

# *All in the Past*

*a film noir murder mystery in two acts*

*by Lauren Ennis*

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*ALL IN THE PAST*

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Cast in order of appearance

Vera – 30's Russian accent  
Lily – elderly Chinese  
Viktor – late 30's Russian accent  
Fyo – early 30's Russian accent  
attractive women non speaking part  
Countess Irena Zakharenko – young 20's-30's  
Yvonne – French dancer in burlesque club  
Another dancer  
Roger Wilde – British prosecutor  
Agnes – Roger's secretary  
Detective Williams – British police  
Sacha – Fyo's underground associate

**Scene 1:** *Shanghai, 1933; Vera's psychic studio. Vera is sitting at a round table across from a customer. The set contains an ornate Chinese screen, beads hanging from the front doorway, decorative swords hanging on the wall, and a crystal ball on the center of the table. Lit candles are scattered about the room. Vera is in her early 30's and speaks with a Russian accent. She is wearing a shimmering robe and several heavy necklaces. She places her hands over the crystal ball and closes her eyes. After several moments she gasps and begins shaking.*

**Vera:** He is here. He says that he forgives you, Margaret.

**Margaret:** I don't understand.

**Vera:** He says that he is glad you are happy with James. Even if he had survived the war, the things he saw, the things he—

*Vera starts sobbing uncontrollably as the table begins violently shaking. After several moments, the table is still and Vera looks up, now composed.*

**Vera:** It is finished. At last, he is at peace.

*Margaret stares at her, dumfounded, then quickly rises from her chair and throws herself at Vera's feet.*

**Margaret:** Oh thank you, madame, thank you!

*Vera stands and helps Margaret to her feet.*

**Vera:** You're free of that terrible burden. Go now, and start your life free of those ties.

*Margaret hands Vera several bills and exits. Vera removes her robe and tosses it onto the chair, revealing a fashionable dress underneath. She then pushes the table aside, revealing a trap door underneath. She knocks on the trap door.*

**Vera:** You can come out now, Lily.

*The trap door opens and an elderly Chinese woman steps out.*

**Lily:** I thought she'd never leave! You'd think that death would bring some peace and quiet, but oh no.

*Vera hands Lily several of the bills in her hand and places the rest in her dress.*

**Lily:** Bless her kind heart.

**Vera:** Remind me never to burn any incense at *your* shrine.

*Vera begins blowing out the candles.*

**Lily:** That's ancestor *worship*, not harassment. I'm going to bed.

*Lily exits up the stairs. Vera finishes blowing out the candles, retrieves a broom from behind the screen, and starts sweeping the room. A knock is heard at the door. She ignores the knocking until it becomes progressively louder and she finally opens it slightly, revealing Viktor waiting on the other side. He is in his late thirties and speaks with a Russian accent.*

**Vera:** Sorry, we're closed.

*She starts to close the door but he holds it open with his foot.*

**Viktor:** I wasn't aware that the supernatural had set hours.

**Vera:** They do, so if you want to make an appointment you'll have to wait until tomorrow.

**Viktor:** Please, I just have one question.

**Vera:** I'm sure, but I'll be in a better state to answer it tomorrow.

*He puts his hand past the door, holding a large wad of cash.*

**Viktor:** Would *this* do anything for you mental state?

*She tries to grab the money, but he pulls his hand back. She opens the door and he enters.*

**Vera:** Take a seat.

*She stands leaning against her chair as he sits in the opposite chair.*

**Viktor:** You have an interesting line of business.

**Vera:** Some days more than others.

**Viktor:** It must require great skill; an unusual way with people. I bet you can get them to tell you things they wouldn't dare hint at to anyone else.

**Vera:** It's a gift.

**Viktor:** You seem to possess another for languages.

*She looks suspicious.*

**Viktor:** I couldn't help but notice that the last customer was from the British concession.

*She nods.*

**Vera:** I thought you had a question.

**Viktor:** More of a proposition.

*He removes a photo from his pocket and places it on the table.*

**Viktor:** Have you seen this woman?

**Vera:** No.

*She picks up the photo and looks more closely.*

**Vera:** Pretty girl, though.

**Viktor:** She was considered quite a beauty back home.

**Vera:** Not something I would recommend being in Shanghai. Who is she?

**Viktor:** Countess Irena Zakharenko. I have reason to believe that she is in Shanghai.

**Vera:** I'm sorry, but this sounds like something for the police.

**Viktor:** Would *you* go to the police here?

**Vera:** Not if I wanted something done.

**Viktor:** I've tried every method I can think of, I've been to every restaurant, nightclub, and back alley and nothing. I've hired private detectives, and still nothing.

**Vera:** What makes you think she's even here?

**Viktor:** It started when I found her jewelry in a second hand shop; unique pieces that had been in her family for generations. The rest of the story would perhaps be best saved until your mental state has improved.

**Vera:** I'm not a policeman, a detective, or a record of missing persons; why come to me?

**Viktor:** Perhaps I'm a victim of superstition, *Pauses* or I'm just that desperate.

*He removes the cash from his pocket and places it on the table.*

**Viktor:** Half now, and half when you find her. If she's alive, I want to meet with her personally. If she's *Pauses* if not, then I want definite proof. Use whatever time and methods you deem fit. *She picks up the money and counts it. He holds out his hand to shake on the deal and she places the money in his hand.*

**Vera:** Come back tomorrow for that appointment and I'll give you an answer.

**Viktor:** Alright, I'll be back again this time tomorrow, Miss...if we are going to work together I think that I should know your name.

**Vera:** Didn't you read the sign?

**Viktor:** Yes, but somehow you don't strike me as a 'Madame Tatiana'.

**Vera:** It's Vera, Vera Yakushova. And you are....

**Viktor:** Call me Viktor. I have a feeling we'll be seeing a lot of each other.

**Vera:** I beg your—

*He kisses her hand.*

**Viktor:** Until tomorrow.

*He exits. She stares after him, deep in thought. Lily appears at the top of the stairs.*

**Lily:** You're not taking that job.

*Vera turns around, startled.*

**Vera:** I'm sure you've been standing there long enough. Remind me to put some bells on those damn silk shoes.

**Lily:** There's something strange about that man. You're no detective, why does he come to you?

**Vera:** Probably the same reason that the Czar went to Rasputin even though he wasn't a doctor. We Russians are a superstitious bunch.

