



# Trial for Innocence

Rolf A. F. Witzsche

The focus of every trial should be  
to establish innocence  
in order that the healing of society can begin.

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**A fictional 'king for a day' story from a novel by Rolf A. F. Witzsche.**

The trial ends in success, miraculously. Well, almost it does. On trial is a patriot who tried to save the world, but made a mess of it. That's really the story of humanity. We often fail in the challenge to do what is right, but society cannot condemn and persecute itself and still live. The goal must be to heal. In the story the healing unfolds when the undercurrents that had grabbed the patriot become exposed. The undercurrents come to light as a conspiracy built on deep failures that society itself had known to exist, had tolerated, and had even actively supported for the sake of a few jingles in the pocket. The success story ends with a warning however, that the defender of the patriot stirred up the hidden layers of the world's self-assumed kings that wield vastly greater powers and resources than any state or institution, or the 'tallest' man. The revenge becomes a devastating blow in which the 'giant' falls and barely escapes with his life.

The 'would-be king' story, *Trial for Innocence*, is a chapter from the novel, [Brighter than the Sun](#), by Rolf A. F. Witzsche.

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# Trial for Innocence

"Tell me, how else do you plan to defend Boris Mikheyev, except you do it by uplifting the trial onto a level of truth, and love, an justice," Igor asked his father moments later. "You do plan to defend him? Or will the trial be just a big show, the kind that you can walk away from afterwards? Do you plan to defend him by analyzing his deeds as an act of insanity? Or do you plan to defend him by exposing the powers behind the scene who had used this innocent man for their purposes, who had organized and staged the entire tragedy from its concept to completion? Are you prepared to name the names? Are you prepared to put the finger on London and say to the world: They did this, they financed it, they selected the target, they arranged the timing? Are you going to say that it was they who tricked one of Russia's bravest patriots to serve their purpose? That would be the truth. They used a human being, destroyed the world by his hands, and ruined his life in the process. Are you going to condemn that man further and let the real culprit walk away? Or are you going to defend him by standing up for the truth, no matter how hard this may be, end envelop you country in love by defending one of his smallest citizens who should have never been put at harms way to such treachery? That is what love is. You are a man, aren't you? Or are you afraid to name the names that stand behind the destruction that was unleashed, even if they may be honorable names? Yes, I agree, it would be damn easy to put the finger onto Boris. Everybody in the world wants that done. They want to see him hang to clear their own conscience for having failed to built a world in which nuclear bombs have no place. But you mustn't. Instead, put the finger onto London. That would be the truth. Don't let them walk, because if you do, sooner or later they will walk over you. Love, on the other hand unfolds from the truth. That's a hard one to learn, but that will heal humanity. I know that isn't your perception of love. I know this for a fact, because the circle that you draw around yourself is too small. I do greatly fear for you, therefore, because you don't really care what happens to humanity. I fear for you, because that will also be your undoing."

I was shocked to hear Igor speak to his father that way. I remembered however that this kind of talk had healed my self-isolation from him on the boat.

I couldn't hear Sergei's answers. He spoke too softly. I could only see him shake his head.

"I guess you will walk away then, from humanity's needs," Igor continued, "in order to save your precious career. I can guarantee you, if this happens, a greater crisis will follow than the one we now lament. The puck has to stop. It has to stop here! We have all the resources to assure that. This is what Paul has been aiming to inspire in you, in his loving way. He has been trying to uplift you into a world of truth and love. He is expecting a lot, I know, because nothing less will be enough."

"Boris Mikheyev will have free government counsel," Sergei replied during breakfast the next morning.

Igor threw his arms up. "What good will that do? With this you aid the cover-up. With this

you will put the blame on Russia, instead of exposing the real traitors, you rat. And let me add this, if you don't defend Boris you will be the traitor in this house, against all of us."

Sergei looked away and covered his face.

"You must defend Boris to defend Russia, and by defending Russia you are defending humanity," said Igor, putting a hand on his father's shoulder. "Nothing less will do. Let us help you. You cannot do this alone."

Igor sat down after this and said nothing more for a long time.

I overheard Igor speak to Sergei in his office later this morning. The door to my room wasn't fully closed.

"Can't you see that Paul merely filled a void that had existed in this house for decades," Igor said gently. "He filled a void that no one had bothered to address. The circle of his affection was wide enough to feel this void on the first day we set foot in this house together, and he was able deal with it in a manner that enriched our world with a new sense of honesty. You have no cause to be upset. You are upset because your affections never reached that far. I also know that you, too, are capable of that love, because you are a human being. You have demonstrated this in so many, many ways. You are just afraid to admit it, as I had been when we were all stuck together on the boat for six weeks. I even blamed Paul for my being afraid to love, can you imagine that? Now you are called upon to demonstrate this capacity as you have never been able before, because if you don't, you will never survive at the trial. You have bees set up. You have been framed. I don't know how you got into this mess, but you are in it, and we can help you with this if you let us."

Sergei became quiet after that. At the end, it appeared that he accused Igor of being cruel.

"No, I am your friend," Igor responded to him. "I am trying to break the yoke that will strangle you if nobody cares to take it from you. I am trying to open your eyes to a platform that allows you to live again as I was told you once lived. You must expand the circle of your affection to embrace the whole of humanity. That is what you were once known for. Don't be so pitifully selfish to take the easy way out by putting the blame for what happened onto Boris. Defend Russia; expose the real traitors with the truth! If you don't, your unspoken lies will kill you. Likewise, don't ever take the easy way out in your relationship to Laara, by putting a cage around her as you have done. Open your heart to relish the riches that she has to offer. Extend the circle of your love so wide that she feels welcome in it. If you don't do either of these things, what incentive do you have for protecting our world from the next nuclear war or something worse? What's there to protect, but an empty shell?"

Having said this, Igor simply walked out.

Laara told me that Sergei cried bitterly this evening. She told him that everyone of us, especially her and I, had spend practically the whole week wracking our brains to develop a higher level platform based on the principle of universal love that he could accept and utilize. She said that she told him that he needed this platform in order to uplift the trial to some level of truth, so that he wouldn't be beaten into the ground.

She came to me and threw her hands up, declaring that all our efforts might have been in vain. She asked for our help. "But what more can we do?" she said. "What more can anyone

do?"

In the end, it was she, herself, who found the answer. She realized that the only answer Sergei would accept was one that he formulated for himself. Towards that, she alone could help. This she did in her usual, gentle and generously grand style. She requested Sergei that he would take her to several more of these cultural evenings, as the one in Moscow that had been aborted. To back up her demands she purchased six tickets for a performance of Schiller's *Don Carlos*, performed in Novosibirsk. She purchased six more tickets for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, performed in English in Kiev. And for the greatest surprise, she purchased six tickets for a rare modern performance of the ancient trilogy, "*Prometheus Bound*" that had been written in the early part of the Greek Classical period.

Laara understood her task perfectly. She had to lift Sergei out of his political quagmire into a human world where truth and love are of greater importance than the games of manipulation, which defy them.

We all signed up to this task. Igor even created a measurement by which to judge Sergei's progress. It would be measured by his readiness to accept my love for Laara and to accept her sovereignty in accepting it.

Luckily, Sergei had a great respect for Friedrich Schiller, the author our first cultural event. On the way to Novosibirsk I asked Sergei to tell us how Schiller had saved Russia from a defeat that would have otherwise destroyed the nation. He had made a remark about that some time earlier.

Sergei smiled, "This happened during the time of Napoleon, when Napoleon crossed into Russia with over 400,000 men and 300,000 horses. Every patriot in Russia wanted to fight the invaders. If they had fought, every one of them would have been killed. Russia had nothing with which to match Napoleon's strength. But Russia had one advantage. Russia had a man who could see the struggle in the context of the universal human scale. This man had been a close associate of Friedrich Schiller. Actually, Schiller was already dead at the time Napoleon invaded Russia, but William von Wolzogen was very much alive, living in exile in Russia. He had studied with Schiller the human dimensions of war, the tragedies, the arrogance, the strengths of people and their vulnerability. Schiller was aware of the little minds of society that met the great opportunities in history with a pathetic weakness of character, by which the greatest opportunities became lost and humanity suffered as a consequence."

Sergei explained that Schiller wrote great works of tragedy in which this paradox becomes plainly laid out in a way that the audience of his plays becomes more widely involved with the dimensions of our humanity as human beings, and thereby becomes better men and women. He enlarged the sphere of their concerns so that they could step beyond their petty little affairs and think about enriching and uplifting the whole of humanity.

"When Napoleon invaded Russia," said Sergei, "Wolzogen made it Russia's goal to survive. Nothing else mattered. He also knew that this goal couldn't be achieved by fighting Napoleon. Wolzogen had only one choice. He took the patriots out of their narrow concerns and opened their eyes. They wanted to block Napoleon's way. He asked them instead to draw Napoleon as deeply as possible into the country. He asked them never to engage Napoleon more than was necessary to irritate him, to make the troops feel vulnerable. He said that this would suffice to

slow the advance. It was Wolzogen's tactic to create a logistical nightmare for Napoleon, and a strategic vulnerability that Napoleon in his narrowly confined thinking didn't recognize until it was too late. By the time Napoleon's army had reached the gates of Moscow, 500,000 of his men lay already dead along the path of the invasion. Most were picked off along the supply trail. Some huge battles were fought, which cost both sides dearly, but gained no one any advantage. The human dimension defeated Napoleon, the collapse of its logistical infrastructure."

"The history books may say that the Russian winter caused Napoleon's defeat," said Sergei. "This is a lie. Eighty-five percent of Napoleon's army was already dead before he reached the gates of Moscow long before the winter began. Only seventy thousand of Napoleon's troops were killed by the bitter winter, and this, again, was the legacy of the dead poet. Wolzogen knew that if Napoleon would be able to utilize Moscow as a shelter through the winter, he would recover his strength and fight anew in the spring and then defeat the weakened nation. Thus, Wolzogen did what Schiller's pathetic heroes of tragedy could never do. He persuaded the Russian elite to completely evacuate the city of Moscow before Napoleon's arrival, and then, even while it was occupied, gradually burn the city to the ground from within. Wolzogen knew that Napoleon would have little choice in the end, but to abandon the city with the first onset of the Russian winter. Out of 630,000 men that crossed into Russia under Napoleon's command, no more than twenty to thirty thousand made it back."

Sergei repeated that Napoleon was not defeated by the vastness of the land, nor by the Russian winter, but by the ennobled character of man that had focused on the welfare of the nation. He said that this man succeeded even to the point that it became possible for Russia to allow its finest city to be sacrificed in order to protect its people and the nation as a whole.

Igor approved his analysis.

"But you already knew the story," said Sergei.

"Sure I did, word for word," Igor grinned, "but I wasn't so sure that you still did. This story provides an excellent background to the play we are going to see, and the task we have on hand before us."

Igor talked about the play, how the entire sequence of the play unfolds towards the one moment where a single act could revive the welfare of a world, but at this crucial moment the central figure of the play, who finds himself in a position to act, fails to act. This pathetic character, who thereby betrays all that is good and honorable, is Don Carlos, the son of the King of Spain. The king is universally despised as a brutal dictator that has ravished the nations of Europe. The king is also a murderer who eventually murders Don Carlos' best friend. At this point, exposing the King as a murderer in front of all the nobles of the realm, Don Carlos takes the sword from the king. He recounts in front of the elite of the nobility how rotten and unworthy that despicable man is to be king. In this situation Don Carlos has the support of the nobles. They would dethrone the king if they were so requested. There has never been a clearer cause for such an act by which all of Europe would have been freed of the tyrant. Alas, Don Carlos' circle of concern did not extend this far. He could not grasp the magnitude of the moment and its imperative for humanity. We find Don Carlos to be content with merely humiliating the king. Having done that, with his victory virtually assured, he pulls back and fails in his duty as a human being. He gives the sword back to the rotten tyrant.

'You are my king once more,' he says to him, and bows, and surrenders.

Igor told us that this narrow range of concern must not be allowed to rule at the trial of Boris Mikheyev, nor at home, nor anywhere else. "The trial of Boris must be transformed into a profound historic occasion." Igor turned to his father. "You must play the role of Wolzogen at the trial, and not the role of Don Carlos. If you can take the initiative at the trial to lay bare the makeup of the real traitors and pull Russia out of this trap and establish the truth, the future of humanity will be radically altered. There will be light once again."

"But who can do such a thing?" said Sergei, quietly.

"You can," Igor answered. "You have the respect, the prestige, the connections, and the needed intelligence. This trial will be the most crucial moment in your life where everything that you have accomplished in your life comes together into a single focus, for that one single purpose which is to achieve this goal. By this you will be able to say to yourself that the life you have been given, has made a difference for the advance of humanity."

Igor turned to the rest of us. "We all have a role to play in this. We must think in terms of universal history. We must think in terms of changing the world for the better." He looked at Sergei and smiled. "Paul and Jennie have taught me that," he said to him.

"Me?" I asked. "When?"

"Yes you did, when you rescued me from the crowd in Honolulu," he said.

Hamlet was performed in Kiev the week after. I had a distinct feeling that Sergei enjoyed our cultural escapades. Perhaps, he did so only in part to relish his new freedom of movement. Or, perhaps, he did so because he could actually recognize the immediate importance of these plays for his part in the trial, for Russia, and for humanity as a whole. If he did, he didn't let on that he did.

Laara spoke about Hamlet on the plane. She called him a noble prince who carries a great responsibility, but turns out to be a fool out of sheer fright of the unknown. "Should he, or shouldn't he?" that is the question he faces. "He knows what history demanded of him," said Laara, "but he doesn't have the strength of character to demand this of himself."

Melanie recalled that Hamlet's father, the king, had been murdered by his uncle who took the king's throne and his wife. All this is being revealed to Hamlet. Hamlet's task is to establish justice in the realm, but the outcome is uncertain. Who can move against the king, against a king who has the power to retaliate? By Hamlet's inaction in fighting for truth and justice, and love for his nation, the murderer remains untouched, by whose continued treachery everyone, including Hamlet, dies in the end.

Laara pointed out that every person alive needs to contemplate what happens in this play, especially us, because this is the essence of the challenge that we face at the trial. "We are Hamlet. We understand the truth. We also know that in telling the truth we have the power to strike out against the mightiest empire on the face of the planet. One man, standing against an empire makes Hamlet's task appear safe by comparison. But we must ask ourselves; can we afford not to tell the truth? Hamlet thinks he can, but he is fatally mistaken."

Here Jennie spoke up at this point. She rarely ever gets involved in these discussions. "This

shouldn't be our criteria for acting," she said. "This scope of thinking is still too narrow, too closely confined." She pointed out that the whole Hamlet tragedy is centered on the invasion of Denmark by the Norwegian army. While the approaching forces are recognized at the beginning of the play, the threat to the nation is pushed into the background by the narrowly focused concerns that may seem immensely important to Hamlet, but are absolutely trivial in the larger context.

"It strikes me that the tragedy of Hamlet is really his inability to place himself into the larger context," said Jennie at the end. "In this context his choice would be imperative, and clear."

