

Bread for My Father

By
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Genre: Drama/Romance

Logline: When a bitterly divorced son reluctantly accompanies his widowed father on a quest to rediscover the recipe for a treasured bread, he discovers what it means to really live for a labor of love.

Originally registered with WGA as "Black Bread Memories"

INT. SOFTWARE COMPANY CUBICLE FARM - DAY

A LONG, LOW CEILING ROOM OF DRAB GRAY CUBICLES UNDER FLUORESCENT LIGHTS.

INT. CUBICLE - DAY

A PROGRAMMER'S CUBICLE CLUTTERED WITH BINDERS AND PRINTOUTS. A FEW PHOTOGRAPHS ON THE GREY CLOTH WALLS. A PLATE OF HALF-EATEN PASTRIES, CUPS OF COLD COFFEE. TWO LARGE COLOR MONITORS DOMINATE THE WORKSPACE, DISPLAYING WINDOWS OF CODE.

VICTOR (mid-30s) impatiently sorts through papers on his desk, pushing binders to the side, looking for something. He finally digs a cell phone out from under a pile of paper.

VICTOR
(muttering to himself)
Paperless office my butt.

He speed dials a number.

VICTOR
(into the phone)
Dad? Are you there? Pick up.
This is ridiculous. Why won't you call
back? I called twice yesterday

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

A MODEST AND VERY NEAT BEDROOM WITH FLOURISHES OF FEMALE TOUCHES THROUGHOUT. A PERFECTLY MADE BED WITH MULTIPLE COLORFUL PILLOWS. BRIGHT CURTAINS BLOW IN A BREEZE. A DRESSING TABLE WITH METICULOUSLY ORDERED PERFUMES AND FEMALE ACCESSORIES.

RAMON (early 70s), a spry man who looks and moves more like a 60-year old, works through his morning stretches while listening to messages on an old-fashioned tape answering machine. As he stretches, he faces a black and white framed picture of a beautiful woman, NONA, (32) who smiles coyly at Ramon.

VICTOR (O.S.)
(on the answering machine)
Dad, are you there? Dad, pick up. Listen
Dad, I know tomorrow will be hard for
you. But it's been a whole year since
Mom, umm, passed. We should do something
together. Call me, please.

The answering machine chirps. Ramon continues his stretches.

VICTOR (O.S.)

Dad, pick up. I know you're there. Come-on Dad. We should go out tomorrow. See a movie. Have dinner. Call me.

The phone rings, but goes straight to the answering machine. Ramon tries a deep knee bend, winces as he gets near the floor, knees cracking, he grabs onto the bed to steady himself. Shakes his head in disgust.

VICTOR (O.S.)

Dad? Are you there? Pick up. This is ridiculous. Why won't you call back? I called twice yesterday

Ramon walks into the bathroom - sounds of the toilet flushing, water running in the sink.

VICTOR (O.S.)

....If you don't call me back I'm coming over there whether you like it or not. I'll drag you out of the house. You gotta get out. Mom would want you to move on. We'll go out to dinner. Have some fun. Bowling! We'll go bowling! Dad? Dad? Damn it!

INT. CUBICLE - DAY

Victor listens on his cell, hoping for a response. He clicks off the phone with a look of disgust. He grabs a coat and heads out of the office, stopping at a nearby cubicle inhabited with a younger fellow coder, CHET (25).

VICTOR

Chet, I'm heading out for an ... appointment. I'll be back after lunch.

CHET

Did you check in your code? Dude, we need your module to test the runtime.

VICTOR

As soon as I get back. It's almost done. Gotta go.

CHET

We're behind schedule!

Victor, without turning, waves back at Chet as he weaves through the cubicle alleyways, heading for the exit.

VICTOR
 (muttering to himself)
 Like I give a damn.

INT. KITCHEN/DINING AREA - DAY

Ramon sets out a full breakfast for two. It's a ritual. He pours steaming coffee into two cups. He places another picture of Nona, a little older in this image, but still radiant, on the table across from a place setting, carefully wipes a smudge from the frame with a napkin.

Ramon surveys the table with satisfaction, and then leaves the room. Steam from the coffee cups swirls in the morning sunlight.

INT. DETACHED GARAGE - DAY

Ramon enters a detached garage through the garage door, stoops to carefully stuff a piece of fiberglass insulation into a wall vent. He squeezes into the car, slips a CD into the player and starts the engine. Ramon presses a button in the car's ceiling and watches through the rear-view mirror as the garage door closes slowly behind him. The garage darkens until only the blue glow from the dashboard lights and CD player illuminate Ramon's relaxed face. Strains of "The Way We Were" begin to play.

RAMON
 Your favorite song, Honey. Let's dance.

In the dark car, the music combines with the purr of the engine into a lullaby. Ramon closes his eyes.

EXT. SMALL TOWN STREET (1944) - DAY

A CLEAN AND WELL KEPT SMALL TOWN STREET WITH ONLY A FEW PEDESTRIANS AND '40S ERA CARS. A CORNER BAKERY IS ONE OF THE FEW BUSY SPOTS ON THE BLOCK.

Ramon as a BOY (9), dressed in clothes of the World War 2 era, runs down the street and up to the door of the bakery. He pauses outside, breathing in the smells of fresh bread. A well-dressed Mother (29) and Father (32) with a DAUGHTER (11) leave the store, cradling two loaves of black bread.

The MOTHER pauses to pull little hunks of dark bread from the loaf and parcel them out to the Daughter and Father. They savor the bread as little Ramon gazes at them and enters the bakery.

INT. POLISH BAKERY - DAY

A dozen CUSTOMERS wait in line in front of the counter. A harried BAKER (50) and a pretty blond female BAKERY CLERK (22) jostle behind the counter as loaves are shuffled off the cooling racks and into customers' waiting hands. There are only a few loaves left.

Little Ramon pushes through the adults to get the counter, holds up his coins and waves them in the air. No one sees him. One by one the remaining loaves disappear over his head to the Adults. The last loaf is sold. The shop empties as the Adults leave, a few empty-handed. The boy stands by the counter, his head barely showing, his hand still waving the coins.

The pretty BAKERY CLERK peers down at Ramon from the other side of the counter. She flashes an impish smile.

BAKERY CLERK

Ramon! Late again!

She glances side to side, bends down behind the counter, and pops up with a loaf of glorious black bread. The last one! She scurries around the counter to Ramon. Crouches down beside him.

BAKERY CLERK

For my favorite customer.

She gives Ramon the loaf, plants a kiss on his forehead, tousles his hair. She takes his coins and disappears into the back of the store behind the counter. Ramon holds the loaf of warm black bread to his nose. Smiles as he takes a deep breath of the fragrant staff of life. He coughs. Coughs violently again and gasps for breath.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR IN GARAGE - DAY

In the dark car, Ramon is coughing and gasping in the exhaust-filled air. Disoriented, he struggles to find the the car door latch. Reaches out blindly for the garage door opener button.

EXT. GARAGE DRIVEWAY - DAY

Victor drags a coughing and gasping Ramon from the dark of the garage into the light of the driveway. Victor tries to administer a round of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation but Ramon impatiently slaps him away. Ramon sits up, wiping his mouth, sputtering, recovering his breath.

VICTOR

Dad, are you all right? What the hell happened?

RAMON

What am I doing in the driveway? I'm suppose to be dead!

VICTOR

You would have been dead in a few more minutes. What happened?

RAMON

The bread! The black bread! It's gone. Forever. Just like your Mother.

Ramon coughs more, covering his face, to hide the start of tears.

VICTOR

Bread? What are you talking about? We need to get you to a hospital. You might have brain damage.

RAMON

You don't understand! THE bread! The baker died and took the recipe with him. It's gone. Never again will I taste that wonderful black bread.

VICTOR

You almost died and you're talking about bread?

RAMON

What do you know? You you eat bread that has never lived! Never been touched by human hands. Never been loved. What would you know about bread?

VICTOR

Thanks Dad. I save your life and you mock me.

Ramon struggles to get up. Victor helps his Father to his feet. Ramon tries to bat him away, but Victor latches onto his Father's arm, leads him over to a bench in the sun.

RAMON

What are you doing here anyway. I didn't ask you to save me.

VICTOR

If you wanted to kill yourself, you should have closed the garage door.

RAMON

I did!

VICTOR

Then who opened it?

Ramon rubs his head, thinking.

RAMON

She did!

VICTOR

She who?

RAMON

The baker's daughter. She would save the last loaf for me. Those were hard times -- the war, shortages, never enough flour to go around. You don't understand. Now there is so much. Too much. You have everything. We only had hope.

VICTOR

Well, I "hope" that you won't try that again. You have a lot to live for.

RAMON

There's nothing left.

VICTOR

Dad, listen, I miss Mom too. But you need to get a life. Find new friends. Why don't you take up golf again?

RAMON

I'm 70. I'd be hitting over a hundred on a kiddie course. I'll save myself the embarrassment.

VICTOR

How about Bridge?

RAMON

That was your Mother's idea of fun. I just played to make her happy.

VICTOR

Cooking? You used to love to cook.

RAMON

It's boring cooking for one person. Especially when it's me.

VICTOR

There must be something you still want to do.

Ramon pauses in thought. Sniffs the air. Shakes his head.

RAMON

Bread. Black bread.

VICTOR

You want some bread?

RAMON

You never listen. The baker died and took the recipe with him. There is no more black bread. Not the kind I remember.

VICTOR

So, recreate it! Find the old recipe. Make up a new one.

RAMON

Find the old recipe? Perhaps. Perhaps...

VICTOR

Visit the old neighborhood. Find the baker's relatives. Someone must know about the bread. Your old friends?

RAMON

There's no one left there. Only ghosts.

VICTOR

We could see if the old bakery is still there. You remember the streets?

RAMON

Like it was yesterday.

VICTOR

Let's look it up.

RAMON

I don't have a phone book for there.

VICTOR

We have Google, Dad.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Victor unzips his laptop from a leather bag as Ramon looks on skeptically. Victor stops and stares at the table with the carefully set breakfast.

VICTOR

What the? Dad, is this suppose to be a message to me? What were you thinking?

RAMON

I always have breakfast with Nona. Your Mom loved her morning coffee. One sugar. A dab of cream.

Victor shakes his head as he sits at the kitchen table and fires up the laptop.

VICTOR

So, you been planning this for long?

Ramon sits across the table from his son, gazes at the picture of his wife.

RAMON

Every day.

Victor reaches hesitantly across the table and almost takes his Father's hand. Instead he gently takes the picture of his Mother, turns it around, away from Ramon.

VICTOR

Let's try to get on with our lives, Okay?
It hurts me, too, that I wasn't here. I didn't get to say goodbye. But we have to get over it.

Ramon starts to reach for the picture, stops and looks at his son -- the look of a lost boy on an old man's face.

RAMON

We can try.

Victor fires up Google Earth on his laptop, spins the computer around to face his Father and sits beside him.

VICTOR

Okay then. Massachusetts. Westfield.
Spring Street. Right?

RAMON

That's where I lived. Try downtown,
Pleasant St.

On the laptop screen, the little town of Westfield zooms into view. The streets resolve into the patchwork of an old New England town with bridges, churches, town squares.

RAMON

Wow. There's my school! And our church!
And there! On the corner. That's the
bakery.

Victor zooms in for a street-side view.

VICTOR

Looks like a Starbucks now.

RAMON

I guess that's to be expected. No need
for bakeries anymore. Why buy good bread
when you can have a multi-frappy-decaf-
whatever with your pastry?

VICTOR

Oh yeah? What's this across the street?

The view on the screen twists and zooms in on a dilapidated looking storefront with the sign "KROKUS BAKERY" and a pathetic-looking Polish flag hanging above the doorway.

RAMON

Krokus? Krokus... that doesn't sound
familiar.

VICTOR

How long has it been since you been back?

RAMON

30, 35 years?

VICTOR

Whole new city by now. But it's a good
sign that there are still Poles in
business there, yes?

RAMON

There will always be Poles in Westfield. The question is, what are they doing there?

VICTOR

Time to find out. You should take a trip home. See the old gang. Find some good Polish food. Golabki, pierogi, pickled pig's whatever. Take a vacation.

RAMON

You know, your Mother and I were planning a trip back east, before....

VICTOR

So now is the time to follow up on it. She'd want you to go.

RAMON

Yeah, she did make me promise not to become an old reclusive fart.

VICTOR

So, do it.

RAMON

And what about you? What have you been doing since Marie left? Working! That's all you do. You should come with me.

VICTOR

I'm doing fine, Dad.

RAMON

Baloney. I can hear it in your voice. You're still pining after her. She was bad to you -- and bad for you.

VICTOR

Mom didn't think so.

RAMON

She did. She just wouldn't say it to your face. But it hurt her to watch how Marie treated you.

VICTOR

I didn't pay enough attention to her.

RAMON

And that's a reason she had an affair? Bah!

(MORE)

RAMON (CONT'D)

I worked a lot too in my day, and your Mother knew why. To support my family!

VICTOR

Mom was busy raising me. Without you, as I remember. Marie and I didn't have any kids to mess up. As you well know.

RAMON

Always making excuses for other people's mistakes. Follow your own advice: Get over it and get on with it.

The two men sit side by side at the kitchen table, the tension building a wall between them. Ramon turns away.

RAMON

I don't have the strength to fight with you anymore.

Victor puts his hand on his Father's shoulder, gently but firmly turns him around to face him.

VICTOR

We're all we got right now, so let's just help each other.

RAMON

Then come with me!

VICTOR

To Westfield? No way.

RAMON

To find the black bread.

VICTOR

I have this huge project at work. I can't just up and leave.

RAMON

You have a lot of vacation time saved up, don't you?

VICTOR

But if I don't do the work, no one else will.

RAMON

Take a break. You need it. I need you. Do it for me.

Victor sits back, eyes his father, examines the formal setting of the now cold breakfast.

He fiddles with his computer. The moment stretches out while Ramon searches his son's face.

VICTOR

There is a flight from San Jose to Hartford on Friday. I'll book seats and reserve a rental car. We'll go in search of your dream bread. But only for a week! I'll have to fight to get that time off as it is.

Ramon beams at this son. Slaps him on the shoulder.

RAMON

Friday! I'll be ready.

Ramon gets up, newly energized. Starts clearing away the dishes of uneaten food.

RAMON

You won't regret this. I'll show you the best of your Polish heritage.

VICTOR

No pickled pigs feet!

RAMON

No homogenous fast food!

Victor raises a cup of cold coffee for a toast.

VICTOR

To the bread.

RAMON

The best bread in the world!

EXT. WESTFIELD, KROKUS BAKERY - DAY

Ramon and Victor look up at the weathered sign on the bakery and the tattered Polish flag.

VICTOR

Appearances can be deceiving.

RAMON

At least they're still in business -- I think.

Victor peers through the dirty glass door.

VICTOR

They don't seem to have any customers.

RAMON

Not a good sign.

INT. KROKUS BAKERY - DAY

Ramon and Victor survey the bakery store. A glass cabinet has a few loaves of white bread and several trays of sweet pastries.

VICTOR

Maybe we came on a slow day?

RAMON

Not a whole grain in sight.

Ramon rings the small bell on the counter.

VICTOR

Are you sure this is the same bakery?

