me. They beat me and stole all my possessions. Yours too, Andzia. I'm sorry.

HANELE

It's not your fault. We'll do with whatever we have.

They arrive at the Polish-Russian border. Their documents are being examined. The GERMAN BORDER GUARD isn't conversant in Polish.

He has a POLISH PEASANT fronting for him. Uziek RAZKOZNIK is transporting a brand new bicycle. The peasant tries to take the bike. Uziek pulls it back. A great tussle ensues.

GERMAN GUARD

(lifting his gaze
from the documents
and turning to the
peasant)

What's going on here?

PEASANT

(in exultation)

Das ist ein Jude! This is a Jew!

Without hesitation or loss of composure, Uziek seizes the bicycle with one hand and with the other he waves his identification papers in front of the peasant's eyes and shouts at him in Polish.

UZIEK

Bang yourself on your head you stupid peasant! Is Josef Razkozniak a Jewish name?

He spits at the peasant and grabs the bicycle, as he hurries across to the other side. The German laughs and mockingly ridicules the peasant.

EXT. RAILROAD STATION ON RUSSIAN SIDE OF THE BUG - NIGHT

On the Russian side, they go to the railroad station where thousands of refugees, wait for a train to take them to Bialystok. A freight train arrives filled with people coming from the east. There's yelling and pushing as the crowd rushes towards the freight cars. They hear a familiar voice calling their names.

HAYIM

Where's Bella?

HERSHL

Right here!

BELLA

(shocked to see him)

How'd you find us here?

When they all scramble up onto a freight car, Hayim gives his account of how the miracle of their meeting came about.

HAYIM

(without pausing for
breath)

I couldn't wait for news of you, so
I decided go back to Warsaw. Just as
I arrived from Bialystok and about
to leave the station, I heard your
voices.

EXT. CITY OF BIALYSTOK - DAY

The city is a teeming beehive of tens of thousands of refugees running from every city and town in Poland.

They make inquiry as to where they might find the home of a rabbi, intending to fulfill Dora's wish that Bella and Hayim have a proper wedding ceremony. They find a RABBI, a very old man with poor vision.

INT. RABBIS HOME - DAY

RABBI

I'll gladly do the *mitzvah*, act of
charity, of marrying the young couple
but I can't write a *ketubah*,
certificate of marriage on account
of my poor eyesight and there aren't
any printed ones to be had.

Hersh1 takes out his own *ketubah*, and copies it word for word on a small piece of paper, except that he inserts Hayim and Bella's names and the new date. After carefully reading it back to the rabbi, the rabbi performs the wedding ceremony.

EXT. CITY OF BIALYSTOK - DAY

Soviet LOUDSPEAKERS blare propaganda all over the city.

LOUDSPEAKERS

Stalin has opened the gates of our
beloved fatherland to all workers
and farmers. Those willing to work
can obtain jobs immediately. Troop
trains are ready to transport
registrants free of charge.

HERSHL

What do you think? Shall we try out
this Soviet brand of happiness?

HANELE

We've nothing better to do than to
wait out the war and this'll give
you a chance to finally test those
ideas you have about socialism.

EXT. RAILROAD STATION - MORNING

Hershl and Hanele register and report at the railroad station. They're loaded onto trains and depart for the promised Soviet "paradise." The train stops several times to take on Red Army troops. The soldiers sit down on the floors of the cars and sing communist propaganda songs urging everyone to sing along.

ENGINEER

We'll remain in Polotsk for half an
hour. If you go into town, don't be
late returning or the train will
leave without you.

EXT. TOWN OF POLOTSK - DAY

There's widespread poverty. The small two-story houses are built of rotting wood, and they stand half in ruin. There's a *larok*, small store, outside of which there's a queue of hundreds of people waiting to buy sugar. A POLICEMAN notices Hanele and Hershl approaching. He calls out.

POLICEMAN

*Eto bieszentsi oni dieset let
sakhраниye videlyi!* These are refugees
who haven't seen sugar for years.

He politely leads them to the door of the *larok* and lets them in ahead of the line. When the storekeeper's about to hand them a kilo of sugar, Hershl waves her off.

HERSHL

We don't need that much. Two hundred
grams will do. We can always buy
more later.

Everyone stares at them as though they came from another planet.

EXT. A LARGER TOWN IN WHITE RUSSIA - MIDNIGHT

A military band marches up to the train and play's *L'internationale*. A POLITICAL LACKEY mounts a platform and delivers a long and boring propaganda speech.

POLITICAL LACKEY

Stalin, having delivered you from Polish *Panczizn* (feudalism), invites you to a happy, joyous existence in our golden fatherland to share the good fortune of all our citizens...

They're driven to a school building, lined up and led to a bathhouse. The streets are unpaved with deep puddles pockmarking the roads. Hershl and Hanele continuously slide off long boards laid out on the streets, landing in mud in over their ankles.

INT. BATHHOUSE - DAY

The bath is in an old, neglected wooden building. There's a long bench on which stand a row of wooden pails. Above the bench, along the entire length of the wall, there are two pipes with faucets attached. They stand naked next to a pail, fill it with water, and, hurriedly, soap themselves. Then they rinse off.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

They're asked their names, birth date, and occupation and led to sleep on the bare grounds of the school. The following morning, they're loaded onto trucks and driven to different factories and collective farms. Hershl and Hanele are among the last to be assigned. A truck is sent to take them to a collective.

EXT. (KOLHOZ) COLLECTIVE FARM - DAY

They're handed shovels and put to work digging long ditches. The shovels are heavy and dull. For the first few days, their hands blister. During the next few days, the blisters burst, leaving the palms of their hands, as well as their fingers, covered with raw wounds.

HANELE

I can't ever become accustomed to living here. I'm used to resting after a day's work. Here there's nothing but hard work. All we ever do is collapse from weariness.

EXT. END OF WORKDAY - LATE AFTERNOON

Hanele takes her usual route across a field where cattle graze. She has a bright kerchief on her head. Hershl stands at the edge of the field and sees a bull clawing the earth with his hooves and raising his head repeatedly in Hanele's direction, and then suddenly takes off after her. Hershl races towards her.

HERSHL

Pull the kerchief from your head!
T-h-r-o-w a-w-a-a-a-y your k-e-r-c-h-
i-e-f!

Hershl runs and calls out to her all the while. She finally turns her head and sees the bull. Hershl motions for her to throw the kerchief from her head.

When the bull's only about a meter away, she pulls it off. The bull rushes towards the fluttering piece of cloth and grinds it into the ground.

HANELE

We can't stay here any longer. I
just can't take it.

HERSHL

(comforting Hanele)
Okay. Alright. We'll leave this
kolkhoz. I promise.

Rising early the next morning, so as not to be noticed, they steal past sleeping guards and trek the long way to Liyasne, where they meet their friends Uziek and his wife, Hella. They all decide to leave for the city of Vitebsk.

INT. VITEBSK - BOX FACTORY - DAY

They find a factory, one that manufactures boxes. Hershl makes application with the SUPERVISOR.

HERSHL

I'm familiar with this work. I was
employed in the manufacture of
yashtshikes, boxes in Poland.

SUPERVISOR

We do need extra help. Let's see
what you know.

The supervisor takes him aside to try him out, and seeing that he could do the work, retains him.

SUPERVISOR (CONT'D)

Okay. You're hired.

HERSHL

One thing. We're fugitives from a
kolhoz. I'm afraid we'll be arrested
if found out.

SUPERVISOR

I'll take care of that. I'll write a
letter explaining that constructing
boxes is your trade, and that our
factory is in great need of your

(MORE)

SUPERVISOR (CONT'D)

skills. Don't worry; I'll see to it that they release you from their employ.

Hanele works in the freezing yard. She has to lift heavy boards onto her shoulders and carry them into the factory.

When it snows overnight and the boards freeze together, it's impossible to separate them. Hanele isn't dressed properly. Her hands are frozen and swollen, and she catches a cold with a hacking cough.

HERSHL

(making request of
the supervisor)

Can't you do something to alleviate my wife's torment? She's constantly crying and feeling miserable. Please give her work inside the factory so that she doesn't have to spend her entire day in the cold. I fear she won't last through the winter.

SUPERVISOR

If she knew how to hammer boxes together, I'd let her work inside.

HERSHL

(seizing upon the
supervisor words)

I'll teach her. You'll see, she'll soon be as adept as the others.

Hershl is seen teaching Hanele how to put boxes together. When she positions the nails to drive them into the box, she misses and smashes the hammer against her fingers and lacerates them so badly that they need bandaging.

INT. OPSHESZITZA (GROUP RESIDENCE) - DAY

Hanele and Hershl are quartered in an *opsheszitza*, group residence. Beds are placed right next to one another. All of the other occupants are men, affording Hanele little privacy. When she needs to wash herself, she has to hang a quilt that screens her from the eyes of the men.

INT. OPSHESZITZA - MORNING

At six in the morning, the factory whistle summons everyone to work. They obtain their allotment of bread, four hundred grams, about a pound, mostly water, straw and bran. This loaf is to suffice for an entire day's meals but is scarcely enough for one, after which they draw a cup of *kipitok*, hot water.

EXT. STREETS OF VITEBSK - LATE AFTERNOON

After work, everyone hurries out onto the streets of Vitebsk to rush from store to store in search of something to buy. All the stores are bare. When there's something to be had, a mile long line forms.

Hershl waits on such a line for hours. He strikes up a conversation with another WORKER. They both come up to the SERVER.

HERSHL

What are they selling?

WORKER

You don't ask what they're selling. Here, in Russia, you ask, *tshto dayut?* What's being given?

SERVER

Sorry, we're all out.

WORKER

(with anger in his voice)

The greatest irony of our Soviet hell is this: You sweat and grub for a mere ruble, the reward for your labor, and you pay six to ten times the value of anything you buy. To make a purchase, you stand in long queues for hours and hours. Then, you're told that you're being "given" the item, not that it's being sold.

INT. FACTORY - DAY

HERSHL

(speaking to the supervisor)

Please do something about my wife living in a man's barracks. It's not right. She hasn't any privacy.

SUPERVISOR

We do have a limited number of unoccupied cottages nearby. She and you can take up residence in one of them.

INT. "COTTAGE" - DAY

The cottage is a dilapidated shack. There's no coal for heating. Hershl and Hanele try to use the sawdust and shavings from under the crosscut saw. Since this wood burns quickly, Hershl has to get out of bed every half-hour to gather additional shavings and sawdust. Otherwise, it becomes as cold indoors as outside.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Hershl lights the stove and he and Hanele go to bed. They fall into a deep sleep and oversleep, so that they don't get up in time for work.

INT. COTTAGE - EARLY MORNING

They're awakened by a loud clatter at the door and when they finally open their eyes, the supervisor and several workmen are standing beside them.

SUPERVISOR

Are you alright?

HERSHL

(groggy and scarcely awake),
Yeah, I think so . . .

HANELE

(just opening her
eyes)
...God...

SUPERVISOR

When you didn't show up for work, we were sure you froze to death. I'm sorry, to have broken in this way.

It takes them many hours and drinking glass after glass of hot *kipitok* to come to.

INT. COTTAGE - MORNING

Bella and Hayim, who stayed behind in Bialystok, arrive in Vitebsk and sleep overnight in Hanele and Hershl's cold cottage. Everyone, including Uziek and Hella, are discussing the difficulties they face in Vitebsk.

