

LEV

By Lee Miller

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The only real voyage of discovery
consists not in seeking new
landscapes but in having new eyes. -
Marcel Proust

FADE IN:

INT. HOUSE ON THE EMBANKMENT APARTMENT - MIDNIGHT

It is Moscow on June 14, 1941. Lev Vetrov is twelve years old. He knows all the countries of the world and their capital cities and every prime number up to 7,057. He can do very high level math. He has absolutely no social skills. The part of his brain that processes emotion is underdeveloped. He is a high functioning autistic savant. Asperger's syndrome.

Lev has a sort of intelligence scarcely touched by tradition and culture. He is unconventional, unorthodox, strangely pure and original, akin to the intelligence of true creativity.

Lev is in his bed in the middle of the night doing cryptography problems in a notebook. He hears a door slam. He stops his work for 2 seconds, and then we hear a cat screaming. He continues his work.

EXT. HOUSE ON THE EMBANKMENT MOSCOW - DAWN

Helenka is a twelve year old girl who Lev believes lives upstairs. Every day, Lev and Helenka meet in front of the building. This morning they walk to the rubbish bin. A cat is lying in one. Its eyes are closed. It looks as if it was running. But the cat was not running or asleep. Mrs. Grekov's cat is dead. Mrs. Grekov is Lev's across the hall neighbor.

HELENKA

"O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!"

LEV

You know who did it?

HELENKA

This is the work of an evil man.

LEV

An evil man with a kitchen knife.

Lev pulls the knife from the dead cat. And he examines the knife carefully. He is looking for clues.

LEV

The cat was called Artamon. It belonged to Mrs. Grekov, who is our friend. She lives on the opposite side of the hallway.

HELENKA

She will want him back.

LEV

I wonder who killed him.

Lev is picking up the cat and about to take him upstairs to Mrs. Grekov, but she has come downstairs looking for her cat that disappeared from her apartment in the middle of the night. The cat is leaking blood from the wound.

LEV

I like cats.

Mrs. Grekov is wearing pajamas and a housecoat.

From Mrs. Grekov's POV, we see Lev standing at the trash with the cat. From Lev's POV, we see Mrs. Grekov and Lev glances at Helenka. Only Lev sees Helenka. Helenka is an apparition. She is Lev's subconscious link to emotion, humanity and to language.

MRS. GREKOV

What in god's name have you done to my cat?

Lev doesn't like people shouting at him. It makes him scared that they are going to hit him or touch him.

MRS. GREKOV

Let go of the cat.

(pause)

Let go of the cat for Christ's sake.

Lev puts the cat down and moves back two steps.

Mrs. Grekov bends down. We think she is going to pick the cat up herself, but she doesn't. Instead she started screaming again.

Lev puts his hands over his ears and closes his eyes.

Later...

EXT. HOUSE ON THE EMBANKMENT MOSCOW - DAWN

The police arrive. The policewoman puts her arms round Mrs. Grekov and leads her back toward the building.

POLICEMAN

Would you like to tell me what's going on here, young man?

LEV

The cat is dead.

POLICEMAN

I understand that.

LEV

I think someone killed the cat.

POLICEMAN

How old are you?

LEV

I am 12 years and 6 months and 12 days.

POLICEMAN

And what, precisely, were you doing here?

LEV

I was holding the cat.

POLICEMAN

And why were you holding the cat?

LEV

I like cats.

POLICEMAN

Did you kill the cat?

LEV

I didn't kill the cat.

POLICEMAN

You don't seem very upset about this.

LEV

The cat is dead.

POLICEMAN

You had better come with me.

The policeman tries to touch Lev, and this is when Lev hits the policeman.

INT. MOSCOW POLICE STATION - DAY

The supervisor looks at Lev for a while without speaking.

SUPERVISOR

I am arresting you for assaulting a police officer. Do you have any family?

LEV

Father, but Mother is dead.

They make Lev take the laces out of his shoes and empty his pockets at the desk in case. Lev has a nice knife with several attachments including a wire stripper and a saw and a toothpick and tweezers. It has the emblem of the NKVD on the side. He has a wooden puzzle, some coins, a paper clip and a key.

The supervisor looks at the knife.

A jailer is about to put Lev in a holding cell.

SUPERVISOR

Where did you get this knife?

LEV

My father.

SUPERVISOR

What does your father do?

LEV

He is a policeman.

SUPERVISOR

What kind of policeman?

LEV

I don't know; he wears a suit.

The supervisor thinks.

SUPERVISOR

(to the jailer)

Put him on the bench there; I'll watch him.

The supervisor's tone changes. Lev isn't so afraid.

SUPERVISOR

(to the Lev)

What is your dad's name?

Helenka sits next to Lev on the bench and whispers something humorous in his ear. Lev chuckles but the supervisor isn't amused.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

HELENKA

Your father is a hero and a good Communist and, more than anything, you want to be like him. You can never be like Comrade Stalin, of course. He's our great Leader and Teacher. But if you can be like your dad this will make everyone happy.

HELENKA

The state security is our secret police, and their job is to unmask the disguised enemies foreign enemies and domestic. Your dad is one of the best.

While the lecture is proceeding, Lev is doing cryptography problems in his journal. However he is so brilliant and the son of a high ranking NKVD officer, it is tolerated. He has never spoken and the answer been wrong. But he only speaks when he finds the topic interesting.

TEACHER

Can anyone tell us about Pluto?

LEV

It's smaller than any other planet - even smaller than the moon. Pluto's orbit is crazy. The other planets in our solar system all orbit the Sun in a relatively flat plane. Pluto orbits the sun at a 17-degree angle to this plane. And it doesn't go around the sun in a circle. Its orbit is exceptionally elliptical and crosses Neptune's orbit. I think they might crash someday.

TEACHER

When would that be?

LEV

In about a billion years?

The class laughs. The teacher nods approvingly and continues with the lesson. Lev concentrates on his journal again.

The audience doesn't know it yet, but Lev and Helenka listen to a strange frequency on the radio at night and it seems to be a coded message. At night, Helenka transcribes the code into Lev's math journal; then during the day at school Lev tries to decipher the code.

Lev continues to work on his code at his desk.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

The school children are allowed to play outside for a part of the day. Lev and Helenka don't play games. They sit and Lev is writing in his cryptography journal.

HELENKA

Why don't you put the math down and write a murder mystery novel? Write something you would want to read yourself. In a murder mystery novel someone has to work out who the murderer is and then catch them. It is a puzzle. You are very good at puzzles.

Lev doesn't want to put up his code book. He hesitates but it is Helenka's job to persuade him and she is able to. He puts his cryptography journal up and gets out an empty journal.

HELENKA

Start with the cat. Start your book with something to grab people's attention.

Lev writes and then hands the journal to Helenka.

HELENKA

This will not be a funny book. You cannot tell jokes because people won't understand them.

Helenka hands the book back to Lev, who scratches out several lines of text. And that is why there are no jokes in this movie.

HELENKA

Your memory is like a film. That is why you will be really good at writing detective novels, like all the things that Mrs. Grekov was yelling. Write what you see and hear in the book, and what people were wearing, and what they smelled like. If you become sick or don't feel right then write it down.

Lev writes.

HELENKA

Put in there that you think cats are very important for the control of mice.

EXT. MOSCOW SIDEWALKS - AFTERNOON

Lev and Helenka walk home from school.

LEV

I've decided that I am going to find out who killed Artamon even though Father had told me to stay out of other people's business.

HELENKA

I'm glad you don't always do what you are told. That is very adult of you.

LEV

People break rules all the time.

HELENKA

And in the Bible it says "Thou shall not kill" but there were the Crusades and the wars with the Swedes and the Turks and the War with Germany. And the war with the monarchists. Lenin had enemies of the Revolution killed.

LEV

Also I don't know what my father means when he says, "Stay out of other people's business."

HELENKA

You do lots of things with other people, at school and in the shop and on the bus, and his job is going into other people's business and fixing whatever problems Comrade Stalin might have. And all of these things are other people's business.

LEV

So I've decide from now on, I am going to chose what to do and what not to do.

INT. LEV AND FATHER'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Lev comes home from school. Lev's father is a broken man. He is sitting on the sofa listening to the radio and drinking vodka. He should be working. There are tears coming out of his eyes.

LEV

Are you sad about Artamon?

Father looks at Lev for a long time.

FATHER

Yes, Lev, you could say that. You could very well say that.

Lev is emotionless and goes to his room.

EXT. LEV'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Lev lays in bed and remembers back two years ago when his mother died.