Sergei didn't care to comment on that. He may have realized for the first time since this trial was announced that he had been thrust into a position where he is demanded to make precisely this choice, and like Hamlet, it frightened him, as far as we could tell.

Prometheus Bound was performed in a small theater, four days after Hamlet and four days before the trial. The intelligence gathering for exposing the truth, for which Sergei had engaged trusted help in high places in Moscow, had been fruitful. The work was almost complete. One of his agents had told him that they had been successful, because it is infinitely easier to find the evidence if one understands the truth. Sergei had registered himself as one of the counselors for the defense. He had sworn, as he signed up for the task, to seek out the truth. He said he had become a member of a team of five. He also said that he was the only one on the defense team who wasn't there to just defend Boris, but to defend Russia and humanity. He understood that it was literally up to him, and that there was no other way to defend Boris than to play Hamlet's role the way it should have been played, the way Wolzogen would have played it.

On this trip to our last theater engagement, I felt it was my turn to explore the dimension of the tragedy that would be performed for us in the theater. I knew precisely what needed to be done in order that a greater tragedy would be avoided on the larger stage of the world than we already had faced.

"Prometheus is a god who has defied the club rules of the gods of Olympus," I said to everyone. "He is the god of universal love who has given mankind the power of reason and the power to create fire. For this infraction which defied the rules of the Aristocracy of Mt. Olympus, Prometheus is bound by the Olympian mob and is subjected to eternal torture. Being a god, he cannot be killed, but he can be tortured. But even while he is tortured by the mob of the Olympian god, he tells them that he already foresees their end and the reason for it. Obviously, the Olympians want to know what he knows, and so, in order to gain this knowledge from him, they offer him his freedom in exchange. Ah, but he refuses the Olympians. He stands his ground and elects to be tortured rather than to give us his secret. He knows, of course, that the real tragic figure in this interplay is not himself. His opponents are the tragic figure. He foresees their demise. He knows that he can endure the pain that they can inflict, as agonizing as it is. He also knows that by enduring the pain his opponents have played out all of their cards and have played them in vain. They have thereby proven themselves to be powerless. If this is the worst punishment they could impose, and do no more, they have no real power at all and no status as gods. That impotence becomes their demise.



My analysis was that we had the task of Prometheus to fulfill, to disprove the power of kings and empires by making it clear for all times to come that they truly have no power. They only have the power that humanity allows them to have, and this can be denied. "It is our task," I said, "to prove and proclaim loud and clear throughout the world that kings, dictators, or empires, have no power in themselves. It must become understood throughout the world that they have power only to the degree that humanity bestows this power on them, which can be withdrawn. Thus, power should be denied to them as Prometheus denied power to the gods of Olympus." I pointed out that this had indeed already happened to some degree, and the modern day gods of Olympus were quite aware of the fact. I suggested that they knew that the platform of their power, the world financial system of their own creation that had looted the world, was in reality no more than a bubble of hot air that was about to pop. I pointed out that their nuclear blast was a desperate attempt by them to create a diversion designed for restaging the world into their favor. It pointed out that this desperate act was their last and final claim of potency. But that dark plan has failed. "They have destroyed the world. There is nothing left that they can take away. This pitiful failure has proved their powerlessness. Their only hope is that the truth remains a secret. The global exposure of their inner emptiness must become their undoing that they cannot survive. In a sense, they are as powerless as Napoleon had been," I said. "Wolzogen knew this. This was also the secret of Prometheus. He knew this, too. And we now too, know this 'secret' today. All that remains is for us to act on this knowledge."

Sergei approved my analysis. He reached his hand out to me and to Laara, and said, "I hope you two can forgive an old fool. We have work to do from now on. Let's go forward together." He turned to all and said, "we must go to this trial together. I invite you to join me. We must act as a team within a team. Together, we can change the world."

The trial of Boris Mikheyev began on a Monday, right in the center of Moscow. When we arrived at the airport, we were taken by shuttle bus to one of the large international hotels that housed the participants. Most of the hotels happened to be within walking distance of the private convention center where the trial was to be held. The hotel was drab, cheap, and a beehive of activity. Everything revolved around the trial. The trial was on everyone's mind. It was talked about in the lobby, in the bar, and in the restaurant. "Are you coming for the trial, comrade Arenski?" the front desk clerk asked as he processed Sergei's room reservation. Sergei simply nodded.

After we were settled in our rooms, Sergei explained the procedures that would govern the mechanics of the trial.

"An international tribunal will preside," he said. "There will be an American judge, a Russian judge, and a judge from India who has been personally chosen by the secretary of the UN."

Sergei further promised that there would be a full TV coverage provided, broadcast live, internationally. We were also promised that there would be a large representation present from the international press. The entire first ten rows in the auditorium was reserved for the press, and the rest of the seats divided between public officials and the companions of the participants in the trial, people like us.

Sergei's time-slot for presenting evidence for the defense was scheduled to begin after the lunch recess on the fifth day. His was to be the third presenter of arguments and supporting evidence for the defense, before the judges. He said it took a great deal of prodding by friends in high places, for him to be permitted to make a presentation at all. In fact it was without precedent that a non-judicial person was allowed to take part in a judicial procedure of this scope. Friends told him that the permission for him to present evidence was granted most reluctantly. He said that these so-called friends lied to him to the last minute, since it was their intent to drag him into this trap that they set for him, to humiliate and destroy him.

"Luckily, they have no idea what a giant of a man Sergei is about to become," I said to everyone. "Sergei's participation will become an intervention that totally alters their game and defeat it."

Before the trial, the papers referred to the event simply, as "the trial." It was to be the trial of the century! In legal terms, it was the case of Humanity versus Boris Mikheyev. The terms of reference had been broadened to take into account the international scope of the case. Only the mentality that was expected to prevail at the trial had not been updated with the change in the world. From all that one could read in the papers, Boris was to meet the 'gladiators' in a fight to the death, his death. This was to be a modern version of ancient Rome, a replay of the old Roman imperial mentality. The only difference was that in this modern arena the outcome of the fight was more obviously fixed than in the olden days when the arbitration by the pointing of thumbs decided a captive's fate only at the end. The modern 'gladiators' wore shiny black robes and gray wigs and had the verdict already in their pocket. One could read in the smirk on their faces, or in their arrogant manners.

Some wore military uniforms. Only a few wore civilian clothes. One of them, a fat fellow who slouched in his chair, cradling his belly, his feet stretched out, was the most notable of them all, and he for gawking at the girls at the recorders' table.

Like in Roman times, the modern gladiators were treated as heroes. Their pictures were paraded on the front pages of the international press. Little did they know that they were engaged in a fight to the death, as in the olden days, which included their own death. As Sergei now saw it, the 'gladiators' could not possibly be allowed to win this trial, even though the outcome was so obviously rigged.

Every one of the players had published his platform on civil rights and duties. The press published all the essays. Jennie was quick to note that there were no women on the panel of the presiding judges of the international tribunal. Laara also pointed out that there wasn't a single woman among the supporting conscripts of lawyers, scholars, and experts. Supposedly, they were all chosen from among the most dedicated in their fields. Laara doubted this

Officially, the trial was to be a showcase of justice. Melanie joked about this, since the selection of the participants, as we found it, caused one to doubt the sincerity of the entire setup.

The proceedings were scheduled to last for a minimum of three weeks. This too, was a farce. It was obvious that no real justice was intended to be rendered. The atmosphere was that of a circus. The mere fact that the trial was to become a showcase for the world, should have made anyone suspicious of its real nature. The trial wasn't held in search of justice, in search of

the truth. It appeared that those words had been banned. They weren't found in any of the opening statements, not one of them, except in the statement presented by Sergei Arenski.

It was a bitter cold and windy day, when the actual trial began. Icy winds swept over the snow-covered streets of Moscow's central district. The traffic was light, perhaps because of the cold. It was so light that it was almost nonexistent. The natives, obviously, had grown wise through experience and had kept their cars home on this blustery day. The chill cut right through the heavy black coat I was wearing. Drifting snow blew into our faces. The cold hurt my ears, and my head. No wonder that no one else was walking that morning. Snowdrifts had formed on the sidewalks. We had to wade through several them on the way from our hotel to the convention center. The smaller drifts we could walk around.

The hotel clerk had told us that it was only a short walk from the hotel to the old granite structure where the trial was staged. Sergei could have requisitioned a car or a bus. Many officials came in busses. He chose not to. He didn't want to be stuck waiting for it, and be late as someone might have arranged.

The guards surrounding the trial compound did greatly appreciate our venturesome spirit. They treated us with more respect than they did the dignitaries who came in long black limousines. I guess we stood on their ground, the ground of the common people.

Between the entrance and the road was a row of flags set up, blowing wildly in the wind. The proverbial red carpet had also been laid out, which was already partly covered over with snow. The stairs, too, leading up to the front doors were visible only in a few places. We had to clear our own path through the loose stuff and then venture up the icy steps at the center of the stairway that should have been deiced. I realized that this pattern of neglect of the human dimension might dominate the whole of the trial.

My face was numb when we finally reached the front door. The facade of the building appeared as cold as the weather was. But it was different inside. The building was comfortably heated. The reception was courteous. Still, since admission was by invitation only, our papers had to be checked at the gate, and re-checked further inside, and then once more at the door to the hall where several armed guards were stationed. Inside the hall, other well-dressed and armed officers examined our papers one last time, who then directed us to our seats.

The atmosphere in the hall, in contrast to all this security overkill, was warm and inviting. The trial stage wasn't set up like a traditional court room in which the judge resides elevated above everyone else, and the decor is overbearing in a way that gives one a glum feeling. The hall in which this trial was held was actually a dance hall. The walls were gaily decorated, in bright soft colors. There were several huge windows at the back of it. The entire setup projected a comfortable atmosphere, well lit for a worldwide TV audience. The warm atmosphere, however, wasn't reflected in the trial itself, as we soon found out.

Boris Mikheyev sat with a group of lawyers to the right of the speakers' podium that was set up in front of a huge flag. Boris' head was bowed. He didn't converse with the layers; neither was his wife with him.

"His wife is in hospital," I overheard a woman in front of us telling her companion in a broad Russian dialect, loudly spoken; "...I read it just this morning, it's been in all the papers,

she's recovering from a suicide attempt!"

Jennie closed her eyes at this point, as if to blot out the vision this statement brought to mind.

The judges of the tribunal had their podium arranged to the left of the flag. It was put onto a slightly raised platform that also contained the witness stand. The wall behind them was bare, except for a large sculptured replica of the emblem of the old Soviet Union that someone had donated as a historical treasure.

The seating had been arranged in the same manner. The tribunal and the witness stand were symbolically separated. The historic emblem that seemed out of place in this context dominated the resulting gap.

To the left of the raised platform stood a second huge flag, a relic of more recent times, the star spangled banner of the United States of America. The two flags overshadowed everything, which, too, might have been symbolic, considering how the trial was set up.

The proceeding began exactly on time. The organization was as clean as the room was sparkling. Attention was given to the finest detail. Boris had been transferred to a prisoner's box. He sat in a posh chair behind a small table on which there was a jug of ice water and a glass of cut crystal, identical to those the judges and the lawyers had been provided with.

The trial began with a speech by one of the judges, outlining the case of the people against Boris. Great care was exercised to convey the impression that justice was the goal, not revenge, although the penalty, if the accused were to be found guilty, was pre-announced to be death by firing squad.

After the judge's speech, the stage was set for the lengthy ordeal to begin. The first part of the show, and this was scheduled to go on for days, was devoted to the prosecution of the case. There were three state attorneys present, representing the people of Russia, the people of the United States, and the people of humanity as a whole represented by an attorney of the UN. Their manners were impeccably polite, as much as this was possible with a mind focused on guilt and punishment. They treated the prisoner with respect and used a language that was carefully staged to give the impression that the proceedings were fair, while the underlying reality was one of mental rape. Throughout the prosecution phase, Boris was called time and again to the witness stand to answer incriminating questions, the answers to which, from pretrial proceedings, had already been printed in newspapers all over the world. This continuing intimidation, obviously didn't serve the cause of justice, but was required for theatrical purposes when the script called for a whipping boy in order to prepare public consciousness for the long anticipated death penalty as a fair and just rendering of the case.

I would have been outraged at the procedure had I not remembered the conclusions we had reached when we first discussed the issue at the ranch. We concluded that the trial would have to facilitate some sort of 'rape' on the dignity of the human being. We had realized that unless the total innocence of Boris, reflecting the essence of human nature, was being accepted at the trial, the consequent acceptance of guilt inevitably drives that scene into the mire of revenge. This was happening exactly as we had recognized that it would, starting right at the first day.

The proceeding was staged in a manner that gave one the feeling of being involved in a

science fiction plot, conducted by alien beings. What was said wasn't real, in terms of truth, and in terms of honesty. There were actors on a stage performing a script. The precision with which this managed drama unfolded was so totally predictable that it became almost boring. We saw acted out in real life what we had discussed weeks before as a theoretical possibility.

Each prosecutor repeated the pattern in his own way, while the defending attorneys carried the theme forward to the next logical step, instead of countering it, and to the next step thereafter. There was no real defense offered at all. The breakout from this quagmire into something resembling reality, that we had hoped might happen at some point, didn't happen. Everything followed the script, and the script hadn't been designed to cater to the needs of justice, but to soothe the emotional needs of the affected countries, and of course to hide the truth. The judges and lawyers seemed like hired actors who had learned to play their prescribed role with unyielding finesse.

After several more days of this process it became Sergei's turn to present arguments in support of the defense. His time came after lunch. I almost despaired when I thought about the momentous task he had to undertake. His task was to untangle all the expertly woven webs that had become anchored in the sentiments of the whole world and had been reinforced day after day of legal presentations of argument. All these proceedings had cemented into place an image of guilt. When Sergei walked towards the platform, my impression was that he couldn't possibly pull it off. Who can turn such a thing around, and so late in the proceedings. For one, his appearance was hopelessly out of line when compared to the decorated dignitaries who had been at the center of the show-trial until then. Sergei wore merely a business suit. He flashed no medals, no stripes, and no ribbons. Also, he had chosen the unpleasant task of denying the world the revenge it saw already within its grasp. Of course, nobody knew this when he began to present his angle on the defense.

"We are here to seek out the truth," he said to the judges. "We do this by considering the evidence we have available. On this basis judgment must be rendered. We have accusations, slanders, insinuations, but what facts do we have? We know that a missile was launched from Freedom Base One, but contrary to the assertion of his accusers, Boris Mikheyev did not launch this missile. The launch occurred as the result of an alertness exercise which had been ordered by a high level authority within the country's defense hierarchy. Boris is guilty of interfering with the exercise in such a manner that a launch would occur. This is all he is guilty of, which I am going to prove."

Sergei produced the architectural drawings for the new sports center that Boris had been requested to help build. Sergei pointed out to the court that the location for the center had been selected in such a manner that it would be directly above the power cable that supplies the launch control center. "Boris Mikheyev didn't select this location," said Sergei. "It was selected for him. Nor was Boris eager to volunteer to work on the project, he was practically ordered to volunteer. The puzzling question is, why, and by whom?"