**Lily:** That's another thing, I don't want you working for a foreigner; I don't trust them.

**Vera:** I'm glad to see I've made such a good impression on you.

**Lily:** You know I don't mean you, Vera. You're like one of my own, but those—

**Vera:** It's good money.

**Lily:** You don't need the money; you've been doing fine for yourself.

**Vera:** It might come in handy if I ever get tired of paying rent to you.

*Vera pulls the crystal ball off of its base, revealing a tray full of cigarettes. Vera removes a cigarette from the tray and lights it.*

**Vera:** We both know we could use the money. All I have to do is show that picture around the right places and we'll be rich. It's a cinch.

**Lily:** I still don't like it.

**Vera:** The worst that could happen is I don't find her, in which case I'll still have more than when I started. Stop worrying so much, Lil, I've taken care of myself before.

**Lily:** Do what you want, but you won't do it in my house. Meet him somewhere else tomorrow, I don't want him coming in here again, and I don't want to hear anymore about it.

*Lily angrily turns and exits up the stairs.*

**Vera:** See no evil, hear no evil.

*She shakes her head and resumes cleaning the room.*

**Scene 2:** *Viktor's apartment several weeks later. Vera enters. The room is furnished with a desk, chair, and a cot folded against the wall. The walls are stained with age and the furniture is in disrepair. Viktor sits at his desk writing and looks up as she enters. She looks around the room.*

**Viktor:** You'd never know you weren't in the Imperial Palace would you?

**Vera:** I've seen worse, though I admit it's not a typical work space. Couldn't we have done this in the parlor?

**Viktor:** We could have, but I didn't think you'd enjoy the company of the other tenants and their clients; or my piano playing.

**Vera:** And *that's* how you have the money to pay me?

**Viktor:** With other odd jobs.

*She looks at him quizzically waiting for further explanation. He clears his throat and gestures to the chair at his desk.*

**Viktor:** Make yourself comfortable.

*She sits down at the desk.*

**Viktor:** Speaking of payment, what have you got for me this time?

*She removes a notebook from inside her coat and places it on the desk.*

**Vera:** Not much. The landlady at a boarding house downtown said she stayed for about a month and ran out on the rent without a trace. A neighbor down the hall thought she did an act at Mademoiselle Fifi's for a while, but it doesn't sound like she held the job down too long.

**Viktor:** What's this 'Mademoiselle Fifi's'?

**Vera:** A burlesque club in the French concession. One of the better ones, I'm told.

**Viktor:** I see.

**Vera:** So from the looks of it, she disappeared into thin air almost six months ago.

**Viktor:** What's your next step?

**Vera:** *Shrugs* I suppose I could try some séances.

*She chuckles at her own joke. He looks unamused.*

**Vera:** I've got a...an acquaintance who might have something.

**Viktor:** Oh?

**Vera:** He knows just about everyone in Shanghai and has a habit of bending the laws now and then.

**Viktor:** That's a good start.

*He removes a cigarette case from his pocket and offers one to her. She nods and he lights two cigarettes, handing one to her.*

**Viktor:** I'd like to meet this friend of yours; what would you say if I came along on this one?

**Vera:** I don't think so. I'd rather not have to see him myself.

**Viktor:** And that's why you've been putting off a good source for so long.

**Vera:** Not my most professional moment, I admit.

**Viktor:** I understand. Besides, you've already found more than I'd hoped for.

**Vera:** *Shrugs* I'm a firm believer in earning my keep.

**Viktor:** A fine sentiment.

*He removes a bottle of liquor from the desk drawer and places it in front of her on the desk.*

**Viktor:** How about a drink to it?

**Vera:** Drinking on the job?

*He stares at her as she crosses her legs.*

**Viktor:** You've earned it.

*He removes two glasses from the desk drawer and pours two drinks.*

**Viktor:** I promise not to tell the boss.

*He takes a swig of his drink and she reluctantly sips hers. She distractedly looks out the window.*

**Viktor:** Investigating the view now too?

**Vera:** Just thinking.

**Viktor:** Oh?

**Vera:** I'm supposed to be finding Irena but here I am taking back drinks with you the same way that she must have.

**Viktor:** Not exactly. You see, I was just a humble tutor. She never would have been allowed to mix with my kind.

**Vera:** She wasn't just a student to you, though.

*He looks at her in surprise.*

**Viktor:** How'd you guess?

**Vera:** I had a hunch when you hired me, but the look on your face when I mentioned Mademoiselle Fifi's made it pretty obvious.

**Viktor:** You really are cut out for this work, aren't you?

**Vera:** I like to think so. So...

**Viktor:** So?

**Vera:** How did the love story end?

*He looks out the window and takes a drag of his cigarette.*

**Viktor:** Before it began, I never had the courage to tell her while I was working for her family. Then when I came back from the war, she was gone.

**Vera:** Then the revolution.

**Viktor:** *Sighs* Yes, the revolution.

*They both look away. She pours another drink and he lights another cigarette.*

**Viktor:** But that was a long time ago. Now I know better.

**Vera:** I'm not so sure.

**Viktor:** I just want to know what happened to her. After all these years I suppose that I still feel responsible for her.

