

NIKITA SERGEYEVICH

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INT. TAXI - DAY

In the back seat an Ivy League professor DOROTHY PRESCOTT, 62, looks out at the passing scenery.

EXT. STREET, WASHINGTON, DC

PEDESTRIANS walk past a tall iron fence. A homeless OLD MAN sits eating a hot dog. His protest sign 'Believe! And You Will Be Saved' leans against the fence. Beyond the fence the front entrance of the White House is visible. TITLE: October 1962

EXT. ENTRANCE GATE

The taxi pulls to a stop in front of the GUARD in the entrance booth. Dorothy rolls down the back window.

GUARD
Can I help you?

DOROTHY PRESCOTT
I'm here to see Mr. O'Donnell.

The guard picks up his appointment book and flips the page.

GUARD
Uh, that would be Mickey O'Donnell
the Groundskeeping Supervisor?

DOROTHY PRESCOTT
No, Mr. Kenneth O'Donnell.

GUARD
(jaw drops)
You want Kenneth O'Donnell the
Special Assistant to the President?

DOROTHY PRESCOTT
That's right.

GUARD
And your name?

DOROTHY PRESCOTT
Dorothy Prescott.

The guard gives her an incredulous smirk and looks at his book.

GUARD
I'm sorry, Ma'am, you're not listed.

The entrance booth phone buzzes and the guard answers.

GUARD
Station F...Yes...Yes, here at the
gate...Yes, sir...Right away, sir.

The guard quickly hangs up and immediately raises the gate.

GUARD
Mr. O'Donnell will meet you at the
White House front entrance.

He frantically waves the CABBIE to drive right through.

INT. WHITE HOUSE CORRIDOR - DAY

Presidential Aide KENNETH O'DONNELL, 38, walks swiftly with Dorothy Prescott.

O'DONNELL
We were surprised when your college
said you were already in town for a
few days. We were ready to send a
plane to Massachusetts to get you.

DOROTHY PRESCOTT
A special plane for me? I don't
understand.

O'DONNELL
It will all be explained.

INT. SITUATION ROOM

O'Donnell opens the door for Dorothy and she enters. She is surprised to see PRESIDENT KENNEDY leaning over a long table and viewing a document with ROBERT KENNEDY. Seated nearby are ROBERT MCNAMARA and JOHN MCCONE sharing notes.

O'DONNELL
Mr. President, Dr. Prescott.

Kennedy looks up and smiles before gesturing introductions.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY
Thank you for coming, Professor.
Uh, the Attorney General.
(Robert Kennedy nods)
Secretary McNamara and CIA Director
McCone. (both men stand a moment)
Please have a seat.

Dorothy and the others sit.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY

Mrs. Prescott, I am a big fan of yours. I've read your books including "20th Century Soviet Leaders From Czar Nicholas To The Present." I'm amazed at the detail you had on Lenin, Stalin, Beria, Khrushchev.

DOROTHY PRESCOTT

Thank you. But I'm a bit confused about why I've been brought here.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY

You and your late husband spent a lot of time in the Soviet Union. Gordon Prescott had many business dealings there. You both speak Russian, the Soviet people liked you very much.

DOROTHY PRESCOTT

And vice versa.

ROBERT KENNEDY

Mrs. Prescott, as you know the Soviet Union is not the most wide open of systems. Our intelligence of the people and its leaders has been limited for a very long time.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY

But you and Mr. Prescott met with Russian people at all levels. Business, cocktail parties - you met with Khrushchev, Molotov and Gromyko. You probably know more about the Soviet hierarchy than the average man in the streets of Moscow.

DOROTHY PRESCOTT

I, I'm sorry but I still don't know why I'm here.

President Kennedy looks over at Robert Kennedy.

ROBERT KENNEDY

Dr. Prescott, what I'm about to tell you falls under the realm of national security. You are now legally bound to secrecy about anything discussed here.

DOROTHY PRESCOTT
I understand.

Pause. She inhales then scans the room. McNamara leans over.

MCNAMARA
What has happened is this. We have learned that the Soviet Union has placed and continues to place nuclear missiles on the island of Cuba.

DOROTHY PRESCOTT
My god...

ROBERT KENNEDY
The President will go on national TV tonight to inform the nation, as well as our first steps in response to all this.

DOROTHY PRESCOTT
I see.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY
We've decided that the missiles must be removed - one way or another. It would be valuable to have insight on how the Russians will respond to each move.