In order to answer this question he brought Boris' friend to the stand who had told him a about Zalygin, the man who had told him about the bureau's desire to launch a mock attack that wouldn't harm anyone, that would bring peace to the world. Sergei then called Zalygin,

himself, and his superior officer, Cherniakov. Both denied what Alexei had told Boris about them. Sergei just smiled.

At this point however, Sergei's world was beginning to fall apart. As soon as Zalygin finished testifying he accused Sergei to be the real traitor in the plot to destroy America.

"Is it not true that you, yourself, are the original architect of the missile security system?" he asked Sergei from the witness stand. "You accuse us of giving out information that was under your control. Is it not true that this tragedy would not have happened had your system not been implemented? We tried to persuade you not to do it, but you rammed it through. We told you that it would be safer to have the system volatile, as it would deter saboteurs. But you wouldn't listen. Didn't you in fact want this thing to happen? You told everybody that we had a safety system in place that would make our missiles harmless until they would be targeted in flight, and then as soon as everybody knew that, you turned the system off. It was probably you who told Boris Mikheyev what to do, and when to do it. Only you would have known when the safety system was turned off, because you turned it off yourself. That's the only scenario that makes sense. I just can't understand who you might have been working for."

Sergei just smiled and shook his head. "You are miles off the mark my friend," he replied. "First of all, I didn't want to have the safety feature made optional. I fought against this insanity. I have witnesses to this effect. Nor did I have any control over. They made it quite clear that only the strategic committee had the capability to turn the safety feature on and off. And they also made it clear that I wouldn't be informed of any change in the status. Sure, I had access to the status files, but that meant nothing since the status could be changed at a moments notice. They were also adamant about secrecy. They told me that nobody but you people in Moscow would be told that the safety feature could be turned off. They even came to my office in person to tell me about all of that. They warned me that I shouldn't lobby to have the turn-off option removed."

"And who are they?" said Zalygin with a sly grin on his face, emphasizing "they."

The Russian judge motioned Sergei to answer.

"The chief of the engineering team headed the delegation that requested the meeting. I think his name is Iziaslav Ivanovich. They were a delegation from the Novosibirsk team. They came two weeks before the catastrophe happened," said Sergei. "There were two women on the team, one called Galina and one Olga Grigorevna, and a man by the name Vasilevich. I think Tverdislav was his first name."

Zalygin immediately conferred with the Russian judge, who called an armed officer. The officer received a piece of paper and left. Moments later Zalygin left also.

"Your honor, I have not concluded my work with this witness," Sergei protested.

"For now you have. I declare a fifteen minute recess," said the Judge.

At the end of the recess the judge stood up and declared that the court had been lied to by Sergei. Sergei was immediately taken into custody.

The judge declared in a solemn voice with a document in hand that the so-called meeting that Sergei had cited for his defense had never happened, that it was a complete fabrication. He said it couldn't possibly have happened because the so-called team leader Iziaslav Ivanovich had died in a car crash two years prior to the supposed meeting, and Olga Grigorevna had died one year after that. He said that Tverdislav Vasilevich is reported to have

died in the same car crash and that no records existed in Novosibirsk of a woman by the name of Galina, nor a record that a delegation had been sent to Sergei's office."

"Lies!" shouted Peter. "The delegation did come, and the meeting did happen. I personally picked the delegation up at the railway station and drove it back. That's an hour's drive each way. That all happened." He identified himself as Sergei's secretary.

The judge just laughed and had Peter arrested too. "How much did he pay you to lie?" he said. "Why would an entire delegation travel by train if Mr. Arenski's estate has an airstrip near his house? But no, all these people took the train." The judge laughed again. "I think we know who is the prime conspirator in this case, by his lies," said the judge and ordered that Sergei be placed with the defendant's box together with Boris. "Whatever penalty we derive at should apply to both men," he concluded his remark.

I was about to protest about this miscarriage of justice when someone else intervened and beat me to it.

A frail man came forward from the back row. "It is a curious thing that is happening here," he said when he came to the middle of the room while Sergei was still being placed in the defendant's box. You say that Tverdislav Vasilevich died in a car crash two years ago, but I assure you, he is very much alive. I am he. I am Tverdislav Vasilevich. I can also assure you that Iziaslav Ivanovich, our team leader, was very much alive that day when we met Sergei Arenski at his base of operations, which by the way, is not an 'estate' as you say, but is the property of the people of Russia. The meeting that you say you have no record of, did indeed happen exactly as Mr. Arenski had told, and I can prove it." He reached into his pocket. "Here is the ticket stub of the railway ticket," he said. "The reason why we took the train is simple. It costs less." He presented the ticket stub for evidence.

"How many lies are we going to listen to?" said the judge. "A railway ticket does not prove that what has been said by Mr. Arenski is true. Anyone can buy a railway ticket."

The man picked the ticket up and smiled and said that it is conclusive evidence. "It has the date on it and the destination," he said, "and it has a serial number." At this point he reached into his briefcase and brought a photograph out. "This photograph shows Iziaslav Ivanovich, and Galina Nikolaevich, who you say doesn't exist, and shows together with Mr. Sergei Arenski in discussion in the garden at the back of his house. If you look closely at the photograph, you will see this ticket stub in front of the empty place on the table with the serial number clearly readable since the number is printed quite large."

Moments later he brought another photograph out that showed Iziaslav Ivanovich standing beside a flip chart with Sergei sitting in front to the right. "If you look closely," he said, "you will see our names listed on the flip chart, and you will see the objective for the meeting listed. You will see that the objective was to inform Mr. Arenski that the safety feature has been made optional." Having said this, he produced a miniature tape cartridge, which he said contains a complete audio recording of the entire meeting. He placed the items on the table. "The reason why I am still alive and not just another one of your statistics is probably due to the fact that I had been doing some photography up north and no one could find me to do me in. Someone, and I don't know who, sent me a ticket for this trial. That is why I am here. It is a good habit to keep records of major events, isn't it? In times like this it pays to keep records, as no one can be trusted anymore."

He stepped back and faced the other two judges from then on. "It is curious," he said, "that the state wishes to deny its own doing. The meeting did take place, and what was said confirms that Mr. Arenski told no lies. You can listen to the tape yourself. The curious thing is that the state lied. They lied about everything, even me being still alive. I just can't figure out why they would do that."

"I can tell you that," said Sergei.

"You are out of order," said the Russian judge.

"I want to her him," said the American judge.

"I had expected these lies," said Sergei. "I was prepared to shatter them with telephone records, but you just wouldn't allow me to present these records since they are obviously too incriminating."

Sergei handcuffs were removed. He was released and given his briefcase back from which he submitted the telephone records to be marked as evidence. The telephone records linked both Zalygin and Cherniakov with a British architectural firm that had set up a branch office in Moscow. The drawings for the sports complex were produced by one of the firm's subcontractors, under its guidance. On the British side, the firm had links to very high places. The trail went so high that the judicial authorities disallowed the Telephone Company to reveal the names of those involved.

Other phone records also linked Zalygin and Cherniakov to a British/American defense electronics company that had established several branches in Russia. Ironically, this firm had been put in charge of expanding Russia's military communications system, its missile tracking network, and its telemetry stations. The construction of the sports complex, itself, was as gift to the state by one of the related companies.

Sergei entered financial records into evidence. The records showed that these companies had donated \$440,000 US for the sports complex, as compared to a mere \$3,000 having been collected from all the other donor sources.

Sergei also showed that he had requested a subpoena for the managers of these firms to testify. By some strange coincidence every one of these people could no longer be located. Employees, however, testified under oath to local authorities to the fact that the firm had been contracted by Zalygin to develop new missile targeting patterns and oversee the installation of these patterns into the country's defense system.

Sergei further brought financial statements before the court, which show that the parent company of these firms is 99% owned by an investment firm that works exclusively for the very highest layers of the British aristocratic society. These statements showed that large sums were given to the electronics firms at precisely the time that Zalygin and key officials of the bureau were treated to a free holiday in Las Vegas where most of them became exceedingly rich on the gambling tables.

Finally, Sergei called Zalygin back to the stand. "Would you please show us your right hand," he said. Then he asked that the court record be read of Alexei's description of Zalygin, given at the pretrial hearing. It described a cigarette burn on his hand that was still partly visible at the location where it was said to be.

At this point in Sergei's presentation the Russian judge had Zalygin arrested. It also looked like as if he tried to have Sergei arrested too, once again, but that the other two judges seemed



to have blocked that. They argued among each other pointing repeatedly at Sergei.

"You were in charge of security," the Russian judge shouted at Sergei at last. "It was your responsibility to know what your departments were up to. You are as guilty as they are." The Russian judge raised his fist in a solemn gesture. He asked Sergei to step unto the witness stand and requested the clerk that he be sworn in.

Sergei defended himself calmly. "Where have you been during the last five years?" he asked the judge. "The finance ministry has contracted out half of the country's defense responsibilities to private firms. These firms were thereby made answerable to the finance ministry, not to me. Zalygin and Cherniakov are private contractors who work for the state for a tenth of the cost that our own defense departments had previously incurred."

Sergei then addressed the international judges and told them that he had requested a subpoena to bring the director of the finance ministry to court, but he was told that this man too, could not be located anymore.

"That's right said a man from the audience." He identified himself as a member of the Duma. "I had the finance director arrested. Most of the man's income came from the IMF. The government didn't run the country anymore. Foreign agencies did. They stole everything we had. They looted our industries and sold them for scrap. They privatized the government functions. Foreign agencies even selected our ministers for us. The whole process was underwritten by our corrupt President." The man sat down again. "Russia was being destroyed by foreign agencies, and still is," he added while sitting down.

Sergei continued to defend himself against the charge of negligence. He thanked the man for his support. Moment's later Sergei presented a book from his briefcase. He registered the book as evidence, and then read from it. He read passages written by the highest official of the most powerful empire on the planet. The official lamented in the foreword of the book that there were too many human beings in the world, and that it was his highest wish to become reincarnated as a particularly deadly virus in order to rectify the overpopulation problem.

Sergei put the book down and commented that the author was the acting head of a very powerful financial society that literally owns the IMF, the WTO, and to a large degree even the UN Organization. He called it the British American Oligarchic Society, the BAOS. He explained that BAOS is really a private world government apparatus. "It creates the wars that humanity must suffer," said Sergei.

Sergei then presented another book into evidence. The book is called, "The Great Game." He explained that this book describes to some degree the old British Empire's commitment, beginning 200 years ago, to break apart Russia by creating constant wars at its southern flank, from the Balkans right to the border with China. "This commitment is still alive," said Sergei. "The BAOS carries out this commitment to break up other empires, meaning thereby the great nation states of the world, such as China, India, Indonesia, the Congo, Brazil, the USA, Canada, and many more. Here, you find the root of the tragedy that Boris Mikheyev is accused to have caused for humanity," he said.

The Russian judge became angry with Sergei after this, "why have you not come forward with this information before, before this tragedy occurred? It could have been prevented."

"It could have been prevented by you," said Sergei, "not by me. I was ignorant about all of these things until my son came back from Hawaii after the holocaust had happened. My son

told me earlier that several members of the last chess tournament in London had boasted that their Empire, the old British Empire that still existed in the background as a world-controlling force, would use Russia as a means to destroy America."

Sergei stepped closer to the judge and looked him in the eye. "They have pulled this off exactly as they said they would, and without anyone being aware that they did so," he said. "My son had regarded their boasting as a sick joke until the day it happened. However, my son had also put that sick joke on record with his report, together with another 'sick joke.' When he reminded his fellow chess players back in London, that America is one of the Empire's best allies, they had laughed at him. They had ridiculed my son. They had called him a naïve dreamer, saying that the Empire has no permanent allies, only a permanent objective. They said he would soon see the light."

Sergei produced a copy of the report from his briefcase. "The original report is in your archives," he said to the judge.

He turned to the UN appointed judge. "I was outraged that my son had put such sick jokes on record when he told me on the phone what he had done. I was ashamed of my son. That was my reaction at first, one of deep shame. But my son also came upon other people who were convinced that what he reported was not diatribe of sick jokes but a sad fact of the modern world. That's when I started to look for evidence."

Sergei paused and raised his hand as if for a warning. "The fact is," he said solemnly, "the empire nearly succeeded. Russia doesn't exist as a nation anymore. They, whoever they are, own us. They owned us then. We are still owned by them today, lock, stock, and barrel, with our own government included. They used our finest patriots in their calculated madness to destroy America. Our country's leaders have never been perfect in the past. Many had made huge mistakes. Nevertheless, in most cases our leaders were all patriots at heart. Under the rule of democracy, this seems to have ended. We live in a democracy where the power of money rules. Democracy has become a tool for the transfer of power into the hands of the empire of money, without any violence and without any recourse. Our country has become invaded and defeated without a single shot being fired. What Napoleon and Hitler failed to do, what the Russian people had rebuffed with enormous sacrifices throughout Russia's history, has been achieved with the tool of democracy."

Sergei paused and looked around the courtroom. "The principle of democracy itself, has been killed in our hearts," he said. "What we allowed it to become has robbed us of our Soul, just as it has robbed America of its once beautiful Soul. It has also killed humanity's patriots, the last representatives of the principle of universal love. We have all been dragged together into this courtroom here to rubber-stamp this very same process, and to execute what might be the last bastion of patriotism that we still have left, the bastion of the humanity of the human being. If we execute this man, we execute ourselves as we have largely already done."

Sergei paused again to let this idea 'ferment' in people's thoughts. "We have already executed the principle of justice by marrying justice with punishment and revenge," he continued. "This court should represent a union of justice and affection. Nothing less will do. Instead, this institution has come to represent a marriage of rage and guilt and punishment under the noble flag of justice that thereby has been tragically soiled. Under this soiled flag our humanity is dying, and has been dying for a long time, so that the tragedy that we now face is

nothing more than one of the end-results of this process of the murdering of our humanity."

Sergei paused again and turned to the audience. "We should stop this process right here, today," he said. "The tragedy that has resulted from this process cannot be undone, but the conditions can be undone that would inevitably lead us into other such tragedies. Let us therefore, for once, be just with ourselves and lay a cornerstone right here in this courtroom for a New World in which humanity can live with itself in prosperity and peace."

Sergei turned without pausing now, and raised his arm and pointed at the Russian judge with his finger. "If you would do today," he said, "what you accuse me not to have done prior to this holocaust, you would render humanity an immensely great service. That service would be immeasurable, because the empire that has unleashed one of our missiles against America still exists. It remains in power to the present day, and continues to be committed to destroy China, India, Russia, Indonesia, Brazil, and other countries. That is their commitment according to their own words as they spoke them to my son and have printed for all to read, in their book, the Great Game. Naturally, nuclear weapons will continue to play a role in the world for such purposes. No other means exist to carry out these types of objectives. This danger, that we had a foretaste of, will remain with us for as long as that empire rules humanity."

More people from the audience got into the act after this.

"Try to save Indonesia," someone shouted.