*The sound of loud talking and laughter can be heard in the hall. He looks at his watch.*

**Viktor:** That would be the start of the night shift. Would you be interested in taking this somewhere else?

**Vera:** Maybe some other time. I've got my own night job. Remember, boss?

**Viktor:** Of course, how could I forget?

*He puts the bottle away and helps her put on her coat. She picks up the notebook and puts it inside her coat.*

**Viktor:** What about tomorrow? Surely your boss wouldn't dare make you work on a Sunday?

**Vera:** Alright, tomorrow.

*He kisses her hand. She opens the door then turns around.*

**Vera:** But no shop talk!

*She winks at him and closes the door. He sits down and resumes writing at his desk.*

**Scene 3:** *Fyo's apartment above The Grand Duchess nightclub. The living room of the apartment contains a large desk, several expensive chairs, and a phonograph. Behind the desk a*

*large painting hangs on the wall and a mirror hangs on the opposite wall. Music can be heard coming from the club as Vera opens the door of the apartment. As Vera enters, a woman in a low cut dress storms out of the apartment. As she reaches the door she pauses to look Vera up and down then glares at Fyo sitting at his desk and exits, slamming the door behind her. Fyo is in his early thirties, and speak with a Russian accent.*

**Vera:** I see you haven't lost your way with women, Fyo.

**Fyo:** Don't mind Anna, she's still getting used to the idea of unemployment.

**Vera:** Oh?

**Fyo:** Caught her fraternizing with the customers.

**Vera:** As opposed to fraternizing with you?

**Fyo:** Naturally.

*He puts his feet on the desk and leans back.*

**Fyo:** Speaking of fraternizing, to what do I owe the company of the swami of Shanghai?

*Vera removes a flask from her pocket and places it on the desk.*

**Vera:** That would be Baby New Year, nineteen thirty-four.

*He removes a pair of glasses from a desk drawer and pours a shot from the flask in each. He hands her one glass and raises the other.*

**Fyo:** To starting the year with a lovely lady.

*He drinks the shot. She rolls her eyes and drinks hers.*

**Fyo:** And finding out what she's really doing here.

**Vera:** Am I that obvious? *Sighs* That would explain the cold trail.

**Fyo:** Meaning?

*Vera removes a photograph from her pocket and places it on the desk.*

**Vera:** Have you seen her?

*He pauses then shakes his head.*

**Fyo:** Unfortunately, no.

**Vera:** Neither has anyone else, or so I've been told.

**Fyo:** Who is she?

**Vera:** Countess Irena Zakharenko.

**Fyo:** What's she to you?

**Vera:** A very pretty paycheck, if I can find her.

**Fyo:** So you've been hired to find her?

*She nods.*

**Fyo:** And how exactly did you manage to con anyone into believing you were up for the job?

**Vera:** I appreciate your faith in me.

**Fyo:** You're awful good, Vera, but even you aren't *that* good. If this guy was willing to hire you, don't think he hasn't hired plenty of others first.

**Vera:** What makes you so sure it was a man who hired me?

**Fyo:** One look at that picture.

**Vera:** Fair enough, if you like the regal, sophisticated, type.

**Fyo:** Not particularly, but I hear that they're still a popular model.

**Vera:** I guess so, if she's worth three-thousand yuan.

*He whistles.*

**Fyo:** You weren't kidding about that paycheck.

**Vera:** I might be willing to sacrifice a portion of that...for a little help.

*He pours another shot and looks at his glass.*

**Fyo:** This stuff works fast; so *that's* what you're doing here. You want to play sleuth, but you want little old Boy Friday to do all the work, isn't that it?

**Vera:** Well, you do know everyone who's anyone in Shanghai. Come on, throw that picture around a few choice places and you and I will be rolling in it.

**Fyo:** I'm a busy man, and I don't appreciate you're wasting my time.

*She takes the photograph back and puts it in her pocket.*

**Vera:** You didn't seem to think that taking back a few cocktails with me was a waste of time.

*She removes a cigarette from her purse. He takes a lighter from his pocket and lights her cigarette before she can retrieve a lighter from her purse.*

**Fyo:** You finally coming around would have been an occasion worthy of celebration.

**Vera:** I suggest that you stick to your bar girls, from what I hear they don't waste any time.

**Fyo:** Look, it's obvious that she doesn't want to be found, and in a city like this, she won't be. If you're smart you'll drop this.

**Vera:** Who ever said I was smart? *Pauses* You really are a scoundrel, you know that?

**Fyo:** And?

**Vera:** And the worst kind too!

**Fyo:** How about I make it up to you.

*He holds out his hand to her.*

**Vera:** The last time I checked you had two left feet.

**Fyo:** Obviously, you haven't checked in quite a while. I'm giving you some business; go on, read my fortune.

*She looks skeptical.*

**Fyo:** I want to hear all about those beautiful blondes I'll be meeting in the new year.

*She starts looking at his palm.*

**Vera:** Blondes, ha!

**Fyo:** You're living proof that I have no effect on redheads.

*She looks up.*

**Fyo:** At least not a lasting effect.

*She looks down again.*

**Vera:** Let's see...long life line, you've gotten into more trouble since the last time I saw you, and this year—

**Fyo:** Would be off to a better start if you'd help me finish off that flask.

*She stands.*

**Vera:** A new year might not be the best time for old habits.

*She walks to the door.*

**Fyo:** Aren't you forgetting something?

*She turns around. He holds up the flask.*

**Vera:** Keep it. I'll come back for it next year.

*She starts to open the door and stops.*

**Vera:** Oh, and if you happen to see or hear anything...

**Fyo:** I'll let you know.

*She exits. He tries to take a swig from the flask and realizes that it is empty.*

**Fyo:** Some new year.

*He sits down with a sigh.*



**Scene 4:** *Viktor's apartment the next night. Viktor is sitting at his desk writing. Music can be heard playing downstairs. A knock is heard at the door.*

**Viktor:** *Without looking up* It's open.

*Vera enters and removes a pack of cigarettes from her coat pocket.*

**Vera:** All work and no play really does make the boss a dull boy.

*She puts the pack of cigarettes on the desk in front of him.*

**Viktor:** I thought you were my landlady after me for the rent.

*She takes a seat on top of his desk and retrieves a cigarette from the pack.*

**Vera:** You're safe for now.

*She looks towards the door and listens.*

**Vera:** Isn't that normally you're post?

**Viktor:** I called in a favor.

*She shrugs and lights a match off of the desk. She lights her cigarette.*

**Viktor:** And how did it go with your acquaintance?

**Vera:** Well he says he hasn't seen her, but I don't know if I believe...wait a second!

**Viktor:** What?

**Vera:** I thought we agreed on no shop talk.

**Viktor:** I'd forgotten that.

*He removes a bottle of liquor from the desk drawer and pours two glasses. They sit in awkward silence as they sip their drinks. Vera holds out her pack of cigarettes.*

**Vera:** Want one?

**Viktor:** No thank you.

*He turns to look out the window and chuckles to himself.*

**Vera:** Must be quite a view.

**Viktor:** What?

**Vera:** You tell me. You're the one laughing.

**Viktor:** I just realized that I don't know what else to talk about with you. After all the time we've spent together, there's so much I don't know about you.

