

**LOVELESS**

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## LOVELESS

### **1. EXT. SCHOOL BUILDING. DAY**

School's out for the day. Students file out of the building, some alone, some in small groups.

ALYOSHA SLEPTSOV (12) and MISHA KUZNETSOV (12), obviously pals, leave the school, carrying their backpacks. They reach the edge of a large wooded ravine that splits the area into two and take leave of each other with a complicated handshake that includes finger signs and fist bumps, and culminates with the boys poking each other in the shoulder. Then, MISHA heads along a path that skirts the ravine towards some high-rise buildings, while ALYOSHA takes another trail straight down into the ravine.

### **2. EXT. RAVINE. DAY**

The trail takes ALYOSHA to a paved footpath sparsely edged by street lights and benches standing next to trash cans. ALYOSHA walks a little way along the footpath, then takes another trail that veers off to the side.

He makes his way through bushes and tall thickets of deadwood, and finally reaches a riverbank. He follows the river for a while, then ducks back into the thicket and returns to the paved footpath, which veers sharply up a hill towards some high-rises nearly identical to those on the opposite edge of the ravine.

### **3. EXT. SLEPTSOVS' BUILDING. COURTYARD. DAY**

ALYOSHA walks past a high-rise building with multiple entrances. He turns and approaches one of the entrances, presses a plastic key fob against the lock on the metal door, pulls the door open, and disappears into the dusky entrance. The door closes slowly on its automatic hinge, clunking loudly as it catches on the magnetic lock.

### **4. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. ALYOSHA'S ROOM (VIEW FROM THE WINDOW). BLUE HOUR**

Overcast evening. Below the seventh-floor window, woods stretch as far as the eye can see under a dirty sky. A large satellite communication antenna looms over the forest in the center of the shot, its dish angled straight up, 'observing' the sky. The clouds above reflect the red light atop the antenna.

### **5. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. ALYOSHA'S ROOM. BLUE HOUR**

ALYOSHA is sitting on a chair at his desk set up right under the window. As if in a trance, he stares with unseeing eyes at some distant fixed point on the horizon. He

is alone in his room, supposedly doing his homework: his sixth-grade physics textbook is propped up on a desktop book stand before him; a grid notebook is open to a blank page; a pen is clasped loosely in his hand. A little off to the side, on the corner of the desk, sits a bulky laptop with a Batman sticker on its closed lid. Besides the desk, the room is furnished with a closet, wall bars for working out, and a bed. An *Incredibles* poster is taped directly to the wallpaper above the bed. The door to the room is slightly ajar.

The doorbell trills out in the hallway, jolting ALYOSHA out of his reverie. He peers at the textbook and begins to write in his notebook.

His mother ZHENYA (36), a well-groomed and shapely young woman, peeks into the room. She is dressed in a t-shirt and workout pants.

ZHENYA

They're here to look at the place. Tidy up your room.

#### **6. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. ENTRANCE HALL. BLUE HOUR**

ZHENYA glances at herself in the entrance hall mirror, straightens her hair, and opens the door to reveal three people: a female REALTOR (very young looking 45), a middle-aged BUSINESSMAN, and a YOUNG WOMAN (27).

REALTOR

Good evening.

ZHENYA

Evening!

With a blinding smile, she ushers them inside.

ALYOSHA closes the door to his room and returns to his desk.

#### **7. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. KITCHEN THAT OPENS INTO A BALCONY. BLUE HOUR**

With a quick glance at the kitchen, ZHENYA, the REALTOR, the BUSINESSMAN, and the YOUNG WOMAN enter the glass-paneled balcony. The BUSINESSMAN opens one window pane, pokes out his head, and looks down.

REALTOR

It's a great neighborhood. Clean air, a metro station opening soon, a shopping center nearby...

ZHENYA

(jumps in)  
A new church, just recently built.

BUSINESSMAN

(closes the window)  
That's good. What about the neighbors?

ZHENYA

They're quiet.

BUSINESSMAN

Why are you selling?

ZHENYA

We're getting divorced.

BUSINESSMAN

Sorry.

ZHENYA

No worries.

**8. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. HALLWAY. BLUE HOUR**

The REALTOR, ZHENYA, the BUSINESSMAN, and the YOUNG WOMAN exit the kitchen into the hallway.

BUSINESSMAN

OK, what's next?

REALTOR

Bedroom.

The BUSINESSMAN and the YOUNG WOMAN disappear into the bedroom.

BUSINESSMAN

(from the bedroom)

How big is it?

REALTOR

Hundred and fifty.

BUSINESSMAN

And the living room?

REALTOR

Two hundred and thirty-six. Come look.

The BUSINESSMAN and the YOUNG WOMAN re-emerge into the hallway and enter the living room.

**9. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. LIVING ROOM. BLUE HOUR**

The BUSINESSMAN and the YOUNG WOMAN enter the living room, look around, and nod.

The YOUNG WOMAN crosses over to the window and looks over the neighborhood below.

**10. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. ALYOSHA'S ROOM. BLUE HOUR**

As ZHENYA, the REALTOR, the BUSINESSMAN, and the YOUNG WOMAN enter his room, ALYOSHA ignores them studiously, leaning over his desk and writing in his notebook, his tongue sticking out with the effort.

ZHENYA approaches him and nudges him lightly on the back of the head.

ZHENYA

Say hello to our guests.

ALYOSHA

(not turning around)  
Hi.

ZHENYA

He's 12, about as untamed as they get.

BUSINESSMAN

A real man then.

ZHENYA

Yeah, right. Cries at the drop of a hat.

ALYOSHA

Mom...

ZHENYA

Don't "Mom" me. How many times do I have to tell you?

ALYOSHA gets up and leaves the room.

BUSINESSMAN

(to the REALTOR)  
Remind me, how many square feet in total?

REALTOR

(uncertainly)  
Twelve hundred and ten...

She looks at ZHENYA for confirmation. ZHENYA nods.

### **11. EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD PARK. BLUE HOUR**

ZHENYA (dressed in a track suit) jogs along a path through the park.

### **12. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. KITCHEN THAT OPENS INTO A BALCONY. NIGHT**

A TV atop the fridge is playing a reality show, with the sound turned down low. ZHENYA is sitting at the table with a glass of wine in her hand, scrolling through her iPhone 4. The front door lock clicks as someone opens the door and enters. ZHENYA shows no reaction. A few moments later, BORIS (42) appears in the kitchen door.

BORIS

Hey. Taking a break?

ZHENYA

What do you care?

BORIS

Never mind.

He opens the fridge, looks inside, then closes it and steps away to lean his butt against the countertop next to the sink.

BORIS

So, did anyone come?

ZHENYA nods without looking up from her phone.

ZHENYA

Said they had to think about it.

BORIS

I see.

He looks down at his feet, clad in white IKEA slippers. He pushes himself away from the countertop with his arms, returns to the kitchen door, and pulls it closed.

BORIS

What about you... Did you think about it?

ZHENYA lifts her exhausted eyes to his face.

ZHENYA

About what?

BORIS

(returns to the countertop)  
You know... You are his mother, after all...

ZHENYA

I'm so sick of your crap...

BORIS

He needs his mother more.

ZHENYA

Actually, at his age, he needs his father more. Though maybe not the kind of father you've been.

She takes a gulp of wine.

ZHENYA

He loves summer camp. He'll love the children's home too.  
Same thing.

BORIS heaves a deep sigh and shakes his head.

ZHENYA

And next thing you know, he'll be draft age. Better start getting used to it. Well, what did you think, you could pull the ol' hump and dump, and move on? Shit everywhere and leave the woman to clean it all up? No. I'm moving on too. That's equality for you.

BORIS

They're going to pester us to death...

ZHENYA

Who's going to pester you to death? You can pester with the best of them yourself.

BORIS

Juvy officers, social workers, I don't know, child psychologists... Protective services, for fuck's sake.

ZHENYA

So take him, and no one will bother you.

BORIS

They'll be going after you more. You're his mother.

ZHENYA

Oh, so it's me you're worried about? How nice. Juvy officers... They'll be only too happy. It's like pulling a baby from a fire. His home, his family, all gone, but he is safe and sound. All thanks to the heroic efforts of child protective services.

She gets up from the table and steps out into the balcony, leaving her phone behind.

In the balcony, ZHENYA throws one of the windows wide open, retrieves a pack of cigarettes and a lighter from the windowsill, lights up, takes a deep drag, and blows the smoke out of the window.

Still leaning against the countertop, BORIS cracks open a cabinet under the sink, sees an empty wine bottle next to the trash can, and closes the cabinet again. After a moment's hesitation, he crosses over to the table, and his hand shoots out to quickly push the home button on ZHENYA's phone. The phone lights up with the password screen: it's locked. BORIS leaves the phone where it is, turns away, and joins ZHENYA in the balcony, stopping just across the threshold.

BORIS

Maybe you should talk to your mother one more time?

ZHENYA

Right. Better yet, you talk to yours. We'll call a psychic, do a séance.

(flicks ash out of the window)

I already talked to her. Don't need any more of that, thanks.

BORIS heaves another sigh and shakes his head.

BORIS

If the Beard finds out...

ZHENYA

Ah, so that's what you're so afraid of! Silly me, I thought you were worried about your child. Would be a hoot, though, if they canned you from your precious job. I bet they would, too. For sending your own son to the orphanage. How un-Christian of you. How un-Orthodox. The Beard will never stand for it. That'll be hilarious! What are you going to do then?

BORIS

Stop it.

ZHENYA

Listen to you! So decisive!

(takes a frenetic drag on her cigarette)

What are you staring at? Quit gnashing your teeth!

BORIS

(after a pause, quietly)

I'm so sick of your shit...

ZHENYA

Bastard.

BORIS

When do we tell him?

ZHENYA

We? What do you mean, "we"? *You* tell him. Tell him whenever you want.

(flicks the cigarette out of the window)

Do it now, if you want. Wake him up and tell him.

She returns to the kitchen, steps over to the table, drains the wine from the glass in one gulp, and walks out of the kitchen with a look of nonchalance, leaving the door, which opens out into the hallway, wide open.

### 13. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. HALLWAY. NIGHT

ZHENYA walks down the hallway and enters the bathroom. We hear her urinate, flush the toilet, and wash her hands.

She emerges from the bathroom and returns to the kitchen, closing the door behind her this time.

Out in the hallway, the door closes to reveal ALYOSHA, who had been hidden behind it, dressed in a tank-top and underwear. He must have been standing there all through his parents' conversation. His face is streaming with tears; he seems to be shrinking into the wall.

ZHENYA (O.S., FROM THE KITCHEN)

That's it, case closed. Don't bring this up with me again. Got it? In fact, don't talk to me at all. I can't stand the sight of you or the sound of your voice anymore. When are you moving out already? If you're too cheap, I'll pay for the movers myself! Why are you still hanging around here? It's over, you understand? Over!

ALYOSHA drags himself dejectedly back to his room and closes the door.

BORIS (O.S.)

I have the same right as you...

ZHENYA (O.S.)

Yes, yes, you have the right! You'll get yours, one way or another!

She flings open the kitchen door, walks quickly down the hallway, iPhone in hand, and disappears into the bedroom.