RAMON

Of course it's not. My bakery used to be across the street. But this is the only Polish bakery in the neighborhood.

From the back of the bakery a crashing of baking sheets resounds, followed by cursing in Polish.

VICTOR

That sounds promising.

The BAKER (45) emerges from the back, wiping his hands on his apron and looking flustered.

BAKER

You want something?

RAMON

I lived near here as a boy. I'm looking for the bakery that was across the street back then. 1940s - 50s.

BAKER

My parents opened this bakery in 1975. There was no other bakery around here.

RAMON

I haven't been here for quite a while. It's very different.

BAKER

Not so much. Business is still bad.

RAMON

Back then we were grateful for the black Polish bread. Do you make it?

BAKER

People just want pastries now. I hardly bother making bread.

RAMON

You don't make the dark bread?

BAKER

Naw, just the sweets. You can charge more for the sugary stuff.

Ramon looks around the bakery.

RAMON

Do you know the bread I am talking about? Very dark, with a tender but chewy crust. The best black bread in the world.

BAKER

There is no money in making bread, white or black. The factories turn out millions of loaves a day for the supermarkets. I barely scrape by as it is with pastries.

Victor eyes the sweet rolls.

VICTOR

I'll take two bear-claws. Will that help your economics?

The Baker pulls out two humongous rolls dripping with sugary frosting and hands them to Victor. Ramon looks aghast.

BAKER

Yeah, now I can close up early, thanks. If you are looking around for the old bread, you're wasting your time. No one makes it any more because no one would buy it.

RAMON

You've got it backwards. People can't buy it if no one makes it. We're on a quest to recreate it.

BAKER

A quest? Aren't you a little old for a quest?

RAMON

Certainly not! Aren't you a little young to give up on a family business?

BAKER

It's barely a business. Do you want to buy it?

Ramon pauses in his argument. Looks around. Victor, biting into a pastry, sees what his Father is thinking, tries to talk but can't with the pastry stuffed in his mouth.

RAMON

Now there's an idea.

The Baker laughs.

BAKER

Are you serious?

VICTOR

(choking)

You're not serious.

RAMON

If I can find the recipe for the old black bread, will you sell me your bakery?

VICTOR

Dad!

BAKER

Gladly! How will you find it?

RAMON

Go to the source!

Ramon turns to Victor, puts on his best Fatherly I-know-what-I'm-doing smile.

RAMON

We're going to Poland!

INT. AIRCRAFT CABIN - NIGHT

Crunched together in a cramped row of airplane seats, Ramon studies a crumpled folding paper map of Poland, while Victor hunches over his laptop, looking at a Google Earth image of Krakow.

VICTOR

Look at this, there are dozens of bakeries in Krakow.

RAMON

Let's hope that one of them makes a decent black bread.

VICTOR

Yeah, and that they'll share the recipe. How are we going to get them to divulge secret recipes?

RAMON

We aren't a threat to them. We'll be baking in another country. It's not economics, it's art.

VICTOR

What are we thinking? We don't know how to run a bakery. I'm a programmer. How are we going to pay for that dump in Westfield? How are we going to make a business out of it? How are we going to do any of this?

RAMON

I have savings. Just enough. I'll sell my house. If your mother were here, she'd run the bakery. That woman could organize a kindergarten.

VICTOR

But first, she'd tell you that you were out of your mind. Then, she'd figure out exactly what you and I needed to do and make sure we did it right.

RAMON

Yeah, she sure ran a tight ship. I couldn't get away with much.

VICTOR

So what did you get away with, Dad?

RAMON

Huh?

VICTOR

You said you couldn't get away with "much". So how "much" did you get away with?

Ramon squirms in his seat.

RAMON

I have to go to the rest room.

Victor puts his hand firmly on his Dad's arm.

VICTOR

The seat belt sign is on.

RAMON

Hey, I gotta go. You think an old man has bladder control?

VICTOR

I just want an honest answer. What did you get away with?

RAMON

It was just a figure of speech! What is your problem?

Victor lets go of his Father's arm. He stares out the airplane window into the night, his Father's face -- masked with concern -- reflected in the scarred plastic of the window.

VICTOR

You were gone a lot when I was growing up. I just wondered....

RAMON

I loved your Mother. I never did anything that would hurt her. I'm sorry that Marie hurt you. That's all in the past now.

Ramon uncouples his seat belt and squeezes into the aisle.

RAMON

Hey, maybe you'll meet a nice Polish girl, eh? Someone who will make you forget all about Marie?

VICTOR

Yeah, sounds like a plan: a nice Polish girl for Victor.

Victor watches his Father teeter down the tight airplane aisle.

VICTOR

What have you gotten us into?

EXT. KRAKOW SIDEWALK CAFE - DAY

Victor and Ramon sit at a sidewalk cafe table in Krakow. Victor investigates a large lacy pastry coated with powdered sugar. Ramon slathers yellow butter on a slice of dark brown bread, a look of anticipation on his face. He takes a bite of the bread and chews thoughtfully.

RAMON

Interesting but the texture is all wrong. It hardly has any chewyness. The crust is weak. Tastes like they use molasses to make it dark. No rye flour either. Too sweet.

Ramon puts down the bread and sighs. Victor bites into the pastry, mimics his Father.

VICTOR

Hmm. Interesting. Definitely sugary. The crust is, mmmm, greasy, with a nice crumble.

RAMON

You're going to get fat eating all that crap.

VICTOR

Hey, you stick to your style of eating, I'll enjoy my sugar bombs. Everyone has their vices.

RAMON

You could at least take an interest in good, wholesome food.

VICTOR

This is your quest. I'm just here to watch over you. Besides I hardly think what you had for dinner last night qualifies as good -- or wholesome -- food. What was that stuff again?

RAMON

Sautéed pig kidneys. Apple baked with boar's blood.

Victor shudders.

VICTOR

I rest my case.

A WAITER (40) appears at the table. He eyes the two Americans arguing over their food. The Waiter is not in a mood to deal with finicky tourists.

WAITER
(in Polish to Ramon;
subtitled)
Your food is good?

RAMON
It's alright.

VICTOR
What's he asking?

RAMON
He wants to know if you like your sugar
bomb.

VICTOR
Tell him I'll have another.

RAMON
(to the Waiter)
He hates it. He'll probably go into
diabetic shock any moment now.

WAITER
And your bread?

RAMON
Fair. Not what I was looking for.

WAITER
Bread is bread. What were you expecting?

RAMON
A memory.

WAITER
Poland is full of memories.

RAMON
When I was a child in America, there was
a Polish bakery that made the best black
bread. No one makes it that way anymore.
So we came to the source to find the
recipe.

WAITER
You are 30 years too late. Bread tastes
like bread everywhere else. Everyone
wants to eat like an American.

RAMON

That's terrible. There must be a few of the old bakeries left?

WAITER

Feel free to explore the neighborhoods. Maybe you'll get lucky.

VICTOR

Hey, could you at least give me a clue as to what you two are discussing?

RAMON

Everyone wants to be an American.

VICTOR

Translation: There is no black bread here.

RAMON

Apparently.

Victor takes another big bite of his sweet roll.

VICTOR

You should make pastries instead.

Ramon gives his son a look of despair, turns back to the waiter.

RAMON

Do you know anyone who might guide us around the city?

The Waiter looks around the cafe and nods towards a man sitting a few tables away.

WAITER

An unemployed chef may have time.

Ramon studies the chef, ZABROVSKI (48). He is well dressed, yet disheveled, wearing sunglasses. As he sips his coffee he looks unwaveringly at Ramon.

RAMON

And he is unemployed because....?

The waiter shrugs and leaves.

Ramon neatly folds his napkin, motioning to Victor to stay put. He crosses over to the Chef's table.

RAMON

(in Polish, subtitled)

Excuse me. My son and I are looking for someone to guide us to the best bakeries. I understand that you may have some knowledge in this area?

Zabrovski does not change the direction of his gaze. He smiles slightly.

ZABROVSKI

(in English)

American?

RAMON

Yes. Is my Polish bad?

ZABROVSKI

You try. It helps. What are you looking for? I am by no means a tour guide.

RAMON

We're exploring the bakeries of Krakow. Especially for the old style black bread. I understand you are a chef?

ZABROVSKI

Ex-chef. The nose still works but the eyes....

Zabrovski taps his sunglasses with a forefinger.

ZABROVSKI

Gas oven explosion. Whoosh! Career over. Luckily my hair grew back.

Ramon assesses the blind Chef. Smiles.

RAMON

Perfect! What better way to tour a city than with a professionally trained nose! You can lead us to all the bakeries that your nose knows.

Victor approaches the Chef-cum-bakery guide's table.

RAMON

Victor, my son, meet our blind tour guide, Mr....

ZABROVSKI

Zabrovski. Anton Zabrovski.

The Chef puts out his hand in the direction of Victor's voice.

VICTOR

Excuse me? Did you say.... blind?

EXT. KRAKOW STREET - DAY

Ramon and Victor scurry after Zabrovski who leads them with his white cane sweeping the sidewalk in front of him, scattering pedestrians. The pace is quick and frightening as the two Americans attempt to keep up with their guide weaving through the crowds.

Zabrovski stops suddenly at a corner, Ramon and Victor nearly pile into him. Zabrovski sniffs the air, turns his head side to side and makes a sudden right turn down an alley. Ramon and Victor follow at a trot.

ZABROVSKI

This one is good. You'll like.

EXT. KRAKOW ALLEY BAKERY - DAY

At the end of the alley, the three come upon an old-world bakery.

Ramon pauses and studies the exterior. It is rich in detail with colorful tiled walls.

VICTOR

This looks promising.

RAMON

Smells promising, too.

With a flourish, Zabrovski bows to the two Americans and points to the bakery door.

ZABROVSKI

Gentlemen, your first real Polish bakery.
Enter and enjoy.

INT. KRAKOW ALLEY BAKERY - DAY

Ramon and Victor gaze around at the bustling bakery. Several local CUSTOMERS purchase pastries and breads. Shelves are full of rolls, flour-dusted breads, sweet pastries, pierogies, and glossy braided loaves. Two CLERKS busily serve customers.

Victor's eyes light up at the sweet pastries filling the glass cases.

VICTOR

I've died and gone to heaven.

Ramon continues to scrutinize the shelves, scanning for his beloved loaves of black bread.

Victor approaches a case, leans down like a little kid to get a better look at the confections glowing under the lights.

Zabrovski stands close by Ramon, sniffing the air of the bakery.

ZABROVSKI

(whispering in Ramon's ear)

Do you see her? Is she here?

Ramon, startled by the closeness of their guide, jumps a step away.

RAMON

See who? What are you talking about? I'm looking for black bread. Of which, there appears to be none.

ZABROVSKI

That's not the only reason you are here.

RAMON

Nonsense. Who would I be looking for?

Zabrovski smiles and leaves the bakery.

RAMON

Where are you going?

Victor, hearing his Father, pulls himself away from the sugary visions of the bakery case.

VICTOR

What happened? What did he say to you?

Ramon stares out the front door of the bakery. Zabrovski stands outside in the alley. Waiting.

RAMON

Let's go. He's right. There's nothing here.

VICTOR

But, my God, this place is full of bread.

RAMON

Not really. Come on.

Ramon heads out of the bakery. Victor looks longingly at the pastries and then follows his Father out the door.

EXT. KRAKOW ALLEY BAKERY - DAY

Ramon stops next to Zabrovski, who sniffs the air.

RAMON

You have somewhere else in mind?

ZABROVSKI

Perhaps. There are many bakeries in Krakow. Only you know what you are looking for.

RAMON

I've never been a fan of riddles.

ZABROVSKI

No riddles. Be honest with yourself.

VICTOR

A philosophical blind guide. This is starting to feel like a movie.

Ramon takes a deep breath of the city air.

RAMON

I lost my wife a year ago. I'm not looking for her.

ZABROVSKI

No? This way then.

Zabrovski bolts off up the alley toward the street, his white cane scattering several PEDESTRIANS. Ramon and Victor look at each other and then hurry after their guide.

EXT. BUSY STREET BAKERY - DAY

The three seekers pause in front of another bakery. Zabrovski signals them to go in. The door closes behind them. Within a few seconds they emerge again, Ramon shaking his head. Zabrovski leads them on down the street.

EXT. BUSY STOREFRONT BAKERY - DAY

Ramon and Victor wait in line outside the next bakery.

Zabrovski waits to the side, talking on his cell phone, his white cane waving in the air, barely missing passersby. Ramon squeezes through the door, followed by his son. A few CUSTOMERS exit the store with bags of goods. Ramon exits, shaking his head again. Victor emerges with a giant pastry and a smile on his face. Ramon taps Zabrovski on the shoulder.

RAMON

Just pastries. Can you believe it?

Zabrovski shrugs, smiles and leads them on to the next bakery.

EXT. PETROVSKI FAMILY BAKERY - NIGHT

Zabrovski stops in front of another bakery, the lights in the window cast an inviting glow on the sidewalk.

Inside, a BAKER (60) puts away rolls and a couple of cakes from the window display as the three look in from the dusk.

RAMON

Why this one?

ZABROVSKI

I am just a guide. You are the one choosing.

VICTOR

Are we paying this man?

Ramon looks uncertain.

RAMON

How am I to choose? I've never been here.

ZABROVSKI

Not with your head.

Zabrovski points accurately at Ramon's heart with his finger.

Through the window, Ramon watches as the old baker, PETROVSKI, carefully puts away the unsold goods.

INT. PETROVSKI FAMILY BAKERY - NIGHT

The shop door bell jingles as Ramon enters the small, cozy bakery. Victor and Zabrovski follow. Petrovski looks up from his tasks at the window, startled by these late visitors.

RAMON

(in Polish)

Good evening. We're touring bakeries.
Yours looks like one I used to visit as a child.

PETROVSKI

American?

RAMON

I apologize for my Polish, it's been many years.

PETROVSKI

(In English)

I won't offend by trying my English on you?

RAMON

Certainly not!

Ramon and Petrovski assess each other.

PETROVSKI

Tea? Would you like some? I am about to close.

RAMON

Tea would be most welcome if you have the time.

PETROVSKI

Time, I have.

Petrovski limps to the back of the shop and puts on a kettle of water to boil on a little stove behind the counter. The right side of his body sags unnaturally.

RAMON

We're looking for an old recipe for black bread. A special bread I grew up with in America. The baker was from Poland but when he passed away, the recipe went with him.

Petrovski considers this as he pours hot water into a teapot.

PETROVSKI

I used to make a black bread. A recipe from my wife's mother. And probably her mother as well.

RAMON

Tender inside but with a chewy crust? Not sweet, not sour. Heavenly.

PETROVSKI

We sometimes make it for special events. Births. Weddings. Funerals.

RAMON

Any of those events happen today?

Petrovski pours tea.

PETROVSKI

Not for me.

Ramon looks around the little bakery. Victor inspects the plain-looking rolls and loaves of bread with disappointment.

Zabrovski sniffs the air and smiles.

Petrovski hands Ramon the teacup. Offers some to Victor who declines.

Zabrovski, supported by his white cane, stares steadily at the Baker.

RAMON

I would dearly love to try your black bread. I am sure it is excellent.

Petrovski sips his tea. Eyes Ramon and Victor.

PETROVSKI

Come back tomorrow. We make a special occasion. For the Americans.

