

## PREFACE

In this book, published in 1993, I wrote, “Here in America, I ask myself a new question: Could anything like that happen here? It is America that I am now concerned about most of all.”

I see the assault of Donald Trump & Co. on the body of American institutions, values, and traditions as a political gang rape. It was cheered, unfortunately, by a large part of Americans. The absurdity of “alternative facts” and the cold cruelty of the now infamous “ban on Muslims” revived my memories of the so-called “refusal”: the Russian ban on emigration of Jews of 1979-1987. I spent the actual 1984 in a Siberian prison camp on the Mongolian border.

The Orwellian relics of the bygone Soviet-Russian life, some of which have been restored and burnished in Putin’s Russia, seem to be tested for import to the USA. I see with bitter satisfaction that George Orwell’s *1984* is being read again in America and some prominent Russian immigrants in the U.S. are shivering like in a cold draft. The worldwide march of anti-Trump protesters makes me hopeful, but not enough to ease my worries. It is hard to guess what the elephant in the china shop can do next.

With all that, I clearly see that Donald Trump has touched upon some real and important problems and his voters are not necessarily bigots, retrogrades, and rednecks. He has a point. He is strong. I am worried all the more because he is strong enough to open the floodgates for lies, absurdity, and hate. The freaky fatal attraction—and similarity—between him and the current Russian virtuoso of absurdity has been widely noted. Paraphrasing Napoleon, from two party-system to one-party system there is but one step.

I am a chemist, but in my youth, projecting my future occupation, I vacillated between chemistry and psychiatry. I was engrossed in both. There is more about it in the book. Witnessing the recent presidential denial of the absolutely indisputable and visible with naked eye facts, and remembering my now antiquated medical textbooks, I am worried even more. “Delirium was the very essence of the Soviet ideology in a very clinical sense,” I wrote.

After some style and content editing of the original manuscript, correcting at least a part of numerous errors, and adding footnotes, I am uploading my *Memoirs of 1984* – my personal story of the real 1984—on the Web. For a while, I will continue editing and updating the site.

As for modern Russia, Bill Browder’s *Red Notice: a True Story of High Finance, Murder, and One Man's Fight for Justice* (Simon & Schuster, 2015) is a fascinating personal story and a source for understanding post-Soviet Russia.

MEMOIRS

OF

1984

YURI

TARNOPOLSKY

FOREWORD BY SENATOR PAUL SIMON

# **MEMOIRS OF 1984**

**Yuri Tarnopolsky**

**Foreword by Senator Paul Simon**

# Copyright page

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To Olga

This is the text of *Memoirs of 1984*, published in 1993, revised in 2017  
No essential changes have been made.  
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Although my wife Olga and I had known much harsher experience, writing this book was hard enough for both of us. Without Olga's patience, support and trust, I would not have been able to complete my manuscript.

For the transformation of my manuscript into this book, I am indebted to selfless and heroic work of three people.

My dear friend Nancy Rosenfeld assumed the functions of my good genius, muse, first reader, first editor, literary agent, and partner. With the exception of the first one, they all required new skills from her. Nancy was a quick learner and she mastered them all.

Christine M. Benton was my editor; it does not say much if one forgets that English is not my native language. In fact, she was also my guide, critic, teacher, inspiration, and to watch her working on my text was an enormous intellectual pleasure for me.

Stephen Rosenfeld generously donated his time, energy, computer skills, and resources to prepare the manuscript for publication and to check it for errors.

I am cordially grateful to all of them.

## FOREWORD

**T**he world has changed dramatically in the years since Yuri Tarnopolsky came into my life and the lives of those who fought for Soviet refuseniks. I was privileged to have worked with the fine volunteers of Chicago Action for Soviet Jewry, who launched the rescue effort for Yuri. The magnitude of that effort was staggering. No less staggering was the sacrifice Yuri and other dissidents made for the cause of freedom.

*Memoirs of 1984* does what George Orwell's visionary warning to future generations would not. It paints a poignant picture of human survival in an inhuman totalitarian system; it is a graphic portrait of real people in an unreal world. Yuri's moving snapshots of life in the Gulag and his incisive critiques of the forces of socialism, ideology, modern Judaism, and Russian history are more than memoirs for posterity. *Memoirs of 1984* is a living testament to the power and force of freedom and a tribute to those, who by their very sacrifice and dedication to human values perpetuate the ideals of freedom and democracy throughout the world.

Yuri's words are words of inspiration and not words of warning for future generations. His anecdotes are a celebration of humanity rather than an indictment of it. His message of human survival in a totalitarian society is as relevant today as it was just a few short years ago, because totalitarians remain with us today and, I fear, always will.

Ultimately, this book is about tolerance: tolerance of political diversity, of religious differences, of races and cultures that are dissimilar to our own. We can all learn from Yuri Tarnopolsky.

U.S. Senator Paul Simon (D-IL)

*I*

## THE SMOKE IN THE WIND

**I**t was a bright, cold day in April, and the clock was supposed to be striking thirteen, as George Orwell predicted. The year was 1984.

As a matter of fact, there was no clock at all. But the day was really bright, so I could use the shade of the electric pole in the yard outside as a sundial.

By that time, I had gotten used to not having a watch on my wrist. It had been taken away by the investigator more than a year ago, upon my arrest. Time did not matter much in the labor camp anyway.

I stood in a narrow, dark hallway with three iron doors along it, all locked on the hall side. Behind the doors were three camp factory workshops. The drone of seventy sewing machines coming from those rooms was as loud as the sound of a turbojet.

To emerge once in a while into this forbidden area was a special privilege granted to me by the doorman. Upon my request, he would occasionally unlock the door of my workshop and let me out of the crowded, dusty, and noisy room so that I could peep out into a larger world.

From the dark hallway, I was watching the brightly lit yard through a grated window the size of a book page. The afternoon shadow of the pole was pointing to the left, I noted, toward the latrine.

The doorman was nice to me because we were about the same age and had both been arrested for the first time in our almost fifty years of life. That was enough to form a bond between us. We could even talk a little, with my part limited to "Oh, really?" "Sure" and "Oh, yeah."

The doorman could not see, however, that our similarity extended beyond age. Both of us had attempted to steal state property from the Soviet government. His crime was losing a dozen state-owned sheep in a snowstorm. Mine, much more heinous, was my desire to leave my country for good. In the state where I was a sheep, I wanted to be my own herdsman, and I wanted to be lost in the snowstorm of history.

I was a *refusenik*—an applicant for emigration who had been denied an exit visa. As a black sheep that marred the pristine white flock, I was sent here for correction.

In the caste system of the labor camp, the doorman, formerly a shepherd at a government farm, was now one of the billy-goats—inmates who had repented and were cooperating with the prison administration, agreeing—not necessarily honestly—to squeal on other prisoners. Therefore, they were trusted to be doormen, cooks, dishwashers, hospital nurses, storekeepers, librarians, accounting clerks, artists, and writers for the prison newspaper.

The doorman pushed me aside and looked into the yard. "Lunch!" he yelled out in a rough voice. He unlocked the outer door and three others. Several other voices in the workshops repeated the call, adding obscenities, and the deafening roar of the sewing machines gradually subsided.

The doorman had no watch either, but he had not used the shadow to tell time. He just noticed an officer on duty who had appeared in the distant corner of the yard, waving his hand.

The yard was surrounded by rows of barbed wire on the ground and a high plank fence. On the north was a wooden fence between the working zone and the school zone. The western fence with four parallel gable-roofed adobe workshops along it separated the working and the living zones. On the south, the roofs of camp warehouses could be seen behind the fence. The main workshop, a long flat-roofed barrack with four iron doors, one of them behind me, ran along the eastern edge of the yard.

All of the fences were adorned on top with the curls of barbed wire. Casual-looking guards with machine guns over the shoulder stood on corner watchtowers. It was a picture of utter peace and security.

I was ready for lunch.

The contents of my pockets included an aluminum spoon in a small fabric bag, another fabric bag with a piece of bread, and a handful of fabric shreds used as napkins, handkerchiefs, and toilet paper. I had also a pencil stub, a self-made French

dictionary, a page of *Moscow News*, a Soviet newspaper in English, and the small luxury of two cheap caramel candies.

When we watch old films shot on the streets in the 1920s, the world looks very different. First, it is black, white, and gray. The clothes look wrinkled and crumpled, streets overcrowded and littered. As it appears on the screen, the world of the past seems devoid of vacant, smooth surfaces, straight lines, grace, and order. It looks like its inhabitants have just moved in and they are not sure they would like to stay.

The labor camp seemed to belong to the world of old movies and photographs. The buildings did not show even a square foot of uniformly colored flat surface. There were no straight lines or pure colors, no symmetry, smoothness, or uniformity of detail. Everything was done haphazardly, everything made by prisoners who hated what they were doing. All was jagged, rough, and coarse. Glass splinters, threads, sewing needles, and cardboard cores of spools were stamped into the dirt yard. The windowpanes were a patchwork of dirty pieces of glass remarkable for their rich collection of the various defects the glass industry could produce.

Now people were coming out into the football-field-sized yard from several of the workshops lining its borders. They were smoking, chatting, walking to the latrine.

The latrine was a typical example of camp architecture. It was hackwork of unshaved wooden planks of various forms and sizes, all cracked and rotten.

The tin-plated gutter for urine was supposed to accommodate about four hundred men per shift. During the severe local winter, the urine froze before it could reach the end of the gutter. It overflowed onto the floor, and by the end of the season two feet of yellow ice accumulated both inside and around the structure. The lowest caste had the job of breaking it up with a heavy crowbar. The strikes of the tool revealed the daily layers, like the year rings on a tree stump. With strict periodicity, some of them showed a reddish tint, probably because of blood from kidneys injured by excess salt and by weeks spent on the cold concrete floor of the punishment block.

Little wonder that during the night shift, and frequently during the day, the inmates did not bother going to the slippery shack but simply used the yard.

It was the windy season—a cold spring after an almost snowless winter, on the eve of a short rainy summer. The wind carried dust mixed with dry urine and scarce snowflakes. Hopefully, it was the last snow of the spring. The soil was still deeply frozen. Some hillocks thawed under the sun, and the rare black wet spots were the only signs of April.

The inmates, mostly Siberian aborigines, were used to much colder weather. Despite the wind, many of them were bare-chested. An occasional scarf served more as a sign of prison prosperity than as protection against cold.

Russian political, ethnic, and geographical terms can be confusing for a stranger.

The part of Siberia that sheltered me in 1984 was called Trans-Baikalia. One can find it on a map of Asia right above the Soviet-Mongolian border, east of the narrow strip of Lake Baikal, the deepest and largest freshwater reservoir on Earth.

From a historical point of view, Russia was the old name of the whole country that was renamed the USSR, or the Soviet Union, by the Communists. Ethnic Russians, often of mixed blood, made up only about half the population, which consisted of hundreds of different ethnicities, from Assyrians to Eskimos. The country hosted believers in all major world religions, as well as pagans. Most of the ethnicities had inhabited their territories as long as they could remember themselves, some since biblical times.

Russia was also the name of one of the fifteen Soviet republics such as Lithuania, Armenia, Ukraine, Georgia, etc., most of which had been acquired during the eastward expansion of the original Russian state. Russia was a walking-distance empire—one did not need to cross an ocean to reach the colonies.

By no means were Soviet republics the counterparts of American states. Each republic had its own languages, culture, history, religion, and mentality. Ethnically, they could be as different as Germany, Iran, Egypt, China, Poland, and Finland. Yet most of them had never been independent states.

The colonization of Greater Siberia, including Trans-Baikalia, by the Russians, which took several centuries, did have something in common with the birth of America. Siberia was not only the land of hard laborers and exiles but also the freest part of Russia for those who stayed there of their own will.

The Trans-Baikalian counterpart of Native Americans was Buryat-Mongols, a people closely related to the Mongols by language, culture, and the Tibetan branch of Buddhism. They considered themselves a part of the Mongolian people, or Tartars, who once ruled the whole of Asia and almost all of Russia.

The Trans-Baikalians were proud of living in the area that had been the notorious penal colony of Russia since the advent of the czars. It was the area with the so-called super-continental climate—the most severe known climate except the polar one—and the part of Siberia that accounted for perhaps the only romantic page in the stern volume of Russian history.

The Decembrists were Russian aristocrats who, driven by the French ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, conspired against the czar but failed to overthrow him in December 1825. He hanged five of them and sentenced the rest to hard labor in mines, mostly in the Chita region, where my labor camp was located. Many of their young and beautiful wives, despite various obstacles imposed by the czar, moved from western Russia to the frozen land to be closer to their chained aristocratic husbands.

The region of Chita was one of the most backward parts of the country. Every fourth man there was said to be locked in a labor camp, sooner or later, either for petty theft or for giving a black eye to his neighbor. Judging by the stories of inmates, the aborigines skinned dogs and ate them, using the fur for warm hats. They beat women and children, drank cheap perfume, and fought each other without mercy. They cared very little about human life and the rest of Russia, and cared not at all about the rest of the world, except Mongolia, which supplied forage for the cattle. Civilization meant nothing to them. Comfort and even freedom meant very little. During a winter night, a herdsman could sleep in the steppe right on the snow.

Of course, one should not judge the hardworking, friendly, and generous population of Chita by prison stories that knew no bounds to fantasy. Still, the presence of an enormous number of convicts, as well as drunk and reckless soldiers and officers, very much defined the way of life in that God-forsaken area. The prisoners were convenient and profitable labor, which was desperately needed in this underpopulated region along the border, part of it with China. The largest Soviet military district was located here, among the hills stuffed with hidden missiles pointing at China and America.

There was no place in the camp for animals, children, age difference, retirement, and women—occasional female technical personnel did not count. The two polar constituents of the camp were the prisoners (*zeks*) and the officers (*ments*). Zeks and ments needed each other like two sexes.

For political prisoners, the KGB (State Security) was a third force, invisible and powerful. For reasons that will be explained later, I and my *refusenik* friends—about that term also later—called the KGB *dybbuks*, evil spirits in Jewish mythology.

An average local zek was a young man, strong, roughly hewn, resourceful, cruel, and proud of being a zek—at least that was the impression the zek was supposed to give.

Some zeks were sons of zeks and future fathers of zeks. Many of them, as soon as they came out of the camp gate, immediately got drunk and started to fight with the first poor fool who came along. The re-arrest of a zek on the day of his release was a common story.

At first glance, all zeks looked alike. They were, or pretended to be, composed, cool, and slow in movement and words. Outbreaks of anger and threats mostly were faked as part of zek rituals. The zeks became truly irritable only when there was no tobacco to smoke.

A member of the highest caste of thieves was supposed to talk and move in a special ritualistic way, spreading his fingers as if to illustrate the laws of electromagnetism.

It took a newcomer like me a certain period of adaptation to see in rough, ugly, cruel, wrinkled, sallow faces the diversity of personalities distributed along the universal human pattern. So, now I can say "we."

We, the zeks, wore dark gray padded jackets stuffed with cotton wool. The green uniform looked like ordinary pajamas. On the left side of the chest we had identity tags—small rectangles of fabric with the name and number of the brigade. Our pants were tucked into classical solid Russian high boots with tarpaulin tops and no shoelaces. Only the color of the jacket distinguished us from the army construction troops.

The unarmed ments who worked in prisons and camps wore regular military uniforms although they had no military training and no military discipline.

Every barrack housed a brigade of about one hundred zeks and was enclosed by a metal cage with a double-gate trap at the checkpoint and fence-netted top. It was forbidden to enter another barrack or workshop.

The big gate between the working and the living zones was now open. The yard was full of officers in trench coats. We lazily lined up in a column of five in each row and made for the gate. We moved across the yard, passed through the gate, turned left, walked between the fence of the working zone and the barracks, through a small central plaza, and turned to the right, where the poster "Out into freedom with clean consciousness" invited us not into freedom but into the mess hall.

The mess hall was the only place where all prisoners of one shift could see each other. It was also the movie theater on Sundays. Saturday was always a workday, as was at least one Sunday a month.

The concrete mess hall was also the place for rare official meetings of the whole camp. There was a stage with political slogans, a movie screen, and a pulpit. On the walls were posters with happy faces of the builders of communism.

The other end of the hall had openings in the wall for food and dishes. Long tables, each seating twenty people, covered by scratched and rumpled zinc sheets wiped with dirty rags. The zeks of the lower castes ate at separate tables.

The zeks sat tightly pressed, hardly able to move a hand, especially with their winter clothes on. The ments were standing or walking in the aisles. There was no time for talk at the tables.

It was as cold in the mess hall as outdoors, but at least there was no wind.

"Hats off!" an officer on duty commanded. The prisoners exposed to the cold their shaven heads, many marked with scars.

First, soup consisting of potatoes, sauerkraut, carrot, beet, traces of tomato paste, and the cheapest artificial fat, arrived in aluminum cauldrons. In the spring, only dried vegetables were available, the sauerkraut was half-rotten, and pieces of



dried beet were carbon black.

Instead of the legally required two ounces of meat a day for each prisoner, only rare meat fibers could be found by a lucky few. If there was a big piece, a privileged zek from a high caste would get it all.

The zek who sat on the edge of the bench stood up and dispensed the soup into gray aluminum bowls, all dented and coated with dirty water after washing. Pieces of bread were put right on the grimy zinc, alongside a bowl of coarse salt. The zeks consumed salt, the only available seasoning, in huge quantities.

I was not very hungry. In the mess hall, I could never eat a meal without disgust, even if I was hungry and even today, when I knew it would be my last meal before a hunger strike.

The second course was barley gruel with the same artificial soap-like grease. They called it margarine. There were no drinks, not even water.

I wiped my spoon with a piece of fabric and put it into a fabric sheath. My mates licked their spoons up and tucked them into their high boots.

"Got guzzled? Now get out," the foreman commanded. We went out, lined up in a column, and moved back to the working zone, past gloomy officers shivering in the cold wind.

At the door of my working barrack, I tried to stay in the fresh air as long as possible.

Camp life dragged on under unrelenting stress. Although the labor camp was supposed to depress any sensation of change, movement, and achievement, existing there was like driving in rush hour traffic. Every minute was charged with compressed danger. On these alleys and aisles, nobody had any insurance, so you had to watch out.

In the free life, the safest place could be in hiding; in the camp, it was out in the open. My eyes and ears were working as radar, automatically pinpointing all the changes around me while I savored the candies bought in the prison store. Once a month I could buy tea, caramel, cheap cookies, and canned fish for a total of about six dollars. The money came from my strictly limited prison account opened and maintained by my wife.

Lunch left heaviness in the stomach but no feeling of satisfaction. The prison food did not contain any ready nutrients. Food had to undergo a complex process of chemical change before glucose could be released into my veins.

Luckily, I was a former professor of chemistry, because that somewhat quirky science, irritating to most non-chemists, gave me lots of knowledge that was especially valuable here, where both the sturdy and fragile mechanisms of life could be put to a test. Astronomy would have been of much less use.

The landscape outside the camp was dominated by the four smokestacks of an invisible power station in the south and the bare hills to the north. That was all that one could see behind the fence. The northwest wind was so strong that it tore the smoke from the smokestacks. As puffs kept stubbornly creeping out, the wind carried them away, shredded, and dispersed into the air.

The sight of the smoke inspired and depressed me at the same time. I admired the persistence of the smoke, and I saw that the smoke was doomed.

I felt sorrow because somebody cared about the smoke and kept it alive by feeding the furnace with coal, but there was no one to replenish the internal fuel that sustained my soul. I was like a self-contained planet, all the coal I had under the ground was my last one, and I was surrounded by empty and cold space. The aftertaste of the candies was the light of a distant world, which had probably already ceased to exist, like faraway stars that we see in the skies long after they have flickered out.

It would be sheer idiocy to begin a new hunger strike tomorrow. Dying was not a way of living. There was no immediate threat to my life. As a chemist, I knew that however black the beet was, however rotten the cabbage, the barley gruel was as good a source of glucose as honey. My mind did not want to fast; neither did my body. I did not want to resist, to struggle, to suffer. Yet there was something else totally immaterial and irrational, neither mind nor body. Pride? Honor? Tenacity? I did not know. I have always wondered what it was. I believe it was scientific curiosity. Life for me was an experiment that I wanted to complete and gain from a loss by learning something new.

To remain strong and to keep my soul alive, I had to burn my own body in the metabolic fire.

Soon the candies shot enough sugar into my brain to resume the humming of thoughts. The real 1984 was not that bad. My brain was free, and nobody was trying to make me love Big Brother. Moreover, prison seemed to relieve me from the daily chores of free life.

## *II*

### THE CATACOMBS

**T**he more I lived in Russia, the more I yearned to understand my country. It seemed to me much more mysterious than the Amazon jungles, Antarctica, Ancient Egypt, and Atlantis put together, probably because I had never been there.

Russia was a no-why land. You could not find answers to many simple questions. In fact, you could not ask some of them because they were forbidden. There was false history, false geography, false statistics, and false information and there were no criteria by which to discern true from false. Even natural sciences were sometimes censored to purge them of foreign ideology.

Answers were the most precious commodity in Russia. The constant itching of questions was a part of the total discomfort of life, like the everyday jam in crowded buses and streetcars. Still, science was the only area of knowledge in Russia that did not lie, and this is why it attracted the country's brightest young minds.

When I was young, I wanted to understand myself. With age, however, my interest in myself began to shrink quickly. Time is all one needs to acquire wisdom, and, although sometimes several lives are needed for that, I had had enough

experience with myself. Russia, however, puzzled me more and more. The country challenged my reason and imagination. Yet its mystery and misery made me feel forlorn. Since there was no objective account of modern Russian history, I would need to live long enough to accumulate personal experience, build up individual archives and annals, and convert them into my own pocket history. Developments in Russia seemed to occur so slowly, however, that I could hardly hope to overcome the critical mass of intellectual breakthrough during my lifetime.

I felt myself a living cell in a senseless, irrational body. This is probably what made me irrational myself. Or, rather, did I feel that way *because* I was irrational?

The camp revived my interest in myself. I was watching the intricate dualism of my existence, the complex game of body, soul, and intellect, and the whole range of their relationship, from cooperation to struggle—all with the vividness of a color movie. In my internal life I found the colors I missed so much in the prison environment. In my imaginary world there were huge evenly colored smooth surfaces, straight lines, and symmetries I did not see around me. This is why I speak so much about the processes in my mind in this my story. Life in prison was just one long day and one short night.

I was both an actor in and a spectator of a drama. After the boring predictability of Soviet life, I was enjoying the unexpected turns and twists of my inner life and its conflict with the powerful aggressive environment.

The psychological subtleties of the drama displayed against four smokestacks and the continuous change of clouds in the sky. The hills on the north looked dead. There were no signs of the missiles with which they were said to be stuffed. The distant hills and the sky were my only glimpses of nature. The proudly towering smokestacks seemed part of nature too, though, as compared with the barracks trampled down into dirt.

Many times in prison and camp, I told myself that it could not be real. It had to be a dream. I should try to wake up.

I rarely see dreams in my sleep. For many years, my rare dreams at night have been only in black and white. They do not survive the daylight; after awakening, I can remember nothing but a couple of mute snapshots.

It is quite different during the day. I am a daydreamer. My brain is soaked in dreams like the beach sand at high tide. Even when I am busy with daily work, my memories of the past and my dreams about the future are all around me. However, unlike my infrequent nocturnal dreams, my daydreams are not visually clear. I just feel things happening, behind my back, at my side, above me, and inside. They are hovering and looming over my head. I feel some bustle, rustle, whispers of shadowy diffuse bodies, and vague faces. Sometimes I see an expression on a face without the face itself, like the Cheshire cat's smile.

Why is there such a difference between day and night? Probably because the night dreams are imposed on me by the depths of my body and by the external world, while the daydreaming is a free display of my true self. I am free in the day, and I am captive in the night, imprisoned by my bed.

My childhood was full of night dreams so vivid that I can still remember some of them. There was one I saw many times.

I am walking through an underground passage or a kind of catacombs I had once visited in my childhood near the Black Sea. The darkness in the vault is frightening. I know there is a crowd of dark figures dressed in hooded cloaks. They are looking for me. With torches and clubs in their hands, they are carrying a coffin. From a distance, I can see them crossing the tunnel ahead of me, at an intersection. I am petrified. I am almost sure it is a dream, but not quite. I cannot run, as if I am chin deep in water. I am striving to wake up.

Everything is uncertain in a dream—one cannot be sure of anything. This is why there is hope even in the worst nightmare.

My life in Russia often looked like a nightmare to me, not because it was sheer terror and suffering—it was not—but because it was as full of confusion and uncertainty as only a dream can be and because my reason was as powerless as in sleep. Very often, it was a nice, pleasant nightmare because there was hope that it was only a dream and not real life.

I was born in the vast and poor Russia, long before the first TV. During my first seven years of life, I saw probably not more than a dozen movies. I remember all of them, including *Sun Valley Serenade* and an American movie called *George from Dinky Jazz*. Nobody could tell me what *dinky* meant. Moreover, in Russian, it sounded rather like "dinky of jazz" rather than "jazz of dinky." I did not understand the plot. There was nothing but a sometimes fascinating, sometimes boring sequence of changing images on the screen.

If I had not seen anything like my early catacomb nightmare, either in a movie or in life, what could have prompted such a dream? Was it in the air?

I was one year old when the terror of 1937 began knocking on the doors at nights. I was four when World War II began to blaze over Russia. I remember the German bombardments of Kharkov, my native city in Ukraine. I remember radio announcements of Air Alert and my mother carrying me to the bomb shelter in the basement of our five-story apartment building. I remember my father, recently drafted, in his military uniform, cleaning his gun with alkali (the first chemical term I ever heard) and oil. I remember the overcrowded bomb shelter. A little girl was eating a crunching a fresh cucumber and I envied her.

Stalin's terror did not touch my family. I had no idea that it was a nightmare of the whole country. I am not sure it was. Nobody was sure of anything.

Although my country and I knew nothing about each other, I was supposed to be her devoted son, and she was my motherland. Those were the terms in which the relationship between a Soviet citizen and his country used to be expressed. We both had just started on our collision course, and it was about fifty years before the crash.

Now that those fifty years have passed, we still do not know the whole truth about the time when I was learning to walk and speak. Clearly, though, while I was a small child in my world limited by my parents and our two-room communal apartment with a kitchen and toilet shared by ten other families, my country was undergoing a metamorphosis. Life in Russia had begun to split into the real life of physics, chemistry, and physiology and the spoken and written life of the state propaganda. An immeasurable chasm separated private from public. They were now immiscible like air and water. Some people got used to life in both media, like frogs and crocodiles, but the majority easily adapted because of the promise of a better future.

The year of 1936, when I was born, was the happiest year of Soviet history from 1917 to the present. So it seemed to my parents and to their peers, then in their twenties and early thirties, when they looked back during the hard postwar years and, all the more, afterward.

In 1936 people in the cities had enough to eat, looked into the future with hope, and looked back at the past with a sense of relief: they felt lucky not to have been shot, hanged, slaughtered in a pogrom, arrested, mutilated in the Civil War, accused of treason or of being of bourgeois descent (i.e. outcast), or exiled.

All clergy, aristocracy, army officers, and merchants, all owners and managers of real estate, banks, factories, and shops, all good and well-to-do farmers were uprooted, cursed forever, and either exterminated or scared to death. As a profound purge of native population, the Russian Revolution was a replay of the Mongol invasion or the colonization of the Americas. This time, however, it was a bloody game played by the same whole nation split in half into invaders and aborigines.

All culture of the past, European glamour, civilization, sophistication and finesse of customs, things, clothes, food, entertainment, arts, and perversion were gone.

The Russian Revolution was, first of all, a revolt against the rich. It was driven by the ideology of equality and noble poverty.

This is why it was inherently self-destructive.

Russia, which in 1913 seemed to blend the spirit of Western enlightenment, Eastern spiritualism, and American entrepreneurship, lost all that overnight. Only the poor, who had nothing to lose but their chains, were recognized as those

deserving of happiness, and happiness was promised to them. Everybody who had more than his neighbor could be considered a public enemy, whatever his advantage was—intelligence, wealth, imagination, diligence, and even common sense.

Unlike wealth, power was never denounced by the Soviets. The cult of power, force, and military might was a cornerstone of the new ideology. The power established peace and maintained it. The way toward a better future was always described in terms like fight and battle, as “the fight for peace” or “the battle for the harvest.”

By 1936, the dead had been buried. Peace descended onto Russia, which could now plunge into just one obsession—“battle to fulfill and over-fulfill” the government production quota. The new constitution guaranteed all basic democratic freedoms, including freedom of speech and religion. The Communist party was once vaguely mentioned in it, but there was no outright ban on other parties. It was a constitution of a democratic state. It lied.

It looked like the sacrifices of the pillaged and decimated nation had paid off.

By that time, Stalin was neither a bloody dictator nor a demented tyrant. He was just one of many leaders of the glorious squad of revolutionaries. He was considered by Lenin, the ideologue and leader of the Revolution, as one of his two heirs, the other being Trotsky, later murdered by Stalin’s order.

By 1936, Russia was regaining her sense of pride. Although the former Russian Empire lost Poland, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, a couple of redundant letters from the Cyrillic alphabet, imperial pomp, religion, heritage, and dozens of millions of people, it still was the largest country in the world, and it could not be denied greatness. Whether it was great for good or evil, it was too early to judge. Communist Russia had won not only diplomatic recognition but also the sympathy of Western liberals and workers, especially, during the Great Depression. It was the newest New World after America, and the new got the benefit of the doubt.

The following year, 1937, was the darkest one in all of Soviet history. The whole population of this giant country found itself marching toward something unknown, between concrete walls so tall that nothing could be seen behind them. From time to time people were taken from the crowd and shot on the spot because they had interfered with the march. The stream of people branched off into a smaller stream, which silently disappeared behind heavy iron doors in the walls. In the dense crowd, one could see only what had happened to his neighbor. The total picture, in the mirror of the press, was just the happy steady march ahead, to the shining summit of Russian paradise on earth and the first ever City upon the Hill.

What happened to those who disappeared? Was it something terrible? What if they were just marching to the same happy future by a collateral road, behind the wall?

It was not the beginning of terror, because the Communists had terrorized

the country since 1917. The new element was that in 1937 the terror became total, comprehensive, and absolute. It was said to be directed not against the people but against the enemies inside: “enemies of the people.”

In 1937, fifteen years after the end of the Russian Civil War, the people were united simply because no enemies had survived. Stalin's terror was a proclaimed war during a proclaimed peace, a war of the government against its own people, a Russian invention, and a strange, unprecedented phenomenon in history, if we discount *The Reign of Terror*, which lasted less than a year during the French Revolution.

My nightmares were gone after World War II. Whatever had induced them—the war, the terror, or just my oversensitivity—they were prophetic. Like rhymes in a poem, the catacombs appeared twice in my life: once as a dream and once as reality.

My memory holds a picture of a long dark underground tunnel with rough concrete walls. An iron grating from ceiling to floor separates it into two parallel passageways. I am walking along one of them in a crowd of dark gloomy figures. A man in a military uniform and high boots is walking in the other passage, behind the grating. The bars protect him from us, the wild beasts. He holds a long rubber club in his hand.

It is cold in the tunnel. From time to time, a gate stops us on our way. The officer opens it from his side of the tunnel. It reminds me of the way lions and tigers are released into a circus arena.

We are not wild beasts. We are, rather, like animals being taken to slaughter, and we feel that way. The tunnel is abominable and gruesome. The officer curses us in the most intricate phrases composed from the inexhaustible Russian foul lexicon.

I recognize the nightmare of my childhood. There is no coffin, no cloaks, no torches, but I can see an obvious connection between the two visions, one a memory of a dream in 1943, the other a memory of a Siberian transit prison in 1983.

Now, when I am writing about it, the tunnel is no more real than the dream. I feel confused about all that. I begin to believe that time and place mean much less than I thought all my life. What matters is patterns.



## *BELATED INTRODUCTION*

**I** came to America in 1987, with fresh memories of 1984. I had spent 1983 to 1986 in prison and labor camp; I had been a *refusenik* (social outcast denied **exit** visa) since 1979.

The very first book I bought in Chicago was *Animal Farm*, the second was *1984*, both by George Orwell. I had lived through the real 1984, I had survived it, and I wanted to compare the reality with the fiction.

Orwell was forbidden in Russia. It was in 1972 when Mary, a good friend of mine, told me a lot about the book while we were walking along the quiet streets of Arbat, an old Moscow neighborhood. The lurid story, the charm of the neighborhood, the company of my friend, and the descending twilight gave me a bizarre feeling of being in a fairy tale world. We were walking past a garden where white plastic pipes had been left scattered after some maintenance work.

"Look," I said, "there are somebody's severed arms and legs!"

"Oh, God, yes!" She stopped. Then she laughed nervously. "You scared me. But it was so much like that."

Since then, Orwell's name has had a mystic meaning for me. In 1984 the fiction and the reality came together in my life.

I would like to look at my Russian experience from a Western setting and, I wish I could say, with Western eyes.

While in Russia, I saw quite a few American movies dubbed into Russian. I believed Hollywood actors were the worst in the world because the acting seemed unnatural and false. I did not know that the problem arose because of the great difference between the Russian text and the American facial expressions, not to mention discrepancies in the dubbing itself. Besides, the background—the visible details of an unfamiliar life, the things of unknown function, the colors and shapes without a comprehended purpose—was mute for me.

Everything was different when I saw the same movies in America. They were natural and the acting was great—or, at least, perfectly professional. I recognized a familiar life. Every detail conveyed a message.

The same was true of the books I had read in English back in Russia and then reread in America. For the first time, the words *parking lot*, *donuts*, *credit card*, *supermarket*, *fast food*, and *checkbook* signified familiar pieces of reality. They would be meaningless in Russian.

This book is an attempt to translate the reality. This is why it could be written only in English, however imperfect.

Although I was not born in America, I was not spiritually born in Russia either. Most of my life I felt myself a stranger in my native land. I write these memoirs neither as a visitor nor as a native. I am feeling like a man who was born in Russia and came to America after fifty years of what he felt was both accidental and voluntary captivity. At least half of those fifty years in Russia were spent in arduous attempts to understand my native country, myself, and the place of both in the world, as well as the world itself. Russia never quite agreed with my personal rational picture of the world. Here in America, the land of questions and answers, outside the stifling Russian atmosphere, I am attempting to revive some whys and to find personal answers.

My memoirs are not one continuous story but a collection of reminiscences and essays. In the following pages I sometimes shuttle from past to present to future, because the past is of no meaning without the future, while the present alone has no meaning at all.

I do not trust chronology. Actually, I think that chronology makes humankind repeat the same pattern of false hope, violence, suffering, and misery. Time sequence, and even history itself, can deceive people. There is always a way to argue that whatever happened first was the cause of anything that happened second, but what happened long ago will never happen again or can never happen here because the distance in time and space breaks the cause-effect chain.

Here in America, I ask myself a new question: Could anything like that happen here? It is America that I am now concerned about most of all.

For me, 1984 is not a year: it is an idea. The year of 1984 has gone: 2084 is still ahead. Ideas do not die.

This book is also evidence of my addiction to experimentation—whether on myself or on the world—because I always knew I was a part of the world and the world reflected in me like sunbeam in mirror. For a modern scientist, the difference between the two could not be too dramatic. My area of science is experimental chemistry. Not accidentally, chemistry is a metaphor for human matters.

I did not intend to write a piece of traditional prison memoirs. First, life in prison is boring for anybody and most days differ only by date and weather. Second, I never wanted to immerse myself in prison life or to study it. I wanted to encapsulate and insulate myself from the prison reality instead of it exploring it.

I do not trust documentary records. I am afraid of dates and names. I believe in patterns: nameless and dateless situations, where a multitude of names and dates can be substituted for blanks, as in mathematical formulas, because I believe in history and its universal laws.

This is why, when I had started writing this book, I changed all names except those of the Soviet officials. However irrational it might seem, I had to change my own name because I did not want, in any sense, to keep them company. I even changed my dog's name, for a similar reason. I was full of fury, my past was burning inside me, and that was my naive revenge against Russia. Anyway, the taste of Russia is impossible to reproduce without some hysterical Dostoyevskian spices.

All the names I have used for my friends and myself are common to both Russian and English. The English David is the Russian David, Mary is Maria, Moses is Moisey, Leo is Lev, Ed is Edik, Al is Alik, Nicholas (Nick) is Nikolay, etc. Human nature is universal, and names do not matter.

My former Russian friends and I are not public figures. I hope neither my friends nor my readers will mind my algebraic way of dealing with names.

History and individual life, however, are in constant change. While I was writing, both my former country and I went through a new series of transformations. When I finished my manuscript, I had some new changes to make. In the end, I renamed my enemies, too. In the last chapter, I will come back to this confusing subject.

I am an incorrigible experimenter.

### *III*

## A PAIR OF SOCKS

**A**fter my arrest, I talked to my wife Ann only two times in the Kharkov prison. Both times were after the trial, and we, separated by a glass window, spoke over the intercom.

According to the rules, as soon as I had arrived at the camp, I was entitled to a visit from her. The first week here, I applied for the visit, but nothing happened.

Two months later, back in the barracks after work, I was writing a letter to Ann when I heard the zek on duty shouting, "Brigade, to attention!"

A sturdy, heavy ment appeared in the narrow aisle between the rows of bunks. I put my notebook with the letter under the pillow. Tense zeks stood frozen between the bunks.

My name, Edward Lutsky, was on the bunk tag. The ment headed straight to my spot and lifted the pillow. He found the letter and began to read it.

"Why are you reading my letter?"

"Why shouldn't I? This is my private letter to my wife. Only authorized people can read private letters."

"I am the right man to read it," he muttered. "It is forbidden to keep anything under the pillow."

"I did not keep it there. I was writing the letter when you came, and I put it there."

"It is forbidden to keep anything under the pillow."

He gave me the letter back and walked out.

"Who was that?" I asked a neighbor.

"Mintay, deputy warden. He supervises the regimen."

By that time, I did not know the full meaning of the word *regimen*. It turned out that Mintay really was the right man. His function was to discover all violations of the regimen and punish zeks for them.

I did not pay much attention to the incident. Mintay was polite with me, and I anticipated no danger.

The next week I was called to the watch. The officer on duty read me the decree. "For keeping stationery in bed, convict Lutsky is deprived a visit for six months."

I had expected something like that. I was sure the dybbuks would prevent the visits. I needed them very much, but I was even secretly glad that my wife would not see me in the camp, humiliated, with my head shaven.

I had to be like stone.

As soon as I had gotten behind bars, I had dozens of opportunities to admire the comprehensive and fundamental truth of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's prison commandments: "Do not believe. Do not fear. Do not ask for anything." I could not convey them to Ann, but I made it a rule to finish all my prison letters to her with a formula: "Never ask anybody for any favor in connection with me. Do not ask for a visit. Do not do anything without my consent."

Ann's visit was, unfortunately, a sensitive point. It was not just a meeting with my wife but also the only way to learn what was going on in the world. I needed the visit, but getting it was entirely up to the dybbuks. If they deprived me of the visit, I would do something in protest.

I was afraid of myself. What would I do? I wondered.

A week after Mintay's search, a zek came to me and said that he saw my wife behind the gates of the camp. I could not believe it. That Ann was just a hundred yards from me, behind the fence was absolutely impossible. She could not have disregarded all my warnings.

For a moment I was glad she did.

"How did she look?"

"Very sad. She was kind of crying."

I was in terrible turmoil, immediately connecting my recent punishment with her arrival. The dybbuks knew she was coming, and this is why they had denied me her visit. I could not believe that they would not let us see each other now, when she was here. That would be incredibly malicious even for them, I thought. Obviously, I needed more time to adjust to their logic.

So, my wife was there. I could easily imagine her anguish and humiliation, and that doubled my pain. At the same time, I was upset that Ann had ignored the basic rule I had been repeating again and again in my letters: do everything the prisoner asks exactly as he wants or do nothing at all. Later I learned that many relatives of prisoners made such mistakes.

After work, I met the warden. Recently appointed, a former teacher of history, he still had soft manners and looked humane. He was in the very beginning of the process of turning into a roaring beast. I would witness that kind of transformation quite a few times.

The warden was listening to me without hostility.

"I am sorry; we cannot allow you the visit from your wife. It is not our decision," he said hesitantly. I understood.

I was longing for my wife. I felt enormous hate for the dybbuks. They were pushing me in the direction I wanted to avoid. I, proud *Homo sapiens*, wanted to be the master of the situation and to experiment with the hostile environment, forgetting in my pride that for the dybbuks I was nothing but a guinea pig whose reflexes and instincts they, experimenters like myself, were studying. I was not slow to respond to the electric shock. Without any hesitation, I sent the application to the warden. "If I am not given a visit in a month, I will start a hunger strike," I wrote.

During my first months in the camp, my worst expectations seemed unfounded. It was not that bad. I worked at the mattress workshop with three other zeks and without any permanent supervision by ments.

Those days, a mattress in Russia could be, rather, a kind of flimsy dog bed. My job was the easiest one—to cut a small piece of fabric, roll it into a little tube-shaped button, and tie it up with a piece of string. I punched a stuffed mattress with an awl that had a small hook at the end. I pulled both ends of the button string through the mattress and tied up another small piece of fabric on the other side.

Other zeks sewed fabric bags and stuffed them with cotton wool scrap from the main manufacture of padded jackets. The scrap was dirty, often stained with oil. The zeks picked it up from the floor they used to spit on.

Before attaching the buttons, the mattress was put on a table, and two zeks beat it down with heavy wooden clubs to flatten. The small shop was full of dust.

They threw the mattress on the same floor on which they blew their noses and expectorated.

We made mattresses for both adults and children. They went to the shops of the city. I believe the whole population of the city of Chita slept on our mattresses. I could tell myself a hundred times that I should not care about a country that was not mine, but I felt sorry for the children who had to sleep on the mattresses we made.

I had some free time during my work. I could even occasionally sunbathe until a ment appeared in sight. The only part of my body I could expose to the sun, however, was my conveniently shaven head.

Soon after I had requested the visit, I was transferred to another brigade. I immediately realized that the dybbuks had drawn some conclusions about their guinea pig. I did not like it. Every change in prison conditions was painful and risky, demanding new adaptation and another struggle for security and recognition by inmates. The hierarchic ladder in the camp was very steep, and it was easy to fall down. With some trepidation, I approached the gate of the iron cage of the first brigade.

Unexpectedly, I was given a VIP reception by Al, the foreman. Each brigade of one hundred zeks had a ment commander who appointed a zek as foreman. A young army sergeant from the western part of Russia, Al had been sentenced for offending and beating an officer. Good-looking, intelligent, heavy drinker, strong, and full of energy, he was respected and, feared by the zeks, but hated by the high caste of thieves for his will and steel biceps. Al was excited about having a *political* (political prisoner) in his brigade and offered me his full protection.

Al had many ties with ments. He said that the order preventing me from receiving Ann's visit had come to the warden by a telegram from Moscow.

The customary reception ceremony for a newcomer included prison tea, which was a brew of a pound or more tea per two gallons of water, with sugar and condensed milk. The concentrated caffeine in such strong tea caused euphoria and a heavy heartbeat. It was a true drug, and zeks were addicted to it.

Condensed milk was forbidden by the regimen, and the amount of tea in possession was limited. The trafficking of milk, tea, vodka, uncensored letters, money, and other forbidden and permitted items was a thriving business for the ments who smuggled, for a commission, money into the camp from relatives and friends.

A mug was filled and passed around the dozen zeks invited to the party. Everybody had to take a small sip and then give the mug to his neighbor. I had to overcome disgust over sharing the mug, but very soon I felt the concoction working on me. I was sitting in the circle of zeks who seemed my brothers, and I was smiling from ear to ear.

Because of Al's protection, I was given a comfortable place in the barrack and left in peace. The new work was terrible, however. The workshop produced heavy wooden crates to hold twenty bottles of vodka, and each was made of thirty-four rough planks, most of them half an inch thick. This incredible amount of timber was wasted in ugly windowless shacks nailed together from scrap wood. The light was dim, but the worst of it was that the shacks were heated by iron stoves made of big oil barrels. It could be over 100°F overhead but only -20°F around my feet, because the cold air stayed at the ground. To keep our feet warm we had to wear old felt boots, the traditional winter footwear of Russia, which we picked up from a huge pile outside the shack where they rotted under summer rains. The boots were brought to the camp from the army for repair.

The good thing about the stove was that we could toast our bread over it, and that was a delicacy.

The contrast between the heat at the top and the cold at the bottom was real torture for me, although nobody else seemed to pay much attention to it. From time to time, to avert fainting, I had to leave the shack to catch fresh air.

A young zek stood on watch all day long, in the open air, exposed to wind and frost. He belonged to the lowest caste: the *devils*. His ear-flapped cap was shifted to one side to protect his frostbitten ear. The other side and half of his shaven head were exposed to the brutal cold. Once I saw his other ear—swollen, bluish, and ulcerated—and it made me sick.

"It will fall off soon," he said with a shy smile. I felt guilty when I met his eyes full of pain. The work in the shack was hard for me, but it was incomparable with the torture by frost this poor guy had to suffer. The *devils* were just slaves of higher castes, doomed to do the hardest and dirtiest job for real or imaginary violations of the prison customs. The ments did not care. Neither did the doctors.

Yet looking at the devils, I felt lucky. I felt sympathy for them, but the idea that I could be one of them would never occur to me.

The new year of 1984 was celebrated in the barrack after midnight with heavy drinking. Only a few had vodka; the rest had tea. I was in bed, thinking about the ominous Orwellian year, which seemed destined to bring me what it promised. The odds were against me. I was afraid of my impending first hunger strike in the labor camp, and I cursed myself for having failed to be like a stone.

I wanted to let my wife know about my plan, but I was afraid that if I tried to send an uncensored letter through Al the KGB in Kharkov would intercept it.

Finally, I found a way. Far in advance of my anticipated February 1 hunger strike start date, I sent a letter through Al, not to my address but to our neighbors on the next floor of the apartment building. I asked them to give the letter to my wife. I was very proud of my trick. I still am: it worked.



When I began the strike on schedule in the coldest month of the winter, the temperature was -40°F. For the first two days, I went to work with my brigade but did not work. Losing strength much faster than I expected, I was now glad that our shack was overheated. I sat on a crate so that my head was at a more or less comfortable temperature.

By the end of day four, I was summoned to the watch, where an officer on duty read me the sentence. For not going to work, I had to be put into a punishment cell for seven days. "Fascists!" was all I could say to the confused officer.

I was delirious because of my defeat. I saw that a quiet life in the camp was not promised to me. All the better, I thought. I wanted to meet another challenge. Yet a voice in my mind said that these experiments on myself were simply stupid. I should control my temper, sit quietly, avoid provoking anybody, and wait.

It was already dark when I was taken to a building that inside looked like a typical prison. And it was. The guard told me to undress. I took off my coat and high boots. I had my uniform and warm underwear on. I also had warm socks on my feet. I was given a pair of dirty slippers made of felt boots with cut-off tops. One was too big, the other too small.

Walking along the corridor, I kept silent when zeks called out from behind iron doors, "Who is brought in? What for?" At the very end of the corridor, the guard opened a cell for me. The bang of the shut door was a familiar prison sound, and it could only comfort me. I remembered the Kharkov prison, where I had been held after my arrest, as a safe place.

Now I was in a real punishment cell with the bunk that could be unfolded only for sleeping at night and four cemented to the floor concrete cubes to sit on during the day. Soon I discovered that their tops were slanted enough to make sitting uncomfortable. There were also a foul bucket and a rusty water faucet in the corner.

The cell reeked but was not dirty. I anticipated enjoyable solitude.

To my despair, the cell proved to have a treacherous heating system. An iron pipe went along the outside wall, about one yard from the floor. Overheated steam went through it from the nearby power station behind the outer fence. Most of the time the heat was on and I felt exactly as in the working shack. The air at the level of my head was so hot that I got dizzy. The floor was cold because the cold air was trickling down from the window and the exterior wall. When the heat was off, the cell cooled down very quickly.

In my early childhood, my parents had taught me that sitting or lying on cold concrete was among the most harmful things in life, like not washing fruit or hands before a meal. Here I had no choice.

I took off my precious Finnish socks, which Ann had sent me in her first parcel. I put them under my side, where I thought my kidneys were, and lay down

on the floor. Immediately I felt relief. The air just above the floor was pleasantly cool. I put one of the dirty slippers under my head as a pillow. I was ready for seven more days of hunger strike.

The comfort turned out to be deceptive, and I ended up cursing the laws of nature that made cold air heavier than warm. After a while, the icy cold of the floor and the dropping temperature above it made me get up. However, sitting without support hurt because I had a bad back, and the hard concrete hurt other parts of my body. So did lying on the floor. When both became unbearable, I had to stand up.

In that manner, I kept switching from lying to sitting to standing until the bunk—a couple of rough boards with sticking out screws—was unfolded for the night.

Food came three times a day. I did not touch it, and it was left until the next mealtime.

The next day seemed endless. I was getting weaker and regretted having started it all. One moment I was angry with my wife; the next minute I felt sorry for her. There was no consistency in my thoughts.

The following days did not seem as long. The intervals between lying and sitting were getting shorter and I do not remember what I was thinking. It seems to me now that it was an incoherent flow of phrases, images, and words, like what passes through the brain when half-asleep. All I remember is that I kept coming back to my thick knitted Finnish socks, praising them for saving my life. I praised my parents, too, for their lessons about the mortal danger of cold concrete.

My gray woolen socks had journeyed a long way from Finland to Trans-Baikalia. The wool for the yarn might have come—who knows?—to Finland from the sheep pastures outside my prison.

I had bought the socks in Estonia in 1969, and they were fifteen years old. They were the only pair of knitted warm socks I ever had. To look for such socks in the stores of Russia or Ukraine would have been futile, but Estonia, having direct trade contacts with Finland, was a shopper's paradise.

Why was a pair of knitted socks a rare luxury in a country with very cold winters over most of its territories, abundant pastures full of sheep, and money enough to launch a spaceship on a voyage to Venus?

The socks were, in a way, the key to the major Soviet mystery: why was Russia both so rich and so poor at the same time? Why there were space stations and no warm socks?

About one and a half centuries ago, the poet Nikolay Nekrasov wrote:

You are wretched, and you are abundant,  
You are powerful, and you are impotent,  
Our dear Mother Russia.

The poet, apparently, had no problem with that. In modern times, even the best reporter from "60 Minutes" could not find the key to the mystery, because the absence of an answer was exactly the right answer.

The Ministry of Consumer Industry, which was responsible for knitting the socks for 250 million Soviet people, could say that there was not enough wool.

The Ministry of Agriculture, which was responsible for wool, could say that there were not enough sheep because they died of diseases and there were no drugs to treat them (an explanation I once heard).

The Ministry of Chemical Industry could say that there was not enough oil to make chemicals for the sheep drugs.

The Ministry of Oil Industry could say that there was not enough oil because there were not enough warm socks for the workers who pumped oil in cold northern Siberia. That was because there were no sheep because there were no drugs because there was no oil because there were no socks because . . . and so on.

It all looked like the story of the house that Jack built. In Russian reality, however, it would be the story of the house that Jack never built. He could not finish a house on Russian soil because the process of construction would be a vicious circle.

All four ministers and all their deputies and a lot of people in the ruling class could always buy socks in a special store that was closed to the general public. Besides, they could just travel abroad and buy whatever they needed, or turn to an underground illegal retailer.

A Soviet ministry was very close to an absolute state monopoly, like the U.S. Treasury, which has an exclusive right to print money. The Ministry of Oil Industry, for example, managed all oil production in the country. Just close your eyes and imagine that there is only one airline, one oil company, one food-processing company, one university, and one bank in America. Now you are in the Russia of the recent past.

That is how it looked from the outside. On the inside, a Soviet ministry was a strange Kafkaesque world, where a bedroom was next to a courtroom and every pathway was a circle. A paper circulated slowly from desk to desk, from file to file, until it ended up in an archive. During its life, however, the paper generated

offspring papers, which completed their circles and generated plenty of new offspring. Papers lived their own lives, grew, crossbred, multiplied, and retired in their turn. There was no death of a paper in that world, only retirement. It was a world of eternal paper senility. A file in an archive was a patriarch that had honestly produced a multitude of children and great-grandchildren during its active life.

Every place in the country where sheep were bred or where socks were knitted reported to its ministry and contributed to the inflow of paper to the top. Those upcoming papers were nothing but descendants of the papers poured by the ministry over its parish.

Like the turnover of water on Earth, which is a circle of rain, river, ocean, evaporation, cloud, and rain, the function of the ministry, like the function of the sun, was to perform the turnover of paper.

That was Soviet bureaucracy. Like any other bureaucracy, it existed because it reproduced itself through clerks, executives, and department managers, who got their fixed salaries only as long as the turnover of paper continued. The paper was inanimate, but the people wanted to live. The paper was their only source of life. They could neither buy nor start their own business. Neither could they change their profession. No free market—no beginnings, no ends, only circles.

Bureaucracy is an evidence of wealth. It is only at a certain level of wealth that a state can feed its sycophants. Only a big American company or institution can develop and afford bureaucracy. It is only natural that the biggest American company—the government—would develop the worst bureaucracy. Russia was rich enough to afford a complete bureaucratic centralization.

The number of socks was planned ahead. The five-year quota for knitting socks, if it existed, would be planned by adding a certain percentage of growth to the previous quote. If one thousand pairs were made this year, the plan would be, probably, one thousand ten next year. I am sure, nobody planned the warm socks, however, because plan was in rubles, not socks.

The centralized planning in industry, agriculture, labor, science, education, art, and ideology hatched out of the chaos of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, when the country was devastated and produced close to nothing. Then it made sense. When the country began to recover, the direction of development was already established, and the system began to grow. In the very beginning, it was merely a system of centralized rationing.

Finland, formerly a province of Russian Empire, was lucky to secede from Russia right after the revolution. Estonia was lucky to have done the same and to have been recaptured by the Soviets whole 22 years after the revolution. This is why Finland was able to produce socks and Estonia, less Sovietized, was able to purchase them. This is why I was lucky to have the socks in the punishment cell of a labor camp in a remote part of Asia. There was definite progress in the world.

A pair of old darned socks made in Finland, sold in Estonia and tucked under the side of a political prisoner in Chita, whose political transgression was his desire to emigrate to America, could tell a lot to an inquisitive researcher. It was like an isolated fossil bone from which a paleontologist could reconstruct much of the mysterious extinct creature's life.

The Soviet system was a relic of bygone times—the times of Russian slavery abolished in 1861. It was not a humble lizard, descendant of proud dinosaurs, however. It was *Tyrannosaurus Rex* itself. There is a definite tragic and even poetic greatness in its weakness, decline, and demise. It will always be a part of human history, a contribution to human social heritage, and an evidence of evolution. It would be good to preserve communism somewhere, like the spotted owl, the white stork, and the bald eagle, or exhibit like the Plymouth Plantations on Cape Cod.

Russian communism was not just a local and unique phenomenon, a freak of nature. It was a precious window into universal human nature. It was something that had happened before and would happen again and again—hopefully as lizard and not as dragon. It might be resurrected if the globe ever lies in shambles and there are no newspapers, no toilet paper, probably, no Finland, and no Estonia.

Why do not hordes of American sociologists invade Russia to study the last dying mammoths and dinosaurs, their anatomy and physiology, their genes? Will we be prepared when they come again? Will we resurrect them ourselves when democracy in a big poor country calls for a state of emergency and the rationing of scarce resources? Will the growing government turn into a dragon overnight? Are we not breeding dinosaurs in our backyards on the ideas of equality? Equality needs somebody to count and dole out equally—and to stash away something for himself; inequality does not.

I had little hope of witnessing any progress in Russia while I was lying on the cold floor, while the KGB chief Andropov, whom I used to call the Dragon, was tightening the noose around Russia.

Some peculiar fish seemed to get into Andropov's dragnet.

Ivan could never accept my negative associations with my use of the word dragon. He was Chinese. Dragon was the symbol of happiness for him. In European fairy tales, however, dragons fed on young girls.

Ivan, as the zeks called him, was the most famous prisoner in the camp. His real name was Wang Zhulan. He was well over fifty, short, plump, slow, and good-natured. He was a sybarite and gourmet, and he despised physical work and physical activity, as well as conflict and resistance, on principle.

"If they want to torture me, I don't mind, but cannot be a torturer myself. It is better to be a victim than a torturer," he used to say. "People can do bad things to me. I cannot do that to others."