EXT. SCHOOL - AFTERNOON - FLASHBACK

Lev leaves school but no one is there to meet him. Lev sits. Several hours pass. Finally Father arrives at the school. Lev's father works for the NKVD with a man called Rurik who is his driver and bodyguard.

INT. CAR - AFTERNOON - FLASHBACK

FATHER

I'm afraid you won't be seeing your mother for a while.

LEV

Why not?

FATHER

Your mother has had to go into the hospital.

LEV

Can we visit her?

FATHER

No.

LEV

Why can't we?

FATHER

She needs rest. She needs to be on her own.

LEV

Is it a psychiatric hospital?

FATHER

No. It's an ordinary hospital. She has a problem... a problem with her heart.

LEV

We will need to take food to her.

FATHER

I'll take some in to her during the day when you're at school, OK?

LEV

But you can't cook.

END FLASHBACK

INT. LEV'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lev and Helenka go to the radio in the front room he tunes it halfway between two stations so that we can hear the "dit dit dot dot". This is the mysterious code that Lev is working on. Helenka transcribes the encoded message into Lev's cryptography journal.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The teacher is teaching an astro-physics lesson but Lev is listening to both the teacher and Helenka.

HELENKA

I think you will make a very good cryptographer.

Lev continues writing in his journal.

HELENKA

To be a good cryptographer you have to be intelligent and you are bright. You also have to understand how math works and you are good at understanding how math works. You also have to be someone who would

like being on their own in a room
deep under the Kremlin.

Lev continues writing in his journal.

HELENKA

Hundreds of meters away from the
surface of the earth and not panic
or get claustrophobia or homesick or
go insane. You like to be alone.

Lev continues writing in his journal.

HELENKA

You don't like to talk to people but
you would have to talk to Stalin.
That would be part of your job.

Lev continues writing in his journal.

HELENKA

Perhaps you should start practicing
by talking to ordinary people.
Stalin can be very difficult and
expects a lot of results so you must
be prepared.

Lev continues writing in his journal.

HELENKA

But if they don't let you...

Lev completes some code breaking. He hands the journal
to Helenka. Helenka is elated that he has broken the
code. Lev however shows no emotion.

Helenka reads his work in German.

HELENKA

- Heeresgruppe Nord
(Feldmarschall von Leeb)
- 18. Armee (von Küchler)
- XXXXII Corps (2 Infanterie-
Divisionen)

- XXVI Corps (3 Infanterie-Divisionen)
- 16. Armee (Busch)
- XXVIII Korps (von Wiktorin) (2 Infanterie, 1 Panzerdivisionen)
- I. Korps (2 Infanterie-Divisionen)
- X Corps (3 Infanterie-Divisionen)
- II Corps (3 Infanterie-Divisionen)
- (L Corps - Under 9. Armee) (2 Infanterie-Divisionen)
- 4. Panzer-Group (Hoepner)
- XXXVIII Korps (von Chappuis) (1 Infanteriedivision)
- XXXXI Motorisierte Corps (Reinhardt) (1 Infanterie, motorisierte 1, 1 Panzerdivisionen)
- LVI Motorisierte Korps (von Manstein) (1 Infanterie, motorisierte 1, 1 gepanzert, 1 Panzergrenadier-Divisionen)

HELENKA

And this is what the code says?

HELENKA

And in German?

Helenka looks confused. Neither Lev nor Helenka understand what it means.

Lev can multi-task. He can hear the teacher's comments as well as Helenka and he participates in the class too.

TEACHER

And will our sun ever explode?

LEV

(to Helenka)

Yes.

LEV

(to the teacher)

Except that no one will see this because we will probably have become extinct by then. And even if there are people still in existence, everyone will be burned to death, even if they live in tunnels.

The class laughs but the teacher knows that he is probably 100 percent correct.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

All the children are running around. Lev is sitting writing in his journal.

TEACHER

You are a very clever boy. But wouldn't you rather run and play?

LEV

I'm not clever. I was just noticing how things are and that is just being observant. Being clever was when you looked at how things are and use the evidence to work out something new. Like the rate that the universe is sexpanding, or who committed a murder.

TEACHER

Murder?

LEV

Someone killed Artamon.

TEACHER

I see.

The talk of murder with the son of a NKVD officer unnerves the teacher who walks away. He doesn't want to know any secrets or get involved with the NKVD.

HELENKA

He will never let you be a code breaker.

LEV

Why not?

HELENKA

You don't have any friends.

LEV

Why do I need friends to break codes?

HELENKA

Good point but you don't try. And you don't know what people mean by their face. They are called emotions. They have them and you don't. Here look.

Helenka takes the journal and draws a sad face.

HELENKA

When Lenin died, people had a sad face.

Then she draws a picture of a happy face.

HELENKA

When they go to the May Day parade on Red Square, they have a happy face.

Lev has no reaction. Helenka draws another face. This face has one eyebrow raised.

HELENKA

It can mean lots of different things. It can mean "I want to do sex with you" and it can also mean "I think that what you just said was stupid."

Lev has no emotional reaction.

LEV

Even though I don't have friends, I am going to go to university and study mathematics and cryptography, because I like mathematics and cryptography and I'm very good at them.

HELENKA

Well, we're meant to be writing stories today, so why don't you write about finding Artamon's killer.

INT. HOUSE ON THE EMBANKMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

Lev goes to Mrs. Grekov's apartment and knocks on the door. She has been listening to a news program on the radio. The door is open and there is a long pause. Lev doesn't speak.

RADIO

The USSR is safe and isolated from the conflict. On August 23 1939 Soviet Union and Germany signed a non aggression agreement the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. And today Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov said that "only a fool will attack Russia."

HELENKA

Hitler is a fool and the British has warned our ambassador the Germans will attack and why are so many German planes violating Soviet air space? And what about the secret messages we have decoded.

Lev is about to speak up and warn Mrs. Grekov about the war that is about to break out.

MRS. GREKOV

Lev, I really don't think I want to see you right now.

LEV

I didn't kill Artamon.

Mrs. Grekov closes the door.

EXT. HOUSE ON THE EMBANKMENT - EVENING

Lev and Helenka are sitting the steps of the building.

Ruric brings Lev's father home. One neighbor sees Lev's father and runs up to him, smiling and bobbing his head,

ZINCHENKO

How many spies did you exposed today?

Lev's father ignores him and goes inside. Lev and Helenka follow him toward the elevator.

HELENKA

Notice that your dad wouldn't tell him. It's a state secret. But he catches enemies every day; that everyone knows.

They enter the elevator.

FATHER

(ironically to Lev)

I would advise you not to talk to him. He'll use it. But you don't talk to anyone, do you?

HELENKA

If you see a suspicious character on the street, you should follow him and observe his activities; he might be a spy. It's wise to be

suspicious. The enemies of Stalin
are everywhere.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

HELENKA

Your mother was only 38 years old
and heart attacks usually happen to
older people, and your mother was
very active and rode a bicycle and
ate food which was healthy.

Lev continues writing in his journal.

HELENKA

Maybe it was an aneurysm.

Lev continues writing in his journal.

HELENKA

Did you want to go to the funeral?

Lev continues writing in his journal.

HELENKA

And then don't you think it was odd
that Mrs. Grekov came over and
cooked supper for you and stayed in
your apartment overnight sometimes?

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

STUDENT

Is there a heaven and a hell?

TEACHER

Your grandmother is very old and she
believes in superstitions. Religion
is the opium of the people. We are
Marxists. All religions and
churches, are organs of bourgeois
reaction, used for the protection of
the exploitation and the
stupefaction of the working class.

Science proves there isn't such a thing. Look around students; and you can search the entire universe and neither (heaven or hell) can be found.

Lev looks to Helenka for guidance. He wants to speak but is hesitant.

HELENKA

Tell her.

LEV

Except that there might be a place if you went through a black hole, but a black hole is impossible to find out what is on the other side because the gravity of a black hole is so big that even electromagnetic waves like light can't get out of it. There is a German jew, a professor, who has proven with math that this is true.

TEACHER

Lev, I'm very disappointed in you. Normally your thinking is very clear. Listen to yourself a "German Jew" said heaven is behind a black hole. Germans and Jews are our enemy.

Lev is embarrassed and looks at Helenka disapprovingly; she gave him bad advice. He has not made a mistake in class in several years.

HELENKA

Sorry.