RAMON

We'd be honored. Can you show us how you make it?

PETROVSKI

You try first. Then we talk. Same time tomorrow. The bread makes its own time.

Ramon extends his hand to shake with Petrovski. He is clearly excited to be so close to his dream.

RAMON

We'll be here.

Petrovski tries to extend his right arm to Ramon, but it falls back to his side, as if it had a will of its own. Or no will. Petrovski smiles a sad, crooked smile.

PETROVSKI

Sorry, the right arm is not much good.

He taps his head with his left hand.

PETROVSKI

Strike.

RAMON

Stroke?

PETROVSKI

Yes, of course. We continue on.

RAMON

How do you manage to run a bakery?

PETROVSKI

I have help. A right-hand man? Is that how you put it?

RAMON

Of course. This is my son, Victor. He's my right-hand man. I'm Ramon. And our guide....

PETROVSKI

Zabrovski.

RAMON

Ah, you've met?

PETROVSKI

Of course.

ZABROVSKI

It's a small city for chefs and bakers. Especially among the walking wounded.

Ramon studies Zabrovski over the edge of his tea cup.

INT. KRAKOW HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Ramon and Victor share a room at an old-world hotel with rich, gaudy curtains. One small sturdy bed.

Ramon sits on the bed, slowly taking off his shoes. Air travel and a day of walking around Krakow has left him exhausted. The edge of hope that he has found his beloved black bread can't sustain him. He takes a photo out of a bag and places it on the night stand. His wife looks back him from 30 years ago.

Victor sits at a small desk, fiddling with his computer.

VICTOR

WiFi access is spotty here to say the least. I can't even get a steady connection to download my e-mail. My boss is going to be pissed if I don't stay in touch.

RAMON

I thought you were on vacation? Do you have to work? I'm exhausted. What time is it?

VICTOR

Here or at home?

RAMON

The time my body thinks it is. I know what my watch says.

VICTOR

Almost 6 AM.

Ramon flops backward on the bed.

RAMON

Arggh. I'm too old to do this.

Victor shuts the lid to his laptop in disgust, unable to get a connection to his world.

VICTOR

Damn it, now there's no connection at all. Hey, this was your idea. You're too old to start a *bakery*, too.

RAMON

You think? A fool's errand, eh? A damn fool chasing a loaf of bread halfway across the world. Should have stayed home. Finished the job.

VICTOR

No, no, I didn't mean it that way. You've really put yourself into this ... project ... quest. It's great to have a goal.

RAMON

It's called a pipe dream. An old man's fantasy.

VICTOR

You think that last baker -- what was his name, Petrov? -- has the secret recipe?

RAMON

How should I know? It was so long ago. Maybe I won't even be able to tell if it is the real thing. Could be great but not the bread I'm looking for.

VICTOR

Great bread would be -- great. After all, you're the one who said there's hardly any decent bread left in America. You can at least bring back a great recipe to work with.

Victor moves over to the bed, gently sits next to his Father who remains laying on his back, motionless.

VICTOR

Dad?

Ramon doesn't respond. Panicking, Victor jumps on top of his Father and starts inexpertly thumping his chest.

VICTOR

Dad, come back!

Ramon flails his arms and legs wildly, knocking Victor off the bed.

RAMON

What the hell?

VICTOR

I thought you, you were, you know...

RAMON

Christ! I just fell asleep for a moment. You trying to kill me?

Ramon sits up and rubs his chest.

VICTOR

You scared me. You were getting morose. Again.

RAMON

I'm just tired!

VICTOR

Yeah, well I didn't expect you to fall asleep in the middle of a conversation.

Victor paces the hotel room. Ramon gets up from the bed, still rubbing his chest, heads for the bathroom.

RAMON

Look, I'm sorry I dragged you into this. I can tell your heart's not in it. You think this whole thing is a waste of time -- of your time. I know you came along just to keep an eye on me.

VICTOR

Not true! I want to see you happy again. For you to get involved with something instead of moping around the house all day. If this trip will do that, I'm willing to eat my way through Poland.

Ramon brushes his teeth in the bathroom, the door half closed.

VICTOR

You're not listening!

Ramon closes the bathroom door completely.

VICTOR

Argh!

Victor picks up his suitcase and heaves it on the bed, throws it open and rummages through it. He pulls out wrinkled sweatpants and a geeky computer software tee shirt to sleep in and starts undressing. From behind the bathroom door, the toilet makes a horrendous gargling sound. Ramon stumbles out of the bathroom wearing his neatly pressed pajamas.

RAMON

Stand away from the toilet when you flush.

VICTOR

Umm, did you perhaps notice that there is only one bed? A very small bed at that?

RAMON

Cheaper this way.

VICTOR

God, Dad, you're so tight.

RAMON
What? We're related.

VICTOR
You snore.

RAMON
You talk in your sleep.

Victor stalks off to the bathroom to finish changing.

Ramon pulls back the bedspread, neatly folding it at the bottom of the bed. He climbs in the right side, carefully pulling up the sheets and blanket to his neck. The toilet gargles violently again.

VICTOR (O.S.)
Damn!

Ramon smiles.

RAMON
Don't listen to your old man.

Victor comes out of the bathroom toweling off his sweatpants.

RAMON
Your not going to wear those to bed are you?

Victor stalks over to the left side of the bed, glaring at his Father. Climbs into bed.

VICTOR
It's what I brought.

Victor snaps off the light on the night stand, leaving the room almost dark, a dim glow coming from the bathroom. Victor tosses in bed trying to get comfortable.

RAMON
Settle down boy.

VICTOR
I'm trying. This isn't my side of the bed.

RAMON
What do you mean?

VICTOR
Marie slept on this side. I never sleep on the left side.

RAMON

You wanna switch?

VICTOR

I'll get used to it.

The bed creaks a few more times. A brief silence falls.

RAMON

Thanks.

VICTOR

For what?

RAMON

For coming with me. For putting up with me. For everything.

VICTOR

You've never asked for my help.

RAMON

I never needed any help. Well, I never thought I needed help. But there comes a time when you have to ask. If we find the recipe, I may ask

VICTOR

Yeah, I've been thinking about that.

RAMON

Dreading it?

VICTOR

I'm just not sure I'm cut out to be a baker. Or a bakery manager. I write software. Big complex business systems.
(Beat)
Actually, I write little pieces of big complicated programs.

RAMON

But you like doing it.

VICTOR

I don't think about whether I like it or not. I just do it. It's a job. You know how that is. You work, you get paid, you spend the money, you go back for more.

RAMON

But a bakery. Making bread. The staff of life!

(MORE)

RAMON (CONT'D)

Making something that nourishes and brings joy. Wouldn't that be more fulfilling?

VICTOR

Definitely filling.

RAMON

You sleep on it. Wait until you taste the bread tomorrow. You'll see.

VICTOR

Sure. 'Night Dad.

RAMON

By the way, when I fall asleep, don't pound on my chest again. I'm too old for that.

VICTOR

No resuscitation. Got it.

EXT. PETROVSKI FAMILY BAKERY - DAY

Ramon and Victor stand side by side outside the Petrovski Family Bakery. The nearby buildings cast long shadows into the alley making the bakery appear lonely and dilapidated. For a moment, the late afternoon sun briefly illuminates the bakery window and the fading lettering "Petrovski Family Bakery".

VICTOR

Well, shall we see if he has the magic bread?

Ramon hesitates.

RAMON

I was just thinking of what Zabrovski said yesterday. He asked if "I saw her" when we were in the other bakery.

VICTOR

Saw who?

RAMON

I'm not sure. He's an odd fellow.

From behind, Zabrovski leans his head into the space between Ramon and Victor and whispers.

ZABROVSKI

Can you smell it?

Ramon and Victor startle and jump toward the bakery.

VICTOR

Jesus! Where did you come from?

Zabrovski smiles and waves his white cane toward the bakery like a magician's staff.

ZABROVSKI

I can smell it. You were right, Ramon. It is heavenly.

INT. PETROVSKI FAMILY BAKERY - DAY

The two seekers and the guide reverently enter the quiet bakery as if it was a sacred space. Petrovski is not in sight. A slow smile spreads across Ramon's face. He sniffs the air deeply. Nods to his son.

RAMON

Maybe. Just maybe....

VICTOR

It does smell wonderful.

Ramon spies a coin on the floor of the bakery, below the glass bread case. He squats down and examines it.

RAMON

An American quarter. When I was a boy this would have bought a whole loaf of bread.

From behind the counter, a female voice interrupts Ramon's reverie.

PAULINA (O.S.)

Our bread is worth a lot more.

Ramon looks up from his crouching position. PAULINA PETROVSKA, a blond Polish woman (34) leans over the glass case with a weary smile. She wears a flour-smudged baker's jacket. Paulina exudes a casual confidence and mature beauty.

FLASHBACK, RAMON'S POV:

INT. WESTFIELD BAKERY - DAY

The young Clerk, the "Goddess of Bread", in the old neighborhood bakery, beams at the Young Ramon over the counter. A glow surrounds her.

She passes a loaf of black bread, like a blessing, to Young Ramon, who receives it with reverence.

INT. PETROVSKI FAMILY BAKERY - DAY

Ramon, lost in memory, just stares upward at Paulina, an older but just as radiant incarnation of The Goddess of Bread from his youth.

Victor, stands next to his Father, nudges him with his knee, whispers to him.

VICTOR

You stuck down there?

Ramon grabs onto Victor's arm and hauls himself up.

RAMON

"Our bread"? Are you Petrovski's "right hand man"?

PAULINA

Is that what he called me? My Father misses his son. I'm the stand in.

RAMON

You're his daughter? A baker too?

PAULINA

Of course. All Petrovskis are bakers. Flour is in our blood.

VICTOR

Which makes a kind of gravy?

Paulina shoots Victor a disparaging look. Not making any points.

RAMON

I'm Ramon. This is my son Victor.

PAULINA

Paulina Petrovska. My father is in back resting. We have not made the black bread in some time.

RAMON

He did make it? For us? How is it?

PAULINA

See for yourself.

Paulina leads them into the back of the bakery.

INT. PETROVSKI FAMILY BAKERY KITCHEN - DAY

In the small but well-organized bakery kitchen, Petrovski sits at an old, well-used kneading table.

On the table is a long oval shape covered with a white towel.

Petrovski brightens as the Americans enter the kitchen.

Ramon eyes the towel-covered treasure in anticipation. They converge around the table. Victor moves to stand next to Paulina. Zabrovski stands behind Ramon.

PETROVSKI

Good, you have come. I have made your bread. In celebration.

RAMON

What are we celebrating?

PETROVSKI

That is for you to decide.

RAMON

I hope we are celebrating the finding of a great recipe.

Petrovski whips off the towel covering a glorious loaf of black bread. A white pot of rich yellow butter sits next to the gleaming black loaf along with a long bread knife. Ramon gasps.

RAMON

It looks perfect!

Petrovski hands the long knife to Paulina.

PETROVSKI

You do the honors.

Paulina takes the serrated knife and expertly slices five perfect slabs from the loaf. She slathers a dollop of butter on each piece and deals them out on the wooden table like cards in a high stakes poker game. All eyes -- even Zabrovski -- turn to Ramon.

With a slightly trembling hand, Ramon gently picks up the slice nearest to him. Holds it in reverence. The butter melts into the rich black bread.

RAMON

(reverently)

It's still warm.

He smells it with a slow, deep in-breath.

RAMON

Oh my.

Ramon takes a bite: the crust pulls away from the soft center. He closes his eyes as he slowly chews. A golden drop of melted butter drips from the bread in his hand. A tear slides down his old cheek.

RAMON

This is it. This is really it. Exactly like the bread from my youth. Exactly.

Victor follows his Father's example. Paulina hands a slice to Zabrovski who smells it delicately, almost religiously. One to her Father. They all partake of the bread.

VICTOR

This really is wonderful.

ZABROVSKI

A masterpiece Petrovski. Congratulations. You have revived an art form.

RAMON

Yes! A masterpiece. You are an artist.

Petrovski looks pleased. He contemplates his own slice. Tastes it. Sighs with pleasure -- and perhaps with relief.

PETROVSKI

(to Paulina, in Polish)

You've done it my dear. Your Mother is smiling.

RAMON

You baked this?

PETROVSKI

She does all the baking. My right hand man.

Victor and Ramon look at Paulina. She bows her head slightly to her Father.

RAMON

Can you give us the recipe? Show us how to make it? I'll pay you. We want to make it in my old home town, just like when I was a boy.

Petrovski shifts his gaze from his daughter to Ramon.

PETROVSKI

I cannot give you the recipe.

RAMON

But, we won't compete with you. We'll be 5000 miles away. I'll.... I'll send you some money every month. From what we earn on your bread.

PETROVSKI

I cannot.

RAMON

Why?

PETROVSKI

There is no recipe. The bread is made from the heart. The baker nurtures the yeast, the flours, the water, salt from the land. It is living. You said your baker died and took the recipe with him. The baker is the recipe. There is only one way for you to make the black bread in America.

RAMON

I'll do anything.

PETROVSKI

Take Paulina with you. She will make the black bread for you. She will run your bakery. It is her turn to have a new start. A new life.

PAULINA

Father!

RAMON

What about you? What will you do?

PETROVSKI

Zabrovski will help me for a while. I have eyes. He has arms and legs.

PAULINA

I will not leave you. You need me.

PETROVSKI

There is nothing left for you here. Soon I close the bakery.

Petrovski waves his good arm in a dismissive gesture. Paulina stabs the bread knife into the wooden kneading table. Leans over the table towards her Father.

PAULINA

I will not leave Mother's bakery! I will not abandon her.

Victor and Ramon eye the knife, wobbling back and forth, embedded an inch into the solid wood tabletop.

PETROVSKI

She is gone. Your brother is gone. I am tired, Paulina. It is time for you to start again. There is nothing here for you but ghosts. Go.

Paulina glares at her father, emotions crisscross her face.

PAULINA

Mother would not abandon her bakery.

PETROVSKY

Your Mother abandoned both of us.

Paulina yanks the knife out of the table, turns to Ramon.

PAULINA

Am I correct that you know nothing about baking?

Ramon takes a step back from the large bread knife.

RAMON

I've made bread. But not like this.

PAULINA

Do you have a bakery?

VICTOR

It's a fixer-upper.

PAULINA

Why do you want to make bread in America? It won't make you rich.

Ramon looks directly at Victor, pauses, then addresses Paulina.

RAMON

Because I'm crazy old man with nothing left but a dream. To make this memory, this bread, this food that was so wonderful that I have not forgotten it even after 60 years. That will make me "rich". I had nothing left to live for, but now I do. But I need your help.

Ramon slowly gets down on one knee, joints cracking, as if proposing.

RAMON

Make my bread. Let's give people good
Polish bread again.

Paulina returns Ramon's steady gaze, taken aback by his "proposal". She bends down, grasps his hands, raises him up.

PAULINA

It is possible to make a great bakery
together -- if you do as I say.

VICTOR

Do as YOU say? It's OUR bakery.

PAULINA

Not if you cannot make the bread.

RAMON

She's right. It will be her bakery to
run, ours to treasure.

VICTOR

Ours to treasure? Yours. I'm not a baker.
This is your dream.

