

THE WILD EAST

Written by
Valesca van Rees

A Georgian jockey learns the hard way that brothers and sisters can quickly become enemies in times of war.

Copyright (c) 2016 (CC Proof, Amsterdam)

Final Draft

FADE IN

EXT. PYATIGORSK, HIPPODROME RACE TRACK - DAY

(1991)

Beyond the elongated green step lie green low hills in the distance.

Loud monotone woman's voice (Russian) from the speaker commentating incomprehensibly on the race, mixed with the sound of many galloping hooves.

Sandy hippodrome race track. Flaking paint on the white sagging iron fence. Wild grass, too high, in the middle of the track.

Skinny jockeys, wearing colourful caps and shirts on nine bony race horses, hunt the first placed green jockey.

Above the sandy race track hang sand clouds where the horses have just passed by.

A pink jockey, SHALVA (21), rides close behind three riders.

Shalva, with mud spots covering his face, looks ahead.

Chasing the three, he focuses on the yellow and red jockeys. He sees how the blue jockey is slowly overtaken by them. They gallop so close to the blue jockey that they touch his legs.

Shalva surveys the scene and shakes his head almost imperceptibly.

He beholds how the blue jockey tries with all his strength to ride away by speeding up. Shalva right behind them, waits to see what will happen.

Unexpectedly the yellow jockey raises his whip and hits the blue jockey in the face. Blue jockey tries to block the beating with his hand. The red jockey on the other hand grabs the girth and quickly pulls it loose.

Shalva stares at the drama in front of him. The blue jockey loses balance and falls.

Shalva holds his breath as his horse's legs narrowly miss the blue jockey when he hits the ground.

Shalva now looks angrily at the two jockeys. The yellow and red jockeys look back at him.

The blue jockey's horse continues the race alone.

Aggressively Shalva urges his horse to accelerate. He passes the yellow and red jockeys on the inside.

For a moment he looks sideways at them. Then he concentrates on the riderless horse in front of him.

The monotonous comments from the speaker continues as Shalva begins his final few hundred meters.

Shalva has now almost reached the typical Russian style, ochre grandstand with a strange little white turret on the roof. The main parts of the small side windows are broken.

He notices the guests on the top floor of the grandstand sitting at the tables covered in white tablecloths and cheap crockery. They eat, drink and chat. They watch the race with little interest. Only a few children jump and cheer on the balcony.

Shalva glances at them.

The people on the first floor cheer and jump.

Shalva grins.

The incomprehensible monotonous voice from the speaker goes a little faster.

Shalva's horse is tired and he loses much speed in the last meters. He tries to speed up his horse but the horse cannot.

Shalva is overtaken first on the left side by the yellow jockey and then on the right by the red jockey. They grin at him when they pass.

The monotonous voice becomes excited and a little higher in tone.

The green jockey passes the grandstand in first place.

People cheer and applaud. Green jockey waves his whip.

DISSOLVE TO:

Beyond the elongated green step lie green low hills in the distance.

The more excited monotonous voice, a little higher in tone, mixed with the sound of galloping hooves and cheering.

TITLE FILM - **THE WILD EAST**

DISSOLVE TO:

The rider less horse passes the grandstand in second place, she's followed by the yellow and red jockeys.

Shalva passes a fraction of a second later. Over the finish line he shakes his head. He pets his horse.

Other racers finish after him.

The voice in the speaker continues.

Shalva slows his horse down after a hundred meters.

A young man, FAGRAT, runs to the horse and takes the reins.

An older man, MR DAVID IVANOVICH, leans casually over the white iron fence and watches the pink jockey. Shalva looks at him for a second.

Shalva jumps off.

Shalva is quite tall for a jockey. He is slim with long skinny legs wearing new black leather Soviet soldier boots that are too wide.

Shalva shakes hands with Fagrat. They hug.

Suddenly Shalva sees the YELLOW JOCKEY, OLEG, who is on his way back to the grandstand and passing him on the horse.

Shalva lets go of Fragrat, he rushes to the yellow jockey.

Unexpectedly he grabs the horse's reigns and stops the horse.