#### **14. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. KITCHEN. NIGHT**

Alone in the kitchen, BORIS looks at the knife block sitting on the countertop, matte metallic knife handles protruding invitingly from it. He retrieves a large knife, places it on the countertop before him, then, after a slight pause, opens the bread box, takes out a loaf, crosses over to the fridge to retrieve some lean sausage wrapped in cling wrap, and makes himself a sandwich. He chews it absent mindedly, staring at a fixed point ahead.

#### **15. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. HALLWAY. NIGHT**

BORIS turns off the kitchen light, walks down the hallway, and disappears into the living room. Inside the room, he switches on the light and closes the glass living room doors that had stood wide open until now. A short time later, he turns off the light and lies down on the couch. It squeaks audibly underneath him.

#### **16. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. KITCHEN. DAY**

Morning. The kitchen TV is playing a morning talk show. ALYOSHA, washed and dressed, is sitting at the kitchen table, poking at fried eggs on his plate with a fork. A mug filled with tea stands next to the plate. ZHENYA, wearing a bathrobe but already in full makeup, is leaning with her butt against the countertop, flipping through her iPhone.

ALYOSHA

I don't want any more.

ZHENYA

(without looking up)

Finish it. What am I supposed to do, throw it out?

ALYOSHA

I'm not hungry.

ZHENYA glares at him, her head lowered.

ZHENYA

Drink your hot chocolate. What's up with you? Are you sick?

ALYOSHA

I'm not sick.

ZHENYA

Fine, leave it, I'll clean it up.

ALYOSHA slides out of his chair and leaves the kitchen.

ZHENYA

No "thank you"?

ALYOSHA

(from the hallway)

Thank you.

ZHENYA puts her phone down on the countertop, crosses over to the table, retrieves the plate of unfinished eggs, takes it to the trash can, and tips the remaining eggs away. She opens the dishwasher and slides the plate inside.

### **17. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. ENTRANCE HALL. DAY**

Dressed in a hooded jacket, ALYOSHA pulls on his shoes, swings his backpack over his shoulder, opens the front door, and steps outside. The female talk show host's voice wafts in from the kitchen, along with the clattering of dishes as ZHENYA loads the dishwasher.

### **18. INT. SLEPTSOVS' BUILDING. STAIRWELL. DAY**

ALYOSHA closes the door behind him and walks past the elevator and down the stairs.

For a long while, he runs down the stairs, hopping noisily and enthusiastically over two or three steps at a time.

**19. INT. SLEPTSOVS' BUILDING. FIRST FLOOR LANDING. DAY**

ALYOSHA reaches the first floor and bursts out of the building entrance, red-faced and with his jacket flung open. The metallic door closes slowly behind him on its automatic hinge, and the magnetic lock closes forcefully.

**20. INT. BORIS' CAR. MOSCOW RING ROAD. DAY**

Behind the wheel of his low-cost foreign car, BORIS is languishing in the Moscow traffic. The car radio is tuned to an abrasively energetic morning show on a Russian pop station. The program is dedicated to the looming end of the world predicted by the Mayan calendar. The anchors' mindless chatter gives way to a Russian dance hit from late summer 2012. BORIS taps nervously on the wheel, completely out of time with the song.

**21. EXT. MOSCOW RING ROAD. DAY**

The traffic is moving at a crawl.

**22. EXT. SIDEWALK OUTSIDE OFFICE BUILDING. DAY**

BORIS parks on the sidewalk in Moscow's business area, literally squeezing his car into a tight spot between two other vehicles. His bag slung over his shoulder, he walks quickly towards the building, then breaks into a jog.

**23. INT. SALES OFFICE. DAY**

BORIS exits the elevator, passes through wide glass doors with the words SALES OFFICE written in gold against a blue background above, and hurries down an aisle between cubicle partitions. He ducks into his own cubicle, drops into the chair at a desk holding a monitor, keyboard, and headset with microphone, boots up the computer, then takes the bag from his shoulder, puts it into a desk drawer, and pulls on the headset.

**24. INT. SELF-SERVE CAFETERIA. DAY**

One wall of the cafeteria is decorated with a large, colorful painting of Jesus feeding the multitudes with two fish and five loaves of bread.

BORIS walks along the self-serve line, placing food on his tray.

He pays at the register and heads towards a specific table, already occupied by another man (COWORKER, 45) with a tray.

**25. INT. SELF-SERVE CAFETERIA. TABLE. DAY**

BORIS and the COWORKER eat their lunch without removing the plates from their trays. The COWORKER stares at his smartphone lying on the table next to his tray as he eats. BORIS is lost in thought.

BORIS

(after a long pause)

Do you think the world is really going to end?

COWORKER

Definitely.

(chews his food carefully and pokes at his teeth with his tongue)

How's work? Any leads?

BORIS shrugs uncertainly.

COWORKER

The Lord taught us to share.

BORIS

Fine, I'll have something for you by tonight. Maybe.

COWORKER

It's a win-win, trust me.

BORIS picks up his glass of fruit juice and takes a sip.

**26. INT. BEAUTY SPA. TREATMENT ROOM. DAY**

Naked from the waist down, ZHENYA is lying face up on the waxing table at the spa. A young female COSMETOLOGIST (30) in a white lab coat applies hot wax to ZHENYA's pubic area with a spatula: one strip, then another, and another... She tears off the strips, and ZHENYA yelps.

ZHENYA

Ouch!

COSMETOLOGIST

Oh, come on.

ZHENYA

It hurts! Really!

COSMETOLOGIST

It hasn't even grown back yet! You can take it.

ZHENYA

So get this... Last night, my ex...

COSMETOLOGIST

What?

ZHENYA

Got himself all worked up, worried.

COSMETOLOGIST

Good. Let him worry.

ZHENYA

So miserable, poor thing.

COSMETOLOGIST

He should be miserable. They're great at making a mess, but when it comes to cleaning it up...

ZHENYA

You think he's worried about the kid? Right. That'll be the day! He's got debts hanging over his head. Terrified he'll get booted from his job because of the divorce. Can you believe it? Their boss man is this radical Orthodox Christian type, a total bible-thumping whack job.

COSMETOLOGIST

Lift your leg. A fundamentalist!

ZHENYA

Exactly. Full-on beard down to here, tailored traditional shirts, nice shoes, Brioni suits...

COSMETOLOGIST

That's one classy fundamentalist.

ZHENYA

You can say that again. Has them all under Christian Sharia over there. Only ever hires family men with children, all baptized Christians, of course. The New Year office party always falls on a fast. So naturally, not a bite to eat, and all very understated. Oh, and we spent a couple of vacations on pilgrimage tours of monasteries.

COSMETOLOGIST

Yeah, I remember, you told me. So what, sounds fun. Exotic.

ZHENYA

Yeah, right. I was bored to death.

COSMETOLOGIST

Other leg.

ZHENYA

At least the money is good. Anyway, I can see he's getting really worried now.

COSMETOLOGIST

Could they really fire him?

ZHENYA

Who the hell knows. I hope so.

COSMETOLOGIST

But what about child support?

ZHENYA

Ouch! Are you trying to maim me?

COSMETOLOGIST

Okay, okay, calm down.

The COSMETOLOGIST squeezes some soothing oil into her palm and rubs it into the freshly waxed areas.

COSMETOLOGIST

Flip over.

ZHENYA flips over onto her stomach. The COSMETOLOGIST lathers hot wax into her butt crack.

COSMETOLOGIST

A friend of mine has this boss who's into, get this: extreme sports.

ZHENYA

No kidding.

COSMETOLOGIST

Yeah. He is always taking them kayaking, or skydiving, or ski jumping...

ZHENYA

Ski jumping sounds cool.

COSMETOLOGIST

I don't know. My friend busted her knee the first time. Spent half a year in a cast. Goodbye tendons!

ZHENYA

Yikes.

COSMETOLOGIST

She says some of her coworkers even bought doctor's notes online: you know, to say they had a weak heart or high blood pressure, or whatever...

ZHENYA

So what happened?

COSMETOLOGIST

He fired them! Said, if you're sick, go to the hospital.

ZHENYA

Damn...

COSMETOLOGIST

So prayers and monasteries aren't so bad – it could be much worse.

ZHENYA

Yeah, I guess. Though as far as I'm concerned, vacation means the sea, the beach, a nice hotel... all inclusive!

COSMETOLOGIST

You have good taste.

**27. INT. BEAUTY SPA. HAIR SALON. DAY**

ZHENYA is sitting in a salon chair in front of a mirror, swaddled in a black sheet up to her neck. A female STYLIST (40), scissors and comb in hand, is tinkering with her hair.

STYLIST

(obviously continuing their conversation)  
And how does your new guy feel about all this?

ZHENYA

Fine. He's actually very progressive, you know?

STYLIST

Well, he's rich and healthy... Why not be progressive?

ZHENYA

Knock on wood.

ZHENYA pokes a hand out from under the sheet, leans slightly forward, and knocks on the shelf under the mirror.

STYLIST

Don't worry, I don't have the evil eye.

ZHENYA

I'm not even really superstitious. It's sort of a habit, you know, just in case.

The STYLIST nods, brushing ZHENYA's hair.

STYLIST

Is he divorced? Got any kids?

ZHENYA

He's been divorced for three years. Has a grown-up daughter. She's studying abroad. In Portugal, I think. Works, too.

STYLIST

How old is he?

ZHENYA

Forty-five.

STYLIST

Good age. But he looks younger.

ZHENYA

He does tai chi, doesn't smoke, almost never drinks...

STYLIST

Now I'm really getting jealous. How is he getting along with your boy? So, I'll even it out in the back?

ZHENYA

Yeah, go ahead. He's not... I feel like the boy hates my guts. And he won't even hear of meeting the guy. The older he gets, the more he becomes like his father. He's even starting to smell like him.

STYLIST

Secondary sex characteristics. He's growing up. What did you expect? That he'd stay your little angel forever?

ZHENYA

He was never a little angel. He's always been so prickly. Almost ripped me in two during labor – he didn't want to come out. Took a full day.

STYLIST

Oh goodness gracious... I've got my own stupid cow, too. I look at her and it pains me to see it: she's just like her daddy... I hope he's drunk himself to death by now in that goddamned slum of his. But she's not into that, I mean, she doesn't drink. I told her outright: I'll kill you if you ever do. No, I'm talking about her personality. Actually, it's not even her dad she's like: more like his mother. And that's one major bitch, let me tell you.

With a swift motion of her hand, the STYLIST captures a lock of ZHENYA's hair with the comb and uses her scissors to trim the ends.

ZHENYA

How old is your daughter, I've forgotten?

STYLIST

Nineteen. Dumb as a board. I mean, she has some smarts: she finished high school, passed her exams... But she refuses to keep studying, and won't budge. Out at all hours, doing God knows what. I told her, you get knocked up, don't count on me to help. And she's like, "I use protection". Can you believe that?

ZHENYA

Thank God for that, at least.

STYLIST

I don't know what she plans to live on. No profession, no ambition... I ask her, what do you want to be? And she says, I want to go into Parliament. So I say, go get an education while you still can then. And she says, you don't need an education to be in Parliament. And that's that. What can I say to that?