INT. HOUSE ON THE EMBANKMENT - AFTERNOON

Lev's father has been drinking and passes out on the couch again. He has been listening to the radio reports of the war in Europe. Lev has collected his journals but

he is simply standing there as if counting his fathers breaths. Lev may have been standing there for hours. There is a knock at the door. It is Helenka. They move into the hall and walk.

HELENKA

Are you ready to go your own direction and solve this murder case?

LEV

Talking to strangers is not something I usually do.

HELENKA

Are you afraid?

LEV

If a strange person touches me I will hit him, and I can hit people very hard. And also I always have my Swiss Army knife in my pocket. I will cut their finger off.

Lev will be conducting interviews and knocks on the first door.

HELENKA

Talking to the people in our building is very brave.

The door opens and Helenka grabs Lev from behind and hugs him. POV of the resident, they only see Lev standing there shaking.

MR. YEVSEYEV

Can I help you?

Helenka whispers into Lev's ear.

LEV

Do you know who killed Artamon?

Lev is puzzled. There is a long pause.

LEV

What sort of face are you making?

MR. YEVSEYEV

Who are you?

LEV

I'm Lev Vetrov from number 36 and I know you. You're Mr. Yevseyev.

MR. YEVSEYEV

I'm Mr. Yevseyev's brother.

LEV

Do you know who killed Artamon?

MR. YEVSEYEV

Who is Artamon?

LEV

Mrs. Grekov's cat. Mrs. Grekov is from number 41.

MR. YEVSEYEV

Someone killed her cat?

LEV

With a kitchen knife.

MR. YEVSEYEV

Jesus Christ.

LEV

A Swiss made kitchen knife.

(pause)

Do you know who killed him?

MR. YEVSEYEV

I haven't any clue.

LEV

Did you see anything suspicious Thursday in the middle of the night?

MR. YEVSEYEV

Look, son, do you really think you should be going around asking questions like this?

LEV

Yes, because I want to find out who killed Artamon, and I am writing a book about it.

MR. YEVSEYEV

Well, I wasn't here on Thursday, so you're asking the wrong citizen.

LEV

Thank you.

Lev and Helenka walked away and to the next apartment.

EXT. SIDEWALK AND PARK AREA - DUSK

Lev and Helenka leave the building. Then they notice that the old lady who lives at number 39, which is on the other side of Mrs. Grekov's apartment, is in the park with her dog.

LEV

Her name is Mrs. Zherdev.

HELENKA

She has an Italian Greyhound, so she was probably a good person.

LEV

Do you know anything about Artamon being killed?

Mrs. Zherdev is very old and puts her hand to her ear. Lev doesn't know what this means.

HELENKA

She is old and almost deaf.

LEV

Do you know anything about Artamon being killed?

MRS. ZHERDEV

I heard about it yesterday. Dreadful. Dreadful.

LEV

Do you know who killed him?

MRS. ZHERDEV

No, I don't.

LEV

Somebody must know, because the person who killed Artamon knows that they killed Artamon. Unless they were a mad person and didn't know what they were doing. Or unless they had amnesia.

Helenka grabs his arm and whispers something to Lev. We don't hear what Helenka says but Lev is speculating and not gathering information.

MRS. ZHERDEV

Well, I suppose you're probably right.

LEV

Thank you for helping me with my investigation.

MRS. ZHERDEV

You're Lev, aren't you?

LEV

Yes. I live at number 36.

MRS. ZHERDEV

We haven't talked before, have we?

LEV

No. I don't like talking to strangers. But I'm doing detective work today.

MRS. ZHERDEV

I see you every day, going to school. You don't have any friends?

Lev doesn't reply to this, because he does have a friend, Helenka. But, Mrs. Zherdev can't see Helenka.

MRS. ZHERDEV

Even if it's only because you're doing detective work; it's very nice of you to come and say hello.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DUSK

Lev and Helenka return to the apartments from the park.

HELENKA

Why would someone kill a cat?

LEV

A. Because you hated the cat.
B. Because you were mad.
C. Because you wanted to make Mrs. Grekov upset.

HELENKA

No one hates cats.

LEV

Of course not but it is possible. It could be a German or a subversive.

HELENKA

Wreckers.

LEV

I've never seen an insane person.

HELENKA

Of course not; the Soviet Union
doesn't have them. I think.

HELENKA

That only leaves people who want to
make Mrs. Grekov sad.

LEV

Most murders are committed by
someone who is known to the victim.
This is a fact. Artamon was
therefore most likely to have been
killed by someone known to him.

HELENKA

Mr. Grekov

LEV

Mr. Grekov used to be married to
Mrs. Grekov and they lived together
until two years ago. Then Mr.
Grekov left and didn't come back.

HELENKA

This was why Mrs. Grekov came over
and did lots of cooking for us after
Mother died.

LEV

And also Father said that she needed
company and didn't want to be on her
own.

HELENKA

And sometimes Mrs. Grekov stayed
overnight at your house?

LEV

I liked it when she did because she
made things tidy.

HELENKA

And you don't know why Mr. Grekov
left?

LEV

He must have died.

HELENKA

Really?

LEV

When you get married, you have to
promise that you will stay together
until death.

HELENKA

Or when you get divorced.

LEV

Why?

HELENKA

This is because one of the two or
both has done sex with somebody
else.

LEV

He might be dead.

HELENKA

Mr. Grekov got a divorce, so he
probably hated her and he might have
come back and killed her cat to make
her sad.

INT. LEV'S APARTMENT

When Lev returns home his father was sitting at the
table in the kitchen. The supper is baked beans.

FATHER

Where have you been?

LEV

I have been out.

FATHER

I have just had a phone call from Mrs. Grekov.

Lev eats.

FATHER

What were you doing poking round asking about her cat?

LEV

I was doing detective work trying to find out who killed Artamon.

FATHER

How many times do I have to tell you, Lev?

(pause)

I told you to keep your nose out of other people's business.

LEV

I know you told me not to get involved in other people's business but Mrs. Grekov is a friend of ours.

FATHER

Well, she's not a friend anymore.

HELENKA

Why not?

LEV

I think Mr. Grekov probably killed Artamon.

Father doesn't say anything.

LEV

He is my Prime Suspect. No one hates cats and...

Helenka interrupts Lev.

HELENKA

No, there are people that might hate cats. And there might be a few crazy people.

LEV

I mean there are some people who hate cats. And unless you say different the Soviet Union doesn't have insane people. Right?

Lev's father looks at him perplexed.

LEV

And a murder is usually committed by someone they know. Mr. --

Lev's father bangs the table with his fist.

FATHER

I will not have that man's name mentioned in my house.

LEV

Why not?

FATHER

That man is evil.

LEV

Does that mean he might have killed Artamon?

HELENKA

No, it means something entirely different.

EXT. SIDEWALK - MORNING

Lev and Helenka are walking to school.

LEV

I am going to prove that I'm not stupid. I'm going to break the code of Stalin's enemies. I will receive a dog as a present and be a hero.

HELENKA

All the other children at our school are stupid.

LEV

Why would they put us in a room of imbeciles that can't do math?

HELENKA

It must be a test.

LEV

A test?

HELENKA

Yes, if you don't murder them all then perhaps they will allow you to be a cryptographer.

LEV

If you think I'm going to snap, please stop me.

HELENKA

We should have a secret code that means "not to kill them".

LEV

3.14159

HELENKA

That is the code?

LEV

Yes.

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

The teacher is lecturing but Lev is back writing in his cryptography journal. He is again doing cryptography problems.

HELENKA

Your father had told you that you I couldn't do any more detecting. Does that mean the book is finished?

Lev takes his detective journal out and gives it to Helenka.

HELENKA

The diagram of the universe and the map of Moscow and the place of the cat in the universe, is good.

(pause)

You should be very proud of having written a book at all, even if it was quite short.

(pause)

But it isn't a real book because it doesn't have a real ending because you never found out who killed Artamon so the case is still a puzzle.

Puzzle is the magic words to control Lev. Only now does Lev look up from his math. He considers resuming the detective novel.

HELENKA

And your father said you were never to mention Mr. Grekov's name in the house again. It seems to me that so long as you don't do that then you can finish the book. Right?

Lev puts the cryptography journal up and takes the detective journal back from Helenka.

EXT. PARK -- AFTERNOON

Lev and Helenka are in the park again and so is Mrs. Zherdev and her dog.

MRS. ZHERDEV

Did you solve the case yet?

LEV

I was delayed a day or two, because I was poking my nose into other people's business and father said I shouldn't investigate who killed Artamon.

MRS. ZHERDEV

Oh, you are not back in the case now?