**Vera:** Well, what do you want to know?

**Viktor:** Let's see...Who are you really behind the crystal ball? Who were you before Shanghai? And what's the difference between them?

**Vera:** *Sarcastically* Cat really has your tongue, doesn't it? One question at a time.

**Viktor:** Alright, who were you before Shanghai?

*She takes a drag and pauses to think then smiles mischievously.*

**Vera:** Someone of little consequence.

**Viktor:** No, really.

**Vera:** Guess.

**Viktor:** *Teasingly* The Grand Duchess Anastasia, oh wait, they already found her didn't they?  
*He starts pacing the room.*

**Viktor:** Women's battalion soldier...no. Revolutionary...no.

*She pulls up her skirt to scratch her knee.*

**Viktor:** Aha!

**Vera:** What?

*He taps her knee with his knuckles.*

**Viktor:** Rising ballet sensation of course!

*She laughs.*

**Vera:** You're almost as good at a con as I am.

*She pulls down her skirt and stands. He puts a hand on her waist.*

**Viktor:** Prove it.

**Vera:** This is ridiculous.

**Viktor:** What's the matter, scared?

**Vera:** I am not!

*He pulls her towards him and takes her hand.*

**Viktor:** Then prove it.

*They start to dance. She dances awkwardly, and is obviously nervous.*

**Viktor:** See, I knew you'd be a dancer.

*She steps on his foot. She tries to pull away in embarrassment and he pulls her back towards him.*

**Viktor:** Not until I'm finished.

**Vera:** You didn't say what kind of dancer.

**Viktor:** All you need is the right partner.

**Vera:** And I suppose that would be you?

**Viktor:** With some practice.

*He dips her. They pause for a moment when he pulls her back up. The music ends and he sits down at the desk.*

**Viktor:** Bravo!

*He claps. She sits back on top of the desk.*

**Vera:** If nothing else, at least I'm a woman of my word.

**Viktor:** *Laughs* Is that what you tell your customers?

**Vera:** Naturally.

**Viktor:** And they believe you?

**Vera:** They pay me, anyway.

**Viktor:** Isn't that a bit exploitive?

*She takes a drag of her cigarette.*

**Vera:** Not really, I'm only telling them what they want to hear. When Freud did they called him a genius.

*She lights two cigarettes and hands one to him. He takes a drag and hands the cigarette back to her.*

**Viktor:** And what would you tell me?

*She takes his hand and pretends to read his palm.*

**Vera:** Let's see...you've made an excellent business choice recently.

**Viktor:** I've no doubt of that.

**Vera:** *Whispering* And...

*She leans towards him.*

**Vera:** You're a bit...

*She leans in closer.*

**Vera:** Too business minded...

*She leans in closer.*

**Vera:** For your own...

*She kisses him.*

**Vera:** Good.

**Viktor:** You think so?

*She nods.*

**Vera:** But I couldn't be certain without at least a brief spiritual consultation.

*She closes her eyes and poses as if in a trance. She opens one eye to look at him and quickly closes it. He pulls her into a passionate kiss.*

**Viktor:** And what do the spirits say to that?

**Vera:** They say it's much better when you put your share in, comrade.

**Viktor:** Can a mere mortal ask the spirits something?

**Vera:** Ask away.

**Viktor:** Whatever made you take on this impossible case?

**Vera:** I didn't know it was impossible. At first it seemed like easy money.

**Viktor:** And after you realized that it was?

**Vera:** I don't know, maybe I needed something to fill my nights.

*He pours two more glasses.*

**Vera:** And maybe I like having an excuse to talk to you.

*He hands her a glass and raises his.*

**Viktor:** I'll drink to that.

*He takes a sip of his drink. She puts hers down on the desk.*

**Vera:** My turn. Why did you hire me for this 'impossible case'?

**Viktor:** I thought we already went over that one.

*She taps her fingernails on the desk. He clears his throat.*

**Viktor:** I'd heard from a friend that you were good with people and not bad at languages either. Nothing else had worked, and a girl like that would be good to have on the team.

**Vera:** I see.

**Viktor:** Of course seeing how those ankles of yours look hanging over my desk gave me a reason to keep you on.

*She laughs. He looks embarrassed.*

**Viktor:** Too much?

**Vera:** Just right.

*He sighs with relief.*

**Vera:** It's just...ankles?

**Viktor:** Would you rather that I said—

**Vera:** No, no. Ankles will do just fine. Now about this friend of yours...

**Viktor:** Now, now, it's bad form to reveal a source.

*She rolls her eyes.*

**Vera:** Fine, be mysterious.

*She walks to the door.*

**Viktor:** Where are you going?

**Vera:** Oh nowhere, anywhere, who can really say?

**Viktor:** That's too bad.

**Vera:** Is it?

**Viktor:** Well considering that I was hoping for another round of spiritual consultations...

*He takes a few steps towards her.*

**Vera:** Uh huh...

*He takes another few steps towards her.*

**Viktor:** And there *is* plenty more where that drink came from...

*He stops a step away from her.*

**Vera:** Uh huh...

*He leans in to kiss her as a door is heard closing in the next room. The sound of a man and woman talking and footsteps on the stairs can be heard outside the door. She steps away from him and starts to open the door.*

**Vera:** And with that I remember my virtue. Goodnight.

*He sighs and helps her put on her coat.*

**Vera:** Usual time tomorrow?

**Viktor:** The usual time.

*She kisses him lightly and exits. He walks to the window and lights a cigarette.*