"Look at the millions of people who were murdered by the mining companies that captured Zaire for its resources," shouted another.

"Look at the millions who died in Russia of starvation," someone else shouted.

"Look at the millions who died in the Ukraine," added a woman with a quiet little voice.

"Where were you, our leaders?" shouted a young woman from the back. "Were you all drunk or asleep, or on vacation at your dachas?"

As the audience exploded more and more into anger, the Russian judge stood up, ripped his wig off, and then shed his robe as he left the podium. I could notice tears in his eyes, which he tried to hide with his hands.

The remaining judges stood up and raised their hands to calm the crowd. They briefly conferred with each other. The American judge sat down. The UN appointed judge, a newly appointed judge from China, a small woman; remained standing until the atmosphere was calm again.

She addressed the audience in a compassionate voice. She said that the case against Boris Mikheyev has been dismissed by the consent of all judges. Boris Mikheyev is a free man. She even said that this man should be honored as a patriot for his country. "Boris Mikheyev has acted against his own conscience to be obedient to a demand made by his leaders, by leaders who convinced him that his courageous act would harm no one and save the world from a terrible fate. The blame falls on us all," she added, "who allowed this terribly perverted leadership to develop that cannot be trusted by anyone anymore, anywhere in the world."

The judge then stepped away from her podium and closer to the audience. "This day must never be forgotten," she said, speaking as a private person now. "What has unfolded here today must be remembered for all times and be enshrined in stories, poetry, and songs. This

day must be made into a beginning for a new era. Go home and think about what has happened here, and tell you neighbors and friends about it. Tell them how one man in this room had dared to stand up for truth against great perils to himself. He had been arrested and been slated to be executed on the basis of lies. Apparently he expected this danger. Still, he dared to start a revolution that may yet save our life from a fate too terrible to image. And when you tell his story, say too, that this revolution for acknowledging the truth, that he has started, must continue in the same spirit until the war is totally won on the side of humanity, and for humanity."

She then stepped back and shook Sergei's hand, and bowed slightly.

With her speech the trial ended.

The article that Pravda issued the next morning, praised Sergei. It stated that his defense had done more in those three hours to normalize relationships around the world, than had been accomplished in decades.

I showed the article to Sergei. He read it, but dismissed it as an exaggeration.

"Did you send that ticket for the trial to Tverdislav Vasilevich?" I asked. "Did you know he would back you up?"

Sergei shook his head. "I had this crazy idea that universal love really is a universal principle. Consequently I trusted that there are plenty enough people left in the world who are in love with their humanity to whom the truth means something; who would fight for it and not let me stand alone. I was right, wasn't I? That is how we will win the next challenge too."

"The next challenge?" I asked.

"That wasn't the end," he said and smiled. "We are in great danger now." He spoke to us quietly, in an almost hushed voice. "The real war has just begun. At the end of the trial I thought I had won like Prometheus did, but the Chinese judge convinced me that the empire hadn't even been weakened. Still, Prometheus didn't surrender. He represented universal love, the greatest power in the universe. Perhaps, whoever wrote this play did understand something about universal love, and that it ultimately cannot be defeated."

On the way to breakfast, Sergei predicted that he would likely be assassinated within a year, unless the world, by some miracle takes up the fight to defeat the oligarchic empire that is strangling it and killing its patriots. "But that attempt too, will fail," he said.

He added moments later while we were waiting for breakfast to be served, that the real tragic figure in this game that is being played, is humanity. "It is unhealthy for humanity that so very few people stand up for the truth. It is tragic, really, that I stood almost alone. Do you realize what it would have meant if I had lost? Nothing would have changed if I had lost. Do you realize that in this entire huge judicial circus only Tverdislav Vasilevich and I had represented the truth? Yes, only us two, out of all those many dignitaries were defending humanity. Humanity has no right to be so stupid to let this happen," he said angrily. "Too much depends on far too few."

During the week that followed the trial a lot of things began to change at the ranch. The very next day after we got back from the trial that should have lasted for weeks, but didn't,

Sergei had to go to Odessa where his presence was urgently required to re-organize the Odessa Staging Center. The way he described it, it was a huge center and the only one in the Ukraine.

As we landed in Odessa I asked him if I could be of any assistance to him, there. I had a feeling he needed help. He should have had a few days off after the trial that had taken so much out of him. He looked exhausted.

He said I couldn't help him with what he had to do. He told me that I should take the plane back and be ready to assist him from his operations base back at the ranch, which was his computer room and communications center. He had already familiarized me with the equipment.

It was a Friday, when he wanted to return. I didn't feel happy, though, leaving him there. On the way back, in the quiet of flying alone, I thought about how much he had done for me and for our families, and how little I had been able to do in return. Still, I did cause him some happy moments. I remembered his smile when I was able to oblige him on our first business flight as now a fully licensed pilot, with the flight instructor merely tagging along as a passenger to fulfill the formalities in terms of the required accompanied hours of airtime. To demonstrate his confidence, the instructor had made himself comfortable in the rearmost seats of the plane, with a book. He wanted to have a few days off in Moscow, in the big city, as he put it.

For an entire week prior to the trials I had spend ten hours a day at the air-base, receiving the mandatory flight procedures instructions, and real time familiarization with Russia's air traffic control rules, not that I didn't know them, and with communication conventions, airport procedures, navigation systems. Some equipment on our jet was new to me. The control system was less automated than on the big planes. Nevertheless, there was a modern autopilot installed that had many of the features that had made flying the big planes more relaxing on the long hauls. When the day of reckoning came, Sergei took the initiative and told the instructors that the certification exercise would have to be combined with our first business flight. He needed to travel. The certification had to be done along the way.

Sergei was all smiles when the instructor handed me the long overdue official government certificate in Moscow. The certificate made it now legal for me to fly Sergei's jet anywhere he wanted to go. It also rendered all of our previous flights illegal. In real term the certificate was but another piece of decoration for our office wall. I couldn't help but grin at him when we received it. I showed him the seal. He just nodded and grinned back. Finally he extended his hand to congratulate me. I asked him in return if congratulations were in order on his side, too, regarding the project.

He just grinned and stuck his thumb up. We shook hands. We embraced each other. Yes, we had come a long way since then.

"My friend, I must be mean to you," he said to me quietly after we got under way on his return trip from Odessa one Friday night.

"Oh! Why?" I asked. We had just reached cruising altitude and I was about to lay the course in, into the autopilot.

"I have to send Jennie and Igor to Odessa. I have no choice. I need a management team there that I can trust. The Ukraine project is too important to me. Nothing must upset the cooperative atmosphere of the new union between our two countries. I must have the best people there that I know. I'm aware that you'll miss having them around, especially Jennie. I know how much she means to you, but this mission is of critical importance. Sending them there can't be helped."

"No! Don't apologize," I said to him. "They will love being in Odessa."

"And you?"

"Of course I'll miss Jennie, but we don't depend on one another. What we mean to each other is carried within. What we have, isn't a relationship that depends on the juxtaposition of external factors. Ours is a relationship that isn't a relationship. It's hard to explain. It has its own magic."

"Explain it anyway, Paul, try!"

"Well, it is something that defies common sense, something that you can't judge with standard comparisons. You may look at it as an association in which no one has any hooks in another that must be constantly cemented into place so that they won't break loose. And since there are no hooks, it doesn't really matter whether we are near or far from each other, or whether we have intimate sex three times a day or never again."

"Oh, it's that shallow! I thought what you meant to each other went deeper than that?"

"Deeper? Love can't go any deeper! Let me tell you about my feelings for her, they have been so intense on occasions that I had to get physically out of the house to take it all in. I needed space and the infinitude of the open sky to measure it. The house was too small. It know it sounds crazy to talk about your wonderful house, in that manner, as being too small."

Sergei said nothing in reply.

"You think I am crazy, don't you?" I asked after some moments of silence.

"NO!"

"Or at least irrational."

"No! What is rational anyway? Is humanity rational, how it behaves; has it ever been rational? A person's behavior can be natural, this I can accept; or scientifically motivated, that, too, I can accept; but rational? Has it been rational to stockpile nuclear arms to the point that we can extinguish all life on this planet? I've grown suspicious about what is deemed rational; the opposite of it is probably the most rational thing to do. So don't tell me about rationality? The word has no meaning left for me, except....."

"Except what?"

"Well, what I see happening between you seems rational!"

I nodded. Then I asked him what day of the month it was.

"The twenty forth, but why do you want to know?"

Without answering, I took my pocket calendar out of my jacket and marked the day.

"Now what is this supposed to mean?" he asked.

I leveled the plane, checked the course, then activated the automatic flight control system and leaned back into my seat. "I marked the calendar, because this is a very significant day. I marked the day, because I hadn't realized before this how deeply sensitive you are. You made me take notice of something I had taken for granted. I had taken Jennie's love for granted

without recognizing what it really stood for."

Sergei blushed. "I have eyes, you know!" he said quietly.

"Yes, and so do most people, but can they see? No, they can't!"

Sergei looked puzzled.

"Most people live very isolated lives," I said, "they don't see beyond themselves, beyond the boundaries of their mentalities, their sex, their color, all of which isolate them from the world. They don't see humanity as one, they hide from it under the blanket of rationality. In reality nobody lives alone. We live with each other. We share the same humanity. We don't need ties, therefore, that hold together what is already inseparable. One only needs to look beyond the so-called rational, to what there is, and not to what one wants to see."

Sergei looked puzzled.

I began to laugh. He must have felt I was rude. I told him about the frogs I had seen in Lahina that sat under a lamp and thought they were perfectly hidden. "People are like that," I said to him, "they think they are perfectly pampering themselves by looking strictly after their own immediate wants and needs. Little do they realize how cruelly they are cheating themselves. They can't see that they live in a small world. By not responding to the universal needs, they let the human scene slip away. In their isolation they see only themselves, consequently they will invest nothing in the world around them. The world around them will consequently fall apart and drag them down, too, into the poverty they themselves have helped create. Jennie and I have been doing the opposite. We have been building each other up, never withholding what another needs. I can only say, it has been a tremendously rich experience. Of course, that's what you've been saying all along, haven't you, that investment is never an expense that ought to be avoided, but is a thing of life that flows back to one, a hundred-fold."

"That's what I've been saying, indeed. It's true in every respect. You are right, it doesn't apply just to money."

"But is this rational?" I grinned.

"No!"

"That is why I have marked the calendar. I've come across another person in the world who knows the secret."

Sergei nodded, and smiled again. "The world locks people like you up into nut houses, and throws they key away!" he said, and began to grin, too.

I told him about a painting I had seen in New York. It showed a man and a woman. The woman is standing erect. She had fastened onto her headband a sparkler, shooting brilliant sparks into every direction. She is the brightest star of creation. However, her head is bowed and her face is buried in her hands. The man is not standing, but kneeling at her feet, his face turned up to her with the most agonizing yearning. He holds her at her hips, begging her, shaking her. But his yearnings remain unanswered and her needs unrecognized and unmet. "This is humanity," I said to Sergei. "Humanity is already locked up, put in irons, locked into the innermost cells of a prison. People aren't sensitive enough to recognize the grotesque isolation in which they live, isolated from each other's needs. There is no investment being made, and no wealth being harvested. It's a dead scene."

Sergei agreed.

"We'll fly Igor and Jennie to Odessa on Sunday morning," said Sergei after a long silence. "We must move quickly on this. Odessa is running out of space. We've got to get things moving."

"You mean, flying!" I joked.

He just grinned.

"Sunday is fine," I answered.

"We're also taking Yoshi and his wife with us. They have seats on the biweekly Moscow to Tokyo run that stops for refueling in Odessa. From there it goes on to Kuwait, Calcutta, Beijing, and finally Tokyo. Their flight leaves Odessa on Sunday at three PM. We should plan to have lunch there before they leave."

"At the same restaurant that we went to before?" I asked.

Sergei shook his head. "I found a better place," he said.

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Jennie and Igor didn't mind to be put in charge of a five-thousand-room complex, part of which was still under construction. They loved the challenge that came with the job. The facility had originally been designed to become the nation's largest resort hotel complex. Vacation space had been badly needed. The idea had already begun to unfold that people must be able to refresh their minds by getting away from the daily routine. They would become more productive in this manner. Now the facility served a still greater purpose. For a vast flood of Americans who were fortunate enough to escape the fallout in the East, this staging center was their gateway to a New World. The Staging Center wasn't the Statute of Liberty, but it promised life. Sergei said the facility was filled to the brim now, and there were more ships on the way.

For most people, their arrival in Odessa was destined to become the beginning of a good life if Sergei's dreams were to come true. Most people would likely end up in the South European Region or remain in the Ukraine which was once the food belt of Russia before financial looting and disinvestment had turned the Ukraine into a zone of hunger and biological disintegration. During the Soviet years the Ukraine had also been a center for high technology industries, and had once the most highly educated work force in the world. This is what Sergei was determined to revive. He had convinced the Ukraine leaders that this could be done in the same manner in which it had been done before, with the refugees taking an active part in the process. He told them they should count the refugees as an asset, not a liability. Sergei said he also needed more people in the other republics, in places like Rostov, Volgograd, and in the large industrial centers farther north.

It wasn't until Sergei's project got us right into the middle of things, that I realize the vast scope of his operation. The Staging Center had been put into operation even before the construction work was fully completed. Sergei gave the responsibility for finishing the facility to the refugees themselves. The completion of the construction had to be done in parallel with operating the center. I could certainly appreciate why Jennie's assistance would be invaluable, together with Igor's. As a team they could interface between the Russian and Ukrainian operational personnel and the American refugees who were immediately needed as



construction workers, counselors, teachers, clergymen, doctors, musicians, and other service providers. Their's was probably the most sensitive post within Sergei's entire organization, because of the vast productive potential of this region. I could see Igor's role mostly as someone supporting her. For this he had an ideal background as a Navy officer, a chess player, and being the son of the boss as well.

On the last day before going to Odessa, Igor invited me for a walk. A new blanket of snow had fallen overnight. He wanted to talk about Jennie. "Will you miss us? Certainly you'll miss Jennie."

"There we go again," I said to myself and sighed. Igor was quite different in this regard, than Sergei. He was always blunt and direct. I loved this in him. It made it easy to be open.

"Don't worry!" I said, "I'll be fine."

He didn't answer right away. "You should come with us to Odessa," he said a while later. "It bothers me now that your flying job which I had pushed so hard to get for you, is now moving us apart. We would have made a great team, like we did in the past."

"Hey, we still are a team," I said.

"But you won't have Jennie!"

I put a hand on his shoulder. "We haven't needed each other ever since we came to the ranch. And if we ever do, so what? Odessa is only three hours away, is it not? Besides, Sergei will bring me to Odessa more often than either of you might want to see me. I could have sex with Jennie three times a week if this would be necessary."

Igor smiled; "Well, if that's what you need, the door will be open." Then he shook his head; "Could you have imagined back in Hawaii, that we would be talking like this some day?"

I shook my head; "It's been a long haul for all three of us, quite a struggle at times, but it was worth it, wasn't it? It was an investment in life?"

He grinned, then became serious. "Why?"

