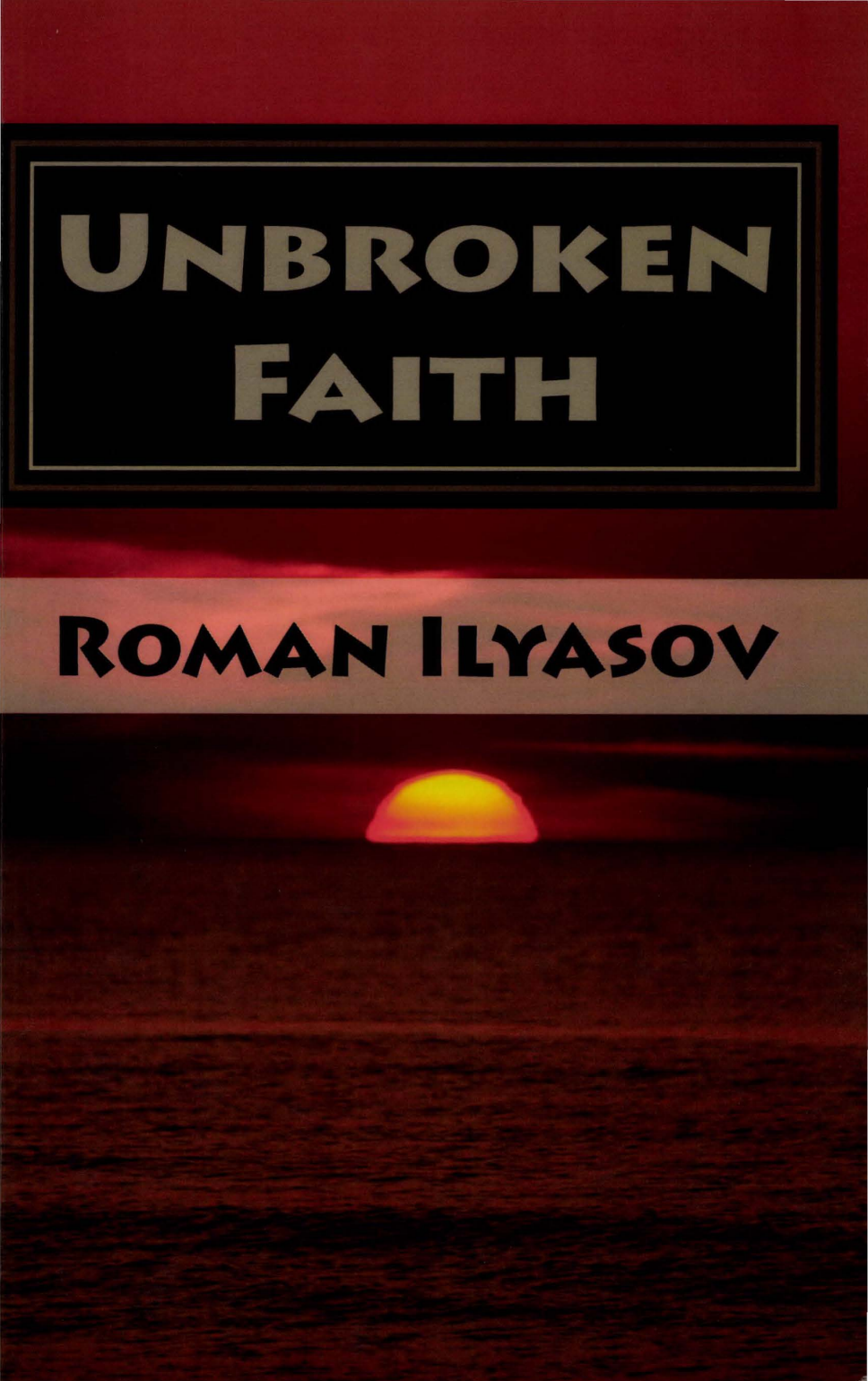
Unbroken Faith

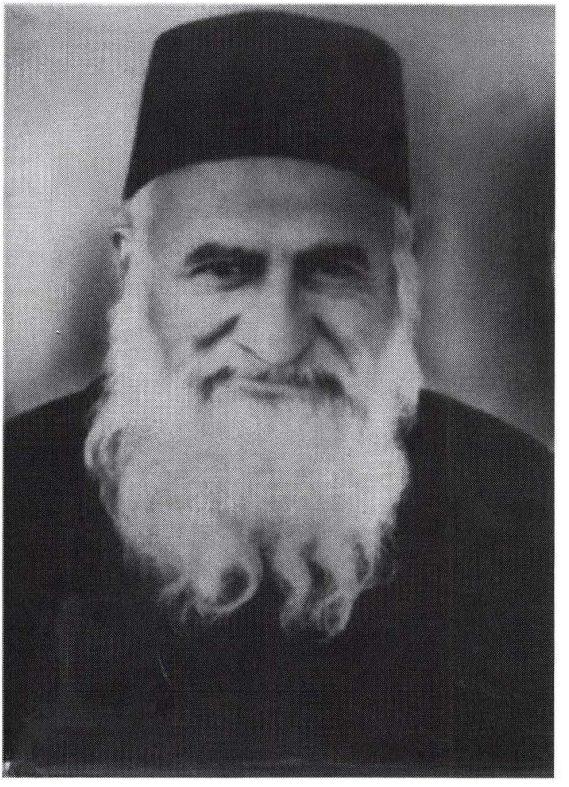
Roman Ilyasov



UNBROKEN FAITH

How one man's beliefs brought hope to those he met in a Soviet prison camp

By Roman Ilyasov



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I have spent two years working on this book. Truthfully, I would never have been able to complete it alone. I am grateful to my wife, Mira, who patiently allowed me to split my free time between working on the book and being with my family. I am also grateful to my two daughters, Hannah and Yocheved, who provided me with a helpful environment to create and fulfill my ideas regarding their great-grandfather, rabbi Jacob Rubinov. This shows they deeply understood the importance of my work.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the staff of The Bukharian Times of Forest Hills, N.Y., the newspaper's editor, Yuriy Tsyrin, designer Regina Kuznetsova, and, especially, chief editor Rafael Nektalov, who is also the head of the Bukharian Jewish Community in Queens, a union for Bukharian Jewish writers, poets and journalists. They helped me significantly to get my novel published. I'd also like to thank English translator Anna R. Ilyasova and English editor and proofreader Elizabeth Cooper.

I would like to express my gratitude to my grandfather's students, who, before they died, graciously shared their precious memories with me. They were talented and respected by all the inhabitants of Samarkand and Kokand, Uzbekistan. They included rabbi Ilia Akilov from Samarkand, and Abraham Khananievitch Iliaev, a native of Kokand and author of a series of autobiographies.

Rabbi Ilia Akilov told the story of how my grandfather, who, as a spiritual apostle, visited all the Jewish Quarters in Samarkand, Khatirchi, Kattan-Kurgan and Dushanbe, as well

as other cities in Central Asia where Bukharian Jews lived. He had only one purpose: he wished to bear an eternal torch of the Torah in contradiction to atheistic propaganda, which had a destructive impact on Jewish souls. He visited Samarkand several times, organizing seminars for religious Jews.

Rabbi Akilov said my grandfather was incomparable. He described my grandfather's unique ability to recite and explain the most difficult pages of both the Talmud and Torah so profoundly and finely that he seemed to be a master of theology. Akilov was among those who attended those seminars. He said he felt as if he were being carried away from reality and into the rich spiritual world of rabbi Rubinov. Akilov said that those who listened to my grandfather's lessons for only a few hours were inspired spiritually for many years to come.



Our descendants must know the stories that make us who we are so that we never repeat our ancestors' mistakes. This book is the expression of those memories and thoughts — from a man who always spoke the truth and remained humble throughout his lifetime.

Introduction

How did the work on this novel begin? I had heard many stories about my grandfather, rabbi Jacob Rubinov, from many people, including his children -- my mother and my uncle -- and my grandfather's former students, who were raised by him, according to Jewish tradition. He taught them Hebrew, Jewish prayers, laws, the rules governing the idea of kosher and other customs that are important to the Jewish community. For someone who deemed himself a mere engineer and a technical man, I will be forever awe-inspired by his life and lessons. In fact, his stories inspired me so much, I could not help but put pen to paper to write them down.

I loved my grandfather very much — his colorful stories and narrations were very exciting and caused my imagination to run wild. Jacob was a lone ranger, fighting injustice on his own, and struggled in a cruel era, but managed to preserve his faith in Hashem[1]. He had to stand his ground against the ruthless barbarian horde of Stalin followers who opposed him violently.

It has been almost 75 years since that tragic era, and I have seen a lot. Every year stirs up memories that remind me it is important to always remember these stories. Our descendants must be told them so they will never repeat the mistakes.

How can a man be faultless? I am not idolizing my

grandfather when I say he personified Kokand's spirituality at the beginning of the 20th century. However, when a man becomes a writer, he tries to perceive the world thoroughly. He learns not only from facts but from emotions as well. "Unbroken Faith" does not only include the facts. As I wrote this book, I not only included factual events, but I provided the readers with my own point of view of the era.

It is obvious that what my grandfather was doing was extremely dangerous given the political situation. However, he continued to guide people spiritually because of an insurmountable force and his faith in God.

Abraham Khananievitch Iliaev said he met many people in Kokand and other cities, but he never met such an honest, noble and faith-filled man as Jacob Rubinov.

Iliaev said he was upset that he and Jacob's other students were forced to stop studying in my grandfather's house because it was reported to the NKVD.

While I was writing this book, many people asked me why my grandfather, who managed to inspire large crowds of Bukharian Jews, failed to instill in his daughter — my mother — the spiritual values of the Jewish faith. I said there was no contradiction or hypocrisy. Quite the opposite. This described my grandfather's special attitude toward his daughter. He did not force his ideas upon those who were dearest to him if they were not ready to accept them. My grandfather greatly respected a person's freedom to choose, as well as the right of a person to create his or her own journey through life. He enlightened those who chose the spiritual path, and helped them graciously if he saw a response in their souls.

My mother was a pediatrician, and dedicated her life to medicine. She was a Social Darwinist, who studied and perceived the world through a Marxist lens. Later, she moved

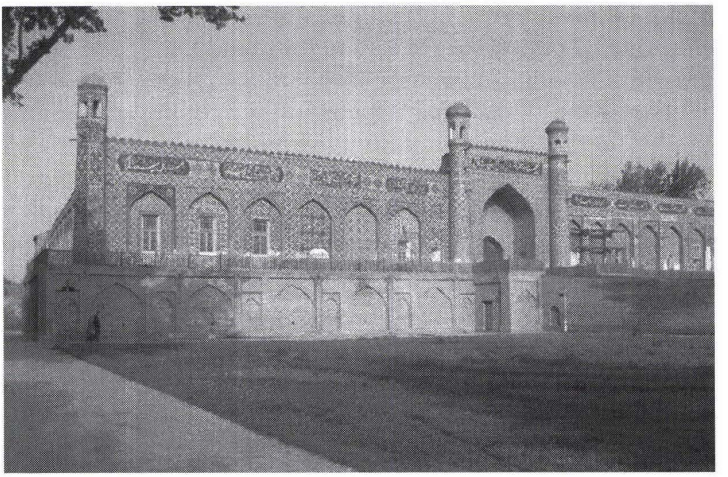
to Israel and realized that she made a mistake when she rejected religion. She regretted that she abandoned her roots.

My mother had a difficult childhood. She and her sisters were raised in the Kokand orphanage while her father was imprisoned, and received a Soviet education. She was endowed with numerous talents that she inherited from her father. After she left the orphanage, she attended Samarkand State Medical Institute, Uzbekistan, and graduated, all without any support. She became chief of medicine in a large hospital in Samarkand City. She was a loyal communist, just like many people of her time. The year Stalin died, 1953, was a time for many people in the Soviet Union to have epiphanies, including my mother.

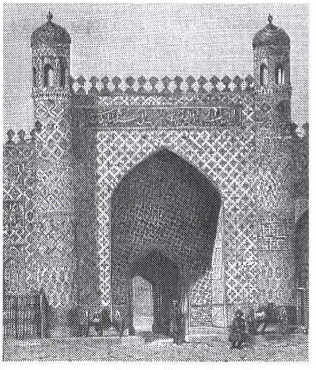
Many people who read chapters of "Unbroken Faith," published in The Bukharian Times, were very interested to learn about me. They were curious because the book had such accurate details of life in jail that many readers thought I, myself, had served a long sentence. I always thank God for having the sense to respect the law; so I have never been imprisoned. I remember the stories my grandfather told, as well as those of my dad and uncles; these stories greatly impressed me. They were all declared "enemies of the people" just as my grandfather had been, and were also accused of spying for Great Britain and Germany. Additionally, my father's family belonged to the generation of Afghan Jews who were exiled from their native lands on the border of Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. Our family's history is full of many stories of the repression, deportation, torture and inquisition that occurred in Soviet prisons.

The protagonist of the story, Jacob Rubinov, dreamed of moving to Israel his entire life. He strongly believed that the Lord would gather all his people in the sacred land, that the Messiah's[2] time was coming, and that we would miraculously

return to the land of our ancestors. As a religious enthusiast and activist, he performed his duty of enlightening people until the very end. He gave his sacred soul back to the Lord in 1966, right on the pulpit of Dushanbe's synagogue. Witnesses claimed that he foretold the opening of the Soviet gate in 1967, which was not long before his death. He also predicted that all Jews would soon return to Israel. Amazingly, he also foretold the exact date and time of his death. All his predictions came true. According to Jewish custom, he received an honorable burial in Dushanbe on the same day that he died. A year later, in 1967, the Six-Day War began, and Jews started moving to Israel from the U.S.S.R.



Chapter 1
Jacob



The arrival of spring in 1937 transformed the Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan within a few days. A damp green coat covered the stark nudity of yesterday's barren trees and bushes. The hills and plains were beginning to spread open with green grass and field flowers. Nature was just beginning to revive. The air was filled with the hum of bees, the songs of crickets and birds, and the rustling of leaves and streams crossing the entire valley.

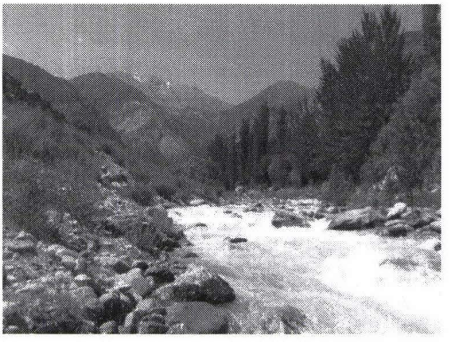
In the eastern part of the valley, at the lower course of the Sokh River in Uzbekistan and about 16 miles away from the Sirdarya River, was the marvelous city of Kokand — "the City of Winds"— that stretched out as far as the eye could see. The city received its nickname because of its incomparable climate and the swaying trees along the caravan pathways. This region was highly appreciated and frequently used by Arabian travelers and foreign merchants. Because of the mighty Kokand winds, the strong, low trees kowtowed to everyone.

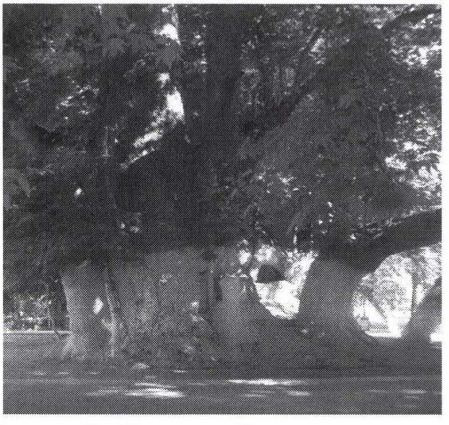
In spite of all of the architectural changes over the centuries, the virgin beauty of the city has managed to endure; it has been praised by both poets and travelers alike. Kokand managed to maintain its ancient structures. The old part of the city preserved the royal Khan's Urda palace with its multicolored, glassy tesserae on the eastern façade, the mosques, madrasas, royal tombs, charnel houses and other memorial buildings.

The terrible, bloody world of 1937, which included several political events in different cities during the spring, was in sharp contrast to the picturesque views of nature.

Kokand was surrounded by fertile lands that verged into barchans dunes near the bottom of the Sirdarya River, which runs from Kokand, about 47 miles west of the valley. It joins the dunes near the Sirdarya River. Pebbles covered the eastern side of the river. Surrounding the city were many cotton and vegetable fields and grape plantations. In the spring, apple, apricot, cherry pear, plum and pomegranate trees blossomed in Kokand, delighting the eye. The city streets were lined with mighty trees — chinars, oaks, curly maples, pyramidal white poplars, English Oriental elms, erythropleums, weeping willows, chestnuts, ash and acacias. The water channels of Kokand-sai, Kipchik-sai, Kipchik-aryk, Gangirovan-aryk and Naiman-sai, all narrow rivers,



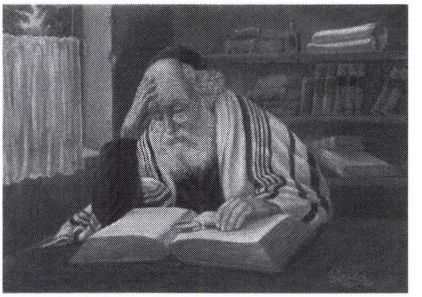




crisscrossed the city like a spider's web and form a unique microclimate, so it was never very hot in the summer or very cold in the winter.

***

Jacob Rubinov, a Kokand rabbi who dedicated his life to spirituality, was one of the most progressive religious revivalists in a population of Bukharian Jews in Turkestan[3]. His keen, philosophical and analytical intellect and phenomenal memory helped him rise to prominence in spiritual knowledge "sciences," i.e. Jewish philosophy, law, history and Hebrew — the ancient Jewish language. Because of his obsession with all forms of spirituality, he adhered to a strict timetable: 20 hours of spiritual teaching and creative activity and four hours of sleep.



Unfortunately, Jacob's gloomy predictions came true: a hostile time for Bukharian Jewish culture and spiritual activity on the whole community had arrived. The persecution of Bukharian Jews by the government strengthened.

These government officials severely delayed the successful development of Bukharian Jewish schools of secondary and higher education, which were originally permitted while the Soviet government began to establish its power. In 1937, everything changed when General State Security Commissar Nikolay Ivanovich Yezhov, the people's commissar of domestic affairs of the U.S.S.R., replaced Commissar Genrikh Grigoryevich Yagoda as director of the NKVD. There were

rumors circulating through the city that the government was considering closing these schools. Many Jewish leaders were arrested, and the repression of cultural and spiritual activities increased to a massive level. The persecution of Jewish spiritual revivals became more frequent, especially in 1937. Many Jews were afraid and stopped attending Jewish schools and synagogues. Jacob chose to put his own life on the line and opened a free-access school in his home. There he taught the Hebrew and Jewish culture, history, prayers and philosophy to children.

***

It was on one of those late nights when Jacob walked out into the yard to rest. It was a remarkably quiet night, so quiet that not a sound could be heard – neither the silent whispers of the leaves nor automobiles driving down the streets near Jacob's house. Lingering in the air was the fragrant odor of lilacs blooming in the neighboring yard.



"It's Sunday… everyone is sleeping," thought Jacob.

The night sky was absolutely breathtaking. It was so clear that stars usually invisible could now be seen. The twinkling stars bewitched Jacob. He knew the names of many constellations, their locations and their stories by heart. He began examining the constellations, which had helped him predict a disaster equal to Nebuchadnezzar's disaster[4].

Suddenly, Jacob gasped. A previously unnoticed star was now visible in one of the constellations. Jacob memorized its position and rushed back into the house. He reached for a map

he drew 15 years ago, and after locating the constellation, added the star to it. Then drawing a dotted line, he connected it to nearby stars on the map.

"Yes, my map lacked this exact star to create a complete picture of an impending disaster," thought Jacob. He was able to predict disasters by looking at the stars. "It might have been hidden by the Creator so people couldn't make predictions in the past. According to the short distance between this new star and the main one, a disaster is on the horizon. Dare I guess it has already begun?"

Jacob removed his astrological notes from the chest and recorded his prediction, desperately hoping his conclusion was wrong. He knew without a doubt that the Highest Wisdom -- God's law -- restricted the laws limiting the interaction of stars and other celestial objects in the solar system. It is impossible to understand the entire nature of this system simply by observing the sky. Therefore, it is impossible for people to make predictions by looking at the stars. God can change his mind. God determines a person's fate, not the stars. The Lord's power is greater than that of the stars. As he thought of this, Jacob was slightly hopeful that he could be wrong with his prediction.

Jacob looked at the clock. It was 11:50 pm. "It's time to go to bed," he thought. "Tomorrow is a special day, a day of circumcision."

Brit-milah[5] symbolizes the treaty between God and the people of Israel. Jacob would get up at 4 o'clock precisely, dress in his robes and prepare for the ceremony of this rite, which would be held in a synagogue near his home.

"I have a few minutes to look at the new star," thought Jacob.

He left his house and walked to the center of his yard. Sitting down on a wooden bench, he looked into the night sky. He was concentrating so intently on the new star that he did not notice

the sound of two automobiles approaching. They stopped on the street across from his house. Someone opened the car doors.

Jacob's attention was interrupted only when he heard a husky voice barking, "Troops, surround the house! Hold your position!" Jacob stayed where he was, but heard the trampling of feet getting into position behind the fence. Then, there was a dead silence.

"What's that?" Jacob thought.

He did not want to believe what he suspected. Could it be that day had come? He shook with surprise when he heard a loud knock on the door that was built into the gate.

"Who is there?" he asked nervously.

"The NKVD. Open the door immediately!" answered the same husky voice he heard before. "But, remember, the house is surrounded. If you don't open the door immediately, we'll consider that as an attempt to flee, and we will shoot."

Jacob realized the seriousness of the situation. He began to open the door, but before he could say anything, the door was pushed open, and he was flung to the ground. There were more than 10 heavily armed Soviet secret police officers rushed into the yard and positioned themselves at various parts of the house: two at the windows; two at the doors; two at the shed; two near the outhouse; and two next to the summer kitchen. Other police officers positioned themselves along the fence under the trees. After Jacob rose up, one of the officers jumped from behind, grabbed his collar and pressed his revolver so tight against Jacob's chin that he could hardly move his mouth.

"Who's inside, criminal?" demanded the chief officer, grabbing his collar.

"I'm not a criminal!" Jacob protested. "There must be some mistake. There is nobody inside except my wife and children." The chief officer pointed to the shed, the outhouse and the kitchen, and briskly ordered, "Check them!"

The assistant officers entered the kitchen, the shed and outhouse. "Clear," nodded one of the men. The chief officer remained behind Jacob, and continued to hold his collar tightly. He signaled with his revolver to check the house.



"No, please, don't do that!" Jacob cried, jerking his body. "You will frighten the children! I'll show you into the house myself."

The chief officer spun Jacob around harshly. He grabbed his beard with his enormous hand, put the gun barrel to Jacob's nose, and hissed, "If you make one more sound, I'll shoot you, kike!" Now Jacob got a good view of this bruiser. The man had an angry, infernal and purple-shaded face and horrendous blood-red eyes. Jacob, afraid, was writhing in pain.

Finally, an officer returned from the house, nodded and said, "A wife and five children." The chief officer released Jacob's beard, put the revolver back into its holster, and pushed Jacob toward the house. He whispered something to his assistant, but

Jacob's was able to catch one of the words — "witness."

Jacob was instructed to walk hastily to the house, with an officer in tow. The house had only three rooms: a living room and two bedrooms. Jacob's wife, Rachael, stood in the doorway looking at Jacob; she was obviously frightened.

"How are the children?" asked Jacob, as he entered the house.

"They are sleeping," Rachael answered, sobbing.

Jacob sighed in relief.

The room where the children slept was at the far end of the house. Jacob hoped the officers would leave soon, so his children would not have to endure this nightmare.

"I shut the door in the bedroom, and asked the officers not to make too much noise." Rachael said. It seemed she had read Jacob's mind.

"That's good," Jacob approved.

A few minutes later, a couple who lived next door entered the living room. Several officers followed them. Jacob suddenly remembered the word "witness," and realized they were going to search the house.

When the bruiser appeared in the doorway, Jacob asked: "What is the reason for this intrusion and disturbance?"

"Nobody intruded," he replied. "You opened the door on your own, didn't you?"

The chief officer's demeanor changed slightly, and Jacob was shocked by this change. The officer turned to the witnesses, smiling, and his voice softened. The rough bass timbre had turned silky. His blood-red eyes became kind and sweet. The harshness of his face disappeared, replaced by an innocent smile, and even his purple face became a calmer pink. "He's a chameleon in human form!" Jacob wanted to yell, but remembered that many people were arrested for offending authorities. Choosing to remain silent, all Jacob could do was look scornfully at him.

The chief officer smiled and introduced himself. "I am

Comrade Shakalin, deputy chief of the second Kokand NKVD Department. I have a warrant stating that we can search Mister Jacob Rubinov's house, who lives at House 40, Maida Millat Street, Kokand." He took the document out of his leather bag, handed it to one of his assistants, and said, "Please, have everyone become familiar with this."

An officer typing documents sat in the corner, and placed his typewriter on two chairs. "What is your full name, date of birth and occupation?" he asked Jacob.

"My name is Jacob Rubinov," Jacob answered. "I was born in 1888. I am a rabbi and a teacher. What is the reason for this warrant?"

"We received a denunciation statement from your neighbors today," the deputy chief said, taking the document out of his bag. "You are accused of organizing and holding anti-Soviet meetings in your house, as well as opening an illegal school, where you propagandize anti-Soviet ideas among children."

"These neighbors are unscrupulous and the denunciation is unjustified," Jacob responded. He turned to the witnesses, his neighbors, and looked at them attentively. "Do you agree with this denunciation?" They avoided looking at Jacob. They shrugged, and, terrified, looked at the officers.

The deputy chief addressed Jacob. "You may not speak to the witnesses or force your ideas on them. We are not here to answer your questions. We are here to ask you questions, and you must answer them. If you admit your guilt now, it will be better for you."

"I have never held any anti-Soviet meetings," Jacob answered. "I am a rabbi. People come here to pray or ask for advice. I only teach children to pray, and I do it for free."

"So," the deputy chief answered, "you don't want to confess? You are tainting yourself."

He then addressed his assistants, "Search the house." Three officers were sent to search the yard, shed, kitchen and

outhouse. The chief scanned the living room and saw three boxes sitting under the window; two were large and one was a little smaller. The deputy chief said to one of his assistants, "You will work here with me. You can start. I will take care of the boxes." He called the last two young officers and headed with them toward the bedrooms.

Jacob ran ahead and addressed the chief. "My children are sleeping in the last room. May I ask you not to disturb them? There is nothing to see in there. There are only beds."

The chief officer looked at Jacob petulantly and warned him, "You are forbidden to move anywhere. Stay here." Then, he turned to his officers, and said, "Watch him."

"Rachael," Jacob called to his wife, who was still standing in the doorway. "Please show them into our bedroom, but make sure the children don't wake up."

"OK, Jacob," she answered, weeping. She opened the bedroom door and let the deputy chief and his assistant enter. The room was sparse. There was a bed in the corner, a desk, a chair and a chest box in front of the window. The chief headed toward the children's room. Rachael ran to the door and said, tearfully, "I beg you, please don't disturb the children."

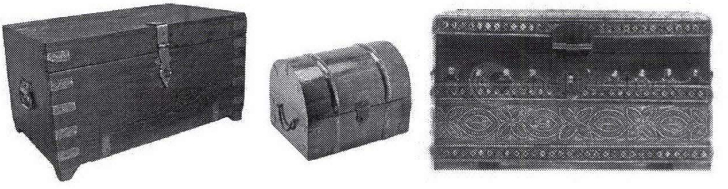
"Step aside, Ma'am," he answered rudely. "I must look in there and decide for myself."

He signaled to his assistant, who was standing behind him. His assistant moved to a position between Rachael and the chief who was now approaching the door. He opened it, and began an examination. It was a small and unfurnished room with only five mattresses lying on a carpeted floor. Four girls between 4 and 13 years old and a 6-year-old boy were sleeping on the mattresses. He shut the door and told an assistant, "Stay here. Only one person is needed."

Rachael entered the room, covered the children with blankets and closed the door. Suddenly the chief officer, who was just about to leave, stopped. He looked at his assistant and

whispered in his ear, "It seems suspicious that they worry about this room so much. You'd better stay here. Check the mattresses and look at the floor with your flashlight. Maybe there is a room hidden underneath."

When the deputy chief returned to the living room, he noticed his assistant was almost finished. Only the chests remained. The chief approached them, and removed their Oriental covers. There were padlocks. "Where are the keys?" he asked Jacob.



Jacob removed a small leather purse with a silver chain from his front pocket. He took the keys out and handed them to the deputy chief. "There is nothing of interest in there. They only contain books and notes."

The chief officer grinned and answered, "You are wrong. Those might be the most interesting items for us." He opened the boxes. The two large ones were full of books; one contained old books; the other, newer ones. The third box contained manuscripts. All were neatly stacked. The deputy chief picked up some manuscripts and turned a few pages. He noticed there were some notes with drawings and diagrams. "What do these hieroglyphs mean?" he asked Jacob, pointing at the manuscript.

"These are not hieroglyphs. That is an ancient Hebrew script writing system."

The deputy chief looked through about 30 more manuscripts and noticed some had faded and yellowed with age; others were still new. "Where did you get these?" he asked.

"These are my private notes."

"Do you think I'm a fool?!" he yelled. "There is no way you could have filled all these pages by yourself. Even if you lived three lives, it would not be enough time to write so many manuscripts. You must have gotten these from abroad through smuggling. What does this say?"

"This was not smuggled here," Jacob responded defensively. "I have already told you. I wrote these notes. Parts of these manuscripts contain my observations and research into different fields of science: religion, history, medicine, psychology, astronomy and astrology. The other parts are simply my teaching notes."

"It seems convenient that all your ideas are recorded here," the deputy chief countered. "That's exactly what we need. It will be much easier to reveal your anti-Soviet leanings. Our specialists will decode any messages hidden in these ancient scripts."

"Are you mad?!" Jacob said, immediately regretting it.

"Oh, you think I'm mad, do you?" the deputy chief said. "You offend an official performing his duty in the presence of witnesses? We could arrest you just for that!" He turned to the officer typing documents, and said, "Enter that into his record!"

Jacob tried to defend himself. "I didn't say you were mad. I only meant that what you were saying was crazy."

"It's the same thing," the deputy chief said.

"Well, then," Jacob replied courageously, "let your secretary also record on the report that you also offended me when you called me a kike. Because of a Central Committee decree approved May 25, 1925, anti-Semitism and other bigoted actions are illegal."

"Your statement cannot be substantiated because it was not witnessed and will be regarded as slander. You will bear the responsibility for that as well," the chief officer replied. "Do you still want it to be placed into the official report?"

Jacob thought it was better not to argue with this dishonorable man and chose to be silent. The deputy chief closed the chest full of manuscripts and moved to the books. He started turning the pages. "Are these also written in Hebrew?" he asked Jacob.

"Of course they are," Jacob answered.

"And what was written in ancient Jewish in these books?" He asked ironically.

"Prayers, in general."

"Anything else?"

"Ancient philosophy, ancient history and so on."

The deputy chief examined the books, which had very old covers. "Where did you get these antiques?" he asked Jacob.

"From my grandfather."

The deputy chief put the books back. "Well, I can believe that you inherited some books from your grandfather. What about these?" He asked, removing some books from the chest that had bright, beautiful covers on them. He sat on the closest box and continued, "I will never believe that books with such anti-proletarian covers were published here. I suspect that these books were smuggled into this country, and you distribute them."

Jacob could hardly control himself. "This NKVD officer is trying to provoke me," he thought. "He wants me to offend him again, this time in the presence of witnesses."

Jacob nodded discontentedly and did not answer.

The deputy chief opened the book and started looking inside. Suddenly, he jumped toward Jacob. "Aha!" he exclaimed joyfully, "you are a failed conspirator! Or did you think that we couldn't read English? London is written on the bottom of the page. These books are published in England! Who delivered them? Why do you have nothing to say? You are distributing anti-Soviet literature, aren't you?"

Jacob could no longer restrain himself, and refused to listen to these absurd accusations. "Some of these books were

published in England and other countries," he explained, "but I got them before the October revolution. Some were bought later, during the diarchy when the tsarist government ruled Kokand. They look new because I know how to handle books."

"I see, I see," said the deputy chief, placing the books back into the chest. "I have made my own conclusion."

He looked tired, and Jacob hoped the officers would leave soon. At that moment, the deputy chief's assistants entered and reported the searches were over and nothing suspicious was found.

A few minutes later, two other officers came out of the master and children's bedrooms. One was carrying a huge pile of books. The other reported he had examined the children's bedroom, touched the bed and knocked on the floorboards, but found nothing.

Jacob was concerned. "I asked you not to disturb the children," he said to the deputy chief petulantly.

"Don't worry," a young officer answered. "I did my job very carefully and quietly. Your children didn't wake up."

At that moment, Rachael entered the room and told Jacob the same thing. "Don't worry, Jacob. The kids are sleeping peacefully."

The young officer who searched the master bedroom told the deputy chief he found nothing suspicious, except that the books were written in a foreign language. He placed them on a box in front of the chief. "They were in the chest in the bedroom," he said. "I also found a set of scalpels and needles as well."

The deputy chief looked through the books and discovered they were published in England and Germany. "What are these books, whose are they, and how did you get them?" he asked Jacob.

"These are my books on anatomy, alternative medicine, psychology and hypnosis that were written in English and German. I bought them before the 1917 Revolution in Russia."

"Did you study medicine?"

"No, but I have been interested in many fields of science since I was young. Alternative medicine was among them."

"How many languages do you know?"

"About 10, maybe more."

"Which ones?"

"Hebrew, Arabic, Tajik, Iranian, Afghani, Uzbek, Russian, Ukrainian, English, German and Armenian."

"Where and when did you learn them?"

"I learned them when I was a child in Kokand. Before the 1917 Revolution, my father worked for English, German, French and other foreign companies, buying cotton and wool. I helped him, and, as I did, I learned the languages."

"Oh, now I see the apple doesn't fall far from the tree," said the deputy chief as he placed the books into the chest.

He turned to his assistants. "Well. It's time to wrap up. We have enough evidence. Make an inventory of the books and manuscripts."

When the list was ready, the deputy chief locked all three chests and ordered them to be put into cars.

Jacob objected. "Can I ask you why you are taking my books?"

"This foreign literature will be confiscated as evidence," the deputy chief said. "It will serve as proof of your anti-Soviet activity. Unfortunately, your neighbors who denounced you underestimated you. In addition to all the information provided in the denunciation statement, you are also suspected of more dangerous activity. You are being arrested on suspicion of spying for England and Germany, preaching anti-Soviet propaganda to children and young children, having contact with foreigners, sabotage and arranging terrorist attacks against our leaders, and most importantly, Comrade Stalin.

"Take him to the van," the deputy chief told his assistants.

The deputy chief then turned to the witnesses. "Read the report and list of confiscated books and manuscripts and then sign."

Upon hearing these unfair accusations, Jacob responded with hostility. "You have no right to arrest me. All you have are groundless accusations. You will bear responsibility for your actions."

"No!" Rachael yelled pitifully as she continued to stand in the corner. With tears in her eyes, she ran to the deputy chief and knelt in front of him. "I beg you, don't take him away!" she pleaded. "He is not guilty of anything! What will happen to the children if you arrest him?"

"Stand up," Rachael heard Jacob say. "Don't kiss his feet." Jacob was led across the room by two officers. Once at the door, he yelled. "It's all the Lord's will. If He sends me there, then He needs me there!"

He was escorted to the van, and placed in the back.

Suddenly, the door to the children's bedroom opened wide, and the children stood in the doorway. Unable to understand what was happening, they looked fearfully at their mother.

"Rivka, Sipora, Moshiah, Ester, Sarah!" Rachael ran up to her children, crying. She picked up 4-year-old Ester in her arms, who started to cry when she saw her mother's tears.

"Where is Dad?" 14-year-old Rivka and 12-year-old Sipora asked at the same time, looking at the strangers with fear in their eyes. Six-year-old Moshiah stepped forward and made fists with his hands, attempting to protect his mother and sisters. He bravely looked at the men in complete silence, and then frowned.

"Ma'am," the deputy chief said to Rachael. "Don't waste time. You can pack warm clothes for your husband. Our prisons are very wet, and I wouldn't like the investigation to last too long, or be postponed because he got sick. Besides that, we don't like to keep prisoners in custody indefinitely. Our

prisons are overcrowded because of the number of prisoners they hold."

Then he turned to the witnesses, who had signed the statement without reading it. "You may go," he said.

He placed the papers into his leather bag and headed towards the door. You have three minutes to get his clothes ready," he told Rachael without caring.

He proceeded into the yard, followed by the witnesses and the typist. A young officer was standing in the yard near the bench, smoking. The deputy chief stopped near him and said, "We have about three minutes to smoke until she brings clothes for this stingy man — an enemy of the people."

He took a cigarette out of his silver case, and the officer gave him a match. He noticed his assistant was looking at the windows of the house regretfully.

"You are worried about something, soldier?" the deputy chief asked.

"Oh, no," he answered, trying to evade his chief's look.

"Are you sorry for this criminal's children?"

"Of course, I am," he answered, inhaling smoke.

"How long have you worked for the NKVD?"

"About a month, sir."

"You are sorry for them because you are new. Remember this: They are children of an enemy of the people. Their mother is the wife of an enemy of the people. And they will bear the mark of Cain for their entire lives. Did you notice how the filthy little toad, his son, looked at us? He is probably less than 7, but his father managed to raise him as an enemy of the people! In my opinion, wives and children should be destroyed with the enemies of the people. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir!" the young officer answered, springing to attention.

"Good. We'll make you a politically capable officer in no time."

A minute later, the front door opened and Rachael stood there

holding two packs of warm clothes; she was crying. Her daughter, Rivka, had a pack of food.

"Where is Jacob?" asked Rachael, looking at the open gate. She heard a car engine behind the fence and quickly moved toward the gate.



"You are not allowed to go there, Ma'am," the deputy chief said, quickly catching up to her. "Put the packs on the bench."

He nodded to the young officer, who checked for anything that might be forbidden, and then he brought them to the car.

Within a few minutes, the other cars' engines started. In the van, Jacob clung to a small bar on the window. He watched as Rachael ran down the street after the van, crying.

***

The road was bumpy, and as the van traveled along it, Jacob was tossed around. It was very dark inside, but from time to time, the headlights of the car following them penetrated the window. Jacob could not concentrate because the van jolted and street lights blinded him.

Jacob thought about his wife and his children. "They will have a hard time if I'm not released soon."

They didn't have a lot of money; there was nothing set aside for a rainy day. When Jacob did have money, he immediately donated it to charitable organizations. He also used the money

to bring children to his home for classes. He bought dried fruits and candy and gave them to his students every day after class. He told the students that eating sweets improved their memories and helped them think logically. This helped them learn difficult subjects.

Jacob believed being charitable was one of the most necessary and sacred actions; he always taught this to his pupils. He would say if a poor man made mitzvah[6], donating everything but the last thing he owned — which is the most valuable thing he has, his sacred deed would be more beneficial to him than an expensive donation made by rich people because they didn't estimate its value. He would be more fulfilled than a rich person making an expensive donation.

There were days when Jacob's family was starving, yet he donated all his money. He wasn't thinking about the future.

As Jacob sat in the van, he believed that all the kind deeds he had done would now benefit his family. He was sure people whom he had helped, and the community to which he'd made donations, would help him now. He was sure his family would not suffer because they would receive support and help. He believed this world was full of ordeals. He always told his students that the Lord had sent people to Earth so they could reach spiritual perfection. The more perfect a man became, the more difficult the ordeal became. The earthly ordeals were boundless, and so was perfection.

Jacob reflected on his situation. "The fact the Lord is now sending me a most difficult ordeal, and it doesn't compare to anything else that has happened in all my 49 years, is proof that I have suffered through difficult events. I am ready to perform the most important action in my life, even in potentially inhumane conditions and under dreadful circumstances, which, I suppose, exist in prisons."

The long drive started to calm Jacob, so much so that he dropped to the floor and fell asleep. He only woke up when the sun's rays shone through the sides and ceiling of the van.



***

Jacob, followed by a prison guard, moved along a long corridor, his packs in his hands. The guard stopped him. "Stand and face the wall!"

Jacob hesitated.

The guard rudely pushed him, and repeated his order, "Stand and face the wall!"

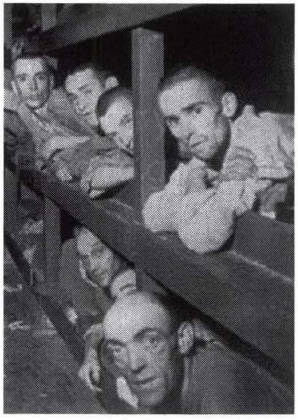
Jacob obeyed this time. Jacob could hear the sound of locks being opened and the banging of doors echoing throughout the corridor.

The guard ordered Jacob to enter the ward. Jacob unnoticeably turned towards the door and looked inside.

"Hurry up!" the guard ordered, and he pushed Jacob so hard

that he almost fell down. The door shut loudly behind him, and Jacob heard the metallic clicks again.

It was not yet evening, but the 220-square-foot room was dimly lit. Jacob looked at a small window at the top of the opposite wall, which was providing the only light for the ward. The air was very stuffy. There were wooden bunk beds along the walls to the right and left of Jacob, and the prisoners either sat or laid on them. Some even slept on the wet concrete floor.



Jacob quickly counted the people in the room: 19. Eight were lying on the bunk beds on the right side; the same number was on the left. Three were on the floor. "I am the 20th," Jacob thought. "I guess I am on the floor." The only vacant spot was near the metal toilet in the corner behind the curtain; it stunk. Jacob noticed several pairs of eyes staring at him.

"Peace be with you, kind people!" Jacob said to everyone in the room. Then he introduced himself. "I am Jacob. I am a rabbi."

"Teacher!" a young voice said in the darkness. Jacob was startled. A boy swiftly rose from the floor and ran to Jacob. He trembled as he spoke. "Is it really you? Don't you recognize me? It's Baruch!" He embraced Jacob. He looked at Jacob from head to toe, and then exclaimed joyfully, "Teacher, God sent you here! It's God who sent you here, to me!"

Jacob stood motionless; he was surprised. Finally, he realized one of his students was standing before him. He dropped his packs on the floor, grabbed the boy's shoulders and looked at him, unable to believe what he was seeing.

"Baruch, son, I recognize you," Jacob said. "Why are you

here? How did you get here?"

"I was arrested yesterday, teacher," the boy cried.

"You were arrested? A 12-year-old boy? Why?"

Baruch started to fight the tears that were beginning to fall down his face. "Because I told a joke."

"A joke?" Jacob asked. Then he declared indignantly, "They put a 12-year-old boy in prison because of a joke? That's incredible! I can't believe it!"

Jacob hugged Baruch as a father would comfort his son. "Don't cry, son. It must be a mistake. They probably thought you were older, or they might have confused you with someone else. You will tell them everything, and they will let you go when they realize they made a mistake."

"No, no, teacher!" Baruch cried. "They know I'm 12. They told me there is a section in the code for juveniles. They arrested me as I was leaving school. My classmate's parents wrote a denunciation statement against me, saying I had told an anti-Soviet joke to their son during the school break and also that my father was in prison as an enemy of the people. They drew up a report and said I was an enemy of the people just like my father. Then I was arrested."

Jacob nodded. "Does your mother know you are here?"