Victor, pulls his Dad slightly aside, whispers near his ear, while looking sideways at Paulina.

VICTOR

Are you sure about this? We just met her.
She seems a little -- unstable.

RAMON

(to Victor)

If she's crazy enough to take a chance
with a crazy old man, give up her life
here, then yes, I'm sure.

Ramon steps towards Paulina, his hand outstretched, ready to seal the deal. Paulina notices the knife still in her hand and gently places it back on the kneading table.

PAULINA

You are brave to take chance on crazy
Polish baker.

Paulina grasps Ramon's outstretched hand in a firm shake. Petrovski smiles sadly from his chair.

Zabrovski puts his hand on the baker's drooping right shoulder. With his left hand, Petrovski pulls a bottle of Vodka from a cabinet behind him, reaches for five small glasses, carefully sets them on the table and fills them with vodka.

PETROVSKI

It is settled. We drink. Nozdrowie! To Paulina's new life.

They all toast.

RAMON

To the black bread. Nozdrowie!

ZABROVSKI

To dreams. Nozdrowie!

PAULINA

To America.

They shoot back the vodka, Polish style.

VICTOR

Oh boy.

EXT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY, WESTFIELD MA - DAY

The run-down bakery in the old home town is getting a face-lift. The two story building, with living quarters upstairs and the store and bakery on the first floor, is getting a fresh paint job and a thorough cleaning.

Ramon, standing on the sidewalk, watches as a new sign "New World Polish Bakery" is hoisted up into position over the old bakery.

A WORKMAN attaches the sign. Another WORKMAN washes the large front windows. As the glass becomes clean, a paper sign taped to the inside of the window reveals "Opening Soon".

EXT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY - BACK ALLEY LOADING DOCK - DAY

Paulina oversees a TWO-MAN CREW unloading bakery equipment from a delivery truck. Under Paulina's watchful eye crew moves in a large mixer. A new gas oven and proofing shelves stand on the loading dock.

INT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY - OFFICE - DAY

Victor sets up the accounting spreadsheets on his computer. A CLOSE-UP of the screen also shows a Google Map with a red pin ad displaying: "NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY -- opening soon. Free samples to first day customers."

Victor jumps as a sudden crash of pans comes from the kitchen behind him. Another crash follows. Victor pushes away from the desk with an annoyed look.

INT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY - KITCHEN - DAY

Ramon enters the kitchen from the front of the bakery as Victor enters from the office. Paulina is chucking old burned baking sheets out the back door into a dumpster.

VICTOR

What on earth are you doing? Those are expensive.

PAULINA

Old pans make burned bread.

Victor looks at his Father.

VICTOR

Dad! Paulina's making a mess! An expensive mess.

Ramon gives his son a look.

RAMON

Son, I think she knows what she's doing.

VICTOR

I didn't budget for new baking sheets.

PAULINA

We don't need new sheets. Metal is no good anyway. We use tile and brick to bake the bread. Gives a better heat. Better, what is the word -- dis....

RAMON

Distribution of heat?

PAULINA

Yes. Which gives the bread the crust that Ramon desires.

VICTOR

All we need are bricks?

Paulina glares at Victor, then sighs like a teacher addressing a particularly dull child.

PAULINA

No, that is not all we need. The ovens must be evenly hot. That's how the bricks will help. Then we need the right flours. Whole grained but finely milled. Rye, wheat, some unbleached. Water is good here, lots of character. Then there is the yeast.

VICTOR

You can get that at any store.

PAULINA

Not just any yeast! Not American yeast. It is too aggressive. Too fast. Too..... American. I brought yeast from my Mother's bakery.

Paulina motions to a cardboard box on one of the kneading benches.

VICTOR

Special yeast all the way from Poland. Now we have it made.

RAMON

How did you get that here? I thought customs wouldn't let in any food? They confiscated my kielbasa!

PAULINA

My mother carried it for me.

VICTOR

She did?

PAULINA

I brought my mother with me. Her ashes.

VICTOR

And the yeast is in there?

PAULINA

Not to worry, it is separate.

VICTOR

Ummm OK.... Not feeling well....

Having heard enough, Victor ambles off to his office, shaking his head.

RAMON

Clever. Can I see?

Paulina unwraps the box, extracting a bright cloisonné urn. She places it reverently on the table.

PAULINA

She started our bakery you know. Her mother was a baker before the war. Probably her *mother*, too. My father married into the craft. Because he loved my Mother, he learned to love the art of baking.

Paulina carefully unscrews the top of the urn.

RAMON

How long ago did she pass away?

PAULINA

Nine years ago. After my brother died. A broken heart, I think.

RAMON

How did your brother die?

PAULINA

Badly.

Enough said. Paulina gently lifts a sturdy bottle of brown powder from the ashes of the urn, dusts it off and screws the top of the urn back on. Pats the top lovingly.

PAULINA

Thank you, Mother.

Paulina presents the bottle of yeast to Ramon who takes it, examining the bottle in the light.

RAMON

Our little friends. What would we do without them?

PAULINA

They are part of our family. Tonight we will start the ~~m~~other dough.

RAMON

Then we bake?

PAULINA

Then we wait. The *mother* must grow and mature. The older the better, eh Ramon?
(MORE)

PAULINA (CONT'D)

You need to order the flours. I give your son the list.

RAMON

His name is Victor.

Paulina shrugs.

PAULINA

He has a lot to learn.

RAMON

His heart isn't into baking. He's a programmer. He's doing this for me.

PAULINA

Because he loves you.

RAMON

Of course.

PAULINA

Or because it is duty.

RAMON

You know how that is -- duty to family.

PAULINA

To no one else?

RAMON

Just me now. His wife, well, she's hmmm, gone.

PAULINA

I see the bitterness.

RAMON

He deserves better. Well at least a bachelor can still yearn. A widower just dreams.

VICTOR (O.S.)

(from the office)

I'm still here you know! I'm not deaf!

Ramon winces. Paulina giggles but quickly stops, restores her serious demeanor. Ramon notices her brief laughter and shoots Paulina a mischievous grin.

RAMON

(calling to Victor)

Did you order the flour?

VICTOR (O.S.)

Tomorrow!

RAMON

Rye and fine-ground whole wheat?

VICTOR (O.S.)

I'll get to it!

RAMON

And the bricks?

Victor stalks out of his office, glaring at his Dad. Paulina stifles a chuckle, quickly turns to study a set of kneading hooks.

VICTOR

Very funny. I am so glad you two are enjoying yourselves.

RAMON

Now Victor, don't be so serious. We.... I was just kidding.

VICTOR

No, it's fine, really. I can see what's happening. You've got your "right-hand man". You don't need me any more.

RAMON

Victor, really, grow up.

VICTOR

Grow up? Looks who's talking. Everything is funny to you. Well everything is NOT FUNNY!

Ramon realizes he's gone too far, stretching an already thin relationship with his only son.

RAMON

I know that. Granted, I used to have a different sense of humor, but since your Mother....

VICTOR

Don't go pulling that excuse out. Mom's dying has nothing to do with how you treat people. Then or now.

Turning to Paulina.

VICTOR

Don't think he won't take advantage of you, too.

Paulina turns from her inspection of the kneaders and shoots Victor a withering glare.

PAULINA

Your Father is trying to build something worthy. Perhaps you are the one who takes life too lightly? A son owes much to the Father.

Victor returns her glare.

VICTOR

I don't need you to tell me how to treat my own Father. I notice you left your Father behind quickly enough.

Victor and Paulina are face-to-face, like pissed-off brother and sister, fighting for Dad's attention.

PAULINA

That's what he wanted. You think I come all the way to America to argue with you? You're a child. I am here to bake bread. Build a life.

Ramon steps between them, gesturing for calm.

RAMON

Now, now, you two, we're a family here, working together to....

Now Victor is in Ramon's face.

VICTOR

A family? Since when is she part of our family?

RAMON

Since I said so! Alright? Cool off, Victor. I'm not replacing you. I'm gaining a daughter I never had.

VICTOR

I wonder what Mom would say about that?

RAMON

She'd approve. Right after she berated me for assuming that Paulina would want to be part of this crazy family.

Paulina turns back to her bread kneader.

PAULINA

Only one crazy person in this family.

Victor snorts loudly.

VICTOR

That's it, I'm off. You don't need me here.

Victor stalks off through the bakery kitchen, heading for the back door.

RAMON

Where you going?

VICTOR

Out. To get something to eat. Something not Polish!

RAMON

You're coming back, aren't you?

Victor stalks out the back door of the bakery, muttering to himself.

RAMON

When will I ever learn?

Paulina tentatively approaches Ramon, puts her hand on his shoulder.

PAULINA

Your son is old enough to decide what he should be doing.

RAMON

I wonder. Maybe I should tell him to go home, back to his software company? I think he's just here to keep an eye on his crazy old man.

PAULINA

You worry too much. We have lots of work to do here. Keep busy. Tonight, I make a Polish dinner. Bring you cheer.

RAMON

Golabki?

PAULINA

If you like, of course!

Paulina turns back into the kitchen, continuing to organize her empire.

PAULINA

And tonight we start the mother dough. Do you have vodka?

RAMON

For the bread?

PAULINA

No, for you. And to clean the mother bowl. Tradition.

RAMON

I'll get some!

INT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY - KITCHEN - NIGHT

One of the kneading tables is set for dinner. An elaborate Polish country style embroidered tablecloth drapes the old wood tabletop. Three places are set. In the fourth position is a huge ceramic bowl -- an empty vessel, waiting for the mother.

Ramon shuffles in the back door, a bottle of Polish vodka under one arm, a bottle of wine in one hand. He looks harried and tired, like a shopper rushing around before Christmas.

RAMON

Found the vodka, finally. You'd think it would be easier to find Polish potato vodka around here!

PAULINA

Good! Always important to have vodka in a Polish kitchen. Brings good luck.

RAMON

I thought it was to sterilize the bread bowl?

PAULINA

That, too. Can't waste it.

RAMON

I see. Well I got a bottle of wine to go with the Golumpkis. Merlot with tomato sauce.

Paulina bustles around the table, laying out the dinner. Ramon rubs his hands together in anticipation.

RAMON

I'll get some glasses.

He retrieves two small vodka glasses from a cupboard and three wine glasses.

RAMON

I see you set a place for Victor. You know how he feels about "our" food.

PAULINA

Just in case. He is part of the family.

RAMON

Well, yes, let's not bring that up again though, *Okay?* Seems to be a touchy subject.

Paulina pulls a steaming dish of Golumpkis out of an oven, presents it with flair to Ramon. Ramon pours the vodka into the two glasses with an equally stylized flourish.

PAULINA

To cooking! Nozdrowie!

RAMON

To great cooks! Nozdrowie!

They power back the shots. Ramon gasps.

RAMON

Christ! That first one is always a killer. Makes you wonder why you drink.

Paulina looks bemused. Pours them both another glass and serves the steaming Golumpkis. Ramon digs in, inhaling the fragrance.

RAMON

Ahhh. Tender cabbage leaves stuffed with beef, lamb, and rice, simmered to perfection in sweet tomato sauce. Fantastic! Now we if only had some of your black bread.

PAULINA

Patience. After we eat, we start the mother.

Ramon tosses back another vodka shot.

RAMON

If I can still stand.

A peaceful calm descends in the kitchen as they work on the cabbage rolls: Ramon with gusto, Paulina tasting every bite -- a cook critiquing her own dish.

PAULINA

It is so hard making the old recipes with your American ingredients. Nothing tastes the same. It makes me fearful.

RAMON

This is excellent! Better than my mother's. Why would you worry?

PAULINA

You are used to the taste. What if the black bread does not work here? What if the ingredients change it? I will fail.

RAMON

Nonsense. The bread will be excellent. I have no doubt.

Ramon digs into the Golumpkis, masking his sudden doubt.

Paulina pushes her plate away, takes another drink of vodka and rises from the table. Turning out most of the room lights, she lights a single candle on the table. She moves her mother's urn into her place at the table. Every action, part of a dance, as if she had choreographed the ritual.

Ramon stops eating and watches Paulina in growing fondness.

Paulina arranges her tools and ingredients around the large ceramic bowl. She pours a healthy dose of vodka into the bowl and swishes it around. She pours the vodka from the bowl into a glass and sets it in front of her Mother's urn. She wipes the bowl carefully with a clean towel. Looks intently at Ramon.

EXT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY, KITCHEN-DOOR - NIGHT

Victor walks in the evening darkness towards the lamp-lit kitchen door. He sniffs the air, taking in the pleasant odor of home cooking.

VICTOR

I'll bet Dad is in seventh heaven. Probably feasting on pickled *pig's*-feet and prune perogies. Victor, you loser, have some compassion for the old man. She does.

As Victor approaches the back doorway, the lights dim and a flickering candle illuminates the semi-darkness. He stops, cocks his head to listen to the voices inside.

Victor quietly climbs up the old wooden steps and peers into the kitchen.

PAULINA (O.S.)

This is the future of your bakery Ramon.
Right here.

INT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY, KITCHEN - NIGHT

In the darkened kitchen, Paulina prepares the mother dough. In the flickering candlelight, she looks like a sorceress, working her culinary magic. Ramon watches in rapture. Close-ups of Paulina's face and the action inside the bowl intermingle with each other, weaving a spell.

Fresh warm water mixes with the granules of yeast brought from Poland. Several varieties of flour sprinkle like clouds of fairy dust into the deep bowl. Paulina grabs a palm of salt crystals from a old tin and sprinkles it into the bowl. She gently stirs the potion as it slowly thickens into a spongy dough.

EXT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY, KITCHEN DOOR - NIGHT

From Victor's point of view, Paulina prepares the mother in the darkened bakery kitchen. From this angle, she is even more phantasmal, focused and intent on her task. She bites her lip in concentration. Her dark blonde hair pulled back, a wisp escaping and swaying across her brow, keeping time with the strokes of her spoon. Victor, mesmerized, takes it in.

INT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Paulina continues to work the mother dough, adding flours, splashes of water, bits of crystalline salt, working methodically to bring the dough to life.

Ramon watches her work from across the table, sipping his neat glass of vodka.

PAULINA

The mother dough is the beginning of a whole generation of bread. She will define how each loaf grows, how it tastes, how it feels when you eat it.

Now Paulina uses her hands instead of the spoon, working the sticky sponge dough with her warm fingers, bringing it to life.

PAULINA

(As telling a bedtime story)

We'll keep her warm, watch over her, feed her, let her grow. Her flavors and textures will mature, become more complex. Then, when she is ready, we take a portion of her body and she will give life to the first of the breads, her children. We will start small, a few loaves. They will give us our daily bread. The mother, we will always protect and keep growing. We take care of the mother and she will take care of us.

RAMON

We'll take care of the mother.

Paulina dusts her hands one more time with flour and gives the mother dough a final gentle toss in the bowl. She brushes the stray hair from her forehead, leaving a streak of flour in her hair.

PAULINA

Now we let her rest and grow. Each day we will feed her. One week, then we bake the first loaves.

Ramon rises from the table and peers into the bowl, bending over it and taking a deep, appreciative breath.

RAMON

Mmmm, I can almost taste the black bread now. A week you say?

PAULINA

At least. It depends on how well the yeast likes its new home.

RAMON

But it's not black. What makes it black?