The way zeks treated Wang Zhulan showed an unusual degree of respect. That was because Ivan could work miracles.

Ivan had left a wife and a son in China to come to Russia in the 1950s for postgraduate study of medicine. By that time, he was already well known in China as the author of about a hundred published papers. After China, Russia seemed a rich and free country to him, so he asked for political asylum in the USSR. He got a PhD in physiology and became professor of physiology in a provincial city. He married one of his students, the most beautiful of all, as he said with pride, and they had two sons.

Ivan privately practiced acupuncture, which brought him an incredible amount of money and influence. He had a car. He bought a house and built a second one. By Soviet standards, he was a "billionaire." In the camp, he treated both zeks and ments with the needles zeks made for him for a couple cigarettes. Al arrived at the camp with a terrible eczema on his leg. The doctors could not do anything. Ivan cured him in a couple of sessions.

In the camp, Ivan lived a relatively comfortable life. He always had enough money and tea smuggled in during his wife's visits. He could always buy some forbidden additional food from the kitchen. Once he gave me a small Russian fried hamburger, which was a one of the kind happening in my camp life.

Ivan was spared intense labor; most of the time he was excused from all labor and devoted his time to writing a book. It was supposed to be the only encyclopedia of acupuncture in the world. Ivan wanted me to translate his manuscript into English. I started the work but soon discovered that, however vivid my memory about the hamburger was, the memory alone was not enough to run my brain.

Ivan's sentence was seven years in the camp for "fraudulent promises to treat people, without any subsequent improvement." Even taking into account the whole idiocy of Soviet life, it was a wild frame-up. Naturally, the KGB staged it, but I never understood why the KGB held a grudge against Ivan. He was a Chinese communist, loyal to the Soviets, and he treated the entire top party hierarchy in the city. Probably, I came to believe, that was exactly the point.

Ivan said that he had arguments with the local top party boss. Ivan was too closely involved with the shark pool of local politics, and, no doubt, he had been abusing his influence. The boss, the omnipotent master of the region, swore to teach Ivan a lesson and did it through the KGB. Besides, as a foreigner, Ivan was under the KGB's jurisdiction.

Ivan never made his story clear, and I was not sure he knew the real reason for his harsh sentence. I had the impression that Ivan did not quite understand the mechanism of the Soviet system. He was strictly pragmatic and apolitical by nature. All he wanted was to live a good life. He enjoyed money, influence, and

connections and did not try to cover up his wealth and to abide by the Soviet rules of the game. If he honestly earned it, why should he hide it?

In Russia, a natural popular reaction to wealth is burning envy. I believe that the envy ruined Ivan. He lived better than the city boss, and that could not be forgiven because it was politically incorrect.

Russia struck another blow against Ivan when he came out of the camp after seven years, a couple of months after me.

Close to the end of his term, he had sent one of the camp officers to his wife with the mission of delivering more money for himself. The officer stayed in his home. The result was that Ivan's wife fell in love with the officer, and when Ivan came home, he found he had none<sup>1</sup>.

The punishment cell was, however mild, the first real torture of my life. Fortunately, as I noticed then and later, hunger significantly decreased the ability of body to feel pain. Physically, my suffering and weakness were the same as for a normal person, but hunger made them seem less important.

Nevertheless, toward the end of the week I seemed to have arrived at my limit. I now had to change position every ten minutes, and it exhausted me. I believe my consciousness was blurred.

Many times I decided to take food. But every time the food was brought in, something irrational and obstinate prevented me from eating. I was driven by sheer curiosity. I wanted to know how much I could stand. I was still an experimenter. I could afford to be; since I had forced the situation on myself, I was its master. Probably, it was just a perversion of martyrdom.

It was only much later that I learned about the Jewish tradition that strongly opposed any deliberate harm to the body. At the same time, the Jews had their own martyrs, who could sometimes prevent terrible death by repenting or converting.

When one believes in God, victory and defeat are unimportant. It is up to God to determine what is what. I was too much of an individualist. I felt the universe reflected in me, and it would be less perfect if I gave up. This is why defeat terrified me so much. Probably I was too much of an adventurer, too. Experimenter is the right word.

It was the sixth night when I heard an unusual sound from the corridor. There was a cable radio in the guardroom. It was very hard to hear the music, but I could not be mistaken about Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*, one of my favorites.

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<sup>1</sup> I accidentally learned that Ivan later opened a private clinic in Moscow. He is warmly remembered there after his death.

Then I heard a voice solemnly announcing something.

Single-channel cable radio was always on in every barrack. I never heard anything like classical music on it, except some popular music by Tchaikovsky. I realized that somebody at the very top of the party had died. Could that be Andropov?

I pressed my ear to the door and heard Andropov's name. So, the Dragon was dead. I felt enormous joy. A grilled steak could not have instilled more energy in me. I was sure the worst was over. A wave of optimism changed my whole perception of the future history of mankind.

It was a good example of the same aberration I have to warn the reader against: I tied the current Russian reality to a name instead of the algebra of history.

Despite weakness, I really felt wonderful when I came "home." Al arranged a bath for me right in the barrack, because it was not the scheduled day for the brigade's weekly bathhouse trip. He helped me wash myself. A new uniform and new underwear were waiting for me on my bunk. I did not question their origin. It was part of the custom of greeting a zek back from the punishment block. A new reception was thrown in my honor. I found sweets in my nightstand. There was even the delicious orange jam from the camp store that was so expensive that I would never buy it even outside the camp.

My pleasure doubled when Al told me what he had heard from the ments. The American radio in Russian reported about my hunger strike, and I realized that my letter had reached Ann and she had contacted an American correspondent in Moscow.

There was a huge commotion over this among the ments. It was as if they had learned I was from Mars and the Martians were about to descend on Chita and pick me up from the yard. Such international publicity was unheard of here. The only way to reach America known here was to launch a missile with a nuclear warhead from the hills nearby. I, it turned out, had some other means of contact.

Legally, six months after the refusal, I could apply for another visit from my wife. The next day I sent another application to the warden. I wrote that I had stopped my hunger strike because of Andropov's death. I explained that I had more hope for the visit, and I promised to resume the hunger strike if I was not granted the visit.

The death of the Dragon inspired me and made me arrogant. I felt new hope, and I was sure I would win my struggle for the visit. The punishment cell, however, left a deep scar on my soul. With all the taste of victory in my bloodthirsty mouth, I was aware of the anesthesia of the moment. That was probably what the Jews felt when Haman died. The story was not over then for the Jews, nor was it for me. Neither was it for Russia.



My hunger strike was my defeat. The dybbuks had pushed me toward the path of dangerous and senseless active resistance, which I wanted to avoid. My first stint in the punishment cell had changed my status. Once on that path, I had to take it to the very end. I felt victorious, however. I needed a victory.

I've killed the Dragon! Who's next?

It was a victory!

## IV

### THE MORTUARY

April 1984, with which I started this story, had come, and with it the time came for my announced second hunger strike.

By that time, I was in a different brigade. Its officer, nicknamed Truba, was known as the toughest of the brigade commanders. I noticed that he visited the barrack more often than usual during the first three days of my strike. When he was walking along the aisle, I had a feeling that I was the only reason for his curiosity.

Could they put me into the punishment cell again despite all that outcry abroad? In my heart, I knew that the public outcry could be nothing more than a shortwave radio report, a couple of lines in a local newspaper, a bulletin of a Jewish organization, and a hundred letters to the Soviet authorities from abroad that would be destroyed without even being read, by order of a minor KGB officer.

America was far away, and here I could rely only on Nick, another *political* in the camp. He was sentenced to four years for illegally printing religious books in Moscow. I let him know about my plans and worries, but he never approved of my hunger strike.

Religion was always respected in the camps. Although a newcomer, Nick was already greatly popular. The zeks thought he was a priest. The spirit of active love and forgiveness was one of the basic traditions of Russian Orthodox Christianity, not always coming from the church hierarchy. Nick was on good terms with everybody, both as a pragmatic person and as a Christian, even though he disliked the Soviets, probably, even more than I did. The Soviets were for him scabs on the body of genuine Russia, while I saw them as a body part.

Nick's connections with influential zeks protected me in the camp. Nick instructed me on the intricacies of the punishment block and the code of behavior in it. He anticipated that I might be put into the devils' cell—an idea I instinctively rejected—and he gave me some advice.

On the fourth day, I was called to the watch. It could mean only that I faced a new punishment.

It was not the first time that I had gone through psychological adaptation to bad news. The common first reaction was an instinctive disbelief. Then the mind started working on its own, without a link to realities of the outside world.

The laws of my internal universe were as implacable toward other people as they were lenient to me. They were as egotistic as they were pathologically optimistic. What was bad and damaging for me seemed impossible; my mind rejected it. I was all emotions. Fury was boiling in my heart, and probably most of the stress that could physically harm me was dissipating with the steam.

The second wave of feelings was the hope that bad news still could have a favorable interpretation. My blind hope was supported by the chronic lack of information. I was hastily looking for other alternative explanations and possibilities. There were too many of them but no facts to cut the branching tree of possibilities right above the ground.

At the third and final stage, I intuitively calculated the probabilities of the outcomes, and the tree turned into foliage of fantasies over a solid stump of reality.

My counterfactual optimism was my natural painkiller. It gave me time to mobilize myself against the odds and to turn my soul into a rock.

I was doing better and better in the art of fatalistic self-petrification. I kept telling myself that I had already survived many crashes. Every crash had a happy end (at a price, of course). Pain always ends (sooner or, rather, later). I had all the parts of my body with me; my family was safe and, hopefully, well. The most important good news was that Andropov the Dragon, was dead. There should be a turn in the course of events. That has always been a Russian pattern — a political thaw after a harsh frost.

Turning to stone was part of my experimentation on myself. Sometimes it worked; sometimes it did not. The planet that I called *Myself* developed a hard crust, but the core was liquid and hard to control.

The habit of looking too far ahead prevented me from looking right under my feet. Paradoxically, it did me a service. While my body was deep in a pit, my spirit was far away, in the self-centered realm of the future, where I was the sovereign. This time, however, I needed all the optimism the glands of my soul could secrete. I needed a lot of optimism even for the simple hope that the pain would ever end.

When I was called to the watch again, still in the barrack, I emptied my pockets, took off my scarf and gloves, hid some fabric ends that would serve as toilet paper in my underwear, and told the zek doorman:

"I have been called to the watch. Let me out."

"Don't you worry, old man. They cannot put you into the hole. It is for the young guys."

"Yes, they can, bastards."

I thought that this time I had a lot of experience. I knew that a wooden floor was not promised to me, but solitude was. I forgot, however, that the world of evil was also subject to the universal law of evolution, and you cannot enter the same cell twice.

On my way to the watch, I pretended not to be stirred by the huge clear sky over the low roofs and distant fence of the camp. I did not permit myself to say good-bye to the blue freedom over my head. I was chasing away the vision and the smell of the punishment block, which was still fresh in my memory.

This time the room was full of people. Truba was sitting at the control panel. All officers who by that time were on duty inside the camp were standing along the walls and against the window. The warden and his deputies, several brigade commanders, chief supervisor of the working zone, and the doctor—all those people in long mouse-gray or dung-brown trench coats, black Russian high boots, epaulets with golden stars, and visored service caps—came to meet me as if I were an inspector general from Moscow. I was so overwhelmed by the gathering that I was hardly listening to what Truba was reading from the paper.

It sounded something like:

"For the violation of the internal regimen which manifested itself in non-coming to dinner, convict Edward Lutsky is punished by confinement in the punishment cell for fifteen days."

I got the meaning, although the sound of Truba's voice was like the squeaking of a gate or the clanking of the small horseshoes the guards wore on the heels of their high boots. I could interpret them, but they existed only in the present and had no bearing on my future. My future was being decided somewhere far

away, in Moscow, in Washington, or in Kharkov. Another punishment cell or not, it did not matter. Fifteen days of solitary confinement could be a rest from the camp. I decided to drop my hunger strike, because this time I was completely exhausted.

I was standing, my back against the wall, breathing heavily, a middle-aged man most of all interested in problems that had nothing to do with everyday life, with a shaven head and, I believe, a very wild look.

With all my heart, I was grateful to Kafka, Goya, Brueghel, and Bosch, who had long ago prepared me for the reality of the unreal world. They were my immunization shots.

I realized in an instant what the purpose of the gathering was. They wanted to catch me at something like shouting "fascists," as I had done the last time. The designated witnesses of my anti-Soviet remarks, they were overzealous and foolishly diligent in following the orders of the KGB, and they exposed themselves.

The Russian saying "Make a fool pray and he will hurt his forehead" needs only to explain that too-observant Russians used to touch the floor with their foreheads when kneeling in the church.

I showed no emotions. That was a defeat, no doubt. Inside captivity, they had captured me again. The concentric captivities were like the Russian nested doll: a doll inside a doll inside a doll inside a doll . . .

I was defeated once again, and humiliated once again before my internal pride and myself.

"Will you sign a statement that you read the sentence?" Truba said.

"I will not sign anything."

Nobody moved. Nobody said anything. They were still waiting for the expected anti-Soviet remarks. Some of them dropped their eyes. "What idiots," were the only words circulating in my mind while I was looking at the long coats, high boots, and pious, confused, sullen, surprised faces of former teachers of history and freedom-loving classical Russian literature, turned into marionettes.

The silent scene was losing all its sense. Truba looked at the warden for a hint, and the warden nodded in response.

"Take the convict away," Truba said to the guard who was stamping in the corridor.

"It looks like you know the way," the guard said from behind my back when we came out of the watch.

"Yes, I do."

"Not the first time, uh? What for?"

"They denied me my wife's visit. She came here from three thousand miles away, and they did not let her in."

"No one arrests anybody for that."

"I am a *political*."

"No, you are not. There are special zones for the *politicals*."

The guard, impressed by what he had just seen, sounded sympathetic.

It was early afternoon. I was enjoying my last breaths of the fresh April air, the brightness of the snow, the naked trees at the hospital, and the last view of the sky. We were walking along the pathway between two rows of barbed wire. I wanted to slow my stride and was ashamed of my desire.

The densely grated windows under the flat roof were getting closer and closer, too fast. Now that I had already been there, I was afraid of it much more than the first time.

The gray squat barrack of the punishment block was as irregular and rough as anything else around. Each window looked different: some grated with rods, some with stripes of metal, some with rags between the bars. There was no frost, but steam was pouring out of some windows. Damp patches from the melted snow on the sills and from the condensing steam were seen on the walls under the windows.

Although the look of the ragged building made me shiver, I was looking forward to the blessed solitude of the cell. I was happy to have outsmarted the ments and avoided the provocation. Even if the inside heat were still more suffocating in April than in February, at last the floor would not be as cold as it had been in the winter.

Fifteen days seemed not much longer than seven.

Inside, following the familiar procedure, I was ordered to undress. I took off my padded jacket, put my hat and scarf into a sleeve, took off my high boots. They would be taken by the foreman and brought to the brigade. The guard searched me without zeal. Fortunately, he did not find my "toilet paper" rags. I entered the familiar corridor and made for the distant end where my previous cell was. Two soldiers with batons stood at the left wall. I did not think their presence had anything to do with me.

"Who's brought in?" zeks shouted inside cells. I kept walking.

"Stop! Wrong way! Get in here," the guard said. I turned back. He was opening a door I had just passed. A bunch of keys was clanging in his hands. I walked to the open door. The half-dark den was packed with inhuman figures sitting on the floor.

Instantly another picture from my recent past flashed into my mind.

The Russian word for refusal (*otkaz*) sounds like the English *outcast*. The English word associates with *refuse*. Refusal was a mode of life for a Soviet citizen who had been denied an exit visa and *de facto* expelled from the society for the disloyal desire to emigrate. Both connotations were components of that involuntary lifestyle. Life in the refusal was physically and mentally exhausting, especially for activists, who aggravated their disloyalty to the government by their persistence and banding together. One never knew when another 1937 would knock on the door.

The refusal had been going on since 1979, and nobody could see an end to it. Life went on, too, marked by birth and death, love and estrangement, illness and recovery, as usual, but all that tinted with bitter grief.

A daughter of one of the Kharkov refuseniks committed suicide. She was over thirty, divorced, with a history of mental problems aggravated by the duress of the refusal. I took charge of picking up the body from the coroner. It was a hot July afternoon.

I was walking from the streetcar stop to the city mortuary. Still a block away from it, I noticed a strange smell. I was sure it was totally new for me, but, at the same time it reminded of something familiar.

The smell carried a disturbing message. It was not as disgusting as it was frightening. The closer I was to the building, the more alarming the smell. It was like the piercing sound of an ambulance or a police siren. At the gate of the building, I realized what it was. The smell carried the message of putrefaction. It was always described in literature as sweetish. I recognized it by its description and by its message that touched some deep animal cords in my spine.

Afternoon was the time for releasing the bodies. From time to time, the large folding door opened to a space about the size of a garage. Two men in dirty white lab coats and rubber aprons would take from the relatives the funeral clothes and coffins for the dead. Then the door was closed. After a while, it would open again to the body put neatly into the coffin.

There was a huge pile of clothes in the corner, some torn and bloodstained. In these clothes, the corpses were brought in for examination by the coroner. They were released to relatives during the morning reception hours.

Inside there was another door at the back. Sometimes both doors were left open and I could see the mortuary. In dim yellow light it looked like filled with mist. There were shelves along the wall. I could see somebody's naked hand hanging from a shelf on the right. There were vague contours of another naked body along the back wall. I could barely see it in the mist.

A young man approached the door. The morticians were joking around.

"Who are you looking for? Your granny? Oh, yeah, there is an old lady. Your granny is a little bit rotten. Wait a little, you'll have your granny back."

The pockets of their stained lab coats were stuffed with wads of money. How can they work there? I wondered. How can they wash away that terrible smell? How can they eat and be with a woman?

The rest of the day, after the funeral, the heartbreaking Kaddish, read by the father over his only daughter was ringing in my ears, and the smell was in my nostrils.

The cell that opened for me in the punishment block and the smell inside of it reminded me of the mortuary. The smell was different but similar. It was distantly related to death.

The yellow mist was the same, too, produced by the same physical effect. The cool air from the corridor caused the condensation of the damp air in the cell, like the cool air inside the mortuary caused the condensation of the hot and humid air of July.

It was another House of the Dead.

Unlike the bodies in the mortuary, however, the figures in the cell were definitely alive. Their glistening eyes on dirty faces stared at me in wonder.

Bewildered, I hesitated at the door of the cell. Then I noticed that it was the first door from the left. I raised my eyes. The number was barely discernible on the wall above the door. Without my glasses, I could easily miss it. It was "the Ninth," the devils' cell. "Never enter the devils' cell of your own free will," Nick's booming voice sounded in my ears.

It was yet another manifestation of the basic law of dealing with dybbuks. Whatever you expect from dybbuks in response to your action, the reality will be worse beyond your imagination. It was their trade and their professional pride not to be human. Superman always was the ultimate ideal of secret police. My optimism has blinded me. It was another bloody blunt blunder of my own doing.

Such a blow can be compared, probably, with the moment when one realizes that his parachute will not open. The next move is to grab for the spare parachute. I did not have one. All I had for my own rescue was the thought that I would survive, just survive, even this.

I drew in an instant all the consequences of what the dybbuks intended to do to me. I even saw myself with a crowbar, picking an iceberg of frozen urine, splinters flying into my face. I saw scabs all over my smashed lips—some scabs cracked up, ichor oozing from the cracks. I saw myself with my head in a barrel of water, my legs kicking in the air, my fingers clutching at the rim of the barrel. That was a picture I saw once in Truba's brigade when his trustees punished a devil for failing to meet the quota. I heard "Get out of here, you devil," ringing in my ears. I saw rough dirty fingers spread wide to punch out my eyes. Would I ever again think about anything that had nothing to do with the needs of the day?



I had no strength to resist. What for? How much could I stand? I had had enough. So be it. Stinking and mangy, sooner or later, I would be out of the camp. I would wash everything away. The scars would heal. I would never tell anybody about what happened to me, and whatever happened, there would always be an escape, the last resort of suicide.

This time I felt broken, tired, exhausted, and drained. There was no anger, because there were no more calories for anger. Even self-petrification is a process that needs energy, as making ice cubes in the fridge does.

It was a moment of weakness. Nevertheless, the propensity to try everything to the very end was as inborn in me as my perfidious optimism. Fortunately, my stubbornness made me follow the prescribed ritual of an "honest" zek from the caste of peasant, the camp's middle class, who had to surrender to force while being pushed into a devils' cell. I pulled together all my remaining strength and yelled into the corridor.

"Hey, countrymen! I'm Ed Lutsky, the *political* from the sixth brigade! They are putting me into the Ninth! I am keeping a hunger strike. Look what the ments are doing to me!" I did not want to offend my future cellmates, so I did not call them devils. I did not say, "They are pushing me to the devils."

The reaction of the zeks was immediate. I heard a buzz and the din of mugs against iron grates.

"Guys, we know him! Hey, countryman, don't give up! Fight! Beat the devils out of the cell! Lance yourself!" That good advice from the zeks was in strict accordance with the camp code. I had to play a role from Arnold Schwarzenegger's repertoire or commit a version of the Japanese seppuku.

I was not well versed in the intricacies of the code of honor among thieves, but I suspected that its main function was to introduce some fun into the oppressive void of prison life, which even TV in each brigade could not fill, all the more that it was black and white. Fresh red blood remains one of the most ancient unifying attractions for humankind.

The extent of that instant reaction and the support of the zeks told me that they had been warned about my arrival. I understood that Nick had done some work on my behalf, and I felt better.

It looked, however, as if the zeks had taken me for a prominent thief who had done something extraordinary, judging by the measure of the punishment. As soon as I was inside the devils' cell, I was supposed to beat all of them so that they would run out when a guard opened the door. If I was unable to beat them, I had to rip open my own belly with a hidden razor blade. In any case, I was not to stay in the same cell with devils.

"Hey, you bloody devils! Don't touch him! We'll kill you if something goes wrong with him!" a strong young voice shouted. I felt a little bit more protected.

"No, countrymen, I can't! I am a *political*. The *politicals* cannot lance themselves; it is not done. We have our own law. If I fight, they will pin another term on me. This is why they are pushing me into the Ninth."

"So, you'll be a devil yourself! Don't step in! Fight! Cut yourself!"

I remembered well what Nick had told me. "If they want to put you into the Ninth, lie down on the floor. Do not walk inside—never. This is all you can do. Let them throw you in. If you don't go in of your own free will, there still may be a chance."

The soldiers and the guard hesitated. They knew very well that what was being done to me was unusual, not justified by any standard, and should not happen. Nevertheless, they were carefully pushing me toward the open door. I resisted. I was really terrified by what I saw both inside the cell and in my future.

My eyes had already adjusted to the darkness and the mist. In the dim yellow light, I saw grotesque, dirty faces, glistening half-naked tattooed bodies, and torn uniforms. Everyone in the cell was sitting on the floor because the bunks were folded up into the walls. The coming out air was hot, damp, and stinking. I felt nausea and deep weakness. My heart sank. The suffocating humid air terrified me more than the faces. My yelling had totally exhausted me.

"Don't make a big deal of it. Throw him in," the guard was saying to the soldiers. As soon as they touched me, I sank to the concrete floor. The soldiers and the guard grabbed me by my hands and legs, carried me into the cell, and put me on the floor, my head to the door. The grating closed with a bang and then the iron door shut.

"Hi. I am keeping a hunger strike," I said. "This is my fourth day. I am not feeling well."

There were seven men in the cell, which seemed like nine to twelve feet square. No one was older than twenty-five. Two of them belonged to a higher rank, judging by the places in two distant corners that they occupied. Unlike my previous cell, this one had no concrete cubes for sitting. There was a rough wooden table on an iron frame, made whole with two narrow benches. The two devils and the table occupied more than half the cell. Nobody could use the space under the table because of its frame. Five other people squatted at the walls or lay on the floor. Three strips of daylight as wide as a pen seeped between wide iron strips over the small window high up near the ceiling.

To my horror, the cooler air left after the door stayed open was quickly disappearing. The heat was on. I saw a familiar steam pipe along the external wall.

"Give him some place," one of the half-naked, heavily tattooed zeks ordered. The zek in the right front corner moved off. I rolled over to the right wall. The left front corner was reserved for the foul bucket. The cell was not long enough to

accommodate two rows of sleeping zeks. When they lay heads apart—one to the window wall, the other to the door—their feet intermingled.

Five minutes after the door was shut, I began to suffocate. There seemed to be no air whatsoever in the cell. For the first time in my life, I was fainting in a prone position. My heart refused to work. I was breathing deeply and noisily, inhaling the fetid vapors. I felt close to death. It was just an instinct.

Can we really know when we are close to death? After his second heart attack, my father was taken to the hospital. The day came when he handed over all his valuables in the hospital to my mother—wristwatch, handkerchief, glasses, and electric razor. "I won't need these anymore," he said. He died the next day.

I am sure that something warns us when death is close. Death comes and goes away; it is not always inevitable. I think it is a particular serenity, the sensation of peace, reconciliation, and a feeling of the significance of the moment that tells us about the closeness of death.

I tried not to move in order to conserve oxygen. The thermodynamics of life says that, apart from regular physiological processes, the smallest mental act—even a simple wish or a short thought, not just a hot desire or long calculations—consumes energy. The heart is just a muscle, and it needs oxygen or it will stop.

I had no strength to go on with the hunger strike. I was now in the most serious jeopardy, and my wife's visit lost all its significance. Suddenly everything but air mattered. I did not think about life and death. I just wanted to breathe. I realized that the iron door would be colder than the air in the cell.

"I realized. I knew. I understood." In fact, there was a swarm of small creatures in my head, a forum, or a pandemonium, where a heated debate was taking place. As never before, I felt the granularity of my existence, its statistical basis. Every decision I made was the result of many small acts, as the movement of a dune was result of individual movements of myriad grains of sand. I felt myself just an abstraction, like a figurehead king or some other symbol. I was a people. "I" was multiple, granular, particulate. "I" was just a label on a jar filled with flies and worms.

That was how a nation of many individuals could be synchronized into a person and act like one; this is how a person can be as complex as a nation. Russia and I were just nested dolls.

As I still remember my childhood nightmare, I shall never forget that eerie feeling I had about myself during those first hours in the punishment cell, when my life was about to abandon me. It was not suffering. I was not in pain, but it was as if I were no longer human. Probably it was very close to how an animal feels. After such an experience, I knew I would feel much closer to animals, trees, and sand. I was just a breathing and moving grain of sand in something much larger than myself, in a dune, and I was a slowly moving dune myself.

I crept closer to the door. My face caught a vaguely perceptible current of colder air. I pressed my forehead to the grating that separated the door and the cell. There was an invisible crack somewhere between the door and the jamb. To catch that air, I had to keep my neck stretched out. Now I knew that I would not faint. After about an hour, I began to recover. The zeks asked me a couple of questions and left me in peace.

The concrete floor in the cell was made of gravel mixed with the smallest possible amount of cement. In my corner, the gravel was only half-embedded in the concrete. It was like lying on walnuts, but I did not move so as not to cut the lifeline of the cold air.

Dinner came, and so did more cold air from the open door. I ate a slice of white bread and knew that I would survive.

I was in the devils' cell, I ate and drank hot water with the devils, and so I was a devil, a pariah myself. I felt I was coming back to life, but the life I was coming back to was frightful. Now, when I could breathe, I could think about life and death.

During the day, everybody in the cell was asleep. The floor was the only available place for that. There were five of us in the front row—from the foul bucket to my corner. I was never able to stretch out my legs, because my feet would touch the soles of one of the two zeks who lay their heads toward the window. I was pressed against a hot, damp body. I tried not to think about how dirty it was. Fortunately, on my other side was the wall. Very soon I felt a familiar tickling: the lice.

Reveille was at four. Five times a day the door opened—for three meals, roll call, and emptying the foul vessel. The huge iron casserole had a chain put through a piece of pipe going through the wall and fixed outside. A guard unchained it from the outside. To fix it again, the guard would put a rod with a hook through the hole and pull out the chain.

Those were the five times a day I could breathe freely. Sometimes the heat was off, and I enjoyed the coolness. Very soon, however, the zeks in other cells, probably, with broken windows started demanding heat.

The bunks were unfolded from 10:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. Nobody could sleep on the upper bunks because it was too hot and humid there. Besides, prison custom dictated that life in the cell began after dinner, and sleeping at night was just not done. Nighttime was for tea drinking, smoking, and talking. Zeks brewed the smuggled tea in an aluminum mug over burning pieces of cloth from the uniforms. The pockets and sleeves went first. A zek coming out of a punishment cell used to wear only shreds of his uniform. Half-naked, he would trot back to his brigade, rain or frost.

At night, the camp prison was humming with voices. The zek nicknamed

Glove was the dominant figure in the Ninth. His entire left arm was covered with a tattoo, which was just a hatching over another picture that Glove, for some reason, wanted to hide. Glove's stories reverberated across the cell for hours. He talked about poaching in wildlife preserves, raping women, fighting a rival gang in the neighborhood, stealing, squealing on other zeks in the camp, and doing, as was the devils' vocation, the job of picking up tea and condensed milk thrown over the fence into the camp. The goods landed on the strictly forbidden and dangerous but still accessible area between the rows of barbed wire.

Glove's recitals reminded me of *Metamorphoses* by Ovid. He would start in a low key and then climbed the steps of emotional tension, one after another, invoking more and more details and using more and more onomatopoeic words, louder and louder with each step. Finally, excited by his own story, which was orated in a kind of rhythmic, almost poetic form of obscene slang, he would rise and start pacing back and forth within the tiny space. Physical movement was the last thing he could add to build up his crescendo.

Glove's strong voice invaded my consciousness, echoed in my brain, and chased away all thoughts. More and more wild goats and deer were tumbling down under his rifle, more and more women ceased to resist him, and urinated and defecated in ecstasy under his body. More and more vodka went down his throat. More and more tea and canned milk flew over the fence into his hands, and more and more he pocketed himself instead of delivering to the thieves. Excited by his stories, the others tried to tell something about their own deeds, but Glove made fun of them.

Although there seemed to be no room for anybody else, newcomers, one after another, were pushed into the cell. One of them had been caught at the garbage bins, where he was looking for some food. That made him an outcast even among devils. After interrogation, Glove ordered him to sit on the foul vessel covered by a lid with a handle on top. The poor zek could sit with only one lean buttock because the handle was right in the middle of the lid. Glove began to pick on him, engaging in the cruel prison game of asking questions that had no correct answers.

Glove was getting excited. He flew into a rage and punched the tormented zek in the face. The zek began to dash around the cell over the prone bodies. I had to rise. I stood up, leaning against the door. Two feet away, Glove was furiously beating the zek, who was standing in my corner. The victim tried to cover his head and face. Blood was splashing under the blows from his nose onto the wall next to my face. Glove reached the grand finale of his performance.

"It's all right. That'll do, Glove. You jerk, wash your face." Crooky, the other top devil, stopped the beating. There was always somebody in the camp who stopped the battering. I never knew whether it was pity or fear of punishment for inflicting severe injury. I thought it was the latter. Of all I saw behind bars, nothing

depressed me as much as the beatings of the defenseless.

I saw from my corner the cell stuffed with macabre figures. The dim light, the feeling of another hot body pressed to my own, the lice, the zek with swollen lips, trying desperately to sleep while sitting in an impossible position—that was real hell.

I hated the devils. I hated both the butcher and the victim. I was close to hating this whole world, where every tiny part, once isolated from the rest, developed the same vicious complexity of relations, the same suffering, cruelty, and malice, as a small shred of tissue taken from a plant leaf develops roots, leaves, and grows into a new plant.

What about a man in solitary confinement? Probably his own personality would split into sadist and masochist, master and slave, hero and coward.

I think that a writer who builds a world from his own memory and personality should be a very lonely person.

Every other day, the punishment ration consisted only of bread and water three times a day. On the days in between, there were regular meals: breakfast of a few half-rotten anchovies, millet or barley without any fat or oil, and bread; a lunch of zero to five small shreds of cabbage in salted water and bread; a dinner of gruel and bread. All was dispensed in very small quantities, but it was enough for a body without movement and a mind without work, especially because of the ambient heat. Combined with the cold, this diet would be lethal.

But the bread was wonderful: the best in the camp. It was white, fresh, and fragrant, with a crunchy crust, about four ounces a serving. They could not grow such grain in Chita. I never saw it even in Ukraine. Probably it was imported American or Canadian wheat to feed the heavily militarized region. The kitchen labor was all zeks, and it was their obligation to send the best bread to the punishment block.

As I took my light amber colored bread from the dirty hands of my mates, I tried to think about the hydrochloric acid in the human stomach that kills germs and about the primitive tribes that do not wash their hands but live on. As I drank from a mug that had never been washed, I comforted myself with the thought that every prisoner was tested for syphilis after his arrest.

Nevertheless, every meal was a trial for me.

How could I live afterwards? I wondered. How could I tell anybody about this? Surely I would never be able to wash away all this dirt and smell from my body and my soul. I would smell like the men from the mortuary, but my pockets would never be stuffed with money. I would be cynical like them. I would never be the same.

I was in the House of the Dead, in a small compartment of the Soviet

mortuary for the living.

Every cloud has a silver lining. The House of the Dead gave me the gift of flying.

Every couple of seconds I saw a moment of my past—my childhood, school, places I had been to, mostly in Kharkov. I was coming back to the same moments and places again and again.

The city's historical downtown area was built on a hill. Often I saw myself standing on the edge of the precipice in the park near our apartment house. The newer neighborhoods spread below. From that point, I would begin my flight over the city of my childhood and lonely youth, taking imaginary snapshots of streets and squares. Then I flew over thousands of miles to Siberia, to the city where I had spent my whole active life, where I loved, wrote poetry, had surgery, was divorced, married Ann, and where our daughter was born.

I flew to Moscow and Leningrad, but I kept coming back to my native Kharkov from all the other places in the country. I could neither control nor stop my flights and the flashbacks. I was unable to think, and I had no feelings except toward Ann. I felt great tenderness toward her, as well as a sense of guilt. I was watching a series of snapshots of her, taken at different moments throughout our life. I kept coming back to the moment when she felt the beginning of labor. I saw her young round face reflecting fear mixed with determination and the desire for fulfillment. I felt great sorrow and regret about everything bad and unjust I had ever done to her.

All my life, my friends, enemies, and relatives, passed before my closed eyes. The life I had lived before seemed poor and shabby, but it was so moving and heartbreaking, like a sick child.

Distant times and distant places followed one another with rhythmic clicks. The impressions of my life were like a game of catch with a beach ball where the players stand in a circle and everyone can throw the ball to anyone else, with neither time nor distance as part of the game. I watched for hours that strobe flashing of pictures, until the stentorian voice of Glove chased the images away.

Yet the very first days and nights, when I was very weak and had no energy even for daydreaming, I watched my breathing. It was like looking at waves at seashore. There was instinctive anxiety at the end of the breathing cycle, a brief uncertainty about whether the new breath would come, then a happy satisfaction when it did. It was the lowest level of life, but it provided me with both suffering and pleasure—two electric contacts supplying power to the life of spirit. My inhalations and exhalations were like the days and nights of the planet *Myself*, and never before my sensation of solitude in the void around me had been so sharp.

Life at the very bottom had its other pleasures. The periodic search of the cell by the guards was one of them. An annoyance in the freedom of the camp, here it was a feast of breathing because we stood in the corridor full of marvelous fresh air. Unfortunately, it did not take place every day.

Once, the camp barber came to shave heads and beards with electric scissors.

"Regards from Priest," he said. "He asked me to tell you not to worry. It'll be OK."

I felt enormous relief. So, Nick had managed to settle all that. I will not be a devil. Everything around me has changed. I felt new hope.

I was released on time.

On shaking legs, I walked out into the blessed freedom of the labor camp. The day was unbelievably bright, and the camp seemed as beautiful as a river streaming between summer meadows.

The chief doctor was passing by. Apparently shocked by my appearance, he silently shook his head. I looked awful. When I came to the barrack, I saw in the mirror an unfamiliar, haggard, dirty, unshaven face with sunken eyes and a lifeless expression.

Nick told me later how hard it was to persuade Maksud, an influential top thief, to contact the rest of the leading thieves and to explain to them that it was an unprecedented case that needed a special approach. The thieves insisted that I should have beaten the devils or cut myself. Maksud was initially of the same opinion.

Maksud belonged to the small Muslim nation of Ingush, in Caucasus. His people had been forcefully resettled to Siberia and other regions by Stalin. He was intelligent, resourceful, and hot-tempered. Bright and hot people used to get into prison for fights while in the military service. So did Maksud.

The next day I had to go to work. Every half hour I had to sit down, because I was very weak. My head was completely empty, and I could not concentrate on anything except my movements.

I decided to stop demanding a visit from my wife. I needed a rest. This time I did not need any additional exercise in the art of self-petrification. I seemed to have achieved mastery.

It is hard to say what the most joyous event in my prison term was, Andropov's death or my wife's unexpected visit the next year, but I never went lower after the Ninth. It was a turning point in my prison life, as the Dragon's end was a turning point in Soviet Russian history.



An absolutely incredible and unheard-of thing happened—I came out of the devils' cell as an "honest" zek. I felt my victory as a bitter defeat, however, even remembering what the poet Boris Pasternak said: you are not supposed to tell victory from defeat on your own.

## LEUKEMIA

My transformation into an enemy of the people took about thirty years.

The long story began in 1956, when Nikita Khrushchev's astonishing de-Stalinization speech was read to the freshmen in the Chemistry Department of the Kharkov Institute of Technology of which I was a student.

By that time, millions of people all around the country were listening to the secret speech at meetings behind closed doors. Making a "secret" speech public by revealing it to the entire adult population "in private" was a classic example of Soviet logic.

When Stalin, the Greatest Teacher and Dear Father, died in 1953, I cried. I was seventeen by that time, and it felt like the greatest loss of my life. My father looked at me with understanding but no compassion. He even seemed in good mood.

Three years later, I learned from Khrushchev's speech that Stalin was one of the greatest criminals on Earth. In an instant, my picture of the world—mostly limited to my country—became a photographic negative, where white stood for black and all the colors were wrong. My generation learned that we were deceived for our whole, albeit short, lives. We loved Dear Father and believed in him. It was all a lie.

As many Soviet people remembered it later, that was a personal turning

point. The collision of Soviet logic with Aristotelian was the Big Bang of Soviet dissent. For it was clear that the system that had produced Stalin remained intact. I lost faith in communism but not hope. I thought Russia could still make progress toward freedom. That was Chapter 1 of my story.

Chapter 2 opened in 1968, when I came back to Krasnoyarsk after a vacation in Estonia. I entered my empty apartment, turned on the radio, and heard the news about the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. That was the day I lost my remaining hope along with my faith in Russia. Still, my hope for personal happiness in that country survived. Soon it became obvious that the invasion of Czechoslovakia was not just an outward strike. A new round of internal terror started, and I had no more political illusions after that. I felt complete aversion toward Soviet life, and sometimes active hate or stagnant despire.

Even love cannot always make one happy. Hate, which is a chronic unhappiness, never does.

Chapter 3 opened with my discovery that I got under surveillance of the KGB, the state security. It was 1976. All my mental ties to Russia were now severed. The next year I moved from Krasnoyarsk to Kharkov, my father died, Ann joined me, and we applied for exit visas two years later. All that sounds simple, but it was not.

I got into the Great Refusal with thousands of other applicants. Four years later, in 1983, I was among a dozen privileged refusenik prisoners.

The prison chapter of my story opened on a misty morning in March 1983. By that time, I was living with my wife, our daughter, and my mother in the same house in which I had been born 47 years earlier.

I came down from our fourth-floor apartment to walk our dog, Magda.

This charming, out of this world, white-and-tan Saluki of a rare Asian breed was my first encounter with something real, valuable, and beautiful. She was delicate, aristocratic, graceful, and seemed a bewitched princess who sadly resigned to the fact that people treated her as a dog. I had worshiped distant beauty all my life, and suddenly it was here in the shape of a fairy tale creature.

I will never forget my first impression of Magda. An incredibly long, flat, and skinny body appeared before me. A small, elongated head with the nose of a supersonic jet was looking up with huge light brown eyes that flitted incessantly. The folded ears were pressed tightly to the head. Gold and silver were her colors. Only her long slim legs and the tail were all white.

The dog had been abandoned by her master and was found in a remote village by our neighbor. What I saw as beauty, the villagers saw as ugliness. Feeding from mounds of garbage and bullied by the local children, she was even now so weak that she could neither sit nor stand for more than three minutes and

needed to lie down.

Soon, however, she was happy and childishly playful, and she gave us the solace only a baby could have provided. We joined a company of Borzoi hunters, and our excursions to the countryside gave me my first rest and relief from the life in refusal.

The chase with a pack of Borzois was a proud Old Russian form of aristocratic fun. The sight of the stretched line of big fabulous animals flying after a hare along the ridge of a hill excited me as it used to excite Russian squires of generations past, but I was not a hunter in my heart. Fortunately, the neglected breed of dogs had lost its strength, and I never saw a hare caught. Yet Magda used to be the head of the pack.

Now Magda was about to go into heat, and she was anxiously pulling me through the half-melted snow. She was pulling me to the park, the regular meeting place for dogs and their masters despite the prohibition on pets.

We were walking through the yard gate when a young man caught my eye. His face and clothes were colorless, unremarkable. He seemed severely strained as if hobbled. I felt an instant tie between us, like the leash between Magda and me. The greater the distance between us, the tighter the invisible string. I stopped. He turned back and passed me again, trying not to look at me.

My friend Gary had taught me to recognize a tail. Many times, when they were following Gary or me, I saw a KGB agent pretending to be idle in the streets. The occupation of the agents was always evident in how hard they concentrated on feigning indifference.

I would worry about the encounter if not for the recent long period of peace between the KGB and me. Our last two meetings had been generally nonthreatening. The dybbuks were concerned only with the contacts between the refuseniks and the West. They showed me a copy of an article in *The New York Times* about refuseniks in Kharkov—it was a result of a meeting of refusenik activists with American correspondents in Moscow—and they wanted explanations. They said that if I were allowed to emigrate and made anti-Soviet statements, they would find me abroad and punish for that. It sounded as if they had decided to let me go. On my request, they even reconnected my telephone, which had been cut off for two years, subjecting my mother to a great stress.

I had let down my guard. Even if I had not, what could I have done? The basic principles of my attitude were strictly passive: to accept anything that could happen to me, not to violate the law in any way, never to cooperate with the authorities, and not to offend or irritate the dybbuks just for the fun of it.

Two hours after Magda and I came back from our walk, the doorbell rang.

"A telegram for you," a voice behind the door said. I opened the door.

"Come in, comrades," the man said happily to somebody downstairs and gave way to a group of four people. He himself disappeared.

That was how the search and arrest began.

Two people were investigator Tomin, in a dark blue uniform, and a typical dybbuk in civilian clothes, who uttered an incomprehensible sound instead of his name. The two other young men were, as I found out later, "law students," whether true or not. The Soviet arrest ritual demanded the presence of witnesses, who were supposed to be neighbors or just people on the street. The dybbuks used to invite law students to witness the search, for practice. They pretended to be passers-by.

After showing me a search warrant, the dybbuks began a superficial search. They were obviously not looking for hiding places. They found inside a book a facetious poem I had written for Purim, and they stuffed a bag with my foreign correspondence and all the color photographs I had received with letters from my supporters abroad.

My mother was in shock, and she went to the other room. A search did not necessarily mean an arrest, and Ann was quietly watching the procedure. Our daughter came from school and could not understand what was going on. Magda wanted out again. The dybbuks would not allow anybody to walk her.

"We have to take your husband with us for a talk," Tomin said to my wife. "He may come home tomorrow. You can give him a sandwich."

"Why should I go with you? No way."

With a mixture of regret and triumph, Tomin opened a folder and displayed a warrant for detention but not for imprisonment.

My mother came out and silently watched how I put on the worst clothing I could find—dark shirt, old pants, old overcoat. Regrettably, I put on my only fur hat, a treasure bought on a lucky occasion many years ago in Moscow. I did not have anything older. I took the sandwich my wife made for me. I kissed my mother, wife, daughter, and Magda and went downstairs with the dybbuks.

The car we waited for did not arrive. The dybbuks asked me to take the streetcar with them, but I refused. The three of us waited quietly, standing on the sidewalk. We could probably look to passersby like good friends, especially when Ann came down with Magda and joined us.

"Don't worry," I told her while we had a chance. "Everything will be fine. Do all you can to let people know. You know whom to call." I meant American correspondents in Moscow. "Don't do anything else. Just be patient and wait for me. Just wait."

In the midst of this uneasy scene, one of the dybbuks decided to ask me, in the very elaborate lingo of his species, what should have been a profoundly simple question. The clarity of English does not allow me to reproduce the rhetorical mess

that the dybbuk made of his question, but loosely, what he asked was how I was feeling about all this. The exact meaning, of course, was fluid, evasive, and ambiguous. The task of interpretation was mine, so the dybbuk could say later, "I never said such things," or "Remember, I warned you, didn't I?" The dybbuk language was designed to prevent later reference to anything that had been spoken.

"Let some time pass," I said. "Someday you will be retired. Ask your son about what happened in 1983, and he will tell you. They will study that at school." I meant the overall atmosphere of repression, but I naively overestimated our significance. I overlooked the clock-like circularity of Russian history patterns.

A car finally pulled up to pick up three unremarkable men standing quietly on an unremarkable sidewalk. But the girl and the old woman in the window of my apartment—they were my daughter and mother and the woman with a dog on the street was my wife.

How did I feel, indeed? I had a little time to think about it during the ten-minute car ride. The Soviet life had adapted me to many unpleasant things. I never took them easily. Now I was drinking from my cup with great sadness mixed with chilling excitement.

I did not want to get into this car. I did not want to be arrested. I was unaware of any transgression of my own except that I delayed seeking emigration for too long. I got into the car as into a taxicab.

Prison, labor camp, punishment, trial, criminals—all that had no sensual basis for me. All my molecules were from free life, however limited that freedom was. I could be afraid of something known. I had never been afraid of an unknown. The unknown was my trade and my obsession. I was a scientist: a hunter for the unknown.

A chemist, separated for years from his flasks and heavenly stinking chemicals, I was longing for the New and the Different and for breathtaking discoveries in the flask of my brain. People, molecules—what is the difference? They all move, bond together, split apart, and recombine. It is all chemistry.

The car stopped at the regional court. I knew the building very well, having come here a couple of times with a complaint about the refusal. Paul, the oldest refusenik activist in Kharkov, was put on trial here.

Paul's trial was the only political trial I had ever attended before my own. No one was let in for the first hearing. Even his wife was admitted only to the second session. The room was packed with "law students," plainclothes police, and dybbuks. We, his friends, were waiting in the hall. We saw Paul walking between two guards, in a good clean suit, his hands behind his back. He was pale. We waved silently.

The refuseniks were admitted only for the reading of the sentence. "You

better not, Edward,” said a familiar dybbuk when I tried to enter the courtroom with the rest. I was standing outside, listening to the stentorian voice of the prosecutor.

“All people who wanted to leave the country have already left. Only zero point four percent of the applicants are refused on security reasons,” the prosecutor orated before a bunch of refuseniks who were living evidence of the opposite. The sensation of the absurdity was physical, like pain. How can they do such things? I wondered.

Paul was the only one among us who was refused for security reasons. Before he applied for emigration, he had worked on a secret project. We could comfort ourselves with the idea that there was at least something in his case that could give the dybbuks a pretext for punishing him. We tried to find some reason in the absurdity. I believe that was happening in the years of Stalin's terror—the free people thought that the one who was arrested had deserved it for some reason.

Many times before and after, I had an opportunity to watch the immense power of the absurdity used as a weapon against intellectuals. The common reaction was to accept the nonsense as a form of reason because it appeared always in the form of reasoning. The absurdity targeted the mind with extreme precision, like a computer virus. Once inside the brain, it could destroy first logic and then will.

“You are under arrest. You have the right to remain silent.”

“I wish to call my lawyer.”

“OK, the telephone is over there.”

This exchange of phrases was unthinkable in Russia. The arrested, whatever the charges, was immediately put into complete isolation from the rest of the world, including his family. Hardly anybody could have a private lawyer.

Together with private property, the Soviets had abolished the previous Russian judicial system.

There was, in fact, no court of jury and judges were all party members. Even the defense was constrained and unable to act as a true advocate of the person charged. The lawyers belonged to the state-controlled Collegium of Lawyers and were open to all kinds of pressure the party could exert. According to the law, the defense lawyer had no right to participate in the investigation. His first meeting with the client could occur only after the investigation had been completed, the court case typed, and the charges proved by the prosecutor.

Since the sixties, when the trials of writers, poets, dissidents, scientists, religious and nationalist leaders had begun, I was anxious to know how the typical charge of “slander of Soviet system” could be proved. The Soviet press gave no hint.

Paul's trial was an eye opener for me. Nobody cared about proving anything at all. Comparing the public or private statements of the defendant with the facts—it never seemed to occur to anybody. The truth about Russia was to be found on the newspaper pages. If you disagreed with the spokesman of the party or the newspaper (which was the same), you were guilty of slander. It was the robust logic of *Alice in Wonderland*.

The KGB was the only institution that could make the decision to punish a person with erroneous ideas about the world. The court had to make public and wrap up the decision made by that top-secret institution, without revealing the source.

There was no compass for the logical jungles of Russia and no machete, either. As Russian poet Fedor Tyutchev said one hundred years ago,

One cannot understand Russia with reason,  
One cannot measure Russia with a common yardstick,  
She has a system of her own,  
All you can do about it is to believe in Russia.

In light of that, I could not imagine how Jewish organizations in the West, which supported the Russian refuseniks, would interpret the episode at Paul's trial when a witness, a telephone employee, was giving his testimony. How would they react to the witness' testimony that several years ago, doing a routine line check, he accidentally overheard a slanderous telephone conversation between Paul and his brother in Israel? One did not need to be Matlock or Columbo to bury that witness under a blizzard of questions.

Was it not late evening, when all the routine service employees of the telephone company were sound asleep? Why would he remember the details? How did he know the last names of the two brothers? Would Paul really have said something disloyal and anti-Soviet, knowing that the KGB was listening to his conversation? In what language was the conversation?

Paul defended himself at the trial, and it seemed ridiculous that he would try to use reason to fight nonsense. As we learned afterward, however, there was a simple explanation: the dybbuks threatened to charge him with state treason and giving up state secrets to the West.

Paul was sentenced to three years, the maximum term in a labor camp for his "crime," which consisted of informing his brother about his situation and encouraging his daughter to write a school essay stating that she had two native countries—Russia and Israel—and loved them both.

Paul was obviously under enormous pressure. In his last word he tried to sound loyal to the authorities. But mere compliance with the rules of the game did



not help him. Only open cooperation with the dybbuks would make a difference. Paul's sentence to the maximum term at a labor camp, thousands of miles from home, with especially brutal conditions, was clear evidence that no cooperation had been given. The harsh sentence did not necessarily constitute an act of revenge of the dybbuks. It was just a precondition of another round of grinding down the prisoner's will. For a political prisoner, the maximum term after his loyal behavior at the trial was only another blow destined to break his moral resistance and force him to cooperate and repent later. There was always enough time for that.

The final goal of evil is not to punish the good but to turn good into evil. The vampire that bites a human not only satisfies his hunger but also produces another vampire. It was only much later, in America that I could fully appreciate the esoteric realism of the American horror movies.

Paul never gave up. I read his letters from the Kharkov prison, which he wrote with humor and unflagging spirits. Paul illustrated his letters with drawings of the prison interior, which, I later found out, were strictly prohibited. The dybbuks permitted the pictures to be mailed to intimidate the refuseniks who read them. I saw in Paul's sketches a prison cell with arched ceiling and a small grated window. It did not look too frightening.

Paul was transported to a camp near Lake Baikal. His wife visited him after his arrival, and she came back in shock. She told us that the prisoners were dying of starvation. The camp surgeon used to amputate prisoners' fingers without anesthesia. The camp was infested with lice.

I refused to believe.

We, people born among lies, violence, and fraud, were taught that our country was the only oasis in the desert of injustice. We were too sensitive to the problem of truth and falsehood. Probably our subconscious was telling us, "If you believe that and if you live in such a country, you deserve all you get." This is why I instinctively doubted what I heard.

Paul's camp proved to be our closest geographical neighbor in the Gulag, and I talked to some prisoners transferred from there to Chita. Everything Paul's wife said was true to the last word. Prisoners died of hunger combined with cold.

Once, long ago, my school friend Mike, a hematologist, told me that every time a leukemia patient in his hospital died, he noticed remissions among the remaining patients. All were eventually to die. "They all were secretly happy and relieved that somebody else had died, not they," he told me. "It was not because they were ill-meaning. They just felt as if they had received a gift of life."

This is how we, Paul's friends, felt when he was sentenced.

Now I was following in Paul's footsteps. In the office were a policeman and the two law students who had witnessed the search in my apartment. While we were waiting for the car, they had taken the streetcar to get here.

Tomin took a seat at the desk and loaded a form into the typewriter.

"When, where, and under what circumstances did you commit the crime by issuing slanderous statements about the Soviet social and political system?" he asked me after formal questions about my identity.

"I refuse to participate in this absurd show, which has nothing to do with law, humanity, and common sense," I replied using the prepared formula. "The criminals are those who have deprived me of my legal right to leave the country according to the Soviet law."

Tomin seemed to expect nothing else. After some typing and talking over the telephone, while I was kept outside the room, he spoke to witnesses and asked the policeman to search me. My glasses, belt, watch, and wedding ring were taken away. No problem; the pants were tight enough without the belt. Very soon, however, I would need to take in the waist more than once.

I said that I could not read without my glasses. Tomin promised to return them to me later.

It was getting dark outside. Another policeman arrived, and I understood that he was from the prison. Tomin seemed to hesitate. He asked me to wait in the hallway with the first policeman. Soon I was called back.

"You will be taken to prison," he said.

"Where is the warrant?"

"You were shown the warrant at your apartment."

"It was the warrant for a search and detention, not imprisonment." Detention meant that I had to be taken for a preliminary investigation and kept in a special cell at the police station, but not in prison. Besides, the law required that my charges be specified.

"Yes, it was the arrest warrant."

"Let me see it again."

"I don't have it here."

"Where are the formal charges?"

"I have just shown them to you."

"I am accused of slander in general. Contrary to the law, you don't specify what particular crime I committed."

I knew it was useless to argue. I wanted to simplify the situation. I tried to avoid any complexity, which would require me to spend mental and nervous energy

on something that neither made sense nor was fun. The outcome was predetermined. So, why to argue?

I got involved in the argument with the investigator because it was a rare opportunity to conduct yet another little experiment, and I had to abide by the rules of experimental research. What if I later would write a report about it? How could I prove, at least to myself, that I had been imprisoned without a warrant? I needed a clear answer, and I had to ask for it.

The purpose of my own investigation was to find out whether the dybbuks really violated elementary procedural laws when they repressed dissidents. Now it was obvious that they did. Before, I was so naive that I thought this was exaggerated—that the dissidents really had done something in violation of the law and not just by way of speech or thought. I believed the dybbuks cared at least about formalities. I was not quite prepared for the reality. It is one thing to know about AIDS or cancer and quite another to learn that you, not your neighbor, have been stricken.

I was not depressed by the loss of my belt, watch, wedding ring, and freedom. I felt excited. I thought I was running a great experiment, using myself as a probe into the dark underworld. This experiment would generate a great, great truth. I was coming to a great, great, great understanding.

The excitement of the moment was a painkiller. I wanted to go to prison. I wanted to go through everything. Under the unbearable gravity of evil, I had my own source of antigravity, the force of knowledge and understanding. I had my own laws on my own planet, and I did not recognize any other laws. That was how I felt while discovering what was well known to everybody else before me who had lost his watch and freedom for wrong ideas and what was for the people of the free world so hard to believe in.

There was nobody to tell me, "Just wait a little while, buddy. They're just warming up."

The second policeman put handcuffs on my wrists. Tomin was looking at me with curiosity. We walked out to the police van waiting in the backyard.

"Don't the handcuffs bother you?" the policeman asked me almost tenderly. I understood that Tomin had told him to treat me well.

"No, not at all. I feel as if I was born with them."