"I don't know," Baruch answered, "and I'm scared to ask anything." Shaking with fear, shock and despair, he nestled into Jacob's shoulder and cried like a baby. Jacob let him weep.

After Baruch calmed down, Jacob picked up a pack. He opened it, took out a blanket, spread it on the concrete floor and put Baruch on it. Jacob then opened his second pack, pulled out some clothes and covered Baruch with them.

"You must be hungry," said Jacob, taking out two packs of food. Baruch nodded.

Jacob noticed how excited the prisoners got at the mention of food. He stepped into the middle of the room, put his packs of food down and said, "Kind people, I have food. Join us,

please."

Jacob saw everyone turn toward the window and stare at a man lying on a bunk bed. This man, who appeared to be about 55 years old, had one arm. However, he had a strong face and an intelligent and keen look about him. Jacob could sense a positive aura about him. They looked at each other for a long time.

Finally, the one-armed man stood up.

"I see you are not cunning, Jacob rabbi, which is why we will join in your meal. But, first, rabbi, spill your guts. Tell us why you were arrested."

Jacob briefly told them what happened. When Jacob was finished, the one-armed man nodded and said, "You seem to have told us the truth. Remember, Jacob rabbi, that if you are lying, we will put you down properly."

"I told you the truth," Jacob answered. "I have nothing to hide."

The one-armed man then addressed everyone in the ward. "I have no objections to this man. Everyone sit on the floor around him and tell the rabbi your names. Everyone, but the mucks."

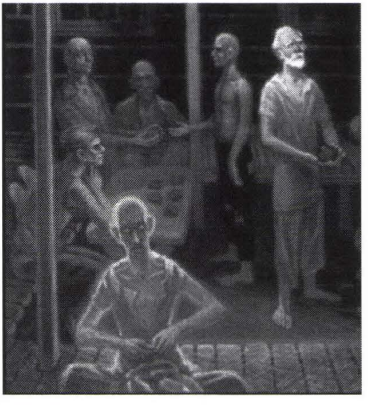
Everyone moved closer, surrounded Jacob and introduced themselves with either their name or nickname. The one-armed man was the last one to introduce himself. "I'm Chopper," he said, shaking Jacob's hand. "But you can call me chieftain."

Jacob sat near Baruch, emptied his packs and said to Chopper, "Our customs say I must bless the food with prayers and thank God who sent it to us."

"Well," Chopper nodded in approval. "We will respect your laws. However, you should also respect ours. We must give part of the food to other wards; it's for a collective fund." Chopper pointed at the walls to his left and right. Jacob knew he meant the adjacent wards. He smiled and nodded.

Jacob asked Baruch where he could wash his hands.

"Behind the curtain," Baruch answered, pointing toward the corner. They washed their hands and thanked God for His blessing. Then they headed back to the center of the ward. As Jacob and Baruch were settling into the circle, Chopper put some of the food off to the side.



Jacob prayed, holding a loaf of tandoori bread in his hands. He tore it into several pieces, dipped them in salt and gave them to the prisoners. Everyone began to eat. Jacob noticed two prisoners who were sitting on the floor did not join the circle. He realized they were who Chopper had called "the mucks."

Quietly, Jacob asked Baruch, "What does 'muck' mean?"

"I guess they were punished or outcasts," Baruch answered. "Yesterday, somebody said they were from the ward of the outcasts."

Jacob nodded to Baruch, and then addressed Chopper. "According to our customs, even outcasts must eat daily bread."

Chopper murmured something in an unpleasant tone, and then said to one of the men, "Sneaker, give them two portions!"

Sneaker quickly prepared two portions and stood up. He put the portions on the floor, refusing to come any closer to them than 10 feet.

While Jacob ate, he was observing the mucks. After a few minutes, one stood up and took some food. Jacob was expecting them to somehow show their gratitude, but they did nothing; not even raising their heads. Jacob suddenly realized

the laws here were unfamiliar to him, and it was important for him to learn them as soon as possible.

It didn't take long before all the food was eaten. The prisoners visibly cheered up, thanked Jacob and went back to their respective places. Jacob noticed that Baruch's cheeks became pink, and there was no more fear or sorrow in his eyes. Jacob slapped Baruch on the shoulder. The boy raised his head, smiled at Jacob, and put his head on his shoulder.

Suddenly, the lights went on, and Jacob looked up. Two dirty bulbs in the ward's ceiling were glowing dimly, allowing Jacob to see the dark sky through the ward's window.

"It will be time for evening prayers in a while, and then we will have to read Aravim[9]," Jacob told Baruch without looking at him. There was no answer, however. Jacob looked at Baruch and saw that he was sleeping. Jacob carefully leaned Baruch against the wooden bunk bed and stood up. Then he spread the blanket on the floor, placed Baruch upon it, and covered him again with the clothes.

Jacob stood, moved to the wall and started to pray. While he was praying, moving his body rhythmically in time with the prayers, he heard some noise in the corridor. Then, he heard the familiar clicks of the locks opening.

"Slop."

Jacob continued praying and didn't turn around. He tried to concentrate on his prayers, but found he couldn't escape the sounds -- bits of conversations and the clinking of dishes.

"Sneaker, pour this stinking slop into the shit-can," Jacob heard Chopper say. He heard curses that prisoners called the guards.

Eventually, with the help of self-hypnosis, Jacob managed to phase out everything.

When he finished his evening prayers, the ward had gotten very quiet. A cool evening breeze was blowing through the window. Jacob approached Baruch, who had rolled onto the

floor while sleeping. Jacob gently pushed him back onto the blanket.

Jacob noticed that Sneaker was lying on the floor behind the bunk bed. He looked at the bunk beds to the left and to the right of him. There was one vacant bed. He closed his eyes, trying to recall how the ward looked when he arrived. Then he remembered Sneaker had been lying in that bunk bed.

Jacob's memory was phenomenal; he had been refining it since he was a child. He wanted to enhance the qualities the Lord had blessed him with as strongly as he could. Jacob managed to develop his visual memory to the highest stage of perfection. He had a photographic memory, and created mental pictures of the things he saw. He was able to remember them in detail later.

Jacob glanced at Sneaker, and wondered why he moved to the floor. At first, he thought it was by choice. Then he looked at Chopper who was lying on the bunk bed, and massaging his shoulder. He was looking at Jacob.

Jacob gave him a friendly smile. Jacob's first impression of Chopper was that he was a very kind man, who had a positive aura around him. Because he is in prison, however, he kept these qualities hidden. Jacob was a gifted psychologist, and had both a talent and a profound knowledge of recognizing the true nation of people. Looking at Chopper's calm and reasonable face, Jacob could see he was also a gifted psychologist.

"A person must possess many qualities in order to lead people so skillfully and maintain discipline," Jacob observed.

Chopper climbed off the bunk bed, approached Jacob and pointed to the vacant bed. "It is yours now," he said calmly.

"Mine?" Jacob asked with surprise. "Sneaker was lying there when I arrived."

"You are correct," Chopper said. "Now, it's yours. We have rules here, rabbi. Beds are given to those who show proper human behavior; the rest get what's left. It's not our fault the

ward is full, right?"

"Right," Jacob agreed, "but if a man does something wrong, isn't it better to help him understand his mistake?"

Chopper winced from the pain in his shoulder. "Rabbi, you are a smart man. You should understand, however, that if a man is rotten inside, there is nothing that can help him. When you arrived, you behaved kindly and shared your food. Sneaker ate his in the dark. By the way, how can you be so sure that Sneaker was lying here?"

"When I entered the ward, I memorized where everyone was lying."

"How?" Chopper asked.

"I have been working on improving my memory since I was a child," Jacob explained.

"How?" Chopper asked again.

"I invented a game," Jacob explained. "I placed some items on a table and memorized their positions. I then asked my brother to move the items. I tried to remember where they were. Then I put them back in their original position."

"You are a talented man," Chopper smiled. Then he nodded toward Sneaker and firmly told Jacob, "Sneaker knows the rules and has no argument against them. This isn't his place any more. It's yours." Chopper returned to his bunk bed.

Jacob looked at Sneaker, who he felt was pitifully sleeping on the floor. Then he looked at Baruch, who he also felt pity for as he lay crumpled on the floor. He carefully moved closer to Baruch, picked him up, and placed him on the bunk bed. After he did that, he reflected. "It's about 10 o'clock now. There are two more hours before I will go to bed. What else can I do?"

Jacob was time sensitive as well. This is also something he had been working on since his childhood. He could tell what time it was just by listening to his internal clock. His "sense of time," which he uses when he is inside, helps him determine the time within 10 minutes. If he looked at the Milky Way,

however, he can be even more accurate, coming within three minutes. When he was a child, he made sundials in his yard and learned to tell time by looking at them. As he grew up, this became harder. The complex sequence of events happening in nature at that moment helped him determine the time. He learned to tell time with the help of animated or inanimate objects, plants, insects, stars, the sun and the moon.

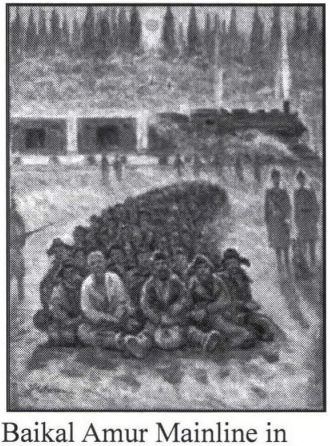
Jacob heard a quiet moaning near the window and turned his head in that direction. Chopper's shoulder was still bothering him. Jacob decided he wanted to help him. He approached him and said, "Excuse me, I don't know what to call you. Do I use your last name — Chopper — or your nickname — Chieftain."

Chopper laughed. "Rabbi, Chopper is not my last name, but you can call me that, if you want. I was called Chopper by my brothers[7] in the gulag.[8]"

"What a strange name," Jacob said. "How did you get it?"

"Oh, it's a long story," Chopper said. "Aren't you tired?"

"No," answered Jacob. "I only sleep for four hours, from midnight to 4 a.m."



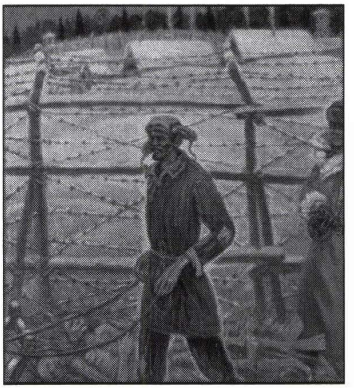
"You are lucky, rabbi! I have been unable to sleep since my arm was pierced."

"Pierced? By what?"

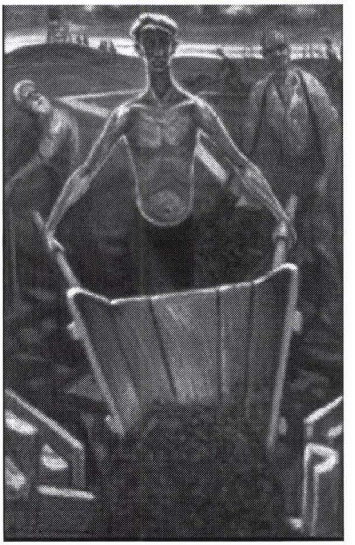
"If you are really that curious, listen to my story."

Chopper began his story. "I'm a veteran prisoner; I've been in lots of prisons. It started when I was young, and I receive a three-year sentence for nothing. I haven't been out since. I served my sentence in gulags, working on the Baikal Amur Mainline in Karelia, in East Siberia; Murmansk, in Russia, and Solovki[10].

"I always followed the schedule in all the camps. They treated us worse than slaves, however.

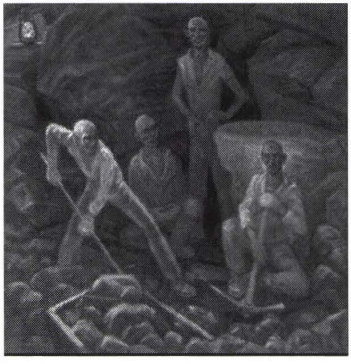


Chopper then pointed to his stump. "This happened to me in the last year of my sentence. We were working 12 hours a day, and after work we had to walk 10 miles to the camp. It was a mess inside the camp. Prison guards would beat prisoners, especially those who weren't in good health or were often sick and couldn't work. Many couldn't stand this and would commit suicide; many others performed self-mutilation, chopping off limbs and fingers or intentionally stay out in the cold until they are suffering from frostbite. This was called "chopping," and when it became an epidemic, authorities added more years to prisoners' sentences. People who lost their limbs in accidents were also convicted.



"So, rabbi, there were only a few months left until my sentence was over," Chopper continued. "I was the healthiest and strongest man in the camp. I had never been ill and I always exceeded the work quota. One day, when it was very cold and windy, we were cutting down trees. One was

supposed to fall to my left. But because of a sudden gust of wind, it started to fall right on top of me. I tried to jump out of the way, but, I slipped in the mud and fell. A broken branch pierced my arm. By the time we arrived back at the camp, mud had gotten into my wound. There was no doctor, so a nurse had to tend to my wound. There wasn't too much she could do, however. The wound became infected and the doctors had to amputate to the elbow.



"The chief guard gloated because he had always hated me," Chopper said. "He created a fake report. In it, he said I put my arm under the tree on purpose. He even found two false witnesses to sign this report. I tried to tell them there was no reason for me to do that because I only had a few months left. Besides, I had always exceeded the work quota. Nobody listened, and they added three more years to my five-year sentence. Since then I have been called Chopper."

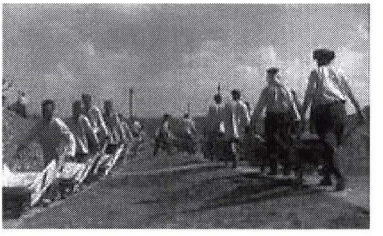




Jacob nodded sympathetically. "Has your shoulder hurt since then?"

"Yes," Chopper answered.

"Listen to me, Chopper," Jacob declared. "I can help relieve your pain so you will be able to sleep peacefully."



Chopper could not believe what he heard. "Are you kidding?"

"No," Jacob answered.

Chopper looked into his eyes. "Are you serious? Are you a doctor? Have you brought painkillers and sedatives into the ward?"



Jacob smiled. "No, I'm not a doctor and I have no drugs."

"Are you making fun of me?" Chopper asked. "Do you really think your prayers will help me?"

"I'm almost sure of it," Jacob answered. He placed his hand on Chopper's shoulder. "You must not doubt that I can do it," he said. "If you do, it won't work."



Chopper's intuition told him that Jacob could possibly help relieve his pain.

"OK," he said. "I'll trust you. I want you to help me."

"Great," Jacob said, smiling. "I will need matches and needles."

"I'll find them," Chopper answered.

"Prepare them," said Jacob. "I'll go wash my hands."

When Jacob returned, Chopper had a set of needles and matches waiting for him. Jacob chose the longest and thinnest needle.

"Take off your shirt, lie down on your back and relax," he said.

When Chopper was ready, Jacob said, "First, I need to find the area affected by the pain. You must help me. Once it is found, I will use the palm of my hand, my fingers and this needle to alleviate the pain. Bodies emit warmth in places that have pain, so I will find the warmest place with my palm."

Jacob started to move his palm around several inches away from Chopper's shoulder and arm. He discovered the strongest pain Chopper had was in three areas of the shoulder and two in the arm. Jacob closed his eyes. This procedure required a high level concentration.

After he finished, Jacob said, "I will have no problem alleviating the pain, and this therapy will neutralize it for several hours. I will press my fingers and this needle into different areas of your shoulder and arm. You need to tell me when you feel pain and describe it. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Chopper answered.

Jacob sterilized the needle with a flame and started the procedure. He found several sore spots and started pressing the needle into them. Jacob then asked Chopper to turn over, lie on his stomach and relax again, so he could do the same thing to the back of Chopper's shoulder and arm.

Before he continued, Jacob said, "Now, you must relax completely. I'm going to press certain areas on your spine, and it will hurt a lot. But you must stay relaxed if this is going to work."

"I understand," Chopper answered. To his great surprise, Jacob noticed that Chopper had outstanding patience and self-control. He didn't make a sound or jerk, and remained absolutely still.

When he finished, Jacob asked Chopper to sit on the bunk bed. "Well, Chopper, tell me. Does your shoulder hurt less?"

Chopper was surprised. It didn't hurt anymore. "It's incredible!" he said as he touched his shoulder. He raised his arm and moved it back and forth. "I feel no pain at all!"

Astonished, he said to Jacob: "You are a wizard!"

Jacob laughed. "No, it wasn't magic! Now, however, I will perform some magic – at least, you'll think it is. It's called hypnosis. I'm going to put you to sleep. Lie down, cover yourself with a blanket and close your eyes."

Chopper was mesmerized. He climbed into his bunk bed, looked at Jacob, and got ready for bed. Jacob started to pray in a monotonous tone. Then, speaking in Russian, Jacob made the suggestions that Chopper's eyes were extremely heavy, his breathing was shallow and his heart was beating slowly. While speaking, he pressed his fingers against Chopper's nose and forehead, as well as the veins on his neck and carotid artery, helping to slow his pulse and heart beat.

Soon Chopper was asleep, and very relaxed.

Jacob was exhausted. It was 11 o'clock; it had been a very tough day. He was arrested, his house searched and he was taken to prison. In addition, he helped out Chopper through hypnosis, and that required maximum concentration and energy.

"Magic!" Jacob heard someone say behind him.

"No, not magic. It's hypnosis," answered another.

Jacob turned around and saw that he wasn't the only one still awake. They were sitting on the bunk beds and talking. Jacob realized they had seen what he had done, which is why they were astonished and suspicious.

One man in glasses, who Jacob believed had an intelligent face, looked at him differently. Jacob saw respect and admiration. Jacob remembered he had introduced himself as Doctor. He also realized he was probably the one who

recognized what he had done as hypnosis.

"Excuse me," Jacob addressed everyone. "I must have disturbed you while I was helping Chopper to sleep."

"We weren't sleeping," one of the men said.

Jacob approached Doctor. "Are you a physician?" he asked.

"Yes," Doctor answered. "I am a surgeon." He stood up, shook Jacob's hand and introduced himself. "My name is Lev Abramovich Kaufman. I got the nickname Doctor here." He offered Jacob a place to sit on the bunk bed.

Jacob was very happy that there was an intelligent Jewish man in the ward.

"So you are a rabbi?" Doctor asked.

"Yes."

"Where did you learn hypnosis?"

"It's a long story," Jacob said.

Jacob began his story. "When I was young, my mother discovered that my hands could heal. She often had stomach aches; she suffered a lot. One day, I saw she was crying; she had a painful stomach ache. I felt a strong desire to help. I went to her, placed my hands on her stomach and started to cry.

"After a while, she stopped crying and started to soothe me," Jacob continued. "She told me the pain was gone. A few days later, however, the stomach ache returned. She asked me to put my hands on her again. I did, but the pain didn't go away. She continued to cry, and I felt a great desire to help her again. I concentrated, and felt a strong emission of warmth in my hands. My hands became so hot that I couldn't stand it. I jerked my hands back and shook them, willing them to cool down. When they were not burning anymore, I put them back on her stomach. She stopped crying, and told me the pain was going away. She asked me to repeat the procedure a few times, explaining that I had taken her pain and threw it away. The pain disappeared, and she smiled and kissed and hugged me.

"In the evening when my father came home, my mother told

him about this miracle," Jacob said. "He said I must have inherited the gift from his grandmother. He told me, however, that his grandmother had an evil eye and dark powers. He told me that once she cursed someone, and her curses were always fulfilled. People contracted terrible diseases, and some even died. Later, I heard that she had cursed a woman, telling her she would go blind, and she did. Another woman said something horrible about his grandmother, and she told her she would lose her tongue. That woman was struck dumb, and could no longer speak. After this, people avoided her, and, of course, no one argued with her. When I learned about my great-grandmother, I swore I would never curse anyone. I did promise, however, that I would look into this mysterious power and only use it for kind deeds."

Doctor listened to the story very attentively. When Jacob finished, he smiled.

"Don't be offended, Jacob, but I have to disagree with you. I don't believe a hypnotist has any supernatural powers. A person who is mentally challenged, however, will believe the hypnotist's words, so healing the body will work."

"Whose research have you studied?" Jacob asked Doctor.

"I studied the works of Austrian doctor and psychologist Sigmund Freud," Doctor answered.

Jacob smiled. "You'd change your mind if you studied the research of German F. Mezmer and Englishman J. Braid. Lev, I won't argue with you. I'll just prove you are wrong. Then you'll agree with me."

"How?" Doctor asked.

"Let me examine you. I will tell you what diseases you have and what diseases you had," Jacob offered.

"OK," Doctor agreed.

"Not now," Jacob answered. "I'm very tired. Examining you would require hypnosis, and I need to be refreshed to perform it."

Jacob saw Doctor looking at him critically, so he continued his explanation. "Hypnosis requires maximum concentration and a huge release of energy. I must focus all my feelings on the patient. I must listen to the patient, feel the slightest motion. If I can manage that, I can affect the person with my aura. You could call this a supernatural power. Only when you reach this state of supernatural power do you have influence over a person's subconscious.

"Believe me, Lev, not everyone can reach this level. Besides, I was blessed with this gift, and have been refining it since childhood. I had to learn about myself before I could help others."

"Well, Jacob, that sounds fantastic," Doctor said. "You persuaded me. Let's try it tomorrow."

***

It was almost midnight when Jacob went to the sink and cleaned himself up. He prayed before going to bed and finished his evening prayer, Sh'ma, with the following words, "Now I forgive everyone who offended me, or insulted me or damaged me or my property, or my good name, or anything regarding me, whether it was done willingly or unwillingly, intentionally or accidentally, by words or by actions. Let nobody be punished because of me."

Jacob spread out his warm clothes on the floor near Baruch's bed, lay down and covered himself with a warm dressing gown. The bulbs were still burning in the ceiling, and Jacob realized they would burn all night. The concrete floor was dank, and Jacob started tossing and turning because the dampness could hurt his lungs. He could tell his subconscious to warm certain parts of his body, but the process required a huge release of energy. Jacob's subconscious would have to work the entire night to control his body temperature, and this

would prevent his body from completely restoring itself.

Jacob felt somebody looking at him. It was Doctor. "Is it damp?" he asked.

"Yes," Jacob answered. Doctor pointed at Baruch and said, "Lie down with the boy. There is enough space there."

"I'll probably fit in," decided Jacob, looking at the bunk bed.

Baruch was a short, thin boy and Jacob was slight despite his height. His body was fit, and his features were clean cut. People who did not know how old he was thought he was about 35, when actually he was about 50.

Jacob stood and carefully pulled the blanket that covered the sleeping Baruch to the edge of the bed. He listened to Baruch's breathing, and lay down on the opposite side of the bed. He made sure he was lying comfortably and not disturbing Baruch.

Then he began his usual nightly procedure. Before falling asleep, he began to hypnotize himself so his body and mind could restore themselves. First, he focused on his extremities, getting them to relax completely. Once this happened, Jacob began to erase the day's unpleasant events from his memory. After he evened his breathing, slowed his heart beat and almost completely eliminated the outside noise, he instructed his mind to wake him up in four hours.

Then, he fell asleep.

***

When Jacob woke up at 4, it was still quiet in the ward. Jacob looked at the filthy light bulbs he remembered seeing when he first arrived. "You've seen too many problems, and you'll see much more," Jacob told them in a still voice.

He turned his head and glanced at Baruch, who was sleeping, a smile on his face.

"Am I here to help Baruch?" Jacob thought. "No one knows His intentions. I have a feeling Baruch will be released soon,

unlike me. If this is true, I was not sent here just for Baruch."

Jacob noticed a bad odor in the ward.



"Somebody must have forgotten to shut the toilet lid," Jacob thought. He stood up quietly and moved toward the bathroom. When he turned to the right, he noticed the place on the floor where the mucks had been sitting was empty.

"That's strange. Where can they be? One of them might be in the bathroom. Maybe that is what the nasty smell is. But where is the other one?"

Suddenly Jacob noticed something hanging on the curtain's lashing. He strained his eyes; what he saw looked like a handmade rope braided with bed sheets. He hadn't seen this rope before. Jacob bent down and looked under the curtain. He didn't see any legs under the curtain, and Jacob decided no one was in the bathroom. He pulled the curtain aside, and what he saw made him recoil. There hanged one of the mucks, his body covered in human excrement. His hands were also covered with excrement.

So many thoughts rushed into Jacob's head. "He hanged himself! Or maybe he was hanged? Where is the other one?"

Jacob looked at the man's face, but was unable to believe his eyes what he saw. He whispered, "Oh, my God, can it be Ishmael?" He now realized why the mucks didn't look at him the day before.

"Yes, that's it! He's the vice principal of the Kokand school, Ishmael, Isakhar's son!"

Jacob closed his eyes and tried to remember one of the most horrifying events of his life. It happened three years earlier on Passover in the synagogue of his friend, rabbi David Khaim,

son of Jahuda.

The synagogue was full of people praying. Suddenly, an 8-year-old boy, Abraham, one of Jacob's former students, ran into the yard. He immediately informed his father, Canaan Iliayev, that a large group of people was heading toward the synagogue.

A man riding a donkey with a tzitzit[11] on his head was in the center. The school's vice principal, Samuel Zakharovich, was the leader. The excited crowd was moving along the Jewish Quarter. Zakharovich pointed at the man in a tzitzit, and yelled, "Brothers! Jews! Why do you allow the confusion of your children? How long will you bear the religious slavery they, the rabbis, call for! They are enemies of the people, enemies of the Soviet government and enemies of the Soviet schools! They teach your children to do things rejected by our schools! They force archaic teachings on your children! They teach your children to serve God! They want your children to be slaves again! Shame on the Jews who support them!"

Canaan told rabbi David Khaim about the incident.

After hearing his father's words, the rabbi asked everyone in the synagogue to leave immediately. He explained the NKVD might have organized this demonstration, and everyone could be in danger. Soon, only rabbi Jacob and rabbi David remained in the synagogue.

Rabbi David could not persuade Jacob to leave. Jacob didn't want to leave his friend alone. He was also not afraid of what might happen. Besides, Jacob said he had foreseen this event long ago and was prepared for it.

Jacob said, "Whatever happens, we must face the ordeal to show God our love and let Him support us and our people."

A minute later, the demonstrators started entering the yard and the synagogue. Jacob and David saw there were several Jews with them: teachers, mentors and workers of the Ministry of Education. Several people tried pulling the donkey inside the synagogue. Jacob and David rushed to the door and blocked

the way with their bodies. Jacob exclaimed, "What are you doing? This is a house of God! Don't bring that animal in here!"

But the crowd pushed Jacob and David against the wall. Ishmael, one of the leaders, ran to Jacob and David, and yelled furiously, "You call this hotbed of sin a sacred place? It's the devil's place! And you are the devil's servants, who mislead Soviet Jewish children!"

Meanwhile, the demonstrators pulled the donkey inside. Ishmael pointed at the shelves along the walls and addressing the demonstrators yelled, "They bewilder our children with these books! Destroy them!" They rushed to the shelves, grabbed the books, started tearing them apart and throwing them underneath the donkey's feet.

Jacob and David tried to calm the demonstrators down, but it was all in vain. Then they started crying, "People! Come to your senses, please! What are you doing? Stop it! God will punish you for this! You will be cursed! You will endure many unbearable tortures in both this life and the afterlife! Many generations will be hurt!"

However, these warnings seemed to incite the demonstrators even more. They began throwing books at the windows, breaking glass inside the synagogue and tearing up carpets and curtains.

Finally, when no books were left on the shelves, Ishmael brought forth a scroll of the Torah, approached the donkey from behind and addressed David and Jacob. "So you prophesy severe punishment? We'll see! Now, you look!"

He lifted the Torah, stroked it under donkey's tail, punched him with this scroll and threw it under its feet.

"Oh, my God," cried David, throwing up his hands. "Forgive the descendants of these people for they know not what they are doing."

Jacob, who always managed to control his emotions, was

unable to control himself. When the demonstrators left, he went out into the yard, fell limply to the ground, and sobbed loudly. He cried his heart out for a long time. He couldn't stop sobbing, even when he started to choke. He sounded like a helpless infant who weeps because it was hurt.

Jacob pulled himself out of this trance. He looked at Ishmael's body, and appealed to God, "Oh Lord! Was I sent here to witness the mean and shameful downfall of this person? Was I sent here to see him punished severely by the authorities he revered so much? Was I sent here to witness revenge for the evil deeds he committed in God's house?"

Jacob drew back the curtain, turned and walked rapidly to Chopper's bed to tell him what happened. He looked toward the bed, and saw that something didn't look quite right. Jacob walked slower toward Chopper's bed. The other muck was hanging under the window on a similar handmade rope, also with a noose on his neck. Jacob looked closely and saw the other end of the rope was tied to the lattice. The man's right hand was smeared with blood. Jacob slowly gazed at Chopper's bunk bed, and was shocked. "Oh, my God," Jacob exclaimed. "What has happened?"

Chopper was lying on the bunk bed; his eyes closed and his mouth open. In his mouth was human excrement. Jacob also noticed a metallic object spotted with blood sticking out of his chest. Jacob was paralyzed with horror when he saw this.

When he came to his senses, he looked at the object in Chopper's chest. It looked like an improvised knife made from a fork or a spoon. Now, Jacob could easily imagine what had happened. The muck, whose body was hanging under the window, plunged a knife into Chopper's heart as he slept. The other one filled his mouth with excrement. Then they both hanged themselves because they knew they would be tortured or killed for what they had done.

"Forgive me, Chopper," Jacob said. "It's my fault. If I hadn't

helped you sleep last night, there wouldn't be three dead men this morning. Oh, my God! Was it part of your plan to send me here to take away these martyrs' lives?

Jacob appealed to the three dead men, "Let your souls forgive me! God knows I bore you no malice. If He deprived you of this life, then it was His will. He is the only one who knows when to bring souls into the world and when it's time to take them to the afterlife. Oh, all merciful Lord, who dwells above us, let those who have died be in peace in the afterlife. Let them become harmless with their place in your world. Oh, Lord, who establishes peace in Heaven, send peace to us on Earth! And let Your name be blessed, exalted, celebrated and glorified! Amen!"

Suddenly, Jacob thought, "Oh, Lord, are there only three bodies?" Jacob felt dizzy after he thought this, and it horrified him. He turned around and swiftly walked around the bunk beds, checking every person. Thank God, he thought, no one else was hurt.

"I have to wake up Lev and tell him what happened," Jacob decided. He approached Lev and started shaking him gently. Lev screwed up his face into a scowl and murmured something.

"He is not used to early wakeups," Jacob thought.

Lev opened his sleepy eyes just a little. "What's the matter, Jacob? I hope you are not waking me up to carry out your hypnotic sessions?"

"No, no," Jacob whispered anxiously. "Wake up, Lev. Get up."

"What has happened?" Doctor noticed Jacob looked very excited.

"The mucks killed Chopper and hanged themselves."

"You don't say!" said Doctor with surprise, looking where Jacob was pointing. His eyes seemed to jump out of his head when he saw the muck under the window.

"I'm not surprised this happened," Lev said quietly to himself.

"We must do something immediately," declared Jacob when he saw Lev still sitting on the bed slightly dazed. "We should tell the guards!"

"What? Are you insane, Jacob?" Lev said. "Never! I mean, not right now! You know what, Jacob? Sit down and be quiet. I'll take care of everything."

Lev stood up, moved over to the three men sleeping near Chopper's bed and woke them up. Their names were Fallow, Butcher and Tatar, Jacob remembered. They quickly stood up and ran to Chopper's bed. They examined Chopper's body attentively. Then Fallow turned to the muck's body and carefully looked at its right hand. After the examination, Fallow went to the ward, followed by Butcher and Tatar.

Soon they returned to Chopper's bunk bed. Fallow turned his head toward the muck under the window. "This piece of shit used Chopper's knife against him, and he didn't even wake up." He looked at Jacob with disapproval. "Then the bastard hanging behind the curtain started defiling Chopper's body to get his revenge." Fallow pointed his finger toward Chopper's open mouth and then toward the bathroom. "That muck's rope and noose are covered with human waste."

"The faggots took it out on a sleeping man," Butcher murmured.

"It's a miracle they passed us by," Tatar added.

"They wouldn't dare do that and die from torture," Fallow said. "I would've torn them apart and stretched their asses to their heads even if I had been killed. Now, let's start. I'll knock on the adjacent wards."

Then Fallow said to Butcher, "Wake up Sneaker and Tailor. They should braid a rope." Then he told Tatar and Doctor to write a message to the other prisoners in the cells. "Let everyone know that Chopper was killed, and make sure they

are ready to receive a parcel as soon as possible."

Jacob did not understand a single word of what Fallow said, so he just watched. Fallow went to the wall and started knocking on it, quietly at first, then louder, until he heard knocking from the adjacent ward. It was a reply.

Butcher and Doctor went up to the bunk bed, sat on the crossbar and took a pencil and a piece of paper out of the wall. Doctor sat down on the bunk bed and started writing something on the paper. Tatar woke up Sneaker and Tailor and told them to braid a rope in order to launch a horse.[12]

Sneaker ran to the corner behind the curtain, took a broom and started tearing it apart. He braided a rod from it. But there wasn't enough material, and Tailor had to tell Tatar that he needed more material — there was not enough for launching the horse.

"What do we do?" Tatar addressed Fallow.

"Ask the wizard," Fallow answered, pointing at Jacob.

Jacob was confused. He disliked this nickname.

Tatar approached Jacob. "Wizard, do you have a knit pullover or a pair of knit socks?"

Jacob hesitated because he wanted to ask him not to call him that, but then he realized this was not the right time. "Yes, I do."

Jacob removed a pair of woolen socks from his bag that Rachael knitted for him for Hanukkah. He handed them to Tatar.

Tatar took the socks, nodded approvingly and passed them to Tailor. Tailor started unwinding them very skillfully and rapidly, braiding a rope from the threads. Jacob watched them with curiosity.

Meanwhile, Lev finished the message and passed it to Tatar. Then he looked at Jacob, noticed his confusion and sat near him. "I know what you're thinking," Lev said. "When I got here several months ago and saw it myself for the first time, I

was also very surprised. If there is an accident in the ward, possibly similar to what happened today, the warden orders a search. And if the guards find a prohibited item, such as cards, tea, knives or blades, we will be tortured. The guards start beating everybody so badly, there'll be hell to pay. And if a man can't stand it, he will tell them everything he knows.

This is why all illegal stuff must be passed to the adjacent wards. They are passed using the rope Tailor and Sneaker are braiding now. First, we send them the message I've just written. Then they will respond saying whether they can accept the goods, and if yes, how many. When the ward is clean, we'll tell the guards what happened."

After a short pause, Lev continued. "Jacob, I noticed you didn't like your nickname." He slapped Jacob on the shoulder and said, "You can't choose a nickname, and you can't demand others to call you by your name. Here, it is beneath one's dignity to talk about it. That's why I beg you, Jacob, don't say anything to anyone about it. Believe me, the nickname, Wizard, is no worse than other nicknames around here."

Jacob did not answer. He remembered Chopper named him Wizard when he last spoke to him.

Soon the rope was ready. Fallow hooked the message to the rope and ordered Sneaker to be the lookout. Sneaker covered the inspection hole of the door with his body so the guards could not see what was happening. The noise woke everyone except Baruch.

Fallow asked three prisoners to help him pull the hanged man off the lattice. Sneaker climbed up the window and untied the rope. Two others pulled the body down onto the floor and pushed it under the bunk bed.

Tatar took the rope, climbed onto the window, and quietly cried out, "Hold the horse!"[13] Then he threw the message into the next window. Within a few moments, they received a response. Fallow read it and mumbled unpleasantly, "They said

we are bullshitting them because Chopper never slept before."

Fallow passed the response to Doctor and said, "Explain that a Healer arrived yesterday and helped Chopper get some sleep." Doctor took a new sheet of paper, looked at Jacob, smiled, and started to write a new message.

When they finally received a positive answer, Fallow asked everyone to move to the back wall and face the door. He did not want anyone to see the place where he, Butcher and Tatar were hiding things.

Jacob was worried about them waking up Baruch. He went over to Fallow. "Baruch will see the bodies if you wake him up," he said.

"Let the teenager sleep," Fallow agreed.

After everything was moved to the other wards, Fallow asked Tailor and two other prisoners to help him hang the body back up. Next, Fallow made everyone stand in a circle and warned, "When they question you about this incident, no one saw anything, and no one knows anything. Everyone was sleeping. I was the first to wake up and find the dead bodies. You woke up when I started banging on the door. Do you catch the drift?"

Everyone nodded.

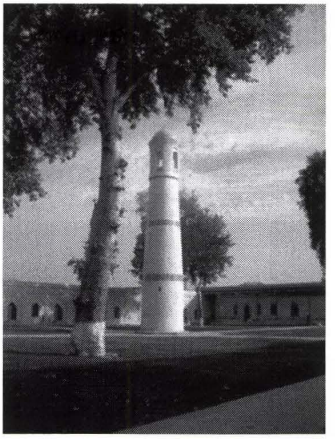
"Then lights out!" Fallow instructed.

Everyone went to back to bed. Fallow went to the door and listened for a long time. Once he was convinced it was silent in the corridor, he started banging on the door and calling the guards for help. Baruch woke up.

Jacob expected this, which is why he had prepared a big woolen scarf. "Don't be afraid, son, I'm here," he said calmly. He handed him the scarf. "Tie it around your head, and cover your eyes and ears. You don't need to see and hear what's happening."

"OK, teacher," Baruch said trustingly. He tied the scarf around his head, covering his eyes, put his head on his knees and covered his ears with his hands.

Chapter 2
Michael



A ray of early morning sunlight danced across the young man as he lay in the upper bunk of the train's sleeping car. The train had just stopped at a station not far from the city and would stay there for a half-hour. The car's air smelled like fresh wormwood, the odor of which came into the car through the half-open window earlier in the night. Michael's thick dark lashes trembled as the sun's ray lit up his face. Even though this ray had awoken him from his sleep, he didn't want to open his eyes. He enjoyed the feeling of the ray's warmth on his closed eyes. This light seemed to deflect off his eyelashes, and created a new array of bright iridescent colors.

Michael didn't understand how he could see so many colors while his eyes were closed. He thought to himself, "I may be very sensitive to light, and all these colors are simply in my imagination." This allowed him to be in high spirits for the rest of the day, and he remained lying down, choosing to face the window a little while longer.

He was filling himself with energy, believing it would give him the strength to face what would be a hard and important day.

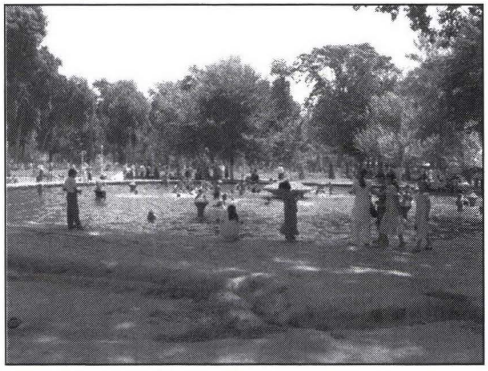
After a while, the train started, and there was a knock on Michael's door. The conductor informed him that they were approaching Kokand station.

After getting off the train, Michael walked slowly along the

familiar streets of the city. He had been studying in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, for three years, and now he was back in his hometown. The city seemed to have changed, but he couldn't figure out how.

"It might just seem different to me because I am used to the noisy capital," thought Michael. "The streets, the houses, the trees and the ditches are the same." Michael smiled as he stopped near the park. "These are my favorite places," Michael said aloud. He glanced inside the park and took a deep breath. A spring chill crept out of the park, smelling like flowers and pine needles, and the sound of birds above.

"I'd like to sit on my favorite bench under the willow near the canal now!" Michael said emphatically. He loved to sit near the water for hours, feeling the cool air, admiring the glorious landscape around him, and feasting his eyes on the flowerbeds, its manicured green meadows and mighty trees. He liked to listen to the music, which wafted jubilantly through the trees from the merry-go-rounds and was accompanied by a feathered choir. Michael glanced at his watch. It was 7:30 a.m.; he had to hurry.



"I'll probably find time to return here today and stroll up and down my favorite places," he thought. In 15 minutes, Michael strode up to the headquarters of the NKVD, the Soviet secret police, and addressed the guard at the entrance. "Hello! I am Michael Mikhailov," he said. "I have an appointment with the chief of the investigation department, Comrade Krasnov

Nikolay Ivanovich at 8 o'clock sharp."

The guard pointed at the small window to his right, and said, "Come up to the attendant over there." Michael crossed the corridor, stepped up to the window and started to introduce himself. He didn't get the chance to finish. "Your documents, please," interrupted the attendant, who was sitting inside the room and looking at him scornfully.

Michael handed him his passport and institutional referral. The attendant took his papers, checking them thoroughly. His look turned from scornful to suspicious. "And who is Mikhailov Michael Mikhailovich?" he asked, frowning at Michael's passport and checking it again.

"It's me," answered Michael.

"Was born in 1913," the attendant read aloud. His suspicious look vanished immediately. He stood up from his chair anxiously, and said, "I'm sorry, Comrade Mikhailov. I was notified that you had an appointment with Comrade Krasnov today at 8. But I didn't expect you to look so young. Please, excuse me."

"No problem," Michael said with a smile. "I hope I'm not late." Michael glanced at his watch. It was 7:55 a.m.

"Of course not," the attendant said. "You are the first on the waiting list." The attendant sat down, took a list from the table, and made a mark on it. He then wrote Michael's personal data on a clipboard. After everything was in order, he stood up again, gave Michael a smile and handed him the clipboard. "Could you sign here, please," he asked politely.

While Michael signed, the attendant made a phone call. "Good morning, Nikolay Ivanovich," he said, standing at attention. "Investigation officer Michael Mikhailovich has arrived. Yes, sir." The attendant hung up and gave Michael a friendly smile. "Nikolay Ivanovich can't see you now," he said. "He has an urgent matter to attend to. He will call you when he's free. You can wait in the waiting room." The attendant

pointed towards the hall. After a moment, he added, "I'll let you know when Nikolay Ivanovich is ready for you."

"OK, thank you," Michael told him, heading towards the hall. He sat down facing the window, his gaze drifted outside towards the NKVD yard. The minutes seemed to drag on forever, Michael thought.

Michael was looking forward to starting a job he had been dreaming about since he was a child. He was sent by the Tashkent Law University, according to the Kokand NKVD claim. Michael studied law and graduated ahead of schedule. He completed the five-year program in three years.

During his study, Michael read a wide range of literature about law, courts and psychology. Last summer, Michael was trained to read the Tashkent archives, and was fortunate to study many interesting archival papers. However, all he gained was theoretical knowledge. Michael dreamed of starting his career as an investigation officer. He was impatient, and wanted to plunge right into real work, investigating mysterious and complicated crimes. He believed he was very ready to conduct investigations because of all his theoretical knowledge.

Michael's thoughts were interrupted by the phone ringing. He leaned towards the office so he could hear the conversation better. "Yes, sir, send him right now!" Michael could hear the voice on the other end; it was so loud and assertive. The attendant hung up, bent down to the window, and said ingratiatingly, "Michael Mikhailovich! Nikolay Ivanovich is waiting for you in his room. It's on the second floor. Turn left. His door is the third on your right. The sign 'Chief of NKVD investigation department' hangs on the door."