Lev says nothing.

MRS. ZHERDEV

His name is Ivan.

Lev doesn't say anything.

MRS. ZHERDEV

You're very shy, aren't you, Lev.

LEV

I'm not allowed to talk to you.

MRS. ZHERDEV

Don't worry. I'm not going to tell your father, because there's nothing wrong with having a chat. Having a chat is just being friendly, isn't it?

LEV

I can't do chatting.

HELENKA

Talk to her; she might offer you
some information on Mr. Grekov.

MRS. ZHERDEV

Do you like secret codes?

LEV

Yes. I like codes.

MRS. ZHERDEV

I know. I can see you have journals.
They are full of mathematics?

LEV

I like codes and solving puzzles.

MRS. ZHERDEV

I bet you're very good at math,
aren't you?

LEV

I am.

MRS. ZHERDEV

Really?

LEV

Yes. I don't tell lies.

HELENKA

She didn't mean to suggest that you
were lying. She just wondered if she
heard you correctly. She's a little
deaf sometimes.

MRS. ZHERDEV

Well, I am very impressed. And I
hope you do get good grades.

LEV

I will.

Lev begins to walk away but Helenka stops him.

HELENKA

You're father gave you all those rules? And asking about Mr. Grekov wasn't any of these things, was it?

LEV

Do you know Mr. Grekov?

MRS. ZHERDEV

Not really, no. I mean, I knew him well enough to say hello and talk to a little in the street, but I didn't know much about him. I think he worked in a bank near the center of town.

LEV

Father says that he is an evil man. Do you know why he said that? Is Mr. Grekov an evil man?"

MRS. ZHERDEV

Why are you asking me about Mr. Grekov, Lev?

(pause)

Perhaps it would be best not to talk about these things, Lev.

HELENKA

Why not?

MRS. ZHERDEV

Because.

HELENKA

Because why?

MRS. ZHERDEV

Because maybe your father is right and you shouldn't go around asking questions about this.

HELENKA

Why?

MRS. ZHERDEV

Because obviously he is going to find it quite upsetting.

LEV

Why is he going to find it upsetting?

MRS. ZHERDEV

Because... because I think you know why your father doesn't like Mr. Grekov very much.

LEV

Did Mr. Grekov kill Mother?

(pause)

Kill her?

LEV

Yes. Did he kill Mother?

MRS. ZHERDEV

No. No. Of course he didn't kill your mother.

LEV

But did he give her stress so that she died of a heart attack?

MRS. ZHERDEV

Oh my goodness. Your mother is dead?

(pause)

Oh, Lev, I am so, so sorry. I never realized.

LEV

Why did you say 'I think you know why your father doesn't like Mr. Grekov very much'?

MRS. ZHERDEV

So you don't know?

LEV

Don't know what?

MRS. ZHERDEV

Lev, look, I probably shouldn't be telling you this. Perhaps we should take a little walk in the park together. This is not the place to be talking about this kind of thing.

(pause)

I am going to say something to you and you must promise not to tell your father that I told you this.

HELENKA

Why?

MRS. ZHERDEV

I will explain but before I do that you have to promise not to tell anyone I said this to you.

HELENKA

Why?

MRS. ZHERDEV

Lev, please, just trust me.

Lev looks at Helenka for the okay to promise.
Helenka nods that it is okay.

LEV

I promise.

MRS. ZHERDEV

Your mother, before she died, was very good friends with Mr. Grekov.

LEV

I know.

MRS. ZHERDEV

No, Lev. I'm not sure that you do. I mean that they were very good friends. Very, very good friends.

HELENKA

(to Mrs. Zherdev)

Do you mean that they were having sex?

MRS. ZHERDEV

Yes, Lev. That is what I mean.

HELENKA

(to Lev)

You can be upset if you want to.

LEV

(to Helenka)

What good will that do?

Mrs. Zherdev understands that Lev is speaking to her.

MRS. ZHERDEV

I'm sorry, Lev. I really didn't mean to say anything that was going to upset you or make you sad.

LEV

I'm not sad.

MRS. ZHERDEV

Oh, you are a very brave boy.

LEV

Was that why Mr. Grekov left Mrs. Grekov?

MRS. ZHERDEV

I'm sure.

LEV

I'm going home now.

MRS. ZHERDEV
You won't tell your father about
this conversation, will you?

LEV
No. I promised.

INT. LEV'S APARTMENT

When Lev gets home Rurik was there. They are cleaning
far too many guns on the kitchen table and they are
drinking. Father and Rurik listen to the war news on the
radio and smoke cigarettes.

RURIK
So, how are you doing, captain?

LEV
I'm doing very well, thank you.

RURIK
What's 251 times 864?"

LEV
216,864.

FATHER
Is that right?

RURIK
I haven't got a clue.

Rurik laughs. Lev feels Rurik might be making fun of
him.

HELENKA
He is just being friendly.

Lev goes to his room.

EXT. SIDEWALK - MORNING

HELENKA

The Brothers Karamazov is my favorite book.

HELENKA

At the heart of The Brothers Karamazov is a murder mystery surrounding the homicide of a family patriarch, Fyodor Karamazov, and the role of his sons in the crime.

It appears that Lev is distracted. He is walking and doing mathematics in his head. We can tell this from his facial and hand gestures.

HELENKA

Lev, the book is also a novel of ideas. This is very very important. Are you listening?

Helenka is a bit upset. Lev stops thinking about math.

HELENKA

Fedor Dostoevsky debates the existence of God, the role of religion in modern societies, and the consequences of class differences on the individual.

LEV

What does a dead cat have to do with God or religion or class differences?

HELENKA

So you aren't writing great literature. You are a kid and it doesn't matter so long as you are writing.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

TEACHER

Class, Charles Darwin was a very talented scientist. He made very keen observations and wrote everything down.

HELENKA

I think you will make a great cryptographer but you need to deal with a few things first.

LEV

(to Helenka)

Like what? Please make a list.

The entire class laughs. Evidently Lev has just shouted out random thoughts before. Even the teacher is amused. The teacher begins to make a list on the chalk board.

HELENKA

1. Stop not talking to people for a long time. Once you didn't talk to anyone for 5 weeks!
2. Stop not eating or drinking anything for a long time. Put the math down and eat and drink!
3. Stop not liking being touched. You are going to be married someday!
4. Stop smashing things when you aren't allowed to do math.
5. Stop groaning when you aren't allowed to carry your journal.
6. Stop refusing to use a toilet if anyone else has touched it.
7. Stop not noticing when people are angry.
8. Stop not smiling
9. Stop telling people they smell funny.
10. Stop doing stupid things like using jam to plaster the walls with bread.
11. And stop reading Trotsky!

Lev looks like his very soul has been exposed to everyone.

HELENKA

Understand? You want to be a code
breaker for Stalin. I'm just saying!

INT. LEV'S APARTMENT

When gets home from school, his father is still out at work making Russia safe for socialism. Lev enters and goes to the kitchen and put his things on the table. And one of the things was his detective novel. Lev takes out his cryptography journal and goes into the front room. Lev does cryptography until his father comes home. Lev hardly looks up when he comes through the front door. Lev's father has blood all over his jacket and shirt. Lev's father is wound up in a knot. Lev is oblivious.

Fifteen minutes later Lev's father comes back into the living room.

FATHER

What is this?.

LEV

It's a book I'm writing.

FATHER

Is this true? Did you talk to Mrs.
Zherdev?

LEV

Yes.

FATHER

Lev. How stupid are you?

Lev is about to answer but Helenka stops him.

HELENKA

This is a rhetorical question. Don't
answer.

FATHER

What did I tell you, Lev?

LEV

Not to mention Mr. Grekov's name in our house. And not to go asking Mrs. Grekov, or anyone, about who killed that cat. And not to go trespassing in other people's business. And to stop this ridiculous bloody detective game. Except I haven't done any of those things. I just asked Mrs. Zherdev about Mr. Grekov because—"

FATHER

Don't give me that. I told you not to go around sticking your nose into other people's business. And what do you do? You go around sticking your nose into other people's business.

LEV

I was just innocently talking with Mrs. Zherdev. I wasn't doing investigating..

Father interrupts Lev and grabs hold of his arm really hard. Lev can't stand to be touched and so Lev hits him.

CUT TO:

Lev is sitting on the carpet with my back against the wall and he is just waking up. Lev rubs the side of his head.

His father is standing on the carpet a meter in front of Lev looking down at him.

The father turns and walks through to the kitchen. He lifts the lid of the dustbin and drops the book into it and put the lid of the dustbin back on.