PAULINA

Secret. That's the last step. I show you when it's time.

RAMON

We'll make sure it does!

Ramon gives Paulina a hearty hug.

EXT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY, KITCHEN DOORWAY - NIGHT

Victor stands just outside the kitchen doorway, half in night, half in candle light.

Victor's POV: Ramon hugs Paulina, starts dancing around the kitchen table. Paulina laughs.

Victor sighs, pulls himself together.

INT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Victor, at first relaxed, enters the darkened kitchen, as Ramon continues his jig. Then Victor spies the half empty bottle of vodka and lifts it up to the candle light.

VICTOR

Getting back to your old ways, Dad?

Ramon comes to an abrupt halt, gasping to catch his breath.

RAMON

Hey, son, we're just celebrating the creation of the mother. You should have been here. It was magical. Look! Here she is!

Ramon picks up the big bowl and shows Victor the sticky mass within.

RAMON

Isn't she beautiful?

VICTOR

Wow. That's going to start our bakery?
It's so.... little.

Ramon gently sets the bowl back down.

RAMON

You really don't know anything about baking do you?

VICTOR

No, and I believe I told you that. And, for the record, neither do you.

RAMON

And that is why we have a real baker.

VICTOR

Who can do some real drinking with you? I thought you gave that up?

RAMON

Bah! It's just a little vodka. I'm 70 years old, I can drink a little if I want to. It's my life.

VICTOR

A little, maybe. Half a bottle, no!

RAMON

We used it to clean the mother bowl. I didn't drink all that. Christ, you sound like your mother. Where's the trust?

Victor slams the bottle of vodka down on the table.

VICTOR

Trust? That was the problem, she trusted you too much.

RAMON

Our marriage was built on trust. Just because Marie betrayed you does not mean that I betrayed your mother. Or you.

VICTOR

So you never cheated on Mom? All those long road trips? All those nights away from home? Not once?

Ramon turns away from Victor, picks up his glass of vodka and slowly pours it into the glass in front of Paulina's mother's urn.

RAMON

It was the 1950s. A different time. I never hurt your mother. I always came back, didn't I?

VICTOR

Did Mom know? Did she?

RAMON

Nona was a very smart woman.

VICTOR

And she didn't leave you?

RAMON

I said I always came back.

VICTOR

She put up with you having affairs?

Victor chokes back emotions long bottled up.

Ramon faces his son.

RAMON

Isn't the answer obvious? We were together until her death. How many ways do I have to say: I did not hurt Nona? I know what this is about. You left Marie because of her affair. You think you should have stuck it out.

VICTOR

Mom did. She loved you until the day she died. Maybe I should have tried harder to forgive Marie.

RAMON

The real question is, did she want forgiveness?

Victor slumps into a chair at the table.

VICTOR

She didn't exactly beg me to stay.

RAMON

Exactly.

Paulina, who has been standing aside quietly, moves a plate of warm Golumpkis in front of Victor.

Victor cuts the soft cabbage role. Takes a bite and chews thoughtfully. Takes another larger bite.

RAMON

Good eh?

VICTOR

Mmmph.

RAMON

Better than pastries?

VICTOR

Mmmmmmmmm.

RAMON

Feeling better already, aren't you?

PAULINA

Food heals.

Victor finishes a mouthful, looks up at Paulina.

VICTOR

So, where's the bread?

INT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY - KITCHEN - DAY, A WEEK LATER

Ramon, Victor, and Paulina gather around the ceramic bowl containing the mother dough. Paulina lifts off the protective white towel. The three lean over the bowl, breathing in the smell of the rising dough.

RAMON

Smells fabulous!

VICTOR

Smells like Vodka!

RAMON

That's the ethanol, a by product from the yeast eating the carbohydrates in the dough.

VICTOR

You mean yeast farts?

RAMON

If you want to be crass about it.

Paulina gently massages the mass of dough, turning it over in the bowl, burping it gently. She inhales deeply.

PAULINA

She does not smell right. Something is different.

RAMON

Smells great to me. What could be wrong?

PAULINA

The flours, water, the air around us. Everything is different here.

VICTOR

Different isn't always bad. It can be a "better" different.

Paulina covers the bowl with the towel. Smells her hands carefully. Looks worried. Mutters to herself in Polish as she walks out of the kitchen

VICTOR
 (nudging Ramon)
 Did you catch that? What did she say?
 What's wrong?

Ramon shrugs.

RAMON
 It's an art, not a science. We won't know
 until we bake the first loaves.

Victor peaks under the towel. Ramon slaps his hand away.

VICTOR
 And when will we get around to actually
 baking? We've watched "mother" here for
 almost a week.

RAMON
 I don't know. She said soon, but now.....

Paulina enters the kitchen from the storeroom carrying a
 large bag of flour. Ramon scurries to help her.

PAULINA
 Victor, get the rye flour.

VICTOR
 We're going make bread? Now?

PAULINA
 Yes. The mother will either work or she
 won't.

Victor hurries to the storeroom as Paulina starts
 measuring the flour from the bag she brought out into one
 of the large mixers. Victor struggles out with another
 large bag of flour.

PAULINA
 Set it down there. Measure out four
 pounds. Ramon, bring the salt and oil.

DISSOLVE TO:

All three measure flours, salt, oils, water into the
 mixer.

Paulina divides the mother dough carefully in half and
 gently adds half to the mass in the mixer.

Puffs of flour drift through the air as they prepare the first batch of dough for the black bread.

DISSOLVE TO:

Three tired and flour-dusted bakers sit around the kitchen work table.

In the center is a beautiful loaf of black bread.

Ramon's eyes dance with expectation.

Victor watches Pauline, who is still wearing a frown and muttering in Polish.

VICTOR

Well? Let's try it.

RAMON

I'm ready.

Paulina deftly carves the bread into slices -- a repeat performance from the bakery in Poland. She hands the first slice to Ramon. He sniffs it carefully, examines the crust, the tenderness of the interior. Breathes it in.

VICTOR

Com'on, Dad, taste it!

Ramon takes a bite, chews carefully. Thoughtfully. He shoots a look at Paulina.

RAMON

It's ummmm, good.

Victor grabs a slice, bites into it. Paulina turns away.

PAULINA

It's not what you want.

VICTOR

Tastes good to me!

RAMON

She's right. It's not the same. What's missing?

VICTOR

You two are nuts. It's perfectly good bread.

RAMON

It's not perfect. It has to be perfect!

Victor throws up his hands.

VICTOR

We can't spend forever messing around to make it perfect. We'll run out of money. It's good enough!

Ramon pounds the table with his fist, rattling bowls and knives.

RAMON

It's good enough when I say it is! It's my dream.

VICTOR

Stubborn Pollock!

Pushing between the two men, it's Paulina's turn to play peacemaker.

PAULINA

This is my bread. I will fix it.

Standing between the two men, she ticks off points on her fingers as she talks.

PAULINA

The flours are different. That could be it. The water seems good here. Salt? Oils? The yeast from home?

VICTOR

We could try sourcing different flours. Maybe a hard winter wheat? Canadian?

RAMON

Winter wheat? Where did you learn about hard winter wheat?

Paulina looks at Victor in a new way.

VICTOR

Didn't think I knew anything about baking, eh? Google is my friend.

PAULINA

Perhaps. My mother said that yeast is very particular. It may not like something in the flours or water. It changes to suit its life, not ours.

VICTOR

So your yeast from Poland is incompatible with our flours? Is that what you are saying?

Paulina picks up a slice of the bread. Tastes it.

PAULINA

We must try something else.

VICTOR

What?

Paulina walks out of the kitchen, heading for Victor's office.

VICTOR

Why does she always do that?

RAMON

What?

VICTOR

Leave without answering the question. It's annoying.

Victor tastes the bread again.

VICTOR

It does taste different. But if I hadn't tasted the original in Poland, I wouldn't know the difference. It would still be good.

RAMON

By American standards perhaps.

VICTOR

So, what, the Poles have higher standards than we do?

RAMON

You misunderstand. It's not just the taste. It has to be "right". Paulina is a master baker. She knows the difference between good and excellent. If you can't get the bread right, it's not worth making. You might as well go to the supermarket and buy whatever is on the shelves. It's a different expectation. It's why I remember the old bread so vividly. It was, literally, perfect.

VICTOR

I thought it was because it was part of your childhood. You know, how childhood memories are always better than the real thing.

Victor picks up the loaf, feels its weight, smells the crust again.

RAMON

Not this black bread memory. Although Paulina does remind me of my Goddess of Bread.

VICTOR

She what?

RAMON

Never mind.

VICTOR

Did you say "Goddess of Bread"?

RAMON

Okay, she was the baker's daughter. I had a crush on her. She was 20, I was, what, 10? She always saved the last loaf for me if I was late. Which I usually was.

VICTOR

Late for your chores? You?

RAMON

Hell, yes. Mom used to send me to get the bread when we could afford it. But I had my news stand job too. Got to unbundle the newspapers at the corner stand and put out the magazines. And Comic books! Boy I loved that part.

VICTOR

Bread and comics. Sounds like good times.

Ramon looks away from Victor. Wipes a sleeve across his eyes.

RAMON

Yeah. All good. Where's Paulina?

VICTOR

She doesn't report to me.

INT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY - VICTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Paulina sits at Victor's laptop, poking around Google Earth. Victor squeezes in beside her and Ramon peers in from the doorway.

VICTOR

Looking for an escape route?

PAULINA

Looking for a vineyard. You do have vineyards here, don't you?

VICTOR

In California. But here in New England? Not that I know of.

Paulina points to the laptop screen.

PAULINA

Here, in Hatfield?

VICTOR

There's a winery in Hatfield?

PAULINA

It's the end of harvest time. I need to go there now.

VICTOR

You need wine? I thought vodka was the magic ingredient in Polish cooking.

PAULINA

I need grapes. Grapes off the vine. For the wild yeast.

RAMON

You are going to make my bread with wild yeast?

PAULINA

It's native to this area. The yeast may work well with the other ingredients.

VICTOR

How are you going to get there?

PAULINA

I Bus.

RAMON

Victor, you drive her! Don't make her waste a whole day going by bus.

VICTOR

Road trip! Why don't we all go?

RAMON

I'll stay here and get the place ready to bake. We're still waiting for the other oven. You'll only be gone a day. I'm a big boy.

PAULINA

We should go soon. I hope they have not picked the vineyard clean. I only need a few bunches.

RAMON

Then go get my wild yeast! Get an early start tomorrow!

Ramon shoos them out of the office.

Paulina heads upstairs to her room. As Victor passes by Ramon, the father catches his son's arm. Watches as Paulina disappears up the stairs.

RAMON

Victor, please be nice to her.

VICTOR

I'm always "nice".

RAMON

You know what I mean. We're her family now. Act like her big brother.

VICTOR

Hey, she's your Goddess of Bread. I'm just the store manager.

RAMON

Just be nice.

INT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY - RAMON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ramon sits on his neatly made bed, holding a picture frame, staring deeply into the image.

RAMON

Well here we are again Nona. I'm fine. You doing well? Yeah, I know--you're dead. We've been busy. Victor? I think we're coming to terms, just like you asked.

Ramon pauses, listening.

RAMON

Yes, she'll be good for him. Hmmm, I think she likes him. I know he likes her. If he just wasn't so stubborn. Ha! I knew you'd like that one. Just like me, too true. Yes the black bread is important. You remember it? No? Yeah that was a long time ago. The bread will complete us. Both of us. It's what I have to do. Then I can rest.

Ramon sinks back in the bed, resting the picture frame on his chest, staring at the ceiling.

RAMON

I know. Of course, I do. Always.

He closes his eyes.

Always see you soon.

INT. RENTED VOLVO - DAY

Victor drives. They cruise up the highway along the Connecticut River valley.

Paulina takes advantage of her first trip in the country to take it all in. The countryside displays the full Autumn aurora of colors. It's a perfect day for a road trip in New England.

VICTOR

God, I forgot how great the countryside looks this time of year.

PAULINA

The hills are amazing. It's so flat in Poland. Here every turn is different. Did you grow up here?

VICTOR

Yeah, but it seems like a long time ago. We all moved to California after I graduated high school. Guess I miss it sometimes -- like now. Not winter though.

PAULINA

Even winter will be beautiful.

VICTOR

I won't be here, thank God.

PAULINA

You are really going to leave your father?

Victor eyes Paulina as she stares out the window at the passing landscape.

VICTOR

That's the plan. Get the bakery up and running smoothly so you two can live happily ever after. I go back to Cal to my real job. Which reminds me, I forgot to call my boss again. He'll be ticked.

PAULINA

It's hard to leave family.

VICTOR

You did.

PAULINA

I said it was hard.

VICTOR

Do you regret coming with us?

PAULINA

If I can make the bread, I will be content. Perhaps there will be more happiness. Less sorrow.

VICTOR

Times were tough in Poland?

A moment of silence stretches out as the car zips past fields gone golden after harvest.

PAULINA

My brother, I told you, he died. But before that, he left the family. He did not want to be a baker. That was my Mother's first heartbreak. We did not hear from him for many months. Then, the police came.

VICTOR

Arrested?

PAULINA

Killed in a crash in Germany. With his girl friend.

VICTOR

No wonder your Mother took it hard.

PAULINA

His girlfriend was pregnant. My Mother lost a son, a daughter-in-law, and a grandchild - all at once. For some reason, she blamed herself. I never found out why.

VICTOR

That's quite a trauma. I'm sorry.

PAULINA

These are not vineyards.

VICTOR

Tobacco fields. They still grow some in the valley. Used to be huge crops here. Most of them have turned to something more profitable. There are always holdouts.

PAULINA

Like old bread makers?

VICTOR

Dreamers, like my Dad. I tell ya, if he hadn't tried to kill himself, I doubt I would have gone along with his folly.

PAULINA

What? You did not tell me this before.

VICTOR

Umm, yeah. Well that slipped out. I guess it's confession time. You started it.

PAULINA

You must tell me what happened. So I can understand. So I can help.

VICTOR

I don't know. That's pretty personal. I'm sorry I said anything.

PAULINA

Of course it's personal. I am part of your business. A partner. I need to know why he would do such a thing.

VICTOR

I found him inside his garage. He tried to kill himself with carbon monoxide. When I got there he was passed out but the garage door was open. So no harm done. I think.

PAULINA

But why?

VICTOR

I suppose he never really got over Mom's death. Puts on a good front but I guess you never get over losing the love of your life.

PAULINA

You still miss your wife.

VICTOR

She's dead to me. After she admitted her affair, that was that.

PAULINA

I do not believe it.

VICTOR

Suit yourself.

PAULINA

Why was the door open?

VICTOR

Huh?

PAULINA

The garage door. You said it was open when you got there, but he was still in the car.

VICTOR

Yeah, that was weird. He was pretty out if it at first. Babbling something about his Goddess of Bread.

PAULINA

Goddess?

VICTOR

He talked -- still talks in fact -- about this young woman in the Polish bakery that used to save the last loaf of black bread for him when he was, what -- 10? Left a big impression apparently. His goddess of bread. I think that's what keeps him going.

PAULINA

What did she look like, this goddess?

VICTOR

She probably looked like you. Maybe that's why Dad jumped at the chance to bring you to America. I hadn't thought of it that way before. But it makes sense. Crazy sense. How does it feel to be a goddess?