SHALVA
(Russian)
Russian cheater.

Oleg jumps off and stands chest to chest with Shalva.

OLEG
(Russian)
Careful, Georgian. Careful.

Shalva lets go of the horse and grabs the man's shirt with both hands. The older man steps in between.

MR DAVID IVANOVICH
(Russian)
Ho, Shalva. Come. Let go.

Shalva looks at the older man and lets go. Oleg looks at him.

OLEG
(Russian)
No wonder you can't hold on to your
country.

Shalva, in one movement, puts both his hands on Oleg's shoulder, steps with one leg firmly forwards behind Oleg's legs and Oleg falls over Shalva's hip backwards onto the ground with Shalva on top of him.

The older man grins while he gently puts his hand on Shalva's shoulder.

MR DAVID IVANOVICH
(Russian)
Leave it, Shalva.

He turns to Oleg on the ground.

MR DAVID IVANOVICH (cont'd)
(Russian)
He's right, Oleg.

Oleg gazes at Shalva as he gets up and walks to his horse.

Shalva turns to his horse too. He swift-handedly takes off the saddle. He leaves the saddle-pad. Fagrat pats Shalva on the shoulder, jumps onto the horse and trots away.

Shalva walks with the older man to the fence. Shalva looks at him. The man nods.

MR DAVID IVANOVICH (cont'd)
(Russian))
Better go home, Shalva.

Shalva looks at the saddle.

MR DAVID IVANOVICH (cont'd)
(Russian)
Hell breaks loose in South Ossetia.
Things change here too.

Shalva stares at the man. The man pats his shoulder.

Shalva hands over the saddle. The old man hangs the saddle over the fence. He takes money from his pocket and gives it to the jockey.

Shalva takes the money hesitantly.

SHALVA

(Russian)

Thank you, Mr David Ivanovich.

Shalva looks at the hippodrome behind him.

Suddenly the people applaud and cheer again.

The men look at the grandstand for a second. Three riders, including the yellow jockey, are facing the cheering crowd. Shalva shakes his head.

MR DAVID IVANOVICH

(Russian)

Maybe next year again.

Shalva looks at him.

The men shake hands. The older man takes the saddle and walks away. Shalva looks at the money, counts it and puts it in his pocket. He sighs deeply.

Loud Russian march music comes from the speakers.

Shalva leaves the sandy track. He takes off his pink cap.

On the adjacent grass runway he looks around him while walking alongside the stable barracks that surround the racetrack.

With big strides the jockey continues on the muddy path. His long arms are just slightly too far away from his body and move with each step.

EXT. PYATIGORSK, HIPPODROME STABLE BARRACKS - DAY

Shalva walks around on the path. Along the path are many stable barracks built parallel to the track with their entrances facing the course.

As he walks along the path he is greeted by people who sit on the doorsteps because they live in the barracks or work there. He nods to everyone.

Shalva enters the stable barrack opposite the grand stand.

INT. PYATIGORSK, HIPPODROME STABLE BARRACK - DAY

There is a little light from the high stable window into the stable box sized space.

Horses neighing and muttering

The small brick stone space is empty except for a water hose and a drain, a filthy plastic soap box with a tiny piece of soap on the floor, and a broken mirror in a light blue plastic frame hangs on one of the wooden beams.

With a naked torso the jockey washes his muddy boots with the water from the hose.

Shalva is muscular; his muscles move beneath his skin as he moves his body.

The sound of Fagrat and the horse entering the stables.

FAGRAT

Shalva!

Shalva turns off the water and listens.

Horse feet entering a stable, a door closes and footsteps come closer.

SHALVA

(Russian)

Here!

Fagrat steps into the water place.

FAGRAT

(Russian)

Shota called.

SHALVA

(Russian)

Again?

FAGRAT

(Russian)

He worries that you will not make it on time for the Bagmaro Race.

SHALVA

(Russian)

I sold my saddle. I'll be in Tbilisi tomorrow evening.

FAGRAT

(Russian)

You fly this evening.

Shalva studies his boots.

SHALVA
 (Russian)
 I'll go by bus.