The ride was short. The van was moving through the night streets. I felt belated love for my native city with its crabapple and wild apricot trees blossoming in the early spring, then chestnut trees in the late spring, then lime trees in the summer. Old women sold roasted sunflower seeds, a favorite Russian snack, on street corners. The farmers' markets were full of everything the black rich soil could produce on tiny patches of countryside.

The local Russian dialect had a mild touch of Ukrainian. People had a sense of humor. They could be affectionate with strangers. A female streetcar conductor could call you "my little bunny" or another tender name that only the Eastern Slavic languages and Italian seem fertile enough to produce.

The speech was seasoned with a rich variety of suffixes that added a wide range of emotions and dimensions to the meaning of plainest words. One can say *kot* (cat), *kotik* (nice little cat), *kotinka* (my dear beloved cat), *kotyara* (big fat cat), *kotishche* (very big cat), or *kotiusia* (come here, my dear, let me touch your soft fur, I'll give you a snack). The language was a substitute for material bounty. A tropical garden of emotions, from love to hate, thrived on the rich soil of the incomparable Russian and Ukrainian languages which could be as laconic as Latin and as long-winded as German—or the French of Marcel Proust.

We went through the downtown area, with streets untouched by the last war, lined up with three- to five-story buildings dating to the turn of the century. There were old houses with caryatids, whose naked breasts had confused me so much in my childhood. There were atlantes and lions. There were whimsical mansions, beautiful parks, old huge trees, and charming side streets with no cars along the sidewalks, where lovers could safely stroll all night, softly cooing the Slavic suffixes.

This time I realized that I would not be home tomorrow, and I tried hastily to hoard my last visual impressions of the free life, which mattered much more than Ann's sandwich in my pocket.

The policeman and the driver were talking about soccer. We went uphill, to the Cold Hill district, where in my childhood was the end of the world.

The big old prison complex looked like a fortress.

"Get out," the policeman said. Outside he immediately grabbed me by the elbow. A door in the wall opened and closed behind us with a familiar metal clang. Where did I hear it? In the movies, of course.

"Just turn to stone," I kept telling myself. My own verses came to memory:

May the lash of the pyramid's master  
Be David's sling.  
You will turn to stone  
And fly away.

When I was going through the booking procedure, it turned out that there had indeed been no warrant. The officer on duty had never seen such thing in his life. After some fuss, telephone calls, and reference to names that made the officer stand to attention, the matter was settled. I entered a cell that looked familiar from Paul's drawings and I greeted my new companions. If not for their pallid faces, they

could have been anybody seen on the street.

Later, in the labor camp, I remembered this cell as a safe haven. True, my prison experience was not typical because I had select company.

The cell was indexed as special. Only three people, including me, remained permanently in the cell. The rest came and went, among them high-level professional stool pigeons recognized unmistakably by their athletic biceps and concocted stories full of gaps and contradictions.

The two other permanent residents were Serge, a burglar in his late thirties with a master's degree in chemistry, and Benny, an elderly underground businessman. Serge was a convict brought back from the camp for another investigation. Both men were educated and intelligent. Benny could draw up the whole genealogy of Russian czars from memory; Serge wrote poetry.

For beginners like Benny and me, Serge was a professor of prison science. He willingly lectured us on prison laws and customs. I could not believe that his lessons would ever become helpful in practice. Nevertheless, both Benny and I listened attentively. I later discovered that Serge's picture of camp life was essentially accurate.

We made a chess set from bread and played with approximately equal skills. Sometimes I could not concentrate and lost game after game. I soon realized this meant that something was about to happen—either I was about to be summoned from the cell or a top officer would visit us. The chess game was my barometer of impending events.

Bread in Kharkov prison deserves a few lines of description. Bread, the sacred main staple of Russia, was free and unlimited in Russian eateries. Plates filled with brown bread were always on the tables and nobody considered it of any value. After a meal, there were always half-eaten slices, with imprints of teeth, left on the table. The prison bread recipe consisted of stale leftovers collected from city eateries: swept from the tables, ground, mixed with a little dough, and baked in the shape of small, hard, almost black cakes—that was our bread. Very few newcomers could eat it, but not for long. It seemed that our own twice-leftovers went into the circulation.

There was another accurate weather bell in the cell—spiders. Serge said that spiders were sacred and honorable creatures in prison, so nobody disturbed them. I gradually noticed that an increase in their motion seemed to presage an event, a break in the monotonous prison life. One morning, I found them running erratically over their cobweb. Our first stool pigeon was soon brought in and the first thing he did was to destroy all cobweb. As it turned out, the spiders had the right hunch. The stool pigeon left the cell, and the spiders restored their snares.

Since then, I felt invariable reverence for spiders. On my self-made pocket calendar, I marked with an S the days when I saw a spider—the bigger the spider, the bigger the S. At least half the time they correctly predicted events, which was

quite good. I was also marking the same feeling of tension I had in the cell before losing a chess game. Some news would follow, this time or next.

Soon after the arrest, I was taken from the cell for fingerprinting. It was the first time I would encounter a variety of more typical jailbirds.

I waited for my turn with about a dozen recently booked suspects. Their appearance was a terrible shock to me. Some of them had faces like classical puppet villains. Others were pale and bloodless like corpses. So, with these dreadful creatures I was supposed to spend years of my life. I noticed my knees shaking.

That very first meeting, however, was a good inoculation against any such fear in the future. Having accepted the company of criminals, later I never treated anybody any differently than I would treat my colleagues, students, or acquaintances. I did not have to force myself. Any other way would have been alien and difficult for me. In both prison and camp, this attitude worked well for me. It helped me gain my mates' favor without any special effort and for just being myself. All I had to do was to watch out for bookish words.

Three months of prison life had passed. The only thing I could see of nature through the fence-netting over the walking yard was a small square of sky. The spiders were part of nature too, of course. Once a week, on the way to the bath, I could see the tops of distant maples behind the prison fence.

Tomin refused to return my glasses. I got them back only after a six-day hunger strike. I learned much later that Tomin had told my wife about my hunger strike, and she had called American reporters. Since I would not talk to him, we had only a few meetings after my arrest. He did not mind my silence.

"You are not talking? OK, Lutsky. This way it is even easier for me," he said once.

I discovered in my brain an ample facility for a Freudian study of the tricks of the subconscious. The irrational blind hope was saving me from desperation and my mind told me that it was the most appropriate mood in my situation. My new foolish belief was that I would be soon released or acquitted by the court. The hope persisted because the opposite would be unbearable.

In fact, with whatever pipe dreams, I had never been an optimist. I always shared the opinion of Alexander Block, one of the greatest Russian poets, that "pessimism is the only sound philosophy in the world."

Many Russian thinkers defined the national paradigm as the famous Russian *avos*'. The word *avos*' means "perhaps, somehow, maybe, with good luck, with God's help, things will straighten out." Was it the Russian soil that fed me, through its potatoes, carrots, and apples, the mysterious nutrient of "perhaps?"

I refused in the most stupid and ridiculous way to believe that my arrest was anything but a means of intimidation and mockery. In my mind, I was replaying the scenario in which I would be visited in the prison by a high-ranking KGB.

Probably the same colonel who summoned me twice to the KGB headquarters for a talk would come to the prison and say: "Well, Ed, we have tested you enough. We can see that your determination to emigrate is real. All right, you can go now. You see, we are not the wild beasts that calumnious dissidents say we are."

The colonel did not come. Probably there was no spider big enough to prophesy such event.

## VI

### TWO KEYS TO A VAULT

**I**t is a well-known cliché that in a moment of mortal danger one's entire life flashes before his eyes.

In June 1983, I had an opportunity to look through thirty years of my life within three hours. I was neither drowning, nor under gunpoint, nor lying on the rocky concrete of the devils' cell. It was in the Kharkov prison.

That morning, a woman guard called me out of the cell and led me through the blinding light of the day. A patch of midsummer grass in the yard was dark and dusty, but it was a feast for my green-hungry eyes. There was neither grating nor netting between me and the grass. The guard was following me, giving directions from behind.

As usual, I was deceived by the refreshing look of the brightly lit interrogation room with high ceiling and whitewashed walls. The glass block window had no bars. I had a feeling of coming back to the normal world to which I always belonged.

The investigator was waiting for me. He greeted me with a friendly smile and asked me to sit down.

The investigation was over; this was supposed to be our last meeting. I made an instant decision to experiment with Tomin. For the first time during the



month of investigation, I responded to his greeting.

I saw three plump bound files on the table, and I understood that it was my court file. I did not expect to see such a big piece of writing. I wondered what they could put into the three volumes.

Although my mind rejected the idea that I could be indicted, the file on the table was unmistakably mine, and its presence was pushing me back to facts. Once again, I had to accommodate in an instant to the harsh reality that I irrationally rejected. My plummeting to earth ended with something like staccato clank inside my heart. Immediately I found a new scaffold on which to climb. Even now, in view of my court file, I was hastily restructuring the scenario. OK, they just wanted to test me for the last time before releasing me. It is only a mock execution.

"You should familiarize yourself with the file and sign it at the end," the investigator said.

"How much time do I have to read it?"

"As much as you need. Take your time, but within reasonable limits."

It was my first encounter with the Soviet judicial scribble. I opened the first file, which was about the size of a solid textbook. It looked harmless, like a guillotine in a museum.

The file held a lot of surprises for me. It was a record of almost my entire life.

My life in Russia was never easy, which was no proof that Russia was a bad place to live.

The complete truth about the past is as hard to obtain as the truth about the future. The truth itself changes with the witness and time. My diary about my last years of life in Russia would be no better as approximation of the truth than a report written six years later.

Even if I managed to convey the density of anger, despair, suspense, and overall stress I lived with during the long eight years of the refusal, every day of it, it would say more about me than about Russia. It would be fair to blame my character for that. My reaction and my feelings were no proof that life was unbearable. There were other people in the refusal who took it much easier. As for hundreds of millions of common people, they were fully adapted to Russia and did not know anything different.

After I had left Russia, life became unbearable for many people there, at least for several years of chaos. I was a good probe of time, a falling barometer, probably oversensitive to the harsh weather.

A suffering minority is no proof that the whole country is wrong, while a suffering majority can blame only themselves.

I was arrested in 1983, a year of anniversaries.

Thirty years ago, in March 1953, Stalin died. Fifty years ago, in 1933, Hitler came to power as dictator, banned all opposition parties, and opened the first concentration camp in Dachau. A year ago, Andropov, the chief of KGB, came to power in Russia. It was the fourth year of the Great Refusal.

Andrey Sakharov was in exile. Afghanistan was the Soviet Vietnam, with almost no coverage by the media. The license to imprison some refusenik leaders was given to the dybbuks—or was snatched by them.

For about twenty years, consumer goods had been quietly disappearing from the shelves, one after another, leaving no trace. Wine, cheese, meat, poultry, fish, footwear, bed linen, furniture, books, butter, coffee, toothpaste, and tea became rare species. Somewhere even matches were on the verge of extinction. Much later, when I ran into old pictures of empty shelves in Moscow stores, they made an impression of a sudden disaster. Even fifteen years before that, however, doing without was a way of life in the majority of Soviet provincial cities, beyond the reach of the foreign press.

For about twenty years, people who dared to express their dissent had been put on the bunks of labor camps or exiled, one by one, as steadily as the goods disappeared from the shelves. The lucky few were deported or granted emigration. There were no mass arrests, no torture, and no murder. Some trials were practically closed to the public so that the allegations could have the benefit of the doubt with the people. Most Soviet people did not care about anything but their daily bread.

The rate of arrests was so comfortably slow that everybody adapted to it inside and outside Russia. The whole world was terrified by the possibility of nuclear war. The proclaimed Soviet policy of detente seemed more important than the suffering of a handful of hotheaded mutineers. Yet the detente brought about a real miracle. The impenetrable border of Soviet Russia opened for the most unexpected category: Soviet Jews.

By that time, the Jews had already been largely expelled from the higher ranks of management, scientific leadership, top positions in medicine, retail sales, the party, army, diplomatic service, prestigious universities, trade, public service, elected organs, law, and the police. They were being pushed out of the middle and lower ranks of the same institutions.

Jewish youth was barred from higher education in fields of high demand or political significance. The Jews were practically the only *nationality* denied its cultural development in areas heavily populated by them. There was a permanent Gypsy theater in Russia, but there was no Jewish one.

The Soviet term *nationality* meant ethnicity: ethnic origin recorded in the internal passport. It was assigned to a citizen at the age of sixteen, according to the

*nationalities* of the parents. If they were different, the teenager had the right to choose between the two. If they were the same, *nationality* was inherited. *Nationality* was not related to religion, to which most Soviet Jews were indifferent, all the more, it was not available to the majority in any tangible form, like books and temples. Food, songs, scraps of Yiddish, and subtly different mentality—that was all.

The Jews were the last ones to hire for any position and the first ones to fire, despite the policy formulated as "no new nails in, no old nails out." The old nails did not feel secure either.

As it had often been in history, discrimination against Jews was the very first foreshadowing of coming social disaster.

Suddenly, quite out of the blue, those despised "kikes, traitors, and scoundrels" became the most privileged segment of society. Without any proof of their political and ideological loyalty, and some even with criminal record, they were allowed to go to Israel, America, Canada, Australia—the fabulous countries where everybody was said to have cars and color TVs, not to mention stores stuffed with meat, toothpaste, and toilet paper.

To obtain a tourist or business visa, an average Soviet citizen needed to fill out numerous questionnaires, collect necessary references from bosses and authorities, be totally loyal, have no unauthorized contacts with people in other countries, leave close relatives at home as hostages, and have no relatives and friends abroad, so that they could not help with defection.

The Jews needed only to present an invitation from Israel, typically, from fake relatives. Moreover, the Jews were leaving with their families, possessions, dozens of tightly packed suitcases, dogs, cats, furniture, pianos, hidden diamonds, and—what was even more incredible—they did not have to come back.

At the very moment of giving up citizenship and leaving the internal passport on the desk of the OVIR (Visa Department) clerk, if not much earlier, the emigrants could shake off the entire Soviet ideology, as dogs shake off water. No more *nationality* stigma, brainwashing, political meetings, Orwellian hate hours, hypocrisy, bribes, black market, and lines at the stores with empty shelves.

As a condition, the Jews were giving up their Soviet citizenship, an act for which the average ethnic Russian would be sentenced to three years in a labor camp or put into a psychiatric asylum. Instead, they received an exit visa, which was like a certificate of enfranchisement for a serf. It was a special emigration visa marked "For permanent residence in Israel." They went to Vienna, where they were free to go to either Israel or America.

Yet some of the departing Jews were crying and lamenting at the railway stations and airports as if they were bound for concentration camps. They were afraid of uncertainty, foreign languages, strange customs, and unfamiliar bread. From the windows of the railway cars, they were blessing Russian birches, the

sentimental symbol of Mother Russia and the traditional material for making punishment rods. The emigrants bemoaned parting with relatives and friends, the latter often decrying the hasty and adventurous decisions of the travelers into the unknown.

Not all of them were so nostalgic. Some cursed even the innocent humble Russian landscape and crossed the border in utmost jubilation.

Very soon, in yet another fantastic and unbelievable turn of events, former downtrodden Russian Jews found jobs, bought cars, houses, and sent their friends color photos of superior quality unknown in Russia. In the photos they looked happy, healthy, well dressed, and ten years younger.

While the ethnic Russians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and other fighters for national independence and human rights went to prison, the Jews went abroad toward an apparently free and happy life.

Ordinary Soviet people knew nothing about dissidents, human rights, freedom, and other inedible things. They did not care about the arrests. They wanted beef, vodka, football, and fishing on weekends. If they knew, they would not care. Neither dissidents nor Jews took anything away from anybody. They even left behind their empty apartments among a never-ending housing shortage.

The emigration generated a small number of first refuseniks. Some of them were grounded because of security clearance. Others had unresolved problems with relatives whose consent was necessary for emigration. Some were more or less eminent public figures, and keeping them in the refusal was an intimidating factor for the rest.

The exodus was yet another classic example of the Russian paradigm. The government was taking away with one hand what it was giving with the other. Jewish emigration did not mean free movement of people. The press launched a wild assault on the emigrants. They were denounced as traitors of the Motherland, people without moral values, and greedy, dirty adventurers.

It was the very first serious crack in the monolith of the Soviet power. Although only one block was removed from the rigid artificial structure of the Soviet system, the consequences were enormous. The removal of that single block signaled the end of the totalitarian principle that had could not have any exception. Very soon, the Soviet rulers realized that any gap in the totalitarian structure was incompatible with its integrity.

Immediately, as soon as I had applied for exit visas for my small family and myself, I felt different. I was free. I had cut my last ties with the system.

Actually, it was as if for all my life one of my legs had been bent at the knee and bandaged in such a way that I could walk only on crutches, and one day I would wake up and discover that I could walk on both feet.

Most intelligentsia in the country walked on crutches only in public. It was in the privacy of the apartment, in the wilderness of nature, or under the influence of alcohol that one could unwind the dirty, sweaty bandages and be himself. Now I had cut the bandages and was walking on two legs outside my apartment—a remarkable, thrilling experience.

In just two months, I thought, we would be in Vienna. Like most emigrants, I was worried about making our way into a new life, finding job, speaking English, and driving a car, with which I had no experience. Those were the worries of a free man.

For a very long time I had been unpatriotic in Russia. I did not accept the labels *theirs and ours*. I had nothing of *ours*. My possessions were in my head. I could not love my native country just because I was born in it. On the eve of my expected departure from Russia, however, perhaps for the first time in my life, I felt real love and forgiveness for my homeland. I was sorry about its shameful history and dreadful present. I wished Russia well. I wished her a brighter future. With new farewell tenderness, I was rambling around the streets of my childhood. With a sense of guilt, I was talking to my mother, whom I was going to abandon. With stoic acceptance, I was standing in the exhausting lines in stores for stinky bones with some meat on them.

Very soon, we left for a resort on the Black Sea.

In the resort village I took everything in stride—the meager food, long lines in eateries, stuffed buses, the tiny room in a summer shack with no furniture, where three narrow iron twin beds occupied all the space. It did not matter anymore.

When we came back, I went to OVIR to take a look at those happy people who were getting their visas. I was curious to see how they felt and what they knew about their future lives.

I saw a crowd of neatly dressed people, all of them Jews. Everybody in Kharkov had a well-trained eye for *nationality*, but it was only at the OVIR or synagogue that one could see a crowd of Jews. There was not a single synagogue, however, in this city of three hundred thousand Jews. The first floor of an apartment house, where OVIR was located, became their Wailing Wall.

The people were visibly upset and worried. Week after week, almost every request to emigrate had been denied, or *refused*. Hence the term *refusenik*. Under the impact of the refusal, most people were walking out of the doors gloomy and perplexed. Some were crying. A minority were trying to hide triumph. They did not want to publicize their luck.

Within a month, I became a refusenik myself. The reason was the standard one: I had no close relatives in Israel. Nevertheless, I felt some relief. In Siberia, doing for years some research work for a top-secret plant<sup>2</sup>, I had a security clearance. Now I knew that it would not stand in my way. My clearance miraculously disappeared.

In the fall of 1979, thirty to forty applicants a week were summoned to OVIR in Kharkov. All over the country, the ranks of refuseniks grew rapidly. The common reason for refusal was the absence of any positive reason for granting a visa. Formally, it was called “insufficient kinship” with the inviting relative.

Jewish exodus from Russia would be impossible without a strong pull from the U.S. Jews and Israel. It was based on explicit, although not public, agreements between the governments. Yet when Jews by many thousands rushed through the miraculously opened door, the rulers slammed it in August 1979.

Initially the refuseniks remained optimistic. We all thought the refusal was temporary, caused by a glut of applicants flooding the emigration channels. Probably the customs could not manage processing the flow. We were all told to return after six months and to inquire about our reconsidered cases.

Six months passed. People applied for visas again, and again they were summoned to OVIR. This time, however, almost everybody was treated tersely.

People were depressed. What was even more disturbing, the new year of 1980 brought us Andrey Sakharov's exile, in addition to the invasion of Afghanistan. It was evident now that the refusal had nothing to do with numbers. It was a sign of deep political reaction in the country and it could probably last longer than we had expected. Russia and America had to come to terms someday, we thought. After the era of detente, the conflict between the two superpowers seemed senseless.

Refusal was a much wider phenomenon than a snag in Jewish emigration.

The Baltic republics always had the constitutional right to secede, but they were *refused* that right nonetheless. Sakharov was not exiled to Gorki but was *refused* the right to live outside that city. Certain banned writers were not forbidden outright; rather they were *refused* the privilege of being published. Citizens were not prohibited from living in the city of their choosing; their application for a residence permit could be *refused*.

Soviet law has always been a two-key system for a bank vault: the written and codified law is one key, the practical implementation the other. One cannot open the vault with one key.

A typical conversation in OVIR sounded like in the anecdote:

“Do I have the right?..

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<sup>2</sup> Now a public company.

“Of course.”

“Therefore, can I?”

“By no means.”

When the Great Refusal began without any warning, more than fifty thousand applicants were trapped in an ambiguous limbo between lost loyalty to Russia and inaccessible freedom outside Russia. The latest skirmish in the cold war took us hostages. Democracy was neither a country nor even a small village—it was an abstract idea. Could it stand for us against the monolith with only a single visible crack? I wondered. All I knew about the world of ideas told me it could.

In the no-why land, nobody could tell how long the refusal would last. The Jewish refuseniks could not imagine that it would take many years.<sup>3</sup>

I had few ties with my native city. Seventeen years of absence had cut me off from the Ukrainian way of life. I never had more than two or three friends. I was completely alone in Kharkov.

The most difficult facet of the refusal was trying to earn a living. We could not touch our meager savings, because they would cover only the cost of visas, tickets, and modest clothing.

In 1977, when I had moved to Kharkov from Siberia, I found a job despite the open anti-Semitism in the Ukraine. I had to switch from academia to patent office, where my PhD degree and ability to read in several languages outweighed the Jewish curse.

The manager of the patent office, department manager, and director of personnel—all were party members—interviewed me. I was curious as to how they would reconcile the current anti-Jewish policy of the party with the need to hire a professional like me.

“Well, Edward, I think we need you,” said the department manager. “We have only one request. Would you please promise us, just in case you decide to emigrate to Israel, that you’ll submit your resignation before making application for the visa?”

“I would, but I am not going to emigrate,” I lied.

“It is entirely up to you. Just quit in advance, please, so that we will not get into trouble.”

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<sup>3</sup> I still do not know all the reasons for the turn in the Soviet policy. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan happened in December 1979. Probably, the refusal had something to do with President Carter’s support, in the summer of 1979, of anti-Russian fractions in the internal struggle within Afghan government.

If I did as they asked, these three would still stand in good stead with the party. I could hear their self-righteous protestation already: "That smart aleck did not show any sign of his subversive intentions while he worked here!"

That was how I became a patent expert.

The patent work was easy and boring. I had been looking for something better from the start. I still had not received an invitation to Israel, and I was not sure I would ever emigrate. After Siberia, where the winter wind scratched my cheeks like coarse sandpaper, my native Ukraine felt mild and sweet. That year there still was beef and fruit in the shops. I would not mind living there.

With my seventeen years of academic experience bolstering me, I solicited the help of a professor at my alma mater in finding a teaching position. He spoke with the local party boss about me.

"You know, they would be happy to give you a position," he said the next time we met. "They desperately need male academics. The women always find excuses when somebody has to accompany students to obligatory agricultural labor in the countryside. But there is a snag. The boss said that the Arab students would be unhappy about a Jewish professor."

All my remaining illusions, inspired by the beef and poultry in the stores, vanished in an instant. My determination to leave Russia became irreversible. Two years later, the beef and poultry vanished too.

I left my job in March 1979, the day after I had received the long-expected invitation from Israel, as did practically all potential applicants for emigration. None of us thought we would need a Soviet job again.

I should have anticipated the problems with emigration in 1979. After all, the Orwellian 1984 was already in sight. The book that I had never seen seemed to have a mysterious relation to my life. When in 1983 I found myself in prison, facing my court file, it looked like a fulfilled prophecy. Something was in the air: the old forbidden book and, probably, all newborn spiders prophesied a powerful strain in the depths of the country, as before a historical earthquake.

My file held the same omen; it was 1984 in microcosm. It opened with the warrant and formal records of the search and detention, and—lo and behold—there was the warrant for my imprisonment, which had been missing when it was needed. Next was a long description of all items that were found and confiscated during the search of my apartment. The meticulous description of each piece of paper could make an impression of a careful search for the truth. Testimonies of "witnesses"—all of them Jews, some of them I never heard of—came next. One thing they all had in common on paper was that the anxiety and fear of those questioned were palpable even in the investigator's transcription. In political trials, the distance between defendant and witness was frighteningly short.



A big envelope with all the photographs sent to me by foreign pen friends was also in the file. I caught myself absentmindedly fingering the glossy Kodak paper, which, of course, was obvious proof of my ties with the imperialists.

Oddly, I was happy the dybbuks had confiscated them. It was one thing to look at them at home, but seeing them in prison was like looking through a window into freedom. It was a profoundly moving experience. For a moment, I lost the sensation of being in prison. I was caressing the warm and silky skin of freedom, which did not feel my touch, like a sleeping woman.

The photos looked much brighter and more real than the patch of green grass in the prison yard. The pictures radiated hope. Those happy faces full of joy and dignity were so different from the sullen, vicious, cunning, worried, and worn-out faces I saw around me. They conveyed the possibility of another life—and, in the process, the total impossibility of Soviet life as a whole.

Compared with those photos, Soviet life could be nothing but a giant fluctuation, perverse abnormality, chimera, monstrous freak. It was, without a doubt, mortal. The existence of another way of life outside Russia was the greatest secret, to be kept a secret at all costs.

The dybbuks could not imagine how much strength I took from the photos that they had carelessly put into my file. I saw in them colorful and peaceful life, unfamiliar interiors, comfortable furniture, and simple and neat casual clothes. Were they the norm or a fluke, a short-lived fluctuation from the average level of suffering, oppression, poverty, and violence in the world? Even I was not sure.

I then came to a set of photos that was most precious to me. My daughter and I were in various combinations with a woman of tender and childish beauty and a good-looking man in thick glasses.

Norma and Stan, from Chicago, had visited our apartment a year before I was arrested. They were the very first Americans I had ever met, and since then I stayed in close contact with Norma through correspondence and by phone. Although by that time our telephone was cut off, a resident without a telephone could be invited to answer a long-distance call from a post office.

Luckily, I was at home with my daughter when they came. I was not prepared for the visit. Although I was an ardent reader of books in English, supplied by Mary from Moscow, it was the very first time I had to speak English with somebody. To my surprise, I understood most of what they were saying. Only the names were difficult to grasp.

Norma and Stan represented Chicago Action for Soviet Jewry, an organization that was trying to help refuseniks. The abbreviation CASJ, which Norma used for her organization, and even Norma herself were like constellations in the night sky. They looked beautiful but not related to my life. Although the times

were ripe for mysticism, I was far from believing in astrology and a star shining only for me. Still, as result of this visit, the abstract "American Jews" had finally found a live and graceful image.

I had heard of many such visitors coming to Moscow and Leningrad, but in the provincial Kharkov, a contact was limited to letters of support. Soon after that, two young men from San Francisco, one of them from a similar organization in California, came on a visit. To learn that somebody outside Russia had established organizations whose only purpose was to help refuseniks leave Russia, no matter how abstract that activity was to me, was an immense inspiration. After those visits, I never felt abandoned. I had proof that the other world existed.

I had no idea about the actual potential of the organization or about mechanisms that could establish any channel of influence between our distant worlds. I believed only in power, and my Soviet life taught me that power could be vested in governments alone. Now I was close to understanding what the major difference between the two words was.

The file had the family photos that Norma sent later. I saw a glass coffee table with crystal geometrical forms and glass figurines of two cats. There was something else on the table. It looked like a pile of small crystal cylinders on a star-shaped glass plate. I could not translate those objects into anything familiar. I decided the cylinders were made of crystal, too, whole with the plate.

I could not imagine that the moment would come when I would be able to touch those unfamiliar things and solve the mystery of the crystal plate.

In my file were also two photographs of a charming black Scottish terrier. They were sent by my distant pen friends from France. The dog was alone in the pictures, with no people in sight. I did not even wonder why they were in the file and what the dog had to do with my crimes against the Soviet system. I just enjoyed the cute dog, the human faces, and bright colors on the other pictures, and I felt neither regret nor envy. Then I read the conclusions of a forensic photographic expert, that the photographs were made on foreign paper unavailable in Russia and that the photos were of unknown persons. Capi the Scottish terrier was granted a person status of person in Russia.

For a moment, I felt very uneasy. The repressive machine did not think at all. It did not care about common sense. I was inside the machine, and I had a chance to watch, in minute detail, how it was processing me. It was a fantastic opportunity, as if a chemist downsized to molecular dimensions could watch real molecular events, not just their symbolic representations on paper.

In 1983, fifty years after Stalin's death, the old gears of terror got some lubrication. The flywheel was building up speed. One was protected only by his own instincts and actions of daring or cowardice. As in the time of Goya, reason was asleep, and the monsters multiplied.

When I had finished going through the photos, I found another treasure in

the file. A document from my Siberian job stated that I had clearance but never used it for access to any secret documents. I realized that emigration was indeed open to me . . . if only I could get out of prison.

The Siberian KGB somehow eliminated my much more serious clearance with the secret Siberian plant from my records. If I had known all that earlier, I would have applied for a visa much sooner, long before the refusal. I had wasted five years waiting for a nonexistent active clearance to expire.

Among my letters to the authorities was the collective letter of a group of refuseniks to local party leaders. It was the prosecution's principal evidence at Paul's trial. The letter had marks saying that it was taken out of Paul's file and put into mine. According to an unambiguous Soviet law, no letter to the authorities could be regarded slanderous. Here it is:

To the Head of the Communist

Party Committee of the Kharkov Region

We, the undersigned refuseniks of the city of Kharkov, were denied our legal right to emigrate from the USSR. This right is protected by Soviet and international laws. We do not have any legal reason for the denial of exit visas. Most of us do not have security clearance. Those who have were not told when it could expire.

We have been refuseniks for more than a year. The authorities tell us that we will never be able to leave the country. At the same time, we are outlawed and we are denied the legal rights of Soviet citizens. We are harassed by police for our desire to leave the USSR. The media calls us traitors. We are denied jobs. We cannot sustain our families.

Such treatment is a severe violation of the Helsinki agreement and the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ratified by the Soviet government.

We declare that nothing can change our desire to leave the USSR, and we will be pursuing this goal until the last moment of our lives.

We appeal to you: let us go.

Of course, it was a slanderous letter. It said that Big Brother was wrong. Signed by a dozen refuseniks, it meant a vicious conspiracy.

There was nothing in the file about my activities, our cultural and scientific seminars for refusenik professionals, our Jewish mini-university, our collective three-day hunger strike, or contacts with Western correspondents.

Only my individual forty-day hunger strike was there.

## VII

### THE PLASTIC CUCUMBER

**M**y long and lonely hunger strike was the most insane venture in my entire life. Nothing before or after that, including the labor camp, could be compared with the awful taste in my mouth, the stomach cramps, the vomiting of bile from the depth of my empty bowels, and the sensation of madness and humiliation. It was stupid. It was masochistic.

Now, in the safety and comfort of America, it is easy for me to denounce my behavior and repent. Still, when I read memoirs by Sakharov and his wife, I felt completely sympathetic with his multiple hunger strikes. They were his only weapon. One who does not fight surrenders—if one is driven by the desire to win, of course.

My timing, unfortunately, was very bad. It was the fall of 1982, and the few refuseniks who still clung together after Paul's arrest were planning another collective hunger strike. Israel's invasion of Lebanon was a blow to our plans. Besides, Sharansky, the symbol of the entire refusal, was on hunger strike in prison.

Inspired by the suicidal Irish hunger strike of 1981, I declared that I would go on for forty days so that the strike would be completed by the time the Madrid meeting on human rights opens. I sent letters to various levels of authority, including Brezhnev himself, explaining that this was my last resort in the struggle for emigration. I had no illusions, though. No one would do anything except pass my appeals to the KGB.

In fact, my reason was not in full control of my emotions. While I wanted to draw the attention of our supporters abroad to the plight of the refuseniks, I also just wanted to do something crazy to get rid of the pain and hopelessness. But there was something else. The cold-blooded homunculus of scientific curiosity inside my head was pushing me to yet another experiment: Could I really stand it? How would it feel after forty days?

I did not prepare myself for the hunger strike and brushed off all the recommendations of a friend of mine, despite her references to some obscure books promising healing through hunger. On the third day, I did not feel hunger, but the bad taste in my mouth was driving me mad. My wife had lots of fun helping me with the enema, but it used to give me only a minute of relief.

I was worried about my eyes. Recently a blind spot had appeared in my eye, hospitalizing me. I remembered the story of Irish hunger strikers who died one after another, losing their eyesight first. This is why I avoided reading. Instead I listened to the Voice of America and BBC and I slept away my days.

On the twenty-seventh day of my hunger strike, I heard the doorbell ringing. I was alone in the apartment. I rose slowly to avoid fainting. Pressing my painfully empty stomach with both hands, I shuffled to the door. Through the peephole, I saw something unbelievable—the familiar woman police officer from OVIR was standing at my door. There was also a man, apparently not a dybbuk, because a dybbuk would never have an expression of confusion on his face.

I felt a stream of hot joy in my slow blood. I had made it! It always pays to put your life on the line. They have come to tell me that I will get the visa! But who was the man?

"Who is it?" I asked through the door.

"Citizen Lutsky, open the door, please. I am from OVIR."

"What do you want from me?"

"Open the door, please. We need to talk."

"About what?"

"You wrote a letter to us, asking for a visa. Open the door, please."

"Am I granted the visa?"

"Open the door, please. We have considered your letter."

"Am I granted the visa?"

"This is what we have to talk about. Would you please open the door?"

"Am I granted the visa?"

"We are about to give you our answer."

"I have already got it."

"When?"

"Right now. You are not going to give me the visa."

"But we have to talk about it. You declared a hunger strike. Is that for a medical reason? I have a doctor with me. He can examine you to be sure you are all right."

"If I have no permission to leave, there is nothing to talk about."

"Open the door, please. It is not quite polite. Why don't you believe us? It is important to talk if you want us to release you."

"It is my legal right to emigrate. You are violating the law. There is nothing to talk about. Hitler wanted to kill the Jews; now you want to complete what he could not. You are anti-Semites, you are fascists. What can we talk about?"

"We cannot release you now. You are offending us by calling us fascists. We just want to talk to you. We are worried about you. Why won't you let the doctor examine you?"

"If you are so worried, give me the visa. I don't need your KGB doctor."

"I am not from the KGB," the man said. "I am a real doctor, and I want to check your health. Your hunger strike can be very dangerous."

"Perhaps you are an honest man and not from the KGB. Then don't take part in this dirty provocation by the KGB. Go home."

I saw through the peephole my wife coming upstairs. She stopped at the landing, visibly embarrassed.

I completely lost my temper. Blind rage erupted from the heavy, dark, hot depths of my body, and I was powerless to control it. My body was my own malicious stepmother of a country, my Russia, which kept me in captivity. This is why I wanted to starve it to death, to harm it, to punish it, to liberate my soul from it. I was losing my flesh as I wished to lose Mother Russia. I hated my body, my only one, with its powerful hormones, that depressed my reason and flung me into disastrous love affairs. I hated Russia, the only country I knew, the source of my only life, my childhood, love, language, poetry. Did she give all that to me, that cow of a country—slow, sloppy, heavy, blunt, crude? Did she? She did not care about me. It was all words, a shameful pun.

The truth was that my life in Russia had come to an end. I was mortally ill. All my vital organs were necrotic. I needed emigration the way one needs a heart transplant.

Those blind irrational forces in my body always made me do stupid things. Those blind irrational forces in Russia punished me for the stupid things I did, and my only hope was that there was a different world somewhere, with glass cats and strange-looking crystal stars, where the standards of intelligence and stupidity were different.

An impatient daydreamer who acts instead of dreaming is a ruinous combination. One should either dream or act and never both.

I was shouting at the people behind the door like a madman. I felt primitive animal fury—wordless, senseless, and instinctive. Suddenly I felt exhausted. I sat on the floor, leaning against the door. After several rounds of arguing and wooing me, the visitors left. When my wife opened the door, she was very upset.

"You were yelling so terribly," she said.

Looking back, while reading my file, I realized that the dybbuks were planning my arrest. They were collecting information, and they needed witnesses. The woman from OVIR and the doctor were the witnesses.

The blow was hard to take. The moment of hope, when I first saw the woman from the Visa Department through the peephole, then the sudden disappointment...

I went on with the hunger strike. I tried to save my energy by making as little physical effort as possible. I lay under a warm blanket, my precious Finnish socks on my feet, feeling like an idiot. The taste of warm boiled water was loathsome, and the torrid taste in my mouth seemed to be the taste of Russia.

On the thirtieth day, I felt as if my stomach could no longer accept water. That was something I could not anticipate. Many books, although I had not read them, advertised the benefits of complete fasting.

I had ten more days. I felt no hunger. I even began to move around more actively. Real food and its smell made no impression on me. Food became meaningless and irrelevant. I realized how animals perceived the world of humans. Food for me was like a book for our dog. It had nothing to do with my life, and it had as much meaning for me as the shape of a cloud.

Still, food attracted me like a magnet, probably because its function, which did not fit into my existence, became a mystery. Sometimes when I was alone in the apartment, I went into the kitchen and stared at the food, fascinated by a strange phenomenon. Tomatoes and cucumbers seemed made of plastic. They bore no association with either taste or nutrition. It was pure texture, shape, and color against the background of subconscious memories about something else. The only taste I knew was the dreadful taste in my mouth.

I realized then that only things related to my life could have real meaning. Suddenly I was subject to relativity. I was really the center of a smaller universe. Meaning was something that could make my life better or worse. Good and evil were just a plus and minus on a number line, and the floating zero point signified the absence of meaning.

For some reason, now that food did not matter anymore, cookbooks were full of magic. They attracted me much more than the meaningless food, and I kept them between the wall and my sofa and read them as if they were masterpieces of

fiction. The world of cooking was a bizarre, totally alien world whose strangeness carried the excitement of a fairy tale. Food was like America before I decided to emigrate, the mysterious land I had no hope of setting foot on, irrelevant but irresistibly captivating. Despite the fact that I saw in my eyes some blind spots when looking at the white ceiling, I began devouring the books.

Some of the meanings that I lost during my hunger strike did not return. I lost forever the young joy of eating. In fact, it seems that I lost the young greed for fleeting physical pleasure of any kind. With relativity gaining ground in my mind, I also began to lose intolerance. It was a good preparation for an unknown future.

Meanwhile, how had my hunger strike shaped that future? My friends told me that the Western news mentioned it, but I never caught that on the radio.

After the thirtieth day, I had to add a few drops of fruit juice to the water I drank to cheat my stomach into accepting water. I had solved the problem of water, but it was a victory-defeat.

Brezhnev died on my fortieth day. Later I proudly proclaimed to my friends, "I killed him!" I was very bloodthirsty.

I found in my court file the testimonies of both the doctor and the woman officer who had visited me on the twenty-seventh day. I had called them fascists, they stated, and I did not really seem to be hunger striking, because my voice sounded strong. The woman quoted me as saying that I was fasting to improve my health.

Many years later, in America, I accidentally learned that the Irish hunger strikers, whom I hoped to emulate, were taking salt. I was not. This is why I suffered so much and felt aversion to the water. It was washing away the last sodium chloride from my body. But why did I not die? I suspect that traces of salt in the tap water helped me to stay on course for the same reason the tap water keeps the plants alive: there are some minerals. I turned into a plant.



## VIII

### A WOMAN WITH AN UMBRELLA

The court file returned me to the life from which I wanted to escape through emigration. In the twilight zone of the refusal, without a job and social obligations, I had begun to forget what it was like to be a common citizen of the USSR. Now, in prison, with all my life passing before me, I found myself on the verge of the unexpected discovery that life behind bars was just a natural continuation of Soviet life and that I had been much better prepared for the transition from one to the other than I could have imagined. I would find the final proof of it later, in the labor camp.<sup>4</sup>

It was not as hard to stay in prison or in labor camp as it might seem — even for me, a former coddled child, a bookworm, and a university professor. No, my imprisonment was not all that terrible. So, relax, reader. To wind up in a labor camp was not as harsh a change as it might seem. Actually, it was a simpler way of life, because there was much less Soviet duplicity.

In prison, everything had its place and we had all the necessities, however minimal. It was just like Soviet life on the outside. Throughout the Soviet Union, the most mundane of tasks had to follow an officially approved procedure as rigorous as the procedure for checking a spacecraft before its launch.

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<sup>4</sup> Mikhail Khodorkovsky, former Putin's prisoner, made a similar remark in one of his interviews. Incidentally, his labor camp was also in Chita region, 240 miles south-west from where I was, only in a new era.

There was an authorized list of portraits of state leaders, a list of authorized slogans to yell or to carry at a parade, and a list of firefighting equipment in every office building. There was a list of every price for every item sold in stores, a typical menu for all cheap eateries, and a list of the maximum permitted square footage of housing per person.

It was much the same in the camp, only instead of the price list there was a list of approved ingredients in the food and a list of possessions allowed in nightstands. The firefighting equipment was exactly the same as everywhere else.

People who were familiar with Soviet labor camps even through hearsay called the camp "small zone" and the country "big zone." As I often thought of my country as a big prison, I found out that I was closer to the truth than I had ever thought. Body or mind, it was just the degree of discomfort that made a difference.

I graduated from high school in Kharkov, Ukraine, received my PhD degree in Moscow, and was the Soviet equivalent of a tenured professor in Krasnoyarsk, East Siberia. I was not spoiled by comfort, however.

When I was a student, I was forced to work every summer for at least a month in the fields, like all students, except in the last year. At least once a year we were ordered to come to the school with a travel bag, aluminum mug, spoon, some food, clothes, and the famous Russian high boots indispensable on the countryside's dirt roads.

We would be taken to the railway station, put into freight cars, and transported over several hundred miles to the farmlands. After unloading in the middle of nowhere, we were stuffed into large open pickups with wooden sideboards designed to carry grain in bulk. Seated on narrow wooden boards laid across the truck, we drove for hours on terrible dirt roads.

The sideboards of the pickups were made of the same boards. Once, on a sharp turn, one of the sideboards broke. I was the closest to it. I found myself hanging upside down, with my knees hooked over the remaining board, the spinning wheel just three inches from my face.

The bad roads were said to have played a decisive role in defeating both Napoleon and Hitler. Drafted into a labor army, we had to fight the invading elements and not complain about casualties.

During our first summer of work, in 1955, about twenty of us, young men, lived in the only room in a half-ruined adobe hut. There was no toilet and no electricity, and straw on the floor was the only furniture. None of that seemed unnatural to us, residents of a big city. The Milky Way looked splendid in the black sky not yet polluted by electric lights on the ground. How much I missed the Milky Way in the always brightly lit labor camp when I was looking for constellations with a page from a popular science magazine in my hand! The pre-satellite countryside

skies of those years were my last opportunity to see our galaxy in my remaining life.

We harvested corn from dawn to dusk. I was so exhausted that I could fall asleep while standing upright and wake up when my knees buckled. We did not have a shower for a month. It was the late nineteen-fifties and Stalin was dead. It was a party order and it was beyond discussion.

I am still grateful to the party for my first stint in Soviet forced labor: there I lost my obesity forever.

Later, as a professor in Siberia, I accompanied students on these labor trips. From time to time the staff had to work with the students, usually on Sundays. We had to shovel dry cow manure from one place to another. The brown dust flew in our faces. With that experience, I could hardly complain about the dry urine in the camp yard.

Every fall, after the first frost, we had to pick potatoes from the loosened soil with our bare hands, pack into hundred-pound bags, and load them on a pickup. Gloves were very hard to find in the stores, so if I had a pair, it was certainly not for potatoes. It was in the seventies, after Khrushchev had been demoted and Brezhnev came to power. It was a party order and our dear party never made mistakes.

I could not be upset by the absence of protein in the prison food, either. Meat in Russia did not mean sirloin, chuck, London broil, or pot roast. It was a chunk hacked off the carcass wherever the axe hit, with all the bones and sinews, and it was pure random chance what part of the carcass you got after standing in line for at least an hour. If there happened to be no bones in the piece, the butcher would put one on the scale for the sake of proletarian equality.

I lived with my wife and our little daughter for a year in Krasnoyarsk on thirty pounds of meat: ten pounds per year per person or one third ounce a day. It was not hard to count those thirty pounds of meat because there were exactly two occasions during the year when I had a chance to buy it. Other years were not much better. In 1965, the only meat meal in the cafeteria for the professors was horsemeat sausage. Horsemeat is almost as off-putting to a Russian as pork to a Muslim.

The cities and regions were divided into a scale of categories with Moscow at the top. This was not a deliberate discrimination but the consequence of scarcity and the fundamental Soviet principle: everything and everybody should know their place. This policy turned most of the country into domestic colonies subject to the ruthless exploitation by Moscow and a few cities.

This alienation of the product from the producer was unprecedented in all of human history. It was probably the most overwhelming artificial caste system in the world. The country map was divided into regions with different levels of consumption, irrespective of the levels of production. Naturally, the differences were never publicized.

Of course, this system was never mentioned in the press. The country that fervently attacked Western democracy for inequality, discrimination, segregation, and poverty divided its citizens into ultra, premium, plus, first, second, and third grades. The ultra-had a choice of about fifteen kinds of cheese. The premium people could buy three brands of cheese at the stores. The plus had cheese once a month. For the third grade, the largest, cheese was an overseas gourmet delicacy, seen only in pictures. It was a division by geography and not by income. I was paid very much above the average, but I was a pauper in my city, judging by consumption.

To receive enough proteins, Soviet people had to consume a lot of potatoes, bad pasta, bread, and gruel. The food was poor in proteins but rich in carbohydrates. The latter could not be all burned off, and it turned into fat. Obesity was common among Soviet women. They grew prematurely old and looked worn out in their forties. Nobody cared how the men looked.

In the seventies, I used to have lunch at a cafeteria that made the labor camp food seem perfectly acceptable. The vegetables, the same choice as later in prison, were colorless and tasteless. The fruit stew for dessert was yellowish, slightly sweetened water. Immediately after lunch in the cafeteria, I would feel full. After an hour, I felt weak and dizzy. Lunch was a deception. Ten years later, the prison gruel reminded me of my academic years in a big Siberian city.

I felt at home in the camp where a description of several rations was posted on the wall—for hard work, easier work, and for punishment cells. Outside I never knew what I was entitled to; I knew well what I was not.

The prisons and labor camps were the only places where the Communist idea seemed realized full-scale. The idea was very simple: the people are for the government. Although ideas are immortal, the price is that they never materialize in pure form. A couple in bed—one for the people, the other for the government—can play the games of modern history by pulling the blanket to one's side.

During 1977-78, when I was back in the Ukraine from Siberia, planning emigration, I got even more Soviet experience that made life in the labor camp easier.

The women in our patent office seemed to me beautiful, bright, and fragile like tropical birds. They did not have the rough manners and frostbitten faces. They smelled of fine perfume and not of stale sweat and changed their dress at least two times a week. Still, the tender creatures had to pull out prickly weeds with bare hands or pick tomatoes in an endless field in the same line with men.

There was a woman in her late thirties whose doctor had warned her against exposure to sunlight. It did not exempt her from working in the fields, so she held an umbrella with one hand and pulled the weeds with the other. When the manager of the government farm came to the field to inspect the work, he started cursing her in foul language for using a tool as inappropriate as the umbrella.

The woman was not a prisoner in a labor camp. She was a mother of a family. She was enjoying the full rights of a free Soviet citizen.

Twice a year, all of us employees of the state patent office had to sweep the dirtiest street in the city of Kharkov that I knew. We had only primitive brooms. The nature of this assignment is difficult to describe in English. We were *conscripted* or *bonded* to the street. The corresponding Russian word means a mandatory tying somebody to something; it has the same root as the word *serf*. We were not assigned by a judge to do that job as punishment for a misdemeanor. We, decent citizens, were “chained” to our street by a party order and so was almost every office in the city. Nobody grumbled, and that bewildered me most of all.

In the winter, we sorted frozen cabbage at a city storage. The cabbage was stored under the open sky, in rows covered by straw. We had to clean the head of cabbage from ice and snow with our fingernails and to tear and throw away rotten leaves to make the cabbage sanitarily acceptable. The satisfaction of executing the order of our dear party was our reward.

That was something even George Orwell could not foresee: forced labor of free people.

Another helpful lesson came when several men in our office were sent to a village to cut grass with scythes and stack the hay, as it had been done three hundred years ago. For ten days, we lived in a village school in a former classroom furnished with ten bunks. The linen was never changed and I could not force myself to sleep undressed in a bed where somebody had slept before me. I put my handkerchief over the pillow.

There was no linen at all in transit prisons and I used my handkerchief again on the pillow of my bent arm. Nobody had to share bed linen with anybody in the camp: it was washed every week.

Most ordinary Soviet people got life sentences of hard labor. Was it not hard labor for Soviet women to stand in food lines after work, to walk miles with heavy shopping bags in both hands, from one store to another, or to go home from the market, squeezing themselves with the bags through tightly packed streetcars and buses? Was it not hard labor for Soviet men to carry heavy loads without any of the equipment that modern technology made possible?

So, reader, take the horror stories of former Soviet inmates with the proverbial grain of salt. It was just a little bit harder than “free life” and it certainly had its advantages. Life was much healthier in the camp with its mandatory morning exercises, two daily strolls under starry skies to and from work, and complete absence of cholesterol in food.

In the nineteen-seventies, the Ice Age of impoverishment and undernourishment had already begun its movement from Siberia and the small cities to the big cities of the western part of Russia. It took twenty years more for the invasion of scarcity to deplete Moscow, the former shopper's paradise of Russia.

When I returned from the camp in 1986, the country was even more impoverished. Even after the camp, even in Moscow, and even though I had never been to the West and had nothing to compare it with, the poverty of Russia was striking. It was absolute poverty and it got worse later. A Soviet newspaper wrote in 1990 that Moscow cats refused to eat sausage from local stores. Our dog Magda refused to eat it in 1982.

I often asked myself what kind of danger Russia could present to America.

Why was the United States hypnotized by Soviet power? In what sense could poor Russia compete with rich America?

Russia would never use nuclear arms first because that would be suicidal. I always believed that the strength of Russia was not in her bombs, troops, and military industry. It was her poverty, low standards of living, simple tastes, endurance, and adaptation to discomfort that could give the Soviet Army a big advantage over America. An even bigger advantage, however, was the cruelty of the Soviets with their own people. They would again shoot their own retreating troops as they did in the battle of Moscow during World War II or sacrifice hundreds of thousands troops to please Stalin, as they did at the battle of Berlin in 1945.

No wonder the Soviets considered emigrating Jews traitors. No wonder the stinking camp was a mild detention measure in times of the Great Cold War against American imperialism and the hot war in Afghanistan. I had no reason to complain.

No, prison did not seem to be such a big contrast with everyday free life. For the lower class of Soviet people, it was not a big deal. For a homeless tramp, it was a certain improvement. The intelligentsia would be terrified by the idea of being put into a Soviet labor camp, but they would have adjusted. They just did not know it, poor things, which is why they were afraid.

What else could scare me? I was prepared even for pain. When I lived in Siberia, I suffered from gallstones. I read in a medical handbook that the pain during a gallbladder spasm was so strong that adult men cried. I did not cry. I just mooed like a cow. After the surgery, the fits never returned.

Hunger? Not after the forty day hunger strike.

Death? I trusted Einstein, who said that when there is death, we do not exist, and when we exist, there is no death. Of course, it was just a comforting sophism. I feared death, but I used to trust Einstein, although most of all I trusted my own eyes.

I watched the prolonged agony and then the death of a man who was in the same hospital room with me when I was recovering after gallbladder surgery. I watched it for six days, until the very end, until his dwindling breath stopped and yellow foam appeared from his mouth, until his name was written with a marker on his leg and nurse assistants carried him out to the mortuary on his sheet drenched in urine.

It all looked so simple that I lost all my young fear of death after that.

I was really afraid of just one thing. My whole life, I had been suffering from heat combined with the lack of fresh air. It made me sick. Something was wrong with my heart. This is why Soviet offices, stores, trains, cinemas, hospitals, dental clinics without ventilation, not to mention air-conditioning, had always been the hardest physical trial for me. It used to make me feel dizzy and weak, and the only way to prevent a fainting spell was to sit or to lie down.

Hot and stuffy rooms made me panic. I did not know that in prison I would have my share of that too.

Anyway, a former pampered child, I was not a wimp who could be scared by cold, sleeping on the bare floor, bad food, hard work, pain, filth, forced labor, humiliation, or hunger. I just did not know that about myself. All the other Soviet people and all the fancy fragile women in the Soviet fields did not know that they were as hard as steel.

## *IX*

### ON FROGS AND MICE

**M**y prison file woke up many sleeping memories, starting from my childhood. I was actually reading two texts superimposed on each other—a palimpsest with my present written over my faded past.

I was halfway through the three volumes of my court file when I ran into the report about my psychiatric examination.

I thought my country well prepared me for prison. Even the shaved head of prisoner was something already familiar because in post-WW2 time, as prophylaxis against lice, all younger schoolboys in Russia had to shave their heads.

I hated that rule while at school. Shaved head was profoundly humiliating, probably because it was a kind of physical violence committed on me. For that reason, I went to the barber only after several reminders from a teacher.

It was only after the sixth grade that the school permitted a short haircut. I always heard the same thing from the barber with scissors in hand:

"Wow, that's tough hair. Young man, you must have a tough temper."

The barber was right about my temper, and I heard the same thing many times afterward. I believe the barber would not be surprised to learn that with such a



tough temper I had gotten into prison.

I could not imagine that I would go under a haircutter again; it would be like cutting off my nose or touching a red-hot iron rod of my own free will. Still, it happened right in the beginning of my prison term.

Early in the morning, I was put into a small cell with a group of other prisoners. As far as I understood, the group was selected for psychiatric examination to establish mental responsibility. We were given breakfast and taken to the shower. When we were dressing, I noticed a zek with an electric haircutter.

I understood that it was unavoidable. It was my first test in the art of self-petrification. I stepped toward the haircutter and passed the test.

Sitting on the stool, I felt cold metal on my head. I saw puffs of hair falling on the floor around me. "This is reversible," I kept telling myself, but when it was over, my head still felt cold. Something irreversible happened to it.

I looked in a mirror and saw a strangely familiar round face. Then I realized that my own schoolboy face had returned to me, aged over forty years, and I understood the reason for the cold feeling.

There was absolutely no reason for psychiatric examination in my case, except intimidation. The dybbuks put me, like a little boy, back into Soviet school, which I always disliked for indoctrination and bullying, to teach me another lesson of obedience.

With new haircuts, we got into a Black Maria. It was my first ride in the notorious prison car, windowless, the interior lined with wooden benches.

I could see through the guard's compartment a narrow slice of the city. The free world looked ten times brighter than ever. People seemed beautiful, and young women divine. One image stuck in my memory—a young slender woman with a child in a pram. The light summer dress clung to her legs against the wind. Normal life and women had not yet begun to lose their meaning. It was only my twelfth day in prison.

The psychiatric hospital had a separately guarded prison block where we were kept in a cell for a couple of hours. When my turn came, a policeman escorted me through a hall. Along my way, I heard an invisible camera clicking.

There were two women and a man in white doctor's smocks, and the room was full of light. They examined three prisoners at three desks. After jailbirds and guards, the doctors looked like angels.

My doctor was a young woman. I could not imagine that she was an officer of the Soviet punitive system of medicine that put dissidents into psychiatric prisons.

I told her my name, address, and refused to answer any more questions. The woman tried to persuade me that the procedure was innocent and strictly formal.

Bright light, white smocks, and intelligent faces made me lose my vigilance. I wanted to help that almost attractive woman. I did not see a dybbuk in her.

"Do you know who I am? I am a refusenik."

"We know. So what? We've had people like you here."

She was better prepared than I expected. I did not say a word after that.

After my very first meeting with the KGB, I had realized that anything you said they would turn against you. If you resisted and took a firm stand, they would take it as proof of your disloyal attitude. If you were weak, they would press you until you gave up. If you asked for something, they would charge a high price. Whatever you said would be interpreted as they wished. This is why it was so important for me not to give any substance to the dybbuks. To cut all contacts, to turn into stone—that seemed the only honest attitude that could save my energy and nerves. It was an experiment, too.