Thank you very much," Michael said. He stood up and headed towards the staircase. He went upstairs to the second floor and turned left. He stopped at the third door where the sign, "Chief of NKVD investigation department," hung. Michael was about to open the door, but he paused for a

minute. "I should remember this important point in my life," he thought, gazing at the sides of the dark, gray corridor. A new and interesting life was waiting for him just around the corner. "Go ahead, Michael, into the promising future!" he said to himself, enthusiastically opening the door. Two large pictures stared down at him from the wall. They were the two great leaders, Lenin and Stalin, creators of this new life. Michael gave a smile, closed the door and stepped up to the table.

He introduced himself. "Michael Mikhailov," he said. "I am here because of a referral from Tashkent Law University to be put under the orders of the Kokand NKVD investigation department." He took out his documents and handed them to the chief.

"Krasnov Nikolay Ivanovich," said the department chief. "Put your documents on the table and take a seat on that chair opposite the table," he said. As Michael put his documents on the table, he noticed part of a picture sticking out of one of the folders. He had seen similar folders in the archives. The chief, catching Michael's glance, immediately pushed the picture back inside the folder and put it in his desk drawer.

Michael sat down as Krasnov examined his documents. Michael took the opportunity to stare at Krasnov. He had a red complexion and red skin across his hands. "He's broad-shouldered and probably tall," thought Michael. His facial expression showed nothing. "He must be a very reserved man," discerned Michael. His eyes bulged and they offered a cold glance. His eyebrows are thin, but wide. He has a predatory sort of nose and wide cheek-bones. From his observation, Michael could see that Krasnov was a strong and robust man.

Once again, Michael's thoughts returned to the picture he saw sticking out of the folder. It appeared to Michael that it showed a body sprawled on the ground.

"I must get that out of my mind because I'm sure Nikolay Ivanovich didn't want me to see that," thought Michael.

However, despite all his attempts to forget the image, Michael was unable to do so. The man in the photograph was wearing a knee-length, checked frock and high boots. His face was hidden, however. "I have definitely seen that frock and those boots before," thought Michael. "But, I must be imagining this because I have never seen that man lying on the ground, and I have never seen this picture before, not even during my training in the archives."

The department chief pushed Michael's papers to the side, took a folder out of the table chest, and opened it. Michael's attention was immediately drawn to the sheet of paper that lay on top. There was some handwritten text on it; it was his handwriting. "It's my biography," Michael guessed. The chief put the referral inside the folder and said, "I have already reviewed the documents I received from your university. It's very commendable of you to finish your studies in three years and get a degree with honors.

"I have also reviewed the recommendations from your deans and from the places where you had training," he said. "They all speak highly of you, and describe you as a smart, cultural and well-educated person eager to gain knowledge. But most importantly, they all applaud your loyalty to the government and to the party."

Then he took a piece of paper with Michael's biography. "I have also reviewed biographical background you've written here," the chief said. "You haven't described your biography in detail. Of course, I understand that it's impossible to note all the details, but I'm interested in your childhood, from the time you started comprehending your life and realizing your existence up to the time you fell into an orphanage," he said. "I'm interested in those details. Do you remember your parents and your relatives? In case you don't, is there any way for you to find them? And what will you do if you find out that your relatives have an inappropriate status for your position?"

He took a faded sheet of paper from the folder. "Here is a release record from the insane asylum where you lived in 1922 that sent you to the orphanage," he said. He took out another faded sheet of paper. "Here is an excerpt from your chart in that hospital. It states that you had partial amnesia," the chief said. "I would like you to clear up the events that happened to you at that point in time."

"I understand," answered Michael. "I am ready to give you a detailed description of what I remember."

"Then I'm listening to you attentively," answered the chief.

Michael began his story. "As you've just mentioned, I had amnesia in my childhood, when I was 9. So, my life actually began at that point. To be more specific, it started in an orphanage. One morning, I woke up in an orphanage, but I didn't know how I got there. I didn't know my name, or whether I had parents or any other relatives. And later, in spite of all my attempts, I didn't remember anything.

"I was taken to the psychotherapist several times before he finally sent me to the orphanage," Michael continued. "He and the other doctors working in that hospital told me how I had gotten there. I was brought there by a local police officer after I had been found in the railway station. The train conductor told the officer that I had been traveling with my father, but my father and all his baggage had disappeared two days before. Since that time I refused to eat or speak, and I looked insane.

"In the hospital I stayed under medical supervision for several days," Michael recalled. "In the doctor's opinion, I had seen something terrible on the train, and I was so scared that my brain made a protective response for my self-preservation. My brain erased all the horrible events I had witnessed from my memory. Besides that, I also forgot everything that had happened to me before the fright. I was sort of born again, though I understand everything they told me."

Michael continued, "He explained to me that I had a unique

capability that had saved me from going mad. The doctor told me that my memory might return during the course of time, but he couldn't find a single reason to keep me in the hospital. He figured that I'd rather live with others my age. So, I was sent to Kokand orphanage. I remembered neither my name, nor my date of birth. I couldn't even recall my hometown, which is why I was given the name Michael Mikhailovich Mikhailov. They estimated that I was about 9, and wrote down my date of birth as Jan. 1, 1913, with my place of birth as Kokand. I didn't succeed in finding my parents and relatives, and if I ever learn that any of them has an inappropriate status discrediting my position, I'll immediately quit my job.

"That's all I have to say," Michael said as he finished his story.

Michael could only guess that the chief was pleased with what he had heard, though it was hard to tell because of his lack of facial expression.

Krasnov asked him, "What did you think about life in the orphanage?"

Michael said he was very grateful for everything the party and the government provided the orphans – food, clothing, and education. In fact, he added, that's what allowed him to get a degree. It gave him the opportunity to have a life.

Krasnov changed the subject, slightly. "Why do you want to start your career as an investigation officer?" he asked.

"I believe that I can greatly benefit my government and party as an investigation officer," Michael answered. "Also, the position is very attractive to me. It seems very interesting and exciting."

"And who would you want to work with?" Krasnov asked. "I mean, when investigating cases, who would you want to investigate -- criminals or political prisoners, such as enemies of the state or spies?"

"Of course, I would prefer political prisoners," Michael said. He thought he heard the chief laugh to himself upon hearing this. So, Michael continued, "I understand, however, that a person must have more experience to work with them. So, I don't mind starting with criminals."

Krasnov smiled. "Well, young man, based on what you have said, you are a perfect fit for us. But, some of your ideas about the job are a little misleading. I hope these ideas will vanish as you become more comfortable with the job."

He continued, "After General State Security Commissar Nikolay Ivanovich Yezhov, the people's commissar of domestic affairs of the U.S.S.R., rose to power, the crime rate decreased because of his governance and high-security awareness.

"Unfortunately, universities do not have the time to train the necessary number of specialists because the Soviet leaders ordered the officials at the jails to increase the number of criminal discharges," Krasnov explained. "And, despite the organization of special committees and NKVD threesomes[14] to help speed up investigations, there is still a great deal to do.

"These establishments, however, have definitely increased the effectiveness the investigational and judicial processes," Krasnov said.

The chief continued his explanation. "Because of a lack of time, we are providing our employees with lodging close to detention centers. In addition, it is a waste of money to transport prisoners many miles just to question them.

"We will send you to one such colony," Krasnov explained. "You will live and work there. You will interrogate prisoners inside the prison. They are overcrowded and understaffed, so you need to work quickly.

"You are intelligent and politically savvy, and you speak English and German fluently. For these reasons, I am letting you investigate cases with both criminals and political

transgressors.

"There is an enemy of the state being held in the place we are sending you," Krasnov explained. "We arrested him yesterday, an espionage suspect. We confiscated three boxes of books and private notes that were written in foreign languages. Unfortunately, none of our employees understands a foreign language very well. I am very happy that we will have someone there who knows how to speak a foreign language.

"I'd like to give you a piece of advice," Krasnov said. "If you are eager to climb the ladder, don't be hesitant to torture those you examine, especially enemies of the state, if it will help speed up the investigation. We can't afford to detain prisoners for too long. It is important to keep the investigation process as inexpensive as possible. It is our job to ensure that we work quickly, and then send them to the prison camps or gulags.[2]

"Do you have any questions?"

"Yes," answered Michael. "When do I start?"

"Right now. You will make an appointment with the human resources manager, and I will hand him your documents," Krasnov said. "You will be registered today and given instructions on how to get there and when to leave. You will take the train, and arrive tomorrow morning. Meanwhile, I'll have the chief investigation officer of the prison, Comrade Palachev Vladimir Ilych, set up your housing, and provide you with any relevant instructions upon your arrival.

"By the way," the chief added, "I strongly recommend that you emulate him. Don't be afraid to ask for advice about your job. He has a lot of experience, and has learned different methods to help get criminals to confess faster."

After a brief pause, the chief asked, "Is everything clear, Comrade Mikhailov?"

"Yes, everything is clear, Comrade Krasnov," Michael replied.

"Then, I wish you good luck in your job."

"Thank you, Comrade Krasnov," Michael answered. "See you later." He smiled and stepped towards the door.

Michael was satisfied with how quickly things progressed. "Now, I am formally accepted, and my dream will finally come true! I will start working tomorrow," Michael said to himself ecstatically.

He was overwhelmed with joy, and he felt like jumping up to the ceiling and sliding down the banisters. But, he stopped himself. "No," he said. "I'm an NKVD investigation officer now. I'm an important person, and I must behave properly."

He approached the attendant who he met when he first arrived. He said, "Comrade Krasnov told me I had to make an appointment with the human resources manager so I can begin working tomorrow," declared Michael enthusiastically.

"Congratulations, Comrade Mikhailov," said the attendant, smiling. "Comrade Krasnov already mentioned it to me, and the human resources manager also knows. He is waiting for you." The attendant made a note in his register and Michael signed it.

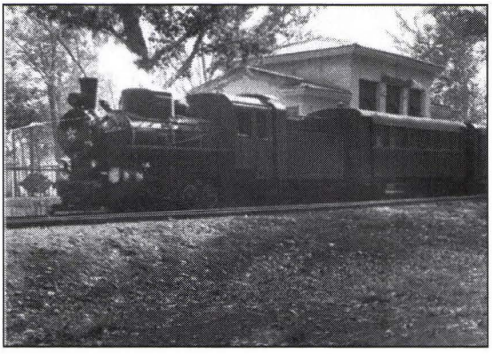
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The next morning, Michael left the train and looked around. Nobody exited the train except him, and the station was empty.

A long narrow road stretched in front of him; cars could hardly pass without touching. Michael didn't see any movement even far down the road. "They are late," thought Michael. He looked at his watch.

"They aren't, though," he realized. "The train was 15 minutes early. It's just 5:45 a.m. now."

Michael put his suitcase on the ground and sat on it. The footpath next to the station was strewn with chipped stones and pebbles that shined like jewels in the morning dew as the sun rose. The train started suddenly, ruining the charm of the morning's calmness. Michael thought, "This train really looks like a metal dragon." It hissed as a dragon would, and its wheels began to clash as it slowly picked up speed.



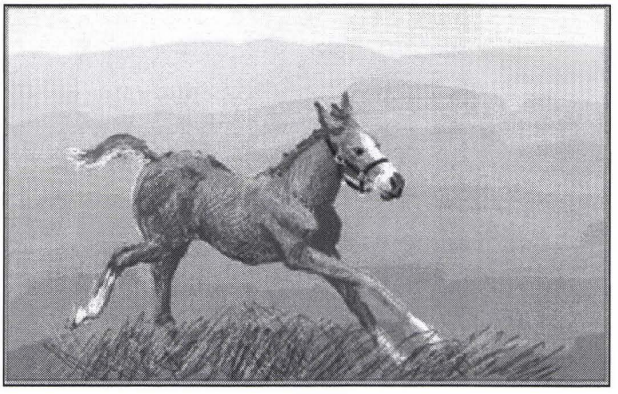
"It will pass by in a moment, and I'll once again be able to sit in silence and enjoy the day," thought Michael. He looked at the train as far as he could, but couldn't see the last car. The track was curved.

Finally, the last car appeared, lurching from side to side as it past him. Once it left, Michael was able to again see the view that first attracted his attention. In front of him, wormwood grew, and a red-shaded stallion ran around a field playfully. His silky golden mane moved in time with his leaps. What a charmed picture, Michael thought, and he watched it motionlessly. Standing there and not taking his eyes off the stallion, Michael began to recite Sergei Esenin's poem, "Forty days' prayer."

Did you see how, across the steppe
Vanishing in the lake fogs
With iron nostrils snorting
On cast-iron paws runs the train?

But behind it
Across the endless grass
As at a festival of desperate haste
With thin legs tossing up to its head
Gallops a red-maned colt?

Dear, dear, ridiculous fool
Where does he think he is dashing?
Does he really not know steel cavalry?
Have conquered living horses?



Suddenly, Michael heard an engine behind him, and turned around. A small black car was heading towards the station down the narrow road, about several hundred feet away from him. Michael picked up his suitcase and cast one more glance at the frisky stallion. It was running towards a small hill, and then it disappeared from view. He took one last deep breath of fresh air.

As the car pulled up, Michael noticed how young the driver was. "Comrade Mikhailov?" he shouted through the open window.

"Yes, it's I," responded Michael as he approached the car.

"Take your seat," the driver said with a smile. He opened the door from the inside.

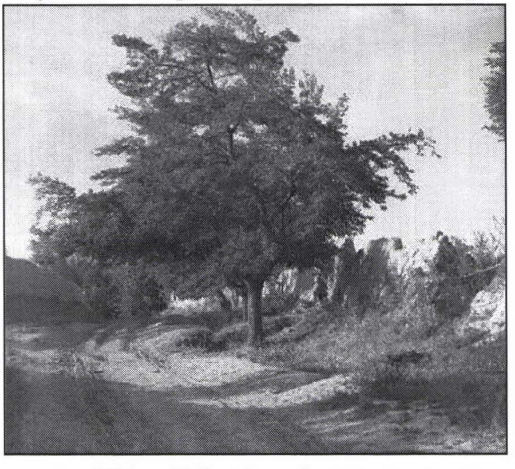
Michael got into the car, slammed the door closed and put his suitcase on the back seat. The young driver gave him a friendly smile, offered his hand and introduced himself. "My name is Vasily," he said. "I'm the driver. Congratulations on your new position." Michael thanked him. Vasily turned the car around and then continued, "I was told to bring you to our residential compound. We will be there in a half-hour."

"Is it in the settlement?" Michael asked.

"Oh, no. The nearest settlement is about 7 miles away from the train."

"Which train?"

"Sorry, you didn't know," Vasily said. "We call our residential compound a train because it is long and narrow, just like a train. It is within walking distance from the prison. This building was built last year for the prison personnel. All people who work at the prison live there. That includes operating staff, investigation officers, prison governor and everyone else."



After a while, they headed up a hill, and Michael could see a long and narrow building that really did resemble a train. "We will be there in 10 minutes," Vasily said. Ten minutes later, Vasily parked the car near the

entrance, which was in the middle of the building.

"Here we are," he said, and got out of the car. He took Michael's suitcase from the rear seat and said, "I'll follow you."

An attendant met them at the door. He greeted them, and asked Michael, "Are you Comrade Mikhailov, investigation officer?"

"Yes," answered Michael.

"I was ordered to hand you these keys to your apartment," he said. "The head of the residential compound will stop by your apartment at 7 a.m. sharp to explain the rules of the dormitory to you, and provide you with all the necessary information about timetables as well as answer your questions.

He continued, "Comrade Palachev, the senior investigation officer, will be waiting for you near the canteen door at 8 a.m. sharp. He said you and he will have time to get acquainted during breakfast.

"Your apartment's number is 66. It's located on the right side."

"Thank you very much," said Michael, smiling.

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At 8 a.m., Michael waited near the canteen door. A man stepped out. He was about 40, and wore glasses. He had a long pale face, a bald head and his eye squinted. He moved towards Michael, and said, "I guess you are Comrade Mikhailov Michael Mikhailovich."

Michael turned, and answered, "You are right. You must be Comrade Palachev Vladimir Ilych."

"Yes, I am, Michael. Let's settle one thing right now. You will call me Comrade Palachev when we are working together. But when we're not on duty, you can be on a first-name basis with me."

"OK, Vladimir Ilych."

"That's very good," Palachev said. "Now, let's go to that table," he said, pointing to one that was already set. "We'll be able to get to know each other a little better."

"Thank you for your invitation," answered Michael as they headed for the table. Michael was very intuitive person, and could discern personality the moment he met people. He felt a lot of antipathy towards this officer. If Palachev had been a stranger, Michael would have never sat at the same table with him. "I have to suppress this feeling," Michael told himself. "I am obligated to work with this man, as he is my direct supervisor. I cannot allow my emotions to harm work that is so important for our state."

They sat down at the table, and Palachev glanced at Michael's eyes. Through his experience, he has developed professional psychological skills. Palachev saw in Michael's eyes a man who was very clever, and one who had principles. And Palachev didn't like that at all.

"As a rule, rivals possess such qualities," Palachev said to himself. He gave Michael a smile, and wished him to have a nice meal. Michael reciprocated. Then they ate breakfast.

"I've heard a lot about your brilliance," said Palachev, peeling an egg. "Not everyone can graduate from the university in three years and learn two foreign languages perfectly. You really have outstanding talents and intellect."

"Oh, Vladimir Ilych, it has nothing to do with intellect," Michael said. "I'm just very diligent. When I do something I'm really interested in, I can work up to 16 hours a day without getting tired. It means I work harder than other people. If you multiply three years by two, you get six years. That means I studied two times harder than the rest."

"That's a good joke," said Palachev, smiling. Michael continued. "This is why I learned a lot. What's more, I really liked learning German when I was a boy."

"That's interesting," Palachev said. "Why did you prefer German?"

"You know, I asked myself this same question. One day, when I was in the library, I found a German-Russian dictionary. I tried reading words, just for fun. I managed to do it with no effort. After that, I started learning everything I could about the language."

"So, you were brought up in an orphanage?" Palachev asked, changing the subject.

"Exactly, from the age of 9."

"And who were your parents and where were they, Michael?"

"I don't know, I was just 9 when I was left on a train. After that, I was never able to find my parents."

Palachev looked at Michael attentively, and thought, "He doesn't look German. He has black hair, black eyebrows and eyelashes. But, one of his parents might be German. It's great that I have learned that. This information could be very fruitful for me in the future. It can be useful for destroying this smart aleck if I need to."

Palachev gave Michael another smile and told him, "It's great that you are used to working 16 hours a day. This will be very useful here. All investigation officers in our department usually work overtime. This is because the number of criminals doesn't decrease. In fact, it's quite the opposite. It increases, despite a regular number of discharges.

"I have been asking Comrade Krasnov for a long time to expand our department, and I'm happy that he sent you," Palachev said. "You are used to working irregular hours.

"By the way," Palachev inquired. "Why did you choose this particular occupation? You could have chosen something more interesting, considering your talents."

Michael smiled and answered: "Honestly, I have been dreaming of doing this work since I was a child because it seemed very interesting and exciting. Besides I'm very young,

and working as an investigation officer will benefit me greatly if I decide to change my occupation to another juridical profession one day."

"He's obviously a high-achiever," thought Palachev. "He graduated from the university in three years, so it will be easy for him to grasp all the necessary skills of the job. He would soon surpass me, and will become my boss in a couple years. I will have to work for him as a regular officer.

"I *must* find a way to take him off investigations. I will ruin you, you bastard, and you will make a mistake before you make your career, and destroy mine!" Palachev thought, determined.

Palachev managed to give Michael another grin. "Michael, I can assure you that you've made the right choice. We really have interesting work here. In addition to the usual detainees, we also have spies."

Michael's eyes shone brightly when Palachev mentioned there were spies. This did not go unnoticed by Palachev. "Great," he thought. "I think I'll try a little intimidation on you when you work with those spies."

To Michael, he said, "Yesterday, we arrested a spy; he's Jewish. We also confiscated three boxes of literature and manuscripts written in a foreign language. I want you to investigate this case. His document claims that he's charged with illegally distributing foreign literature, which he smuggles in from abroad. Your job will be to decipher these books, find out what they say.

"In addition," he continued, "this spy wrote notes, which were also confiscated. Unfortunately, they are all in Hebrew. Did you ever learn any Hebrew?"

"No," answered Michael.

"It's a pity. Anyway, you have to figure out what he wrote. You can do it using interrogation and torment torture.

"Well, we'll discuss it later," Palachev said. "You only have a

short amount of time to get his confession and prepare a prosecution report with substantiated charges for the court."

Palachev continued. "I would like to reiterate something. We expect you to get a quick confession. Otherwise, your fellow officers will have more work to do if you delay your investigation. Comrade Krasnov will be very disappointed if your monthly percentage of discharges is the lowest of the officers in our department."

"Vladimir Ilych, I'll try to do everything right in this investigation, and to do it as soon as possible," Michael said reassuringly. "But, I think, that even randomly going through the items in the boxes will take time. In my opinion, it's impossible to compare the speed of discharges of a regular crime to an espionage investigation. An espionage investigation requires a more careful and sensible approach."

"What an ass!" Palachev thought. "He hasn't even started working and he's already showing his non-Russian opinions, and trying to inflict those views upon me." He forced a grin at Michael and answered, "I agree. These things are hard to compare."

Michael continued, "This is why, Vladimir Ilych, I would ask you to give me more than one case to investigate at a time, so the other officers don't misunderstand me or what I'm trying to do."

Palachev nodded his head and thought, "He seems to have figured me out. It won't be that easy to destroy him."

"OK, you convinced me," he told Michael. "I'll give you several criminal cases to investigate."

When they finished their breakfast, Palachev said, "You must be tired after your long trip, so you can rest for a few hours. We can meet after lunch, around 3 p.m., on the prison grounds. I plan to give you an initial briefing and introduce you to your colleagues in our department and to the warden."

Michael wasn't tired, however. "I got enough sleep on the

train, Vladimir Ilych, so you can do it all in the morning, if you don't mind."

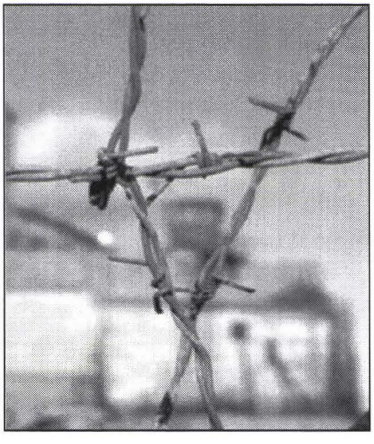
"But, I do mind," Palachev said. "I'll be busy this morning. However, I'll ask the warden whether he can meet you at 11 a.m. At 10, he will be busy with the prisoners who have been sentenced, sending them to prison camps. But, I think he will be done by 11 a.m. He will show you around the prison, and that should take about an hour or two. Then you'll have lunch, and I'll meet you at 3 p.m."

"That's perfect," said Michael, his face lighting up.

"Come up to the attendant at 10 a.m.," Palachev said. "I'll make you a prison pass and leave it with the attendant. Don't forget to ask him whether the warden agreed to meet with you. The attendant will tell you how to get to the prison."

"Thank you so much, Vladimir Ilych!"

"Don't mention it," answered Palachev as he rose from the table.



Michael left the residential compound and headed towards the prison. It was only about a mile away, based on what the attendant said. There was only one road that led to prison, and it took about 20 minutes to get there. Michael went around a small hill and saw a vast plain in front of him, well within eyesight. There was a tall watchtower several hundred feet away from the hill, and Michael noticed what he thought was sunlight reflecting from its surface. But, it wasn't sunlight, however.

The reflection was caused by enormous floodlights.

"They have chosen a good place for prison," thought Michael. "It is easy to see. Because of its location, an escape would be impossible as it would be noticed both during the day and at night. Only heavy fog could cover an attempt."

The prison was long and square cut, and the closer Michael came to it, the more clearly he saw a wire fence with its horrible thorns protruding all over the place. The longest and most terrible thorns pointed to him and filled Michael's heart with fear.

Michael stopped for a moment, choosing to not move any closer to the prison gate. There were prison guards and dogs standing near the fence. Michael could hear furious barking and growling coming from behind the gate; it sounded as though the dog were tearing somebody apart. Michael had an unpleasant feeling and a sense of foreboding.

"Will I work here every day?" Michael asked himself. "I have chosen this work, and there is no turning back now."

He stepped up to the prison guards and showed his pass to one of them. After he checked the documents, the guard sprang to attention and yelled: "Good morning, Comrade Mikhailov!"

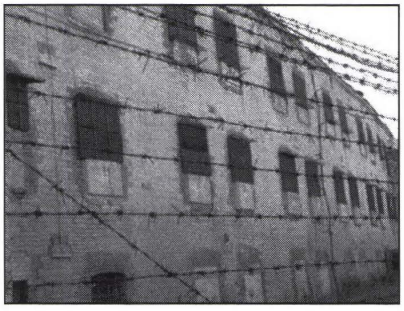
The gate opened and Michael entered. There was another prison guard behind the fence and Michael told him, "I have an appointment with the warden."

"Comrade Rastorguev will be free soon," the guard told him. "He's over there, on the square, the one holding papers. He's transferring prisoners to an officer from a labor colony."

There was a large territory between the buildings, and sitting there were three vans ready to transport prisoners. Two vans were already full. Prison guards with dogs were standing in a line on either side of the third van to make sure no prisoner tried to escape.

Every 30 seconds, a prisoner would be brought out of the building, led to a van and put inside it. The guards and their

dogs stood so close to each other that a prisoner couldn't take a step in either direction. The dogs barked furiously and jumped wildly, trying to get them; the guards would pull on the dogs' collars slightly. If a prisoner fell or a dog's collar got loose, a prisoner would have been torn apart. This scene terrified Michael.



Finally, the vans' doors were shut and the warden handed an officer a document. Michael guessed the document was a list of the prisoners who were heading to the camp. The officer signed the document and gave a copy back to the warden. They shook hands, and the officer left. Michael looked at his watch; it was 11 a.m. sharp. He noticed the warden heading towards him, swinging his arms and smiling cheerfully.

"Are you Comrade Mikhailov?" he asked when he was about 16 feet away. His voice sounded very cheerful. "I'm very glad to meet you." He offered Michael his hand, which Michael took, and gave him a very long handshake, all the while continuing to smile.

"Good morning, Comrade Rastorguev," answered Michael coldly.

"Oh, I see, you are a very serious young man," Rastorguev said. "Our prisoners will have a hard time with you." His smile became wider.

"No, you are mistaken," Michael said. "By the way, I'm not sure I liked what I saw here."

"And what did you see?" asked the warden, slightly bewildered. Michael directed his glance to the vans that were leaving the prison.

"Ah, that," answered the warden, innocently. "We didn't break any rules. We did everything according to the rules."

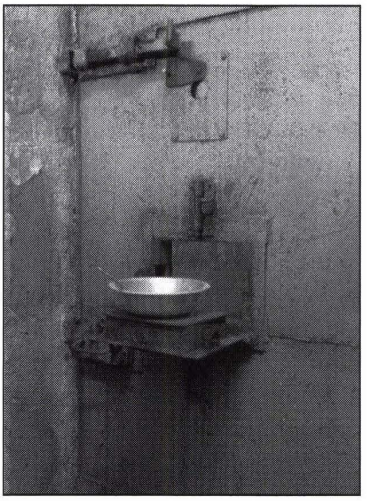
"But, it looked like prisoner abuse!"

Rastorguev smiled again. "I can assure you, Michael, it wasn't. Abuse involves beating and hitting; we adhered to the rules. The rules are not a waste of time. The rules take into account that there have been escapes during prisoner transport.

"You are new, a freshman. You have never seen this before, so I can understand that it is a bit painful to see for the first time. Don't worry. Many have had a similar feeling at first.

"Now," he continued, "let's walk along the prison building. I must show you where everything is."

They entered a long, black two-story building. The corridors were narrow and a metallic staircase led to the second floor. Metallic nets hung from the banisters to the ceiling. Rastorguev explained the layout of the building to Michael. "We have 200 wards. Each is 200 square feet in size and can hold 16 prisoners. The total capacity of all the wards is 3,200. But, in fact, we have hundreds of extra prisoners, obviously more than we can handle. I hope you can help decrease the number, so we can return to our initial number of 3,200."



"Where are those extra prisoners kept?" asked Michael.

"In the same wards," answered Rastorguev.

"Did you build new beds inside the wards?"

"Are you joking, Comrade Mikhailov? I'm going to show you

the ward through the gate, and you'll see that there's no room for additional facilities."

They reached one of the wards, and Rastorguev ordered one of the guards to check the gate and see through the inspection hole whether any prisoners were near the door. After checking, the guard said, "It's all right to go in, Comrade Rastorguev."

Michael looked through the inspection hole and saw four prisoners sitting on the floor while the rest were sitting on their beds.

"Do they sleep this way, on the floor?" asked Michael.

"Yes," Rastorguev replied. "What would you suggest I do? Do you want them to come to your apartment and sleep on your bed?"

Rastorguev burst out laughing and slapped Michael on the shoulder. Michael pulled his shoulder away from Rastorguev's hand with disgust. "I noticed that the window is very small. It must be incredibly stuffy in the ward during the summer."

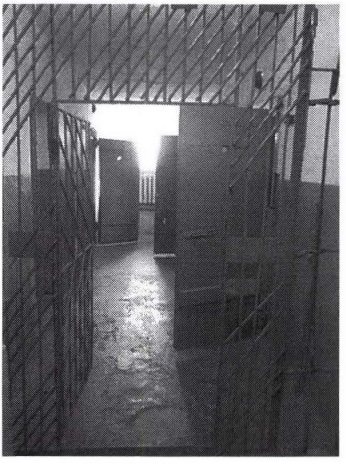
Rastorguev grinned. "You know what, you are absolutely right. This fact will help you investigation officers a lot. The rate of crime discharges goes up in the summer. A stuffy ward becomes intolerable for some prisoners, and they want to leave quicker. So, they confess to crimes they committed; some will confess to crimes they didn't commit." He laughed again. "Can you believe it? They'll admit to crimes they didn't commit.

"Well, let's move on," the warden said. "We hung these metallic nets between the banisters and the ceiling a few months ago. The suicide rate increased when several prisoners jumped from the stairs last year. Maybe they thought they were angels and could fly?" Rastorguev seized his belly and started to laugh. As he laughed, he noticed that Michael was very pale. "Oh, it's stuffy here for you, too?"

"A little bit," answered Michael through clenched teeth, hardly able to control himself.

"That happens to all the new employees. You'll get used to it.

Now, let me show you the most interesting here. It's located almost at the end of the building. Then we'll finish our tour a little bit early because you're not feeling well."



The warden walked swiftly along the corridor, which ran deep into the building. Michael followed him. In a while, Rastorguev asked Michael, "Can you here some weird sounds, Comrade Mikhailov?" Michael did hear something. However, it was hard to figure out what exactly was making the sounds because the corridor distorted them.

"Yes, I can hear something," answered Michael.

"What do they remind you of?" asked the warden.

"Like an echo inside a bathhouse," answered Michael. "Are you going to show me your baths?"

"No one has ever compared the sounds to the echo in a bathhouse," laughed the warden. "But, in fact, you are correct. What I am going to show you now can be compared to little cold baths with water on the floor and saunas."

"I don't understand, Comrade Rastorguev."

"You'll soon understand. I'll show it to you." He stopped and said, "Listen to these sounds. What do they remind you of now? What do you hear, and what do you imagine?" Michael listened, and heard moaning, screams, weeping and knocking in the distance.

"What's that?" Michael asked curiously.

The warden was disappointed. "You must have very poor imagination," he said. "Some nights, when I stand here and listen to these sounds, I imagine I'm alone at night in a

cemetery, walking between the graves, and, suddenly, I hear moaning coming from those graves. It's the call of the dead. Ghosts start whining somewhere behind the graves as well. The Angel of Death is there also, standing above a nearby grave. He is tapping his scythe against the grave stone.

"If I stand here for five minutes with my eyes closed, I have the feeling that I am in another dimension. You can be skeptical, Comrade Mikhailov. It doesn't only help relieve weariness and stress, but I find so much inspiration here that I think I could write the most interesting novel in the world, if I had a talent for writing."

Suddenly, the warden asked Michael, "Have you ever tried to write a book, Comrade Mikhailov?"

"No, I haven't," Michael replied, "but I read a similar kind of novel when I was a boy. In an ancient castle, there were very old pipes that made sounds that resembled the moaning of ghosts and other spirits. I still don't understand where these sounds are coming from, Comrade Rastorguev. Are they also made by old pipes? And where are those baths with water on the floor and heated saunas?"

"We're there," Rastorguev said. Here they are, the baths and saunas." The warden pointed at a line of metallic doors. Now, Michael could distinctly hear knocking on the door, screams, weeping and moaning. Terrified, Michael glanced frightened at the warden with fear. "Did you lock people there?" he asked.

"Yes," Rastorguev replied. "Prisoners who break the rules, are guilty of misconduct, or those who violate the rules are locked up here," he explained. "These are punishment cells. There are seven isolation wards in this building. These five are cold, and these two are hot. If the punishment is strict, we pour water into cold isolation cells. The water reaches the prisoners' ankles. As for the hot isolation wards, hot water runs inside the pipes, so the prisoners feel like they are in the sauna.

"There are no windows like in the regular wards," Rastorguev

continued, "and there are neither seats nor beds. If there is one man inside, we put a bucket between his legs. Now, however, there is no space for a bucket because we presently lock two or three men there at the same time."

"It is mere abuse!" exclaimed Michael, indignantly.

The warden was surprised. "Come on, Comrade Mikhailov! I guess I can understand how you feel, though. It's your first day in the prison, and it all seems a bit strange to you. But, these are the rules of the prison. We didn't create them, and we don't have the right to discuss them. So, Comrade Mikhailov, I would recommend you keep your comments to yourself. Your comments may be misinterpreted by some people.

"I don't wish you any harm," he continued. "You are just starting a new life. That is why I suggest that this conversation never happened.

"The 17 men inside these cells are from the same ward," Rastorguev explained. "Three crimes were committed there tonight or maybe early this morning. As a result, we have three dead men. One of those men killed a person under investigation by stabbing him in the heart with a handmade knife. And another man hanged two others. One man isn't capable of committing all three crimes. There were also witnesses. Nevertheless, when the guards rushed into the ward each of these men said he hadn't seen anything, nor knew what happened. The prison guards, half the prisoners and I were awoken at 5 a.m.

"This is the first incident of its kind at this prison since last year."

"What if there are a few of the 17 who didn't commit a crime, or didn't see anything?" Michael asked. "These crimes were committed at night, when most of the prisoners were asleep. It also can't be true that two people under investigation hanged themselves?"

"It is true," the warden said. "It's Comrade Palachev's job to

figure it out, and his department should help him. Right now, Palachev ordered the guards to put them all into isolation for 24 hours to see whether they will talk."

Rastorguev looked at his watch. "Comrade Mikhailov, I had planned to meet with you from 11 a.m. until noon. If you have any questions about your job, I'll be happy to answer them. However, let's head toward the exit."

Rastorguev turned quickly toward the exit, and continued to talk. "I've heard that you can speak foreign languages fluently, so you'll probably be working specifically with spies. You can make something of yourself very quickly because of this knowledge. Not even the chief investigation officer speaks a foreign language."

Michael interrupted him. "I'm sorry, Comrade Rastorguev, but I'm wondering. A man under investigation was brought to the prison yesterday. He had three boxes of confiscated books with him. Could you tell me where the books are and where he is being held?"

"The books are in the warehouse, the building next to this one," Rastorguev said. As for the man, he was in the ward where the incident occurred yesterday, and is one of 17 now locked up in isolation."

As the warden went outside, Michael asked, "Did he have a medical examination before being put into isolation?"

"No," answered the warden. "He was brought here on Sunday, and we had planned to give him an examination and cut his long beard today. But, now we don't have the chance to do it. Do you understand?"

"I have one more question," Michael said. "Do you know where Comrade Palachev is now?"

"He must be somewhere on the prison grounds," Rastorguev said. "Stop into the investigation department; he might be there. His room is the 12th door on the right side of the corridor. Palachev said you had an appointment with him at 3

p.m. today."

Rastorguev smiled. "I wish you good luck, Comrade Mikhailov." The warden proceeded to walk in the opposite direction.

Michael headed to Palachev's office, and knocked on his door.

"It's open," he heard Palachev say. Michael cracked the door open a little, and asked: "May I come in, Comrade Palachev?"

"Oh, Comrade Mikhailov! Where is Comrade Rastorguev?"

"He just finished with me," Michael answered. "It was my idea to pay you a visit."

"Really?" Palachev said. "Come in. I was just looking through some cases I plan to give to you, Comrade Mikhailov."

There were four folders lying on his table. He took the one on the top, which happened to be the thinnest, and said: "Here is Jacob Rubinov's case. He is the one we were talking about in the canteen. Here is his neighbors' statement, search warrant, list of confiscated books and his private notes. In addition, I will be giving you three more cases. I am planning to discuss them with you in our meeting."

"Comrade Palachev, I'm here because of an urgent matter concerning Jacob Rubinov."

"I'm listening to you attentively, Comrade Mikhailov."

"I just learned that Rubinov was put into isolation," Michael said.

"Yes, I know," confirmed Palachev. "He was unlucky. He had only been in the ward a few hours before the three crimes were committed."

"Right, only a few hours!" Michael said. "That is why he is not guilty! Also, he was put in isolation before he had a medical examination. I consider that to be irresponsible.

"Also, there are several people in one cell, and they don't have enough air," he continued. "I'm worried he won't be able to endure 24 hours in the cell if his health is not good. He could

die. If he really is a spy and he dies, there will be hell to pay. It will be especially hard for you when the NKVD administration learns that he died before we found out his contacts."

Michael noticed that Palachev's face suddenly got pale. There was also a look of fear and bewilderment in his eyes. However, he quickly regained his composure, and said in a loud voice, "Comrade Mikhailov, everything was done according to the instructions. Something happened. Three people died! We have a right to punish anyone we believe was involved, including those who committed the crime, their accomplices and any witnesses. Besides, it isn't just my decision.

"I didn't know Jacob Rubinov never underwent a medical examination. Who told you?"

"The warden," Michael answered.

"The warden approved of sending them to the isolation wards, but he didn't tell me about Rubinov. Thank you for telling me, Comrade Mikhailov. I'll issue an order returning Jacob Rubinov to the ward."

"Comrade Palachev," continued Michael, "Since Rubinov came from the ward in which the murders were committed, could you allow me to investigate that case as well?"

"I'll think about it," Palachev answered.

As Michael turned to leave, Palachev said, "Hold on." He thought for a moment. There was a pile of folders on his desk; he took out three. "OK. I will assign the three murders to you instead of the three cases I had planned to give you. But remember, Comrade Mikhailov, something happened. You cannot take your time. You must complete your investigation in three days.

"Return at 3 p.m., and I'll give you all the pertinent paperwork and protocols for this case, as well as some instructions," he continued. "I will have you work with another investigation officer because it will be impossible for you to interrogate 17 persons by yourself. You both will share the

work, however, you alone will be responsible for the result."

Michael wasn't happy with this arrangement. "Comrade Palachev," he said, "Because I am responsible for this case, I would like to request to work on it by myself, allowing me to form my own opinion and make my own decision."

"What do you mean?" Palachev asked cautiously.

"I mean, I'd like to approach the case in my own way. I want to use my own methods to interrogate the prisoners. I will probably use methods that haven't been used here before."

"Comrade Mikhailov, all methods are good, if you get a result. You use whatever methods you feel you need to, but you must finish in three days."

"Then, could you change your order and release the prisoners? I would like them placed in cells in different wards so they cannot speak to each other."

"OK," Palachev said. "I will tell the warden to grant your request."

"I'll mention it to him myself, if you don't mind, Comrade Palachev."

"Comrade Mikhailov, I'm not sure he is on the prison grounds right now," Palachev said as he glanced at his watch. "He likes to eat an early lunch. However, sometimes the job keeps him longer. You can try to find him, if you wish. Just remember to return at 3 p.m. for our meeting."

"See you at 3," said Michael, rapidly leaving the room.

The warden was walking towards the gate to leave the prison when he saw Michael rushing toward him.

"Comrade Rastorguev," Michael called from a distance. He was a little out of breath. "I have just talked to Comrade Palachev, and he assigned the murders to me to investigate. I would request that you release the prisoners in isolation as soon as possible so I can begin my investigation."

"Oh, you are jumping right in, I see," the warden said, a little

surprised. "I can see your business acumen, enthusiasm and drive to succeed. I see a bright future ahead for you. Or you could fail miserably. Both things will primarily depend on you regardless various circumstances."

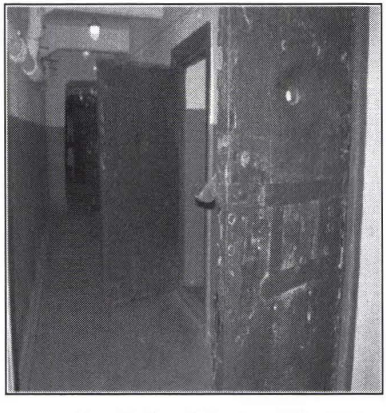
The warden, turning to the guard at the gate, said, "Tell your chief to send some guards to the isolation cells. They will wait for me and Comrade Mikhailov. We will be there in five minutes. The guard quickly ran to the building Michael had just left. The warden's office was directly opposite the investigation department.

"You are lucky," the warden told Michael as he opened his cabinet. "It will be easy to find cells for them since we sent many prisoners to camps today."

He grabbed a register and began to write the numbers of 17 wards. "I'll take care of it, Comrade Mikhailov. You just focus on your job."

"I'd like to observe the transportation of the prisoners into the wards, if I may?" Michael asked.

"You may do anything that is not prohibited," the warden said as he left the room, "That is your right."



The guard was standing near the cells as Michael and the warden arrived. At Rastorguev's suggestion, they stood away from the cell so the transport was not delayed.

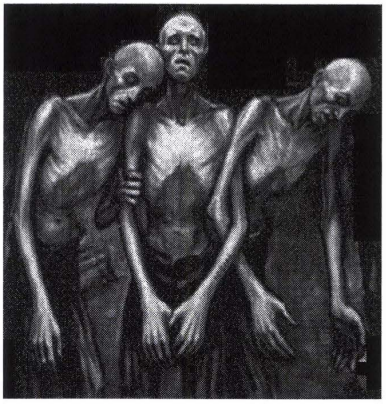
Then he told the guards, "There are two or three prisoners in each cell. You will call out each prisoner's number, and I will tell you what ward to bring him to. The 17 prisoners will be sent to 17 different wards. If there are no

questions, you can begin."

The head guard approached the first cell, unlocked its door and opened it slowly. An exhausted half-dead man started to collapse slowly. He was caught by two guards, and pulled out of the cell. "Stop!" yelled the head guard at the prisoners who were still inside the cell and locked the door immediately. The guards turned away from the prisoner because there was the less-than-fragrant smell of perspiration permeating throughout the area and on the prisoner as well. Michael was horrified. The prisoner's underwear was wet and his eyes bulged. His legs were so weak, he could hardly stand. The head guard read his number: "1556."

"He goes to the 26th ward," said the warden, who wrote the number on his papers. The guards carried the prisoner through the corridor. "It's terrible," whispered Michael. He was standing behind the warden. Rastorguev heard this, and said, "You must get used to it, Comrade Mikhailov. It's our job. And, now, it's your job as well."

"Hurry up, men," the warden told the guards. "We need have this done by lunchtime."



The other prisoners inside the cell looked just as bad as the first one, and they were treated the same way. Michael turned very pale and shut his lips tightly. The warden noticed this and said to Michael, "You'd better leave. I know it's hard to watch this for the first time. Don't worry. I'll do everything properly."

"No, I'll stay," Michael said.

Fourteen prisoners were led out of the cells, and all looked

very sickly.

