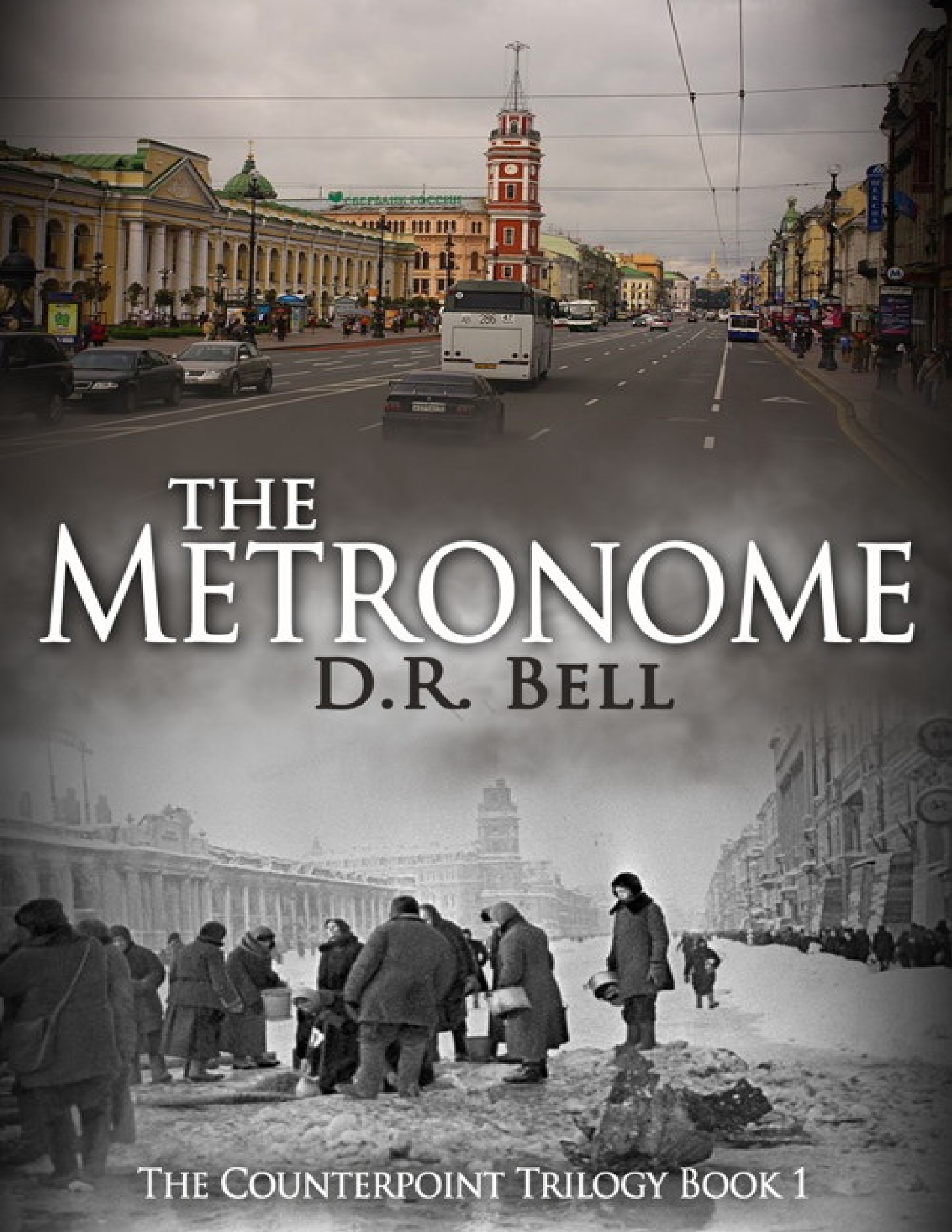

THE METRONOME

D.R. BELL

THE COUNTERPOINT TRILOGY BOOK 1

The Metronome

Book One of the Counterpoint Trilogy

D. R. Bell

The Metronome is the first book in *The Counterpoint* trilogy. The trilogy also includes *The Great Game* and *The Outer Circle*. *The Great Game* and *The Metronome* are largely independent, with only a minor overlap amongst the characters. *The Outer Circle* brings the heroes of the two earlier books together to conclude their journey.

“What’s past is prologue.”
William Shakespeare

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PART 1: NIGHT CALL

Wednesday, June 7, 2006, 3 a.m. EST

I hate when the phone rings in the middle of the night. Nobody likes such calls, but for me the feeling is visceral. It must have come from the old country, where a knock in the dark often meant that a black car was waiting downstairs and someone was about to disappear. Because of my father's work, we had the luxury of a phone. When it rang at odd hours, I heard my parents whisper. Then my father would quietly dress and leave.

The ringtone keeps getting louder. I reach for the phone, but it's not in its usual place on the nightstand. Something falls. On my left, a light comes on. I figure that the noise comes from a pile of clothes I now see on the floor. I stagger forward, fish the BlackBerry out of the pants pocket and raise it to the light to find the little "phone" button. I simultaneously realize that I am naked, that I am not in my apartment, and that there is a woman sitting up in bed. I have a momentary urge to cover myself, but the phone keeps ringing so I punch the button with a little green sign if only to silence the noise.

The man's voice on the other end is speaking Russian. Amazing, but even after twenty years the brain still switches languages seamlessly. I listen to the voice, at first not comprehending what he wants. I need a paper and a pen. I cover the phone and ask the woman. She shakes her head, rummages in the nightstand on her side, and hands over a small pad and a pencil. I write down the name and the number and hang up.

"Don't your Russian friends know the time difference?"

By now I am completely awake and know who she is: Sarah, an ex-girlfriend of my soon-to-be-ex-wife and an ex-wife of my ex-partner. If two wrongs can make a right, would four exes make for a mended future? Bits and pieces of last night's events come to me. Her expression changes when I answer:

"My father is dead."

The airport surges with families going on their summer vacations. Between a still-valid Russian passport and mention of Major Vakunin and a family emergency, getting an Aeroflot ticket to St. Petersburg was easy. Vakunin is the *militzia* officer that called me last night. *Militzia* is the Russian term for police. My father was an investigator in the St. Petersburg *militzia* for many years; that's why I had the honor of a ranking officer calling me. I program Vakunin's number into my BlackBerry and call AT&T to make sure I have roaming in Russia. I also call the credit card company to let them know I'll be using the card abroad. I now have to take care of the details myself.

Poor Sarah, she must have regretted running into me three days ago and agreeing to have dinner last night. To her credit, she jumped out of bed, made us both a strong coffee—*You need caffeine to function!* —and cried, genuinely sympathetic over my loss. I did not explain to her that my father and I have been estranged for many years.

November of 1984. My mother is lying in a narrow hospital bed. Cancer has eaten away her body. I don't know if she can hear us, as her lungs still noisily suck in oxygen. Her eyes are open, but she seems to be looking past me, face expressionless.

I hold her hand and scream at my father, "You have connections, bring in the best doctors. She is only fifty-nine! There is still hope!"

He is standing three feet away, not touching her, and coldly replies, "Pavel, let her go. She is not suffering anymore."

Mother died two days later. I've seen him only three times since: when I told him I was leaving the land of the victorious proletariat; when I brought my family to visit Russia in 1999; and when he surprisingly came to visit us last year. I've never gotten over his calmness, his coldness that day. That anger is still inside me; I have not been able to let go.

When I got to my apartment to pick up a few things for the trip, my father's voice was on the answering machine, the call forwarded from the old Connecticut number. He called at 9:42 p.m. when I was finishing dinner with Sarah, negotiating a return to her place. He spoke in his typical commanding manner: "Pavel? It's your father. I tried your cell phone, but there is no answer. If you get this message, please call me back. There is a situation you should know about."

He did not know that my cell number had changed. My previous number was on a corporate account of my last job and trying to salvage it from a cell phone carrier became a bureaucratic nightmare that I did not have the stomach for. Then a second call came in at 10:31 p.m., just as Sarah and I were tearing each other's clothes off. This time, a hesitating, pausing, almost stumbling message: "Pavel? It's me. If we don't talk again…I am sorry for any wrong that I did. I was not always the best father. But I loved your mother more than anything… You remember how she used to always worry that you don't eat enough, send you food? Goodbye."

A few hours later, a *militzia* officer called to tell me he was dead. My father's last message was so unlike him that I would not have believed it if a secretary had taken it. But the voice was his, no doubt about that.

I call Jennifer before we board. She answers sleepily.

“Hello?”

“Hi, honey. Did I wake you up?”

“It’s OK, Dad.”

“I am sorry, honey, I know it’s early. How are you?”

“I’m good. Almost done with the exams. Signed up for a surfing class down by Grandpa in a couple of weeks. I can’t wait!”

“Great. Honey, I have bad news: the other grandpa is dead.”

She sobs. “Oh, no! The one in Russia? What happened?”

“Yes, the one in Russia. I am not quite sure. I’m at the airport, flying out to St. Petersburg. They are calling my flight.”

“Be careful, Dad.”

“I will. I love you.”

“Love you too.”

On the long flight from New York to Moscow, I sit in economy. It’s not comfortable. I used to fly business or first class, but I can’t afford either at this time. Next to me is a twenty-something kid. He is very excited to go to Russia with his family who are sitting across the aisle from us. After learning that I am originally from Russia, he gets wound up even more and starts throwing questions at me:

“How did you come to the U.S.?”

How did I? Do I explain that I caused a bit of a diplomatic furor? The headlines were screaming “Congressman’s Daughter Wants to Reunite with Her Husband!” and “Let Pavel Rostin Go!” That was my fifteen minutes of fame. I choose to mumble that I married an American woman.

The kid does not stop.

“And what do you do?”

I try to keep it short.

“I am a physicist, but I worked on Wall Street.”

“Wow, I want to work on Wall Street! How did you get a job there?”

He sprays saliva in excitement.

One of the problems with middle age is that any question can bring up unwanted memories. I am now in the office of Jason Rabinow, the chair of the physics department, at the college where I teach. Jason sadly shakes his bald head and says, “Physics is true science. Why would you exchange it for glorified trading?” Because he and his wife raised three kids, he does not quite understand

why the teaching salary is not enough when you have a wife and two kids. Of course, his wife was not the daughter of a rich U.S. congressman.

“I started in quantitative analysis and ended up running a hedge fund for a while,” I answer the kid.

“Hedge fund!? I’m studying accounting; can I come intern for you after we get back?”

I am glad my loquacious neighbor has a seat belt on; otherwise he would have jumped out of his chair.

Then he gets suspicious and accidentally hits a painful spot.

“I thought you people traveled in first class?”

“Sometimes things don’t work out,” I muster, and succeed at getting the attention of a passing flight attendant to ask for a small bottle of Scotch. The kid loses interest, deciding that I am a fraud. He is right. I was there at the top for about a year, running a fund with over a hundred million under management. Doing great for a while; then it was like someone was following us, knowing our positions, crowding our trades. When the fund dropped 17 percent in one-quarter, the secretive major investor forced a liquidation. I relied on my partner, Martin, for most of the legal due diligence, so I did not know about an unusual small print proviso in the documents that gave priority to that investor. We were finished.

I think of Sarah, Martin’s ex. She did not want to talk about her divorce, only said that it’d been in the works before our hedge fund collapsed. Without knowing it, we both moved to New York two months ago and rented apartments only four blocks apart. Yesterday at the end of our dinner she said, “You can come with me if you like; I don’t want to be alone.” Her lips curved into an anxious smile.

I paused, unsure because there’s been this chemistry between us for years. She sensed my hesitation and quickly tried to protect herself. “You really don’t have to, no hurt feelings.”

“I want to; that’s what scares me,” I replied.

She gave me a quick smile of relief. “Same here.”

I drink the last of the Scotch and decide to take a nap. It’s already nighttime in St. Petersburg. I suffer one of my recurring dreams where I am fighting but can’t see the opponent, so my punches strike at the empty air until my arms tire.

Thursday, June 8

After a stopover in Moscow, I land at Pulkovo, St. Petersburg's airport, at 10 a.m.; I am planning to go straight to my parents' apartment, but as I walk off the plane, I realize that I have no keys. Before I have a chance to call Major Vakunin I am intercepted by a *militziaman* in his late twenties.

"Pavel Vladimirovich Rostin?"

"Major Vakunin?" I ask in turn.

The young man protests, "No, the major asked me to meet you. I am Lieutenant Govrov."

I want to ask how they knew which flight I was on, then I think better of it.

Govrov continues anxiously, "I am supposed to take you to identify the body and then to your father's place on Malaya Sadovaya. Unless you want to go and rest first…"

The events of the past twenty-four hours feel surreal, but then the last few months have been this way. I am like an automaton, reacting to external commands. I nod my agreement to the plan, and Govrov relaxes. He walks to the baggage area and is surprised when I tell him I have just the small backpack and a rollaway bag. His Lada is parked outside—*militzia's* privilege—and he opens the back door for me. We get in and drive north into the city.

I try questioning Govrov about my father's death, but he only responds that Major Vakunin is handling the case. I attempt a different angle, get the same response, give up. For the rest of the short drive, I just look out the window. I spent the first seventeen years of my life in this city, and it's still my home. I am happy to see that it looks more colorful, more alive than during my youth or even since the last time I visited seven years ago.

We drive through the city center to Suvorovskiy Prospekt, where Govrov parks the car in front of a massive gray building guarded by giant Tuscan columns. The place is buzzing with activity. I follow Govrov up the steps and down some corridors until we arrive at a door marked "Medical Examiner."

Back when I was a teenager, my father wanted to bring me to a morgue, to make me see "what death looks like." Being a detective, he'd been there many times. Mother blocked the idea as foolish, and he grumbled about not teaching me what real life is like, but relented. As the result, I've never been to a morgue. Linoleum floors, fluorescent lights, no windows. There is a smell in the air, a lingering hint of formaldehyde, decay, and death. As one would expect in a movie script, a gaunt, cadaverous-looking man in a white coat sits behind a desk

piled high with papers. An ashtray overflows with cigarette butts. I feel like having a smoke even though I quit many years ago. Govrov tells the man why we are there. The man motions us to follow, rolls out a gurney, lifts the sheet.

For a tiny second, I am relieved that it's not him; then I realize my mistake. My father has an almost relaxed, peaceful expression, different from the strict look he wore in life. He has not changed much since the last time I saw him about fifteen months ago. May have lost a few pounds, but otherwise the same lean body even at eighty-one. I don't have to guess how he died; a round wound with a black burn mark on his temple tells the story.

I point to it.

"Is this…"

"Yes," the examiner jumps in eagerly. "This is the cause of death and the only wound. Looks like a suicide. No defensive wounds, no signs of struggle…"

Govrov coughs and the examiner stops talking.

The image of the hospital bed with my dying mother is stuck in my head, and I can't let go of it. I feel neither anger nor love, only sadness. I have no siblings, no uncles or aunts, my father the only link to the past. Now I have no past.

The examiner asks, "Pardon the formality, but this is Vladimir Ivanovich Rostin, your father, right?"

I nod. "Yes."

Govrov exhales, happy that this part of his task is over.

"Let me drive you to the apartment. Major Vakunin will meet us there."

He starts walking out, then pauses when I don't follow.

I stop the examiner from covering my father's face. I take Father's cold hand, close my eyes, push away the image of my mother dying.

One of my first memories: I am three, I am walking between my parents, each of them holding one hand. It's a bright sunny day on Nevskiy Prospekt. "One, two, three …" They lift me up, my skinny legs dangling in the air, and I am laughing. "Again, again!"

I see my father teaching me to play soccer when I was five. "You do a nice gentle pass with the inside of your foot." He shows me. "Now, for a power kick…"

I am ten, sitting across the table from him, chess set between us, and he smiles when I win.

I am twenty-five, telling him I plan to leave my country forever; he nods and says nothing.

I feel alone. All alone.

To Govrov's great relief, I finally turn and follow him out of the room and the building.

Govrov parks his Lada on Nevskiy Prospekt. Malaya Sadovaya … Little Garden Street. The street I grew up on. My parents were lucky to live here; that had much to do with moving in at the end of the war when the city's population was still scarce, or so they told me. There were occasional designs on pushing them out, but with my father being a respected *militzia* investigator, we were not an easy target.

Malaya Sadovaya is now an area of fashionable stores, closed to traffic. Nicely painted buildings, flowers, statue of a photographer. It's a beautiful if humid sunny day, with lots of people out. Women are in shorts and bright-colored short dresses, showing off their legs after the cold winter and spring. We make our way through the crowd to the third building on the right, climb the stairs. There is no longer the urine smell that'd been there since I could remember. We get to the third landing, the door on the left is the one I walked through thousands of times. It is slightly ajar. I expected a yellow tape or something indicating investigative activity, but there is nothing of the sort.

Govrov respectfully waits. I put my hand on the door handle and hesitate. I get the feeling that stepping across this threshold is crossing into the unknown. I take a deep breath, push the door open, and walk in.

Three doors in the familiar corridor. The two on the left lead to the kitchen and the bathroom. The one on the right takes you to the living room and the bedroom. This last one is open and I walk in.

Two people are there already. One is wearing a *militzia* uniform; the other is in civilian clothing. The uniformed man walks toward me with a big smile and an open hand.

"Andrei Vakunin. I worked with your father."

Everything about him is large: the hand, the height, the girth, the head, the mustache.

The other man is slight, more refined, expensive-looking suit, careful haircut. After an awkward minute, he flashes small white teeth and stealthily moves forward.

"Pavel Vladimirovich? I am Nikolai Pemin, the investigator. I also had the pleasure of knowing your father."

I shake hands and smile.

Pemin looks at Vakunin and gives a slight nod in the direction of the door.

Vakunin tells Govrov, "Lieutenant Govrov, thank you for your service. You

can go now."

Dismissed, Govrov quietly leaves. Vakunin turns to me.

"Pavel Vladimirovich, I am sorry you had to start your visit with identifying the body of your father. I am afraid it could not be helped."

I nod, trying to show understanding.

Vakunin guiltily waves his hand.

"I realize you must be tired, but we would like to discuss the circumstances of his death."

Yes, so would I.

"Where did it happen?"

"Right here—" Vakunin starts, but Pemin unceremoniously interrupts him.

"Pavel Vladimirovich, please sit down," Pemin says. He pulls a chair from the table and points to it. His manner is so authoritative that I follow his direction without protest. Pemin looks at Vakunin, who sits in a chair to my right. Pemin remains standing, now the tallest person in the room.

"Pavel Vladimirovich, when did you last hear from your father?"

I was about to answer that my father left me two messages before he died, but something in Pemin's manner puts me on guard. I am sitting in a chair in the middle of the room and he is interrogating me. This does not feel right.

"March of last year, when he came to visit us in Connecticut. He stayed with us for three days."

"Are you sure? You hesitated."

"I have to think before I respond. I have this habit." I get sarcastic when I am angry. "I sent him an e-mail a few weeks ago that I was moving to New York. I did not hear back."

"OK. You understand, it's very important that we know the truth."

"It's important that I know the truth as well," I spit out. "Where was my father when he killed himself?"

"It was indeed right here, by his desk." Pemin points to the bedroom. For as long as I can remember, my father had his work desk there by the window. He liked to work by natural light. I stand up and walk there. The chair is pushed to the side; there is a chalk-drawn contour and a dark spot.

Pemin continues.

"Yesterday morning at about 7 a.m. the neighbor heard a loud noise. He rang the bell, but no one answered, so he called the *militzia*. The door was closed but not locked; the *militzia* men came in and found your father lying on the floor."

He pauses and offers me a drink of water. I decline.

Pemin shrugs. "Why did you say it was a suicide?"

"The medical examiner said that's what it looked like."

“Maybe it was, but we have to consider all possibilities. Was he sick?” he asks.

“He had prostate cancer. Stage one. Doctors told him it was slow moving.”

“Hmmm, that’s interesting …” Pemin sits in the chair across from me, opens a half-inch thick brown file lying on the table, studies a couple of papers. “Because according to his medical records, his cancer was rather advanced. Stage four.”

“What???” I feel like someone slugged me in the stomach. “No, there must be some kind of mistake. He told me it was well under control. He even joked that he was certain he wouldn’t die from cancer.”

“And when did he tell you that?”

“When I saw him last year.”

“I see.”

Pemin pulls a photo out of the file, shows it to me. It’s a picture of a handgun.

“He was killed with an old German gun, a Walther PPK. Do you know anything about this gun?”

“I know my father had fought in the war. He must have taken it from the enemy.”

“Well, that’s not legal…” Pemin starts, then waves his arm. “Ahhh, it does not matter now. Here’s the problem: the neighbor across the way claims he heard two different types of noises: first something that sounded like a muffled shot, then that of a closing door. It’s possible that someone was in the apartment with your father. Do you know who may have wanted to kill him?”

“No, I have no idea. I am sure he made enemies back when he was an investigator, but he’s been retired for a long time.”

“Yes, fourteen years.” Pemin nods. “Not likely that it’s someone from his past. Do you have any brothers or sisters?”

“No, I don’t.” I am tempted to add that surely an investigator should know this.

“Any relatives?”

“No. My parents were the only ones from their families that survived the war and the blockade.”

“Ah, yes. So you are the only living relative?”

“As far as I know.”

“Well, here’s what I am struggling with, Pavel Vladimirovich. *Cui Bono*, as they say, who benefits? The only asset of any significance that your father owned is this apartment. Given the area, this apartment is worth at least thirty million rubles, probably more. That’s over a million dollars. You didn’t know

that he was terminally ill …”

The essence of what he is saying gets through my jet-lagged brain.

“Are you insane?” I ask Pemin in genuine wonderment.

He only smiles.

“And you did have some financial problems lately, have not you? You are the only heir, and this money would go a long way to improving your situation. When one can hire a contract killer for a small fraction of the value…” Pemin makes a sweeping motion across the apartment. “The door lock was not broken; your father let someone in—why? Did he think that the killer was carrying a message from you?” He stops theatrically.

I am speechless, as the difficulty of my position sinks in. I finally squeeze out, “I did not hire anybody; this is complete and total nonsense.”

Vakunin looks aside while Pemin stares right at me. I feel like a shadow of a smile crosses his lips.

“Of course, this is all speculative,” Pemin says. “Are you sure you did not have any communication from your father lately? We need some lead, something to explain why he was killed. Because, right now, the only person we know who has a motive is you, Pavel Vladimirovich. Major Vakunin here does not believe that it’s you.”

“And you think I did it?”

“I am an investigator; I have to stick to the facts and motives,” Pemin says. “I feel like there is some information here that I am missing.”

After a quiet minute, Vakunin noisily gets up. “Excuse us, Pavel Vladimirovich, Detective Pemin and I need to have a discussion.”

They go out of the apartment; in the background I hear quiet conversation. Vakunin comes back.

“Pavel Vladimirovich, we’d like to make funeral arrangements for tomorrow at 10 a.m.”

“You? For tomorrow?”

“He was a part of the department for many years; the department was his second family.”

Why do I feel like I am being rebuked? I meekly protest, “But how would people find out and make plans on such a short notice? And what about the investigation?”

“We’ve examined the body, we know the cause of death, we won’t gain anything by postponing the funeral. He had no relatives; you said it yourself. People in the department will be informed and given time off if they want to attend. We’ll take care of everything and send a car for you.”

I nod, not sure whether I should resist the plan.
“Do you need anything today? Would you prefer to go to a hotel?”
“No, I am fine. I will stay here.”
Vakunin looks at Pemin, who nods.
“By rules, you should not, but we have searched the apartment already.”
They go, leaving me alone.

I stand by the window, taking in the street’s noise. There used to be a produce stall on the corner. Usually it would offer small, partly rotten apples and brownish heads of cabbage. But once in a while an unexpected delicacy would show up: oranges, bananas, tangerines. Mother habitually checked the window every few minutes. If she saw a line forming, she would grab her faithful *avoska* string bag and run downstairs. If you did not queue up in the first fifteen minutes, you were too late, although for many years we had our share of overseas delicacies. At some point in his career, my father “got off” a manager of a large food store. Father grumbled that the man was a thief but happened to be innocent of the particular transgression that someone tried to pin on him. The grateful manager had a package of food and liquor delivered to us monthly, to my mother’s great pleasure and my father’s chagrin. On this particular issue, mother reigned supreme. Alas, in the mid-1970s, the man was finally arrested for embezzlement, and the packages stopped.

I don’t remember much of my early years. Our small household was very orderly. Father had his habits, favorite foods, favorite TV shows. Mother sometimes tried to change the routine and he would indulge her for a while, but then slowly bring things back to normal. The fragments that come to me are mostly related to my father or to some of the grand Leningrad buildings. Of course, no self-respecting local called the city “Leningrad;” it was simply “Peter.” Both my father and the buildings had towered as a larger than life authority. I wonder if that’s why twenty years later I rebelled against them.

In 1986, I stood in almost the same spot, delivering the “I am leaving” message. The law of eternal recurrence. But perhaps not so eternal—this time my father is not sitting in his chair, nodding gravely.

The desk’s surface is clean and empty, except for a holder with pens and pencils, a mouse pad, and an old metronome. That’s how he liked it: uncluttered. The mouse pad is new; everything else has been there for as long as I remember.

Sometimes my parents would turn the metronome on. *Click…click…click* They would do it when they argued; one would turn on the device and an

argument would end. And sometimes mother would say, “Today is such-and-such date” and start the metronome. My parents would exchange glances and grow silent for a minute.

I decide to go through the desk drawers. The two large, lower drawers are occupied by carefully marked hanging file folders, mostly various bills and correspondence. I flip through them, wishing I had inherited some of my father’s organizational habits.

The left upper drawer contains two rulers, a USB cable, and a few computer books and CDs. It registers with me that there is no computer on the desk. My father had a Dell laptop; he brought it with him last year and was proud of mastering it, at least enough to use e-mail and search the Internet. I make a mental note to look for his laptop.

When I lived here on Malaya Sadovaya, the left middle drawer had always been locked. I had never seen my parents open it. I pull on the handle expecting to find it locked, but it effortlessly slides out. It’s empty.

The right upper and middle drawers have newer bills and correspondence, stuff yet to be filed.

There is a thin file marked “Medical.” The latest report is from four months ago. Stage four, inoperable, life expectancy one to three years. I look at the earlier reports. Pemin was right. Father lied to me last year; his cancer was already well advanced when he visited us.

As I thumb through the rest of the pile, on the bottom of the middle drawer I see a full-size notebook. I pull it out. The cover is faded, but it must have been colorful when new. It says “Diary.” I open the notebook. The paper is yellowish and brittle. The first page says:

The Diary of Vladimir Rostin
Began 18 August, 1941

My father’s handwriting has changed over the years, but I can recognize his hand in careful, almost calligraphic letters. August 18th was his birthday. On August 18, 1941, he has just turned seventeen.

The doorbell rings. I carefully put the diary back under the pile of papers and go to open the door. The man in his fifties standing there has a careful smile and unnaturally black hair. He starts with, “Pavel Vladimirovich?”

“Yes. And you are?”

“My name is Evgeny Zorkin. I am your neighbor.” With that, he first points

to the door behind him, then to his feet. The gesture puzzles me until I realize that he is wearing slippers. That must be his way of proving to me that he is indeed my neighbor and not someone off the street. With me being silent, he continues. “I am so sorry for your loss.”

“Thank you.”

“Do you mind if I come in?”

“Well …” I don’t feel like having company right now.

“I promise it won’t be long.”

I reluctantly invite Mr. Zorkin inside. We come into the living room and take chairs on opposite sides of the table.

“Vladimir Ivanovich was a wonderful person; I am sorry for your loss,” he repeats.

“How long have you lived here?” I ask in order to say something.

“I moved in about seven years ago. Such a wonderful place!”

At this point I remember Pemin saying that a neighbor called the police.

“Were you the one who called the police yesterday morning?”

A color of excitement comes into Zorkin’s pasty complexion.

“Yes, it was me. I usually sleep late.” He rushes to explain this impropriety, “You see, I stay up past midnight. I indulge in a bit of trading on international stock markets. But you are the expert in this, right?”

On seeing my expression, he continues.

“So, when I was woken up by a loud noise, I did not immediately come out. I had to get dressed.”

“What was the time?”

“It was 7:09 a.m. I know exactly because I looked at the bedside clock when the noise woke me up.”

“And what kind of noise was it?”

“I am not an expert, but I thought it sounded like a gunshot or a loud car exhaust. I started getting dressed when I heard a second sound; that one was like someone had slammed a door. Please understand that this is a noisy street; we get all kinds of things going on at all hours. But these sounds were not the usual kind of noise.”

“How do you know it was this door?”

“I don’t know for sure, but there are only two doors on this floor.”

I nod for him to continue.

“I came out and there was nobody on the landing, so I rang the bell to your father’s place. I rang and rang, then called the police.”

“But my father could have been out?”

“I knew his routine; he would usually leave between eight and eight thirty,

just as I was getting up."

"And then?"

"Then *militzia* arrived and found your father." Zorkin said this with a sense of pride, as if he solved the crime.

I remain silent.

"So, Pavel Vladimirovich, are you planning to go back to your work on Wall Street?"

"How do you know what I do?"

"I am a resourceful man," demurs Zorkin, then continues in a tentative tone, "If you are not staying in St. Petersburg, you won't need this apartment?"

"And?"

"Well, I just thought that if you look to sell, I am interested. Very, very interested. It's not too difficult to connect the two apartments…"

I remember what Pemin said, but my expression must have spooked Zorkin because he starts apologizing.

"I am sorry, I understand this is not the best time…"

"And how much would this apartment go for?"

"Well…" A combination of greed and uncertainty passes over Zorkin's face. "It can fetch several hundred thousand dollars…I would be willing to go even higher because I am a motivated buyer. I am very, very interested."

So Pemin was right: the place must be worth well over a million.

"Of course, selling such a property requires a lot of paperwork and effort, and I could save you from all of this. As I said, I am a resourceful man with many connections."

I stand up signaling the end of our conversation.

Zorkin gets up too, but before leaving reaches into his pocket.

"Here is my visiting card. Evgeny Antonovich Zorkin, mobile phone, e-mail. I am very, very interested and I'll make it happen quickly, no hassle."

After Zorkin departs, still mumbling "very, very interested," I go through the apartment looking for my father's computer. There is not a lot of furniture. I search in the neatly organized wardrobe, check out the kitchen and the bathroom. Nothing.

The bookcase still has most of the volumes I've read as a child: collected works by Chekhov, Tolstoy, Gogol, Turgenev. I pick up the books, run my fingers over gold lettering on a black spine. *The Three Musketeers. War and Peace.* The familiar old edition of *The Count of Monte Cristo,* the pages stained and yellow—my parents had some sentimental attachment to the book. I remember father reading these books to mother. It was a ritual that I could not

quite understand: she was a language teacher, perfectly capable of reading. And she must have known these books by heart. But she would sit with her eyes closed, almost hypnotized, as if some important secret was being revealed.

There is a shelf of chess manuals and books on math and physics. But there are some works I have not seen before: Solzhenitsyn, Grossman, Updike. Surprisingly, I find fairly new books on finance—offshore banking, offshore companies, money laundering. Some are in Russian, some in English. I did not realize his English was good enough to read these, and I am not sure why he would after his retirement. No sign of the laptop, though.

On the upper shelf of the closet, I find a photo album. I sit down on the bed and look through the pictures. They are well organized by date through 1984, the year my mother died. But a few photos are at the end in a small pile. My father organized everything, except for the pictures. I look through the pile, surprised to find pictures of me, Karen, and the kids taken over the years. I puzzle over them for a moment, then realize that these are the pictures I e-mailed him when he asked. He had them nicely printed.

A couple of older black-and-white pictures catch my attention: my parents in their twenties with a light-haired boy who looks to be about thirteen; my parents with another couple and two young men; one is the same boy but grown up. I don't quite understand why these pictures are not filed in chronological order and why I have not seen them earlier. I look for a recent photo of my father, find one of him with a slightly younger man. Father looks the same as he did during last year's visit, even wearing the same sweater. The other man looks vaguely familiar. I am not sure why.

I sit on the bed, thinking whether I want to contact anyone. I left in 1978 to go to college in Moscow; I barely remember my schoolmates. My parents were the only war survivors in their families; I have no relatives. There is nobody to call. Jet lag overcomes me. It's only about 3 p.m., but I can't fight it. I stretch out and close my eyes.

I wake up from hunger pains. I have not eaten since the airplane breakfast. Still groggy, I don't bother changing. I grab the apartment key that Vakunin left on the dining table and go downstairs. Just as I come out, there is a little café temptingly called *Sweet Tooth*. It's not the right thing to do, but I go in for a strong black coffee and a couple of cakes. As I order, I realize that I have no rubles. Fortunately, they accept my Visa. The cakes calm my stomach while the coffee brings me back to the land of the living. Even though it's already evening,

it’s warm and light outside. The short street is full of people, most speaking Russian, but also English, German, French. Tourists gather around a fountain and a statue of a man taking pictures. Since my days here, they have replaced the boring asphalt with colorful tiles, turning the street into a place to stroll.

I walk to Nevskiy Prospekt, turn right, and blend into the crowd. I walk on the street of my childhood. It was the walk I would take for ten years, as my school was located all the way up on the Admiralty Embankment. Twenty minutes walk there, twenty minutes back. I have learned the history of every building on the way. I never wanted to take a tram or a metro; I loved walking the Nevskiy even during the winter when the wet wind would push you back, determined to prevent you from getting to the river. When I was little, my mother would walk me. When I got older, I did not want her to.

I recall it was Gogol who said, “There is nothing better than Nevskiy Prospekt!” I think he was right. Karen preferred Paris, but then she’s only been to St. Petersburg once. The Nevskiy is different now, brighter, with many stores and restaurants, and people are dressed similar to New Yorkers. Young people check each other out, now that the weather is warm and bulky clothing has been shed.

Not many boats on the Griboyedov Canal; they can’t travel under the low Kazanskiy Bridge. The native St. Petersburgers call the canal by its old name, the Catherine Canal, after Catherine the Great. The buildings on both sides of the canal are the typical beautiful buildings of old St. Petersburg, adorned with porticos and caryatides. But, beyond the façade, the courtyards are dark, the stairways dimly lit. Go there and you are transported into the novels of Dostoyevsky…or Zola or Dickens.

The beautiful House of Books is straight ahead. How many times did I get in trouble at home because I lost myself amongst its shelves and forgot what time it was? A hundred years ago a famous producer of sewing machines, Zinger decided to build a skyscraper similar to the “Singer Building” in New York. But according to the local law, not a single building could be higher than the Winter Palace. Zinger agreed to make it lower but ordered that a glass dome be placed on top so that it looked a little bit more like a skyscraper. After the revolution, they got rid of sewing machines and turned the building into a bookstore. I’d love to visit for old times’ sake, but it’s closed for renovation.

Kazanskiy Cathedral is towering on the other side of the street. I used to feel that its colonnades were like two arms, trying to grab the passersby. Mother would tell me they are trying to welcome, not capture. The cathedral became a memorial to victory over Napoleon. The French emperor thought that taking

Moscow would end the war, and that mistake cost him his empire. Kutuzov's statue is in front, pointing a sword at past and future invaders.

The memory comes to me. It's late August 1968, and I am seven years old. I remember it vividly because I am about to start first grade. My parents and I are right here, before the cathedral. Mother has on her favorite green summer dress, and father is in his usual black pants and short-sleeved white shirt, minus the jacket. It's hot, and they buy me an ice cream bar from the vendor. The three of us sit on the bench; I lick the frozen goodness, enjoying every little bit of it.

Father has been moody for the past couple of months. I can sense that mother is being careful around him, see her using his diminutive name, cooking his favorite dishes.

She says, "Volodya, you did what you had to do. It was the best for Pavel. You can't help…" Her voice trails off.

My father's reply is quiet, measured.

"No, Nastya, I can't. But it still hurts. And now the bastards are invading again."

"Who is invading?" I ask. "The French?" I had just read about the War of 1812; we are sitting in front of Kutuzov's statue, and I am anxious to demonstrate my knowledge.

"Nobody is invading, Pavel." Mother hugs me. "Your father misspoke. Volodya, tell him you misspoke."

My father is silent, his face severe. Years later, I figured he must have been referring to the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia: half a million soldiers from the Soviet Union and its allies occupied the country to stop the "Prague Spring" reforms. The rest of the conversation is still unclear to me.

I cross Green Bridge over Moika River and admire colorful boats full of tourists. When I lived here, the official name was People Bridge, but no self-respecting inhabitant of the city would call it that. I stop to admire the Stroganov Palace: the facade has been transformed from a neglected, dilapidated dark green shadow to a light pink Baroque beauty, probably as Bartolomeo Rastrelli originally intended back in the eighteenth century. The Stroganovs were the Russian counterparts of the Dutch and English merchant adventurers and empire builders. Since the reign of Ivan the Terrible, they were the richest businessmen in Russia. It was the Stroganovs that crossed the Ural Mountains and started the Russian conquest of Siberia. Peter the Great elevated them into the Russian nobility. Funny how things turn out; now they are primarily remembered for Beef Stroganoff.

The Nevskiy ends, and I continue down the Palace Square Road. On my right, the expansive Palace Square. In the history books of my youth, it was primarily mentioned when describing how the heroic revolutionary masses in 1917 crossed the square to storm the palace. In truth, there were no great masses or battles; it was a simple *coup d'état* where the Bolsheviks occupied government buildings without much struggle. The Winter Palace was defended by cadets and an all-female battalion who offered no resistance. The Red Guards broke into the palace, looted parts of it, and arrested the provisional government. Obviously, this was not glorious enough so a politically correct version of "storming the palace" has been created in films and books. As Orwell put it, "He who controls the present controls the past." The coup may have been bloodless, but what followed was certainly not. Grabbing power can be easy—governing is the hard part.

The red granite Alexander Column rises in the middle, with the Winter Palace behind it. The Admiralty's golden spire is soaring to my left, fronted by the Alexander Garden.

I walk to my former school that's hidden in a nondescript building in the shadow of the Admiralty. I don't know what favors my parents called on to enroll me here, in a "gifted children" school, right in the middle of Peter's city. While taking classes, my eyes would wander to the Peter and Paul fortress across the river, to the spit of Vasilievskiy Ostrov. Sometimes I would skip a class and go to the Hermitage or visit the Bronze Horseman just a few minutes away or, in my senior year, sneak out with one of the girls to the Alexander Garden and practice kissing.

My father rarely came to the school; it was my mother's job to keep up with my grades and teachers. I do recall him coming once, when I was thirteen. Some big party official showed up to speak that day. I remember because it was soon after Nixon resigned, and people were whispering trying to understand: How is it that the Americans forced their own president out?

The big party cheese explained to us that in America they had a "palace coup" where one group of capitalists overpowered the other, that it had nothing to do with their constitution. And, of course, this could never happen here because our government represents all the people, not some capitalist clique. Americans were right to criticize Nixon because he was a scoundrel. We are also free to criticize our government, but only as long as the criticism is true. Because if your criticism is not true, then it's a lie, and we punish people for lying. The

big party official finished by saying that we, the students, were fortunate to grow up in our truly democratic country led by the Party and that we should always follow the Party's direction because that's the only way to a bright future. Everyone got up and applauded.

Afterward, I asked my father what he thought of the speech.

He looked at me and said, "Pavel, remember, you and only you are responsible for your actions, what you will or won't do, where you will draw the line."

The old grouch could not even give me a normal answer. Only years later, when I was already in Moscow, I understood what he was saying. It was lies, lies, lies that they were feeding us. Lies from our teachers, in our textbooks, in our newspapers, on TV, from our leaders. Lies that those in power tell in order to stay in power. Lies designed to make us follow them rather than to think for ourselves. I was angry at my father because he knew it was lies, but he did not tell me. I think that's what eventually made me so angry—foolishly believing the lies until it became impossible to do so. Most other kids must have figured things out in their teens and had learned to live within the system. They were that much better adjusted. I was the village idiot who became angry when I realized my own stupidity.

The Neva draws me like a magnet; I continue onto the embankment. It's late. The golden spires of the Admiralty and the Fortress shine through the pale light of white nights. The white nights give the city its enchantment, immersing it in twilight from dusk to dawn. But the city pays for this during the cold, dark days of winter when long shadows of towering buildings threaten the human ants scurrying around in the snow.

The river flows for only forty miles, but its power creates a tapestry of islands. No hills here like in Paris or Rome, just flat land barely above the water level. Why did Peter the Great pick this spot? Take all the accepted rules for choosing the right location for a city, turn them on their head and you'll get this place. No fresh water, no agricultural land, annual flooding, no hills, no trees. The city rose on the bones of its builders. Peter's will was destiny, turning swamps into an imperial city. But behind the grandeur there was poverty and despair.

I follow the Neva to the right, along the embankment, past the Hermitage, the Peter and Paul Fortress watching me suspiciously from the other side of the river. I make my way to the Fields of Mars. People are swarming around, young, tourists, or both, celebrating the white nights. Many are drunk. From the bushes come sounds of laughter and muffled sex. The government has changed, the

economic system has changed, but some things remain as they were in my time here.

My mother loved coming to Letniy Sad, the Summer Garden. In June, it's green and lush, with statues guarding it from the shadows. Here, too, one should be careful to not step on a couple. I meander down narrow paths until I find an empty bench and sit down to think. Pemin was right, the apartment is worth a lot of money—does this mean I am the main suspect now? Something about the encounter with Vakunin and Pemin did not feel right: my father was a tough investigator who did not bow to anyone, but even he would not have ordered a *militzia* major around the way Pemin did to Vakunin. Where is my father's computer? Where is his will? I can't imagine someone as organized as him wouldn't leave one. Why would he let somebody into the apartment that early in the morning? And if the *militzia* found his body at 8 a.m., how come Vakunin was calling me on my new, unpublished cell phone number just three hours later? Perhaps the St. Petersburg *militzia* has become more efficient, but to move so quickly over the death of an old man? Why were they taking care of funeral arrangements? Why was Pemin so anxious to find out when my father last spoke with me?

I go back to the voicemail: "*You remember how she used to always worry that you don't eat enough, send you food?"* My father was not a sentimental man; this question just did not fit. Was there a hidden meaning? When I was studying in Moscow State University, my mother would indeed send me food. But she did not want to send it directly to the university, rightfully not trusting that the parcel would arrive to me intact. She would send it to a post office on Lomonosovskiy Prospekt, about ten minutes away. I would go and pick it up there, and then, without telling her, still share with my roommates.

Is this it? Did my father send me something to that post office? Was he afraid that someone was listening and communicated in a way that only I would understand? Or am I falling victim to that Russian curse of looking for a deeper meaning in everything, and my father was just reminiscing about the past? I have to go to Moscow to find out. I look at my watch. It's past midnight, time to head back.

Walking through a milky twilight, I think of Sarah. It's funny, but when Karen, Sarah, Martin, and I went out, people often thought that Sarah and I were one couple and Martin and Karen were the other. Must have been the way we were bantering and laughing at each other's jokes. I felt guilty, like I was lying, hiding something. But there was nothing to hide, except for an accidental touch

that took a bit longer than necessary or an occasional sideways glance and a quick turn when caught. I remember one time two years ago when our hands brushed against each other's and lingered for a moment. There was that electric spark between our fingertips before we pulled them back. Once, after a party, I gathered the courage to call their house but hung up after two rings. We never crossed the line. Karen still picked up on it, said once with a touch of jealousy, "You like Sarah, don't you?"

I shrugged. "Sure, she is funny."

Sarah is different from Karen: while Karen is a serious, calm and stately blonde, Sarah is a lithe brunette, full of nervous energy, always ready to laugh.

Her lovemaking was also different from Karen's: greedier, more aggressive, as if she wanted us to merge into a single being. We did not even make it to her bed at first. Sarah cried quietly afterward but would not tell me why.

When I get to the apartment, I go through the files and the books again, searching for the will without success. I prepare my small backpack for an overnight trip. Then I remember my father's diary and take it as well, together with the most recent photo of him.

Friday, June 9

When I was a child, I used to sleep on a folding couch in the living room. In the morning, the couch would be folded into a kind of recliner chair, except that it wouldn't recline. After I left for Moscow, the folding couch was replaced with a sofa. Last night I could not bring myself to stay in the bedroom, so I tried to sleep on the sofa, with little success. I was tossing and turning as the northern light of white nights seeped through the windows. I must have fallen asleep at some point, because my travel alarm woke me up at 8 a.m. I wash up, put on my suit, white shirt and a tie, and go downstairs to the already familiar *Sweet Tooth* for coffee and a cake. When I come back up, Lieutenant Govrov is patiently waiting by the door.

We get into the same Lada, drive a block on the Nevskiy, then turn right onto the main Sadovaya Street. Traffic is heavy and people outside are walking with purpose, hurrying to their jobs. We turn right again, drive by the circus, and cross Belinski Bridge over Fontanka.

I ask, "Which cemetery are we going to?"

"Piskariovskoye memorial cemetery," replies Govrov.

"What?" I can't hide my surprise. "I did not think they buried people there now; it's a memorial to the victims of the blockade of Leningrad."

"Generally, they don't have new burials there. But your father was in the city during the whole siege, and he served as a soldier defending Leningrad."

My parents did not like to talk about the siege and would change the subject when I tried asking them about it.

"We've been trying to find your mother's grave but could not," Govrov admits, sounding guilty.

"She did not want to be buried. She wanted her ashes to float to the sea."

We turn left onto Liteyniy Prospekt, cross the Neva, and continue along the embankment until we come to the Piskariovskoye Prospekt. I am taking in the view of my native city and thinking that only Paris could possibly compare.

We park at the entrance gate. I've only been here once, thirty years ago, on a school trip. Even for horsing around teenagers this was a solemn site. Now, the thought of over half a million people buried here shocks me. We quietly go by the eternal flame, and by the mounds of mass graves, Beethoven's music playing from invisible loudspeakers. Just before reaching the sculpture of the Motherland, we turn to the left. I follow Govrov down a winding path until we come to a birch grove. A few people are there already, surrounding a freshly dug

grave. A hearse is parked on the side.

A man approaches and introduces himself as Petr Saratov. “I had the pleasure of knowing your father,” he says. With sunken cheeks, deep-set eyes, and thin bluish lips, the man looks like a skull with skin stretched tight over it. With this appearance, I expect his voice to sound solemn and grave. Instead it’s high-pitched, as if he is straining his vocal cords. Since he seems to be in his early thirties, I wonder how exactly he knew my father, but don’t have a chance to ask as others come up to introduce themselves. An orthodox priest is there, which surprises me, as my father was decidedly not a religious man. Vakunin and Pemin show up together, and that seems to be the signal to start.

Vakunin and another man make speeches, the siege of Leningrad is brought up a number of times, my father is praised as a war hero, at some point a reference is made to him raising a “brilliant young scientist,” and all eyes turn to me. Vakunin whispers to me asking whether I want to say a few words. I know I should, but I shake my head no. What am I going to tell them? That he was a good soldier and a good investigator? They know that. That he was cold and distant? That he did not shed a tear as my mother lay dying? *De mortuis nihil nisi bonum*.

We lower the coffin, and soon the ceremony is over. People start shaking my hand and leaving. To my surprise, Zorkin is here. I ask him how he knew about the funeral, and he replies, “I am a resourceful man. And very interested in the apartment.”

A man with a cane, in his seventies, tries talking to me, but Vakunin gently pushes him to move on, saying, “Anton, don’t bother Pavel Vladimirovich; he must be awfully tired.” The old man hesitates, then obediently moves on, but not before giving me a sorrowful look. He looks vaguely familiar.

Vakunin continues, “Pavel Vladimirovich, the department will put up a memorial stone with a star, your father’s name, and the years 1934 – 2006. Let me know if you want something different.”

“It’s 1924, not 1934” I automatically correct him.

“But of course, I misspoke.”

Vakunin moves on. Pemin also says goodbye, and it’s just me, Govrov, and a freshly covered grave.

I stand in front of it, trying to comprehend what just happened. Heart-wrenching loneliness momentarily overcomes me. Govrov carefully taps me on the shoulder. “Pavel Vladimirovich, would you like me to take you back to the

apartment?"

"Yes, please, take me back."

At the apartment, I change into jeans, a T-shirt, and a comfortable jacket. I deliberate for a minute whether I should have created some cover story, but it's too late for that. I grab my backpack and run out.

Instead of going through the main entrance to the building, I sneak into the courtyard, find an open door in one of the neighboring buildings and come out onto Karavannaya Street. I look around, don't see anyone paying attention to me, turn left and briskly walk to Manezhnaya Square, figuring I'll find taxis there. I am right, a few private taxis are parked there. I go to the first one in line, show him a twenty-dollar bill and say, "Pulkovo One."

As we make our way to the airport, I wonder if I will be arrested there and brought back as a primary suspect trying to escape. At the airport, I buy a ticket for the next Aeroflot flight to Moscow, exchange $200 into rubles, and get a quick lunch all the while nervously checking things around me, expecting a tap on the shoulder. But my shoulder is not touched, and I board the Airbus, squeeze into my middle seat, and breathe a sigh of relief as we take off. I try to take a nap for the duration of the short, just over an hour, flight.

We are approaching a landing from the East, over distant suburbs and green fields. From my window seat, I can see Moscow proper in the distance. Moscow and St. Petersburg, the two poles of Russia. One dates to a small twelfth-century fortress built by Prince Yuri Dolgoruki. Two hundred years later, after the Mongolo-Tatar devastation, Moscow emerged as the leading Russian city, sometimes by its leaders aligning with the Tatars to subdue the city's rivals. All's fair in love, war, and politics. From the victory over the Mongol-Tatar forces in 1380, Moscow's reach grew and grew, primarily to the East, until it reached China's borders and the Pacific Ocean. Moscow —the "Third Rome," the "Second Constantinople," the defender of the Orthodox faith, protecting it from "barbarians" in the East and in the West. As the Russian monk Filofey wrote in 1510: "Two Romes have fallen. The third stands. And there will be no fourth."

Until the upstart in the north rose out of empty marshes. St. Petersburg: majestic, imperial, haughty. Proclaiming that Russia's future was not in the footsteps of Constantinople and Byzantium, not in Asia, but in Europe. Peter the Great wanted St. Petersburg to be the beginning of new, European Russia.

And for two hundred years the upstart reigned, Moscow relegated to a noisy, dusty has-been. But the city that Peter founded as a leap of faith became a capital of mammoth bureaucracy. In the end, Russia rejected this implant in favor of its

natural focus in Moscow. And then the curtain fell between Russia and the West.