I was looking around, enjoying normal human faces. Another young doctor was smiling at me. There was another woman, and a lot of light.

The doctor let me go and the policeman escorted me back.

They called me again after the lunch break. This time the room was full of doctors. They all asked questions and shouted at me chaotically. I did not answer. I was glad there were even more faces, more light reflected by white frocks and whitewashed walls. I was just watching them. I was glad we all could have some fun in the middle of the day. Somebody said that they had never seen such behavior. No wonder: there was nothing more terrifying for a prisoner than a psychiatric prison, so nobody wanted to irritate a psychiatrist. I wish I could apologize and blame my tough hair for my arrogance, but I could not speak during my experiment, and besides, I had no hair to present as the evidence.

They called the policeman, who looked at me with great astonishment. When I was leaving the room, I heard two voices yelling at the same time.

"We will recognize you mentally fit and responsible anyway!"

"We will recognize you mentally ill for your silence!"

I was proud of this part of my experiment. But what I read in my court file made me blush.

The record said that I was normal and responsible because I "looked normal, told my name and address, said that I was a refusenik, and was looking around."

I was angry with myself. Damn! I had screwed up my experiment! I wanted to see what a psychiatrist would do if a prisoner did not communicate with the doctor and how a mental responsibility could be established. I suspected that even if I did not say a word, they would do all they wanted. But now I could not prove it because I had said who I was. Indeed, I had said too much!

Psychiatry was not an alien subject for me. When I was in the last year of high school, I was torn between two possible careers —chemistry and psychiatry. I had a home laboratory in two wooden boxes, and our small apartment was often filled with the fumes and odors of chemicals. At the same time, I was eagerly reading books on psychiatry. The subject seemed having nothing in common with the rest of medicine. The human mind seemed to be even more mysterious than turning water into wine and other chemical tricks.

I remembered, from my psychiatric studies, a story from an old textbook. A delirious woman said she had frogs in her stomach. To disavow her of this delusion the doctor first tried logic. When that failed, he made her throw up, and secretly put some frogs in the basin.

"Well, now there are no more frogs inside."

"You see, doctor, I was right. Why didn't you believe me? I know there are still some frogs left in my stomach."

It was one of the two stories that I had many opportunities to tell. The other one was about mice. It was an old Sanskrit parable.

Two mice got into a bowl of sour cream. One accepted its fate and drowned. The other one kicked and wriggled until it felt something hard under its feet. The sour cream had churned into butter, and the mouse got out.

The first story perfectly described the Soviet world, especially the logic of the dybbuks. To play games with the dybbuks, to talk to them, to rely on logic was like talking to a lunatic.<sup>5</sup> Delirium was the very essence of the Soviet ideology in a very clinical sense.

The story about two mice has always been my principal guideline. If I consistently followed my own theory of self-petrification, however, as befit a stone, I would surely be side by side with the drowned mouse. I could not be too dogmatic. Self-contradiction is human, too.

I was reading my file with increasing interest. Next were the testimonies of my two former superiors at the Kharkov patent office.

One was a group leader, the other head of the department. The first one did not say anything bad about me, but mentioned that I wrote poetry. We had a happy but precarious relationship. Her husky voice sounded in my ears and a new wave of memories rushed through my mind.

The head of the department testified that by the end of my term at the office I

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<sup>5</sup> I feel the same way while watching the exchange between the U.S. media and Donald Trump or his acolytes.

was doing my job poorly. That was true because I was waiting for an invitation from Israel, and nothing else mattered to me. She also testified that I had refused to take a voluntary assignment to work at a factory, which was also true.

A new kind of forced labor was practiced in Kharkov. White-collar workers were assigned to some hard and dirty work at state factories. Of course, all the assignments, including those at the farms, were voluntary, which meant they were mandatory—another example of Soviet Russian newspeak.

When I got an order to go to a furniture factory, I could not stand any more. I went to the personnel manager who was also the chief party boss.

"Is this kind of physical work compatible with my professional duties as a patent expert?" I asked him.

"Maybe not. But we should help our industry."

"Isn't that a kind of forced labor? There is nothing in the law that says that I, patent expert, PhD, should go to work at a furniture factory as if that were a punishment for a crime. What about labor legislation?"

"This is not a legal matter. This is the policy of the party." He was surprised that I seemed not to understand such simple things. Naturally, the policy of the party had nothing to do with the law.

Anyway, I refused to go. Later, people who went to the factory told me that they had to shovel sawdust and wood shavings and dig trenches for electric cables with nothing but primitive spades.

One day, not long before my arrest, almost five years after I had left my job, I was passing by a monument to Taras Shevchenko, the most famous Ukrainian poet and artist who lived during the times of serfdom, the Russian form of slavery. He had been a serf himself before his Russian friends bought him out.

The monument presented the sad poet standing on a high pedestal. Large bronze figures stood on the steps of a spiral stair winding up around the pedestal. A serf woman with a child was at the bottom. A step up, a male serf stood bent under a heavy millstone. Another step up was a man trying to break the rope that tied his hands, apparently, a serf peasant punished by the owner for disobedience. They were characters from Shevchenko's poetry. Heroes of the revolution and, finally, free and happy farmers and workers of the blossoming Socialist Ukraine were next.

A group of my former colleagues from the patent office were working on a decorative circle around the monument, paving it with heavy granite slabs.

The eloquent monument had been erected in the 1930s. Now, 150 years after Shevchenko, the highly educated serfs of the 1980s were hauling polished granite slabs instead of millstones, but no desire to break their bonds was visible on their faces.

## X

## THE TIME MACHINE

**T**he court file was leading me through my whole life, backwards in time, to my first marriage.

I married very early, when I was a graduate student in Kharkov. My first wife's parents lived in Siberia. I felt suffocated in the anti-Semitic Ukraine and, in the dusty dull Kharkov of those years. After graduation, we moved to Krasnoyarsk, which was by that time a city of four hundred thousand people and over two thousand miles from both Moscow and Kharkov—about the same distance as between Chicago and San Francisco.

Siberia carried the promise of Moscow. I was tempted by the possibility of being sent to Moscow as a postgraduate by the university at which my wife and I would work. It meant that I would not need to compete for the position of postgraduate with other graduate students. With my Jewish *nationality*, that would be a pointless contest. If I were sent by a Siberian university, I will be admitted without question because the positions would be reserved for my wife and me. The

condition was that we would have to return to Siberia after completing our three-year long doctorates.

Three years in the capital of Russia—it seemed like a miracle. Moscow was the heart of Soviet culture and science and one of only two Russian cities—the other was Leningrad—where life was more civilized, culturally rich, and the stores full of delicacies.

This is how we got to Siberia from the warm Ukraine.

Though I had always felt something like the American spirit in Siberia, the analogy did not extend beyond colonial times. The same Russians lived in Moscow and Krasnoyarsk, spoke the same language, just as the British and the Americans, but Siberia was a colony of distant Moscow as America was a colony of distant England. Yet the diversity of population, most of which came from somewhere else, willingly or not, kept the same unifying spirit alive.

As in Canada, the population of Siberia was concentrated along the southern border. Siberian resources of hydroelectric power, metals, and timber were enormous. I often thought that the giant Krasnoyarsk region could be one of the richest countries in the world if it were independent.

We shared a two-bedroom apartment with my in-laws, which was typical for Russia in perennial housing crisis. The prospect of spending three years in Moscow overshadowed the inconvenience. For a young Jewish couple, to become academics right after graduation was practically impossible in the Ukraine. Siberia was not our choice: we had no alternative of any kind.

I tried to do research, but there was neither scientific literature nor enough lab equipment in Krasnoyarsk. To cool my reaction flask, I used to break off pieces of ice that formed on the inside of the windowpane. There was no one with whom to discuss chemical problems. Yet ascent up the career ladder was quick.

We went to Moscow after only a year in Krasnoyarsk.

My three years in Moscow were filled with intense work in the laboratory. I often stayed in the lab from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. I returned from work to our nine by six foot room in the students' dormitory. The room had enough space for a single narrow bed, a small decorative rather than dinner table, and a cupboard where we kept food, dishes, and clothes. We had to turn sideways to get between the table and the bed.

Nadine, my first wife, was a postgraduate in the same department, but she was rarely seen in the laboratory. Instead, she plunged into the temptations of life in the capital. Nevertheless, late at night, when I came home from the lab, the teakettle was already boiling and a modest supper was waiting for me. I did not care about the rest. It was only much later that I saw the obvious truth: a young woman cannot enjoy any kind of life alone. I was happy until that moment, but after the shattering

showdown I forgave my wife, even though I had no evidence of guilt. Most of all, I was interested in my work. Nadine and I were held together only by the four walls of our tiny room and by our young desire. The rest of the ties between us were no stronger than between two halves of a peanut in its shell.

In Moscow, for the first time in my life, I met a man with whom I could talk about everything. George was a young assistant professor. Other postgraduates and students used to join our discussions. We discussed everything, from chemistry to politics, and from gossips to books and movies.

It was the time when Solzhenitsyn published his first short story about the Gulag. It was the talk of the day in Moscow.

Once George told me that he had met a former Stalin's prisoner, a chemist. "What made people confess to crimes they had not committed," George asked the man. "When they inject hydrochloric acid into your urethra," he replied, "you will do anything." Later, I met that man. The head of department had helped him find a job in a research institution where he was an advisor. When I had to do some project there, I found the former convict a most gentle, warm, and helpful person. I did not even know, however, how to start a conversation on a subject as distant from my experience.

In such age-diverse institution as university, there was always an abundant feed for gossips. Once, taking a short walk around the block, I saw a young girl, a postgraduate, with one of our much older professors. "Now I will have something to tell George," I thought. Suddenly, something clicked in my mind, some secret mental rearrangement, like a quick chemical reaction. I did not say anything to George or anybody else. Since then, for the rest of my life, as far as I remember, I followed the principle: never talk about intimate relations of two people to any third party.

Lilly was an assistant manager of the laboratory in charge of glassware and chemical reagents. It was her duty to take care of the supplies and to make sure we did not lack any needed materials.

Lilly, a humorless sour-faced woman, liked to show her inexplicable contempt for postgraduates. It was very hard to solicit anything from her, however necessary it was for work. She kept the glassware and chemicals under lock, and it was common knowledge that she would say "no" even when the requested chemicals were abundant in the cabinets.

George, who needed chemicals as badly as I did, found a suitable key, and, late at night, we opened the cabinets. The treasures inside excited us. There were things the other postgraduates and I could only dream to possess. I took small amounts of a few reagents I had to use every day. I felt I had done the right thing, but I knew it was theft. My excitement was tripled by that.

Crime was fun. We do not take that to consideration regarding corrupt dictators, politicians, or bankers, not to mention people too squeamish to spread around a harmless gossip.

Only once more did I participate in stealing. After that, the sinful component of the excitement started to bother me. Besides, we got all we needed. That was my first crime. Like many people in Russia, I was stealing only what legally belonged to me and was stored specifically for my use.

What a shame that the dybbuks did not find out about my real transgression. The prosecutor could have traced my antisocial behavior back to those years.

All that poor Lilly possessed was the chance to say *nyet*, no. Soviet people heard so many *nyets* from the authorities that their own *nyet* was the only way to boost self-respect. Their *yes* and *no* within the scope of their job duties were their only valuable possessions. The permanent scarcity kept these two assets in high value. A *yes* became a type of private property that could be either bartered or sold for money, which honest Lilly never did, unlike many other people.

This source of wealth, unlike money, was inexhaustible. One could say *yes* and *no* as many times as one wished. It was somewhat similar to land that was able to bear fruit many times. Unlike the soil, *yes* and *no* did not require hard work.

This is not to imply that America is immune to corruption. It is a part of life everywhere. The profound difference between the Russia of the nineteen-seventies and America of all times is that corruption in Russia, was for the absolute majority of population the *only and exclusive* form of private property that could produce, nurture, and grow wealth. People had no choice because money could not be invested in production. Besides, as I said, crime was fun<sup>6</sup>.

Nadine and I divorced after having completed our postgraduate terms, coming back to Siberia, and getting our PhD degrees.

The housing crisis in Russia produced immense domestic tension and dramas of Shakespearean magnitude. We could be kept together indefinitely by our Siberian four walls. Since we lived in the apartment of my parents-in-law, however, more than two characters, about whom I have nothing bad to say, were involved in our drama.

Fortunately, by that time we had been granted (yes, really, housing was free, as well as education) an apartment in a brand-new apartment house—two rooms, tiny kitchen, and a decent bathroom. The walls were made of solid whitewashed concrete without plaster. It was impossible to drive a nail into it. The floor was made of roughly shaven wall-to-wall boards with half-inch cracks between them

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<sup>6</sup> How has Russia changed under Putin? Read *Red Notice* by Bill Browder, Simon & Schuster, 2015. It is no more a totalitarian state, anyway.



through which small change and various detritus frequently disappeared.

There was no more peanut shell around us. I moved into the apartment with my books, folding camp bed, tape recorder, and a shortwave radio. Nadine stayed with her parents.

Fifteen years after our divorce and six years after I left Siberia, the dybbuks questioned Nadine about me in Krasnoyarsk, where she lived. My former wife repeated several times that we were "absolutely different people," which of course was true.

I always believed that all people were different, but an affinity of souls was, nevertheless, my unrealistic ideal. After my failed first marriage, I drastically reduced my expectations of other people.

Fifteen years later, when the dybbuks arranged our symbolic reunion over the court file, I felt completely reconciled with Nadine. I even forgot that the two months it took her to give, under my desperate pressure over the telephone, the required consent to my emigration cost me eight years of refusal and three years of prison. If I had applied for the visas just two months earlier, I would have gotten out in time.

The most unbelievable thing I found in my file was a relic from even more ancient times.

It was my essay for the entrance exam at the university. Written almost thirty years before my arrest, in the immature and diligent handwriting of a teenager, it had been kept in an archive and was retrieved by the prosecutor for a purpose that was, by that time, totally beyond my comprehension.

I was both amused and moved. It was a meeting with myself, a time-machine journey into the past. It was a much more exceptional voyage than from Siberia to Rome and Chicago. There was no way on earth that I could have gotten hold of my old essay if not for the trial.

The dybbuks not only showed me myself as a schoolboy with shaven head; they also put me back at the examination desk.

The next pages came as a cold shower.

My Moscow cousin Helen and I did not see each other very often. I knew that she and her family wanted to emigrate. They got their Israeli invitation but waited too long, and when the refusal began, they dropped the idea.

I asked Helen for permission to send her my postcards for correspondents abroad so that she could drop them into a Moscow mailbox. I did not know where they were censored—in Kharkov or in Moscow—and thought it would save them from the hands of the local KGB. I was sure that less attention would be focused on

foreign mail in the capital than in provincial Kharkov. I put half a dozen of them into an envelope and mailed it to my cousin. I repeated that several times.

The dybbuks discovered my naive trick. One way to do that was to follow me constantly and watch for the mailboxes I was using. Another way was to control all outgoing foreign correspondence and sort it according to the addresses.

As I learned from the file, Helen and her husband were questioned about that. The formal reason for that was revealing.

An anonymous resident of Moscow, my file said, found my letter to Helen in his mailbox. My letter was supposedly dropped in the box by a mail carrier by mistake. The curious, loyal, and vigilant Soviet citizen opened the envelope instead of sending it to the right address. What he found were my postcards written in English and French. Supposedly, he took the trouble of taking them in person to the prosecutor's office in Moscow instead of simply mailing them. He left the envelope on the windowsill in the lobby, with the note "Comrade Prosecutor, I found this letter in my mailbox. Its contents may be of interest to you."

Even now, in America, writing these lines many years after the event, I feel cramps of anxiety in my chest. The dybbuks did not feel a need for a minimal plausibility. There was something deeply disturbing in the authentically Russian way of giving you both the truth and a lie without the slightest care about the screeching dissonance between them.<sup>7</sup> It was as disturbing as the M. C. Escher's picture of the staircase that goes up and down at the same time. The message of the primitive story was clear: "Hey, you eggheads, you think you're so smart? Now try to outsmart us! Of course, we're talking cheap rubbish. But how can you prove it? With all your brains, see how easy it is for us to make you look stupid? Don't mess around with us. Got it?"

Still, the dybbuks had to cover up their crime. Fear goes along with crime, as jealousy goes along with passion. The dybbuks were no exception.

I was very upset by the questioning of my relatives in Moscow. I had let them down. I could easily imagine how shocked and scared they were and I felt awful.

Now, close to the end of the file, I could clearly see that my own crime was nothing more than writing four postcards abroad, with approximately the same content, as well as numerous petitions to the Soviet authorities, all with exactly the same content.

My curiosity about the mechanism of persecution sustained me for four months in prison. Now I had a chance to hear the answer to my old question: how a charge of slander could be proven.

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<sup>7</sup> Should I mention Donald Trump again?

The crime of “slandering the Soviet political and social system” was proved in the following way. In the inventory of the documents, the letters and postcards were listed as “slanderos documents.” That was it. Their slanderous character was self-evident.<sup>8</sup>

I sent three of my postcards to Moscow in one envelope. The fourth one was alone and uncovered. It was intercepted too, but that story was presented in a different way.

As the story goes, a female post office worker was sorting mail. Supposedly, there was a postal regulation that stained mail with an unclear stamp and address should not be processed. The vigilant, loyal Soviet woman noticed a postcard written in French. She had to withdraw it because of a stain. The good woman kept looking at the card. She understood that the card contained slanderous information, and she informed her superior. He sent the card to the prosecutor.

The postcard was in the file. There was something like a smudge of rubber stamp ink on it. However, neither the stamp nor the addresses were stained.

I felt some respect for the postal worker who had a command of a foreign language. French language was rarely if ever taught in Soviet schools.

The worst thing was my mother's testimony.

She said she did not know anything bad about me. When asked if I had any relatives abroad, she said no. It was the same as saying that my invitation from Israel was fake. As a matter of fact, the invitation had been sent by our very distant relatives on my father's side, so distant that we had never even seen them, and my mother knew about them only from me.

It was not the legal aspect that tormented me. I was not afraid that my mother's testimony would bar me from emigration. By the same token, I knew that if the game between the USA and the USSR resumed, I would be released no matter what was written in the Penal Code. My cell would open for me.

Jewish emigration was a party policy, the refusal was a party policy, and so would be my prison term, release, death, emigration, or whatever. So would be everything in Russia until the party was out of power. Probably, so would it be even afterward, when it would be called “the will of the people” by another gang.

I had relatives abroad. My aunt's family, on my father's side, lived in New York. My mother knew them very well. However, my sister was married to an army officer, and my mother was worried about them. Having relatives abroad could mean the end of his career. What could be more painful than making a choice between two children? I could vividly imagine the terrible struggle in the soul of the old and gravely ill woman who had to choose between her son and her daughter. It

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<sup>8</sup> .....

was a typical dilemma of the totalitarian state as well as a frequent dilemma of a civil war. I believe she made the right choice.

The day after she had signed the testimony, however, my mother realized that she had let me down. She wrote a letter to the investigator and acknowledged that I had relatives in the USA.

I was angry with myself. I was sorry about all those people who had to go through interrogations. I was sorry about my wife, daughter, and, especially, my mother. During the war, she was starving in Uzbekistan, but I remember no hunger. I saw the whole situation through her eyes. I knew she had a sleepless night between visiting the investigator and writing the new letter.

Our family was relatively well off after the end of WW2. My parents expected quiet life at old age. In the end, my mother found herself involved in another war, the meaning of which she did not understand. She was never anti-Soviet.

I never saw my mother again after the days of my trial. When I was in the camp, she moved in with her daughter, far away from the Ukraine. In America, I learned about her death.

My wife Ann refused to testify.

I had come to the end of the third volume of my file.

It was good to sit in a clean room without grating in the window. Bright sunlight was softened by the blocks of frosted glass. I could ask for another day of reading. The dybbuks would need my signature.

Suddenly, everything lost its importance. Nothing mattered anymore in the mad world around me. If I was drowning, it was in the sea of my own disgust and contempt. Almost fifty years of my life were cut off. I did not know how much—and of what—lay ahead.

If I was never to see the distant life and the little crystal things on the crystal plate, there was no sense in lingering in the past and in unattainable present. If I was destined to see it, there was no sense in all that either.

I had to go "home," back to the cell that was my home and shelter in the world of the absurdity. Yet I still had one more experiment to conduct with Tomin.

"Do you need more time to familiarize yourself with your case?" he asked me.

"No, that will do. But I have a couple of questions."

"Go ahead."

"In my letters and petitions, I never used the word *Jew*. I wrote about refuseniks. However, you substituted the word *Jew* for it. Therefore, you ascribe to

me statements about the Jews in the USSR that I never made. Why is that?"

"There is no such word as *refusenik*."

I was satisfied with the answer. I asked my second question:

"Why are letters and petitions to Soviet authorities considered libel?" I had in mind that in the Soviet Penal Code there was a special note that did not allow anything addressed to Soviet officials to be deemed slanderous.

"Do you think everybody can say whatever he wants?"

"All right, last question. Why did you carry on this totally absurd and illegal lawsuit?"

"I am a soldier. I must obey orders."

That was how I interrogated the interrogator. Tomin was not confused by my questions. He answered without any hesitation. I believe he did not realize the meaning of what he had just said. He was completely honest. Why shouldn't he? The investigation was over. I would be behind bars for at least three years. I did not know that, but he did. He could afford to be forthcoming. I was talking, at last.

I rejoiced. This time, unlike in the psychiatric hospital, my experiment was clean and successful. I had a chance to take a look at the very core of the Soviet judicial logic.

"So, are you going to sign?"

I thought again about the possibility of spending the next day in this comfortable place, about going into the details of my file, which I had read selectively and hastily.

I had no intention whatsoever of defending me or participating in the court show in any way.

I learned two important things from the file. First, my clearance with the secret Siberian plant, which I used for years, had disappeared from my records and I never used the one with my university. It was all confirmed in writing,

Second, I learned that only a very cruel person could be a voluntary martyr if other people depended on him. I made many people suffer. I lost all my respect for martyrs and heroes.

I felt tired of the intense light in the room and too many images flaring up in my mind. I refused to sign anything, and I did not request another day of reading.

The trial would be the next step. Strangely, I still could not believe it would take place.

Full of bitterness and sorrow, I was walking back, with a guard behind me, through the door, past the patch of dusty green grass, to my block, through iron doors and stairways, and when I stepped into the darkness of the cell and the door banged behind me, I tried to smile to my cellmates.

For quite some time I remained immersed in the images of my life, as they had passed before me over the court file.

Like my country, I had a history of my own.

# XI

## THE DYBBUKS

**I**f I waited patiently for the end of our ordeal, the eight years of the refusal would be a complete loss. I did not, and I was rewarded more than penalized.

The Jewish emigration was never officially open and neither was it closed. I had to come to OVIR once a year to find out the status of my visa application. The answer was negative. After the second year in suspension, half a dozen impatient refuseniks decided to dig a tunnel under the impenetrable refusal wall. We met each other mostly at the doors of OVIR or through common friends.

As the first step, we organized seminars on Jewish culture, meeting in turn at one another's apartments. This custom was instituted by the previous, relatively small generation of refuseniks, most of who were refused on the grounds of possessing state secrets. We also held weekly scientific seminars in my apartment. About a dozen scientists and engineers presented introductory lectures on subjects of common interest such as modern world history, the efficient burning of fuel, chemical separation, the world fuel crisis, the nature of economic inflation, the modern car industry, and so forth. My contribution was history of Hungary. While still in Siberia, I was studying the language and translating a unique Hungarian poet Endre Ady torn between love and contempt of his nation, as well as passion and aversion of carnal love.

My friendship with Gary was one of the two most precious gifts of the refusal. His intellectual power possessed the beauty of a great natural phenomenon, like a free-flowing river, a pristine lake, or a mountain range. I could talk with him endlessly. Gary's intellectual stream brought into motion rusty turbines inside my own head, and his influence on me was immense and lasting.

Gary worked in several fields of theoretical physics and published his papers abroad. He, his wife, and their daughter lived in a tiny one-bedroom apartment near the city airport. He used to work in the morning at a coffee table that served as his only desk. His train of thought was stimulated by the noise of jet planes taking off or descending over his apartment house, as well as by a poster of Albert Einstein on the wall. There was an obvious visual resemblance between the two physicists.

At least once a week we had a long walk after lunch. We started with the latest refusal news and a political update. Then we switched to science.

Gary's lectures on physics were brilliant. He was a born teacher. The most complex problems appeared simple with his explanation. He opened to me the world of abstract theoretical physics and problems of life, evolution, chaos, and order.

Like all refuseniks activists, Gary was harassed by the KGB. The absence of peace of mind could be more harmful to creativity than the roar of the nearby airport. Still, Gary managed to avoid total consumption by the refusal. He was one of the few scientists in his situation who worked productively. He was a member of the Moscow refusenik seminar of scientists, well known to scientists around the world.

I had always respected physicists, seeing them as superior beings and mediators between God and us mere mortals. Gary was the first theoretical physicist I had ever met, and he did not disappoint me. In my memory, he has a double standing as that mediator because he was also my first teacher of Jewish history. He prepared for our seminars a cycle of three lectures based on an old textbook, and we all were fascinated by his presentation of the subject, which was new to him and us.

Judaism was the other gift of the refusal. Among the subjects of the Jewish seminar were dietary laws, life of the Jews in pre-revolutionary Russia, Jewish jokes (which I translated from Polish) and songs, theater, an introduction to Hebrew, Hasidism, the Talmud, and many other topics.

The refuseniks of the previous generation used to sign petitions to the authorities, and so did we. Any appeal that was not definitely loyal to the party was automatically considered disloyal, especially a collective one.

Our seminars and petitions were our first acts of defiance. We took the next step in 1981. Seven men, including Paul, Gary, and me, held a three-day hunger strike in my apartment. Immediately, all home telephones, over which we tried to send messages abroad, were disconnected. They remained that way for almost two years.



Some of the refuseniks in Moscow resorted to desperate acts such as hanging posters "Let me go to Israel" on their balconies. The most prominent and active refuseniks were tried and sentenced to labor camps and exile. The Soviets created Jewish martyrs and that sealed their defeat.

The refusal, the invasion of Afghanistan, Sakharov's exile, the new trials of dissidents—those were the last convulsions of the agonizing system. Of course, no one could foresee its collapse within our lifetime. On the other hand, nobody believed the refusal would last eight years.

The problem with predicting the timing of a historical milestone is the same as for a major earthquake or a possible scientific breakthrough. Since the event is unique, all we can safely say is that it could take from one to one hundred years. On the historical scale of the evolution of Earth, that is extremely precise. When something big is coming, we can see it from afar; we just do not know when it will get here.

The Soviet dissident, Andrei Amalrik—he died young—wrote in the nineteen-seventies a book entitled *Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984?* He borrowed the date from Orwell. He predicted that it would not, and his optimism turned amazingly accurate.

The life of the old refuseniks in Moscow was well covered by the Western press. It was much harder for the provinces to get into focus. Our first press conference in Moscow with two American journalists drew some attention to the obscure Kharkov. I wanted to do something else, however.

I wrote an essay containing an overly emotional description of life in the refusal. I compared the refusal with radiation sickness: the source of the disease was invisible. People do not sense radiation, but afterward they slowly die.

I showed the manuscript to all my friends, asking the sole question:

"Is there a single word with which you do not agree?"

Nobody wanted to change anything.

Almost any such publication abroad was a direct route to prison. Before making my final decision about publishing "Description of a Disease," I talked to Ann.

"I am going to do something suicidal that might put me into prison. I hope I will survive it. I also hope that you will not be left without help. I know that this is the right way to bring the day of our release closer. It is my duty to do something. Will you support me?"

The answer was not instantaneous.

"You should do whatever you consider right."

My "Description" was published in the U.S.

In the beginning of our seminars, only a few people among us were really interested in Jewish culture. We naively wanted to become a “mote in the eye” for the authorities and to be ejected by Russia as nuisance. At the same time, we expected to draw the attention of the American Jews to the new generation of refuseniks. For the old ones there was at least some formal reason for the refusal—security clearance or other formalities, whether true or false. We were given no legal reason at all, and we thought it was important, although reason did not matter at all in Russia.

We had no idea who the American Jews were. We knew very little about Judaism and even less about the way the things were done in America. We knew nothing about the complex relationship among different branches of Judaism.

It was hard to overcome the idealistic delusion that elsewhere the world was like Russia where every Jew saw in another Jew his possible distant relative. That was not always true even in Russia. We expected the American Jews to consider us to be of the same blood. Religion was something secondary, because being a Jew in Russia had nothing to do with religion.

What we could not foresee in the beginning was that Russia had entered a new long period of tightening the screws and no one could predict where it would go. When it became clear later, it gave me a creepy chill, as if I were watching a corpse trying to dig out of a grave. We would have been terrified to learn in advance how many years we would spend in the refusal.

While waiting for the release, most of the thousands of Kharkov refuseniks chose to maintain a low profile. They hid their outcast status and tried to secure any job they could. They had to conceal their education to get positions as parking lot guards, janitors, or operators of heating boilers in a block of apartment houses.

A job gave a sense of security. According to the law, nobody could be forced to work unless so ordered by the court. In practice, the chief of police decreed that a person who did not work and evaded working could be punished by exile or imprisonment. The contradiction did not bother the authorities. The dybbuks widely used that to persecute dissidents and active refuseniks. The story of the poet Joseph Brodsky was an example.

Common refuseniks shunned the activists. We called our timid brethren “roaches,” which was, of course, unfair. They were normal people who cared about their families, and they well understood that we could expect the worst from the Soviets. There were many silent sympathizers among them. Some of them, however, thought that we could only inflict the anger of the authorities on all refuseniks. The Jews faced that split under the Nazi regime. It is part of human nature.

The initial circle of activists was very narrow, just a dozen families. Gradually, after the repressions started, the "Jewish resistance," that we were so proud of, fell apart. The remnants were later destroyed by fear, mutual suspicion, and greed. Still, our activism was remarkable for the totalitarian Russia, where any organized but unauthorized activity led directly to prison.

"Jewish resistance" was my actual crime against the system. It was never in any way mentioned in the Penal Code. Neither was any collective activity ever mentioned in my file—neither our march into the police headquarters to free an arrested friend, nor our Jewish mini-university for young people who would not be accepted into colleges, nor our seminars, nor celebrations of Jewish holidays, nor meetings with foreigners in Moscow. The dybbuks did not want to publicize defiance in the face of the regime. None of it mattered anyway. If I had not written postcards and petitions, the dybbuks would have set me up in a dark street and charged me with street fighting, as they had done to other people.

Looking back at the overwhelming absurdity of the Soviet system, I cannot attribute it to any ideology. There was nothing specifically Communist in it. It was the old Russian pattern to rely on force rather than on reason. Authority of any kind and political authority in particular was measured by its violent force, just as they had been at the dawn of history.

Moses was the oldest among us. He had access to self-published Judaica.

In Russia, copying machines were forbidden for public use. Office copiers—of the size of four large refrigerators—were kept in special rooms behind locked iron doors. They were closely guarded by the KGB, were considered classified equipment, and only an authorized operator with clearance was permitted to work with them. Underground publications were either typed through carbon paper in multiple barely readable copies, or photographically printed at home. The photo prints were too bulky and heavy, and the Soviet photo paper was prone to warp. On the other hand, it was difficult to trace them to the photographer.

One session of our cultural seminar was dedicated to Isaac Bashevis Singer, the Yiddish-American writer, who had just recently been awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. Singer's work was just one example of literature that was neither approved nor disapproved and therefore was forbidden in Russia.

Our only source of knowledge about Singer was a carbon copy of a hand-typed magazine. Among other material, it included excerpts from Singer's essays.

Dybbuks were common characters in Singer's stories. In one of his essays, he mentioned that when things and pages of his manuscripts disappeared from his desk, he attributed it to dybbuks. A footnote explained that the dybbuk was an evil spirit: a rejected by God soul of the dead that entered another body.

Moses once complained that some papers had disappeared from his desk, and somebody suggested that dybbuks from the KGB seized them in his absence. I started to promote the nickname, which suited the KGB very well. A word denoting something sinister and supernatural was used as a nickname for the secret police in other countries, as, for example, *Tontons Macoutes* of Haiti under Duvalier.

Although the new word *dybbuks* stuck to the KGB, I was somewhat uneasy about the term. I was not sure the mythical dybbuks were as mean as the real ones. The dybbuks in Singer's stories appeared to be hapless, good-natured, and funny creatures rather than menacing monsters. I felt a bit sorry for having offended good Jewish dybbuks by comparing them with the KGB.

I had always been curious about the dybbuks, even long before I gave them that name. Who were they? What kind of person could be an instrument of secret and illegal state terror? Were they smart, educated, sophisticated, honest, honorable? Were they the noble knights of revolution, as books and films tried to depict Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the Soviet secret police, and his heirs?

There were two distinct institutions of state terrorism in Russian history. One was established in the sixteenth century by Czar Ivan the Terrible. He tried to break the resistance of his vassals with the raids of his cavalry goon squad, the *oprichniks*. They rode with a broom and a dog's head attached to their saddles. That meant that they were faithful like dogs in their mission to sweep away the enemies of the czar.

The other institution of terror was the secret police in Soviet Russia under Stalin and his successors.

The freedoms proclaimed by the Soviet Constitution of 1936 sprinkled some blue and white paint on the red facade of the empire. That familiar red, white, and blue made Western liberals feel more comfortable about Russia. Then came the dybbuks whose main goal was to remove quietly all those freedoms without damaging the facade. That theft of freedom, of course, violated the constitution and it could be punishable by death or the maximum term of imprisonment in Russia—fifteen years. Therefore, the very function of the ideological department of the KGB was in fact state crime.

As far as the law was concerned, it could be interpreted as arbitrarily as Rorschach tests. The long tradition of a double law in Russia expresses in such sayings as "Not every word is written into the line," i.e., one should always read between the lines of the law, and "Like a wagon, law goes where you turn the shaft," or, in modern terms, law is nothing but the steering wheel of a car.

I thought the dybbuks fit neatly into the roster of intimidating organizations that had served dictatorships throughout history, including the Gestapo, Seguridad, Securitate, Siguranza, Stasi, Savak, etc. People who act against the dominant power need guts. Subjected to persecution, they face punishment, injury, and death. The state terrorism of the dybbuks did not take courage. Neither did it require the brain

of Sherlock Holmes. The officers of the ideological department of the KGB, whose function was the persecution of dissidents, needed only minimal intelligence to understand what their victims were saying.

"Why don't they kill us?" wondered a dissident in his underground book about the rules for playing games with dybbuks in case of arrest.

Fortunately for Russian dissenters, the Soviet government had not given the dybbuks a license to kill. Without it, in the long run, they were as powerless as their victims.

In Stalin's time, the dybbuks were simply butchers. They knew how to slaughter cattle and skin it. The cattle did not resist. It was just a simple technology that did not involve any intellectual standoff. The question anti-Semites often ask Jews—Why didn't the Jews fight the Nazis?—could be addressed to millions of Russians: why didn't they resist the terror? The answer is simple: the cattle do not resist butchers because the animals are physically restrained before slaughtering and because nobody returns from the dead to warn the living.

The dybbuks could not prove to the public that dissidents were real criminals. They could not directly use the threat of death or extort a false confession under typical torture, with a few exceptions. They did not use the most powerful tool of Stalin's time—the torture of the closest relatives, which used to break the strongest victims.

The dybbuks had to break the moral resistance of the victim with relatively mild means. All they needed was to cut short the flying feathers of the bird, breaking no bones. Cooperation from the victim was usually sufficient. It was enough to show that the victims were either agents of the West or just mean and immoral persons.

After Stalin, the secret police had expanded immensely. In every big city, KGB buildings multiplied like the cells of a developing fetus. They grew until they occupied a whole block. The police-KGB complexes turned into closed fortresses, usually with one wall facing a street named after either Dzerzhinsky or Lenin.

I do not think the growth was spurred only by the needs of ideological repression. More contacts with the West meant more work for intelligence and counterintelligence. To expand, the dybbuks had to prove that they had much work to do. Therefore, they needed more foreign spies, more state secrets, more dissidents. The monster of the secret police, once created, had to be fed, and it created chicken coops to feed on. Dissidents were created, bred, and taken care of to provide the monster with food. People were carefully provoked until their dissent grew ripe for repressions that were amplified by Western media and broadcast back to Russia, where they generated more dissent and consequently more growth for dybbuks. It was a self-perpetuating system.

As Gary used to say, the two most important events in the life of a Soviet citizen were the first love and the first meeting with the KGB.

My first love was entirely platonic, and I was spared disappointment. My first encounter with the dybbuks fell on my mature years and I was spared the mistakes of youth.

In the nineteen-seventies, when I lived in Siberia, the idea of emigration was slowly cooking in my mind, but to emigrate from that part of the USSR seemed impossible and extremely dangerous in my circumstances. In a closed to foreigners city surrounded with secret plants and a whole secret city nearby, over two thousand miles from Moscow, I could not expect support and protection in case of conflict with the authorities. A round trip to Moscow would cost a month's salary. I would have practically no contacts with emigrating Jews, their relatives, and friends. An invitation from Israel could be easily intercepted by the KGB. Even though I taught not politics but chemistry, as a professor I was responsible for the political correctness and ideological purity of the thousands of students who attended my chemistry classes.

It seemed equally impossible, however, to move to the European part of Russia because I would not have the necessary *propiska* (residence permit, like Chinese *hukou*). This is why I kept telling myself that there was no paradise on Earth.

In my heart, however, I knew that if I lived in the Ukraine I would be among the very first ones to leave. Here I needed a strong blow to knock me out of my lethargy. It came from my old school friend Mike who still lived in Kharkov. Although we were separated by a great distance and met only one or two times a year, we remained close. Every time I happened to be in Kharkov, we took a long stroll from his mother's downtown apartment to a distant neighborhood where he resided with his wife, mother-in-law, and two children.

Mike was a doctor. Five people in Mike's family lived in a two-room apartment with no signs of any well-being. American readers will be surprised to learn that this was the residence of a medical specialist, but that profession was one of the most underpaid in Russia. Useful connections and some cash from private practice, neither allowed nor forbidden, but not commonly persecuted, were the only advantages of the job.

On our walks, we talked about everything but science. It was the only time I was able to speak about what I kept in my soul for half a year or more.

Mike was the brightest and most informed among my school friends. He always knew a lot about hidden developments in the country and around the world, all rumors and gossips from Moscow, as well as the freshest political jokes. As a practicing doctor, he met a lot of people, had scores of friends and acquaintances, and was always in the middle of everything. In Ukraine, he could listen to a

Western broadcast in Russian, which was jammed or just beyond the reach in Siberia. He often traveled to Moscow and Kiev, both cities just an overnight ride by train away, and he kept abreast of all the news about Moscow Jews and their flimsy interface with the Western world. He was full of vigor, intense emotions, human stories, quotations, great ideas, moral dilemmas, and I used to return to Siberia charged with his energy like a battery.

Mike was preparing to apply for emigration. He did not conceal his intentions; he visited some well-known refuseniks and was in contact with foreigners. Short-tempered, volatile, he never watched his language and, of course, he was under surveillance by the KGB. I also noticed that his letters often arrived in Siberia opened or badly sealed and were full of sharp anti-Soviet remarks. I warned him about that. "Our correspondence is more confidential than President Nixon's" was his typical reply. He was careless by nature, and "I don't care" was his favorite motto, the meaning of which was exactly opposite of its form.

In August 1976, on my way home from a Black Sea resort, I dropped in on my parents in Kharkov, and I called Mike from there. We took our regular route, and Mike told me that he, his wife, mother, and elder brother had been summoned to the KGB, all at the same time. They were interrogated separately about my political views and loyalty. Mike said that the KGB officer—young and good-looking—demanded that he surrender all my letters. Mike said he had refused to do so. After a long discussion and arguments, he and the dybbuk agreed to burn my letters in a forest near Mike's apartment. That was what he said.

That sounded like a detective story, but I realized that what happens between the secret police and its target could never be checked. Fear and shame are the natural aftertaste following contact with dybbuks because it is their trade to stir it up. Shame is just a kind of fear that changes with time, like fresh milk turning sour. People despise themselves and lie to friends even if they are not intimidated.

After Mike told me about the KGB's interest in me, I had to fly back to Siberia expecting God knows what. I was not yet ready for that. I did not want any confrontation with the authorities, especially with the KGB. I felt indignation rather than fear. Still, I realized at once that it was the major turning point in my life, much more significant than first love.

I began to recollect a vague feeling of change in my Siberian life during the last years. Once I was talking with the production manager of the lithium plant.

We were standing in the yard, about to finish the conversation and part.

"You know what? There is something else," he said with a strange expression on his face. Then he quickly changed his mind. "OK, let's not talk about it."

Lithium is a light rare metal. All of it was transported to another, even more

secret place nearby, where it was separated into two isotopes. One of them was part of a thermonuclear explosive; the other isotope could be used for civilian purposes. The plant was part of a huge, super-secret industrial complex.

During my long contact with the plant, I came to the conclusion that someone with secrets wants to share them as much as someone with money wants to spend it. Residents of the city knew about the lithium too, despite secrecy and some childish tricks, like requiring workers never pronounce the word lithium. It was called *the metal*. Cesium, the metal that was my subject, was *metal 2*. I designed a process for its production, draw a primitive sketch on a piece of paper, and was, couple months later, invited into a shop with equipment built along my picture and in full production mode.

My research was very successful. I enjoyed all possible cooperation within the plant. The grants from the plant gave me enough money for my own research team, as well as extra money. Equally important, between the outer and the inner fences of the plant were two stores where I could occasionally buy the unavailable in the city meat, pickled cucumbers, and, just once, the rarest thing: a decent dress for my wife, which she had no choice but wear to the first hole.

I had access to the central laboratory of the plant, behind the second checkpoint. I had a pass like anybody else in the plant, and I could go through both checkpoints anytime. After the conversation with the manager, my pass was withdrawn without any explanation, and I had to call for a temporary pass every time I had to enter the plant.

A year before the incident with Mike, I had been refused permission from my university to receive industrial grants. That was highly unusual because grants were always encouraged.

I also recalled a couple of times when a strange-looking man hid from me in one of the apartment houses as I was passing by on my way to the bus stop. He kept the entrance door ajar, peeping at me. The same man was hanging around when, in the same neighborhood, I had a private talk with my young assistant who had relatives in Israel.

I recalled looks—a mixture of anxiety and exaggerated friendliness—cast at me by the dean. Probably the dybbuks contacted him about me.

So, that was what my garrulous friend had done to me. Mike was under mandatory surveillance as a political suspect. This is how, I presume, I got on the hook. I did not blame him—far from it. I was always deeply grateful to Mike for the blow that kicked me out of Siberia, even though I bounced back and landed there once again, even farther east, before jumping west over the border.

Besides, it was a unique opportunity to learn more about the dybbuks. I do not remember any desire of mine to experiment in this field, however.



## *XII*

### A GIFT FROM A GENERAL

**I**n 1976, I returned to Siberia from the Ukraine not only with a heavy load of food but also with the burden of discovery.

I said nothing to my parents. My father accompanied me to the airport. It was the first time I found myself looking around with suspicion in the streets and at the airport. Everybody seemed suspect.

At that time, there was only an occasional security check at the airports. A policeman stopped me as I was about to go through the gate. I had never looked like somebody who could be stopped by a policeman and no one else was checked in the line for boarding.

"What is in your suitcase?"

"Various things. Food."

"Open up."

The policeman stared in surprise at the blocks of something wrapped in plastic bags and newspapers.

"What is this?"

"Meat."

"And what is this?"

"Fish."

My father had frozen all that stock over two nights so that I could take it the two thousand miles away where it was a rare delicacy. It looked innocent enough to stop the search.

As always when the airplane was approaching Krasnoyarsk, I felt anger and frustration.

The city was located mostly in a valley, on both banks of the Yenisei River. A low cloud of dust and smog filled the whole basin. Huge complexes of industrial plants producing cellulose, aluminum, synthetic fiber, alcohol, explosives, antibiotics, tire, rubber, as well as a power station working on low-quality coal, encircled the city.

In the middle of the chain of plants, right in front of my window, were a big cement plant and my lithium plant, both producing enormous amount of dust.

Whatever the direction of the wind, there was no escape from the stinging acrid air. Five minutes after a table was wiped, one could write on the dusty surface with a finger. Taking a shower, I could see black streams flowing down my body. Dust filled the lungs, nostrils, and ears of the city residents living in primitive five-story apartment houses for forty families. The buildings were devoid of any architectural touch and were strictly functional, like cages for experimental animals.

Some Krasnoyarsk children looked like middle-aged midgets with grayish skin, grotesque faces, and snotty noses. It was painful to think that our daughter would live in Siberia all her life, her lungs filled with poisonous air and soot.

In the winter, with gusty winds at -40°F, people with children would stand at bus stops, waiting sometimes for half an hour for the bus to take their kids to kindergarten. They would jump and clasp their hands to warm themselves up. When a bus arrived, the crowd of people would storm the door. Men were ruthless to women, children, and each other. Occasionally a child who lost his mother in the bus jam would scream desperately, lost between the bodies. Strong, massive men wore black sheepskin coats as coarse as sandpaper. Any decent overcoat would be soon grated in the bus jam.

Strangely enough, for some Russian immigrants who came to the U.S., it was a big disappointment that most Americans did not know much about the world, did not care about music or classical literature, could not maintain a serious Russian-style conversation, and often were not interested in anything but sports. That reaction always surprised me. There are not many people in Russia who can meet the requirements of the Russian intelligentsia. So why grumble? There must have been some reason for that attitude, and the mystery intrigued me very much.

Later I understood. Most Americans are neatly dressed, decent looking, easygoing, friendly, and, compared to the average Russian, exceptionally well mannered. These characteristics—not only in combination but also individually—were not so common in Russia. Therefore, the automatic reaction of an educated Russian was to expect from an average American what he could expect in Russia only from the elite.

I never got used to the Siberian roughness, and it hurt me. Still, comparing the Siberians with slightly more polished and more corrupt residents of capital cities west of the Ural Mountains, I could fully appreciate the straightforward, generous, open, honest, and dependable spirit of Siberian folk under the rough crust.

Although I had friends in Siberia with whom I could talk, exchange ideas, and learn something, I felt as if in exile. My major solace in Krasnoyarsk was the setting. The majestic Yenisei River, shivering because of high speed, ran toward the Arctic Ocean. Picturesque hills, anthropomorphic rocks, and receding into mist stacks of mountain vistas were just a short bus drive from home.

Now even the scenery looked tainted. Another plague had been added to the deadly air, meager food, killing frost, dreadful mosquitoes, and boorish people—my conflict with KGB.

I could hesitate for a long time before making a decision, but not afterward. I wanted to leave Russia and was ready for that. I was thankful to my careless friend Mike who made me act instead of ruminating.

Some American and Israeli Jews were disappointed to find that most Russian immigrants were driven neither by Zionism nor by the desire to practice Judaism. The never seen or tasted exotic fruit of political freedom did not attract many of them. It was not a positive ideal that put them into motion, but the same expelling force of poverty and hopelessness that had brought to America the previous waves of immigrants from Ireland, Poland, Italy, Greece, and Russia.

In two trips, I hauled my heavy baggage up to the fourth floor of our standard five-story walk-up apartment house.

The first thing to do at home was to burn all of Mike's letters, as he had begged me to do. I took the letters down to the dirt yard between houses and made a bonfire. Surprisingly, it was hard to burn a lot of paper. Only after that did I tell Ann about the news and my decision. She accepted it without hesitation. I explained that a fake divorce was the only way to accomplish my plan. I could have the legal right to a residence permit with my parents only as a single man. She did not mind. We went through with it. We applied for a divorce and had to wait several months for the court hearing.

Ann taught English at the School of Medicine. Once she came home after midnight. We had no luxury of telephone—the local telephone station had only a

limited number of lines—and she could not call me to say she would be late. She said she had attended a birthday party of a colleague, who happened to be the daughter of the chief of the city KGB. Her father, a KGB general, was about to leave Krasnoyarsk for another assignment.

By the end of the party, the host had asked my wife to join him for a talk. In an empty room, he told her that I was under surveillance.

"We know everything about him, even what kind of underwear he buys and at what store," he said.

The general said there was nothing serious against me. If I wished to emigrate, I would not be detained. Mike was a typical anti-Soviet. Professor Funk, one of my colleagues and friends, was a KGB agent. If I had any question, the general would answer through his daughter. He had no right to interfere with the ongoing investigation conducted by his subordinates. I should soon expect a summon to the KGB headquarters.

He passed to me an advice not to meet with anybody. My wife did not understand what that meant, but I did. I immediately recalled an odd episode.

A couple of weeks before the party I had met Nelly, a friend of mine since our student years in Kharkov. We met from time to time, usually when her family life was approaching another crisis and she needed support and sympathy. As we stood in the lobby of the city library, Nelly told me that she had met some wonderful people impatient to do something they considered necessary for Russia in its Dark Ages. She asked me if I would like to meet them. I promised to think it over.

It was late at night, and the library was about to close. I noticed a woman—neither young nor old, neither handsome nor ugly—who stood between the pillars in the lobby. I had not seen her approaching us. Our eyes met, and she immediately disappeared behind the pillars. I had the feeling that she had been eavesdropping on us.

The astonishing news brought by my wife stirred up my memory. Now I understood even stranger events in my recent past. There was the bewildering, but perhaps not surprising, behavior of Mark Funk, one of the few Jews I knew in Krasnoyarsk. Always emphatically amiable and supportive of me, he had taken to inviting me into his small, apparently unused office. Then he would turn on a strange switch on the wall, which he explained was a burglar alarm. No such alarm could be on during the day, but I did not pay much attention.

I liked Funk but never fully trusted him. Not only were there some inconsistencies in his life story, but his eyes were never open wide enough to appear honest. Funk always helped me with all he could and I appreciated our half-friendship. Still, I was never open with him on political matters.

Once I told Funk that I was translating some poetry from the Hungarian, and he asked me for a copy of my translation.

The poet Endre Ady challenged me with the apparent impossibility of translating his taut laconic poems charged with condensed passion and fury. I learned about Ady from books about Bela Bartok, my forever favorite composer. Bartok's music came to me as a revelation and salvation during a difficult period of my life, before my second marriage, and it pulled me out of depression. It was music totally devoid of illusion and sentimentality, written by a great pessimist who relied only on his personal strength in this world.

Funk kept my translations for more than a month despite my reminding him to return it. Ann told me that the manuscript was in the hands of the KGB and that the general noted, by the way, that his people did not like Funk.

Now I recollected Funk telling me that as a former intelligence officer he had kept in touch with the KGB, was periodically briefed, and was given the opportunity to read forbidden books, like *Doctor Zhivago* by Boris Pasternak. He probably wanted to warn me against saying something risky.

"Since I worked for intelligence in the army, I am always their reservist," he told me. I did not get the message.

Once I asked him what he would say if questioned by the KGB about me. Looking at me in a queer way, he said he would tell them only the best.

Now I also remembered one of my last visits to the lithium plant. Although my exchange with the production manager, whom I highly respected, was limited to shop talk, he sometimes cautiously deviated from the production of alkaline metals into Soviet economy. A couple of times, I noticed him periodically checking and fixing something out of sight in his desk. I had instinctively thought of a hidden tape recorder but did not care because I always watched my language for political correctness, as was the deeply rooted Soviet habit of behavior in public. Now I believed that he, too, wanted to warn me.

I realized why the manager was so evasive about the withdrawal of my pass. He knew that I was under surveillance.

Everything fit into place, as in a finished jigsaw puzzle. I had no more illusions. In 1976, I began my personal exodus.

The next spring, I was about to make reservations for the flight to Kharkov, hopefully my last flight from Siberia. I wanted to take our six-year-old daughter with me so she would not breathe the polluted air anymore. At least twice a year she would catch a cold, which would end with a terrible, heartbreaking cough lasting several nights.

Once I saw a visitor talking to the chairperson in the hallway of our department. My superior looked highly excited and fidgety. Half an hour later, he came to my lab. This time, he looked worried and confused.

"You know, somebody from the KGB asked me about you."

"It could be."

"Have you done anything?"

"Absolutely nothing. Probably they need some information from me." I tried to look unperturbed, but it took a lot of nerve to continue typing the papers I was working on.

Several days later, the KGB called to ask if I could come the next day. I said yes, and they promised to send a car.

I had several lectures the next day. I spoke quite mechanically and with difficulty, which I tried to conceal. I felt my face was a wax mask. My students looked at me in surprise. By four o'clock, I was outside. The car was waiting for me.

The car stopped at the corner entrance of the Krasnoyarsk KGB. Inside it looked just like any other Soviet office, but the hallways were empty.

I was ushered into a small, shabby-looking office with a maze of wires on the wall, and was left alone for a while. No doubt, they were secretly studying my behavior.

I was not really nervous. I had believed the general that there was no serious case against me. As if in a fairy tale, I felt I was in the middle of a magic circle that protected me against demons.

A uniformed military officer with the rank of Major entered the room and began to ask me some formal questions, clearly pretending to be angry with me about something: "You should denounce your wrongdoing. We cannot close our eyes to such deviations. Tell us everything. You must realize the consequences. This is not the right way for you. It could harm you. We can help you. You cannot deceive us. We know everything."

"What wrongdoing? What deviations? I don't have any idea." I really had no idea. If there was no case against me, what did he mean? He was trying to blame something on me, but it was impossible to understand what.

"You know perfectly well. You are not stupid. You know where that could lead you. Don't go that way. You are not a child, are you?"

I felt rising irritation and I knew that if I got angry I would lose control.

Although the Major was obviously performing a simple routine, he himself felt insecure. I could not withstand the temptation to probe him. I did not want to experiment: the homunculus in my head did.

"Do you think I committed a crime against the Soviet system?"

"No, I don't want to say that."

"Then why did you keep me under surveillance?"

"Why do you think so?"

"I used to receive letters that were badly sealed, sometimes open."

"We did not open your letters. Even if we did, do you think we don't have enough glue to seal them?"

This time I felt that I had hit an invisible target. The major started all over again.

"You think too much about yourself. You may be easily entrapped into alien influence and fall prey to hostile ideology."

Finally, he walked out. A new officer in civilian clothing appeared. He was the man who talked to the dean. Plump, with thin black hair and with no military bearing, he seemed polite and mild, and I recognized the age-old police scenario: bad cop, good cop.

The officer asked me about my life and work, and if I was happy there. I certainly was.

He asked me about my family and relatives, and then switched to friends. He carefully steered the conversation to Mike, inquiring about his intentions and views. I said I did not know anything about his political views.

Did we correspond? Yes, there was a period of intense correspondence. When? About 1973. Now we write less. Why? My life changed. In what way? My family takes all my attention.

What did we write about? Literature, history, arts. Was there anything anti-Soviet?

Now it was my turn to ask. "What is anti-Soviet?"

"Come on, you know, of course. You are an educated man, an academic; you are responsible for shaping the ideology of the Soviet youth."

A quiet talk did not seem like an interrogation.

"I do not teach students anything bad."

"We know. We trust you."

"Then why am I here?"

"Do you think we talk only with anti-Soviets? If you did something like that, we would talk to you in a different way."

"Well, why are you interrogating me?"

"This is just a talk; it is not an interrogation. We want to prevent some deviations from happening. There is something that surprised us."

The officer gave me a sheet of paper with three paragraphs written in childishly diligent handwriting. I recognized three quotations from my letters to Mike, which I would have otherwise completely forgotten about. They said:

"I think a new Christ is possible."

"There is no other country in the world where a person is as much deprived of freedom as in Russia."

"In Russia everybody is a serf of the government."

I must have blushed.

"Yes, I recognize my letters. How did you get hold of these?"

"Your friend Mike gave them to our officer in Kharkov."

"That's impossible. I don't believe you. You intercepted my letters."

The officer did not argue.

"So, how do you explain such views? I ask you because you work on the ideological front. Your friend is an open anti-Soviet. We cannot believe you and he have anything in common."

I was thinking hard. An instant solution occurred to me.

"Those were my old letters. I think I wrote them around 1973. It was a special time in my life. I was having some personal problems then, a kind of depression. It was just a transient mood. Since then I have not written such things." That, of course, was true, because by then I had become disturbed by the open envelopes. Had the KGB been trying to warn me in that way?