Then he comes into the front room again, but he wasn't carrying the book anymore.

FATHER

I need a drink.

INT. LEV'S APARTMENT - MORNING

The next morning Lev's father is washing the cut on his cheek with iodine. Lev's father makes some elaborate sandwiches.

INT. THE MOSCOW CIRCUS - DAY

Rurik takes them in the car to the Moscow circus. The circus is clearly a prominent piece of culture, and a point of Russian pride. Lev and his father watch the clowning, juggling, acrobatics, contortion and animal acts (especially bear acts, such as bears who juggle with their feet). The acts are focused on Eastern European culture, and are narrative. There is plenty of dancing. Lev watches every detail of the action, memorizing it all, but he does not smile.

INT. CAFÉ - DAY

Lev and his father go a café. His father has a meal from the kitchen. The only thing Lev will eat is food prepared at home, so he eats the sandwiches. Lev reads the guidebook to the circus.

FATHER

I love you very much, Lev. Don't ever forget that. And I know I lose my cool occasionally. I know I get angry. I don't want to see you getting into trouble, because I don't want you to get hurt. Do you understand?

LEV

I don't know.

FATHER

Lev, do you understand that I love you?

LEV

Yes.

EXT. SIDEWALK - MORNING

Lev and Helenka walk to school.

HELENKA

Why do you have a cut and a bruise
on the side of your face?

LEV

I must have fallen.

HELENKA

Your father hit you.

LEV

No I woke up and I was against the
wall on the floor.

HELENKA

Your father hit you.

LEV

No he grabbed me.

HELENKA

He was angry?

LEV

He read my detective novel.

HELENKA

Why?

LEV

It was on the kitchen table.

HELENKA

Gosh, I leave you alone for two
minutes and the next day you look
like you were hit by a bus.

LEV

He didn't hit me.

HELENKA

He hit you.

Lev is not emotional about it.

HELENKA

Are you frightened about going home?

LEV

No.

HELENKA

If you don't want to talk about it anymore that is fine.

LEV

Okay.

HELENKA

What do you want to talk about?

LEV

The circus.

HELENKA

You mysteriously fall and bust the side of your face open and then he takes you to the circus?

LEV

Yes.

HELENKA

He hit you.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

INT. LEV'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

When Lev returns from school his father is still at work.

Lev goes to the dustbin to find his book. Lev wants to know who had killed Artamon and the book was where he had kept all the clues. But the book isn't in the dustbin.

Lev goes to his fathers books on a shelf he looks at each book but his book isn't in there either.

Lev's Father has hidden the book somewhere in the house. So Lev decides to find it. He looks in the kitchen, and then in the front room and then in his bedroom.

Finally the only place remaining to look is in his father's room. Lev is hesitant about looking in there because he had told Lev not to mess with anything in his room.

Lev finds his book in a cupboard box. He also finds a 30-40 letters. They are unopened and addressed to him. Lev takes one of the letters and his book and closes the box. He leaves the box the way he found it.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

HELENKA

Well this is addressed to you.

Lev Vetrov

Ul. Serafimovicha 2

Moscow USSR

You have every right to open it.

Lev is mater of fact not nervous but he hasn't opened the letter until school the next day.

HELENKA

It is from Leningrad

Pr. Maksima Gorkogo 23,

Kv. 10, 9

She looks at him for a reaction. Of course, there isn't one. He don't know anyone in Leningrad.

HELENKA

Can I open it?

Lev nods. Helenka reads the letter inside.

HELENKA

Dear Lev, I'm sorry it's been such a very long time since I wrote my last letter to you. I've been very busy.

CUT TO:

HELENKA

Lots of Love,
Your Mum

Lev looks confused.

HELENKA

Your mother isn't dead.

Lev is thinking there is no date on the letter.

HELENKA

Look on the envelope at the date, two months ago.

Lev is thinking someone is pretending to be his mom.

HELENKA

Look at the handwriting. Who dots their "i" with a tiny circle? You don't know anyone who does that except your mother.

Lev is debating with himself whether to include this in the detective novel sitting on his desk.

HELENKA

Well it seems that the dead cat is just subplot.

The teacher is just now explaining some concept that is perhaps difficult.

LEV

It's all so confusing.

The class laughs.

INT. LEV'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Lev and Helenka return after school. Lev's father isn't home so Helenka opens the letters and reads them to Lev. Lev is emotionless but isn't distracted by math. It appears that the very last letter is finished.

HELENKA

Your mother didn't have a heart attack.

(pause)

Your mother didn't die.

(pause)

Your mother Mother had been alive all the time.

(pause)

And your father lied to you.

(pause)

And now you feel sick?

Helenka seems pleased in a very slight way. She won't be upset if this entire soap opera makes Lev a bit more emotional.

Lev is on the bed and curled up in a ball.

Father comes home and into the room. The father sees the open letters on the bed.

FATHER

Lev. Lev?

Lev doesn't move. His father is worried he is dead. The father touches Lev and Lev barfs on his father and his suit.

FATHER

I'm sorry, Lev. I'm so, so sorry.

FATHER

You read the letters?

Lev is in a near catatonic state.

FATHER

Lev...? It just... It got out of control
and I wish...

FATHER

Lev, I'm going to go to the bathroom
and I'm going to run you a hot bath.
Then I'm going to come back and take
you to the bathroom, OK?

FATHER

Let's do this really gently, Lev.
Let's sit you up and get your
clothes off and get you into the
bath, OK? I'm going to have to touch
you, but it's going to be all right.

Lev doesn't resist.

INT. LEV'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN

Lev and his father are sitting at the kitchen table
about to have dinner. Lev still hasn't spoken since he
was sick.

FATHER

I want you to know that you can
trust me. You have to know that I am
going to tell you the truth from now
on. About everything.

LEV

Who killed Artamon?

FATHER

I killed Artamon, Lev.
Lev is processing all this.

FATHER

Lena... Mrs. Grekov... We had a fight
and I killed her cat.

Lev screams and pushes the table so far that his father
tips over backward in his chair. His father however
doesn't over react. Lev's father looks up from the
floor.

FATHER

OK. Look. Lev. I'm sorry. Let's
leave it for tonight, OK? I'm going
to get some sleep and we'll talk in
the morning.

Lev's father goes to bed.

Lev begins to pack, food, clothes, a bed roll, etc. He
packs the letters from his mother and also his detective
novel.

Lev leaves the apartment.

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT

Lev arrives at the roof where Helenka is waiting for
him. He spreads out his bedroll and he looks up to the
sky.

HELENKA

What will you do next?

LEV

Math.

Lev seems to be doing math in his head. Perhaps he is
calculating the number of stars.

EXT. FRONT OF HOUSE ON THE EMBANKMENT - MORNING

Lev is suddenly awake. Helenka is at the edge of roof
looking down at man on the ground in his underwear.

FATHER

Lev! Lev!

Lev joins Helenka at the edge.

A black car, obviously NKVD, four men step out from the car. They approach Lev's father. Lev's father tries to run back inside, but he is tackled and beaten. He is put in the car and the men drive off.

Helenka and Lev are dumbfounded and can't move. They recover but the car is gone.

HELENKA

They clearly arrested your dad for killing a cat?

LEV

How did Stalin find out so fast?

HELENKA

But how long will it take before Stalin releases him?

LEV

Stalin is busy; he has to take care of all of us, millions all over the country.

HELENKA

And what if your father is punished for a long time?

LEV

Killing cats is a very serious offence.

HELENKA

Who knows how long?

LEV

I'm are going to be hungry.

Helenka suddenly is inspired.

HELENKA

Let's go to Leningrad and find your
mom?

LEV

Okay.

There is a slight hint of emotion in Lev's voice and
face. There isn't much emotion but Lev seems to be
making progress.

INT. LEV'S APARTMENT - DAY

Lev and Helenka walk back into the apartment. Lev looks
on the kitchen counter next to the sink and he spots his
father's identification and his wallet and his address
book. Lev is frozen.

HELENKA

Get the money out of the wallet.
Leave the rest.

They exit the apartment.

INT. HALL OF APARTMENTS

Lev looks out the door into the hall. He wants to make
sure there was no one is there. They enter the hall and
suddenly Mrs. Zherdev and her dog appear.

MRS. ZHERDEV

You going on a trip?

LEV

I'm going to Leningrad.

MRS. ZHERDEV

How long are you going for?
Until I go to university.

MRS. ZHERDEV

Right.
(pause)

Are you and your father moving house?