"Your father called it that, Igor. Freedom is a tall prize, never a gift. Your father said this. It must be earned."

"Yes, I suppose my father may be right."

"Actually, I said it first," I said to him and punched him gently.

Igor stopped at this point; "We are rich beyond measure," he said; "all three of us are. I love Melanie, too, you know." He reached out his hand for a handshake. Our hands met. "This investment has brought us treasures that no marriage can ever buy," he added and embraced me.

We went quite a long distance into the forest that day, the day before their leaving, taking no note of the passing time. Before we realized it, it had become late. We had to run back, and run hard so as not to miss supper. We were racing each other and reached the house just in time, though in total exhaustion. We embraced each other before we entered, a hug between friends, if indeed, the term friendship was still valid.

It was a festive occasion when I landed our jet on the meadow the next morning, white against white. Everything I felt, or saw, or experienced, added up to a great celebration. The snow sparkled on the meadow in the early morning sunshine. The air was crisp, cold, clear. I

saw Peter's bus at the end of the runway. Someone was standing beside it, watching my approach. No doubt it was Sergei. What he witnessed, was a perfect three-point touch down. I slowed, taxied to the bus, cut the engines, and then turned them off once I was in position. Our passengers emerged from the bus, one by one, stepping up to the plane. For a moment I felt as if I was operating a real airliner again. I was the proudest of all captains. This was a special flight. It was a good feeling to be at service to those I loved.

The first to enter was Jennie. She wore her coral necklace again. She smiled when she saw that I noticed it. Was it symbolic? I nodded in agreement. This was the end of an era. Another one was about to begin. Would this one lead to a still wider scope of vision? I remembered what I had said to her on the night I had bought the necklace and put it on her in the shuttle to Honolulu, that every new day would be as beautiful and as grand as we would make it be. Perhaps she remembered. She grinned when our eyes met, and kissed me before taking her seat. Igor smiled understandingly and gave me a hug.

Actually, everyone smiled who came aboard. Everyone was delighted with our aircraft every time they came aboard. Even those were delighted who wouldn't come with us to Odessa. Melanie came on board with some of the children, for a visit to see us off. The plane was attractive, comfortable. It looked as good as it was fast. Of course no one except myself, perhaps, could appreciate the technical details which had a beauty of their own, appreciable only to someone who had grown up with airplanes and had a special interest in them.

The plane was designed with comfort, safety, fuel economy, and performance in mind. It was a dream to fly. There was one aspect that I came to appreciate most of all. The plane came with just the right amount of electronic wizardry, not too much, it didn't make a pilot feel obsolete, and not too little. A lot of the wizardry was devoted to reduce fuel consumption. I'm sure, our three hour flight to Odessa required no more fuel than a big jumbo had burned up each morning standing in line at O-Hare airport, waiting to get onto the runway.

In Odessa, a young woman came to meet us. Sergei introduced her as Nina Ostropovitch. As far as I could make out, she acted as coordinating secretary and as the second highest person in command; superseded only by Sergei himself.

"I have a feeling you are a highly efficient person in this operation," I said to her as we introduced each other while the luggage was being unloaded. I also introduced everyone else, especially Igor and Jennie who would be working with her.

Before the day was out, I realized that my assessment of her was an understatement. No detail escaped her attention. Nothing was forgotten or left undone. Her work has done with a smile, without a complaint, without a lot questions being asked. I said to Sergei that she was perfect.

Nina blushed, which made her even more attractive. She was a pretty girl with short hair and a smile that could make ones heart melt. I had to congratulate Sergei on his skill in selecting people.

"No, no. I select nothing," he corrected me. "I merely specify the required skills; I open the door; the people then come and select me!"

Lunch that day had been followed up with a tour of the staging center, arranged exclusively

for my benefit and our Japanese guests'. In parallel to this, Nina and an engineer from Moscow gave a separate tour to Igor and Jennie. The tour was arranged to show them around, to introduce them to the staff, to explain the current status of the building project, to inform them about the major problems and the goals that had to be met. Obviously, that, too, was well planned. The entire complicated piece of business was concluded in time for us to meet again at the airport to see Yoshi and Rumico off.

After this, we had dinner together, all five of us. It was like a farewell supper for Igor and Jennie. We drove them to the docks afterwards, to the Mary Q, where they had chosen to live. No one had claimed our precious Mary Q since the day we had availed ourselves of it. Perhaps the owners were no longer alive. Thus it remained ours. I doubted, though, that it would have been released, anyway.

Nina assured me that the boat was desperately needed, to supplement the city's scarce living space. She added that the boat was in fact luxury accommodation, as things stood in general. She said that although the boat was small, it was roomier and much more beautiful to live in than her own apartment, or any other apartment or place she would have been able to get for them.

Nina had the boat implemented with electric heating and electric appliances. It was even fueled up again, for emergencies. A telephone had been installed, a tiny television, and an old computer terminal that was connected by a phone line to the refugee services network. I'm sure, nobody could have done more for them, to make them feel welcome and able to devote their energy immediately to the task of running the Staging Center.

I don't know why I had assumed that Sergei would want to fly home again once all this was taken care of. I should have known better. I began to realize what was up when Nina took us to her office that was set up in her apartment, instead of driving us to the Airport. I found out that she had made room for us there; luckily I had put a night bag on the plane. As we stopped at her place, I found my bag in the back of her bus, together with Sergei's bag. God knows how it got there.

She explained to me, as she showed me around, that her apartment doubled as an office in the daytime and as a hotel for us at night. Hotel space was so scarce during the refugee crisis that for all practical purposes there was none. "But with you guys staying here," she said in perfect English, and with a grin, "I managed to get the place reclassified as a hotel and attached to the Staging center. I wouldn't have been able to keep such a large place, even though it contains also my office."

"Why would they take her office away?" I asked Sergei.

He smiled. "There are still too many little minds in our bureaucracy who want to over fulfill their tasks by trying to squeeze everything into a given space, instead of creating more space. Still, they're doing a good job. We would be in a terrible mess, if they hadn't. There are not many families in this city who were able to evade their 'patriotic duty' to take in temporary boarders."

I shook my head, and smiled. "Except one person did!"

"You're wrong!" Nina replied. "Sergei! Why don't you tell Paul, why?" Her voice came thinly out of the kitchen. I could smell coffee being brewed.

I looked at Sergei. He grinned from ear to ear. "We are going to be permanent guests, at least for two weeks, or until our business is over."

"What?" I asked, surprised. Actually, I didn't mind it at all. I didn't mind being cramped? And there was an added bonus. Nina was part of the package. Also, living at 'headquarters' had a certain advantage in terms of efficiency.

It seemed ironic that for one of the most visible operations with international scope, so little room was available. But maybe that was its virtue. Three desks, with stacks of papers and books piled high upon them, were shoehorned into the living room. This was our base of operations, the nerve center for an entire area that stretched from Poland to the Ural Mountains, and from Minsk to the border of Turkey and Iran.

Still, our region wasn't the largest in terms of land, but it included more major ethnic groups than any other. I couldn't help wondering how Nina could handle this vast amount of work. Actually, I didn't see any work being performed. Sergei explained that her office no longer responds to anything other than the few details that aren't taken care of by automatic procedures. "Her new job is having a holiday," Sergei joked. Of course, she knew that he was joking. Still, there wasn't a single phone call received that night.

In the mornings, before we left on our daily trips to the hot spots in the territory, an office girl and a well dressed young man came to work in her office, who would remain there until we returned, or be replaced by another person. "These are the real workers," said Nina with a note of pride in her staff, as she introduced them to us.

No, she couldn't fool us with that. It was plain to see who did most of the work. We left before dawn, every day, came back late at night, and never encountered a single instant when the day's activities hadn't been minutely prearranged. Of course, the problems that required Sergei's personal attention weren't many. All routine business was handled by the districts, the rest came to her, and what she couldn't handle was passed on to Sergei, and very few cases of these required an on site visit. Without exception, these cases involved requests for special funding. Requests for funding, over a certain limit, required his presence for a first hand investigation. Funding priority was determined according to a project's ability to support extra people. At instances, when funding was delayed, or denied, Nina job became a diplomatic one. Mostly these cases required her personal visit as well.

If funds were approved, the project plans were appended with descriptions of opportunities for specially trained people. These were passed on to the Staging Center to be matched with available manpower. The filtering was done according to job-title, qualification, preference, educational background and a political impact factor. I was told that some job matches had been made while the people were still in transit on ships, or put up in intermediate camps in England, France, Germany, Norway, Poland, Hungary, or wherever else the air lift service had taken them. The job matching process was interfaced with NATO Operations in Brussels, which also handled transportation of the selected persons to the various staging centers abroad.

While none of this was specifically Sergei's invention, he found a way to make it work best for him. Nina noticed right from the beginning that the districts that accepted the most people, required the least supervision, the least auditing, and got the most money. Sergei merely expanded on this trend, and by doing so turned the whole economic picture around into a

profit making enterprise that began to upgrade the general welfare throughout his region. He promised a rule of no supervision and ample funding to whoever would best utilize the capabilities the refugees had to offer. This allocation process wasted not a talent. The most viable opportunities were exploited first, for everyone's immediate profit. This scientifically managed process, based on the principle of physical economy resulted in a fifteen-percent rate of growth. That kind of economic success would have been the envy of the world a year earlier, and a thorn in the eye of the chairman of the US Federal Reserve who hated economic growth like the plague.

I found it amazing that we could actually see the results of our efforts coming in right from the beginning. Good things were happening all over the place. The project ran by its own steam, so it seemed. The machine tool industry was revived. New agricultural machinery was being built. Transportation systems were repaired and upgraded.

The Staging Center in Odessa soon served the whole Ukraine as a job placement center and as an educational institution, mostly for language training. The initial objective was to provide basic language training. There was a great need for more advanced training. Most teachers came out of the refugee's own ranks, at first, but were soon hired from out of the population. The center also became a supply organization for which special clothing was manufactured, which was dispensed to those destined to the high arctic regions. Also, the center became the world's largest travel bureau. It arranged train trips, flight schedules, bus rides, including whole itineraries with 'hotels' along the way. If job matches were found, the center could take people to any plane within the new union of nations, often far outside the Ukraine and even Russia. The Staging Center also dispensed loans for small businesses and housing. People were expected to repay their travel costs. The costs were minimal, but repayment was mandatory. Life was not to be a gift.

The new policy structure had been Sergei's idea. He was proud of it. It assured that the refugees would be fairly treated, and fairly paid. There would be no free labor for anyone to exploit. Many of our trips were exploratory visits. Sergei wanted to see how his policy worked in practice. As far as I could see, he was pleased, or else he didn't let on that he wasn't.

Our first schedule of trips took us to various cities of the Ukraine, even onto side trips into the country. We averaged as many as three stops a day, which was possible only because of the work Nina had done beforehand. Wherever we touched down, a delegation was on hand to receive us. A schedule of tasks was handed to Sergei by the head of the delegation, prepared under Nina's guidelines. It governed meeting, concerns, solutions that must be worked out, facilities that should be inspected or that Sergei wanted to see. Rarely were inspections made unannounced.

In a way, Sergei's comment was right, that running the project was like a holiday. In fact Nina saw to it that it was that. There wasn't the last minute haste to include this and that, or changes in plans to alter stops or hold meetings that hadn't been planned because some districts didn't care to discipline themselves. We never did cater to poor discipline. In this fashion, most of our business was done efficiently, with enough time left for a few social niceties before we would be off to our next destination.

"Really, now, where did you find a person like Nina?" I asked Sergei one evening. He just grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

It was plain to see that I wasn't the only one impressed with her abilities. Sergei had nothing but praise for her. Actually, her work wasn't the only thing that impressed us. She was as interesting as a person in private, than she was efficient in her work. She was a lot of fun to be with. We certainly had ample cause to be proud of her. There wasn't a day when she wasn't exquisitely dressed. She was one of those rare individuals who looked great in almost anything.

One day she told us her secret. She had sewn her clothes herself, even her uniform. She wore it smartly; graced by a small cap that suited her as though it was designed for an evening at the ballet.

One day I came upon the standard issue of the uniforms that were handed out to persons of her rank. I could see why she made her own. It wouldn't have blended with her gentle expression and her blue eyes. She couldn't have worn it. That's just the way she was, a true individualist.

In the same sense, our association with Nina wasn't the standard worker to worker association, either. Nor was it the kind of relationship where woman are politely treated as a different species, or gloated over and pursued as a sex object. It wasn't that her presence didn't stir my heart and soul. Indeed, being with her was a treat, a privilege, an honor. She was a female's female, and was proud of it. One could feel it. Going out with her in the evenings was a sexual experience of the deepest intimacy without anyone touching another. Many times, after the day's duties were done, we would go for a dish of ice cream, a piece of cake, a dance if we were not too tired, or just to have some conversation over a glass of wine. If the weather wasn't too cold, we would stroll along the empty streets of Odessa after our return, like some school kids, arm in arm, with Nina in the middle, to unwind from the daily tasks. There were times when I needed to unwind after being with her, when I felt like 'Alice in Wonderland' with the difference that the wonders of our days were all totally real, which took some getting used to.

Against this background it didn't seem unnatural that we shared a single room whenever we stayed over in a city. Sharing rooms may have been imposed as a necessity, but for us, it seemed the logical thing to do in response to what we felt towards each other.

The thing that had startled me quite early on our tour, when a locality couldn't provide the promised lodging, was the accommodating spirit of everyone. Sometimes we camped in the plane, slept on the seats pulled together and kept each other awake out of agony for being cold and uncomfortable. It wasn't surprising that the subject of sex surfaced in our minds, and popped up from time to time. I could recognize myself in Sergei's reactions, who reacted the way I had half a year earlier.

One morning, in a village hotel in the Ukraine, while Nina was in the community washroom for her morning shower, Sergei commented cautiously on her wonderful figure, and added with a grin; "Wouldn't you love to be in bed with her?"

I smiled at him; "Would you?"

He smiled back, faintly, and didn't say anything. Obviously, he was too honest to answer

with a denial. I could well imagine what he wanted to say, and how this conflicted with what he felt he ought to say, being the boss and all. So he couldn't say anything.

"I would love to share a bed with her," I broke the silence. "Why not?" I could almost see Sergei's mind working, churning over the implications, wondering how I had resolved the conflict. I grinned at him; "There are a million ways to appreciate a woman as a woman," I said, "sex could be one, but doesn't have to be, and then again it might. Besides, where does one draw the line as to what is sex, and what it isn't?"

I cautiously mentioned to Sergei what Laara once told me, how evolution has favored long time bonding between the sexes as an instrument for increased survival. This couldn't have grown out of sexual attraction alone. Other factors must have entered the scene, perhaps many factors with sex being but one. "All these factors are still valid in our life," I said to him. "Sexual attraction should be viewed in context, neither magnified out of all proportion, nor denied as invalid."

Sergei shook his head. He raised his hand to cut me off, but I stopped him.