"This is correct. You wrote less in the last few years. What was the reason for your depression?"

"I cannot remember. I just did not feel happy. It was very personal."

"Do you regret those words?"

"How can I regret anything about my private correspondence? It didn't harm anybody."

"Do you now think the same way you did then?"

"No, I don't."

The officer was apparently relieved.

"Well then, put it on paper. By the way, what are your immediate plans?"

"I am moving to Kharkov."

"Are you sure you can find a job there? The Ukraine is known for ethnic bigotry and prejudice."

"Yes, there is anti-Semitism. In Siberia, I have not seen it. Still, I am optimistic about finding a job."

"Here in Siberia we can value people for their talents."

I got the hint. My entire future depended on my written repentance.



He gave me a sheet of paper and left. I wrote:

To the KGB of the city of Krasnoyarsk.

Explanation

In 1973, during my private correspondence with Mike Perlman, due to temporary personal circumstances, I admitted some views, which contradicted the official point of view. Now I would not write such letters.

Edward Lutsky

The officer was not happy about my explanation, but he accepted it.

"Very good, Edward, we knew you were a decent and honest man. Some of our officers were your students, and they had a high opinion of you. You were considered intelligent, responsive, and fair. We know you are a loyal Soviet citizen. We understand that everybody can have doubts and questions, but you should ask us and not use questionable sources. You can ask right now."

The KGB gives me the best reference in my life. Unbelievable! Something was wrong with me if I deserve the kudos from the secret police. That was how I learned that the KGB recruited university students.

"Can I ask right now?"

"Sure."

"Why is there no meat in the stores?"

I asked the question with which I was very much preoccupied. He seemed to have little trouble with the problem.

"Well, you know, the party tries hard to solve the problem. We asked America, Australia, and other countries to sell us meat, but they refused. Now we are negotiating with Argentina. Any other questions? All right, we wish you success in your native city."

He saw me off to the exit, and I walked out. It all took about one hour. I felt I had just undergone another crucial phase of my metamorphosis, the most radical one in twenty years.

I was not tied to this country anymore. All my thoughts were pragmatic—how to get out of Russia. I lost all interest in Russia—her past and her future. My obsession with my mysterious country seemed to evaporate.

In a week, the general passed along his summary. He said I was a clever man, and he wanted to know if I had any questions. My only concern was whether my postgraduates would be in trouble if I emigrated. My question went down the same channel, and the response was no.

In two weeks, I was leaving Krasnoyarsk with my daughter. At the airport,

Ann and I had to play a divorced couple who were happy to part. We knew we were watched.

Soon after my departure, the general left Siberia for a new assignment and his daughter gave my wife some furniture—bookcase and cabinet—he left behind. It was a valuable gift because decent furniture was not available in stores.

After a year, Ann moved to Kharkov with all our furniture, ready to marry me for the second time. A brave girl.

The bookcase had a lower compartment with a lock. In 1980, when seven refuseniks held a three-day hunger strike at our apartment in Kharkov, I put all nonperishable food from our kitchen into the general's bookcase and gave the key to my wife. My mother was visiting her daughter.

I have warm feelings for the late KGB general whom I never saw. His assurance that I would be able to emigrate could mean only one thing—my top security clearance was erased. Fortunately, following some deep instinct, I had never used my other clearance, obtained at the university. Very unfortunately, I did not fully believe the general until I found the proof in my court file: my school essay was there, but no trace of my clearance.

I did not change my opinion about dybbuks as a tribe, but I really learned something about them. With hindsight, I must admit that Isaac Bashevis Singer knew well that life was complex everywhere—in both the world and the underworld. Rubbing shoulders with humans, the dybbuks could acquire human qualities and drop their mischievous habits. It could become impossible to tell both apart. As for humans, they could live among dybbuks, be undistinguishable from the ambience, but remain human in their hearts. Yet such antisymmetric transformations are rare and we will gain more from simplification, independence, self-reliance, and mistrust of miracles. In the end, this story remains a mystery. It can have simpler explanation. The simplest one: people are not identical run-of-the-mill machines even if they have identical labels.<sup>9</sup>

I have warm feelings for all people who helped me in both worlds, not only for the general, but also for Mark Funk. He gave me a precious advice, which I fully appreciated only much later.

"You have only one single flaw, Ed," he used to say. "You think everybody can do what you can." That was not praise but reproach.

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<sup>9</sup> These days we can see better how blurred the border between sexes can get. The border between hyper-sexes of moral and intellectual opposites is equally blurred. A Russian proverb says something like "There is a simpleton in every sage."

*INTERLUDE*

When I was lying on the rocky concrete of the devils' cell, I was given the fascinating gift of flying. Writing this book, I am captivated by another curious phenomenon. All the people I met in Russia—friends, enemies, dybbuks, and even the ignorant zeks—all of them speak English. I see their faces, hear the unique modulation of their voices, but they talk to me in English and I speak English to them, too.

I can retrieve the smells and colors of the camp, my visions are vivid, and I even feel that the memories of the past crinkle up my face into a scornful and callous mask.

The language in my ears, however, is evidence that I have been undergoing a cataclysmic transformation. I am probably still in the process of it. I observe in myself the battle of the two greatest elements of life—past and future. They clash like hot lava and seawater. The past cools down, forever solid. The future recedes a little, forever fluid. The past crumbles, the future evaporates.

The voices and visions are just daydreaming. I am typing these lines on my computer. I see the Latin characters on the screen. I am free. I am in America.

What can be greater than the transition I am in—from slavery to freedom? I was wading chin deep in water in my nightmares. Here, I walk chin deep in freedom. No one around me can feel the freedom as I do. It is as material and tangible as the rain. It is anti-pressure, anti-matter, anti-resistance, and anti-suffering. Oh, Lord! I am still too Russian: a negative form always comes to mind first. Slavery is still primary for me. Probably, it must be so.

I am happy I was a slave. Thank God, I was a slave! There is no light without darkness, no heat without cold, no satiety without hunger, no health without illness, no freedom without knowing slavery.

I knew happy times in slavery and sad times in freedom. As Plato said, we cannot say that somebody is happy until he dies. Whatever else is going to happen to me, I am happier than those born in freedom because I was privileged to experience the painfully sharp delight, the mellow penetration, the sweet shock of transition from slavery to freedom. My feeling of freedom is ever acute and piercing. My love of freedom is not platonic anymore.

## *XIII*

### ON FOXES AND RABBITS

**D**uring my first Siberian encounter with the KGB, I had only a vague premonition that it was a precursor of further less agreeable contacts.

Without any telescreen, without bugging my telephone, which I did not have, the KGB made the right evaluation of my inclinations. It honestly warned me, but I did not heed it. What the KGB diagnosed as a cancer of bourgeois ideology and what I felt, it was just the instinct of freedom that kept growing into a tumor with metastases all over my soul. Finally I had to be administered a strong remedy.

To be objective, the KGB and the party were right: dissidents, religious believers, and even we, potential emigrants, were agents of bourgeois ideology. No denying, we were subversive elements, the fifth column, spies and traitors.

The religious dissidents recognized some power and authority that outranked the party. Political dissidents put the power and authority of law and reason above the authority of the party. Emigrants voted against the party with their feet. They carried with them shocking secrets about the backward political and economic system.

There was definite logic in the policy of the KGB, and the atrocities of dybbuks were justified from the party's point of view. A Martian would probably see the struggle as legitimate on both sides, but here, on Earth, one had to take a stand.

Although Soviet dissidents demanded nothing but human rights and the implementation of international agreements, they were engaged in a real war against the party. We can call it struggle, but it was essentially the same as war in which one side was counting the wounded and, sometimes, dead.

War is, in fact, the key word that makes at least some logical sense of Soviet history. Brezhnev's doctrine was that Soviet Russia had the right to intervene into the internal affairs of her satellites. It was a geopolitical doctrine based on territorial reasons, i.e., the most common reasons of wars. Sakharov's doctrine implied that the West had the right to intervene in the internal affairs of any country when it came to human rights. Taken abstractly, the two approaches are remarkably similar. It was a *territorial dispute*, and such disputes could be resolved only by war.<sup>10</sup>

Russia did to dissidents what any country would do to people loyal to the enemy during a war. Were we enemies of the state? Yes, we were. We were not enemies of the people, but how could we prove that? The party did not wish anything bad to befall the people, either. It seemed to anticipate that the demise of communism would bring only more suffering to the nation.

True, the dissidents were the traitors, because they belonged to the West and relied on the West. They were traitors in the same sense as the conspirators against Hitler were.

The dissidents possessed the real means to convey information to the West because American correspondents were their best allies. As the American transports and convoys during World War II brought weapons and food to Russia through the cold northern seas swarming with German submarines, so American and other Western correspondents carried information about dissidents through Moscow streets swarming with dybbuks. The correspondents were soldiers—they would probably deny that vehemently—in the war for democracy. They did not risk their lives but sometimes put their comfort on the line. Tourists and scientists were allies, too.

Dissidents wanted Russia to be conquered by Western ideals of freedom and by Western institutions of democracy, as their imagination pictured all that. Their desperate howling about violations of the Soviet law was just a military ruse. To scream wildly, as if being skinned alive, was the only way to wake up the West. It was intrinsically false to accuse Russia of violations of the nonexistent law. The Western approach to logic and reason simply did not work in Russia.

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<sup>10</sup> The blazing Cold unCivil War in the U.S., if we look at its two-color map, is a territorial dispute, too.

The dissidents were screaming like a woman raped in a dark alley where the law of dark alleys rules but the lights of a busy street can be seen at a distance.

The role of dissidents in changing the course of events in Russia was enormous. Dissidents were the only people in Russia who could convey to Western visitors the uncensored truth, which the common Russians did not know and did not care about.

However cold, the war was real. A prisoner of war myself, I did not become a pacifist, however.

I left Russia with the deep conviction that if a nation, group, or individual is incapable of standing against what is considered not only wrong but also evil, they are doomed. The absolute primacy of comfort, health, pleasure, even life, over a freely chosen ideal sterilizes a social entity. So does any state ideology, because it excludes individual choice and imposes the ideal on an individual.

My other conviction, of earlier origin, was that we should not wage slash-and-burn war against what we think is “only wrong” with a nation, especially as split in the middle as the U.S. We should try to understand, look for common ground, compromise, and avoid street fight. The U.S. is not former Czechoslovakia and cannot peacefully split along some neat border.<sup>11</sup>

My own home-brewed criteria for what is evil involve some elements of physics. I believe that pure chaos and pure order are the two sides of evil. What is good—life, civilization, and progress—is born on the diffuse border between order and chaos.

Gary was much preoccupied with evolution and natural selection. According to him, political change in a society is a result of natural selection, a competition between different ideologies or, even more important, modes of behavior. Attitudes compete for survival over a limited territory of human minds, and they breed like rabbits and foxes.

When a silent, shy dissenter, who is afraid to say what he thinks, can see several dissidents speaking openly without being arrested or harassed, he becomes an open dissident. He speaks up openly, first timidly, then more and more fearlessly. In a similar way, he himself encourages more dissidents of a braver breed. This bothers the dybbuks, and they start hunting dissidents.

If somebody outside his circle is arrested, the new dissident hesitates. If somebody close to him falls victim, he scurries to his den. If the pressure is very strong, he can betray his friends.

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<sup>11</sup> The simmering Cold Civil War covers the entire land with its froth. The U.S. needs some kind of constitutionally enforced political détente and peace treaty. Without it, the obsession of secession will start spreading from the South-West to North-East.

The more foxes, the fewer rabbits. The fewer rabbits, the fewer foxes. The fewer foxes, the more rabbits. Frost and thaw, rise and decline, growth and recession go in circles. There are simple mathematical reasons for that.

Political and social reality, however, is somewhat different from the law of the bush, where foxes and rabbits alternate in peaks of reproduction. On the one hand, human foxes employ artificial selection to breed timid rabbits who never run from foxes and never cry fox. On the other hand, human rabbits mutate so that instead of surrendering to foxes, they start attacking foxes, especially if they believe there is a strong Rabbitland overseas.

If dissidents were the only force against dybbuks, they would have been exterminated or tamed in an instant, but they actually belonged to one of two sides with comparable strength.

The dybbuks, first of all, wanted to destroy hope. Prisons and camps were not Nazi extermination camps but hope-grinding mills. It was another example of the traditional Russian halfway policy. Terror is efficient only if it is open and ruthless. This is why the old czarist Russia failed. This is why Stalin, a non-Russian, succeeded. This is why Brezhnev failed. The right hand ruins what the left hand creates—this is very Russian.

The war started with a very simple idea, formulated by dissidents. It was later repeated by Gorbachev: "Communism has failed."

It was one of many Russian paradoxes that the Soviets spread the heresy themselves. While the majority of the Soviet population did not know anything about dissidents and did not read their forbidden works, the public defamation of Sakharov in the Soviet press was the most effective advertising campaign on his behalf. Other dissidents might have done a more profound dissection of the Soviet way of life than Sakharov did. Nobody was heard by millions except Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, however, because people could read so much about them in newspapers.

The dybbuks lost their last war of the nineteenth century. There had to be a loser.

While the traditional Eastern philosophy, like Confucianism, as well as conventional wisdom, praised the middle way—abstinence from extremes and extravagances—the deeply rooted Russian mentality was the halfway mode of life.

At first glance, the difference between middle way and halfway is strictly semantic. The Russian philosophy of sitting on two chairs was not the same as the Confucian walking the "middle way," however. It always sounded like "on the one hand yes, but on the other hand no." This is why Europe saw Russia as country of extremes: it was impossible to maintain the balance and encompass two opposite and irreconcilable tendencies.



Why, then, did the Russian Communist revolution succeed in physically destroying those brains that had rejected the imposed on them beliefs? In my opinion, it was due to the wide participation of non-Russians among revolutionaries and the Western, i.e. alien, origin of Marxism that the revolution and Stalinism were so consistent.

The lessons of Robespierre and the Commune of Paris inspired Lenin, who used to set quotas for shooting and public hanging; Stalin amplified Lenin's tactics of terror in class struggle, but made it secret. The Russian Revolution was efficient only while it was essentially non-Russian and, therefore, not halfway. It achieved its goals. As soon as the native Russians reestablished their old colonial rule and Khrushchev, the true Russian, son of peasants, and close witness of Stalin's terror, came to power after the non-Russian Stalin, the iron rivets loosened. The terror took on the indigenous Russian halfway style.

The dybbuks were given the impossible task of killing the victim while leaving him alive, and they were declawed. They could no longer burn a victim with cigarettes, as their habitual trade required. They could not rape a wife in front of her husband. They could not inject hydrochloric acid into urethra anymore. This is why I, as many others, had to thank Mother Russia for my coming out of prison alive and physically well.

Halfway in everything but physical destruction, Russia after Stalin was halfway in terror. Hundreds of political prisoners were indebted for their lives to the same Russian inefficiency that some of them had been attacking.

My wild guess is that the spirit—but not the Church establishment, which has always been subservient to the czar<sup>12</sup>—of the Russian Orthodox Christianity and its ideals of compassion and justice, which we can feel in classical Russian literature, played a role in shaping the famous Russian patience, self-sacrifice, and big-heartedness. It became part of national mentality and did not even need literalistic belief in God—and even the Bible—to survive in atheistic society.

As soon as I felt myself a hunted rabbit, I had to prepare for meeting foxes right in the bushes. I was surprised to find out later that the major problem would be meeting other rabbits.

With dybbuks, it was simple. Can one communicate with inanimate metal parts of an engine? I considered it useless. It did not make sense. Let this machine grab me, put me into its jaws, grind me. My only hope and purpose was to make the crunch of my bones heard by people.

I arrived at the decision not to deal with dybbuks long before my arrest. A Moscow dissident suggested a system of legal defense under interrogation by KGB. The interrogated one should demand recording everything, never answer questions

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<sup>12</sup> Russian Czar is God's chosen ruler, and *vice versa*. This makes modern Russian Orthodox Church, restored and pampered by Putin, just another servile bulwark of autocracy.

about other people, and reject irrelevant questions.

I immediately decided never to follow the advice. I told my friends that if I were arrested I would never answer any questions at all and would not take any part in the investigation. If I did, it would mean that I was relying on the law, whereas I was outlawed in my country, where there was no law at all for me. Any participation on my part would help the dybbuks disguise an act of political persecution as a judicial procedure that would look so appealing to the West. Later I learned that I was not quite alone in that stand.

With my fellow rabbits, it was not so simple. There was always mutual suspicion and mistrust among dissidents and active refuseniks, as with any clandestine activity, from mafia to anti-Nazi underground, because the border between conspirators and authorities was always uncertain and diffuse and the latter were trying to populate it with their agents. As soon as somebody becomes afraid to pay for his stand, the all-consuming fear turns into mutual suspicion. A suspect can be hurt by a former friend much more harshly than by an enemy.

I decided to ignore that complexity by paying no attention whatsoever to the matter. If somebody were a spy of the dybbuks, it would not matter if I never did anything illegal and was always ready to accept the consequences of my position. I had no secrets with the KGB, just some ploys.

I believe the attitude toward secret police in a repressive society is something like the attitude toward death. For an average person, accepting death requires either a strong philosophy or total simplicity. It is much easier, however, for somebody who is “off the wall,” like one with suicidal or self-sacrificial tendencies. The desire to challenge a Goliath, while not being a David, is a clear sign of being off. People who dare an omnipotent evil are always off a few deep-seated basic instincts. Scientists know, however, that deviation from the so-called norm is a norm itself.

Somebody is always off the wall, and this is why history changes its course.

Fairy tales of many European nations have the same plot. A dragon appears in a neighborhood and devours beautiful girls. A knight fights the dragon and kills it. This happy end has its price—those several girls who have been eaten.

There would have been no reason to put one's life on the line and fight the dragon if it had been grazing harmlessly on the grass. The victims and their cries were necessary to trigger outrage about the dragon. The last girl chosen to be eaten had a chance if she cried with all her might.

Only you never know if you are the last one.

## *XIV*

### THE PYRAMID

Although I lost all my interest in Russian matters when I decided to emigrate, Russia did not lose her interest in me. It was as if she needed me to stay with her for a while and to whisper her last intimate secrets into my ear. Did she want me to complete my quest for understanding the world and myself, before releasing me from her farewell hug? Like the Snow Maiden from a popular Russian fairy tale, she seemed to anticipate her meltdown and wanted me to save part of her snow in my heart.

The similarity between a person and a country was something I did not expect to find while trying to understand Russia. I discovered that both were unique combinations of universal elements and both were products of evolution. Both of us were born, we emerged and developed complexity, and we were mortal—on very different time scales.

I knew a lot about myself. I knew how my body was built and what the basic laws of my behavior were. But what about Russia? What was the anatomy of the body that produced and incorporated me—albeit unsuccessfully—as a living cell?

My years in the refusal, prison, and camp, meetings with people as different as Serge the burglar and Gary the theoretical physicist, nourished my mind in spite of my intermittent attempts to starve my body. I had as little power over my mind as I had over my soul; the thinking continued on its own, humming on and off, like the refrigerator in the kitchen, and Russia was inside and outside me.

From a great distance in space and time, multiplied by barbed wire, fences, and watchtowers, the entire structure of my native country took shape in my imagination. It was a pyramid.

The stepped pyramid was built not of stone but of human figures arranged in layers, one on top of another. It was alive and even had vessels and nerves running up and down through the layers.

I did not invent the image; it was suggested by a picture from my school textbook of history. In the old cartoon, a crowd of Russian peasants was standing on the ground, bearing a round platform on their shoulders. The inscription said, "We feed you." They were the foundation for all of Russia.

The workers were the next level. "We work for you," they were saying under the platform on which the less numerous merchants took care of trade and retail. "We trade for you."

The small group of gentry stood on the shoulders of the merchants. They owned the land and ruled the country.

The army officers were one level higher. They were the cream of the gentry.

The clergy was next, and only the Czar with his Czarina was on top of the clergy. "We rule over you."

That was the hierarchical pyramid of prerevolutionary Russian society, which consisted of clear-cut classes. Still, the majority of Russians did not have a particular person as an ultimate superior. There was a lot of personal independence, even among free peasants, who made up the vast majority of the population after abolition of the Russian form of slavery in 1861, and free professions were spreading.

The short chaotic February Revolution of 1917 beheaded the pyramid by toppling the Czar. The same year, the Bolshevik October Revolution blew up the pyramid, leaving, after years of the Civil War, only two lower levels as a foundation for the new one.

Gradually, the new Soviet pyramid rose from the rubble. It had distinct layers, too, but this time every citizen carried on his shoulders not an impersonal platform for the next-higher social layer, but the weight of a particular person, a superior. The hierarchy of personal domination and superiority went up from the bottom to the very top. Everybody but one had a superior and even that one was

elected by a couple dozen of his equals of the so-called *Politburo of the Communist Party*<sup>13</sup>.

First, a big basement appeared—the system of prisons, labor camps, and exile. Millions of people, including the former middle and upper levels of the pyramid, either populated the basement or passed through it. It was an essential but hidden part of Soviet life, which I never noticed until it sucked me in.

As before, farmers and workers were the two first visible levels.

Rank-and-file officials, minor executives, and clerks were at the third level.

Next, at level four, were people with higher education—engineers, teachers, doctors, lower managers, accountants. They were supposed to attend to all lower levels while they themselves were managed by the upper levels. Academia was somewhere there, with a hierarchy of its own, but it was also managed from the top levels of the pyramid.

People in retail sales and services stood next. Legally, they were not merchants, because they could neither buy nor sell wholesale. They did not own the goods and could not import and export. They were supposed to act as vendors and managers in the stores owned by the government or to provide consumer services. Formally, they were just employees. Still, it was the level where money could potentially accumulate.

Power, the main Russian currency in all times, started with the sixth level, which was occupied by middle and upper management, usually party members.

Power was not the ultimate purpose. Power and money were two forms of wealth, as heat and work are two forms of energy. Power could be converted into money and vice versa. More important, it was convertible directly into goods, skirting money.

Money in the Soviet Russia was an inferior form of wealth, like heat, as compared with work, is an inferior form of energy. Money could not be legally invested and converted into more money and for a private person, there was no social machine to grow it. It was possible to divert and stash it away from the total flow and pay for small-scale retail corruption. On the contrary, power could be invested in both money and more power. Power was the only driving force of the society, its wealth, and its real currency. The Russian social structure was a pyramid of power.

The Politburo, not elected by population, crowned the pyramid. Actually, it was the Politburo that *de facto* owned and controlled the whole country with all its natural resources, residents, land, buildings, institutions, and so on. There was no institution that did not “belong” to the Politburo. For an American, it is probably more difficult to imagine than the U.S. not only without cars but also without

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<sup>13</sup> Putin, like the Russian czars, has nobody and nothing equal.

bicycles, horses, and even running shoes. Anyway, Soviet Russia was just a single company owned by the Politburo, and it was structured and managed exactly as any big American company, but it was a close corporation. The Politburo was not accountable to anybody, not elected by the people, and nobody had any influence on it, except, in a way, "aggressive American imperialism."

After the Communists took power, Russia simply inflated the basic unit of capitalism—the company—to the size of a self-defeating absolute monopoly. Private property ceased to exist.

The leader crowned the Politburo. He made the most important decisions, the party aristocracy delineated and decreed them, and they went down through managers to those who had to obey.

For the leader who had reached the top, the only available path led downward, so that his main purpose, concern, and obsession were to stay in power and to eliminate or neutralize his internal rivals.

There was something in Russia, however, that had no American counterpart. As human body contains two ubiquitous systems that penetrate every organ and tissue—blood vessels and nerves—Russia had two parallel systems of comparable size and significance; unlike blood vessels and nerves, though, these two duplicated each other in the same function.

Russia had two nervous systems. One was the government, which was essentially no different from the American system of management. The other was the party, which did the same thing. Each city hall, factory, hospital, farm, school, and writers' union had party members—over ten millions in Russia—who formed a separate system with separate military-style subordination up to the Politburo, which, like the Russian czars, combined administrative and spiritual authority.

The reason why the two parallel systems—government and the party—developed in Russia was that they doubled the amount of power per capita by doubling the capacity of the reservoir of power. Production did not bring real wealth in Soviet socialist society: power did. In my opinion, that was the main factor in splitting the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia: more power per capita become available. Power brought instant wealth, while free market capitalism was an unknown overseas fruit.

If, miraculously, abundance and affluence spread over the entire country, it would mean an end to the system.

Gary's wife quoted her grandfather who used to say, "Under the Communists there will never be any order in Russia, because if there is order there is no need for the Communists."

It is impossible for two separate powers to run a country. So, the two systems—the party and the government—were made compatible through a very

simple trick. Practically every key position in management, education, and even culture could be given only to a party member. Therefore, these individuals not only managed but also executed orders of the party, regardless of what their common sense and professional experience might have told them.

The Soviet system was like an army directed by clergy—a remarkable and fatal contradiction. Like any army, it could be used efficiently only for destruction, as with nuclear weapons and space exploration. In the construction business, it could be used only for building something temporary and provisional.

While modern democratic countries separated church and state long ago, the Soviet system went in the opposite direction. The party controlled all domestic life via ideological principles that could never be proved or rejected and were strictly a matter of faith. Such a system could be given credit in only one area—as an experiment. It took seventy years to recognize that the experiment had failed.

The new Soviet clergy was supposed to worship the cult of the party.

The *partorg*, or party organizer, was of the lowest rank, a leader of a primary party cell. The *partorg* was the one who was responsible for pursuing the party line not only through his cell, but also through the whole body of nonmember workers around the unit. He was responsible for ideological purity, holiday rituals, selfless and conscientious work, decency, high moral standards, and family values in his office, workshop, theater, school, or large army unit. In practical terms, when a wife discovered that her husband had a lover, she could threaten her husband by complaining to the *partorg*, which she often did (as I once witnessed). If the husband was a party member, he could be reprimanded or even expelled from the party, depending on his willingness to compromise.

The scope of that responsibility posed a problem. How could a person of very limited knowledge and capabilities know, without any special training or education for this particular function, what was right and wrong about a neighbor who had not violated either regulation or law?

Heresy could be detected only with the yardstick of orthodoxy.

Soviet orthodoxy was shaped as a secular religion with Marx as God the Spirit, Lenin as God the Father, the party as collective God the Son, and the current party leader as the Czar. All four personifications were infallible, the czar at least while on the throne. That in the Russian Orthodox Church the czar was both a spiritual and civil leader, and his power was divine, had significant influence on Russian mentality. The four were one, and they were righteous and almighty. Only those who believed in them could enjoy life in the worker's paradise on earth. Those who were not true believers had to be re-educated. If they resisted, they should be destroyed or isolated.

It was an elaborate orthodoxy of human behavior that made it easy for

*partorgs* to pinpoint heretics. The latter were not just those who deviated from the orthodoxy of thinking. It would take some brains to find out whether there was a deviation or just a rewording of the orthodoxy. Instead, anybody whose behavior did not fit the approved model, whatever his motives were, was labeled a heretic.

Actually, the Soviet system of ideological control was nothing but a system of quality control at the end of an industrial assembly line. Any bolt that did not fit the standard dimensions went to scrap.

Unlike in Orwell's picture, it was not thoughts that were controlled, but only behavior, because the intellectual capacity of the party and police rarely exceeded the lowest common denominator.

The powerful process of artificial selection was at work in Russia because there was always a standard of behavior. It was like the standard of breed for a dog breeder. That is how the intricate function of ideological control could be performed by ignorant people—they were given a yardstick or, rather, the Procrustean bed.

There was nothing obviously bad in this political and economic system. A company could be managed very efficiently. It could grow and expand, develop new technology, concentrate resources on big projects. It could take care of its employees, providing them with housing, health care, and education.

The progress of Russia after the revolution and Civil War amazed the West.

In the beginning, the company called Russia was doing very well. It developed giant industries, rather efficient by contemporary standards, sufficient agriculture, free modern education, comprehensive free health care, subsidized performing arts, and sports. It won the war against the Germans; it developed modern science, nuclear arms. It explored the moon and Venus. It became the major political and military adversary of the Western world. It gave a sense of comfort, security, and, often, happiness to most employees, except those in labor camps.

Still, the troubles began right after World War II.

The simple beauty of the pyramidal shape, recognized in ancient Egypt as well as in modern Paris and San Francisco, could resist cold and heat in Russia, but not the ugly complexity of the neighboring Western world.

One of the major functions of the government was to plan. Every item, from nails to airliners, had to be planned ahead, every item had a set price, and every shipment was scheduled.

If Russia had the abundance of products seen in America, the entire population probably would have been busy planning and counting production, especially, because computers did not exist in every Russian city and the abacus was a common calculator. This is why the number of produced items was limited. As a



way to alleviate the burden of complexity, bolts, nuts, paper, even heavy tools and machines, and many other things were planned by weight or by total cost, without regard to whether they could be sold.

If Russia maintained political isolation, had not pushed toward the world economy, had not become involved in international disputes, had not supported certain regimes only because they were pro-Soviet and anti-American, but just produced food, clothes, books, and aspirin, it would not have failed—at least not within seventy years. Russia was rich enough in natural resources, inquisitive minds, skilled hands, and immeasurable patience. What the party should have done was to kill dissidents quietly instead of letting them contact American reporters or putting them into labor camps. It should have destroyed all the books that even mentioned the word *democracy*. It should jam all foreign radio broadcasts in all languages, withdraw from the United Nations, and completely close the borders even to diplomats. It should follow Orwell instead of Marx.

Russia, however, entered global competition. It needed to plan and produce as many varieties of everything as there were in the West, except for ideas. This is how the Trojan horse of Western complexity was smuggled into Russia. I believe it was the burden of complexity that crushed the Soviet system. If anything ever crushes America, would it not be the burden of complexity?<sup>14</sup>

Russia failed in the competition, yet there was no immediate danger for the party in that. The danger came from the level of the pyramid that the rulers never would have expected.

The tentacles of a newborn class began to grow in the interlayer between the voiceless working majority of modern serfs and the self-conceited minority of serf drivers. It was the class of mediators, or merchants, level five of the latter-day pyramid. It was the reservoir of money, not power, a new social phenomenon, new for Russia but not for the world.

There was a third invisible and powerful system in Russia before the demise of communism. It was an underground, forbidden, and punishable market economy, for which the only available term was foreign: business (sounds in Russian same as in English).

There were always more shoppers than goods in Soviet Russia. To imagine a Russian grocery store, we have to reverse the picture of an American supermarket and put there as many goods as there are shoppers on a weekday morning and as many shoppers as there are goods on the shelves. There were no UPC bars and almost no packaged goods. Sales attendants worked with rigged scales; they put fake price tags on the products so they could make literally millions of rubles shared with the police, state inspectors, prosecution, and judges when the criminals were

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<sup>14</sup> Is this why America welcomed a twitting king? Simplicity now!

caught. It was actually an invisible sales tax on consumption.

Other businessmen bought consumer goods in the part of the country where they were more readily available, transported them in their baggage to where they were scarce, and sold them for ten times the original price, which was also a crime. Others stole fabrics and made clothes for illegal sale.

The businessmen in Russia were all underground, their revenues not taxed, and the millions not legally investible in production. They could only be spent or kept in a mattress. That was one branch of the free market. It did not produce anything, however; it just redistributed money.

Another branch of the free market was selling contracts, government positions, cushy jobs, access to higher education, airline tickets during the summer season, certificates of disability to avoid the military draft, and other commodities in great demand. Everything was for sale, even, some said, exit visa in refusal. This branch did not produce anything either. Corruption is never a productive force.

It has long been noted that in Russia, one had to pay a bribe not for a violation of the law but for its enforcement. For a violation, there was a separate price tag. This is why corruption was a relatively safe racket in Russia.

Therefore, Russia had two competing currencies. One was power, the other money. To have power was legal; to have money was not. With all salaries, incentives, and rewards fixed, one could rarely earn a significant extra without violating the law.

Corruption in Russia was the only possible expression of the normal human desire for a better life. There was just no other honest way to prosperity.

A fascinating process of blending and mingling the two different layers of society—party bosses and "merchandise criminals"—was starting in Russia. It was the beginning of the natural process of the new Soviet bourgeoisie's ascent to power. It grew up like grass, bursting out through the asphalt of the Soviet order.

I heard in the camp a symbolic story.

In March 1985, I was transported to the prison hospital that served all the camps in the area. As I learned later, it was because my wife raised Cain, demanding a medical checkup for me.

Life in the hospital was fabulous. It was clean and neat there. The regimen was loose. Food was definitely not worse than in a free hospital, i.e., moderately bad, and even a piece of real butter was given once a day. Wooded hills and part of the city could be seen from the yard and the windows. Incredibly, some windows had no grating.

In the hospital, I met Tom, a heavyset short-legged prisoner from another camp. He was a Muscovite, physically strong, but mild-mannered.

Tom used to earn big money in many illegal ways that he did not expatiate on. Apparently, they were not enough for him, and he finally took up selling high-ranking positions in Moscow City Hall, using his connection with Brezhnev's brother. I think he was just a mediator between the Politburo Head's greedy family and the no-less-greedy Moscow officials. However, to an outsider it was as if the Godfather himself was selling cushy high-class jobs. That was how he saw his business. Even a tiny splinter of the immense might of the czar was a big power.

Unfortunately for Tom, there was somebody who kept an eye on such things. The KGB charged him with the intent to offer a bribe. The Penal Code listed no such crime as an intended bribe. Nevertheless, he got thirteen years. The KGB let him know that his real crime was selling political power. Money was overtaking power. Primitive accumulation began.

Although that story was unique due to the high connections involved, I think it was quite an ordinary episode in the life of the capital city. I heard that the amount of illegal money that was turning over in Moscow was enormous.

That was the picture that gradually took shape in my head while I was in the camp. Since then I have not found any reason to change it. The subsequent breathtaking events fit into the entire concept.

It seems to me now that the whole avalanche of contemporary Russian events was triggered by the ominous KGB. I realize that this may seem paradoxical. I have no proof. Psychologically, however, I can well imagine the outrage of the KGB, whose instincts for corruption were restrained by its internal system of mutual spying.

"Those party pigs can steal while we have to be honest" could be very natural and very Russian thought in a dybbuk's position.

It is just my guess that although Andropov had promoted Gorbachev as a minimally corrupt man in the top ranks of the party, Gorbachev double-crossed his patron after his death. Instead of purging the corrupt party, he wanted to purge the ideology, leaving the party intact. It was a much easier task, because all it required was to ease the censorship.

Immediately a different breed of Trojan horses rushed into the country: freedom of speech. The situation got out of control. Exposed to fresh air, the ossified, corrupt, inefficient, and parasitic institution of the party<sup>15</sup> was quickly withering away, and its strength, potency, people, and wealth were flowing, together with the cholesterol of corruption, through the arteries of the government.

The former owner—the Politburo—was quietly strangled by the government. Power in Russia consolidated.

Then it was immediately divided.

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<sup>15</sup> After 30 years of watching the U.S. politics, I begin to think that maybe every political party is parasitic, at least if there are only two of them.

What happened in Russia when the Big Brother of the Politburo died was very similar to what happens in a wealthy family when the patriarch dies intestate.

The Politburo was the exclusive owner of everything, and after its collective death, its wealth—i.e., the ultimate power—was divided by the family. The party elite and lucky businessmen took over various areas of industry, natural resources, and finances, taking charge of new organizations somewhat reminiscent of large American corporations. Now, for the first time, they have found access not only to power but also to money—in amounts that fruit vendors and underground businessmen could not even dream of. If we zeks had to stuff the mattresses we made with all those rubles, we would have to work twenty-four hours a day.

The redundancy of the double power came to an end. Russia became a secular state. Still, it had the same two currencies in circulation—money and power.

Although the "secularization" of power was progressive and beneficial for Russia, it could not solve her problems. It was an internal process at the top of the Russian pyramid. The major Russian conflict, which promises to involve the entire society, still lies ahead. It is the conflict between money and power.

The merchants, the newborn capitalists, and the nouveaux riches do not want two currencies—power and money—to coexist. The new businessmen, out of the closet, need to free business from all restrictions. They want money to be the only currency, and they want to convert their money into power. The former Communists, now in the government, do not want the truly free market because the currency of power will be devalued. This is probably the essence of the major Russian crossroads.<sup>16</sup> The two currencies are now both legal, but they compete fiercely with each other. Neither one, however, can be invested freely in production.

Russia has found a Solomon's solution to the problem of two currencies. The third currency—American dollars—pushes both competitors out.

Here I am too far ahead of myself. Still, there was much more of Russia in me, slowly cooking during my final years in my native land. I was looking back into Russian history and culture, trying to explain myself why the Russian pyramid rebuilt itself from debris after it had been shattered by the revolution. I was interested in the intimate genetic information rather than in the anatomy of the pyramidal body, which looked as if built of stone but was in fact of flesh and spirit.

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<sup>16</sup> The treatment of Mikhail Khodorkovsky made one of the roads paved with IEDs. This book was written before the era of Putin and the oligarchy.

## FROM RUSSIA WITH ALLERGY

Nick was ten years younger than I was. A smoker, tall, haggard, speaking in a low-pitched voice, always looking busy or in a hurry, he was eager to help anybody with any problem. He was in the middle of everything. He taught Christianity, mediated disputes, comforted the needy, wrote prayers and petitions for zeks, counseled them, and with some success persuaded the court of appeals to reexamine cases.

He was the father of five sons. In the camp, he learned that one of his sons had multiple sclerosis. "God is especially strict with those he loves," he told me sadly.

Not an ordained priest, Nick was closely involved in church activities in Moscow. His principal venture was an underground publishing house that was reprinting Orthodox religious books. Nick ran the venture on a large scale, right under the nose of Moscow dybbuks. After the books began to appear all around Russia, the KGB had no difficulty tracing them back to Nick.

We could meet only once a week at a movie in the mess hall. Despite our huge philosophical differences, I treasured every such chance to meet Nick and talk for an hour and a half while sitting on the back row of benches where the wall supported our backs. The intense human warmth that he radiated made me feel as

comfortable by his side as one can feel at a fireplace during a snowstorm.

Nick was deeply, even militantly Russian. He introduced himself as a monarchist. He believed that only a czar could rule Russia, which needed a head as a family needed one. In the ideal family, according to Nick, the wife did not work; her duty was to care for the children and her husband. Unlike an elected ruler or a Soviet dictator, a czar would care about Russia as a father cares about his family and its future generations. Only a czar could be truly responsible for his entrusted to him by God people.

Nothing could have been less appealing to me than the idea of autocratic monarchy. The Russian intellectual tradition did not carry any sympathy for the monarchy. In 1817, Alexander Pushkin, from whom the Russian literature of the nineteenth century started its ascent into fame and modernity, wrote in his *Ode to Freedom*:

Autocratic villain,  
I hate you and your throne,  
I see with cruel joy.  
Yours and your children's death

The poem circulated in handwritten copies: the *samizdat* of that time.

I listened to Nick, trying to understand his point of view.

Nick was educated, intelligent, and free of hypocrisy, as well as sentimentality. He liked to recite Russian translations of old Chinese poetry, and he knew more about Chinese literature than Ivan, the native Chinese. At the same time, Nick did not like science and did not believe in it. He dropped out of the university after two years and joined the Russian Orthodox Church. His motives remained a mystery to me.

Nick's perception of communism was diametrically opposed to mine. He believed communism was an alien plant on the Russian soil. It was entirely Jewish and Western ideology imposed by wickedness and force. The Communist revolution was a tragic aberration of Russian history. Nick denied that the Russians dominated and oppressed other nations of the USSR. He said, contradicting himself, that the Russians bore no guilt because they suffered from communism more than anybody else did.

My point of view was that the Soviet form of communism, whatever its origin, adapted to the new soil, becoming a natural continuation of Russian history and a typically Russian phenomenon.

It was my first encounter not only with a monarchist but also with a Russian nationalist. The Russians I knew could be passively chauvinistic, but they were not nationalists in the sense that they stood for the rights of their ethnicity against some external infringement. Who could ever infringe on the rights of a dominating

nation? It was simply unthinkable. The Russians always seemed to be well above any national fuss, like an elephant among monkeys. The intensity of anti-Semitism, however, seemed to increase in western direction from the Ural Mountains, i.e., with the density of Jewish population.

Surprisingly, Nick represented Russian nationalism on defense, which could well be a natural pause before an offense. According to Nick, any non-Russian ideology was a threat to Russia. Naturally, one would conclude, any Jewish influence was evil. Talking to me, a Jew, he tried to be as delicate as possible, I never felt hurt, but it was slightly irritating.

I did not argue with Nick. For a long time, he was my only solace in the camp. He saved me from becoming a devil—the worst possible fate in the camp. I appreciated his intelligence and his knowledge of Russian and Soviet history. He told me many things about Russia that I had not known.

Before I met Nick, I believed, as the vast majority of Russians did, that there was only one truth and people could be either right or wrong on any subject. Even now I am not sure whether it was Russian or Russian-Jewish mentality. How the mentality of the dominating nation shaped the minds of the Jews in the countries where they lived is an intriguing question.

Amazingly, it was in the Chita labor camp, located in the eastern part of Asia, that I learned my very first lesson in Western tolerance. I tried to be open-minded with Nick and to respect his right to express any idea. Because he spoke to me in my language and at my level, I could not just brush off his ideas as crumbs of obscurantism. While I saw that he was wrong only from my personal point of view, I was absolutely, unconditionally wrong from his point of view. Nick, unlike me, did not allow any relativism. It would have been strange, of course, to expect anything else from orthodoxy, religious or not.

My political and historical discussions with Nick helped me summarize my own views on Russia as a social structure built of universal human atoms bonded in a particular and unique way.

The split of the Soviet Russia in the 1990s opened to the world the imperial patchwork of the country and its profound heterogeneity. The division between Russians and non-Russians was one of the most profound and most underestimated internal antagonisms.

Ethnic characteristics are not a popular topic in politically correct America. The more America is involved in the world economy and dealing with Asia and Africa, the clearer it becomes that the complex chemistry of ethnic differences cannot be ignored. The breakdown of countries such as Russia and Yugoslavia shows that the world as a whole is a boiling pot, rather than melting one.

National or group character is two collections of stereotypes accumulated by two nations or groups looking at each other. It may tell something about conditions in which both of them live, whether together or across borders. It is a slippery topic, anyway, but I cannot censor my story.

A lot has been written by foreigners about the mysterious Russian soul. It has been a widespread belief that Russians are a people of extremes. Even their self-image used to swing between megalomania and inferiority complex. As Dostoyevsky said, a Russian could give you the shirt off his back and kill you the next moment. I believe the writer exaggerated only the second half of his remark. A Russian would rather risk his life for you than kill you. I met an American scientist who had lived and worked among Russians in Antarctica, and he was of the same opinion. Yet he confessed that he never knew whether that was because of the fear of responsibility for the death of a foreigner.

My personal impression was that ordinary Russians were curious, friendly, sensitive, responsive, selfless, and warm. They were good, reliable friends in need. They appreciated friendship more than anything else in human relations did. Yet if upset, tired, distressed, and preoccupied with personal problems, they could show to a stranger the opposites of their best qualities without any apparent reason.

For the majority there was no "shrink" to help rise out of depression, no counselor to advise, no priest to hear a confession or give guidance. A friend was all of those in one. Shared joy was double joy, and shared burden was half a burden. A friend was the Yellow Pages in a country where private telephones were still a luxury.

Nobody in the West can imagine to what extent ordinary Soviet people were consumed not only by everyday money troubles but also with the problem of spending them on food and decent clothes, especially for growing children. Most Russians, especially in provinces, were as obsessed with search for goods as an average teenager with sex.

A friend was an insurance company, a bank that could make loans interest-free, a baby-sitter, and a provider who could buy, on rare occasions, two highly needed pairs of shoes—one for himself and the other for his friend. In a world of total deficiency, shortage, and scarcity, a good friend was both part of the family and an escape from it.

"Yes, they have their cars and comfort and everything one can buy in America, but they do not have our warm hearts and richness of spirit," a Russian would say as if he had ever met a single American. For many Russian immigrants in America it was a shock to see that the Russian friendship could fade away in the world of Yellow Pages.

Russian friendship was more similar to war camaraderie than to the Western kind of social friendship. Russian life was always a kind of war. A sharp distinction between friends and enemies, "ours" and "theirs," as Russians say, was the basis for



deeply rooted double standards. There was one ethics for "ours" or friends, and no moral obligations toward "theirs" or non-friends, who could turn into enemies at any moment. The enemy had to be defeated by deceit, force, or trick. A fistfight has always been the national way to solve disputes.

It was my impression that the majority of Russians were proud of their homeland being the biggest territory in the world and of the victories over Napoleon and Hitler who wanted to conquer it. They did not mind expansion. They looked down on small countries and small nations. Often, they were gut-level racists. They respected nothing but size and power in international politics and at home.

Most Russians were loyal to the system because they identified it with their homeland. Therefore, it was undoubtedly "ours." If they saw injustice, hardship, and deprivation, they attributed it to the lower level local bosses who deceived the top boss and concealed the problems from him. I heard this explanation many times, especially, under Stalin's rule.

In private life, the moral values of the Russians were no different from those of any Christian nation.

Over several decades, however, an amazing set of double standards regarding property had developed. As the government was "our," its property was also "our." Stealing from other people was a sin, but stealing from the government was not. The Soviet propaganda was driving into the minds the idea that, for the first time in world history, everything in the country was common property and belonged to the people. The result was that nothing had an independent owner.

Paint, meat, timber, nails, paper, gasoline, thread, drugs, scissors, eggs, alcohol, glass—all that was being stolen, often by those who were guarding it.

The thieves argued they were justified because even more grain, cement, steel, vegetables, and valuable equipment perished beneath the snow and under the rain, devoured by rust, frost, mildew, carelessness, irresponsibility, and the lack of a real owner. Meanwhile, the stores were empty.

I believe the fatalistic attitude was part of Russian historical heritage. Ordinary working Russians rarely wanted to look into tomorrow, over which they had no power, and lived mostly for today. As an average, they did not like working assiduously toward a distant goal. Periods of hectic activity could alternate with periods of lethargy. The future, as well as the past, was of little relevance. Like all people everywhere, Russians could easily do something that might be harmful to them in the future but pleasant in the short run. For the same reason, they could repeat same mistake again and again.

When deceived or deprived of anything, an average Russian did not remember it for long and could be as easily distracted from his grief as a child could. This childishness was both the charm and the curse of the Russian character. Seeing

Russians of the lower classes as children deserving spanking and flogging was a widespread stereotype among Russian gentry. The Soviet authorities thought that any propaganda rubbish would pass, and often it did.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, Russians possessed such high degree of patience that could be attributed only to very old age and by no means to children. Amid everyday hardships, ordinary people mostly waited patiently for a turn for the better. Many, especially women, even developed a masochistic pride in withstanding the trials of everyday life. They thought suffering developed richness and refinement of soul. A Russian can relish suffering—his own or a shared one.

Russian patience seemed to me pathological. People could suffer from hard work, hunger, cold, pain, and humiliation with the stoicism of a peasant's horse. They would do with just a little. Once I heard a likely explanation of it: they always knew that it could get worse, and they were happy while it did not. Anyway, Russian humility was both moving and disturbing.

Russians took pride in their immense patience and considered it a traditional Russian merit. An old Russian saying put it this way: "Jesus suffered, and so he told us to." With that kind of masochism, Russia was a fertile soil for despotism. Which preceded which, the despot or the serf, was like the question about the chicken and the egg.

Of course, my perception of Russians was biased by my own personality. I liked to look far ahead. I drew the lessons from the past. I had no patience. I always wanted to be on my own. Most Russians, and even my parents, wanted to be like everybody else.

My politically incorrect for American ears impressions did not discover anything that had not been described by writers and observers from both inside and outside Russia. Russian extremes, naiveté, patience, drinking, and irrationality had been acknowledged in prerevolutionary literature, journalism, and art. But Russia also had refined aristocracy and educated class that were portrayed in art quite differently. Alexander Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy, and Anton Chekhov left the evidence of a rich and complex emotional and intellectual life of Russian upper classes. That life, however, was already extinct in my time, together with the classes. A few of my high school teachers and university professors of older generation still carried that spirit. It was partly resurrected after Stalin's death and again repressed right before my eyes.

I thought Russians were different from Americans and that was why life in Russia and America was so different. When I came to America, I gradually realized

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<sup>17</sup> Alas, the U.S. elections of 1916 showed me that at least half Americans hardly were better. It was a devastating discovery, but maybe I am still too immature. But at least now I cannot blame the Russians wholesale.

that any national character is nothing but an adaptive social behavior. The more I learned about America, the more I saw that there was no difference between Russians and Americans as individual human beings. I saw a familiar spectrum of personalities, intimate problems, emotions, complexes, virtues, and vices.

American social chemistry was based on the same periodic table as the Russian. Atoms of human nature were the same, but Russian and American social molecules were structured differently. The two cultures seemed to contrast as sharply as the lifestyles of birds and fish.

The difference between the Soviet and American systems is more like the contrast between a northern river in the winter, all frozen, with an invisible flow under the ice, and the same river in the spring: a turbulent mixture of running water and colliding blocks of ice.<sup>18</sup>

I was anxious to share my thoughts about Russia with Nick. I did not find a common ground with him, however.

Nick completely rejected all Russians and non-Russians who criticized Russia from the Western point of view. His own perspective was the uniqueness of Russia, her moral superiority over all other nonorthodox Christian nations, let alone non-Christian ones. The bright future of Russia has been stolen by Jews, non-Russians, and Western ideology. In other words, it was the old Russian political triad: autocracy, orthodoxy, nationalism. It matched "One country, one people, one Fuhrer" pretty well.

My own view of the Russian historical perspective was shaped by the names that irritated Nick.

The main inspiration for my critical attitude toward Russia was the books by Alexander Herzen, the most prominent Russian dissident and political emigrant of the nineteenth century. His memoirs depicted Russia as a backward and irrational country chained by the Russian autocracy and separated from the civilized world.

I was fascinated by Herzen. His *My Past and Thoughts* was my favorite reading in the 1960s. He was the only major Russian writer not censored in czarist Russia because he published in Europe and his works were smuggled in. Over the pages of his memoirs I often forgot that a whole century distanced me from the time of the author, so conservative were the customs and details of everyday Soviet life.

The intensity and richness of Herzen's spirit of freedom were unique in Russian literature. The Russian idea of freedom was always a logical negation of the primary and natural non-freedom. Everybody knew what non-freedom was, so the unknown freedom was defined in the way light could be defined as the absence

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<sup>18</sup> I have no first-hand knowledge of modern Russian life. It is certainly not a totalitarian state anymore, but it is very close to a despotic monarchy. The phenomenon of the royal court repeats at different levels of power, spreading corruption all over the society.

of darkness. While freedom in Russian poetry meant liberation from tyranny and oppression, freedom, in everyday common usage, was simply the opposite of prison. A person was supposed to enjoy maximal freedom as soon as he was physically free. The next degree of freedom was anarchy and chaos, where everybody is free to do as he wishes. You also were free if your opponent was in chains. There was no positive and constructive content in the Russian concept of freedom, and it could not be presented as a list of particular components. I believe that was the most tragic heritage of Russia.

Freedom for Herzen was an institutional condition of creativity and progress. After his initial enthusiasm, however, Herzen got disappointed in Western values. He was depressed by the ability of Europeans to idolize their monarchs and rulers. I believe it was just his mission in this world—to look at everything with a critical eye. Although it is true that people in the West could idolize their kings, they could also chop their heads off. Still, I believe that when Herzen projected himself far ahead into Europe's future, he sensed the smell of burning flesh and books.

Herzen mentioned in his memoirs two writers whose books were not available to the general public in Soviet libraries and bookstores. One of them was Pyotr Chaadayev, his predecessor in the thin but unbroken line of Russian dissidents where Andrey Sakharov was the last giant.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Chaadayev, a brilliant nobleman, wrote a series of essays on Russia, *Philosophical Letters*. In 1829, he managed to publish only one.

The reaction of the czar had set a precedent for the abuse of psychiatry by the KGB in Soviet times. Chaadayev was pronounced mentally ill and forbidden to write. He had to be checked by a doctor on a regular schedule.

Chaadayev's name was always known to Russians because his story was taught in schools. A famous passionate poem by Alexander Pushkin was dedicated to him and students at school learned it by heart as part of the mandatory curriculum. It ended with the following lines:

Russia will wake up from sleep,  
And our names will be written  
On the wreckage of autocracy.

The Russian word exactly translating the Greek autocracy (*samovlastiye*), which Pushkin used in the poem, was a close synonym of the older word with the same

meaning but applied only to the Russian czar and nobody else (*samoderjaviye*)<sup>19</sup>.

Nevertheless, in Soviet times only a few people ever had any access to forbidden Chaadayev's writings. It is a good example of the consistency of Russian autocracy.

Before the Revolution of 1917, Krasnoyarsk possessed one of the best private collections of Russian books in Russia. The giant collection was bought in 1906 by the U.S. as the foundation of the Russian Collection of the Library of the Congress. What remained of the pre-revolutionary collection was, in Soviet time, closed to the public in the public library.

In the 1960s, I made friends with a young librarian. She told me that there were secret catalogs in the library. I asked her to write down all references to Chaadayev. She gave me the books I wanted, his biography among them, where I found more references. It was my own little historical investigation, and I was absorbed by it.

Chaadayev was probably more critical of the past and contemporary Russian ways of life than anybody else in Russian history. Mostly pessimistic, he rejected it as a whole in passionate and eloquent words, the way Soviet dissidents rejected communism. He wrote in French, which was more his native language than the Russian. Translated from French, his words sounded amazingly modern.

Chaadayev put the love of truth above the love of one's country. He wrote that Russia probably existed only to give the world a terrible example of what not to do. He regretted that the Russian brand of Orthodox Christianity separated his country from the West. He praised Catholicism.

I used to go home from the library late at night along the main street of the frozen city, which was dimly lit, drab, and icy from the compressed snow and frozen spit, with the swinging, shaky figures of drunkards in sight. I thought about Russia. The continuity of Russian history was astounding. Probably, many Russian refugees repeated, leaving their homeland, the words of Mikhail Lermontov, a great national Russian poet and a contemporary of Pushkin.

Good-bye, grimy Russia,  
The land of slaves, the land of masters,  
And you, blue uniforms of gendarmes,  
And you, the people, obedient to them.

At that time, I could not imagine that the day would come when I would say

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<sup>19</sup> In February, 1917, Russian *samoderjaviye* was broken by a popular revolution under the slogan "Down with autocracy" and ceased to exist, until Stalin and, later, Putin *de facto* restored it.

Lermontov's lines to myself.

Another predecessor of Herzen was a foreigner: the Marquis de Custine, a French nobleman who visited Russia in 1839. His book *Empire of the Czar* (available in English) was published in Russia and reprinted in early Soviet times. One could not find it in libraries, however.

De Custine was neither bound by Russian patriotism nor blinded by the glamour of the royal court. His criticism of Russia was shattering. Like Herzen's books, his book looked fresh and alive in 1980s as if written the same year. It made it absolutely clear for me that Soviet communism was the natural destiny for Russia. Russian history was a consistent evolution of the country of masters and slaves. This is why the period from 1905 to 1917, when Russia was experimenting with non-authoritarian forms of government, was so short and unsuccessful.

In the 1970s, I read a lot of Vasili Klyuchevsky. He was probably the only Russian historian who was interested in the truth more than in the positive image of his country.

Klyuchevsky, a very self-critical Russian, derived the features of the Russian character from Russian geography. The vastness of Russia made communication and cohesion of communities difficult. They could be kept together only by iron despotism. Due to the unstable climate, occasional years of bad harvest were the norm. This is why Russians used to live only for today. There was always somebody who decided for them—either a master or the elements. With a master, there was no stimulus either to work hard or to plan far ahead. Even the flat landscape of Russia, as Klyuchevsky noted, contributed to the lack of imagination.

It was the poverty and uncertainty of life that contributed to the establishment of serfdom. Initially, according to Klyuchevsky, personal serfdom was just a way to pay off a debt after a lean year.

For a long time, there was one day each year when a serf could leave his master. Czar Peter the Great abolished the day of freedom and made serfdom permanent. Ironically, he was the one who westernized Russia more than anybody else.

Slavery arising from debt . . . something to think about in America.

My last source of bookish knowledge about Russia was Nikolai Berdyayev, a Russian religious philosopher who died an expatriate in 1948. I was able to read his books only in America. He confirmed what I had seen in Russia—the contradictory nature of Russians, who combine anarchism with servility and believe that Russia is like no other country in the world, the only one that possesses the truth, and is supposed to bring it into the errant world.