**28. INT. BEAUTY SPA. RECEPTION DESK. DAY**

A female CLIENT (55), doing her best to look younger, and a cute female RECEPTIONIST (35) trade compliments across the reception desk.

RECEPTIONIST

You look wonderful!

CLIENT

Really?

(takes a few steps to the side, towards the mirror, and examines her new look)

I keep thinking it might be too short.

RECEPTIONIST

No, it's absolutely perfect! It looks great on you!

CLIENT

You think so? Thank you! You are very kind. How much do I owe you?

RECEPTIONIST

Three and a half.

CLIENT

What do you mean, three and a half? Your website says three.

RECEPTIONIST

Our rates changed.

CLIENT

When? Just now?

RECEPTIONIST

Day before yesterday.

CLIENT

That's when I made the appointment. The website said three.

RECEPTIONIST

You know, I don't deal with the website.

CLIENT

Well, you know, I want to speak to your manager.

RECEPTIONIST

Sure, go ahead.

CLIENT

Don't talk to me like that!

RECEPTIONIST

Like what? What did I say?

CLIENT

Call the manager! And give me your complaints book!

RECEPTIONIST

One moment.

The RECEPTIONIST lifts the landline phone receiver and dials a number.

### **29. INT. BEAUTY SPA. MANAGER'S OFFICE. DAY**

ZHENYA is sitting at the desk in the manager's office, staring at the computer screen. Her iPhone buzzes and vibrates on the table. She picks it up, glances at the screen, and takes the call.

ZHENYA

Hello... Yes, I see. I'll be right there.

She puts the phone back down, and her eyes return to the computer screen. She grabs the mouse, moves it around the table, clicks a few times, then finally gets up, takes her phone, and walks out of the office.

### **30. INT. BEAUTY SPA. DAY**

ZHENYA crosses the hair salon. Some of the chairs are occupied. Most of the hairdressers and clients are women: all but one male stylist and his male client.

### **31. INT. BEAUTY SPA. RECEPTION DESK. DAY**

ZHENYA arrives at the reception desk just as the CLIENT finishes her tirade in the complaints book. She ends the complaint with a period and practically throws the pen on the desk.

ZHENYA

Good afternoon! How can I help you?

CLIENT

I need you to explain to me, my dear, why your website lists one rate, and your people charge another?

ZHENYA

Which services did you purchase?

RECEPTIONIST

A haircut. With Filippova.

CLIENT

When I made the appointment the other day, your website listed 3,000 as the price. And she's charging me three and a half. I come here a lot to get my hair done and use some of your other services, and this has never happened before. Never.

ZHENYA nods with understanding.

ZHENYA

I'm very sorry. Our rates have gone up, and the website has now been updated. But you are right, it was out of date the day before yesterday. It's our mistake. *You* are still entitled to the old rate.

The CLIENT visibly relents and settles her account, placing three 1,000-ruble notes on the desk while pointedly ignoring the RECEPTIONIST.

CLIENT

(to ZHENYA)  
I hope this doesn't happen again.

ZHENYA

Of course. Thank you very much. Have a good day.

CLIENT

Goodbye.

She turns around and heads towards the exit. ZHENYA sees her to the door, then returns to the reception desk.

ZHENYA

I told you this morning, you have to warn them about the rates.

RECEPTIONIST

Sorry. I completely forgot.

ZHENYA

Is everything OK?

RECEPTIONIST

Yes.

ZHENYA

If this happens again, I'll have to dock your pay. Got it?

RECEPTIONIST

Yes.

ZHENYA

Pay more attention.

**32. INT. SUPERMARKET. BLUE HOUR**

BORIS is strolling leisurely past the supermarket shelves and displays, pushing a shopping cart. MASHA (25), noticeably pregnant, is walking next to him and they are filling the shopping cart with various items.

MASHA

Why do you never tell me anything?

BORIS

What do you mean?

MASHA

Like, how it went with your place yesterday? What did the buyers say?

BORIS

They said they had to think about it. Trust me, if anything actually happened, I would tell you.

MASHA

How come it's taking so long to sell? I mean, you work in sales!

BORIS

Well... You see, that's not really the same thing..

MASHA

No, I don't see. Leave the dumplings. Mom said never buy the dumplings.

BORIS

Where is she today?

MASHA

She went back home. Even I was getting tired of her. So it's just you and me tonight.

BORIS

Thank God.

MASHA

(slaps him lightly on the back)  
Don't say that!

BORIS

What?

MASHA

That's my mother you're talking about! Get some broccoli, instead of those dumplings.

BORIS obediently picks up a head of broccoli.

**33. EXT. SUPERMARKET. BLUE HOUR**

Commuter district. MASHA and BORIS, cradling a full shopping bag, emerge from the store and head for his car, parked not far from the exit. MASHA settles into the front passenger seat. BORIS places the bag on the back seat and shuts the door.

**34. EXT. MASHA'S PLACE. COURTYARD. BLUE HOUR**

BORIS parks his car among the multitude of others standing alongside the multi-entrance high-rise building, retrieves the shopping bag, and follows MASHA to one of the entrances. She punches the code into the lock of a metal door, and they enter the building.

**35. INT. MASHA'S PLACE. BEDROOM. BLUE HOUR**

In the bedroom, on a large bed, BORIS and MASHA are making slow, careful love, lying on their sides.

After they have finished, they hold each other for a long while.

MASHA

Everything is going to be OK, right? You won't leave us?

BORIS

Have you lost your mind? Why would you even think that?

MASHA

I just feel so scared sometimes...

Her eyes suddenly well up with tears.

BORIS

Come on, stop it... I'm right here...

MASHA

You probably used to tell your ex the same thing.

BORIS

You are different. I never felt so happy with any of the others.

MASHA

How many others have there been?

BORIS doesn't respond.

MASHA

More than ten?

BORIS

I'm hungry. Are you hungry?

MASHA

I'm always hungry these days. And by the way, I'm mad at you.

BORIS

I'll go make us some food.

MASHA

Bring me an apple.

BORIS

Okay.

He climbs out of bed, pulls on his underwear, retrieves the covers that had slipped onto the floor, pulls them over MASHA, kisses her, and walks out of the bedroom.

She rolls carefully over onto her back, pulls the covers up to her chin, and lies there, lost in thought.

BORIS returns with a large red apple in his hand.

BORIS

(stops in the doorway)  
Catch!

He tosses the apple to MASHA.

MASHA

(catches it)  
Thank you.

BORIS

Boiled chicken with broccoli?

MASHA

No. I want a cucumber and tomato salad.

BORIS

And salad on the side.

She nods. He turns and leaves.

Alone again, MASHA lifts the apple to her nose and inhales its aroma with relish. She then bares her teeth, opens her mouth wide, crunches into the apple hungrily and loudly, and chews with her mouth full.

**36. EXT. OUTSIDE BEAUTY SPA. BLUE HOUR**

ZHENYA is practically glowing as she emerges from the spa, carrying her handbag. The sign blazing above the door reads KALI YOGA BEAUTY SPA.

A slender, meticulously groomed man with streaks of gray in his hair – ANTON (50) – climbs out of the driver's seat of a black Mercedes parked nearby. He rounds the car, opens the front passenger door for ZHENYA, offers her a hand as she climbs inside, then closes the door and returns to the driver's seat.

Inside the car, ANTON kisses ZHENYA's hand. She laughs.

**37. INT. CAFE. BLUE HOUR**

ZHENYA and ANTON are eating dinner in a cozy, nearly empty cafe with quiet music and understated lighting. ANTON is watching her with undisguised delight.

ZHENYA

I can't eat when you look at me like that.

ANTON

I'm sorry.

He lowers his eyes to his plate, filled with seafood and grilled vegetables.

ZHENYA

I was just joking.

She sets down her fork and slides a hand along the tablecloth towards him. He smiles, takes her hand, and their fingers intertwine.

ANTON

Did you get your hair trimmed, or am I just imagining it?

ZHENYA

You noticed.

ANTON

Of course. I pay attention.

ZHENYA

Still? After all that's happened between us?

ANTON

Especially after all that's happened.

ZHENYA

After what happened the day before yesterday?

Under the table, she slips a foot out of her shoe and slides it between his legs.

ZHENYA

Or the day before that?

ANTON

Zhenya...

ZHENYA

Yes, Anton? Am I making you blush?

ANTON lifts his wine glass. ZHENYA lifts her own, and they clink their glasses together.

### **38. INT. ANTON'S PLACE. BEDROOM. NIGHT**

In the twilight, ZHENYA and ANTON are making tantric love on his bed.

### **39. INT. ANTON'S PLACE. BEDROOM. NIGHT**

Later, ZHENYA sits with her back to the headboard, illuminated by a night light, holding a glass of wine and wearing nothing but ANTON's shirt. Her legs are stretched out in front of her, one slung over the other. ANTON is lying on his back, covered up to his waist. His hands are on his stomach; his head is on the pillow; his eyes are closed. ZHENYA watches his profile and listens to his rhythmic breathing.

ZHENYA

Are you asleep?

He doesn't respond.

ZHENYA

Hey!

Silence.

ZHENYA

It's not fair.

He remains silent.

ZHENYA

I love you... Do you hear me? I've never loved anyone. Except my mom, when I was little. But she was so cold to me. Never a kind word, or a warm touch. Nothing but discipline, order, chores, homework... Mean, lonely bitch.

ANTON

(without opening his eyes)  
Still alive and well, I hope?

ZHENYA

Alive. And yes, generally well. We almost never talk. Every time I call, we end up fighting. Later, I can't even figure out what started it.

She takes a sip of her wine.

ZHENYA

I didn't even know what love meant until I met you. I never loved my husband. And there wasn't really anyone before him. Even with him, I got pregnant by accident. He was so happy, kept asking me to marry him. Said everything was going to be okay because we were together. But I didn't want any of it. I was so scared... Scared to get an abortion, scared to keep it... I really didn't want a kid. When I went into labor, I thought I was going to die. They had to take me to the ICU. And when they brought him to me afterwards, I couldn't even look at him. I felt outright disgusted. My milk never even came in. But then, life went on, things settled down and we fell into this inertia...

ANTON

(without moving or opening his eyes)  
Without love. Life should never be loveless.

ZHENYA

To this day, when I look at him, or even think about him, like now, for example, I have this feeling that I made a mistake which I can't fix. I blame him, I blame myself... All I want is to be happy. I'm an evil bitch, right?

ANTON opens his eyes, turns his head, and looks at her.

ANTON

The most beautiful evil bitch in the world.

ZHENYA

Do you really love me?

ANTON

Come here.

**40. EXT. ANTON'S PLACE. NIGHT**

A yellow cab is waiting outside the entrance. ZHENYA comes out of the building and climbs into the back seat. The cab pulls away.

**41. INT/EXT. YELLOW CAB/CITY STREETS. NIGHT**

ZHENYA stares out of the window, leaning back in her seat, as the cab makes its long way through the city.

**42. EXT. SLEPTSOVS' BUILDING. BLUE HOUR**

Early twilight. The yellow cab pulls up outside the high-rise and idles for a short while. Finally, the back door opens, and ZHENYA climbs out. As the cab pulls away, she heads towards the entrance, digging her keys out of her purse as she walks. She unlocks the door, and disappears inside.