Two cities, three tzars: Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Stalin. Should it be Stalin the Murderous? Three tzars that fought to modernize Russia, each in their own way. All left behind fields filled with the bones of their subjects, not caring how many had to die in their cause. All ruled with an iron fist, believing that their ends justified the means. All, directly or indirectly, killed their own flesh-and-blood sons. All fought with Europe: one was defeated, one victorious, the last one got his tanks all the way to Berlin.

As we land in the Domodedovo Airport, I am again anxious, expecting to be stopped. But no one bothers me as I make my way outside to the taxi line. This time I have to splurge ninety dollars for the ride, but after an hour and a half in heavy traffic, I get to the post office on the Lomonosovskiy Prospekt only twenty minutes before it closes.

I look around, don't see anyone following me, then I head in. I wait in line, get to the window, show my Russian passport. The indifferent woman behind the glass goes inside and comes back with a thick manila envelope addressed to me. I recognize my father's handwriting. With a trembling hand, I sign off for the package, stuff the envelope into the pocket of my backpack, zip it and leave.

In a hurry to make it to the post office, I had made no plans for my stay in Moscow. I debate for a minute whether to try and fly back to St. Petersburg, but decide that this will be too much for one day. I should find a hotel, eat, read the materials that my dad sent, and hopefully get a good night's sleep. Not seeing taxis nearby, I recall that there is a hotel on the Leninskiy Prospekt a short distance from here.

There are not many pedestrians, and I walk briskly. A group of two men and two women walk toward me, laughing. They stop and loudly argue about where to go eat. The sidewalk is narrow, and I try to get around them on the building side when a strong arm loops around my neck from behind, squeezes, and the lights go out.

PART 2: UNDER SIEGE

Friday, June 9, early evening

I come about from a strong smell of urine. I am sitting in a puddle. There are people standing around me, blocking the light. I only see their legs. Someone says, “Let’s just do him and get it over with!” A voice that sounds familiar disagrees, “The colonel’s orders were to take the package and let him be.”

The first voice grumbles unintelligibly, and the legs disappear, leaving me alone. I remain on the ground staring at a sliver of cloudy sky, my chest heaving. A tiny voice in my brain reminds me to slow down my breathing. I try to speak up, but my throat hurts and my voice betrays me. I slowly get up to my knees, holding on to the wall behind me. I am in a dark passage between two buildings. My backpack is on the ground by the other wall. I crawl towards it. The external pocket is open, and my father’s package is gone; everything else is still there. The smell of urine follows me. I look back and realize that’s the puddle I was sitting in. My jeans are soaked in some drunkard’s urine. I sit by the backpack, exhausted.

The pain and throbbing in my throat subsides a bit. It’s getting darker. My breaths are still ragged and my hands shake, but the blind panic has given way to disjointed thinking. I can’t stay here. I can’t go to a hotel like this. I need a place where I can feel safe.

I pull my Blackberry out of the backpack. After being gone for twenty years, the only Moscow phone number I still have is that of Yakov Weinstein, my old university professor. I gather my courage for a few minutes and then dial the number.

After all these years, he recognizes my voice immediately. I apologize and haltingly explain my immediate situation. He tells me to come out to the street in ten minutes and watch for a blue Toyota. I remain on the ground, thinking of what I will tell him. After about ten minutes, I get up and make my way to the street. I must look and smell awful because a passing woman grimaces and mutters, “Damn drunks!” A small blue Toyota is slowly cruising by, and I tentatively raise my arm.

The car stops. It’s Anya. *Why did he have to send his daughter?* I wish for the ground to open up and swallow me. Suppressing an instinct to run away, I walk over, open the passenger door and say, “Anya, I am sorry; it was a really bad idea. I’ll go to a hotel.”

“Pavel, get in.”

“I can’t. My jeans are soaked in urine.”

“Pavel, please get in. We are holding up traffic.”

As if on cue, cars start honking. I get in, feeling my face turning crimson.

She says, “I have not seen you in twenty years; I was wondering what you would look like. You still have that strong jaw and at least they didn’t damage those nice full lips. But otherwise, you look like shit!”

We both start laughing hysterically, so hard that she has to pull over.

Then she sniffs the air and says, “Yes, we better keep going, get you into a hot bath.” My former professor’s place is only a few minutes away. I steal a sideways glance at Anya. I am forty-five, so she must be forty-two now. The years have been kinder to her than to me: she is slender, almost feline, a wide mouth ready to curl into a smile. But the years have left their imprint in the crow’s feet and frown lines on her face.

Professor Weinstein still lives in a high-rise on Donskaya Street, a mile away from the Academy of Sciences. From the balcony of his fifteenth-story apartment, one looks straight at Gorky Park. If you turn to the right, you see the Kremlin. I used to come here regularly. Now, I am awkwardly riding a narrow lift with Anya, guilty and embarrassed.

But the professor seems to be genuinely glad to see me, with a smile, a big hug, and a Russian kiss on both cheeks. He is short, like Anya, and has to rise up on tiptoes to reach me. Yakov is in his seventies now; he stoops even more than I remember, and his face is a spider web of lines. His hair is still all there, Einstein-like unruly, only all white now. Yakov studied under the famous Lev Landau and was known in the department for the saying, “That’s not how Lev Davidovich would approach the problem” whenever he disagreed with someone. His wife passed away three years ago; I sent a card but could not bring myself to call.

Yakov ushers me into a small bathroom with a tub full of steaming water. “I took the liberty of drawing you a bath; undress and get in.”

I would have preferred a hot shower in a more American fashion, but right now I’ll take anything to get out of these soaked jeans and wash off the smell of urine. I climb in, soap myself, and close my eyes.

There is a knock and the door slowly opens. It’s Anya. I try to cover myself.

She laughs. “Pavel, I’ve seen you naked. You’ve gained some weight since then. Here’s something for you to change into.”

She sets down a set of clothes, picks up the stinky dirty pile from the floor, and leaves. I luxuriate for a few more minutes, but as the water grows colder I pull the plug from the drain, rinse myself, and change into the clothes that Anya left: boxers, white linen shirt, brown pants. They can’t be Yakov’s; he is much

smaller than I.

I come out of the bathroom and go to the kitchen, where the voices are. There I find Yakov, Anya, and a boy of about nine sitting around a small table. Anya introduces him.

"Pavel, this is my son, David."

She pronounces "David" in an English manner, with an emphasis on the first syllable. David is a shy blond kid with bright eyes, flat nose, and high cheekbones. There is not much of Anya in him, at least visually. Yakov suggests that we should eat now so that David can go to bed, and then we'll talk. The dinner consists of a salad, meat stew, and potatoes, plus a bottle of vodka for my benefit. Yakov explains to David that I was his student back in the 1980s— "one of the most talented students I have ever had"—but then I moved to America.

David's eyes light up. "Are you working in particle physics? I love physics!"

Evidently, Yakov has brainwashed him already. I disappoint the boy by saying that I left physics for finance, and he loses interest. By the time we finish eating, it's dark outside. Anya motions to David, he kisses his grandfather, politely wishes me good night, and Anya takes him away.

Yakov shakes his head.

"Pavel, Pavel, I know it's not the time, but I don't see you very often. How could you have traded physics, the queen of sciences, for this pseudo-scientific financial mumbo-jumbo?"

"It's not mumbo-jumbo," I protest. "We use models and sophisticated math equations."

"Models? Equations? You can write down all the elegant equations you want, but your theories have the empirical validity of alchemists trying to turn lead into gold. I am seventy-four, and I still stand in awe of trying to discover the God-given laws of physics. They are permanent and exact. You, on the other hand, are pretending that you can precisely model human behavior, which is inherently impermanent and inexact."

"It's not true; we have historical data to base our models on. And we don't try to predict each individual behavior; we use probabilistic distributions."

"Historical data? How can you rely on historical data when the very system you are trying to model is being changed by the application of your models? I've seen some of the formulas you use; you just borrowed the heat transfer equation with normal distribution from physics. It works in physics precisely because its laws are permanent. In finance, human behavior causes extreme events that are not subject to the normal bell curve distribution. Mandelbrot proved it, and you all ignored him because you are now practicing this Stalinist approach of

politically correct science, when in reality you are just like Roman augurs, divining birds' entrails to justify whatever campaign the leaders want. I think you've lost your way."

Anya saves me by her return.

"Come on, Dad, you have not seen him in twenty years and that's what you start with?"

She turns to me with a smile.

"My dad does not tolerate betrayal of his first love: physics. But why don't you tell us how you ended up in a puddle of urine in a dark alley?"

Grateful for the change of subject, I tell them everything starting with the middle-of-the-night call from Vakunin. Well, almost everything—I skip the part about Sarah. When I finish, Anya pours everyone another small shot of vodka.

Yakov refuses his.

"I am too old; you youngsters go ahead. It seems to me that they —whoever 'they' are—thought that your dad must have mailed you some information and have been following you in order to get it."

"Yes, I think they've been playing me all along," I agree.

"You said that your dad came to visit you last year?" Anya asks.

"Yes, he did, in March."

"Was that the first time he visited you in America?"

"Yes. There was a distance between us since my mother's death. I thought he could do more to save her, to prolong her life. And he did not approve of me marrying Karen, did not come to the wedding. About seven years ago, we took a trip to Europe and came to St. Petersburg. That was the only time we saw him until last March."

"How long did he stay with you?"

"Only a few days. He continued to Los Angeles. I remember taking him to a local travel agency; he had to make a slight change."

Yakov has that look of concentration that I remember from classes long ago.

"Do you know why your dad flew to Los Angeles?"

"He said he wanted to see California. I thought he was going to meet Simon —that's my son's name—who is going to university there, but they never connected."

"And where did he go from Los Angeles?"

"I presume back to Russia."

"And how old was he at the time?

"He was eighty. But he was still in pretty good shape. At least I thought so. Now I know he had an advanced stage of cancer that he didn't tell me about."

“So your dad, who is not known to travel internationally, at eighty decides to fly all the way to America, spends only a couple of days with his son, and then goes to Los Angeles where he does not even meet his grandson,” muses Yakov.

When presented this way, things do look somewhat strange. My father came with gifts of books and kitschy *matryoushkas*. Karen thought the visit was his way of saying goodbye—which makes sense now that I know about the real situation with his cancer. I was too busy with a new job to give his actions or reasons much thought at the time.

Yakov asks, “And what happened with you after that?”

“What do you mean?”

“Exactly what I asked. I tried to follow your career a bit; there was something about you managing a money fund.”

“A hedge fund. Well, after I left academia I went to work on Wall Street as a quant, basically an analyst developing and programming trading models. As a quant, you make an OK salary, but to do well you have to move into trading or, even better, become a hedge fund manager. But it’s hard to become one, as that is everyone’s goal. So, in April of last year, when an acquaintance asked me if I’d be interested in co-managing a fund with him, I jumped at the chance.”

“Who was this acquaintance and why did he offer you such an opportunity?”

“His name is Martin Shoffman. We moved in the same social circle; Karen and I went out with Martin and his wife, Sarah, a few times and became friends. He was more of a sales person, did not have a strong analytical background. He told me he wanted me as a partner because we complemented each other and the prospective investors wanted to see a well-rounded management team.”

“And what happened after?”

“Martin did have investors, although it was really just one large investor putting up the bulk of the money.”

“Who was that large investor?”

“It was a Cayman Islands limited partnership, very secretive, we only met their attorneys. But their money was real. Their main requirement was that Martin and I should put our own ‘skin in the game,’ as their attorneys put it.”

“And you did?”

“Yes. Martin and I mortgaged our houses in order to put up the money.”

Yakov is silent.

“We opened in May with over a hundred million in funds,” I continue. “We’d been doing well for a while, but in February things turned sharply against us. It felt like some of our leveraged positions were being pressured by a large player. In particular, I thought that the housing market was overheated and went against it, but the value of our positions had declined. I wanted to cut our losses, but

Martin thought we'd be kicked out as the fund managers and we doubled down instead. The fund lost a lot of money that quarter, and the major investor's attorneys descended on us. Turns out there was a provision in the funding agreement allowing the majority investor to liquidate the fund for poor performance and to have priority on recovering their money."

"What does it mean?" asks Anya.

"The fund was closed, they took over the assets, Martin and I lost everything."

"Everything?"

"Yes. We put everything we had into the fund."

"That was rather risky, wasn't it?" Yakov spreads his hands in wonderment.

"It was," I admit. "We were afraid of missing our chance at running a fund and risked too much."

"Was that a typical provision? I mean, about liquidating the fund?"

"Not really, usually you get a pass on one bad quarter. I am not a lawyer, and in the initial excitement I missed some of the fine print, counting on our attorney catching things like this."

"Did you have an attorney review the agreement?"

"Yes, of course."

"And who hired the attorney?"

"Martin did."

Yakov wonders out loud. "Your partner gets you into a bad agreement and then encourages you to take big risks. How much of a partner was he?"

"I am not happy about his decisions, but he lost his house just like I did. And his marriage broke up like mine."

Yakov ponders things for a while.

"Sometimes you do a physical experiment, and the results neatly fit one theory. Then you do another experiment, and the first theory does not look like such a sure thing, while some of the seemingly random data points in the first set don't appear to be so random. Your description looks entirely logical. But when I combine it with the events of the last few days, I am not so sure. You may want to recheck some assumptions back in America."

He gets up.

"I am sorry. It's late for an old guy like me. Let's sleep on it. As a Russian proverb goes, 'Morning is wiser than evening.' Good night."

Once he leaves the room, Anya says, "So where are your kids now? You have a boy and a girl, right?"

"Yes, Simon and Jennifer. They are both at the University of Southern

California in Los Angeles. Jennifer just finished her first year, Simon is a year ahead."

"Why are they so far away from you? Don't you have great colleges where you live?"

"My father-in-law went there and pushed really hard for them to follow. Plus, California's year-round sunshine was hard to pass on."

"Is your breakup hard on them?"

"On Jennifer, yes. Fortunately, she was in college already. Simon, he grew distant a while ago. Tell me about David."

"His father's name is Jim Morton; he was in Moscow with the American-funded Reconstruction and Development Bank back in the '90s. He has a wife and two daughters back in New York. I am not sure he ever plans to leave them. Jim comes here on business once or twice a year; I don't think his wife even knows about his son. It's his clothes you are wearing."

"Don't you want more?"

"Jim helps financially." Anya stops, looks down at her hands pinching folds of her skirt. "Yes, I would have wanted more. But I no longer expect it from him. Meanwhile, I have David. I hope Jim will eventually gather up the courage to officially accept his son. I teach physics; I never had the same brilliance that my father and you share, but I am good at teaching. And all the spare time I have goes to my son and my father. It's a quiet life."

She gets up, too.

"I can't stay up too late; I share a bedroom with David. I made you a bed on the living room's sofa. Let me show you."

In the living room, I sit down on the sofa and without thinking take Anya's hand and try to draw her to me.

She gently removes her hand.

"Pavel, I survived you twenty years ago, I am at peace now. You can't go back in time. Please don't start something you are not ready for."

She leaves, and I silently grieve over the old hurt I inflicted—and Yakov's words about losing my way hurt more than he knew.

Saturday, June 10

My inner clock is somewhere in Western Europe, for when I get up the sun is high in the sky. Between bad dreams and an uncomfortable bed, I woke up a few times during the night. I make my way to the kitchen wearing Jim Morton's PJ's. To my surprise, everyone is there.

"What's wrong?" asks Anya seeing my befuddled expression.

"Well, I thought David would be in school by now."

"Pavel, today is Saturday."

Of course. I lost track of the days. I pour myself a cup of strong black coffee.

Yakov looks at me expectantly.

"So, is your morning wiser than the last evening?"

"I think so, thanks to you."

"What are you going to do?"

"I will head back to New York and try to check on a few things, answer some questions."

Yakov nods.

"I figured you would."

Anya asks, "Do you want to stay for a day or two, see some old friends?"

"I would have loved to, but with the apartment situation I want to figure things out quickly. Besides, what friends do I have here other than you?"

I don't explain that after what Pemin told me, I am wary of staying in Russia. I did not tell them about Pemin's insinuation. With my father being an investigator, I've heard too many stories about people being framed and disappearing into the Gulag. Perhaps things have changed, but I don't want to tempt the fate.

"I wager he'll be back." Yakov smiles.

Anya drives me to the Sheremetyevo Airport.

"Did you say that Jim Morton lives in New York?"

"He works in New York for an investment bank, lives somewhere in the suburbs."

"Have you been to New York?"

"No. I hope to take David there one day."

She pulls in front of the terminal, leans over to kiss me on the cheek.

"I hope it'll be less than twenty years before I see you again. Be careful."

I get out of the car, close the door and stand there looking at her. She pulls away from the curb without looking back.

The next flight to New York is on Delta. I use my U.S. passport to get a

ticket. This being Saturday, the flight is not completely booked, and I get an aisle with an empty seat next to me. I wonder about paying all the credit card bills I am running up, but that's a worry for the later. I am anxious about being prevented from leaving the country, and keep glancing over my shoulders. But nobody bothers me and I board the plane without further adventures.

The flight is not full, but is noisy, with a quite a few kids. Must be some well-to-do Russians heading on vacations to the exotic U.S. of A. Karen and I have had our share of long flights with the kids, and I am sympathetic to frazzled parents trying to keep up. Thankfully, there are no loud neighbors in adjacent seats: an older woman in the window seat puts on an eye mask and goes to sleep soon after the takeoff, while a teenage boy across the aisle is totally engrossed in his computer. I am still jet-lagged and tired; it's midnight in New York, and I try to nap.

The plane is somewhere over the ocean when I come to. I reach into the overhead compartment and get the diary out of my backpack. I never expected that my father would have a diary. Perhaps we just can't picture our parents as young people. At least I have never thought of my father at seventeen. I take a deep breath: he was not a talkative person and I feel like I am about to open a box full of secrets. I feel a knot in my stomach.

18 August, 1941

My name is Vladimir Rostin. Mother gave me this diary notebook today, on my 17th birthday. She bought it in May, before the war. She knows I want to be a writer like Maxim Gorky or Arkady Gaidar. She thought keeping a diary would help me to develop my writing skills. I was going to apply to study literature at the Leningrad State University, but I may have to wait until the next year. Now I can capture the events of the war here in Leningrad, and make them into a book after we defeat the Nazis.

My father, a newspaper editor, signed up with the Fourth People's Volunteer Division and left for the front earlier. I was not home. I was mobilized to dig defensive trenches and did not have a chance to say goodbye. I want to volunteer for the same division. I hope the war will last long enough for me to join him, but I doubt it will. Radio reports say that we are inflicting very heavy casualties on the Nazis and when they are all exhausted,

we'll go on counterattack all the way to Berlin.

At home it's me, my mother, Svetlana, and her father, my grandfather, Viktor. My mother is a musician, grandfather retired. He is spending all his time going around the city, trying to buy food. Mother laughs at him, but he just says, "During the war, the most important thing is to have food."

We live in a communal apartment on Liteyniy Prospekt, near the center of the city. Two other families, Monastevs and Leontsevs, live in the apartment; we share the kitchen and the bathroom. Monastevs have a mother and two daughters, Nastya, 16, and Serafima, 8. Their father has been called to the war. Leontsevs have only the mother and Andrei, 5. Andrei's father had been arrested two years earlier, without the right of correspondence. It's crowded sometimes, but we mostly get along. Yesterday I bumped into Nastya on the stairs. She smiled and asked me how I am doing. Like a fool, I mumbled something and ran, jumping stairs two at a time. Then I was thinking about her, but I should be thinking of defeating the Germans instead.

I have to go now. Mother is calling. I will continue later.

My mother's name was Nastya—is it her? My parents never told me how they'd met. Perhaps they were neighbors?

My elbow takes a direct hit from a food cart, and the attendant apologizes profusely. I tell her it's my fault for sticking it out into the aisle. She insists on making amends and offers a drink of my choice. I don't want to refuse a free drink and opt for scotch.

My heart is sick with thoughts of my father as a young boy not understanding the hell that is about to be unleashed on his family and his city.

10 September, 1941

I was sent to dig trenches again. This time we dug them only a few kilometers from the city. We were sleeping on the ground, cold, dirty, hungry. And then the German planes attacked. Two people on my right were killed, a boy of 16 and an older woman. On September 3rd, an officer came and told us to get out, go home. It took me a day to walk back. At home, there is food rationing. We, as dependents, get only 300 grams of bread

a day.

Two days ago, there was a big air raid. I was on the roof; it's my responsibility to extinguish incendiary bombs. Then suddenly a huge cloud started to grow. It turned bronze and black, a giant fire. In the morning people said the Germans bombed the Badayev warehouses where all the city food has been stored, and now the food is gone. I can't believe it. I am sure the government did not have all the food in one place. Later that day, a man from the building came back from the front. He was in the Fourth People's Volunteer Division, like my father. He did not see my father but said very few survived because on August 11th they counterattacked with old rifles against German tanks, and most volunteers have been mowed down. Then the NKVD secret police came and took the man away.

We gather around the radio when we can. Poetess Olga Berggoltz is reading poetry every day; mother really likes her. She wrote down some of the verses:

I speak with you to the sound of exploding shells,
Lit up by eerie fires.
I speak with you from Leningrad,
My country, my heartbroken country.

When there are no news announcements or music or poetry reading, the station turns on the sound of a metronome: "click… click…click." The soft rhythm is soothing, like the sound of a beating heart.

People are saying that the city has been completely encircled and no supplies can come in. We have to break the encirclement. This morning, I volunteered for the army. The enlisting officer was from our block. He knew me and told me I am not old enough. I protested that I am big for my age. He looked at me, wrote something down on a piece of paper, and told me to go to the *militzia* station on Suvorovskiy Prospekt and give the message to Ivan Mershov. I did as told and found militzia's officer Mershov. Mershov read the message and told me he'll enlist me into the *militzia* starting tomorrow. "This way you'll at least have a bigger ration," he said. So starting

tomorrow I will be a *militzia* man. My mother was upset that I signed up for a dangerous job, but glad that at least I was not sent to the front. She is crying all the time now, thinking that my father is dead. But I still have hope.

I remember the name Mershov. Someone like that was at my parents' birthday parties when I was a child. I can vaguely recall the face, but I don't think his name was Ivan and he was not older than my father.

1 October, 1941

The rations have been cut again today, 400 grams for workers, 200 grams for dependents. We are hungry all the time. Thankfully, my Grandfather Viktor managed to buy and store some food when it was still available. He rations it, saying it will be a long winter.

I am now a regular *militziaman*, doing patrols around the city. Mershov paired me with an old *militziaman* named Makar. Makar is always grouchy, a real curmudgeon. I carry an old heavy rifle; I did not get to fire it yet. There are always rumors of German spies in the city, and we have to be on the lookout. Yesterday an old woman came to us pointing at a tall man wearing a green jacket and screamed, "Arrest him, he must be a spy, he is wearing a foreign green jacket!" The poor man turned pale, but Makar just replied, "Be quiet, you old fool! If we start shooting everyone wearing a colorful jacket, there will be no people left in the city." The man came over to thank us.

My mother has been visiting hospitals, hoping to find my father there. She did not, but she met a wounded man that saw him on the morning of August 11th. He said that very few from the Fourth People's Volunteer Division have survived.

A few days ago, poetess Anna Akhmatova gave a speech on the radio. Mother was listening, then started crying, "She is Russia's greatest poetess and they persecuted her for years, would not allow her work to be published." She did not say who "they" were.

The Monastevs received the news that their father had been killed near Pskov, back in July. All this time they were hoping for his return, and he was no longer.

My mother told me that her father was killed in the army, early in the war. The Nastya in the diary must be her.

14 October, 1941

We killed a man today. Makar and I had been on patrol when we heard screams from the direction of the bakery. We ran there and saw people from the bread line screaming at a man in a long fur coat. Another patrol was already there. They searched the man and found dozens of ration cards; he must have been stealing them. Makar and another *militziaman* pushed him against the wall and shot him. People from the bread line rushed to pick up the coupons lying on the ground, but Makar gave a warning shot in the air, then picked up and tore the coupons.

It's getting colder every day. Grandfather Viktor is now mostly lying in bed covered by blankets. Just a few weeks ago, he was a robust man, but these days his yellowish face is tired and drawn, covered by a gray beard. When he gets up, which is infrequent, he moves carefully, with enormous effort. Grandfather used to read, now he just listens to the radio. Mother is giving concerts to wounded soldiers in hospitals. She is getting weaker. We all are getting weaker. It's not only the cold and the hunger. Sounds of falling bombs, exploding shells, the fear…they all wear you down.

26 October, 1941

Grandfather died. We were not home when it happened. I was on patrol, my mother working in a hospital. He was lying in bed, all skin and bones. When we lifted the blanket, his left hand was clutching a bag full of dried up bread. Turns out for weeks he's been starving himself, saving much of his ration for us. He probably hid the bag on the side of the bed and with his last strength got it out today, making sure we wouldn't miss it. I started crying. My mother hugged me and said, "He is not suffering anymore. He escaped." But I saw that she cried silently.

We had to take him to the cemetery. Snow is covering the ground, and I went to Leontsevs to borrow Andrei's sled. Andrei's mother looks like a ghost. Much of the wallpaper is gone from their walls —they scraped off the paste because it's edible. But their apartment is warm; they have a little *burzhuika* stove that they feed with their books. I gave them a potato for the use of the sled. Mother and I wrapped Viktor into a white linen and took him to the cemetery. We walk slowly, and it took us three hours.

"Are you OK?"

The older woman in the window seat is touching my arm.

"Yes, why?"

"Your hand. And you were making a sound like it is hard for you to breathe."

I look at my right hand and realize that I was biting it, teeth marks clearly visible on the skin.

"She is not suffering anymore." Now I understand. That's what he said when my mother died and I hated him for it. I wish he would have told me then. I wish I had asked him.

"I'm sorry," I say to the woman. "I did not mean to bother you."

"This looks like an old notebook," she replies. The woman is about seventy, intelligent face crisscrossed with lines of years.

"My father's. From the war."

"Where was he?"

"In Leningrad. He was seventeen. I just found it. I did not know what he went through. He never talked about it."

She starts crying. "I was in Kiev; they evacuated us to Siberia in July 1941; that's how we survived. I heard the stories about what it was like in Leningrad. I am so sorry."

4 November, 1941

Our neighbor Nastya moved in with us. Her sister Serafima died two days before. Nastya and her mother were taking Serafima to a cemetery when they got caught in a German bombardment. Nastya survived, but she is the only one left from their family.

It's very cold. The three of us sleep in the same bed, in our clothes and covered by all the blankets we have. My mother is

in the middle for propriety, although I am not sure how much this matters. All we care about, all we can think about is food. Our little stash is down to only a few frozen potatoes. We are now scraping the wallpaper paste and boiling any leather we can find.

Makar and I are still doing our patrols. We shuffle on swollen feet. In this cold, it's important to keep moving. You stop, you die. Some of the *militziamen* have died, and we can't cover their territory. Makar says the city is slipping into anarchy.

It hits me: if this Nastya is, as I suspect, my mother, then I just read how my maternal grandmother died. I just knew that she was killed in the war.

16 November, 1941

There are four of us now. Three days ago, my mother went to check on the Leontsevs and found Andrei barely alive, his mother's body frozen on the bed. She'd been beaten to death with a can of ham. Whoever did this must have had plenty of food, as he left the bloody, mangled can lying next to the body. Andrei told us that men were coming to see his mother. The last one was in a military uniform; Andrei saw his face through a little opening in the curtain that covered Andrei's bed.

There is no water or heating in our building any longer. Nastya is responsible for the water. Every day she goes to the river and brings two buckets back on Andrei's sled. She has to climb down to the ice, fill the buckets, then climb back onto the embankment, one bucket at a time. Every day I wonder if she'll make it. Then we have to boil the water. We brought in the *burzhuika* stove from the Leontsevs' apartment. I think between heating and boiling water we only have enough books and furniture to burn for a month.

Anna Akhmatova was on the radio, reading her new poetry:

Birds of death are high in the sky.
Who will come to help Leningrad?
Be quiet—he is breathing,
He is still alive, he hears everything.
Hears how his people lament in their sleep,

How out of his depth screams “Bread!”
Reach out to heaven.
But the steel has no pity
And death is looking from every window.

The rations have been cut again, to only 125 grams per day for dependents. I used to suffer from hunger, but now the pain has stopped. You have to prolong the process of eating the little that you have, fool your body, cut the bread into small pieces, let the bread melt in your mouth for as long as possible. Two months ago, we were human. Now, we are starving animals. I don’t understand; for years we sacrificed in order to be ready for the war. We’ve been singing how we’ll swiftly defeat any invader! How come we are surrounded and starving?

Both my parents loved poetry. Which was surprising for my stern, unsentimental father. Perhaps that carried forward from the days of the siege, when this poetry sustained them?

Some pages were torn here. They had been torn carefully, slowly, but you can see that at least two pages are missing.

5 December, 1941

It’s only the three of us: Nastya, Andrei, and I. We have no food supplies left; it’s just the bread rations. Andrei is in bed most of the time; we force him to get up and walk around once a day. Nastya’s breathing is shallow; it takes all her strength to bring in a bucket of water. We manage with one bucket a day. There is enough fuel left for perhaps two weeks. We are skeletons, covered by yellow skin with red spots. Our unwashed bodies smell, our breaths sour. Because we wear hats all the time, our hair is dirty and matted. It is freezing cold; the thermometer outside the window is stuck at -40 degrees. My feet are so swollen, it’s difficult to squeeze them into the boots. Nastya massages them at night. I am embarrassed that she handles my grimy stinky feet.

Makar and I continue our patrols. Have to walk carefully, for ice is hiding treacherously under the snow. You fall, break your ankle, you are done for. My beautiful city is now a majestic graveyard. The wind howls through the canyons of stone,

piercing us to our bones. Today I saw a man sit on a bench, then slowly roll over and fall. He became one of many frozen corpses lining the streets like statues. Bare blue legs protrude from snowdrifts. Life and death coexist right in front of our eyes; there is only a thin line between the two. People show little emotion. All they talk about is food. It's mostly a city of women, as men and children die faster.

Winter days are short. I leave in the dark, come back in the dark, crawl onto the mattress where Nastya and Andrei are bundled up. Sometimes I write in this diary, but we are down to the last candle and we have no fuel for the wick lamp. The *burzhuika* gives out heat, but no light for reading. We try to sleep as much as possible, to save our energy. We still hand crank the radio, listen to occasional music, and the reading of poetry. Olga Berggoltz read her new work today:

My dear neighbor,
Let's sit down and talk,
Just the two of us.
Let's talk about peace,
The peace we want so badly.
Almost six months of war,
Of bombs falling from the dark sky,
Shuddering earth, collapsing buildings,
Tiny rationed slice of bread
That weighs as little as a feather.
To live under siege,
To listen to deadly whistle of bombs,
How much strength do we need,
How much hatred and love.

But mostly it's a "click, click, click" sound of the metronome, the heartbeat of the starving, frozen city. We are not living, we are surviving one day at a time.

What happened to his mother, my grandmother? There were four of them and now only three. It must be in the missing pages. Why are they missing?

Flight attendants are distributing food. It's a long day, and I take a break to eat, then go back to the diary.

9 December, 1941

In addition to the water, Nastya takes responsibility for getting our bread rations. It's a dangerous assignment; people will look to steal your coupons and your bread. Every morning, she goes to the bakery. As she leaves, Nastya carefully locks the door and tells Andrei to not open for anyone.

I convinced Makar to alter our patrol route to pass the bakery. Sometimes we see Nastya in the bread line, and she smiles at us. "Pretty girl," says Makar.

Yesterday I had a day off. We took Andrei to the Puppet Theater. They only perform during the day now, when the Germans eat their lunch and stop shelling us for a while. There were more adults than children in the frozen theater. For the first time since we took him, I saw Andrei laugh.

I broke the crank handle of our radio. We have to get a new one, but we have nothing to trade for it.

Another torn page here.

17 December, 1941

Today, our apartment building took a hit from an artillery shell. The apartment of our third-floor neighbor is now laid bare: sofa, *burzhuika*, half of the bookcase, pictures on the wall. The people that lived there are dead. Our apartment has been spared, except all the windows have been shattered, and we have nothing to close the gaping holes with.

The building is not safe, but it's dark, and we have nowhere else to go. We spend the night in our place. The wind is shrieking and the whole building is complaining. Andrei is crying, "We are going to die…" Nastya cradles him, says, "If we do, we'll die together." We are all on death row; we just don't know the exact time. My soul has been exhausted. I've never prayed. I've been told that religion is the opium for the masses, but I am praying tonight: "God, please get us through this night. Let us see the light of day."

18 December, 1941

Ivan Mershov arranges for us to move to an empty apartment on Malaya Sadovaya. The previous occupants have all died. He gives me the rest of the day off.

We move the *burzhuika*, the radio, and a few of our possessions using Andrei's sled. The good news is that the new apartment has furniture that we can burn, as all of ours is gone. The other good news is that we find two boxes of candles. I light one up. Our shadows sneak along the walls. And the best news is that the apartment has a radio. I crank it up and we sit around the little wooden box, listening to the news of our victories near Moscow. It is strange to be in someone else's home. But home is not a physical place any longer; it's where the three of us, the *burzhuika*, and the radio are. Like this candle, it's a flicker of life in the sea of death.

So that's how we ended up in our apartment on Malaya Sadovaya. They had to move after their place was hit in a bombardment. Sixty plus years ago, and now I am talking to Evgeny Zorkin about selling the place.

20 December, 1941

I killed a man today. It was at the end of our patrol. We heard a woman screaming and ran to the sound. She rushed out of a dark alley, collided with Makar; they both fell. A man charged after her, big, well-fed, carrying an ax. Seeing us, he turned around and ran back into the alley. Without thinking, I pulled the rifle off my shoulder and shot at him. He staggered, dropped his ax, but continued moving. I ran after him and shot him again, this time for good. The woman explained that she took a shortcut trying to get home before dark and the man jumped out of a door, tried to grab her, missed and then went after her. Another cannibal…the city is now full of them.

I felt sick when I got home; my teeth were chattering. I told Nastya what happened; she held me and cried. "He was no longer human," she said. "Hunger took his mind."

Was it really like this? Did people turn into cannibals? Not in zombie movies

but in real life. I was walking these streets just a couple of days ago; it's hard to imagine someone coming at you with an ax to kill and eat you.

24 December, 1941

For the last three days, Makar and I were on a new kind of patrol: going through apartments. We would go into freezing caves that were rooms, check who is alive. In many places, whole families were dead in their beds. Sometimes, we would find places where parents died but children were still alive. We would take them to a hospital, for evacuation out of the city over the frozen Ladoga Lake.

One of the days, we check buildings along the Fontanka River. There are signs of artillery bombardment everywhere. The Horse Tamers statues are gone from the bridge. Makar says they've been buried in the nearby Anichkov Palace. The ice of the river is covered with people. When I look closer, I realize that these are corpses, left there by the relatives that had not strength to get them all the way to a cemetery. Most are wrapped in shrouds, but some have been stripped of warm clothing.

In our new apartment with its supply of candles, I started reading Andrei one of my favorite books, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. He listens, transfixed, as poor innocent Edmund Dantès is condemned to life imprisonment. Andrei asks how big the food portions were in the Château d'If prison; I reply they are similar to our rations.

The book takes our minds off hunger. Our little extra supply from the cinema has run out. We live on the mattress by the *burzhuika* stove, swathed in blankets. Getting up in the morning is so hard. Sometimes I just want to stay on that mattress, not move, slip into nothingness. I force myself to get up for Nastya and Andrei. The three of us, bound by an invisible bond.

We try to keep the radio on; Nastya winds it up with whatever little energy she has. There is still a daily reading of poetry or occasional music, but mostly it's the metronome ticking. I feel a mystical connection to it—as long as the metronome is beating, we are alive. It's like a tiny beam of light in the midst of darkness.

Supply from the cinema? More pages are gone. Where are they? Were they used to light the *burzhuika* in 1941?

31 December, 1941

At the end of our patrol, Makar gives me a box of cookies wrapped in a paper. When I protest, he waves me off. “You have a child to care for. My wife’s been saving this for him. Happy New Year!”

We have our little celebration. Nastya saved a little bit of tea, and we open a can of ham and spread it on three pieces of bread. There were eight of us just a few weeks ago, only three are now left, one from each family. We listen to the broadcast from Moscow, which has not fallen, and we cheer the New Year hoping it’s the year we’ll break the blockade. Olga Berggoltz is on the radio:

It will come,
The bright day of victory,
Of quiet, and peace,
And aroma of fresh bread.

Hope is everything. So many times this winter I wanted to die. I kept going only for Nastya and Andrei. This night, I want to live.

The plane’s captain announces we are an hour away.

I never quite understood why a loaf of hot, freshly baked rye bread was treated with an almost religious respect in my family. Mother would place it in the middle of the table and they would smell it and carefully cut out slices. Knowing that I liked the crust, she would take the end piece, spread a small portion of butter that quickly melted on the hot bread, and hand it to me. Now, I keep imagining myself starving in the same room but starving and freezing. I have to stop; my throat has constricted, I can barely breathe. I’ll finish the diary later.

I get to my apartment by 4 p.m. It’s been just over three days since I left home. A few voicemails on my answering service, only two of significance: one

from Sarah wondering about my well-being; one from Jennifer, my daughter, asking when I'll come to visit. I want to talk to both of them.

But first I look up Mary Gorossian, the travel agent we've used. I figure, correctly, that she works during the summer Saturdays.

"Mary, hi, it's Pavel Rostin. Remember me?"

"Of course, how are you? I am so sorry…"

Evidently, everyone in our Connecticut town knows about my bad fortune.

"Thank you. Look, do you recall me bringing in my father last year? He needed to make some changes to his itinerary and I left him with you while I was doing shopping in town."

"Yes, I remember him. He was a dear, trying to use his little dictionary to explain things."

"Do you remember what he wanted?"

"Yes, I do, it was kind of unusual. He had a ticket to Los Angeles, but he wanted to get to Santa Barbara. He was not sure about renting a car and driving, so he asked me to arrange for a commuter plane and a hotel."

"Santa Barbara? Did he explain why? He was not a wine country type person…"

"Well, that's what was so unusual—he wanted a place near the Santa Barbara Police Department."

"What?"

"Yes, my reaction exactly! I've been a travel agent for eight years and nobody ever asked me for a hotel near a police department. But I found him a nice little place called The Garden Inn only a block away and booked him for two nights. I also checked on a taxi service from Santa Barbara airport to the hotel."

"Do you know where he was going after these two nights?"

"I am sorry, I don't remember. He already had his itinerary. I only helped with the Santa Barbara trip."

I thank Mary and hang up. The Santa Barbara Police Department? What the hell was my father doing?

I call Jennifer. She screams in delight, "Dad!" and my heart melts. I don't know if it's a special father-daughter connection, but Jennifer and I have always been close. I think Karen has been a bit jealous about it. But our son, Simon, has always been much closer to her, so I guess things just even out in life.

There are voices in the background.

"Sweetheart, where are you?" I ask.

"We are in Laguna Beach, in Grandpa and Grandma's house. Mom and

Simon are here. So are Uncle Roger and Aunt Toni. Dad, where are you?"

"I'm in New York."

"Are you going to come over and see us?"

I hesitate. I don't really want to visit my in-laws, but I do want to see my children. And Karen. And I probably should go visit the Santa Barbara Police Department.

"I'll try to. I'll give you a call beforehand. Are you all done with your classes at USC?"

"Yes, I am done! I've got a 3.7 average!"

"I am so proud of you. I love you." I have to stop because tears well up in my eyes.

"I love you, too, Dad. I miss you. Please come see us soon."

"I will, sweetheart, I will."

I have to take a couple of deep breaths after hanging up. She is at my in-laws' grand estate overlooking the ocean. My in-laws are loaded from the chain of automotive dealerships that my mother-in-law inherited. My father-in-law parlayed the money into a long political career. He became a congressman in 1984, and over twenty years has built a network tied by mutual favors. "Uncle Roger" is their only son, with political aspirations of his own. "Aunt Toni" is Roger's wife and the only person in this family I have a human connection with. No, that's not fair. I had a deep connection with Karen. I am not sure if it's completely broken or if there is still a strand holding us together.

I call Sarah next. She sounds genuinely happy to hear from me. I tell her a little bit about my last three days and say I want to find out more about Martin.

She sighs theatrically.

"You are just using me to get the dirt on your ex-partner. Well, I am a willing participant, happy to oblige. You had a rough week, so give me your address and I'll be over eight-ish with dinner and more."

As I hang up, I realize that I am really excited to see her. I'm not yet sure what it means: a certain comfort of being with someone who knows me and still wants to be with me? Excitement of a new intimate relationship? Something more than that? I don't know. I am nervous about it, but I enjoy her company.

I search through the boxes I brought in and dumped in the corner of my small apartment when I moved here from Connecticut. I am looking for the original agreement establishing the Grand Castle Rock investment fund that Martin and I managed into the ground. The official name of the primary investor was the New Treasury Island ELP, based in the Caymans. I have to find who really was

behind this. I need help. In looking through the Blackberry's "Rolodex," I realize most people there would no longer take my calls now that I am tainted with a scent of failure.

I come across Jack Mikulski's name… the risk manager at the investment bank where I worked before getting involved with Martin. The old curmudgeon had been pushed aside into a position where no one would listen to him, because he kept warning of the risks of leverage, accumulating collateralized debt obligations, and other strategies that were generating enormous profits—and bonuses. Because he knew where too many bodies have been buried, he was not pushed out completely, just made irrelevant. "The old Cassandra" became his nickname. Well, Jack was one of very few that called me after the Grand Castle Rock investment fund collapsed. I always liked him and I think he liked me back.

I chance it and dial Jack's cell phone number.

"Hello?"

"Jack? This is Pavel Rostin."

"Pavel? How are you? I am sorry about your fund; you got a pretty raw deal there."

"Thanks, you told me earlier. Jack, look, I want to find out more about the main investor into our fund, the one that caused the liquidation."

"Hmmm, where are they based?"

"The Caymans."

"Oh, that's a tough one."

"That's why I am calling you."

He cackles. "Flattery will get you everywhere. How about lunch next week?"

"I may need to fly out to California. Can we meet tomorrow?"

"You are a pushy SOB; you need something and you want it on a Sunday! I've got a life, you know?"

The line is quiet, Jack must be thinking. Finally, he sighs.

"All right, you've helped me in the past with those crazy formulas that you quants were making up. I owe you one. I have someone in mind to help; let me check and I'll call you back tomorrow morning."

I give him my number and hang up, grateful for not being told to go and pound sand or worse.

The intercom rings; Sarah is downstairs. Funny how we ended up in the same Murray Hill neighborhood. It's relatively inexpensive for Manhattan and conveniently located. A great place to hide amongst millions of people.

She energetically sweeps into the apartment, declaring, “Chinese food, a bottle of wine, and a pretty girl!”

Despite surface cheerfulness, I detect a note of anxiety in her voice. I am anxious, too. I tell myself to just take it one date at a time.

While I was gone, Sarah changed her hairstyle: her dark hair is now cut short, framing her oval face and diamond-shaped eyes. I think every woman in my life has a facial feature that makes her stand out. In Sarah’s case, it’s her lips, full and bow-shaped.

I provide a partial story of my trip while we eat, omitting the story about the package. I am not sure how to explain my suddenly strong interest in Martin.

Sarah is a smart girl; she sees that I’m not telling her everything.

“So why exactly did you come back so quickly?”

“The Russian investigator insinuated that my father may have been murdered, and that I am a suspect. I did not want to hang around.”

“Oh my! You said it looked like a suicide.”

“Yes, and the man in the morgue said so as well. But I was still wary.”

“And how is Martin connected to this?” she asks incredulously.

“I don’t know.” I shrug. “There is probably no connection. But I had time to ask myself some questions that I probably should have asked much earlier.”

She sips the wine, thinks about it, then says, “OK, you are my FWB. I’ll tell you.”

“What’s FWB?”

“Friend with benefits.” She laughs. “I picked up this phrase from a girlfriend. I am freshly liberated after a long marriage, I like you, and I would enjoy a bit of revenge on my ex.”

She takes a deep breath.

“Martin and I have been on the rocks for a long time. We married young, and I think that at some point Martin decided that he wanted a wife that could help him to climb the ladder so to speak, not a third-generation schoolteacher.”

I knew that Sarah taught elementary school; I did not realize it was a family thing.

Seeing my puzzled look, she confirms, “Yes, three generations of schoolteachers. I wonder if this is some kind of a record. Do I sound bitter about Martin? I guess I am. I wanted children and a simple life. He wanted success and no children. ‘I want to be a player,’ is how he put it to me. We’ve been discussing divorce for over a year, but I was hoping to walk out with a bit of money from your hedge fund venture. I got greedy and paid for it—not only was there no money after your fund’s disaster, we also lost the house, and the attorney told me that if I go to court I might even have to pay Martin since he

doesn’t have a job. I just signed the damn papers and moved to New York.”

“Do you know anything about that investor that Martin brought in? How did he find them?”

“No, we didn’t talk about his work much.”

“What is Martin doing now?”

“No contact with him since the papers were signed a month ago.” She shakes her head. “Sorry, Pavel. I guess I’m not much help to you.”

“No, Sarah, you’ve been a great help. And it’s great to see you.”

Sarah pours herself more wine and drinks it all.

“Here, I needed this to gather up the courage. There was always that bit of a pull between us, wasn’t there? Or did I imagine it all this time?”

“No, Sarah, you did not imagine it. But we were married …”

Her hand sneaks up my leg:

“Not anymore … at least not in any meaningful sense. I am nervous but I’ll be forward: are you up for the ‘benefits’ part of the FWB? Do you like making love to me?”

I don’t want to show my hesitation.

“Sweetheart, I do. But you know how we men are about performance—I am worried that my body doesn’t even know what time zone it’s in now. This morning I was in Moscow; I’m working on a thirty-plus-hour day.”

She waves it off.

“No worries, we’ll try another time. Just my luck, I gather up the courage and the guy is dead tired.”

I can’t help but laugh at her easygoing cheerfulness.

She says more seriously.

“Look, don’t be fooled by my acting, please. You are the only man I slept with since the breakup. But I’ve known and liked you for years and I need some closeness now. I don’t expect anything; we are both freshly wounded. Just someone holding me …”

I reach for her. Our chemistry is stronger than my tiredness. This time, we do make it to the bed as we dump our clothes on the floor. Sarah gets into her favorite position on top—I know from our first encounter—plants palms into my chest and starts slowly grinding her lithe body into mine. Unlike Karen, she does not ask to turn off the lights and I watch her face. Sarah’s eyes are open, looking into mine.

I squeeze out, “I am going to come.”

She slows down.

“Not yet, not yet. When we first made love four days ago, I was afraid you

were just using me for revenge."

The last word hangs in the air, tagging an unfinished sentence.

"Revenge for what?"

She is silent, moving slowly, not looking me in the eye now.

"Sarah, revenge for what?"

I grab her hips and pull myself out.

She climbs off and stretches on the bed, not looking at me, then says in a halting voice, "I thought you wanted to get back at Martin and Karen for their affair."

"What???"

"I'm sorry. I am such an idiot. You didn't know? I assumed you did."

"Karen and Martin?"

"Yes, for at least a year. I guess this was a bad time to bring it up. Hey, it's not like you were an angel. You've been doing that barista from the downtown coffee shop."

"How do you know?"

"Pavel, did you really think paying cash at a motel five miles down the highway would prevent people from knowing? Half the town knew."

"Did Karen know?"

"I am sure she did. But I guess she didn't confront you over that."

"Karen and Martin? Why?"

"I don't know why Karen was doing it; she probably was angry at you. Martin was serious. Perhaps he thought she was the ticket he needed, a daughter of a prominent congressman. Karen did not have any real interest in him. She dropped Martin like a hot potato when she left for the West Coast."

"And what about you? We were still going out as two couples as this was going on."

"I had nothing against Karen; it was over between Martin and me by then. Deep inside, I was hoping you'd find out and reach for me. Are you OK?"

I shake my head in bewilderment.

"I feel like that guy in *The Truman Show*—everyone knows what's going on, except for me."

Like most married men, I loved Karen and I also wanted to be free, to have other women. Poor barista Michelle. She was the one that started flirting first. What was that line about cream in my coffee? Double meaning but delivered in a way that was not double at all. I was flattered, getting that "I still have it" feeling. Funny, that's what she said checking herself in the mirror the first time

in a roadside motel. She wanted re-affirmation that she was still desirable after a lousy divorce.

What was I trying to re-affirm? That after eighteen years of marriage, a woman not named Karen could find me attractive? I imagined myself as the aging hero of Chekhov's *The Lady with the Dog*, when he thinks of having two lives—one open, seen and known by all, and another life running its course in secret, and everything that was essential to him was hidden from others. I did not have a secret life and perhaps unconsciously imagined that by creating one I'd find something of value. Except that it only made me feel like a foolish middle-aged Casanova. My secret life gave me no pleasure and carried no significance, only the embarrassment of trying to let Michelle down gently while finding a new place to get my morning coffee. And now it turns out that half the town knew about this "secret."

I close my eyes and wish to die.

"Do you want me to go?" asks Sarah guiltily.

I don't want to be alone with my shame.

"No, please stay. We can just sleep."

"OK, baby," she caresses my face.

Sunday, June 11

I tend to sleep on my right-hand side, on the right side of the bed. I wake up with Sarah spooned around my back, snuggled to me, her breath warming my neck. I move, she wakes up and presses against me. She gently nibbles on my ear, her left hand moving from my chest to my stomach, then lower …

Sarah pulls me towards her. I move on top of her and we make love. First slowly, in a pleasant, still half-sleepy state, then more frantically. Karen always closed her eyes during sex, as if she traveled to a different place. Sarah is all here, pinned under me, her eyes searching mine, looking to merge together in a single spasm.

Afterward, we lay side by side, breathing heavily, spent. I feel the bed rock slightly, look to my left. Sarah has turned away from me and is crying quietly, shoulders quivering. I reach for her.

"What's the matter?"

Sarah shakes her head, says nothing.

We stay in bed until almost noon, interrupted only by me running downstairs to get us some breakfast from a deli.

"What are you going to do?" Sarah asks.

"I am planning to fly to California tomorrow morning."

"To see Karen?" I hear a twinge of hurt in her voice.

"Sarah, I would like to see my kids; I have not seen them in months. And I plan to retrace my father's steps. When he visited us last year, turns out he went to Santa Barbara of all places. I want to find out why. I have to understand what happened to him."

"Why do you want to know? You can't bring him back."