DOROTHY PRESCOTT
I'm sorry, Mr. President, but I'm not the one you want. And I'm sure you're aware that the college is in the middle of the fall semester - I have to get back to my students.

ROBERT KENNEDY
Dr. Prescott, we need your help. If we make a mistake here you may not have a college to go back to.

She gasps.

O'DONNELL
I've already called the university. I couldn't give your boss the details but I assured him it was a matter of national importance. He agreed to a temporary leave of absence.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY

In the next few days, possibly weeks, I will make a number of critical decisions to counter this threat. But we just don't know what the Russians will do.

DOROTHY PRESCOTT

Sir, you're talking political and military strategy. I'm a historian.

MCCONE

(opens a file)

Other than God Himself you are probably the most qualified person in the nation in judging how the Soviets will react.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY

Most importantly I will need everything you know about a man who doesn't believe there's a God. And that man is Nikita Sergeyeovich Khrushchev.

Dorothy leans back to take everything in.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY

Will you help us?

SITUATION ROOM - LATER

Dorothy sits alone watching Kennedy's speech on television.

JUMP CUTS

PRESIDENT KENNEDY (V.O.) (ON TV)

...unmistakable evidence that the Soviet Union has placed offensive nuclear missiles on the island of Cuba...A blockade will be maintained...Any ship found to be carrying offensive weapons will be turned back...I call on Chairman Khrushchev to halt this reckless and provocative threat to world peace...

LATER

Dorothy sees JFK, RFK, O'Donnell and other ADVISORS enter.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY

Well, what did you think?

DOROTHY PRESCOTT
I liked your speech, sir.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY
That's not what I mean, Professor Prescott.

DOROTHY PRESCOTT
Please, call me Dorothy.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY
Alright, Dorothy it is. So, you're Khrushchev. Your missile scheme has been uncovered and you've been called on it. How do you think he will respond to the blockade?

DOROTHY PRESCOTT
Not good, sir.

ROBERT KENNEDY
Are you saying nuclear war could...

DOROTHY PRESCOTT
Khrushchev is very impulsive. His first reaction will be to deny the missiles exist or threaten war if his ships are stopped. Or both.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY
But why? Cuba's nothing to him, so far away. And everything to us, so damn close. He must realize that!

DOROTHY PRESCOTT
Khrushchev is a dedicated Marxist, and he has publicly vowed to defend the existence of a fellow Marxist.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY
I can't believe Khrushchev would risk everything just because he's loyal to an SOB like Castro.

DOROTHY PRESCOTT
You forget there was a time he was loyal to an even bigger SOB.

EXT. DIRT ROAD OUTSIDE OF CITY - DAY

A small truck speeds away down the bumpy trail.

TITLE: Kharkov, Ukraine, Soviet Union - May 1942

Explosions all around begin rocking the truck.

EXT. RUSSIAN COMMAND POST - DAY

Near the heavy guns firing shells at the truck Army Commander IVAN BAGRAMIAN watches through field glasses. Then he freezes. He turns to his ARTILLERY OFFICER.

BAGRAMIAN
Stop firing - now!

ARTILLERY OFFICER
Stop?

BAGRAMIAN
It's one of ours!

The guns stop and the truck skids to a stop in a cloud of dust at the command post. A short chunky MAN, late 40s, in civilian clothes but with two military medals on his shirt, jumps out of the truck. He swats dirt from his outfit and approaches.

BAGRAMIAN
Nikita Sergeyevich, we had no idea it was you. May I ask what you were doing coming from that sector of Kharkov? It's all German.

KHRUSHCHEV
Having a good look, Commander Bagramian. I was ordered by Chairman Stalin to confirm your report of enemy strength.

BAGRAMIAN
And you saw...?

KHRUSHCHEV
Nothing. Drove to the center of town. Not a single shot fired.

BAGRAMIAN
Comrade Khrushchev, I assure you that German divisions have massed...

KHRUSHCHEV
Commander, I agree with your assessment. All along that road Stalin wants to use for our drive into Kharkov I didn't see a single German. Not a tank or an artillery piece...But they were there!

BAGRAMIAN
How could you tell?

KHRUSHCHEV
The foliage on both sides of the road and circling the town. It looks like webbing, you know, the kind we used to catch apples with on our farm in the Ukraine.

BAGRAMIAN
Apple webbing?