"I can't name what these factors are," I kept on. "I just feel good in the presence of some woman, and I know you do, too. That's what makes it so wonderful being human. I don't have to go to bed with anyone to feel like this, and if I do, it rarely adds a great deal. However, it does take away the myth. It takes down boundaries."

Once again, Sergei didn't respond. There was silence again between us.

"Sure, I'd love to go to bed with Nina," I came back; "it would be fun. No, fun isn't the right world," I corrected myself.

He looked puzzled.

"The thought of fun is too seductive," I added. "The thought tends to elevate something that is natural into something extraordinary. It takes away the elegance, by projecting it as something artificial or extraordinarily unnatural."

Sergei shrugged.

Oh Sergei, I must have turned his neatly pegged world upside down. I knew I had been at this point once myself, in Lahina. But it had all been overturned. What I had experienced in those days wasn't an ecstasy, but a deep satisfaction. Appreciation was the key. It was an element that had made us both able to go on, to face the world in a great crisis.

"I pity people who can't grow up," I said to Sergei, "people whom society seduces into perpetual infancy, parading a myth in front of their eyes while it keeps their hands tied behind their backs that they can't test the myth for its substance."

Suddenly, it came as a shock to me, that I might be referring to him. I stopped talking. I smiled at him, and moments later the smile was returned.

"Now, tell me, would you dare asking her?" I challenged him.

He shook his head; "I can't! I simply can't!" He became embarrassed by it all and shook his head in a more pronounced exaggerated fashion. "But what about you?" he asked, and started to grin. "Would you really be so daring as you boast. Go on, prove it! Go on and ask her into bed with you. See, if she'll kill you!"

I grinned back at him, paused for a moment; "Certainly, I will," I said firmly. "There is nothing daring about what one had recognized as totally natural!"

"Totally natural!" he repeated. He began to laugh. "You have a strange sense of reality."

"Maybe to you, I have," I replied immediately. "But have I really? Would I risk what we feel for each other, if I felt I was convinced that sleeping with Nina was unnatural? Just look where this train of thought leads to. We've built giant cities and live closer together than ever before, but our cities have become capitals of high-density isolation, or rape capitals, or lust capitals, or seduction capitals! This, my friend, is unnatural! I don't think I have to prove any of this! Humanity is proving it for me. Virtually every opera, every musical, every operetta or love song ever composed, deals with the subject of isolation and loneliness at its core. Either the plot develops towards marriage, or is exploring facets of being married, or is searching out the dimensions of friendship, or togetherness. Even Elvis Presley cashed in on the theme. You may remember that song of his from so long ago: Are you lonely tonight?"

Sergei was quiet again. Maybe he was cautious, or he wished he had never 'unleashed' the subject.

"I think you can't respond, because you are married," I broke the silence. "It isn't that Laara imposes this on you. You can't allow yourself to respond to your feelings, not because your life is somehow linked to another person, but because it is linked to a myth and is enveloped by it. Your marriage wouldn't impose this isolation on you if you would recognize your marriage as but an expression of a larger truth that we are all human beings, sharing a single humanity. Most people get stuck and isolate themselves, because they fail to recognize this universal principle that no one has created, that is as natural as the sunshine. Shouldn't we respond to these kind of higher principles? There is nothing wrong with a child learning to walk, taking a first step. But there definitely would be something wrong, if the child wouldn't continue after the first step."

I was interrupted by Nina coming back. Immediately, I popped the question.

What I suggested came as a shock to her. Her smile vanished. Her expression became a blank stare. "How dare you!" she said in appropriate Russian terms. Then she began to smile shyly and developed a delicate pink rose complexion.

"Why is everybody so obsessive with this being daring?" I asked.

Sergei just grinned.

"What I have asked is no more difficult to say than asking if you want another cup of tea. There isn't that much to it. Still, it would be nice; don't you agree?"

The red in her face faded slowly, but the silence remained.

"I ain't think'n of anyth'n heavy," I added in a drawn out American country slang.

She began to laugh now. Maybe the drawl sounded funnier than I realized. It broke the spell. "OK, boss!" she replied in an upbeat tone of voice and began to grin. She emphasized the word boss and spoke with a put on, husky sounding voice, like a Texas cowboy acknowledging his foreman.

We both had to laugh now.

"I knew she'd come around and say yes," I turned to Sergei.

She grinned, still slightly embarrassed; "Sergei, too?" she added.

"Whatever is appropriate!" I replied and shrugged my shoulders.

Sergei shook his head; "Leave the boss out of it!" he said. He sounded totally serious.

I nodded in silence. I felt sad for him. It was plain that he had turned down the very thing he would have loved to accept with all his heart. I could see it on his face. It was a hard thing



to turn down, but a harder one yet to accept. I felt compassion for him. I knew what the consequences would be. And I was right. As expected, his manners were colder during that day, and a great deal harsher, especially during his business dealings with other people. I felt I should help him. But how could I? Looking back over the past months I felt that my satisfaction with living was far less dependent on the mercy of others than it had once been.

After twenty more cities were visited, the time had come for us to return to the ranch. One of the last things Nina arranged for us, was to have a Family Services worker bring Tania's two children to the airport at Kiev where we were scheduled to refuel on the way home. In recognition of her thoughtfulness, Sergei offered her an extra week of vacation and invited her to visit the ranch; "A well deserved holiday!" he commented.

I suspected that the reason was slightly different. "Laara will be pleased to meet her," he said to me as we were getting on the plane. "She always wanted me to bring more woman into my departments. She will also be pleased to know that the South European Refugee Project leads every other district in the Soviet Union on sexual integration. We have achieved a fifty-percent female staffing level in every major area. We are also maintaining an even balance between American and Soviet personnel."

I congratulated him. I was about to raise the question of whether jobs should be awarded by qualification, rather than sex. But in view of Nina's outstanding performance, raising such a question would have been absurd. In any case, he repeated several times that Laara will be pleased when she finds out that the second highest position within the project had been awarded to a woman.

I couldn't agree more with him. As I knew Laara, she would most certainly be pleased seeing Nina, and possibly also for other reasons as well. Sergei had chosen a fine woman to lead the team. Laara had been interested in seeing female qualities added to the public scene, to enrich it. Still, she wasn't demanding the supernatural, either. Super-beings are not representative of the masses of humanity. Their extraordinary achievements tend to cause one to underestimate oneself. Nina wasn't like that. She was super, but in human terms, as a human being. She made one proud of one's own humanity and human heritage. It was truly an honor to know her.

"I should have done this years ago," added Sergei at one point.

"Done what?"

"Bring more woman on board. I didn't see it as worthwhile, then. I told myself that if equality means anything, then sexual mixing shouldn't matter. However, that kind of thinking causes one to leave one precious element out of the evaluation process. Whoever coined the phrase, 'she is only a woman,' should be regarded as a traitor of humanity."

"Is this the reason why you can't bring yourself to sleep with Nina, even though you would love nothing better?" I asked cautiously. "Isn't that the same issue, though in a different context?"

Sergei nodded. "What you suggest opens up an arena in which I am a beggar. It wouldn't be fair to her for us to meet on this level. Most people meet each other in the sexual arena as beggars, expecting another to provide a fulfillment in life that they can't find in themselves.

That's like beggars begging from beggars. One day I will be rich enough to meet Nina in a way that enables us to share our riches, and enrich one another. I am not there yet. I have a lot of growing-up to do, Paul, before I am able to meet her in a meaningful manner that enriches us all. Still, I think I have made a start."

"There already exists total equality in worth between all human beings," I said. "We are all extraordinary beings of the same humanity. The trick is to let this 'sun' within us shine brightly in all the rich colors of our individuality. The more we invest in this process to enrich our individuality, the more we have to share and to enrich our wonderfully human world with. In that department you are not a beggar, Sergei, but a giant. You are richer in this department than all the kings that ever trod the earth. It is an honor to be touched by you, to be embraced by you, even just to know you. Without you the earth would be a darker place. That is also how I see Nina. I think she respects the unfolding need for this to be acknowledged."

"Few would," said Sergei.

"Why wouldn't she?" I replied. "She is a woman and proud to be one, and 'preciously' so. Shouldn't that be acknowledged?"

"Sure," he said, "but who would have known this, then? It's easier to see now, seeing how much more life and enthusiasm is expressed at the refugee project than there had ever been found within the walls of the strategic planning center. I had lived in a world in which the term 'humanity' was banned, never to be mentioned, never to be thought of. How else could we do what we felt we had to do? So you see, I have a lot of growing-up to do."

I nodded, and grinned; "Gosh, Sergei, don't we all? Don't I know it? Don't ask where I stood half a year ago?"

"You, too?" he grinned back. Then he paused for a moment while I aligned the plane to our beacon. "I shouldn't say this," he said, "but I am grateful to you that you fell in love with Laara. It opened my eyes. I've never been as much in love with her as I am now; as we both are."

"I'm not in competition with you," I replied. "Love isn't an Olympic game where only one can win. It is the opposite. It is an arena where one can only win when all win at the same time. That's a much greater challenge than winning a Gold Medal. That's a challenge that the Olympians have yet to recognize and accept."

"That's not exactly what I meant, Paul," said Sergei quietly. "But you are right. You opened my eyes to what it means to love. I think Laara can feel this."

"Gosh Sergei, I had hoped you would say something like this one day. I value our friendship, Sergei. I value it tremendously. I also value Laara for the wonderful person that she is. I can't deny this to myself or to her. She exists. She is a beautiful woman that I am proud to know, and she values this acknowledgment. I still hope to get her to know more intimately as time goes on."

"That's what is so exciting about our friendship," Sergei grinned. "We are both in love with the same woman, and we honestly respect each other for this. I thought I would never be able to say this. This shouldn't be possible, Paul. We really have created a New World, and a very rich world at that."

"Is this what you had in mind, back then, when you said you need someone on your team whom you can trust to do the right thing when it becomes unclear what the right thing is?" I asked.

Sergei just grinned. "Maybe I did without knowing? But, I also think that our being together with Nina was crucial. It that opened my eyes a great deal more. Some day I will be able to meet her not as a beggar. Then we will celebrate."

As we came in for our landing Sergei called Nina to the cockpit. I saw Melanie at the far end of the meadow. At least I thought so; or perhaps I wanted it to be her. She was standing beside a horse drawn sleigh, waiting for us. She looked beautiful. She wore a heavy fur coat, a fur cap, and a long scarf that matched the length of her coat that was as white as the sleigh and the horses. I was fascinated by her right through the landing. She looked like a snow-princess from one of those romantic Russian fairy tales that I remembered from childhood. "This is my wife!" I said to Nina as we came to a stop near the sleigh.

"You're a fortunate man," she said and smiled at me.

I didn't feel right about what I had said, and Nina didn't feel that comfortable with her reaction either, I could see it on her face. It wasn't right to refer to her as 'my' wife. I should have invented some new terminology, calling her a kindred soul that I love to share my life with. I think she understood that we all had a lot of growing-up to do, yet.

While I installed the engine port covers to keep the turbines from freezing in, I overheard Melanie speaking with Sergei who unloaded the luggage, asking him if he wouldn't mind taking the sleigh back. "I would like us to walk," she added.

I glanced at Sergei. He grinned. He said he didn't mind. "But, don't forget it will take you at least an hour to walk to the house from here."

"You're mistaken!" I butted in. "I think, it will take us at least two hours, maybe more!"

Sergei laughed. He climbed on the sleigh. "Don't forget that in two hours is supper time!"

I promised that we wouldn't forget. I gave him a hand with the luggage, and helped the children and Nina onto the sleigh, which earned me a hug from the children, and a kiss from Nina. To Nina, and the children, I was 'family.' I was a part of Sergei's great family that included the whole human race.

As soon as everyone was on board, Sergei commanded the horses to go. I waved a good bye after them, arm in arm with Melanie. At the end of the meadow, Nina and the children looked back once more and waved again. We waved back, then strolled slowly on, across the meadow relishing the crisp cold December sunshine. The sun stood low, casting long shadows. In the fresh powder ahead of us, tiny crystals reflected the sunlight into flickering sparks, like rays of gold, a mirage of a magic that sprung to life and disappeared in rapid succession. Not until we got to the forest, did I notice the brooding silence that unfolded between us. I tried some conversation. There was little response. Whatever I said, dissipated, as if thoughts, too, could be muffled by the fresh snow. This silence wasn't Melanie's way.

In time, she started to speak. "Why are you doing this to me?" she said.

I was puzzled for a moment.

She was slow to explain.

"Well, the way you carry on," she said eventually. "The way you chase after every skirt you see. God only knows what must have gone on the last two weeks! It was the same with Jennie, wasn't it?"

"Now, now, you better hold it!" I stuttered. "No doubt, you are referring to the kiss you saw. Why does that trouble you?"

"Come on, Paul, that wasn't merely a kiss! A blind person could sense that it wasn't. There was something going on."

"Sure there was. At least I would hope so! Nina is a very lovely person that I am proud to know and be associated with. I would lie, if I said I don't feel close to her. It was the same with Jennie, very much so, and it still is. I went to bed with both of them, if you must know, and there were others, too. I feel so fortunate, so blessed. But why do you feel this concerns you? What has my loving others cost you as a loss? Do I love you less? This can't be, Melanie. I think the opposite happened. Love is like a bank account that grows richer the more one draws from it."

There was silence again, a tense silence. I cleared my throat; "What am I stealing from your existence by responding to life! I never swore to you that I wouldn't live. Love is life. You can't have one without the other. Neither of the two can exist in isolation."

She raised her hand to stop me. "OK, you are right, I don't want to know what went on between you and those women."

"Why shouldn't I tell you. I swore an oath once that I would share my life with you, honor you, support you, cherish you, be open towards you. However, I never gave myself to you as some property that you own. Slavery has been abolished. A human being is not property! As a human being I must respond to life as it touches me. If I'm not permitted this, I might as well be dead. However, I take it, what you are enraged about has nothing to do with my commitment to you, has it? It is based on some groundless ancient mythology. What I feel for you, I feel, because there is something about you that makes me feel wonderfully rich just to know you, and proud to know you. I have not stopped responding to that and never will. This is what my commitment to you is built on! I cherish you for what you are. I always have. I always will."

"Still, it wasn't right what you did. I never gave you any cause to do this to me," she said.

"Wow! You better explain this one," I said. "If I hadn't told you what went on you would never have known. Your life would have been the same as it always was, or as it is now if you don't destroy it for some silly reasons."

With this the brooding silence ended. There was no time from now on to even catch one's breath.

"All right!" she said. "I agree it made no difference to my life what happened between you and those woman, but..."

"Now you're going to be wrong again," I said. "What happened between Jennie will have an impact on your life. It has had an impact already. I don't feel quite as 'dead' anymore. You may have noticed that. I feel richer, and by this, the life we share has been richer for you, too. That's unavoidable!"

She raised her hand again to stop me; "I only wanted to know where I stand."

"That is unavoidable, too. Nobody lives in isolation. But this is easier felt than explained. Hack, it took Jennie and me months to move a few steps ahead and closer to one another. We dared to take these steps that the whole world had refused to take. If it had, America might not have been destroyed. Unfortunately, the very concept of universal love has been banned. You

practically said it yourself, it is deemed to be treason. Yes, Jennie was a great help in taking a few steps in this direction. Let me tell you, that was scary! Other people were helpful, too. There is no profit in hiding what has happened. There is only a lot to uncover that stands against it."