I bite my lip, think how to answer.

"I am not sure I can quite explain it. I have failed people in my life. And now I feel that he was one of those I failed, that I'd become estranged from him because I thought I knew him—but I really did not. So perhaps by finding out what happened I can fix this a bit. Does it make any sense?"

She nods, sits up.

"I think so. Please be careful. No pressure, but I don't want anything bad to happen to you."

She kisses me hard on the lips.

After Sarah leaves, I think how strange it is to have known someone for years and discover the person anew. I am glad she is not putting pressure on me. I don't think I could handle it right now.

Karen and Martin… All this time I felt mostly guilt towards Karen, for letting her down, for not giving her the life she wanted. Now it's mixed with anger, the fresh one over the affair and the deep-seated one that I denied myself before, for placing a subtle but real pressure on me to produce. Although, how much of that pressure I created myself, I can no longer tell. And I am not sure whether the anger reduces the guilt or amplifies it.

I've googled New Treasury Island ELP, our primary investor, in the past, but the pickings were slim. I do it again today just in case. I can't figure out who is really behind it.

I try calling Martin; he does not pick up. I leave him a voicemail, keeping my voice artificially cheerful. Just an old friend trying to get together.

I check my credit card account, and my line of credit is still quite large. I guess they did not find out yet that my income dropped to nothing. I buy tickets to Los Angeles for tomorrow morning, reserve a rental car, and book myself into Santa Barbara's Garden Inn for one night.

My rolling bag, with my travel clothes, is in the St. Petersburg apartment. Perhaps Pemin is going through it right now. I have to buy a new one. It's a hot summer day, and the streets are bustling with people: youngsters enjoying the-school-year-just-ended freedom, locals picking out places to eat, tourists with half-folded maps, young mothers pushing strollers, young fathers with babies resting in high-tech baby carriers. Bare skin is everywhere; unlike Californians with their year-round sunshine, New Yorkers are eager to grab as much sun as they can during the summer: skirts get very short, blouses cut low, sleeves disappear. I get a hot dog from a street vendor, then stop at a nearby travel shop and browse through rolling bags until I settle on a dark-blue TravelPro. As I am paying, my phone rings.

It's Jack Mikulski.

"Pavel, can you meet me and my researcher at Langan's on Forty-Seventh? Five p.m.? Dinner is on you." He cackles.

"OK, Jack, thank you for meeting me on Sunday."

I booked an early Monday morning flight, so I pack quickly. I have just enough time to walk to Langan's. June is the best time to walk in New York, as it's warm but not yet humid.

Jack shows up with a pretty young Asian woman in her twenties.

"Suzy Yamamoto—Pavel Rostin. Suzy graduated from Harvard Law School last year; prior to that she went to Berkeley where she studied finance. She did

some research for a hedge fund in Connecticut; now she is interning at our investment bank."

Suzy volunteers that she is not looking for a permanent job and is exploring her interests while waiting for her fiancée to finish medical school.

Jack chimes back in, "The HR could not pass up on someone with Suzy's credentials. But the trading department does not want her around; they don't think women mesh well with that testosterone-charged trading pit. She does not program, so the quantitative group doesn't know what to do with her either. So they sent her to the dead-end corner of risk management. Out of sight, out of mind. Suzy is going to the theater with friends, we don't have her for long, so let's order and get on with the story."

For the second time in three days, I explain the sorry brief history of the Grand Castle Rock investment fund. Suzy throws out some questions related to the fund's registration and disclosures; clearly she knows quite a bit about the field. But there is not much to go on; the Grand Castle Rock had only a few "accredited" clients. I did bring my file with the funding agreement, list of holdings and some of the subsequent paperwork. Suzy is hesitant because of confidentiality. Jack laughs and takes the file with a "she is young" comment.

I turn to the New Treasury Island ELP and my former partner Martin Shoffman. Jack listens for a while, then casually throws out, "I heard Martin was at the BJH Financial Products Group last week, trying to buy CDO insurance for a large anonymous client."

Seeing my dumbfounded expression, he bursts out laughing.

"Pavel, you are so damn smart and so damn stupid at the same time! Just a babe in the woods, a babe in the fucking cutthroat Wall Street woods. All these months you've probably been feeling sorry for your poor destitute partner. Martin must have sold you five ways to Sunday. Let me say this: I think the holdings of the Grand Castle Rock have not been liquidated. Instead, assets have been transferred to the Cayman's fund."

"Why do you say this?"

"First, many of your holdings were not liquid; it would have been difficult to sell them. Second, your former partner trying to buy similar assets should be a clue even to a naïf like you."

"You mean the insurance policies on CDOs?"

"Yes. The kind that Martin is shopping for."

"Why did you buy them in the first place?" Suzy wonders. "There is literally no market for them."

I take a sip of my drink, ponder how to explain months of strategy in a

couple of minutes.

"CDOs are 'collateralized debt obligations.' They are basically a product of mortgages that people took on their homes. Bankers sliced and diced the expected cash flows from these mortgages to create new securities, such as CDOs."

"And in the process they completely destroyed the natural risk management process." Jack motions for another drink, he is warming up. "Back in the times of *It's a Wonderful Life*, before extending you a loan the banker would think really hard whether you'll pay it back. But then our government decided that people have this basic right to get loans, and now the bankers don't care whether you'll pay the loan back or not; they just turn around and hand it over to one of the government-sponsored organizations."

"To make a long story short," I say, taking back the conversation, "we modeled what would happen to these CDOs if the real estate market cooled off, and we realized that they are grossly overpriced."

"Why?" asked Suzy. "In school, they teach you that markets are efficient."

Jack laughs so hard, he almost hits his head on the table.

"Efficient, my ass!"

I also smile.

"You see, Suzy, in combining multiple mortgages in one big pile, the bankers argued to the rating agencies that they have diversified the risk and that the combined security is much safer than individual mortgages. But it's a false diversification because when the real estate market cools off, it affects most mortgages. Nevertheless, the ratings agencies bought this argument and slapped the highest AAA rating on many CDOs. That's why they are overpriced. That was our big idea—to buy CDO insurance. It's a gamble but with a possibly very high payoff."

"It's not a gamble; it's a sure thing as long as you can hold the position," Jack grimly states. "Eventually the proverbial you-know-what will hit the fan."

Suzy has to go, but Jack asks me to hang on for a while.

"Pavel, are you telling me everything?"

"Why do you think I'm not?"

"Suzy is a smart cookie, and she'll dig out what dirt can be dug out here. But I've been around this business for thirty years, and I don't need a ton of research, I have my nose. It sure looks to me like you've been set up in this whole 'fund management' thing. Someone knew where you were vulnerable and exploited your naiveté to screw you over. But what I can't understand is why? Pardon me, but it's not like you had any real money to be swindled out of. What is it you

have that someone wants? Do you have any assets?”

“My father died in St. Petersburg last week. He left me an expensive apartment, but I don’t see how that could be connected to the fund business.”

I feel that I’m crossing the line between an omission and a lie, but I am just not ready to share more.

Jack nods, though I am not sure he believes me.

“I’m sorry about your father. You never talked about him.”

“He and I have not seen each other often.”

“So there is nothing else you can think of?” says Jack, looking straight at me, probably trying to judge my body language.

I am tempted to tell Jack about the stolen package, but resist.

“No, nothing else.”

“OK. It’s just puzzling that we don’t know the motive here.”

I agree. It is puzzling.

Monday, June 12

I am back on a plane, this time heading to Los Angeles. Some people like traveling; I am not one of them. I am susceptible to jet lag, and the whole process wears me down. At least I luck out again and the seat next to me is empty.

I open my father's diary and go to the first 1942 entry, where I stopped on Saturday.

> 29 January, 1942
>
> Mershov sent me on another visit to Smolniy. I get to deliver a package to Zhdanov again. He is in a good mood, not screaming at anyone.
>
> Zhdanov asks me, "You look kind of young for a *militziaman*. What's your name, how old are you?"
>
> "I am Vladimir Rostin, seventeen," I answer honestly.
>
> "Where are your parents?"
>
> "My mother was killed when she was giving a concert to the troops. My father was in the Fourth People's Volunteer Division. He was last seen on August 11th counter-attacking the Germans."
>
> "Your parents died as heroes. You should be proud of them," Zhdanov lectures me. "Their sacrifice was not in vain. They stopped the invaders. The most important work is to protect the Party. The Party will save the country. Are you living by yourself?"
>
> "No, with a neighbor and a small child whose parents are dead."
>
> Zhdanov lifts up the phone:
>
> "Bring me a food package. The usual: bread, jams, ham, sausages."
>
> I feel dirty taking it. But I think of Nastya and Andrei. We have to survive.
>
> Listening to the radio. Olga Berggoltz's husband died today from starvation. She was crying as she read her new poem:
>
> *I can't feel grief or sorrow any longer.*
> *I have to serve out my cursed sentence!*
> *Your love condemned me to live*

And to be brave.

Nastya breaks down, whimpering, “My mother, my sister.” Little Andrei hugs her and they sway together.

Zhdanov in Smolniy… That’s the Smolniy Institute, the former aristocratic girls’ school from which Lenin had directed the 1917 putsch. It became the party’s headquarters in Leningrad. Stalin started the Great Terror here by assassinating Sergei Kirov, his potential rival within the party.

Zhdanov was Leningrad’s party chief during the war. He personally signed hundreds of execution lists, condemning thousands to death. At one point, he was Stalin’s likely successor but died from alcoholism. The author of *zhdanovshchina*, the cultural and artistic code of the Soviet Union, he was an incompetent dilettante that prosecuted great artists and tried to reduce all of culture to a chart of simple moral values.

But why did my father write “Zhdanov again”? And “mother was killed during a concert”? Must have been in the missing pages.

22 February, 1942

The bread rations have been increased to 300 grams for dependents. This is not enough to survive, but we still have a bit left from the Zhdanov’s package. The days are getting longer; the darkness starts to retreat.

We gather round the radio, taking in Olga Berggoltz’ latest poem:

Another day of siege.
A girlfriend came over,
Without tears told me that yesterday she buried her best friend,
And we sat silent until the morning.
We ate the bread that I saved,
Wrapped ourselves into a shawl for warmth.
Leningrad became very quiet,
Only the metronome kept working.

In our small nightly ritual, I am reading the book to Andrei and Nastya. Dantès, disguised as the Count of Monte Cristo, is almost done exacting his revenge against de Morcerf, Danglars, and Villefort. He tells Fernand, “How did I plan this moment?

With pleasure!”

But Nastya does not like it. “He became like his enemies,” she says. “He is not saving anyone; it’s all about vengeance.”

11 March, 1942

A few banyas in the city reopened, and Nastya went to one, saying, “I want to feel like a human being again.” I went yesterday with Andrei. We sat in a warm communal bath for the longest time. Andrei is six now, but he weighs as little as a three-year-old. Most men in the bath looked like us: bones rattling inside bags made of grimy yellowish skin.

Our last candle burned out as we were finishing the book. Valentine and Maximilien get reunited and inherit Dantès’s fortune while he sails away with his concubine, Haydée. Dumas tells us to “Wait and Hope.” That’s what we do, wait, hope, try to survive.

15 April, 1942

It’s Nastya’s 17th birthday, and Mershov gives me a day off. The sun is out, and it’s almost warm. The Germans are shelling, but the three of us decide to go for a walk while the sun is shining. Nastya puts on a blue dress she had saved from the old apartment. She lost a lot of weight, and it dangles on her like on a hanger despite a belt she tightened, but after many months spent swaddled into every conceivable piece of clothing, she looks like the young woman she is. I don’t have a suit, so I put on a jacket that the previous occupants left in the closet. It’s a bit large but not too bad. We convince Andrei to put away his toy soldiers and come with us.

On the street, Nastya tries to make a dance move with me and almost falls. I catch her, and we all laugh; it’s wonderful to see color in Andrei’s face. We walk down the Nevskiy Prospekt that’s been cleared from the snow, stopping frequently because we are out of breath. Very few people are out, but it’s no longer a graveyard, just a beautiful empty city, an architectural museum. It’s like the city itself has a lean, hard, starved look. Suddenly a tram goes by. I have not seen one moving in months. It stops, and we climb aboard. The tram takes us almost to the Admiralty. From there, we walk to the Bronze

Horseman. It's covered to shield against the bombardment, but it's still there, protecting his city. The legend has it that as long as Peter the Great rides his stallion, the city won't fall.

We stand before the statue, cold northern sun warming our faces just a bit. Nastya starts crying, remembering her parents, her sister, my mother, Andrei's mother. I put my arms around her and say, "But we are alive!" She nods, whispers, "Yes, we are." Nastya lifts her face, wet with tears, and kisses me hard on the lips. I stroke her face, smell her hair, her sharp scent.

It feels strange reading about my parents' courtship. If one can call it that. Starving, frozen, taking care of a little boy. The first dinner I had alone with Sarah, I complained when my food was overcooked.

29 May, 1942

It took us almost a month to teach Andrei to sleep in the other room. He would only fall asleep once he crawled between us. He was always holding Nastya's hand, and the moment she tried to get up, he would start screaming. Nastya sat by his new bed night after night until he finally was able to sleep on his own.

The first night he did, we made love. It was my first time, and hers. I desire her so much; I wish I had more strength. We are still weak and malnourished, we moved slowly, whispering to each other. She murmured through tears, "I wanted to remain human, to remain a woman."

She fell asleep, and I sat by the window, enjoying the warm air of an early white night. Northern lights give a performance, dancing across the sky.

A page is torn out of the diary. Or cut out with a knife, leaving a tiny stub.

26 July, 1942

Knowing that I will be called into the army soon, Nastya and I got married today. A one-armed officer officiated; Mershov and Makar served as witnesses. Andrei carried the rings. The rings were made of brass, not gold. We had a small reception

afterward. Thanks to Mershov and Lieutenant Kulikov, we had vodka and food. There are now small garden plots everywhere, and we are no longer starving. We have very little, but we're happy because we don't have much to lose. Except for each other, of course.

Makar gets drunk, toasts us for saving Andrei, then starts talking about "fat pigs" that live off the others while hundreds of thousands die. Mershov takes him outside to sober up. Kulikov looks down; you can tell he is feeling guilty.

We were supposed to evacuate Andrei, but he cried so hard that we did not have the heart. He is skinny and gets out of breath after the shortest exercise; how can we send him to some orphanage in Siberia? Here, he has us and a friend, a five-year-old from the floor below that also survived the winter. Andrei does not have to go to school for another year. Mershov frowns disapprovingly, but says nothing. I can see that Makar approves.

I asked Kulikov whether Andrei's father might still be alive. He shakes his head. "Ten years without the right of correspondence" is a sham sentence for the relatives; it means the father was killed soon after his arrest in 1938.

Yesterday, they paraded German prisoners down the Nevskiy. Some women were screaming, but most watched in silence. What is the mentality of the people that indifferently and deliberately attempt to starve millions of old men, women, and children? I don't think I'll ever understand.

Who is Lieutenant Kulikov? I don't recall him being mentioned before.

August 9, 1942

Today, Leningrad performed Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony. I could not get tickets, so we listened on our radio by the open window. It felt like the performance started with an artillery barrage, only it was our artillery keeping the Nazis in their dugouts. The metronome kept us alive, and now the symphony is telling them: "We are alive! You have not conquered us!"

20 August, 1942

Tomorrow, I am leaving for the army. Rumors are the Germans are preparing another offensive, and we have to stop them. Nastya's and Andrei's eyes are red. I call Andrei aside and tell him to look after Nastya.

Mershov and Makar promise to take care of both of them.

27 March, 1943

I had a slight wound, really just a scratch, but it has earned me a two week's break from the army. Nastya and Andrei are doing well, but the extra food I brought in helps. Mershov is keeping an eye on them. Makar was killed by a German shell a month after I left.

We broke the blockade in January. The Germans are still close and continue shelling the city, but we are no longer encircled. I was lucky, I missed the Sinyavino offensive; not many came back from that one. Our fighting was brutal, but the Germans are weakening.

Again, a page is torn. Does not seem they needed it for the *burzhuika* any longer. They were removed on purpose. Why? By whom?

May 3, 1944

I got two weeks off after months of nonstop fighting on the Leningrad Front. In January, we finally threw the Nazis away from the city. Then it was the Narva offensive. Half of my battalion's been killed or wounded. The things we saw… the things we did in return. Brutality, evil—it's in all of us. Just scratch the surface.

Leningrad is busy. People are coming back from evacuation, repairing factories, schools, hospitals. The life is returning to the city. Andrei is finishing first grade; he is a quiet, studious boy. Nastya is almost done with her 10th grade in the same school; she is the oldest student there. Not many girls from her year survived to finish their studies. She wants to be a teacher. Nastya tells me that Andrei often wakes up screaming; sometimes he breaks down crying. She took him to see a doctor, who said there is nothing obviously wrong with the boy but added, "Nobody survives what he survived without paying the price. Nobody."

The exhibit of “Heroic Defense of Leningrad” opened last week in a building on Market Street. We all went to see it yesterday. Paintings, photographs, letters, documents, bread cards, pieces of clothing shredded by artillery shells… Hundreds of people walked in silence, interrupted by sobs.

We are trying to have a child. There are very few children in the city; Mershov told me that only a few hundred have been born in the last year. A few hundred newborns in a city that used to have four million people.

While still on the front, I started writing a play about a family living through the siege. I wrote on small pieces of paper when I could find a quiet minute during fighting. My fellow soldiers first laughed at me but then asked me to read to them. Gruff, foul-mouthed men were crying when they heard what the winter of 1941 in the city was like. Our lieutenant, who taught school literature in Pskov, told me, “You must tell this story. You have a gift.”

June 16, 1945

The war is over! I was demobilized almost immediately. Mershov requested that I be released to work in the Leningrad *militzia*. I am honest with him that I don’t plan to stay for long. Nastya is done with her first year in university, Andrei with the second grade. They are helping out in the “Defense of Leningrad” museum, collecting and organizing exhibits.

Andrei was struggling in school at times; the malnutrition must have had an impact. There was another malnutrition impact as well: a doctor has told Nastya that she is not likely to conceive. She is devastated, crying all the time. I try to console her, tell her that many orphaned children now need parents, but I am heartbroken myself.

I finished the first draft of my play that I call “The Metronome.” I plan to enroll in night studies at the university. In the meantime, I gathered my courage and went to the *Zvezda* magazine to ask for help. Instead of laughing me out of the office, the editor-in-chief remembered my father’s name, an editor like himself, and called out “Misha” to a fifty-something man. It was Mikhail Zoshchenko, a famous writer. I made a fool of myself telling Zoshchenko how much my parents and I loved

his stories. He thanked me and volunteered to review and critique my play. I ran home, unable to believe my luck.

October 6, 1945

Yesterday, Zoshchenko took me to meet Anna Akhmatova. She lives in a small room in the Sheremetyev Palace. We had to check in and show our documents at the entrance. It was strange—are they protecting her?

At least a dozen people crowded into a small room. Olga Berggoltz was there, too. I told her how her poetry readings gave us hope, helped keep us alive. She remembered my father. We stood silent for a minute, to honor him, Olga's husband, and countless others who died.

The diary ends with a few torn pages, leaving me with a lot of questions. What happened to my father's play? And what about Andrei? I don't recall anyone by that name growing up. Who removed the pages and why?

We land in LAX on time, I take a shuttle to a rental car, and by 1 p.m. I am on the 405 freeway heading north. After fighting my way through a seemingly endless suburban sprawl, I am driving north along the ocean. Years back, we leisurely drove from Laguna Beach to San Francisco. The kids were bored, but it was one of my favorite vacations. Driving with the Pacific stretching to the horizon has a calming effect on me.

I go to the Garden Inn first. While checking in, I show them my father's picture, the one I brought with me from St. Petersburg.

An indifferent clerk shakes her head.

"No, don't remember him."

"He stayed here in March of last year."

"I was not working here then."

The police station is indeed only a short walk away, in a neat Spanish-style building. I come to the reception area, show a policewoman the picture, and ask if she remembers seeing my father. She shakes her head, then calls her male colleague to come over.

The officer looks at the picture and nods.

"I remember the older guy. He was here last year, wearing the same sweater."

"What did he want?"

The officer looks at me suspiciously.

"And why do you want to know?"

‘It’s my father. He’s been killed, and I’m trying to find out why.”

My reply takes them by surprise. The male officer mulls over the picture.

“Give me your name and number. I have to talk to someone. You don’t have to wait here, but don’t go too far.”

I retrieve the picture and walk over to the major thoroughfare of State Street, a tourist trap I remember from the last visit to Santa Barbara. I am hungry, so I stop at a small Italian restaurant and order pasta and a glass of wine. Before the food arrives, my Blackberry rings.

“Mr. Rostin, this is Detective Rozen. You are looking for the person that met with your father last year?”

“Yes.”

“That would be me. Where are you?”

“Palazzio on State Street.”

“Stay there, I’ll come over in ten minutes.”

I am still working on my pasta when I sense someone standing over me. I look up and see a short, bald man in his fifties, wearing khaki pants and a checkered jacket.

“Mr. Rostin?”

“Yes. How did you know?”

He points to a half-empty restaurant.

“I would be a really bad detective if I did not. Besides, there is a resemblance. Do you mind if I sit down?”

“Please. Thank you for seeing me.”

He noisily squeezes himself into a chair.

“He told me your name but I don’t remember it; my memory is not what it used to be.”

“It’s Pavel.”

“Yes, yes. I recall now. You live on the East Coast, you are a physicist. He was very proud of you.”

I swallow hard and say nothing. The waiter must know Rozen, because he brings a glass of ice tea without asking.

Rozen continues.

“I am sorry to hear about your father. You said at the station he’s been killed?”

“Yes, I did. Although it’s not clear whether it was a murder or a suicide. It happened last week in St. Petersburg.”

“And that’s why you are here?”

“Yes.”

“What makes you think that a visit to Santa Barbara would lead to your father’s death?”

“I don’t know if it did; I am just trying to understand why he came here. He was not exactly a traveling kind, but at eighty he flies halfway across the world to visit a police station in a small city? There must have been a reason.”

Rozen drums his fingers on the table, probably deciding how much to tell me.

“It’s getting close to five, the place will fill up. Why don’t we go back to the station and talk there?”

At the station, I follow Rozen into a small, cluttered office with two desks facing each other. Rozen sits behind one of the desks, points to the chair in front of it.

“Make yourself comfortable. The other detective is out today; we have our privacy.”

After I sit, he casually throws out, “Do you remember the case of John Brockton?”

Rozen must have wanted to be an actor; he enjoys the dramatic effect of a perfectly delivered surprise, but after a few seconds and my stunned nod he can’t hide a proud smile.

“Yes, the biggest case to grace Santa Barbara in God knows how long. A filthy rich financier and his mistress, Natalya Streltsova, get killed by a son of someone who committed suicide over the losses inflicted by that very financier. Murder, greed, sex, the Russian connection—the media had a field day with this.”

“I recall reading that this was an open-and-shut case. The murderer had the weapon and literally blood on his hands?”

“Most people thought so. Imagine my surprise when a barely-speaking-English old man shows up here in March of last year, claims to be a private investigator from Russia, and asks for me. People at the front thought the old man was a nut case, but it was a slow day and they amused themselves by directing him here. The guy pulls out an old badge with Cyrillic letters and says in a prepared sentence that he used to be a detective in St. Petersburg, retired in 1992, but still takes on cases, and that a client hired him to investigate the Brockton murder.”

“Did you believe him?”

“I took his name and made some inquiries via Interpol. I used to work in Washington before I decided to head to a smaller city and warmer climes, so I had my connections. To my surprise, they confirmed that indeed Vladimir Rostin

was a detective in the St. Petersburg *militzia*, now retired."

"Did he tell you who hired him?"

"He did not, but I can guess. During the trial, we had a visitor from Russia who came to see me—Mark Bezginovich, Streltsova's brother, an attorney from Moscow. Streltsova was a name she took for TV work. He thought that Natalya was the target, not Brockton. Bezginovich would be my number one suspect amongst potential clients."

Rozen starts finger-drumming again.

"And?"

"Well, Mr. Rostin, I told your father things that were not in the newspapers, and now he is dead. So I wonder how much I should tell you."

I rub my forehead.

"Detective, I appreciate your concern. I don't have a death wish. But I do want to know what happened. This may end up having nothing to do with my father's death."

"That might be," agrees the detective. "Anyway, there are things about this case that never smelled right, and that's been eating away at me. I have trouble letting go when something does not add up."

"What did not add up?"

"OK, let's start at the beginning. Back to the basics, so to speak."

He pulls a thick file from the middle of the stack on his right.

"As you can see, the file is still on my desk. John Brockton, born 1965, blah, blah, blah, Harvard Law School 1989, joins Millennium Mutual in 1992, in 1995 moves to Moscow to run the Russian Leveraged Equity (LRE) fund. In 1996, the fund was up seventy-one percent. In 1997, up 192 percent. In 1998, down eighty-six percent, investors wiped out. But the smart guy Brockton left in July 1998, right before the Russian devaluation and crash. Earned four million in 1996, twenty-two million in 1997. Bought a ranch near Santa Barbara in 1999. Killed in 2003, together with his girlfriend Natalya Streltsova. With me so far?"

I nod.

"Jeff Kron, the convicted murderer. In 2003 he turned 21. Was a student at San Francisco State, dropped out due to financial difficulties. His father, Stanley Kron, killed himself in 2002. It is believed he was depressed over his financial losses; he lost a lot in the LRE's wipeout, then took a mortgage on the house to finance Jeff's education. Was laid off in the recession that followed the dot-com market crash of 2000. The mortgage loan reset to a higher rate in 2002, he lost the house and had nothing left."

Rozen flips through the file and pulls out a photo. He looks at it without showing me.

“John Brockton and Natalya Streltsova were killed with a knife. The knife was found near their bodies, with Kron’s fingerprints. Kron was stopped for reckless driving the night of the murder and immediately arrested. He was incoherent, had blood on him that was later shown to belong to the victims, and had a gun in his pocket. A parking ticket would prove that he’d been ‘casing’ the Brockton’s house for days. As you said, open and shut case, right?”

I shrug, already knowing that the case is anything but.

Rozen continues.

“Well, the prosecutor certainly thought so. Plus, such a high profile case is a rare opportunity to get name recognition, perhaps start a political career. So the whole show was staged pretty dramatically. The murderer was actually portrayed as a sympathetic but misguided person; no death penalty was requested. Jeff Kron was represented by a well-known attorney but would have been better off with a public defender: the well-known one took the case to get his name into the limelight, and his pompous defense only turned off the jury. Jeff Kron is now serving a life sentence about an hour from here; with good behavior he might get out in twenty years.”

“But Kron never admitted his guilt?”

“No. He said that he was watching the house and went there to confront Brockton; he wanted Brockton to know that Stanley Kron’s blood was on his hands. But he claimed that when he walked in the door, Brockton and Streltsova were already dead, lying in pools of blood. And that someone grabbed his neck from behind, he lost consciousness, and when he came to he was lying next to Brockton and Streltsova with a knife in his hand. He dropped the knife and ran to his car.”

I shudder at the mention of Kron’s neck being grabbed from behind.

Rozen picks up on my movement.

“Anything wrong?”

“No.”

Rozen nods.

“OK. Brockton had a bodyguard, Alexander Shchukin, but that day of the week a local restaurant had a veal special that Brockton and Streltsova liked, so they sent Shchukin for takeout. As a matter of fact, this had been done four weeks in a row—a pattern.”

I stand up and stretch.

“I am sorry, Detective, my whole body is stiff after a long flight and a drive here. It really sounds to me like you believe the Kron’s version?”

“It’s not that I believe it out of some vague feeling,” demurs Rozen. “It’s that there are quite a few little things that don’t fit the official version.”

“Like what?”

“For one, in the official version Kron went to the house with both a gun and a knife. Come on, he was a student, not a professional assassin—why would he bring a knife? Kron is a big, strong guy, but still, to quickly kill two people with a knife is not an easy task unless you are trained for this. And there was nothing in his background to indicate such training.”

Rozen pauses for effect.

“Streltsova used to be an anchor and an investigative reporter on the Russian TV station Telenovostiy. There was practically a war in Russia between different oligarchs, and Telenovostiy was owned by the oligarch Sosnovsky, who fell out of favor with the new Russian president. She had enemies, and it’s possible that her brother was right and she was the intended target, not Brockton. In which case, Kron had no motive for the murder.”

“Is that what my father believed?”

“That’s what he was hired to investigate; that’s why he came here.”

“But did he believe it?”

Rozen hesitates.

“Look, he was only here for a couple of days. I don’t know for sure. But I would say he thought it likely that Streltsova was the target. There were other things that did not quite add up with the case. Why was the door of the house open and Kron able to just walk in? We checked against the insurance records and some of the expensive jewelry items were missing. And Streltsova’s computer was gone. Kron did not have these items when police stopped him. Where did they go?”

“Perhaps she did not have a computer at the moment. Had it repaired in a shop or something?”

“She was seen with her laptop just two days prior, and we checked all the computer repair places in the area. The last big investigation she worked on was that of terrorist bombings in Moscow in 1999. It was blamed on the Chechen separatists, but she questioned and raised a possibility of the Russian security services, the FSB, as being behind the bombings. That also made her a potential target.”

This all is pretty confusing, but the mention of the FSB really gets my attention. Did my father find something that the FSB did not want him to?

“So neither you nor my father believed the official version of Kron killing Brockman and Streltsova?”

Rozen sits up, all serious.

“As I said, these unanswered inconsistencies bother me. Each can be explained away, but there are just too many here for my taste. And if your father

was killed over this, then all the more reason to believe that the truth did not come out and someone is trying to keep it that way. Jeff Kron never struck me as a killer. Sometimes you just have to trust your judgment. Do you want to form your own? He is less than an hour drive from here. Your father had met with him."

When stated this way, it's hard to refuse.

"Of course. But don't you have to schedule an appointment in advance?"

"I am a police detective, I don't need much of an advance. Meet me here at 10 a.m. tomorrow."

I return to the hotel and check my e-mails. Months ago, I was getting hundreds of e-mails a day. Now they are in the low dozens, and only a handful are not junk. A message from Jennifer, asking me when I am coming to Laguna Beach, ending with "Dad, can't wait to see you!" and a hug emoticon. A "how are you" message from Sarah, ending with "miss you" and a kiss emoticon. I think of answering, then decide not to. I don't want to reply with "miss you too" but the reply would feel wrong without it.

And then a message from Nikolai Pemin, wondering why I left Russia in such a hurry, reminding me that I am a suspect and should get in touch with them. I puzzle for a second how he got my e-mail, then remember that they had no problem finding my new and unlisted cell phone number.

I make my way back to State Street, stroll around enjoying the warm summer night, sounds of people laughing, music drifting from some of the restaurants. Come to a quaint outdoor shopping mall with tiled pavement and outdoor seating. It reminds me of Malaya Sadovaya Street. I grab a small table at a Hawaiian-themed restaurant, order fish tacos and a glass of syrah, and watch people saunter by.

A couple stops to look at the posted menu. A woman tentatively offers "This looks OK," but the man is having none of it. "I want a place where I can order a good rare steak." He is heavy and breathing hard from walking. His high-pitched voice bothers me as if he is scratching a blackboard with his fingernails. (I am old enough to remember blackboards and chalk.) Another scratchy voice pops into my head: *"The colonel's orders were to take the package and let him be."*

The recognition that was at the back of my consciousness comes rushing to the front: Petr Saratov, the man at the cemetery. It was him directing others in a dark passageway off the Leninskiy Prospekt. He must have followed me on the same flight from St. Petersburg to Moscow. If only I was paying more attention instead of trying to hide, in fear that they'd stop me. They did not want to stop

me, they wanted me to go and retrieve the package.

Who can I talk to who might have an insight into my father's work? I search through my wallet, find the card of the "very interested" Evgeny Zorkin. It's 8:45 p.m. here, so before 8 a.m. in St. Petersburg; he might still be asleep. I dial the number anyway.

It rings and rings, and then a sleepy and unhappy voice comes on.

"Allo?"

"Mr. Zorkin? This is Pavel Rostin."

The voice changes, it now oozes a delight at being woken up.

"Pavel Vladimirovich, so nice to hear from you! Have you given any thought to our conversation?"

"Yes, I have. But I do have a small favor to ask."

"Please, anything."

"Do you remember the old man with a cane at my father's burial? His name was Anton."

The voice is now less sure about the favor.

"No, I am afraid I don't remember or know the gentleman."

"Can you find him for me?"

"Pavel Vladimirovich, I can greatly expedite the transaction. I have wonderful connections in the City Hall…"

"Mr. Zorkin, at this time I don't need to expedite the transaction, I need to find that old man."

"How would I do that?"

"You told me, you are a resourceful man. I promise to negotiate exclusively with you at this time. Do you want to buy the apartment or not?"

Half a world away, I can sense fear and greed fighting within Evgeny Zorkin. The fear of getting involved in something dangerous, the greed of the whole third floor of a Malaya Sadovaya building being his.

"All right, Pavel Vladimirovich, I will look for him. Should I call you back on this number?"

As I expected, greed wins out.

"Yes, please."

"You understand, I can't promise anything."

I hang up without responding, to make him think that the old man is his key to the apartment. I have no idea if this is a complete wild goose chase; the old man knew my father, and Vakunin prevented him from talking to me. That's a sufficient reason to find him.

I take a slow walk back to the hotel. I like the names of the streets: Anacapa, Canon Perdido, De La Guerra. It's a slow Monday night; the streets off the main drag are empty. I pause at a light to cross the street, and my brain suddenly registers a scary quiet. Scary because I just heard steps, and they abruptly stopped. I take a quick look behind me; there is no one there. I start walking again, and the steps resume. I turn to my left to cross in the other direction and steal a glance. I see a figure in the shadow on the opposite side. A knot forms in my stomach, and I hurry back to the hotel while listening intently. I hear steps, but they don't come closer. When I get to my room, I lock and latch the door. I need a few minutes to regain normal breathing.

Tuesday, June 13

When I come out of my room in the morning, I scan the street. There are people out, but nobody seems to be watching me. I am not sure whether someone was following me last night or if I was just being paranoid, but I still tell Rozen about this.

"Your father was an interesting man," Rozen tells me on the way. "It was a bit hard to understand him, but his stories about the war … made my blood curl even worse than what my dad told me."

"Your dad?"

"Yes. He participated in liberating some of the German concentration camps in 1945. Fifty years later he still had nightmares about them."

We drive in silence for a few minutes, then Rozen says angrily,

"War is hell. Some wars have to be fought, but I get so mad at these politicians that think war is always the answer."

I've never been to a prison, not even as a visitor. The ugly building announces "United States Penitentiary" in giant letters, as if someone could be mistaken in thinking it's a normal residence. We are taken to a visiting area. Along the way, Sal Rozen informed me that Jeff Kron is lucky to be here in a medium security facility, only because they have a "special housing unit."

Having just met someone, people often say afterward "He was not what I imagined." Well, Jeff Kron is pretty much what I imagined: tall, thin, blond, looking unsure and scared. He appears confused when a guard escorts him in and points to me, but then he sees Rozen and smiles.

"This is not a regular visiting day, so I was wondering who came to see me," he says. "I am glad it's you, Detective Rozen."

Kron looks at me expectantly; Rozen makes an introduction.

"Jeff Kron—Pavel Rostin."

"Rostin? You are, you are…"

"He is the son of Vladimir Rostin, the man you saw last year," Rozen finishes for him.

"Oh, wow! How is he?"

"I'm afraid he is dead," says Rozen, without going into details.

Kron exhales, puts his right hand on his heart, tears well up.

"I am so sorry."

"Jeff, I know you've done it many times before, but please tell Mr. Rostin what you were doing the night that Mr. Brockton and Ms. Streltsova were killed?"

Kron swallows hard, continues in a soft voice.

"I was outside of their property. I just wanted him to see the picture of my dad, to know what he'd done, to feel a little bit of what we felt… I don't know why, but I was obsessing on knowing if he cared even a little bit about those he ruined. I moved to Santa Barbara a month before, worked in a fast food place while gathering the courage to talk to him. I'd been going to his house for three weeks; a few times I parked my car and walked around."

"And that evening?"

"I saw the other guy leave, the tall, strong one. I figured that was my chance. I climbed over the fence, went to the door, and rang the bell. There was no answer, and I pushed the door open. I took a few steps inside, and then on the right, in the kitchen, I saw a big dark spot on the floor. I went toward it, and I saw a woman's leg."

Kron stops. Rozen makes a hand movement, encouraging him to continue.

"I saw a movement out of the corner of my eye. I tried to turn, but someone grabbed me from behind, squeezed my neck, and everything went dark. When I came to, I was lying on the floor between two bodies, a knife in my hand. I dropped the knife, ran out of there, climbed over the fence, got into my car and drove down the hill. There were two police cars driving up, and then another one at the bottom stopped me."

"Why did you have a gun on you?" asks Rozen.

"I would have been too scared to go there otherwise. I just wanted him to see my father's picture…"

When we get up to leave, Kron hesitates, then says, "I am so sorry about your father. His death … it had something to do with this, right?"

"Why do you say that?" I ask.

"You wouldn't be here otherwise."

I nod. Smart kid.

"Jeff, we don't know. I am just being thorough. It probably had nothing to do with you."

I can see that he doesn't believe me. When we leave the room, I look back. Kron is still there, looking at us.

In the car I ask Rozen, "Did he have his father's picture?"

"Yes, it was in his pocket."

"Who triggered the alarm?"

"We don't know; it was never explained. Hey, it's almost noon, and there is a great Mexican restaurant on the way; how about some lunch?"

We've come to a very casual taqueria, with predominantly Latino faces and everyone speaking Spanish. As we walk in, the only blond woman in the place waves to us. "Sal!"

Rozen and the woman hug each other, and then Rozen introduces me. "Melissa Kron—Pavel Rostin."

"You are…" we both exclaim in unison, and Rozen enjoys the effect.

"Yes, Melissa is Jeff's sister, and Pavel is the son of Vladimir Rostin."

"I have not met your father, but Sal told me about him," says Melissa. She is older than Jeff, I guess in her late twenties, with a pretty but severe face. Melissa is the only one in this place dressed in business attire.

"How is your dad?" she asks.

"I'm afraid he is dead," I say.

"He may have been killed," adds Rozen.

Melissa covers her face, breathes heavily and almost falls but for Rozen's supporting arm.

We sit down.

"How many must die?" Melissa now has her hands in her lap and sways back and forth, tears streaming down her face.

I try to be objective.

"We don't know if there is a connection here. I am just trying to retrace my father's steps."

She shakes her head, not dissuaded.

Rozen orders us lunch. While we eat, I find out that Melissa is a lawyer. Last year she finished law school in Chicago and moved to Lompoc to be near her brother because "I am all he has" and because he needed "an attorney that cares." Their mother outlived their father by barely a year. Melissa and Jeff were the only ones left from the family. She is doing legal paperwork for local wineries ("It's not much of a business, but I get free wine") and sees Jeff twice a week, the maximum allowed. Melissa is, of course, completely convinced of her brother's innocence. She rattles all the reasons why her brother did not do it. I'd heard them all except for one: the camera.

Rozen nods solemnly.

"Yes, I forgot to mention the camera. The house had a number of security cameras, and the one in front shows Jeff coming in and then running away. It does not show anyone else. But we found the camera trained on the rear door stuck in a position that does not show the actual entrance."

"Why was that?"

"Don't know. Could have been a malfunction with suspicious timing."

"It was not a malfunction," protests Melissa. "Someone disabled the security

camera and walked in through the back door."

She turns to me.

"I am so sorry about your dad. I believe the answer to this murder is in Russia. Your dad may have found it and was killed because of that."

I don't bother correcting her; I don't know if my father was killed or took his own life.

She gives me her card as we leave.

"If you find something to help in my brother's defense, please let me know. But most of all, please be careful. I don't want any more people to die."

In the car, I turn to Rozen.

"Why did you bring me to see them?"

"Your father came here to meet him. He believed, like I do, that it's important to see the accused."

"And his sister?"

"I try to see her when I come here. And I thought she should know that someone was possibly killed for investigating this case. Because then she might be in danger too."

"You are sure that Kron is innocent?"

He drives for a couple of minutes without answering then says

"Yes, I am. Unfortunately, I can't prove it. Most of the people we convict are guilty as hell. But when you put away a person and you don't believe he is guilty…it's hard to sleep at night."

I change the subject.

"Is it difficult to make someone unconscious by pressing on his neck?"

"Not for a well-trained person. You cut off the blood flow without cutting off the oxygen. Police used to apply a chokehold; it's not as popular now because of the risks. But if you don't expect it, a strong, practiced person that approaches you from behind can put your lights out in seconds."

We drive the rest of the way in silence. As Rozen drops me off, he leans out the window and hands me a manila envelope.

"This is a copy of the papers that were found in a book on Streltsova's nightstand. She must have been reading and marking them."

"Did you give them to my father?"

"Yes. Interesting that her computer was gone and we could not find any of her working papers, but for these few pages. It's like someone carefully removed her work, but missed what was stuck into a book. I think Melissa is right: the answer is in Russia. Be careful. Don't look around, but there is an unmarked car with two detectives across the street. I was keeping an eye on the rearview

mirror and noticed the same van appear behind us a few times. The detectives will watch you drive off and see if anyone follows."

As I retrieve my things and the rental car from the hotel, my Blackberry rings. It's Zorkin.

"Pavel Vladimirovich, I found the man! His name is Anton Rimsky; he used to work with your dad."

"Great, let me write down his number."

"Unfortunately, he does not have a phone. Probably living off a state pension, does not have the money."

"How am I going to contact him then?"

"I have his address, you can come see him. Or write to him."

I know Zorkin's vulnerability, the power of his greed, so I go for the throat.

"Look, Mr. Zorkin, I am half a world away at the moment. I told you I need to talk to this man."

"You said you needed me to find him," Zorkin whines, "and I did."

"So tomorrow you go to Anton Rimsky, bring your phone with you, call me and hand the phone to him."

"I have a very busy day tomorrow," Zorkin complains in a defeated voice.

I add one last kick. "And remember the eleven hour time difference."

I call Jennifer from the car.

"Hi, sweetheart. Is it OK if I come see you and Simon later today?"

She squeals with delight. "Yes, yes, this is great!"

"Let me talk to Mom."

"I'll let her know."

Poor Jennifer is afraid that Karen will block my visit.

"No, sweetheart, it's for me to let her know."

"OK," Jennifer sighs. "I'll go look for her."

I hear voices in the background, then Karen comes on.

"You're going to just show up without bothering to let me know even a day in advance? You are such an ass."

"Karen, I am sorry, I'm in California on business. I did not know whether I'd be able to visit. I'm not going to inconvenience you or your parents. I will stay in a hotel somewhere nearby, and I'll come take Simon and Jennifer to dinner tonight and perhaps breakfast tomorrow."

"We have guests and dinner plans tonight," Karen informs me. "You can't take the kids."

"I want to see my kids!" I grip the wheel so hard, the car swerves and I'm hit

with a horn blast from the car in the next lane.

"Well, then you should have…" Muffled conversation in the background, then Karen comes back on. "All right, my dad says you should come and stay here."

I am dumbfounded; the man hates my guts. Let me correct that, he hates failure. He liked me well enough in the beginning, when the reflection of Karen's and my notoriety was good for the new congressman. Now he is afraid that my problems will somehow be used against him during the upcoming election.

"You are coming for one night only, right?" Karen says.

My Blackberry phone rings again. It's Rozen.

"You were not mistaken, someone was trying to keep you company."

"Who?"

"It's a local private investigator. He pulled from the curb just after you drove off. The detectives followed him until the next exit on the 101 freeway, then brought him in. He usually does medical disability cases, stakes out people that cheat insurance companies. Yesterday, in the late afternoon, he received a call from someone offering him a thousand a day to follow you and report on your movements. Soon after, a messenger delivered an envelope with payment for two days, your picture, and the message that you were likely to be at the police department. He's been following you since."

"So who hired him?"

"He does not know. He is not exactly a selective type. We are trying to find the delivery person, but it doesn't look promising."

By the time I get to L.A., it's past three and the traffic has built up. I resign myself to a slow slog. Gas pedal, brake pedal, gas pedal, brake pedal…

January 1986. The country has a new leader, Mikhail Gorbachev. He just met with Ronald Reagan; a smell of détente is in the air. A group of American students on their winter break come to visit Moscow and the Moscow State University. A few of us, the supposedly more reliable and presentable ones, are chosen to go meet with the Americans. I often wondered if whoever qualified me for this meeting had been demoted later. But one can't blame him or her; not only was I a good student with no blemishes on my record, I also spoke decent English and had just defended my doctoral dissertation. Perhaps the idea was to impress the Americans with our brainpower. Not wanting to rely on the intellect alone, I went to a *banya* the night before and sweated all the dirt and smells out

of my pores.

We meet in a designated room of the Lenin Library; the organizer must have thought that choosing a library would give the whole affair some kind of intellectual undertone. The meeting starts awkwardly, with introductions and forced conversations. Turns out “the others” don’t have horns or hoofs and seem to be very similar human beings. There are a dozen of us and perhaps ten Americans. I am introduced as “one of our brilliant young physicists.” At that, two pretty American girls smile at me. I look aside in embarrassment, then steal a glance at the girls and suddenly lock eyes with one of them. Everything freezes for a second. I feel a jolt of recollection, as if I have met her before, although this is of course utterly impossible. Her expression turns serious, her smile disappears. My face is hot; I must be turning crimson. I feel like everyone is staring at me, so I stand up, mumble something and escape. Now everyone is really staring. In the restroom, I wash my face with cold water and wait for the palpitations to subside.

When I get back, the organizer announces that it’s time to “visit the Red Square and then go to a restaurant.” We are told to stay together as we start walking to the square in the bitter cold. Snowflakes are dancing in the air like little dervishes. The two American girls are just in front of me, and they are clearly freezing. I hear a whisper in my ear, “Pavel, let’s split. It’s too damn cold. I have a flat nearby, and I just cashed in the Kremlin store coupons.”

It’s Leonid Krasnov, usually known by the diminutive Lyonechka. He is a graduate student in my department, smart but much more interested in parties and girls than in physics. He can get away with pretty much anything because he comes from a pure lineage of old Bolsheviks: his great-grandparents defended Moscow from the White armies, his grandparents were Party stalwarts that managed to avoid Stalin’s purges and died from natural causes, rare case for the people of their time and position. Many nights they must have woken up in a cold sweat, hearing noises and heavy steps, but there were no knocks on their door. Now his parents are important diplomats in the Foreign Service. They live abroad and Lyonechka has free reign of their large three-room apartment in the center of Moscow, making his friends indirect beneficiaries. By Soviet standards, the apartment was richly, even over-the-top decorated: paintings, Persian rugs, crystal goblets, delicate jade vases, extensive collection of good books—all displayed as a sign of social prestige.

Foreigners don’t understand what having an apartment meant in the 1980s

Soviet Union, where privacy was at a great premium. Lyonechka, despite his slight stature and rather bland looks, was one of the most popular people in the university. Young lovers were always asking him for permission to use the apartment for their trysts. I admit to using the flat a few times with Anya. Rumors flew that even some of the faculty took advantage. To Lyonechka's credit, he was generous with his favors and did not try to profit from his position beyond reason, although he'd been known to sleep with some of the girls that needed a place to stay for a few days. Lyonechka also threw great parties that featured alcohol and food from the Kremlin food store. One had to have special coupons to shop there, which Lyonechka's parents had been receiving monthly. I'd been to a few of these parties. They pretty much always ended up in general intoxication, sex, and women's underwear disappearing— which Lyonechka was supposedly collecting. There was only one rule: Don't break things. Two students that broke a vase by drunkenly tossing it back and forth had been permanently banned from the apartment.

In these circumstances, Lyonechka was trouble and I obviously should have known better. But the thought of delicacies and having a shot of vodka on a bitterly cold day clouds my judgment. I am not the only one seduced by Lyonechka's offer: somehow six of us separate under the cover of falling snow —Lyonechka, me, Olga and Vadim, a couple from the theater department, and the two American girls that smiled at me in the library. Lyonechka quickly ducks into a back street, and we follow, giggling in a youthful excitement of doing something that we are not supposed to do. One of the American girls, the one I locked eyes with, puts her arm through mine. Despite the cold, my face gets hot again. I hope she doesn't see it. I did not get her name during the introductions, so I ask her in a stammering voice.

"Karen Baker," she says.

"I am Pavel Rostin," I reciprocate.

"I know, you are the brilliant physicist." She laughs.

Her teeth are chattering. I free my arm and put it around her shoulders. She snuggles to me and puts her arm around my waist. Her touch feels natural and familiar, like we have gone together for years.

Lyonechka was telling the truth about cashing in his Kremlin store coupons. The kitchen has caviar, smoked salmon, sausages, meats, salads, fruits and plenty of vodka and champagne. I sit next to Karen Baker. The flat is warm, so we peel off our heavy overcoats, hats, jackets. Karen is almost as tall as I am, with straight blonde hair reaching halfway down her spine, a cute button nose, brown eyes, and a beautiful smile showing two rows of perfect white teeth. Her

skirt is riding up, showing nice legs. I feel the heat of her body next to mine.

Karen is a senior in college, studying history. We are all having a great time trying to converse in broken English. We drink for friendship between our countries, for world peace, for victory over Nazi Germany, for beautiful women. In the back of my mind, I think that someone must be looking for us and this will not end well, but I chase the worry away with a drink.

After a third glass of vodka, I lose some of my inhibitions, stand up, and recite my bad English version of one of Pushkin's poems:

My angel, perhaps my sins
Make me unworthy of your love.
But please pretend!
Your one look will easily deceive me,
And I am only too happy to be deceived!

Everyone laughs and applauds. I am not going to tell them that last year I worked with a tutor to improve my English by making translations of Pushkin's poems. Of course, my translations are amateurish, and normally I would not dare to utter them in public, but vodka is a great equalizer.

In my mind, I see Anya's image. We'd been making out on this very couch not long ago. After three years of dating, her parents treated me as their son-in-law. A hot feeling of shame washes over me. I chase the thought away. I am here, I am free, I am excited. I don't need the guilt. I have to understand the jolt of recollection that surged through my body when I locked eyes with Karen Baker.

Olga asks me to recite more, and I oblige:

I love you, even though
I am mad at myself for this passion,
As I confess in despair at your feet.

Lyonechka enjoys watching me making a fool of myself, and he laughs. "Poetry in Russia is a serious business, especially with women."