**43. INT. SLEPTSOVS' BUILDING. STAIRWELL. BLUE HOUR**

ZHENYA emerges from the elevator, unlocks her apartment door, and steps inside, trying not to make a sound.

**44. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. ENTRANCE HALL. BLUE HOUR**

Inside, ZHENYA takes off her shoes in the dark, tiptoes silently past the closed doors of the living room and Alyosha's room, enters the bedroom, and closes the door behind her.

**45. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. BEDROOM. BLUE HOUR**

In the bedroom, ZHENYA literally collapses onto the bed without switching on the light. She undresses, pulling her clothes off without getting up, seemingly without even lifting her head. Then she crawls under the covers and falls asleep, cradling her pillow.

**46. INT. SALES OFFICE. BORIS' CUBICLE. DAY**

BORIS is sitting at the desk inside his cubicle, staring at the computer monitor. He lets out a loud yawn without covering his mouth, leans back in his chair, and stretches, lifting his arms over his head.

His COWORKER's face peeks over the partition wall.

COWORKER

Lunch time.

**47. INT. SELF-SERVE CAFETERIA. DAY**

The moment BORIS and his COWORKER enter the lunch room, BORIS' phone rings. He glances at the screen, nods to the COWORKER, and moves off to the side, stopping by the wall near the entrance, right under the painting of Jesus feeding the multitudes with two fish and five loaves of bread.

BORIS

(into the phone)  
Hello.

**48. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. ALYOSHA'S ROOM. DAY**

ZHENYA has just emerged from the shower: her hair is wet and tangled; the bathrobe is open over her naked body. She is standing in the middle of ALYOSHA's room, holding her iPhone to her ear.

ZHENYA

(into the phone)  
Did you see Alyosha last night?

BORIS

No, I didn't come home last night. Why, what's happened?

ZHENYA

I just got a call from school. He didn't show up yesterday or today.

BORIS

What do you mean, didn't show up? Who called you?

ZHENYA

His homeroom teacher.

BORIS

What exactly did she say?

ZHENYA

That he didn't show up to school yesterday or today. Are you deaf?

BORIS

Did he come home?

ZHENYA

I don't know. I got back late last night myself. Didn't check his room, thought he'd be asleep. I slept in this morning, thought he'd already left, as always. He's so independent... And I can't reach his phone. Has he called you?

BORIS

No.

ZHENYA

Oh God...

BORIS

Don't get hysterical. We'll find him, he'll be fine. We should call... what's his name... his friend.

ZHENYA

I already spoke to Misha. He hasn't seen him either, yesterday or today.

BORIS

I see... Where are you now?

ZHENYA

At home.

BORIS

And you can't tell whether or not he was home last night?

ZHENYA

No.

BORIS

Why not? How hard can it be?

ZHENYA

Oh, gee, I don't know. Why don't you come home and see for yourself?

BORIS

I'm at work, in case you forgot.

ZHENYA

Do you understand that no one has heard from him in over 24 hours?

BORIS

He could be coming up in the elevator as we speak. Or walking home right now, I don't know... I think you're overreacting. He probably did something bad: got an F, or lost his tablet... And now he's afraid of how you'll react, so he's staying away.

ZHENYA

You mean it's all *my* fault again?

BORIS

You don't even know whether or not he's been home. Most likely, he was there last night. Hello?

ZHENYA

Well, I'm calling the cops. And you can stay at work and keep deliberating over what *might* and *might not* have happened. Idiot.

#### **49. INT. SELF-SERVE CAFETERIA. DAY**

BORIS

Can't we do this without insults? Hello?

Realizing that ZHENYA has hung up on him, BORIS gnashes his teeth, heads towards the counter, and picks up a tray. His COWORKER waves to him from the head of the line.

#### **50. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. ALYOSHA'S ROOM. DAY**

A young female POLICE OFFICER (25) moves around the room, taking photos of the furniture and various items with her camera. She finishes up and heads into the kitchen.

#### **51. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. KITCHEN. DAY**

ZHENYA is sitting at the table, her face free of makeup and her hair tied back into a ponytail. A weary-looking plainclothes DETECTIVE (45) sits across from her, writing on a sheet of paper. A thin folder and a toothbrush in a sealed plastic bag lie on the table next to him.

The POLICE OFFICER enters the kitchen.

POLICE OFFICER

I'm done.

DETECTIVE

Great, thanks.

(nods at the toothbrush)

Take this and wait for me in the car. We have to make one more stop.

The POLICE OFFICER nods and leaves without even a glance at ZHENYA.

DETECTIVE

Well, what can I tell you... I see no evidence of criminal activity.

ZHENYA

What do you mean, "criminal activity"?

DETECTIVE

Well, you know, sometimes parents will do away with their kid, then file a missing person's report.

ZHENYA

And you thought that's what I'd done?

DETECTIVE

We always start out with that theory. But what you have here is a runaway. Happens all the time: 12 years old, rebellious age, hormones out of control. Give him a few days, he'll be back. Of course we could go to the precinct, spend a few hours on a detailed deposition. Probably not today though: we would need your husband to be present as well. But in any event, this case is unlikely to go beyond a preliminary inquiry.

ZHENYA

You said there's no evidence of criminal activity. But what if he was kidnapped? Because I can't imagine where he could be.

DETECTIVE

I'm sure he's just bumming around the neighborhood. He won't last long. He's used to a comfortable life. And you have a comfortable life here. You can't even imagine the kinds of conditions kids come back to. Because the streets are worse

than any home, no matter how shitty. Now, as for a possible kidnapping. Here's how the system works: first, we conduct a preliminary inquiry, which includes interviews with the parents, relatives, friends, possible witnesses, and so forth. We are short on resources, plus we have other cases to investigate: murders, rapes, assaults, robberies, and so forth. So the preliminary inquiry could take a few days. If the runaway hasn't turned up by then, and if we have grounds, by which I mean evidence, then we open a missing person's case. Then, if the case investigation presents more grounds, meaning more evidence – suspicion of murder, kidnapping, and so forth – it becomes a criminal case. But that's up to the Investigative Committee. You can imagine how long that takes and the mountain of paperwork it requires. By then, the runaways have normally come back and run away all over again.

ZHENYA

So you're just going to do nothing?

DETECTIVE

I'm giving you a realistic picture. We are obligated to act. And we will. But in this specific case... The system does not have the resources or the time to chase after every kid.

ZHENYA

I see. This case is going straight in the trash. So what am I supposed to do? Sit around waiting for him to come back? What if he doesn't come back?

DETECTIVE

Statistics don't lie. In the overwhelming majority of cases, teenage runaways come back after a week, ten days at the most. But let me offer you some advice: if you want somebody to actually look for him, and if you want them to start as soon as possible, go online, find the missing child search team website, and give them a call – they'll tell you what info they need. It's staffed with volunteers, working their asses off round the clock. No bureaucracy and a streamlined, highly effective response protocol. How do I know? Past experience of working together, with good results. Anyway, here's my phone number.

(hands her his card)

I have yours. We'll be in touch.

The DETECTIVE tucks the sheet of paper he was writing on into the folder and rises from the table.

ZHENYA examines the card he handed her.

ZHENYA

And that's it?

DETECTIVE

For now.

ZHENYA

The drowning man's rescue is in his own hands, is that right?

DETECTIVE

His own hands, and his feet, his head, and most importantly, his heart.

ZHENYA

Unbelievable.

DETECTIVE

Trust me, had you gotten any other detective, they'd have been much more assertive with you, and much less helpful, to put it mildly. It's not that I'm such a nice guy. I'm just trying to save time: my own, yours, and the search team's. The sooner you contact them and the sooner they get started, the sooner they will find your little slacker hanging out on the street or at the mall somewhere, or most likely hiding out at a friend's house while their parents are away for a few days and they've got the place to themselves. So get moving. Or wait. Your choice. That's it, I have to go now.

ZHENYA

But if he's at a friend's house, why didn't he tell me?

DETECTIVE

That's a question only you can answer.

**52. INT/EXT. BORIS' CAR/COMMUTER DISTRICT. BLUE HOUR**

BORIS is driving his car through the neighborhood. He spots a group of about a dozen people in the open space near his building (?), most dressed in hiking gear, some wearing reflective vests. They are crowded around several all-terrain vehicles and a minivan, all its doors open.

**53. EXT. SLEPTSOVS' BUILDING. BLUE HOUR**

BORIS pulls up to the building and parks the car.

Outside the next entrance over, a guy in camo is explaining something animatedly to several old women sitting on the bench.

**54. INT. SLEPTSOVS' BUILDING. ENTRANCE LOBBY. BLUE HOUR**

BORIS enters the building and presses the elevator button.

**55. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. STAIRWELL. BLUE HOUR**

BORIS steps out of the elevator to see his apartment door slightly ajar. A young woman in camo pants (LENA, 30) is talking to a female neighbor who lives on the same landing. (DIALOG (?)). His head lowered to avoid catching the neighbor's eye and escape an unwanted conversation, BORIS ducks into the apartment.

**56. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. ENTRANCE HALL/LIVING ROOM. BLUE HOUR**

Leaving the front door ajar, BORIS heads straight into the living room.

**57. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. LIVING ROOM. BLUE HOUR**

BORIS enters the living room to find ZHENYA and the male search team COORDINATOR (35) sitting across the table from each other. The COORDINATOR is writing in his notepad. A large color photo of ALYOSHA lies on the table in front of him.

BORIS

(to the COORDINATOR)

Hello.

(to ZHENYA)

Sorry, got stuck in traffic.

ZHENYA ignores him.

COORDINATOR

(to Boris)

Take a seat. Come on, let's get to work. My name is Ivan. I'm the search team coordinator.

BORIS

(takes a seat at the table)

My wife told me on the phone.

COORDINATOR

Excellent. Then let's get started. Or more accurately, let's continue. Let me tell you what's going to happen, so you have fewer questions later on. I will be asking you detailed questions about your son, Alyosha.

Meanwhile, my team is interviewing your neighbors and possible witnesses: on the street, outside the building, in the local stores...

The young woman in camo pants who was talking to the neighbor enters the living room, smartphone in hand.

LENA

(to the COORDINATOR)

Nothing of interest from the neighbors.

COORDINATOR

Nothing at all?

LENA

No one saw or heard him, today or yesterday. Can't remember anything specific. More of our people have arrived. We set up a command post behind the building (?) and brought the fliers.

COORDINATOR

You printed them out? Excellent.

LENA

I'll keep canvassing the building.

COORDINATOR

Yes, stay on it.

LENA leaves.

COORDINATOR

So depending on what the canvassing yields, we will focus on specific locations and objectives. You and I are going to finish up here and head on to the precinct to see the detective in charge – rarely happens, by the way, even in Moscow, so you really lucked out there. He promised to give us access to the security cameras. This is a big deal, and could really simplify our task. Next. It's getting late, and the boy will need a place to spend the night. Since it's not exactly spring outside, we'll be searching entrance lobbies and stairwells. We'll ask the detective for the entry codes, I expect he'll cooperate. So let's start from the beginning.

He checks his notepad.