We stopped walking. He began smiling at each other as we talked, until we finally embraced one another, and kissed. "You're quite something!" she added at one point and shook her head.

"And you are an angel!" I replied immediately, holding her tighter still. "The fact is; I am as deeply in love with you as I ever was with anyone. I admire you for what you are, in the same way that I admire others for what they are. And there is a lot to be admired. Humanity is a wonderful species, don't you think?"

She nodded, smiled, but replied nothing. We walked on. The forest appeared to reflect this lighter mood. We stopped now and then for a quick kiss. Our steps became lighter, too. The silence we found in the forest was no longer a tense silence. We could hear the rhythm of our feet. There was less snow in the forest, except in the nearby clearing. The trees surrounding the clearing were covered with tufts of white powdery stuff as though they had donned their most festive garments. The scene mirrored what I felt.

Walking swiftly, now, we reached the end of the trail much sooner than we had intended. At the junction, we noticed Peter's bus approaching. I recalled that Sergei expected some guests from Sverdlovsk. Peter stopped and asked if we wanted a ride. He introduced us to Sergei's guests who had come for a conference. We accepted his offer. In this way, we were back in plenty of time for supper.

"Why, did you run?" Sergei joked, when he saw us by the fireplace talking with Nina.

"Run? No! We came on the wings of angels, on the wings of love!" I grinned.

Sergei grinned too, then nodded.

Dinner that night was one of those formal occasions again, for which the good silverware was brought out. Only at this rare occasion the 'home crowd' outnumbered the guests. After the meal, stories were exchanged between Sergei and his visitors, political stories that meant nothing to Melanie or me. Later, Sergei withdrew with his guests and with Peter, to the upstairs conference room to conduct their business, while for the rest of us it became dish-washing time.

In the mornings, we all stayed together for light conversation, a sleigh ride before lunch, and a few drinks afterwards. In the afternoon, it was conference time again. On the third day, the conference concluded. A formal breakfast was served, a few drinks, too. Afterwards I got the plane from the air base. All this was followed up by a leisurely flight to Volgograd. Sergei's visitors were part of a Chinese delegation on a mission to exchange experiences in handling refugee problems. What was discussed, was however kept in strictest confidence.

With the visitors gone, the ranch became quiet again. We went for walks with Nina, spent the evenings in front of the fire with a book, or just listening to the piano. Laara had been a concert pianist at one time. Nina had studied music in Moscow in her earlier days. Sergei certainly wasn't wrong when he suggested that the two would enjoy each other's company.

This was an understatement. In this manner the rest of the week passed quickly. Before I knew it, I was in the duster again flying to the Air-Force base to pick our jet up. On this "adventure," as Nina called my flights in the duster, going to the air base, she came with me. She didn't regret it. She enjoyed the special air show that she became a part of.

"I think Melanie would enjoy accompanying you to Odessa," said Sergei to me over lunch before our departure. "She might like to visit Igor and Jennie, or do some shopping with her friend as she had done in the past. Maybe the children would like to go along, too."

Melanie's face lit up as she overheard this. The children cheered. We left right after lunch that day. It was the 23rd of December. Sergei smiled as he saw us off at the meadow. "Have a merry Christmas!" he added with a grin as I closed the cabin door and secured it from the inside.

So it was that we all spent Christmas together, as we had many times in the past, except for Frank. We all slept on board the Mary Q, which added a romantic flavor to our visit. Of course it was near impossibly crowded now on board. The children had to sleep on the floor. But they didn't mind, they thought it was great. The same could be said about the rest of us. This visit was great! It was good to see Igor and Jennie again, to be aboard the Mary Q, to lean against the old railing, and sleep in the old familiar bunk. It brought back memories of a different world, a world of extremes, of great pain and great love, of struggles, trial, and tears. I loved seeing the old table again. How many times had we had supper around it, wondering what the next day would bring?

I recalled that first celebration we have had on board, the sumptuous roast beef feast on the very first night after leaving Tofino. Maybe that scruffy old table, around which we now celebrated Christmas, didn't look special to anyone who hadn't lived in the boat as we had. To me it stood for long hours filled with hopes, fears, kisses, endless discussions and occasional victories. It was the same with the sink in the galley? How many hours had we spent there, talking and smiling at one another, making meals and washing the dishes when the boat was rolling in heavy seas, or leaning thirty degrees in a stiff wind. It felt good to be reminded of these difficult times, too. In a sense, the entire period appeared more like a fairy tale now that seemed so remote from the world we had come to as if it never had happened.

The Mary Q itself, and Jennie's red coral necklace that hung on the cabin wall near the forward bunk, where the only links that we had left to testify that this far away world had been real. They testified that we had been there, that we had come through some hard times together that eventually became wonderful times.

Too much had changed, and in too short a time. Even our love for one another had changed, though it remained fresh and came alive in ever-new dimensions. It was appropriate, therefore, that we should have Christmas dinner on the boat. Perhaps this was why I didn't feel sad that I hadn't brought any presents. Just being together was enough. Igor had a surprise for us, however. He and Jennie had organized a Christmas party at the refugee center, to which we were all invited.

The party, though, was not the joyous celebration that the season ought to inspire. It should have been a time of singing, dancing, and story telling for the children. It was a time of silently reflecting on the past. It was a time of bitter, heart-wrenching grief for some, and at the same

time one of great gratitude for having somehow escaped the hell stirred by the holocaust. For most, this Christmas had become a time filled with tears. I could see the pain in their faces. I could feel it in their silence. It was hard to experience this Christmas in which no one would smile, or even speak much except of great tragedies. A feeling of unutterable tragedy now overshadowed this Christmas season for most of them. Their grief apparently went deeper than anything I could possibly understand did. It was as if the general agonizing silence had been enforced by a shameful knowledge that something had happened which should never have been allowed to take place, for which they felt they somehow carried the blame.

Attempts were made for a few carols to be sung. Also, time was set aside for telling Christmas stories to the children. Even Santa was there. But the children's faces, there, were sad, too. Only a few responded. It was with the same with the adults. It wasn't until near midnight that slowly a little more enthusiastic singing of the old hymns filled the hall.

The next day's activities were happier. A circus was staged at the center, with clowns and magicians, to bring some measure of laughter and excitement back into the children's faces. Maybe this was the better part of Christmas. There certainly was enough excitement among our own children on the boat. As soon as the last bite of lunch was eaten, they were up. They got themselves ready without being asked to. They were eager to go. They were constantly checking the time; after all, it was a 20-Minute walk to the center. As we watched them hurry down the jetty, disappearing behind the Coast Guard station, Igor reminded Melanie that she had wanted to go out for some shopping.

"Oh, yes!" she replied, "will you come with me?"

"Certainly, if you like," said Igor with a smile. "You wouldn't know where to go, anyway. But let me warn you. There won't be many stores open. It won't be like shopping on Fifth Avenue in New York."

"That's good," Melanie replied.

"OK! Then let's go!" he grinned and held out his arm.

"Why don't we all go?" added Jennie.

"No, no! There is no need for everyone to go," said Igor, "it is cold outside. Also somebody must stay home for when the children get back."

Jennie agreed.

I noticed that before Igor and Melanie got on their way, Melanie hugged Jennie. "We'll be an hour or so," she said.

"You'd better make that three hours if you want to buy anything," said Igor. "It's a long ride into town, and the few stores that are open may be crowded."

"Then make it four hours," said Melanie as she walked down the jetty with Igor arm in arm.

"Did you hear what I suggested," asked Jennie after they had gone, "that we go with them? I would have given away our only chance to be alone together. It was as though it didn't matter."

"Oh, I've noticed," I replied. "You are right, it wouldn't have mattered. Of course I'm glad that we stayed."

We hugged each other for a while, unhurried, as in times past. Then Jennie suggested that we bake a cake for something to do. "Won't they be surprised when they come back out of the

cold!"

"Let's do it," I agreed. I sealed the answer with a kiss, actually two. Those kisses felt wonderful. Also, this cake baking was becoming quite an adventure. She brought two aprons out, cleared the table....

We made a pound cake, the kind we had enjoyed in Hawaii. We had the most wonderful time with it. That is, Jennie did most of the work while I stood aside and watched her.

"I'm glad you didn't bring any presents," she said at one point.

"I never felt good about bringing presents," I said. "It just doesn't seem the right thing to do. Presents can be seductive. If I have to give you presents to make you feel good about me, what do I have won? In fact, I must ask myself; what have I done to you? I would either try to coerce you, or worse, I would cause you to feel cheap, as though you could be bought."

"I give presents out of appreciation," she replied and smiled, "as my way of saying thank you!"

"But if you felt that strong and that deep about someone, giving a present wouldn't add anything of value, it would at best be a superficial substitute for what in such a case communicates itself from heart to heart."

Jennie nodded; "That must have been the reason why I didn't want you to buy me anything on Maui, at least not until the last day had passed and we were in danger of being torn apart again by the course of events."

"It was an ego trip on my part," I said, quietly. "I would have bought you the world, then, if I could, to show how much I loved you, as if you didn't know. I would have given everything. I wanted to be so good to you. God, was I stupid! That present wasn't inspired by love at all. It was designed to make me feel good. I hope it didn't make you feel cheap, as if these things mattered. It just won't happen anymore. It would tear chunks away from your soul. Love should imply that there is no need to give gifts. The giving should be commonplace whenever there is a need. That's what it has become. Hasn't it? The tribute of love that I bring to you, that says thank you for being a light in this world, acknowledges a fullness and satisfaction with life that needs no embellishment."

She grinned. "What you just said was the best Christmas present anyone ever gave me. I see, we understand each other." She said and smiled and embraced me....

Just to be with Jennie, Igor, and Melanie, was the finest Christmas celebration I could think of, not as a celebration of the love we had for each other, but as a celebration of love itself. And it was rich in blessings. The warmth of it and the joy of being in love, stayed with me on the way home. Melanie, too, was touched by it. I saw it reflected in her smile and in what we said to each other and to the children. I saw it reflected in a growing tenderness. Those days in Odessa, in spite of the agony at the center and the fact that Frank's absence was felt deeply, had been one of the finest Christmases we had had together. Even Sergei was all smiles when he picked us up at the meadow. Had anyone told him?

As it was, Christmas was by no means over. When I took our jet back to the air base, another surprise awaited me. The old duster had been radically transformed. One of the mechanics, an expert in forming plastic, had built a canopy over the cockpit. "For rainy days,"



he explained.

I thanked him, but he just waved his hands. "I liked doing it," he insisted. "I like to be comfortable, myself, when I take the thing up in the cold."

The plane had also been given a new pair of wheels. The airmen had raided the scrap pile and retrieved two discarded nose wheels off the big fighters. The wheels almost fit. The machine shop did the rest.

The greatest surprise, however, was that it had been given a new paint job. For a moment I didn't recognize the old duster. It sat outside, in front of the hangar in which our jet is usually kept. It looked like a new plane. As I looked at it, everybody came out and cheered. Half the base came together to watch me take our new duster up for its 'inaugural' flight. It had been painted bright red, and given a name at last. 'Fire in the sky,' was written on its fuselage in large hand painted Russian letters.

It certainly was a great Christmas present to be allowed to share in the fun they had had with it! The Sky-Fire, as they called it, had been lately more in their hands than in ours. It was easy to see, by the way they babied the thing, that they enjoyed flying it as much as I did. For this, our jet also received the best possible care. The unfolding fun also meant, that whenever we required the jet, there was never a shortage of volunteers to deliver it to the meadow in exchange for the Sky-Fire.

This cooperative arrangement created a warm friendship between us, which, in time, became an invaluable asset to me. But this lay still far in the future. At the moment I was content that there lingered no personal problems in our lives, except for Boris' despondency. Sergei had brought him to the ranch. We had the room. He needed the company of people who cared. Still, he remained as withdrawn from us as he had been on the day he came back with us from Moscow. He sat by the window for hours at a time, staring out onto the lake. He rarely spoke. Nothing moved him. No reason touched him. For Tania, these were difficult times. To Sergei, however, the problem was merely an indication that more work was needed in his defense. Except, no one knew how to proceed.

"We should have taken him for a holiday," I said to Sergei. "We might still be able to reach him in a different environment."

I suggested India or China might be the right place, for their large populations and throngs of people in the cities. We could take him across the Himalayas. I discovered that he had long been interested in this part of the world. As much as I knew, he had hoped to trek up to the famous base camp at the foot of Mount Everest. I told Sergei that we could stop over in Katmandu, if we ever had to fly to Japan. We might even escort him on the trail. We might also show him the trail from the air. I could see us already fly over glaciers, along rivers, past an endless array of gargantuan icy shapes. Tales of expeditions came to mind, of isolated monasteries hidden in remote valleys.

On leaving Katmandu, we would follow the Ganges River across India or fly south across the Indian subcontinent. If we flew low enough, Boris might be able to see the thousands of villages and towns that he had helped keep alive. I suggested to Sergei that we would visit some of the villages. "Maybe there, in the heart of this vast land where survival depends on the simplest forms of agriculture, he may glimpse a new image of humanity, an image that is no

longer visible in our automated society." I suggested that if Boris saw the dignity of these people, who had not the slightest awareness that their world had almost crumbled because of a glitch in the arms race, he might regain a feeling of dignity about himself.

"Maybe it will help," said Sergei after a while, "and maybe it won't. In any case, that's too expensive!" These were his last words on the issue.

"India is only twice the distance to Odessa," I was going to say, and suggest that he reconsider. But I didn't say it. The incentive that would make this worthwhile had to come from Boris himself. We had no right to force him into making strides that he was not yet prepared to make.

"But we can help him to clear the obstruction out of the way," I said to Sergei.

Sergei nodded. "Assuming that we know what the obstruction is. Unfortunately we don't know what it is. It's like telling to a smoker that he ought to stop smoking, saying that it's bad for him. It won't do any good."

Also, there was another thing that bothered me. The obstruction that Boris was facing was reaching very deep. He might unconsciously regard this obstruction as something he wants or needs like a safety valve, something that gives him a feeling of security that was in real terms not justified.

"Maybe if we were to take him on walks," said Laara, "if we let him feel that we understand why he had done what he did, he might recover and regain his inner strength."

"It's an odd situation," I suggested.

"It may take months or years," said Melanie.

I wondered if we could stay with him that long.

"But we must," said Laara.

I was in favor that we should give Laara's suggestion a try. There were days in which we were quite hopeful that we would succeed, or had in some aspect already succeeded. But those periods of hope were short-lived. He quickly found a flaw in our defense of him, and then re-established his self-condemnation.

It seemed there was nothing one could say or do, which would sway him. Sometimes his arguments against us were totally logical.

One day he came upon the original text of the Hippocratic Oath. He said the ancient oath was considered to be moral law for all practicing physicians, though it contained not a word about healing. The oath only demanded that the would-be healer cause no harm. "Against this law, I did wrong," Boris concluded. "I had failed to assure myself that my actions were as totally harmless as I thought them to be."