BELLA

I thought it was bad in Bialystok but here it's impossible.

HERSHL

We tried to warn you when we wrote to you, but you arrived before getting our letter.

HAYIM

How about coming back to Bialystok with us?

HANELE

Yes. I want to leave especially since we'll all be together. I don't want to stay here one more day.

HELLA

We can't stay all by ourselves.
You're our only friends here.

UZIEK

If you go, we go too. But how do we
leave? They'll arrest us.

HERSHL

We pack our things tonight and first
thing tomorrow morning, we tell the
supervisor we're seeing Bella and
Hayim off to the train station.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - WINTER - 1940 - EARLY MORNING

MONTAGE

- 1) The group waits at the train station a very long time, fearful of being caught by the NKVD.
- 2) A Train pulls in destined for Minsk, the capital of White Russia.
- 3) They climb on board.
- 4) In Minsk they see thousands of refugees at the train station intermingled with soldiers streaming to and from the Finnish front.
- 5) They haven't any place to stay as snowstorms rage outdoors.
- 6) The police mercilessly turn them out into the street.
- 7) They are ill - dressed and the biting winds penetrate to their bones.

INT. - RAILROAD CARS IN RAILROAD LOT - NIGHT

When they have nowhere to sleep, they go to the railroad lot. They sneak into a car and spend the night on the seat of a berth.

HERSHL (V.O.)

There was considerable risk connected
with sleeping on those trains. The
local thieves made it a practice to
rob refugees of what little they
still possessed.

A REFUGEE, while still asleep, senses that his coat is being pulled away. He holds on to it with all his might and everyone's awakened by a horrific scream. When they run down from their berth, they see the THIEF running out of the car carrying the sleeve of a coat in his hand.

HERSHL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

We knew something drastic would have to be done or we would all perish from cold and hunger. We decided to lie down along the streetcar tracks and prevent the trams from running even if this would cost us our lives. This was when we were arrested.

INT. JAIL - NIGHT

HERSHL (V.O.)

Upon arrival, thirty-five of us were packed into each cell, like chickens in a crate. There was but one cot and no likelihood of sleep. There was scarcely room to sit on the floor. Every twelve hours six men, chosen by lot, took turns sitting on the cot.

INT. JAIL - DAY

Once a day, the prisoners are taken outdoors for a ten-minute walk. They are marched around a steel tower in the prison yard. Atop the tower, a prison guard holds a machine gun, aimed directly at them.

INT. JAIL - MORNING

At nine o'clock, they're given a hunk of bread and a cup of black, bitter coffee brewed entirely of chicory.

INT. JAIL - NIGHT

Everyone's crowded together on the floor, hands around their knees, their heads resting upon them in insufferably cold temperatures. The blood cannot circulate and everyone experiences extremely painful stabbing in the soles of their feet.

HERSHL (V.O.)

If anyone tried to get to his feet, he created a disturbance. The resulting commotion awakened everyone. If we managed some sleep, it was only prior to midnight for there was none to be had thereafter.

Promptly at midnight, all hell breaks loose. The cell door opens and a GUARD begins reading off a list of initials.

GUARD

Na bukva "A"! Letter A!
(meaning 'Altman')

Hersh1 steps outside and lines up next to the cell door.

GUARD (CONT'D)
 Na bukva "B"! Letter "B"!
 (meaning BERNSTEIN)

Bernstein fails to respond fast enough and several guards rush in beating him with iron rods and drag him into line. They're led through the long prison corridors into the yard. "Black crows" await them, and take them for a fifteen to twenty-minute ride to the headquarters of the NKVD.

CUT TO:

INT. NKVD OFFICES - NIGHT

They're escorted up a staircase and then taken separately into a small room that contains a desk and two chairs. An NKVD AGENT sits in one chair and Hersh1 is told to take the seat opposite him. Then the interrogation begins.

NKVD AGENT

Who were your grandfathers?

HERSHL

Lev Silbermints and Yitzhak Altman

NKVD AGENT

What were their occupations?

HERSHL

Lev was a manufacturer of silk goods and Yitzhak, a tailor of women's hosiery.

NKVD AGENT

Like all Jews, wealthy capitalists.

HERSHL

No. Most Jews in Poland are not well off.

NKVD AGENT

Oh. And your father, what does he do?

HERSHL

He's a milliner in Belgium.

NKVD AGENT

So, I'm right, a long line of Jewish marketeers.

HERSHL (V.O.)

The examiner badgered me until the grey of dawn. By the time I was back in my prison cell our daily routine commenced. I didn't dare take a nap for sleeping during the day was strictly forbidden.

MONTAGE - SAME THING EVERY NIGHT

- 1) The interrogator looks at the report he'd written the night before and has Hershl relate the story of his life again from A to Z.
- 2) Occasionally, he makes a note in his papers.
- 3) Hershl begins to weigh and measure every word he utters.
- 4) On succeeding nights, Hershl recites his story quickly and mechanically.

NKVD AGENT

(the interrogator breaks into a smile)
Enough, I've heard exactly the same thing from you day in and day out.
(in a suddenly familiar fashion)
How are you being treated in prison?

HERSHL

You know better than I do the answer to that question. Instead, why don't you tell me why I'm being tormented like this? What terrible crime have I committed that warrants my incarceration? While you're at it, perhaps you can tell me as to the whereabouts of my wife, my sister-in-law and her husband. How come he's not in my cell?

NKVD AGENT

(laughing out loud)
Your brother-in-law and his wife aren't as stubborn as you. They signed up for work and were sent to a factory in Orsha where they're working and living happily like all the rest of our citizens. If you sign a paper that you're willing to return to work in Vitebsk, you and your wife will be released as well.

HERSHL

Absolutely not. I refuse to work in Vitebsk under those terrible conditions.

NKVD AGENT

If that's your position, you've no one to blame but yourself. Nor have you cause to complain. We've no facilities for tramps and parasites such as you.

START FLASHBACK

EXT. CLUB HOUSE OF THE DEAF MUTES - DAY

When the men leave the WOMEN outside and enter the clubhouse, the women see dozens of militiamen surround the building. They take fright. They attempt to enter the club but the MILITIA GUARDS block their way.

HANELE

(pleading)

Let us through to our husbands.

GUARD

We have orders not to let anyone pass.

EXT. CLUBHOUSE - NIGHTFALL

No one comes out. All the lights in the building are extinguished. Some of the women go up to the door and knock. All is silent. They go to the police station to inquire as to their husbands' fate.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

BELLA, HANELE, HELLA (SIMULT.)

Where have you taken our husbands?
Where are they?

POLICE OFFICER 1

(cold bloodedly)

They've been sent to prison for
roaming the streets without passports.
If you don't leave the city
immediately, you'll be arrested too.

The women begin to wail loudly.

HANELE

No. We'll not leave without our
husbands!

BELLA

If you release our husbands, we
promise, we'll leave Minsk.

POLICE OFFICER 2

(feeling sorry for
the women and turning
to the first officer)

YURI, bring some tea and butter rolls
(turning to the women)

ladies, I invite you to stay out of
the cold for a while. Have something
to eat. Your husbands will probably
be released shortly. But you can't

(MORE)

POLICE OFFICER 2 (CONT'D)
 defy Soviet law. When assigned work,
 you can't quit on your own.

INT. POLICE STATION - NEXT MORNING

Hayim and Uziek arrive at the police station with railroad tickets. They're going to Orsha to work.

HANELE
 Why were you released and not Hershl?

HAYIM
 We weren't getting anywhere with the Russians, so we agreed to go to work wherever they'd send us.

UZIEK
 Come with us until Hershl's released.

HANELE
 No. If I leave now, I'll never see Hershl again.

Hayim and Uziek take their leave as NKVD officers arrive and arrest Hanele and several of the other women.

INT. PRISON CELL - SEVERAL DAYS LATER - NIGHT

Hanele is stricken with terrible abdominal pains. She begins to moan and call for help. The GUARD, doubting that there is anything seriously wrong, yells into her cell.

GUARD
 If you don't stop your complaining,
 you'll be thrown into the dungeon
 and there you'll remain, like a dog.

The pain doesn't subside. She remains all night long with parched lips, screaming in agony.

INT. PRISON CELL - NEXT MORNING

The prisoners are hurried into the washroom. Hanele can't stand up. She's forcibly removed from the cell and shoved into the washroom.

The prisoners are counted. The guard sees someone missing. He goes into the washroom and finds Hanele lying on the floor lying in a pool of blood. He sends for the prison NURSE.

NURSE
 Hurry! Hurry! She's dying!

INT. PRISON HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Hanele regains consciousness. She's in a hospital and there's a DOCTOR at her bedside.

DOCTOR

You had a miscarriage. You've lost a great deal of blood. We had to operate and give you multiple transfusions to keep you alive. I've prescribed a nutrient rich diet for you. You won't have much of an appetite for you're anemic but you must force yourself to eat.

Hanele sees an ARMED MILITIAMAN sitting beside her bed observing her every move. There are other women there but none of them are being guarded like criminals.

She breaks into tears bemoaning her unhappy fate. She's being provided nutritious food but finds herself unable to eat.

MILITIAMAN

(shouting at her)

Eat what you've been prescribed. If you don't, we'll return you to prison weak as you are. There you won't be catered to with such bourgeois fare.

She remains in hospital for a week but without much improvement.

INT. HANELE'S PRISON CELL - DAY

Two GUARDS lead Hanele to the prison office anteroom.

GUARD 1

Wait here until you're called.

HANELE

What am I waiting for?

GUARD 2

Would you like to see your husband?

HANELE

I don't believe you. You're all of you liars.

They burst out laughing at her words.

END FLASHBACK

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

On the last night of interrogation, Hersh1 enters the NKVD's office and is politely directed to his seat.

NKVD AGENT

Do you wish to see your wife?

HERSHL
 (doubting his sincerity).
 Of course. That's my fondest wish.

NKVD AGENT
 You may see her on condition that
 you sign a statement that you'll
 give up being a parasite and return
 to work.

HERSHL
 I've worked all my life. I've never
 been a parasite. Under no circumstance
 will I return to work under the same
 or similar conditions.

A lengthy pause follows.

NKVD AGENT
 (with uncertainty,
 while measuring his
 words)
 If we find work for you here in the
 city, will you and your wife be
 willing to work?

HERSHL
 If conditions are even halfway decent,
 we'd be happy to.

The NKVD agent thumbs silently through his report for some
 time. Finally, he asks:

NKVD AGENT
 How old were you when you first
 learned to be a tailor?

HERSHL
 Thirteen.

NKVD AGENT
 Have you learned anything about the
 trade since then?

HERSHL
 Not much.

NKVD AGENT
 Can you operate a sewing machine?

HERSHL
 Yes.

NKVD AGENT
 What would you say to being employed
 in a *Shvayni* Zavod, tailoring factory,
 here in the city of Minsk?
 (MORE)

NKVD AGENT (CONT'D)

The plant produces greatcoats for the Red Army. Would that be all right?

HERSHL

Certainly.

The interrogator slides a sheet of paper across the desk for Hersh1 to sign. He motions for the military attendant to take Hersh1 back to prison. As Hersh1 reaches the door. . .

NKVD AGENT

You'll hear from me soon.

INT. JAIL CELL - DAYLIGHT

HERSHL (V.O.)