PAULINA

Nervous.

Paulina mutters something in Polish.

VICTOR

I hate when you do that! I don't know if you are swearing at me or just rambling.

PAULINA

You care what I think of you?

VICTOR

Of course I care. You're you're my our business partner.

PAULINA

And that's all?

VICTOR

And Dad's goddess of bread.

PAULINA

I thought so.

VICTOR

Whatever. Enjoy the scenery, we're getting close to your grapes.

EXT. MASSACHUSETTS VINEYARD - DAY

The Volvo pulls up to a classic New England stone wall guarding the autumnal remains of a field of grape vines.

Victor extracts himself from the car, stretching away the stiffness.

Paulina slips out of the passenger side and surveys the vines hopefully. She sniffs the air carefully, hugging her arms close against the autumn chill.

PAULINA

Their pickers are good. Not much left here.

VICTOR

C'mon, let's find the owner before we go tip-toeing through the grape vines.

Victor grabs Paulina's coat from the back seat and drapes it around her shoulders. They pass through the gate in the stone wall and head toward a winery barn.

INT. MASSACHUSETTS VINEYARD - WINERY BARN - DAY

Victor peaks into the cool darkness of the barn. Sounds of pumps and gears reverberate through the cavernous building.

Three MEN across the room work near several tall stainless steel fermentation tanks, a STOCKY MAN coils hoses, A THIN MAN adjusts dials on the tank. The VINTNER holds a wine glass and peers intently into the dark red liquid.

Paulina edges past Victor in the doorway, a smile on her normally stoic face.

PAULINA

Smell that? Yeast at work. Here it makes grapes into wine instead of wheat into bread. Same process.

VICTOR

Our friends the yeast. Let's talk with the big guy. He looks like a vintner.

Victor and Paulina approach the Vintner. He is in a heated discussion with the man adjusting the valves on the tank.

THE VINTNER

You've got to stabilize the temperature, George, it's rising too fast. Get those coolers tuned up quick before the vat overheats and screws up the alcohol balance --

VICTOR

Excuse me.....

The Vintner gives Victor a quick once over and twitches his head towards the doorway.

THE VINTNER

Tasting room is out the door to your left. There's a big sign.

VICTOR

Yeah, I saw it. But we are here to get a few grapes.

THE VINTNER

We finished harvest two weeks ago. It's all in the tanks. Besides we don't sell grapes.

VICTOR

We just need a few bunches -- for the yeast.

The Vintner considers them both for a few seconds.

THE VINTNER

You want yeast?

PAULINA

The natural yeast from your grapes. Not your fermenting yeast, that's too strong.

THE VINTNER

Too strong for what?

PAULINA

My bread. I need a good slow yeast to make my bread.

THE VINTNER

Slow Foodie?

PAULINA

I don't understand.

VICTOR

He means, are you part of the Slow Food Movement.

PAULINA

I am not familiar with this. All good bread is made slowly.

VICTOR

She's from Poland. All food is slow there. We're starting a bakery, down in Westfield. She's my baker.

THE VINTNER

You're starting a bakery -- in Westfield? What kind?

PAULINA

Polish, of course.

THE VINTNER

Of course. Tough time to start a bakery.

VICTOR

Tough time to run a winery.

THE VINTNER

Too true. Look, why do you want wild yeast? It's pretty unpredictable. That's why I use my own strain.

PAULINA

It's the way my Mother did it. All bread used to be made this way. So every bread is special.

VICTOR

That's right, look at San Francisco Sourdough. Wild yeast is what makes it special.

Paulina gives Victor another look of re-appraisal. Victor winks back at her.

THE VINTNER

You're both crazy.

(beat)

I like that. Walk with me.

The Vintner heads toward the bright day outside the winery doors.

EXT. MASSACHUSETTS VINEYARD - DAY

Rows of red and gold grape vines extend for hundreds of yards. A field of spent vines, their work done for the season.

Paul, Victor, and Paulina walk among the grape vines, inspecting the colors, feeling the crisping leaves, taking in the richness of the vineyard.

VICTOR

I didn't even know there were vineyards in New England. What do you grow here?

THE VINTNER

Maréchal Foch, a French-American hybrid. And a St. Croix hybrid. They are hardy to -40° F. They love our warm summers. As long as we don't get a late spring frost, they do fine.

(MORE)

THE VINTNER (CONT'D)

We are making some decent red blends from them. If I do say so myself.

VICTOR

Looks like your pickers are pretty thorough.

THE VINTNER

Small crop. Every bunch counts. Look up under the top branches, there might be some up high that the pickers missed.

PAULINA

I smell them.

Paulina darts over to the next row and carefully parts golden leaves.

The Vintner pulls a pair of shears from a belt holster, hands them to Pauline. A few sharp clips and Paulina reveals her prize: a still plump cluster of dark purple grapes. She hold them up to Victor.

PAULINA

Perfect! Victor, you have the cooler?

VICTOR

In the car. I'll get it.

Victor takes off back down the row, towards the parking lot. Paulina spreads a few more branches on a nearby vine.

PAULINA

There's another!

THE VINTNER

Damn. How did they miss these?

PAULINA

She saved them for us.

THE VINTNER

She?

PAULINA

Goddess of the vineyard. She knew we were coming.

THE VINTNER

Goddess, huh? So you're from Poland? What brings you all the way here?

PAULINA

An old man's dream.

THE VINTNER

And what's in it for you? A green card?
Citizenship? A husband?

For a moment, Paulina loses her carefully controlled composure.

PAULINA

I I continue my family tradition. My mother, my grandmother, my father, all were bakers. It's what we do.

THE VINTNER

But why here? Why bring Polish bread to a small out of the way town in Massachusetts? I've heard of starting small, but this is really small.

PAULINA

What did you call it before? Slow food? I make slow bread. It is the only way. People in small towns need good bread too. I fill a need, just like my Mother.

THE VINTNER

Suit yourself. I'm a winemaker, I'm just naturally nosy. Just be sure you know what you really want out of it.

Victor huffs up the vineyard row, carrying a small cooler.

Paulina carefully places the two bunches of lush grapes in the cooler. Victor cradles the cooler possessively.

VICTOR

Do we need more than that?

PAULINA

Let's look, a few more would be helpful.

They walk down the aisle, Paulina sniffing the air.

THE VINTNER

Can you really smell the grapes on the vine?

VICTOR

You wouldn't believe how sensitive her nose is.

Paulina turns her attention to the deep recesses within a tangle of red and gold vines. She pulls out another bunch of purple grapes.

THE VINTNER

Wow, you'd be great in the tasting room.

VICTOR

Hey, hands off. She's my baker.

PAULINA

That's the third time you've said "my baker".

Victor blushes.

PAULINA

Be careful what you wish for.

THE VINTNER

Are you two friends or business partners?

Paulina places the grape bunches in the cooler Victor is holding and gives him a pinch in the arm.

PAULINA

Both of course. Right, Victor?

VICTOR

That's what Dad says.

THE VINTNER

Huh, you two sound more like brother and sister to me. Well, if you have what you need, I'll get back to the tanks. Feel free to look -- or smell -- for more grapes if you need them. Oh, and buy some wine while you're at it.

The Vintner walks off down the aisle of grapes, whistling a tune.

VICTOR

Brother and sister? What the.....

PAULINA

"C'mon brat", we need to get these grapes back to the bakery.

VICTOR

Brat? Why am I a brat?

PAULINA

Brat -- brother in Polish.

VICTOR

Oh. What's sister?

PAULINA

Siostra.

VICTOR

(bad Eastern European accent)

As in: "Hey, Siostra let's buy some wine and have lunch!"

PAULINA

Are you inviting me on a date, Brat?

VICTOR

If food and wine is a date for you, we can call it that, but then we can't play Brat and Siostra.

PAULINA

I'll settle for lunch then.

Victor and Paulina head back to the car through the autumn grapevines, each with a hand holding the cooler between them.

VICTOR

You think Dad would approve?

PAULINA

He's not *my* Dad.

VICTOR

Huh, you're right.

INT. VOLVO - DAY

Victor drives.

Paulina watches the roadside show, half asleep, one hand possessively caresses the cooler on the seat between them.

"The Way We Were" starts playing on the car's radio.

VICTOR

Dad's favorite song. "The Way We Were." He would put it on around dinner time. Mom and he would do a little kitchen dancing in between pot stirring and arguing over whether the meat was done, or over *done* or if it could wait until the green beans finished. They always seemed pretty happy. At *least*, when he was home.

(MORE)

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Sometimes I think that's what they wanted me to think, put on a little show for me. Keep little Victor happy. The illusion of a perfect marriage.

PAULINA

Why do you think it was illusion?

VICTOR

Why wouldn't it be? I haven't encountered any happy marriages, have you?

PAULINA

My mother and father were very much in love.

VICTOR

So were mine, but there is more to a great marriage than love. People slip, they make mistakes, and they have to pay for it sooner or later.

Paulina sits up from her half-sleep, scrutinizes Victor as he drives.

PAULINA

Ramon told me about what happened with your wife. Everyone makes mistakes. You need not be the one to pay for it. Not everyone is unhappy in marriage.

VICTOR

Have you tried it?

Paulina sinks down into the car seat. Stares out the passenger window, muttering softly in Polish.

VICTOR

What?

EXT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY, SIDEWALK - EVENING

The Volvo pulls up to the dark bakery. Paulina gets out of the car, cradling the cooler. She tries the front door as Victor fiddles with bags in the back seat.

PAULINA

Is locked. I go around back.

VICTOR

Wait, I have keys. Hold your horses.

PAULINA

What horses? I want to get the mother going with these grapes.

Victor fishes keys from his coat pocket. Opens the door for Paulina, but he's in the way. She stops close, juggling the cooler.

VICTOR

Wait.

PAULINA

Why?

VICTOR

I just wanted to say. I, um, enjoyed our trip. You know, we've been so busy setting things up here, it's been nice to have time to

PAULINA

Victor. Are you telling me something? Because my English is still not complete.

VICTOR

It's just been nice to have a Siostra. To talk with.

PAULINA

Siostra. Of course....

She gives him a punch on the arm.

PAULINA

Let's make bread, Brat.

INT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY, KITCHEN - EVENING

Victor follows Paulina through the dark empty store into the kitchen.

PAULINA

I'll start the new mother. Bring a five pound bag of unbleached flour from the pantry.

VICTOR

Sure. I thought Dad would have heard us come in. Where is he when you need a flour hauler?

Victor heads for the storeroom for the flour. Paulina extracts the precious grapes from the cooler, inspects them and then wraps two bunches in cheesecloth.

VICTOR (O.S.)

Oh my God! Paulina!

INT. BAKERY STOREROOM - EVENING

Pauline enters the storeroom doorway, Victor stands over Ramon lying on the floor, part way between a peaceful sleep and an awkward fall.

Victor bends over Ramon, hesitating, not sure what to do or expect. Pauline rushes to Ramon's side, turns him over, face up.

VICTOR

Is he breathing?

Pauline holds her face close to the old man's nostrils, waiting for the exhale. She picks up his right arm and feels for a pulse.

PAULINA

Yes. Breathing. Pulse, yes. Ramon!
Ramon!

She shakes Ramon's shoulders gently.

VICTOR

Don't pound on his chest. He doesn't like it.

PAULINA

You think he fell? Should we call a doctor?

Ramon makes a gurgling, coughing sound.

VICTOR

This is good. He's coming around. Let's get him on his side.

They move Ramon over on his side. Now he starts mumbling, as if he is talking in his sleep.

RAMON

Nona. Don't leave now. Wait for me.
Please.....

Ramon's voice trails off to a small moan.

Victor moves to prop up his Father.

VICTOR

Dad. Dad! What happened? Can you hear me?
Understand me?

RAMON

Unnnn....

PAULINA

I call a doctor.

VICTOR

911. Dial 911. Just tell them we need
emergency care. Send an ambulance. Tell
them just get here!

RAMON

Nona! Nona!

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Viewed through the window of Ramon's hospital room, a
DOCTOR (40) is in an intense discussion with Victor.

Paulina sits next to Ramon's bed, holding one of his
hands.

A NURSE hovers next to Ramon's bedside, adjusting machines
that monitor Ramon's ebb and flow.

Victor and the Doctor pause in their discussion. Victor
walks to Ramon's bedside, standing next to Paulina.

INT. HOSPITAL - RAMON'S ROOM - NIGHT

Paulina looks up at Victor.

PAULINA

I did not understand what he was saying.
What is wrong?

VICTOR

He's had a stroke. But they can't tell
how many hours ago, because he was alone.
So they don't know what drugs to give
him, if any.

PAULINA

No medicine?

VICTOR

One could cause severe bleeding and may not do any good if it was more than 4 hours ago. And because he's over 70.

PAULINA

My father had a stroke. It left him weak on one side. What will happen to Ramon?

VICTOR

Can't tell yet.

The Doctor finishes conferring with the Nurse, moves to Victor's side. He puts a hand on Victor's shoulder.

DOCTOR

Your father is stable. You say he has no other health problems?

VICTOR

Aside from stubbornness? Not that I know of.

DOCTOR

In this case, stubborn is good. We'll have to see how much, if any, damage was done by the stroke. I think it was ischemic, a clot in the brain, as opposed to bleeding but I have to warn you.....

VICTOR

He may never be the same?

DOCTOR

There could be behavioral changes. Or none at all. There could be physical weakness or not. Every stroke is different, due to the complexity of the brain. But he will need attention while he recovers. You are close by?

VICTOR

We all live in the same building. In a bakery.

DOCTOR

Here? In town?

VICTOR

Westfield. Paulina's starting a Polish Bakery for my Dad.

DOCTOR

Fantastic! We haven't had a good bakery in decades. My mother used to rave about this great black bread when she was a child.

Victor rolls his eyes in mock amazement.

VICTOR

Do tell. Well, that's my Dad's dream. To recreate the black bread. It's what keeps him going.

DOCTOR

That's just what he will need to recover -
- a goal. That's how you can help him.

VICTOR

For how long?

DOCTOR

No telling until we see what the damage is from the stroke. Could be months, could be a year -- or more.

VICTOR

A year! I can't stay that long!

Paulina finally can't just sit listening anymore. She bolts upright from her chair next to Ramon.

PAULINA

Victor! Enough with having more important things to do. This is your Father!

Victor stutters a response...

RAMON

(weakly, half-awake)
Nona, let the boy go.

The Doctor bends over Ramon, checking his pupils, noting the monitor readings.

Paulina sits back down and takes Ramon's hand again.

PAULINA

Ramon. Can you hear me? It's Paulina. We are here. Victor is here. Do you understand?

DOCTOR

If he can understand what's going on, even subconsciously, that's a good sign.

VICTOR

Yeah, he doesn't miss much. But he's still calling for Mom and she's been gone over a year. That can't be good.

DOCTOR

Older memories and associations often resurface first. You'll have to be patient.

The Doctor takes note of the monitors again.

DOCTOR

I'll be back early tomorrow morning to check on your Dad. He's stable enough that you can go home for the night if you want. Nursing will call if anything changes.

PAULINA

We have much to do still. If he will be all right, we need to attend to the mother.

Paulina rises from Ramon's side and gathers her coat.