"Yes, poetry in Russia is respected; it gets people killed," I reply. In response to puzzled looks, I explain, "It was not me who said it. It was Osip Mandelstam. He was killed by Stalin's goons."

Karen leans to me and whispers, "Say some poetry just for me."

Her breast is hot against my side. She smells good. I whisper back:

I remember the magic moment

When you appeared before me,
A fleeting vision of perfect beauty.

Olga starts making out with Vadim, her boyfriend. I lean over to Karen and carefully kiss her lips. She swings her arm around my neck, and her tongue slips into my mouth. I touch her breast; we are still locked in a kiss and I feel how her breathing quickens and her other hand presses on the top of my leg. I'd never wanted someone this badly. The couple that was making out disappears. Now Lyonechka and the other American girl start kissing in the corner of the room. Karen pulls my hand, and we go to a bedroom, but it's already occupied by the first couple having sex. We wander through a dark apartment and find another room. We are so excited, we can barely wait to close the door.

I wake up in the morning from the cold. Snow is still falling outside. Karen is quietly snoring next to me; we are covered by a thin blanket of unknown origin. I move her hair and uncover a small, delicate ear. I look at her and then shut my eyes from the wave of tenderness that spreads through my body. Her image is engraved in me as if we have known each other for hundreds of years. I suddenly can't imagine the world without this girl that I've met only a few hours ago.

She wakes up, looks at me, kisses me hard and whispers, "More poetry, please."

I recite Akhmatova's words about love:

Love is like a snake,
It coils, enchanting the heart.

"You are a strange physicist," Karen murmurs. We warm each other up by making love again. Then the other two couples show up, wearing blankets. An argument ensues between Karen and the other American girl; we figure out that the other girl is concerned about being away from their group, which Karen does not want to go back to yet.

The other girl laughs, points at me, and says, "She wants to marry you!" Everyone laughs, except for Karen and me. I realize that we'll have to part soon and for a moment I can't breathe. We find more food and stay in until the late morning. The snow stops, the sun makes an appearance, and we all venture outside and go to the Alexander Gardens by the Kremlin walls, fresh snow sparkling and crunching under our feet.

Karen holds on to my arm and starts crying. The other American girl says, "She does not want to leave," and looks at me as if I am the one at fault here.

At that, Lyonechka comes up with, "We can get you married today." We

laugh because it's ridiculous and completely impossible, but he insists. "I know a *refusenik* that lives not too far. He applied to emigrate back in 1978, never got permission, so he became a rabbi. He can marry you."

This makes no sense whatsoever, but we don't want the adventure to end yet, so the four of us take the metro to the *refusenik*'s flat. Olga and Vadim peel off, sensing trouble. The unfortunate *refusenik* is there and foolishly lets us in. We explain our purpose. His first question is, "Are you Jewish?" I am not. Turns out neither is Karen.

The rabbi walks out of the room and comes back with a bottle of vodka. "I am sorry, I am not experienced. This requires some thinking." He drinks and deliberates out loud. "I don't think there is anything in the Jewish tradition that forbids me from officiating at non-Jewish marriages. It will not be a valid wedding under Jewish law, *halachah*, but since you are non-Jews, it does not matter to you. As long as you make a commitment to each other in good times and bad, yes, I think I can marry you."

In good times and bad… That's the tough part, is not it?

Karen and I walked out of the *refusenik*'s flat with a handwritten marriage certificate drawn on a piece of lined notebook paper, still treating this as an adventure, not quite comprehending what just happened. Lyonechka and I take Karen and her friend to the hotel they are staying in. Karen throws her arms around my neck and kisses me, giving rise to lewd smiles of a small assortment of KGB and "Intourist" personnel around. As she is about to enter the hotel, Karen turns back to look at me, her eyes full of blame. "How can you let me go?" An overweight woman from the delegation grabs her arm and gives me an angry stare. I almost scream, "Don't touch her! Let her come back!"

Less than a block away, I am stopped by two plainclothes officers. I expect to be taken to the infamous Lubyanka, but they just question me in their car. I am given a dressing down, reminding me how I did not behave in a manner appropriate to the Soviet standards. Turns out there was a major commotion about the American tourists that disappeared, and our chaperones contacted the university. According to the *propiska*, the Soviet system of residence permits, both Lyonechka and I lived in the dormitory. It was only this morning that someone at the university figured out where we were, given Lyonechka's involvement—but they must have missed us by a few minutes.

Before they let me out, one of the officers asks conspiratorially "So, how was it fucking an American? Did she have any special tricks?"

They both laugh. I grind my teeth and say nothing.

The second officer adds, “Well, she was probably curious to see if the Russian dick is any different. She’ll have stories to tell her American friends. Don’t worry, you won’t hear from her again.”

From time to time, I looked at the handwritten marriage certificate, reminding me that this really happened and wondering whether it would mean anything or just remain a piece of paper that would gather dust in a drawer of my desk. Life went back to its normal routine: I had research to do, courses to teach. Lyonechka got in trouble, but his parents bailed him out. Except that Anya and I were awkwardly avoiding each other. That moment when I woke up and could not imagine the world without Karen kept coming back to me in the early morning hours.

Sometime later, I received a visit from two different officers. They again asked me about Karen Baker. I admitted to the events but blamed the vodka. After nodding in understanding, one of the officers said, “Do you know who Sam Baker is?” I had no idea. Turns out Karen’s father was a U.S. congressman.

And then the other officer added, “And she is pregnant.” U.S. newspapers picked up the story, making it sound like the Soviet government was preventing me from reuniting with my pregnant wife. “Let Pavel Rostin Go!” The headline was smack on the front page. Star-crossed lovers, Romeo and Juliet, you name it—every cliché had been dragged out and splashed on newspaper pages and TV screens. Partly out of those early mornings’ memories, partly due to guilt—what kind of a man abandons his child?—I requested permission to be reunited with my wife.

In a bizarre development, the local army office, *voenkomat*, had called me in. Generally, the mandatory service in the glorious Soviet Army would be deferred while one was in college, often indefinitely if you were doing some work of importance. But there I was, requesting permission to unite with some capitalist adventuress. I looked like a perfect target for three years of psychological and physical abuse in the army. But when I dutifully appeared as summoned, the colonel in the recruitment department was confused. Technically, I was an officer by virtue of going through years of ROTC-like service in college. The logical thing would have been to strip me of my lieutenant’s rank and ship me off to some remote and dangerous location where no U.S. congressman would find me. The war in Afghanistan was still going on. But the Soviet Union was one massive, centrally managed bureaucratic state, and the bureaucracy did not easily deal with exceptions. The wheels of the military due process had ground

to a halt; they did not want to take me as an officer, but they also could not strip me of my rank just because I got an American pregnant while being a civilian.

After months of uncertainty, I was called back to *voenkomat*. Portraits of Lenin and the murderous "Iron Felix" Dzerzhinsky stared accusingly from the wall behind the colonel, as he moved his lips and eyebrows in disgust and told me that I don't deserve the honor of serving in the Soviet Army.

If that had been only a couple of years earlier, my application would have been denied and I would have turned into another *refusenik*, likely sweeping the streets for a living. But warmer winds were blowing, and I was allowed to leave. Very few people showed up to say goodbye. I still remember seeing Anya's teary face in the back.

Gas pedal, brake pedal, gas pedal, brake pedal… A chain of random events twenty years ago—falling snow, Lyonechka and his apartment nearby, too much vodka available, authorities fumbling the finding of us—and I am now stuck in traffic crawling past the Los Angeles Airport that everyone calls LAX.

I believe Karen did love me. But in the end, she was her father's daughter, and she wanted her place in society. I could not provide it. I am surprised I have not gotten the divorce papers served to me yet; it's been over two months since she left.

I steer the rental car into a small parking space left in front of Sam Baker's home on Ocean Way, blocking two Mercedes in the process. As I make my way into the house, Jennifer flies out and hangs herself around my neck. She does not say anything, just nuzzles her face in my neck and softly cries. I am silent as well, unsuccessfully trying to hold back tears.

After a couple of minutes, she untangles herself and says, "I missed you so much."

"I missed you too," I choke out. I don't care how cliché it is; sometimes kids make all the pain worth bearing. She looks just like Karen twenty years ago: tall, long blonde hair, a cute little nose, almond-shaped brown eyes, and a smile that lights up the room.

Jennifer takes me into the house and we make our way to the familiar huge patio overlooking Woods Cove. Karen gives me a polite hug and an air kiss.

Her father shakes my hand. "Good to see you, Pavel," he says and introduces me to another congressman and his wife.

Karen's mom singsongs, "Hello, Pavel."

Karen's brother is there with a firm handshake, and his wife, Toni, greets me with a mischievous smile and a peck on the cheek. Toni and I get along because

she does not take the whole “upper crust society” thing seriously.

I am pleasantly surprised by the greeting I received, but I would like to see Simon. After wandering through the humongous house, I finally find him engrossed in a video game of strange characters making their way through a fantasy land. He stops the game, hugs me. I try to ask about his college, but his eyes wander back to the TV screen and I let him go. I return to the patio, get myself a drink, and sit with Jennifer in the corner discussing her studies.

As the sun sets, we all have dinner on the patio, under the heat lamps. I sit next to Karen; she is polite, not a word about our separation. The visiting congressman makes fun of Sam’s prospective opponent in the upcoming November elections and raises a toast to Sam becoming a chairman of the House Means and Resources Committee, “a well-deserved post.” After dinner, everyone piles into the living room to watch a recorded show of *Desperate Housewives* on the latest and greatest large-screen TV. Simon and I sneak out, he probably to play his game, while I go back to the patio to watch the waves. The ocean sparkles in the moonlight. I think of the sparkling snow in the darkness of 1941 Leningrad.

Someone slips into the chair next to mine. It’s Toni. She says, “I am sorry about you and Karen.”

“Thanks. How are you?”

“OK. Roger has political ambitions; otherwise we would have been in the same boat.” She pats my hand. “Sam has an important election coming up. The ambition is their weak point.”

By “their” she must mean the whole class of Sam-like people.

When I get to my assigned room, I open the computer but discover that the Wi-Fi password has changed since the last time I was here. I am not sure I’ll be trusted with the new one, so I pull out the envelope that Rozen gave me. Inside there is a printout titled:

> “Statement of Richard Palmer on the Infiltration of the Western Financial System by Elements of Russian Organized Crime before the House Committee on Banking and Financial Services on September 21, 1999.”

From the introduction, Palmer was a CIA station chief in Russia. Some sections of his statement have been highlighted by a light-color marker, probably by Streltsova:

> Plans for the looting of then Soviet State were first discussed in 1984 by specific sectors of the Soviet Politburo, the top officials of the Communist government. However, one must keep in mind that this massive effort included many of the highest

officials of the Soviet government, several elements of the KGB (now FSB), and others. Their primary goal was to ensure their financial and political status in the future, by taking control of the vast funds and resources of the Party and converting them into personal assets.

By late 1986, the informal planning committee had been given the services of two KGB officers who were experienced in moving funds overseas. The Chairman of this planning group was Central Committee Treasurer Nikolai Kruchina.

The following plan was carried out to gradually build the enormous support structure that would eventually be needed and then to secure their wealth.

1. Initially, smuggled "suitcases" of cash and the diplomatic pouch would be used to move limited amounts of funds to help sustain the initial firms that were to be founded and foreign accounts to be opened.

2. In the second phase, Russian organizations were used to simply transfer large amounts of funds for national reasons to their related offices and firms in the Soviet republics and, where possible, to the West.

3. Simultaneously, trading firms were founded to act as "intermediary" firms to sell Russian resources, such as oil, natural gas, non-ferrous metals, diamonds, chemicals and cotton. These firms received these materials at state-subsidized "internal prices" and sold them at world market prices. Profits from these operations were deposited in tax havens such as Switzerland, Cyprus, the Caribbean, Panama, Hong Kong, Ireland and the British Channel Islands.

4. In the fourth phase, from 1989-1992, larger firms and banks could be founded in Russia and the former republics, as well as in the West. When possible, the offshore accounts that had been previously established were to be used to discreetly purchase controlling interests in existing banks and firms with good reputations.

5. In the fifth stage, "shell" corporations were founded in Western countries such as Germany and Britain, as well as Ireland and Switzerland, and the United States.

6. In the sixth stage, the criminal structure became highly developed and was capable of creating new income by using its contacts in Russia and selected republics for "profitable investments," such as purchasing materials and natural resources at rock bottom discount prices as well as from legitimate investments in the West.

In October 1990, several KGB Foreign Intelligence workers were shifted to work in the Party Central Committee Property Directorate, so that a structure that was capable of coordinating the Party's economic activities could be established. The basis for this new group was an agreement between Deputy General Secretary of the Central Committee, Vladimir Ivashko; the Central Committee Treasurer, Nikolai Kruchina; KGB chairman, Vladimir Kryuchkov; and KGB Deputy Director, Filipp Bobkov. Also in October 1990, Bobkov sent a directive to selected overseas KGB residencies stating that they should immediately begin to submit proposals for the creation of covert KGB commercial firms and financial establishments.

Colonel L. Veselovsky was called in November 1990 from abroad. He was a specialist in international economics and was transferred to work on management of the Central Committee… The firing of Veselovsky two weeks before the August putsch is especially noteworthy. Veselovsky immediately left for Switzerland.

In the margins are Streltsova's notes in Cyrillic:

Kruchina killed in August of 91, right after the Putsch – covering up the

tracks?

$300+ billion moved?

Stage 7: from 2001?

Nemtsov? Nemschev?

The Putsch she is referring to must be the failed attempt by the Communists and the KGB to retake power in August 1991. The KGB largely dispersed after that and then was officially disbanded.

Wednesday, June 14

In the morning, the guests are gone and so is Sam's good disposition. He corners me after breakfast.

"You have some nerve showing up here uninvited!"

"I wanted to see my kids. Don't worry, I'm not planning to stay."

Sam changes his tack. He is one of the few people I know that doesn't skip a beat when switching between good and bad cop roles.

"Look, I am sorry things didn't work out. You understand, I have to protect my daughter. Let's not rush into anything. You two take some time off from each other, then we'll see. You are still a family, we take care of our own."

I understand. The divorce papers have been drawn but won't be served until after the election. Can't have an unpleasant divorce thing going on during the election.

I find Karen alone on the patio. Still beautiful, now mature and stately, with some hard lines around her mouth. She is polite but distant. She is sorry about my father's death. I don't go into any details.

"What are you doing now?" asks Karen. "Why are you in California?"

"My father went to California last year; I was trying to understand why."

"Millions of tourists come to California every year. If you wanted to come see the kids, you should have just said so."

I guess it'll be one of those conversations where I better expect an accusation to be thrown at me at every opportunity.

"Yes, I wanted to see the kids," I allow. "Karen, how are you?"

"I am fine. My father told me you've been seen with Sarah Shoffman, is that true?"

"Is your father following me?"

"True or not?"

"It's true. But your father has no right to spy on me! Is this what we've come to? And you've been 'seen' with Martin Shoffman, have you not?"

"You ask me after half the town knew that you were screwing that coffee girl?" Karen hisses, then starts crying.

The ocean is still today, no waves to cheer up the surfers. Karen's words disconnect me from myself; I feel like it was some stranger rather than I that did these stupid, reckless things. Seagulls are having a dispute on the beach, filling the air with angry screeches.

Karen gets up, stands in front of me. She cautiously says, "I am sorry if my father spied on you; I didn't ask him to do this, and I'll tell him to stop this crap

immediately. And I am sorry about Martin; I was just so mad at you for not only having the affair but also being foolishly indiscreet about it. I felt people snickering behind my back over that fling of yours. It was like you wanted to get caught, not even bothering to drive to the next county or something. But don't you understand what's most important? All these years I wanted to be independent from my father. And I wanted our children to be independent from him. Instead, we are back in his house because we have nowhere else to go. You are so self-absorbed you can't even see what's right in front of your nose. If you wonder why Simon is the way he is, just look in the mirror!"

"But Karen, I thought you wanted me to be successful, to live on Park Ave, to socialize with the movers and shakers. There was always that pressure from your family. That's why I was taking chances!"

"Of course I wanted you to be successful," she sighs. "But most of all I wanted to be independent from him."

I take her hand into mine, kiss it.

Sometimes one has these moments of perfect clarity. I realize right here and now that Karen is defined by her relationship with her father and that there is nothing I can do or say to resolve this. She wants me to be like him and she hates for me to be like him.

There is still this deep connection between us, and my heart is full of sorrow for her. Akhmatova's words come to me:

In closeness there's a special place
Where love and passion cannot reach,
Even when lips come together in silence
And love breaks the heart into pieces.

I look at Karen as I say the words. Her face convulses in anguish. "I'm sorry, Pavel. We are beyond poetry now." She frees her hand and walks away, wiping at her tears.

I clamp a hand over my mouth to not cry out from a sudden stomach pain. Guilt and anger boil in my insides. Years ago, on a backpacking trip, I had to cross a raging creek on a narrow log. That's what being married and having kids sometimes feels like: walking on a wet log with a heavy backpack, pretending that you know what you are doing, trying not to look down. When you are young, you don't realize how much is predestined from childhood. At some point I slipped.

Just then my phone rings. Polite, but somewhat less friendly, Mr. Zorkin is on

the line with an elderly gentleman.

"Allo, this is Anton Rimsky," strains the weak and hoarse voice of a long-time smoker.

"Mr. Rimsky, this is Pavel Rostin. I think you wanted to talk to me last week."

I hear Rimsky telling Zorkin that he needs privacy, shuffling of feet, door closing.

"Yes, Pavel, I wanted to talk to you. I am so sorry about your father."

"Mr. Rimsky, how did you know my father?"

"I worked with him for over thirty years. He was my mentor in the *militzia*. He was already an experienced investigator when I joined. I've met you; I've been to your place a few times, although Volodya did not mix work and family much."

That's why he looked familiar.

Rimsky takes a breath.

"I retired five years ago, but for a while I was offering private investigation services, sometimes working with your father. The pension is not enough with the current prices."

"Are you still a private investigator?"

"No, I stopped about a year ago. My health is bad, and there was practically no income. I can't compete with young people. I just try to manage my expenses now."

"But my father continued working as a private investigator? He was older than you!"

I hear Rimsky taking a drink of water.

"Yes, but physically and mentally he was in a better shape. He exercised daily. And he still liked a good challenge. He did not want to sit around."

"And people would hire an eighty-year-old man?"

"Your dad had a reputation as a capable investigator and someone who can be relied on for confidentiality. He learned computers, spoke a bit of English. People trusted him."

"Do you know what he was working on last?"

"He kept his clients' information secret. I just know he did a lot of traveling lately."

"He didn't tell you where he went?"

"No, as I said, he kept things confidential."

I am about to hang up as I think of another question.

"Do you know about a little boy Andrei that survived the blockade with my parents?"

“Yes, of course. Your parents adopted Andrei, even though they were just a few years older than he.”

Adopted? I hear the word, but I can’t quite comprehend its meaning.

“Adopted? What happened to him?”

Rimsky hesitates, I hear him drinking water again.

“Oh God … So they never told you… They adopted and raised him. He was drafted into the army and in 1956 his unit was sent to crush the Hungarian anti-communist uprising. He was arrested after an incident there, sent to the Gulag.”

“Why didn’t they tell me?”

“I … I don’t know … Perhaps they tried to protect you. Or bury the memories. Frankly, your dad was never much for the Party. He was careful not to talk about this, but I could sense it from small comments. He never got promoted because he did not join the Party.”

I thought of my father’s diary.

“Do you remember Ivan Mershov, his *militzia* boss during the blockade? I think I recall him coming over.”

“You can’t remember Ivan; he died soon after you were born. You are probably thinking of his son Kostya. Kostya was friends with your dad. He started in the *militzia* but then transferred to the KGB and moved to Moscow in the 1970s; I’ve lost track of him since.”

There is a 500-year-old globe in the New York Public Library that carries a “Here are dragons” inscription on the unknown land. I managed to live with Karen for twenty years and not fully understand what makes her tick, until today. And now I find out my parents adopted someone. Which makes him my brother? A brother I’ve never met? I am in the land of dragons now.

I want to take Jennifer and Simon to lunch before I leave, but Simon is glued to his video game. When I suggest that he might be spending too much time gaming, he protests, “But Dad, this is The Kingdom of Soma, the coolest game ever!”

I let him be. I’ll have to find a way to reconnect with him, but not today, not under this roof.

Jennifer and I drive to the tiny downtown, walk along the beach, eat her favorite deep dish pizza, talk about the first year in college, her life in California, plans for the summer. However badly Karen and I screwed up, we did create this wonderful human being.

Jennifer wants to change her major. “Dad, I want to be a scientist, like you. I love research.”

“That’s great. I am sure you’ll do well. What kind of science are you interested in?”

“Physics or computer science, I haven’t decided yet. The only thing is, Grandpa won’t let me. He says I should study business administration or policy. He won’t pay for me to go to school and study science. But Mom and I will talk to him again.”

I cringe inside, understanding Karen’s words that much better. Her father uses his money to control everything.

I tell Jennifer about my trip to St. Petersburg. She asks, “Are you trying to find out what happened?”

“I am looking into it.”

“Please, be careful.”

“Don’t worry, sweetheart, I always land on my feet.”

As Jennifer walks back into the house, I see Karen in the second-story window, looking at us. I wave to her to come down, but she shakes her head. It feels like her way of saying “farewell.”

Back on the freeway, stuck in the famous Orange County traffic. Alone with my memories.

No matter how strong we are,
We are still prisoners of our memory.

It was my mother who taught me Akhmatova’s poems. From the diary I understand why.

When I boarded that flight to New York twenty years ago, I was scared out of my wits: I had burned all my bridges to unite with someone I knew for just one day. A magical day, but only one. But when Karen met me in the JFK airport, already visibly pregnant, it was like we had never parted. The magic was still there.

How do you grow apart? One day at a time. In movies, couples discuss their differences, the man says something profound about his devotion that he couldn’t express before, the woman falls into his arms. In real life, wounds go deep.

I think we were happy in the beginning. After Simon came Jennifer. I was teaching physics in college. We lived in a small two-bedroom apartment, but I did not know any better. Then the in-laws started talking about how much better private schools are and how we really should live in a big house with a yard. All for the kids, of course. I left physics and went to work on Wall Street, in the

1990s when hiring physics professors as “quants” was all the rage. Wall Street tried to gain respectability by portraying finance as a science. In fairness to Karen, she did not push me. But she liked that I almost tripled my salary in the move; we sent the kids to a private school, we bought a small house, then a bigger one. Karen kept an orderly home. As an influential congressman’s daughter, she started getting traction in society. I became another mid-level Wall Street functionary. Actually, a lower mid-level one—in our Connecticut town the upper middle social strata was reserved for people with seven-figure incomes.

And as I was marching on, I limited my field of vision to what others told me was needed. Nobody forced me to; I put the blinders on voluntarily, even willingly. At some point, my careful life stopped feeling real to me. I was acting in a movie where a character named Pavel Rostin worked, tried to climb to the top, collected objects, people and stomach problems along the way. In trying to become a “player,” I took one chance too many. Suddenly the performance ended and I stood exposed, real, mortified, angry at Karen for what I was about to do to her.

That evening when I came home and, drunk with terror, told her that we were broke and the house, the one she’d been building and decorating for the past four years, was no longer ours, she did not raise her voice.

She sat there quietly staring into space and asked, “When do we have to move?”

“We can live here until they kick us out.”

“I don’t want to be kicked out. Pavel, I love you, but I am leaving.”

If you love me, why are you leaving? I wanted to say. In my world, if you love someone you stay with them. Perhaps we needed a new dictionary: “Love according to Karen” vs. “Love according to Pavel.”

But I just asked, “Where will you go?”

“I will go to California to stay with my kids.” It’s *my* kids now.

That night, she took off her nightgown and made love to me for the first time in a year. When I woke up, she was gone.

As the traffic crawls past a giant billboard of one of Sam Baker’s dealerships, I think how Karen craved to be free from her father but at the same time wanted me to be like him.

By the time I get to LAX and turn in my rental car, it’s past 4 p.m. and my only choice is an overnight flight leaving in five hours. I hate red eyes, can never sleep on the plane, but don’t see other options. I make myself comfortable in a bar by the gate and call Jack Mikulski,

“Jack? Pavel Rostin here.”

“You missed me, you really missed me,” come his words with cackling laughter. “You want your results already?”

“No, but I will be in New York tomorrow.”

“OK, why don’t we meet in The Ketch at five? They have a good bar.”

“Sounds good, Jack. Look, I have one more name for you to check out.”

“Ha! I knew you wouldn’t be able to hold out on me. What’s the name?”

“John Brockton.”

The voice on the other end changes.

“John Brockton? The same one that was killed in California with his Russian girlfriend? Is that why you are in California, you crazy Russian?”

“Look, I just want someone to look at his fund’s transactions, public information, nothing more.”

“OK, but we’ll have to keep it pretty tight. I don’t want to jeopardize Suzy.”

Neither do I. And I don’t want to jeopardize you, Jack. I don’t say this to him.

I get a pen and a pad of paper and start drawing pictures. As my father taught me, “Pavel, when in doubt, get organized. Focus on the facts, on things you know.”

In one corner of the page, I draw a circle I call “Grand Castle Rock Fund.” Under the circle I put down Martin Shoffman. Overweight, balding, always ready with a broad smile, a joke, and a firm handshake. Referring to his wife, Sarah, as “my much better half, I don’t know how she can put up with me.” Turns out she couldn’t. Martin, who arranged a bad agreement for us and now seems to be quietly working for another hedge fund. Martin, who brought in the New Treasury Island ELP that pulled the rug from under us. Was his smile just a mask? Did he sell me out from the beginning?

In the other corner: a “Brockton-Streltsova’s murder” circle. Under it, Sal Rozen, Jeff Kron, Michelle Kron, Mark Bezginovich.

Jeff Kron, the man convicted of murder but proclaiming his innocence. Don’t all the murderers insist they did not do it?

Michelle Kron, a lawyer who sacrificed her career to move to a small California town in the middle of nowhere because she believes in her brother’s innocence. And because she has nobody else left, the family destroyed by someone else’s greed.

Sal Rozen, a detective who thinks that Jeff Kron did not commit the murder.

Bezginovich, Streltsova’s brother, who may have hired my father to investigate.

That’s three people that do not believe the official version.

Into the third corner goes a “Streltsova’s investigation” circle. All I can place under it is “Nemtsov? Nemschev?” from Streltsova’s notes. What was she investigating during the last days of her life? Terrorist bombings in Moscow? Laundering of money out of the failing Soviet Union? If hundreds of billions have been stolen, that’s the kind of money that someone would kill to keep secret.

In the last remaining corner, I make the list of people that may play some role but I am not sure to which circle they belong:

Major Vakunin, who finds new and unlisted numbers in hours. He must have worked with my father, but who would care about an old guy that retired many years ago? Unless that old guy’s been working on something of interest.

Investigator Pemin, who commands *militzia* majors and dresses like a Wall Street financier. During the meeting, Vakunin was clearly playing second fiddle to Pemin. Either Pemin is very well connected for an investigator or he is not an investigator at all.

Petr Saratov, who follows the orders of some colonel. Why did he say he knew my father? Not likely they worked together; Saratov seemed to be too young for that. He wanted the papers my father sent. Why did they let me live?

Sam Baker, who has people following me, probably just for divorce blackmail purposes. I don’t see him being involved in any of these cases, but I leave his name on the list for completeness. And because he spies on me.

In the middle, I put my father. Under his name, I write “Missing pages???” I don’t know if a sixty-year-old diary has anything to do with stolen billions. It’s just another question to which I have no answer.

So far, Natalya Streltsova is the only connection between these circles.

Famous physicist Richard Feynman compared particle physics experiments to smashing two watches into each other as hard as you can and then trying to figure out their workings by picking up the pieces. I am looking at the pieces, sensing there is a complex mechanism behind them.

Thursday, June 15

The red-eye flight wipes me out, as usual. I get home and climb into bed for a nap, but sleep does not come. The noisy weekday world keeps intruding.

I sit at the computer, pull out the pad of paper from yesterday, and start methodically googling names.

Natalya Streltsova: Nothing before 1998 when she first appeared as an investigative reporter on the Russian TV station Telenovostiy. Born in Moscow in 1970. The station is acquired by Boris Sosnovsky, one of the most powerful Russian oligarchs with strong ties to the government. In 2000, Streltsova became an anchor of a popular weekly program reporting on corruption, graft, and government-sanctioned pilfering. There is a picture—very pretty, blonde, willowy, tall, smiling fearlessly into the camera. She raised questions about the terrorist bombings in Russia that killed hundreds and were used to justify the second war in Chechnya. Except that Telenovostiy claimed that the bombings were orchestrated by the FSB and the GRU, the descendants of the KGB, to create a pretext for war. The TV station was sold in 2001 and the Telenovostiy's investigative program got canceled. There is nothing on her from 2002 until late 2003 when she is found dead in Santa Barbara. I make a mental note to do more research about the bombings.

Mark Bezginovich: A newspaper article from 2001 describing a "new kind of successful Russian attorney." Other references are not as kind, labeling him an "attorney for the mob" and mentioning his name in a number of high profile cases. There is a phone number, which I write down from the Yellow Pages.

John Brockton: Born 1965 in Chicago, degree in Russian Literature from the University of Chicago in 1986, Harvard Law School in 1989. Climbs up the ranks of Millennium Mutual. A 1997 article has his picture as a "new breed of American emerging market money manager" that lives in the "emerging country" (Russia), speaks the language, and guided his fund to a fivefold appreciation in only three years. A small announcement about Brockton leaving in July 1998 "to pursue other interests." An article from the Santa Barbara News-Press about a young multi-millionaire buying a "magnificent property" in 1999. All quiet until 2003, when the news world erupts with a sensational murder case.

Martin Shoffman: Born in 1966 in Boston, marketing degree from the

University of Iowa in 1988, Wharton Business School in 1993. Assorted Wall Street jobs, Lehman, Salomon, Barclay. Becomes co-manager of a certain hedge fund in 2005.

Boris Sosnovsky: A powerful Russian oligarch with strong ties to Yeltsin's family. But as the government changed in 1999, Sosnovsky found himself on the wrong side of the new president. Moved to Paris but continued agitating about the Russian government, blaming it for staging the bombings in Moscow and other things. In February of this year, he was found hanging in a locked bathroom. Police declared it a suicide.

Sam Barker: U.S. congressman since 1984, currently the third longest serving congressman. Being pegged for the chairmanship of the powerful House Means and Resources Committee. Has been dogged by allegations of enriching himself by acquiring real estate that would jump in value following Congress's decisions. Being challenged in the 2006 elections by a populist district attorney who dug up Baker's lucrative purchase of a cheap tract of land just a couple of months before freeway construction was unexpectedly funded.

What ties them together if anything?

I dial the number I found for Bezginovich. It's an answering service. I leave my name and phone number.

I get to the Captain's Ketch early, saunter to the bar, get a beer, and watch the testimony of the Fed chairman. A few months ago, I would be glued to the TV, hanging on each and every word. Now I just casually follow the text running along the bottom of the screen proclaiming that there is no bubble of any kind in the U.S. real estate.

A familiar cackling laughter scares the few present patrons and makes the bartender smile. Jack hits my shoulder.

"These clowns wouldn't know a bubble if it had a neon sign posted saying B-U-B-B-L-E!"

Suzy follows him at a slight distance, probably embarrassed by his display.

It's early, so we get ourselves a quiet corner table. The waiter makes a face when he hears we are partaking only in drinks and appetizers, but it's too late to reseat us.

Suzy pulls out two manila folders and opens the thicker one.

"The Treasure Island Exempt Limited Partnership was set up with $110 million in April of 2005. You won't easily find this—the Cayman Islands are a jurisdiction that's short on taxes and long on privacy. Judging by the amount and

the timing, it looks like the Partnership was specifically set up to finance your hedge fund. The directors are a usual bunch of for-hire Cayman nobodies, most of whom sit on hundreds of boards, get a little bit from each, and know nothing. While nominally an independent fund, the beneficial ownership indicates that it's effectively a 'feeder' fund to a larger 'master' hedge fund by the name of White Sycamore ELP. The White Sycamore has a number of other feeder funds, with about $800 million under management. No names of interest on the management or directors roster. Here's where it gets interesting: the White Sycamore is a 'special purpose vehicle' for another fund called Douglas Fir Holdings."

"Why?"

"Generally, it's used to separate different types of investments. In this case, perhaps to hide the true size of Douglas Fir Holdings—it appears to have a number of special purpose 'side pockets' and feeder funds, with likely tens of billions under management. Ownership of Douglas Fir points to The Birch Grove, a company in Cyprus. Cyprus is also known for its excellent tax treatment and privacy."

"And for being a money-laundering haven for the Russian mafia and oligarchs," adds Jack.

"The Birch Grove has other subsidiaries. Ultimately, it probably manages hundreds of billions of dollars—we can't estimate. It is in turn owned by Kedr II Holdings of Switzerland. Unlike the other companies I mentioned, the Kedr is not a financial management group but a diverse conglomerate—there is a bank and a network of trading companies, mostly registered in Antigua and Panama."

Suzy draws her finger through various printouts.

"Bearer shares …" says Jack knowingly.

"Shares that are not registered to a particular name …" I think out loud.

"You claim ownership by presenting them." Suzy nods. "The ultimate in secrecy, money laundering, tax evasion… Very few jurisdictions allow them."

"And who owns the Kedr?"

"The ownership points to Der Hornstrauch Anstalt, which is an offshore company in Liechtenstein. So far the trail ended there, Anstalts are Liechtenstein's financial institutions that don't disclose beneficial ownership."

Suzy moves to the last printout page in the manila folder.

"One more thing," she says. "This looks like a network of companies carefully set up for opaqueness. The financial management arm, The Birch Grove and her feeder companies, are relatively new, nothing before 2000. The Kedr II Holdings and other companies go back to the early 1990s. Even if we,

along with the unlikely help of legal authorities, get through the Caymans' veil, we then have to pierce the veil in Cyprus, and then Liechtenstein, and we don't even know if it ends there. I went through the names of directors and administrators for all of these companies, they are included in the printout, but I did not see anything of interest. Then I started looking for the earliest documents, and one name caught my eye: Greg Voron."

She leans back, enjoying the effect as both Jack and I drop our jaws in surprise.

"Voron?" Jack and I say in unison.

Greg Voron is a rising star among private equity managers in New York City. He was profiled not long ago in *New York Finance* magazine. At thirty-six, he already manages reportedly over seven billion dollars. Originally from Russia, he came to the United States in 1999 to study executive management at Columbia. Started the Eastern Cottonwood private equity fund in 2001, in the midst of the post-Internet bubble recession, purchased distressed companies cheaply and rode the market recovery.

"Yes, Voron," Suzy confirms. "He was there at the beginning of The Birch Grove. His name disappears after 2002, but it's on the early documents."

"Perhaps he figured out that they are money-laundering fronts and resigned?" My suggestion earns me a you-are-such-an-idiot look from Jack, who wryly observes, "Yes, I am sure this is just an innocent coincidence. And all these funds named after trees…"

I see Jack's eyes suddenly narrow and I instinctively start turning around. Before I have a chance to do that, I spill my drink because someone hits me on the shoulder, too hard to be friendly.

"Look who's here! An old Luddite from risk management, a Russian quant that blew up his hedge fund, and a pretty Oriental woman. Are you planning a little ménage-a-trois?"

It's Bob Cleyton from the trading desk. Loud and obnoxious, he despises all quants because "it's the sales skills that matter."

Cleyton laughs at his own joke, then turns to Jack.

"Mikulski, I am warning you—I have had it with your memos trying to sabotage my business."

Jack turns red from anger.

"Your business? You are trying to sell that poor county in Missouri a lousy swap deal that will end up losing them tens of millions. A deal that you're betting against behind their back. If you don't care about the hardships and layoffs you are going to create for them, perhaps you should think about the potential lawsuit that you are subjecting our bank to."

Cleyton stabs his index finger at Jack.

“Mikulski, I am telling you again, sit quietly in your office, wait for retirement, and don’t fuck with me.”

“Or what? You haven’t screwed enough grandmothers in California, you now have to screw some in Missouri?”

Cleyton leans his fists on our table, spits out, “I will bury you!” and leaves.

“What was that about screwing California grandmothers?” Suzy sounds very confused.

“Bob Cleyton used to be a trader at Enron,” Jack explains. “It was his group that gamed the electricity market in California and that was caught on tape laughing over how they screwed ‘Grandma Millie.’ He should have never been allowed back into the business, but here he is, racking up tens of millions in potential damages for the bank. I’ve been trying to stop him for a while, but nobody listens. The bank president’s motto now is ‘Take risks!’ At the weekly executive meetings, they sometimes ask me to leave the room so I don’t remind them of exposure or liability.”

Jack glares across the room at the table where Cleyton is laughing with three other men.

“Look at them. The one with a goatee, sitting across from Cleyton, loaded our bank’s balance sheet with billions of dollars in high-risk CDOs and dicey mortgages using leveraged funds. The one in dark glasses is an analyst who a few years ago took a dozen internet companies public. He knew them to be worthless, but there was a lot of IPO money at stake. He is now handing out recommendations for technology stocks. The main requirement for a positive opinion is for the company to give our bank some business. The last one, with his back to us, is a lawyer that makes sure that none of them is personally liable when things go wrong. They are all way too smart not to know what they are doing is a fraud. But they don’t care, they want their multi-million dollar bonuses and to hell with the consequences. Greedy predators, preying on others.”

Suzy seems to be taken aback by Jack’s outburst.

“But, Jack, there are laws in place to prevent this. There are underwriting standards, securities laws…”

Mikulski shakes his head.

“Even if we enforced the laws, which we don’t, it’s next to impossible for the regulators to deal with the organized, complicated thievery of extremely clever financial criminals. There is that great lie at the core of our financial system—a massive network of thieves.”

He takes a drink, puts down his glass.

“Let’s get back to Pavel’s business. Suzy, any more surprises in that folder of yours?”

“Not in this one.” She smiles and picks up the second folder.

“But there is a bonus: Brockton! I only had a few hours, so I started by looking at the history and performance of the Russian Leveraged Equity fund he ran. One thing jumped at me immediately.”

She starts pointing to circled and underlined numbers in the printout.

“In 1995, the fund underperformed its peers. In 1996, it outperformed them by a bit. In 1997, Brockton hit it out of the park, Number 1 fund in Eastern Europe, mentions in the financial press, etc., etc. But when the Russian financial crisis hit in 1998, the fund was *by far* hit the worst. Brockton was already gone.”

Suzy catches her breath and continues.

“I reviewed the holdings in the quarterly reports and noticed a pattern. Look at this.”

Jack and I lean in.

“Mobile Electrosvyaz. If you round the numbers, you can see how their holdings go from six million shares to five million, then back to six, back to five, back to six.”

“That does not make any sense,” I say. “A fund manager usually builds a position and then sells it.”

Jack asks Suzy, “What’s the float?”

She smiles. “Mobile Electrosvyaz had ten million shares, after the 1993 privatization insiders owned forty percent.”

“He made the market,” says Jack.

“He made the market,” agrees Suzy. “And that was true for the four of his largest positions that I had the time to check on.”

Even I get it by now.

“It was a Ponzi scheme, sucking in new investors into his fund by showing jacked-up returns. He’s been running up the market in his holdings by trading back and forth, recycling the shares. That’s why the fund dropped so much: when the music stopped, there were no buyers. But he had to have partners in order to do this.”

“He had to have partners,” agrees Suzy. “And at least one of these partners must have been hurt badly, because they had the shares that were being recycled at the moment. The fund holders were not the only ones who got burned.”

“Then there must have been quite a few people that wanted to kill Mr. Brockton,” observes Jack. He laughs, surprising me. “How well do you know

history? Brockton's scheme is exactly what Goldman Sachs did in the late 1920s with various investment trusts they controlled, like Shenandoah and Blue Ridge. Different time, different place, same grift."

Suzy has to go, to see her fiancé who was coming into town from Boston. She leaves me her files. As she walks away, Jack says, "Isn't she something?" He looks as proud as if he trained her himself, then turns to me. "You still not going to tell me more?"

I shake my head. I feel like I'm protecting people by not giving them too much information.

"Pavel, Pavel…if you were not in such a hurry to become a fund manager, you could have paid for a good attorney and smelled this rat before they got you."

Yes. But they knew my weaknesses. Arrogant fool who thought he was smarter than everyone else.

I change the subject.

"Jack, what do you think is going to happen when this real estate bubble blows up? It's a big one."

Jack rattles ice in his glass, contemplates for a moment.

"Yeah, it's a big one. I don't think it's *the* big one though. There is a lot of resiliency in the U.S. system; we can take a few body punches, we can afford a few trillions in losses. This blow won't fell us. The next one after that, who knows?"

"Do you think there will be a next one?"

"I am afraid so. We took some heavy hits in the past, and we recovered by changing how we do things. When we had a crash seventy something years ago, we took the bitter medicine and enacted new laws to prevent the next one. Six years back, we had a bubble and a crash, and we just blew another bubble. It's the hubris of very smart people: they think they can control everything, that there is always another adjustment they can make, another knob to turn. But the more knobs they turn, the more fragile the house of cards becomes."

"I am such a slut," says Sarah. "Run into your bed whenever you are in town. But I feel like we have a connection, survivors of the same battle."

During dinner, she asked me how my trip to California went. I told her about my father investigating the Brockton murder but skipped the part about Streltsova's notes.

Sarah asked carefully, "And how was it seeing Karen?"

I took my time to answer, not sure what to say.

"She is angry at me. Angry about becoming dependent on her father again.

Angry about the coffee girl. Angry about you."

"About me?"

"Yes, her father told her we're seeing each other."

"But how, how…" Sarah stared at me in horror.

"He probably had me followed, to gather dirt for the upcoming divorce."

Sarah took an angry breath.

"Well, let's go to my place then."

Now she sits up, the sheet slides, her small breasts exposed.

"I saw the beautiful assistant that you and Martin had in the office in NYC and I wondered who was doing her. Then one night I came by the office late to pick up Martin and she was coming out of your office, buttoning her blouse, straightening her skirt. She looked at me; she knew that I knew and she did not care. I wish it was had been him, not you. It was such a cliché, a successful finance guy banging his secretary. I wanted to cry."

I remember Oksana, young, dark-haired, elegant, the fine fabric of her clothes, the contour of her body with the sun shining through the fabric as she stood in front of my desk. It was Martin who hired her. When she would leave the office afterward, I would feel an exhilaration of power, the thrill of having everything available. I hid behind my "master of the universe" mask, free from guilt and scruples.

I clench my fists until they hurt.

Friday, June 16

In the morning, I look for Jim Morton, find him at a respectable boutique investment bank. The web page shows a confident-looking man in this late forties. He could be a walking advertisement for a hair coloring system, with just the right touch of silver in his hair to demonstrate a proper combination of energy and experience. I call the bank and leave a message “from a friend of Anya Weinstein.”

He calls me back quickly, anger in his voice seeping through politeness.

“Mr. Rostin? Why are you calling me?”

“Mr. Morton, I’d like to talk to you. How about lunch today?”

“I already have plans. What do you want, and why did you mention Anya?”

“I have no intention of blackmailing you.” I figure mentioning the word will make him more amenable. “I just need some first-hand information about the Russian financial markets in the 1990s.”

He breathes into the phone, seems to be considering his predicament and decides to play along. “I can meet you next week.”

“I am afraid it must be today, I have to leave for Moscow.”

We arrange to meet at a coffee shop two blocks from his bank.

My phone rings. A smooth, confident, friendly voice, speaking in an accented English.

“It’s Mark Bezginovich. Mr. Rostin, you were looking for me?”

“Yes, I was. If you have time, I wanted to ask a couple of questions,” I say neutrally, not sure if there is a connection between him and my father.

Bezginovich clears this up immediately.

“I was wondering when I would hear from you, Pavel. I am sorry about your father.”

“Why did you think you were going to hear from me?”

“Don’t play mind games with me, Pavel.” Bezginovich sounds more weary than irritated. “We both lost loved ones.”

This stings, because he must have truly cared about his sister, while I thought of my father as a cold-blooded bastard.

“OK,” I concede. “Can we talk?”

“I’d rather not. It’ll be best for both of us to leave this behind.” But he does not hang up.

I rush with, “Mark, please. I just want to know what my father worked on. I am not trying to reopen anything.”

Hesitation on the other end, then, “OK, but don’t expect much and not on the

phone. We can talk in person. Call me when you are in Moscow. Write down the number."

I look up what I can find on Greg Voron. A degree from Moscow State University, but after I was already gone from there. Not a whole lot about his early years. A puff piece in the *New York Finance* magazine informs me about Greg's tastes in pets, music, literature, colors and more. I wonder whether the magazine had a matchmaking business on the side, because that's what the article feels like, a matchmaking agency profile. I glance at the history of the Eastern Cottonwood private equity fund; the list of acquisitions includes a building materials manufacturer, a company making home security systems, a subprime mortgage lender, a mid-size bank, and more. His recipe is to shake up the management, bring in the latest technology and financial tools, aggressively acquire market share. All the usual buzzwords.

I play a hunch and call detective Sal Rozen in Santa Barbara.

"Sal, the home security system in Brockton's house, was it made by"—I consult the list—"Hardrock Security Company?"

"Hold on," says Sal, "let me check." He disappears for a few minutes, then comes back on the line. "It was installed by a local company, but the equipment was from Hardrock Security."

"When was it installed?"

"Let me see…about two months prior to the murder. We questioned the installer because of the rear camera malfunction. He said Hardrock Security really dropped their prices and advertised very heavily in our area at the time. Do you want to tell me what this is about?"

"Probably just a coincidence."

"Sure," says Sal, "a coincidence."

That's a second intersection between different strands in my diagram. I print out a page with Voron's picture.

Jim Morton is already waiting for me, looking older than his picture on the company's web page. I introduce myself. Jim responds with, "I looked you up; I now understand how you know Anya."

I keep silent, so he continues, his eyes not focused on me.

"So, about me and Anya…it's really complicated…"

I raise my hand to stop him.

"I'm not here to ask questions about Anya or David. I am interested in John Brockton. You must have known him when he was in Moscow."

Morton's eyes widen in shock.

"Yes, of course I knew him. What does that have to do with Anya or David?"

"Absolutely nothing. I need to know who Brockton worked with in Moscow."

"Why do you think I know anything?" Morton hesitates—and that tells me he knows something.

"Let's not take this conversation to the place neither of us wants it to go." I look to the side, then back at Morton.

Morton chews his lip.

"We all suspected that the wonder boy Brockton ran a Ponzi scheme, so I was not too sorry to hear he paid for it. I know he worked with Avtotorgoviy Securities, run by two brothers that hustled in Moscow during that time. They were meeting a lot, and the brothers joined him during parties."

"Do you know how to get in touch with them?"

"No, I don't."

"What about their names?"

"I am sorry, I don't remember."

Back at home, I search for Avtotorgoviy Securities. A few small hits from the 1990s, nothing since 1998. Nothing about the brothers or their names.

I update the notepad, adding Voron and Avtotorgoviy. All my leads are in Russia. Yakov was right when he said that I'd be back soon. Truth be told, I am scared to go back. But I don't see another choice. Too many questions. I can't figure out how the pieces of this puzzle fit together. I have to find out.

I call Sarah.

"Hi. Look, I'll be heading back to Moscow."

"Is this about your father?"

"Yes."

"OK. Be careful. Why call me?"

I take a deep breath. A simple question that I don't know how to answer. Because I would have felt guilty if I didn't call?

"To see if you want to meet for dinner tonight."

She thinks for a minute, then says quietly, "No, I'll wait until you are back… if you are back."

PART 3: SECRETS AND COINCIDENCES

Airplanes are good for thinking. Paradoxically, despite being the quintessential modern products, they are also the last refuge from the distractions of modern life. I am afraid that at some point they will allow us to have our phones turned on, and then there will be no place to hide from people trying to reach you.

There was my father's death, possibly connected to his investigation of John Brockton's case. And there was an early demise of the Grand Castle Rock hedge fund, together with the career of a certain Pavel Rostin. Nothing was tying the two events together except for my father and for a certain overlap in timing. Until today. Until the Hardrock Security Company appeared on both threads. Coincidence?

Merriam-Webster defines coincidence as "the occurrence of events that happen at the same time by accident but seem to have some connection." *Seem to have some connection*…Perhaps they do, perhaps they don't. Coincidences are dangerously sneaky. Sometimes they are truly random unrelated events that we attach a deep meaning to.

Karen told me later that a combination of falling snow and us getting separated from the main group felt to her like a sign that we were meant to be together. Later I discovered that she had a magnet sticker on her refrigerator that said, *Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous. – Albert Einstein*, which may have predisposed her to seeing significance where none may have existed. I think that her ovulating at the time—as proven by an immediate pregnancy—made her ready to embrace the possibility of love. Regardless, she took the coincidence seriously, and it changed the course of her life. And mine and Anya's.

And other times we walk past coincidences as not worthy of our attention, but in reality they are signs of something taking place behind the curtain, be it undiscovered laws of the universe or levers and knobs being adjusted by men. One day, the physicist Roentgen noticed something strange when investigating cathode rays: a screen at some distance from his experiment glowed when it was not supposed to. He probed further and discovered X-rays. Most likely, the phenomenon had been noticed by others before him but was written off as an accident.

Between my father and Yakov, I have learned that research in physics is not that different from investigating a complex case. You look for coincidences, for anomalies, and try to find who or what is behind them. You decouple

complicated problems into simple ones. I remember Yakov quoting Rene Descartes: “Divide each difficulty into as many parts as is feasible and necessary to resolve it.”

But no matter how cynical or analytical I get about these things, my thoughts go back to that “I can’t imagine the world without her” feeling I had when looking at Karen the morning after. Whatever else I did, or failed to do, that moment was etched in my consciousness as the purest instance of my life, the time I had been touched by something greater than I. I am sure that a chemist would explain this by my body releasing some kind of endorphin. But no one ever will convince me that a chemical reaction is all it was. Our lives are like tapestries, intricate combinations of events following a central pattern. And then there is a spike of color that gives it brightness. I think it’s the hue of us loving another person, without conditions, without constraints, sometimes without any particular cause. It is the proof of God that I can understand because it transcends reason and every natural instinct of self-preservation, not for the collective good or an abstract theory but for a flesh-and-blood human being.

Sunday, June 17

I land in Sheremetyevo for the second time in as many weeks. I deliberate whether to call Yakov or Bezginovich first. I decide to go with Bezginovich because it may determine where I go from the airport.