I was filled with a confusion of feelings, a mixture of doubt and hope. The hours dragged on and I wondered whether it was true that I would be released, that I'd soon be seeing my Hanele of whom I hadn't heard anything for over a month. Or were they having sport with me deliberately giving me false hope?

The cell door is unlocked and Hersh1 hurries out to the washroom. Half an hour later, the lock is turned again. Breakfast is served and there's no sign of the interrogator's promise being fulfilled. The cell door is unlocked once more and the GUARD calls Hersh1's initials.

GUARD

Na bukva 'A'!

HERSHL

Altman!

GUARD

Bieri barakhla y wystupai, Take your things and step outside.

He's led through the long prison corridors toward the NKVD office. When the office door opens, Hersh1 sees Hanele flanked by two prison guards. Her face is waxen and her cheeks appear swollen. Hersh1 rushes over, hugs her and covers her with kisses.

INT. MILITARY OVERCOAT FACTORY - DAY

HERSHL (V.O.).

We slept in an immense dormitory barracks. Here, men and women had separate accommodations. We didn't see much of each other. The factory operated on three shifts and Hanele
(MORE)

HERSHL (V.O.). (CONT'D)
 never worked the same shift I did.
 We met only during our days off,
Vikhodnoya.

The NKVD keeps watch on everyone in the barracks and takes note of when they go to work or return.

INT. BARRACKS - DAY

Hersh1 and Hanele receive a letter from Hayim and Bella.

HANELE
 What does the letter say? How come
 it comes from Kowel?

HERSHL
 They heard rumors that in the city
 of Kiev permits are being issued to
 those wishing to return to the
 occupied western areas. They managed
 to get to the Polish city of Kowel
 and they say we'd better hurry there
 lest it be too late. Hanele, we need
 to plan an escape again.

EXT. RAILROAD STATION - DAY

Hersh1 rushes over to the railroad station to purchase tickets to Kiev, the Ukrainian capital.

TICKET AGENT
 Show me your komandarovka, special
 permission to travel from one city
 to another.

HERSHL
 I haven't got one.

TICKET AGENT
 Too bad then. I can't sell you any.

Hersh1 takes out a couple of rubles and shows it to him.

HERSHL
 Is this just as good?

TICKET AGENT
 Come with me.

The porter goes through a back door into the ticket booth and gives Hersh1 tickets good for passage one week from the date of purchase.

EXT. BARRACKS - NEXT DAY

Hersh1 packs their things in a valise he'd been using to carry soiled clothes to be washed. As he carries the valise

out of the barracks, an NKVD agent stops him. He motions for Hershl to open it. As Hershl moves to open it, he hesitates for a moment and the NKVD agent suddenly asks -

NKVD
What's inside?

HERSHL
(somewhat relieved
and swiftly collecting
his thoughts)
You know what's inside, dirty laundry.

Fortunately, he doesn't ask to inspect its contents.

NKVD
Okay. Go ahead. I don't need to see that.

Hershl hurries on to the railroad station where he rents a locker. Surreptitiously, over several days, Hershl and Hanele steal other things out of the barracks and past the NKVD, hiding them under his and Hanele's outer clothing.

On the day of departure, Hershl and Hanele rise a little earlier than usual.

NKVD (CONT'D)
You're a bit early this morning aren't you?

HERSHL
Yes, we need to catch up on our work from the other day.

NKVD
Have a good day.

HERSHL/HANELE (SIMULT.)
Thank you. You too.

They walk to the railroad station and arrive in Kiev as planned.

EXT. RAILROAD STATION - KIEV - DAY

At the railroad station in Kiev, thousands of refugees are standing on line. They get on line and obtain travel permits to depart from Kiev to Kowel.

EXT. KOWEL - DAY

The black market provides everything that anyone could want. It's a cornucopia of things to eat and the Russians are buying in quantity, a new experience for them.

HERSHL (V.O.)

These bargains in smuggled goods gave rise to an exaggerated conception of the wonders of life in capitalist countries. The Soviet authorities regarded this phenomenon as dangerous. Realizing that their citizens were being carried away by these stories from across the border, they decided to eliminate the threat.

Placards on the walls of the city direct all refugees to register during the course of the next three days. Poles are permitted to return to live under German occupation but Jews are barred and immediately referred to the Soviet officials for processing, bound for the Soviet Union.

HERSHL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Uziek and his wife managed to get back to Warsaw. In both appearance and name they seemed typically Polish. Unknown to us all, this proved, in the end, to be a fatal choice. The rest of us ignored the registration thinking it would be better to wait and see the outcome of this new edict. We rented a small storefront, and set up housekeeping.

The owner of the apartment has a DAUGHTER who's employed as a secretary in the offices of the occupying Russian and German powers. The girl's friendly to them and, from time to time, brings news of official plans affecting refugees who registered but aren't in a hurry to apply for Russian passports.

INT. STORE FRONT APT. - LATE AFTERNOON

LANDLORD'S DAUGHTER

A decree was issued today directing all refugees who haven't yet obtained Russian passports to be forcibly expelled this evening. Don't spend the night in your apartment for the city's to be cleared of refugees.

HAYIM

No one knows we're here.

BELLA

They'll not know to look for us.

HERSHL

Still, we should spend the night elsewhere.

HANELE

We could stay out back?

They bed down on the grass under the trees. They're unable to shut their eyes, and strain to hear any indication of impending trouble. First, they hear a truck approaching. Then the pounding of rifle stocks against the closed shutters. The sound of furious SOVIET SOLDIERS reaches their ears:

SOVIET SOLDIERS

*Atvariti, miznayim je zdies biejentzy
jewiot! Open! We know refugees live
here!*

After shouting several times and banging liberally on the doors, they're convinced that there's no one inside. The truck starts up again and its sound gradually dissipates into the night.

EXT. STORE FRONT - NEXT MORNING

When they emerge from their hiding place, they're greeted with the silence of a burial ground. Occasionally, a Red Army soldier passes by, his clumsy boots echoing dully in the emptiness. They slip back into their apartment and lock themselves in.

HANELE

What do we do now?

HERSHL

We can't stay here, that's for sure.

HAYIM

Sooner or later, we'll be caught.

HERSHL

If we go out in daylight, we'll most certainly be recognized. I don't think we have any alternative but to surrender. Whatever happens, it'll be easier to endure together with the other refugees.

They despondently pack their belongings, open the door to the little store as wide as they could, and wait for someone to notice them. THREE SOVIET ARMY OFFICERS come by. Hersh1 motions to them and calls them in.

HERSHL (CONT'D)

We heard that all the refugees were taken away. The soldiers must have accidentally missed us.

Two of the soldiers immediately take up guard over them. The third calls for a truck to take them away to the railroad yards outside the city limits where long trains of freight cars stand waiting.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Forty people, baggage and all, are stuffed into each of the freight cars. The train drags on slowly. They read the names of the stations along the way and realize they're going farther and farther north.

HANELE

Why won't they tell us where they're taking us?

HERSHL

Looks like we're en route to the white bears.

BELLA

Oh my God, No!

EXT. ARRIVAL IN ASINO - THREE WEEKS LATER - NIGHT

They're ordered to sit down and wait for a boat of transport. Night falls, damp and chilly. They huddle together to keep warm. Suddenly, clouds of mosquitoes attack. They run from spot to spot and look like black ghosts dancing in the gloomy night.

EXT. NEXT MORNING

In the morning, their faces are so puffed up, their eyes can scarcely be seen. The boat that's to take them finally arrives. It's an immense barge, black and dirty. As many as could fit are packed in.

EXT. TOWN OF ZIRANSK, NOVOSIBIRSK - SEVERAL HOURS LATER

The Soviet slave traders are waiting for them. They start to sort the newly arrived human merchandise for forced labor. Since Hayim is a chauffeur-mechanic, he's called to step away from the group and stand to one side.

HAYIM

Wait. We're together. We're family.

BELLA

Please, don't separate us!

They're pushed aside by the SOVIET GUARDS.

SOVIET GUARD 1

(with dripping sarcasm)

We don't give a shit about families.
Russia is your family now.
Your mother, father, sister, and
brother.

SOVIET GUARD 2

We'll let wives accompany their
husbands, but no one else.

They're taken to a destination unknown. The others are directed to load their things onto waiting horse-drawn peasant wagons.

They're ordered to march behind two armed soldiers and in front of two that bring up the rear...urged on and hit from time to time with rifle stocks. It begins to snow.

HERSHL (V.O.)

This wasn't the kind of snow we were accustomed to seeing in Poland, neat, sparkling crystals that looked like many variegated stars. What fell from the skies here were irregularly formed "sheets" that soon transformed the ground into puddles of mud which were so sticky that walking became increasingly difficult.

In front of Hersh1 and Hanele there's a PROFESSOR from the University of Krakow, an elderly gentleman who reaches the limits of his strength. He's about to topple over, so they each takes hold of one of his arms to hold him up to walk. The poor man can no longer stand and has to stop.

HERSHL (CONT'D)

You mustn't give up!

HANELE

Come on professor, keep on walking.
You can do it.

PROFESSOR

I'm sorry. I just can't.

They fall behind the other marchers and the rear guards yell and curse at them in the coarsest Russian possible. The guards angrily pull the old man from them and he falls full length into the mud. The guards order them to lift him up and get him to the horse and wagon that comes up from behind.

EXT. BRAND NEW VILLAGE SUKHOYLAG - ONE HOUR LATER

Alongside a wide road, are new, but still unoccupied, little shacks. Six to eight people are assigned to each shack, which consists of a single large room that's completely bare.

There's no sign of furniture anywhere, no bed, no table, not even a bench to sit on. They complain to the COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV.

HERSHL

How do we sleep? Where do we sit?
How are we expected to live like
this?

By way of reply, he shows them a pile of boards and another pile of logs lying outdoors.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

We'll provide you with tools and give you three days to settle in before putting you to work.

Hershl cuts some of the boards and puts a bed together. He builds a table and two long benches to put alongside it. When the others see it, they ask Hershl to make beds for them as well. They go out to where the tall, wild grass grows and gather it up and lay it over the boards of their new beds.

INT. DINING HALL - PROKHARUVKA

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

Your work will be to cut down trees. The less you produce the less bread you'll receive. The lazy won't get to eat at all. Forget where you came from. This will be your city from now on.

Hershl stands up, raises his hand and begins to speak. Hanele tries to stop him but it's too late.

HERSHL

Comrade *natchalnik*, you're telling us to forget our homes and never think of them again? How can we forget? The cruel war tore us from our homes. We were dragged off to distant, frigid Siberia, suffering inhumane conditions all along the way. We're impoverished and ill clothed, and now we're being forced to do slave labor, to do work that none of us ever learned to do. What sins have we committed to deserve this?

Everyone assembled breaks into applause. Suddenly frightened and stunned by his own words, Hershl sits down.

HANELE

(reprimanding in a half whisper, with fear in her voice)

You've gone too far. The Commissar could send you so far away no one will know what's become of you.

When the crowd settles down, the Commissar bangs his fist angrily on the table. His face turns red with rage.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

We don't tolerate this kind of thing!
(MORE)

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV (CONT'D)

We've a place for counter-revolutionaries who preach parasitism. You can forget about our ever letting you return to your accursed Poland!

Silence reigns in the hall. A deep depression falls on everyone.

EXT. PROKHARUVKA SQUARE - EARLY MORNING

The sirens blare in Prokharuvka. Everyone hurries to the square. A convoy of several armed soldiers conducts them to a forest several kilometers away to show them how to fell trees.