Fagrat's face turns serious.

FAGRAT
 (Russian)
 You can't.

SHALVA
 (Russian)
 I'll have too. I've no money to go by
 plane.

FAGRAT
 (Russian)
 It's really not safe! Someone has to
 send you money.

SHALVA
 (Russian)
 I tried. This is my last chance to be
 on time. You know how important
 Bagmaro Race is for Shota.

FAGRAT
 (Russian)
 He talked about his horse, Sadapi,
 for almost half an hour.

Shalve becomes serious.

SHALVA
 (Russian)
 Will you come to the Caucasus Cup?

FAGRAT
 (Russian)
 You won last year.
 (sadly)
 The trainer thinks we cannot compete
 in Georgia any more.

Shalva turns on the water again and quickly washes the sweat
 from his chest, back and neck.

SHALVA
 (Russian)
 It's all falling apart, Fagrat. Life
 was good. We competed all over the
 Soviet Union.
 (MORE)

SHALVA (cont'd)
We had good salaries and could fly to
Moscow just for fun. What's left of
it? Nothing.

Shalva turns to Fagrat.

SHALVA (cont'd)
(Russian)
Tell Shota I'll be there on time.

Fagrat nods. They hug and Fagrat leaves.

Shalva pours water over his hair and onto his face. He
shakes his head and splutters loudly.

Then Shalva disappears into the empty horse box next to the
watering place.

Splashing water in the straw

The jockey returns with his britches still open. He washes
his hands and starts pulling his light blue shirt over his
wet skin.

While buttoning up his shirt he listens to the horses
neighing and muttering. He looks tired and sighs sadly.

EXT. PYATIGORSK, HIPPODROME STABLE BARRACK - NIGHT

The stable door opens. Shalva, now dressed in a pair of dark
blue jeans, brown shoes and socks and the light blue shirt,
leaves the stable. He carefully closes the stable doors
behind him.

Shalva carries a medium sized heavy green duffle bag over
his shoulders.

The jockey passes the barracks at the other side of the
track walking toward the grand stand. It's quiet and dark.
There's only one lamp working near the grand stand.

At the last barrack Shalva looks back at the hippodrome.
Then he follows a dark path between the barracks area and
the racecourse office until he reaches the road with the
railway station.

A long train passes slowly. On the side of the train are big
white letters: CCCR.

For a moment Shalva is watching the train. Then he follows
the long path along the rails to the centre of Pyatigorsk.

A second long slow freight train passes him but Shalva doesn't seem to notice.

Shalva arrives at the bus station in the old city centre. The office is still open, Shalva enters.

INT. PYATIGORSK, BUS OFFICE - NIGHT

An older CASHIER WOMAN sits at the desk. Shalva heads towards her. He places his green duffle bag at his feet and leans on the high counter.

SHALVA
(Russian)
Good evening.

The older cashier woman acts as if Shalva's not there. She pretends to be busy by reading a document.

Shalva tries to be patient. He looks around the dull place.

CASHIER WOMAN
(emotionless in Russian)
Yes?

Slowly she looks up at the young man. Shalva looks at her friendly.

SHALVA
(Russian)
Are there Georgians on tonight's bus
to Tbilisi?

The woman suddenly looks at Shalva and studies his appearance.

CASHIER WOMAN
(coldly in Russian)
Plenty.

Shalva hesitates.

SHALVA
(Russian)
Are you sure.

The woman looks aggressively at Shalva.

CASHIER WOMAN
(Russian)
Do you want a ticket or not!

The woman starts reading again. Shalva puts some coins and notes on the counter and waits.

The cashier looks from the money to the jockey. She takes a pen and slowly writes a ticket. She carefully counts the money. Then writes a receipt. She puts the ticket, receipt and change on the counter.

CASHIER WOMAN (cont'd)
(coldly in Russian)
Fifty-six. The bus leaves in three
hours. The bus is open.

The woman continues reading.

Shalva picks up the documents. He folds them in half and puts them in his pocket with his passport. He puts the change in his wallet. He puts the wallet in his back pocket.

When he walks away the older lady watches him go outside.