COORDINATOR

Alyosha Sleptsov, 12 years old, looks 10, no distinctive features, healthy, approximately 5'1", dark blond hair, last seen wearing blue jeans, red hooded jacket, blue backpack, white sneakers (?). Two days ago, left for school at the usual time, and by the looks of things, hasn't been home since. His cell phone is unreachable, but we will keep dialing it anyway. Now, I need you to tell me: what are the boy's interests? Hobbies, sports, dreams of building a space station, traveling the world, and so on?

ZHENYA

He doesn't have any hobbies. And he's not interested in sports, either. I guess he spends most of his time at home.

COORDINATOR

You guess. Ah. I see. At home: that means on the computer. His laptop is on his desk, right?

BORIS

Yes, but we try to limit his online time.

ZHENYA

Especially you.

COORDINATOR

Let's keep personal issues out of this. Can we access the computer?

BORIS

Of course.

ZHENYA

Yes.

COORDINATOR

Excellent. You have access to his email, social network accounts, phone numbers and addresses of his buddies and girlfriends?

ZHENYA

He only has one friend, I guess. Misha Kuznetsov.

COORDINATOR

Guessing again. Fine.

BORIS

I have all his user names and passwords. And he does only have one friend: Misha. I mean, in real life. As far as the social networks...

COORDINATOR

I see. Any close relatives he could have gone to see? Grandmas, grandpas, uncles and aunts, cousins?

ZHENYA

No one on my husband's side. On my side, just my mother. She lives outside Moscow.

BORIS

But it's probably been about three years since we last visited. I doubt the kid remembers.

COORDINATOR

The kid. I see. I do hope you called the grandmother? And she said she hadn't seen the boy, correct?

ZHENYA

I can't reach her. Actually, things between us are... you know...

COORDINATOR

What do you mean, you can't reach her?

ZHENYA

First she wouldn't pick up the phone, and now it says "the number you dialed is unavailable." Her connection was always shoddy...

BORIS

Her connection is fine. She's the one who's "shoddy".

COORDINATOR

Grandma's quite a character, then. I see. Did you try the neighbors?

ZHENYA

I don't have any of their numbers.

BORIS

It's her summer home, her plot, her house, her neighbors... It's best to stay out of it, to avoid a heap of trouble.

COORDINATOR

Could she be hiding Alyosha? Say, if he asked her to?

ZHENYA shrugs.

ZHENYA

I don't think so...

BORIS chortles.

BORIS

She's capable of anything. Stalin in a skirt!

ZHENYA

That's enough. How would he even get there? We only ever drove there. And my mother wouldn't exactly be happy to see him. You know how she is.

BORIS

What if they've been talking in secret? Isn't it possible? She's a real trouble maker. Damn, I thought he'd seemed withdrawn lately. She must've been filling his head with nonsense this entire time!

ZHENYA

But she doesn't love him. She doesn't love anyone.

BORIS

Loves, doesn't love... She's using the kid against me. And against you, too.

COORDINATOR

(cuts them off)

Anyway. You have to go see the grandmother right away. Where exactly does she live outside Moscow?

ZHENYA

At her summer home. All year round.

BORIS

It's towards Kiev. Hard to explain. The turnoff from the highway is difficult to spot...

COORDINATOR

Do you have a car?

BORIS

Yes.

COORDINATOR

How long is the drive?

BORIS

About three hours. Maybe two and a half.

COORDINATOR

OK, here's what we'll do. Give me the contact info for all his friends and acquaintances, including his homeroom teacher's number – I hope you have it? Excellent. Also, all his user names and passwords. I'll take the laptop; we'll go through it at our headquarters and then decide on the next step. And you, the both of you, get your car and go see dear old granny. Lena will go with you: she's a highly skilled operative. Or rather, she'll *follow* you in her own car. Meanwhile, keep trying to reach the grandmother. When you get there, check everything carefully, don't overlook anything, and call me right away to tell me how it went, no matter what happens. Can you handle that? Someone will stay here, in case the boy comes back.

### **58. EXT. HIGHWAY. NIGHT**

BORIS' car speeds along the dark highway, followed by an all-terrain vehicle driven by LENA.

### **59. INT. BORIS' CAR. HIGHWAY. NIGHT**

Ominous music is playing on the radio.

ZHENYA keeps dialing her mother's number, but to no avail.

ZHENYA

Oh for God's sake...  
(to BORIS)  
Can't you turn this off? Please? I have a headache.

BORIS

There're some pills in the glove compartment.

ZHENYA

Turn it off.

BORIS hesitates, then switches off the radio.

They drive in silence for a long time.

ZHENYA

Do you think he's there?

BORIS

Where else could he be? Think about it.  
(glances in the rearview mirror at LENA's car following  
closely behind)  
Fuck, he really knows how to make life difficult! Perfect  
timing too, the little shit.

ZHENYA

What if something terrible's happened to him?

BORIS

Don't think like that. He's fine. He'll get what's coming to  
him though, I'll see to that.

ZHENYA digs through her purse and fishes out her cigarettes.

BORIS

You can't smoke in here anymore.

ZHENYA

Right, terribly sorry. You've got a pregnant woman to  
chauffeur around now, how could I forget? I'll blow it out  
the window.

BORIS

No, I said you can't.

ZHENYA

Or you'll do what? Throw me out of the car?

She lights up spitefully.

BORIS

I see your headache has gone.

He rolls down all the windows, puts the fan on high, and switches the radio back on, turning the volume all the way up. It's now playing a different tune. The wind roars through the car, beating against their faces and tearing at their hair. An air current knocks the ash from the tip of ZHENYA's cigarette. After only a few drags, she tosses it out of the window, and pushes the window button on the passenger door. The glass doesn't budge: BORIS has locked the windows in the open position.

ZHENYA

Close the windows!

BORIS grins, staring at the road.

ZHENYA leans back in her seat and covers her face with her hands.

**60. EXT. FIELD. COUNTRY ROAD. NIGHT**

BORIS' car turns off the highway, windows rolled up and the radio now silent, and LENA's all-terrain vehicle follows it down a barely paved two-lane road with half the street lights broken. The road cuts through expanses of fields fringed by woods.

**61. EXT. WOODS. COUNTRY ROAD. NIGHT**

Leaving the fields behind them, the two cars enter the woods, which soon grow increasingly sparse, giving way to the concrete fencing of summer home communities.

**62. INT. BORIS' CAR. SUMMER HOME COMMUNITY. NIGHT**

BORIS' car pulls up to the summer home community's automatic metal gates. LENA's vehicle stops a few feet to the right.

BORIS

Great, they put up a gate. What do we do now? Ram it?

ZHENYA

The side door is open.

BORIS

We just leave the car here?

ZHENYA

Well, what do you suggest?

She opens the door and climbs out of the car. BORIS switches gears and backs away from the gate. His headlights illuminate ZHENYA and LENA, who has joined her outside. BORIS parks the car so as not to block the gate.

**63. EXT. SUMMER HOME COMMUNITY. SIDE DOOR. NIGHT**

ZHENYA, BORIS, and LENA, who is armed with a long black flashlight, leave their cars outside the gate and enter the community through the side door in the gate.

**64. EXT. SUMMER HOME COMMUNITY. STREET. NIGHT**

For a long while, ZHENYA, BORIS, and LENA walk along a sparsely lit, deserted street bordered by fences of all shapes and sizes surrounding even more diverse summer homes. None of the houses are particularly grand, and the lots surrounding them are small, just a little over a tenth of an acre. All the windows appear to be dark. Suddenly, an enraged dog begins to rattle his chain in an agitated frenzy from behind yet another fence.

**65. EXT. SUMMER HOME COMMUNITY. ZHENYA'S MOTHER'S HOUSE. FENCE. NIGHT**

ZHENYA, BORIS, and LENA are standing in front of the garden gate of a tall, solid wooden fence badly in need of a coat of paint. All they can see of the house beyond the fence is the ridge of its roof and the brick chimney. ZHENYA presses the doorbell next to the gate, and they hear a distant, muffled trill coming from somewhere deep in the house. Silence. ZHENYA leans on the doorbell for a few long moments. They hear no movement on the other side of the fence.

BORIS

She won't open up. Probably raising the barricades as we speak. She's such a...

ZHENYA

Enough. You make her sound like a complete monster.

LENA

Is there any other way in?

BORIS

Only over the fence.

ZHENYA

We don't have a key.

LENA

I see.

LENA examines the gate, then walks along the fence and rounds the corner.

BORIS

Where is she going?

ZHENYA

How should I know?

ZHENYA rings the bell again and phones her mother at the same time. No response.

Suddenly, they hear crunching and cracking sounds, followed by the dull thump of something hitting the ground on the other side of the wall.

LENA (O.S.)

Son of a... Fuck.

She reaches the gate and after a few seconds of fiddling with the lock, opens it from the inside.

**66. EXT. SUMMER HOME COMMUNITY. ZHENYA'S MOTHER'S HOUSE. FRONT YARD. NIGHT**

ZHENYA is standing outside the front door to her mother's house.

ZHENYA

Mom! Open up, it's me!

Behind the door, all is silent.

LENA and BORIS circle the house from opposite directions. The dark rectangle of a shed looms in the corner of the plot. LENA shines her flashlight into the windows of the house. Suddenly, in one of the windows, the spotlight lands on a woman's pallid face, which immediately disappears back into the darkness.

LENA

She's in there!

LENA wheels around and walks quickly back to the front door.

ZHENYA hammers on the door with her fist.

ZHENYA

Mom, open up! Alyosha is missing!

**67. INT. ZHENYA'S MOTHER'S HOUSE. KITCHEN. NIGHT**

A small oil lamp is burning under an icon on a shelf in the corner. ZHENYA is sitting on a chair at the table. Her MOTHER (65) removes a tea kettle from the stove, carries it to the sink, and fills it.

MOTHER

I nearly had a heart attack. First the doorbell starts ringing in the middle of the night, like there's a fire. Then I hear someone climbing over the fence. Oh, dear Lord in heaven... And I can't find my phone. What am I supposed to do?

She turns off the faucet, replaces the kettle on the stove, takes a box of matches, and lights the gas burner under the kettle.

MOTHER

You could've at least warned me.

ZHENYA

I've been calling you nonstop. And don't tell me you didn't hear the phone.

MOTHER

As God is my witness.

ZHENYA

I know you. First you wouldn't pick up, then you turned it off.

MOTHER

I haven't seen it since this morning. Can't imagine where it's got to. I must have lost it. Ah, to hell with it.

Zhenya's MOTHER takes four tea bowls from a shelf, places them on the table, then takes a seat and stares closely at ZHENYA.

MOTHER

Tell me this, my dear: I just can't figure out why you thought your boy was here. I can't even remember the last time I spoke to him. Or to you. Thank the Lord.  
(turns towards the icon in the corner and crosses herself)  
And I don't regret it for a second. Not even a little. What's that goddamned ape of yours doing skulking around outside? May God forgive me... Didn't you say you were getting a divorce?

ZHENYA

Your god and your devil are cut from the same cloth.

MOTHER

What'd you say? What cloth? You watch your mouth, girl. Don't be getting all smart. And quit wagging your head at me. This is your mother you are talking to. Have some respect. Or else scram, and don't let the door hit you on the way out. I didn't invite you here. Nothing but trouble since you were born. Do you know what you look like now?

ZHENYA

What?