Well, what could I say to that?

Laara said that it was a hopeful sign that he was at least contemplating the issue on a deep level and was trying to be honest with himself. However, those occasions were rare. More often, the smallest reminder of the accident was sufficient to send him running to his room, crying for hours. At one occasion, the act of eating pudding triggered the pain. The spoon had reminded him of the bulldozer's blade. At another occasion, as we sat by the fireplace, the shape of a flames reminded him of "his missile" lifting itself into the midnight sky. He held on to these visions with the same tenaciousness with which he held on to the arguments that he was personally at fault.

"Let's not push him," said Laara. "If we make demands that he can't fulfill, we'll only drive him deeper into his senseless guilt."

"As our madness drove us into the arms race," said Sergei, "we pushed each other deeper and deeper into situations that none of us had the smarts to deal with."

I agreed with Laara that we should back off and be more compassionate with his fears.

Everyone agreed with that. This was our Christmas present to Boris. I suggested that it was probably the hardest task a person could take on.

Everyone agreed with that too, and promised to give him the freedom to heal himself.

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The one quality I admired most in Sergei, was his dedication as a family man. During the day he was devoted to his work, but from suppertime on the business of state was tabled till the next morning. This was family time. It hadn't always been that way, but it had become so. A ritual became established, that right after dinner, for a half an hour news events were discussed that pertained to the family, little things that occurred during the day, or big things of world affairs that could also affect the family's welfare. Once this was concluded, it became story time for the children.

One evening, however, a long time after Nina had returned to Odessa, the normal order became reversed to everyone's surprise. The family news time was brought forward, ahead of the meal. Sergei announced proudly that he had received a letter from Yoshi with an invitation to all of us, to come for a visit.

"Wow, Japan!" said Dick and squirmed on his seat.

After Dick calmed down, Sergei explained that we were invited to their silver wedding anniversary in late spring.

"I hope you all like Japan as Dick does," said Sergei, putting the letter down. "As you may know, there are twelve seats on our plane."

"You really should have a copilot for these long flights?" commented Peter.

To my surprise, Sergei ignored Peter's remark. This wasn't Sergei's way! Without reacting to it in the least, he stood up, went across the room to a heavy oak chest that he always kept locked, and produced a bottle from it. He carried it back to his place as if it were the Holy Grail. Then he began the speech of the evening.

"This is a very special bottle," he said solemnly, "and today is a very special day."

I wondered what the hack he was up to. Surely he wasn't referring to Yoshi's invitation, as exciting as it was.

"I once chose this bottle from our cellar and brought it up here to celebrate the end of the world with. This was on the night of Natalia's wedding. As you can see, the bottle hasn't been opened and the world hasn't come to an end. I propose that we open the bottle tonight and drink of it together." He reached for the corkscrew. Then he said something about Japan.

"Wait!" I interrupted. He put the corkscrew down. "Flying to Japan, to Yoshi's anniversary, isn't that important. You should keep the bottle for a much more momentous occasion, like the beginning of peace."

I wasn't sure what exactly to say next. All I knew was that a trip to Japan didn't measure up to what the bottle had been saved for. "You might want to keep it until all nuclear weapons

have been removed from the globe, or have been disabled. This would more accurately commemorate the reason for which the bottle was not opened," I added.

He looked at me. "Well spoken, my friend!" But while he praised me, he reached for the corkscrew again. "That's why I must open the bottle tonight," he said. He looked at his watch while he spoke. He explained that exactly two hours and twenty two minutes ago that condition that I described had been fulfilled. He looked at me with a wicked grin, then continued. "I got word from Moscow this afternoon. The last nuclear warhead has been removed from America's soil, from the soil of Russia, India, China, Israel, England, France, and wherever else these weapons had been planted. Every last missile, every last warhead, from the smallest type to the largest, is a relic of history now. Over the next three years the plutonium will be reclaimed and re-processed under UN supervision into fuel for nuclear power utilities. I hope that you all know what this means?" he said solemnly. "It means that for the first time since the beginning of World War II, the world is once more, safe. That's cause for celebration, isn't it?"

Indeed it was good news, and worth celebrating. I smiled. Everyone did. It was wonderful. The 33,000 holocausts that stood ready to be ignited at any moment could no longer happen! I could have shouted, hurrah! The terror had come to an end. What greater news could any man offer?

"I think the foretaste that Boris provided has been too bitter," Sergei kept on. "No government thirsted for more..."

While he yet spoke, bottle in hand, a sudden burst of applause and laughter erupted out of the living room next door. Moments later, Nina, Igor and Jennie and their three children came rushing in. "We got here as fast as we could," said Igor and embraced his father. "Your friends from the Air Force were delayed in Odessa," he explained.

"I know," Sergei smiled. "That's why we held back on the dinner."

Within seconds some extra dishes were brought out, then finally, we were ready to eat. "Hey, but don't open the bottle just yet," said Igor. Sergei had already reached for the corkscrew again. "You should wait until the conditions no longer exist for which the nuclear warheads were once designed and build. It takes time for people's fears to die. New missiles and warheads can be built all too easily. Their destruction today is no guarantee for peace for tomorrow. Only when the mental background no longer exist for which these weapons were made in the first place, can anyone be justified in celebrating the beginning of peace."

"You know Igor is right," I said to Sergei, "the fight against war hasn't been won yet, it does take time. But a start had been made, a significant start, a miracle has happened. This, I must acknowledge. This I must celebrate. I must acknowledge that humanity is the brightest phenomenon in the heavens of life to have achieved such a miracle. This has always been my belief. Today, I see the evidence of it. Tomorrow we will begin to build on this evidence a New World. For today, the achievement that has been made will do." He reached for the corkscrew again and drilled it down into the cork.

A year earlier I might have protested. I might have pointed out that it takes time to move humanity onto a new platform, time to build a New World, and that the time for celebration

had not yet come. I would have argued that the bottle should remain unopened, that it be carried back to the giant oak chest across the room and be locked up for another season. Since that time, however, I had learned to see the world in a different light. I had seen the world in transition and been a part of this changing world. Miracles had happened. Wonderful things had become commonplace that I had never dreamed off to be possible. I knew with all my heart that Sergei was right in opening this bottle as an acknowledgment of a marvelous light on the horizon. I knew deep in my heart that nothing could turn the clock back again, from now on. The world had changed too much for this to happen. Chaos might still erupt, and the villains and murderers of this world might still try to drag humanity back into the mud, but they will no longer succeed. Prometheus had found his freedom.

We all, except the children who had apple juice in their glasses, drank from Sergei's bottle this toast of joy in honor of the new era that had begun. Sergei said that this marked the fulfillment of his innermost wish that he had harbored since childhood, that this hour might come. "And the hour has come," he said, "but this is not an hour for rest. It is an hour for the joy of looking forward. It is an hour for committing ourselves to go forward to enrich one another's existence in as much as the nations of world have begun to commit their energies to the general welfare of mankind. It is an hour to celebrate the sovereignty of the world's nations and its individual people." We all drank to that.

Actually, we found a lot more that we had to celebrate with than champagne. Melanie, Laara, and I had worked for two hours in the kitchen that day to prepare the greatest desert ever made, with home made ice-cream, two types of cake, and a thick raspberry sauce.

While we feasted on the dessert Sergei remarked that no one should feel tempted to think that we live an outrageously opulent life in this house, that we should limit ourselves to dry bread and give the rest to the poor. No, he said, we should see ourselves as pioneers and make a solemn promise to uplift humanity to this level where everyone lives richly, where this becomes the rule.

"Humanity is an exceedingly rich species," he said. "We live in a world of inexhaustible resources. Nuclear energy gives us infinite power for millions of years to come, and in the rocks of the earth are bound up all the metals and minerals we can ever want. We must never forget that the potential to harvest this abundance lies within us. What we partake of today," he said, "is a taste of the future of humanity if we commit ourselves to the task of getting there from where we are now."

When all the food was consumed, and everyone was satisfied and felt comfortable, Sergei stood up once more for his second speech.

"I would like to announce that we have a copilot in training," he said, pointing to Igor. "This means, when we go to Japan in May, we will travel in style, fully equipped, so that our friend Peter won't feel uneasy traveling with us." Sergei added that he wished he could have responded to Peter's comment, earlier. He said he hated being rude, but he didn't want to give his punch line away until the whole crew was present.

Peter commented that he was used to this kind of treatment. He had been associated far too long with Sergei that something like this should surprise him at all.

Igor smiled, somewhat embarrassed by it all. The children didn't care. To them, these things were trivialities; they cheered. Sergei also announced that he would send me to Odessa more often than before, to give Igor the extra airtime he needed. Our jet was definitely larger than the aircraft the Air Force was training him on in Odessa.

"Also, from now on, whenever we have visitors coming," Sergei continued, "we'll pick them up in Odessa instead of at the railway station. And if anyone has business in Odessa, for anything at all, shopping, or going to the movies, he or she is welcome to tag along."

"Did you say movies?" Fiona's face lit up. "Are children allowed, too?" she asked shyly. "I love movies..."

"On occasions, Yes!" answered Sergei sternly, but then he smiled, which earned him a hug from Fiona and a kiss.

## More works by Rolf A. F. Witzsche

Selected stories from the series of novels  
The Lodging for the Rose  
and from other novels by Rolf A. F. Witzsche



### A selection of love stories and stories about love

The primary focus is on the Principle of Universal Love in social relationships.



### Stories focused on healing

The focus for healing is wide-ranging, from bodily healing to the healing of perceptions, limitations, small-minded thinking, etc..



## War Stories

There are many types of wars being fought with the ferocity of lightning that flashes brilliantly until the driving energy is spent. Then peace resumes.



## Stories about sex

While the focus is on sex, the explorations focus on a passion for love in a higher sense than erotica, opening to the Principle of Universal Soul reflected in the brotherhood of all mankind as human beings.

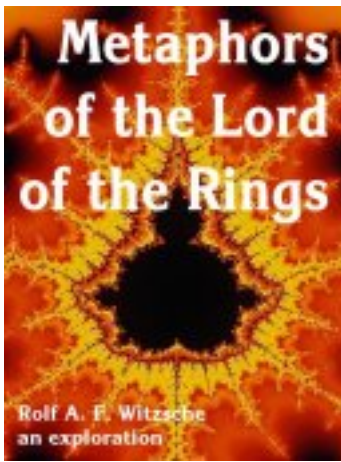


## Oh, to be King for a day!

If we had the power to change the world, how would we change it? But don't we have that power already in our hand?

Political exploration

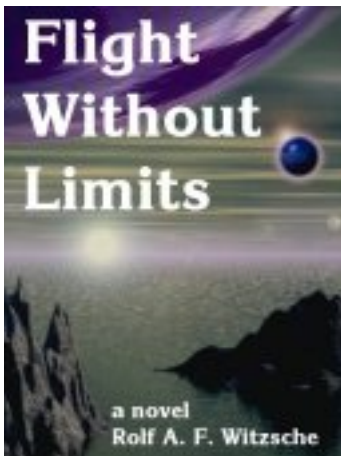




## The Lord of the Rings' Metaphors

It is a rare thing in literature that one finds a tale written a long time ago that is reflected in the present to such an extent, that it seems the writer had created a script for the future and the future has obeyed. Such a thing can be said about the story of J.R.R. Tolkien's mythical tale, The Lord of the Rings.

## Novels



## Flight Without Limits

(science fiction)

The novel is a science fiction work with a touch of reality. It is about a space voyage to Alpha Centauri, the nearest solar system to our own. But in metaphor, the novel is really about being able to move mentally without limits. Physically we may never be able to overcome all limits, but what would hinder us to break all limits mentally?



## Brighter than the Sun

(playing with nuclear matches)

This novel has two opposite centers. One reflects the tragic domain of our nuclear armed world, and the second the domain of spiritual freedom where old axioms become discredited and fall away while love unfolds its universal face. Will the latter prevail?

## The Lodging for the Rose a series of nine novels



### \* Episode 1 - [Discovering Love](#)

Here begins an epic story that spans eight novels. The subject is freedom powered by universal love, the largely unexplored 'country.' Few people have dared to cross its borders and travel its landscape.



### \* Episode 2A - [The Ice Age Challenge](#)

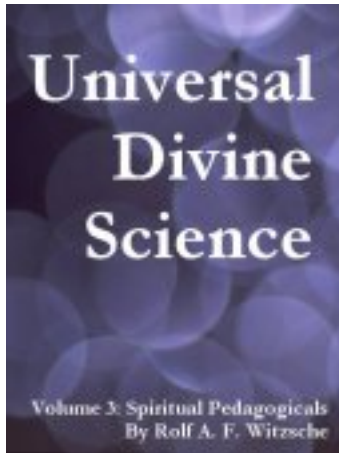
"The Ice Age Challenge" refers to the challenge that we face to create a new foundation for living when the coming Ice Age climate shuts down most of the world's agriculture. The resumption of the Ice Age could happen possibly 100 to 150 years from now. It may take that long to build the vast facilities that will be needed to feed the world from indoor agriculture. But is our love big enough that we can achieve the physically near impossible in order to assure a future for mankind beyond the space of our time? What limits would we put on the dimension of universal love? It appears we are in a triple race to meet all of these challenges. The big question is, do we have the skills to stay the course?



### \* Episode 2B - [Roses at Dawn in an Ice Age World](#)

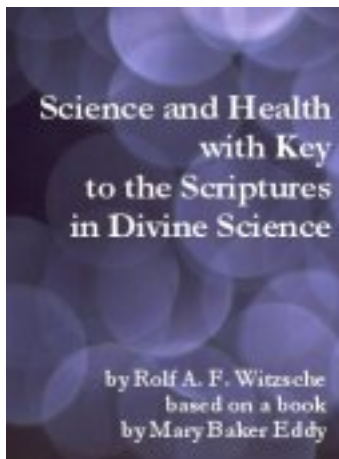
With the Ice Age resuming 100 to 150 years from now we are challenged to embrace the still rejected renaissance principle, the Principle of Universal Love, without which mankind may not survive. But will we be able to upgrade our human dimension sufficiently to accept the Principle of Universal Love and to reflect it in our daily living? God is Love, universal divine Principle. Do we dare to love universally in the social domain? Or do we pretend that the divine Principle of Universal Love doesn't apply there, especially when it comes to our personal loved ones and friends?

## Spirituality and Healing - research, exploration, pedagogicals



### [Universal Divine Science - Spiritual Pedagogicals](#)

Unknown to the world, Mary Baker Eddy created a scientific monument in the form of a vast pedagogical structure for the advance of universal Divine Science. The pedagogical structure is so large that she made all of her major works a part of it, and so far-reaching that it may have been a contributor to the rare period of nearly 50 years of peace in the world between 1866 and 1914



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A special Divine Science exploration of Mary Baker Eddy's book, **Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures**, in a unique presentation interwoven with editorial notes and research into Mary Baker Eddy's pedagogical structure for what she hinted may be termed Divine Science.

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