EXT. PYATIGORSK, BUS-STATION - NIGHT

A few buses are parked at the bus station.

Shalva finds the old red-white Soviet bus with number fifty-six. The doors are open. He gets in.

INT. PYATIGORSK, BUS PARKED AT THE STATION - NIGHT

He's the first.

The bus is old. The curtains on the bus are dirty and most are torn, this applies also to the seats.

Shalva looks around. He takes a seat in the middle of the bus by the window.

Shalva sits back. He looks out of the window. Then he nestles into his seat, closes his eyes and falls asleep.

INT. PYATIGORSK, BUS PARKED AT THE STATION - NIGHT

(3 AM)

The engine starts. Shalva wakes up. He is surprised and looks around him sleepily.

He sees that all seats are occupied by Azerie market saleswomen in their long dark dresses and black scarves around their heads.

Shalva looks more carefully around. He is the only male passenger on the bus and the only Georgian.

Shalva sits back in his seat, thinks and shakes his head. He looks doubtfully; he touches his duffle bag, sits up straight, almost stands up to leave, then he sits back again, closes his eyes and sighs.

An OLDER WOMAN next to the jockey tries to get her heavy bag in the luggage rack above her but she cannot reach. Shalva is suddenly aware of the woman's struggle. He stands up.

SHALVA

(Russian)

Please.

He takes the bag and puts it up on the rack. He looks at the woman again and nods. The woman smiles. They sit.

A YOUNG WOMAN with large dark eyes sitting at the other side of the aisle turns to them. She stares at Shalva. Shalva notices her, he smiles and nods. The young woman quickly looks in front of her. Shalva silently laughs when she does so.

Slowly the bus starts to move. The engine makes a heavy sound and the bus vibrates tremendously.

Shalva looks out of the window. He makes the sign of a cross and tries to relax. He looks aside to the older woman; she stares in front of her. Shalva closes his eyes.

INT. SOUTH OSSETIA, BUS AT A ROAD BLOCK - NIGHT

(4 AM)

The bus reduces speed. Shalva opens his eyes, he pushes aside the dirty curtain.

It's completely dark outside, no lights and no moon.

The bus manoeuvres slowly around some invisible obstacles and continues.

Shalva looks around in the dark bus. Most women seem to be sleeping. Shalva leans back his head and closes his eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BAGMARO, RACE - DAY

(dream)

Rough rocky hillside.

Shalva on his horse gallops over the rocks. They are leading. Its slippery. The horse slips down the hill, both horse and rider fall and slide down a little.

Shalva, with torn clothes and bleeding skin, stands up and looks at his horse. The horse gets up again too. On one side part of the skin is gone. Quickly Shalva examines the horse, then he mounts the horse again and continues galloping.

Further down the hill, just around the corner is the finish. Shalva can hear the music.

EXT. BAGMARO, FINISH - DAY

A rider is galloping fast down the hill. Both rider and horse are completely covered in blood. When they come closer women start to scream.

The rider finishes in first place. The crowd is staring at the two in shock.

Shalva is wiping blood out of his eyes and laughs when he looks at himself and the horse. He's won!

(end of dream)

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NALCHIK, BUS AT A CHECK POINT - NIGHT

(4:30 AM)

Shalva suddenly awakes, startled. He is breathing heavily, recovering from a dream. He sees two Khabardino-Balkarian soldiers standing inside the bus. They collect passports.

Shalva looks around. He feels the shirt pocket that holds his passport.

A FAT SOLDIER stands the closest and looks at him. Shalva looks at the floor as if trying to become invisible.

FAT SOLDIER

(Russian)

Passport!

Shalva looks up at the man. The other doesn't show any emotion. Slowly Shalva takes his passport from his shirt pocket and hands it over to the Muslim soldier. Shalva watches the man.

The young woman turns her head towards the jockey.

The fat soldier looks from the passport to the jockey whilst pointing at him with his Kalashnikov.

FAT SOLDIER (cont'd)
Gruzinskiy!

A TALL SOLDIER turns his head.

TALL SOLDIER
(Russian)
Georgian?