LEV

No.

MRS. ZHERDEV

So, why are you going to Leningrad?

LEV

I'm going to live with mother.

MRS. ZHERDEV

I thought you told me your mother was dead.

LEV

I thought she was dead, but she was still alive. And Father lied to me. And also he said he killed Artamon.

MRS. ZHERDEV

Oh, my goodness.

LEV

He has been arrested.

MRS. ZHERDEV

For killing a cat?

Lev looks at her with an "of course" expression.

MRS. ZHERDEV

Is your mother here?

LEV

No. Mother is in Leningrad.

MRS. ZHERDEV

So you're going to Leningrad on your own?

LEV

Yes.

MRS. ZHERDEV
Where's your father at the moment,
Lev?

LEV
I don't know. They just took him off
in a car.

MRS. ZHERDEV
I'm sure that there's been some
dreadful misunderstanding.

Mrs. Zherdev looks befuddled and lost. She doesn't know
what to do. Lev and Helenka leave.

EXT. MOSCOW SIDEWALKS - DAY

Lev and Helenka walk and walk and finally Rurik pulls up
in his car. The brakes lock and the tires scretch. Rurik
is looking around nervously; he expects to be arrested
also at any moment.

RURIK
Captain, get in.

LEV
I don't know where the train station
is.

RURIK
Smart boy. Good idea?

LEV
My mom is in Leningrad.

RURIK
You go. You don't want to stay here.

Lev looks like he doesn't know what to do.

RURIK
Well get in I will take you there.

INT. NKVD CAR - DAY

Lev and Helenka get in the car. Rurik looks around nervously.

RURIK

Do you have papers?

LEV

I have my notebooks and a pencil.

Lev shows Rurik his two notebooks. Rurik turns the car and stops. Rurik gets out and talks to a man in the sidewalk. The man looks into the car takes cash from Rurik and goes into a building. In less than a minute, he comes back out with some forged travel papers.

Just as Rurik is getting back in the car, he gets a panicked look on his face. Behind them, there are dots that are grow larger and larger, until they turn into shiny black State Security automobiles.

Rurik gets in his car, gives one of the travel permits to Lev. Helenka doesn't get one.

Rurik pulls out rapidly into the street and the chase is on. The NKVD car is chasing them; Rurik is to be arrested also. Rurik is an expert driver, he gets to the train station fast enough the NKVD agents don't see Lev get out of the car.

Rurik abandons the car and runs in the opposite direction. There is a big fight across the street as Rurik is arrested.

Lev and Helenka go into the train station.

INT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Lev doesn't like new places. Helenka seems okay with it and seems to love all the people and the noise. Lev is nearly comatose; until Helenka points out the train schedule. Lev begins to read it and a calm comes over his face.

And then Lev looks up and sees that there was a policeman standing in front of him.

POLICEMAN

Are you okay son?

Lev stops looking at the train schedule numbers.

POLICEMAN

Are you all right, young man?

The policeman looks around for Lev's parents.

POLICEMAN

The lady at the counter says you've been here for over 2 hours, and when she tried talking to you, you were in a complete trance.

Lev says nothing.

POLICEMAN

What's your name?

LEV

Lev Vetrov.

POLICEMAN

Where do you live?

Ul. Serafimovicha 2

POLICEMAN

What are you doing here?

Looking at the schedule.

POLICEMAN

OK, let's keep it simple. What are you doing at the railway station?

LEV

I'm going to see Mother.

POLICEMAN

Mother?

LEV

Yes, Mother.

POLICEMAN

When's your train?

LEV

I don't know yet. She lives in Leningrad. I don't which is the best train to Leningrad.

POLICEMAN

So, you don't live with your mother?

LEV

No. But I'm going to.

POLICEMAN

So, where does your mother live?

LEV

In Leningrad.

POLICEMAN

Yes, but where in Leningrad?

LEV

Pr. Maksima Gorkogo 23, Kv. 10, 9

POLICEMAN

Have you got a ticket?

LEV

No.

POLICEMAN

Have you got any money to get a ticket?

LEV

Yes.

POLICEMAN

Why don't you and I take a stroll to the ticket office, eh? And in the meantime show me your papers.

LEV

How many kopeks does it cost to get a ticket for a train to Leningrad?"

TICKET AGENT

Rubles son. Rubles.

The policeman laughs. Lev doesn't laugh.

TICKET AGENT

Single or return?

LEV

What does *single or return* mean?

TICKET AGENT

Do you want to go one way, or do you want to go and come back?

LEV

I want to stay there when I get there.

TICKET AGENT

For how long?

LEV

Until I become a code breaker for Comrade Stalin.

TICKET AGENT

(pointing)

Twenty five minutes, track one.

Lev gets his travel papers back.

POLICEMAN

Now, are you sure you know what
you're doing?

LEV

Yes. I'm going to Leningrad to live
with my mother.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM 1 - DAY

Lev is in the middle of the shouting and someone bumps into him as they walked past and Lev makes a noise like a cat to scare them off. Helenka hugs him so he is less scared.

INT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Two NKVD agents question the ticket seller. They are looking for Lev. The ticket agent points them to platform 1.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM 1 - DAY

A lunatic runs from one end of the platform to the other. The man is being chased by police. The lunatic hits Lev's arm when he runs past. Clearly it hurts and Lev's journals fly under the train. The train is about to steam up and leave. Lev might be crushed.

The two NKVD agents walk past and don't realize Lev is under the train. By the time they get to the end of the train, the railroad employee and car attendant is screaming to hold the train. Lev climbs back up onto the platform and the train pulls out.

Lev and Helenka board the train at the very last moment. The train gathers some speed. One NKVD agent runs and boards the train, the other is over weight an can't make it.

INT. TRAIN CAR - DAY

HELENKA

There are lots of people on the
train

LEV

I didn't like that, because I don't like lots of people and you can't get off of the train when it's moving.

NKVD AGENT

Lev.

Lev turns as if he thought it would be someone he knew, like a teacher from school or one of the people who live in his building. But it is an NKVD agent.

NKVD AGENT

Caught you just in time.

The NKVD agent picks Lev up and moves to the door... He wants to jump off the train but the train has picked up too much speed and had just cleared the platform.

Lev kicks him and bits him and finally the officer returns Lev to his seat. Lev is by the window and the officer is blocking any exit.

NKVD AGENT

Your father is an "enemy of the state" and you aren't allowed to life with him anymore.

NKVD AGENT

I'm going to take you to your new school.

LEV

Really a code breakers school?

NKVD AGENT

(pause)

Yes, as a matter of fact yes.

HELENKA

He is lying. He's going to take you to an orphanage.

LEV

I'm not qualified to be a code breaker yet. I'm going to live with my mother.

NKVD AGENT

Son, you will never be a code breaker for this government. I can promise you that.

HELENKA

He doesn't have that power.

LEV

(to Helenka)

I know.

NKVD AGENT

So, why are you going to Leningrad?

LEV

I'm going to live with mother.

The agent looks through his notes.

NKVD AGENT

Comrade Stalin wants you to go with me.

Lev starts to run away, but the NKVD man grabs Lev. Lev punches him and Lev screams. Helenka breaks a vodka bottle over the man's head. He doesn't feel anything. But Lev is screaming, people are looking and then the NKVD man lets go.

NKVD AGENT

OK, let's not get overexcited here. I'm going to take you back to Moscow and you and me and comrade Stalin can sit down and have a little talk about who's going where.

LEV

I'm going to live with Mother, in Leningrad.

NKVD AGENT

Not just yet you're not.

LEV

Father killed a cat. With a kitchen knife. The cat was called Artamon.

NKVD AGENT

An apple never falls far from the tree.

LEV

What does that mean?

HELENKA

Socially inherited criminality.

NKVD AGENT

So you are both criminals. You and your father.

The NKVD man reaches out to touch Lev again, perhaps grab him by the ear, and Lev starts to scream again.

NKVD AGENT

Now listen, you little monkey. You can either do what I say or I am going to have to make-...

About six grandmothers, who have all been watching, approach and are all glaring at the agent. He shows the women his badge. They don't move.

NKVD AGENT

Go on about your business.

The women don't move.

LEV

Where is the toilet on the train?

NKVD AGENT

Through those doors there. But I'll
be keeping an eye on you,
understand?

LEV

No

NKVD AGENT

Just go to the bloody toilet.

Lev gets up, takes his journals and goes to the
bathroom.

NKVD AGENT

Leave those here.

GRANDMOTHER

Toilet paper, you moron.