The head guard then approached the last cell, unlocked the door and opened it slowly. Michael stood across the hallway from the door and watched as a man in glasses fell out. He was unconscious. A man with a very long beard, who was inside the cell with him, was holding him. Two guards caught this prisoner and started pulling him aside.

Michael also noticed that there was a young boy in the cell as well. His eyes were red, and he looked exhausted. He wiped his eyes and trembled and was visibly frightened.

The bearded man bent down, and tried to calm him. "Hold on, Baruch," he said. "It seems to be over. We are being released."

Michael was shocked. He couldn't take any more. "What are you doing, villains!" he yelled at the head guard who was locking the door after the man with glasses was taken out. The head guard was taken aback, and stopped. Michael rushed to the door and exclaimed, "Free the boy immediately!" He opened the door and entered the cell. It was so wet and stuffy inside that Michael immediately started to choke and began to feel sick. He picked up the boy, who was very weak, and exited the cell.

"Call the doctor quickly!" cried the warden anxiously. He looked at the man in glasses who was left on the floor by the guards. "Three dead prisoners are enough for today!" Jacob Rubinov, the bearded man, was still standing inside the cell.

"What are you waiting for?" Michael asked him. He continued to hold Baruch who, still trembling, had nestled on Michael's chest. "You must leave this hell immediately!"

Jacob stepped out. The head guard was having difficulty focusing after Michael's outburst, so his commanding voice had vanished. So, when he called Jacob's number, he did so in a strange voice. "Number 121," he said. "Take him to the 57th ward," ordered the warden.

As two guards were about to take Jacob away, Baruch

suddenly cried out, "Teacher?" His voice was hoarse. "Don't leave me alone with them." He stretched out his thin arms toward Jacob.

Jacob turned to Michael and said, "Mister commandant, you're a kind man. Could not the boy and I be in the same ward? He will feel better then."

Michael put Baruch down carefully, who staggered over quickly to Jacob.

"Are you his teacher?" Michael asked.

"Yes," Jacob answered. "Baruch is one of my students."

"How old is he?"

"He's 12."

Michael looked at the warden disapprovingly, and asked, "Comrade Rastorguev, what is going on? Why is a 12-year-old boy in the same ward as adults?"

"What would you have suggested I do, Comrade Mikhailov?" Rastorguev said defensively. "I told my superiors that all the wards for young prisoners were full, that each ward had 20 people in them, and it was impossible for us to accept any youngsters. No one listened. They said that is situation at all the prisons. This 12-year-old was sent here two days ago. I had intended for him to be in the adult ward temporarily because the head officer promised he would be sent, along with other young prisoners in a camp …"

Michael interrupted him. "Comrade Rastorguev, it's probably none my business, and I know it's not my responsibility, but don't you think we could create an extra ward for youngsters? I don't think it will be too hard to do after all those prisoners were sent away today."

"I think you have a good idea," the warden said. "I'll choose the lesser of two evils. I would prefer to make the process harder on the adults than the children.

"Thank you for your suggestion, Comrade Mikhailov. I'll start rearranging the wards today."

The warden then ordered the guards to put Baruch in the 57th ward "for a while."

"Dear commanders," Jacob addressed both Michael and warden. "I have one more request. Let me examine the injured." He then nodded his head and pointed at the man in glasses who was lying on the floor unconscious. "The doctors haven't arrived yet, and every second that he doesn't receive medical attention will bring him one second closer to death."

Are you a doctor?" asked Michael.

"No, I'm not," Jacob said, "but I studied medicine and know how to give first aid."

"What are you waiting for?" Michael said. "Go ahead and examine them!" Michael looked at the warden, who nodded his head in approval.

Jacob sat near the head of the sick man, and pressed his ear to his nose. He shook his head. He said loudly: "Lev! Lev, can you hear me?" But Lev was motionless. Jacob checked for a pulse. He just barely found one.

"It's very bad," Jacob said, kneeling to the right of Lev's head. He squeezed Lev's nose, put his mouth close to his mouth and started to breathe air into his lungs. Lev's chest rose with every breath Jacob gave him, but there was still no response. There was the sound of a door being slammed shut and furious footsteps echoing down the corridor as Jacob stood up above Lev's chest, put his hands on it -- the left one above the right -- and started to press. Lev was still lying motionlessly, and Jacob started to breathe into his lungs. He repeated the whole process a few times. Lev finally stirred.

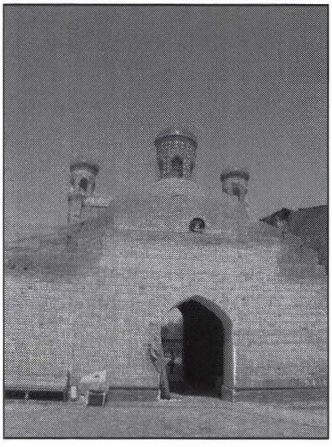
"Let me examine the man," Jacob heard someone say. He saw a doctor standing next to him; two others were standing next to a stretcher. Jacob immediately stood up and moved aside.

The doctor examined Lev. He opened his eyes, and looked at the doctor with some confusion. "Where am I? What has happened?" he asked faintly. The doctor pointed at Jacob and

said, "You are alive, thanks to this man." Lev was becoming more coherent. The doctor continued, "Lie quietly and don't move. We're taking you to the medical room."

He signaled to the men with the stretcher, and they carefully placed Lev onto it. Lev looked at Jacob gratefully as the stretcher went past him. Jacob smiled, and it followed him as he went by. The doctor glanced at the isolation cells and murmured something with dissatisfaction under his breath. To the warden, he said, "He will be in the prison hospital for a few days until he is completely recovered." He followed the stretcher down the corridor.

Chapter 3
Baruch's case



When Michael entered Palachev's room at 3 o'clock, he saw Palachev talking with another young investigation officer who was waiting for him. The young officer, who was about 25, stood up, approached Michael, and said: "Krotkov Ivan Petrovich." He offered Michael his hand.

With a neutral expression, Michael looked into Krotkov's dumb eyes, shook his hand and introduced himself.

"Take your seats," said Palachev, directing them to chairs at the opposite end of his desk. "I have told Comrade Krotkov that he will work with you temporarily until you finish the murder cases. Krotkov started here two months ago. He is not very experienced yet and he doesn't know much about the job, but he showed himself to be a good worker. He types very quickly and makes reports. He has already taken part some interrogations, so, he is qualified to be your assistant.

"If he is not able to help you because of his lack of experience, you can always ask me for help," he said.

Palachev slapped his hand on a pile of files that were lying in front of him, and continued, "Here are 19 cases I'd like you to look into, including these three files on top, which are about men who have died."

Palachev noticed a bit of bewilderment into Michael's eyes. "Is anything wrong, Comrade Mikhailov?"

"Yes," Michael said. "I thought there were 20 men in the

ward where the incident occurred, not 19."

"You are correct," Palachev answered. "It is good that you already know that. We received an urgent message this morning saying that we must send 30 youngsters to labor camps. That is why I want you to interrogate several young prisoners as soon as possible, including the little Jewish boy who had been put into the adult ward temporarily. So, you should be glad, Comrade Mikhailov. I've made your job easier."

"Excuse me, Comrade Palachev," Michael said, with much insistence. "But I would like to interrogate the young prisoner named Baruch alone."

"I see you've already learned some of their names," Palachev said, feigning amazement.

"Yes, I met some of them under very unfortunate circumstances," Michael answered.

Michael couldn't understand why Palachev wouldn't allow him to interrogate Baruch. His instincts were telling him he had to keep Baruch away from Palachev. He needed to investigate his case alone.

"Please allow me to work on Baruch's case by myself. I promise I will investigate his case until it is time to send the prisoners away tomorrow. I will also provide you with a completed report, so that if he pleads guilty, he can also be sent away."

"I don't mind," answered Palachev. He gave Michael an artificial smile and took Baruch's case out of his case box. He put the file on top of the pile, and raised his finger as if to give Michael a warning. "Keep in mind that your report on Baruch Aminov's case must be on my desk by 1 p.m. tomorrow."

"I hope there will be no problem with transportation if I need to go to the city to gather evidence," Michael said.

"I will provide you with everything that you need, Comrade Mikhailov," Palachev said. "But, remember, you will be held

accountable if you don't finish in time. I will be waiting for you in this room at 1 p.m. tomorrow."

After the conversation ended, there was a short briefing. Palachev then asked Comrade Krotkov to show Michael to his desk in the investigation department. The room was narrow, but very long, with 10 wide trellised windows and high metal cabinets between them. There were wide desks with lockers near each window. "Here is your desk," Krotkov said, pointing to the last desk on the right. "Your desk is close to mine. You will get keys to your cabinet and desk with a written receipt from the supply manager. His name is Comrade Lysenko. His office is at the end of the corridor on the left.

"If you have any questions or orders, feel free to mention them. I am here to help you."

Michael thanked Krotkov, and went out to get his keys. After he returned to the office, he took all the case folders – except for Baruch's – and put them into his cabinet. Then he started to work on it.

He took a form out of the folder; it was a handwritten witness statement. Michael turned the page and noticed that there was no signature. The document ended with the phrase: "Your sincere friend of the Party." Michael started to read it.



"To the head of the Kokand NKVD:

Today, I learned from my son that the son of the enemy of the state – Aminov Baruch, who is a fifth-grade student -- told an anti-Soviet joke to his classmates during recess. My son, who was alone in the classroom, heard this joke

through the open door.

"Here is the joke:

"Some wolves that lived in a forest caught a bear that lived in an adjacent forest on the border between the two forests. They began to ask it questions. 'Why are you crossing the border?' the main wolf asked.

'The bear answered: 'There is an incredible purge occurring in my forest, and a decree was given to destroy all boars in the forest because they are considered harmful. This is why I am heading into your forest. I want to hide there.'

The main wolf opened bear's passport, read his name, and was surprised. 'What are you afraid of?' he asked. 'You are not boar, you are bear.'

'This is true," the bear agreed. "But, try explaining that to them!'

"Fortunately, my son didn't understand the joke's true meaning. He retold it to me, and then asked why Baruch would call it a joke. I didn't answer him. I told him to never speak of it again. As a true friend of the Party, I am incensed that the children of the enemies of our glorious people are allowed to study with our children. Isn't it obvious that their children are also enemies of the people? They secretly try to impose hostile, anti-Soviet ideology on our children.

"I kindly ask that you to be more vigilant, investigate this case and take the appropriate measures.

"Your sincere Friend of the Party."

Michael turned the page and began making notes on a sheet of paper. He analyzed the meaning of the joke: the wolves are border guards; the bear is a defector from Soviet-controlled country asking for asylum in a capitalistic one; and boars are saboteurs, enemies of the people. There is a large-scale purge for the saboteurs in every part of the country. Why is the bear so scared that he will be mistaken for a boar, a saboteur and an

enemy of the people? The bear was also sure that there would be no evidence proving he is not a boar.

Michael thought about it for a while. There were many announcements in the media that revealed details about crimes and sabotage plans. Stalin always urged others to be vigilant in their investigations.

Stalin was very insightful. He believed there was underground enemy activity in the country. We could reach an incredibly high level of planned crimes disclosure by virtue of his stable instructions concerning the proper personnel into government institutions and by the virtue of his restless executor Comrade Nikolai Ivanovich Yezhov. We could solve a very large number of cases involving planned crimes because of his instructions on how to conduct them, and because of his tireless drive. Is it no wonder that Stalin trusts Yezhov, and supports him when he carries out his orders. This also allows us to stop the crime before it is committed.

These enemies can be found anywhere, and have managed to place themselves into various political and governmental institutions, including the NKVD and the Central Committee.

But, Michael also knew that a few people among those who were arrested had frequently proved their loyalty to the party and Lenin during their time as an employee. Those Bolsheviks and KGB servicemen recanted their previous confessions, claiming they were severely beaten during their interrogations and forced to sign fake papers written by NKVD members. They said they were cruelly tortured.

Michael also knew about a few cases where people who were declared enemies of the people, traitors and/or spies managed to escape imprisonment and/or punishment. Usually, they were people who were traveling abroad for business, somehow learned there was a possibility they may be imprisoned, and asked a Western country for asylum. Many did it because they were scared they would be accused of a crime they never

committed. The bear from the joke seems to symbolize these people.

Michael put the statement aside and continued his analysis. Baruch didn't look like an enemy of the people, Michael thought. The person who originally told the joke – and probably the one Baruch heard it from -- is no doubt the enemy of the people. But, if the person telling the joke doesn't understand its meaning – as Baruch probably had -- then he is obviously not an enemy of the people. It seemed to Michael that Baruch had heard this joke from somebody and he mistook it for a funny story about animals in the forest.

Michael took out a sheet of paper and started to write down his outline for the interrogation:

- Listen to the joke Baruch told and record it.
- Compare Baruch's joke to the joke mentioned in the statement.
- Listen to his explanation. What does he think it means?
- Figure out who told him this joke.
- Find the person who told the joke.
- Get witness's testimony from Baruch's classmates and compare the joke they heard to the joke in the record, and the joke from the denunciation.
- In the event there is a difference between the jokes, consider a follow-up plan and redo the investigation. (Unfortunately, this would prolong the investigation and cause undesired effects):
- Get a reference from the school principal about Baruch's character, as well as from his teachers. It is also necessary to get a character reference from his neighbors and acquaintances and ask the public what they think of him and his family.

Michael made some more notes in his outline, and after he had finished it, he started calculating the amount of time it would take to perform each task, writing it down next to each

item. After he was done, he felt the blood suddenly rush to his head. He wiped his sweaty forehead with a handkerchief, rested his head on his hands and started to reflect on the case. This case would most likely take three to four days to complete, as long as the circumstances were favorable. If not, it could take up to several weeks, or even months, to complete, if everything is taken into account.

Then Michael thought about Palachev, and why he would let him investigate this case on his own and tell him it was due the next day. There could be two answers.

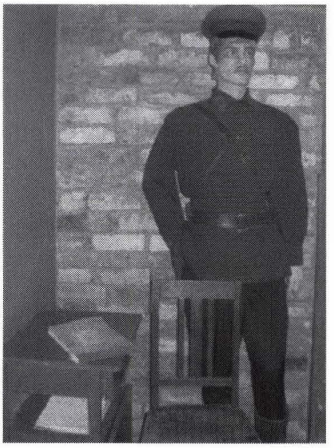
The first, Michael thought to himself, was because of his lack of experience he had prepared an incorrect outline. If that is the case, he would have to find Palachev immediately and ask him for help. The second answer was that Palachev was planning to create a fake case report. But, why? Was he sure Baruch was guilty? Or maybe he wanted to get rid of him because keeping him in the prison was costing too much money? On the other hand … Michael made one more guess, but he refused to believe it. Could it be because the head office told them to get rid of him because a certain amount of people must be sent to the labor camps?

Michael wanted to reject this last idea because it was too unbelievable. Then he thought: "We get instructions from the head office about five-year plans," and he smirked. He decided the correct answer was the first one, and decided to find Palachev to ask him for help. The chief could help me create a proper outline and advise me on how to begin the investigation properly, as well as how to end it properly, Michael said.

Michael headed towards Palachev's room, the outline in his hands. When he approached the room, however, he noticed a robust guard standing near the door of interrogation room. Michael knocked on Palachev's door. The guard spoke to him in a heavy Ukrainian accent, his voice hoarse: "If you want to visit Comrade Palachev, he's here." The guard pointed at the

door to his right.

As Michael approached the guard, he heard frantic screams behind a heavy door, "Don't do it! Don't do it! Don't beat me! I can't stand it anymore! I'll sign anything you want me to! Don't beat me anymore! Please don't beat me! I beg you. I can't stand it! I'll sign all papers!" After a while, the beating ceased, and the prisoner began to cry loudly, choking as he wept.



Michael was shocked. He shifted his gaze from the door to the guard. "What is happening inside?" he asked.

"Comrade Palachev is conducting an interrogation," the guard answered. Michael continued to stand. He was deep in thought. Finally, he said, "Tell Comrade Palachev that I need to see him as soon as possible."

"To tell you the truth," the guard said, "Comrade Palachev doesn't like to be interrupted when he is performing an interrogation. That is why I'm standing here."

"I have a matter that needs to be addressed immediately," Michael said, nervously.

"OK, I'll let him know. Excuse me, but I don't remember your name."

"Tell him that Comrade Mikhailov needs to speak with him."

The guard nodded, knocked on the door and went in. Meanwhile, Michael thought to himself, "This answers my question about how he was going to complete Baruch's case in a day. He was going to force a confession."

The guard soon returned and told Michael that Comrade

Palachev would be done soon. He asked Michael to wait for him. Michael said to himself, "It wouldn't even take him a day; this bully would get Baruch's confession in a few minutes!"

He remembered how Baruch trembled as he was led out of the isolation ward. Only then did Michael realize what his intuition was telling him during the briefing. He could not trust Palachev with Baruch, and he had to keep the boy away from Palachev's bloody grasp.

He also remembered what Comrade Krasnov's had said. He told him to observe how Comrade Palachev performs an interrogation and use any methods he felt would help him in his own interrogations. His train of thought was interrupted when Palachev appeared, standing in the doorway. His eyes were blood red and protruding from his head, and he was breathing heavily. "You have an urgent matter you need to talk to me about?" he asked curtly.

"Yes, I do," Michael said. "I have written an outline for Baruch Aminov's case that includes the amount of time it will take to perform each task. However, based on this outline, I have discovered that I will not be able to complete it by 1 p.m. tomorrow.

As Michael showed his notes to Palachev, he continued, "If you agree with my assessment, I would like to suggest that we postpone sending Baruch to the labor camp until we can completely determine the level of his guilt and prove his guilt or innocence. I think this is the right thing to do."

"What are you talking about?" Palachev asked. He was confused. He shut the door behind him, grabbed the papers from Michael's hands and started to examine them attentively. When he finished, he asked in a stuttering voice, "Were you taught this in the institute?"

"Was I taught what?" asked Michael.

"THIS!" yelled Palachev and nervously shaking the paperwork. "Were you taught to plan your investigation and split time for each action?"



"Of course I wasn't taught that in the institute," Michael answered. "But any study helps to develop intellect and may have certain effects when you overreach yourself."

"If you keep on working like this, you'll spend more time wasting paper than on the work itself," Palachev said.

"Planning doesn't just help to organize the investigation, but it also prevents us from possible mistakes and hastens investigation," retorted Michael.

Palachev felt he was losing confidence after hearing what Michael had said. He started to stutter even heavier and fumbled his words. But, then Palachev got mad at himself for showing weakness. He told Michael furiously, "If I were you, I would forget the outline and flog the truth out of this brat within a half-hour! By the way, I would like you to come into the interrogation room for a few minutes so you can see how I managed to break this prisoner's will and get him to sign the confession in less than an hour. This man had stubbornly denied the accusations when interrogated by the other investigation officers."

Palachev opened the door slightly and motioned Michael to enter, but Michael remained motionless. Through the open door he saw a fierce-looking, heavily built prison guard standing in front of Palachev's recent victim. His sleeves were

rolled up, and his fists were stained with blood.

The prisoner was bald, and about 50. He sat on a stool at the desk, and trembled as he signed the confession. He didn't read it; he just signed it. Occasionally, he would look fearfully toward the guard standing to his left. An officer's assistant stood to his right, turning pages of the confession, and pointing to the places where he had to sign.

"Thank you for the invitation, Comrade Palachev," Michael said. "In the short time I was standing by the door, I was able to understand how you work. I will revamp my outline so I can speed up the investigation process, and I'll do my best to make sure that I complete the case by 1 p.m. tomorrow."

"Oh, really?" Palachev said, smiling. "Then I wish you luck in your first investigation."

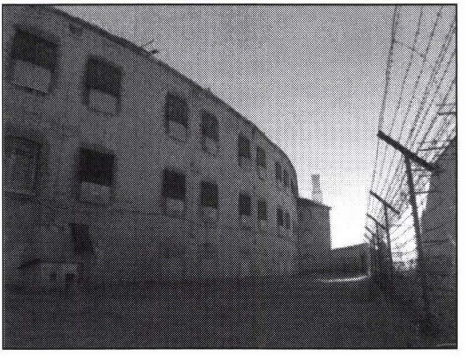
Michael nodded his head and left.

"I must do everything that is possible, and impossible, to increase the progress of this investigation tenfold," thought Michael as he marched quickly along the corridor. "I will have to have total concentration, better organize myself and make quick decisions during the interrogation. I will have to increase my work hours to about 20 hours a day, and I will have to stay awake the entire night, if necessary. I will also need to have my assistant, Comrade Krotkov, work the same schedule."

Michael returned to the investigation department and opened the door. He addressed Krotkov while still standing in the doorway. "Comrade Krotkov, may I ask that you arrange for an interrogation room immediately?" he said. "I plan to see the prisoner, Baruch Aminov, and interrogate him as soon as possible. I will also need you for making a confession report."

Krotkov sprang up immediately, sensing Michael's request was urgent.

"Not a problem," he answered enthusiastically. "I will reserve an interrogation room, prepare it and order the guards to bring the prisoner there immediately."



Michael imagined there would be a huge angry guard leading a frightened and shivering Baruch along a long, dark and cold corridor. "No, no," Michael said, waving his arms in disagreement. "Tell the prison guards to wait for me near the prisoner's ward. I will be there in 10 minutes. I want to escort the prisoner to the interrogation room on my own, and I want the guards to follow."

"It will be done as you wish," Krotkov answered. He ran out of the office. Michael prepared all the necessary documents and arrived at the ward in exactly 10 minutes. Two prison guards and Comrade Krotkov arrived a little while later. One of the guards looked into the ward through the gate, and said to Michael, "Those two seem to be making strange noises like a shaman."

"They are praying," guessed Michael. He remembered how annoyed his orphanage guard was when he was interrupted from praying. He thought: "Of course, it would be impolite to disturb them while they are praying, but we must begin the interrogation."

Michael nodded and the guard opened the door. Immediately, Jacob and Baruch stopped praying. The guard gazed fiercely at Baruch and yelled angrily, "You, prisoner, get out!" Baruch fearfully glanced at Jacob, and Jacob put his arm on Baruch's

shoulder, looking at Michael for compassion. His vibrant eyes wordlessly told Michael his plea. Then Michael pointed at Jacob, and told Krotkov, "I find it reasonable that an interrogation of a preteen prisoner be conducted in presence of a custodian and/or teacher in order to speed up the process."

"We usually conduct interrogations with one prisoner," Krotkov answered. He was confused by Michael's suggestion.

"During his briefing, Comrade Palachev explained to me that all methods are good if they produce the desired result and help achieve your goals," Michael insisted. "My goal is to conduct a quick interrogation of prisoner Aminov, and doing it with his custodian present might help."

Krotkov shrugged his shoulders, and answered, "I am just your assistant. You are completely responsible for this case."

Michael immediately addressed the senior guard, "Please, lead both prisoners to the interrogation room."

"Then, I will have to send for one more guard," the guard said.

"What for?" asked Michael, surprisingly. "There is no need for that."

The senior guard shrugged, and Jacob nodded gratefully to Michael when the guards took them out of the ward. Once they arrived at the interrogation room, the senior guard asked Michael, "Shall I let both prisoners in or shall I let them in one after the other?"

"Let them both in at the same time," answered Michael, stepping aside.

"You will stay here," the senior guard addressed his assistant. "I will let them in."

Michael was the last to enter the room. There were no windows, only chairs that were screwed to the floor, a desk in the middle of the room and a typewriter in the corner. Krotkov headed towards the desk, and Michael politely invited Baruch to sit in the chair. Then Michael stepped up to the desk and

started arranging papers on it. After a while, he turned and noticed the senior guard standing to Baruch's right started to unbutton and roll up his sleeves. This, of course, frightened Baruch. Michael immediately addressed the guard, "We don't need your help here. Please wait for us behind the door."

"Behind the door?" the guard asked, confused. His jaw dropped and he quizzically looked at Michael. He then shifted his glance to Krotkov, who just shrugged and continued to insert paper in the typewriter.

"Yes, you heard me correctly. I said behind the door!" repeated Michael, pointing to the door. The guard awkwardly turned around and walked to the door, rolling down his sleeves and fastening them as he went.

"Baruch," began Michael, "I am a new investigation officer here, and I am responsible for investigating your case. This is my first one, and I promise that you will receive a fair and honest investigation. However, I hope you will be completely honest with me. I want you to know that you can speak freely and frankly. If you do not understand my question, please don't be afraid or shy to ask me to clarify it. I will then try to ask the question differently so you can understand it. If you have any questions during our conversation, don't be shy and ask me. I will answer all your questions. If you feel tired or sick, or if you feel that you can't continue for some reason, let me know, and we will continue our conversation later."

Michael gave him a smile and asked, "Do my conditions seem acceptable to you?"

"Yes," said Baruch quietly. He glanced at Jacob, who was standing near the door. Jacob nodded, and gave Baruch a wide smile. This made Baruch feel a little better, and he repeated his answer a little louder: "Yes, they are acceptable, mister commander."

"That's great," Michael said, grinning, "First, I would like you to tell me everything about yourself. For example, I would

like to know your full name, what country you are from, your date and place of birth, what school you attend, and what hobbies and extra-curriculum activities you like. In addition, I would like to know about your parents, what they do and where they live. I'd also like to know about your family. How many members are there?"

Baruch started to give a detailed description, and the typewriter started rattling in the corner. Michael listened to him very attentively showing Baruch that he was very interested in his story. The atmosphere that Michael created during the interrogation helped make it friendly and relaxed, and Baruch was very comfortable. Baruch told Michael everything he could within a short time and without stopping.

When Baruch finished, Michael told him, "You have a very interesting life, Baruch. You are to be commended for getting excellent grades in every subject except literature. I think it's also wonderful that you are also interested in extra-curricular activities, and that you study history, philosophy, foreign languages, as well as other subjects. You sound a little like me. I was also fond of science and foreign languages when I was a boy. They were very useful to me, and I had a feeling they would be fruitful for me in the future."

Baruch listened to Michael with profound interest. After a while, Michael asked: "Baruch, do you know why you are here?"

Baruch shrugged his shoulders and answered, "I was told that I was the son of the enemy of the people, and that I told an anti-Soviet joke. But, I don't know any anti-Soviet jokes."

"Baruch, do you know any other jokes, not anti-Soviet ones, I mean? Have you ever heard any or told others these jokes?"

"Yes, I know many interesting jokes," Baruch said. "All the students like to tell jokes and to listen to them during recess."

"And what jokes do you like the most, Baruch?"

Baruch thought for a moment, and then said: "Jokes about

animals."

"About animals," repeated Michael with glint in his eyes. "I like jokes about animals, too. Can you tell me the last joke about animals that you heard? The joke you told at school?"

"The last joke about animals?" Baruch paused, thinking. "Ah, I remember," he exclaimed. "It was about a bear!"

"About a bear?" Michael asked. "Tell me this joke!" Michael sat comfortably on a chair and listened attentively as Baruch told him the exact same joke that was mentioned in the witness statement. When he finished, Michael said: "It is a really interesting story. But, why do you call it a joke?" Baruch shrugged his shoulders, and answered, "I don't really know why they called it a joke."

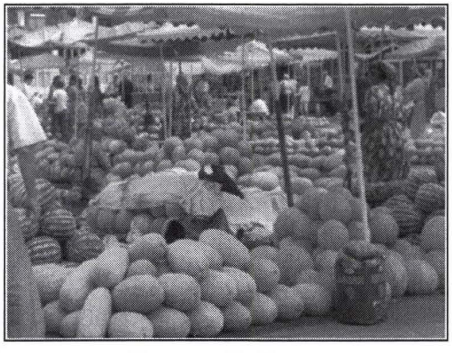
"Who called it a joke?" Michael asked.

"Some people in the market," Baruch said. "I heard it from them."

"Can you tell me about them?"

"I went to the market to buy some potatoes," Baruch began. "Two adults were in front of me and one told the other this joke. I heard it and memorized it."

"Do you remember what these men looked like?" Michael asked.



"No, I can't. I didn't see their faces. I was behind them."

"Did you see where they went?"

"No. After I heard the joke, I stopped at the counter and bought the potatoes. They continued to walk along the market. I never saw them again."

Michael scribbled something in his report then addressed

Baruch again. "Baruch, do you like listening to fables or telling them?"

"Yes, I like fables very much. We learned Ivan Krylov's fables in our literature class at school."

"Why do you like them?"

"Because they are about animals who speak like humans do, just like in the joke I told you."

"That's right," confirmed Michael. "But, during your literature lessons was it not explained that the animals in the fables represent people?"

"Yes, the teacher told us. But, it was more interesting for me to imagine that animals could really speak. That is why I know many fables by heart, and always raised my hand to retell them in class."

"It is strange," Michael said. "A few minutes ago, you told me that you have excellent grades in every subject except literature. Why don't you have excellent grades if you retold the fables perfectly?"

Baruch hung his head in shame, and said, quietly, "It is because of the fables. When the teacher asked me to explain their meanings, I couldn't."

"It's a pity," Michael said sympathetically. "I have an idea. I think that it's possible that animals can represent people in your joke just like in fables."

Baruch gave him a bright smile, and answered: "What you are talking about? My joke is about animals that live in a forest. People live in cities."

"That's true," Michael answered. "I hadn't thought about that." Michael paused for a moment, and then said, "Baruch, can you tell me the names of the classmates who heard you tell this joke?"

Baruch named everyone he knew.

"Did you tell the joke in the school yard?"

"No, I told it in the corridor, near our classroom."

"Was there anybody in the classroom?"

"I don't think so. Students usually need a break after math class. That is why everyone runs outside to play in the schoolyard."

"Was the classroom door open or closed?"

"I don't remember. I think it was open. The door is usually left open during the break to let air into the classroom."

Michael noticed that Baruch was thinking about something, and asked: "Do you want to ask me anything?"

"Yes, I do," answered Baruch.

"Then go ahead and ask!"

"You've been asking me about the joke I told. Was this why I was put into prison?"

"Unfortunately, I can't answer that right now," Michael said. He then addressed Krotkov: "Did you manage to record the interrogation?"

"I am almost finished," he answered. "I'll be done in a few minutes."

Michael approached Krotkov's desk, took a page of the report from the stack and read it attentively.

'Ready," Krotkov said as he took the last page out of the typewriter. Michael nodded in approval, and thanked Krotkov after he was done reading. He put the papers on the table in front of Baruch, and told him, "Baruch, I want you to read the record of our conversation very carefully. If you find that there is something missing, something is wrong, or you don't understand something, tell me. However, if you agree that everything written in the report is correct, please sign each page. Do you understand?"

"I do," answered Baruch. He started to read the report.

While Baruch read, Michael thought to himself: "This case doesn't seem too difficult. I can probably get all the documents proving Baruch's innocence by 1 p.m. tomorrow. I will have to go to the city early in the morning to visit Baruch's school. I

need to interview his classmates about the joke, and make sure their testimony matches what it says in the report. I will also have to get character references from the principal, supervising teacher, literature teacher and other teachers. In addition, it will be necessary for me to question his neighbors and family friends, and talk to his mother.

"It will be senseless to try to find the person who wrote the anonymous letter," he continued thinking to himself. I will recommend to Baruch's mother that she change his school. That way, the anonymous author cannot harm him anymore."

Michael looked at his watch. It was 7:30 p.m.

Michael started to think about what he needed to do the next day. "It takes 2 1/2 hours to get to Kokand by car," he continued. "That means I would have to leave here at 4 a.m., and return from the city at 10:30 a.m. to makes sure I am back by 1 p.m. If it seems that I cannot get all the pertinent documents by 10:30 a.m., I will leave Krotkov in the city with orders to finish the work. I will have to return with whatever documents I can get. However, I am sure that the evidence I will be able to get by 10:30 a.m. would be enough to release Baruch and keep him from going to the labor camp."

After Baruch had read the protocol and signed each page, Michael addressed his assistant, "Thank you, Comrade Krotkov. Your help on my first investigation was exemplary. Now, I am going to follow the prisoners and guards back to the ward. Could you do me a favor and wait for me in the investigation department? I need to discuss our plans for tomorrow with you."

"OK," Krotkov said, nodding. He took the typewriter and headed towards the door.

"Tell the guards behind the door that I will call them. Let them wait for a while."

"I will tell them," Krotkov nodded again and left.

"Take a seat," Michael said to Jacob, pointing to a chair at

Krotkov's desk.

"Don't worry, mister commander, I have sat enough in the ward," answered Jacob with a smile. Then he added, "Thank you for your care and God bless you for your kindness!"

Jacob placed his hand across his breast and bowed, expressing his respect and gratitude for what Michael had done. The gesture reminded Michael of the guard at the orphanage again. He was one of the nicest men Michael had ever known, and he always greeted people from the orphanage with such a gesture. Michael politely nodded in return. He then addressed Baruch, "I am sure you are not guilty, so I will do my best to gather all information I can to prove your innocence.

"I do have one piece of advice for you, however. Well, actually, it's not really advice, but an order coming from a man who is sincerely sympathetic and sorry for you. Never ever tell any jokes to anyone in the future, whether they may be good or funny. You may not understand what they mean because you don't have a lot of experience and you aren't very knowledgeable about politics."

Baruch listened to everything Michael said intently. Large tears were rolling down his cheeks. When Michael was finished, Baruch sprang up from the chair and happily exclaimed, "You believe me! It is true! I will be free soon!" Then he ran to Jacob, embraced him with tears in his eyes, and exclaimed: "Teacher! Did you hear him? Your prediction came true! HE has heard our prayers!"

Jacob hugged Baruch, shook him slightly, and said: "Calm down, Baruch. This is not the right place to show your emotions. Calm down, son, I beg you."

After Baruch finally calmed down, Michael opened the door and addressed the guards, "It's time to return the prisoners to their ward. Do your job!"

He stepped aside and let the guards in. When Baruch and

Jacob were returned to the ward, Jacob managed to silently mouth, "thank you," to Michael near the door, and gave him a bow. As the guard was shutting the door, Michael heard Jacob's voice, "Now, let us continue to pray, Baruch. We must thank God for His mercy, and we must also pray for the man who was sent to save an innocent soul."

Michael glanced at his watch; it was almost 8 p.m.

"I must reserve a car for tomorrow immediately and then meet Krotkov," Michael realized.

He left the building and crossed the prison yard, heading toward another building that was on the opposite side. He noticed the warden and a chief supply manager standing near a wall not far from the door. The manager was pointing at the window frame and trying to explain something to the warden.

It was also at this time that Michael saw Palachev leave the building. "He's probably done for the day," Michael thought, "and is going home." Michael started to walk a little faster.

Palachev noticed him and stopped. "Are you looking for me, Comrade Mikhailov?" he asked as Michael approached him.

"Yes, I am," Michael replied. "I need to reserve a car for 3 a.m. tomorrow."

"For what purpose?" Palachev asked.

"The Aminov case," Michael replied.

Palachev was startled, and a little surprised. "When I last spoke with you, I had the impression that you would finish this case today, and would be starting the investigation of the three murders."

"After today's interrogation, I concluded that Aminov was not guilty," Michael said. "He is just a victim of an anonymous person who falsely denounced him in a statement that was sent to the NKVD. There are a few people in the city I need to speak to about the case. If they confirm my conclusion, then I will be able to give you my report tomorrow and begin working on the murder investigations."

"Comrade Mikhailov!" Palachev shouted. "Listen to me. Your character reference described you as politically conscious, that you understood and supported the Party's policies and that you were incredibly observant. But, now I see it was wrong. We live in a dangerous time. This requires high vigilance toward discovering any potential crimes of hidden enemies of the people. Besides, it requires total intransigence towards them. Besides, it requires us to be totally uncompromising with them. Every decision you make, if wrong, could be fatal. Even if you were able to prove Aminov's innocence, you can't foresee what might happen if he were ever accused again. Your career could be put in jeopardy, and so could your life."

After a short pause, Palachev was a little calmer. "What you do with your career is your own business. But imagine what would happen if the entire investigation department is punished because of that boy? We would be declared unvigilant and wouldn't be able to do our jobs.

"Do you think it's fair to put the entire department at risk just to prove one boy's innocence? What about ruining your life?" Palachev continued. "Wouldn't it be better to say a person is guilty until he is ready to confess instead of proclaiming his innocence and make a mistake?"

Michael protested. "Comrade Palachev, I am educated enough that I understand the policies of the Party and the government. I am aware of everything that is going on in the country, and, of course, I know that Party leaders expect everyone working in political institutions to be highly vigilant. I am also aware of Comrade Stalin's appeal to work diligently, and that this initiative is having large-scale effects all over the country. But, I am certain that those who rule this country would understand the level of irreversible damage that would occur if executors become too zealous trying to make a name for themselves, or are too afraid of making a mistake. They

would damage one of the essential values that serve as a basis for our ideals: the people's faith in the party.

"To tell you the truth," Michael continued, "I believe the damage is caused by those executors who send innocent people to prison camps, not by those who pleaded innocent. Has it ever occurred to you what might happen if the top office observed the department and found cases in which the prisoner's confession was coerced? Do you realize the level of damage, both morally and spiritually, that would occur to the Soviet people?"

As he spoke, Michael noticed that Palachev's face got paler and paler. When he finished, Palachev's face was deadly pale, and he had the look of fear in his eyes. His left hand, in which he held a folder, was moving about nervously every once in a while. His teeth were clenched, and he stuttered as he muttered: "Time will show …"

He didn't finish his sentence, but turned to the door and quietly opened it. He avoided looking at Michael. As he entered, he said: "I will order a car to be at the entrance of the residential compound at 3 in the morning."

Michael wasn't given the chance to respond. Palachev immediately shut the door behind him. At exactly the same moment, Rastorguev and the supply manager had finished their conversation. Rastorguev approached Michael, who was standing near the door, and gave him a smile.

"I didn't mean to, but I overheard your conversation with Palachev about prisoner Aminov. It is none of my business, and I should ignore it, but you remind me of myself when I was young. I was also looking for justice just like you, but then I realized that all my efforts and attempts were fruitless. They only hurt my career and endangered my life.

"The same thing is happening with the Aminov case," he continued. "You believe you are fighting for justice. You think you know what is right and what is wrong. In fact, you don't.

We were ordered to send 30 youngsters to labor camps. If Baruch doesn't go, someone else will. So, it is a waste of time." Then Rastorguev gave him a wide grin, waved his hands and added, "We never had this conversation, Comrade Mikhailov."

He slapped Michael on the shoulder and left.

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At 2:55 a.m., Michael arrived at the guard desk of the residential compound. Krotkov showed up a few minutes later. He was carrying a heavy briefcase. "I ordered food for us," he said, pointing at the briefcase. "We have food for the whole day."

The car drove up to the residential compound at 3 a.m. sharp. Michael and Krotkov left the building and walked toward the car. Michael remembered the driver, Vasily, from yesterday. He flashed him a smile. Vasily pleasantly greeted both investigation officers, opened the car door and invited them to get in. Then Vasily got into the driver's seat, and started the car. He said to Michael, "I see that you have managed to jump right into your job in less than a day, Comrade Mikhailov. I brought you here from the station at 6 o'clock yesterday morning. And, now I'm taking you to Kokand at 3 in the morning on business. Did you get any sleep?"

Michael shook his head and said, "In this time, many people must work 24 hours in order to keep to their schedules."

"So, have you been in the investigation department all this time?" the driver asked curiously.

"No, I finished working at midnight. Then I spend some time thinking about things while I was in the residential compound. So, I really didn't have much time to sleep."

"What things were you thinking about that wouldn't let you sleep?" the driver asked. His curiosity was piqued.

"The purge," Michael answered emotionlessly.

In the rear-view mirror Vasily could see that Michael was lost in thought again. He didn't say anything more for the rest of the trip to Kokand. While Krotkov put his head in the corner of the seat, looking like he was trying to sleep, Michael was deep in thought.

The purge that was led by Yezhov was gathering speed. It was being done on such a massive scale that it not only impacted the highest levels of government -- the central committee, NKVD, defense industry and other institutions – but the rest of the population as well – the common people living in cities and villages. It affected people living near the country's borders and people of different nationalities. Stalin ordered the deportation of entire communities, small populations and even people with the same nationality -- Jews and others like them -- in Soviet territory because it was thought they would threaten our way of life.

Many of these actions were not released to public, and those that were released were done on groundless accusations, in Michael's opinion. It also affected old Bolsheviks who had proven their loyalty to the party many times and were faithful to Lenin and his ideas.

Michael was very interested in the lives of party leaders, and was often shocked by the announcements that accused them of anti-Soviet activity. After the fall of Commissar Genrikh Grigoryevich Yagoda, many NKVD officers were accused of espionage. They were officers who Yagoda promoted. They did their work diligently and were often rewarded by the government.

Suddenly, Michael remembered what the warden had said about the good deeds he did when he was young, and how they often harmed his career and even endangered his life. Michael also remembered what happened during Palachev's interrogation. That poor man was so beaten down from the

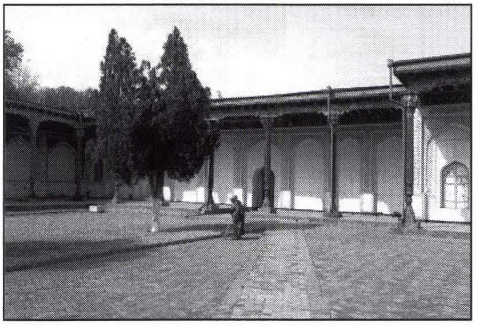
unbearable torture that he admitted his guilt, possibly to a crime he never committed. Michael remembered the man sobbing and desperately pleading. The pathetic picture of this man remained in his memory and wounded his soul.

What Michael saw happen to this man is probably similar to what happened to other people tortured by Palachev. This one small event could be a part of a larger evil spreading across the political stage of the country. Central committee officers might have made some mistakes or passed some imprescriptible laws that motivated people like Palachev.

Such people are ready to accuse anyone they believe committed espionage, treachery or other anti-Soviet activities and create a false case.

This was something Michael never thought about in the past. However, after what he saw during his first day at the prison, his entire view of the world was ruined. Michael was affected deeply by what had happened the previous day, and he realized that he would now be able to find the right answers to the questions he couldn't respond to without internal contradictions.

The car arrived at the school at 6:15 a.m. Krotkov was still sleeping, so Michael left him in the car, and walked toward the school gate. Through a low fence he could see janitors sweeping the schoolyard with handmade brooms. Then, Michael saw a tall man in a long Uzbek dress holding a hose. He was standing near the gate and watering the plants in the garden. As



Michael approached the gate, the guard dog started to bark. The man in the dress quickly turned off the water that was feeding the hose and headed toward him. Michael recognized the man at once. He used to be a guard at the orphanage where Michael grew up. The man recognized Michael immediately as well. He gave him a smile, and started unlocking the gate.

"Salam, Aleikum, Mishka-aka!" he greeted Michael in Uzbek. "You are a grownup now! An adult!" He opened the gate, warmly embraced Michael and slapped him on his back.

"Maleikum a salam, Bahtier-aka!" Michael answered in Uzbek, and gave him a slap on his back, too. "Are you working here now?"

"Yes, I am," answered the man. "My grandchildren are students here. I changed my job so I could keep an eye on them. I am a guard for the school now. Come in, Mishka-aka. Let's go to my room."