He answers quickly.

"Are you in Moscow?"

"Yes, just landed in Sheremetyevo."

"Where are you planning to stay?"

"I have not made any plans yet."

"How about the Courtyard Moscow City Center on Voznesenskiy Pereulok? It's centrally located, reasonably priced, and quiet. And it has a bar we can meet at. Some of my clients stayed there, and I know the owner."

From his comment "reasonably priced," I figure that he must have looked into me and my financial situation.

"Did my father stay there?"

Bezginovich hesitates, then allows, "Yes, he did."

We arrange to meet in the bar at seven.

The taxi takes me on another trip down memory lane. When I was a student, I used to take a bus. The streets are much busier now, filled with European and Russian model cars. The hotel is as advertised—civilized, not over the top, only two stories, and busy with tourists. Bezginovich called ahead with a reservation.

I get to my room, unpack, and call Yakov. I smile when I hear him calling out to Anya, "I told you he'd be back within a week!" Yakov gets upset with me for staying in a hotel and harangues me until I agree to come and stay with them after my "downtown business" is concluded.

"Yakov, I do have a favor to ask."

"I figured you would."

"I'd like to check on someone who graduated from Moscow State University. His name was Gregory Voron or something like that. He would have graduated in the 1990s."

"What do you want to know?"

"Whatever you can find—when he graduated, what he studied, who he worked with…"

"All right. So we'll see you soon?"

"Yes, soon."

I have a bit of time, so I go for a walk to Novyy Arbat. I start at the

Arbatskaya metro station, dropped like a red Japanese pagoda into a middle of the square. It's a tourist trap, filled with shops and kiosks selling magazines, cigarettes, books, films, alcohol, fake handbags, *matryoshkas*, and T-shirts proclaiming that the wearer's been to Moscow. Kiosks are manned by loud people trying to lure tourists into buying whatever they are peddling. It reminds me of New York—boisterous, haphazard, impromptu, and exalted.

Stalin glares at me from a poster in one of the kiosks. The great man is staring into the bright future. Took me a second to realize that it was not a tribute to the former dictator but a curiosity, a decoration. I wonder if he is turning in his grave from such insolence.

I go through the underground crossing and find it full of more kiosks and beggars. A group of men is clustered near a building, smoking and gossiping. I walk by a church, then a casino. Everything seems pushy and loud. It's a cliché, but like many clichés it has truth in it: St. Petersburgers consider Muscovites pushy and loud, while Muscovites think that St. Petersburgers are stuck up on their former glory. Kind of like New York and Boston, especially when the Rangers meet the Bruins in the hockey playoffs.

Peter the Great wanted St. Petersburg to be everything that Moscow was not: precise, orderly, elegant, centered around palaces and the fortress rather than churches. The window to the West. But it was Catherine the Great that completed his vision, creating an imperial city to rival Paris and Rome. Rightfully, St. Petersburg belonged to both of the Greats, except that Catherine was the one that turned away from Peter's dream: as the age of Enlightenment was sweeping Europe, she pulled the country back. And so Russia settled between the West and the East, present in both worlds, belonging to neither. In the battle between the two cities, Moscow eventually emerged the winner.

Time to head back. I turn onto Borisoglebskiy Pereulok. I like this quieter, greener street lined with trees. That's where the beauty of Moscow comes across. It's not intentional, not laid out with a premeditated artistic vision that was looking centuries ahead but instead an accidental collection of streets and buildings that involuntarily come together. In St. Petersburg, you are a child visiting a strict grandfather that spent his life in the military. In Moscow's little streets, you call on a chaotic and sometimes confused aunt.

A statue of poetess Marina Tsvetayeava is on the left. Her head leans on her hands, eyes downcast. Yes, poetry was a serious business in Russia. Unlike Mandelstam or Babel, she was not killed. Tsvetayeava came back from exile in

June 1939. In August, her daughter had been arrested and sentenced to 15 years. A month later, her husband was taken and shot in the Lubyanka prison. Persecuted, lonely, broken, unable to publish, she took her own life and was buried in an unmarked common grave. She knew how it would end:

As for me, a zone of unrestricted sleep,
Bell sounds and early dawns,
In the graveyard of Vagankovo.

In 1946, on behalf of the party, Andrei Zhdanov condemned verses of Anna Akhmatova, another great poetess, because they were too "autobiographic, intimate, and emotional." Imagine that, intimate and emotional poetry! Of course, politically correct Juliet would not have asked Romeo to change his name but implored him to double coal production instead. Petrarca's pining for Laura would have earned him a one-way ticket to the Gulag, but pining for higher steel output meant the Stalin Prize, an apartment in the city's center, and Kremlin store coupons.

Between the NKVD and suicide, what was the survival rate of the Russian poets in the twentieth century? Someone should run the numbers; I am sure it was not too high. The blood-sucking spider in the Kremlin sat in judgment over who should be published, who met the criteria of "social realism," who should be hounded or shot outright. And then Stalin would charge his yes-men—*What did Mandelstam call them? "A rabble of thin-necked leaders, fawning half-men for him to play with"* —to deal with the non-compliant ones. But why did he care about a few lines of rhyming text? Was the power of poetry such that it threatened a mighty state? It was not enough to be careful of what you said, you could be damned by what you did not say, by not heaping enough unquestioning praise and adoration on the leader. You are either with us or you must be destroyed.

The poets collided with the brutal system and lost. They were not revolutionaries, they did not fight the leadership. They just had that desperate courage of people unable to surrender their humanity.

I never quite understood my parents' love of poetry. Now I wonder if that's why: these poets gave them the endurance to defend their own humanity in an inhuman system.

The hotel bar looks like a Marriott in most American cities, a typical middle-of-the-road set up with wooden chairs and wooden tables with no tablecloths. What's different is a cacophony of languages: Russian, English, German,

French, others. I am a few minutes early. I make my way to a not-too-crowded bar, grab a chair, and order a Heineken. A mini-skirted blonde no more than twenty squeezes herself in the chair next to mine, leans over and asks in a throaty, heavily-accented English, “Where are you from?”

“New York,” I reply, surprised by the attention.

“Oh, how long are you in Moscow for?”

Her fingers gently touch mine.

Before I have a chance to respond, a hand gently grabs my shoulder. “Pavel?”

I turn. Bezginovich does not look much like his sister; he’s short, portly, balding, ears sticking out. But I can see the connection in a small delicate nose and an open smile.

He tells the blonde, “Sorry, dear, we are here for a meeting.”

The blonde grimaces, jumps off the chair, catches her balance on stiletto heels, and saunters away.

Bezginovich looks after her and shakes his head. “They are pretty much everywhere now.”

“They?”

“The working girls, who else? Let’s get a table. Thankfully, it’s not too noisy here.”

We position ourselves at a corner table.

“How did you recognize me?” I ask, expecting that he checked me out on the Internet.

“We’ve met before.” Seeing my puzzled expression, he laughs and gestures with his hand, as if shooing away a fly. His laugh is pleasant and young. “Well, ‘met’ is too strong a word. In my first year at the university, I had to take a mandatory physics course. One day the professor was sick, and you substituted for him. It was impressive, you teaching an auditorium of at least a hundred students while being only a few years older than us. And then a couple of years later your picture was in the news…you and that senator’s daughter…”

“Congressman’s daughter,” I automatically correct him, and chuckle in embarrassment. “Small world.”

Bezginovich looks down.

“As I said, I am sorry about your father. I tried to talk him out of it.”

“Why don’t we start at the beginning? You know, why did you approach him?”

As Bezginovich stares at me, thinking, a waiter appears at our table with two glasses of water. Bezginovich purses his lips, “Why don’t we order? It’s going to be a long story.”

Our waiter leaves with the order, and Bezginovich continues.

"You left in 1987?"

"1986."

"Have you been back much?"

"Until this month, only once. Came here with my family seven years ago."

"So you really did not live through the change, did you?"

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"It's like a preamble, a context that you have to understand about Natalya and me. Moscow now is a city of the world. We are native Muscovites, so we had front row seats to this show—1991, the year that Yeltsin stood on that tank and the Communist putsch collapsed, that was the beginning. Moscow, being the center of the empire, even a collapsing one, was the land of opportunity. I had just become a lawyer and the concept of law and proper legal process was at least nominally being implemented for the first time in generations."

"Some people called you an 'attorney for the mobsters.'"

"Pavel—may I call you Pavel? Please call me Mark—that was the Russian capitalism of the '90s. The free-for-all lasted until the 1998 financial crisis. Yeltsin threw away his chance. Russia, as it had done throughout the centuries, turned to a strongman. Some of the original oligarchs left or got thrown in jail, and new ones rose. We are still a corrupt oligarchy, but with different bosses."

He takes a gulp of water.

"This brings me to Natalya. Unlike me, she was blessed with good looks, a sexy voice, and a quick mind; she was a natural for the media. But Moscow was flooded with thousands of good-looking girls from the provinces, ready to do anything. And a degree in journalism was not worth much. At some point in 1997, she hooked up with John Brockton, having met him at one of the parties. He was a good-looking, successful, American banker and she fell for him. He was the one that helped her get a break at a TV station. That's all she needed, an opening. When Brockton left for the U.S. in 1998, he asked Natalya to come with him. I know she agonized over it but decided to stay; for the first time she had a real shot at doing something she loved. And she stayed and became the anchor of her own program."

The waiter interrupts Bezginovich's monologue with plates of food and a bottle of wine. Bezginovich does not seem to worry about his weight; he got a bloody ribeye steak with a large roasted potato and a beet salad on the side. I munch on a boring Caesar salad with chicken.

After taking a few bites, I try to direct the conversation a bit.

"Did she make enemies with her reporting?"

"Of course. She exposed an oligarch who was siphoning money from a

company that he did not own by charging enormous fees for simple transactions. She deposed a minister who was angling to give away a state company to his son-in-law in a phony privatization…"

"Could any of them have taken revenge?"

"Three years later in a faraway country? Possibly, but I doubt it. Her last and biggest case was about the 1999 bombings, and that was the one that I thought may have put the price on her head. Do you remember the details?"

"No, not the details."

"In September of 1999, there were a series of apartment building explosions in Moscow and two other cities. Hundreds had been killed. The explosions had been blamed on the Chechen terrorists, and Russia launched a war against Chechnya. But some people, including people in the Duma, the Russian parliament, were questioning who was really behind the bombings. Attempts at independent investigations had been squashed until the TV station Telenovostiy launched a series of investigative reports led by my sister, focusing on the incident in the city of Ryazan. In Ryazan, a bomb was found on September 22, 1999. This time, the suspects were arrested. Except that they turned out to work for the FSB, the KGB's successor. The FSB claimed that this was a test designed to check anti-terror preparedness."

"What happened after that?"

"The new government put the 1990s oligarchs under its thumb. The oligarch that owned the TV station where Natalya worked ended up on the wrong side, was forced to sell the station and leave Russia. Natalya was let go. She was not popular with the new regime. John Brockton was still calling her, and in late 2001 she picked up and moved to California. After that, she came back to Moscow only once, for two weeks in 2003."

"Rozen told me you were at the trial."

"Yes, I was there. You know, most of my clients are guilty. Jeff Kron did not strike me as the person who committed the crime. At least not the way they'd been killed."

"So you wanted someone to investigate?"

"Yes. With Kron as the only suspect, it became all about Brockton. Everyone forgot about my sister."

"Why my father?"

"Your father was not my first or second choice. I have my stable of private investigators in Moscow. I asked one of them and he took the case, but two days later called and declined without comment. I went to another one, same story, only this one told me that someone put the word on the street that this case would be 'bad for business' and that I won't find anyone legitimate in Moscow

to take it."

"Who put the word out?"

"He did not know or would not tell me. I am an attorney, I give them some work, but there are people that can easily put them out of business for good, you know. They'd rather lose my business than risk that."

"Then you went to my father?"

"I went out of Moscow. When your father was first suggested to me, I laughed—why hire an old man? But I had a business trip to St. Petersburg, so I met with him. He really impressed me, he was in good form, spoke some English, had a computer, and knew his way around the Internet. Thanks to you, it was easy to get a U.S. visa for him. And he was a very experienced investigator."

"Did you tell him about the word on the street?"

Bezginovich makes a face as if I insulted him.

"Of course I did! That's the damn thing—it actually made him want the case. There was something about your dad, like he was not afraid of anyone. And he knew that my sister's investigations were not popular with the new Russian regime."

The waiter brings us coffee.

"I hired him in February of last year and your father went to the U.S., ostensibly to visit his family."

I must have winced because Bezginovich quickly adds, "Sorry, he combined his visit to you with flying to Santa Barbara to investigate. He took his time, following leads on both my sister and Brockton. The big find came in September."

"What kind of big find?"

"When your dad searched Natalya's apartment, he found a key. Mind you, the apartment had been searched before by a number of people. The key had been hidden so well that no one saw it. We traced the key to a safe deposit box in a local bank. Inside was a printout of twenty-four pages."

"Was that the bombings investigation?"

"No. Money laundering, illegal arms dealing, drug trafficking. Companies, accounts, names. Some big names, both Russian and Western."

"And what did you do with these materials?"

"Nothing. You see, your dad was skeptical about them. He asked me 'Are the notes in the margins definitely Natalya's?' and I could not say. They looked like Natalya's handwriting, but I was not one hundred percent sure. I remember him saying it was too easy."

"Has anyone seen these papers?"

“Not as far as I know.”

“Can I have them?”

Bezginovich looks at me guiltily.

“No. I am sorry. In December, two clients canceled my services. And then I received a call. I don’t know who was on the other end, but he knew everything. He told me to stop the investigation, or more of my clients would start canceling and tax authorities would take an interest in my business. I loved my sister, but I have a family to protect. I contacted your father and told him the assignment was off. Then I destroyed my copy of the documents.”

“You stopped my father?”

“I stopped being his client. Whether he stopped investigating, I don’t know. I am not sure he did.”

“So he still had the document that you found in your sister’s safe deposit box?”

“Probably. But as I said, he doubted the document’s authenticity.”

“Is there anything else you can tell me?”

He shakes his head and gets up to leave.

“No. I’m not sure I should have told you as much as I did. I had to explain your father’s role; I owed that much to you. I am sorry he is dead, but the investigation must end.”

Bezginovich leaves and I go walking through the Moscow night. Walking helps me think or just unwind. Bezginovich seems like a decent man despite his “lawyer for the mafia” reputation; he must have met with me to soothe his conscience. But the question remains: Was Streltsova investigating something that marked her for death?

I pass by the Duma and the Bolshoy, with scores of people out on this warm night, and find myself in front of Lubyanka. It’s a large Baroque-like yellow brick building, imposing and ugly. It could be the headquarters of a large bank or insurance company, except that for many years it’s been the headquarters of the Soviet secret police in all its incarnations, from the Cheka to the KGB. The most dreaded building in the whole country. And the tallest, as a joke went: you could see Siberia from it. Yakov’s mentor, Lev Landau, was imprisoned here for a year. He would have been killed by the NKVD goons but for the stand taken by the head of the institute, Pyotr Kapitsa. It’s hard for a non-Russian to understand Kapitsa’s bravery.

There is a new monument in front of the building now; I walk over to look at it. It’s a stone from one of the infamous Gulag camps, here to remind people of

the victims of Communist terror. The meat grinder of the Lubyanka cellars: thousands upon thousands were executed in the basement of this ugly building, and many more were sent to slave away and die in the Gulag.

Could the FSB have set up the 1999 bombings as Streltsova was alleging? If they did, and she had proof, that would have been a damn good reason to silence her. Is it possible they killed hundreds of innocents just to justify a minor war?

I turn around, walk down Ilyinka Street to Red Square and St. Basil's Cathedral. Scores of people are there on this warm night. St. Basil is lit up, rising like the flame of a fire. Legend has it that Ivan the Terrible had the architect blinded so he couldn't build anything else. There is no truth to it, but it fits with the character. In reality, the *Terrible* sobriquet is misplaced. There is no proper English word to represent *Grozny*. It conveys a combination of dangerous, strict, and formidable. Ivan the Terrible was more like Henry VIII of England: intelligent, ruthless, and a womanizer. He was the first "Tsar of All the Russias," he unleashed terror against his own people, he fought endless wars, and he had seven wives. In a rage, he killed his son, Tsarevich Ivan.

Ivan the Terrible was an inspiration for both Peter the Great and Stalin. Tragically, Peter the Great condemned his son Alexei to death, while Stalin let his son Yakov die in a Nazi camp. In Genesis, God commands Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, then stops Abraham at the last minute. For the God of the Bible, the sacrifice is symbolic. In Russia, it's real: to reach the pinnacle of the power, to be able to measure out death to countless others, you had to sacrifice your own flesh and blood. Here it's a God of vengeance, not love.

Where do I go from here? This city now feels foreign; I've been gone for too long. Yakov is my only connection, and I can't jeopardize him and Anya and David. But I still have three names: Avtotorgoviy, Mershov, and Voron. I'll try to follow these clues the best I can and hope I don't reach a dead end.

Sunday, June 18

Jet-lagged, I sleep fitfully. First, I dream of driving in a car with the top down through beautiful mountainous scenery, trees on one side, a valley of the other. A powerful engine purrs as I climb up. I reach the top and slow down, blue sky all around me. The road starts heading downhill and the car picks up speed. I gently tap the brakes. Nothing happens. I slam the brakes as hard as I can, but the car continues to accelerate, tires screeching, as I fight the steering wheel. I'm flying into a sharp turn and realize that I won't be able to make it.

I wake up, sweating, toss and turn for an hour until the light starts seeping through the window, then fall asleep again. This time, I am with a woman; we are making love. We change positions, but I am always facing her back. I ask her to turn and look at me. She shakes her head. Her hair is blonde like Karen's, but this does not feel like Karen's body. In frustration, I grab her shoulder and throw the woman on her back. Sarah's face is looking up at me.

I wake up from the hotel phone ringing. It's Yakov.

"You did not call last night!"

I did not realize I was supposed to call, so I just answer, "Sorry, I had a meeting and then it was late."

"Fine, fine. I have some news for you."

"What news?"

"You get up, check out of your fancy hotel, come over here and I'll tell you."

"Yakov, I am not going to inconvenience you and Anya…"

"Don't talk rubbish." Yakov hangs up.

I eat a quick breakfast, take the new PSP portable console and a couple of games that I bought for David, and walk to the metro.

The game console is a hit with David, not so much with Anya. Yakov spreads his hands. "Where is your luggage?" I give them both a guilty shrug.

The three of us proceed to the kitchen where, despite this being before noon, Yakov sets up tea. It's a carefully orchestrated procedure. He measures loose-leaf black tea from a colorful can using a small spoon he has for this purpose. Yakov then pours boiling water over the tea in a special teapot and lets it steep for exactly four minutes. Then he mixes it with hot water to your individual taste: strong, medium, or mild. Sugar cubes are lined up on the side. Yakov does not recognize the concept of adding milk to his tea.

As I sip the hot liquid, Yakov tells his news.

"When you asked me to look into this Gregory Voron, I thought 'It's

Saturday, why didn't he ask me earlier?' But I called my friend Vera Semenovna from Student Services anyway—she's been at the university almost as long as I, and after so many years I figured I would trouble her on a Saturday. And since everything's been so computerized, she did not even have to leave her home, she could look everything up on the computer."

Yakov stops to drink his tea, no doubt for dramatic effect. Anya and I patiently wait.

"So Vera Semenovna calls me back and she is all upset!"

Failing to get a reaction earlier, Yakov prods us by pausing.

"Why is she upset?" Anya plays along.

"The records show that Gregory Voron graduated with a degree in history in 1993, but she could not remember anybody like that."

I laugh. "Ten thousand people graduate every year. How can she remember them all?"

Yakov raises his right palm as if to signal *stop*.

"Don't laugh yet. Vera Semenovna is a very thorough person with an excellent memory. See, in addition to graduation records, there are records for individual classes. These are not kept in the main system for long, but Vera Semenovna, being a thorough person, archives them."

Yakov goes back to his tea, then continues.

"To make a long story short, Vera Semenovna went into the archives and started checking records of the classes that Mr. Voron supposedly attended. She checks one class record—no such person. She checks another class record, no such person. She checks…"

Anya interrupts. "So basically he was not in any of the classes?"

"Vera Semenovna checked seven classes and not a single one had him in it," Yakov proudly declares.

"Somebody inserted his name into the graduation record but did not bother modifying the old archives," I think out loud.

"Exactly right," Yakov says. "If someone wants to check whether Mr. Voron graduated from the university, they'll be told 'yes.' Only a very thorough, expert examination would detect this fraud. Of course, Vera Semenovna is very upset and will take action first thing Monday morning."

"What kind of action?" I wonder.

"Well, expose the fraud, of course. We know there are cases of people 'buying' degrees from second-rate institutions, but nothing like this has ever happened in our university."

I shake my head. "Yakov, please call Vera Semenovna and ask her to keep quiet about this."

“What do you mean? Why?”

I don’t know what to do. Last night I decided I couldn’t involve Yakov and Anya any deeper into this case. How do I stop Yakov without saying anything? I try an evasive maneuver.

“Yakov, it’s dangerous and best to leave it alone.”

“Pavel, you asked me to check this name. What did you find out? Why is it dangerous?”

I look from Yakov to Anya, pleading with them to listen.

“Last night I met the man who hired my father to investigate a case. That man was threatened into stopping the investigation. I don’t know what my father had discovered, but I am afraid to involve you. I don’t think checking the records would endanger you, but asking further questions might.”

Yakov sips his already cold tea, chews his lip.

“Fine, I will ask Vera Semenovna to drop this matter. Is there anything I can do to help you?”

“I have to investigate something that took place in the Russian stock market about eight years ago. If you can introduce me to someone who worked in the market back then, that would be helpful.”

Yakov’s face turns to show his displeasure,

“Unfortunately, you are not the only one of my students that traded real science for finance. Back in the 1990s, a number of promising young physicists went into banking and that kind of stuff.”

“What about Tolik Osipov?” asks Anya. “He runs a bank of some kind.”

“Yes.” Yakov nods ruefully. “He dropped out in 1995 without even defending his dissertation. Such a waste!”

I have not heard the name, so it’s unlikely Osipov would be some major oligarch or something. Better this way.

He disappears into the apartment and comes out with a cordless phone and an old address book that has pages falling out. Yakov flips the book’s pages back and forth.

“I don’t have Osipov’s number. But I think I know someone who might be able to help. Do you remember Lyonya Krasnov?”

Both Anya and I gasp. I squeeze out, “Of course.”

“His family has always been well-connected,” says Yakov and dials a number. “Allo? This is Yakov Weinstein calling for Leonid Krasnov. Not available? So when will he be available? You don’t know? You will take my message, I understand. It’s his former professor Yakov Weinstein, W-e-i-n-s-t-e-i-n. What’s this about? Tell him that Pavel Rostin is in town and would like to get in touch with him.”

Yakov hangs up, a bit flustered.

“Such an important man, can’t answer his own phone on Sunday? All right, enough business for now. Anya, can we set up a lunch for our guest?”

The phone rings as Yakov is still holding it.

“Allo? Yes, this is he. Lyonya? Yes, I am well. Yes, Anya is well too. Pavel is here. He needs to get in touch with Tolik Osipov.”

Yakov hands me the phone.

“Pavel, my goodness, how long it’s been!” I easily recognize Lyonya’s voice.

“Twenty years, Lyonya.”

“That long, eh? So, why are you looking for Tolik Osipov?”

“It’s not specifically him; I need to talk to someone who was active in the Russian stock market about ten years ago.”

“OK, I’ll try to get hold of him. What’s your number? And why don’t you come over for old times’ sake. Perhaps I can help. I am still at the same address.”

I don’t need to be reminded where it is.

As I get up to leave, I ask Anya to walk me to the metro station. Yakov hugs me at the door. He does not predict my imminent return. Perhaps he is thinking that this time the prodigal son is disappearing for good. He was like a second father to me and I was not kind to my fathers.

“May God keep you safe.” Yakov sounds solemn.

“God? Yakov, you are a scientist. In all the lectures I’ve taken from you, I don’t recall you mentioning God once.”

“Pavel, when you were taking my lectures, mentioning God would have cost me my job. I started believing in God on March 5, 1953, well before you were born.”

“Why March 5, 1953?”

“That’s the day the monster died. Fifty years have passed, but I remember it well. For months, the smell of pogroms was in the air. The editorials talked about evil spies and murderers, all with Jewish-sounding names. People talked about trains being readied to take all the Jews to Siberia. Stalin’s henchmen were experts at deportations: Poles, Germans, Crimean Tatars…and now they were coming for the Jews, to ‘save us from the righteous anger of the Soviet people.’ Our whole family was packed, sleeping in our clothes, expecting a middle-of-the-night knock on the door. Except for my grandfather, who said ‘God won’t allow this. Not after the Holocaust.’ Stalin died on March 5, before the plan could be carried out.”

I mumble, “I am sorry; I did not know.”

“Don’t be sorry; they did not teach this in school. Nobody cares now. They

think it’s been too long ago to matter. And I realize it’s not logical and well might be just a coincidence, but I don’t think one comes to God through logic alone.”

The day is nice and sunny, so Anya and I decide to go to the further-away Oktyabrskaya Station. Anya puts her arm through mine and we walk arm-in-arm through Gorky Park, like we did twenty years ago—before Karen swept into our lives.

Back in the Soviet days, at the beginning of each school year they would send students to help on farms. Such was the brilliant outcome of collectivization: once the private property had been eradicated, the farmers cared more about drinking than about the harvest. So each September, the city folks would get mobilized and sent to the country to help. That particular year, we were sent to gather potatoes. Since I was already in my fifth year, I was in a privileged position of working inside where the gathered potatoes were cleaned and sorted.

The younger students were condemned to outside labor in the muddy fields, under cold rain and hot sun. Inside we worked under the direction of Semyon Nikanorovich. Semyon was in his fifties, thin as a rail, and foul-mouthed. His bald head was covered by a dirty fur hat even when it was warm. Bloodshot eyes and a red nose immediately alerted us to Semyon’s priorities. He would show up at ten with a half-empty bottle of vodka, the first half already warming him up from the inside. Despite being perpetually drunk, he managed to maneuver through sharp rotating machinery without injury. One of our seniors was not so lucky—he got half of his little finger cut off and was sent home to Moscow. His replacement was a petite younger girl with a long braid of black hair, big eyes, and a soft voice. She was at the far end of the conveyor. I barely saw her and paid little attention.

Until Semyon tapped me on the shoulder and spoke in a conspiratorial whisper. “That new girl, she keeps looking at you.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” I said, trying to keep my eyes on the conveyor and my fingers away from it.

Semyon belched, emitted a puff of alcohol breath, and confirmed. “Yes, she’s been here for two days, and she would stare at you and then quickly look away. Nothing gets by Semyon Nikanorovich.”

I was flattered but trying to keep my fingers and limbs intact was the priority.

Later that night, I stumbled on a bottle game. We all stayed in cinder-block barracks that must have been built years ago for the army and now were sitting

empty eleven months out of the year, until the city folks would show up for the harvest. While there were separate sections for men and women, put a couple of hundred young people in their late teens and early twenties into close proximity and things got intermingled rather quickly. A game of bottle had numerous advantages: it did not require any tools but one empty bottle; it could be played in any state of inebriation; and it could be made as sexual or as innocent as the participants liked. On one end of the spectrum, it could be played as strip poker where participants had to remove a piece of clothing whenever the bottle pointed at them. On the other end, you could be required to perform something, like singing a song or reading a poem. This particular game was in the middle of the spectrum: one person would spin the bottle and whoever it pointed at, had to kiss the first person.

I was walking by and someone called out to me, “Pavel, help!”

It was Volodya, my usual lab partner. He and one other senior boy were surrounded by four giggling younger girls.

“There are four of them and only two of us.”

“I am sure you can manage.”

I smiled and was about to leave when a soft voice mockingly said, “What’s the matter, Pavel, are you afraid of us?”

It was the black-haired girl that Semyon had pointed out. The others started laughing at me. “Yeah, he is afraid!”

Trying to save face, I mumbled, “Fine” and sat down to play.

After a few embarrassing pecks on the lips, I was ready to leave when the black-haired girl spun the bottle at me. As I was pursing my lips for another peck, she said, “I will take my kiss later.”

“Anya, this is not fair,” protested other girls, but she held firm.

I smoked at the time. Later that night, I was outside inhaling a bitter smoke of *papirossa,* a Russian filterless cigarette with rough tobacco and a hollow end. A shadow appeared at my side and a soft voice said, “I’ve come to collect my kiss.”

It sounded a bit theatrical, and I started laughing. To my relief, she laughed as well.

“I gather your name is Anya?”

“Yes. Pavel, you don’t remember me at all?”

I desperately searched my memory. Had I met her at one of the wild parties at Lyonechka’s flat? Did we sleep together, and I was too drunk to recall?

She came to my rescue.

“Last spring, I was in a class where you were helping the professor. You

taught two classes and graded one of our tests."

I remembered, it was one of the introductory quantum physics classes. The regular teaching assistant got pneumonia, and I was asked to help, even though I was not supposed to; these tasks were reserved for graduate students.

Trying to buy time, I asked, "What grade did I give you?"

"You gave me a four, although I deserved a five. I went to complain but lost my nerve at the last moment. You acted so confident in front of a classroom of students." She laughed. "All right, I see you don't remember."

I admitted my guilt.

"Sorry. What is your last name? Perhaps I'll remember then."

"After I collect the debt." Anya lifted on her tiptoes and took my face in her hands. This was not a peck on the lips but a strong, open-mouthed kiss. She let go, and we both breathed out.

As she turned to leave, I called after her, "Your last name?"

"Weinstein."

"Wait, wait…as in…"

"Yes, I am Yakov's daughter."

Weeks later, when we made love for the first time in the Lyonechka's apartment, she told me that she had fallen for me in that class. And she'd given Semyon a bottle of vodka so he would bring her to work on the conveyor.

"Pavel, are you OK?" Anya's voice brings me back. "You have that 'I'm a thousand miles away' look."

Back in the present, I don't know how to begin, so I just say it. "Anya, I saw Jim Morton."

Anya jerks her arm out of mine. "Why?"

"I had a finance question. About someone he knew."

"Did you talk about David or me?"

"No."

She walks silently, so I have to continue.

"Anya, I'm not sure he has plans for David and you."

"But you did not talk about us?"

"No. Just the feeling I got."

Anya bites her lower lip.

"I am not surprised. I think so myself. I wish David had a real father. But at least he has me. And I have him."

"Do you want to come with me to see Lyonechka? You knew him too."

"Pavel, he is the last person I want to see."

I feel like an idiot.

Anya turns to me fiercely.

“Pavel, what happened in 1986? Did you love her? Or did you want to go to America?”

“I loved her. I am sorry for what I did to you. I did not want to hurt you, but back then I could not live without her.”

Anya nods. There is this romantic streak in Russia that people would excuse anything for love.

“I guess that’s better. It tormented me for years that I did not know why you left me. Do you still love her?”

I evade the answer. “We’ve grown apart, separated.” A few weeks ago I would have said yes. Now it’s Sarah in my dreams, and I’m not sure what it means.

“Anya, what about you?”

She shrugs.

“I told you, I have my son and my father to take care of. I would like to meet someone, but I am content.”

She touches my face, kisses me softly on the lips.

“A lot of gray in your hair now, Pavel. I don’t think life has been easy on you. Please be careful.”

Lyonechka’s building has not changed much. Some of the memorial plaques are gone, and the façade has been painted to cover the empty space. The cars in front are now Mercedes and Bentley, not Chaika or ZIL. The building was popular with the elite of Stalin’s apparatchiks. During the day, they would be a few blocks away in the Kremlin or in Lubyanka signing death orders, then come home for a pleasant dinner with the family. They had invented the Russian method of mass production: instead of individual names, death sentences were signed for lists of hundreds. Must have made everything more efficient. Not as efficient at killing as the Germans, but still.

The apartment, on the other hand, has been remodeled and brought into the twenty-first century. The paintings have been changed from social realism to abstract. Contemporary Italian furniture. Books mostly gone, but jade vases still there. Except for the view, it could be an apartment in New York.

Lyonechka aged. We don’t notice aging as much in ourselves unless we look at old photos, but meeting someone you have not seen in twenty years puts things into perspective.

He tries to overcome the awkwardness by showering me with food and

drinks.

“Pavel, I have already called Osipov and left your phone number. He is a big cheese now, but I am useful to him because of my connections, and I think he’ll call back. I won’t torture you with questions of why you need to talk to him. I am just happy to help an old friend.”

“Thank you, Lyonechka.”

“The last time you were here, we were with the American girls,” Lyonechka reminisces. “What a crazy affair it was! I got into quite a bit of hot water. My parents had to really fight to keep the flat. For a couple of years, it was touch-and-go, but then all hell broke loose with Gorbachev and then Yeltsin. You missed an exciting time; it was like the Wild West in the movies. The ‘privatization’ that allowed the insiders and the well-connected to grab the choice properties. Connections were so important…. Disputes being settled with dynamite and bullets… And the parties…”

Lyonechka leans forward, a *good times* smile playing across his face.

“The parties we had. It was like people who’d been restricted and controlled for many years had suddenly been released and told ‘Anything goes!’ Clothes and inhibitions all came off. I remember taking some clients from England to a restaurant that was built like an amusement park with a river. You’d swim and there were entertainment stations along the way: food and naked girls.” He shook his head to leave the memories behind. “It could not continue, of course. We settled into a more normal life. But it’s still very different from your time.”

“Lyonechka, have you ever gotten married?”

“No, too much temptation.” He laughs. But then his look darkens. He pours himself a glass of vodka, drains it. “What the heck, it’s been twenty years…I have to tell the truth, to unburden myself. Do you know what I am talking about?”

I shake my head. I have no idea.

“For years, I was in love with Anya. I know, Lyonechka the life of the party, Lyonechka the Casanova, hopelessly in love with one girl. But she only had eyes for you, and eventually she got you. She brought you here to make love. It was killing me. That whole thing with the Americans twenty years ago…I thought I’d try getting you in trouble, it’d go public, then perhaps Anya would break up with you. How could I have possibly known that you would fall in love with that American girl?”

“And what happened after?” My voice is hoarse.

“I tried to talk to Anya, but she wouldn’t give me the time of day. She blamed me. I know she still does. I wanted to help her a few years ago, and she would not even acknowledge me. All this time… I am sorry, I am sorry,”

Lyonechka cries drunken tears.

I want to punch him in the face. Instead, I get up and walk out without saying a word.

I did not expect to hear from Osipov, so I'm pleasantly surprised when the phone rings.

"Mr. Pavel Rostin?" he says.

"Yes."

"This is Anatoly Osipov. How can I help you?"

"Thank you for calling me. I have a few questions about the Russian stock market in 1996-1998. Can we meet?"

"I understand you worked on Wall Street?"

"Yes, I did."

"Interesting. Look, my schedule is full for the next few days, but I have a party I have to attend tonight; why don't you come with me? You can ask your questions there."

"Well, it's awkward, I don't know anyone…"

"Not a problem, you're with me. Where are you staying?"

I explain and am told to be outside in half an hour.

I wait outside the hotel in my best—and only—Armani suit. It's a bit wrinkled from being in the carry-on, but I figure the occasion calls for it. I looked up Osipov, and he turned out to be a co-founder and president of the Stroitelny Bank, one of the ten largest in Russia.

A black G63 Mercedes growls down the street and pulls onto the sidewalk, scattering pedestrians. The driver comes out, looks around appraisingly, zeroes in on me and asks, "Pavel Rostin?" I nod, and he ushers me into the back seat.

The man already there offers his hand. "Anatoly Osipov."

"Pavel Rostin. Thank you for meeting me."

"My pleasure."

Osipov is in his mid-thirties, immaculately groomed and dressed, full head of dark blond hair, jovial full lips, nicely shaped nose. A slightly unnatural tightness of the skin suggests help from plastic surgery. There is another passenger in the front seat, but there is no introduction; I assume he is a bodyguard.

Osipov came to the university in 1989, knows nothing about my famous-at-the-time departure, and finds the story amusing. Osipov himself did not bother with physics after getting his diploma, but started a bank with a well-connected partner. He just wanted to make money and that meant finance, not physics. As he casually explains, they were "small potatoes" until the 1998 Russian financial

crisis. Their bank was “well-positioned” in his words, benefited from acquiring assets of some of the less fortunate rivals, and that propelled the Stroitelny Bank into the rarified air of top Russian banks. I can sense that I am just a curiosity for him as he questions me about the financial models we’ve been using.

As Osipov finishes describing his ascent, the G63 pulls up in front of a red four-story brick building. There is a small crowd gathered by the door. The driver and the bodyguard part the human sea for us, past a vicious-looking bouncer, and we are escorted inside, while Osipov explains that we are in Moscow’s newest club, the Diaghilev.

The music is pumping, and so is the dance crowd which mostly consists of girls in their early twenties sheathed in Valentino and Bulgari micro-dresses and high heels or knee-high boots. In front of us a man in a silk black cravat and a burgundy velvet coat materializes out of thin air. His shaved head shines like a halo.

“Tolik!” He wraps his arms around Osipov as if it’s his long-lost brother.

“Misha,” Osipov responds, and introduces me. “Pavel Rostin, from New York.”

“Welcome to the club, Pavel,” sings Misha and motions us to a private loggia on the side. Two willowy girls in shining dresses are already there with kisses for Tolik and demure “Tanya” and “Olya” introductions for me. A bottle of champagne is chilling on a table. Tolik and I squeeze inside the loggia. The bodyguard and the driver, who probably doubles as another bodyguard, take their seats at the opening. Osipov tells the girls to go dancing, and they reluctantly listen but don’t go far and start writhing and bumping right in front of us.

Osipov pours us champagne and hungrily follows the girls with his eyes. With some effort, he tears himself away and turns to me. “So, Pavel, what do you want to know?”

“Anatoly, do you remember John Brockton?”

Osipov gives me a blank look.

I try to refresh his memory. “He was an American fund manager who operated in Moscow from 1995 to 1998.”

Osipov shrugs. “Sounds vaguely familiar, but there were so many people here. I’m afraid I don’t remember him.”

“How about Avtotorgoviy Securities, do you know about them?”

Osipov brightens. “Yes, I remember. It was a brokerage firm. I had some dealings with them. It was run by two brothers, Victor and Gennady Crossman. They took a hit in the 1998 crisis, closed the company, started a new one; I don’t recall the name. They were hustlers.”

“Where can I find them?”

“At some cemetery.” Osipov enjoys the effect for a moment, then adds, “It was in the newspapers back in 2001. They were eating in a restaurant at a window table, and a sniper took them both out. After that, window tables became less popular.”

I swallow icy champagne, and the bubbles hit my sinuses.

“Do you know who killed them?”

“No. Like most professional murders, it has never been solved. Must have been a real expert, though. Two quick head shots.”

“Is there anybody left who worked with them?”

Osipov shrugs. “I would not know.”

He is distracted now; the girls dancing in front of the loggia must have gotten frustrated from the lack of attention, pulled down their tops, and started tonguing each other. Osipov inhales deeply, enjoying the show.

Misha’s shaved head appears. He brings two new visitors, interrupting the revelry. One is a man in his sixties, trim, bald, wearing sunglasses and a three-day stubble. He is dressed casually in a black T-shirt, gray jacket with rolled up sleeves, and khakis. An oversized gold Rolex and a gold chain complete the picture. He is followed by a huge man in his late twenties, closely cropped hair, the broken nose of a boxer. The older man pats one of the girls on the bottom, squeezes the other’s tit, and makes his way into the loggia.

“Hi, Tolik.” He gives me a questioning look.

“Hi, Alexei,” answers Osipov. “This is Pavel Rostin from New York; we were just finishing.”

“Pavel,” the man acknowledges me.

“Say, Alexei.” Osipov looks like he has an idea. “Do you remember the Crossman brothers?”

“Oh, sure. I did not do them”—Alexei laughs—“but I’d love to know who did. We can use a man like that.”

“Do you know anybody from their organization who is still around?”

“Why would you want to know?”

“It’s not for me, it’s for Pavel here.”

Alexei lowers his sunglasses, looks at me questioningly, and I feel uneasy.

I try to explain. “I’m looking into the activities of John Brockton, an American who was here in the 1990s. He used the Crossman’s brokerage firm.”

Alexei turns to Osipov.

“Tolik, why are you helping him?”

“I don’t know,” Osipov stammers, taken aback. “We had the same professor. He works on Wall Street; he is not involved in our business.”

Alexei continues to stare at Osipov.

“The Crossman brothers are dead. Brockton is dead. You bring this guy here. You don’t know who he works for and he is asking questions about the murders?”

“I can pay,” I offer.

Alexei’s dirty look tells me it was a mistake.

“How much would you pay for your life?” says Alexei, his eyes drilling into mine. I feel trapped, jammed behind the table, unable to get out.

The man with the broken nose leans on the table, Osipov slides away from me. The girls stop their gyrations.

As if sensing trouble, Misha appears again. This time he is accompanied by a slight man in a dark blue suit and a red tie.

“Gentlemen, is everyone having a good time? Should I send more girls to your table?” Misha soothes.

Alexei turns back, glances at Misha, then lingers on Misha’s companion. It feels like some kind of nonverbal exchange is taking place.

After a few tense seconds, Alexei smiles dismissively and pushes his sunglasses up to cover his eyes. “Sure, why not?”

He turns to me.

“I guess Americans trying to find dirt on each other. What do I care? My money guy, he’s been around, he might know someone.”

Misha visibly relaxes and disappears together with the slight man in a suit. Osipov slides back, the girls start moving again.

Alexei turns away, produces a mobile phone, and punches a speed dial. The girls in front are devouring each other, Osipov’s attention is back on them, his hands digging into the table.

Alexei turns back. “Anyone have a pen and a piece of paper?”

I always carry a pen, an old habit. I produce it, together with my Grand Castle Rock business card. Alexei writes something on the back of the card.

“My man says this guy ran operations for Crossman,” Alexei says. “He might still be alive.”

He looks at Osipov, who comes out of the girls-induced trance and turns to me.

“Hey, Pavel, Alexei and I have to discuss some business. Kolya will take you back to your hotel.”

Kolya must be the driver’s name because the man gets up. I follow him out, giving a last look at the dancing crowd. Russia has changed since my time. It’s like the people whose natural instincts had been suppressed for decades had the inhibitions removed, and now they have overreacted to the other extreme.

The G63 drops me off in front of the hotel. Kolya grunts, “You were lucky tonight; Alexei can be capricious” and does not bother to open the door.

When I get to my room, I carefully take the card from my pocket and look at the back. It has a name “Boris Shmulin” with a Moscow phone number. It’s late, but I decide to call anyway. The phone rings for a long time, my hope diminishing with each ring.

“Allo?”

“Allo, Mr. Shmulin?”

“Who wants to know?”

“My name is Pavel Rostin, I am looking for information on Avtotorgoviy Securities.”

I hear breathing on the other end, then, “How did you get my number?”

“Anatoly Osipov introduced me to a man called Alexei; I don’t know his last name.”

“Tall, bald, in his sixties, hooded eyes?”

“He wore sunglasses, so I did not see his eyes, but otherwise yes.”

This is not exactly true. Alexei lowered his sunglasses when it seemed like he was going to kill me. But I don’t remember what his eyes looked like except it felt like a cobra staring at me just prior to a deadly strike.

Shmulin muses. “A banker and a gangster. The new Russia. I don’t think I should be talking to you.”

But he does not hang up, so I rush to keep the connection open. “Mr. Shmulin, I won’t give your name to anyone, and I’ll pay for your time.”

“The information may not do you much good,” retorts Shmulin, but he still does not hang up. After a pause, he adds, “It’s your business. Come here tomorrow morning and bring five hundred dollars.”

I take down the address. It’s in the Zemlyanoy Val area. I feel elated; I found a trail.

Monday, June 19

I take the metro in the morning. Today is a weekday, and the metro carries harried commuters. We are jammed together, people staring straight ahead. I arrive at Chkalovskaya station and emerge into bright sunlight. Even on a Monday morning the walk to Shmulin's place feels dangerous: the area is populated with street urchins and prostitutes. Drunks are already out in force. I am sure people have been attacked here for much less than the $1,000 cash in my pocket. I do my best to look like a local and walk briskly, avoiding eye contact. It is only a ten-minute walk, but I'm sweating by the end.

Shmulin's apartment is in one of the eight-story communist-era monstrosities that dot the suburban landscape. I step around a half dozen young people sitting on the steps in front, climb to the fourth floor, and ring the bell at the number fifteen. I hear someone shuffling to the door, the peephole goes dark, then at least three different locks click. The door opens by about one inch, still latched on a chain. An eye appears at about my shoulder level.

"Pavel?"

"Yes, Mr. Shmulin. Can I come in?"

The eye studies me for about a minute, then a nasal voice pronounces, "Well, come in."

Boris Shmulin must have been short even at an earlier age. Now he was thin, stooped, and barely five feet tall. Despite this being a warm day, he is dressed in a red fleece coat, a flannel shirt, running pants with stripes on the sides, and slippers. A wrinkled face is covered by bottle-thick glasses and a few white wisps of hair are plastered across his bald head. Shmulin gestures to follow him and shuffles down a dark corridor to what looks like a small living room with a table, three chairs, a worn-out sofa, a TV set, and a bookcase filled partly with books, partly with photos, vases, and goblets.

Shmulin sits on one of the chairs and nods at me to sit in another. Without asking me, he pours two glasses of water from the pitcher on the table. He carefully pushes one glass in my direction, I automatically take it.

We look at each other, and then he clears his throat.

"I am afraid I must ask for the money upfront. Moscow is an expensive city."

"Of course." I count out three $100 bills.

"I told you five hundred," Shmulin hisses.

"And I have two hundred more for you. But I have to see if the information is worth it."

Shmulin considers me with suspicion and pockets the bills. He narrows his

eyes, stares at me for a while and says, “What did you say your last name was?”

“Rostin.”

“Are you related to Vladimir Rostin?”

This is so unexpected that my hand jerks and I spill some of the water.

“He was my father. Did you know him?”

Shmulin looks with annoyance at his now wet tablecloth.

“Your father sat in the very same chair.”

“When was he here?”

“Six, seven months ago…I remember it was cold.”

“Tell me what you told my father.”

“Why not ask him?”

“He is dead.”

Shmulin’s eyes narrow. “How?”

“He killed himself.”

I decide not to mention that it might have been a murder, with me as the prime suspect.

Shmulin bites his lower lip, chews on it and says, “I don’t think I want to talk to you. Too dangerous.”

“Look, it’s been a long time since you’ve met with my father and nothing happened to you, right?”

Shmulin shakes his head.

“Even if I got lucky once, does not mean I should tempt fate.”

I play the greed card.

“Give me back my money then.”

Shmulin stands up and pulls a small gun out of the right pocket of his fleece coat:

“I don’t think so. And I’ll take the rest of what you have.”

He smiles and stands tall, at least for his height.

I remain seated, trying to think. Shmulin knew the gangster from last night.

“Alexei sent me to you. He is not going to like it when I tell him you robbed me.”

“You don’t know Alexei!” Shmulin spits out, but his pupils dilate behind thick glasses and his body stiffens visibly.

I press on.

“He gave me your number. I told you that last night.”

Shmulin breathes heavily, his shoulders sag, smile now completely gone. He puts the gun back in his pocket, sits down dejectedly.

“All right, I am sorry. I became anxious when I heard about your father.”

“Don’t do this again.” I try to stop my hands from shaking. Thankfully, he

can’t see them under the table. “Now, what did you tell my father?”

Shmulin scratches his bald head.

“Your father was looking into activities of a certain John Brockton. Are you familiar with that name?”

“Yes, I am.”

“Let me start back in 1993. I am an accountant by profession, always been good with numbers. The Soviet Union has fallen, we have a free market, which means the prices are going through the roof, official salaries don’t buy much and are not even paid regularly. Everything for sale, everything a commodity. Mini-skirted young women line Tverskaya Street selling their bodies. Army veterans advertise themselves as killers-for-hire. What are you going to do? You have to hustle.”

Shmulin theatrically spreads his arms to demonstrate that hustling was indeed the only choice.

“That’s how I met Victor and Gennady Crossman. They were doing black market stuff for years. Now they found themselves a new playground. People like that thrive in markets that are either rigged or undeveloped. They speculated in currency until they figured that the stock market is a more lucrative game. There was no such thing as a stock market in the Soviet Union, so it’s all new with no rules; nobody knew what things are worth. The government decided to privatize everything, so in late 1992 they issued vouchers to all citizens to buy shares in Russian companies. People had no idea what to do with them. The whole Russian economy was valued at a few billion dollars. The Crossman brothers started by trading vouchers for bottles of vodka. Then they hired others to do it for them, open kiosks for vouchers trading. By 1994, they accumulated shares in a number of companies. That was the year they hired me to run their operations while they focused on “marketing” as they called it. They were advertising Avtotorgoviy Securities as a brokerage firm, but basically they were looking for ways to hustle their customers. If there was demand for a certain stock, they would sell it at a small profit to one of the accounts they controlled, and then mark it up for a real sale. All their profits would go to a company they set up in Cyprus to avoid taxes.”

Shmulin stopped, pulled out a handkerchief from the pocket of the fleece coat, and blew his nose.

“Excuse me. As I said, they were small time. Until they met John Brockton, I think it was in 1995. Brockton had just arrived in Moscow. He was this brash, tall, blond, baby-faced American who dove into the local party scene. The girls loved him; he was known to take home two or three of them at a time. Brockton wanted to purchase a block of shares in a company where Crossman’s

accumulated a significant stake. They tried to hustle him, but he figured it out. I think Brockton already knew exactly the scheme that he wanted to run, but he needed the right Russian partners to do it."

"The scheme was to corner the market in some of the stocks?" I asked.

"Kind of, but it required some finesse and sophistication. The way that the Russian privatization was structured, only about half of the shares were public; the rest were owned by the insiders. So in some cases you wanted the insiders in on the scheme. Additionally, Brockton's fund had to trade with multiple parties; otherwise the auditors would quickly figure out what was going on. It took them a few months to set things up, but by mid-1996 the scheme was in place. Besides the Brockton's fund, three "investment companies" were involved: one was controlled by the Crossman brothers, one by Arkady Khmarko, and one by Evgeny Voronezhsky."

"Voronezhsky?" I could not help my reaction.

"Yes. Why, do you know him?"

"No, just the name sounds familiar. Sorry, please continue."