The women wait until the NKVD man looks down at his
notes and then they move back to their seat.

INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT - DAY

When Lev leaves the toilet opposite there is a
compartment. There were two shelves with Helenka, two
cases and a rucksack on them. So Lev climbs onto the
middle shelf and he pulls one of the cases across like a
door so that he and Helenka are hidden.

Helenka writes code and then hands the math journal to
Lev who then decodes it.

The train starts to slow down and then the NKVD man
comes and stands near the toilet door and knocks.

NKVD AGENT

Lev...?

(pause)

Lev...?

And then the NKVD agent opens the door of the toilet.
And then he goes away, running. The train stops Lev
doesn't move because he does the NKVD to find him.

A few minutes pass.

The train begins again. One of the grandmothers opens
the door

GRANDMOTHER

I think the man is out there on the
platform looking for you.

(pause)

He got off the train.

And then the train starts going fast again.

Helenka and Lev do more practice breaking codes.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. TRAIN COMPARTMENT - NIGHT

Lev wakes up and the train has slowed considerably as it
pulls through Leningrad. Lev is scared. Helenka is not
there. But she arrives and tells him to get up.

HELENKA

There is a war or something. Let's
go.

So Lev gets off the shelf and he looks through the door,
but the NKVD man is there. But his bag had gone as well,
which had the food in it.

INT. LENINGRAD TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

The train station is full of soldiers. Some with
families who are saying good-bye. Some soldiers are half
dressed and are busily trying to finish. There is a
great deal of chaos.

LEV

It is 12:59 a.m. Are soldiers always up at this time of night?

HELENKA

No, I told you it's a war or something.

They hear a noise and turn round and it was a policeman.

POLICEMAN

Kid, you are going to have to get off right now. We need to turn this train around as fast as possible.

The policeman thinks and remembers something.

POLICEMAN

I think someone's looking for you, sonny.

LEV

Who's looking for me?

POLICEMAN

Your mother, maybe?

The policeman points to a woman on the platform who is looking in all directions.

LEV

That isn't my mother. That is an other boy's mother.

POLICEMAN

Oh. Right. Well get off the train.

Lev gets off the train. He is struck by the noise, babies crying, equipment rattling, everyone talking. Lev places his cryptography journal over his left year and his detective novel over the right. He is jostled about as he walks through the crowd and out of the station.

EXT. LENINGRAD SIDEWAK - NIGHT

By the time he gets out of the crowded station his nerves are a wreck. He puts the books in one hand he opens his Swiss Army knife. He holds it out as people walk past him. Most people don't notice. A soldier chuckles as he walks past Lev.

SOLDIER

The German's aren't here yet. You can put that up for now.

LEV

(quietly)
Is this Leningrad?
(louder)
Is this Leningrad?
(sill louder)
Is this Leningrad?
(very loud)
Is this Leningrad?

Now a lady stops.

LEV

Is this Leningrad?

LADY

Sure is, honey.

LEV

Is this Leningrad?

LADY

Indeed it is.

LEV

How do I get to Pr Maksima Gorkogo
23, Kv. 10, 9?

LADY

Take that trolley to Maksima
Gorkogo.
(Pause)

You will have to walk from there.

(Pause)

You OK, honey?

Lev looks where she is pointing and there was a big red trolley car that is unloading people. It is almost empty before she stops pointing.

Helenka runs up to them.

HELENKA

Isn't this exciting! There is definitely a war.

LEV

Yes.

HELENKA

Come on we can do this!

They walk across the boulevard and to the red trolley. Helenka has a hold of Lev's hand. The trolley is empty of people and begins moving. Helenka and Lev run and jump on. Lev is terrified. Helenka is exhilarated.

EXT. LENINGRAD TROLLEY - NIGHT

And then lots of people started coming into the trolley. And someone sits down on the other end of the bench and Lev looks sick.

FADE TO BLACK

And Lev opens his eyes but he can't see anything at first because there were too many people. And then he sees that they were getting onto a trolley that wasn't there before. There is sweat running down Lev's face from under his hair and he is moaning.

Helenka has gotten off the trolley and must get back on to fetch Lev who is laying on the floor.

HELENKA

Come on we are here. This is your mother's street.

And then the trolley starts moving. Lev crawls off and rolls on the pavement. Helenka jumps off and the trolley roars on.

EXT. MAKSIMA GORKOGO STREET - NIGHT

Lev looks around from the ground and it is dark and there are a few bright lights. He is not crowded in the empty street. He keeps his eyelids very close together and he just looks at the shape of the street sign.

Helenka is surveying the area. She takes off in a certain direrctions.

HELENKA

I think it is this way.

She walks about a block, reading the numbers.

HELENKA

47, 48. 49. Wrong way.

She walks back to Lev who has heard he counting and he picks his head up off the street.

HELENKA

It is this way. 45, 44, 43.

Lev stands up and begins to walk.

EXT. PR MAKSIMA GORKOGO 23, LENINGRAD - NIGHT

Lev looks very bad standing outside his mother's building. He can hardly walk and his hair is a mess. He is filthy from laying on the floor of the trolley and then in the street. Helenka looks like spring.

INT. PR MAKSIMA GORKOGO 23, KV. 10, 9?

As he is laboriously climbing the stairs, two men dressed up army uniforms almost run over Lev. They are running down the stairs with helmets and weapons and they are buttoning their uniforms.

Lev presses the door bell. There isn't any answer.

Lev and Helenka descend the stairs to the exterior steps of the building.

EXT. PR MAKSIMA GORKOGO 23, LENINGRAD - NIGHT

LEV

Don't watch.

Lev doesn't like peeing in the alley but he sees no alternative and disappears around a corner. Helenka sits on the steps of the building and waits. Lev appears and zips his pants and returns to the steps. Lev sits down on the steps and soon lays down. He appears near death or at least total exhaustion. To complicate his situation even more, it starts to rain and Lev is soaked. He doesn't wake up but is clearly shivering.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. PR MAKSIMA GORKOGO 23, LENINGRAD - NIGHT

At 2:32 p.m. and Lev hears voices of people walking along the street.

LADY

I don't care whether you thought they would invade or not.

MAN

Look. I'm sorry, OK.

LADY

Well, perhaps you should have thought about that before you made me look like a complete idiot.

Lev wakes up to hear his mother's voice.

Lev's mother arrives to the steps and looks down at Lev.

MOTHER

Lev?

MR. GREKOV

What?

Lev's mother reaches down and holds his head.

MOTHER

Lev, Lev, Lev.

LEV

You weren't in so I waited.

Lev is beginning to push her away because she was grabbing him and trying to make him sit up. He resists but is very weak.

MR. GREKOV

What the hell is going on?

MOTHER

I'm so sorry, Lev. I forgot.

MR. GREKOV

I suppose this means his father is here.

MOTHER

Where's your father, Lev?

LEV

I think he's in prison.

MR. GREKOV

Thank God for that.

LEV

He killed Artamon. And they came to arrest him.

Mr. Grekov shakes his head that he doesn't believe it but has an alternative theory.

MR. GREKOV

Stalin.

MOTHER

But how did you get here?

Lev's teeth are clicking against each other because of the cold

LEV

I came on the train. And it was really frightening. And after he got arrested, I took father's money and a policeman helped me. But then a man wanted to take me back to an orphanage. And he was on the train with me. I hid until he wasn't.

Lev hands her the soaking wet money that has been in his pocket.

MOTHER

Lev, you're soaking.

(to Mr. Grekov)

Don't just stand there.

(to Lev)

Oh my God. Lev. I didn't ... I didn't think I'd ever... Why are you here on your own?

MR. GREKOV

Are you going to come in or are you going to stay out here all night?

LEV

I'm going to live with you.

MR. GREKOV

O my God.

MOTHER

Pavel, please. Come on, Lev, let's go inside and get you dried off.

Lev stands up and he goes inside the building.

MOTHER

You follow Pavel.

Lev follows Mr. Grekov up the stairs and there is a landing and a door for their flat. Lev is scared of going inside.

MOTHER

Go on or you'll catch your death.

LEV

I'll run you a bath.

MOTHER

Are you OK, Lev?

LEV

I'm very tired.

MOTHER

I know, love.

(pause)

You're very brave.

LEV

I broke 292 German codes on the way here.

MOTHER

You never wrote to me.

LEV

I know.

MOTHER

Why didn't you write to me, Lev? I wrote you all those letters. I kept thinking something dreadful had happened, or you'd moved away and I'd never find out where you were.