**Scene 5:** *Fyo's apartment. Fyo enters his apartment pulling Irena with him by her arm. He lets go of her and locks the door behind them. She is thin and pale but still attractive, and in her mid thirties. She wears a shabby dress and her hair is down and disheveled. She carries a small suitcase with her. She tosses her suitcase onto the floor and sits in a chair, stretching.*

**Irena:** *Coyly* If that's what you wanted you didn't have to lock me in. You know, you could have just asked.

*She kicks off her shoes. He ignores her and locks the window.*

**Irena:** I can't even tease you?

*He places the phone receiver onto the desk and checks that the window is locked.*

**Irena:** *Seriously* What is it, Fyo?

*He removes a pistol from a locked drawer in his desk and hands it to her.*

**Irena:** It's that bad?

**Fyo:** I'm not sure, but we can't afford to take any chances.

**Irena:** How'd they find out? It was that tart, Anna, wasn't it? *Shouting* I told you not to trust her! I told you not to—

**Fyo:** Would you knock it off before the whole club hears you?!

*She glares at him.*

**Fyo:** I don't know how they found out. I'm not even sure that they have.

**Irena:** Then why did you drag me up here? If you want to be paranoid, feel free, but I've got work to do.

*She starts to open the door. He rushes past her and shuts it. He stands in front of the door.*

**Fyo:** All I know is that someone's been hiring people to track you.

**Irena:** What do you mean track me?

**Fyo:** Vera came by a few nights ago asking if I knew anything about you or where you were. She's been flashing your picture all over town to anyone who will listen.

**Irena:** Vera? Wait, that scrappy little con-girl? What's she got to do with this?

**Fyo:** If you'd shut up and let me finish I'll tell you.

*She rolls her eyes and sits in the chair again.*

**Fyo:** A guy's been paying her to get information on you.

**Irena:** What sort of information?

**Fyo:** Anything and everything.

**Irena:** Well, who is he?

**Fyo:** I didn't ask.

**Irena:** What do you mean, you didn't ask?!

**Fyo:** And let on that I had what she wanted? That would have been a great idea.

**Irena:** Now what?

**Fyo:** Now you unpack that bag and make yourself comfortable.

**Irena:** And how long do I have to stay here?

**Fyo:** As long as it takes. And in the meantime no one comes in and you don't go out.

**Irena:** But—

**Fyo:** Not under *any* circumstances.

*He looks in a mirror on the wall and adjusts his tie.*

**Fyo:** I've got some things to do downstairs; make yourself at home.

*He starts to open the door.*

**Irena:** Fyo.

**Fyo:** Yea?

**Irena:** *Embarrassed* Could I just...could you...

**Fyo:** What?

**Irena:** Could you just get me a little something. A little bit to tide me over?

**Fyo:** Don't even tell me your back on that again.

**Irena:** *Pleadingly* Please, Fyo, just a little bit?

*He sighs in exasperation.*

**Fyo:** I'll see what I can do.

*He exits. She starts unpacking her suitcase then throws down her clothes in exasperation and starts pacing the room.*

**Scene 6:** *The dressing room at Mademoiselle Fifi's burlesque club. The room is lined with mirrors and vanities at which several dancers are adjusting their hair and makeup. Vera enters from a back door leading to the alleyway outside wearing a low-cut dress and excessive makeup. She casually approaches one of the mirrors and begins applying lipstick. The dancer at the next mirror, Yvonne, sees her in the mirror. Yvonne is wearing a corset with a removable skirt, stockings, and excessive makeup and speaks with a French accent.*

**Yvonne:** What are *you* doing back here? Customers aren't allowed back stage.

*Vera pretends to be confused. Yvonne sighs, grabs her arm, and leads her out of the dressing room. Vera resists and pulls her arm free.*

**Vera:** *Raising her voice to a higher pitch* Look, I'm not a customer I'm—

**Yvonne:** The building inspector, right?

*Yvonne sighs and tries to lead Vera out of the dressing room again.*

**Vera:** I...I...I was told to come here about a job.

*Yvonne looks skeptical and turns to a Chinese dancer in a similar costume exiting the dressing room.*

**Yvonne:** Jin?

*Jin turns around.*

**Yvonne:** Is Rene trying to bring in another girl?

**Jin:** What do I look like, his secretary? How should I know?

*Jin exits. Yvonne rolls her eyes.*

**Yvonne:** *Under her breath* I could say you're more things than a secretary to him.

*Yvonne turns to Vera and adopts a professional demeanor.*

**Yvonne:** So you're the new girl? Well why didn't you just say so?

**Vera:** I...well I'm not really used to this sort of thing.

**Yvonne:** Who is? Come on, you'll catch on soon enough.

*Yvonne exits the dressing room and leads Vera up a nearby staircase.*

**Vera:** A friend of mine said this was one of the better clubs to work at.

*Yvonne throws her head back and laughs.*

**Yvonne:** With a friend like that who needs enemies? Who's this 'friend' of yours?

**Vera:** You might know her. Her name's Irena.

*Yvonne pauses on the stairs then continues.*

**Yvonne:** No, I don't think I met her. She must have been here before I started.

**Vera:** Oh, how long have you been here?

**Yvonne:** *Evasively* Not long.

*They reach the top of the stairs and Yvonne knocks on the door. She waits a moment then turns back to the stairs.*

**Yvonne:** He must not be in. You'll have to try some other time.

**Vera:** Maybe he didn't hear.

*Yvonne knocks again as Vera leans over a railing to observe the club below.*

**Yvonne:** Your best bet would be to come back tomorrow. He's usually in then.

*Vera reluctantly follows Yvonne down the stairs. Vera notices Irena enter a room down the hall. Irena turns around and shuts the door when she notices Vera watching her. Yvonne leads Vera to the dressing room door.*