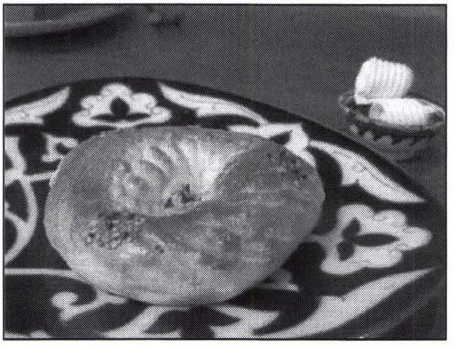
He pointed to a small log cabin not far from the gate. "We'll have some tea and talk." Michael thanked him, and they headed toward the cabin. Breakfast was already laid out on a small, low table. On the table there was a beautiful Uzbek teapot, which sat in the center of the table, a sugar bowl, a bowl of cottage cheese, a bowl of cream and Uzbek tandoori bread covered with a napkin. The bread smelled like sesame, cumin and poppy seeds.

"Sit down, Mishka-aka," the man said. "We'll have a meal."

"Kattah rakhmat – thank you very much -- Bahtier-aka," Michael said, "but, I'm not hungry. I'll just have tea, please."

"You can't say no, Mishka-aka," the man said as he tore the bread into several pieces. "Don't you remember our customs? If you respect me, and don't want to offend, you must eat something." He put pieces of the bread on a napkin, poured green tea into small bowls, put a hand on his chest, and handed a bowl to Michael. "Drink your tea, Mishka. Have some hot tandoori bread with cream, and don't be shy. The bread is still

hot; it just came from the tandoor oven.[15] My wife just cooked it this morning. And the cream comes from the milk of our cow. Try it. It's delicious!" He poured some cream from a big bowl into a small one and moved it closer to Michael.



"Rakhmat, rakhmat, Bahtier-aka," Michael said once again and started to eat his breakfast.

After a while, Michael asked, "Tell me, please, Bahtier-aka, what time do the teachers and the principal usually arrive?" Michael dipped a piece of the bread into the cream.

"The principal is usually here by 6:45 a.m., and the teachers arrive at about 7 o'clock, sometimes a little later. The first class begins at 8. Why do you want to know? Are you here on business?"

"Yes, I am, Bahtier-aka," Michael nodded. Michael was enjoying the cream. "This cream is so tasty!" he exclaimed. "The tandoori bread is delicious! This is a meal fit for a king!"

"My wife is a talented craftswoman. She is a great cook," smiled the guard. He changed the subject. "I heard that you went to Tashkent after you left the orphanage to study. Did you finish?"

"Yes, I have, Bahtier-aka," answered Michael and gulped down some tea.

"Oh, barakalla," the school guard praised Michael in Uzbek. "So, you want to see the principal. Do you want to be a teacher?"

"No, Bahtier-aka. I already have a job. Today is my second day."

"Oh!" the guard exclaimed. "Barakalla – what a fine fellow you are! What do you do?"

"I am an investigation officer, Bahtier-aka," Michael said. He proceeded to wipe his mouth with a napkin.

"Very good, Mishka-aka," the school guard said happily. He poured more tea into the bowls and continued: "It is very good that a man like you is willing to be an investigation officer. There are so many people in the prisons now." Then, he added in a sad and hoarse voice, "There are a lot of good people in the prisons also."

The guard nodded his head slowly and said to himself, "Now, my Mishka will help them."

He looked into Michael's eyes and asked, "Am I right?"

Michael smiled and nodded. "Of course, I will help the innocent people," Michael said. "I will definitely do my best to help them, Bahtier-aka."

"Kattah rahmat, thank you very much for your kindness," the guard said with gladness. He shook Michael's hand. "I always knew you would turn out to be a good man, Mishka. Thank you very much."

"I haven't done anything yet," Michael said. "Why are you constantly praising me and thanking me, Bahtier-aka?"

"It's not a big deal," the guard waved it aside. "You will perform many good deeds in your lifetime. I know it for sure." He looked at his watch.

"Bahtier-aka, I'm sorry. I seem to be keeping you from your work," Michael said. "You do whatever you need to do. I will wait for the principal in the schoolyard."

"Why must you wait in the schoolyard? You can wait for him in here. You drink your tea, and I will take the dog to the back yard." The guard pointed to a huge wolfhound that was visible through the window.

"Let's go together," Michael offered.

"Good. OK, Mishka, let's go."

"Thank you very much for a wonderful breakfast and a warm welcome, Bahtier-aka!" Michael said.

Following Eastern custom, he put his hands on his chest and bowed slightly as a sign of respect and gratefulness.

"You should thank Him," the school guard said, and raised his hands into the air. He recited a prayer in Arabic, touched his face and finished the prayer with "Omin."

"Omin," Michael repeated.

"Tell me, Bahtier-aka, could you tell me whether you know one of the students?" Michael asked as they returned to the back yard, "His name is Baruch Aminov."

The guard smiled, nodded and said, "I guessed the reason you came here was because of Baruch. He is a very good boy. His mother is a very nice woman, and his father is also a very nice and honest man. If you had been an investigation officer before now, and if you had investigated his father's case, I believe his father would be free by now. It is rumored that he is an enemy of the state, but I don't believe it. He is a friend of the people. Baruch is just like his father; nice and honest. Help the boy, if you can, Mishka-aka."

"I know that Baruch is a nice boy, Bahtier-aka," Michael said. "That's why I am here. I intend to get the necessary information that could help him."

The guard stopped, grinned, and said, "That is great, Mishka! Thank you very much. You are a good man. You are a very noble, honest and kind man. But you must be very careful. Many nice people are being arrested nowadays."

The principal came at 6:45 sharp, just like the guard said. He stopped near the gate, looked around, gave a slight nod to the janitors who greeted him with a slight bow and headed towards the school building. Soon Krotkov appeared in the school gate.

Michael and Krotkov entered the building and saw a sign that said "PRINCIPAL" hanging from one of the doors in the wide

corridor. Michael knocked on the door, and opened it slightly. A man in an austere suit was standing near a large table and looking out the window. He had a glass of milk in his hand. He turned around slowly, glanced at his watch, and asked in an arrogant and disgusted voice: "Are you gentlemen looking for me?"

Michael and Krotkov entered the principal's room, showed their official documents, and introduced themselves. The principal immediately dropped his arrogant demeanor. His hands trembled as he put the glass on the table. Then he fearfully introduced himself: "Anatoly Andreevitch."

"Sit down, please," the principal said, offering them a chair. He gave them an obedient smile, and started to arrange the chairs from the table awkwardly.

"Thank you," Michael said. "We are sorry to interrupt your breakfast."

But, despite Michael's politeness, the principal didn't respond. Michael gazed at him attentively, and saw that he was a little bewildered. He stood in front of Michael and Krotkov, staring at them as a silly delinquent boy would. "You would probably be more comfortable if you sat at your desk," Michael suggested.

When he finally sat down, Michael told the principal why they had come. "We are here because we are investigating Baruch Aminov."

"Ah, Aminov. I see," the principal said, regaining his temper slightly.

"What can you tell us about him?" Michael asked.

"Nothing," the principal began. "You probably know more about him than I. A few days ago, we were told that he was arrested. No one saw him after that. Now, we are just waiting for instructions from the authorities. As soon as they come, we are prepared to expel this troublemaker who discredited our Soviet school."

"Is he a troublemaker?" asked Michael.

The principal was startled, but answered at once, "Excuse me. I meant to say troublemaker and enemy of the people."

"How often did he disturb the peace," Michael asked. "What bad deeds has he done? Moreover, what did you, as principal, do about it?

The principal's right cheek twitched with anxiety and perspiration began to form on his forehead. He took a handkerchief out of his pocket, wiped his forehead, and answered with a stammer: "After I learned that he had been imprisoned ... I ... I spoke to his supervising teacher ... as well as other teachers."

After a pause, the principal continued, "They told me they had never seen him misbehave. Can you believe some of them dared to question whether he should have been imprisoned? His supervising teacher said he was the best and most diligent student in the class. Right after these conversations, I held a meeting with the teachers. During the meeting, I criticized our staff and the method in which the students were taught. I prepared an order saying that his supervising teacher should receive a reprimand for his political blindness, lack of vigilance and poor teaching. But, I haven't presented it yet because I need advice from the authorities.

"Do you recommend that I fire Baruch's supervising teacher? I have thought about it, and I am ready to do so immediately."

"Anatoly Andreevitch," interrupted Michael, "We are not here to give you advice or instructions. We are here because we need to find out the truth about Aminov. If Baruch had never been accused, or found guilty, of dishonorable acts in school before he was arrested, I would like it if you, his supervising teacher and other members of the staff were honest. If his supervising teacher said he was the best and most diligent student, then let him write about it in Baruch's character reference. We need conscientious character references from all

of you."

"Ah! I think I understand!" exclaimed the principal suddenly. "You mean that Aminov was arrested by mistake! I knew that! I had a feeling that was the case. That is why I didn't send out the orders to reprimand his teachers. I will do as you request."

"Anatoly Andreevich," Michael interrupted again. "We are still conducting the investigation. And, I repeat. I am not telling you what to do. All I want is to look at this case fairly.

"To reiterate, the investigation is still ongoing. That is why the fairness of this case, Baruch's future and the reputation of your school depend on you and your staff being honest. I do believe that each person must remain loyal to his or her conscience, but I have no doubt that each of you has other important, noble and admirable qualities that allow you to proudly call yourselves teachers."

The principal gazed into Michael's eyes, and it appeared as if he were trying to figure out what he meant. Michael noticed. "I mean exactly what I said. I have no ulterior motives. Do you understand?"

"I think I do," the principal answered.

"We don't have a lot of time," Michael continued. "We have a lot of work to do, and it must be finish by 10 o'clock. We need applications and witness statements in addition to character references. The application must be from his literature teacher." Michael said her name.

"The witness statements will be from Baruch's three classmates." He read their last names. "We will need two separate rooms. My assistant, investigation officer Comrade Krotkov, will speak with the three students and get their statements. I would like to talk to you and the other teachers. I would like the chance to explain to them how to properly write the applications and where each of you can prepare your character references."

"I understand your instructions," the principal said solemnly.

"I will gather the teachers in the teacher's room at 7:30, and make an announcement. Then, I will have the three students meet with your assistant to give their statements. The teachers you wish to have write applications and character references I will have come to my office. I believe we can finish this earlier than you planned. Is that OK?"

"Sure," Michael answered.

The principal gave a sigh of relief, and wiped his wet neck and forehead with his handkerchief.

"We will wait in the school yard until everything is ready," said Michael as he stood up. "One again, I am sorry for interrupting you. I think you should be able to finish in time."

"Don't worry about it, and thank you for caring," the principal answered. He stood up, quickly glanced at his glass of milk and rushed toward the door to open it for Michael and Krotkov. By 8 a.m., everything had been prepared, and the principal went into the yard to let Michael and Krotkov know.

Michael had everything properly organized, and by 9, he received very informative applications and references from the teachers and the principal. Michael told the principal to give everything to Comrade Krotkov and left the office.

He dropped in to see how Krotkov was doing with the three students. Michael asked Krotkov to join him in the corridor for a few minutes to let him know he would be left alone. Michael also asked him to pick up the references.

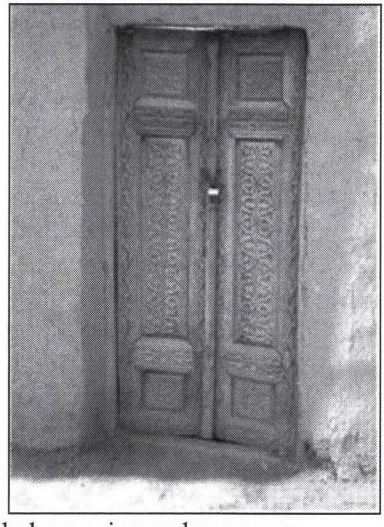
"I am going to see Baruch's mother. I will try to return by 10 to get you," he told Krotkov.

Michael hurried to the car and jumped in. "Maida Millat Street, number 16. Hurry up, Vasily. We don't have a lot of time," Michael said.

"Maida Millat Street is very close," Vasily answered. "We will be there in three to four minutes. I've been there a couple times. It is in the Jewish Quarter."

About four minutes later, Vasily slowed down, passed an old

fence and parked near an old, carved gate with an Uzbek classical ornament on it. Michael exited the car and stepped up to the gate. He could smell the odor of cotton oil coming from inside the house. Michael knocked on the gate, and because it was half cracked by time, it made a deep melodic sound. The door opened, and a dark-skinned boy in a cap of about 5 or 6 years old appeared in the doorway. He gazed at Michael.



"Hello," Michael said with a smile. "Is your mother home?"

"Mommy, some man has come," yelled the boy in a loud clear voice and ran away. Through the open gate, Michael could see children's clothes and white bed sheets hanging on a line across the yard. From time to time, they would wave like boat sails in the wind, allowing a view of the small yard.

Michael noticed a woman in a kerchief rinsing clothes next to a well. There was a colored wooden couch in the center of the yard, and several children were creeping around it or sitting on it. The woman turned off the tap and quickly headed toward the gate, wiping her wet hands on her skirt as she walked. When she saw Michael, she slowed down a little and stopped a distance from the gate. She looked at Michael incredulously, and asked, "What do you want?"

Michael could tell she was mistrustful and bewildered, so he asked nicely, "Are you Baruch's mother?" He watched as the woman's face changed upon hearing her son's name. She

rushed toward the gate, invited Michael in and hastily closed the door behind him.

"Yes, I am Baruch's mother," she answered. She started asking numerous questions in quick succession. "Have you seen him? What is happening to him? How is he? I beg you, tell me, is he alive? Is he sick? Where is he now? Why am I not allowed to see him? Where is my beloved boy?"

Her expressive eyes filled with tears, while her voice expressed bitterness.

"Don't worry, madam," said Michael in a sympathetic tone. "He is all right. I am investigating his case, which is why I came here. My name is Michael."

He offered his hand in respect, but she recoiled, pulled her hand back, and exclaimed, "I am sorry. My hands are wet."

Then she came to her senses. "Why are we standing near the gate? Come into the yard, please."

Michael headed inside and quickly glanced at the woman's hands. They were dry, so Michael guessed, "Maybe their customs prevent a woman from shaking a man's hand."

Suddenly, Baruch's mother rushed past Michael, released a pin that was holding a sheet on the line and said, "Excuse me, comrade investigation officer. My clothes are hanging all over the yard. Come here, please," she offered and pulled the sheet aside.

"Oh, no. Please, don't worry," answered Michael with a smile. He bent down and went under the line. "It is not worth it just for me. It wouldn't have been a problem for me." They approached the couch and Baruch's mother offered to bring out a chair from the house for Michael.

"No, no, don't do that," Michael said as she was about to enter the house. I'll sit on the couch, if you don't mind."

"Of course. Have a seat, if you wish," she answered. After a moment, she exclaimed, "Oh, I left oil burning on the stove! Just a minute, I will be back!" She rushed towards the summer

kitchen.

Michael sat on the bench and looked at four rosy-cheeked angelic-like children who were creeping around it. In a while, he heard oil hissing in the kitchen and smelled the pleasant savory odor of fried pies. In a minute, the woman returned with sour milk, homemade sour cream and hot pies.

"Do you know what this is?" asked Baruch's mother. She pushed the pies closer to Michael and started skillfully cutting radishes, cucumbers and garlic. She then mixed the vegetables with chopped dill, basil and cilantro.

"It looks like belyash," Michael answered.

"Belyash is made of dough and is filled with meat," Baruch's mother said. "These are chalpaks, plain fried batter without meat. It's almost ready, and then we will have breakfast now."



She spilled everything into a bowl with sour milk and began to stir.

"The ayran[16] is ready," she said and poured the blend into three small bowls.

"You have breakfast and feed your children. I ate already," Michael said.

"No, no, you don't say so." Baruch's mother was worried.

"But I ..." Michael objected, but was interrupted: "Aren't you local? Do you not know our customs? You are a guest here, and the guest must be fed the most delicious dishes. Have a try. It's very tasty," she insisted. She moved a bowl of ayran and a plate with chalpaks closer to Michael.

Michael was certain that she wanted to speak about Baruch as soon as possible. But, he also knew that oriental cultural

traditions say conversation should be an afterthought. What was important was hospitality and treating guests well.

"This is for my beloved, for my most beautiful and most obedient sweetheart," Baruch's mother said as she served her children who were sitting in a circle on the opposite side of the couch. Michael found it pleasant to see how skillfully and lovingly this woman fulfilled her duty as a mother.

"Why aren't you eating?" Baruch's mother asked when she finished serving her children. "Chalpaks must be eaten hot! Do you know the proper way to eat them?" She sat down on a bench opposite Michael, took a chalpak from the plate, tore off a piece, dipped it into the ayran, and raised it to her mouth, turning it continually to keep drops from falling. Michael couldn't help but smile when he saw a ring of ayran around her scarlet lips.

"You prepared it in such an appetizing way that I suddenly felt hungry," he said. "I'll try to eat it the way you did."

He took a chalpak, tore off a piece, carefully dipped it into the ayran and started bringing it to his mouth. He turned it, stretched out his neck and raised his head, and tried to catch drops in his left palm. However, he didn't have much luck the first time, and several drops ran down his palm. Michael looked at Baruch's mother, and all of a sudden, they both burst out laughing. She gave Michael a cloth napkin, and he wiped his palm and lips. While he wiped, he smacked his lips and groaned with pleasure, "What a delicious dish!" Michael exclaimed. "I have never tasted such meal!"

When breakfast was over, Michael thanked Baruch's mother for her hospitality, and said, "The reason I came here was to let you know that Baruch is safe, and I am working on a not guilty plea for him. He should, hopefully, be released soon."

Baruch's mother pressed her hand to her chest and suddenly exclaimed: "Oh! Is it true? My Baruch will be released soon!" Tear began running down her face, and she took a napkin from

the couch and started wiping them.

"I do my best to make it happen as soon as possible," Michael answered.

"I don't even know why he was put into prison," Baruch's mother continued.

"He told a joke to his classmates, but he didn't understand its true meaning. Somebody sent a written statement to the NKVD because of it," Michael explained.

"I always scolded him for talking too much, making friends with everyone at school, or telling jokes or stories! I warned him. I told him to be careful!" Baruch's mother said between sobs. "Are you sure you will be able to release my dear, my sweetheart, my silly boy?"

"The investigation is still ongoing, and I can't guarantee it will end the way I would like it to. This is my first case, but I am very principled. I will make every effort to prevent any mistakes that could harm his case. You must be strong and don't lose hope."

Baruch's mother could hardly control herself. She gave Michael a teary smile. "Thank you for letting me know about my son and for giving me hope. You have a kind heart. Thank you for what you are doing. You told me such a great thing! I've never felt so happy! You are a good man. God bless you for your kindness!"

Baruch's mother sighed. "I wish everyone was like you and thought like you do and did their jobs as diligently as you. If everyone were like you, there would be no grief on Earth. The Earth would be a paradise. I believe that you will save my poor son."

"No, Baruch is not poor," Michael answered. "I think he knows how much you love him, and that makes him the richest boy in the world. Today, I saw how much you love children, and Baruch. I was both surprised and inspired by your affection."

"What do you mean?" Baruch's mother asked, a little confused. "Don't all mothers have unconditional love for their children?"

"Maybe," Michael said sadly, "but sometimes terrible things happen and children lose their mothers to the will of God. Unfortunately, these children are destined never to feel the love of a mother."

Baruch's mother was startled by Michael's statement. She glanced at her children and hit her breast, saying: "Lord, forbid it! Lord, forbid it!"

Michael glanced at the children who were sitting quietly on the couch and listening to this conversation attentively. They peered at both of them with wise-beyond-their-years eyes. Michael smiled, and they smiled back. He looked at his watch. "Unfortunately, I will have to leave this kind place very soon. I do need to ask you do something. If everything ends well and Baruch is released, you should put him in another school. I am afraid that whoever wrote the statement in the first place will find another reason to report him. This is why I recommend your family moves to another city, if you can."

Baruch's mother nodded and said, "I understand. I thought about that after my husband was arrested. My sister tried to get me to move to the Uzbek city of Namangan with my family. But, I hesitated. I wasn't sure. But, now I know. You convinced me. I will leave everything behind and move to Namangan for the sake of my children. Thank you so much for your kind advice."

She sobbed and started to wipe her tears again.

Michael continued, "I would like to ask you not to tell anyone that I suggested you change schools or move to another city."

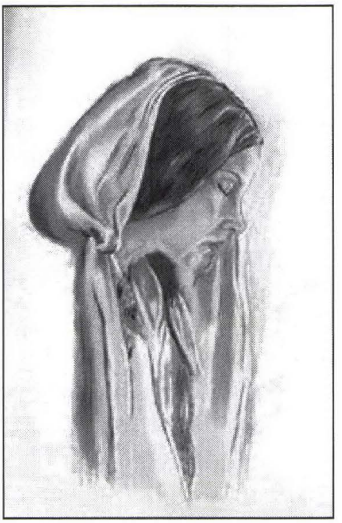
"Oh, don't worry about it," she said. "I understand that now is not the right time to tell everybody everything. It has happened too many times. This is why my family has so much grief. You didn't give me any advice or recommendations. It was my

decision to leave."

Michael nodded in approval, stood up and said, "Thank you for your kind hospitality. It's time for me to leave." Baruch's mother heard the bang of the car door behind the fence. "Hold on, I will wrap chalpaks for your driver."

"There is no need to do that," Michael said, waving his hands. "We were given food for the whole day."

Baruch's mother came out of the house with two packs in her hands, her body shaking as she headed toward Michael and her children. There were tears in her eyes. She gave one of the packs to Michael and said, "Here is food for my poor hungry boy." Then she handed the other pack to him, and continued: "Here are some clothes for my poor boy so he won't feel so cold." Then she put her hand on her chest, and moaned: "If it would encourage him, I would rip out my heart and give it to my lonely boy." She couldn't control herself anymore, and burst out crying.



"Calm down, please. Calm down," Michael told her. He felt like he would cry as well. "He is neither hungry nor cold, and he is not lonely. I forgot to tell you. His teacher, the rabbi, is in the same ward with him. He is taking care of him."

Suddenly, Baruch's mother stopped sobbing. She gave Michael a surprised look and exclaimed: "Oh, my God! Have I heard you right? The rabbi is in the same ward as my son?"

"Exactly," Michael answered. Baruch's mother's face lit up, and she raised her hands into the air chanting, "Oh, blessed

Lord, you've heard my prayers. Oh, blessed Lord, the king of the universe, you haven't abandoned my most precious one alone in the darkness. Oh, almighty Lord, you sent an angel in a human's body to relieve the pain of a martyr who loves you sincerely and whose soul is pure. Oh, blessed Lord, the creator and master of all creatures, you sent good news through this kind messenger to your exhausted slave and this messenger is standing behind me and soothes my ears and my soul with his marvelous news. Oh, holy Lord, you have created great miracles both now and always. You have created one more miracle for me now. Your miracles are boundless, and there is no difference for you between great and tiny miracles. You are the only one who knows the depth of a mother's misery, and you are the only one who can determine a mother's love."

Baruch's mother finished praying and glanced at Michael. She noticed that he looked dumbstruck, his face was pale and he had a vacant stare.

"What has happened? Are you OK?" she exclaimed with fear. Upon hearing her cry, Michael returned to his senses and said: "Yes, I do. No, I mean, I'm all right."

"But what happened? You are not quite yourself," she continued.

"It's nothing important. I just had a feeling," Michael said.

"What kind of feeling?" Baruch's mother insisted. "Please, tell me. It seems to be very important."

"It's not a big deal," Michael answered, smiling. "Many of words from your prayer seemed familiar to me, and I understood their meanings."

"Why are you so afraid to say so?" Baruch's mother asked with curiosity. "Many words in the prayer are holy ancient Jewish words. This is the only language that God can hear from his chosen folk. If you can understand the language, then you might have an important mission: to save the innocent among God's people. You may not know it, but your mission has

already started. You are saving my son."

"Oh, no, it can't be true!" said Michael in disbelief, and shook his head. "I already told you that it was just a weird feeling. I'm sorry, but I don't have any more time to talk."

"It's a pity," Baruch's mother said. "I will see you off." She led Michael toward the gate. When they approached the gate Michael asked, "Do you know the rabbi well?"

"Is there any man who doesn't know him?" Baruch's mother said, rather surprised by the question. "Everyone in our district knows him. He is the purest, truest, kindest, holiest and nicest man that has ever lived. This is not just my opinion. All the Kokand Jews, as well as Jews in other Uzbek cities, also believe it."

Michael thought about that, and then responded: "You know? I also believe that."

"I am sure that Jacob rabbi was also arrested by mistake," Baruch's mother said. "Can you tell me how soon he will be released? He has a big family. His poor wife is worn out."

"His case is much more complicated than Baruch's," Michael answered. "I am not sure that the investigation will end as quickly."

"Oh, poor Jacob," Baruch's mother said. She sounded worried. "Please, tell him that we are all praying for him to be released soon. We are sure that God will hear our prayers. Please, tell him that the whole district is helping and supporting his family during this difficult time. The heads of our district and rabbis of the synagogue requested it."

"Really?" Michael asked. He was marveled by this statement. "What a pleasant surprise! I commend you people for having such values. After listening to you speak, I began to realize how noble your motives are, and how you value your customs. It is unfortunate that many people don't possess these qualities. The Jews in this district must be endowed with many other wonderful customs, all of which make you a noble people. I

wish I had more time because I would like to take to you some more about the history of the Jews. I will tell Jacob everything you said."

Michael said goodbye to her in very respectfully and left. He returned to school at 10 to see Krotkov waiting for him near the entrance. He was holding a briefcase in one hand and a thick folder in the other. He saw the car approaching, glanced at his watch, nodded, and headed towards the car.

"Everything is here," said Krotkov as he handed the folder to Michael.

"Thank you, Comrade Krotkov," Michael answered. He put a folder on the back seat. After a while, he opened it, looked through the papers, nodded his head in approval, and said, "I think we have enough material to keep Baruch from being sent to the labor camp."

He thanked Krotkov for the accuracy of his work, and invited him into the car.

"Everything is proceeding according to plan," Michael stated when they were in the car. To Krotkov, he said, "I am going to leave you in the city until tonight, just as we discussed yesterday. You should be able to get all the necessary information and write your report based on what Aminov's neighbors say."

Then, he told Vasily, "Please, return to Maida Millat Street." He asked both men whether they had eaten breakfast and they both said they had.

"That's great," Michael said. "You can keep the lunch and dinner meals, Comrade Krotkov. Vasily and I won't need them because we will be eating in the residential compound. Am I right, Vasily?"

"Yes, you are," he answered. When the car arrived on Maida Millat Street, Vasily stopped the car, and Michael addressed him: "You will pick up Comrade Krotkov at 7 o'clock sharp right here."

"OK, I will be here at exactly 7 o'clock," Vasily answered.

"I will see you later in the residential compound," Michael told Krotkov as he was getting out of the car.

"See you tonight," Krotkov said nodding. He closed the door and waved goodbye.

"Now, Vasily, turn around, and let's hurry back. I must meet with the chief investigation officer at 1 o'clock on the dot."

Vasily looked at his watch, and answered: "Don't worry, Comrade Mikhailov. We'll be there on time."

The documents that proved Baruch's innocence were sitting on Palachev's desk by 1 o'clock.

"Good job," Palachev declared grimly after reading them. Then he glanced at Michael's conclusion, and asked: "So, you conclude he should be discharged as soon as possible, right?"

"Yes, I do," Michael confirmed. "He has suffered needlessly."

"Suffered?" Palachev said with a smirk. "I wouldn't recommend you express emotions or sympathy while doing your job, Comrade Mikhailov. If you want to make your mark, you must become more cruel and obstinate."

"I think that approach is totally wrong," Michael objected. "We shouldn't measure all prisoners by our standards. Baruch is not guilty, and he deserves sympathy, a quick release, and compensation for moral damages."

"Moral damages?" Palachev grinned. "That is science fiction! You have read too many books. Don't worry, you will soon change. You will lose your imagination after you work with prison trash long enough. Then I will remind you of your ridiculous words about moral damages."

They heard knocking on the door, and the warden appeared in the doorway, panting.

"I am terribly sorry for interrupting, Comrade Palachev, but there are only a few minutes left before I must send the prisoners, and we still don't have a complete list of names. I

have already sent my assistant to you, but you didn't respond. What about prisoner Aminov?"

Palachev was confused and shuffled uncomfortably in his chair. Then, he unwillingly pronounced, "Please, ask to make a new list of prisoners to send, and change Baruch Aminov's name with Ivan Kozlov. I will sign it as soon as it's ready."

The warden nodded, and gave Michael an imperceptible wink. Then he disappeared. Palachev returned all the papers that related to Baruch's case to the folder and handed it to Michael. Then, he said, "I will start the proceedings as soon as I receive the statements taken from Comrade Krotkov. Now, you are free to investigate the three murders. Keep in mind that you only have two and a half days to do so.

Michael realized how tired he really was only as he left Palachev's room. He relaxed for a moment, and immediately felt dizzy.

"My sleepless night is finally getting to me," Michael thought. He decided to eat, a small snack, and, slightly exhausted, staggered toward the exit. In spite of his weariness, Michael still had a lot of energy because of his high spirits. He was happy that he had managed to save an innocent boy and that he had proved to everybody, and to himself, that he could do this difficult job.

However, his soul wasn't entirely happy. A part of it was still depressed, and Michael knew this. He was beginning to see that some government policies had a harmful affect on the people. He started to lose faith in the very ideas that had inspired him to become an investigation officer.

"Why do the party and the government implant these ideas into people's minds?" Michael wondered as he made his way to the canteen. "Could some of the party members be mistaken? Or does this perverse ideology belong to Stalin alone? Why don't the party members who see the errors in his

plan mention something to Stalin? Are they too scared? Nowadays, there are too many violent reprisals. There is one more option that is possible. All party members and the government might be convinced that, right now, harsh measures are necessary.

"If that is really true," he continued, "then I guess I have misunderstood something. I'll probably have to reconsider the party's policy and find out what it truly means.

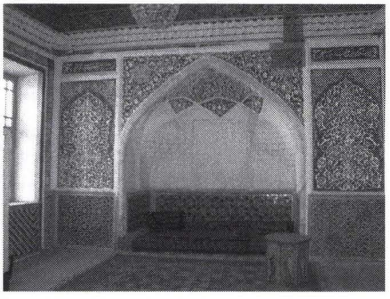
"But, what if am correct?" Michael asked himself with concern. "What shall I do then? Will I have to follow the instructions of the government and the party and be conscious of their harmful consequences? But then I will become an unscrupulous temporizer and true enemy of the people like Comrade Rastorguev. I could follow the instructions of the party and the government, knowing what will happen, if I don't. But, won't that make me like Comrade Rastorguev, an unscrupulous procrastinator and true enemy of the people? If I rebel against Stalin's ideology, I will definitely be perceived as a traitor and enemy of the people and executed. This often happened to some well-known Bolsheviks who were destroyed by Stalin's mechanisms.

"If I quit, many innocent prisoners will remain in prison. Their lives and freedom depend on me. Common sense and my conscience are telling me that the best decision I could make is to continue working here and save lives. However, I cannot do it on my own. Everyone here is a follower of Stalin's ideology. If they see that I oppose this ideology, I will be arrested.

"There is only one way to do the job then: covertly," Michael decided. "However, if there are many more faultless people than guilty ones, my work will be revealed. There will probably be more innocent people than guilty when I do my work. Then my covert business will be revealed sooner. This would have me declared a traitor and an enemy of the people." Michael stopped near the canteen and solemnly concluded, "I

don't see any other way out of this situation. I hope the end would be successful, if I manage to save many innocent people."

Chapter 4
Three murders case



Michael felt a surge of energy after lunch. He didn't feel dizzy anymore, so he decided not to sleep. He thought he would be able to work efficiently for several hours. As he headed toward the investigation department, he thought about how he would investigate the three murders case, and end it on time. Upon entering the room, he saw two men sitting at the table to his left. They stood up, stepped towards Michael, and introduced themselves. The first man Burkovsky, was an investigation officer of about 35 years old. Although he offered Michael his hand, he had a rigid smile on his face. However, his glance was cold and penetrating, and that made his smile seem artificial and a little arrogant. The second man, Tikhonov, was also an investigation officer. His smile was vibrant and sincere. Michael politely shook each of their as he introduced himself.

Burkovsky quickly glanced at his watch, and interrupted Tikhonov, who wanted to know more about Michael. "Excuse me, Comrade Mikhailov," Burkovsky said. "I think we will have more time later to get to know you better. Now, I must leave. I have urgent business."

He looked at Tikhonov, who nodded in agreement. "Yes, I, too, have urgent business. We'll talk later."

Michael smiled diplomatically and said, "That's all right. I am very busy myself."

Burkovsky suddenly headed toward Michael and said, "By the way, I was asked to tell you that you have mail from a

secretary."

"What kind of mail?" Michael asked.

"Experts' findings on those three murders," Burkovsky explained.

Michael thanked him and left immediately. He received the envelope, returned to the investigation department, took a pile of documents from the cabinet, and placed it on the table to his right. He opened the envelope, and looked at the papers that were inside. There were medical statements, several reports by experts with details of what they found, and a few pictures of the bodies from different angles. Two men were hanged, and one man was stabbed, a knife sticking out of his chest. Michael studied all the pictures attentively and read the medical statements and reports.

According to the reports, the fingerprints found on the handle of the improvised knife belonged to both of the hanged men. There were bloodstains on their hands and clothes as well. It was estimated the murder was committed between 2 and 3 a.m. There were no signs of self-defense on the body, which led experts to assume the crime was committed as he slept. It was common knowledge, however, that the victim, whose nickname was Chopper, never slept at night. There was no evidence that he was given any tranquillizers either. The autopsy showed nothing. Human excrement was found in his mouth five to 15 minutes after his death, according to the experts, and traces were found on the hands and sleeves of the men who were hanged as well as their hand-made ropes. It was very doubtful that they had been forcibly hanged because there were no bloodstains and excrement on their ward mates' clothes and hands. Besides that, there were no traces of physical coercion on the bodies of the hanged prisoners.

Michael finished reading and wrote some notes on a sheet of paper. He put all the papers in a new folder, signed it and put it aside. He then took the thickest folder from the pile. This was

the dossier for Shamalov Samuel Zakharovich, one of the prisoners who were hanged. Michael opened the folder and immediately saw a familiar street written in the first report: "Permanent place of residence is Maida Millat Street."

"This is the street where Baruch and his family live," Michael said. "It's also where the rabbi and his family lived before his imprisonment."

Shamalov's report said he has been a school vice principal for 10 years until he was imprisoned. "He is a well-known man," Michael thought. "The rabbi must have known him, and Shamalov must have known the rabbi. Baruch's mother told me that everyone in their district knew the rabbi."

Jacob Rubinov was put into the ward one day before Shamalov's murder, or if the report were to be believed, his suicide.

"Could this meeting be the reason for his suicide?" Michael thought. He made another note on the paper. "Suppose that the meeting was not the reason for his suicide. They must have recognized and communicated with one another. If that were true, Jacob might know the reason why Shamalov killed himself." Michael wrote down his thought and continued to read Shamalov's papers. Shamalov was arrested because the history teacher denounced him. The statement was written just before the principal retired.

One of the documents stated that issue of who would become the next principal remained undetermined in Minpros[17]. There were only two possible candidates: Vice Principal Samuel Zakharovich Shamalov and history teacher Anatoly Andreevich Khitrov. In his statement, Khitrov claimed Shamalov was a hidden enemy and an ardent Zionist. His real name was Sion Isakharovich. At the principal's goodbye party, Shamalov got drunk and said that his ancestors were people close to the Emir of Bukhara[18] and his grandparents were people close to the king of Kokand Knanate. Khitrov also

learned that Shamalov had many relatives abroad. They were very wealthy and powerful people who would be happy to support him. They also dreamed of a family reunion.

Shamalov was only interrogated once during his imprisonment, and he denied everything that was said in the statement. It was all nonsense, he said. He never said any of that. His father and grandfather lived their entire lives in Samarkand, not in Kokand. They were poor, uneducated and never had rich relatives. That is why they couldn't have been close to the king of Kokand Knanate. There was only one witness to Shamalov's alleged words of hostility. Everyone else describe him as a loyal party member. The result of the investigation was a deadlock. There were few investigation officers available at the time, so the case was postponed.

Inside Shamalov's folder were many documents -- appreciation certificates, reward certificates, character references and recommendation letters from district, city, region and party committees that were signed by the heads of these committees and other powerful people. Shamalov was described as an educated and politically literate man, a civil war[19] participant, a fighter against Soviet enemies and religion and a tireless public propagandist in the Jewish Quarter of Kokand. The letters in his defense stated he was critical of the traditional Jewish customs and archaic traditions that were practiced inside and outside his district. He was an outstanding man who organized events with the goal to end all customs and opinions that contradicted the guidelines set forth by Lenin and Stalin, as well as policies created by the government.

There were also copies of denunciation statements that Shamalov himself had written. Michael looked very closely at some that had been written recently. One was a denunciation statement against Joseph Aminov, Baruch's father. Shamalov said he was a saboteur and a hidden enemy of the people who preached hostile propaganda against the party and Soviet

government to the Jewish community. He also accused several rabbis of practicing mutilation, specifically, secretly circumcising 8-day-old baby boys. Another was an accusation against the chief Kokand rabbi, David Khaim, who was, according to Shamalov, a deceiver. There was also an accusation against Jacob Rubinov that was signed by Shamalov on April 1, 1936.

"I was right," Michael said. "Shamalov and Rubinov did know each other. The investigation department made a serious mistake by putting Rubinov and Shamalov in the same ward. Palachev told me it was strictly forbidden to have relatives, acquaintances, or people involved in the same case in the same ward. It is also prohibited to let them out for a walk at the same time," remembered Michael. "The only exception would be if it were related to the investigation and used to gather information necessary to speed up the process, or determine whether there will be any hostilities."

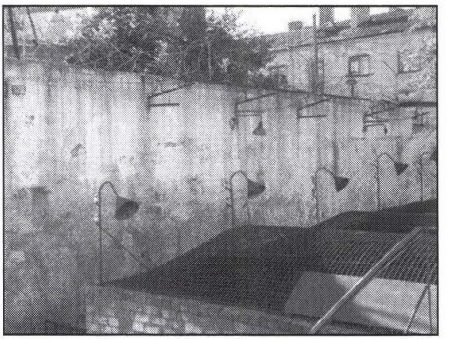
Michael made a few notes, and continued reading: "Jacob Rubinov and his traitorous activity have caused serious damage to our country. Jacob Rubinov is a well-known educator in the Jewish community. He is known, not just in Kokand, but also in many other cities of Central Asia. He is a talented speaker, and the Jewish communities secretly give him money to travel to different cities in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. He visits every place that has a Jewish population, giving lectures and persuades them to keep their religious customs, which is contradictory to the ideology of our progressive society and great country."

Michael read the last denunciation statement to the end, put all the documents into a folder and looked at Khitrov's statement lying on top. "There is only one page that I can see in this entire document that discredits," Michael said. "And it only contains 10 lines. This statement by Khitrov looks slanderous. Shamalov has done great things for the party. That

is undeniable. His struggle against enemies of the people is tireless, and his contributions to the state are obvious. He was careless of his life during the civil war – he chose to fight in the revolution, and he devoted his life to help develop the country after it ended. In spite of all of this, the state and institutions that he helped to create did nothing to refute this slander and arrested him. Michael remembered something Palachev said. "Isn't it more reasonable and patriotic to make a prisoner plead guilty to a crime he didn't commit rather than make the occasional mistake?"

"What is wrong with our system when it creates monsters like Palachev and the warden?" Michael wondered. "Why is our system antagonistic against people who were raised in the system? These people are loyal to the system." Michael moved Shamalov's case away, took a new piece of paper and wrote down his thoughts.

"Let's suppose that Khitrov wrote this denunciation statement because he wanted to get rid of his rival. In addition, let's suppose that Shamalov realized who denounced him after the interrogation and the reason for it. There could've been a positive result for him. So, why would he commit suicide? Even if he were forced to confess to the words he allegedly said when drunk, everything else he did in the past should've been enough to quell some suspicion and keep the punishment from being too severe. However, instead, he kills his ward mate, exacting his revenge by stuffing feces in his mouth, and then commits suicide. To me, that means he wanted his



revenge more than he had hope of leaving the prison.

"But what could Chopper do to him? He didn't beat him. In the medical report, there was no mention of violence against Shamalov. There was the only interrogation, and he refuted all accusations.

"But, what made his life so unbearable?" Michael asked himself. "His ward mates may have learned that Shamalov had written denunciation statements before he was imprisoned. Maybe Chopper, who was a leader in this ward, and the other ward mates humiliated Shamalov in some way that made his life unbearable. After he killed, Chopper, he probably realized that he would never get over the humiliation and felt there was only one way out for him: death."

Michael tried to imagine other ways of how the event could've happened. However, the first option seemed to be the most plausible. But, how could he prove his theory?

"Jacob," Michael thought, and started to develop his idea. "Shamalov might have shared his heartache with him. He might even have regretted writing the denunciation statement against Jacob, and asked for forgiveness. Jacob probably guessed or knew many Jewish families who suffered from Shamalov's denunciations. Shamalov might have asked Jacob to tell them that he regretted what he did, and asked for their forgiveness as well."

Michael wrote down on the draft: "Jacob should be the first to be interrogated."

Then, he pulled a pile of folders closer to him and started searching for Jacob's case. It was the thinnest folder in the pile. Michael opened it, and saw it contained only four documents: a denunciation statement dated March 11, 1937, with a signature of "neighbors" on it; the report of a search dated March 13, 1937; a list of confiscated property dated March 13, 1937; and the original denunciation statement by Shamalov, dated April 1, 1936. There were no actions taken by the NKVD. For

instance, no surveillance was done, nor were there any interrogations, searches, or arrests.

"No measures were taken because Yagoda was the head of the NKVD then," Michael concluded. "The work of NKVD was accelerated after Yezhov rose to power in September 1936. The NKVD and its local institutions were reorganized, and the NKVD was obligated to respond to all denunciations.

Michael reread the statement by Jacob's neighbors. "Our neighbor, Jacob Rubinov, is a suspicious person. He doesn't work in any state institution, but he has a large family and always seems to find money to feed everyone. It seems that he may be engaging in some illegal business that gives him income. His neighbors also suspect that he holds secret meetings in his house. You can often see suspicious-looking bearded men entering his house with prayer books. However, we think they carry these books just to mislead everyone because religious people usually pray in churches, synagogues, or mosques. We suspect that he runs anti-Soviet meetings. Schoolchildren visit his house, too. We suspect that he preaches anti-Soviet messages to them as well. We would kindly request that you study this suspicious person. Neighbors. March, 11, 1937."

Michael made some more notes and then put Rubinov's case aside. By 8 o'clock, he had finished reading both the cases of Chopper and Ismailov Said Rashidovich, the other prisoner who was hanged. Chopper was arrested for the alleged gang robbery of a cash register at the factory where worked. The cashier, who was injured during the crime, said the robbers were wearing masks. Chopper was immediately arrested, even though the cashier denied that the one-armed man was present during the robbery. An investigation officer couldn't believe that he didn't participate. The NKVD didn't consider letters written by workers and chiefs from the factory in which they all described Chopper as a diligent worker and kind person.

The NKVD said its officers knew the laws of the criminal world. Chopper was a criminal with a reputation. Everyone in the criminal world knew him. Thieves would never be allowed to rob a business where he worked without his permission. In the NKVD's opinion, Petrov, a.k.a. Chopper, either gave them permission to attempt the robbery or took part in it as a spotter. All attempts to extract a confession during his interrogations failed. He claimed he had never participated in any robberies.