The women on the bus turn their heads towards the young man. The young woman looks at the jockey, shocked. Shalva closes his eyes and sighs deeply.

FAT SOLDIER
(Russian)
Grab your things and get out,
Gruzinskiy.

Shalva looks up at the man and stands up. He picks up his duffle bag and steps towards the aisle.

The older woman next to him puts her hand on his arm when he passes and looks up at him. Shalva tries to smile at her.

FAT SOLDIER (O.S.)
(Russian)
Come on!

Shalva's knees suddenly feel weak and he steadies himself on the seats while he walks in front of the soldier down the aisle.

The young woman stares at him. Shalva straightens his back when he feels her gaze, he blinks his eyes when he catches her eye.

WOMEN INTERCHANGEABLY
(Russian)
Oh look, such a young boy. What are
they gonna do to him? Why do they
take him?

Before he leaves the bus Shalva looks at the driver. The driver turns his head.

EXT. NALCHIK, CHECK POINT - NIGHT

(4:30 AM)

The jockey slowly steps off the bus. He recognizes the place.

The bus is parked next to a small dilapidated concrete office building. A huge lamp illuminates the area in front of the building.

Shalva looks at the Khabardino-Balkarian soldiers who are waiting for him next to the bus. He nods at them. The soldiers ignore the gesture.

Shalva is followed by the fat soldier holding his Kalashnikov pointed at him.

Shalva is put under the light in front of a wall. Three soldiers aim their Kalashnikovs at him. Shalva makes the sign of the cross almost unnoticeable and looks at the soldiers.

Women's voices shout, scream. Many hands bang on the bus's windows.

Shalva sees how the Muslim women gather behind the windows on one side of the bus. They scream and beat on the glass. The whole bus is tilting sideways.

The young woman's face stares at the young jockey. Shalva looks back at her, he tries to look calm.

The fat soldier turns to the bus and then to the jockey. Shalva avoids his gaze. He tries to get his breathing and heavy heartbeat under control. Without a sound he's mumbles repeatedly a short prayer.

SHALVA
(Georgian, almost
invisible lip
movements)
Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.
Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy.

The three soldiers stare at him.

The fat soldier disappears inside the building.

The women silence.

Shalva stops mumbling. He stands with his duffle bag at his feet facing the three armed soldiers. He stares in front of him focusing on a dark spot on the ground. He waits tensely and slowly calms down.

A strong looking Khabardino-Balkarian OFFICER comes out of the building. He is followed by the fat soldier. He walks towards the jockey and looks at him. Shalva looks up and nods at him.

STRONG OFFICER

(Russian)

You are in hostile territory,
Georgian. Do you realize you're going
to be shot?

(smiles)

Didn't you know we're at war?

Shalva looks straight at the officer, pretending self confidence and he listens emotionless.

The strong officer studies him. Then he looks at the fat soldier and points at the duffle bag. The fat soldier rushes to pick it up. He hands it over to the other. Shalva stares at the officer with straightened back.

The strong officer empties the duffle bag onto the path. He goes through the jockey's belongings. Suddenly he holds a bridle up and shows it to the jockey.

STRONG OFFICER (cont'd)

(Russian)

Horseman?

Shalva nods shortly.

SHALVA

(Russian)

Jockey. I raced with Dyadya Jora
whole summer.

STRONG OFFICER

Jora Pshukov?

The strong officer looks at the jockey and thinks. He touches the bridle, smells it and looks again at the jockey. Shalva unwittingly holds his breath.

STRONG OFFICER (cont'd)

(Russian)

Get back on the bus.

The Khabardino-Balkarian soldiers take down their Kalashnikovs. Shalva quietly sighs, he closes his eyes and mutters inaudibly a short prayer. He carefully walks to his duffle bag. He squats and as fast as he can he puts back his belongings.

The strong officer stands next to him and holds out the bridle in front of the jockey's face. Shalva looks from the soldier to the bridle. Slowly he reaches with his hand and takes the bridle. He stands up with his duffle bag and waits.

STRONG OFFICER (cont'd)
(Russian)
We're all horsemen here.