**Vera:** Maybe I could just wait a while?

*Yvonne pulls up a chair at the vanity and gestures to it.*

**Yvonne:** Fine. Just stay there and don't touch anything. Customers aren't supposed to come back here.

**Vera:** But I'm not a—

*Yvonne exits. Vera looks around the dressing room then exits into the hallway. She hides behind a corner and watches as Irena enters the hallway moments later and hurriedly exits through the back door to the alley. Vera starts to follow Irena when Yvonne appears down the hall with Rene. Rene is impeccably dressed in a three piece suit holding a long cigarette holder. He also speaks with a French accent and has exaggerated, flamboyant, mannerisms.*

**Yvonne:** There you are!

*Vera turns around, startled.*

**Rene:** *To Yvonne* Who might I ask, is this?

**Yvonne:** You mean you aren't interviewing her?

*He takes a long drag from his cigarette and looks Vera up and down.*

**Rene:** Interviewing? *To Vera* Look to the side.

*Vera turns her head.*

**Rene:** Now turn around.

*Vera turns around.*

**Rene:** Thank you, cherie. *To Yvonne* I should say not! And how many times have I told you not to let the customers back here!

**Yvonne:** Me?!

**Vera:** I...I heard that you might have some openings.

**Rene:** Well sorry, cherie, but you heard wrong.

**Vera:** I'm sorry to have wasted your time then.

*Vera starts towards the back door. Yvonne pulls her back.*

**Yvonne:** Oh come on, what would one more girl hurt?

**Rene:** *Agitated* And since when are we running a charity?

**Yvonne:** I just thought—

**Rene:** Do I pay you to think or dance?!

*Yvonne looks down nervously. A crowd can be heard applauding offstage. Rene regains his composure.*

**Rene:** That'll be your number coming up. Get her out and get on stage in two minutes. Got it?

*Yvonne nods and leads Vera towards the front of the club. Vera turns around to look at the back door.*

**Yvonne:** Trust me; it's not your loss. Come on.

*Vera follows Yvonne offstage.*

**Scene 7:** *Vera's studio. Three days later Vera enters the studio wearing a similar low cut dress with a slit on the side and garish makeup. She sits down at the table and begins writing notes. Lily enters silently from the stairs in a silk bathrobe.*

**Lily:** Aren't we up early?

*Vera looks up, startled.*

**Lily:** Last time I checked, I don't rent this studio to tenants by the hour.

*Vera turns around and looks at her in confusion. Lily gestures to Vera's dress.*

**Vera:** Oh that, well let's just say that I've been under cover.

**Lily:** Where?

**Vera:** I thought you didn't want to hear anything about it.

**Lily:** In that case which dives weren't you slumming around last night?

*Vera ignores her and continues writing. Lily removes a newspaper from her robe pocket and places it on the table.*

**Lily:** You'd better read this.

*Vera picks up the newspaper with a sigh of exasperation then stares at it in shock. She puts down the newspaper and stares ahead blankly.*

**Lily:** She's the one you were looking for, isn't she?

*Vera slowly nods.*

**Lily:** I knew you shouldn't have taken that job.

**Vera:** It couldn't... I saw her less than three days ago. There must be some mistake.

**Lily:** There wasn't any mistake.

*Lily hands Vera the newspaper.*

**Lily:** You'd better keep reading; there's more.

*Vera holds the newspaper without looking at it.*

**Lily:** Vera...

*Vera abruptly stands and walks to the staircase. She starts to walk up the stairs.*

**Lily:** They found her at the Duchess.

*Vera stops without turning around.*

**Lily:** In Fyodor's apartment. She'd been strangled.

*Vera slowly sits down on the stairs.*

**Lily:** They're looking for him now.

*Lily sits down on the stairs next to her and puts an arm around her.*

**Lily:** I'm sorry, but you had to hear it. I know he couldn't have done it. But you needed to—  
*Vera shrugs Lily's arm off and rushes up the stairs. Lily stands and stares after her.*

**Lily:** Know.

**Scene 8:** *That night in Viktor's apartment. Viktor is sitting at his desk with his head in his hands. A knock is heard at the door. He remains with his head down.*

**Vera:** *From behind the door* Viktor?

*She knocks again. He looks up and stares at the door as though in a daze.*

**Vera:** Viktor, please. Oksana told me that you're in there.

*He slowly walks to the door and lets her in.*

**Viktor:** I'm sorry... I tried to help her. I never...

**Vera:** I know, I read it this morning.

*He sits down.*

**Viktor:** I was so close!

*He slams his fist against the desk.*

**Vera:** You did everything that you could. The odds of even finding her were...

*He puts his head down in despair.*

**Vera:** You can't blame yourself for this.

**Viktor:** Who else can I blame? I let her go when I went to war, I practically tipped off whoever did this. It might as well have been my hands around her throat!

*She puts a hand on his shoulder.*

**Vera:** You have to listen to me; all you did was try to help her. You've got to believe that there was nothing you could have done.

**Viktor:** I can't believe it, especially not coming from you.

**Vera:** Me?

**Viktor:** I sent you into every back alley in town. Do you realize the danger I put you in?

**Vera:** It was a job; I went in with my eyes open.

**Viktor:** It could just as easily have been you. How can I expect you to forgive me?

**Vera:** There's nothing to forgive.

*She removes a bottle of liquor from his desk and pours him a shot. She hands the shot to him. He reluctantly drinks it.*

**Viktor:** Thank you. It was very kind of you to come here.

**Vera:** It was the least I could do, which reminds me...

*She removes a large wad of cash from inside her dress and hands it to him.*

**Vera:** Here.

**Viktor:** You earned it.

**Vera:** It just doesn't seem right.

*He hands the money back to her.*

**Viktor:** Please, I'm asking you to.

*She puts the money down on the desk and lights a cigarette. She walks to the window and stares out it.*

**Vera:** What will you do now?

**Viktor:** What do you mean?

**Vera:** Now that the search is over.

**Viktor:** What makes you think it's over?

*She looks at him and shakes her head.*

**Vera:** You can't be serious.



**Viktor:** Nothing's really changed.

**Vera:** You just said yourself how dangerous it is.

**Viktor:** For a woman it *is* dangerous.

**Vera:** You can drop that line. If we were back home, I could have my own regiment by now.

**Viktor:** I have to do this.

**Vera:** There's an entire police force out there to—

**Viktor:** To waste time while he gets away. To cover it all up when they get tired of looking.  
*He removes a photograph of Irena from his pocket and looks at it.*