LEV

Father said you were dead.

MOTHER

What?

LEV

He said you went into hospital because you had something wrong with your heart. And then you had a heart attack and died and he kept all the letters in a shirt box in the cupboard in his bedroom and I found them because I was looking for a book I was writing about Artamon being killed and he'd taken it away from me and hidden it in the shirt box.

MOTHER

Oh my God.

LEV

And then Lev's mom doesn't say anything for a long while.

MOTHER

Oh, Lev, I'm so sorry.

LEV

It's not your fault.

MOTHER

Let's get you out of the bath and dried off, OK?

INT. LENINGRAD APARTMENT - DAY

The next morning Lev is having breakfast.

MR. GREKOV

OK. He can stay for a few days.

MOTHER

He can stay as long as he needs to stay.

MR. GREKOV

This apartment is hardly big enough for two people, let alone three.

MOTHER

He can understand what you're saying, you know.

MR. GREKOV

What's he going to do? There's no school for him to go to. We've both got jobs. It's bloody ridiculous.

MOTHER

Pavel. That's enough.

(pause)

You can stay for as long as you want to stay.

Mr. Grekov leaves the table furious and listens to the radio. There is news of Russia's new war. Mr. Grekov leaves the apartment.

EXT. LENIGRAD STREET

Lev and his mom are shopping for clothes, pajamas, and a coat. They catch a trolley to the center of town. Lev is again not happy about his trolley ride.

INT. LENINGRAD STORE - DAY

There are far too many people in the store and Lev is frightened. He sits down on the floor next to the coats screams.

INT. LENINGRAD APARTMENT - DAY

Helenka and Lev play code breaking game creating and then solving different encryptions.

INT. LENINGRAD APARTMENT - DAY

Lev's mother brings home some clothes and some pajamas.
She also brings home some milk.

LEV

I have to go back to Moscow.

MOTHER

Lev, you've only just got here.

LEV

I have to go back because Stalin
needs me to tell him what the
German's are saying.

MOTHER

Honey, there is a war. I'm not sure
that is safe.

LEV

Except I don't want to see Father.
So I have to go to Moscow with you.

MOTHER

I don't know whether that's going to
be possible.

LEV

But I have to go.

MOTHER

Let's talk about this some other
time, OK?

LEV

OK. But I have to go to Moscow.

MOTHER

Lev, please.

Lev drinks his milk.

EXT. LENINGRAD APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lev can't sleep. He gets out of bed at 2:07 a.m. and goes downstairs and out of the building. There was no one in the street. Lev can hear traffic in the distance and sirens.

And then Lev hears his Mother's voice and she was shouting.

MOTHER

Lev...? Lev...?

She reaches Lev, who is standing in the street in his pajamas.

MOTHER

If you ever do that again, I swear to God, Lev, I love you, but... I don't know what I'll do.

MOTHER

There is a war. This is dangerous. You could be hit by a car. Do you understand what is at stake here? You might not be able to stay here.

Lev says nothing.

MOTHER

You must promise never to leave the apartment on your own because it was dangerous and you can't trust people in Leningrad.

INT. LENINGRAD APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lev's Mother comes into the spare room before he goes to sleep.

LEV

I have to go to Moscow to help the war.

MOTHER

Lev, not now. Your father might be dead. I'm getting it in the neck from Pavel. It's not a good time."

Lev says nothing.

MOTHER

Look. They have adults that can do math and break the codes. We can go to Moscow later. You can help some other time.

EXT. LENINGRAD PARK - DAY

Lev and his mother go to the park. They sit and watch Soviet planes leave to go bomb the Fins.

INT. LENINGRAD APARTMENT - EVENING

Lev's Mother and Mr. Grekov argue. Lev goes to the radio in the front room he tunes it halfway between two stations. Lev turns the volume up really loud to escape the argument. Helenka transcribes the code into Lev's cryptography journal.

INT. LENINGRAD APARTMENT - NIGHT

Very late at night and Mr. Grekov comes into Lev's room and wakes him up and he clearly has been drinking vodka.

MR. GREKOV

You think you're so fucking clever, don't you? Don't you ever, ever think about other people for one second, eh? Well, I bet you're really pleased with yourself now, aren't you?

Lev's mother came in and pulled Grekov out of the room.

MOTHER

Lev, I'm sorry.
(pause)
I'm really, really sorry."

INT. LENINGRAD APARTMENT - DAY

Mr. Grekov goes to work. Lev's mother packs lots of her clothes into two suitcases.

EXT. LENINGRAD APARTMENT - DAY

There is a taxi. The driver puts the suitcases into the trunk they drive off.

LEV

Where are we going?

MOTHER

We're going home.

LEV

Do you mean home in Moscow?

MOTHER

Yes.

LEV

Is Father going to be there?

MOTHER

Please, Lev. Don't give me any hassle right now, OK?"

LEV

I don't want to be with Father.

MOTHER

Just... Just... It's going to be all right, Lev, OK? You don't have to worry about that.

LEV

Are we going back to Moscow so I can do my codes?

MOTHER

What?

LEV

I'm meant to be helping Stalin.

MOTHER

We are going back to Moscow because if we stay in Leningrad any longer... someone was going to get hurt. And I don't necessarily mean you.

LEV

What do you mean?

MOTHER

Now I need you to be quiet for a while.

LEV

How long do you want me to be quiet for?

MOTHER

Jesus. Half an hour, Lev. I need you to be quiet for half an hour.

The taxi brings them to the train station.

INT. MOSCOW APARTMENT - NIGHT

And when we got to Moscow, Mother had keys to the house and we went in. She does not say "Hello".

LEV

I'm afraid.

MOTHER

You are safe here.

INT. MOSCOW APARTMENT HALL - NIGHT

Lev and his mother are leaving for school, when Mrs. Grekov comes out into the hall and yells at Lev's mother.

MRS. GREKOV
You've got a fucking nerve.

MOTHER
Lets go, Lev.

MRS. GREKOV
So, has he finally dumped you, too?

They walk away.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

HELENKA
I saw your mother.

HELENKA
I'm glad to see you again

HELENKA
Are you okay?

Lev looks at Helenka. He seems to be looking to her for assurance that what he is doing is correct.

HELENKA
Sure, do it.

Lev puts his two journals, his cryptography journal and his detective novel, in a large envelope.

INT. POST OFFICE

Lev is standing in line. But when it is his turn at the counter, Lev freezes.

HELENKA
You don't have to do it, Lev. If you say you don't want to do it no one is going to be angry with you. And it won't be wrong or illegal or stupid. It will just be what you want and that will be fine.

LEV

No. I'm going to do it.

HELENKA

Okay.

INT. VERY SMALL BEDROOM, NEW APARTMENT - DAY

Lev and his mother have moved to a very tiny apartment. It is a room in a big house. The walls are thin; some walls don't go up to the ceiling. Lev and his mother's room is cleverly divided with shelves of books about Stalin. Both sides are very small. Lev's mother is sleeping.

INT. VERY SMALL KITCHEN, NEW APARTMENT - DINNER

Its dinner time, so the kitchen is crowded. Lev looks nervous sitting at the kitchen table. It appears that Lev has started a new novel. He has a new notebook.

HELENKA

There is a large iron stove with twelve burners - one burner per family.

HELENKA

Forty-eight hardworking, honest citizens share the kitchen and single small toilet in the communal apartment.

HELENKA

Make sure you put in there how important a toilet is.

HELENKA

We live here as one large, happy family: We are all equal; we have no secrets. We know who gets up at what time, who eats what for dinner, and who said what in their rooms.

Later...

INT. VERY SMALL KITCHEN, NEW APARTMENT - LATE NIGHT

It is late night and everyone has retired to bed. Lev doesn't like waiting to find out about his code breaking.

LEV

I wish Comrade Stalin would respond to my journals.

HELENKA

Don't worry about that. Just think about today. Think about things that have happened. Especially about good things that have happened.

HELENKA

Write a list in your journal.

LEV

1. Mother bought me a wooden puzzle.
2. I helped Mother paint her room white.
3. Mother bought me a book called Cryptography.
4. My teacher called me a scientist.
5. I went to Leningrad and didn't die.
6. I solved the mystery of Who Killed Artamon.
7. I wrote a detective novel.
8. I found my mother.

There is an authoritative knock at the door. Lev and Helenka get up from the table and go to the door. Lev opens the door. They look up. We can tell from Lev and Helenka's face that it is an important person. We can't see his face but a man in a uniform (probably Stalin) hands Lev a puppy.

The End