KHRUSHCHEV
It's camouflage. The Germans used the exact same camouflage to hide their tanks before their attack on Kiev. I was almost killed there too.

INT. COMMAND TENT - DAY

Khrushchev is on a high frequency phone with Stalin.

KHRUSHCHEV
I beg you, call off the Kharkov counterattack before it's too late. The enemy has laid a trap.

STALIN (V.O.) (ON PHONE)
Come now, a trap! How?

KHRUSHCHEV
Comrade Stalin, General Bagramian is right. The Germans are massed on both flanks. Any force entering the town will be encircled and cut off.

STALIN (V.O.) (ON PHONE)
But our reports say the route to the city is wide open. The Nazis are moving south, heading to Stalingrad.

KHRUSHCHEV
I personally viewed the enemy positions.

STALIN (V.O.) (ON PHONE)
And how many troops and tanks did you see?

KHRUSHCHEV
They were too well hidden to count.

STALIN (V.O.) (ON PHONE)
 (laughs)
 You are panicking for nothing.
 Order Bagramian to move
 immediately. My decision is final.

KHRUSHCHEV
 (groans)
 Yes, Comrade Chairman.

Khrushchev holds the phone and turns to Bagramian.

KHRUSHCHEV
 You are to move on Kharkov now.

BAGRAMIAN
 No! I won't do it! Our men will be
 slaughtered...

Khrushchev quickly hits the receiver so Stalin can't hear.

CUT TO:

INT. KREMLIN, STALIN OFFICE - DAY

JOSEPH STALIN, 63, hears the phone receiver click off. He turns to aide NKVD head LAVRENTY BERIA, 33, balding, with specs.

STALIN
 Khrushchev is against the Kharkov
 operation. Says it will be a
 disaster.

BERIA
 He should be immediately arrested
 for his anti-socialist behavior.

STALIN
 (smiles)
 Calm down, Comrade Beria, my little
 Niki Sergeyeovich is a patriot. He's
 hard-working and an avowed
 Communist. He's wrong about the
 Germans but he is loyal.

EXT. COMMAND TENT - DAY

General Bagramian looks through his field glasses. HE SEES:

Three columns of Russian tanks grinding forward toward
 Kharkov off in the distance. Following are long rows of foot
 soldiers carrying rifles and uniformed in the standard Soviet
 army caps and coats.

Bagramian hands the glasses to Khrushchev who looks.

EXT. TANK COLUMN

Atop the lead Russian tank is COLONEL VASTILEV scanning the area.

INFANTRY FORCE

Riding a truck slowly in the middle of the foot soldiers is GENERAL LUSMENKIN. He spots activity ahead of the tank force.

TANK COLUMN

Vastilev also looks ahead through his field glasses. HE SEES: Two rows of German tanks approach over a ridge near Kharkov.

VASTILEV

(on radio)

Tiger tanks! Less than half kilometer.

BAGRAMIAN (V.O.) (ON PHONE)

Colonel Vastilev, how many?

VASTILEV

(looks again)

I see twenty, maybe thirty.

BAGRAMIAN (V.O.) (ON PHONE)

Proceed, Comrade.

The Russian tanks open fire while continuing to advance.

GERMAN LINE

As shells explode nearby, the Tiger tanks return fire.

TANK COLUMN

Most explosions miss their mark. It seems both sides are too far away to get accurate hits. The Russian tanks speed up.

GERMAN LINE

The Tiger tanks suddenly speed backwards toward Kharkov while still firing at the Russians.

INFANTRY FORCE

General Lusmenkin throws down his field glasses and stands in his truck. He shouts to the foot soldiers.

LUSMENKIN

Advance Comrades, they're retreating!

The infantry troops give a loud and continuous cheer and begin running forward. Some of the delirious troops even outrun the tanks as they push toward Kharkov.

GERMAN LINE

Some scattered German riflemen fire at the advance and a few Russian infantry are hit. But they keep coming.

GERMAN TANK COLUMN

The Tiger tanks in reverse back down a small ridge. They join a huge force of German Tiger tanks and heavy artillery that is concealed by the apple webbing camouflage Khrushchev mentioned.

RUSSIAN ADVANCE

The tanks and infantry continue their advance with fury.

GERMAN LINE

The camouflage is ripped off and all the Tiger tanks and heavy field guns open fire.

The Soviet advance stops and is cut to shreds.

COMMAND TENT

Bagramian grabs the radio as Khrushchev views the battle.