MOTHER

A whore, that's what.

ZHENYA

Mom...

MOTHER

What do you want, huh? A teat to suck on? Here. Always mom-this, mom-that...

**68. EXT. SUMMER HOME COMMUNITY. ZHENYA'S MOTHER'S HOUSE. FRONT YARD/ATTIC. NIGHT**

In the front yard, LENA is climbing up a straight ladder to the attic, holding her flashlight. BORIS is on the ground, holding the ladder steady. LENA opens the bolt with a click, pushes open the door, and peeks inside, shining her flashlight around the attic. It illuminates the opposite slope of the roof, the ceiling beams, some small bits of trash – and nothing else. LENA locks the bolt and climbs down the ladder.

LENA

OK, we're done with the house. Let's check the shed.

BORIS

He's not here, I can feel it. He never was.

LENA

We'll check everything.

**69. INT. ZHENYA'S MOTHER'S HOUSE. KITCHEN. NIGHT**

BORIS enters the kitchen, walks over to the table, and sets down an ancient-model cell phone. LENA stops in the doorway. ZHENYA looks inquiringly at BORIS, who shakes his head in response.

MOTHER

So have you poked around every nook and cranny? No sign of him, huh? I don't know why you even thought...

She takes the phone from the table and pushes a few buttons.

MOTHER

The battery is dead, of course. Where did you find it?

BORIS

Under your bed.

MOTHER

Must've fallen. Well at least you found it. Sit down, have some tea. I don't have anything to sweeten it, though. Just some honey, but it's all crystallized.

ZHENYA

No, thanks Mom, we're going soon.

MOTHER

Well aren't you polite. You two don't seem all that torn up about Alyosha going missing... Must've made this sob story up to get me feeling sorry for you, is that it?

She looks from ZHENYA to BORIS and back again, then looks LENA up and down with a mix of suspicion and disgust.

MOTHER

You picked the wrong one to mess with. I see right through you. You said you were getting a divorce. Thought you could saddle me with your fucking spawn, huh? Think again!  
(makes an obscene gesture)  
I've told you before, and I'll tell you again: I'm not looking after him.

BORIS

Do you get any company here, other than your TV?

Zhenya's MOTHER pointedly ignores him and continues to look at ZHENYA.

MOTHER

Didn't I tell you, back when you were knocked up, to come to your senses? You ignored then. And I told you: the day will come when you'll come crawling to your mother, but it will be too late.

(raps a finger on the table)

Now, you reap what you sow. There's your future.

ZHENYA

Mom, what the hell are you saying? Have a little shame! At least in front of strangers.

MOTHER

Don't you lecture me. I have nothing to be ashamed of. This is my house. Snooping around here in the middle of the night, like thieves, and with your appraiser, too... Trying to make a fool of me. I'm not signing the house over to you, don't even think about it. I'm leaving it to God.

The tea kettle on the stove begins to whistle. Zhenya's MOTHER gets up and switches off the gas.

MOTHER

I have nothing to feed you. Making ends meet on just my pension. With no help from you, not one bit. I'd die waiting. You wouldn't spare a nail for my casket.

#### **70. INT. BORIS' CAR. HIGHWAY. BLUE HOUR**

Predawn twilight. BORIS and ZHENYA drive along the highway in a deathly silence. He is staring at the road ahead, exhausted, while she sleeps, leaning away from him towards the window, her hands folded over her belly. The car bounces slightly on a pothole. ZHENYA wakes up and looks at BORIS.

ZHENYA

Where are we? How much longer?

BORIS

Another 40 minutes, I think.

ZHENYA

Put on some music, will you?

BORIS turns on the radio.

BORIS

She gets more and more paranoid every year. And all that hatred... Awful.

ZHENYA

Like you're bursting with love, huh?

BORIS

Why are you defending her?

ZHENYA

Because she's right.

BORIS

About what? That you can't wait for her to croak?

ZHENYA

Watch your language. She's right that she warned me not to get involved with you, not to have the baby, not to be stupid. But stupid I was. I listened to you instead. "Everything will be okay," you said, "as long as we're together..." Now you tell me, how is it that you, who wooed me with promises of love and happiness, and showered me with flowers, in the end brought me nothing but pain and disappointment? Just an insufferable, shit-filled life.

She watches his profile as he clenches his jaw, staring at the road.

ZHENYA

You know, I never loved you. I just couldn't live with *her* anymore. And I couldn't get free of her on my own. But I did with you. I used you. At least that's what *I* thought. And all the while, *you* were using *me*, *you* needed a family. I would've been fine without you. Really. I just needed somebody to move in with. You were simply convenient. Had you not gotten me pregnant... That clouded my judgment. I shouldn't have listened to you: I should've gotten the abortion, and that would've been that.

BORIS

You should have. You're right, it would have been better. For everyone.

ZHENYA

You don't say! So what's changed? Are you a different person? Didn't you just knock up another young idiot so you

can drag her down to hell with you? And if your dick still works in 10 or 12 years' time, you'll do it all over again, I know it. Poor girl, I feel sorry for her. You ruined my life. Do you understand that? Thank God I finally met a good man, someone who doesn't need anything from me except me.

BORIS stomps on the brake, turns off onto the shoulder, and stops the car.

ZHENYA

What happened? Did we break down?

BORIS

Yes, we broke down. Get out.

ZHENYA

No, I'm serious.

BORIS

So am I. Go fuck yourself.

ZHENYA

What?

He leans over her and pushes the passenger door. It swings open.

BORIS

Get out, or I'll kick you out.

ZHENYA

Go ahead! That's the one thing you haven't done to me yet. I'm not going anywhere.

BORIS

Fuck off!

He lifts his hand, his eyes blazing terribly, but instead of hitting her, simply clenches his fist until his knuckles turn white.

ZHENYA

Fine, I'll get out. You bastard.

ZHENYA climbs out of the car.

ZHENYA

Don't forget, your son is missing!

She slams the door shut with all her might.

BORIS speeds off abruptly and drives away without looking back.

BORIS

Fucking idiot! Bitch!

**71. EXT. HIGHWAY. BLUE HOUR**

Daybreak. Standing on the shoulder, ZHENYA takes her cigarettes from her purse with trembling hands and lights up a smoke. Feeling calmer, she pulls out her phone and makes a call.

**72. EXT. RAVINE. DAY**

Early morning. Walking in a dense line, the search team is combing the ravine that splits the Sleptsovs' neighborhood in two. A fog is creeping over the river.

**73. INT. POLICE PRECINCT. DAY**

Morning. The DETECTIVE is sitting at a desk in front of a computer. BORIS and the COORDINATOR are standing behind him. All three are watching footage from the external security cameras. BORIS is dressed in a waterproof outdoor jacket and laced-up boots.

The monitor shows a very long view of the building entrance. The door opens, and ALYOSHA bursts out of the building, wearing his jacket and a backpack on his back. He skips along the side of the building until he disappears from view. Several more people walk one after another in the same direction. (Possibly a second camera (?)).

DETECTIVE

And that's it. None of the other cameras picked him up. Not on the way to school, not around the mall, which is like a magnet to those kids...

COORDINATOR

There's a food court there. And it's a nice place to hang out.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)

...not on the way to the bus stop or the taxi depot, if, say, he was headed towards the metro, hoping to get to a train station somewhere. There are a few possibilities. He either turned down a street with no cameras – and there are plenty of places like that – or he was careful to stay out of camera range, which is less likely. Or somebody took him.

BORIS

What do you mean, "took him"?

COORDINATOR

Kidnapped him.

BORIS

Are you serious?

COORDINATOR

This is no joking matter.

BORIS

No, but... that's impossible...

DETECTIVE

Unfortunately, it does happen.

(to the COORDINATOR)

What have you got?

COORDINATOR

Nothing from the canvassing yesterday. Of course a lot of time has lapsed. By our standards. Time to open a missing person's case. Maybe even a criminal one.

The DETECTIVE nods.

COORDINATOR

We handed out the fliers: took them to the emergency room, highway patrol, the stores; asked shopkeepers to keep them by the registers. We haven't put any up yet. A runaway would see those and hole up somewhere, then we'd never find him.

DETECTIVE

Naturally.

COORDINATOR

We spent half the night combing the stairwells, any place he might have known the entry code to and spent the night.

(to BORIS)

He really doesn't have a lot of friends.

(to both)

We are about to go talk to his best friend. Didn't get to do it yesterday, for reasons beyond our control. Looks like they have a secret spot, "the base" they call it. We found references to it on Alyosha's computer. Any clue as to where it might be?

BORIS shrugs.

DETECTIVE

Leave me 20 or so of your fliers. I'll hand them out around the precinct.

COORDINATOR

Of course.

BORIS' phone rings. He checks the screen, excuses himself, and steps off to the side.

BORIS

Hi...

**74. EXT. PARK. DAY**

MASHA is sitting on a park bench, holding her phone to her ear. An elderly woman is sitting very close to her on the bench, reading a current affairs magazine lying open on her lap.

MASHA

(into the phone)

I miss you, baby. Are you coming tonight? You promised.

BORIS

I'm afraid I can't, honey. I have to keep searching.

MASHA

What about me? What about your work? You said they're very strict over there.

BORIS

I took some personal time.

MASHA

Mmm. From work *and* from me?

BORIS

Please don't be silly. You know what's going on.

MASHA

I just feel so lonely... You are there, I am here... It won't always be like this, will it?

BORIS

Of course not. Please stop doing this to me.

MASHA

When are you coming over?

BORIS

I don't know yet. I'll call you.

MASHA

When?

BORIS

Soon, baby, soon. OK, I have to go.

MASHA

Don't hang up. I want to hear what's going on over there.

BORIS

Stop it. You're putting me in an uncomfortable position.

MASHA

Why? Do you have something to hide?

BORIS

No, honey, of course not.

MASHA

I'm sure you're hiding something. Is your ex there, too?

BORIS

No, no, she's not. Don't be silly. I love you.

MASHA

Really?

BORIS

Of course.

MASHA

I love you too. *We* love you.

BORIS

And I love you both. OK, bye, baby.

MASHA

Bye, sweetie. I can't wait to see you.

MASHA holds the phone to her ear for a few more seconds to make sure BORIS has hung up, then ends the call and turns to the old woman reading a magazine.

MASHA

Let's go, Mom.

MASHA'S MOM

(closes the magazine)

You hungry?

MASHA nods and heaves herself slowly up from the bench.

MASHA'S MOM

(rises and helps MASHA to her feet)

You are so gentle with him, like a little kitten.

MASHA

Mom, let me deal with him my way...

MASHA'S MOM

Was I meddling? Of course you deal with him your way. I'm only looking out for you. My mother taught me, and I'm passing it on to you. You know how men are...

MASHA

(suddenly ecstatic)  
Oh! The baby moved!

(holds her belly)

MASHA'S MOM

Let's see, let's see!

She leans down and presses an ear to MASHA's stomach.

MASHA

Can you feel it?

MASHA'S MOM

Of course! My sweet babies!

**75. INT. ANTON'S PLACE. BEDROOM. DAY**

ZHENYA is asleep on ANTON's bed, cradling a pillow.

Freshly shaven and full of pep, ANTON enters the bedroom, perches on the bed, and gently wakes ZHENYA.