Victor takes Ramon's hand and tucks it under the bed blanket, leans over to Ramon's ear.

VICTOR

Good night old man. We're going to make your bread. Hang in there. You need to be around to have the real thing.

Ramon snores softly.

INT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Paulina enters, throws her coat over a chair and examines the grapes she put in the cheesecloth.

PAULINA

They are still good. I'll mix the sponge for the mother.

Victor drags himself into a chair next to the table, watches as Paulina mixes flour and water into the large ceramic bowl.

VICTOR

Don't you ever get tired? I'm beat.

Paulina takes the bunch of grapes wrapped in cheesecloth and gently compresses them with her hands, just breaking the skins. A few drops of juice drip on the table. She submerges the bag of grapes into the thin mixture of flour and water, gives the mixture a gentle stir.

PAULINA

The natural yeast from the grapes will start fermenting the wheat. It's a slow process, two days until we can see if it is good. We can rest now and let nature take its course. And hope that the yeast is happy here. For Ramon's sake.

VICTOR

And for yours.

PAULINA

And you!

Victor lays his head down on his arms, folded over the kitchen table.

VICTOR

(muffled by his arms)

Yeah, for me too. Okay, for all of us then. And for the great town of Westfield, and all the citizens, that they may have black bread again.

Paulina tidies up the table, putting away the flour, covering the bowl, as Victor rests. She wipes the table near him. Pauses. Hovers for a moment, one hand reaching out to stroke his head, almost. Pausing.

VICTOR

And for my father. May the black bread help him live happily ever after.

Paulina pulls her hand away from Victor's head.

PAULINA

Now I am tired. Good night Victor.

She leaves the kitchen, turning out all but one light.

Victor remains with his head on his arms on the table. In the dim light, only the soft shaking of his shoulders indicates the slow release of sadness.

INT. BAKERY KITCHEN - DAY

Victor sits at the side kitchen table, nursing a cup of coffee, staring blankly at his computer laptop -- or at nothing.

Paulina skips down the stairs into the kitchen, full of energy, tying her hair up into a pony tail.

PAULINA

You are early awake. Or did you not sleep?

Victor comes out of his reverie. A small smile crosses his face.

VICTOR

Oh, I slept. And when I awoke, I find out that I am without a job. I was fired yesterday. Nice, huh?

PAULINA

You mean from your other job?

VICTOR

Yes, the paying one.

PAULINA

Then, you have no.... reason to go back? You can.... stay?

Victor takes a slow sip of coffee. Thinks about this assumption.

VICTOR

I guess so. I am now a bakery manager. And a rehabilitation nurse.

PAULINA

You are a son. You heard from the Doctor?

VICTOR

Briefly. Dad's "stable," whatever the hell that means. But he is awake, so we should go soon.

PAULINA

We will bring him breakfast. I know what will make him happy.

Paulina gets busy cooking.

PAULINA

You want breakfast before we go?

VICTOR

What the hell, why not. Lay it on.

Paulina looks pleased. Victor notices her smile lights up the kitchen. He closes his laptop. He leans back in his chair, breathes deeply.

VICTOR

Yeah, what the hell.

INT. HOSPITAL, RAMON'S ROOM - DAY

RAMON'S HOSPITAL TRAY TABLE IS AN UNAPPETIZING DISPLAY OF TYPICAL HOSPITAL FARE: A CUP OF SEALED YOGURT, DRY SCRAMBLED EGGS, SOME WHITE TOAST, A CUP OF UNIDENTIFIABLE FRUIT. ALL UNTOUCHED.

Paulina's hand takes the tray away and replaces it with a smaller plate, covered in a brightly patterned tea towel. She whips the towel away revealing ...

RAMON

Prune perogies!

Ramon struggles to sit up in bed, staring with delight at the plate of petite prune-filled pastries. He looks at Paulina with joy as she fusses with napkins and utensils.

Victor fluffs up Ramon's pillow, adjusts the bed up and down, trying to get Ramon closer to the plate of pastries.

VICTOR

Prune perogies? Prunes? Is that a good thing to have now?

RAMON

Best breakfast in the world. It's a mover!

Paulina pours a small cup of steaming coffee from a thermos.

PAULINA

Comfort food, right Ramon?

RAMON

Absolutely. Food heals.

VICTOR

Dad, the doctor says you're doing good. But that you don't remember what happened yesterday.

Ramon chews a perogie carefully, thinking.

RAMON

You left in the morning. To get ... grapes?

VICTOR

That's right! Paulina and I got fresh grapes from a vineyard for the yeast. For your black bread.

RAMON

Right. Right. Then I ... something to do with

Ramon struggles with the memories.

VICTOR

You were in the storeroom. That's where I found you.

RAMON

I was? Hmm. -- Damn, Paulina, these perogies are excellent.

PAULINA

Ramon, try to remember what happened.

Ramon bites into another perogie.

RAMON

Nope. Is that bad?

VICTOR

Nah not as long you as know who we are.

RAMON

I can hardly forget *that*. By the way....

Ramon finishes the last perogie.

RAMON

Do you know where my wife is?

Victor visibly shudders.

INT. BAKERY KITCHEN - DAY

Victor paces the kitchen as Paulina works the mother dough into the large mixer.

Puffs of flour float up into the air as she pours in flours from different bags. She adjusts the mixer's speed as the rich brown dough thickens, the kneading hooks twisting and turning the future bread.

VICTOR

So his memory may not be quite right, but the doctor says he's regaining strength. There's weakness on his left side. He should be able to come home in a day or two. Do you think the bread will be ready? How is it? Is the yeast working?

Paulina continues monitoring the mixer, intent on the kneading dough.

PAULINA

Smell it.

Victor stops his pacing, leans hesitantly over the large whirring mixing bowl, takes a deep breath.

VICTOR

Smells yeasty alright. Tangy even. Is that right?

PAULINA

No, it should not be that strong. We do not want the sour taste to come through for the black bread.

VICTOR

Can you fix it?

PAULINA

It may take several batches to train the yeast. It is a good start.

VICTOR

A good start? Oh Brat.

Victor continues pacing as Paulina works the mixer.

EXT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY, SIDEWALK/STREET- DAY

Victor's Volvo pulls up to the curb outside the bakery. Victor helps Ramon out of the passenger side, the Father looking much smaller than the son.

Ramon stares up at his store. A new sign has been added to the big glass window-front. "Black Bread Bakery"

RAMON

Nice touch. Your idea?

VICTOR

The name? Both of us thought of it.

RAMON

Ah, so you're working as a team now?

VICTOR

Just like you told me to Dad.

RAMON

That's a first.

VICTOR

Now don't get cranky already.

RAMON

Just get me inside. How's the bread?

VICTOR

Umm, coming along.

RAMON

Hmph. What have you two been doing all this time?

INT. BAKERY KITCHEN - DAY

Paulina is working at the mixer, testing the next batch of dough. Seeing her at work, Ramon shakes off Victor's helpful grasp and makes a beeline for Paulina. Halfway there, he stumbles, catches himself on the kneading table. Victor rushes up.

VICTOR

Hey, hey, not so fast Dad, you're still a bit wobbly.

RAMON

I just tripped. I'm fine.

VICTOR

The doctor said....

RAMON

I said I'm fine!

He shrugs away Victor's helping hand. Victor hovers, uncertain how to help.

VICTOR

Okay. Paulina's working on your bread, see? Don't get in her way.

Paulina turns from her giant mixer and comes to Ramon, giving him a floury hug.

PAULINA

Ramon, you looking good. I have a treat for you soon.

VICTOR

This batch working out?

PAULINA

Yes. The texture is much better. The yeast is finding its pace. We are reaching an understanding.

RAMON

I'm glad someone understands what's going on around my bakery.

VICTOR

Dad, calm down. We have it under control. It just takes time. Paulina knows what she's doing.

PAULINA

The wild yeast needed a little taming, you know, Ramon.

She gives him a playful pinch on his left arm.

Ramon doesn't react.

Victor pinches his right arm.

RAMON

Ow, what the heck. I get it.

Paulina strokes his left arm.

PAULINA

You do not feel?

RAMON

My arm hurts like hell. The doctor says it may stop. Or not. Nothing he can do about it. Criss-crossed nerves or something.

PAULINA

But you do not feel this?

She strokes his arm again.

RAMON

Feel what? I told you my whole arm hurts. Now enough of these games. I'm sure you all have work to do. Victor, you just standing around getting in her way or are you helping?

VICTOR

Now, just a minute Dad. We're working together just fine. And taking care of you, I might add.

RAMON

Well you don't have to "take care of me". I can take care of myself. Let's get this bakery rolling! I haven't got forever you know.

Paulina turns back to her mixer.

PAULINA

Soon, Ramon, soon.

INT. UPSTAIRS BAKERY, RAMON'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Ramon lays in his bed in a jumble of cozy blankets. A troubled sleep.

Victor stands in the bedroom doorway, watching his father.

Paulina walks behind Victor in the hallway, stops, joins him in the doorway. They both spend a quiet moment watching over Ramon.

VICTOR

I wonder what he's dreaming about.

PAULINA

Your mother.

VICTOR

Yeah, that was spooky, when he asked where he left her.

PAULINA

My Father often thought that way about my Mother. When you are together so long, you're never really apart again. Nothing separates you. Not even death.

VICTOR

Love immortal. I wonder if that is a good thing or

PAULINA

How could it not be good? To be together forever with someone you love. You do not believe in this?

VICTOR

Haven't had the chance yet.

PAULINA

No chances. You fall in love.

VICTOR

But it takes two. What if there is no one.

Paulina grips Victor's arm.

PAULINA

You think too much.

She kisses him on the cheek. Lightly.

Victor, startled, backs up into the door frame. Touches his cheek. He leans toward Paulina, kisses her back. A longing kiss. A grateful embrace. A release.

RAMON (O.S.)

Having fun?

Victor looks over at his Father without releasing Paulina. Awake in bed, Ramon is watching.

VICTOR

I'm having a life.

RAMON

About time.

Ramon struggles to raise himself up in bed but the twisted blankets have him trapped.

Paulina extricates herself from Victor's embrace to help Ramon.

Victor untwists and straightens the blankets while Paulina props up pillows.

RAMON

So how long have my son and my baker been in love?

VICTOR

For a while.

Paulina shoots Victor an "oh really?" look.

PAULINA

Ramon, I have something for you. Be back.

Paulina leaves. Victor fusses with the blankets and pillows.

RAMON

Sorry, I was such a bastard yesterday. I don't know what the hell was wrong with me. Feeling morose, I guess.

VICTOR

You don't need to apologize. I'm sure I'd feel like crap too, after what you've been through. But you're doing better, right?

Ramon pulls the blankets up around his chest.

RAMON

I'm scared.

VICTOR

I know.

RAMON

After your mother had a stroke she was never the same. Never recovered. It was awful watching her waste away. I'm glad the end was quick. I couldn't stand to see her suffer. Couldn't stand seeing her become someone else. I don't want to go through that--again.

VICTOR

But she had the other kind. Bleeding in the brain. You had a clot. Doctor says it's easier to recover from that.

Ramon lays back against the pillows.

RAMON

I saw her.

VICTOR

Who? Saw who?

RAMON

Your Mother. When I, you know, when I had the fall.

VICTOR

That's not uncommon. It was a dream.

RAMON

Did I ask for her in the hospital?

VICTOR

Sure did. Gave me the chills.

RAMON

It was so real. Like she was there with me. By my side, just like you are here, right now. And then I lost her. Again.

VICTOR

I am sure she was there, Dad. Looking after you.

RAMON

You don't believe in that. You're an atheist, for Christ's sake. No pun intended.

VICTOR

It's what you believe that matters. I think

Paulina enters the bedroom carrying a tray.

RAMON

Is that the bread?

PAULINA

Only you can tell...

She brings the tray to the bedside, serves Ramon a hefty slice of dark black bread.

RAMON

Still warm!

He smells it, following the now familiar ritual of savoring the bread. He takes a slow bite. Chews thoughtfully.

RAMON

That's it! I've died and gone to heaven!

Paulina beams, hands a slice to Victor who performs the ritual.

VICTOR

Mmmm. I'm swearing off pastries. This is soooo good.

RAMON

See? When you have good food, you don't need all that other crap.

VICTOR

Is this how it was when you were a kid?

RAMON

This is better, I swear.

Paulina appraises her two men, sits on the bed close to Victor.

PAULINA

Now comes hard part. Running a bakery. Making enough bread, but not too much. Paying the bills.

RAMON

Trust me, they will be beating down our door. Victor, do we have enough supplies to open?

VICTOR

You bet. I'll order more as soon as we see what the demand is.

RAMON

You better order more now. Can we open in time for the weekend? Paulina, you're in charge. What do we do next?

Paulina takes one of Ramon's hands, one of Victor's - a triangle.

PAULINA

We bake!

INT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY, KITCHEN - DAY/NIGHT

MONTAGE:

Victor hauls sacks of flour from the storeroom to Paulina's station.

Ramon sits at the kneading table, measuring out precise volumes of salt and oil into glass bowls.

Paulina hefts flour into the big mixer.

Victor checks a thermometer in one of the big ovens.

Ramon snoozes on a chair in the corner of the kitchen.

Victor, covered in flour dust from the waist up, cuts chunks of dough into a row of proofing trays under the watchful guidance of Paulina.

Ramon, his left arm in a sling, pokes rising loaves of black bread, testing for firmness.

Paulina guides Victor as he pushes loaves of dough into a hot oven with a baker's peel. She sprays water into the oven, resulting a rush of steam as Victor quickly closes the oven door. She sprays his sweaty face with the water hose. He threatens to whack her with the peel. She grabs him and kisses him into submission.

EXT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY, SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Victor puts out a large black and white sandwich board sign on the sidewalk.

INSERT: BAKERY GRAND OPENING TODAY!

Paulina dances out the front door of the bakery to join Victor by the sign.

Ramon props himself in the doorway, looking happy but very tired.

The sun rises in the east, painting the bakery storefront with autumn light. Victor and Paulina share a quiet embrace on the sidewalk.

Yawning, Ramon nods approval from the doorway of his bakery as the morning sun highlights his old face.

INT. NEW WORLD POLISH BAKERY, STORE FRONT - DAY

Ramon stands at attention behind the bakery counter as Paulina finishes loading fresh loaves of black bread into the glass case.

Victor mans the front door, preparing to open the store to the first customers. With a nod from Paulina, Victor unlocks the door and props it open. He takes his place next to the cash register.

A few curious locals file into the bakery store: A YOUNG COUPLE hand in hand, an OLD GENTLEMAN dressed in a well-worn suit, a YOUNG MOTHER with a CHILD.

They look around the bakery: dozens of loaves of black bread grace the shelves. A tray of fist-sized black bread rolls fills a side case. Elegant twisted baguettes of black bread crusted with fennel and caraway seeds spike out of tall wicker basket.

OLD GENTLEMAN CUSTOMER

Bread? You are only selling bread?

YOUNG MOTHER

No pastries? No cakes?

CHILD

No donuts?

RAMON

We make and sell the best Polish black bread ever made.

CHILD

Cupcakes?

VICTOR

Once you taste it, you'll never want a cupcake again.

RAMON

Bread. Whole grained. The staff of life.

YOUNG COUPLE

The baker who was here before had pastries. To go with coffee.