Shalva nods. The strong officer hands over the Georgian passport.

STRONG OFFICER (cont'd)
(Russian)
Don't show this to anyone as long as
you're in this country.

Shalva takes the passport. The officer smiles. With his head he gestures to Shalva to get onto the bus.

INT. NALCHIK, BUS AT A CHECK POINT - NIGHT

(4:45 AM)

Shalva climbs back onto the bus. The strong officer follows him.

STRONG OFFICER
(Russian)
At the next check point you might not
be so lucky.

Shalva turns to him. He sees the officer step off the bus. The engine starts and the bus moves off.

Shalva walks through the shaking aisle. The women gaze at him.

The young woman watches how Shalva gets to his seat.

Shalva sits down. He closes his eyes and makes the sign of the cross again. He puts his hands in front of his face and shakes his head.

The Muslim woman next to him looks at him, grabs his arm and pulls it away from his face. Shalva stares at her surprised.

WOMAN
(Russian with Azerie
accent)
Hide your passport. You're my son;
you cannot hear and you cannot speak.

Shalva looks at her speechless. He puts his passport in a paper sandwich bag under his seat.

The woman examines Shalva carefully. Shalva looks emotionally back at her. She points with her finger at the little wooden cross on a rope around his neck on top of his shirt.

Shalva touches the cross, he kisses it and puts it back under his shirt. The older woman nods approvingly. Then she looks in front of her. Shalva sits up straight, looks at the Muslim woman again. He fights his emotions.

At the next stop Ossetian soldiers enter the bus once more. They inspect the passengers. Shalva stares in front of him, scared. He tries to control his breathing and heartbeat, and avoids looking in their direction.

A tanned soldier takes a good look at the Georgian jockey. Shalva stares at the back of the seat in front of him.

TANNED SOLDIER

(Russian)

Passport!

Shalva doesn't respond. The woman puts her hand on Shalva's arm and looks coldly at the soldier.

WOMAN

(Russian with Azerie
accent))

He's my son. He was born deaf- mute.

The tanned man looks for a long time at the jockey. Then he turns around and walks away. The woman shortly squeezes Shalva's arm before she lets go.

The young woman stares at Shalva. The jockey looks at her unwitnessed and blinks slowly. The young woman nods almost imperceptibly.

After a few hours on a bumpy road the bus arrives at the Georgian border. Shalva is relieved and looks happily out of the window.

A nasty-looking GEORGIAN OFFICER comes onto the bus.

GEORGIAN OFFICER

(Russian with
Georgian accent)

Everybody out! Bring all your belongings.

Shalva stands up and looks questioningly at the Georgian.

The women in their dark dresses and black scarfs leave the bus carrying all their things.

Shalva watches them with a pity and guilty gaze.

He is the last to exit. Slowly he steps down. On the last step he stops and looks around, confounded by the situation.

EXT. GEORGIAN BORDER - DAWN

A BLOND GEORGIAN soldier opens the luggage part of the bus. The women stand together and wait.

GEORGIAN OFFICER
(Russian with a
Georgian accent)
Take your luggage, put them here and
open the bags.

The women start to take their bags. Some are very heavy. The women are helping each other to take everything out and put them near the officer.

The officer gestures to the women to step back.

One by one the soldiers go through the bags. They take out all the valuables and put them aside. They put money they find in their pockets. The women watch what happens.

Shalva looks with angry disapproval at the ongoing scene. Filled with a growing anxiety he takes the last step off the bus. Breathing heavily he shakes his head.

He walks towards the officer who is supervising everything.

SHALVA
(Georgian)
Sir, what are you doing?

Without looking at Shalva the soldier points at a tree.

GEORGIAN OFFICER
(Georgian)
Wait over there, Boy.

Shalva shakes his head while trying to keep his emotions under control. With clenched fists he steps closer to the officer.

SHALVA
(Georgian with
emotional voice))
You have no right to do this. These
women saved my life.

The officer looks at Shalva. He collides deliberately against his shoulder when he passes. The jockey, shaking from anger, stays upright. His facial expression is cold.