Shmulin noisily drinks water.

"You must understand that these "investment companies" were not empty shells; they had to have financial backing, access to capital. Let's say you want to raise the price of a stock from five to ten dollars a share. To make it look legitimate, you have to create decent trading volume. You put a million shares into play to raise the price to six dollars, so an investment company puts down six million. Over a period of a couple of months, the shares get taken over by another company at seven dollars a share, then another at an eight dollars. After six months, the shares are back where they started but now they are trading at ten. You get the picture. And when you have a dozen different stocks in play, you have to manage the cash flow, the inventory. Everyone was making money as long as Brockton's American investors were buying into his fund. Which they were: in 1996 and 1997 the foreign investors could not get enough of Russian equities. And Brockton himself was being paid based on the fund's performance. Even I, a lowly operations manager, was doing well and could afford to take dates to the Serebryany Vek restaurant and party with the rich. I knew the dates were not there for my looks, but still. It was a beautiful thing. Until it all went wrong in 1998."

"What happened?"

Shmulin stares at me, says nothing.

I repeat, "What happened?"

"I told you five hundred. Do you think I'll finish the story without seeing the rest of the money?"

I hand him the remaining two hundred. Shmulin smiles in satisfaction and continues.

"The first cracks appeared in late 1997 when the Russian stock market plunged almost twenty percent in one day. The partners got nervous, but Brockton reassured them that this was a normal process for an emerging market and that the investment flow from the U.S. would go on. He probably knew that the party was ending, but he did not care; he wanted to get his bonus for the year. The market recovered, and the business continued. In May of 1998, the market started dropping again. The Russian government had been funding itself by taking on more and more short-term debt, and its financial position became unsustainable. People started running scared, but in mid-July the International Monetary Fund, IMF, announced a massive bailout for Russia. Many thought that the crisis was over, but this turned out to be only a short respite. In August, the markets started tanking again, then George Soros wrote in the *Financial Times* that 'the Russian financial meltdown has reached the terminal phase.' In mid-August the ruble had been officially devalued and everything collapsed."

Shmulin falls silent, tired from his speech. After a minute, I prod him.

"And what about Brockton?"

"Brockton disappeared in mid-July. He would sometimes take off for a week without notice, taking some of his girlfriends to the French Riviera or skiing in the Alps; nobody was worried until early August when rumors started circulating that he left for good. I think he carefully prepared his departure. Now remember that the scheme worked only as long as everyone participated. With Brockton gone, his fund was out of the game. The Crossman brothers and Khmarko smelled the rat and pushed the securities they were holding to Voronezhsky's company. After the IMF announced the bailout package in July, Voronezhsky must have decided that things were safe for a while. So he was out of the country on vacation. When he came back, he found himself with most of the securities that were in the pipeline. As the crisis hit, these securities collapsed—there was no market for them outside of the scheme. Voronezhsky lost tens of millions of dollars that belonged to the mafia that bankrolled him."

"What happened?"

"Voronezhsky killed himself in late August of 1998."

"What about others?"

"The Crossman brothers and Khmarko were not completely wiped out, but they lost a lot of money in the crisis. I lost my job and most of my savings."

"I know that Victor and Gennady Crossman were killed in 2001. Is that the end of the story?"

Shmulin cackles. It takes me a few seconds to realize that he is laughing.

“Not quite, not quite. You see, Arkady Khmarko went back to his native Ukraine, started doing well there, but in the summer of 2002, he died in a boating accident. His high-speed boat just exploded as he was driving it on the river.”

“You continued to follow him?”

“It was in the news. At the time I thought that Khmarko had an accident and the Crossman brothers must have crossed somebody they should have not crossed. But then a year later I read that John Brockton gets killed. This had a lot of publicity; his girlfriend was a Russian TV person at one time. So I said, ‘Boris, there are too many coincidences here.’ I decided to look up Voronezhsky’s second in command, the man who was ‘minding the store’ so to speak during that critical time in the last week of July of 1998.”

Shmulin pauses dramatically, and I play along.

“And?”

“Took some digging, but it turns out he was killed during a home invasion robbery in 2000. Right here, in Moscow.”

“So pretty much everyone who was involved in the scheme is now dead?”

“Pretty much,” Shmulin confirms. “Except for me.”

“Are you afraid?”

“No. I am more afraid of real estate shysters that kill old people for their apartments. It’s a lucrative business in Moscow. If they wanted to kill me, they would have done it a long time ago. They were going after people in charge.”

“Who are ‘they?’”

Shmulin cackles again.

“Your father asked the same question. Probably someone in the mafia that lost money in the scheme. I don’t know, and I don’t want to know.”

He gets up, signaling that the conversation is over.

I remain seated, and the eyes behind thick glasses get anxious.

“One more question. Please sit down.”

Shmulin obediently lowers himself back into the chair.

“Yes?”

“I need to find a person. I have his name. I know he used to work for the KGB.”

Shmulin rubs his chin.

“Well, it’s possible. Like any Russian business, we had to have a ‘roof,’ a strong protector within the government. Otherwise, between the mafia and the government bureaucrats, you’d be out of business within a month. Our ‘roof’ was fairly well placed within the Federal Security Service, the FSB. He is retired, but he can still find almost anyone. But there is a price.”

I know what he is going to say before he says it.

“Five hundred dollars.”

“OK.”

“Who are you looking for?”

“I am looking for Konstantin Mershov; he moved from Leningrad to Moscow to work for the KGB in the 1970s.”

“The money upfront.”

“No, not upfront. When you deliver the information, I’ll pay.”

Shmulin whines.

“I can’t do it this way. You may disappear and then I am on the hook for the money.”

I stand up.

“Fine, give me a hundred dollars upfront.”

“How do I know you won’t pocket it and do nothing?”

“You know where I live.”

I think about it, then give him another hundred-dollar bill and a card with my mobile phone number.

As I walk downstairs, four of the youngsters that were sitting outside are now waiting for me at the front door of the building. They block my way and one of them pulls out a blade. “Give us the money.”

The blade is inches from my throat. Before I can react, I hear a voice behind me. “Let him pass!”

Out of the corner of my eye I see two large people coming from my right; they must have been in the building, hiding in the shadows. One of the youngsters turns to them, is immediately thrown to the floor, and hollers in pain. A melee begins. I rush to the door and run out into the street. My heart slows down only by the time I get to the metro station. Was someone deliberately protecting me, or did I get caught in a turf war?

When I get back to the hotel, I redraw the diagram.

I make the “Grand Castle Rock fund” circle, with Martin Shoffman, the New Treasury Island ELP, plus Greg Voron with his Eastern Cottonwood private equity fund under it. Beneath the last entry, I write Hardrock Home Security.

Under the “Brockton-Streltsova’s murder” circle, I put Brockton and Streltsova. Then I add Crossmans, Khmarko, Voronezhsky—all dead. I write Hardrock Home Security and draw a line to the company’s mention under the other circle.

Below the “Streltsova’s investigation” circle, I put Streltsova’s name and

“Nemtsov? Nemschev?” from Streltsova’s notes. Again, I draw a line to the other Streltsova’s mention.

Was she the target? Was Brockton? Both of them?

In the last corner, I put Major Vakunin, investigator Pemin, Petr Saratov and Sam Baker.

In the middle, I put my father and draw arrows to the “Brockton-Streltsova’s murder” and “Streltsova’s investigation” circles.

I stare at the diagram and make a dotted line between Voron and Voronezhsky. When people move to another country, they often shorten their name. Voronezhsky was in finance, Voron is in finance. It’s a questionable connection, more of a coincidence.

After finishing the diagram, I search the Internet for Evgeny Voronezhsky. Nothing, zero, zilch. Did Shmulin lie to me? I try Arkady Khmarko and Google returns his obituary following an August 2002 boating accident on Dnieper, some tidbits about the trading company he ran in Kiev, and a little about the investment company he had in Moscow.

My phone rings at three in the afternoon. A gruff smoker’s voice says, “Pavel Rostin?”

“Yes.”

“Shmulin told me you are looking to find someone.”

“That’s right. Who am I speaking with?”

“There is no need for you to know my name. You can call me Ivan if you like. Shmulin gave me a name: Konstantin Mershov. Said he worked for KGB in Moscow back in the 1970s. Is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“So what do you want to know: Who he does business with, who he fucks, where he is keeping his money?”

“Just his phone number.”

“That’s it?” the voice conveys disappointment. “Oh well, that will still cost you.”

“Shmulin told me five hundred, and he already took a hundred.”

“Ivan” starts guffawing, which sounds like a big dog barking. “What an old shyster…just getting the phone number is only two fifty. At least you only gave him a hundred. Where are you staying?”

“The Courtyard on Voznesenskiy.”

“Hmm… It should take you about forty minutes to get here.”

“Where’s ‘here?’”

“I’ll tell you. Expect my call in an hour or so.”

“Wait,” I say. “I was going to pay more anyway, so how about checking one more name?”

“I already like doing business with you. What name?”

“Probably Andrei Rostin, but could be Andrei Leontsev.”

“Probably Rostin? Your relative?”

“My parents adopted a boy whose parents perished in the siege of Leningrad, but I’ve never met him and did not know about him until a few days ago. It’s possible he’d been sent to the Gulag forty years ago.”

“I’ll see what I can find and call you later.” “Ivan” hangs up.

Ivan does call close to five and tells me to meet him in the Diamonds gentlemen’s club on Prospekt Vernadskogo. I try to suggest that perhaps the place might be loud, but he cuts me off.

“We don’t need to talk much. You bring the money, I’ll enjoy the girls.”

“How will you recognize me?”

“Don’t worry about that. Be there by six.”

I debate whether to take a metro or get a cab, but the club turns out to be just off the Yugo-Zapadnaya metro station, the last stop on the Sokolnicheskaya line, and I go with the metro.

I walk over to Okhotny Ryad station. Sokolnicheskaya was the first metro line in Moscow dating to 1935. Unlike the later Stalinist architecture monstrosities, the early stations have a nice classical feel to them. Last time I was here, it was named after Karl Marx, although no self-respecting Muscovite would call it that. The station was showing its age and the wear and tear of millions of people passing through it every year.

On a weekday rush hour, secretaries, engineers, businessmen, artists, and schoolchildren streamed through the metro. Moving with the flow, I squeeze myself into a tram and settle into a rhythmic movement as the train makes its way along the line. With the connections worn out, the lights flicker and sometimes go out for a few seconds. During one of such moments, I feel a searching hand probing my back pocket. When I look behind me, a young girl quickly turns away. Thankfully, my wallet and the envelope with $500 are inside a buttoned jacket.

The tram is still full when we get to Yugo-Zapadnaya, the last stop. I’ve never been at this station before, but it is a typical nondescript 1960s construction. Was this blandness of pillars, straight angles, and low ceilings better than the socialist classicism that Stalin treasured? I am not sure. The old escalator makes a clicking noise as it raises the throng of commuters to the

surface.

The Diamond Club is only a five-minute walk from the station, and I arrive exactly at six. The club turns out to be a curious combination of a strip joint and a sauna. I hesitate which way to go but lacking more precise directions opt for the more conventional strip joint.

A scantily dressed waitress assures me that I can apply the fifteen-dollar entry fee to the sauna later if I choose to do so.

"Many visitors start here, but when they find the girl they like they go to the sauna with her. There are private sauna rooms and a massage service. Would you like to sit by the stage for the best view?"

"No, I will be meeting someone so I would prefer a more private spot."

"Couches are generally reserved for groups of four," she demurs, but a twenty-dollar bill quickly secures me something resembling a small red sofa away from the stage. The waitress hands me the menu.

"We have salads, hot and cold appetizers, shashliks, soups, cocktails. Private dances are only thirty dollars. I am available for private dances, too; you just give me a one-song notice so I can change."

She lowers her eyes coyly.

"My name is Tanya, I am a good dancer, and I'll let you touch my tits."

"Thank you, Tanya. I'll just have a beer for now. Heineken if you have it."

Tanya sways away on tall platform shoes. She looks like a first-year student that just arrived in Moscow from the provinces. I've been gone for too long, and this switch from a false puritanism to wanton sexuality is still jarring to me.

It's early in the evening and the place is half empty, but layers of smoke already hang in the air. I am not used to smoking anymore, and my eyes start watering. Through the haze I can see a brunette in micro-fatigues and a Soviet Army hat rubbing herself against the pole on the stage. Then I become aware of a large figure moving toward me from the direction of the bar.

"Pavel?"

Ivan appears to be in his late sixties, large, red-faced, with short buzz-cut hair and a bulbous nose crisscrossed by a thin net of red lines.

"Ivan?"

He sits next to me, and the couch complains with a groan. The waitress appears with my Heineken.

He grabs her ass and says, "Tanyechka, my dear soul, bring me a bottle of vodka and a plate of pelmeni."

"Oh, Uncle Vanya, don't pinch." She giggles. "Will you hire me for a dance

later?”

“Of course, little love, of course.”

After she leaves, I laugh.

“So your name is really Ivan?”

“No, but that’s how they know me here.”

“How did you recognize me?”

Ivan smiles and punches me in the shoulder.

“You look like a man from a small village that has never seen such a place before.”

“I lived in Moscow for eight years.” I shrug. “But it’s a different city now.”

“It sure is. I just wish I were younger.” He sighs. “This is a country for young people. But I am a cheerful man.” He brightens. “I am grateful that I can afford to come here and enjoy the company of pretty girls.”

Another girl shows up with a bottle of Stoli, a plate of pickles and two small glasses.

He pinches her as well.

“Svetlana, little darling, how are you?”

“Good, Uncle Vanya.” She kisses him on the cheek. “You’ll have me for a dance later, right?”

Ivan pours two glasses.

“Drink with me, Pavel. I don’t trust people that drink foreign beer.”

He gulps his vodka, exhales, wipes his lips, and crunches a pickle. I drink half a glass, not willing to risk more.

“Did you bring the money?” He suddenly is all business.

I hand Ivan the envelope.

“How much is there?”

“Four hundred. Please count.”

“No need to. Not in your interest to cheat me.”

He pulls a folded piece of paper from his pocket.

“Computers are great. A dozen years ago, I would have had to show my face in the archives, search through the old files, pay people to forget I was there. Now, I just pay people for access and login with one of their accounts. Konstantin Mershov was a colonel in the FSB. He quit and moved back to his hometown of St. Petersburg in 1999. His phone number is current, so he must still be alive.”

Ivan pours himself another glass, fills mine to the rim. After repeating the procedure and finishing another pickle, he says, “A fascinating story about Andrei Rostin. Thankfully, the KGB kept good records and preserved them. Your parents never told you about him?”

“No.”

“Hmmm. He was supposed to be evacuated from Leningrad in 1942, but I guess they did not want to send him away to an orphanage. At the end of the war, he had to go to school and the authorities would have taken him away, so your parents adopted him. They were ridiculously young themselves, and they take on this kid to take care of. Crazy!”

Tanya shows up with a steaming bowl of pelmeni and two plates.

Ivan loads pelmeni on both plates.

“Eat, Pavel. You don’t want to go back drunk; people in this area will kill you for ten dollars. Food here is crap, but pelmeni not too bad.”

He swallows a couple and drinks another glass of vodka. His face reddens even more.

“So in 1955 Andrei gets drafted, and a year later he is in Hungary crushing the uprising there. You are too young to remember, but after Stalin’s death, Hungarians thought freedom was within reach. So we sent the tanks to liberate them from themselves. Except that Andrei came back in handcuffs, arrested for insubordination. Normally they would have just shot him, but someone interfered, and he got ten years instead. He served seven and was allowed to return in 1963. Instead of sitting quietly, he became involved with anti-Soviet writers, was active in *samizdat,* propagating prohibited works by Solzhenitsyn and others. He was arrested for subversive activities in 1966 and sent back to the camps.”

Ivan refills his plate and pours more vodka for both of us. I do another half a glass. I drank less than half of what he did, but my head is starting to swim.

“There was nothing from your parents in that file until 1968. That’s when there was a record of a letter from your father denouncing Andrei. That’s the system we lived in. Children were denouncing their parents, parents their children. Our national hero, Pavlik Morozov, was celebrated for denouncing his father to the authorities.”

“And where is Andrei now?”

“Ufa, an oil town in the southeast. The second time Andrei served the whole ten years, but this time he did not come back to St. Petersburg. I wrote down his number for you.”

Ivan falls silent; the story must have had an impact.

I need one more thing from him.

“Shmulin told me you provided a ‘roof’ for their operations, is that true?”

“Yes, back in the 1990s.”

“So you knew Evgeny Voronezhsky?”

“That I did. I know the story. Why do you ask?”

“Because when I checked the Internet, I couldn’t find his obituary.”

“So what? It’s been eight years.”

“I am curious. I can go check newspapers archives, but perhaps you remember: Did he leave a family behind?”

“He had a wife and a son.”

“Do you remember their names?”

“Wife’s, no. I think the son’s name was Grisha. He was going to university somewhere out of town, perhaps St. Petersburg.”

Grisha is diminutive for Grigoriy. When Americanized, that would be Greg. Now the connection between my failed hedge fund and the Brockton and Streltsova murders is suddenly not so tenuous.

Ivan finishes his vodka and pelmeni, waves to Svetlana who is circling nearby and stands up unsteadily.

“You’ve got your money’s worth. Pay for the food and drinks, and Misha will see you to the metro station; we don’t want you robbed on the way.”

A younger man tears himself away from the bar. I did not realize he’d been watching us all this time.

Back in the metro, heading to the center of the city. We must be going against traffic, the train is not full. An inebriated soldier tries to strike up a conversation with a girl listening to her iPod and demonstratively ignoring him, a gang of five young men going to a party downtown, a babushka, an old man wearing a tweed gray flat cap and a dark blue Adidas tracksuit. The young men noisily crowd him. He moves next to me, clears his throat and quietly asks, “Are you visiting Moscow?”

“Yes,” I decide to respond. “But I lived here twenty years ago as a student.”

“Ah,” he whispers. “So you remember how things used to be.”

He nods to the young people that chased him away.

“Young people knew how to behave, to be quiet and respectful. But if you ask me, it all went downhill after Stalin died. They would not do that under Stalin.”

“Did he not kill millions?”

“When you cut trees, chips fly! Stalin made this country great.” The old man is practically spitting saliva in his excitement. “He showed the world what Russia can do; they were all afraid of us. Now too much freedom, no respect inside the country, foreigners don’t respect us, all these Americans, Germans, Chechens, Jews.”

A strange combination, I think. America is the superpower. Germany, well, two brutal wars will leave bad feelings. Blaming Jews seems to be our tradition,

the small tribe being almost a mythical superhuman force. But Chechens? I guess Chechens now rose to a similar status. There's our dirty little secret: for all of our conquests, for all of our space missions, for all of our nukes, Russia has the worst inferiority complex I have ever seen in a country. I think that's the real reason why we like strongmen to lord over us and tell us lies about our greatness. And that's why the small tribes we can't subdue take on these absurd, unreal qualities.

I was born after his death, but for as long as I can remember, Stalin was both a monster and a hero. Hero, because he turned our backward country into an industrial and military power and "won the war." Monster, because of the Great Terror he unleashed in the 1930s. As if he was a perfectly nice guy before and then suddenly went off the rails. Somehow people like the Adidas tracksuited-man next to me conveniently overlook that Stalin started murdering well before the purges. Back during the Civil War, he directed killings of thousands, burning villages near Tsaritsyn, the city that was later named after him, the famous Stalingrad. Then millions died in collectivization efforts he ordered. The Boss, *Khozyain*, as his gang referred to him. Because that's what he was: a smart, ruthless, paranoid, immoral, revengeful, psychopathic killer, a mafia boss that surrounded himself with rapists and alcoholics. But he made others afraid of us, and that made him "great." Will we ever get to the point where greatness is not measured by the ability to bomb someone to smithereens?

"Sorry, can't agree with you here," I reply to the Adidas man. He glares at me and moves away.

I think my business in Moscow is done for now. I don't feel safe. I call to make a reservation for a flight to St. Petersburg. The first available seat is in the afternoon tomorrow.

Tuesday, June 20

Since I have time in the morning, I pull out Suzy Yamamoto's files and research companies on the Eastern Cottonwood private equity list. Who is this Greg Voron and what is he doing?

A couple of successful sales of public enterprises. First, an Internet e-commerce company, then a failing oil company. Both were purchased in 2002 following the market crash and flipped a few years later for a nifty profit. The rest of the Eastern Cottonwood purchases remained private. Already mentioned Hardrock Home Security company, bought in 2002. A home lender, a home builder, and a private building materials company all in 2003, all based in California. A curious combination. The last one is MRA Technologies, a semiconductor "system-on-the-chip" (SoC) company. That's a fairly recent and expensive acquisition.

Something does not feel right. In a booming market, I would expect a private equity firm to flip the companies quickly, take them public and re-invest into another acquisition. But only two companies were sold, the rest remained private. And then in 2002 and 2003, well before they had a chance to sell anything, the fund invested over a billion dollars. Someone staked a lot of money to the Eastern Cottonwood private equity fund, but who? Detailed disclosures are not required for a fund with a small number of investors.

Before leaving for the airport, I dial the number in Ufa that Ivan gave me.

A wheezy voice of someone who must have difficulty breathing answers.

"Allo?"

"Allo, I am trying to reach Andrei Rostin?"

There is a pause, then tentative, "Pavel?"

"Yes."

"I thought I'd hear from you. Where are you?"

"I am in Moscow, about to leave for St. Petersburg."

"I'll come see you there."

"Are you sure? I can come to Ufa."

"No. Peter is the place. There are direct flights now, and it's only three hours. I'll be there tomorrow if I can get on the morning flight."

He called the city "Peter," the name used by locals and old-timers.

"Let me give you the address."

I realize my stupidity even before the words are completely out. Andrei replies gently, "I know the address."

I hang up and just stand there with the phone in my hand. I just spoke with

someone who is my brother, even if not by blood. Someone whom I've never met before, whose existence was unknown to me. Someone who was with my parents during those horrible days of the blockade. I will meet him tomorrow. I don't know what to expect or to ask. None of this feels real.

For the second time in two weeks, I land in the Pulkovo Airport. During the war, this is where the frontline was. The nearby Pulkovo Heights were occupied by the Nazis. They had their long-range artillery there. The shell that hit my parents' apartment on Liteyniy Prospekt in that brutal December of 1941 was probably fired from here. I half expect to be stopped and arrested right here in Pulkovo, but nobody pays any attention to me.

I get to Malaya Sadovaya in the late afternoon. Despite this being a workday, the street is full of people, locals and tourists. I climb the stairs, open the door. The flat is exactly as I left it. Well, almost exactly. Someone was here. One of the chairs is placed at an angle. I am compulsive about pushing chairs all the way in under the table. It drove Karen nuts.

I spend an hour going through things, to make sure I had not missed anything on my previous visit. I now know why my father was reading all these books on offshore banking and money laundering. I look for notes in the margins, anything that would give me extra clues, but come up empty.

The kitchen window overlooks the courtyard. A memory from over thirty years ago crosses my mind.

Five kids, three boys and two girls, are playing hide and seek. I am facing a fresh beat down at the hands of Vasya Proshkin, my nemesis. Vasya is two years older and at least twenty pounds heavier. He is a bully and for the past few months he's been taking a particular pleasure in beating me up. The usual sequence was: Vasya knocks me down, sits on top and pummels me. But he is careful to not hit me in the face, to avoid drawing blood. This way the adults don't get involved.

The difference today is that Vasya's father came out. He is not stopping his son, he is enjoying Vasya being a man. Vasya pushes me especially hard; I fall face down and stay there, expecting to feel Vasya's weight on top of me and blows to my sides. But nothing happens. I hear steps, look up. It's my father; he must have come from work earlier. My father stops about ten feet away, stands there saying nothing.

I turn over, get up. Vasya looks not sure what to do, his father behind him. I am not sure what to do either, but I have to do something. I step up to Vasya and

hit him. He is stunned for a moment, then hits me back. I fall, but this time I am not waiting to be pummeled, I turn around and meet Vasya with a kick to the groin. He doubles over, I get up, jump on him, and we roll on the ground, kicking and hitting each other until we are pulled apart. Before we leave, my father says a few words to Vasya's dad. I don't know what is said, but Vasya stays away from me from then on. I am bleeding from the nose and the mouth, and my white shirt is ruined. Mother cusses at my father for not preventing the fight; he does not respond, just pats me on the head.

If I were in a similar situation, would I have interfered on my son Simon's behalf? Probably. But then, I don't recall Simon ever coming home with a bloody nose. Private schools, tennis lessons, summer camps, the latest games, and electronics… Why do I feel like we lost Simon along the way?

There is a knock on the door. As can be expected, it's Zorkin. He welcomes me as if I am his best friend: "Pavel Vladimirovich, I thought I heard you. Welcome back!"

"Thank you, Evgeny Antonovich."

"How long are you back in town for?"

"I am not sure yet, a few days. I'd like to thank you for finding Anton Rimsky for me. "

"Oh, I am happy to help. As I mentioned, I am resourceful and well connected. Pavel Vladimirovich, have you given any thought to my earlier question? You know, the one about the apartment?"

I mull his question over, to make Zorkin uneasy.

"Evgeny Antonovich, I had to travel a lot since we spoke and did not have the time to properly think things through. But I will promise you that I won't look for other buyers if you help me with a small matter."

Zorkin slumps visibly; he must have been hoping for a more definitive action.

"Pavel Vladimirovich, please understand that this is not an easy sale for you. Your father's death is still under investigation. I am not sure you'll be able to find many buyers under the circumstances."

"Evgeny Antonovich, I can wait if needed."

Zorkin takes a deep breath, the greed wins out.

"How do I know you are not negotiating with someone else?"

I raise my voice in indignation.

"Mr. Zorkin, I just promised you!"

"OK, OK, what can I help you with?"

“I had a childhood acquaintance, Grisha Voronezhsky. He went to university here in the 1990s, probably St. Petersburg State University, but I am not completely sure. I can’t find anything on the Internet; can you check for me which university and faculty he studied at?”

Zorkin shakes his head.

“This won’t be easy. I possibly have to send someone to multiple universities, pay bribes to get access to the records…”

“Evgeny Antonovich, I will gladly reimburse you for any expenses.”

Zorkin leaves with a sour expression, not sure whether he got any tangible value for his promise to help but too afraid to refuse.

I pull out the piece of paper that Ivan gave me and dial the second number there. My lucky streak of phones being answered ends with, “You have reached the number of Konstantin Mershov, please leave a message.”

I dictate my name and phone number.

I call Detective Rozen. He answers after two rings. “Hello, hold on a minute.” The microphone is covered, and I hear indistinct voices, then Rozen comes back. “Pavel, I walked out of an interrogation. I have maybe ten minutes. Where are you?”

“In St. Petersburg.”

“Figures.”

“Sal, can you recommend a private investigator in California?”

“Why, do you need to follow someone?”

“No, it’s not that, more of a corporate investigation. I am trying to gather information on a few companies.”

“Like that Hardrock Security Company that you asked me about before?”

“Yes, kind of like that.”

“OK, give me the names.”

“I don’t want you to be involved. I just need someone to hire, has to be in California.”

Sal must be getting frustrated because he carefully spits out each word as if throwing them at me.

“Pavel, I checked on you. I know you are practically broke. So don’t act like you have the money to burn on private investigators.”

“Sal, please, I don’t want to put you in any danger.”

“I appreciate that you are trying to protect me. I will be careful, and there are people that owe me favors. Now, give me the names.”

I hesitate, but Sal is right; I am broke. I give him the names of the California-based companies that Eastern Cottonwood purchased and hear Sal writing.

“And what do they have in common?”
“They are owned by the same investment company.”
“The one that owns Hardrock Security?”
“Yes, the same one.”
“All right, give me a couple of days.”

Wednesday, June 21

My phone rings early in the morning.

“Allo, this is Konstantin Mershov returning your call.”

“Mr. Mershov, my name is Pavel Rostin. I understand you knew my father.”

“Yes, of course I knew your father. I’ve met you, too, but you might not remember. You were only a child.”

“Mr. Mershov, do you know about my father?”

“Yes, I do. I am sorry.”

“When did you last see him?”

“Pavel, where are you?”

“Here, in St. Petersburg.”

“Staying on Malaya Sadovaya?”

“Yes.”

“Why don’t we meet tomorrow? I will arrange with my son to pick you up; I no longer drive. We’ll come between ten and eleven.”

I call for voicemails in New York. The usual suspects: Jack, Sarah, Jennifer. Jack wants to meet. Sarah is hoping that I am OK. Jennifer loves me.

I am about to go for a walk in the afternoon when there is a knock on the door. I open without asking, figuring Zorkin must be back. Instead, it’s a slightly hunched old man with a small beat-up suitcase. He has a deeply lined and wrinkled face, a fringe of white hair around his balding scalp. A long pale scar crosses his right cheek. I instantly recognize the man from the picture with my father.

“Hello, Pavel. There were seats on the first flight from Ufa, so I got here quickly.”

Andrei’s smile is both disarming and sad.

“Please, come in,” I say. I am not sure what to do or say. Am I supposed to hug him? Shake hands?

He follows me inside, looks around.

“Last time I was here in 2002, four years ago. It looks exactly the same; our father did not change a thing.”

It hits me when he says “our father.”

Andrei must sense it because he puts down his suitcase.

“I am sorry, it must be awfully strange.”

“It is.”

“Why don’t we go take a walk?”

I nod. And then I realize why he looked familiar in the photo: he was here in 1984, when my mother died. There were many people I did not know that came to say goodbye to her. He was one of them.

Andrei walks slowly, with a limp, and his breathing is heavy.

"I am sorry," he says. "I am not in a good shape. Too much smoking; doctors say my lungs are bad. As if I don't know without them. My right leg was broken in '69 in the camps, never quite healed right. Father was twelve years older, but he was a young man compared to me. Do you mind if we walk to the Bronze Horseman? That's my favorite place in the city."

This would be at least a twenty-minute walk for me, probably an hour for him.

"Should we get a taxi?" I ask.

"If you don't mind, I would prefer to walk. I am not sure when will be the next time that I can walk this city during white nights. I know I am slow, but we have a lot to talk about, and I did not want to do it in the apartment."

"Why, do you think it's bugged?"

"Possibly, possibly."

We resume our walk.

"Why did our parents not tell me about you?"

"It's a long story. You see, I was arrested in 1956 in Budapest. When Stalin died and Nikita Khrushchev made that speech about the personality cult, many people thought that things were really changing. These silly Hungarians imagined that they were free to replace the Moscow puppets and put in their own government. So we sent two hundred thousand troops to show them the extent of their freedom. Marshal Konev himself, the hero of World War II, led the invasion. He fought the Germans at Moscow, defeated them at Kursk. In 1945, his armies took Berlin. Now, he was fighting Hungarian civilians. It was war, but they had rifles and we had tanks. They were killing us by hundreds, and we were killing them by thousands. There was a fight for one building in the working-class neighborhood of Csepel, where the resistance fighters managed to burn two of our tanks. When they ran out of ammunition and tried to surrender, the officer ordered them shot. I refused. Under Stalin, they would have put a bullet in the back of my head, but instead they court-marshaled me and gave me ten years."

Andrei leans against the parapet of Kazanskiy Bridge, wipes his brow with a handkerchief, catches his breath.

"My first camp was in the north, near Barents Sea," he says. "Prisoner number R-3725. Half of the year temperatures are below thirty degrees. Never enough food, never enough warm clothing. Trying to stay out of the *hole*, the

solitary confinement. Survival of the fittest. I came back from the camps early, in ’63, and was even able to return to St. Petersburg. All thanks to our father and his boss, Ivan Mershov. Usually you did the whole time and they made you stay somewhere near the camps. I never had a chance to thank Mershov; he died before I came back. I got a job at Kirov’s Works heavy industry plant, a bed in their dormitory. You don’t remember, you were little, but I would come over from time to time. But I did not last long. In a sense, I was freer in the camp. When you have nothing to lose, you are free. I became involved with the writers, the ones that were rebelling against the state. Of course, they were not being published so I was helping to copy and distribute prohibited works via *samizdat.* I tried writing myself, but did not have the talent or the patience. In ’66, they arrested me again. It was almost a relief, like pulling a tooth and getting it over with.”

Andrei has to stop and pause again. A young couple bumps into him, the boy swears.

“This time they sent me to a camp in the southeast, not far from Chelyabinsk. It was a much better camp than during my first term. We worked on oil fields; that’s where I learned the business.”

“Why did Father write a letter denouncing you?”

“Ah, you found out about that. You understand, I had already destroyed any chances of him rising up in the ranks. You know what they say about the apple not falling far from the tree. My being a political recidivist made my father automatically unreliable. And he was fine with that. It’s you that he wanted to protect.”

“Me?”

“Yes. Our parents did not expect to have you; doctors told Mother that she was not likely to get pregnant. I read somewhere that older mothers tend to have smarter children. It was true in your case. Even when you were little, it was clear you were a gifted child. The way you learned arithmetic, the way you learned chess. Our parents wanted to send you to a school for talented kids. But you had no chance of getting into one with a brother like me. It did not matter to them that I was not a biological son; I grew up with your parents, and that marked them and, by extension, you.”

“My father denounced you so I could go to the school for the gifted?”

“Yes. It made no difference for me; I was already in the camps. It made no difference to our parents, as their lives were not going to change. But by writing the letter, Father was giving you a chance for something better.”

“Did you see the letter?”

“Yes. The camp commander showed it to me, rubbing it in. But I knew why

it was written; Father did the right thing. He tried to apologize for it later, but there was nothing to apologize for. That was the only time I saw tears in his eyes, that's how badly writing this letter hurt him."

"Why did you not return to St. Petersburg after the second term?"

"They released me in '76, but there was no way they would allow me to have the *propiska* in St. Petersburg this time. You remember what it was like: you had to be registered and have a *propiska* in order to live somewhere. We were like modern serfs, able to live only where the government let us. And I have not even tried to return. In '71, they transferred me to another camp, this one near Ufa, to work on an oil pipeline. I ended up settling there. Your parents wanted to tell you about me after my release, and then your father wanted to introduce us in '84, when I came here after your mother died. Both times I asked not to."

"But why?"

"Pavel, you were young and brilliant, with all that promise ahead of you. Even though I was only forty when they released me the second time, I was an old *zek*. I don't know if you remember the expression, *zek* for *zaklyutcheniy*, a prisoner. Seventeen years in camps. I thought your parents sacrificed so much to save me during the war, and I wasted it all. I belong to a different era, the period of time that Russia is trying to erase as if it did not happen. Why saddle you with this?"

"Do you want to come back now? Did they not cancel the *propiska* system about ten years ago?"

"They did cancel it. There is still a registration requirement if you want to stay somewhere for more than ninety days, but it's much easier for people to move now. No, I don't want to come back. I like Ufa. I don't know anybody here. People I knew, they are all dead. No reason for me to return to Peter. But I'd like to go to Paris one day."

"Why Paris?"

"Father told me that's the only city that can compare to St. Petersburg. I saw pictures; it looks beautiful. Just would like to see the place before I die, to compare for myself."

"Father's been to Paris?" I can't hide my surprise.

"Yes, he went early this year. In January, I think. Have you been to Paris?"

I nod. "It's true, Paris is the only city that would compare."

What was my father doing in Paris in January? It was right before my fund came under attack.

We finally make it to the statue and find an empty bench. Peter the Great is astride his horse, pointing to the west. The horse is trampling a serpent of his

enemies, riding on top of the enormous Thunder Stone. It took two years to move the stone, twelve to build the monument. *The Bronze Horseman,* named so by Pushkin, is still riding, protecting his city.

Andrei recites Pushkin's verses:

"*To spite our neighbor*
Here I shall found a great city
By Nature we're destined
To cut a window to Europe."

Two young couples are being wed, one placing flowers at the statue and taking pictures, the other waiting its turn.

"When did you last see our father?"

I feel strange saying this, referring to my father as also his father.

"Last summer. He came to Ufa to talk about UfaNeft, the local oil and gas company that I worked for since 1971."

"That was one of the companies on Brockton's list!" I react involuntarily.

"Yes, he mentioned this name. Also a few others. He brought some pictures for me to look at."

"Did you recognize anybody?"

"Yes, I did. You see, I am an old *zek* and I could have never become a part of the upper management, but I was there for a long time and close enough to know what's going on. When the Moscow reformers started privatizing everything, there was a brutal battle to control UfaNeft. One executive was found floating facedown in the local river, another was blown up in his car. There were at least three different oligarchs fighting for the spoils until one group won in '96."

"And who were the people that father was asking about?"

"Two brothers, I think the last name was Crossman or something like that. They showed up around '95 or so, set up kiosks where their people were buying privatization vouchers for vodka. That was also a cutthroat business; some kiosks got burned with people inside. Father wanted to understand how the scheme worked, and I helped to provide some missing pieces. Brockton and the Crossmans struck a deal with the UfaNeft insiders. The ownership of the company's shares was split between the two groups, and Brockton and his helpers were manipulating the prices upwards, while the insiders were cashing in. We re-created our vision of the West, only we took the worst of it. Our father was an experienced investigator, but this was completely new to all of us; he was trying to learn how they were rigging the market."

"What happened when the scheme collapsed?"

“Oh, the insiders just found another way to rig the game. The oligarch in charge set up various finance and service companies that were supposed to make the operations more efficient but in reality were skimming the cash flow. That lasted for a couple of years, until Putin got rid of the old oligarchs and brought in the new ones. They are still skimming, but not quite as bad; at least some money gets reinvested into the business. Of course, I quit five years ago, I am not involved anymore.”

“Why did Father take this case?”

Andrei falls silent, then reaches into his pocket for a pack of cigarettes and offers me one. I shake my head. He lights up.

“You are right, doctors keep telling me I should stop. But here I am, enjoying a cigarette, in Peter, sitting in front of the Bronze Horseman during a white night, talking to my brother… You don’t mind me calling you that? We are not biological brothers, but I loved your parents with all my heart, so perhaps I have earned the right.”

I choke up.

“Of course I don’t mind.”

“Why did Father take the case?” he repeats. “I think for the same reason that I refused to shoot in Budapest. Did you read his war diary?”

“I found it in his desk a few days ago. There are pages missing.”

Andrei nods.

“I know, I have them. Father always wanted to make them pay. He was very sick and this was his last chance. When you were young, he could not tell you how much he despised the system where the few so blatantly take advantage of the many. He could not share this with you; he always protected his family. You see, to understand him, to understand your mother, to understand me, you have to understand the diary.”

“But they never talked to me about that!” I cry out. Some of the people milling around turn to look at the source of the commotion. “They did not talk to me about the blockade. They did not tell me about you. I did not know about the letter. Father left nothing but a part of his diary, not even a will!”

“They were just trying to protect you in the only way they knew how.” Andrei puts a hand on my shoulder. “I think they wanted to spare you the horror.”

“Did he continue writing?”

“No. He was a creative person, but he gave up trying to write. He did not want to risk getting his family into trouble.”

We sit in silence for a while, until I say, “I failed at my business. I failed at

my family. Now I know I have also failed at knowing my father … our father … you knew him, I didn't."

Andrei quietly replies, "Pavel, everything happens for a reason, but often we don't know what it is until it's revealed to us. For years, I thought that my small rebellion had only hurt me and my family and achieved nothing, that the 1956 Hungarian uprising was in vain, that people had died for no reason. Then in 1989 the Hungarians reburied Imre Nagy, the hero of 1956. On the thirty-third anniversary of the uprising, they proclaimed the new Hungarian Republic and threw out the communist leadership. As the Iron Curtain between Hungary and Austria fell and the borders became open, more and more East Germans started leaving through that border. Fifty thousand people escaped in a week. And that may have been the final catalyst for the Berlin Wall coming down and the world changing. So perhaps it was not all in vain. Perhaps the thousands of small individual tragedies and sacrifices, mine included, collectively changed the course of history."

Andrei takes a wheezing breath, continues.

"All my life I felt guilty because your parents suffered to save me. Father killed a man because of me; I don't think he ever got over it."

"Killed a man?" I am startled by another revelation. "What are you talking about?"

"You'll find out. I now believe that there was a purpose to me being saved. Perhaps it was meant for me to meet with you and give you the story. Might be that that's what the universe wanted. Don't assume that you failed. You don't know what destiny has in store."

He slowly stands up.

"Pavel, I am tired. I'll explain the rest of the diary tomorrow. Do you think we can find a taxi to get back?"

Thursday, June 22

The clock says 8:32 when I wake up. Andrei insisted on me taking the bed and him sleeping on the couch. I kept tossing and turning in the milky semi-darkness of a northern summer night, until an exhaustion overcame me and I dropped into a deep dark hole.

I get up and quietly tiptoe into the living room. I don't have to be quiet, Andrei is gone. On the table, there is a thick envelope and a handwritten piece of paper on top of it:

Dear Pavel,

I am sorry I snuck out like a thief in the night, but you were tired, and I did not want to wake you up. I did not tell you yesterday that I purchased a round-trip ticket and my return flight is this afternoon. I am going to the cemetery to see Father. I want to go by myself. From there, I will go straight to the airport.

I am so glad to have met you. In the envelope there are missing pages from the diary. You need them in order to understand our father. You see, the diary was dangerous, and back in '46 your father hid it. After Stalin died, he brought it out of hiding. I read the diary in '64, when I came back from the camps for the first time. But then things became dangerous again, with me being involved in the *samizdat.* I knew they were going to come after me. Father was tired of hiding, so I tore out the most dangerous pages and concealed them at the top of the stairwell. I came back in '84 when Mother died. I was out of the camps already, and nobody cared about a broken old *zek,* so I retrieved the torn-out pages and took them with me to Ufa. I am giving them back to you. They are rightfully yours.

I have also enclosed a copy of father's will. He gave it to me last summer; he felt that the project he took on was risky and wanted to make sure that his will survived. This apartment is all he owned, and he wanted you to have it. Please respect his wishes. I have no need of the apartment; I don't want it. It brings up difficult memories, and I don't plan to return to St. Petersburg ever again. He left me the old volume of *The Count of Monte Cristo;* I am taking it, that's all I want. Last, I enclosed some old pictures that you may want to have.

Thank you for letting me see the Bronze Horseman one last time.

Andrei

I re-read the letter to fully comprehend its contents. As I finish, the bell rings.

I open the door in my underwear. It's Zorkin.

"Pavel Vladimirovich, I am sorry, I can come back later."

"It's all right, come in."

"Well, I looked into the matter that you asked me. Turns out there was one Grigoriy Voronezhsky that studied in the St. Petersburg State University. Not only that, he did graduate studies at the Faculty of International Relations and completed his dissertation in 1998."

"Do you know what his dissertation was about?"

"I am afraid I don't. Now, Pavel Vladimirovich, I've done everything you asked of me; how about we discuss the apartment?"

"Very well, Evgeny Antonovich. As you can see, I just got up. Would you mind giving me half an hour to wash up and get ready? Come back then and we'll discuss business."

"Of course." Zorkin's face lights up. He can smell the prize.

I do need a bit of time to think. I wash up, get dressed, and go downstairs to the *Sweet Tooth* café where I get myself a cake and a large coffee. As I settle back in the apartment, the plan comes to me.

Zorkin is punctually at the door in thirty minutes, carrying a folder with some papers. He tries to speak, but I interrupt him.

"Here's what we are going to do, Evgeny Antonovich. I will sell you this apartment for a million dollars."

Zorkin first smiles, but then catches himself and theatrically spreads his arms.

"Pavel Vladimirovich, that is way too much. In this situation, there is a lot of complicated paperwork—"

I stop him again.

"Evgeny Antonovich, let's not even go down this path. You know very well that this flat in this location is worth at least a million and a half. And to you it's worth more because you'll have a whole story of this building to yourself. Half a million discount justifies a lot of complicated paperwork. And a couple of additional favors I will need from you."

"Additional favors?" Zorkin is scared that his grip on the apartment is

slipping away.

“Yes. First, I want the transaction to be done quickly and the money deposited into my account on Monday.”

Zorkin groans but does not protest.

“Second, I want to be able to go to the St. Petersburg State University and see the dissertation that Grigoriy Voronezhsky wrote.”

This worries him. “Why? What are you getting me into? This can be dangerous!”

“Evgeny Antonovich, I just want to see a dissertation that a student wrote, not some secret military plans. This is Russia; anything can be arranged for money, and the half-million discount you are getting should cover quite a few, how shall we put it, incentives.”

Zorkin is unsure, but then he is so close.

“Pavel Vladimirovich, if I find a way to do this and I bring you the paperwork to sign tomorrow, will you sign it? Or will you find something else to ask? Because I am not sure …”

“Evgeny Antonovich, prepare the paperwork, and I will sign it. There will be nothing else, I promise.”

A bell rings.

“And now if you’ll excuse me, Evgeny Antonovich, I have other visitors. I am working exclusively with you… for now.”

I open the door to a tall, thin man around forty. He is dressed casually in jeans and a T-shirt. His face seems to be all out of proportion, with a prominent jaw, a long nose, and tiny ears, but the combination is saved by friendly brown eyes.

“Pavel Rostin?” he says.

“Yes.”

The man’s eyes travel to Zorkin, who is standing right behind me.

I turn to send him away.

“This is my neighbor Evgeny Antonovich Zorkin. He was just leaving.”

Zorkin mumbles something and disappears behind his door. I have no doubt he is listening, probably wondering whether this is his competition for the flat. I point to Zorkin’s door and motion for the man to be quiet. He understands. I step back to grab a copy of Palmer’s statement with Streltsova’s notes and to put on a jacket, then close the door, and we quietly walk out of the building.

“Are you Konstantin Mershov?”

“No.” The man laughs and sticks out his hand. “I am Ivan Mershov. Konstantin is my father.”

I shake the hand he offered.

“Ivan? My father worked for Ivan Mershov.”

“Yes, my grandfather. My father is waiting for you. Can’t drive on Malaya Sadovaya, so we parked just around the corner.”

I follow Ivan to an old Zhiguli parked near the Turgenev statue. Three people are standing next to it: an old man of around seventy and two tall teenagers.

Ivan introduces me. “This is Pavel Rostin.”

“Hello, Pavel,” says the old man. “I am Konstantin Mershov. I am sure you don’t remember; it’s been almost forty years since I saw you. You’ve already met my son. This is my grandson, Vitaly, and his friend Oleg Khmelco.”

I shake hands with all of them.

The old man says, “I hope you have a few hours. I asked my boys to take a day off, go for a drive.”

“Where?”

“Just out of the city, to one of the memorials. This is June twenty-second.”

The day when Germany attacked. I forgot. Or rather, I am not used to thinking about this date.

Mershov reads my face.

“Yes, people here still celebrate the Victory Day, but not many remember the day when the war started sixty-five years ago. Why don’t you climb in the back with me? Let the younger generation drive and navigate.”

The Zhiguli is a small car, so Vitaly has to squeeze in the back with us, with Konstantin in the middle. Ivan maneuvers us on Nevskiy Prospekt and heads east, across the Fontanka River, past the Moskovskaya train station.

“Pavel, is there anything in particular that you wanted to know?” asks Konstantin.

I get the Streltsova paper out of my pocket.

“I am trying to learn more about this.”

Konstantin puts on glasses, reads the short paper, hands it back to me.

“Let’s talk about this a bit later.”

We cross the Neva over Alexander Nevskiy Bridge and turn right onto Dalnevostochny Prospekt.

“You won’t remember my father,” says Mershov. “He was only fifty-seven when he died, two months before his grandson was born. I think most of those that survived the blockade died early; too much of their life force was taken by that horror. My mother only outlived him by two years. And your mother died young, too. Your father was an exception; it was like the suffering made him stronger. He had a certain tough grace about him, an elegant but unyielding

dignity of honest strength. You know, your father was like a second son to my dad."

Runs in the family, I think. *We find ourselves second fathers. But mine waited until his was gone*.

We turn left onto Murmanskiy highway and proceed east. Majestic buildings of the old St. Petersburg are far behind us now. Instead, the houses here are all built in the shape of matchboxes: matchbox standing upright, matchbox lying down, matchbox on its side.

"Perhaps it was the way your father took on responsibilities and took care of people," continues Mershov. "In the first winter of the blockade, people only took care of their families. Some only took care of themselves. When you are starving and freezing, you can't afford to be helpful. I was six. I saw people sit down and you knew if they didn't get up, they'd freeze to death. But you walked by without looking because if you tried to help, they'd take you down with them. The kids that lost their parents…most of them died the same winter. But not Andrei. Your parents took him even though they were starving themselves. And later, they did not send him to an orphanage as they were supposed to. They raised him instead. They saved him. And they were only the age of my grandson here."

We cross another bridge over the Neva. The river makes a semi-circle as it flows from the Lake Ladoga to the sea. There is a white-on-blue sign *To Shlisselburg, 2.5km*. Konstantin tells his son to take the exit. We get off the highway and pull into a park.

"Let's go for a walk," Konstantin commands.

We walk by a sign: *Museum of Breaking the Leningrad Blockade*. In the clearing stand half a dozen of Soviet tanks from World War II, with the museum building behind them. There are only a few people in the park, mostly tourists with cameras.

Konstantin points back to the river.

"That's where they crossed it in January of '43. I was here with your father a few years back and he was showing me where the crossing was, where the German fortifications were. They called him up in August of '42. A month earlier, and he would have been thrown into a bloody Sinyavino Offensive just south of here. These marshes"—he swept his arm in a semi-circle—"are full of bones and metal. But it's here where they broke the encirclement." He turns to Ivan and the boys. "Why don't you go look at the tanks and the museum? Pavel and I need to talk."

Konstantin and I walk slowly into the woods, down an overgrown path.

"I am sorry to drag you here," he says, "but I come to this place every June

twenty-second. I think it's good for Vitaly and Oleg to remember; the young generation does not think about the war. That's the problem, as people forget about the horror, they are more inclined to repeat the same mistakes." He stops and turns to me. "About that paper you showed me—your father came to me with a similar question a few months ago. It's a dangerous topic; I did not want to discuss it in front of my family. I joined the KGB in 1958, right after college. Had this romantic notion of fighting foreign spies. But in Leningrad, I mostly dealt with the dissidents. I managed to stay away from Andrei's case, but I still hated the work. After my parents died, I applied to transfer to Moscow, to the First Directorate. It was the foreign intelligence part of the KGB. I did not get any foreign postings, but I was involved in operations abroad."

Konstantin resumes walking.