RAMON

Try the black bread with creamy butter. Warm from the oven.

The Young Couple turn to go. Paulina knows what to do.

PAULINA

We have samples.

Paulina whips out a platter with slices of black bread piled high. Ah, something free!

The customers gather around the counter. Each takes a slice. The Young Mother hands a big piece to her son. At first, there is silence as they inspect, smell and consume the slices of black bread.

OLD GENTLEMAN CUSTOMER

Mmmmmmm!

YOUNG COUPLE

Wow.

CHILD

It's alright, I guess. Can I have another piece?

RAMON

You've never had anything like it, right?

OLD GENTLEMAN CUSTOMER

This reminds me....

VICTOR

Let me guess, of bread you had in your childhood?

OLD GENTLEMAN CUSTOMER

Yes! Yes. So good. So many memories. I have not had anything this good in years. Thank you! I'll take two loaves!

YOUNG COUPLE

Two for us, too!

YOUNG MOTHER

One for me and one for little Edward!

Paulina quickly wraps up the loaves in brown paper.

VICTOR

The rolls make great sandwiches.

YOUNG COUPLE

Four of those, too. We can have a picnic today.

OLD GENTLEMAN CUSTOMER

You'll be open tomorrow?

RAMON

Of course.

OLD GENTLEMAN CUSTOMER

Black bread. Real Polish black bread. Wait until I tell my friends.

VICTOR

That's right, tell everyone about The Black Bread Bakery.

The old gentleman walks out with his two loaves of bread. Turns in the doorway.

OLD GENTLEMAN CUSTOMER

And I thought today was just a Saturday.

YOUNG COUPLE

We teach at the college. I hope you are prepared for an onslaught when word gets around there. Make sure you save some for us!

CHILD

Me, too! Save some for me!

Ramon beams.

As the Young Mother and Child leave, two more CUSTOMERS wander in off the street.

CHILD

The best bread in the whole entire world!
Isn't it Mom?

FOURTH CUSTOMER

What is that heavenly smell?

YOUNG COUPLE

You better start baking again!

The Young Couple leave, but they are stopped by a SECOND COUPLE outside the front window, to whom they briefly chat letting them smell their loaves and then point into the bakery.

The SECOND COUPLE make a beeline into the bakery.

DISSOLVE TO:

The store is buzzing with people.

Bread is sacked, laughter spreads.

Ramon struggles with one arm but Paulina helps him wrap loaves and rolls.

Victor mans the register: a whirlwind of cash changes hands, THIS makes him smile.

The glass case quickly empties.

Paulina refills it with fresh loaves.

New customers get even more excited over the warm fresh-from-the-oven loaves. People buy two, three, four loaves at time. It's like a drug.

Ramon wraps bread, banter with customers, hands out samples.

Victor works the register. Paulina hustles back and forth from the ovens to the storefront.

INT. STORE FRONT, BEHIND THE COUNTER - DAY

Ramon, Paulina and Victor sit on the floor behind the counter. They are exhausted but giddy with success. The bread case is empty but the cash register drawer on Victor's lap is full.

VICTOR

Unreal. Is it going to be like this everyday?

RAMON

I'm exhausted.

VICTOR

I'm starving!

Paulina reaches into a cabinet behind her and extracts a paper bag. She pulls out three large rolls of glossy black bread.

RAMON

Thank God you saved some!

VICTOR

You don't know how many times I tried to get one for myself today.

They devour the rolls.

VICTOR

Who would have thought these would be so popular? And oh so good?

RAMON

I did.

PAULINA

It was never like this in Poland. I did not know Americans were so--hungry.

VICTOR

We're going to do really well. You have any idea how much money we took in today?

They both look to Victor.

RAMON

Enough to buy more supplies I hope?

VICTOR

Way enough.

PAULINA

Now we do it all over again.

VICTOR

This is much harder than writing software.

RAMON

Welcome to the real world.

PAULINA

Every day we bake. Every day we clean.
Every day we sell. It is the way of the
baker. Are you two ready?

RAMON

It's what I want. I'll work 'til I drop.
What else is there to live for?

Paulina looks at Victor.

VICTOR

Why not? I don't have a job now,
remember?

RAMON

What? Since when?

VICTOR

Since you were in the hospital. I got
fired for being away so long. To heck
with 'em if they can't take a joke.

RAMON

You never told me that your job was in
jeopardy. You really want to stay?

Victor takes Paulina's hand.

VICTOR

More than ever. If it's okay with
Paulina?

She kisses Victor on the cheek, turns and kisses Ramon on
his cheek.

PAULINA

My right-hand men. You are in so much trouble.

INT. BAKERY KITCHEN - NIGHT

CLOSE-UPS OF TIME: WALL CLOCK 5:45, OVEN TIMER -0:35, -0:34.... DIGITAL WRISTWATCH - 5:46 AM. ZOOM OUT FROM THE WRISTWATCH ON RAMON'S ARM.

A bleary-eyed Ramon hand-forms rolls from a long rope of black bread dough.

Across the table, Paulina expertly braids a loaf of challah -- from golden dough.

Ramon eyes her across the table.

RAMON

I don't know Paulina, selling Christmas bread is one thing but white bread? I thought we were only going to make black bread. The Black Bread Bakery, remember?

PAULINA

It is a special order. For our neighbors down the street. They asked me. Don't you have fond memories of sweet bread for Christmas?

RAMON

My mother used to make it. Really yellow from all the egg yokes. Too sweet for me. But it does remind me of Christmas. As if that is a good thing. I suppose it's alright to make it. But only as a special.

Paulina finishes the braid and covers it with a towel to rise.

PAULINA

You are making the rolls too large. They will not bake evenly.

RAMON

It's the same as I always form them.

PAULINA

You are tired. Let me finish. You should rest.

Ramon waves her away.

RAMON

Bah! I can do my share of work. Don't treat me like an old man.

PAULINA

My father was stubborn, too but he knew when to let me take over.

Ramon reaches for another chunk of dough, knocks it on the floor. Paulina quickly scoops it up, forms it into shape and puts it on a separate sheet to rise.

PAULINA

That one is for us.

RAMON

Damn it. Let me do my work.

Victor enters the kitchen, carrying clean proofing trays.

VICTOR

Are you two fighting again? What did I tell you about playing nice? Dad you really should rest.

Victor gives Paulina a playful hug. Ramon glares at him.

RAMON

Conspiring against me. That's what you two are doing.

PAULINA

We are not fighting. I was comparing stubbornness. Not conspiring.

RAMON

Stubbornness keeps me alive.

VICTOR

That's what the doctor promised.

Ramon finishes forming the rolls.

PAULINA

I'll make breakfast while the first batch bakes. We open in 2 hours.

RAMON

I'm going to get some air.

Ramon leaves the kitchen, heading out the front door of the bakery, struggling with his limp arm into a heavy coat and pulling on a knit cap.

PAULINA

Do not go far, breakfast will be hot in fifteen minutes.

Ramon grunts as he closes the front door behind him, the bell leaves an echoing jingle.

VICTOR

He's getting worse.

PAULINA

What is it that the doctor said?

VICTOR

The weakness in the left side is progressing. He may lose control of it completely. And I know it still hurts him, though he doesn't complain.

Paulina stirs a pot of polenta on the stove.

PAULINA

Just like my father.

VICTOR

Have you heard from him?

PAULINA

Breakfast is almost ready. Try to find your Father.

Victor opens the front door, peering out into the pre-dawn darkness.

EXT. BAKERY SIDEWALK - NIGHT

VICTOR

Dad! Dad! Breakfast.

Victor peers down the street, up the street.

VICTOR

Where did he

Ramon walks up out of the darkness just as a taxi pulls up in front of the bakery. The driver rolls down the passenger side front window, leaning out.

TAXI DRIVER

Is this a bakery? A Polish bakery on Pleasant Street?

VICTOR

Yes. But we are not open yet.

TAXI DRIVER

I have a passenger looking for you.

VICTOR

We're not open yet.

The rear window of the taxi rolls down. A familiar face, sporting sunglasses, peers out at nothing in particular.

RAMON

Zabrovski?

INT. BAKERY KITCHEN - NIGHT

Paulina, Victor, and Ramon sit around the kitchen table eyeing Zabrovski as he sits at the head of the table, sipping hot coffee. They have bowls of steaming polenta in front of them.

The blind Chef looks much the same, his clothes a bit more wrinkled than usual after his long flight.

ZABROVSKI

The airlines are very kind to blind people. Such attention! I think they are afraid we will break something.

RAMON

You are here to check on the bakery? To see, I mean celebrate, Paulina's success?

ZABROVSKI

It is my pleasure. Petrovski was very pleased to hear his daughter is so successful in America. It made him very happy.

Paulina sits staring at Zabrovski, waiting for the inevitable.

RAMON

And how is the old baker?

Zabrovski reaches down to feel for his bag. Finds it and unzips it. Brings out a porcelain urn. Sets it on the table.

ZABROVSKI

He is happy. Especially if his daughter is happy as well.

Paulina bows her head. A shudder passes through her.

INT. PAULINA'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Paulina sits on her bed, holding her Father's urn. Victor pokes his head in the doorway.

VICTOR

You doing okay? We're cleaning up downstairs. Dad put out a sign that we're closed tomorrow. It will give us some time to rest.

Paulina strokes the urn.

PAULINA

Come here -- please?

Victor sits on the bed next to her.

VICTOR

Can I get you something?

She puts the urn on a small table next to her Mother's urn.

PAULINA

Just hold me.

Victor whole-heartedly obliges.

PAULINA

I did not think that I would feel this alone. They are all gone now. Brother, Mother, Father. How odd it is to be the last one.

VICTOR

You have us.

PAULINA

I want....

VICTOR

What? What can I get you?

PAULINA

I want a child. To continue on. You understand? You know this feeling?

She has taken him completely unaware with her total honesty.

VICTOR

You really want that--with me?

PAULINA

With you.

Victor kisses her, holds her hands.

VICTOR

I don't know what kind of father I will be.

With her foot, she closes the bedroom door.

PAULINA

You think too much.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ramon and Zabrovski sit at the kitchen table. Zabrovski is enjoying a sandwich made with the black bread. They each have a small glass of vodka, the bottle between them. Ramon's left arm is in a sling.

RAMON

It was good of you to bring the news personally.

ZABROVSKI

One cannot deliver such news otherwise. Petrovski and I are friends. I be sure Paulina was with good family.

RAMON

I have the feeling she was expecting the news.

ZABROVSKI

She did not tell you? Last they talked, Petrovski said goodbye. She knew.

RAMON

She's an exceptionally strong woman. Reminds me very much of

ZABROVSKI

I said you would find her.

RAMON

So you did.

ZABROVSKI

And now she is part of your family. You and Victor are very lucky.

RAMON

Especially Victor. I just hope he marries her.

ZABROVSKI

And you? You have your bakery. You have your wonderful black bread. You have a family. You are full of luck.

Ramon considers this. Pours more vodka.

RAMON

Did Petrovski know he was going to die?

ZABROVSKI

This bread is excellent!

RAMON

Did he?

ZABROVSKI

He said it was time. He knew Paulina was happy. She spoke of being in love. That was enough for him. He knew she would not be coming back to Poland. So it was time.

RAMON

Was he very ill?

ZABROVSKI

No more than he had been. He just decided.

RAMON

Just like that?

ZABROVSKI

I simplify. But ... yes. We know when it is time.

Ramon steers Zabrovski's hand to the vodka glass. Takes up his own and toasts.

RAMON

To knowing.

ZABROVSKI

When it is right.

They drink.

INT. BAKERY STORE FRONT - DAY - SPRING

The bakery store bustles with customers.

A huge vase of spring-time daffodils graces the counter.

Paulina hustles with bread from the kitchen to the store. It's apparent she has a bun in the oven as well.

Victor helps her carry bread and runs the register.

Zabrovski is outside the store on the sidewalk, terrorizing pedestrians with his white cane while offering free samples of bread.

Ramon sits behind the counter on a stool, propped in a corner, watching over his bakery. His left arm rests in a sling, all but useless. The left side of his face noticeably droops, leaving a wry smile. Despite his deterioration, or because of it, he looks content.

A noon-time influx creates temporary chaos in the bakery store. People are in a rush to get the famous black bread before it runs out, as it does, every day.

Among the adults clamoring for loaves, the CHILD who was among the first customers, patiently waves his money in the air, not quite tall enough to be clearly seen among the adults. He jumps up and down, hoping to get noticed.

From his perch, Ramon peers over the counter, watching the CHILD strive for attention. Ramon nudges Paulina, nodding towards the CHILD. Paulina's face lights up. She leans over the bread case.

PAULINA

So, you made it in time!

The CHILD smiles broadly and waves the cash.

CHILD

Two, please!

Paulina wraps up two loaves and grabs an extra bun, comes around the counter to deliver the precious bread.

The CHILD takes the bread, giving Paulina the money, hugs the loaves and breathes deeply their wonderful smell.

Paulina hands him the roll and plants a quick kiss on his forehead.

PAULINA

For my favorite customer!

The child looks up in wonder at this goddess of bread as she gets back to work.

In the corner, Ramon rests in the chair with his eyes closed, a smile on his face. Victor, admiring the ritual, notices his Father's stillness.

INT. PAULINA AND VICTOR'S BEDROOM - DAY

CLOSE UP: A LITTLE ALTER IN THE CORNER OF THE BEDROOM WHERE THE SUN SHINES IN THROUGH THE WINDOW. TWO RED AND BROWN URNS GLOW IN THE SUNSHINE. NEARBY, A PICTURE OF A YOUNG PETROVSKI WITH A PRETTY YET COMMANDING WOMAN ABOUT THE SAME AGE, BOTH WEARING BAKERS' UNIFORMS.

Victor's hands place a blue enameled urn next to the two other urns. Paulina's hands carefully position a picture of a smiling Ramon holding a prized loaf of black bread.

Victor places a glossy bun of black bread next to the picture. On the wall above the alter is the picture of his Mother from Ramon's room.

Victor and Paulina stand for a moment in front of the little altar. She places her hands on her swelling belly, takes Victor's hand and places it near her navel.

VICTOR

Hey little Ramon. You ready to be a baker? We need some help out here.

Paulina gives Victor her playful pinch.

PAULINA

Give our son some break! But we need to get to work.

VICTOR

I know, the yeast waits for no man.

EXT. BAKERY STORE FRONT - DAY

Victor opens the front door of the bakery, turns around the OPEN sign, ready to start the day. He steps out into the sunlit sidewalk.

A SIGN PAINTER is just finishing up retouching the front window sign. Victor steps back to approve it.

Victor gives it a thumbs-up.

Paulina pops out the front door, hands the SIGN PAINTER a big roll of black bread. He devours it with gusto. She admires the new sign.

INSERT: BREAD FOR OUR FATHER BAKERY

Several couples walk up the sidewalk, pat Victor on the back, hug Paulina. They all file into the bakery. Time for work. Time to buy the daily bread.

More PEOPLE head into the bakery. They stream out carrying loaves of bread.

The CHILD runs up the sidewalk, a handful of dollars clutched in his hand. He pauses to admire the new sign, gives it a thumbs-up, runs inside the bakery.

Fade to black.

The End

In memory of Edward Ramon Stasielowski 1918-2013