**Viktor:** It's the least...the only thing that I can do for her now.

*She picks up the money and puts it in her dress.*

**Viktor:** Thank you.

**Vera:** Don't bother, I'm still earning it.

**Viktor:** No, you're not.

**Vera:** Nothing's changed our contract after all.

*She pours herself a shot and drinks it. Viktor stares at the photo.*

**Viktor:** It must have been agony for her.

**Vera:** Do you have any idea who might have done it?

*He takes her hand.*

**Viktor:** That's what you'll help me find out.

*She looks away. He lets go of her hand.*

**Viktor:** I'm sorry, I—

**Vera:** No, it's just...they say they have a suspect.

**Viktor:** You mean that lounge lizard?

*He shakes his head.*

**Vera:** Why not?

**Viktor:** I've never known the police to pick a suspect so quickly; except of course when he's slipped through the cracks one too many times already.

*He looks thoughtful and shrugs.*

**Viktor:** Perhaps it is him, but either way I need to be sure.

*The piano can be heard playing downstairs along with loud, intoxicated conversation.*

**Vera:** I guess that's your cue to get back to your post. I'd better be going.

*She puts on her coat.*

**Viktor:** I got the night off.

*She walks to the door.*

**Viktor:** Oksana didn't think I'd have a good effect on the customers.

*He forces a weak smile.*

**Vera:** Goodnight. Try and get yourself some rest.

*She starts to open the door.*

**Viktor:** Vera, I—

*She turns around.*

**Viktor:** Do you think you could stay just a little longer? *Pauses* I can't stand the thought of being alone tonight.

*She walks to the desk and sits on top of it. He lights two cigarettes and hands her one.*

**Vera:** Any ideas on passing the time?

*He shrugs.*

**Viktor:** I remember I spent a night like this with Irena once.

**Vera:** Really?

**Viktor:** I was leaving for training the next morning. Neither of us said a word. She sat at the window watching the snow fall while I watched her.

**Vera:** I thought she wasn't allowed to mix with 'humble tutors'?

**Viktor:** She wasn't. *Pauses* But that doesn't mean she didn't find ways around it.

**Vera:** Tell me what she was like.

**Viktor:** I wouldn't know where to start.

**Vera:** There's always the beginning.

*He sits down next to her on the desk.*

**Viktor:** I was nineteen when Count Zakharenko first hired me as his daughter's music teacher. *She rests her head on his shoulder.*

**Viktor:** Even at fifteen, Irena possessed a skill for the piano that most can't attain in a lifetime. *He puts his arm around her.*

**Viktor:** My friends scoffed at what they thought was my waste of talent, but as time went on... *The lights slowly fade as he talks.*

**Scene 9:** *Later that night outside Vera's studio. Vera is walking home from Viktor's when she is startled by the sound of someone behind her. She turns but sees nothing and continues walking. She hears the same sound and looks again, then begins walking at a faster pace. As she reaches the doorway, Fyo approaches from behind her.*

**Fyo:** Vera.

*She turns around and screams. He quickly puts his hand over her mouth and she struggles to free herself of his grip. A police officer approaches carrying a flashlight. Fyo pulls his hat down to cover his face and passionately kisses Vera in the doorway. The policeman continues past them and exits. Fyo lets go of Vera and she wipes her mouth in disgust.*

**Fyo:** I guess even being on the lam has some perks.

**Vera:** *Terrified* Get out of here.

*He shakes his head.*

**Vera:** Get out of here or I'll scream again.

**Fyo:** Just let me in and I'll explain everything.

*She looks around for an escape.*

**Fyo:** That cop will be back anytime.

*She stares at him, terrified. Footsteps can be heard offstage.*

**Fyo:** Well?!

*She opens the door and they enter her studio. He turns around to look back at the door with a sigh of relief as she removes a dagger from the wall. As he turns around, she puts the dagger to his throat.*

**Vera:** Go out the back door. Don't let anyone see you.

*He grabs her wrist and after a struggle manages to take the dagger from her. He tosses the dagger aside onto the floor. She runs to the door and starts to open it.*

**Vera:** Help police!

*He grabs her from behind, drags her back inside, and closes the door. He releases her and stands in front of the door, blocking her exit. She slowly backs away from him in fear. He walks to the table and picks up a newspaper lying on it. He scans the first pages.*

**Vera:** I won't say anything, I promise. Please, Fyo, you know I'd never turn you in, please—

**Fyo:** You really believe it, don't you? I would have thought that at least *you* would have seen through this trash.

*He tosses the newspaper aside.*

**Fyo:** You can stop shaking, you're safe.

*He sits down at the table and removes a cigarette from his pocket. He lights the cigarette and looks thoughtful.*

**Fyo:** Vera, in all the years you've known me, have you ever known me to be a fool?

**Vera:** *Reluctantly* No.

**Fyo:** Then why the hell would I suddenly be dumb enough to kill a woman in the most obvious way possible?

*She looks hopeful then shakes her head.*

**Vera:** Not all crimes are premeditated. What about a crime of passion?

**Fyo:** And in the passion of the moment I left the body lying around waiting to be found for a day. *Pauses* If I were to commit a murder...let's just say the czar would be back on the throne before I got caught.

**Vera:** I want to believe you. *Pauses* But why did you lie to me when I asked if you'd seen her?

**Fyo:** Because I hadn't seen any countess.

**Vera:** Of course not, but after you saw that picture you just couldn't resist and made sure she shackled up with you while there was still time. Is that it?