INT. SHACK - DAY

HERSHL (V.O.)

Despite our returning home weary from a full day's work, we were obliged to go out into the woods after dark and gather firewood. We had to amass enough for the hard winter to come. Our ration of black bread wasn't enough for even a single meal. Yet we greedily consumed all of it first thing in the morning in a vain attempt to still the incessant gnawing hunger that ate at our insides.

Hershl and Hanele arise and are about to leave for work, they look out the window and see that they're buried in snow. They open the door but can't see the sky. They can't clear an opening. When they try to light a fire in the stove, they're nearly asphyxiated.

HANELE

Put it out! Put it out! I can't breathe.

The chimney is filled with fallen snow and the smoke backs up into the house. Hershl throws snow on the fire putting it out. They keep the door open to let the fumes out but this causes them to suffer from the freezing cold. After two days, some workers dig a path to their house and free them.

EXT. SPRING IN SIBERIA - MAY

The snow begins to melt. The snow cover is transformed into deep mud holes. These are accompanied by the appearance of billions of mosquitoes, arriving in great clouds devouring everyone in the way.

HERSHL (V.O.)

During the winter we managed to keep our deteriorating shoes bound together and bandaged. The ground and snow were too frozen to leak into our shoes. Now slogging through the mire made our shoes heavy with moisture, adding to our misery.

A tremendous horsefly gets through to Hersh's left foot and bites him on the instep. Two days later, after tramping in the mud, his foot is so swollen he can't go to work.

INT. OFFICE OF THE COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV - MORNING

HERSHL

See here I was bitten by a horsefly and my foot's so swollen, I can't possibly go to work.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

(examining his foot)

Looks like you'll be out of commission for about three days. I'm sending you to the camp DOCTOR and have him attend to your foot.

INT. DISPENSARY - DAY

The doctor lances the wound and presses out some matter. He applies a clean bandage.

DOCTOR

Stay in bed three days. Then come back and see me.

INT. OFFICE OF THE COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV - THREE DAYS LATER

DOCTOR

You ought to release *Grisha*, Hersh, for several more days. The wound is far from healed.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

(taking a look at the wound and then at Hersh)

Nitshevo, it's nothing, you can work.

DOCTOR

If you send him back too soon, for sure it will worsen.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

Nah, it's no problem, he can work.

DOCTOR

At least, give him work that won't aggravate his condition.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

(turning to Hersh)l

Alright, I'll make you a *diesatnik*, leader of ten, of one of the brigades.

He hands Hersh)l a notebook, a pencil, a chisel, a hammer, and a ruler.

EXT. WOODED FIELD - DAY

When the workers finish for the day and arrange the logs in neat piles, Hersh)l measures them and makes entries in his notebook recording the length and breadth of both ends of each pile.

The Commissar rides by on his horse. He dismounts, ties the reins to a tree, and calls out to Hersh)l.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

Kak diela? How's it going?

HERSH)l

Nitshevo. All right.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

Do you understand your responsibilities?

HERSH)l

Sure.

As they walk along conversing, they move some distance away from where the brigade is working. The Commissar sits down on the ground, and bids Hersh)l to sit down and begins to question him.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

Where are you from?

HERSH)l

Warsaw, Poland.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

What's life like for people in Poland?

HERSH)l

In Poland a worker is free to choose his employment and employer. He can purchase whatever he wants. Bread isn't rationed. Those with sufficient funds can purchase food, clothing, furniture, all sorts of things.

COMMISSAR KHATYEVYOV

Ye znaiu szeshti gramatni, I know you're an educated man. I realized it from the very first day you arrived. I could've punished you severely, but I admire your courage. That's why I assigned you less strenuous work. But what you're saying now is beyond belief, like a tale from the Arabian Nights. Either you've just invented it or you're lying.

HERSHL

Listen to me, Comrade Khatyeyov. Poland isn't the greatest country in the world, but I tell you, compared to living conditions here, a dog lives better there than does a Commissar in the Soviet Union.

The Commissar rises, smiling, and, as if talking to himself, he murmurs:

COMMISSAR KHATYEVYOV

Tu vriash, Grisha, tu vriash... You're lying, Grisha, You're lying.

EXT. OUTSIDE COMMISSAR KHATYEVYOV'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Four NKVD OFFICERS in full-dress uniform, with gold braids on the epaulets of their overcoats, sit waiting on their horses. Everyone in the village returns.

COMMISSAR KHATYEVYOV

Everyone, Line up and face the officers!

The Commissar counts the workers to see that no one's missing.

HERSHL (V.O.)

I felt something terrible was about to happen. I thought that I surely brought trouble upon myself with my big mouth.

Still sitting on his horse, one of the NKVD officers reads from a list of names and orders each person whose names are called to step out. When he calls six names, the riders pair off, two in front and two behind those selected and march them off in the direction of Ziransk.

COMMISSAR KHATYEVYOV

(warning the refugees)

The same thing will happen to you if you incite others or if you're dishonest in your work.

HERSHL (V.O.)

If they were being punished for incitement, I should have been the first to be taken away. Why did they pass me by?

EXT. FORESTRY FIELD - MIDDAY

The Commissar comes riding by to check on the workers. Hersh1 tries to keep from looking in his direction and pretends not to see him. The Commissar calls out to him.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

Grisha, kak diela? Grisha, how's it going?

HERSHL

V'so fpoaradkie. Everything's in order.

The Commissar approaches and smiles as though nothing happened. He sees the fright in Hersh1's face.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

I know you're alarmed over yesterday. Had I stuck to the letter of the law, I would have sent you to prison too. I warn you though, don't speak so freely on forbidden subjects.

EXT. END OF THE WINTER SEASON - DAY

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

All those who know how to swim, line up here. You'll ride the rafts and release the logs that jam at the edges of the stream.

Hersh1 lines up with the swimmers. Eight workers, including Hersh1, set out to perform the dangerous *eplav*, rafting labor.

EXT. RAFTING DOWN RIVER - DAY

The raft crashes against the bank and falls apart. The force of the crash catapults them into the water. The stream carries one man further away. Hersh1 jumps into the water and helps the drowning man take hold of a log. He places the other end of the log under his arm and swims to shore.

EXT. SIBERIAN TAIGA - NEXT MORNING

They hurriedly construct another makeshift raft. As they glide down river, a torrential downpour begins. They make their way to the river's edge and go deep into the *taiga*.

Their teeth chatter from the cold and wetness. Tiny mosquitoes attack and devour their faces, which are soon so swollen around the eyes that they can't see where they are.

EXT. SIBERIAN TAIGA - NIGHT

They set up camp in the pouring rain and try to go to sleep. Hersh1 suddenly finds himself shaking and shivering, simultaneously hot and cold. All through the night, he's feverish and trembling, and tortured by dreadful nightmares.

EXT. SIBERIAN TAIGA - DAYBREAK

LOGGER 1
(shaking Hersh1)
Get up! It's no longer raining!

Hersh1 opens his eyes but has no idea where he is or what's happening to him. They shake him some more.

HERSHL
I'm sick or something. I can't get up.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

A DOCTOR comes to examine him.

HERSHL
What's wrong with me?

DOCTOR
You had a severe attack of malaria.
I've given you shots of *acriquinine*.

After remaining in hospital two more days, he's taken back to camp Sukhoylag

EXT. SUKHOYLAG - MORNING

Hersh1's assigned to a different brigade and is again cutting down trees. They cross a river in two large boats, which are secured at the riverbank until it's time to return home.

EXT. A RAINY AUTUMN DAY IN SUKHOYLAG - DAY

The brigade marches down to the water's edge to take the boats to the other side of the river. The boats are seesawing out in the middle of the river. The Commissar comes galloping on his horse.

COMMISSAR KHATYEV
Whoever swims out and brings the boats back to shore will be rewarded with an easier assignment and an extra ration of bread.

One of the MEN throws off his clothes, jumps into the water and begins swimming at a fast pace. At about halfway, he turns back and swims at an even faster clip back to shore. The cold and stinging ice water is more than he can stand.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV (CONT'D)

Anyone else want to try?

HERSHL

(to a fellow worker)

He went halfway and back. He could have gone the whole way.

Hershl removes his clothes and jumps into the river. He's soon beside one of the boats. He takes hold of it with both hands and gets in. The Commissar and workers raise their voices in a hurrah! Grasping the oars, Hershl rows to the other boat, ties it to the one he's in, and brings them in.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

From now on, it'll be your responsibility to take the men to work and bring them back. In the meanwhile, you can spend the day, waiting for them.

A lasting snow begins to fall and the accompanying frost paints magnificent white leaves and flowers on the tiny windows of their cabins. The streams begin to freeze as well and soon their surfaces are covered with a thick firm glaze.

INT. COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV'S OFFICE - MORNING

HERSHL

The river's frozen and the boats are immovable. The workers can now walk across the river. I'm reporting for a new assignment.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

(giving it some thought)

Do you know how to harness a horse?

HERSHL

Yes.

The Commissar walks Hershl to the stable where he points out an emaciated little horse.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV

Grisha, take the horse outside.

Hershl leads the horse to an immense sleigh. A very large barrel is fastened to the sleigh. In the center of its belly is a sizable opening large enough to admit a pail. When the horse is harnessed, the Commissar shows Hershl how to drive the sleigh to the well, fetch the water, and fill the barrel.

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV (CONT'D)

You are now the *vodovos*, water carrier, and you'll be responsible for supplying water to the bakery,
(MORE)

COMMISSAR KHATYEYOV (CONT'D)

the dining hall and the *banya*, bath. The barrel holds about a hundred pailfuls and you'll have to draw them from the well five or six times a day and empty it as many times to serve the community. That's twelve hundred people.

As Hershl fills the barrel and dispenses the water, he can't avoid spilling some on himself. After a while, Hershl's wearing so much frozen "armor" that he can scarcely walk or bend over. When he comes home, Hanele pulls off his rigid trousers and stands them up in a basin where they stand at attention.

INT. SUKHOYLAG - NIGHT

Hanele is pregnant again. On a bitter cold night in mid-winter, her labor pains begin. Hershl runs to fetch a MIDWIFE.

MIDWIFE

You should take your wife to the hospital in Prakhurovka, it's two kilometers from here.

INT. MAKESHIFT HOSPITAL - PRAHUROVKA - NIGHT

The makeshift hospital is but a single room, which contains three beds in total. It is devoid of instruments and medicine. Hanele is in hospital for three days. She lies screaming in excruciating pain. Neither the DOCTOR nor the midwife is able to help.

DOCTOR

Your wife may need surgery but we haven't the facilities with which to perform an operation. It would be best if we take her to the regional hospital in Ziransk. To get there, we'll have to go fifty kilometers by sleigh.

MIDWIFE

With this fearfully cold weather, there's a distinct possibility the journey may never be completed.

HERSHL

There's no choice. We have to chance it.

A horse is harnessed to the sleigh. A quilt is tied around Hanele to keep the cold from penetrating her body and fat applied to her face to keep it from freezing.

Hershl gets on intending to drive. Hanele is in great pain and screams with every upsurge of labor pangs.

DOCTOR

No, no. You can't come along. The heavier the sleigh, the harder it'll be for the horse to pull it.