Ismailov was a former field-crop team supervisor. First, he was arrested for the rape of his lover's 13-year-old daughter. Then the investigation concluded he was an enemy of the people and saboteur who had intentionally failed to fulfill the plans of his team. After Ismailov had been in prison for a month, the NKVD received an anonymous statement accusing him of being the nephew of a former enemy. Because of this statement and interrogation under torture, Ismailov confessed that he was a spy. If it weren't for this last denunciation statement, he would've been shot way before this. The statement prolonged the investigation process because it was necessary to find the person who gave Ismailov his orders.

When interrogated, Ismailov said he didn't know the real name of his accomplice, who he said was a veteran criminal and dangerous spy. Ismailov only knew his nickname, Kara-Basmach. In addition, Ismailov described two distinguishing features of the man's face: His right ear was cut off, and there was a deep scar on his left cheek. However, a man fitting this description was nowhere to be found.

Michael felt dizzy again as he stood up to return the folders to the cabinet. It was already 8 o'clock – time for dinner -- but Michael was too tired to eat. "It is better to sleep than to eat now," Michael said, "but I don't have a lot of time to finish this case."

Michael looked his notes, and decided to conduct a short interrogation with Jacob to help speed up the process and have

a complete understanding of the case in the morning. Jacob was brought to the interrogation room at around 8:30 p.m. just as Michael had ordered. Michael asked the prison guards to leave and politely suggested to Jacob to sit down. Jacob noticed right away that Michael looked exhausted. He was pale and he had dark circles under his eyes. Jacob looked at Michael's eyes. He guessed that he hadn't slept for the past two nights, and he had been working too hard.

"Jacob," Michael began, "I have called you because I want to talk to you about the incident that took place two days ago in your ward. I am very sorry that you had to witness this horrible event the second day you were here. I can only guess how you felt when you saw the three dead prisoners. You were probably scared, and you probably were not aware of what was happening. I believe that the feelings and perceptions of someone who had just arrived, such as you, are keener than those who had been here for a while. You may have noticed something others did not. That is why I would like a detailed description of what you saw, felt or heard."

"Thank you for your understanding and sympathy," Jacob said. "I would also like to offer my gratitude for your fair and honest investigation of Baruch's case. Baruch is my favorite student, and I would like to thank you again."

To Michael, Jacob was a man who symbolized bravery, purity and sainthood. It seemed to Michael that Jacob's holy energy alleviated his recent fatigue and achiness that he had because of lack of sleep.

Michael looked at his papers, questionnaire and interrogation plan and tried to concentrate, but failed. He thought about Jacob, the way he looked, how he spoke and the way he thought. These thoughts began to awaken hidden feelings that Michael didn't realize he had. He even felt like he had this conversation before.

"This is a mystery," Michael thought. He tried to push these

sudden thoughts out of him mind. However, they wouldn't go away. "Who does this man remind me of? He has a kind, frank and warm face, wise eyes, and a thick beard. Wait!"

Suddenly, Michael had a thought, and it startled him. Jacob looked exactly like a man from Michael's childish, blurry dreams. Michael couldn't understand whether this figure was an angel, a magician, or a man from his forgotten life. Michael finally managed to suppress his thoughts and emotions, and asked Jacob, "Do you remember anything that could help the investigation?"

"You were absolutely right when you said that this incident was horrible and unexpected," Jacob said. "I was so shocked with what I saw that I still feel sick and can't concentrate."

"Well," Michael suggested, "How about I ask you questions and you answer them?"

Michael glanced at his notes, and asked, "Did you know any of these men before you arrived?"

Jacob guessed that Michael knew about what went on between him and Shamalov's case, and that they knew one another. This would be easy to figure out even if Michael wasn't aware of it yet. What's more, Jacob knew Michael was a nice man, and didn't want anything bad to happen to him. That meant Michael would probably do nothing cruel during the investigation. Therefore, Jacob decided not to conceal anything except that he was the first to find the bodies. Fallow warned everyone not to say Jacob found the bodies, and then claimed he found them. Fallow probably knew that investigation officers could rearrange this case according to their wishes. This is why he decided to claim responsibility. He was quite experienced at evading the interrogator's questions. He couldn't have known that this case would be given to an investigation officer who actually cared.

"Yes," Jacob answered, "I knew one of the men. Samuel Shamalov. He was one of the men who hanged himself. He

knew me as well. But, I think you already knew that."

Michael gave him an embarrassing smile, and answered, "You are right, Jacob. I already knew that. However, I just wanted to check. I wanted make sure that our conversation was based on mutual trust and understanding."

"I would like to tell you my opinion of you, mister investigation officer," continued Jacob. "I strongly believe that you are a very decent and fair person. I realized that when you released us from the cells, when you let Baruch stay in the same ward as me and completed Baruch's case properly. This is why I will answer your questions honestly, so that you can end your second case just as correctly. However, I would like to tell you now that I am not afraid of what might happen to me because of what I've done. I may refuse to answer questions if what I were to say would put others in danger."

"I understand," Michael said. "That is fair. I agree to conduct our conversation in this way. Here is my first question: Why did you say, 'Samuel hanged himself?' How do you know he wasn't murdered?"

"I was sleeping when it happened, so I couldn't see how he hanged himself," Jacob answered. "But, I saw blood stains and some excrement on his hands and on a handmade rope. No one in the ward except the three dead men had these stains on them. Besides, if it were a violent death, there would be noise, and I didn't hear anything that night. I am a light sleeper. Because of all of this, I concluded that Samuel hanged himself."

"You are incredibly observant," Michael said as he wrote Jacob's answer down. "In that crazy situation you noticed that no one else in the ward had bloodstains or excrement on their clothes." Then he made a joke: "Have you worked in investigation institutions before?"

"No, because no one offered me a position for some reason," Jacob smiled.

"Now, I'm going to ask you this," said Michael. "Did you talk

to Shamalov before he hanged himself?"

"No, I didn't."

"But, why not?" Michael asked. "Were you on bad terms with him? Did you dislike each other? Did you hate each other? Or was there any other reason?"

Jacob grinned and answered, "I think you already know how much Samuel disliked me. Nevertheless, I am a religious man, and such feelings as hatred, dislike and other negative emotions are not allowed. Spiritual people try to clean their souls from it."

"Are you saying that you knew how much he hated you, and you didn't have a falling out with him because of it?"

"Absolutely," Jacob answered. "I must rise above human sins and forgive those who have strayed."

"Why do you think he strayed?"

"Why?" Jacob repeated the question. "Because he was weak and unwise and influenced by events. He was unable to distinguish truth from lies. He rejected the teachings of the Torah and promoted other doctrines. He couldn't see his sins and didn't want to listen to the holy teachings."

"I understand, and, in a way, I approve," Michael said. "Besides, you have proven to me that you are a very wise man, Jacob. This is why I would like to figure this out with you. You just said that Shamalov hanged himself. He should have thought a lot about his life before he decided to do so. He might even have confessed his sins to someone. What do you think? Did he come to you the day before he died? Did he share his heartache with the only person he knew in this ward, the only man who was able to understand him?"

Jacob pondered the question for a minute, and then answered: "Mister investigation officer, I see that you have the ability to look into a person's soul. Moreover, I am pleased to hear what you have to say. I agree that Samuel must have had a lot on his mind before his death. However, he never said anything to me.

First, I think he was ashamed to confess his numerous shameful deeds to me. Besides, you must understand he couldn't repent all of his sins, cleanse his soul or make amends with others before he died even if he had confessed. He committed the final and worst sin before he committed suicide: He killed Chopper."

After a short pause, Jacob solemnly continued, "I may have been able to figure out what he was going to do if he had looked into my eyes that day. I could have prevented it. But, he seemed to have known this was going to happen, and chose to turn his back on me."

Michael finished writing and asked one more question. "Jacob, because you are new I don't suppose that you know the reason Shamalov murdered Chopper. Or do you?"

"You're asking me whether I know the reason for the murder." Jacob said. "It's true I am new, and I don't know many things, but I can guess."

"And, what do you guess?" Michael asked.

"Chopper seemed to have been a very fair, but authoritative, person in the ward. It's possible he knew some of the reproachful things Shamalov did. On the other hand, perhaps, Shamalov might have behaved in an unruly manner after he arrived. I think it was possible that Chopper attempted to inform Shamalov of some of the unspoken rules that the prisoners were expected to obey. Chopper was the leader, and he decided how Shamalov should be punished. In my opinion, Shamalov wanted revenge, and killed Chopper. However, as I've said, it's just my opinion. I could be wrong."

"Honestly," Michael said as he wrote Jacob's words down, "That's my opinion as well."

Jacob had remarkable vision. When he was a child, he spent a lot of time teaching himself, and read books while lying upside down. He called this visual flexibility. He believed a person should develop not just flexibility of the body, but

intellectually, cognitively, visually, and aurally as well. His vision was so acute that he could see a thin piece of thread hanging all the way across the room before any of his classmates could. In addition, he could easily read a book when he held it very close to his head. His memory was so fine-tuned that he could look at a page in a book and instantly memorize it. Then, he would close his eyes recite every word accurately. This skill came in handy on that horrible day.

As Michael wrote in the report, Jacob would occasionally glance at the questionnaire. The last question on the page was "Who was the first to discover the bodies?"

"I won't answer this one," Jacob said. "What if he has already interrogated Fallow, and he said he was the one to find them? If that is the case, my refusal to answer might make me look suspicious. It would damage the investigation and put Fallow at risk. What should I do? I need to think of something quickly."

Michael finished writing, and was just about to ask this question, but Jacob beat him to it. "Sorry for interrupting, comrade investigation officer, but can I ask you something?"

"Of course," Michael answered. "You have the right to ask anything."

"You didn't sleep at all yesterday or today, and you didn't sleep enough the day before yesterday, right?"

"Correct," Michael answered, a little surprised. "But how did you know?"

"You just told me that I am very attentive," Jacob reminded him. "You look very tired. I am also very tired. Could we continue our conversation tomorrow?"

"Of course, we can," Michael answered. He immediately called the guards, and asked them to return Jacob to his cell.

"I need to get a hold of Fallow right away, and tell him that I will be asked who found the bodies," Jacob thought to himself as he returned to the ward. "I wish I had seen Fallow that day

because I would have told him that lying would only create more problems. I must have told him that I couldn't lie because it is a sin, and if I refuse to talk, it will look like I am covering something up. How can I speak to him?"

Jacob paid close attention to noises that he heard in the long corridor. He could hear both strange and familiar voices coming from inside the metal doors. He could hear many people talking, but not Fallow. He could recognize Fallow's solemn bass-like voice in a crowd of thousands. Suddenly, the guard stopped, and he signaled to Jacob to do so as well. Jacob returned to the ward, and the guard closed the door behind him. Baruch rushed straight to him and anxiously asked, "Teacher, are you all right?"

"Thank God, I'm all right, my dear boy," he answered.

"But, you don't look well, teacher," Baruch said. He was worried. "Did anything happen during your interrogation? Were you tortured?"

"No," Jacob said. "God is merciful. I spoke to the angelic man, investigation officer Michael. I look a little concerned because I can't solve a problem."

"Tell me teacher! What is your problem?" Baruch insisted. Jacob didn't want to bother the boy with his troubles, but Baruch wasn't satisfied with his silence and was very persistent.

"I need to speak to Fallow, but I have no idea how I can," Jacob said.

"I know," Baruch answered.

"You do?"

Of course, I do. You need to knock on the walls. Then someone will knock on our wall. We will have to wait for a fishing rod to be sent through the window. Then, we can write a message to whomever we want. I've seen it many times."

"I've also seen it, but only once," Jacob answered. "However, it was performed by experienced prisoners who had

communicated in this way many times and knew each other well. Do you really think they will communicate with us? You are a child, and I have only been here for three days."

"We can try," Baruch insisted.

"You may be right, son," Jacob agreed. "I don't see any other way to do it."

A few hours later, when dead silence had settled in the corridor, Jacob started to knock on the right wall and Baruch knocked on the left wall. They put their ears to the walls after knocking, but heard nothing. They continued to knock for a long time until Jacob finally said, "They don't recognize us. Let's forget about this idea."

Jacob squatted, put both his arms on his head and started thinking about what he was going to do. Suddenly, he thought he heard a faint sound. It randomly appeared and disappeared; Jacob decided it was a hallucination. Soon, however, the knocking became more distinct. Jacob covered his ears, and the sound disappeared. He thought, "That's strange. This doesn't seem to be a hallucination." He uncovered his ears and heard the knocking again. He immediately put his ear to the wall, called Baruch and joyfully whispered: "They are knocking from the adjacent ward! They responded!"

Baruch stood up and rushed to the window. "Teacher," the boy said excitedly, "they will throw the fishing rod soon."

They both peered into the darkness that sat behind the window. A minute later, an object flew by them, and disappeared.

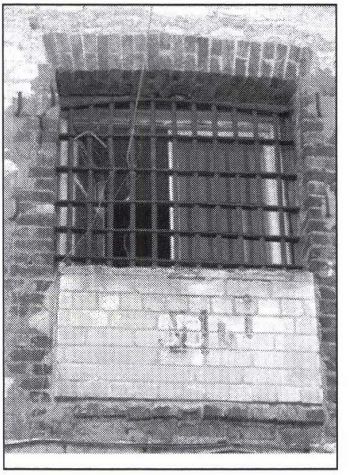
"Did you see it, Baruch?" Jacob asked.

"No, I saw nothing," Baruch answered.

"Step aside!"

Jacob grasped the bar with his left hand and stretched his right out as far as he could get it. Something flew near his hand and touched his fingertips. This process was repeated until Jacob managed to catch it.

"I think I've caught fish," Jacob whispered gleefully, and pulled his catch in. On the fishing pole was a piece of paper and a pencil tied to a handmade rope. Jacob carefully untied them, and tied the rope to the window's metal bars. Then, he went to the wall and started to write a message. Jacob had written on both sides of paper. When he was finished, he wrapped it, tied it to the rope and threw the fishing pole outside.



"Teacher, you forgot to warn them!" Baruch exclaimed, looking at Jacob. "You should have yelled: Catch a horse!"[20]

"There is no need to make noise, son," Jacob said quietly. He gave him a slap on the back. "We'll just knock on the wall, and they will know we've set the horse free."[21] Jacob knocked on the wall again, and got a response at once. Jacob glanced at Baruch and smiled. In about an hour, they heard knocking again. Jacob knocked a response, and went to the window. He stretched out his arm and caught the fishing rod immediately. He unfolded the sheet of paper. It contained only one word and one letter: "OKAY. F."

"F stands for Fallow, I guess," Jacob said. He sighed in relief, grinned at Baruch, and said, "I could never imagine that I'd go fishing in prison."

***

The next morning, just about a half-hour before Jacob's interrogation, Michael was called into the chief investigation

officer's office. Palachev's demeanor was very cold, however, and he offered Michael the chair next to him to sit on. He told Michael that he wouldn't keep him more than five minutes.

"I wanted to tell you I've received all the necessary papers from Krotkov. I will keep my promise and send Baruch's case to the head office. However, you never should have left Krotkov alone. It was terribly irresponsible of you. What would you have done if something had happened to him? Who would be in charge?"

"First," Michael answered, "you only gave me one assistant. You also told me that you didn't have enough people and then you ordered me to finish the case as soon as possible. That is why I had to leave Krotkov in the city. Moreover, his job was safe, so I didn't think it was necessary to ask for another assistant."

"You might be right," Palachev said, "but you couldn't have considered everything. If you had come to me, I would have told you that Krotkov was a weak and unhealthy man, and that he shouldn't be outdoors all day. He is sick now because of your irresponsibility. He caught a serious cold."

"But, it was neither cool nor windy yesterday," Michael said a little confused.

"Nevertheless, it's your fault that Krotkov won't be able to help you investigate the three murders, and there is no one else," Palachev said. He slammed his fist on the table and angrily glanced at Michael. "This investigation cannot be delayed. So, now tell me, what decision should I make?"

Michael understood what Palachev was asking. "I'll handle it alone," he said.

Palachev's eyes were filled with joy, and he felt victorious, but he tried not to show it. He said coldly, "OK, but remember, it was your decision. I should also tell you that I received a complaint from the chief of security. He told me that you broke the rules of interrogation. If you remember what I told you,

interrogations are to be held in presence of guards to ensure your safety. You ordered the guards to leave. Why?"

"Comrade Palachev," Michael answered, "do you remember that you told me that all methods were good as long as they produced the proper results?"

"Yes, I told you that," Palachev confessed. "Are you saying your unusual method of interrogation helped you get the proper results?"

"Exactly," Michael answered. "This method allowed those under investigation to trust me, which sped up the process significantly."

Palachev thought, "Greenhorn, this happened because you interrogated a Jewish boy in the presence of a rabbi.

He didn't say anything to Michael about this, though. Instead, he said, "It might have helped you for this case, but you aren't planning on using this method on everyone, are you? There are many dangerous criminals who may try to attack you during interrogation."

Michael thought about it for a minute, and then answered, "I agree that there should be different ways to interrogate prisoners. This is why we should study the case before conducting the interrogation. We need to understand their motives and criminal history. This will allow us to choose the proper interrogation method. I know I'm not that experienced as an investigation officer, but I believe every criminal deserves to be treated as humanely as possible. I am going to follow the rules based on human justice and consciousness. Moreover, I'm sure that you can reach a person's heart if the person has some talent."

Palachev clenched his teeth when he heard the word talent. He thought to himself, "It's probably better not to prevent him from conducting interrogations this way. His methods, his humanistic approach, and his abilities may be the death of him. A dangerous criminal, someone like Tatar perhaps, will help,

too. It would solve all my problems at once. It would be a pleasure for me to put the words 'killed in the line of duty' on his tombstone."

"Well, you should know, I don't approve of your innovative ideas," Palachev said. He smiled. "I warned you about the potential risks of interrogating someone in this manner. You'll only have yourself to blame if something goes wrong. You had better not discredit me! Is that clear?"

"Yes, it is," Michael said. Palachev wasn't able to hide his emotions anymore. His wish to see Michael fail very soon made him happy. He smiled brightly, and said, "I wish you would finish the case on time. By the way, I strongly recommend you interrogate a prisoner called Tatar. I am sure he knows everything about these murders."

Michael thanked Palachev, and left.

***

The next morning, Jacob was brought to the interrogation room again. When Jacob entered, he saw that Michael looked healthy and his complexion was rosy. He didn't expect to see anything. When Michael raised his eyes, Jacob noticed that his glance was more vibrant and energetic, and the circles under his eyes had disappeared.

"This man has a healthy body and can recuperate very quickly," Jacob thought. "But, he hasn't has enough time to completely recover from all those sleepless nights. Even a very healthy body cannot recuperate within a few hours. He must have rare inborn qualities that help him fill himself with outer energy. Those rays of inner energy emanating from him are not created internally. His inner energy must be supported by eating.

"He probably didn't eat any dinner yesterday," he continued. "If he had gone to bed right after dinner, his tired body

wouldn't be able to digest the food properly. However, there is no indication on his face to show there is something wrong with his digestion. That means he didn't eat dinner yesterday; he absorbed energy from the environment and the atmosphere."

Michael asked the guards to leave and respectfully told Jacob to sit down.

"I hope you feel better after your rest," Michael addressed Jacob.

"I feel quite well. Thank you," Jacob answered. "I managed to remember numerous details that should speed up, as well as, simplify your investigation."

"Oh, really?" Michael asked happily. "I'd like to thank you in advance. It's very important that I finish this case as soon as possible because it is an outstanding incident, and we must provide a detailed and thorough report to the head office as soon as possible."

"I understand," Jacob answered.

"So, what would you like to do?" Michael asked. "Would you like to have another question-and-answer conversation or would you like to tell me what you remember?"

"I'd like to tell you everything I know," Jacob said, "and afterward I would be happy to answer all your questions, if you have any."

"Great! You may start," Michael said.

Michael wrote down everything Jacob said.

Jacob began with the moment he was brought to the ward. He told Michael everything, except taking the bodies down from the window bars and hanging them back up, passing illegal stuff to nearby wards and what Fallow told him not to say. Michael was so impressed with Jacob's story that he didn't say anything for a long time. He just looked at Jacob with surprise, his lips parted. Jacob noticed, and broke the silence.

"I see you look a little perplexed," Jacob said. "Aren't you satisfied? Would you like to say something else, mister

investigation officer?"

"No … I mean, yes," Michael said. "I didn't expect that you were going to tell this story in such an interesting and detailed way. You are a very talented narrator; your story sounds like a novel. You described all the events so skillfully and you fleshed them out with wise judgments and assumptions that were based on your impressions, understanding and an ability to see things on the outside more clearly. If a writer who was hoping to write a book saw this report, the writer wouldn't have to change anything to publish it. Thank you for helping me with my investigation. Now, the whole situation is clear, and I will definitely finish on time. Thank you very much for your detailed descriptions, Jacob."

Jacob gave him a kind smile and answered, "Actually, I didn't make any effort. I don't know any other way to tell a story."

He looked through the report Michael wrote and signed each page. He gave it back to Michael and said, "If you don't have any more questions for me, then I wonder whether you could answer one of mine. Mister investigation officer, I would like to ask you about Baruch. What is happening with his case?"

"Things are coming along nicely," Michael declared happily. "My assistant got all the information that was missing, and his case is moving up in the chain. Hopefully, he'll be released in a few days. I am also concerned about him, and I don't want to see this innocent boy stay here any longer."

"Thank you very much, mister investigation officer," Jacob said, and he politely nodded. Michael respectfully nodded back and called for the security guards. When he was left alone, Michael reread the report and put it into a folder.

"That really looks like a book," Michael said again, and stood up. "This report is as thick as the entire Shamalov's case."

As Michael headed towards investigation department, he thought about what he was going to do next.

"My major goal is to find and interrogate the ward mates of Petrov, Shamalov and Ismailov. I don't have a lot of time, so I first must speak with the prisoners who have been here for a while and ask them about the unspoken rules and attitudes between the prisoners. I also must figure out whether Shamalov and Ismailov were punished and humiliated by their ward mates. If so, then I need to know how they were punished. Was Petrov the only one who punished them? Did he organize a lynch mob? Was their revenge the real reason for Petrov's murder? Was fear the reason for their suicides? All I have are assumptions. I need to prove them."

Michael returned to the investigation department and went to the cabinet. Michael said to himself, "I need to study the cases of all prisoners who were in the ward at the time of the incident. Then, I have to choose the appropriate people to talk to."

Michael finished studying the cases by lunchtime. He had put three aside. He looked at them, and sighed. "These are the prisoners who I need to interrogate," Michael said. Their names were Medvedev Theodor Egorovich, a.k.a. Fallow; Mironov Oleg Grigorievitch, a.k.a. Butcher; and Mamutov Seidamet Ametovitch, a.k.a. Tatar. These prisoners have been in prison for a while. And so had Petrov, or Chopper.

Medvedev's nickname caught Michael's eye. "I'm going to interrogate him first," Michael said.

Both Fallow and Chopper served time in the same prison camp. However, they weren't there at the same time nor were they accused of the same crime. Michael felt this was important. "I think this must have brought them together in some way. They probably had mutual friends in the prison, and they must have spoken to each other about them and other things. A person has plenty of time to think about all the details of his life while sitting in a prison cell.

After I interrogate him, I will talk to Mironov," Michael said.

"He has not been in the prison system as long as Fallow, but he was sent here because he was accused of murder. He was found guilty of slaughtering his wife's lover and got his nickname because of it. He then went to the police station and confessed. Someone like him must have some respect among the prisoners. It's possible then that he was a good friend of Chopper's, and that may give him a reason to punish whoever killed him.

"What's important is that he seems to be an honest and fair man," Michael concluded. "I hope he'll tell me the truth.

"Mamutov, or Tatar, is the last person I would like to talk to," Michael began. "He probably got his nickname because of his nationality. However, outside, he had another nickname, Robust. He has been imprisoned several times because of violent crimes he committed while intoxicated. He has also resisted arrest, which explains why his prison terms were so long. He broke an officer's jaw resisting his last arrest and almost strangled a prison guard during interrogation. He probably would've killed him if he hadn't been subdued by other guards.

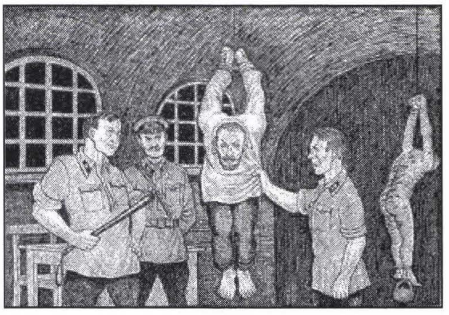
"This is the kind of man who could frighten and punish 'guilty' prisoners," Michael concluded. "Palachev was right when he said that Tatar must know what happened."

Michael quickly created a questionnaire to ask Fallow, and ordered the guards to bring the prisoner to the interrogation room immediately. Michael then headed to the room. He was stopped outside the door by a guard. The guard told Michael the room had to be cleaned up and it would be ready soon.

Michael was not happy. "I don't have a lot of time," Michael said. "I need to know how long it will be." He entered the room before the guard could answer him. Inside there were two men: a prison guard with a nightstick and a prisoner/janitor.

"Hurry up!" the guard yelled when he saw Michael enter the room. The prisoner who was cleaning blood off the chair

jumped, and glanced at the guard and then at Michael. He quickly dipped a cloth in a bucket filled with bloody water. He said, "I am almost finished, commanders!"



Michael glanced at the prison guard with displeasure, and addressed the prisoner, "Don't worry. There is no need to rush. We have some time until the prisoner arrives."

"Thank you very much, mister commander," the janitor answered as he squeezed the excess water from the cloth into the bucket. Michael saw him begin to calm down. As he passed by the janitor, Michael saw a puddle of blood and some knocked-out teeth near the chair.

"Who has just conducted an interrogation in here?" Michael asked the guard.

"Comrade Palachev," he answered.

After the room was cleaned up, Michael entered and positioned himself at the table. He heard footsteps in the corridor outside, and a guard's angry voice. "Face the wall!" he yelled.

Michael recognized this voice. It belonged to the purple-faced prison guard who was present during Palachev's interrogation two days ago. Another guard appeared in the doorway and asked, "May I let him in, comrade investigation officer?"

"Yes, you may," Michael answered. One guard came in and stood near the door. The other stood behind the door and shouted, "Come in!"

A 6-foot-tall prisoner with a thick muscular neck and wide shoulders appeared in the doorway.

"Hurry up!" ordered the guard who was standing behind him. He pushed him hard.

"Stop it!" Michael yelled, and stood up quickly.

"Stop what?" both prison guards asked with surprise.

"Stop treating the prisoner so rudely!" Michael answered in a loud voice. The guards gave each other bewildered looks, and shrugged their shoulders. Michael offered a seat to the prisoner and told to guards to leave despite a protest from the purple-faced guard.

Michael interrupted him and said, "I know the rules!" He then pointed to the door and continued, "Leave us immediately!"

The guards obeyed, and headed toward the door. Michael glanced at Fallow. He flashed a contemptuous smile as the guards left the room. However, as soon as the guards closed the door, Fallow became sad and unapproachable. Michael looked at the man for a while, studying him. He was trying to understand this man. Michael was usually never wrong with first impressions. But, now he felt that his intuition, which works fine in other cases, wouldn't help him at all.

"There is an invisible wall between us," Michael thought. "Fallow has created a wall of mistrust."

Fallow was the first to break the silence. "Why are you looking at me that way, commander? Are you staring at me because you're trying to figure out what to say?"

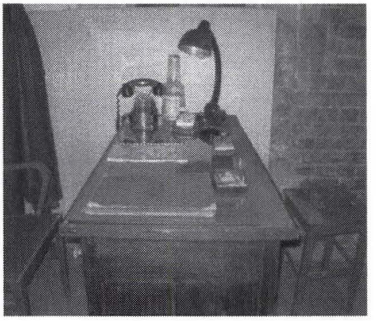
"How did you know that?" asked Michael with a smile.

"Even a bird can crab that just by looking at you," answered Fallow.

Michael laughed. "That's true. However, you are not an idiot. Your name is Medvedev Theodor Evgenievitch, right?"

Fallow nodded, looked at the folders lying on the table, and said, "You know that. Everything is written on your cards."

"True. I have already studied your case. I'm just confirming your name to ensure that the guards haven't brought the wrong person."



"Don't try to shit on me, commander," answered Fallow. "The hacks who brought me all know my name even thought they are all anserine."

Michael nodded, and started to write a report. Fallow noticed that Michael wasn't smiling; Michael, at that moment, was deep in thought. "Fallow is cold and mistrustful," Michael thought. "I must find some common ground on which to stand with him."

"Theodor Egorovich, you are here because you have spent a lot of time in the ward where the three men were killed. I think you would be very helpful to my investigation. This case must be finished by tomorrow."

Michael looked straight into Fallow's eyes and asked, "Are you ready to honestly tell me what happened?"

Now, it was Fallow's turn to stare at Michael in silence. Michael noticed this and said to himself, "He's trying to turn the tables on himself."

After a short, silent pause, Michael broke the tension with a smile. "Why are you staring, Fallow? Cat got your tongue?"

Fallow turned to Michael, raised his eyebrows and said, "What?"

Cat got your tongue, Fallow?" asked Michael.

"How did you manage to learn our language, commander? People whispered to me that you were green, and you already knew how to speak prison thug talk."

"You just taught me how to do it," Michael laughed.

"You are cool! I'm impressed, mister commander," said Fallow. After a while, he continued, "To tell you the truth, I would not talk to other investigation officers. However, you are such a cool man. Besides, they told me you were somewhat nice. So, OK, I'll talk."

"Thank you," Michael said. He asked Fallow to tell him everything he knew. Fallow told Michael everything that Jacob had already told him. When Fallow finished, he paused for a moment, then said, "Someone has already spoken to you about this, right?"

"Right," confirmed Michael, "But, I had to make sure the stories matched, so the investigation goes in the right direction."

"So …?" Fallow asked.

"They are absolutely the same," Michael smiled. He continued, "How would you describe the victims? Start with Chopper, please?"

"Cool," Fallow agreed. "Chopper was the leader; an experienced guy, a veteran inmate. He called the shots. He made sure the rules were obeyed and that everything was in good order. He always gave people the right advice. I met him here for the first time, but I knew about him from other prisons and camps where I had served sentences. His death is a big loss for criminals everywhere."

"I understand," Michael said with sympathy. "What do you know about Shamalov?"

"Who is that?" Fallow asked. "Oh, you mean that rotten kike! I regret I did not tear this traitor's ass apart. He was a snitch on the outside as well. This nark had thousands of his compatriots killed. I did time with one of them. He was the young boy's dad."

"Do you mean Baruch Aminov's father?"

"Yes," Fallow said. "By the way, there is a rumor that he died in one of the gulags.

"Of course, some people tore Shamalov apart. And the bastard took it out on our leader."

Michael thanked Fallow for that explanation, wrote what he said in his report, and continued, "What can you tell me about Ismailov?"

"That dude was a dung beetle," started Fallow. "He ripped off his whore's daughter."

"You mean, he raped his lover's daughter," Michael interrupted him. He hardly managed to put those words in the report and write their meaning in parentheses.

"Sure," Fallow confirmed "According to prison laws and rules, we had to cut that knot. It was good that he hanged himself because this piece of shit knew that he'd be passed around and end up dying on his hands and knees for killing our leader.

"And who made these severe laws and rules?" Michael asked.

"We didn't. No one here did. They were probably already here when the tsar ruled the country. They still work because they protect everyone, and if you're smart, you'll understand that with law there is order. If there is no law, chaos ensues. And, no one wants that. Do you understand?"

"I do. But, tell me, please, Fallow. Was it this ancient law that killed Chopper?"

"It was just an accident. There are bound to be plenty of those in total chaos."

"That makes sense. Thank you very much for your cooperation, Theodor. You helped me to understand many things."

"It's always a pleasure to help a nice man," Fallow said. Then he got serious. "I want to you know something. I can read you like an open book. Therefore, I must give you some advice. You must always be harsh. You are inside a wolf pack now, and one must learn to howl with the wolves, or, at least, pretend to run with the pack. Otherwise, those dragons – the

investigators -- will kill you. I will tell my guys to help you."

Michael nodded and called the guards. He followed his outline, and interrogated Mironov, a.k.a Butcher, next. Butcher also gave Michael honest answers, and helped clear many things up. After Mironov left, Michael ordered the guards to bring one more prisoner: Mamudov Seidamet, a.k.a Tatar.

There were three guards escorting Mamutov instead of the usual two. Two watched him from behind the door while the purple-faced guard entered interrogation room. He told Michael, "I wouldn't recommend you be alone with this prisoner. And his hands and legs should stay bound during the interrogation."

"Why?" asked Michael.

"Not a single interrogation has ended peacefully with him. He is a real beast."

"Let him in," Michael ordered. "I want to look at this beast."

Two robust guards led Mamutov inside the room, one holding each arm. The purple-faced guard ordered them to stop when they brought him to the chair.

Michael looked into his Mamutov's eyes attentively, and knew he had seen this brave, disobedient glance before. Mamutov was a skinny, but muscular, man with high cheekbones. He had a crooked eagle-like nose with predator-like nostrils that stood out on his face. His thick, wide eyebrows met low on the bridge of his nose. With his facial features as well as his expressions and his fighting spirits, Mamutov resembled a warrior who lived during the time of Genghis Khan.

Michael watched him for a while, observing his angry glances and trying to remember something. Finally, he did. When Michael was a student, he went to the Tashkent Zoo, and saw a wolf. This wolf looked straight into Michael's eyes, and never blinked. His stare was both clever as a human's and as severe as a beast's. They stared at each other for a very long time.

Michael couldn't take his eyes off him; he was hypnotized by the wolf's stare. It was as the wolf was saying: You think that because I'm locked in a cage, you have won. However, if we could meet in the forest face-to-face, it would be I who would win."

This frightened Michael, and he couldn't look into the wolf's eyes anymore. He dropped his gaze. When he finally raised his eyes, again the wolf was proudly moving towards the other end of the cage.

"Take off the bindings and leave us," Michael declared, not taking his eyes off Tatar. He saw the guard was speechless and shocked.

"Did you hear me?" he asked in a loud voice.

"Do what he said," the purple-faced guard ordered, trembling. He handed the keys to the other guards and stepped back, holding his nightstick. The two guards started opening the locks resignedly, but cautiously. Tatar scornfully glanced at the guard standing off to the side and said mockingly, "Don't worry. I won't touch you, not today. It is not your day. However, next time, I'll definitely do what I promised I would. I swear."

After the guards removed the bindings, they moved to a safe distance. Michael looked at the guards and pointed at the door; all three disappeared immediately. When the door was locked behind them, Tatar lost his wolfish predatory look.

"Sit down, Seidamet Ametovich," Michael offered politely. Tatar smiled, sat down, and rubbed his sore hands.

"I'm not used to hearing my given name. Thank you for remembering. Thank you also for removing the handcuffs, commander. I'm not used to being in an interrogation without them. I received the mail. I already know what case you are investigating, and I was told not to give you a hard time, but answer all questions honestly. So, ask what you'd like. I won't lie to you."

Michael realized that Fallow somehow managed to inform everyone about him and his interrogations despite the fact they were all in different wards.

"I'm new here, so I don't understand what you mean by mail. What are you talking about, Seidamet Ametovich?"

Tatar smiled and said: "They told me to answer questions that relate to the case. That question doesn't."

"Sorry, Seidamet Ametovich, you are absolutely right," Michael agreed.

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After Tatar was interrogated, Michael's investigation went quicker than he had expected. He conducted a few more interrogations, and by the time evening had arrived, he had a large pile of testimonies on his desk. From these, he would write his report.

Later that night, Palachev entered the investigation department. Michael saw he looked pale and a little lost. Palachev approached Michael's desk, looking a little bewildered. "I was told you managed to interrogate many people today," he said, his voice stammering. "What's more astonishing is you managed to interrogate Tatar without incident. How did you do that?"

"It was because of you, Comrade Palachev. You told me I had to interrogate Tatar by any means necessary. Besides, since you gave me such a short amount of time it was impossible to do so any other way."

"So, will you be able to finish this report by tomorrow?"

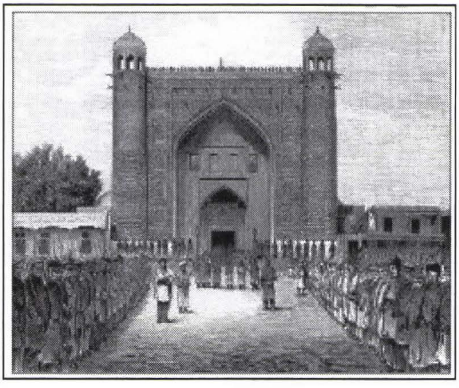
"Absolutely. The documents are almost ready. They will be on your desk tomorrow."

Palachev stood in front of Michael in complete silence. He had the look of a man who couldn't believe what he just heard. He gave a stunned blink when realized that his plan to morally

destroy Michael had failed. His cheeks nervously jerked, and he didn't know what to say.

Michael broke the silence and asked, "Are you going to let me continue to do my work, or you have something to tell me?" Palachev turned around and left the department without saying anything. In the morning, the finished case for the three murders was on his desk.

Chapter 5 Jacob's prophetic dream



Jacob woke up at 4 o'clock, as usual. He opened his eyes and sprang off his bed like a cat that had been dropped in scalding-hot water when he remembered that an angel had visited him in a dream. This angel was sent by God. Jacob put his hands on his head and tried to remember every detail about the dream. It was the 12th time in his life that he had one of these dreams. He first had a dream on his 13th birthday, right before his bar mitzvah. He remembered the voice didn't come from a human body, but something that resembled a soft, gaseous cloud. The voice spoke in ancient Hebrew.

It said, "Tomorrow is an important day. This rite of passage will create a soul that will have a meaningful life. This soul reached a high point of comprehension in 12 short years. After devoting, it will continue its way to the highest point of wisdom in order to approach the highest level of creation. Only chosen souls can reach this point."

At the time, Jacob didn't understand what the words meant. He was only 13, after all. It was only when he began to study a secret book called the Zohar, as well as other books of Kabbalah, that he understood.

Jacob immediately memorized what he had heard. He was told, "One chosen soul has reached the point of wisdom. There is only one step left until it reaches the highest level. However,

it is very hard to take this step. The way goes through the forest of time. One may occasionally stumble and fall into the abyss. Not everyone can escape. It will be dangerous. The soul is able to overcome all hardships and fulfill its manifest destiny. It will suffer the bitterest trials during its punishment. However, each year of punishment will become a month. Freedom will be given after an evil spirit destroys the soul of the demon that it created."

The second thing the voice said was, "The past will be revealed to one of the souls at this place, and this soul will be reborn. Two souls will find each other and help each other."



The third thing was, "One soul gave birth to another soul 13 years ago, which shall be released today. This soul has passed its earthly trials and left this world."

Jacob usually wrote down everything that was said in his dreams. This time, however, he had neither paper nor pencil. This is why he had to memorize it. Its meaning was not that important right now because Jacob knew that every word uttered meant something. It was not enough just to remember the general idea. Over time, the meaning could change. Forgetting a word or changing the word order in a sentence, or even getting words confused was inexcusable. The meaning could also change if a sentence is forgotten.

Jacob said the words in his head repeatedly until he was sure he had learned them by heart. Then, he relaxed. The morning was cool and it was wet in the ward. He glanced at the bed where Baruch was lying. He was under a sheet and rolled up into a ball. Jacob took his blanket and tenderly covered Baruch

with it.

"I'll have a plenty of time to figure out the meaning of the words from my dream," Jacob thought as he looked at Baruch with affection. "I won't wake Baruch up. He is 13 already, and is an adult, according to our laws. He is still weak and fragile like a baby, I think, so he should be allowed to sleep for eight hours."

Suddenly, Jacob was inspired. "Wait! Baruch is 13. There must be a connection! The third thing the spirit said was, 'One soul gave birth to another soul 13 years ago, which shall be released today. This soul has passed its earthly trials and left this world.' Let's assume these words refer to Baruch, who is 13. How can I figure out the meaning? Hold on. Let's look at each sentence separately. 'One of the souls gave birth to the other 13 years ago.' The soul that gave birth to Baruch 13 years ago is his father, Joseph! I should have known that immediately! OK, what's next?"

Jacob intuitively understood that he had to forget for a moment the words from the end of the dream and concentrate on the words from the middle. Jacob collected himself and whispered, "This soul has passed its earthly trials and left this world." Jacob thought sadly, "If I guessed correctly, Joseph, Baruch's father, had died. The poor man. He wasn't able to see his children or say goodbye to his loving wife. He was one of the most honest men in our district. He always said what he believed, and suffered because of his honesty.

"If this is true," Jacob said, "it's very important for Joseph's soul to read prayers and solemnize all rites. I need to let Joseph's family know about his death because as far as I know the authorities stopped informing relatives of political prisoners that they had died. Sometimes families learned about their death inadvertently. They find out from people who were released.

"But, what if I am wrong and the words don't have anything

to do with Joseph? How can I make sure that I am right? What can help me?"

He continued to reflect. "But, I haven't guessed its whole meaning. 'The emanation of this soul will be released today.' That seems to mean Baruch. How can I understand it though? What will he be released from?"

Jacob's face brightened, and he hit himself on the forehead. Then, he exclaimed gladly, forgetting that Baruch was sleeping. "That could mean that Baruch will be released today! If he is released, it will prove that I was right about the dream's meaning."

With his hand on his temple, Jacob strolled up and down the ward, the meaning of the dream the focus on his attention. "Why did the Lord send me this spirit?" he asked. "It must mean something. Maybe it would be easier for me to learn about Joseph's fate here. If it's true, I can let the Aminovs know and they will be able to read prayers and celebrate all rites. That might be one of my missions here. I must take some measures, and use the prison mail system. The prisoners could probably find someone who is serving a sentence with Joseph. I have to find out.

"Now, what about my boy, Baruch? If he is really to be released today, it will be my job to tell him he will never see his father again. But, how can I do that, especially since he'll be happy about his release? There is only one solution: I'll hint to him that he might have to hear some sad news and survive. Well done!"

After he made his decision, Jacob hastily stepped towards the sink. When Baruch woke up, he ran to the sink eager to join Jacob in morning prayers. However, Jacob was already finished. As Jacob said the last words, he turned toward Baruch.

"Teacher, why didn't you wake me up earlier?" Baruch asked sadly.

Jacob stepped up to the boy, gave him a slap on the shoulder, and said in a kind voice, "Son, when I looked at you this morning, you were sleeping like a baby, although we both know you are now an adult. Today, I had a feeling this day would be a special one for you, full of happy events. I decided not to wake you because I wanted you to have the strength and power you'll need to face your destiny and whatever it has planned for you. Now, read the morning prayers, son. When you are finished, I have to speak with you."

When Baruch was finished with his morning prayers, he headed toward Jacob who was sitting on the bed near the window. Baruch sat in front of Jacob. Jacob said, "Son, I would like to ask you something. We have discussed this topic before at my house. I would like to ask you a few questions."

"Ask me, teacher, I'm ready," Baruch said.

"OK. Tell me, Baruch, what determines how long people live and where do souls go after death?"

"You taught us that our life is a life of ordeals," Baruch answered. He noticed Jacob's encouraging glance and continued. "Each of us has to pass his ordeals and then the Lord decides where He will send a soul. We need time. The Lord created heavenly bodies in the universe to help us figure out time. There are many temptations in the world. The Lord allows the Devil to tempt people. The more temptations you have, the harder your ordeals are.

"There are many laws in the universe: the law of balance, energy conservation law, energy flow law, etc.," Baruch continued. "People are like candles, and each candle has latent energy. When a candle burns, it gives off light and warmth. Its soft light warms people's souls and eliminates darkness. Candles die to give warmth and light to people. The brighter the candle burns, the quicker it fades.