BAGRAMIAN

Vastilev, what's happening!

VASTILEV (V.O.) (ON PHONE)

Heavy resistance! Many casualties, half of our tanks have been destroyed. We have to pull back!

KHRUSHCHEV

No! They must go forward.

Bagramian is shocked then speaks into the radio.

BAGRAMIAN

Colonel Vastilev, maintain your advance. If you can punch through...

Something distracts him. He and then Khrushchev look through their field glasses.

REAR OF SOVIET FORCE

The webbing camouflage far to the Russian right is removed.

German tanks and infantry flood down toward the Russians.

The same thing then occurs to the Russian left. The entire Soviet force is engulfed in a pincer maneuver.

COMMAND TENT

Through their field glasses Bagramian and Khrushchev watch the slaughter in horror. A tear runs down Khrushchev's face.

BAGRAMIAN
Comrade Commissar?

A devastated Khrushchev can only nod.

KHRUSHCHEV
Give the order to retreat.

Bagramian grabs the phone.

BAGRAMIAN
Colonel Vastilev, get your people
out of there immediately!

VASTILEV (V.O.) (ON PHONE)
Yes, Commander. We will try to...

The loud crackle of an explosion is heard and the radio goes dead.

KHRUSHCHEV
What is it? What happened?

BAGRAMIAN
I'm afraid Vastilev will be unable
to return.

They see a burning truck screech to a halt nearby. The driver slumps unconscious. General Lusmenkin falls out of the truck holding his bleeding shoulder.

BAGRAMIAN
Lusmenkin!

Soviet troops, Khrushchev and Bagramian rush toward Lusmenkin.

LATER

Khrushchev is on the high frequency phone.

STALIN (V.O.) (ON PHONE)
I want Bagramian and his entire
staff arrested for incompetence and
cowardice.

KHRUSHCHEV
But Comrade Chairman...

STALIN (V.O.) (ON PHONE)
...And also that idiot tank commander,
what is his name - Vastilev?

KHRUSHCHEV
Colonel Vastilev did not survive
the battle.

STALIN (V.O.) (ON PHONE)
And don't forget Lusmenkin!

KHRUSHCHEV
General Lusmenkin followed your
orders exactly. He fought bravely
and was wounded. It's a miracle he
returned alive!

STALIN (V.O.) (ON PHONE)
Nikita Sergeyevich, should I be
suspicious you won't do what has to
be done? Do you want to join them
against the wall?...Well?

KHRUSHCHEV
I, I understand.

Phone CLICK.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A small Russian convoy of two tanks and four small trucks
sits parked to the side.

Bagramian, Lusmenkin, and four OFFICERS, stand in front of a
short stone fence. Their hands are tied behind their backs.
Lusmenkin can barely stand erect, his uniform blood-soaked
from the shoulder wound. Nearby, Khrushchev faces the men.

An army CAPTAIN and six SOLDIERS holding rifles are lined up
next to Khrushchev. Bagramian stares at Khrushchev who then
looks away.

CAPTAIN
Prepare!

The soldiers aim their rifles. The captain looks over.
Khrushchev, anguished, pauses. Finally he nods.

CAPTAIN
Fire!

The soldiers shoot. Bagramian and the others fall to the ground.

The captain gives Khrushchev a dirty look as he walks toward the victims while pulling out his pistol. The captain then fires a shot into each man to make sure they are dead.

EXT. DACHA, SOUTHWEST RUSSIA - DAY

In the back yard of a modest rural dwelling, a stout plain-looking WOMAN, 40s, kneels while tending to a vegetable garden. She hears footsteps on the path behind her.

She turns and looks up. Her face explodes with joy and she rises.

WOMAN

Nikita Sergeevich!

Khrushchev removes his cap and smiles.

KHRUSHCHEV

Nina Petrovna.

They hug tightly and then begin kissing each other on both cheeks.

INT. DACHA

Khrushchev sits in the kitchen eating a snack. Nina cleans dishes.

NINA

I wasn't sure I would see you again. We heard so many rumors.

KHRUSHCHEV

Let's not talk about it. Have you heard from the children?

NINA

They're safe in Moscow. Continuing with school as you wanted.

KHRUSHCHEV

That's good. I wish you would go there too.

NINA

If the Germans break through and head north, then I will leave here.

She dries her hands and sits with Khrushchev.

NINA

I also got a letter from Leonid.

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