"Forward ahead to the mid-eighties," he says. "The Soviet Union is falling apart. As usual, the upper echelons, the Party Central Committee, the leadership of the KGB, they are all trying to figure out how to take care of themselves. The amount of wealth that the Party has accumulated is staggering. And now they are afraid that a revolution is coming and they will lose everything. So they start preparing. A special group gets formed, firms get set up abroad, funds get transferred."

"How do you know? Were you involved?"

"If I were involved, I would not be talking to you right now. I would be either somewhere high up in the government or, more likely, dead. There is a difference between knowing about it and having the information. The program went on for at least six years; you can't keep something like this secret. People within the KGB knew about it. People within the CIA and the MI6 knew about it. The devil is in the details, and very few people knew the details. And those who knew, they are not talking. Most of them must be dead. Nikolai Kruchina was one well-known case. He was the Central Committee's treasurer; he knew the names, the firms, the accounts. So when the '91 putsch failed, when it became clear that this was the end for the Central Committee and for the KGB, Kruchina supposedly threw himself down a stairwell. And there were others that suddenly died or disappeared. The ones that survived, they looted the country and got away with it."

"How much money are we talking about?"

"Who knows? Must be hundreds of billions. They ruled the country for seventy years. Hard currency, diamonds, gold, priceless works of art…the Party had it all, and it's all gone."

It's quiet, except for the sounds of our footsteps.

"Mr. Mershov…"

“Konstantin, please.”

“Konstantin, there is something else you discussed with my father a few months ago, right?”

“Why do you say this?”

“Palmer’s testimony is a public record. You have not told me much more than that.”

Mershov stops, points to a wooden bench amongst the trees.

“Let’s sit down. Yes, I told your father more, and he is dead now. How do I know it was not my information that killed him? Let me see that paper again.”

I hand him Streltsova’s paper.

Mershov studies it, his finger going over handwritten comments.

“Where did you get this?”

“They belonged to Natalya Streltsova. She was killed in California a couple of years ago.”

Mershov nods.

“Yes, that’s what Vladimir…I mean your father…said. She worked for Boris Sosnovsky, the oligarch that had to leave Russia and not long ago was found hanging in his house in Paris.”

“The newspaper reported it was a suicide because the door was locked from the inside…”

Mershov gives a short laugh that turns into a cough.

“Sure, a suicide. And Nikolai Kruchina jumped down that stairwell because he was depressed; nobody pushed him. Sosnovsky was an insider in the Kremlin in the 1990s. He must have known something. When he had fallen out of favor and had to run away rather than get arrested like one of his oligarch friends, he wanted payback. Perhaps he was feeding information to Streltsova for an expose.”

“Do you know this?”

“No. That’s what your father thought. He knew more than he was willing to tell me. He came to me to verify his theory about the ‘Stage Seven.’ You saw how Palmer in ’99 spoke of six stages? Remember, ‘they’ originally transferred the assets to take care of themselves. But by 2000, the KGB—with the new names like the FSB, the GRU, the SVR—was back in charge. Actually, more than before. They had their president, they had their oligarchs in control of the economy, they had their people in command of most of the state organizations. They were the government. And the assets could now be used in service of their policies. At least that’s what was being whispered.”

“Whispered?”

“I was not high enough to know, just high enough to hear an occasional

drunken whisper."

"What about that name that Streltsova wrote? Nemschev?"

"I don't know about 'Nemschev,' but there was an ambitious officer Nikolai Nemzhov in St. Petersburg's KGB. Last I've heard he was a colonel in the GRU."

I remember Saratov's words when I was attacked on the Leninskiy Prospekt: *The colonel's orders were to take the package and let him be.*

"He was from St. Petersburg?"

"St. Petersburg's KGB and St. Petersburg State University have been the training ground for our current political elite. We even referred to ourselves as the 'St. Petersburg Mafia' and joked that this is revenge on Stalin, who was believed by some to hate the city."

"Konstantin, can I ask why you left Moscow and moved back to St. Petersburg? You had a rank of colonel. You were what—sixty-two?"

"Sixty-three. You see, Pavel, my career ended on May 27, 1997. That's when Yeltsin signed the NATO-Russia Founding Act. A wave of protests arose immediately because the document was believed to provide NATO, a military organization, with a blank check to extend into the Baltic countries and Ukraine, right to Russia's borders. We were treated like a defeated power. Those of us that wanted a close relationship with the U.S. have been labeled as 'traitors.' Even the man I was reporting to, the Secretary of Security Council, Alexander Lebed, said that the agreement trampled our country's dignity. In 1998, Lebed left Moscow. I was a pariah without any support; I did not have much of a choice but to retire and leave as well."

Mershov stops to catch his breath. His voice conveys dejected acceptance of the reality he does not like.

"Back in '91, I wanted to believe. Yeltsin on the tank, protecting democracy. The image is still with me. At the time, it made me trust that anything was possible. Did not know that Yeltsin was a hopeless drunk who sold a chance of greatness for a bottle of vodka."

Mershov's voice breaks, then he recovers.

"For centuries, Russia has been an Eastern country, the new Constantinople as the *boyars* called it. Peter the Great finally succeeded in opening the window to the West, pointing us in the new direction. We admired the West and wanted to be like them. And we were afraid of the West because in the last two centuries we suffered brutal incursions from there. Societies have memories, and we reach into them for a response. I am afraid the Russian pendulum will swing back East, to the new great powers rising there. I don't really understand. I thought that once communism fell, Russia and America would be natural allies. What do we

have to fight over? Instead, I feel like Peter's window was slammed back into our faces. I don't like it. But then, I am an old retired man. Nobody cares what I think."

Ivan and the boys are standing in front of a massive KV-1 tank when we return.

The older Mershov sweeps his arm.

"In '43, this was covered in snow. Your father asked me whether I had ever seen blood in the snow. How red it is… They had to go forward under heavy machine-gun fire; there was no air support that day. The person on his left got hit…then the one on his right. Your father kept crawling through the snow expecting a blow any second. In the 1960s, they lifted one square meter of the ground on the beachhead by the river. It had ten pounds of metal in it: fragments of bombs, shells, bullets. One square meter, ten pounds of deadly metal."

The drive back is quiet, but when we get close to the city Konstantin asks to visit the cemetery.

"They buried your father so quickly, I found out two days after."

And so we drive to Piskariovskoye cemetery. We walk by the monument and Konstantin reads aloud the words written there: "Nobody is forgotten, nothing is forgotten." He shakes his head. "Words, words…Too much has been forgotten already."

From memory, I manage to find father's grave. No memorial stone yet, just a small marker. Ivan, Vitaly and Oleg stay respectfully in the back, as Konstantin lowers to his knees and places his hands on a small mound.

"I met him in November of 1941. A lifetime. Goodbye, old friend."

His shoulders shake. The day is still full of light, warm, humid, windless. For the second time in two weeks, I am saying farewell to my father. The man I just started to get to know.

I've been back for only a few minutes when there is a knock on the door.

Anxious Mr. Zorkin is there.

"Pavel Vladimirovich, I've gotten you access to the university's archives, but you must go tomorrow morning."

"Why tomorrow morning?"

"Because the person that will give you access will be leaving at two in the afternoon and won't be back until the next week. Her name is Zinaida Petrovna Konyukhova; I wrote down the directions for you."

"All right, I will go see her tomorrow morning. Thank you."

"And Pavel Vladimirovich, I will have papers for you to sign tomorrow.

There is one problem though: it's difficult for me to raise a million dollars by Monday. It's a lot of money, I am sure you understand."

I spread my arms theatrically.

"Evgeny Antonovich, you told me you are a resourceful man!"

"I am, and I've met quite a few rather unusual requests from you." Zorkin bares his teeth.

"That you did. And I have not only given you an exclusive deal here, I also lowered the price by a very substantial amount. If you want more time, you can have it—but the price will rise."

Zorkin clearly would love nothing more than to kill me on the spot.

"Very well, Pavel Vladimirovich, I will do my best to gather the funds even if it costs me. But usually these things require an escrow of some sorts. How do you propose to handle this?"

"If your friend Zinaida provides me with access to the archives, I will sign the papers tomorrow but date them with a later date. If the money is not in my account on Monday, I'll stop the transaction."

Zorkin is taken aback.

"You will sign the papers tomorrow, even before the money is in your account?"

I smile confidently.

"Evgeny Antonovich, I am sure you researched me and know that my father-in-law is a well-known U.S. congressman. If you try to cheat me, you'll wish you were never born."

Sam Baker won't lift a finger to help me, but Zorkin does not know that. His face turns slightly green.

"Of course, I'll make sure everything's taken care of."

Finally, he is gone. I get the envelope that Andrei left for me. It contains a document, a dozen handwritten sheets of lined paper, and four old, cracked, yellowed black-and-white pictures. I recognize my father's handwriting; these are the missing pages from the diary. The will is dated July 18, 2005. It is, as Andrei said, leaving the apartment to me. *The Count of Monte Cristo* and a bank account that as of July 17, 2005 had an equivalent of $2,172, go to Andrei.

The pictures are of my parents and Andrei, all taken in front of the Bronze Horseman. In the oldest one, Father is in a military uniform. His right arm is around my mother's shoulders. She wears a light-colored dress. Her left arm is wrapped around my father's waist. The boy in front is held in place by two hands, my father's on one shoulder, my mother's on the other. He looks very

serious, while my parents are laughing. The next picture is similar, except Father is in a militzia uniform and Andrei looks to be about twelve. In the third one, it's Andrei who is in a soldier's uniform. He and Father are flanking; mother is in the middle. Mother is not smiling in this one, as if she has a premonition of what's to come.

In the last picture, they all are in civilian clothes. Mother is again in the middle, with Father and Andrei on the sides. They all look like they are in their early forties. It must have been taken after Andrei came back from the first camp that aged him. In front of them there is a small boy, about two or three years old. I realize that it's me.

I am hungry, and I have to get out of the apartment. Not in the mood for a long walk, I go downstairs to one of the restaurants on Malaya Sadovaya, find a table where there is enough light to read, and place my order.

I unfold the handwritten pages and organize them by date.

26 November, 1941

Three days ago, Mershov took me and Makar off the regular patrol and sent us to the Smolniy Institute, the headquarters of civil and military administration. They normally use the NKVD, not *militzia*, but they were short of people that week. Smolniy is carefully camouflaged and untouched by bombardment. Makar says under his breath, "Of course, the authorities are focused on protecting themselves, the rest of us be damned!" Then he looks at me and says, "Don't you repeat this."

We get stationed outside, by the door, together with an NKVD lieutenant Kulikov. He checks documents of the people coming in, we are supposed to hold our rifles at the ready. Not sure if they expect that German spies would storm the headquarters. At one point on the first day, the lieutenant accepted a parcel and told me to go inside and give it to Comrade Zhdanov, the party leader of Leningrad. I was stopped at the door to the office, questioned and sent in. A fat man was standing behind a big desk, screaming at the two officers standing in front of him. "I want to attack now! I don't care that the Germans are dug in, send as many people as you have! We all have to make sacrifices! I don't want to tell Comrade Stalin that we postponed the attack! Do it or I'll send you in front of the

firing squad!”

At the end of the first day, the lieutenant told us, “Go inside, towards the Canteen No. 12. It’s a private eating area for top party officials. There is usually some food to be had by the door. But remember, don’t take anything out; they’ll shoot you!” Makar and I found the place. By the door, plates had been piled up, with unfinished meatloaf, mashed potatoes, pasta, cabbage. I stood there, hesitant to eat off dirty plates, but Makar whispered, “Don’t be an idiot, save your ration for your family.” And so I ate off someone’s plate with my hands, ignoring the looks of passersby. We did it for all three days and I was able to give my bread rations to my mother, Nastya, and Andrei.

So that’s when he met Zhdanov for the first time. And now I understand who Kulikov is.

30 November, 1941

Mother left for the front the previous morning, as a part of a small orchestra. They went to perform for the troops that will try to break the siege. She told us not to worry, the musicians will be in the back, not in the line of fire. And they’ll get special rations, too.

They were supposed to return last night, but she did not come home. I tried to reassure Nastya and Andrei, saying they must have gotten delayed and she’ll be back tomorrow. It was just the three of us that night, with Andrei nestled between Nastya and me. Andrei was whimpering all night, with Nastya comforting him.

I rushed to the *militzia* headquarters in the morning and asked Mershov to find out what happened. He switched Makar and me to patrol the area next to the headquarters. I kept checking with him every hour. When I came in for the third time, Ivan was sitting behind the desk, staring down at his hands. He spoke without looking at me. “They were right on the front line, seeing the soldiers off. The Germans are well entrenched there, they had every inch covered with fire. It was a direct artillery hit. I am sorry, kid.”

I started screaming, “That fat bastard! Sitting in a warm

office, stuffing his face, sending people to their death!”

A sweaty hand clamped my mouth. It was Makar, holding me from behind, whispering in my ear. “Volodya, don’t! You have to stay alive.”

The old curmudgeon held me in his arms until my sobs subsided.

My grandmother was killed in one of those senseless, bloody frontal attacks that Zhdanov and his ilk concocted. She was sacrificed in order for the people in charge to report to Stalin that they were attacking.

11 December, 1941

Mershov called us into his office yesterday and told us to do a short patrol today, then report to a cinema in Sadovaya Street. We find there NKVD Lieutenant Kulikov, the same one that we worked with in Smolniy. It’s a fully functional theater, kept warm by its own heating system. Most importantly, there is plenty of food. Kulikov tells us that’s where party functionaries relax in the evening, bring their girlfriends and prostitutes. Our job is to watch the door, make sure that only the people that are supposed to be here can get in. After the show, the food gets packed away, but we can collect what’s left behind, what’s partially eaten. When the show ends, in my gas mask I collect bread, cakes, sausages, cheese. Makar hands me the choicest pieces.

The city in the dark is dangerous, as gangs and cannibals come out at night. I walk with the rifle in my hands, to make me a less attractive target. It’s a scene from hell: a sliver of moon, skeletons of bombed out buildings, a red glow from *burzhuiki*-set fires that nobody puts out. The snow sparkles brilliantly in a cold, deep silence. Searchlights are sweeping the sky. I can see figures moving in the dark. Whenever anyone approaches, I lift the rifle to scare them away.

I am tired, I have to stop. The shadows creep closer. Leningrad is the city of shadows now. I open and close the bolt of my rifle, the sound echoing in the still air. The shadows move back. I start walking again, counting steps. When I get home, I wake up Nastya and Andrei. I only let them eat a little bit, so

they don’t get sick. With food, comes hope.

28 December, 1941

Andrei is not going to last much longer. I can see that he’s lost the will to live; he is just lying in bed silently, air wheezing in and out of his lungs. In desperation, yesterday I asked Mershov whether we could help the NKVD Lieutenant Kulikov in the Sadovaya cinema or in Smolniy.

This morning, Mershov tells me to report to Smolniy. Kulikov is waiting for me there; we are to go with him and his boss to the airport to receive and distribute a food shipment for the families of the party officials. The giant city outside is starving, but nobody in Smolniy looks hungry. A truck picks us up, and we drive through a city in standstill. We get to unload boxes of food: ham, caviar, cheese, expensive wines. The truck takes us back to Smolniy. As I am about to leave, hungry and exhausted from the effort, Kulikov gives me a small package and reminds me to make sure to stop by Canteen No. 12.

I don’t look inside the package until I get home. It’s a loaf of bread, three cans of ham, three jars of jams: boysenberry, strawberry, raspberry. Once home, Nastya boils the water, and we feed Andrei two pieces of bread with boysenberry jam. A touch of color comes into his face.

I realize that the last entry was written right here, across the street. I look up at the apartment’s windows and try to imagine what it looked like in 1941.

18 January, 1942

Today, Makar and I patrolled the Haymarket. I asked to come here, wanted to trade a small jar of raspberry jam for a collection of toy soldiers for Andrei. Nastya thought it might lift his spirits.

Thousands are dying daily from hunger and cold. But here, everything’s on sale. Warmly dressed, healthy-looking, pitiless people sell bread, meat patties, and sausages to walking skeletons. A woman produces a wedding ring in a trembling hand to a tall man in a fur coat. He cuts a small piece of bread,

“Here, that’s it.” She says, “I need more, it’s a gold ring. My child is dying.” The man is about to take the bread away when he sees Makar pulling a rifle off his shoulder. The man thrusts the bread in woman’s hand and scurries away with his packages. Some others start packing their wares. Makar breathes hard, I see that he wants to kill them all.

“Where did they get all this when everyone is starving?” I ask.

“Some work in the food supply chain, they steal,” Makar snarls. “Some kill people and turn the bodies into sausages and meat patties. All prey on others.”

“That’s what we are, human predators,” I whisper.

Makar looks at me. “Not all. You saved him, Volodya.”

I don’t understand. “Saved whom?”

“Andrei. People are going crazy from hunger, stealing food from their families. There is no way for a child to survive on a dependent’s ration. The bastards here, the bastards in Smolniy, they only take care of themselves and send others to die. But you, you saved someone else’s child. When the judgment comes, God will take the measure.”

I did not realize Makar is religious. It’s something one has to hide.

“It’s just one child.”

“You never know. One soul can make all the difference.”

This is the hardest month. No food, no heat, no running water, freezing cold. German shelling is much worse than it used to be. But we have this will to live now. Nastya scrambled for wood from burned out buildings, and we have enough to feed the burzhuika for at least a month. We still have two and a half candles left. Both Andrei and Nastya are into the *Count of Monte Cristo* story, waiting for me to read to them how Dantès takes his revenge. And the metronome keeps beating.

The waiter brings my food. I take a break, eat absentmindedly, looking around. I like the new Malaya Sadovaya. It’s a happy, cheerful place with tons of people.

5 April, 1943

Two days ago, Andrei said he had something to tell me. He saw the man that killed his mother. I asked if he was sure; he said he would not forget that face as long as he lived. He followed the man to a building on the Fontanka River Embankment, just a five-minute walk from our old apartment.

I told Andrei to show me. Waited and waited, but as the daylight was running out, Andrei grabbed my arm. “That’s him!”

A large red-faced man walks by us and into the building. He is stout, bordering on fat, wearing a coat with major’s epaulets and an officer’s hat. I remember him. He was in that cinema on Sadovaya back in December of 1941, laughing out loud, grabbing his girlfriend’s tits.

“You sure?” I ask again.

“I am,” Andrei replies. “I bumped into him on purpose; he swore at me. I remember his voice, screaming at my mother.”

“Don’t talk to anyone about this. Anyone!” I look Andrei in the eyes to make sure he understands.

The next day, I clean out and load the Walther PPK that I took off the German officer I killed during the January offensive. I wait for the man, but he has a woman with him. They are laughing loud as they walk. I go home. He and he alone is my target.

6 April, 1943

Today, I wait again. This time, he is by himself. I follow him as he gets into the building and climbs up the stairs, catch up as he is opening the apartment door.

“Major!” I call out.

“What?” he turns impatiently, the smell of alcohol mixed with sour breath.

I raise the gun and pause.

He backs into the wall, small eyes growing scared. “You can take anything you want. I have food, I have gold.”

“Do you remember a woman on Liteyniy Prospekt that you visited in November of ’41? The one you hit over the head with a can of ham?”

“No, I did not hit anyone!” he protests. But a momentary hesitation betrays him with a flicker of recognition in his small eyes.

Images fly through my brain: Andrei's mother, her head bashed in; the man laughing in a warm theater; frozen corpses like statues in the snow; Zhdanov lecturing me on sacrifice; resignation in the German officer's eyes before I kill him; Nastya saying "he became like them" about Dantès; Makar talking about God's judgment. I can't wait for God.

I pull the trigger. The sound is deafening, and I run away as fast as I can.

I hid the gun in a courtyard place I had chosen beforehand. When Andrei asks me, I remind him to never speak about this to anyone. Never.

In four days, I will be back on the front line with my infantry regiment. Let them chase me there.

Before I leave, we are going to apply to adopt Andrei as our son. It will be difficult to send him to school as an orphan, Nastya and I are afraid they'll take him away from us.

The table next to mine erupts in cheers. They are celebrating a birthday. I feel angry at the interruption, but then I smile and salute them. Life goes on.

8 January, 1946

Tatyana, a teacher in Nastya's university, has been arrested for maintaining a diary of anti-Soviet propaganda. Tatyana survived the blockade but lost her mother and one of her children. She kept a diary like I did. Tatyana brought her diary to the museum. Nastya read it; it was a simple account of hunger, shelling and death. And then the NKVD came and took Tatyana away. Why?

Nastya is still helping out in the museum, but she is afraid. After this entry, I will hide my diary in a safe place. I work with Mershov during the day, take writing courses at night. This does not leave much time for editing, but I am almost done with my play!

30 August, 1946

This will be my last entry. I have burned my play. Earlier,

when I tried to publish it, I'd been told to eliminate "negative characters." Then they cast Akhmatova and Zoshchenko out of the Writer's Union. That fat pig Zhdanov is now in charge of the country's cultural policy. Nastya can't work in the museum anymore; it's getting too dangerous, too easy to be accused of subversive activities. There are rumors that Zhdanov wants to close the museum. Two days ago, the NKVD called me in. My name was on the list of people that came to see Anna Akhmatova. Only intervention by Kulikov, now a captain, saved me. But I've been warned that I must demonstrate unquestioning loyalty toward the Party from now on.

Nothing true about the blockade can be published. They want to wipe out the memory, to rewrite history. I knew then I had to destroy the play. I have to protect Nastya and Andrei. It's never enough to destroy a person; they always come after the family. I will not be a writer, I will become an investigator, as Mershov asked me to. I will hide the diary, but I retrieved the Walther PPK that I took off the German officer I killed and it's now in my desk, loaded. They can come after me, but they will never take me alive.

That's it, that's the end of the diary. I should put the torn pages back into the notebook, in order. No reason to worry about the sixty-year-old killing; they can chase my father's regiment in the sky. No reason to worry about the NKVD and their descendants, history made its judgment. *I can't wait for God.* Where do you draw the line between revenge and forgiveness?

Friday, June 23

Rozen calls in the morning. “Hey, it’s already past six in St. Petersburg, you should be up!”

“OK, Sal, go ahead.”

“So we looked into the companies you asked about…”

“We?”

“Me and Alex Shchukin. Remember, he was Brockton’s and Streltsova’s bodyguard that was sent for a take-out when they were killed? He’s in Los Angeles and was only too happy to help out. Let’s start with the home lender. I visited their local branch; looks like a perfectly legitimate operation. They advertise a lot in Russian and Spanish communities, so Alex asked around in the West Hollywood area where many of the Russians have settled. Turns out there is some kind of scam going on where they basically pay people to take loans.”

“That does not make sense; the borrowers pay ‘points’ for the loans, not the other way around.”

“That’s how it should be, but it seems there is like a rate card, about one percent of the loan, depending on your FICO score and God knows what. You sign documents that you are buying a house and taking a million dollar or whatever loan, three months later you sign documents that you can’t pay and are walking away from the house, and for your troubles you get paid ten grand. Nice, eh? Alex gave a hundred to one of the fake borrowers to refresh his memory and the borrower remembered the street in Simi Valley, an L.A. suburb, where his supposed house was. I drove there to check it out. It’s a private gated community, a big sign in front announcing that the construction was done by a home builder whose name you gave me. A guard came out and asked me what I want. From his accent, I figured he is from your old country. I told him I want to see houses for sale; he replied it’s by appointment only. I drove all the way from Santa Barbara, I was not going to turn around so I pulled my badge, police business. His eyes narrowed, like he was calculating whether to kill me or let me through. I pulled my jacket open to show the holster with the gun. He raised the gate. I drove through the community; perhaps fifty built homes but mostly lots where construction has barely started. Very few cars, no people. After I left, I checked the real estate transaction records. Almost four hundred homes have been sold on those streets in 2005, prices starting from $700,000, most financed by that home lender. I can’t figure out what the scam is though: they give people the money to buy homes and then pay them to walk away? What’s the deal?”

I know what the deal is; they are offloading the loans to government-sponsored Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, as soon as they make those loans. They

don’t care that these loans will never see any payments; they just sell the loans to the government and pocket the money. They sell unfinished houses because the so-called buyers never move in. Another fraudulent game where the sucker is the U.S. taxpayer. Eventually the government will pick up the tab for the worthless mortgages. But that’s what much of Wall Street is doing these days anyway; these guys just seem to be more aggressive.

I remain silent, so Sal continues.

“I think there is some major money laundering going on. But as I said, I don’t get the whole scheme. You do, don’t you?”

I just say, “Sal, thank you. Please thank Alex for me. No need to look into this further.”

Rozen sighs.

“Fine, be that way. Take care of yourself, OK?”

I promise to do just that.

St. Petersburg State University is Russia’s oldest university, founded in 1724 by Peter the Great. That’s a source of pride over the Moscow upstarts to the south. The university is located just across the Big Neva from the Hermitage, on Vasiliovskiy Ostrov (Island). I don’t waste the opportunity to walk by the Palace Square and the Hermitage before crossing the bridge to the Kunstkamera, an anthropological museum. It was the very first public museum in Russia, also started by Peter the Great, who was anxious to follow the Western examples. Its first collection was a cabinet of curiosity, an assortment of deformed fetuses. I shuddered when I read about it. Following the river, I come to the vermilion-and-white three-story faculty building, directly in sight of the Bronze Horseman. After about twenty minutes of wandering within the building, merely finding Zinaida Konyukhova feels like a victory in itself.

Konyukhova turns out to be a nice-looking woman in her mid-thirties locked away in a windowless office with a small “Archives Administration” sign. She is planted behind a massive desk and seems to be glad to have a visitor.

“Zinaida Petrovna?” I say.

“Yes, that’s me.”

“I am Pavel Rostin, Mr. Zorkin told me I could visit you.”

The smile on Konyukhova’s face morphs into an expression of puzzlement.

“Did you say Rostin?”

“Yes,” I answer carefully.

“There was another person by this last name here a few months ago…” Konyukhova’s voice trails away, her smile gone, eyes narrowed in suspicion.

I try to respond confidently and without hesitation.

“It was my father, Vladimir Rostin. He was looking for Grigoriy Voronezhsky’ dissertation.”

The woman nods.

“But I made him a copy, why are you back?”

“He had a mild stroke and can’t remember where he put it. I searched his whole apartment; I think he accidentally threw it away. He did not finish reading the document and asked me to find it. He could not even remember your name, so his neighbor, Mr. Zorkin, offered to help. You know, Zinaida Petrovna, my father is eighty-one. I am sure you’ve dealt with people that age and know how they can be.”

The last bit must have convinced Konyukhova.

“Yes, my grandfather is eighty-two and he often forgets things. But your dad seemed to be so together.”

“Yes, well, he was. Until the stroke.”

“I am sorry to hear about that. I hope he recovers. You see, I am not even supposed to give you access to the archives, let alone make copies.”

As she says it, the palm of her right hand turns face-up signaling what’s expected.

“I understand, but I would love to indulge the old man,” I say while producing a pair of $100 bills from my wallet.

Konyukhova’s palm flips once again, facing me, signaling to stop.

“It’s nice of you to care about your old man.”

She pushes herself up and squeezes past the desk to stand next to me. Zinaida Petrovna is pleasantly plump and wears a short black skirt below a prim white blouse. She takes the bills and smiles.

“Follow me, please.”

Konyukhova walks in front of me, her hips swaying. We take an elevator to the basement. Two other men share the ride with us, both eyeing Konyukhova as she stands formally with her hands clasped in front. I follow her to the door with faded “Archives” lettering, which she unlocks with a key. Once inside, she takes my hand with a “We don’t want you to get lost” comment, and we make our way through a library-like setup of shelves filled with books, manuscripts, and binders. She must be bored in her job and enjoys a little game of seduction.

We turn into one of the spaces between shelves. Konyukhova lets go of my hand, bends down, picks up a thin binder, and hands it to me.

“I did not have to look it up; I was getting it for your father not long ago.”

I open the binder to read: “Financial Warfare in the 21st Century: Scenarios, Trends, and Policy Implications. Master’s Thesis by Grigoriy Voronezhsky,

1998.” There are more words on the page, but I have trouble concentrating with Konyukhova’s body emanating heat right next to me.

Konyukhova takes the binder from my hands, steps back and asks, “Would you like me to make another copy for your father?”

I squeeze out, “Yes,” and she leads me to a side wall, where she disappears into a small copier room while I lean against the wall and take a deep breath. The copier stops whirring, and Konyukhova comes out, hands me a manila envelope with papers inside, and takes the binder back to the shelf.

I had a thought in the meantime.

“Zinaida Petrovna?”

“Yes?”

“The university does have an annual book of graduates, right?”

She hesitates, unsure of where this is going.

I add, “All universities print one every year, I think.”

Konyukhova nods, eyeing me suspiciously.

“Can I look at the one from 1998?”

I reach into my wallet and produce another hundred.

She hesitates, then reaches for the bill.

“You can’t make a copy.”

“That’s OK, I don’t want a copy. I just want to look at it.”

I follow her to a rack by the entrance to the archives, and she pulls out a book of 1998 graduates off the shelf. I flip through the alphabetical listing, get to the right page. Grigoriy Voronezhsky and Greg Voron are the same person.

Konyukhova escorts me out of the archives, guides me to a side exit on the first floor, formally shakes my hand and says, “Thank you for visiting the university and good luck with your research.”

There is a note of relief in her voice. With that, Konyukhova turns around and marches back, hips swaying, high heels clicking on a stone floor.

When I get back to the apartment, I open the envelope. It’s has a document of about fifty pages. The table of contents reads:

1. The Wolfowitz Doctrine and the Brzezinski’s Grand Chessboard
2. Financialization of the U.S. and its Societal Implications
3. Emerging Instruments of Financial Conflict in International Policy
4. Implications for the Russian National Security

The doorbell rings. As expected, it’s Zorkin.

“Pavel Vladimirovich, I have some papers for you to sign,” he says cautiously, half-expecting to be told that I have another assignment for him.

I see his relief when I respond with, “Yes, Evgeny Antonovich, we do.”

We go through the piles of paperwork. Seems that although the Russian real estate privatization has been done only recently, the document bureaucracy has already caught up to the U.S. levels. I date everything with the coming Wednesday. When Zorkin protests that it should be Tuesday, I point out to him that Monday evening in the U.S. will be Tuesday in Russia.

“What’s another day, Evgeny Antonovich? By the way, one small request for you.”

Zorkin’s face drops, but he recovers when I explain that I just may ask him to send some of my father’s items to New York.

“No problem, I will be happy to ship everything.” He sweeps his hand, indicating that he has no interest in any of my father’s furniture. He probably already has a painting and remodeling crew standing by.

“Thank you, Evgeny Antonovich. That won’t be necessary; I will clearly mark what I would like sent. Here’s the key; I trust you to not use it until Wednesday.”

“Of course, of course, you can absolutely trust me,” gushes Zorkin, ecstatic at reaching his goal at a price that’s much lower than he was prepared to pay. “Pavel Vladimirovich, should we go out and celebrate tonight? I have connections at the city’s best restaurants.”

I thank him and beg off. I have had enough of the man.

I reserve a flight to New York. An unmistakable sign of progress in Russia: one no longer needs “connections” to get airline tickets and doesn’t have to buy them well in advance. If there are seats, you buy a ticket and you get on. Fortunately, my credit card limit is pretty high, as the credit card company has not caught up with my new reality. Going through Father’s things, I take the diary, the metronome, and the photo album. I put a few other books into a box, marked for shipment to New York City. Everything else can be left to Mr. Zorkin.

PART 4: THE PROPOSAL

Saturday, June 24

Once again, I get lucky on the Moscow–New York flight: The middle seat next to me is empty. The man in the aisle seat tries to strike up a conversation, but after receiving a few single-syllable answers, he thankfully gives up. I pull out the manila envelope with Voronezhsky's document and start reading. I don't read each and every word but try to focus on what's relevant to the events I find myself embroiled in.

From The Voronezhsky's Thesis, 1998

1. The Wolfowitz Doctrine and the Brzezinski's Grant Chessboard

The Wolfowitz Doctrine is the initial version of the US Defense Planning Guidance from 1992 authored by Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Paul Wolfowitz. It was published by the *New York Times* the same year. The policy stated:

"Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere, that poses a threat on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union. This is a dominant consideration…We must discourage the advanced nations from ever aspiring to a larger global or regional role ..."

The Wolfowitz memorandum cast Russia as the gravest enemy of the United States. It also defined the United States as the global hegemon that would rule the world according to its interests. A close-to-home illustration was the broken pledge about respecting Russian interests and not expanding the military organization of NATO to Russia's borders. It has been well documented that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, President George H. W. Bush met with Mikhail Gorbachev in Malta for a two-day summit and promised not to "take advantage" of a Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe" by expanding NATO into these territories. This promise has been confirmed by Jack Matlock, then-U.S. ambassador to the U.S.S.R. Similar promises have been made by the German Foreign Minister Genscher and by the French President Mitterrand and confirmed by the Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov and by American scholars Susan Eisenhower and Stanley Kober. Another American ambassador George Kennan warned in the *New York Times* on Feb. 5, 1997: "Expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold-war era..."

The United States abandoned its promises and extended NATO membership to Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and the Baltic states. Some believe that this happened because Bill Clinton didn't want to be perceived as a foreign policy "wimp" during his re-election campaign against Bob Dole and used the NATO enlargement to advertize his assertiveness. Whatever reasons and internal politics have been involved on the American side, this was a blatant betrayal of the pledges made to Russia.

This American attitude towards Russia has been further confirmed in the recent book *The Grand Chessboard*, by Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security

Advisor. Even he acknowledged that America had missed the opportunity to create an alliance with Russia in the mid-1990s and that many of the Russian concerns regarding NATO expansion were and still are legitimate. Having said that, Brzezinski advocated an essentially adversarial relationship with Russia, in particular emphasizing actively undermining Russia's relationship with the Ukraine in order to deprive Russia of European presence and of its position on the Black Sea via the Crimean ports.

It is imperative for Russia to dispense with the illusions regarding its position vis-à-vis the United States. We can no longer pretend: the United States continues to view us as Enemy # 1. The Cold War has never really ended. Currently, Russia is obviously the weaker party in this struggle. But as the lessons of history teach us, empires and hegemonies are transient. The United States has its weaknesses that are already showing and will only grow more pronounced over time. The inevitable logic is the same as in the Roman Empire: the need for peripheral security will create a nearly endless series of threats and obligations. The United States will be forced to continue, at a tremendous cost, supporting an open-ended imperial project, sapping its finite resources. This document discusses how Russia can prepare and take advantage of these opportunities, while focusing on the financial side of the emerging warfare.

Flight attendants arrive with a cart of drinks. I get black coffee and ask for a scotch. I'll need a few of those to make it through Voronezhsky's document.

2. Financialization of the U.S. and its Societal Implications

We will define "financialization" as the increasing dominance of the finance industry in a national economy. While we don't deny the importance of financial matters, when financial motives, financial markets, and financial institutions rise to the primary role in a society and extract inordinate rewards compared to the productive industries, we consider such a society "financialised." Financialization took place a number of times in history: Spain in the 16th century, the Netherlands and France in the 18th century, the British Empire in the 19th century, the Roman Empire in the 5th century. Each of these countries was either the leading or one of the most advanced economic powers of the time. In all cases, financialization preceded their decline. These societies have followed an evolutionary progression, from agriculture to industry, commerce, and finally finance.

It is our premise that the U.S. economy follows the same pattern of financialization that would lead to a similar decline. The primary indicator is the gradual reversal of the anti-trust regulations that were put in place in the first third of the 20th century with regards to financial institutions. In 1994, restrictions on interstate banking were eliminated. In 1996, U.S. banks were allowed to sell insurance. In 1997, they were allowed to buy securities firms. As this paper is being finished, Citicorp, a major U.S. bank, merged with a major insurance company, Travelers Group, in violation of anti-trust regulations. We can expect that the U.S. Congress will thus remove the last remaining obstacles to creating massive financial conglomerates. At this writing, the U.S. financial sector already represents close to 20% of the country's economy, exceeding U.S. manufacturing.

What are the likely consequences of this development for U.S. society? We can expect a number of mutually reinforcing trends:

- The financial industry will use its leverage to capture an inordinate amount of the country's wealth while benefiting only a small portion of the society.
- The wealth will be used to further advance a crony capitalism, where the industry will use lobbying and donations to establish strong relationships with the government and regulatory sectors.
- Select financial institutions will grow and become "too big to fail," creating systemic economic problems.
- Increasing market speculation will create boom-and-bust instability. The capital markets will stop playing its intended role of allocating capital to the most productive uses and instead become instruments of policy.

The eventual impact on the society will be profound. Some of the likely developments include:

- Rising inequality, as the upper classes extract ever-increasing share of the country's wealth
- Rise of credit and debt needed to feed the financial machine.
- Effective devaluation of the currency in order to support creation of cheap debt and allow extraction of the wealth by the unproductive financial class.
- Emergence of the political/financial elite that will effectively rule the country and will attempt to centrally manage the increasing share of the economy.

This process will become self-reinforcing as the government will become dependent on the continued source of debt that financial institutions will provide.

The model described above is unstable and not sustainable. The crucial variable in the rise and fall of empires has always been the collective capacity for action. The Roman Empire went from being a cohesive nation of citizen-soldiers to an atomized society of extreme inequality and lack of solidarity between individuals. When the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, cooperation between social classes is undermined, and the nation gradually loses its ability to cooperate.

Great countries die by suicide, and "financialization" is the core element of that process. That much is predictable. What is impossible to predict is the exact process and timing. The situation is unique compared to previous "financialised" societies because for the first time in history, the world is truly global and financial warfare will represent an important part of any large conflict.

The section is full of tables and graphs trying to prove the points. I skip over them. Back in 1998, this was a theory, an attempt to predict an outcome of future experiment. Eight years later, we can judge some of the results: the financial industry was indeed completely deregulated in 1999, the banking business was consolidated amongst a few giant institutions, finance profits and compensation went through the roof. In 2000, we deregulated the derivatives, enabling a shadow financial system of unknown risk. The debt went up sharply. Too early to draw conclusions, but I have to give Voronezhsky at least some credit for these predictions coming true.

I drink the last of my scotch, ice cubes rattling, and continue.

3. Emerging Instruments of Financial Conflict in International Policy

Financial power had always been an integral part of national security. But the global nature of the modern financial and monetary systems combined with development of computer and communications technologies will raise the importance of financial warfare to a whole new level. Financialization of the U.S. will accelerate this process, as the financial sector will become both more sophisticated and in a greater need of protection and expansion in order to ensure its self-preservation.

We have already seen examples of such operations, but so far they have been isolated incidents. One instance was application of sanctions against Serbia in 1993: the U.S. had identified and seized the assets of the Serbian leadership. Another instance was the use of financial sanctions against individuals and companies that the United States believed to be involved in the Colombian narcotics trade. The United States evolved a special office of the U.S. Treasury Department called the Office of Foreign Assets Control designed to conduct such financial operations. While this organization existed in different forms and under different names since World War II, the true potential of this type of warfare is only now being realized.

We should expect that development of the tools of financial conflict will continue and that these tools will leverage the strengths and advantages of the U.S. financial complex:

- The U.S. dollar's status as the world's reserve currency. The majority of world trade is conducted in dollars. The dollar makes up almost two-thirds of foreign reserves in other countries. The American ability to print, at will, the most accepted currency of the world gives it tremendous advantage in financial affairs.
- Global importance of the U.S. banking system and capital markets. It is difficult for a country, or even for a large company, to function in financial isolation. The United States can—and will—exploit this to punish those that are not complying with American policies.
- Access to and control of banking data. We should expect that information about any transaction, any bank-to-bank transfer via standard banking mechanisms, such as the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), will become available to the United States.

In short, the financialization of the United States, while weakening many aspects of the economy and societal cohesion, is also providing the United States with powerful tools for using the financial system in its national interests. In the process, we can expect that the United States will develop the surveillance capabilities over both foreign and domestic entities and individuals that the security services of the past could only dream of.

I shrug this off. There were some publicized financial actions against North Korea and money laundering in Eastern Europe, but otherwise I see no evidence that Voronezhsky's thought experiment ended up being correct.

Flight attendants are back with a so-called dinner. I take a break with some form of lasagna and a refill on my scotch.

4. Implications for the Russian National Security

We expect the United States to develop increasingly sophisticated surveillance and financial warfare tools and employ them in its international policy. In the ongoing debate within the Russian government, some argue that this is not to be concerned with since the United States in the 20th century has been largely a benevolent power. The U.S. post-World War II behavior towards vanquished Germany and Japan is given as an examples of this benevolence. In our view, such an argument is missing the point. U.S. behavior will be driven by U.S. interests, and any benevolence will be shown only to the extent of such interests. But even more important is the simple maxim that's been shown true throughout history and that Russia is well familiar with: "Power corrupts." When presented with the opportunities that such financial power makes possible, it is inevitable that at some point —and probably sooner rather than later—policy decisions will be made to the advantage of the American ruling elite rather than worldwide well-being. It is not in the Russian national interests to be dependent on the American goodwill. Moreover, the very unsustainability of the financialised model that the United States is embarking on makes such dependency especially dangerous.

Another argument being made is that with the United States being strong and Russia, at least at this time, weak, there are no real policy alternatives. While acknowledging the pragmatic point of Russia's relative weakness, we must disagree with the conclusion. There is no possibility—or even desirability—of directly confronting the United States in the near future, but many wars have been won by patience and guerilla tactics. The very course that the United States is undertaking ensures that its weaknesses, and our opportunities, will increase over time.

What are the present and likely-to-emerge U.S. weaknesses that we should seek to exploit? This list provides a suggested roadmap for how Russia can protect its national security and resist U.S. dominance in this 'financialised' environment:

- Nurture alliances with like-minded nations. Countries such as China, India, Brazil, Iran represent possible targets. The nature and application of the U.S. power will likely lead to "if you are not with us, you are against us" attitude.
- Work to end the "reserve currency" status of the U.S. dollar. The United States will be increasingly forced to grow through the rise of indebtedness rather than true wealth creation through production. There is no constructive outcome to this state but the effective devaluation of the currency. Russia can help to accelerate the process by working with like-minded nations to eliminate the dollar from bilateral or multilateral transactions.
- Avoid the oversight of the U.S. financial system. One avenue is to work with allied countries to construct parallel financial networks. The other avenue is to deeply embed some of our financial resources into the Western system, so these resources are not perceived as "potentially hostile." As increasing indebtedness makes the U.S. system more leveraged and less stable, even a limited but unexpected and well-placed action can cause a widespread crisis.
- Promote internal divisions. Inequality will undermine societal cohesion of the United States. History shows that most of the societal collapses and bloody revolutions have been preceded by extreme inequality. The United States has been protected by the majority of its population belonging to the middle class that traditionally provided societal stability. As "financialization" decimates this group, its stabilizing influence will dissipate and the divides between various groups and states within the United States will increase.

The steps described here are largely clandestine, requiring time and patience.

> Over time, all political systems deteriorate because organized interest groups extract ever-increasing value for themselves. Our strategy should be based on United States continuing down an unsustainable path and eventually wearing itself out via societal divisions and imperial overstretch. We believe that the key element is displacement of the U.S. dollar as the reserve currency. It is impossible for us to predict exactly when such a point will be reached. Based on the likely trajectory of the rising debt, aging of the U.S. population and corresponding increase in the U.S. government's social and medical expenditures, and faster growth of other countries, we would project this to be twenty to thirty years in the future.

After finishing Voronezhsky's document, I re-do my diagram. This time I start with two large, partially overlapping circles. One circle I title "Brockton's scheme." I place Crossmans, Khmarko, and Voronezhsky Sr. inside the circle, Brockton into the overlap part. The second circle I call "Deep embed?" and put Nemzhov and Sosnovsky inside the circle and Streltsova into the overlap part. Below the circles, I write names—Vakunin, Pemin, Saratov, Voron(ezhsky), Shoffman. And then I draw just one more circle, with Karen and Sam Baker. This diagram is much simpler now, the picture in my head is almost complete.

When I land, my first instinct is to call Sarah. I pull out my phone as I walk through the terminal, stop, stare at it for a minute and call Jack instead. We arrange to meet for lunch on Monday.

When I get to my apartment, I unpack and set up my father's metronome. It fills the place with a steady *click, click, click…* The fridge is empty, and I go to a neighborhood grocery to pick up some food. There, while standing in front of Fuji apples, I give up and call.

She answers on the third ring. "Pavel?"

"Yes, it's me."

"Where are you?" She must hear the noise of people in the background.

"In a grocery store."

"In St. Petersburg?"

"No, here in New York. I just got back."

"Are you OK?"

"Yes, I am fine. Are you?"

"I am good. Look, I have to go, OK?"

"OK."

What did you expect? She has to live her life. I wanted Anya for her pleasant comfort and familiarity. I wanted Karen for that instant recognition in the Lenin Library, the recognition that changed everything. Why do I want Sarah? It's not familiar or spiritual. It's a physical, hungry relationship. But there is also that hope for another chance. Perhaps the best thing I can do for her is let her go.

Back in the apartment, I eat without noticing what, just to keep myself going.

Find a bottle of Chivas Regal, pour myself a glass. I stand by an open window, listening to the sounds of New York, thinking of taking a walk to the river, when the intercom rings.

It's Sarah.

I planned to ask her about her week, explain what happened to me. Instead, when she comes through the door I push her against the wall and pull up her dress. Her mouth latches onto mine, her left arm pressing me into her face while her right hand desperately tries to unzip me. "Yes, Yes," she sobs as I enter her against the wall, her breaths coming out in short cries. I don't know how we ended up on the floor. I gasp and Sarah pulls me into her as hard as she can. After we climax, we lie there, breathing hard. She is dressed for going out, a sparkly little emerald green affair with a string of pearls and matching high heels. Satin red underwear is lying by the wall.

Sarah lightly runs her hand through my hair, starts crying quietly.

"Did you put some potion in my drink when we went out together the first time? I just wanted to be comforted. Tonight I was on a date with a perfectly nice guy, and then you called and all I could think about was how to leave without hurting his feelings too badly. Maybe it's because you're such bad news, so fucking unavailable. I have to have my head checked."

I cradle her in my arms, rocking gently.

"Sarah, I am so sorry. I tried not calling. But to be in the same city and not call you…I couldn't, I'm sorry. We can go out, get dinner."

She gets up, lifts the dress over her head, standing there in shoes and a bra, her pubic hair neatly trimmed.

"No, not tonight. I want to stay here. But tomorrow is Sunday; promise you'll spend the day with me."

I promise.

Later in bed she says, "I feel like a character in one of those depressing Russian dramas from the nineteenth century, caught in a hopeless affair. Reading those back in college, I could not understand this kind of attraction to tragedy, to hopelessness, to pain. I think I do now."

I want to say something about the Russian soul or about the ancient Greeks inventing tragedy, but it's just false and cliché. Instead, I simply repeat, "I am sorry."

Sunday, June 25

We make love in the morning, then Sarah leaves to change with,

"You stay right where you are and wait for me."

I am happy to obey; my inner clock is all confused with time changes. I give Sarah my second set of keys in direct violation of the rental agreement, then I fall asleep again.

She is back in an hour with two cups of coffee, pulling off my blanket and ordering me to the shower.

"Come on, you promised this is my day."

Sarah traded her little emerald dress and high heels for a T-shirt, jeans, and comfortable walking shoes. I wonder if her underwear is red satin; I'll have to wait to find out.

I like going to the East River, but Sarah leads me west.

"I know it's a cliché, but I love visiting Central Park. I've only lived in New York for two months now; perhaps after a few years I'll get tired of it."

We walk through Central Park Zoo with its polar bears, sea lions, and leopards, eat a late breakfast at Ballfields Café, then wander aimlessly through the little trails. It's a warm day, and New Yorkers are sunbathing on the grass, happy to shed off their clothes after a chilly spring. Sarah sighs. "I wish I had my bathing suit on," she says, then finds an unoccupied patch of the Great Lawn and spreads out on the grass. I follow her lead. For what feels like an eternity, we lie there, watching the clouds drift by. It's simple and kitschy, but my head is clearing and stress is draining out of my body.

"When it comes like that ... at forty ... losing myself like a teenager…I did not want it ... I did not expect it."

Sarah is looking at the clouds, not at me.

"And then I can't sleep at night while you're half a world away without calling and I practically run to get to your building when you finally show up. I wish I could, but there is nothing I can do to stop it. I should be focusing on finding a job, some stability. I run into people I know, and they offer me sympathy. 'Let me introduce you to a nice man,' they say. But I don't want sympathy. I want this abandon I feel."

I lean over her and kiss her. She puts her arm around my neck and draws me in until I have to come up for breath.

"What is this bracelet?" I ask, pointing to the inch-wide sliver of silver with strange lettering just below her left wrist.

“It was my mom’s. It says ‘One who saves a life saves the entire world’.”

“Oh, this is from Spielberg’s movie …”

“It was written well before they made movies.”

We watch clouds going by.

“What’s going to happen to you, Pavel?” says Sarah. It’s more of a musing than a real question. She knows I am not in any condition to be certain of anything.

“I’m not sure, but I think I’ll know soon.”

“What did you find in Russia?”

How do I answer when I am not sure myself?

“I brought home my father’s diary; it’s an old notebook on my desk. I found out that he was not the man I thought.”

“Was he better or worse?”

“Better, much better. I think he kept so much inside, not wanting to be a burden, a liability, not wanting me to feel any guilt. I was angry at him all these years because I thought he didn’t care about my mother dying. I did not realize how much death he’d seen during Leningrad’s blockade when he was only a teenager. He was just letting my mother go, letting her leave the suffering and the pain behind.”

My voice breaks and Sarah raises herself on her elbow, kisses me and caresses my face until I can continue.

“Turns out I have a brother, Andrei. Not a biological one. During the blockade, my parents adopted a neighbor’s boy who’d been orphaned. They were barely older than he was. They saved him.”

“Where is he now?”

“He lives in a city in the southeast of Russia. He spent many years in prison camps because of his opposition to the government. At one point, my father had to denounce him in a letter to the authorities so I could go to a special school for talented kids.”

“Oh, Pavel, I am so sorry. But it’s not your fault.”

“My father hated them…the hypocritical ruling party functionaries that lived at the expense of others. All these years he kept silent in order to protect his family, but he hated them with all his heart. He wrote that letter for me, and I left him all alone. I think he killed himself so the very people that he hated couldn’t get to me through him, so that there was nothing they would have on me. I was so selfishly blind.”

“Are these people trying to threaten you?”

“Sarah, I don’t know yet. I came across some ugly stuff that’s best not to discuss.” I try to say it in a please-don’t-ask-any-more voice, and she gets it.