"The same thing happens to people. Those who devote themselves to others, rise above their sins and don't give into

temptation usually live a shorter life than people who care only about themselves. They are wise representatives of humanity and always do good deeds. They usually pass their ordeals quicker, and if Lord wishes, He can send those souls to the saintly world. Death is the beginning of immortality for them. When a soul leaves this world, it is reborn into the sacred world and lives forever. This is why we never mention death when we read prayers at a funeral or a memorial. We don't dare tempt any misfortune. We thank the Lord for His love and His great deeds.

"Some people are unwise when they are young and that's why they sin. Nevertheless, God is merciful, and gives us the chance to improve. As man gets older, he gets wiser. In addition, there are people who manage to cover their small sins with kind deeds so their souls aren't sent to Abaddon[22]. Only God knows the proper place for each soul."

"You learned your lesson well," Jacob said. "Now, I would like to tell you something I haven't mentioned before."

Baruch smiled happily and got comfortable on the bed. He was ready to listen to Jacob attentively. He loved to hear Jacob's stories. Every time Jacob told a story, Baruch and the other students always had a feeling of spiritual resurrection. He could feel his mind develop and his view of the world was transformed. Baruch was ready to feel that way again.

"There is spiritual life and physical life," Jacob began. "In addition, there is also physical death. The moment a soul joins a human body is the beginning of physical life. When the soul leaves a human body, physical death occurs. Physical death is only the death of the body because, as we know, the body cannot exist without a soul. However, as you stated before, the soul is immortal. Spiritual life follows physical death. There are many levels of spiritual life, as well as many worlds. There are the low and high worlds, and God decides what the proper level for the soul is and where it should live. We only know

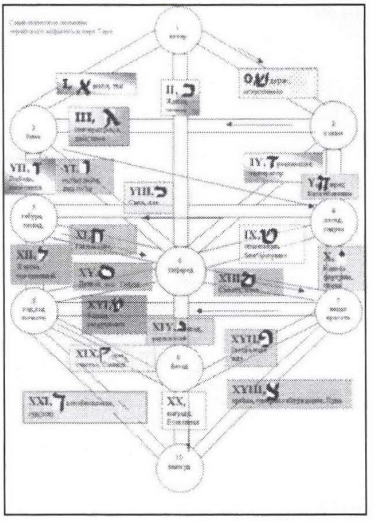
one thing: There is a direct correlation between mortal life and afterlife. This correlation depends on how many good deeds a person did during his lifetime and the level of his spirituality."

Jacob continued, "Our people created a model of the tree of life based on the greatest of the Lord's creations: the lowest and highest worlds. This model consists of 10 spheres. According to the model, the soul is closer to God when it is in the highest spheres of spiritual life. This is why it possesses more divine features. You know, son, God is omnipresent. He is everywhere -- the mortal realm, the immortal realm and all parts of the universe. Some human souls are also blessed with these features. Souls in the highest spheres have more freedom. They can remain in the mortal and immortal worlds for a time. And our wise men found explanation of this miracle. People can now determine where their loved ones' souls went. The memory of dearest people is a determinant of freedom and the determinant of vicinity to the supreme worlds. Some mystical doctrines state the soul can be contacted through our memory. However, it is not true. In fact, it's the opposite. We see our loved ones in dreams and in memories because they want to communicate with us through our memories. Now we can draw a conclusion. The more the soul communicates with us through our memories, the more freedom it has and the higher its spiritual sphere is.

"The different fate is for those souls in other worlds that didn't do kind deeds and who were selfish while on Earth. They disappear from people's memory very soon after their death as though they were never alive. They become nothing because their souls are at the zero point -- between the lowest and highest spiritual sphere. They can't move up or down.

"People who committed violence and evil on Earth are cursed. The more violent the deed, the longer and stronger they are cursed after death. Their souls are on the lowest spheres and are doomed for unbearable tortures.

"Thank God there are very few violent people among our great folk. We are the chosen people, and are blessed with the Torah. The whole world knows that we are immortal. Everyone who has ever tried to control us, have disappeared or vanished. We are the oldest people, and we have spread all over the world. We didn't vanish. Nor were we absorbed. We didn't disappear because we followed the rules of the Torah, which teaches kindness and wisdom. The Torah gave birth to customs that lay at the heart of many cultures. Most of these traditions are related to memorable events for individuals and families.



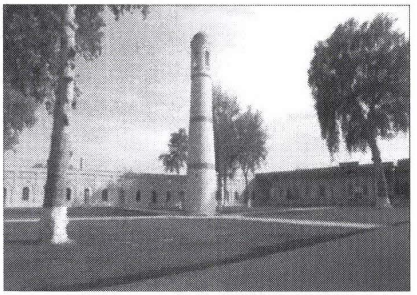
"For example, Sephardic Jews continue to memorialize family members 50 years and more after they died. Several hundred people gather at Bukharian Jew funerals and memorials. You remember that we praise the Lord when we read the Kadish at funerals and memorials. However, this is not the end. During funerals and memorials, rabbis hold spiritual gatherings in the synagogue or at home. This is why our funerals and memorials are called Yeshvo, from the word Yeshiva, and means school and study. Rabbis, friends, and relatives of the deceased speak of the kind deeds he has done. Everyone understands that the soul is immortal, and we must not complain either during the funerals and memorials or after them. Grief and suffering is not allowed. As long as they live in our memory, their souls will be both with us and in the

supreme world at the same time.

"I want you to remember these words, Baruch. I have a feeling you will be released very soon, and we won't see each other for a long time. Many things can happen between now and then. Your father isn't with you now, and you won't see me for a while. It will be God who will give you the love and support you need in the moments of grief and sadness. That is why I wanted to give you this lesson now," Jacob finished.

"I understand, teacher," Baruch answered gratefully. "I will never forget what you have said and will always follow your instructions."

Chapter 6
Recovery



After all the documents for three murders case were given to Palachev for review and the composition of a report, Michael enthusiastically began investigating Jacob Rubinov's case. He had had a strange feeling since the morning, and felt that investigating Jacob's case would help him uncover ideas that might possibly destroy everything he believed and thought. However, it might also help him find something that was lost and forbidden, and this will have a huge impact on his life.

Michael also felt that there could be fatal consequences. That didn't scare Michael, however. Instead, he was intrigued by it. He was very interested in discovering these ideas, as well as solving a mystery.

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Everything that was confiscated from Jacob's home was put into a prison warehouse. Michael had to request the items be brought to a special room near the investigation department. At midday, Michael was told the items were in the room. There was also a request for him to meet with an administrative manager near the room in 15 minutes. Fifteen minutes later, Michael arrived at a door that was padded with thick metal sheets. It was sealed and locked with two locks. A prison guard who stood not too far from the door's entrance, said, "The administrative manager, Comrade Lysenko, has just left the building, and said he would be a little late. Could you please

wait for him? He will be here soon." Michael said yes, and thanked the guard. Michael thought he heard footsteps echoing down the long corridor, but no one was there.

"Somebody is going downstairs from the second floor," Michael guessed.

A short, thin man appeared at the end of the corridor. Two robust guards followed him. Michael saw them and thought, "Some young person is heading to interrogation."

He turned his face to the door, and began reading a piece of paper. The paper said the door had been sealed at 10:30 this morning and Lisenko's signature was on it. When the three men finally approached, Michael glanced at the prisoner. It was Baruch. He looked scared, lost, and confused. He stopped suddenly when he saw Michael. The tall guard walking behind him, looked at Michael, and almost knocked Baruch down. He was about to swear, but was stopped by Michael's exclamation. "Baruch!

"Where are you taking this prisoner?" Michael asked in an anxious, but strict voice.

"He is not a prisoner anymore," said the guard who was standing in front of Baruch. "The warden just received a release order for him and we were told to set him free immediately."

"I am free?" yelled Baruch loudly, but relieved. Baruch's eye filled with tears and he glanced from Michael to the guards, unable to believe what he heard.

Michael was surprised by the sudden news, but quickly came to his senses. He forgot about his position and rushed happily to Baruch. He hugged him and declared, "Congratulations, Baruch! I am so happy for you. Now all the bad things are behind you. You are free now, and you will live a happy life. You will see your mother, your brothers and sisters and your relatives and friends again."

"Thank you so much!" said Baruch, wiping his tears with his

sleeve, "Thank you for your kindness. You are my savior. I would never be free if you hadn't helped me. You are not a man. You are an angel sent by God! I don't know how to thank you. I swear I'll always pray for you!"

"Goodbye, Baruch," said Michael, opening his arms. Baruch and the guards headed toward the door. Baruch continued to look back and happily waved his thin hand to Michael.

Suddenly, the entrance door opened and the administrative manager appeared in the doorway. He was holding a folder in his hands. Two people followed him.

Comrade Lisenko and his two companions approached Michael. Lisenko offered his hand to Michael and said, "I am sorry about the delay, Comrade Mikhailov. I have been very busy." Then he pointed to one of his companions. "This is Comrade Kutilov, vice security manager. The other man is my assistant, Comrade Travkin." Michael noticed that Travkin was young and short.

Lisenko continued, "Regulations state that there must be three people present when confiscated property is turned over."

As Michael introduced himself and shook hands with Kutilov and Travkin, Lisenko continued to talk. "Thank God, it won't take us long to give you the prisoner's property. It consists of ..." he paused suddenly. "Damn it! Where are my keys?"

Lisenko nervously took bunches of keys from his pockets.

"Here they are," he said with a sigh, and took two keys from the inner pocket. He then approached the door, lifted the padlock and said, "This is the check lock, Comrade Mikhailov. We sealed the door a half-hour ago. Look at this paper. It has a signature on it, and lists the time the door was sealed. You are permitted to do that every time you leave this room."

He pierced the paper that covered the padlock with the key and unlocked it. "Here is the key to the second lock," Lisenko said as he unlocked that one as well.

"Here are the keys, Comrade Mikhailov. Let's enter the

room." He handed the keys to Michael.

Lisenko entered first and turned on the light. After everyone was inside, Lisenko asked Michael to close the door, which he did, and continued the briefing. "Don't forget to lock the door immediately when you leave. You are responsible for the items in this room."

He pointed at the boxes filled with books and laughed, "It's not property, though. It's just old junk. There are only books and a metal box full of needles. I don't know how this junk will help in the investigation process. In my opinion, it's just a waste of time and space."

While Lisenko was talking, Michael looked around. The room was windowless and had shelves along the opposite wall. Three carved wooden boxes of different sizes sat on the lower shelf. One was about 59 inches long; the other was a 39 inches long; and the third one was about 19 inches long. The corners and lids were covered with a yellow metal and adorned with oriental engraving. The front of the smallest box was padded with a brassy sheet covered with six-pointed stars and artificial jewelry.

The room also contained two tables, chairs, a bookcase, and a cabinet near the right wall. The ceiling had extra lamps, and there were stepladders and stands near the left wall.

Lisenko offered Michael a seat at the table, took some paperwork out of his folder and addressed his assistant. "Nikola, you know what to do. Open the boxes, bring the stands closer to them, put all of it on the stands and count. Comrade Mikhailov and I will be counting, too."

"Take your notebook and get comfortable, Comrade Mikhailov," Lisenko said. "I have heard that you are an outstanding investigation officer. Unfortunately, sometimes you have to do the boring work of a bookkeeper, too."

Lisenko's assistant, who was facing Michael, began to empty the big box of its books onto the stands, loudly counting them

as they did so: 217. While Travkin put the books back, Kutilov started on the second box. There were 146 books and a set of medical tools in it. There were 64 notebooks, 143 copybooks and 157 folders containing drawings and manuscripts in the third box.

"That's everything," Lisenko said as he moved closer to Michael. "Now let's check our figures, Comrade Mikhailov." He gave his paper to Michael, who started checking the figures. As Michael counted, Lisenko took out three copies of the document from his folder and signed them. He then had his assistant and Kutilov sign them as well and handed documents to Michael. Michael checked his figures with what was written on the documents and signed them as well.

"That's it. We wasted a whole hour on this procedure," Lisenko said. "This copy is yours, and these two are ours. Now, you can start your work."

Lisenko stood up and said, "We wish you good luck in your work. We have to leave now." He waved and headed toward the door, searching in his pockets. When he came to the door, he slapped himself on the forehead. "I am a fool!" he said. "I gave you the keys! Let us leave, Comrade Mikhailov."

Michael approached the door, opened it, stepped aside, and said with a friendly smile, "Thank you very much for your help, comrades."

Travkin nodded, but said nothing. Kutilov, however, stopped, gave Michael a smile, and shook his hand. He said, "Comrade Lisenko said you were an outstanding investigation officer. He is right. No one has been released from this prison for a long time, and you managed to have it done the first week you are here. The whole prison is talking about it!" He nodded and added, "I will always be happy to help you if you ever need something." Then, he left.

As Michael was about to close the door, he saw the warden walking quickly down the corridor, signaling to Michael that

he was heading toward him. Michael waited in the doorway for him.



"It's good that I found you," Rastorguev said breathlessly as he approached Michael. "Comrade Palachev just told me that you finished investigating the three murders. In addition, Baruch Aminov has been released. Therefore, the ward where Rubinov is being held is vacant now. There will be a van full of new prisoners arriving here in a couple hours, and they will go into Rubinov's ward. Comrade Palachev said he doesn't have a problem with that, but he asked me to check whether you had a problem. So, do you?"

Michael thought about it for a minute, and then said, "As you have only a few hours before they arrive, then I will have to object. Wouldn't it be difficult to return prisoners back into the ward with Rubinov and split the new ones into other wards?"

The warden looked confused, but answered, "It would be easier for me to put the new prisoners in one ward. What is your reason for objecting?"

"I'm investigating Rubinov's case now, and I have to study the cases of all prisoners you are going to put into the ward with him. It is very important to keep anyone who knew him out of the same ward, or anyone who could harm him in any way. That could affect my investigation. I have already studied the cases of the prisoners who were locked up with him. He didn't know any of them before he was arrested. He also gets along with the other prisoners. This is a very important fact in my investigation."

"Well, if it is important to the investigation, I'll have to agree to your request, even though it will create more work for me," Rastorguev said. "I'll put these shitheads in different wards," the warden said with displeasure. He headed back toward his office mumbling to himself.

When Michael was finally alone, he decided to look through the books. He lifted the lid off the big box. There were several books in German lying in a separate pile on top. Michael was happy because he has loved the German language since he was a child. He had spent many hours in the library ecstatically reading books by his favorite authors. What Michael loved the most was 19th century German philosophy. Michael took a pile of books from the box and moved towards the table.

"Magnetism in the Animal World" was the name of the first book. Michael read the introduction. The author published the research of a German scientist named Franz Anton Mesmer, an 18th century healer and physician. Mesmer created the theory of animal magnetism, the theory of the "Influence of the Planets on the Human Body," and others he called the theories of mesmerism -- hypnotism.

Michael started to read excerpts from the book, paying close attention to the text that was underlined by the previous reader -- Jacob. Michael also found folded pieces of paper full of notes inside the book. He paid close attention to these as well. Most of them showed that Jacob disagreed with Mesmer's theories. For example, he disagreed with the theory about the magnetic fields of planets. Jacob opposed this theory, choosing to believe in the theory in the Zohar. He called it "The Book of Enlightenment," or a book that explained everything about life in the universe. It was important for Michael to understand Jacob's way of thinking, his morals and philosophy in order for him to accurately and honestly investigate his case.

After about an hour, Michael finished looking through Mesmer's works and Jacob's notes. Michael realized at this

point that Jacob's education was vast. He had an extraordinary intellect and deep and profound knowledge of medicine and ancient Jewish philosophy as well as other fields. Michael folded all of Jacob's notes, evened the paper, closed the book, and carefully put it aside.

The next book was by English scientist James Braid, a 19th century Scottish surgeon. Michael read the name -- "Neurypnology; or the Rationale of Nervous Sleep Considered in Relation with Animal Magnetism. It was translated into German. Braid invented the theories of hypnosis and hypnotherapy, and Michael found many notes in this book as well. Jacob gave examples of his own experiments that were based on Braid's theory. In addition, Jacob described observations he made and methods he invented. Michael read all of the notes thoroughly. Jacob's philosophy explained Braid's theory in more detail and developed additional ideas of the mysterious science of hypnosis.

Jacob was fascinated by the healing power of hypnosis. A hypnotist could help a patient by planting a suggestion in their head; this directs the body's inner energy to heal. However, Jacob said this "power of influence" was not very effective. He wrote that the healing effect would increase greatly with the help of self-hypnosis. Not everyone can master it, however. One must learn to listen to his or her own body and understand how it works; they must learn to talk to their bodies. If successful, a person can learn to control the next phase of hypnosis: ruling his or her body.

Jacob strongly believed that all living creatures are endowed with this ability; every plant and animal needs it to survive. He even provided an example. One day, when Jacob was 10, his dog came up to the gate and started yelping. He opened the gate, and the dog, which was sick, lingered nearby. Jacob followed it, and a few hours later, they came to a place where he had walked the dog. A plant was growing not far from an

oak tree, and Jacob watched as the dog began to chew it. It was late in the evening when Jacob went home. The dog remained. In the morning, Jacob returned, but the dog wasn't there. It returned home two days later, and it was healthy. Jacob guessed that the dog had the ability to talk to its body and learned how to heal itself.

Michael noticed that Jacob wrote the following: "Man has more energy than other animals, but doesn't know how to use it properly. Many people don't know how much energy they have, and don't use enough of it to help them. However, only a man who lives in a spiritual world is able to use it entirely, and he never stops discovering vast fields of spirituality that are described by ancient-Jewish scientists in the Zohar."

By 6 o'clock, Michael had read five more books, and studied all of Jacob's notes from each one. There was only one book left. Michael marveled at its magnificent covered.

The room was very stuffy, Michael thought.

Michael carefully picked up the beautifully adorned book and headed toward the door. He looked at the book, and stopped suddenly at the door. "What the hell?!" Michael exclaimed. "Where is the name of the book?" The book had neither a title nor an author on its cover.

"That is strange," Michael thought. "I have never seen a book like that before. Although ..." his thought trailed off.

His heart was beating heavily. He felt as if he were holding something sacred. He ignored the feeling, however, and instinctively opened the book to its last page. He swiftly glanced at that page, and grinned. "Here is the title. It is a collection of Jewish prayers called the Siddur."

Michael closed the book and reached into his pocket to get the keys. However, he shuttered when he realized that he read the name of the book in ancient Hebrew.

"What is going on?" Michael asked. He was confused. "I just read the name of the book in a language I never studied, and I

also know its purpose."

Michael slowly took his hand out of his pocket and dropped the keys on the floor. He held his breath, and started turning pages with a trembling hand. He was turning the pages so hesitantly it was as if he were turning pages of his life. He stopped at the title of one prayer that was underlined in pencil. Michael was rooted to the spot. It was amazing! He could read Jewish prayers and understand them! The word "REFUAH" meant recovery. Michael couldn't believe it. He continued to read aloud, "Heal us, O Lord, and we will be healed; help us and we will be saved; for You are our praise."

Each word was read in time with the beating of Michael's heart, and each beat reverberated in his head and deafened him. He felt as if his soul had been separated from his body and lifted up. Nevertheless, Michael couldn't stop reading despite how he felt. He was afraid this "miracle" would end forever. He continued, "Bring complete healing for all out sicknesses. O Lord for You are our faithful and compassionate Healer and King. Blessed are you, Lord, the Healer of the sick of Israel."

As Michael said the last word of the prayer, he felt his heart beating very strongly, so strongly that he could feel his head throbbing as well. Michael had to stop reading because not only was he exhausted, but also he was getting a headache. He felt that his soul started to fall. He couldn't hold the book anymore, and dropped it. He felt dizzy, and his soul still felt like it was falling. Michael was scared to death. He tried to see the ground, but couldn't. It was as if he were falling into nothing. Ancient Jewish letters flashed before his eyes and danced on the pages. Finally, he reached the ground. Michael waved his hands through the air. He was trying to catch something invisible.

"But, what is on the ground?" he asked. "Is it me? It's my lifeless body! However, I'm not there. I'm here, floating in the air!"

Michael tried to find his flying body, but he couldn't see it.

"I won't crash into the ground! My soul will reunite with my body! This can't be true! It must be a dream from my childhood! I must wake up, and then everything will be all right."

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Michael rose slightly, settled comfortably on his bed, and looked around. Here is his alphabet book near him. He grabbed it, and started turning pages, admiring its fabulous pictures.

"But, wait. I'm not sitting on my bed!" Michael realized. "I'm sitting on someone's lap!"

Michael lifted his head, slightly confused, and saw someone with a thick black beard. It was Jacob, the rabbi. He touched his beard; he liked to feel its silky surface on his hands. Michael looked straight into Jacob's eyes.

"Wait," Michael said. "That is not Jacob! Who is it?

Then Michael realized. "This is my father!"

Michael's heart began to beat stronger. He hadn't seen his father in many years.

"Daddy! Daddy!" Michael frantically yelled. He tried to embrace him, but something pushed him, and he found himself lying on the floor. Then, he heard a noise, the sound of train wheels. After that, he was lying on the floor in a van.

"How did I get inside a van?" Michael asked. "I was just sitting on my father's lap in our house. He was teaching me the Hebrew alphabet. Why am I on a train? Where is my father? Here he is! Is he also in this cold and dark van?

"I see an enormous horrible figure that looks like an evil spirit. It attacked my father, grabbed him by the jacket, and threw him out of the van. But, why? Why is this evil spirit doing this?"

Michael stretched out his arms toward his father as if he were

trying to catch him. It was too late.

Suddenly, time sped up. Everything slowed down, however, and Michael's voice sounded like a voice on an old and broken gramophone. He watched as his father, who had been thrown from the van, began to grow smaller and smaller as it pulled away.

"Father, father, where are you?" Michael yelled frantically. His father said nothing, but looked at his son with anxious eyes. He was not afraid for himself, but for his son. It was fear of what might happen to him, and that worried him.

Michael could not stand this horror anymore. "This is a nightmare; a silly devilish dream," he said. He tried to think of it in terms of a drowning man grasping at a straw for breath. It is possible, he felt.

When Michael opened his eyes, his visions disappeared. Still, his father was not near him. In addition, it was very dark.

"I haven't woken up yet," Michael said. "Why can't I wake up? If I can't wake up, I must change what I dream about. I have to forget everything I've seen. When I wake up, I will never remember this nightmare again."

Michael's desire to forget the dream was so strong that his wish came true. Some invisible entity entered his memory and erased everything he had seen and remembered. Everything was gone. Only darkness and an empty soul remained. Michael didn't want that either. "I don't want this darkness!" he cried. "I am afraid of it! I want light!"

Michael looked around and saw a light blue light in the distance. "Oh, God!" he exclaimed. There was brilliant light, and stars were flying past him. Michael thought he was being transported through time – the past and the future – or, perhaps, to another planet. Suddenly, a kind doctor appeared. He smiled and told his orphanage teacher, "None of my patients has every regained his or her memories. It's very rare. However, you never know. Miracles can happen."

When Michael finally woke up, he found himself lying on the floor near the door.

"Where am I?" Michael wondered. He looked around. "This is not the train," he observed.

He rose slightly, and unable to stand, leaned on the door. He started to feel better. His headache dissipated, but there was still ringing in his ears. Signs of consciousness began to make their way through the darkness that hid his memories for 15 years.

"I'm not in the train," he said, "and, I am not a baby." Michael remembered everything.

"My name is not Michael," he said. "My name is Joseph. I am Rafael Cohen's son. My mother's name was Yocheved. I don't remember her at all. She died when I was 2. My father was the most important man in my life. We lived in Moscow in a big apartment with windows facing a garden. Something happened, and we had to leave. My father told me that we had to move to Kokand right away. He said his kind, old friend lived there and that he would help us find a place to live.

"But, why did we have to leave so quickly?" Michael wondered.

He started massaging his forehead, as if doing so would jog his memory.

"My father didn't tell us why we had to leave," he remembered. "I had never seen him so worried before. He ran around the house, from room to room, taking papers from his desks and bookcases, and burning them. We were in such a hurry that we didn't have time to pack any clothes. He only grabbed some food as we left.

"That means my father wasn't pushed out of the van by robbers. He was most likely pushed by those who were persecuting him."

Michael felt much better. His mind cleared and he took a deep breath. The book of prayers was lying on the floor near

his feet. He glanced at an open page, gradually focusing on the words and reading the prayer:

"I give thanks before You, Living and Eternal King, that You have returned within me my soul with compassion; [how] abundant is Your faithfulness!"

He remembered his father had read this prayer every morning. He grabbed the book carefully, and kissed it tenderly and sacredly just as his father did. Then, he put the book on his chest, and began to cry sorrowfully. He remembered the precious time he spent with his father, a dear man, a beloved man. His love for his father was so strong and deep that even time wasn't able to heal his wounded soul. These wounds were still open. Michael's pain was unbearable, and it resided in the depths of his soul. It was like a sleeping volcano that suddenly erupts, ejecting smoke and lava.

Michael continued to reminisce for a few hours until he was interrupted by a loud bang on the door. This immediately knocked Michael out of his trance. He picked up the keys and grabbed the handle of the door to help him stand up. He could hardly do that.

Michael finally managed to stand up and opened the door.

"So, you love to work late, I see," Lisenko said, wiping his glasses. "I thought that you had left for dinner and had forgotten to lock the door with the check lock."

He put his glasses on and looked at Michael's eyes. Michael said nothing.

"What's wrong, Comrade Mikhailov?" he asked. "You are deathly pale and your eyes look lifeless. You must have been in here too long."

He poked his head inside and smelled the air.

"I forgot to tell you that there wasn't a lot of air in this room, so it isn't a good idea to stay in it for a long time. Sorry."

Lisenko took out his notebook and pencil from his pocket and wrote something. Then he said, "I'm going to have

maintenance come tomorrow to check the vent pipe. You must be present while the workers are here because you are responsible for the items. Is 9 a.m. OK with you?"

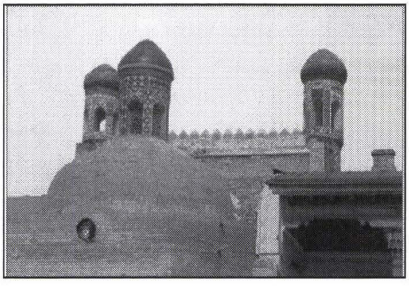
"It is."

"Oh, my. You are exhausted. You can't even speak. You must stop working immediately and get some sleep. You have done too much for one day!"

Michael re-entered the room and closed the door. He lingered next to the table, holding the Siddur close to his chest. He kissed the book one more time, and carefully put it on the top of the pile. He lifted the pile, supporting the top with his chin, and lingered near the stands. The pile seemed to become 10 times heavier. He put the pile on a stand and started to lift the oak lid of the box. It seemed to have gotten much heavier as well.

"I'm tired," Michael thought. He put the books inside the box and managed to close the lid with a little effort. "Lisenko is right. I need to sleep."

Chapter 7
News about Joseph



Jacob was worried. Baruch was taken from the ward two hours ago and there had been no news of what happened to him.

"The last time the guards took Baruch for interrogation, I was with him. We were followed by the investigation officer Michael, who was sent to us by heaven," Jacob reflected. "Why was he taken alone today? Why wasn't investigation officer Michael here? The last time we met, Michael told me he was handling Baruch's case. If he knew that Baruch was going to be taken away, he would have been here."

Jacob then remembered that Michael said Baruch's case had been sent up the chain of command. Suddenly, he felt anxious.

"What if something happened to investigation officer Michael and someone else got Baruch's case? What could have happened to Michael, though? Perhaps he's ill, or he went on a business trip? Or maybe the worst thing happened: his application was rejected and he was removed from his position."

Jacob sprang up from the bed and started pacing back and forth across the ward, trying to rid his head of these horrible thoughts.

"Wait," he said to himself, "not every one of those could be true. The spirit told me that today was the 'day of release.' I must cleanse my mind of these thoughts and start to think rationally. Let's assume they took Baruch out of the ward and released him. It's possible that the investigation officer is not

informed of this because he is only responsible for investigating the case. Michael is new and he might not know about it.

"I must ask one of the prison guards about Baruch," Jacob said. "But, prison rules state a prisoner can only call guards if there is an incident of some kind, such as disease, murder, or fighting. If I ask anything else, I can be punished. I'm still going to try."

Yelling from behind the door broke Jacob's train of thought. "Hands behind your back, and face the wall! Drop your head!" Then, Jacob heard some noise at the gate.

"Baruch is back," Jacob thought, and hurried to the door to meet him. The gate noisily opened and a guard's hoarse voice shouted, "Three steps back!"

Jacob stepped back, and heard someone unlocking the door. It opened, and a prisoner was shoved inside from the dark corridor.

"Sneaker!" exclaimed Jacob with surprise.

"That's me," Sneaker said, nodding. Jacob heard the sound of the gate being locked, and rushed toward the door. He started to bang on the door. The guard finished locking the gate and yelled, "What are you banging for? Do you want to get beat with my nightstick?"

"I am so sorry to bother you, commander," Jacob said, "but could you tell me what happened to Baruch? He was taken away about three hours ago, and he hasn't returned."

"He will be brought back when he misbehaves again," the prison guard said as he shut the window. "Your boy was released," he said and locked the door completely.

"He was released!" Jacob exclaimed happily. He turned his face to Sneaker, and tears ran down his face. "Sneaker, did you hear? Baruch was released!"

"Hey, Healer, you're a little slow. Everyone already knew that."

Jacob wiped his tears, raised his hands up, and started praying in ancient Jewish:

"King, Helper, Savior, and Protector, blessed are You, Lord, Protector of Abraham.

"Blessed are You, Lord, King, who loves righteousness and judgment.

"Your might is eternal, O Lord, who revives the dead, powerful in saving, who makes the wind to blow and the rain to fall, who sustains the living with loving kindness, who revives the dead with great mercy, who supports the falling, heals the sick, frees the captive, and keeps faith with the dead; who is like You, Almighty, and who resembles You, O King who can bring death and give life.

"Blessed are You for not having made me a slave.

"Praised are You, Creator of all as the captives are freed.

"Blessed are you, O Lord, who smashes enemies and humbles the arrogant.

"Look upon our affliction and plead our cause, and redeem us speedily for your name's sake, for you are a mighty redeemer. Blessed are you, O Lord, the redeemer of Israel.

"May it please You to bless Your people Israel at all times and in every hour with Your peace. Blessed are You, O Lord, who blesses His people Israel with peace."

Jacob stopped when he heard the sound of the locks being open again. This time, Lev was shoved inside.

"Lev!" Jacob exclaimed.

"Jacob!" Lev exclaimed. He ran up to Jacob, embraced him, and started to greet and thank him. "Hello, my dear Jacob," he said. "Hello, my savior! I'm so glad that destiny has brought us together again, and that I can thank my savior. Thank you, Jacob. You are a magician, an angel who gave me a second life."

Lev started to cry, but he continued to talk. "What is happening to this world if people such as my savior are put into

prison? When will this injustice end?"

Jacob gave Lev a slap on his back, and started to reassure him. "Don't worry, Lev. It's all God's will. If I was sent here, God had a reason for it. There is something I had to do here."

"You have already done it!" Lev declared. "You revived an innocent man who was thrown into hell by those filthy devils."

Lev pointed at the door and said, "I swear my curses and my scorn will never cease. I will curse those bloody devils until the day I die, and even after. I will also be grateful to you for the rest of my life, and even after I die. I will always remember your kindness, and my children and grandchildren will remember you as well. You will be a hero to me and to all those who come after me!"

They heard the familiar sound of the gate being unlocked again and froze. The door opened, and Fallow's mighty shape appeared in the doorway. When the door was locked, Sneaker rushed up to greet him. He flashed a wide smile at the new leader, waiting to hear what he would say. However, Fallow said nothing. He walked past him as if he hadn't seen him. He approached Jacob, and smiling, offered him his hand and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Peace, kind man," Jacob responded.

"My brothers and I want to say thank you, Healer. You know what we are thanking you for, right?" Fallow asked. He added, "You will sleep near the window, on that bed, right across from me."

Then, he looked at Lev, who stood near him, and said, "Congratulations on your resurrection!"

"Thank you so much!" Lev said happily, and shook both Fallow and Jacob's hands.

"Now, Jacob, you must be ready to meet new challenges. I will help you," Fallow said. "You were a leader while we were out. New prisoners will arrive soon."

About a half-hour later, the ward had 17 old and three new

prisoners. The last prisoner to enter was Tatar. He was, of course, wearing handcuffs. He was ordered to place his hands through the food-distribution window; he did so, and the handcuffs were removed.

"Hi, guys!" Tatar declared happily and slapped Fallow and Butcher on their hands. Then, he lifted his hand above Jacob's, and froze. He smiled. Jacob offered him his hand, and Tatar loudly slapped it. "You are one of us!"

"OK, everyone is here, so let's sit in a circle," Fallow offered. "We are going to listen to the confessions of the fish."

Tatar and Butcher sat near Fallow and Jacob.

Fallow called to one of the new prisoners, "Come here!" A young man of about 20 approached him.

He came closer and with a defiant look, approached Fallow.

"OK, handsome, confess to us? Tell us your name and why you are here," Fallow said politely.

"Are you a priest?" the young man said tauntingly. He had a heavy Armenian accent. "Why should I tell you my confession?"

Jacob noticed Tatar become wild-eyed after he answered, and saw that began to tighten his fists. Jacob knew what he was going to do. He decided to stop Tatar before he started anything. He calmly placed his hand on Tatar's knee, and then peacefully addressed the new prisoner. "Young man," he said, "Please listen to what I have to say. I've visited the Caucasus many times, and I'm very familiar with the customs. Are you from the Caucasus?"

The fellow nodded.

"Then you should know better than I that when you enter someone's house, you are a guest, and a guest always introduces himself respectfully to the owners of the house. The host must also treat the guest with respect. This is an important custom for you, but it is a little unusual for others, isn't it?"

"Probably," the young man answered.

"Probably or exactly?"

"OK, exactly."

"This ward is a house," Jacob continued, "and you are a guest. This ward had a master, just like every house, and you must introduce yourself. How you are treated depends on your introduction and why you were brought here. You will either be considered a kind guest and treated well, or a bad one."

The young man dropped his head and said, "I understand. I'm really sorry. I didn't know about the rules." He started to tell his story.

"OK," Fallow said when the young man finished. "You may go. We will talk, and let you know where you will be sleeping."

When the prisoner left, Fallow pointed to Jacob and told Tatar, "You can teach him without beating him."

"Yes, Healer is smart. He told him without using his fists," supported Butcher.

"However, it would not be bad to teach him using fists," said Tatar.

"We must act the way he learned in the lesson," said Fallow. "We'll see. It's never too late to do so if he still doesn't understand."

After the new prisoners had introduced themselves, Fallow started allotting beds. The three new prisoners got beds near the door, and 13 old prisoners kept their previous beds. Fallow took Chopper's place, and offered his former bed to Tatar. Tatar's former bed was given to Butcher, and Fallow told Butcher: "Healer will take your bed."

"Is it all right?" he asked, and glanced from Butcher to Tatar. "Have I offended anyone?"

"It's all right," Butcher answered.

"No problems," Tatar said in agreement.

After all prisoners were settled into their new spots, Fallow called Tatar, Butcher and Jacob over for a meeting.

"The brothers in the other wards want to know about our new investigation officer. We need to learn as much as we can about him. We know a few things, but it's better to know a lot more. We all confessed to him. We should tell each other what we spoke about with him. We will tell everyone in neighboring wards about him. If the new investigator is not fooling us, then he will be good luck for us. He could benefit us all."

He stopped and looked at Jacob and nodded. This was his way to let him know it was his turn. Jacob told a very detailed story. Butcher and Tatar followed. Fallow was last. He started to mention his conversation with Michael. In the middle of it, Fallow said he told Michael that he served a sentence in a far away camp with Baruch's father. Jacob was startled by this news, and Fallow noticed that. He asked Jacob, "Healer, do you know him, Apostle?"

"Who?" Jacob asked.

"Baruch's father," Fallow clarified.

"Yes, I know Joseph Aminov," Jacob confirmed. "He was my neighbor."

"Yes," Fallow agreed. "He introduced himself as Joseph. Later, he was called Apostle because he was a very educated man, never told a lie, and always helped others. He could explain what was going on in the country. He was never afraid of anything even when he spoke about Stalin.

"I have some sad news for you, Healer," Fallow continued. "Your neighbor, Joseph Aminov, is dead."

Jacob sadly nodded, and answered, "I already knew what happened to him. Unfortunately, I don't know when it happened. It's very important for me to know when he died so I can let his family know. Because of our traditions, it is important to read funeral or memorial prayers on certain days, and these days are counted from the day the person dies.

"It's sacred," Fallow agreed. "I should help you. He was a nice man. Let him rest in peace, and I'll try to find out when he

died."

"I would be very grateful," Jacob said. "How are you going to do that?"

"One of my friends told me about Apostle," Fallow said. "He was in a camp with Apostle. He has just arrived here, and is in the adjacent ward. If he knows when Apostle died, he will tell us."

"Oh, I hope his memory is good," Jacob pronounced. "God bless you for your kindness."

"I'm not expecting any reward in this life," Fallow said "But, if your wish comes true, when I reach the afterlife, maybe the fire under my feet won't be too hot."

Tatar and Butcher burst out laughing, and Jacob said, "It's never too late to repent your old sins and perform good deeds, thus keeping you from hell."

"It's too late, Healer. It's too late," Fallow said with a sigh. After a while, he asked, "How did you know that Apostle had died?"

"A voice in my dream told me," Jacob answered.

The three prisoners looked at him in bewilderment.

"Whose voice?" Fallow asked.

"An angel's voice," Jacob answered.

"What did it say?" Butcher asked.

"It said that Baruch would be released today, and that his father's soul had left this world."

Fallow, Butcher and Tatar looked at each other with surprise. But, Jacob was serious. It was impossible to know whether he was a raving lunatic or just lying because he behaved normally and reasonably.

"It was just a dream and a coincidence," Tatar said, waving his hand.

"Do you have these dreams often?" Fallow asked.

"It was the 12th time in my life that I've had a dream," Jacob answered.

"And did everything the angel said come true?" Butcher asked.

"Yes," Jacob said.

"I don't believe in dreams," Tatar exclaimed.

"But he said that they were all fulfilled," Butcher protested.

"Come on," Tatar complained. "That's just a coincidence."

"I believe in dreams," Butcher said. "There cannot be a coincidence every time." Then he addressed Jacob, "If you have a dream about us, or if you hear prophetical voices in a dream, tell us about it immediately and we'll see whether they come true."

"That's a good idea," Tatar said, and raised his finger in agreement.

"OK," Jacob agreed. He added, "But, I hope you are released before I have another dream."

"That's a good thought," Fallow said in approval. He continued his story. When he finished, he took a piece of paper and a pencil and handed them to Jacob. He asked Jacob to write down his thoughts about Michael based on the conversation they had. When Jacob had finished, Fallow said he would write to his friend, Murky, who had been in the same prison with Joseph and him, asking whether he knows when Apostle was killed.

The letter was sent after dinner, and Jacob looked forward to an answer. They received an answer about midnight. The letter was about Michael.

The prisoners were afraid that the prison chiefs might start persecuting the new investigation officer. His actions definitely contradict the rules of the prison, and could be declared hostile. This is why the letter instructed everyone to be on the alert and inform others about everything regarding Michael, who they nicknamed Fervid.

At the end of the letter, Murky said Apostle died last Saturday. Jacob read the letter until the end. He said to Fallow,

"I need to let Joseph's family know. They must organize a memorial or funeral as soon as possible."

"It won't be hard to let his family know," Fallow said. "But, it will be hard to do on time. We must find something to bribe the guards with so they will bring the letter to Joseph's family.

Fallow thought for a minute. "Or we can try to use another plan. This hasn't been arranged, however. I'm sure the prisoners are working on it."

"What's this plan?" asked Jacob.

Fallow looked around carefully and then whispered, "We plan to send mail through a new investigation officer."

"I understand," Jacob said. "It's a good plan."

"There is still a question of time," Fallow said. "We don't know whose case he is investigating or who will be called for interrogation. It might be any one of the bastards that we don't trust. Healer, pray to your God and angels to have good luck."

"I believe that we have luck," Jacob said with assurance. "Joseph was a righteous man, and investigation officer Michael is not a man; he is an angel. I'm convinced that God will hear my prayers and will help."

"We'll see," Tatar said, unconvinced.

"Yes, we will, and you'll see that God is almighty," Jacob answered and stood up. He went to the wall and started to pray. When it became quiet in the ward, Jacob began to analyze his dream. "The last thing the angel said, 'One of the souls gave birth to the other soul 13 years ago. This soul has passed through human's ordeals and left this world and the emanation of this soul will be released today.' That has already been fulfilled. Included in this speech were a prophesy and a task. The prophesy was fulfilled this morning; Baruch must be home already. God bless this boy.

"The second thing, the task, is for me. I must let Joseph's family know about his death. Actually, this would be my second mission here. The first part was to give Baruch spiritual

support. That has been done. I have learned the date of Joseph's death thanks to the prisoners here, and they are helping me to fulfill my second task. Therefore, now, it's just a question of time. God rules time, and this is why I believe that Joseph's family will be told in time.

"Now, let's examine the second thing the angel said. 'A past will be revealed to one of the souls at this place, and this soul will be reborn. Two souls will find each other and help each other.' I would interpret it this way: Someone in this prison is unaware of an event that occurred in the past. Today, he discovered the truth, and it impressed him. He was reborn, starting to change the way he thinks, and became a different person. This is not easy for him. He will need support. So, two souls will find and help one another. That means that a person who helps others, will himself need help.

"Why was I told about it?" he asked. "Maybe I am the second man who needs help? Assuming that's true, who could the first man be? And what kind of help does he need? If I knew who had just discovered something about his past, I would be able to figure it out."

Jacob looked at each prisoner attentively.

"I do not see anyone here who looks as if they have just been 'reborn.' Perhaps this person is in another ward? Perhaps we could contact each other through the prison mail? If that is the case, then I must tell Fallow about this part of the dream, and ask for his help to find this man. I don't think Butcher or Tatar will object because they don't believe I am having prophetical dreams."

He looked at Fallow who was sleeping on his bed.

"I will ask him tomorrow," Jacob decided. "Now, I can try to figure out the beginning of the dream."

He quoted the words he memorized, "One chosen soul has reached the point of wisdom. There is only one step left to the apex of creation. However, it is very hard to make this step.

The way goes through the dense tangles of time. One can occasionally fall into the marsh of despair. Very few can escape from this marsh. It will be a dangerous time.

"But the soul is able to overcome all hardships of its life journey and fulfill its manifest destiny. The bitterest trials will be suffered during the punishment. But, each year of punishment will be turned into a month. Freedom will be given when an evil spirit destroys the soul of the demon that it created," Jacob concluded.

"Everything is pretty clear here except the last two sentences," he said.

"It was about me and my destiny. I had achieved wisdom after studying the Torah and other sacred books. Now, I only have one level left to reach the top. However, it will not be easy. The slightest mistake might be fatal. I might have to serve a sentence in a prison far away. I will face my ordeals under torturous conditions, and not everyone returns from that. It will be up to me whether I survive these trials, and remain pure before God.