INT. HOSPITAL IN ZIRANSK - NIGHT

The RESIDENT PHYSICIAN examines Hanele as she continues to writhe with pain.

RESIDENT PHYSICIAN

A Caesarian section won't be necessary. I anticipate an uncomplicated delivery in about two hours.

The midwife and doctor go out into the corridor to catch a nap. Awakened by Hanele's screaming, they find the baby with its umbilical cord wound around its throat. As they lift the child, it exhales its last breath. Hanele sees the lifeless child and her screams of pain turn into cries of horror.

INT. SUKHOYLAG - DAY

After her return, she cries incessantly.

HANELE

(while weeping)

The baby was so slender and beautiful with long lashes and a full head of hair.

Hershl is moved to tears as he cradles Hanele in his arms.

EXT. FIELD - LATE AFTERNOON

HANELE

Why don't I go in the woods and pick berries early so that when it's time to go home, we can leave right away rather than first begin to gather them?

HERSHL

Okay, but don't wander off too far.

The workday over, Hershl goes into the woods to look for Hanele. He can't find her. He asks some WORKERS who are still gathering berries whether they had seen his wife.

WORKER 1

No, we haven't seen her.

WORKER 2

Some people left work earlier. She must have gone with them.

Hershl hurries into the barracks and washroom. Hanele is nowhere to be found. He informs the Commissar. They saddle up a couple of horses and set off in two different directions. Hershl rides slowly, going deep into the forest all the while calling out her name. The echo of his own voice is all he hears.

HERSHL (V.O.)

I greatly feared the coming night,
for these woods were populated with
bear and other wild animals. I hoped
the Commissar found Hanele.

Hershl gives his horse a slap and gallops back towards the village.

HERSHL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

My fears intensified when I saw that
he also returned without her.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Hanele hears a rustling in the brush behind her and suddenly takes fright. She runs and trips on the roots and underbrush lacerating her feet. She removes her sandals to clear the blood from her feet. Not knowing where to go she climbs up on the top of a tree stump. She stands and shivers with cold and fear.

CUT TO:

Hershl turns off the path on which he encountered the Commissar and gallops down a different narrow trail into the depths of the woods. Every so often he stops and calls for Hanele. Receiving no response, he rides another half kilometer and calls out once more. He hears her very faint desperate cry.

HERSHL

(with all his strength)
Stay where you are and wait till I
get to you.

He gallops faster and sees her standing on the tree stump. The area around the stump is overgrown with wild thorns, making it impossible to ride up closer. Hershl tethers the horse to a tree and runs to her. Hershl carries her on his back until they come to the nearby path. When they arrive, everyone is happy to see them return.

INT. BARRACKS - EVENING

HERSHL

(addressing Hanele)
Now might be the only time we can
make our escape before the coming
winter.

EXT. SUKHOYLAG - EARLY MORNING - NEXT DAY

Hershl and Hanele pick up their bundles and walk out of the village. They proceed with running steps for the first few kilometers.

HERSHL

It'll be two hours before anyone reports for work. We won't be missed until then.

EXT. REGIONAL SEAT OF THE TOWN OF ZIRANSK - DAY

Hershl and Hanele stumble through the wild taigas of Siberia. Hundreds of refugees sit beside a riverbank. They're waiting all night for a steamer to appear and take them to Asino, away from Siberia. They notice an empty truck going by. Hershl runs up to the DRIVER.

HERSHL

Where are you headed?

DRIVER

To Novosibirsk.

HERSHL

Can you take us along?

DRIVER

If you pay me one hundred twenty rubles each.

Hershl makes a gesture of hopelessness. The driver notices the condition of Hanele's feet and that both she and Hershl are wearing shoes so torn that the soles hang loose and are bound up with ropes. He relents some.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Okay, for you a special price, just a hundred and forty rubles together.

When they arrive in the large Siberian city of Novosibirsk, the truck driver lets them off at the railroad station. They board a train heading for Tomsk.

EXT. RAILROAD STATION, TOMSK - DAY

They board another train to Tashkent. In three weeks they reach the warm Uzbekistan region and its capitol, Tashkent. The city's teeming with Polish refugees making it resemble a Persian fair.

Hershl purchases a kilo of *uruk*, a peach-like fruit, and two very large *lepiashki*, flat rolls, from some UZBEKS. Hanele and Hershl sit down right on top of their things to spend the night.

EXT. RAILROAD STATION - MORNING

They hop onto the first train to arrive and it brings them to Samarkand, a city of little clay houses. There are no pavements. Everything's imbued with the same gray hue. The only exceptions are the small government buildings. Hanele and Hershl walk over to a little white building.

INT. GORSOVIET (MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION) BUILDING - DAY

An UZBEK, who obviously had plenty to eat, comes toward them.

UZBEK
(in mutilated Russian)
What is it you want?

HERSHL
We're refugees recently freed from
Siberia. We're homeless and looking
for work.

The Uzbek points to some long benches. Several other refugees are already seated and also seeking refuge. Hanele and Hershl sit down and wait. More refugees arrive. There's no more room on the benches, so they sit down on the floor.

CUT TO:

A primitive wagon, with two enormously high wheels, arrives, drawn by a camel. The Uzbek directs them to go on board the wagon. The wagon lumbers on for about two hours. They come upon vast fields that stretch for miles around. When they come closer, they see men and women picking cotton.

EXT. COLLECTIVE FARM - LATE AFTERNOON

The wagon drives into a very large yard and the Uzbek driver, addresses them in his own tongue and tells them to get off. They're left standing beside a huge warehouse. The driver goes up onto the roof and, forming a round horn with the palms of his hands, sings out an exotic, long drawn out tune:

DRIVER
H-a-a-k-i-m, H-a-a-k-i-mm!

Several seconds later, there's an ANSWER, which seems like an echo:

ANSWER (O.S.)
Y-a-h-shi, Y-a-a-shi!

The Uzbek then descends from the roof.

DRIVER
I've just shown you the telephonic
device by which communication takes
place here.

A few minutes later, the FOREMAN of the collective arrives. He's dressed in white linen trousers, tied with a rope around his waist. Over these, he wears a long cotton *tshupan* or caftan with wide multicolored stripes and he has on a *dopa* or skullcap.

FOREMAN

Zdrastvoyeti Tovarishtshi! Greetings,
comrades!

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

He unlocks the warehouse, weighs out a kilo of flour for each person and makes them understand, by speaking half in Kirghiz and half in Russian, all the while gesturing with his fingers, that what he gave them is a five day supply.

FOREMAN

Unless you want to die of hunger,
divide the flour into five portions.
Don't use it up all at once.

He hands each person a blanket. Hanele and Hershl are taken to a clay yurt. Their yurt, or *kibitka*, is a single windowless room. A rectangular opening serves as both entrance and window. Instead of a kitchen there's a hole in the floor where a fire can be started and over the hole is a clay chimney.

EXT. THE COLLECTIVE - DAY

Hershl's given a horse and wagon and assigned to deliver cotton to the city. He unloads the cotton piling, several meters high, climbing up and down repeatedly. It's grueling work.

With the tropical heat on the one hand and malnutrition on the other, Hershl's and Hanele's strength is ebbing and they realize they won't endure for long.

INT. THE BARRACKS - DAY

A healthy appearing POLE, who looks to be made of steel, becomes distended from starvation, taking on the appearance of a barrel. When he's no longer able to work, he languishes in the barracks for two days and then expires. A deadly fear overcomes all of the refugees.

HERSHL

The same fate awaits us all.

The REFUGEES gather to figure what to do.

HERSHL (CONT'D)

On our day off we should select a
delegation to call on the *Salsoviet*,
rural governmental administration,
to lodge a complaint.

REFUGEES

Hershl, since this is your idea,
take two of us and go to the *Salsoviet*
and tell them of our dreadful
circumstances.

INT. *SALSOVIET* - DAY

HERSHL

(addressing the
Salsoviet OFFICIAL)

We work very hard and we're
compensated with a mere two hundred
grams of flour a day. We aren't even
given shortening or salt. We're
becoming swollen with hunger and one
of us has already died of starvation.
We've come to ask that you do
something to help us or have us
transferred to a different collective.

Upon hearing their request, the official flushes bright red,
bangs his fist on the table and begins to upbraid them.

OFFICIAL

Where do you get the nerve? Do our
citizens get more than you do? What
right have you to make demands?

HERSHL

Comrade Manager, it's true, the
citizens of the collective don't
receive more. You can't compare them
to us. Every citizen member of the
collective has his own garden. They
have a cow or two goats. Many raise
chickens. We subsist on a hundred
grams of pap twice a day. How long
can we survive on that? We're only
asking to be relieved of our desperate
situation. . .

As Hershl's about to finish speaking, the official's no longer
able to contain himself.

OFFICIAL

You speak of misery? What should our
men, who've fallen in defense of the
fatherland, say? Can they complain
about their miserable lives? You
should be thankful we took you in.
Where were you when our people ate
clay instead of bread? For twenty
years we ate clay and no one
complained!

(MORE)

OFFICIAL (CONT'D)

Now it's time for you to eat clay...
I can't bear the sight of you. If
you don't take yourselves out of
here at once you'll not even receive
your two hundred grams.

HERSHL (V.O.)

Moved by hunger and despair, we began
to look for ways to ease the hunger
pangs gripping at our bowels. We
went out into the field and picked
the wild clover, *shchav*, and mint
that grew there and boiled them up
in our *kazan* with a bit of flour.
This was all we had to sustain us
and I had vivid visions of our
starving to death.

They receive their two kilos of flour; Hanele kneads it and
bakes some flat rolls on the fire. They rise early the next
morning and steal off to the railroad station and board a
train headed to the city of Osh in the Soviet Republic of
Kirghizia.

EXT. OSH - DAY

In Osh they wander about on dreary clay streets. Leaving the
city behind, they find themselves on a road called Pomirska
Doroga that stretches five hundred kilometers to the Chinese
border.

EXT. SALSOVIET KHAZAYSTVO - DAY

They arrive at a *Salsoviet Khazaystvo*, Rural Government
Administration, and the OVERSEER agrees to employ them.

OVERSEER

We'll provide you with a *kibitka* and
pay you one hundred twenty rubles
per month. You'll have the right to
purchase four hundred grams of bread
and, in the field, where you'll be
working, a daily ration of *shurpa*,
soup. You'll be harvesting melons,
potatoes, other vegetables, and
strawberries.

(turning to Hersh1)

Do you know anything about carpentry?

HERSHL

Yes I do.

OVERSEER

Well then, we'd like you to build a
larok, small store, for bread
distribution.

(MORE)

OVERSEER (CONT'D)

(addressing Hanele)

And you'll be assigned to picking strawberries. But I warn you, the penalty for eating even one is very harsh...You'd be fortunate to receive no more than expulsion.

Hershl is provided the tools for building the *larok* and with the aid of several other workers, completes the task. He shows the overseer his handiwork.

OVERSEER (CONT'D)

Wonderful, just wonderful. You've done a great job!

Every day a wagon is sent to the municipal bakery in the city to fetch bread. When the bread arrives, it's weighed and everyone purchases his ration.

HERSHL (V.O.)

Often, the driver returned empty-handed saying that for one reason or another the bakery was short of bread. The Soviets had a stock excuse for such situations: *Diyen prezhil diyen propol*, a day lived through is a day lost.

Hershl and Hanele are stretched out in the shade, near the entrance of their *kibitka*, exhausted and faint with hunger. They haven't strength enough to swat the flies that constantly beset them.