We get hungry, so we make our way to Gabriela's Restaurant & Tequila Bar just west of the park. The place is loud and full of happy-looking people; I love it. Sarah's been there before, and she does the ordering: two lime margaritas and two Gabriela's Brunches. We fill up on burritos, crispy tortillas, assorted tortas, and can barely get up from our table. We walk it off by heading to AMC Loews on Eighty-Fourth Street. There we are presented with the grand choices of *X-Men, The Fast and The Furious, Cars*. Sarah settles on *Peaceful Warrior*, which turns out to be a mix of *Rocky* and *The Karate Kid*. But Sarah looks happy, snuggles next to me munching popcorn and says, "I feel like I'm on a real, old-fashioned date."

We eat dinner in one of our neighborhood restaurants and end the day in my apartment. I impatiently watch Sarah undress, and she gives me a curious look. "What?" I explain that I've been wondering all day if she has red satin underwear on. She laughs and steps out of her jeans. It's blue satin.

Sarah says, "I made you promise this day for me and you did it. Now, what is your wildest desire?"

"Well, that would require at least two young, nubile girls dressed in a harem attire…"

She laughs and slaps me.

"They are not here, but let me see what poor old me can do."

She can do plenty.

Monday, June 26

Sarah has an afternoon interview with a private school on the Upper West Side.

"I have enough money to get through the summer, but come September I'll need a job," she says. "I look forward to teaching again. Hey, do you want me to ask if they need a physics teacher? We can have a simple life."

She kisses me and leaves.

I check the bank account; the money is not there yet. It's still early, but I am anxious.

My phone rings. Private number, unfamiliar voice speaking with a Russian accent.

"Pavel Rostin?"

"Yes."

"This is Greg Voron. Grigoriy Voronezhsky if you prefer."

I remain silent, so he continues after a pause.

"Can we meet at the Carlyle tomorrow? Say, 11 a.m.? You know where it is?"

"Yes, I do."

"Excellent. Go to the front desk; there will be a message for you there."

Surprisingly, Jack asked to meet at one of the waterfront places on the East River. I walk there to kill time and calm my nerves after the call from Voron. Jack is already there, waiting for me, drinking. He is not wearing his tie; I am not sure I've ever seen him without one.

"What's going on, Jack? Are you playing hooky?"

Jack laughs.

"You could say that. I no longer work at the bank."

"What?"

"Yes. The chief called me on Friday. He was honest about it. Said that while he understands my conservative approach to risk management, this is a different era, and we have to be more aggressive in order to keep up."

"So they don't need to manage risk?"

"The way he put it, 'while the music is playing we've got to dance.' They've been ignoring me anyway, but two weeks ago I wrote a memo directly to the CEO warning that our traders are taking very dangerous positions in sub-prime CDOs. I reminded him how our bank almost went bankrupt in 1998 following the Russian crisis, and we are more leveraged now. The CEO did not like it. He

needs a big bonus this Christmas to pay for his new digs in the Hamptons. The trading group generates the majority of the company's profits these days, and they all hate my guts. Nobody seems to give a damn what happens after they get their bonuses. Profiting at the expense of others while claiming to do 'God's work.' And as I was being escorted out, the bank's chief counsel showed up and warned me that I have a confidentiality agreement with the bank and to keep my mouth shut or they'll sue me until I'll be forced to beg on the street."

"Jack, I am so sorry. They are idiots!"

"You know, Pavel, we did not used to be this way. When I started thirty years ago, we made good money for pushing paper but not these outrageous amounts. We cared beyond the next bonus. You see, that's the problem—we knew we had to keep our reputation so we could come back next year. Now a trader makes millions in one year and an executive makes tens of millions, so they don't care if they are buying crap because they get to keep their money and someone else will foot the bill!"

Jack's voice is rising, heads turn, but he does not care.

"Who was it that said 'After me, the flood'?"

"It was either Louis XV or Madame de Pompadour, I don't remember."

"Didn't they lose their heads?"

"No, but their successors did twenty years later."

"Well, I hope our children won't have to pay for our sins, but one can't defy the laws of mathematics, and I am afraid we are going to take away their future and leave them a giant Ponzi scheme. I dealt with money for most of my career, and ultimately it's just a mechanism for making the commerce simpler. It's much better to use money than to barter—'I'll give you ten goats and a hundred chickens for this used car.' But we've now attached to money some mythical power, as if it's a magical elixir that can control and fix the economy. That's more convenient for Wall Street and the politicians because it's easier to create money out of thin air than to make something real. But ultimately this only creates a rigged system that serves special interests. There can be no sound economy without sound finance. Our corruption is not ideological, it's the corruption of money, of taxing everyone in favor of those that have influence."

Jack finishes his drink and motions for another.

"How's Suzy taking it?" I break the silent pause.

"She probably has had enough. She never seemed to buy into the notion that what's good for Wall Street is good for the country."

A waiter appears and takes our orders, including more drinks.

Jack waves his hand dismissively.

“But enough about me. I am ready for retirement anyway. Did you see *The New York Times* story last Friday?”

“No, what story?”

“I guess you were pre-occupied in your travels. The story was also in the *Wall Street Journal* and *Los Angeles Times*. The U.S. government is now analyzing the international banking data, the data that was supposed to be private.”

“Really? Why?”

“Going after terror suspects.”

“Well, that makes sense. Come on, Jack, we are the good guys.”

“Of course we are. You are a good person, and our waiter is a good guy, and I am mostly good, although my wife sometimes disagrees. Most of the Russians and Chinese and French are good people. Many of the Germans under the Nazis were good, too. Most people are too busy earning a living and taking care of their families to worry about their government’s activities—until it’s too late. Pavel, I think you are missing my point.”

“What is your point?”

Jack rattles ice cubes, sips his drink.

“How do I explain? Only a short time ago, our Secretary of State was telling the whole world that we know for sure that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. We are in the middle of a hugely expensive war, thousands of lives have been lost already, but we have never found the weapons. You can’t just say ‘we are good’ and stop questioning. You can’t continue giving the state ever-increasing power without reservations. It is precisely when we believe ourselves to be incapable of evil that we become most vulnerable to its power. Covertly, we just took for ourselves a major new capability, and we ask the world to just trust us with it. You can’t debate the morality of something that’s shrouded in secrecy. If another country did this and told us to trust them, how would we feel about it? There is a price to everything.”

He stares at the river, then adds quietly, “The problem is not in getting the state more power, the problem is how to prevent the state from abusing the power it already has. All too often secrecy becomes the enemy of freedom. The line between protecting people from real enemies and protecting the state from its people is too easy to cross. What will come next? Manipulating markets? Manipulating public opinion ‘for a good cause’? Asking us to give up a bit of our privacy so that they can better defend us? I am afraid that it’s the very idea of America that’s being endangered here—and by the same people that are trying to protect her.”

I am silent, thinking of Voronezhsky’s document. He proved to be correct on

this prediction as well.

"So, are you going to tell me about your trip?" asks Jack.

I tell him about my father and about Andrei. He knows I am holding out on him but does not probe.

I call Jennifer as I walk back. She is worried about me, and I reassure her that everything is fine and I am safe and sound in New York.

"Have you talked to your grandfather about changing your major?" I ask.

"Yes, both Mom and I did."

"And?"

"He won't go along with it."

We are about to hang up when she says in a small voice, "Dad?"

"Yes?"

"Do you think you and Mom will ever get back together?"

"I don't know, sweetheart. Perhaps. We need some time to figure things out."

"OK." I hear her cry.

How do you explain that even when you love each other, all the misunderstandings, hurts and lies of many years crust over you like an impenetrable armor? I did not understand it in my twenties and I can't explain it in my forties.

I hear voices in the background, then Jennifer comes back.

"Dad, Mom heard us talking. She wants to talk to you."

"Of course."

Karen comes on the line.

"Hi, Pavel."

"Hi."

"I wanted to talk to you and I overheard Jennifer…is now a good time?"

"Yes." As much as I expected this, I feel that I have to sit down. There is a small park with a few benches across the street, so I head there.

"Why is it so noisy?"

"I am on the street in New York."

Karen hesitates, then plunges in.

"Pavel, I think we have to accept that this separation is permanent."

"Is your father pressuring you?"

"Somewhat," she admits. "He wants me in California, close to the kids. Simon really needs me; I worry about our son."

I am silent.

Karen starts sobbing.

"You know that I love you, Pavel. But I can't start over. I need security."

“I know, baby. I am sorry. I screwed up.”

“Pavel, do you have a poem for me? Like the first time we met? A brilliant physicist that reads poetry?”

I feel mostly sadness, not the overwhelming sense of loss that I had when she left. Now, I understand Karen’s language: this ‘love’ she speaks of is a lingering feeling about the past, heartbreak of what was and what could have been but no longer exists. Twenty years ago we started with Pushkin; it seems appropriate to end with another bad translation of mine:

I loved you.
The embers of that love are glowing still.
But don’t let it trouble you,
I don’t wish to bring you sadness.
I loved you quietly, hopelessly,
Consumed with jealousy and shyness.
My love was so true and tender,
I hope you’ll be loved this way again.

We are both crying, and passersby give me funny looks. I don’t care.

I rush to the computer when I get home and log into my bank account. Zorkin has delivered, the money has arrived. Not available yet, but that’s OK.

Sarah is excited to describe her interview, whom she met, the location, the questions. Looks like they may offer her a job. I am happy for Sarah, but my anxiety must be showing. When she asks, I tell her about my friend Jack being fired. I don’t mention the meeting with Voron or the money. I don’t tell her how her bracelet helped me decide what to do.

Tuesday, June 27

I wake up agitated and go through my routine while inside I am dying to meet them face-to-face. I head to the Carlyle, a luxury Upper East Side hotel a block off Central Park. There is a message for me at the front desk: a small envelope, a piece of paper with the room number inside.

I come to the door, take a deep breath, and knock. The door is opened almost immediately, but I don't see anyone until I take a couple of steps inside. I recognize both men in the room: one is Greg Voron looking just like his photos in the magazine article and in the graduation book, the other is the man I've met as investigator Pemin. Voron is sitting on the couch while Pemin stands at the window looking straight at me. The door closes, and I see a third person, the one that introduced himself as Petr Saratov at the cemetery and later attacked me in Moscow.

Saratov is the first one to speak.

"Mr. Rostin, a small formality."

He extends a hand-held metal wand toward me. I take an instinctive step back.

Pemin raises his hands palms out toward me.

"Pavel, it's a wire detector, nothing more. We were hoping for a private discussion, without recordings."

I give Saratov a dirty look but allow him to buzz me with the wand. He nods, satisfied that I carry no listening or recording devices.

Pemin continues. Clearly he is the one calling the shots.

"Pavel, allow me to introduce people here. You've already met Petr. And with the research you've done, you must know that this is Greg Voron, formerly Grisha Voronezhsky. Last time you saw me, I introduced myself as investigator Nikolai Pemin. I apologize for that small but necessary deception. I am Nikolai Nemzhov, colonel in the GRU. We are very excited to have this meeting with you."

The suite is not large but nicely appointed. Around a low coffee table, there is a couch where Voronezhsky positioned himself, and three large comfortable chairs. To the side, there is a table with coffee, sodas and water, and an assortment of expensive-looking food—caviar, salmon, meats, fruits.

Nemzhov points to the table.

"Please make yourself comfortable. And before we go any further, I want to say how sorry I am about your father. I swear he did not die by our hand; he

killed himself."

"Then why did you imply that I am a suspect in his death?"

"I apologize. Oh, what a complex web we weave… Pavel, I wish I had a simple way of explaining, but we have multiple threads intersecting. In a sense, we were testing you and keeping you off balance."

I walk over to the table and pour myself a cup of coffee. I wonder why Nemzhov so quickly showed his cards regarding his real name.

As I sit in one of the chairs facing Voronezhsky, he smiles and says, "So, did you like my thesis?"

"You know?" I can't quite contain my surprise. "Was the document real?" I am feeling like an angry marionette whose strings have been pulled one time too many.

"It is real." Nemzhov steps away from the window, sits in a chair across from me, then leans forward and continues respectfully. "We wanted you to have it as an important background. Back in 1998 there was still an internal struggle going on in Russia between those that wanted to align with the U.S. and those believing that the U.S. remained the enemy. Grisha's paper was invaluable in both crystallizing our argument and creating a roadmap for the ongoing war."

"So is Voronezhsky here"—I nod at the man—"implementing his guerilla 'deep embedding' financial strategies for you? Is that the purpose of all these funds and partnerships?"

"Yes, Pavel." Voronezhsky nods, smiling. "That's exactly what they are for. And they will pay off … in time."

"You must have been influenced by the 1998 events in Moscow?" I ask him.

The smile disappears. "Of course I was! My father killed himself. I blamed Americans for his death. They brought us Brockton and the likes of him. And you know what really made me angry?"

Voronezhsky pauses until I shake my head to show that I don't know.

"It's the hypocrisy, the constant 'we are the good guys' propaganda when in reality it's just calculated, cynical behavior to perpetuate American power by any means possible. At least Wolfowitz and Brzezinski were open about us being enemies."

"Really? Are you telling me that the U.S. and Russia would have been friends otherwise?"

Voronezhsky is about to respond, but Nemzhov raises his palm and Voronezhsky quiets down.

"I don't know whether the U.S. and Russia could have become friends," Nemzhov tells me patiently. "I can't tell you what would have been in an alternate reality. I think the history of mankind is a tragedy of self-fulfilling

prophecies. In this reality, the one we are living, the U.S. embraced doctrines where Russia is an enemy and encircled us with NATO bases right on our borders. Yes, we Russians are paranoid, but then history has taught us to be. How many horrific invasions have we suffered over the years? So when the U.S. self-declared itself an imperial power that alone decides what's right and what's wrong, the cast was set."

Nemzhov gets up and pours himself a glass of water.

"Pavel, please understand that I am not some kind of anti-American fanatic. But we've been humiliated. How do you think the Americans would have reacted had we put military bases in Canada and Mexico? If the U.S. government had tried to understand the Russian perspective, perhaps things could have been different. Instead, they kicked us while we were down. And they openly stated that they intend to keep us down. That's why we are enemies. They are anti-Russian, so I am anti-American. It's *realpolitik*, not an ideology. We are weaker, but we have our weapons. That was the main achievement of Grisha's thesis: to focus on the American vulnerabilities, their weak points, to help us develop a plan."

"And who is 'us'?"

"You know that St. Petersburg State University is now the ideological brain center of our government. Much of the political elite, starting with Putin, were educated there. We get this cross-pollination of knowledge and ideas."

"Was the Palmer testimony correct? About all that money that was stashed away in the '90s?" I ask.

Voronezhsky beams.

"Palmer was largely on point, but he significantly underestimated the resources involved."

Now this shocks me because the amounts mentioned were in hundreds of billions.

"Underestimated?"

"Yes"—Voronezhsky almost jumps up in excitement—"over a trillion dollars has been transferred between 1986 and 1991. Real money, eh?"

Transferred? They were stolen from the people of Russia! I keep my mouth shut.

"The money was quite significant," confirms Nemzhov. "And kept hidden away, with very few people having any knowledge of it. Originally it was intended to provide a safety net for the high-ranking members of the Party. But by 1999, as we came back to power, a new line of thinking emerged: this money could be pressed into the service of our national interests, to become our secret weapon in a guerilla financial warfare."

“All these funds with tree-sounding names—the Birch Grove, Kedr, others—they all come from the original movement of assets out of the Soviet Union in the late ’80s?” I state more than ask.

Voronezhsky confirms.

“Yes. They’ve been moved and recycled many times so the origin can no longer be found. But we became a lot more aggressive in utilizing these resources. We set up new financial companies, we invested in critical technology areas, we have taken advantage of the opportunities that the U.S. financial system provided to increase our leverage. We are using America’s financialization to our benefit.”

“So the mortgage lender, the home builder…all these companies you bought __”

I don’t have a chance to finish, Voronezhsky enthusiastically takes over.

“Is this not a beautiful thing? We keep making these real estate loans as fast as we can and sell them to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. We don’t care that the supposed buyers never pay a penny; all the risks go to the U.S. taxpayers. We launder some of the money by paying above-market prices for timber and other construction materials. When we sell a house for a million, most of that million ends up laundered away, and the U.S. holds the bag of a useless mortgage. And then we make even more on packaging these loans into these wonderful ‘synthetic’ debt obligations that Wall Street invented…”

“But the fraud will come out! You are selling houses that have not been built yet to people that never saw them.”

Voronezhsky laughs.

“What do we care? When it comes out, perhaps some low-level locals will end up going to jail. Wall Street is making billions and transferring the costs to the taxpayers; do you think anything will happen to them? Meanwhile, we made over ten billion last year just with the companies you mentioned. And there are quite a few other such operations that we are running.”

Nemzhov waves his arms to stop us.

“OK, we wanted Pavel to get the larger context here, but you two financial wizards are putting Petr and me to sleep. While Grisha is quite excited about the moneymaking process, this is simply manufacturing more weapons for the coming war. It’s just that the weapons are numbers in bank accounts, not tanks or airplanes.”

“You are not going to bring the U.S. down with your little operation,” I blurt out.

“Of course not. We are just profiting, same as big U.S. banks, positioning ourselves for the future. Money corrupts, and we want to help the process. Pavel,

the bottom line is, we are aggressively building and deploying our financial resources for the eventual end game. But we have more ground to cover, and I am sure you have other questions as well."

I stand up to get a bottle of water, trying to gather my thoughts. I attempt to change the subject and take Nemzhov by surprise.

"Who was the intended target in Santa Barbara—Brockton or Streltsova?"

Nemzhov does not skip a beat.

"What do you think, Pavel?"

He is smiling as I find myself on the spot. I take a deep breath, I badly want to hit Nemzhov and wipe the annoying little smile off his face.

"I think Streltsova was the primary target."

"True." Nemzhov nods. "As I said, very few people had any specific knowledge of the money. During his time in the Kremlin, Boris Sosnovsky found out a few things. Just enough to give someone a start. It's like a ball of yarn, you don't want people pulling at the end. Natalya Streltsova was a popular anchor working for Sosnovsky's TV station in Moscow; unfortunately he gave her the information, and she started pulling. That's when we took notice."

"And then you figured out that someone was acting out *The Count of Monte Cristo* game of revenge?" I point at Voronezhsky.

Three of them laugh as if this is some kind of a big joke. Nemzhov shakes his head.

"I wish I could take the credit, but no. After his father killed himself, Grisha came to me in 1998 looking to protect his family. The money that his father lost in the Brockton's scheme was owed to some nasty characters. We wanted Grisha on our team, so we stepped in and kept those characters at bay. But at the time we did not know about Grisha's extracurricular activities."

Nemzhov drinks some water and goes on.

"To Grisha's credit, he eventually came to us on this as well. Brockton was the last piece left on his board, so to speak. Grisha was a bit obsessed with completing his revenge. Streltsova was living with Brockton then, and Grisha knew enough about the Sosnovsky connection to alert me. We gave him a hard time over the whole vigilante avenger stuff, and then we started working together because we had common interests at stake. Brockton was a bonus for Grisha."

"But something went wrong?"

"Yes. Just serves to prove that no matter how much you prepare, random chance plays a role. We worked on this operation for months. Managed to entice Brockton to install the Hardrock security system that had a 'backdoor' we controlled. Figured out a time when the bodyguard would be gone. Found the

password to Streltsova's computer by observing her in a local coffee shop. You see, the plan was to remove sensitive information and to install the data we wanted. Everything was going according to the plan, and then this Jeff Kron person shows up! The operation was timed by seconds, and he threw it off. A couple of minutes had been lost, there was not enough time to finish before the bodyguard returned. Our people had to leave with Streltsova's computer, did not have a chance to clean up properly. Before Kron appeared, they grabbed some jewelry to make it look like a robbery, forgot to put it back."

"And they set Jeff Kron up as the killer?"

"What other option was there? We decided to leave things as they were. Until your father appeared on the scene, another entirely unplanned and unexpected event. We heard that Streltsova's brother was suspicious of the verdict against Kron and looking for a private investigator. We spread the word in the Moscow investigators' community to stay away and did not give it much thought. Imagine our shock when an old Russian detective shows up in Santa Barbara asking questions! How did Bezginovich even find him? Anyway, after we assessed the situation, we saw not one but two opportunities."

Nemzhov is looking at me, so I indulge him.

"I figure one was the possibility to try the disinformation that you originally planned. What is the second opportunity?"

Nemzhov points at me.

"You, Pavel. There were lots of changes since you left; so many people from Russia moved to the West, we lost track of who was where. And the vast majority were of no interest to us whatsoever. But you, Pavel, you are another story. We decided that we want to reconnect with you."

"Well, you expressed your interest in a strange manner."

Voronezhsky takes over.

"You did not expect us to approach you out of the blue? We worked indirectly, through Martin Shoffman."

"Have you worked with him before?"

"No. We tried to follow you and the people in your circle, found out that Martin had some points we could pressure…"

"So you concocted the New Treasure Island ELP to fund the Grand Castle Rock hedge fund…"

"Yes. It was done in a hurry."

"And you put in that little provision that gave you control, figuring that I'd trust Martin's assurances that the agreement went through a legal review?"

"Right. We wanted to maintain control."

"So why did you pull the plug? You knew that our positions would pay off!"

Voronezhsky shrugs guiltily.

“I am sorry, I had orders.”

Nemzhov raises his hand to take over the conversation.

“Please allow me to interject. Pavel, remember that your father was conducting his investigation at that time. I won’t lie; a part of the reason for helping you was to gain some influence over him. We gave it a bit of time, then carefully directed him to the disinformation package.”

“Was that the story with the key and safe deposit box in Moscow?”

“Exactly. We waited and waited for your father to release the information, but he would not. He smelled that something was not quite right. To make things worse, he continued to work on the case. We put pressure on Bezginovich to stop the investigation, but your father persisted on his own. Then, early this year, your father traveled to Paris to meet with Sosnovsky. I truly admire your father’s persistence and investigative abilities, but the situation was getting out of hand.”

“So you killed Sosnovsky?”

“The official version is that Boris Sosnovsky hung himself. I’ll leave it at that.”

“And then you pressured my father by showing him that you could destroy me?”

Nemzhov shakes his head.

“Foolish, foolish move. If there is any excuse, during that critical time I was in a hospital for kidney stones surgery and this unfortunate decision was made without me. Grisha also did not have a choice, he had his orders. An attempt was made to ‘convince’ your father by destroying your fund. I deeply apologize for it.”

“How did you pressure my father?”

“For the last month your father was under constant observation, his mail, e-mails, phone calls—everything was monitored. Frankly, he would have been killed if the powers-that-be were not afraid that he set something up to be released upon his death. One day he managed to elude his tail; that’s probably when he sent a package for you to be picked up in Moscow. I arranged to come see him very early on June seventh; at that point I was trying to work with him personally. When Petr and I got there, the door was open. We walked in. Your father was sitting at his desk facing us, with a gun in his hand. He shot himself as we were looking at him. It was devastating to me personally. I am sorry.”

We all are silent for a minute, looking down.

“What was in the envelope you took?”

“To be honest, it was not as much as we were afraid of. Your father pieced together a lot of information, and it’s definitely not something that we would

have wanted to become public. But we were concerned about a ‘guide to the money,’ and it was not there. It probably means that Sosnovsky did not have much. But we did not know it at the time.”

I get up, walk towards the window, look outside. Warm, humid summer day. Heavy lunch hour crowds. What I’ve heard is pretty much what I expected.

“So, why all this charade? What do you want with me?”

Voronezhsky smiles broadly.

“Good, let’s cut to the chase. Pavel, we hope to mend things between us. We’d like to make you a proposal.”

Voronezhsky looks at me expectantly, but I remain silent.

“I know it’s difficult after what happened with your father, but we did not wish it. Come work with us,” he continues. “We can set you up with a new fund or you can join one of the existing ones, whatever you prefer.”

“I still don’t understand why you want me. I am just a quant, a financial analyst.”

“Pavel, you are much more than that. Your ideas on how to capitalize on the coming crash of the U.S. real estate market are brilliant; we are already copying them. And you are Russian, you are on our side.”

It’s time for my gambit.

“I have a couple of questions I would like to ask Colonel Nemzhov.”

As everyone is staring at me expectantly, I look straight at Nemzhov and add, “Privately.”

Nemzhov nods slowly.

“Grisha, Petr, please give us a minute.”

Voronezhsky shoots me a murderous look but obediently leaves with Saratov.

After they are gone, I ask Nemzhov, “This all has been about Sam Baker, has it not?”

“Yes, this was and is about Sam Baker,” he admits almost cheerfully. “I thought you’d figure it out. Your father-in-law is poised to become one of the five most powerful people in this country. We would like to get closer to him. That’s why I was so upset when these idiots shut down your fund. They were looking to influence your father when the bar had been set so much higher!”

“Why would Sam Baker listen to me?”

“You are a family member, a part of his inner circle. I am sure the situation between you and Karen can be repaired. In a way, we owe it to you; your breakup must have had a lot to do with the failure of your fund. Fixing this will go a long way to fixing your marriage. We are not asking you to do anything

distasteful. Karen is an attractive woman who you loved for many years and who probably still loves you."

"That's your method of operation, get to someone through the people they love?"

"Pavel, that's how it was throughout centuries. I doubt Sam Baker cares about you much, but he does love his daughter. We are not setting up to blackmail Mr. Baker. We just would appreciate having a trusted connection to him. When you are viewed as an accomplished finance person, a 'major player' so to speak, he will likely seek your advice on financial issues. Or perhaps you will hear about the internal legislative discussions. We are only looking for ability to influence the events a little bit. What do you think the thousands of high-priced lobbyists are doing in Washington every day? Soft power of influence runs the world."

Yes, that's how they get you to do things. Use the loved ones. My father knew that.

"Colonel, do you really think you can defeat America? I am not talking militarily. Your trillion dollars is a drop in the bucket compared to the wealth of this country."

Nemzhov sighs wearily.

"Pavel, Pavel. Not any time soon and not by ourselves. During World War II, we wasted innumerous lives and resources by throwing our people into bloody frontal attacks against the Germans. And then we employed a similar strategy during the Cold War, substituting raw power for thinking. We won't defeat America this way. We have to let America defeat itself. Let them destroy their society through financialization and rising inequality. Let them push other countries into our corner by imperial arrogance and hubris. Let them damage their reserve currency status through debt and money printing. Like in any complex system, small changes will keep adding up until they turn into big dislocations."

He pauses to take a breath.

"As for 'only a trillion dollars'…it's not only about the money, it's about embedding ourselves into the system. The chessboard is larger than Mr. Brzezinski imagined. What he did not foresee is us taking the fight to the U.S. Not openly, of course, but clandestinely, by acquiring influence and helping the U.S. exhaust itself. Arrogance, hubris, soft corruption, influence of money—these are our allies and weapons. The more 'financialised' America becomes, the more it will be built on leverage. And greater leverage means greater vulnerability. All the great generals knew that it's a matter of applying maximum force in weakest spots. The only thing I am afraid of is that we won't have the

patience to wait for the right time. We do our projections based on the growth of debt and retirement of the "baby boom" generation. I figure it's another fifteen to twenty years before the American situation becomes unsustainable. What do you think, Pavel? Be honest."

"Frankly, I think America won the Cold War because they were a more dynamic society, while the Soviet Union has always been a monstrous bureaucratic state run by a small political elite. And I think that America is still the more dynamic society. So, I am not sure you can defeat them."

"Pavel, I actually agree with you about the past, but you are looking into a rear-view mirror. America, by now, has evolved a privileged political and financial elite similar to ours. We have our oligarchs, they have theirs. A hundred years ago America broke up their oligarchies and that made the twentieth century the American one. But now, they allowed the oligarchs, especially the financial ones, to take over. Do you know that the heads of the twenty-five largest hedge funds made more money than the management of the five hundred largest companies of the S&P 500 index altogether? And these in turn make obscene amounts of money compared to their workers. Money talks, and money drives politics. There will be more market blow-ups, more financial crises, more debt leveraging until they reach the point of no return. Imperial hubris never ends well. History is not linear, it always repeats itself. Pavel, don't bet on the wrong horse."

But I'd rather bet on them. Because there is still hope for them, but there is none for you.

I take a deep breath and ask the one question that I could not figure out.

"Why didn't you just arrest me after I picked up the package that my father sent? You could have told me everything then. Why make me figure things out on my own?"

"No, we couldn't," Nemzhov replies. "We were puzzling over your father's suicide and not sure whether he told you anything. I had to find out without torturing you." He says this casually, to torture-or-not being a simple business decision. "More importantly, we had to learn about you, Pavel. We used your weaknesses against you. We wanted to learn your strengths before we could trust you with this conversation."

I nod in agreement and understanding. Now is the time for the real question. I ask casually, "And what about Jeff Kron?"

Nemzhov squints in puzzled incomprehension.

"What about him?"

"An innocent man is in jail for many years."

"He put himself into this situation. He was going there with a gun, intending

to kill John Brockton."

"But he did not kill anyone."

"OK, Pavel, why are you asking this?"

"I want him released."

"Not a good idea." Nemzhov shakes his head. "That case has been closed; who knows where re-opening it would lead?"

"I've met him; he is on my conscience now. That's my price. It's not negotiable."

He who saves one life saves the world.

Nemzhov rubs his chin.

"I don't like it, but if it's important to you…we can arrange for some killer-for-hire to admit to murdering Brockton and Streltsova. We have plenty of those in our jails, should be able to find one that fits the profile. People will bring up the old story of Streltsova reporting on the 1999 bombings in Moscow being the work of the FSB and the GRU."

"Was it?"

"No, but if some people want to think that, that's fine. Keeps them chasing the wrong scent. OK, I can't promise tomorrow, but before the week is over there will be a story that should free Jeff Kron. So, Pavel, if we do that you'll accept our proposal?"

"Yes."

"Then I have one question. The same one I asked earlier: Why did your father kill himself? I am sorry, but this haunts me."

Because you did not see the whole diary, you don't know how much he hated people like you. He'd been forced to play your game his whole life, but no longer.

I simply reply, "I think he did not want you to be able to pressure me through him. Or perhaps he wanted to avoid the pain of cancer."

Nemzhov nods, unconvinced.

Sarah has an interview in Boston on Thursday. She's going to leave tomorrow and come back Thursday evening, after spending a day with her sister who lives there.

"It'll be good for me to go, clear my head a bit," she says sadly. "I'll survive a day or two without seeing you."

I show her my father's diary and read the first few pages. I don't think I am doing a good job translating.

We make love as if this is the last time we'll see each other.

Wednesday, June 28

I take care of business in the morning. First, go to the notary to complete my will. Then, to the local Kinko's to make copies. Last, back to my apartment, prepare e-mails and two packages to the *Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*. There is not much else to do but wait.

My phone wakes me up at half past one in the morning. The caller ID says it's from somewhere in Russia. A heavily accented voice tells me to check the news. I go to my computer and here it is: A man serving a life sentence in a Moscow jail confesses to killing John Brockton and Natalya Streltsova in Santa Barbara. The police confirmed that the man was in California during that time. The reason is given as a contract killing, revenge for a business gone wrong between Brockton and one of the Russian mafia chiefs, since killed in another dispute.

I call Sal Rozen. "Sal, this is Pavel."

"Do you look at your watch before you call?"

"Go to your computer, search the news for Brockton."

I hear some swearing and footsteps as Rozen carries the phone with him, clicking of keys, then, "Holy shit! What did you do?"

"What do you mean?"

"Don't BS me, if this is not your work, I'm the Pope!"

"Sal, is this enough to get Jeff Kron out?"

He thinks, then I almost hear him nod.

"Yeah, this should work. I'll start tomorrow. You know Melissa Kron will turn heaven and earth with this."

"Thank you, Sal."

"No, thank you. But you still didn't tell me what you had to do."

"Sorry, Sal, I can't."

Thursday, June 29

I wake up to a beautiful sunny morning. I've lived here for twenty years, and I never liked the East Coast summers. Give me the heat of California or the rain of Canada, but please spare me New York's humidity. But sometimes we get these wonderful June mornings when the air is clear and crisp and the sun is bright and not too hot and the city feels like it just arose from the ocean like Botticelli's Venus, and you feel like you just might get that second chance at life.

I know what I have to do, but I prolong it, go for a nice leisurely breakfast with an extra cup of coffee. I wonder if Julius Caesar hesitated before crossing Rubicon. Perhaps took a few hours, sat down for a nice lunch? No, I am sure he just plowed through.

"Enough!" I say out loud, spooking a nice tourist family at the next table. I push myself away from the table and quickly walk home. I read through one of the e-mails I prepared yesterday to make sure I got it right, then quickly hit "Send" on all of them, afraid that if I don't do it now, I'll never do it. Then I grab the envelopes for the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, walk over to a mailbox on the corner and quickly push them in.

Now that the deed is done, for the first time in many months I feel light and happy. The way one feels when a difficult task has been completed. I think of Sarah coming back tonight. Later, I will go buy some flowers and get us a nice dinner and a good bottle of wine.

I arrange things on my desk. Make sure the removed pages are in their proper places in the diary. I turn on the old metronome, the way my parents did when I was a child. I listen to its sound, tuning out the noise of a busy New York street and imagining my parents as teenagers, huddled around a wooden crank radio, hungry and cold, armed only with their will to live.

I know it's too soon. I know both Sarah and I should take our time. My logical, reasonable self knows this. But my other self is not listening. Too often have I been a careless rogue. I blew it with Anya and Karen. I don't deserve it, but here it is, another chance. I am afraid to lose it. Simplify: go back to physics, teach, try to make it work with Sarah. I want a simple life.

EPILOGUE

Monday, July 3

The brief service has ended. With short notice and the holiday weekend, not many have attended.

Two men are standing to the side, talking. The older one, in his fifties, wearing a nicely dark suit, is short and overweight but otherwise not particularly noticeable. Not so the younger one with sunken cheeks, deep-set eyes, and thin lips, dressed in a leather jacket and speaking with a heavily accented, high-pitched voice.

"There was never any danger of him being able to send the materials out. We kept everything on a very tight leash. When he was in St. Petersburg, we got to his computer and changed the e-mail settings. Anything he sent would go first to our servers where we would check it before forwarding."

"What about other communication? Did he mail anything or tell anyone?" asked the older man.

"He was followed for some time. It was an effort to keep him safe; the damn fool kept walking into dangerous situations. The two envelopes he put in a mailbox were removed immediately. And of course his apartment was bugged and his phone tapped. We think he did not want to jeopardize others so he never shared anything of importance with them."

"And this is being treated as a suicide for sure?"

"Oh, yes. We've been careful to leave no marks. Newspapers reported that he killed himself because he was depressed over the failure of his fund and the recent suicide of his father. His girlfriend found him in a bathtub and called 911. Officially, he took a bunch of sleeping pills and cut his wrists. He made a new will just a day prior and left it right on top of his desk, which showed that he was in a suicidal state of mind."

"Nicely done, nicely done. I actually was not convinced about the wisdom of this operation. It has not succeeded, but you handled it well."

"Thank you. We were never sure about Rostin, but the colonel was interested in finding an inside connection to Baker and, with us in control, thought that the risk was worth it. Rostin was just a pawn in a bigger game."

"That's OK. We'll find another, more conventional way of getting to Baker," said the older man. "Campaign contributions, I know a few lobbyists he is friendly with."

The younger one continued.

"To be on the safe side, we'll be closing Greg Voron's fund and the associated partnerships. We've been looking to do this anyway. Our people think

that the scheme he's been running is coming to an end and it's time to cover our tracks."

"And what was in Rostin's will?"

"Pretty much all of his assets were the proceeds from the sale of the apartment on Malaya Sadovaya. He left half to his wife Karen, and the rest was split between Andrei Rostin, his daughter Jennifer, his girlfriend Sarah, and Anya Weinstein from Moscow."

"Who is that Anya?"

"A daughter of his old professor and, we think, Pavel's girlfriend before he met Karen Baker."

"Were there any instructions?"

"Only that Andrei Rostin should use the money to visit Paris and that Jennifer should study what she wants and not what others tell her."

"You are not going to try to hold back the money?"

"No, we don't want to attract any more attention. This is not our money anyway. The neighbor purchased the apartment and paid for it."

"And that Jeff Kron affair?"

"We'll just let it play out."

"But why did Rostin asked to clear Kron's name? It does not make sense."

"Who knows? Let Kron be released; it's an old case, nobody's interested. It would create more suspicion if the confession was rescinded. What difference can this possibly make?"

People started leaving. A group of three women were moving past the two conversing men, when one of them, a nice-looking blonde in her early forties, stopped and walked over to a black-haired woman standing by herself. The two women stood for a few seconds looking at each other, then embraced and cried. The brunette reached into her bag and gave the other woman a notebook.

When the blonde woman then rejoined the other two, the oldest one said sharply.

"Karen, why are you hugging that slut? Is it not enough that he left her some money? You should contest the will."

"Oh, shut up, Mother," replied the blonde woman. "She is not my enemy and nobody is going to contest anything. And tell Father, since he did not show up in person, that I will be moving out and taking the kids."

The youngest of the three asked, "Mom, what did Sarah tell you?"

"She said that she does not believe that your father killed himself. And she gave me the notebook that he brought from Russia. She said you should have it."

“I presume that was Karen Baker?” asked the older man.

“Yes, it was her with her mother and daughter. Sam Baker and Pavel’s son did not make it.”

“And the woman she embraced?”

“Sarah Shoffman, Pavel’s lover that found him.”

“And who is that?” the older man nodded toward a crying young Asian woman, standing by a tall blond man.

“Oh, that’s Suzy Yamamoto. She did a bit of research for Pavel. Don’t worry about her; she is totally irrelevant.”

Almost three thousand miles away, four people, three men and a woman, sat around a small table in a private room of a U.S. penitentiary: a tall, blond man in his early twenties in an orange jumpsuit of an inmate; a slightly older woman in a business suit on the man’s right bearing a family resemblance to him; the man next to her dressed casually in a blue open-collared shirt and jeans. The last one, a short, bald man in khaki pants and a poorly matched jacket with a chessboard black-and-gray pattern leans forward and gently drums his fingers against the table.

“Jeff,” said the woman to the inmate while pointing to the casually dressed man. “This is Mr. Adrian Cronby. He is an attorney with the Innocence Program organization. He will help me and Detective Rozen to overturn your conviction.”

Cronby’s pose is relaxed, almost leisurely, left-hand dangling, but fierce dark eyes betrayed the inner intensity.

Adrian nodded a greeting and said, “Jeff, your chances of being released are excellent. Admission of guilt by a known hired killer is powerful exculpatory material. In addition, Detective Rozen briefed me on a number of inconsistencies in your case that were swept under the rug in the rush to convict.”

“Do you know why the killer suddenly made his admission now?” Jeff asked.

“Frankly, Jeff, I don’t know.” Adrian shrugged. “Perhaps his conscience caught up with him. Does it really matter?”

Jeff turned to the man in a checkered jacket.

“Detective, I am sure you had something to do with this.”

“No, Jeff, I really did not.”

“What about that man you brought here to see me not long ago?”

“I am afraid Pavel Rostin is dead.” Rozen lowered his head. “The official version is suicide.”

“No! First his father, now him. Do you believe it was a suicide?”

“Jeff, I don’t know,” the detective said. “Let’s focus on getting you out of here. You’ll be getting your life back. Earn it. Pay it forward.”

COMMENTARY

The people described in this book are fictional. But most of the historical events and characters have been reproduced faithfully. This *Commentary* is intended to help the reader distinguish between fact and fiction.

The Leningrad Blockade

While the Rostin family is fictional, the story of the siege is as described: mass starvation, freezing temperatures, constant bombardment, cannibalism. The estimates of the human toll range from seven hundred thousand to a million and a half. Almost half a million are buried in 186 mass graves of Piskariovskoye memorial cemetery.

It is also true that the military leadership wasted countless lives in senseless frontal attacks and that the leadership and those in the food supply chain did not suffer from lack of food.

Illustrative sources:

"The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad" by Harrison Salisbury, http://www.amazon.com/The-900-Days-Siege-Leningrad/dp/0306812983/

"Leningrad – State of Siege" by Michael Jones, http://www.amazon.com/Leningrad-State-Siege-Michael-Jones/dp/0465020356

The Financial Crisis of 2008

The roots of the crisis are represented faithfully. The bank that Mikulski and Rostin worked for is modeled after Lehman Brothers but truly could have been any of the large Wall Street banks.

It's well known that the real estate bubble and subsequent collapse was the immediate origin of the crisis. In a greatly simplified picture, three distinct forces combined to lead to this trouble:

1) "securitization" of mortgage obligations where residential mortgages were "pooled" together to create consolidated debt instruments that could be sold to investors,

2) government's policies that, in the name of encouraging home ownership, pressured quasi-government organizations such as Fannie Mae to purchase lower-quality (subprime) mortgages, and

3) ratings agencies' (S&P, Moody) inability to properly rate the risk of such

debt instruments or unwillingness to antagonize their Wall Street clients.

As a result, financial institutions were able to obtain high ratings for pools of low-quality mortgages and sell them to investors that relied on these ratings. Essentially, these collections of bad loans were marketed like high-quality AAA corporate debt in mistaken belief (or intentional lies by those that understood the real hazard) that combining multiple loans reduces the overall risk. Such risk reduction would have been true if these loans were not highly correlated – but they were correlated because they all depended on constantly rising market prices. The lenders could make loans without worrying about such loans actually performing because they could package and sell the loans to someone else. Given human nature and the lack of oversight, creation of such moral hazard was bound to lead to a disaster.

It is not the book's intent to create an impression that the Russian security services created the crisis. In the book, Voronezhsky is smart enough to take advantage and profit from the bubble and the financial chicanery that went with it, but the crisis was manufactured entirely within the US.

Illustrative sources:

"The Big Short: Inside the Doomsday Machine" by Michael Lewis, http://www.amazon.com/Big-Short-Inside-Doomsday-Machine-ebook/dp/B003LSTK8G

"All the Devils Are Here: The Hidden History of the Financial Crisis" by Bethany McLean and Joe Nocera, http://www.amazon.com/All-the-Devils-Are-Here-Financial/dp/159184438X

The Quants of Wall Street

In the book, Pavel Rostin is a physicist that goes to work on Wall Street as a quantitative analyst, or a "quant" in the Street's lingo. A quant is a person that applies mathematical and statistical methods to financial problems, usually in derivatives pricing, statistical arbitrage and risk management. Career jumps from physics to Wall Street were not entirely uncommon in the 1980s and 1990s, with one of the better-known examples being Emanuel Derman, physics PhD from Columbia that joined Goldman Sachs in 1985.

One of the most successful theories in finance is that of Black-Scholes

formula that applied some of the theory behind thermodynamics to options pricing. While Black-Scholes theory was developed in the 1970s, it was not until 1990s that Wall Street kicked off the era of exotic options and derivatives. The complex formulas began to be used extensively in 'financial engineering' wherever more complex 'synthetic' financial instruments were being created. For example, in 2000 a quant named David X. Li proposed a solution to value so-called 'collateralized debt obligations' or CDOs using the Gaussian coppola. This formula was used to price tranches of mortgages.

But the problem with these attempts to apply the laws of mathematics and physics to financial markets is that financial markets are different—they highly depend on the actions of others. As Nasim Taleb warned, investors are "fooled by randomness" and don't expect deadly volatility jumps that occur in financial markets. Mathematical and physical problems are right in typically assuming the famous bell-curve distribution in the natural world. But this distribution, as originally pointed out by Mandelbrot, does not work in finance.

The perils of quantitative finance are perhaps best illustrated by Robert Merton and the history of Long-Term Capital Management (LTCM). Merton received the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1997 for his contributions to the Black-Scholes-Merton formula. He was a co-founder of LTCM which earned fabulous returns for its investors for four years by using high leverage. But in 1998 the volatility turned against their positions, the fund lost almost $5B and had to close soon thereafter.

One can argue that the same recipe of excessive leverage and high volatility brought down the markets in 2008. The profits generated prior to the crash have remained private, while the losses were born by everyone.

Illustrative sources:

"The Quants: How a New Breed of Math Whizzes Conquered Wall Street and Nearly Destroyed It" by Scott Patterson, http://www.amazon.com/The-Quants-Whizes-Conquered-Destroyed/dp/0307453383

The Financialization of America

The deregulation milestones and various statistics are reproduced faithfully. While there were many voices calling for tighter restraints of financial markets after the 2008 crisis, in reality nothing has changed. In 2014, the financial institutions are bigger than ever. New and improved rackets, such as high-frequency trading and creative derivates, are being created as regulators turn a blind eye. The finance industry continues to be by far number one in campaign

contributions and lobbying expenditures. In 2012, the average Wall Street salary was $363K. In comparison, the average salary in New York was under $68K and median for US households only $50K.

Illustrative sources:

"How the West Was Lost: Fifty Years of Economic Folly and the Stark Choices Ahead" by Dambisa Moyo, http://www.amazon.com/How-West-Was-Lost-Economic-ebook/dp/B00486UAXY

And many others.

On the Russian Financial Crisis of 1998

Under Yeltsin, the Russian government had been funding itself by taking on short-term debt at high interest. The situation could not continue. On August 17, 1998, the Russian government defaulted on its domestic debt, let the ruble exchange rate plummet. And froze all bank accounts. Almost half of Russian banks went bankrupt. The Russian middle class lost most of its savings. Domestically, it resulted in halting some of the economic reforms, and revitalized secret police took power and wealth from the original oligarchs and replaced them with "their" oligarchs. One of the losing oligarchs was Boris Berezovsky who had to escape Russia; in 2013, he was found dead on the floor of his bathroom.

One of the international consequences was international market turmoil that brought down LTCM, probably the best known quant hedge fund of the time. The Federal Reserve stepped in to organize a rescue. Debatably, this has started the Federal Reserve on a dangerous road of ever-increasing market interference. In August of 2014, the Federal Reserve's balance sheet stands at almost $4.5 Trillion, leveraged at over 70:1 (more than twice the leverage of Lehman Brothers when the famous bank collapsed). Since the 2008 crisis, the Federal Reserve has been buying 60-70% of the U.S. debt every year.

Illustrative sources:

"How Capitalism Was Built" by Anders Aslund, http://www.amazon.com/How-Capitalism-Was-Built-Transformation/dp/1107628180

"The Sale of the Century: Russia's Wild Ride from Communism to Capitalism" by Chrystia Freeland, http://www.amazon.com/Sale-Century-

Russias-Communism-Capitalism/dp/0812932153

The Voronezhsky Document

The document is fictional. The closest equivalent that the author is aware of is in writings of Igor Panarin. Igor Panarin is a Russian professor and diplomat, currently the dean of the Russian Foreign Ministry School for future diplomats. In 1997, he was awarded a Doctorate in Political Sciences for a thesis titled "Informational-Psychological Support of the National Security of Russia." In 1998, Panarin formulated his hypothesis of the eventual breakup of the U.S.

In 2014, it is hard to ignore increasing signs of emerging China-Russia axis to oppose what these countries view as "American hegemonism." Besides closer economic and military cooperation, both countries are actively trying to move away from using the US dollar in international transactions. In particular, China is positioning renminbi as another 'reserve currency.'

On Russian Claims That the Promises Made to Gorbachev in 1989 Have Been Broken

Numerous participants in the Malta summit of 1989 and in subsequent discussions confirm that there was a promise to not expand NATO to Russia's borders.

Illustrative sources:

"Superpower Illusions" by Jack F. Matlock, Jr., 2010 by Yale University. http://www.amazon.com/Superpower-Illusions-Jack-Matlock-Jr-ebook/dp/B00492CRVU

"NATO Enlargement: Illusions and Reality" edited by Galen Carpenter and Barbara Conry, 1998 by the Cato Institute. Especially "The Perils of Victory" by Susan Eisenhower. http://www.amazon.com/NATO-Enlargement-Ted-Galen-Carpenter/dp/1882577590

The Statement of Richard Palmer on Infiltration of Western Financial System

This is factual. The hearing took place on September 21, 1999. The statement has been reproduced faithfully. It is widely believed that very substantial assets have been transferred out of the collapsing Soviet Union and hidden in the West.

How much, where these assets are now and who controls them, we don't know.

See, for example:
http://democrats.financialservices.house.gov/banking/92199pal.shtml

On Financial Warfare

On June 23, 2006, *The New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Los Angeles Times* published articles about the U.S. government sifting the international banking data, the data that has been viewed as private.

Illustrative sources:
"Treasury's War: The Unleashing of a New Era of Financial Warfare" by Juan Zarate, 2013. http://www.amazon.com/Treasurys-War-Unleashing-Financial-Warfare-ebook/dp/B00DFM5C3U

The Wolfowitz Memorandum

The concepts of the memorandum have been reproduced faithfully. See, for example, http://work.colum.edu/~amiller/wolfowitz1992.htm.

Zbignew Brzezinski's Book

The concepts of the book have been reproduced faithfully. See, for example, http://www.amazon.com/Grand-Chessboard-American-Geostrategic-Imperatives-ebook/dp/B005OSFX0A

Russian Poets and Writers

Anna Akhmatova: the pen name of Anna Gorenko (1889-1966), one of the most acclaimed Russian poets of the twentieth century. Suffered greatly from the Stalinist terror: personally condemned and censored, while her husband was executed by the secret police and her son spent many years in the Gulag. She was in Leningrad during the most horrible part of the siege. In 1946, Andrei Zhdanov banned her poems and had her expelled from the writers' union.

Olga Berggoltz: a Russian poetess that spent the whole blockade in Leningrad and became famous for working on the only functioning radio station

of the city. Day in and day out, she read poetry and delivered news, urging the people to hold on to hope. Her husband died of starvation in 1942. She was arrested and imprisoned in 1938, released in 1939.

Marina Tsvetayeva: a renowned Russian lyrical poetess. After living abroad, she came back to Russia in 1939. After her husband was executed and her daughter arrested, Tsvetayeva killed herself in 1941.

Osip Mandestam: a Russian poet and writer. Mandestam refused to conform to the Stalinist regime and at one point wrote and read a poem highly critical of Stalin. He was arrested multiple times and died in the Gulag in 1938.

Alexander Lebed

Popular Russian general and politician that placed third in the 1996 Russian presidential election. In 1991, during the communist putsch, he was ordered to send tanks against Boris Yeltsin and the parliament but Lebed refused to obey the order and the putsch collapsed. Lebed served as Russia’s Secretary of the Security Council until 1998, when he left Moscow. He opposed NATO’s expansion to Russia’s borders. Died in a helicopter crash in 2002.