GEORGIAN OFFICER
(Georgian)
Get out of the way, Boy.

Shalva stays still. He breaths heavily.

SHALVA
(Georgian)
You're just robbing innocent women.
Women the same age as your mother,
Sir.

The officer now turns to the young man and stands really close to him. Shalva looks at the officer.

GEORGIAN OFFICER
(Georgian)
One more word and you'll end up in
prison.

For a long time they look each other in the eyes.

The officer turns away. He looks content as he watches how his soldiers steal from the women.

SHALVA (O.S.)
(Georgian)
Do you feel no shame?

The officer turns, points his Kalashnikov at Shalva's head.

GEORGIAN OFFICER
(Georgia)
Hold your tongue.

Shalva, frustrated, looks at the women waiting for the soldiers.

He stands with his arms alongside his body and his head slightly bowed when the women pass him with their bags.

The women are on their way to put their bags back into the bus.

Without talking Shalva steps forward to take the bag of the first woman. When Shalva takes the bag he sees the young woman behind her. She has tears in her eyes. Her lips tremble from grief.

Shalva bows his head and he turns away from her.

The jockey carries the bag to the bus. He continues with a second bag. He avoids looking the women in the eyes. Then he turns toward them all.

SHALVA
(hoarsely in Russian)
Put down your bags. I'll put them on
the bus.

The women hesitate. The older woman first leaves her bag behind. The others follow her example and climb onto the bus.

The young woman stays behind. Shalva gets close to her each time he is picking up a bag, he avoids looking at her. Slowly the young woman turns away and walks towards the bus. Shalva now stops and watches her leave.

The women watch emotionless through the windows.

Shalva is working very hard putting all the bags in the bus. The soldiers look at him with bored faces.

INT. GEORGIAN BORDER, INSIDE THE BUS - DAY

(8 AM)

Shalva gets onto the bus. He is sweaty, dirty and tired. Ignoring the women's gazes, he walks past them and sits down.

Nobody talks. The engine starts running and the bus moves.

Shalva stares outside, still breathing heavily.

The bus drives through the amazing Georgian countryside. Shalva stares out of the window, a tear runs over his cheek. Quickly he wipes it away and looks around.

None of the women look outside. They all stare at the back of the seat in front of them. Some cry. Shalva emotionally returns his face to the window.

The bus enters Tbilisi and takes them alongside the Mtkvari River with the beautiful city appearing at both sides.

Shalva sits up straight. He sighs deeply and stands up. He takes his heavy green duffle bag. He nods to the neighbouring woman. With an empty expression she looks up at the jockey.

He walks towards the driver.

SHALVA
(softly in Russian)
Can I get off here?

The driver nods and stops at the side of the busy road.

Before he leaves Shalva turns to the women in the bus. He looks at the ground, then he looks up. For a second he finds the young woman's gaze. Her big dark eyes look right through him.

SHALVA (cont'd)
(hoarsely in Russian)
I am sorry.

The women stare at him emotionless. At the back the older woman nods at him. Shalva closes his eyes, turns away and steps out with his duffle bag.

EXT. TBILISI, MAIN ROAD UNDER THE BLUE CHURCH - DAY

(9 AM)

The bus passes Shalva. He watches how the bus continues alongside the river.

The jockey looks up at the blue (roof) church on top of the steep hill about fifty meters above in front of him.

In the park, at the foot of the precipice, starts a monumental granite staircase.

Shalva carefully crosses the busy road and walks through a small rocky park towards the staircase.

Up, the church begins its fast melodious chimes, immediately after the church bells all over the city start the same call.

Shalva makes the sign of the cross. He looks up the mountain. The dark rock looks threateningly down on him. He climbs the first step.

Shalva becomes emotional, he bursts into tears. Crying he falls to his knees and flinches. Then he straightens his back and looks up.

Shalva stands up straight. His face wet and bitter. He pushes his heavy bag on his back, and starts to walk up.

EXT. TBILISI, BLUE CHURCH - DAY

The church bells continue.

Beyond Tbilisi lie the green Caucasus mountains who enclasp the historical town.

FADE OUT