HERSHL (CONT'D)

Hanele, you know what's in the *kopiyets*, storage cellar, behind our *kibitka*?

HANELE

No. I often wondered.

HERSHL

It's where the day's harvest of potatoes is stored. If only we can break into it, we wouldn't go hungry.

HANELE

The *kopiyets* is secured with an enormous snap-lock. We don't have the key to open it!

HERSHL

When I was a child, I used to play with a snap-lock and worked it with a nail, opening and closing it without ever using a key. Maybe I can do the same with this lock.

EXT. - VILLAGE ASLEEP - LATE NIGHT

Hershl gets up from the ground and hunts for a large nail. He finds one. Stealthily, he makes his way to the earthen cellar and manipulates the viscera of the lock. As he presses hard on the languet, the lock flies open. He slips quietly back to his hut and picks up a sack.

HERSHL

Hanele come with me and make sure no one's watching.

Hershl opens the lock and lifts one lid of the cellar door. Hanele closes the door behind him, and stands watch. He comes out and closes the cellar door, puts the lock back on and snaps it shut. They return to their *kibitka* with a sacksful of potatoes.

INT. THE *KIBITKA* - DAY

The overseer enters Hershl's and Hanele's *kibitka*, which has no door. He sees the potatoes hidden under a blanket, under their bed.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Hershl's digging the hard, dry earth with his primitive hoe. The overseer of the Salsoviet suddenly appears.

OVERSEER

(with a stern mien)

Go to the administration office for your *roshtshot*, accounting. You and your wife are to leave and never come back!

EXT. THE PAMIR ROAD - DAY

After a day's long march, Hershl and Hanele come upon an immensely huge agricultural collective. They go to see the MANAGER of the collective.

HERSHL

Are you in need of additional workers?

MANAGER

Have you ever done construction work?

HERSHL

Yes, we have.

They're assigned to help build *kibitkas*. The wet clay's frightfully heavy. The hodful of wet clay is carried up a tall ladder to the roof. The person in front has to bend down to the ankles so as not to be taller than the person behind.

The person in back carries the hod on his shoulders while gripping the ladder with both hands. He has to push at the carrier in front of him to keep him from falling backwards.

INT. FOREMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Hershl and Hanele develop blisters on the palms of their hands. On the second day, the blisters become abraded turning into extremely painful, raw wounds. They complain to the FOREMAN.

HERSHL

Can't we be given an easier assignment for just a few days, just long enough for the wounds on our hands to heal?

FOREMAN

(bursts into laughter)

Rada privikatsh, kak niye privikniesh toh zdoye, if you don't get used to it, you croak.

When the house is finished, Hanele and Hershl are sent to do farm work.

EXT. DAY

Hershl tills the soil with his *tikmen*. He hears a horrific scream and runs to Hanele to see an enormous snake hissing at her. He brings the sharp edge of the *tikmen* down hard upon the snake's head. The snake's body coils and recoils spasmodically as its severed head keeps opening and closing its mouth.

INT. FOREMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

HERSHL (V.O.)

The Soviet government issued a new directive: all collective farms were to raise pigs to supply pork for the Soviet market. The commune was gripped with dismay. The Kirghiz are pious Muslims, afraid to take on the defiling work. The foreman realized that he had a *Urus*, white European, on the farm. And so he sent for me to put me in charge of thirteen squealers.

HERSHL (CONT'D)

I don't know. I've never done this sort of thing before.

HERSHL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I was fearful of undertaking such responsibility. Should any of the piglets die, I would be accused of
(MORE)

HERSHL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 sabotage. Whenever something went wrong, those in charge were labeled saboteurs and sent to join the white bears.

FOREMAN
 If you work at it, you'll learn in good time.

HERSHL (V.O.)
 People were treated like worthless slaves at the collective, but animals received truly humane attention. I received thirteen kilos of barley meal daily, plus sixteen kilos of potatoes for the thirteen little pigs in my charge. The workhorses were allowed as much oats or whole barley as they could consume. A person received only four grams of bread.

EXT. BEHIND THE KIBITKA - DAY

Hersh1 cooks potatoes in a large *kazan*. He transfers it to the pigsty where the baby pigs swill it down, only to begin screaming again. Hersh1 chases them into the wide-open field. They stray over to a planted field and destroy it before Hersh1 notices.

OVERSEER
 (in a stern rebuke)
 You're not properly carrying out your responsibilities. You mustn't allow the hogs to destroy government property. Such breach of duty can subject you to severe punishment.

HERSHL
 Please relieve me of this responsibility. Four grams of bread doesn't give me sufficient strength to chase the piglets. They're faster than I am and much better nourished.

FOREMAN
 (insinuating Hersh1's a blockhead)
 You have thirteen *tshutshkas*, piglets, in your charge. You could pretend to have fourteen. No?

INT. KIBITKA - MORNING

Hanele has severe abdominal pains. There are no doctors on the commune, only a NURSE who serves the entire collective.

INT. NURSE'S STATION - DAY

Hershl goes to the nurse. She examines Hanele.

NURSE

She needs to be taken to the hospital.

HERSHL

How far is that?

NURSE

Fourteen kilometers.

INT. FOREMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Hershl hurries to see the foreman.

HERSHL

Can I have a horse and wagon to transport my wife to the hospital?

FOREMAN

All the horses and wagons are at work. I can't let you have any before evening.

HERSHL

By then it'll be too late!

FOREMAN

That I can't help.

EXT. BLACKSMITH SHOP

Hershl goes out onto the large yard of the blacksmith shop. Outside the smithy, there are several two-wheeled handcarts. Hershl takes one of the carts, hitches himself to the shaft and hurries to the yard of his *kibitka*.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE KIBITKA - DAY

HERSHL

Please help me get my wife in the cart and come with us to the hospital.

Once again, he harnesses himself to the cart. The nurse pushes from behind.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

They reach the hospital bathed in perspiration. Immediately upon arrival at the hospital, Hanele's examined by the resident DOCTOR.

DOCTOR

She's contracted typhoid fever. The delay may have jeopardized her life.

(MORE)

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

The high temperature can continue for three more weeks before a turning point can be expected. If she comes through the crisis, she has a chance of surviving.

As Hershl finishes preparing food for the pigs, he locks them up and rushes off to the hospital to see how Hanele's doing. Because of the danger of contracting the disease, he isn't permitted to see her. He waits for hours beside a closed window, and sees her lying exhausted with cold compresses on her forehead.

HERSHL (V.O.)

I could see that she was becoming more debilitated. At night, I couldn't fall asleep for fear of losing her.

INT. THE KIBITKA - NIGHT

The tropical winter arrives and a series of heavy rains begin to fall. The downpours wear away the clay roofs of the *kibitkas*. Hershl ties the corners of his quilt to the head rails of the bed.

The quilt's soon saturated and the rain water leaks right on top of him. He pushes hard against a wall of the *kibitka* and remains there for the rest of the night.

EXT. EARLY MORNING

Hershl prepares the feed for the swine, locks them up, and starts his walk to the hospital. The roadbed's transformed into slippery, sticky, thick mud that makes it difficult to walk. Dozens of *kibitkas* are washed away; the roofs fallen inward and the walls collapsing.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Soaking wet and exhausted, Hershl arrives at the hospital.

DOCTOR

Your wife weathered the crisis safely but she's extremely tired and weak. There's still great danger though. She's completely drained of energy and she'll need good care to regain her strength.

Hershl goes over to the window and looks in. Hanele lays on her bed worn-out. She tries to raise her hand in greeting, but her hand falls limply back upon the quilt and she greets him with a weak smile instead.

EXT. BAZAAR - NEXT DAY.

HERSHL (V.O.)

I took a bar of soap with me to sell on the black market to buy something that would help Hanele recuperate.

Hershl wanders about the bazaar with the bar of soap in hand. Someone takes hold of his arm. He turns around and is shocked to see an NKVD lieutenant holding him firmly in his grip. The man doesn't take the soap from him. He lets go of his arm, and opens his arms wide as if to embrace him.

SHMAYE

(with great glee)

Have you forgotten me already?

Stunned, Hershl stares into his face and recognizes a former comrade from his communist days. Hershl falls into his arms. Shmayer won't let Hershl go.

SHMAYE (CONT'D)

You must come with me to the Kirghiz teahouse where we can talk over old times.

INT. KIRGHIZ TEAHOUSE - DAY

They enter the teahouse where the Kirghiz can be seen drinking from small vases as they sit with their legs crossed beneath them. Shmayer and Hershl drink their vase of tea.

SHMAYE

I was severely wounded in Spain during the failed revolution against Generalissimo Franco. The USSR agreed to admit a number of the wounded. The Soviet government hired me and I eventually attained the rank of lieutenant in the NKVD.

HERSHL

Shmayer, It's been a wonderful surprise to see you but please excuse me. I was on my way to see my wife who's in hospital recovering from typhoid fever and after I visit her, I still have to walk fourteen kilometers to return to my commune.

SHMAYE

(handing Hershl a card)

Here's where you can reach me. Don't hesitate. I can be of much assistance in making your lives easier here.

HERSHL

Thank you, Shmayer.

HERSHL (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I made a firm decision that I would never see him again for I became convinced of the falsehood of the communist ideology that was put to so cruel an effect. I'd come to detest anyone who would help the Soviets carry out their barbaric machinations, even if it happened to be my former compatriot and friend with whom I had so blindly fought in the cause.

EXT. COLLECTIVE FARM - DAY

Hanele comes home from the hospital. She's home but two days and she's assigned to a construction brigade twelve kilometers from the commune.

EXT. KZYL-KYA (RED HILLS) - DAY

Hershl's assigned to work in the coal mines of Kzil-Kiya, a Tupik town of coal mines at the very end of the railroad line. Mountains reaching high into the sky surround the town. This range of mountains is bare, having no vegetative growth.

INT. COAL MINE - MORNING

An overseer lowers the new arrivals by way of a windlass, deep underground and shows them the shaft where they will start work. Hershl works with a group of *kanagani*, horse riders. He's given a wide belt onto which he hooks a heavy, rectangular battery. A length of electric wire leads from the battery to the hard hat on his head and a searchlight is attached to the hardhat.

INT. MINE SHAFT - LATER

They go down into the shaft. Horses are waiting. They harness them to small railway cars, each of which is loaded with approximately half a ton of coal. Two *kanagani* attend each horse. His CO-WORKER tells him to stand up on a "bumper" at the end of the car.

CO-WORKER

Hold on tightly and bend as low as possible. That is, if you don't want to have your head severed from your body by those low beams.

He lets out a brief whistle at the sound of which the horse carries them deep down into the bowels of the shaft. The light from their headgear casts shadows that float on the beams and rafters of the walls and ceilings. The horse stops.

The co-worker jumps off the bumper and, with one hand, disengages the horse and harness which is fastened but by a single hook to the front of the car.

Holding the hook in his hand, he leads the horse and his harness to the other track, to cars already loaded with coal, and he re-hooks the harness to the row of loaded cars. They then get up on the bumper of the last car. He whistles, and they're off in the opposite direction.

They deliver the cars, filled with coal, to a turntable from which a special hauling machine, called a *lebyotka*, pulls the cars up out of the shaft. As they travel back and forth, a car derails.

HERSHL

(with fear in his
voice)

What now? We'll need a dozen people
to get the car back on track.