I was not alone in believing that the Russians, as Berdyayev wrote, are dogmatists who believe in one truth for all, label the rest heresy, and treat the

heretics as sworn enemies. I think that the idea of the uniqueness of truth is the very core of the Russian paradigm.

The problem with Russia has always been the belief that the truth is the same for all. Therefore, a lie could always be presented as truth if it was the only statement known to everybody. People could be very confused if given a multitude of lies, but the very consistency of a single known lie made it very truth-like. Still, Nazi Germany had the same problem.

Whatever the origin of the Russian system, and however alien it was from the Western point of view, there should be some way to explain the system in Western terms. Moreover, there should be some simple reason for which it was so persistent.

The Marquis de Custine was the first outsider who tried to find, in terms understandable to a Westerner, some rationale for the Russian political system. He defined the Russian way as *de facto* martial law that became the norm.

Martial law, in my opinion, is the best way to understand the totalitarian society. Limitations of human rights, rationing of food and information, and censorship are natural temptations for a country at war. The detention of American citizens of Japanese descent during World War II is just one example. The war on drugs is full of other examples. The curfew in the recent Los Angeles riot is yet another one.

The unanimous conclusion of various observers since the Marquis de Custine was that the Russian government was in a permanent state of war with its own people. That always seemed to me the only plausible rationale for Russia.

In the times of de Custine and Herzen—the times of serfdom—Russia needed the martial law to keep the slaves obedient.

After slavery had been abolished in Russia in 1861, Russia was moving closer toward Europe, where the colonial system was natural. Russia needed a kind of martial law, because it was a colonial empire with colonies *inside* the borders of the country. England did not need martial law when the riots broke out far away overseas. Russia needed it every day.

Later, monarchy needed martial law to fight revolutionaries and terrorists. After the monarchy was abolished, Soviet Russia needed martial law because of the revolution and the Civil War. The Civil War lasted until Stalin's death. Finally, there came the blessing of the cold war. Martial law was softened but not lifted after Stalin.

Martial law remained in force partly because it was the foundation of the whole building. To lift martial law would mean the collapse of the entire structure. After Russia surrendered to the West in the Cold War, martial law was abolished and there was nothing to hold the empire together.

After fifty years in Russia, I knew very well what non-freedom was. What do I know about freedom after five years in America? What does it mean to be free? Who is more free and who is less free? In America, where freedom is positive, while non-freedom is an unknown negation of freedom, it may seem bizarre that a stranger like me, who came from the dark, is attempting to define light. However, as I have said before, my advantage over somebody born free is that I have seen both. I know that both non-freedom and non-slavery are full of colors, and one can live and be happy in both. Like order and chaos, one does not exist without the other.

America is also a shifting balance of freedom and non-freedom. With my eyes sensitized by the long years of darkness, I can probably see what I will not be able to see in America when I get completely adapted to it.

The chaos of molecular movement seems to be an embodiment of freedom. Nobody decides for the molecules of gas or liquid where to move, though they do not decide either. Their movement is pure chaos. It is not predictable.

Pure chaos is an abstraction. It never exists in a pure form. There are walls in an empty bottle, so when a molecule of gas hits the wall, it cannot move chaotically anymore, and it bounces off in a predictable direction. The more walls, borders, structure, and force, the less free is the freedom.

Am I free when I decide to turn left? I turn because I need to or because I do not care at all. When I need something or do not care, I am not acting freely. There is freedom when the alternatives are equally attractive or repellant. Then if I make a choice, there is no freedom, just tossing a die.

If a human being can kill another human being, he has more freedom than if he could not. But murder takes freedom away from the victim. On the other hand, is war murder? Is capital punishment murder? Is slaughtering animals murder?

To answer such questions we need a legal definition of life, death, murder, and freedom. All such definitions change with time and place; some do so right before our eyes. If we take the religious definition and convert it into a legal one, there will be a mandated state religion.

I think freedom is neither chaos nor choice and it is definitely neither law nor order.

Personal freedom is the power of an individual to control both his internal chaos and the chaos around him. To be free is hard work. Freedom demands energy and needs a high productivity of society. The closest relative of freedom is independence.

The stronger our upbringing, the better we can tell good from bad; the more we have learned in kindergarten, the less free we are. The more we know, the less free we are to decide and the closer we are to machines. Knowledge is power, but it limits our choices.



The more dogmatic we are the more ready formulas we have for decision-making and the easier it is to make a decision. We are not free when we are free of the burden of decision-making and if there is no chaos to overcome. The Western idea of freedom, unlike the Russian concept, is not an absence of something. Freedom is a burden of choice and decision.

Any strict orthodoxy tends to take the burden of freedom away. It tells a person what to do with one's internal chaos. Yet orthodoxy can hardly control the external chaos of events; the individual is left to deal with that on his own.

The totalitarian state did not leave an individual any chaos to control. It aimed at both internal and external chaos. It demanded maximal predictability of life. It was just a new form of ultra-orthodox religion. Its initial intent was very humane: to remove the burden of freedom from the shoulders of an individual. It ended with imposing the burden of oppression.

The core of the Soviet idea was complete, absolute, and total order. Russia inherited from her capitalist past a human being who was an individualist. He did not know what was good for him, pursued false values, and constantly deviated from the truth. The Communists set for the whole society the goal of bringing up a new man, the true man, the righteous man. They wanted somebody whose behavior would always be predictable. They could forgive sins in exchange for repentance.

Here in America, I enjoy the sweet burden of freedom as a woman might enjoy the weight of her lover's body. Still, I can say pessimistically that a new totalitarian system is possible in America because ideas never die. The totalitarian idea of whatever content waits for another opportunity to offer freedom from the burden of freedom.<sup>20</sup>

Chaos and destruction in the new Russia of the 1990s erupted, ironically, because the weight put on the lid of the Russian boiler was lifted without being exchanged for the weight of freedom. I cannot say anything meaningful about new Russia, however, because I insulated myself from it, never visited the country, and never got seriously interested in it. I wanted amnesia.

I did not come from Russia with love. Mother Russia was not a mother to me, though she was definitely a woman. My love-hate-crime affair with her ended with my last look at a young border guard in a Soviet military uniform who let me step out of Russia toward the flight Moscow-Vienna.

I did not come from Russia with hate either. On a short flight with a crew of nice Russian pilots and flight attendants who, breaking all the rules, allowed our dog to

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<sup>20</sup> I can't believe I wrote it! But something very Russian is testing grounds in the U.S. of 2017, 100 years after the Russian revolution if the U.S. President chides and scolds judges, senators, institutions, press, and public companies and orders them around.

travel in the cabin with us, Russia and I passed each other through a revolving door, like death and life, and I lost all my claims, complaints, and grievances. From that time on, I could share her sorrows without either judging her or taking her too close to the heart, as if she were an incidental companion in a Russian overnight train.

If not with either love or hate, I certainly came from Russia with a violent allergic reaction to any state ideology.

The source of ideology is a code that, to ensure its stability, is put into writing.

Another necessary condition is that the statements of the code are neither proved nor disproved. This condition is automatically fulfilled if the code predicts something about the future, i.e., something that has never happened before and cannot be proved in advance. Then, of course, it is a matter of belief and not of science.

Yet another condition is that the written source code of the ideology is of ancient origin. It should not be directly applicable to the problems of modern times. The new reality brings about things, events, situations, and phenomena that did not exist at the time when the code was written. Moreover, the code should contain something that has disappeared from life, like the “well-regulated militia,” and does not exist anymore. In other words, the code should be sufficiently obscure to be applicable to modernity.

Then, to allow one to find answers to modern questions in the ancient code, an oral or written interpretation is necessary. Of course, unlike the code itself, many interpretations can exist. Which interpretation to accept, it is also a matter of faith.

Since any interpretation becomes obsolete and ambiguous with time, a new interpretation of the interpretation is necessary, and so on.

The Soviet ideology resembled the Russian religion not only because of the divinity of the czar but also because of the institute of the top clergy who interpreted the code—books, articles, speeches, and letters by Marx and Lenin, all contradictory, dark, polemic, and written to answer the need of the long gone moment.

The source code of communism was German. The development of the institute of state religion was authentically Russian. The institute of interpretation initially included a lot of Jewish Communists, who set about to interpret Lenin like the Jewish sages and scholars interpreted the Torah. They created the standard Soviet ideology so that the behavior of any elementary school student and any theoretical physicist could be checked against the standard and evaluated as either right or wrong.

Watching, with an allergic itch, the cold civil war on abortion, which followed the hot civil war on abolition in America, I see it as a sign of age. After so many years, the U.S. Constitution, with all its striking clarity, might become

ideology too, if not religion.

Will another state ideology take the place of communism in Russia? Will the foreigners be evicted after they help Russia emerge as an economic superpower? Will America pursue the socialist ideals of equality and harmony with the same means of government control as in Russia? Will the American people entrust the government with emergency powers if things go too badly?

I know that if any ideology takes the place left in the world by *communism*, it will be orthodoxy and fundamentalism. In the algebra of history, the C-word stands not for Marxism but for the rule of orthodoxy and fundamentalism of whatever content.

Again, I am too far ahead in time and space in my memoirs. Moreover, I am ahead of my current American life. I repent. I have to punish myself, with my residual Russian masochism, for the sin of impatience. I am ordering myself back to the punishment block of the labor camp.

## XVI

### TWO TRIALS

I was just a single casualty in the war of the Soviet government against its people. Since I had volunteered for the war, I had nobody to blame but myself for being confined to the punishment block four times in 1984.

The third time, in the middle of the summer, the term was ridiculously short, five days, and it was not the devils' cell. At the end of my term, I was not released, however. Two officers took me by my hands and legs and threw me into the devils' cell, this time in the internal prison and for a month.

Internal prison was a different kind of punishment, designed for hard-core violators of the camp regimen. Since they were supposed to spend a long time there, the conditions were better than in the short-term punishment cell.

The food ration was meager, but the prison cell with wooden floors was clean and light. Decent mattresses and bed linen were given for the night. We went to a filthy bathroom once a week. I could receive newspapers and magazines to which Ann subscribed me. My two young mates were neat and friendly.

A literary magazine that published translations of modern foreign authors brought me *Jaws*, which I had read before in English.

The light in the cell never went off. A young devil was reading the

American best-seller all through the night. From time to time, he awakened me with the exclamation "Another one eaten!"

It was 1984, and nobody could predict the beginning of the *glasnost* of 1985, just as nobody could predict the terror of 1937 after the bliss of 1936. With hindsight, *Jaws* was a symbolic herald of new times. It was not just the first American best-selling thriller ever published in the USSR during the Cold War. To me, the novel carried the message that the shark was mortal.

Once, there was unusual fuss around our cell. An officer on duty arrived with a worried look. After a while, the door opened and a thickset man peered in. He was in his thirties, wearing a good gray suit, too tight over his muscles. Something about him made me think he was a dybbuk. Probably it was the expression of independence, power, and quiet contempt on his face.

"Which one is Lutsky?" he asked.

"I am," I said. He looked at me, said nothing, and left. The guard locked the door.

"He is definitely not a ment," one of my mates said.

"Why do you think so?"

"I just do. The ments don't look like that."

The visitor was a dybbuk. Later he talked to other political prisoners, and my descriptions matched theirs. Then I saw him a couple of times behind the cage of the brigade when he was going to the security office.

The dybbuk was another sign of approaching changes.

So, that was my guardian angel who decided my fate and scheduled my stints in the punishment cell. What made him come? Did he want to see how much more I could take? Was it mere curiosity?

I had already lost any desire to fight for a visit from my wife. I did not want any change. I would even stay in this cell for the second half of my term. I wanted a rest.

No rest was promised me, however.

It is a cool day in July 1984. I am standing in a six-by-six feet walking yard of the internal prison. There is a dirt floor under my feet and thick wire netting low over my head. The cells of the netting are wide enough to let three fingers through. The movement of an airplane in the sky appears punctuated through the checkered netting.

When the structure is built, the concrete walls are finished with freshly made cement mortar thrown onto the surface by dipping a broom into the thick mortar and then hitting with it a stick rested against the wall. The mortar solidifies in the form

of curly stone foam that looks like gray astrakhan fur. Called "fur coat," it is intended to prevent zeks from writing messages on the walls.

There is an iron bench along the right wall of the cubicle. Four steps forward, four steps back if no one is in your way.

The corners of my cubicle are wet from the saliva of all people who used to spit on the walls and floor for an hour every day. At night, when the guards catch a violator of the internal regimen, they place him here until morning and he urinates under his feet because there was no other place for that. The mucus and saliva hang down from the curls of the fur coat.

There are five people in a cubicle of the same size across a tiny hallway. Their faces are as rough and colorless as the fur coat. They wear dark gray pajamas over warm underwear. All of them are smoking cheap cigarettes and spitting on the floor and walls. Their uncovered heads are shaven.

There are very few things that can frighten me now, after a year of prison experience, after the long railway transit, after walking through the catacombs of transit prisons, after hunger strikes and punishment cells. Right now, the coming event makes me feel chilly. I have to stand another trial.

The people in the cubicle are talking to me over the space between the grated doors.

"Who do you think you are? Do you think you're something special? You think you're better than a devil? You've been in their cell; you are eating with them. You're a fucked devil yourself. You'll get a prick in your ass back in the zone, sure thing. That's the law," says an emaciated zek and spits on the wall.

"You would have ripped open your belly if you were an honest zek. You should have fought with your fists and kicked with your legs. You should have beaten the hell out of the devils. You should have chased the fucked devils out of the fucked cell. That's the law," another one says and spits on the wall. He is the youngest and most aggressive of the five.

"You know, countrymen, I am a political prisoner. Sure, I respect the law. But a political cannot cut his belly and fight with his fists. If I fight, the ments will have a legal reason to stretch out my term. You are not *politicals*. You know what day you will get out of here. We, the *politicals*, do not. The ments promised to keep me here for life. I cannot give them a pretext to do that to me."

I try hard to speak quietly, to look relaxed, and to be convincing. Talking fast in the camp is not done. Shouting and showing emotions is also not done. One expresses his emotions with his fist or a knife.

"Are you really a *political* as you say? There are special political zones. Why are you here?"

This is the question I heard in prison whenever I mentioned that I was a

*political*. There is no legal status for a political prisoner in Russia.

I repeat my usual explanations.

"There are three other *politicals* in the camp. Nick was given four years for religion, for example."

"Ah, the priest! We know him."

"He is not a priest. He privately published religious literature. The other one is Ivan the Chinese."

"What is he in for?"

"I don't know. I only know that he is a *political*, because he was put on trial for fraud. He is a professor of medicine. He can cure almost any disease. Can he be a swindler? He got seven years."

"Who else?"

"There is a newcomer. He is in for religion too. Three years."

I am not alone in my status is what I am telling them. Numbers will impress anybody. I am on trial for my involuntary residence in two devils' cells—here and earlier in the Ninth. I am defending myself, and my future fate in the camp will be decided by the court of thieves—the camp elite. I must convince the jury.

"You know that the *politicals* are protected by common zeks. I was brought here from my city two thousand miles away. You've never seen a political here, in this camp. This is why the ments put me here. They think you know nothing about politicals. They think you won't find out what is right and just."

"A prick in the ass is all you'll have, you devil."

I am not sure my age can protect me from that. Despite a year in the Gulag, I still do not know much about what is done here in the camp and what is not. I know that, like everywhere in the world where violence rules, the law is only an instrument of violence. So it is in all of Russia; so it has always been here, in the basement of the pyramid.

I would live in the devils' row of bunks, the so-called "corner." "Honest" zeks would not touch me except for beating; nor would they share food with me. If they did, they would become devils themselves. I would do the hardest and the dirtiest work, and I would look like a devil. I would think about suicide, and I would probably act on those thoughts as two devils I knew had. I know that the fig seed of an idea can grow into a powerful tree, and as the idea of suicide has been planted, it will grow and bear its only hanging fruit.

It is the second time that I have to replay my transformation into a devil in my imagination. The first time it was in the Ninth.

The idea of suicide for me, a non-religious man, was my lifesaver long before I got into prison. "If it is unbearable," I used to think, "I will kill myself."

Although I saw it as a way out, I hated the idea because I thought not in terms of my personal life and death, and not even in terms of my duty to my family, but in the slippery terms of victory and defeat. In my universe, they were categories as ponderous as matter and void.

"You see, countrymen, the ments threw me into the devils' cell. I did not enter it of my own will. The *politicals* do not fight with ments because this is what ments want them to do."

"You are saying you are a *political*. We don't care about politics. We are thieves, gangsters, hoodlums, and ruffians. We are happy with the Soviets. Why should we care about you if you are against our state? Take care of yourself."

This is a new voice. The man is the oldest among them. I can hear from the way he speaks that he graduated from high school. He does not look like a gangster. He seems to be testing me. I know, however, that educated evil is more dangerous than illiterate one.

"I am not against the state. I am against the ments. They won't let my wife visit me. I held two hunger strikes. I was incarcerated three times."

"That you did in the zone. What did you do outside to get in here? What is your article of the code?"

OK, let's go over my story again. I repeat the number of my article, which means nothing to the zeks. The name of my crime is "Defaming the Soviet Social System," but none of them had ever heard of this kind of business.

I feel as if we have come to the crucial moment.

"I wanted to leave the Soviet Union and go abroad. I have relatives in America. There is a Soviet law that gives me the right to leave the country, but the ments won't let me go. I demanded my rights, and they accused me of slandering the Soviet political and social systems."

The five men remain silent for a long time. The custom in the camp is to think for a long time before making a decision. The same questions and the same statements go in circle many times. The reason is probably that time here has a negative value and it should be wasted as much as possible.

Explaining what kind of crime I had committed was the greatest possible challenge for me, whether my audience was a university professor or an uneducated convict.

My crime consisted of my private postcards. I wrote that I was being persecuted illegally for my desire to leave my native country. The persecution consisted of harassment by police and KGB as well as the threat of imprisonment. After having committed the said crime of writing said postcards, I was arrested. I was kept in prison, accused of slander, and put on trial, **as I had predicted** in my letters abroad.



It was obvious, as the prosecutor said at the trial, that an innocent person could not be persecuted for any legal desire, such as emigration. Moreover, the prosecutor said, everybody who wanted to leave Russia had already done so. He stated that in a courtroom filled with people like me: people who did want to emigrate, had the legal right to do so, and had indeed been forbidden to leave the country.

I was sentenced to three years in a labor camp. Therefore, I had defamed the Soviet political and social system **by predicting** that such thing could happen to me.

Even if I could put all that in short sentences and avoid bookish vocabulary, I would not expect the five zeks to understand my problem. Even for a Western intellectual that would not be easy.

What can I expect from these five who are to decide my fate? They do not know anything about logical paradoxes. The KGB is associated in the mind of an average Russian with a superman, like the movie hero who was a Soviet spy during the war and infiltrated Hitler's den. Now the KGB catches American spies as easily as zek lice.

A barber shaves only those villagers who do not shave themselves. Does the barber shave himself? If yes, he shaves somebody who shaves himself. If not, he does *not* shave all who do not shave themselves. This is the Russell's paradox. It breaks up the classical logic of Aristotle.

Lord Bertrand Russell was the famous English mathematician who tried to persuade Khrushchev that it was illogical to execute a man for a crime if the law permitting capital punishment for this particular crime was enacted after the crime was committed. Khrushchev, however, relied on logic of his own. The man in question was executed.

I cannot teach logic to zeks.

"Why didn't you like it here? Why was Russia bad for you?"

It has come to patriotism. This is a risky topic. All Russians are patriots. I am not Russian. I am a Jew, but nobody here is interested in my *nationality*.

I should not forget I am talking to Russians.

"I have nothing against this country, but it is my legal right to leave it. I am not going to do any harm to Russia. You know you have rights even in prison. You know when your term ends. The KGB can keep me in the camp indefinitely. I am outlawed." I am trying to steer away from patriotism.

"I don't know what you're talking about. You're just kidding. You had to fight the devils, or you had to rip open your belly. You're in the devils' cell right now. So you're a devil yourself. This is the only law we know."

I could say that I had no blade to cut my skin, but this would mean that I

accepted the rules of the zeks. This would mean weakness.

"This is exactly what the ments want." I do not want to mention the KGB anymore, either. "The ments want me to die, but they want to kill me with my own hands or with your hands."

I have made another mistake. I am losing ground. They could hold me in contempt of court. The zeks can sentence me for the slanderous prediction that they can sentence me without any legal reason.

"Well, don't you worry, countryman. We won't do anything too bad to you. You will just live in the corner. Maybe they will fuck you down here in the camp, maybe not. You won't die of it. Nobody does."

"You know, I didn't enter the devils' cell of my own will. I resisted. But the ments threw me in."

I am going in circles. I am getting nervous. It is OK to go in circles in prison. What is not OK is saying something others do not understand.

I must defeat my despair. I must control myself. I must suppress my wild anger against this bloody, irrational, miserable country.

The walk is over. A ment takes me back into my cell.

I am shaking. I am exhausted. I am hopeful.

Still, that trial was quite different from the trial by the court in Kharkov. The zeks were asking me reasonable questions. They were trying to understand the matter. This trial was based on a kind of law as well as on common sense. I had a chance to defend myself, to persuade the jury, my fate depended on my mind and will, and the outcome was not predetermined.

The zeks' Supreme Court acquitted me, as I learned when, after a month in the internal prison, I returned to my place. After that, nobody tried to make me an outcast. That was my reversal of fortune.

The hardest criminals in the camp tried to abide by the only law and the only justice they knew. What a contrast with the court that sent me here!

My trial by the Soviet court in June 1983 had been much less remarkable than the trial by the thieves.

The Black Maria used to pick up the prisoners in the early morning and deliver them to all the district courts of the big city. In the afternoon, it brought them back to prison.

The court building was the same place where I had been taken after my arrest three and a half months earlier. A silent crowd of spectators watched the unloading of the Black Maria. I walked with all my belongings between two lines of

soldiers yelling at me, "Faster, faster!"

I was taken into a tiny cell deep in the basement. Soon I was summoned out. I walked between two guards, up the same staircase where I had watched Paul on his way to the courtroom. I saw my wife and daughter through a glass door for the first time since my arrest. I was happy that they looked fresh, healthy, and did not seem to be in low spirits.

I was taken into the courtroom long before the trial. There was only one guard in the entire chamber. I enjoyed sitting in the large open space.

Then the public was admitted. My friends—close and distant ones—were entering the courtroom like the procession in *Aida*. Although there were no trumpets, they all looked as beautiful as gods, with smooth tanned faces, in heavenly clothes, happy, relaxed, almost as the people in the photographs in my file. They made an enormous contrast with the world from which I had just come.

It was a big surprise to me that the trial was indeed open. The dybbuks used to fill up the room with law students and others so that no seats would be left for friends. It was different this time.

All my friends were there, as well as my wife, mother, and my mother-in-law who had come from Siberia. My daughter was not admitted into the courtroom. I saw her only on my way to the basement and back. The room was now half-empty. There were a few people I did not know. Nobody from my patent office was there.

The judge was old and lean, his face etched with little wrinkles. He looked like a peasant and spoke like one. Two "yes-men," his assistants, were sitting on both sides. The defense lawyer, appointed despite my refusal to accept him, took a separate table.

The trial started with a long reading from my file. When the photographs of unknown persons were mentioned, I said, "including two photos of the dog Capi," but no one was impressed. It would take too long to explain that story.

I did not answer any questions except about my name. Every time the judge asked me a question, the guard hissed, "Stand up." I rose, and after a moment of silence, the judge let me sit down.

Several refuseniks, the most timid ones I knew, were called as witnesses. They mumbled their answers, trying to avoid any confrontation with the official point of view. They honestly answered questions about their profession and occupation. Their background and current odd jobs contrasted very much, exactly as I described it in my slanderous letters abroad. Neither the judge nor the lawyer cared.

There was Jacob, a young refusenik known for his love of Israel and hatred for all who did not go there. Refuseniks called him Machine Gun Jacob because he used to say that he would shoot with a machine gun all Jews who went to America

instead of Israel. He said at the witness stand that he and I were at different ideological positions, and if he were permitted to go to Israel, he would join the Israeli Communist party.

One of my closer friends, Leo, refused to testify. It took great courage. Refusal to testify was a punishable crime. The judge immediately promised to sentence him separately. Later I learned that Leo's sentence was six months of probation plus community service. Since he, PhD in economics, had already worked as a boiler operator in the hospital for party bosses, that was counted as his punishment.

Gary, my closest friend, who could be the most outspoken and eloquent, was in court. Since he was summoned as a witness—and witnesses had no right to attend the hearing before their testimony—he was removed from the courtroom but never allowed to testify.

None of the refusenik witnesses tried to complain about their situation. Nobody supported me in any form. I felt bitter, but I remembered well the lesson of Professor Mark Funk. I did not expect other people to be able to do what I did. Besides, it would be senseless.

There was only one witness outside the close circle of refuseniks. It was the bilingual female postal worker who had discovered the stained postcard with anti-Soviet slander in French. Her personal data were read. She was a party member. The judge asked her if she knew any foreign language. She honestly admitted she did not. No further question was asked. My lawyer did not ask a single question at the trial.

All that took one day, with an intermission for lunch, which was brought from prison to my basement cell.

In the back row, I saw the young dybbuk who used to take part in talks with me at the KGB headquarters. He made faces at me whenever I looked in his direction. I liked him for that. Crime is fun.

The prosecutor read the beginning of his speech from a couple of sheets of old yellowish paper. The speech sounded familiar. I recognized the beginning of his speech from Paul's trial. The prosecutor evidently used his old notes.

Looking at him and listening to his powerful voice, I suddenly realized something that had escaped my attention until now. There were only three uniformed people in the room—two guards and the prosecutor.

The prosecutors and investigators in Russia were incorporated into a military-style organization. They wore uniforms with insignia that showed their ranks, and they issued and executed orders. It was not their function to use logic and common sense. When investigator Tomin, who also wore a uniform with insignia, told me "I am a soldier, and I obey orders," I did not accept it as a matter-of-fact statement. It was, however, literally true. The Russian system of justice was a

military tribunal in form and kangaroo court in essence<sup>21</sup>. The Russians had a five-century-old expression for that: *Shemiaka's court*.

The last pieces of the judicial jigsaw puzzle fell into place.

The prosecutor said that I was ungrateful to my motherland, which gave me a good education. Meanwhile, my motherland was good and generous to me. In what way? When I wrote an essay for the entrance exams to the university, I made two mistakes in spelling. Nevertheless, my essay got the highest grade. Later, he said, I paid with slander to my motherland, which forgave me two misspellings. Yes, he really said that! I was unappreciative of my country, which had given me all a man can desire—education, a career, a roof over my head, and medical assistance. I was in debt to her for life.

Finally, I was given an explanation as to why my thirty-year-old essay had resurfaced in my court file.

There was logic after all. I felt more respect for the prosecutor. He was doing quite well. It was the kind of respect I felt for Magda when she learned to poke me with her paw for a cookie. No one taught her that. No one taught the prosecutor to look into my thirty-year-old essay. He was really smart.

The highest priority in times of war is victory, not reason. It was the first time I actually saw the army of the government on a battlefield, in military fatigues. I was in my old pants, whose waist I had already taken in several times.

My personal way to evaluate life in terms of victory and defeat, as I did all my life, was something I had to give a further thought. The foundation of my personal philosophy was shaken when I saw that I had actually borrowed from the Soviets the concept of victory at any price.

The defense lawyer said that I was accused of both slander and libel. However, he said, there was no proof of any oral violation.

He was smart. I felt respect for him too.

The next morning I accepted my sentence—three years in a labor camp. I still hoped that it would be less. At that time, I still relied on both reason and miracles.

I had the right to give my "last word"—the final statement that a convict is allowed in Russia according to the law. I knew in advance I would be interrupted, and I had prepared just two sentences:

"I am addressing my friends and my people: the shameful refusal should be put to an end." As I expected, the judge immediately deprived me of the last word. I was unable to utter my second sentence, addressed to my wife.

I entered my quiet and safe cell, trying to look nonchalant. "Three years," I

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<sup>21</sup>For political opponents in Russia it still is.

said to my mates.

"Cheer up! No big deal. Just a short entertainment cruise through the correctional institutions," Serge said.

That night I slept well.

How could an average Soviet person rise so high in the eyes of dybbuks that he would be worthy of arrest, which automatically implied a sentence? How could I, who was afraid of dogs and cows in my childhood, shy and unsociable in my youth, and who later lived in the world of science, arts, and history, earn three years in a labor camp? After all that sinister Soviet history, how could it be possible at all, especially for somebody as historically and socially vulnerable as a Jew? That was the question I often asked myself while watching the rise of the refuseniks' timid but unheard of resistance against the omnipotent Soviet power.

We, refusenik activists, were involved in a kind of a process that is common in nature and society, though never in its pure form: the *equilibrium process*.

In the beginning of the equilibrium process, it is always easy to take a small initial step in a given direction. Every subsequent step is then so small that there is practically no difference between another step ahead and a step back. Both seem to be just a small change, so small that they do not disturb the equilibrium. In other words, the system adapts to the change.

The decision to emigrate was the very first step off the safe path. An application for exit visa meant that the serf wanted to change its master. The Jew did not belong here anymore. He spat in the face of the party, his caretaker and provider. He was ungrateful and disloyal. He was a debtor who wanted to escape. Still, in 1979 there was neither a law nor a public decree to punish the disloyal Jews. The international agreement on the right of emigration was unambiguous. Therefore, the first step was minute. We believed not so much in law and order as in the *status quo*.

Our first collective letter to the authorities was another step in an escalation of dissent. This time, we not only confirmed our desire to escape from the loving hugs of Russia, but also implied that the party was doing something basically wrong.

In the beginning, our climb was an equilibrium process. Nothing followed after the second step—no crackdown, no reaction. Having taken the second small step up, we were at the same small distance from both the preceding and the following steps. Therefore, the third step demanded as little courage as the second one, although the height had tripled. That small *escalation* could always be considered accidental. One could ask forgiveness for a small regression. It was always easy to take the same small step back.

The equilibrium was slowly shifting, but it persisted. The next step was another collective letter to the authorities.

One is one, but two is many. One letter could be just an accident, an aberration. The second one, however, was an obvious intent. We could not say later to the KGB that our first letter was a mistake and that we had realized our mistake and stopped in time. Still, it was just a small step up. The height, however, made one dizzy. The equilibrium was doomed to break.

There were about two thousand refuseniks in Kharkov. About fifty people signed the first two letters in 1979. A dropout started immediately. People were measuring the height and counting the steps to tumble down. They were normal, reasonable, careful people. Fewer and fewer people made the next step, so that in 1982 I was almost alone when I went on my long hunger strike.

All spontaneous processes in an isolated part of the universe drift toward chaos. Everything is deteriorating, decomposing, falling apart, leveling out, and dissipating. In inanimate nature, there is nothing fully reversible on its own. The universe has no memory and, therefore, nothing to return to.

In animate nature, human memory preserves a lot of what existed before. The world becomes more and more populated by things, phenomena, and ideas. If something falls apart, it may be reconstructed from a blueprint. The material complexity of our world increases. Nothing—or almost nothing—disappears, dissipates, or crumbles in the world of ideas.

In the comforting realm of memory, we have an eternal ideal existence vastly different from our physical existence. Everything can exist at least twice—first as a transient, ephemeral physical reality and then as its memory.

Mike, who had been obsessed with his own mortality since his youth (who was not, in his youth?) once shared with me his "theory of coin."

"Why did the ancient coins survive millennia and we can still find them?" he would ask. "Because they were coins and not just pieces of metal. They had value, and people cared about them. They kept them in safe places and protected by burying the treasure. I want somebody to care about me. Let us take care of each other. In this way we will survive whatever happens."

I was climbing up the ladder because I had a poor memory. I did not care about measuring the distance I had covered. However, I can imagine how somebody in the middle or at the top of the ladder could be forced to look down and get scared, then feel weak, then ask for mercy, and finally repent. The dybbuks' aim in preventing dissent was to show a person that he would descend not just to his initial level, but much, much lower. Terror was supposed to eliminate all equilibrium and reversibility from dissent, to plough the terrain of dissent and to sow salt, so that nothing would grow there, as in defeated Carthage seeded with salt by the Romans.

That was the physics of punishment and terror—to build and show a place

deep in the basement so that the resident of a middle level in the pyramid would be frightened of falling down. This is why revolutions have often been driven by those who lived not much higher than the basement. The distance just did not seem so terrifying.



## ***XVII***

### **MICKEY AND MINNIE**

**S**oon after my trial in Kharkov, I was alone in a compartment of a prison car on my way to an unknown destination. I was beyond the comfort of my cozy prison cell, and I had lost the camaraderie of my companions forever. I could not imagine winding up in Siberia. But on the second day, a guard told me that I was going to the city of Chita, about 250 miles East of Lake Baikal.

"It is even farther from my home than Paul's camp" was my first thought. "How can my wife get enough money for such a long trip?"

By the end of the third day, the train stopped right behind the Ural Mountains. It was Sverdlovsk (now Yekaterinburg). Siberia waited for me. For centuries, an outflow of people in chains or behind bars was pumped into its enormous vastness. The pipeline crossed the Europe-Asia border at this point.

It was the first time that I was going through the procedure of unloading a prison car. I looked familiar after the movies about Nazi concentration camps, although it was a passenger train instead of a freight one.

The armed soldiers were driving the prisoners with German Shepherds and shouting, "One step to the right, one step to the left is considered escape. We shoot

without warning.” We were ordered to squat on the ground until the car was completely unloaded, and then to run in columns of five, arm in arm, our things in our hands.

I was put into a tiny cell with two short benches. Late at night, I was taken to a bathhouse. Millions feet, starting with the prisoners of the czars had worn out its stone floor. The potholes had been patched with concrete many times, but the repaired upper layers were worn out, too.

The prison was a city in itself, a huge compound of multistory buildings with walking yards on the roofs.

So far, my prison experience had been limited to the microcosm of the cell in Kharkov. The transit prison was my first close contact with the prison world as a whole. In the morning, I was brought to a big overcrowded cell.

There was not enough space for all to sleep and I took turns with a convicted murderer knitting little keepsakes in the cell. A pickpocket in his fifties, who had spent thirty-six years of his life in prison for numerous thefts, was waiting for another trial. Next day he went to court and came back with another six years for robbing a woman of a purse with three rubles. His trade was the only one he knew, and he could not give up the habit. Stealing was as much his livelihood and passion as science was mine.

During my two weeks there, I learned from some more upscale looking mates about large-scale underground economy in Russia. Enormous quantities of exotic goods, such as American jeans, for example, were transported by air from one area of the country to another, where they were sold; other goods in great demand were bought on the spot, flown back to the first point, and so forth.

The black market was doing exactly what the government was supposed to do. It was free market economy in action. The successful businessmen, however, were sentenced to years in a labor camp instead of being awarded state honors and promoted to the government.

In those days, it was not only political dissent that was on trial but also capitalism itself.

A young rookie was at the top of the cell hierarchy. His parents were local big wheels. He had a supply of smuggled food, which he generously shared with the rest of us.

I was there not long after a Korean airliner was shot down over Kamchatka. The rookie was jubilant. He thought it was a triumph of Russia. He could not forgive Stalin for having lost Japan to America.

The rookie told me about a specific local problem. Yekaterinburg, the old Russian city on the border between Europe and Asia, attracted a lot of people from other overcrowded and corrupt republics. They were able to make careers in the relatively sparsely populated Ural Mountains, and the ethnic diversity was growing.

That generated ethnic tensions between Russians and non-Russians. The latter were called *Nerus* (non-Russians), an ancient derisive word no longer in use. For the first time, I realized the extent of the ethnic polarization of Russia. Before that, I had been aware only of the Russian-Jewish and Slavonic-Asian polarization.

Around ten o'clock in the morning, I was summoned from the cell and told to bring along my belongings. I wished my cellmates good luck and walked out. The guard and I followed the maze of corridors and stairs, crossed the yard, and entered the same building at which I had arrived. I was put into a small waiting cell with two narrow benches, a water tank, and a washbasin on the floor.

The usual swarm of short and disconnected thoughts was swirling in my head. The crazy hope that I would soon be back in Kharkov was still alive. While other thoughts felt like short thick worms, or even stumps of worms, this one was thin, sharp-nosed, and wriggling briskly. It was piercing and pushing the slow knot of other thoughts. Never in my life had such a mistaken idea occupied my mind for so long. In my microcosm, it was my own Communist utopia. I needed a long and painful experience to overcome the disease of hope.

I heard two guards, man and woman, talking to each other in the hoarse voices of heavy drinkers and smokers. Occasionally keys clanged and a heavy door slammed with the distinctive booming bang peculiar to prisons.

To be alone in an empty cell with a bench to lie on was a luxury. The only possible greater luxury would be the same plus a toilet in the cell. I began to worry about its absence.

Suddenly, with my peripheral vision, I noticed some movement in the cell. First I thought it was an illusion. Then I discovered a hole in the opposite wall under the bench. A little mouse was sticking its nose out from the hole. At the slightest noise, heard by it alone, the mouse rushed back into the hole. Nevertheless, gradually, two steps forward, one back, it was moving ahead.

The little mouse was nervously exploring the neighborhood outside the hole when another little snout appeared. It was smaller, probably a female, and its behavior was different. Minnie seemed to have no connection with her environment. She was looking only at Mickey. When he jerked, she withdrew immediately. He was the entire world to her, and she entrusted him with orientation and leadership. The external world held no attraction for her, and she refused to explore it. That made her life more secure, because Mickey was the first to perish in case of an accident.

The relationship was beneficial to Mickey, too, because his companion or fiancée was always around. She was tied to him by an invisible string and that introduced more order and stability into the startling and dangerous world.

My thoughts turned into an ordered procession of long and thin snakelike

mice moving in strict head-to-tail order. They were making circles and spirals in my head.

We see the difference between the two sexes at first glance. It is obvious even to a child. As a matter of fact, however, there are numerous distinctions between people, typically even more significant than the sex difference. Those quasi- or, rather, hyper-sexes are visible too, but only in the long run and to an experienced observer. Some interaction between them is as necessary to reproduce our civilization as the play of biological sexes. Kurt Vonnegut described this polysexual reproduction on the planet Tralfamadore in his *Slaughterhouse Five*.

The revelations of modern group psychology have shaken the millennium-old idea of human equality layered over the even older idea of natural inequality.

People are born different. There are born leaders and born followers, born conformists and born rebels, born explorers and born couch potatoes, just as there are born men and born women. Their interaction is necessary to produce new issues of the same variety of sexes and quasi-sexes.

Our biological nature does not change. We are the same, but we can always give birth to new combinations of old attributes.

Then why do we have more and more new things and ideas cropping up? Why is the future unpredictable? Why is the new not just a combination of the old eternal elements?

As a chemist, I start with atoms. They aggregate into molecules, molecules into polymers, polymers into cells, cells into tissues, then into organs, then into organisms, societies, civilizations, religions, ideologies, worlds, global communities . . . what next?

We have a set of symbols, then words, then sentences, then cards, then a box of cards, then a warehouse of boxes, then a country of warehouses.

Thus, independent entities become bonded. The complexes of entities become entities themselves, only at a higher level. This is how the new emerges and evolves. The question is what makes them form one level after another. What brings them into motion or into shuffling or into combining?

I had a vivid picture in my head, but I did not know at that time that Teilhard de Chardin had painted it before me. He was forbidden in Russia, too.

If we heat up a living cell, it decomposes into molecules. If we heat up molecules, they decompose into atoms. If we heat up a society, it decomposes into fighting parties and individuals.

After the universe started with the Big Bang, the enormously hot Something began to cool down. The lower the temperature was, the more bonds were possible and the higher the level of aggregation was. Our neighborhood in the Universe is cooling down, so we can enjoy the development of complexity, the establishment of

bonds, the evolution of structures—until the complexity becomes too overwhelming, the bonds too burdensome, the structures too constraining. The more we cool down, the more freedom we lose. When communism was on its victorious march, Russia, Poland, and the Baltic States just froze together, and even Finland had to watch out.

We try to stay on the strip between our dry land of order and the swelling water of chaos, where there are always tidal waves that are neither land nor water. We do not want to freeze. We resist the cold that sustains life on earth.

Order and chaos are the two universal parental sexes of the world that produce all its complexity.

We have to burn fuel to avoid overheating or overcooling of a narrow strand where evolution can occur, this natural machine where the existing complexity transforms the free energy of fuel into a new complexity of devices, society, structure, and knowledge.

The universe is full of extreme heat and extreme cold. To use them to maintain and control our complexity is probably the ultimate wisdom.

The Soviet system was growing in Russia from the lack of fuel, food, even sunshine. Nazism was born in poor Germany. If America becomes poor, there will be totalitarian America. It is very likely that the dictator will be elected and not imposed by a coup as in some novels<sup>22</sup>. If this process is slow enough, nobody will raise an alarm. The government can grow to a critical and irreversible point when it absorbs society. Then the leader is dictator whether he wants to be or not.

Communist Russia, the realm of poverty, wanted to start a totally new civilization, to open a new chapter in history, to realize a dream of equality with its crystal order and simplicity. Complexity, however, already existed in railways, cars, telegraph, telephone, radio, newspapers, prisons, army, taxes, retail stores, money. The whole complexity of human history slept in the volumes on the shelves of libraries and in the heads of university professors. The complexity of the Western world oozed from the pages of translated textbooks. The latent power of knowledge, like a genie in a bottle, was waiting for a master, whether good or evil.

Order existed in the form of military discipline. The army is, of necessity, voluntary or forced temporarily. It is strong only if it is voluntary. Therefore, to have a major enemy was crucial to the system. The enemy was, of course, the rest of the world, the rich, the owners, the Western democracy, even the modest freedom of the old czarist way of life. As soon as the army is strong enough, the rest of the population accepts the militarized way of life.

Russia became a frozen country, the kingdom of cold, the crystal palace, the clockwork doomed to repeat the same circles of slavery and half-slavery.

The gray cells of the human brain were made by nature long before the

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<sup>22</sup> Decades of stagnant middle class income and, lo and behold, Donald Trump comes to power with not yet totalitarianism but hand in hand with a totalitarian friend.

telephone was invented. Actually, those cells invented both the telephone and the means to bug it. The cells were made of water and surrounded by flesh, which kept the temperature constant—in the narrow strand of metabolism. Their own evolution was completed. They were small. Those tiny droplets of Jell-O could not be completely frozen by anything but drugs, physical cold, or death. They possessed both chaos and order—neither one could be completely taken away by poverty, threat, torture, prison. They generated or just reproduced forbidden ideas, made mistakes in following orders, and generated chaos that could not be tolerated in an army. Human heads and hearts were the only source of warmth in the frozen country, and the substrate of submissiveness and treason as well.

That was the essence of the war of the Soviet government against its own people—it was the war of order against chaos: a hopeless undertaking.

I did not know how much time I had spent in the cell. They brought me a prison lunch but did not take me out. The meager calories were quickly consumed by my excited brain.

More and more often, however, the train of my thoughts was interrupted by impulses from my bladder. Soon I discovered that it was not only my problem. I heard the clamor of many people from a larger cell nearby, where guards kept more than one hundred prisoners—judging by what they were yelling—waiting for transportation. Apparently, there was hardly enough room to stand. The prisoners were demanding to empty the foul vessel that served as a toilet. They were banging at the door. The guards—a man and a woman—jeered at them amicably.

"Piss under your feet, guys!"

The prisoners answered with curses.

I started banging on the door myself.

Somebody opened the peephole. Through a dirty glass, I saw an eye moving behind the hole.

"They'll take you away, they'll take you away," the witchlike coarse voice of the woman guard sang behind the door.

"Let me out into the toilet," I yelled. "I have been here since morning."

The eye disappeared. "They'll take you away, they'll take you away," she sang again, scuffing off.

I had no choice. I used the tin basin under the water tank. That was certainly not what it was intended for.

I felt as if not only my bladder but also my brain had been drained.

Hours passed. It was dark in the grated window under the ceiling. Finally the door opened. A new woman guard stood in the door. She was in her thirties and

did not look like a witch. She squinted suspiciously at the basin and ordered me out.

I was taken into the yard between the rows of soldiers with rifles and German Shepherds. It was late at night, and the air was cold and heavenly fresh. Under the yelling and cursing of the soldiers, I climbed into the Black Maria and found a seat.

The van went through the illuminated downtown streets. I saw well-dressed people, the neon signs of restaurants, a movie theater. My heart was aching with sorrow. "All this is a plastic cucumber," I kept telling myself, but my heart was not convinced.

They put me into a separate compartment of the prison car. Soon I was transferred into a regular one. It was almost bearable. There were only fifteen people.

## *XVIII*

### EURO-ASIAN PING-PONG

**I** crossed the Ural Mountains, the natural border between Europe and Asia, seven times in my life. I count only the journeys that meant crossing a certain line in my life and not just on the map.

First, in 1941, at the age of five, in a freight car, I crossed the border to escape the Nazi occupation with my mother and grandmother. The refugees, Jews among them, were given free railway transportation by the government. My father, already in military uniform, saw us off at the station and went to the front. The train brought us to a city in southeast Uzbekistan, far from the war. Later we moved west, to the Ural Mountains, almost on the border, but still in Asia.

Three years later, we crossed the intercontinental line on our way back to Ukraine. Alerted by my mother and already aware of geography, I saw from the car window the slant layers of rock where the road cut through the mountains. The little monument with the sign "Asia—Europe" stood on the border between the two continents.

The third time it was in 1960, when my Nadine and I went east, much farther behind the Urals, to the city of Krasnoyarsk, in the very heart of Asia. Her family



wound up there in similar circumstances as mine. The monument stayed in its place.

We were both escaping anti-Semitism in our native Ukraine. Soon, we returned to Europe for three years in Moscow, but we knew it was only temporary. We could not obtain a residence permit in the capital, and went back. That was my last journey by train, or so I thought.

I crossed the Ural Mountains for the sixth time in 1977, when I flew to my native city of Kharkov with my little daughter from my second marriage, in a noisy plane reeking of dirty socks. I could not imagine I would cross the mountains eastward once again. I was determined to move only westward, across the Soviet border.

Now, in 1983, I was heading for Siberia by train and against my will. The seventh trip had again to do with my *nationality*. Indeed, that was why I had been bouncing all my life between Asia and Europe like a ping-pong ball between paddles. From the prison car, I could not see the little monument. My side had no windows. They went along the opposite side, separated from prisoners by barred doors.

In great excitement, I anticipated passing Krasnoyarsk, the city in which I had spent most of my adult life. I expected to see our former home from the train, but thick smog made the city invisible from the bridge over the Yenissei River. On the other bank, new houses rose between our block and the railway, and the once-familiar landscape was beyond recognition.

I expected to encounter anti-Semitism in the labor camp for which I was heading, although Serge, my erudite thief-professor in the Kharkov prison, had told me in the very beginning that there was no anti-Semitism in Soviet prisons and camps. "All nations are equal behind bars," he used to say. But there, in Ukraine, where anti-Semitism was as organic to the mentality as borscht to the national diet, I could not believe it.

I never witnessed any ethnic hostility in the Kharkov prison. Neither did I feel myself a Jew in three transit prisons and later in the labor camp. After four years of my stewing in the cauldron of Jewish refuseniks, however, Jewish problems would, time and again, inevitably come to mind.

As I have said, being Jewish in Russia was *nationality* (ethnicity), like Russian, Armenian, or Estonian, and not a religion. I was listed as Jew in all official records and my internal passport, and even if I wanted to—which I never did—I could not change that. Had I become a faithful Christian or Muslim, my papers and my status would not have changed a bit. In questionnaires, no one ever asked what religion an individual actually practiced. The state pretended it did not matter, and, as a matter of fact, it mattered very little because most people did not practice any religion in any form.

I had entered the refusal without any particular interest in Jewish problems and wanted to go to America to be free, not to be a Jew. But the refuseniks' seminars in Jewish culture revived my interest and involvement. It was in the refusal that we held our first Passover Seder and celebrated other festivals. I had access to the literature that I would otherwise never have found and I quickly became absorbed. It turned out that for me being free included being a Jew.

Judaism seemed more rational than any other religion known to me from secular books. It had a certain beauty, like mathematics. It started with a system of axioms presented in the Torah—the first five books of the Bible—and the rest was just logically derived from the axioms. Even the Hebrew language seemed an evidence of creation, not evolution, because it was based on a three-letter root code, like the genetic code in biology. It could not be an accident, I thought sometimes.

It was then that I made one of the biggest personal discoveries of my entire life (sometimes, ignorance is a blessing): the Jews invented the love of one's neighbor and humanism in general, whereas I always thought it was the Christians. My own moral values, which I had not always followed but always cherished, were of Jewish origin. I admired the nonintrusive negative formula of Judaism: "Do not do to your neighbor what you do not want to be done to you." I did not want my neighbor to do to me what he considered right for himself. But, honestly, the difference was arguable.

After some superficial study of Hebrew, I started reading the Bible in original. I was thrilled by another discovery. I used to think that the power of the most ancient modern book was a trick of translation, while the original had to be dark and primitive, but my own translation was unambiguous: "First, God made the skies and the land."

Although I gradually lost some of my sensitivity to it, the memory of the Holocaust, even if more destructive than constructive, shaped my generation of Russian Jews. It dominated my awareness of myself as a Jew. What I learned from original Judaism, however, had nothing to do with the Holocaust. What I discovered in my forties was not a new mix of delight, captivation, pride, or any other familiar components. It was a completely new constituent. The Judaism I discovered was my first positive Jewish self-image, more positive than my Russian idea of freedom. It was a feeling of belonging to history and a perpetual chain of generations, a feeling as elemental as the feeling of having a mind or of being alive. Unlike the physical nature, we had a long memory.

I do not remember when I first realized that I was a Jew.

In the numerous questionnaires a Soviet citizen had to fill out during his life, *nationality* was the next question after name (three lines) and date of birth.

Every resident of the USSR had first name, patronymic derived from his father's name, last name, date of birth, and the fifth identifier: *nationality*. Party

membership, liability for military draft, education, marital status, place of birth, names of parents, and address were not as important as nationality. The Jews euphemistically called it “fifth line” or, sometimes, “disability.” It was the fifth line in the internal passport that looked like its American counterpart, with no space for visas, however. Clean pages were intended for residence permits, as if Russian cities and towns were foreign countries for their citizens, as well as marriages, and divorces. There was no space for Soviet citizenship, however.<sup>23</sup>

A Soviet Jew in Russia or Ukraine was under the impression that the “fifth line” was intended only to distinguish between Jews and non-Jews. In a popular anecdote, a Jew fills out the fifth line simply with “yes.” Being Armenian or Lithuanian had no consequences except when one was striving for a very high position in the party, government, or management. I believed that the only important distinctions were between Russians, non-Russians, and Jews. Other nationalities probably had their own perceptions.

I realized that I was different long before I got my passport. I was first asked about my nationality by teachers at school while answering questionnaires. Later, every application for any position had the fifth line.

When my mother and I came back to Kharkov from the safety of the Ural Mountains, the war was still on. My father was in the army, on his way from Stalingrad to Berlin. Kharkov had just recently been cleared of the Germans.

We got out of the train. Walking behind the horse cart loaded with our things, I was frightened by the destruction and poverty in the streets. For the first time I saw the ruins of multistory buildings with blocks and lumps of crushed concrete hanging on the bent reinforcement rods. I saw the black graffiti of the combat engineers on the walls of houses: “Checked. No mines,” and a signature. I saw people in rags, dirty homeless children, and emaciated adults. The residents were discussing the recent public hanging of several German officers in the marketplace. The German POWs were building a school across the street from our old apartment house. Many years later, my daughter would study there.

Luckily, our neighborhood was almost untouched by bombs, but our former apartment was taken. My grandparents, my mother, and I settled in a single room elsewhere. There were several families in the “communal” apartment. The single toilet, where I was forbidden to go, was down the long hallway. There was no bath of any kind.

The local school made a shocking contrast with the clean and neat school back in the Ural Mountains, far from the war. Foul language and fights were common. Most of the children were survivors of the German occupation. For the

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<sup>23</sup> The modern Russian passport is close to international norms. It has citizenship, but no nationality. Stamps of residence substitute for *propiska* and are said to play the same role.

first time I heard the word *zhid*, an old contemptuous Russian nickname for a Jew.

When my father came back from the war, he managed to find a two-room apartment in our old house. It had a toilet, but the bathtub was in the kitchen where an almost a quarter was taken by big brick oven fired with wood and coal. After a few years, we got natural gas and took the oven apart. I later used the metal bars as exercise weights.

Many Jews did not manage to leave Ukrainian cities when the Germans were approaching. The Germans ordered thousands remaining Jews in Kharkov to walk with their things to a ghetto in the far outskirts of the city and shot them, day after day, on the edge of a ravine. Around 90% of the pre-war Jewish population had left the city in time.

It became a tradition of our small refusenik community to go to the ravine on May 9, Victory Day. On the eve of that day, the dybbuks tried to intimidate us and prevent our action.

We had to walk about three miles from the last stop of the streetcar, through the fields, each carrying a few red tulips. A grove of fruit trees covered a mound where two elongated hills joined like the spread legs of a sleeping giant. There was a simple stela on the mound. It was said to be erected by a Jew whose relatives were buried there. The Jewish star was chiseled away by the authorities and the inscription mentioned only "victims of fascism."

A group of dybbuks with walkie-talkies used to wait for us in the grove. Some potential witnesses of our disorderly conduct picnicked on the grass with bottles of vodka.

We would surround the monument and lay down the flowers. Paul's daughter sang an Israeli song and we would go back to the streetcar stop. While we were standing in silence, I had a sharp feeling of the small historical distance that separated me and those whose bones were under my feet. It was impossible to comprehend the Holocaust. It was equally impossible to grasp that on the state holiday dedicated to the victory over fascism, the descendants of the victors tried to harass the descendants of the victims.

Before the Torah, my relatives had been my only Jewish roots.

My numerous uncles and aunts often visited us in Kharkov. Since there was no spare bed, someone had to sleep on the floor or on several suitcases shoved together. A sofa was bought later.

My father's six brothers and sisters represented the whole spectrum of the social status of Soviet Jews.

Aunt Polly, from a small provincial city, was the only religious Jew in our

family. She ate only kosher food and she used to bring kosher chicken and traditional delicacies when on a visit. A widow, she was mentioned in our family only with the epithet *poor* or *unlucky*, had almost no education, and spoke mostly Yiddish, a language that my mother understood but did not speak. For my father it was as good as Russian.

Aunt Sara in Moscow represented the opposite end of the social scale. She was a devoted Communist, worked at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, and was one of the editors of the posthumously published *Complete Works* by Lenin. She had been an organizer of the Soviet regime in a small city in Ukraine.

Aunt Sara lived in Moscow with her niece, Aunt Polly's daughter, who suffered from schizophrenia but had long remissions between rare fits. Her little son lived in the same room with them. Despite Aunt Sara's party privileges, three of them occupied a tiny room in a communal apartment, sharing the kitchen, toilet, and bathroom with twenty other people. Aunt Sara also took care of her old friend who had lost her hearing and could not work. Besides, Aunt Sara provided her less lucky brothers and sisters in other cities with some delicacies from a limited-access store for old Bolsheviks. One could never infer all that from listening to the dictatorial manner Aunt Sara treated her relatives.

During the revolution, Aunt Sara fell in love with a commander in the Red Army. He was wounded in the battle, paralyzed, and soon died. She had had no men in her life since then.

Uncle Joseph stood on the same step of the social ladder. He was one of the top figures in the Ukrainian printing industry. As an old Bolshevik, he, too, had access to a special store. He lived in Kiev in a luxurious apartment, which was a great contrast to the way the other brothers and sisters lived.

Aunt Rebekka lived in the city of Odessa at the Black Sea. Although her own family was less well off than anybody else, she took care of the elderly mother of the whole family.

I rarely saw my uncle Ezra, who lived far away from the rest of the family in the Ural Mountains. He was the only one among our family who did not return to Ukraine after the war.

Uncle Isaac worked in the sales department of a watch factory. His job required frequent business trips. He was a frequent guest in our house. As I realized later he was the most anti-Soviet member of my father's family. He hated the Soviet system and the Communists, and sometimes he shared his feelings with my father, who was also a party member.