**Fyo:** So that's what this is all about? You think that me and Irena were—

**Lily:** *From upstairs.* It's after one, Vera. Are you trying to wake the whole neighborhood with that racket?

**Fyo:** *To Vera* Nice work.

**Vera:** Me?!

*Lily enters at the top of the stairs in her bathrobe and looks from Vera to Fyo and back again.*

*Fyo approaches the staircase.*

**Fyo:** Lily, my darling!

**Lily:** Fyodor? But you... the papers... that girl, and the police...

*She grasps the rail as her legs start to give way. He rushes up the staircase and helps her up. He helps her down the staircase and they sit down at the table.*

**Lily:** *To Vera* Get me a drink.

*Vera finds a bottle of liquor and pours Lily a shot. Lily takes the shot in one gulp.*

**Lily:** Does anyone know he's here?

**Vera:** One can only hope.

*Lily gives her a reprimanding look.*

**Vera:** I don't think so.

**Lily:** Then there's only one solution.

*Lily pets Fyo's hand.*

**Lily:** You shall stay here.

*Vera opens her mouth to protest.*

**Lily:** For a little while, that is.

**Fyo:** Thank you.

**Lily:** But if anyone *does* find you here...

**Fyo:** I haven't seen either of you for years. I just broke in.

**Lily:** You may stay downstairs, but you'll earn your keep.

**Fyo:** Anything you need. Cleaning, looking over the books...

**Lily:** You will help Vera conduct her appointments.

**Vera:** But we have an entire system! Remember how long it took to perfect that? He couldn't possibly do it!

**Lily:** I'm sure our Fyodor could learn.

**Vera:** But the police!

**Lily:** You know my opinion of the police.

*Lily walks to the stairs.*

**Lily:** I'm going to bed. It's well past an old lady's bed time. Vera, help our guest settle in.

*She exits up the stairs.*

**Fyo:** Well, at least I can rely on old Lil, eh partner?

**Vera:** This doesn't make us partners.

**Fyo:** That's *just* what it does. Look, I don't give a damn about your smoke and mirrors routine. You owe me a favor.

**Vera:** Harboring a fugitive isn't enough? Do you know what happens to people who hide killers?

**Fyo:** For the last time, I didn't kill Irena!

**Vera:** And I'm sure you have no idea who did.

**Fyo:** All I know is that you're the one with blood on your hands in this mess.

**Vera:** Me?! What did I—

**Fyo:** Shut up, and listen. This wouldn't have happened if you hadn't been poking around asking about her. Irena wasn't living with me, she was working for me. That's why I hid her at my place, and that's probably why she was killed.

**Vera:** What exactly goes on at that club?

**Fyo:** I never said she was working at the club.

*He takes a drag of his cigarette and pauses.*

**Fyo:** *Gesturing to Lily's glass* Get two more of those.

*She remains still. He shrugs, pours himself a shot and pulls out a chair for her.*

**Fyo:** Sit down.

*She rolls her eyes and leans forward against the chair.*

**Fyo:** I remember what hell you went through to get here.

*She shrugs.*

**Vera:** We all had to.

**Fyo:** What if we hadn't? What if there was a better way?

**Vera:** That's a very pretty thought, Fyo, but what does it have to do with Irena?

**Fyo:** What if I told you I found that better way?

*She leans in to listen.*

**Vera:** How?

**Fyo:** Remember when Ivan was trying to get his brother out?

*She nods.*

**Fyo:** That's when it all started. Yuri couldn't leave his girl behind so we had to get her out. Then the girlfriend had a cousin who had fallen out of favor with the Reds and it kept going. Pretty soon we had a network of us smuggling people into China.

**Vera:** *Awestruck* You what?! How did you pull it off?

**Fyo:** That's a story for another time.

**Vera:** So you helped smuggle her in.

*He nods.*

**Fyo:** She was better than any man in my ranks. At least for a while, anyway.

**Vera:** What happened? Don't tell me a certain man in this ring might have been a bad influence?

**Fyo:** No, it was one out of the ring; one with a stash of pretty poppy flowers.

**Vera:** So that's what she was doing at the...

*She looks away and nervously taps her fingernails on the back of the chair.*

**Fyo:** Next time you want to find someone, don't go flashing their picture all over town reminding people what they look like.

**Vera:** You might want to ask me this favor of yours before the sun comes up.

**Fyo:** Not ask, tell.

*He pours himself another shot and a shot for her.*

**Fyo:** You managed to get two of us out of commission for the price of one. And my job's not so easy to replace.

*He takes one glass and hands the other to her. She drinks her shot.*

**Fyo:** But, I think you're up to the task, Ginger.

*She nearly spits out her drink.*

**Vera:** You can't seriously—

**Fyo:** I can and fully intend to so don't bother arguing.

*She sits down with a sigh, defeated.*

**Vera:** Can I ask one question?

**Fyo:** Sure.

**Vera:** What makes you think you can call me that after all these years?

*He moves his chair, and sits down next to her. As he leans in to kiss her, she closes her eyes in anticipation. He shakes his head and moves away from her.*

**Fyo:** Just a hunch.

*He stands, walks to the trap door, opens it, and begins climbing down the stairs. He pauses.*

**Fyo:** Goodnight, Ginger.

*He climbs down the stairs. She glares and pours herself another drink.*

**Act II. Scene 1:** *The next night at Mademoiselle Fifi's. Yvonne enters the dressing room to find Vera sitting in a chair at the vanity. Yvonne is wearing a two piece costume and Vera is wearing a casual dress.*

**Yvonne:** You again?!

*Vera picks a newspaper clipping featuring Irena's murder up off of the table.*

**Vera:** Souvenir?

**Yvonne:** I already told you, we don't have any jobs.

**Vera:** Speaking of jobs, I hear you've been here a year and a half.

*Yvonne ignores Vera and adjusts her makeup in the mirror.*

**Vera:** You said you hadn't worked here long.

**Yvonne:** That all depends on what you call long.

**Vera:** How well did you know Irena?

*Yvonne pulls Vera out of the chair and leads her towards the dressing room exit. Vera holds up the clipping.*

**Vera:** Well enough to cut this out?

**Yvonne:** This is a dangerous business; I just kept it as a reminder to watch myself.

**Vera:** *Sarcastically* And I came here for the show. You're lying to me, Yvonne.

*Vera pulls her arm free.*

**Vera:** You knew Irena and you knew she was here last week.