ANTON

Get up. Time to go. I made breakfast.

ZHENYA

Huh? Oh, right, right...

She sits up in bed and squints at him sleepily.

ZHENYA

What time is it? Did anyone call me?

She takes her iPhone from the bedside table and looks at the screen.

ANTON

I'll come with you, if you don't mind.

ZHENYA

Yeah?

(lifts her face from the iPhone)

No, I don't mind. But don't you have to go to work?

ANTON

Work can wait. They're people too, they'll understand.

ZHENYA

Right, I have to call what's his face, the coordinator... My God, it's so late! I set the alarm.

ANTON

I turned it off. You needed to get some sleep.

ZHENYA

Hello, Ivan? This is Alyosha Sleptsov's mother.

**76. INT. COORDINATOR'S CAR. DAY**

The COORDINATOR is driving a high all-terrain-vehicle through the neighborhood, following BORIS' car.

COORDINATOR

(into the phone)

Yes. Any news?

ZHENYA

(a little taken aback)

No. You?

COORDINATOR

We haven't found him yet. We'll keep looking.

ZHENYA

You see, what happened was...

COORDINATOR

I really don't have the time.

ZHENYA

Yes, yes, I'm sorry. Tell me, is there anything *I* can do? I can't just sit around...

COORDINATOR

Get on the phone, call every single hospital in the area. We are looking for any unidentified boy between the ages of 10 and 13, brought in by the cops or an ambulance. Even if he doesn't fit the description, we need to check in person. If you find anyone who fits these parameters, contact me immediately, preferably by text, and I'll send over a team to take a look.

ZHENYA

We can go ourselves. We have a car.

COORDINATOR

Excellent. But let me know anyway. I'll send over one of our veteran operatives to go with you, they'll know what to do and what to say. If you find more than one boy, it's best to send several teams. OK, we'll be in touch.

He hangs up and parks the car next to BORIS in a small parking lot outside the school wall.

**77. EXT. SCHOOL. DAY**

BORIS and the COORDINATOR climb out of their cars, enter the school yard, and head towards the building.

BORIS

Why do you only want to talk to Misha Kuznetsov? Why not notify the entire school?

COORDINATOR

Same reason we haven't papered the town with fliers. If he knows people are looking for him, he'll dig in, and we'll never find him.

BORIS

What if he and Misha are in cahoots?

COORDINATOR

Of course at this age they are already pretty good liars, but nowhere near as good as adults. We'll get the truth out of him. I'll be the only one asking questions. This is not up for discussion.

They enter the school building.

**78. INT. SCHOOL. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE. DAY**

In the Principal's office, the COORDINATOR is speaking to MISHA. BORIS is sitting on a chair nearby. The female PRINCIPAL (50) is also present.

COORDINATOR

When was the last time you saw him?

MISHA

Um... three days ago, I think...

COORDINATOR

Tuesday? The twenty-fifth?

MISHA

Yes.

COORDINATOR

Where?

MISHA

Here, at school.

COORDINATOR

What did you do after school?

MISHA

Nothing. We both went home.

COORDINATOR

Where do you normally hang out?

MISHA

Um... outside the building... I don't know...

COORDINATOR

Where else?

MISHA

Um... nowhere...

COORDINATOR

OK, fine. Probably at the mall?

MISHA

No, our parents won't let us.

COORDINATOR

So what, you just play in the sandbox all day like little babies?

MISHA

No. We're not babies. We play soccer at the hockey rink...

COORDINATOR

Do you have a bike?

MISHA

Yes.

COORDINATOR

And where do you and Alyosha normally cycle to?

MISHA

Just, uh... outside the building...

COORDINATOR

Listen, Misha, if you know where he is, but you promised not to tell, that's fine, don't tell us. We'll find him anyway. Or he will show up on his own when he gets tired of living outside. What matters is that you know your friend is safe, alive and well. And we old people can run around in circles looking for him, we don't mind. It's like hide-and-seek, right? Is this a game you two are playing?

MISHA

No. I don't know where he is. I swear.

COORDINATOR

OK. I believe you. Well, where *could* he be? I know you two have your “base”. I might not know where it is, but I know it’s out there. You talked about it on Facebook. If you really don’t know where he is, but you think he might be there, you have to tell us where it is. Your friend might be in danger.

MISHA

Um...

COORDINATOR

See, son, we will find it anyway. But what if we’re too late? What’s more important to you: your friend or some secret spot? You’ll find a hundred other secret spots. Even if you swore some sort of an oath, you wouldn’t be breaking it. It doesn’t count when you’re saving a friend. He needs your help.

MISHA

Um... our base is in the woods.

COORDINATOR

Is it a dugout? A tent?

MISHA

No, an abandoned building. It’s in the basement...

COORDINATOR

How do you get there: on foot or by bike?

MISHA

It’s far on foot, but you could do it. We usually take the bikes.

**79. EXT. ROAD THROUGH THE WOODS. DAY**

Several all-terrain vehicles and a minivan are heading down a road through the woods.

**80. INT. COORDINATOR’S CAR. ROAD THROUGH THE WOODS. DAY**

BORIS travels through the woods in the COORDINATOR’s car.

**81. EXT. ABANDONED BUILDING. DAY**

The search team’s minivan and all-terrain vehicles pull up to an abandoned building concealed by the woods.

The operatives file out of their cars and prepare for their search. Most of them look experienced and well-equipped, except for a few newbies like BORIS.

**82. INT. ABANDONED BUILDING. BASEMENT. DAY**

Armed with flashlights and radios, wearing a mix of construction hard hats and military helmets, the search team searches the basement. BORIS is among them. (They could be using portable fluorescent lamps. (?)) In one corner, they find

several wooden board pallets; two disintegrating armchairs spilling their springs and foam; a wooden crate doubling as a table and covered with a piece of cardboard; empty soda bottles; crushed McDonalds boxes; and on one peeling wall, a poster of a vulgar half-naked woman, eyes rolled back in affected ecstasy.

On one of the pallets, BORIS finds a tattered child-sized jean jacket. He picks it up, examines it, and turns to peer into the darkness at the search team operatives.

BORIS

This is his jacket.

A radio hisses and clicks in the dark as one of the operatives immediately gets the COORDINATOR on the line.

OPERATIVE

(into the radio)

Ivan, we've found a jean jacket. The father is sure it's his.  
Over.

COORDINATOR (O.S.)

Copy that. So we definitely have to comb the entire building and surrounding area.

### **83. EXT. ABANDONED BUILDING. DAY**

The COORDINATOR is standing over a map of the area spread on the hood of one of the cars and talking to his team.

COORDINATOR

Remember to mark down and report dangerous or questionable spots, but never go near them on your own. We have experts for that. Let's not add to the misery by getting hurt. If anyone does have an accident, though, we suspend the search and focus all efforts on helping our friend. First off, contact the coordinator. The only person qualified to administer medical help is the doctor, this gentleman here.

The COORDINATOR points at one of the operatives, who raises a hand in response.

COORDINATOR

If the runaway has limited mobility when you find him, do not move him. Talk to him, calm him down, and wait for the doctor. That's it. Now, lock and load, people! Figuratively, I mean; don't take that as literal instructions.

### **84. INT. ABANDONED BUILDING. DAY**

The search team is painstakingly combing through the debris that fills the post-apocalyptic innards of the building.

### **85. EXT. HOSPITAL. DAY**

ZHENYA and ANTON pull into a parking lot in ANTON's car. LENA, still wearing camo pants, parks her own car nearby, and the three of them walk through a secure entrance into the hospital grounds.

**86. INT. HOSPITAL. MAIN LOBBY. DAY**

After a short walk along the building and past the windows of the main lobby, the three enter the hospital building and head for the changing room.

**87. INT. HOSPITAL. STAIRWELL. DAY**

Wearing blue plastic shoe covers on their feet, ZHENYA, ANTON, and LENA take the stairs to the second floor.

**88. INT. HOSPITAL. NURSE'S STATION. DAY**

ZHENYA, ANTON, and LENA walk into the unit and head straight towards the nurse's station, with LENA leading the way.

A NURSE (40) is sitting at a desk behind the counter, writing in a thick ledger.

LENA

Hello. Could you help us?

NURSE

Hello. What can I do for you?

LENA

We are from the search and rescue team. We're looking for a boy, Alyosha Sleptsov, 12 years old. This is his mother.  
(points at ZHENYA)  
He ran away from home, so he might be going by a different name. We got a tip that you admitted a child yesterday who fits his description. We'd like to see him.

The NURSE closes the ledger, slides it into a desk drawer, locks it, and stands up.

NURSE

(to LENA and ANTON)  
You two need to step out, please.  
(to ZHENYA)  
You, follow me.

ZHENYA and the NURSE walk down the hallway.

ZHENYA

Is he OK?

NURSE

He's fine. Just a little tired and frightened.

ZHENYA

Frightened of what?

NURSE

Well, the cops picked him up on the street last night, kept him somewhere at the precinct until morning, then brought him here, dirty and hungry...

ZHENYA

How could that be? They *know* we're looking for him. I filed a missing person's report.

NURSE

They don't know anything. The shift changes, and that's that. They have no idea who the kid is, or where he came from. And he's not talking either. So they take him to the hospital. We see this all the time.

**89. INT. HOSPITAL. WARD. DAY**

The NURSE motions for ZHENYA to follow her and enters the ward, walled in by partitions. One of the two beds inside is unoccupied. The NURSE stops by the other bed, in which a boy is lying, facing the wall with the blanket pulled over his head. The NURSE leans over the boy and shakes him lightly by the shoulder. He pulls the covers from his head and turns to face them. It's not ALYOSHA.

**90. EXT. WOODS. DAY**

The sun dips below the horizon. Search teams of between five and seven people, walking in a line with 15 to 20 feet between each person, continue to comb the woods.

BORIS is part of one of the teams.

TEAM LEADER (35)

Stop! Don't get ahead of the others, and don't fall behind!  
Keep visual contact! Use your compass! And hold the line!  
Let's go!

**91. EXT. WOODS. UNDER THE LARGE SATELLITE ANTENNA. DAY**

BORIS' search team is walking in a line along a concrete fence topped with coils of barbed wire. The massive dish of the satellite antenna looms beyond the wall, turning at a painfully slow pace.

**92. EXT. WOODS. ANTENNA STATION CHECKPOINT. DAY**

The TEAM LEADER and BORIS are talking to a police CAPTAIN (45) guarding the antenna. They hand him one of the fliers.

CAPTAIN

(examining the flier)  
No, I haven't seen him around here. No one gets inside without a pass or a special permit. This is a restricted facility.

TEAM LEADER

Could I take down your personal information?

CAPTAIN

Sure, go ahead.

**93. EXT. WOODS. LAKE. BLUE HOUR**

BORIS and the TEAM LEADER emerge from the woods on the shore of a lake. The antenna looms on the opposite side of the lake, where other teams are searching the thicket at the edge of the water.

The radio hisses and clicks in the TEAM LEADER's hand.

TEAM LEADER

(into the radio)

Ivan, come in. We've searched the lakeshore. No trace of the boy. Over.

COORDINATOR (O.S.) (ON THE RADIO)

Copy that. Get back here.

BORIS

What about the lake itself?