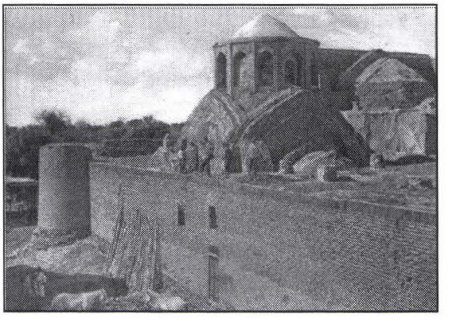
"The last sentence says, 'but, each year of punishment will be turned into a month.' I don't know whether I should take this literally. If I do, it means that a 10-year sentence will be, for me, only 10 months. Is that possible? I have heard stories of some prisoners who worked hard in the prison camps, performed multiple tasks and behaved well that were pardoned. I don't think the law would allow a sentence to be reduced so significantly.

"It said in the end that 'Freedom will be given when an evil spirit destroys the soul of the demon that it created.' Who is the black lord? Black villain? Black devil? Stalin's Soviet system raised plenty of black villains who work for the system like devils and who don't even hide their filthy bloody deeds. Lenin was their creator. Now, Stalin is their master. 'Black lord's soul?'Assuming that the dream meant Stalin, who is this person

he created? And, who is he going to swallow? He created many monsters. How can I know whom he is going to destroy? Right now, he is destroying those who brought Lenin to power, the Bolsheviks. He's destroying the Bolsheviks who can discredit him. Are his people next? It's quite possible. At the very core of this godless system is its own self-destruction. It is inevitable. The future of this system is self-destruction.

"But freedom will be given when an evil spirit destroys the soul of the demon that it created. Years will turn into months.' Wait! He must have been talking about the great amnesty that is able to reduce the terms of sentence. I know! Stalin will be eager to cleanse himself in history and he will decide to blame a crime on someone who was instructed to perform that crime by Stalin himself. And he will manage to fool people with this amnesty for a while. But, how blind can he be? Does he really think that history won't reveal all his crimes after he dies?"

Chapter 8
Sunrise



Michael went home late at night and fell into bed. He was still much stressed, and even though he was exhausted, he couldn't fall asleep. There were too many thoughts running through his head. He was asking himself, "Who was my father fleeing from? Why, and who killed him?"

He was tossing and turning in his bed trying fruitlessly to remember his address. He could remember neither the address nor the street on which he lived. He remembered there were many people at their house every evening. He remembered his father always took him to a room and gave him Jewish books to read when those people came. They would spend hours discussing things, and Michael would often fall asleep in a chair while reading a book. Michael remembered most of these men had thick beards and wore beautiful fur hats and knee-high shoes.

"I think I've seen those shoes recently," Michael thought, and sprang up quickly from his bed. "I saw them in a picture that was in one of Comrade Krasnov's folders!"

Blood suddenly rushed into Michael's head, and he started to speculate. That man was wearing those shoes. They were worn only during the time of the civil war when Michael was about 9. "Why was Krasnov worried that I seen the picture?" he asked, "And why put it away so quickly? Why did he behave as though he was trying to hide something from me? The man in the picture was probably killed. How could I know who he was?"

Michael started to remember his conversation with Krasnov.

"Oh, my God!" Michael exclaimed when he recalled the details. He realized the significance, and grabbed his head. "He asked me about my life after he put the folder into the desk. He was especially interested in my relationship with my family. He asked, 'Do you remember your parents or your relatives? If you don't, is there anything that can be done to find them? What would you do if you find out your relatives were considered enemies of the people?' He looked at me very suspiciously when he asked that, and only relaxed when I said I'd quit my job."

Michael concentrated again, trying to remember any details he could about that picture. Then he remembered: the man in the picture was wearing a checkered jacket that was similar to one his father wore the day he was killed. Michael almost lost his mind.

"The man in that picture was my father!" Michael exclaimed. "Krasnov knew. If my father hadn't been considered an enemy of the people, he never would have hidden the picture or his case. Bastard! He knew that man was my father, and he hid it because he needed me. He used me as a weapon against my father's ideologies.

"What should I do," he asked himself, "now that I've remembered everything? My views have obviously changed, and I need to make the right decision. Should I quit as I promised? But, while I worked here I've realized that they would never leave me alone if I tell them the true reason for my quitting. I know it. They will consider me an enemy of the people. I'm not afraid to die, but to be killed by a group of bastards …

"I haven't helped enough people," Michael continued. "My life has been short and worthless. I haven't done enough good!"

Michael finally realized something. "I'll be destroyed if I let

anyone know who I am. I must have my questions answered. I must know what my father did. If he fought against Stalin's ideology, then I will gladly pick up where he left off. Then, I will have a reason to die."

It was 4 a.m., and Michael had a terrible headache. He couldn't think clearly. He was distressed and upset. He stood up, got closer to the window, and started to massage his head and temples. The crickets chirping in the trees made him feel worse.

It's unbearable, Michael thought. He put on his jacket and left the room. He slowly walked along the dormitory's corridor. He passed by a guard silently and went outside. The air was fresh, and after about a half-hour, Michael felt much better. Dawn was breaking; Michael didn't want to go to his room.

"I won't sleep today," Michael said, "and I have to work in a few hours."

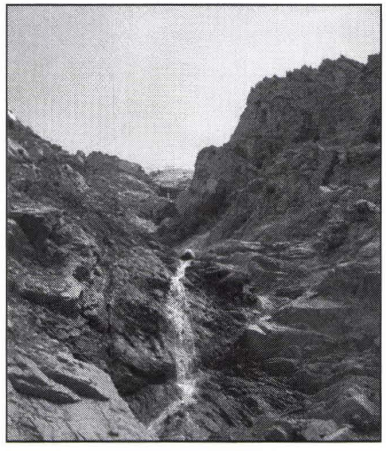
It was abhorrent for him to think that he would have to pretend to be someone else. He would have to be the young specialist Michael, someone who supported Stalin's ideas. He mustn't ever show that he remembered anything. He had never lied before and had never been afraid of expressing his ideas. Now, he will be forced to hide the truth from everyone.

"Will I be able to do it?" Michael asked himself. "How long can I last?"

A cool breeze blew in from the mountains, and Michael savored the smell of the grass and flowers in the field. This made him feel much better. He wasn't as upset as he had been. His headache had dissipated, and he could breathe more freely.

Now, he was hungry, so he decided to walk around the compound for about an hour until it was time for the cafeteria to open. He headed toward a hill that was not too far away. The sun was rising; and dragonflies, grasshoppers and other insects began their daily routines. Birds were singing in a small forest that was off to the right of the field. The higher Michael

walked up the hill, the more resonant and melodic their songs became. As Michael reached the top, all the sounds seemed to join in a charming choir. Michael was blinded by the rising sun. He stood there admiring the bright colors of the fields and valleys and enjoying the smell of the grass and flowers. He looked up and saw an eagle flying proudly in the sky.



"I wish I could forget everything, and become a part of nature," Michael said. "I wish I could be as free as that bird!" He stretched his arms, closed his eyes, and imagined that he was flying over the hills, meadows, and brooks. He could picture his childhood, and remembered a poem he wrote when he was a boy. With a chorus of creatures and the howling wind as accompaniment, he started to sing:

Everything begins and ends and opposites balance each other in the world.
The base of the mountain is its beginning; the peak, its end.
Love cannot exist without hate.
Sunrise cannot be without sunset.

One cannot rise without first falling,
Light cannot exist without shade.
One cannot take without giving,
And without hell there would be no heaven.

There is no ending without a beginning.

The sea has a surface, but also a bottom.
After war, there is peace; but with peace there is also war.
Spring always follows winter.

Earth and sky are the two pillars of the world,
Earth could not exist without the planets.
For the greatest and the smallest of creatures
God created Man, and Woman.

No one could exist alone,
Except for the almighty God!
Everything begins and ends
But only God is immortal and infinite.

Michael opened his eyes only when he felt his salty tears in his mouth. He raised his arms and, looking up at the sky, yelled, "Oh, mighty Maker of our world! Show me my way and give me proper guidance! Lift the veil from my eyes, and let me know the truth about my father! Strengthen my heart and help me embrace my father's ideas! Answer me, oh merciful Lord, what belief should I carry throughout my life? Should I avenge him? Should I be noble? How should I behave among these insane people?"

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After eating an early breakfast, Michael went to work. A young guard greeted him loudly and stood to attention in the corridor. Michael passed by him silently, nodding in response. There was complete silence. Michael remembered something, and suddenly turned to the guard, "Do you know whether the administrative manager is here yet?"

"No, not yet," he said in a rather dully. "You are the first."

"When does your shift end?"

"It ends at 10," the guard said, looking at the opposite wall.

"When the administrative manager arrives, could you tell him that Comrade Mikhailov will be waiting in the confiscated-property room?"

"Yes sir, I will tell him," the guard said.

Michael thanked the guard and headed to the confiscated-property room. Once inside, he took Jacob's manuscripts out of the small box and began to study them. A large part contained teaching sketches. The remaining manuscripts were analytical notes. There were several articles on policy from various newspapers, magazines, and books. In addition, there were notes and essays that Jacob wrote on these articles. According to Jewish tradition, Michael opened the last page of a manuscript and began to read. It started with Maxim Gorky's[23] recollections of Lenin. The following quote appeared on the right side of the page: "Once in the evening when we were in Peshkov's house, Lenin was listening to a Beethoven sonata performed by Dobroveyn.[24] He said, 'I know the Piano Sonata No. 23 – "Appassionata" -- inside and out, and yet I am willing to listen to it every day. It is wonderful, ethereal music. On hearing it, I proudly, maybe somewhat naively, think 'See! People can produce such marvels!' He then winked, laughed, and added sadly, 'I'm often unable to listen to music; it gets on my nerves. I would like to approach my fellow human beings and whisper lovely thoughts in their ears for producing something so beautiful in spite of the abominable hell they live in. However, today one can't caress anybody – for people will only bite off your hand and strike without pity. Theoretically, we are against any kind of violence. Umph! It is, in fact, an infernally difficult task.' "

On the left side, Jacob wrote the following in ancient Hebrew: "According to Jewish philosophy, God created many

worlds. Our world is like a station; there a train stops for a while. Our world is a station between other worlds. God sends our souls here in order to exercise them. In other words, our world is a world of ordeals where God determines the value of our souls. After facing life's ordeals, each soul is sent into the eternal world that it deserves. A man can't decide when he should come into this world, or when he should leave it. But, his soul is free to choose. Our world is a world of ordeals, and this is why God created extremes. These extremes might be absent in other worlds. Everything is kept balanced with the help of extremes. There is good and bad; love and hate; intelligence and stupidity; bravery and cowardice; nobility and hypocrisy; light and darkness; cold and heat, etc. A man is free to choose. He chooses which way to go and what to take.

"God endowed man with the ability to distinguish things. Lenin is a perfect example. He had the ability to hear and interpret music, a miracle. Music showed him the beauty and purity of the world. He could perfectly identify that Beethoven's work could awaken the sanctity of humans' souls with the help of divine power. Thus, sacred things are born into a man's soul, raise his spirits, and encourage him to be kind and pure. Lenin had chosen the opposite: destruction, violence and cruelty. He understood that the power of Beethoven's sonata was very strong, and it frightened him. He built an insurmountable wall between his soul and music that he said harmed his nerves."

Michael turned the page and continued, "How long can this new world that Lenin created exist? A world that is based on godless rules, and states that being materialistic is more important that being spiritualistic? It is a world where threats, fear, prisons and work camps are the norm. It is built on human sweat and sacrifice; it's hell. It was created by the Devil and run by his servants. This world has no spiritual value. It cannot last more than a century. There is no future for this world.

"This world is a creation of the Devil, where the bodies and souls of innocent people are lost. People don't know what is going on, and ask the devil's servants why they are being punished. This 'beast' will continue to grow while people continue to be fooled by communistic ideas. When people living in this world finally see the light and understand that they were being deceived, then they will beat this mighty monster."

Michael's contemplation of Jacob's notes was interrupted by a knock at the door. It was around 9 a.m., and Comrade Lisenko has arrived. "Comrade Mikhailov," he said, "maintenance is here. Open the door, please."

Michael quickly put all the manuscripts back into the box, closed the lid, and stepped toward the door. Outside stood Lisenko and a few uniformed men with tools in their hands. Michael greeted them, and let them in. Lisenko gave the workers a short briefing, and after he left, the workers began to cover boxes and furniture with fabric. As the men worked, Michael stood near the door, reflecting on the things he had just read. "Jacob was right when he said this new world built by Lenin is deprived of spirituality. He was also right when he said the government uses threats and fear. Universities and schools teach communist ideals and philosophy. Our prosperous socialistic society has been compared to the capitalistic ones, which the government says are rotten, spiritually, politically and economically. In fact, after we graduate, we discover that real life is completely different from what we learned.

"I never thought that authorities practiced methods of fear, humiliation, abuse, moral and physical destruction in prisons and camps," Michael continued. "Jacob was right when he said this world is doomed. The end of this world was predicted from the beginning because it is based on the blood of millions of innocent souls. My father was one of these souls. I would never

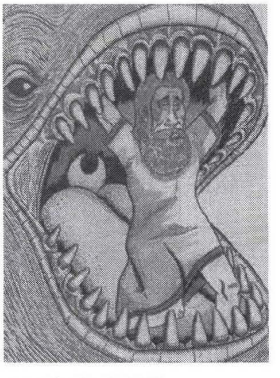
have suspected that the leader of any country would destroy everything God gave him to preserve his ideas. Can anybody create something good if there is no soul?



"No, it's impossible. This is why our system is imperfect. One cannot do good through evil, and Lenin used only evil methods. He performed malicious acts to change the world. His successor, Stalin, continues to preserve this monster. He followed Lenin's ideology and fed this monster more, and it grew larger and more horrible. He always finds new victims, the so-called enemies of the people. The irony is most of those accused are some of the most faithful to members of the party.

"This is why Jacob concluded this world had no future," Michael said. "He also said people will only be able to defeat this 'monster' when they finally see the light."

"My poor father," Michael thought. "I guess he didn't realize how powerful this 'monster' was. That is why he was one of its first victims. He must've seen the flaws in the system.



"Is that why people came to our house?" Michael asked. "Were they hoping to somehow find a way to destroy it and create a new society? Did they know it might not happen?

"If my father was as smart as Jacob, I think he must have known the futility of what he was doing," Michael concluded. "However, he was an honest man, and he felt it was his duty to fight for

truth until the end."

Michael's thoughts were interrupted by a worker. "We have finished. We plugged the vent pipe with birds' nests," he said. He kicked a bag that was on the floor and said, "Look how many nests there are."

"Thank you," Michael said. "I hope I will be able to work now."

"There will be enough air," the worked assured him. "The pipe is high and the air vent works perfectly." The worker followed his helpers out the door. Then, he added, "I will tell the administrative manager that we are done, and he will send the janitor to clean the room."

"Thank you. I will wait for him here," Michael said, and watched the workers make their way down the corridor and out the door.

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After the janitor left, Michael read Jacob's manuscript until the end. He could work with the documents longer, but he was eager to see Jacob and talk with him.

"I have to compose a questionnaire," Michael thought. "I have learned a lot from reading his manuscript about …"

Suddenly, he stopped. "About what?" he asked himself. "About my self-destruction and Jacob's as well?"

Michael felt weak and sat down. "First, I must clear everything up and decide what I should do. I must find a path and choose a direction. But, how can I do that without harming innocent people or revealing anything about myself. Now, I know who the true enemy of the people is. Therefore, my goal is to save those people. Besides, I must be extremely careful. Neither my chiefs nor the prisoners must know my true motives. This is why I must thoroughly prepare all my interrogations. I will have to compose alternative versions of

interrogations and use them, if necessary. What's more, I must set other goals. It shouldn't just be about saving innocent people. I should also have to figure out what my father was doing, and continue his fight, if possible. It's my duty as his son. My goals will not be completed until I do."

Michael added more points to his goals and objectives, took a sheet of paper and started to write questions for Jacob. When he finished, he ordered that Jacob be brought into the interrogation room, and then headed there himself. The young guard Michael met earlier was standing near the room.

"Tell the guards who will be arriving soon to let the prisoner in without any hassle. They will stay behind the door. I won't need them," Michael said.

"Yes, sir!" the guard yelled into Michael's ear, which momentarily made him deaf. He looked into the guard's silly eyes and closed the door.

Not long after, Jacob was brought into the room. He noticed that Michael had changed a lot. He looked tired and pale. When Michael offered him a seat this time, he wasn't smiling like he usually did. Jacob was used to Michael's warm and friendly smile. However, now his smile was artificial as though he had a difficult time grinning. His voice was dull. Jacob thanked Michael and sat down.

"Could it be that our benefactor Michael was chastised because of Baruch's case?" Jacob thought. "That was the last case he investigated. He must have been reprimanded. Perhaps now he is trying to keep his distance, so his smile as not as friendly as before."

"First," Michael said, interrupting Jacob's thoughts, "I want to apologize for breaking my promise to you. You must have been worried when I wasn't present for Baruch's release yesterday. This was partially my fault. I didn't know that no one is obligated to inform the investigation officer about what happens to a prison after a case is complete."

Michael paused, waiting for Jacob's answer.

"I had already guessed that you did not know about it," Jacob answered. "And you needn't apologize. I would like to thank you for all you've done for Baruch and for justice. Moreover, I want to congratulate you on the successful completion of your first case. It was a good beginning, and it showed that you are a kind and understanding man. These are not just mere words. The other prisoners told me that you were the first officer to get a prisoner released this year. They say that you succeeded in doing the impossible. No one has ever dared to put himself at risk before and break the strict unspoken prison rules."

Michael gave him a grateful smile and nodded. Jacob's finely tuned ear caught a quiet sigh of relief and he noticed that Michael's smile became warmer.

"Our savior is returning. Thank God," Jacob thought.

"I must tell you Jacob that I saw Baruch in the corridor as he was leaving and I managed to say goodbye," Michael said.

"It is not a coincidence," Jacob said. "Your meeting was planned by God so that Baruch could thank his savior."

Michael was a little confused, and shrugged his shoulders. Jacob continued, "You can't imagine what you have done. It was a miracle! His mother will be so happy and …"

Suddenly, Jacob stopped. After a short pause, he continued. "Unfortunately, destiny will not have her completely happy."

"Why not?" Michael asked.

"Because Baruch's father completed his mission in this world, and his spirit rose into heaven last Saturday."

"Ah, yes. I heard about his death," Michael said sympathetically. "I'm really sorry. He must have been a very honest man if he managed to raise a nice boy like Baruch."

"He wasn't just honest," Jacob answered. "There weren't many people in our district like Joseph."

"How did you find out about his death?" Michael asked.

After a long pause, Jacob said, "I'm not going to answer that

question. I'm really sorry, but I can't answer everything right now," Jacob said politely.

"Don't worry about it," Michael said. "I understand that you don't want to put others at risk."

"Thank you for understanding," Jacob said. "Mister investigation officer, do you think that Joseph's family will be notified in time?"

"In time?" Michael asked.

"Ah! You are not familiar with our custom stating that the commemoration rite cannot be performed unless the date of death is known." Jacob said.

"But, I have no idea of how this system works," Michael said. "I don't know when they are entitled to inform relatives about prisoner's death, or if they are entitled to inform prisoners' families at all."

"Well, I have also heard that there are exceptions for political prisoners, for whom it is forbidden to inform the relatives of the death," Jacob said. "I know that many families don't receive news about their relative for some reason. When they asked, certain institutions said notifications were sent, but they must have gotten lost."

"If you have certain information, I can let his family know," Michael said enthusiastically. Jacob gave him a bright smile. He was hoping Michael would respond positively. In fact, he didn't want to catch Michael off-guard with this question and decided to give some hints.

"Thank you very much," Jacob said, "but, I'm not sure that this case will be safe for you."

"Which case?" Michael asked. "This is not a case, and it's not a problem. Baruch is not a criminal, and he never was one. I have the right to visit him."

"You are absolutely right," Jacob answered. "Unfortunately, not everyone agrees with you. Some people won't understand your desire to do good deeds. Even kind people have enemies,

especially nowadays. These enemies can distort this case, and harm your career and …" he paused. "I think you understand. This is not just my opinion. The other prisoners agree because they care about what happens to you."

"The prisoners care about what happens to me?" Michael said with surprise.

"Yes," Jacob said. "They know everything about everyone here, and they were going to warn you. They learned about you after your first investigation and they want to help you. There were investigation officers in other prisons who investigated cases fairly, but were declared enemies of the people and shot."

Michael was astounded that they prisoners were willing to help him. He didn't expect to hear such news from Jacob, a man who had only been in prison for a few days.

"Jacob must have gained quite a reputation among prisoners in his short time here," Michael thought. "That must be the reason they trusted him to tell me this dangerous news.

"What should I do?" Michael asked himself. "I trust Jacob, but I'm not sure I should trust criminals. There are some innocent people, of course, but there are also criminals. I must be careful, and perform my job so no one discovers my thoughts or intentions."

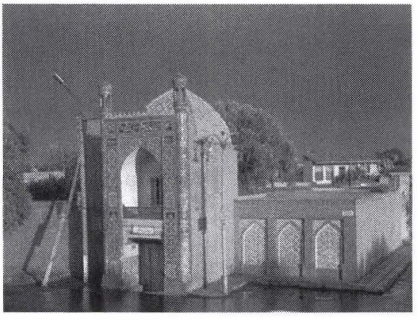
Finally, Michael made a decision, and addressed Jacob. "Tell everyone I said thank you. I knew about the things you told me. However, it won't keep me from doing my job. And I will be fair, even if that means my career or my life. I don't need anybody's help or support, and I don't like rumors."

"I understand," Jacob said. Michael gazed into Jacob's wise eyes, and felt that Jacob was reading him like a book. He seemed to have read Michael's thoughts.

"I understand you perfectly," Jacob said, "and I will tell them what you've said."

"OK," Michael said, pulling his questionnaire closer. "Now, I would like to talk to you about your case."

Chapter 9
The meeting



"Do you know why you were imprisoned?" Michael asked.

Jacob answered, "My neighbors denounced me to the NKVD. They said I was an enemy of the people, I met with suspicious people at my place and I promoted anti-Soviet propaganda. These accusations are groundless; they are lies. During a search, I already told the authorities I had never spoken against Soviet ideology.

"It is true that people met at my house, but they were my relatives, friends, and members of our community. They would ask me questions about religion, and we would discuss them. Others wanted to know about our customs -- for example, the proper way to celebrate Jewish holidays. Some, including my relatives, gathered to perform rites and holidays. Many friends asked me to teach their children Jewish culture, language, and prayers. However, I never discussed politics with anyone who came to my house. This is why I believe I was imprisoned."

"You are correct," Michael agreed. "This denunciation is the main reason for your imprisonment. There were several other similar denunciations sent to NKVD as well. We'll talk about those later. Right now, I'd like to have a short talk with you so I can determine your personality and understand your case. This will help me create outlines for our follow-up meetings.

"I have studied your biography, and I have a few questions. Many manuscripts were confiscated during the search. They are all written in ancient Hebrew, but I understand they are your notes and thoughts about articles you had read, including

articles on politics, philosophy, medicine, and biology. Your biography states that you didn't attend either secondary school or any institutes of higher learning. I can't understand how a man with a limited educational background is able to understand these subjects. Most highly educated men cannot."

"You are right," Jacob smiled. "An illiterate man wouldn't be able to understand all these sciences. However, when I said I had no education, I meant I had no official training or degree. I am self-taught. I had private lessons when I was a child. Rabbis and enlightened men were my teachers. They taught me languages and prayers, but their main purpose was to teach me to think profoundly, be well-rounded, and they instilled in me the interest to explore all avenues of learning. Because of them, I had an enormous desire for knowledge. The ancient science of the spiritual world uses many other sciences to explain things, and my knowledge for science was boundless. The more I studied, the better I understood that all sciences were connected with the spiritual world."

Michael wrote Jacob's words in his report. "Your neighbors wrote that there were suspicious people among those who visited you. What did they mean?"

"That's ridiculous," Jacob smirked. "You should ask them. I don't know who they considered to be suspicious. Have you ever tried to determine what criteria they used to consider people suspicious? Is it just because they don't know them?"

"Unfortunately, the denunciation wasn't signed," Michel said, "so we couldn't figure it out."

"See? How can you trust those letters of libel if they are not signed?"

"The previous denunciation was signed, however," Michael said as he turned pages in his notebook. "The author states that everything you were doing was 'hostile' and against state policy. Many Jewish communities provided substantial financial aid for you to perform this business. You used

these finances to visit Jewish populations in other cities and countries and speak out against the Soviet Union. What do you say about that?"

"Well, our religious communities are always raising money," Jacob answered, "and, it's true that I used some of the money to visit different countries and cities. They wanted to support and preserve culture and religion in other Jewish communities. That is why they were constantly donating money to various events and charities. Countries participate in industrial exchanges for the sake of their economies. They also set up new business relationships with several industries and make new business contacts and partners within the same industry.

"Something like that also happens in our religion," Jacob continued. "Jewish communities in different countries and cities send representatives to each other in order to discuss religious topics, to exchange news and opinions, to hold religious lectures, and pray in synagogues. They want to be in touch and set up new relations. However, we never discuss politics or anti-Soviet rhetoric. And I say this not only about myself. I have never heard public speeches that spoke against the Soviet political system. What the author of this denunciation statement wrote is nothing but ideas from his imagination."

After a while, Jacob smiled slyly. "What would you do if you had to give a speech in front of an audience with different points of view? Would you carry out anti-Soviet speeches right now, even if you were a hidden anti-Soviet propagandist?"

"I don't believe I would," Michael answered.

"You see! You have just answered your own question! That just proves that this author's statement is pure libel."

"Indeed," Michael agreed. "There is no reason to get into an argument; you provide rock-solid logic." He decided to move his examination forward and began recording the interrogation. Jacob glanced at this sheet of paper, unintentionally, because it

was not lying upside down as it should have. The question was written in such large letters that one could read it from a distance. "He must have turned this sheet by accident," Jacob thought. "It must be a very important question for it to have been written that big. He didn't want to forget it." The question asked, "Do you agree with the party's policies, and what is your opinion of them?

"I will not answer this question," Jacob decided. "Everyone has an opinion, and it is not obligatory for someone to say what it is. Therefore, I will keep my views to myself. I can't tell a lie, because it's a sin. But, if I tell the truth, I will have signed my own death warrant."

Just then, Jacob thought of something. "Perhaps, Michael put the paper like that on purpose. But, why? It could mean that he wants to help me, not put me at a disadvantage, and give me time to think. He can't help me outright; that's obvious. He may be a kindhearted person, but he must obediently follow the instructions."

Jacob's thoughts were interrupted by Michael. "So, if I understood you correctly, your religious and personal activities were never used as anti-Soviet propaganda. Right?"

"Right."

"Now, Jacob, I would like to know your opinion on existing state policy and what you think of it. I want to know what you think about, but what you wouldn't say aloud: something you disagree with, or something you're not happy with."

Jacob was ready to say he wasn't going to answer the question until Michael interrupted him. "Don't rush. Think about it before you answer. Your future depends on your answer. You cannot refuse to answer this question."

He looked straight into Jacob's eyes and added, "The answer must be put into the report. To refuse is admitting that you are hiding something – possible hostile views of the system – and you may be considered an enemy of the people."

Jacob thought to himself. "My guess was correct, and he proved it with his unofficial warning. He wants to help me."

"HELP, HELP," Jacob repeated in his mind. These words forced him to concentrate on them. Jacob's feeling had never lied to him: "Two souls will find each other here and they will help each other."

"That can't be true," Jacob thought, and he was startled by it. He looked into Michael's eye trying to read his soul. "Michael is trying to behave as if nothing has happened to him, but his look is a dead giveaway. His eyes are the doorway to his soul, and I can feel some energy getting ready to erupt as his soul transforms. He is wearing a mask, but my intuition and my knowledge have revealed his secrets. Michael is the man who wishes to help me, but needs help himself. He is the man from my dream. He must have has a mystery revealed yesterday. Perhaps if I guess this mystery, I can help him."

"Right," Jacob answered. "It's a very serious question, and it will take me time to explain my views. May I answer this question next time?"

"Yes, we can continue our conversation tomorrow," Michael said. He put his papers into the folder.

Before Michael called the guards, Jacob decided to ask Michael a question. "Mister investigation officer, because I am a person under investigation I have no right to ask you private questions. However, I'd like to ask you something, if you don't mind."

"You may ask," Michael answered.

"Psychology is one of my favorite sciences. Once upon a time, I created profiles that divided people into different categories depending on their inclination, spirit, etc. I would then analyze these profiles, and make conclusions about a person's personality and behavior. I have seen you several times, now, and I have noticed that you were an honest and brave man who makes outstanding decisions. You are a very

rare person, and I no doubt believe your past has formed your personality. I wonder, could you tell me something about your past?"

"I quite agree with your opinion," Michael declared. "My childhood was different from others because I spent it in the orphanage. There was nothing usual about it. I went to the university, and came here after graduation."

"It's a shame that you spent your childhood in an orphanage," Jacob said sympathetically. "In what city were you born? Who were your parents? Why were you sent to the orphanage?"

"Unfortunately, I don't remember much about my life before the orphanage," Michael answered. "I had amnesia when I arrived at Kokand orphanage 15 years ago, and I couldn't remember anything."

"But, did you figure it out later?" Jacob asked.

"Unfortunately no," Michael said.

"Did you manage to remember your name?"

"No, I don't remember anything. I was given a new name in the orphanage."

"Let's see. You said 15 years ago? That was 1922," Jacob recalled, his eyes wide open. Then he grabbed his head and exclaimed, "Oh, my God! Oh, my God! You were about 9 in 1922, correct?"

"Yes," Michael answered. He was surprised by Jacob's reaction, "I looked like a 9-year-old boy, and my documents state that I was born in 1913."

"Oh, my God," Jacob exclaimed again. Michael was looking at him. He was very confused, and couldn't understand why Jacob was surprised.

Finally, Jacob started to explain. "That is quite coincidence. In 1922, I was looking for a 9-year-old boy. He was my friend's son. I went to police stations, orphanages and the nearest railway station, but no one had seen him. Unfortunately, my friends told me about his departure from

Moscow after it was too late. I was only told about a month after they left."

As Jacob told his story, he noticed that Michael's look began to change. He became deathly pale, and his eyes filled with tears. Jacob stopped when Michael dropped his pen.

"What was your friend's name?" Michael asked in a hoarse, but soft voice.

"Rafael. Rafael Cohen," Jacob said. "He was a rabbi in Moscow." Jacob didn't finish. Michael started to tremble. He sprung to his feet and rushed toward Michael. "What has happened, mister investigation officer? Are you ill?" He hastily unbuttoned his jacket and repeated, "What has happened? What has happened?"

Michael continued to tremble and choke. And, finally, he fainted. Jacob held his limp body with his left hand, took paperwork from the table with his right, and started to fan Michael's face.

"What should I do? Should I call guards for help?"

He glanced at the container of water that was on the other table. He gently put Michael down, and ran to it. He grabbed the container and sprinkled some water on Michael's face. As he was sprinkling, Michael woke up. Then Jacob filled a glass with water and carried it to Michael.

"That's right. Drink mister commander. That will help you," Jacob said.

Michael came to his senses after a few gulps.

"Do you feel better now?" Jacob asked. He continued to hold Michael's head. "Should I call for the guards or the doctor?"

Michael shook his head, and Jacob felt his whole body shiver. Jacob gave Michael a glass of water and sat down in front of him.

Michael drank all water at once, wiped his forehead, took a deep breath, and said in a trembling voice, "Thank you for your help."

"Don't worry about it," Jacob said. He added in a caring voice, "You must go outside immediately."

"It's not a big deal," Michael said as he tried to stand. His limbs wouldn't allow it, however. "I'm sorry for disturbing you, Jacob. I just remembered something from my past. Besides, I had another sleepless night yesterday."

Jacob instinctively felt that Michael was hiding something from him.

"It's not the right time," Jacob thought. "It's better not to bother him with my questions."

Michael took the glass of water and moved awkwardly toward the table. After a while, he said. "I would like to talk about your friend, however."

"May we do it next time?" Jacob asked. "You must rest and get some sleep otherwise this will happen again."

"It's not a big deal," Michael repeated. I don't think it will happen again." Michael sat at the table. "Where and when did you meet your friend, Rafael?"

"Kokand's head rabbi asked me to go to Moscow in 1917. His friends had invited him to a religious conference. He also asked me to bring some religious literature and books of prayers back. While at the conference, I met a bright young man. I met him again in our friends' houses and I even paid him a visit a few times. He was a good friend and a very smart man. I had never met a man like him.

"We started talking after prayers and we didn't stop until morning. He had wise, profound, and extraordinary views on everything. There were no topics he couldn't discuss. Oh, we were so young, and we had so many progressive ideas!

"We wrote letters to each other until 1922. In his last letter, he stated that he was leaving Moscow, but he didn't know where to go. He couldn't explain the reason why was leaving, however. I suggested he move to Kokand. He promised me he would think about it. He told me that he had been invited to

live in many cities, and asked whether he could continue his religious activity in Kokand. I mentioned his plight to the rabbis and community members, and they said they would be happy to have this bright rabbi come to Kokand. They promised to help him find lodging and work if he decided to come.

"I wrote him, and he wrote back, saying he would come to Kokand very soon. He also told me not to write him anymore because some of his friends had been arrested, and he was afraid he was under surveillance as well. This was his last letter. There was no address on the envelope, and a man from Samarkand who was returning from Moscow gave it to me.

"About three months later, I received a message from a Bukhara rabbi. He was meeting rabbis in Moscow, and they were wondered what happened to Rafael. They knew he moved to Kokand with his 9-year-old son. I started searching for them. One of my friends working at the railway station told me they had found a man's body three months before. The body was laying not far from the railroad tracks about 18 miles from Kokand. He helped me find the conductor of the train who said he was attacked by robbers. He told me the boy was staying on the train until they arrived in Kokand. The boy vanished while the conductor was informing authorities about him. Later, everyone I asked said, 'I don't know anything about him. I have never heard of him.' I filled out a report at the police office, and asked them to issue a bulletin for Joseph Cohen. I knew the chief of police; he was my former neighbor, an Uzbek. The search, however, yielded no results, and despite being my former neighbor, the police chief rudely told me to leave and not bother them anymore. He said if I continued, he would have me put in prison, claiming I earn money illegally.

"This is the sad story that happened to my friend and his son, mister investigation officer."

Jacob looked at Michael, and Michael stared at the table and

thought. Jacob couldn't see Michael's eyes, but he could see there was conflict.

Then he noticed Michael's features, his forehead, eyebrows, eyes, nose, and chin. They were very similar to Rafael's features.

"Oh, my God," Jacob thought anxiously. "Can Michael be Rafael's son, Joseph? It looks like that could be true. Oh, the poor boy. He became an orphan! How can I tell him? I am not sure I should. His soul is in distress. No, I can't do it. It's wrong."

Jacob's thoughts were interrupted by Michael as he raised his head and looked into Jacob's eyes.

"Oh, my God, look at his eyes!" Jacob exclaimed. "He has a pure and wise glance! He is the spitting image of Rafael!" Jacob started choking and he couldn't help sobbing. Michael slowly stood up, stepped up to Jacob and said, "Hello, my dear Jacob!"

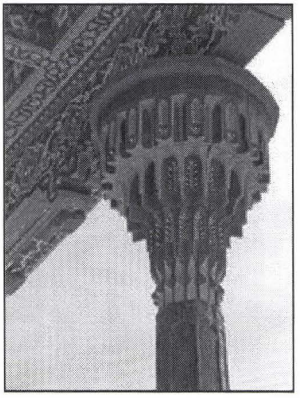
Jacob was stuck speechless and stood up unable to believe his ears. Michael stretched his arms and continued, "Our boat has finally reached the shore after 15 years of wandering. There is no captain, however. My father, Rafael, is dead."

"Oh, my God, Joseph, son!" Jacob stammered. He began to weep. He rushed up to Joseph with open arms. They embraced each other as a father embraces his son and as a son embraces his father. They were standing close to each other and weeping with happiness. They thanked God that he had joined their futures, and their hearts were beating strongly. The whole room seemed to be shaking in time with their beating hearts.

Joseph closed his eyes and imagined an invisible door in the center of this room. Two martyrs were banging on it trying to find each other. He couldn't help sobbing anymore, and began to cry. Jacob soothed him.

He affectionately said, "Don't worry, son. It will be all right now. God has returned your memory and your life. Don't cry,

son. It is all God's will. It was your destiny to meet me after 15 years. He prepared this ordeal 15 years ago, and we passed it with dignity! He prepared this ordeal so we could start fulfilling our main mission. We can go His way; I will help you find yourself and show you the way."



Conclusion

This book is dedicated to the author's grandfather, Jacob Rubinov, who was a rabbi in Kokand, Uzbekistan, at the time of the Great Purge of 1937-38. The book tells Jacob's story, and how his life was affected by the events occurring in his country at that time. While the story contains historical facts, some details, however, are fictional, and some may seem exaggerated. That was the author's intent. If he had given an exact and more detailed description of the events, it would have seemed unrealistic and absurd. That very short period of time, between 1937 and 1938, represented the entire ideology of the socialistic system and Soviet government. This period was, and still remains, beyond human understanding.

The author's reason for writing this novel was quite unusual and uneasy.

Roman Ilyasov was deeply affected by the self-contradictory ideas of his mother, and these ideas touched his soul for many years. He remembers, "My mother, Sofia Rubinova, spent the time of her father's imprisonment in Kokand's orphanage with her sisters. Her world view was distorted there. Her favorite novel was "The Gadfly," written in 1897 by Ethel Lilian Voynich. She must have tried to become the book's main character, Gemma, and challenged her father's spiritual world, believing it was religion that led her family into poverty and suffering."

After Stalin's death in 1953, all Soviet Union government officials still tried to deceive people by gently calling Stalin's methods, and those of his followers, small "mistakes."

Every year, more and more Soviet people realized they had been deceived, and the state was stealing their property.

Time is the best determinant to many things, including history, and time eventually revealed the dangers of a system based on Marxist principles. The system began to decay, and only survived for less than a century. This period highlighted the total inadequacy and improperness of the Soviet system, morally, economically and politically. It is impossible to build a sound state based on the principles of Lenin, Stalin and Leon Trotsky. This period in history also proved that it was impossible to govern a state based on socialistic principles without repressing the people. Otherwise, as time revealed post-Stalin's socialistic government rule, when the repressions have been decreased, then the corruption, Nazism, antagonism, anti-Semitism, robbery, speculation, anti-gang violence, profiteering and theft appeared and developed. All these negative phenomena lead to the inevitable crash of a Socialist state and Socialist system.

The author said, "My mother had recognized her mistakes, but she didn't return to religion. She used to repeat words that have remained in my memory throughout my life. She said she was a realist, and all things that were beyond reality were mystical to her. Meanwhile, she was unable to explain to herself how all her father's prophecies were fulfilled, however."

His mother said, one of her father's most memorable prophecies regarded his imprisonment. When the court sentenced Jacob to 25 years in prison, he burst out laughing and loudly declared, "I will be released in 25 months when one of the highest leaders destroys his follower, who is performing his malicious ideas now." The judge did not understand the meaning of this and pronounced him "insane." The author's mother said she was astonished about her father's prediction

coming true. He was imprisoned for 25 months, and he received amnesty. He was released after Yezhov was executed in 1940.

Jacob Rubinov's complicated philosophy of life, combined with the world views of Roman Ilyasov's family, inspired him to expose modern-day readers to the harsh reality of this time. There are serious dangers to a society governed by a socialistic system. The lessons we learned should always be present in our minds, so such a bloody monster can never gain power again.

Endnotes

[1] **Hashem** is the common Jewish practice of restricting the use of the word Adonai to prayer only. In conversation, many Jewish people, even when not speaking Hebrew, will call God "HaShem," which is Hebrew for "the Name."

[2] **Messiah** is a term used in the Hebrew Bible to describe priests and kings. The Talmud extensively details the advent of the Messiah and describes a period of freedom and peace, which will be the time of ultimate goodness for Jews and all mankind.

[3] **Turkestan** includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

[4] **Nebuchadnezzar**, king of Babylon, only deported the most prominent citizens of Judah, people such as professionals, priests, craftsmen and the wealthy. The "people of the land," or am-hares, were allowed to stay. In Jewish history, there are groups of people who were exiles: those in Babylon and those in remained in Judah.

[5] **Brit-milah**, which means "covenant of circumcision," is a Jewish ritual performed on a baby boy eight days after he is born.

[6] A **mitzvah** are precepts and commandments given by God. It refers to a moral deed performed as a religious duty, and has come to mean an act of human kindness.

[7] The word "**brothers**" refers to an elite group of people with criminal records who run large or small groups of people in the criminal world.

[8] **GULAG** is an acronym for Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps and Colonies. The gulag was the government agency that administered the anti-Soviet forced-labor systems. While the camps housed a wide range of

convicts, from petty criminals to political prisoners, large numbers were convicted by simplified procedures, such as NKVD troikas and other instruments of extrajudicial punishment. The gulag is recognized as a major instrument of political repression in the Soviet Union.

[9] **Maariv Aravim** is the evening blessing.

[10] The **Solovki** Prison Camp, later Solovki Prison, was on the Solovetsky Islands in the White Sea, which is on the northwest coast of Russia. It was called the "mother of the gulag" because it became a model camp where the NKVD developed and tested security measures, living conditions, etc.

[11] A **tzitzit** is a Jewish kerchief for men.

[12] "**Launch a horse**" is an expression used in jails. It means "Send a letter."

[13] "**Hold the horse**" means "grab the letter."

[14] An **NKVD** troika was a commission of three people as an additional instrument of the legal system for extrajudicial punishment. It was introduced as a mean for quick punishment of anti-Soviet elements.

[15] A **tandoor** is a big oven made from clay bricks. Usually Uzbek tandoors are built in a home's backyard.

[16] **Ayran** is a Uzbek yogurt dish with garlic, radishes, dill and salt.

[17] **Minpros** is The Ministry of Education.

[18] An **emir**, meaning commander or general, is a title of high office that is used throughout the Muslim world. They are usually considered high-raking sheikhs, but sometimes, in monarchic states, they denote princes.

[19] The **Russian Civil War** occurred between 1917 and 1922.

[20] **"Catch a horse"** is an expression used in jails. It means "Catch a letter."

[21] **"We've set the horse free"** is another expression used in jails. It means "The letter was sent."

[22] **Abaddon** means "a place of destruction," "The Destroyer"

or "Depths of Hell." The Hebrew term, Abaddon, is an intensive form of the word "destruction," which appears as a place of destruction in the Hebrew Bible."

[23]**Maxim Gorky**, whose real name was Alexei Maximovich Peshkov, was a Russian and Soviet author. He was a founder of the Socialist Realism literary method and a political activist.

[24]**A. Isay Dobroveyn** was a Russian pianist, conductor and composer, and friend of Russian writer Maxim Gorky. It is well known that Dobroveyn played for Soviet leader Lenin his favorite sonata, Beethoven's "Appassionata," in the apartment of Catherine Peshkova, Gorky's former wife.



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How one man's beliefs brought hope to those he met in a Soviet prison camp



The author, Roman Ilyasov, was born in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. He was a professional engineer before moving to the United States in 1995. He has worked for 14 years as an IT professional for a financial company in New York City, and lives in Queens with his wife and two daughters. He dedicates this novel, his first, to his grandfather, who was persecuted in Soviet Russia for being a Rabbi during the period known as "yezhovshchina," or Great Purge of 1937-38.

Me facis go unclabit; non diori cona a pari, quostrummus. Conumus ve ut publiconde tussi senem in iaciend esilici enihiconum, te num publintium mus etium.

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