My father, the youngest in the family, joined the party during the most difficult period of the war, during the battle for Stalingrad. It was a patriotic act on the battlefield.

In my presence, my aunts and uncles, except Aunt Sara and Uncle Joseph,

often spoke Yiddish among themselves but never taught it to children. That language kept the talk secret from the children for a very simple reason: the children did not have separate rooms of their own, and Yiddish allowed for some adult privacy. This is how the new generation of Soviet Jews, born in Soviet times, lost their own language.

Unfortunately, a lot of precious knowledge regarding the life of the older generations of Soviet Jews and the way they regarded the Soviets was lost. Most of Jewish history is a story of adaptation to alien environments. The Soviet experiment with the Jews was unique because, on the one hand, a Soviet Jew had no way to change his Jewish identity, and, on the other hand, discrimination during Soviet times was mild—that is, bloodless—by historical standards. I think that the study of Jewish adaptation to communism could shed a lot of light on the way the Jews had fit into the alien environments of the past.

There were, of course, conscious Communists among the Jews, but I believe the Jewish attitude toward the Soviet system was mostly either indifference or quiet contempt, both combined with complete conformity, as well as traces of superiority complex.

I never heard about any ideological arguments between my aunts and uncles. The family was very united. Family ties were, in fact, held above all else.

It was only a couple of years before her death that Aunt Sara, old Bolshevik Guard, told my father how much she disliked the Soviet leadership. Ironically, by that time she finally got a two-room apartment on the outskirts of Moscow. For the first time in her entire long life, she enjoyed a private bathroom.

I do not think she had ever been disappointed in the ideals of communism. She thought that the leader and his hangers-on were not true Communists. If it were not for bad people at the top, life would be better. It was a traditional Russian mentality, shared also by my mother.

My parents belonged to the Soviet middle class, another term that could be as misleading for Americans as the Soviet trade union, press, elections, court, and democracy.

Like the absolute majority of the Soviet middle class, my parents had neither a house nor a car. They lived with two children, a boy and a girl, in the apartment I described earlier. All four of us slept in the same room. We did not have anything expensive or fancy. However, we were among the first to have a refrigerator or the TV set with a tiny screen and a huge plastic lens filled with water. In the 1950s, appliances were first introduced to the Soviet consumer. We could buy any kind of food available in the stores—and nothing expensive was there.

What was much more important and what defined us as the middle class was that my parents did not work with their hands. Neither carrying heavy loads on their

backs nor digging ground with a shovel, they did not do the hard physical work that was so common in Russia for both men and women. It was, rather, off-white and not white-collar status.

My father dropped out of college before the war. He, the youngest in the family, was the only one among his brothers who served in the army from the beginning to the end of the war. He never forgave himself for not re-entered college after the war, when war veterans had a lot of privileges and benefits. His lack of education was fatal to his career, and his last job was close to blue-collar one.

My mother's family had much weaker ties with their Jewish heritage and with each other.

Uncle Daniel, the youngest, a member of a tank crew, was listed as missing in action since the first year of the war.

Uncle Boris was an electrical engineer. He served in the army for a short time during the last part of the war. Shortly before his death, he discovered, after a long search, his brother's grave.

Uncle Abraham also had a degree. He was an airplane designer, which exempted him from military service. He died at the age of fifty from a heart attack.

My mother graduated from a college of accounting, but for many years after the war, she did not work. After her two children had grown up, she resumed work.

Many family stories, secrets, destinies, confrontations, and dramas hide behind the formal list I have enumerated, and I regret very much that I was never interested in the life of my family until it was too late. Moreover, as a child, I was ashamed of such things as the religious zeal of Aunt Polly, the Yiddish accent of my relatives on my father's side, the anti-Sovietism of Uncle Isaac, the not too refined manners of my own father, and everything that was not modern and Soviet. I was critical of any visible trait of Jewishness I saw in the members of the family. Something similar happens with the children of Russian immigrants in America, who are critical of all things non-American in their parents, until they are grown up.

Needless to say, human life and health were sacred to Soviet Jews. They were not limited to any *nationality* and stood above all other values.

I was brought up mostly by my grandmother on my mother's side. Granny Esther spoke standard Russian, smoked Russian cigarettes, was a nurse by education, read a lot, and considered book the most valuable thing on earth. She passed that on to me, although, much later in my life, I gave my daughter this advice: "Books are books, and life is different." That notwithstanding, I was shaped totally by books, and so was my appreciation of freedom. Looking back, I can see that I have always been an extreme individualist.

My very first book, at the age of six, a year before I started school, happened

to be *The Mysterious Island* by Jules Verne, a gift from my cousin. I read and re-read the book for many years, understanding more and more, and by the time I understood it all, the book was just a loose bundle of yellow paper with lacerated edges, many pages lost, and no trace of the binding.

The book's four main characters, American abolitionists during the Civil War, were my first heroes, and the relationships among them fascinated me. My sense of justice was formed in large part by American abolitionism. The book's description of chemical processes ultimately made me a scientist.

*The Mysterious Island* was, in fact, second of the two major literary discoveries of my childhood. I realized that Cyrus Smith, the American engineer from *The Mysterious Island*, possessed a great power that was not physical strength but knowledge. I discovered the power of knowledge. It was the only thing I could use against all odds. If I needed a weapon to protect myself, science would be it. This is how a fictional American engineer became my ideal hero for many years to come.

From time to time, granny Esther supplied me with new books, such as *The Globe*, a kind of Soviet counterpart of *National Geographic* yearbook. With a good deal of it given to America, including illustrated reports about the New York World's Fair of 1939 and American national parks, I discovered the American dream early in my childhood. Initially, America was just a wonderland for me; later in my youth most of the American appeal to me was that it seemed to be ruled by creative reason.

Things were not bad in Russia, though. There were always Russian hamburgers (kind of Salisbury Steak), bread, and mashed potatoes with fried onions on the table of my childhood. I lived in the best country in the world. The Great Leader Stalin cared about all of us, as well as about the rest of the world, if not the universe.

Still, somehow I had a feeling of a dark menace looming on the horizon. It had something to do with my Jewish identity.

The turning point in the development of my self-awareness as a Jew was a small book that looked small even to a ten-year-old boy. It was about the Treblinka extermination camp.

I do not remember all the details. Many things in the book were beyond my understanding, like the procedure for making sulfuric acid in *The Mysterious Island*. One scene, however, stuck in my mind for the rest of my life. An elderly Jew was stripped naked and put on the table, all his hair was set afire, and he was made to dance among a crowd of laughing Nazis. There was nothing in the description that was beyond my understanding, except probably pubic hair, about which I had no clear idea.

The little book was the second of the two strongest literary impressions of



my childhood. It taught me that to be a Jew meant to be very different.

In my childhood, however, being a Jew was no big problem for me. I lived in a downtown neighborhood with a large Jewish population; it was the most prestigious place to live.

At that time, none of the schools was coeducational. I attended a school for boys and about one-third of my class was Jews. Close to half teachers were Jews and some had a heavy Yiddish accent.

Old and middle-aged men in crumpled white canvas suits and canvas shoes spoke Yiddish on street corners. To keep the shoes white, they painted them with a mix of tooth powder (just pure chalk; toothpaste was unknown) and milk.

Every second salesperson in stores was Jewish. Many managerial positions were held by Jews. A majority of leading scientists and musicians and the leading medical staff was mostly Jewish. There were many journalists and writers who had exchanged their Jewish names for pseudonyms.

How I or anybody else could know that somebody was a Jew without looking into his or her passport? The art of recognition did not required extrasensory perception. If the face outline, sad or sarcastic eyes, accent, intonation, and choice of words were not enough, the last name, if available, did the job in vast majority of cases. Ukraine was fine-tuned to such things. Siberia was not.

The world of canvas shoes was quickly disappearing, but I did not see it behind the wall built of books.

## *XIX*

### I AND US

**I** had no personal experience with state-sanctioned anti-Semitism until my graduation from the university. I did not believe either in that or in the quota for Jews in higher education, and not even in career ceilings. I trusted our teachers, radio, and books about the happy Soviet life of total equality. The book about Treblinka and the chilling image of the dancing Jew on fire was the only string that tied me to my people.

While many asked themselves whether the Communists were going to pick up where Hitler had left off, I had another problem. I had juvenile obesity, and I looked very funny in my own canvas suit and shoes painted with chalk powder and milk. Other children bullied me. I could not run fast. I tired easily. The prone position was the most appropriate for me. Therefore, I plunged deeper and deeper into the world of books. Soon I trusted them more than I trusted people. Books said nothing critical about life outside our two-room apartment with the bathtub right in the kitchen. The facial recognition routine occasionally failed in my case, which later in life caused awkward situations. Yet I was different enough even without my Jewish identity.

Once, on a visit, Uncle Isaac was telling my parents horror stories about torture in Soviet prisons, about rubber shirts used for beatings, so that the clubs would not leave marks on the skin. He then turned to America and to Jewish wellbeing there. He was talking about anti-Semitism in Russia, and, for some reason, he was speaking Russian in my presence.

"They beat up the Blacks in America," I interjected. I remember vividly how silence fell and how all eyes turned toward me. I remember the expressions on their faces and the looks my parents and Uncle Isaac exchanged. He switched to Yiddish.

No wonder I did not like Uncle Isaac, and no wonder I found him charming when I met him twenty years later. I learned much later that anti-Semitism had its own history in America.<sup>24</sup>

My Soviet patriotism was shaken when, in 1952, I witnessed a wave of anti-Semitism in the media after the "Doctors Plot," when a group of top Jewish doctors was accused of a conspiracy to murder party leaders. It was a dark time for Jews. Never before—and never afterward, except in the most recent times—was anti-Semitism preached openly in public places and in the press. Many thousands of Jews were purged from the practice of medicine and from the remaining top positions in management and science. Luckily, Stalin died in 1953. The Doctors Plot was recognized as a frame-up. The fired Jews were restored to their jobs, so they could be pushed out *quietly* later.

When I was close to the end of my last year at the university, the dean invited me to his office.

"I have a suggestion for you. We are going to send you to Moscow for postgraduate study. How does that sound to you? Do you have a place to live in Moscow?"

It sounded great. I would not even be able to dream about getting my doctorate in Moscow if I was not sent there to a position reserved for me. I was doing very well at the university. All my grades were As. The problem was where to live. My parents called Aunt Sara, and she agreed to take care of me. Her friend had died by that time and her room was available. The next time I saw the dean, I told him that I would be happy to go to Moscow.

"Sorry, but you should forget about it."

"But why? You said—"

"Sorry, there are some circumstances."

"What circumstances?"

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<sup>24</sup> Elections 2016 wiped off all my complacency about bigotry in the U.S.

"Well, there are some."

The Russian dean looked into my eyes with a strange expression that reminded me of the one on my Uncle Isaac's face when I tried to push him into a corner on racial injustice in America. The dean knew something that could not be spoken aloud to those who had not learned it in the street. But how could he have missed my identity written on my face?

After that awkward incident, Siberia, my only remaining way to postgraduate studies in Moscow, had the appeal of a tropical island.

With age and experience, I felt myself more and more Jewish, but it was a gradual transformation that, paradoxically, completed only after I had left the Ukraine for Siberia, where there seemed to be no anti-Semitism at all.

The Israeli war of 1967 made little impression on me. I supported Israel with all my heart, but Israel was so far away. Even Moscow was far away from Siberia. Israel seemed to have no relevance to my life.

Russian socialism, based on the primacy of collective over individual, strongly repelled me. The kibbutzim, although I knew little about them, looked typically Communist to me, and the enthusiasm of the Israeli pioneers seemed too familiar from the rosy Soviet movies of the 1930s.

I was afraid of socialism and enthusiasm. I had had too much of both in Russia. Besides, I could not accept the idea of a state religion, whatever it was. Only Jewish music and songs, which I heard from the Voice of Israel, deeply moved me. Whether it was Israeli euphoria or Yiddish sorrow, I loved it. Later, in prison, I did my exercise in the walking yard to Israeli tunes sounding in my head.

I also did not like the territorial expansion of Israel because the occupation would never prevent retaliation. The losers always have an advantage over the winners. They learn from their defeat, whereas the winners learn only complacency. The arithmetic was against Israel. Numbers were the major enemy of the Jewish land. I was a scientist and I believed in the aloof laws of numbers. Only reason is more powerful than numbers because it invents and manipulates them.<sup>25</sup>

For most of my life in Russia, there was only one source of knowledge about my own people. It was the commentaries to the Russian edition of *Collected Works* by Sholem Aleichem. The footnotes and endnotes explained Jewish terms, religious services, parts of clothing, holidays, quotations from the Torah, historical figures and events, prayers, and more. It was a small Jewish encyclopedia.

The real *Jewish Encyclopedia*, published in Russian before the revolution, was inaccessible in the libraries: a special permission was required. There was

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<sup>25</sup> I am afraid, Israel borrows the missing numbers from an unreliable bank, see previous footnote.

absolutely nothing available about Judaism, except some crude antireligious literature.

Once, when I was a postgraduate in Moscow, a graduate student and I explored an empty lab, which was under reconstruction, looking for some chemical goodies. We found in a drawer an abandoned New Testament and I read the Gospel for the first time in my life. What struck me most was that Jesus was a Jew and his story was part of Jewish history. With all my atheistic upbringing, I could see that there was something real behind the story. I had no idea why the Jews ignored Christianity and the Christians vilified Jews.

Soviet atheists used to say that the discrepancies in the four Gospels proved that the story was false. To me, an atheist, they proved the opposite. I did not believe in miracles, however. Any religious mysticism was completely alien to me.

To be a Jew in Russia meant to have a Jewish *nationality*, i.e., Jewish blood. So, if Jesus Christ was a Jew, why did the Christians hate the Jews? It was incomprehensible.

I was twenty-four years old then. It was not a good time for religious quest. My total ignorance graphically illustrated the complete religious vacuum in the Soviet spiritual life. For an average Soviet citizen the Scriptures were so rare that one could run across it only by accident.

I read the Old Testament for the first time when I was over forty. It was a lucky accident, too. My friend Mike borrowed the Bible from one of his patients, an old Ukrainian woman. I had about a week to read it.

The reading had a profound effect on me. Now I could trace my roots to the very beginning of everything, to God himself. The most sacred religion of my people, I thought, was nothing but history. I felt new pride in being a Jew. I was chosen not only for persecution, but also for glory.

Still, the comparison between the Old Testament and the New confused me. While the Old Testament was full of devastation, bloodshed, and murder, the New Testament preached love and humanity. The bloody price was the same, though.

In the winter of 1971, a traveling Jewish theater from Lithuania came to Krasnoyarsk. I felt a magnetic force pulling me there. It would be the first time I would expose myself as a Jew through an action, instead of my passport. It would mean that I was a Jew not only because the state said so, but also because I felt so. Would going to the Jewish theater have any consequences for my career?

I went to the first performance in the teacher's club, a drab, neglected two-story house that had probably belonged to a rich merchant before the revolution. It had a tiny ballroom used for meetings, recitals, amateur theater, and movies. Even that small place was almost empty. The audience consisted of either old or very young people; I may have been the only person who fell somewhere in between.

The actors performed *Tevye the Milkman*, by Sholem Aleichem.

I understood only some Yiddish words. That was a problem for the younger people in the audience, too. There was a constant humming of old people translating the play for their grandchildren.

The actors were diligent but rather amateurish. Nevertheless, the play turned something inside me.

I also went to the company's second play, a modern drama. The third performance was a concert, in which a young woman sang Yiddish songs. Onstage she looked beautiful and tall. I saw her in the staircase, during a break, and found her surprisingly short. Art elevated her.

The concert affected me deeply. I felt like an orphan who had just discovered that his parents were not just alive but looking for their lost child. The characters on the stage, the songs, even the language that I did not speak were definitely my own. That was an overwhelming revelation. Soviet life could not give me anything like that.

Those three performances reverberated in me for a long time. Since then, I never missed buying a record of Jewish music on the rare occasions that I ran across one in a music store.

Still, there was a big gap between the world of Sholem Aleichem and the world of the Bible. Something was missing. I discovered what was missing only in the refusal. It was the Talmud.

I did not become a Zionist.

When I thought about the Jews, I felt that the mentality of the people I knew was shaped not by the years of the Kingdom but by the centuries of the diaspora. The cultural heritage of the Jews was for me not something that could be called real estate. Nor was it architecture, arts, or monuments. The culture of the Jews could easily fit into the bag of a pilgrim. The Jewish heritage was the spirit that was carved on the pages of the sacred books and transferred through generation even in their absence. This is why it was impossible to destroy it.

However, as soon as the Jews have army and real estate—land, houses, anything destructible, disputable, or in need of defense—they become people like anybody else.

I thought the spirit of the Jews had nothing to do with statehood. It was a dream: to have a Jewish homeland where every Jew would be safe. It was one of many human dreams—Christian dreams, Communist dreams, and so on.

Israel was supposed to be the only country where there was no anti-Semitism. In fact, Israel appeared to be a rolling and pitching ship in the largest and most turbulent sea of anti-Semitism in all of human history. The neighbors had their

own sacred book, in which Jews and Christians were mentioned by name and in anything but nice and friendly words, quite like the capitalists in Karl Marx' writings.

I believed that only reason could protect a smaller people from a much larger one. War and reason, however, were incompatible by definition. A state at war is driven not by reason but by the desire for victory, sometimes at any price. I was already living in such a country. A state at war has no other choice but to fight, and when there is no choice, there is no freedom. Victory at any price still looks to me a potentially self-defeating goal. I could be wrong, however, and in this particular case, I hope I am.

Since childhood, I had thought that the people with Jewish *nationality* in their passports were a better people because they were smarter, better educated, more caring about children and relatives, more honest, and more responsible—and because they did not drink themselves under the table.

I thought that Jews could not cheat, steal, kill, deprive, or terrorize. They were not born better, but they had to *be* better, and they had to prove it, as in sports.

I cannot remember seeing any Jew under the table. As for the rest, my image of the Jews was generally false.

Jewish Communists in Russia were no better of their Russian counterparts. They participated in the revolutionary terror. They accounted for a substantial segment of the slave drivers and overseers. This is why modern Russian anti-Semites blame the entire Soviet history on Jews.

I was very surprised to learn in prison about famous Jewish criminals, such as gangster Rabinovich from Kharkov, who would slowly saw his victim's leg off to find out where the money was. I learned in America about the Jewish mafia.

My experience in the refusal also seemed to confirm that the Jews were just people like anybody else, with no superiority of any kind.

Yet never in my whole life had I witnessed any Jew expressing anything like hate toward all Russians as a nation, while some Russians I met passionately and obsessively hated Jews. That was the biggest possible plus for the Jews in my eyes. Unfortunately, as the murder of Yitzhak Rabin showed the world, the Jews were quite capable of hating each other.

Probably, what made me think in my youth that the Jews were better was also an idealized compensatory self-image of somebody who lived in a hostile environment. Probably, it was a difference in the system of values. Probably, it was the leading position of Jews in science and the performing arts at the time of my childhood. Probably, it was because of my individualism.

The Jews I knew always appreciated reason more than force. That was

something I could sympathize with. All Jews cared about tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. They tried to look ahead. The Jews relied not on an abstract global human reason, which everybody understands differently, but on their own.

Most appealing of all was the fact that the Soviet Jews remained individualists in a totalitarian state. This is something I can fully appreciate only here, in America, where individualism is the foundation of the system.<sup>26</sup>

I saw in Zionism the familiar intent, on a mass scale, to give priority to an idea over an individual. Instead of the Russian opposition between *us* and *them*, it was an opposition between *I* and *us*. That was—and is—something that an ardent individualists (and, probably, idealist) like me is unable to accept.

Russian socialism fostered the ambitious individualism of Soviet Jews. "Every Soviet Jew believes that the Jews are the smartest people in the world and that he is the smartest among all Jews." That is how I summarized my major impression about the Jews in refusal. I did not want to be that way.

I am afraid of any priority of the corporate over the individual. I believe that any mass cruelty is based on a collectivist mentality. For an individualist all people in the world are equal, although they are not equal to him. An individualist poses no danger for the world because one never makes an army. Collectivism—nationalism is one of its forms—always divides the world into "good guys" and "bad guys" so that two armies can be drafted for bloodshed.

For a resident of Soviet Russia, socialism was not an abstract idea but everyday reality. Russia was poisoned by the primacy of an abstract idea over basic human needs.

The American idea is also a concept of primacy. It is the only sound idea of primacy because it is nothing but the sacred right of all to pursue their basic human needs. With my eyes adapted to the Soviet collectivism, I see American materialism as a true idealism, but I do not expect to be understood: where can one put realism in this game of words?

In Rome, on our way to America, I met a woman from Israel who was the sister of a famous refusenik still held captive in Russia. I was overwhelmed by her anger against all Jews who did not live in Israel.

"Those who stay in America are not real Jews. Only we Israelis are real Jews. The American Jews think we should be grateful to them for their help. We can do without them. We don't need their help. They should be grateful to us because we fight for them. They must go to Israel if they consider themselves Jews. You too must go to Israel. Only traitors go to America."

Her words smacked of typical Soviet mentality. "There is only one truth,

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<sup>26</sup> "No man is an island" and that is why individualism goes hand in hand with idealism.



and only we know it, and if you are not with us, you are our enemy.” That was the very essence of every totalitarian and despotic ideology.

She was the second Jewish nationalist I had met, after Machine Gun Jacob.

"On the one hand, yes, we are all Jews; therefore you should help us. On the other hand, no, you are not really Jews; don't poke your nose into our politics."

I can vividly imagine a Jewish commissar in a black leather jacket with a Mouser gun, speaking Russian with a Yiddish accent, knowing very well that he who is not with us is against us, inebriated by power after a subjugation of the shtetl, holding the great revolution, and shooting the enemies of the people.

Gary's uncle was a famous red commissar and his name was mentioned in textbooks of Soviet history. So was my aunt Sara, an editor of Lenin's Collected Works. The colors of the young people from *Irgun* were different—white and blue. Bright and courageous, they could sacrifice their lives, but, with the same detachment, they could splash the red on the white and blue and sacrifice the lives of others without asking for consent.

In Kharkov, when our first puppy died of distemper, I was very upset. I told my friend Leo, who was later sentenced for refusing to testify at my trial and who happened to love dogs, "She did not even know what summer looked like."

"Take it easy; it is just a dog," he said.

The same year, I discussed Israeli's invasion of Lebanon with Leo. I was worried that the invasion would cast a shadow over the image of Israel. "Take it easy," Leo said, "They are just Arabs."

The Gulf War, although Israel did not take part in it, had a much stronger impact on me than the war of 1967. For the first time I realized what kind of neighbors Israel had to deal with.

I saw very clearly that Israel had *no choice* but to be strong and to defend herself. Israel and her neighbors were as incompatible as Americans and Soviets. Like an individual, the country that has *no choice* is not free. The choice between life and death, however, is beyond freedom and philosophy. It is just physiology.

All my life experience has taught me that we have to take a stand. I cannot accept the Soviet "on the one hand, yes; on the other hand, no." I would not hesitate to take sides. Still, the conflict between physiology and philosophy has always been a scratchy issue for me.

During my last year in the camp I had an opportunity to better understand what kind of physiological choice a besieged nation can have. I felt it on my own skin, and it was another illustration of my fixation on the similarity between a person and a country.

XX

## THE MOUSETRAP

It was Thursday, the bath day.

I went to the storeroom and took from the closet my fabric bath bag with my name on it. For over one hundred inmates in the barrack, there were only about a dozen fabric bags with a spare towel or boxers. Other zeks would have nothing to put in bags.

The zeks' code of manners called for politeness, hospitality, mutual help, and tidiness. It was not the law of the jungle, as I had expected it to be. It was a primitive but consistent culture, and a new Teilhard de Chardin could find in prison a lot of curious ethnographic material. In the stringent vertical stratification into castes, as well as in the horizontal communal geopolitics, the law ruled the relations among groups, not individuals.

A *family* usually included people from the same region, city, or even neighborhood. They had an obligation to support each other. The European part of Russia was so far away that for an aborigine there was no difference between its various cities and villages. All of the Russians from afar were compatriots.

The first task for every newcomer at the labor camp was to find a family. It had an obligation to welcome him with a bucket of tea and to supply him with spare underwear, socks, towel, and handkerchief, if it had any. If it had not, the family had to find, extort, or take it away from somebody else, although to steal from each other was a crime. That was a conundrum.

As an individualist, I had no family, and I had the bag to myself. Half of my things had been given to me by Al, the foreman, the other half came from home in rare parcels, three of them a year, but only after half my term was behind.

Most zeks did not have anything to store. They used to sew a couple of boxer underpants at the factory, and that was all. Those with only one set of underwear had to put their uniforms over the naked body while the washed underwear was drying.

I took a terry towel and a clean change of underwear. I put all that into a plastic bag and added a bar of bath soap from the store and a bar of stinking laundry soap dispensed in the camp. Last time I had seen it was right after the WW2.

"Get out for the bath!" the foreman shouted. "Line up!"

The zeks did not budge. It was -40°F outside. A few of us were sticking to the walls of the hallway, waiting for the rest to be ready, so that we would not have to wait for them in the frost. I tried to accumulate some heat, pressing my hands in knitted gloves to the radiator pipe.

I was pulling myself together for the battle over the washbasins. I tried to chase away the thought about the way back, in the frost, with my body steaming after bathing. I knew a very good trick against catching cold. I had to strain as many muscles as possible and to get angry at something, no matter what or who.

"Get out, you bastards! Line up! We're late!" the foreman shouted again. He still had to shout several times more. It was all routine.

There was no wind in the yard. After a couple of minutes, I felt the frost. First, it started biting the inside of my nostrils. Then I felt it with the tip of my nose. Then the frost started stroking my cheeks with hands in sandpaper gloves. Finally, I felt it through my pants. Only the padded jacket, Nick's gift, protected me well. By the time most of the zeks had come out, I was jumping because the cold had reached my feet.

The fence-netted roof of the yard was covered by thick hoarfrost wherever warm wet air streamed out of the windows and the door. Every tiny chink produced a trickle of vapor, which condensed above into needlelike snowflakes slowly falling on the ground.

The sun was low above the roof of the other barrack across the alley. Through the vertical bars of our cage, it was just a diffuse spot in the misty sky.

"Open the door, you billy-goat!" the zeks were yelling at the doorman sitting in his concrete booth. "Bring me the foreman, you faggots," he responded. Formally, he could open the door only on the request of the foreman. Two iron gates formed a trap between them.

The foreman appeared, and we rushed out in disorder, despite his cry of "Line up!" We made a column on our way. We walked past the pile of coal at the kitchen, across the central plaza, the central alley between the cages of the eighth, ninth, and fifth barracks on the left and the wooden fence of the working zone on the right, turned left between the fifth brigade and the hospital, turned left again between the fence of the punishment block on the right and the quarantine block on the left, then over the pile of coal between the laundry on the left and the outer fence on the right.

It was a wonderful trip around the world, although all those things visible behind the fence from the top of the coal pile were strange objects without any use or meaning in my life: the roofs of houses and an occasional bus were plastic cucumbers.

The cages, flat-roofed barracks, fences edged with barbed wire, coal pile, and grated windows belonged to my world. They were grim and ugly, but the walk was full of excitement. It was like the time when I was four or five years old and was taken on a stroll over the streets of my neighborhood. Many things in the street were beyond my comprehension, such as the sculpted lion in a niche under the balcony of a pretty mansion. It had no meaning but still attracted my attention and stirred up a mixture of anxiety, fear, surprise, and curiosity. Now so did the roofs seen over the edge of the camp fence. I was not sure I would ever be able to adapt to life outside the camp and to its frightening complexity.

The front zeks began to run. The bath was around the last corner, on the other side of the laundry. The hoarfrost over its windows was the thickest.

I began to run too, but the door of the bath was locked. Dozens of zeks were pressing against each other on the steps. I joined the crowd. We were waiting for the bath attendant to open the door.

I used a scientifically proven strategy of pushing through the crowd and getting closer to the door.

It was the ratchet-and-pawl principle. I had to arrange my movement as an irreversible process, like the transformation of the pendulum swing into the clock hand rotation. I did not elbow anybody. I had no need to struggle with the crowd. I was in constant motion, and I merely waited for an occasional favorable moment to wedge myself further between two bodies moving apart. Therefore, all I had to do was to wriggle and press steadily in the direction of the door.

I learned that technique from clockwork, as well as from the Soviet foreign policy. That was the strategy of Soviet expansion—to wait for an opportunity, grab what was unguarded, never give the enemy a chance, and never give up what was

taken.

The bath attendant appeared. He was as experienced in making his way through the crowd as only the Secretary General of the United Nations can be. We barged into a small dressing room with two racks for clothes, two wooden benches, and several wooden trellises on concrete floor. Curls of icy mist were rolling into the dressing room through the open door, over our heads, and between our legs.

The room had two large windows completely covered with a blanket of hoarfrost. Broken pieces of glass in the windowpane were replaced by torn polyethylene film. Cold air was pouring through holes. Still, it was warm in the room after the outdoor chill.

Nobody even stopped in the dressing room. We rushed into a much bigger bath hall set with long wooden benches. Pipes with huge primitive faucets ran along the walls, and tinplate basins were stacked on the benches next to the entrance.

There was always a shortage of basins for a brigade as large as ours. Zeks used to fetch more basins for their families than they needed, and that was a problem for a loner like me.

I grabbed a basin, took it back to the dressing room, and undressed as quickly as I could. After hanging my uniform on the rack, barefoot, with the basin and dirty underwear in my hands, I walked over the cold floor to the bath hall. It was cold there, too, and thick glaciers flowed down the windowpanes. Now that I had gotten hold of a basin, I had only one remaining wish—to get back to the barrack as soon as possible.

There was already a line for water, and it was moving ahead slowly because the flow was sluggish. When my turn came, I discovered that my basin had a leak. Besides, only scalding water was available. I went around asking for a spare basin, and I was unbelievably lucky to find two.

A heavy stone fell from my heart. Even a small stroke of luck in the camp can make a zek's day. Instinctively, the prisoner assumes that any chip of good fortune must have come from a whole block of it somewhere. If I had been lucky enough to find the basin, then perhaps someday I would be back home and even out of the country. My logic made transcontinental leaps.

The hall was filled with the sounds of streaming splashing water and the voices muffled with vapor. Most of the bodies were rough and bent, most faces grotesque. Dirty jokes, smell of sweat, and the reek of the kitchen soap were spreading in the mist.

One is well aware in the camp that all body parts are created equal. Nevertheless, the sight of some penises with plastic balls and bars stuffed asymmetrically under the skin was sickening. One young man in the early stage of this operation had threads sticking out his foreskin, which brought me close to

fainting. I turned my eyes away and moved to the icy window. I breathed in the refreshing air, oblivious to the cold air stream rolling down my chest.

The zeks were preparing themselves for the free life. They wanted to be successful with women, and they hoped to achieve that with penises that, ideally, should look like corncobs. Yet the surgery by zek experts was expensive and only a few could afford it.

Women in this world were chimerical creatures, like mermaid or sphinx. The world seemed to consist of only one sex with dangling appendages between the legs. The camp was a breeding ground of homosexuality and male prostitution. Active homosexuality was considered normal for an honest zek. Some thieves did it openly. Passive homosexuals were at the very bottom of the devils. They were supposed to be paid for their service, but they did it under threat. Most of them had been straight. Here they were raped and converted into "gals."

The scalding water made my hands red. I put the basin on the sill and pressed it to the layer of ice. This water was for rinsing.

First, I had to wash my underwear. One thing was good about the hot water: the occasional lice (not a common occurrence in the camp) in the underwear would be killed.

I soaked my things, soaped them on the bench, and rinsed by spilling water over them slowly, handful by handful. This my technique was inspired by chemical method called chromatography. The constant flow of fresh water in one direction through the fabric, however slow, pushed the soapy water out of it without mixing with the fresh one. In this way, I could do with less water. I had no need to refill the basin and cool the water again.

I put the washed things on the hot-water pipe. The next problem was to wash myself. There was no shower, so the only way to do that was to wet the body, soap it, and then pour water over myself. One basin had to do for all that. This was the way Russian peasants had washed themselves, using wooden basins, for hundreds of years. The zeks did not mind this kind of bath. They were scrubbing each other's backs, enjoying the heat and steam.

The prison and the camp were a complete reversal of my former way of life. This world bore no apparent resemblance to my past world, except the principles on which it was built. Even my thoughts were different. It was amazing to see my own body, which was the only remaining firm evidence of my former life. It had not changed much, unlike my face in the mirror. My body was now my best friend, who secretly came from the past to save and protect me. I was totally dependent on it.

A group of devils patiently stood at the wall, still dressed, in the steam and heat. They had to wait until we left. Then they would wash themselves in a hurry, put on wet freshly washed clothes, clean the bath hall, and return to the barrack, taking the risk of being caught outside the cage without a foreman.

The final step of the bath performance was coming. The zeks were leaving the hall one by one, holding the basins with some fresh water. My place was close to the door. Each time the door was open, cold air blew over my legs.

I was finished. Holding my basin in both hands, I pushed the door with it. I walked into the cold dressing room, barefoot, over the dirty concrete floor covered with the coal dust brought in on the soles of the boots. The heat stock in my body would last for three minutes while I dried and dressed myself. This is why I carefully hung all my clothes beforehand—so as not to waste even a second while getting dressed.

I was bumping into naked bodies, and I was glad I felt disgust. It was proof that I still was "normal," as one would say in Russia, or straight, as one would say in America.

Like everybody, I used the water left in the basin to wash my stained feet. The water immediately turned black. First I put on my boxers. Then I had to put one leg through my trousers and into a sock and boot. I repeated the same with the other leg. The rest was easy.

I was as proud of my bathing aptitude and of the good fortune with the basin, as I could be proud of solving a scientific problem.

With my high boots on, I returned to the bath hall to collect the washed things and soap. The devils were undressing.

Dressed, we were waiting in the anteroom filled with the acrid smoke of cheap coarse tobacco<sup>27</sup>, familiar to me, like the soap, from the war years. The ice on the windowpane posed no threat anymore. I felt I had enough heat stored for the way back. When we were walking past the laundry, I climbed onto a pile of coal. Nothing had changed: the free world looked like a kitschy painting on oilcloth.

We came back to the barrack, and I hung the wet underwear on the head of the bunk. We still had fifteen minutes left before supper. I walked to the TV room to watch the news. Nothing could be better. The Soviet people united around their dear party led by the true follower of Lenin. The union of the party and the people was as solid as the rock of Gibraltar. Aggressive American imperialism put world peace in jeopardy. It threatened to disrupt the peaceful life of the Soviet people. Our dear party would do everything possible to preserve peace and will fight for it, tooth and nail.

It was 1984, and war was peace. The peaceful USSR was waging war in Afghanistan, tooth and nail.

The bath day was over. It was the hardest day of the week because there was too much chaos. I spent a lot of energy trying to reduce the chaos because the procedure of bathing required a carefully calculated sequence of small acts.

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<sup>27</sup> *Nicotiana rústica*, Aztec tobacco, *Makhorka*.

I needed to replenish my energy. I took an extra piece of bread left over from lunch dinner and slowly savored it.

Fenced off from the real world, I felt free in the world of abstractions, ideas, and theories. I had no contestants, no rivals, no critics, and no judges there. It was the individualist paradise. Nobody could reveal either my stupidity or my ignorance. I enjoyed the unrestricted gliding in my own fantasy skies, watching my own mental scenery from the height of my own head.

My planet, fed three times a day, did not face an energy crisis. There were no regional conflicts and no environmental problems.

My only problem was Truba, the officer in command of my brigade. He was my worst nightmare.

As love puts one person into the center of the small space to which the other person retreats, while the outside world recedes to the stars and the moon, so does hate.

I got into prison at the ideal age for this kind of adventure. The impatience of my youth had cooled down. I had acquired education, knowledge, and experience. I had a more balanced view of life and was able to see myself soberly even though I could not always control myself.

I got used to cold, hunger, lice, concrete floors as bedding, constant stress, uncomfortable positions, and occasional—not constant—pain. This is not to say I lost my sensitivity to all that. I did suffer. But hardship was already something familiar. I knew what to expect, and I knew it would end sooner or later.

A human enemy was so different! This time I hated a human being with all my heart. It was Truba, and he did not care at all.

The whole bloody history of communism, Stalinism, Gulag, Czechoslovakia, refusal, Afghanistan, dybbuks, plus all the memoirs and fiction I had read about the butchers of Nazi concentration camps and their victims, and all the injustice inflicted on me by my native country joined in an enormous whirlpool around Truba, and I was being sucked into it. I was psychotic.

Although Truba, like any human being, was a universe of his own, he was not my equal. He was not one of my kind. He did not deserve my. My hate was as blind as only love can be. It was misdirected. He was nothing but a tool and could do nothing to me without orders from his superior. Still, I felt very uneasy when I imagined that Truba could experiment with me on his own, just to satisfy his professional curiosity, and that he could provoke me to do something I would later regret.

Serge the burglar once told me how he was questioned by a criminal police investigator when he had been caught. They put him into a cell with a barred door.



He could see through the door the wall clock at the far end of the corridor. The ments took him to the office, on regular schedule, for a harsh beating. They jumped on his chest while his hands were held down by the high boots of the assistants. After the beating, they would return him to his cell and promise to come again at the set time. Although he could more or less stand the beating because it was part of his professional life of a burglar, the worst torture, he said, was watching the slow movement of the clock hands toward the time set for another beating.

It realized that, however different were the reasons and motives that could bring different people into prison, there were some basic prison skills that everybody needed equally, and there were hardships suffered equally by all. Scientist or burglar—we were colleagues.

I was a zek like all other zeks, and even though I tried to reject prison life and consider myself internally free, I was a captive. Prison was supposed to suppress my will, my resistance, and all my self-control. The institution of captivity and prison was thousands of years old, whereas I was still under fifty. It was hard to stand up against the product of such a long uninterrupted evolution. I failed in this game.

My heart sank each time I saw the familiar figure in the long greatcoat. My heart was wrenched not only by the sound of his name shouted out as a warning by a zek on watch but even by the incidental innocent word *truba* (pipe) on the radio or the appearance of that word in a book. It was not fear of Truba himself, bound by his instructions. I was afraid of my own hatred and of a potential loss of self-control in a surge of the blind psychotic fury I knew I was capable of.

After a talk with Truba, I felt a painful pulsation in my lower back, which I attributed to kidney problems. But there was something else. Truba bore an association with the punishment cell. He was the messenger, the herald of torture. He was the hands of the wall clock, and I never knew if the clock was showing the correct time.

I was trapped by my own nature. As usually, when harassed, my only way to ease the internal tension and fear was my readiness to suffer and my determination to endure anything the dybbuks could do to me. My soul was an arena for the match between physiology and philosophy, and the boots of both heavily armed contestants trampled me without mercy.

I was still experimenting. Secretly I wished to know my limits as well as to take pride in the successful fight for survival. I wanted to know how far the dybbuks would go. My body had to pay for the perverse curiosity of my mind. This is how I betrayed my body, my secret savior from the past.

It is much easier to endure physical pain when there are some breaks from it than to overcome our own nature that never gives us a rest.

During my years of fervent book reading, I came across several books about heroes who were tortured but did not give up. Such books bothered and depressed

me. I wondered if I could stand such things, and I saw that I probably would not.

What would I do if they passed high voltage through my genitals, put me barefoot on a metal ring with a sharp edge, or thrust a sharpened wooden stick into my anus?

When I had been a devoted Soviet schoolboy, I was blessing my dear Soviet Motherland, which protected and defended me and would never put me into a situation where enemies would break my bones and torch my face as they had to captured underground guerrillas during the war.

In the refusal, considering the possibilities of torture, maiming, and even death in prison, I tried to prepare myself. Theoretically, I accepted the possibility. When I thought about it, however, I felt cramps somewhere between my legs. It seemed to me that I did not fear anything, but who knows what would happen had I really been tortured.

Many times in my life, I had had a chance to see that our inability to foresee the future was the greatest blessing of human nature. People in the Gulag suffered much more than I did. Still, what happened to be my share was incomparably more than I had expected before I got into prison, and I used to inflict most of it myself.

Despite all my comfortable philosophy, each time I was brought into contact with Truba I got close to losing my self-control. If I wanted to be a stone, it was only to hit that hateful face between the eyes whose color I did not even remember. I never looked Truba right in the eyes so I could conceal my hate.

The year 1984, after four stints of corrective therapy in the punishment block, finally ended. I had survived it.

By the spring of 1985, I had reached equilibrium with the camp environment. Dybbuks did not harass me. My physical strength was coming back to me and I could even stand on my feet throughout the whole shift. Two years of the term were over. I had only one year left.

Something was going on in the outside world. Within a short time, three living corpses had fallen off the Russian throne. History seemed to be doubling and tripling its pace. Gorbachev came to power, and he was speaking about new things, although in the old language.

For the first time, dybbuks openly appeared in the camp. They took other *politicals* one by one for a talk, but not me. Neither my friends nor I could understand the purpose of those talks. As always, dybbuks spoke in a professional slang that never stated anything directly and clearly. This time, my friends told me, the dybbuks were neither aggressive nor threatening.

Gorbachev appeared good-natured but used to get irritable when backed into

a corner. He looked neither intelligent nor kind, neither honest nor straightforward. He did not display any quality in an affirmative way. His essence seemed to be the lack of extremes. The Russian folk saying "Neither fish nor meat" fit him well. He spoke a decent but not cultivated Russian and was not as rough and corny as his predecessors were, although not polished either. He used to give long rambling speeches full of meaningless words and devoid of a clear overall message, dybbuk-style. He denied any political persecution in Russia, any violation of human rights, and any such thing as the refusal.

Soon I had a chance to discuss the new turn with Nick. We were standing in the yard of the working zone, hiding from both ments and the stingy cold wind, amid the huge packages of pressed fabric scraps. Our eyes were instinctively scanning the yard. It was empty. The wind had blown everybody away.

"He has big plans and ambitions. He wants to change all that," Nick said about Gorbachev. "With time, however, he will see that it is impossible, and he will be concerned only with his survival, like all of his predecessors."

With Gorbachev, the idea expressed by the state leader, however obliquely, that communism did not work—it was something really new.

Nowadays we can contemplate the bloody history of ancient Rome without the passions of contemporary participants and witnesses. We can enjoy the solemn beauty of a process that had its own logic, from birth to burial. I am sure, in fifty years, a historian will be able to render a dispassionate narration of the dramatic story of Russia in the twentieth century, so that readers will enjoy the natural consistency, logic, and magnificence of the rise and fall of the Soviet idea. Russia is waiting for both her Shakespeare and her Michener.

In the spring of 1985, my shy hope was growing. I regained not only my external equilibrium but also an internal balance. Gary and I corresponded on scientific matters. I was receiving all major literary magazines. The dybbuks seemed to forget about me.

As before, my wife wrote to me every day. I used to get a bunch of her letters once or twice a week, after they had been censored. I was happy to know that my family did not suffer poverty, and I concluded that the distant and mysterious America was supporting my family, as it was helping many others. So, America existed indeed. With self-censored letters excluding any details, however, my picture of the U.S. was still out of focus.

On the night shift, there was no search at the gate from the work zone. We walked in disarray through the sleeping zone like free people. We barged with loud stomping into the barrack, and soon I was asleep.

All my leisure time, including my watching stars on the night shift and daily writing in my notebook, was not more than an hour a day, but it was enough to make me feel the fragile morbid happiness experienced only in prison, when life is routine. The roll call, search, bath, barbed wire, filth, dust, reek, cold, foul language, and

violence around me—all that seemed to pass me over. I was crossing out day after day in my homemade calendar, and I was adding page after page to my notebook.

Life in the camp in 1985 could be a sheer delight if not for Truba. He was the focus of my mania. He was picking on me, lightly, carefully, watchfully, like a bird pecking at a worm. He made me stand on duty at the entrance of the brigade. "If you don't, I will punish you," he said. It was my turn, true. It was considered impossible for "honest" zeks to stand on duty, so only devils did it. I thought it would be unjust to pick a devil instead of me, as the foreman suggested. So I stood by the door. The brigade seemed not to care at all.

The other day, instead of a scheduled political hour, Truba ordered the brigade to turn on the TV and watch a football game while he left. I went back to my place and opened my notebook. When Truba appeared, he came right to my spot.

"You missed the political hour, convict Lutsky," he said. "Next time I will punish you."

His "I will punish you" used to drive me crazy. My heart was pounding in my chest. I felt powerless fury and physical weakness. I felt chest pain for the first time in my life. Worst of all, after one of his "I will punish you" threats, blind spots appeared in my eyes. My health began to deteriorate again. My thoughts whirled in circles around Truba, and I was picturing fantastic scenes of revenge.

There were only two people in the camp who enjoyed beating zeks, one of them Truba. The absolute majority of ex-teachers and career guards, in fact, would not touch a zek. A common guard would use force only if a zek was asking for it with his behavior. Some officers occasionally would lightly punch an underdog who was too slow, but without any hostility. Intentional cruelty was extremely rare, and always attributable to a sadistic personality, not to the regimen.

Actually, the restraint of the officers and guards, in an environment that provoked cruelty, had a simple explanation. On the one hand, an abusive officer could elicit an instant response from a deranged zek. The latter would not care about anything, and if not in the camp, then after the zek was released, he would take revenge. On the other hand, zeks and ments were tied together by the business of smuggling.

Truba used to beat zeks without distinction. Once I saw him using a wooden board to beat an emaciated zek who was old enough to be his father. The poor zek was running away between the sewing machines. He was screaming pitifully, like a hurt dog. He escaped Truba and his board only when he ducked under a table.

Another time, in the middle of the winter, Truba took two zeks outside the working barrack and reprimanded them at length, purposely dragging out the task,

while icy wind was tearing at the jacketless, bareheaded men. He released them when he noticed me watching.

I was falling apart. The most reasonable thing was not to defy him and to do what he wanted. After all, formally, he did not want anything beyond the regimen. However, I was losing my self-control together with my mind. Two years at the camp were taking their toll.

Nick was watching my paranoia disapprovingly. I despised myself but was unable to do anything about it.

I began to talk with the zeks about Truba. I was collecting information. I was digging him a pit. The images of my revenge flared in my brain more brightly than any love scene.

That was the time I felt like a tiny Israel amid hostile neighbors. My liberal ideas faded away. Liberalism is not good for survival. Secretly, however, I was ashamed of setting a mousetrap for Truba.

During the day, from time to time, I would emerge from the barrack to check my eyes against the gray skies. When I blinked, I could see new blind spots. I felt fury and despair, and my hate was as vast and dull as the cloudy skies.

Gradually my scheme began to take shape in my mind. It was dirty. At the same time, I was happy to be able to defend myself, because keeping my fate in my own hands was an overriding general principle that contradicted my temporary pragmatism of being a passive victim in captivity.

I collected written testimonies from four zeks who had been beaten by Truba. By chance, I got a unique opportunity. I saw Truba kicking an elderly zek right in the coccyx with his high boot. I suggested to the zek that he see a doctor but not reveal who had kicked him. Such cases usually had to be investigated by internal security. After the doctor had seen the bruise and recorded the case, I asked the zek for a written statement. That was all I needed.

I sent the package, together with my note, to the prosecutor, as was permitted. Meanwhile, the security officer summoned the zek and asked who had beaten him. The officer was surprised by the answer, but he recorded the complaint.

Soon I was called to the watch to pick up a parcel from home. In the alley, I met Truba. He stopped me.

"Where are you going, convict Lutsky? Walking outside your brigade without the foreman is forbidden. I will punish you."

I lost my self-control in an instant. At the same time, I instinctively found the best way to knock Truba off.

"Many things are forbidden. It is forbidden to beat convicts. You are not afraid to be punished, are you?"

For the first time I looked straight into his eyes. They were brown, turbid, and bloodshot. Or so they seemed.

"You know what, Lutsky? Don't forget where you are. This is a labor camp. Anything can happen to you in here."

"Do I understand you correctly, Citizen Superior?" I addressed him in the prescribed way for the first time. "Are you threatening to kill me because I want to stop your abusing the convicts?"

"I did not say that!" Truba was worried.

"Yes, you did. That is exactly what you just said."

Truba did not know what else to say. "You can go, Lutsky."

I went on my way.

Was that the final test of the weapon of intellect I had been developing all my life since *The Mysterious Island*—a cheap dirty ploy with a simpleminded prison guard? I felt the familiar pounding of pulsating blood in my back.

I took my parcel to the brigade—a piece of salted pork fat, which was a standard enclosure in every prison parcel. Neither milk in any form, nor sausage was permitted. There was some dried fruit, American vitamins without the packing, American peanut butter, two American pens, and two boxes of hotel courtesy matches, also American, which I asked my wife to send me as gifts for zeks.

At the barrack, I wrote a letter to the warden. I accused Truba of threatening to kill me. I took the letter to the mailbox at the watch. I did not care if anybody stopped me.

Truba avoided me for a week. I was in a state of high anxiety. Finally, the unbelievable happened.

I spotted Nick entering our cage with his things. A young zek was carrying Nick's mattress—the sign of respect in camp.

"Hi! They have exchanged us," he said. "You are going to take my place."

I would have preferred to get rid of Truba completely, but this was also an acceptable solution.

When I compared my Jewish stratagem with the Christian position of Nick, who seemed unable to take revenge and did not like my blind hatred of Truba, I felt bad. There is no neat war, even if you win it with reason.

I felt that what I had done was shameful. Certainly, I did it for self-protection, but Truba was personally responsible for neither my imprisonment, nor my impatience, nor my lack of self-control. Most likely, I instinctively considered moral norms universal. I did not follow my own advice to my daughter: "Books are books and life is different."

The books taught me that an individual should apply his moral norms only to himself and that one cannot expect the same values from other people. Naturally, we do not always like our neighbors. The lowest possible depth we can fall to, however, is to cross our opponents off the list of equal human beings. I could not say to myself, "He is just a ment," like Leo said about dogs and Arabs.

When living conditions deteriorate and the struggle for existence dominates, this is unavoidable. It forces the society to limit the list of equal human species, usually at the expense of minorities. Then the majority claims their sacred right. The superiority of a majority is an ideology too.

I did not know the answer to my dilemma—to be or not to be like a wolf among wolves. The heritage of my animal predecessors was action instead of reason. The smallest and weakest creature defends itself when attacked by a predator. If I want to be tolerant of other people, should I be tolerant of myself?

There was no solution. Any personal, social, or political dilemma has only one solution: one has to take a stand. I wanted to survive.

Nick prepared his former brigade for my arrival. He conducted an excellent PR campaign. I even got his bunk. It was a wonderful (and prestigious!) place at the back of the barrack, where I could lean against the wall while reading and writing, so that my back did not hurt. It was entirely Nick's legacy that I was already rich and famous in my new brigade.

Soon Nick was released on parole, but he had no right to leave the city where the camp was located. I missed him very much. As a consolation, the most tranquil period of my imprisonment began.

## XXI

### THE RIOT

**I**t was November 1985, and I had less than five months left. Meanwhile, I began to sense changes in myself and wondered whether my release would come soon enough.

I was terrified to see how the camp, that pseudo-complex world of shadows, which seemed to an external observer like just an X-rayed skeleton of some larger world, and which was so insignificant, worthless, and trifling for me, began to suck me in like a swamp, in spite of my standoffish position and internal resistance. Once, I caught myself discussing the monthly padded jacket production with somebody. Another time, I noticed that I felt slight disdain for the brigade that made padded pants, subconsciously considering pants inferior to the jackets we made.

I began to slide down into prison life. It was a shocking discovery. My only hope was that as soon as I was free I would be myself again. But how soon? That year, on his visit to France, Gorbachev denied the very existence of political prisoners in Russia. My term could be stretched.

Although I was gradually losing my internal identity, I developed a certain complexity in my own material microcosm. I had a lot of possessions in my two



nightstands, one on top of the other. The most precious part was the spiral notebook with my notes on *Meta-chemistry*—a science about the world in terms of elements and bonds—which was my brain treadmill. The ideas I was putting to paper were my small army that withstood the siege of thoughts about Truba, dybbuks, chances for release, and chances for punishment. The fight went on with variable success. Large or small, there was always a population of abstract ideas in my mind. They survived yearlong "millennia" of my prison history.

Next was an American pen from the parcel from Ann. Another similar pen had already been transformed into a half pint of sunflower oil. I was indebted for the business transaction to Tony, professional burglar and my friend, who had done the bargaining with the cooks.

I had a piece of salted pork fat from one parcel. There was a tiny can of baby food and a box of vitamins. Receiving medicines and vitamins was forbidden, but American vitamins looked like candies to the woman guard who inspected every parcel, so they slipped through.

There was a pack of envelopes, writing pads, a dozen books bought in the bookstore-on-wheels, coming twice a year. Literary magazines, letters, pencils, electric razor, tooth powder, soap, cheap candies, ends of fabric, thread, and a hidden needle. I was rich.

The only photographs I had were two shots of Magda. I did not want my wife and daughter to be in the camp even in pictures.

There was my self-made pocket notebook with the prison calendar. The major events of my current life were marked in it with special secret signs, the meaning of which I often forgot. Those were not only big events like incarcerations and summonses by officers, but also searches, encounters with spiders, and meetings of my friends with dybbuks. A sudden fit of bad mood was marked with a teardrop-like sign. Sometimes one drop was not enough to measure the degree of sadness. Three wavy vertical lines meant heavy heart or a premonition of trouble.

I was counting each week's events, and when the occurrence exceeded the average, I expected a major event such as an incarceration or a talk with an officer.

I had a spoon, an aluminum mug, a pint glass jar with a homemade padded insulation and lid for making tea, and a self-made electric boiler—just two steel plates of the size of a razor blade separated by two bars of rubber insulation and bound together with cotton thread.

There were two postcards from Israel and a letter from England. That security officers destroyed bags of my foreign mail was not just a guess. The guards talked to Al, whom they trusted. I knew from Al much of what I was not supposed to know. I had no idea why those three pieces of foreign mail had slipped in.

The zeks had never stolen anything from me. Once, when I was in the punishment cell, my food disappeared, but a new stock, incredibly, was prepared

later. Although I certainly did not idealize the zeks, there is no denying that they had helped me a lot and cared about me, not in exchange for something, but idealistically and selflessly. Most of them were not born criminals; many of them, in fact, had been made into criminals by the camp.

I was rich and needed nothing but some forbidden coffee to whip up my drowsy brain and some moderate pleasure for my palate. I needed pleasure—the very thing that prison life intended to disinfect.

The year 1985 was coming to an end. I felt secure and independent. I had gotten rid of my worst enemy, and the era of living corpses in the ruling Politburo seemed to have reached a hiatus.

It was the time when I could see Dave almost every day. One of the four political prisoners at the camp, he arrived later than the three others.

Although my contacts with other *politicals* were hindered, Dave and I were given full freedom of contact. We either worked the same shift or even were in the brigades that shared the same walking cage.

Dave belonged to the Moscow Hare Krishna movement. It is hard to imagine anything less political in Russia than Krishnaism. It did not claim any political or religious dissent, and as far as I understood, it was pure escape from Soviet life and from all Russian problems.

Dave translated the *Bhagavad Gita* and some other literature from English into Russian, and that was his whole crime. Naturally, that was not for what he was put on trial. His crime was "inflicting damage to one's health through religious ritual and forcing an individual to evade socially useful work." Of course, no evidence that he committed anything like that was produced, but that did not prevent him from getting three years.

Even I was surprised by the cruelty with which the dybbuks had dealt with seven Hare Krishna leaders. One was put into a psychiatric hospital, where he spent five years. Two others were given four-year terms, one year longer than the standard three. Among them was a woman, the mother of two daughters, who was arrested while pregnant. Her third daughter died in prison several months after birth. Who in the world would intercede for Russian Hinduists? India?

Dave was in his late twenties, a little above five feet tall, looking frail and vulnerable. Nevertheless, he managed to show once again that physical strength did not matter much in the camp. He had a strong character, and he won an independent and respectable position in the camp hierarchy. Unlike me, he was deeply immersed in camp's life and that sometimes irritated me. Nevertheless, we talked a lot.

Dave used to tell me stories from *Bhagavad Gita*, which accounted for most of his brief life experience. I told him about my scientific and technical ideas and taught him a little Hebrew. He had a very skeptical and critical frame of mind, and he nagged me constantly: "How do you know that this is true? It may not be so."

Dave was honest, selfless, and full of energy under a melancholic appearance; combined with having doubts, those qualities were a direct way to problems with dybbuks.