TEAM LEADER

We don't search for bodies. That's up to the Emergency Services and the police...

He turns around and heads back into the woods, leaving BORIS alone. BORIS remains there for a long time, staring at the dark surface of the lake.

**94. EXT. COMMUTER DISTRICT. NIGHT**

Late night in the city. The mobile search and rescue command post has moved from the woods back to the lot near the SLEPTSOVS' building. Most of the same team members and gear we saw in the woods are here now. Operatives are crowded outside the minivan, its doors open. The COORDINATOR is standing on the door step of the minivan, towering slightly over the crowd. ZHENYA and ANTON are standing at the front of the crowd; BORIS a little off to the side.

COORDINATOR

Since we have no leads and no new information about possible search sites, we are moving on to full-scale flier distribution. We paper everything with them: bus stops, doorways, lamp posts, benches, announcement boards, fences... Get permission from the guard or management before posting them in stores. In other words, follow the usual protocol. We also need a team of five people to search the stairwells.

**95. EXT. COMMUTER DISTRICT. BUS STOP. NIGHT**

ZHENYA, ANTON, and LENA hang fliers on both sides of the bus stop, using wide clear packing tape.

**96. EXT. COMMUTER DISTRICT. SIDEWALK. NIGHT**

ZHENYA, ANTON, and LENA put up fliers on lamp posts lining both sides of the street, winding packing tape all the way around each post.

**97. INT. 24-HOUR STORE. NIGHT**

LENA is talking to the OWNER (55) of a small 24-hour store: a barrel-bellied man from the Caucasus. ZHENYA and ANTON are standing nearby.

LENA

You have such a nice store, great foot traffic. Would it be OK if we put up a flier at the entrance? A young boy is missing.

The OWNER looks ZHENYA and ANTON up and down.

OWNER

And who are you?

LENA

Search and rescue team. Volunteers.

OWNER

Ah. Fine, put it up. But not on the glass.

LENA

Thank you.

She turns around and heads towards the exit.

**98. EXT. HIGH-RISE BUILDING. ENTRANCE. NIGHT**

ZHENYA and ANTON tape a flier outside the building door, right above the intercom buttons.

**99. INT. HIGH-RISE BUILDING. STAIRWELL. NIGHT**

BORIS and the COORDINATOR, holding the radio and with a flashlight at his side, search the stairwell. They take the elevator to the top floor, then walk down the stairs. While one searches the nooks and crannies, the other watches the stairwell.

They check two floors and head further down. Suddenly, the elevator starts moving from the top floor.

COORDINATOR

(to BORIS, quietly)

Stop.

They stop on a landing between floors and listen closely. The elevator stops somewhere below them. The COORDINATOR's radio springs to life.

TEAM LEADER (O.S.)

(on the radio)

Ivan, the elevator stopped on the fourth floor. Over.

COORDINATOR

Got it. We're waiting.

**100. INT. HIGH-RISE BUILDING. ENTRANCE LOBBY. NIGHT**

On the first floor, the TEAM LEADER is watching floor numbers light up above the sliding elevator doors. Number four is lit up above one of the doors. The elevator starts moving, and number three blinks to life.

TEAM LEADER

(into the radio)  
It's heading down.

COORDINATOR (O.S.)

(on the radio)  
Copy that.

Number two lights up, followed by number one... The elevator doors open, letting out two slightly tipsy YOUNG WOMEN (20).

YOUNG WOMAN 1

(to the TEAM LEADER)  
Oh... Hello!

Her friend drags her towards the exit. The TEAM LEADER watches them leave, then lifts the radio to his mouth.

**101. EXT. HIGH-RISE BUILDING. COURTYARD. NIGHT**

On the other side of the street, almost directly across from the building entrance, another operative dressed in camo stands holding a radio. The YOUNG WOMEN emerge from the building and head straight towards the operative.

TEAM LEADER (O.S.)

(on the radio)  
It's not him. We'll keep going.

COORDINATOR (O.S.)

(on the radio)  
Got it. Stay in touch.

When the YOUNG WOMEN draw even with the operative, one of them gives him a wink. They turn and walk down the road past the building, heading in the direction of another OPERATIVE (40) wearing camo and equipped with a radio, standing outside the third entrance down.

YOUNG WOMAN 1

(slows down as they reach the OPERATIVE)  
Hey, it's the little green men! What planet are you from?

OPERATIVE

Keep moving, ladies.

YOUNG WOMAN 1

So polite!

Her friend drags her along.

**102. INT. ANTON'S PLACE. BEDROOM. BLUE HOUR**

Early twilight. On the bed, ZHENYA and ANTON are asleep under the covers, their arms around each other.

**103. INT. MASHA'S PLACE. BEDROOM. BLUE HOUR**

Daybreak. On the bed, BORIS is lying on his back, sleeping like a log, as the saying goes. MASHA is lying on her side next to him, watching his profile silently.

**104. EXT. COMMUTER DISTRICT. DAY**

Early morning. Fliers bearing ALYOSHA's photo are plastered all over the still deserted streets: on the bus stops, lamp posts, outside building and store entrances, on announcement boards, on the backs of park benches, on walls and fences...

**105. INT. MORGUE. HALLWAY. DAY**

The COORDINATOR marches briskly down a long hallway inconsistently lit with fluorescent lights. BORIS follows him, then ZHENYA a few steps back, with ANTON lagging behind considerably.

**106. INT. MORGUE. COLD STORAGE. DAY**

The COORDINATOR, BORIS, and ZHENYA stand over a body on a gurney, concealed by a sheet.

COORDINATOR

This won't be easy.

ZHENYA

I'm ready.

The COORDINATOR turns his head and nods to someone.

A morgue technician emerges from the side somewhere, wearing a lab coat that was once white, and uncovers the body.

ZHENYA yelps, then immediately clamps a hand over her mouth. She stares at the gurney, her eyes bulging with horror.

The blood drains from BORIS' face. He sways slightly, as if punched in the chest by an invisible fist, his breath caught in his throat.

ZHENYA

(holding a hand to her face)

It's not him.

They are looking at the disfigured body of a child: face smashed beyond recognition, body covered with bruises and signs of putrefaction, and a clotted reddish-black mess where the sex organs should be.

ZHENYA

Alyosha has a birthmark right there, on his chest.  
(looks helplessly at BORIS)  
A birthmark... on his chest...

BORIS

(catches her eyes, then immediately looks at the  
COORDINATOR)  
It's not him.

COORDINATOR

Are you sure?

BORIS

Yes.

ZHENYA

It's not him. The feet, the hands, the fingers – all different.

Trembling, she takes a step back.

ZHENYA

Please, take it away...

BORIS moves towards her, as if to catch her. She motions for him to stop.

The COORDINATOR nods to the morgue technician, who covers the body with the sheet and rolls the gurney around the corner and into the darkness.

COORDINATOR

The proper thing would be to run a DNA analysis, just to be  
sure...

BORIS

To be sure of what? It's not him.

ZHENYA

We are absolutely certain it's not him.

COORDINATOR

You know, sometimes people simply refuse to believe...

ZHENYA

(raises her voice)  
It's not him. How many times do we have to tell you?

COORDINATOR

Listen, you are the only ones who can request the test. The  
cops still haven't opened a case. Dragging it out, as usual.

Your detective, it turns out, is retiring in a few days – he has other things on his mind...

ZHENYA

(explodes)

Quite torturing us! I told you, plain as day: it's not him! You hear me? It's not him! Not him! (to BORIS) Say something!

She stares desperately at BORIS, then suddenly wrings her hands as tears literally stream from her eyes. She suddenly looks like a little girl.

ZHENYA

I wanted you to suffer, I wanted you to hurt, you bastard! I would've never given him up, you hear me? Never! You understand? I would've never given him up to anyone!

She lunges at BORIS, fists raised, and starts pummeling him on the chest, shoulders, face... He doesn't defend himself. Blood starts dripping from his nose.

ZHENYA

I will never give him up! You hear me? Never! Please God, just let him come back!

The COORDINATOR drags her away from BORIS and leads her out into the hallway.

### **107. INT. MORGUE. HALLWAY. DAY**

The COORDINATOR leads ZHENYA out into the hallway. ANTON dashes over, puts his arms around ZHENYA, and holds her close.

ZHENYA

(her face buried in his chest)  
It's not him... It's not him...

ANTON

(whispers)  
Thank God for that. That's good.

The COORDINATOR returns to the cold storage room.

### **108. INT. MORGUE. COLD STORAGE. DAY**

The COORDINATOR returns to the cold storage room to see BORIS sitting on the floor, slumped against the wall, head hanging down, face buried in his hands. He feels the presence of another person, lifts his head, glances at the COORDINATOR, then hides his face in his hands again. Blood is smeared under his nose.

### **109. INT. SLEPTSOVS' PLACE. ALYOSHA'S ROOM. DAY**

BORIS and ZHENYA's old apartment is undergoing major renovations. A contractor enters Alyosha's former room from the hallway, crosses over to some bags of construction trash stacked by one of the walls, picks one up, and walks out of the room. Another contractor is peeling wallpaper from a different wall.

Eventually, he reaches the *Incredibles* poster, and pulls it down along with the wallpaper stuck to it.

Outside the window, it is winter. Snow is falling over the same view of the woods that stretch as far as the eye can see under a dirty sky, with the same large satellite communication antenna looming over the forest, its dish angled straight up 'observing' the sky.

**110. INT. MASHA'S PLACE. KITCHEN/HALLWAY. DAY**

MASHA and her MOTHER are making dumplings in the kitchen. A text message notification chimes on a cell phone in the hallway. MASHA wipes her hands and walks out into the hallway to get her phone from the side table that stands under the mirror by the front door. She picks up the phone, looks at the screen, presses a few buttons, and carries the phone back into the kitchen.

**111. INT. MASHA'S PLACE. LIVING ROOM. DAY**

From the hallway, we see a 2-year-old child walking brightly around the living room with toy in hand. A TV in the living room is showing a report on the winter military action in Debaltsevo, a village in Eastern Ukraine. BORIS is watching the report from the couch in front of the TV, eating chips right out of the bag. He has a beard and a different haircut.

**112. INT. ANTON'S PLACE. LIVING ROOM. DAY**

The same report is playing on the TV. ZHENYA, with a new haircut and looking like a different person, her face altered in some elusive way, is sitting with her feet on the couch in front of the TV, flipping through her iPhone 6. Finally, she presses a button on the side of the phone, switching off the screen, gets up from the couch, and carries the gadget out of the room.

On the other end of the couch, ANTON doesn't look up from the TV.

**113. INT. ANTON'S PLACE. BALCONY. DAY**

In a spacious, winterized balcony with expensive window panes, radiator, and heated floor, ZHENYA is running on a treadmill. She runs for a long time.

Finally, she lowers the speed and slows down, then switches to a walk and stops, breathing heavily. She turns off the treadmill.

**114. EXT. RAVINE. BLUE HOUR**

Twilight. It's snowing. A badly faded flier with a barely distinguishable photo and text is taped to a lamp post that stands over a paved footpath down in the ravine. The tape's dirty edges are peeling off in places. The flier reads "Alyosha Sleptsov, 12 years old, missing since September 26, 2012..."