CO-WORKER

One's enough.

HERSHL

A full car weighs nearly a ton. How's
that possible?

CO-WORKER

(smiling)

As a rule, when a car is derailed
only three of its wheels go off track.
The fourth wheel remains on the rail.

He points to a small thick board, with one side shaved. He takes hold of the board and inserts its thin edge under the wheel that's still in place. Then, he walks to the other end of the car, puts his shoulder against it and gives it a sudden lift. With a groan, the car puts its other three wheels down on track.

INT. MINE MANAGER'S OFFICE - DAY

HERSHL

Can I get a permit for my wife to
come and live here?

MINE MANAGER

I've no objection. We'll put her to
work cleaning the barracks, carrying
in coal and seeing that there's a
supply of hot *kipitok* in the *kazan*.
Mind you, she'll only receive half a
ration since she won't require as
much food as the miners.

INT. HERSHL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Hershl's malaria reappears and he suffers from very severe attacks. At the beginning of every siege, Hershl feels extremely cold. After shivering for several hours, he's

suddenly overcome by a feeling of extreme heat. This plagues him for twenty-four hours, sometimes leaving him unconscious.

EXT. ON THE ROAD TO WORK - MORNING

Hershl begins shivering while on his way to work. He reports to the NURSE as soon as he reaches the mine.

INT. NURSE'S QUARTER - MORNING

HERSHL

Can I be excused from work? I'm undergoing a malaria attack. I need a shot of acriquinine.

The nurse takes his temperature.

NURSE

Illness unaccompanied by high fever isn't considered illness. If you miss work or even if you're fifteen minutes late and can't prove you have high fever, you'll be considered *prigulshtshik*, tardy, and deprived of half your bread ration for a month. If you malingers a second time, you'll be imprisoned, and forced to perform the same work as before but under the watch of armed guards and receive only three hundred grams of bread. A third time you'll be sentenced to five years in prison

HERSHL

I assure you, I'm sick.

NURSE

(reading the
thermometer)

You do have a fever but not as much as is stipulated in the regulations. I'm not allowed to give you a statement.

Hershl goes down into the mine to work. His fever forces him to return to the nurse. This time she gives him the note excusing him from work.

The malaria continues to plague Hershl and several days after his return to work, the doctor prescribes a change of assignment so that he could avoid standing in water.

INT. MINE SHAFT - DAY

He's given a task working in a dry area. Instead of being a *kanagan*, he becomes a *plitovoy*. Hershl stands on a large iron plate where the loaded coal cars are lowered by a pulley. Hershl unties the grabs from the cables and turns the cars

around on the plate so that they're in position to enter the tracks.

INT. MINE SHAFT - AFTERNOON

Hershl's jacket is chock-full of biting lice and nits that he cannot get rid of. As he waits on the plate for the cars to be loaded and lowered to him, he takes off his jacket and delouses it in order to alleviate the itching. When he receives the signal that the cars are ready, he puts his jacket back on.

INT. POLYCLINIC - DAY

The chief PHYSICIAN determines that Hanele is pregnant.

HANELE

(in tears)

I lost my babies twice. I can't have it happen again.

HERSHL

She shouldn't have to continue to carry the coal and heavy pails of water at work. It's too dangerous for her in her condition.

PHYSICIAN

(listening
compassionately)

I'm writing up a demand for your release from work.

HANELE/HERSHL (SIMULT.)

Thank you, Doctor, thank you so much.

INT. DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Hershl and Hanele bring the statement to the director, he reads it.

DIRECTOR

(angrily tears it
into bits)

I know Soviet law better than the doctor. I'm not letting you go before your ninth month.

Hershl and Hanele are in shock as they leave the director's office.

HANELE

What do we do? I can't go through this again!

HERSHL

I don't care what he says; you'll not go back to work and jeopardize the pregnancy.

INT. THEIR APT. - SEVERAL DAYS LATER - PAST MIDNIGHT

There's a knocking at the door. Two NKVD AGENTS are let in.

NKVD AGENT

(addressing Hanele)

Your passport and food ration card.

She hands them over. They pocket the papers.

NKVD AGENT (CONT'D)

You are to appear early tomorrow morning at NKVD headquarters for your documents.

INT. NKVD HEADQUARTERS - EARLY MORNING

Hanele arrives at NKVD headquarters.

NKVD AGENT

Please be seated. Here's the thing: You must return to work a full eight months, as is stipulated in the law. If not, you'll have to go hungry. On no condition will you be released at this time.

HANELE

You're telling me to risk the life of my child. I won't do it.

NKVD AGENT

Well then, you've no one to blame but yourself when you starve to death.

Hanele doesn't go back to work.

INT. COAL MINE MESS HALL - DAY

When Hersh1 goes to work, he carries a small kettle with him which he leaves in the mess hall, near the mineshaft. On the way home, he brings some *shtshi* and takes it back to Hanele. They survive the first eight months of the pregnancy, on *shtshi* and eight hundred grams of bread.

EXT. ROAD TO THE HOSPITAL - MIDNIGHT

Hanele begins to have labor pains. They dress quickly and begin a slow walk to the hospital, some four kilometers away. The journey drags on for more than three hours. The labor pains make it difficult for Hanele to walk. They're forced to stop every ten or fifteen minutes.

INT. HOSPITAL - EARLY MORNING

Dawn begins to break when they arrive at the hospital. Hanele is admitted immediately and one hour later she gives birth to a little boy. The child's also infected with malaria.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Hershl takes some boards and nails and makes a box. He places hay in the box, covers it with a diaper, and places it on the table as a bed for their newborn child. When Hanele tries to nurse the child, the high fever accompanying her malaria spoils her milk. The baby screams with hunger and they're unable to help in any way.

INT. WORKSTATION IN COAL MINE - MORNING

While sitting on the plate waiting for a loaded car to be lowered, Hershl dozes off. He dreams he's standing in a yard in Warsaw and a horse is kicking wildly as he runs straight towards him. The horse rears up on its hind legs, and begins to wave its forelegs above his head. He awakens from his terrifying nap and finds himself in a cold sweat.

In the next instant, he sees the grab of a car pull away from the cable, and the car hurtle down the tracks straight towards where he stands. The car lands on the plate, at full speed, and pins Hershl against the wall.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Hershl regains consciousness. He has an excruciating pain in his back. His eyes bulge outward, engorged with blood. He groans and yells in pain. He dozes off and is besieged by nebulous, pain filled nightmares. At the end of three months, the doctor discharges him despite the fact that he's still in great pain.

INT. MESS HALL - NOON

It's announced over the loudspeaker that the war had come to an end. Men toss their caps in the air and shout hurrahs. All the sirens are sounded. The miners stream out of their shafts. Trucks fill up with people who drive around town filling the streets with the sound of patriotic communist songs.

HERSHL (V.O.)

In the midst of jubilation, doubts began to creep into my heart. Now that the bloody war was over would the Soviet government free us and allow us to return home?

INT. MINE SHAFT - DAY

A YOUNG FELLOW appears in the shaft.

YOUNG FELLOW

A Polish delegation has arrived here
in Kzil-Kiya to register former Polish
citizens for repatriation.

HERSHL

Come on now, you've just cooked that
up didn't you?

YOUNG FELLOW

No, it's true, I swear. I spoke with
them personally. Find out for
yourselves.

Hershl's very skeptical as he and several refugees set out
for the indicated address. When they arrive at their
destination, hundreds of Polish citizens are queued up to
register. Their names are recorded and placed on an "option"
list, which is being prepared

INT. OFFICE OF THE POLISH DELEGATION - ONE YEAR LATER

Hershl and Hanele receive a summons to appear at the Polish
delegation office. After the Russians interview those
assembled, they're given authorization to depart for Poland.
They all hug and kiss each other and weep and rejoice. The
Kyrgyz and Russian PASSERSBY stop and stare.

PASSERBY

What's going on?

HERSHL

The day we yearned for and dreamed
of for so long, has finally arrived.

EXT. TRUCK DEPOT - DAY

Hershl and Hanele and child stand outside with their luggage
and wait for a truck that picks them up. When it's packed
full of other refugees, it brings them to the railroad
station.

EXT. TRAIN - DAY

Forty people and their bundles are crammed into each car.
The train drags on slowly. The convoy stops several hours at
the larger stations. Hershl and Hanele run over to each train
to inquire about Bella and Hayim, from whom they hadn't heard
for seven years.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

HANELE

Is there a couple by the names of
Bella and Hayim on this train?

PASSENGERS

Yes, in the rear of this compartment.

Hanele and Hershl rush to the back and see Hayim and Bella with a newborn infant scarcely two weeks old in their arms. They kiss and hug, happy to have found one another.

HANELE

Oh my God your baby is precious. We too have a baby. He's two years old.

The closer they come to the European border the colder it gets. It's particularly hard on Bella's infant. One freezing cold night, the infant suddenly falls silent. Everyone thinks it fell asleep exhausted by its night long ordeal. When the train stops the next morning, Hayim appears.

HAYIM

Our son died last night.

HANELE/HERSHL (SIMULT.)

What? How? Why?

HAYIM

I think it was the cold.

ENGINEER

Your child must be buried at once.

EXT.OUTSIDE THE TRAIN - DAY

They walk a few meters from the train and dig a little grave. They wrap the baby in its swaddling clothes and bury it. Dozens of refugees gather about the grave. Hayim says *Kaddish* for his son and there's sadness in everyone's eyes as they return to the train.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Hershl and Hanele's two year old son's malaria attacks come regularly. As they approach a station and the light from the electric lamps flood the car, they cast huge moving shadows on the walls. He screams terribly. The fever persists longer than ever before. They find a DOCTOR among the refugees.

DOCTOR

The fever isn't due to malaria but to measles. I haven't any medicine and can't give him anything that might help. But keep the child warm.

INT. TRAIN ARRIVES - POLISH BORDER THREE WEEKS LATER - DAY

SOVIET POLICE are the first to enter the train.

SOVIET POLICE

Submit your Russian passports.
(they're immediately
confiscated)

Do you have money to declare?

(MORE)

SOVIET POLICE (CONT'D)

You won't need Russian rubles any more. Open your packages, please.

They inspect the bundles, and take whatever takes their fancy. The train then proceeds slowly for a short distance and stops again. The POLISH BORDER PATROL comes on board.

POLISH BORDER AGENTS

Do you have anything to declare?

HERSHL

We have nothing. The Russians asked before you did.

They grin and descend from the train. The train now travels at high speed and some of the returnees are so pleased, they start singing patriotic songs. A sudden racket of machine gun fire and a hail of bullets terrify the REFUGEES.

REFUGEE 1

That's the anti-Semitic Polish organization calling itself A.K. *Armija Krayowa*, the nationalist army that's supposedly fighting the Soviets. Since their arms are too short to strike effectively, they've turned to the task of annihilating any Jews that escaped the claws of the Nazis.

REFUGEE 2

The AK murderers are making it a practice to rout Jews from the trains, take them out into the woods and shoot them.

HERSHL (V.O.)

On our return to Poland, we were reminded of a fact we chose not to remember during our sojourn in Russia that Polish anti-semitism always was and continues to be the most virulent in the world.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - POLAND - DAY

As they step down from the train, a number of POLES gather around and stare at them. Some can't refrain from calling out.

POLE1

Would you look at that! So many Jews still left over?

POLE2

And to think, people say Hitler killed them all...