Dave strongly believed that I would be in America someday, and he even presented me on my birthday with *The Climate of the USA* bought in the camp bookstore. I did not learn much from the book because even for me the subject was of no immediate interest.

As far as the weather is concerned, early fall in Siberia is the mildest time of the year. The sun shines during the day, and the ferocious winds are yet to come. The trees and grass are still green and often they would rather die of the frost than wither the natural way. The nights are cold, as they always are in Trans-Baikalia.

Sunday was coming to an end. I went out into the rectangular walking yard between two barracks and the grating with a gate.

I began my regular evening stroll—thirty-four steps from the outer bars to the bench along the back fence.

The clear autumn sky promised good visibility on Monday, when I would work the night shift. I could scarcely see the stars through the fence-netted ceiling of the walking yard, and I was looking forward to tomorrow night under the open air of the production yard, where I would be able to view the constellations.

The sky was the only thing I shared with the free world.

I thought about free life without any great longing for it. Nothing outside the camp could attract me except getting out of Russia. Even my ties with my family were getting weaker. My life in the camp seemed safer and calmer than my future as a released ex-convict who would have to deal with the police, would not be able to get a job, and would be exposed to all the uncertainties, pressures, and intricacies of a life full of choices and decisions.

Looking back, I saw that my life made sense. It would not if I had found my ideals of personal freedom to be wrong. It would not make sense if I thought individual resistance was of no value. Finally, it would not if I could not see that, in my own way, I was helping other people reach freedom. For many of them freedom was equated with earning and buying. I did not mind. That was a kind of freedom never listed among civil rights because it was self-evident and natural. In Russia it did not need to be granted, but could be *de facto* denied, as it was in the empty-shelved Krasnoyarsk, where we could not spend our money.

I was dead tired of Russia. Only in prison did I realize that ethnic Russians were seen as barbarians, conquerors, and oppressors by many ethnic non-Russians. Unlike me, brought up in the Russian culture, their roots were different. They regarded Russians as an alien nation. There was more harmony and justification in their life because they did not bear any responsibility for it. The *Nerus* (non-Russians) could blame everything on the Russian domination.

Even if something changed, turmoil in Russia would not bring about anything but even more confusion, poverty, absurdity, decline, and terror. I did not want to leave the camp for anything other than emigration.

Russia was growing handicapped, abused, neurotic, and perverse. By no standards was it a civilized country. It exhibited the political and economic decomposition of necrotic tissue pretending to be alive. It installed paralyzed officials. It supported dead institutions. Its desires and drives were impotent. It was full of lies.

The whole country was behind visible and invisible bars, and everything that was natural for a human being was restricted, regulated, or forbidden. People were told that they themselves were responsible for that because they did not want to be as perfect as the unattainable political goal demanded. Thereby, a sense of guilt was implanted in the people. They were told that they deserved this way of life because they did not want to work hard. It was the Soviet version of original sin.

The camp was a model of society. It was filled with young, strong, healthy, sexually and physically hungry men driven by their hormones. It overflowed with blind, destructive energy, because physical energy was controlled only by fear and not by intellect, culture, traditions, or faith.

Only in my last year, I learned about the effect of the presence of four political prisoners on the whole camp of twelve hundred. A special regimen of deliberate and unjust pressure had been put on common zeks because of us. They did not know that, but it was the reason why they were restricted in getting visits from relatives, prevented from getting out on parole, and punished with fifteen days in the punishment cell for minor violations. That was something I learned through Al, too. I heard from him the story of an ex-teacher officer who quit because he did not want to take part in the unfair treatment of the zeks that was required from him by the administration. All that was done to prevent the communication between the four *politicals* and the outside world. If the zeks had known all that, they would have torn us into small pieces.

What can suppress fear? Alcohol, anger, hope.

I was measuring the distance between the rear wall of the yard and the front grating, back and forth. Fresh cold air began to burn my lungs. I felt hot.

I noticed through the windows two ments walking down the aisle of the

barrack next to us. It was time for the nightly rounds. For some reason, the ments did not come out. I saw them talking to a zek in the depot.

I went inside my barrack. There I saw a familiar peaceful picture of the last hour of the Sunday rest: stale damp air mixed with the aggressive smoke of coarse tobacco, smell of bread and latrine, cable radio blaring, cards (prohibited), sleep (permitted), prison tea with milk (prohibited), reading (permitted), and handcraft (prohibited). A tightly packed composition of pillars, two-story bunks, two-story nightstands, little tables, dim fluorescent lamps, shadows, bodies, and smoke.

However peaceful was the picture, like any other zek I had to be ever alert, always prepared to meet the unexpected, aware of sudden eruptions of violence. I could never be totally relaxed, even lying on my bunk.

I undressed, put my clothes on the empty bunk above me to protect myself from the light, and got into bed.

The crash of shattered glass and rough voices woke me up.

"Come out, you devils! Beat the goats! If you don't, you are dead. Come out, everybody. We'll kill those who stay."

At first, I could not understand what was going on. The same voices kept yelling, "Riot! Get up! Riot! Get out, everybody."

Several apelike figures were jerking in the dim light of the night bulbs. The rioters were waving metal pipes and banging on the bunks.

Some of the zeks were getting dressed. Others, groggy, were leaping down from the upper bunks, dressing, and waking up their neighbors.

"Break the bunks! Make clubs! Beat the devils! Beat the goats!"

"The devils have already escaped," somebody said.

Somebody has turned the lights on. The devils' corner was not totally deserted, however. There was a commotion. I heard muffled blows and shrieks, but I could not see what was going on in the distant corner behind the pillars and bunks. Somebody was being hammered.

The poor beaten devil somehow managed to escape. The others rushed out after him.

I went to the drying room and found my jacket on the floor. I picked it up and went out. I saw an orange glow in the west, above the roof of the opposite barrack, and thought it was a new kind of illumination in the working zone. Then I realized it was fire.

It was about three o'clock in the morning. A hollow rumble of voices arose from a distance. Both gates of the cage were open and the doorman's booth was empty. It was a ravishing, inebriating view of instant, however transient, freedom.

I went out. I was walking back and forth in the narrow lane between the barracks. From time to time, somebody ran by. I devoured sharp, rich, thick, hearty change. I could not resist the attraction of fire, and I went into the plaza. I came to Dave's window, but he was not there. Everything inside his barrack was in disarray—nightstands and little tables turned upside down, bunks moved off, mattresses dragged down.

The fire over the fence, in the working zone, attracted me like magnet.

At the main gate, I could make out a dark crowd. A car for cesspool service was slowly moving toward the gate, pushed by the crowd. The other brigades seemed deserted. Three fires were raging behind the fence dividing the working and living zones. One of the burning buildings was in the school zone, and the gate to the working zone was open.

I heard a burst of machine-gun fire. Something whistled over my head. The tone of the whistle changed from high to low when the bullet passed over my head: the Doppler Effect.

I felt enthralled. At last, something significant and meaningful had happened in our lifeless existence. It was as similar to big historical riots and revolutions as lizards to dinosaurs. It was nothing more than a prison riot, but for me it was something momentous and pivotal. So was the Russian Revolution for some observers and unwilling witnesses and even for some of the Russian intelligentsia who watched the fires all over Russia and listened to the sound of the bullets. They felt they would be wiped away soon, but they enjoyed the richness of the moment in an otherwise dull Russian life. Anton Chekhov was prophetic: cherry orchards will be cut down.

I felt an ugly, blind, and cruel desire for destruction. So that was how the Bolshevik revolution looked in October 1917. Like this riot, it was driven by criminals. No wonder it generated such a monstrous system, where destruction was the only available catalyst for change. People, if deprived of variety, complexity, and change, build up internal tension and it goes off like a bomb.

No shrieks of pain could be heard, only the tat-tat of machine guns. Therefore, I concluded, the gunfire was pointed above the heads.

I knew that I should stay away from the trouble. The dybbuks would pin something on me later. I must be seen close to my barrack.

I came back into the lane between the barracks. Tony was there. The burglars were the intellectual elite of the criminal world, and Tony was no exception. His shaven head had a powerful shape that seemed designed to house the mind of a philosopher. Like Serge the burglar in Kharkov, he was also a poet.

"Why don't you go up there?" I asked Tony.

"I've got my six years. I don't want anything more pinned on me. It's better to stay away from that. You better not go there, either."

We took a stroll in the yard, and he told me that yesterday a box of antistatic liquid containing alcohol had been smuggled into the neighboring barrack. There was only one way of smuggling, of course: through the guards.

The effect of the liquid was devastating. The zeks got mad. They defied the officers and even tried to beat them. They shared the liquid with others. The officers took refuge.

The intoxicated zeks turned the barrack into shambles. They burst into another barrack and forced the zeks out. The doormen immediately escaped, protecting their heads from the blows. That was how the riot began. The driving force was for most zeks their fear of the drunken ones and the fear that afterward they would be punished by other zeks for weakness. Nevertheless, the instinctive lust for destruction and blind revenge was genuine.

All ments promptly escaped. Only the main gate separated the rioters from the free world. The zeks tried to use the cesspool car as a battering ram, but the guards on the watchtower were firing at the area just before the gates, occasionally firing over the heads.

Meanwhile, a group of zeks set fire to the buildings in the working and school zones. The zeks hated the school because those who had no legally required education were forced to attend classes instead of getting a day's rest after the night shift duty.

I was anxious to know if the workshops had caught fire. I hoped to have at least some days without work. It turned out later that it was not easy to set fire to the concrete buildings. Besides, the tight rolls of fabric refused to burn.

Tony could not stand the temptation and left. I went back into the barrack. From the hallway, through the open door, I could see the barrack on the other side of the alley. There was a small security office. One of the thieves broke the window, struck a match, and tried to set fire to the curtain, but it refused to burn. He started throwing burning matches into the room. Finally, the curtain caught fire. The zek had torn it down, threw it into the room, and walked away. Disappointed, I saw that nothing else in the room had caught fire.

A couple of hours passed. The noise suddenly drew nearer. I heard tramping. A mass of zeks shouting, "The ments are coming," ran into the lane and rushed into the brigades. The ments were now on the offense.

Soon the barrack was full of zeks. They took their places on the lower bunks. The air was filled with tobacco smoke and the humming of excited voices.

"Break the bunks! Make barricades! Make clubs! Fight the ments!"

"Hey, man! What for? Just shut up and sit quiet!"

Some bunks were dragged to the door. I heard nightstands falling down.

"The ments are coming! There are soldiers in the zone!"

Everybody rushed to the back wall, where four remaining bunks stood, including my own. Six people in thick padded jackets were tightly pressed together on my bunk, breathing heavily. Some others squatted on the floor. I heard both my nightstands falling. Somebody tried to drag one to the door, but there was no room to push it through.

The lights went off. Someone threw a high boot and smashed the night lamp. Violence could take the upper hand in an instant. Uncertainty seemed to hold everyone in thrall. After all, the prison code demanded fighting to support the uprising. Later, the thieves who did not fight could be held responsible for their cowardice.

I imagined a furious fight and was, most of all, worried about my notebooks. In the glow of the distant fire, I could still see the fallen nightstand, and all my thoughts were there. My revolutionary zest evaporated. I was not a proletarian. I had something to lose.

The shouting ceased. I heard a new sound in the silence, a quiet clapping. A strangely familiar chemical smell was coming through the broken windows. It was tear gas. I actually enjoyed the faint smell of the chemical lab that I missed so much. It evoked memories of the smooth, rounded chemical glassware, more desirable than women's breasts.

The soldiers were busy with the neighboring brigade. The zeks seemed to resist. I could see through both sets of windows the movement of dark figures in there.

Pete, a smart crook and drug addict, pushed through the crowd and squeezed himself into my aisle.

"What are we gonna do? What do you think?" he asked me. "The guys are thinking. They want your advice."

I felt relieved. I was even as proud as if the President of the Academy of Sciences had asked me for advice on a problem concerning environmental pollution.

"Don't make any barricades," I said. "Don't break anything. Everybody sit quietly, do nothing, and don't fight. You should come out and tell the soldiers that everything is OK in the brigade. That's all."

"All right, we figured it out about the same way."

My opinion was important to them. I was flattered. Ironically, I, the enemy of the state, had been involved in saving state property and helping the authorities quell the riot.

We were sitting and waiting. Nothing happened. Gradually the zeks returned to their places. I saw Pete cautiously pushing his head out through the door and talking to the soldiers. The new day was breaking.



"A helluva lot of soldiers," Pete announced, back in his place. "All have shields, gas masks, clubs. There's an armored car right at the brigade. They're cracking down on the eleventh brigade."

We waited hour after hour. I noticed a fire in the Eleventh. I saw black figures moving against the light. A megaphoned voice was commanding the zeks to come out of the building. The tear gas was coming through the broken window. My eyes itched.

"They're giving up," somebody announced. The zeks were surrendering. They were jumping out of the window in the other side of their barrack while the remaining zeks were raking letters and magazines out of the drawers and burning them. They tried to set fire to bed linen and nightstands. That could happen to my notebooks, I thought.

The Eleventh, which the Sixth had joined because their own barrack was completely burned out, had barricaded the gate of the cage with bunks. The soldiers pulled out one of the bars in the fence with the help of an armored car. They shot grenades with tear gas right into the barrack. The smell of the gas was now quite strong even for us. The zeks were weeping and cursing.

I was savoring the condensed soup of time rich with chunky events. At last! All my senses devoured the miraculous blend of novelty, danger, tear gas, flame, clapping grenades, anxiety, and fear of retribution. I had the long-expected break, a rest from nothingness. Something was happening. In my imagination, I scaled the events up to the dimensions of the country. Something like that was to happen in Russia.

My ancestors had been taken by the Russian Revolution, and some were captivated by it. If only I could get out from Russia between this small fire and the future big one!

I felt satisfied, watered after a drought, given a gulp of air after a deep dive, fed to the brim after a fast. I was ready to plunge back into the shabby camp life for a long time. It was the same feeling I had had when Ann unexpectedly visited me in the camp, after two years, and I had not even requested her visit, and the spiders had not even augured it. Two such great events in one year—the effect was enough to last three more years.

This time, the hopeless, senseless drunken riot seemed to have some prophetic meaning. Something big has happened, not directed against me. It was not an incarceration, not interrogation, not persecution. What sign should I use in my calendar for all the exhilaration of this day?

When nothing happens day after day, the soul dries out, parches, shrivels, and turns into cracked stone when some underground waters of existence drain away. Punishment by immortality means that you never see anything new because the changing events always reflect the same general pattern. Changing details are

meaningless because they cannot harm you. If you cannot die, life does not matter anymore. It was the sense of danger that kept me alert in prison; the awareness of death forced me to think and to act.

When I die, I shall not meet my death. We will miss each other in an opaque revolving door. It is the long confinement that could make me a witness to my own death and decomposition.

The right time to die is when one has no further questions. I still had questions for which I had no answers. One question was about my conflict with Russia. I was close to conclusion that we were both abnormal. A normal man in a crazy country can adapt, a crazy man in a normal country will be taken care of, but a crazy man in a crazy country . . . oh, God.

My personal history was telling me that I would always get into trouble. I got out of one kind of trouble only to get into another. It was my genes, my heredity, and my tough hair. It was my pattern, my fate, my character. Character is fate, Napoleon said.

Another question was bothering me: what was new? What made the difference between the old and the new? What did it mean to be new? No doubt, the question was stinging because of the chronic lack of novelty in Russia throughout my life.

An answer was developing in my spiral notebook. Now I could put the fallen nightstand upright. I checked the notebook and found it in place.

I came to the door. It was a bright morning, and it was exactly as Pete had described it—lots of soldiers in ranks, antiriot ammunition, and the armored car. Truba and other officers stood in rank in front of our fence. The siege of the Eleventh apparently was over.

"Get back, Lutsky, and shut the door," Truba said politely.

## XXII

### THE MONUMENT

After the interrogations in the city prison and inside the camp, some rioters were selected for trial and given long terms, others were transferred to other camps, and about half came back. Anyway, the Eleventh did not exist anymore. The Sixth was unsuitable for habitation for the rest of my term. The burned down school did not open.

The soldiers used to shot rioters during prison uprisings, zeks told me. After a riot, all the prisoners and staff of the camp used to be replaced. This time, however, there was an order not to shoot people. Only the KGB was capable of changing the routine procedure for putting down a riot. It seems that they were protecting a handful of political prisoners whose death they had not planned. The omnipotent KGB could sacrifice the rights of a thousand common inmates to create a regime of terror for four *politicals*, and it could spare the lives of the same people only to save the lives of the four privileged.

Repercussions after the riot were relatively mild. The staff was not changed.

New layers of frozen urine were adding up during my last winter in the camp. This time, however, a real mountain covered with yellow ice appeared right

in the yard of the working zone: the remnants of one of the burned workshops were bulldozed into a huge mound near the latrine.

The mound was a monument to the experiment of dybbuks with four insignificant political prisoners who did not pose any political danger whatsoever: Ivan, Chinese professor of medicine who treated Russians and wanted his book translated into English; Nick, Russian underground publisher of religious books, some of them translated into Russian from Hebrew and Greek, reader of Chinese poetry; Dave, an electrical engineer, a Jew, and a Krishnaite who translated an ancient Hindu book from English into Russian; and I, Ukrainian-Jewish refusenik who translated poetry from English, German, and Hungarian and now wanted to go to America.

Now I could see what we all had in common: we were digging tunnels for people and ideas under the barbed wire of Russian borders. We belonged to the world, and we did not want to belong to Soviet Russia.

It was at the foot of the yellow monument that I was preparing for American diversity.

The Big Zone was visible from the top. With no ments in sight, zeks took every opportunity to perch there and empty their bladders. I preferred to watch the deserted fields and lifeless hills from the flat roof of our workshop—there was an iron ladder to it. The night scenery was more animating: shimmering stars, my beloved Orion, the lights of the power station and distant outskirts of the city, the glow over the airport, and moving lights of trucks on the road.

I always had to be alert, to watch the yard for the occasional officer on duty. It was cold up there on the roof, and the lights along the fence made the stars barely visible.

To stand on the roof was strictly prohibited, but the punishment block had not yet corrected me.

It was March 1986. I had only fifteen days left in my term. Three months before their release, prisoners were exempt from having their heads shaved and exempt even from work during the last month.

My hair was slowly growing. I did not work. I slept normally, although insomnia was common for those on the eve of their release. I was ready for anything, including the extension of my term.

When I, incorrigible dreamer, was called to the watch, I thought it had something to do with my expected release.

Without any decree, without any given reason at all, I was politely taken to the punishment block again and put into the internal prison for ten days. Despite all my preparedness, it was so unexpected and unbelievable that I did not even feel the

shock. I had really hardened in the camp.

I was allowed to choose the cell and was accepted by the cell of thieves, the privileged caste. All four bunks were taken, and I had to put my mattress on the floor. My newspapers and magazines were delivered to the cell. I read the speeches at the party convention, and the more I read the more certain I was that I would be released.

Russia had entered a new stage. It was a way neither to freedom, justice, and common sense, nor to rudimentary well-being. It was a time of great turmoil, like the riot in the camp. This time it looked like the gate of the Big Zone would be pried open with a cesspool tank car.

Three days later the camp barber came to shave my head. I resisted.

"I am going to call the soldiers," the guard who stood nearby said quietly. I understood that he had strict orders. By that time, I had already acquired a great ability to accept loss, and I obeyed.

Once, late at night, another guard wanted to talk to me. He did not know what to think about my incarceration. In all his life, he had never seen anybody put there without due process, but I was.

"You know, we are simple people," he said. "We are not educated like you. We do what we are told to. Maybe someday you, the *politicals*, will be like the Decembrists for us. One never knows."

I was compared to the cream of Russian aristocracy, who had revolted against the czar in 1825. After the execution of their five leaders, the rest went in exile in the Chita region.<sup>28</sup> I felt compensated for the loss of my hair. I did not know what to tell the guard, however, because I did not know anything. Probably the local dybbuks just wanted revenge for all the trouble I had given them.

In Russia, which now seemed to roll over in her deep sleep, one still could not ask why.

I was released from the punishment block in due time. I still had five last days. The party convention was over. I left most of my possessions to Tony the burglar-poet, including the miraculous knitted socks from Finland, which still looked like new, and a gift from one poet to another—the book of poetry by Endre Ady bought in the camp bookstore. It included six of my translations from Hungarian.

Ivan and Dave remained in the camp. I said good-bye to them through the bars of their cages.

I walked out through the checkpoint, where I had to tell my name and my

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<sup>28</sup> Chita remembers the Decembrists. Local [online materials](#) mention their first in history hunger strike against unimaginable cruelty and humiliation.

article of the Penal Code for the last time. I emerged from the camp carrying a book, several letters from home, my prison calendars, and the spiral notebook. Taking books out of the camp was not done, but it was a book on mathematics by Ulf Grenander, professor at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, USA, translated into Russian, and nobody would read them, anyway.

Ann and Nick were waiting for me. I did not feel anything.

Later I asked Ann how I looked.

"You smelled of an alien smell. Your face was gray. You were like a robot. You showed no emotions and no interest in anything, and did whatever you were told. You enjoyed neither food nor even me," she said.

Wow! It was a very disappointing image for a murderer of czars and destroyer of empires.

Ann and I spent a couple of days in a hotel and flew home, back into the refusal.

I found at home a pile of letters from supporters. Norma called me each week. New people wrote to me and called me on the phone. I realized that I was in the focus of attention of many people. After the dead silence of the camp, all that was very hard on me. I wanted peace but could not find it. I was dead tired, deeply frozen inside. Still, I realized I had to fight to the very end and was preparing myself for a new, however improbable, arrest.

On December 31, 1986, soon after a delegation of French officials had visited my apartment, I was notified by a call from OVIR that my family had been granted exit visas.

On February 1, Ann, our daughter, dog Magda, and I arrived in Vienna. Norma met us at the airport.

After two weeks in Austria and a month in Italy, we landed in Chicago.

I could finally touch the glass cats in Norma's house and examine the enigmatic cylinders on the crystal plate. They turned out to be just wrapped candies. I had a feeling of homecoming, and it was sweet.

## PREMATURE CONCLUSION

**M**y own planet left its orbit around the dead sun of Russia. I was on my own, and the new world was designed for all other planets like me. I had to start a totally new life and was full of curiosity, expectation, and apprehension. I was about to witness my own rebirth.

I fell in love with America as soon as I took my first walk along Devon Avenue in Chicago, the morning after our arrival.

It was the middle of March, four years after my arrest.

The last traces of snow were melting down in the shadows, the sun was hot, the colors bright, the smell of spices from Indian shops arousing.

Looking at the Jewish bookshops, I could not believe my own eyes. How could anybody openly expose anything Jewish? It took me almost a year to get used to it.

The novelty of this world, even as compared with Austria and Italy, was electrifying. I felt that only here could I finally satisfy my hunger for the New and the Different.

The words that Norma repeated so many times, but which bore no visual associations in me—"Chicago Action for Soviet Jewry"—finally took shape in a small, crowded office in a Chicago suburb. In Russia, I was not aware how many people had been involved in my personal exodus, especially in America and France.

It was not just a Jewish crusade. French Catholics, too, participated in the struggle.

I learned that my ghost image in Chicago Action germinated a network of people spread over several countries. I was only one seed among many others. A much larger network of volunteers supported other and more important people of my kind. No government and no state either subsidized it or forced the participants, as it could have been in Russia.

At Chicago Action, looking at the colorful gathering of women who came to see me, one of the first live messengers of their victory over the refusal, I sensed a new mystery. I had to find an explanation as to why America was so materialistic and so idealistic at the same time.

I realized that the phenomenon, which was so natural for America and so baffling for me, had something to do with the very essence of freedom.

The ideal of freedom was a necessary condition of material progress. Material progress was a necessary condition of idealism. Idealism was a necessary condition of freedom: you cannot eat or wear freedom. This is how it all was linked. It was simple and obvious. In Russia, however, it was always just a hypothesis. Outside Russia, I saw it in action. Individualism and idealism went hand in hand.

The previous wave of Jewish emigration from Europe had come with the Holocaust. It was not a popular subject right after WW2. It took several decades for the world to digest the experience, to draw conclusions, and to incorporate it into a larger historical perspective.

My generation of immigrants came to America and Israel with a different, much less gruesome experience: that of Soviet "socialism." Its universal message is yet to be digested by the world.

Socialism for me is neither a political nor an economic term. What I mean by Soviet socialism (usually called "communism" in America), for the lack of a better term, is a concept of the priority of an abstract idea over basic human needs—a phantom of many reincarnations in history.

One of the reasons why I survived the real 1984 was that George Orwell had already immunized the world's reason, as well as my own mind, against it. The disease of totalitarianism had lost its deadly fatality.

The only practical way I can pay off my incalculable debt to my supporters and to my new country is to tell both my story and my own interpretation of it.

The wheel of progress rolls on, and every conclusion is premature.



## XXIII

### THE HURRICANE

**I**n America, letters from our friends, articles in newspapers, and TV reports reminded me about Russia. My release and the end of the refusal for the rest of the trapped people marked the beginning of a new era. Although I spent almost two years under *glasnost*, real openness began only in 1987, after I had left.

Looking at Russia from a distance, I saw a country torn apart by the hysteria of fragmentation. Everybody wanted independence at any price—republics, nations, regions, cities, institutions. Yet people were afraid to be on their own. They wanted somebody to take care of them, to tell them what to do, and to provide them with food and clothing. People were afraid of civil war. They were afraid of capitalism too. Andrei Amalrik, the prophet who predicted the fall of the Soviet Union, noted that the Soviet Russian idea of justice was "nobody should live better than I." The Russians could accept poverty on the condition that nobody else was rich either.

My own problems, however, occupied me more than anything else. My life in America was neither smooth nor easy. I got my American share of trouble. After my Russian experience, I knew I could blame only myself. That, however, is another story.

The news about the coup d'état against Gorbachev in Russia coincided with the arrival of Hurricane Bob, the first of the 1991 season. All of my family was at home—our daughter had come for a visit—and it was our first experience with a natural disaster.

Despite televised warnings, we decided not to go to the basement when the wind started slashing the branches of our oak. What could we fear after the slow, elephantine, devastating waves of history that had implacably rolled over our lives in Russia? America seemed so secure.

Soon the power went out. We could not watch the developments of a new, faster stage of the Russian hurricane. We shared the earphones of our radio instead, announcing the news to each other.

As the eye of the hurricane passed right over our neighborhood, the wind subsided and the skies cleared. Then the wind resumed its rampage, this time from the opposite direction. So did the events in Moscow—the coup failed.

While the fallen branches were drying out and Rhode-Islanders celebrated the restoration of electricity, the Russians rejoiced over their restored national self-respect.

Strangely, the incredible events on the screen looked quite natural. Many times during my Russian life I had passed the Moscow square with the monument of Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the KGB. Many times I thought that freedom could not be born in Russia while the giant stern figure was backed by the building of his creation—the Russian Bastille. The bare pedestal, however, looked today not like a dream come true but merely like a nightmare ended. The empty square looked natural, but the Bastille remained in place.

I read Dzerzhinsky's memoirs in the labor camp. He wrote them in solitary confinement, in a czarist prison. He was a strong, idealistic man. The predominant theme of his memoirs was not hate but love of life, his young wife, and his little son. The Polish revolutionary had fought Russian autocracy, injustice, and exploitation. He was actually a hero. He spent eleven years in prison and exile, and I knew that such places could not make anybody a better person. Later he was said to have taken care of homeless children in Russia.

Looking back at my own prison experience, remembering Lenin, Hitler, Stalin, Dzerzhinsky, and other former convicts in the political arena, I arrived at the firm belief that a former political prisoner should never be trusted with political leadership, however affectionate he is with children.

The eye of the political hurricane passed over Moscow, and the winds of history turned around. Yet it was just half the story. Will the other wing of the hurricane last for another seventy devastating years? Who is going to restore the power?

Russia is not an empire anymore. As I always believed, only dismantling the empire could give Russia its chance to reverse its fortune. It appears that chance has been given to Russia.

Meanwhile, what I saw on the TV screen looked like *déjà vu* in a historical retrospect.

Over one thousand years ago, Russians were pagans. After a bad harvest, they used to beat their idols with birch rods. In better times, they brought them sacrifices and adorned them. It was the sequence of one lean year after another and, finally, the empty shelves in Moscow shops that turned the anger of the crowd against the idols.

The Russians were toppling the statues of their idols, but they may carve new ones in the same fashion. Instead, some of them immediately turned to the old idols, toppled in 1917.

On our TV screen, an elderly, worn-out Russian in a czarist uniform sat on the rubble of a barricade. He kept saying, "I will not go away until we kill all of them." He was a familiar type. His voice, intonation, and choice of words told my Russian ear that all he wanted was a license to kill someone, anyone—Communists, Jews, Armenians, dissidents; all were the same—but with the license that could be given only by war or revolution.

I saw Russians who marched in the uniform of prerevolutionary Cossacks, the ruthless elite assault troops, most devoted to the czar. They used to disperse demonstrations and crack down on revolts.

What was going on in Russia—a revolution against tyrants or a restoration of the old tyranny?

If the Russians blame Marx, Lenin, Dzerzhinsky, Communists, Jews, KGB, Gorbachev, et al. for the years of national self-destruction, humiliation, and decay, then they have not learned anything. Russian history will be rewritten again, and it will be a lie again. They can blame only themselves.

Since for the average Russian there is only one truth for all people, the one who possesses it has a mandate to govern. From the uniqueness of truth, the Russian brand of logic draws the conclusion that any idea that has no rivals is true. Therefore, one can get the mandate if he simply kills any opponents.<sup>29</sup>

It is hard to predict how the idea of democracy can grow on such mental soil. If Russia overcomes this barrier, the spiritual West will extend its continuity to the East Coast of the Pacific.

Since I came to America, I have been watching the exciting American attempts to understand Russia. One of the first major discoveries was that the Soviet

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<sup>29</sup> I did not insert this and next pages in 2017, I swear. One can look into the 1993 edition. Yet I somehow saw the future.

Union was not populated only by ethnic Russians. Another discovery was the pitifully low quality of life in the countryside and the provinces. The next discovery was that the Russian Republic, as well as some others, had a much finer structure of so-called autonomous republics. Yet another one was the extent of theft and corruption in Russia that explains why the newborn business is so much intertwined with the criminal world. The next one could be the discovery of the Russian mentality, so different from the American.<sup>30</sup> Yet another one could be just the opposite—a profound significance of the Russian experience for America.

I am sure that if America understands Russia and other nations, it will discover more about itself and about its own fate in the world. Russia and America are living and evolving molecules built of the same atoms, only arranged in different combinations. The chemistry of society is universal, and history is a record of most unexpected transformations.

As a born daydreamer, I frequently look too far ahead in my dreams, jumping over tomorrow. Millions of Russians, however, are not concerned about anything beyond today.

A parcel came from relatives in Siberia. A modest gift was wrapped in a torn newspaper with a photo of a group of little Siberian children in it. The caption said, "My daughter will be lucky to remember the time when candies were sold in shops."

My memories of Russia do not fade away against the backdrop of the most pathetic show of our time, in which Russia is trying to blend freedom and violence, reason and absurdity, hate and compassion, like fire and water, in the typically Russian half-measure. Looking at the photo, I felt that the last splinter of Russian ice in my heart had finally melted away.

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<sup>30</sup> It looks less different after Trump.

## XXIV

### THE NAMES

When I had finished my memoirs, both Russia and I changed since I came to America five years ago. We both discovered the taste of freedom. I was part of a larger world. Hunger, hatred, and hardships were far away, cushioned by the immediate environment of comfort, contentment, and compassion. My hate and vengeance evaporated.

I went over my manuscript, where only the names of my enemies were real, and made all the names fictional.

Immediately the whole trick became false because I had introduced a false equality.

The dybbuks, investigators, prosecutors, and camp officers were just bolts and nuts in the mechanism of terror. When initially I had left only their names unchanged, I was driven by a subconscious instinct for revenge. I cooled down. Russia warmed up. We got equal. The true names of small cogs in the machine of terror were of no importance. I changed them, too.

I clearly saw that both Soviet totalitarianism and American individualism represented, actually, different ratios of order and chaos. The differences were not

absolute. The Soviet system could not completely freeze individual resistance; the American system did not make everybody selfish and materialistic. While I and people like me, with a hypertrophied instinct of freedom, were probably splinters of alien America in the body of Russia, there are infectious splinters of intolerance in the body of America that spread inflammation of self-righteous hatred.

America did not invent the ideas of individualism, basic freedoms, and human rights. The ideas of freedom came from the Old World, from the Italian Renaissance and the French Revolution.

Soviet Russia did not invent oppression, violence, and terror either. They came from the distant past of human history. It was not the only tyranny in the world.

Having been in both worlds, so far apart on the scale of order and chaos, I can see the profound unity of the world and human nature. The world is complex and simple at the same time. If you look for simplicity, the names do not matter. America, Russia, France, India, Ann, Olga, Norma, Nancy—the names are just tags. If you look for complexity, the name, the fact, the moment, the look, the touch are of the utmost importance.

I had to find a way to reconcile both the complexity and the simplicity of my personal experience. This is why I decided to go on with yet another experiment in writing memoirs.

My friends in the refusal and the people outside Russia who helped me survive and come to America were not abstract X, Y, and Z variables in an equation. They acted not as parts of a machine but as free human beings. That was the most fundamental difference between a totalitarian society and the free world. I want their names to be known; it is the only way I can express my deepest gratitude to them.

My name is Yuri Tarnopolsky. I was born in 1936. I came to America in 1987 with my wife, Olga, our daughter, Irina, and our dog, Nika.

To my wife's strength, devotion, and courage I am indebted for whatever peace I had in my heart during most turbulent years.

To my relatives I am indebted for my exodus from the very beginning to the very end.

I received an invitation from Israel due to the assistance of the family of my late aunt Esfir Kogan, who lived in Brooklyn, New York. She, her late husband, Abram, their only daughter, Galya, and her husband, Lev Rabinovich, in the best traditions of my father's family, also helped us start our life in America when the three of us came to Chicago with four suitcases, sixty dollars, and Nika the dog. Galya's daughter, Yelena Rabinovich, maintained a link between my relatives in America and Chicago Action for Soviet Jewry.

Lev's sister Maria and her husband Yakov Waisberg, in Haifa, Israel, sent us the vital invitation in 1979. If not for that, we would not have been able to start our exodus.

The former Soviet Jews who managed to escape Russia before the refusal maintained contact with refuseniks and supported families of prisoners, raising money among themselves. Their help was crucial to the survival of my family when I was in the labor camp.

I am cordially thankful to my friends Yury and Luba Verlinsky, who have always been at the center of activity in the Chicago Russian community. In 1978 Yury bravely smuggled my poetry from Russia, taking that risk without any hesitation.

I am deeply grateful to the Russian immigrants in Chicago for their selfless and generous support, both moral and material. I wish to mention Roman Kahn, Daniel Simon, Soria Shadkin, Peter and Yanna Gerner, Leo Biron, Lidia and Leonid Livshitz, Victoria and Pavel Berezin, Grigory Holsman, Yefim Kotlyar, Michael and Diana Goldin, Henrietta Williams, and Gary Light.

My school friend Mikhail (Misha) Berman, who lives in Chicago, supported me in many ways. He deciphered my poetry from barely readable photocopies. It is due to his work that my poems were published in Israel and France. I am also indebted to him for information and influence that prompted me to start my journey from Siberia to America.

Other former residents of Kharkov—Alex and Inna Mishulovich, Valentin Berman, Elvina Berman, and Yuri and Luda Shulman—helped us adjust to our new life. Alex introduced me to the American way of life and customs with his brilliant lectures on American culture. Later, when I advised new immigrants, I often caught myself quoting Alex.

Our refusenik circle in Kharkov included Anatoly and Olga Borovsky, Slava and Tanya Burdein, Eugene and Marina Chudnovsky, Lena and Yakov Dardyk, Konstantin and Sofia Fukshimov, Leonid Gugel, Gennady and Ludmila Grubman, Yakov and Tamara Khainovsky, Felix and Lana Kronfels, Lev and Mira Lifshitz, Isaak and Alla Moshkovich, Alexander and Polina Paritsky, Mark Pechersky, Martin Ranzer, David, Lina, and Sasha Soloveichik, myself and Olga Tarnopolsky, Maya Tilchenko, Lara and Edward Umansky, and Lilia Zatuchny.

Chudnovsky, Moshkovich, Soloveichik, Paritsky, and I organized a mini-university for a few children of refuseniks. These people, as well as Fukshimov, Pechersky, and Zatuchny, were the core of our group.

There were other active circles of refuseniks in Kharkov, about which I do not have much knowledge.

Eugene Chudnovsky was my closest friend in the refusal. He is now a professor of physics at the City University of New York and an active member of

the Committee of Concerned Scientists.

We were common people, not very young, with families and with no political inclinations. Our mutual relationships were not always easy. We lived an intense life, full of stress and powerful emotions. We created a small independent circle with no particular leader, and we managed to challenge the Dragon in an isolated provincial city, in a country with a long history of terror. Looking back, I can see that it was a remarkable episode of Soviet Jewish history. In this book I did not tell much about the internal life of the refusenik community. Full of dramatic and amusing incidents, it would require a true literary talent to narrate it. I am not fit to explore any microcosm, however, outside my own.

I keep warm memories of my cellmates in Kharkov and the common prisoners in the Chita labor camp whose company and support I enjoyed. I wish them well, I hope they found a straight way in life, and if they did not, may they stay free.

With all my heart I thank former political prisoners of the Chita labor camp Victor Burdyug, Boris Eysurovich (now in Israel), and Chan Chung.

After I was arrested, Moscow refusenik activists provided contacts with the West and supported my family while I was in prison.

I address my special gratitude to Dr. Yakov Alpert, an outstanding Moscow scientist and refusenik leader, and his wife Svetlana, for the attention and support they gave to my wife in the most difficult time of her life, after my arrest. In their apartment my family spent our last night in Russia. It is entirely due to Yakov's aggressive intervention that we were not separated from our dog Nika when we were boarding the plane to Vienna in the Moscow airport. The Alperes now live in Boston.

I would like to gratefully mention other former Moscow refusenik activists who supported my wife: Lev Blitshtein, Lena Dubyansky, Inna Elbert, Tanya Heifetz, Natasha Khassina, Abram Taratuta, and Alexander Yoffe.

Refuseniks and nonrefuseniks Slava Amusin, Mark and Yana Chudnovsky, Alla Nazarenko, Mikhail Raicher, Grigory and Bronislava Shvetsky, Mark and Larisa Stolkin, and Boris and Stella Zhupanov were among our friends.

Martin and Nancy Rosenfeld, who knocked on my door in Kharkov, represented Chicago Action for Soviet Jewry on their mission to the USSR. Nancy (whom I call here Norma) was the driving force of the campaign on my behalf in America.

It turned out that while I was in the refusal and in labor camp, a cold war of hot hearts was going on. In Russia I had no idea how much time, money, energy, and, first of all, passion was being devoted to the rescue of Soviet Jews. It was an amazing war with victories and defeats, offenses and retreats, excitement and disappointment, but no guns.



The grass-roots movement for the rescue of the Soviet refuseniks, in my opinion, is an even more remarkable episode of modern Jewish history than the movement and resistance of the refuseniks.

We, Soviet Jews, were struggling to escape discrimination and persecution and to gain a better life. It is easy to understand our motives. I was an individualist. I was struggling to get out of Russia and did crazy things because for me it was a matter of life and death.

The Americans from Chicago Action and other Councils for Soviet Jews were born free and lived in peace and freedom. What drove them to fight for people like me and others? What made American housewives mobilize all their energy, expend enormous effort and time, often at the expense of their families, to go to Russia with bags of clothes for refuseniks, risking discomfort and humiliation, to go to Washington to reach the top levels of the American government, and to put real passion, imagination, and courage into the cause of helping people who were not their friends and relatives? That was the highest demonstration of idealism and personal values.

The Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, now presided over by Micah Naftalin, national director, and Pamela Cohen, national president, with many local branches such as Chicago Action for Soviet Jewry (the largest among them), is still the only organization outside the former Soviet Union that monitors and protects the human rights of Jews in the hostile environment of the fallen empire. There are new refuseniks in Russia, new problems, new human tragedies. It is much harder to hear pleading voices out of the pandemonium of the new Russia than it was when the clatter of Soviet weaponry dominated everything.

I believe this (yet unfinished) episode in Jewish American history is the long expected counterbalance to the sad pages about the mistrust and indifference to the much worse plight of European Jewry under the Nazis. The Soviet Jews were not abandoned.

I omitted in this book most details of Nancy's struggle for my exodus. Nancy Rosenfeld gave her personal account of the story in her book *Unfinished Journey*, the first document of that kind ever, which fills the void I left.

Our meeting in Kharkov was the beginning of a very special friendship with Nancy. In America she was my practical guide into some deeper aspects of the American way of life. It turned out that we had a lot to tell each other, and the more we knew about each other, the more I felt that the refusal had presented me with another treasured gift. An amazing bond grew between us. It seemed to feed on similarities and differences, discoveries and disappointments, promise and denial. Its strength has been tested many times.

Here I want to list some other Americans who were closely involved in my case:

Pamela Cohen and Marillyn Tallman, leaders of Chicago Action for Soviet

Jewry, and all activists of this unique organization;

Lynn Singer, Long Island Council, who was president of the Union of Councils when I was in the refusal;

The Bay Area Council for Soviet Jewry in San Francisco and David Waksberg, its longtime president, with whom I had unforgettable meetings in Kharkov and San Francisco; only after arriving in America did I learn how much imagination and fun the Californians introduced into the rescue campaign;

Sandy Spinner from the Cincinnati Council for Soviet Jews: I very much liked her letters to me and was sorry when she hurt her hand and could not write anymore;

Lorna Adelman from Philadelphia, who sent us a letter of support every week, throughout the years of the refusal, with the steadiness of a lighthouse showing the way in the dark;

Milton Glaser, who has been providing me with scientific information, professional advice, and support for many years, from the refusal to the present.

Professor Peter Shaw, a scholar and writer from New York, wrote me unusual letters of support. They reminded me of the music of my favorite Bela Bartok: sober, dry, strong, no false optimism. Later he showed me around Manhattan—it was one of my strongest American impressions not only because of the Empire State Building and Grand Central Station but also because of the personality of my guide. Peter Shaw was also my first editor and adviser when he encouraged me to write for an American academic journal where he was executive editor. He was the very first reader and critic of a part of this book. I suspect that my English sounded to him as the Russian prison slang to me.

I am deeply grateful to North Shore Congregation Israel, which adopted my family when we were in the refusal. Rabbi Herbert Bronstein introduced me to the world of Reform Judaism totally unknown to me. He, Rabbi Stephen Hart, and Rabbi Paul Golomb helped our daughter, Irina, for whom the transition from Russia to America was the hardest, to adjust to American life in a summer camp and to receive a good education at Ida Crown Jewish Academy of Chicago.

The powerful impression Rabbi Bronstein made on me can be compared only with my first encounter with Jewish culture long ago in Siberia. This time it was not in a shabby teachers' club but in a beautiful temple.

Amnesty International was always a magical phrase for me and for all Soviet political prisoners, whom it protected from the worst forms of persecution like a spell against demons.

Here I wish to thank:

American correspondents in Moscow Robert Gillette (*The Los Angeles Times*) and Kevin Klose (*The Washington Post*);

My political supporters Congressmen John Porter, Alan Cranston, Alan J. Dixon, John Glenn, Edward M. Kennedy, Thomas Luken, Howard Metzenbaum, Paul Simon (he spoke to me over the phone after I had come home from the labor camp), Pete Wilson, Tom Lantos, and the late mayor of Chicago Harold Washington, who gave me the treasured key to the city;

Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, Archbishop of Chicago;

Nobel Laureates Arno Penzias, Christian Anfinsen, Herbert C. Brown, Jerome Karle, and Melvin Calvin;

Committee of Concerned Scientists, with special thanks to Dorothy Hirsch, Joel L. Lebowitz, and Zafra Lerman; I am indebted to Zafra for my introduction into the world of American academia, for wonderful meetings and discussions, and just for the privilege to be at least for a couple of moments involved in the whirlwind of activity that always surrounds her;

American scientists Peter Lax, Louis Nirenberg, Harry Gray, Harold Scheraga, E. R. Piore, Julien Hecklin, Amos Turk, Melvin Pomeranz, Joseph Lambert, Donald Ciappenelli, Jim Snyder, Harold Friedman, John Endicott, Peter Persham, Ulf Grenander (whose books were with me in the camp), Rolfe Herber, Thomas Spiro, Michael Lederer, Eric Stover, Gordon Bixler, Warren D. Niederhauser, Frank Press, Fred Basolo, Morris Pripstein, George C. Pimentel, and especially Richard J. Seltzer, whose articles about me in *Chemical and Engineering News* still serve me as the best explanation of the ten-year professional gap in my resume;

Professors of law Alan Dershowitz and Irwin Cotler;

My supporters in Chicago Jane Ramsey, Pat Nissenholz, and Eugene Golan. I am grateful to all Chicagoans who surrounded my family with warm attention.

I am indebted to Manuel Silberstein, a Foreign Service officer, for his help in arranging the speedy processing, through the State Department, of our immigration case when we were in Italy. Thanks to Nancy, I had a remarkable meeting with Manuel and his wife, Fanchon, in their Washington house. They are people of vast experience, residents of a larger world, much beyond American borders, aware of its diversity, richness, and long history.

In France the campaign on my behalf was coordinated by Mme. Jeannette Zupan. While in Russia, I knew very little about her practical efforts to draw the attention of French intellectuals and officials to my case. Her role in the campaign was enormous. She organized the international *Comité Youri Tarnopolski* and was its executive secretary. The committee included many Nobel Laureates, among them some legendary scientists whose names epitomized for me the history of science in this century.

Jeannette's remarkable letters to me were full of warmth and profound wisdom. They conveyed the same intense spirit of Christian compassion and forgiveness that attracted me so much in Victor Burdyug (whom I call here Nick). It may seem strange, but they both stand side by side in my memory. Both knew tragic losses. They both symbolize for me the immense spiritual power of Christianity, which I have always recognized and respected. Very unfortunately, I have not found an opportunity to meet Jeannette in person.

The committee on my behalf in France included Sir Derek H. Barton, Roger Buvat, Gustave Choquet, Paul Flory, Pierre Gilles de Gennes, Jean-Louis Greffe, Francois Gros, Gerhard Herzberg, Pierre Jaquinot, Edgar Lederer, Evelyne Nakache, Francis Perrin, Max F. Perutz, Paul Rabette, Alfred Ramani, R. A. Raphael, Auguste Rousset, Daniel Schumann, Gabriel Simonoff, Eugene P. Wigner. Professor Michel Che was its scientific secretary.

I am indebted to late Henny Kleiner for the translation and publication of my poetry in France and for the campaign of support among French poets. It was enormous and selfless work. I also wish to thank my publisher, Dominique Daguet.

My French supporters included Pierre Mauroy, the mayor of Lille and former prime minister of France. The fact that I was practically the first refusenik who was granted visas should be attributed to very special efforts made by Mr. Mauroy in interaction with the late mayor of Chicago Harold Washington. I am especially grateful to French officials Jaques Malamet, Jean-Pierre Guffroy, and Jack Lang.

My special thanks to French poets Jean Mambrino, Robert-Hugues Boulin, Georges-Emmanuel Clancier, Bruno Durocher, Pierre Emmanuel, Claudine Helft, Claire Laffay, Robert Mallet, Jean-Paul Mestas, Armand Olivennes, Claude Vigee, Serge Brindeau, Jehan Despert, Pierre Esperbe, Henri Heinemann, Jean-Paul Klee, and Pierre Seghers.

I thank the members of P.E.N. Club Francais for their support and The Freedom Award (Le Prix de la Liberté) that I was awarded in 1985: Eugene Ionesco, Andre Lwoff, Dimitri Stolypin, Rene Tavernier, Vercors, and Emmanuel Le Roy-Ladurie.

I am cordially grateful to my French supporters Claudette Bloch, Ruth Fein, Nicole Malamet, Dora and Herve Touitou (my first French correspondents), and Alain Suied, to French scientists Jaques Barbier, Georges Bram, Patrick Cassoux, Jean-Francois Hemedi, Jaques Charles Vedrine, Michel Guelton, and to Mexican poet Juan Cervera.

I would like to thank Mrs. Edith Frankel, England, who maintained contact with refuseniks in Kharkov.

I have the warmest memories of my Israeli correspondent Bruria Shirman. Her letters gave us the sound of live Hebrew, and her parcels brought us the treasured taste and smell of Israel.

I am sorry that I was unable to remember or missed the names of hundreds of other people from many countries who supported me and wrote letters to me and my family.

While in the refusal, my soul was an example of the classical school problem of a pool in which water comes through one pipe and drains out through another. It was not water, however, but the fluid of hope. Sometimes the level of hope was rather low. The letters of my supporters were a constant life-giving rain that never let it dry out.

Of all my supporters abroad, only a handful knew me personally. Some met each other and became good friends only because they had worked together on my behalf.

When I came to the USA, the knowledge about all that came to me as a heavy burden. I was dead tired from eight years of refusal, and I had an aversion to all that had anything to do with my past. I never wanted to be in the limelight. I was neither a prominent scientist nor a published writer nor a public figure. I was one of many prisoners of the cold war, a less known one. Certainly I did not deserve all that attention as a person.

The activity of all the people in the West who attacked the Soviets on specific issues of human rights, focusing on certain names, however, contributed to something much larger than their initial goals. I do not believe that communism collapsed on its own. I am convinced that the signatures of my supporters on petitions of protests, which were just a small part of the avalanche of similar petitions on behalf of other prisoners, in a way anticipated the sledgehammers at the Berlin Wall. It was a part of the campaign for human rights and disarmament that rammed the borders of the empire under banners with the names of Sakharov and Sharansky.

There was no single coordinating hand for the multitude of grass-roots campaigns. If not for the support of Western governments, however, the movement would not have succeeded. I have always held in high esteem former presidents James Carter and Ronald Reagan, to whom I feel indebted for my freedom. An absolute majority of former Soviet refuseniks share my feelings.

U.S. Ambassador in Vienna Warren Zimmerman deserves a lot of credit for his steady pressure on the Soviets on the issue of human rights.

My personal story is a microscopic part of the living tissue of history, which is made by common people as well as by presidents. I am happy I lived in the time of a big historical change and, in an oblique and mostly passive way, took part in it.

I address my final words of gratitude to our dog Nika. Her name is the Russian for Nike, the Greek goddess of victory. She was a permanent source of joy and consolation for all members of our family in the refusal. I anticipated with

trepidation our meeting, but she recognized and enthusiastically greeted me after three years of absence. I felt rewarded for my 1984.

Nika has not learned much English in America. She was disappointed by dog food and even more so by her neutered male friends—a breed totally unknown in Russia. In her dreams, she is still chasing hares in the fields of Ukraine.

Have I mentioned everybody? Ah, yes, the spiders! The only prison habit I have acquired for the rest of my life is respect for spiders. I never harm them and we have, probably, too big a spider refuge in our home. When I see a big one, I make a note in my wall calendar: S.

## AFTERWORD

By Nancy Rosenfeld

**I**n the spring of 1992 I was on my way to Providence, Rhode Island, to visit Yuri. As I stared out the window of the plane, my thoughts flashed back to our first meeting ten years earlier.

It was a dreary May day in Kharkov when I arrived from Moscow with my husband; our home in Deerfield, Illinois, seemed worlds away. The usual gaiety marking the first bloom of spring was missing from this gray industrial city located deep within the walls of the dreaded Ukraine.

We had traveled to the Soviet Union under the auspices of Chicago Action for Soviet Jewry (CASJ) to meet with Jewish refuseniks, and Kharkov was the second stop on a two-week tour extending from Moscow to Leningrad. I remembered the words of Marillyn Tallman (co-chairman of CASJ) shortly before our departure. She had said that during the genocide years of World War II, American Jews did not act to help victims of the Holocaust. "We know," said Marillyn, "what is taking place today behind the Iron Curtain, and the situation must be monitored to prevent another crime. *Neither oceans, nor miles, nor oppressive*

*governments will keep us away from our people."*

After hailing a taxi from downtown Kharkov, we arrived at Krasnoznamenny Pereulok 2, the apartment building of Yuri Tarnopolsky.

We entered the building, climbed to the fourth floor, and rang the doorbell. We were cautious not to knock because the KGB *always* knocked; friends used the buzzer. In a moment Yuri appeared at the door. I softly whispered, "Tarnopolsky, shalom!" He stood there, stunned. He could not believe our presence since nobody from the West had visited Kharkov in over three years. Yuri showed us into the apartment, and we made our introductions.

As we sat together in the rather worn-looking living room, we noticed a fine collection of some very rare books and recordings. Yuri spoke very softly.

Our meeting was intense. Yuri painfully and urgently related the details of his family's struggle for freedom and permission to emigrate. Many relatives and friends had already left the USSR and resettled in the West, but his own family had applied too late and had been trapped when the door to freedom closed in 1979 after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Since Kharkov was completely cut off, refuseniks there would have been isolated from the rest of the world if not for periodic visits to Moscow. At the time of this meeting Yuri had just returned from a visit to Moscow, where he had met with Robert Gillette, a correspondent from the *The Los Angeles Times*. It was fate that brought us to Kharkov at this time . . . one day earlier and we never would have met.

Yuri reached into his desk and pulled out a manuscript, which he had just completed shortly before our arrival. The paper was entitled "Description of a Disease." At this time he stressed the necessity for the article to remain anonymous. The "disease" or "otkaz" (the Russian for refusal) referred to the prolonged agony of the refusal. Marty and I smuggled it out of the country. It had great significance later.

.. fasten your seat belts. We are making our final descent into the Providence airport. . . ." Suddenly I realized that I had been lost in memory; this was Providence, USA, not Kharkov, USSR. This was to be a reunion in freedom, a celebration, not a mission or a desperate meeting held behind the Iron Curtain. Yuri was a free man.

As I looked below, my eyes quickly spanned the beautiful coastline of Rhode Island, with hundreds of boats dotting the bay area. I was thrilled and excited, not nervous and apprehensive as I had been ten years earlier.

Before long I was hurrying through the airport to the receiving area, where Yuri was waiting to greet me.



We spent the weekend taking long walks along the beautiful shores of Narragansett Bay and wandering through a densely forested area in a nearby park. The pain and joy of shared reflections over a ten-year struggle were recalled during our hikes.

Olga, Yuri's ever-patient and supportive wife, looked happy and seemed to be enjoying the beauty and tranquillity of her new land. We chatted together as the three of us continued our walk, and she spoke with pride about their daughter, Irina, a student at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

"Yuri, what crossed your mind on that day back in Kharkov when you opened the door of your apartment and found Marty and me standing outside in the corridor?"

"I felt absolutely unprepared, Nancy. I wasn't expecting anybody, and I was ashamed of my appearance since I was unshaven. You and Marty looked like people from another world. You looked beautiful."

"What were you thinking on that first day as we sat together and I began to relate the story of my own family's Russian roots?"

"I was completely focused on understanding what was being said. It was my first 'live' English experience."

"Were you able to grasp the significance of what I was telling you about the Soviet Jewry movement and the massive, worldwide effort that was being made to rescue Jewish refuseniks?"

"Since it was the first time I had heard about this, it was very hard for me to make an association with anything familiar. There was no basis for understanding the different organizations. But, Nancy, after you had left, the realization hit me that we were no longer alone. Our isolation had been broken."

That meeting in Kharkov was the beginning of an intensive international worldwide campaign to rescue Tarnopolsky. I led this dramatic campaign under the sponsorship of CASJ.

Yuri and I were driven by compulsion as we struggled together for several years from opposite sides of the Iron Curtain. The result of our obsessive struggle would lead to an extraordinary lifelong friendship.

"... We are like two people digging a tunnel from two different sides, and I think we will meet in the middle," said Yuri one day during a telephone conversation to Kharkov.

Yuri Tarnopolsky . . . kindred spirit and fellow author. It is with pride and satisfaction that I have embarked on a great venture with Yuri: the writing of our two books. These two volumes, which are separate but complementary, detail a single experience from our two distinct perspectives.

"Norma"

Deerfield, Illinois

March 1993

NOTE: Portions of this section have been excerpted from my book, *Unfinished Journey, "Two People, Two Worlds . . . from Tyranny to Freedom,"* University Press of America, 1993.