HERSHL (V.O.)

We paid them no mind. They might as well have been just so many barking dogs.

Hanele takes their child in her arms and hurries away to seek out a medical center where he might be helped. Hayim, Bella, and Hershl gather up their bundles and go to inquire after lodging.

MONTAGE - THE AK GANGS RAMPAGE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY
UNCHECKED

1) Jews are pulled off the trains at station stops, dragged into the woods and shot.

2) Lawless mobs of Polish anti-Semites harass defenseless Jews.

3) They attack Jews who come to the market place to sell what little they still have to stay alive.

4) They beat them and rob them.

5) Dead Red Army soldiers are found lying among the bombed out ruins or a Jew is found-done away with as he comes home from work at night.

6) Gangs break into Jewish homes to rob and plunder their property at gunpoint.

INT. WARSAW - APARTMENT OF ABANDONED BUILDING - NIGHT

HERSHL (V.O.)

We kept the lights off at night to prevent anyone noticing our apartment was occupied.

All night long, shots are heard in the street. Rummaging in the attic, among old pieces of metal left behind by the Germans, Hershl finds a bayonet. He keeps the bayonet at hand for defense should anyone break in.

INT. APT. EVENING

HAYIM

I think there's a way we can get to the German border and safety. I know where the smugglers cross the border. What we do is steal into their truck. If the smugglers catch us and demand payment, we say we don't have any money, but they'll have to take us for fear we'll cause a disturbance and attract the police.

HERSHL

Your plan doesn't appeal to me. Under no circumstances would we bring our child along on such a hazardous venture. What makes you think the smugglers can't overpower us? The result could be fatal.

HAYIM

Bella and I will risk it. Anything to get out of this hell-hole.

Hayim and Bella pack a small valise, with a few things, and leave Hershl, Hanele and their child behind. Several days later, a letter arrives informing them that they escaped to Germany, in the American Zone.

INT. APARTMENT - EVENING

Hershl comes home in the evening, locks the entrance to the empty building, goes up to the third floor, walks into the apartment, and fastens the lock on the door. After their evening meal, they go to bed early so that they need not turn on the lights.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

They hear a loud commotion in the yard. They hold their breaths and strain all their senses to try to discover what's going on. They hear several men talking to one another. Somewhat later, they hear knocking at the downstairs door. Several THUGS begin to kick at the door and yell, as though possessed.

THUG1

You better open up or it'll go badly with you.

THUG2

(roaring, interspersed with curses)

Open up! We know there are Jews here!
If you don't open up, we'll break down the door and none of you will get out alive!

Hanele and Hershl stay very still and, with baited breath, listen to the racing of their hearts.

HERSHL

(whispering)

If we get through this night safely, we'll not spend another day in this damned country.

Hershl gets out of bed and creeps to the window to look down into the yard. He sees three thugs hard at work, with iron bars in their hands, trying to raise the downstairs door off

its hinges. He goes to the door and puts his ear to it to try to hear whether anyone's coming upstairs.

He stands at the side of the door with bayonet in hand, ready for any eventuality. Suddenly, the sound of several revolver shots reaches their ears. The door bursts open and a thug enters the room, gun in hand, aimed directly at Hanele and the baby.

Hershl brings the bayonet straight down on the thug's hand. Blood spurts from his hand as he drops his gun. He grabs his injured hand and turns around as his comrade is about to enter the room.

Hershl swings the bayonet at the second thug who, shocked at the turn of events, turns to run after the first thug, as Hershl cuts a gash in his leg. They all try to hightail it out of the building as Hershl picks up the gun.

THUG 3

(as he's running away)

You just wait, we'll be back for you!

All is quiet. Hershl and Hanele wait a few minutes, after which, Hershl goes to the window once more to see what's going on. There's no one to be seen in the yard. They go back to bed but can't close their eyes. Hershl rises at the first grey of dawn. He hurries over to the Jewish Committee.

HERSHL

Lock the door behind me and don't open it to anyone until I return and you hear my voice. Here's the gun. If all else fails, don't hesitate to use it.

Hanele flinches at the thought.

INT. OFFICE OF THE JEWISH COMMITTEE

HERSHL

I wish to see the secretary, please.

He's ushered in. Hershl tells the committee of the night of terror his family just experienced.

HERSHL (CONT'D)

We cannot risk staying here any longer. You must do something.

Silence reigns. The secretary exchanges silent glances with the two other people sitting at the table. Suddenly, one of them, an ELDERLY GENTLEMAN, inquires:

ELDERLY GENTLEMAN

What's your name?

HERSHL

Hershl Altman.

ELDERLY GENTLEMAN

Might your father's name be Sholem
Altman

HERSHL

(looking at him in astonishment, his
eyes searching his face).

Yes, how do you know?

A smile appears on his face. He seems pleased to have to
offer an explanation to the other two.

ELDERLY GENTLEMAN

His father, Sholem Altman, is a highly
regarded leader in the Poale Zion
movement. Many long years ago, I
worked with him in Warsaw, where we
organized the very first labor unions.

(addressing Hershl)

I assure you, we'll do everything
possible to keep you from living
through another night as you describe.
Please remain seated.

The older man leaves the room and comes back ten minutes
later with a YOUNG MAN. The young man is an agent of the
secretive *Briha*. The young man writes down the address of a
kibbutz on a small piece of paper.

YOUNG MAN.

Go straight home, pack everything,
and go to that *kibbutz* with your
wife and child. From there you'll be
taken across the border, along with
a number of others.

INT. *KIBBUTZ* - TWO HOURS LATER

Kibbutzniks are sitting on their luggage on the floor waiting
to depart for the border. They are given instructions on how
to conduct themselves in order to cross the border safely.

YOUNG MAN

Get rid of any Polish documents,
addresses, or photographs that
identify you as Jews, or citizens of
Poland. Forget your real names. Make
up a German name, and an address you
supposedly lived in before the war,
and commit each of those to memory.

(without a pause,
addressing Hershl)

What's your name?

HERSHL

Hans.

YOUNG MAN

And where do you live?

HERSHL

*In Hamburg, Koenigstrasse, number
twenty-two.*

YOUNG MAN

Good! Remember you're Germans who've run away to Stettin to escape the bombardment and that you're coming *nach heimat*, back home. We'll take you to the transit camp where Poles will register you and put you aboard trains. During registration make your answers brief. If they talk to you in Polish, make like you don't understand. We've bribed them. But just to be sure, follow our instructions exactly.

INT. TRANSIT STATION - EARLY MORNING

Several POLISH OFFICIALS are seated at the registration tables. When Hersh1 and Hanele's turn arrives, they ask them questions in Polish. Hersh1 pushes Hanele and the baby ahead of him and answers for the three of them.

HERSHL

Das ist meine frau, und meine knabe.
That's my wife and child.

POLISH OFFICIAL

Namen? Names?

HERSHL

*Hans Altman, meine frau, Hilda und
Karl.*

POLISH OFFICIAL

Address?

HERSHL

Frankfurt, Koenigstrasse 22.

The official's face breaks into a smile. He turns to Hersh1 and speaks to him in Polish:

POLISH OFFICIAL

We know you're not Germans.

Hersh1 shakes his head and waves his hands around. He grimaces to show that he doesn't understand a word he said. Hersh1 steps aside and the next person steps up to be registered.

They board the train which transports them to the English sector in Hanover, Germany.

EXT. STREETCAR - DAY

Hershl's riding on a streetcar that is so jammed with passengers that there's no room inside and he remains standing outside on the platform. A young man catches his eye. The YOUNG MAN notices Hershl observing him. He smiles broadly and inquires:

YOUNG MAN

Yehudi?

HERSHL

Ya. Yes.

They start a conversation as they ride along.

HERSHL (CONT'D)

I'm here in the city with my wife and child, just returned from Russia, and we're having difficulty making a life for ourselves. I heard the *Briha* was transferring Jewish refugees to the American sector but, so far, I've been unable to find anyone who knows how to get in touch with them.

The young man interrupts Hershl with a smile.

YOUNG MAN

You've found the right address.

He takes a notebook from an inside coat pocket, writes something on a page with a pen, and hands Hershl the piece of paper.

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

Come to this address with your wife and child. From there you'll be taken to the American Zone.

EXT. STREET IN HANOVER - EARLY MORNING

Hershl and Hanele, child in hand, board a streetcar. They arrive at a secluded one-story building that has a kitchen on the street entrance level.

Food is being cooked in great pots and served to refugees in an adjacent large hall furnished with a long table and very long benches.

A military truck drives into the yard. The refugees are crammed in with their baggage. The open side of the truck is covered with a tarpaulin, and they drive off.

EXT. MILITARY TRUCK - DAWN

The sun is fully raised; the air within the truck becomes extremely warm and uncomfortable. Hanele knocks on the DRIVER'S partition.

HANELE

Can you please open the tarpaulin
and let some fresh air in? The heat's
unbearable.

The driver stops the truck and removes the cover. Several hours later, the truck stops again.

DRIVER

I have to replace the tarpaulin.
We're approaching the American zone
You must remain silent. No talking,
coughing or sneezing. Insofar as the
border patrol is concerned, I'm
transporting goods, not people. Once
we're in the American Zone, I'll
remove the tarpaulin and, then, I'll
leave it off.

After a while, the truck stops again. Everyone holds their breath. They hear English being spoken, in loud tones, alongside the truck. Then the driver turns on the ignition.

The truck starts up and travels a short distance, then stops once more. The tarpaulin opens and the driver sticks his head inside.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

We're in the American zone.

He removes the tarpaulin and drives on.

EXT. A TRANSIT CAMP IN THE AMERICAN SECTOR - NIGHT

The truck comes to a halt. The refugees are led into one of several barracks. Everyone's appropriated a bed and they toss their things on it.

Caldrons of steaming hot soup are brought in, and everyone is served a bowlful, along with several little packages of crackers. Weary, they lay down with their clothes still on. Worn down by the journey they fall asleep.

INT. BARRACKS - LATER THAT NIGHT

A blinding light floods the barracks and awakens Hershl. He sits up in his bed and looks about to see what is happening. A half-dozen American soldiers come in with large cartons, which they set down on a long, large table in the middle of the room.

Taking blankets from the cartons they place one on each bed. If the occupant is asleep, the soldier carefully covers him so as not to awaken him. They leave little packages of cookies and candy on the children's cots. They quietly slip out of the barracks and turn off the light as they depart.

HERSHL (V.O.)

I remained sitting in utter surprise.
I was nearly moved to tears at the sight of the heartfelt, humane attitude that these considerate American soldiers displayed towards the unfortunate and weary Jewish wanderers. I thought of the anti-Semitic Polish hooligans in contrast with these merciful young Americans. There are still some good people in the world, after all.

INT. S.S. AMERICA, NEW YORK HARBOR - MARCH 9, 1951

Hanele comes down from the deck of the ship to their compartment.

HANELE

(excitedly)

Hurry, come upstairs.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK HARBOR - DAY

It's a magnificently beautiful, sunny spring day. The ship sails calmly and slowly on mirror-smooth waters. Visible in the distance is the Statue of Liberty, torch reaching for the blue skies. Soon wide strips of land appear, upon which hundreds of automobiles glide by at great speed.

Hershl and Hanele, with son in tow, run to the upper deck. They kiss and hug and can't contain their joy at the sights present before their eyes.

FADE OUT